

# Temporal Dimension in Thai-Lao Relations

The Historiography of Ubon Ratchathani and Champassak

# Today's Topics

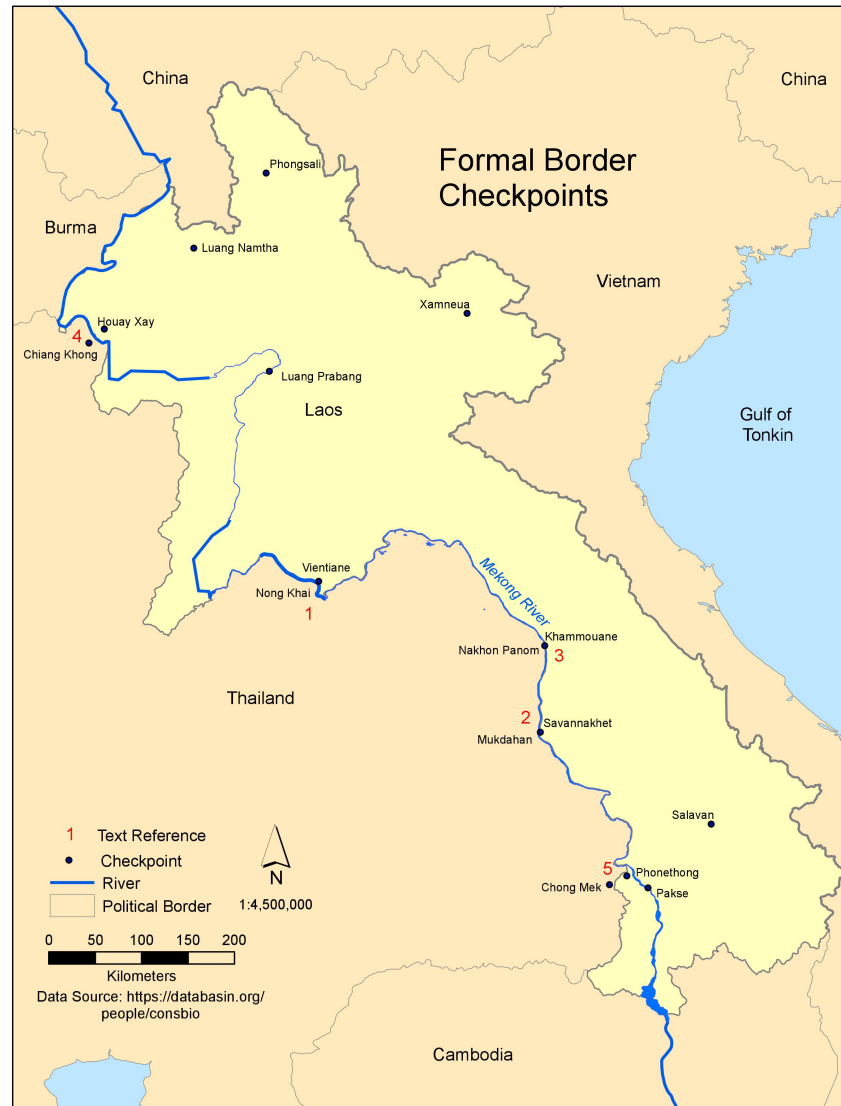
- 1. Introduction: The location of the case study
- 2. Research questions and argument of this presentation
- 3. Temporal Trap in International Relations
- 4. The narrative of Thai-Lao relations in IR
- 5. Conclusion

# 1. Introduction: The location of the case study

- Where is Thailand and Lao PDR?
- Where is the borderland of Ubon Ratchathani and Champassak?



# 1. Introduction: The location of the case study



# 1. Introduction: The location of the case study



# 1. Introduction: The location of the case study

- Why is the borderland of Ubon Ratchathani and Champassak has been chosen?
- The contemporary Thai-Lao border is 1810 kilometres.
- The Mekong border: riverine border is 1108 kilometres.
- The overland border is 702 kilometres.



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# 1. Introduction: The location of the case study



## 2. Research questions and argument of this presentation

- Research question
- What are the ways in which temporality in the discussion of the Thai-Lao border of Ubon Ratchathani and Champassak is interpreted in International Relations ?



## 2. Research questions and argument of this presentation

- **The argument of this presentation**
- If the temporality of the interstate relations are interpreted by IR scholars, the temporal trap is observed
  - Temporality monopolised by the elites, state-centrism and unilinear historicism
- If the interstate relations are more interdisciplinary and the analysis is refocused from the capital city to the borderland: Pluralities of temporal dimension can be expected
  - Mixed interpretation of time by the elites of the capital and the elites of the local
  - Less state-centric and different ways of historical narratives produced.

## 2. Research questions and argument of this presentation

- Combination of state-centric and border-centric pluralities
- The state offers the ways in which the time is state-centric, linear and is monopolised by the political elites.
- People in the borderland has their own version of history which is different from what the state expects.

### 3. Temporal dimension in International Relations: Thai-Lao relations

- Social science
  - Kia Lindroos (1998)
  - Barbara Adam (1990)
- Temporal dimension in the narrative of International Relations
  - Kimberley Hutchings (2008)
- Chronos the modernist interpretation of time of formal schedules, often controlled by the state
- Kairos the actual judgement whether or not to conform to *chronos* in a particular situation

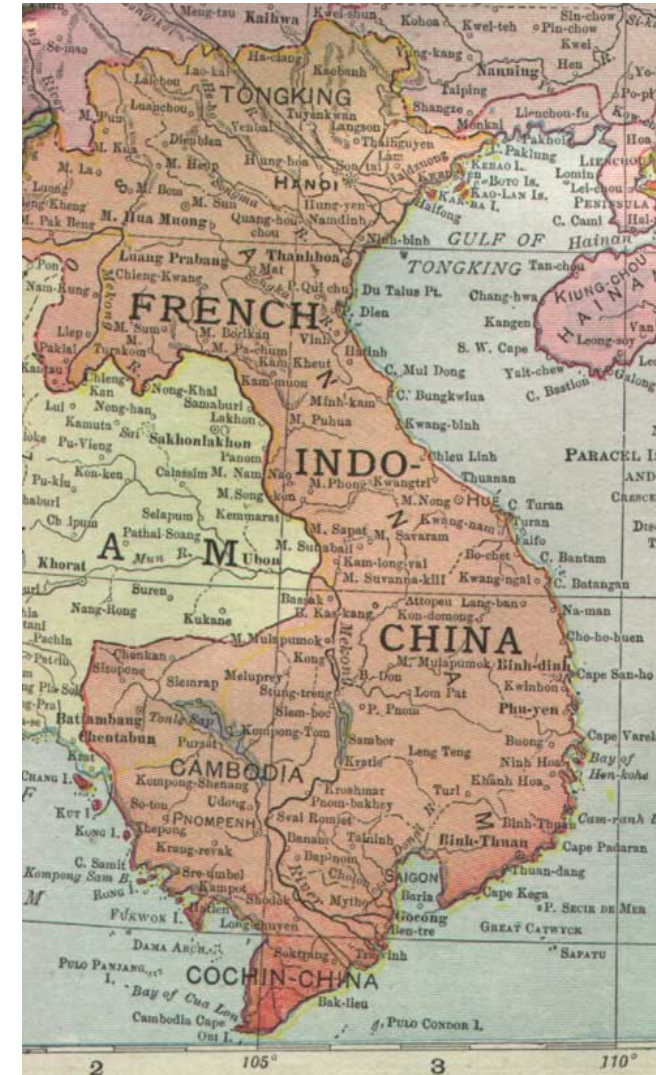


### 3. Temporal Trap in International Relations: Thai-Lao relations

- Temporal trap
- State-centrism –
  - Time is state-centric in IR narratives
- Temporality controlled by the political elites
  - Time is controlled and dictated by the elites
- Unilinear historicism
  - Chronos runs its course with the interruption of kairos but in a unilinear manner

## 4. The narrative of Thai-Lao relations in IR

- 4.1 colonial time
- The political narratives are monopolised by political elites
- The Mekong was used to separate to political unit
- Siam
- Indochina





## 4. The narrative of Thai-Lao relations in IR

- The French
  - Roland Meyer (1931)
  - Ch. Lemire (1894)
  - Lucien de Reinach (1919)
  - August Pavie (1902)
  - Alfred Coussot and Henri Ruel (1898)
  - Eugène Picanon (1901)

## 4. The narrative of Thai-Lao relations in IR

- The Siamese
  - The name [of Monthon Lao Kao] was changed again to “Isan” (from Pali: Northeast) “for shorter and easier pronunciation”, according to the Regulation signed by the Minister of Interior, Prince Damrong Rachanuphap



## 4. The narrative of Thai-Lao relations in IR

- The Siamese
  - Pathom Khanechon revised the local documents of Ubon Ratchathani, with a close supervision of Prince Damrong
  - Some words in the original text were changed.
- The indigenous people of the region (*khon phuen mueang*) are Lao, Khmer (*Khamen*), and Suai, race (*chat*), and [in addition] there are people of other countries (*prathet uen*), such as Thai, Farang [Westerners], Vietnamese, Burmese, Tongsu, and Chinese, who have settled to engage with trade in large numbers (Iijima, 2018)

## 4. The narrative of Thai-Lao relations in IR

- When the people of the Lao race (*chon chat lao*) who had been in the country (*prathet*) to the north, which had Mueang Sisattanakhanahut (Wiangchan) for example, dispersed and came down to get settled independently....
- When the people of the Thai race (*chon chat thai*) who had been in the country to the north, which had Mueang Sisattanakhanahut (Wiangchan), for example, dispersed and came down to get settled independently.....

## 4. The narrative of Thai-Lao relations in IR

- 4.2 1954-1975: Temporality monopolised by the political elites
- Eisenhower (1965): “...the fall of Laos to communism could mean the subsequent fall – like the tumbling row of dominoes – of it still free neighbors”.
- Kissinger (1994): Domino discourses when discussing Indochina





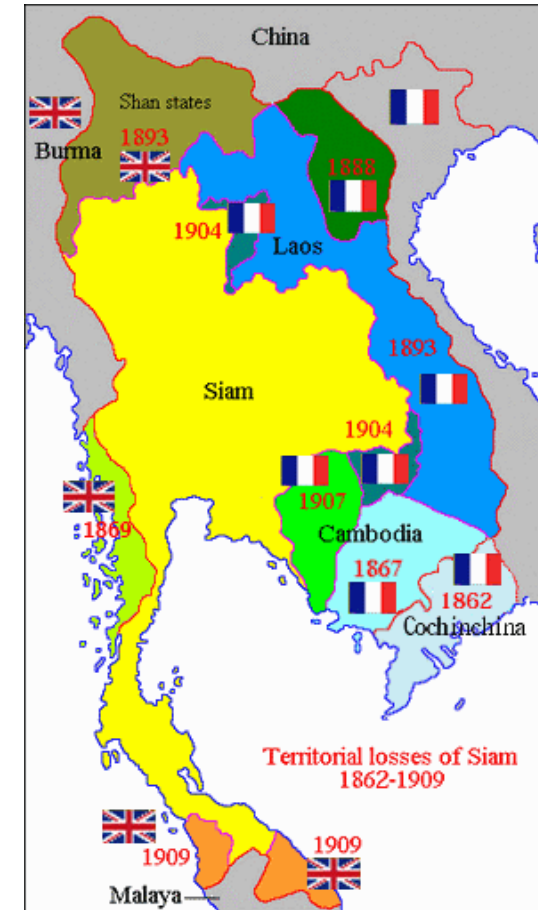
## 4. The narrative of Thai-Lao relations in IR

### Unilinear historicism

M.L. Bansoon Ladavalya (1970)'s historical account; Thai nationalistic narrative of Lao being part of Bangkok polity before 1893; territorial loss

IR teaching materials to Chiang Mai University (1970)

- US policy changed to support the inclusion of Pathet Lao
- Disagreement; fear of threat to Thai border

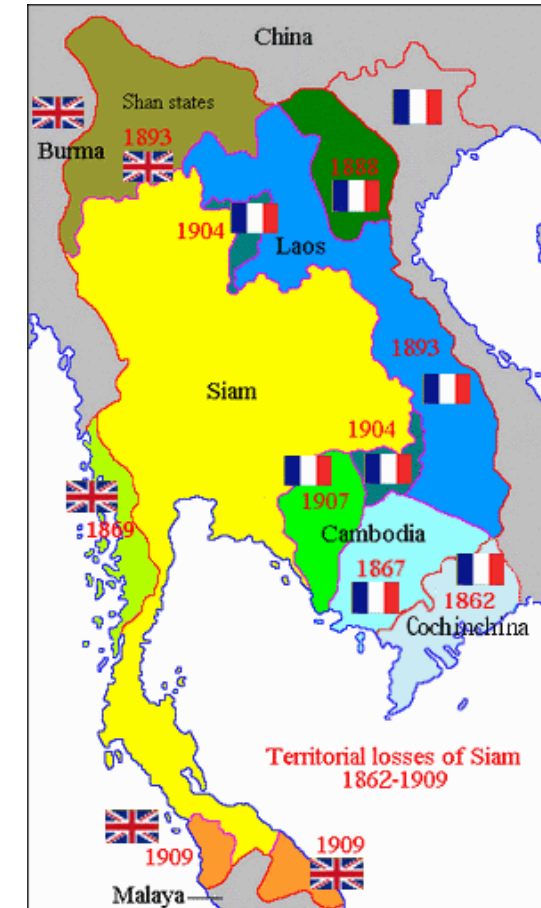


#### 4. The narrative of Thai-Lao relations in IR

- Tej Bunnag (1967)
  - The relations of chronos and kairos in a unidirectional manner
  - Ancient kingdom of Siam became modernised with the application of Westphalian territorial border but it took decades.

## 4. The narrative of Thai-Lao relations in IR

- 4.3 1975-1989
- Temporality monopolised by the political elites
- Unilinear historicism
- State-centrism – National interest
- M.R. Sukhumbhand Paribatra (1984)
  - Left bank of the Mekong was part of Siam before it became a modern state
- Pheuiphanha Ngaosyvathn (1985)
  - Disagree with the assumption of Sukhumbhan that Lao used to be part of Siam



## 4. The narrative of Thai-Lao relations in IR

- Separated sets of Unidirectional historicism
  - Charles Stevenson (1972)
  - Corrine Phuangkasem (1980, 1984)
  - Surachai Sirikrai (1979, 1987)
  - Master Degree thesis in International Relations in Chulalongkorn University

## 4. The narrative of Thai-Lao relations in IR

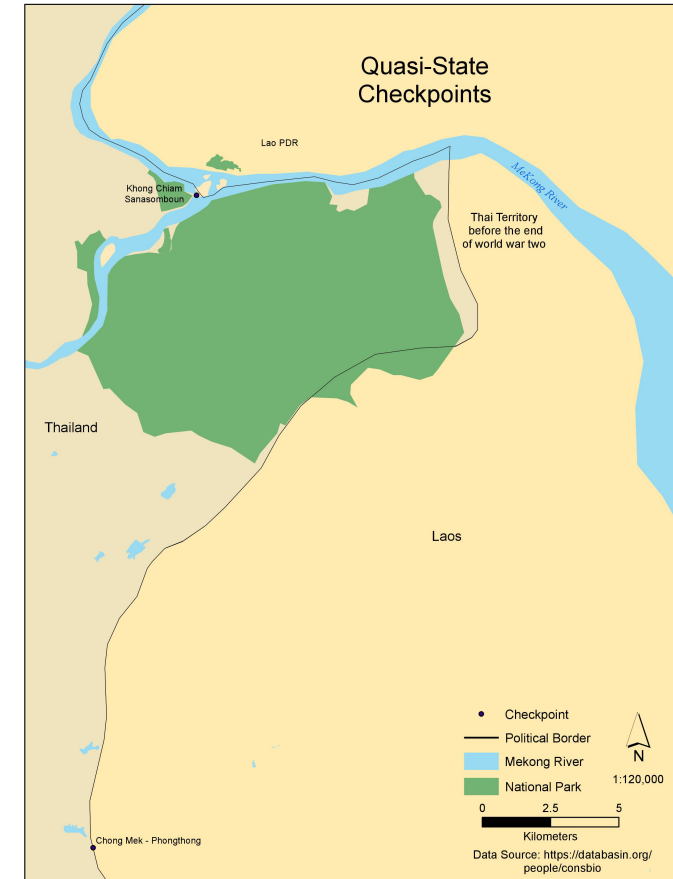
- 4.4 1989-2018
- When It is IR and state documents temporality dominated by the elites, state-centric and still unidirectional
  - Text book produced by the Ministry of Education of Lao PDR (2010 and 2012)
  - Champassak and Ubon Ratchathani has separated history line.





## 4. The narrative of Thai-Lao relations in IR

- Local documents of the former area of Champassak-Ubon Ratchathani
- The committee of Khong Chiam's history revision
- The unilinear historicism, the voice of the elites in Bangkok and state-centrism are reproduced



## 4. The narrative of Thai-Lao relations in IR

- When it is more interdisciplinary
- Border-centric approach
- Temporal dimension is mixed: Interpretation of the elites in the capital city, elites in the border town and people on the ground
- Historiography is more stuttering: not only one narrative dominates the scene – not only the voice of Bangkok and Vientiane is heard
- State-centrism can still be observed but less intensive. People who do not conform to temporality dictated by the state are more heard.

## 4. The narrative of Thai-Lao relations in IR

- Instead of looking at relations of the two state from the perspective capital city: Vientiane (Lao PDR) and Bangkok (Thailand)
- Bordertown perspective was applied
- Chiang Khong (Thailand) and Houai Xay (Lao PDR)
- Andrew Walker (1999; 2008)
- Jakkrit Sankhamanee (2006)



Source: Neighbouring Countries Economic Development Cooperation Agency

POSTgraphics

## 4. The narrative of Thai-Lao relations in IR

- If the analysis of the Thai-Lao border is more interdisciplinary
  - More contested notion of time
  - Co-existence of chronos and kairos
- The notion of borderland is paid more attention from anthropologists and sociologists and other subfields in social science
- Ubon Ratchathani and Champassak
  - Khien Theeravit and Adisorn Semyeam (2002)
  - Iain Baird (2010)
  - Thanachate Wisaijorn (2018)
  - Phonvichien Pookongchi (2003)

# 5. Conclusion

- Argument:
- If the temporality of the interstate relations are interpreted by IR scholars, the temporal trap is observed
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