



The Dara'ang and the Art of Becoming Governed

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ARTICLE



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ABSTRACT

Southeast Asia is marked by its diversity and, unfortunately, widespread ethnic conflict and political instability. This unsafe environment has led members of vulnerable ethnic groups, particularly those who reside in mountainous upland regions, to engage in refugee migrations throughout the region. Yale political scientist James C. Scott discusses this particular subset of upland migrants in his book *The Art of Not Being Governed*. He characterizes the interactions between the upland and lowland peoples as one in which the former seeks to escape the state control and official legibility from the latter. The Dara'ang are one such upland group seeking relocation. Since the 1990s, thousands of Dara'ang have fled Myanmar into northern Thailand in a pattern that seems to fit Scott's model. This paper argues, however, that the Dara'ang exhibit shifting attitudes toward state control and legibility—from one that seeks to escape the state to one that embraces the state in pursuit of an improved quality of life. Data for this paper was collected through archival research and fieldwork in Thailand and Myanmar in 2018. Inclusive of qualitative interviews and observational data, the paper analyzes collected evidence against Scott's theoretical framework to modify Scott's conclusions, at least with respect to the experience of Dara'ang refugees.

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KEYWORDS:

Dara'ang; Thailand; Refugees; State-society relations; upland peoples

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

McCaw, Gwen, Kaytlyn Marcotte and Marine Vieille. 2021. "The Dara'ang and the Art of Becoming Governed." *ASIANetwork Exchange*, 28(1), pp. 67–75. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/ane.8151>

Political violence and humanitarian crises plague the region of Southeast Asia. In recent decades, ethnic conflict and political instability have led to multiple refugee migratory events, with one prominent pattern of refugee movement being from Myanmar to Thailand. Many such migrants face novel challenges in adjusting to their new country of settlement. This paper analyzes the refugee migration experiences of the Dara'ang people—a group of highland peoples forced to flee into Thailand to avoid violent domestic conflict in Shan State in Myanmar. The Dara'ang, also known as the Palaung, are a relatively unknown refugee group to casual and academic observers of the region because of their small numbers and pattern of resettling at higher altitudes in mountainous northern Thailand, largely out of the public eye. Since the 1990s, close to 8,000 Dara'ang have fled into Thailand by way of both official and unofficial channels in search of a better life. This paper provides a scholarly account of the Dara'ang people's refugee experiences in Chiang Mai Province in northern Thailand, in the famed "Golden Triangle" where Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand meet. It argues that Dara'ang refugees, unlike their ancestors who fled upland to avoid state control, now seek to engage with the Thai state, their preferred state, given that the full encroachment of the state into the once "nonstate" spaces of mountainous upland climbs is now complete. Today's Dara'ang refugees seek to master the "art of being governed" in Thailand, of becoming "legible" (in James C. Scott's interpretation of the word) as a strategic means to escape the war, violence, and oppression they endured as an upland minority in Myanmar's unstable Shan State.

Because of their small population and relative obscurity among the larger populations of refugees from Myanmar in Thailand and a dearth of scholarly sources on this refugee community, Dara'ang interactions with Thai authorities and society deserve greater attention. This paper therefore analyzes Dara'ang refugee experiences and interactions with Thai authorities and communities, explains how these interactions have changed over time, and explores how the Dara'ang fit into the larger-scale relationship between upland and lowland people in Southeast Asia. It combines archival research and on-site field research conducted in both Thailand and Myanmar during July 2018. The methodology employed for gathering data drew upon primary and secondary sources, a series of structured and semi-structured qualitative interviews with Dara'ang migrants and stakeholders in Thailand, observational data from historical sites and museums, and documented field notes and video footage assembled during three weeks of site visits and fieldwork.¹ Sources and methods of analysis combine to uncover how Dara'ang groups in Thailand, both those with refugee status and those undocumented, interact with the Thai state and Thai society. The paper begins with the adoption of a

conceptual framework for upland-lowland relations in Southeast Asia articulated by political scientist James C. Scott (2009). It then explains the legal background and current status of the Dara'ang people with respect to the governments of Myanmar and Thailand. Lastly, it investigates the current developmental status of Dara'ang migrant villages within Thailand and provides evidence as to how the Dara'ang proactively engage with the Thai state, the economy, and Thai society.

JAMES C. SCOTT AND THE ART OF NOT BEING GOVERNED

There have been many studies that have attempted to explain the relationships between disparate groups of people residing in close proximity. Among such works, James C. Scott's *The Art of Not Being Governed* (2009) is a new keystone in Southeast Asian studies. In this work, Scott discusses the people of "Zomia," a term initially coined by Willem van Schendel to describe the large upland region that spreads across eight countries in South and Southeast Asia, defined by cultural features (Scott 2009, 14). While a simple representation of this space on a map may not obviate the logic of this cultural grouping, it was the belief of van Schendel—eventually further expanded on by Scott—that the groups of people contained within Zomia shared enough cultural traits to make their grouping under one name appropriate. Scott's expansion of the term contextualizes the lifestyles of those who live there, characterizing their separation from lowland-dominated governments as a manner of intentional difference in elevation instead of accident of residence. His work paints with a wide brush, suggesting a sort of irrecoverable dichotomy between those residents of the highlands, where upland minorities reside, and lowland regions, where majority cultures such as the Han, Burman, Thai, and Lao reside. This incompatibility sprouts largely from the upland groups' voluntary settling, as Scott describes it, in the "nonstate spaces" of Zomia, utilizing it as a "region of resistance to valley states [and] a region of refuge as well" (2009, 13, 22). These nonstate spaces, as defined by Scott, refer to those regions where people fleeing the growing spheres of central government influences have been able to settle outside their functional reaches. These spaces do exist within the internationally understood borders of states, but the states' control of them is technical, not functional. The distinction can be separately explained by Scott's concept of "legibility." The idea of being legible can be simply, albeit incompletely, defined as one's ability to be counted by government, but a more complete definition would define the term as being able to be integrated into the governing body's bureaucracy, whether in the form of taxation, licensing, forced labor, or a military draft (Scott 2009, 14, 54). In nonstate spaces, the

people can be described as lacking legibility as defined by the government. Scott's work further discusses the many cultural differences between the lowland groups of Zomia that try to claim the right to govern and, most notably, upland groups and their strong desire to resist that claim (4). The research that informs this paper's analysis of those Dara'ang living in Chiang Mai Province of northern Thailand suggests that, for this group, these stressors may have changed. Thus, we seek to explain, through Scott's lens, the current interplay between the Dara'ang people and the entities closely involved in their lives.

The Dara'ang have been forced to adapt in response to pressures from growing state spaces for much of their recent existence. Their traditional home is in Burma (present-day Myanmar), primarily within the modern-day Shan State region. During the period when the Burmese attempted to rule over this territory, the Dara'ang's interactions with the government adhere quite firmly to Scott's descriptions. The Dara'ang moved their communities higher up into the hills to avoid the rule of the lowland Burmese ethnic group (Howard and Wattanaphun 2002; Manheng 2018). This practice takes advantage of one of the primary methods Scott discusses: "friction of distance." The idea of "friction of distance" represents the variable level of deterrence to governance in the land itself in different geographic settings, with mountains and the accompanying travelling difficulties representing the primary deterrent here—the more mountainous the terrain, the more the friction of distance protects minorities from state encroachment. Scott (2009, 5–7) states that upland groups will thus move further and further up a mountainside in response to growing pressure from a lowland state, seeking to maintain a friction of distance that allows their nonstate space to remain so. Over time, repeated pressures from the Burmese-led government led to the development of a general fear and distrust of lowlanders (Manheng 2018). Considering the near-constant conflict present within Shan State, the Dara'ang found themselves caught in between rebels and the government (Silverstein 1958, 44–46). For the Dara'ang of the time, becoming legible in the state space meant surrendering to this relationship, an outcome that clearly served the purposes of few in the region.

In recent decades, conflict, infrastructure development, and technology have pushed the violent reach of the Myanmar state space into the Dara'ang's nonstate space. These developments lessened the friction of distance between the upland groups and the military government by alleviating the deterrent created by the mountainous terrain, contributing to the diminishing of local autonomy. As a result, some decided to move to the Thai border. Among these was Nawng Manheng, one of the original Dara'ang refugees and a current resident of No Le, the original Dara'ang-specific village just inside

Thailand's borders. When Nawng Manheng crossed the Thai-Burmese border forty-one years ago, along with about thirty-five other people, it marked the official beginning of this mode of political egress, bringing a type of legitimacy, or legibility, to the Dara'ang people's experience in Thailand. Importantly, this does not directly address the continued illegibility being sought by those who remained in Shan State. It instead marks the beginning of a different relation among those Dara'ang that would come to settle in Thailand.

With the king of Thailand's blessing, they were granted asylum, and the Dara'ang, which means "people who stay in the mountains," simply moved from one upland region to another (T. Lawan 2018a). These high-altitude settlements, lying between mountains considered sacred in Thai culture, presented an interesting conflict between what was expected under a less antagonistic state and what their geographic location entailed (Swearer, Premchit, and Dokbuakaew 2004). The location of their settlement near important cultural sites greatly increased public attention to both their existence and their plight among local Thai people, particularly as the Thai king allocated public funds towards their community. The king at the time was establishing programs through the Royal Project Initiative to give refugees opportunities to engage in trade in legal goods, to wean them off poppy-growing and the opium industry, which played key roles in both the traditional upland-to-lowland economy and political conflicts. The government granted the first large Dara'ang settlement, in No Le, the resources to cultivate strawberries, beans, and other cash crops, a practice the Dara'ang continue to this day.

Despite the Thai government's support and contributions to their lives and livelihoods, the Dara'ang continued to hold a distrust of outsiders from their time in Burma—particularly those of the lowlands—and spent much of their early time in Thailand embracing the illegibility of their lifestyle in the hills (Manheng 2018). This continued resistance to lowland control and influence is predicted by Scott's theories, but more current observations suggest that this resistance is now breaking down. Within the past thirty years, this attitude has undergone a change, and this new state of affairs was considered by Scott in his work. While being published in 2009, Scott primarily pulled from data collected before World War II, leading him to assert that his exact framework "makes little sense for the period following the Second World War" (xii). As Scott himself suspected, much of what he held as constant among residents of the Zomia region seems to have shifted since the end of his study. The introduction of "distance demolishing" technologies dramatically "changed the balance of power" between upland groups and their lowland neighbors (Scott 2009, xii). Whereas the original incentive structure for upland groups had not led to the conclusion that assimilation was a necessary outcome,

today's context has altered the conclusions that might be drawn and suggested a need for further evaluation of these ideas.

THE DARA'ANG AND MODERN-DAY SCOTT

Scott's framework for upland-lowland relations establishes a dichotomous relationship where the upland people flee the legibility of governance, up into the nonstate spaces of higher elevations. Scott refers to this dynamic as "state-evading behavior." As technology has developed over time, the friction of distance present between these two groups has decreased, forcing the upland people even further upward. However, for some upland groups in northern Thailand, the relationship between technological development and geographic relocation seems to have ceased. Here, the Dara'ang of Thailand are striving for a more coherent and structured relationship with the Thai government, essentially striving for legibility. Obtaining Thai citizenship is a common goal for Dara'ang individuals. The Dara'ang are particularly concerned with their children's legal rights. They seek assimilation under the Thai government umbrella while maintaining their traditional practices and customs (T. Lawan 2018a)—like many in Southeast Asia, their loyalty lies in their ethnic group first and foremost. The practices and attitudes of those who live in their villages demonstrate that the move to Thailand has brought with it a shift in priorities and goals.

Fear of persecution drove these Dara'ang out of Myanmar. Historically, they resorted to isolationism within their home country by settling further and further up the hills. However, this strategy offered neither the protection nor the improved living conditions they sought. As a smaller ethnic group, the Dara'ang from the Namsang area in Shan State were caught up in the conflict between the Shan United Army and the Burmese military. Dara'ang boys and young men would be forcibly conscripted as soldiers or forced to conduct drug transactions for either party (Village Elders 2018). The Shan Army, and especially those tied to the drug lord Khun Sa, were especially brutal. In Burma, the economic relationship between upland and lowland peoples was limited and one-sided, with a less developed government focused on providing available goods and services to the domestic market to multiple groups of ethnic minorities in the upland regions (Scott 2009, 107). Alongside the same government's exploitation of these same groups, the results were generally negative and unconvincing to those they sought to sway. Thailand furnished a different environment, particularly early in the timeline of the Dara'ang's migration, in that the Thai government offered direct programs that prioritized the economic assimilation of upland groups, (Manheng 2018). These programs were made available as part of the Royal Project Initiative to curtail the internal cultivation of opium by upland residents, focusing on Doi Tung, one

of Thailand's sacred mountains. The program was started in 1964 by Princess Mother Mae Fah Luang and was intended as an anti-drug and poverty-alleviation program. Some of the areas of concern for the Royal Project Initiative were opium production, droughts, deforestation, unemployment, flooding, extremism, the growth of Islam,² and environmental degradation. The availability of such programs was an opportunity for development that had been nonexistent in Burma. The adoption of these programs by the early Dara'ang settlers likely cultivated a more trusting relationship with the government, but many of the current residents of these early villages believe that the original refugees' initial reluctance to accept more aid and seek out greater benefits has severely hindered their development and standard of living (Manheng 2018, T. Lawan 2018b). Beyond economic benefits, the greater level of state development in Thailand (when compared with Myanmar) confers legible members of the state access to a relatively peaceful and stable society, access to notably better health care and education systems, and greater freedom from oppressive military actors. From the perspective of the Dara'ang refugees, the implication here is that the potential relationship between upland groups and state centers is different in this case than it has been historically. Past transitions on the part of non-state groups moving into state centers would traditionally be expected to entail benefits for the state in question with little benefit going to the absorbed group in exchange for detriments such as loss of local authority, enforced living permanence, and other downsides of state legibility. However, such a move under the recent political climate could potentially incur both political and lifestyle benefits for the moving party notably greater than those that could be achieved solely within the societal structure of the ethnic group.

The Thai government-run primary school in the largest Dara'ang village in Chiang Mai Province's Fang District, Huay Mak Liam, provides a useful example of a case in which refugees have embraced state resources to receive benefits. In addition to following programming dictated by Thailand's standardized curriculum, the school has a weekly Dara'ang cultural day where students are encouraged to wear traditional dress. Dara'ang students also sing songs praising the village and those who live there, a Dara'ang tradition, each morning before classes begin, along with the Thai national anthem. Although the Dara'ang language is heard at the school, the school formally conducts educational curriculum in Thai, and the school's main goal is to teach children how to exist within the Thai state to ensure their assimilation (Kamat 2018). There are about 430 students taught by 18 teachers, all of whom are ethnically Thai. The free lunch program is run by the teachers, who teach the students how to cook healthy meals. The teachers hope that the children will transmit their acquired knowledge to their families

and improve food hygiene and nutrition in the village. The school integrates the vision of late King Bhumibol Adulyadej's "sufficiency economy" by implementing agricultural education programs in this rural area.³ In Huay Mak Liam, children are taught how to fish, raise chickens, and plants various foods. Their local harvest is used in the free lunch program (Headmaster 2018).

Another service offered by the school is a health program that checks up on the school's children. Although health care is free for all Thai citizens and inexpensive for non-citizens, access to services require forms of transportation that are not available to all. The school's provision of health services within the building thus does much to circumvent this issue, as it is located near the center of Huay Mak Liam, within walking distance for most, if not all, of the children who attend. The largely accepted view of the school held by village leaders is that this education is both welcome and necessary for the continued future of their people (Seana 2018). Whereas Scott suggests that ethnic groups like the Dara'ang will often choose to live in the hills to avoid assimilation into the cultural homogeneity of state centers in the past, evidence today suggests that the villagers now perceive legibility as desirable.

Despite having to deal with an overly complicated and opaque system of identification cards giving each individual person a "level" of citizenship, the villagers put in significant effort to improve their status, hoping that they will be able to participate in citizen activities such as free travel and farmland leasing (T. Lawan 2018a, P. Latwan 2018). Far from being concerned about the drawbacks of the Thai state, Dara'ang refugees actively seek the benefits and lifestyle of Thai citizenship. In addition to engaging with Thai schooling, health care, and legal status, they have communicated and worked with the government to obtain electricity and a paved road that connects their village to lowland areas populated by the Thai.

This has resulted in the current state of affairs, in which the Dara'ang people have become much more integrated not only into the Thai state space but also the international community. The group has become more enthusiastic and outgoing in seeking aid from nonprofit organizations and wealthy individuals. The Thai-run elementary school in Huay Mak Liam is only partially funded by the Thai government, which pays for salaried workers and supported the construction of the main building and the teachers' housing. The rest of the funding, including new buildings, upgraded classrooms, and improved facilities, has been paid for by international development groups and individual donors (Headmaster 2018), who have contributed as a direct result of efforts by Dara'ang village leaders to secure additional resources. Plan Japan and Takara, small non-profits that focused on infrastructure and education development in small Asian towns, provided further funds to better the school. An

education-focused European non-profit group sponsored a preschool that teaches 144 children between the age of four and six years old, divided into classes of between twenty and thirty pupils. While the preschool was not constructed by the Thai state—as is the case of the adjacent facility—the state does provide teachers in a similar manner (Headmaster 2018). A doctor from Singapore donated a clean water system to the school. Being not only open to but *seeking out* donations of this type has allowed the school to grow far beyond the typical government project. Thus, more students can attend the school for more years, increasing their knowledge of the Thai language and better preparing them for the more integrated life many in the village hope will be their future.

Beyond direct state aid, village leaders have been active in utilizing support from development non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as the Upland Holistic Development Program (UHDP). A combination of these groups and certain private companies helps provide running water and cellular service—and the basic infrastructure needed for access to wired internet—to the homes of the village. The presence of funding from these groups provides a healthy alternative to reliance on the state for these services, given both the distrust exhibited by the Dara'ang refugee group regarding integration into the state and the state's potential unwillingness to commit large amounts of resources to a relatively small number of people. Recent years have seen the availability of funds diminish—particularly under King Bhumibol's successor, King Vajiralongkorn—and an inconsistent commitment of funds to upland aid programs such as the DNA citizenship program outside the education program in recent years has led to growing concern about the availability of those funds moving forward (P. Latwan 2018; Kamat 2018). These concerns may overestimate the danger, given the government's historic commitments to the village and continued support in education, but distrust remains, stemming from these recent changes and a continued wariness of becoming reliant.

Importantly, observational data confirms that the UHDP has garnered much public support. Agroforestry, environmental conservation, health and water access, and backyard agriculture are the main areas of concern for the NGO. The UHDP has taught the same agroforestry practices to all upland groups, including the Dara'ang. Along with backyard agriculture, which is a form of subsistence agriculture, agroforestry has helped the Dara'ang become more self-sufficient. It is especially useful in Huay Mak Liam, where the Thai government has forbidden the Dara'ang from making use of the forest surrounding their village. UHDP helped to bring water to the village at affordable rates, saving the Dara'ang time and money (U-Baan 2018). The NGO also hosts a radio show featuring a Dara'ang man named "DJ Phat," which

largely serves as a networking and advice service for the benefit of Dara'ang and other upland groups seeking the benefits of living within Thai borders.

UHDP plays a key role in the Dara'ang's seeking legibility within Thailand by providing legal guidance. The process of obtaining an identification card in Thailand is inherently complex, and refugees tend to lack understanding about how to acquire status. There are five different types of documentation available for refugees in Thailand, each with varying levels of accessibility and benefits. The most obvious is full citizenship, though that is quite uncommon. Most of the first Dara'ang to settle in Thailand obtained full citizenship, but many of their children did not; for full citizenship at birth, one needs to be documented as a newborn, either at a hospital or by a doctor, which can be extremely difficult for populations in more remote areas. An important advantage of full citizenship is the right to own land, which provides stability: landowners can be sure that they will not have their access to land removed or revoked by the state and because they acquire land for agricultural purposes, this assurance enhances their quality of life. Blue cards are the second highest form of legal status; though these blue cards only grant about 80 percent of the rights available to those with full Thai citizenship, they allow their holders to obtain approval if they wish to travel out of the country. Unfortunately, blue card holders still cannot purchase land, work for the Thai government, or vote. Other types of cards include ten-year labor permits and more temporary labor cards with time-specific limits. The least attractive status of all is the lack of status. Reports about the Dara'ang show that they are concerned and anxious about getting into arguments with the police (P. Latwan 2018; T. Lawan 2018b). Some get frustrated and decide to move back to Myanmar. Most who make this choice, however, end up returning to Thailand on account of the lack of safety, the higher levels of tension, and the absence of financial security they encounter in Myanmar (P. Latwan 2018). UHDP programs help connect the Dara'ang with services that can provide legal advice to regularize their situations, since 90 percent of the Dara'ang in Thailand were not eligible for birthright citizenship and face significant barriers to obtain citizenship through the state's DNA citizenship system. (Cheva-Isarakul 2018).⁴ The popularity of these programs demonstrates a potential secondary explanation for the changing behavior of the Dara'ang, if not also other groups in similar situation: In a manner that demonstrates a transition from Scott's framework which describes the direct relationship between two parties, the upland communities and the lowland state, over the past thirty years ethnic minorities have come to have other options through which they can receive resources or guidance. For those dissuaded from attempting to form closer ties with lowlanders on account of power and cultural

differences with the ruling ethnicity, these intermediaries are more trusted to prioritize the interests of the upland groups. Regardless of the cause and the means, there is significant evidence that the Dara'ang are seeking out the assistance of groups, both within the state and without, in order to better their standard of living and ease their transition into Thai state space. While much of the evidence collected during this research is specific to the Dara'ang ethnic group, the wide reach of the UHDP and the close proximity of other ethnic groups suggest that further research be conducted to determine if this changing relationship is widespread across other upland groups in Thailand.

BECOMING PART OF THE LOWLAND COMMUNITY

At this point, it is important to differentiate between becoming part of the Thai state and becoming culturally Thai, particularly in light of what past state-evading behavior on the part of what lowland the Thai people see as "hill tribes." Scott describes this relationship is nearly impossible to separate and states that from the Thai perspective, "becoming civilized ... is nearly indistinguishable from becoming ... Thai" (2009, 105). Scott's use of the word "civilized" comes from an important context, as the specific frame of reference here is that of the lowland Thai elite and not some general conception of "civilized." An elaboration of his point would be that lowland Thai consider the traditional practices of upland groups to be uncivilized due to their cultural differences. He notes that a conversion from animism to Buddhism is seen as a pivotal precursor to an ethnic minority group's inclusion into the state (104). From research conducted over the course of our project, the Dara'ang appear to be on this path, with the primary religion of the group being a hybrid of Buddhism and animism, a belief system common among ethnic groups close to state centers throughout Zomia. Interestingly, this gradual shift did not occur during the group's time in Myanmar, suggesting that their new, more positive relationship with the state has played a key role in introducing Buddhism into their day-to-day lives, whether that be by way of schooling, closer proximity to lowland Thai communities in comparison to previous proximity to Burmese communities, or increased trade and labor relations (T. Lawan 2018b). However, rather than seeing this shift as a harbinger of cultural loss, the same people who advocate for a transition to Thai citizenship also declare the impossibility of a cultural shift away from Dara'ang traditions (T. Lawan 2018b, Seang 2018). They view the introduction of elements of traditional Thai practices, such as Buddhism, as simple components of the culture's evolution and growth, often highlighting the community's adaptability as evidence. From these sources, this belief highlights a subtle tension between citizenship and identity.

The Dara'ang people have struggled with their state identity since fleeing to Thailand. Many among the population do not feel as if they have to identify either as Burmese or Thai—for all purposes, they identify as Dara'ang (T. Lawan 2018b). In the village of No Lae on Doi Ang Khang mountain, A-Un Manheng and his father Nawng Manheng claim that getting properly documented is a struggle that the entire community faces. Despite of being one of the few Dara'ang who have a college degree, A-Un has struggled to find a job outside of No Lae due to travel restrictions on his residence card (Manheng 2018). While the approach that the Dara'ang have taken in their interactions with the Thai government has shifted, it is clear that there still exist structural barriers to accessing resources for those in this community, largely surrounding this pursuit of official documentation and, ideally, citizenship.

Beyond the official citizenship cards mentioned above, there are additional sets of cards that most Dara'ang use to conduct basic affairs and work. The Bat Husu card is one example. A Bat Husu card is not recognized as a citizenship card, but it allows the holder to remain in the country for ten years. Greatly valued, these cards allow people the ability to obtain work and access housing in Thailand more freely. The last two levels of official residential status are Hua Sun cards and work permits. Holders of these cards only have temporary status, but this status allows card holders to obtain jobs legally. If an individual does not have one of these cards, one is classified as undocumented and is at risk of being deported and subject to capricious and unscrupulous employers (P. Latwan 2018; T. Lawan 2018b).

Migrants seeking to upgrade their card status and legal position do so in an effort to advance their socioeconomic standing and opportunities in Thai society. Ta, a thirty-year-old migrant, has been able to rent land many miles from his village to farm corn over the past few years. This economic opportunity has been vital for stimulating his income and allowing him and his family to renovate their home and live more comfortably in his migrant village. Though his identification card allows him to rent land, the owner of the land has the last say in the arrangement. If there is someone who is willing to offer more money to rent the same land, then the owner has the discretion to kick Ta off the land, even in the middle of growing crops, and allow a new farmer to come in. Ta and many other entrepreneurially minded refugees suffer the inability to purchase or own land due to their limited residential status. Some in such situations team up with parents who have full citizenship to purchase land. Ta has also been able to harvest and grow lychee fruit on land owned by his aging father. This arrangement allows Ta to have a smaller but more stable income in the event that he can no longer rent the land that he currently

grows corn on (T. Lawan 2018a). What will happen to the title for his father's land upon his father's death remains an open question.

FINAL OBSERVATIONS

This research demonstrates a collective mentality among the Dara'ang people in the villages of No Lae, Huay Mak Liam, and Huay Chanu that prioritizes Thai citizenship, state legibility, and closer economic and social ties with the lowland Thai. This new approach to interactions with the Thai state represents a significant shift from the dichotomous relationship described by James C. Scott in *The Art of Not Being Governed*, in which he argues that attempts by lowland state centers to bring in the labor and agriculture of upland groups were met with state-evading behavior from minority groups. As noted above, Scott did not consider his thesis to have a firm hold past the period that his data was drawn from, as the widespread development and embrace of advanced technologies by state centers have rendered attempts at maintaining nonstate spaces by means of friction of distance futile. While his work does much to explain how this dynamic developed and functioned as the involved nation-states continued to grow, there remains a need to further explain how this relationship has changed since his described time period. This paper fills in the story with a new dynamic that has emerged in recent decades, a dynamic that finds some upland minorities, suffering endless economic limitations and harassment by more powerful state and cultural groups, now seeking to be governed in a manner of their own choosing—of preferring life under one state rather than under another. Field interviews conducted with Dara'ang refugees for this project suggest a combined pursuit to maximize a positive cost-benefit ratio through preference of being governed by the Thai state with engagement of Thai intermediaries and third-party groups to assist in their transition into lowland society. Further research is needed to fully confirm these conclusions, but the evidence is mounting that Thailand's Dara'ang migrants seek to be governed. These results raise other questions, including about whether this changing mentality among the Dara'ang is unique among such populations. Not only in Thailand but all across Zomia, further research ought to investigate whether the changing relationship observed among the Dara'ang is emerging among other groups within the region—and if so, what the differences are in each of these groups. While their historical peers kept to themselves, seeking interaction with large population centers only for trade, the Dara'ang ethnic group today is transitioning toward a new approach. Rather than practice the art of *not* being governed, Myanmar's Dara'ang refugees who reside in Thailand now practice the new art of becoming governed.

NOTES

- 1 Field research, funded in part by an ASIANetwork-Freeman grant and a Mellon Digital Humanities grant, was conducted ethically through adherence to self-regulatory guidelines and the accepted practices and standards of humanistic research, oral history, and scholarly inquiry.
- 2 Concerns surrounding growing embrace of Islam by those within Thailand were considered of critical importance to a royal structure that has historically considered protection and purification of Buddhism within the state crucial. The time surrounding the Royal Project Initiative was a particularly heated time for this conflict. See Yoneo Ishii (1994) for more.
- 3 This “sufficiency economy” is an economic model emphasizing sustainability and agriculture based off of the sayings and development projects of King Bhumibol and aligned with Buddhist economic practices. For more, see Darren Noy (2011).
- 4 Notably, there is currently a method by which this issue of “statelessness” among upland groups is being addressed by the Thai state by way of DNA testing. However, this system is rather fraught, with access, cost, and outcomes varying radically among different ethnic groups and geographic locations, and there is some concern that statelessness is not being addressed to the level expected. For further reading, please see Amanda Flaim (2017).

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors completed this research with funding in part from an ASIANetwork-Freeman grant and a Mellon Digital Humanities grant.

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TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

McCaw, Gwen, Kaytlyn Marcotte and Marine Vieille. 2021. The Dara'ang and the Art of Becoming Governed. *ASIANetwork Exchange*, 28(1), pp. 67–75. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/ane.8151>

Published: 28 December 2021

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