

CHAPTER 3

A HISTORY OF OVERLAND TRADE: FROM COLONIALISM TO STATE FORMATION

This chapter takes a historical perspective; arguing that it is necessary to view the Yunnan-Burma frontier during late eighteenth to twentieth century as a significant sphere of international trade and commercial development. By taking a historical perspective, this chapter aims to understand how the process of overland trade in this region has been constantly influenced by Western colonialists, and thence modern states. This process takes place prior to the emergence of a “deterritorialization stage” (Duara 2005) in which the modern states, particularly China, created flexible border trade that also influence present day, wider economic circles.

To understand this process, I begin with an examination of “ethnic trade” activities conducted by ethnic traders, such as the Hui (Muslim Chinese), Tai, and Han Chinese; all have a long history of overland trade along the Yunnan-Burma frontier. This chapter, however, does not intend to review the entire chronological history of trade development; that is beyond the scope of this study. Instead, I provide a basic description of the ethnic trade activities and their importance, in order to comprehend the changes of trade activities occurring simultaneously with the frontier transformation in the border territories of colonial powers and the modern states.

The overland trade and ethnic trade activities during the pre-modern state period, up through colonial times, can be characterized as “trans-frontier trade” where local ethnic traders were significant mediums, building bridges to overcome exchange of food and other goods among economic units of villages, towns and principalities. The “trans-

frontier trade", with abundant minerals and fertile resources along the trade routes reaching China and India, was seen by Western colonialists (mainly British in India) as a way to gain access to resources. Railways were planned for better transportation in order to increase international trade and commercial development.

Beginning with the British colonial era (late eighteenth to early twentieth century), this chapter seeks to understand how the frontier became a sphere where British colonialists expanded their commerce along the border by using their political power – a "commercial expansion sphere of colonialism" – by which overland trade, ethnic trade activities and the entire frontier area (as an economic resource) were transformed by colonial influences, and led to the next stage of border territory formed by modern states.

In the first stage of colonialism, it was the economic desire of the British, who were competing with French colonizers in Indochina, to turn the frontier into the highway to China and Indochina. Exploring the old plans for trade and rail routes, as well as road transportation networks on the frontier, it is evident that the British and the French designed for the same purpose: commercial penetration into China.

Then, during the Second World War or particularly the Second Sino-Japanese war (1937-1945) in the region, the political anxiety of the colonizers and the modern Chinese state drew the frontier and its peripheral areas into a territorial border. Local ethnic trade became obstructed. The Burma Road replaced the older trade routes along which the western military used to transport weapons and troops to China. It was built by the nationalist Chinese government with assistance from U.S. allies, in order to fight the Japanese Empire during the Sino-Japanese War. It extends from the railhead in Lashio, Northern Burma to Kunming; in China it runs from Bhamo on the Irrawaddy to Chung King (the capital of China during the war), located on the Upper Yangtze. The road was built across 1,000 miles of mountains to circumvent the Japanese blockade of the coast after the Japanese took effective control of the Chinese coast and of Indochina (Fitzgerald 1940: 161-171). With the replacement of older trade routes by the Burma Road, market cities were transformed into transit stations and garrison bases.

Not until the end of hostilities and the opening up of the wider region, did the political-economic atmosphere along the Yunnan-Burma border begin to engage with surrounding states. The states' decision to cooperate showed de-territorializing the border in economic, but not political, terms. Under economic pressures within the wider region, the state, particularly the Chinese state created the "flexible economic border" and its rearranged regulations to further their economic integration with Southeast Asia.

3.1 Early Overland Trade Activities on the Yunnan-Burma Frontier

A history of trade along the Yunnan-Burma border in the pre-modern states can be seen as a particular type of "trans-frontier trade" in which ethnic traders played a significant role in connecting villages, towns and principalities. During every dry season, ethnic peasants became "peasant traders", loading their goods on pack-mules together with their muleteers' teams, and crossing the mountains. Systems of local and long-distance highland caravans and peddling crisscrossed the interior of the mainland, stretching from northern Burma and Thailand into Vietnam and southern China. These systems of caravan trade helped connect far-away places, which were relieved of scarcity of different types of food and goods.

The overland trade's significance along the Yunnan-Burma frontier has recently been highlighted by scholars (for example, Jiranan 1989, Bin 2004) in that it belongs to one of the three branches of the Southwest Silk Road (SSR or Bonan Road, *Bonan dao* in Chinese) where its trade routes cross the Bonan Mountain. The SSR passes Yongchang¹ and Tengyueh² (modern Tengchong) into Burma and India. Giersch (2006) depicts the area as the "northern Crescent" during the early eighteenth century. In addition, several names were used by distinctive scholars and explorers to

¹ Yongchang is called Wansang by the Chinese Shan (Dehong Tai), which means the city of "the dawn". Marco Polo referred to this town as Voochuan.

² Tengyueh, as mentioned by Joseph Dautremere (1913:324), is the first true Chinese settlement reached upon arriving from the Burma frontier, and consequently is an important point for the study of all kinds of traffic. He writes that "The route, after leaving Tengyueh (elevation 5,555 feet) rises to 7,000 feet at Chiang Tsai-tang, and then falls to 4,500 feet to the bridge over the Shweli River. It then crosses the Yung Chang plateau, crosses the Me Kawang watershed at 7,700 feet, and then falls to the level of that river at 4,000 feet. Then, two mountain ranges of over 8,000 feet have to be crossed, one after the other, before one reaches Hsia Kuan, which is the port and market at the southern end of Lake Erh-Hai, on which Tali stands. This is why the trade is not substantial, and why an interchange of goods is so difficult between Burma and this part of China" (Dautremere 1913:324).

explain the characteristics of the roads and overland trade. For example, Dautremer (1913: 324) calls this the “trans-frontier” overland route, while Yang Bin (2004) calls the specific trade in this area “trans-regional trade”.

For Giersch (2006: 4), the “crescent” refers to the frontier area as a crescent-shaped zone which begins in *Muang Mao* (Ruili) and Tengyueh (Tengchong) in the north, curving southeastward to *Chiang Hung* and Simao in the south. About “the northern Crescent”, he writes that it is the frontier town of Tengyueh, following a major trade route by which Chinese merchants traveled to the frontier markets to trade for gems, silver, and jade.

Whilst Giersch focuses on the “crescent” which holds the current major trade routes in the southwest, Bin (2004) reviews prior historical trade routes. Bin notices that the southern caravan route during the Nanzhao-Dali Period (around seventh to - mid thirteenth century), penetrated further into the inner Chinese empire through the cities of Chengdu, Yibin, Zhuti (Zhaotong), Wei County (Qujing), Dian (Kunming), Anning, Chuxiong, and Yeyu (Dali). Similar routes in the south and more road extensions to the north are mentioned by Forbes and Henley (1997) regarding the Yunnanese Hui Muslims and long-distance caravan trade. These scholars note that trade routes, generally commencing in such Yunnanese commercial centers as Kunming in central Yunnan, Dali and Tengchong (TengYueh) in the west, and Simao in the south, wound their way across rivers and over mountain ranges, through some of the most inhospitable terrain in mainland southeast Asia, to reach the high plateau of Tibet in the north-west, or the fertile river plain of Burma and Thailand in the south (Forbes and Henley 1997: 54-55).

Giersch (2001) asserts that there are three main areas that attracted Han Chinese merchants to markets of frontier areas. The first area includes area within Siam, Burma, and the small Tai petty states beyond Chinese control; the second is inland China; the last is the frontier itself. Many traders trekked all the way to Burma, and in return people from outside the Chinese domain brought goods from abroad to markets in the frontier or in Yunnan. Chiranan (1989: 48) contends that together many ethnic groups created one of the three overland Yunnan trade routes in the nineteenth

century which transported a variety of goods -- cotton, opium and metal in particular. That was where the trade across boundaries was neither regulated by the Chinese government nor influenced by the economic prosperity in the northeast.

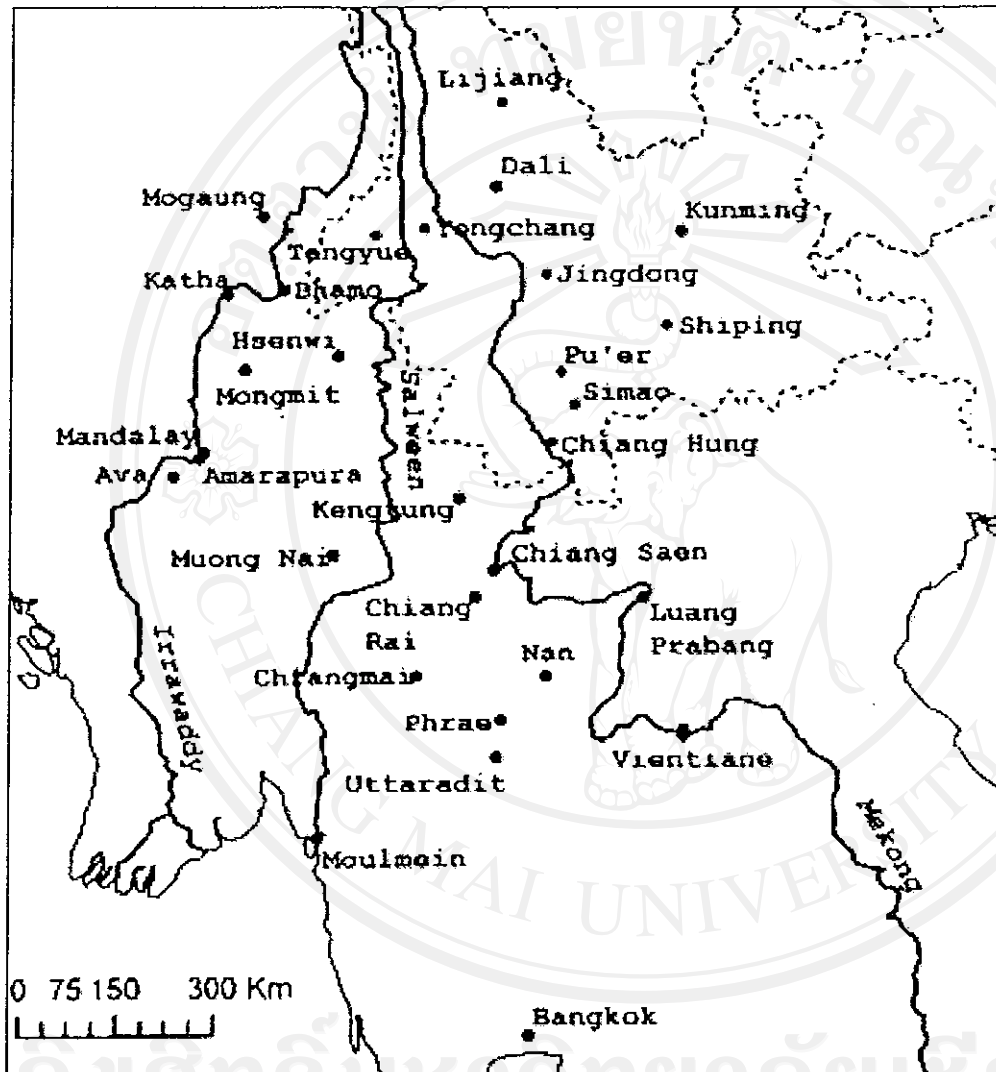


Figure 3.1 Overland trade route along the Yunnan-Burma frontier of the late sixteenth century to eighteenth century (Adapted from Giersch 2006: 5).

Trading was seasonal and cyclical; local ethnic traders usually carried on their trade during the dry months. This is because the rainy season made it difficult and dangerous to travel. Long distance trade therefore could not be engaged year-long. For this reason, every fall, after the rains ended in late October, Han Chinese, Muslim Chinese traders, and other ethnic traders would transport copperwares and silks south to meet Burmese merchants coming up the great rivers with boats full of merchandise.

Most merchants dispersed before spring rains and rising humidity created malarial conditions in May. Along these routes, Southeast Asian traders bought Chinese finished goods (i.e., goods already finished the working process) from Chinese artisans, weavers, and silk manufacturers who produced high-quality items. Han Chinese and Muslim Chinese traders traveling from the north or Yunnan needed Southeast Asian products such as raw cotton, *miang* (fermented tea), indigo, betel, sugarcane, and safflower (Bowie 1988: 129-143).

The merchandise exchanged between the Han Chinese from the north and ethnic traders in Southeast Asia during that time were both necessities and luxuries. Scholars (i.e., Bin 2004, Chiranan 1989, Vogel and Hieronymus 1993: 211-252) assert that the commercial articles transported on the Southwest Silk Road included shell, jade, precious stones, elephant tusks, horses, lumber, cloth, herbs, spices, salt, tea, gold, silver, copper, tin, lead, cotton, silk, and opium. Some commercial items - such as gold, silver, cloth, and salt - certainly sometimes functioned as money.

Local ethnic traders usually traveled together in caravans. They rode different kinds of animals according to the distances involved. Mules and horses usually were used for long-distances, because these animals could climb mountains and endure difficult travel conditions. Cattle were used for short-distances which did not involve crossing mountains. Some merchants who were not keen on riding mules would hire caravaneers with guild. Giersch (2006: 170) refers to Captain William Couperus McLeod's translators, who remark on this issue.³ He writes that many caravaneers were Chinese or Muslim-Chinese from Dali or other areas of Kunming. The caravan teams were organized by guilds, and a merchant who wanted to hire one would negotiate with the guild leader or a local mullah. In late Qing Ganyai Dynasty (circa 1690), for instance, there were seven inns with enough room to house 2,000 people and their pack animals (Giersch 2006: 170) It is not surprising that systems of local and long-distance highland and caravan trade established caravan routes which

³Captain William Couperus McLeod and Dr. David Richardson were British diplomats who also belonged to the East India Company Madras Army. They traveled on elephants, horses, and in the caravans of traders, from Moulmein to the present day regions of the Shan States in Burma, northern Thailand, and Xishuangbanna in China. They set out in December 1836, aiming for trade and friendship (see more detail in Grabowsky and Turton 2004).

crisscrossed the interior of the mainland, stretching from northern Burma and Thailand into Vietnam and southern China. A case of the Tai will be shown here in order to understand how overland trade worked consistently.

3.1.1 The Tai and Overland Trade Activities on the Frontier

As reported in McKinnon and Wanat (1983), hundreds of years ago trading activities in the area were engaged by several ethnic groups, such as the *Hui* or Yunnan Muslim, Panthays, and the Tai (also see Hill 1998, Forbes and Henley 1997). They traded different goods and built up long-distance overland trade routes — the so-called “caravan trade”— throughout present day China-Burma-Thailand. These ethnic traders inter-exchanged with the northern Chinese as early as the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) (Steinberg 1985, Giersch 2001).

Tai traders (Burmese Shan, Chinese Shan) have practiced overland and long-distance trading for hundreds of years. There is evidence that many former Shan Tai and Dehong Tai traders, peddlers, and marketers were at the same time peasant traders and artisans, selling their home-produce, agricultural products (grain, fruit, vegetables, meat) or collected and procured goods (salt, wood, herbs, etc) for subsistent economy. They engaged in all types of trade: market peddling, short-distance trade, or even long-distance trade by mule caravans, on which the scale of trade depended on the goods being traded. Kang (1976) experienced these kinds of trade phenomena in the Dehong area during the 1940s. He mentioned that during *Wan Kad* (market day) people came from everywhere to buy and sell things. This included foreign traders (i.e. Chinese, Muslim Chinese, Burmese) from outside, and even villagers from remote mountainous areas. Sir George Scott (1901) was one among others who witnessed the local livelihoods prior to the 1940s. His observations regarding local inhabitants in the Shan state during British colonial times (1880-1910) is significant evidence confirming that Tai traders were in the area.

Scott (1901: 402) writes that,

“The Möng Maü people do a good deal of trade with pack-cattle, both mules and bullocks. The greater volume of it seems to be with Meng Tung, a small Shan State within the Chinese border, and also with Meng Teng, but caravans seem to go fairly regularly to Tang Yan in South Hsen Wi, whither they take opium, iron, vessels from China, and walnuts, which are brought into Meng Ting from Mêng Hâm and Mêng Teng. From Tang Yan, they bring back rice and salt and occasionally piece-goods” (Scott 1901: 402).

Milne (1910: 84-85), mentions that it was remarkable that Shan Tai traders and their households were from across the frontier of Burma and Yunnan. She writes that,

“Shan traders, who spend much time traveling between the Shan States and Yun-nan, generally have two homes, one in British territory, the other in China, and they may have wives in both countries. I know a Shan woman who was so fond of her husband’s son by his Chinese wife that when the boy came to visit her she tried to keep him with her, as she said that she loved him quite as well as her own little girl” (Milne 1910: 84-85).

Other significant works (i.e. Chusit 1989) mention the Tai in general that they have probably done long-distance trading in the past. Sao Saimong Mangrai contends that the Shan Tai were “reputed to be good traders although on a petty scale” (Sao Saimong Mangrai 1965: 8). The Tai were primarily “commercial traders” experienced in caravan trade, like traders of other ethnicities.

Because the Tai people actually are peasant traders, they do not trade apart from their agricultural work. Therefore, there is no classification of Tai traders based on particular occupation like in the present day. Classification of types of Tai traders, however, requires understanding of the scale of trade which relies on classes and on the social organization between male and female. Observed by Milne (1910: 50), in the past, the Shan Tai were divided into what might be called two castes - all who are

related, however, distantly to the *Sao pha* (Tai rulers). The upper class (or “caste”) was the Tai who made their living by agriculture, by silversmithing, or as respectable merchants and traders; the lower class consisted of fishermen, butchers, and all who made/sold intoxicating liquors, kept pigs, or grew opium (Milne 1910: 50).

The Tai traders in the pre-modern state conducted trade in three main categories: long-distance caravan trade, short-distance trade, and marketplace vending.

Long-Distance Caravan Trade: the Fang Family

Here, I illustrate the case of Fang family stories told by *Lung Maigern* (Uncle Maigern), an 84 year-old Dehong Tai who is a descendent of a long-distance trading family. During the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, the Fang family was a noble family connected to the *Sao pha* (Tai rulers) of Muang Khon⁴, of Dehong.

Lung Maigern told me during my fieldwork (pers. comm. December 2004) that,

“When I was young, my dad and relatives always set up caravan teams that carried goods like copper, silver and other commodities from China by mule going south and north. They traveled to the south to Burma - Mandalay, *Nong Sae* - and into the north - Tengyeuh, Tali and Bhamo.⁵ They went to sell goods bought from the north - silver, Chinese silks, copper and brass ware - then they brought other goods back; for example, cotton from *Muang Tae* (several Southern towns of Burma) to sell to Chinese merchants who came from the North.”

⁴ Muang Khon is called Luxi (Mangshi), the capital of Dehong Prefecture nowadays. During the late nineteenth century, Muang Khon was also an independent petty state of the ten Tai states ruled by each *Sao-hpa*, or native chieftain, under the Chinese empire with its authority based in Tengchong. Until the early twentieth century (before the 1954 Communist state), the Tai *Sao-hpa* rulers were still under the Chinese Republic government, but had political and economic independence.

⁵ Bhamo is the principal trade route to China through Namkham. The road was a Kachin track. The whole length of the road from Bhamo to Namkham is forty miles, and runs through the Kachin hills. Shortly after the road was completed numerous caravans traveled over it. The track was then widened and converted into a hill road about twelve feet wide (Scott 1901: 52).

He (and his family) was one of several male traders of Tai royal trade families who have long traded in long-distance journeys along the Yunnan-Burma frontier. He also added that in the past, hundreds of mules were prepared several days before taking a long trip to the south or to the north. Sometimes, long-distance traders went further to Lashio and Mandalay to get several western products. At the same time, they carried Chinese products from the north to sell to customers in the south.

As narrated by *Lung Maigern*, his father and grandfathers always welcomed Chinese merchants traveling from the north to buy goods in their house. During the dry season, particularly on market day, the Fang family house in the center of *Muang Khon* (near the *Sao pha* palace) was usually busy the whole day, because Han Chinese ("Pansea" or Panthay) traders from the north came to visit this house for trade. They unloaded silks, Chinese fabrics, salts, etc, and then brought back cotton fabrics, and products from the south to their homes. Sometimes, mountain-dwelling Chinese and traders of other ethnic groups (Achang, Bulong or Jingpo) climbed down into the valley and met his father for goods exchange.

The story told by *Lung Maigern* is similar to what Sir George Scott observed in the Shan villages of *Muang Mao* (Scott 1901). Grabowsky and Turton (2003: 178-183) reaffirm the scenario of long-distance caravan trade conducted by the Tai. They contend that the Chinese or Shan Chinese caravans facilitated commerce by surmounting huge distances across often dangerous terrain. A single caravan probably contained from 180 to more than 300 mules, carrying commercial goods. They usually traded during the off-season, since they were dealing with difficult overland roads and busy work in the paddy fields (Grabowsky and Turton 2003: 178-183).

Because long-distance trade needed capital investment for purchasing transport animals and trade goods, this kind of trade usually was reserved for the *Sao pha* family or other well-to-do families, whose economic capital was gained from agricultural lands and taxes (on rice and other agricultural products) received from ordinary Tai. As witnessed by Scott (1901:603), the *Myoza* (Burmese Shan ruler)⁶

⁶ The *Myoza* means a ruler in Burmese language. It is the same meaning of *Sao-pha*, a ruler in Dehong Tai of China.

was the chief merchant, and owned five hundred of the eight or nine hundred pack animals available in town. Also, long-distance trade needed a well-organized team to handle the many animal vehicles and to take care of goods. The Tai elite belonging to the *Sao pha* family could access manpower and hire ordinary Tai, particularly professional muleteers, to take care of the trade.

Also, the case of the Fang family has shown that long-distance trade and economic activities usually required males, rather than females. *Luang Maigern* told me that he had never heard any females being involved with trade which occurred far from home. He continued,

“My father always said that women should stay home, taking care of the children. Long trips were for many days, passing through dangerous forests and high mountains in which women and children, like me, would not be allowed. So my elder sister could never go anywhere, except to the market in the village, and I could never travel with my father until I was a young man.” (cite as pers. comm. December 2004)

In summary, long-distance trade was usually dominated by males and relied upon social relationships among households and kin of upper classes to form the travel teams. When they got products from the south, they mainly dispersed their products to Chinese merchants from northern China, who in turn transported the goods from northern China into the South.

Short-Distance Traders

Normally, short-distance trade was engaged in by occasional peasant traders who organized trade during the off-season. This kind of trade was different from long-distance trade in terms of scale of trade, numbers of pack animals, and types of animals used. Short-distance traders usually organized short journeys to bigger towns. The peasant traders loaded their goods in small amounts of mules or cattle and planned their trip to last just a few days during off-periods in the dry season. Such trade was usually handled by ordinary village Tai in who had a few mules or cattle.

The Tai villagers would go with neighbors or relatives to other central towns and principalities - Bhamo, Pangsai, Namkham, etc. - in order to exchange their textiles, vegetables, rice, and cigarettes, and return with cotton, Buddha images and foreign goods. They used mules, cattle and baskets for carrying products; exactly which depended on how many goods they had, and how big the groups were.

One of my informants, *Lung Soisang*, an 83 year-old Shan Tai male trader, who originally lived in Namkham (60 miles from Bhamo) told me that when he was young (during the 1930s), he and his relatives and some close friends usually packed goods (agricultural goods, hand-wrought silver, cotton, clothes, British textiles, salted fish, scissors) on mules and traveled through the mountain passes into Bhamo, to join the market day in Bhamo. When he assembled a team for a trade journey, he usually oversaw his own three mules. His friends and relatives had a total of five mules, going for market day. As in this case, short-distance traders usually went and dispersed their products in periodic markets held on market days in the bigger towns. Tien Ju-Kang (1986) observed that the Tai in Dehong and Namkham usually traveled throughout this area in order to buy and sell goods, like Buddha images, Buddha statues and so on.

This type of trade has generally been reserved for the ordinary Tai who owns a small number of mules or cattle. They usually travel and trade accompanied by a group of friends or relatives. Sometimes this type of trader has specific skills in silversmithing, goldsmithing, or blacksmithing. These artisans or craftsmen, in some villages - particularly those who lived near the *Sao pha*'s house - usually were the *Sao pha*'s artisans. They traveled to different villages, selling their silver or gold Tai-style handmade products - for example, necklaces, buttons, bracelets, and ornaments - to other Tai villagers.

Market Vendors

Scott (1901: 603) mentioned that the Tai were keen marketers. He gave one example of the Shan Tai village in Namkham. He recounted that in Namkham, trade was entirely in the hands of the Shan Tai. One quarter of the population was engaged

in trade, either as hucksters or in a more ambitious way. There were a good many silversmiths engaged in the manufacturing of the huge silver bracelets which the Chinese-Shan (Dehong Tai) women wear (Scott 1901: 603)

Among the Tai inhabitants along the Yunnan-Burma frontier, Tai petty traders in the markets were usually female household members. The reason for this was partly that the household needed some outside basic consumer goods, and partly that the market was near the house, in which case the female could take care of household business, agriculture, and children all at the same time. The existence of Tai females' roles in the market is confirmed by *Pa Maikam* (Aunt Maikam), an 84 year-old Shan Tai woman living in Muse. She told me, in the past, generally females needed to raise their children and take care of domestic work as much as working on the farms. They could only visit the markets in their own village or in villages nearby on market day. The market also provided females a venue for socializing; trading in the market allowed women to gossip and to arrange marriages for their children.

Sometimes there was widespread trading between the lowlands and the highlands of the interior. Highland wood, bamboo and lacquer were traded for lowland fish sauce, dried fish, salt and lime. During the markets days held every three or five or fifteen days, imported goods were distributed by traders to the villages of the interior. Chinese merchants traded up, carrying salt, Chinese earthenware, textiles and opium from the north to the south. From there, peddlers and small traders set out for the market in the south.

However, a few females probably went further than normal to markets in other towns. This was the case for *Pa Moeifong*, a 60 year-old Shan Tai petty trader, originally living in Muse. She said that when she was young, she and her relatives usually gathered in groups, walking through the forests and mountains into *Muang Wan*, a town nearby where many Dehong Tai lived, in order to sell domestic goods like betel, cigarettes, as well as gold and silver leaf (for merit making and paying respect to Buddhist images). She put all her goods into one basket, and carried them to another town. Another case was of *Pa Hueankam*, an 84 year-old Dehong Tai woman living in *Muang Khon*. She recalled that as a child seven decades ago (during

the 1920's) in *Muang Khon*, her mother usually went to market during market day in order to sell woven clothes, turbans, and *Sin* (traditional skirt or sarongs), and bought some sweets for her. In still another case, *Pa Jaisang*, an 82 year-old Dehong Tai elder living in central *Muang Khon*, told me that she went to sell vegetables, and came back home with needles and some forest products collected by the mountain-dwelling Han Chinese and the Jingpo, who had caravanned their vegetable products by mule to the market.

In conclusion, trade by the Tai generally took place either within localized markets or in more distant areas with different economic structures and agricultural zones. In former times, usually the Tai males took charge of long journeys through jungles and high mountains, encountering danger and adventure at the same time. Tai women usually played their role within the local markets because their households needed basic consumer goods and, if the market was nearby, the women could take care of household business, agriculture and children all at the same time.

As discussed, the eighteenth century to the early nineteenth century exhibited a growth in frontier commerce as exemplified by growth in caravan trade in luxury goods. Within this are two important developments: the growth of local marketing into the larger scale of regional markets, and the integration of Sino-Southeast Asian borderlands into a more elaborate long distance trade network. The growth of trade development at that time was overshadowed, however, by the growth of western colonialism at the frontier.

3.2 The Frontier and Overland Trade in a Colonial Context

Although the Yunnan-Burma frontier was recognized as important trade area since the East India Company established a trade depot at Bhamo in 1619 (Christian 1940), it is not until 200 years later that the Europeans engaged broadly in trans-frontier trade with China, especially from Bhamo.

Prior to the second half of the twentieth century, the Yunnan-Burma frontier was one of the main areas in Southeast Asia that was colonized by Western Europeans. Until

its dissolution in 1858, the British East India Company was the key to expansion of the British Empire in Asia. While French colonizers dominated the Mekong, this frontier was mainly colonized by the British, whose administrative rules were applied throughout Burma (Lower and Upper Burma) during the late half of the nineteenth century. Burma was colonized by the British, and the Burma-Yunnan frontier was seen as a resource for maximizing British profits and benefits. Trade routes and railways were planned for British economic benefit, as reported in many documents of British travelers and explorers that were submitted to their government.

The attention British colonizers paid to the frontier was similar to France's attraction to the Mekong (Osborne 1996), where they hoped that trade and commercial development would open a gateway to China and allow access to the abundant valuable resources of the frontier. The Yunnan-Burma frontier was viewed by the British as a fertile area for commerce and international trade to China. The trade routes by which local traders could reach China, India, and Indochina, and the abundance of resources such as minerals, gold, silver, jade, and agricultural products attracted the British from the very beginning.

The prominence and significance of the frontier to Western Europeans in regard to trade and commerce was explicitly illustrated by early western explorers whose expeditions were funded by the British governments in England and India. For example, a letter that General Fytche wrote to Lord Mayo, Viceroy of India in 1869, is clear evidence of British interest in trade to China. He wrote, "Burma has other and strong grounds for attention. It promises to furnish a highway to China" (Fytche 1878: 120-121 cf. Christian 1940: 180).

Much of the literature written by European explorers and governors evidence the British desire to expand their commerce into China. For example, Colonel Sir Edward Sladen (1871) reported on his expedition to explore the trade route to China via Bhamo.⁷ In 1868 he was placed in charge of a political mission sent to the Chinese frontier to

⁷ Colonel Sir Edward Sladen proceeded via Bhamo to Maulmein or Teng-yueh Chu, the frontier town of the Chinese province of Yunnan, where he stayed six weeks. But his journey was prevented from proceeding further by the disturbed state of the country. The mission reached Bhamo on its return journey, having acquired much valuable information about an almost unknown country.

inquire into the cause of the cessation of overland trade between Burma and China, and to obtain information with respect to the Shans, Kachins, and Panthays.

The explorers, and their expedition on the trade route to China via Bhamo, played a significant role in suggesting the British government improve their commerce policies. Bhamo, as the main terminus of the British from Upper Burma into China, became a base for surveys by some remarkable explorers, i.e. John Anderson (1871)⁸, Archibald Ross Colquhoun (1883)⁹ and Dr. Clement Williams (1868)¹⁰.

The books and reports written by the western explorers reflect the colonial visions of the frontier as a profound resource for commerce. For example, Anderson, a naturalist on an expedition to Upper Burma and Yunnan during 1868 and 1875, wrote "It is desirable that every judicious effort should be made to open to British commerce the great high-way to China, by the valley of the Tapeng" (Anderson 1871: 3). Colquhoun (1988: 238) wrote about "the rich condition of Yunnan" where "some millions of people are there to be clothed with British piece-goods, and to receive the manufactures of England." He claimed, "In return they will give us the finest tea drunk in China, cotton, silk, petroleum and the most useful and precious metals, to an extent which will be enormous when European skill shall effect their development" (Colquhoun 1988: 238).

Britain's extreme interest in the China route was evident when, in 1860, the Manchester Chamber of Commerce exhorted the home government on the necessity of opening the Moulmein-China route for the British textile trade. In consequence, Sir Arthur Phayre was sent again to Ava in 1862, negotiating a treaty which permitted British residents to live in Upper Burma, restricted duties on imports from China, and prohibited

⁸ John Anderson, (1833-1900) was a Scottish zoologist. He was born in Edinburgh, studied medicine in 1861, and went to India in the same year of 1861. He was the first curator of the Indian Museum at Calcutta in 1865 and held the position until 1887. During his time in India, he made several collecting expeditions to China and Burma. In 1867 he accompanied Colonel Sir Edward Sladen as a naturalist on an expedition to Upper Burma and Yunnan.

⁹ Archibald Ross Colquhoun spent most of his furlough engaged in planning for an expedition with C. Wahab through southern China and the Chinese Shan states. This 1881-1882 expedition explored the territory from Canton to Bhamo in order to trace the best route for a railway connecting Burma and China.

¹⁰ Dr. Clement Williams was the first political agent at Mandalay for the Chief Commissioner of British Burma during the years of 1862-1865. He published one publication, as a blue book, titled "Through Burmah to Western China".

the levy of any tax or transit dues on goods destined for China overland (Christian 1940: 178).

Besides the economic incentives and trade routes, the abundant mineral resources were seen as a source of wealth on the frontier that the British colonizers could develop into a larger scale of international trade with the Chinese Kingdom.

Colquhoun (1988: 217) further reported that,

“There can be no doubt as to the mineral wealth of the province. On our way through the south and west we met with numbers of caravans carrying coal, iron and copper in ingots, as well as silver in small quantities. At Dali, we saw large quantities of gold being prepared for the Burma market by being beaten out into a leaf. Gold, copper, salt, iron, silver and lead-ore mines were passed by us on our way through the south and west while coal, copper, lead, zinc, tin, iron and silver are to be found in several places throughout the province” (Colquhoun 1988: 217).

Meanwhile, the French were extending their own markets and were actively doing surveys of their own on the frontier, looking at the competition for these new markets. Dautremere, long a Consul for France in Rangoon during British Colonial times, had described his expedition in his 1913 book regarding “Burma under the British rule”. He explored trade activity, routes, and organization. He detailed his experiences of early overland trade along the frontier, traveling the important routes from Burma into China through western Yunnan across the Shan State in three lines: (1) from Tali (or Dali) by Tengyueh to Bhamo (2) from Tali through Simao and Kengtung and (3) from Yunnan-Fu through Talang and Simao. Dautremere suggested that, of these three, the first route (from Tali by Tengyueh to Bhamo) was the most important. The route was from Bhamo to Namkham, it crossed the Shweli River (Mao River), and transversed the Shan-Chinese State of Ruili, Chefeng, and Mangshi to the Chinese town of Longling. From Longling two routes could be followed leading to Yung-chang Fu (Yongchang nowadays), where they re-joined the main road to Tali. The most difficult roads and the highest mountains in

Yunnan were especially those between Tali and Bhamo. They traversed the upper valleys of the *Mae Kawng*, the Salween, and the Shweli (Dautremer 1913: 324-328).

Trade competition with the French was mentioned by scholars and even in the media. For example, an editorial in the *Saturday Review* pointed to the advantages of the trans-Burma route, stating that “the French are threatening us on the Upper Cambodia” (Christian 1940: 181). Colquhoun (1988: 290) wrote “the field for a new market is to be worth securing and, with the French pressing upon our flank at Tonquin, there is no time to be lost. Exploration is what is required to inform us as to the best means of securing this new market for British industry”.

Colquhoun (1988: 191) also told the British government that:

“With the French in Tonquin making persistent efforts to be before us in securing the trade of southern China, it is necessary that we should neglect no chance to gain the command of this market and retain the place we have held so long in the mercantile position of nation. Parliamentary papers show that all the officials to whom the administration of British Burmah has been confided including such names as Sir Arthus Phayre, General Fytche, Sir Ashley Eden and Sir Charles Aitchison - have urged the importance of the discovery of some such trade-route” (Colquhoun 1988: 191).

As seen in these documents, the British had shown how they followed the trade route used by local ethnic traders as a main route in their exploration of the region; they denote the gateway by which European commerce and influence could be sure to penetrate into inner China and India.

The idea of using the frontier area to reach China and India was specific to the British who were working by that time to find good transportation to better serve commerce. A railway project was the first plan which obviously reflected British interest, with at least two explorers who searched for a railway route from Burma to China. While Captain Sprye proposed a trade route up the Salween to China by way of the Karenni hills to Kinghung (present day Jinghong) on the Mekong and thence on to Simao; Colquhoun's

alternate railway plan was proposed to the British government in the 1880s (Christian 1940). Colquhoun (1988: 217) proposed connecting Rangoon and Maulmein (present day Mawlamyaing in Mon state) with Zimme (Chiang Mai) and Kiang-Huang (Jinghong); the effect upon trade and population would have been simply enormous. In this plan, Colquhoun therefore suggested a railway with two lines: one extending into India, and the second from the Shan country to Bangkok, continuing thence to the frontier of Yunnan. Colquhoun wrote, "The extension of the railway from Toungoo...would pass through the richest rice-producing plains of Upper Burmah, and tap all the passes connecting Upper Burmah with the central and northern Shan countries" (Colquhoun 1988:217).

Dautremere (1913), a French official, commented that the British railway plan was a way for the English to attempt to solve the problem of resource access and commerce development. Dautremere also compared the railway solution that the British chose to a similar plan the French chose on the Mengtzu side, by which the French had improved their lines of penetration into Yunnan by constructing a railway from Laokai onwards.

However, high mountains and upper valleys, and difficult conditions of land routes along the road, became big obstacles for the railway as planned by the British. A depiction of these obstacles and other troubles to trade was illustrated by Colquhoun (1988: 190) in his book on exploration in Southwest China,

"Owing to the absence of navigable water communication throughout Yunnan and the Shan country, and the evil condition of all the land routes, together with the great length of carriage, the cost of European articles is nearly prohibitory, and only such goods as matches, knives and needles, that can be conveyed in small parcels, are to be had at reasonable prices. In the end, the Burma railway as planned by the British had to be abandoned beyond Lashio" (Colquhoun (1988: 190).

The decline of overland trade along the frontier was caused by several factors, but there is no doubt that a main factor was the direct and indirect impact of Western European forces operating in the frontier during the time. Although the Panthay rebellion against the

Qing Dynasty of the Chinese Kingdom during the late nineteenth century consequently affected the atmosphere of overland trade, a more significant factor obstructing overland trade was the British seizure of Upper Burma in 1885, when the important last caravan stop at Bhamo fell into British hands (Forbes and Henley 1997).

3.3 Transformation of the Yunnan-Burma Border and Overland Trade

Commercial interest and trade activities on the Yunnan-Burma frontier paused during the Second World War, particularly during the Second Sino-Japanese war (1937-1945) in the region. From the war against the Japanese Empire, the Chinese state gradually changed its views on the frontier -- from "barbarian" lands where native chiefs ruled their people, to a sense of "territorial control" and the sovereignty of the modern state. Litton, a British consular officer who examined the region when the British were attempting to open the entire Yunnan-Burma frontier after the Annexation of Upper Burma in 1886, wrote he thought the Chinese never recognized boundaries because of the un-demarcated frontier he witnessed, where the Wa tribes and the Tai considered themselves autonomous (Norins 1939: 70). Gradually, new Chinese concepts of territory and sovereignty took root because of military pressure from the 1895 Sino-Japanese war, as well as the political demands of the Qing Dynasty reforms (1902-1909), which had created the administrative structures for a national policy and new types of education which ironically led to the fall of the monarchy in 1911.

But not until the rising tide of Chinese nationalism under the Kuomintang government from the second Sino-Japanese War and World War II did China develop the idea of being a "nation". From from this time, the Chinese state under the Kuomintang attempted to unite China under one central government and build a strong, united country. Duara (2005: 35-54) strongly asserts that it was during this time when the Japanese Empire occupied northeast China and created the puppet state of Manchuko (circa 1932) that the politically backward, peripheral, and dispensable frontier suddenly came to be seen as "lost territory". In this sense, the old territory that was formerly of little concern began to be viewed as "lost territory". "Lost territory", part of the process of modern state-building which Anderson called "the specter of comparisons", is a process whereby the ideal of nationalism is deeply conditioned by comparisons with those of more "civilized"

or more “powerful” others (Anderson 1988). In the process, nationalist discourse often calls back to an original ancient nation, people, myth and culture (Smith 1991). Chinese nationalism is thus imaginary in this sense of its ghostly or ancient ancestor-type presence - some ancient wellspring of identity that can always be claimed in the service of enforced solidarity and unity. During the war, Chinese nationalism created a political fervor, a sense of “territorial belonging” which provided the Han Chinese patriots with deep resources for defending “their motherland” (Ong 2007: 8).

Furthermore, the Yunnan-Burma frontier and its trade routes were involved with the war with the Japanese because the Burma Road was one of the main routes transporting the weapons and troops of the European Allies, the United States, and the United Kingdom.

During the Sino-Japanese War in 1937, the Burma Road and its connection to China increased in importance for transporting war supplies that had landed in Rangoon and were to be shipped by railroad to Lashio. The Burma Road that China had built with the assistance of the U.S. allies was a well-defined road system in the southwest quarter of Yunnan, where formerly there were mostly tracks and caravan trails. It constituted the overland supply route stretching from northern India through Burma and into China. Although it is uncertain if the Burma Road aimed for cross-border trade as deliberate, nonetheless the road network now links various border towns, many *near*-border towns, as well as designated border marketplaces to the province as a whole (Nittayaporn 2004).

The Burma Road passes through several towns in Yunnan: from Kunming, to Baoshan, Longlin, Mangshi, Chefang and Wanding before getting into Burma. Mangshi, Chefang and Wanding are where the Tai people have long been settled and have used the same basic route for their caravan trade. There were stories told by local people living on the border from the 1930s onward regarding their economic livelihood. *Paka Kamcheun*, an 84 year-old Dehong Tai elder, recalled her life during the 1930's,

“We had to run away into rural villages, staying with our relatives there. We sometimes hid ourselves in the jungle near the village when Japanese soldiers came to patrol regularly. Over there, we lived struggling with hardship. We grew

some vegetables and rice only for survival; we did not sell them in the market. We did not see any *Pansea* (Muslim Chinese merchants) coming into *Muang Khon* because this town was a Japanese garrison”(pers. comm. January 2005).

In another case, *Sangkam*, an 87 year-old Tai woman living in Ruili told me about Japanese soldiers that had rode horses to her house. They gave her father Japanese banknotes in exchange for food (i.e. vegetables, chickens and pigs) to serve the Japanese army. Later, the Japanese general came to her house again, with a bag of Japanese banknotes to buy ten mules to transport their supplies, in order to retreat from the advancing enemy. The Japanese army then burned their military bases and some villagers' houses before they left.

Local people experienced many difficult years on the frontier under the Sino-Japanese War and later political conflicts between the modern states of China and Burma. Their livelihoods and small-scale trade between villages and towns had been interrupted and forever altered. The frontier where once local inhabitants and local ethnic traders could travel between villages, towns and principalities for their economic and social needs changed with the new sense of “border”, with the influence of western forces further demarcating territorial lines and sovereign realities. The frontier where local inhabitants had loosely categorized themselves by ethnic and spatial boundaries based on tribes and principalities has been closed since that time.

For the three decades after World War II and the later Cultural Revolution in China, the Yunnan-Burma border was virtually closed by the Chinese and Burmese states. From the early 1950s until the Cultural Revolution, most borders as well as border trade in China was subject to the control of state-run commercial agencies. Many local inhabitants and traders moved away from their long-time homes. Some of them (as was the case of Dehong Tai traders in Mangshi) fled from civil war and political difficulties, moving into rural Burma or Thailand. Some of them were forced to join guerilla groups. Other local inhabitants faced harsh economic difficulties. Then, for more than a decade (from 1965 to 1978), most trade was cut off. Local trade in border area markets was closely restricted all the way until 1980's. After the 1980s, controls on local trade were progressively relaxed and “semi-official trade” was allowed to operate under fewer controls. This had special

benefits for township and county enterprises seeking to expand production and so to increase their income from taxes and fees.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has taken an historical approach in examining the transformation of the Yunnan-Burma frontier into a modern border. It examines significant historical stages, including periods of western colonialism and modern state formation. Fundamental change was driven by “Western colonialism” dominated by the British during the late eighteenth to early twentieth century, in addition to “internal colonialism” which was controlled by the concepts of “territorial colonialism” as imposed by the modern states of the twentieth century. This chapter has demonstrated the transformation of overland trade on the Yunnan-Burma frontier from colonial times to states’ formation which is concluded as below.

Firstly, overland trade and ethnic trade activities during the pre-modern state period until colonial times can be characterized as a type of the “trans-frontier trade” where the roles of local ethnic traders are a significant medium making the bridge to overcome exchange of food and other goods among various economic units (i.e., villages, towns and principalities).

Taking the case of Tai traders into account, this chapter has demonstrated their social systems in regard to their trade during the pre-modern state, examining long-distance caravan trade, short-distance trade and marketers. As evidenced by Tai traders, the trade exchange practiced by the Tai generally took place either within the locale of the market or in a more distant area with a different economic structure of towns and another agricultural zone. The short-distance and long-distance trade in former times was usually maintained by a group of Tai men, who encountered danger and adventure throughout their journeys. However, the long-distance trade was distinguished in that it was usually managed by the upper class of the Tai society. The upper class mostly consisted of the *Sao pha* (Tai ruler) or those who had a connection with *Sao pha* families; these people had packs of cattle and transport animals for trade investment. For the marketers, Tai women usually played their role within the market partly because of the household needs and

partly because the market was nearby the house thus allowing for the female to take care of household business, agricultural and children at the same time.

Secondly, the “trans-frontier trade” conducted by ethnic traders has changed and shifted in the political evolution of colonizers and modern states. During colonial times, the Yunnan-Burma frontier was where what was once trans-boundary trade conducted by ethnic traders became the area of commercial expansion of colonialism, overlapping with the trans-frontier trade conducting by ethnic traders. Abundant minerals and fertile resources as well as existing trade routes that would allow for goods to reach China and India, motivated Western colonialists, mainly the British India (compared to the French colonizers in Indochina) to improve trade routes for resource access. For the colonizers, it was an “economic desire” to turn the frontier into a highway to China and Indochina. Exploring the old trade routes and railway building plans on the frontier provide evidence that the British and the French had aimed for the same vision of commercial penetration into China.

Thirdly, in the second phase that would transform China into a modern nation, the war throughout the region and the political anxiety of the colonizers and particularly the formation of the Chinese modern state reshaped the frontier and their peripheral inhabitants into the “territorial border”. Ethnic trade, particularly long-distance and short-distance trade conducted by ethnic traders, had been obstructed and eventually declined in a consistent political response to changes and varied civil conflicts among ethnic mutineers, and communist ideals, respectively. Not until the end of antagonism and the beginning of the economic reforms of the Chinese modern state, did the political-economic atmosphere of the Yunnan-Burma border begin to involve cooperation between states. With competing claims for power and economic pressure from the wider region to open the border, the Chinese state, in its intentions to deterritorialize the border for economic development, has essentially played a key role in transforming the border, in creating the “flexible economic border”.