

Socio-Economic Transformation Process of a New Town: A Case Study of Ayemyatharyar Myothit, Okpo Township

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Abstract

This paper tried to analyze the socio-economic transformation process of Ayemyatharyar Myothit based on data derived from official statistics and personal interviews (authority concerns and residents) in the study area. Major economy supporting the study area in the early period of establishment is timber extraction and wood processing. Based on these major economies, minor economies like restaurants, tea shops and grocery shops were developed. Then, economic development encouraged the social functions like education, health and religions in the study area. However, in the late 1990s timber extraction was restricted in the area. Many timber related industries were closed and it affected the minor economic activities and social functions. This paper analyzed this process of development and tried to construct a model of a new town development from the case study of Ayemyatharyar Myothit.

Key Words: Socio-economic transformation process, new town, major economy, minor economy, social functions

Introduction

Ayemyatharyar Myothit was established in 1989 with the relocation of peoples from Yangon and nearby villages. Authority concern gave one plot of land for the construction of a house and an acre of farm land for cultivation. Some infrastructures like hospitals, water supply, schools and roads were also provided at the same time. The major economy at that time was agriculture. It has had some difficulties to do farming for people moving from Yangon. Thus, the authority concern created many other jobs. Of them, peoples moving from Yangon were mainly engaged in timber extraction and processing. They sold out their farm to the local farmers. After a couple of years, some Yangon people start doing business by opening tea shops and restaurants. Some services like trishaw and running of small grocery shops also started in the 1990s. However, regional government policy towards the timber extraction changed in the late 1990s. Thus, many Yangon natives lost their jobs. As a

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consequence, many of them moved back to Yangon and other parts of the country.

Problem

Based on the above background, this paper tried to examine the socio-economic transformation process of Ayemyatharyar Myothit by means of following questions.

- (1) How socio-economic condition of Ayemyatharyar Myothit was transformed as a new town development process?
- (2) What is the future development prospect of Ayemyatharyar Myothit?

Conceptual Framework of a New Town Development

Before examining the development process of Ayemyatharyar Myothit, it is necessary to develop the framework of new town development processes. Three types of new towns development patterns are found in Myanmar: *planned new town*¹ (PN), *urban fringe new town* (UFN), and *upgraded new town*² (UGN). Development processes of PN have different characteristics from the UFNs those are established at the edge of large cities as a process of urban expansions. The majority of urban fringe new towns depend their economy mainly on the adjacent large cities and then gradually divert the dependency to the newly established economic activities that utilize the locational advantages (especially cheap and abundant labor, low land cost and availability of large land space) of the new town. Upgraded new town has different characteristic from the former two types. Since it was upgraded from a large village, it has its own stable economy and socio-economic function compared to the PN and UFN. In case of PN, it has to depend on the natural resources as its driving economy. Thus, it is necessary to divert its major economy from the resources based to other more value-added-production-base economy before exhausting the natural resources.

Figure (1) shows the conceptual framework for the socioeconomic transformation process of a PN. Generally, it is established by relocation of peoples from urban slum and/or gathering of small villages originally located in the area. Infrastructure including roads, hospitals, and schools are generally

¹ The new town that is established in a place that has little influence by existing urbanized area and base its own economy on natural resources.

² The new town that is upgraded from large village.

constructed for this type of new town at the beginning. Since PN could not totally depend upon near large urban centers for its economy, it generally has one or two major economies in the village to sustain the economy of the new town. In that case, major economy generally should be able to feed many people and could absorb further population.

At this early stage of development the residents will effectively use the infrastructure. Income generated from major economy will supply for their family. Thus, purchasing power of the residents increased. To fulfill this requirement, other economies like restaurants, tea shops, stores, and services, cinema hall, and hair dressing services will develop. Furthermore, residents could invest their surplus income on the social facilities like construction of *Dhamayon*, monastery, etc. and celebration of religious ceremonies. They could also improve their living standard in areas like water supply, electricity supply, and sanitation, education, etc. As a result consolidated social development will occur. This social development, on the other hand, will benefit the economic development.

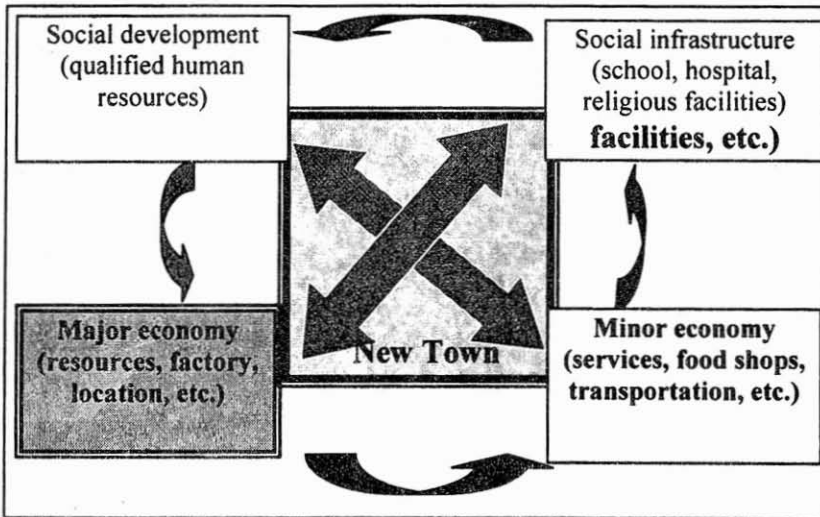


Figure (1) Conceptual frame work for socio-economic transformation process of a planned new town

Data

Data derived from Ayemyatharyar Village Peace and Development Council and social facilities (like school, monastery) were used to be able to understand the socio- economic transformation of study area. However,

official data were limited only to three time-points: 1992, 1999 and 2004. Derived data were verified by ground surveys and personal interviews of local residents during several trips taken at the end of 2004 and early 2005.

In addition, structured interviews related to socio-economic changes were conducted to the 262 households (10 percent of the target population) by using systematic sampling methods. Derived data were also used in the analysis of socio-economic change of residents.

Geographical Background of Study Area

Ayemyatharyar Myothit is located between north latitudes $18^{\circ}4'12''$ and $18^{\circ}5'24''$ and between east longitudes $95^{\circ}43'18''$ and $95^{\circ}45'00''$ (Fig. 2). Administratively, it is included in Okpo Township, Bago Division. It is located at 1 mile distance in the eastern part of Yagon-Pyay Road. The location of the area is in the midway between Bago Yoma and Yagon-Pyay Road. This locational advantage gives different incentives for the development of the region.

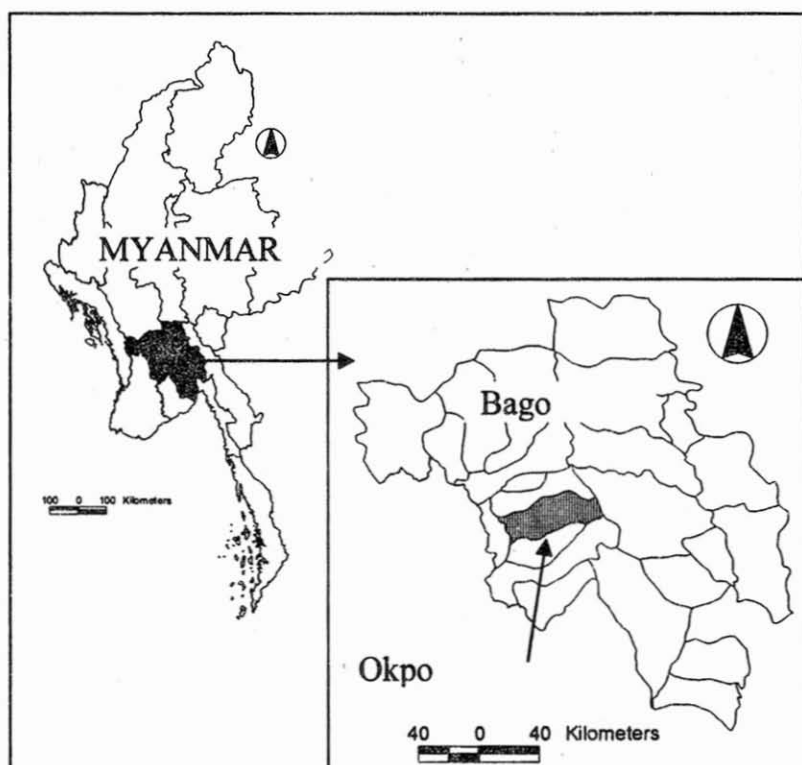


Figure (2) Location of Okpo Township

Source: Department of Geography, Yangon University.

