

CHAPTER 4

The Spatiality of the Border Markets

4.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to provide a descriptive account about the spatiality of the border markets, primarily describing the very nature of the border markets, and also presenting it in a spatialized way. To put it another way, the landscape is a kind of text that needs to be read. This study employs ethnography, and particularly participant observation, conducted over the period from January to March 2014.

Strictly speaking, the spatiality of the border markets illustrates the contemporary history, human landscape, images, symbols, technology, sights and sounds of such border markets. That is, the border markets are a lived space in which traders, tourists and people socially experience and engage space. In other words, they are a small social world in which is constituted different groups of people and ethnicities, who come to interact and negotiate with, or even tolerate each other, grounded in everyday activities. They are a society not just limited to buying and selling goods each day, but involve the totality of human life. The border markets are of importance to the ethnic border traders whose positions are infused with spatial-social and economic relations, perspectives and interests. The borders, the state boundaries of Thailand and Myanmar, are also linked through the markets on either side, one in *Mae Sai* and another one in *Tachilek*. As a result, the markets' spatiality is always marked by differences, dynamics, flux and movements, and it generates relations between such movement and time-space. Furthermore, these border markets are physically situated in the context of a tourism atmosphere.

This chapter is structured into five parts. It begins with a general image of the border markets of *Mae Sai*. Then, it also discusses spatial development of *Doi Wao Market*. It is also followed by its adjacent market, which is *Sai Lom Joy Market*. These

two important markets are in *Mae Sai*¹. On the other side of the river bank of the *Sai River* is *Ta Lor Market*, in *Tachilek*, or as it is commonly called *Tachilek Market*. The last part is the conclusion.

4.2 The Spatiality of the Border Markets

Near the borders of Thailand and Myanmar are located two marketplaces. *Mae Sai Market* on the Thai side, which is made up of *Doi Wao Market* and *Sai Lom Joy Market*; people often call '*Mae Sai Market*'. On the Myanmar side in *Tachilek*, *Tha Lor Market*; people often call '*Tachilek Market*'. It is the location that gives names to the place. *Mae Sai Market* and *Tachilek Market* are divided yet united by the *Sai River*. They are divided because the *Sai River* has been used as international maker, dividing the geo-bodies of Thailand and Myanmar since the time of modern nation-states. It is united because the people living along borders have been crossing the river back and forth since time immemorial. Even today, the Thailand and Myanmar's authorities could tolerate local people wading across this small and shallow river in *Sai Jom Joy* and *Kok Sai* areas, as long as they return their place before 06:00 pm. Above the river is a concrete bridge, and this is always busy with people crossing the borders, including locals conducting small-scale trade and tourists passing across it to shop at the two markets. *Mae Sai Market* and *Tachilek Market* form a common market-scape, despite the presence of a nation-state boundary in-between.

Since the ADB's regional development initiative in the 1990s, both *Mae Sai* and *Tachilek* have been geared towards cross-border trade and tourism. The states have

¹ There is also another market at *Mae Sai*, which is *Nāi Bun Yeūn Market*. It is a morning and evening fresh goods market. It belongs to *Srisamut Family*. Mr.Boonyuen Srisamut and Mrs. Pinkaew Srisamut are from central Thailand, but came pioneer businesses in *Mae Sai* after World War I. They also help support *Doi Wao Temple*. Their family now owns a lot of businesses in *Mae Sai* such as hotels, gas stations, orchards, a school, and real estate. All these businesses are now managed by Mr.Saraiyon Srisamut and his wife, Mrs.Amporn Srisamut, who are the third generation of the family, and their sons and daughter, who are their fourth generation. The three sons are Mr. Chaiyon Srisamut, elected member of Chiang Rai Provincial Council, Mr.Sawetyon Srisamut, owner of Phiyaphorn Place Hotel, Mr.Petchyon Srisamut, owner of Phiyaphorn Pavilion Hotel, and the last one Ms.Phiyaphorn Srisamut, owner of PTT gas station.

intentionally used their borderlands for a tourist attraction. For example, Thailand has promoted a discourse related to visiting the northern-most tip of the country, albeit that this is very mundane in the eyes of the locals. Moreover, if one searches for the words ‘*Mae Sai*’ or ‘*Tachilek*’ on the internet, they will be described as shopping-related border towns, and there will be images shown of people street shopping. Today, *Mae Sai Market* and *Tachilek Market* are blanketed with a variety of cheap Chinese goods targeted at tourists visiting the towns. *Mae Sai Market* offers tourists clothes, blankets, dried food, fruits, vegetables, jades, gems, electronic appliances, gadgets and toys, to just name a few. *Tachilek Market* is similar to *Mae Sai Markets* just across the borders, but also sells illicit, pirated and counterfeit items such as CDs/ DVDs, *Viagra*, copycat *Louis Vuitton* or *Rolex*, mobile phones, western brand cigarettes and liquors, animal pelts and skulls. The Thais usually called copycats in general ‘*kǒng góp*’. Local handicrafts and *Shan* or *Akha* clothing are also available. Thai Custom officers randomly check the items that Thai tourists bring back from *Tachilek* to *Mae Sai*, but a few illicit/illegal items are treated as concessional on the ground of *Mae Sai* being a tourist border town. Flash floods often inundate both *Ta Lor Market* and *Sai Lom Joy Market* during downpours in rainy seasons due to surges in the *Sai River*. The locals recall that the *Sai River* in the old days was very wide, but is too shallow and narrow due to the expansion of shop-houses and communities along the riverbanks.

Mae Sai Market and *Tachilek Market* would seem to have become part of China’s frontier through the presence of so many Chinese commodities. China produces a wide variety of consumer products, and customers prefer cheap prices; they do not care about the quality. Nonetheless, this implies China’s growing influence on economic border. Since China introduced economic reform in the early 1980s, its economy has expanded and penetrated towards southward. Now, the borders of southern China, eastern Myanmar and northern Thailand are chained together through, or have been re-configured by, the presence of ‘Made in China’ products. In other words, *Mae Sai Market* and *Tachilek Market* are virtually Chinese markets. This implies that the spatiality of the border markets is always a cross-cutting relationship with wider networks of places. China has a growing economy and is expanding its market towards its southern neighbors like Myanmar’s and Thailand’s borders. *Mae Sai* and *Tachilek* have become one of the biggest markets for Chinese goods outside China. The border

market also reflects China's 'Southbound Policy' via the northern border of Thailand and eastern border of Myanmar as well as western border of Laos. It forms the borderless 'Golden Triangle'.

This is to remind that the wind of change swept this borderland in the 1990s, during which major territorial problems declined dramatically, opening up a new chance for trade, growth and development. The spatiality of the border markets is an example of the globalizing trade that has been increasing in recent times, both symbolically drawing the borderlands of neighboring countries together and practically blurring borders and borderlines through the circulation of cross-border flows (Martinez, 1994). The spatiality of the border markets is unique in a sense that it is the landscape of the mixture of things, thoughts and people after all. A *Doi Wao Temple's* churchwarden talked about the border market:

"Doi Wao, Sai Lom Joy and the area around, when merchants were caught by the police, they were in trouble and taken the police station. The police imposed a fine because of the traders' violation of copyright laws. This charge seemed to come from the US because the goods violated their copyright laws, through brand-name clothes and Mickey Mouse. If asked if they copies or not, the sellers said that they didn't think so. It was China which made the copies. They were just sellers. They were downstream. Why didn't the authorities go and catch upstream? They just sold to make a living. Why didn't the authorities go and catch the source; why focused on downstream? The sellers couldn't tell anybody. Go catch that those who produced the goods".

4.3 Doi Wao Market

Generally speaking, *Mae Sai Market* occupies a downtown space alongside *Phaholyothin Highway 1*. Tourists can walk along the road and shop at shop-houses, stalls or kiosks situated along footpaths on both sides of the main street. Nonetheless, *Doi Wao Market* is the biggest shopping bazaar. Latitudinally, it occupies an area starting from in front of *Mae Sai Police Station* (opposite is the gem market at *Soi 4*) and ending at *Sai Lom Joy Market*, which is close to Mae Sai Border Check Point, and

also along the main street. Longitudinally, it is a small alley that starts from the entrance on the main street going uphill to the foot of *Doi Wao Temple*. This small alley, which is flanked by shops-houses, stalls and carts, is usually crowded with tourists in the winter season, but thinly-populated in the rainy season. Using letter shapes, the geobody of the gem market at *soi 4* is an inverted 'u-shape', while *Doi Wao Market* is an inverted 't-shape'. A shopper can shop in two directions; along the main street until reaching the Mae Sai Border Check-Point, or uphill towards *Doi Wao Temple*.

Fifty years ago, uphill *Doi Wao Temple* sat among empty space. It was a place to where hill-tribe people came down from *Tachilek* to sell items such as orchids, herbs, animal parts or miscellaneous items they had collected and hunted in the local forests. It was also a local morning fresh market with a few traders. Some people who visited *Mae Sai* at that time remember they used to buy cigarettes and liquors.

Doi Wao Market as it is today is the result of tourism and cross-border trade that have been developed since 1990. The birth of the market shares its story with the *Buddhist* merit-makers at *Doi Wao Temple* and the border closures at *Tachilek*. To make a long story short, *Buddhist* merit-makers from many places throughout Thailand usually come to visit the temple to make merit or celebrate a religious occasion every year. For them, the temple is also a shelter. Routinely, they, as both *Buddhist* merit-makers and tourists, get up in the morning and cross borders to buy items in *Tachilek*. But, some of them prefer shopping in *Mae Sai* and buying items from the local petty traders who cross the borders to sell stuffs at *Doi Wao Market*. Some shoppers say that items sold in *Mae Sai* and *Tachilek* are the same. In fact, local merchants, who wait for the *Buddhist* merit-makers of *Doi Wao Temple*, import their items across the borders at *Ta Lor Market*.

In 2001 and 2002, there were border closures at *Tachilek* due to Myanmar's ethnic-armed struggles, and the crises lasted 127 days and 147 days respectively. The border closures brought about changes in the spatiality of *Doi Wao Market*. During these particular years, *Buddhists* merit-makers and general tourists alike could not cross the borders to *Tachilek*; they had to stay and shop in *Mae Sai*. Also, Myanmar's petty traders could not sell to visitors in *Tachilek*. Therefore, a number of them began to cross the borders to *Doi Wao Temple* where they could sell stuffs to tourists because groups

of tourists usually stayed overnight at the temple. Now that a number of local merchants and cross-border traders were visiting regularly to sell items at the market, the temple began to lease out plots of land to individual merchants for commercial activities. The business was good partly because of the availability of the *Buddhist* merit-makers who came to visit the temple every year.

Doi Wao Temple occupies land along the border, covering approximately 80 to 90 *rai* (31-35 *acre*), of which 15 to 20 *rai* (6-7 *acre*) is leased out to individuals for commercial purposes. An individual petty trader pays rent of 300 to 600 *Bath* (7-15USD²) a month, depending on the size of the area, and the lease agreement is made on a yearly basis. Initially, the temple leased out to the locals. However, as trade and tourism picked up in *Mae Sai*, the locals then sub-leased their shop-houses or empty spaces to whomever who wants to do business.

The high demand and limited supplies of real estate led to not only an increase in rents, but also fraudulent practices at the market. Presently, the rents are 100,000 *Baht* (2,325 USD) to 200,000 *Baht* (4,651 USD) a year, or even as high as 1,000,000 *Baht* (23,255 USD), depending on the location of a shop-house. On average, the rents are about 6,000 to 10,000 *Baht* (139-232 USD) a month. However, some counterfeit lease agreements have been produced on behalf of *Doi Wao Temple*. This also helps remind the rental price of gem offices during the gem trade boom. The pricing project at *Mae Sai* is a growth craze after all.

Nowadays, there are roughly 300 to 400 shop-houses at the market, and numerous carts or stalls. There are two major groups of people who trade there. The first group of people includes the locals who have conducted businesses at the market for a comparatively long period of time. The majority of them are *Tai-Lue*, *Tai Yai* and *Thai-Chinese* who own shop-houses. Nonetheless, there are those from ethnic groups who have money and connections, but are not considered of Thai nationality such as the *Wa*, *Karen*, *Burmese*. These particular groups can buy shop-houses through the illegal method of subrogation. The border space of *Mae Sai* is a legal-illegal space in the eyes of the locals. The second group of people includes new-comers such as the *Burmese*,

² The exchange rate was about 43 Baht to one US dollar in 2002.

Chinese-Burmese, Muslim Burmese and Shan. A large number of them are cross-border traders who mostly own carts or stalls selling a variety of items such as food, fruits and snacks; some of them are smugglers who sell CDs/DVDS, cigarettes and medicines. The former who run shop-houses belong to a well-established community, while the latter are cross-border traders who cross the borders back and forth every day. The former has capital, while the latter has little. The locals estimate that the latter group of people outnumbers the former group of locals at the market. Mae Sai Immigration Office estimates that about 500 to 600 people cross the borders from Myanmar every day. However, the actual numbers must be higher due to the influx of migrants, and they are very mixed. A *Tai Lue* Buddhist monk at a temple said:

“Today, I didn’t even know which ethnic group people belonged to, those who lived in Mae Sai. The civil registration system couldn’t categorize these different groups of people, or tell which group was which, because they arrived undocumented. They came to trade and sold their labor”.

Doi Wao Market is unique in that it is an ethnically-diverse space. Some people have dual nationality. Moreover, the sub-leasing and subrogation of estate usher in the flows of different groups of people, together with goods, who are in search of a better life at the borders. These people speak a variety of languages such as *Thai, Burmese, Shan, Chinese and Akha.*

4.3.1 Market as Spacing, Timing and Distancing

O was a *Tai-Lue* woman who was once a street vendor at *Doi Wao Market*, but was only a seasonal street vendor who came to sell fresh strawberries to tourists in the winter. She ordered the strawberries from *Chiang Mai*. She had done this job for three years before giving it up due too many street vendors competing each other in cutting their prices. These traders were *Tai-Yai (Shan)*. Her strawberries passed the quality control at the factory. They were of high quality but also a high-price. The *Tai Yai* sold lower quality of fruit, so could sell at comparatively cheaper prices, though there was little difference in the eyes of the tourists. The high season in *Mae Sai* was a good time not only for tourists, but also for street vendors like *O*. She came to find a little space every day in the morning around 06:00 am to secure a good position, though this was

hard to find as it was always crowded. Sometimes, the street vendors fought over small spaces; they would not compromise and finally ended up at the police station or a temple to help with mediation. Her tactic was to move on and around as a means of finding a new space and also distancing herself from the authorities and the place. She would leave *Doi Wao Market* when the winter season ended, or when *Mae Sai* entered the low-season for tourists. She had to deal with tourists, the police and other vendors during her trading activities. She was mobile, opportunistic and tactful. This was her everyday life in the winter as she said:

“I came to find a room by myself and a space to my fresh strawberries. I put my strawberries into a basket. During winter, it was so crowded and there were many vendors; even a small space was hard to find. I came here very early in the morning to get a space before the other vendors arrived. One particular space might be owned by a particular vendor, but I didn’t take other people’s space. If they came, I kept on moving around to find a small space. Wherever there was empty space, I moved to that space. Or, if I knew them, I could share a space and place my basket there. I usually set-up near a tourist bus stop in front of the Mae Sai Police Station. There were tourist buses coming very early in the morning and stopping around here. The earlier it was in the morning, the better chance I had of selling all my stock. If I was in a good location, I could leave at the end of the morning and go back home to do something else. I moved every day to find a small new space. However, when the Mae Sai municipal police came, I ran away”.

In some other case, O comments on the *Tai Yai* at the market:

“They were friendly and too hard-working. It was perhaps they had been oppressed in Myanmar. They couldn’t do anything; couldn’t trade, couldn’t earn money. Once they crossed the Thai border, they did whatever they could to make money. The easiest work of the Tai Yai was to trade because they were business minded. They collected vegetables or whatever they could collect. If they had only a small plot of land, they grew vegetables to sell. They had kin who helped supply goods for sale

also. I accepted that their network was very tight. When they worked as a team or worked whatever cultural, they could work better than the local people in terms of participation, giving a hand to one another”.

4.4 Sai Lom Joy Market

The beginning of *Doi Wao Market* is related to *Doi Wao Temple*, and *Doi Wao Market* also gave birth to *Sai Lom Joy Market*. *Sai Lom Joy Market* is adjacent to the border, so the land is mostly state property land, but the buildings are both privately owned and state owned. This market is smaller than *Doi Wao Market*, and there are diverse ethnicities, both local merchants and cross-border petty traders. They are *Thai Chinese*, *Chinese*, *Tai Yai*, *Akha* and *Burmese*. Most of the petty traders are *Burmese* and *Tai Yai*, and they pay 30 *Baht* (0.9 USD) a day to rent a space in front of the building. *Sai Lom Joy Market* runs along the main street, and is also near to the Mae Sai Custom Office and Mae Sai Border Check-Point. *Sai Lom Joy Market* and *Doi Wao Market* are linked by a small alley. *Sai Lom Joy Market* is shaped like an ‘I’ because it runs parallel to the *Sai River*.

Sai Lom Joy Market is similar to the *Gem Market* on *soi 4* due to the power of geography. Generally speaking, tourism boom had led to the annexation of nearby space to accommodate the increasing number of tourists and vibrant trading activities that have taken place there since the 1990s. In a sense, *Sai Lom Joy Market* is a copy of *Doi Wao Market*. It is a small alley, seemingly disorganized alley, flanked by shop-houses, carts and stalls. The products sold are mostly cheap ‘Made in China’ goods. An *Akha* ethnic who lives at *Sai Lom Joy Market* said:

“I saw that most of the shoppers cross the borders to buy brand-name products [copycats or ‘kǒng góp’]. For the locals who had lived here for a long time, they got that there was something very cheap, it shouldn’t have been that cheap, but it was actually real cheap. Like, socks, in Bangkok, a dozen 100 Baht (3.1 USD) was out of question, but a dozen 100 Baht here was possible. It was a standard sale price. If bargained, they might be cheaper, maybe 70 Baht (2.1 USD) something like that.....It was tourist town, it was the so-called the China’s border”.

The history of *Sai Lom Joy Market* is related to the entertainment area around forty to thirty years ago. Originally, *Sai Lom Joy* was the name of a village community before it is later became known as a market today. The locals still remember entertainment pubs, karaoke bars, restaurants, motels and especially brothels in *Koh Sai Village Community*³ down from *Sai Lom Joy Village Community* and along the *Sai River*. The place was known for relaxation.

Zazuvi, an *Akha* woman, works at EMPOWER, which is 'Education Means Protection of Women Engaged in Recreation', and is also known as the 'Centre for Sex Workers' Protection. It is an NGO that supports sex workers by providing health protection and welfare services. It has been active in *Mae Sai* since 1984. She talked about *Sai Lom Joy*:

"Sai Lom Joy came together with the entertainment service labor. It was the area of services and sex workers. There were an estimated forty brothels open around-the-clock, and one brothel had about forty sex-workers. They were about twenty bars and food shops. The sex-workers were mostly female ethnic minorities. Men went to the brothels. All the way here to Kok Sai area were mostly brothels. The business owners were mostly Thai; otherwise, they couldn't have opened them.....The number of sex-workers finally reduced to about ten a brothel, but nowadays there was no more".

In fact, the area along the borderlands of *Mae Sai-Tahcilek* was a junction to where traders and merchants came from far-away and different places to import and export and distribute commodities by land or river at *Mae Sai*. As a pivotal transit point, situated among Myanmar, China and Laos, it had many small restaurants and shelters set up to receive the traders and merchants after they had undertaken a long and exhausting journey. Brothels, just like other underground businesses, and in these places ethnic sex-workers, cross-border customers and the businesses could exploit loopholes

³ *Kok Sai Village* and *Sai Lom Joy Village Community* are along the *Sai River* and close to the Gem Market. In fact, the Gem Market is a part of *Kok Sai Community*. One side of *Kok Sai Community* is on the *Sai riverbank*; the gem market is on *Phaholyothin Road*.

in state regulations. *Sai Lom Joy* was for sojourn and sex. In this regard, space was also gendered. It was a male space for releasing male tensions and emotions. While the female sex workers were confined and controlled by the bounded border, working in a brothel, males were free to move beyond. It was both a symbolic and behavioral spatial duality.

The wind of change blew into *Sai Lom Joy* when Thailand introduced the ‘*Children and Women Trafficking Prevention and Suppression Act BE 2540*’ (1997), after which the Thai authorities closed down these brothels. Some of the business operators could not pay the fines; other changed their brothels to *karaoke* bars. Certain parts of *Koh Sai* were occupied by the *Chanthaburi* gem trade community, and the traders were frequent visitors to the *karaoke* bars and restaurants at *Sai Lom Joy* along the *Sai River* after they called it a day. But, the forty to thirty year-old story of the area now remains only in the locals’ memories.

4.5 *Ta Lor Market*

Another side of *Sai Lom Joy Market* is *Ta Lor Market* or *Tachilek Market*, divided by the *Sai River*, yet linked by the cross-over. Thirty years ago, it is just a small market, selling local goods and handicrafts. Besides, the locals still recall people coming over to the area to play *Ma Kong Ti*, a *Shan*-style lottery. Nonetheless, *Ta Lor Market* is almost as contemporary as *Doi Wao Market*. It is also a logistic hub like *Sai Jom Joy Market*, as it is located along the *Sai River*. Merchants and traders alike stop over at the market before crossing the borders to sell goods at *Doi Wao Temple* or re-distribute their goods elsewhere.

Today, *Ta Lor Market* is comparatively bigger than *Mae Sai Market*. It is rectangular in shape, and has small alleyways crisscross the area and contain many shop-houses. It is also ethnically diverse, as the shop-owners are mostly the Burmese, Chinese Burmese, *Shan* and Thai.

Tourists who come to *Ta Lor Market* always face many ethnic street vendors coming up to and pestering them. They carry with them baskets strapped to their backs

or necks. It is estimated that there are three hundreds street vendors at this market. Some of Thai tourists just turn away from them. They speak Thai in a very set pattern:

One Ethnic petty trader: “Brother/Sister, wanna have Viagra, porn CDs/VCDs, Songs?”

Another Ethnic petty trader: “Brother/Sister, wanna need cigarettes, flashlights?”

Other Ethnic petty trader: “Brother/Sister, wanna get electric razors, laser pointers?”

Experientially speaking, these ethnic street vendors’ selling techniques require that they become involved in each other’s presences, as their livelihoods are contingent on it. The street vendors must encroach themselves into the Thai customers’ private space and disrupt their intentionality and immediate thinking. They need to engage the shoppers in a fast, sequential manner, for the greater the number of different individuals they encroach themselves upon, the greater the chance they will sell something (Richardson, 2003).

While the Myanmar’s traders who cross the borders to *Mae Sai* are the poor, the Thai merchants who operate businesses in *Tachilke* are comparatively the rich. There are a lot of Thai businessmen who rent shop-houses there. Some of the Thai merchants sell copycats of western brand products such as *Louis Vuitton*, *Chanel* and *Rolex*, just name a few. The selling of these copycats is considered illegal in Thailand, but is allowed in *Tachilek*. Other sell fashion clothes and pirated CD/s/DVDs. The business owners prefer to use *Shan* workers to the *Burmese* because they can speak both *Thai* and *Burmese*. The shoppers are mostly Thai people who favor the brand-name products. A *Tai Lue* local petty trader said:

“There were a lot of Thai people who went sell items at that market-side. Mostly, the Thais invested a lot of money because they could sell brand name products. Selling brand-name products was not permitted at this side. The Thais sold clothes, handbags, things like that over there. They both imported and did wholesales too. They didn’t sell here; they

sent them to customers in Bangkok. There were a lot of brand-name products at the market there”.

In *Tachilek*, Myanmar’s and Thai merchants who rent shop-houses pay rents to the owners. There are about hundreds of Thai businessmen who operate at this market. They pay rents of about 20,000 to 100,000 *Baht* (666-3,333 USD) a month, depending on a shop-house’s location and size. Moreover, they sometimes pay the custom officers in order to help facilitate the flows of goods across the borders; particularly, when Thai tourists carry illegal/illicit goods or pirated products on the way back to *Mae Sai*.

Back to *Mae Sai*, the Myanmar’s and Thai merchants must pay rents, though some other charges are also incurred. For example, they sometimes have to pay the excise officers first, then the police, then the municipal police and so on. Particularly, merchants who sell illegal/illicit goods or pirated products, especially electronic gadgets, clothes or appliances, are likely to be bothered frequently by such authority figures. Such payments help smooth their business activities. As a result of being bothered by the authorities, some Thai businessmen decided to move to *Ta Lor Market* instead. They felt sick of being too much bothered; they paid rents, taxes and extractions. The authorities’ rules and regulations are sometimes introduced to serve their own interests due to the fact that the regulations are also sometimes implemented without political accountability to those affected and without sound and consistent judgment. A Thai-Burmese dual national who rents a shop selling electronic goods at *Sai Lom Joy Market* said:

“I was away from my shop for a few days, so my nephew helped take care of it. The excise officer came. They could seize items but they had to know where these items came from. It came from Khlong Thom Market in Bangkok. They had to go there, not here. They asked for 7,000 Baht (233 USD), but they wrote on the ticket 3,000 Baht (100 USD). I was charged with selling Powerbank [battery backup for mobile phone]. Last year, I paid 30,000 Baht (1,000 USD). Sometimes, they didn’t give a ticket. It was like a ransom. Actually, I didn’t want to keep the ticket, as it was useless. If I had been here, I would not have given them money, but would have asked for the ticket and paid it at the excise office. A lot of

Thai merchants have moved to Tachilek to trade because the police and soldieries didn't get involve. Go take a look CDs/DVDs, copycats and other illegal items. They paid only taxes. That was enough".

4.6 Conclusion

The spatiality of the border markets is unique. First and foremost, it is an ethnic mosaic space made up of different groups of people with diverse ethno-social backgrounds. The border markets are not simply a place of buying and selling, but an ethno-social world in which all these people think, do and interact. It is these people themselves who define the spatiality of the border markets. The spatiality has always been marked by the flows of people, ideas and goods, thus making it a lived border market. In other words, the spatiality of the border markets is integrated or chained through people, thoughts and commodities on a daily basis.

Secondly, the spatiality of the border markets can be considered more spatio-social than spatio-political, through the eyes of the locals who have lived along the borders. For these borderers, movements up-here and down-there are a normal daily practice; a part of the social network in their daily lives. Regardless of state politics and policies, there is no borderline in the borderers' minds. They conceive spatiality as a totally whole; space is for moving and travelling around. People have long conducted trade and commerce without recognizing borders. There is perhaps no such thing as 'crossing border' for borderers because the border has no absolute entity, but a totality of whole space. Contradictorily, the borderers' everyday border crossing activities mean to ignore or even reject the borderline.

However, the word 'borderline' is a nation-state manufactured modern word, and has state-infused meaning. However, it does shape general people's conceptions of the practices and meanings of borders. That is, the eyes of the state conceive borders as politically-fragmented space; a different part constitutes a different whole. To put it another way, a space is perceived through a series of, or a put together from, annexed political space. The spatio-social space is based on the socio-economic practices of the borderers, embedded in daily trading experiences, while the spatio-political space is drawn by state sovereignty.

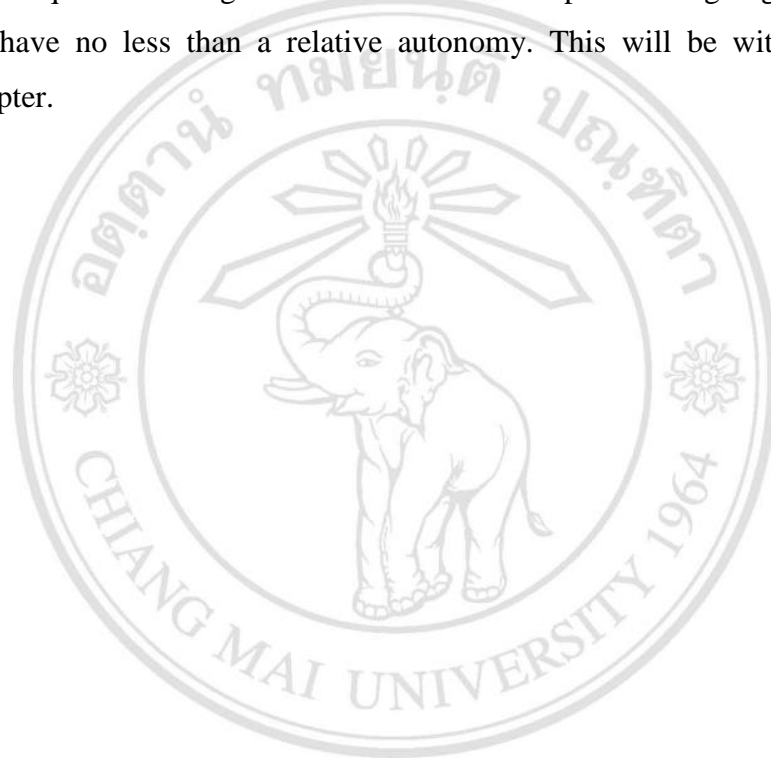
Thirdly, the spatiality of the border markets is also marked by a convergence of globalization from above and from below. It is the globalization from above because the spatiality of the markets is created by the state as a national project to promote cross-border trade and tourism. It is the globalization from below in that the movement of people and goods across the borders is a daily-life occurrence, but enhanced and interfaced by modern infrastructure. As such, the border markets have become a gathering venue of multiple open-ended and interconnected trajectories (Massey, 2005). That is, the Chinese market has become enormous for the border markets as a result of China, Thailand and Myanmar's increasing economic ties. The overwhelm presence of 'Made in China' products at both *Mae Sai Market* and *Tachilek Market* reflects an increase in border economic ties among these countries through the interface of cross-border trade and tourism. In other words, the spatiality of the border markets is connected to wider localities beyond its own space.

Nonetheless, the marketplace is connected through the globalization of economic activity, but this process also by-passes some other areas. While the spatiality of *Mae Sai* is linked through spatially-diverse places, it simultaneously creates spatially-discontinuous commercial growth in certain places. That is, there is a cluster of places through which it is re-connected economically, both within the space of which it is a part and across its border to wider network of space on the one hand. On the other hand, there is another cluster of space which is de-connected due to being located outside such economic globalization. This situation generates unevenness of economic activity and growth through economic globalization. To put it simply, the border economy generates inconsistent and uneven economic activities due to the different nature of the economy and its mode of global market influence.

Fourthly, the spatiality of the border markets is place-specific in a sense that the political crises and border trade co-exist. The area is highly exposed to pressures owing to the ethnic-armed struggles and the high mobility among ethnic people. Stability and non-stability go hand in hand in the border markets, and in particular on the *Tachilek* side of the border. At the most basic level, the spatiality is divided between the space of long conflicting processes and the space of recent regional developments on a number

of levels: locally, regionally and globally. However, it is also integrated through the movement of cross-border people, who also bring with them economic activity.

In the final analysis, the spatiality of the border markets is a space of exchange in which different and diverse stories co-exist, meet up, affect each other and come into cooperate or conflict. *Mae Sai* is never dormant, but always disruptive, active and generative. Thus, to develop a sufficient understanding of the spatiality of the border markets would require the recognition that there are multiple stories going on there, and these stories have no less than a relative autonomy. This will be witnessed in the following chapter.



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