

Dissertation Abstract (English)

Dissertation title	People Living Together with Tea: Economic Anthropological Studies of Hill People in Myanmar in the Transition Period
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The purpose of this dissertation is to re-examine the existing research on patron-client relationships and to reveal the dynamics of patron-client relationships by investigating tea producers in Myanmar. The Namhsan Township, located in the highlands of northern Shan State, is the largest tea-producing region in Myanmar with the Palaung (or Ta-ang) people of the Mon-Khmer group constituting 90% of the population. In the Namhsan Township, the relationships among tea producers can be considered to be patron-client relationships which they call '*Toh* or support' relationships.

The patron-client relationship is reciprocal bounds based on social relations between a person of higher socioeconomic status and a person of lower status. Anthropologists who have studied peasant societies have focused on patron-client relationships as a characteristic of reciprocal relationships in a moral economy. Many scholars have focused on the unequal social relationship between patrons and clients because they believe that the economy is embedded in social relationships. However, little attention has been given to the micro-level fluctuations that occur in this relationship.

Thus, in this dissertation, I consider power between two persons engaged in a patron-client relationship and examine how their relations fluctuate and what causes fluctuations in their relations based on two perspectives. First, from a de-anthropocentric perspective, I consider the patron-client relationship with reducing it only to social relationships but by connecting various non-human factors. The Actor

Network Theory proposed by Bruno Latour (1993) considers our world as a network of humans and non-humans. Non-humans, such as things and the environment, have agency as long as they participate in the network.

Second, I focus on debt in order to examine the fluctuations in the relationships between the patron and the client. While many scholars have focused on reciprocity when considering patron-client relationships, David Graeber (2011) insists that all moral principles cannot be reduced to reciprocity. Graeber proposes 'communism', 'hierarchy', and 'exchange' as the main moral principles upon which economic relations are based. Graeber also indicates that the patron-client relationship is composed of all three principles that become entangled with one another and states that debt is the key to disentangle them. In this dissertation, I reveal fluctuations in the relationship between the patron and the client by investigating their debts.

This dissertation consists of eight chapters. In Chapter 1, as I described above, I provide an overview of previous studies on patron-client relationships and locate the problem. In Chapter 2, I provide an overview of the history of tea production in Namhsan as reported in previous studies in order to provide a general outline of the area of study. Chapter 3 focuses on how tea, the non-human factor and people interact with each other. I will clarify how the tea producer interacts with tea as a plant during tea cultivation, harvesting, and processing.

In Chapter 4, I examine the 'support' relationship between farmers and laborers. Farmers are responsible for supporting their laborers if they wish to obtain an adequate quality of tea leaves. Farmers 'support' laborers by providing them food and money in advance and protect them from financial failure. Laborers, on the other hand, are obliged to provide labour to the farmers and repay their debts. Although there are

socioeconomic inequalities between farmers and laborers, the relationships between them fluctuate because of changes in labour demand and their debts. In Chapter 5, I examine the 'support' relationship between tea factories, farmers, and agents involved in obtaining tea leaves. Despite the socioeconomic inequalities between tea factories and farmers or agents, their relationship fluctuates on a daily basis due to demand for tea leaves and debts. Chapter 5 also discusses 'support' relationships among relatives or neighbours, which are relationships between two persons with no power difference.

In Chapter 6, I describe the impact of consumer market trends on producers. Although the tea produced in Namhsan township was popular earlier, its popularity has recently declined, and the producers are facing a serious slump. Furthermore, this slump has affected 'support' relationships among producers. In Chapter 7, I examine how 'support' relationships have changed historically. Because of the recent serious slump in the tea industry, several famers and laborers have left their tea gardens and moved away from home to work as seasonal migrant workers. The serious labour shortage has increased the demand for laborers and lowered the status of farmers. Some farmers have had to break their 'support' relationships that have continued for over 30 years.

Finally, in Chapter 8, I offer conclusions. The first conclusion of this dissertation is that the relationship between the two persons in a 'support' relationship cannot be reduced to only a social relationship expressing socioeconomic inequality. The power between two persons fluctuates in response to changes in demands for labour, tea leaves, and processed tea. The changes occur in different phases based on social relations, tea plant, the environment, changes in the consumption and distribution style, and increases in migrant labour. The involvement of multiple factors leads to a

fluctuation in the power relations between the have and the have-not in the patron-client relationship. Although the conventional discussion on the patron-client relationships has focused on social relationships with socioeconomic inequality, this is only one element constitutes the patron-client relationship.

The second conclusion of this dissertation is that although 'support' relationships are based on the principle of 'exchange', it may shift to the principle of 'communism' or 'hierarchy' depending on the debts. The debts between the two persons fluctuate their patron-client relationship that is composed of these three principles. Focusing on debts can help us understand the transition among the three different principles which compose a patron-client relationship.