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Women's Work and Market Hierarchies Along the Border of Lao PDR

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ABSTRACT *Contrary to claims by some neo-liberalists that international borders are becoming irrelevant, market liberalisation can actually enhance the effect that borders have on the lives of the people living along them. This study examines how the opening of border trade between Laos and Thailand has influenced gender divisions of labour, and definition of women's work along the border zone. Studies were undertaken in two border areas in Lao PDR—Sayaboury province and Kammoune province. In the former, cotton-weaving activities were studied and in the latter, sticky rice box production. The production and trading of these commodities brought crucial cash income to the women studied and their households. How the women benefited from these activities in terms of income and status depends on how other members of the family perceived these activities. However, the formalisation of the border trade has changed women's 'sense of space' and their relations with men and other women.*

Introduction

In recent years, processes of international integration and globalisation and the resulting 'borderless' economy has not only suppressed national borders, but formalised the existence of joint transborder actions, as can be seen in the formation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and other regional agreements (Wong-Gonzalez, 1998). However, the viability of the notion of the 'region-state' (Ohmae, 1993) has been challenged by various empirical studies (Staudt, 1998; Bergeron, 2002; Razavi, 2001; Cohen, 2001; Sadowski-Smith, 2002). These studies maintain that the global, integrated and liberalised economy increases social fragmentation and disintegration, and that the process of global integration has been asymmetrical and uneven across countries, classes and gender (Grown *et al.*, 2000, p. 1146; Evenett and Yusuff, 2001; Petras and Veltmeyer, 2001; Stiglitz, 2002, p. 5). As McDowell (1999) and Pratt and Yeoh (2003) contend, globalising forces reconstruct rather than destroy localities, and for many people everyday life continues to take place within a restricted locale.

While proponents of market liberalisation claim that it eliminates barriers of

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trade and enhances the movement of goods, the officialisation of border trade under market liberalisation policies can strengthen international borders, functioning to create a market hierarchy across the border, and thus having an impact on women's and men's work in border areas. As Papademetriou and Meyers (2001) point out, market liberalisation and the official opening of borders actually make national governments reassert control at the border. Hence, new processes of inclusion and exclusion are developed under state control. Gooneratne and Mosselman (1996) also caution that regulating or formalising (legalising) activities may increase income for one group, while causing another to lose employment and income. This article examines such exclusion/inclusion functions of geographical borders under market liberalisation, by taking a localised view from the Lao–Thai border.

Borders, Border Trade and Women's Work

International borders are both structures and symbols of a state's security and sovereignty (Donnan and Wilson, 1999, p. 15). International borders not only mark state territory, but also create space and give meanings to that physical space. Spaces are socially imbued, and as Donnan and Wilson in their review of literature on border studies pointed out, a border has a meaning-setting function (1999, p. 4). The same activity on one side of the border can have a different meaning for people on the other side.

Anderson (1996) defines borders in terms of institutions and processes. As processes, borders are instruments of state policy and markers of identity. Anderson focuses on the role that borders play in forming national identity and constructing national cultures but, as Wilson and Donnan (1998) state, they can also be markers of gender, class and ethnic identities. Very little literature exists on the gendered effect of international borders. Of the few extant studies, scholars have elaborated how geographical borders define and label women's work. Cheater (1998) shows how cross-border 'shoppers' in Zimbabwe were labelled as a security threat to the country. Vila (2003), in her work on the US–Mexico border, demonstrates how borderlands, as margins of society, are seen as 'dangerous' and full of 'vice', and that certain gendered behaviours and attitudes are seen as characteristic of *Fronterisas/os*. Similar findings are reported by Biemann (2002), who concludes that, 'The border thus becomes a metaphor as well as an actual material institution that capitalizes on the differences between the economic and the sexual' (p. 108).

Staudt (1998) has pointed out that although there is a large body of literature on informal work, the relationship between space and informality has not been examined closely. International borders create a space where certain income-earning activities are generated and defined, giving status and assigning roles to certain groups of people, thus making work gendered. In her research on informal work and housing on the US–Mexico border, Staudt observed that the space created by the borderland provides an opportunity for women and men to make 'strategic decisions' to maximise border opportunities, and 'allow male and female border-crossers to generate earnings that (however meager) reduce globally ubiquitous and deep gender inequities' (p. 8). Marchand (2002), based on her study of the US–Mexico border, also focuses on the importance of border spaces. The re-ordering of spaces, she argues, creates new opportunities for some women and men, while exacerbating forms of exclusion along the lines of class,

gender and ethnicity. Contestation over and re-articulation of space produces new meanings (Marchand, 2002; Moss, 2002) embedded in power and resistance (Staudt, 1998, p. 20).

This study discusses the role that international borders play in the creation of markets and market hierarchies, and in the definition of women's work. International borders create different scales of places (Smith, 1993), and women's ability to access these scales depends on their and their household's definition of their work.

While some of the literature on gender and market liberalisation points out the economic benefits that women gain through increased employment (Schultz, 1982; Chen, 1995), others argue that increase in income does not translate automatically to an improvement of women's status (Razavi & Miller, 1995; Sen, 1996; Joekes, 1999). The cultural restrictions on and the definitions of women's work limits the gains that women can make through employment and business opportunities (Wolf, 1992; Horn 1994; Brenner, 1998; Kusakabe, 2003). The definition of women's work is framed by a contextualised culture. By emphasising the 'contextuality of social life' (Giddens, 1984, p. 132), this study demonstrates how place creates different spaces¹ for women workers and how restructuring of places creates differentiated outcomes in terms of their work.

Q2

Lao-Thai Borderlands

Thailand and Laos have a long history of border trade. This study looks at two borderland areas in Laos: Hongsa, Ngeun and Xianghon district in Sayaboury province of Lao PDR bordering Salermprakiet district, Nan province in Thailand; and Thakhek district, Kammoune province of Lao PDR bordering Nakorn Phnom province of Thailand. These two areas were selected because these are relatively newly opened checkpoints, where Lao women are involved in the production of traded goods and in trade itself. Both checkpoints have been closed for some time under the Communist regime in Lao PDR and have recently been officially re-opened (Fig. 1).

These areas were gateways to Thailand even before international boundaries were demarcated. Walker (1999) described that Hongsa was along the main caravan route in the late 19th century connecting Sipsongpanna in Yunnan province to Nan in northern Thailand.

The war of 1964–73 between Vietnam and the United States² was a tragedy for Laos, but the burden of war was experienced differently among different ethnic groups (Stuart-Fox, 1997, p. 153), as well as some ethnic groups being divided into opposite sides. There are 49 ethnic groups in Laos. They are grouped largely into Lao Lum (lowland Lao), Lao Theung (midland Lao) and Lao Sung (highland Lao)³. Some Lao Sung collaborated with the United States while some sided with the Communist Pathet Lao. Some Lao Theung in the mountains along the Vietnam border fought together with Pathet Lao, and some fled to government controlled areas. There were also large refugee movements among the Lao Lums (Walker, 1999, p. 153). The Lao Lums in the two study areas along the Mekong remained under government control during the war. There were, however, occasional threats of Communist advance in the government controlled area along the Lao–Thai border, and people fled across the river to Thailand⁴. In December 1975, the Lao regime changed from a constitutional monarchy to a Communist people's



Figure 1. Map of Lao PDR indicating location of the research.* Northern Sayaboury Provinces are from the east—Hongsa District, Nguen District, Xianghon District and Kop District.

republic. Imports were curbed as government moved to nationalise commerce and industry (Stuart-Fox, 1997, p. 174).

In 1976, border patrols were strengthened as a number of incidents of resistance against the Communist government occurred. From 1976 to 1988, the border was strictly closed. However, because external trade was crucial to maintaining the domestic economic system, there was considerable unofficial cross-border trade. In 1986, Laos adopted a more market-orientated economic policy, with the New Economic Mechanism policy. In Thailand, in 1992, prime minister Chatchai Choonhavan advocated the 'from battlefield to the market' approach to Indo-Chinese countries. As a result, the Friendship Bridge was constructed between Vientiane in Laos and Nongkai in Thailand. These developments encouraged cross-border trade.

Even though trade policies changed in 1988, borders were opened only in certain places. At the Sayaboury–Nan border the border market opened only in 1996. At Kammoune–Nakorn Phnom, traders had to wait till 2000 before they

could cross the border directly without going through the official border checkpoint (Panyanouvong, 2002).

Official border trade between Laos and Thailand was 9984.2 million baht in 1995, and passed 12 500 million baht in 1998 (Samithisawad, 1997; Thai commercial bank, Nakorn Phnom branch, 2000). By 2001, it had risen to 13 236.21 million baht (Ministry of Commerce, 2003)⁵. The value of unofficial trade, which is not included in this figure, is estimated to be 1.5–3 times greater than the value of official trade (Bank of Thailand, 2003). The major export items from Laos to Thailand are log and wood products and agricultural products. The items under study have not been reflected in export statistics, partly because most of the trade in them is unofficial.

Q2

Methodology

This article is based on two studies on border trade between Thailand and Laos. The first focuses on cotton weaving along the borders of Sayaboury province, Lao PDR and Nan province, Thailand, while the other focuses on sticky rice box production along the border between Kammoune province, Lao PDR and Nakorn Phnom province, Thailand. Both studies focus on the definitions of women's work and how the international border created differences in these definitions.

In Sayaboury province, cotton weaving has been traditionally carried out for home consumption among Lao Lum (lowland Lao ethnic groups), especially among the Lü people. Many Lao Lums stopped weaving in the last two decades, because of the increasing availability of ready-made clothes. However, with new economic opportunities, weaving was revived. The study examined the changes brought about by this weaving activity through individual and group interviews with 35 weavers and traders. The study was conducted by the author during the months of February, March and December 2000.

In Sayaboury province, three types of villages were selected for study, according to their history of involvement in weaving activities. Interviews were conducted in these villages with weavers willing to take part in the interview at the time of the fieldwork.

1. Traditional weaving villages. Women in these villages, who are Lao Lum, have been weaving and still are weaving cloth for their domestic use as well as for household income (14 respondents in four villages). These women were the first batch of weavers subcontracted by Thai weavers to weave new designs for the Thai market. These villages are located closer to the Thai border than the other two types.
2. New commercial weaving villages. These Lao Lum villages had a tradition of weaving, but weaving activity in the village had declined and was almost extinct until the early 1990s. They have entered commercialised weaving much later than weavers in the traditional weaving villages (seven respondents in two villages).
3. Non-weaving villages. Weaving was introduced into these villages by a government project for diversifying household income. Because there was no traditional weaving in these villages, residents had to learn either through the government project or individually from Lao Lum villagers. Most of these villages are inhabited by Lao Theung⁶ (midland Lao ethnic

groups) (14 respondents in 4 villages). They are located furthest from the Thai border and road access is worse than the other two types of villages.

The other study, on sticky rice box making, was conducted from September 2001 to August 2002 by Xouchai Panyanouvong and the author. Sticky rice box makers were interviewed in Pak Peng village, Thakhek district, Kammoune province in Lao PDR. Pak Peng village is located 25 km south of Thakhek district centre, where there is an official border checkpoint. Pak Peng village is located along the Mekong River, which marks the border between Laos and Thailand, hence villagers take boats to go to the Thai side.

There are 167 families in Pak Peng village, and those who are involved in sticky rice box production on a full-time basis joined a group discussion (18 people). Sticky rice boxes were traditionally produced only for home consumption, and solely by men. However, since the opening of the border in 2000, commercial demand for sticky rice boxes increased, and women started getting involved in the production.

Border Trade of Cotton Woven Material in Sayaboury Province

The Lü women have a tradition of cotton weaving, mainly for home consumption but also for domestic sale. As Walker (1999) has demonstrated, Lü people, especially women, have been engaged in long-distance trade of consumer goods and woven material since the pre-colonial era⁷, utilising Lü connections scattered over the Northwest part of Laos.

Large-scale refugee movements during the wartime era of the 1960s and the early 1970s gave women exposure to mobility and trade (Walker, 1999, p. 153)⁸. The Indochina war forced many Lü people to move to Thailand. While some Lü people live in communities with Thais in Nan province, others formed separate Lü communities. The Lü in Thailand continued their weaving activities and, with exposure to Thai commercial weaving designs, developed modern versions of their traditional design patterns to appeal to a wider market. As the demand for Lü's woven material grew in Thailand from around late 1980s, the domestic supply fell short, and the Thai Lües had to subcontract the weaving to Lao Lües.

In the 1980s to early 1990s, the border between Thailand and Laos was officially closed. However, Thai and Lao Lües stayed in touch with their relatives on the other side of the border. The Thai Lües taught the Laotians the new patterns and which loom to use, and gave them credit to build looms and buy thread⁹. The Lao Lües were hired on a piecemeal basis.

The Lao–Thai border was opened officially in 1996, and a weekly border market was established. As the Lao Lües mastered new patterns and saved enough capital to buy their own threads they started weaving independently, and sold their products at the weekly border market. Because there were few cash income-earning opportunities in the area, the activity spread quickly among women in Sayaboury province. Starting with the Lao weavers who initially took up the contract work from Thai weavers in the early 1990s, weaving then spread to other Lao Lum women. These women had abandoned weaving for nearly two decades, and now had to learn the Thai weaving style. In the late 1990s Lao Theung took up weaving, with help from the government in the form of technical training and initial capital.

Because weaving generated regular cash income in a place where few cash

Table 1. Changes in division of labour* by number of respondents and by types of weaving villages in Sayaboury province, Lao PDR**

	Traditional weaving village	New commercial weaving village	Non-weaving village	Total
No change in division of labour	5	3	1	9
Some changes in division of labour	9	4	13	26
Total	14	7	14	35

* Division of labour examined in this study included cooking, fuel wood collection, washing clothes, and fetching water.

** Changes in division of labour for fuel wood and water fetching, cooking, and washing were aggregated. Respondents were divided into whether there has been any change in at least one of those activities or no change occurred at all. Respondents of new commercial weaving villages and non-weaving villages were combined to increase the number of cases in one cell. Fisher's exact test (two-sided) was conducted between the respondents of these two types of villages and those of the traditional weaving villages on the changes in division of labour. The test showed that there is a statistically significant difference with a significance level of 0.056, showing that the changes in division of labour is seen significantly more in new commercial weaving and non-weaving villages.

income sources were available changes have taken place in the household division of labour for some Lao women, as seen in Table 1. The changes are more evident in the villages where there was no tradition of weaving and where weaving has newly been introduced (non-weaving villages). In the traditional weaving villages, even though weaving brings in a substantial amount of cash income, weaving is still defined as a secondary income-earning activity, conducted when women have 'free' time. In the traditional weaving villages, weaving is the primary income source for 10 of 14 respondents, but for new commercial villages the number is only one of seven, and for non-weaving villages only one of 14. In the traditional weaving villages, although the women weavers' contribution to household income is much higher, their work is considered a leisure activity¹⁰ and household work continued to be women's primary responsibility.

By contrast, in villages where weaving was revived or newly introduced, there were fewer preconceived notions attached to it. Weaving was considered not as a secondary income-generating activity, but as a major source of income. This is despite the fact that these households also earn cash from collecting non-timber forest products as well as from livestock, and weaving is not the most important source of income.

How weaving was introduced into the village is obviously of importance. In the villages where weaving is a recent phenomenon, it was introduced as a major part of the household's economic strategy, and not as a minor activity. Because income from non-timber forest product is seasonal, and income from livestock irregular, income from weaving was seen as stabilising the household economy. Family members in these villages often told women not to go to the upland fields or to the forest to collect forest products, but to concentrate on weaving instead. Men were

willing to share domestic activities in order to allow women time to weave. In these villages, especially in the Lao Theung villages, women were also exempted from going to the forest to collect forest products. Men began going alone to the forest, or with other men. Considering that in Lao Theung villages, compared to Lao Lum villages, the gender division of labour is stricter, such changes in gender division of labour signifies the importance that the family attaches to women's weaving activities.

However, farming is still perceived as the most important occupation in the household, and both women and men work on the farm. If it is essential that someone stay home and weave, it is usually the daughters who stay. When the busy agricultural seasons are over, men farm alone and women come back home to weave.

These changing practices indicate a shift in hierarchies and priorities in the household. While farming retained its pre-eminence, weaving appears to have become of higher importance than collecting forest products. Thus, in 19 of the 35 households, women stopped going to the forest altogether after they started weaving¹¹.

It should be noted that this practice does not necessarily coincide with the income that weaving brings to the household. Because the villages where weaving was newly introduced started weaving much later, the financial benefit they received was much smaller than those who started in the early 1990s. In 1992–95, the price of one set of woven cloth was 800 baht, which had dropped to 300 baht by 2000. Also, while weavers in traditional weaving villages were able to develop new patterns, the new weavers could not. Weavers in traditional weaving villages have more information and connections to markets, because of their connections with Thai weavers and Thai markets. Some Lao Lum women, especially Lü women in the traditional weaving villages had been engaged in long-distance trade and had experience in the cloth trade. Thus, when many women started weaving, some Lao Lum women in the traditional weaving villages became merchants collecting woven material from their villages as well as from other weaving villages to sell in the Thai market. Among the 13 respondents in traditional weaving villages, eight respondents said that they sell the woven material to traders inside the village, who were former weavers themselves. Because of the lack of infrastructure and lack of public transportation in this area, transportation costs are very high. For weavers in new commercial weaving villages and non-weaving villages who live far away from the border, it was not viable to go to the border market to sell the product themselves once the price had dropped.

Until 2000 movement of products across the border was not restricted, and women could bring their woven materials to the weekly border market. However, in 2000 the Lao government introduced an export tax on all materials sold to Thailand. The tax can be paid per piece or on a monthly basis. The amount of tax that people pay is much less on a monthly basis but it requires capital to pay the tax in advance, as well as to have enough material to benefit from this arrangement. Weavers-turned-merchants were able to opt for this arrangement. In order to ensure enough production to justify paying this tax, these weavers-turned-merchants also started providing credit to weavers for them to buy thread. Some of these merchants were also able to travel deep into Thailand to access larger markets directly. These women normally went with their husbands, who were already trading other consumer goods across the border. It should be noted

that women had better access to the market in the long-distance trade when they were with men. Although both married and unmarried women were engaged in long-distance trade, married women trading with their husbands had an advantage (Walker, 1999). This was because it was difficult for single women to have socially respectable relationships with their buyers.

Border Trade of Sticky Rice Boxes in Kammoune Province

Since the early 1990s, in Pak Peng village, Thakhek district, Kammoune province, many youths have emigrated to Thailand for work, and the village economy has benefited from their remittances. Other than this income, the village economy has operated on a subsistence level. People would produce enough rice for home consumption throughout the year. They would also grow vegetables, but they did not have access to markets to sell them. Both women and men work in rice farms, but vegetable production is carried out more by women.

The village also had a tradition of making sticky rice boxes from bamboo for home use. Panyanouvong (2002) noted that, traditionally, men used to make sticky rice boxes. After the opening of the border in Kammoune, a female Thai relative of a woman villager in Pak Peng village invited her to produce sticky rice boxes for sale in Thailand. Because the demand was high and they were able to sell as many as they could produce, more women started to produce boxes. Now this activity has become women's work, and is considered 'light' work—a labour-intensive, secondary income activity that women do during their 'free' time at home, while men concentrate on rice farming. The work of cutting the bamboo has also become women's work, whereas it used to be men's work and considered 'hard' work. Previously a symbol of providing food for the family (Panyanouvong, 2002), sticky rice box making has now become a low-priced commercial activity. In Kammoune, like Sayaboury, rice farming is considered of prime importance. Women normally get together in some of the larger houses in the village, and make the sticky rice boxes together. However, they buy raw materials and sell the finished product individually.

The price for the boxes fluctuates seasonally when Thai buyers come to buy in Pak Peng village. However, if the Pak Peng villagers deliver the boxes to Thailand the price is a stable 8 baht¹² a box for the whole year. Thus if a Pak Peng woman crosses the river to the Thai side of the border by boat to deliver her products, other women entrust her with their own products for sale. Prices are not negotiated, but decided by the Thai buyers. The women make sticky rice boxes all year except during August–September, when they are busy on the rice farms. They can earn 700–1200 baht per month by investing 100–150 baht. The product that these women sell is unfinished. The finishing is carried out in Thailand, and the product is sold in the Thai markets at double the price. This is not because Laotians cannot carry out the finishing part: technically they can. However, the Thai buyers do not want to buy finished products from Laotians and the Laotians, being dependent on a few Thai buyers, do not want to jeopardise their relationships by looking for new buyers or trying to negotiate a better deal.

Sticky rice box making gave women more self-esteem, as can be seen in one woman's statement: 'I am very proud that I can give him [her husband] some money, that I have never done before.' However, the household division of labour did not change as much as in the previous study. Men do help out in childcare and cooking during the time women are busy, but this was done even before the sticky

rice box production was introduced. In this village, income from sticky rice box is not significant. A large part of their cash income comes from remittances from children who are working in Thailand. Sticky rice box making is not a new activity for the village, but before, it was not a commercial income generating activity and was carried out by men. Now, it is perceived to be a secondary income source by women, and the importance attached to the activity is low. Women feel that it is better to do sticky rice box making rather than 'sitting idle at home', and thus feel good about themselves being engaged in productive activity at home, but this does not change how men see their activities and neither does it give them the opportunity to expand their relational space with others outside the village.

Comparison Between the Two Borderlands

There are several similarities between these two case studies. First, both are based on traditional activities and extant skills. Secondly, both depend heavily on Thai markets, not only for selling the final products but for technology, e.g. design and specification. In Sayaboury, the design comes from Thailand, and there is little the Lao weavers can do in terms of developing design. In Kammoune, sticky rice box producers follow the size specifications provided by the Thai buyers. In one sense, Laotians in border areas depend on Thai markets but on the other, this is an opportunity of which people in this area can avail themselves because of their positioning in the borderlands. Thirdly, both are labour-intensive activities, fetching low prices¹³.

What has been observed in both of these cases are the functions of the international border in defining the genderedness and the hierarchy of work. In Sayaboury, Lao Lü women were weaving even before the border opened, to supplement household income. When weaving boomed, more women entered the field. The increase in activity and its commercialisation derived from the area's proximity to the border. The formalisation of the border trade and the international border line had the effect of both expanding and limiting women's activity. With the formalisation of border trade a hierarchy among weavers was created.

For a long time, for Lao Lum weavers, their lives and relations were limited to those in their communities and with Thai women weavers' houses where they learned new weaving techniques. With the formalisation of the border trade their place in the household did not change, but they jumped scales in terms of their weaving business. They established trade links with new weavers in the new commercial weaving villages and non-weaving villages, negotiated with village authorities for tax payment, and some even expanded their trade to central Thailand with the help of their husbands.

With the opening of border trade, the women weavers in new commercial weaving and non-weaving villages also jumped scales from the household and community to border markets. They developed a 'sense of place' for themselves in the border market. Many women had earlier never been out of their own villages, but with the border trade they brought their woven materials to the Thai side of the border. The income from weaving also changed their 'sense of place' in the household; but as the price for woven cloth fell and the export tax was levied, their place diminished to securing relations with the Lao Lum weaver-turned-merchants. Thus they retreated from the international border.

In Kammoune, making sticky rice boxes used to be men's work, but after the

activity was introduced as a commercial business by Thai women relatives of the villagers it became women's work done in their 'free' time, and was redefined as 'light' work¹⁴. Not only did this change the definition of the work, it also changed the definition of the associated activity of bamboo cutting. Thus the border played a meaning-creating function for this activity.

Even though there are many similarities between the two situations, there are different factors causing different outcomes. For example, in Sayaboury, Laotians can penetrate the Thai market, while in Kammoune they cannot. One of the reasons for this is that the Lao Lü women in Sayaboury had a tradition of long-distance trade, and thus had fewer cultural barriers to overcome. In Sayaboury, Lao women gained access to Thai woven material market partly because men began to be involved. Men had already started cross-border trading with other products and thus had experience in trading with Thais.

Sticky rice box production in Kammoune depended solely on the few Thai traders on the other side of the border. Thus the border created a barrier preventing Laotians from accessing the Thai market. In Kammoune, Thais controlled the sticky rice box market and Laotians were mere piecemeal workers. An international division of labour has been established, placing the Laotians at a disadvantage. It should be noted that villagers—both women and men—in Kammoune migrate to work in Thailand more than villagers in Sayaboury. Thus, it is not the mobility across the border that is important but men's involvement in women's cross-border long-distance trade activity that has made a difference in Lao women's penetration of the Thai market between Sayaboury and Kammoune.

Conclusion

This study has attempted to describe the meaning-creating as well as the including/excluding function that international borders have. When activities are introduced or reintroduced, the border opens up opportunities to redefine the femininity or masculinity of the work. Further, borders create hierarchies among women through their articulation with the market economy. The 'sense of place' of women involved in border trade in various ways has changed with the formalisation of border trade. With the development of market economy and market liberalisation, contrary to what some neo-liberalists argue, borders are becoming more visible and more strongly demarcated. Borders are having a strong effect on people's material lives and work, as well as the meanings thereof.

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Notes

1. Donnan and Wilson (1999, p. 9), referring to the works of Gupta and Ferguson (1992), Keith and Pile (1993) and Hastrup and Olwig (1997), pointed out that space is the general idea people have of where things should be in physical and cultural relation to each other, and place is the distinct space where people live; it encompasses both the idea and the actuality of where things are.

2. This war is better referred to as the Second Indochina War (following the First against the French) as it spilled over into Laos and Cambodia (Stuart-Fox, 1997, p. 4).
3. Many government officials are from Lao Lum ethnic groups.
4. Many Laotians living along the border went back to Laos once the fighting had subsided (Stuart-Fox, 1997, p. 153), but many Laotians also fled the country during this period. Around 10% of the population of 4 million in 1975 is said to have left the country (http://www.cam.org/~sblao/lao_canada.htm).
5. In the year 2002, it decreased to 11 955.44 million baht. In US dollar terms, the increase is not evident because Thai baht devaluated greatly during the financial crisis in 1997. In 1995, 1 US dollar was equivalent to 25 baht, while in 1998, it was 40 baht. With this calculation, the trade in 1995 was around 400 million US dollars, in 1998 it was 312.5 million US dollars and in 2001 it was 330.9 million US dollars.
6. Lao Lums are less patriarchal compared to Lao Theungs, and Lao Lum women have relatively more say in household decision-making than Lao Theung women.
7. Laos was a colony of France from 1893 to 1945.
8. Walker (1999, pp. 154–155) suggested three elements that enabled entry of some women into long-distance, wholesale trade during and after the war. One was the exodus of the established trading class from Laos, providing rooms for women traders to operate. Secondly, the official closure of the border opened up opportunities for black market trade, which enabled windfall profits in what would normally be petty and localised trade. The third is that with the changes in regime, state officials have changed and new avenues for petty patronages appeared. This enabled new women traders to emerge.
9. The Thai looms are larger than the traditional Lü looms.
10. They can weave two to three sets (skirt and shirt) in a week during the dry season. During the rainy season when they are busy with agriculture activities, women can weave one per week or less. On the Thai side of the border, where the new design has been developed, and the market demand cultivated, women take 15 days to complete a set. Some of these cloths are order-made, and have more intricate design and better quality than those that are traded in the border. Thai weavers also do not weave full-time, thus take much longer time to weave one cloth. In Thailand, some weavers get a better price for cloth compared to Lao weavers, because of its higher quality.
11. Among the remaining 16 households, two women now go together with their husbands for fuelwood collection, while they used to go alone before they started weaving activity. Ten households said that even before they started weaving activity, only their husbands went for fuelwood collection, thus there is no change in the division of labour. The rest said that women still continue to collect fuelwood even after they started weaving.
12. US\$1=42 baht as of September 2002.
13. Even though woven cloth fetched a high price before, the price has now dropped to a level that is no longer viable for Thai weavers.
14. On the Thai side of the border, making sticky rice boxes has been and remains men's work, although nowadays, because of the rising demand, women also take part in the production (Panyanouvong, 2002).

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