

CHAPTER 1

Introduction and Research Context

This thesis aims to study the space-making ‘processes’ in *Mae Sai* border town in relation to different groups of people who have not only migrated to *Mae Sai*, but also shaped the border space based on their spatial and material practices. It focuses in particular on the ways in which these people have created, negotiated and regulated the border space of *Mae Sai* amidst different socio-economic interactions, and also the particular way in which the border town generates spatial forces that limit or maximize these people’s space-making activities at the border.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Globally, social scientists since the 1990s have paid increasing attention to the mobility and movement of people and cultures across time-space (Appadurai, 1996, Ong, 1999; Massey, 2005). Prior to this orientation, anthropologists had tended to focus on a particular group of people in order to develop a holistic picture of the communities; like historians studying cross-cultural contact and exchange among people from different places and of different cultures. The Upper-Mekong region has long experienced cross-border relations in various forms, based on a variety of activities such as trade, commerce and even war (Curtin, 1894; Walker 1999; Prista, 2008). Such activities reflect the earliest form of cross-border connection within human societies, and these have in turn ignited interest in the study of space-making processes.

What makes *Mae Sai Mae Sai*? *Mae Sai* is a border town in northern-most Thailand that shares an international border with *Tachilek* border town in eastern Myanmar. *Mae Sai* has long had different groups of people who have migrated there for different reasons. For instance, the *Shan*, *Tai Lue*, *Haw* ethnics and *Chinese Kuomintang* (KMT) migrated to live at *Mae Sai* on a permanent basis, while *Chanthaburi* gem traders generally just visited and moved on. The most recent group of people to visit the town is

the ethnic petty traders from over the border in *Tachilek*, who cross the border to sell goods in *Mae Sai*.

To understand how *Mae Sai* developed into the border town it is today requires systematic enquiry. In a specific sense, how the border space of *Mae Sai* has become a real society has depended on the processes through which people have lived, experienced and interacted over time. This construction of space has also been subject to diverse and distinct social forces, those in turn conducive to the formation of its border space. People cannot understand their social world as an important part of social construct if they do not take into account how space-making is carried out through people's interactions (Kant, 1953).

This research adopts 'people-centered approach' which meant making people the center of both the research and its context. As defined by this approach, border people or 'borderers' refer to those who have not only migrated to *Mae Sai* but also actively engaged with the border physically, socio-economically and symbolically. As such, border-space is also defined as social construct, one which includes markers of individual or group identity, and which separates people into insiders and outsiders (Hellstrom, 2004). Moreover, it concerns with the dynamic process of differentiation that takes place in such a space, in terms of the perceptions of different groups of people, and as stimulated by other social forces that in turn engender the production and re-production of the border space. An emphasis is placed on spatial relations and human movements across the border, as this will contribute towards the development of a deeper understanding to empirical, experiential and ideological aspects of the border space-making process. The border space of *Mae Sai* is the outcome of negotiations among and the articulation of diverse spatial, political, and socio-economic trajectories.

In the early 20th century, numerous groups of people fled to contemporary *Mae Sai*, which its routes were linked to the frontiers of Eastern Myanmar's *Shan State*, northern Thailand's *Lanna Kingdom* and Southern China's *Xishuangbanna*. At that time, sporadic border violence led to a number of people moving to *Mae Sai*. (Sturgeon, 2004; Pitch 2007). As such, the associated instances of border violence and migration ushered in the creation of small-scale but unique border in the area (Sturgeon, 2004).

At that time, the British occupied a number of small, autonomous principalities known as *Shan State*, the home of many *Shan* ethnic groups¹ (Sturgeon, 2004). As a result of clashes with the *British Chiang Tung* in 1927, members of the *Shan* ethnic group were the first wave of people to migrate to contemporary *Mae Sai*. Pitch's research (2007) about the history of *Mae Sai* revealed that, in accordance with sources from the *Shan* community, three *Shan* princes and their families escaped to the area of contemporary *Mae Sai*, with *Shan* people subsequently following from the three *Shan* principalities involved, these being *Muang Tum*, *Muang Hsat* and *Muang Yong*.

In such a scenario, the border space-making that took place was not natural; the *Mae Sai* frontier was fundamentally built as a small political border enclave formed as a safe haven. During this nation-state building period, *Shan State* was being integrated into *British Burma*, while the *Lanna Kingdom* was incorporated into modern Thailand, leaving *Mae Sai* under the shadow of these state-making projects. The annexation of Burma into the *British India Empire* caused some *Shan* to flee from *Shan States*² to *Mae Sai*, where they created a patron and client relationship within the diverse new configuration of such small political border space. From the outset; therefore, *Mae Sai* had the potential to be a space of struggle, negotiation and contestation.

The second wave of people migrating to *Mae Sai* area came from *Lamphun* and *Chiang Mai* in northern Thailand, but they settled in *Tachilek*, inside Myanmar, on the opposite bank of the *Sai River* from *Mae Sai*. This migration took place around 1940, which signified the year that *British Burma* and modern Thailand set the borders of their respective territories based on this river (Pitch, 2007). The historical recollection of the *Shan* in reference to *Mae Sai* also stated that *Tai Lue* from *Xishuangbanna* of southern

¹ Prior to 1948, the *Shan States* were small autonomous principalities. Once included within *British Burma*, the area covered by these states became known as *Shan State* (Sturgeon, 2004).

² The *Shan*, who lived under feudal or colonial oppressive regime, could be free to settle anywhere, particularly, if they had been ruled harmfully and taxed heavily. There are *Shan* descendants now living at *San Kamphaeng District*, in *Chiang Mai Province*, northern Thailand. They moved from one of the *Shan States* about 80 years ago, having been taxed heavily by their princes or *chaofa*. *Chaofa(s)* were not land-owners in the European feudal sense, but land belonged to the state, as in the modern sense of the term (Yawnghwe, 2010).

China also fled to the area as a result of Chinese communists uprising started in 1944 (Evans, 2000), and also due to the Japanese invasion of China during World War II, after which Japan carried out air raids on *Xishuangbanna* in 1945 (Wijeyewadene, 1990). Members of the *Tai-Lue* group were victimized, as they had been dragged-into the political violence wrought by both the Chinese and the Japanese. During this same period, more *Tai Lue* from another part of northern Thailand and *Chiang Tung* also migrated into the area. Not until 1950 did the movements of *Tai Lue* settle and create their large community in *Mae Sai* (Pitch, 2007). They are now the very large group of the local people in the town.

The space of the present-day *Mae Sai* was embedded in the geo-body of the modern nation-state of Thailand, with *Mae Sai* being partially constructed out of the socio-politico meanings of refugees' lives. Both the *Shan* and *Tai Lue* ethnic groups shared a common experience, of oppressive political regimes, with some of the *Tai Lue* migrating due to political instabilities, heavy taxes and slave raids, and other migrating voluntarily. As Thailand was able to avoid western colonization, so it suffered relatively little political violence during the nation-state building period, meaning the migrants were able to take up sedentary cultivation, move closer to the state's center, develop trade ties and eventually drift ethnically and linguistically towards the modern nation-state (van Schendel, 1997; Scott, 2009). In other words, they became assimilated into mainstream Thai society.

This also brought about a change to the space in *Mae Sai* itself. As mentioned-earlier, van Schendel, Sturgeon and Scott put forwards a view on peripheral territories in relation to the state-centric paradigm. They said that producing a new complex border requires an exploration of a new set of social relations in the border space to take place, such as the development of a cross-border political network that give political leverage to borderland overlords during their negotiations and articulation with the state (Sturgeon, 2004). The state; meanwhile, also takes action to eliminate cross-border network in order to bolster and secure its territorial integrity. Paradoxically, but obviously in the case of *Mae Sai*, state sovereignty, people network and border zones have colluded within the complex space that exists there.

The third wave of migrants who took up the area of *Mae Sai* was the *Haw* ethnic groups, of which there were two groups. The first group was comprised of the long-distant traders who had long been trading between southern China and the Mekong basin; while the second included the *Kuomintang* (KMT) or the *Nationalists Chinese of Army 93*, who had fled China after the Chinese Communist revolution in 1949. KMT soldiers who had not been evacuated to Taiwan were forced to flee southern China, first crossing the frontier with Myanmar and then moving on to *Chiang Rai Province* in Thailand in 1960. Later, they were re-located to *Doi Mae Salong* area set in the northern Thai highlands, as the Thai government used them to guard against the communists along the border (Sturgeon, 2004; Pitch, 2007).

The KMT, a relatively new and mountain dwelling group of opium growers, worked in collaboration with other ethnic minorities such as *Shan*³, *Haw*, *Yao*, *Akha*, *Lahu* and *Lisu* to build opium trade because their way of life appeared to confine them to opium-cultivating mountainous areas (Sturgeon, 2004; Scott, 2009). In subsequent years, *Shan State* in Myanmar, northwestern Laos and northern Thailand collectively became known as the ‘*Golden Triangle*’, producing seventy percent of the world’s illicit opium (Chandola, 1976).

This scenario provides an example of how a group of caravan ethnic traders, once seen as backward, were able to change a frontier area into a relatively autonomous space, by imposing their own expansive trading ties and increasing commercial activities (Wolf, 1982). The caravan traders not only brought with them raw opium, but also high-priced Burmese jades and gems. As a result, *Mae Sai* was able to attract businessmen from Hong Kong, Singapore and *Bangkok*, becoming connected to the global drug and gem trades after 1960s, having, since the 13th century, been a part of the ancient trade route connecting *Shan State* with *Chiang Tung* and *Lanna Kingdom* (Chang 2004; Pitch, 2007).

³ *Shan* rebels and warlords were also another major group of opium growers. They forced the locals to grow opium, then sent the raw opium to Thailand, where it was refined into heroin and then export globally (Yawnghwe, 2010).

The KMT had a significant impact upon the re-drawing of the space in the *Golden Triangle* area, transforming spatial and social relations there. KMT members acted as overlords of the border space, which was inhabited by a plethora of physically scattering ethnic minorities. They overlaid a coercive patron-client relationship on to these groups in a complex form of kingship-like, kinship-formed, martial ties, trade alliance and shared memories of violence, in exchange of immediate assistances given to households in need that eventually linked all these diverse hill tribe groups together (Sturgeon, 2004; Pries, 2005).

The fourth wave of people who moved to settle in *Mae Sai* included people from *Chanthaburi Province* in Thailand over the period 1990 to 2003. These were gems traders, who, once the gem mines in *Bangkaja Sub-district* in *Chanthaburi Province* and *Bo Rai District* in *Trat Province* (eastern Thailand) had been depleted, moved to the northern-most area to buy gems from Myanmar's ethnic gem traders who travelled to *Mae Sai* from *Mogok* in *Mandalay* in northern Myanmar and from *Mong Hsu* in *Shan State*, eastern Myanmar to sell their gems. About 2,000 gem traders from *Chanthaburi Province* moved to *Mae Sai* over this period, later bringing their families with them. With such a large pool of gem brokers coming from various gem-trading places across Thailand, together they ultimately formed a large gem trade network in *Mae Sai*, which in the end constituted around 8,000 to 10,000 people in total. These traders moved to *Mae Sai* and lived among the locals, many of who were *Tai Lue*⁴.

The group from *Chanthaburi* people initiated a so-called 'space of flow', as their space was not just 'out-there' at the gem market, but also constructed through cross-border trade network, those embedded in globalization as a result of telecommunication and transportation development brought-in through the state-sponsored 'Economic Quadrangle' program, which was launched in 1993. As a result of this development, space in the area became more fluid. Such fluidity also relied on, to a certain degree, the cultivation of interpersonal connections, spatio-social and material relations and mutual trust, those that spanned across time-space (Pries, 2005).

⁴ As a result of Thailand's assimilation policy, the early ethnic groups of people who are the *Shan*, *Tai Lue* and *Chinese* living at the border town of *Mae Sai* are usually called *Thai Yai*, *Thai Lue* and *Thai Chinese* respectively.

More to the point, the border space of *Mae Sai* increased its level of complexity over this period, as it encountered multiple trajectories. The *Chanthaburi*'s negotiation of border space would have not been impossible without the articulation of their knowledge and technical expertise within gem trade, as this allowed and encouraged them to exploit the modern infrastructure and extract frontier resources. The *Chanthaburi* also raises the question of the space of capitalistic flow, in the sense of a particular economic space, can strengthen for a while and then weaken⁵. To put it simply, the arrival of the people from *Chanthaburi* produced temporarily and uneven economic growth among a group of people in a certain area, and then was gone.

The latest wave of people who came to contemporary *Mae Sai* was a group of ethnic petty traders from *Tachilek*. They came with Chinese goods which can now be found across *Mae Sai* market, and are targeted at tourists visiting the town. They sell a variety of cheap items such as clothes, dried food, stone jades and fake gems. The expansion of this ethnic trader community in the town is the result of China's growing economy and the expansion of its market towards its southern neighbors such as Myanmar, Thailand and Laos. *Mae Sai* becomes one of the biggest markets for Chinese goods. At first sight, these traders may not be considered the majority group in *Mae Sai*, but despite being a rather small ethnic group, having a major impact on social space in the town⁶. They remind one of the *Chanthaburi* people who once ran their gem businesses in town and made it a major part to the local economy. Similarly, these ethnic petty traders who have come from across the borders have replaced, repeated and rewritten to a degree the *Chanthaburi*'s social relations, adding to the complexity of space in *Mae Sai*. Also, these ethnic petty traders who go back and forth across the borders have helped co-construct the border space of both *Mae Sai* and *Tachilek*.

⁵ My ethnographical research found out that the gem trade lasted for approximately ten years in *Mae Sai*, between 1990-2003, but the peak period lasted only two years from 1995-96. The majority of the *Chanthaburi* gem traders began to go back *Chanthaburi Province* once the gem trade started to decline in *Mae Sai*.

⁶ *Mae Sai* nowadays (2012) constitutes numerous groups of people who have migrated to live in this border town over time. The *Tai Lue* (*Thai Lue*), *Shan* (*Thai Yai*) and *Thai Chinese* are considered the locals because they migrated around fifty years ago, or after World War II and have Thai ID cards. Others, more recent ethnic migrants include the *Burmese*, *Akha*, *Rohingya*, and *Chinese*.

In the final analysis, the border space-making in *Mae Sai* has led to the growth in size and complexity of the border town in terms of both its quantitative and qualitative significances. This underscores dynamism of this border space which is always shifting and changing cultural network as well as temporal, social and material relations (Massey, 2005; Pries, 2005; Ong, 2006; Harvey 2006). Present-day *Mae Sai* is also a reflection of the political border dynamics that have reached out beyond its own space and across different time periods, a space in which the concentric locality played out. Therefore, understanding the border space of *Mae Sai* will help us understand the border town in general, in more detail.

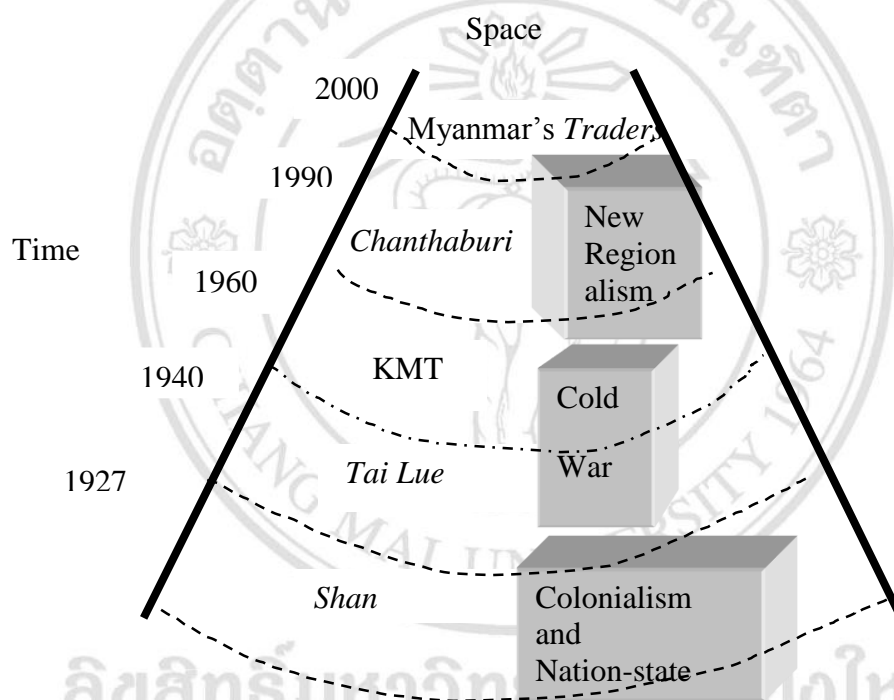


Diagram 1.1 Time-Space Diagram of *Mae Sai*, Reflecting Different Migration Waves and with Reference to Global-Regional Politics

The border of *Mae Sai* has experienced five key migration waves over time: the *Shan* (1927), *Tai Lue* (1940), *KMT* (1960), *Chanthaburi* (1990) and *Myanmar's traders* (2000). These groups of outsiders have contributed to the space-making, produced and re-produced out of historical, geographical and socio-cultural relations, and their articulations have been a response to shifting and changing regional situations and settings. With the advent of globalization, the border space has shrunk considerably.

Chart 1.1 Mae Sai Space Configuration through Time in Relation To Border Actors Including Border Goods

	1927	1940	1960	1980	1990	2000
Global-Regional System	Late Colonialism and Early Modern Nation-state		Cold War	Transitional Period	Globalization and Regionalization	
State Boundary	No Clear-Cut State Boundary	Semi-Close and Semi-open State Boundary			Cross-Border Region/Economic Quadrangle	
Border Configuration	Small Political Border and Autonomous Border			Border in Transition	Border Economic and New Regionalism	
Border Actors	Shan, British Burma, Lanna	Thai Lue, Siam, Chinese, Japanese	KMT, US, China, Burma, Thailand	US, China, Burma, Hong Kong	Chanthaburi, Myanmar's ethnics	Myanmar's ethnics
Border Goods	Opium, Heroine, Jades			Gems, Jades, Consumer Goods	Chinese Goods, Consumer Goods, Pirate Products	

1.2 Research Questions

This thesis is organized in line with two topics of interest: border space and borderers, and how they are linked. The research questions are as follows:

1. How do different groups of people construct border space?

- a) Who are the major groups of people who shape border space?
- b) How does a particular group of people make a meaning to border space?

The Thai state border was first introduced during the colonial period; however, there was a lack of consideration given to the different groups of people who would have to live with the border realities. These borderers have since played a crucial role in constructing and practicing the border, in ways that ensure they are able to secure physically and socially meaningful positions that connect to and stretch social space (Witteborn, 2011). People in this way are usually defined through a meaning-infused space.

2. In what way is the border changed to a form of capital by different actors?

- c) How does the border become a resource tool?
- d) Why do actors negotiate the border?

The border appears to have become of growing political importance in recent times, as a socio-economic asset to be used by different actors living there. The border is not only manipulated, negotiated and transgressed to serve different purposes and desires through time, but also influenced by its larger socio-political environment. As mediated by different social forces, the border is turned into a form of capital that can be exchanged for power and benefits.

3. How does border space continue to play a central role in shaping, dividing and uniting people?

- e) Whose border space is being drawn and according to which principle?
- f) To what extent does a meaning of border space change over times?

The border space-making involves the process by which the different groups of people construct an understanding of their communities in relation to the rest of the

world, and has emerged as a natural order in human existence. A border is not only deemed to be a boundary, but an essential referent point for people's lives and social conditions. While it is true that a set of issues, such as migration, border trade or transnational network, highlight the growing interactions and interdependence between different places, the border has taken on different roles, functions and symbols.

1.3 Research Objectives

This research aims at

1. To examine a particular form of the spatio-temporal and political-economic construction of *Mae Sai* as a border town
2. To study the production process of *Mae Sai* border and the way its border can be transformed into a form of capital, and
3. To investigate a border regime that fulfills different functions and purposes for different border actors in relation to the state border

1.4 Theoretical Frames and Review of Literature

Social scientists, such as anthropologists, geographers, sociologists, before doing anything else, are supposed to define their areas of study with certain spatial frame of reference. This research should be done so by now by describing three frames of reference for this study: 'the border', 'capitalism' and 'the state'.

1.4.1 The Border

First and foremost, this thesis explores the border as a kind of space. The idea that space is socially-produced or constructed has demonstrated a renewal of interest in issues of space and place in social sciences, ranging from classical human geography to contemporary multi-disciplinary studies. Situated in the Upper-Mekong region, the border space examined here is becoming a locale in which the new articulation of both formal and informal trade and new spatial-regulatory regimes are now emerging. If the border space is the sphere of multiplicity-the product of social-relations, and these relations are real practices, and always on-going-then this border space is always open and open-ended; based on global relations and the ever-present element of chance

(Massey, 2005). One thread that stands out is that this border space has been through many different trajectories, and so has become increasingly complex in nature.

In a simple sense, Massey (2005) deconstructed space into a set of three interrelated propositions. First, space was being made through social-relations; thus, space was the coming together of the previous unrelated, a constellation of forces and events. Secondly, space was the sphere which reflected the possibility of the existence of heterogeneity, hence it was constituted through interactions, ranging in scale from the global to the local. Lastly, space was always in the process of being made, so it was dynamic. All in all, space was functioned as a verb, not a noun, because of uncertain process of possibility in the making. Massey's space could also be compared to a spatializing-chemical reaction due to no portable rules or explicit controls being in place. In other words, space had to negotiate and articulate with unavoidable challenges, coming out of different trajectories here and now.

More specifically, the Upper-Mekong border has undergone a dimensional shift and change in terms of the social-relations and network in a new time-space. Time-space implies the idea of internal relations; of external influences being internalized within specific processes over time (Harvey, 2006). As a result, the turn-over rate of time-space in the Upper-Mekong borders has been increasingly tight (Perkmann and Sum, 2002), based on processes through which private-public and regional-national-local actors have been able to re-articulate and re-fix the border's time-space across regions (Allen and Allan Cochrane, 1998).

Lefebvre (1996) has been widely cited in human geography, and used his classical work to highlight his conceptual idea and problems associated with geographers' uses of his original idea related to the social production and construction of space (Unwin, 2004). Lefebvre's space was portrayed as involving three interrelated interactions: (i) the space we lived in and practiced every day (lived space), (ii) the space affected by how spatial practices were organized (perceived space), and (iii) how the construction of space was verbalized in the first place (conceived space)⁷. Social space worked in a

⁷ Lefebvre was influenced by Marx as he endeavored to construct a dialectical theory in which it was inextricable indivisibility of spatiality and society. Unwin summarized that 'spatial practice, which

triad that facilitated human understanding of the many-faceted mechanisms surrounding the space-making process (cited from Hellstrom, 2003). Even though his space was not totally a stasis, it was devoid of time. Post-modern social scientists like Massey, Harvey and Smith have since incorporated time into their works on space.

Space has been at the center of human geography, but in recent times the concept of time-space has become more important and widely accepted, in the sense that time reflects our understanding of the world in which we live; while space is influential in the social meanings of our lives. As such, a number of seminal works have been written which focus on border space-making in the context of the Upper-Mekong region, covering spatial development in terms of time-space operations. These studies can be grouped into the following approaches.

1.4.2 Border Studies in Anthropological Approach

Three contemporary works have addressed border space-making from the vantage point of the border itself. Both Lee Sang Kook (2007) and Kyoko Kusakabe and Zin Mar Oo (2007) shared a similar idea that border space-making was conducted within the dynamic challenges of people's movement between different places. As a result, border space-making was constructed through the nexus of varied forms of network that went beyond their bounded places. The border social system integrated informal actors such as undocumented migrants, as well as continuous flows of people and informal relationship, to a relatively greater degree than social system in non-border areas. Likewise, but on a larger scale, Prista Ratanapruck (2008) explored the *Manangis* community in Nepal constructed through, and embedded in, the social relations stretching

embraced production and reproduction, and the particular locations were the characteristics any social formation. Thai is, 'spatial practice' ensured continuity and some degree of cohesion. In terms of social space, and of each member of a given society's relationship to that space, this cohesion implied a guaranteed level of competence and a specific level of performance. 'Representations of space', which were tied to the relations of production and to the 'order' which those relations imposed, and hence to knowledge, to signs, to codes, and to 'frontal' relations. 'Representational spaces', embodying complex symbolisms, sometimes coded, sometimes not, linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life, as also to art (which might come eventually to be defined less as a code of space than as a code of representational spaces)' (Lefebvre 1991, 33 cited directly from Unwin, 1999).

from *Manangi* valley to various trading territories abroad. She emphasized the fact that these relationship functioned as an institution in which people always cultivated relations and trade with nexus members.

This helps us reflect on a classical anthropological work on border studies written by Edmund Leach (1954). He described Burma as a frontier between China and India, meaning it was a border populated by people of many different ethnicities. He added that Burma's border was shaped through complex patronage relationship developed between lowland and upland people of different ethnicities on the one hand, and on the other hand by mutual interests (Sturgeon, 2004). Indeed, Grant Evans, Christopher Hutton and Kuah Khun Eng (2000) claimed that even before 1960s, the process of state formation proceeded briskly in the Upper-Mekong region, extending into China, Thailand, Laos and Myanmar, with the states there trying to control people through political establishments; to ensure its territorial integrity. In a similar vein, James Scott (2000) also looked at the border in relation to nation-state, because the creation of new borders brought about a whole new set of power relations.

Analyzing border between northern Thailand and northwestern Laos, Andrew Walker (1999) critiqued the way border was turned into a center through the introduction of a new form of time-space governance; the 'Economic Quadrangle' project. At a time when states in the area were both tightening their border rules and regulations, and at the same time opening-up their borders, this project provided unequal incentives and opportunities based on a new form of regulation over border affairs. The border was constructed through the active local border community and its trading network, so the border became a node of power where border transaction took place, and where space of negotiation between local communities and the state-led market reforms could develop.

In this regard, the Upper-Mekong border has been re-constructed out of a wide constellation of forces and actions, originating from local, national, regional and global dynamics of relevant agencies. Some of them have developed out of long-running shifts in the structure of the region in general, while others have taken shape during particular historical moments (Allen and Allan Cochrane, 1998). Nonetheless, border studies conducted by anthropologists have been grounded mostly on border negotiation, cross-border social relations and ethno-cultural landscapes.

1.4.3 Border Studies in Phenomenological Approach

As well as viewing border space as socially-produced or constructed at the beginning, border space can also be grounded in, or contingent on, human lived experiences. The anthropological approach focuses on the functional and material aspects of the border, while the phenomenological approach focuses on the mental and experiential aspects of the border. Phenomenological studies on borders shed light on symbolic borders; where it is possible for human beings to describe their life-worlds through how they are constituted, engaged and experienced (Husserl, 1970; Zahavi, 2003).

One basic assumption of space is that all forms of space, whether they be functional, material and/or mental, are both societal and spatial, because human beings construct them both physically and mentally. Social events can also be interpreted in terms of time-space connectivity, that is, what it means for us to live in one place, exists in our space of experience. Alfred Schutz (1993) and Jergent Habermas (1981) conceptualized experiential space in two ways. First, it was societal space with which human beings first engaged as infants and then ‘conquered’; and second, it was primary in a methodological sense because it formed the basis for every further experience of space (cited from Pries, 2005). In a simple sense, space becomes influential in shaping, separating or uniting people, because space of experience is increasingly tied to reciprocal exclusiveness. A clearly defined geographical space always goes beyond a territory or locale where are supposed to correspond to only one societal space (cited from Cooper, 2008).

Gaston Bachelard (1958) explored the habitation of the architectural space of the house. He set out his phenomenological account to unveil the essence of the daily experience of house-dwelling (Copper, 2008). As such, a single geographical space became a socially-occupied territory with space for only one societal space; a locale could only accommodate one community; a house supposed to fit only one family (Pries, 2005). People’s struggle over and exploitation of space were a result of accommodating exclusive geographical spheres. Bachelard also reflected upon the nature of poetry and the role of the poet, and suggested that it was poetry which allowed for the articulation

of the 'oneirism', or day-dreaming (Copper, 2008). As such, people were making space as much as they were thinking space at the same time.

Imagination plays an important role in phenomenology. Anthropologists can benefit from phenomenologists in terms of imagination, in spite of the fact that they do not need to subscribe to the philosophy. For examples, Aranya Siriphon (2000) studied the lived experiences of the *Tai* ethnic traders along the borders of Myanmar and China, when re-constructing and re-vitalizing their own culture and identity through the consumption of symbolic and meaningful Thai clothes and fashions. This had enabled them to create a consciousness of '*Pan-Tai*' images based on their imagination for the '*Tai-sibling*' through cross-border cultural links, which went beyond the physical boundary. As a result, the *Tai* ethnic traders had intentionality towards the '*Pan-Tai-ness*' cutting across different *Tai*-speaking world.

Similarly Wen-Chin Chang (2004) investigated the operation of the jade trade network that relied on '*guanxi*'. It was a life-world in which helped accommodate consciousness of sibling that spanned across different social spaces. The sense of belonging created and generated a pool of social resources such as mutual obligation and conflict resolution, all of which appeared in acts of consciousness. It helped establish relationship cultivated out of interpersonal experiences that connected traders on the move. As a result, it was a cultural product of social interaction that was turned into institutionalization for collective network that linked nexus members or open-ended trading groups.

More significantly, the most influential contribution of phenomenological approach to anthropology can be seen in the tradition's focus on meaningfulness, because social beings are thinking beings. A man is never ever an object, but rather is an agency of the network of experience. That is, he is a living and engaging entity by which, and through which, he himself actively experiences the world. Nonetheless, it is not possible for a person to experience the world in its totality; therefore, a person is deemed the existential node of contact from which various human engagements with the life-world

are transacted, and in which meaningfulness is conceived and intersected (Overgaard, 2008; Desjarlais and Throop, 2011⁸).

The border space-making activities that take place at the edges of a nation-state can be addressed from, or constructed through, the ‘below’ or the ‘above’, or both. The below appears in the form of outsiders, insiders, migrants and other beyond-boundary influences and flows, while the above reflects the appearance of new forms of regionalism, which state-led regionalism underlining resource frontiers.

1.4.4 New Regionalism

The Upper-Mekong Sub-region, as an interconnected and integral border, provides a motif for the new context of Thailand’s border space. Post-Cold War, this area has witnessed considerable regional economic cooperation, marked in Thailand by the Thai Premier *Chartichai Choonhavan*’s 1988 initiative to change ‘battlefields to marketplaces’ (Hirsh, 1995). In fact, this call for regional economic cooperation was driven by Thailand’s own increasingly scarce resource, and a hope for opening-up regional resource diplomacy. From the early 1990s, regional economic cooperation has made the ‘Mekong motif’ possible, helping to construct a new region. This has gone far beyond the Mekong basin, based on logical thinking that has included a set of natural resource complementarities that go far beyond Thailand’s own natural resource pool. As a result, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) founded the ‘Greater Mekong Sub-

⁸ Robert Desjarlais and Jason Throop, in their ‘Phenomenological Approaches in Anthropology’ (2011), additionally explained that to examine human lived experiences was to recognize the necessary emplacement of modalities of human existence within ever-shifting horizons of temporality. Human existence was temporally constructed in such a way that human past experiences were always retained in a present moment that was feeding forwards to anticipate future horizons of experience. This included the dynamic ways that actors shifted between differing attitudes in the context of their engagements with life-world. According to Husserl, it was by means of acts of phenomenological modification that actors came to take on differing attitudes that evidenced more or less reflective or engaged stances when relating to objects of experience, be those objects deemed to be of the mind or of the world. Particularly significant here were phenomenological insights into a distinction between modes of existence predicated on our immediate pre-reflexive experience and more reflexive mode of existence that arose when actors took up theoretical attitudes towards their own and others’ actions.

region' (GMS) program in 1992, and has referred to the GMS as a 'new regionalism for Asian economic growth' (Hirsch, 1995).

Philip Hirsch (2008) also stated that the colonially- and Cold War-defined political border in the region had once again become increasingly permeable due to economic ties with neighboring countries. Thailand's border was being incorporated into the GMS project, meaning that what was once an economic backwater was set to become the geographical center of regional economic power. Thai border towns had attained a new vibrancy because of their border locations (Chuthatip and Wu 2004). Some of the processes involved in recovering the national border had been conducive to new economic opportunities. New regionalism, reflected in the opening of the 'Economic Quadrangle' program, was both a strategic planning dream and also a grounded reality. The program was based on complementary factors of production, trade and commerce, that were materialized themselves through investment in transportation systems and the removal of or reduction in trade barriers among member countries. The GMS's 'Economic Quadrangle' program had also been significant for a diverse groups of people (Huguet and Punpuing 2005; Caouette, 2007), leading to both legal and illegal migrants from Thailand's poorer neighbors moving to border towns such as *Mae Sai* in *Chaing Rai Province* and *Mae Sot* in *Tak Province*.

The study regarding the new regionalism is also in line with the study of Kyoko Kusakabe and Zin Mar Oo (2007). They concluded that the government's initiative on 'Border Area Development Program' (BADP) was resulted in the border town of *Tachilek* becoming more ethnically diverse. It was once a dangerous town, beyond the control of both the state and the local community. Nowadays, the understanding of the security situation in *Tachilek* had improved due to peace talks between the government and rebellious ethnic groups. There were now more female ethnic workers moving from the heartland of Myanmar to the borderlands, and they were maintaining connections and commitments to their homelands. As a result, *Tachilek* was increasingly and inversely coming under the influence of the heartland village. Furthermore, in the context of it being an ethnically diverse border town, the Myanmar government's policy of suppressing ethnic minority groups had exposed Myanmar's ethnic minority migrant workers to historically-based ethnic bitterness. This has in turn led to female ethnic

workers remaining connected with their heartland village, with their mobility helping to re-create a new community in the border town based on spatial-social relations, enhanced by new regionalism.

1.5 Capitalism

With the appearance of regional development of the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS), the borders of these countries have become a terrain of capitalism. As a result, national borders are being converted into a route of transition to capitalism that is expansively spatialized; it is highly geo-capital. The geo-capitalism is influential in the way that it has penetrated the borderland and turned it into an economic border facilitating cross-border production and/or cross-border trade. Grant Evans, Christopher Hutton and Kuah Khun Eng reasoned that capitalism was radically de-centered, having moved away from its previous national or even corporate focus. Therefore, it became more expansive and 'footloose', owing largely to states turning borderlands into marketplace, making borders conducive to capital growth. For instance, the border town of *Mae Sot* in Thailand became a base for cross-border production, with factories there using abundant cheap labors and raw materials from the border areas of Thailand and Myanmar (Pitch, 2007; Arnold, 2010). These areas were a complex web of local sub-contracting production activities targeted at the global export market. Nonetheless, different borders had different means of connections, owing to their diverse socio-economic setting (Appadurai, 1996).

Anna Tsing (2005) explained that imperfect capital interfaces between the global and local connections yielded a specific consequence on borderland because the global and local were interconnected across different trajectories. These interconnections occurred among different people, and across socio-economic statuses and diverse social phenomena. As a result, the *Meratus Mountains of southern Kalimantan* in Indonesia was turned into inter-scalar domain. It generated a newly-developed trans-local network which further linked the global, regional and local through capital. The idea of capital, together with prosperity, attracted an array of international investors, local officials and villagers, including documented and undocumented workers, to come together. As a result, capitalism helped break down borderland into being increasingly fluid space, while at the same time creating spatial inconsistencies.

Theoretically speaking, capitalism renders each borderland into a distinct form of border area. It is the border space where the expansive nature of the capitalism of extraction comes into its own. Border of capitalism can be said to possess its own history, having different starting points and operating according to its own rhythms as well as laying down its own trajectories.

To begin with, the idea of capitalism arriving at the periphery and specifically in border areas can be traced to Harvey's works (2009). As capitalist-industrial society approached the period of late capitalism, it inevitably relies on the process of intense capital accumulation, as was obvious in the way capital penetrated the entire global space. Consequently, it sparked the crisis of over-accumulation, which could be solved through the creation of re-investment in remote areas such as borderlands. As a result, the border areas became both the by-product of expansive space and the solution of its over-accumulation. Capitalism in the border areas worked through the export of capital and labors surpluses into such areas, so it could be thrive through the quest of new people, new groups and new frontiers. To put it another way, the border had to be fixed, that is, 'spatial-fixed', in order to accommodate the over-accumulation of capital through megaprojects and cross-border manufacturing. These projects included highways, dams, power plants, factories or service industry, all of which entered the Upper Mekong Sub-region including its border towns.

Neil smith (2008) talked about the borderland as being co-produced by capitalism in terms of social-material relations with the border. Initially, as men came to use the border, then figuratively speaking they began to 're-border'. They used their labors to appropriate, transform and destroy it. The way they did it was akin to re-writing or re-working the border to fit their purposes. For them, the border was also a commodity, so they produced the border in a concrete and material way; as both the product and thing by means of labor process. Capitalist humanity laid claim to border for a set of use values in Marxist term. In turn, the concrete and material border was turned to natural border through the dynamics of capital accumulation and commodification, as exchange value. To put in another way, the natural border co-existed and overlapped with man-made border, but embedded in different value forms. Hence, the border became increasingly treated as a commodity with exchange value, so much that the process

became a seemingly natural border. In fact, the production of border was increasingly a product of capitalism, and more importantly could not be perceived as independent from capitalist dynamics of production, circulation and exchange. The bottom line was that border as a commodity was now traded with limitless social-material usages, and through exchanges. As such, people were made to become labors, but nature made to become a resource (Tsing, 2005).

All these works have contributed to the study of borderland capitalism, which has two interrelated functions. It drains the surpluses of over-accumulated capitals, taking into remote areas, and at the same time, as capital is exported to the border areas, it turns the natural borderland into a kind of capital for further profit accumulation. The border is now embedded in spatialized capitalism, not vice versa.

1.6 The State

There has been an attempt recently among anthropologists, geographers, political scientists and their scholar circles to review the study of state, which has tended to be eclipsed by the globalization discourse. Effected by the widespread impacts of globalizing capitalism, the state has loses much of its ground, and subsequently has been rendered a product of concerns only. Nonetheless, globalizing capitalism is currently the key concern for state practices, and its consequences are in turn shaped by the states as part of the world's trans-national flows. The broader significance of such concern lies in its potential contribution to the opening-up of a space of possibilities for the state to perform hybridized state functions, other than just act as a sovereign entity as it did before. State practices for survival lie in the conception that the state has manifested a variety of facets at different historical moments (Obeid, 2010). Although state is never a self-thinking entity, it generates different roles and performs different functions in a global system, as it interacts with different power dynamics and shifting socio-economic conditions, domestically, regionally and internationally.

Southeast Asian states are characterized as 'developmental state(s)' because they have demonstrated a development facet after the World War II. As part of this facet, the state, markets, regulation and planning have manifested themselves in the form of intervention to promote global competition, focusing on the building of industrialism

and collective responsibility for social prosperity. The developmental state has sometimes been linked to the politics of development, albeit with an attempt to downplaying politicization. For example, Ferguson (1994) and Scott (1998) described state-sponsored megaprojects induced to develop remote rural areas where the state eventually claimed the role of developer in order to taking control over those spaces⁹. This could also be applied to the Greater Mekong Sub-region contexts, where the developmental state has come to replace locality and supplanted it with state techniques used to govern border people and transform the border areas.

The state, as a political entity, occupies territorial space, but can sometimes lose control over its borderland due to cross-border mobility, which has increased in recent years. Relevant to this, Pitch Pongsawat (2007) exemplified the state's spatialized practices through which labor subjects were controlled in the borderland. His study built on and extended Foucault's concept of 'bio-power'. It is the practice of a modern nation-state regulating its subjects by means of diverse regulatory mechanism to achieve the subjugation of bodies. Not only did state take control its territories through border surveillance, but also engaged in the border space practices such as incarcerating ethnic minority workers within a border town, based on the use of various ID cards and border check-points. The Thai state could exploit abundant cheap ethnic labors which had immigrated to the border towns of *Mae Sai* and *Mae Sot* of Thailand. The state practices control through a spatialized-bureaucratic regime.

Similarly, Dennis Arnold and John Pickles (2011) studied the transformation of border space into a part of global production network, through the use of export-processing zone, under the ADB-led initiative the 'East-West Economic Corridor' (EWEC) program. The border space of Thailand's *Mae Sot* was conceptualized as a 'global factory', as it was to form part of the global supply chains. Their study enquired about the practices through which cheap ethnic migrant workers were spatially-constructed in the border town using state bio-power. The state bio-power was infused through physical human bodies that helped create economic growth, based on a system

⁹ **James Ferguson's** *Anti-Politics Machine: Development, Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (1994) and James Scott's *'Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed'* (1998).

of primitive accumulation and disciplined bodies, and connected to the global economic constitution.

To sum up, Pitch, Arnold and Pickles describe border as a space infused with state bio-power and state practices through which spatial subjectivities are constructed, regulated and exploited in this border space for the sake of cross-border production, and to serve the global export market in exchange for hard currency (Fougner, 2006; Arnold, 2010; Witteborn, 2011).

In terms of unpacking complexities of states, state is not monolithic. It plays a variety of roles in response to globalizing economy. A Thai political scientist named Chai-Anan Samudavanija (2001) referred to the modern state as a 'marketing state' because it complicated its role with the global market. He argued against the Weberian scholarship approach, which drew a clear line between the state and the economy. Recently, the line between the state, the market or even capitalism has been made blurred, as reflected in recent studies. Aihwa Ong (2006) argued that the state should be seen as a flexible entity in connection with the neo-liberal economic project, that eventually helped promote growth. In practice, the state, in its bid to accommodate location-based marketing strategies, became more flexible in its management of sovereignty, and in particular over border space. The state created 'Special Economic Zones' (SEZs) to attract large amounts of capitals and to help it interact with the expansive global market.

Similarly, Tore Fougner (2006) related this idea to global competitiveness. The state geared towards international competitiveness to search for competitive advantage (Cerny, 1990). State acted more like a market player that shaped its policy options to promote, control and maximize the returns it could make from the global market, as it increasingly engaged with global economic competition. Concerning the role of the state as a marketer, it re-ordered its own territorial space, equipping it with facilities, services and qualities necessary to support entrepreneurs', investors' and businessmen's activities (Strange, 1990). As a result, the nation-state, which once concerned with territorial aggressiveness, began to promote territorial attractiveness because this attracted capitals, investments, and jobs (Cerny, 1990).

To put it another way, the marketing state accommodated and transformed itself to deal with global capital dynamics on the one hand; it conformed to the new global reality. On the other hand, it created flexible mechanism upon which the new global reality of economic globalization could be made profitable, marketable and accessible (Ong, 2002). In any case, economic globalization and the state were not conflicting dynamics, destined to pull in opposite direction. Rather, the marketing state acted as mediator in order to adapt itself to the new global settings. One facet of the marketing state was that potential conflicts over spatial governance were assumed to be resolved by the plasticity of the state.

Theorizing the state in recent decade, critiques of the state have neglected to recognize spatialized and socio-economic relations that take precedence over, and are embedded in, distinctive historical contexts. This is because any society springs from, and evolves out of, diverse forms of local wisdoms and knowledge, developed in accordance with the spatial challenges encountered and the aspiration sustained by variegated human communities (Scott, 1998). In other words, space and society embed in their own spatial and socio-cultural practices. In conclusion, the state performs as correctional institution (Foucault, 1979). It included a set of state's own techniques, experts and knowledge for regulation and extraction, but excluded local peoples, wisdoms and multiple spatio-socio realities.

In summary, the term 'border space' is used to conceptualize the spatiality of the border town of *Mae Sai* as a product of social relations. It is constructed out of different and diverse spatio-social trajectories, which derive from interfaces between globality and locality. This product is a result of the evolution of the cross-cutting relations between places, both within the country and as part of a wider network of places. In contemporary times, the construction of the border space of *Mae Sai* is identified through a set of social parameters. These are the border, capitalism and the state, thus shaping and re-shaping the border space of contemporary *Mae Sai*.

The border town of *Mae Sai* is conceptualized in a spatialized way in relation to the movement of different waves of people across time-space. The town's border space is made out of dialectical relations between state control and borderers contests, amidst negotiations and articulations with diverse spatial, political and socio-economic

trajectories. *Mae Sai* is not static, but open, heterogeneous, and dynamic. As a result, the border town of *Mae Sai* represents a very visible form of border space. This illustration is drawn into conceptual framework shown below.

1.7 Conceptual Framework

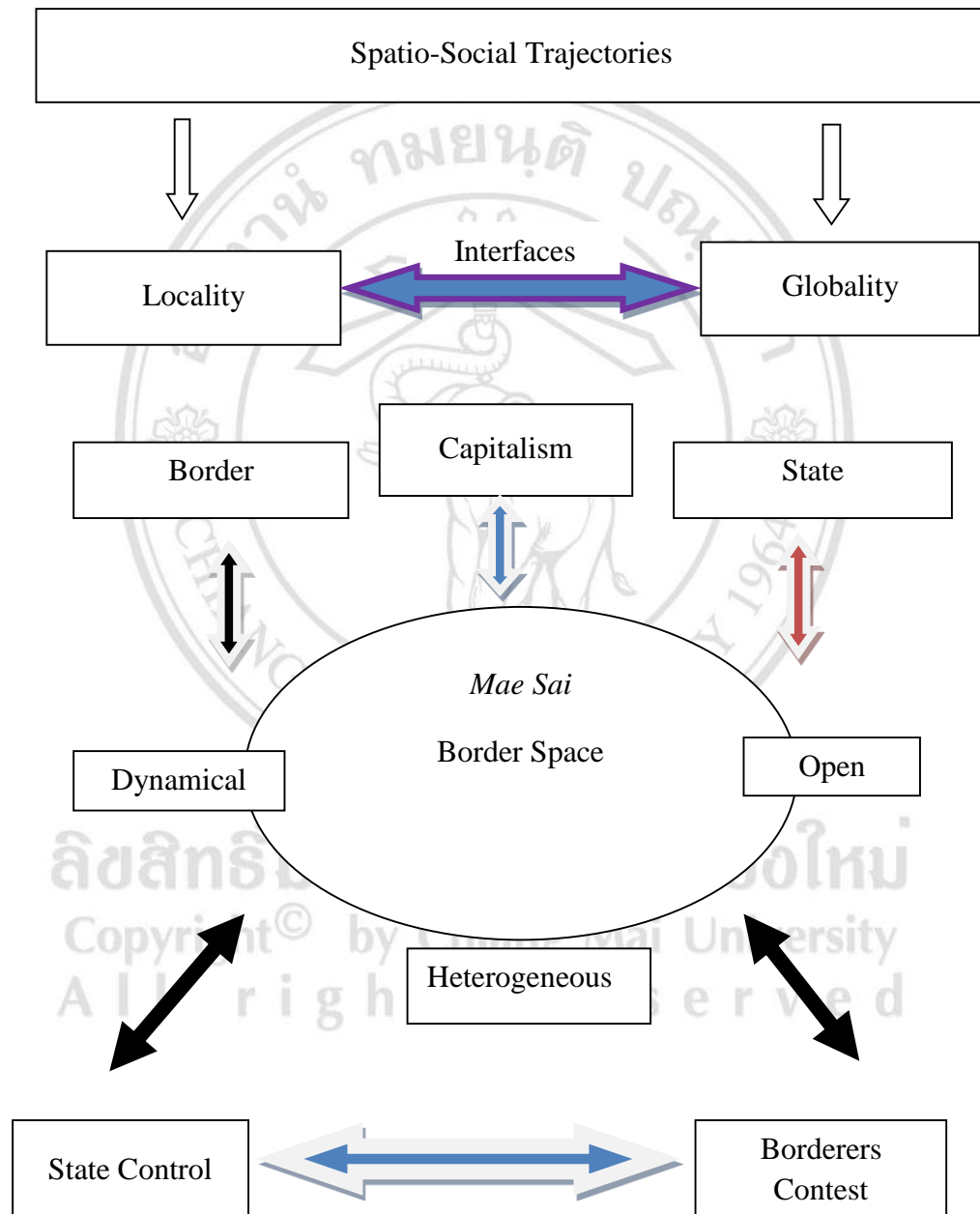


Diagram 1.2 Conceptual Framework

1.8 Research Method and Fieldwork Reflection

This section describes my personal experiences of and personal point of view on the research methods used as part of the study, and my self-reflection on the fieldwork I carried out as a first-hand ‘researcher’ at the border town of *Mae Sai*.

I came to develop *Mae Sai* as my research problem through my indirect experience with the *Chanthaburi* people. I came from *Bangkok* to be a lecturer at a university in *Chiang Rai Province* in October, 2000. It was the year so-called ‘Y2K’. When I first arrived here, my problem was that I needed to find housing. A few months later, I got a house for rent at *Thanaphum Village*. It was a gated-community, fifteen minutes far away from the university and half an hour from *Mae Sai* by car. The house that I rented was a one-storey semi-detached house. It consisted of pairs of house built side by side sharing a wall, and usually in such a way that I lived very close to my neighbor. The house next door was inhabited by a college student who also rented it, yet the garage in front of his house had been modified into rows of small cells. It looked like a prison cell to me, but cells were empty. He told me that they were used for gem lapidary. The *Chanthaburi* gem traders had previously rented this house before he came, and they did gem-cutting inside the small cells.

One day when I was at the university, my colleague told me that a number of people from *Chanthaburi Province* were living in *Mae Sai*. They were gem traders. They came a long way from a province of eastern part of Thailand--sharing a border with Cambodia and close to the shore of the Gulf of Thailand--to the northern-most of Thailand and the northern-most of the border town. In other words, they were borderers who came to another border.

It shaped my idea about *Mae Sai* in the sense that it was a place constituting different groups of outsiders who have migrated to the border area. Its importance lies in socio-economic activities dealing with cross-border trade. When my professor asked about the way I experienced *Mae Sai*, based on my research proposal, I could not help having my intention directing towards the *Chanthaburi* and their gem trade. For general people, *Mae Sai* is a sight-seeing and border shopping town. But, it later on became like the backyard for my fieldwork.

Let me take a detour in order to introduce *Mae Sai*. It is the northernmost district of *Chiang Rai Province* in northern Thailand. It is 785 km north of *Bangkok* and 60 km from the downtown of *Chiang Rai*. To the north is Myanmar, separated by the *Sai River*. The river is also used as international border marker, and above the river is the First Friendship Bridge. The bridge is 100 m across and connects *Mae Sai* and *Tachilek*. The border towns of *Mae Sai* and *Tachilek* are a major border crossing point along the 2,000 km Thailand and Myanmar borders. Both *Mae Sai* and *Tachilek* have geared towards the regional development program since 1989.

On the Thai side, the Thai Immigration Office and Custom House are situated near the bridge. *Highway 1* or so-called *Phaholyothin Road* ends at Mae Sai Boundary Post. Alongside the highway near the post are shop-houses selling a variety of goods, both local and international. These goods include handicrafts, gems, jades, clothes, toys, electric appliances. On the foot-paths of both sides are also street vendors; they sell mostly clothes, food, fruits, souvenirs and many other items. *Mae Sai Market* and *Tachilek Market* are relatively large and sell a variety of goods. These are popular shopping areas crowded with people during winter. But, *Tachilek Market* sells goods which are considered illegal/illicit in Thailand such as pirated CD/DVD, brand cigarettes, electronic devices and animal parts.

Mae Sai is also the largest border town in the north of Thailand in terms of the registered population, not to mention the undocumented migrant population at the border. *Mae Sai* border trade and commercial activities are mostly conducted by local Thai people and various ethnic minorities such as the *Lue (Tai Lue)*, *Shan (Tai Yai)* and *Chinese Haw*. Unlike the *Shan* and *Lue* ethnics who are Buddhist, the *Chinese Haw* are both Buddhist and Muslim. There is no hostility on the part of Thai local people towards these people of diverse ethnicity. They usually come to interact and celebrate important socio-religious occasions.

Mae Sai Boundary Gate opens daily from 06:00 am until 06:00 pm while *Tachilek* side operates from 08:00 am until 04:00 pm. A Thai national with a border pass is allowed to travel to *Tachilek* and 5 km beyond, while a Myanmar national also with a border pass is also permitted to travel within the downtown *Mae Sai*.

On Myanmar side, there is a Custom House situated on *Bogyoke Aung San Road*. It leads to *National Road No. 3* or *R3B*, which goes to *Chiang Tung* in *Shan State* and also *Muang La*, a Myanmar border town in eastern *Shan State* connecting the southern Chinese border town of *Dalou*. *Muang La* is the *East Shan State Special 4th District*, an autonomous district under the control of *Wa* group. This area has been established after the ceasefire agreement between *Shan State Army-East (SSA)* and the Burmese military government since 1989.

Tachilek is a border town in *Shan State* in eastern Myanmar. It is partially under the autonomous control of the *United Wa State Army (UWSA)*, based on a ceasefire agreement with the Burmese government, and under which the *UWSA* agrees to suppress ethnic minority groups hostile to the government. The *Wa* group has control of several business concessions and large businesses in this area. Major border trade and commercial activities in *Tachilek* are conducted mostly by the *Wa*, *Shan* and *Burmese Chinese*. Nonetheless, *Tachilek* has an ethnically diverse population such as *Shan*, *Burmese*, *Akha*, *Karen* ethnicities, just to name a few. *Tachilek* is also a place for migrant people who move from different places from Myanmar hinterlands to the border. They come to find jobs and opportunities at the borderland.

Interactions do take place among the *Wa*, *Shan*, *Burmese Chinese* and other ethnic groups in *Tachilek*, particularly during important socio-religious events, as the majority of them follow, to a certain degree, *Theravada* Buddhism. Relatively speaking, the *Wa* retains relative economic autonomy in *Shan State*. Nonetheless, the *Wa*, *Shan*, *Burmese Chinese* and some other ethnic traders have entrenched network in the Upper-Mekong region in history.

I had two major research sites. The first place was *Mae Sai Gem Market*; and the second *Mae Sai Market*. The gem market¹⁰ was at *Tetsaban Soi 4* right opposite the

¹⁰ Related to the *Mae Sai* gem market is *Talad Ploy Tanon Sichan* where it is the commercial area and center of gem business at *Chanthaburi* Province. *Talad Ploy Tanon Sichan* is now the largest gem market in Thailand, and possibly largest in the world, as it deals with gemstones from all the countries bordering Thailand and also Africa. *Chanthaburi Province* is located in the east of Thailand, and shares a border with *Battambang Province* and *Pailin Province* in Cambodia and the shore to the Gulf of Thailand.

Mae Sai Police Station and within a walking distance to Mae Sai Boundary Post. *Mae Sai Market* was along the downtown main road.

When I had first begun to explore the site of gem market where it was a community of *Chanthaburi* gem traders for preliminary study, I surveyed for a week and I ended up with having too little information. They hardly talked to me. Later on, I realized that I had a distant relative of mine who was a policeman working at Mae Sai Police Station, which was opposite to the gem market. I decided to call and told him about my research. The other day he helped connect me with his friend. He was a *Chanthaburi* gem trader. Subsequently, I could connect from one person to another and so-forth. I made friends with the traders and they all became my informants. They were nice, informative and open. Even though I had detached myself from the fieldwork, I sometimes visited them.

My social life was at the gem market and their village community. I also helped one of my key informants working as her shop assistant at the gem market, thus changing from observer as participant to participant as observer. When there was no customer, she taught me how to verify fake gems out of real ones by means of sunlight refraction. I learnt very little. So, it was evident to me that the *Chanthaburi* were the group of people who had technical expertise, and outsider like me found it hard to copy their knowledge.

They sometimes welcomed me into their houses in *Piyaphorn Village*, the first community of the *Chanthaburi* gem traders living at *Mae Sai*. I went there for chatting, interviewing or giving a hand. Once, I came across the village headman, I felt that we could not get along each other. It was perhaps I frequently came visit my friends here and he might be suspicious of my work. He was also a businessman doing a construction and real estate business in the village, and he was well-known and respected because he came from a family of local politicians in *Mae Sai*. The border itself was a grey area. I was a complete stranger in the village through his eyes. One day I met him by accident while he was waiting for his friend, and he invited me for drinks. We, three persons, then sat and drank from noon until the late evening. My time ran so slow, endlessly drinking and talking at a restaurant. But, my time was worth it because I got field data. He also gave a community map and pictures another day and I became quite familiar

with him. By the end of my first field site visit, I interviewed about twenty gem traders, gathering plenty of field data. So, my first key connection did matter.

My second field site was *Mae Sai Market* where a number of Myanmar's ethnic petty traders from different ethnic backgrounds crossed the borders from *Tachilek* to sell a variety of goods such as fruits, sunglasses, food, toys at their stalls or from mobile carts. There were a variety of groups of petty traders, but I was particularly interested in a young group of petty traders who sell CDs/DVDs, brand cigarettes and *Viagra*. They were interesting because this group shared similarities with the *Chanthaburi* group. They migrated to *Mae Sai* and became involved in both legal and illegal trade at the border. They now also sold small items that they could carry with them across the border. However, while the *Chanthaburi* once settled in *Mae Sai* before the majority of them later on moved back to *Chanthaburi Province*; this ethnic petty trader were constantly mobile, moving back and forth between the two sides of the borders. I observed them for a week, but nobody was willing to talk to me, so *Mae Sai Market* turned out to be a repeat of my previous experiences at the *Gem Market*.

I had to buy DVDs in order to talk to them. I also talked leisurely with other ethnic petty traders. I was able to talk in some Chinese to the *Burmese Chinese* vendors. It helped create a good talking atmosphere, but I was not able to collect enough data because they were not the subject of my study. One day, as I was buying a CD from a Myanmar's ethnic CD street vendor and also talking to him, he invited me to meet an NGO staff member. He wanted to go to the NGO's office to get a pain-killer. As soon as I got there, the NGO staff seemed embarrassed that he had brought a stranger to the office. However, luckily they were preparing to go out and meet a group of vulnerable children near Mae Sai Boundary Post. They went to observe Myanmar's vulnerable ethnic children before offering help. I asked if I could go with them, so now there were five people altogether, one a young Canadian woman who just came to work as a volunteer. I took the opportunity to do Thai-English translation to her, based on our observation of those children. The atmosphere was better as I began to cultivate relationship with the group. This NGO was familiar with the group of Myanmar's ethnic petty traders who were my subject of study. A few NGO staff members often visited them at *Mae Sai Market* to offer assistances. Finally, this NGO was able to put

me in contact with them and also another NGO for gathering field data. When I interviewed some of the cases of these ethnic street vendors who sold CDs/DVDs, their eyes turned red with tears, and I could not help giving money. In the end I interviewed about twenty of these vendors.

This research study took me a total of nine months to complete. I always drove to my fieldwork site. Driving also became part of my personal method. Even though I sometimes returned home with no field data, I never felt bored because the drive home offered some time for self-reflection. While driving on the road, I could free my mind, and sometimes felt repentant about my assertiveness when trying to obtain field data from people.

Two aspects my professor asked me to consider. First, the way in which the *Chanthaburi* gem traders and Myanmar's ethnic street vendors used border space for their socio-economic activities because each group had a particular strength. Secondly, the ways in which the border, and the people they interacted with, influenced their lives and livelihoods, though unavoidable challenges might sometimes interrupted their lives.

I would like to summarize a few major points in relation to border area research, as derived from my *Mae Sai* experiences. First and foremost, border area research requires a researcher to have a good connection because there are many different groups of people in the research area. The researcher should identify a gate-keeper who can help make connection in the area pertinent to the subject of study. For me, these connections included businessman, trader, village headman and NGO employee. The gate-keeper should be able to steer the researcher towards other sources of information. Secondly, the researcher needs to be exposed physically to different people and places at the research site. This allows the researcher to generate a bodily disposition towards different groups of people, until s/he can sympathize with them as much as possible. The researcher must make use of his/her values, actions and disposition to deal with future encounters, as practiced through the activities, expectations and sensibilities of other people living in that social environment. The researcher also needs to move around among diverse people and areas because borderers are by my definition mobile in nature. So, the researcher comes and plays, thus exposing him/herself to this environment of movement. Thirdly, there are different languages used at the border

area. The researcher requires enough foreign language skills to help break the ice with those people. In the final analysis, the border area research infers the use of personal techniques. The researcher somehow relies on his/her intuition and consciousness to help solve immediate problems.

1.8.1 Qualitative Method and Data Analysis

The research is a qualitative study, which is ethnographic and documentary research. I used documentary research to do a historical part and to cross-check my evidence of field data. I used various sources of information, both governmental and non-governmental, such as government policy, press release, Mae Sai Chamber of Commerce, Mae Sai Customs House, Federation of Thai Industry-Chiang Rai Chapter, Chanthaburi Chamber of Commerce, Chanthaburi Gem and Jewelry Traders Association and newspaper clippings. The information was both statistical and textual including formal and informal cross-border trade volumes, gem trade values, crime, and pirated entertainment products. I also conducted the documentary research at the National University of Singapore's (NUS) Main Library and Library of Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), from May 15-July 30, 2012.

My qualitative method employed informal or semi-structure interviews and participant observation. I applied purposive samplings on people with experiences directly related to the research issues, and expanded the number of participants using snowball samplings. My field research focused on people's direct experiences and perceptions of life at the border area of *Mae Sai*. Their accounts of narratives were treated as pure phenomena and also as the absolute data I needed to start my research.

I applied a phenomenological approach to frame my unstructured questionnaires and to create interactive and natural dialogues with the participants. The questions were mostly opened-ended and general; otherwise, I asked the participants to describe the issues or life stories that they were introduced. My questions focused on; for example, 'how you come experience gem trade?', 'how you fell about selling CDs?', or 'why you decide to move from your hometown to the border?' Subsequent to these questions, I also asked them 'what it means to you?', 'what values you derive?', or 'how is your experience selling items at the border market?' These questions were broad enough to get interviewees to open up.

Most importantly, I interviewed these people in order to probe my research questions. The time slot given for each interview was about one hour, and the interviews were conducted at the interviewee's office or house, at the market or in public space. I spoke mostly Thai but also some Mandarin Chinese, but Burmese was used with the help of a translator.

As the questions were open-ended, they could start telling the story from any point of experiences. I considered the literal content, the number of times a meaning and an experience was mentioned and also non-verbal or para-linguistic cues. Also, I assumed that every bit and piece of information they were beginning to tell was of importance and meaningfulness, priority given to the actor's points of view, not answers per se. People can be certain about how things appear in, or present themselves to, their consciousness (Husserl, 1970). I thus viewed every event as a clue and each piece of data that they reveal, whether willingly or in spite of themselves, as a partial expression of a coherent and underlying reality (Ramsay, 1996).

Explanation of the data connoted the phenomenological account back to things themselves. In terms of such technique, it involved 'bracketing' done at two sides. I tried to hold all theoretical frames in abeyance but allowed the participants to reveal their unique experiences without my pre-interpretation. That is, no position was taken or against the participants' descriptions. In spite of this, I, as researcher, never deny that a researcher cannot be completely detached from her/his own perspectives and s/he himself should not pretend otherwise, but put on hold explicit beliefs during fieldwork. In this regard, participants were allowed deliberative and purposeful openings to the phenomenon in its own right with its own meaning. That is, the description of data was almost free from the construct of the intellectual and society as possible (Groenewald, 2004). A participant also had his/her own way of experiencing temporarily, spatially or materially. Subsequently, each of these coordinates must be understood and interpreted in relation to the participant's socio-cultural contexts or the setting of cultural sharing group. I had to decide where these fragments fit into overall research questions. The concepts were eventually brought back for data analysis in the final phase of research writing, and at the same time, I began to detach myself from fieldwork. However, I rather admitted that, to some extent, my interpretation of the data was subjective.

My analysis of data started from the social-empirical phenomenon or ‘real concrete’ information in which the social world presented to me and then proceeded to ‘abstraction’. I came across multiple levels of abstraction. This meant that I had to go through the intellectual activity of breaking/uplifting the social phenomenon and its meanings down/to mental units through which I was thinking, as much as I was reflecting, them. This was in turn to help mediate by my dialogues with theoretical foundations and conceptual frames. As a result, the whole social phenomenon was re-produced from, or re-constituted through, the set of ‘thought concrete’. (Ollman, 2003; Pitch, 2007).

1.8.2 Operationalization of the Research

The operationalization of research dealt with the technical methods used to gather data in the field. Each research question was broken up into a series of key data, which were then matched to the relevant research methods.

I interviewed a range of different people during my field research. For the first case study, I interviewed twenty small-and medium scale gem traders, who I purposively interviewed at *Mae Sai* gem market. For the second case, I interviewed twenty Myanmar’s ethnic petty traders at *Doi Wow Market* and *Sai Lom Joy Market*. They were called ‘CD sellers’ who sold CDs/DVDs, brand cigarettes and prescription drugs. The gender and age of these sellers varied randomly. I tape-recorded the interviewees if they granted permission, and the interview data were transcribed. Some interviewees asked for a copy of the transcription data, so they could review it. There were some confidential data that were considered private.

Copyright© by Chiang Mai University
All rights reserved

Table 1.1 How do different groups of people construct border space?

Questions	Data	Methods
1. How do different groups of people construct border space?	<p>1. History of nation-state building and the border</p> <p>2 Major groups of people influencing the construction of border space</p> <p>3. Diverse social forces impacting upon border space-making processes</p>	<p>1. Primary and secondary documentary research</p> <p>2. Review of chronicles</p> <p>3. Field survey</p> <p>4. Interviews</p>
a) Who are the major groups of people who shape border space?	<p>1. Construction of border space by the migrants: the <i>Shan</i>, <i>Tai Lue</i>, KMT, <i>Chanthaburi</i> and ethnic petty traders</p> <p>2. Contribution to and impacts on border space-making processes</p> <p>3. People's socio-cultural conditions and their spatialized-social relations in relation to border space-making</p>	

Table 1.1 (CONTINUED)

Questions	Data	Methods
b) How does a particular group of people make a meaning to border space?	1. Interactions and negotiations with the state borders 2. Livelihood strategies and adaptations	

Table 1.2 In what way is the border changed into a form of capital by different actors?

Questions	Data	Methods
2. In what way is the border changed into a form of capital by different actors?	1. <i>Mae Sai</i> space-making process through people's interactions, strategies and tactics 2. Border capitalism/frontier of capitalism	1. Documentary research 2. Application of theories regarding border space-making 3. Ethnography 4. Interviews

Table 1.2 (CONTINUED)

Questions	Data	Methods
c) How does the border become a resource tool?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. New regionalism, i.e. GMS, Economic Quadrangle 2. State's changes in political ideologies and its impacts 3. People's manipulations of state border regimes 	
d) Why do people negotiate border space?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. People's conceptions of the state border and their border 2. People's political leverage strategies 3. People's interaction with state sovereignty at the border and state border loopholes 	

Table 1.3 How does border space continue to play a central role in shaping, diving and uniting people?

Questions	Data	Methods
3. How does border space continue to play a central role in shaping, diving and uniting people?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Multi-functions of border space 2. People's engagements with multiple borders and meanings 3. People's experiences and memories of the border 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Documentary research 2. Participant Observation 3. Interviews 4. Critical evaluation of theory
e) Whose border space is being drawn and according to which principle?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Roles of different groups of people in shaping the border 2. Cross-border trade and spatialized-border economics 3. Manipulation, management and mismanagement of the border for benefits and power 	

Table 1.3 (CONTINUED)

Questions	Data	Methods
f) To what extent does a meaning of border space change over times?	1. Interrelations and counter-interactions among borderers, capital and the state 2. Border politico-economic conditions 3. Border mediation processes	

1.9 Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter 1

This chapter describes the construction of research problem regarding the space-making of *Mae Sai* based on different waves of people who have migrated to the contemporary *Mae Sai* border town. The research context relates such border space-making to the borderers. It raises three key research questions and presents research objectives. The review of the relevant literature provides a theoretical and conceptual discussion pertaining to the construction of border space, and then subsuming it into conceptual framework. It also presents the research design at the end.

Chapter 2

This chapter describes the situation and setting in the contemporary *Mae Sai* in relation to *Tachilek* just over the border in eastern Myanmar in terms of regional border development. It aims to provide the historical development of the border of *Mae Sai* over different periods. The chapter explores the first three waves of migrant people who moved to settle in *Mae Sai* border; the *Shan*, *Tai Lue* and *Kuomintang* (KMT), and their border space-making activities, those which helped created differences at the

border. It argues that the border space-making of *Mae Sai* has been shaped by outsiders, and these outside groups have contributed to the construction of the border space of *Mae Sai* as political project, and in opposition to, as much as in connection with, the making of the modern-nation state. The study method relies on reviewing historical documents and general history books on the study area.

Chapter 3

This chapter describes the first ethnographical study regarding the *Chanthaburi* people who are the fourth wave of outsiders who settled in the border town of *Mae Sai*. It aims to discuss the *Chanthaburi* gem trade community in *Mae Sai*, the gem market, gem trade operation and cross-border network developed within the context of Thailand and Myanmar's border economic developments and ethnic armed insurgencies that took place in Myanmar in the 1990s. It also explores the rise and fall of the gem trade and its impacts upon *Mae Sai*'s border economy, the gem trade community and the changing space of the border town. It ultimately argues that the gem trade involves the making of a 'regulated spatial practice' in which the *Chanthaburi* gem traders, in cooperation with the Thai state, can regulate the cross-border gem trade. This allows the traders to tap the large gem resources from the Myanmar hinterland, confining its ethnic gem caravans to a restricted space. Furthermore, it sheds light on the interplay between the flexibility of state sovereignty and the *Chanthaburi*'s knowledge and technical expertise as 'spatial capital'. It also argues that state and borderers can work hand in hand for mutual power and benefits on border.

Chapter 4

This chapter begins by describing the three border markets being studied. There are *Doi Wao Market (Talad Doi Wao)* and *Sai Lom Joy Market (Talad Sai Lom Joy)* at *Mae Sai*. There is also *Ta Lor Market (Talad Ta Lor)* in *Tachilek*. The chapter aims to explore the contemporary development of these three border markets. Although the markets are divided by the *Sai River*, they are connected by mostly Chinese products, as these markets together form one of the biggest markets for Chinese goods in Thailand, and primarily serve Thai tourists. It eventually argues that the borders of China, Myanmar and Thailand have been virtually pulled closer together by the presence of

Chinese goods and cross-border trade activities at these markets since the new regionalism developed in the 1990s, blurring the state borderlines.

Chapter 5

This chapter describes the second ethnographical study. It focuses on Myanmar's ethnic cross-border petty traders who travel back and forth between *Mae Sai* and *Tachilek*. They are considered the most recent wave of people who move to *Mae Sai*. It aims to discuss the border-space making of *Mae Sai* and *Tachilek* by exploring through interconnection created by cross-border movement, network and illegal/ illicit components of commodities. It argues that these ethnic borderers have developed border tactics based mainly on their everyday cross-border movements and by maneuvering through state border loopholes to create their own new meaning and functions of the border.

Chapter 6

This chapter summarizes research finding by discussing the theories and concepts related to space-making, so rendering it possible to understand the contemporary border town of *Mae Sai*. The border space-making of *Mae Sai* is made through a process of 'border re-configuration'. It is characterized by the discursive symbiosis that occurs between the borderers and the state. They are sometimes cooperative, and some other time conflictive, depending on the situation with no portable rules at border. The argument of the thesis is that the border space of *Mae Sai* is 'political border dynamism'.

ลิขสิทธิ์มหาวิทยาลัยเชียงใหม่
Copyright© by Chiang Mai University
All rights reserved