#### **CHAPTER 2**

#### REVIEW OF CONCEPTS AND RELEVANT STUDIES

This chapter aims to review relevant concepts and studies which help us to understand the Yunnan-Burma border and the complexity of border lives. The focus is an attempt to comprehend the Tai social world in which Tai ethnic residents living on the Yunnan-Burma border are strategically weaving a "flexible economic border" via cross-border trade and social practices of Tai petty traders, while also considering the state's fluid power and regulations of the border with regard to changing economic conditions. In order to understand these issues, I will apply the following selected concepts: (a) the border as an "ambiguous sphere", (b) the process of translocality and (c) the construction of images of modernity and ethnic identity.

### 2.1 Reviewing Previous Border Studies

Previous scholars have presented a diversity of ways to approach study of the border. Anthropology provides several previous border studies before the 1950s; for example, British anthropological border studies originated by Gluckman (1957, 1964) and his border approach regarding "backdrop zones". This approach, however, tends to physically limit systems of place and culture, while community cohesion is seen as being generated by underlying conflicts of loyalty and morality (cf. Wilson & Donnan 2002). Such research implies on the one hand, that borders are where we should study social structures, social ties, and social systems and that communities/structures exist within a closed, bounded system and that what happened within the community was bounded in a physical, fixed place. On the other hand, such fundamental research was limited (i.e., it did not focus on contacts or relations within the larger context) in its approach to state border security and state territories. In this sense, borders are taken as signs of the sovereignty and domain of the state and the markers of relations between a state and its neighbors. This fundamental approach has gradually been

challenged by several different approaches after the 1960s in view of the very complex situation developing at the physical border of modern nation-states.

In recent years, there has been growing academic interest in the particular social, economic, and political phenomena of populations living on the border. This interest allows scholars to explore; for example, "border culture" and processes of identity formation in borderlands (see Alvarez 1995). The scholarly interest in border studies has been fueled partly by the growth of transnational processes, such as mass media communications and global economics, and partly by recently political reductions of international boundaries among nation-states. The borders today that once were established as fixed and monolithic boundaries of national and cultural entities, unveil processes of cross-border negotiation and complexity of power relations among diverse groups. The border circumstances conceptualized by many scholars have given rise to new interesting and provocative questions about, for example, the multi-vocal borderlanders when viewed within existing genders, ages, and classes (Rosaldo 1989), the relationship of local and global (Tsing 1994, 2000), the inclusion of space and place and culture (Gupta and Ferguson 1992), and the "liminal zone" of migration (Chavez 1992). For instance, the US-Mexico border (see more in Alvarez 1995) during the past decade has been the site of valuable anthropological analyses regarding border residents and their socio-economic and political circumstances (for example, Alvarez 1987, Rosaldo 1989, Chavez 1992, Martinez 1994). Here, borderlands become the meeting sites of diverse politics, economics and cultures which provide insight into the ways in which political, cultural, and social identities are simultaneously constructed, intermingled, deeply placed (Flynn 1997: 313) or struggled over (for example, Wilson and Donnan 1994), as well as hybridized (Gupta and Ferguson 1992) in relationship to the "other".

I reason that discussions of border studies that fit within the modern nationstates framework can be classified into four general categories: the cultural and ecological geo-boundaries approach, the border as images approach, the state-oriented approach, and the agentive border approach.

Firstly, the cultural and ecological geo-boundaries approach is reflected in the remarkable works of Leach (1954, 1960) and Wijeyewardene (1992, 1993), among others. Rather than approaching the Yunnan-Burma border as a marker of the domain of Burma state, and as an exercise of state power, Leach argues that the actual Yunnan-Burma frontiers of pre-modern times were not a fixed zone. The "cultural and ecological geo-boundaries" conceptualize the role that hills, valleys and various ecologies have in the separation of cultures, customs, and agriculture - as seen in the differences among various ethnic groups living along the Yunnan-Burma border. Frontiers based on cultural and ecological geo-boundaries have been influenced by ethnic people in this area, such influence as seen in classification of environments and ethnic groups living in the hills and valleys, which also directly impact social structures. It follows from this that the border, under the modern European concept, is not appropriate for understanding the complexity of people and the social structures on the Yunnan-Burma ethnic frontier because it does not allow for an understanding of the diversity of intermingled ethnic categories and the use of ethnic and ecological geo-boundaries. More recently, Wijeyewardene (1990), following from Leach's work, is concerned more with the ethnic groups that have been moving across national boundaries in the region. He examines the issues of cultures that cut across political boundaries in mainland Southeast Asia. In 2001, he expanded Leach's observations on the Burma frontier by examining the complex relationships of not only the Kachin-Shan boundaries, but also those of the many ethnic groups who live around this frontier (Wijeyewardene 2001).

The second is the border-as-image approach which conceptualizes the border as a metaphor; it is a 'border' which demarcates a line between social aspects (images demarcating a line of, for example, morality, development). This approach has been increasingly used after the 1970s postmodern turn and increasing transnational flows of people, goods and ideas. Here, the border becomes a metaphor extending into other lines of academic thought; for example, literary theory, media studies, as well as extending into social issues of underdevelopment, globalization and exploitation in which all capital, goods, people and cultures across the border are considered.

This border-as-image approach has helped us to understand conflicts and changes within and between cultures along physical borders or elsewhere; with many applications on the US-Mexico border. Furthermore, several levels characterize border studies in terms of images; images of culture, societies, politics, sexuality, ethnicity, psychology, social class have been of particular interest among western scholars. For instance, Rosaldo (1993: 208) implies that border zones of culture are sites of creative cultural production. Anzaldua's work regarding the border as cultural creativity and hybridity is a remarkable work in that it provides an analysis of "multiple identities" (1989). Heyman (1999), Alvarez (1995), Kearney (1995), Lavie (1995), and Hannerz (1997) all imply that the borders represents images of multiple cultures which are both continually flowed into and contradicted in different forms. For example, some research conceptualizes borders as going beyond the physical border. Rouse (1991), for example, studies Mexican migrant workers who live in the city but whose livelihoods can be seen as border images since their lives are still related to their home towns, since the flows of their relatives' connections and goods among the two areas still proceed. In this case study, migrant people, displaced people, as well as mobile people become part of fascinating border studies viewed through the "border as images" approach.

The third is the state-oriented approach which proposes that modern nationstates are socially constructed as "imagined communities" (Anderson 1985) or "geobodies" (Thongchai 1994) in different historical periods. This contribution based on constructivism challenges previous border studies which ignore historical transformations of states, space and exercises of state power in which the physical border has been material in defining new meanings for the states' imagination and being a nation.

The fourth group takes a so-called "agency" or agentive border approach. This approach forms a middle ground between state-oriented models of Anderson (1985) and Thongchai (1994) and the older center-periphery model, in both of which, I believe, most scholars largely ignored the actual people living along the border and their experiences. There are many anthropologists who have paid close attention to

"power" in the agency approach, and apply this approach in examining the complex and diverse cultures that exists at borders in which their experience sometimes participates in constructing the national border (i.e., Martinez 1988, Sahlins 1998) and negotiates with the states' regulation (Walker 1999). As emphasized by Walker (1999), in his study of long-distance female traders in Laos, although the states play the key role in initiating, managing and directing the interconnections of the borderlands, the state does not monopolize regulatory practices. Jakkrit (2006) examining the Mekong River as the border-river landscape, argues that complex trade relationships based on social connections across the Thai-Lao border have placed different agencies in different positions on both sides of the border where they make use of unequal power relations in dissimilar ways.

This agentive border approach is accompanied by several other approaches to borders; for instance, anthropological study of border and border identities (Wilson and Donnan 1998), border culture, and geo-politics of the border (cf. Wilson and Donnan 2002). Moreover, this agentive border approach explores the dynamic social processes and sees the border as a "laboratory of social and cultural change" (Horstmann 2002), rather than considering fixed entities with a definable essence of "border life". Other works on border studies, for example by Staudt (1998) and Marchand (2002) point out that the space created by the border provides an opportunity for women and men to make "strategic decisions" and to maximize border opportunities. This border space "allows male and female border-crossers to generate earnings that reduce deep gender inequities" (Staudt 1998:8). Marchand (2002) perceives that although the border creates new opportunities for women and men, it intensifies somewhat in its forms of exclusion along the lines of class, gender and ethnicity.

In this research, I apply a structure-agency approach toward the border which partly follows an agentive border approach, and argues that states are not so powerful in that states absolutely define the border. In fact, local agents of the modern states and other players, mainly local inhabitants play an important role in defining the border, along with the central state. Although we normally see the state and its

authorities' control over the border as expressed and exercised through many forms of surveillance (for example soldiers, patrolling police and border gates), the state and its exercise of power are never monolithic. On the contrary, distinctive local state authorities and local inhabitants as well as outsiders who take advantage of the border's economic and political opportunities, interests and benefits, always illustrate the gaps in the state's power along the border. More importantly, it is the border populations themselves who can define their border livelihood and border meaning by interacting with notions of border defined by the state, local authorities and other powerful forces.

However, the agentive border approach is problematic to some extent. I argue that the agentive border approach somewhat overlooks the "adaptability" of the state in itself. Although we now tend to argue that the control over the borders of the state is problematic because the state needs to rely on the border towns for economic purposes and for national security simultaneously, the state never absolutely loses its control over the borders and never allows transnational flow activities and movement to blur national boundaries absolutely. In fact, it is by consequence of a process of compromise that power-sharing is actively negotiated by various cultures in seeking to legitimize their social identities. More importantly, it should be noted that an understanding of the state's transformation and change should be seen in the sense that the state needs to strategically and consistently adapt itself, interacting with the irresistible change of wider global-economic forces.

Taking the case of "graduated sovereignty", Ong (1999: 55-75) illustrates an example of how the state changes its strategies when it has been stimulated by economic globalization. It is the shifting relations between market, state, and society which have resulted in the state's flexible experimentations with sovereignty. "Graduated sovereignty" and its strategies are exemplified in that the state subjects different sectors of the population to different regimes of valuation and control, and then creates different zones of law internally, including its interference in a different zone of discipline and order. Another example reflecting the adaptability of the state in the context of economic globalization's increasing force is Appadurai's

"postnational geographic processes" (2003: 340), which is developed through in the study of state regulations for non-resident Indians (NRI) in India. It is a new type of "citizenship" which is rearranged and modified by the Indian government. The non-resident Indian (NRI) status is applied to Indian citizens who have migrated to another country, or a person of Indian origin who is born outside India or a person of Indian origin who resides outside India. The term NRI also includes oversea Indians and expatriate Indians; and often includes Indian individuals and people of other nations with Indian blood who have become citizens of other countries. The non-resident Indian (NRI) citizens can have special offers on tax deduction, and general permissions on purchasing land and real estate in India. These NRI citizens at the same time make and remake culture and identity, as diasporic people living in different places in the US, England and India; living between "here" and "there".

These two examples have demonstrated that notions of citizenship, as one of the main powers exercised by modern state to control over people and territory, are not simply restricted to those people living within national boundary. But it shows that economic benefits, international trade and commerce expanding in global space have consistently forced the states to adapt themselves, reinterpreting the concept of "citizenship" in order to include all people inside and outside the national boundary and at the same time to maintain its power under different conditions.

## 2.2 Constructions of the Image of Modernity and Ethnic Identity

In general, this study views modernity as a global relationship of differences. On one level, modernity is conceptualized as a "process" (Tanabe and Keyes 2002: 9-12) which has taken place under two influences: the global market economy and mass media. The first context, that of the global market economy, is motivated by the states themselves purposing to open borders for economic growth. The flow of goods, transportation and so on, transcending the national border has incorporated the border into the regional market economy. This also includes the way in which the Chinese state has developed their people in the periphery, aiming for economic reform in which development projects have been disseminated throughout China for many years. The second is the context in which expansion of the mass media through flows of

goods and also commodities themselves becomes a context which allows a possible choice of cultural identity.

This allows us to understand modernity as a cultural dimension of transnationalism and globalization encouraged by the state and global flows. Generally, the idea of "modernity at large" by Appadurai (1996) was based on the centrality of media and migration; deeming it appropriate to view the mobility of people, and of signs and processes of varied interconnections between people and spaces affected by contemporary modes of transnational flows, as transcending national boundaries. Thus, both mass media and the flow of goods have made it possible for modernity to be shared by people living in places, very distant in space and time. Influenced by global flows of media and migration, people use these channels to imagine themselves as different people living in different worlds. For Appadurai, these global flows of images and people enable people to unevenly experience new ideas and practices and thereby imagine new ways of being. These new ways of being are not merely idealized thought, but there is also expectation and desire that increasingly changes because people engage with various facets of modernity.

Hence, modernity means one aspect among many of the social world's creations that the Tai ethnic people define and shape actively. It is the Tai, as dynamic actors who are now renewing their own social world which once was alienated under the hegemonic Han Chinese culture. Particularly, it is their own social world which cooperates with the constructed images of Pan-Tai siblings and Tai culture as shown in trading practices of ethnic goods exchange.

This line of thought, particularly the way in which the Tai have constructed images of Pan-Tai siblings and Tai culture, implies that modernity should be viewed not simply as a reaction to the west, but as creating new diverse forms of modernity, the modernity that the Tai choose to connect to Thai culture, as having cultural intimacy to their own. The preceding works usually refer to modernity (in relation to the local consequences of global interconnectedness and force) as a sense of global interconnectedness which usually combines with or reacts to the west. Those works

usually illustrate their understanding of modernity through an emphasis on new forms of political organizations, global capitalism, media and migration. In debate, special attention usually situates the transformative roles of nation-states and economics; technological social and cultural conditions; and development within industrial and post industrial societies of the West (i.e., King 1995, Gidden 1991). However, there are some noteworthy scholars (i.e., Hodgson 2001, Cooper 2001, Mill 2001) who argue that there are non-western sources and forms of modernity called "alternative modernities" (Rofel 1999, Gaonkar 2001, Hanchard 2001) produced outside the reaction of the west.

As Hodgson asserts in Gender Modernities: Ethnographic Perspectives,

"Although modernity is a dominant and pervasive mode of imagining and ordering the world, other forms of modernity exist...Despite the global hegemony of Enlightenment version of modernity, other powerful modes of modernity exist....As people engage these dominant versions, they produce new forms of modernity, other ideas and practices associated with being modern" (Hodgson 2001: 7-8).

This study partly follows the line of thought in which culture resists global forces and seeks economic, political and cultural domination; including a question in the argument for "modernity as universalized". Modernity does not necessarily become the "cultural homogenization" which is reflected in discourses on globalization taken from theories of modernity or "cultural imperialism" (Schiller 1976, Tomlinson 1999).

Following debates framed by students of culture studies from many corners of the world, I contend that the idea of global homogenization is inadequate for making sense of the experiences of modernity that people go through and for developing an understanding of contemporary cultural change. Many studies paid attention to the dialectic between the "global and local"; Appadurai (1999: 231) adds that "when we hear the word global, the word local is never far behind". Robertson (1995: 100) describes globalization as entailing an "interpretation of the universalization of the

particular and the particularization of the universal", and has subsequently developed the concept of "glocalization" (Robertson 1995).

At the level of glocalization, globalization does not absolutely destroy cultural differences. Instead, it reinforces people's sense of cultural difference. For example, media studies often emphasize the spread of some goods through media channels and flows, while cultural studies analyze now the local creativity and appropriation of these goods by the local culture. The idea of local people culturally appropriating, indigenizing the globally spread of goods and ideas in their society becomes more analytical in particular forms; for instance, Miller's analysis on consumption (Miller 1995), or Friedman in his work on the consumption of Coke imported from outside Brazzaville by the Congolese (Friedman 2002). These scholars argue that new cultural influences are domesticated or employed by local people in order to serve the construction of personal or collective identities. Local people in relation to regional/global influence always pay attention to the construction of many other forms of cultural particularity and communal identity. As asserted by Tomlinson (1999), people constantly attempt to make themselves at home in the world. The provocative issues here are that "globalization reinforces heterogeneity" or how modernity in relation to global forces is modified and formed a crucial role in making sense of their social life world.

Besides aforementioned analyses on modernity creating global heterogeneity, in this study I follow the particular idea of "alternative modernities" in which the idea of creative adaptation is a necessary component. Creative adaptability is the key that allows people to question or criticize what they are in their present, and what they expect for their future. Creative adaptability in this way will reflect alternative modernity which people, case of the Tai, will not be trapped in modernity imposed by the dominant culture. Here, the idea of alternative modernities does not imply that one can freely choose whatever one likes from the offerings of modernity. Also, it does not mean one can take good things (i.e., technology) and avoid the bad (i.e. excessive individualism), as repeatedly highlighted by past scholars. More importantly it means that one can question the scope and viability of creative adaptation in certain critical

areas such as modern law where form and function are tightly integrated. Particularly, the idea of alternative modernities is not simply a matter of adjusting the form or recoding the practices to soften the impact of modernity. Rather the idea points to the manifold ways in which people can question the present (Gaonkar 2001: 18). The case of Afro-diasporic people studied by Hanchard (2001: 272-298) has demonstrated that, while forced to think through the languages, religion and ideals of their oppressors, the Afro-diasporic people succeed in articulating their own distinctive vision of pan-African modernity. One strand of that vision concerns the strategies for overcoming the temporal disjunctions of racial time which pave the way for imagining "transnational imagined communities" unhampered by the logic of territoriality (Gaonkar 2001: 13-23).

Therefore, constructions of the image of modernity and ethnic identity consist of both notions of "alternative modernities", diverse ways of modernity that provide people alternative choices so that people can choose for their own world and the world at large, as well as a "multiplicity of identities". Resultantly, a multiplicity of identities, produced in effect from the perspective that alternative modernities provides, can be seen in the diverse forms of identities and communities.

#### 2.3 The Process of Translocality

During the past decade, many scholars have been conceptualizing "transnationality" and "translocality", sometimes using the terms "transnational space" and "translocal space" in diverse ways. This study will review the literature in reference to transnational spaces and transnationality in multiple dimensions of global-local space, and notions of translocality.

#### 2.3.1 Transnational Spaces and Transnationality

Research regarding transnational space tends to focus on "people on the move" in the sense that it encompasses the global-spatial transformation produced by the economy of late capitalism. Broadly describing the transformation of space, transnational space can be generally identified as: first, refering to global space in

which the global economy and flows of capital transforms local places, creating homogenized and/or deterritorialized space. For instance, global spaces produce other forms of cultural deteritorialization, such as travel, tourism, or even religious diaspora (Low & Lawrence-Zuniga 2003: 25). Second, transnational space can refer to movement of people across the border which creates new transnational spaces and territorial relationships.

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Ong, one notable scholar applying the notion of "transnationality" to the Chinese Diaspora as seen in her book, "Flexible citizenship: the cultural logics of transnationality" (1999), looks at "transnationality" as the "context" within which the Chinese population and transnational capital flows take place between China and Southeast Asia as well as the United States. It is the way that practices of diasporic Chinese business elites imagine themselves and are imagined by Southeast Asian states. The case of Hong Kong business elites is an example that allows us to understand how they adopt a kind of "flexible citizenship". Hong Kong elites choose to work in China in the wake of Tiananmen Square massacre while seeking citizenship elsewhere, also interacting with the transnational flow situation. Here, both the flows of people and capital cross the Pacific, while cultural meanings are created in order to make sense of their lives' mobility. The Chinese diaspora searches for a flexible position among the possibilities and limitations found in the global economy in a claim of racial loyalty to China.

#### 2.3.2 Translocality

Besides these diverse researchers who view transnationality as contributing to an idea of activities going beyond national border, some remarkable scholars are interested in translocality and translocal space notions, in order to contribute a better understanding of the mobility of people, goods and ideas crossing the border.

As Oakes and Schein (2006) point out, the term "translocal" has appeared in recent works by academic scholars in several disciplines; for example, in the work of cultural theorists (Clifford 1997:7), geographers (Massey 1999, Cartier 2001, Katz 2001, Castree 2004), anthropologists (Escobar 2001, Eriksen 2003, Peleikis 2003),

and historians (Rafael 1995, Dirlik 1999, Wigen 1999). In their book Translocal China, Oakes and Schein (2006) used the term to highlight a simultaneous analytical focus on mobility and localities. Translocality draws their attention to the multiplying forms of mobility in China without losing sight of the importance of localities in people's lives. The authors classify four complications to the notion of what constitutes translocality. Firstly, translocality is constituted by circulation of capital, ideas and images, goods, styles, services, diseases, etc. It involves technologies that transport people and transmit images of other places, emphasizing the interdependence of the subjective dimensions of translocality in which people move indirectly by using technology and translocal imaginaries. Secondly, translocality reflects images of connectedness, decenteredness flows, networks, deterritorialization. Thirdly, it refers to the transgression of spatial boundaries and the movement between scales characteristic of translocality, as a revitalization of placemaking and place differentiation. Lastly, Oakes and Schein (2006) regard the translocal in terms of the dilemma of old and new characteristic in China.

Appadurai's (1996) notion of "translocality" is indicative of a shift in the relationship between territory, identity and political affiliation. He uses the term in reference to various processes. For example, the process of transnational labor migration and diasporic community-building, in which the territorial angles of identity and community are problematized by modes of practice which effectively reconstitute these communities in locales beyond the boundaries of fixed territory. Additionally, the process of cultural globalization has created "translocal spaces" and forms of public culture embedded in the imaginings of people that dissolves notions of state-based territoriality. Moreover, translocal space and mobile sovereignty describes a world where minorities and migrants are flowing into nation-states, threatening the stability of ethnic coherence and traditional rights. This is increasingly challenging the nation-state and gives pressure on states in terms of maintaining their territoriality (Low and Lawrence-Zuniga 2003: 25).

Nevertheless, it should be noted that translocal phenomena are not new since people and communities have long been moving and reconfiguring themselves across

geographical spaces. With the emergence of various new technologies of travel and communication, however, translocality can be understood in a new line of thought as entering a new phase of intensively global influence which is changing social relations and local places—in regard to the interventions of media, facilities and migration and the consequent breakdown in the isomorphism of space, place and culture.

# 2.4 The Conceptual Framework: Flexible Economic Border as an "Ambiguous Sphere"

Influenced by the increasing economic growth as a result of China's borders opening, the Yunnan-Burma border city of Dehong has become more significant to the Chinese and also Southeast Asian states. The states' border regulations need to be more flexibly enforced in order to enrich economic growth supporting not only national economic growth but also global-regional economic connections to Southeast Asian countries. The regional and global economic force of free trade, as exemplified by regional economic integration within the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS), has partly forced the states to reopen their borders while the states themselves, especially the Chinese state, have been simultaneously pursuing their own economic interests.

In this context, the Yunnan-Burma border becomes a more "flexible" economic border; the states find themselves needing to communicate with regional and global forces and adjust themselves for mainly economic purposes. Particularly, it means that the "flexible economic border" illustrated by the Yunnan-Burma border in Dehong, constitutes a new characteristic of the border which is increasingly allowing the flow of people and goods, aiming to be the gateway of economic activities, Chinese markets, tourism, and goods transportation across national border which were once strictly controlled by the states.

These phenomena and the new characteristic of the "flexible economic border" have made the border what I call an "ambiguous sphere". The "ambiguous sphere" purports to explain dynamics of the border, in that the states now are not absolutely powerful in defining and operating their power exercise at the border, the

power dynamics are ambiguous. Although we still see the state concerned with sovereignty and national territory (through many forms of power exercised, for example, security issues and social risk; and also expressed through many forms of surveillance, for instance soldiers, patrolling polices and border gates), the state and its power are now being challenged by other agents of power who recognize gaps in the state's power; such groups attempt to take advantage of economic opportunities at the border. Particularly, it means the border becomes an overlapping space where new forms of culture, and thus identity, are constituted, generated, and participated in by the border population themselves in ways in which they define their borders' meanings, and negotiate livelihoods with state power and economic opportunities of new conditions.

The ambiguous sphere conceptualizes the agency of local people at the border. The local power-sharing and negotiations are influenced by the border but also make change at the border; border residents and their livelihoods can be dialectically shaped by interrelations between the consequences of nation-states' border economic policies and alternative choices made, for example, by Tai petty traders in the wake of their socio-economic opportunities.

This case of Tai petty traders and their trading practices presents the interrelation between state power and the local inhabitants in which, on the one hand, we see how the states selectively allow the border flows and local residents to cooperate with border activities, and on the other hand, we see the local residents design their border lives within alternative directions under the constraints and new opportunities interacting with the involvement of the power.

More importantly, the notion of the border as an "ambiguous sphere" allows us to understand that the signs and orders of territorial and sovereign borders defined by states are now being challenged by a movement of the production of social and cultural imaginary. The case of the Tai and the process of translocality practiced through their trading exchange activities on the Yunnan-Burma border illustrate how the production of social and cultural imaginary can emerge strategically within the new character of border power-sharing. It means particularly that the Tai, as active

actors, are now producing and renewing their cultural formation by borrowing images and signs of their Thai siblings, as labeled in commodities, in order to reposition their social status in their society, and react to the Han Chinese hegemony. Hence, cross-border trade and trade exchange conducted by Tai petty-traders and peddlers does not merely illustrate the sale of daily, economic products. Instead, it also shows the process of cultural revival and formation within a history of ethnic-cultural domination among Chinese culture and the "other". Ethnic residents of the Dehong Tai nationality, and their Tai, Buddhist culture (which share common culture and languages with the Shan Tai in Shan State and Thai in Thailand), have been encountering a loss of cultural materials (temples, Buddhist scripts, and so on) since the Cultural Revolution in China. The new characteristic of the "flexible economic border" and the economic development of the border desired by the state is now providing opportunities to better economic and socio-cultural border livelihoods in the sense that it can renew Tai culture and ethnic belonging.

Therefore, the ambiguous sphere refers to the following distinctive aspects of the border: (1) it is the context which the state requires in order to open the border for economic growth and which makes the border more flexible by rearranging the state's border regulations. (2) It is the product of globalization, in particular with regard to economics, in which the state (particularly the Chinese), with pressure from global-regional levels, on the one hand, is pushed to open the border, and on the other hand, the border is pushed by the state itself to do so for its economic gain. (3) It is the site where Tai traders, as active agents of Pan-Tai culture, are involved in the process of translocality of Tainess. As a result, the Pan-Tai culture practices through trade in ethnic commodities and choices in dress and clothes styles become an alternative which reflects the alternative modernities that the Tai use to enlarge their social world and to go beyond dominant social structures.

By employing the concepts of modernity and ethnic identity, this study views modernity in a way in which images of being "modern" are seen as constructed images, and thus, are connected with respective actors' (i.e. the Tai) notions of ethnic identity and belonging. Essentially, it is this sense of "alternative modernities" which

provides a point for the Tai people to question their present day existence and be concerned with alternative strategies or ways to attain and imagine a "translocal imagined community".

As an active agent constructing a translocal imagine community, it is not necessary for the Tai to follow the dominant images of modernity, no matter if such images are western or Chinese; they can be active in creating choices. Tai residents at the border have shifted a sense of ethnicity connected to the constructed images of "Tai siblings" and of "high quality and fashionable"; in particular Thai clothing products and goods. Here, these Thai products and other ethnic commodities become substantial cultural materials which simultaneously identify ideals of being "intimate" with and reflect "alternative modernities" of their Thai siblings.

By employing the concept of translocality, this study utilizes this concept as "practice". By looking at the translocal practices, it is evident that the process of ethnic commodities' circulation transmits constructed images of other places, and then creates "translocal imaginaries" which exist among the Tai residents within the specific transnational context of commodities exchange. Although there is no physical border between Thai and China, Tai residents along the Yunnan-Burma border feel attached to Thai products and other ethnic products of the Shan Tai, and then preferably trade and consume them. Hence, the trading exchange practices of the Tai petty traders with their Tai customers transmit images of connectedness in which ethnic commodities transported from Thailand and the Shan state play an important role in constituting translocal imaginaries.

For this analysis, the dress practices of Thai and Shan Tai, in particular ethnic clothing as an example, are traded among the Tai traders and customers not merely as a transportation of culture which Dehong Tai customers enjoy wearing. The practice of dressing in Thai clothes has gained value and status as a display of acquired wealth that has resulted in an "upgrading of social status" and hierarchical positions among members of Dehong Tai society. Thus, the meaning of wearing certain clothes becomes a self-identification that the Dehong Tai use to display their social position in public. Hence, the translocality of Tainess which the Tai are involved with

becomes a significant process in which the Tai, as active agents, attempt to utilize and improvise constructed images of Tai sibling, as well as affinity with Thailand and other Tai, in order to upgrade their own ethnic identity in association with their hierarchical status and the Han Chinese. Here, ethnic commodities, particularly Thair products reflect alternative modernities in which the Tai people utilize the ethnic commodities as an aspect of alternative choice to choose their own modernities. And, this alternative modernity chosen by the Tai is not necessary to follow those of dominant Chinese or the west. Instead, it is chosen within a particular sense of ethnicity.

#### 2.5 Conclusion

The cultural production of Tai identities under shifting economic and political conditions, the bearing of state policies and actions on how border communities form or constitute themselves in relation to state power, and the diversity of responses to state actions are all of interest to this study. Moreover, shifts in patterns of trade (and therefore shifts in patterns of consumer demand) reveal the Tai people's efforts to position themselves in relation to the hierarchy of other powerful groups (especially the dominant Han Chinese and the social hierarchy in their society) since they are embedded within nation-states. As the conditions of their lives change, the Tai use the opportunities that arise to alter their work and lives to accommodate both state power and their communities.

As discussed, the ambiguous sphere provides a conceptualization of the Yunnan-Burma border that can be identified as a sphere of overlapping, ambiguous power where the power of different groups and of various levels (i.e., regional-global forces, local authorities and particularly local inhabitants) challenge the states' power exercised at the border. Particularly, the ambiguous sphere is the site where Tai petty traders are challenging the uneven power of the dominant culture and hierarchies in their societies through their border culture and livelihood. Moreover, translocality practices as seen in trading of ethnic commodities become an alternative that in turn provides alternative notions of modernity. As a result, the practices of translocality reflect alternative modernities; modernity that does not trap people (the Tai) in a

realm of cultural domination and alienation played out under state hegemony. Instead, we see an alternative modernity emerge that gives the Tai alternative choices to enlarge their outside world.



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FLEXIBLE ECONOMIC BORDER AND TAI PETTY TRADERS

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