

## New Actors and Space Contestation for Ideology Representation in a Thai-Laos Border School: A Case Study of Chiang Rai Province

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### Abstract

The research objective was to study and analyze the space contesting for ideology representation by new actors in a Thai-Laos border school in Chiangkhong, Chiang Rai Province. Baan Rim Khong School (Pseudonym) was chosen for this research using empirical phenomenology approach. Data were collected from (1) reviews of documents including school's curriculum, institutional annual reports, and policies regarding education in the border area; (2) semi-structured interviews with school's Vice-Principal, teachers, and actors; and (3) observations of physical artifacts of the school, classrooms, routine activities in morning ceremony, as well as other special activities. Results of the study revealed that within the past decade, Baan Rim Khong School had seen actors from more than 30 organizations, at least six of which were from local-level organizations that continuously exerting their influences. These new actors have contested in the space of influence held by school's administrators and teachers as well as official and hidden curriculum in order to representation ideologies among the students. Ruk Chiangkhong Group and Amphor Chiangkhong Office were able to contest and occupy mostly significant space of influence. Nevertheless, every organization similarly encountered challenges with regards to school's culture as well as its own internal factors affecting the ability to contest and expand its influences. These internal factors related to the organization's authority and capital resources.

**Keywords:** Chiangkhong / Ideology representation / Border school / Official curriculum / Hidden curriculum

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## Introduction

School is a strategic unit in the mechanism employed by modern state in constructing and guiding the desired ideology among its citizens toward common culture, ideas, beliefs, and values. Desired ideology is achieved through school's culture, official curriculum, hidden curriculum, school's policies, and course content (Banks, 2010, p. 22). According to Althusser (1969), school is the most important mechanism for ideology representation by the government. Only school can bring children of all social classes to be educated and trained together for a number of years so that they are equipped with life skills. At the same time, they are instilled with ideology desired by the nation both directly and indirectly (Althusser, 1969, p. 231).

In Thailand, schools have been used in dissolving unique background identification and creating shared memory and imagination for the people so that they identify themselves as only belonging to one culture and as part of the greater unity. Thus, stability and development of the country could result in the direction dictated by the nation-state (Buadaeng, 2007, p. 135). This similar attempt exists in the border area of Thailand and Laos in Amphor Chiangkhong, Chiang Rai Province. Schools in this area serve as the mechanism for the Thai Government to unite the people of Chiangkhong so that they become seamlessly part of Thailand. Since the Royal Statute for Elementary Education of 1921 (Royal Thai Government Gazette, 1921, p. 605), schools have been established in Amphor Chiangkhong to educate people in this border area. The education helps them to develop both reading and writing skills in Thai; realize responsibilities of an honored Thai citizen; as well as gain knowledge about geography, topology, and history of Thailand. These goals of education became even more evident when the Royal Statute officially came into effect in 1935 making it mandatory for all citizens to enter educational system at the age of eight and receive the minimum elementary education until close to 15 years of age.

At the same time, national state of 1921 uses schools as the mechanism to gain control over space of influence to represent the ideology previously belonging to the indigenous community, including religion. Governmental management system and supervision encompass curriculum as well as learning format and pedagogy (Siwarom, 2008, p. 86). Uncontested control continued until educational reform in 1999 also with new royal statute allowing citizens, families, organizations in private sector, communities, local organizations, local governments, as well as occupational, religious, commercial, and other social institutions to participate in the design of education (Royal Thai Government Gazette, 1999, p. 4). As a result, the ideology in education has shifted from promoting

stability and unity of the nation to focus on the harmony of the citizens with their locality and cultural background. The trend in globalization also has pertinent effects on border schools which are regarded as strategic units for local, national, and international organizations to contest for space of influence in represent the ideology suitable for these geographical areas. Research studies by Khieochan (2011) and Arunotai et al. (2013) indicate that globalization makes border schools the *zone of exception*, providing opportunities for these organizations at various levels and their ideology actors to seek space of influence as well as opportune time and situations to increase their involvement in schools.

As for Baan Rim Khong School in Amphor Chiangkhong, Chiang Rai, it has been regarded as a prime strategic unit used by the government for ideology representation in the border area of Thailand and Laos. Established in 1963, this public school has provided education and preparation for the local citizens with knowledge and skills necessary to secure a job, sustainable living, or more advanced education in accordance with the country's economic and governmental plans. This mission continued until 1999 when the government changed educational policies and opened its door to external actors, for example, individual, family, community, community organization, local administration, private organization, Association of professional, religion, establishment and other social sections to participate in education management and wanted to develop the border areas into special economic zone by 2015. As a result, this made the school became Zone of exception. It is a challenge opportunity for actors in local level, nation level and international level to contest in school space for passing on citizenship ideology. Due to these changes, Baan Rim Khong School opened up both official and hidden curriculum to contributions by new actors of both government and non-government organizations at various levels. Their contributions to represent the ideology become ingrained in the students' experiences and their way of life for good.

Therefore, this article is aimed at uncovering the contestation among new actors at Baan Rim Khong School, particularly at the Thai-Laos border in Amphor Chiangkhong, Chiang Rai Province. Further, the author wishes to argue and demonstrate that schools, especially in the border areas, are the mechanism for ideology represent for not only the nation-state but also for contesting actors targeting at the young generations.

## Objectives

To analyze the space contestation for ideology representation by new actors in a Thai-Laos border school in Chiangkhong, Chiang Rai Province

## School and Ideology Representation

For this study, the author reviewed literature relating to ideology representation in the school system. To begin with, Althusser (1969), a French philosopher proposed that ideology is the system of representation through images, imaginations, myths, ideas, and concepts, depending on situations. The most important mechanism for ideology representation for modern states is schools. This is because schools bring together young children of all social classes to be educated and nurtured for a number of years. They learn life skills as well as are instilled with ideology directly and indirectly (Althusser, 1969, p. 231). This proposal is in line with that of an American educator Apple (2013). He offered that ideology is the system of thoughts and beliefs that serve as the foundation for behaviors and social values. Schools are the social unit that allow ideology to be transferred. Further, schools allow politics to play out where contestation exists among the classes, ethnicities, genders, and religious groups. Such contestation determines whose knowledge is most deserving and valuable for education and would be instilled in the experiences and lives of students for good (Apple, 2013). Thus, schools not only serve as the place where government's authority and discourse take place but also become contestation arena where actors fight to have their ideas, beliefs, and cultures represented, as delineated as follow.

### Official Curriculum

Official curriculum is the space of influence managed to represent cohesive systematic ideology. Curriculum not only guides academic development but also implies ideology that benefits classes of people with regard to political, economic, social, and cultural dominance. These are reflected in (1) curriculum content which transfers culturally shared ideology and memories, having significant influence on students' thoughts and opinions as well as their behaviors in school (Apple, 1986 as cite in Thongthew, 1986, p. 33); (2) textbooks which represent ideology in a silent manner (Apple, 2013, p. 108) by presenting facts and conventional ideas as well as unconventional alternatives for new knowledge and values that may replace the old (Apple, 1993, p. 57); and (3) learning and pedagogy serving as primary mechanism in constructing ideology among children to maintain social norms or to enhance the effectiveness of existing ideology (Althusser, 2014, p. 44) with teachers determining which knowledge, standards, and rules to be presented in the classroom.

### Hidden Curriculum

Hidden curriculum includes lessons not officially taught. However, through exposure every student sees, feels, and perceives them and these lessons become part of students' daily life at

school. Also, untaught lessons are powerful and influential to school's culture and perspectives of the students. Many times, hidden curriculum is seen as more important than official curriculum (Banks, 2010, p. 24). Hidden curriculum thus has strategic importance in constructing ideology for students to realize standards, values, and behaviors simply through consistent schooling for many years (Apple, 2013, p. 29). The best approach to obscure these aspects of ideology is, surprisingly, to present them conspicuously because students hardly take notice (Miller et al., 2007, p. 19). According to Althusser, while children are seeking knowledge and developing various skills in the midst of school environment, they also learn to abide by the rules and regulations and to behave within supervision of various constituents assigned for this task (Althusser, 2014, p. 73).

Based on the review of literature, schools serve as important ideological mechanism available for educating, shaping, and reinforcing ideology through both official and hidden curriculum to result in internalization by the students. Especially, schools along national border have seen new actors at local, national, and international levels contesting for space of influence, time, and circumstances within the schools to represent desired ideology among the students. Whereas, the government as the primary actor is attempting to control and monitor the transfer of ideology desired by the nation while limiting the influences of new actors in the schools (Khieochan, 2011; Nawarat, 2012; Arunotai et al., 2013).

### Research Methodology

For this study, the researcher used the empirical phenomenology approach aiming at interpreting occurrences taken place at school. Analysis was performed to determine whether any ideology or symbolism underlined these occurrences and what it was. The analysis also included finding relevant answers from those who personally experienced these occurrences in natural setting (Podhisita, 2016, pp. 177, 191). The researcher gathered data from (1) use of informative documents including educational policies for the national border areas, school's curriculum and annual reports; (2) semi-structured interviews with key informants based on purposive sampling including the school's Vice-Principal, eight teachers, six ideology actors; and (3) observations of physical artificial of the school, classrooms, routine activities in morning ceremony, as well as other special activities. Data were collected between August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018 and October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2018.

As the area for the study, the researcher chose Baan Rim Khong School (Pseudonym), Amphor Chiangkhong in Chiang Rai Province. It is the major secondary/high school of the Amphor and located on the border across from the town of Houayxay in Bokeo District of Laos. The school is

open to students having residency in Amphor Chiangkhong and others nearby as well as from areas in the neighboring country. There is no restriction based on ethnicity or nationality. The school also invites actors in the Thai-Laos border area to participate in the design of both official and hidden curriculum to represent the ideology for the young generations to respond to the changes within the area.

Qualitative data analysis was performed. This process performed including data organization, coding, data display, conclusion, and interpretation (Podhisita, 2016, pp. 340-372). The researcher also employed methodological triangulation to evaluate the validity of the data. In presenting the research results, the author used alias names for the participating school as well as for the interviewees to maintain privacy and confidentiality of all participants according to the approval of the Institutional Review Board at Chiang Mai University with certificate of approval (COA) No. 034/61 CMUREC No. 61039 dated July 24<sup>th</sup>, 2018.

## Results

### 1. New actors at Baan Rim Khong School, Thai-Laos border

Baan Rim Khong School has engaged in ideology representation for the people in the border area since 1963. The nation-state has the dominance in determining curriculum requirements which provide common framework for all schools. Students should achieve similar knowledge outcomes as prescribed by the government. These outcomes also include loyalty to the Nation, the Religion, and the King for public security and unity of the state (Buadaeng, 2007, p. 135). Until educational reform in 1997, the government started to loosen its control and invite actors to contest in the curriculum design and development to respond to the varying needs and issues within each community (Royal Thai Government Gazette, 1999, p. 6). Further, the government's policies to develop areas along the border into special economic zones in the year 2015 also make the border areas *zone of exception*. As a result, new actors from all levels (local, national, and international) are now present in the border areas. Under these circumstances, schools have been opened up by state to the contributions from these actors whose ideologies are diverse. Contestation ensues to occupy space of influence, time, and situations where and when they can represent their ideologies (Arunotai et al., 2013, p. 10).

For the reasons and factors described above, in the past decade (2008-2018) Baan Rim Khong School has engaged with actors from more than 30 organizations at many levels. They can be categorized into two groups: (1) government actors such as from national governmental units and departments, ministries, local government offices, local police department of Chiangkhong, Amphor

Chiangkhong Office, community organization, custom office, immigration office, and many units that promote national security. These government actors share similar ideology favoring government control and policies; stability of the nation, religion, and royal institution; tourism promotion and development; commercial development and investment and (2) non-government actors such as from Ruk Chiangkhong Group, Child Right Protection Center Chiangkhong, Kiang Rim Khong Group, Center for Girls, local communities and their leaders. Most of these actors endorse human rights and wellbeing, children's rights, rights of the community, and development of local economy (Somchai [Pseudonym], 2018)

At the local level, there were actors from the following organizations and groups that had ongoing presence at Baan Rim Khong School especially after this area had been declared special economic zone: (1) Amphor Chiangkhong Office - It is a district office responsible for promoting and supporting national government's policies regarding various development initiatives to improve the area. For instance, Chiangkhong the star is an initiative to support the development of this area to become part of the special economic zone (Chamnan [Pseudonym], 2018). (2) Wiang Subdistrict Municipal Office - It is tasked with improving the foundation of the community to promote tourism, develop human resources, and promote local arts and cultures (Aurathai [Pseudonym], 2018). (3) Community Group of Baan Jo-Go - This group works collaboratively with other governmental units to provide supports and promote the wellbeing of local residents. The group also takes part in educating children and youths in the community so that they are knowledgeable about changes in the community (Somnuek [Pseudonym], 2018). (4) Ruk Chiangkhong Group - The works of this social services group is in relations to the Mekong river and also monitoring the side effects of area development on the environment, society, and community. Their philosophy is to "Respect for nature. Believe in humanity justice." Their knowledge of the community serves as the tool to help in developing local youths so they achieve personal growth, value their heritage, and together become the joining force to improve their community (Wirat [Pseudonym], 2018). (5) Kiang Rim Khong Group - This non-government organization is responsible for educating the public about sexual wellbeing and health, non-discriminatory treatment of HIV patients, unplanned pregnancy, and creating safe environment for children to share and learn about sex (Somporn [Pseudonym], 2018). Lastly, (6) Child Right Protection Center Chiangkhong - Also a non-government organization, its goal is to protect young girls from human trafficking and child labor, to promote education among at-risk teens to improve their

quality of life, as well as to provide assistance for children who are victims of abuse (Saerirak [Pseudonym], 2018).

The entrance and presence of new actors has led Baan Rim Khong School to having more diverse ideologies despite the differences and contradictions among them. These ideologies, however, all reflect the current circumstances in Amphor Chiangkhong, Chiang Rai. As McLaran (1998) stated, schools should reflect the history and economy, represent human nature and needs, as well as be the voice of the community with careful consideration to its specific context (McLaran, 1998, pp. 453-459). Therefore, Baan Rim Khong School has become the location where ideologies play out in a manner that fuses authority and politics. The goal is to achieve dominance and receive acceptance among people of different classes. That way the sense of cooperation and commitment can result and compliance to the ideology is possible through the atmosphere of education, curriculum, lessons, as well as learning and teaching format. Also, students may become accustomed to the vital process of the social system and structure (Gramsci, 1971, p. 527). However, the ability of these new actors to dominate space of influence in representing the ideology in the school system depends on the format and approach used by each organization. This issue will be discussed next.

## **2. Space contestation for Ideology Representation in a Border School**

In contesting for the space of influence to represent the ideology among students and to instill in their experiences and lifestyle, new actors have to confront the major actor, the government. The national government always has had the authority to control and direct school administrators, teachers, curriculum, lessons, culture of the school, as well as hidden curriculum. Therefore, new actors must devise sophisticated techniques and approach to occupy the space of influence as described in the following.

### **The Contestation in administrators and teachers space**

Administrators and teachers have important leadership roles in the school system. They are trained professionals capable of organization, dissemination, and creating commitment to ideas and ideology that guide the lives of students, allowing them to carry on the culture (Nawarat, 2008, p. 81; Siwarom, 2008, p. 102). In the school's organizational structure, administrators and teachers thus can influence the role and accessibility of the new actors. This notion is in line with Sharp's (2017) suggestion which stated that school's administrators and teachers are the center of power in determining students' daily activities, deciding what knowledge is worthwhile, and guiding interactions with standard rules and regulations for the school and in the classroom (Sharp, 2017).



Developing informal relationship is an approach used by new actors to win over administrators and teachers. Most of the actors are from local organizations also having their leaders as alumni of Baan Rim Khong School. Though, this is not the case for the head of Amphor Chiangkhong Office and Kiang Rim Khong Group. Therefore, for most organizations informal relationships can be easily developed. For instance, the President of Ruk Chiangkhong Group reported that “...*we started to be seriously involved with the school when Mr.Nitad (former School’s Principal) was there. I’ve known him from Chiang Mai University. He started there before I did. I consider him my elder brother. Also, we are from the same hometown. We spent some time together to know each other’s personalities...a while back my other friend was also Vice-Principal. He also went to Chiang Mai University and graduated with Industrial Degree. We went to the same high school and graduated together...we always talked about how we can help each other in our jobs...*” (Wirat [Pseudonym], 2018). Personal relationship was similarly reported by the Mayor of Wiang Subdistrict Municipal Office, “...*I’m an alumni of the school so I provide support for the different projects that the school has...the Vice-Principal and teachers who are close friends generally make the contact...*” (Aurathai [Pseudonym], 2018). These comments illustrate how personal relationship serves as the basis actors use to expand into space of influence such as other teachers and eventually to reach the students in the school. However, there is limitation to this approach. The exclusive access or relationship would diminish when the personal contacts whether administrators or teachers relocated or retired (Somnuek [Pseudonym], 2018).

For those actors without similar personal network or relationship, they often take a more formal approach, for instance, by having a meeting to directly discuss with the administrators and teachers or find opportunities at meetings at other community functions to do the same. Amphor Chiangkhong Office provides good example for the implementation of this approach. At the monthly meeting for the area’s governmental units is when discussion takes place to convince and provide directions to the school’s administrators and teachers (Chamnan [Pseudonym], 2018; Somchai [alias], 2018). In the case of Kiang Rim Khong Group which is a non-government organization, its representative formally meets and discuss with administrators and teachers, “...*through meeting, we may develop mutual understanding with the administrators and teachers. From our discussion, we can explain that some problems are shared by more than one party. Everybody has to take part in protecting our children including the administrators. We are responsible for creating that understanding and try to adjust the attitude...*” (Somporn [Pseudonym], 2018).

Another means of building formal relationship is through agreement with memorandum of understanding (MOU). The MOU provides assurance and credibility for the new actors. Examples include MOUs between Baan Rim Khong School and many actors such as Ruuk Chiangkhong Group, Child Right Protection Center Chiangkhong, Wiang Subdistrict Municipal Office (Somchai [Pseudonym], 2018; Wirat [Pseudonym], 2018; Seriruk Pseudonym], 2018).

The explanations above show the effort of new actors in contesting for space of influence, in this case the school's administrators and teachers, in order to gain access and become internal members of the school. By having this status, the attitude toward the actors is likely positive. Consequently, these actors will have a greater chance of maintaining their presence and proceeding to gain control over other important space of influence including official and hidden curriculum.

### **The contestation in official curriculum space**

Most of the official curriculum (around 70%) is controlled by the government, leaving only limited flexibility in the curriculum. The government's control as reflected in the official curriculum is in response to the needs of the majority of the population and to benefit them in terms of political, economic, social, and cultural dominance (Apple, 2013, p. 81). At present, the Thai Government enforces the common curriculum guidelines for educational foundation as of 2008. The stated curriculum also guides the primary ideology to be incorporated in the design and development of foundation courses from elementary school year 1 to the last year of high school. In total, there are 76 learning standards and 4,330 indicators of commonalities in education management. These requirements ensure that every student will achieve necessary knowledge and skills for their lives, as determined by the government (Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 3). The remaining 30% of the curriculum is open to each individual school to develop additional courses or extracurricular activities to meet the needs and circumstances of the space. For the first three years of high school (year 1-3), no more than 240 hours of additional courses/activities per academic year is allowed. For the last three years of high school (year 4-6), no more than 1,680 hours for all these three years is allowed. Curriculum specific to the localities, curriculum pertaining to special economic zone in the border area, and curriculum regarding the study of ASEAN are some examples of acceptable additional courses for that 30% (Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 23). Both required foundation courses and additional courses (as decided by each individual school) together then determine the requirements of the school and guide class scheduling.

Based on analysis in the space of official curriculum, it was found that only two organizations were able to exert their influences – Ruk Chiangkhong Group and Amphor Chiangkhong Office. Their ideologies are represented in the curriculum specific to the localities and curriculum pertaining to special economic zone in the border area (i.e., courses designed specifically to respond to the needs and circumstances of Chiangkhong). Examples include Local History, Cultural Ecology, Strategic Development of Chiangkhong: Dual-Format City, Strategic Development for Amphor with Creative Initiative, Community Rights, and Border-Commerce Economy. These courses were developed for the curriculum during 2016-2017. It was the period when the government came out with the policies to develop the border area of Chiangkhong into special economic zone. Around the same time, it was when the local civic groups voiced their concerns about the consequences of this economic development. Hence, the school felt the needs to adjust its curriculum to respond to the changes within the area. As one teacher reported “...*The school wants to work with other units in managing the education for students. There’s no consensus on what the outcomes should be in developing the students as individuals. There’re always conflicts. The government wants the products to be a certain way. Hospital wants another. Businesses yet want people who know business. So, these constituents must come together to help making the best adjustments so the future is guaranteed...*” (Saowaluck [Pseudonym], 2018). Accordingly, actors from the two organizations (Ruk Chiangkhong Group and Amphor Chiangkhong Office) were given opportunities to participate in the design and development of the curriculum. These actors also worked with the administrators and teachers as internal members of the school until courses were offered starting in 2017 (Somchai [Pseudonym], 2018).

While the foundation courses were prescribed, variability in course content was still observed. Teachers improvised and revised the content to suit the context and circumstances of Chiangkhong area; taking into account, for instance, local community, ethnicities, human's rights, environment, and special economic zone in border area. Teaching materials, examples of events, class speakers, or field trips with the new actors, all context-specific, were also used. One teacher supported this observation, “...*we designed our science curriculum so the students can learn about Mae Khong River and fish species in the area. Students have hands-on experience going to an actual location to work with the locals and Ruk Chiangkhong Group. Local people were invited as speakers to teach students and take them to Mae Khong River School. We’ve continued to do this for some time now...*” (Aunchalee [Pseudonym], 2018). Despite strict control by the nation-state over the curriculum,

teachers still have some freedom in their pedagogy and course content. Further, opportunities arise for new actors to contribute to the curriculum and exert their influence in representing the ideology in school. Though, not every organization and its actors gets such opportunities. Only those with good relationship with the teachers and valuable expertise would be extended the invitations and opportunities.

Actors from other organizations could not accomplish what Ruk Chiangkhong Group and Amphor Chiangkhong Office had in the space of official curriculum. Instead, they may be invited to speak occasionally at meetings, weekly workshops, or weekend special group workshops. Thus, not all actors from every organization were able to compete for the space of official curriculum. This space of influence is restricted by regulations, laws, and scheduling and requires special resources to access. Once gained access, how to maintain it and expand the influence into the future still depends on whether needs for the chosen ideology continues. Administrators and teachers are the decision makers and can always modify certain part of the curriculum at their discretion.

#### **The contestation in hidden curriculum space**

Each eight-hour school day is spent in classes to fulfill the school's overall curriculum of which official curriculum is a part of. In addition to this daily academic routine, students are also educated by the hidden curriculum. Through their senses, students are exposed to the various clues within the school system; its atmosphere and environment, symbols, mottos, daily activities in morning ceremony, rules and regulations, school culture, as well as relationships between students, teachers, and administrators. These clues comprise the hidden curriculum that communicates and educates the students certain ideologies, values, and attitudes by constant reinforcements (Kentli, 2009, p. 88). Without realizing it, these ideologies become, in a way forcefully, ingrained in the students' way of life such as Wai (Thai greeting), paying respect to the Royal family and social norm. Therefore, hidden curriculum is another significant space of influence that new actors try to contest for in represent the ideology among the young generations.

Contestation to gain some control in the hidden curriculum as space of influence partly is the result from competitions in other space (i.e., administrators and teachers, official curriculum). Hidden curriculum was presented in the form of physical artificial, symbols, posters, and various mottos displayed around the buildings and classrooms. From observations of the school's physical features, it was found that after the curriculum specific to the localities and curriculum pertaining to special economic zone in the border area had been developed, physical improvements within the school

were made. A classroom serving as the center for the study of local history was set up. Another was designated for the study of special economic zone in border area. Changes were made to names of the buildings and conference rooms to correspond with the area's geography. Strategic mottos relating to Amphor development were posted. Information boards also include educational materials about Chiangkhong such as history, economic development plan, cultural heritage and sources. The ideologies represented in the physical evidence mostly belonged to the Ruk Chiangkhong Group and Amphor Chiangkhong Office as the result of their relationships with the administrators and teachers. Also, the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that these two organizations had with the school allowed them to engage more in this space. Other organizations had very little of their ideologies represented in the school's physical environment.

The hidden curriculum also extends to include daily interactions among the new actors, administrators, teachers, and student from the beginning to the end of school day. These interactions may be formal, semi-formal, or informal. For instance, every morning after the national anthem and related protocols, there would be a meeting routine between the Principal (or assigned teacher) with students. Topics of the day varied but generally to provide information or to educate about events and policies relating to the students and the school. Occasionally, information presented may relate to the developments in the area, special economic zone, local events and activities organized by the Amphor Chiangkhong Office, Wiang Subdistrict Municipal Office, or the community. What was going on in the area regarding children and teens' rights could also be shared during this meeting routine. From classroom observation of Citizenship and Responsibilities subject, the teacher used Ruk Chiangkhong Group as an example and how this organization helped to fight for the rights of the community. Similar works by Child Right Protection Center Chiangkhong and Kiang Rim Khong Group for the rights of children and women were also mentioned. Class discussion to promote exchange of ideas was used, allowing especially four female students who were in the care of Child Protective Center to participate. Other activities were organized at the school to involve students including school's open-house and events/activities created by such as a private development group to fight human trafficking, Youth Senate with the support of Wiang Subdistrict Municipal Office, and Amphor Chiangkhong office. Through interactions, students also learn and absorb ideologies of these actors without realizing it.

The contestation in the hidden curriculum thus has strategic importance to reach students and expose them to the ideologies of these actors. How competitive an organization is depends on

its available resources as related to authority, budget, and network. However, the final outcome depends on the students themselves who determine how willing they are to accept and internalize the ideologies presented to them by these organizations and their actors.

### 3. The challenges in contestation for ideology representation in border school

The new actors encounter challenges as they try to exert their influences at Baan Rim Khong School. Primarily, it is the cultural framework established by the government which has long-standing effect and control over school's policies, rules and regulations, and daily routines for all members of the school (Nawarat, 2018, pp. 101-103). It also has significant effect on the status of these actors and allowable involvements with the school. While government control has become more lax and allowed increased contributions and diverse ideologies, the government is still dominant in both official and hidden curriculum. At the same time, the new ideologies presented by the actors can be suppressed. As a matter of fact, the inferiors may have to succumb to the superior authority and may not be able to freely maintain their ideology or sense of control (Pipatpen, 2009).

Similarly, school's culture presents the new actors with some challenges that can also suppress their influence. The school's culture includes: (1) laws and regulations - these are the mechanism used by the government to control the routines performed by teachers and students. Activities created by the actors which may include workshops, exhibitions, and field trips must abide by the laws and regulations and follow the prescribed protocols. This is in spite of the MOU that has already been established (Cholakaan [Pseudonym], 2018); (2) academic schedules – classes and activities are regularly scheduled for each school day, Monday through Friday according to the government's mandates. At times, the presence and engagement of the actors are seen as interference and time is wasted on additional activities rather than spent on what was regularly scheduled. One teacher commented “...activities organized by the outside organizations are in fact good. Kids get the opportunities to learn new things. But lately, they come too often. We're behind in the classes. There're more class materials to learn and teach. Each time we have a special event means less time in class or changes in class time. It affects many things...” (Witoon [Pseudonym], 2018); and (3) outcome assessment - this is required by the government to ensure that students achieve the knowledge and quality standards in education. Thus, required curriculum which is assessed or tested receives primary focus and all others secondary (Na Lee, 2016, pp. 38-39). One teacher stated “...but I think it is difficult because the Ministry stresses so much on the results of O-Net exam. The Principal always brings extra stuff for students to learn, on top of what they already

*have to which is a lot. I don't care about the extra stuff. I'm going to teach the kids what they need for the exam. If the O-Net results dropped, we'd get scolded..."* (Suparb [Pseudonym], 2018).

While actors from either government or non-government organizations all want to contest for space of influence to represent their ideologies in the school, each of their mission and agenda may vary. Even with the policies and regulations that allow the new actors to be rather freely involved with the school since 1999, the organization's mission still dictates the parameter of influence within which these actors will exert. Especially for a government organization, its strict regulations and particular mission must be followed as the Mayor of Wiang Subdistrict Municipal Office Explained *"...we can only organize a workshop, helping to provide support and educate about drugs, AIDS, health, sports, and so on. We're not involved with the academics, we simply can't. It's not our responsibility but the Ministry of Education's or Regional Educational Services'..."* (Aurathai [Pseudonym], 2018). Similarly for non-government organizations; although they have more flexibility, their mission and primary goal must still be considered. Further, they may encounter budgetary limitations as some of them rely on financial assistance from other international non-governmental organizations. Mrs. Serirak, the President of Child Right Protection Center Chiangkhong said *"...we sometimes have problem with budget because a lot of money is needed. We have expenses with the children we help, high expenses...we have to seek donations from international non-governmental organizations like KNH of Germany, World Childhood Foundation of Sweden, and some from the U.S..."* (Serirak [Pseudonym], 2018). These challenges can affect long-term competitiveness and success in occupying the space of influence and maintenance of ideology representation in the school.

As described above, the new actors face many challenges from these various factors: (1) school's culture especially has long been established by the nation-state. Its effects are still felt today despite changes in laws and policies. Though, government control has become more lax and allowed access and contributions from outside actors and (2) internal actor's factors – these factors relate to authority as well as financial, social, and cultural resources available to the actors. These resources can determine the ability to compete and expand their influences in the space of official and hidden curriculum for the representation of ideology.

## Discussion and Conclusion

From the study results, it was found that after education reform by the government in 1999 and changes in policies in 2015 to develop border areas into special economic zones, border schools have become the setting where representation of ideology is implemented. It is where the politics in

knowledge is played out and ideological contest to determine whose knowledge has the most value for education (Apple, 2013). In the past decade (2008 – 2018), Baan Rim Khong School had seen new actors from more than 30 organizations, both government and non-government entities. At least six of these organizations were from local-level organization, continuously exerting their influences. These organizations and groups included District (i.e., Amphor) Office, Wiang Subdistrict Municipal Office, Community Group of Baan Jo-Go, Ruk Chiangkhong Group, Kiang Rim Khong Group, and Child Right Protection Center Chiangkhong. This finding corresponds to that of Khieochan (2011) and Arunotai et al. (2013). They also found border schools having a variety of ideology actors in three categories: (1) international non-governmental organization (INGO) – most of them promote human rights and provide aids to the refugees and immigrants in the border area; (2) national organizations – these Thai government units are actively involved in the area to promote security for the nation and citizens; and (3) local organizations – these organizations are based in the border areas including such as local communities, migrant workers, private development organizations, foundations, social works. Actors from these organizations try to bargain their way into the school system and to participate in policies, budgets, curriculum, media development, instructional materials, etc. It is evident that border schools serve as the mechanism not only for the nation-state but also for contesting actors at various levels in representation of ideology. The goal is to achieve dominance and receive acceptance among people of different classes. That way the sense of cooperation and commitment can result and compliance to the ideology is possible through the atmosphere of education, curriculum, lessons, as well as learning and teaching format. Also, students may become accustomed to the vital process of the social system and structure (Gramsci, 1971, p. 527).

Nevertheless, not all actors succeed in representing the ideology that they endorse. To gain support and acceptance of their ideology, they must compete for the space of influence including administrators and teacher as well as official and hidden curriculum. These space are instrumental in providing repeated exposures for the students on a daily basis and from the entrance to the school system until graduation. Internalization thus can result in the lives of the students (Apple, 2013, p. 81). The study findings indicated that Ruk Chiangkhong Group and Amphor Chiangkhong Office were the new actors that were able to contest and occupy mostly significant space of influence. They were able to incorporate their ideologies into the school's curriculum as represented in the teaching and learning of both foundation and additional courses. These are considered space that significantly influence perceptions and behaviors of all members of the school (Apple, 1986 as cite in Thongthiew, 1986, p.



33). Further, they were able to contribute in organizing events, special activities, workshops, and serving as expert speakers, both in-class and outside of the classroom. These two organizations also were involved in the hidden curriculum and their ideologies were reflected in the physical environment of the school. Further exposure of their ideologies to the students thus resulted. The key to their success was the accessibility to the administrators and teachers. As an important space of influence, administrators and teachers as internal actors have the authority to determine the level of involvement for actors. There is direct effect on the contestation for other space of influence (i.e., official and hidden curriculum) as well. The study by Thanosawan and Pornprachatham (2010) similarly stated that administrators and teachers hold the power to decide the degree of involvement and position of the new actors.

Other actors including Wiang Subdistrict Municipal Office, Community Group of Baan Jo-Go, Kiang Rim Khong Group, and Child Right Protection Center Chiangkhong were only occasionally involved with the school. They helped to organize events, workshops, and other activities in the hours outside of scheduled classes or provided support in the space within their purviews. Their involvement depends on authority as well as financial, social, and cultural resources available to the organizations.

Furthermore, the new actors found challenges that come from school's culture including laws and regulations, attitudes of administrators and teachers, academic schedules, and outcome assessment. These factors relating to school's culture may suppress the ideologies that the actors try to propose. According to Arphattananon (2013), allowing outside organizations, whose ideologies can vary greatly, to be involved with the school appears as though diversity in cultures and ideologies is welcome and accepted without any politics. However, the reality is the nation-state still holds superior power and control through protocols, rules and regulations, and specified standards. These can create hindrance and suppress non-mainstream culture and ideology (Arphattananon, 2013, pp. 2-19). Internal factors are no less challenging. Government organizations have less flexibility as they are restricted by laws and regulations. While non-government organizations have more flexibility, they encounter more uncertainty with budget as they are generally funded by donations. This corresponds to the study by Vungsiriphisal (2014) which indicated that government organizations have authority and resources to be involved and exert their influences in schools but lack flexibility to have close contact with the students. Whereas, non-government organizations have flexibility to approach the target audience and are able to maintain currency with situations, they bear more risks and uncertainty resulting from reliance on financial support from international non-governmental organizations, non-

profits, and religious groups. These circumstances affect different organizations differently their work inside and outside of schools (Vungsiriphisal, 2014, pp. 167-170).

From the study and analysis of the contestation among new actors for space of influence in representation of ideology in a Thai-Laos border school in Amphor Chiangkhong, Chiang Rai Province, it can be concluded that border schools serve as the mechanism not only for the nation state but also for contesting actors in exerting their influences and representing of ideology through official curriculum, hidden curriculum, and administrators and teachers. The goal is to create exposures leading to acceptance and internalization among the students and the desired ideology becomes part of their lives. Nevertheless, students themselves determine the outcomes and whether to accept or reject the ideologies bestowed upon them. Not every actor will always succeed in gaining access or control in the space of influence. It also depends on each actor's authority and capital resources.

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