CHAPTER 2

Theoretical Approach to Ethno-religious, Borderlands and Social Network

2.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the theoretical approaches related to the thesis topic, as a guideline to support my arguments. I have divided this chapter into two different sections, first, the relevant conceptual developments and, second, their relationship to the practical level. The first section contains an anthropological debate on the main concepts proposed by my thesis, ethnic identity or ethnicity[22]. In the mid 1950s, Edmund Leach brought the concept of ethnic identity into a concept debated, by positioning it as a product of social interaction. Leach showed that the nature of ethnic identity is not only limited to the discussion over genealogy, but also related to the relationship between people and place, or people with people (1954). Although this has since been debated, ethnic identity is still discussed as a more complex contextualization, such as the migration issue or globalization phenomenon. From these various contextualizations, the meaning of ethnic identity has not only become as complex as boundary maintenance, but also a construction of social capital.

The second part of this chapter describes the conceptual framework, based on three different concepts: the borderland as a place, ethno-religion as ethnic identity, and social capital as the meaning of ethnic identity. By connecting these three concepts, in this thesis I suggest that ethnic identity is a social construction; fixed on particular levels yet negotiable, manipulated and transformed on others. Ethnic identity appears as a product of social interaction between "people and place", "people and [the] state", and "people and people". The first relationship shows that ethnic identity is "given" because it is related to one's origin, like kinship (King and Wilder 2003); whereas, the second

[22] In this thesis, I prefer to use the term 'ethnic identity'rather than 'ethnicity', because its application is more flexible; is not only limited to nationalism or the building of a nation-state.

and third relationships bring us to view ethnic identity as a product of power relations among actors, and it often contains economic, social and political interests. As a part of historical relationships, ethnic identity does not appear as mutually isolated, but exists through the construction of others. Social interaction itself is a significant factor in making ethnic identity negotiable, whether maintained or transformed (Barth 1969), and taking this into the migration context, one may wonder if power relations between migrants and social structures in the host country lead ethnic identity to be continued or discontinued.

2.2 Ethno-religious Identity as Ethnic Identity

In the post-colonial era, ethnicity or ethnic identity in Southeast Asia is a concept that has become very familiar within Anthropology circles. A groundbreaking study by Leach entitled, "Political System of Highland Burma", is the starting point for anthropologists to broaden their analysis on the concept of ethnic identity. This led researchers to focus on the symbolic construction behind the material aspects of ethnic identity. Some anthropologists re-problematized their questions such as: Who is the Kachin? Who is the Burman? Who is the Karen? into questions like: Why are they Kachin? Why are they not Burman? Through such questions, anthropologists began to leave the primordial point of view behind, which states that the nature of ethnic identity is embedded in genealogical ties and based on territorial boundaries. They did not ignore the fact that ethnic identity is a self-identification of common origin, but they contested some arguments that placed the nature of ethnic identity as a basic given; as fixed, firm and unbreakable. They believed that ethnic identity is socially constructed, meaning it is flexible, negotiable, contested, relative and subject to change (King and Wilder 2003).

Talking about ethnic identity delivers every researcher towards two different, yet related frameworks: "ethnic classification" and "ethnic group" (Rousseau 1990, Eriksen 1993, Wilder and King 2003). The first framework refers to the conceptual dimension of identity, while the second refers to social interaction. Anthropologists engaged on these two concepts usually focus their arguments on power-relations between states and their people. On the first level, their studies show how the modern nation state exercises

its power and secures domination at the same time, through a justification of "who belongs to whom". In this sense, a categorized group is the object of state power; thus, is passive. On another level, their studies try to place a group as an active object, because there is always a reaction against or contestation with state domination (Rajah 1990, Grundy-war 2002). Both of these analytical levels lead me to conclude that the identity of Burmese Muslim is a part of building Burmese national identity, which is then re-presented by Burmese Muslims to illustrate their boundaries with other ethnic groups. In this case, we can see how ethnic identity has a double interpretation: by the state and the categorized group.

By positioning this as a social construction, research on ethnic identity in the discipline of anthropology is becoming more complex. Many anthropologists concentrate on the issue of shifting ethnic identity in accordance with building national identity (Keyes 1994, 1995 and 2008), due to transnational migration, or the more recent phenomenon of globalization. However, most of their arguments are arranged under Barth's (1969) concept of "boundary maintenance", whereby social interactions among people or groups influence whether ethnic identity is maintained or transformed. In this sense, it is not enough to relate the nature of ethnic identity with origins or native places; there is a need to examine in detail historical relationships, either in the social or political context. In this thesis I problematize the shifting of ethnic identity on two different levels. On the first level, I analyze under what conditions people interchange their ethnic identity, while on another level, I show how it is possible to shift ethnic identity for a person or society. I argue that constructing ethnic identity is not only related to imagining a community, but also a part of an attempt to develop social capital.

The development of Anthropology in recent decades cannot be separated from debates on ethnicity over the primordial, the instrumentalist and the constructivist camps. The significant difference between these three perspectives is not only in terms of the nature of ethnicity, but also in its function (see Keyes 1981, 1995, 2008, Sachiko 2008, Van Thang 2007). The primordial view sees ethnicity as a fixed form; stable and unchanged because ethnicity is embedded on cognation or race, and so is derived genetically. In this case, ethnicity is given by birth, implying the passivity of an actor, whereby one cannot choose which ethnicity one belongs to. Without denying the

genealogist's point of view, instrumentalists and constructivists view ethnicity as a social construction or a product of power relations; therefore, it is dynamic, situated and manipulated. Keyes (1981) argued that an individual who has closeness to two different ethnicities will have the chance to manipulate his or her identity, and choose when to display it (see also Leach 1954, Chua 2007).

The construction of ethnic majority identity as national identity in Southeast Asia has strengthened the constructivist argument in viewing the nature of ethnicity as a social construction. Not only does the state choose the majority to be the national identity, the state also exercises its hegemony through classification systems (Keyes 2008, Gladney 2003, Hill 2008). However, over the past few decades, literature on ethnicity studies can be categorized under the three camps mentioned above. While claiming to be different, these three perspectives underline the same issue; that the construction of ethnicity is normally used to illustrate boundaries between "us" and "them", as well as "belonging" with "otherness". It is for this reason that this study attempts to show how these three perspectives can sometime go together, and other times act separately, to explain how ethnicity operates in the borderlands of Thailand and Burma.

Gladney (2003), in a study of ethnicity in China, shows how Han's ethnic identity has been constructed as the national identity in China, leading to the marginalization of ethnic minorities. He also shows how the state exercises its power towards this ethnic classification, using two different models: a Stalinist approach and Culturalist approach[23]. According to Gladney, by combining these two models, the state has in effect simplified the complexity and heterogeneity within and among ethnic groups. This can be seen in the case of Hui Muslims, who live all over Chinaand so have different dialects and customs[24]. Because they practice Islam, the state classifies them into a single ethnic group: Hui Muslims. This case also exemplifies how the state

[23] The Stalinist approach is ethnic identification based on four similarities: language, locality, economy and cultural make-up, whereas the culturalist approach is identification based on cultural traits (culture unit) and history. The culturalist approach identifies ethnicity based on cultural features (language, religion, economy, place of origin) or biogenetic physical features. Both approaches view ethnic identity through a primordial perspective, meaning it is static and biven by birth (Gladney 2003).

[24] Hui is one of ethnic minorities which has neither a language or culture of its own. Although they speak Sino-Tibetan, their dialect is different due to the influence of regional dialects (Gladney 2003).

intersects “ethnicity” and “religion” into one, single category when applying ethnic classification.

The conflation of ethnicity and religion appears in various studies focused on national identities building projects. Berlie (2008), in his study of Burmese Muslims in Burma, shows that the Burmese national identity contains three elements: the dominant ethnic group (Burman), one united country (Burma) and one religion (Buddhism). This is strongly related to the state’s attempt to construct a homogenous nation after separation from India. A long history of Indian migration during British colonial rule led to Indians dominating various economic sectors in Burma. Hatred towards these Indian migrants began to grow among the native people, so they formed Burmese chauvinism, which led to riots targeting Indian migrants (including Muslims and Hindus). They started to campaign that Burma was only for Burmese, and that a Burmese person should contain all three aspects of national identity mentioned above. Furthermore, Berlie shows how Buddhism was constructed as the Burmese national religion, and this in turn marginalized non-Buddhists. In this case, the state invented a religious identity to illustrate the boundaries between Burmese and Indian migrants; Buddhism for Burmese and Islam and Hinduism for Indians, so they may always be considered foreigners (*kala*).

Similar to Berlie, Chua (2007) takes the case of the Bidayuh ethnic group in Malaysia to argue that the Malaysian state has constructed “Malay” national identity based on an intersection between ethnic identities (Malay) and religious beliefs (Islam). A person can be classified as Malaysian if he adopts the manner of an ethnic Malay (language and customs), and practices Islam. While Berlie views Burmanization in Burma as an attempt to exclude other ethnic minorities, construction of Malay national identity in Chua's case has been used on two different levels; as an exclusion and inclusion. Building Malay national identity can be viewed as an effort to exclude ethnic minorities while positioning Bidayuh as indigenous people; as uneducated and traditional, so they cannot obtain the same rights as the Malays. However, as building Malay national identity works to include the non-Malay ethnicities also, so becoming Malay is not impossible for non-Malay ethnicity. Even though the Bidayuh have a

different language, different customs and religion from the Malay ethnicity, a Bidayuh can become "Malay" if he or she adopts the manners of a Malay and converts to Islam.

Platz (2003), in his study, *"Buddhism and Christianity in Competition?"*, also shows how the conflation of ethno-religious identities has already excluded some people. His study examines that ethnic classification is not only constructed by the state in order to sustain its domination. He shows how people reinvent ethnic classification within ethnic groups, as a product of their social interaction with other actors. In this sense, the coming of global ideology (Christian) brought by missionaries, and Buddhism under Thai nation building, caused the Karen in northern Thailand to become a heterogeneous ethnic group in terms of religion. The animism practiced by the Karen no longer remained the single faith within this ethnic group, as many converted to either Christianity or Buddhism. Through conversion to different faiths, they attempted to gain access to different capital. To sum up, through such conversion phenomenon, Platz argues that the new Karen identity; a combination of ethnic and religious identity, is used by the Karen to create boundaries within their ethnicity[25].

Vatikiotis (1984), in his study on multi-culturalism in Chiang Mai, states that the Yunnanese Muslims invented religious identity to argue against the ethnic stigma of being Chinese. At first, the Yunnanese Muslims were considered an ethnic group from China, so were considered to be a part of the *Koumintang* – a term with a negative meaning and also a controversial term in Chiang Mai. Yunnanese Muslims then began to use Islam as a key part of their ethnic identity, to differentiate themselves from the *Koumintang* identity. While Vatikiotis views the process of group identification as a community response to external power, Hill (1998), in her study "Merchants China in Southeast Asia", shows the complexity of identification within a community of Yunnanese Muslims. While facing an external power (as non-Chinese), they absorbed the Chinese national identity within their identity, and when they meet with another Chinese fellow they will reinvent their native place and religious identity.

[25] Karen-Christians label themselves as a modern group due to the Western missionaries' influence, Karen-Buddhists label themselves as good Thais, since they attempt to assimilate with the Thai majority. The Karen-Animists label themselves as an authentic group, because they practiceas their ancestors did.

Over the past few decades, literature on migration studies has begun to highlight the process of reconstructing identity among migrant communities. The authors argue that migration does not stop once people move from one place to another; we should also consider migration as the movement of various attributes taken with them by migrants, whether money, goods or ideologies (Aranya 2007, Walker 1999). Appadurai (1996), using the term *ethnoscape,* argues that in globalization era, the flow of identity cannot be separated from the advance of technology and media. Therefore, identity is no longer embedded in a specific place, but also being transferred, reconstructed and reproduced by migrants in other places, together with migration. However, he seems to view the process of re-inventing an identity as natural, and takes it for granted without questioning why communities re-invent their identity and what it means. Appadurai also seems to ignore limitations on resources at the migration destination or the pressure coming from other identities, which may lead identity to be sustained or transformed (see also Keyes 1981, Hall 2006). In this case, although a migrant may have successfully sustained his or her identity, it will tend to be modified and influenced by the new locality (see Kearney 1995, Berlie 2008).

In addition to both factors mentioned above, the disruption of identity can also be influenced by another significant factors, that is the lack imagination of hometown. Using a case study of Indian Sikh twice-migrants, who migrated first to East Africa and then to the United Kingdom, Bhachu (1993) showed how they lack any imagination of hometown. Even though Sikh twice-migrants realize they come from India, their houses are not physically there, but in East Africa. Also, due to the fact that entire families migrated, so contact with India has been lost, even more so among the East African-born generation, who have no link to India at all. Therefore, after they then moved to the UK, already with no connection to their homeland, they chose to re-invent their identity by focusing on religious aspects (being Sikh) as opposed to other ethnic groups (Hindu) from India. In terms of religious practices, Sikhs are considered to be strict, making other Indian migrants (non-Sikh) view them as a conservative migrant' group. Through this case study, we can see that self-identification based on a place of origin or a native place, as Hill (1998) stated, no longer exists for those communities, as they lack the ‘myths of return’ (back to their homeland). These communities have therefore

tended to re-invent other forms of identity, to construct a boundary between ‘us’ and ’them’.

Reflecting the above, though Burmese Muslim migrants have a cultural link to India, they are not identified as Indian twice-migrants. Bhachu's arguments about Indian twice-migrants – that they lack a ‘myth of return’, I would argue, cannot be applied in the context of the Burmese Muslim migrants in Mae Sot. On this matter, Burmese Muslims have attempted to reinvent their identity in relation to their “native place”, the difference here being that the native place and “homeland” has become the “place” where they were born, which is Burma rather than India. The phenomenon of inter-marriage and the strong Burmese national identity that has been built, are the two key factors to have severed the Burmese Muslims cultural links to India. During my fieldwork, I found that almost all the Burmese Muslims I met intend to return back to Burma someday, when the political situation in Burma allows. The myth of return is; therefore, still maintained, along with relationships between Burmese Muslims in Mae Sot and their families and relatives living in Burma. Other those circumstances (including migration, inter-ethnic marriage and the Burmese nation-building project) make the Burmese Muslim case even more complex than the Sikh twice-migrant case, in accordance with their ethnic identity.

As mentioned above, in this study I argue that Burmese Muslims can be categorized as representatives of an ethno-religious community. The formation of Burmese Muslim identity has occurred due to the conflation between ethnicity and religion. People are recognized as Burmese Muslims if they claim Burma to be their native land, and also embrace Islam. Both these elements cannot be separated when arranging the ethnic identity of Burmese Muslims. In some cases, the religious identity of the Burmese Muslims seems more dominant than that of their native land, perhaps because Islam is not only a religion passed-down over generations, but is also the focus of many cultural, everyday practices among the Burmese Muslims. Nonetheless, I should also stress that Islam, or religious identity, also comes over as a part of Burmese ethnic identity, though reinvented in line with their social interactions, such as being used to construct the “other”, as invited by external powers.

The category 'Burmese Muslim' is actually a product of state organized national censuses, a hangover from British rule in Burma. The term *Zerbadee* (then changed to Burmese Muslim) was first constructed by the British government to classify the Burmese-born descendants of mixed marriages between Indian Muslims and Burman Buddhists (Yegar 1972 and Berlie 2008). This category attracted multiple responses from Burmese Muslims, who attempted to create a barrier between them and the Indian Muslim community, especially during a time of heightened Burmese prejudice in the 1930s. The claim made by Burmese Muslims that Burma is their native land certainly has strong backing, as they were born in Burma and their identity did not grow under the shadow of Indian identity. After Burma gained independence, Burmese Muslims began to be included in the Burmese nation through their inclusion as Burmese citizens, though they were and still are excluded from various rights as citizens, due to having a different religion to the majority, and also due to their historical relationship with India.

The term used for ethnic identity (*Lu-myo*) in Burma is an anomaly and a controversial (TNI & BCN 2014). In the modern nation state era, ethnic classification is still based on a colonial framework that is based on four different indicators: ancestry, genetics, territory and linguistics. By using these four indicators, the state is able to simplify its ethnic classification system, because it does not pay attention to migration phenomenon and inter-ethnic marriages, even though these often trigger fluidity in terms of ethnic categorization. In this context, Burmese Muslims have become an exception in terms of ethnic classification since the 1982 Citizenship Law was passed, as this stated that people with Indian or Chinese descendants should be recognized only as secondary citizens, and in some cases they are even categorized as foreigners. This law immediately excluded Burmese Muslims from the Burman majority, although they actually match the four ethnic classification indicators set by the state. On the other hand, ethnic classification as a state construction tends to be a political tool related either to national elections or the state's attempt to weaken major non-Burman ethnic groups (TNI & BCN 2014).

Through a case study of Burmese Muslims, I have uncovered here an ambiguity as well as a simplification of state ethnic classification based on the four indicators mentioned above. As an example, although most Burmese Muslims were born and live

in Burma (across 7 different divisions), the state does not categorize them as Burmans (native people). As a result, an ethnic barrier has been constructed by both the state and the Burman majority through a reinvention of religious identity. This means that Burmese Muslims are not only considered second class citizens, but are also often recognized as *kala* or foreigners, in the very place they call home. Many types of discrimination are experienced by Burmese Muslims, and this has caused many of them to migrate to various parts of the country, such as Karen, Shan and Mon states. This migration has never come to the state's attention, so it has continued with its simplifications of ethnic classifications, and especially those based on regional indicators. For example, since Burmese Muslims live in Karen territory, the state includes them as part of the Karen ethnic group, without being concerned with the heterogeneity that exists within such a group.

As a social construction, ethnic classification not only reflects the state's hegemony over its people, but also categorizes people's subjectivity (Toyota 2003), and in the context, we can see the Burmese Muslims long struggle against the term *Zerbadee*. *Zerbadee* people are defined as mixed marriage descendants (referring to their cultural link with Indians), and this leads to various types of discrimination and exclusion, including being excluded from Burmese citizenship. The term Burmese Muslim replaced the term *Zerbadee* because it better describes their community. Some Muslim organizations wanted the Burmese Muslims to be an official ethnic minority in Burma. Referring to the four indicators used by the state for ethnic classification purposes, the Burmese Muslims identify themselves as Burmese natives, but non-Buddhist, and such a self-identification is always reinvented during their migrations, to draw a barrier between them and other Muslim ethnic groups in Burma.

The attempt of Burmese Muslims to be a native group is certainly in opposition to the current national law; which aligns with the 1982 Citizenship Law. As a result, the Burmese Muslims have never been recognized as native Burmese because they still have cultural links to India. In this case, the state over-simplifies the situation by linking India to the native land of the Burmese Muslims, though in fact they were born in Burma and also have genealogical ties to the Burman people. As a result, the claims of the Burmese Muslims that Burma is their native land is not as strong as the 7 other

major ethnicities in Burma, such as the Karen, Shan or Mon, whose claim is based on a geographical setting. Their native land is not the most significant factor which gives the Burmese Muslims their feeling of togetherness as a community. In the Burmese Muslim's imagination, Burma is the place where they were born, as well as where they grew up. The strong enthusiasm on the part of the Burmese to nation-build did not mean creating Burmese Muslims as a community unbounded to a spatial landscape, but instead one tied to a religious view. It is this which causes tension between the Burmese Muslims and the state; it is based on economic jealousy combined with a long history of ethnic identity conflicts rather than simply as conflicts over territory or land.

From the case above, I argue that Burmese Muslims are a unique ethno-religious grouping, and unlike most ethno-religious communities across the world. Generally, the identity of an ethno-religious community is both constructed through religion, and also has a strong cultural link to an imagination related to a native land. The Jewish community; for example, although living throughout the world, is always linked to its native land of Israel. Another case is the ethnic Malay. Chua (2007), in her study, shows that the Malay group is the majority group in Malaysia; the term 'Malay' refers to Malaysian citizenship, for people who predominantly live on the Malay Peninsula - those who behave like the Malay and embrace Islam. She argues that even though they are fixed in space, all the people (including the indigenous groups in Serawak and Sabah divisions) can be the Malay, as long as they adopt Malay behaviors and cultural ethnics from the peninsula, including converting to Muslim. In the context of Burmese Muslims, the land is not merely a link to their ethnic identity, so we cannot call them simply "Burmese", because this image is linked to a Buddhist country. On the other hand, we also cannot call them just "Muslims" for two reasons: 1) it refers to people from Arab countries, and 2) due to the heterogeneity of the Muslim community inside Burma.

Through my research, I found out that the construction of ethno-religious identity has resulted in a flexibility of their ethnic identity among the Burmese Muslims. In Burma, Burmese Muslims have subsequently drawn a barrier up between them and India by imagining Burma as their native land. As well as their cultural differences, constructing Indian Muslims as the "other" is also related to the strategy used by the

Burmese Muslims to avoid the various types of discrimination displayed against the wider Indian community in Burma. However, the cultural link to India cannot be totally severed, since their religious identity (Muslim) is constituted as Indian by the state. In contrast, the Burmese Muslims in Mae Sot have reinvented their cultural links to India, either through their religious practices or by retelling stories of their ancestors. There are at least three significant factors at work here: the strong influence of India on their Islam, the negative stigma placed on Burmese migrants by those in Thailand, and their strategy to connect with a transnational network.

The factors above bring me to argue a primordial view, one that also simplifies ethnic identity as a fixed form based on genealogical ties. Burmese Muslim identity is situated, manipulated and transformed, because it appears as a product from the dialog between "self- attributed" and "other- ascribed". The high levels of mobility of Burmese Muslims has increased their social contact with diverse actors, places and structural hierarchies, and as a result, their identity even highly flexible; always being shaped and reshaped, depending on the context and conditions. I support my argument by employing Toyota's (2003) view; that ethnic identity is shaped according to crossing-points and intersections between internal and external imaginations of ethnic categorization. Since there are unstable social interactions in place due to the complexity of power relations between individuals, so the expression of identity is just as inconsistent, contradictory, multi-layered and fluid (Toyota 2003).

2.3 Negotiating Identity within the Flexibility of Borderlands

In the development of anthropology, the concept of borderlands or international borders is not debated so keenly. The borderland concept that leads to the presence of "physical boundaries" is much more familiar among geographers. During the first World War, political geography appeared as a sub-field of Geography, and was then associated with border studies (Donnan and Wilson 1999), but the analysis on borders started by defining and redefining the terms 'border', 'boundaries' and 'borderland', in order to minimize their overlap in terms of use. The term *boundaries* is defined as lines that demarcate state territory, a *border* is an area adjacent to the boundary, while a *borderland* refers to "the transition zone within which the boundary lies" (Prescott

1987, cited from Donnan and Wilson 1999). On its development, many scholars have begun to view the concept of borderland based on broader aspects, that is, related to social, economic, political and cultural issues. In other words, the concept of borderland is not only limited to an analysis of the physical environment, but is also used to view the dialectical within the human environment.

Borderlands, or state boundaries, in the eyes of international relations are seen as the limits of sovereignty of neighboring countries, based on international law. Various state symbols, such as immigration offices, national flags, and even the military, are presented along borders to demonstrate state power as well as to maintain sovereignty. In political studies, imagining national boundaries is a part of building national identity; to increase the level of nationalism among the population. Although it is governed by international law, drawing national boundaries often triggers conflicts between neighboring countries, either during the drafting process or thereafter. Donnan and Wilson (1999) claimed that the type and intensity of border disputes in Europe has tended to increase with the increasing number of nation states present. The issue of border disputes becomes more complex, for it is not only about conflicts between territories, but also cross-border ethnic conflicts, regional contestations over self-determination and nationhood, and conflicts on cross-border activities, including refugees, immigrants, illegal workers, smugglers and terrorists (Donnan and Wilson 1999).

The construction of international borders in Southeast Asia is a relic of the colonial era, meaning the diplomacy carried out between countries on this subject happened long before the independence in Southeast Asian countries was declared. Nonetheless, new debates concerning international borders are often reinvented among neighboring countries in the contemporary era. In terms of Thailand, the first agreement on national boundaries was drawn-up after the British conquered southern Burma after the first Anglo-Burma War (1924-1926). The boundaries agreed then did not cover the mapping of settlements, but dealt with those domains belonging to Siam (Thailand) and Britain (Thongchai 1995). Before the colonial era, Siam and other kingdoms in Southeast Asia did not employ a fixed territory as the limits to their sovereignty. Political relations at that time led to hierarchal lordships; creating a pyramid with a

"High King" in the top position. Every King had his own power and kingdom, but there were also power relations between inferiors and superiors. The king from a smaller kingdom (inferior) was required to serve tribute to a superior king, in order to maintain their relationship and to receive protection[26] (Thongchai 1995).

From the above explanation, it can be concluded that the construction of international borders in Thailand and Southeast Asia was different from the European case. The concept of *mandala* before the national boundary drawing process, meant most borderlands in Thailand remained neglected and uninhabited areas. After the national borders were agreed, Siam began to look after these areas by presenting some symbols of its power. In the context of Mae Sot, the demography of this area experienced a dramatic transformation after a road was constructed connecting it with Mawlamyine (a key economic center in British-Burma). From an "*isolated zone*", Mae Sot was transformed into one of the gateways to overland transnational trade from India to Siam. People from inner Siam or outside visited Mae Sot and built their settlements there, as approved by the King of Siam at that time. This is different to the case of Europe, in which national boundaries were constructed in inhabited areas as a result of falling empires and international war, and this process certainly led to conflicts among local people living around borderland areas.

During the contemporary era, the situation regarding Thailand's international borders has been mostly similar to what has happened in Western countries. The state has had to face various complex conflicts, including territory disputes with Cambodia (Wagener 2011), ethnic insurgency in the southernmost provinces (Liow 2006, Yusuf 2009), and the issue of illegal migrants, smugglers and human trafficking along the international borders with Burma (Rajah 1990, Grundy-Warr 2002, Lee Sang Kook 2007, 2008) and Laos (Molland 2010). In the first case (Cambodia), conflict has reached nation state level, based on struggles over national resources. Although there have been diplomatic attempts to resolve the territorial dispute by referring it to international arbitration, the conflict could re-occur any time, since both countries have a military presence around the disputed area. This is different to the second case (Southernmost

[26] The relationship among the Kings was called *mandala*. This term was introduced by O. W. Wolters, and was defined as a particular area.

provinces), where a conflict between the state and local people occurred as the result of building Thai national identity. The third case (Borderland with Burma and Laos) represents a conflict on two different levels, because illegal cross-border activities have resulted in negative impacts upon national security and local people. From these three cases we can see that in the contemporary era, continuity of state power and limits to sovereignty (borderlands) are still threatened by local, regional and supranational relations (Donnan and Wilson 1999).

The dialectical among those three levels attracted some anthropologist scholars to engage in the borderland concept. Basically, the borderland is not a strange or new thing within the development of anthropology as a discipline. Many anthropologists have conducted research into borderlands (and before this concept became popular), but they tended to view them merely as places and as a backdrop to their studies. Among these anthropologists, borderlands were considered to represent unique places with their own cultural diversity (Cohen 1965, Cole and Wolf 1974). This made anthropologists concentrate on "*symbolic boundaries*", those that represent border cultures. Donnan and Wilson (1999) claimed that anthropologists have come up with different perspectives on borderlands by understanding their cultural landscapes at a given time. Unlike economic or political sciences that analyze borderlands at the state regulation level, anthropologists focus their analysis on local people's perspectives, taking into account their power relations with a complexity of agencies at the local, national and international levels. This can be seen from some pioneers of anthropological research who conducted fieldwork around European borderlands. They argued that ethnic distinction (based on culture, class, social or political views) among peoples increases, not due to the construction of national borders, but these people's perspectives on it (Harris 1972).

Negotiations between people and agencies, whether at the local, national or international levels, have become the focus of most anthropologists, because they believe that:

> …although the structures of the state at international borders are often static, the negotiations of political and economic actions and values among the

> agents and organs of the state, and those who live at the border are continues and dynamic (Donnan and Wilson 1999).

On its further development, there is the anthropology of the border as a sub-field of political anthropology, and this concentrates on the borderland concept. Wilson and Donnan (1998) claimed that this school analyzes the everyday lives of communities around the borderlands, and includes:

> ...the cultural permeability of borders, the adaptability of border peoples in their attempts ideologically to construct political divides, and the rigidity of some states in their efforts to control the cultural fields which transcend their borders (1998; 4).

To get a whole picture of border identities, anthropological studies have been carrying a multi-disciplines perspective over the last two decades, by connecting empirical data with historical and economic-political contexts. Recent phenomenon in borderlands, including globalization and transnational, cannot be left out of the analysis. Some anthropologists have discussed whether the engagement of states with global economic conduced state power around borderlands is weakening or being threatened. Others have elaborated upon this question with various social phenomena, such as migration, labor, health, settlement, identities and the environment (see Alvarez 1994, Donnan and Wilson 1999). Since it is focused on the dialectical between people and agency, anthropology of the borderland in this sense has its relevancy with development studies. Through anthropological research, we not only find state perspectives on borderlands, but also how local people define the borderland itself. By examining these two perspectives, development experts and state agencies are expected to be able to formulate the right regulations for the sake of borderland development.

In her study of "trans-localized" Akha identity in Burma, China and Thailand, Toyota states that anthropologists view borderlands in upper Southeast Asia as the showcase of constant, shifting and changing ethnic boundaries, with uncertain memberships and markers (2003). This social relation complexity has grown since the traditionalist state era, during which power relations between inferior and superior kingdoms made people in the borderlands the subject of more than one state's civilization. The lining-up of fixed territory in the modern nation state era has involved an overlapping and ambiguous identity among the borderlanders. Such as the case with

the Akha people, Toyota shows that although these people belong to one group, they are known by different terms and localized in each of the countries in which they live. According to Chinese administrators, the Akha are of Hani ethnicity, which is one of the three biggest ethnic minorities in Yunnan Province. In Burma, they are known as a border minority as well as part of the Shan and Yunnanese Chinese groups, while in Thailand they are called Akha and categorized as a hill tribe.

In the modern state era, with fixed sovereignty, social systems around the borderlands have grown even more complex and ambiguous. This is due to the increasing flow of people torwards borderlands as a result of civil wars in some regions, transational trade developments and industrialization. The image of the borderlands as frontier areas which have a lack of state control, is one of their attractions for most illegal migrants. They believe that living in the borderlands is the right strategy to follow, to avoid strict state control. This perception is not totally correct. In Thailand, state control over the Thai borderlands seems tighter, as the areas invite the state's apparatuses, such as demarcation walls, immigration checkpoints and border patrols. People who enter or exit through an immigration check point are required to have a passport or visa, while those who want to work have to hold a work permit.

Even though the state seems so strict at guarding its sovereignty limits, state power in the borderlands is in fact still negotiable due to the role of agencies. Toyota (2003) mentioned that this happens due to the involvement of the state in free trade regimes and the interests of industrialization. A series of regulations introduced by the Thai state led to an economic boom in northern Thailand during the early 1990s, and the demand of Thailand for cheap labor to support its national economic sector motivated the state to loosen its control over the borderlands. This certainly triggered an increase in the number of migrants to Thailand, particularly from neighboring countries like Burma and Laos. The migrants often take advantage of the state's exceptions, through the issue of border passes or temporary passports, and this helps them to cross the international border, to live and work in the Thai borderlands. Many people enter Thailand legally, but may end up illegal because they do not hold legal permits or documents.

The borderland concept is the focus of this thesis because of my research location, which is an international border area between Thailand and Burma. Moreover, I place borderland as the main context in order to formulate some of the arguments in this thesis. As a borderland, Mae Sot is a unique space, with a multiple culture and some state exceptions taking place. The sustainable engagement of the Thai state with international overland trade conducted around Mae Sot has led to it dealing with flows of people, commodities and ideology since the mid-nineteenth century. At that time it was then accessed as a meeting point and a transaction location between international traders (such as the Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and Yunnanese) and traders from inner Siam. Many of these traders decided to build settlements there and live permanently. This led to Mae Sot developing into a plural region and made the people there tolerant of others' cultural or social systems (Lee Sang Kook 2007). As for the Burmese Muslim migrants, the plurality of Mae Sot (as a place) and the presence of another migrant community (as agents) was a significant factor in helping them to reinvent their ethnic identity.

According to historical records, Mae Sot at that time was not only a destination for transnational traders, but also displaced people and migrant workers. Much ethnic violence has occurred in Burma over the years, leading to the displacement of many who have crossed the border to Mae Sot town seeking shelter or the nearby refugee camps (Rajah 1990, Grundy-Warr 2002, Lee Sang Kook 2007). Although many have been settled in these refugee camps along the Thai-Burma border, some have made their way into town in search of a better life. In my view, the surplus human resources available in the mid-1990s allowed the state to declare Mae Sot a Special Economic Zone (SEZ), its aim being to improve the industrial sector. At the same time, Mae Sot also experienced an economic boom, attracting more people from the Burma side (Myawaddy). For most people, this rapidly increasing number of migrants resulted in a surplus of labor, which subsequently led to low wages. This case shows that the discussion on international borders involves, not only a relationship between states, but also between states and the people, as both are active actors in terms of manipulating borderlands for their own interests.

Under GMS regional economic cooperation, some international borderlands in Thailand seem to have become borderless. The meaning of an international border as the “limit of sovereignty”, but this has been challenged because for the state, such areas represent a “connector zone” for resource exploitation in other sovereignties. In the context of Mae Sot, the Thai state turned this region into a “transit area” for transnational trade with Burma. Besides the state, people in Mae Sot and surrounding regions certainly have different interpretations of Mae Sot as a “transit area”. As a consequence of living next to an international border, people are required to respond to regulations set by both neighboring countries. Such as the case for the Burmese Muslim businessmen in Mae Sot, for when the Burmese or Thai state unilaterally closes the border, it automatically stops cross-border activities. On the other hand, they also have to respond when the Burmese government issues a new regulation regarding export and import activities. From here we can see how the attitudes of people around the borderlands are a reaction to the actions of the relevant states.

2.4 Cultural Capital and Social Networks around the Borderlands

Social capital is “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition” (Bourdieu 1985). In this case, social capital is the non-monetary form referring to the process of individual participation within a group or community; to open the access towards another capital form. Portes (1998), in his study about social capital, illustrates clearly the differences between social, economic and cultural capital. Economic capital is related to monetary or material resources like money, gold or natural resources. If economic capital leads into material form, so cultural capital is the symbolic or invisible form, but is very decisive in terms of man's position in the social structure.

Cultural capital is the capital embodied within somebody, such as belonging to an ethnicity or as a native. In addition, cultural capital also refers to identity form, social status and an ability or knowledge to do something like the ability to speak foreign language and entrepreneurship skills. While social capital is capital formed beyond both economic and cultural capital, it is an important source of power. As I mentioned

previously, due to actors' involvement in particular activities, social capital refers to a network or mediator used to access resources. According to Portes, its mechanism at accessing economic capital can be divided into two kinds: direct, or by accumulating cultural capital first through a contact, with some experts or individuals to later refine it (1998).

In his study about the Manangi trade diaspora in South and Southeast Asia, Prista (2008) explains the mechanism of cultural capital accumulation through social capital. In short, the Manangi began their transnational trade using their social capital, even though it was relatively small in scale[27]. Wherever they went, they always purchased cultural products, to be sold in the next place. Along their trading routes, they tried to build networks among other Manangi and/or with local people. By building such networks, the Manangi slowly accumulated cultural capital in the form of knowledge and experience. Some Manangi with cultural capital subsequently decided to settle down along their trading route, as *cultural brokers*[28] for other Manangi merchants. They serviced the Manangi merchants by providing materials or information. In addition, even though they came from the same native land, a new community developed at the migration points due to socio-economic interactions related to the gems trade. The communities thus established represented a social network that accommodated the needs of the Manangi traders traveling the trade routes.

In the case of the Burmese Muslims, although they belong to one ethnic group from Burma, the Burmese Muslim community in Mae Sot has been quite recently formed, only since its arrival in the town. This is due to each member coming from a different place of origin. The mobility of Burmese Muslims has been lower than that of the Manangi, because they have chosen to stay at their first destination (Thailand); only a few have moved to a second destination (another country). However, Lee Sang Kook (2007) argues that Burmese migrants have quite high levels of mobility within Thailand. Mae Sot is not the main destination; it is meant as a staging post before moving on to

[27] Usually they search out Manangi in another areas. Ethnicity is a strong relation for the Manangi, so this network would them help each other, although they have never met before.
[28] They became cultural brokers by building boarding houses for Manangis,to set in place Manangi culture. There were also some cultural brokers who acted as go-betweens for trade activities with local people.

other cities in Thailand, like Chiang Mai or Bangkok. Mae Sot is the ideal place to accumulate both cultural and social capital, as the first step in a new life. On the other hand, knowledge and experience have also become important cultural capital for Burmese Muslim migrants who have decided to stay in Mae Sot, particularly for those who are actively involved in the trade and service sectors, such as running food stalls, secondhand commodity businesses, operating as gems traders, and running visa-passport agencies and money transfer businesses.

Berlie (2000), in his study of the Yunnanese Muslim caravan in northern Thailand, views migration patterns and cultural capital accumulation there as nearly the same as the Manangi community or Burmese Muslims in Mae Sot. The existing social networks along the caravan route became the major social network used by Yunnanese Muslims to access many other capital forms. The pioneers among Yunnanese Muslim traders built mosques along their caravan routes, from southern China into northern Thailand, to provide a religious reference point and also support economic activities and trading networks. This network was built and maintained over many generations. As happened with the Manangi, the knowledge, experience and ethnic/religious network built became a significant tool for Yunnanese Muslims, helping them to accumulate cultural capital. Another similarity between the Manangi and the Yunnanese Muslims is that both of them accumulated cultural capital by marrying local women. The first Yunnanese Muslim migrants were single men who subsequently married local women they met along the route, wherease in the case of the Manangi, only a few men married local women, normally those who decided to settle down in Thailand. According to Prista (2008), this was because many Manangi migrants maintained contact with their home towns.

As I discussed previously, in the case of Burmese Muslims in Mae Sot, knowledge and experience of trade were the cultural capitals which distinguished them from other migrants after arriving in Mae Sot. They were able to accumulate cultural capital through direct contact with experts within the community. In this case, the community has played a key role, as a form of social capital that has facilitated the flow of knowledge and experience among members. Therefore, the construction of ethnic identity has become key cultural capital for individuals, allowing them to become

accepted and enter the community. In Mae Sot, reinventing ethno-religious identity has supported the flexibility of the Burmese Muslims in terms of accessing the social capital from two different circles; there are the Burmese network and the greater Muslim world. As migrants from Burma, Burmese Muslims can easily socialize with other Burmese migrants, because they share a national identity. On the other hand, Burmese Muslims can also access social capital beyond their ethnic-national identity by reinventing their religious identity. As Muslims, they have a chance to meet, socialize or even build a network with other Thai Muslim communities, every time they go to pray at a mosque. The new generation of Burmese Muslims can also accumulate Thai cultural capital by entering Thai educational institutions, those belonging to Nurul Islam Mosque.

The economic survival of Burmese Muslims in Mae Sot has not merely depended on their religious networking. During my research, I found that the success of the Burmese Muslims' migration cannot be separated from their personal, cultural capital, such as the ability to speak Thai, their entrepreneurial skills, and their Thai social networks. Through this cultural capital, Burmese Muslims have become one of the key actors able to get actively involved in and benefit from transnational economic activities in Mae Sot. For example, in the case of the passport-visa agency, to run this business Burmese Muslims are required to have knowledge of regulations in both countries and also to maintain social networks with actors both in Burma and Thailand. One of the most important skills to possess in this business is to speak Thai, because success depends on being able to deal with actors on the Thai side. The care shown when balancing labor demand in Thailand and the "Bangkok dreaming" mindset that exists among the undocumented Burmese migrants, also shows how people involved on this business possess entrepreneurial skills. In contrast, Burmese Muslims, those without those three types of cultural capital, tend to work only as unskilled laborers for low wages in Mae Sot.

Dorairajoo (2002) in her dissertation "No Fish in the Sea: Thai Malay Tactics of Negotiation in a Time of Scarcity", also examines the work of ethnic/religious identity as cultural capital, while communities as social capital. In this study, she draws on the success of Thai Malays (Thai Muslim speaking Malays) at running tom-yum restaurant businesses, due to their strategy of accumulating cultural capital from two different

sources: Thailand and Malaysia. The label of "authentic" in any kind of Thai food they cook[29] and sell in Malaysia is the cultural capital they can use based on their identity as Thais. Meanwhile, the language, religion and historical similarities they have to Malays is the second form of cultural capital they use to ease themselves into everyday life. If cultural capital of the Thai Malays refers to the form embodied in each actor, their social capital comes from being constructed to his or her interaction with other Thai Malays or with Malaysians. In this case, the advancement of a Thai Malay, from being a dishwasher to becoming a cook and even the owner of a restaurant, is possible, though it depends on their success at accumulating knowledge and experience from the community.

A similar case is reviewed by Toyota in her study of the Akha people around the borderlands of Burma, China and Thailand (2003). She captures how the localized identity of the Akha in these three countries (known as 'Hani' in China, as a Tai-speaking group in Burma, and as the 'Akha' in Thailand) not only results in multiple identities among the Akha people, but also contributes to their socio-economic benefits. In this sense, she argues that a person who claims to be Akha (self-attribute) has a chance to access the Akha network across three different countries. In addition, she also shows how the intersection of Akha identity and the wider Chinese world is often successfully manipulated by some (especially migrants), as cultural capital with which to negotiate with the negative image portrayed of the Akha. At this stage, she investigates the ongoing trans-localized "Chinese identity" used by Akha people, who fundamentally are not recognized as Chinese, either in their country of origin or residence. Nonetheless, she stresses that ethnic identity, as socio-cultural capital, does not work independently, since it has to be supported by people's personal abilities.

It cannot be denied that the transnational Akha network that has moved out from Yunnan to Thailand has helped the Akha people with their migrations. Reinventing 'Akhaness' is a strategy used by migrants to gain approval from the Akha community in other places. However, Toyota (2003) in her study, does not relate the reinvention of 'Akhaness' to the concept of ethno-nationalism, but tends to see it as an economic and

[29] Although when in Thailand Thai Malays never cook Tom Yum, nor do they know how to cook it, they are from Thai territory, so the label 'Thai authentic' is embedded in every Thai dish they serve.

networking strategy. In Thailand, the economic success of some Akha migrants has not only been influenced by their ethnic network, but also their ability to play on their multiple identities as well as their entrepreneurial skills. For example, Akha migrants with Chinese language skills have been able to take advantage of the increasing number of non-Western tourists (such as from China, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong) visiting northern Thailand. The building of a transnational network around the tourism sector has then been manipulated by some circles to develop their businesses into other sectors, such as managing labor. Based on this, Toyota leads us to review Basch et al. (1994), whose argument on "transnational identity" is that it is not simply something that spans nations or social worlds, but is also represents a symbolic network of relationships that connect simultaneously to two or more social spaces.

Lee Sang Kook (2007), in his dissertation about Burmese migrants in Mae Sot, states that cultural similarities have also become cultural capital for migrants, helping them to access jobs. In the case of Karen migrants, their ability on three languages (Karen, Burmese, and Thai) as well as their good work ethic has led some Thai traders to employ them rather than those from other ethnic groups of Burma. Lee Sang Kook argues that Thai traders can gain two major advantages from Karen migrants who work for them: first, it is easy for the owner to communicate with them (in terms of giving instructions), and second, communications between the workers and Thai consumers are facilitated. Furthermore, the ability of the Karen migrants to speak Burmese is also used to attract Burmese consumers to come and shop there. The increasing number of Burmese coming to Mae Sot has certainly become one of the reasons why Burmese has become so important for trading activities there. This is also one advantage for some Burmese migrants who master in both Thai and Burmese languages because it facilitates them to get a job.

In the context of borderlands, Nisakorn (2009), through a case study of female Thai Muslim migrants in Malaysia, shows the importance of social capital for migrants, whether at their origin or in the destination country. If there are any relatives working or living in Malaysia, Muslim women from Southern Thailand decide to migrate. They think that if they have relatives there, at least they can minimize the chances of getting into trouble as illegal workers. Through relatives or family networks, female Muslim

migrants are not only helped when crossing the national border, but can also access information about jobs opportunities or places to live. The major role of social capital, as seen in the Thai Muslim migrant studies, can also be seen in the case of the Burmese Muslim migrants in Mae Sot. The number of undocumented migrants in Mae Sot is one indication of the social network at work, especially in terms of crossing the border. This usually happens among Burmese Muslim migrants who maintain a relationship with their hometowns in Burma. When a Burmese Muslim can survive in Mae Sot, it inspires other relatives or friends in their circle to follow suit. Such as the case with the gems market in Mae Sot, where many traders or brokers are relatives, yet do not come all together, because some have been living in Mae Sot for 20 years, while others are the newcomers.

As well as those methods mentioned above, an individual can also accumulate cultural capital beyond their ethnic/religious network, such as by joining an educational institution or contacting experts. Kang (2012), in his study about South Korean educational migrants in Singapore, shows how the parents prepare their children for global citizenship through advanced English learning. The parents realize that English is one of the most effective items of cultural capital at creating success, and Singapore is a key option, as English is the first spoken language there and their children also have the chance to learn Mandarin. Another reason why they choose Singapore is also related to cultural similarities, for it is very much the same as Korea, and when compared to western countries, is much more reasonable in terms of expenses and living costs. In this case, Kang adds that Singapore could be said to be a stepping-stone to competing in global area.

While Kang examines the role of studying abroad at accumulating cultural capital to compete with actors beyond the community, Liow (2011), in his study about Muslim identity and transnational Islam in Thailand's southern border provinces, shows a different side. In this case, cultural capital from studying abroad raises the students' social hierarchy within the internal community. After finishing their studies in Middle East countries and retuning to Thailand, these students attain a higher social hierarchy

because they are considered to have an advanced understanding of Islamic knowledge[30]. As a result, such students might occupy major positions in religious institutions, while others may be selected as Imams. However, the new ideologies they bring sometimes trigger conflict with other Muslims. In both case studies we can also see how cultural capital is accumulated beyond ethnic/religious networks; instead, it is accumulated based on access to global capital.

From the various studies above we may conclude that cultural and social capital are complex terms. Cultural capital is unfixed, stable and embodied in each individual, but it is obtained through interactions with a social structure. We cannot take for granted viewing cultural capital as a capital form which is given by birth, since an individual accumulates cultural capital through the learning process. In this case, social capital, as well as social networks, are certainly important. Talking about social capital, we need to realize that every individual does not come from the same background, so social capital or networks are not the same either. In the context of Burmese Muslim migrants, different individual backgrounds, such as the native location, educational level, occupations and migration periods, cause different social capital to form and lead to an imbalance in cultural capital among members. Therefore, in this research I aim to describe the impact of this imbalance; in terms of the social contacts made by the Burmese Muslim migrants, both within the without the community.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

The main analysis of this thesis is the re-invention of ethnic identity and its shifting of meaning in the context of Burmese Muslim migration to Thailand. Here I assume that the nature of ethnic identity as a socio-political construction is somehow flexible – whether maintained or transformed, following changes in time and space. As I mentioned previously, Burmese Muslim identity is a conflation between ethnic and religious aspects, as a product of national discourse in Burma. Through this identity classification, the state has attempted to sustain its domination over the Burmese population, and has created an identity that has been reworked and re-presented by

[30] It is similar to a Muslim who returns back from the Hajj in Mecca whom afterwards becomes respected more in their society (Suthep 1977).

people or units to create a barrier with others. Although having a cultural link with the majority Burmans, Burmese Muslims are still considered an unofficial ethnic minority due to religious differences. This awareness as a Muslim often triggers fear and worry, based on a long history of riots and violence against Muslims in Burma that could happen again at any time. Both these matters have led to their flexibility in terms of ethnic identity, as many present themselves as Burmese in public spaces, yet as good Muslims once they are at home (Berlie 2008).

Crossing a national border and living in a new country definitely means migrants have to deal with new socio-political structures. They are no longer living in their homeland and they meet new people in different cultures and with different identities. This often requires migrants to assimilate into local identities; to avoid being excluded in terms of social interactions. However, we cannot simply generalize that assimilation pressure from one place to another one is the same. In Mae Sot, in contrast, the Burmese Muslims have even successfully re-invented their ethnic identity, mainly due to Mae Sot's socio-political landscape, which is so open to and tolerant of others' cultures. On the other hand, I argue that there are another two factors that have supported Burmese Muslims when attempting to reinvent their ethnic identity, as follows: 1) the location of Mae Sot, which is on the Thai-Burma international border, and 2) the presence of other ethnic groups.

Although Burmese Muslims have successfully maintained their ethnic identities in Mae Sot, to some extent we cannot ignore that their identity has also changed. Here, I prefer to discuss the changing of Burmese Muslim identity using the term "switch", considering their ethnic identity has not been totally transformed into a new one. The 'switching' of ethnic identity happened when they were still in Burma, as Burmese Muslims there tend to perform as Burmese rather than Muslims, at least in public (Berlie 2008). Now they are in Mae Sot, they prefer to present themselves as Muslims. They can even be easily recognized among the crowd of Burmese migrants, through the various Islamic items of clothing they wear and other Muslim attributes they display. The shifting of this ethnic identity is not only related to religious tolerance, but also a positive image held of Muslim community, as well as the development of negative stigma over Burmese migrants in Mae Sot.

The growth of the Muslim community in Mae Sot has conduced religion identity to become cultural capital for the Burmese Muslims. The principle of *Ummah* (a Muslim nation) has facilitated the Burmese Muslims in their socialization process; helping them make friends with Muslims beyond their own group. On this matter, the mosque as a religious space also helps Burmese Muslims mix with other Muslims, especially during prayers. Through this process, Burmese Muslims can access information related to religious, social and economic issues in Mae Sot. As Muslims, they are also advantaged through the provision of many public facilities (Muslim schools, a Muslim cemetery) provided by the Nurul Islam Mosque, to accommodate the needs of the Muslim communities in Mae Sot. On the other hand, joining a religious movement such as Tablighi Jama'at, which is based at Nurul Islam Mosque, also gives Burmese Muslims access to multiple forms of capital.

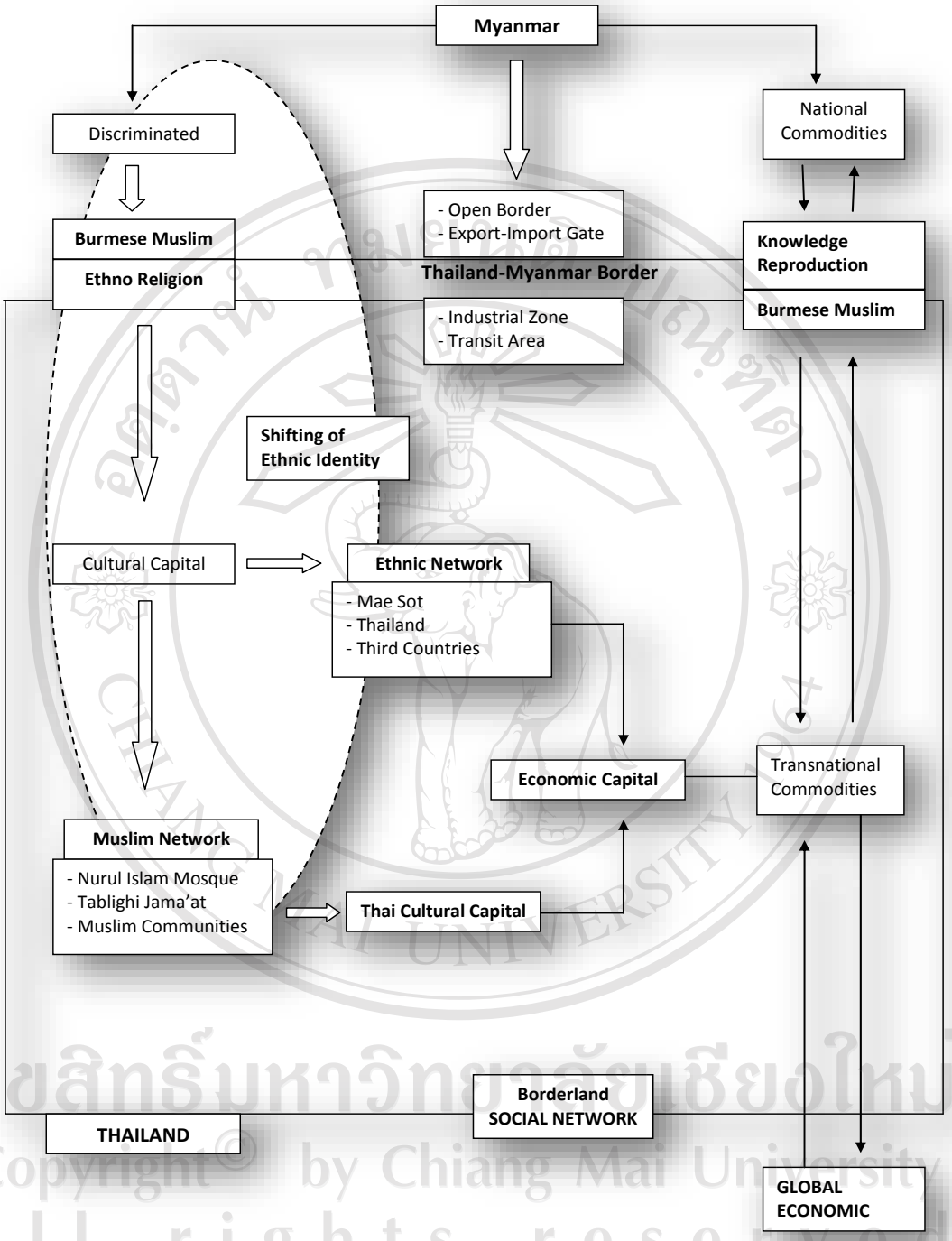

Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework