

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

I would like to begin this concluding chapter with a statement from an elderly Karen woman: “We have hope as long as we have the Salween River.” This statement is emblematic – it is not only a pithy reflection of an elderly woman whose life has been interwoven with the struggle, but it is also an insight into the intimacy that local people share with the Salween River. The Salween is no longer merely a source of the local people’s livelihoods, but it has become more than that; it represents a hope, a struggle, and a challenge. From this, I am concerned with border people’s negotiation processes, those that take place beyond the Salween borderlands and allow a broader possibility for them to invent a strategy which functions as a connection between diverse groups of people, from many places and on different scales – to enhance their network and strengthen their struggle for a common goal. The issues and questions posed by the border people’s everyday survival struggles are the central points of this study.

The Salween River has been targeted by capitalist markets and states as a resource frontier – to generate capitalist expansion along the Thai-Burmese border in a form of frontier capitalization. Frontier capitalization at the Salween borderlands, in terms of social construction of ‘nature’, can be characterized as the commodification of the Salween resources, namely forests and rivers, that have been transformed into commodities for trade in particular markets. It has taken place in that the landscape of Salween borderlands have been read by the capitalist market and the states as empty lands where they can turn nature into a commodity, which in turn facilitates and generates economic growth and progress. This commodification takes place in different forms, and has been produced by different forces at various points in history. Previously, the commodification of the Salween forests occurred when forests were transformed into a source of timber for trade on the global commercial timber market. Thereafter, the commodification of the Salween River has been carried out by transforming the River into a source for hydro-electricity for trade on the regional energy market. In order to understand how and to what degree the border people can

survive along the Salween borderlands and negotiate with multiple fields of power relations, I analyzed the frontier capitalization proceeds in the Salween borderlands. Contextually, I have explored the political and ecological dynamics of producing nature, especially forests and rivers, along the Salween borderlands, within the context of neo-liberalism, and where a number of stakeholders are involved, via the competition between the border people and corporate and state sectors for control and access to the Salween resources.

The process of commodification of the Salween resources has been continually carried out by different forces during different periods of time. However, the commodification of the Salween River in the current neo-liberal period is more complicated than the previous commodification of the forests that took place during the colonial period, between the 19th and 20th centuries. In the colonial era, the main forces which had taken control of Burma and the Salween forests through military force were the British Empire and European timber firms.¹ By taking control of the Burmese state and the Salween forests the imperial state and its national firms were able to directly exploit the Salween forests. In the postcolonial era, it is said that the Thai and Burmese states (and to some extent the Chinese state), state-owned enterprises, and Burmese companies supported by the military, are all involved actors. Since capital does not belong to a single nation-state, there are other global or international capitalists involved. The global capitalists aspire to exploit the resources with the support of the states, because on their own, global capitalists cannot claim legitimacy over resources. These transnational corporate and state sectors have manipulated economic integration or regionalization to ensure regional energy security and gain benefits through the frontier capitalization process. Meanwhile, the border people have tried to create a negotiated space in order to deal with the capitalist market and states, to articulate with the everyday violence and cultural politics they have experienced and encountered. In this regard, I have analyzed the everyday life practices of border people to transform their border livelihoods into a border identity and redefine border livelihoods to deal with the conflicts taking place.

¹ The British Indian government in Burma and the European timber firms were replaced by the Japanese Empire and Japanese timber firms during World War II between 1942 and 1945.

7.1 Major Findings of the Study

Despite the Salween borderlands being at the margins of society, a place in which neo-liberalism seems a far away practice or policy driver, the Thai and Burmese states are in the business of creating new territories there, in order to subdue ethnic politics and to control and exploit resources. Capitalism has also entered the borderlands in the form of intensive frontier capitalization, and in this transnational world, frontier capitalization can be characterized as the commodification of the Salween's resources, a process embedded in state politics and the wider ethnic politics of the area. As commodification of the Salween River has occurred as a part of the neo-liberalism process, so capitalism has become more intense at the borderlands, and is replete with state strategies and market exclusion, with implementation of the 'powers of exclusion' being two-fold in nature. On the one hand, the Thai and Burmese states have used brute force to generate violence in people's everyday lives, and on the other hand, the capital and state sectors have exercised domination by constructing multiple discourses, as a sophisticated form of technology used to 'civilize the margins', plus create 'functional territorialization' and an 'anti-politics machine'. They claim to have brought development to the borderlands – to benefit the people living there, but through their actions have instead excluded the border people from their local resources. Through both multiple discourses and brute force, the capitalist market and the states have thus redefined the people's 'imperceptible naked lives', confirming that they are powerless and have been rendered invisible – not a part of the nation-state's politics. Therefore, the Salween borderlands seem to be empty lands, and the Salween's resources have slipped from the hands of the border people. However, these border dwellers have not been submissive; they have fought using various strategies to redefine themselves, to become visible as political actors and to protect their livelihoods. The findings of this study can be classified into three main parts, as follows.

The first key finding of my study is that frontier capitalization at the Salween borderlands has proceeded along neo-liberal market lines, related to the states' territorialization processes and to ethnic politics in Burma. It is a complicated and contradictory process that has led to commodification of the Salween River area, a process not just about turning the River into a hydro-electricity hub, but also about a

variety of political practices that contradict and overlap with each other. In general, a neo-liberal approach involves an attempt to utilize natural resources for capitalist purposes, and the market's commodification of nature enhances the international's community's function, leading to transnational enclosure, and brings about de-territorialization in the form of nation-state abatement. Normally, neo-liberalism is believed to enfeeble states; however, here I believe it has served a reverse function in which the states involved have become stronger. In turn, the Thai and Burmese states have encouraged neo-liberalism, including at the borderlands, in order to carry out commodity production and maximize profits. In spite of the de-territorialization of state control, commodification of the Salween River has strengthened state power in the form of state re-territorialization. The Burmese government has been unable to control the Salween borderlands, an area occupied by ethnic groups; however, the government has been able to (re-)territorialize state control over resources in these ethnic insurgent zones, and also subdue the ethnic minority insurgencies, by making agreements with transnational dam investors, who have subsequently implemented dam construction activities. In this sense, the Salween dams mean not only economic returns, but also political projects of Burma that eliminate ethnic insurgent groups' resistances. Thus, it can be said that the more the state opens up the market for capital, the stronger it becomes. The Burmese state, in association with the Thai state and state-backed companies, has used frontier capitalization as a tool to re-territorialize state control over local resources and eliminate ethnic politics at the margins. In this sense, the capitalist market and states have developed a three-pronged strategy using the Salween dam projects, and in so doing, the capitalist market's commodification of the Salween River has created transnational enclosure, a process which has led to the state's re-territorialization and has brought-about a de-politicization of ethnic politics in the borderlands. Nevertheless, the states' and/or market's frontier capitalization's commodification of the Salween River has not represented unquestioned hegemony, for it has been contested by the border people, both in Burma and Thailand, and also local and international NGOs have competed against it. Therefore, the market and the states have had to develop a three-pronged strategy through the commodity production of nature, transnational enclosure and the states' re-territorialization and de-politicization of ethnic politics; however, their

strategies and practices have involved politics within which various actors have come to interact.

Frontier capitalization is the result of the process of transnational exclusion, in which development discourse and brute force are used to exclude border dwellers from access to local resources. These processes are discursive practices used subtly by the capital and state sectors via development discourse, and explicitly through the application of brute force to oppress and exclude the border people from natural resources in the Salween borderlands area. Three subtle exclusion processes, including ‘civilizing’ the Salween, ‘rationalizing’ the Salween’ and ensuring the border people are submissive, have been combined to produce transnational enclosure (see Chapter 3).

The first process used by the Thai and Burmese states has been to ‘civilize’ the margins – claiming that the Salween borderlands are marginal regions and that the border people there are uncivilized, and; therefore, that they need to be ‘developed’ in order to bring them better living conditions and guide them to *siwilai*. To civilize the margins and to respond to the needs of regional economic integration, the states have employed a ‘civilizing the margins’ discourse to enclose the borderland areas.

In the second process, the Thai and Burmese states have rationalized the Salween River in terms of the ‘functional territorialization’ of state control; to undermine local resource control and management by prohibiting the border people from accessing resources and prescribing energy production activities in the area - to serve the nation’s and the region’s prosperity. The state territorialization process, using state politics as a tool, has excluded the border people from access to the local resources and also legitimized state and capitalist claims and authority over them, until finally the Salween borderlands are now being regulated by state authorities and backed by state-run enterprises.

Under the third process, the states and the state-backed enterprises have begun to implement large-scale Salween dam projects and alternative development schemes, as an “anti-politics machine,” to make the border people submissive and to sway rebellious ethnic groups away from opposition to the Burmese government and the dam construction activities in the Salween borderlands. The Thai state and the EGAT have introduced small and community development projects and used *khwaam charoen*

and the Thai King's 'sufficiency economy' theory to approach the border communities and persuade them to join their development programs. In addition, the EGAT has promoted Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) to bolster its image and has also exercised a philanthropic approach within the local communities. These discursive practices have given birth to dam projects that have created a very real level of exclusion, turning the Salween River into a hydro-electricity producer, and prohibiting border people from accessing its resources, removing the border people's struggles and eliminating the ethnic groups' resistances.

In order to overcome and remove the border people's struggles and resistance, and continue the Salween dam projects, the Thai and Burmese states have used brute force, as state violence, as well as silent violence, to reinforce the state of powerlessness felt by the border people as part of their 'naked lives'. As a result, they now despair of their lives and feel hopeless and without protection, for under the threat and danger of violence they are unable to strive for survival (see Chapter 4). Since these processes are embedded in a neo-liberal market and state violence mechanism, the Salween dam construction activities and the threats, danger and violence cannot be separated. As war and hydropower dam development become entwined, so the Salween dam projects extend the political conflict that already exists between the ethnic armed groups and the Burmese troops, as well as the conflicts taking place over resource access between the corporate sector and the states, and local people. The state authorities have attempted to turn the Salween borderlands into a space of capital, so that they may be able to proceed with their plans to make the border people submissive, for once submissive they can be excluded from access to resources, plus ethnic politics in Burma can be de-politicized. Therefore, frontier capitalization, state territorialization and ethnic politics in Burma are intertwined in the sense that capital expansion towards the Salween borderlands has not only facilitated transnational enclosure, but also strengthened the state and de-politicized the ethnic insurgencies. As the result, border people have found themselves, not only excluded from resources, but also dehumanized and given 'imperceptible naked lives', plus the ethnic nationalist movements around the Salween borderlands have been weakened and damaged.

Secondly, I have found that, in response to the ambiguity of the Salween borderlands, the border dwellers have attempted to make clear their identity as border people, as Salween people and as citizens. Based on identity (re-)construction, they have had to redefine their border livelihoods and citizenship, having lost their position as political actors since Burma became independent in 1948, and with their livelihoods since threatened by the capitalist market and by state exclusion activities. In particular, the Burmese state has taken the border dwellers out of Burmese nation-state politics, having not been a part of the Union of Burma for over six decades, and wishes to use the dam construction activities to suppress those ethnic groups who have become emboldened enough to politically resist the Burmese government in more recent times. The construction of the Salween dams will cause immense insecurity among border livelihoods, and will also destroy ethnic nationalist movements. To achieve this, the Thai and Burmese states have reinforced their power through use of a development discourse – as a sophisticated form of technology, and through the use of brute force at the Thai-Burmese border. On the one hand, those who have had to struggle politically have found themselves under a discourse of development and have faced threats and violence as part of their everyday lives, whilst on the other hand they have also found themselves not a part of Burma - not being citizens. Therefore, the state has taken their citizenship away from them in order to exclude them from the political space developing in the country, plus their livelihoods are being threatened by the capitalist market and by state exclusion activities. If they lose their political actor position and their livelihoods, they will lose sight of exactly who they are; however, they are not submissive, for they have attempted to fight for a political position and for participation in the Union of Burma, and have begun to negotiate with the capitalist market and with state agencies through the production of space and a sense of belonging. As people with little power at the Thai-Burmese border, these people have had to manipulate their lives in order to create a space for negotiation – a space from which to negotiate with and contest the capitalist market and state agencies. The border people have used their physical, social and cultural spaces to compete with the capitalist market and state activities; to protect their political actor position and gain access to the Salween borderlands. They have turned the Salween borderlands, both the forests and rivers as bio-physical

spaces, into their livelihoods, and it is through the contested meanings of the forests and fish that the Salween borderlands have become social spaces or contested spaces, those constructed to contest the meaning of hydro-electric commodity produced by the capitalist market and the states. Livelihoods, citizenship and identity are further related to each other, and in terms of cultural space, the border people have sought to express their lives, to be visible and be a part of nation-state politics. Social memory, local history and cultural lore have also been used to shape their sense of belonging and form a border identity. They, and in particular the Karen, also share a common culture, with ethnic ties spanning state boundaries and with shared resource-based livelihoods. They perceive themselves as “Salween people” who live in the Salween borderlands and intimately experience the Salween River on a daily basis; they are people with a history (see Chapter 5). In addition, the border dwellers in the Salween borderlands share a common feeling as “border people,” those who have been suppressed by the Burmese state authorities over a long period. These border dwellers have attempted to secure a political-actor position as Burmese citizens within the nation-state, for if they can secure a position as political actors or citizens, they will be able to participate in the national polity and in national development activities, or even gain self-determination (see Chapter 4). In so doing, they have resisted the Salween dam construction activities, because both their livelihoods are now threatened and they have had their positions within the nation-state political framework suspended. In response to this, they have created a cultural space in which border identity has been re-formulated, providing them with a negotiated space in support of their struggle.

The Karen people have proclaimed, in terms of place-making, that the Salween borderlands are their homeland, by referring to community histories. They have also used their legacy as frontier guards to improve their position in relation to the Thai state. The landscape of the Salween has been interpreted, for political purposes, as a buffer zone by the Karen – and they have played the role of frontier guards in the past, inhabiting an in-between space for the sovereign powers of Burma and Thailand. It makes sense then, for the Karen people to appeal to the Thai state’s national security concerns. Their history as ‘frontier guards’ has provided them with the negotiation space to deal with the Thai state, even though this narrative’s function

is limited to the nation-state level. Using this legacy, they have been able to claim that they are Thai subjects and thereby gain more bargaining power in their negotiations with the capitalist market and with state agencies.

As there are different ethnic groups living around the Salween borderland, in order to form alliances across ethnic ties and state boundaries, the border people have not used ethnicity but instead their shared sense of belonging in order to construct a border identity, to defend their territories and secure their livelihoods. They have used cultural lore to relate themselves to the Salween River and shape their sense of belonging, plus form a border identity as Salween people (a group within which other ethnic groups, such as Buddhist Shan and Muslims are included) – a people whose lives rely on the Salween resources and intimately experience the Salween River. In this regard, a border livelihood is characterized as a borderless livelihood – based on natural resources and cultural ties across state boundaries; it is a livelihood beyond borders. By constructing a border identity as Salween or local people, they have become visible, and the Salween River and its forests have become sites of resistance used by these people to develop a sense of belonging and to defend their lives and livelihoods. In other words, their livelihoods have generated a ‘double movement’, as part of their resistance to the Salween dam projects.

They have resisted not only the Salween dam projects, but also the Burmese state’s attempt to integrate the Salween borderlands into state territory. There is a political dimension to the border people’s struggle, as they have fought against the state’s political exclusion to be a part of or have a political identity within the Union of Burma at the borderlands. However, the Burmese government has not cared to accept them as citizens, and the Burmese military has attempted to discriminate against and clear-out the borderlands. It can be said that the Salween borderlands are not a part of Burma, and those ethnic minority people who live there are not counted as members of Burmese society. On the contrary, now the Burmese government is returning to the Salween borderland, to claim that it is a no-man’s land and belongs to the nation-state, attempting to legitimize state authority over the resistance groups there. As a political issue embedded in the border people’s resistance, their struggles have taken place against the state, not only because natural resources are being snatched from them, leading to livelihood insecurity, but also because the state has

excluded them from participation in state politics. They have thus struggled to protect both their livelihoods and their rights as political actors and citizens – as citizens of Burma, meaning that their identity construction has been carried out, not only to be visible as border people, but also for political reasons; to be a part of the nation-state, as political actors.

Finally, I have found that since we live in an interconnected world, the border people's identity construction has recently been produced, not only through social memory, local history and cultural lore, but also through the movements formed against the Salween dams, as led by NGOs, particularly in terms of re-defining border livelihoods and citizenship. The process of re-defining border livelihoods and citizenship through the anti-Salween dam movement has been based on trilateral relations between the border people, state agencies and NGOs, all of whom have their own agendas but have come together to engage in the Salween movement, co-producing a collaborative articulation project. The border dwellers on the Burmese side have attempted to re-define themselves as Burmese citizens, while those on the Thai side have attempted to re-define themselves as Thai citizens. Since the Thai state is concerned with state security in terms of its integrity as a nation-state and its sovereignty, the violent situations that have developed around the Salween borderlands have been seen as eroding border security, leading the state authorities to incorporate border dwellers within the country. In the meantime, those living at the border seek only livelihood security and the right to a livelihood in the area, while local NGOs tend to be concerned mostly with environmental conservation and human rights, supporting the border people in their fight against the Salween dam construction activities. Since the Thai state's desire is to maintain border security, while the border people's desire is to achieve livelihood security, so local NGOs have come to mediate between them and their requirements through the citizenship registration program. This represents a collaborative articulation in which they have been able to express their demands clearly, and all parties have ended up as co-producers, while still wishing to follow their own agendas and achieve their own interests.

Due to the complex processes involved in terms of border people claiming citizenship, they alone have not been able to achieve this; hence, they have created a

network based on the anti-Salween dam movement. The border people have been persecuted due to state exclusion and transnational enclosure activities, and based on the introduction of frontier capitalization, plus have been forced to defend the Salween borderlands and their livelihoods. As a result, they have set up networks with NGOs in order to negotiate with the Thai state agencies and struggle against the Salween dam projects; to protect their livelihoods and gain their citizenship rights. Meanwhile, NGOs have supported them, using border livelihood issues to fight commodity production, as brought in by the capitalist market and the two nation states, based upon the anti-Salween dam campaign and the use of transnational advocacy. The issues of livelihoods as a local discourse, plus the NGOs' environmentalism and international human rights campaigns, have been combined as part of this movement. In practice, the border dwellers and NGOs have joined forces to raise the issues of *dindaen* and national security, negotiating with Thai state authorities using a legal advocacy campaign, arguing that Thailand will lose a part of its territory due to the Salween dams, and that this will cause significant border problems. NGOs have also used a wide range of discourses, not only based upon Thailand's loss of territory but also human rights violations, migration and environmental issues, in order to produce a negotiation space and struggle against state exclusion and transnational enclosure, plus to advocate for the Thai government to change its policy. Through their legal advocacy campaign, their concerns have been highlighted and presented to the Thai National Human Rights Commission and the wider public, and it is this process of negotiating a bordered terrain which has provided them with the opportunity to collaborate and contest. Meanwhile, within this process, Thai politicians have also compromised with the EGAT over the operation of the Salween dam projects. As part of a weak government, Prime Minister Abhisit's legitimacy could be called into question, due to the support he gave to the military – responding to their legal advocacy campaigns and other demands in order to avoid political confrontation. As a result, eventually the EGAT proceeded with the Salween dam construction activities.

At the regional level, the anti-Salween dam and transnational advocacy campaign has been two-pronged. On the one hand, ASEAN's legal processes have been used to advocate against the Burmese government, demanding it change its

policy, while on the other, transnational investors have been monitored to ensure they follow international standards and norms, particularly the World Commission on Dams' (WCD) guidelines and recommendations, plus the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) framework. This movement has negotiated with state powers in order to secure livelihoods, and has had the support of NGOs. This represents the border people's identity construction practices, which have involved building a network with NGOs at the national and international levels in order to enhance their negotiating power.

A *thirdspace* is a terrain for the generation of counter-spaces, and the border people here have created their own spaces of resistance in relation to the capitalists and state agents, as firmly rooted in their experiences at the Thai-Burmese border. As a result, these border people have been able to use the Thai government as their negotiation interlocutor, in order to re-define their border livelihoods, even though the Thai and Burmese states plus the transnational companies are themselves key players in the Salween dam construction projects. They have realized that the Salween borderlands are connected, rather than being isolated or bounded, and that people's livelihoods there also extend beyond state boundaries. The border people's lives on both sides of the Salween River are thus related, and their border livelihoods can now be characterized as 'borderless', as they exist across state boundaries. At the same time, the Thai and Burmese states have not been able to fix or bound social relations, cultural ties or natural resources at the Thai-Burmese border.

7.2 Theoretical Discussion

Many scholars have sought to understand borderland through their discussion in border studies (Anzaldúa 1999; Bhabha 1994; Rosaldo 1993; Sahlins 1998). One of the in-depth discussions is in the characteristics of the borderland. The borderland may perhaps be regarded as a "liminality" (Turner 1992) in the sense that it became an ambiguous zone of power and a contradictory border practice. This section is an attempt to reveal these characteristics of border in the complex relations between stakeholders who have come to engage in the Salween borderlands. As a result, this would give us an insight into the way border people negotiate power among stakeholders and position themselves in relation to the states and capitalism at the

borderlands within an interconnected world. In my major findings, I highlight my engagement with some theoretical discussions in borderland studies.

The first discussion is centered on (ambiguous) power at the border which expresses itself through border development in terms of both economic and political projects of the states. According to political ecology approach, border development activities, which take place in borderlands, are not only economic projects. They are also political projects even though politics is not the main issue in the political ecology approach. The relationship between economics and politics does not take a form of dichotomy opposition. Instead, it is a complex relationship where the fields of economics and politics overlap each other. In the light of capitalism exploiting natural resources through transnational exclusion, some scholars have carried out their studies on border development which focus on trans-boundary impacts,² negotiation livelihoods and livelihood strategies (Barney 2012; Hall and Kanokwan 2011; Hirsch 1995; 1999; 2001; 2002; Hirsch and Warren 1998; Hirsch and Wyatt 2004; Jakkrit 2010; Sturgeon 2004; 2005a; 2005b). These are the common knowledge that my research has sought to build upon.

In my study, I have attempted to show that the states have sought to exert control over the Salween borderlands in view of reinforcing the state border for their national interest. Thus, such political activities are the states' hidden agendas that have been carried out along the Salween borderlands. Since the capital and state sectors have come to join hands in transnational exclusion at the Thai-Burmese border, the border development schemes are implemented to exert control over the borderlands and enforce state border in order to gain benefits from it. In terms of political states' agenda, the processes of 'civilizing the margins' and 'anti-politics machines' have been applied so as to re-territorialize the Salween borderlands and at the same time de-politicize ethnic politics in Burma (Woods 2011). These processes

² The Yali Falls Dam is located in Vietnam, 80 kilometers upstream of the Cambodian border. There are 90 indigenous communities along the Se San River in two provinces of northeastern Cambodia have been impacted by flooding. The impacts consisted of inundated agricultural land and riverbanks, unusual flooding events, a longer dry season, harms to livelihood activities, unpredictable fluctuations in river flow and height, poor water quality and public health, and harm to fisheries such as blocking fish migration routes. Furthermore, a human rights lawyer collected testimonial evidence: 39 deaths by drowning were attributable to unpredictable and rapid changes in river flow and height. Ten years after the commencement of its construction, communities impacted by the dam have not been compensated for damages to their properties and for the loss of lives and livelihoods (Anonymous 2000; Hall and Kanokwan 2011; Hirsch and Wyatt 2004; Scurrah 2007).

have formulated state re-territorialization and transnational enclosure in such a way that the border people lose their access to resources they traditionally possess. Subsequently, the Salween River will be commoditized through the development of a hydro-electricity hub for trade. This aims to eradicate the presence of the ethnic groups resident at the border which includes the destruction of their insurgent forces. In this regard, border development which is a state apparatus has reinforced and expanded the exercise of bureaucratic state powers (Ferguson 2003: 255) and technocratic transnational expertise (Jakkrit 2010) at the margins of the states.

Moreover, some scholars examine border development by the economic perspective to include the political dimension (Pitch 2007) and analyze border politics which is accompanied by state violence (Anusorn 2010; Decha 2003; 2007a; Horstmann 2007). Accordingly, Pitch's study shows that border town development at the explicit level is economic in nature. However, the state's political agenda is concealed behind the scene (Pitch 2007; Peluso and Vandergeest 2011). As the Thai state attempts to reinforce the state border and to exert control over the borderlands, Pitch elaborates that the Thai government has implemented border economic zone as "economic dam" not on the Burmese side but on the Thai side. The state's purpose is to obstruct migration flow from Burma in such a way as to create difficulties for Burmese migrant workers populating the border towns of Mae Sot, Tak Province and Mae Sai, Chiang Rai Province. To some extent, as part of the process of primitive accumulation, the Burmese who migrate to Thailand to work as low-paid laborers are exploited by Thai capitalists because the Thai government identifies them as illegal migrants (Pitch 2007). Similar to Pitch's statement, I have also found that the proposed Salween dams have been represented as economic projects which have subtly concealed hidden political agendas of the states. Since I propose that analysis of political motives are from both states, I argue that Pitch's analysis of border town development is a one-sided conception. He has chosen to focus on the Thai hidden agenda but rarely consider the Burmese political agenda in his analysis.

Nevertheless, my study shows that the Salween dam construction activities are a series of border development initiatives implemented by the capital and the political agendas from both Thai and Burmese governments. In the macro view, there is cooperation between capital and state to develop a capitalist economy in terms of

capital expansion and transnational exclusion (Burch and Rickson 2011; Hall, et al. 2011; Harvey 2001; Nevins and Peluso 2008; Ong 2006; Smith 1984) as the economic system is absorbed in the social system (Polanyi 1980). At the micro level, I have also found that capitalization can work in the Salween borderlands which are conflict zones not because of free capitalist market mechanism alone but the capitalists have gathered support from the states. Both the capitalist market and state agencies have their own different but compatible interests. The Thai and Burmese states wish to re-territorialize the Salween borderlands, while the transnational dam investors wish to transform resources into commodities for trade. The states have introduced economic development programs which refer to state policy as “civilizing the margins” (Duncan 2004; Lambrecht 2000; 2004) so as to snatch natural resources from the people at the Salween borderlands. In the meantime, the states and transnational dam investors have begun to implement large-scale Salween dam projects as an “anti-politics machine” (Ferguson 2003; 2005) and even “seeing like a state” (Scott 1998). They substantiate it by arguing that Thai government makes the border people submissive and removes their struggles while on the Burmese side, the Burmese government eliminates the ethnic groups’ resistances along the borderlands.

Besides, there are several research studies that focus on how the Thai state (or the Burmese state) has exercised suppression and violence along the borderlands as political tools to confirm the state-ness at the border (Anusorn 2010; Decha 2003; 2007a; Horstmann 2007). Horstmann, Decha and Anusorn emphasize political agenda at the border as establishing and reinforcing state sovereignty. The implication that I have drawn from their studies is that, without appreciating border development in terms of the economic dimension, we will myopically view the Thai and Burmese states as explicitly using violence on the border people, which already exists, in order to reinforce state sovereignty. Nonetheless, I posit that the states’ political agenda at the border has been intricately interwoven with economic gains. The Thai and Burmese states have reinforced the state border in the Salween borderlands for both economical as well as political purposes. My research shows that the Salween dam construction activities have been expressed as economic projects for the capital and states to seek economic profit while implicitly concealing the enforcement of the state border as their political agenda. Essentially, I have found

that both Thai and Burmese states retain clearly-defined sovereignties at the border. Though both the Thai and Burmese states are largely similar in reinforcing the state border, the outcomes on both territories are different. Each state on both sides of the border manipulates its sovereign power differently due to their differences in the nature of state and state's ability. Consequently, the practices taken by the Thai and Burmese states to reinforce the state border are diverse. Hence, both sides of the border have different politics.

Cases from other areas illustrate the potential for state violence along with political state agenda and as Ferguson and other scholars affirm, state violence coexists with extraction of natural resources (Ferguson 2003; 2005; 2006; Peluso and Vandergeest 2011; Peluso and Watts 2001). Similar to their suggestion, I have found that the Burmese government has chosen to reinforce the state border by suppressing the ethnic rebellious groups along the Thai-Burmese border. On the one hand, the Burmese government has resorted in using military violence to threaten the border people and suppress rebellious ethnic minorities in the Salween borderlands where it has historically lacked control.³ On the other hand, the Burmese government has strongly supported the transnational dam investors in their exploitation of the Salween's resources in order to gain economic benefits.

This is the political nature on the Burmese side which is congruent with MacLean's assessment that Burma is actually a weak state which has mosaics of control over its territory. Due to the limited power at the borderlands, the Burmese government has attempted to exert control over the areas and resources in ethnic insurgent zones. Therefore, the more the Burmese government opens up for investment opportunities, such as for gem and gold mining, and dam construction activities, the stronger it becomes (MacLean 2008). Hence, the Burmese government has seized the opportunity to gain benefit from permitting capitalists to invest in economic development projects in uncontrolled areas. At the same time, the government has intervened to subdue the rebellious groups. In fact, the government cannot afford to invest any amount of money in the Salween dam construction

³ In the Chino-Burmese border, ceasefires that Kachin insurgent groups signed with the Burmese junta in early 1990s granted the Burmese military further control over the natural resources in ethnic areas (Woods 2008; 2011).

projects. As a result, the government has chosen to collaborate with outsiders, particularly the Chinese and Thai governments, to garner investment. Therefore, the Burmese political project and its implications are complicated in that the Burmese government has used the Salween dam construction activities as an anti-politics machine to suppress ethnic minority groups. Such suppression has re-defined the border people in the state of 'naked lives' where they have become powerless and unprotected. In addition, the Burmese government has actively sought to exclude the ethnic minority insurgencies from participating in Burmese politics.

In contrast, on the Thai side, the Thai state's reinforcement at the border has led to cooperation rather than ethnic exclusion and civil wars. The Thai state has created a political space of involvement for the border people as a bait to gain an economic power. The major purpose of Thai government is to invest in the Salween dam projects for economic return. In order to reap economic benefits at the border, the Thai government has opened a political space for ethnic people to negotiate with the Thai state. The Thai government wishes to come in the Salween borderlands to seek economic profit from the Salween dam construction activities. To do so, the Thai government has attempted to pacify the border people so that they will cooperate with the state and will not create unrest against the government. Therefore, the border does not pose itself as a problem to the Thai state, the Thai government does not seem to place emphasis or significance to the distinction derives at the border as if it is borderless. Since the Thai state has commenced the Salween dam construction activities, the border people have struggled against its plans. In the past, the Thai state did not care for the border dwellers. But now, due to the border people's resistance, the Thai state has to negotiate with them in order to claim legitimacy to the construction of the dams by making them submissive. In order to legitimize the state's authority in transnational exploitation, the Thai state has to offer or confirm citizenship to the border people in order to pacify them as apolitical. My research shows that the border people are not only confronted with the state re-territorialization, they have also collaborated in the citizenship registration process among diverse negotiating parties along the Salween borderlands. These negotiating parties involve in particular the border people, Thai state agencies and local NGOs. These various groups have their own agendas when they engage in a Salween

movement and have co-produced a collaborative articulation project. Hence, this collaboration has taken in a form of trilateral relations in negotiation process. Precisely, the transnational exploitation and accompanying citizenship are interconnected.

In this regard, the proposed Salween dam projects would be built and firmly operated when they get the full support from the border people. To make the border people give consent to them, the Thai government has included the border people through the citizenship registration process. Nevertheless, Mukdawan states that, in terms of politics of belonging, there are internal barriers created which hindered the hill villagers from being fully accepted as Thai citizens. As she points out, the citizenship registration process has been used by local officials who have colluded with sub-district and village heads to exploit the hill villagers struggling to be fully accepted as Thai citizens (Mukdawan 2011). Thus, citizenship has become an instrument used by these officials to extract cooperation from the ethnic minorities (Amporn 2011: 10; cf. Horstmann 2006a: 157-66). While I concur with Mukdawan's position, I have attempted to look at the cooperation or collaboration through the citizenship registration process in another way. I have chosen to view it as an appropriation of the reworking of citizenship which is used in people's struggles in the borderlands (Horstmann 2006a: 156).

The reworking of citizenship is one of the crucial issues of "border crossing practices" (Barney 2012; Chainarong 2010; Horstmann 2006a; Horstmann and Wadley 2006). As Horstmann points out, the reworking citizenship constitutes an important strategy to deal with the constraints that have been designed by the state to control the populations at the border. In the context of border crossing on the Thai-Malaysian border, the reworking of citizenship refers to the acquisition of dual citizenship by Thai-speaking Muslims from the west coast of southern Thailand and Buddhist Thais from northern Malaysia. On the contrary, in the context of state re-territorialization at the Thai-Burmese border, I have found that the border people have acquired national belonging through the use of citizenship as Burmese or Thai citizens at their respective states. Since the Thai state is wealthier and has a greater economic power than the Burmese state, the Thai state does not care about the state's borderline as much as keeping citizenship to maintain the state border. In contrast, citizenship at

the Burmese border has certainly become a tool for people's use to resist against the Burmese government. As the Thai state's standpoint differs from the Burmese state's concern, the Thai state has chosen an opposite direction to the Burmese state's act.

In sum, the Salween borderlands are both ambiguous and contradictory in nature. As my discussion above shows, the politics at the border consists of ambiguous power-play between rival groups. The Salween borderlands are conceptualized as a zone of ambiguity in such a way that no single actor is able to monopolize with absolute power and yet they are not in an absolute state of power vacuum. Therefore, each rival group has used the borderlands to construct and negotiate power. In addition, the Salween borderlands have become a zone of contradiction. This can be seen in the contradictory nature of Burmese's state politics and Thai's ethnic politics working out at the borderlands. On the one hand, the Burmese state has attempted to expand its power over the borderlands by seeking to diminish the power of ethnic minority groups. Yet, on the other hand, the politics on Thai side has been transformed into ethnic politics in which ethnic minorities have been given more space to engage in negotiation with the Thai state through citizenship. In essence, the conceptualization of the Salween borderlands is complex as characterized by both ambiguity and contradiction.

The second discussion focuses on the border identity in border studies. The relationship between nation-state, border and identity has long been debated in transnational and border studies (Adelman and Aron 1999; Cohen 1965; Horstmann 2006b; Koshy 2005; Ong 1999b; Wilson and Donnan 1998a). Some theorists have celebrated a new eclecticism and hybridity in cultural production around the world (Adejumobi 2007: 2). Identities can be in-between diasporas of the postcolonial and the transnational (Bhabha 1994), post-national citizenship (Appadurai 1996) and flexible citizenship (Ong 1999b; cf. Ley 2005). They have characterized identities as relatively unmoored from the control of the state and bounded territories. As Lionnet and Shih point out, flexible or nomadic subjects function as if diasporas or immigrants are free floating signifiers without psychic and material investment in particular geopolitical spaces (Lionnet and Shih 2005: 8). In this sense, diasporic identities stay mobile and have the ability to deal with nation-states. This assumption has a tendency to underestimate the role of the state which continues to play in the everyday

lives of its own and other citizens. This role exists as a result of the physical structures of territory, government and state which have not withered away in a globalizing world (Wilson and Donnan 1998b: 1-2). Nevertheless, Lionnet and Shih appraise their notion of diasporic identities, in that minor transnational subjects in transnational context are inevitably invested in their respective geopolitical spaces. In fact, they often wait to be recognized as “citizens” in order to receive the attendant privileges of full citizenship (Lionnet and Shih 2005: 8). In this regard, I concur with Lionnet and Shih’s assertion. As I have discussed in the preceding section, the border people have attempted to engage with the state politics in calling for recognition as “politically qualified subjects” (Decha 2003: 235).

At the Salween borderlands, the border people who are “politically qualified subjects” are not passive or submissive. This is the case despite the persistent state violence on the Thai-Burmese border which is an everyday occurrence and a normal part of the border people’s lives. They are active agents who have sought ways to retaliate against the state re-territorialization and the Salween dam construction activities. The states have attempted to reinforce the state border between Thailand and Burma by using border development programs in order to establish or exert control over their territories. Instead, the border people have tried to make the nation-state border ambiguous so as to maintain their ability to survive in the borderlands. My finding is fairly similar to Flynn’s study on border identity formulated by Shabe border residents along the Bénin-Nigeria border. Flynn has found that, as they identify themselves as border – “we are the border,” they are neither hybrid nor nationless. In this sense, if they depend on any nation, it will come to dominate or control them at the border. On the contrary, they recognize that they belong to separate nations which they can manipulate and negotiate the border to their mutual advantage (Flynn 1997: 327). Flynn’s analysis shows that the border has another ambiguous source of power which the rival groups attempt to manipulate at the border due to the absence of control from the center.

On this point, the Thai-Burmese border became ambiguous zone, not by itself, but by the people living there. This ambiguity of border breeds the border people’s ability to survive in the Salween borderlands without being fully controlled by the states. My research also shares a common finding with several studies. Basically,

local people who are excluded from resources have used their legacy, history, social memory and local lore to mediate their place and identity in their struggle against exclusionary practices (Moore 1993; 1998; Prasert 2007). This process of making claim over territory is known as politics of location and belonging (Hammar 2002; Kuper 1972; Moore 1997; Pile 1997; Raffles 1999; Slater 1997; Yos 2003). In terms of sense of belonging, Karen people, for instance, are seeking to be recognized as people who are rooted in particular localities with distinctive cultural practices (Keyes 2003: 217). They then claim to be competent at managing natural resources in a sustainable way (Keyes 2003; Pinkaew 2003). In addition, my research, further, shows that the sense of belonging produced by the border people transcends the nation-state border.

Theoretically, there are three main areas focused in border studies: (1) the state power at the border, (2) border identity, and (3) border trade. Generally, scholars have carried out their research on border trade (cf. Jakkrit 2006; Tagliacozzo 2007; Walker 1999). In my case, the research is related to the states' production of economic development projects at the border, which mainly involves the first two areas. Since I have discussed earlier that the Salween borderlands are zones of ambiguity and contradiction, we cannot possibly articulate the characteristics of the border in any rigid or fixed manner. It depends on what dimensions we are researching about. As the borderlands are not empty and clear zones, whatever outcomes happening at each dimension might not be similar at other dimensions.

Potentially, border trade scholars have emphasized an interrelation between formal and informal economies on the border. A general finding, for them, is that though the state wishes to reinforce state border, the state is actually unable to effectively exert control over the border. Thus, the state officials open up an informal or "second economy" (Flynn 1997: 324) for members of border communities to trade illegally or to smuggle goods across the border. They also turn a blind eye to the people's travelling or crossing border, such as the Thai-Lao border (Walker 1999: 109), and even permit the practice of dual citizenship at the border, such as the Thai-Malaysian border (Horstmann 2006a: 160). With the connivance of border officials, traders and even brokers, they are active participants in the creation and maintenance of nation-state border. They acquire for themselves an economic position of

advantage and benefit from the resources that the border creates (Horstmann and Wadley 2006: 13; Walker 1999). Thus, the state has used informal economy of border trade to maintain and enforce the state border.

However, I have chosen to depart from a dualistic discussion of formal economy and informal economy as border trade is highly complex in nature. I emphasize that the states have used large-scale development project to reinforce the state border. This is different from the informal economy of border trade that state officials connive with border tradesmen or brokers in second or subversive economy as discussed earlier. In the Salween borderlands, the Thai and Burmese states can reinforce the state border through the implementation of the Salween dam construction projects. Thus, the dam construction activities have become processes of the state re-territorialization, the enforcement of the state border and the commodification of the border which are dreadful to the border people. These processes are contradictory in that the more the states try to re-territorialize or reinforce the state border, the more the border people attempt to make the state border ambiguous for survival. If the state border is clearly constituted and reaffirmed or reinforced, they will be subdued and dispossessed from their resources and territory. As a result, they do not want the state border to obstruct their lives. The “border” for them does not mean a clear zone with nation-state boundary line. In this sense, they do not identify border with regards to the notion of state border and state power. Instead, the border dwellers re-define border for themselves. They have tried to define their “border” in terms of their identity as they are border inhabitants or Salween people who have lived in and experienced life in the border area.

The third discussion is centered on a concept of space which enhances our understanding of the border at a more abstract level. Theoretically, many scholars have urged us not to perceive the border as a margin by looking from the center (Horstmann and Wadley 2006; Sahlins 1998; Tsing 1994; Walker 1999). The argument is that from the center’s perspective, the border is a margin without any power in itself. Hence, one should not be trapped by assumption that the power has to come from the center. Likewise, I do support this theory that the border cannot be seen from the center due to many interconnected overlapping dimensions within. Even if it is seemed to be powerless, the border has power in itself. According to my

research, I have found that the border has intrinsic power. It is neither generated from the center nor created by itself. Actually, its power is constructed or created by certain groups of people who have engaged in the negotiation of power. The border's power is ambiguous for there is no single rival group which can claim power monopoly in the midst of power conflicts at the borderlands. Even with the engagement of power play from the center, it has to be in a framework of ambiguity of power in the borderlands. Thus, the border opens up space for certain groups in negotiating or bargaining power.

Previously, the border has been viewed from the center as a powerless zone and as a zone of vigilantism. Vigilantism is viewed by the state as disorderly and illicit acts that challenge the state (Eilenberg 2011: 239). Vigilant power at the border, which is held by gangsters or ruffians, is neither legal nor formal as it is not governed by state power (Tsing 2005). Yet, the way of conceptualizing border's power as formal or informal (alternatively, legal or vigilant) is dichotomistic in nature and adheres to the center's point of view. Nevertheless, my research emphasizes not on a binary opposition but a complexity of in-between lives. So, I propose that in the case of Thai-Burmese border, the border's power is neither power from the center nor an informal power. Instead, the power comes from construction and negotiation. In other words, there are many dimensions of power overlapping in such a way that the border power cannot be viewed as either from the center or as an informal source. In this sense, the border can be conceptualized as "liminality" (Turner 1992) or "third space" (Bhabha 1990; 1994; Soja 1996) where it opens the opportunity for power negotiation which provides a space to (re-)construct power.

After discussing with several researches in the preceding sections, I have found that the Thai-Burmese border is a zone characterized by ambiguity and contradiction. It has a self-evolving power which renders everyone powerless to establish absolute power in the borderlands. Conceptually, the case of Thai-Burmese border that I have exemplified confirms Turner's conception of "liminality" or Bhabha's or Soja's conception of "*thirdspace*." In practice, the Salween borderlands have manifested in creating a space of negotiation and even, a space of contestation. The Salween borderlands are not empty spaces but spaces of ambiguity and contradiction where there is no solely dominated power. At the border, all

stakeholders have to suspend the exercise of their state-given authority when they enter into power negotiation. As I have shown, the Thai state does not have a full status of a state. The government sometimes yields its political power to the border residents in order to gain more economic power at the border. Therefore, the borderlands are different from other state areas where they are centralized and dominated by state power (Foucault 1980). Yet, there is none who is completely powerless or possessing absolute power in the borderlands. On this point, the border is a common space that avails negotiation for several groups of people. Hence, the Salween borderlands as ambiguous and contradictory zones express a complexity of power interactions where each rival group is contesting to gain power in each respective capacity. Therefore, the Salween borderlands become a negotiated space for diverse groups of people – marginalized people, capitalists and state agencies, and NGOs – who have rights to negotiate in the borderlands. According to my research, the negotiation, which takes place in the Salween borderlands, has led the Burmese state to be stronger. However, the political power of Thai state is on the decline due to its opening up of political space which provides an opportunity for ethnic groups to negotiate.

7.3 Contribution to the State of Knowledge on Borderland Studies

Besides extending our understanding of a particular borderland, this research opens up new perspectives on borderland studies in general. I will indicate these new perspectives in the section that follows.

First, the capitalist market not only functions at the borderlands by itself, which is different from other places in general, but it also functions in association with the states on both sides of the border, in the sense that the states have supported the capitalist market to reduce the cost of investment through state practices of violence. Eventually, the economic aim of the capitalist market has corresponded to the political agenda of the state. The capitalist market aims to turn natural resources into commodities for trade so as to maximize profit. Meanwhile, the states wish to re-territorialize the borderlands. In this regard, frontier capitalization has functioned in the capitalist market and state mechanisms. However, the results of state's practices on both sides of the border might not be the same. In borderland studies, thus, it is

necessary to conceptualize the state's practices on both sides of the border in relation to the role of capitalist market as "neo-liberalism" and the "state of exception" are interconnected.

Second, livelihoods and identity are related in the sense that the local people have produced livelihoods, which is a social relation to resources, to contest state and capitalist forces for access resources. In order to secure livelihoods, they have to construct and make visible their identity. Transforming livelihoods into identity is the process of constructing negotiated space to struggle against the commodification of nature at the borderlands. This process, produced by local people, is characterized as dialectics of physical-social-cultural dimensions. Livelihoods and identity are related, so that borderland studies should bring livelihood strategies and identity formation together into an analytical framework.

Third, the complexity, dynamism, and diversity of social movement at the borderlands is very important. Previously, the conceptualization of transnational social movements tended to be trapped in binary opposition, such as above-below, state-civil society, global-local and even collective identity-individual subjectivity, which does not reflect the ongoing social reality in the borderlands. On the contrary, the establishment of minor transnationalism or minor forms of transnational cultural production as experience movement is more useful in expanding our knowledge and our understanding of local people's everyday struggles at the borderlands.

7.4 Recommendations

At present, Burma is undergoing the political and economic transition. The situation inside Burma has been dramatically changing since the national election in late 2010. The Burmese government is trying to catch up with its neighbors, and recent reforms to improve the country included freeing political prisoners and holding elections. Because of these acts, the US and the EU's sanctions were relaxed or suspended so as to open up avenues for investment in Burma. The Burmese government's response to business investments is heavily tilted towards the private sector, which will be the driver of its economic growth. Transnational corporations are also crowding Burma's door and are ready to invest their money at the expense of Burma's natural resources.

Even though civil society inside Burma is developing, there are very few organizations that have the ability to negotiate with the state in order to keep control of local people's resources. Fighting and violent situations continues to plague the border regions; for example, fighting between government troops and the Kachin Independence Organization has not yet ceased. War with other insurgents continues as well, despite the success of *Tatmadaw* in signing a ceasefire agreement with the Karen National Union in January of 2011. The Burmese military maintains its hold government power, and economic growth is driven by monopolies and families who have benefited from nepotism and cronyism (Roughneen 2012). It is under these conditions that the practices of frontier capitalization continue at the borderlands. These are the situations with which further studies should be concerned.