CHAPTER II
THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO COMMUNITY, IDENTITY AND ETHNIC CLASSIFICATION

2.1 Introduction

This chapter is divided into two main parts. The first part begins with an examination of theoretical concepts and a discussion of the position of place in anthropology that unpacks the link between identity and place, illustrating its complexity and multiple meanings. This section addresses the theoretical concerns and debates regarding the conceptualization of community within the context of state vis-à-vis ethnic relations in Thailand. Issues of ethnic classification are also examined, incorporating an analysis of social and geographical categorization of cultural and agricultural practices exemplified through state discourses of inclusion and exclusion. Finally, this part provides a note on context that illustrates how a phenomenon is connected to its surroundings through interpretation and translation. The second component of the chapter introduces the conceptual framework for the study. This is done by situating the theoretical underpinnings and practical knowledge in a framework based upon the negotiation between local and state interpretations of community and ethnic identity.

A central theme running throughout this study is the analysis of the complex set of relationships that exist between state and policy discourse and the actions and experiences of various social actors. Yet while emphasizing the importance of an actor perspective, we must also acknowledge that attempting to understand these processes of interaction requires a rethinking of certain analytical precepts and processes related to rural development, state intervention, the social and political construction of the community, the politics of place, and the marginality of local people. Crucial to understanding the processes of intervention, as argued by Long (cited in Moore 1996:52), is the need to identify and come to grips with the strategies that local actors devise for dealing with particular interventions so that they might appropriate, manipulate or subvert this action. Similarly, Long (ibid) continues, "the question of how far people make use of formal state or market frameworks and

resources necessarily entails the consideration of how local knowledge, organization and values reshape these external structures."

2.2 Place in Anthropology: Theoretical Issues

In the context of this study, the concept of place is important for a number of reasons. With the emergence of nation states, boundaries and borders become an essential element of analyses into identity, for they highlight the interaction between centers and peripheries, and multiple actors. The most compelling reason for speaking about places, suggests Prazniak and Dirlik (2001:41), is "that there are already many people out there who are engaged in defending places and their lives against the encroachment of states and capital." The notion of place also conjures up methodological and ethical reflections, as is pointed out in a 1988 issue of *Cultural Anthropology*:

> [A]nthropologists have often used specific locales to identify the particular groups that inhabit them, and associated these with specific research topics that profoundly limit and narrow our understandings. Ethnography thus reflects the circumstantial encounter of the voluntarily displaced anthropologist and the involuntarily localized 'other'.
> (Appadurai 1988: 16, cited in Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003: 15)

An analysis of place clearly illustrates the problematic of ethnicity and territory resulting from the traditional interpretation of these subjects as static and fixed, whereas struggles fought at the local level emphasize the dynamism of local relationships and networks, while simultaneously connected to international organizations and social movements in a wider global community. The fluidity and blurredness of boundaries can be seen for example in the Lisu word *meua* that has similarities to the Thai word *müang* indicating a country, land or village (Klein Hutheesing 1991:14). It can be seen that in this context the politicized state-orientated concept of territorialization of land and domains has filtered into Lisu folk beliefs as a cosmologized "country." In songs and stories, *meua* is an imagined land that the Lisu lost and for which they yearn (Chapter IV section 4.3).

Within the sphere of social and political analysis, place consciousness is integral to human existence because it is nearly impossible to "imagine what it would be like if there were no places in the world" (Casey 1993, cited in Prazniak and Dirlik

2001:15). Places are not a given, but can be viewed as products of human activity, implying that how places are imagined by different people is a historical problem (Anderson 1991, and Thongchai 1994). Places can therefore have a unique reality for each individual inhabitant, and while those who live in the same place or external agents may share this meaning, these interpretations of place are likely to be competing and contested in practice (Rodman 1992:15, cited in Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003:15).

Recently there has been significant interest in the role of ethnography in terms of allocating specific localities to identify different groups that inhabit marginal areas. Rodman (2003:204-223) concentrates on the definition of place as an analytical construct. This argument is approached by criticizing traditional anthropological conceptions of place that "provide taken-for-granted settings to situate ethnographic descriptions, are used analytically as metaphors, or are reduced to a locale that imprisons natives" (Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003:15).

In response to this situation, Rodman (2003) proposes the concept of "multilocality" to describe considerations of place affected by the influence of modernity, imperial history and contemporary contexts. Simply stated, multilocality attempts to understand multiple, non-Western and non-Eurocentric viewpoints in the construction of place, effecting a more decentered anthropological analysis that acknowledges there are no "others." This concept is also useful for understanding the networks of connections among places that link micro and macro levels of analysis, including the reflexive qualities of identity formation and the construction of place as people increasingly move around the globe (Rodman 2003:210). This argument is especially poignant with regards to the politicization of indigenous movements in Thailand and the use of local wisdom and knowledge as a counter-discourse to state narratives. This is particularly true concerning resource management, where a multivocal approach (Rodman 2003: ibid) urges us to listen to the voices infrequently heard, such as native people who claim power by employing imagery of "rootedness" and symbolism to suggest they are inseparable from place or by asserting primordial connections of oneness with the land.

Place in anthropological writing has traditionally received little critical analysis and have been equated with locales or settings where things happen. The physical, emotional, and experiential realities different places hold for their inhabitants at particular times need to be understood apart from their creation as locales of ethnography (Rodman 2003:205). Entrikin (1991:3, cited in Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003:206) suggests that such discourse productively blends distinctions between place as an analytical concept, on the one hand, and as "situatedness" in a real world, on the other. Appadurai highlights such a situation:

> The nation-state conducts throughout its territories the bizarrely contradictory project of creating a flat, contiguous, and homogeneous space of *nationess* and simultaneously a set of places and spaces (prisons, barracks, airports, radio stations, secretariats, parks, marching grounds, processional routes) calculated to create the internal distinctions and divisions necessary for state ceremony, surveillance, discipline and mobilization. The latter are also the spaces and places that create and perpetuate the distinctions between rulers and ruled, criminals and officials, crowds and leaders, actors and observers.
> (Appadurai 1996: 189)

Gupta and Ferguson (1999), however, adopt an alternative perspective, in essence arguing that spatial representations in the social sciences are dependent on images of fracture, rupture and disjunction as starting points for analysis. The distinctiveness of societies, nations, and cultures is predicated on seemingly unproblematic divisions of space, on the understanding that they occupy "naturally" discontinuous spaces (Gupta and Ferguson 1999:33-34). Therefore, the idea of discontinuity between cultures and societies forms the starting point from which concepts of contact, conflict and contradiction can be theorized. For example, the representation of the world as a collection of 'countries' on a map portrays it as an inherently fragmented space, divided by different colors into diverse national societies, each rooted in its proper place (ibid:34). It is therefore taken for granted that each country embodies its own distinctive "culture" and "society." Geographical territories of cultures do not necessarily coincide with national borders, however. There are many examples of multicultural nations and instances where "cultures" overlap national boundaries, as in the case of Thailand. In such cases the "ethnographic map" is often used to link different cultures, societies and peoples, tribes, and cultures to specific spaces.

Problems raised by the implicit mapping of cultures onto places include how to account for cultural differences within a locality. Conventional thinking on ethnicity, even when used to describe cultural differences in settings where people from different regions live side by side, relies on the unproblematic link between identity and place (Gupta and Ferguson 1999). While such concepts are suggestive because they endeavor to stretch the naturalized association of culture with place, they fail to address the assumptions on which they are based. There is therefore a need to appreciate, investigate, and analyze cultural differences, while abandoning perceived notions of (localized) culture and fixed places.

If one begins with the premise that spaces have always been interconnected, instead of naturally disconnected, then cultural and social change becomes not a matter of cultural contact and articulation but one of rethinking differences through connection. Keeping in mind that notions of community refer both to a demarcated physical space and to clusters of interaction, we can see that the identity of a place emerges from the intersection of its specific involvement in a system of hierarchically-organized spaces (ibid:35-36). However, according to Gupta and Ferguson (ibid), the irony of modern times is that as actual places and localities become ever more blurred and indeterminate, ideas of culturally and ethnically-distinct places become perhaps even more important in reasserting the significance of locality.

These dynamics lend a distinct visibility to how imagined communities (Anderson 1991) and discussions of "geo-body" (Thongchai 1994) are constructed, and how the emergence of the modern state has come to be attached to imagined places, as displaced peoples cluster around remembered or imagined homelands. This section therefore emphasizes that places are socially-constructed by the people who live in them and know them, and that how people experience and interpret these places are in turn essential considerations in an analysis of identity and community.

2.3 Conceptualizing Community and the Significance of Place

> Whether or not its structural boundaries remain intact, the reality of the community lies in its members' perception of the vitality of its culture. People construct community symbolically, making it a resource and repository of meaning, and a reference of their identity.
> (Cohen 1985:118)

Critical social research literature has long been wary of the concept of community as a place-specific entity, confined and analyzed as a geographically-bounded area. By taking the pre-existing, localized community as a given starting point, traditional understanding fails to examine sufficiently the processes that go into the initial construction of space as a place or locality (Gupta and Ferguson 1999:36). Cohen (1985, in Delanty 2003:2-3) argues that the community is to be understood less as social practice than as symbolic structure. This approach has been very influential in debates on community in the last two decades and has shifted the focus away from the older emphasis on community as a form of social interaction based on locality, to a concern with meaning and identity. As both a symbol and a desire, the idea of community continues to hold a significant position in public discourse. The concept of community has been one of the most compelling and attractive themes in modern social science, and at the same time one of the most difficult to define. Indeed, as conceptual notions of community were being discarded by sociologists and anthropologists from radical or structuralist schools of thought, people throughout the world were aggressively asserting their locality and ethnicity, and in essence, their membership in communities.

Like such words as culture, identity and ritual, notions of community are ambiguous and notoriously difficult to define. However, a reasonable interpretation of the word's use implies two related assumptions: firstly, that members of a particular group of people have something in common with each other, which in turn leads to the second assumption: that this commonality distinguishes them in a significant way from members of other putative groups (Cohen 1985:12). Kemp (1991:314) illustrates additional perspectives of community in the context of Thailand. The first designates a unit or a quantitative entity in terms of a bounded locale: the village. The second perspective focuses on distinctive qualities of behavior. Thus, these explanations simultaneously connote paradigms of similarity

and difference based on classifications that are both internally constructed, and externally-imposed and bounded to a specific location in the form of a village. Therefore, in this sense the term community expresses a rational characteristic that serves to juxtapose one community with another or one social entity with another, accentuating paradigms of inclusion and exclusion. This has attributed political significance to the notion of community and place, where through the classification of land and resources, those people who use these resources are also classified, as is the case with Lisu in northern Thailand. This situation is intensified in times of conflict and contestation, when the very meaning of community and place is defined and redefined by government policy and local divisions of land.

People manifestly believe in the notion of community, either as an ideal or reality, and sometimes both (Hamilton, cited in Cohen 1985:9). It is possible to approach an understanding of community by seeking to capture members' experiences of it. Instead of asking, "What does the community look like to us?" We need to ask, "What does it mean to its members?" Thus, moving away from the earlier emphasis that anthropology and sociology placed on structure, community is approached as a phenomenon of culture that is meaningfully constructed by people through their symbolic powers and resources (Cohen 1985: 38).

To successfully move past previously held perceptions of the community and investigate alternative approaches, it is thus necessary to analyze community as it is symbolically constructed as a system of values, norms, and moral codes which provide a sense of identity within a bounded whole for its members, focusing on the diversity of structural forms within which a sense of belonging to a local social context can occur (Cohen 1985). The concept of community, if we can indeed call it that, provides both a means of encompassing a wide variety of social processes as well as an idea, beyond a simple nominal meaning, that refers to symbols, values and ideologies, and suggests many appealing features of human social relationships. Cohen (1985) shifts analysis from structurally-based definitions of community and studies of whether structural limits are resilient to social change, to one of how successfully members are able to infuse its culture with vitality, and to construct a

symbolic community that provides meaning and identity. Therefore, as Cohen (1985:38) stipulates, that the core or key nature of this idea of community reflects both an undercurrent of social processes and cultural meaning which is constantly present in modern societies.

Developments relating to postmodernism, globalization and new advances in technology such as the Internet are continually challenging classical interpretations of community, as have recent trends in migration and the political mobilization of local communities. The Lisu in northern Thailand, for example, in the space of a single generation have faced extensive pressure to change traditional meanings of community and ways of life, in terms of relationships with the state, economic transformation and changes to production systems and labor structure. However, far from disappearing in both theory and practice, this community has gained new life in current political and social circumstances, including state development projects and a new focus on local knowledge and community-based resource management. As Delanty (2003) suggests, this has produced a worldwide search for roots, and identity, and aspirations for a sense of belonging. Different interpretations and uses of the term community have been outlined above. There are, however, some commonalities: it can be said that the community encompasses both feelings of belonging and a particular social phenomena. Community can thus be expressed through the search for meaning and solidarity, and in collective identities, surpassing previous conceptualizations of the community connected to a fixed place.

2.4 Hegemonic Power of Community in the Context of Rural Development in Thailand

In the context of rural development in Thailand, and more recently the rise of notions of local knowledge and community-based natural resource management (CBNRM), the community has been questioned both as a concept and as an administrator's tool. Kemp (1991) shows how western sociological experience has been applied uncritically to produce a fundamentally flawed concept of community in the rural Southeast Asian context. The element that embodies the primary sense of classification and discrimination in the examination of the nature of community is the

boundary. From an administrative perspective, the village (*muu ban* in Thai) is constructed for the purpose of control and ease of administration, focusing on the creation of boundaries both physical and conceptual. On the conceptual side, rural research by anthropologists and others continues to rely on the village as the primary unit of study. The conceptualization of what a Thai village actually constitutes and represents, though, has changed considerably with the emergence of new approaches to researching rural society.

The creation of boundaries within both theoretical and practical paradigms is, then, a means to create order. Boundaries provide a channel for the navigation of social spaces comparable with the geographical maps that helps us navigate our physical environment. Herzfeld (2001:135) shows that at the conceptual level, maintaining order starts with the question of who defines order, in other words: Who sets the boundaries? Herzfeld (ibid) also suggests that this is essentially a question of classification. People who move around are problematic for the maintenance and establishment of state administrative and bureaucratic control. The foundation for the modern nation state is the formalization of the connection between political sovereignty and the identification of boundaries. The crossing of this imagined line has significance for how people are classified, whether they are considered asylum seekers, refugees, or ethnic minorities. This argument maintains that the people on either side of these boundaries are rigorously categorized and objectively defined. Scott (1998) dedicates an entire book to better understand why people who move around have always seemed to be perceived as enemies of the state. Transcending regional boundaries, his study includes an analysis of the state's interaction with nomads, pastoralists, hunter-gathers, Gypsies, vagrants, and homeless people. Such an analysis of movement is relevant to a study of the highland peoples of Thailand. Through the territorialization of land, policies criminalizing traditional forms of shifting cultivation, and state-led community development projects, the Thai state has fixed highland people to a geographic location in both policy and rhetoric encompassing both cultural and political domains. This has been achieved through household registration of highland communities, census data collection, a ban on

logging and tightening control of resource use, where the Lisu have been connected to highland areas and forest destruction (Chapter I, Overview).

Both state development and administrative programs rely on the existence of a clearly bounded village, and a function of these programs is to reinforce such boundedness. The best example of this in the Thai setting is action by the state in the formation of *muu* as an administrative grouping. The *muu* serves as the basic unit for many facets of local administration, such as census data, development planning and implementation, budget allocation, and political association. The issues of territorial or spatial boundaries as they are perceived by village communities themselves also cannot be dismissed, for as a basic level of social relation, villagers do actively engage with their territory, forest, water and other resources (Hirsch 1993).

Regarding Lisu, of northern Thailand, the community as seen from an external perspective is a fixed geographical entity conforming to boundaries set by state agencies, predominantly within the boundaries and demarcations of national parks and forest reserves. However, Lisu communities have a deeper meaning; they are places that have been constructed and maintained through memory and history, highlighted by contestation of social relations, the environment and external forces. Ritual, migration, memory, and labor structures transcend fixed notions of community and, in turn, of community members. According to Chayan (1993:20), there is a need to examine how different levels of the village boundary are contingent upon various social relationships, including kinship networks, ethnic relations, political alliances or membership in spirit cults. The village thus needs to be seen as a contested terrain, situated within multiple systems of meaning and conflicting discourses of space (Chayan 1993, and 2003). With reference to the Lisu, this encompasses ritual practice, memory of migration, and state development planning.

Examining the village as a contested site where political, administrative and development objectives are played out, these issues can be seen to be intrinsically connected and the village, as we observe it, as an outcome of these interactions (Kemp 1991: 312). Kemp (1991), Chattip (1991), Chayan (1993, and 2003), Hirsch (1993), and others have shown that the idea of community as it has emerged in an

increasingly urbanized social and political environment with powerful and romanticized images of the past, particularly regarding communal organization, has a central role in the construction of contemporary discourse on national cultural identity and the development aspirations for Thai society. Yet in Kemp's (1991:312) view, it is increasingly evident that the peasant village community at the center of this discourse, while elusive in actuality, persistently distorted the perceptions of Thai social formations held by outsiders as well as by Thais themselves.

The reasons why this stereotype of a "typical" Thai village persists is several fold and empirically grounded. At the heart of this interpretive dispute is a conceptualization of the community that, as outlined by Kemp (1991:313) in his study of peasant societies, is associated with the village. Difficulties arise as a direct result of this conceptualization and the fact that these grand theories of the community have largely not been applicable in the context of rural Thailand. Since the community is the primary element in the processes of state building and transformation to modernity, it follows that because concepts of community are ambiguous and misleading, the formation of the nation is highly suspect (ibid).

By using two theoretical approaches, namely structural-functionalism and postmodernism (Delanty 2003 and Cohen 1985), a clearer picture of the community can be approached through an examination of center and periphery, ethnic interaction, and social relations. However, addressing these concepts cannot allow us to fully examine the complexity and dynamics of the contemporary imagery of a "village in the forest"; rather, it is necessary also to approach community as created, felt, expressed, maintained and interpreted differently according to age, gender, religious background and class. Thus by assuming that identity, ethnicity and culture are not homogeneous, static concepts situated in geographically-specific areas or "communities," the methods, objectives and questions of research selected must be flexible and adequately accommodate a diverse range of social identities.

National, regional, and village boundaries have, of course, never contained culture in the way that the anthropological representations have often implied. However the existence of a transnational public sphere means that the misperception

that such boundaries enclose cultures and regulate cultural exchanges is no longer sustained (Gupta and Ferguson 1999:58). Physical location and territory, for so long the only grid on which cultural difference could be mapped, therefore need to be replaced by multiple grids that enable us to see that connection, contiguity, and more generally, the representation of territory, varies considerably according to factors such as class, gender, race, and sexuality, and are differentially available to those in different locations in the field of power. Proceeding from this understanding, the community can be conceived as a social space that consists of social relations of various types. Paramount in this analysis and this research is how each community or ethnic group defines their space or territory, socially, ecologically, and culturally (Gupta and Ferguson 1999:59).

2.5 Interpreting Identity

> It has been said that being born Indian is being born into politics. I believe this to be true; because being born a Mohawk of Kahnawake, I do not remember a time free from the impact of political conflict.
> (Gerald Alfred, in Tuhiwai-Smith 1999:110)

The notion of identity has intrigued academics and students of the social sciences, including myself, for some time. Is identity permanent, or does it shift? Do we have a single identity, or is identity multiple and contested? Is identity inherent or is it socially and/or culturally constructed? Not surprisingly great ambiguity lies at the heart of any study into identity. On the one hand, identity expresses locality, permanence, a fixed entity, and on the other, it is constructed, shifting and multiple. This multiple sense of identity is even more acute when analyzed in the context of development and change.

Considerable attention has been paid to the social construction of identity, and there are a range of associated terms, including the self, subjectivity, the subject, subjectiveness, the agent, agency, and action, that all have something to do with identity, as do the terms “individual” and “collective”. Craib (1998) argues that the central theme of the self in modern society is its reflexivity, a constant questioning and reconstruction of the self as a lifelong project. Essentially, this process is one of constant negotiation with those around us: “identity is a product of agreement and

disagreement and open to change" (Craib 1998:2). Other authors have pointed to the complexity of analyzing identity, in particular collective identities, in critical social science literature: "collective identities have come under suspicion in recent years among putative radicals infatuated by postmodern and postcolonial critiques of subjectivity, so that even to speak of collective identities is to risk charges of essentialism" (Dirlik and Prazniak, in Prazniak and Dirlik 2001:3).

Of all the disciplines, anthropology, sociology and developmental psychology make the greatest claims to analytical investigations of identity (Reynolds 1991:3). To follow the track of postmodernist thought, identity is seen, rather than as an endless process of self-creation, as something constructed through various disciplines and discourses intrinsically linked to other concepts such as community and culture. In this sense, the social self is tied to social relationships which are deeply embedded in community and culture, and are in turn strongly associated with a group's history and geography or "place."

Identity is closely correlated with the concept of place, and conceptualized through geographical, social, and political orientations. Under the dominant ethnic discourse in Thailand people have been categorized into specific ethnic groups and, more significantly assigned to fixed geographical places determined by boundaries. This conceptualization of the social, geographical and political place that is assigned to ethnic minorities originated with the emergence of the modern Thai state (Keyes 2002, 1987, 1979, Thongchai 2000,1994, Anderson 1991 and Tambiah 1990). The modern nation state, unlike many other political systems, draws on the notion that political and cultural boundaries should be consistent with national ideology (Eriksen-Hylland 1993:109). Thus a national collective identity is constructed through education, media and government policies of assimilation and integration. This "new" collective identity attempts to identify the nation's subjects as "citizens," as well as identify those who are not.

A related criticism of Thai identity as a hegemonic construct is that the instrumentalist intent assumed in such a construct is misleading (Reynolds 1991). Society does not cohere simply because the nationalist ideology, fashioned by the

ruling elite, strikes a responsive chord in the population. The historical assertion of Thai identity as explained by Turton (2000:11) has occurred in the context of a particular kind of social and political development, namely that of the *müang* as a civilized central power, as opposed to *pa* referring to wild, forested and uncivilized areas outside of the *müang* domain. Turton goes further to suggest that one might even speak of this development as müang-ization, as analogous with civil-ization (from the Latin civis), or even politization (from the Greek polis).

The concept of a dominant ideology assumes an over-integrated, overly simplistic view of society (Reynolds 1991:30). Dominant ideologies are not clear, coherent and effective but are fractured and contradictory in most historical periods (Abercrombie et al, in Reynolds: ibid). It would be a mistake at the end of the twentieth century, suggests Turton (2000:9-10), to think of all marginal ethnicities as either "tribal" or geographically remote, as misguided as considering the populations of mountains and borders as predominantly non-Thai. Additionally, the notion of identity politics can be seen as a mechanism for making space for one's self, or for a collective group (Hetherington 1998). At other times, as shown by Hetherington (1998:124), identity politics has meant staying in a certain place and trying to change one's situation there, either in the sense of one's everyday life or by challenging authority in its spaces of social centrality. Another perspective is that of Zaretsky (cited in Castells 1997:10): identity politics, he writes, "must be situated historically."

Discussions on identity, then, need to be situated in historical context. Identities are constructed within, not outside discourse, and we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices (Hall 1996:4). Following Hall's (ibid) argument, and specifically related to the objectives of this research, identity emerges within the play of specific modalities of power, and thus is more the product of the making of differences and exclusion than the sign of an identical, naturally-constituted unity, or an identity in its traditional meaning of an all-inclusive sameness and without internal differentiation.

2.6 Ethnic Classification: Locating the "Other"

Scholars have traditionally dealt with the issue of ethnic identity by using a variety of approaches. Early writings on the hill-tribes of northern Thailand focused on cultural attributes, language and religious practices. Since the 1970s, significant attention has been placed on the Karen ethnic group (Keyes 1979). More recent studies have focused on discourse and counter-discourse, reconstructing identity in the analysis of the relationship between state and highland peoples and policy concerning resource management, centering on the debate between scientific and local manifestations of knowledge and practice (Pinkaew 2001, McKinnon 2003). Analysis of identity has also been approached from the standpoint of marginality and the social construction of marginalization (Komatra 1998). Other studies show identity as a form of struggle and response, or taking on the debate with regard to gendered spaces (Klein Hutheesing 1990a) or state projects of ethnic classification (Keyes 1979). While the state attempted to integrate the hill-tribes into the Thai state with the classification of people and agricultural practices, centralized education, and increasing controls over resource use, these people were also treated as troublesome and problematic to national security (Hayami 2004:60-61).

My approach differs from earlier work in that the focus is placed on historical interaction and the forming of networks and alliances at varying levels. Within this field of research, there has been little focus placed on the notion of community and how people produce and maintain identity based on relationships which are not only attached to place but flow past bounded territory. In this way, identity exists on the symbolic level through expressions and experiences of belonging, and intra-community social, ritual and political organization. At the same time, ethnographic research and more recently the work of NGOs has contributed to the varying constructions of a romanticized image of highland people in northern Thailand.

Research into ethnic identity and classification in Thailand has a long history. The Hmong, for example, have been generally presented as a group whose segmented tribal organization presents an inherent challenge to the authority of the state; their traditional practice of shifting cultivation clearly demarcates them as an ethnic group

from the practitioners of irrigated cultivation, and they are particularly remarkable for their strong sense of cultural homogeneity (Tapp 2000:87). According to Tapp (2000:90), since ritual is fundamental to the construction of cultural identities, the constitution of cultural identity may also be partly demonstrated through an analysis of rituals. So there is a clear need to investigate the nature of these ritual incorporations and adoptions more carefully than has been done in the past, in order to see how the discourse of local, ethnic, regional, and national identity is actually, literally, and currently — as well as historically — constituted (ibid).

By using ethnicity as the unit of analysis in social relations, the construction of identity can be viewed as a two-way process. Power to determine and construct identity lies both with the contemporary state through codified laws and territorialization, and with minority communities' responses to the state. This suggests that the conceptualization of ethnic identity is problematic, and while the subject tends to be viewed as static, struggles are fought at the local level, consolidating relationships with the state regarding rights and citizenship, and may be simultaneously acknowledged at the international level as having membership in a wider "indigenous community". This representation lends support to the argument that as long as we view ethnicity in abstract terms without giving sufficient attention to the complexity of identity construction, the actors involved, inter-group interaction and the notion of adaptation and negotiation in power relations, the significance of diversity will remain at the conceptual level (Fee and Rajah 1993).

Highland people's struggles for land rights has included the assertion of rights to place, geographically and politically, in the face of state policies classifying and "redefining nature" (Pinkaew 2001) as National Parks, Wildlife Sanctuaries and Conservation and Watershed Areas. As local struggles intensified between highland people and state agencies**,** NGOs have become involved in the creation of wider political networks encompassing local communities and selected village members in the assertion of rights. The Karen, for example, with the support of academics and NGOs (Pinkaew 2001 and 2003, Yos 2003, McKinnon 2003, Delang 2003 and Hayami 2004), assert that "the forest is not only their home, but also the root of their

cultural identity" (Hayami 2004:57), linking their lifestyle and knowledge systems to the preservation of the natural environment and the maintenance of biodiversity.

The construction of the counter ethnic discourse has allowed the Karen people to move, however slightly, from the image of *chao khao* 'destroyers of the forest' to an image of "guardians of the forest" (Prasert 1997). The extent to which this will affect the other ethnic groups struggling for similar recognition and acceptance of their identity and cultural survival remains unclear. In the process, the Karen have attempted to move away from the image of "forest destroyers", and classification alongside other ethnic groups such as Hmong, Akha, Lisu and Lahu, to a position where they are increasingly seen as forest guardians through the promotion of indigenous knowledge and traditional belief systems (ibid.). These claims, as outlined by Hayami (2004:57-59), are contributing to the formation of a Karen discourse that combines environmental conservation and traditional knowledge. Hayami (ibid.) maintains that this discourse has given rise to increased ethnic consciousness and has provided a platform for the assertion of land rights and Thai citizenship. In response to previous work on the Karen, as outlined above, some academics have referred to this discourse as a "Karen consensus" (Walker 2001). This argument has put forward the idea that academic, activist and many Karen leaders themselves have created a singular and homogenous conception of Karen agricultural practices and traditional knowledge systems as a strategic counter discourse. In essence, Karen and other highland people are using these approaches to increase their power in negotiation with state agencies over resource allocation and access to land.

The dominant state position regarding all identified ethnic minorities and in Thailand is embedded within these political and social processes of interpretation and categorization. Such a situation, arising from the creation of the modern nation state, dictates official action as well as development initiatives and projects. As a result, state-initiated projects such as community-based natural resource management run the risk of perceiving communities as fixed and homogeneous, and representing the community as objective reality. In this case, notions of identity and community are formed around how a community uses their resources. This has lead to a redefining

of community and identity from local perspectives, where the geographical location of the community has taken on new meaning. It is therefore necessary to examine the impact of the "community as a bounded entity" in the form of state territoriality and local responses.

Arbitrary classification of different ethnic groups spreads deeper than government labeling and policy, penetrating the social realm where highland people are negatively portrayed as destroyers of the forest, involved in the narcotics trade, and as threats to national security. As outlined by Eriksen (1993:60), ethnic classifications are also social and cultural products related to the requirements of the classifiers. They serve to order the social world and to create standardized cognitive maps over categories of relevant others. The important term here is "others," emphasizing the connection between ethnic classification and the concept of place. Therefore, ethnic classification in the case of Thailand covers not only the labeling of different groups, but incorporates social and geographical categorization of cultural and agricultural practices, which are exemplified through state discourse of inclusion and exclusion and the majority/minority dichotomy. This in turn, Keyes (1979) shows, has resulted in intensified discourses of contestation for power between the majority and minority. This is true, however, as this research will show, there are also contestations within as well as between groups and communities.

Within the field of colonial studies, it has been argued "the colonial regime had an almost paranoid obsession with collecting information regarding the land, economy and customs of the vast and diverse populations they had set themselves to rule" (Karlsson 2000:26). As aptly observed by Anderson (1993:184), the map, the census, and the museum developed under colonial rule clearly illustrate the existence of a discourse related to power and perspective which was imposed by the colonial power over its geographical, social and political domain. These institutions essentially classified everything under colonial control into measurable and quantifiable variables, including its people, regions, religions and languages (Chapter IV, section 4.5.3). As Pramoedya Ananta Toer (1980, in Anderson 1993:184-185) asserts,

> …the colonial state did not merely aspire to create, under its control, a human landscape of perfect visibility; the condition of this 'visibility' was that everyone, everything, had (as it were) a serial number. This style of imagining did not come out of thin air. It was the product of the technologies of navigation, astronomy, horology, surveying, photography and print, to say nothing of the deep driving power of capitalism.

Salemink (1991, cited in Jonsson 2000:221) has described how French colonial officials codified manuals detailing the customs of separate ethnic groups in the highlands of Vietnam during the 1900s, and developed in the process ceremonies in which the leaders of highland groups swore allegiance to these agents of the colonial power. Acknowledging the impact of the expansion of the state in Southeast Asia is one step towards understanding upland peoples in terms of history of the region, beyond the notion of "tribal" groups as isolates. In his study of social dynamics in the Kachin Hills of Burma, Leach (1954) discussed repeated shifts in the political organization of upland social formations, and also the movement of people between the categories of upland (Kachin) and lowland (Shan) social spheres. Leach argued that, during the period he was conducting research and for a considerable time before that, "uplanders" could become "lowlanders" by adopting Buddhism and engaging in wet-rice cultivation. These "religious" and "agricultural" factors were simultaneously social and political, and implied subject-hood and tribute relations with particular Buddhist kingdoms (Jonsson 2000:231).

Social and cultural systems, therefore, are reference systems, which are used selectively in specific environments (Lehman 1967: 105, cited in Conrad 1989:198). Within such environments, ethnic categories are defined not in absolute terms, but by "role complementation" (ibid). This argument proposes that ethnic groups do not follow or correspond to a distinct ancestral group, but to a group or groups of people who assume a social role defined as a function of the environmental context of other such roles (Conrad 1989:198). The ethnic group as such is based not on its linguistic or cultural distinctiveness, but its structural opposition to other groups in relation to different resources. A consequence of this dynamic is that ethnic groups, identities and categorizations are not permanent and that their applications often depend on social context (Kunstadter 1979:120, cited in Conrad 1989:198), and is an important variable in investigating the classification of Lisu.

All societies contain within them a repertoire of different life-styles, cultural forms and rationalities that members utilize in their search for order and meaning, and in which they themselves play a part in terms of affirmation or reconstruction. Therefore, the strategies and cultural constructions employed by individuals do not arise from a void, but are drawn from a stock of available discourses (verbal and non-verbal) that are to some degree shared with other individuals (Long and Long 1992:25). Social actors are not simply seen as disembodied social categories or passive recipients of intervention, but as active participants who process information and strategies in their dealings with various local actors as well as outside institutions and personnel. The different patterns of social organization that emerge result from the interactions, negotiations and social struggles that take place between several kinds of actor. In this way, the social construction of actors touches crucially upon the issue of agency (ibid).

2.7 Conceptual Framework

This research employs a conceptual framework and argument highlighting the interaction between binary opposites such as hill and valley, center and periphery, and Thai and non-Thai in order to examine the field site, a village in the forest. Conceptualizing the linkage between community and identity**,** this study illustrates that where people live — their place, community or home — and the networks and alliances that they form are the sources of basic materialistic substance, symbolic meaning, contestation, struggle, and ethnic identity as a distinct group. This leads not only to resistance strategies and alternative understandings of place and how people identify with these new locales, but also to different ideas about development and progress that challenge previously held beliefs and ideologies. Identity in this case can be seen as a political strategy that differentiates and mobilizes ethnic minorities through the promotion of their distinct cultures and traditional practices in response to external pressures. This is certainly the case when we consider issues such as human rights, land rights, rights to place, personal legal status and other issues of concern for minority and ethnic communities. It is here where the concepts of community and identity are articulated through the notion of the politicization of place. Community itself is not a fixed and unchanging entity. Indeed, the identity of highland people as

connected to place is undergoing significant change. Following the assumption that being on the periphery shapes ones experience of community and identity, as well as way of thinking and life world, this study also maintains that centers need peripheries for the maintenance and promotion of their own identity, in this case Thai and non-Thai. The very idea of community as a physical entity or the combination of social relationships, ritual practices, and feelings of belonging to place, is an intensely fragile social achievement, an achievement exemplified during times by struggle and negotiation with external forces and internal transformation.

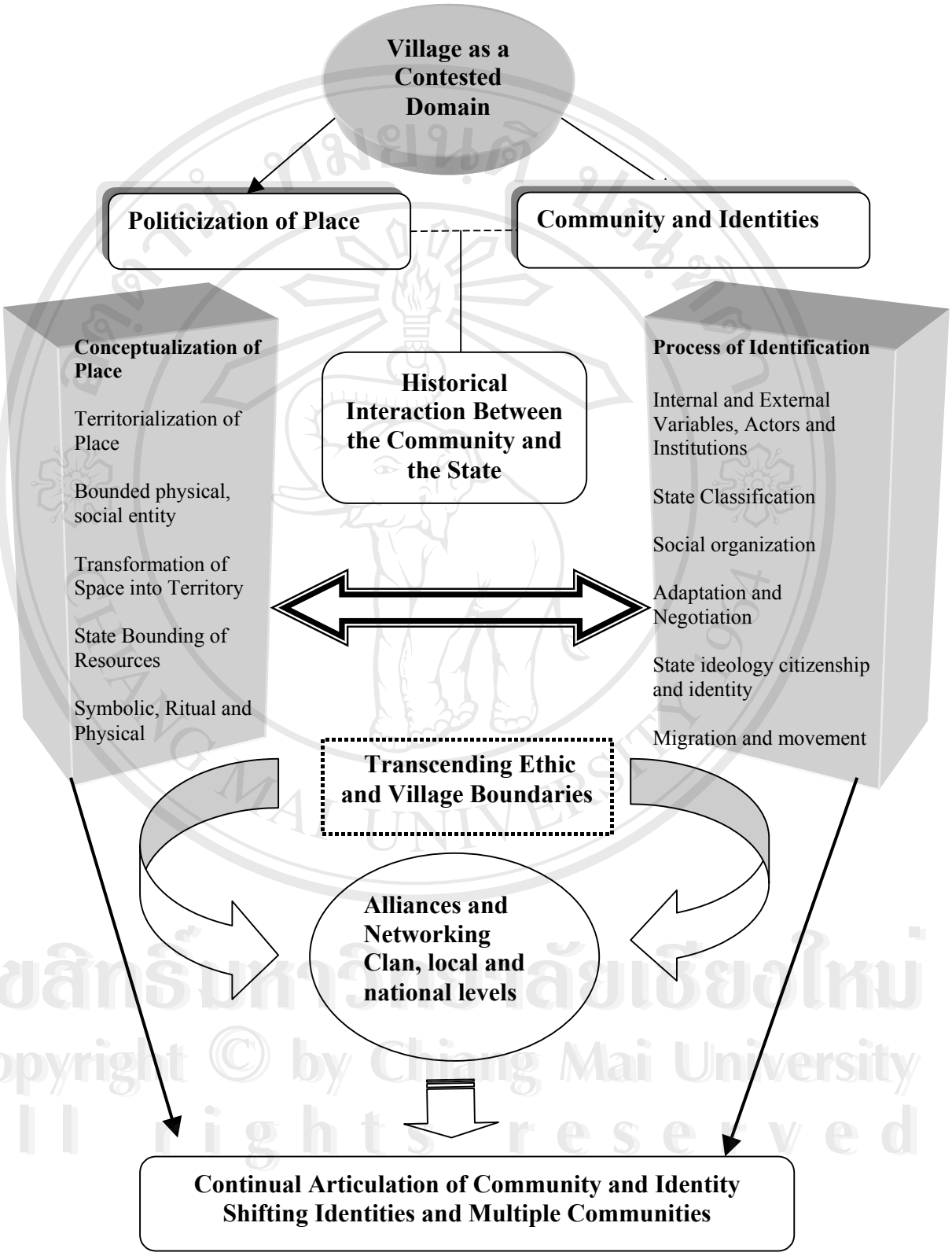

Figure 2.1 Conceptual Framework for the Analysis of Community and Identities: The Politics of Place