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Post-orientalism on the Thai-Lao Border from 1954 to 2019**

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Abstract

This article explores how various Orientalist perspectives and their eventual hybridisation have shaped different conceptualisations of space along the Thai-Lao border. In this case, the original Orientalist spatial conceptualisation of borders was passed on from French during the colonial days to local academia and state practitioners along the Mekong basins. It held that the western spatial conceptualisation was objective and superior to others. It privileged the assumption that space and people should be separated according to their own state. Also, such conceptualisation was used in nationalistic policy formulation on space management by the states. However, such spatial conceptualisation became hybridised when the Westphalian border was embraced by the local elites, especially in Bangkok. This has become known as second order Orientalism. Since the independence of Laos in 1954, academic discussions on the Thai-Lao border, especially in International Relations, have been divided into three phases, each with different Orientalist perspectives. Yet, all were accompanied by a sense of Western superiority. From 1954 to 1975, the Westphalian border was not strictly applied by the then Thai and Lao governments due to American intervention in the region. After 1975, the territorial integrity concept was strictly applied, accompanied by an increase in nationalism. After 1989, nationalism waned and trade along the border was promoted. This article argues that while this awareness is post-Orientalist, it is difficult to distinguish the Oriental from the non-Oriental. Indeed, the hybrid spatial conceptualisation among different political actors, local peoples, business entrepreneurs, state officers and academia has been more prevalent.

Keywords: *orientalism, Thai-Lao border, geopolitics, international relations, greater Mekong subregion*

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คณะรัฐศาสตร์
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

สภาวะหลังบูรพคดีศึกษานิยมในการตีความชายแดนไทยลาว จากปี ค.ศ.1954 - 2019**

ธนเชษฐ วิสัยจร*

บทคัดย่อ

ในประเด็นชายแดนไทยลาว ลักษณะการอ่านพื้นที่แบบบูรพคดีนิยมยังปรากฏให้เห็นชัดในหมู่นักวิชาการและผู้กำหนดนโยบายรัฐ โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งลักษณะความเหนือกว่าของความรู้แบบตะวันตก การอ้างถึงความเป็นกลางของความรู้นั้น การแยกพื้นที่และผู้คนออกจากกัน และการจัดการพื้นที่เพื่อการป้อนนโยบายชาตินิยมให้กับรัฐ การอ่านและเขียนพื้นที่ชายแดนแบบเวสต์ฟาเลียได้รับการยอมรับโดยชนชั้นนำท้องถิ่นและนำไปปฏิบัติผสมผสานกับวิถีปฏิบัติดั้งเดิม จนอาจกล่าวได้ว่ามีลักษณะเป็นการอ่านพื้นที่แบบบูรพคดีนิยมมือสอง ตั้งแต่ลาวได้รับเอกราชในปี ค.ศ. 1954 จนปัจจุบัน บทความฉบับนี้เรียกลักษณะผสมเช่นนี้ว่าภาวะหลังบูรพคดีนิยม เพราะไม่สามารถแยกแยะได้ว่าการอ่านพื้นที่แบบใดเป็นบูรพคดีนิยมและแบบใดไม่ใช่ การอ่านและการนำแนวคิดเชิงพื้นที่แบบเวสต์ฟาเลียไปปฏิบัติที่มีลักษณะผสมผสานกันกับบริบทในท้องถิ่น ซึ่งสามารถสังเกตได้จากนำการเขียน การตีความ และการนำการตีความนั้นไปปฏิบัติโดยบรรดาตัวแสดงทางการเมืองต่าง ๆ ทั้งผู้คนในท้องถิ่น นักธุรกิจ เจ้าหน้าที่รัฐ หรือแม้กระทั่งนักวิชาการทางด้านประวัติศาสตร์ มานุษยวิทยา ภูมิศาสตร์ รัฐศาสตร์ และความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างประเทศ

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Introduction

Mainstream International Relations inherited colonial characteristics of space management from traditional geopolitics and these reflect a Western perspective of the world (Thanachate Wisaijorn 2017, 2).[1] Europeans travelling in non-European zones viewed the lands as barbaric and needed to be tamed by the more superior Europeans (Said 1977; Ó Tuathail 1998, 5). Said (1977, 36) called this perspective Orientalism. European space management, in regard to territorial borders, became important in geopolitics in the colonial era and in International Relations after WWII. Political and academic elites in the colonies gradually accepted European space management and applied it to the peoples. Said (1977, 322) called this process "second-order Orientalism." However, this article argues that in international politics nowadays, the spatial conceptualisation has been hybridised. It is difficult to distinguish between western and eastern concepts of territorial border. This article coined this state as post-orientalism and will review how this hybridised spatial conceptualisation has unfolded over centuries. In Southeast Asia, pre-colonial lowland elites formerly followed *mandala* spatial conceptualisation, a Hindu cosmological view that did not recognize fixed borders, but later adopted the Orientalist Westphalian concept of territory (Thongchai Winichakul 1994, 37). However, in the case of the Thai-Lao border, this concept did not fit the local peoples' perspectives. Mountains and rivers account for 1,810 kilometres along the present Thai-Lao border (Pinitbhand Paribatra 2013). Van Schendel (2002, 647) and Scott (2009, 170) described mountainous areas, together with other locations where lowland peoples escaped the attention of state administrators in pre-colonial days as zomia. These areas are indeed difficult to get access to. Yet, the peoples from the highlands have interacted with lowland peoples up to the present day. (Baird 2013, 276; 136; Vatthana Pholsena (2006, 138). The Mekong River was crucial to the livelihood of local communities (Jakkrit Sangkhamanee 2009; 2010), but its use as an international border often muted their voices and ignored the practices of the locals at first.[2]

[1] This article follows the normal practice of using 'International Relations' to indicate the academic discipline, whilst 'international relations' identifies the range of political, social, and economic activities that are studied.

[2] Recently, the locals have embraced the concept of international border and used the Mekong as the Thai-Lao border for their own benefit, for instance, Lao labourers have crossed it to work on Thai territory for higher wage (Vatthana Pholsena and Ruth Banomyong 2006; Yos Santasombat 2008).

The Thai-Lao border is a good example of Orientalist spatial interpretation. According to the Siam-France Treaty of 1893, this boundary separated a significant number of Lao people on the two sides of the river from each other (Thongchai Winichakul 1994), despite the river having provided a major form of contact for centuries. In pre-colonial times, North-East Thailand received an exodus of Lao people from the eastern banks of the Mekong and in 1961, it was estimated that ten million Lao people lived in the area, the largest Lao settlement in the world (Mayoury Ngaosyvathn and Pheuiphanh Ngaosyvathn 1994). Furthermore, mainstream education in what is known as the state of Lao PDR nowadays argues that Thai citizens in northeastern Thai provinces are of the same ethnicity as the people in Lao PDR (Phuangkham Somsanith 2011; Phuangkham Somsanith and Sangneun Vaiyakhone 2012)

From 1893, Siam and French Indochina had border conflicts from time to time. Between 1954 and 1975, despite Laos being an independent state, North Vietnam tried to intervene in Lao domestic affairs. Meanwhile, both Thai and American troops also did the same, with the rationale of containing communists from North Vietnam. First order Orientalism occurred as both the United States (US) and Thailand wanted to contain communism (Kullada Kesboonchoo Mead 2003; 2007) and also secretly intervened in Laos. To apply Said's term (1977), second-order Orientalism followed when Lao and Thai elites facilitated this intervention. Thus, it can be argued that Westphalian Thai-Lao border facilitated the operations of US troops in the region. After Laos became a communist state, border conflicts between the Thai and Lao states occurred regularly. The Thai-Lao border not only separated the two nation-states of Thailand and Lao PDR from each other but also the two ideological worlds of a space under American influence on the one hand and of the Soviet Union on the other. In the post-Cold War era, Orientalism remained as the political elites of both states followed the policies of the more developed nation-states. Lao PDR, with its policy of *New Thinking,* opened up to capitalism, and liberalism was announced in 1986. The Thai Prime Minister, Chatichai Choonhavan, talked about changing battlefields into marketplaces (Pinitbhand Paribatra 2013), this being an important step on the Thai-Lao border in the wake of the global victory of economic liberalism. The seeming easing of strict controls along the borders as a result of the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) facilitated trade, investment, and tourism among the six riverine nation-states along the River. Jakkrit Sangkhamanee (2009; 2010) argued that this development was similar to the colonisation

of the past and that Orientalism was still evident on the Thai-Lao border.

Accordingly, as part of the research project funded by the Faculty of Political Science, Ubon Ratchathani University in the academic year of 2018/19, this article examines the following issues. First, it discusses the characteristics of Orientalism of Said (1977) in traditional geopolitics and International Relations. Next, it examines Orientalism in geopolitics and International Relations in the Mekong basin in terms of the 1893 French Indochinese-Siamese border. It argues that there was a hybrid spatial interpretation between the pre-existing order and the newly modernised state mapping. The hybridised interpretation of local spatial conceptualisations such as *zomia* among highland peoples and *mandala* of the pre-colonial elites by Westphalian state space is then explained. The Orientalism of the US on the Thai-Lao border during the Cold War is further included in the discussion. Finally, second-order Orientalism, as a result of the application of European views of borders by academic and political elites of the Thai and Lao states, is outlined. The years since Lao independence in 1954 are divided into three periods, 1954 to 1975 when US troops were present in North-East Thailand to contain communism (Philips 2017), 1975 to 1989 when Laos became Lao PDR, and 1989 to the present as economic liberalisation developed. Issues concerning the Thai-Lao border in this period have become more interdisciplinary and recent academic debates have shown more awareness of a hybridised practice in regard to the Thai-Lao border. For example, Walker's (2008) historical research indicated that during the colonial days the Siamese government tried to embrace a strict logic of Westphalian border to prohibit their citizens in the borderlands of *Chiang Khong* from crossing the riverine border to the other side under French sovereignty. Recently, Thanachate Wisaijorn (2018) argues that strict territorial border concept co-exist with one about its porosity. The Thai-Lao people in the riverine borderland embrace the logic of territorial border in their everyday life when such logic is of benefit to themselves. The boat operators increase the transport fees and take international tourists across the international river border. Yet, the same boat operators see the river as a lived space when they catch fish for food and use it for everyday travel to visit their relatives in different villages both in Thailand and Lao PDR. This article calls this hybridised conceptualisation as post-Orientalism. It further argues that such conceptualisation moves beyond the dichotomous understanding of Orientalism/non-Orientalism in terms of space in the social sciences, especially International Relations.

Orientalism in Geopolitics and International Relations

Orientalism

Said (1977) proposed the idea of Orientalism to critique the self-claimed superiority of Europeans over the non-European world in colonial times. Originally, Orientalism was based on knowledge produced in Europe related to geography, linguistics, and ethnography in the Middle East before colonisation and spread to the US in the post-WWII era. Said cited the French traveler Alphonse de la Martine as saying that Orientals were backward because they were "nations without territory" (1977, 179). It was assumed that it was possible for the Orient to be civilised by European colonisation and commercialisation. The French Emperor, Napoleon Bonaparte, required an Orientalist advisor to organise the space of Egypt in the 18th century (Said 1977), a form of Orientalist didacticism that occurred within the discipline of geopolitics, and space management in the Westphalian form was imposed in the colonies (Soja 1989; Walker 1993). Accordingly, the Orient refers to non-European areas. Orientalism refers to knowledge about the Orient, and Orientalist refers to experts with knowledge about the Orient.

Accordingly, there began in 1919 a strong relationship between Orientalism and International Relations, especially in terms of spatial conceptualisation, Dodds (2005, 1) defined geopolitics as "the study of the state, the border and relations with other states." To support his argument, Dodds (2005) identified four important characteristics of traditional geopolitics, namely, Western superiority, objectivity, separation of places and peoples, and recommendations for nationalistic policies to be adopted. These characteristics were passed on to mainstream International Relations, especially in political realism.

First of all, western supremacy was evident when the western style of mapping is used in academic discussion with regards to geopolitics and international relations. Westphalian borders were based on ocularcentric mapping (the ability to see and tell) in colonial days and reflected Western superiority. An ocularcentric map offers three visions, the stage of the whole world over which a geopolitical gaze can be applied, a fixed scene for strategic international politics, and a distantiation gaze – the ability to compress time to understand location from a long distance (Ó Tuathail 1996). After viewing an ocularcentric map, one understands the locations of places without visiting them. Space thus is depoliticised, totalised, de-temporalised, and controlled by humans, as if humans were God. This leads to the belief that it is possible to organise the disorganised and chaotic barbarian

world (Ó Tuathail 1996). This approach was used in the colonisation of lands but there was also the imposition of superior Western culture on them.

Ocularcentricism was passed on from geopolitics to International Relations. For instance, Mackinder's map indicating the Pivot Area was portrayed by Morgenthau (1948), known as the forefather of classical realism in International Relations. World maps that represented an Orientalist view indicated the locations of nations, populations, and natural resources. Also, the assumption of unequal relations between different locations was present throughout the work of Morgenthau (1948). Inside the state, civilisation was expected, but outside was barbaric space waiting to be tamed, inviting colonisation by the more sophisticated Europeans from other parts of the world. Morgenthau included a map to indicate the "colonial area" presented, as if colonisation was presupposed knowledge (1948, 283). Justification for colonisation was recognised in other pieces of writing by Morgenthau (1951), as the American President, William McKinley, explained his country's 19th century imperialistic foreign policy by using biblical allusions, saying that the Philippines was annexed by the US because of God's guidance (Morgenthau 1951). Moreover, ocularcentricism can be noted in neo-realism. Mearsheimer (2001, 175), for example, used nine maps that represented states with their Westphalian territorial borders and explanations of the aims of past great powers to expand their territories. The map indicating Japan's targets during WWII clearly provided information about Japan's imperialistic foreign and military policies at that time, similar to the European powers' colonisation campaigns. Hence, Mearsheimer (2001) similarly justified territorial acquisitions as means to increase national power according to reason of state. Orientalist colonial legacies, a term coined by Said (1977), were implicitly supported and reified.

Secondly, geopolitics is expected to be an objective explanation of locations. Spykman (1938, 236) said, "…geography does not argue. It simply is." However, geopolitics is not objective but an imposition of space management by the politically superior on the inferior. Specifically, geopolitics served the purposes of European colonisation which, by violence, silenced other peoples' voices in that space. For example, the spatial details of Mackinder (1904) facilitated colonisation, stating that maps were drawn according to what was naturally given. His map in *The Natural Seats of Power* gave details of land geography and became very influential in both geopolitics and International Relations. The spatial conceptualisation proposed by Mackinder was influenced by ocularcentric mapping.

In the 19th century, it was expected that, like other intellectual disciplines, geography had to become scientific (Ó Tuathail 1996). Geographical knowledge was differentiated from knowledge that needed to be discovered and knowledge that was in a human's inner thoughts. Thus, a geographer was the 'detached subject' who observed the space outside as 'viewed objects' in a neutral manner (Ó Tuathail 1996). Therefore, geographical discourse was claimed to be a neutral perspective for universal knowledge. Colonialists claimed to discover such neutral knowledge of geography and imposed it on the colonies. However, this geographical knowledge was not totally neutral as it went hand in hand with brutality conducted by the Europeans.

Mackinder's claim that geography was an objective science may be considered a one-sided truth as European superiority was implied in the discipline. This colonial characteristic is also found in mainstream International Relations, especially when objectivity is claimed in classical realism and neo-realism. The classical realist Morgenthau (1948) mentioned the importance of geopolitical location to the national interest, though he did not explicitly claim it to be objective. Morgenthau was aware of the difficulty of making international politics a 'science' in comparison with natural science because human behaviour is more complicated than physical interactions in nature. Unlike natural substances, humans cannot be positioned as fixed objects when studied by other detached groups of people. Morgenthau concluded that "politics is not science but arts" (1947, 16). However, in terms of space management in international politics, the existence of Westphalian territorial borders was taken for granted as factual by Morgenthau. He wrote that "…in the same way in which in a certain district of the national territory, the municipality represents the nation and exercises its authority, each nation of the globe will represent humanity and in its natural boundaries act for it" (1947, 82). The concept of objective territorial borders expressed in Morgenthau's work was a product of ocularcentric mapping. The claim for objectivity is more explicit in neo-realism. Waltz (1979) stated that objectivity was expected in an analysis in international politics, when states were universally seen as political units interacting with others in the international system. This ocularcentric mapping, with its claim of objectivity, led to the assumption that the state was self-contained. Such a state-centric worldview can be noted in neo-realists' comparisons of the state with a black box or billiard ball (Mearsheimer 2001) and in the treatment of the state as a like-unit (Waltz 1979). The classical realist Herz (1959, 40) also used the term "impermeable hard-shell," similar to Mearsheimer's metaphors.

Westphalian territorial states, accepted as a truth in International Relations, were but one form of space management that originated in 17th century Europe, and were passed on to other parts of the world during the colonial era. The assumption of a state being like a self-contained black box, as a colonial legacy, has been a problem examined in International Relations for decades. This is especially true in the reliance of state decision-making on the assumption that the outcomes of complex internal processes approximate to rational utility maximization. This is an expression of the concern that the national interest underpins Foreign Policy Analysis as a sub-field of International Relations. The problematic assumption of a state being a black box that privileges security and power of the US applied with regards to Laos during the Cold War was criticised by Stevenson (1972) and is discussed more in the following sections.

Thirdly, the expectation that state space and its people should be separated was obvious. The maps influenced by Orientalism and drawn according to different territorial states in the Westphalian style implied the dichotomous understanding of the inside/outside of a political unit. Walker (1993, 151) described this dichotomy as the "double canon of Western political thought," defining the inside space and the outside space of the state as taken for granted in International Relations. The inside guaranteed justice and order, and justified national defence, military operations, and very often violence, while the outside suggested anarchy. The dichotomous inside/outside understanding of territory was common to classical and neo-realism. Morgenthau (1948) cited international treaties that suggested binary opposition to the inside/outside of the state. Herz (1959) discussed that the sovereign should be supreme within its delimited territory and should not be interfered with by others. Waltz (1979) noted this dichotomous understanding of the inside/outside. Domestic politics differed from international politics, the structure in the former being hierarchical, with the sovereign power making and enforcing laws, a situation impossible in the international arena.

The Westphalian concept of borders is characterised as decontextualised reification found among the classical and neo-realists. Morgenthau (1948) and Herz (1968) discussed history in their writings and their standpoints on borders varied, but it was the history of the elites in Europe. Non-intervention and territorial integrity were violated at times in the interests of the nation and international peace and order as in, for example, the suspension of territorial integrity for Atomic Development Agents to control atomic weapons (Herz 1959; Morgenthau 1948). Eventually, Morgenthau (1948) and Herz (1968) insisted that Westphalian borders were universally important.

Similarly, Waltz and Mearsheimer, with less historical and contextual concerns, homogenised the state as a unit that interacted with others in the international system. Waltz offered a systemic explanation with three variables: the ordering principles of the structure, the character of the state, and the distribution of the capabilities among states. First, hierarchic domestic politics differed from anarchic international politics. Second, units in domestic politics were different as they performed different tasks, while international units were undifferentiated (Waltz, 1979). Third, the state as a unit imitated the security strategies of others to survive international anarchy. When states maximised their strength, some became major powers. The number of major powers at any one time led to different international systems. A bipolar system was more stable than a multi-polar system, while a unipolar system did not last long and rarely occurred. The neo-realists were attached to this perception of the dichotomous understanding of inside/outside. They assumed the borders existed as attributes of a Westphalian state as the best form for survival in the anarchic international system.

Finally, geopolitics was a set of knowledge that a state advisor recommended nationality policy to the government. Geopolitics is a set of knowledge for nationalistic advice in international affairs (Ó Tuathail 1998; Dodds 2007, 9). This article notes that it is limited and monopolised by certain groups of people. These elites are what Ó Tuathail and Agnew described as "intellectuals of statecraft" (1998, 81). For example, during WWII, German geopolitical advisors, Haushofer and Ratzel, had nationalistic mindsets that served their state interest. Though Haushofer denied any influence on Hitler, similar ideas to increase the German living space can be found in Hitler's writings (Haushofer 1998; Hitler 1941; Ó Tuathail 2005). Likewise, Ratzel believed that a larger space meant greater power and living space helped justify Hitler's aggressive foreign policy (Ó Tuathail 1996). Again, such a characteristic of geopolitics was subjectively driven by statesmen's the national interest. Geopolitics was used for purposes of colonisation, if not imperialism, and its colonial legacy was passed on in the Cold War as a different brand of International Relations (Thanachate Wisaijorn 2017).

In the Western hemisphere, similarly, the geopolitician Mahan was seen as the innovator of the idea of the Great Fleet's push for territorial and commercial power for the US (Ó Tuathail 1996). It was even argued that the US president, Theodore Roosevelt, already had that plan in mind to build the fleet to expand US naval power. Mahan's writing was used to

justify Roosevelt's policy (Ó Tuathail 1996). Additionally, Mahan was fond of ocularcentric naval maps and, as a result, they were used to provide the strategy for US naval warfare. Thus, it is difficult to deny that the ocularcentric maps did not, in the following decades, play a role in International Relations discourse in the US. International Relations narratives can be linked to state foreign policy in two aspects, namely, as a reading source for practitioners and also are for theorists as practitioners themselves. For example, Lebow (2003) stated that Morgenthau's book *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* was a great source for policy-makers in international politics. In addition, George Kennan was regarded as both a scholar and a practitioner. As a diplomat to the Soviet Union, Kennan wrote *The Sources of Soviet Conduct* that discussed an appropriate foreign policy the US should have adopted in the 1940s. He said that to defend the US national interest, statesmen must be patient and a containment policy should be conducted. This was because there was no time to exert pressure as the communist doctrine suggested that capitalist society itself would decline eventually, and hence there was no need to attack capitalist states before the time was ripe (Kennan 1947).

Orientalism in the Mekong Basin as the Thai-Lao Border

The French Indochinese-Siamese Border

The concept of Westphalian borders was a product of 17th century Europe. Ruggie (1998, 184) indicated that after the Westphalia Treaty, the principles of the religion of the ruler dictates the religion of the ruled and the king is the emperor of his own realm were set as social norms at that time. Soja (1989) explained that the interpretation of space by the use of ocularcentric maps was dominant after the Westphalia Treaty. This mapping style was used by Europeans to colonise different parts of non-European zones (Walker 1993). Soja (1989) further argued that space was regarded as fixed and little attention was paid to it by social science in Europe, including geopolitics and its process of colonisation. This spatial conceptualisation in ocularcentrism was criticised by Said (1977) for reflecting the European worldview. The mapping of the colonies was contaminated by cultural subjectivity as space outside Europe was conquered with colonial brutality and defined eurocentrically (Ó Tuathail 2005).

In the Mekong basin, this situation occurred at the time of Siam's modernisation when ocularcentrism replaced the ancient spatial concept of *mandala* of the Bangkok and Vientiane courts and the spatial practices

of riverine communities.[3] The then Siamese-French Indochina border, now the Thai-Lao border, was established by means of violence. The Siamese elites slowly accepted the European style of Westphalian mapping as they put the territorial border into practice (Walker 2008). The border settlement silenced most tiny Lao statelets along the Mekong that were still attached to the *mandala* system as well as the riverine practices of the peoples. Accordingly, in the late 19th century, the Mekong basin was incorporated in Oriental Studies in an institution called *Societé académique indo-chinoise* in France. This was of course involved with geography and administration combined with scientific, military, and commercial knowledge (Jakkrit Sangkhamanee 2012). The Mekong was seen as the *mission civilisatrice,* implying the French people's mission to civilise other parts of the world (Garnier 1873). To compete with British imperialism at that time, it was even proposed that Indochina should become "French India" (Said 1977, 218). Thus, geopolitics played a significant role in French colonial knowledge.

Peoples along the Mekong had their own interpretations of borders in pre-colonial times which differed from those of the Westphalian system. Wolters (1999) used the Sanskrit term *mandala* which referred to the ancient power relations in the region without fixed territorial boundaries. In mandala, the strongest king at the centre acted as a suzerain and expected tributes and respect from the less powerful vassal kings. Regalia and manpower were supplied by the vassals to the overlord king. It was also common for less powerful kings to send tributes to more than one suzerain at the same time, as Lao statelets did with Siam and Annam (Evans 2002).

The French colonialists introduced the Westphalian form of state, and the Siamese elites accepted it (Thongchai Winichakul 1994).[4] The Westphalian border settlement according to the 1893 Franco-Siamese Treaty silenced tiny Lao statelets along the Mekong that still observed *mandala* system as well as the riverine practices of the people who made daily crossings. At the first phase after border demarcation, Tej Bunnag (1968, 117) stated that in the slow process of Bangkok centralisation from 1892 to 1915, the local nobilities were "silenced" by means of tax nationalisation. The Siamese King Chulalongkorn's half-brothers were sent as commissioners to to the Northeastern statelets located on the west

[3] Siam was the name of Thailand before 1938.

[4] Walker (1999) added to Thongchai that even though pre-colonial statelets along the Mekong paid attention to people more than space, some statelets used the Mekong as the state boundary to secure their trade routes to southern China.

bank of the Mekong seen as vulnerable to be colonised by of France. Some princes stopped the tax used to be collected by the local nobility such as on liquor and tobacco and nationalised the opium trade in Ubon Ratchathani.

Modern geography was slowly accepted, as more Siamese elites became accustomed to the idea of Westphalian borders when Britain took control of Burma in 1885 (Thongchai Winichakul 1994). This article sees such acceptance as a hybridised spatial conceptualisation. By the late 19th century, Siamese elites accepted European thinking regarding border settlements but this acceptance of the European concept of space meant the silencing of the voices of local people. Lao nobilities in various statelets along the Mekong attached to the *mandala* system were forced to accept modern administrative reform from Bangkok. The administrative reform started in 1892 and was not completed in a fortnight. The initial stage called the creation of the centralised system of provincial administration known as *Monthon Thesaphiban* lasted from 1892 to 1899 (Tej Bunnag 1968). The implementation stage even followed from then to 1915. Siam adopted colonial tactics similar to the West resulting in military clashes with the French in 1893 and the 'loss' of vast areas on the eastern banks of the Mekong to French Indochina (Thongchai Winichakul 1994). After the Franco-Siamese conflict, the Siamese-Indochina border was drawn for the first time. Some parts on the west bank such as Champassak province was ceded to Indochina and returned to the Thai state in 1940s (High 2009; Peera Charoenvattananukul 2020). After WWII, those parts of the west banks were again returned to France and became the colonial legacy for post-colonial Thai-Lao relations.

The people from the highland areas play an important role that cut across the Thai-Lao Mekong border since the independence of Lao PDR in 1954. They were the Hmong, who joined the US, and the *Lao Theung* people, of Mon-Khmer ethnicity from the Bolaven Plateau (Vatthana Pholsena 2006), who joined the communist *Pathet Lao* in the battle against the Royal Lao government supported by US.[5] Indeed, the Hmong, a group of people living in *zomia,* the term employed by Van Schendel (2002) and Scott (2009), joined both parties in Cold War battles.[6] This article agrees with Vatthana Pholsena (2006), Hillmer (2010), Supang Chanthavanich

[5] These Lao Theung people are often referred as "kha" which can be translated as slave in Lao accent and hence a pejorative term that this article tries to avoid.

[6] Zomia covers the area of the present North-Eastern India, Bangladesh, Southern China, Northern Thailand, Lao PDR in the Mekong Valley, Northern and Central Vietnam, and Eastern Cambodia (Scott 2009).

and Tawil Pliansri (2011), Lee (2015), and Baird (2013) that Mon-Khmer and Hmong peoples from the highlands should not be downplayed in the history of the Lao state. Scott (2009) suggested that pre-colonial states in Southeast Asia sent to the ancient kings in mandala captured people as tributes to work in construction of public works and to become soldiers in warfare. As a result, a significant number of peoples fled the pre-colonial mandala states to freedom in the highlands (Scott 2009).[7] Jonsson (2010; 2012) and Baird (2013) however, cautioned that total separation of upland-lowland could be misleading because they were always interrelated. Baird (2013) provided an example of how the Mon-Khmer people played a role in the lowland politics, resisting the French colonialist policy. The French even said that the Champassak royal family urged people in the highlands "not to pay taxes" (Baird 2013, 263). The lowland state and highland people have had contacts and thus cannot be totally separated.

The inclusion of these areas and peoples in the analysis of this region is justified since 702 of 1,108 kilometers of the Thai-Lao border is made up of highlands, much of it being zomia or non-state space. To ignore these areas and peoples would disregard the locations of Thai-Lao border conflicts in three villages, Bane Kang, Bane Savang, and Bane May in 1984, in Ban Rom Klao in 1987-1988, and the Vang Tao incident in 2000 (Pinitbhand Paribatra 2013; Khien Theeravit and Adisorn Semyeam 2002) and the peoples in highlands. They took parts in a number of battles during the Cold War. After Laos became a communist state, many Hmong became refugees in Thai territory. In the contemporary context of fixed borders, peoples from *zomia* such as the Hmong still maintain contact with lowlands peoples. Yet, after 1989, the roles of peoples from *zomia* were referred to as refugees, terrorists, and insurgents, when they crossed the Thai-Lao border, especially in mainstream International Relations.

Orientalism on the Thai-Lao Border during the Cold War

This sub-section discusses the portrayal of Orientalism in border conceptualisation in US foreign policy on the Mekong basin and in International Relations during the Cold War. The features of Western superiority and monolithic communism are discussed.

[7] Mai Na Lee (2012) argued that to conclude that all people went to highlands to seek political refuge might not be totally correct. Some group of people in the highlands were simply vulnerable tropical diseases such as malaria as the Hmong did in the colonial days.

With regards to the idea of western superiority, the independence of Vietnam in 1954 did not bring peace to the region. The Cold War saw the continuation of violence US troops presence in the South and the Soviet Union support for the North Vietnamese replaced French influence after its defeat in 1953 in *Dien Bien Phu.* To support the unpopular regime in South Vietnam and the military dictatorship in Thailand, the US formed the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), condemned by Said (1977) as a ploy to lure Third World nations to join the US which stationed military forces in the region to counter communism. The US even believed it could replace the French *mission civlisatrice,* aimed to civilise peoples in Indochina (Said 1977; Jakkrit Sangkhamanee 2009). According to Said (1977), the US intellectuals of statecraft were not the only party to be blamed for its intervention in Indochina, as such an intervention was only possible with the consent of the elite groups in the region who welcomed the eventual 500,000 American military personnel (Routledge 1998).

In a number of International Relations texts, the peoples of Indochina were back then often perceived as less developed and less rational. When the people of Vietnam were perceived thus, it became a justification for the US to intervene in the region, which covered not only South Vietnam but also Thailand and Laos, so that there were prevented from communist influence and become the role models of better economic practice of American liberalism. For example, Ngo Dinh Diem, the President of South Vietnam in the late 1950s was described as "an Oriental despotic totalitarian" (Morgenthau 1965, 21). True, Diem could have been cruel and nasty as indicated in historical textbook on Vietnam in the era (Chandler et al. 2005; Johns 2010, 33), yet, the phrase 'Oriental despotic totalitarian' suggests that because he was an 'Oriental' so he was 'despotic totalitarian'. Indeed, a 'despotic totalitarian' does not have to be an 'Oriental.' With such conceptualisation, Morgenthau was influenced by Orientalist perspective. Even the Indochinese elites were viewed as less rational because they were oriental. Morgenthau's statement that "we could deprive the *Viet Cong* by herding peasants into strategic hamlets" (1965, 15) suggested a superiority of 'we' over the locals as 'cattle.'

The notion of Western supremacy was recognised by Stuart-Fox (1997), a Western historian. He was aware of the fact that the US personnel working in Laos during the Cold War were tainted with the idea of Lao people being inferior. For example, in reference to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), whose work was to support refugees

in terms of medical and basic needs, Stuart-Fox said that the organisation treated "the Lao much as the French had done, as incompetent, lazy and childlike" (1997, 154).

Similarly, justification of the intervention in Indochina can be noted in the work of Herz (1959, 40) who said that state territory was very important and compared it to a "hard-shell" that should be defended. However, with more advanced technology, especially after WWII, Herz stated that Westphalian territorial borders were obsolete. For instance, the US border was 'shifted' to Indochina to contain the communists. Such a statement, before the establishment of Lao PDR as a communist state in 1975, showed that US statespersons, and even some academics, wanted to defend their imaginative geography in Indochina as right wing groups that supported the Lao monarchy's fight against fought with the left wing *Pathet Lao* groups assisted by the communist Vietnamese. Since the Thai state provided military airbases for the US to intervene in Laos before 1975, the Thai-Lao border in that era was academically set aside, thereby suggesting that US intervention in Thailand and Laos was justified. The US border may have shifted to Indochina as Herz theoretically contended, though a decade later, his stance changed and he emphasised the importance of state territory in the Westphalian system again (Herz 1968).

Stevenson (1972) showed an awareness of the failure of American foreign policy relating to Laos in the previous decade and criticised US intervention, saying that statesmen such as Dulles ignored significant factors regarding Laos. For instance, Stevenson (1972, 9) believed the boundary of Laos in the ocularcentric maps was "fictitious" due to different tribes and feudal warlords. He recognised the fact that in the 1960s there were more Lao people in Thai territory than in Laos itself and that the movements of peoples from the highlands transcended the Lao state boundary. Stevenson believed that American intervention in Laos was agreed to by some groups of Lao elites and American statecraft intellectuals that overlooked the plight of peoples on the ground. Stevenson's work was not recognised as much as that of Morgenthau and Herz but was often quoted by Surachai Sirikrai (1979), a Thai expert on Thai-Lao relations in the 1980s.

Secondly, monolithic communism perceived by US statespersons was often found in International Relations. Morgenthau (1965) warned the US President not to view communism as monolithic. Yet, the US intellectuals of statecraft back in the 1950s who advised the President viewed global communists as one single unit, despite Chinese and Soviet communists being different (Rystad 1990). Kissinger (2011) blamed Eisenhower and Dulles for viewing

communism as a monolithic entity. The 1947 Truman Doctrine and Dulles' position in 1954 to oppose communism were successfully implemented in Europe but not in Southeast Asia (Kissinger 2011) because the threat in Europe from the Soviet was mainly military. The threat in Southeast Asia, from China, however, was not only military but also political. China had significantly influenced Southeast Asia for centuries. It was therefore difficult for the US to contain China simply by using the mechanism of SEATO with its troops in Thailand and South Vietnam (Morgenthau 1965). Morgenthau (1965) suggested that the US intellectuals of statecraft be aware of differences among communist states that were satellites of the Soviet. This awareness would help the US win the hearts and minds of some moderate/smaller communist states and to compete with the Soviet and China.

While communists were viewed as monolithic, communist states tended to be viewed as self-contained, and this led to the domino theory. Such a theory was often included in the rhetoric of the US intellectuals of statecraft and academia to intervene in the Thai-Lao border (O'Sullivan 1998). The comparison of a state as a domino resulted from the geopolitical legacy of ocularcentric maps that silenced the spatial conceptualisations of *mandala* and peoples in the *zomia* and Mekong River. This discourse can be found in the words of the intellectuals of statecraft and International Relations scholars. For instance, former US president Eisenhower said that "the loss of Vietnam, together with Laos" would threaten "not only Thailand but also Burma and Malaya" (1963, 333). Eisenhower additionally argued that Laos was a very important "domino" in Southeast Asia because the Ho Chi Minh Trail that the Viet Minh used as a route to support military operations in South Vietnam was in Lao territory (Kissinger 1994, 641). Eisenhower stated further that "the fall of Laos to Communism could mean the subsequent fall – like a tumbling row of dominoes – of its still-free neighbors" (Eisenhower 1963, 607). Eisenhower was partially right when communism under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh was successful in uniting the country, Laos subsequently became a communist state in 1975 (Chandler et al. 2005).

Kissinger (2011) criticised the Eisenhower administration for viewing the Soviet and Chinese communists as monolithic, but similar criticism could be applied to Kissinger himself. Dommen (1985) attacked Kissinger's view of the Soviets and the Vietnamese as one single unit. Kissinger hoped that his diplomatic skills in lobbying the Soviet and Indochinese statespersons in the 1973 Vientiane Agreement would guarantee a neutral Laos after the withdrawal of US troops. However, Hanoi was more ambitious than just

having Laos as a neutral state. The events of 1975 could be called second order Orientalism as Vietnamese and Lao elites applied the spatial concept of Westphalian territory to their states. Laos became Lao PDR after the US withdrawal while Vietnamese troops remained in Lao territory (Oldfield 1998).

Second-order Orientalism: Thai-Lao Border from 1954 to the Present

Second-order Orientalism was found in what Said called "intellectual, political, and cultural satellites of the United States" (1977, 322). This happened among the policy-makers in Thailand, Laos, and South Vietnam in the 1950s. For example, the US had its chosen men, such as General Phoumi Nosavan, to promote an anti-communist campaign in Laos (Stuart-Fox 1997) and close allies, such as the Thai dictator, Sarit Thanarat, at the peak of the Cold War.

Evidence of second-order Orientalism from 1954 to 1975 can be seen in the US role in the region. From 1975 to 1989, however, the territorial integrity of the Thai state was emphasised. From 1989 to the present, the Thai-Lao border has not only been paid attention to by International Relations but also by history, sociology, geography and anthropology. Some scholars are still attached to the Orientalist spatial conceptualisation and the idea of territorial integrity, despite the increasingly borderless world as a result of post-Cold War economic liberalism supported by Thai-Lao International Relations scholars. There has been an emergence of a hybridised spatial interpretation by the state and locals in Thai-Lao border debates.

From 1954 to 1975, Bansoon Ladavalya, a Thai political scientist, is a good example of second-order Orientalism among academics who strongly echoed US anti-communist policy. Bansoon Ladavalya (1970) spoke the language of communism containment similar to what Dulles, the US Secretary of State, said in the 1950s, and disagreed with the change in US foreign policy in the early 1960s in which the Kennedy administration favored a coalition government in Laos that allowed space for a communist faction. Bansoon feared that such action would later threaten the Thai state. Bansoon accepted all four Orientalist geopolitical characteristics in his text aimed to teach International Relations students at Chiang Mai University in the 1970s. Presentation of the ocularcentric map of Laos with Westphalian-style borders indicated its linear boundary led to the use of the first geopolitical characteristic – objectivity. This led to the second geopolitical assumption of separation of space and peoples, in this case, those of Lao ethnicity on both banks of the Mekong separated by the Westphalian system. It seems Bansoon

recognised some degree of contest over the borderline as the map indicated the areas occupied by *Pathet Lao.* However, he concluded that non-intervention and territorial integrity were eventually expected when Laos became a sovereign state after the 1954 Geneva Agreements. However, these expectations were not fully realised. Bansoon condemned North Vietnamese military intervention that violated the territorial integrity of Laos but accepted US intervention if it was cloaked in the name of a military collective mechanism such as SEATO, established to contain communism and requested by Laos. The third geopolitical characteristic, Western superiority, was evident in the work of Bansoon as the Westphalian territorial system was taken for granted and suspension of it was accepted when required by the US.

Between 1954 and 1975, the Westphalian territorial form of state was taken for granted in discussions of the Thai-Lao border. A number of influential academic texts published between 1975 and 1989 examined the historical background and recognised occurrences of border disputes and military intervention. These instances were regarded as deviations to the ideal Westphalian territorial form and it was hoped that the territorial integrity of Laos would be respected when its domestic politics became more stable (Surachai Sirikrai 1979).

Ocularcentric maps still influenced explanations of the causes of Thai-Lao border conflicts after the establishment of Lao PDR in 1975. For example, Virat Ruampongpattana (1988, 82) used six maps of the Thai-Lao border to explain spatial details between 1975 and 1988. Claiming to be more objective, aerial photography of the three border villages of *Bane Kang, Bane Savang,* and *Bane May* was used to argue that the disputed areas in 1984 were in Thai territory. However, a Lao national, Pheuiphanh Ngaosyvathn (1985), had a different stance claiming that these villages had been in Lao territory since the colonial era. The two authors' analyses differed because they were attached to different forms of 'objectivity.' Laos had confidence in the map drawn during the French days, while the Thais cited the newer and technologically more advanced aerial photography. Nevertheless, an error in the Thai-Lao border found in the map could be noted. In that period, a number of texts reported that the Thai-Lao border was 1,750 kilometres in length (United States of America, Department of the State 1962[8]; Sompen Kutranon 1982; Virat Ruampongpattana 1988). The fact that this distance was corrected

[8] The US Department of the State uses a mile as the unit of measurement and indicates that the Thai-Lao border is 1,090 miles or 1,750 kilometres in length.

to 1,810 among scholars after the delimitation in the late 1990s implied that the objectivity of the map should not be taken for granted.

However, it must be noted that the logic of mandala was sometimes mixed in the spatial conceptualisations of scholars at that time. For example, historical accounts recognised by Bansoon Ladavalya regarding the issue of the Thai-Lao border showed signs of Thai nationalism. The clichéd discourse of territorial losses on the Eastern bank of the Mekong to France in 1893 was repeated all over again (Bansoon Ladavalya 1970). This was the claim attached to the pre-colonial spatial conceptualisation that represented the voice of the Court of Bangkok for its suzerainty over Laos Indeed, the Westphalian logic had not been accepted in these areas before the establishment of modern state boundaries in 1893. As the east bank of the Mekong territory was not de jure possessed by either Siam or France, it could not be lost according to international law unless the claim was based on the replaced mandala norms. Similarly, the faith in the objectivity of the ocularcentric maps remained in master theses in International Relations submitted to Chulalongkorn University. Daomas Imsomeranrach (1992) presented the ocularcentric map in her thesis *Bureaucratic Politics in Thai Foreign Relations: A Case Study of Thai-Lao Disputes over the Three Villages* to objectively explain the border conflicts in 1984. Chan-orn Bongsebandhu-phubhakdi (2000) similarly presented the map to indicate "the loss of Thai territory to France" in the colonial era in her thesis *Land Border Settlement between Thailand and Laos.* Though it could be argued that such a claim was based on the spatial concept of ocularcentricism which is Orientalist, the belief that the Thai state lost its territory to France was based on the mandala spatial conceptualisation. The two ways of spatial interpretation were hybridised.

Corrine Phuangkasem (1980) adopted the Social Field Theories of Rudolph Rummel to explore the behaviour and interaction of Thailand and other states in Southeast Asia in the 1960s and 1970s. The space of the state was a supposedly self-contained unit when the theoretical framework was applied. The spatial conceptualisation of Thailand and its neighbouring nation-states in the 1960s and 1970s, including Lao PDR, were like two billiard balls, metaphorically speaking, that hit each other on the table of international politics. Corrine Phuangkasem (1980) believed that when the state was like a unit, it helped International Relations students and policy-makers make more objective predictions in international politics. Corrine Phuangkasem (1984) analysed Thai foreign policy regarding Indochinese states and

revealed another geopolitical characteristic, the unequal presentation of space. She regarded Laos as economically less developed in comparison with Thailand and, being a land-locked state, had to rely on Thailand for access to seaports. No longer was there justification for colonisation from 1975 to 1989 but the inequality of space still provided reasons for Western intervention in the 1950s and 1960s, as Laos was seen as a key area to Southeast Asia (Corrine Phuangkasem 1980). She further defined different spaces according to traditional geopolitics and explained the great powers' interest in Southeast Asia, especially Thailand and Laos. She saw this area as a "land ridge" providing a route from the Pacific to the Indian Ocean, and a source of cheap labor, raw materials, and a means of transporting oil (Corrine Phuangkasem 1980, 27). This explanation was similar to Spykman's geopolitical description of Indochina as strategically important as the route to the continental landmass of Eurasia. Spykman (2008) believed that control of this region meant greater power. In short, the geopolitical characteristic of the presentation of unequal space as justification of Western intervention still remained in International Relations.

First-order Orientalism dominated by US interest became second-order when the Thai-Lao elites internalised the knowledge of spatial conceptualisation in the Westphalian state form and mixed it with their own nationalism. For example, a Thai, Sukhumbhand Paribatra (1984), mixing Westphalian state perception with ancient mandala, said that Thailand lost Lao territory to France during the colonial era, but this view was not shared by the Pheuiphanh Ngaosyvathn (1985) who believed that Laos was invaded by the Thais even before the arrival of the French. This Thai chauvinism emerged again during World War Two when Thailand tried to annex parts of Lao territory while France was significantly damaged by what was going on in WWII in Europe (Pheuiphanh Ngaosyvathn 1985). As a state practitioner, Kajadpai Burutpat (1988) not only repeated the traditional chauvinism regarding the territorial loss of Thailand to France in 1893 but also accused the *Pathet Lao* of planning to annex the then sixteen North-East provinces of Thailand, where a significant number of Thai-Lao people lived, on the same *mandala* grounds. Though this accusation has never been proved, this present article insists that claims to territory based on historical accounts from the pre-colonial era were anachronistic as, under mandala, territorial borders were not absolute. Such claims were simply made to arouse nationalistic feelings.

Turning our attention now to the phase 1989 to the present, Chatichai Choonhavan was elected

as the 17th Prime Minister of Thailand in 1988 and launched a policy aimed at turning battlefields of Indochina into thriving marketplaces. This present article considers 1989 (the year of the fall of the Berlin Wall) as the end of the Cold War and as the starting point to examine concepts of the Thai-Lao border by International Relations in the most recent period. Jakkrit Sangkhamanee (2009) argued that the triumph of economic liberalisation originated from French actions to civilize colonies in colonial days and the US capitalist development scheme during the Cold War. An Orientalist legacy has remained, even after the end of the Cold War.

Western superiority regarding the knowledge of space management on the Thai-Lao border was noted in International Relations after 1989. For example, Pinitbhand Paribatra (2013) explained the development of the Thai-Lao border that had been reified by four colonial treaties between Siam and France. Though he recognised that border conflicts very often resulted from inaccuracies in the days of the French and ocularcentric maps, an Orientalist perspective, problems were argued to be merely technical. European imaginary geography of Westphalian states was still prioritised when the Thai-Lao Joint Boundary Commission was set up in 1996 to solve the inaccuracies that resulted from colonial treaties. In 2012, 96% of the Thai-Lao border delimitation was completed (Pinithbhand Paribatra 2013).

Such western superiority in terms of spatial conceptualisation shaped the ways in which history was written in Thailand and Lao PDR. In Lao mainstream history, second-order Orientalism is found in the transition of the historical focus from lowland Lao to include other, highland, peoples in 1975 as Marxist-Leninism allowed more space for peoples from the highlands (Vatthana Pholsena 2006). Before this time, Lao historiography was influenced by traditional Lao historians, such as Maha Sila Viravong (1964), and was similar to Thai traditional historiography that emphasised the common movement of Thai-Lao peoples southward from China. This pre-1975 historiography spoke for the voices of the lowland Lao and completely silenced those from the highlands. The Marxist-Leninist version of historiography after 1975, on the other hand, emphasised more 'national space' of Lao PDR. Its promotion of equality in line with Marxist-Leninist doctrine included other groups of ethnic minorities (Vatthana Pholsena 2006). Even though Marxist historiography included the voices of peoples from highlands, the prioritised form of 'national space' was still the Westphalian one promoted by the elites from the *Pathet Lao.* In the present day, the peoples from different groups of Lao, Hmong, Mon-Khmer,

Tibeto-Burman, and Yao are citizens of Lao PDR and co-exist (Vatthana Pholsena 2006), in accordance with the geopolitical characteristic of separation of peoples and space of Westphalia. No matter what ethnicity one was, once a Lao citizen, one should be loyal to the state, and loyalty to the state was in line with loyalty to the national space of the Westphalian state. The logic of this national space repeats the traditional geopolitical characteristics of separation of spaces and peoples. This second-order Orientalism arose as the elites from the party reified the form of space in Marxist-Leninist doctrine to promote equality among citizens.

There has been an awareness of second-order Orientalism among scholars in International Relations and the hybridised spatial interpretation in regard to the Thai-Lao border has become more obvious. For the former, the criticism towards the fixed and established spatial conceptualisation in the forms of Westphalian state has been more critiqued. For example, Thongchai Winichakul (1994) criticized mainstream Thai historians. He argued that the Orientalist ocularcentric map was used as a tactic to boost Thai nationalism and repeated by both historians and International Relations scholars. To assume that Siam lost territories to France meant that Thailand de jure had possessed Lao territory before colonisation. This logic cannot be applied as the Westphalian borders were not established by the time France explored the Mekong overnight. Indeed, the process took decades as suggested by Tej Bunnag (1968). Nationalistic discourse of lost territories can be found in the works of Thai historians such as Tej Bunnag and was passed on from the work of Prince Damrong, the father of Thai historiography (Surachai Sirikrai 1979), and Luang Vichit Vadhakarn, the pioneer of Thai chauvinism during WWII (Thongchai Winichakul 1994). They took for granted the shift from mandala spatial conceptualisation to Westphalian, silenced peoples' attachment to natural landscape such as the Mekong and mountains, and hence were trapped in the dichotomous understanding of the inside/outside of the Thai state.

For the latter, in regard to hybridised spatial conceptualisation, more voices of peoples on the ground have become heard. For example, Khien Theeravit and Adisorn Semyeam (2002) explored Lao peoples' views of Thailand's use of a number of events, such as the border conflicts in the three villages in 1984, *Ban Rom Klao* in 1987 and 1988, and the *Vang Tao* incident in 2000. This piece of research found that not only the voices of the elites were echoed but also those of the peoples who daily crossed the Thai-Lao border were heard. Evidence of Lao

nationalism was shown by the general tone of the respondents' answers. Lao responses indicated that the Lao people did not agree with Thai historical narratives that Lao territory used to belong to Thailand, but so the researchers suggested that toleration in Thai-Lao relations should be promoted.

Recent anthropological researchers have been aware of the colonial legacy of the Thai-Lao border and listened to the voice of marginal peoples, and second-order Orientalism has become less salient. Since the end of the Cold War, neo-liberal discourse of a borderless world suggests that the Thai-Lao border should be borderless. For example, the historical research of Walker (2008) said that although the Westphalian territorial border was a European logic of how space should be interpreted, during the colonial days, the Siamese government put this concept into practice more strictly than the French did, as found in *Chiang Khong.* This was because France tried to promote trade in the riverine cities along the Mekong border with Siam. If the territorial border was strictly interpreted, trade could have been interrupted. Yos Santasombat (2008) studied the cross-border activities of peoples in the *Chiang Khong-Houay Xay* District in the upper Mekong region and found that peoples from Lao PDR used kinship ties to cross the river border daily to work in Thailand. Similarly, in the southern area of Lao borderland, people in the area are involved with everyday border-crossing (Thanachate Wisaijorn 2018). Most of the time, the Mekong was not a barrier for these peoples. However, it was a barrier for others. Post-orientalism which is used to describe the co-existence of the practice of strict national territorial border and the Mekong border as a lived space can be observed. Jakkrit Sangkhamanee (2009) found that when GMS was introduced in the early 1990s, policies were monopolised by bureaucratic elites and stricter import and export taxes were imposed at formal border checkpoints. As a result, Lao traders smuggled goods from Thailand to Lao PDR so that boat-owners were able to make a profit (Jakkrit Sangkhamanee 2009). Cheaper products from China became more attractive in Laos, although Thai products were better known through exposure to Thai television.

High (2009) argued that it was difficult for border area people to cross the Thai-Lao border, as in the case of a girl from Southern Lao PDR who had to pay a lot of money to a job agency to work in Thai territory. Similar cases existed in the work of Vatthana Pholsena and Ruth Banomyong (2006) about a number of Lao people who were exploited when they crossed to find jobs in Thailand. The Orientalist view remains dominant, despite the peoples on the

ground being heard academically. With the existence of the border, they have used it as a strategy to find better jobs than they could in Lao territory (Soimart Rungmanee 2014; Thanachate Wisaijorn 2018). Yos Santasombat (2008) and Jakkrit Sangkhamanee (2009) explored the informal movements of the peoples across the Thai-Lao border, but the works of Vatthana Pholsena and Ruth Banomyong (2006), High (2009), Soimart Rungmanee (2014) and Thanachate Wisaijorn (2018) showed that the area is not really borderless. For some people, to cross the Thai-Lao border is not very difficult. For example, tourists from Thailand can cross the border without much difficulty at the formal checkpoint at *Chong Mek-Vang Tao* in the southern Lao PDR. Yet, people who want to find jobs encounter much difficulties dealing with state officials (High 2009). It can be concluded that hybridised spatial practices could be observed when different groups of people found their own formal and informal ways to benefit from Orientalist spatial conceptualisation – the Westphalian style of state boundary.

Conclusion

This article argued that the colonial characteristics of space management in traditional geopolitics which evinced a Western way of looking at the world in the colonial era were passed on in the ways that academics and state practitioners view the Thai-Lao border. Such Orientalist space management became important in geopolitics in the colonial era and in International Relations after WWII. Political and academic elites in the colonies gradually accepted and applied it, leading to a hybridised concept and practice of post-Orientalism.

The Thai-Lao border is a good example of how Orientalist spatial conceptualisation became hybridised into post-Orientalism. The Thai-Lao border was recognised in the Siam-France Treaty in 1893 as a line that separated Siam and French Indochina, and the Mekong River became de jure the international boundary that separated a significant number of Lao people on the two sides of the river between them from each other. This separation was despite the river being an important means of contact for centuries.

Before 1975, the separation of space and peoples between the Thai and Lao states was not strictly implemented as US and Thai troops secretly conducted military operations in Laos as part of the Cold War, but these military interventions were not officially announced as they contravened the international norm of non-intervention. Very often, a number of scholars in International Relations, both Thai and non-Thai, at that time justified US intervention in the region.

In 1975, Laos became a communist state and the colonial logic of Westphalian borders was resurrected and border conflicts between the Thai and Lao states occurred regularly. This spatial conceptualisation by the Thai and Lao elites suggested second-order Orientalism. Mountainous and riverine areas were still sites of contact as Hmong and some Lao people fled from the communist regime.

In the post-1989 era, academics in International Relations and other related fields such as history and anthropology became more aware of Orientalist spatial conceptualisation, and the voices of the peoples along the border were increasingly represented. The GMS, established to facilitate trade, tourism, and development, led the elites and the border peoples to adapt their commercial practices and hybridised border practices developed.

A total separation of the Occidental and the Oriental is difficult as spatial ideas from Europe were embraced by the local in the colonial era. Westphalian borders were part of peoples' everyday lives, especially after former colonies gained independence in the post-WWII era. This article calls for more careful consideration of space as a form of post-Orientalism. Such consideration by academics, elites, and border peoples could lead to a greater understanding of the development of hybridised spatial practices.

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