CHAPTER V
IDENTITIES AND SHIFTING CONTEXTS: EVERYDAY ARTICULATIONS OF POWER

> We live in a world where identity matters. It matters both as a concept theoretically, and as a contested fact of contemporary political life.
> (Gilroy 1997:301, cited in Woodward 2000:1)

5.1 Introduction

Ambiguity lies at the heart of any study into identity. On the one hand, identity expresses locality and permanence, and on the other, it is seen as constructed, shifting and multiple. This multiple sense of identity and place-consciousness is even more acute when analyzed in the context of development and change. This chapter argues that Lisu identity shifts and moves through diverse levels of interpretation, both internally negotiated and externally constructed. As a national minority in China, an ethnic group in Myanmar, and a hill-tribe in Thailand, one might contend that Lisu identity can be analyzed primarily through the tracing of historical origins and relations with a hegemonic state. However, as well as these representations, Lisu of Thailand, unlike the Lisu of Myanmar and China, now claim an identity of "Thai-Lisu", and are simultaneously represented as an indigenous group by NGOs and INGOs in the struggle for rights and recognition, and as rural poor and marginalized people participating in rallies and protests at a collective national level. I argue that, although an analysis of origins or roots is significant, the interaction between the web of local, state and non-state actors and institutions, and the fact that Lisu in Thailand have come to recognize king, religion and nation, is fundamental in the analysis of Lisu identity. In this respect, Lisu have their own history and stories of movement and migration linked to the nation state and to their cosmological landscape. Language used in development and ethnic classification defines and redefines the meaning and experience of "place" for the Lisu within wider ethnic discourse, creating a situation where Lisu identity can be seen as shifting and multiple in an ongoing process of adaptation and contestation.

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Power to determine and construct identity lies with both the contemporary state through codified laws, the classification and territorialization of land, resources and people, and by minority peoples' responses to these practices. This lends support to the argument that as long as we view identity in abstract terms without giving sufficient attention to the dynamics of ethnicity, actors involved, and inter-group interaction, the significance of diversity will remain at the conceptual level (see Fee and Rajah 1993). Approaching identity from the perspective of symbolic interaction and as sites of contestation provides the foundation for examination into Lisu society and provides a significant frame of reference for this study. Different individuals and groups negotiate their identity through different means. The examination of the nature of relationships between these groups is essential in the analysis of the level of acceptance and legitimacy of state authority, and that of rights to self-determination.

Such an analysis requires a multidimensional understanding of the interactions and relationships, not only between the minority and majority relations within the framework of state mechanisms, but also the role of the state and minority peoples in international systems, involving economic and political dynamics. How ethnic groups respond to classification and categorization plays a significant role in creating a voice at local, national and international levels. This includes, for example, the incorporation and strengthening of traditional practices, such as ceremonies and rituals, and the forming of alliances and networks locally, nationally and internationally. This has significance regarding both state classification, and self or vernacular identification. The preceding chapters introduced discussion of the subjective nature of ethnic classification and theoretical debates regarding the use of language, text, narratives and "official history" to approach an understanding of the complex relations between the state and local communities. This analysis illustrated that geographic area, and the ideational boundaries of where the community exists are shifting. This chapter focuses on Lisu identity as related to the politics of place with reference to government policy, market integration, the expansion of cosmological space, movement, and political representation. How ethnic identity is represented in the larger national Thai discourse of national identity is examined in order to illustrate historical and contemporary process of state classification, and in turn local

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interpretations. The primary guiding question of this chapter is, "What is the relationship between changing social, political and economic circumstances and shifting representations of Lisu identity, and how are the dynamics of identity and multiple locales of community navigated?" From this chapter it will be shown that the images of marginal peoples, in particular the state system of classification of highland peoples in Thailand, is more complex than first thought, and intertwined with internal perceptions and differentiations.

5.2 Representations of Lisu: Local, National and International

> *Wu sa pha* (God) created everything: trees, water and humans. The first people that *wu sa pha* created were Chinese (Tibet), this is what my ancestors told me; Lisu, Lahu, Akha, came from Tibet. He created China first and from that beginning all people separated to different areas. (Interview with a Lisu shaman, Ban Sai Ngam, February 2004)

What is Lisu identity, and how do you define it? This is a question that many researchers past and present, state officials and NGOs have struggled with. Intertwined in these definitions are the internal definitions and characteristics that Lisu use to differentiate themselves from other ethnic groups, most notably Lahu, and external characteristics used to differentiate the Lisu from other ethnic groups. Lisu have been described as the most difficult group to develop, as strong individualists, strong-willed and reluctant to accept outside influences (Conrad 1989, Prasert 1989, and interviews with army personnel, see Prologue). Lisu identity has also been associated with distinct dress, language and interaction with other groups (see Durrenberger 1971), a certain lifestyle and set of cultural goals (Dessaint 1992), and even a distinct way of singing (Klein Huthseeing 1990a). Non-governmental organizations working with the Lisu focus on cultural attributes, resource management and local knowledge, and this can also been viewed as promoting identity as a political strategy for the assertion of rights. During interviews conducted in Ban Sai Ngam by the author, some villagers responded to such debates by saying, "Lisu have culture and pride, we are not lower than others, and we are different from Lahu. Lisu know shame. Knowledge of clan and kinship is also important" (interview with a women elder, Ban Sai Ngam, February 2004). Karen identity is commonly associated with shifting cultivation and resource management (see Pinkaew 2004 and 2001), while Hmong identity has been linked to clan and kinship

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relations (Tapp 2000), and Akha identity involves a complex cultural system and knowledge of rituals and ancestors (see Alting von Geusau 2000). The question one must ask, then, is how can we best approach an understanding of Lisu identity, for the Lisu of Ban Sai Ngam?

As discussed in Chapter I of this study, Lisu stories, songs, rituals and ceremonies flow across national boundaries, telling of gradual migration to southwestern China, following the Salween River to Myanmar — where kin and clan lineage clan still be traced although specific details are somewhat "fuzzy" — and recent migration and movement to the mountains of northern Thailand. Such movement and migration has brought the Lisu in contact with diverse people and environments, and can be seen as clear determinants of their ethnic identity. This is highlighted through the use of Chinese clan names and spirits, reference to mountain landscapes of Myanmar in ceremonial prayer, and now the integration of many aspects of Thai culture and external development ideology into their everyday lives (Chapter IV). State authorities in China described the Lisu as one of the *minzu* or national minorities, in Myanmar they are an ethnic group (*taing yinn thar*) classified under the category of Kachin, while in Thailand they are considered *chao khao* or hill-tribe by state authorities.

Across these regions and within these networks, "[Lisu] way of life has been determined by the steep slopes of mountain ridges, by the forbidding forest, the red dust clouds, and the long rainy period during which they [Lisu] become shadows moving between maize stalks in daytime fog" (Klein Hutheesing 1990a:1). Visitors to Lisu villages most often remark on the fierceness of the dogs and then on the proud egalitarian bearing of the people. Once this observation is shared with others, it can become part of an acceptable body of popular or consensus knowledge, with the information and labels thus gained seeming to take on a life of their own (Prasert 1989:174-175). It is natural for people to form impressions of the places they go and the people they meet. In contemporary analyses of ethnic relations vis-à-vis the state, it has been found that such casual impressions based on ideological assumptions of ethnic classification and criteria of social differentiation have often been solidified

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into law and policy used to govern different groups within society. According to government rhetoric, Lisu are the most difficult highland group to develop, to the extent of labeling them anarchists (see Prasert 1989, Conrad 1989); "Leesaw [Lisu] are the most difficult group to develop, they are stubborn, strong headed (*hua kheang*) and do not accept outside people. They must change!" (Personal communication Army officer, Community Development Unit, Ban Doi Phii Luu, December 1, 2001).

Households within Ban Sai Ngam are relatively independent, and form the basis for socio-economic relations in the community. Lisu society in the past has tended to be described as being constituted by an egalitarian social structure, where no one person had any great power over the decisions of the community, and clans were not hierarchically differentiated. Traditionally, Lisu are expected to show respect for their elders:

> The most delicious food must be given to the elders first, if you have one chair you give it to elders first. Repute is the most important cultural characteristic of the Lisu; if you have no food to eat or no money you can still respect yourself and others. This is what Lisu believe. (Interview with Lisu NGO staff, Ban Sai Ngam, January 2004)

During the 1970s, Lisu were classified and categorized as *chao khao* or a hill-tribe in Thai state discourse. At the same time, Thai village administrative structures and systems have been influential in the historical formation of Ban Sai Ngam. Traditionally, officially elected village leaders have little power, and are mainly involved in the general day-to-day running of the village. However, as contact and integration with the Thai state and NGOs has increased, so too has the influence of the village leader.

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Figure 5.1
Lisu dancing performed during New Year celebrations

As shown by Ayabe (1996:16), the people who call themselves Lisu, and the people we think form one group called the Lisu, are in fact an aggregate of people with vastly different backgrounds. The Lisu of Thailand are in fact a highly heterogeneous group, and include within the same ethnic group classification many Yunnanese (Haw) Chinese, Lahu, and other ethnic group descendants. They are also dispersed geographically with increased migration to urban centers as a result of land restrictions, increased educational opportunities, wage earning capabilities, and market interaction. Many authors have described Lisu as a group that adheres to a model of egalitarian society and social structure (Durrenberger 1971 and 1986, Dessaint 1992, and Klein Hutheesing 1990a). Many villages in the past had no authorities and no official leaders, and they were considered to be independent political units with superficial ties to state authorities (Durrenberger 1971, and Dessaint 1992:317). Such claims were supported by the observation that Lisu had no origin myths related to certain lineages — although this was later refuted by authors such as Dessaint (1992) — and that mythology was de-emphasized in general, lineages were socially and politically insignificant units, and there were no social units beyond the village (ibid:2). Further, Durrenberger (1971) even claimed in a

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later that there was essentially no social unit that could be referred to as Lisu, that Lisu was one of many interrelated sets of ethnic roles, and not a political unit.

Durrenberger (1989) has also noted that Lisu cosmology can be seen as a dual oppositional system of day-night, left-right, male-female, heaven-earth, large-small, spirit-human, body and soul (in Dessaint 1992:324). Differentials within Lisu society are based primarily on material and economic status supported through channels of ideology of repute and shame (Dessiant 1992:327 and Klein Hutheesing 1990a). Interwoven in this system are a series of rituals and beliefs to ensure a prosperous future, good crops, and good health. From an external perspective the Lisu are all too easily categorized and classified as *chao khao* or hill-tribe, and as an underdeveloped group within the Thai state. Within this classification Lisu are further categorized, as outlined above, as a marginal group that are the most difficult to develop. This definition is both geographic and social, and is embedded in state policy implementation and development planning. Lisu are agriculturalists, with their economy traditionally based on the swidden cultivation of rice, maize and opium (Chapter III).[1]

Classification in this sense is based on several distinctions. The first, elevation, refers to the location of highland villages and their proximity to watershed areas, as designated by state authorities. The second characteristic is related to borders, or ones' perceived proximity to a border area, categorizing highland people in government policy discourse as a threat to national security. The third element pertains to agricultural practices viewed as damaging to the environment such as swidden agriculture and opium cultivation. The final characteristic concerns the level of perceived cooperation with state policy and development initiatives. The official categorization of peoples according to elevation, border, and traditional practices have thus situated perceptions of the Lisu as shifting, or "slash and burn ,"cultivators living at altitudes of 1,500 meters above sea level. This classification, supported by the state and academics alike (Yos 2003), clearly positions Lisu as destroyers of the forest and

[1] Throughout the region were I conducted my research, opium production by the Lisu was not for sale or distribution and does not constitute an important part of household income (see Chapter IV, section 4.2).

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has therefore brought increasing pressure for these people to resettle in areas of lower elevation. Such an approach, however, fails to adequately analyze the diversity that exists within Lisu communities and the social and economic changes that are affecting livelihoods and settlement patterns.

Nationally, the Thai state does not recognize distinct minority indigenous populations within its borders. Therefore, from the perspective of the state the Lisu are not an indigenous group of Thailand. From this standpoint, state agencies view the Lisu as a hill-tribe (*chao khao*), a threat, and a problem, and assumptions variously represented through legislation and policy thus categorize these people as slash and burn cultivators, illegal aliens, and forest destroyers. The question remains, is this also internally represented in Lisu ethnic identity? Since government agencies do not easily accept or recognize the category indigenous in relation to the peoples who live within their national boundaries, there is official rejection of the conceptual construction that accompanies the use of this word — that is, the original occupation of a territory, its implication in terms of rights, and the characterization of state sovereignty as a form of domination. Despite a distancing from this terminology in official statements relating to land, community and resources, Lisu communities are often promoted as distinctive tourist destinations by local and national tourist operators (Chapter III). The importance of the Thai state and economy cannot be underestimated in Ban Sai Ngam, although Lisu traditionally meet outside pressure to adapt and change with pragmatism, a cultural trait of the Lisu (see Dessaint 1992), adaptation and contestation with the Thai state has now entered the everyday life of the community. It is here, in this contextual web of actors, institutions and language, that Lisu identity can be seen as shifting and multiple.

Ritual expression and stories of migration connect the village to Myanmar, and to a lesser extent with southwestern China. The political significance of this can be seen through the construction of networks and the building of alliances through the formation of the Lisu Network of Mae Hong Son and membership, at the individual and village level, in a local NGO that links the community to international bodies and mechanisms concerning international law regarding indigenous peoples.

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Economically, the community continues to grow garlic to sell on the national market, increasingly the price of production includes petrol for water pumps, chemicals and fertilizer, and the price of the product fluctuates with international markets. Thailand's policy of increased economic cooperation and trade with neighboring counties, in particular China, has increased local market competition, affecting the price of garlic and other commodities. Along with this, several households are involved with producing handicrafts for tourists in Pai town and Chiang Mai.

To help unravel the question of what constitutes Lisu identity, we must focus analysis on how the Lisu understand their identity themselves. Continuing the above discussion, the notion of Lisu identity summarized by Durrenberger (1971:16) is as follows: the Lisu are an ethnic category who distinguish themselves by their distinctive language, dress, customs, and political system from other groups with whom they participate in a system of complementary interaction (Figure 5.1). Klein Hutheesing (1990a:20) takes another approach: "despite these fluidities and blurred distinctions, I suggest that among the many mentioned cultural elements that differentiate the Lisu from other people, their way of singing would be a sure proof of Lisuness." Paul Lewis, a Baptist missionary who has worked in Myanmar and northern Thailand since 1947 and the author of "Peoples of the Golden Triangle" gave the title "Desire for Primacy" for the chapter on Lisu. He concludes the section stating, "A Lisu always wants to be first" and "...every Lisu wants to excel" (Lewis and Lewis 1984:241-271). Other references to Lisu identity take a different view; Lisu are said to be "…preoccupied with looking their best, the Lisu are the sartorial peacocks of the hills."[2] To follow yet another approach the ethnic label Lisu primarily describes a shared lifestyle; "To be Lisu is to live and work in a Lisu community and to be recognized as such by other villagers, it is to be part of a particular network of social relations" (Conrad 1989:203-204).

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Lisu self-identification encompasses "clothes, language, facial features and appearance, clan grouping, cultural practices, music, dancing and singing. Parents teach children about shame and repute within the family, clan and society. Other

[2] For further information see www.chaingmaihandicrafts.com/thaiculture/Hilltribesof northernthailand/Lisu.htm (retrieved by the author November 1, 2003).

groups have no culture, they do not understand shame" (interview with female village elder, Ban Sai Ngam, January 2004). Problems faced within Lisu communities, though, include "narcotics, alcoholism, lack of unity, women working in urban areas, and the disappearance of culture and customs" (interview with village elders, Ban Sai Ngam, January 2004). These problems are affecting life in the community: "Younger people do not understand the significance and importance of their family, relatives and clan. Lisu are increasingly taking on and adapting to the lifestyle of lowland Thai" (interview with village elders, Ban Sai Ngam, January 2004). The major problem outlined by the school principal in Ban Sai Ngam, is the difficultly of language:

> Lisu cannot speak Thai clearly; translation from Thai to Lisu, then, Lisu to Thai is very difficult. Classes use central Thai, northern Thai language (*kham müang*) and Lisu. Lisu must learn Thai.
> (Personal discussion with the school principal, January 2004)

One of the many approaches to Lisuness, or that which differentiates Lisu from other ethnic groups can be illustrated as follows: "[There are] things that you can see and things you cannot. The things that you can see are the clothing, rituals and life style. The things that you cannot see are the language and showing respect for elders" (interview with Lisu NGO staff, Pai district, May 2004). It can be stated that the Lisu in northern Thailand are distinct in terms of dress, language and culture. Lisu self-organization is fundamentally based on the family, followed by clan and kinship lineage, and ritual and social relations. Through social and ritual relationships members of the community construct "locality" beyond the bounds of the local community. At a more practical level, community can be understood as organizing strategies to mobilize members in the claiming of access to forest resources through collective action. Community organizations are also used to produce and maintain intra-group networks and alliances through membership in various non-governmental organizations.

The following quote highlights the external perception of the Lisu, in this case expressed by German tourists visiting Ban Sai Ngam in January 2004, and other highland people:

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> We wanted to see "real" natives of Thailand. We looked in our German guidebook and went to the Hilltribe Museum in Chiang Mai. We stayed at a guesthouse in Pai town for one week and rented motorcycles and went for a three-day "hill-tribe adventure trek." The trek was not what we had expected; it was more of a fun trek with elephant riding and bamboo rafting. It was very materialistic; all of the villagers wanted us to buy their handicrafts. But, we wanted to know more about their lifestyle, beliefs and culture; we wanted to know about their belief in spirits. Outside of Pai town we saw a sign 'Lisu Lodge' and decided to stay. The owner told us about the New Year's festival in Ban Sai Ngam and that Lisu were very open and warmly accepted tourists. We decided to go and see for ourselves. We were told by a soldier here [in Ban Sai Ngam] that that 90% of Lisu girls work in Bangkok as prostitutes, and that Lisu girls are more expensive than Thai.
> (Interview with two German tourists, Ban Sai Ngam, February 2004)

Thailand's ethnic minority and rural populations have been vocal in the assertion of their rights to manage natural resources and possess full citizenship. One avenue for this expression of rights, and a important reference point for this study, is the 1997 Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, the most progressive in the Kingdom's history. The document embraces the issues of participation and decentralization of power, setting out a framework to strengthen the rule of law and human rights, and enhancing accountability mechanisms. Of greatest importance to NGOs and activists alike is Article 46, which states that:

> Persons so assembling as to be a traditional community shall have the right to conserve or restore their customs, local knowledge, arts or good culture of their community and of the nation and participate in the management, maintenance, preservation and exploitation of natural resources and the environment in a balanced fashion and persistently as provided by the law.
> (Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand 1997, Article 46)

This article clearly protects the rights of individuals and the rights of traditional communities to preserve and pass on their customs, ceremonies, knowledge and wisdom, art and culture.[3] Yet another method for the promotion of rights has been the establishment of formal inter-village organizations that have allowed the Lisu to discuss, collaborate and coordinate responses to issues that they believe are key to their survival, such as the local expansion of autonomy in terms of access to the information necessary to make decisions that effect their future, and

[3] Other mechanisms for the legal protection of highland peoples at the international level include the International Labor Office's Declaration 169, and the Convention of Biodiversity Article 8j, along with bodies of the United Nations working directly with indigenous peoples, such as the Permanent Forum for Indigenous Peoples.

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secure land rights and sources of income that complement the environment and lifestyles that they choose. Additionally, the Lisu Network of Mae Hong Son currently focuses on issues of retaining and disseminating traditional cultural beliefs, stories, songs and ceremonies, along with promoting education for small children and youth, issues of Lisu knowledge in resource management, and citizenship. The Network has also been significant in gaining greater political acceptance for Lisu in the area, one of its central aims:

> I established this Network over 10 years ago. I understand the villagers, their feelings and their beliefs. Those working for the Lisu Network must understand both systems, internal and external. Villagers must understand the importance of preserving culture. This is where NGOs are important. Cooperation between all Lisu is needed. If all Lisu can cooperate at the network level then other highland people can join — Karen, Lahu and others. The Lisu Network of Mae Hong Son has a good reputation, it is strong and many other communities want to join.
> (Interview with NGO staff, Ban Sai Ngam, January 2004)

The major problems facing the Lisu Network revolve around unclear roles and responsibilities for member villages and the organizing committee, along with insufficient budgets to implement proposed activities and projects (Chapter IV). Additionally, "IMPECT [a local NGO that has been working in Ban Sai Ngam for almost 10 years] is no longer interested in supporting the network, the connection between the local community and villagers is not strong (interview with village member, Ban Sai Ngam May 2004)." There is one current staff member of IMPECT in the village, one former staff member, and a member of the IMPECT executive board; they are all brothers from the same family. Another village member said that;

> We follow the projects of NGOs, join workshops, conferences and meetings. Ban Sai Ngam is presented as a strong community and many international NGOs and funding representatives are brought to the village. This is good, but we still have the same problems, nothing is improving, we are not developing.
> (Interview with village member, Ban Sai Ngam, May 2004)

The following case comes from an interview with a village elder who attended the Lisu Network New Year celebrations held in Ban Sai Ngam in January 2004, and clearly illustrates the importance of maintaining social relations and culture, as well as the impacts of external pressure on local communities. Asurpha Lao Yee Pa from Ban Nam Pla Mung, is a member of the Lisu Network Mae Hong Son committee (extracts from an interview with Asurpha Lao Yee Pa, Ban Sai Ngam January 2004).

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He told me that collective participation of community members is an essential element to the solution of community problems. Community leaders, NGO and the Lisu Network highlight this belief through the increased attention placed on conserving traditional culture, a situation where the importance and significance given to modern culture meets traditional practices. It follows that;

> If youth are not interested in preserving traditional culture then it will disappear forever, cultural preservation is the most important objective for all communities. Today many youth work outside of the village. This is a new problem facing Lisu communities; in the past we never did this. In the past many ceremonies were performed at the community level, such as healing, road and development activities. Every village is important in the exchange of culture. I want to join the activities here, and cooperate with the other communities. Joining together, we can solve our problems. Outside people look down on us. By joining together, we can preserve our culture and traditions. For me I enjoy this festival very much, I like to see people singing and dancing. Seeing Lisu wear traditional clothing makes me think about the past. Coming here I see my relatives from other communities, I have not seen them in a very long time
> (Interview with member of the Lisu Network of Mae Hong Son, Ban Sai Ngam, January 2004)

At the most fundamental level, the rights of highland people to express their identity and cultural self-determination is being undermined by the deprivation of their lands and resources, and in many cases, encouragement to pursue non-traditional and more mainstream lifestyles and livelihoods, such as the growing of cash crops (Chapter III, section 3.4.1). Social changes taking place simultaneously at the global and the personal levels can produce uncertainties and insecurities in relation to who we are and our place in the world. Such conditions must also be seen as creating continuities and discontinuities within and between actors and institutions, as well as being a catalyst for change. The expression and experiences of community is in a sense a collective endeavor that shapes and gives voice to new identities. In Ban Sai Ngam, the historical significance of identity can be seen as embedded in the contestation and assumption of rights, and through access to resources and place. Indeed, boundaries have become more blurred as interaction and connectedness between centers and periphery increases, resulting in a situation where culturally distinct places have become more important (see Gupta and Ferguson 1999).

In government development initiatives, policy implementation, and official reference to the village, the Thai term Ban Sai Ngam is always used. The language of development and government policy fixes not only the way development is initiated,

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but also specific terminology of the village. Entering the village there is a sign that reads Ban Sai Ngam, with no reference to the Lisu name. From this perspective, the village is created as a community of Lisu, represented by the official census, documentation, and maps, of a Thai village. The historical analysis of the village, however, shows that a small group of Lisu established the village, naming it *Ja Zu Na Khauw*. It slowly came under the administration of state agencies and authorities and came to be known as Ban Sai Ngam. In this sense, the social self of the Lisu in Ban Sai Ngam is tied to social relationships that are deeply embedded in community and culture, and in turn strongly associated with a group's history of migration, movement and geography, or "place."

5.3 Outside is Bigger

Lisu cosmology, as discussed by Durrenberger (1989 and 1991) and noted above, can be seen as a dual oppositional system of day-night, left-right, male-female, heaven-earth, spirit-human, body-soul, north-south and large-small. This last pair of binary opposites has traditionally been preserved for the classification of spirits and areas of human gender relations within the community (see Klein Hutheesing 1990a). When Lisu refer to the bigness or smallness of supernatural beings, they use dimensions of power or rank; those who are important are high, and those who are of less importance are low. In the spiritual world, the major divisions are inside *i khu nei* and outside *kaw nei* (Appendix B). Inside are tame or domesticated spirits, outside are wild spirits (Klein Hutheesing 1991:4). However, during interviews and informal discussion, this cognitive classification system was seen to describe power relations between the immediate community and outside (Thai) society. In this sense, the significance of education, wage earning ability, as well as knowledge, information and experience, were considered by many as elements that brought repute to a family: "in the past young people listened to their elders, today elders listen to their children" (Interview with NGO worker, Ban Sai Ngam, January 2004).

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For the Lisu of Ban Sai Ngam, sites of interaction include the forest, local market, different communities through clan and kinship networks, and formal organizations such as the Lisu Network of Mae Hong Son. They also include NGO

meetings held in Chiang Mai and other provinces, various settings for the negotiation and implementation of development work, and the district government office where Lisu are involved in meetings, citizenship applications, land disputes, and other conflicts, and more recently interaction with tourists in the village and in town.[4] For the Lisu of Ban Sai Ngam, the nature of interaction with the spirit world, incorporating the family, clan and community has undergone certain changes:

> Because of differences in education levels, a travel and work experience, the outside is *bigger*. Elders are always the same; they do not change, they do not have the same experiences as their children. Children are moving to the city. They have mobile phones and are accepting Thai ways, and when they return to the village there is a conflict with ceremonies and traditions. Children no longer believe in spirits. When they work in the city they have problems with drugs and other social problems. They bring money back home, and parents are happy that their child has money: "My child is so good, she goes to the city for a week and brings back 20,000 baht."
> (Interview with NGO worker, Ban Sai Ngam, January 2004)

In the past, such things as young girls leaving the village to find work in town was of great embarrassment to the individual, family, clan and community, and even now, feelings are mixed:

> If this continues, in 20 to 30 years there will be no one who is able to teach Lisu culture and beliefs to youth. Lisu culture will disappear. On the positive side, what I am impressed with is the level of personal pride that Lisu women have in themselves and their culture. When Lisu women go to the city they wear Lisu clothes. They are not lower than others. However, for everything to return to the way it was in the past cannot happen. Many outside factors are threatening Lisu culture, TV, electricity, mobile phones, and Thai pop music, dressing like *farang* [westerner], working in Chiang Mai. Adjustment is necessary, but how much?
> (Interview with NGO worker, Ban Sai Ngam, January 2004)

During my preliminary research in June 2003, I was sitting outside a house talking with friends when an old woman walked past carrying a small boy on her back. The baby was crying and shouting loudly "*hew khaow, hew khaow"* in Thai, which means "I am hungry, I am hungry." The Lisu man I was talking with at the time called out to her in Lisu, "the boy is hungry, and that is why he is crying." The woman explained that he had been crying most of the morning, and she did not know

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[4] Fifteen years ago, Ban Sai Ngam was considered an ideal 'trekking' destinations for tourists, situated only six kilometers from the main highway, with only a small dirt access road and virtually no cars. Village members were hired to carry the bags of tourists, and an elder even built a small 'guesthouse' in the village where tourists could stay. However, since the development of the road and increased attention given to other more 'remote' villages, Ban Sai Ngam is no longer on any trekking route of tourist companies in Müang Pai.

why, because she cannot speak Thai. She went back to her house, probably to feed the small boy. It was explained later that her daughter, the baby's mother, worked in Bangkok and came back to the village with a baby, left him with her mother and returned to work in the city.

Outside influences are causing significant changes to the village lifestyle, and attitudes of the younger generation are also changing. Importance is being placed on television, radios, modern music and fashion;

> Just look at how many young boys have dyed their hair gold. Now VCDs can be found in almost every house. I have had experience working with both Karen and Lisu. Lisu are different to Karen. Karen children will help their parents in the field. Nowadays, Lisu youth do not go to the fields, they are losing their traditional knowledge about the forest, plants and medicine.
> (Interview with the school principal, Ban Sai Ngam, January 2004)

Walking back to my house after watching a Thai drama on television, huddled under blankets with about 20 other people, a young Lisu man commented:

> The traditional cultural, and way of thinking of my fathers and grandfather's generation, and younger generations are like the ground and the sky.
> (Personal communication with Lisu youth, Ban Sai Ngam February 2004)

However, as shown in the example of a ritual performed over the telephone (Chapter IV, section 4.7.1), culture and clan relations remain important in the life of younger generations. Elders continue to express that "youth today are lazy, they are not interested in Lisu culture" (interview with Lisu elders, Ban Sai Nam, January 2004). Importance is attributed to outside influences, as the above quote indicates. This has in many ways been a gradual process of integration; it is at the personal and intergenerational level that social relations are contested and negotiated, where the future of the village along with 'culture' is at stake. Migration and the introduction of cash crops are changing the production system and labor structure of the community along with the use of the Thai language from the outside. The process of modernization and its connection to changing social and economic contexts at the local level affects highland communities throughout Thailand. Children in the village began studying in Mae Hong Son central district from 1989, at the public welfare school for highland people, and other male village members studied in monasteries in

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Chiang Mai and Bangkok. The first period of labor migration from the village was in 1993. Men from the village went to work in Chiang Mai, some in an incense factory 20 kilometers outside of Chiang Mai and worked in orchards collecting longan fruit, while others found construction work both in Chiang Mai and Müang Pai. This was seasonal work and began with villagers leaving Ban Sai Ngam to find extra income after the rice harvest between October and March. The incentive for this movement was to gain extra income for their families, since at this time no cash crops such as garlic were grown by the villagers. Garlic production began in the community in 2002. In the beginning, only small numbers of male villagers left the community to find work and sell products in town, a very different situation to the current level of movement in the village. In January 2004, before the start of New Year celebrations, I traveled to Müang Pai town and returned to Ban Sai Ngam by motorcycle taxi. I spoke with the driver on the way, and as he said,

> You are lucky to get a taxi to the village today, there are already four taxis on the way to the village. I have been driving a motorbike taxi for the past 25 years. In the past, Lisu would come to the main road by horse and wait for a lift into town to buy clothes, salt and other material. Today, I make three to four trips a day when the weather is good.
> (Interview with a motorcycle taxi driver, Müang Pai, January 2004)

In 1997, women began moving out of the community to sell handicrafts in Müang Pai to international tourists and some then moved to Chiang Mai. Through clan and kinship networks, male village members were able to find employment in seasonal construction and other work, while female members were able to make products to sell to tourists. This employment remained seasonal until 1999 when the first group of young women moved to work full-time in Chiang Mai.

Alerma was married at 14 to a Lisu man in a nearby village, and when I spoke with her in April 2003, she was 17. After less than one year of marriage, she came back to her family in Ban Sai Ngam, when she decided she could no longer live with her husband and his family. She stayed with her mother for two years, and when she and a friend left to find work in Chiang Mai, they both ended up with her older sister in Hat Yai province in southern Thailand. Her sister had moved away from the village some time before, in 2001. When asked where they have been working, they both tell people that they work in a restaurant with other Lisu from Müang Pai. They

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have been able to spend enough money back home to purchase a television, VCD player and other items. Life in the village remains uncertain for these young women: "we are bored to stay, I do not want to go to the fields and work;" "life in the city is fun I have many friends, we go the karaoke and discos, there is nothing to do in the village." Days before the start of New Year celebrations, the village seems to almost double in population, as children come back to the village from distance schools, and young men and women who have been working in other provinces also return.

Movement and migration are significant elements in the formation of identity and the experiences of community, resulting in extensive contact and interaction between different peoples and groups. In Ban Sai Ngam, labor migration to urban cities in northern, central and southern Thailand is substantial. One young man explained that:

> In the past, our family had many pigs and cows. Father was one of the original settlers in the village. However, my mother fell ill in 1994 and we had to sell everything for medical expenses. She passed away soon after. We are involved in the highland agriculture project and are in debt to the project for water pipes. This will bring water from a distant mountain stream and redirect it to many fields in the community. We have relatives in surrounding villages, as well as in Pai town, Chiang Mai and distance provinces such as Lopburi. I have worked in surrounding villages for over a year. I previously worked at Chiang Mai University as a guard for two months. The money was not good and the security company cheated me. I also spent some time working in a restaurant in Chiang Mai. Other work has included two months in Lopburi province working for relatives in a photocopy shop and ten days at a petrol station. I could not find any good work and life was hard, so I came back to the village and got married.
> (Interview with village member, Ban Sai Ngam, January 2004)

Yet an elder in the community related another example of movement to me:

> Several members of my family have moved to Chiang Mai — one daughter and two sons, along with many other relatives from the village. They moved from the village almost seven years ago. There was little land available and they could not find extra work in town. Other relatives told us that they were making a lot of money selling handicrafts to tourists in Chiang Mai, so my daughter and sons moved to Chiang Mai. They sell handicrafts and clothing to tourists who come on tours for bamboo rafting, elephant and ox cart riding and the hill-tribe craft market. The men work for a local tourist company taking tourists bamboo rafting. They receive 100 baht per day plus tips. During low [tourist] season, work is difficult to find. Some Lisu work in a nearby tobacco plant and others return to the village. There are three different Lisu villages in the area all organized by different tourist companies. Each village is permitted to sell handicrafts to the tourists from 'their' designated company. There are 11 households where my family lives and seven are directly related me. Other relatives include three households from the maternal side of the family.
> (Interview with village elder, Ban Sai Ngam, January 2004, see section 5.3.2)

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One village member of Ban Sai Ngam, Asurpha, currently works as a freelance guide taking tourists on 'treks' through the forest with stops at different Lisu villages in Mae Hong Son, and has brought several tourists to Ban Sai Ngam. He was a staff member of the Urban Tribal Youth Project, under the umbrella of another NGO, from 1998 to 2001. The project's responsibilities included such things as collecting information on highland children and youth living and working in Chiang Mai, researching the problems faced by highland youth and children in urban areas, and providing emergency assistance for people affected by various forms of exploitation, such as labor-related problems, prostitution, human trafficking, or sexual assault and other from of degradation. Project members provided assistance and information on HIV/AIDS, drug use and alcohol-related problems, as well as citizenship. In order to accomplish these goals, meetings with youth leaders, government agencies and NGOs were held to discuss possible solutions to these problems; workshops for youth were conducted to increase understanding of human rights violations, along with activities to promote cultural dissemination. The budget for the project finished in 2001.

Preliminary discussion of the reasons why youth migrate to urban areas includes the difficulty of life in the village, such as poverty, problems within the family, hard work in the fields, little or no money, problems with government agencies, and lack of available land. For youth there is a common assertion that "life is boring in the village there is nothing to do" (from an interviews with village youth, Ban Sai Ngam, March and June 2004). However, youth who seem bored with their lives in the village are able to suggest improvements such as increasing the quality of teaching and resources available at the school including a well-equipped library, sporting equipment and the formation of a strong youth group in the village (from an interview with village youth, Ban Sai Ngam, March and June 2003). Asurpha has been working independently and with the assistance of various groups to promote a village-level youth group:

> I would like to continue working with youth in the village to promote activities and projects. I do not want to see youth continue to move into the city. I plan to develop a Lisu Youth Network for Mae Hong Son.
> (Interview with village member, Ban Sai Ngam, January 2004)

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According to Asurpha, the major problem for the community is that "many youth continue to move out of the village. This will cause a problem in the future with culture and traditions being lost. No one will be left to take care of elders or perform ceremonies" (interview with village member, Ban Sai Ngam, May 2004). It has also been pointed out that there is currently little financial support available for youth activities in the village. Youth from Ban Sai Ngam have previously attended youth groups and workshops conducted by the army and related to government policy on narcotics, and alternative occupations, and with NGOs on issues of covered youth problem analysis and the formation of a provincial-level youth network. For Asurpha, one way to promote village development and provide extra income for village members is to promote tourism; "I would like to make Ban Sai Ngam a tourist village. Developing the community for tourists, we could perform shows, dancing and singing, and sell handicrafts" (interview with village member, Ban Sai Ngam, May 2004).

5.4 Interaction and Lisu Names

Daily interactions between different communities and ethnic groups, between community members and forest spirits both benevolent and malevolent, and with ancestral spirits, outside agencies including the state, NGOs, researchers, and the village guardian spirits, are defined by articulations of power. This idea of articulation of power refers to the processes and particular meanings these practices and actors have produced. By examining these relations and how they are played out in a Lisu community provide alternatives sites for the investigation of identity. Clan and kinship still remain significant in everyday life, along with interaction with the spirit world: "whether you believe or not, it is best not to do anything to offend them [the spirits]," a young Lisu boy told me. Villagers are free to travel, for they all have Thai citizenship. Every day they pass through garlic fields grown as one of the only cash crops that link the village economically to national and international price fluctuations, and move through the national park, wildlife sanctuary, sacred forests, conservation forest and community forests.

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Figure 5.2 Bracelet used in Lisu traditional healing by a shaman in Ban Sai Ngam

Figure 5.3 A lock of hair kept by a village shaman. It is believed to the hair of the Buddha, Ban Sai Ngam

Lisu have several names, a traditional name following a pattern of the order of children born (first, second, third and so on), with exceptions made when a child dies before the naming ceremony is performed. They also have a nickname or play name that their family and relatives refer to them by. They also are given a Thai name. I asked one woman the name of her newly born son, and she answered, "I do not know." She asked her husband what their child's name was; he recited the Thai name, a good name according to a nurse in the Pai hospital. I traveled to the Pai hospital with some villagers from Ban Sai Ngam whose young son was ill. The waiting room filled quickly, and everyone took a number and sat down. The nurse called a name, but there was no reply, and the name was called for a second and third time, still with no answer. After about half an hour a Lisu woman carrying a small child went to the front desk. She was holding ticket number one. It was her son whose name had been called, but she could not remember what his Thai name was, and therefore did not respond when the nurse called out his name.

By analyzing birth and naming ceremonies, it is possible to approach an understanding of the meaning and significance of names for Lisu. This approach can be used to investigate name changes and the importance of Thai names, since

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currently in Ban Sai Ngam there are 10 families who have changed their names to Thai. For an investigation of social memory, the birth and naming of the child are significant in representing the start of a child's learning process of the conscious self. Changes of name, from Lisu clan names to Thai surnames, do not, I have observed, correlate to any change in social membership and acceptance within the community. Indeed, those people who have adapted Thai surnames continue to participate in naming rituals, and the rituals make especially visible the ideas about individuals and society. The performing of ceremonies and rituals in many circumstances equate with the fulfillment of new social rights and duties. Such responsibilities may include becoming the village priest or village shaman, and accepting increased obligations related to supernatural power, when the spirits choose a man to be a *nee pa* or *moh muer*, or in the case of becoming the village leader.

5.4.1 Agents of Change

One day during the 2004 New Year's village celebrations in Ban Sai Ngam, dancing was performed at the house of the village representative for the SAO. His house is built on stilts and surrounded by a large wooden fence. To the side of the house, a pig was being prepared for the ceremony and lunch. Women were busy cleaning, washing, cooking and preparing. A very lavish 'reception' with Chang beer, coke and Lisu whiskey was prepared for the guests. Young children were dancing to the tune of a mouth pipe and *surbue*, a traditional Lisu musical instrument similar to a banjo, with three strings.

That day, a new dance was performed. The dance was created by Asurpha and his friend, playing the musical instruments, the mouth pipe and surbue (Lisu traditional three stringed banjo). Two new songs were played and new dance steps were performed by altering the music, making the song faster and the notes shorter, repeated over and over. Usually, all dancers hold hands at their sides, or crossed over in front of their bodies, an older style typically performed by the Lisu in Myanmar. The dance steps were changed to fit the music and to have more fun. Instead of holding hands, dancers swung their hands and clapped to the beat of the music, "Lisu disco," a young boy laughed. Only young girls were dancing like this, they all

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seemed to catch on quickly and follow those who knew the steps. Older women were still dancing the traditional way in a circle separate from the main group, though. They had difficulty following the faster steps but seemed to be enjoying themselves nonetheless.

This was the first time that this dance had been performed at Ban Sai Ngam. I asked several people where the steps and music came from. The musician told me that he had created the song himself, and had spoken with some young girls the night before introducing the new steps to the village. An elder told me that it was not a new dance, that he had in fact seen it performed in other villages in Mae Hong Son. Avu, a young Lisu man who now works for an NGO in Chiang Mai, even told me that this was a common dance for younger children in other villages, such as Ban Pak Saem Lisu village in Wiang Haeng district, Chiang Mai. Others said that it was a Lisu dance performed by Lisu in Myanmar, or by Christian Lisu (Christian villagers use different dance steps). It is possible that the altered dance was from other villages in Mae Hong Son, a combination of several different styles and a quickening of the pace to make it fun. Asurpha is a tourist guide and a well-known Lisu musician, popular with young Lisu people, and has been to many villages in Mae Hong Son, Chiang Rai and Chiang Mai, so it is possible that he saw the dance at another village and taught the youth at Ban Sai Ngam the steps. One young girl told me that the new dance was a lot of fun, and that they had started to learn the steps the night before. I asked the elder men who were watching about this new dance. Several men told me that it was good to change sometimes and for everyone to enjoy themselves, it was New Year after all.

Changes taking place at the village level are significant in the analysis and understanding of wider social changes. As this one event illustrates, certain members of the community, as a result of increased contact with other communities, have been able to introduce a new dance during a traditional Lisu festival. It is uncertain if this particular dance will be performed next year, or in any other villages for that matter. However, in the context of this study it is significant in terms of internal changes, not in response to outside forces, but as a result of increased contact and integration.

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5.5 *Pai Talat*

Every Wednesday, villagers from Ban Sai Ngam prepare early to go to town for the weekly market. Villagers, and a researcher, wait at the bridge for cars to pass from other villages. The return trip costs 60 baht per person. 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. Market towns are no longer 'distant' and unfamiliar, or places where Lisu feel uncomfortable and inferior. In Müang Pai, Lisu people represent a large and mobile population. Almost fifteen years ago, Dr. Otome Klein Hutheesing, a Dutch anthropologist published a book on the Lisu in Thailand, and in her discussion regarding relationships with lowland Thai populations, she observed that "In terms of social space, the Lisu occupy a backseat and move in a limited area when they enter the town environment" (Klein Hutheesing 1990a: 87). Today, the lowland market town is no longer the domain of Lisu men purchasing supplies and returning to the village, but increasingly the place where women go to sell and trade handicrafts and clothing to tourists. Many of the Lisu come from surrounding villages in Pai and even Mae Hong Son town that is over four hours away. Other I spoke with come from villages in Chiang Mai.

Lisu women who sell handicrafts, bags and clothing set up early in the morning and stay until evening sitting on mats, laying out their products on the main street in town near the guesthouses and the bus station. Another place in town where Lisu meet, gather, wait, talk, and purchase food and other materials is the market. Those with vehicles wait for passengers to return from their shopping, and then return to their villages with their four-wheel drive cars full of people, agricultural equipment, food and vegetables. 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 town wearing 10 different hats, bags and other merchandise attached to their bodies. Those trading from a single location have set their 'stall' up in the most practical places for their trade, namely those places where there are the most tourists, including in front of guesthouses, the market, various restaurants and cafes, the bank and the bus stop. Those with a permanent place in front of a guesthouse, restaurant or café, or other private business must pay the owner of the business a previously agreed-upon amount

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determined by the amount of space they occupy and the length of time they sell their goods every day. Those with 'stalls' in front of the bank and bus stop do not have to pay such fees, however, along with those women who set up further away from the center of town off the main road. The group of women who do not sell their handicrafts from a fixed location walk up and down the road following the path of the visiting tourists, often walking from the bus stop to guesthouses, guesthouse to the bank, the bank to the restaurant, the restaurant to the market and then back to the bus stop.

When I was in Pai town (January 2004), I spoke with one Lisu woman from a village in Chiang Dao district, Chiang Mai province selling bags and other handicrafts on a mat spread out on the pavement. Her "place," an area for selling goods, is away from the main tourist area and so she does not pay rent. Many of the Lisu women selling handicrafts and clothing can speak a few words of many different languages, such as French, Japanese and English: hello, cheap, one hundred, two hundred, or "Where you from?" Some can even speak a little Israeli. On a broader level, the languages that Lisu speak are a representation of interaction with other groups. This is highlighted in the village through the use of Lahu, Shan, Karen and Chinese, and by the use of English, French and Japanese by women in town for commerce.

These women working in town also use classifications for the differences between foreigners, largely as a result of interaction through market and trade relations, although they generally use the Thai word *farang* when referring to Western people in general. They differentiate between Australians, British, Americans, French and German, and also between Chinese, Japanese and Korean people. One woman I spoke with in Pai town commented that, "Japanese, American and Australians give the largest tip, while Chinese and Israeli people give no tip at all and are the hardest bargainers" (a Lisu women from Pai town, January 2004). "Israeli tourists like the colors light and dark blue, so Lisu women make bags, hats and other handicrafts from these colors to sell to Israeli tourist" (personal communication, Thawit, April 2004). This interaction may contribute to a greater understanding of ethnic boundaries as continually constructed through interaction and relationships.

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I met Alerma, a 35-year-old Lisu woman from Mae Hong Son, at the Network New Year's celebrations in Ban Sai Ngam (January 2004). She was selling Lisu clothing at the New Years festival:

> I have sold Lisu clothing and bags in Mae Hong Son since I separated from my husband two years ago [2002]. I have three small children, and I rent a small house in town. I have some relatives in the village from the Laomee clan, and have visited Ban Sai Ngam many times. I am able to sell enough clothes to buy food and support my children. I sell clothes in Müang Pai and sometimes in Chiang Mai. I receive cloth on loan through an agreement with a fabric store in Chiang Mai. I turn the fabric into Lisu pants, tunics and leggings for women. When I sell the clothes I must repay the company, plus extra. I work for myself, individually. In the past I would buy a lot of material in Chiang Mai, we had an agreement based on credit. Tell the foreigners [at the celebration] to buy some pants from me. I like to watch the dancing and see what clothes people are wearing. I am more excited in the dancing than the arrival of the district officials.
> (Interview with a Lisu women, Ban Sai Ngam Network New Year Festival, January 2004)

The example above of Lisu women selling crafts to people of many nationalities in the local town is a useful reference point for consideration of how these different loci of interaction represent different forms and expressions of ethnic identity from the personal internal perspective and from the perspective of those with whom they interact. Within this context, it is also necessary to consider the significance that these boundaries may play in the formation of one's identity, and in turn, people's experiences with place.

5.5.1 Tourism and Migration: The Construction of a Traditional Lisu Village

In order to frame discussion of identity in terms of external categorization and perceptions together with internal adaptation, the following case of the construction of a traditional Lisu village is included. This case is particularly poignant for a discussion on ethnicity and tradition. In this instance, the villagers built traditional houses for tourists who visit the area, as well as a Grandfather spirit shrine for village members. The shrine is significant not only for tourists to see but also in the lives of the village members themselves. Therefore, from an external perspective, the village is a traditional community. The village Ban Pang Tai is located in Mae Ta Man sub-district, Mae Taeng district, Chiang Mai province. In 1994, Lisu started to move down to this area from surrounding highland villages after the construction of a resort, an elephant and ox-cart riding camp, and bamboo rafting for tourists. This village

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is/was on a popular hill-tribe trekking route for one and three day tours from Chiang Mai. In the surrounding area, there are Akha, Lahu and Lisu communities. However, it was the Lisu who first began selling handicrafts to tourists, and now 10 years later in 2004, Lisu are the only ethnic group involved in the tourist trade in the area. Early initiatives for Lisu involved selling small handicrafts to tourists on visits from Chiang Mai. There are now three large tourist companies that bring bus loads of tourists to the area on a daily basis during the winter period; the high season for tourists is from October to March. Villagers from Ban Sai Ngam first moved to the area seven years ago. Around this time women began selling handicrafts on a more permanent basis as well as developing closer relationships with the tourist companies operating in the area. Tour itineraries started featuring visits to the "traditional hill-tribe village" of Ban Pang Tai from Chiang Mai. Lisu people from surrounding areas formed three separate communities, differentiated by fences with a separate tour company operating in each.

"Traditional" houses were built from bamboo with grass thatched roofs, and when tourists are brought by the tourist companies to one of the villages, the villagers wait in front of their houses with a display of bags, hats, handicrafts (both bought elsewhere and locally made), water bottle holders and pillow cases along the path where the tourists pass through. The men of these villages start work early each morning, hired by different companies to take tourists rafting for 100 baht per day, plus tips. None of the three villages in the area have electricity, since this is not traditional according to the tourist companies, and they do not raise pigs — tourist companies maintain that the animals would be too smelly for the tourists.

Ban Pang Tai consists of 11 households, three from Ban Sai Ngam and the remaining eight from Chiang Dao district, Chiang Mai province, although all eleven households are related. They moved to their current location in November 2003. Their old village site was located less than a kilometer further down the road, and they received very few tourists. They bought the land at the current site from a local Thai man for 25,000 baht and are now the first village on the road where the tourists are taken on the backs of elephants or in an ox cart. Each Individual household usually

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makes the items that are sold to the tourists, and families therefore receive the profit directly. In addition, many items for sale including bracelets, necklaces, wooden carved elephants, T-shirts that boldly state that the wearer "Loves Thailand", small swords and bamboo tea sets, are bought by two or three households on a collective basis to sell to tourists. Women in Ban Sai Ngam also weave meters of colorful cloth by hand to send to the village to make bags for sale.

In the previous village location for these 11 households, two village groupings worshipped the same village guardian spirit shrine, *apa mo hee*. They moved to the present location because of a lack of tourists in their old village, especially when a tourist company that they were connected with stopped bringing tourists to their place, and because of the distance between the village and resort, few tourists came independently to their village. According to a village elder of Ban Pang Tai,

> Conserving tradition is important for the tourists to see. If we preserve our traditions, tourists will want to come to our village. If we do not preserve our culture tourists will not come and we cannot sell our handicrafts. We can dance for the tourists, they will come and we can sell handicrafts.
> (Personal interview with village leader, Ban Pang Tai, March 2004)

The selection of an appropriate location, a place, for the construction of the village guardian spirit shrine is essential. In this particular village, the selection of the area followed traditional ritual practices as outlined in the creation of Ban Sai Ngam with certain distinct characteristics. Traditionally *apa mo hee* is erected on a hill overlooking the village near a large tree and water source. However in this case, the village is located on a flat plain, and so *apa mo hee* was constructed at the back of the village between the last house and the boundary fence of another village next to the communal water tank. A tree was also planted, therefore adhering to the final criteria, and the women cleared the area of grass, weeds and undergrowth. In Ban Pang Tai as elsewhere, however, once the shrine is completed, women are not permitted to enter. The men cut the timber and bamboo for the posts, roof and altar, and bamboo stakes were prepared to make a fence.

The ceremony (February 2004) commenced with the sacrifice of one male pig and five chickens, two male and three female. The number of guests determines the

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size of the pig needed. There were four eligible men in the village able to take on the responsibility of village priest; three of the eleven households in the village are Christian and therefore unable to take on such a role. The four men gathered around the shrine. A shaman from another village was invited to perform the ceremony. When the altar was completed, incense was lit and glasses of whiskey were arranged on the shrine. The next stage of the ceremony the shaman prepared two triangular pieces of wood with black markings on one side. The shaman called out the name of the first man eligible to be village priest. The two pieces of wood were dropped on the altar; the village guardian spirit did not choose him. The young man looked rather relieved. The process was repeated another three times with the same result. *Apa mo* did not choose anyone. The shaman called a Thai man to join the ceremony. He is Buddhist and is married to a Lisu woman, and he can therefore perform the responsibility of village priest. At this time, the *apa mo* entered the body of the *nee pha* and directly chose on the previous candidates. A young man of 25 years from Chiang Dao district was to be the village priest. He accepted the decision quietly and continued to make preparations for the rest of the ceremony.

Figure 5.4 Lisu women selling handicrafts to tourists, Ban Pang Tai, Chiang Mai

Figure 5.5 Construction of the village guardian spirit shrine, *apa mo hee*, Ban Pang Tai, Chiang Mai

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5.5.2 Conditional Citizenship

> The individual is equally a member of the sovereign body that makes fundamental law and a member of the subject body that obeys it.
> (Rousseau, in Chesterman and Galligan 1997: 1)

Citizenship, as shown by Tsing (1996:23) in the opening monograph of Chapter I, illustrates how marginalized people are simultaneously part of the state and external to it. A central element of the analysis of the position of highland people, ethnic minorities, and local communities within the state administrative and legal systems is the question of citizenship and personal status registration. Currently only 47.3% of highland people have been granted full Thai citizenship (according to the Office of Registration on the Issuing and Consideration of Personal Status and Household Registration of Highland People 2000: 211), a situation that many activists and NGOs regard as the greatest hindrance to human development in highland communities. This situation is contradictory and based on the classification of resources and the people who depend on them. As a direct result of forest classification, divided land on a map indicating conservation areas, national parks, watershed areas and wildlife sanctuaries, those highland people who do have citizenship, as in the case of the Lisu in Ban Sai Ngam, are denied basic rights of full citizenship, such as rights to land and access to resources.

The complexities of Thai citizenship have been identified and discussed by the research and reports of local activists and NGOs throughout Thailand for the last several decades. It is, however, a recent phenomenon that Thai citizenship has become conditional in policy and rhetoric. Highland and minority people are viewed by state authorities simultaneously with suspicion and framed as fixed entities, and when granted citizenship, new provisions and specific criteria are involved. Not only must these people swear allegiance to the King and Nation, but now must also promise not to destroy the forest or become involved in the narcotics trade. If they do, their citizenship will be legally revoked. In a recent case involving 700 Hmong people from Nan province in the upper northeast, who were being granted citizenship, “as part of the ceremony, villagers pledged not to become involved in either the drug trade or deforestation… villagers had been monitored for a long time to ensure they

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were not associated with any activities that could pose a threat to national security" (Somchai 2004: 3A).

In such a situation, rights of individuals and communities are linked through opposing conceptualizations of citizenship. Citizenship in this sense is used as a strategy in negotiation and control between minority peoples and the state; it is something that can be given on a conditional basis, and thus something that can be taken away. Such action goes to the heart of the debate over ethnic classification and the categorization of people and resources, and local people's responses, or to put it another way the continual contestation between official discourse and local counter-discourse. To follow this argument, it is my assertion that highland people are caught in a conundrum, that highland people in Thailand desperately desire Thai citizenship and full recognition as citizens of the Thai state, however, to do so requires accepting existing policies and prejudices, knowing full well that they remain as marginal peoples in a changing society. This has created a situation where rural people have united to advocate the implementation of mechanisms promoting greater participation at the local, national and international levels. From 1997, the Thai population witnessed the creation of the new constitution and Development Plan number eight, which clearly sets out a foundation for increased participation. Today the new Constitution of 1997 provides the foundation for people's participation, especially for local participation in natural resource development and biodiversity management. Following six years of implementation under the new Constitution, in practice the extent to which local participation is promoted remains unclear (Piya and Rickson 2002).

Ban Sai Ngam's history of conflict with forestry officials, along with political mobilization for the right to access resources and land, and protesting injustices felt not only in their community but also at the wider national level, is indicative of their struggle for recognition, legitimacy and security. When viewing these struggles from a local perspective, that of the Lisu in Ban Sai Ngam, Thai citizenship is not considered negotiable. They all have been granted citizenship and view themselves as citizens of the Thai state with the corresponding rights, duties and obligations. When

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affirming rights to land and cultural expression, not only are national laws and articles in the 1997 Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand used, so too are international laws and conventions for indigenous peoples. These struggles played out in the forest and in public arenas is a fundamental element of democracy and citizenship; a citizen, according to Aristotle's famous definition that has shaped political thinking, "is one who shares both in the ruling and in being ruled (in Chesterman and Galligan 1997:1, see also section 5.6). However, highland people are excluded from many aspects of this definition.

The following case is indicative of the problems faced by highland people regarding the lack of citizenship, and it also illustrates how these problems are being addressed by local communities, NGOs and ethnic networks. Amema Sae Chuu is 19 years old, and she was born in Ban Nam Po Sapae, Soppong sub-district, Pang Ma Pa district. She arrived in Ban Sai Ngam several days before the celebrations for the Lisu Network New Year began. She has no relatives in Ban Sai Ngam, but came with over 50 people visiting from her village. As Amema told me,

> There remains a serious problem of lack of citizenship in my village. Very few people in my village have citizenship, including many people in my family; most have a blue identification card while others have a green card with a red border. Because of this they cannot travel outside of the community for they are afraid that they will be arrested.
> (Interview with Amema Sae Chuu , Ban Sai Ngam, January 2004)

These different colored cards represent different levels of legal status for highland people. Amema has been working with the Lisu Cultural and Environmental Network of Mae Hong Son and a local NGO on the issue of citizenship for highland people. Two years ago at the age of 17, she participated in the protest in front of City Hall in Chiang Mai.

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When we spoke in January 2004, she had recently returned to Mae Hong Son from a trip to Bangkok along with other highland representatives to present a document on the current situation of legal status for highland people to the National Commission for Human Rights. They also tried to present the same document to a representative of the ruling Thai Rak Thai political party. In total, there were eight people from her village, along with 80 other highland people from different ethnic

groups. A spokesperson for the Thai Rak Thai party agreed to look at the document and promised to examine the problems of citizenship, but cautioned that it would take time to resolve, and that citizenship would only be given to those people born in Thailand, with appropriate documentation. As citizens of the Thai state villagers of Ban Sai Ngam can vote, and receive government benefits such as health care. However, they are not permitted to join the armed forces, they have no land title, and are under the threat of arbitrary arrest for violating forestry regulations.

5.6 Village Elections in *Ja Zu Na Khuaw*: Lisu Political Representation

> Political representation is essential for the development of highland communities. To have a Lisu representative in local government will help significantly with development. This is truly sustainable development.
> (Interview with Lisu candidate for Sub-district representative of Provincial Parliament, February 2004)

> Justice and power must be brought together, so that whatever is just may be powerful, and whatever is powerful may be just.
> (Pascal, cited in Ackerman and Duvall 2000: 1)

Several times during 2003, the Lisu Network of Mae Hong Son committee members discussed local government budget allocation and development project implementation. According to many villagers, the majority of previous provincial annual government budgets was allocated to urban development, with very little spent on assisting highland people, in particular Lisu, who constitute a significant proportion of the population and are the majority in certain sub-districts such as Mae Na Tern where Ban Sai Ngam is located. In the course of the 2003 Network committee meetings, it was decided that a Lisu representative was needed in local and provincial government. Where local government exists, local authorities' functions, powers, finances and staffing are permitted by the central government to maintain stability. In Thailand, levels of local governance include the Provincial Administration Organization, municipality, and Sub-district Administration Organization. The responsibilities of these positions are area-specific and include maintaining roads and waterways, and other functions involving public health development planning. After several months of deliberation, it was decided that the Network would support Khun Phriwan to run as a candidate in the forthcoming

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district elections. At that time, Khun Phriwan had been a staff member of IMPECT for over 10 years and had been involved in the formation of the Lisu Network of Mae Hong Son. This case suggests the frustration of the Lisu living in Pai province (at the Network level) in political negotiation, development and funding issues. It is hoped that the election of a Lisu representative will increase development for highland communities in the area.

A village meeting was held in Ban Sai Ngam on the eve of the elections in March 2004 to explain the election procedures the following day. That night the meeting hall was full and voting procedures and details were explained, including the correct way to complete the ballot forms. Before the election, it was evident that Khun Phriwan had a large basis of local support. When I spoke with him in January 2004 he was confident that he would be successful; however, in Ban Sai Ngam and in other villages, concern had been expressed over ballots being completed incorrectly. The whole community was encouraged to vote. Ballots were open from eight in the morning when the police officer arrived with the ballot papers and other official documents, until three in the afternoon, and were located at the village school, where a line was forming as early as seven in the morning. The village election committee, comprised of eight men and two women, including one police officer from the Pai district police station, oversaw the election process. The vast majority of the community, those who are eligible to vote (over 18 and possessing citizenship and registered in Ban Sai Ngam), lined up at the school to place their vote. After many months of deliberation, which included accusations of vote tampering and paying for votes, Khun Phriwan was sworn in as a Member of Provincial Parliament for Mae Hong Son. Khun Phriwan was the first Lisu to have been elected to government office in Thailand, and his win represents a movement of locally-based issues and politics to a wider forum. Although, his position has minimal legislative power, with responsibilities primarily covering the allocation of budgets for community development, many villagers see it as an essential step in the development of Lisu in the area. When placed within the larger political context, a consideration that remains is the nature and extent of the impact this will now have on local and state relations. What is the future for this representation?

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5.7 Language and Text: Internal Interaction

The power of language regarding ethnicity lies above the level of the word or sentence. Indeed, the significance of language in the production of knowledge has consequences for social action, as can be seen in conflict based on perceived differences (see Chapter IV, section 4.5.3). Language, in this case concerning ethnic representations of highland people and their social, religious and economic organization, has ramifications in the political realm. This means that issues such as the recognition of rights, resource management and cultural survival are not played out solely at the local level. Furthermore, terms relating to minority peoples that once had negative or derogatory meanings, such as "tribal", have been reinvented by the people they had been used to refer to, and given new significance that now reflects a shared collective identity and has contributed to the creation of both social and political space for these communities. There are now many representative organizations in Thailand that use this term prominently, for example the Assembly of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples of Thailand, and the International Alliance of Indigenous and tribal Peoples of the Tropical Forests. The reclamation of this term has enabled many highland communities of Thailand, including Ban Sai Ngam, independently and through association and connection with various NGOs, to be part of a regional and international community. Tribal, Indigenous, *chao khao*; the power of language is embedded not only in the social and cultural imaginings of the state regarding ethnic groups, but in the political representation and presentation of meaning. The current government rhetoric used to classify the highland peoples of Thailand is, therefore, strongly dictated by language.

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Within the context of Lisu ethnic interaction, the language of the state is significant. At the same time, the language of other ethnic groups, for instance Lahu, holds equal importance with respect to historical analysis of the Lisu. Within the community, when speaking with other ethnic groups, Lahu is commonly used as the middle language. The contemporary importance of the central Thai language for the Lisu also cannot be underestimated, as facilitating the political apparatus of the state, through media, education, and other forms of daily interaction. Today, forest management rules are written in Thai and displayed in the meeting hall, in contact

with outside agencies Thai is used, and meetings and conferences attended by villagers are also in Thai. Further, it was noted by a villager that;

> When Lisu speak with Lahu, Lisu speak Lahu. When Lisu speak with Karen, Lisu speak Karen. When Lisu speak with Shan, Lisu speak Shan. When Lisu speak with Thai, Lisu speak Thai, and when Lisu speak with Chinese, Lisu speak Chinese. Only Lisu can speak Lisu.
> (Personal communication with a village member, Ban Sai Ngam, February 2004)

This linguistic adaptability poses important questions relating to the centrality of language to notions of Lisu identity. History, family and clan are all important determinants of "Lisuness." I asked a number of female elders a question: "If a person was born to Lisu parents and was taken to live with Thai from an early age would they be considered Lisu?" They answered, "Yes, if they could still remember their clan name and village where they were born." "What if they could not speak Lisu?" I asked. "They would be Lisu if they knew the history of their clan and lived like Lisu (extract from an interview with Lisu elders, at a Chiang Mai tourist village, February and March 2004).

There are two Shan men living in Ban Sai Ngam, one of whom has been in the village on and off for several years. They work as hired labor, some days receiving 100 baht and others 150 baht, depending on the type of work they perform. Their role is also significant in terms of ritual practices, as can be seen in the following example, a clan-level ceremony known as *chuew lua* that was performed while I was in the village in April 2004. This ceremony is performed to expel evil spirits from the clan and cleanse those who attend, giving them a new life with fortune, health and happiness. It is the most auspicious of all ceremonies, and is significant in terms of clan relations for all clan members must attend. During this ceremony, a dog is sacrificed, however sacrificing or eating dog meat offends the village guardian spirit, *apa mo*. One Shan man was given 100 baht to perform the sacrifice, allowing the Lisu to conduct their ceremony and appease the guardian spirit at the same time. This is significant for analysis and investigation into ethnic relations and adaptation within a Lisu village. Given that it is considered an offense to the Grandfather spirit to sacrifice a dog, and that this ceremony is the most auspicious at the clan level for Lisu, to perform the ceremony successfully Lisu need a representative from different

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ethnic groups, in this case Shan, to sacrifice the dog and therefore cleanse bad spirits from Lisu clans.

These men speak Shan and a little Lisu. As noted above, most older, and many younger people for that matter, can speak several languages including Shan, Lahu, Karen and Thai (*kham müang*). These multi-linguistic representations within the community are the result of contact and interaction, migration and movement. In the surrounding area, eight kilometers away, is a Lahu Bala village that has close contact with Ban Sai Ngam. Several times a month, Lahu villagers from Ban Nai Khong will come to Ban Sai Ngam to sell bamboo thatched baskets. Economic relations between Lisu and Lahu and Karen were originally based on opium, trade and labor exchange. Lahu, Karen and Shan have worked in the village at various times and are used for hired labor. The area where the village stands today was once a Shan community, with historical interaction (see Chapter III, section 3.3, and Chapter IV, section 4.2). In one of the families in Ban Sai Ngam, the father is Lisu and the mother is Lahu. There is also a clan known as Musuer Kui in the area that several people from Ban Sai Ngam belong to. It is said that this clan originated from a Lahu family clan grouping, and since they have lived with Lisu for many generations they have now been given Lisu ancestral spirits.

5.8 Princess and Expressions of Thai Diversity: We are Lisu-Thai

> The king's visit to Mae Hong Son in 1968, the first visit to the province by any Thai monarch, thus entailed the ceremonial display of the essential elements of Thai national culture for people whose connection to the Thai state was tenuous owing to their residence in a remote border area and their ethnic distinctiveness.
> (Keyes 1987: 1)

One day in January 2004, I left the village early with Alu to go to town, a journey that takes half an hour by motorcycle. He needed to buy chemical fertilizer and pesticide for their garlic fields. On the way into town from the village, we noticed considerable activity at the nearby army base, with soldiers and police directing through traffic. We were told that the Princess was arriving at the base soon, and continued on. After spending not more that 20 minutes in town we started the drive back to the village. More people had gathered at the army base to welcome and catch a glimpse of the Princess. The possibility of being on television may also,

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has been a motivating factor for many. As a local teacher told me, “Today I chose a red shirt. Red shows up clearer on television, you know.” We waited along with almost 100 others for almost two hours. There was the usual pageantry befitting such an occasion, with contingents of police, army and government officials waiting for the Princess’ arrival. There were also students from Pai Witiyakarn High School and a line of young Lisu women dressed in full traditional outfits in the front row standing in the sun. The vast majority of those gathered at the army base were Lisu, almost outnumbering the army. Other Lisu youth were standing around in groups wearing jeans and T-shirts. I looked on from the back of the crowd while army officers made final preparations on two-way transmitters, and government staff were meeting and greeting those waiting, smiling and shaking hands.

Many Lisu were sitting quietly in the shade chewing betel nut and nursing babies. When the first helicopter landed, the wind was so strong that it sent the entire crowd running for cover. Three people got out of the helicopter and walked towards the stage at the other end of the field that had been set up for dignitaries, however, the Princess was not with them. The helicopter then took off, sending people running once again. An hour later another helicopter landed, this time with the Princess, who disembarked, walked ten paces to a convoy of waiting cars, vans and army vehicles, and was promptly swept away. She was gone in less that a minute. People turned and walked back to their cars and motorcycles, Lisu women removed their hats and silver breastplates, and with the excitement finished for the day people went home.

Analysis of this particular event is significant in terms of situating the Lisu in the theoretical and practical debates of ethnic minorities and the state. Why did the Lisu turn out to greet the princess in such large numbers? Lisu from a nearby village were informed of the visit only that morning, and had only a few hours to prepare. Lisu women wearing their best clothes, normally only worn at New Year, were placed at the front of the crowd. It was as much a show of the ethnic diversity of the province by the government officials as it was an expression of Lisu identity during an official state ceremony, two strategic, though divergent assertions.

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5.8.1 Unidentified Soldier: National Imaginings and Local Identity

> The idea of national community is quite recent in Thai history, dating only to the end of the nineteenth century when reforms were instituted that began the transformation of the traditional Siamese state into the modern nation-state of Thailand. The idea has been formulated, however, with reference to the pre-modern past, and the different interpretations of the past advanced by different governments and national leaders have determined the salience of particular ethnic identities (Keyes 1987: 22).

> To realize their Thainess, promotion of environmental protection, use of technology, elevate the community to become a benefit for wider Thai society and the nation.
> (School motto, Ban Sai Ngam, from an interview with the school principal, January 2004)

The creation of a national community, and a corresponding and interconnected national identity, is based on the foundations of unity and homogeneity among the population. In Thailand, these processes are embedded in historical and political contexts based on the three pillars of King, Land and Religion. This nation building, when related to *chao khao*, hill-tribes including the Lisu, intrinsically links national development ideology with security agendas. Lisu have been stereotyped as the most difficult group to develop and integrate into Thai society, a group that cannot be easily changed and because of the location of their villages in what is perceived by the state as isolated border areas, and ecologically sensitive watershed areas development and security missions have been implemented by state and NGOs with equal enthusiasm. The role of the army in this context (see also Chapter I, Overview) is to promote development and security in the area. However, as the following case highlights, goals of development in highland areas are also closely linked to religious and cultural assimilation.

This section introduces an interview I conducted with an unidentified soldier who was staying at a nearby village and came to Ban Sai Ngam for the Network New Year celebrations in January 2004. His comments illustrate the extent to which state ideologies of identity and community penetrate local realities and expressions of a collective national identity. Every year after Lisu New Year is celebrated in individual villages, a Network-level New Year is organized on a rotational basis, and this year after long indecision it was decided that Ban Sai Ngam would be the host village. The Lisu Network of Mae Hong Son inter-village committee, a local NGO, the village leader, and village assistants from Ban Sai Ngam organized the festival.

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Participants included villages from nine member communities of the Lisu Network, Lisu from other villages in Mae Hong Son province, Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai, as well as army officers, NGO staff, two German tourists, visitors from INGOs, a professor of anthropology from Australia, his family, and myself. One by one, people started to arrive at the school. Tents were being erected and last-minute preparations were being made. A pig was killed and women started cooking. Some walked to the event, some came by motorcycle, and some came by car.

The army officer that I interviewed was staying at the school during the festival and was a member of the Lopburi Special Forces Unit 514. He had come to Ban Doi Phii Luu and Ban Nam Pla Mung for training. He agreed to the interview, however due to security reasons could not tell me his name or any other sensitive information. While speaking with him, I introduced myself and explained what I was doing in the village. I found myself answering his questions, so in actual fact for the first half of my interview, I was the one being interviewed. His training period coincided with the Network New Year's festival and he had decided to come and watch. This was the first time he had been in Mae Hong Son province but was not the first time he had seen the Leesaw (in Thailand the term Leesaw is commonly used to refer to people who call themselves Lisu). He told me that part of his training involved preparing a report on Lisu culture and beliefs, and it was at this point that he began asking me about village shamans and traditional leaders in Ban Sai Ngam — their names, the houses they lived in, and whether I believed what they said. He was also interested in collecting Lisu clothes and other materials for the Lopburi "One Sub-district One Product" project.[5] In the past, he had been stationed in Chiang Dao, and Fang districts in Chiang Mai province, as well as in Chiang Rai, working with Leesaw, Ekaw (Akha), Karen and Thai Yai (Shan) people. In early 2004 when I spoke with him, he was training with Lisu and Lahu in Pai district, Mae Hong Son province. This short interview was significant in aiding an understanding of the contemporary situation of the Lisu and the imagining of the state in the creation of a national community. The soldier commented that:

[5] "One Sub-District One Product" is an initiative of the central government to promote local products and strengthen economies at the sub-district level. The project is being implemented nationally.

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> We are now beginning to understand each other. I distribute medicine and give basic health care, help with community development such as road improvements, maintaining safety in the village, and providing agricultural advice on food and market products. Altogether there are three teams working in the area. I must complete a report on Lisu culture and beliefs, and collect information on the role of the village shaman.
> (Interview with army personnel, Ban Sai Ngam, January 2004)

During the celebrations, the district governor sat on the bamboo stage overlooking the crowd of more than 100 Lisu who had come to Ban Sai Ngam for the festival. Before walking up to the stage, the district governor was given traditional Lisu pants and one of the silver studded jackets worn by Lisu men. He placed these 'new' clothes over his suit and walked out on the stage. From the crowd, the cuffs of his suit pants and the sleeves of his jacket could be seen protruding from his Lisu clothes, in visible layers of meaning. The district governor sat in front of a Buddhist shrine and a picture of His Majesty the King, and gave the opening speech in front of the Lisu who had gathered from across the northern region of Thailand. The following is an extract of the speech he gave that day:

> I first went to a hill-tribe village 32 years ago. After that I became district governor in Pang Ma Pa district and moved to Pai. I want to tell you something today I have told you many times before: hill-tribe people have a benefit, you can make handicrafts to sell, you can preserve your culture and have extra income. This is what the King said regarding sustainable economies, "enough to eat, enough to live". But do not do anything that is against the law, or else families must be separated, and in some cases you will only meet again in the next life. Do not expect to achieve too much; a home, a family and happiness is enough. Today, 12 villages in Mae Hong Son have come together. Lisu have many people in Pai, I have been to every Lisu village in Pai. I slept at a Lisu house, it had a dirt floor and the room was dark with a small fire burning. We ate together on the floor and drank Lisu liquor; it was very good. I saw ceremonies performed by the shaman. Soon there will be a beauty pageant held in town, and there will be Lisu, Lahu, Karen, Thai Yai [Shan], Mien and *khon müang* participating. The show will be on television shown across the country. Then it will be shown through the world and people will know which ethnic groups are in Thailand and Mae Hong Son…
> (Opening of the Lisu Network of Mae Hong Son's New Year Festival, speech presented by the district governor, January 2004)

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Overall, the importance of this festival can be interpreted on many different levels. The first is the network level: all network member villages attended, showing unity with respect to organization and mobilization. As a result, people saw friends and relatives, they ate, danced and sang together, and discussed problems. The government officials and army, who attended and participated in the ceremonies, viewed the proceedings from a different perspective. Youth and children watched and

joined in the ceremonies, danced, sang, and had fun. It is powerfully evident in such gatherings that, in terms of the cultural dimensions of identity, "Lisuness" is simultaneously connected to place and dependant on other factors such as social relationships, and interaction with external groups, and thus interconnected with political, social and cultural variables at the levels of family, clan, society and nation. Identity is closely correlated with the concept of place, and conceptualized by 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 delineated by boundaries. Thus a national collective identity has been 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.

Figure 5.6 Opening ceremony of the Lisu Network New Year Festival (District Governor sitting), Ban Sai Ngam

Figure 5.7 Army watching the proceedings from the crowd.

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5.9 Summary

The above chapter illustrates that any discussions on identity must be situated historically, culturally and socially. With respect to ethnic classification and government policy, and Lisu responses to these processes, it can be argued that identities are constructed within, not outside discourse. Therefore, we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional frameworks, encompassing specific practices and strategies. The diversity of strategic representations of place related to the identity of the Lisu is distinct and multiple, and might contribute to a greater understanding of individual expressions of identity.

Such an analysis requires a multidimensional understanding of the interactions and relationships that exist in a Lisu community, as outlined in the above chapter, not only between the minority and majority relations within the framework of state mechanisms, but also the role of the state and minority peoples in international systems, involving economic and political dynamics. At the most fundamental level, the rights of highland people to express their identity and cultural self-determination is interconnected with rights to maintain resource management practices, livelihoods, and the maintenance of cultural practices. One the one hand, ethnic identity is local, for all those who identify with a particular group do so in a context of interaction and social relations in a local community. But at the same time, as in Ban Sai Ngam, experiences of community and identity are not only local but transcend the physical boundaries of the community represented as lines on a map, or delineated by wording in government policy. Thus their locality, place, "and cosmopolitan discourses [are] what shapes their lives as ethnic citizens of modern nations" (Harrell 2002:12).

As shown in the above chapter, different individuals and groups negotiate their identity through different means, such as increased market interaction, expansion of ritual practices, political representation, and labor migration. In essence, this has given empirical evidence to the theoretical approaches of identity through the symbolic interaction between community members, with outside agencies, and the spiritual world, and as sites of contestation and negotiation. In this context, the level of acceptance and legitimacy of state authority, and rights to self-determination, are

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dependant on the villager's collective voice. In Ban Sai Ngam, the historical significance of identity can be seen as embedded in contestation and the assertion of rights, and through access to resources and place. In Ban Sai Ngam, experiences of community and identity are not only local, but transcend the physical boundaries of the community represented on maps or delineated by wording in government policy. Rituals and the expansive nature of Lisu healing practices, also transcend the boundaries of the community. This practical and ideational fluidity involves, as I have discussed, ethnic adaptation in healing and other types of ceremonies, with the incorporation of Buddhism, scientific knowledge and ritual objects from other ethnic groups. These adaptations and transformations have become distinctly "Lisu" within a particular cultural field.

In the above chapter, it was shown that expressions of ethnic identity occur at different loci of interaction represented through personal internal perspective and from the perspective of those with whom these people interact. In other words, these events are significant because of the symbolic power used to transcend boundaries in the formation of one's identity, and in turn, expand their experiences with place. The idea and in turn the creation of a national community is a relatively new phenomenon, that is directly connected to a national identity promoted through government policy, centralized education and classification systems of the people which fall within the states boundaries. This identity is based on the foundations of unity and homogeneity among the entire population. This is illustrated in Thailand through historical and political processes based on the three pillars of King, Land and Religion, illustrating the extent to which state ideologies of identity and community penetrate local realities and expressions of a collective national identity identifying those who are and are not Thai.

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