

Chapter 2

The People: Who are the Kokang Chinese?

2.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at Chinese migration and the settlement of the Kokang Chinese in Burma/Myanmar from a historical perspective. Recently, the term ‘Kokang Chinese’ has begun to be noticed by many people, as it has appeared on the news in relation to the clashes between the military government and the ethnic armed troops. Recently, in August 2009, there was a clash between the military government and Kokang self defence troops on the issue of disarming the Kokang’s local troops and transforming it into a ‘Border Guard Force’ (BGF), as per the new 2008 constitution. This incident caused thousands of Kokang Chinese to cross the border to Nan San in Yunnan Province, China and led to large economic losses in the region. Moreover, local leaders fled the area and it came under a temporary administrative committee organized by the Myanmar central government, with some local Kokang people represented. This clash focused many peoples’ attention on the Kokang Chinese, a previously unknown ethnic minority in Myanmar, and the area where they reside. Many of the other ethnic minority groups staying in other parts of Myanmar still do not have much knowledge on the Kokang Chinese; some people do not even know the term used to address these people, though the Kokang Chinese have been migrating into this part of Myanmar and other areas for generations.

There is no written record of when the Kokang Chinese started to migrate into the Kokang region and how they led their lives in the remote hilly areas, nor who were the original inhabitants of the Kokang region. There are several ethnic groups currently living in the area, such as the Shan, Kachin, Palaung, Lahu, Miaozi, Wa and Kokang Chinese. It is said that the Kokang Chinese are descendents of the late Ming dynasty and that they are 'Han Chinese'. The history of Chinese migration into the Kokang region has become a bed time story for the children; passed on orally by the elders for generations.

The terms 'Kokang Tayoke', 'Malipa Ren', 'Kokang Ren', 'Yunnan Ren' and 'Kokang Chinese' are used to address the ethnic Chinese from northern Shan State, an area which borders the western part of Yunnan Province in the People's Republic of China. They are descendents of the late Ming Dynasty and have been living in the border area for more than 300 years, as evidenced by the presence of Chinese tombs, Guan Yin temples and many places of worship around the Kokang region (Tun Naing 2000). Due to the remoteness of the region where they live, as a result of the weak communications and transportation links, the people and the term Kokang Chinese are not well-known among the other Myanmar people, in fact, even some of the new generation Kokang brought up in the cities of Myanmar know little about their ancestral roots.

In the Myanmar language 'Kokang Tayoke' (ကိုးကန့်တရုတ်)" refers to the Chinese (*Tayoke* means Chinese) people from the Kokang region. It is less used but another common term 'Yunnan Lu Myo' (ယူနန်လူမျိုး) (Lu Myo means people in Yunnanese), is used to tell among the Chinese whether they are from the Kokang

region or Shan/Kachin States, those who have migrated into upper Myanmar through the mountainous areas of China. In the past, the Kokang Chinese liked to address themselves as ‘Malipa Ren’ (麻栗坝人 or people from Malipa). ‘Mali’ is a kind of chestnut and ‘Pa’ means a plain in Chinese; therefore, Malipa Ren means ‘people from the plain where Mali trees grow’. However, there are different ideas on the origin of the term. In the Shan language Malipa means ‘a wildest, remote place’, so it can be said that Malipa Ren in Shan means ‘people from the remote and wildest area’ (New Kokang).

Kokang (果敢) in classical Chinese, where ‘Ko’ (果)” means 果断 ‘decisive’ and ‘kang’ (敢)’ means 勇敢 ‘brave’. The Kokang people say that they are (果断勇敢的民族) ;decisive brave people’, which helps them get ahead in business and politics. They are thus proud to be called Kokang (Tun Naing 2000).

However, the name Kokang has been defined by many different scholars in different ways. Some claim that the name of the Kokang comes from the mountain *Ke Kang San* (科敢山), which is part of the mountainous tract that originates in China, and where the Kokang Chinese currently reside. People have been cultivating and making a livelihood from these mountains for a long time, so have become known as the Kokang people (New Kokang). Some believe that the name is derived from a Shan name ‘Kau Kang’. During the British colonial period in Burma, the Kokang area was included in one of the 49 *mongs* - under the control of the Hsenwi State government. Kokang under Hsenwi was divided into nine *kangs*, kins or townships, which in Shan are called ‘Kau Kang’ (Upper Burma Gazette). Kau means nine in

Shan and Kang means township; however, nobody clearly knows about how the name Kokang was introduced, but it has been adopted ever since.

Although there are many different ways in which the people of Kokang have been referred to over the years, they were already recognized as one of the key ethnic groups in Myanmar (135) as early as the 1960s. Most of them are Yunnanese people who migrated from China and settled in Myanmar over many centuries. Some families' records show that these people have been living in the region for more than fifteen generations (Tun Naing 2000). They reside in the mountainous region along the Myanmar-China border, an area recently named 'Kokang Self-administered Zone' in Myanmar. They are one of the Chinese speaking groups in Myanmar and almost all of them are immigrants from various provinces in China, such as Yunnan, Guizhou, Guangxi and Sichuan, and are sometimes known as 'Mountain Chinese' (www.baikē.baidu.com). They call themselves 'Kokang Chinese' though they are from various parts of China over different migration periods. This thesis will address the following questions: when and how did the people of Kokang migrate into Myanmar and how they have been living in the region? How have they been recognized as an ethnic group in Myanmar, given that 90% of them are of Chinese blood, and how has the name 'Kokang Chinese' been used to treat them? To answer all these questions, I carried out field research and talked with a number of Kokang Chinese. Following the description of my field research, I will give some background information on the different waves of Chinese migration that have taken place into northern Shan State by referring to the oral history of Kokang elders, plus some scholars' works. The mobility of the Kokang Chinese and their current status in Myanmar will also be discussed, based on my field studies. Although there are several

other ethnic groups living in the Kokang region, such as the Miao, Palaung, Lisu, Kachin, Wa and Shan, my study will mainly focus on the Kokang Chinese group.

2.2 Chinese Migration into Northern Shan State

2.2.1 Late Ming Period (1623-1662)

A number of books on Kokang history mention how this group of people are the Han Chinese descendants of followers of the late Ming Prince. When the Ming Dynasty collapsed in China, the Ming Prince of Gui - Zhu Youlang (Yong Li) was defeated by the Manchu. A group of Han Chinese thereafter followed the Ming Prince, who fled from Nanjing to Zhejiang, then to Guangxi, Guizhou and finally Kunming in Yunnan, in 1658 (Tun Naing 2000, Yang Li 1997, Wikipedia). While in Yunnan, Yong Li ruled for several years and established the 'Nan Zhao' dynasty. Finally in 1661, with the assistance of Wu Sangui - a former Ming military man, the Manchu brought about the fall of the Ming Dynasty in China and the prince was forced to seek refuge in neighbouring Burma. Yong Li, with his 1500 followers, first sought refuge in Bahmo, a town in present Kachin State which has a border with Yunnan Province in China. With the help of Bahmo Saopha, Yong Li sent 100 *viss* of gold (about 150 kilos) to Ava, the capital of Burma, in order to claim political asylum. He was granted refuge by the Burmese King of the time and went by barge to Ava with his family and 700 unarmed followers. They then lived in Sagaing, on the Ayeyarwaddy River opposite the Burmese King's Ava Palace. In 1662, Wu San Gui, who had been identified as a betrayer of Ming Dynasty, led 20,000 men to Aungbyinle in Mandalay District and demanded the Burmese King hand over Yong Li. The Burmese King feared that he would lose his own kingdom if he continued

providing the Ming Prince shelter, and so he allowed Wu San Gui's troops to arrest the Ming Prince. Some of the Prince's followers were killed defending him and some ran away. The Prince was finally taken back to Yunnan where he was strangled with a bowstring by Manchu (Gazetteer of Upper Burma 1983, Yang Li 1997, Wikipedia).

The followers of Yong Li who lost their chance to go back to China, ran away from their place of refuge and looked for a safer place to restart their lives. As a result, some arrived in the mountainous areas of northern Shan State and settled down there. However, their hopes of returning to their homeland were dashed by the growing power of Manchu in China, so they started to rebuild their lives in this remote hilly region, a place where only a few people were living. Many soldiers of the late Ming prince then married local women and settled in the region. Tun Naing mentions in his book, that the name 'Kokang' was adopted at that time, as the Prince's followers felt bitter and were afraid of being killed by Manchu, so in order to hide their identity as Han Chinese, started to use the name 'Kokang'. They believed that a name including the words 'decisive' and 'brave' would help them overcome any difficulties faced and bring success to their lives. As a result, they are still proud to be called 'Kokang' - as decisive and brave people.

The first Kokang Chinese settlers were educated people - advisors to the Ming Prince and literate Han Chinese, and their thoughts on Confucius and Lao Zhi have influenced the Kokang people over time. Basically all the culture and traditions of the Kokang people follow the Han Chinese traditions; their language is also similar to Mandarin, but many local words have been adapted and people in the region mostly speak a local Yunnanese dialect. The women follow the practice of compressing their feet and legs as a beauty statement, while the men wear a consume in the Manchu

style, except for having long hair. According to oral history, the area was previously made up of dense forest, with plentiful wildlife on display when the people first arrived and settled down in the area. The Ming followers had to work hard for their livelihoods; clearing the forest to cultivate fields and hunting in the forest. They started with slash and burn agriculture, following the practice of others in the area such as the Kachin, Palaung and Wa people who were scattered in the mountains and some of whom lived as clans. The area was under the control of local hill tribes until it was ceded to the British in 1897. Due to the remoteness of the area, it was not much influenced by the Yunnan chiefs who had authority over the Kokang area or the Qing Dynasty, or in fact any other power center. The Kokang Chinese lived in a 'new' world, in a remote forest area, and were totally out of contact with the outside world. There was some intermarriage between the local hill tribes and the Kokang, but people in Kokang nowadays are still proud to say that their ancestors are from Nanjing and that they are the descendents of the Ming Dynasty.

2.2.2 Yang Family's Rule and the British Colonial Period (1670~1948)

The Kokang area at this time was far from both the Chinese and Myanmar central government administrations, so different hill tribes were ruled by their own chiefs, while the Kokang Chinese came under the rule of Yang - one of the late Ming Prince's advisors. Due to a lack of proper administration, many conflicts arose between different tribes over land use, the ownership of livestock and property. Moreover, bandit groups organized by the Kokang, Kachin and Shan appeared along the Salween River and were a constant threat to villagers. By 1739, when bandits along the Salween River again raided the villages, Yang Zheng Cai, a son of Yang,

took a lead and attempted to protect the villagers from the bandits. After this, the villagers came to respect him and acknowledge him as their leader. Yang Zhen Cai's priority was to organize local defence by giving military training to the local population, after which the Kokang self-defence troop was formed. Yang Zhen Cai also introduced an organized administration and set government standards which were to be followed by successive 'House of Yang' rulers. He encouraged villagers from other localities further away to migrate and trade with the Kokang, after which petty trade developed among the villagers. The House of Yang then maintained an unbroken line of hereditary rule over the region, one which lasted for nearly 250 years (Yang Li 1997).

Kokang is located on the border of China and Burma, but prior to the British occupation of Burma, the border between China and Burma was poorly defined. Citizens of both sides moved back and forth freely without needing to worry about formalities. Kokang has had close social relations with China over many centuries, particularly with regard to trade and religious matters. The majority of Kokang's population are the descendents of Yunnanese Chinese, though there are other ethnic groups in the region, such as the Miaozi, Kachin, Shan, Lisu, Wa and Palaung. Many local people still have relatives living on both sides of the border, and trade relations with China have existed since the first settlers arrived. Previously, silver coins – the British Indian Rupee, were used as the currency for trade. Kokang has traditional ties with the Chinese states of Mending, Zhenkan and Gengma, so the people of these three areas tend to speak the same dialect and their cultures and traditions are similar. Previously there were a lot of Shan/Tai in the area and there was not much Chinese influence. Being Han descendents, the Kokang Chinese still maintain and follow the

ancient Chinese ceremonial rites and rituals, and practice ancestor worship (from personal interview with a Kokang elder).

Before the British arrived, the Burma-China border was not clearly defined and no official border line existed until 1962. The southwest region of China had been autonomous for centuries and in general had been ruled by the Tu-shi system (土司制度) or 'Native Chieftain System'; a Chinese administrative system used for the ethnic minorities in southwest China during the Ming and Qing Dynasty (Wikipedia). Tu-shi is a hereditary title (Tu means 'earth' or 'land' and Shi means 'control'), and the Chinese address the native chieftains as 'Tu-Shi Guan' (土司官), which literally means the 'leader' or the 'controller' of the land, with the son of the leader assuming leadership from the father after his death. Tu-shi is a Chinese approach used to control local people and it is quite similar to the Shan's 'Saopha' or 'Sawbwa' system in Burmese. These areas were traditionally occupied by the minority tribes of China, such as the Shan, Lolo and Lisu, and the Han referred to them as 'Yi Ren' (彝人) or barbarians, a group in which the Kokang Chinese were included. As well as the Han Chinese, a small number of other ethnic groups such as the Shan, Lisu, Miaozi, Kachin, Palaung and Wa lived in the Kokang region. The minorities and Han Chinese lived together and there is no record of ethnic tensions having existed between these groups of people. Most of the people in the region were agrarian, though some carried out trade in tea, salt and kerosene bought from Yunnan and sold to neighboring villages. Many Kokang elders said Kokang people were farmers as well as soldiers in the past, and almost all the adult men were trained militarily for self-defence and became soldiers when their villages required protection from bandits or other

invaders. If there was no conflict, they normally worked in their shifting cultivation fields and tea plantations, and carried out some hunting.

Several years after the British annexed upper Burma in 1885, the area was incorporated into British Burma (then a part of British India) under the Anglo-Chinese Treaty on 4th February 1897, though almost all its inhabitants were Chinese of Yunnanese stock (Tinker 1957, cited in Skinner 1958). Some Kokang elders who I interviewed believe that opium was first introduced to the Kokang by Yunnanese traders in the nineteenth century, as at that time it was already plentiful in Sichuan and Yunnan provinces in China. When demand exceeded local production levels, the Yunnanese traders began to look for areas where more opium could be cultivated. The climate and ecological conditions in Kokang favor poppy cultivation; the whole region is mountainous and has relatively little annual rainfall, which means lower yields for the main agricultural products of rice, maize and wheat, but leads to good yield for opium poppies. Before poppies were introduced to the Kokang region, tea and walnut plantations were the main source of livelihood for the Kokang people. Kokang tea has been famous for its taste over many years, and has been traded with people from China for centuries, and tea was the key cash crop before opium poppies arrived in the region. Kokang men used to hunt in the forest and women used to collect herbs and forest products for family consumption during their free time.

Soon after poppy cultivation started in Kokang, the traditional livelihood activities of the Kokang people (tea and hunting) were all replaced. Local people shifted their interests to opium production, as it was the most lucrative crop for the people to grow. As a result, villagers started to clear the forest in order to expand their opium fields. Opium thus became the main source of income for the people and they

used the money derived from selling opium to buy rice, and help resolve their centuries-old annual shortfall of rice (details of the people's livelihoods will be discussed in Chapter IV). Many Chinese from Yunnan's remote areas moved to Kokang in order to grow poppies and it provided a good profit for them, as there was already a good market in China. After the Communist Party took over in China, they restricted the border crossing, after which the opium market was shifted from China to Thailand by the Yunnanese traders and with the help of the Kuomintang (KMT) troops based along the Thai/Burma border. The Kokang population increased with the growth in the opium trade, but the exact number of Chinese in Kokang was not clear until recently. However, the number of people gradually increased as the number of villages increased, from 183 in 1953 to 294 by 2009, and with 24 village tract in the region (WFP village profile). The estimated population had reached 200,000 by 2010.

2.2.3 China Nationalist Party Era (1935–1950)

The population of Chinese migrants in Myanmar increased after World War II, especially from Yunnan Province (Tun Naing 2000), with many KMT remnants settling in Kokang. When Chiang Kai Shek's KMT group was defeated by the Mao Zedong Communist Party in 1949, a group of Chinese nationalists fled from China to Yunnan. Being separated from the main force that had retreated to Taiwan, thousands of soldiers from the KMT's Eighth and the Twenty Sixth Armies and their families crossed the border into Kokang, the hills north of Kengtung and other areas on the Burmese side of the Yunnan frontier. With the fall of Yunnan to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the CCP army launched a number of attacks on Kokang, an area in which many KMT soldiers took shelter. The KMT set up training schools in

Kokang and trained local men and encouraged them to join their army with the hope of fighting back against the CCP one day. With Kokang being inhabited mostly by Chinese, recruitment for the KMT was possible, especially as the KMT said that the Kokang Chinese would be given senior positions inside the KMT (Sai Kham Mong 2005).

In 1950, 1,000 KMT troops driven out by the CCP army took refuge in the border area of Kokang State, with 700 troops from the Communist side also reported as having stationed themselves in the border area on the China side. At that time the 'Kokang Tu Shi Guan' (Saopha in Shan) was away from the region and staying in Lashio, so the area's administration had been left to Tu Shi Guan's younger brother (Yang Li 1997). The KMT along the border between Burma and China were able to reinforce their troops from the Chinese population living in the villages on the Burmese side. With Kokang being 90% Chinese, this area was particularly good in terms of recruitment to the KMT army. Moreover several local armed troops began appearing along the China-Burma border and some of these groups were reported as having received support from the CCP (Sai Kham Mong 2005).

The situation in Kokang in early 1950 meant that the area was partly influenced by the KMT and partly by the Communists, and the Chinese in Kokang could also be divided into pro-KMT and pro-Communist groups. Whilst the Communists and their supporters moved freely across the border to Kokang, the KMT, with their base in Kokang, also went into Yunnan to loot and plunder the villages, plus collected money from refugees in Yunnan, Sichuan and Hunan provinces in China (Sai Kham Mong 2005).

Myanmar gained its independent from Britain in January 1948 and Shan State was left to its fate, without any substantial help coming from the central government during the early part of the KMT incursion in the 1950s. The government administration set up in the frontier areas of Kokang and Wa states had to be withdrawn, leaving these areas in the hands of intruders and armed brigands. The Kokang Tu Shi Guan returned to Kokang in 1952 after several demands were made by the Shan State government (Sai Kham Mong 2005). The administration in Kokang was retaken by the Sawbwa, and the strength of Kokang levy force grew to 2000 men (Sai Kham Mong 2005). A major offensive against the KMT in eastern Shan State was launched by the Burmese Army in 1953, and the KMT subsequently retreated to Wa State to get new recruits - with the aim of reoccupying Kokang State (Sai Kham Mong 2005).

In Kokang, about 2000 armed men were placed along the frontier (the Salween River) to block the entry of the KMT into Kokang. This effort by the Kokang was greatly appreciated by the Chinese authorities on the Chinese side of the frontier (ibid).

The major offensive by the Burmese army against the KMT in Shan State began in 1953. The General Assembly of the United Nations also took action against the KMT in Burma by adopting a resolution calling for the disarming, internment and withdrawal of all foreign troops in Burma (YUN 1953). In compliance with the resolution, a total of 5328 KMT troops and 1142 of their dependants were evacuated, but thousands of KMT refused to disarm or withdraw and remained in Shan State. These remaining troops scattered across areas in eastern and northern Shan State, where the government's rule was not so strong. It was reported in 1956 that 1000

KMT troops from Wa State fled to Kokang and took sanctuary there (Sai Kham Mong 2005). The remaining KMT troops in Shan State, especially in Kokang, married local women and settled down in the region. Most of them joined the mule caravan traders from China and became involved in long distance trade with Thailand, trading in opium, jade and arms with the support of KMT troops stationed along the Myanmar-Thailand border. With the support of the Chinese Nationalist Party in Taiwan, many KMT remnants and their descendants migrated to Thailand and then to Taiwan, Japan and other parts of the world. Some KMT trained soldiers became leaders of the Kokang self-defence force, while others became world famous drug lords. As a result, the Chinese Nationalist Party did manage to change the situation of the Kokang people, from being simply poppy farmers to war victims, but many of the new generation Kokang have since reaped the benefits of being KMT descendants, as they have had the chance to study in Taiwan, securing a better education and a better way of life when compared to those remaining in the remote areas of Kokang - who have had to fight poverty for decades.

2.2.4 The 'New' China Period (1949 ~ 1978)

A significant number of Chinese migrated into northern Shan State soon after Mao Zhedong's Communist party revolution in China in 1949. As a result of the Communist revolution, a new China was established using Mao's commune system ideas. Landowners and well-off Chinese families were stripped of their property and by 1957 peasants were forced to work in agricultural cooperatives. The 'Great Leap Forward', a time of suffering for China, was introduced soon after the new China had been established and led many Chinese to migrate out of China.

During the Great Leap Forward, farming was organized into a commune system and the cultivation of private plots was forbidden. Families were organized into production units and all men and women had to work in their respective production units. This kind of collectivization removed the peasants' and individual's desire to work hard; moreover, Mao thought that iron and steel were the key requirements for economic advancement, so millions of peasants were ordered away from agricultural work to join the workforce producing iron and steel.

People were encouraged to work hard in their respective production units, to produce more food not only for self-sufficiency purposes but also for export and in order to improve the country's economy. Rural communal mess halls were encouraged - to supply food for free, and people had to queue for food at these mess halls. As the Great Leap Forward drew labor away from food production and into iron and steel, only a few workers were left on food production. By the spring of 1959, the grain reserves for the people had been exhausted and a severe famine began across the whole of China.

The ban on private farms ruined peasant life, as villagers lost their basic level of livelihood. Villagers were unable to secure enough food to go on living, because the tradition of being able to rent, sell or use their land as collateral for loans was removed by the commune system. People's lives became harder and harder, day by day, and many died due to the famine caused by the Great Leap Forward. This tragedy led many villagers to run away from their homes in search of a better place to live and a better life, people from Yunnan Province included. Many people from Zhenkhan, Gengma and Mengding also suffered from the Great Leap Forward and tried to escape from their terrible lives by migrating to adjacent countries, such as

Burma. Many of them ran away from their villages to the remote areas of Yunnan Province and then migrated to the Kokang region.

Mr. Peng, in his sixties, told me of his horrible experiences during the Great Leap Forward and of his trip to Kokang, as follows:

“I was born in a peasant family in Zhenkhan. Both of my parents are from Sichuan; I have two brothers and one sister. They are all married, have their own families and live in Zhenkhan. None of my siblings attended school, as my family was too poor to afford for us to enter education - instead we all became peasants. We had our own plots which gave us enough food for a year if we worked hard. But our family was not that lucky, as our land was confiscated when the Chinese government established ‘Great Leap Forward’ production units for which our village was included. We had to take three meals at the mess hall each day, with all the villagers’ queueing. Women worked for food while men worked in the fields growing corn, rice and vegetables. Everybody was busy on their own work and life was really hard – we were poor at that time; we did not even have that many clothes and there were many patches on them. Our lives were really poor and hard at that time. One day, while working in the fields with some of my friends, a friend came up with the idea of running away from the village to a neighboring country. None of us had any knowledge of how far these places were from our village, but we decided to carry out that plan. When the dark came, we ran away from our unit without taking any property except a knife in

case of needing it on the way. Afraid of being arrested, we only travelled at night, and it took us three nights of walking in the forest before we arrived in Kokang. I met Mr. Yang, the relative of a Kokang Saopha, and he allowed me to stay and work at his house. I helped him by taking care of his nine children while he and his wife worked on their tea plantations. In the evening, I had the chance to learn Chinese with the children. When Mr. Yang moved out of Kokang around 1960, I went with his family to Kunlong. At that time I was twenty years old. Mr. Yang also helped me to get a Burmese National Identity card, pretending to be one of his family members. After that, I became a legal, Burmese citizen, but I still cannot read, write or speak Burmese. After helping the family in Kunlong for some years, I travelled to Lashio where I met my wife, a Shan. We started our lives with nothing, as I had just moved to Lashio and did not have any money to buy a house or land. We rented a small plot from a local Shan family and built a little hut. I worked as a wage laborer for Shan people in their fields, and sometimes worked as a pig slaughterer, cleaner, or whatever job I could find to get money for my family. After working hard for several years, I managed to save up some money and started to trade. At first I sold noodles, as a street vendor - there were almost no streets in Lashio I did not go to. I then met a Chinese friend and started to change my career - going to Mandalay with him though both of us did not speak a word of Burmese, after which we bought

Burmese products such as dry fish and cotton in Mandalay and sold them at the border town, Muse. Gradually, I was able to save money and our lives became better. Now, I own plots of land in Lashio and my children are all married. I have not been back to China since I ran away from home, and I do not have any contact with my family; do not know whether they are alive or dead. I am now a Burmese citizen and will die and be buried in Burma. I am really proud to be a Kokang; I think we, the Chinese people, should maintain our culture and traditions wherever we are. Even though I am married to a Shan, I have never learned to speak Shan or Burmese; whereas my wife can speak fluent Chinese and is well-versed in Chinese culture and traditions. Some of my friends, those who fled China with me, joined the KMT and now live in Thailand; some also joined the Burma Communist party. I hope that one day I have the chance to go back to my homeland and visit all my relatives again.”

From Mr. Peng’s life experiences, we can see that many Chinese took a risk and ran away from Communist China in the hope of getting a better life. Nobody would ever want to leave their family, but the situation forced them to do just that, and nobody knows how many Chinese ran away from their homeland and how many arrived at their destination safely and started a new life like Mr. Peng. The situation in Kokang as compared to China at that time was a bit better. People only needed to work hard in their own poppy or tea fields, and could enjoy a peaceful peasant life; they did not need to worry about the authorities’ rule. This kind of way of life attracted many Chinese from rural villages to move into Kokang. Some worked as

laborers in the opium fields and some undertook petty trade. These people also brought with them many relatives, so that the Chinese population in Kokang increased year on year.

2.2.5 Recent Migration (1978 ~ 2009)

The Kokang region covers 800 square miles in all, and has an estimated population of 200,000 (2010). In 1893, according to the Burma Gazetteer, the population of Kokang was not more than 20,000, rising to estimated 50,000 in 1953, and this fact complicated and confused Shan State politics. Although the population of Kokang was thought to be around 50,000 in 1953, no updated figure of the population in Kokang was ever given (Upper Burma Gazetteer). Many Chinese from China taking the Kokang continued to flow into Shan State, and as a result, many Kokang can now be found in both Shan State and Upper Burma.

Yang Li's book (1997) records that in 1892, there were a few Shan villages on the Kokang plain, the current area of Laukkai. These Shan are thought to have inhabited the whole of the Kokang area at one time, gradually replaced by the Kokang Chinese and moving west across the Salween River. Other minorities also lived in Kokang during that period. For example, the Lisu Chinese were said to be the remnants of an army which had been sent by China to fight the Burmese, a part of which mutinied and refused to return to China - settling down along the Salween valley. There were also some Miaozi villages in the Kokang - also said to have been original inhabitants gradually pushed out and assimilated by the increasing number of Kokang Chinese (Sai Kham Mong 2005).

Shan statistics on Kokang state that there were 600 villages in the Kokang region when the British colonized the area, of which five were Shan, ten were Palaung, 30 were La or Wa, 50 were Miaozi, fifty were Shan Chinese and the remaining 450 were Chinese. However, an inspection of the district by British officials in 1892 gave a figure of 138 Chinese villages, with 1993 households across the whole region (Sai Kham Mong 2005).

The population of the region seems likely to have increased over the decades, though there were several civil wars in the region. The indigenous population did not increase as rapidly as might have been expected, so most of the increase must have been due to immigration. Many Chinese from neighbouring states in China crossed the border each year in search of cultivable land, of which there was plenty available for plowing. With Kokang located on the frontier with China, communication between Kokang and Yunnan was well supported by ferries and land routes, so people travelled back and forth between the two countries to conduct petty trade on daily necessities, as the Kokang people had done for centuries. Inter-marriage between different ethnic groups also occurred in the region. Many Chinese people from remote villages in Yunnan Province also migrated to the Kokang region and married local women. Since then, the number of villages and the population in Kokang has increased.

With the region under local authority rule, and being far away from the central administrations of the state governments of China and Myanmar, many illegal trading activities sprung up in the region around the 1960s. Another issue with the Kokang area was that, being situated on the border with China and being populated mostly by Chinese, border infiltration became a real danger. A high-ranking official of the Shan

State government made a remark about Kokang in 1954, as cited in Sai Kham Mong (2007), saying that “Every Kokangese is a Chinese but every Chinese is not a Kokangese.”

The migration of Chinese people into Kokang since the 1980s has had the most visible effect in terms of the development of the region. The size of the population grew significantly between the 1870s and 2010, and it has been estimated that 90% of the current population in Kokang are Chinese, with the Chinese population growing both in absolute and relative terms up to 2010.

According to Walker, the 1980s and 1990s were important decades in the development of the economies of the border regions of Southeast Asia, of which Myanmar is one such country (Walker 1999). The Myanmar government formed the Central Committee for the Development of Border Areas and National Races for Border Development in 1989; moreover, in 1998, an agreement between China and Myanmar governments was put in place to establish official border trade towns along the Myanmar side, namely Muse, Lwejie, Laiza, Chinshwehaw and Kambaiti (Xinhua 2006). Chinshwehaw, where many Kokang reside, has become one of the main five trade zones, and is classified as a second-level checkpoint by the Chinese government, one through which third-country personnel are not allowed to cross. In addition, the Myanmar central government has also set up special trade policies and privileges in order to improve border trade, such as tax exemptions for certain types of goods being imported, something which has allowed Kokang people to become quite influential in terms of border trade. The Kokang’s ethnic ties with the Yunnanese from mainland China, and their social networks, have also made it easy for them to conduct trade with their large neighbor and have attracted many Chinese migrants into the region.

Chinese influence can also be seen in Kokang due to its geographical location, its remoteness from the major towns in Myanmar and its proximity to China. Due to the relative isolation of the region, poor communication links, transportation and language barriers, the Myanmar government finds it difficult to provide assistance in order to promote the region's development. The Chinese language is widely used in Kokang, as 90% of the population is ethnic Chinese and it has become the official language for the local administration. Moreover, the standard currency used in the region is the Chinese Yuan, not the Myanmar Kyat, and the people also follow Chinese standard time (1½ hours ahead of Myanmar). Local people's daily necessities are all imported from China, and this has led Chinese people to become very influential with regard to trade, and they now represent 90% of the local economy.

Chinese participation in the local trade scene in Kokang is extensive, with Chinese shops, particularly grocers, department stores, food and drug stores, seen all over the region in urban areas and rural villages, as are Chinese owned hotels, restaurants, food centers, jewelry and mobile phone shops. Most of the traders also own land and buildings at their places of business, while some receive concessions from the local authorities to run their businesses. Most of the businesses in Kokang are run as joint ventures between local Kokang and Chinese.

Chinese migration from Yunnan Province has been taking place for centuries, and after the Chinese government implemented its open market policy in 1978 - in order to promote the country's economy and development, many Chinese from mainland China took the chance to go to neighboring countries with the aim of doing business or making money. When compared to Chinese people in Yunnan Province, the Kokang lack the necessary education, knowledge, technology and human

resources to develop their own area, and as most people in the region were once poppy farmers, they do not know much about doing business, except those involved in petty trade for daily necessities such as salt, rice and kerosene. Moreover, the area is far from other cities in Myanmar and is situated in a remote area, and this has also created difficulties for other Myanmar nationals who wish to do business with people in the region. These transportation and communication problems have led to people in Kokang being far removed from the other ethnic groups in Myanmar, but close to the Chinese next door. As a result, Chinese businessmen can make big profits from doing business in Kokang, as no communication problems exist for them at all.

The local authorities also encourage Chinese investment and development in the area, though there are no proper investment or immigration policies in Kokang. As a result, the Chinese have been able to exploit Kokang's natural resources, such as the forests and land, though they claim they have brought many employment opportunities for the local people.

In line with the Chinese government's open market policy, the Kokang local authorities have taken the opportunity to develop their own region. One of my informants from the local authority said:

“We, the Kokang people are very simple and most of us are illiterate. China is a developed country and they have so much advanced technology in terms of agriculture, such as fertilizers and pesticides, to increase yields. Therefore, we have opened the door for them to come and invest in our region. Meanwhile, our people also can learn from them. The Kokang region will remain as it was during our ancestor's time if there is no investment from the Chinese people. Now every

village has access roads and mobile phones, which ease people's transportation and communication needs. I never dreamt that I would be able to drive a car with my own hands in my village, but these dreams for the Kokang people have come true with China's economic development. Ex-poppy farmers from the rural areas now have the chance to work on sugarcane plantations, and their lives are getting better as compared to when they were growing poppies."

From these comments we can see that the Kokang people welcome Chinese immigrants and believe their lives are improving as a result of doing business with Chinese people. They feel there is nothing different between themselves and the Chinese, as they speak the same language, and practice the same culture and traditions.

As a result of China's economic reforms in 1978, the border has become invisible for people on both sides around Kokang. Although there is an official checkpoint between Kokang Yang Long Zhai village and Nan San town in Ling Cang County, China, many people still use their traditional routes to travel back and forth across the porous border. Most of the Chinese people doing business in Kokang migrated into the region with the help of their relatives, friends or social networks.

Some of them had never heard about the Kokang when they were in China, and many recent Chinese migrants were persuaded by their relatives, those who have been living in Kokang since the Great Leap Forward period. After the Chinese government introduced its reforms, many of the earlier Chinese emigrants had the chance to go back to their hometown and visit their family members.

Many people from the rural villages of Yunnan Province are still very poor, though China has begun to become a developing country. Some of the people are

extremely poor due to a lack of cultivatable land and/or a lack of education, so they expect to have a better life in Kokang and so migrate along with their relatives. Some of them work as wage laborers at Chinese contract farms in Kokang, while others work as street vendors selling noodles and snacks in Kokang. Since the area is a border region, many kinds of job are available for the people. In general, the Chinese migrants' lives are better in Kokang when compared to living in the rural villages of China, as they can earn more money and some can even own cultivable land. Many of the poor Chinese wanted to escape from poverty in China, and had the chance for a better life by crossing the border; moving out from their homeland and migrating to Kokang. Thus, the population of Kokang has increased year on year due to these immigrants, and this has changed the situation in Kokang, from having been a small, remote rural village in Burma, to being more like a small town in China. Chinese people, Chinese style buildings and Chinese products of all kinds can be seen in every corner of Kokang, and as it is a border area, the Chinese continue to flow into the region, from there many migrate to other countries.

2.3 Livelihoods of the Kokang Chinese during the Pre-Opium Ban Period

The livelihoods of the Kokang Chinese relied on opium cultivation, production and sale for many centuries, and as a result, did not develop or evolve any alternative livelihood strategies during that time - almost all the Kokang people in the region made their living from growing opium. Throughout the period of the Kokang sawbwaship and the BCP, opium was the only and most lucrative cash crop grown by people in the region, and it was named 'Lang Han Zhuang Jia' (懒汉庄稼), meaning 'lazy farmer's crop' in Chinese, because it grows well in relatively poor soil and in

cold conditions; thus, it was suitable for the mountainous areas and valleys of Kokang. As it was a lazy farmer's crop and did not require much labor in terms of care, the opium poppy was the main and only crop grown in Kokang and northern Shan State in Myanmar for many centuries.

There is no clear record of when poppy cultivation started in the Kokang region, but many of my informants believe that it was introduced into the region by the British after the opium wars. Others said it was introduced by the Yunnanese farmers who migrated into Kokang to meet the demands of the growing Chinese market. Whatever the reason, poppy growing spread to Kokang from Yunnan Province in China, and once the British had forced opium onto the Chinese with the Opium Wars of 1839 to 1842, entrepreneurs in southern China began promoting poppy cultivation on a commercial scale, in order to undercut the British merchants who were importing the substance from Bengal. Some poppy cultivation may also have spread from Assam in British India, eastwards through Kachin State to Kokang (Ronald D. Renard). Nevertheless, it was to become the main cash crop grown by the Kokang Chinese, and their livelihoods depended on opium poppies for many generations. The planting season for opium poppies was every October and November of the year, soon after the wet season had finished. The small poppy seeds were planted using a 'broadcasting' method on the hills and in the valleys of the region where the fields were prepared using slash and burn techniques. The fields only needed to be weeded once, while the poppy seedlings were young, and after that could be left. No labor or agricultural inputs such as fertilizers or pesticides were needed, and the plants were ready to harvest by March or April the following year. Some countries such as Thailand and Pakistan used fertilizers on their poppy fields, but the

Kokang Chinese used no inputs on their fields. The weather and geographical location in Kokang helped the poppy farmers obtain high opium yields without the need for agricultural inputs, so compared to other crops which need greater inputs of fertilizer, wage labor and others, poppies were relatively easy to grow. The plant was only grown once a year, even though the growing time only lasted three to four months, from planting to harvesting. Opium brought good profits when compared to other crops, so the villagers in Kokang preferred to grow it as their main cash crop, and did so for many centuries. As a result, they did not develop other agricultural skills, as the poppies few agricultural techniques to be applied in order to grow.

While growing poppies, people in the region mainly subsisted on rice and other crops grown primarily using shifting cultivation methods. Rice was grown mostly in the valleys, with some grown on the hills of Kokang, but due to a lack of water and cultivable land, production of this commodity was severely limited and was insufficient for local needs. As a result, for many years, the bulk of the rice consumed in the area has had to be purchased and imported from China or other parts of Myanmar. Some of my elder interviewees said that the main livelihood of the Kokang people used to be opium poppy cultivation in the hilly regions, but that some of the villages situated at lower attitude grew tea, chestnuts and other crops, as poppies could not be grown in the villages. Until the early eighteenth century, people in the region were entirely self-sufficient, except for salt which they obtained by trading forest products or tea at various lowland market towns. The people also practiced hunting and gathering and foraged for additional foodstuffs as well as various utilitarian materials in their free time, when they did not need to work in the poppy fields.

As there was no population census or village data collected, the number of opium growers that existed in the past can only be estimated. A survey conducted by the United Nations Office on Drug and Crimes (UNODC) estimated that about 260,000 households were involved in poppy cultivation (Joint Kokang-Wa Humanitarian Needs Assessment Report 2003). Different ethnic groups living in the Kokang region: the Shan, Kachin, Palaung, Wa, Lahu, Miaozi and Kokang Chinese, were all involved in poppy cultivation. The area of the poppy field was varied on the financial and labor situation of the family. Forest land could be cleared and prepared for cultivation freely, as there were no proper land use policies in Kokang in the past. The land was therefore cultivated for many generations and some families cleared more lands as the number of household members increased. One of my informants (80 years old) stated:

“I was brought up in an opium growing family in Zha Zhi Shu village. I remember that during my childhood all family members spent the whole day working in the opium field. I am the fifth child of the family and I had to look after my younger brother and sister while my parents and elder brothers were working in the field. I was left at home to take care of the housework - cooking, raising the pigs and taking care of our backyard vegetables garden. Unlike the urban children, our village children matured early - around twelve or thirteen years old. None of my siblings were sent to school for an education, and so our daily life was quite simple. We got up in the early morning; parents and elder siblings prepared to go to the field and the one left at home did the housework. There was a never-ending list of household chores to do.

We rarely went out from our village to other areas; only my father and brothers used to go to the market for five days to purchase necessities of salt, kerosene and some foodstuffs. Chinese New Year was the happiest time during my childhood, as we got new clothes and candy. Almost all the villagers' lives were the same. Some of the boys from some families joined the local defence troop, while some joined the caravan traders as coolies. Villagers helped each other with village events such as house building, weddings and ancestor worship. We never needed to buy vegetables as almost all of us had backyard gardens. Our lives were quite simple and peaceful in the past, as we had enough food to eat.”

The poppy was also cultivated as a medicinal herb used to treat ailments – as a pain killer, cough suppressant and for treating dysentery and malarial symptoms. Since they produced the opium themselves, the expense to the growers was minimal. Many male farmers in the village were opium smokers, as were some of the older women; no thefts or other crimes were committed by the opium users to obtain the substance as it was plentiful in the region. In 2001, I went to Kokang on a family trip and found opium in the living room of every house in the village; as a gift for visitors. When villagers visit neighbours' houses, they are offered opium just like coffee or tea. Most of the villagers also have tea plantations and chestnut orchards, but their main focus used to be on opium, as it was the only lucrative crop at that time.

The Kokang Chinese, unlike the other groups who have been living in the area even longer, are also petty traders, so before they not only grew poppies, but also joined the caravan traders, trading salt, kerosene and many other daily necessities

which they bought from Gengma, in Ling Can county, China, to sell to people in the region. Before 1989 and the open market policies implemented by both the Chinese government and Kokang authorities, Kokang's nearest Chinese border town, Nan San, was just a small village and had not yet developed. The caravan traders went around villages in the region to sell their materials and sometimes they bought back raw opium from the villages they visited. Some of the villagers from remote mountainous villages traded their opium with the traders using the barter system. Opium was a kind of cash for the villagers which they could use to get food, clothes, materials and also medicine for everyone.

The Kokang had to work hard in their poppy fields to earn a living, and many men became opium smokers and addicted to it; their wives and family members had to work hard in the fields in order to get enough income to purchase the family's daily necessities and food. Even though the Kokang people worked hard to earn a living, they did not have the chance to enjoy a peaceful, simple life, as their lives were destroyed by several wars and conflicts in the region. As the region is situated in the border area, it used to be a place in which many armed groups were located. From 1949 to 1989, the region was home to many armed groups, such as the KMT and CBP, and a number of wars and conflicts shook people's lives. Many Kokang Chinese volunteered or were forced to move out of their villages by these wars and internal conflicts, and a large number of Kokang moved to other cities in Shan State in 1968, and even Thailand (please see following section for details of the migration patterns of the Kokang Chinese at this time). As a result, only a few Kokang were left in the Kokang region. Those who moved out of the region abandoned their traditional economy producing opium, growing tea plantations and orchards and also their

houses in the region, those later occupied by those from other ethnic groups such as the Lisu and Miaozi, whilst others were occupied by new Chinese immigrants.

Though they had already moved out from Kokang and settled down in other places in Shan State, many of them still went back to Kokang during the opium harvest to collect the gum for trading. As Chinese descendents, the Kokang people very much value their family networks, and almost all of the villagers at this time were related to each other, either by family name or marriage relations; therefore, it was not a surprise to find one Kokang with many relatives in the region or elsewhere in Myanmar, and even in a third country. The people who stayed behind in Kokang later sent their children to their relatives' houses in Lashio, Mandalay or Yangon to get a better education - after the ceasefire agreement between the local authorities and the central government. Many better-off Kokang families went to live in cities around Myanmar, while those who stayed back in Kokang still lived in the remote hilly regions under relatively poor conditions, though they enjoyed their lives as opium farmers, until it was banned in 2002.

Opium poppy cultivation was not banned as soon as the ceasefire agreement was signed in 1989, for after the agreement many Kokang Chinese traveled out from the Kokang region to cities in central government controlled areas, where many started to launder money - in Lashio, Mandalay and other big cities with the help of their families or friends. For a lot of real estate in Myanmar, especially in Mandalay, the price suddenly rose, and many Kokang Chinese or Chinese from the mainland took advantage of relaxed government immigration policies and moved to central government controlled areas to invest or simply to set up some export/import companies - in order to launder their opium money. These Kokang travelled back and

forth between Kokang and their new homes in Lashio, Mandalay and Yangon, or in other counties, as they possessed valid travel documents, with some of them spending 10,000 to 25,000 Chinese Yuan to obtain a national identity card as they did not have a family profile before. According to one of the local authorities, only 60% of the Kokang Chinese got their National ID card, either by bribing officials, buying them officially or issue by the Myanmar immigration officers. Many of them still did not register or obtain any national registration card, and have been living as 'stateless citizens' for decades.

The livelihoods of the Kokang Chinese in the region can be divided into the better-off, medium-income and poor families. Most of those previously involved in the opium trade were better-off than those who grew opium. In response to my questions on household income, many Kokang Chinese were not willing to reveal information and I could obtain no information from the authorities during my field work. In 2002, one mu¹ (0.16 acres) of poppy field could produce one viss (around 3.3 kg) of opium gum. At that time the price of one viss of raw opium was around 1000 CNY, so a family who owned 40 Mu of opium fields could earn around 40,000 per year, just enough for a family with an average of five to six household members; for food, health care and the children's education etc., but they were also subsistence farmers at that time. Not all the villagers in the Kokang region owned that much land or poppy fields, and there were many opium smokers addicted to opium who sold their land to others. Opium addiction caused many social problems in the villages, such as broken families, debts etc., and the family members of drug addicts had to work as wage laborers in order to survive.

¹ 1 acres = 6.6 Mu

Those involved in the trading of opium received double or sometimes triple that of the opium farmers, but despite this, almost all people in the region had enough food for the whole year round, which they bought with the money derived from selling opium. Many family members, including women and children were still involved in opium cultivation and production, and few or none of them looked for an alternative livelihood, except those who had enough capital to invest in businesses inside or outside of the Kokang region; within Myanmar or China. The opium farmers' lives changed significantly after the local authorities implemented an opium eradication plan in 2002.

Almost all the Kokang Chinese people from the Kokang region involved in poppy cultivation had different reasons for migrating. The Kokang Chinese are mostly the descendents of Chinese who migrated into the region during several waves. The first settlers were descendents of the late Ming Dynasty who ran away from Manchu, then later on, several waves of migrants moved to the Kokang region to run away from the political changes in China, and some also ran from poverty. Almost all of them ended up in the hilly regions of Kokang and became involved in poppy cultivation, as at the time it was the only lucrative crop. Until 1978, almost all the Chinese migrants in Kokang were involved in either growing poppies, tea or chestnuts, and they all were simple, agrarian folk.

After the Chinese and Myanmar governments implemented open market policy in 1989, almost all the new Chinese migrants in Kokang region started to carry out cross-border trade as their main livelihood activity. The new Chinese migrants in Kokang region nowadays mainly carry out petty trade or have invested in the Kokang region by starting alternative cash crop plantations, mining, logging or gambling

activities, which have also contributed to the development of the region. They are not like the old Chinese migrants - illiterate and simple, agrarian people; they have capital and are taking the advantage of the social, culture, economic spaces of exception in Kokang today in order to do business. Some have taken the name of the ethnic Kokang Chinese and migrated to other big cities in government controlled areas, those away from the Kokang region. Due to the spaces of exception granted by the central government and the special economic policies of the local Kokang authorities and Myanmar government, the Kokang Chinese lives have gradually got better; moving from being poppy farmers to petty traders.

2.4 Mobility Patterns of Kokang Chinese (1968-2009)

Since the 1960s, Myanmar has witnessed a dramatic increase in the mobility of the Kokang population across the country. The reasons for such an increased mobility are complex, ranging from the new immigration policies adopted by the Myanmar government and civil conflicts in the region, to better access to education and health care, and the development of a new, better lives away from growing poppies. The Kokang Chinese have dispersed to many parts of the country and also migrated to other countries such as Thailand, Taiwan and to some western countries. The population of Kokang Chinese in Myanmar has increased dramatically in recent years, and while the estimated population in the 1960s was 120,000 in Kokang Special Region and around 240,000 in other places across Myanmar (Tun Naing 2000), the number today is likely to be double this figure. Some of the Kokang living in Myanmar are locally-born Kokang Chinese and some are recent Chinese migrants who took the name Kokang in order to do business in Myanmar. There are many

Kokang Chinese owned businesses that play an important role in the Myanmar economy and its development sectors. Some have participated in the country's infrastructure development projects such as road and bridge construction, and factory developments; moreover, the more recent generations of Kokang have become educated in a number of professional fields such as medicine and engineering, and some work as civil servants in various government departments.

The more efficient transportation system, with improved telecommunications technology and access roads has promoted the mobility of people. In the past, there were no sealed roads across the whole Kokang region, just an earth road which connected Laukkai with Kunlong. The length of the few roads in the whole region added up to no more than 70 kilometers, so villagers had to travel on footpaths or rely on mules for transportation. As people were scattered across the mountain ranges and worked in their opium fields, they did not travel much to other villages. Most of the travel was done by the household heads, who used to go to the markets² to buy cotton, salt and other daily necessities - women and children stayed at home and worked in the fields. In Kokang, there was no proper school until the nineteenth century, so most school age children helped their parents in the fields or did some housework. Due to the lack of roads, people rarely traveled out of their villages; they lived in a kind of backward, primitive and closed society for many decades and they did not even know what was happening outside their villages. Even now, there are still many remote areas in Kokang where the roads do not reach.

² A market was held every five days in Laukkai or other big villages, to where villagers from around the region came to sell agriculture products and buy daily necessities. On market day, outsiders, especially the Chinese from China came to sell Chinese products and opium traders came to collect opium

From the Yang Li book (1997) about the Kokang Yang family, one can see how the Kokang Chinese lacked general knowledge and how they were brought up in the remote hilly regions. She notes that:

“....the Sawbwa’s son who went to study in [the] Anglo-Vernacular School in Lashio had never seen a motor car before. They were told about motor cars which would take them from Kutkai to Lashio which was thirty-five miles [away]. The motor car was described as four feet in length, unlike a beast, and consumed oil and water. Its eyes were round and big like a round plate and it could see the distance of a mile at night. Its speed was so fast that one would get dizzy if one’s eyes were opened while travelling. To avoid this it was advisable to kowtow three times before mounting the car on the first occasion...”

Most people in the Kokang region traveled on bare foot on the muddy footpaths - for many decades. There was no proper school in Kokang, but in 1902 the British government established a school in Shan state to train sons of the ruling families to be leaders in the British tradition - only relatives of the ruling families could enrol in these Shan schools. It was a copy of the British public school system; discipline and character training were stressed rather than academic achievement. In 1930, the Kokang Sawbwa was able to send his son to attend the Shan Chief’s school and he was trained in a very British way. Some well-off families in Kokang were able to have their children learn Chinese from educated Chinese people at home, so one can see that education was only available for the ruling families and rich people (personal interview with one of the ruling family members).

The situation changed in the early 1960s, as some of the Kokang migrated to the nearest big town, Kunlong, in the hope of getting an education for their children. They realized that if they continued living in Kokang and growing poppies, their lives would not change or improve, and that future generations would be poppy farmers again. They did not want future generations to become like them; spending the whole life in the opium fields. Some families decided to move out of the area, and the nearest and most accessible town for the Kokang was Kunlong, so it became the destination for many Kokang – who migrated out from their villages in the early 1960s (personal interview with a Kokang Chinese in Lashio in 2010).

Kunlong was formerly was a separate administrative area, but in 1893 it was attached to the Kokang district of North Hsenwi in northern Shan State. It was important for its ferry transport and was one of five ferry ports connecting Kokang with Yunnan Province in China. Kunlong was also a good market place for the Chinese, Shan, Kachin and other hill tribes to sell their agricultural products such as vegetables, corn, gaoliang (sorghum), tea, and chestnuts, while Opium poppies were the main cash crop for the Kokang and Kachin. The Kokang Chinese in Kunlong mostly engaged in petty trade, as the town was also a stop for the caravan traders of Huizi (Muslims from Yunnan Province) in China, on their way down to Mandalay. Some of the poorer Kokang Chinese joined the caravan traders as porters, while some invested capital in the caravan trade. The caravans travelled through Lashio to Mandalay for trade and sometimes down to Mawlamyine in Lower Burma. After that, many Kokang Chinese started migrating to Lashio and Mandalay and many other places in Shan State along their petty trading routes. Some of them moved to the Thai/Burma border simply in search of a better livelihood, while other migrated to

northern Thailand to join their relatives who had fled Kokang during the KMT invasion and Burmese socialist period. Since then, many Kokang Chinese have migrated to Thailand.

The Kokang area has long been an independently administered area, and the area remained autonomous throughout World War II, both from the government and from other power centers. Kokang became a strategically important area and was given self-administration state status in 1951, but self-administration in Kokang was spoilt when the military took over Burma on March 2nd 1962, after which the Kokang was kept under military administration. Dissatisfied with the centralization of the Myanmar government's administration, a Kokang resistance movement was re-organized to fight for freedom. The self-defense troop formed in the early stages of this movement was split into two. Some of the older soldiers in the Kokang troop did not want to fight or wage war in the region, as they wanted to settle down and live a peaceful life, while in contrast, some of the younger members of the troop thought that they could not accept the military government and wanted to fight for freedom or autonomy for the region. A new force was thus formed with 1500 young men under the leadership of the Sawbwa's brother Yang Zheng Shen (Jimmy Yang). During the last week of April 1965, the Burmese army was able to attack Kokang with the assistance of a group of Kokang soldiers who had surrendered to the Burmese army.

In total, 1000 women and children, including about 200 soldiers from the KMT, led by Yang Zheng Sheng troops, moved north to Kachin State. A unit of the KMT was in the area and its commander suggested it might be possible to go to Thailand, where their security could be ensured and, once settled there, they could plan their next move. Contact was made with a commander of the ex-KMT third army who agreed to

the proposal and instructed his unit to guide the Kokang party down to Thailand. The Kokang faced many difficulties on their way to Thailand, as the Burmese army chased them along their way. Once they crossed into Thai territory the Burmese gave up their chase and the families were reunited in Ta Wo, where many Kokang settled down (Yang Li 1997).

Back in Kokang, the Kokang Chinese enjoyed a short period of peace in the region until the BCP came into the area in 1968. At that time several different armed groups appeared in the region; the Burmese Tatmadaw, the Kokang self defense troop and the Kokang Communist Party - which was backed by the BCP. The Kokang people suffered a lot due to the civil wars and faced poverty as a result. In 1968, several villages in Kokang were burnt to the ground due to the conflict between the BCP and the Burmese Tatmadaw, who received support from the Kokang home guard – the Ka Kwe Ye troop. As a result, thousands of Kokang Chinese moved to inner Shan State with the help of the Kokang self defense troops. The military government officially arranged for these Kokang Chinese refugees to settle down in Lashio, Pyin Oo Lwin, Taunggyi, Moe Ne, Lwe Lin, Lin Ke and many other places in Shan State. A current estimate of the population of Kokang dispersed around Shan state is around 60,000 (Tun Naing 2000).

The events that occurred between 1965 and 1968 had the most impact on the people of Kokang. About 3,000 men, women and children were forced to migrate out of the area, the forced migration all the worse because they depended on their land, and it would be extremely difficult for them to make a living in another location. Many who migrated to Thailand and the Myanmar's central government controlled areas faced difficulties, as Kokang people seldom travel to settle elsewhere. They

were neither equipped nor prepared for the sudden eviction from their homes; moreover, they did not possess the skills needed to assist them to cope with their new life outside of the Kokang region. While it was difficult for those who migrated to the Shan States to carve out a living for themselves, the opportunities for those that went to Thailand were also severely limited. Some chose to live in the remote jungle, areas, cultivating, while others moved into the larger towns such as Chiang Mai to find work - as laborers and domestic help. Nowadays, Kokang people are spread all over the globe. The younger generations were able to adapt their lives well in the countries they adopted and are now doing well (personal interview with a KMT remnant from Kokang in Nam Rim village, Mae Hong Son Province in Thailand, 2010).

The Kokang region was then in the hands of the BCP from 1969 to 1989 – when the Kokang self-defense troop split away from the BCP and agreed a ceasefire with the military government. The situation in Kokang was very confused at that time; the BCP established their 404 battalion in Kokang and set up their headquarters in adjacent Wa State, in Pang Kham. A Kokang Chinese, Peng Jia Sheng, became leader of the BCP troops in Kokang and their levy troop grew in size with the support of the Chinese Communist Party. In order to prevent the Communist Party gaining power in the Shan State, the military government initiated the formation of a home guard troop, or in Burmese *Ka Kwe Ye*, in different parts of Shan State. Luo Xin Han, a local born Kokang Chinese became the leader of Kokang *Ka Kwe Ye* troop, and between 1969 and 1973, the home guard participated in many battles between the military government and the Communist Party. Among them, the Kunlong 40 day battle was the largest and longest, with fifteen soldiers from the Kokang *Ka Kwe Ye* troop being killed, and with more than 100 injured.

In 1973, the government ordered the dismantling the Ka Kwe Ye troop, but some of the soldiers who did not want to surrender their arms ran away to Thailand, where they rejoined the Kokang resistance troop in 1974. The existence of these freedom fighters in Thailand was very difficult, and to survive some of them had to cultivate grain, while others worked as laborers in the KMT camps; some worked as butchers and in other trades. For their daily needs each was allowed one baht (Yang Li 1997), but this troop eventually surrendered their arms to the military government in 1980 and returned to Lashio from Thailand. The government arranged a new village for them, which is 30 miles from Lashio, and named the village 'Salween Village'. The remnants of these home guard troops live around Lashio area today, and a large Kokang community can be found in the area. The village has been well-served in terms of education and healthcare services; some of the Kokang conduct cross-border business with their relatives who stayed in Thailand. Moreover Thailand became a place for many young Kokang to seek a better life after middle school in Burma; many migrated to Thailand and from there moved to Taiwan and other countries. This has led to a Kokang diaspora being seen all over the world.

Kokang people are always on the move, as most keep migrating to new towns, cities or countries. As a result, the number of Kokang has increased year on year in different areas. Castle and Miller have stated that people everywhere have been on the move on such a large scale that the contemporary world is experiencing an "the age of migration". While the locally born Kokang Chinese have migrated to other countries in the expectation of finding a better life, the Chinese from mainland China have taken the name of the Kokang when migrating into Myanmar. These new Chinese migrants own businesses in many cities in Shan State and Myanmar, especially in

Lashio, Muse and Mandalay (personal interview with members of the Yunnanese Association in Mandalay, 2010).

As Myanmar has a 2000 kilometer long border with China, many Chinese people, especially those from Yunnan have migrated to Myanmar from the border region over the years. In 1989, the central government of Myanmar signed ceasefire agreements with most of the rebel armies along the border areas, including the BCP, so many Chinese from Yunnan as well as other parts of south western China, including peasants, workers and intellectuals, flowed into Myanmar across the border. Lacking proper identification papers and immigration documents, nearly all of them ended up in the areas of northern Myanmar which were not controlled by the central government, but by the various rebel armies, including the BCP. To make living in a rough environment - where employment opportunities were extremely limited, many Yunnanese became poppy farmers, opium smugglers or both. Some former communist commanders became some of the richest men in Burma.

Recently, the opening of the border between China and Myanmar has led to an influx of Chinese people into northern Myanmar, and this threatens the population balance of the area. When a person in a northern Myanmar village dies, his or her death is not reported to the authorities; instead, that person's relatives send notice of the death and the person's papers to a broker in Ruili or another border town in Yunnan Province in China. The identification papers are then sold to Chinese people who want to migrate to Myanmar. The buyer's photo is placed on the ID card and he can then move to Myanmar, as a legal citizen. All of this is possible due to the weak immigration policies in Myanmar and also the corruption of the local officials assigned to work along the China-Myanmar border (Mika Toyota 2003a). However,

in Kokang this kind of incident rarely happens, as the Chinese from mainland China can travel into the region without any formalities. The local authorities have not developed strict policies on the movement of people, so thousands of people cross the border every day, just to visit, for business or gambling purposes.

Since the ceasefire agreement was signed between the central government and the Kokang military, the Kokang area has developed rapidly, into a modern, border trade town. The local authorities have set up investment policies which encourage Chinese businessmen to invest in the region, since the opium ban came in 2003. The new economic policies allow businessmen to buy land and run all kinds of businesses – whether legal or illegal. This has made the region a magnet for businessmen to conduct all kinds of business activities, and many Kokang who moved away from the region a long time ago have returned to their place of birth to take advantage of the business opportunities. Economic development of the region has brought with it many advantages for the Kokang Chinese, whether local or from outside Kokang. Many Chinese businessmen have set up trading companies in the region, and Laukkai has developed into a modern town with tall buildings and many entertainment activities; however, the town does not represent the picture across the region, as there are still many poor ex-poppy farmers facing food shortages in some of the remote villages of Kokang. Many young people from these villages have left for Laukkai and other cities in Shan State or Thailand, to find a job. As a result, Kokang people are still on the move – looking for better jobs and a place to settle down (details in Chapter V).

2.5 Legal Status of the Kokang Chinese in Myanmar

The Kokang Chinese has been an officially recognized ethnic group in Burma/Myanmar since the early independence period, though 90% of the population is Chinese. Only 60% of the population nowadays possesses a valid national id card, and some do not have any identification to show which nation they belong to, whether China or Burma. Many Kokang Chinese did not have an identification card until the recent elections took place in Myanmar in 2010. In order to allow Kokang Chinese to vote in the election, the Myanmar Immigration Department implemented a project for national registration, and issued national identity cards to the Kokang Chinese just before the election took place. However, some people from the remote villages still do not obtain an identification card; people have been living without identity cards for generations and do not have a sense of how important or useful it is to have one. They used to say that they were Chinese but nation-less people, as for generations they did not possess any national identification papers.

The mobility of the people is very much connected to the travel documents they do or do not possess. In Myanmar, there are many checkpoints which check people's identity cards or travel documents while they are travelling. People's movements are restricted by the documents they possess for domestic or international travel. For those Kokang who want to travel into the Myanmar government's administration area, they need to show identity cards or valid travel documents. As most of the Kokang do not have any papers and cannot speak Burmese, it is impossible for them to travel out of their region. These restrictions open up the opportunity for human traffickers to take advantage of those who do not possess valid travel documents. Many young people who want to leave their villages to look for a

better job have to rely on brokers to get to their destinations. In the past, many Kokang travelled to Thailand via mountainous routes with the help of armed troops; it took them several months to reach northern Thailand and they had to pay a fee to the troops who led them. Now, since the election, almost all Kokang people have valid national id cards, and this allows them to travel into the government administered areas.

In the past, the Kokang Chinese were mostly engaged in tea plantations, shifting cultivation, opium cultivation and raising livestock such as horses, pigs and mules, and they rarely travelled out of Kokang - only a few went to the Myanmar government administered cities or towns. As a result, they lacked general knowledge and lived under the hereditary rule of Tu Shi Guan for many decades. After World War II, some of the Kokang people started to travel to government administered areas, so in order to control people's mobility, the Kokang authorities issued local Kokang identity cards to those people who wanted to travel out of the region. This identification card was only issued to those who had been living in Kokang since their ancestors' time, and was not issued to more recent Chinese migrants. The Kokang Chinese used this kind of locally issued identity card for many decades, until the Myanmar government officially issued national identity cards to them.

In 1958, the central government sent many officials to the remoter areas of Shan State and set up immigration departments for the people there to go and register and be issued with national identity cards. As a result, the central government's immigration officials and staff travelled to many villages to carry out household and national registration. The Kokang people were classified into different categories by

the immigration officials in order to issue national identity cards for them (Tun Naing). The classifications were as follows:

- 1) Chinese living in Kokang since the Myanmar Kingdom period; those who are descendants of refugees from the late Ming dynasty
- 2) Chinese from China who migrated into Kokang before World War II
- 3) Chinese from China who migrated into Kokang after the political changes occurred in China, and
- 4) Descendants of the above mentioned Chinese.

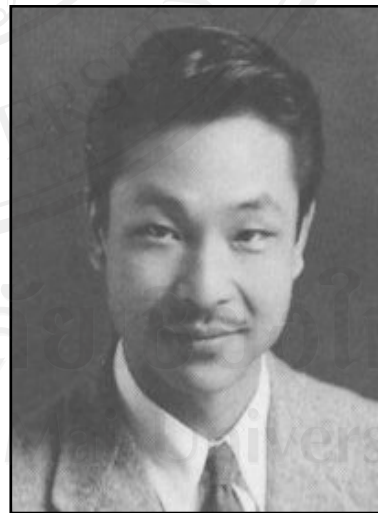
Since there had been different waves of Chinese migration into Kokang and the people were classified in four categories, the central government formed a committee to investigate the real situation of the border people in 1955. As per the committee's recommendations, an official national identity card was issued to Kokang people in 1958. The Myanmar immigration set up policies on issuing the national identity card - it was only issued to those Chinese who had been living in the Kokang region since their ancestors' time, and up until January 31st 1959. The Chinese who migrated into the region after January 31st 1959 were only eligible to receive a Foreign Registration Card (FRC). Not all the Kokang Chinese got their national identity cards, as most of them did not understand its importance - most of them were illiterate at that time and rarely travelled out of their village. As a result, many Kokang Chinese today still do not have a national identity card or any form of card or legal documentation.

There are around 50,000 Chinese people living in the Kokang region due to its proximity to the border (interview with the Kokang authorities), only a few of whom are officially registered at the local administration office - almost all of them live in

the region without any documentation. As Myanmar and China have had close relations in the area for many centuries ago, so there have been no strict border crossing policies in place. In addition, people from both sides of the border speak the same dialect, practice the same traditions and do not find much difference between them. In the past, Kokang, when compared to China where many political changes occurred, was much more peaceful and it was much easier to make a living, and as a result, many Chinese crossed the border and settled down in Kokang, while only a few Kokang migrated the other way into China, except for those who married Chinese people from China. In light of this history, it is very difficult to differentiate between the ‘real’ Kokang born Chinese and the recent Chinese migrants. It is this kind of difficulty that has led some Kokang Chinese to miss the chance to obtain official identity cards, while other new Chinese migrants have received them and settled down – making a decent living in the big cities of Myanmar.



2.1 Heng of Kokang (Yang Guo Zhen)



2.2 The Last Kokang *Tu Shi Guan* (Yang Kyein Tsai)



2.3 An Old Kokang Lady with 'Compressed' Feet (Left)



2.4 Miaozi and Palaung Women in Kokang



2.5 A Kokang Traditional Dance – the 'Da Ge'

(Photos sources : <http://blog.ifeng.com/2545888.html>)

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