CHAPTER III
CULTURAL LANDSCAPES: SHIFTING HISTORICAL, ENVIRONMENTAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXTS

3.1 Introduction

> If we give up our land we give up our life in the mountains, our land will be in the hands of outsiders, no longer ours.
> (Lisu village leader Ban Sai Ngam, personal communication January 2004)

The significance of minorities within the political systems of pre-modern Thailand and the contemporary Thai state is concerned not only with the creation and maintenance of boundaries, but also with the categorization of people in terms of geographical location, ethnicity and agricultural practices. It is also important to consider historical differentiations and the relationships within and between the center and the periphery in the early part of this century as an integral component of a contemporary analysis of Lisu in northern Thailand. This chapter is divided into two historical timeframes. The first involves investigation of the formation of the Thai state and the position of Müang Pai as a district of Mae Hong Son province (northern Thailand), the research area of this study. Secondly, focus will be placed on contemporary government policies regarding highland peoples. This includes analysis from both Lisu and non-Lisu perspectives focusing on the cultural landscape as fluid; through movement, historical interaction with other groups including relationships and networks formed at varying levels, their cultural landscape is not fixed in a particular geographical location with a clear boundary. This results in a situation where people too are neither fixed nor bounded within the community; although Lisu identity can be correlated with locality, it moves and shifts through different levels of articulation with a diverse range of actors. It is from this perspective that an understanding of the term cultural landscape emerges, not as a situation of objective relations between a dominant group and minority peoples, but as a process of fluidity and movement where different groups of actors interact historically, linguistically and culturally.

Since 1999, I have been living, working and studying in northern Thailand, and it is hard to remember a time when I picked up a newspaper, or turned on the radio or television, when the mention of land, forests, mountains and rivers, as well as people's rights to these resources, did not enter the discussion somehow. One striking characteristic of these conversations, stories, or narratives of a nation, remains that people's lives, cultures, and social beings are embodied in the land. Land, as this study shows, has multiple meanings. In fact it has many and varied meanings — spiritual and geographical, as well as political. In a conventional sense, the historical and mental landscapes of people living within the Thai borders have been divided into the separate spheres of hill and valley, or *müang* and *pa*. When the landscape is examined more closely we see different layers of connection and interaction that involve transcending these seemingly fixed social and geographical spheres.

The Lisu, through movement and migration, represent the phenomena of border crossing, bringing with them aspects of culture and history from southern China and northern Myanmar (Klein Hutheesing 1991, Dessaint 1971 and 1992, and Durrenberger 1971). It is more than this, however; by establishing villages in the mountainous regions of northern Thailand the Lisu have brought with them "their" symbolic land, as will be discussed later in the chapter. Through this process the forests and mountainous areas of northern Thailand are characterized not only by state boundaries and forest categorization, but also intertwined and embedded with the cultural practices of the Lisu. In this way, the village and forest guardian sprits of the Lisu, including *apa mo* and *ed da ma*, and the water spirit *e ja nea* are worshipped by Lisu across international borders. The fence and fire break built around the village guardian spirit shrine of the Lisu and the small cups filled with corn liquor placed on alters in the house to worship deceased ancestors can therefore be interpreted as physical representations of symbolic place, as well as the promotion of a cultural and historical consciousness.

3.2 Place Consciousness of Lisu: Interactions Between Environmental and Social Contexts

When attempting to trace the history of a particular locality, we must primarily focus our analysis on people. The history of Thailand in particular exemplifies such a need. Thai history is complex and encompasses the interaction of a diverse range of peoples, societies, cultures, political alliances and beliefs. These narratives have taken place within shifting environmental and social contexts that are as much political and cultural as they are geographic. Over the space of many centuries, 'Thai' culture as a civilization and identity has emerged as the product of interaction between Thai, indigenous and immigrant cultures (Wyatt 1982:1).

To provide an overview of the physical setting of northern Thailand, the interactions between the environment and the people must be addressed, for it is these interactions and the movement of different groups across the region that have shaped our understanding of the land and its inhabitants. Within this context, the north of Thailand is characterized by low plains, high mountain ranges, deep valleys, river systems, and diverse peoples covering an area from Mae Hong Son province in the far northwest, Chiang Rai province to the north, and Nan province in the upper northeast. The northernmost region of Thailand covers approximately 85,900 square kilometers, or one fifth of the kingdom (Yos 2003). Stories of movement told by Lisu elders speak of the Salween River and give it special meaning as a route of migration, and as a way to distinguish between different groups of Lisu, including those from the headwaters and those living further downstream near the Myanmar-Thai border (Ayabe 1996).

Investigation into the movement of Lisu across upper Southeast Asia, through Southwest China along river systems and mountain ranges, into the highlands of northern Burma and splintering into groups spread as far as Assam in India, can assist our understanding of the current position of Lisu within the Thai state. Myths of origin can also throw light on how Lisu conceptualize place (Chapter IV, section 5.5). As Klein Hutheesing (1990a:34) shows, writings on the Lisu past reveal long wanderings across several borders and extensive contact with many ethnic groups, to

the extent that there is mention of Sinization, Lahuization, Kachinization, and most recently Thaization.

The origins of the Lisu remain somewhat ambiguous with different authors claiming different origins and attributing the Lisu with a variety of different customs, religions, dress and languages. However, a common theme is the movement of a group of people from China to Myanmar and Thailand, with references to the headwaters of the Salween River; "Lisu do not come from nowhere; they come from everywhere" (Conrad 1989:208-209). From a historical perspective, there are connections between various groups who refer to themselves as Lisu throughout the region. Looking at kinship and clan lineage, Lisu interact in a widespread network of relations throughout Southeast Asia and Southwestern China, following both ritual and political associations between villages to activity at national and international levels. As a group of people, then, Lisu have to be considered within the context of these relationships (Durrenberger 1971).

The populations of the mountain regions of mainland Southeast Asia have never been unchanging or static. The Hmong and Mien (referred to as Iu Mien in Thailand), for example, are found in Vietnam, Laos, Thailand and southern China. Khamu are represented in Vietnam, Laos and Thailand. The Shan and Karen live in both Myanmar and Thailand. Akha are found in southern China, Myanmar, Laos and Thailand, as are the Lahu and Lisu. The latter group, the people who are the focus of this study, refer to themselves as "Lisu" in Thailand, however many other names are used in self-identification and official categorization throughout the region. They are known to the Chinese as Li, Liso, Lisaw, Lihsaw, Lishaw, or Lip'a. The northernmost Lisu along the Salween River are referred to as Lutzu, or Yehjen. These terms are related to the Kachin words for Lisu: Yawyin, Yawyen, and Yaoyen. Lisu in Myanmar who have not been heavily influenced by Kachin society are sometimes called Shisham, while those more strongly influenced by Kachin are called Lasaw. The Maru in Myanmar refer to them as Lasi. The Lolo (Yi) in Yunnan call them Lip'o, while Shan and northern Thai people know them as Khae Liisoo, Liisaw or Lisshaw (Dessaint, 1971: 71, cited in Conrad 1989:209).

Such extensive variability in terms of ethnic classification carries significant implications for any study of Lisu identity. The dominant groups that Lisu have been in contact with, namely Yunnan Chinese, Shan, Kachin and Tai, make distinctions between different groups of Lisu, distinctions that may also be representative of internal classifications and self-identification. Such classifications and identifications have arisen in a specific locality and context, and researchers therefore cannot conceptually dislocate them from their particular circumstances.

It is thought that Lisu first moved into Thailand from Myanmar towards the beginning of the twentieth century, about eighty years ago, from an area near Doi Mae Salong to the villages of Huai Sarn and Doi Chang in Chiang Rai province (Ayabe 1996:17). From these early beginnings, the Lisu have established villages throughout the lower and upper northern regions of northern Thailand. "The Lisu in Thailand is not an ethnic group that is fully understood" (Ayabe 1996:15); neither is their position clearly and consistently defined within the Thai state. They have been variously represented as a hill-tribe or *chao khao*, destroyers of the forest, threats to national security, involved in the narcotics trade, as a tourist attraction, un-Thai, or the most difficult ethnic group to develop.

Lisu villages are now dispersed throughout the northern provinces of Thailand, including Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Mae Hong Son, Tak, Phetchabun, Phayao, Sukhothai, Lampang, Kamphaengphet and Phrae (Appendix A, Table 2). Following Chinese classification systems, the Lisu fall into three categories, namely the White (*pae*) Lisu, the Flowery (*hua*) Lisu, and the Black (*hae*) Lisu, on account of differences in ethnic costumes, dialect and the degree of Sinicization (Ayabe 1996). The Lisu in Thailand, however, are generally considered to be homogeneous and part of the Flowery Lisu or Lisu *lai*, which means striped in Thai. The classification of "up" and "down" is significant for Lisu; among the Lisu spread across northern Thailand, the people in Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai and Mae Hong Son refer to themselves as *Gapumüsu* or people of the upper part, and the people in the southern provinces are referred to themselves as *Upumüsu* or people of the lower part (Ayabe 1996: 17). According to a 2002 survey, there are 38,299 Lisu living in Thailand,

consisting of 155 village clusters and 6,553 households (Hilltribe Welfare Division 2002:24). The largest populations of Lisu are found in Chiang Mai province with 17,946 peoples, or 47% of the total Lisu population (ibid).

Meanings of place are constructed by the Lisu through negotiation and interaction with ecological settings, social organization, and the supernatural through ritual practices, external pressures, life histories and political mobilization (Chapter V, section 5.7). In Lisu the word *wa* means place, or stay place, this place has no specific boundary representing an agreed-upon assumption of where they (Lisu) have established a village in relation to the spirit world and cosmology (personal communication with Otome Klein Hutheesing January 2005). There are several ways to approach the notion of place for the Lisu. When Lisu talk about specific settings in their natural environments, such as the forest or water sources, these areas are also the place (*wa*) of different spirits both evil and benign. During times of conflict, the notion of place is intensified for Lisu, including cases of conflict both within the community and with outside agencies where boundaries are considered to be invaded, an offence to the Grandfather spirit *apa mo* solidifying place in the mind of the Lisu (Chapter IV section 4.4.3). Another classification of place and space for the Lisu significant for this study is the division of land using the directional compass markers of north (in some circumstances described as upper or higher), south (lower), east and west. Along with these divisions, there are also divisions relating to auspicious and inauspicious areas of the village and the forest, and male and female spaces (Klein Hutheesing 1990a). This practice of classifying land using directional markers and into male and female space has survived throughout the Lisu's long migration from Yunnan to Myanmar and to the mountains of northern Thailand.

Through movement and migration, Lisu have come into contact with many different peoples, religions and political systems, continuing to adapt and integrate aspects of other cultures into their "life worlds." Such adaptations include displaying images of the Buddha or Jesus in their houses, a Lisu shaman keeping the Buddha's hair in a small cloth bag, the use of Chinese clan names and Thai surnames, Lisu students singing the Thai national anthem as the Thai flag is raised at their village

school every morning, and attending lessons on Thai language and history taught by Thai teachers. In Ban Sai Ngam, there is also ceremonial reference to the great mountain spirit (territorial spirits) in Myanmar and northern Thailand's Doi Luang Mountain in Chiang Dao province during New Year rituals known in Lisu as *chae loseu pha* (Chapter V, section 5.4 and 5.4.1). Another representation of these interactions and adaptations is the altar in the house where ancestral spirits are worshipped, including a foreign supernatural being (*bya su nei*) for whom the Lisu light candles rolled out of beeswax. This is a Tai spirit of the Shan state of Sipsongpanna that has invariably found its way into Lisu cosmology, and has many similarities to Buddha (Klein Hutheesing 1990b:133). Additionally, I witnessed in the research site the use of the *som poi* plant, considered pure and sacred, for cleansing ceremonies to rid a person of evil spirits. The use of this particular plant has many similarities with Buddhist tradition in northern Thailand. These various cultural encounters, according to Klein Hutheesing (1990b:133-134), have apparently left a permanent mark between the spirits and gods of minority religions and the beliefs of the majority lowland populations.

Beyond this, Chiang Mai City Hall was chosen as a site of protest for land rights and citizenship in 1999 and several more times in the following years, Chiang Mai's central bus station serves as a destination and departure point for ethnic dispersal, there have been changes from swidden agriculture to fixed cropping systems since the 1990s, and urban migration has altered the structure of labor and traditional perceptions of Lisu culture. All of these factors illustrate manifestations of adaptation and transformation that have become fundamental elements in understanding contemporary notions of Lisu identity. As Gardiner (2000:6) asserts, it must be acknowledged that everyday life incorporates a form of "depth" reflexivity, which is necessary if we are to account for the remarkable ability that human beings display in adapting to new situations and coping with ongoing existential challenges, as well as to explain the enormous cross-cultural and historical variability that daily life maintains.

For Lisu in Thailand, *apa mo* (village guardian spirit), *e da ma* (forest guardian spirit), and *wu sa pha* (God), along with water spirits, spirits in the forest, village spirits both evil and benign, and ancestor spirits make up the basic supernatural cosmology. Likewise, it is necessary to investigate the territorial spirit classification of important spiritual places in Myanmar and northern Thailand (Chiang Dao province) to understand how Lisu divide and categorize space. There are no gates when entering a Lisu house (Chapter IV, section 4.3), however, a fence with a clear entrance gate is constructed around the shrine for *apa mo*, known as *apa mo hee*. During New Year festivities Lisu pay respect to the forest spirit, *e da ma*, with a ceremony that is performed every year during the third day of the New Year festival. When I attended in February 2004, young men, wearing their best clothes adorned with silver, and elders were the first to arrive at a clearing in the forest on a high ridge overlooking the village. They parked their bikes at the entrance to the shrine just a short walk from the top of the ridge. Young girls were the last to arrive. They too were wearing their best outfits including silver breast-plates. Women are permitted to attend this ceremony, although there are several taboos regarding attendance. If a woman is menstruating or pregnant she cannot attend, or *e da ma* will be upset and the women will have a difficult birth. The same applies for a man whose wife is pregnant. Those who attended during my visit first constructed a shrine. Elders kneeled before the shrine and gave respect to three territorial spirits of the Lisu: a mountain in Burma, Doi Luang mountain in northern Thailand, and third mountain in Mae Hong Son province.

3.3 Centers and Shifting Peripheries: Expansion of the Lan Na Kingdom

This section attempts to show how understanding the center and in turn the periphery have influenced contemporary relations between the two, in an historical analysis of the relationships between Lan Na kingdom (Chiang Mai, northern Thailand) and Müang Pai (Mae Hong Son province, northern Thailand). I explain how the shifts in relationships and power have a localized history that highlights the diversity of ethnic groups and interaction between a changing center and various peripheries. For it is through an exploration of "local history," as will be shown throughout this research, that the interaction between spheres of power can be

illustrated and the line between theoretical and practical binary opposites becomes "fuzzy." Tanabe (2000: 292) maintains that these complex and dialectical processes of demographic movement, cultural pluralism and plural identities are constantly renewed, leading to a situation of multi-ethnic representations of rural villages and districts.

In Thailand, national history has been a fundamental component of nation-state building (Thongchai 1994). This history portrays narratives of homogeneity in ideology, language and deference to the constitutional monarch. There has, however, been increased interest regarding the potential for local history in Thailand to provide "a challenge to the conclusions of the general history of the center" (Reynolds 1992, cited in Tapp 2000: 84). The Lan Na kingdom, which means "million rice fields" in Thai, is the terminology commonly used to describe a succession of states centered in Chiang Mai from about 1263 AD. This Kingdom had periods of Burmese rule, and from 1775 came increasingly under Siamese sovereignty, up to the ending of the royal line and residual ruling functions in 1939. The Thai Yuan[1] (northern Thai ethnic group) had established this powerful kingdom in the late thirteenth century, centered in the Chiang Mai Ping River basin, although after the expansions of Siamese centralized rule and the emergence of the modern Thai nation-state, it no longer existed as an autonomous political entity.

Tanabe (2000:292) has shown that the *müang* has had a particular significance for the self-identification of the people who live there as belonging to a certain (*müang*) domain. The *müang* was the primary unit of social and political organization above the simple village level (Wyatt 1984:7). *Müang*, however, is an ambiguous term that remains difficult to translate, for it encompasses both personal and spatial relationships. In turn, as shown by Wyatt (ibid) argues that when it is used in ancient chronicles to refer to a principality, *müang* can mean both the town located at the hub of a network of interrelated villages and also the totality of the town and villages ruled by a single *jao* or lord. The *müang* is a representation of lowland valley civilization, wet rice cultivation and an autonomous political entity.

[1] The term Thai Yuan refers to the Thai ethnic group of northern Thailand (Turton 2000).

The significance of the term *müang* lies principally in what it encompasses and what it excludes. Outside the moats, gates and walls of the *müang* are the rice fields (*na*) that constitute its economic base (Stott 1991). Past these fields lies an area of mountains and forests that acts as a border a 'mental map' that separates the *müang* administrative control and outside domains. This area is perceived by those inside the *müang* as being filled with spirits, wild animals and non-Tai peoples effectively lying outside the social and economic control of the *müang* and the king. According to Stott (1991:145-147), this entails a crucial contrast that is made between Tai 'civilized' space and areas beyond social control. Following this model, *pa* is non-Tai space. Today, however, the *pa* is no longer outside the interest and control of the *müang*. At the local level, the people require forest products for food, medicine and housing for their everyday lives. Nationally, there is concern about forest depletion and access to resources that has been objectified through the implementation of forest policy and demarcation of national parks, wildlife sanctuaries and watershed areas. This situation indicates that the "good of the *müang* is ultimately linked with the wise inclusion of *pa* as part of the civilized and socialized state" (Stott 1991:151).

3.3.1 History of Müang Pai

The control and administration of Müang Pai district, Mae Hong Son province (Map 3.1) has undergone significant transformation over the last 700 years. These changes have been highlighted by periods of rule by Shan chiefs (the present-day Shan state in Myanmar) and Lan Na kings (Chiang Mai kingdom), and finally by its designation as an official domain under Siamese (Thai) authority by the early twentieth century. Throughout this time, the power of Müang Pai waxed and waned under different military and political influences. Early historical accounts of the area west of Chiang Mai refer to large populations of Shan and Burmese. While Lisu as a distinct ethnic group are relatively newcomers to the area (Chapter IV, section 4.2), this section will show the diversity of ethnic groups and historical relationships to different centers of power, outlining the social and political context of the period when Lisu migrated to Thailand.

It is through this process of historical examination that an understanding of minority peoples in the highlands of Müang Pai can be situated in a contemporary analysis of center and periphery relations. Official records indicate that the original inhabitants of most of Mae Hong Son province were Lua or Lawa. The original name of Müang Pai was Ban Don, which dated back to the fourteenth century.[2] At that time, a Burmese commander by the name of Par Kar Sor ruled the area, though it would later be referred to as an external principality of the Chiang Mai center. When under the administration of Chiang Mai and later encompassed in the expanding rule of Siam, it was known as Müang Pai. This term *müang*, discussed in the previous section, is significant for an analysis of the local history of the area, including relationships with surrounding communities and people. The use of this particular label indicates that Müang Pai was, during certain periods, an autonomous political entity. However, as the power of Chiang Mai increased and spread to areas on its western border, Müang Pai fell under its administration. This was not a fixed status, though, as it was retaken by the Shan in later years, and then fell back in the hands of Chiang Mai, only to become a part of Siam in the early 1900s.

This discussion highlights a significant theoretical and practical situation in the analysis of centers and peripheries, for over time neither position is permanent. In reality, as the case of Müang Pai illustrates, shifts in power and control directly impact upon the composition, administration and allegiance of these states, where centers shift and peripheries are multiple. The primary motive for such shifts in power was perceived as necessary to increase control in surrounding areas, to expand influence, territory and power. Such a system of governance has been described by Tambiah (1977) as the "galactic polity," a concept that he used to illustrate relational power structures in pre-modern states. The idea of *müang*, according to Tambiah (1976:112), refers to centered or center-orientated spaces, as opposed to bounded space, and typically represents a capital, town, or settlement with the surrounding

[2] The history of Müang Pai and surrounding areas was recorded from the Burmese Chronicle and Chinnakanmalineepakorn in 2510 B.E [1967] by Pho Duang Dee Jai Paeng, and reprinted in 2540 [1997] in Wiang Nuer sub-district, Pai district, Mae Hong Son province. The original text was damaged, therefore Pho Duang Dee Jai Paeng copied the text, concerned that it would otherwise be lost. A copy of this document along with a personal in-depth interview was obtained by the author. Sukit Kanjina and the author performed translation from Thai to English.

territory under its jurisdiction. This idea of center-orientated space is fundamental in assessments of state spaces, state ceremonies, and state imaginings of its population and territory. Through a historical analysis of the relationship between centers and peripheries, Tambiah (1976:112) outlines the fluidity and flexibility of boundaries and territory:

> Territorial jurisdiction could not be strictly defined by permanent boundaries, but was characterized by a fluidity or flexibility of boundary development dependent on the diminishing or increasing power at the center… the state "is far reaching in its fame," and was a "bright world." The state is thus likened to a torch so bright that it spreads its light far afield. (Tambiah 1976:112)

The history of Wiang Nuer (northern township) and Wiang Tai (southern township) sub-districts in Müang Pai that follows was translated from the Burmese Chronicle. In 1318 (1861 B.E), [3] King Kram, who ruled over Pingkaburi (Chiang Mai), heard that the Burmese commander Pa Kar Sor had moved his troops to the northwest of Chiang Mai and settled down at Ban Don (present day Müang Pai). In order to protect the growing town and its inhabitants (namely Shan and Burmese), they constructed a moat surrounding the village, with gates and ramparts.

A later king of Chiang Mai King, Chaomachacheevit, moved his troops and elephants to invade and conquer Ban Don. The ruler at that time, a relative of Pa Kar Sor, was Pa Kar Kan Na. The town was ambushed and Pa Kar Kan Na surrendered, though he asked for and was granted permission to remain in Ban Don. For this reason, there are two groups of people living in Wiang Nuer, (literally meaning northern township), which exists to the present day. One group is Shan (Thai Yai), living in the west, and the other group is Thai Yuan, living until the present day to the east of the town.

[3] B.E refers to Buddhist Era, which began after the death of the Buddha, and is used to indicate the calendar years in Thailand. To change from the Buddhist year to the Christian year one must deduct 543 years.

Map 3.1 Thailand and the Union of Myanmar indicating the position of Mae Hong Son Province

Map 3.2 Research site in Müang Pai district, Mae Hong Son province, northern Thailand

Historical interaction and conquest during different periods of its history saw Müang Pai under the control of Shan, Thai Yuan and Siamese rule. Control of Müang Pai altered many times, from Shan and Burmese control to become a satellite region of Lan Na, and back again. These shifts in power relations are currently represented through the diversity of the present population of Müang Pai and were solidified by the drawing of borders in the middle of the previous century. When Siam (Thailand) began to formalize its territory in 1900, it was announced that Müang Pai and three other districts in Mae Hong Son province were to be included under the central Thai administrative and political systems. By 1911, Müang Pai had its first District Governor, Sorn Sukhummint (Social Research Institute, 1981).

In the context of this study, the use of language and text is significant. Due to the fact that the majority of the original population of Pai was Shan, and even though there has been an increase in the number of peoples from northern Thailand, the Shan language is still commonly used. Other ethnic groups living in the area have their own languages, beliefs and customs, however, many can speak Shan, *kham müang* (northern Thai dialect) and central Thai in addition to their own language, through such interactions as trade and formal education. It can be seen that long-term residents of Pai, whether they are highland minorities or lowland Thai, can speak at least two languages (Chapter V, section 5.7). Research conducted by the Social Research Institute (1981) found that 40.83% of the population of Pai spoke northern Thai as their first language, while the remaining 59.17% spoke Shan, Lue, Karen or Lisu as their primary language.

The Second World War was a catalyst for great change for the people of Müang Pai. Students had to learn Thai script for the first time, Thai army training began in town, and the Thai flag was raised every morning along with the singing of the national anthem. Alien residents in the region were required to report every day to the police station, Thai soldiers began to move into the area, and the construction of a road connecting the different districts of Müang Pai, and Wiang Haeng in Chiang Dao district, began. In October 1943, approximately 150 Japanese soldiers marched into Müang Pai and stayed in the Karen village of Ban Mae Ping on the bank of the Pai

River (Social Research Institute 1981). Japanese soldiers soon began construction of a new southern route to Chiang Mai and west to Mae Hong Son müang district, which increased trade with surrounding villages and movements of the population.

3.3.2 Müang Pai: A Frontier Town

The first day of my field study started with a four-hour bus journey from Chiang Mai to Pai district, Mae Hong Son province (Map 1.3). The bus left at nine in the morning from Chiang Mai central bus station. It was full, with an interesting mix of foreign tourists, soldiers, local people and monks. The bus took just over four hours to travel some 140km. With seats just a little too small, the journey began by traveling north along highway number 107 towards Chiang Dao and Fang districts of Chiang Mai province. The road is lined with petrol stations, car repair garages, markets, discount shopping outlets, and golf courses, as well as City Hall, the Chiang Mai Central Prison and the Community Development Battalion of the Royal Thai Army. These latter three places are significant in the history of highland development and the political mobilization of highland peoples' struggle for land and citizenship. There were probably few people on the bus who realized that City Hall was a site of mass protest in 1999, when over 3,000 highland people joined farmers, the rural and urban poor, people affected by large development projects, people who had lost access to land and been denied basic rights such as birth registration and citizenship, and people fighting for the right to practice traditional forms of agriculture.

At this point one may ask, "Why would Lisu from Müang Pai, situated over 100 kilometers away, protest in front of Chiang Mai City Hall?" Through the building of alliances and networks with local NGOs, Lisu from Müang Pai, Mae Hong Son province, joined the demonstration in front of Chiang Mai City Hall. It was a collective protest where Lisu joined other highland peoples, as well as rural poor and other marginalized groups outlined above. Müang Pai has historically been treated as a frontier town or outpost of Chiang Mai. Administratively, the provincial government of Mae Hong Son controls the district, however politically and socially the district is linked to Chiang Mai as a center of northern Thailand. In this sense,

Müang Pai can be viewed from multiple sites, as a periphery of Chiang Mai and as a part of Mae Hong Son provincial administration.

Mae Hong Son province is situated 924 kilometers from Bangkok (the capital of Thailand), and has a total area of 12,681 square kilometers representing the eighth-largest province, with the lowest population density. In fact, Mae Hong Son province boasts 70% forest cover, predominantly tropical evergreen and mixed deciduous forest (Alpha Research 1999:20-25). Even as late as the 1970s, Mae Hong Son was relatively isolated from Chiang Mai and Bangkok. As Keyes (1987:1) points out, "Mae Hong Son had long been regarded as the "Siberia" of Thailand, for even into the 1970s it was largely cut off from the rest of the country." This isolation, as pointed out by Keyes (ibid), was as much geographical as it was cultural. The local population of the area consisted primarily of Shan (Tai-speaking peoples from the Shan Sate of Myanmar), and Lua (considered the original inhabitants of northern Thailand), along with many other ethnic highland populations. Sharing its northern and western borders with Myanmar, it is important to note that the borders of Mae Hong Son have only been formalized officially in the imagination and maps of the kingdom since early last century.

The first visit to the province by King Bhumibol Adulyadej, the ninth monarch of the Chakri dynasty of Thailand, was in 1968 (Keyes 1987:1). Keyes (1987:1) explains that this visit was accompanied by a ceremony of appropriate grandeur, one that displayed the fundamental elements of the Thai national culture, and was a significant event "for people whose connection to the Thai state was tenuous owing to their residence in a remote border area and their ethnic distinctiveness" (Keyes ibid). However, it was not until 1974 that the King and Queen would make a similar trip together to Müang Pai, and then in January 2004, during my research, the Princess also made a brief stop at Müang Pai (Chapter V, section 5.10).

Majority and minority dialectic oppositions are punctuated throughout the bus trip from Chiang Mai to Pai, along with a perplexing spin on the "us" and "them" debate set out in practice at the Forestry Department checkpoint. Two and a half

hours into the journey and just before the border of Mae Hong Son province on the Chiang Mai side, there is a forestry checkpoint where all cars, motorcycles, trucks and buses are usually stopped, at least if those stationed in the office take a particular interest in a particular vehicle or person. The bus I was traveling on was stopped and boarded by armed officials. They check all passengers for identification cards or travel permit documents, except for the bewildered tourists who are not sure what is going on or why selected passengers are removed from the bus and have their bags searched by the side of the road.

Checkpoints are a physical representation of state power, of control, classification and the enforcement of a bounded entity (Figure 3.1 and 3.2). These checkpoints indicate a point where certain criteria must be met before one can cross, and is in effect as much a cultural and political manifestation as it is a physical one. This particular checkpoint represents the border between two provinces, Chiang Mai and Mae Hong Son, and if it were not for the checkpoint, and the presence of forestry and army officials, the border would otherwise go unnoticed. As a province on the frontier of the Thai kingdom, its population, the majority of which are Shan, Thai Yuan and highland people, are intrinsically intertwined in larger political workings of state policy towards natural resources, national security and the suppression of narcotics, including relations with the neighboring country, Myanmar.

Words such as border, ethnic group, natural resources and national security hold substantial power with regards to government policy implementation in Thailand. All of these words can be used to characterize Mae Hong Son province. With Chiang Mai province to the east, and Tak province to the south, Mae Hong Son shares an international border with Myanmar's Shan State the entire length of the province. It is here where political, geographical and social spheres of state policy implementation and local communities meet. National security in this sense is dependent on maintaining a clear physical division between Thailand and Myanmar and protecting the nation from illegal immigration, and the trafficking of narcotics, as well as administrating the province's ethnic minorities and the preservation of remaining forests. This description is based upon a specific national ideology

regarding the classification of people and resources, along with national security and development goals. However, the actual border and frontier areas of the Thai state are not as clear and fixed as the state perspective indicates. Many ethnic groups, including the Lisu, have moved throughout the area, changing settlement locations and recognizing that their origins are linked to multiple places. People move and migrate; on the one hand the state fixes people to a particular place, while on the other, ethnic groups lay claim to different places. Lisu conceptualize boundaries and borders symbolically through ritual practice, for example by making bamboo rafts, *ko pur*, to send evil spirits out of the village (Chapter IV, section 4.4). *Ko pur* are normally placed on the road leading from the village to send bad things from the village to the town. The road, therefore, symbolizes not only a path for development but also a route for problems and conflict to enter the village.

Figure 3.1 Police checkpoint on the road between Chiang Mai and Mae Hong Son provinces

Figure 3.2 Sign indicating a checkpoint before entering the road leading to Ban Sai Ngam

3.4 Integration of the Lisu into the Modern Thai State: A Historical Perspective

> Since the reign of King Chulalongkorn, who ruled from 1868 to 1910, there has been a conscious effort on the part of the central government in Bangkok to bring all the diverse peoples living within the political boundaries of Thailand under its authority. The assertion of this authority has been exercised not only primarily through the use of force, although from time to time force has been directed against groups that have resisted central government control. Rather, it has been asserted by emphasizing a set of national symbols that hold a strong appeal for the vast majority of the populace. At the center of this set lies the monarch (*phra maha kasat*), upon whom the legitimate power of the state is based (Charles Keyes 1987: 3).

Since the 1980s, significant attention has been given to the twin issues of deforestation and watershed conservation, the state placing emphasis on the potentially destructive linkages between agricultural practices and environmental degradation. More recently, forest degradation has become a major issue in Thailand's environmental movement, government policy implementation and regulation, and community-based resource management models. Forests that once covered most of the country are now estimated to be less than 20% of the national land area (Alpha Research 1999), much of which is found in northern Thailand. Examination of the destruction of Thailand's forests has been most acute in the northern provinces, which boasts 45% of the remaining forest cover (Rutherford 2002:56). Contemporary relationships between populations, natural resources, and the variety of agricultural technologies in northern Thailand are products of a long history of intensification of food production and population expansion (Kunstadter, Chapman and Sabhasri 1978:5). Topography and physical environment have thus played important roles in determining agricultural production systems, resource management, community organization and the social practices of different ethnic groups in the region (Yos 2003:16). Conceptions of identity and place, then, are deeply embedded in our understanding of history and the land.

The reasons for state attention to forest degradation are multifaceted. A diverse range of ethnic minorities inhabit the highlands of northern Thailand (Appendix A, Table 1, 2, and 3), a settlement dispersal is the result of migration and interaction over the past several centuries. The Hmong and Mien (Iu Mien in Thailand), for example, are dispersed throughout Southern China, Laos and Vietnam. While the Lisu, Lahu and Akha are considered recent migrants to Thailand, some estimates of Akha migration to Thailand are of 130 to 150 years ago, while it is considered that Lisu are more recent arrivals estimated at between 60 to 80 years ago. Other groups such as the Lua are considered to be the original residents of many parts of northern Thailand. The political nature of the debate between territory and ethnicity in northern Thailand can be understood, as outlined by Pinkaew (2003:31), through the shifting and multiple interpretations of "border" and "elevation" becoming significant markers in differentiating Thai and non-Thai peoples, in

conjunction with other methods such as assessments of agricultural practices, and perceived cooperation in state development projects. In this context, border is equated with national security and a symbolic representation of identity, and it is assumed that highland peoples live in remote, isolated border areas and, as outlined above, are involved in the production and trafficking of narcotics and the destruction of the nation's natural resources. Elevation refers to the perceived geographical position of highland communities located at high elevations and in watershed areas, and it is here where the debates over the protection or the destruction of natural resources and watershed areas are fought (ibid).

Continuing this argument, Lisu, for example, are perceived by state agencies as both a threat to national security and as destroyers of the environment as a result of their proximity to sensitive border areas and the elevation of their settlements, by juxtaposing the twin issues of elevation and resource degradation. According to the state's scientific framework, "forests consist of a classification system in terms of ecology and management" (Santita 1997:256). The Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives has classified land into three broad categories: economic zones, land reform zones, and preservation zones including protected areas, national parks and wildlife sanctuaries (ibid.). These classifications from external agencies have little resonance for Lisu and their internal divisions of land, forest and resources (as shown throughout this study), however their implementation has effectively resulted in the ethnicizing of place and resources. Through perceived information regarding the settlement patterns of ethnic groups, the differentiation of ecological zones, and agricultural practices, the Lisu are therefore objectified in a fixed geographical location; it is understood that Lisu inhabit high altitude hill evergreen forest at an altitude between 1,200-1,500 meters above sea level, and practice slash and burn cultivation (Yos 2003:16-19). By combining the data from these sources, watershed and sensitive resources are seen to be located at high altitudes, as are Lisu settlements.

Such a broad analysis, however, fails to adequately examine several key elements. First is the politicization of place — that is, how the state has territorialized land, resources and people, fixing them to a specific location and essentially giving

political meaning to place. Secondly, time of migration to Thailand and available land are significant determinants of settlement. Third, and most importantly, ethnic groups exhibited great variation in terms of settlement patterns marked by migration and movement over the past several decades. In Mae Hong Son, the research found Lisu living in lowland areas, traditionally classified as areas settled by Thai Yuan, and establishing communities close to market towns at elevations normally classified as characteristic of Karen, Khamu [Khmu] and Lawa [or Lua] settlements (ibid.). Similarly challenging official narratives, the local history of the area (information collected through interviews conducted by the author during 2004) tells of Lua, Karen and Shan villages established well over elevations of 1,200 meters.

State perspectives, however, automatically situate the Lisu in watershed areas, and in the context of resource management and forest classification in Thailand, this implies that Lisu establish their settlements in watershed areas, therefore implicating them in forest degradation. Based on surveys of highland communities in the 1960s, the National Forestry Policy that took shape in the 1980s have thus redefined how resources are classified, along with the linking of forest degradation with settlement elevation that has fixed highland people to a specific place in national narratives and policy.

Within such structures of social organization and increased interaction with the Thai state, Lisu have remained a group who are socially and culturally categorized and placed at the margins. Tapp (2000) makes the point that if the construction of cultural discourse can be seen in terms of the creation, maintenance, and adoption of distinctive tastes and manners, with notions of cultural essentialism finally abandoned, then definitions of ethnic minorities are in fact integral to the construction of a Thai national identity — both for the Tai *as* minorities, and for minorities within Thai states.

Projects for the national integration of highland peoples have been conducted through a variety of different approaches. The primary means for promoting integration, though, have been the establishment of territory-based administration

systems, Buddhist missionaries, centralized education and national-level development planning. The Thai state also initiated many projects to essentially define Thai culture and identity, including the National Cultural Maintenance Act of 1940 which defined culture as the "qualities which indicate and promoted social prosperity, orderliness, national unity and development, and morality of the people" (Thak 1978:256, cited in Reynolds 1991:6), and the National Culture Acts of 1942 and 1943 which established the National Cultural Council. Building on this in the 1960s, the *Thai Culture Magazine* began publication under the Ministry of Education, and in 1977 the Office of the Prime Minister began issuing a monthly magazine called *Thai Identity* (*ekalak thai*) that presented Thai culture and identity as the basis for national independence and sovereignty, promoting Thai music, social values, maps, the writing system, customs, and popular Buddhist texts. These various initiatives, however, had little direct affect on highland communities, which experienced the most significant changes as a result of modifications in forest policies, primarily the introduction of a national logging ban in 1989 and the promotion of replacement crops for opium cultivation, and in the introduction of compulsory formal education.

It can be argued that the assimilation of highland peoples has primarily been achieved through the introduction of standardized education that universalized the use of the central Thai language (Figure 3.3 and 3.4). Insight into the construction of national identity is gained from the following statement by the school principal of Ban Sai Ngam, the research site for this study: "Thainess (*khwam pen thai*) of Lisu in Ban Sai Ngam is only half. They promote and advocate their rights but show very few Thai characteristics or Thainess" (personal interview January 2004). The principal refers here to Thainess as something tangible, as something inherent in one's action and behavior, and a particular type of unity within the nation showing allegiance to the Thai government.

Along with the establishment of laws and institutions that coalesced nationalism and culture, the Siam Society conducted its first survey of "hill-tribes" in the 1920s, marking the beginning of concern about highlanders living inside the borders of Siam. Later surveys of ethnic groups and "hill-tribes" in Thailand were

conducted in the late 1950s and early 1960s, in step with increased state interest in the development and management of hill-tribe peoples and control over resources, and what was soon to become known as the hill-tribe problem. On a broader scale, the Thai state has attempted to manage forests and the people who live in them for over a century, with the establishment of the RFD in 1896. The Border Patrol Police (BPP) was established in 1955 to oversee the protection, education and development of highland people living in remote and border areas. Here the term border, as argued by Thongchai (1994:170), signifies the demarcation of otherness from Thainess, rather than signifying a geographical boundary. By 1956, the Committee for Hill Tribe Welfare was created, along with the Central Hill Tribe Committee in 1959. These institutions proved to be the catalyst for state-led highland development in northern Thailand. It was at this time that the first extensive survey of Hill Tribes Populations was conducted. In 1963, the Hill Tribe Development and Welfare Center was launched, and in 1964 the Tribal Research Center was founded in Chiang Mai, in the grounds of Chiang Mai University.

From the original Economic Development Plan in 1961 and the establishment of the Hill Tribe Development and Welfare Center in 1963, to the present "Third Master Plan for Community Development, Environment and the Control of Narcotic Crops in the Highlands", Lisu have been categorized as *chao khao*, or hill-tribe. Current policy rhetoric exemplifies this categorization and situates highland peoples under three major branches, with corresponding policy initiatives: 1) highland peoples as destroyers of the forest; 2) highland peoples as involved in the production and transportation of narcotics; and 3) highland peoples as a threat to national security. The past two decades have witnessed a resultant tightening in the regulation, classification and utilization of land, along with the expansion of control over forest management by centralized government departments such as the Ministry of Forestry, Parks and Wildlife and the RFD.

Interaction between government agencies of highland peoples occurs on many levels; officially recognized villages have an elected leader, generally chosen on their ability to speak Thai and perform official government duties, as well as an elected

Sub-district Administration Organization representative (SAO) involved in development and budgeting for the community. Along with these positions, there is also an assistant village leader as well as a village committee. As the research in my field site showed, the actual role of these groups is unclear, and the power they had within the internal workings of the community was minimal. However, certain individuals did have considerable power in terms of budget allocation, project implementation and contact with local NGOs. While the influence and authority of the elders in Lisu villages, dependant chiefly on their strength of personality, experience, ability, wealth and family size is still significant (Dessaint 1988:317), the increasing role of the state in internal workings and social structures of the village is undeniable.

Figure 3.3 Lisu school children sing the Thai national anthem before the start of the school day, Ban Sai Ngam

Figure 3.4 Lisu children studying Thai language. Above them is a picture of the Thai flag, a symbol of the Buddha, and a picture of the King, Ban Sai Ngam

3.4.1 Lisu in *Müang* Pai: Economic and Environmental Change

> Now, let me start from the beginning. After the closure of highland agricultural land and the marking of boundaries for national parks, highland people can no longer practice shifting cultivation. We are given a small piece of land that we must use year after year. The soil is not good so we must invest in fertilizer, chemicals and pesticides. It is for this reason that Lisu, Lahu, Hmong, Akha and Mien are working in the town. One bag of fertilizer is 500, 600 or 700 baht. How can we survive? I have worked the same piece of land for over 10 years, I need to use chemical fertilizer and pesticide. I don't know what else to do, we have no choice. It is dangerous for us, we know, people die from the chemicals, but we have to use it or we will starve. What is the option? When I cut down a tree, I feel sad. The tree is older than me, but if I do not cut it down my wife and children will die. This is what we have to consider, these are the problems we face.
> (Interview with a village shaman, Ban Sai Ngam, January 2004)

It can be argued that the history of a nation's growth and development is intertwined with the history of its people and the utilization of land. Land, as well as water and forests have a voice in Müang Pai, Mae Hong Son province; in fact, they have many. The languages spoken now and the languages spoken in the past are represented by the current ethnic diversity in the area, such as the construction of small pagodas in a clearing on a mountain-top by Lua, the building of a Shan spirit house, a Karen forest ordination ceremony, a Lahu *maw le ve* ritual worshiping the guardian spirits of the forest and mountains, or a Lisu *mue kua* ceremony of returning the forest back to the great spirit. There are also state ceremonies performed on the land, which includes the classification of natural resources using scientific knowledge. Much of the surrounding area of Müang Pai was originally Lua and Shan settlements, as was the research site.

The perception of the land as an interconnected grid of fixed boundaries, permanent settlements and fixed cropping practices are thus the creation of state perceptions of resources and the environment: "The Lisu must understand that this is not their land, they have no land! All of Thailand is the land of the King" (senior government officer, Pai district, personal communication January 2004). During my research period, there was continued mention of forest and land classification by government officials, NGO representatives and Lisu village members. Issues such as increased market integration have also penetrated agricultural practices, along with the crops grown and the methods used. This can be seen most dramatically by the shift from rotational swidden agriculture to fixed cash crop production. Traditional farming systems are still used in some instances, for example, the use of rotational labor systems to plant and harvest rice and corn. However, it is becoming increasingly popular to use paid labor. When an area of land is declared a National Park, villagers are forbidden to practice shifting cultivation, collect forest products, hunt, or any other activities deemed as destructive to the land, as one Lisu villager explained:

> If forestry staff see us carrying guns or animals, they will take them away and fine us. In the past, restrictions were not enforced and we could hunt, practice swidden agriculture and cultivate small plots of opium. Today it is much harder and the policy is strongly enforced. They [the Forestry Department] came to the village and confiscated all of our guns, they took mine too. Now we have no guns and forest animals are eating our crops. We cannot even cut wood to build a house. We cannot burn our fields. The village has also divided the forest; there is community forest, conservation forest and other classifications. Original problems with forestry staff were over the boundaries of the national park and wildlife sanctuary, they were not clear. Confusion and misunderstanding between the forestry staff and villagers led to conflict. The area that was allocated for us to practice agriculture was too small. The fields are old, the soil is not good enough and we are prohibited from opening new fields. There were no projects or support for the community to change from shifting to fixed agriculture. People started moving outside of the village, originally young men for work seven or eight years ago. They moved to places such as Chiang Mai and Bangkok, some came back and others never have. Women started working outside the village only in the past three or four years. Our ancestors always worked hard in the fields and did not have any money. In the past we never bought food, we could grow enough. Now we buy food everyday. Money has become an import part of our lives.
> (Interview with a Lisu elder, Ban Sai Ngam, January 2004)

According to a recent survey of highland communities in northern Thailand (Ministry of Social development and Human Security 2002:179-193), there are a total of 50 hill-tribe villages in Pai, including Karen, Hmong, Lahu, Black Lahu, Red Lahu, Lua, Shan, Lisu, and Tong Su.[4] The population of Müang Pai in 2004 is 26,839 persons (Information obtained by government official, district government office, June 2004), with a Lisu population of approximately 4,400. This figure of 4,400 was calculated by comparing both information gathered from official sources from the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security (Hilltribe Welfare Division 2002) and interviews with local NGO staff. The official report did not however, include the Lisu village of Ban Nam Huu in Wiang Tai sub-district with a population estimated at 980.[5]

The impacts of shifting from a basically subsistence agricultural system, where Lisu tend to eat what they grow and grow what they eat (Dessaint 1992), to market-driven production and labor systems have been well documented. These shifts

[4] State classifications of ethnic groups use different terminology from the terms used by the groups themselves, for example Leesaw (Lisu), Musuer (Lahu), Kariang (Karen), Maew (Hmong), Yao (Mien), and Eekaw (Akha). The information provided in the survey includes highland communities along with data on other groups living in these communities defined by altitude and religion, (Appendix B), such as *khon müang*, Burmese, and Muslim. The latter is in fact a religious classification, and there are no similar entries for Buddhist or Christian communities

[5] The figure of 980 came from an interview with a member of the Lisu Network of Mae Hong Son, July 2004.

entail, for example, the growing of tomatoes, cabbage, and fruit trees or, as in the case of the Lisu in Müang Pai, garlic. Almost all of the Lisu villages I visited in Müang Pai over the past year grow garlic. In some villages they began three to four seasons ago, although in others garlic has been grown for only one or two seasons. Seeds, garlic buds and knowledge of growing garlic are shared among the Lisu and between villages. In the research site for this study, almost the entire village is involved in garlic production.[6] Investment in garlic and other cash crops came primarily from the current Thaksin government's "One Million Baht, One Village" development fund.[7] However, the price of garlic fell dramatically in 2004, and in March when the garlic was harvested the price was five to seven baht a kilogram. It was collected and left under the their house to dry, waiting for the price to increase.[8] There are other villages and other stories similar to this one: Lisu in Chiang Rai tell of "red fields", when the price for tomatoes fell as low as one baht per kilogram and they were left in the field to rot.

Since the 1960s, and in some places before that time, opium production in the northern highlands was deemed illegal according to Thai law. However, it is significant to note again that this law did not impact upon the research site until 1986. Moves towards the production of other crops, such as garlic had an immediate impact on livelihoods in the community. Such changes required investment of capital and corresponding changes to production systems and labor structure; villagers went into debt to generate quick cash for the purchase seeds, fertilizers and pesticides. This integration into the market system has not been equal and has had an acute impact on different members of the Lisu household. In particular, the role of women in the managing of household income has been adversely affected (Klein Hutheesing 1990a).

[6] From interviews in the research site only three households out of 61 were not directly involved in garlic production.
[7] One village member invested in the construction of three tourist bungalows.
[8] In order to break even villages estimated that they would require at least six baht per kilogram. Those families who had substantial debt sold at least some of their garlic harvest to repay previous loans.

3.4.2 Rubber: A Magic Tree or Stretching the Meaning of Development

"Every day villagers cut trees and destroy the forest, especially areas in national parks and wildlife sanctuaries, trees are cut and burnt with no benefit. Illegal people continue to cut wood illegally" (speech made by the district governor, district meeting, Pai district office, February 2004). This was the introduction of the Pai district governor's speech at the monthly meeting for village leaders at the district office. Currently the national government has a policy to grow rubber trees in northern Thailand. The project is to begin in 2004, with plantations to expand until 2006. In the north of Thailand the policy stipulates the planting of 300,000 rai of rubber tree plantations, to be divided over a three-year period, including 60,000 rai in 2004, 90,000 rai in 2005 and an additional 150,000 rai in 2006 (on both state and private land). In order to join the project, land needs to be surveyed by government staff. People who have not participated in previous government debt-related development projects must have the bank survey the land and assess the financial stability of the individual.[9] It takes seven years for the trees to mature for the harvesting of rubber. There are plans for this project to be implemented at the community level; after establishing a community committee, then 500,000 baht will be available to implement and manage the project. Lisu have no experience growing rubber and have no connections to potential markets, although government officials have said that they well find markets for them, many obstacles remain.

Due to the fact that people living in protected areas lack land title they must "rent" land from the forest department for a period of 30 years at an agreed-upon amount to join the project. Only land that is already cleared can be used; no new land (land not currently being used in agriculture) can be cleared for the project. Therefore, rubber trees must be planted on exiting plots of land that highland people are already using for agriculture. Requirements for leasing land have not been uniformly welcomed: "This is our land and we will not let it go, just give it away to the government. If we lease the land today, what will our children eat tomorrow?" (Lisu villager, personal communication, January 2004). This is land that Lisu in Ban

[9] In the case of highland people, very few have land title certificates and as a result cannot use their land holdings and agricultural potential as forms of collateral for a bank loan.

Sai Ngam use for their livelihood, their survival, and given the fact that they currently have no land title for any of the land, the idea of giving the land to the RFD is not considered an option for village members. Presently land holding agreements have been made by word of mouth between Ban Sai Ngam, government departments and RFD. In order to join the project, in essence, land must be leased to RFD and the villagers would be responsible for planting and harvesting, it essentially means that they hand over rights to the land, their livelihood and survival. Land would be leased to the RFD, however, it is the responsibility of the villagers to plant and harvest the rubber themselves. The villagers have expressed concern, "What happens after thirty years, we just give our land away?" (interview with village members, Ban Sai Ngam, February 2004). The government official disagreed: "That is not true. After 30 years you rent the land again and again and again, the government will not take your land" (Interview with a deputy district governor, Ban Sai Ngam, February 2004).

Also at the provincial government level, the district governor is personally promoting a conservation initiative: "I am trying to begin a project to protect the environment and resources of Pai called the "Love Pai River Project". This project is necessary because there are many examples of villagers destroying the environment and exploiting resources" (District Governor, Pai district office, February 2004). In this respect, many Lisu communities have been accused of being responsible for polluting the river, and throwing rubbish and chemicals into the water. "I recently went to Ban Sai Ngam. Villagers throw rubbish into the river, they do not conserve the water" (District Governor, district office, February 2004).

A central element behind broadly different perspectives of villagers and the state not only centers on resource use and the livelihood strategies and settlement patterns of highland people, but also encompasses issues of property relations and land title. In essence, the case of the rubber tree project above requires the villagers to lease their land, turning it over to the RFD, whereas the second case of a planned project to conserve the Pai river directly implicates Lisu villages as causing water pollution. These debates, focusing on issues such as water scarcity and pollution, along with forest degradation, arise from differences between and within official and

vernacular identification of resources and power relations between Lisu and state agencies. Inconsistencies and competition between government agencies remains a serious obstacle for the implementation of many development programs in highland areas (Chapter IV, section 4.5.3). At the same time, underlying perceptions of highland people destroying natural resources remain prominent, as well as the related theme of needing to extend the control of the state, such as the district governor claiming Lisu pollute the water and cause problems for lowland farmers, and the director of the Lum Nam Wildlife Sanctuary claiming that smoke is always rising from the mountain, implying that Lisu burn the forest (Chapter IV, section 4.5.2).

Since 2003, an NGO has been implementing a Highland Alternative Agricultural Development Project in several Lisu villages in Müang Pai. Agricultural support is being given in three major areas, in the form of debt financing. The first is cattle raising; cattle are already owned by many of the villagers, and funds are provided to buy cattle from those villagers who wish to sell and then sold through initial budget allocation from the project to be paid back after three to five years. The second area of assistance relates to water, with the provision of support for water piping from mountain streams and the river to the fields. This is also dependent on a payback system. The third method is the allocation of funds to start cash crops and home gardens, which is also dependent on the creation of debt. Throughout the planning process of the project several community-level meetings were conducted in order to identify community-wide problems and suggest solutions.

3.5 Development of Müang Pai and Ban Sai Ngam

> Everyone listen carefully! The provincial governor has told me directly to promote Pai as a tourist town. Promoting Pai as a tourist town all year round will increase economic benefits for Pai people. We must preserve the forest by growing trees and selling goods to tourists. Many hotels in Pai require staff. If you know anyone who can fill these positions, contact me. Requirement is a ninth-grade education. This will help promote economic development in Pai.
> (Pai district governor, monthly meeting, district office Pai district March 2004)

State authorities and outside agencies first came in contact with Lisu living in the area of the research site in 1972 through a logging company that hired Lisu, Lahu, Karen, Shan and *khon müang* for 12 baht per day (Chapter V, section 4.2). In this

same year, the Lum Nam Pai Wildlife Sanctuary was established. The following year, 1973, Lisu from different villages in Mae Hong Son and Chiang Mai moved into the area of the research site and established a village (Chapter IV, section 4.2). By 1981, the village had moved to its present location and had been named *Ja Zu Na Khuaw*. The village was officially recognized and a school was constructed in 1983. Three years later, in 1986, the village had its first officially-recognized leader. In 1986, the Narcotics Suppression Division came to the village to destroy opium crops and conduct workshops regarding national law and policy. The road was developed in 1989, followed by the first contact with NGOs in 1992. The village faced its first major conflict with forestry staff in 1998, one that proved to be the catalyst for the creation of the Lisu Network of Mae Hong Son.

Müang Pai has only recently become a major tourist destination for international and Thai tourists. In 2003, there were more than 280,000 visitors to Mae Hong Son, including almost 200,000 who traveled through Pai (Atcha 2004:3A). Walking around Pai town on market day the remarkable ethnic diversity of the region is strikingly evident. There are Lisu, Lahu, Hmong, Shan, Karen, Thai, and international tourists, along with a variety of food catering to the large diversity of people. Over the past two years, the number of tourists to Pai has exploded, along with all of the services needed to support this increase including guesthouses, restaurants, travel agencies, and many other services. Cafes and restaurants advertise "Fresh Bread and Mountain Coffee", and menus offer spaghetti, steak, hamburgers, American breakfasts, soup, French fries, falafel, and banana pancakes. Signs in English proclaim attractions such; as spas, camping, white water rafting, elephant riding, motorbike rental, face waxing, hot springs, hot showers bath inside, yoga, tattoos, movies, traditional massages, and Internet. Guesthouse and trekking agencies offer a variety of services, however, the most common, and usually the most profitable, is "Hill Tribe Trekking."

Guesthouses and private tour-operators offer a variety of packages for tourists to experience traditional hill-tribe life, and see the "traditional tribes of northern Thailand." Walking into these places one is bombarded with pictures, post cards, and

drawings of hill-tribes, along with maps and photographs of past adventures. These invariably include pictures of an old Lisu man smoking opium, two Lisu girls smiling wearing brightly colored Lisu dresses, and longneck Karen (Padong) women smiling and playing the guitar. These companies do not just offer a trip, but market an experience — one that you will never forget — of living among the tribes of Thailand, if only for one night.

Trade has also increased for related businesses, including those owned by Lisu, especially the women who have been able to take advantage of the tourist boom. There are at least two groups of Lisu selling handicrafts in town. There are those who have a permanent "place" and those who walk around wearing 10 different hats, one on top of the other, with bags and other merchandise arranged on their bodies for sale (Chapter V, section 5.9). Seeing a woman preparing to leave the villager one day, I asked, "Mother, where are you going?" "I am going to town to sell handcrafts to tourists" (conversation with a Lisu elder, Ban Sai Ngam, January 2004). The market, *talat*, is a significant place for the Lisu of Ban Sai Ngam; no longer are market towns 'distant' and unfamiliar, places where Lisu feel uncomfortable and inferior. In Pai district, Lisu people represent a large and mobile population, with many businesses owned and operated by Lisu themselves, such as "Avu's Internet Café" and several fabric stores.

The Lisu in town are easily recognizable in their traditional clothing, with green or blue baggy trousers for men, although younger boys can be seen with pants of many different colors and designs, and brightly colored dresses and red or pink leggings for the women. Lisu villagers move freely through the town, buying and selling goods, or waiting in the hospital or at the district office for a lift back to their village. Müang Pai is a meeting place, a market town, and a location of interaction with other groups of people and state bureaucracy. Effectively, Lisu are making Müang Pai their place; they are increasingly visible, and Lisu identity is known to those living in town, they have become a visible group. Lisu identity has become part of the identity of Pai, where Lisu have the power to mobilize communities in response to government policies through both networks and alliances, and Lisu are now

represented politically at the provincial level (Chapter V, section 5.5 and 5.6). Pai and müang thus represent ethnic spaces for Lisu, creating new cultural, economic and political landscapes.

The importance of Müang Pai as a tourist town has not gone unnoticed by state agencies, as shown by two recent articles in one of Thailand's English print newspapers, with a headline that read "Mae Hong Son gets 1.5 billion baht (or 36,585,365.85 USD, calculated at 41 baht to the dollar) from sympathetic PM." Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra approved all eight proposals submitted by Mae Hong Son for development in the province, costing the government almost 1.5 billion baht (Damnoen 2004:4). The amount cited included budget for road improvements between Chiang Mai and Mae Hong Son, the construction of concrete roads in villages costing 41 million baht (1,000,000 USD), and 11.5 million baht (280,487 USD) for a project to improve Pai airport, along with a reforestation project to cost 9.3 million baht (226,829 UDS). Another article points to Pai becoming an international tourist destination, and plans are afoot to develop the airport in Pai district by improving the landing strip and passenger terminal in the expectation of increased tourism and air traffic. In this respect, Müang Pai is rapidly becoming an international tourist destination, a "developmentalized" principality, as a place of beautiful forests and traditional hill-tribe peoples.

3.6 Summary

As boundaries are drawn and spaces become territories, the spatial organization of people and resources is fundamentally altered. It is in this context that the relationship between natural resources and people has become highly politicized. People are classified and categorized not only by their languages, religions and customs, but also by how they are perceived to manage natural resources and their level of participation and cooperation in national policies. The states' preoccupation with the classification and stereotyping of individuals and groups along the lines of resource management is concerned less with terms and ideology of local knowledge, traditional agricultural practices, ritual and ceremony, than with new words such as Watershed, National Park, Conservation Area, Resettlement, and Scientific Knowledge. People's relationships with their environment have been redefined and

these new manifestations of interactions between and within local communities and the state are at the core of notions of community, represented through notions of belonging and identity.

The perception of the geographical, political and social spheres of *müang* and *pa*, and hill and valley have had an enormous impact on the historical conceptualization of ethnic minorities and their relations to the Thai state. During the fieldwork for this research I lived in both, and saw first-hand the differences and similarities, prejudice and stereotyping, negotiation and resistance, between these places. Within the larger environmental and political background of development in a period when highland communities have been undergoing unprecedented transformation, economically and socially maintaining their own ethnic identities becomes even more complex, retaining some aspects of their existing cultural identities and incorporating those of others. The Lisu of Müang Pai are connected by locality in a particular historical context, and it is for this reason that we cannot talk about one identity, but shifting representations of Lisuness within the contexts of government policy and development.