CHAPTER 2

Production of the Mae Sai Border

2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the formation of the border space of *Mae Sai* as a result of a small political border. It was once formed out of the ethnic border violence that took place in the shadow of state-making project in the area during the early part of the 20th century. This chapter first and foremost traces the making of *Mae Sai* border space by accomplishing cross-fertilization between two different fields of study, which are 'border studies' and 'migration studies'. It argues that the early border space-making activities took place in *Mae Sai* were carried out mostly by outsiders. In the early 20th century, there were the *Shan* and *Tai Lue* ethnic groups, as well as the *Kuomintang* (KMT) or Chinese Nationalist soldiers who fled to the contemporary *Mae Sai*. Not only was *Mae Sai* border space-making made out of the mobility and movement of these ethnic migrant people, but also linked relationally with the frontiers of Eastern Myanmar's *Shan* State, Southern China's *Xishuangbanna* and northern Thailand's *Lanna Kingdom*. Furthermore, the social forces constituting colonialism, modern nation-state building, ethnic contestation were also contributed to the growth and adaptation of the small political border space of *Mae Sai.*

This research is primarily relied on the analysis of a mixture of written historical records, such as a collection of *Tai* chronicles, a collection of *Lue* chronicles and other selected historical documents or books. These manuscripts were originally copied, re-copied and reviewed by *Buddhist* monks often under the instruction of the relevant royalty. In the Mekong region, such manuscripts are kept mostly in temple libraries, and some have been translated into English by both local intellectuals and Western scholars in the Southeast Asian Studies circle. Other historical artifacts include general historical books containing pictures and stories related to the British and French colonialists regarding the socio-political history of the Mekong basin during the colonial and modern nation-state periods. The Mekong region also had a tradition of oral history in

which descendants narrated their life-stories about socio-cultural events, which were later on turned into publications (Freeman, 2001).

This chapter is structured into five major parts. It starts with a snapshot of *Mae Sai* today to capture the contemporary situation of this border town. Then, it traces back the formation of the border of *Mae Sai* by giving a short history of the area. After the discussion of the short history, the chapter deals specifically with key border actors and border goods in *Mae Sai* and linked with both the power of colonialism and the modern nation-state in the wider context of Upper-Mekong region, all of which help contribute to border violence. In the final analysis, the chapter looks at the process of the process of the production of *Mae Sai* as a small political border in which is produced out of counter-interacting social forces.

The social history of border space begins with putting local people to their place. Earlier scholars found out that the Upper-Mekong borders had been formed out of networks of friendship, kinship ties, and trade and commercial partnership for a long time (Walker, 1990; Evans, 2000). As a matter of fact, the reality of border did not necessarily coincide with the state border because the reality of border was reached out across the varied ethno-social space of the Upper-Mekong basin. Particularly, the border space of *Mae Sai* was not created from a fixed border entity, but out of the discursive practices of spatio-ethno relations. In fact, these local people had long initiated and controlled the mobility of goods, capitals and labors across time-space. Therefore, *Mae Sai* was the result of complex articulation and negotiation between history and globality.

Those groups of people who had migrated to *Mae Sai* in the early 20th century constructed their own border in reaction to external threats such as colonialism, state capture and state-boundary marking. These threats to their ethnic freedom also give rise their 'first border' as a safe haven as part of their power struggle. They protected themselves in the highlands and mountain valleys. They also used the border as a resource tool to deal with power-relation differentials. As a result, they formed a 'second border' out of, and embedded in, the act towards their own consciousness. It was the border from within that called upon freewill. Their own meaningful border was rather abstract when compared to a rigid state border. Once the state border and their own border overlapped, their most meaningful border was actually the one with no

boundary. As such, their second border lay within the journey of freewill or without confinement, while the state border was the border of power and possession.

2.2 Snapshot of *Mae Sai* Today

The picture of *Mae Sai,* for general people, is always called to mind as a tourist border town as a result of media construct. This picture is commonly found at websites such as *Expedia*, *CNN Travel and* printed media such as *Lonely Planet*, *Tourism Authority of Thailand Magazine*, that in turn help reinforce the construct of the border town picture. For instance, common pictures give the sights and sounds of *Mae Sai* including *Mae Sai Market* along the highway where tourists shop for cheap goods made in China. Tourists who visit the border town also usually go up hill to *Pra Thad Doi Wow* (*Doi Wow Temple*) where they can see panoramic view, overlooking *Mae Sai* and *Tachilek*. It looks like the same city with a sprawling concrete jungle interspersed with green hills and valleys. Besides, a lofty concrete building similar to a tower marks the Mae Sai Border Check-point where the physical borders between Thailand-Myanmar come to the general people's view.

Geo-economically speaking, *Mae Sai* is the northern-most border town in *Chiang Rai* Province of Thailand, and shares a border with *Tachilek* in eastern Myanmar, the two being separated by the *Sai River*. The town is also known as a major border crossing point along the approximately 2,000 km long Thailand-Myanmar borders. The Thai government has begun gearing *Mae Sai* towards cross-border trade and tourism since the 1980s, but it was not until the 1990s that border trade and tourism began to attract large sums of money to sustain the viability of *Mae Sai*'s economy. This was the period that the local people called the 'Golden Year'. The locals witnessed construction booming and tourists coming to the town.

Few people would deny that economic growth in *Mae Sai* has been a success story since then. Nonetheless, the cross-border economic growth maps out a distinctive economic spatiality. There is much evidence as much as talk in the town regarding the cross-border trade, which involves formal-informal links, or even legal-criminal economy. The locals are familiar with the saying 'if you wanna rich, go *Mae Sai*, if you wanna die, go *Muang Phan'* due to the fact that *Mae Sai* has long been involved in the

trade of narcotics like amphetamines that make you rich, while *Muang Phan* has a lot of gunmen who can make you die. Interestingly, *Mae Sai* area connotes, in certain senses, border violence or even a grey zone, but in exchange the town also offers huge benefits. So, welcome to *Mae Sai*.

In terms of *Mae Sai*'s economy, *Mae Sai*'s trade has reached a value of 10 billion *Baht* (278 million USD) every year since 1998; but only 3.3 billion *Baht* (120 million USD) of this is generated by formal trade. Generally speaking, *Mae Sai*'s dependence on informal border trade constitutes 60% of its income, meaning the informal trade is almost three times larger than the formal one (Manager, January 14, 1988). To put it simply, the majority of cross-border trade is not recorded through the custom house at the border checkpoint. This is in line with the views of the general public who say that the *Mae Sai*' s economy still today has links with underground businesses, through which large sums of money are generated out of smugglings, drugs and human trafficking. Tourists who visit *Mae Sai* usually cross the borders to *Tachilek* to buy pirated CDs, DVDs and electronic goods. For example, only pirated CDs and other copycat goods generates about 10 million *Baht* (4 million USD) daily (Komchaluek, 28, July 2004). Other merchandise like cheap fashioned clothes and shoes, dried food and fruit are also on sale on both sides of *Mae Sai* and *Tachilek*; even some illegal goods such as pirated CDs, DVDs and smuggled gems, can be found in *Mae Sai*. The Thai authorities keep one eye closed and one eye open regarding these activities, as is probably the case at Thailand's other border towns.

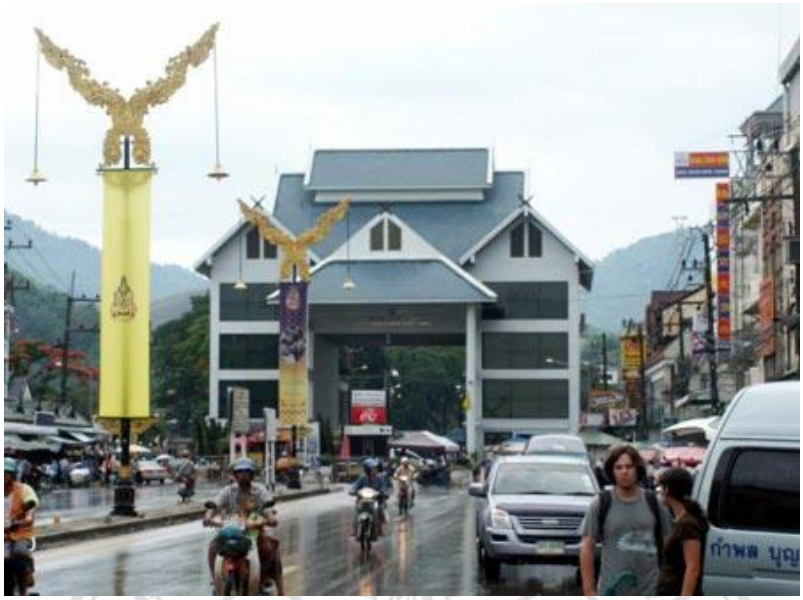

Figure 2.1 Mae Sai Border Check-Point between Thailand And Myanmar

Source: Retrieved from the Internet Source

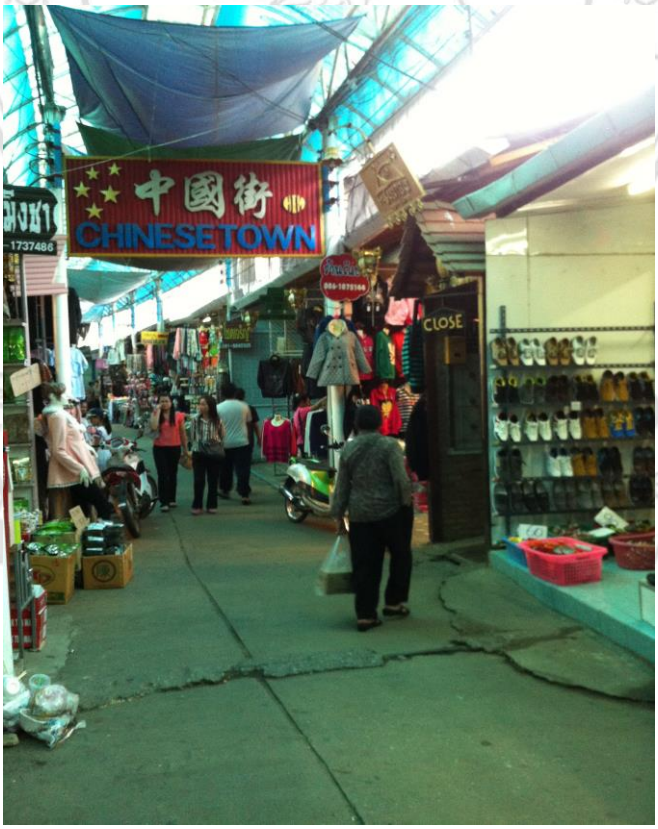

Figure 2.2 Inner Alley of *Mae Sai Market*

Source: Photo of the author taken in 2012

The growth of *Mae Sai* has involved collaboration between three key actors since the 1990s. These are the Thai Government, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Chiang Rai Chamber of Commerce that have helped re-shape the border town in the name of development. Initially, it was along this border that the states of continental Southeast Asia and China's southern province cooperated under the ADB's 'Greater Mekong Sub-region' (GMS) program or the ADB's GMS program. The ADB also launched the 'Economic Cooperation' program, which later became known as the 'Economic Quadrangle' project. Its member countries comprise the countries along the Mekong River basin, including Myanmar, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand, Vietnam and *Yunnan Province* of southern China. The program is focused on improving the physical infrastructure of the area in order to facilitate regional economic integration among its member countries (ADB, 2007). Under this program, the construction of *R3A* and *R3B* routes help connect northwestern Lao, northern Thailand and southern China via *Chiang Rai Province*, as a hub of the GMS in the very near future. Moreover, the program aims to formalize cross-border trade through government channels of control. In short, the ADB's GMS program aims to regulate, channel and formalize cross-border flows, reflecting the fact that this border area is entering the globalization.

Mae Sai has a lot of ethnic minority people within its population; nonetheless, the majority of them are *Lue, Shan, Yuan* and *Muslim Chinese*. The locals refer to these people as *Tai Lue, Tai Yai, Tai Khoen* and *Chinese Haw* respectively. Unlike the *Tai Lue, Tai Yai* and *Tai Khoen* who are *Theravada* Buddhists, the *Chinese Haw* are *Chinese Muslim*. They mostly run shop-houses for businesses in downtown *Mae Sai*. Today's *Mae Sai*'s citizens are mostly descended from indigenous inhabitants of these early waves of ethnic migrants; therefore, the latest generations are strongly rooted in the mainstream Thai society, more so than their ancestors were. They can now be considered *Mae Sai* locals, and particularly the *Tai Lue* as the local biggest community in downtown *Mae Sai*. There is no hostility between the Thais and these diverse ethnic groups. They interact and celebrate many socio-religious occasions together such as Tai Lue Beauty Pageant and Buddhist Lent; therefore, *Mae Sai* represents the very mix of ethnic people. For instance, Mae Sai Municipality recently made use of this diversity by arranging an ethnic fair called, '*Miracle of the Ten Ethnics in Mae Sai*, to promote the border town's tourism.

Moreover, ethnic mosaics are also represented in the classical book named '*30 Nations in Chiang Rai'*, written by *Boonchuay Srisawat*, first appeared in 1950. *Mae Sai* today is still subject to migration from across the border. They are mostly *Burmese*, *Shan, Karen, Lahu* and *Akha* ethnics. The Thais commonly refer to them as '*Bamar*' due to the fact that they all who come from Myanmar are lumped together as *Burmese* workers.

Mae Sai is relatively peaceful today, but the local people still remember ethnic armed insurgencies along the *Tachilek* and *Mae Sai* borders. Ethnic armed struggles generated among the *Shan State Army* (SSA), the *United Wa State Army* (UWSA) and the Burmese government contributed to the distinct economic trajectory of *Mae Sai*. The SSR ran a trans-border narcotics trade; while the Burmese government's concessions to the UWSA in *Shan State* allowed various kinds of businesses to develop. The Yangon government used the UWSA as a proxy army to fight against the SSA in exchange for the UWSA being given business autonomy in *Tachilek*. For example, the UWSA involves in the productions of amphetamines and also pirated CDs/DVDs under the name of *Hong Pang* Import-Export Company (Manager Weekly, 3 July 2000). The fighting between the SSA and the Burmese government often resulted in border closure. For example, the border closure amounted to 127 days in 2011, or accounted one-third of the year, while it amounted to 147 days in 2002 (Pitch, 2007). *Mae Sai* became a conflict-prone area as a result of fighting at *Tachilek*, which inevitably affecting *Mae Sai*[1] itself (Pitch, 2007). As a result of these closures, border trade and tourism was almost dead. Nonetheless, in recently years, ethnic armed insurgencies have declined because of the Burmese government's peace talks with the different rebellious ethnic groups since 2002[2].

[1] For example, there were major ethnic armed conflicts in 1998, 1999, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2006. Mostly, Myanmar government closed its border on these events. This information excluded some other minor clashes.

[2] Khun Sa surrendered to the Burmese government in January 1996. Khun Sa or Chang Chi-fu was generally known as a heroine warlord due to his heroine trade in the Golden Triangle. He was also the leader of the Shan United Army (SUA). His role also had implications for Yangon government's peace support initiative.

Thai society is currently very excited about the acronym 'AEC', which stands for 'ASEAN Economic Community'. Under the AEC, all ASEAN member countries will be entering a single market in 2015. This has become somewhat of a myth that is confusing the *Mae Sai* locals. They commonly refer to it as 'free-openness', as they understand there will be no restriction on mobility and movement of people. Some of them have voiced concerns regarding security, joblessness and robbery, believing that the ethnic minorities over the border will be able to cross into Thailand freely. Actually, with or without ACE, ethnic minorities have long been moving around, and this border has long been open before AEC coming of age. Other people say that the local economy will improve as more people are attracted into the town. When thinking from a Thai social viewpoint, the term 'ethnic minorities' has a negative connotation, as Thai people can sometimes be biased against such group due to socio-cultural differences. That is, they know very little about these people.

In reality, the *Shan*, *Lue* and *Chinese Haw* arrived phenomenally after the World War II, and already had entrenched network in the Upper-Mekong region, long before the birth of modern nation-state in the late 19th century. These waves of outsiders who had migrated to the border contributed to the space-making that took place in contemporary *Mae Sai.*

2.3 Re-thinking *Mae Sai* Border History

The border space[3] of *Mae Sai* has long undergone the process of 're-constructedness'. Its border space has been re-constructed by spatio-social relations in which social engagement with the borders beyond has made it possible for the re-making of both border space and social space at the same time. The result is a very mixed construct.

[3] There are some slightly differences of the terms 'frontier', 'boundary' and 'border', though the terms are sometimes used interchangeably. There appears to be a tendency for the American scholarship to use the first, and for the British scholarship to use the other two. Frontier commonly refers to the territorial expansion of nations or civilizations into an empty space. Boundary is often used in diplomatic discussions on the precise location of borders, but it is also has a more general meaning, pointing to the dividing line between difference people and cultures. When discussing psychological differences and when emphasizing regions rather than lines drawn upon a map, the term border is normally preferred. Look at Michiel Baud and Willem Van Schendel.

Particularly, *Mae Sai* border space has had to deal with changes derived from multiple and loose-ended trajectories. As such, the border space of *Mae Sai* is subject to much unexpectedness (Massey, 2005).

Moreover, *Mae Sai* as a place has long been an important location for spatial contact to take place, as much as the development of social network in the Upper-Mekong basin. To put it another way, the *Mae Sai* border space has been constructed by history, interwoven with cosmology, varying frontiers, unstable economy and power politics as wells as local power dynamics, all of which have come together to form the politics of space-making. *Mae Sai*'s border space has been constructed within specific social contexts and local instances over certain periods of time.

The turn of this century and millennium found the Upper-Mekong region breaking free of the logic of the Cold War that dominated the 20th century. New possibilities emerged at every border. With so much change happening, one might question whether history still matters when wishing to comprehend this border space. It does as a matter of fact. As Burawoy's global ethnography (2000) argued that ethnography needs to be situated within its historical and geographical contexts. The very basic structures and principles of the Upper-Mekong cross-border relations are deeply rooted in historical development. The discussion of such development needs to begin with a long-term perspective based primarily on history, as will be covered in subsequent section. In the next chapter, it will be moved towards a more recent development of the border town using ethnography. Historians and social scientists alike can benefit each other because ultimately they are studying change.

2.3.1 Upper-Mekong Civilization

The Upper-Mekong Civilization in relation to *Mae Sai* border is closely linked with the *Singhanawat Legend*, one of the oldest northern legends. It indicated that the present location of *Mae Sai* border was linked to the Mythical *Kingdom* of *Yonok.* The King *Singhanawat* established the kingdom and founded a new city center in *Chiang Sean* basin (nowadays *Chiang Sean District* of *Chiang Rai Province*) at the confluence of the *Kok River* and the *Mekong River*, dated back around the 8th century (Pitch, 2007; Schliesinger, 2001). *Mae Sai* was known as '*Vieng Sri Tuang*' at that time and was inhibited by the *Lawa* ethnic group. The *Lawa* were recognized as the first modern

inhabitants of northern Thailand, and had their own small kingdoms scattering across the mountainous areas from the 5th to 10th centuries. *Vieng Sri Tuang* was a part of *Yoknok'*s *Chiang Sean.* In the following centuries, there was a rivalry of domination between *Chiang Saen* and the *Khmer Kindgom* of *Chenla*, centering at today's southern Laos. The powerful *Khmer* defeated *Dvaravati* the *Kingdom*, another civilization centering at the *Chao Praya* basin in the 13th century.

Back to 1080 AD the *Khmer* once seized and destroyed *Chiang Sean* (Schliesinger, 2001). *Chiang Saen* was by no means made weak by the *Khmer*, but King *Promarat* of *Yonok* later took the city back and drove out the *Khmer*. However, *Chiang Saen* was eventually absorbed into the new rising *Lanna Kingdom* of King *Mangrai*, who eventually consolidated all the small *Tai* principalities in the Upper-Mekong hinterland. He established the first capital city of the *Lanna Kingdom* at *Chaing Rai* before subsequently changing to *Chiang Mai*. The *Lanna Kingdom* reached its peak of civilization from 14th to 15th centuries, covering the northern upland Southeast Asia, and with the majority of *Tai* ethnics.

The *Tai* had already established themselves across the whole of the Upper-Mekong basin by the 13th century, and they were once nomadic upland-valley people and also practiced wet-rice cultivation. The size of their settlements depended on the extensiveness of the valley. Once found a favorable location, they settled along the river valleys. Most of their kingdoms were small with sparse population. The fertile land and rivers determined settlement and rice cultivation. The land supported the growing of rice, tea, oil palms and many tropical fruits. Because the Upper-Mekong region was vast and under-populated or even uninhabited in many parts, there was no continual human settlement at ancient time *Mae Sai* border (Conwey, 2006; Pitch, 2007; Schliesinger, 2001).

The different *Tai* groups were identified by their different locations across the region. The sense of place was political because it was always tied to various groups of people who came live on, and live through, their experiences in such areas. For example, the *Lue* claimed to have their origins in *Muang Lue* or *Xishuangbanna* (*Yunan Province*), the *Yong* in *Muang Yong* (in *Shan State*) or the *Khoen* in *Chiang Tung* (in *Shan State*). The territories were connected by trade activities, which were conducted

through different ethnic groups between the *Tai* (including *Lue*, the *Yuan* and *Lao*) and non-*Tai* such as *Haw* from *Yunnan*. Assimilation of ethnicities took place through inter-ethnic marriage, but ethnic boundary was also practiced. For instance, as a result of ethnic contestation by Chinese, Burmese, Thai, Lao, or Vietnamese, these upland *Tai* coalesced into a larger tribal group or society such as *Tai Dam* or *Tai Khao*, and many tribal groups or societies tried to preserve an ethnic identity (Schliesinger, 2001).

There were two major trade routes, which were inland trade routes and river trade routes. Therefore, the existence of *Mae Sai* border was as a direct result of both trade-routes that connected it to other towns, and the mobility of people which they carried with them goods and information. Caravans transported clothes, salt, silk and copper products from imperial China through *Chiang Rung* (*Xishuangbanna*) to *Chiang Tung* (*Shan State*) and *Chang Saen* (*Yonok*) and later on to *Chiang Mai* (*Lanna*) and as far south as *Yangon* and *Moulmein* in southern Burma.

The terrain in the Upper-Mekong region was markedly a mixture of hills and valleys. This topography effected a world apart among different groups of people, thus each group of people living all but isolated in the highland; nonetheless, contacts among different ethnic groups were connected through trade and commerce. In fact, trade and commercial activities were the earliest form of trans-local connection to take place among human civilization, which brought about exchanges throughout human history; and changes to all domains of human societies (Curtin 1984; Prista 2008). Prior to colonial expansion, the Upper-Mekong region already had well established trade and commerce relations (Walker 1999, Prista 2008).

Nonetheless, the highland also helped protect people against the threats posed by distant civilizations, and in particular a warring state. To put it another way, the highland helped prevent lowland kingdoms from invading and conquering the people living there. The people who inhibited the Upper-Mekong region had experienced relative peace during the 13th to 16th centuries (Freeman, 2001). The *Tai*'s principalities were relatively small, and each of which had a small number of population. They had disputes at times but they were more likely to ethnically-unite together to fight against external threats.

The *Tai*'s spatial cosmology could be drawn out from the '*muang*', which was both vertical and horizontal in nature. The *Tai*'s history of the Upper-Mekong region presented the *muang* as the *Tai* ethnic group's primary administrative and social organization unit above the village level (Pitch, 2007). A *muang* was comparable to a principality which could be referred to both town located at the hub of a network of interlinked villages and the totality of town and villages, which was governed by a single '*chao*' or lord. The lord acted on his own behalf, not for the benefit of a distant overload. (Wyatt, 1984; Steinberg 1987). At the center of the *Tai*'s *muang* which was usually aligned with a main river of the basin was the lord's capital which contained a city pillar, a palace and temples. Thus, a *muang* was portrayed as being at the center of a circle, as influenced by the preceding the *Mon-Khmer* civilization's idea of *Sumeru*, a mythical fabulous *Indian* mountain in the middle of the world called '*Mountain of the Gods*'.

The *Tai muang* also connected through kinships with their former *muang*, the former *muang* chained through earlier *muang* and so-forth. In this way, the system of *Tai muang* was developed out of social relationship and network of *muang*(s), extending over vast territories of the Upper-Mekong region (Schliesinger, 2001). The more expansive the *muang*, the larger its orbit. Thus, the *muang* was also both absolute in itself with a single *chao*, and also relational with its confederation of other *muangs*. In this sense, the *muang* then was not just a piece of land, as it is today, but was rather conceived in terms of spatial social-relations, or as networks of places. A *muang* was situated in a river valley bounded by mountains, but linked with others through economic and kinship ties. The power of the *muang* also varied based on its internal socio-economic strengths, ethnics' power and the leader. In the second millennium, this power depended on the military might of the army (Schliesinger, 2001).

Outside the moats of each *muang* were rice paddy fields which constituted the *muang*'s principle economic activity. Around the edge of the *muang* was forested land. The locals believed that there were sprits, wild animals, ghosts, bandits, non-*Tai* ethnics and vulnerabilities. This area fell outside the political control and territoriality of the *muang* (Stot, 1991; Pitch, 2007). So it was another space, generated out of much imagination or tales, and thus having a bad connotation.

However, it helps shed light on the *Tai*'s spatial construct in the sense that space means the space of control, boundary and connectivity, while other spaces do exist. Control over a certain space allows a group to take control over what is included and incorporated into that space, leaving other spaces excluded and uncontrolled (Korff, 2003). The meaning is not only fluid but also political, depending on the way people conceive the time-space.

All in all, early human civilization begins with a categorization of people's surroundings. They were primarily concerned with how things related them to a certain space. To give this space a name primarily made possible human interactions with nature and the meanings arising, so forming spatial-taxonomical consciousness. In other words, relationship between humans and nature give birth to the human conception of natural space in the first place. The spatial-taxonomical consciousness is a logical subsequence of nature. That is, space is somehow reflected through natural surroundings which can become social, because space always appears through human minds and is reflected through human experiences. So, space and nature are the same. Once a space is named or once human consciousness is directed towards physical-natural space, humans know it through their state of mind.

In certain ways, people have always been trying to find a definitive and absolute way to conclude what there is and where it is going, in order that they can be conscious of happenstance in some kind of capturing words of ideas. As such, people never fail in their attempts to define, categorize and analyze a set of neatly structured understandings of their natural and social space. On the one hand, humans have always been in search of the satisfaction of a finished, decided explanation of places which can ensure their understanding of the place where they live and the space that encompass their spatial-material world. On the other hand, people have never limited themselves to only putting their surroundings into words. Even though they cannot name it, human consciousness makes it possible to think, doubt or imagine, to a certain extent, a space or place beyond in a sense that humans direct their intentionality towards their imagined things. To put it another way, people have always directed intentionality towards something like a place because, figuratively speaking, the human mind speaks louder than words. As such, people can know space, although they cannot exactly name it.

The name of a place could also infer spatial importance and hierarchy. For example, *'Chiang Saen'*, '*Chiang Tung'*, '*Chiang Mai'* were as important as '*muang*' because the words '*chiang*' or '*muang*' were meant principality or city, while *Mae Sai* just was referred to the name of a river, so the name helped define a location and where the village was situated. Thus, the division of society into aristocracy and commoners was reflected in the polarity between *'muang'* and 'village'. The '*muang*' represented the seat of power, which usually included an administrative unit, and surrounding villages under a ruler, who exercised power at '*muang*' level, while the villages represented the politically unorganized population and subordinated entity (Pitch, 2008).

2.3.2 Inter-state Power Politics

Mae Sai's border space has not emerged from an inner essential totality, but out of linkages to spatial differentials and interactions. Its spatial dynamics did not necessarily begin with human occupancy over a space, but fundamentally spatial networking both from within and with the beyond. Key to inter-state power politics in earlier periods was the ability of one state to balance the power of another state, so neither could take-over smaller territories and build a single totalitarian power (Goldstein, 2003). Such the system led to stability in the Upper-Mekong region for a certain period of time.

Mae Sai was situated in the middle of *Lanna Kingdom* (which had its capital at *Chiang Mai*), *Shan States* with their center at *Chiang Tung*, and southern China's *Yunnan* border. The history of *Mae Sai* was mostly related to the rise and fall of *Chiang Saen* in *Chiang Mai*'s *Lanna Kingdom* because, geo-politically, *Mae Sai* was a part of the *Chiang Saen* frontier. The *Lanna Kingdom* and *Lanchang Kingdom* (Lao), the *Shan States* and China's *Yunnan* border were all linked, and functioned, through the orbits of trade, tribute and war from the 13th to 16th centuries. In fact, the *Lanna Kingdom* under King *Mangrai* and *Sukhothai Kingdom* under King *Ramkhamhaeng* had expanded their powers over the Upper Mekong valleys since the 13th century. But, King *Ramkhamhaeng* was inclined to expand towards the east to replace the *Khmer*.

Particularly, the *Lanna Kingdom* and *Ava Kingdom* (Burma) had been a rivaling power in this highland region from the 14th to 15th centuries. Small principalities on both sides of territorial borders were much under their influences. They made war against each other as part of power politics intended to expand both the King's personal

glory and territories, though at other times they made alliance to avoid any single state conquering the other. Nonetheless, their relationship was always complex and subject to power struggles. One practical manifestation of the power politics that played out was marriages between members of the *Lanna* royal family and the *Ava* royal family. This was to ensure mutual trust and political union. Moreover, political relationship between regional kingdoms such as *Lanna*, *Yunnan*, *Ava* and some other small ethnic *muangs* such as *Shan*, *Karen*, *Wa* and *Mon* were all defined through, and regulated by, tributary system. Diplomatically, the weaker powers paid tributes to the stronger powers, but sometimes the weak powers paid off these tributes against each other (Freeman, 2001). Tactically, for small powers like the different ethnic groups, tributes played an important role within the wider context of the Upper-Mekong politics. These tributes allowed them to form and break alliances, shifting their relative smaller powers around grater power, thus letting no single state conquer the others. Tribute system did not necessarily reflect weakness, but was used as a power tactic. Even so, sometimes this system broke off and the balance was lost.

The rise of the *Ayutthaya Kingdom* in the lower *Chao Phraya River* basin eventually caused troubles for the *Lanna Kingdom.* This culturally sophisticated *Indianized*-state used warfare as an instrument of power politics. It placed special important on the handful of great power with strong armies capacities, territorial interests, outlooks and intense interactions with each other. *Ayutthaya*'s commercial relations with foreign kingdoms allowed it to prosper. Much of this area later came under its cultural domination. After King *Ramathibodi* founded *Ayutthaya* in 1351, the king's successors put in motion a form of belligerent statecraft. In subsequent years, it made moves to destroy the *Khmer;* taking over *Sukhothai;* and then subjugating *Lanna,* making them all *Ayutthaya*'s vessel states.

Particularly, *Ayutthaya*'s imminent confrontation with *Burmese Kingdom* of *Toungoo* made *Chiang Mai* a pawn on a political chess board. From the 14th to 18th centuries, *Ayutthaya* had become a regional power which made wars with its neighbors, so challenging *Burmese Kingdom*. Finally, *Ayutthaya* fell under *Burmese Kingdom* twice; in 1569 and 1767. This led to the *Burmese Kingdom* becoming a rising regional power. The *Burmese* proceeded to conquer and control the *Lanna Kingdom* from the

16th to 18th centuries. The *Burmese Lanna* promoted *Chiang Sean* to be the capital instead of *Chiang Mai* in 1668. Having declared independence from the *Burmese* in 1769, *Ayutthaya* also came to recapture *Chiang Mai* in 1775. It also took another thirty years of conflict took place between *Ayutthaya* and *Burmese* armies, until finally the last remaining *Burmese* troops completely withdrew from both *Ayutthaya* and *Lanna*. Subsequently, *Lanna* was destroyed and de-populated.

During this period, the ruler of a triumphant kingdom taking slave captives from the defeated kingdom back to his homeland was widely practiced throughout the Southeast Asian peninsula states. As in the above-mentioned case, slave captives were forced to move around for building a new city and infrastructure. Once the *Burmese Lanna* promoted *Chiang Sean* to be the capital instead of *Chiang Mai* in 1668, people were also forced to relocate from *Chiang Mai*; in reverse, then when *Siamese Lanna* made *Chiang Mai* the capital again in 1775, *Chiang Saen* was evacuated and eventually lost its importance. Both *Siamese* and *Burmese* made both *Chiang Mai* and *Chiang Sean* a zero-sum game; one city gaining at the expense of the other. By the end of this game, *Chiang Sean* itself and *Mae Sai* also were left ruined.

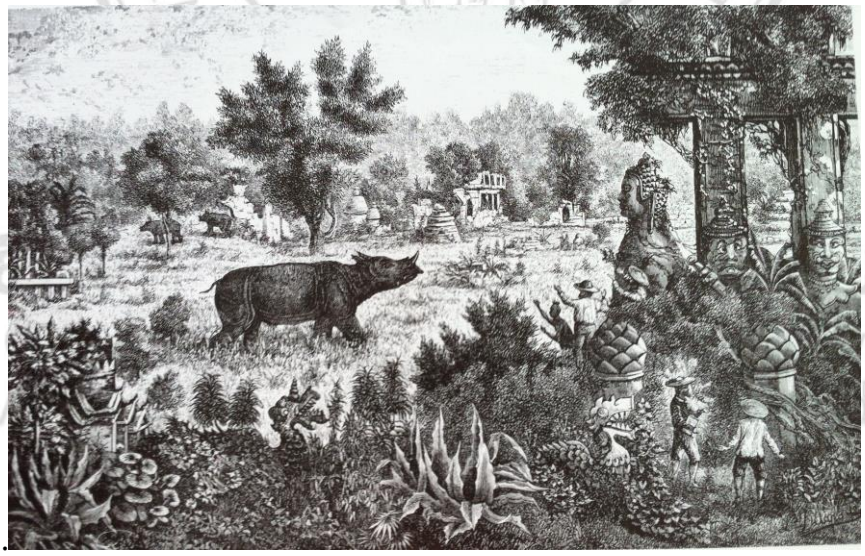

Figure 2.3 Ruins of *Chiang Sean* around 1866-1868
Source: Courtesy of *Louis Delaporte* and *Francis Garnier* (1998)

Looking back, *Mae Sai* was impacted by the shifting trajectories of the importance of the capital locations. Having been in-between the borders of warring states, *Mae Sai* was dragged into a war-prone trajectory. Firstly under the *Ayutthaya Kingdom* and secondly under the *Burmese Kingdom*, *Mae Sai* border space was constructed out of relational effects. That is, *Mae Sai* was never isolated but instead completely-open and spatially-chained to *Chiang Saen*, the *Lanna Kingdom*, *Ayutthaya Kingdom* and *Burmese Kingdom.* During this particular period, it was the war that made this place particularly vulnerable. Furthermore, *Mae Sai* border space was subject to the movement of people across different time-space. Throughout this time, attempts to gain power were not primarily concerned with taking land, but with appropriating slave-labors. After all, it was the people who carried out border space-making.

In the 19th century, the British took over Burma and the French occupied Indochina. These two global powers became an important trajectory of spatial development in the region. For example, *Siam* was made familiar and concerned with border. There was a funny story that once the British asked the *Siamese* court where the border was, and so were told to go and ask the locals who lived there (Thongchai, 1995). But, this was a serious joke. *Bangkok* began sending commissioners to negotiate with the British and French and to pinpoint its boundaries. Consequently, the geo-body of Thailand had come into being, for which the development of the space of *Mae Sai* was also a co-construct. In any case, the superpowers of the time introduced the principles of political independence, bounded entity and sovereign states that continued to shape the region and eventually gave rise to the modern-nation state.

2.3.3 Colonialism

Basically, colonialism began with the advancement of industry in Europe and was then followed by the development of oceanic navigation; sailing ships in search of natural resources. European industry brought about not only increasing volumes of mass production and trade, but also increasing ties between Europe and the rest of the world, spatially-economically. Advanced industrialized colonialists were interested in expanding their power throughout the 19th century. With their strength in terms of military technology, they could place armies and cannons on ships going off-shore. European countries first gained control of coastal cities and of re-supply outposts along major trade routes. The

colonialists forced the locals to work in agriculture and in the mining of silver and gold as well as abundant natural resources extraction. The wealth generated was shipped to Europe, where kings spent it to further upgrade their armies, develop industries and expand global trade (Goldstein, 2003). Both Britain and France took expeditions to the Upper-Mekong basin to fulfill their economies' needs.

Colonialism was one of the most important forces in shaping the Upper-Mekong borders throughout the 19th century because it was the idea much devoted to the political and economic interests of particular power. The British and France rushed to the hinterlands from the *Mekong River* as they vied for territorial divisions. *British India* including Burma became its largest off-shore administration and its most important colony, whereas the *French Indochina* became its oversea empire on Southeast Asian peninsular. China's coastal areas were taken control by various European powers, including late comer such as the Portuguese. *Siam* was finally allowed to be a shatter-belt between the two powerful adversaries of Britain and France.

The Upper-Mekong borders were generally conceived as a direct result of the nation-state building process induced by the West during the colonial period after the 19th century. The border was always confined to the Western idea, context and the logics of its inception[4]. The Britain and France's powers were manifested by taking control of territories beyond their own. Ultimately, the colonialists' conquest of the whole region brought about a single regional civilization under the realms of their political power, albeit with regional variants and sub-culture (Goldstein, 2003). Above

[4] Modern state system is based on the 'Treaty of Westphalia' that ended the 'Thirty-year War' (1618-1648) between the Catholics (Austria-Hungary, and Spain) and the Protestants (France, Britain, Sweden and Netherlands). The 'Treaty of Westphalia' laid the foundation of modern state once achieved first in Europe and then the rest of the world; (I) legitimacy, states as independence and all states as equal; (II) sovereignty, no other power more powerful than sovereignty, territorial integrity is paramount, and non-interference; (III) duties, rules and regulations for inter-state relations or international laws. Nonetheless the creation of nation state often incorporated smaller or weaker states, territories or frontiers. Thailand, as nation-state, was created during King Rama V (1892-1932).

all, colonialism left the whole region as a fractured cultural and scattered ethnic landscape against the backdrop of western-induced modern nation-state.

The Upper-Mekong border space is also a good example of how a mental construct can become a social reality (Baud and Van Schendel, 1997). Generally speaking, colonialists created a state border through their conscious acts towards frontiers to which they laid claimed. They made it possible for the state to both concentrate its power and expand its territories, with assistance of the technologies of cartography and military deployment. The capital city became the seat of power of the colonialists, and border demarcations were first designed and then drawn onto a map (Van Schendel, 1997). With the British and France's concerns for their boundaries and cartographic skills, they were the pioneers of an attempt to divide the Upper-Mekong region into a bounded political territory; in particular, the British school of geography owing much of its professional existence to this kind of activity (Smith, 1990).

The map was an example of a space that could be conquered. Consequently, the geo-body of a nation was constructed through geographical terms such as boundary, territory, resource and the like, which were reproduced, or represented, onto a paper map. In fact, map-making was a universally spatial-mechanical practice, producing a mathematical space which accurately proposed and demonstrated the science of spatial measuring. The British and French introduced the region with the notion of absolute space, which dumfounded the locals and later caused ethno-political consequences. The Upper-Mekong basin was made bounded, owned and governed by sovereign power. To some extent, the extension of political control over a large single territory like Burma, Thailand created the commonality essential for nationhood-state created a nation. Simultaneously, the perceived existence of a nation had led to the creation of a corresponding state-nation created a state (Goldstein, 2003). Consequently, a political boundary was introduced and drawn, but a cultural landscape was totally destroyed and rendered unrecognized. As a result, the birth of national border was generally produced through both an imaginative and colonial construct, drawn without any consideration to pre-existing conditions of ethno-socio precedence (Scott, 2009).

Mae Sai appeared in the record of British Army in 1887 as a village situated on the *Mae Sai River* which was claimed by *Siam* as its boundary. The village was recorded as

a part of a route form *Chiang Rai* to *Chiang Tung*. This meant that the British had recognized the place of *Mae Sai* (Pitch, 2007). Another source mentioned that early human settlement at *Mae Sai* was traced back to the 18th century or 19th century. It was mentioned that the first group of people in this contemporary area were the peasants from other Thai towns who had knowledge of irrigated farming, and there was a small barter marketplace for trading crops and animals (Pitch, 2007).

2.3.4 Nationalism

Nationalism has remained a key point of reference for the Upper-Mekong since World War II, during which time indigenous people have played a leading role in calling for independence. Nationalism has emerged because it is much based on people's collective beliefs and consciousnesses towards self-determination. Nationalism involves a set of values such as identity, belief, religion, culture, language, and history; all of which chained individuals who shared similarities. People internalize these qualities based on, as much as constructed through, symbolic interaction, which is carried out on a daily basis. For example, they talk to one another by using a common language; they worship ancestors by adhering to the same religious practices and so-forth. People's externalization through long-established collective imagination was finally put forwards the construct of a particular community.

The idea of nationalism can be practiced alongside self-determinism, the two of which lead to ethnic realization. Nationalism means a devotion to the interests of a particular nation. It is highly political due to the fact that it was made fixed with international laws and world community that have adhered to sovereignty in an absolute political entity. All these principles were conceived by the colonialists and then the modern-nation states have inherited them through long-established political interrelations that once existed between colonialists and their colonies. Some ethnic groups can realize both nationalism and self-determinism that help them materialize their own sovereign nation-states such as Burma, Thailand, Lao PDR, just to name a few.

Generally, but not always, a nation is allowed to pursue its own interests, and people who indentify as a nation should have the right to form a state and exercise sovereignty over their domestic affairs, and this principle is widely accepted in world community today (Goldstein, 2003). However, self-determinism tends to be seen

subservient to nationalism and territorial integrity; a single group is never allowed to change an international border, even though it may have been imposed by colonialists (Goldstein, 2003). Self-determinism always brings about ethnic armed struggles and border violence today.

Post-Cold War era witnessed the breaking-apart of the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe including Yugoslavia along the line of linguistic-ethnic groups. As a result, many new nation-states were formed. The mobilization of the fervent ideology of self-determination in one place by an ethnic group also had an effect on other ethnic groups in other places, who also wished to start ethnic movements. The information society also made it possible to create a virtual ethic self-determination movement across the globe. In the Upper-Mekong context, self-determination has been suppressed by authoritarian states due to the fact that there are a myriad of different ethnic-linguistic groups who have lived along the borderlands. To allow self-determination to take hold would lead to a disintegration of national border.

For example, the Yangon government decided to destroy The *Sawbwa Palace* in *Chiang Tung, Shan State* in 1991, as it had served as the home of the *Shan* princes and had come to symbolize *Shan* ethnic independence. The government even changed the country's name from Burma to Myanmar in order to lower the profile of the Burmese ethnic majority. However, Yangon government's actions also sowed the seed of ethnic minority resentment against it. Today, Myanmar's different groups of ethnic minorities are still chained through self-determinism. The *Shan State Army* (SSR) and other ethnic armed movement are still active in campaigning for independence. In case of Thailand, the government cajoled hill-tribe ethnics into working for the royal project's highland development program. The development discourse could prevent ethnic border violence by improving these people's economic-well beings. In a narrow sense of the Upper-Mekong context, nationalism is collectively imaginative; self-determinism is a political movement. Self-determinism is localized and made context-specific on a global scale. Today, nationalism and self-determinism are still counteracting forces that could provide possibilities to certain groups of people who desire an ethno-politico place-making.

2.3.5 Cold War

After the end of the World War II in 1949, the world was divided into two competing blocs between capitalist-democracies led by the United State (US) and communism led by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR). Not only did the Cold War create ideological borders, it also designated border interactions along the line of ideological settings. For example, the *Iron Curtain* of the USSR forged alliance with the *Bamboo Curtain* of China; while the US allied with Western Europe. The Cold-War also created the balance of power that structured world order throughout forty-five years, despite occasional confrontations and disputes between the two superpowers, and also proxy wars in the third countries supported by one or other of these superpowers.

The Cold War also created two sets of client countries within the upper-Mekong Sub-region. Thailand's military run government followed the US's '*Containment Policy'*, aiming to block the expansion of communism across mainland Southeast Asia. Burma's initiative entitled '*the Burmese Way to Socialism*' was introduced over the period 1962 to 1988. Meanwhile, Indochina was being run entirely by communist governments by 1975. The *Vietnam War*, which began in 1962, had intensified the Bangkok government's nervousness regarding the encroachment of communism at its border. All of these border events caused Thailand to be in a state of paranoid throughout the Cold War period.

Mae Sai and *Tachilek* borders were intermittently opened and closed for political-economic reasons over this period due to the two countries' limited contacts with each other[5]. Thailand's border remained under the military's surveillance. Ethnic-armed struggles intensified in *Tachilek* throughout the 1980s and 1990s as *Shan* ethnic armies had fought against the Yangon government for independence, and this fighting inevitably affected *Mae Sai*. Nonetheless, the border trade between *Mae Sai* and

[5] Throughout the 1980s, jade was smuggled from inland Burma to *Mae Sai* via *Tachilek* by ethnic traders, before being taken on to *Bangkok* and abroad. Generally speaking, *Mae Sai's* Thai-Chinese traders and also middlemen gained a lot of money from the cross-border trade in consumer goods and jade that took place at this time.

Tachilek was mostly about consumer goods during this period. The mismanagement that occurred as part of Yangon's *'the Burmese Way to Socialism*' led to greater impoverishment among the Burmese people. Ethnic conflicts, poverty and trade also designated *Tachilek* to become a black market, while *Mae Sai* supplied necessities for ethnic minority armies and the general people across the border. In an irrational move, the Burmese government cancelled its banknotes in the hope of destroying the back market, but this did not work and instead intensified black market activities. *Mae Sai* and *Tachilek* became realms of demand and supply, and were linked through smuggling. The black economy at the borders dealt with armament, opium, heroin, amphetamine, jade and gem. Paradoxically, *Mae Sai* and *Tachilek* borders were always closed in political conflict, but always opened up for economic exchange. To put it another way, *Mae Sai* and *Tachilek* borders were de-linked by political ideology but re-linked by economic activities.

As a result of ethnic armed conflicts in *Shan State*, *Mae Sai* was drawn into the ethnic minority politics, in which the *Shan* border was pitted against the *Yangon* center, and whereby *Mae Sai* was accused of providing its backyard for a safe haven and assistances to the ethnic rebel groups. Yangon government was suspicious of Bangkok government due to *Mae Sai*'s political-economic activities. Even today *Mae Sai* and *Tahilek* are a black market for currency exchanges and transfers, that help facilitate cross-border transactions (Manager, 26 March, 2011).

In the final analysis, *Mae Sai* border space came under the global influence of Cold War, which framed the local content of this ethnic-armed border. Figuratively speaking, it was the *Cold-War* that determined border's outlooks and ethnic-armed border that designated border actions. The combination of global influence and local content created the trajectories of *Mae Sai* border development. *Mae Sai* space also becomes a site of border negotiations and power struggles between the local and global, and between the peripheries and center.

2.3.6 Cross-Borders Region

Post-Cold War period has witnessed the decline of political ideologies and regional conflicts, and the rise in cross-border economic cooperation. Economic globalization has helped open borders to capital investment, with an increasing volume of money,

goods, information and people worldwide. In the Upper-Mekong Sub-region, China was the first country to experiment with borders and capital. Despite its different political and economic regime, *Shenzhen-Hong Kong* was established in 1979 as a model of cross-border economic region. In 1992, *Deng Xiaoping*'s southern tour at the 'Special Economic Zone' (SEZ) laid claim to the success story of opening the border to capital.

Generally speaking, the history of the idea of the cross-border region in Southeast Asia was not an internal initiative, but totally foreign. To make a long story short, the opening of Southeast Asian borderland was tied to the Japan-US agreement on the '*Plaza Accord'* in 1985. The agreement was made to 'depreciate' the *US Dollar* against the *Japanese Yen*, by intervening in the currency market. Since the 1970s, Japan had become a full-fledged industrial and exporting nation, while the US encountered trade deficits with Japan. The *'Plaza Accord'* had generated the so-called '*the flying geese'* effect, due to the fact that the *Japanese Yen* was allowed to relatively 'appreciate' against the *US Dollar*. Domestically, Japan incurred high industrial production costs. Even though the '*flying geese*' idea had first been purposed in the 1930s, it was not put in motion until the 1960s, by which time Japan had become the only industrial power in Asia.

As a result of the strong *Yen* created by the *'Plaza Accord'*, Japanese industry started to relocate to Southeast Asian nations such as Indonesia, Philippines, Malaysia and Thailand, as they were much cheaper. While Japan moved towards more capital-intensive industries domestically, it also re-located its labor-intensive industries to those countries. Also, Japan felt that the Word Bank did not serve Japan's interests in Asia, and wanted to set up a financial institution that Japan could institutionally benefit from, and aim at, regional economic development. Endorsed by the Japanese government, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) was founded in 1966. Japan was major capital contributor and major shareholder. For example, it accounted for 50 percent of shares in 1993. The great numbers of shares led Japan to assume a more assertive position. The ADB largely served Japan's economic interests because its loans went largely to Indonesia, Philippines, Malaysia and Thailand, major trading partners of Japan in Southeast Asia (Wan, 1995). Japan gave contributions to preferred sectors and regions, and tied its investment to the procurements of Japanese goods and services, as reflected

in its initiative in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) under the aegis of ADB, which were launched in 1992.

The ADB played a key role in channeling Japanese private capitals to the GMS, particularly by improving local infrastructure (Wan, 1995). The ADB's GMS cooperation became a huge development project. It brought together the six Mekong River basin countries, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam and the *Yunnan Province* of China. The GMS covers 2.6 millions square kilometers and has a combined population of approximately 326 million.

Now that state and capital as well as border had been fused together to rework and refix the Upper-Mekong basin (Permann and Sum, 2002), so the region became like the Japan-conceived border. In other words, re-territorialization of the Upper-Mekong borders had been made possible under the ADB's GMS project. Last but not least, Japan's plan to de-territorialize the Upper-Mekong borders was to use the ADB as a conduit for over-accumulation of its huge surplus of industrial capitals, particularly during the period 1980 to 1985, a time when the *US Dollar* had appreciated about 50 percent against the *Japanese Yen*. It was also used to absorb the shock of the *'Plaza Accord'*, as after 1985 the *Japanese Yen* had to appreciate against the *US Dollar*.

Over-accumulation was released through a long-term modern infrastructure project like ADB's GMS project (Harvey, 2006). Nonetheless, all these developments were lumped altogether under the name of cross-border economic development. To put it another way, the Upper-Mekong borders became the frontier of capital where Japan both exported its surplus of capitals and relieved its currency appreciation crisis.

Furthermore, over-accumulation attempted to convert the Upper-Mekong region into a market for products, place for manufacturing as well as for consumption. Nonetheless, all these processes could not make happen altogether due to different natural resources and labor power qualities. Consequently, the region was partially transformed into a labor-intensive manufacturing and partially into a place for the consumption of goods (Smith, 2008). The power of consumption also depended on wage labors. As such, the Upper-Mekong borders generated their particular spatial form.

It seemed as though Thailand had become a backyard for Japanese industries. As Thailand aimed at Japanese industrial powerhouse for economic growth, its major towns were prepared for industrial development estates such as *Khon Kaen* and *Chiang Mai* becoming Thailand's growth poles (Glassman, 2003). Prior to this, the creation of built environment for production such as transport, factory, field, warehouse, power station, workshops, telecommunications was a prerequisite for the flows of capitals, resources, and labors throughout Thailand. This infrastructure is deemed the spatially-fixed form of capital, so paramount to the process of capital accumulation for a new round and on a new ground. A particular space is created by design for investment.

At the same time, *Mae Sai* and *Tachilek* became the subject of border development project after 1990. Investment to upgrade modern infrastructure was carried out for border linkage throughout the Upper-Mekong borders. The GMS project's slogan was 'connectivity, cooperation and community' (Arnold, 2010). *Mae Sai* was quite responsive to such border development, while *Tachilek* was an ethnic-conflict prone-area. The Chiang Rai Chamber of Commerce, The Mae Sai Chamber of Commerce and an international consulting firm helped lobby the Thai government, which was also had its policy consultation with the Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB). These entities worked together to promote the development of the economic border of *Mae Sai*. On a broader scale, the development of cross-border economic region drew a large number of people in search of opportunities to *Mae Sai* and *Tachilek*. For example, domestic opportunity-seekers like the gem traders from *Chanthaburi Province* and the cross-border petty traders from Myanmar hinterlands. These two major groups of people saw opportunities in the border areas.

There is one significant point to have emerged from the construction of *Mae Sai* in the context of cross-border region. The contemporary border at *Mae Sai* has been constructed out of international exchange. The so-called cross-border region was co-constructed by the global economic restructuring closely associated with the crisis-generated cross-border development. There are both new dangers and opportunities. To put it directly, the re-structuring of global capitalism has become a regional, political event which has helped contextualize the Upper-Mekong region co-optation. Since the 1990s, the Upper-Mekong region has never been a taken-for-granted development

scheme or seen as naturalized development process, but a hegemonic subordination of spatiality generated activities, generated by capitalism. As such, it reflects both the defeat and retreat of capitalism (Soja, 1996).

In the final analysis, *Mae Sai*'s historical context helps shed light on border construction activities of *Mae Sai* in relation to myriad social forces. *Mae Sai* has always been situated in the confluence of local and global currents, and this has led to the opening-up of its border space. *Mae Sai* is not an isolated place, but always tied to areas beyond, with multiple flows such as trade, commerce, warfare, politics and development.

The *Mae Sai* border is always open up to countless connections on the tide of local and global interactions. It is always engaged with the people, ideas and goods that flow into and out of the area. Therefore, this border is always made out of complex spatio-social-relations. The movement of people has over time been one of the most important factors driving change. It is the people factor that has generated the spatial-material development at the border and maintained its significances.

2.4 Human Landscape of the Border of Mae Sai

The historical context of *Mae Sai* border space was especially important in the early 20th century, particularly after the World War II. *Mae Sai* became a crucial element in a new increasingly local-global system of nationhood, wherein modern nation-states, ethnic struggle, and border contestations interplayed and intermingled. Hence, the contemporary situation on *Mae Sai* has been produced out of such spatial material-relations.

Where there is power, there is resistance. *Mae Sai* was constructed against the backdrop of power differentials between the new comers and old subjects; spatial differentials between existing border and newly-created space. As a result, *Mae Sai* border space emerged out of border violence, becoming the crossroads of conflict and confrontation among different groups of people and state power. This violence led to three different waves of people who came to settle in the contemporary *Mae Sai* over different periods.

They were the *Shan* migrants who came to *Mae Sai* in 1927,*Tai Lue* from *Xishuangbanna, Lamphum,* and *Chiang Mai* in 1940 and *Kuomingtang* (KMT) in 1945 (Pitch, 2007). *Mae Sai*'s border space also developed substantially in-between the colonial and modern nation-state period in the early 20th century. It has long been closely related to the waves of migrants who have brought dynamics to border and provided its meanings to the border town. The settlement of the more recent of these groups of people is better known than that of the earlier groups, and better documented (Convey, 2006).

2.4.1 *The Shan*

The history of *Shan* States and their people were merged with the history of Burma, in particular the late 19th century. The British conquered Burma and subsequently took over many small principalities in the *Shan States* in 1889, which were home of many *Shan* ethnics[6] (Sturgeon, 2004; Yawnghwe, 2010). The *British Myanmar* initially pledged to allow independence of the *Shan muang(s)* or principalities and recognized their *chaofa(s)* or princes as semi-sovereign rulers under British protection, though below the Governor of *British India*. The *Chaofa* had authorities over their domestic affairs. The *Shan muangs* under British rule came to the locals' minds as the 'Golden Age' because the British helped get rid of Burmese soldiers on *Shan* land and wars between the Burmese and *Shan* as well as conflicts and rivalries among princes themselves (Yawnghwe, 2010).

The wind of change blew in the late 1920s, once the British introduced the Government of Burma Act 1921. It was geared towards the '*Greater Self-Rule*' in which the whole Burma was to be constituted as a province. The next year, the British re-organized the *Shan* principalities into the '*Federated Shan States*', and subsequently these *Shan States* were transferred to Burma since they once used to be ruled by the Burmese King. Now that *Shan* principalities were no longer a bounded political entity, but rather reduced to being an administrative region of Burma, the *Shan* princes were deprived of political power over their territories; even local affairs had to be deferred to

[6] Prior to 1948, the *Shan States* were small principalities. Once included within the *British Burma*, the area became the *Shan State*.

the nearest British office. As a result, the *Shan* princes demanded their political legitimacy be restored, but these pleas were ignored by the British. This new administration lasted until the Japanese occupied Burma in 1941 (Yawnghwe, 2010).

The Act of 1921 also introduced fiscal reforms throughout the country. Under these reforms, the *Shan* princes were subject to accounting practices instituted and supervised under the British. The British transferred responsibility for the *Shan* principalities to the Governor of Burma the following year, as he was in charge of the central budget. The *Shan* princes and rulers then had to contribute fifty percent of their revenue to the central fund, despite having only advisory roles. Once having semi-sovereign status, they appointed their representatives to collect taxes and then had to report back at least once a year. (Yawnghwe, 2010). As political privilege dramatically reduced, so their financial burden increased, the *Shan* princes frequently rebelled against heavy taxes and military conscriptions in times of war (Conway, 2006). These *Shan* rebels and warlords also got involved in drug trade in *Shan* area, forcing local people to grow opium poppies. They sent opium and heroin across the borders to Thailand (Yawnghwe, 2010).

The *Shan* social organization was feudal, but its subjects enjoyed enough freedom. Relationship between the *chaofa* and their subjects were relatively permissive, even though the subjects were always obliged to their *chaofa*. However, the *chaofa* was not considered landowners, but the land belonged to the state or King. The subject could choose to migrate to another *muang* where living conditions were comparatively favorable. For example, there are now many *Shan* descendants living at *Sankampeng District, Chiang Mai Province* in northern Thailand because their ancestors had moved into this area eighty years ago due to heavy taxes imposed by their *chaofa* (Yawnghwe, 2010).

The *Shan* were the first group to fell to contemporary *Mae Sai*, which showed no traces of human settlement at that time due to its struggle with the *British Chiang Tung* in 1927. The *Shan* had earlier fought bravely against the British during the First *Anglo-Burmese War* in 1824 (Mangrai, 1963). Pitch's research (2007) on the history of *Mae Sai* revealed that, in accordance with *Shan* community sources, three *Shan* princes and their families escaped to the area of contemporary *Mae Sai*. It was also indicated that

the *Shan* people subsequently moved from three *Shan* principalities: *Muang Tum*, *Muang Hsat* and *Muang Yong*.

2.4.2 *The Tai Lue*

The second wave of people to settle in *Mae Sai* was the *Tai Lue*. They did not migrate in one movement, but gradual and small-scale migrations over time (Freeman, 2001). There were *Tai Lue* moving from *Lamphun* and *Chiang Mai* and settled in the *Tachilek* area in Burma in 1940. It was the same year that the *British Burma* and *Siam* (Thailand) agreed upon using the *Sai River* as the boundary-marker of the area (Pitch, 2007). Like the *Shan*, the *Tai Lue* moved to *Mae Sai* largely due to wars and social disturbances at home. Both the *Shan* and *Tai Lue* ethnics shared a common experience of being suppressed and subordinated. Some *Tai Lue* moved to due to political instabilities, heavy taxes and slave raids; others migrated voluntarily.

The historical recollections of the *Shan* in reference to *Tai Lue* also stated that *Tai Lue* from *Xishuangbanna* of southern China had fled to the area as a result of the Chinese Communist invasion in 1944, otherwise as a consequence of Japanese air raids in *Xishuangbanna* during the *World War II* in 1945 (Wijeyewadene, 1990). However, the massive movement appeared to have moved after the communist take-over in 1949. At this time, more *Tai Lue* from other parts of northern Thailand and *Chiang Tung* in *Shan State* also migrated into the area. These *Tai Lue* had previously lived in communities in *Lanna*, *Nan*, *Chiang Saen* and *Chiang Khong* in 1804 (Freeman, 2001).

The Chronicle of *Sipsong Panna* (*Xishuangbanna*) also gave an account of the *Tai Lue* rebellions against the Chinese rule as a reaction against a new Chinese administrative policy towards *Xishuangbanna* over the period 1921 to 1950. Under the *Nationalist Government* (KMT), certain principalities were re-organized and then incorporated into a new administrative district. In 1912, *Muang Long's* leader, *Ai Cai San*, gathered people to resist the Chinese power. Defeated by the Chinese commissioner *Ke Shuxun*, *Ai Cai San* fled to *Muang Yong* of *British Burma*. Likewise, in 1918, *Ting Pa Li* who was *Lahu* led some *Tai Lue* to rebel against the *Chinese*. *Ting Pa Li* himself claimed to be the reincarnation of a god. Both *Lahu* and *Tai Lue* gathered to attacked and killed Chinese merchants. Even worse, when the *Japanese* occupied *Xishuangbanna* over the period 1942 to 1945, clashes between KMT soldiers and Japanese army

inevitably led to the loss of life. This turbulent time had caused *Tai Lue* to migrate from the area in quest of a safe haven.

The *Sipsong Panna* texts also mentioned the *British Burma*'s towns of *Muang Yong* and *Chiang Tung*, describing *Tai Lue* migration out of the areas during their insurgencies. Both *Muang Yong* and *Chiang Tung* inhibited a number of *Shan* and *Lue*. Nonetheless, *Shan*'s social organization was more hierarchical than that of *Lue*; *Lue* relatively egalitarian. Both Leach's and Keyes's syntheses of social interactions in highland Burma touched upon the shifting ethnic identities. Ethnic identity and belongings were a dynamic process which depended on social circumstances and configurations. As such, shifting identities and belongings made it possible for different ethnic groups to gain access to, or exchange, political power, as differences and alliances were defined. Leach's work exemplified *Kachin* becoming *Shan.* The Chronicle of *Sipsong Panna* also mentioned *Lahu* mixing with *Lue*. Accordingly, it could be assumed that the *Lue* and *Shan* could mix in certain situations and settings. Moreover, a person never saw him/herself as belonging to one ethnic group, albeit that there was ethnic cohesion and tradition.

Throughout this period, Thailand's neighbors were colonized, Thai nationalism was essentially defensive, helping protect its territory and avoid colonial violence (Wijeyewadene, 1990). The *Shan* and *Lue* migrants were more likely to take up sedentary cultivation, move closer to state centers, develop trade ties and eventually drift ethnically and linguistically towards the modern state. (van Schendel, 1997; Scott, 2009). Not until 1950 did the *Tai Lue* create their large community in *Mae Sai*, and they had socio-religious ceremonies regularly. Successfully assimilated into the mainstream society, today *Tai Lue* own shop-houses and sell items at *Mae Sai*. Some *Tai Lue* are experts in making handicrafts such as lacquerware and brooms. A 'Thai Lue Beauty Pageant', organized every year in *Mae Sai*, attracts a number of the locals, and this helps reproduce their culture and tradition through performance.

2.4.3 *The Kuomintang* (KMT)

Contemporaneously with the *Shan* and *Lue*, the *Chinese Nationalist* or KMT constituted the third wave of migrants who took up the area of *Mae Sai* in 1960. They were *Haw* ethnicity or Muslim Chinese from *Yunnan Province* in China. Generally

speaking, there were two major groups of *Haw* in the Upper-Mekong region. The first group was the long-distant traders who had been traditionally trading along the trade routes between southern China and the Mekong basin; and the second group was the *Kuomintang of Battalion 93.* Due to the fact that *Yunnan* was the last province taken over by the Chinese communists in 1949, a number of KMT soldiers fled over the frontiers from southern China's *Yunnan* into Burma's *Shan State* and on to Thailand's *Chiang Rai Province*.

Although the *Taiwanese* government began to evacuate these last troops to Taiwan in 1953, some *Nationalist* soldiers were not willing to go to Taiwan because they felt unfamiliar with it, unlike their motherland of mainland China. Furthermore, Burma and Thailand were closer to their homeland. Generalissimo *Chiang Kai-Sek* even envisioned that one day these troops would help contain the Chinese communists from the southwest of China, while the *Nationalist Army* would advance from Taiwan to the southeast coast of the mainland and recapture the lost country. Then, a number of the remaining troops organized themselves into a KMT guerrilla force and fought against the communists under the leadership of General *Duan* and General *Li* in 1951 (Chang, 2001).

This KMT troops who had lived along the frontiers of Burma's *Shan State* and northern Thailand eventually enmeshed these frontiers. In specific, *Mae Sai* became a globalizing local space formed out of, and dragged into, the constellation of international politics. *Mae Sai* border space got involved with different power actors, both locally and globally. Once in Burma's *Shan State*, the KMT allied itself with some of the ethnic groups to rebel against the Burmese military regime, which was led by General *Ne Win.* He had been trying to put down the ethnic armed groups in the country after his taking-over Burma in 1958. After the establishment of *Socialist Burma*, ethnic insurgencies began to intensify. For instance, *Khun Sa*, also known as *Chang Chi-fu*, a heroin warlord of *Shan* ethnicity, had trained guerrilla warfare with the KMT, and subsequently became the leader of the *Shan United Army* (SUA) and *Mong Tai Army* (MTA). Fighting between Burmese Army and KMT along the *Shan State* border happened frequently. Both China and Burma considered the KMT to be a threat to national security (Chang, 2001). As the KMT had fought against the *People's Libration Army* (PLA) of China,

and with the *Burmese Army* under international pressure, the KMT was subsequently driven out of *Shan State* and so moved across the borders into northern Thailand.

The KMT eventually gained a foothold in the border of *Chiang Rai Province*, northern Thailand during the 1950s to 1970s, having crossed the border to *Mae Sai*. Thailand's military governments of the time, under the Generals *Phibun*, *Sarit* and *Thanom* respectively had taken-up a strong anti-communism position, and so forged an alliance with the KMT. They were allowed to settle in *Doi Mae Salong*, a highland area close to the border with Burma. The Thai military governments employed the KMT as a *de-facto* border military force, guarding against a potential communist invasion along the northern border. At that time, the US was also following the '*Containment Policy*' to prevent communist expansion in Southeast Asia, and also supplied goods and weapons to the KMT via the Thailand governments, while at the same time supporting Taiwan. In retrospect, *Mae Sai* itself was being contained by the external powers such as the US, China, and Burma, as these actors contested each other over the borderlands.

Moreover, the KMT generals and Thai generals including some Thais ruling class shared a common interest in the heroin and jade trades, so they became patrons and clients in these lucrative businesses (McCoy, 1972). The KMT engaged in drug trade, and also extorted taxes from other heroin traffickers and local people. They also recruited other ethnic minorities into their narcotics network and guerrilla troops. In spite of the fact that opium had been cultivated by many ethnic groups, it was the KMT who expanded heroin production into the border areas of the *Shan State*, western Laos and northern Thailand. The '*Golden Triangle*' became known to the world because they trade pure heroin for gold bullion. The heroin trade not only chained together scattering ethnic minorities such as *Shan*, *Haw*, *Yao*, *Akja*, *Lahu* and *Lisu* with KMT, but also exposed these ethnic minorities to hard currency.

In the *Doi Mae Salong* area, the KMT had successfully established their military posts along Thai-Burmese borders, and by the 1970s and 1980s had won several important battles against the communists. It was estimated that General *Duan* and General *Li* had a number of ten thousand people; those were consisted primarily of dependents of the troops and secondarily of civilian followers (Chang, 2001). Moreover, both the KMT generals and Thai generals saw eyes-to-eyes on the mutual

benefits and power. That is, the KMT gave money to the Thai generals. The former provided border surveillance, the latter afforded location. The exchange of benefit eventually gave rise to *Doi Mae Salong* autonomous area.

Not until 1970s did it exist KMT villages on *Doi Mae Salong* where they could practice their own culture such as language, food and ancestral worship. Each village had a self-governing committee which took care of communal affairs such as infrastructure construction, communication with the relevant Thai officials, mediation of disputes and organization of communal rituals. The KMT's generals appointed their own representatives to the committee, but rarely interfered with village affairs, while the Thai generals respected the KMT generals' domain of power (Chang, 2001).

Once the communist threat had been subdued in the border area, the Thai government decided to bring back the border under its control. It now wanted to disarm the KMT troops, and so began disbanding the KMT army in 1984, the process ending in 1987 (Chang, 2001). The KMT villages have been gradually assimilated into the local Thai administration.

In the early 1980s, 'The Royal Development Project' initiated cash crop production activities in northern Thailand in order to replace opium poppy cultivation. The project was part of a huge highland development scheme, one of many internationally financed efforts to eliminate both the opium trade and shifting cultivation. In the early 1990s, the 'Economic Quadrangle' program was introduced in the Upper-Mekong basin, aimed primarily at developing modern infrastructure in the area[7]. As part of this, new roads were built and old road surfaces improved. Moreover, the government offices were constructed and government officials deployed. These activities demonstrated that the state now controlled and regulated its remote border area in the name of development (Ferguson, 1994). A number of ethnic minorities now work for the many so-called 'development projects' that now exist in the Thai highlands. Along the highway to *Mae*

[7] An example of development de-politicizing increased state intervention as it is put forwards in by James Ferguson in 'The Anti-Politics Machine: Development, Depoliticization and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho'. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 1994.

Sai, there is a local road which winds its way up to *Doi Mae Salong*. The former KMT area is now promoted as a tourist attraction where tourists can experience living in Chinese villages and view *Sakura* blossom, eat *Yunnanese* food and drink Chinese tea. All the shop-houses are now run by the *Yunnanese Thais*.

2.5 Production of *Mae Sai* Border Space

Mae Sai border space, as a small political border space where border and society fused together, was no accident of matter but the result of spatial-material production that happened in the early 20th century. *Mae Sai* space was constituted out of spatio-social relations on multiple and interrelating layers--originating from the new power that colonized, divided and ruled the Upper-Mekong borders and the old local power that the different ethnic groups at various places resisted such power. Consequently, the locals tried to negotiate with spaces beyond theirs. As such, distinct trajectories developed for these two different and juxtaposing spaces. To put it simply, although the Upper-Mekong region was intentionally made spatially-fixed by the colonial rulers, those activities carried out by the ethnic borderers were not spatially-fixed (Smith, 2008). These borderers were mobile subjects who had always moved from one place to another over different historical periods.

To being with, the spatio-social evolution of the Upper-Mekong region was characterized by periods of relatively stability, followed by those of sudden change, and so forth. Nonetheless, the early 20th century, the spatio-social transformation of space in the Upper-Mekong was produced mostly out of colonialism, state-nationalism and contestation, all of which had generated a spatial impact. These social forces were often contradictory in nature, yet pushed forwards spatial turn.

Historically, the evolving hegemony of spatial incorporation in the Upper-Mekong region was always associated with the rise and fall of colonialism including the origins of European modern nation-state system. The colonialists tried to 'level' all spatial differences, with the assistance of cartographic professionals and military troops, placing the whole area under a uniformed administrative control, albeit with certain extent of accomplishment of the colonialist policy on '*Divide and Rule*'. European colonization of the Upper-Mekong region was at the forefront of the production of

space in early 20th century, and these nations would also progressively conquer the geographical space. They defined their colonized territories precisely, based on their own means and conceptions. However, the colonial project was never fully accomplished because of spatio-social differentiation embedded in, and in relation to, the larger context of borderers and their cultures.

This differentiation derived from the historical build-up, which was destroyed by the forward march of colonial leveling. As a result, *Mae Sai* border space was constructed out of tension and concentration of an on-going articulation and negotiation between the frontier spaces of 'here' and 'there' that structured the area's spatial formation (Pitch, 2007). It was the seesaw effect that eventually created the historically specific border space of *Mae Sai*.

While there was certainly a tendency towards spatial leveling in the sense of colonialism, it was continually frustrated by equally powerful social forces at the heart of borderland dynamism which inclined towards a continual spatial differentiation. Such a relativity of social space gained active momentum, which in turn produced an integral necessities and measures to limit colonial power. Colonialists invaded pre-colonial space only by capturing it, but at the same time produced a new form of local resistance.

The new politico-colonial regime punctuated throughout border space, but in turn helped created another particular border space out of it such a place as *Mae Sai*. Indeed, the politics of border space-making had no potable rules, but relied on the articulation and negotiating of spatial differentials. The interplay between intense ethnic struggles at the colonial border and a relatively far-away new frontier contributed to the re-configuration of *Mae Sai* space (Pitch, 2007). As such, *Mae Sai* border space became of increasing concern with regard to the survival of the ethnic migrants. As the area was subject to political pressure owing largely to the presence of colonialists, equipped with the power of gun, so a tension-driven environment was created in which these ethnic groups were mobile and highly-political, and endowed with contestation in the quest of a safe haven. The more intensified and oppressed their old place, the greater and freer the new border space. To phase it differently, the absolute space which was once made by the colonialists, contrasted with relative space in the sense that ethnic groups were searching for a new ground. Furthermore, the opposing forces of spatial stability and

chaos, as well as gradual and abrupt change, were leading to the creation of a new border re-configuration.

In retrospect, the Upper Mekong border space was divided between the colonial space of occupancy and the contested space of ethnic migrants, thus leading to the border filled with 'rulers' and 'anarchists' (Scott, 2009). Both sides led the process of structuring and re-structuring the border and interactions between absolute and relative space. Colonialists engulfed the geographical entity using modern cartographical technologies and geographers, while also simultaneously beginning the production of border space through internal local differentiation. So, while colonialists did function as some kind of external spatial fix; however, any external geographical space was denied its externality by the fluidity of highly-mobile ethnic migrants who had never been made fixed, but had always moved around the region and had always been socio-ethnically diverse. While the colonialists attempted to produce border space from outside by externalizing the internal, the local ethnic migrants tried to make their own space from within their space. As externalization underwent, as much as was punctuated by internalization; therefore, the quantitative space put forwards by the colonialists shifting towards a qualitative one (Harvey, 2006). While the colonialists incorporated the global surface, some ethnic groups tried to create for themselves a small place in which to pursue freewill. As a result, a small political border like *Mae Sai* was produced and came into existence, constituted of a global-colonial versus a local-indigenous space (Harvey, 2006; Smith, 2009).

The take-over, merger and re-structuring that accompanied the spatial crisis also helped prepare the new space for a new-round of spatial formation in which spatial stability and spatial punctuation went hand in hand (Smith, 2009). This ensured that the leveling and control of all spatial differentials would have to prepare the subsequent expansion of differentiation itself.

The modern-nation state filled in the political and economic forms of the absolute space that the nation-state inherited from the former colonialist powers. What could be inferred was a distinctive trajectory in which the development of one form of colonialism sowed the seeds of the modern-nation state within the cocoon of absolute space. The fundamental building block of the modern nation-state space was the

individual absolute space of private property, and such space had its absoluteness in the form of sovereignty. The modern nation-state space was both absolute and relational. It was absolute in terms of its size, nature, people and government, and as a container of social relations; it was also relational when it came to interactions with other absolute spaces beyond which it formed the processes of spatio-social interaction, expanding across different time-space.

As the absolute expansion reached the limits of its own national scale, the formal aspect of spatial integration through nation-state building was increasingly subsumed into its geo-body. At the end of this, the modern nation-state that grew and became large also had a weakness, as it found itself difficult to maintain political integrity over its entire territory, in particular the border area which was comparatively porous.

While the modern nation-state project was followed by the integration of lowland-highland, land-sea and center-margin, such spatial conformity also created spatial frictions and fissures as the project moved forward the production of modern nation-state. As a result, *Mae Sai* border space was pushed into, and generated out of, spatial confrontation and geographical tension, due to the fact that some of its border space was partially converted by the modern nation-state conformity process to construct the nation's geo-body, while at the same time also being partially converted into a vulnerable place by and for runaway ethnic people. As the sovereign power of the modern nation-state could not bring the borderland totally under its control, so *Mae Sai* space became a small political border at which the diverse socio-cultural characteristics of the ethnic borderers were able to resist the conformity laid down by the nation-state building process.

2.6 Conclusion

In retrospect, instead of seeing a border as natural, *Mae Sai* border space can be seen to have been constructed through a process of integration, of diverse spatial links in which different groups of people at different spatial-times contributed to the construction of a socially-integral border space. Nonetheless, this border space was not unified by different ethnic groups but mediated by diverse geographical spaces. In other words, the

border space was linked through social interactions and spatio-social relations, through which all social elements had flowed (Chang, 2001).

As such, *Mae Sai* border space was linked through diverse trajectories and various political regimes, directing the movement of people. The *Shan*, *Lue* and *KMT* ethnic borderers set out their living places, proceeding from one place to another and finally inventing a new place. Not only did they occupy space, but also contributed towards the creation of a new political border space. All these moves were grounded in border realities tied to broader spatio-political project. Amidst diverse social circumstances coming and going, waxing and waning, *Mae Sai* border space was articulated through a combination of different juxtaposing spaces. Thus, transformation of the *Mae Sai* border was treated as an integral moment within overall socio-political dimensions that produced a spatially-interactive border, rather than simply as an independent effect. It was spatial contradictions that mattered the most at the *Mae Sai* border.