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# Indian Journal of Tai Studies

An International Journal devoted to the study of all aspects of the Tais of the World.

## **Volume XIX, October 2019**

- A Journey to the Land of Dai (Tai) Mao in China
- Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflicts in Old Siam
- The Khwan and The Ominous Calendar
- A Graphemic Analysis of Tai Ahom Manuscripts
- Black Tai Women in Vietnam : Preservation of Cultural Identity
- Gender Relations and Masculinity Among The Nung Fan Slinh
- The Song Drawings of China's Poya Zhuang People
- Spreading of the Tais and the Tais of China
- Socio-Economic and Human Development of The Tai Communities
- Understanding Konyak- Ahom Relations

**Institute of Tai Studies and Research**  
Moranhat, Assam (India)

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- b) *Tai-Ahom Manuscript : Chum-Pha-Rung-Cheng- Miun*  
(With a Translation into English and Assamese), March,2010
- c) *লিট লাই ক্বা মৌং* Lit Lai Kwa Moug,  
(Tai Ahom Manuscript with a translation into Assamese and English) 2011
- d) *লিট সাং হান* Lit Sang Han  
(Tai Ahom Manuscript with a translation into Assamese and English, 2013)
- e) *লিক আন নাং নগৈ নগৈ টাই* (Lik Aan Naa Ngai Ngai Tai Ahom)  
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Girin Phukon  
Editor



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## Editor's Note

The *Indian Journal of Tai Studies* is an annual publication of the Institute of Tai Studies and Research. Dissemination of knowledge through rigorous empirical inquiry in the field of 'Tai Studies' has been the objective of this Journal. It has already evolved as a major forum for publication of scholarly works on central and current themes of the Tai Studies. Its contents reflect the aims and intellectual pursuit of the Institute of Tai Studies & Research and its growing importance. It is a multidisciplinary Journal which presents a diversity of approaches to Tai studies. Leading scholars in the field from India and abroad, have been publishing their articles in the Journal on a wide variety of areas of Tai Studies such as history, culture, language, literature, society and polity, economy, archaeology and art, religion and philosophy and so on. Although, the Journal is primarily interested in academic works in the field, it also publishes contribution of other areas indirectly linked with Tai Studies. *This is the first Journal of this kind published in India.* It has already established its credibility as a referred Journal with the publication of its volume XIX.

I would like to express my profound gratitude to the authorities of ICSSR, New Delhi for extending financial support to bring out this volume. Besides, my appreciation is due to all those who have extended their co-operation towards publication of this volume. It is my pleasure to put forward this volume of the Journal to the members of academic community with the hope that it will stimulate them.

October, 2019



(Girin Phukon)





*Continued from last issue :*

## **A Journey to the Land of Dai (Tai) Mao in China:<sup>1</sup> Reflections on an Indian Scholar's Field Trip to China**

Chen Jianming

### **Part V**

#### **Prof. Girin Phukon's Fieldwork in Mengmao, the Old Home of Those Tai in Assam, India**

On the morning of January 3, 2015, Ai Zuo, the Dai Mao man, informed me of the fact that he could not come because of his tight schedule on the New Year's Day holiday. It postponed Prof. Phukon's fieldwork as early as he had planned. I checked the places of his academic interest on the Internet and decided the first one should be Mangyue village.

I drove my car Great Wall with Prof. Phukon and his company to Mangyue, a Dai village near Ruili. In order to go deeper into the village, we went too far beyond the village and met an old Jingpo (Kachin) lady in a Sanpai village shop. She offered us four bottles of drinking water free of cost. This was a village overgrown with bamboos, very possibly the legendary fernleaf hedge bamboo.

Jingpo is the name the Kachin call themselves in China. Jingpo's ancestors belonged to the Di-Qiang people, originating in the northern part of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau and gradually moving to Dehong during the Ming and Qing dynasties. They have Jingpo, Zaiwa, Lang'e (Langsu), Laqi (Chashan), Bola and other branches. Their languages belong to the Jingpo branch of the Tibeto-Burman language group of the Sino-Tibetan language family (in which the language of Zaiwa branch belongs to the Zaiwa language of the Achang language branch). They are now using Jingpo script in general and Zaiwa script is on trial use.<sup>2</sup>

Dehong prefecture is the most concentrated area of Jingpo people. Most of them are found in the mountainous or semi-mountainous areas with an elevation of about 1,500 meters above sea level in all counties and cities of the prefecture. Since the Communist liberation in 1950, some Jingpo have descended the mountains and inhabited with the Dai villagers.<sup>3</sup> Jingpo is a forthright, bold and brave group of people with a sky-high sweep. For example, they intercepted and killed the British spy A.R. Margary in Yingjiang's Mangyun,

defeated Horace Browne-led invading and colonial army in Bengxishan, and Muran Zaoruodong, their leader, resisted the British aggressors in Longchuan's Wangzishu.<sup>4</sup>

Before 1950, Jingpo people lived in mountainous areas and were collectively called *shantou*, meaning the people on hill tops, by those from outside of their communities. Their mode of production was believed to be backward and their life was bitter, with a population of only 560,000. As usual, the land and water were the Dai chieftain's, and the hill tops where the Jingpo people live were no exception. They had to pay the Dai *tusi* (chieftains) a small amount of tax as per household. As a matter of practice, the Dai *tusi* had less power over Jingpo area than in the basins.<sup>5</sup>

The Han, and De'ang and Dai people living near Jingpo mountain villages were oppressed by Jingpo's *shanguan*, namely, the officials on the hill top. Most of the Han people there were bankrupt peasants from inland China who followed the policy of "making a living in the land where the barbarian minorities lived". Besides planting crops, the Jingpo also grew and sold opium. Jingpo *shanguan* not only intercepted travelers and merchants uphill, but also plundered properties from those downhill, which made the Han farmers to pay poll tax to them. The less populated and dispersed De'ang people and the Dai people who did business near Jingpo communities also paid them poll tax at regular intervals.

Jingpo people prefer force of arms, especially area dedicated themselves to guns and steel knives. When Wang Liangfang, with a delegation to convey greetings and appreciation to the ethnic minorities, held a meeting at Sanpeng inhabited by the Jingpo people in Lianshan county later to become a part of Yingjiang county in Dehong prefecture, the local people went to meet Zao Bao, the Jingpo leader who was in charge of the ninety-nine villages. When seeing him coming, they fired a whole clip of ammunition to salute him. Zao Bao also responded with a whole clip of bullets in a portable machine gun. Also in Lianshan, Wang met with many Jingpo young men wearing British army uniforms. According to the county government officials, they or their relatives had been soldiers in Burma. At that time, there were still more than 200 Jingpo soldiers in Burma. The people across the border in Burma appreciated the bravery of Jingpo soldiers. The steel knives were carried by all men. When a little boy was seven or eight years old, his elders should solemnly give him a long knife to encourage him to fight bravely like a man. The reason why Jingpo *shanguan* dared to compete with the Dai *tusi* is that they relied on Jingpo's agile and brave spirit that set great store by martial qualities.<sup>6</sup> Comparatively speaking, the Dai is a friendly and polite people.

However, the force of arms is a double-edged sword. It threatens others as well as itself, and the ethnic relations between Jingpo and its neighbors were extremely tense. When the Jingpo women travelled down hill to the streets, they were always protected by men carrying knives. If an outsider touched a knife carried by a Jingpo man, the owner of the knife would think that you wanted to murder him and he would hack you with a knife. Jingpo mountain villages were high on the alert against the outside world. It was said that Zao Bao, one of the *sanguan*, had been afraid to go downhill for 12 years. The comrades in the government delegation went to a Jingpo mountain village. Although they were accompanied by Jingpo comrades and had notified beforehand, they still had to fire shots into the air outside the village to inform the villagers. They could not enter the village until a response from the village was yes. Otherwise, it would cause misunderstanding and even conflicts. When you enter the Jingpo people's home, you have to tread heavily and you have to speak loudly. You will be suspected of being a burglar if you are light-handed and light-footed. After 1950, this practice began to change.<sup>7</sup> I remember that one day in April 1991 when entering the house of Silashan, the late Christian preacher in Zhangfeng town, Longchuan county, Dehong, his wife was kinda scared at our already entering her house. We didn't see her in the backyard.<sup>8</sup> On one occasion, Wang Lianfang rode on the horseback to a Jingpo village. When he got outside the village entrance, the guide urgently asked him to dismount. He said that each village had a ghost specially designed to bite horsemen. If Wang was bitten, he would not justify himself. Later, whenever he went to a Jingpo village, Wang went on foot, respecting their customs.<sup>9</sup>

In Myanmar, the Kachin are another ethnicity that was heavily missionised by Christian groups during British colonial times.<sup>10</sup> In Kachin state, the Jinghpaw, who are generally known as Kachin, are the majority, and since their language can be written (using a Roman alphabet system devised by 19<sup>th</sup>-century Christian missionaries), Jinghpaw has become a lingua franca for the state. Although many Kachin people now a days are nominally Christian or Buddhist, some of the old beliefs are practised syncretically. Under the British and today, to a much lesser degree, under the SPDC, the Kachin tribes have continued to practice their own form of semi-democratic civil administration, *gunlao-gumsa*. One of the distinctions of this system is that the youngest in the family, rather than the eldest, is the legal heir when a parent dies.<sup>11</sup> For more information about the Jingpo, please refer to Edmond R. Leach's *Political Systems of Highland Burma*.<sup>12</sup>

Jingpo people call the Dai people as Assam (a sa:m).<sup>13</sup> Is it possible that the Indian state of Assam got its name from the Jingpo people's calling of the Tai people there? The answer is affirmative. Xie Yuanzhang writes that the Wa, Kachin and Benglong (present-day De'ang) and other peoples in Myanmar call Tais as Siam, Shiam, Sam or Sham. Assam's Sam is a "Sam" by which the Tais are called by other people or a transliteration of Sham. So fundamentally speaking, Assam was from Siam. In 1952, Xie Yuanzhang participated in a government mission to visit the Wa tribe in Shandong, Ximeng county. When talking in Dai language with Yan Gong, the tribe's top leader, Yan Gong pointed to Xie, saying: "Siam, Siam." It means "This man is the Dai." Therefore, Siam is the name given to the Tai people by the Mon-Khmer peoples. Assam is pronounced as [asom] in the local language, a variant of Shan, and as [seóm] in ancient Chinese, which is actually an alternative name of the Tai.<sup>14</sup>

In the local language, the word of Assam means No in the Bali language, and Sam was originally the name of the Tai people used by the Meng, who was one of the oldest indigenous peoples in Myanmar, and was assimilated by other peoples. It was pronounced as [sm] in the Mon language, and later changed to [sm]. The ending of [sm] is a bilabial nasal sound, which is not found in Chinese language, so it is written as "Sam". Sam prefers to the Tai. The State of Assam can be understood as the state of the Tai. The Tai people living in Assam claim to be the Tai, and Assam is the name used by other peoples.<sup>15</sup>

At 11:50, we returned to Mangyue village and met with a middle-aged man, a farmer with a hoe on the shoulder, walking on the village road. He was home bound. I asked him if we could visit his home and he said with a beaming yes. He invited us to his home and offered tea and slices of watermelons. They called themselves as Dai Mao. Prof. Phukon took interviews and collected information, but the young son didn't agree to give their names. The reason could be the discipline of not communicating with foreigners for a past long period in border areas or the present practice of personal privacy. Mangyue village has a population of about 1000 in 200 households.

Bamboo or wooden buildings of the Dai people in the village are rare, just like those in Mengzhe and Menghun in Xishuangbanna. This is a floor-to-floor building with bamboo and brick walls. The down stair's space is converted into a living room, such as those in Thailand or northern Laos witnessed when I was travelling there. The house has a dish for satellite TV reception. Life has changed and the habits that have disappeared include gold-or silver-gilded teeth, tattoos, chewing betel nut and dyeing teeth with ashes or herbal medicine.

In daily life, men no longer wear traditional Dai clothes but the Han ones. Not far from the house, there is a bamboo-wood structure, suspected to be some kind of religious event appliances.

Mangyue is an important village in Yunnan's archeology. In December 1982, Ruili Group of Yunnan Provincial Cultural Relics Census Team first discovered a Neolithic site in Mangyue village. Its relics include stone axes, sand-laden lime pottery pieces and so on. According to preliminary estimates, it is more than 3,000 years ago.<sup>16</sup>

At 13: 18, we left Mangyue. Back on the main road, I had my car refueled at Saijing petrol station, but no receipt was given as the case in other business establishments (the one even you get does not indicate that you have paid the percentage of the consumption tax). I doubt if the Dai villagers have the same awareness.

It is said that there is a village called Dadenghan on the way to Nongdao. Dadenghan village is known as a "natural,rural park" because of its picturesque scenery. Its shaddock produced locally is famous at home and abroad for its high quality and sweet taste. Its monastery was first built in the reign of Emperor Qianlong in the Qing dynasty, and was rebuilt twice in 1918 and 1958, and again in 1981. It has a Legend that Sakyamuni built this house as a mememto because he put up here for one night when he passed through for preaching Buddhism. The house is made of dozens of wood carvings of birds, animals, flowers, plants and human figures. It is exquisite in carving and possesses a strong architectural Dai style. In 1980, the Beijing Film Studio filmed the scene of *Peacock Princess* in the village, and used the monastery as the imperial palace.<sup>17</sup>In addition, more than ten films, such as *Menglongsha*, *Jingpo Girl* and *Journey to the West*, have been filmed in this village.

In December 1985, Her Royal Highness, the Princess Galyani Vadhana, the late sister of Bhumibol Adulyadej, the late king of Thailand, visited Dadenghan village. In compliance with the Dai custom, the princess sat on the floor and had lunch with her host. After dinner, the host said to the princess, "Come to my house as if you are visiting relatives, and come often." The princess nodded with a smile. The Dai people's reception of the princess's relatives left a good impression on her. She said again and again that her visit enhanced the understanding and friendship with the Dai people.<sup>18</sup>

At 14:40, we arrived at Nongdao town. The road from Ruili city to Nongdao was built with black top from 1974-75. Now a new type of industrial area at Nongdao is under construction.

“Halt!” snapped one of the three armed policemen in full uniforms. My car was motioned to stop. It was almost across the border check-point which shed is so simple that I didn’t recognize. To my surprise, the policemen are very polite, not scolding me for almost over crossing the point without permission. I asked if we could go to see the border river and markers with Myanmar on Ruili river. One of them said yes but allowed us to walk there, not in the car. He warned us that there is only a monument inscribed with a poem of China’s late marshal and former foreign affairs minister Chen Yi, nothing special.<sup>19</sup> But we would like to see it with our own eyes. Across a small bridge, Prof. Phukon was so painful in his leg that he decided to give up the inspection there and returned. Namkham was just seen in the near distance.

Nongdao is the end of Ruili basin. I suggested that Prof. Phukon should visit Nongdao because it is just opposite to Namkham, a Myanmar border town with Ruili. It is very possible that Sukapha led his followers crossing the river here and proceeding to advance into Assam. It is said that in Nongdao’s Leiyun village there are legendary ruins of King Zhaowuding’s ancient city. At the end of 1984, an ancient human tooth fossil was found on the Nangu river in Nongdao. According to the expert’s appraisal, this was a young man’s right upper incisor, and its geological structure belongs to the late period of late Pleistocene, about 10,000 years ago.<sup>20</sup>

A native of Mang’ ai village in Nongdao, Zhao Shangnong Mang’ ai (1848-1914) was a best-known modern Dai singer. Nongdao is a place that is associated with well-known legends of Zhaowuding and Mengguozhanbi kingdom. In Leiyun village, there is a family called the Hansas. They have a book called *Zhaowuding Dynasty*, which was copied on ancient paper made of paper mulberry in Dai Na language. It has 275 pages. The original book is 60 centimeters long and 32.5 centimeters wide. According to the last page of the transcript, the book was copied in the Buddhist calendar of 2487, that is, 1944 in Gregorian calendar. This is the earliest and more detailed copy of the six texts about the legend of Zhaowuding. Zhaowuding lived in the “pre-Buddhist era” 3000 years ago. The Dai society entered the era of tribal alliance in the time of Zhaowuding, who established a powerful tribal alliance country Mengguozhanbi kingdom. The mode of production changed from collecting and hunting to farming. Animals such as elephants, cattle and horses were tamed for servitude, thus completing the transition of the Dai history from the savage one. With the great progress towards civilization, in a vast area, the Dai people had become the most advanced and powerful ruling nation. Therefore, Zhaowuding is regarded by the Dai people as a great ancestor of

the Dai people who initiated history. However, Zhaowuding dynasty and all the texts describing Zhaowuding are not faithful to history, but folklore stories.<sup>21</sup> It is reported that there have been two international symposiums on Zhaowuding dynasty. There are the ruins of the capital of the Zhaowuding dynasty in Leiyun nearby.

In 1939, the China's Nationalist government and the United States government established an aircraft repair plant in Leiyun, with the main components provided by the United States, Britain and the Soviet Union.<sup>22</sup> Claire Lee Chennault's Flying Tigers Cemetery was discovered in 2007, which is located on a hill to west of Leiyun Airport. Yunnan Flying Tiger Team Research Association has initiated the restoration of itself with its counterpart in Kunming.<sup>23</sup>

For myself, I would like to see the boats shuttling across the Ruili river. From there one can see Namkham from Chinese side across the border. On July 12, 2009, I travelled from Muse to Namkham with two of my students for a fieldwork along the border. Seeing from a Buddhist temple in Myanmar side I saw a great expanse of green paddy with Ruili as its background.

The Ruili river joins the Nanwan river near Rongbangwang in Nongdao and enters the central and eastern part of Myanmar through the Namwan Assigned Tract. It flows into the Irrawaddy river and further into the Indian Ocean. The Namwan Assigned Tract is one of the famous places in the history of Sino-Myanmar relations. In the second half of the nineteenth century, after the British occupation of Burma in February 1897, the Qing government was forced to 'lease' this tract to Britain. After the establishment of the People's Republic of China and friendly consultation between the governments of China and Burma, from November 1960 to July 1961, the two countries jointly demarcated their border and established permanent boundary markers. According to the provisions of the treaty, the areas of Pianma, Gulang and Gangfang (formerly Hpimaw, Gawlam and Kangfang respectively) originally belonging to China were returned to China. The Namwan Assigned Tract was abolished of its "permanent concession" relationship and made part of Burma's territory. In exchange, and in order to consider the historical relations and tribal integrity, Burma agreed to divide its jurisdiction west of the 1941 line into China.<sup>24</sup> China and Burma settled their border disputes peacefully by replacing their territories, just like the case between India and Bangladesh.

Namkham is a Shan place name, which means 'golden river'. It was named after Ruili river as it was called Dajinsha river by the ancients. Namkham is located on the southern bank of Ruili River, across the river from Nongdao. It is a town in northwest Shan State of Myanmar, which is also one of important

towns and gate ways in northern Myanmar. Namkham is an ancient city with well-organized streets and reasonable layout. Its dwellings are full of elegant and simple features of Southeast Asia. The ancient pagodas stand upright and have extraordinary bearings. The Buddhist temples are magnificent, hidden in the green trees and are particularly attractive.

In July 12, 2009, I visited Namkham. True, its old pagodas and Buddhist temples are the essence of Myanmar's architectural art. Its unique structure, varied statues and beautiful murals show the ancient and splendid national culture of Myanmar and the wisdom and artistic creativity of its working people. These historic relics have attracted many tourists from both at home and abroad. The verdant Namkham valley, cut by the Shweli (Ruili) river and southwest of Muse, is a beautiful patchwork of bamboo and rice paddies. Most of the people living off the land in this area are Shan and other Tai ethnic groups.

Namkham itself is renowned as the WWII-era location of Dr. Gordon Seagrave's American Medical Center. Doctor Seagrave renounced his associations with the American Baptist Mission in order to offer medical service free of Christian proselytisation. The people from all over the northern frontier states emerged from his medical centre trained as doctors and nurses. He and his staff tended wounded soldiers around the clock during the Allies' siege of Myitkyina in 1944. In 1951 Seagrave was briefly imprisoned by the post-independence Burmese government for his alleged associations with Kachin rebels. After his release, he remained in Namkham till his death in 1965.<sup>25</sup> An American writer, modelling on the Seagrave couple, wrote a biographical novel which was later adapted into a movie and made a sensation, so the world knew this place called Namkham.

At 14:57, we left Nongdao. On the way I again suggested Prof. Phukon to visit Jiegao (or Segao), a border town with Myanmar. However, his company shown interest to go for shopping in downtown Ruili. Thus, Prof. Phukon gave it up for the next time.

Jiegao border trade zone is only 1.92 square kilometers. It is the largest inland trade port between China and Myanmar. It is 4 kilometers away from Ruili city seat and 500 meters away from Muse, Myanmar. In 1985, the Dehong prefecture was opened as the border trade zone. In that year, Zhong Yanfang, a Chinese business woman from Burma, first came to Ruili by bike from Jiegao after crossing the river on a bamboo raft.<sup>26</sup> In 1988, Ruili city opened the Jiegao Economic Pilot Zone and began to become the "transit station" and "distribution center" of trade between China and Myanmar. In 1989, the Jiegao



highway bridge across Ruili river was completed. The street for mutual trade opened on September 27, 1990. In 1991, Jiegao Border Trade Economic Zone was formally approved.<sup>27</sup> From August 1, 2000 onward, Jiegao began to implement the special policy of “domestic and foreign” quasi-free trade area. In 2000, with the approval of the State Council, Ruili became the only border trade zone in China to implement the special supervision mode of customs both at home and abroad. In 2008, Yunnan provincial government proposed to speed up the construction of cross-border economic cooperation zones at Ruili-Muse between China and Myanmar, Hekou-Laocai between China and Vietnam, and Mohan-Boten between China and Laos. At present, Ruili National Key Development and Open Pilot Zone is being built.

The Myanmarian government attaches great importance to the opening up of Muse area. In 1988, Muse and Panghsai<sup>28</sup> were opened as the first group of border trade ports. In 1998, customs and other port trade administration of Muse and Panghsai were withdrawn to a place called Mile 105<sup>29</sup> more than 14 kilometers away from the border. In 2004, Muse was upgraded to one of the first-class ports with the same import and export authority as Yangon Port did, and Muse Special Economic and Trade Zone with 300 square kilometers was established. In 2007, RMB, kyat and international currencies were allowed to be used in paying import and export tax at Mile 105. The Lashio-Muse railway in Myanmar is planned.<sup>30</sup>

We went to the Huafeng wholesale Market, where we had lunch and did some shopping. At that time, Mr. Ai Zuo, the Dai man who was expected to come in the morning, did come, and took us to the Jade Street Market in downtown Ruili. The price of bangles was so high that Prof. Phukon did not buy anything. From 1993 when Ruili established the first jewelry market in China, namely China’s First Jewelry Street, to 2000 when Ruili implemented the brand-oriented strategy of Oriental Jewelry City, the city has nurtured jewelry and jade as a dominantly key industry. Lured by the wealth effect, treasure-seekers from abroad also gather in every link of value chain in the jewelry and jade industry. Ruili’s immigration success stories have their “foreign-language version”, beginning to tell different stories of foreigners in different languages, such as those from Myanmar, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal and so on. Three major advantages from the border trade, jewelry and tourism industries have produced a huge market like a magnetic field.<sup>31</sup> In the Jade Street, some shop-owners were found to come from China, Myanmar and India.

Ruili is committed to becoming a trading center of jade and jewellery, because it is near the jade-producing areas in Myanmar. In Myanmar's Taunggyi, there is Maing Shu (Mong Hsu) gem tract to the east, which is one of Myanmar's most prosperous and enterprising towns.<sup>32</sup> The jade trade may also have something to do with travel restrictions in the state. During the Konbaung era, roughly 75% of all Kachin jade ended up in China. China is still the biggest market for Myanmarian jadeite, which is preferred over China's nephrite, although both minerals can be called jade.<sup>33</sup> Myitkyina is also the focal point for two of Myanmar's greatest cash generators: jade and opium. Near Hpakan, northwest of the city, huge deposits of translucent green jadeite - one of the world's rarest gemstones - are excavated by thousands of workers.

After that, Ai Zuo led us to Laochengzi village to visit the former site of Mengmao kingdom on Mengmao river in northwest part of Ruili proper. Prof. Phukon and we arrived at a village with a city wall with battlements and an entrance, like those in ancient China. Obviously, it was built by the local government and it was like a miniature city, much smaller than what I thought a powerful Mengmao kingdom should be. At first sight, I found it was not the original site of Mengmao kingdom, because on the wall there was a sign reading "Ruins of Pinglu City, East Entrance" in Dai and Chinese languages. It was recognized as one of provincial cultural relics in 1995. *Pinglu* means the conquest of the Luchuan Dai regime from the Yuan and Ming dynasties. The city is on a small hilltop. When the Ruili River was not diverted, it passed along the south of the hill. The hill was so steep, the fences were so strong, and the moat was so wide that one could not jump over them. In 1596 in the reign of Emperor Wanli in the Ming dynasty, Chen Yongbin, the governor of Yunnan province, ordered to build the Pinglu city on the old site of Luchuan city, having garrison troops or peasants open up waste land and grow food grain, and sending generals to defend the border.<sup>34</sup> Now, it is the seat of Mengmao town.

After reading the stories of Ming dynasty's three conquests of Luchuan Dai regime, I could not help feeling much relieved when seeing the two stone lions sitting on either side of the entrance, before which some farmers in twos or threes were selling vegetables. It was an ordinary yet peaceful day in Ruili, the former site of Mengmao kingdom. There is a slogan in Han, Dai and Jingpo languages on the wall of the entrance: "The Han people cannot live without ethnic minorities, the ethnic minorities cannot live without the Han people, and the ethnic minorities cannot live without each other!" This is China's current policy towards its ethnic peoples.

Chinese scholars have always adhered to the process of mutual assimilation between the Han and the ethnic minorities, that is, you possess me in yourself while I do you in myself. In 1939, Fu Ssu-nien, a historian, believed that the ethnic minorities and the Han people were one family. Another historian GuXiegang held that the Chinese nation was one entity. Fei Xiaotong, a social anthropologist, expounded his theory of “the pluralistic integration of the Chinese nation”. The Chinese government holds that the number of ethnic classifications is not to increase. Yunnan-based ethnologist Du Yuting’s research shows that the Jinuo people in Xishuangbanna should be a single ethnic group. This group was officially recognized in 1979 as the 56th ethnic group in China, which practice is not easy. Studies over the past decade have shown that no pure Han people are found now. The song *Love My China* with lyrics by Qiao Yu has gone viral across China in recent decades. Its message: “As fifty-six constellations and fifty-six flowers, fifty-six ethnic brothers and sisters are within one family.” The 56 columns representing China’s 56 ethnic groups, once put on the Tiananmen Square for the National Day holiday celebrations, are now standing high in the Olympic Forest Park, Beijing.

In fact, there are the ethnic minorities and the Han are one family examples: Fang Guoyu, a late historian based in Yunnan, was considered to be of the Naxi ethnic group. Now, it is discovered that he was a Han who was naturalized as one of the ethnic minorities in Lijiang, Yunnan.<sup>35</sup> Harrison E. Salisbury writes that the Yi were a slave society, dividing themselves into “black bones” (the nobility) and “white bones” (the slaves). The white bones usually were not of Yi origin. They were captives taken in battle - Han Chinese, Miao, Tibetans, other minorities.<sup>36</sup> It is said that the 1987 film *Buddha’s Lock* tells a true story: Air Force Lieutenant James Wood from Texas, USA participated in the Hump’s Flying Tigers during the War of Resistance Against Japan in the WWII. In 1944, during a visit to a pilot who was missing in an airplane crash in Daliangshan, Sichuan province, he was resold several times to become a slave in the Yi area, and was assimilated into the Yi tribes without any choice. When he was told to return to the United States in 1955, he was reluctant to leave.<sup>37</sup>

In 1396, Qian Guxun and Li Sicong were sent to Luchuan on the orders of Zhu Yuanzhang, the first emperor of the Ming dynasty. From Nanjing to Yunnan, they passed through Baoshan and Pupiao, crossed the Nu River, climbed over Gaoligong mountains into Tengchong, Nandian, Longchuan and Mengmao. They went to Bhamo along Ruili river and sailed into Burma by boat. Soon afterwards, they returned to Mengmao. They met with SiLunfa,

Luchuan's *spingmian* (suppressing Burma) *xuanfu* officer, mediating the contradictions between Luchuan and Burma and the conflicts between Dao Ganmeng, the leader of Luchuan's subordinates, and Si Lunfa. Returning to the Ming dynasty, they presented Zhu Yuanzhang with the book *Stories of the Baiyi*<sup>38</sup> which was what they had seen and heard of along the way, for which they were awarded.<sup>39</sup> Their book can be regarded as a Chinese version of Marco Polo's travels. Marco Polo arrived at Zardandan and Vochang, namely, the present Dali and Baoshan and the rest of west Yunnan, called Jinchi, meaning Gold Teeth. He found the custom of putting a thin casing of gold on their teeth, tattooing, gold and cowrie shells as currency. He also found the very example of couvade (husband, not his wife, as the person who gave birth to a baby), which is of anthropological or ethnological significance. There were no physicians. Instead, they had sorcerers to heal the sick.<sup>40</sup>

Prof. Phukon's video recorder had some problems with screen and Ai Zuo guided us to a home appliance shop but failed to have it readjusted. Fortunately, it became workable. After that, Ai Zuo led us to Bengbeng village to see the newly constructed Luchuan kingdom's Palace Ruins on the Ruili river in northeast Ruili. It was still under construction. First, we visited the pagoda complex. The pagodas were gilded, thus shining in the sunset glow with the white moon in the blue sky. It reminds me of a Chinese proverb of springing up like bamboo shoots after a spring rain. The sun and the moon shining simultaneously was a sign of eternity. We visited the palace that is being rebuilt. It was made of brick and mortar, which had no suggestion of a golden-rich palace as we think such a great palace should be. It was the reconstruction of the Dai history, which I wish would be eternally gold-rich after its completion. Ai Zuo said: "The Dai people here were once very powerful." Prof. Phukon answered: "It is a pity that it was powerful in the past but not now". Ai Zuo lamented the rise and fall of Luchuan in the Yuan and Ming dynasties, which was also the strongest period in the Dai history. It was no longer the strong one after the three expeditions against local Luchuan Dai regime in the Ming dynasty. Many great civilizations in the world rose and fell, such as Babylon, ancient Egypt and ancient India. The same is true of Chinese civilization. The Chinese revolution over the past hundred years has been striving for its revival, and now it is the same. In the 1930s, the Thai government changed its name from Siam to Thailand, which was a nationalist movement. Its essence was a pan-Thai or -Tai national movement, calling on the Tai people of all countries to unite and establish their own nation-state, namely, a greater Thailand. The campaign was lost because it involved the territorial

integrity of nations concerned. The Ahom movement in Assam, India, was also an independent movement attempting to break away from India.<sup>41</sup>

There are also many ruins in Assam, Sibsagar, a friendly township, was the capital of the Ahom dynasty, which ruled Assam for over 600 years. Sibsagar is dominated by Sibsagar Tank, a vast artificial lake created in 1734. Besides the tank is the 33m-high Shivadol Mandir, and nearby is the Tai Ahom Museum, with exhibits on Ahom history. About 4km west of the town centre are the ruins of the seven-storey 18<sup>th</sup>-century palace known as Talatal Ghar, and the nearby two-storey Rang Ghar pavilion, where the Ahom kings watched elephant fights. Gargaon Palace, about 13km east of Sibsagar, is another ruined Ahom palace. Many Ahom kings are buried at Charaideo, 28 km from Sibsagar.<sup>42</sup>

From the palace rebuilt, we could see Myanmar's Muse across Ruili river, the China-Myanmar border river. The city was in evening mist but we could see it in the setting sun. I could not help thinking of my visit to Muse on July 12, 2009. I still remember its central food market and various vegetables on sale, the young and pretty lady at the video shop, the clean food shops where we had some local food, and the green fields of the golf course. It was a nice city.

It is reported that the Shweli River, as Ruili river is called in Myanmar, forms the border between Myanmar's Shan State and China's Yunnan province at Muse. Although it extends all the way to Lashio (and to some degree beyond), the Chinese influence is of course stronger here than elsewhere in the Shan State. You're not likely to be allowed to visit Muse from the south. However, package tours entering from China have received permission to enter Myanmar at Muse, and travel south to Lashio. As Muse continues to prosper, the situation may open up for foreign independent travellers. Muse's once sleepy frontier-town atmosphere has been swept away by the bustling border trade with China. The town's electricity is supplied by China, so the power cuts common around the country are unheard of here. Chinese tourists flock to Muse to shop, keeping the money changers busy. Trucks from Myanmar cross to China with dried fish, rattan, fresh beans and fruit, including tamarind, which is then processed into a soft drink and sold back to Myanmar at a tidy profit. On the return trip from China, the same trucks carry electrical goods and spare parts, cement and other building components. Smuggled goods include teak, cigarettes and alcohol. The territory surrounding Muse is one of the primary pipelines for opium and heroin smuggling from the Shan State to Yunnan province, and from there to Hong Kong. East of Muse, along the border, there are reportedly

several major heroin refineries, as well as methamphetamine labs. This area to the east is strictly off-limits to foreigners. The area around Muse is thought to have been the centre of one of the first consolidated Shan kingdoms (called Kawsumpi, or Mong Mao) as early as the 7th century. From this point the Shan dispersed to other river valleys to the west, east and south. From Muse it's four or five hours by pick-up or car along the famed Burma Road to Lashio, a distance of 176km.<sup>43</sup>

The peoples in Ruili and Muse are keeping on good terms with each other. In 1984, a village close to the border in Ruili caught fire. The Burmese town of Muse, which was adjacent to the village, dispatched fire trucks in time to fight the fire. With the help of Burmese friends, the fire was quickly put out. The Muse officials apologized for entering the country before they had time to negotiate with the Chinese government. Ruili officials expressed their deep gratitude for the help rendered by Muse side. On the National Day of that year, the people's government of Ruili also invited officials from Muse and Namkham of Burma to participate in the festival, once again expressing its gratitude to Muse officials. In recent years, especially in November 2016 and May 2018, armed conflicts broke out between Myanmar's government army and ethnic minority armies. A large number of refugees entered Jiegao across the border to take refuge and were received by the local Chinese government. In view of this, the second meeting of the 21st Century Panglong Peace Conference that kicked off on August 31, 2016 in Nay Pyi Taw, the capital of Myanmar, did not achieve the desired results in straightening out the relations between the Myanmar government and the local armed ethnic minorities along the border.<sup>44</sup>

After the newly built palace, Ai Zuo took us to a village restaurant called Lesai, which shingle was written in the Chinese and Dai languages. He offered a dinner with typical Dai Mao dishes, including the ant's eggs. Natacha du Pont de Bie, a self-proclaimed food tourist wrote a book *Ant Egg Soup: The Adventures of Food Tourist in Laos*.<sup>45</sup> Dai food is inclusive of rice and rice cooked in bamboo tubes (Ruili is famous for soft rice), bamboo shoots, moss pie (I ate it in Luang Prabang in December 2008), and roasted fish with grass. Tonight, no chopped raw pork was offered as one of the courses, for it is risky to suffer from trichinosis. During my stay in Chudong Hani and Yao village in 2011, I personally observed the Hani people eating unboiled pig's blood as one of the foods they enjoy, especially at the dinners with friends. Marco Polo writes that the people in the province of Zardandan (west Yunnan) eat their meat raw. <sup>46</sup> I watched our driver purchasing raw pork as food in Banqiao

town, Baoshan in March 2006 when escorting Japanese Prof. Abe Kenichi to do his fieldwork in Nujiang valley. The raw pork was to be shared among the driver's relatives there. Zebu is one of Ruili's local specialties. It is suitable for serving as a draught animal and food. But Prof. Phukon even agreed to eat beef, despite the influence of Hinduism on the Tai Ahom of Assam. Ruili was called Mengmao Guozhanbi, which means the place where fragrant soft rice was produced.<sup>47</sup> The Dai people in Dehong eat *japonica* rice, while those in other areas eat glutinous rice.

Prof. Phukon also writes about rural northeast India's Ahom and other Tais who still maintain a traditional menu of their own food like other Tais of Southeast Asia. Rice is the staple food and *nam hao* (home-made rice beer) is the traditional drink. They prefer to take boiled food having no spices and directly burnt fish, meat and vegetables. Sticky rice cooked in the tender bamboo pipe, bamboo sauce, pork, chicken, duck, forg, cocoon seeds of Endi and Muga worms, eggs of red ants are some of their typical favorite dishes like other Tais of Southeast Asian countries.<sup>48</sup>

Bengbeng was shrouded in the thicket of fernleaf hedge bamboo. This kind of bamboo is closely related to the production and living materials of the local minorities. Some composers had produced very nice songs about the Dai people and the bamboo, such as Shi Guangnan's *Fern leaf Hedge Bamboo by Moonlight*, and Yang Fei's *There's a Beautiful Place*. The Dai's characteristic musical instrument, *hulusi*, is a tongue-spring instrument. It can continuously produce five-degree intervals by means of cyclic ventilation, using bamboo tubes and gourds. The Dai people also used bamboo to build bridges, such as the one spanning Ruili river in Dehong, which was 200 meters long and made of bamboo without any nails. It was not only feasible for people and horses, but also for cars to pass safely.<sup>49</sup>

After saying good-bye to Ai Zuo, we went to the night market again. We did shopping and at 10:45 returned to the hotel. In the room, I still felt the buzz of a market-driven Ruili.

In 1985, Dehong prefecture, including Ruili, was approved to open its territory as a border trade zone. In Ruili a brilliant border trade was created in the 1980s and 1990s. Now, the Dali-Ruili railway on the western line of Pan-Asian Railway has been built in Baoshan, and the Longling-Ruili express way is being constructed. China-Myanmar oil and gas pipeline construction has started, and from Myanmar's Kyaukpyu it will enter China at Ruili, from which it will extend to Yunnan's Kunming, Guizhou province's Guiyang, and Guangxi's Guigang.

In 2009, Yunnan government proposed the construction of the Third Eurasian Continental Bridge, linking some areas of eastern and central China. It starts from Kunming westward to Dehong's Ruili or Baoshan's Houqiao, entering Europe from Turkey via Myanmar, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Iran, and finally arriving at Rotterdam, the Netherlands, with a total length of about 15,000 kilometers across 17 countries in Asia and Europe. Ruili is at the key point of China's construction of the Third Asia-Europe Continental Bridge, instrumental for opening up a westward trade channel.

When the highway arrives in Lashio, Myanmar, it connects with the railway which can go south to Yangon and north to Myitkyina. From Myitkyina to Ledo, India, along the Stilwell Highway, you can communicate with India's railway network. From Bhamo Port to the Irrawaddy river, you can go directly to Yangon and enter the Indian Ocean, which is the land-water transport channel of the Irrawaddy river between China and Myanmar.

In 1952, China designated Wanding as a state-level port. In 1992, it approved Wanding and Ruili as open cities along the border, and established two national-class border economic cooperation zones respectively at Wanding and Ruili. Therefore, Ruili possessed two first-class national ports, Ruili and Wanding. In 1999, it cancelled Wanding and its jurisdiction area merged into Ruili. In 2004, it launched a pilot project of implementing tax refund in RMB settlement for border trade export in Dehong.

The more India, Myanmar and China are interconnected, the more changes the Dai society will undergo.

### **Prof. Phukon, Presented Some Academic Books, Says Good-bye to Prof. Cai Xiaohuang and Mr. Gong Jinwen in Mangshi**

At 7:00, January 4, we had breakfast in the hotel restaurant and after that went to the food market nearby. At a shop called Thai City on the second floor, Prof. Phukon his associate purchased Dai ethnic costumes for grown-ups and young kids. The lady shop-owner claimed to hail from Namkham, Myanmar.

Immediately after shopping, at 11:07, we started our journey from Ruili to Mangshi. My car, Great Wall, made its way through crowded traffic. Seeing the heavy traffic in Ruili, I remember one story about the Dai people here. It is said that before 1950, the Dai *tusi* of Mengmao once rode in a car in Burma. Feeling very comfortable, he purchased a car from across the border, sent seventy or eighty labourers and carried the car to Ruili. He asked the



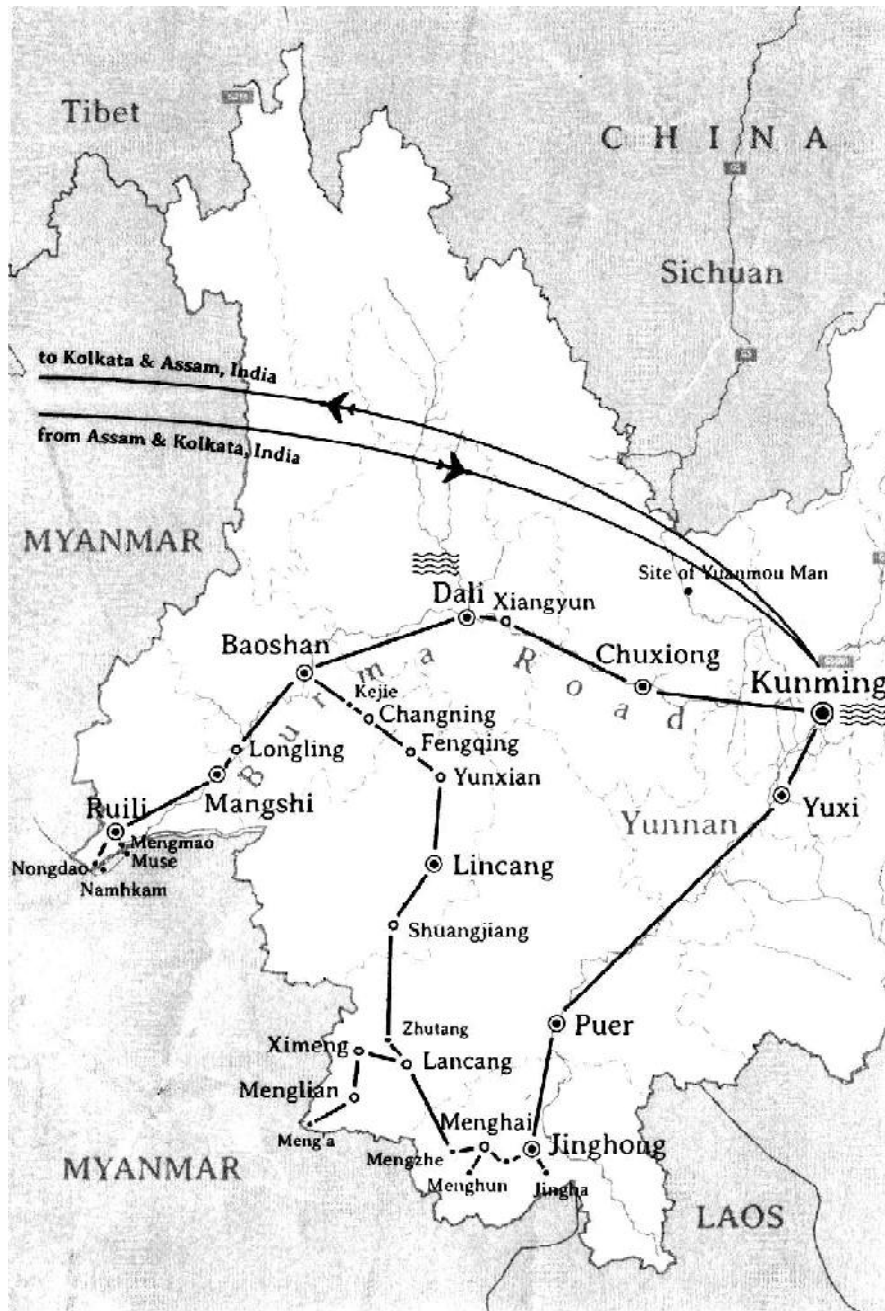
people to arrange bamboo rows in paving rough roads. He drove the car from Ruili's old city gate to Mengmao *tusi* office. He used it twice only. Feeling it was too troublesome, he didn't use it anymore and it became an ornamental object.<sup>50</sup>

On the way from Ruili to Mangshi, a car, face-to-face with us, was overtaking several trucks before it. It would be a head-on hit of my car if I did not slow down a little bit to let it swerve on to the lane between the truck and my car. However, it was an often case in mountainous Yunnan. It is really dangerous to overtake any vehicles at the road bends.

It was a sunny day today. In Mangshi, we met with Cai Xiaohuang and Gong Jinwen again. As promised, they presented us some Chinese-language books on the Dai studies in Yunnan.<sup>51</sup> Most of these books were published under the sponsorship of the Dai Research Society of Dehong Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture. In April 2019, the first workshop on the history and culture of the Dai in west Yunnan was held in Mangshi.

According to an introduction to one of his books, Mr. Gong Jinwen, born in 1955 in Lianghe county, Yunnan province. In 1988, he graduated from Yunnan University for Nationalities (now Yunnan Minzu University) with a master's degree in language and literature of the Dong and Dai peoples. From 1989 to 1990, he went to Chulalongkorn University in Thailand for further studies. From 2005 to 2007, he worked as a second-class secretary in the Economic and Commercial Counsellor's Office of the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Thailand. He was a teacher of Dehong Prefectural Normal School for Ethnic Groups and a lecturer in Yunnan Minzu University. He has visited Thailand, Myanmar, Japan, Korea and other countries for academic exchanges. In his retirement, he once served as the vice president of The Dai Research Society of Dehong Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture. He has procured the ancient Dai books *Golden Antelope Ah Lu* and *Wanxiang Bianmeng* (co-authored with others) and had them published. He participated in the compilation of *A Dictionary of the Han and Dai Proverbs* and the *Volume on the Dai in China's Ethnic Minorities Dictionaries Series*. He has had more than 40 papers, poems, lyrics to songs published, of which many papers were award-winners. In 2003 and 2009, he had his two books *Studies of the Dai Culture* and *Essentials of the Dai Language in Dehong* published by Nationalities Publishing House of Yunnan. He is compiling a new book *Collected Works of Gong Jinwen on Dai (Tai) Studies*.

**Prof. Girin Phukon's Fieldwork Route in Yunnan, China**  
3, 136 km in 12 days, Dec. 26, 2014 - Jan.6, 2015



**The Trip Parallel to the Burma Road from Mangshi to Dali Where the Thai Once Were Believed to Have Risen and Ruled but Conquered by Kublai Khan**

After saying good-bye to Cai and Gong at 14:35, we started our trip back to Kunming. At 15:35, we got to Mukang border check point with armed police, where not a few drug smugglers have been apprehended.

On the way, I noticed the sign board reading “Longling Sub-pump House of China-Myanmar Oil and Gas Pipeline Project”. It reminded me of the oil pipeline laid from Calcutta to Kunming in WWII. After the Cairo Conference, in December 1943, Chiang Kai-shek and his wife May Ling Soong inspected the trained Chinese troops in Ramgarh, India. I read some data about the oil and gas production in Myanmar and India. For example, Yenangyaung Oil Field, and in Sittwe’s Baronga Islands, hand-dug, privately owned oil wells are a major source of livelihood on the island of East Baronga.<sup>52</sup> India’s Assam also has oil and gas fields.

In 2005, China and Myanmar signed in Yangon, Myanmar’s capital, a contract for the construction of Myanmar’s largest Yeywa hydropower project on July 15. The hydropower station will be built 50 kilometers east of Mandalay, Myanmar’s second largest city, with a total installed capacity of 790,000 KW.<sup>53</sup> In 2011, due to opposition from local people, the Myanmar government unilaterally called for the suspension of the Myitsone Hydropower Station on the Irrawaddy River, which was built jointly with China.

At 15:54, we had lunch at Daoxiang(Rice Fragrance)restaurant in Longling county seat. I could not find any traces of wars staged in WWII. During the War of Resistance Against Japan, mechanics from Southeast Asia drove on the Yunnan-Burma Highway the charcoal-fueled trucks, namely steamed trucks fueled with firewood, to transport military materials. I saw a picture of trucks of this kind: the firewood was used as fuels for boiling water in a steam pot behind the cab, generating steam to propel the truck to go forward.<sup>54</sup>

Around the Communist liberation in 1950, trucks in Yunnan were still powered by charcoal instead of gasoline, and there was a big wooden barrel next to the cab of the truck. In the early 1950s, Wang Lianfang headed government delegations to the border areas respectively to Lunan county and western Yunnan by that kind of truck twice. Wang saw that the driver was working extremely hard. Every morning he would get up at 4 or 5 o’clock to ignite the truck by burning charcoal. The truck could only drive forty or fifty kilometers a whole day, and the people walked faster than the trucks up the

hill. When they got tired riding in the truck, they often got off and followed the truck for a while before getting on. When they went to western Yunnan, on the first day, the charcoal-fueled truck went to Anning's Wenquan (Hot Spring) and went to Yipinglang for four days. Most people in Yunnan have never seen any motor cars. In 1953, Wang Lianfang went to the southern Yunnan. In Tongguan town, Mojiang county, the people who built roads were chasing to see the "iron horse" as the motorized vehicles. Several old ladies fed the vehicles with grasses.<sup>55</sup> Both the Soviet Union and the DPRK once developed the steamed trucks for transportation.<sup>56</sup>

Seeing the restaurant flooded in January sun and its very clean tables, chairs and palatable food, I was so satisfied physically and mentally. Forever gone are the days of wars and famines that were described by many people. I think of the world's great hungers: the Irish famine in 1845-1852; China's famine in the late Ming dynasty that triggered Li Zicheng's peasant uprising to overthrow this dynasty; Henan's famine in 1942; China's famine in 1959-1961, and so on.<sup>57</sup>

After lunch, we again started our journey. At 18:05, we made our way on to the express way from Zhen'an toll gate, as Donovan Webster said when Burma Road converges on its modern counterpart: a new, six-lane highway connecting Ruili and Kunming, which can put passengers in Kunming in four or five hours. Webster kept to the old road all the way from India to Kunming.<sup>58</sup>

At 0:30 we reached old Dali city of Bai people's autonomous prefecture. The city was less busy at these small hours. We stayed in Gudu (Ancient Capital) Hotel there. The front courtyard has screen wall, and the guest houses around the inner yard are decorated with a lot of marble, a type of hard stone that is usually white and often has coloured lines in it, which can be polished and is used in building and for making statues, etc. In Chinese, this type of stone is named *dalishi*, the stone from Dali, the very name of the old town where this stone is found, just like *Karst* of Yugoslavia for lime stone topography and *Danxia* of Guangdong for red-layered landform. *The purpose of arranging Prof. Phukon to visit Dali was that Dali is one of the very important places that help retrace the origin of the Dai/Tai people.*

More than 80% of the Bai people in China live here. Therefore, in 1956 when regional autonomy for ethnic minorities was implemented, Dali Bai Autonomous Prefecture was established. Bai people are also found in Hongjiaguan village (home of He Long, one of the China's top ten marshals), Hunan's Zhangjiajie and, Guizhou's Weining, Sichuan's Liangshan and other places, just like the Bai's enclaves. Dali is the capital of successfully two local

regimes, namely, Nanzhao in the Tang dynasty and Dali in the Song dynasty (commonly known as Nanzhao and Dali kingdoms) and thus one of the famous historic and cultural cities in China.

In the mid-seventh century (the early Tang dynasty), six large ethnic tribes appeared in Erhai lake region, historically known as the Six Zhaos. Among them, the Mengshe Zhao was in the south of all six *zhaos*, thus known as the Nanzhao, nan meaning south. In the 740s, Nanzhao, supported by the Tang dynasty, unified the six *zhaos* and established the Nanzhao regime. In 902, Zheng Maisi, the minister of Nanzhao regime, launched a coup and seized Nanzhao's power, known as Dachanghe kingdom. Nanzhao, which lasted 247 years with 13 kings, was thus destroyed. In 937, Duan Siping, Tonghaijiedu (prefecture) officer, joined 37 tribes in eastern Yunnan and marched into Dali, overthrowing the Dayining kingdom and establishing the Dali kingdom. In 1253, Kublai Khan of the Yuan dynasty led the army and suppressed Dali and established Yunnan province, which was divided into *lus* of Dali, Heqing and Yunlongdian *Junmin* (Military and Civil) Prefecture. In 1254, the Mongolian army broke through the city of Yachi (now Kunming), capturing Duan Xingzhi and suppressing Dali.<sup>59</sup>

The reason Nanzhao and Dali are involved in the discussion of the origin of the Dai or Tai people is that some people believe the Nanzhao kingdom was founded by the Dai or Tai ancestors, so Kublai Khan's conquest of Dali gave rise to the mass movement of the Dai or Tai people into present-day Thailand. Some scholars think differently.

The originator of Nanzhao as a Thai or Tai Kingdom was D. H. St. Dennis,<sup>60</sup> a Frenchman. In his book about the Ailao people in China that was published in France in 1876, he puts forward the idea that the Thai people, descendants of Ailao, should have established Nanzhao.<sup>61</sup>

Prof. Terrien de Lacouperie of London University, in his introduction *The Cradle of the Shan Race* A. R. Colquhoun's book *Amongst the Shans*, published in 1885, advanced the theory that the Nanzhao kingdom was a Thai people's state. In the several decades from then on, a number of Western scholars, intelligence officers, priests and diplomats wrote books to expound the theory one after another, vehemently advocating that the Nanzhao kingdom was a powerful and prosperous state founded by the Thai people.<sup>62</sup>

E. H. Parker, E. Roehrer, Pierre Lefevre Pontalis, J. George Scott, H. R. Davies, W. W. Cochrane, W. C. Dodd, W. A. R. Wood, W. Credner, among others, had their monographs and treatises published, giving enormous publicity to the theory that the Nanzhao kingdom was a state founded by the Thai

people. Of them, those that have made a great impact on the compilation of books on the ancient Thai history are: H. R. Davies' *Yunnan: The Link between India and the Yangtze* (London, 1909). Major Davies was an important intelligence officer of the British colonial government in India.

William Clifton Dodd's *The Tai Race: Elder Brother of the Chinese* (Iowa: The Torch Press, Cedar Rapids, 1923/Bangkok: White Lotus Co., Ltd. 1996) Dodd was an American pastor who did missionary work in northern Thailand over a long period of time. W. A. R. Wood's *A History of Siam* (London, 1926). Wood was a diplomat who was once British consul general at Chiang Mai in northern Thailand.<sup>63</sup>

I would like to add more other authors who support the same theory. For example, C.P. FitzGerald writes that it is not clear what tribe or group were displaced or conquered by the rulers of Nanchao when they moved north to seize Tali. It seems clear enough that the rulers of Nanchao kings, and probably their followers, were T'ai, but it is doubtful whether the Pai people by their surviving customs and languages can be classed as T'ai. He claims that Nanchao was a kingdom ruled by a family of T'ai origin, supported, probably, by a ruling class of the same stock.<sup>64</sup>

D.G.E. Hall believes that Mongolia's Kublai Khan conquered Nanzhao kingdom in 1253. The Mongolians did adopt the traditional policy of "divide and rule", which damaged the establishment of a series of Thai countries with the support rendered by the countries that were of long standing. In the areas concerned, the residents had not changed a lot, but its political power was seized by a Thai ruling class.<sup>65</sup>

Gregorio F. Zaide writes that the history of Thailand began in Yunnan province, China, where various Thai tribes had established the Kingdom of Nanchao there. Because of the frequent wars with China that they had to fight in defense of their freedom, many Thais migrated southward to what is now Thailand. There, the Tai immigrants under Phra Ruang founded in 1238 a new kingdom - the Sukhotai kingdom, named after their capital city. In 1253, the Mongols under Kublai Khan conquered Nanchao. Thus this old Thai kingdom vanished from history. With the capture of Nanchao, Thai refugees fled to Sukhotai to swell its population.<sup>66</sup>

The first historically significant ethnic people in Myanmar were the Pyus, who probably migrated from southwest China in about the third century. The Pyus were defeated by the Mons in the eighth century. They fled northward and became the vassals of the Thai kingdom of Nan Chao.<sup>67</sup>

Those who first opposed the theory that the Nanzhao kingdom was a Thai people's state were the Chinese scholars Shun-Sheng Ling, Fang Guoyu and Hsu Yun-Tsiao, who, in the 1930s and the 1940s, wrote articles to counter that theory.<sup>68</sup> For example, Shun-Sheng Ling's *A Study of the Wuman and Baiman Peoples of Yunnan During the Tang Dynasty* (Collected Papers on Anthropology, 1938, Vol.1(1)), and Fang Guoyu's *Whether or Not the Nanzhao Kingdom Was a State Founded by the Thai People* (New Trends (Kunming), 1939, Vol. 3 (6)).<sup>69</sup>

In 1944, the famous linguist Luo Changpei had his paper *On the Naming System of Linking Father and Son's Names Among Tibeto-Burman Peoples* published. He believes that according to the *Baiguji*<sup>70</sup> quoted in *The Unofficial History of Nanzhao*, Nanzhao's ancestral line adopted the naming system of father-son linkage, while the Dai clan genealogy of Cheli's *sxuanwei* officer did not record this. He demonstrates that Nanzhao was built by the Tibeto-Burman peoples, not by the Tai-Dai people.<sup>71</sup>

Hsu Yun-Tsiao's *Investigation of the Issue that the Nanzhao Kingdom was Not the Former Home of the Thai People* (Nan Yang Journal, 1947, Vol. 4 (2)).<sup>72</sup> In the following decades, more Chinese scholars have published books and articles in succession to oppose the same theory. Most of them hold that the Nanzhao Kingdom was a regime set up by the ancestors of the Yi and Bai groups.<sup>73</sup>

Among the important monographs and treatises are Liu Yaohan's *New Proofs that the Meng Royal Family, Ruler of the Nanzhao Kingdom, Belonged to the Yi Nationality* (Historical Studies, 1954 (2) (in Chinese)) and Jiang Yingliang's *The Nanzhao Kingdom was a State Not Founded by the Thai People* (Journal of Yunnan University, 1959 (11)(in Chinese)). Jiang writes that the Meng and Duan clans of Nanzhao Royal Family were neither Dai nor Thai, which means that neither Nanzhao nor Dali was built by the Dai or Thai. However, among the peoples under Nanzhao and Dali, there were ancestors of the Dai people. At present, we can affirm the Man and Mangman of the Gold Teeth and Black Teeth. These Dai ancestors were members of Nanzhao, but they were not the main ethnic group of Nanzhao. They were only the frontier ethnic minorities under Nanzhao. The relationship between them and the rulers of Nanzhao was the political subordination and the obligation of military service.<sup>74</sup> From the 8th to 13th centuries, Xishuangbanna was under the jurisdiction of the local regimes of the Tang and Song dynasties, that is, Nanzhao's Meng's regime of the Tang dynasty and the Dali's Duan's regime of the Song dynasty. It can be seen that Nanzhao and Dali regimes were stronger than the Dai regimes.

Fang Yue and Wang Fang had their paper *Refuting Imperialists' Misrepresentation of Several Questions in the Ancient History of the Bai People* (Academic Research, 1961(2) (in Chinese)) published. In the early 1960s, researchers with Yunnan Institute of Ethnic History compiled some works, such as *A Brief History of the Bai People*, *A Brief History of the Yi People* and *A Brief History and Chronicles of the Dai People*, which also refute the theory of Nanzhao as a Thai kingdom.<sup>75</sup>

Ma Changshou also had his paper *The Clan Composition and the Slavery System within the Boundaries of the Nanzhao Kingdom* published.<sup>76</sup> Wang Chi-lin, a Taiwanese scholar, strongly refutes the theory of Nanzhao as a Thai kingdom in his introduction to the book *A Study of the Relations Between Nanzhao and the Li's Tang Dynasty*,<sup>77</sup> which exerts a great influence on Western scholars.

Chen Lufan's paper is *A Preliminary Analysis of the Important Cultural Relics of the Nanzhao and Dali Kingdoms?* (Art and Culture, Bangkok, 1984(11)).<sup>78</sup> Chinese scholars have proved that the Nanzhao kingdom was a state not founded by the Thai people. It was a local separatist regime founded by the ancestors of the Yi and Bai peoples in the Tang dynasty,<sup>79</sup> and that Kublai Khan's conquest of Dali kingdom in no way gave rise to any mass migration of any people to the south.<sup>80</sup> Foreign scholars also criticize the Nanzhao as a Dai or Tai kingdom. In 1965, the Burmese scholar Sao Saimong explicitly put forward that Nanzhao was not a country established by the Thai people in Chapter 2 *Early Shan People* of his book *The Shan States and the British Annexation*.<sup>81</sup>

Chin Yudee is a well-known archaeologist of Thailand. In his book *Prehistoric History of Thailand* published in 1967 he concluded that the archaeological findings have shown that far back in the Paleolithic Age some 500,000 to 10,000 years ago, there had already been human inhabitants in the present-day Thailand. Later history passed successively through the Mesolithic, the Neolithic and the Metal Ages, and entered upon the age with recorded history. People nowadays "can still see the cultural vestiges of the various ages that have remained right up to the present era."

Sud Saengwichian<sup>82</sup> is an anatomist at a medical college of Thailand. In 1967, after making a comparative study of 37 human skeleton remains of the Neolithic Age, exhumed on the banks of the Big and Small Kuae<sup>83</sup> Rivers in Kanchanaburi and Rachaburi, with the skeletons of modern Thai people, he had come to the conclusion that the two "are almost identical", and that the piece of land that is now modern Thailand is no other than "the place where the progenitors of the Thai people had multiplied and thrived".<sup>84</sup>



D.G. E. Hall believes that the militant Nanzhao Kingdom in west and northwest Yunnan was inhabited by the Thai people, but the rulers were another race.<sup>85</sup> This is to say that the Dai people were part of the Nanzhao population, and the rulers were not the Dai people. This argument, although not quite clear, is true to historical facts. He should have written clearly that Nanzhao's major population was not Dai people.

In 1968, Duong Nien Van,<sup>86</sup> a Vietnamese historian, had his article published, which is about the formation of the Tay and Tai in Vietnam and their relations with the peoples of southern China and Indochina. It affirms the criticism of Chinese scholars on the theory of Nanzhao as a Thai kingdom.<sup>87</sup>

In the former Soviet Union, Its,<sup>88</sup> a senior researcher at the academy of sciences, had his work published about the history of ethnic groups in southern part of east Asia in 1972. He fully considers and analyzes the research results of the history of Nanzhao and Dali, mainly by Chinese scholars, and concludes that the existing linguistic data give us grounds to believe that Wuman, the founder of Nanzhao, was a direct ancestors of the Yi people. There is no doubt about it.<sup>89</sup> The *Encyclopedia Britannica* (15th edition, 1980) states in its entry of History of Siam and Thailand: In the past, it was assumed that the Thai people were the founders and rulers of the Nanzhao kingdom, but subsequent studies have shown that the rulers of Nanzhao were not Thai.<sup>90</sup>

In 1981, Charles Backus, an American scholar, had his book *The Nanzhao Kingdom and T'ang China's Southwestern Frontier* published by Cambridge University Press. Backus concludes that the main inhabitants of Nanzhao belonged to the ethnic group of Tibeto-Burman language family.<sup>91</sup>

David K. Wyatt writes that the western and southwestern portions of Yunnan province were for the most part dominated by people, the Chinese termed *Wu-man*, "black barbarians," dark-skinned peoples speaking Tibeto-Burman languages akin to those of the Lolo and Lahu peoples who still inhabit the region. It was the *Wu-man* of western Yunnan who in the seventh century formed the nucleus around which the state of Nanchao was formed.<sup>92</sup>

He also writes that the significance of Nanchao for Tai history is not due to the identity of its rulers, who especially during this period were certainly not Tai. The *chao* of Nanchao followed the patronymic linkage system in choosing their names, the first syllable of each ruler's name being the same as the last syllable of his father's name - thus, P'i-lo-ko, Ko-lo-feng, Feng-chia-i, I-mou-hsfin, and so on - a pattern common among the Lolo and other Tibeto-Burman groups but unknown among the Tai. Moreover, the lists of Nanchao words mentioned by Fan Ch'o are identifiable as Lolo and untraceable as Tai.

No Tai legend or chronicle mentions Nanchao or any of its rulers, but nineteenth-century Lolo chiefs in central Yunnan traced their ancestry back to the Nanchao ruling house. The significance of Nanchao for Tai history therefore must be sought in its effects upon the Tai peoples living in the southern and eastern portions of its empire and along its periphery.<sup>93</sup>

In many local legends and Chinese chronicles it is said that kings of all Indian dynasty, from at least the third century BC, ruled the region around Tali of Yunnan. One legend tells that many centuries before the founding of the kingdom of Tien at Tali in 280 BC, an Indian prince with the name of Ah-in, also known as King Asoka, then ruled at Tali. Local legends assert that the people of early Nan-chao were of Indian origin, coming from the valley of the Indus; it is unclear, if this refers to the ruling class of Nan-chao kingdom, or the people, who comprised in the early days several different ethnic tribes, probably not including ethnic Tai at all.

Since the study by Karin Korn-Riedlinger in 1988 about the Nan-chao state, in which she reported convincingly that the rulers of Nan-chao and the majority of the population were of Tibeto-Burman origin, Western scholars tend to reject the former theories.

Back in 1930s, Wilhelm Credner, who visited the Yunnan region in 1930, already doubted that ethnic Tai people had ever settled in the area around Tali. In support of his thesis, W. Credner noted that no “traces exist of ethnic Tai having lived in the area and the Tai traditionally base their agriculture on rice, which had to cultivate in 2,000 meters above sea level. Hence, the Tai originated in a tropical region where rice grows wild, most probably in the region around today’s Guangxi (Kwangsi) and Guangdong (Kwangtung) provinces, from where they migrated west and south, but not north.”<sup>94</sup>

For foreign scholars who do not know Chinese, Chen Lüfan and Du Yuting’s papers are well worth reading. They are (1) Chen Lüfan’s *Nanzhao Kingdom: A State Not Founded by the Thai People* and *A Preliminary Analysis of the Important Cultural Relics of the Nanzhao and Dali Kingdoms*, and (2) Du Yuting and Chen Lüfan’s *Whether Kublai Khan’s Conquest of the Dali Kingdom Gave Rise to the Mass Migration of the Thai People to the South?*<sup>95</sup>

In view of the studies made by Chinese and foreign scholars, I have to say that most of the foreign researchers do not know what Kublai Khan conquered is Dali, not Nanzhao, and their arguments are not buttressed by clear, hard and adequate facts.

In Chinese works, many foreign authors and their works cited by Chinese scholars do not have original-language references and do have spelling errors and confusions, and some people are believed that they have not yet read all the original texts in full and only use other people's Chinese translations, thus causing misunderstandings. For example, Jiang Yingliang writes that Wilhelm Credner, in his *Cultural and Geographical Observations Made in the Tali (Yunnan) Region with Special Regard to the Nanzhao Problem*, claims that the independent kingdom of Nanzhao established by the Thai was a powerful enemy of the Han in the Tang Dynasty, Nanzhao King was called Prince Thai, and Geluofeng's name should be written as *Kunluanfeng* in accordance with Siam's customary naming practice. According to Jiang, W. Credner's original is in German, translated into English by Erick Seidenfaden, and then into Chinese by He Youmin, which was published in Bangkok in 1931.<sup>96</sup> Credner's conclusion quoted by Jiang Yingliang in Chinese is probably based on this Chinese translation, not German or English ones, and even Credner's name and paper title are incorrectly spelled. However, other scholars who have read his work concluded that back in 1930s Wilhelm Credner, who visited the Yunnan region in 1930, already doubted that ethnic Tai people had ever settled in the area around Tali.<sup>97</sup> German scholar B. J. David<sup>98</sup> also claimed that in 1935, Credner first raised systematic doubts about the Thai nature of Nanzhao.<sup>99</sup>

Some researchers say that Hall is in favour of the argument of Nanzhao as a Tai kingdom. However, as mentioned before, D.G.E. Hall claims that Nanzhao Kingdom in Yunnan was inhabited by the Tai people, but the rulers were another race.<sup>100</sup> In the light of this, it is hard to say that Hall is fully in favour of the argument of Nanzhao as a Tai kingdom.

In some Chinese versions, the translation of the original works seems to be unsatisfactory. For example, as some commentators put it, in *Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*,<sup>101</sup> there are some mistaken ideas about Vietnamese history, and its published Chinese translation also has many mistakes. In Chinese version, D.G.H. Hall writes that the conquest of Nanzhao kingdom by Mongolia's Kublai Khan in 1253 prompted a stronger jubilant mood among the Thai people.<sup>102</sup> I simply don't know what this jubilant mood means. I do not know if it is due to Hall's original or simply the Chinese translation.

In a sense, the Chinese writings on the Tai resemble telling a part for the whole like the blind men trying to size up the elephant, or Ryunosuke Akutagawa's *Rashomon*, or Argentine author Jorge Luis Borges's short stories depicting the copy of sth. It is necessary for Chinese scholars to read all those

original works more faithfully and carefully. At least I personally would love to be the first one, for some of the above-listed ideas of foreign scholars are copies of Chinese translations, not the ones in original. Old foreign-language classical books are rare and hard to find in China.

One point for attention is that although Joachim Schliesinger writes that in many local legends Nanzhao kingdom was not of Tai origin, but it is wrong to say they were of Indian origin, and the kingdom of Tien (Dian, short for Yunnan) was not in Tali (present-day Dali) but in Kunming. Nanzhao's ethnic people include ethnic Tai people.

In ancient times, besides a large number of modern Yi and Bai's ancestors, there were also many Dai ancestors in river valley in today's Erhai lake area. The names of some Dai languages in the records of Nanzhao in historical books are the local reflection of the Dai ancestors' culture at that time. In the middle of the eighth century, with the support of the Tang dynasty, Nanzhao unified the Erhai lake region and established a slavery regime with Wuman (today's Yi) and Baiman (Bai today) as the main body. A small number of Mangman leaders, such as Zhao Longxili, also served in Nanzhao. However, due to Nanzhao's unification war and subsequent wars, the Mangman tribes originally living in the Erhai region and its south were forced to move southward along both sides of the Lancang river and into the present Jingdong, Jinggu, Menglian, Xishuangbanna and beyond.<sup>103</sup>

In ancient times, although Baiman and Wuman were the main parts of ethnic groupings around Erhai lake, there were also a large number of the Dai ancestors, mainly concentrated in today's Yunxian, Huaping, Midu, Yunlong, Eryuan and the Yangtze river valley. Before the Sui and Tang dynasties, there were a large number of Dai ancestors in Erhai lake area. They influenced each other culturally with Baiman and Wuman, so that many cultural phenomena remain to this day.<sup>104</sup>

Since the later period of Nanzhao, with the rise of the Dai in politics, economy and military, the vast area south of Nanzhao's *Jiedu* of the Dai moved northward continuously, merging into the originally Yue people's area and went deep into areas without the Yue people. Nanzhao's *Jiedu* Prefecture at Yinsheng had to move from Jingdong to Chuxiong.<sup>105</sup>

Since the Han dynasty, especially Nanzhao in the Tang dynasty and Dali in the Song dynasty, there have been many scenic spots and historic sites between the mountains and rivers of Dali, which are of great significance for exploring the origin of the Dai people. For example, Nanzhao's leader Piluoge

unified in 738 the Erhai lake region, with the support of the Tang dynasty, and was repeatedly feuded by the Tang dynasty. In the same year, it moved its capital from Weishan to Taihe City (Taihe village in Dali today). From then on, Dali became the ruling center of Nanzhao.

In 766, Geluofeng set up the Dehua Stele in Taihe village, describing the early history of Nanzhao and its relationship with the Tang dynasty, and telling in detail the beginning and end of the war in the reign of Tianbao of Emperor Xuanzong. On Nanzhao's this stele there are many Dai names, and even Zhao Longxili was named. He was appointed to the court as a high-ranking official, leading to the position of *dajunjiang* (army general).

The Three Pagodas were built in the Tang and Song dynasties and are located in the site of Chongsheng Temple at the foot of Yingle peak in Cangshan mountains, northwest of Dali city. The Monument of Kublai Khan Suppressing Yunnan in the Yuan dynasty is located in the ruins of Yangjumie city at the foot of Cangshan mountains' Zhonghe peak (in Third Month Fair today), which was set up in 1304. The inscription describes the achievements of Kublai Khan, who led the troops to annihilate Dali in 1253.<sup>106</sup>

At present, the theory of Nanzhao as a Dai kingdom has been abandoned in academic circles. For example, although the study of the early history of Nanzhao and its early relations with Thais started very late in Thailand, a quick progress has been made since 1978. More and more scholars have abandoned the theory of Nanzhao as a Thai kingdom. Thailand's history textbooks have also been revised, and they no longer affirm that Nanzhao was a country established by the Thai. In the former Soviet Union, Vietnam, Myanmar, Japan and other countries, scholars have also abandoned the old and unfounded theory of Nanzhao as a Thai kingdom.<sup>107</sup>

### **From Dali to Kunming : Road Trip Like Marco Polo Makes**

The raindrops came pattering on the roofs and window panes in the early morning of January 5 when it was still dark. It was wonderful to imagine that Marco Polo came here in Daliten days after visiting Yachi (now Kunming) in 1284 in the Yuan dynasty.

Marco Polo writes in his travels: "Leaving the city of Yachi and travelling ten days in a westerly direction, you reach the chief city of the province of Karajan (the city of Ta-li, located on a great lake)...Gold is found in the rivers,... there are also veins of it in the mountains. " They used gold and cowrie shells as currencies, with the latter brought from India. These people

never took virgins for their wives. The local people killed and ate crocodiles which gall was a highly valued medicine, and "...the horses are of a large size, and while young, are carried to India for sale". All their arrows were poisoned. Many persons always carried poison with the intention of swallowing it in case they were captured and faced torture. But their rulers...always had dog dung which they made the accused swallow, causing him to vomit the poison. Thus an antidote was ready against the tricks of these wretches. He found that these people were addicted to the following brutal custom: When any stranger of fine quality and personal appearance happened to lodge at the house of one of them, he was murdered during the night - not for the sake of his money, but in order that the spirit of the dead person, endowed with his talents and intelligence, might remain with the family, and all their affairs might thus prosper.<sup>108</sup>

Firstly, we had breakfast in a restaurant on a street lined by cherry trees with pink-coloured flowers. However, the life was not a bowl of cherries, not all cakes and ale: the restaurant owners, a middle-aged couple complained that they were laid off from a State-owned enterprise, and had to eke out an existence by selling food here.

In the Tang dynasty, the teas produced in Menghai and six tea mountains were transported to Tibet through Puer and Xiaguan, and became an indispensable drink in Tibetan people's life, because Tibetans mainly ate barley, cow, mutton and milk, and tea could help digestion. Tibetan businessmen often rushed horses to Xiaguan and changed tea from Puer, forming a famous "tea-horse market" in history.<sup>109</sup> Xiaguan's *tuocha* (a bowl-shaped compressed mass of tea leaves) produced by Xiaguan Tea Factory is very famous. In 2015, China Central Television Station was airing its commercial.

At 8:42, we headed for Kunming on the express highway, parallel to the Burma Road. If we had proceeded southward for about 70 kilometers, we would have got to Weishan county, which was the place where the Nanzhao kingdom was originated, that is, the first king Xinuluo rose to power. The fourth king of Nanzhao was Piluoge. As I put it before, in 737 in the Tang dynasty, he led the army, with the support of the Tang dynasty, and put down other five zhaos and the next year he won the victory of annihilating the five zhaos. Then he made expeditions eastward against the thirty-seven so-called Man barbarian tribes, and established the Nanzhao kingdom. In 738, the capital of Taihe was moved from Weishan to Taihe city (now Taihe village in Dali). It is important to note that he was of Yi ethnic group.

Next to Weishan is Midu county, where a lot of Nanzhao's cultural relics were found, including the Iron Pillar of Nanzhao in Tiezhu temple of the county seat. It was built in 872 during the Tang dynasty, 3.3 meters tall and 1.05 meters in circumference. It is an important material for the study of Nanzhao religious sacrifice and smelting technology. Baiya city site is located in Gucheng village, Hongyan district. It covers an area of about 90,000 square meters. It has been reclaimed as a good farmland. Now there are only three walls and flag blocks respectively in the north, south and east. It is considered as a part of Baiyacheng site in the time of Nanzhao. The ancient site of Jindianwo is located behind Xinfu village in Hongyan district, covering an area of more than 100,000 square meters. There is a racetrack in the south of the site and a horse-washing pond in the north, and a building of the Golden Palace in the center. In front of the palace there are flag blocks and other relics. There are a large number of Nanzhao's scraps of ancient tiles and bricks unearthed, which is initially considered as a new city built by Nanzhao's Geluofeng.<sup>110</sup>

We passed through Xiangyun, where the name Yunnan was first used in the Western Han dynasty. In 1276, Sayyid Ejjell changed the administrative divisions of *Wanhu*, *Qianhu*, and *Baihu* set up during the military rule to *lu*, *fu*, *zhou* and *xian*, establishing Yunnan *Xingzhongshu* Province, and relocating the administrative center from Dali to Zhongqing (present-day Kunming). Since then, "Yunnan" has officially become the name of administrative divisions at the provincial level.<sup>111</sup> Yunnanyi is still used to name a small town on Burma Road. Xiangyun airport was built in the WWII, one of the stop over on the Hump airline from Assam to Kunming.

Now we were travelling in Chuxiong, the Yi's autonomous prefecture. This was also the land where the Dai once occupied and prospered, but later moved to other places, leaving the land mostly to the Yi. Today, Chuxiong Yi autonomous prefecture is no longer the main area inhabited by the Dai, but a large number of place names originating from the Dai language reflect that there were many Dai ancestors in these areas at that time. In Yuanmou county, there are more than 500 ethnic names, of which 316 are Dai names. Today, the Dai residents here are less than 1% of the residents.<sup>112</sup>

According to the statistics around 2008, there were 36,000 Dai people on Jinsha river, the upper reaches of the Yangtze, including 9,602 in Lijiang's Huaping and Yongsheng counties, 18,018 in Chuxiong's Dayao, Wuding and Yongren counties and 3,904 in Kunming's Luquan county (90 km north of Kunming city). In addition, there were 2,302 Dai people in Panzhihua city

(which borders Yunnan on the southern edge of Sichuan province) and 1,935 people in Liangshan's Huili county, both in Sichuan province. According to ancient Chinese documents, Xichang, Huili and Miyi in the Jinsha river valley in southern Sichuan province were the living areas of the Liao (Laos), the Dai's ancestors during the Wei and Jin dynasties (220-420). Chinese anthropologists believe that the Liaos may have the same origins with the Dai ancestors. A part of the Dai in Wuding county moved from Huili and Miyi. The Dai in Huaping and Yongsheng counties of Lijiang city may also have migrated from southern Sichuan. However, in Chuxiong's Dayao, Yongren and Luquan counties, most of the Dai moved northward from Longchuan, Tengchong, Midu, Nanjian, Jingdong and Jinggu counties in west Yunnan during the Ming and Qing dynasties due to wars, except for some of the Dai ancestors who might have moved from southern Sichuan.<sup>113</sup>

In 1900, H. R. Davies went to the Jinsha river to investigate the feasibility of the railway to be built there. He passed through Luquan county and saw several Dai villages along the Pudu river. He inquired about their origins. He writes that to his surprise, there were several Shan villages along the river. He never expected them to live so far north. Although they claimed to have emigrated from Awa hundreds of years ago. But this statement is rather vague. It seems likely that they originated from the Shan State, which belonged to Burma at that time, and had no priests or monks when they emigrated, thus losing their literary and Buddhist beliefs, although they still spoke Shan language. It was really an interesting question to find out where they came from. They had no idea where they came from or why they moved here.<sup>114</sup> The Dai live across the Jinsha river in Yunnan and Sichuan provinces. There are more Dai migrating northward from Jingdong in the south, which is contrary to the trend of the Dai migrating southward after the Yuan dynasty.<sup>115</sup>

In the Yuan dynasty, the distribution of the Dai further expanded with migration, reaching the Jinsha river basin in the northernmost and connecting with Vietnam in the southernmost. In the middle and late Ming dynasty, with the advance and retreat of the Dai and some Dai chieftain forces in Luchuan, western Yunnan, many Dai people moved into the inland, and the distribution of the Dai expanded to Chengjiang, Lufeng, Luquan, Dayao, Shuangbai and Qujing.<sup>116</sup> This is how the Dai people on the Jinsha river came to be the northernmost ones in China. Now there are Wanma and Yongxing Dai townships in Yongren county, and Dongpo Dai township in Wuding county, both in Chuxiong prefecture.



At 14:18, we reached West Kunming Toll Gate. When seeing the memorial arch in downtown Kunming, Donovan Webster stared “at the West Gate again, remembering the road’s other end, with its patchy mud and asphalt, all the way back in India.”<sup>117</sup> But for me, Kunming’s west gate should be here in the suburbs of Kunming. I believe Prof. Phukon was likely to think of India at the other end of the road. He would say “India!” when seeing the poor, potholed road on the way into the city proper. That meant the road here was as poor as those in India. “Our roads don’t have a few potholes,” former Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee once complained to aides in the mid-1990s. “Our potholes have a few roads.”<sup>118</sup>

To be continued

### Notes and references

1. When writing the end of my present article, I was distressed to learn of the passing away on July 12, 2019 of Prof. Xie Yuanzhang ( a.k.a. Cheah Yanchong or Yanyong Chiranakorn) at the ripe age of ninety. He was a learned scholar on Dai/Thai studies, and his death is a great loss to the circles of Tai studies across southern China, Southeast Asia and South Asia. For this reason, my article is dedicated to him. It deserves to be mentioned that Prof. Xie received Prof. Girin Phukon on December 26, 2014, organizing a group of scholars on Dai/Thai studies with Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences. It helped make Prof. Phukon’s fieldwork successful in Yunnan
2. Policy Research Center of CPC Committee in Yunnan Province, Office of the Compiling Committee of Chronicles of Yunnan Province, eds. *Survey of Yunnan’s Prefectures, Cities and Counties: Dehong Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture*. Kunming: Yunnan People’s Publishing House, 1987.6 (in Chinese)
3. Compiling Group of *A Survey of Dehong Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture*. A Survey of Dehong Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture. Mangshi: Nationalities Publishing House of Dehong, 1986.24 (in Chinese)
4. Ibid. 24 -25
5. Wang Lianfang. *Wang Lianfang’s Recollections of Ethnic Work in Yunnan*. Kunming : Yunnan People’s Publishing House, 1999. 80 (in Chinese)
6. Of the Yi in Sichuan, Harrison E. Salisbury writes that no man ventured forth without a weapon—a knife or a bow and arrow, an old musket or a new submachine gun (Harrison E. Salisbury. *The Long March: The Untold Story*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1985.197)
7. For all these sources, see Wang Lianfang. op. cit. 81-82
8. According to one of the bodyguards to Mao Zedong, China’s late paramount leader, required that the bodyguards should not enter his room without making some kind of noises (such as clearing one’s throat) as a reminder.
9. Wang Lianfang. op. cit. 83
10. Steven Martin, Mic Looby, Michael Clark, et al. *Myanmar (Burma)* 8th edition. Melbourne Oakland London Paris: Lonely Planet Publications. 2002.51
11. Ibid. 362
12. Edmond R. Leach, *Political Systems of Highland Burma: A Study of Kachin Social Structure*. London: G. Bell and Sons, Ltd., 1954

13. Compiling Group of *A Brief History of the Dai*. A Brief History of the Dai. Kunming: Yunnan People's Publishing House, 1985.243 (in Chinese)
14. Anonymous. *Assam State*. <http://baike.haosou.com/doc/5651665.html>, accessed 2015-1-21 (in Chinese)
15. Cai Xiaohuang. *A Tour for the Cultural Exchange with the Tai in Assam, India*. [http://www.daizuwang.com/Article\\_Show.asp?ArticleID=4455](http://www.daizuwang.com/Article_Show.asp?ArticleID=4455), accessed 2015-8-7 (in Chinese)
16. Policy Research Center of CPC Committee in Yunnan Province, Office of the Compiling Committee of Chronicles of Yunnan Province, eds. op. cit. 145
17. Ibid. 145-146
18. Xu Zugen. Thai King's Sister "Visits Relatives". Southeast Asia, 1986 (1). In Chen Lüfan, ed. Proceedings of Researches on the Thai Origin and Nanzhao Kingdom (first of three volumes). Beijing : China Book Press, 2005. 315-316 (in Chinese)
19. The poem was composed on December 14, 1957 that was entitled *To My Burmese Friends*: "I live at the head of the river, and you at the end. We have an unlimited affection for each other and drink from the same river. I suck up water upstream and you downstream. The river never ceases to flow, and the drinkers are happy with each other. Growing with each other as close neighbors, the friendship is as old as green hills and as constant as flowing rivers. The countries are inter-connected with each other as mountains with rivers. Anti-imperialism delivers a freedom and peaceful unity. We are brothers and sisters speaking a common language. Solidarity and mutual assistance make peace a great force. One admires mighty waters on the river and praises high rocks on the mountain. Mountains after mountains are oriented to the north while rivers upon rivers flowing south." (Chen Yi. Selected Poems of Chen Yi. Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 1977. 200-202 (in Chinese)).
20. Compiling Group of *A Survey of Dehong Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture*. op.cit. 37
21. Jiang Xiaolin. Preface. In Anonymous. Cai Xiaohuang and Yue Xiaobao, trans. Zhaowuding Dynasty. Kunming: Yunnan Publishing Group, Yunnan People's Publishing House, 2014. 6-7 (in Chinese)
22. Policy Research Center of CPC Committee in Yunnan Province, Office of the Compiling Committee of Chronicles of Yunnan Province, eds. op.cit.147
23. Xiong Ling. Veteran Flying Tigers Initiate the Restoration of Flying Tigers Cemetery in Kunming. Yunnan Daily, 2007-09-25:2 (in Chinese)
24. Policy Research Center of CPC Committee in Yunnan Province, Office of the Compiling Committee of Chronicles of Yunnan Province, eds. op.cit.35.
25. Steven Martin, Mic Looby, Michael Clark, et al. op.cit. 361
26. Liu Liu, Zhang Ying, Li Shaoming. *Ruili: An Open and Inclusive City of Immigrants*. Yunnan Daily, 2009-09-23:6 (in Chinese)
27. In April 1991, I visited Ruili and its adjacent areas for the investigation of border communities management project sponsored by Yunnan people's government. The border trade market was a bunch of simple tents, but my co-workers and I were dazzled by the endless array of beautiful commodities there.
28. Also called Jiugu by Chinese.
29. My own translation.
30. Li Shaoming, Liu Liu, Zhang Ying. *Ruili: The Largest Overland Port Between China and Myanmar*. Yunnan Daily, 2009-10-3: 3 (in Chinese)
31. Liu Liu, Zhang Ying, Li Shaoming. op. cit.

32. Steven Martin, Mic Looby, Michael Clark, et al. op.cit. 341
33. Ibid. 362
34. Policy Research Center of CPC Committee in Yunnan Province, Office of the Compiling Committee of Chronicles of Yunnan Province, eds. op.cit. 147
35. Zhang Kefeng. Late Dinner Given by Mr. Fang Guoyu. *Reading Monthly*, 2019(6):144-153
36. Harrison E. Salisbury. *The Long March: The Untold Story*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1985. 197
37. Anonymous. *Buddha's Lock: The Story of an American Pilot Wandering Destitute in Daliangshan*. <https://www.a-site.cn/article/198068.html>, accessed 2019-06-5 (in Chinese). It is also rumored that before the Communist liberation in 1950, a female Han scholar conducted her fieldwork in Daliangshan's Yi area. Unfortunately, she was treated as a slave and was able to leave the Yi village only after the liberation in 1949
38. Baiyi refers to the minorities, especially the Dais, in west Yunnan.
39. Policy Research Center of CPC Committee in Yunnan Province, Office of the Compiling Committee of Chronicles of Yunnan Province, eds. op.cit. 146-147
40. Milton Rugoff, ed. *The Travels of Marco Polo*. New York: New American Library, a division of Penguin Group (USA) Inc. 1961. 160-163
41. See also Girin Phukon, ed. *Documents on Ahom Movement in Assam*. Moranhat: Institute of Tai Studies & Research, Assam, India, 2010. The book was presented to me by Prof. Phukon. The metaphor of the rise and fall of civilizations is found in many cases, such as the prosperity and decline of the Buendia family and Moconda the town they have built as well as of the city, the sexual desire of Dr. Juvenal Urbino, the forest, the beloved lady Fermina Daza respectively described by Gabriel Garcia Marquez. (Gabriel Garcia Marquez. *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. London: Penguin Books, 1972; Gabriel Garcia Marquez. *Love in the Time of Cholera*. London: Penguin Books, 2014)
42. Sarina Singh, Arnold Barkhordarian, Paul Harding, et al. *India*. 10th edition. Melbourne, Oakland, London, Paris: Lonely Planet Publications, 2003. 543
43. Steven Martin, Mic Looby, Michael Clark, et al. op.cit. 360-361
44. For more information of border areas, especially, of Kokang, please see LüNan. *Prisons of North Burma*. Beijing: China Nationality Art Photograph Publishing House, 2015.
45. American author Sherwood Anderson wrote his short story *The Egg*. Spanish painter Salvador Dali's oil painting *Persistence of Memory* (1931), represents that "metal attracts ants like rotting flesh", "ants, a common theme in Dali's work, represent decay, particularly when they attack a gold watch, and become grotesquely organic." This is his surrealist ambition (Harriet Schoenholz Bee, Joanne Greenspun, Cassandra Heliczer, et al, eds. *MoMA Highlights: 350 Works from The Museum of Modern Art, New York*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2013. 130)
46. Milton Rugoff, ed. op.cit. 162
47. Policy Research Center of CPC Committee in Yunnan Province, Office of the Compiling Committee of Chronicles of Yunnan Province, eds. op.cit. 127.
48. Girin Phukon, *Tai of Northeast Indian and Southeast Asia: A Study of Ethno-Cultural Linkage*. Guwahati, Assam 2019.
49. Cao Chengzhang, Zhang Yuanqing. *The Dai People*. Beijing: The Ethnic Publishing House, 1984. 22-23 (in Chinese) 50 Wang Lianfang. op.cit. 151
51. They include: Jiang Xiaolin. *Illustrated Records of the Ethnic Groups of the Dai in Yunnan in the Qing Dynasty*. Kunming: Yunnan Publishing Group, Yunnan People's Publishing House, 2014 (Dai Studies Series, with its deputy editors including Cai Xiaohuang

and the editorial committee members of Yang Guangyuan, Gong Jinwen, Cai Xiaohuang, et al.); Anonymous. Cai Xiaohuang and Yue Xiaobao, trans. Zhaowuding Dynasty. Kunming: Yunnan Publishing Group, Yunnan People's Publishing House, 2014 (photocopied with Chinese translation); Jiang Yingliang. *Collected Works of Jiang Yingliang on the Study of the Dai People's Ancient History*. Kunming: Yunnan Publishing Group and Yunnan People's Publishing House, 2014 (in Chinese); Cai Xiaohuang, Cai Rongnan and Si Qinzhang. *Basics of the Dai Language*. Kunming: Yunnan People's Publishing House, 2012; and Gong Jinwen. *Essentials of the Dai Language in Dehong*. Kunming: Nationalities Publishing House of Yunnan, 2009. These books are in Chinese.

52. Steven Martin, Mic Looby, Michael Clark, et al. op.cit.400
53. Zhang Yunfei. China, Myanmar Sign the Contract for Myanmar's Largest Hydropower Project. *Yunnan Daily*, 2005-07-16:4 (in Chinese)
54. Yunnan Provincial Library. Pictures Exhibition from the Literatures Collected in Yunnan Provincial Library for Yunnan's War of Resistance Against Japan and the 70th Anniversary of the Victory of China's War of Resistance Against Japan and World Anti-Fascist War, August 28, 2015. For more information on the Burma Road, see also Nicole Smith. *Burma Road*; Tan Pei-Ying. *The Building of the Burma Road*. New York, 1945; Field-Marshal Viscount Slim. *Defeat into Victory: Battling Japan in Burma and India, 1942-1945*. Cooper Square Press, 2000; Frank McLynn. *The Burma Campaign: Disaster into Triumph, 1942-45*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011.
55. Wang Lianfang. op. cit. 150-151
56. Now in 2019, there is a big sensation that the automakers in Nanyang, Henan province, China are designing autos with water as the source to produce hydrogen in order to propel the auto in generators.
57. More cases of being utterly destitute : One old man recalled that bringing children aged about five on the journey to the Northeast China to eke out an existence before the liberation in 1949, the female adults were found naked on their upper body with bare breasts to be seen (*Braving the Journey to the Northeast* (1), CCTV9, 2017-05-12).

Edgar Snow writes that some Chinese travelers told him of their horror: They found that the farmers in rural Sichuan were so poor that they couldn't afford to buy rags to cover their daughter's body, so girls at marrying age worked totally naked (Edgar Snow. *The Battle for Asia*. Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1942; Its Chinese translation: Edgar Snow. *Collected Works of Edgar Snow*, Vol 3. Beijing: Xinhua Publishing House, 1984. 171).

The Communist Red Army veteran Zeng Xianhui told Harrison E. Salisbury that in 1934 when entering with Mao Zedong's army the Miao areas in Guizhou, he had never seen anything like it-the poverty of these mountains. They lived so poor that women could not emerge from their huts-they had no clothes.They sat huddled in nakedness beside straw cooking fires, with the smoke issuing from a hole in the roof. Girls of seventeen and eighteen worked naked in the fields. Many families had only one pair of trousers to share among three or four adult males Almost everyone of the age of fifteen and above smoked opium.They sat outside their huts puffing their pipes with glazed eyes, men, women, teenagers.The men and teenagers often wore nothing but loin cloths, the women not even that. Here the poor peasants-and all of them were poor-lived in houses made of mud and lath, with thatched roofs. Zeng's mind in 1984 still held images of people huddled half-naked in rags along the roads and of passing out clothing he had confiscated from the few landlords.

Zhu De, one of the Red Army commanders, kept a notebook in which he jotted down his impressions of the countryside. Of Guizhou he noted: "Corn with bits of cabbage, chief food of people. Peasants too poor to eat rice... Peasant call selves 'dry men' - sucked

dry of everything... Three kinds of salt: white for the rich; brown for the middle classes; black salt residue of the masses... Poor hovels with black rotting thatch roofs everywhere. Small doors of cornstalks and bamboo... Have seen no quilts except in landlord houses in city..."

Salisbury also writes that in Guizhou it was said that no man possessed three silver dollars. The peasants were not slaves in the legal sense, but in many ways they were worse off than slaves. They owned no land. They were in debt to the landlord from birth to death. There was no escape. They sold their children if anyone would buy them. They smothered or drowned baby girls. That was routine. The boys were killed too if there was no market for them. The infant mortality rate in Guizhou in 1934 was about 50 percent. Life expectancy was about thirty years. Poverty was so intense there was little difference between a landlord and a peasant, at least among the minority people like the Miao and Dong. Illiteracy was total.

Zhu De's parents had five babies who were drowned because there was no way of feeding them. Zhu was given away to a childless relative and put into a school for landlords' sons.

In crossing the Yi areas in Liangshan, Sichuan, Salisbury writes: "Hans had driven the Yi into the hills, where they poked a meager living, herding sheep, cultivating a patch of corn or millet on the mountainside, living in such poverty that most men wore only a tattered cloak, women a rag or two, and children nothing..."

The Red Army lost a good many stragglers to the Yi. When they dropped behind, the Yi were on them in a flash. They did not waste bullets. They simply took their guns, if they had guns, robbed them of the food and knapsacks, stripped them of their clothes, and left them in the woods. Few of these naked soldiers managed to save themselves. They froze to death or starved in the mountains (Harrison E. Salisbury. *The Long March: The Untold Story*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1985. 124, 106, 107, 108, 83, 196, 199, 227, 230). For the discussion of famine, please refer to Armatya Sen's *Development as Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

58. Donovan Webster. Blood, Sweat, and Toil along the Burma Road. *National Geographic Magazine*, 2003(11): 96
59. Policy Research Center of CPC Committee in Yunnan Province, Office of the Compiling Committee of Chronicles of Yunnan Province, eds. *Survey of Yunnan's Prefectures, Cities and Counties: Dali Bai Autonomous Prefecture*. Kunming: Yunnan People's Publishing House, 1987. 1-2, 22 (in Chinese)
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61. He Shengda. The Origin and Bankruptcy of "Nanzhao-Is-a-Dai-Kingdom Theory". *Social Science in China*, 1990(3). In Chen Lüfan, ed. *Proceedings of Researches on the Thai Origin and Nanzhao Kingdom* (first of three volumes). Beijing: China Book Press, 2005. 539 (in Chinese)
62. Chen Lüfan, *Nanzhao Kingdom: A State Not Founded by the Thai People*. In Chen Lüfan. *Whence Came the Thai Race? - An Inquiry*. Beijing: China International Culture Press, 1994. 173 (in Chinese and English)
63. Ibid. 208-209
64. C.P. FitzGerald. *Southern Expansion of the Chinese People*. First published by Praeger Publishers, Inc., New York, 1972, and reprinted by White Lotus Co., Ltd. Bangkok, 1973. 51-52

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66. Gregorio F. Zaide. *History of Asian Nations*. Manila: National Book Store, Inc. 1980. 110-111
67. D. R. Sar Desai. *Southeast Asia: Past and Present*. 6th edition. Boulder: Westview Press, 2010. 31
68. Chen Lüfan. *op.cit.* 173-174
69. *Ibid.* 209
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71. Luo Shentian (Luo Changpei). On the Naming System of Linking Father and Son's Names Among Tibeto-Burman Peoples. *Humanities in Border Areas*. 1944. Vol. 1 (3-4) (in Chinese) 72
72. Chen Lüfan. *op.cit.* 209
73. *Ibid.* 173-174
74. Jiang Yingliang. *A History of the Dai*. Chengdu: Nationalities Publishing House of Sichuan, 1983. 634, 635 (in Chinese)
75. He Shengda. *op.cit.* 547.
76. Ma Changshou, *The Clan Composition and the Slavery System Within the Boundaries of the Nanzhao Kingdom*. Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 1962 (in Chinese)
77. Taipei: Liming Cultural Inc. 1976. 11-19 (in Chinese)
78. Chen Lüfan. *op.cit.* 209-210
79. *Ibid.*
80. Du Yuting and Chen Lüfan. Whether Kublai Khan's Conquest of the Dali Kingdom Gave Rise to the Mass Migration of the Thai People to the South? *Historical Studies (Beijing)*, 1978(2). See also You Zhong. *A History of Yunnan's Ethnic Groups*. Kunming: Yunnan University Press, 1994. 262-267 (in Chinese); Ma Yao, ed. *Yunnan: A Brief History*. Kunming: Yunnan People's Publishing House, 1983. 101-102 (in Chinese) For their English translations, see Chen Lüfan. *Nanzhao Kingdom: A State Not Founded by the Thai People*. In Chen Lüfan. *Whence Came the Thai Race? - An Inquiry*. Beijing, China International Culture Press, 1994. 261-293 (in Chinese and English)
81. Sao Saimong Mangrai. *The Shan States and the British Annexation*. Ithaca: Cornell University's Southeast Asian Program, Data Paper No. 57, 1965. 25
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83. Also spelled as Kwai.
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88. My own transliteration.
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93. Ibid. 14
94. For these sources, see Joachim Schliesinger, *Tai Groups of Thailand*, Vol. 1. Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 2001. 25-26, 27.
95. Chen Lüfan. op.cit. 173-228, 229-260, 261-293.
96. Jiang Yingliang. op. cit. 623-624.
97. Joachim Schliesinger. *Tai Groups of Thailand*, Ibid. p. 27.
98. My own transliteration.
99. B. J. David. Rethinking the Origin of the Thai People. *The Far East*, 1978 (25). Its Chinese translation: B. J. David. Shen Xu, trans. Rethinking the Origin of the Thai People. *Ethnic Translations*, 1989(4). In Chen Lüfan, ed. *Proceedings of Researches on the Thai Origin and Nanzhao Kingdom* (first of three volumes). Beijing: China Book Press, 2005. 124 (in Chinese)
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101. Nicholas Tarling, ed. *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992; Its Chinese translation: Nicholas Tarling, ed. He Shengda, et al. trans. *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*. Cambridge. Kunming: Yunnan People's Publishing House, 2003; Li Chenyang, Zhu Xianghui, eds. *A Review of Cambridge History of Southeast Asia and the Study of Southeast Asian History in China*. Guangzhou : World Book Inc., 2010
102. My own translation from the Chinese version.
103. Wang Yizhi, *A Study of the Origin of the Dai*. In Wang Yizhi. *Yunnan's History and Culture: A New Inquiry*. Kunming: Yunnan People's Publishing House, 1993. 93 (in Chinese)
104. Ibid. 75
105. Cang Ming. *Research on Yunnan's Culture of Migration*. Kunming: Nationalities Publishing House of Yunnan, 1997. 33 (in Chinese)
106. For these sources, see Policy Research Center of CPC Committee in Yunnan Province, Office of the Compiling Committee of Chronicles of Yunnan Province, eds. *Survey of Yunnan's Prefectures, Cities and Counties: Dali Bai Autonomous Prefecture*. Kunming: Yunnan People's Publishing House, 1987. 47, 634 (in Chinese)
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115. Wang Guoxiang, *Seeking Truth from Facts in the Dai People's History and Culture*. Kunming: Nationalities Publishing House of Yunnan, 2006. 48 (in Chinese)
116. Cang Ming. op.cit. 34
117. Donovan Webster. op.cit. 97
118. Don Belt. Fast Lane to the Future. National Geographic Magazine. 2008-10: 80. It reminded me of the road in Chicago as John Gunther describes: "...The icy wind screaming down snow-clogged boulevards; ...the automobilelike horns on the Illinois Central suburban trains; the steady lift of bridges, bridges, bridges; holes and bumps and mountains and earthquakes and yawning pits in the streets;..." (John Gunther. Inside U.S.A. New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1947. 370).



## Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflicts in Old Siam

Volker Grabowsky

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century Thailand is still one of the most centralised states in Southeast Asia.<sup>1</sup> This has not always been the case. Until the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the Kingdom of Siam, as Thailand was known until 1939, was divided into four classes of provinces (*müiang*) and a multitude of vassal states along its northern, eastern and southern borders. A unified royal administration did not yet exist. Some vassal states - Luang Prabang in the Northeast and Trengganu in the far South - now parts of Laos and Malaysia respectively, enjoyed a high degree of autonomy and hardly any interference from the Siamese government. However, their rulers, like those of the other vassal states, were obliged to send every three years tribute gifts such as the “gold and silver trees” as a token of political submission to Bangkok.<sup>2</sup>

A fairly large number of scholars contrast present-day Thailand with “good old Siam” in which provinces possessed autonomy and a multi-ethnic population lived together in harmony. Even though there is no doubt that premodern Siam was a Buddhist country, one is reminded of the tolerance that Buddhist Siamese showed to followers of other religions, especially Muslims and Christians. Things turned bad only with the transformation of the poly-ethnic and multi-cultural empire of Siam into a modern nation-state called Thailand. Though the project of “nation-building” already started under King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910) and his successor Vajiravudh (1910-1925),<sup>3</sup> it was the “revolution of 1932”, abolishing the absolute monarchy, that enforced the rapid transition of Siam into a unified and centralised nation-state.

The military dominated majority faction of the “People’s Party” (*Khano Ratsadòn*) under Field Marshal Phibul Songkhram played an ignominious role in this regard. On 24 June 1939, the seventh anniversary of the coup d’état of 1932, the “People’s Party” leaders decided to change the country’s name to Thailand (*Prather Thai*) arguing that “Siam” was just a name used by foreigners (“Farang” or Europeans, Khmer, Burmese, etc.) to denote the country. In contrast, the new international name “Thailand” resembled the ancient endonym “Müang Thai” which has been documented since the Ayutthaya Period and which, furthermore, takes into account that more than four-fifth of the population is made up of Tai ethnic groups.<sup>4</sup> However, the country’s new name also reflected the Pan-Thai ideology of the new non-aristocratic political elite conceiving Thailand as a nation-state potentially

encompassing even the Tai peoples living outside its borders (including the Lao, Shan, Tai Lü, Tai Dam, etc.). Pan-Thaiism abetted irredentist efforts paving the way to Thailand's entry into World War II at the side of Japan. Fortunately, Thailand got off lightly with her adventure with Pan Thaiism. But the legacy of Thai ultra-nationalism has repercussions until the present and thus poses an obstacle to a lasting solution of ethnic and religious conflicts, especially in the Deep South. This is the key argument of Dr. Chamvit Kasetsiri, one of Thailand's leading historians and former rector of Thammasat University.

For a couple of years Charnvit Kasetsiri has been heading a campaign that aims at renaming "Thailand" to its old name "Siam". Thereby he has taken up and even radicalised demands of royalist circles around M.L. Panadda Diskul, President of the Prince Damrong Rachanuphap Library, raised in May 2005, that both names - Thailand and Siam - should be used together at the occasion of King Bhumibol Adulyadej's 60<sup>th</sup> Throne Jubilee in 2007. The purportedly "undivisible" Thai nation (*chaat thai*) is systematically deconstructed by Charnvit and his followers. In fact "our country" Siam was the home of more than fifty ethnic groups, such as Thai, Lao, Khon Müang, Khou Isan, Mon, Khmer, Kui, diverse Chinese groups as Teochew, Cantonese and Hainanese, but also Malay, Lahu, Akha, Nyakur, Persians and esterners (*farang*) from different countries. To ensure that all these groups, some of which comprise only a few hundred speakers, were able to participate in social life on an equal footing, the discriminating name "Thailand" should be abandoned, the "ultra-nationalist sin" of 1939 be revoked and the harmonious order of multi-ethnic Siam be restored.<sup>5</sup>

Here is not the right place to discuss the chances of Charvit's campaign. Rather it shall be investigated to what extent Chamvit's basic assumption is in accordance with reality. *How harmonious were relations between peoples of different ethnic and religious background in old Siam?* In the first section of this essay I will provide some basic facts about the composition and structure of the population in pre-modern Siam. These are data about the demographic development in Siam until the early twentieth century and the ethnic and religious make-up of the country's population. Thereafter I will analyse the policy of the Siamese elite vis-à-vis the different ethnic and religious groups living in the empire. *Had this elite any conceptualisation of ethnicity? If this was the case, what was its impact on state and society?* These questions appear justified as constructivists and postmodernists argue that not only the very concept of nation is an invention of modernity but that ethnicity

is as well a modern construction which did play only a marginal role in premodern societies.<sup>6</sup> Ethnic loyalties, as far as they existed at all, were in general less important than personal bonds between the ruler and his followers. Or, as James Scott put it, “ethnic boundaries were labile, porous, and largely artificial”.<sup>7</sup> In the third and last section I will provide a case study of a political conflict in late nineteenth-century Siam with regard to its ethnic dimension.

### **The Population of Siam Prior to the Twentieth Century**

There are hardly any reliable sources on the size and composition of the population in pre-twentieth century Siam. Comprehensive censuses of the country, as a whole or only parts of it, were not carried out. Population registers comparable to the Burmese *sit-tans* do not exist. The Siamese Department of Registers (*krom suratsawadi*) maintained only long lists of able-bodied men who were eligible for corvée and military service or for tax payments. Therefore, the Siamese population registers are largely restricted to male commoners (*phrai*). Moreover, there was usually a distinction between different categories of *phrai* - namely those directly attached to the crown (*phrai luang*) and those attached to high-ranking noblemen (*phrai som*) - and between able-bodied men (*chai chakan*) and disabled persons (*khon phikan*).<sup>8</sup> But the large group of serfs or *that* (ทาส) making up roughly one quarter to one third of the total population as well as the women, children and elderly people (above 60 years old) were hardly counted.<sup>9</sup> Thus, even if one took the number of registered *chai chakan* and multiplied it by a certain factor - for example, four, five, or seven - to calculate the total population, one would at best arrive at very rough approximate results for specific regions but not for the whole kingdom. This problem is aggravated by the tendency that the rulers of vassal states (such as Chiang Mai and Nan in the north and Kedah in the south) communicated far smaller figures of *chai chakan* to the government in Bangkok that were actually living in the confines of their states. The reasons are easily comprehensible; as the size and scope of the tribute to be delivered by a vassal state depended on its natural resources and the size of its population.

Therefore, we have to rely on estimates which also derive from European visitors, diplomats, merchants or missionaries who had been living in same instances over many years in the country.<sup>10</sup> The frequently quoted figure of Simon de la Loubere, a French diplomat, mathematician and poet, who had been living in Siam during the reign of King Narai (1656-1688), claiming a total of 1.9 million inhabitants may well be based on complete census lists kept

at the royal court-in Ayutthaya, but-it reflected at best a snap-shot. Moreover, it remains unclear to which geographical area de la Loubère's figure refers. There is good reason to assume that at the turn of the nineteenth century only 2-3 million people inhabited the present-day territory of Thailand, half of which were concentrated in the Siamese core region of the central plains and the south. Lieberman's estimate of 3.5 million for the early nineteenth century appears too high.<sup>11</sup> Only as a result of a continuous and sustained growth in the second half of the century did the population of Thailand reach the size of eight million inhabitants by 1910.

Given present-day population figures (2013:68 million inhabitants), pre-modern Siam looked like a "land without people" (*Land ohne Volk*). It was exactly this impression which Sir John Bowring, chief representative of the British crown, got in his conversations with Siamese chief minister Somdet Cao Phraya Si Suriyawong. Bowring pointed at the huge natural resources - land, minerals, etc. - that Siam would have to exploit systematically: "See what a soil you have!" His Siamese counterpart responded laconically: "Yes, a soil, but no people. A soil without a people is but a wilderness."<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the small population was not evenly distributed over the country. In the contrary, the population was concentrated along the coasts and on both banks of the large rivers and their tributaries, whereas the interior and the delta regions, covered by mangrove forests were only very sparsely populated, if at all.<sup>13</sup> This pattern of population distribution is most perceptively described by British consular official Satow after an extensive journey through the central plains of Thailand:

The most striking feature of this part of the country, and the remark applies to some extent to the whole of Siam, is the large number of inhabitants, the extensive cultivation and comparative prosperity where means of communication exist, and the wildness and unproductiveness of the country 'where such means are inaccessible. Along the rivers and canals the traveller is surprised to find the country far more populous than previous ideas as to its condition may have led to expect. On the other hand, no sooner has he left the vicinity of a river or a creek, than he may wander for many hours, and sometimes for days, through uninhabited forests and uncultivated plains without meeting a village or even a single house. Roads, properly speaking, there are none, but only paths joining the chief towns or villages.<sup>14</sup>

High mortality rates due to endemic diseases occurring seasonally in the subtropical climate of Southeast Asia prevented any substantial natural increase of population over extended periods of time at least until the early nineteenth century.<sup>15</sup> In the face of demographic stagnation, the chronic shortage of manpower for building and maintaining a viable agricultural infrastructure could only be overcome through well-directed immigration policies. Refugees and other immigrants from neighbouring countries were welcome with good grace. Following the destruction of Champa by the Vietnamese in the seventeenth century, numerous 'Cham Muslims sought refuge in Cambodia where they were often given privileged positions in the civilian and military apparatus, their religious background notwithstanding. Since the mid-eighteenth century numerous Mon fled to Siam to escape Burmese repression. These Mon were extended a warm welcome as well. Suporn Ocharoen identifies at least seven major waves of Mon immigration to Siam, the largest wave occurring in 1815 when up to 40,000 Mon fled to Siam and Lan Na.<sup>16</sup>

Before the Chinese mass immigration to Siam and other parts of Southeast Asia got underway in the last third of the nineteenth century, voluntary migrations were insufficient to resolve the chronic demographic deficit of Southeast Asian polities. Their rulers frequently resorted to force to adjust perceived demographic imbalances. An essential feature of warfare in pre-colonial Southeast Asia was the control of manpower, not the conquest of land. Instead of fighting to incorporate weaker neighbours into their realms and administrative systems, Southeast Asian rulers seemed to be more interested in capturing people whom they could resettle in the heartland of their kingdoms. At the same time, the victorious side was usually content to establish a loose tributary relationship with the former enemy whose resources of manpower had been effectively reduced.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the accumulation of population by forced resettlement campaigns and slave-raiding tended to strengthen power as argued by some scholars.<sup>18</sup>

As a consequence of such migration movements - both voluntary migrations and forced resettlements - Siam, like most other Southeast Asian empires, had an ethnically highly diverse population. Nicolas Gervaise, who had been living four years, from 1683 until 1687, at the court of King Narai, reports that the Maenam Chao Phraya basin in central Siam was populated not only by Siamese but also by a large number of refugees and war captives from neighbouring countries making up more than one-third of the kingdom's population. Gervaise's work published for the first time in 1688 as "*Histoire naturelle et politique du royaume de Siam*" states :

There would be no kingdom in the Indies more populoua than Siam, if the same conditions as those that prevail on the banks of the rivers were to be found elsewhere. But those who like myself, have spent some time travelling there know that there are fearful deserts and vast wildernesses where one only finds wretched little butts (...). What has surprised me more is that, out of so small a total of inhabitants, over one-third should lie foreigners. Some of these foreigners are the descendants of people from Laos and Pegu whom the Siamese took as prisoners of war and brought into the kingdom in captivity about two hundred years ago. (...) They were first given lands to cultivate, and truces were levied on the profits they earned from their labour.<sup>19</sup>

Khmer villages in Ratchaburi, Phuan settlements in Lopburi, Lao enclaves in Saraburi and Phanat Nikhom (Chonburi) remind us of the deportations and forced resettlements carried out by the Siamese rulers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. At turn of the twentieth century, descendants of these war captives still made up majorities or at least substantial minorities in large areas of the Siamese heartland.<sup>20</sup>

### **The Political Role of Ethnicity in Siam**

Now it is time to consider the question originally raised. Did a conceptualisation of ethnicity exist in pre-modern Siam? If such is the case, which role did ethnicity play for the organisation of state and society? In the eyes of the Siamese monarchy and the ruling aristocracy the multi-ethnicity of Siam was an undeniable fact. Thus King Chulalongkom carried the official title “Lord of the lands of the Siamese and the Lao, and sovereign over Malaya”.<sup>21</sup> Siamese literature of the Ayutthaya and early Bangkok periods allude to the ethnic diversity of the kingdom in many ways. The famous epic *Khun Chang Khun Phaen* (ขุนช้างขุนแผน) mentions a scene where a diverse group of people come together to attend a public event :

ต่างแดนตื้นถิ่นกันมาออกอีจ้อ  
ไทย, จีน, พม่า, ข่า, ลาว, ลื้อ  
งมมือลูกหลานชวนเข้าไป<sup>22</sup>

They come together in large numbers, excited and noisy,  
Thai, Chinese, Burmese, Kha, Lao, [Tai] Lü.  
Leading their children and grand-children by their hand, they squeeze in.

In *Krai Thong* (ไกรทอง), a theatre play (*bot lakhòn nòk*) composed by King Rama II on the basis of a Siamese folk tale we find a similar trope :

ทั้งจีน, เขก, พวน, ญวน, ทวาย  
ต่างถวายลูกเคี้ยวหน้า  
เขมร, มอญ, ชาวชุมพร, ไชยา  
ทุกภาษามาพึ่งบารมี<sup>23</sup>

Chinese, Khaek (Malay), Phuan, Yuan (Vietnamese), and Tavoyans  
Burmese from Tenasserim)

subdue themselves (literally, present their offspring to the King,  
give their faces).

Khmer, Mon and the people of Chumphon and Chaiya,

[people of] all languages depend on the grandeur of the King.

A third example from classical Thai literature comes from the upper north of Thailand. It is a travel poem (*nirat*), probably composed in the first half of the seventeenth century, describing the deportation of war captives in 1615 from Chiang Mai to Pegu, the capital of Burma at that time. “Mangthra’s War Against Chiang Mai”, a poem composed in *khlóng* verse form (โคลงมังฆราวาทราบเชียงใหม่), is one of the great classical works of Lan Na literature. It has been edited first in 1980 by the late Singkha annasai, a famous scholar of Lan Na language, literature and culture, and recently been critically re-edited by the Thai Royal Institute (TRI) in 2009. In verse 105 (TRI : verse 102/2 (...)) the poem states :

ชาวชนช้างม้าจาก	เจียรคลา มากเฮย
หนองครอบครวทางมา	เนื่องนั้น
ไทเมืองมานชวา	ขัมขิว ครวเฮย
เพียงแมลงมายนล้ำน	ผู้ห้อง หงสา

Numerous people, elephants and horses are moving forward.

On route, they [reached] Nong Kbp,<sup>24</sup> a non-ending convoy.

[These people are] Tai, Mon, Burmese (*man*), and Lao (*chawa*).<sup>25</sup>

They are driven forward relentlessly.

Densely crowded like termites during their swarming period, they  
make their way to Hongsawadi (Pegu).<sup>26</sup>

It may be doubted whether the Burmese troops, after having successfully quelled the Chiang Mai rebellion, rounded up and deported to Pegu a sizeable number of ethnic Burmese and Mon who - if any of them had been living in Chiang Mai in the early sixteenth century - were most likely civilian and military personal loyal to Burmese overlordship. Therefore their explicit mention in the poem should rather be interpreted as a literary expression of the multi-ethnic character of seventeenth Chiang Mai and Lan Na society.

Ethnic diversity in old Lan Na is also reflected in the Siamese travel poem Lilit Phayap (ลิลิตพายัพ) which was composed in 1906 by crown prince Va iravudh, the later King Rama VI (r. 1910-1925), after his visit in 1905/06 to Chiang Mai and other former Tai Yuan vassal states, now integrated into the centralized Siamese administrative system as Monthon Phayap (Northwestern Circle). His Highness acknowledges the presence of both lowland Tai and hilltribe groups in the large crowd joyfully greeting the representative of the Siamese crown :

บางหมู่รวมหมู่ร้อง โท่ร้องทวยเอกราช ฝ่ายล้านนาค่งเชียง มพร้อมใจใคร่รวมกระวีกร อธิษย์เซิมเฮ็ดไถ่ คาวินชัตติยุมาร  
ไทยเมืองพระยาอินทปัตย์ หมู่เล็ดทวยคตสันนถอง หัวบึงกลองยั้งพะเง็ด มุ่ชอกอชู่บรมตุ้ พระพุทธหม่อให้ ยักหัดจันมือเกศไหว  
นศบนี้ดมนี้ศบสน (... ..) ถวายออกหน้าพิลลพลา เพื่อศัตนชาบวมนเท (... ..) ยังเสเียมพึงเียง สร้อยส่งเซียงกลองพิล  
ไทยเมืองมุ่เชอเื่องว เค็ดวลคพลามเข้าทวาม บวชฎามากทวยมเมมมี งามย้านเื่องวัก ความนิกคี่แต่ทวเข้า ยุกั้มคชปภกเล  
ไพร่พิลลชู่เื่อง

[I] saw the people hailing me, the crown prince. The musketeers shot boisterously twentyone times to paying their respect to the crown prince. The Thai Müang (Tai Yuan) rushed in large crowds the Ngiao (Shan) squeezed in taking a look, the Yao (Mien) squatted raising their heads up, the Musoe (Lahu) crowded around and looked at the young prince. They all raised their hands over their heads to pay respect with humility and admiration. (... ..) When I walked out in front of the pavilion to watch the procession (...) [I] watched the dancers singing praises of glory. Thai Müang, Musoe and Ngiao participated in the procession. The masses speaking numerous languages pledged their loyalty to His Majesty, the King, [who rules his] subjects (*phrai fa*) so that they live in peace.<sup>27</sup>

At first glance the ethnic groups in pre-modern Thailand - whether Lao or Vietnamese, Mon or Malay, Chinese or Khmer, Shan or Lahu - appear as constituents of a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society par excellence to use a fashionable modern paradigm. However, the basic dichotomic differentiation was between the Buddhist and non-Buddhist subjects of the King; this was of



much more importance than the differentiation between Tai ethnic groups (Thai/Siamese, Lao, Khon Müang, Shan, etc.) on the one side and non-Tai ethnic groups on the other side. The oldest Northern Thai chronicles, dating from the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, such as *Mūlasāsanā*, *Jinak lam līpakaranam* or *C madevīvamsa*, also called chronicles of Lan Na Buddhism, distinguish between the Buddhist people of the lowlands (predominantly Tai) and the non-Buddhist autochthonous population called *Milakkhu* (Sanskrit : *Mleccha*)<sup>28</sup> In other texts of the region, such as the chronicles of *Sipsòng Panna*, and *Müang Yòng*, we find the ethnonym *Thamin* or *Tharnila*. It seems evident that ethnic stereotypes which are embodied in Indian prototype chronicles (for example, the Sinhalese *Mah vamsa*), have been conferred to the ethnic divide between Buddhist lowlanders and non-Buddhist highlanders prevalent in the Tai-Thai-Lao world.<sup>29</sup>

The bulk of the highland population consisted of *Lawa* (also ‘*Lua*’ or ‘*Wa*’) and other Austroasiatic peoples who formed a symbiotic relationship with the Tai based on both, ritual and economic exchange. Their sense of cultural superiority notwithstanding, the Tai rulers of Lan Na, *Sipsòng Panna*, and other polities in the Upper Mekong region regarded their Austroasiatic subjects as an integral and essential component of their *müang* and appreciated their loyalty in times of common threat.<sup>30</sup> Inter-marriage between Buddhist Tai rulers and daughters of *Lawa/Lua* chiefs was not uncommon.<sup>31</sup> Conversion to Buddhism was, however, a precondition for becoming accepted as a member of Tai society.

Siamese sources also confirm that Buddhist ethnic groups constituted a special category vi-à-vis all other segments of the population. Under King *Thai Sa* (พญาสุธรรม) or *Phrachao Phumintharacha* (r. 1709-1733) activities of Catholic missionaries that were quite in successful among ethnic Lao, many of whom lived in impoverished conditions, became submitted to severe restrictions. A royal decree of 1730 prohibited the Catholic bishop :

- a) to teach and propagate the Gospel to Thai, Mon, and Lao;
- b) to publish and distribute Christian pamphlets in Pali or Thai;
- c) to instigate Thai, Mon, and Lao through cajolery and deception to convert to Christianity;
- d) to criticize Buddhism.<sup>32</sup>

In a later decree it was forbidden to propagate the Gospel in Siam in one of the following languages : Thai, Mon, Lao, Yuan (Vietnamese),<sup>33</sup> and

Chinese. It is insightful that the above mentioned decree does not mention any of the many Muslim groups who had established their own quarters in the Siamese capital Ayutthaya, such as Persians, Malays, Indians and Javanese. The Siamese state was obviously not concerned with Christian proselytism among non-Buddhist ethnic groups which seemed to respect the sensibilities of the Siamese Buddhist authorities more. "In Siam there are people of many languages and nationalities, such as Moors, Malay, Chinese, Khmer, and many others. All these people, however, believe in their own religion without criticising the Thai religion (Buddhism). We ourselves refrained from criticising Christianity. Thus why does the archbishop (*sangkharat*) slander our religion?"<sup>34</sup> Finally, in 1763, a law was promulgated prohibiting the sexual intercourse between Thai, Mon and Lao - i.e., Buddhists - with French, English, Indians, Malays and other groups showing "wrong beliefs" (*micch dīṭhi*) "in order not to misguide the population."<sup>35</sup>

How did members of different ethnic groups live together in everyday life? Did tensions or conflicts exist in Siam's multi-ethnic and - at least in the capital and several provincial towns - also multi-religious society? In Ayutthaya the various nationalities lived separately in their own quarters. A seventeenth-century map of Ayutthaya identifies quarters of Mon, Malay, Japanese, Chinese, but also of French and Dutch (see map).<sup>36</sup> But how was the situation in the countryside? It seems that different ethnic groups lived here also separately in their own villages. However, the Siamese government tried to prohibit the formation of village clusters belonging to the same ethnic group in larger territorial units. Mon and Lao settlements were usually surrounded by Siamese villages, thereby favouring the gradual assimilation of minority populations in the long run.<sup>37</sup> As ethnically mixed villages were still quite rare until far into the nineteenth century,<sup>38</sup> it is not surprising that village headmen usually belonged to the same ethnic group as the large majority of villagers. In old Siam, the organisation of manpower surpassed the confines of natural villages. Those commoners (*phrai*) obliged to work in the king's service for three to four months a year (*phrai luang*) were organised in divisions (*kòng*). The *phrai luang* living in the same geographical area were organised in different divisions, contingent on their member's ethnic descent and places of origin. The leader of such a division (*nai kòng*) normally belonged to the same descent group to ensure the loyalty of the *phrai* towards the Crown and to obviate ethnic conflicts.<sup>39</sup>

This provision turned out to be very reasonable as the following incident demonstrates: In the province of Ratchaburi, located 80 kilometres southwest

of Bangkok, a large number of Tai Yuan from Chiang Saen and Chiang Rai had been resettled in 1804. Their descendants, considered by the Siamese authorities as a “Lao” sub-group, lived in Ratchaburi alongside with Lao war captives from Vientiane and Tai Dam (“Lao Song”) who had been moved to the region at the end of the eighteenth century. When in the early 1860s the head of a *kòng* whose members originated from Chiang Rai passed away, it was planned to appoint a descendant of Chiang Rai war captives as his successor. However, the leader of another *kòng* whose *phrai* were from Thoeng, a small township situated half-way between Chiang Rai and Chiang Saen proposed to appoint one of his own followers to the vacant position. The Siamese governor of Ratchaburi rejected this proposal with the argument that this would jeopardize the stability of the “Chiang Rai *kòng*”.<sup>40</sup>

### **The Ethnic Dimension of Political Conflicts**

Until far into the second half of the nineteenth century the co-existence of diverse ethnic groups in the Siamese empire seemed to be without serious tensions at least on the local level. The self-administration of ethnically separated hamlets, villages, and labour units may have significantly contributed to avoiding or minimizing inter-ethnic conflicts. However, it may be disputed whether political and social conflicts in old Siam lacked in general any ethnic dimension. The harsh retaliatory measures of the Bangkok government against the rebellious sultanates of Patani (1808/9) and Kedah (1821 and 1839) are considered from *present-day* Malay-Muslim perspective as brutal repression of the Buddhist Thai state directed against vassal states which had a completely different ethnic and religious make-up. Nevertheless, the Siamese punitive expeditions against Patani and Kedah were not primarily motivated in ethnic or religious terms but resulted from a particular need for legitimation of the Chakri kings that was closely linked with the notion of Buddhist kingship emphasizing the moral superiority (*bun barami*) of the supreme suzerain - the “righteous king” (*dhammar ja*) and “world conqueror” (*cakravartin*) - over his vassals. During the whole early Bangkok period it was considered an iron rule of inter-state relations : “Once a vassal, always a vassal”.<sup>41</sup>

This principle was applied even stronger and more vigorously whenever the control of a Buddhist vassal state was at stake. The rebellion of a Buddhist vassal, such as that of the Lao king Anuvong of Vientiane in 1827/28 provoked much harsher reactions from the Siamese side than the likewise threatening uprising of the Malay Sultan of Kedah ever did. As a consequence of the most

violent suppression of the “Cao Anu Rebellion”, Vientiane was completely destroyed, the Lao kingdom of Vientiane dismantled and a large section of its population living on the east bank of the Mekong river was moved to the Khorat Plateau and the Siamese core region in the central plains. Whether the bloody conflict between Bangkok and Vientiane did possess a “proto-nationalist” dimension of a “Siamese-Lao War” as argued by several Lao historians,<sup>42</sup> may be disputed. Neither did Luang Prabang support Cao Anu’s move politically and militarily nor did the king of Vientiane succeed in rallying the majority of Lao *müang* in the Khorat Plateau to his cause. The Lao governors of Kalasin and Khemnarat even actively supported the Siamese counter-offensive.<sup>43</sup>

Even though political conflicts between Bangkok and her renegade vassal states in the first half of the nineteenth century did not exhibit clearly discernible ethno-religious components, this began to change as the Siamese administration was being centralised, a process which accelerated during the 1880s and 1890s. The ethnic conflicts embedded in the process of forced centralisation will be exemplified by the so-called “Shan rebellion of Phrae”.

Phrae was the smallest of the five principalities of Lan Na which had recognised the suzerainty of Bangkok since the last quarter of the eighteenth century.<sup>44</sup> Perhaps due to its relative geographical isolation, Phrae could maintain its indigenous administration longer than other principalities in the North. It was only in 1894 that a Siamese high-commissioner (*kha luang*) was set to the side of the local ruler (*cao luang*). Besides Chinese tax-farmers who closely cooperated with Siamese officials, migrant workers from Burma constituted another important “foreign” element in Lan Na. Some of these people were ethnic Burmese or Mon, others were Karen (“Toungsu”) but the majority were Shan (apart from Shan proper, many Tai Khun from Chiang Tung) working for British teak wood companies. Many of them suffered from restrictions imposed on their liberty of movement. As “British subjects”<sup>45</sup> they were not allowed to move within the five principalities of Lan Na without valid passports. The issuing and extension of such documents involved high bureaucratic obstacles and high financial costs. Furthermore, the Shan like all other foreign subjects were forbidden to purchase land, build houses or open their own shops.<sup>46</sup>

On Friday, 25 July 1902, a group of 30-40 armed Shan from neighbouring Lampang entered the small capital of Phrae, occupied the local police station and confiscated all weapons which were stored there. Within a short period of time, approximately 300 Shan living in Phrae joined the group commanded

by the two rebel leaders Phaka Maung and Sala Pochai. Not all were ethnic Shan. Within their ranks there were also many Burmese, Karen, and members of other ethnic groups. Numerous local Tai Yuan people joined the rebels as well. Siamese government reports describe the rebels either as “Shan-Karen-Burmese” (*phuak ngiao tongsu phama*) or as “Shan-Tai Yuan” forces (*kamlang ngiao loo*). The rebels attacked the residence of the Siamese *kha luang*, Phraya Chaibun. When Phraya Chaibun and his family tried to seek refuge at the residence Cao Phiriyathepphawong, the *cao luang* of Phrae, they were rejected with the embarrassing excuse : “How can I help you. I do not have any weapons, thus I will also flee.”<sup>47</sup> The administrative seat (*kao sanam luang*) was seized by the rebels, 46,910 *bat* and 37 *at* from the “state treasury” of Phrae fell into the hands of the rebels. A brandy distillery was also occupied. Of vital importance was the opening of the local prison. Prisoners who joined the Shan rebels received guns.<sup>48</sup>

Whereas state institutions were looted, the rebels avoided the damaging of private property. They even offered indebted people the reimbursement of the poll tax they had to pay the previous year. Then the two chief leaders of the uprising called on the fugitive *cao luang* of Phrae to return and resume power in his principality in close cooperation with the Shan. Back in his residence, the *cao luang* and his ministers pledged to fight along with Shan against the government in Bangkok. It is said that the *cao luang* even requested from his subjects to support the Shan with two coconut shells (*thanan*) of rice per household.

Similar to the Phaya Phap uprising in Chiang Mai (1889),<sup>49</sup> the Shan uprising in Phrae had a clearly anti-Siamese orientation. Numerous Siamese fell victim of the pogrom. The Shan even promised rewards for all those who provided information about Siamese who went into hiding. On 27 July 1902 the Siamese *kha luang* was captured and assassinated still on the same day.<sup>50</sup> In a pamphlet written in Kam Müläng (Northern Thai) the liquidation of Bangkok’s highest representative in Phrae was justified with the arbitrary measures taken against the Shan (including the prohibition of building houses and of planting rice).<sup>51</sup> Moreover, the hatred of the rebels was also directed against the Chinese in Phrae who they considered as agents of the Siamese state. Many Chinese were killed and Chinese shops plundered.<sup>52</sup> The same anti-Siamese and anti-Chinese mood is reported from Chiang Rai in the diary of an American missionary who witnessed the growing political tensions :

The trouble was not with the Western Shans, but the people of this country. A general massacre of all the Siamese was evidently intended. Chao Luang (governor) only spared, if he would fight the Siamese. The people willing to fight dacoits, but if the dacoits failed to appear, the Siamese and the Chinese were to take the consequences.<sup>53</sup>

As one of their first military actions, the Shan occupied in best “Leninist-Bolchevist” manner the telegraph station of Phrae and thus cut direct communication between the Siamese *kha luang* and the outside world. News about the events in Phrae nevertheless spread fast into neighbouring provinces. The government in Bangkok mobilised troops in Phichai, Sawankhalok, Sukhothai, Tak, Nan, and Chiang Mai. Cao Phraya Surasakmontri was appointed commander-in-chief of the Siamese troops sent to quell the rebellion as soon as possible.

The Shan troops split into two detachments. One detachment, under the command of Sala Pochai, marched to the South to corner the Siamese troops. The second detachment under Phaka Maung moved to Lampang to conquer the strategically most important, second largest city in Lan Na and set up there a basis for a long-enduring struggle of liberation against Siamese rule. The plan of the Shan failed due to *the* stiff resistance of the *coo luang* of Lampang who remained loyal to the Siamese side and due to the military superiority of the 1,100 men strong army commanded by Cao Phraya Surasakmontri. After the military defeat of the Shan at the Pang-ò River (south of Phrae) on 10 August 1902, the Shan rebels retreated from Phrae, where they were no longer able to organise resistance, and sought refuge in flight.<sup>54</sup>

On 16 August 1902, Siamese troops conquered Phrae which was not only abandoned by the Shan insurgents but also by the *coo luan* and his family. Anticipating Siamese reprisals, the *coo luang* Phiriyathepphawong had fled to Luang Prabang in time. In a trial set up by the victorious Siamese authorities he was accused of collaboration with the rebels and removed from office. The other members of his family were also “all deprived of their former privileges. This explains the fact that, unlike the descendants of all other Northern Thai princely families, such as the “Na Chiang Mai” or “Na Lampang”, the descendants of the *cao luang* of Phrae are not entitled to carry the name “Na Phrae”.<sup>55</sup>

In the meanwhile, the remnants of the Shan rebels were rallying their forces in Phayao, a strategically important junction north of Lampang and south of Chiang Rai. Phayao was the scene of the last major military

confrontation between the Siamese troops and the Shan rebels. The Siamese police force led by the twenty-four year old Danish police major Jensen won the battle.<sup>56</sup> Close to the super highway connecting Phayao with Chiang Rai is the grave of the remarkable young Danish police officer who sacrificed his life in the struggle of Phayao.<sup>57</sup>

In September and October 1902 the Shan rebels split up into small units to carry on a guerilla warfare in the rough mountainous landscape of Phayao and Chiang Rai. However, an attack on Chiang Rai on 17 October 1902 failed. Small Shan groups were able to hide in the demilitarised 25 kilometres wide buffer zone on the right bank of the Mekong River between Chiang Saen and Chiang Khòng. Protected by the French on the left bank of the river, the Shan were even allowed to build up several camps in the demilitarised zone.<sup>58</sup> In 1904/5 the rebels were finally forced to abandon their camps and retreat to the French side where they were disarmed. There were close ties between the Shan and local Tai chiefs in northwestern Laos (in particular in Müang Sing).

The term “Shan rebellion” (*kabot ngiao*), most frequently used in Thai historiography, is misleading as numerous indigenous Tai Yuan had oined the uprising. The poll-tax introduced in Phrae relatively lately (instead of the formerly usual corvée labour) had given rise to widespread grass-roots dissatisfaction, particularly as numerous citizens were still conscripted to - albeit reduced - corvée labour although they had already paid the poll-tax.<sup>59</sup> In the years before 1902 several infrastructure projects (e.g., twenty-five bridges) were built, realised mainly through forced labour. The ruler of Phrae had also good reasons to join the rebels. Bangkok had finally abandoned the status of Phrae as a vassal state (*prathetsarat*) only in 1899, several years later than in Chiang Mai. Cao Phiriyathepphawong’s bitterness over the Bangkok’s administrative reforms in the North severely curbing his own power was still fresh. Moreover, he was heavily indebted to the Siamese government as well as to foreign timber companies “because of his reckless spending habits.”<sup>60</sup> Thus the temptation to get access to the Siamese treasury in Phrae was great.

The uprising of 1902 finally also failed because of the absence of a coherent political programme of the Shan, their illusionary hopes for British support and the lack of support from the Tai Yuan rulers (especially of the *cao luang* in Nan and Lampang). It also demonstrates that the Siamese administrative and tax reforms had exacerbated, at least temporarily, the tensions between the local population - both the elite and the population at large - on the one side and the agents of the Siamese state - Siamese military

and civilian personnel as well as Chinese tax farmers - on the other side. Even those scholars, who emphasise the social and economic grievances of the main cause of the uprising concede the ethnic dimension of the “Shan rebellion of Phrae.”<sup>61</sup>

### **The Re-evaluation of Ethnicity by the End of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century**

The government in Bangkok changed its attitude towards ethnic diversity fundamentally within only a few years during the 1890s. The growing pressure from France since the late 1880s culminating in the Pak Nam incident of July 1893 had certainly contributed to a radical re-evaluation of ethnicity on the side of the Siamese elite which now began to negate any differences between Thai (i.e., Siamese) and Lao (i.e., Khon Müang and Lao proper).

At an assembly of Lan Na princes a Siamese representative proposed the following toast : “From now on we do not know either Thai nor Lao. Within the borders of Siamese possessions there are only loyal subjects of the King of Siam.”<sup>62</sup>

Linguistic and cultural differences between the two Tai ethnic groups were played down or denied. The Lao were indeed Thai, argued King Chulalongkorn, and according to him, the true “Lao” were the Lua or Lawa, an uncivilised and backward hilltribe in the north of his empire. Therefore, he demanded that the category “Lao” should be avoided at any cost in public statements and no longer be applied in censuses.<sup>63</sup>

These rigid measures reflected implicitly the deep concern that France would expand her territorial claims to all “Lao” inhabited areas in what had remained of Siam, Such claims would have certainly included most the Khorat Plateau and Lan Na. With regard to the category “Khmer”, Bangkok adopted an increasingly chauvinistic stance as well. Several decades later, Field Marshal Phibun Songkhram’s chief ideologue Luang Vichitr Vadakam developed the audacious argument that the Khmer population of Cambodia were just the degenerated descendants of the ancient Khòm, the builders of Angkor, whereas the most vital elements of the Khòm became the ancestors of the Thai.<sup>64</sup> Thus Siamese claims on northwestern Cambodia, including the prestigious temple area of Angkor, could be maintained. At any rate, it is striking to observe that in the wake of creating administrative circles (*monthon thesaphiban*) all references to the respective majority ethnic group were step by step eliminated. The *Huamiang Lao Phung Dam* (“Provinces of the black-bellied Lao”)<sup>65</sup> in present-day Northern Thailand became Monthon Phayap (Pali: Nordwest); the *Huamiang Lao Phuan* in the northern part of the Khorat



Plateau<sup>66</sup> became Monthon Udòn (Pali: North) and the Huamüang Khamen in present-day Northwest Cambodias<sup>67</sup> were renamed Monthon Burapha (Pali : East), to mention only a few cases.<sup>68</sup>

In the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Thai elite emphasised more and more the ethnic homogeneity of the country. This process gained further momentum after the abolition of the absolute monarchy (1932) and the renaming of Siam as Thailand (1939). Already in the first modern census of 1904 the category “Lao” was suspiciously absent. In later Thai censuses, data concerning mother tongue and nationality were no longer raised. Thus ethnic groups such as Khmer, Mon, and Chinese (as far as they were Thai citizens) were statistically assimilated. Only ‘the Muslim Malays in the deep south of Thailand remained visible through the category “religious affiliation”.

Since the 1970s the notion of Thai national homogeneity has been increasingly challenged by various sectors of Thai society. However, it is difficult to predict whether and to what extent the Thai state will deal with ethnic diversity in a more relaxed way. The experiences of the past discussed in this essay provide us with some possible options. However, a simple return to the romantic idyll of “Old Siam” where ‘numerous ethnic and religious groups were living in harmony’ might not be an ideal solution because this idyll never existed.

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## Notes

1. The legacy of over-centralisation in Thailand and proposals for a gradual decentralisation are discussed by Tanet Cbaroenmüang, *Thailand: A Late Decentralizing Country*. Chiang Mai: Faculty of Political Science and Public Administration, 2006.
2. As to the tributary relations of Siam to her vassal states, see Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-body of a Nation*. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1994, pp. 81-94.
3. Eiji Murashima has demonstrated that key concepts such as "nation" (Thai: *chat*; Sanskrit: *j ti*, "birth") have already been coined and introduced into an official discourse during the reign of King Chulalongkorn. The trinity "Nation, Religion and Monarchy" did not start with King Vajiravudh but much earlier. See Eiji Murashima, "The origin of Modern Official State Ideology in Thailand", in: *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 1, 1988, pp. 80-96.
4. Whereas "Thai" refers both to the citizens of the Kingdom of Thailand and to the speaker of Central Thai, the term "Tai" denotes all members of the ethno-linguistic family whose areas of settlement extend from the Malay Peninsula to southeast China and from northern Vietnam to the Indian state of Assam.
5. Chamvit Kasetsiri, *Prasat khao phra wihan: lum dam latthl chatniyom prawattisat phlae kao prawattisat tar ton kap ban-müang khòng rao* (Preah Vihear Temple: A Black Hole-Nationalism Wounded History and Our Country). Bangkok 2008.
6. A great influence on such constructivist re-interpretations of phenomena such as nations, peoples and ethnic groups which have developed historically had Benedict Anderson's study *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London/New York: Verso, 1991, 2nd edition).
7. James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009, p. 254.

8. As to social stratification in pre-modern Siam, see Akin Rabibhadana, *The Organization of Thai Society in the Early Bangkok Period, 1782-1873* (Data Paper No. 74, Southeast Asia Program). Ithaca, N.Y.; Cornell University, 1969. See also Piyachat Pitawan, *Rabop phrai nai sangkhom that, ph.s. 2411-2453* (The Phrai System in Thai Society, AD. 1868-1910). Bangkok: Tbammasat University Press, 1983.
9. As to slavery in Siam, see Robert Lingat, *L'esclavage privé dans le vieux droit siamois*. Paris: Dornat-Montchrestien, 1931.
10. An interesting reconstruction of the economic and demographic situation in Siam during the early Bangkok period, based mainly but not exclusively on such travel reports, is Barend Jan Terwiel, *Through Travellers' Eyes: An approach to Early Nineteenth century Thai History*. Bangkok: Editions Duang Kamol, 1989.
11. Victor B. Lieberman, "Local Integration and Eurasian Analogies: Structuring Southeast Asian History, c. 1350-1830", in: *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 3, 1993, p. 500. As to a critical evaluation of demographic data in mainland Southeast Asia before the mid-nineteenth century see Volker Grabowsky, *Bevölkerung und Staat in Lan Na: Ein Beitrag zur Bevölkerungsgeschichte Südostasiens*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2004, pp. 15-20.
12. John Bowring, *The Kingdom and People of Siam*, Vol. 1. Oxford, etc.: Oxford University Press, 1969, p. 466. See also the following statement from the early Bangkok period: "To have too many people [as subjects to a lord] is better than to have too much grass [uncultivated land]." Quoted from James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed*, p. 70.
13. Jonathan Rigg, "Redefining the Village and Rural Life: Lessons from South East Asia", in: *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 160, Part 2, 1994, p. 128.
14. Public Record Office (Kew), "Report on the Country traversed by Mr. Satow in his Journey to Chiangmai in December, 1885, and January, 1886" (Inclosure: Mr Archer to Mr. Satow, Chiang Mai, April 2, 1886) [F.O. 881/5295], p. 3.
15. Norman G. Owen, "Toward a History of Health in Southeast Asia", in: *Death and Disease in Southeast Asia*, ed. by Norman G. Owen. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987, pp. 3-22.
16. Suphon Ocharoen, *Môn nai müang thai* (The Mons in Thailand). Bangkok: The Thailand Research Fund, 1998, pp. 43-77.
17. Only Tongking, the densely populated heartland of the Vietnamese state was an exception to the rule. See Grabowsky, *Bevölkerung und Staat in Lan Na*, pp. 20-31.
18. James Scott, *Tire Ari of Nor Being Governed*, p. 67; see also Terwiel (Through Travellers' Eyes, p. 238) who argues: "The tens of thousands of prisoners-of-war, settled in regions not of their own choice, and the even larger numbers of men indelibly marked on their wrists, bear witness to stale power."
19. Nicolas Gervaise, *The Natural and Political History of the Kingdom of Siam*. Bangkok: White Lotus, 1989, p. 57.
20. This is supported by the results of the population census in the administrative circle (*monthon*) Prachinburi carried out in the years 1905-1907. See Volker Grabowsky, *An Early Thai Census, Translation and Analysis*. Bangkok: Institute of Population Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 1993, p. 36.
21. Ernst von Hesse-Wartegg, *Siam: das Reich des weissen Elefanten*. Bangkok: White Lotus, 1986 (1899), p. 16.
22. Bhasit Chitrabhasa, "Sipsòng phasa" (The twelve languages [of the human race]), in: *Sinlapa-watthanatham*, 1991, p. 118.
23. Ibid.

24. *Nòng* denotes a water reservoir, a pond, lake, or also marsh; *khòp* (Tr. ()) the name of the pond. *Nòng Khòp* is a village situated on the right bank of the Ping River in the district of San Karnphaeng, Chiang Mai province. On the opposite side of the river lies another Mon village, Ban N ng Du (Pasang district, Lamphun province). Both villages were settled by Mon refugees from lower Burma in 1815.
25. *Chawa* designates [people of] Müang Chawa (Lao: Sua), i.e. Luang Prabang.
26. Singkha annasai, *Khlong riang mangthra rop Chiang Mai* (Mangthra's War Against Chiang Mai). Chiang Mai: Chiang Mai Book Center, 1979, p. 40; Thai Royal Institute (ed.), *Photcananukrom sap wannakam thòngthin thai phak nua: khlong mangthra rop Chiang Mai* (Dictionary of Northern Thai regional literature: Mangthra's War Against Chiang Mai). Bangkok 2009, p. 98.
27. Vajiravudh, Prince, *Lilit Phayap* (Travel Poem [about a visit to the Northeastern [Circle]]). Bangkok: Khurusapha, 1973, pp. 59-60. I thank Peera Panarut for drawing my attention of this work.
28. As to the etymology of the term and further discussion, see Grabowsky, *Bevölkerung und Staat in Lan Na*, p. 69.
29. Foon Ming Liew-Herres, Volker Grabowsky, and Renoo Wichasin, *Chronicle of Sipsong Panna: History and Society of a Tai Lü Kingdom. Twelfth to Twentieth Century*. Chiang Mai: Mekong Press, 2012, pp. 15-16.
30. As to the preeminent role of the Austroasiatic peoples in the formation of early Tai polities see Cholthira Satyawadhna, "The Dispossessed: An Anthropological Reconstruction of Lawa Ethnohistory in the Light of their Relationship with the Tai", PhD dissertation, Australian National University, 1991.
31. Both the Mangrai dynasty, ruling Lan Na from the late 13<sup>th</sup> until the mid-16<sup>th</sup> centuries, and the Kawila dynasty, ruling Chiang Mai, Lamphun and Lampang since the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, had at least partially some Austroasiatic' ancestry. Inter-marriage between Tai rulers and Lawa girls is also mentioned in the Sipsong Panna Chronicle. See Foon Ming Liew-Herres et al., *Chronicle of Sipsong Panna*, p. 18.
32. "Cotrnhaihet khòng khana bat luang farangset sting khao ma tang khrang krung si ayutthaya tòn phaendin phracao súa lac paendin phracao thai sa" (Report of French Priests Who Established a Mission in the Ayutthaya Era During the Reigns of King Phracao Súa and King Phracao Thai Sa), in: *Prachum Phongsawadan* [Collected Chronicles], Vol. 22, Part 37, p. 81. See also Bang-on. Piyaphan, *Lao nai krung rattanakosin* (The Lao in Early Bangkok). Bangkok: The Thailand Research Fund, 1998, p. 17.
33. "Cotrnhaihet khòng khana bat luang farangset : ..", p. 82. The mention of Vietnamese language is noteworthy as it testifies a sizeable presence of ethnic Vietnamese in Ayutthaya and some other places already in the early seventeenth century. However, a more significant influx of Vietnamese refugees occurred in the last quarter of the century when thousands of Vietnamese fled the civil war in Vietnam caused by the Tayson rebellion (1771-1802). See Pussadee Chandavimol, *Wiatnam nai müang thai* (The Vietnamese in Thailand). Bangkok: The Thailand Research Fund, 1998, pp. 25-26.
34. "Cotrnhaihet khòng khana bat luang farangset ...", pp. 75-76. It seems that the use of the Siamese along with Pali, the sacred language of the Theravada canon, for preaching the Gospel infuriated the Siamese officials most of all. See *ibid.*, p. 78.
35. [ทุกวันนี้ เวลามีฝรั่งมาพูดศาสนาหลาย ๆ คนไปประเทศ เข็มมาสู่พระบรมโพธิ์สมภารแผ่นดินเราด บัดนี้เก็บไปไว้ที่หอแก้ว ข้ามมาอยู่ที่หอหลวงการของมอญ ในช่องกำแพงมอญจะมีฝรั่งมาบอกฝรั่งผู้มาพูดศาสนา ซึ่งสิ่งนี้ฝ่ายมหาดไทย เห็นจะมิให้ไปจากพระบรมโพธิ์สมภาร]
36. Chris Baker et al., *Van Vliets Siam*. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2005, p. 15.

37. A recent study of ethnic diversity in Bangkok and surrounding areas during the early nineteenth century summarises the situation as follows: "The rural hinterlands were inhabited by the Thai peasantry as well as farming communities of Lao war captives and other ethnic minorities seeking refuge under the provincial authorities. The Bangkok periphery was peopled largely by communities of non-Thai specialists - mercenaries, merchants, artisans - serving the Thai aristocracy. The walled city (Krung Ratanakosin) was reserved for the Thai élite." Edward Van Roy, "Under Duress: Lao War Captives at Bangkok in the Nineteenth Century", in: *Journal of the Siam Society*, Vol. 97, 2009, p. 57.
38. Volker Grabowsky, "Forced Resettlement Campaigns in Northern Thailand During the Early Bangkok Period", in: *Journal of the Siam Society*, Vol. 87, Pans 1 & 2, 1999, pp. 65-66.
39. For the function of the *nai kông*, see Constance M. Wilson, "The Nai Kong in Thai Administration, 1824-68", in: *Contributions to Asian Studies*, Vol. 15, pp. 41-57.
40. Bang-on Piyaphan, *Lao nai krung rattanakosin*, p. 127.
41. Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, *Thai-Malay Relations: Traditional Intra-regional Relations from the Seventeenth to the Early Twentieth Centuries*. Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 56. As to the *cakravartin* ideology in the Siamese-Burmese context, see also Sunait Chutintaranond. "Cakravartin: The Ideology of Traditional Warfare in Siam and Burma, 1548-1605." PhD dissertation, Cornell University, 1990.
42. Exemplary for this dominant position among historians in Laos may be the following thoroughgoing study of Mayouri Ngaosyvathn und Pheuiphanh Ngaosyvathn, *Paths to Conflagration: Fifty Years of Diplomacy and Warfare in Laos, Thailand and Vietnam, 1778-1828*. Ithaca, N. Y.: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1998.
43. Cao Anu even executed the governor of Kalasin when the latter refused to cooperate against the Siamese. See Volker Grabowsky, "Lao and Khmer Perceptions of National Survival: The Legacy of the Early Nineteenth Century", in: *Nationalism and Cultural Revival in Southeast Asia: Perspectives from the Centre and the Region*, edited by Sri Kuhnt-Saptodewo, Volker Grabowsky and Martin Groöheim. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1997, p. 149.
44. The other four Lan Na principalities were Chiang Mai, Lamphun, Lampang, and Nan.
45. In 1895, a total of 6,200 British subjects (*khon nai bangkhap angrit* (.....)), among a total population of less than one million, were registered in the five principalities of Lan Na. See Chawalee na Thalang, *Prathetsarat không sayam nai ratchasamai phrabat somdet phrachunlacòmklao caoyuhua* (Siamese Vassal States under King Rama V). Bangkok : The Thailand Research Fund, 1998, P. 20.
46. "Prap ngiao tòn ton 1" [Suppressing the Shan, Part I], in: *Practum Phongsawadan* (Collected Chronicles), Vol. 47. Bangkok: Khurusapha, 1970, p. 5. As for a contemporary Western source confirming the Shan grievances, see Lilian Johnson Curtis, *The Laos of North Siam*. Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 1903, pp. 22-23 Cf. Sarassawadee Ongsakul, *History of Lan Na*. Transl. by Chitraporn Tanratanakul. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2005, p. 206.
47. "Prap ngiao tòn ton 1" [Suppressing the Shan, Part I], in: *Practum Phongsawadan* (Collected Chronicles), Vol. 46. Bangkok: Khurusapha, 1969, p. 301.
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49. See Chusit Chuchat, "Kabot phaya phap (prap songkhram): kabot chao na nai phak nua" [The Phaya Phap Uprising : A Peasant Rebellion in the Northern Region], in: *Sangkomsat* (Social Sciences), Vol. 3, No. 2, 1979/80, pp. 24-34.

50. Ratanaporn Sethakul, "Political, social, and economic changes in the northern states of Thailand resulting from the Chiang Mai treaties of 1874 and 1883", p. 278.
51. "Rüang raingan phra senarat klaò kann thi pokkhròng thap pai prap phu rai ngiao" (Report of Phra Senarat on the military operations against the Shan bandits), 18 September 1902, in: Thai National Archives (Bangkok), Mahatthai (M) 63/9.
52. James Louis Gardner, "Der Shan-Aufstand von 1902 in Nordthailand", in: *Saeculum*, Vol. 23, 1972, p. 80.
53. "Report of the American missionary Briggs to Reverend Arthur Brown (New York City)", in: Phayap Archives, Chiang Mai.
54. Gardner, "Der Shan-Aufstand von 1902 in Nordthailand", pp. 81-82.
55. Prachum Amphunan, *Thiao pai nai adit: müa ngiao plom müang phrae lae müong nakhòn lampang* (A Journey into the Past: When the Shan pillaged Phrae and Lampang). Bangkok 1984, p. 183. See also "Prap ngiao" (The Suppression of the Shan), in: *Prachum Phongsawadan* (Collected Chronicles), Part 78 (sequel), Vol. 49. Bangkok: Khurusapha 1969, pp. 86.
56. Ibid., pp. 176-77.
57. Prachum Amphunan, *Thiao pai nai adit: müa ngiao plom müang phrae lae müang nakhòn lampang*; pp.177-178.
58. Gardner, "Der Shan-Aufstand von 1902 in Nordthailand", p. 86.
59. The grievances of the local Tai Yuan population about taxation and forced labour are articulated in a telegram of Phraya Narit to Mòu Udom, Chiang Mai. See "Prap ngiao tòn ton 1" [The Suppression of the Shan, Part 1), in: *Prachum Phongsawadan* [Collected Chronicles], Vol. 47. Bangkok: Khurusapha, 1970, pp.90-102.
60. Ansil Ramsay, "Modernization and Reactionary Rebellions in Northern Siam", in: *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 2, 1979, p. 291.
61. See, for example, Bantorn Ondam, "The Phrae Rebellion: A Structural Analysis", in: *The Cornell Journal of Social Relations*, Vol. 6, Spring 1979, p. 94.
62. *Bangkok Times*, 21 February 1902, p. 31; quoted from Gardner, "Der Shan-Aufstand von 1902 in Nordthailand", p. 77.
63. Grabowsky, *An Early Thai Census*, p. 54.
64. See Luang Vichitr Vadakarn, *Thailand's Case*. Bangkok 1941, pp. 129-130.
65. The Siamese called the Tai speaking population of Lan Na by this term because the male practice to tattoo their bodies below their hips.
66. In the course of the nineteenth century numerous Phuan left the Plain of Jars (Siang Khwang) and resettled in the vicinity of Vientiane and in adjacent parts of the Khorat-Plateau.
67. Provinces of Battambang, Sisophon and Siem Reap.
68. Te Bunnag, *The Provincial Administration of Siam 1802-1915*. Kuala Lumpur etc.: Oxford University Press, 1977, pp. 136-217.



## The *Khwan* and The Ominous Calendar<sup>1</sup>

Barend Jan Terwiel

Before setting out on an enterprise with uncertain outcome, many traditional Tai householders would first consult a manuscript that contained a calendar in which auspicious and inauspicious moments were listed. With the help of such a calendar they would ascertain when exactly the planned activity should be engaged upon, or at least which moments of time should be avoided. Some of these calendar tables were based on the seven days of the week; others had as base the lunar month, others again the sequence of the sixty-day cycle. They told what days were best for engaging upon difficult transactions, which direction should be avoided for setting out on a particular day, or when to try and sell an animal on the local market.<sup>2</sup>

For example, one paragraph of a lengthy calendric text reads as follows :

“The five days in the sixty-day cycle ending with *hsi*, are lucky days, cattle purchased on such a day will thrive, but the five days ending with *hsaii* are unlucky, cattle purchased on such a day will die (Scott and Hardiman, *Gazetteer of Upper Burma and the Shan*, p. 49).”<sup>3</sup>

Probably the best overview of the use of a large number of such calendars is an article Richard Davis wrote in 1976. At the outset of his study he writes :

“... every day of the lunar phase is either good or bad for having new clothes made, performing wedding rites, buying farm animals, placing newly harvested rice in the household granary, felling trees, building houses, clearing fields and moving to another town or village.”<sup>4</sup>

### **A puzzling calendar**

Many years ago when conducting a survey of Tai sacred writing I came across an unusual type of calendric table. I found this enigmatical type of table among several Tai groups, in various parts of Thailand, among the Tais of Northern Vietnam, and also among the Tai-speakers that live scattered in Assam. Such a wide distribution is a sign that the table has been known for a long time among Tai-speaking peoples.

This genre lists a sequence of days<sup>5</sup> (often the fifteen days of the waxing moon, followed by the fifteen days of the waning moon, but the other above-mentioned temporal sequences were also occasionally found) adding for each day a position of the *khwan*.

The puzzling aspect of the lists noted among Tai peoples in such diverse settings is that apart from a temporal sequence also a *khwan* is mentioned for each day. As an example, one of these tables gave the following list :

- Day 1 the *khwan* is in the left knee
- Day 2 the *khwan* is in the head
- Day 3 the *khwan* is in the back
- Day 4 the *khwan* is in the right ear
- Day 5 the *khwan* is in the left foot
- Day 6 the *khwan* is in the chin
- Day 7 the *khwan* is in the right eye
- Day 8 the *khwan* is in the nose
- Day 9 the *khwan* is in the right hand
- Day 10 the *khwan* is in the toe
- Day 11 the *khwan* is in the waist
- Day 12 the *khwan* is in the forehead
- Day 13 the *khwan* is in the left thumb
- Day 14 the *khwan* is in the side
- Day 15 the *khwan* is in the eyebrows
- Day 16 the *khwan* is in the left hand
- Day 17 the *khwan* is in the eye
- Day 18 the *khwan* is in the nose
- Day 19 the *khwan* is in the left ear
- Day 20 the *khwan* is in the arms
- Day 21 the *khwan* is in the right knee
- Day 22 the *khwan* is in the left hand
- Day 23 the *khwan* is in the cheek
- Day 24 the *khwan* is in the right hip
- Day 25 the *khwan* is in the left foot
- Day 26 the *khwan* is in the hands
- Day 27 the *khwan* is in the chin
- Day 28 the *khwan* is in the head
- Day 29 the *khwan* is in the left arm
- Day 30 the *khwan* is in the forehead

After acquiring copies of a number of this type from texts written by ritual specialists of the above-mentioned Tai peoples, these lists were compared in the hope of finding out whether or not a common element could be found, notably whether there was a sequence that several lists had in common. In the sample listed above, for example, from day 6 to day 10, the *khwan* moves from the chin, the right eye, and the nose to the toe. Thus the *khwans* were situated in the head, and suddenly that vital element moved down to the lower extremities.

However, whatever sequence was tested, none of the lists showed a sequence of three or four locations in common. Neither could a system be discerned regarding the left and right side of the body. No regularities were discovered whatsoever. These lists seemed strange because calendars and *khwans* seem to be totally unrelated concepts.

All Tai peoples share the notion that a human body possesses a number of “vital elements” and in all Tai languages these are called *khwans*. This Tai belief in *khwans* is well-documented.<sup>6</sup> It is the element of life, the difference between a corpse and a living being. Humans are believed to have many *khwans*, if a person blushes the *khwans* in his cheeks are active. Signs of *khwans* can be seen in the eyebrows, the movement in the nostrils, the pulse in the wrist, a tic is evidence of a *khwan*, and so is a muscle cramp. When a child is suddenly listless, it may have lost a major *khwan* through inattention. Sneezing is dangerous, one might lose a *khwan*. Well known is the ceremony of recalling a lost *khwan*. PhyaAnumanRajadhon calls the *khwan* an insubstantial thing supposed to reside in the physical body of a person. If it leaves the body the person will be ill or experience some undesirable effects.<sup>7</sup>

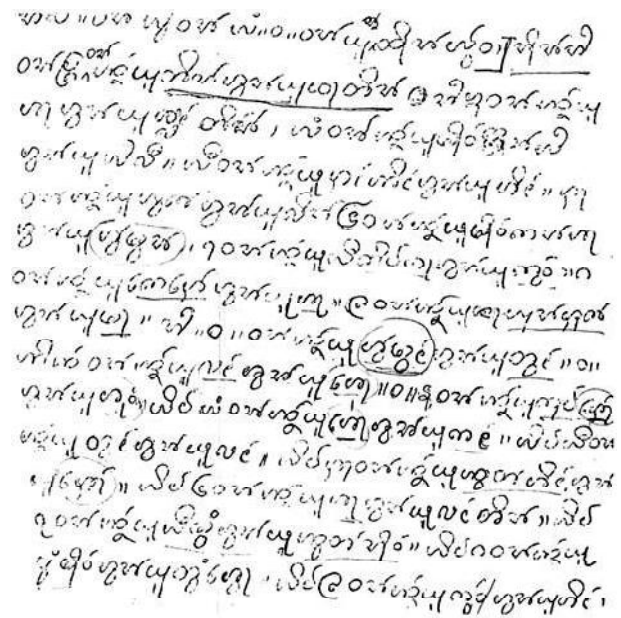
In a previous publication I gathered more information on this concept :

“The *khwan* of a person denotes a specific general quality, but specific parts of the body can also be assigned that characteristic. Thus a Thai can speak of the *khwan* of the eyes, of the mouth, and of the hands. This does not mean that these can be assigned separate individual “souls”. Instead such expressions simply refer to the liveliness, to the animation of that particular part of the body. In traditional medicine, it could be that a certain part of the body, say the kidneys, the ears, the intestines or the heart was found to have insufficient vitality, and a ceremony to remedy the situation was prescribed.<sup>8</sup>

To complicate matters further, in a manuscript of the Tai Phakey in Assam (*Lik Nu Phelai Chong*)<sup>9</sup> a variant was given where for each day of the lunar month two concepts were placed in various parts of the body, first the *chai* and then the *khwan*. A whole list can be summed up in the following table :

<b>Day</b>	<b>Position of the <i>chai</i></b>	<b>Position of the <i>khwan</i></b>
1	Feet	Sole of the feet
2	Legs	Heels
3	Left hand	Navel
4	Waist	Shin
5	Elbow	Tongue
6	Right hand	Top of the head
7	Right side strength	Calf of the leg
8	Armpits	Legs
9	Edge of the feet	Shoulder
10	Top of the head	Belly
11	Back	Neck
12	Throat	Head
13	Neck	Chin
14	Belly	Back
15	The whole body	Head
16	Legs	Heels
17	Top of the head	Whole body
18	Wrist	Adam's apple
19	Calf of the leg	Shin
20	Right side strength	Side
21	Finger	Eye
22	Soft part of the leg	Whole back
23	Back	Hip
24	Sole of the feet	Breast
25	Back of the hand	Chin
26	Palm of the hand	Side of the feet
27	Knee	Head
28	Left side	Feet
29	Top of the head	Mouth
30	Ankle	Hair

With the introduction of the concept *chai* (Thai: ใจ; Shan *sai*) we are once again confronted with a term that is difficult to translate. The standard McFarland dictionary gives: “disposition” and “mind”. The word is frequently used together with conditional term, thereby indicating a mood. Well-known in Thai are the expressions *chai yen* (ใจเย็น), meaning “take it easy”, or *chai ron* (ใจร้อน), “being temperamental”. However Fang Kuei Li points out that among the Southwestern Tai Languages it rather means “heart”.<sup>10</sup>

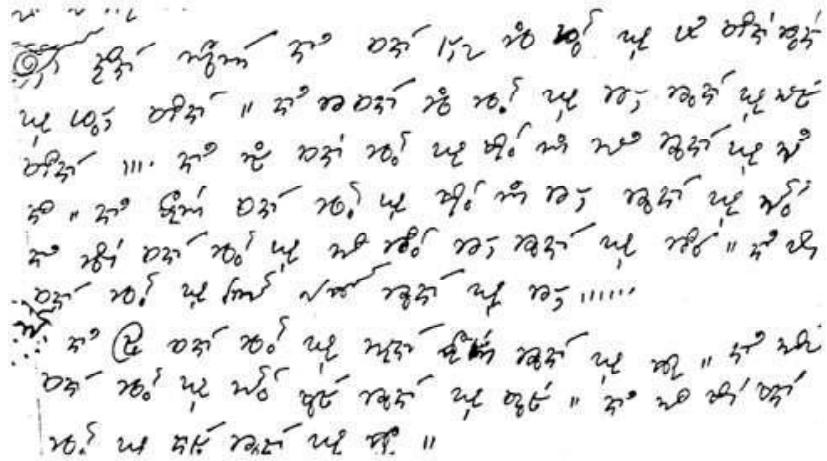


**Illustration I**

**The Beginning of The Section *Chai* and *Khwan* in The Tai Phakey text *lik Nu Phelai Chong*.**

While losing a *khwan* has, as we have seen, unpleasant consequences, the word *chai* could, in principle, be connected both with positive and with negative concepts.

That the “double list” with positions of *chai* as well as *khwan* has been part of the ancient Tai culture is indicated by the fact that in the Manuscript collection of the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies in Assam there are no less than four manuscripts in the Ahom language and script that contain a *chai-khwan* list that is almost identical to that found in the Phakey *rLik Nu Phelai Chong*.<sup>11</sup> Probably the Phakey ritual specialist who collated *Lik Nu Phelai Chong* had access to a copy of one of the Ahom texts.



**Illustration II**

**The Beginning of The Section *Chai* and *Khwan* in an Ahom Manuscript**

A major step towards understanding this puzzling calendar, was reached when consulting the list of more than twenty types of ominous calendars that Richard Davis had found in northern Thailand. His 19<sup>th</sup> type of calendar lists for each day of the week a person’s when “glory” (Muang [northern Thai] *salii*, Sanskrit *Srī*) is concentrated in a particular part of his body, and activity concerning that part of the body is auspicious. In addition for each day a different locality was noted for *Kjlaki* (i), a figure identified by Davis as “the goddess of Adversity”, and activity concerning that part of the body is inauspicious.<sup>12</sup> The table was given as follows :

Day of the week	Location of “glory”	Location of <i>Kjlaki</i> (i)
Sunday	tongue	chest
Monday	forehead	nipples
Tuesday	nose	feet
Wednesday	face	mouth
Thursday	nipples	eyebrows
Friday	stomach	ears
Saturday	calves	hands

*Kjlaki* (i) is a local Northern Thai way of writing *Kjlaki* (i), a name that occurs twice in the *Jt* takas. First it occurs in *Jt* taka Number 83 as the

name of a servant who had this inauspicious name *Kj laka* (usually translated as “curse”), but who nevertheless saved his master’s fortune. However, the *Kj laki* in Davis’ 19<sup>th</sup> type of calendar refers to *Jjtaka* 382 (the *Sirikj laka*-*Jjtaka*) where the daughter of *Virfpakkha* is also called *Kj laka*. *Srī* and *Kj laka* argue who shall be first to take a bath and “*Kj laki*” in Davis’ calendar type 19 are therefore the embodiment of “luck” and “misfortune” respectively. *Srī* and *Kj laka* argue who shall be first to take a bath in Lake Anotatta. *Kj lak*, dressed in blue garments loses out to *Sri*, who wore gold-coloured clothes.<sup>13</sup>

“*Srī*” and “*Kj laki*”, in Davis’ calendar type 19 are the embodiment of “luck” and “misfortune” respectively. The table tells for each day of the week on what part of the body one may expect something positive by looking to the list under “*Srī*” or where the owner of the calendar is warned of a danger lurking at a part of his body by looking under *Kj laki*”.

The calendar with the position of the *chai* and the *khwan* in specific body locations is clearly of a similar type. Apparently the table tells the owner of the calendar where on a certain day in the body auspicious “heart” can be found, and also where the ominous *khwan* is most vulnerable.

At this point, it should be understood why the various tables vary in their position of the *khwan*. Such tables are made on order. Enterprising persons would consult ritual specialists who would – for an appropriate fee – write down a series of spells, magical diagrams and calendars for their clients and create a personal handbook to assist them in their decisions. They contained magical diagrams (*yantras*) to be copied on a piece of cloth for luck, tattooing designs with numbers and syllables that will be effective only for the owner, spells to ward off danger, moments to be avoided, complicated designs to be copied whilst saying certain texts, the latter can be rolled up, dipped in wax and burnt to have effect.

Such documents invariably were made for a particular individual, taking into account that person’s moment of birth. Therefore the information they contain was valid only for that person. The thirty-day list of where the *khwan* resides could thus be a personalised list, one that differs for each individual. Its aim was to warn the owner which part of his body would be most vulnerable on a particular day. In the first example cited above, the owner should therefore be careful on the first day of waxing moon and avoid bumping into something with his left knee.

Finally it may be asked what the relationship is between the *khwan* calendar and the *Srī* and *Kj laka* type described by Davis. The *khwan*-

type occurs among a range of Tai-speakers, but the Sri and Kꨲlakaꨲꨳi calendar has only been found thus far among Northern Thai. Therefore I assume that Davis' type 19 is a Buddhist version of an all-Tai older list, one of a wide range of formulae with which Tai peoples attempted by magical means to increase control of their destiny.

### Notes and References

1. A first version of this article appeared in the *SCA-UK Newsletter* (Vol 11, December 2015, pp. 20-23)
2. See H. G. Quaritch Wales, *Divination in Thailand; The Hopes and Fears of a Southeast Asian People*, London: Curzon Press, 1983, p. 123 ff.
3. James George Scott and J. P. Hardiman, *Gazetteer of Upper Burma and the Shan States in Five Volumes*, Part 1 Vol. 2 (Rangoon 1900), Chapter 10. Another study dealing with this topic was written by Nicola Tannenbaum, "Shan Calendrics and the Nature of Shan Religion", *Anthropos*, 79, 1984: 505-515.
4. Richard B. Davis, "The Northern Thai Calendar and its Uses", *Anthropos*, 71, 1976: 7.
5. Commonly they listed the thirty days of the month, but the other above-mentioned temporal sequences were also occasionally found.
6. Barend Jan Terwiel, The Tais and Their Belief in Khwans; Towards Establishing an Aspect of 'Proto-Tai' Culture", *Indian Journal of Tai Studies*, Vol. 15, 2015, pp. 7-24. See also Ruth-Inge Heinze, *Tham Khwan; How to Contain the Essence of Life*, Singapore
7. Phya Anuman Rajadhon, *Essays on Thai Folklore*, Bangkok: The Social Science Association Press, 1968: 202.
8. B. J. Terwiel, "The Tais and their Belief in Khwans", *The South East Asian Review*, 3, No 1, August 1978: 5.
9. Literally: Book [with] Predictions.
10. Fang Kuei Li, *A Handbook of Comparative Tai*, Oceanic Linguistics, Special Publication No. 15, University Press of Hawaii, 1977: 165.
11. These four have been filed as MS 2, MS D, MS 1156 (A) and MS 1162.
12. Davis, "The Northern Thai Calendar and its Uses": 29.
13. For the Sirikꨲlakaꨲꨳi-Jꨲtaka see E. B. Cowell, *The Jātaka or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births*, Vol. 3, Delhi: MotilalBanarsidass, 1990: 165-168.



# A Graphemic Analysis of Tai Ahom Manuscripts

Stephen Morey  
Poppy Gogoi

## 1. Introduction

The study of 'dead' languages have always been challenging. Because these languages are no longer spoken, it is the written forms that have to be studied, and the writing system is thus more important for their study (Saussure 1983, 2013). The writing system of a language however may include many inadequacies and mysteries that need to be carefully understood in order to describe that language. In this regard, a graphemic study of the writing system can pave the path for a systematic understanding of the language. It is a linguistic study on par with a phonemic analysis (i.e. analysis of the sound system) where the orthographic (written) units are described along with the graphotactics that systematically connect each element in the system.

Ahom is one such language which is largely survived only in the written form until its more recent revival. Ahom is no longer spoken as a mother tongue and its modern usage is largely in religious and related cultural practices (such as the Chaklong wedding ceremony). However, there is a huge collection of manuscripts which are rich resources of the Ahom language. These manuscripts are written on pages made from the bark of the Sasi tree (*Aguilera Allagocha*) ranging in different shapes and sizes. There are also a few inscriptions and brass plates, the oldest inscription is the Snake Pillar, dated back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

The Ahom language has been of interest for many researchers doing comparative studies on the southwestern branch of the Tai language family. Many of the Proto Southwestern Tai reconstructions have in part based on data from Tai Ahom sources. For example, Jonsson (1991) in her reconstruction of the Proto Southwestern Tai used data from 10 different Southwestern varieties of which Ahom was one (Morey 2009, 2015). Since there are no speakers of the Ahom language the source of Ahom data for various linguistic studies has always been textual rather than spoken, and the sole sources for these comparative studies has been two dictionaries, namely the Ahom-Assamese-English dictionary (Barua 1920) and the Ahom Lexicons (Barua and Phukan 1964). The sources for information in these dictionaries is not clear. Many of the discrepancies in the dictionaries have been discussed in detail in Terwiel (1988) and Morey (2009).

The fact that textual data cannot be considered at par with spoken data has often been ignored. Most of the data from other languages included in comparative studies is spoken language data, which has been recorded, checked and carefully transcribed often with the aid of native speakers. In the case of Ahom, however, the comparative work has relied entirely on the two dictionaries, and these do not always accord with what is found in the manuscripts. It is also very difficult to decipher the meanings of the texts in the manuscripts, because the script itself is quite complicated with no tone marks and other graphic complexities that need to be resolved first to interpret meanings of the texts in the manuscripts.

Languages similar to Ahom like Old Shan, Khamti have developed their scripts based on Indic scripts which do not provide enough graphemes representing the Tai vowels and consonants. This under representation of the vowels and consonants has been briefly discussed in Li (1977). The Ahom script originating from the Brahmi script (Morey 2005, 2012, 2105) also fails to give a clear representation of vowel and tones, leaving many mysteries behind. It is seen that certain graphs in the manuscripts are often used interchangeably whereas some occur in complementary distribution.

For example, the graphs *Yl* and *en* occur in free variation in most of the manuscripts for a particular group of words. For example, the word for 'mountain' is spelled both as *Ylloi* and *enloi*. Hence, keeping in mind these inconsistencies and allographic patterns in the Ahom script, it is necessary to first do a proper graphemic study of the script to make the data more reliable when comparing with other spoken data.

## **2. Research project: graphemic analysis of the Tai Ahom manuscripts**

Over the last couple of years, Poppy Gogoi has been undertaking study in the Department of Linguistics at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand, which is perhaps the premier institution for the study of Tai languages in the world.

In order to research the Tai Ahom language, this project is undertaken to study the allographic patterns (variation in spelling) reflected in the Ahom script in order to identify the respective graphemes (units of writing) in Ahom. Once this has been thoroughly undertaken, we will then be able more easily to establish the relationship between the Tai Ahom language and other Tai

languages, and the language from which all these languages descend, which is called Proto Southwestern Tai. So the aims of the research are :

- (i) To examine the conditioned and the unconditioned allographic patterns in Tai Ahom manuscripts
- (ii) To interpret the allographic patterns in (i) in relation to Proto-Southwestern Tai (PSWT) phonemes.

Our research into the Tai Ahom writing predicts that we will find the following:

- (a) Tai Ahom manuscripts display conditioned and unconditioned allographic patterns that can be used to classify Tai Ahom texts into two different sets. Conditioned allographs can be defined as the varied forms of a grapheme that it occurs in based on its environment. Whereas unconditioned allographs are irregular variation patterns of a grapheme, for which no explanation can be found.
- (b) Conditioned allographic patterns in Tai Ahom manuscripts would be expected to reflect retentions of PSWT phonemic contrasts.
- (c) Unconditioned allographic patterns in Tai Ahom manuscripts reflect mergers among PSWT phonemes.

### **3. Past research on Tai Ahom**

The oldest research that we are aware of is that done by Francis Buchanan during his data collection in 1808 and 1809. At the time he noted that Ahom was already a “dead language”; by then with only a few people following traditional Ahom religion by studying the manuscripts (Hamilton 1963:7; Terwiel 1988). Following Buchanan there were a number of British researchers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century who described the various Tai languages in Assam (see Grierson 1903, Morey 2005).

Certain genres of Tai literature are found across the Tai speaking world, so that for example the spirit calling texts and prediction and augury texts are also found among the Zhuang (Holm 2004, Morey 2015). The *Ming Mvng Lung Phai* is a manuscript which is to be read when the country is in difficulty. According to the ancient Tai tradition, everything in the universe has a *khwan* or spirit and any kind of misfortune is the result of the *khwan* being upset or affected by something. This manuscript contains mantras or recitations to call back the spirit of the country which might have fled the country for various

reasons. *It is thus believed that Ahom represents one of the oldest recorded examples of the Tai language. There are also stone inscriptions in Yunnan which are similar to Tai Ahom and it is possible that the Ahoms brought their script from Mau Lung when they arrived in Assam.* The oldest surviving Ahom text is the 'Snake Pillar', now in the State Museum of Assam, Guwahati inscribed for King Siuw Hum Miung (1497-1539) (Hosken and Morey 2012). The historical documents reflect many archaic elements of the Tai tribe, which have been lost or obscured among other Tai groups. Thus study of this Tai group will help us to search for the original roots of the Tai society and culture. (Chatthip and Ranoo 1998).

The Ahom script is of Brahmic type with an inherent vowel. Orthographically, words in Ahom are usually of the patterns- CV and CVC. As a Brahmic script, there is a primary base consonant with diacritic vowels. These vowel diacritics are either placed below, above or around the initial consonant. The vowel graphs cannot occur independently, instead they are represented by the Ahom letter graph *a* followed by the corresponding dependent vowel sign. (In Assamese the inherent vowel is a back vowel written [ʌ] by linguists.




Medial consonants, if any, are clustered with the initial consonant and a visible virama (killer) character appears on top of the final consonant graph marking the end of a word. This however has become obligatory only in modern Ahom and some of comparatively older manuscripts lack this marker. Dependent vowel signs are stored following the initial consonant cluster. There is generally no word spacing in Ahom but in modern Ahom i.e., the revived form, and in a few manuscripts, there are word spaces. (Hosken, Morey 2012). There are no tone marks in Ahom generating multiple meanings to any written syllable. In some instances more 20 different meanings have been recorded for a single syllable. Thus, the context of the discourse and the knowledge of the translator on the subject of the discourse is crucial to achieving a good translation (Morey 2015).

From the surviving manuscripts, it can be seen that the Ahom language was closely related to the language of the Shan states and even more closely with the Tai varieties in Northeast India, particularly Aiton. In the present linguistic scenario of Ahom, as has been claimed by Terweil, there are marked differences between the Ahom language of the old documents

and what the revivalists call Ahom, which has totally abandoned the rules of Tai grammar and often uses Ahom in a non-idiomatic sense (Terwiel 1996: 284; Morey 2002).

### **3.1 The Grapheme Theory**

In order to conduct a graphemic study of Ahom, it is important to have a clear understanding of the grapheme theory. Traditional studies have used the term grapheme as parallel to phoneme (Vachek 1959). According to Robert P. Stockwell (1961), “A grapheme is a class of written symbols in a given set of manuscripts, such that (1) all members of the class are in complementary distribution or free variation, and (2) the class belongs to a set of classes which are mutually contrasting”. In more simple words, a grapheme is a set written characters either in complementary distribution or in free variation used in any particular group of manuscripts. Further these characters belonging to different sets of graphemes are mutually contrastive. For example, in English, the upper case *A* and the lower case *a* are allographs of the same grapheme, i.e., they are the members of the same grapheme.

A grapheme can occur either singly or in combinations with other graphemes to represent meaningful units in a written text. And one grapheme may represent one or more phonemes or several graphemes or combinations of graphemes may represent only one phoneme. For example, Middle English <e>, <ee>, <ie>, <ei>, <ea>, <ie> may represent /i/ (Venezky, 1965). A similar example from Assamese is the vowel grapheme  /ʊ/ which is a combination of the graphemes  /ɛ/ and  /a/

### **3.2 Graphemic Analysis**

Graphemic analysis is a linguistic study on a par with a phonemic analysis where the orthographic units are described and the graphotactics that systematically connect each element in the system. (Bussmann 2006; Coulmas 1999) cited in Maspong & Pittayaporn, P (to appear). To elaborate, the distribution of all the graphs in the writing system of the language are examined. The contrastive graphs can be established as individual graphemes whereas the graphs in complementary distribution can be analyzed as the allographs of the same grapheme.

This study by Maspong and Pittayaporn presented a systematic graphemic analysis of the vowel graphs in the Sukhothai inscriptions. The

identified vowel graphemes were further mapped with their corresponding to Proto Southwestern phonemes to account for the vowel length contrast that was reflected in the Sukhothai inscriptions. The allographic patterns were then carefully considered for allography and homography as put forth by Shorto (1965) in script based studies.

### **3.3 Previous literature on Ahom phonology**

As mentioned earlier, Ahom has been an important part in the reconstruction of Proto Southwestern Tai (Tabassum and Morey 2009). Terwiel (1988, 1996), Diller (1992), Morey (2005, 2012, 2015), and Ranoo Wichasin (1986) has presented extensive descriptions on the Ahom script and its usage in the various socio-cultural traditions. But a detailed phonological description of the language is still lacking, one of reasons perhaps being that it is no longer a spoken language. Morey (2005) is the most well described and systematic phonological description of Ahom produced so far. Similar to the many other descriptions on Ahom phonology it also assumes a one to one correspondence between the letters and the phonemes but it is not just limited to that assumption. He analyses the Bar Amra manuscript, Ahom to Assamese dictionary manuscript, to reconstruct some of the phonemes which he further compares with the reflexes of the Tai languages in Northeast India like Aiton and Phake, more specifically with Aiton which is claimed to be closer to Ahom. But he does not give a full description of all letter graphs in Ahom script and describes just a few of the graphs following this methodology.

Duangthip (2012) however, does attempts to give a full phonological description of Ahom but it suffers from many serious methodological problems. Firstly, she has given a phonological description of Ahom solely based on the Buranji (historical chronicle) manuscripts and has totally overlooked variations that existed in the writing pattern of manuscripts other than Buranji. Furthermore, it appears that the phoneme inventory of Ahom was constructed simply by considering a one to one sound-letter correspondence. There is no methodological note as such explaining on what basis phonetic values were assigned to the Ahom graphic symbols. A similar case is seen in Rane (2004), where the romanized transcriptions of the Ahom data collected from the *Ahom Lexicons* were given phonetic values purely on the independence of the author with no explanatory notes again. Further, the inconsistencies in the roman transcriptions in the two Ahom dictionaries used for Ahom data has been questioned in Terwiel (1988), Diller (1992), Tabassum and Morey (2009). This

brings us to the conclusion that a systematic graphemic analysis of the Ahom script is very important to analyze each and every graph and understand what they stand, whether they are in an allographic relation with another graph or are homographs, to figure out the contrastive graphemes, their relation with the PWST phonemes etc before assigning any phonetic values to them.

### **3.4 Review of Proto Southwestern reconstructions**

The Southwestern branch is the most well described of the three branches of the Tai languages and covers the largest geographical area as well as the largest number of speakers. Li Fang Kuei's reconstruction of Proto Tai which is a pioneering work in the classification of the three branches of the Tai language family also gives detailed description of each of the branches in the language family. In his description of Proto Southwestern Tai, he chose Siamese (i.e. Bangkok Thai) as a representative of the Southwestern group of languages. Along with Siamese he also made references to other languages in the sub group to describe the features which were absent in Siamese but were present in some other language in the group. Ahom occupies an important position in Li's description of the clusters in Proto Southwestern Tai. He claims that /l/ is found after unaspirated stops and /r/ after aspirated stops and that Ahom was the only language that preserved the cluster /phra-/. Examples of clusters that Li claimed were retained in Ahom are /pla/ and /phrai/ (based on Baruah 1920). However, a comparison of the data of these clusters with the Ahom manuscripts are in contrast to Li's description, for example, the words for fish and empty are found to be written as /pa/, /pau/ respectively unlike the Siamese /pla/ and /plau/.

Jonsson (1991) is another description of Proto Southwestern Tai. She presents a comparative study on the Southwestern branch with a wider range of languages unlike Li's representation. She also provides ample example data describing the reflexes of the Proto Southwestern Tai reconstruction. The most recent reconstruction of Proto Southwestern Tai is that of Pittayaporn (2009). This reconstruction corresponds to Li's reconstruction but at the same time makes some important claims. One such claim put forth by this reconstruction is the existence of an additional uvular series of consonants. It disagrees with Li and Jonsson's views on the existence of the clusters \*phr- at the Proto Southwestern Tai level which has been claimed to be retained in Ahom.

In the reconstructions of Li and Jonsson, the data for Ahom was solely based on textual materials. This has also been noted as a problem in Pittayaporn

(2009) in the context of the retention of clusters in Ahom. Li himself noted the inconsistency in the Ahom data for the clusters. The source of Li's data for Ahom were from the two dictionaries, Barua's Ahom-Assamese-English dictionary (1920), discrepancies of which has been listed in detail by Terweil (1988). Jonsson's reflexes also ignore some of the allographic variations in Ahom. For example, words like 'leaf', 'lotus' and 'mucus' are found to be written with the graph *m* in the manuscripts instead of the graph *b* as cited in Jonsson's Ahom data indicating a merger between the two PWST phonemes of which the letter graphs are a representation. Such allographic variation is also seen to occur between <h> and <r> in words like 'cry' which is written using both <h> and <r>. This study thus aims to investigate the allographic patterns in the Ahom manuscripts reflecting the mergers and splits in the Proto Southwestern phonemes.

### **3.5 Problems with the Ahom Lexicons**

The two main lexicons which have been the source of data for the so far available works of Ahom are- The Ahom- Assamese- English dictionary and the Ahom Lexicons.

The Ahom- Assamese- English dictionary was compiled by G. C Barua who was entrusted the task of learning Ahom and translating the Ahom manuscripts by E.A Gait. Barua himself was not a native speaker of Ahom and compiled this dictionary with the help of a few Deodhais (Ahom priests) who could read and perform Ahom rituals (G.C. Barua 1920:i).

The Ahom Lexicons was compiled and published by N. N Deodhai Phukan and B.M Barua in the year 1964. It consists of two parts, the first part is general dictionary consists of words from the Ahom manuscript lexicon Bar Amra and the second part consists of the other manuscript lexicon Loti Amra. Further, the editors of the Lexicons super imposed the entries of the Bar Amra on the G.C Barua's Ahom-Assamese-English dictionary (1920) without proper indication of the source of the two different list of entries.

Terwiel has listed many important issues with the dictionaries, some of which are discussed as follows: One of the main issues of the two dictionaries was mixing of different forms of transliterations without any notes on them. The compiler of the dictionary G.C Barua was Assamese and had no linguistic training. These collection of words were then supplied to Grierson who later on wrote a chapter on Ahom in the Linguistic survey of India. Further, there were issues with the transliteration as well. When Barua took entries from Grierson he followed Grierson's system of transliteration in Roman script but



when including words from other systems he used a different pattern. For example, there are many words taken from Grierson with the sound " as in English 'hog' written with an accented mark on top of the letter /a/. But when in case of other instances Barua renders the same sound with /a/ following the way Assamese is often transliterated into English. Grierson's explanatory notes to the transliterations were also left out creating further ambiguities. Thus creating a large number of mistakes in transferring entries from Grierson's into the new dictionary (Terwiel, 1988). Thus, any kind of linguistic study based on these dictionaries will tend to have a false start and may not be able to accomplish satisfactory results.

To make matters worse, the second dictionary, the Ahom Lexicons (B. Barua and Phukan 1964) which was a mix of the previous Ahom-Assamese-English dictionary along with the two dictionary manuscripts created further confusions and mistakes.

Besides the mixing up of the roman transliterations, the influence of the 'intermediate Assamese transcription' further problematized the transcription of the sibilants and the vowels in the Ahom Lexicons. Thus the sound that was transcribed as /ch/ in the dictionary was rendered as c in the lexicons and the s sound was transcribed as /sh/ in the 1920 dictionary was written as /ch/ in the Ahom Lexicons. This makes it very difficult for a person unfamiliar with the Ahom and Assamese script to recognize the intended sound of the word. For example, the lexical entry 'chak' in Ahom Lexicons needs to be pronounced as 's" k' to get the accurate meaning of the general Thai word 'elbow' (Terwiel 1988).

Thus as rightly remarked by Terwiel that under the circumstances the dictionaries were compiled it was inevitable that the reference works would contain spelling inconsistencies and would copy and compound mistakes from earlier wordlists. Linguists ought to be aware of such factors before they use Ahom in comparative studies (Terwiel, 1988).

#### **4. Notations used in the project**

The transcriptions for Ahom are not presented using the IPA. In the translation of manuscripts undertaken by Chaichuen Khamdaengyodtai working with Stephen Morey (and searchable on <http://sealang.net/assam/>), the vowels are presented using letters from the Roman alphabet, rather than a phonetic transcription.

One of the symbols used in the translations is <v>, as in *mvng* 'country'. This symbol is written in the manuscripts as <iu>, as <miung>, but the sound is

neither a /v/ sound or an /iu/ sound. In contrast, it is a vowel that is usually described as ‘back unrounded’ that sounds a little bit like that <ur> in *turn* but is not an /u/ sound.

Table 1 presents a comparison of the forms used in the translation with those found in two of the reconstructions of proto Southwestern Tai (PSWT), Li (1977) and Jonsson (1991)

Table 1: Vowel symbols in this study

PSWT vowel/ consonant (Li 1977)	PSWT vowel / consonant (Jonsson 1991)	transliteration used in Morcy and Chaichuen translation	‘pronunciation line in Morcy and Chaichuen translation
i	i	I	i
ii	i	I	i
n	n	U	n
uu	u	U	u
a	a	(various)	a
aa	aa	(various)	a
c	æ	E	c
o	□	(various)	o
ī	ī	Iu	v

## 5 Methodology

The methodology adopted in this project aims to do a systematic graphemic analysis of the Ahom script to establish the contrastive graphemes in the language and establish their relation with the Proto Southwestern Tai phonemes. Each and every graph in the manuscripts were analyzed for their position in a word, co-occurrence with other graphs, and also for any cases of homography or allography.

## 6 Data Analysis

### 6.1 Identification of the graphemes :

The graphemic analysis was done by recording the positional distribution of each and every graph in a word. A graph was confirmed as a grapheme only when it was contrastive to another grapheme, thus proving its distinctness. The graphs which occurred in free variation or in complementary distribution were considered as allographs of the same grapheme. Based on this criteria, a total of 19 consonant graphemes were found, 18 of which could occur in the initial position whereas only 8 of them could occur in the word final position. In the table below, the initial and the final consonant graphemes are presented.

In the table here, we show the graphemic transcription, so that words with the /a/ vowel, which is unwritten, are shown with the vowel in brackets, as *k(a)ng*. Here *ng* stands for a single consonant.

Table 2: Initial consonant graphemes in Tai Ahom

Consonant graphemes	Initial consonant graphemes	Final consonant graphemes
<k>	<i>k(a)ng</i> ‘middle’	<i>s(a)k</i> ‘any’
<kh>	<i>khon</i> “spirit”	--
<ng>	<i>ngvn</i> “silver”	<i>s(a)ng</i> ‘build’
<n>	<i>n(a)ng</i> ‘sit’	<i>s(a)n</i> ‘shake’
<ch>	<i>ch(a)ng</i> ‘elephant’	--
<t>	<i>tuk</i> “fall”	<i>s(a)t</i> ‘mat’
<p>	<i>pai</i> “go” <sup>1</sup>	<i>s(a)p</i>
<d>	<i>d(a)ng</i> ‘loud’	--
<m>	<i>mon</i> “mulberry”	<i>s(a)m</i> ‘three’
<ph>	<i>ph(a)ng</i> ‘listen’	--
<th>	<i>th(a)ng</i> ‘way’	--
<s>	<i>s(a)ng</i> ‘build’	--
<r>	<i>r(a)ng</i> ‘body’	--
<j>	<i>j(a)ng</i> ‘still’	--
<ny>	<i>nya</i> “grass”	<i>siny</i> ‘hundred thousand’
<l>	<i>l(a)ng</i> ‘back’	
<h>	<i>ha</i> “five”	
<b>	<i>b(a)ng</i> ‘some’	<i>k(a)w</i> ‘1SG’
<a>	--	

Besides establishing the graphemes in the Ahom script, the following allographs were also identified. These allographs are as follows:

**b (W4w (l’**: Both of these graphs are in complementary distribution, the graph *balways* occur in the initial position of a word whereas the graph *w* is always found word finally. Examples of such words are words like **W***ang* meaning ‘some’, ‘*lkaw* meaning ‘not’ *baw* written as **W** with both the graphs in their respective positions.

**b (W4 m (b):** These graphs are also allographs of the same grapheme and are in free variation. For example, the word for ‘village’ is found to be written both as *ban/man* & cf.

**n& 4d &Y:** These graphs also appear as allographs of the same grapheme, examples of which are words like ‘star’ written both as *nvw/dvw* (cB/YB).

A total of 12 vowel graphemes have been found as presented in the following table. Here, it can be seen that some of the vowel graphemes occur only in open syllables whereas the others occur only in closed syllables.

Table 3: Vowel graphemes in Tai Ahom

Vowel graphemes	Open syllables	Closed syllables
a/aa	<i>ka</i> ‘crow’	
u	--	<i>kun</i> ‘person’
uu	<i>kuu</i> ‘every’	
i		<i>kin</i> ‘eat’
ii	<i>kii</i> ‘how many’	
o		<i>kon</i> ‘lead’
au	<i>kau</i> ‘1SG’	
ai	<i>kai</i> ‘chicken’	
am	<i>kam</i> ‘word’	
E	<i>kE</i> ‘untie’	
O	<i>kO</i> ‘linker’ <sup>2</sup>	
v		<i>kvn</i> ‘tax’

**Comparison with the PWST phonemes:** The graphemes were then compared with the PSWT phonemes to comprehend the possible mergers and retentions indicated by the allographic variations in the Ahom script. Li’s model of PWST reconstruction was used for comparison with the Ahom graphemes. For this a spread sheet was made recording each PSWT correspondence with the Ahom example words. The number of occurrences of the example words with their exact locations, i.e., line numbers of each word were also recorded and most importantly any kind of variation in the graphemic representation of a word were noted to be analyzed for allophony or homography.

The table below presents the correspondences of the Ahom graphemes in 8 different manuscripts, Ming Mvng Lung Phai, Tai Ahom and the Stars (Text A, B and C), Nang Khai, Nemi Mang, Lak Ni and the Pvn Ko Mvng manuscripts with the PSWT phonemes. Further, any number of irregular patterns have been noted along with the frequency of their occurrence.



<k>	*k	eat	kin	--	kin	--	kin	kin	kin	kin
	*k	chicken	kat	kat	kat	--	kat	kat	kat	kat
	*g	pair	kuu	kuu	kuu	--	kuu	kuu	kuu	kuu
<kw>	*g	chew	kiw	--	--	--	kiw	-	-	kiw
	*kh	log	khon	--	--	--	-	khon	--	--
	*kh	ride on horse back	khii	--	--	--	khii	khii	--	khii
<kh>	*c	to enter	khau/kh aww	khav	khav	khav(4) khav(4)	khau	khau	khav	khav
	*x	rice	khau	khav(5) khov(3)	khav	khav	khau	khau	khav(6) khov(4) khov(1)	khov

**Vowel graphemes**

Table 5: Vowel graphemes compared with PSWT

Grapheme	PSWT	Examples
i	*i	<i>sip</i> 'ten'
	*ii	<i>tin</i> 'foot'
	*c	<i>chit</i> 'seven'
	*ɕ	<i>mE</i> 'mother'
ii	*ii	<i>piu</i> 'year'
u	*u	<i>um</i> 'to hold in one's arms'
	*o	<i>lung</i> 'to descend'
	*uu	<i>luk</i> 'child'
uu	*uu	<i>pluu</i> 'male'
v	*ɨ	<i>thvng</i> 'to arrive'
	*ɨ̃	<i>pvn</i> 'other'
ø	*ə	<i>m(a)n</i> 'yam'
o	*ɔ	<i>kong</i> 'drum'
O	*ɔ̃	<i>pO</i> 'father'

**Diphthongs :** There are two graphemes that correspond to PSWT diphthong phonemes. These are <ai> and <au>. The correspondences of these graphemes to PSWT phonemes are presented as follows:

Table 6: Diphthong graphemes compared with PSWT

Grapheme	PSWT	Examples
ai	*ai	<i>pai</i> 'to go'
av	*au	<i>khav</i> 'rice'
	*aĩ	<i>mav</i> 'new'

**7. Findings**

This project was undertaken to identify the distinct graphemes in Ahom and the various allographs that are present in the Ahom script. These allographs have always been a mystery lacking a proper explanation. The findings of the project agrees to the proposed hypotheses which have been discussed in detail below :

### **7.1 Unconditioned allographs showing mergers of the PWST phonemes**

The unconditioned allographs in the Ahom script reflect consistency and thus cannot be ignored or disregarded as mere scribal errors. These set of allographs when compared with their PWST correspondences show clear sign of mergers in the Ahom script. Some of them are discussed as follows:

***b4 m***: Both of these two graphs are seen to occur interchangeably in the manuscripts. These graphs when compared with the PSWT phonemes, it is seen that only those words which correspond to PWST \**b*- and \**hm*- respectively are represented with the graphs <*b*> and <*m*> interchangeably. Also, the variation is seen in the correspondence sets \**b*- and \**hm*- but the same variation is not seen in the correspondence set of \**m*- where all the words are represented with the <*m*>. This indicates that \**b*- and \**hm*- has merged with \**m*- given that words in these sets are also represented with the <*m*> grapheme which corresponds to \**m*-.

A frequency count of the number of tokens revealed that the use of the graph *b* in the Ming Mvng Lung Phai manuscript was more in comparison to the graph *m* except for the word ‘top/above’ where out of total of 6 tokens, 4 of them were for the *m* graph and 2 for the *b* graph. It is further interesting to see that the negative ‘not’ was distinctively spelled with *b* graph as *bawin* in the Ming Mvng Lung Phai, the Tai Ahom and the Stars, Nang Khai, Lakni and the Pvn Ko Mvng manuscripts. In the Nemi Mang manuscript, there were two tokens for the *m* graph, but these 2 tokens were among a negligible score of 105 tokens, of which 103 were written with the *b* graph. This implies that at least for the word ‘not’ there was a clear distinction in the usage of the *b* graph positing *b* and *mas* two contrastive graphemes. While the other words in the set shows a merger of \**b*- with \**m*-. The inconsistent use of the graphs for the other words can be explained by Conserving Effect as proposed by Bybee (2007). Higher frequency words tend to have stronger mental retention than lesser frequency words and hence are more resistant to sound change. This view can be applied at par with the allographic variations in the Ahom script, ‘not’ being a more commonly used word resisted the change in the usage of the two graphs interchangeably except the two sporadic occurrences. Thus, the word ‘not’ maintained the graphs *b* and *m* as two contrastive graphemes which was gradually losing out in the other words in all the other manuscripts. This brings us to the conclusion that the unconditioned allographs *b* and *m* actually show a merger between the PWST \**b*- and \**m* phonemes in Ahom.

Similarly, both the graphs *b* and *m* are in free variation in words corresponding to \*hm- phoneme as well. But in this case, in all the example words, the grapheme <m> is used in a majority except in two instances for the word 'burn', in the manuscripts Nang Khai and the Nemi Mang, where occurrences of both the graphs are found. However, here too, out of a total of 3 tokens in the Nang Khai manuscripts only 1 of them is written with the <b> and in the Nemi Mang manuscripts out of 10 tokens of the word 'burn' 7 of them are written with the grapheme <m> and only 3 of them are written using the <b> grapheme. Here again, it is to be noted that the Nemi Mang manuscript shows the most number of variations which accounts for its inconsistency. These variations further indicates that there is merger between \*hm- and \*m.

**n4d** : A similar merger is also shown by the allographs *n* and *d*. The *n* corresponds to PSWT \*n- whereas the *d* corresponds to \*\*d-. These graphs when compared with the PWST phonemes, it is seen that both the graphs occur interchangeably in words corresponding to PWST \*\*d-. But all the words corresponding to \*n- are always represented with the *n* graph although there was one exception found in the data in the manuscript *Nang Khai* for the word "little" where it occurs with *d* graph which may also be due to the close resemblance of both the graphs. Further, the number of tokens for the *n* graph is much higher than the *d* graph in this correspondence set in all the manuscripts. The only exception was for the word 'star' in the Ming Mvng Lung Phai manuscript where all the 3 tokens occur with the *d* graph contrasting it from the *n* graph. This leads us to the conclusion there is a merger going on between PWST \*\*d- and \*n-.

## **7.2 Conditioned allographs showing retentions of PWST phonemic contrasts**

In all the manuscripts, it is widely seen that *b* and *w* are allographs of the same grapheme. The *b* always occur in the word initial position whereas *w* always occur in the word final position. When both the graphs are compared with their PSWT correspondences, they show retention of their phonemic contrasts. For example, the word 'village' *ban* is written with initial the grapheme *b* corresponds to PSWT \*\*b-. Again, on the other hand the word for 'enter' *khaw* written with the final *w* corresponds to PWST \*-w which is also attested in other southwestern dialects like Shan. This correspondence of the two allographs to two different PSWT phonemes helps to conclude that these conditioned allographs which can never occur together preserves the PWST phonemic contrasts.



Another such pair of conditioned allographs are *n* and *d*. These allographs occur as unconditioned allographs in the word initial position but in the word final position they appear to be a complementary distribution. The graph *n* occurs in both the word initial and the word final position but the graph *d* occurs only in the initial position. The correspondences of these graphs to PWST reconstructions show that the *d* in words like *dau* 'star' corresponds to \*'d- whereas *then* corresponds to \*-n as in a word with a final *n* like 'non'. Both of them corresponding to two different PWST phonemes.

### **7.3 Allographic variations imply two sets of manuscripts**

A comparison of the allographic variation patterns in the manuscripts led to the identification of two groups of manuscripts. The manuscripts Ming Mvng Lung Phai, Tai Ahom and the Stars and the Nang Khai manuscripts contained lesser allographic variations. For example, the word 'watch' is represented either as *du* or *nu* i.e., either by the allograph *d* or *n*. But in the Nemi Mang manuscript besides *d* and *n*, there are also 2 occurrences of the same word with the initial *l*. The Nemi Mang manuscript also contains a lot of spelling variations which is not common in the other manuscripts. For example, the word for 'morning' is written as *Xl chaw* in the Ming Mvng Lung Phai manuscript but in the Nemi Mang manuscript, there are three different forms for the same word- *Xl chaw*, *Xs chou* and *Xs chow w*.

The special *u* like graphic marker exists only in the Nemi Mang manuscript, attached to the word final consonant grapheme. For example, there are 42 tokens for the word diamond. But out of these 42 tokens 22 tokens occur with the additional graphic marker as *h Qsing u*. This graphic marker is not present in any of the other manuscripts.

Based on these variation patterns, these manuscripts can be divided into two sets. One group consisting of the Ming Mvng Lung Phai, Tai Ahom and the Stars and the Nang Khai manuscript and the Nemi Mang, Lakni and the Pvn Ko Mvng manuscripts comprising the other. There appears to be lesser allographic variations in the first group whereas more varied and innovative forms exist in the latter group. The manuscripts containing more of the regular allographic variations with close correspondences with the PWST phonemes can be considered to be older manuscripts in comparison to the manuscripts with higher number of variations. Another reason that accounts for the Nemi Mang manuscript to be a recent one is the Buddhist text in it. Ahoms remained the only Tai community in Northeast India that never converted to Buddhists. Hence, the manuscripts containing these Buddhist stories confirm that these manuscripts were later additions.

### **8. Problems with the project**

The initial plan of the project looked very convincing. But once work on the project was started, there were many issues that need to be dealt with to commence the work. The first and foremost problem was the selection of manuscripts. Although there are hundreds of manuscripts, there are also a handful of manuscripts that have been systematically transcribed and translated. So only those manuscripts were that carefully transcribed and translated along with a good amount of text were chosen. But it appeared that only good translations with a good amount of text was not enough. Problems arose when comparison of the Ahom words were done with the PWST reconstructions. For instance, it was very difficult to extract example words from the manuscript *The Tai Ahom and the Stars* as it was a manuscript dealing with a specific subject i.e., astrology dealing with fortune telling based on the position of the stars. For example, words like sugarcane, hair etc are very unlikely to be found in a manuscript like *The Tai Ahom and the stars*. It can be seen in the analysis section later that very few example words could be elicited from this manuscript unlike the other two manuscripts. Thus, selection of the content of the manuscripts also plays an important role on the kind of data that is required for the project.

Another issue with the project was that it was its exhaustive scope which required a lot of time in doing it. This project focused on both qualitative and quantitative data. Tokens of each example word had to be listed in all the manuscripts to look for any kind allography in the texts.

### **9. Conclusion**

This project gave a detailed insight into the Ahom script in the three manuscripts. It throws insight into the inadequacies that a script may present in understanding the actual phonological representations of the language. The graphemic analysis of the script and further comparisons with the PSWT phonemes helped solving the inconsistent allographic patterns in the script which were just considered as variations with no explanations. This project thus along with giving a detailed description of the Ahom script, it also presented a systematic methodology in conducting a text based study of a language.

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**Notes**

1. Note that *ai* is written with a single symbol
2. The capital O symbol is used for the e and a symbol combined

# Black Tai Women in Vietnam

## Understanding Preservation of Cultural Identity

Luong Thai Thu Hang

### **Preface**

One of the most topical issues of mankind today is the cultural identity of different ethnic groups in the course of development of the modern world. Is cultural conservation and integration a challenge to each nation, each ethnic group during its development?

Vietnam inhabits 54 ethnic groups with their cultural diversity. At present, the conservation and promotion of the cultural identity of each ethnic group is a significant precondition to the comprehensive and sustainable development of the nation. So what has been happening to the conservation of the traditional cultural elements as well as the reception of the outside cultural elements into the cultural identity of each ethnic group? This report helps to find an answer to this important question and focuses on analyzing some characteristics of Tai culture and the role of Black Tai<sup>1</sup> women in the traditional cultural conservation in the background of renovation in Vietnam.

The Study has been carried out in Thanh Luong commune; Dien Bien district, Lai Chau province. This site in Northwest Vietnam is since long inhabited by Black Tai, and it is since some time also heavily influenced by urbanization because of its location near to the strategically situated Dien Bien Phu town (*Miàng Thään*), a mixed habitation with relatively new King (Viet) people's settlements, and their frequent communication with the Lao (a relative ethnic group) across the national border.

### **Some Traits of the Studied Site**

#### ***Physical conditions***

Thanh Luong is both a low-land and border commune of Dien Bien district, about 5 km from the district and province centre, and borders Dien Bien town to the East, Laos to the West (about 10 km), Thanh Nua to the North and Thanh Hung commune, Dien Bien district to the South. Thanh Luong lies in the monsoonal region. The weather is divided in two seasons: the dry season (from November to April) and the rainy season (from May to October). The commune stretches on a slope of 16° to 20°, on a total area of

4,010 ha, of which agricultural land and tenure land represent 842 ha, and forest land and water surface cover the remaining 3,168 ha.

Thanh Luong has the mountain-foot valley landscape topography, which is typical of Tai settlements in the region, and different from the middle-range and high mountain topography of the Mon-Khmer, Hmong-Yao, and Tang-Mien ethnic groups in Northwest Vietnam. The typical topography has been the precondition to the formation and development of the Tai culture, which I will mention in a later part of my report.

My intention here is not to discuss Thanh Luong's physical conditions in detail, but to imply that the natural environment of a geographical area is a factor influencing an ethnic group's culture. I am not surprised to witness that the recent earthquakes in Thanh Luong have resulted in a heavy destruction of Kinh people's houses, but caused little damage to Tai people's houses on stilts<sup>2</sup>. Perhaps more cultural elements devised by humans help form the cultural entity of each ethnic group, but the house on stilts and the inhabited topography are very typical of the Tai people's culture.

### **Population**

*Müang*) *Thään* (vn: Muong Thanh) is one of *sip hok tjâu tai*, i.e., one of the 16 administrative units of the Tai people (*müang*) in the XIII century. Muong Thanh was formerly known as *müang thään* ("müang of heaven" in Tai language), of which most Tai people in Northwest Vietnam, in Laos and a proportion in Thailand believe that their ancestors inhabited here<sup>3</sup>.

Thanh Luong commune lies within *müang thään*, where Black Tai inhabited for a long time. Old people in Pe Luong village, a pure Tai village in the commune centre have told me about *pau puu* (their ancestors) here. They said that Tai inhabited here for a very long time. They could not say exactly for how many generations, but recalled that it must have been 4 generations since then, and in the past only Black Tai inhabited (Pe Luong) and the neighboring villages. Pe village has 5 clans, of which Lo is the largest, being divided into three branches: Lo Huong (namely. Bac Cam), Lo Noi and Lo Nuong. About 2 generations ago Pe village was composed of only 7 Tai households dwelling around the present Muong Thanh bridge. Since 1950, the Tai population has increased rapidly in both directions: natural and mechanical; the mechanical increase brought about by Kinh people and others have changed the population structure and the ethnic profile, which forms one of the preconditions to cultural changes.

At present, Thanh Luong's population is nearly 8,000 comprising 5 ethnic groups, of which the Black Tai represent about 40%, King (Viet) 35%, and Tay, Hmong, Khmu the remaining 25%. The entire commune is composed of 41 villages, of which 21 are Tai villages. Between 1954 and 1960, besides a Khmu village called Hua Pe of nearly ten households, there were 9 Tai villages *baan* in Thanh Luong: Pe Luong, Pe Noi, Hong Hin, Long Tong, Lo, Banh, Nong, Le, Nguu. Among these 9 villages, Pe Luong was regarded as the central village and the farthest was Nguu, lying 3 km from the commune centre on the border with Laos. So far they have remained pure Tai villages.

However, the migration of people from elsewhere to this region has resulted in King (Viet) villages and half-Tai/half-King villages intermingling with pure Tai villages. Villages inhabited by King people are called *thôn* (hamlet [vn]), therefore in the commune's administrative documents the term *than baan* (hamlet-village) refers to both Tai and King villages within the commune.

Mixed habitation is characteristic of the ethnic groups in Northwest Vietnam. The population distribution in Thanh Luong is no exception. What I am interested in here is how mixed habitation has influenced the cultural identity of each ethnic group, and how the cultural relations among these groups have been going on. Specifically in Thanh Luong, how has the Tai cultural identity been conserved in the mixed habitation among Tai, King, and Khmu people? How will Tai culture change with the integration of modern factors of urbanization in the Muong Thanh basin valley? And furthermore, how will Tai culture change and appear when Muong Thanh airport (located inside Thanh Luong) becomes an international airport, and when the Muong Thanh valley, thanks to tourism, becomes the meeting point of many cultures in the world?

### ***Production and Life***

In the renovation background of the whole country, the economic life of Thanh Luong people has changed a lot. In the pre-renovation period, their major source of income came from traditional wet-rice cultivation. With the strains of rice like Bao Thai, Moc Tuyen, Short Tran Chau, the crop yield was rather low, only from 1 to 2.5 ton/ha. Since after 1986, Thanh Luong has adopted the technique of rice-plant without transplanting. This technique was originated from Cuu Long river delta, and has been popularized in Dien Bien since 1988. This was the time the renovation policy of the government was issued. Thanh Luong carried out the product-based contract system to farmers, in which farm land was allocated to each household according to the number of dwellers

and the farmers were active in their production and handed over the quota output to the state. At the same time various new rice strains were also used by Tai people, for example CR203, IR45, and in the early 1990s, several others were added, such as Chinese cross breed, Khang Dan, IR64, etc. By adopting new rice strains and advanced cultivation techniques, the crop yield increased quickly, with the summer crop producing 6 t/ha and the winter crop 4 t/ha. Benefiting the restructuring policy in agricultural management, Thanh Luong also enjoyed other policies in the comprehensive development program on mountainous areas and ethnic groups complying Resolution 22/CT approved by the Political Bureau and Decision 72-CP by the government (in 1989). Following these programs, in recent years agro-forestry households in Thanh Luong have been granted loans to do business at a preferential interest rate of about 9.6%/year. Specifically in 2000, 128 households in the commune were granted a total loan of 337 million VND from the poverty elimination and hunger alleviation program. The farm model has the tendency to develop, with 6 cattle and goat household farms. According to the 'waste land and barren hill afforestation' program #327 of the government, 246.8 ha of forest land in need of afforesting and 1226.9 ha under protection have been allocated to households in the commune.

The renovation policies have made a turning point for Tai people economically: the market economy is taking the place of the traditional subsistence agriculture. In the 1980s the number of rich households could be counted on one's fingers, but in 2000 it amounted to 129 households, accounting for 7.05%, the number of fairly rich households, average households, poor households, very poor households were 548 (31.42%), 783 (44.90%), 113 (6.47%) and 177 (10.16%) respectively; the average food converting to rice was 380 kg/person, the average income converting to cash was 920,000 Dong/person/year (source: The People's Committee of Thanh Luong, 2000). In the past, the temporary move to town, sub-towns for seasonal jobs was very rare or hardly ever, especially among Tai people. Over the past 5-7 years, this phenomenon has had the tendency to occur more frequently in Thanh Luong. As far as I know, there are about 15 men in Pe Luong village and 10 men in Nguu village who often do temporary jobs during off-crop time in Dien Bien town. Most of them are men, and their jobs are mainly assisting builders, carrying soil and stone, and loading goods. Also in two pure Tai village, trading across the border into Laos is quite popular, especially in Nguu village, which borders Laos, in which it occurs in almost every household, and 60% of the traders are women. Mixed with the traditional houses on stilts of Tai



people are 2 two-storey flat-roof houses, 13 bungalows with .... walls and tile roofs (like King people's houses). Both Pe Luong and Nguu village have grinding and husking services, tea shops. Motorbikes, television sets, radios and other modern facilities have appeared in many households.

In general, influenced by socio-economic conditions in the renovation period, the Tai people's life in Thanh Luong nowadays has become greatly different from the past. Modern life elements have penetrated into each village, each household, and each individual of the Tai community here. It is also one of the reasons leading to their cultural changes here.

### **The Concept of Culture and Some Traits of Tai Culture**

#### ***The concept of culture***

There have been several deep studies into culture and different ways of understanding culture. In my opinion, culture is a system of material and spiritual values devised by humans and accumulated through practice, including material, spiritual and social aspects.

Together with the concept of culture in general, *ethnic group's culture*, which is one of the basic concepts of anthropology, *is a combination of various elements of language, script, material and spiritual cultural activities, psychological and emotional shades, customs and formalities, etc., distinguishing one ethnic group from another group*<sup>4</sup>.

Ethnic group's culture covers a large scale, indeed all fields of life. However, each culture encompasses its own identity. "*Cultural identity is the integrity of cultural qualities, characteristics, nuances of each people, which has come into being and developed sustainably in the course of history, helping to maintain the uniqueness and uniformity of an ethnic groups culture, distinguishing its culture from another group's*".<sup>5</sup>

The definitions I mentioned above are regarded as tools to be used in this report and are not intended to be discussed in detail. They help to provide me the background to study further into Tai cultural identity and the contribution of Tai women in conserving, diversifying and promoting the ethnic group's cultural identity.

#### ***Some Traits of Tai Culture***

Tai people live in wooden or bamboo-made, thatch-roofed houses on stilts. Each house represents a patriarchal family. These families gather in a residential unit called *baan* ('mountainous village' in the understanding of the Viet). A village on average has about 30-40 families. Some large villages like Peluong or Nguu inhabit 106 and 60 families respectively.

Basically, the traditional costumes of Tai groups are similar. So, the women's costumes are typical of Tai culture: *süa koom*<sup>6</sup> (blouse), *sin* (skirt), *saai ääô* (belt), *paa piau* (headscarf, only for the Black Tai), and some ewels like *pua sooi* (a kind of silver chain worn round the hip, also called key chain), *mai khat kau* (metal hair-pin for married women, only for the Black Tai). The men's costumes are simpler. They consist of a round-necked, side-split shirt, bell-bottom, ankle-length trousers, and a headscarf. All of these items are made of hand-loomed and indigo-dyed cotton cloth.

Traditionally, Tai people eat sticky rice, garden and forest vegetables and cook mainly by steaming or grilling. The drink served in traditional festivals and reception of guests is a sort of wine cooked from rice, cassava and com. Tai people believe that in heaven there is the god *thään luang* who supervises the heaven and earth, humans and all creatures. On earth there are *phii* (deities) who are in charge of supervising, including the *phii hüan* (family deities), *phii dam* (deities of the clan), *pu pau* (ancestors), regarded as protective forces to humans. On the occasion of early spring, Tai people hold the festivities of *seen müang*, *seen baan*, *seen hüan* in honor of natural genies and of their family's ancestors. During the festivities they perform *khap* (singing) and *sää* (dancing), which are very creative kinds of folklore music of the Tai people.

Tai culture is reflected by many aspects of life: their eating habit, dressing style, dwelling, customs, ceremonies and formalities, art activities, psychology, lifestyle, which distinguish Tai culture from that of other ethnic groups.

### **Black Tai with the Conservation of the Ethnic Group's Cultural Identity *Changes in Black Tai Culture***

Some researchers in Vietnam have raised a warning about the decline of the ethnic groups' culture<sup>5</sup>. My study is not involved in discussing this proposition. However, I found that in Thanh Luong there is now a phenomenon of combining traditional and modern elements in Tai culture in some spheres of life.

In the relations between tradition and modernity in culture, the young generation, as the inheritors of their ancestors' cultural legacy, plays an important part. It is quite difficult to refer to cultural identity through young Tai men's costumes in Peluong and Nguu village nowadays. Men over 35 in the two villages hardly ever wear Tai traditional costumes but put on shirts and trousers like the King people instead. They told me that only elderly people wear

traditional clothes, but the young find these clothes unpleasant, inconvenient for going to work, to school or for going out. Moreover, making Tai traditional costumes involves a lot of time and energy, which is also discouraging for tailors nowadays. It is the easiest to identify Tai people through elderly people's and women's costumes. Particularly for young Tai girls nowadays, their costumes are not *süa koom* with shining silver buttons, but modern blouses instead. Any young girl in Peluong village now has at least 2 Tai traditional dresses, but they only wear them in traditional festivals, or on reception of guests to their house. I was taken by surprise to see that even in a wedding in Peluong village, the bridegroom does not put on Tai traditional clothes, the bride wears blouse and Tai dress. Also in this wedding, besides the very typical Tai formalities like the rituals performed by the bridegroom and the groom's families, the formality of *tang kau* for the bride, modern disco is also played and young men and girls dance to the music. Obviously in Pe Luong nowadays, there are some differences between adults and adolescents in terms of fashion, lifestyle and aesthetic values. Is it a sign of cultural integration, which anthropologists regard as a gathering of cultural changes on the move, and narrowing the gap among different cultures?<sup>8</sup>

### ***The role of women in Tai society***

In the development period nowadays, there have been some changes in the role and function of Black Tai women in economic, social and cultural fields. In Thanh Luong, Black Tai women also confront the challenges during the urbanization in Dien Bien town. How do they perform their cultural functions in that renovation background? Before going further into this matter in detail, we should study the traditional conception of Tai society on women.

As a Tai legend goes :

Once upon a time there were only women on earth. One day there was a strange gourd flowing along the stream. The women picked up the gourd, sharing and drinking the water inside it. Then all of them were pregnant and gave birth to sons and daughters, who are later regarded as human ancestors.

The association of the women's image with the onset of human life exists not only in Tai culture, but also in other wet-rice agricultural communities in Vietnam, as found in the legend of "*Ba Mu*" (midwife) of the King (Viet) people. For Tai people, who regard wet-rice agriculture as their main source

of income, the element of *water-female-mother* takes the leading role in Tai culture. In Tai family, if a man is considered as the master of the house, the pillar who manages big affairs, and whose power is asserted by *sau tjau süa* or *sau ton dang* (master's pillar), a woman is thought to bring wealth and prosperity to the family. Therefore, in a new house erection ceremony, *sau hää* (female's pillar) - the symbol of the woman's power must be placed in front of the *sau tjau süa* (master's pillar). Many important rituals are carried out with the erection of female's pillar by *lung taa* (the wife's relatives), while no relevant rituals are carried out the erection of master's pillar, which is put up afterwards.

Similarly in the kitchen and new house erection ceremonies, the master of ceremony is always either the wife's father or her mother. The prayers in the ceremony are always for good health, wealth and prosperity of the whole family'.<sup>9</sup> Tai family is a congregation of people of the same blood, living under the same root, together with the women coming from outside the family after marriages. On the other hand, girls are born in the family, grow up and become a member of another family. Therefore, a marriage is an important event, marking changes in status and role of a woman in a family. In each stage her status and role are established differently.

A girl's status is established right at the moment of birth "*Njing tooi daai, chaai tooi dam*" (women must know to sew, men must know the matters of the clan; meaning that a woman depends on her husband, and a man depends on his clan)<sup>10</sup>. According to this notion, a newly-born girl is not considered a member of the clan. Tai people even believe that girls are born to be sold and become a member of another family "*fuu njing khoong khaa - fuu chaai khoong liang*" (daughters are for sale, sons are for rearing). In addition, the girl's gender is first established by the birth rites (the practice of *au luuk long khuang* (carrying the baby in arm down to the floor), *ook fai* (moving away from the fireplace) to present her to Lady *mää bau*, and the name-giving ceremony. The baby girl is given a name representing beauty, gentleness with the wish that she will later on become skilful at weaving and embroidery, hardworking and versatile.

Puberty is a stage in which a Tai girl prepares everything thoroughly, both physically and mentally, to enter a new life phase, in a new role- the role of a wife and mother. As a Tai saying goes: *fuu chaai sip saam huu tat pii, fuu njing sip sii huu thii buu* (a thirteen-year-old-boy knows how to make a pipe, a fourteen-year-old girl knows how to make up her face)<sup>11</sup>. At this age, parents teach their children the skills that they need to know by convention.

For example, sons are taught by their-father how to cast a net, daughters are taught by their mother in the fields of cooking, weaving and embroidery skills. Not considered as a member of the clan, girls are not entitled to inherit the family's property; however, they are allowed by the parents to accumulate their own fund.

Besides working in the fields and cooking, Tai girls also grow cotton, weave fabric, tailor and embroider clothes, bags, scarves, blankets and mattresses; even they raise pigs and chicken in order to accumulate the dowry for their later marriage. If a Tai man is judged by his capability to weave and cast fishing nets, a Tai woman is judged by her fabric-weaving and embroidery skills.

In traditional Tai society, parents arranged their children's marriage. Tai people believe that girls are not considered as members of their family, and only after a marriage, they are entitled to join the clan *dam* of their husband's family, which is reflected in the *ngwon phuon phai* ceremony (i.e., the ceremony of changing the family name) in the wedding. The groom's family chooses an auspicious day to go to the bride's house to ask to bring the *hoo* of the bride home and hang it at the wing *tang chaan* (verandah) of their house. And from that moment, the girl is officially considered as a member of that specific family.

According to Tai custom, when a child is born in a family, a *tai* is hung at the roof of the house wirig *tang quan* if it is a boy, or a *hoo* at the wing *tang chaan* if it is a girl. A *tai* is a bamboo-woven basket containing a talisman which is a bow and a small bamboo fan. A *hoo* consists of two small bamboo baskets, one representing the womb, the other one containing sacred objects, which are a cotton-carding machine, a fan and a cloth bag of betel and areca, when the owner of a *tai* or a *hoo* dies, these objects are thrown away into the "forest of ghosts" *dong fii*. Coming to a Tai family, you will know the number of men and women in the household by counting all the *tai* and *hoo*. When the *hoo* of a girl is brought to her husband's house, she will then begin a very important role in her husband's family.

After a marriage, the woman officially becomes a member of the *dam* of the husband's family, which is marked by the practice of *tang kau* (coiling her long hair in a topknot) applied to married women. In Tai custom, the notion of respecting men and despising women is expressed clearly in the practice of marriage.

For instance, Tai people have the tradition of mourning for a dead husband: if a husband dies, his wife should abstain for three years from remarrying (female abstinence); for a childless couple having lived together for 3 years, a widow must be in mourning for her husband for 3 years; having lived together for 3 months, she must be in mourning for 1 year.<sup>12</sup> By convention, if the wife does not refrain from remarrying, she will be punished 3 tacels of silver supplemented by wine, buffaloes, etc. But there is no rule of being in mourning for a dead wife. Inequality between men and women is also reflected in the divorce rule: *Women have to compensate twice for a divorce, men just lose property in a divorce (njing thiang chaai - mot phang song; chaai thiang njing - sia khoong dai doc)*<sup>13</sup>. Perhaps because of the buying-and-selling nature of patriarchal marriages, Tai women after a marriage depend entirely on the husband's family, i.e, exist as a member in that *dam* (clan) and are perceived to die as a ghost of her husband's family. Women are always treated differently even at their death, which is reflected clearly in the mourning rituals of the Black Tai. Through the above-mentioned, it can be seen that the status of women in traditional Tai society is much lower than that of men. In their family and marriage, they are not entitled to get involved in important matters and cannot make decisions by themselves. Black Tai women almost have no right to make decisions in communal activities.

### ***Black Tai Women and Traditional Costume Conservation***

In recent times, the clothing habits for men in Pe Luong have changed a lot. Most of the men wear now clothes which design and material is similar to those worn by the King people. The self-made cotton clothes with Tai design are nowadays rarely seen, and only with elderly people. And although affected by exogenous/external elements, the women's traditional-style clothes are still maintained in Pe Luong and Ngu village.

The essential clothes worn by married women are: blouse, skirt, belt, headscarf, and metal hair pin. However, the typical Tai blouse is not always worn. The women say such traditional clothes make them very hot and uncomfortable during summer days. They therefore wear those traditional clothes at festival days only, and otherwise they wear modern-style clothes on a daily basis.

The Black Tai women play a very important role in the preservation of Black Tai traditional costume as they are the family members who are in charge of all woven and tailored products. There is a reason why little amounts of cotton yarn are left nowadays for the women to make their traditional

products. The importance of forest protection has been acknowledged, so that the Tai in Ngu village do not longer practice slash and burn agriculture on the mountain slopes. As the result, the cotton plantation area has been considerably reduced here, and cotton growing hardly exists in Pe Luong. Most of their weaving products are made nowadays of fabric available at the market (nylon mixed fabric produced by factories or private procedures). Most of the handicrafts by the above villagers are *paa piau* headscarves, face towels, blankets for weddings, clothes and cloth for funerals. It is noted that Black Tai women have used modern material to weave their traditional ethnic costumes. Blouses *süa koom* are now made of industrial fabric which is both soft and colourful. Those worn by old women are round-collar blouses and those worn by young ladies are modernized round or heart-shape collar *süa koom*. Along with the blouse *süa koom*, the *paa piau* headscarf is one of the costume strongly reflecting their cultural identity, heritage by generation to generation, mother to children, grand mother to grand children. Any Black Tai woman knows how to weave and embroider *paa piau* headscarves. The *paa piau*'s decorations at two ends are different now. The PeLuong women's *paa piau* is woven more colorfully, young people weave *kut pua* (5-8 petal flowers) instead of 1-3 petal flowers to decorate the 2 ends of the Pieu which makes it more vivid and brighter. Black Tai people used to use self-made worn-silk thread *mai laai as* embroidery thread *sääo* and the decorations are *simply-maak kuom* (<>), *sum book* (bunch of flowers), but now they use Vietnamese and Chinese colour threads for embroidery with different decorations such as gourd flowers, elephants, birds, etc. Women and girls make use of any free time to weave and make things for their families. These days, Black Tai women from Nguu and Peluong make weaving products not only for their families but also for trading. They sell their products for tourists to Dien Bien town or exchange with Khmu people, Hmong or Lao.

It will not be surprising to see a Hmong woman or girl wearing a Black Tai *paa piau* on their head or Khmu clothes which are mostly made by Tai people. We can see that through making, using and selling weaving products, Black Tai women not only preserve their traditional costume but also promote it, spread it and leave impacts on some other ethnic groups in Dien Bien. In another word, the traditional cultural elements are not only preserved within the Tai community but have also impacted and become regional cultural features.

### **Black Tai women and the preservation of Customs and Religious Beliefs**

The patriarchal society of the Tai people often highlights the role and status of men, while the women's role in the family and community is considered as minor. In Peluong today, if the husband has the family name of Lo, his wife and children must take that name and similarly in other families, wives and children are under the husbands' clan *dam*. With such status, what role do women play in the customary and religious beliefs' systems of Tai people? Our research shows that Black Tai women not only play a role in preserving features of their traditional costume, but also maintain their customs and the religious beliefs of the Tai people.

#### ***Women and wedding customs***

During my fieldwork, luckily I had a chance to attend a Black Tai wedding ceremony in Peluong which was held in December 2000, between 21 years old bridegroom Lo Van Tien and the 18 years old Luong Thi Thoa. This wedding made me think a lot about the mixture of traditional and modern features. It is not difficult to distinguish between the traditional and the modern features but it is not easy to evaluate which one tends to increase and which one tends to decline, that is why this needs further investigation. The outstanding figure observed by me in the wedding is the bride. According to the Black Tai rules<sup>10</sup>, the wedding of the *phia taa* class of people (village heads) must follow 7 steps : open engagement parcel; official request for wedding; bringing their son for *o quan*; entering the wedding room up; down, picking up the bride; presenting the name, seeing off.

An ordinary people's wedding has to follow 6 steps : open engagement parcel; presenting name; bringing their son for *o quan*; entering the wedding room up; down, picking up the bride; presenting a specific shirt *sua*. Accompanying these 6 steps are many formalities. According to old people in Pe Luong, wedding ceremonies nowadays do not follow all the steps but only the main ones :

Step 1. ***pai soom***. The groom's family chooses an auspicious day to send 2 marriage brokers to the bride's and ask for the permission for the girl to get married with the boy. This is regarded as the first talk between the brokers and the girl's parents.

Step 2. ***pai wai***. This can be regarded as the engagement of the couple.

Step 3. ***pai khöi***. "Wedding up" lasts for 2 days. During the first day, the groom's side brings donations to the bride's side. The *tang kau* ceremony



is performed on the bride (her long hair is put in a great knot on the head), followed by a festive meal. At the second day, the bride's side takes her to visit the groom's parents.

Step 4. *pai au / pai toon*. "Wedding down" is the ceremony of taking the girl to her husband's house and finalizing all the necessary procedures to get the daughter-in-law to become a member of the groom's family.

In the marriage, the female broker plays a very important role (there used to be male brokers but now most of them are female). She is the intermediary to communicate between the two families. She must be a person who well knows the customs from theory and practice and must be very communicative. In many cases it depends on this mediator, whether the bride side accepts the wedding. If steps 1 and 2 are through, the preparation of specific material things for the wedding is mainly done by women (broker, bride's grandmother, mother, the bride herself and her aunt).

Step 3, "wedding up" can be regarded as the most important step of Black Tai wedding in Peluong. In this step, the groom's side (mother, grandmother, sister or female relatives) must prepare carefully for the bride's *tang kau* ceremony, and woven products like blankets have to be brought to the bride's side. At this official wedding, Luong Thi Thoa will be given *tang* ceremony and recognized by the community to be a married woman, and groom Lo Van Tien can officially cohabit with the bride, will be the son-in-law and has to start a period of living in the bride's house. It can be said that the main role in the wedding is played by women. The groom's delegation of more than 20 persons bearing gifts such as mattresses and other household goods is led by two women: the groom's paternal grandmother and related grandmother. Welcoming the groom's delegation at the stair path are the bride's paternal grandmother and other women. The first action done by women after entering the house of the bride is to lay out mats, blankets and a mosquito net for the newly married couple's room. It is followed by the *tang kau* ceremony for the bride. Aunts from the groom's and bride's sides put hair decorations in a small flat basket, and the bride's paternal grandmother is selected to carry out this ceremony which is a typical cultural trait of the Black Tai.

Ms. Lo Thi Dien from Peluong said: "Today, no matter what clothes the Tai wear but the hair decoration ceremony cannot be got rid of", as it was since long imbued in their thinking. Black Tai women consider the *tang kau* ceremony as the symbol of the faithfulness towards their husband. The practice of *tang kau* (wearing the large hair knot on top of the head) is stopped by a married Black Tai woman only after her husband has died. Esteeming

this, Black Tai girls mostly keep their hair long as a precious treasure from their young age until teenage, and beyond.

The *tang kau* ceremony is performed by the groom's and bride's grandparents gathering and offering wine and singing the song *ke duong dau gia* and then moving to the *quan* (the house for worshipping). Till this moment, the groom and bride parents, uncles, aunts and others are allowed to gather and enjoy meals and drinking. According to custom, men sit by the worshipping side and women sit by the *chaan* (verandah). The two sides enjoy meals and exchange songs to each other.

Following this comes the "wedding up" where the bride's side brings the bride to do greeting with the groom side. The bride side bring along a lot of blankets, *paa piau*, bags, face towels to be given to the groom's parents and relatives. This is a special feature of Tai costume done by women. Those ladies who don't know how to weave and embroider will not be married by any men and their wedding can't be held if they don't have blankets, *paa piau* cloths, and bags according to the customary requirements.

At step 4, the last step in the wedding, is the "wedding down" where the bride is taken to her husband's home and stays there permanently. Formerly, the groom used to live in the bride's house for 3-5 years, where he had to work for the parents-in-law. But nowadays this time is shortened to several months in Peluong, except for the case that the bride's family has a shortening in people. In this case, the groom would have to stay for 1 year at the longest. At the wedding, the bride's mother is the person who prepares everything for the daughter to bring to her husband's home, including a hen, a parcel of breeding rice seed and cotton, vegetables, fruit seed, thread and needles, and a pin box which symbolizes the transfer of important roles from one generation to the next generation. Following their mother, the new bride will act as a mother, wife, and daughter-in-law and continue to handle the tasks assigned to women by Tai society.

During the "wedding down" in Peluong, an important and essential detail is the "blouse offering ceremony", bringing the *hoo* from her parent's house to hang them at her husband's house. More information about the Tai people's *tai-hoo* is provided as follows. When a baby boy is born to a family, a *tai* will be made and hung on the *quan* side of the house, and if the baby is a girl, a *hoo* will be made and hung on the *chaan* (verandah) side of the house. A *tai* is a small basket made of bamboo which contains a bow and a small bamboo fan regarded as a protective tool for the boy. A *hoo* consists of 2 small bamboo baskets, one of which symbolizes a womb, the other contains a bamboo fan, a

little cotton card and a small cloth bag containing a protective tool as well as areca nut and betel leaf. *Tai* and *hoo* symbolize the living people only; so if a family member dies, his/her *tai* and *hoo* will be thrown into the forest. Thus we can easily know how many men and women there are in a Tai family once visiting them. Due to this custom, when a girl gets married, a ceremony will be held to move her *hoo* to her husband's house. The "blouse offering" and moving of the *hoo* may be done after the wedding, but today to simplify the prescribed steps, this ceremony is done along with the occasion of escorting her to the bride-groom's home.

At the *hoo*-moving ceremony, the bride's side, in particular her mother, prepare the daughter a set of blouses and skirts (traditional ones) put in a basket and the groom side prepare a meal with meat and wine. At a chosen auspicious time, the blouse and skirt and food are put in front of the ancestral altar, where a female *mot* (indigenous religious specialist) prays and initiates a welcome song for the *hoo*, asking the ancestors to move the bride's *hoo* to the groom's. One person, normally the bride's paternal grandmother takes her *hoo* off and puts it into the basket and divides the food into half, then lets the groom's side to take it away. When the newly married couple is escorted to the groom's house, a soothsayer will initiate an ancestor praying song and the female *mot* medium does the service and initiates a welcome song for the *hoo* and hangs it on the *chaan* side of the house where the other *hoo* of her new husband's female family members are hung. To welcome the *hoo* of the bride is the last of the wedding ceremonies. After this, the bride starts a new life period with new functions.

The above description shows clearly the women's role in wedding rituals and procedures. They not only well understand their ethnic cultural custom but also directly implement them. They also play an important role in the formal preparation of the ceremonies. The key people can be listed such as the (female) broker, the bride's mother and grandmother, and the female *mot* medium.

At the wedding of Thoa and Tien, the modern cultural elements appear overwhelming the traditional elements, which is showed by the dancing music, background decorations with green and red color papers, crowds of guests giving gifts in the forms of happy money (some put it in envelopes and other giving it directly to the bride's parents). Of course some guests still give presents in the form of rice and wine but they are close relatives only. The old people say that wedding customs are simplified a lot now and the young generation prefers to sing karaoke and dance to western music during weddings, they like busy atmosphere, and do not sing and dance Tai songs as they did before.

The formal service and participation of most of women is the never ending element and custom preservation which build up Tai cultural identities.

### **Women and Funeral/Mourning Customs**

Black Tai people perceive that the universe consists of 3 *müang* in 3 levels :

*müang faa* (the level of heaven) is where the gods (saints) stay, and there is happy and permanent life,

*müang lum* (the level of earth) is where human beings live,

*müang kong* (the level of underground) is where ghosts stay.

Tai people believe that after death, the people will return to *müang faa* and enjoy a permanent life. However, if someone dies without a donation of material things to serve as *hdäáo* will not enjoy *müang faa* but has to go to *müang kong* and live an isolated life. Acknowledging the above, the *hdäáo* ceremony in the funeral of the Black Tai people is very important. The *häáo* ceremony is understood as a process in the Black Tai funeral procedure which is very complex. We don't intend to describe the procedure of the funeral but want to understand what part women play in such a procedure.

The old people in Peluong say that a Black Tai funeral consists of 2 parts occurring in the same time : a formal ceremony and a material preparation for the formal ceremony. The formal ceremony is often done by men, but the preparation works for it is performed by the women, according to custom. When someone dies, the 1<sup>st</sup> thing women do is to go and get *nat* leaves (wild mugwort), *dong det* (bamboo leaves), *bu From* (herb leaves) which are boiled and used to wash the body of the corpse. Then the family members have to check for the completeness of things for the funeral which will not be held unless everything is ready. They are weaving cloth/products of Tai people. Women have to prepare enough cloth for the whole funeral duration such as different types of cloth, clothes, flags apart from clothes, blankets, special cloth put in the coffin according to individual funeral attendants relating to the dead one. When a person dies, his/her family has to perform the *tuk* ceremony with the intention to inform *thään* (heaven). To do that, women prepare a basket containing a bunch of normal cloth and a bunch of *khuyt* cloth (*khuyt* is a specific kind of cloth used for funeral purposes only) and a plate of areca and betel, and then one male member of the family will inform *thään*.

After the *tuk* ceremony, mourning clothes for the blood relatives and other relatives have to be prepared. The female family members prepare *suang-süa tok* (mourning clothes) for the male members such as the husband,

and the sons wear *suong tok* (pants) made of Tai cloth without sewing tum-ups, and they are wearing *süa tok* (shirts) made of 4 pieces of cloth which are long to the ankles without sleeves and collars, pre-sewing, without sewing hems, and wear additionally the 4-sided *tong tau* cloth (which looks like a cloth hat) without sewing hems.

For women, the mourning clothes to be worn are different for different categories of people. The wife of the dead wears a *süa tok* and a white cloth on the head. The daughter-in-law wears a *süa thoong hung* (a “rainbow blouse”) made of black cloth and colorful cloth from red, yellow, white and green pieces, and also wears a white cloth on her head. Sisters and nieces wear only the white head cloth. The wife of the *khöi kok* (the oldest of the sons-in-law, brothers-in-law, or grandsons-in-law) is chosen to act as the chair person to deal with the key ceremonies of the funeral. She wears a black long dress, 2 layers of cloth on her head with the white under the black. A *khöi kok* wears a black long dress, white trousers, a long black cloth on his head which is covered by a white cloth sticking to the black cloth’s hem, and wears a white bag, and a belt made of 3 small colored long bands of cloth.

This is followed by the preparation of umbrellas, paper fans, flags, hats and others made of cloth and paper. This step is done by women. An umbrella used for a funeral looks like a large umbrella which is made of 4 colorful cloth pieces and sticky with different color flowers and surrounded by different color threads. Paper fans and hats are made of color paper of which the hem is bounded by color cloth hung by color threads and the hat’s strap is made of color cloth. Flags are made of 2 bands of *khuyt* cloth, 400 mm wide and 1.2 m long, of which 2 ends are sewed together and externally covered by color cloth. The flag’s end is cut with V shape and supported by a round piece of wood. It is tied into a stick. Two sides of the flag are stucked yellow paper with the full moon shape. Two bands’ end are also the flag’s and cut with V shape which is filled by yellow paper of half moon shape. The ends of the flags are decorated with different color threads. One type of flag called by the Tai as *chau uan* is made of a band of white cloth, 400 mm wide, folded along its length with thread for hanging by stick, and its 2 ends are sticky with blade threads.

One type of flag called by the Tai as *chau faa* of which the main part is one natural bamboo tree, made of a band of white cloth, a band of *khuyt* cloth threading together, 500 mm shorter than the bamboo. They meet at one end and the white band is 500 mm longer than the *khuyt* at the other end, then the white’s one side is folded with thread for hanging by stick, and its 2 ends are sticky with different color threads.

One type of flag called by the Tai as *liu* will be made by at least 30, or even hundreds. Half of the total number is made of white cloth and the rest is made of *suvt* cloth. One *liu* is about 400 mm wide, square, the white's one side is folded with thread for hanging by stick, and its 2 ends are sticky with different color threads.

One type of flag called by the Tai as *teu giu* which is as small as  $\frac{1}{2}$  *liu* in terms of quantity and size but is made in the same way of *liu*. At funeral, men are responsible for preparing wooden equipment like sticks to hang the flags, *choong* (a bamboo, wooden container of the dead body), *nok kao*, *hoo*, *pui* (wooden materials to build the tomb).

By then, the preparation for the funeral is considered to be finalized. It is followed by a long process including many formal ceremonies such as the "last seeing", burying, escorting the dead spirit home, and so on. As mentioned earlier, ma or formal ceremonies are carried out by men and the gender discrimination among Tai people is clearly shown in their funerals. For example, if the dead person is female, her remains are not allowed to be brought outside the house by passing the *quan* side stair but the kitchen stair, and the flags and umbrellas are not used as many and various as in funerals for men.

Nevertheless, the preparations of a funeral require both men and women to participate, if the formal procedures and customs are strictly followed. The above description even shows that the women's role is very important. They not only prepare sufficient cloth but also get other matters related to the funeral done. However, due to the perception of the society, the functions played by women in the Tai community's formal ceremonies are almost not respected; it is just taken for granted that women must take such assignments.

### **Black Tai with traditional medicine**

As believed by the Tai people, humans are always composed of two parts : soul and body, and during their life as well as after death; they should always take care of their soul. Each body organ has its own soul, for example, *khwan hua* is the soul of the head, in charge of controlling the whole body; *khwan taa* is the soul of the eyes, helping people see light and everything; *khwan lin* is the soul in tongue, helping to form human wisdom; *khwan ju miüi* is the soul of the hands, bringing handiness; *khwan ju khääng* is the soul of the feet, bringing toughness; etc.

Taking care of the souls involves two persons : *moo* and *mot*. *Moo* are wizards whose main responsibilities are taking care of the soul for the whole community, worshipping ancestors, worshipping the ghosts of the village, praying

for good health and prosperity for the entire population, or acting as the master of ceremony in funerals. *Mot* is undertaken by women, and those who perform the functions of *mot* are often referred to as Madam *mot*, who memorize ceremonial chants as well as know how to cast spells to chase evil spirits. Madams *mot* are regarded as those who are capable of applying magical remedies; by using their ceremonial chants, they can free sick men from invisible forces called *phii*, help sick people to get over their illness. In addition, Madam *mot* are also masters of ceremony in many daily life celebrations like name-giving ceremonies for newly-born children, weddings, etc.

At present in Pe Luong and Nguu village, the number of Madam *mot* is very small, and they often act as charlatans. In Pe Luong village, there is a 67-year-old women called Li? Thi Hom, who is considered to be a traditional healer, and who knows a lot about medical herbs, ceremonial chants and can combine both the herbs and chants for disease treatment. Mrs. Hom says that she can pick up medical herbs for treatment of infertility or asthma. Concerning common diseases like cough, cold in adults and children, or ways of caring for women in childbirth and infants, most elderly women in the village are quite good at dealing with them.

The folk knowledge on reproduction, communal health care and first-stage health care are very interesting issues and closely associated with women. It is also an element helping to form the original cultural identity of the Tai people. Herein I will present briefly some folk knowledge that Black Tai women in Thanh Luong have preserved from generation to generation regarding the care for women in childbirth and infants.

In most Tai houses in Pe Luong, there are several small gardens where all types of vegetable and some common medical herbs are grown. When in a family there is a woman beginning labour or a sick person, only grandmother or mother knows what, where and how medical herbs can be taken for the woman in childbirth, the infant or sick person. In non-urgent cases, women usually go into the forest to look for medical herbs, and only in urgent cases do they have to use the herbs grown in the garden. However, some medical herbs can only be found in the forest.

For women having just given birth to a child, leaves of the herbs called *juu khääng* or *mu khet* should be picked and then boiled for the mother's bath during the first 5 days after the birth, 3 times a day. In addition, a creeper called *khila khau* and *to don* should also be picked and boiled to make a drink for the woman in childbirth (the older the creeper the better; it would extract a yellowish-red color with a sweet taste); the drink should be taken

when it is warm, and should not be taken when it becomes cold, resulting in the mother's good appetite, sound sleep, increased amount of breast-milk without affecting it. For infants, leaves of *koo chap* should be picked and boiled for the baby's bath during the first month, twice a day in the morning and late afternoon.

In the case of sunk womb after birth, leaves of *hong hoom* should be picked for the woman to sit on, and her womb will contract. If the woman has little milk, a deer's or pig's leg should be cooked with papaya or potatoes and then eaten by her. After giving birth, the woman should refrain from eating hot, sour food and spice and should not eat fish, fresh meat, but only dried grilled tilapia and pork within 15 days. After 15 days, the woman can eat fresh fish but it should only be grilled, and she should not eat buffalo's meat.

Unfortunately, if the baby's naval does not dry up, the solution is scrapping wood from the *hai khau*, grinding it into powder and pouring it onto the naval (a *hai khau* is a wooden part placed above a pig-iron earthenware, which is used by the Tai people to steam their main staple *khau oon* (sticky rice)).

At present, the health centre in Thanh Luong is operating quite well; however, many women still give birth at home with the assistance of midwives in the village. According to these women, the traditional Tai sitting and kneeling labor is much more easy and energy-saving than lying labor at the health centre.

The folk knowledge on traditional medicine has been passed on by Black Tai women in Pe Luong from generation to generation. Although birth and health care are now propagandized quite popularly in Pe Luong, the women here still apply and preserve their precious traditional knowledge on medicine. Deep-rooted in the women's sub-consciousness is the folk knowledge, a good way of health care, a belief in the safety of body and soul of each individual in the community.

### **Conclusion**

In the recent development process with the impact of the market economy, the socio-economic appearance of the Black Tai in Thanh Luong has changed dramatically. Black Tai in Thanh Luong have shifted from the subsistence economy into market economy with cattle and goat farms, and established commercial relations with the neighboring ethnic groups.

Together with socio-economic changes, the traditional culture of the Black Tai in Thanh Luong has moved forward in two directions : declination or reception and integration with the modern culture. Maintaining and promoting



the traditional cultural values of the ethnic group's identity is crucial. Because of their typical status and function; Black Tai women play a more important part than the men in conserving and promoting the traditional cultural values. This part is reflected clearly in their brocade weaving, the practice of weddings, funerals, traditional medicine, etc. Black Tai women not only preserve their own cultural traits and pass them on from generation to generation within their family and community, but they also create strength, enabling the Black Tai culture elements to impact on the neighboring ethnic groups. This should be comprehended and grasped thoroughly in planning and implementing the policies to conserve and promote the traditional cultural values of the Black Tai people.

#### **Notes and References**

1. The author of this article used Black "Thai" (according to the Vietnamese nomenclature). This was changed by the editor to "Tai" throughout the article, to avoid a mingling up with the Thai in Thailand.
2. As estimated by the People's Committee of Thanh Luong commune, 70% of King people's houses were cracked or damaged heavily, while Thai's people's houses on stilts only suffered from tile disarrangement and pillar sinking. (3/2001).
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4. Scientific Report KX.06-05. *Local and ethnic cultural nuances in the country's development strategies*. The Social Sciences Publishing House, Hanoi 1998, page 25.
5. Ibid, p.8.
6. Many of the Tai Dam expressions were checked in Germany, with Mr. Tong Van Chau, a Tai Dam.
7. Committee for Ethnic Minorities and Mountainous Areas. *Actual state and socio-economic development move for ethnic and mountainous areas after 15-year implementation of renovation strategies (1986 - 2000)*. Hanoi 1999, page 24.
8. Thomas Barfield (Executive Editor). *The Dictionary of Anthropology*. Blackwell Inc., 1997.
9. Hoang Nam, Le Ngoc Thang. *Thai Houses on Stilts*. The Culture Publishing House, Hanoi 1994, p. 38.
10. Ha Van Nam. *(Black) Thai Sayings*. [vn]. The Ethnic Culture Publishing House, Hanoi 1978.
11. Such kind of sayings and other traditional wisdoms on the sexes is contained in the ancient book of the Black Tai "*song chuu - soon saao*" (accompany the paramours - teach the girls) [O.R.] Another typical (though seldom applied) saying blackmailing "bad" women in the ancient days was "*in chuII - huu lak*", a kind of verbal conglomerate of bad characteristics for Black Tai women.
12. In any of these cases that her husband dies, the widow has to take the symbol of her married status off : "*maai fua - khot fom*", This means, she has to take down her hair-knot.
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*Continued from last issue :*

## Gender Relations and Masculinity Among The Nung Fan Slinh: Rethinking Gender Equality in Southeast Asia

David B. Wangsgard

### **Masculinity Celebrated**

In this section I will outline some practices of men during the New Year holiday. These practices highlight the themes of men's increased capacity to embody desirable human characteristics, such as strength, health and spiritual potency.

### **The New Year**

As stated above, the Nùng Fan Slinh new year coincides with the Sino-Vietnamese new year. The first of the year is considered springtime, and carries with it strong notions of new beginnings. Although this is an auspicious time, folks must be very mindful of their conduct and social interactions, as the behavior, fortunes, luck, health, mood and temperament of a household during this time heavily influences and sets the tone of a household for the entire upcoming year<sup>1</sup>. The Nùng celebrate the New Year for the first 15 days of the first lunar month. (This does not include any of the days leading up to the first day of the new year, which entail considerable preparations for the holiday.) Here will not elaborate details of this holiday in any depth. Rather, my focus will be trained on the gendered practices embedded in the grand, ritualized party that is the Nùng Fan Slinh New Year's celebration.

One cold evening I was sitting around the fire talking with a group of women. Our conversation focused mainly on the upcoming New Year holiday (*Nèn bìn chiêng* or *Nèn pi mau*, or abbreviated simply as *Nèn*). All of the women present agreed that one of the worst things a person could do on the first day of the new year is to visit other people's homes. A woman in her 40s told me, "Even if someone invites you to visit them on the first day of *Nèn* you should not go because they will resent you for it." This seemed rather odd to me because I had received many invitations to visit homes on the first day of the new year.

Several days later I was having tea with a high-ranking commune level official. During our conversation he told me that, “You must come to visit my home on the first day of *Nèn*. You are here by my good graces, and I will be offended if you do not come to my home.” I thanked him for the invitation, but I told him that I thought it was taboo to visit other people’s homes on the first day of the new year. He asked me who had told me this, and I told him. He said,

They are women, of course they will say this because this taboo is only for women; men can go visiting as they please. You are a man and should not suffer to hear a woman’s words. Men are strong and healthy so they bring a strong and healthy influence into the homes they visit. It is especially lucky if a strong, healthy, successful man enters a home. The influences that are brought into a home on the first day of *Nèn* will remain for the entire year and will directly affect/influence the household’s health, luck and success. Women are weak and not healthy like men, and very importantly, they bleed, making them weak and unclean. Bringing a lesser, weaker and unclean influence into a home is not good, so women cannot enter other people’s homes on the first day of *Nèn*.

These gendered practices are explained in terms of men and women’s capacities for health and strength and to carry an auspicious influence into a home. Men are assumed to have a greater capacity to carry a positive influence, as they tend to have higher or stronger “numbers”, and therefore greater capacity for health and strength. Women are assumed to have diminished capacity for these, as they tend to have “lighter” or weaker “numbers” and due to their menses, which make them “unclean” and contribute to their perceived spiritual weakness. On the first day of the new year, my host family and I had’ a quick breakfast and then busied ourselves with preparations for the lunch time celebratory feast. We killed and prepared ducks and chickens and offered these, along with assorted treats, goodies, fresh fruit, rice liquor and joss sticks to the ancestors on the family altar. We sat and chatted, ate treats and drank rice liquor, made New Year’s wishes to one another, and then enjoyed the feast we had prepared. All of this was done with just the immediate household members-male and female alike. After the lunch time feast, my host lay down for a nap and recommended that I do the same. I was a little confused as to why we were sleeping when there was celebrating to be done on this festive occasion. The ensuing booze marathon made it very clear to me why resting up before hand was a good idea after all.

My host and I arose from our nap in the early afternoon, and he announced that it was time to go visiting. I went outside to wash my face and saw that a group of women from the village had gathered outside the house in the courtyard. (Although I saw several groups of women congregating outside of friends' houses throughout the day, I did not see any woman enter a home that was not her own.) They were talking, laughing, eating treats and drinking rice liquor. It looked like they were having a good time, and I went over to wish them health, luck and wealth in the new year. Soon after, my host came over, took me by the arm and led me away from the group of women saying, "Especially on this day you will not be with women! Men go with men, let the women go with women. We will go to visit brothers." And with that, we left to go visiting.

When we entered a home we would greet the men with a New Year's wish of happiness, health, and wealth, and they would return the greeting. We would then sit and drink rice liquor, smoke cigarettes, eat goodies and make jovial conversation. As we prepared to leave each house the men of the house would accompany us to the next house. And so it went, moving from house to house, continually growing in number, drinking, eating, smoking and socializing. By evening we were all stone drunk and the group began to dwindle as men made their way to their respective homes. When my host and I arrived home the family was making dinner preparations and he and I both lay down for a nap.

After passing out and sleeping for about an hour, I was abruptly awoken by some one dragging me out of bed by my arm. I looked up from the floor squinting, trying to make out the identity of the person who was standing over me and yelling my name. As the haze slowly cleared from my eyes, I recognized the old priest. He told me that the day could not end until I had brought my influence into his home. (I would like to point out that I was by no means revered by anyone in the village. I felt that some people genuinely liked me, while most people politely tolerated me, and a few explicitly disliked me.<sup>2</sup> The reason why people were so keen to have me visit their homes on the first day of the new year is that I was perceived to be healthy, strong and endlessly wealthy. After all, the amount of money I spent on my plane ticket alone was more money than most people in the village would see in an entire year.) Apparently, one of his younger sons had come earlier to invite me to dinner, and I had gruffly told him to go away. Refusing a request made by a woman or a man younger than one's self is a simple, unceremonious matter. Elder

men are allowed and take behavioral license when dealing with others (e.g., dragging a sleeping, drunk, adult male off of his bed and on to the floor in order to make a dinner invitation) that would not be tolerated of someone of a lower station. So I rose, brushed the dirt off myself, splashed some water on my face and accompanied the old priest back to his house for round two of the first day of *Nèn*.

The next 14 days of *Nèn* consisted mostly of visiting and socializing with friends and family. As far as I could tell, both men and women participated equally in the socializing and visiting that took place in the days following the first day of *Nèn*. Many people, both men and women, also attend “festival markets” (*hoi háng*) and “going down to the field festivals” (*hoi long tong* [hoi is vn for festival]), that take place during the New Year’s season. There are also various rituals that must be performed during this time of year. I will not detail all of these here, but I will describe the ritualized masculine practice or performance of the lion dance.

### **The Lion Dance**

A popular male practice during the spring time/New Year is the lion dance (*oóc tai sung* or more commonly *long fu*). On the first day of *Nèn*, not a single young man could be found in the village, as they had all gone lion dancing. In the course of a lunar year, young men begin practicing the lion dance in the 12<sup>th</sup> month in order to be ready to perform the dance during the *Nèn* holiday. The end of the first lunar month marks the end of lion dance performances for the year. On the last day of the first lunar month, the lion is symbolically killed, or in other words, all of the lion dance paraphernalia and accoutrements are packed away and stored. In the village, this event is celebrated with a grand feast, which is only attended by men.

Lion dance accoutrements and paraphernalia consist of a lion costume, a lion keeper’s costume, a monkey costume, and a minimum of one gong, one drum and one pair of cymbals used to beat out a rhythm and set the tempo for the dance. The lion costume is similar to the well-known dragon costume of the Chinese dragon dance, only smaller and worn by only one man at a time. The lion’s head is constructed from paper mâché, painted in a wide array of bright, swirling colors, and very stylized in appearance. Many of the lion costumes I saw also had manes of brightly colored yam glued to the outer rim of the lion’s head. The head of the lion costume is basically round and measures approximately 0,75m in diameter. Attached to the backside of the lion’s head is a rod that the dancer holds in both hands in order to manipulate the lion’s

head as he dances. Flowing from the back of the lion's head is a fabric cape, approximately two meters in length and a meter wide, that drapes over the dancer. The capes I saw varied in color, from bright pastels to dull grays, and could consist of one solid piece of fabric or several pieces of different fabric sewn together.

The lion keeper's costume consists of a paper mâché mask that is worn over the head and face of the "lion keeper." The lion keeper's masks that I saw were all painted a light pink with rosy cheeks and noses, broad smiles, and made to have very fat cheeks and large ears-lion keepers look to be very jolly fellows. The only other accessory used by the lion keepers is a short length of tree bough, used to guide and keep the lion in check. The lion keeper does not actually dance, but leads the lion from house to house and animatedly walks a perimeter around the lion (at a safe distance) while it dances, keeping the lion contained in one general area.

The monkey costume consists only of a paper mâché mask that is worn over the dancer's head and face. These masks were mostly painted with browns, yellows, black and white, though I did see some reds, greens and oranges also used. The monkey mask is stylized as well, but less so than the head of the lion. The role of the monkey is to tease and antagonize the lion so that it will "dance", thus expending and radiating its strength and health. The dancers who wear the monkey masks stood and crouch, make furtive movements, and generally mimic a monkey-running and jumping around and towards the lion, then darting out of its reach.

Starting on the first day of *Nèn*, young men (anywhere from 18 years old to their late 30s) leave the village *en mass* to go lion dancing. The young men always practiced the lion dance in the village, but never gave performances there. Instead, they would go and perform in the homes of townsfolk, or "people who live out on the paved road", who were believed to be of greater influence and considerably wealthier than folks from the village and thus able to give higher gratuities to the dancers. When the dancers would arrive in a neighborhood, people would come out and invite them to dance in their homes. In exchange for bringing the auspicious, strong and healthy influence of the lion into their homes, people would give the dancers money that was later pooled and divided, as well as liquor and goodies that were consumed on the spot.

All of the men I spoke with about the lion dance were keen to emphasize the physical strength and endurance required of an adept lion dancer. I was told that the footwork and arm movements a lion dancer must make to correctly



perform the dance are the same movements executed in Nùng martial arts. The ability to perform the lion dance well indicates that the dancer is also an accomplished martial artist, and the two were always practiced in concert during my observations. Young, married lion dancers were expected to abstain from sexual intercourse with their wives during lion dance season. Otherwise, they may absorb weak female essences and possibly lose some of their strong, healthy male essences to her, which would compromise their ability to perform the dance well and to leave a strong, healthy influence in the homes to which they were invited. It was during the numerous lion dance practices I attended when I heard young men level the highest number of criticisms and taunts at one another about sleeping with their respective wives.

The lion dance troupe from the village had been invited to perform at a festival in the Provincial Seat on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the first lunar month. Later that same day they were competing in a lion dance competition with dance troupes from other villages in the commune at a “going down to the field festival” being held around a popular pagoda near the weekly market. I had been told by several individuals that the traditional mode of transportation to this annual festival was by foot. Groups of friends would make the 5km trek down to the festival, and the journey itself was considered as a part of the festivities. Several of the married women I was closest to had made me a new suit of Nùng clothes and invited me to join their entourage for the walk down to the festival, where I could debut my new outfit. A suit of Nùng clothes represents a considerable labor investment—the women had grown, harvested, pulled, spun and woven the cotton into cloth, then dyed the cloth with indigo, then sewed the cloth into a pair of trousers and a shirt. I very readily and gratefully accepted their invitation. A few days after I had accepted their invitation, another friend (a married man in his 40s) invited me to go with him to the festival by motorbike. I told him that I planned to walk to the festival for fun and invited him to accompany me. He told me that there would be a lot of drinking at the festival and riding home on a motorbike would be much more convenient than walking home drunk. I continued to gratefully decline his attempts to convince me to go with him by motorbike, and then he asked me who had invited me to walk to the festival, and I told him. He became indignant and exclaimed, “A man who heeds the words of women will wreck himself and his life! Us men go together, ignore the women, let them find their own way there, let them walk, ignore them! It will be very embarrassing for you if others see you walking with women! Men go with their brothers, ignore the women, let them go alone.” I persisted that I would prefer to walk and again

told him that he should join me. He shook his head in dismay and told me that he would be going with brothers by motorbike.

On the day of the festival the women who invited me to accompany them stopped by my host family's house to collect me. In total we numbered 17: six married women, six adolescent girls, four young children, and myself. Only then did it become starkly apparent to me that I would be the only man accompanying the group. This made me feel a little out of place and more than a little uncomfortable. Regardless, I decided to accompany the group and see what came out of it. As we made our way to the festival the conversation was light and jovial and the mood festive. We reached the paved road and turned toward the pagoda. Not long after this, the lion dance troupe, on their way to the festival from their earlier performance in the Provincial Seat, passed us on motorbikes.

A short distance up the road, the lion dancers pulled into the courtyard of a friend, parked their motorbikes and began preparing to make their way to the pagoda and festival grounds. As we passed the home where the lion dancers were congregated, I waved and called a greeting. Whenever I encountered folks from the village while outside of the village (e.g. at the market or at a festival) they always seemed very anxious to demonstrate to others their acquaintance and association with me. However, on this occasion, not one of the lion dancers returned my greeting, which seemed very odd to me indeed. Rather, upon seeing me in the company of women, they all stopped and stared. Some of them looked confused, some embarrassed and a few laughed uncertainly. After staring at me for a moment, the lion dance troupe continued to gather their lion dance gear and ready themselves for their performance.

After we arrived at the festival grounds, the lion dance troupes began to line up. I went over to where the troupe from the village was gathered to wish them luck. Once again, not one of them attempted to engage me. A few young men glanced my way and gave slight nods, otherwise I was ignored. When I asked the women I accompanied to the festival about the young men's behavior, I was told to "never mind." None of the lion dance troupe members ever attempted to explain their behavior to me either. I figure that the lion dancers were very focused on their upcoming performance. More likely, or at least in addition to this, women's capacity for health, strength and physical endurance is not as great as men's, and keeping the company of women will diminish a man's capacity for these. The lion dancers did not want to absorb the weak influence of women, which would have passed to me by accompanying them all the way to the festival. After all, the lion dance is a very masculine

act that requires the performers to draw on all of their physical strength and endurance, and embody the strength of a lion, or “*hèng pèn tu tai sung*” (literally translated, this means: healthy/strong like/become lion).

The Nùng folks I know do not consider women to be bereft of health and physical strength. I was often told that good health, strength and the ability to perform physical labor are very desirable feminine traits. On several occasions, the headman’s wife boasted to me that she is the only woman in the village who is healthy/strong enough to plow a field with a buffalo, which is otherwise an exclusively male task. The task of plowing the fields is not reserved for men because it is thought to carry with it any prestige or status; it is a male task simply because of the physical strength required to drive a buffalo and plow. The fact that the headman’s wife could drive a buffalo and plow gave her boasting rights about her physical strength. However, her physical strength also brought less desirable consequences because on exceptionally wet and cold mornings the headman would send her to plow the fields in his stead—after she had made breakfast and accomplished her other morning chores, of course. Furthermore, several young women in the village did practice martial arts, and were considered to be quite accomplished martial artists. However, it was widely believed that they did not possess the strength and endurance required to perform the lion dance, or the capacity to embody the strength of a lion. Therefore, the lion dance is exclusively a male practice. This illustrates that the same kinds of strength, health and physical abilities are desirable characteristics of both men and women, but that men possess greater capacity for these.

### **Gendered Capacities for Social Networking**

As permanent members of households and the village, men are born into a fairly stable social network of “brothers”, or network of cognatic paternal relatives. On the other hand, women as daughters and in-laws (i.e. temporary members of their natal households and villages, and provisional members of their husbands’ households and villages) have no such pre-established social networks, at least not to the same degree as men. Beyond the absence or presence of social networks inherited by default of a person’s sex at birth, there are configurations of gendered practices among the Nùng that work to increase or diminish men’s and women’s capacities, respectively, for establishing, maintaining, expanding and mobilizing social networks. Below I will discuss certain configurations of gendered practice that guarantee men’s increased capacities and women’s diminished capacities for social networking.

### **Men's and Women's Work as Gendered Practices**

As I briefly mentioned above, very often when men reach middle-age (in their 40s) they slow down considerably with regards to physical labor. By this time, their children are physically able to labor and their wives are expected to continue to labor until they are physically unable to do so. Men most often work separately from women and children, and both the men and women in the village prefer this arrangement. During one conversation with a group of married women, the headman's wife told me,

“Nùng husbands and wives are not like the Kinh [the Vietnamese ethnic majority] ... Nùng people do not love that strongly. There is only one person in the village who married his love ... Everyone else got married because their parents forced them to the groom's parents go and talk to the bride's parents and it is the parents of the two households who arrange the marriage. In the old days, no good child would refuse the parents' wishes. Me and [my husband] are not, and never were lovers, [my husband] had other lovers ... What would someone who is handsome like [my husband] be doing marrying someone ugly like me? You get married and stay married to appease your parents, and by the time your parents are gone you usually have children. Once there are children, people very rarely split up because that is what marriage is about, having children. After a couple is married they can still go and flirt with their true lovers, but after there are children what would the wife be doing taking the children along to go and flirt? The husband does not have to suffer the responsibility of taking care of the children, so he is still free to go play and flirt [it was repeatedly emphasized to me that flirting consists of only talking with a lover.]” I said, “Yes, but you can still live together and seem to get along.” To which the headman's wife responded, “Sure, you sometimes argue and fight, like husbands and wives everywhere do-some more than others-but you do not spend time [i.e. socialize or “hang out”] together. You never see a husband and wife go to market together, go to work together or go to play together. You do these things separately and with the people you like [i.e. other women]. Even if me and [my husband] are going to market, [he] will take the motorbike and I will walk. Or if [he] passes me on the road he does not pick me up. But I do not want to go with him on the motorbike, I do not want him to pick me up. I would rather walk and talk with my friends. Generally speaking, we lead separate lives, because we want to.”

I took numerous opportunities to accompany women and men to work. During harvest seasons, men contributed a much greater effort in bringing in the yield than they did during growing and planting seasons (with the exception of the plow work). Most households are able to bring in their harvests within a time span of two weeks to a month (this includes the large harvests of food staples such as rice, maize, potatoes and sweet potatoes; watermelon, though not a staple crop, is one large harvest that may take longer than a month as the melons sometimes do not ripen at a uniform rate). However, these bursts of concentrated, middle-aged male labor seemed to only last as long as the harvest. The following is an excerpt from my field journal, which describes one of the many typical workdays I spent with my host :

This morning after breakfast [my host] and I headed out around 8 a.m. to get veggies for the pigs. [My host] has gardens and forests in the hills around the village, and on this particular day our destination was a sweet potato garden near [a neighboring village.] We stopped off at [a friend's] house to chat. [This particular friend] also makes liquor-specifically the famous Mau Son liquor-and sells it hot off the fire. We had a few drinks and then a Tày man from a neighboring district came by to buy some liquor. I don't know how much we drank but by 9 a.m. I was properly stoned. We sat and chatted and smoked and drank until about 10 a.m., then we hit the road again, both of us drunk and not yet out of the village. We walked several km to [a neighboring village]-beautiful countryside-where we visited [two homes]. Of course, we drank at each home. At the second home we drank and had lunch and then passed out. Around 2:45 p.m. [my host] woke me up and said it was time to go. We had one more smoke and one more cup of tea then hit the road again. We walked to [my host's] sweet potato garden and picked the leaves and vines to take home for the pigs. We talked about work, veggies and the various kinds of snakes we might encounter in the garden, and then bundled up the pig feed and headed home for dinner.

Several married women, as well as adolescent children, explained to me on a number of occasions that when a man says he is going to work in the fields or forests he will always stop in at brothers' and friends' homes to visit, drink and smoke, and accomplish very little actual work. A common joke among women and children is that the household patriarch's forest knife is always just as sharp when he returns home as it was when he left. On the days that I remained at home to write, organize field notes and the like, I would receive

a steady flow of visitors; the vast majority of whom were married men in their late 30s and upward, and who wandered freely in and out of one another's homes, as they had been doing since childhood. The women and children I knew well were quite resentful of this masculine practice, mostly because it meant they had to pick up the slack and work harder. One evening after dinner, two of my host's "brothers" came over to visit. One of the men was notorious for going visiting and playing after telling his household he was going to work. He told the other two men, "Can you hear my wife scolding/chastising me at night? The past few days she has been scolding/chastising me too much! She scolds/ chastises me because I work so hard during the day, expending all of my strength so when she requires sex I do not have the strength to fuck her!" The other two men thought this was hilarious. After a hearty laugh, my host announced that they had some unspecified business to attend to (i.e. going visiting and socializing), and the three men left. After they were gone, my host's wife looked quite upset and said to me,

They spoke very rudely! The real reason [his] wife was scolding/ chastising him is because he does not help with work. [He] tells his wife and children that he is going to work in the fields or work in the forest and then goes visiting and playing instead and then [he] scolds/chastises his wife and children, he even hits his wife, if they do not finish all of the work. [He] goes out playing at night until very late, and gets up whenever he likes, which is usually very late. It is very rude for him to talk like that.

Although I often heard women criticize their husbands and children criticize their fathers, they would rarely make these criticisms while the man they were criticizing was present. On the few occasions that I did hear a child criticize his or her father, the criticisms were met with scathing rebukes and reprimands that sent the children scurrying away in tears. More often I heard wives criticize their husbands in the man's presence, however, such criticisms were most often simply ignored, or at least went unanswered. On one occasion, the headman's wife was interrogating me about male-female relationships in the West, and she told me, as I was told by many men and women in the village, "Men should not listen to their wives, they should do what they like because they are men. Here if a man suffers to hear his wife then he is not a good man."

On the many occasions that I accompanied women to work in the fields and forests, the women never did stop in at friends' homes to visit or socialize. Instead, women would stop on their way to the fields or forests and socialize

with other women they met along the way. Women would also take rest breaks (the longest rest break I ever experienced while working with women was approximately one hour) and socialize with women who were working in adjacent fields. Furthermore, women-in-law and female children who belonged to the same household would socialize among themselves while hoeing planting, weeding, fertilizing and harvesting their husbands' and fathers' fields, or collecting firewood in their husbands' and fathers' forests, and so on.

Women do have the ability to establish and maintain social networks, however, not to the same degree as men. Women's socializing most often takes place in the context of agricultural labor. As men and women tend to lead separate social lives, women's social networks consist of other women. However, burdened with childcare and the bulk of the agricultural labor, women are not able to establish and maintain social networks, especially outside of the village, to the same degree as men. And, as we have seen, men are loath to heed women's words. Mobilizing networks of women, therefore, would be politically ineffectual (especially if it may jeopardize or undermine men's relative leisure, privilege or dominance in general), as it is the men who control all property resources, the family's labor power and ultimately the decision-making in Nùng society.

During a communal work project (every communal work project I witnessed was inter-sexed), men's and women's work habits as different configurations of gendered practice came into sharp relief for me. The village, as a community, was breaking ground for a new "culture house", which would be used for village and hamlet meetings, and other communal affairs and gatherings-almost all of which are male domains. The spot chosen for the culture house was on a hillside, which we had to dig away in order to create a level of foundation for the building. This entailed several days' work of picking, shoveling and hauling away dirt. I accompanied the village headman to the worksite, and once we were all busily engaged in the work at hand he announced that he had "business to attend to" but that I was there as his household representative and to work in his stead. With that he left. The most difficult task was the picking-the soil was a very hard, iron-rich clay, and breaking the ground required considerable physical effort. This task was left to the women. The men gathered in the shade, as it was a hot, sunny day, to smoke and banter back and forth. The shaded area was just large enough for the men to tightly crowd into, and the women were left to take their rest in the sun. When the large chunks of red clay that the women had broken loose piled up to the

extent that it inhibited the women's ability to proceed, the men would shovel the dirt into wheel barrows, wheel the loads of dirt over to a steep slope (about three meters away), dump their loads, and retreat back to the shaded area. There were only four wheel barrows available, so the men worked in shifts, while there were enough pick-axes for everyone of the women.

After about an hour and a half of work, one of the old priest's sons, a married man in his late 30s, told me it was time for a break. Under the pretense of going to urinate, we stealthily made our way to a "brother's" house that was near the worksite. We sat with the patriarch of the home, drinking rice liquor and tea, smoking and talking for about an hour. We then returned to the worksite, and found that many of the other men had also "gone to urinate." Shortly after we returned to the worksite, the village headman reappeared. His face was flushed and his eyes were glassy—he too had been socializing and visiting homes near the worksite. (I was often told that men drink together to share *tinh cam*, or "feeling/sentiment [vn]", and that drinking facilitates socializing, or "makes the talk flow easily.") He was not happy with the progress that had been made in his absence and he turned on the women, who were still working, and began gruffly giving them orders to increase their productivity. He then retreated to the shade to squat and talk with the other men.

These configurations of masculine and feminine practices obtained whether men and women were working separately or together. Men's work practices concentrated considerable time and energy into socializing and visiting with other men, or in other words, establishing and maintaining intra-, inter- and extra-village social networks the importance of which I will further discuss below. Women's work practices concentrated the majority of their time and energy into agricultural labor, gathering forest products and household maintenance. Although women's work practices involve socializing with women from one's own household and village, and to a lesser extent neighboring villages, it is not to the same degree as men and most often takes place in the context of other work, rather than an activity in and of itself.

I spoke with several individuals, both men and women, about the differences between men and women's work habits. Women explained to me that men are players, and women are workers. When I asked one married woman in her 40s about the subject, she told me that, "I am a woman, women do not go play. Playing is for men. If women played then what would their children eat? They would starve to death. Men play, women work." I asked her, "Are you jealous of men because they go to play?" She said, "No, I am



not jealous. I am a woman and a woman's life is to work. That is the way this ethnic group/people is. You are a man so you should go to play, I am a woman so I am going to work."

On another occasion, I was sitting and talking with the headman. His wife and sister-in-law were sitting in the corner of the room bundling up green leafy veggies to sell at market. The subject of conversation turned to a festival that was taking place that day in a neighboring district, about a two-hour motorbike ride away. The headman's wife and sister-in-law told me that this is one of the best festivals in the area because "it is solely a Nùng Fan Slinh festival market; no Kinh, no Tày, no Dao, only Nùng." The two women then started encouraging me to go and see for myself. The headman grabbed onto the idea, and told me, "We can both ride on one motorbike-the only money you will have to spend is on gas and smokes. I have relatives there-the son of my father's oldest brother, his son is my nephew, whom you have met before, so we can park the bike at his house and eat and drink at his house." I was a little surprised that he was so ready and willing to go because a few minutes prior he was telling me about all the work he had to do on that day.

Outside of attending weddings, funerals, birthdays and the like, I never did see either of the women go to play just for the sake of playing. But I should point out that women attend weddings, funerals, festivals, weekly markets, birthdays and other very social occasions, which happen frequently in village life. The people I know in the village are all fond of a good party, men and women alike. However, the occurrence of exclusive men's parties is much more frequent, as they often happen spontaneously, while those events listed above are organized and planned in advance.

When I spoke with married men about men and women's different work habits, they would often, matter-of-factly, point out that they have wives and their children are big enough to labor, thus, for them, the issue required no further explanation. Several men told me that men are able to "*choi bòi*", or "lead a carefree/playboy life [vn]." Early one afternoon, the patriarch of a particular household put the word out that his household would be slaughtering a pig, and that evening he would have fried pig entrails and organ meats for the "brothers" to enjoy. That evening, a knot of men gathered in the home, and we stuffed ourselves with offals, rice liquor and tobacco while we bantered back and forth. During this exclusively male gathering, the host of the party exclaimed to me over a toast, "This is what being a man is, this is leading a carefree/playboy life."

### **Relationships Between Women-in-laws**

Another aspect of women's diminished capacity for social networking that I will briefly discuss here is the relationships between women-in-laws. As noted above, once married, a woman becomes a provisional member of her husband's household. Once a wife becomes pregnant, she moves in permanently with her husband and becomes a stranger in a strange household. Just because women-in-law share in common a subordinate position in the gender system does not mean that they inherently or automatically share an affinity for one another. Any reader who has ever been married or "partnered" need only to reflect on the different ways that a couple's respective natal families interact, run the household, celebrate holidays or manage finances, regardless of common socio-cultural backgrounds and histories in general, in order to recognize the large discrepancies in "ways of being" that can exist between families-in-law and the friction that can result from such differences. In the village, as anywhere else in the world, individual idiosyncrasies abound, personalities clash, and jealousies, rivalries and feuds exist. In the village, relationships between women-in-laws were stereotypically characterized by petty quarrels and arguments, backbiting, accusations, and turmoil in general.

There were two sisters-in-law in the village, the widowed woman mentioned above and my host's wife, who were particularly proud of their unique relationship. Perhaps other sisters-in-law in the village also enjoyed a close relationship, but I never heard anyone besides these two women boast of their in-law relationships as positively as these two women did. Furthermore, I observed that these two women frequently sought and kept one another's company, more so than other sisters-in-law I knew well. During several recording sessions with the widowed woman, she spoke of her unique relationship with her sister-in-law. Following is an excerpt from one of her narratives:

If a husband dies the woman-in-law will often return to her parent's home, even if she has a son. The widow will leave the children, especially if they are only daughters, with an uncle or the grandparents and go home. I did not go home, and this proves the good and solid/firm/durable relationship I have with [my sister-in-law]. The women-in-law of a family rarely get along-always fighting and scolding each other. Our relationship is unique in [this village]; we are the only sisters-in-law who truly get along.

... we share the work, we work together and help each other, and this is unique. Perhaps we get along so well because our fathers

died when we were both still young, so we are alike ... Even after my husband died I stayed with his family, as I did not have a son.

The ability to mobilize a social network in support of one's own or a common cause depends on the quality of relationships that constitute that network. If the relationships between women-in-law are tenuous and marked by turmoil, then rallying support from and nurturing solidarity within such a network would be difficult at best. I do need to point out that it was relationships between the women-in-law living in individual households that were most commonly stereotyped as tumultuous; not necessarily inter-household relationships between married women. I am not arguing that there is no solidarity among women-in-law, or no support to be found in social networks of women-in-law. I am arguing that configurations of gendered practice and women's position within the Nùng system of gender relations re-produce diminished female capacities for these things.

The people women seemed to be most fond of were their mothers, sisters and friends from their natal villages. Although all of the married women I know in the village did return to their parents' homes for visits (the frequency often depending on the convenience of doing so in terms of distance and time), opportunities to socialize with these women were much less frequent than opportunities to socialize with women living in their husbands' village. Furthermore, the fact that they no longer "belonged" to their mothers and that their sisters and friends had also dispersed and become members of other families and villages undermines social solidarity among women and their ability to maintain these social networks, at least relative to the degree that men are able to maintain male networks and foster solidarity among themselves.

### **Masculine Solidarity**

Solidarity among "brothers" is not only re-produced through daily, routine masculine practices, but also ritual practices that encourage, reaffirm and emphasize the importance of "brotherly unity", or *pi noong tô ném* (actually, I most often heard this concept expressed as *pi noong doàn ket*, which is a combination of the Nùng term for "brother" and the Sino-Vietnamese term for "unity" or "to unify/unite"). The majority of Nùng ritual practices and ceremonies involve some aspect or reference to brotherhood. I was told this is due to the fact that ritual acts and ceremonies involve a supplication made to the ancestors or ghosts, which entities are literally one's parents, grand parents, great-grandparents, and so forth. A priest once explained to me the importance of demonstrating brotherly unity as follows: "If you argue, fight

and do not get along with your brothers then the ghosts punish you because the ghosts are your parents, grandparents. And like living parents they scold bickering children.” Below, I will describe and discuss the ritualized masculine practices of grave cleaning and praying for rain.

### **Grave Cleaning**

Every year on the third day of the third lunar month is “grave cleaning day”, or *bún slam so slam, van son mo.* or simply *páy son mo.* Typically, only adult and adolescent males, as well as children of both sexes, go to clean graves, which actual cleaning entails clearing away the brush that has grown over the gravesite since the last cleaning<sup>3</sup>. Exceptions are made if a household has no sons, e.g. one 16-year-old girl went to clean her father’s grave because he had no sons. However, her 15-year-old male cousin accompanied her so there would be a strong, positive male influence at the gravesite. (I was told that it would be dangerous for a female to go alone, as there are bound to be ghosts at a gravesite, and without a strong male presence she would be more susceptible to ghost bites.) I accompanied my host and his youngest daughter to clean graves. We took a small “ground-altar” on which offerings are placed. The offerings include rice liquor, paper money and joss sticks to bum in offering, red, yellow and black sticky rice, chicken, duck and deep fried sticky rice cakes. We also took a hoe-axe and long jungle knife to clear brush with.

When cleaning graves, you start with your most recently departed paternal ancestor and then work backward in time. We started with my host’s father’s grave, and because my host is the only living son of his father, we were the only ones performing the cleaning and offering at this particular gravesite. There are graves a short distance away on either side of my host’s father’s grave, and there was a young man at each of these gravesites clearing brush and making offerings. After we had finished clearing the brush, we placed the ground-altar at the foot of the grave, which is marked by a large mound of dirt (approximately 1 to 1.5 meter in height), and filled it with offerings of food and rice liquor. We then lit joss sticks and stuck them in the ground at the foot of the grave. Then my host put some food and rice liquor on a single dinner-plate and put this on the top of the grave mound along with some burning joss sticks. We then lit and burned some paper money at the foot of the grave, which concluded the offering. After the offering was accomplished, we gathered with the young men, who were cleaning the graves to either side of us, to talk, drink and smoke. As I alluded to above, people only go to clean the graves of their direct patriline (i.e. father and mother, grandfather and

grandmother, great grandfather and grandmother, and so on); people do not go to clean graves of uncles or other deceased paternal relatives from whom they did not directly descend.

After we had finished at my host's father's grave, we moved on to his grandfather's grave to perform the same tasks. My host's grandfather sired several sons, so all of the grandsons (i.e. cousins or "brothers") congregate to clean this grave, make their offerings, socialize, drink and smoke. The further you move backward in time, or the older the grave, the more potential there is for a large group of male scions to be gathered there to clean, make offerings and socialize. The cleaning of graves is a very concrete display and reminder of who your brothers are. Year after year, *Nùng men* gather at the gravesites of their patrilineal ancestors, identify with one another through common descent, and celebrate their blood relations and solidarity among "brothers". This ritual practice exemplifies brotherly unity, as no one would dare display anything but camaraderie, or make anything but friendly talk with one another in the presence of potentially punishing ancestral powers; it is an opportunity to downplay any rifts that may actually exist between them and reaffirm their brotherhood.

### **Praying for Rain**

Every year on the second day of the fourth lunar month, the men of the village make an offering to the *tho công*, or principal ancestor/ghost of the village to pray for rain. Two days prior to this offering, all the male heads of household gathered in the home of the old priest. Each household was asked to contribute 4000 VND, which would be used to buy a pig's head that would serve as the offering to the *tho công*. As each male head of household came forward and made his contribution, his name was written on a ledger.

On the second day of the month, I accompanied one of the old priest's sons, who is also a priest, another married male, and a group of young children (both boys and girls) to the spirit house of the *tho công*. The priest set the pig's head, some rice liquor and a bowl of rice in the spirit house. He then lit two large bundles of joss sticks, which he put into the joss stick-holders at either side of the spirit house. The priest then recited the prayer, which basically asks the principal ancestor to let the rain come. After the priest finished the prayer, he lit a piece of paper money on fire and all the children, forming a semi-circle around the spirit house, bowed three times. Then the priest, the other man and myself made our three bows in front of the spirit house. Once the paper money had completely burned to ash, we gathered up the rest of the offering and all headed for the old priest's house.

Once we arrived at our destination, the two men, using a scale to ensure equity, cut up the pig's head into equal portions. By this time, several other married men and children of both sexes had also joined us. Several of the men inspected and re-weighed the portions of meat and some minor redistribution was made. Then the priest produced the list of names that had been drawn up two days prior, and began reading off the names on the list. When the name of a household patriarch was read, a child who belonged to that household would come forward with a bag or a bowl (a few of the children simply used their hands, and received reprimands) to collect their household's portion of the meat.

After all of the meat had been distributed, the priest and two other men began to explain the ceremony to me. One man said, "This is done to unite the village and show our unity to the *tho công* so he will make it rain. If brothers are arguing and fighting the ghosts do not like it, they see that we brothers are not behaving properly, so we will not meet with luck." The priest added, "Did you see that as soon as everyone [i.e. the household patriarchs] gathered and contributed money to buy the pig head it rained that very night. But even if it is raining when the brothers gather to contribute money, or go out to make the offering then the offering still gets made to show our unity and make sure it continues to rain."

Here again is another instance in which the importance of masculine solidarity is ritualized, but also has real, felt consequences for the entire village. If the households that make up the village (i.e. the male members of the village, or the "brothers") are not united in solidarity then the principal ancestor of the village stops the rains from coming. The lack of rain during this time of year, which is the primary growing season for staple food crops, can be devastating because most, if not all of the major crops have been planted. For Nùng men and women, "brotherly unity" is not just a symbolic badge of honor, but also a matter of survival.

### **Importance of Masculine Networks**

As I have illustrated above, masculine practices entail a great deal of socializing with other men, sharing sentiment facilitated by the consumption of rice liquor, and solidifying, reaffirming and establishing new ties between men. A simple trip to the market to purchase salt, lard, a bike tire or a new light bulb would, almost without fail, turn into a social event that spanned several hours. On the many trips I made to the market in the company of other men, we would stop in, whether of our own accord or at the behest of a household

patriarch, to visit a relative, a friend, and, as often as possible, men of influence or wealth, which often meant a man in an official position. The establishment, maintenance and expansion of one's social networks are key to enlisting others into one's causes, and garnering and calling upon favors. The more expansive a man's social networks, the more opportunity and assistance he can muster.

In addition to emphasizing accounts of brotherly unity within the village, the men in the village would very frequently, and with obvious pride, recount to me social networks and personal relationships that extend well beyond the village. Whenever I would travel outside the village with male friends, they were always very keen to demonstrate to me the extent of their social networks and associations with people of import. Likewise, my male friends were also anxious to demonstrate to others their association with me. Whenever commune officials or cadres came to the village, or when a hamlet meeting was called, the village headman, who also served in the capacity and held the official title of "hamlet headman", or *truong thôn* [vn], would request me to be present. Again, this was not out of any particular fondness or respect for me, but rather to demonstrate to others that his network of "relationships reach all the way to America,"

Above, I briefly discussed an opportunity I took to accompany the village headman to a festival in a neighboring district. As we passed by villages within this district, the headman pointed out the villages and homes where women from his village had been sold as in-laws. He boasted to me that, "I can stop at any house in any village in [this district] and they will know me. I can stop at any house and eat and drink and sleep if I want to without any problem, The only thing I need to fear is that the household will not have any liquor." Then, as if to prove his point, he began ordering me to stop at some of the houses along the road (I was driving the motorbike and he was on back). The ride to the festival was taken as an opportunity to reaffirm and maintain his networks of and relationships with other men.

These masculine social networks are not established and maintained simply or solely for bragging rights, or for landmarks that can be referenced in the construction and realization of one's masculine identity; though masculine networks are these things, they are also more than this. As we have seen, these networks can be utilized for hospitality while traveling outside of the village. Perhaps more importantly, these networks are used to access resources, garner favors and rally others to one's causes.

Shortly after I arrived in the village, my host was preparing to purchase a new motorbike, which is a considerable investment. He told me that on his own he did not have enough money to make the purchase. I asked him if he planned to get a loan from a bank in the Provincial Seat. He said, "I have many brothers, I do not need to borrow money from the bank. Besides, I would rather borrow from my brothers than the bank because it is much simpler, I do not have to pay interest, and it is a sign of trust, a way to build strong friendships. My wife and children complain when I borrow from brothers. They say, 'If we do not have the money to buy then we should just settle for what we have.' But they do not know men's relationships. I even have a Yao friend who has agreed to loan me two million *aong*. You see, I even have friendships with different ethnic groups. I know a man who sells motorbikes in [the Provincial Seat], and he is flexible with payment if you do not have all of the money up front. [Two brothers] bought from this man, and they did not have all of the money up front. Brothers create means for each other."

Men in the village worked hard to maintain Positive relationships with commune, district and provincial level officials and cadres. Several of the men in the village had achieved a strong relationship with the president of the commune level People's Committee, as well as the commune level "construction cadre". Through these networks, the men of the village were able to receive funding, in the form of building materials, for the construction of the village culture house. The lion dance troupe made yearly endeavors to perform in the homes of commune level officials, as well as in the homes of officials from the provincial level Ministry of Culture and Information. Their efforts resulted in positive relationships with these officials, and they received a recommendation from the commune level People's Committee to the provincial level Ministry of Culture and Information for sponsorship to perform at a cultural event in Hanoi, which sponsorship was granted. Men from the village also established and maintained networks of men who sold crop seeds and seedlings. If a household had met with financial hardship, by drawing on these networks the men were still able to obtain seeds and seedlings with a promise to repay the seller once the crop had been harvested. Configurations of masculine and feminine practices embedded within the Nùng system or gender relations gave men a greater capacity to establish and nurture these relationships and networks.



Among the men in the village, the necessity of a network of “brothers” in achieving one’s goals is axiomatic. I soon learned that in order to accomplish my research I had to continually rally support from my sponsoring institution in Hanoi (The Institute of Vietnamese and Development Studies), the provincial level Ministry of Culture and Information, the commune level People’s Committee and the village headman. If I, by myself, approached men who had agreed to participate in my research I would very often be put off and told, “another time”. Although I would perform physical labor, such as helping in a harvest, hoeing a field, planting crops, or offer a gratuity in exchange for individuals’ participation in my research, I found that I most often had to mobilize my networks in order to accomplish my ends. (It is interesting that women were more ready and willing to participate in my research than men.) Furthermore, when a man would make a request of me he always did so in the company of one or more of his “brothers”, who would lend support to and press the cause of the man making the request.<sup>4</sup>

To be without a network of “brothers” not only limits one’s access to resources and favors, or ability to muster support for one’s causes, but also leaves one in a potentially vulnerable position. People in the village were often perplexed when I would make trips to the market or to the Provincial Seat by myself. They were especially amazed that I had traveled to the highlands of Viet Nam on my own. I was often told, “You must be very brave, or perhaps stupid.” This point was driven home to me as I prepared to leave the village at the conclusion of my research. The village police officer said to me, “You are lucky to have come to this village because we have protected you. You do not have any brothers here; here you are by yourself so we could have done what we wanted with you. If you would have gone to another village they would have fought/beat you and robbed you because you do not have any brothers here to protect you, but we have protected you and it has been a huge responsibility.”

In the village, the fact that I lacked, or at least had a lesser capacity than other men for desirable characteristics that serve as indicators for one’s masculinity, such as a network of “brothers” and the ability to mobilize this network in one’s own interests, or my willingness to keep the company of females, made my masculinity, or the degree of my masculinity suspect. (Perhaps this is why women often seemed better able to relate to me, or at least more willing to participate in my research.) On the other hand, I was

perceived to have a high capacity for physical health and strength (I was the tallest individual in the village, standing a head taller than most men, and weighed about 10 kg heavier). Undoubtedly, my gendered practices presented the folks in the village with as much of a puzzle as they did for me.

### **Iteration**

I have offered a very partial and, no doubt, positioned glimpse into the gendered social life in a particular Nùng Fan Slinh village.

I have attempted to trace the contours of certain masculine practices embedded within a system of gender relations, as well as the positions of women in that same system where I felt it would lend some sense. I realize that I have only given cursory treatment, or have entirely neglected some important interactions, such as those of gender and age, or a more subtle and nuanced analysis of class and gender, or the gendered afterlife, and the like. My intentions with this article have been entirely ethnographic: to convey cultural detail, provide anthropological analysis and theorize around debates on Southeast Asian gender systems. More pointedly, I have attempted to demonstrate that a sex-role framework is ill-equipped for theorizing Southeast Asian systems of gender, and argue that analytical approaches that make use of concepts embedded within these very gender systems will be a much more illuminating endeavor.

Among the Nùng, masculinity/maleness and femininity/femaleness are not constituted by qualitatively different kinds of human characteristics and traits. Rather, the gendered categories of “man” and “woman” are conceived of as greater and lesser capacities for these characteristics, or gendered differences of degree. The masculine and the feminine are realized through different configurations of gendered practice within a system of gender relations that assumes a person’s capacity for desirable characteristics is attached to one’s biological sex. Because this gender system does not assume a polarized masculine-feminine dichotomy that re-produces gendered differences of “kind”, employing a framework that does assume such a dichotomy, as sex-role theory does, is inadequate. Claiming that gender equality obtains among the Nùng folks, with whom I lived and worked, based on the recognition that men and women both have capacities for the same kind of characteristics and traits would be widely off the mark. Perhaps it is time to move beyond a framework of sex-role when theorizing gender in Southeast Asia.

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### Notes

1. The most common Nùng New Year's wish I heard was, "*Cúng hi phát sòi, Bìm Chiá ng pi mâu, Het lang to lì, Chì lang to aay a*, which literally means "Wish happiness wealth, First lunar month new year, Do whatever also o.k./able, Desire whatever also o.k./able" In practice, doing whatever was actually not o.k.
2. I think I can safely say that everyone in the village thought I was quite odd. Many men could not understand my endeavors to spend time with women, and their opinions of my willingness to do so ranged from pitiful to scandalous, even after I explained that my research demanded that I inquire after women's perspectives as well as men's. I was given the nickname "*Da Vit paac*" by the men who were not fond of me it literally means "crazy David", and not crazy in any endearing sense of the English term. The women I interacted with most found me to be a novelty, and most thought it very amusing that I would sit and talk with them at length. Before I left the village, I was told by at least ten different people, more women than men, that, "When you leave we will be very sad and bored because there will not be anything new and fun/entertaining to talk about."
3. Anywhere from three to seven years after the funeral of a member of man's direct patriline, the deceased's skeleton is exhumed and cleaned on grave cleaning day, a practice called *fanúe*. Dirt is cleaned from the cavities of the skull using a long needle and all the bones are then placed in a container (traditionally made of fired clay, but nowadays plastic containers are also used) and reburied in the same grave. I was told this is to "protect the bones from being eaten by ants", and is considered a great sign of respect and reverence for the deceased.
4. This was also an issue of "face". Men would never go into a negotiation solo, they always had backup or support, which helps diffuse any direct individual confrontation that may result in a loss of face for the man whose cause is being pressed.

\* By courtesy of *Tai Culture. Vol. 19.*

## The Song Drawings of China's Poya Zhuang People : An Indigenous Tool for Cultural Heritage Transmission

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**Abstract:** The eighty-one symbols used by the Northern Taic-speaking Zhuang people of Poya Village in Southern China in their *Poya Songbook* are an ingenious and practical tool for the transmission of indigenous vernacular oral literature to the next generation. The example of the Poya Village Zhuang people could serve a model for other language communities for the transmission of endangered oral vernacular literature.



*(All photos by authors.)*

Although the majority of China's 16 million Zhuang nationality people live in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, over one million Zhuang also live in Yunnan Province, mostly in the Wenshan Zhuang and Miao Autonomous Prefecture in the extreme southeast of the province. Most of Wenshan Prefecture's Zhuang nationality people speak one of several related Tai-Kadai languages or dialects, some from the Northern Taic branch ("Northern Zhuang") and some from the Central Taic branch ("Southern Zhuang"). In Funing County in the extreme east of Wenshan Prefecture, on the border with the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, there is a Northern Taic-speaking village called Poya in Bo'ai Township. The Zhuang of Bo'ai have created a

“songbook” of symbols that correspond to eighty-one Zhuang love songs in the Guibian sub-dialect of Northern Zhuang.

The eighty-one *VaFwen* or “Song Drawing” symbols developed in Poya Village do not represent specific phones, phonemes, syllables, or morphemes of the language. Rather each symbol represents a specific song. Each of the eighty-one symbols depict a metaphor or a theme employed in that particular song, for example, a picture of twisted, intertwined lines represents a song that uses the metaphor of braided rope to represent the inseparability of the lovers.

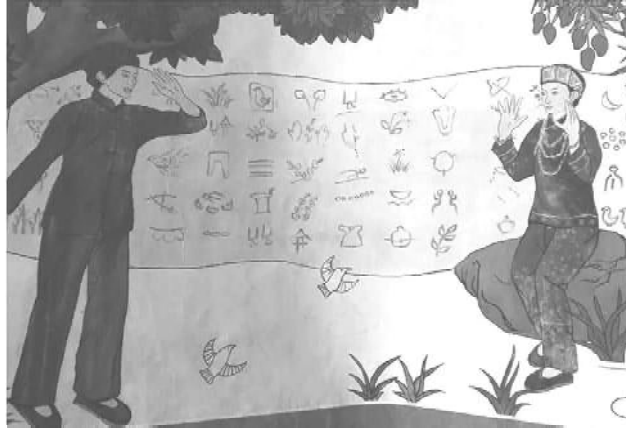
The eighty-one poems are composed in five syllable lines, as is typical of Zhuang poetry, sung to several locally known tunes, with lengths of five to twenty lines. The songs are sung by duets, of two men or two women, except for the final song which is sung by both men or women (four or more singers). Forty-one songs are written for men to sing, and thirty-nine for women.

Most of the songs are semantically independent from the other songs, although there are several pairs of companion songs in which questions or themes in the first song are answered in the second song, song in response by singers of the opposite gender. The songs are notable for their subtlety, elegance, understatement, emotional power, universal themes and appeal and the sophisticated use of metaphors from nature and from Zhuang daily life and agriculture. Some images and metaphors require a certain amount of “insider information,” that is, awareness of Zhuang cultural, environmental and agricultural background, to correctly understand. The concise nature of the lyrics relies upon implicit information shared between the singers and the original audience. Because many of the songs employ untranslatable puns, as is always the case, some of the beauty is “lost in translation.” But plenty of the richness of the artistry remains for those who access the songs through Chinese or through English.



Because the eighty-one Poya *VaFwen* symbols do not represent phonemes like an alphabet does, for example, the Latin script, or syllables like a syllabary does, for example, the Liangshan Yi script, or morphemes, for example, Chinese characters, this small set of symbols does not constitute a true orthography for the Zhuang language. The symbols are not “mobile,” that is, they cannot be used to represent and transmit new content. Rather they are symbols for these specific eighty-one songs. They are well-known in Poya and at least some of the other Zhuang villages in the immediate vicinity, but are not known in the wider Zhuang area and they cannot be used to communicate in a written form to Zhuang communities who have not already learned these specific songs. These symbols are currently used in only one domain of life, that of singing, and are not currently suitable to represent the Zhuang language in all the other domains in which it is used, such as in storytelling, recording of history, education, healthcare, business, governance, etc.

Therefore, these symbols are not a replacement for the Zhuang Latin script alphabet developed by the Chinese government, which, when adapted to local Zhuang dialects, as the Yunnan Minority Nationality Language Commission has done, has great potential to record various forms of Zhuang intangible cultural heritage of every Zhuang dialect group and village. Nor are these symbols able to serve the functions that the traditional Zhuang square characters, called *Saw Ndip* in Zhuang, which have historically served certain functions in some Zhuang communities. Rather, these symbols are a powerful mnemonic educational tool for the transmission of an important form of oral literature, one of types of intangible cultural heritage in which the Zhuang people are extremely rich, and yet one of the types of intangible cultural heritage whose continued transmission and preservation is extremely threatened in modern China. As Chinese language media via television, internet, mobile phones reaches every village and Chinese-language elementary education becomes nearly universal, with young minority children and young people often living away from their villages and families for extended periods of time, the factors mitigating against successful and intact transmission of oral literature and other forms of intangible cultural heritage have grown greater.



The impetus for the creation of the Poya VaFwen symbols appears to be pedagogical, that is, to teach intact the village's treasured collection of love songs. It is beyond the scope of the present paper to discuss the sociological needs these love songs meet. But living singers recount how, as children, they were taught the songs while seeing the *VaFwen* symbols drawn into the dirt on the ground using their own little hands.

Linguists who specialize in second language acquisition agree that using the whole body with as many of the senses as possible is essential to successful second language acquisition. In second language learning methodology, this is known as "total physical response" or TPR. The idea behind this is that electrical connections that pass through pathways between the synapses in the brain that make memories are increased and diversified when we use not just our ears to hear the words, or our eyes to read them, but all our senses at once to experience the meaning of the word, phrase, or sentence that we are learning, as a young child does when she or he first learn to speak. The memories are much stronger and permanent if, instead of looking at the foreign word for "apple" on a page in a textbook, or listening to a recording pronounce the sound, we simultaneously see an red apple, touch its smooth skin, taste its sweetness, and hear the sound of its crunch at the same time as hearing the pronunciation of its name in the language.

Independent of formal linguists and educational experts, the villagers of Poya have discovered this on their own and have established a tradition of teaching their children that does not rely only on rote repetition but also involves the drawing of simple pictures related to the meaning of the songs. The pictures the villagers draw as they sing the songs are not arbitrary, but rather depict a



tangible image which represents a metaphor or theme in the song itself. The result is that even a young child who cannot yet personally relate to the longing of unrequited romantic love depicted in the love song can recognize and draw the image of the moon and remember her people's song whose lyrics begin with a description of the moon. The drawing of the pictures is as important a part of the pedagogical method that the Poya villagers have discovered as are the specific *VaFwen* drawings themselves.

A decade ago, outside researchers became aware of the Poya *VaFwen* drawings for the first time, and this event has been described as a "discovery." Similar to Columbus's "discovery" of North America, which was only a "discovery" from the point of view of the Europeans since the Native Americans already knew of the continent, the Poya *VaFwen* drawings were not, of course, undiscovered by the indigenous people of Poya. The Zhuang people of Poya and the surrounding area already knew of these drawings and the songs they represented. What they themselves discovered, who knows how long ago, was an efficient, indigenous method of transmitting their own valued cultural heritage to their children and grandchildren. That is the true "discovery."

Social science researchers have invested their lives in documenting, preserving and promoting intangible cultural heritage via books, articles, recordings, dictionaries, primers and other teaching tools. This is important and essential work, worthy of full support to protect and promote intangible and threatened cultural heritage for the Zhuang people, for China, and for the world. But the methods we use, are, by their scientific and international nature, inevitably "outsider" methods. The villagers of Poya have developed an "insider" method, a method that fits their own situation, cultural, environment. The very characteristics that make their set of symbols "non-portable" also make it perfectly suited to its purpose in context. Their method doesn't require a graduate degree in anthropology or linguistics or outside experts and their method doesn't require expensive recording or photographic equipment requiring funding and grants. To truly preserve China and the world's intangible cultural heritage, we need low-tech, local, indigenous methods like this just as much as we need high-tech, scientific, documentation projects. Both are equally needed, the formal research, publication and protection from the highest levels of government, and "home-spun" truly grassroots teaching techniques like the drawing of the Poya *VaFwen* to pass on the songs and the singing culture of which these songs are the heart.

In the artistic beauty of their songs and in the sociological ingenuity of the VaFwen symbols, the people of Poya have made an important contribution to China and to the world. Through the publicity that the Poya Love Songs have received, hopefully more villages like Poya will be inspired to develop locally-appropriate methods for passing on their own intangible cultural heritage to the next generation in the midst of a changing society and changing world.



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## Spreading of the Tais and the Tais of China

Girin Phukon

The Tai is a race of people of Mongoloid origin who inhabits in large tracts of Southeast Asia extending from Northeast India in the west to Hainan Island in the east and from Guangzi of China in the north to Thailand in the south. The Tai people are extremely wide-spread. They live in the plains of Southern China, the valleys of Northern Vietnam; they are dominating people in Laos and Thailand; they inhabit most of the low-lying areas of Northern Myanmar, and a number of Tai groups are also found in Northeast India. They number approximately 100 million and are known by a bewildering variety of names in history as well as in the present times among whom are included the well known branches called *Tai Shan, Tai Lue, Tai Yuan, Tai Lao, Tai Zhuang, Tai Dong, Tai Nua, Thai, Tai Dam, Tai Deng* and so on. In India, the Tai people live in the Northeastern states of Assam, Arunachal and Manipur who are known as *Tai Ahom, Tai Aiton, Tai Khamti, Tai Khamyang, Tai Phake, Tai Turung* and *Tai Lai*. (Pithiphat, 2013: 33) The people of one culture have become split up into many sub-groups at different periods of time and each of the sub-groups has developed its own specific setting. Although they are separated by several centuries and several thousand kilometers, yet they are remarkably homogenous. In this paper an endeavour has been made to understand the question who are the Tais and how they have been spreading over a wide range of areas of southeast Asia with a focus on the Tais of China.

### **The Tais and their settlement :**

The word 'Tai' is almost self-evident and generally speaking the Tai people are those groups who speak Tai languages which have been recognized as Tai, such as the *Shan, Khamti, Lue, Yuan, Thai, Lao, Nua, Black Tai, Red Tai* and so on. When dealing with theories and speculation about Tai groups which may go back thousands of years in time, the label 'Tai' was not so easily applied. We have no written Tai record before the thirteen century A.D. and all observations relating to the Tai prior to this, rest upon scholarly reconstructions. The Linguists try to reconstruct aspects of an original Tai gene-pool and in an ethno-historical work; a socio-anthropologist attempts to build up a picture of some Tai customs and belief relevant to a period when

the Tai people formed a much more homogeneous group than it is today (Terwiel B.J, 1980:63). For this purpose, the use of 'Tai' with linguistic level is inadequate and therefore it is necessary to include other criterion. In view of this, the term 'Tai' is used for all people who share not only Tai speech but also cultural aspects. The concept Tai, therefore, should not be used to indicate a specific lingo-racial group (Terwiel B.J., 1980:67)

Therefore, the 'Tai' refers to all the groups and sub-groups of a race who call themselves as 'Tai' and are the speakers of Tai language. They are inhabitants of India's Northeast, in a number of regions of Myanmar, all over Thailand and Laos, Northern Vietnam and the five Southern Provinces of China namely Yunnan, Kwangsi, Kwangtung, Kuechu and Sichuan, and are known under a variety of national, regional and local appellations. Sometimes the same Tai sub-group is known by different names to different people. As such, in Northern Vietnam, a group of Tai people are known as Tai Dam to neighbouring Tai group. The Vietnamese name them 'Thai'. The French name them Tai-Noi and to the English it is Black Tai. The 'Thai' is used as appellation in order to denote the Tai people of Thailand earlier known as the Siamese perhaps to distinguish themselves from other Tai groups. The "Shan" is the Burmese name for the Tais of Myanmar used by the English writers in the nineteenth century. (Phukon J. & Phukon G, 2009)

Thus, the Tai is a larger ethnic group living in Yunnan Province and in Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and India. The issue of the root of the Tai group has been debated for more than a century. The age of the Han dynasty in China is the most important age in the forming of the Tai group, as the history of the Tai can be clearly described from that time. The original place of the Tai is in Yunnan. After the Han dynasty, the ancestors of the Tai migrated gradually to Laos, Vietnam, Myanmar and further to Thailand, India, along the Honghe River (Naam Tau), the Lancang River (Mae Naam Khoong) and the Ruili River (Naam Mae Lung). The migrating and growing of the Tai group is also a process of duplicating its culture. As a result, there emerges at this region a cultural zone with Tai as its core. (Xiaoyun Zheng; 2010:7)

To settle down in new territories to build their new homes and grow bigger, the Tai had the instruments of "rice cultivation" and their 'Muong Baan' social system. Yunnan is a starting place of rice cultivation and the Tai is one of the earliest rice cultivating ethnic groups. Rice cultivation is the traditional way of life of the Tai. Before the arrival of the Tai, Southeast Asia was inhabited mainly by the Mon-Khmer groups. The Mon-Khmer live by slash and burn Agriculture, which could not afford the growth of population

and could not support a higher civilization. When the Tai came, Tai civilization took the place of the local civilization and the Tai grew and pushed other people out (Xiaoyun Zheng; 2010 :07)

From a historical perspective, it is clear that the Tai culture often spread by way of an administrative elite imposing its way of life upon the local peoples it encountered during its spreading over a large tracts of Southeast Asia and Northeast India. The Tai cultural boundaries are not rigidly applicable to just the one type of people. The process of spreading the Tai Culture must be seen as a two-way traffic; as the Tai elite influenced local indigenous culture and the local cultures left their mark upon the Tai. When the Tai people began to play the role in some of the larger river basins, the mixture of cultures is apparent. The Tai of the Chao Phraya Valley, which is now Central Thailand, adopted many Mon and Khmer features in their language and custom yet retained sufficient Tai characteristics' to put the label 'Tai' (Terwiel B.J.,1980:19). The Tai Ahom of the Brahmaputra Valley became so influenced by the indigenous culture that they eventually lost much of their Tai Culture.

Various anthropologists have attempted to characterize the Tai by producing glossaries of aspects of Tai Culture (Lebar, Frank M, 1964:72). From such account, it appears that, historically, the Tai people appear as valley dwelling wet-rice growers, a fact that gives to the Tai Culture of most Tai speaking populations a certain uniformity. They may be seen historically as a people with some assimilative ability and a tendency in the direction of social organization. Of the inherited culture, agriculture being the main source of living of the rural Tai people, the traditional cultural foundation of the Tai is agriculture. Rice has been an important factor responsible for creating a cultural identity and determining social values and way of life of the Tai people. In order to understand that part of material culture it is necessary to know the crops cultivated, folklores and rites related to it.

Being a valley-dwelling and wet-rice growers, the Tais have been occupying many valleys of the Upper Mekong, the Salween, the Upper Red and Black Rivers, the Me Nam, the Irrawady the Chindwin and the Upper Brahmaputra, which create certain uniformity of their culture. The different nomenclatures of the Tai people appearing in history as well as at national, regional and local levels in different countries, however, do not signify, the influence of non-Tai people or of the locals. Rather these are merely distinguishing marks either applied by themselves or by the local people to distinguish them at places where they settled (Dodd W.C., 2010:29). In the same way, the differences in names do not mark, in any significant degree,

the cultural differences among them. Therefore, throughout their long history, they maintained a fair degree of uniformity of cultural heritage. In fact, they always preserved their culture in spite of certain amount of adaptation, and maintained uniformity in political, economic, social institutions and linguistic spheres. (Terwiel B.J., 1980:23)

Their river-valley settlements, at the highest political level, was called *muong* (*muang* in Thai) under a lord called *chao* (or *chao pha* in case of larger *muong*) who was hereditary. A *muong* was comprised of several *baan* or cluster of villages. Tai villages are inhabited by Tai people clan wise, a fact that helps them to maintain homogeneity of culture even at the local level. Their wet-rice growing method is most suitable in flood plains, and their economy is based on rice which give them certain advantage over their neighbours who are mostly hill people. In the social sphere, their clan predominance and *pi-nong* institutions to which they have firm traditional attachment greatly help them to retain a fairly uniform social life through centuries. As a result of all these, the different Tai groups could continue to maintain homogeneity of culture despite their scattered settlements through time and space. (Phukon, 2019: 33)

There was, however, no total detachment of the Tai from their plain neighbours, and in fact, the Tai acquired certain cultural properties of their neighbours who enjoyed long and stable form of government and well-established institutions like the Mons and the Khmers and the Burmese in Burma and Thailand, and of some Hindu population in the middle and lower Brahmaputra Valley. Such local cultural elements adopted by the Tai are distinguishable from their inherited cultural heritages. (Joachmin, 2001: 87)

As such throughout the history the Tai people wherever they lived (as they only lived in the flood plains) retained their cultural heritage which include their *muong* polity lorded over by a *chao* or *chao-pha*; social institutions, family and clan bonds called *pi-nong* system. Another very distinguishing element of their culture is language, which retains, *in spite of certain influences of neighbourers, fundamental homogeneity in all aspects of grammar and syntax, uniformity of legends relating to the origin of the world, religious beliefs that include the belief systems in khwan and in many gods and spirits, ancestor worship, the burial method, and other elements of life and culture.* All these are uniformly found among the Tai people throughout even in modern times that make them different from other people. But one should not understand that all these are found in equal degree among all groups. Nevertheless these are basically found among them. (Field observation)

Before their spreading over Southeast Asia the Tai culture appears to have been much more homogeneous than it is today. Because of geographical factor and political circumstances, the various Tai groups have effectively lost contact with each other. For instance, there has been no contact, direct or indirect, among the farmers of Southwestern Vietnam, Northern Thailand and Ahom farmers in Assam. Yet they share certain cultural traits which are common in nature to its smallest details. (Terwiel B.J.;1980:31)

The Muong Baan social system is also a key energy for the Tai to grow. It was a unique political system in ancient Southwest China and Southeast Asia. A Muong is a feudal administrative system which include villages. A Baan is a village. Both Muong and Baan are relatively independent as a political, economic-military body. In Yunnan and Southeast Asia there are many place names of which began with Muong. It shows that these are started by the Tais. Both Muong and Baan have a god of its own. The god serves as a spiritual core of the government and the community.(Field observation)

As already noted, the Tai migrated to to-days' Southeast Asia and settled down with their culture. The Tai communities do not only share a common root but also share basic cultural elements. Today they are widely spread in Southeast Asia and consists of many branches. In China alone there are more than ten branches. However, it is not a matter which branch they belong to, they have the sense of their ethnic Tai identity. They think they are a part of the great Tai race. As already noted, their main inhabited areas are Yunnan Province of China, Northern and Northwestern Vietnam, Northern Laos, Northern Myanmar, Northern and Northeastern Thailand, and Northeast India. Though it has evolved into many dialects, they all derived from the common mother language and the fundamentals of them are the same.

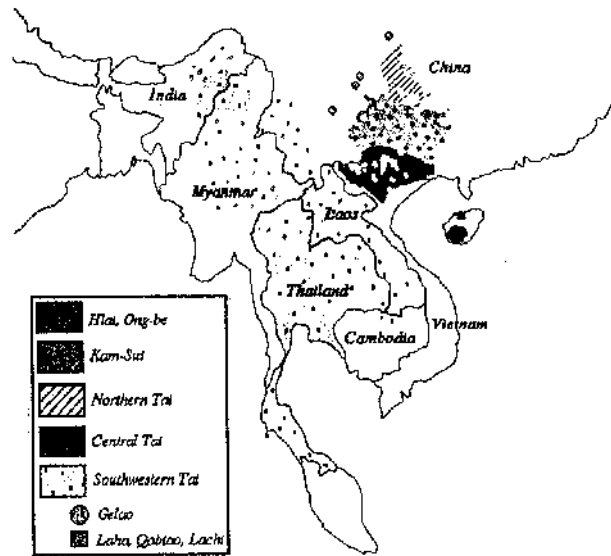
More importantly, the Tai share common religious traits, and nature of worship. They believe every thing has spirit and should be respected. In accordance with the Muong Baan social system, every Muong has a Muong god and every Baan has a Baan god. This is basically traditional religion of the Tai People. Even after most Tai people have become Buddhists they still continue their traditional religious practices. The art and literature of the Tai come from the same culture. As such their art and literature are similar or even the same. They are fond of stilted house, sour and boiled food, sticky rice. This is a part of the common culture for the Tai. The common way of production is rice cultivation. Rice cultivation provides the opportunity for surplus and growth of the population. Rice cultivation is an important part of their culture, shaping their way of life. Therefore, the Tai culture may help to



understand the historical roots of the Tai and their present situation and to explain the similarities of Tai in various areas of settlement. In fact, all the Tai people share a common root. (Phukon, 2019)

**Territorial Location of the Tais :**

With this short introduction to their definition and groupings of the Tai we move to their living space across political boundary and geographical limitations. The people called Tai live across the political boundaries of Indian Union, Union of Burma, Royal Kingdom of Thailand, Peoples' Republic of China, Peoples' Democratic Republic of Laos, and Democratic Republic of Vietnam. In specific terms, their habitat crosses the political boundaries of States to cover many areas of India's North East, Burma, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, and China's south.



**Map showing Tai dwelling areas of Southeast Asia and China**

The most significant pointer to their living space is the valley-dwelling character. They are always found in the valleys, not on hills. They were never in the past nor are today hill-dwelling people. No doubt they live in many valleys surrounded by hills but hill-dwelling nature is totally foreign to them. In Northern Burma, says E.R Leach, "The Shans are scattered about in this area but not at random. The Shan settlements only occur along the river valleys,

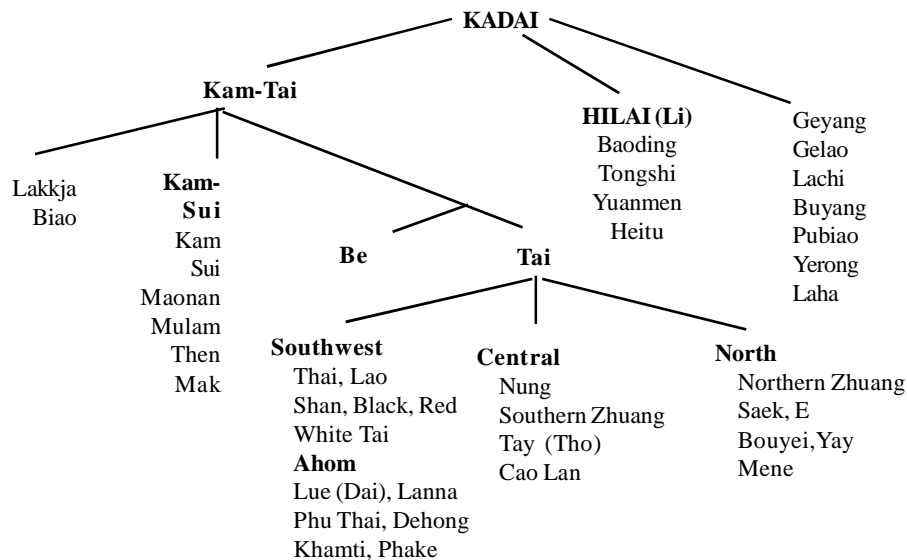
or in pockets of level country in the hills.”(Leach ER; 1970: 30). They are always found along river valleys of the region spreading from the Upper Mekong and Middle Mekong valleys, the valleys of the Taping, the Shweli (Nam Mao), the Salwin, the Irrawady and its major tributary the Chindwin, the Menam and its tributaries, the Red River and its tributaries. In other words the Tai living spaces cover many river valleys of southern China, northern part of the Mainland Southeast Asia, the whole of the upper region of the Irrawady, the Upper valleys of the Brahmaputra. This situation goes to explain their life and culture, and their food and clothing as well as their living strategy. In terms of geographical distribution, the area presently occupied by the Tai extends from 7<sup>0</sup> to 26<sup>0</sup> N. and 94<sup>0</sup> to 110<sup>0</sup> E.[Phukan J.N. & Phukon Girin; 2009:10]

### **Names of Different Tai People and Their Distribution**

<b>No.</b>	<b>English Name</b>	<b>Main Area of Their Distribution</b>
1	Dai Lue	Xishuangbanna (China), Luang Namtha and Luang Phabang (Laos), Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai (Thailand), Lai Chau and Dien Bien Phu (Vietnam)
2	Tai Mao	Dehong (China), Shan State (Myanmar)
3	Tai Lue	Xishuangbanna and Dehong (China); Luang Namtha (Laos)
4	Tai Noi	Shan State (Myanmar); Central Part of Thailand
5	Tai Yai	Shan State (Myanmar); North Thailand; Bokeo (Laos)
6	Tai Dam	Northwest Vietnam; North Laos
7	Tai Khao	Northwest Vietnam; North Laos
8	Tai Daeng	East Laos
9	Tai Khamti	Northwest Myanmar; Assam and Arunachal Pradesh (Northeast India)
10	Tai Ahom	Assam (Northeast India)
11	Tai Phake	Assam (Northeast India)
12	Tai Aiton	Assam (Northeast India)
13	Tai Turung	Assam (Northeast India)
14	Tai Khamyang	Assam (Northeast India)
15	Tai Lai	Manipur (Northeast India)

**Classification of Tai People on the basis Tai-kadai Language :**

The Tai Languages are spoken in a fairly large area in Southeast Asia and Southern China. Some of the Languages are well-known, such as Siamese of Thailand, Lao of Laos and Shan of Northeastern Myanmar along the Chinese border and Northeast India. There is no doubt that these languages are closely related, for they share a large portion of their vocabulary. In any case, George Abraham Grierson has shown Tai Languages with Chinese as a combined branch called “Siamese-Chinese” as a part of greater Sino-Tibetan Language family (Grierson G.A, 1966). This classification has been followed by a number of scholars. But a major attempt was made by P.K. Benedict in 1942 A.D. attempted to snape the link of Tai Language from Chinese and deconstructed Siamese- Chinese or Sino-Tai family of the Sino-Tibetan super family. Thus, he sought to establish a new super language family called “Tai-Kadai”. It was done by combining Tai Language family with Kadai Language family. (Benedict P.K.; 1942). In this connection, his assertion was that the Kadai Languages belong to the same family with the Tai but of a different stage of development. Hence, the super family called Tai-Kadai was created. Thus, in the Tai Language, groupings moved away from Siamese-Chinese / Sino-Tai to Tai then to Tai-Kadai and now moving towards super *Kadai* which may be shown as below: (adopted from Edmondson & Solnit; 1997, P.2)



The language classification model is based on the idea that there was a single language in the past which in the course of time gradually became diversified. Tai language is the biggest group within the Tai-Kadai language family. Tai languages are now spoken in eight countries in South East and East Asia which may be noted as follows :

- the national languages of Thailand and Laos
- the language of the largest minority group in China, i.e. Zhuang
- the language of one of the largest states and minorities in Myanmar (Burma), namely Shan state
- a significant minority in Northern Vietnam
- spoken by smaller communities in Cambodia, Northeast India and Malaysia.

The Tai languages have been broadly divided into three sub-groups : The Southwestern Group (SW,) The Central Group (CG), and the Northern Group (NG). The names of these groups are chiefly geographical. (Stephen Morey, 2014)

#### **Distribution of TAI-KADAI People in Several Countries**

<b>Group</b>	<b>Alternate Name</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Distribution</b>	<b>Population</b>
LAO	Lao Lum, Tai Lao Tai Isan	Laos (PDR)	All over the country	4,569,327 (1993)
		Thailand	mainly north-east	16,720,201 (983)
		Combodia	north-west	figure NA
BLACK TAI	Tai Dam, Thay Daeng (Vn.), Tai Noir (Fr.)	Vietnam	Lai Chau, Son La, Hoa Binh Provinces	approx. 500,000 (1997)
		Laos (PDR)	Hua Phan & Hua Mekong Province	approx. 50,000 (1993)
		Thailand	Phetchaburi, Supanburi, Ratchaburi Samutsakon Province	NA
		USA	Decorah, Iowa	NA
WHITE TAI	Tai Khao (Tai) Tai Don, Tay Trang (Vn.)	Vietnam	Both banks of Red River to border of Yunnan, Moug Te, Muong Xo, M. Xat, M. Ma, M. Lai (Lai Chau), M. Chieu, M. Chen	approx. 400,000 (1973)
RED TAI	Tai Daeng (Tai)	Vietnam	Thanh Hoa & Nghe An Province	approx. 125,000
LUE	Lu, Dai, Shui Dai, Han Dai	China PRC	Yunnan Province: Sip Song Panna Aut. Pref. Dehong Dai-Singpho Aut. Pref. Gengma Country, Menglian Cnty. Yuanjiang Cnty, Zinping Cnty	approx. 850,000 (1964)
		Myanmar	Keng Tung (Jeng Tung)	NA
		Thailand	Chieng Mai, Chieng Rai, Nan Province	NA

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		Laos (PDR)	Haut Mekong, Nam Ta, Nam Beng, Luang Prabang	125,000 (1995)
		Vietnam	Binh Lu, and along the China border	approx. 4,000 (1997)
NEUA	Nua	Laos (PDR)	Hua Phan (north-eastern Laos), Xieng Khuang, Haut Mekong, Phong Saly Province	more than 40,000
		Vietnam	Upper Black River	NA
PA DI	Tai, Buyi	Vietnam	Lai Cao Province	NA
		China PRC	Yunnan: Maguan Contry	NA
SHAN	Tai Yai, Tai Shan, Tai Long, Tai Mao, Tai Le, Burmese Shan, Shan Tayok, Chinese Shan, Sam, Asam	Myanmar	Throughout Myanmar, except in Chin Hills, Arakan and Tenasserim	more than 4,000,000
		China PRC	Yunnan: Dehong Pref., Menglian, Gengma, Ruili, Mengding Conties, Gengma Maguan Contry	NA
		Thailand	Mae Hong Sorn, Chieng Rai	more than 300,000
TAY	Tho	Vietnam	Concentrated in Cao Bang Provn. Quang Nin, Lao Cai, Yen Bai Provn. Bac Thai, Tuyen, Ha Giang, Dien Bien Phu, Lam Dong, Dac Lac	NA
		China PRC	Yunnan: Eastern Part Guangxi: Western Part	NA
NUNG	Nong, Lung Chwang	Vietnam	China-Vietnam border, Cao Bang, lang Son, Bac Giang, Ha Giang, Lao Cai	approx. 705,000 (1993)
		China PRC	They are called Zhuang in Guangxi, a small number in Yunnan mostly in Tuyen Quang and Bac Thai	NA
CAO LAN	San Chay	Vietnam	Mostly in Tuyen Quang and Bac Thai Province	NA
ZHUANG	Chwang, Tu, Dong, Nang, Buxiong, Buman, Tai Wuming	China PRC	Guangxi: 90% of Zhuang live in this Province so called Guangxi Zhuang Aut. Region. Yunnan Zhuang are in Wenshan Zhuang-Miao Aut. Pref. In Guangdong they are in Lianshan Zhuang-Yao Aut. Country. In Guazhou Provn. in Qiangdongnan Miao-Dong Aut. Pref. In Hunan Provn. in Jianghua Yao Aut. County.	15,489,630 (1995)
BOUYEI	Pu-l, Po-ai, Pui, Buzong, Buman	China PRC	Guizhou Provn. South and South-west in 2 Aut. Prefs. 3 Aut. Country,	

	Giay			in suburban areas of Guiyang. Yunnan: Liupanshui Dist. Luoping, Maguan Counties. In Sichuan: Ningnan Cnty.	2,545,059 (1990)
			Vietnam	North-west	approx. 40,000
SAEK		Laos (PDR)		Khammouane Prov.: 10 villages	NA
		Thailand		Nakhon Phanom: 5 villages	
		Vietnam		Northern Part: 2 villages	
KAM	Dong, Tung, Lam	China	PRC	Guizhou 60%, Hunan 22%, Guangxi 16%, Hubei	NA
SUI	Shui, Ai Shui	China	PRC	Guizhou and Guangxi Zhuang Aut. Pref.	NA
		Vietnam		Chien Hoa Dist. in Tuyen Quang Provn.	NA
MULAM	Mulao	China	PRC	Guangxi: 1 Aut. County, rest scattered. In guizhou they are scattered	159,328 (1994)
MAONAN	Ainan	China	PRC	In 1 County in Guangxi, rest scattered. In Guizhou scattered	71,968 (1991)
LI	Hlai, Day, Lai Lao, Loi, Le,	China	PRC	Hainan Island: Li-Miao Aut. Region	1,236,800 (2000)
ONG BE	Lin'gao	China	PRC	Hainan Island in 4 Counties, and suburb of Haikou City	500,000 (2000)
LACHI	Lipo	Vietnam		Ha Giang Provn.	7863
		China	PRC	Yunnan: Sino-Vietnam border	1,634
GE LAO	Klou, Ho-ki, Phumahen	China	PRC	Guizhou, Guangxi Aut. Reg., Sino-Vietnam border	50,000
		Vietnam		Ha Giang Province	NA
LAHA	Buyang	Vietnam		Lao Cai and Son La Province	approx. 10,000
THAI	Siamese	Thailand		all over the kingdom, but all are not Tai (Phukan, J.N., 2012)	

### **The Tais of China :**

The Tais of China are known by varieties of names. The Tais who are inhabitants of South and Southwest Yunnan Province are officially known as Dai ethnic group. The Tai people, with population of 1.30 million in 2000, are mainly distributed in south and southwest Yunnan Province, that shares borders with Vietnam, Laos and Myanmar, i.e. mostly in Yunnan's Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture, Dehong Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture, and in Gengma, Menglian, Jinping, Xinping, Yuanjing, Jingdong and Jinggu counties and in the valleys of Jinsha river, the upper reaches of the mighty Yangtze river. The Dai people are concentrated in such places as the reaches of big rivers, particularly the Lancang (Mekong river in Yunnan is called Lancang river) and Red rivers. (Phukon, 2019:46)

Today, the Dai and other Tai people live in several provinces and autonomous regions in the People's Republic of China. It must be borne in mind that a precise identification of the Dai and its related peoples in China remains incomplete. First of all, there is a lack of precision in giving group names. Many of the names have undergone changes in the hands of Chinese historians over dynasties. If one name appeared in the Ming Dynasty, it underwent change in the next. Secondly, the transliteration of Chinese names is rather difficult. Thirdly, many of the Dai and other Tai peoples have been heavily sinicized, particularly in areas where the Han Chinese are dominant. However, we have tried to collect a list and give a brief overview of China's Dai and other Tai people from various sources, mainly from those of Chinese writers. In China, Tais are referred to as Dai and in Chinese-language as pinyin. The Dai people are classified as different from the Zhuang, the Buyi, the Dong, the Mulao, the Shui, the Maonan and the Li people. They are related linguistically, i.e. they fall into the category of Zhuang-Dong language group of Sino-Tibetan language family, but they are different from each other in terms of ethnic identification. They are also related to Thai, Lao, Shan, Tay and Nung dialects in Thailand, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam. The following is a brief account of them. (Phukon, 2019:47)

**1. Zhuang-Dai language branch:** The Dai, the Zhuang and Buyi peoples are closely related in terms of the Zhuang-Dai language branch.

**i) The Dai :**

There are two major groups of Dai in Yunnan Province. One group lives in southwest Yunnan, and the other in south. The southwest group is found mostly in such places as Ruili (Called Muong Mao in the past. The Dai word Muong becomes Meng in Chinese and Mang in Burmese) City, Lianghe (Nandian is named Lianghe now), Yingjiang (Zhanda is named Yingjiang now), Gengma and Menglian counties, Mengding and Zhefang towns in Dehong prefecture and Lincang and Pu'er cities and in other places along Longchuan and Yingjiang river basins. The Dehong prefecture is situated between 23° 50'-25° 20' N. and 97° 31' - 98° 43' E. It is bounded by Tengchong and Longling counties in the east and northeast and borders Myanmar's Shan and Kachin states on the southwest and northwest. The whole prefecture consists of two cities and three counties. Dehong covers a total area of more than 11,000 square kilometers. The climate in the region below 1,500 meters above sea

level falls into the category of South Asian tropical climate, which is characterized by a high temperature, abundant rainfalls and an appropriate humidity. It is neither too hot in the summer nor too cold in the winter. The rainy season begins in May and ends by September. The Dai people live on the flatland along the river valleys below 1,300 meters above sea level. (Information collected from field work)

The other Dai group is found in Xishuangbanna (Sip Song Pan Na or Sipsongpana in foreign literatures) Dai Autonomous Prefecture with Jinghong as its capital. The Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture was established in 1953 and now it consists of 3 counties of Jinghong, Mengla and Menghai. Xishuangbanna stretches through the southern part of Yunnan within 21°08' - 22°36'N. and 99°56' - 101°50'E. It has a tropical monsoon climate of a humid river valley type. The rainy season begins in May and continues till October. The tropical forests are spread all over the prefecture. In general, the elevation of the area ranges from 420 to 1400 meters above sea level. The major river draining the area is Lancang River, the Mekong in China. (Phukon, 2019: 47)

The Dai in Xishuangbanna are generally known as Lue or Dai Lue. They number about 320,000, divided into three groups viz. Dai Lue (called Shui Dai or the Water Dai living along rivers), Dai Na (the Han Dai that are much influenced by the Han Chinese) and Dai Ya. (Another division of the Dai in Xishuangbanna has 4 branches: the Shui Dai, Han Dai, Huayao Dai and Kemu. Dai Sai is called Huayao Dai or the Dai of Flowery Waistband living in Xinping and Yuanjiang counties in Yunnan. Other Dai peoples live in Gengma, Menglian, Jinping, Jingdong and Jinggu counties and in the valleys of Jinsha river, the upper reaches of the mighty Yangtze river). The Dai Lue constitutes the vast majority forming 90% of the population.

## **ii) The Zhuang :**

In addition to the Dai in Yunnan, there is the Zhuang, earlier known as the Chuwang or other names. According to the 2000 A.D. Census, the population of the Zhuang was 16.178811 million with about two-thirds speaking a northern Zhuang dialect and one-third speaking southern Zhuang dialect. (Zhuang language is divided into northern and southern dialects) About 90% of the Zhuang people live in Guangxi, for which reason Guangxi has its official name of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. Apart from Guangxi, the Zhuang people is also scattered in Wenshan Zhuang and Miao Autonomous Prefecture in Yunnan Province, Lianshan Zhuang and Yao Autonomous County



in Guangdong Province, Qiandongnan Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture in Guizhou Province and Jianghua Yao Autonomous County in Yunnan Province.

The Zhuang people practice polytheism, animism and Taoism. There are approximately 40,000 who are Christians. The non-Christian Zhuangs worship their ancestors, offer sacrifices to gods, and believe in khwan. They make all kinds of sacrifices. They usually practice wet-rice cultivation. Usually the Zhuang people take three meals a day. Like the Tai-Ahom, the Zhuang people who live at the border of Guangxi and Guizhou keep in their granaries paddy stalks without removing the grains. Everyday they remove the grain from the stalk. Ahom rice-beer (lao) and Guizhou Moutai (lao) are well known to the connoisseurs. (Field investigation)

**iii) The Buyi :**

Another group of Tai in China is the Buyi. They have different names such as Buyi, Pu-I, Po-ai, Puyi, Bo-I, Dioi, etc. They are also called Chung-Chia. According to 2000 A.D. census, the population of the Buyi was 2.9715 million. The main body of the Buyi people is found in south and southwest Guizhou Province, where there are two Buyi and Miao autonomous prefectures and three Buyi and Miao autonomous counties. There are also Buyi people in the suburban areas of Guiyang (the capital of Guizhou Province) and Liupanshui City in Guizhou, Luoping and Maguan counties in Yunnan Province and Ningnan County in Sichuan Province. The language of the Buyi is classified within the northern dialect. They have no written script of their own. They use Chinese characters where necessary.

Heavily Chinised, the majority of the Buyi can speak Chinese. In dress and physical appearance, they can scarcely be distinguished from Chinese peasants. But women wear distinctive dress. The Buyi people practice polytheism, animism, Buddhism and Taoism. There are about 5000 Christians and some are Muslims. The Buyi people worship their ancestors, offer sacrifices to gods and believe that everything has a soul (khwan). In the Buyi's religion of Molism, Bu Luodong is the creator and is the highest god. Bronze drums are beaten on festive occasions. They bury their dead. Villages are characteristically located away from the main roads. Fields are ploughed with the help of buffalos. (Field observation)

**2. Dong-Shui language branch:** The Dong, the Mulao, the Shui and the Maonan peoples are most related in terms of Dong-Shui language branch.

**i) The Dong :**

The Dong is also known as Kam or Gan, Tung-Chia or Tong, etc. They are found mainly in southeast Guizhou Province, such as Liping, Rongjiang, Congjiang, Jinping, Sanshui, Tianzhu, Jianhe, Zhenyuan, Chengong counties in Qiandongnan Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture, Yuping and Jiangkou counties in Tongren City. They also live in Xinhuang, Tongdao, Chengbu, Zhijiang, Jingzhou, Huitong and Shuining counties in Hunan Province and Sanjiang, Longsheng, Rongshui counties in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region as well as Enshi and Xuan'en counties in Hubei Province. Approximately 60% of the Dong live in Guizhou, 22% in Hunan, and 16% in Guangxi. Most of the Dong people live in villages on the rivers or near the paddy fields. As they are valley-dwellers, they usually build their house on stilts. The Dong people practice polytheism and animism. There are approximately 1,600 Christians among them. Periodical water-buffalo fights are highly characteristic of the Dong people. (Field work information)

**ii) The Mulao :**

They are also called Mulam. Their population was approximately 207,352 in 2000 A.D. Nearly 80% of the Mulao live in Luocheng Mulao Autonomous County in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. The rest are scattered throughout Xincheng, Yishan, Liucheng, Du'an, Huanjiang, Rongshui and Rong'an counties and Hechi City in Guangxi. Most of the Mulao believe in polytheism and that all things on earth have souls. They worship their ancestors and offer sacrifices to all kinds of gods. The Mulao people mainly believe in Taoism.

**iii) The Shui (Sui):**

The Sui people live mainly in Sandu Shui Autonomous County in Qiannan Buyi and Miao Autonomous Prefecture in Guizhou Province and in some other areas in Duyun City and Libo, Dushan, Rongjiang and Congjiang counties as well as Rongshui County in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. Their total population was about 406,900 in 2000 A.D. They believe in polytheism and that all things on earth have souls. They worship their ancestors and offer sacrifices to many gods. On fixed dates, they eke out sacrifices to their gods and spirits, some of whom are evil and the others benevolent.

**iv) The Maonan:**

The population of Maonan was 107,200 in 2000 A.D. The Maonan people are mainly found in Huanjiang Maonan Autonomous County in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. Others are spread over throughout Hechi City and Nandan, Yishan and Du'an counties in Guangxi.

**3. Li linguistic branch:**

**The Li:**

They live in Hainan Province, with a population of 1.2478 million in 2000. \*(Formerly Bao Lengdon)

**Epilogue:**

China is the original homeland of the Tais and still South and Southwestern China have been the home of a large number of Tai ethnic groups, who retain their traditional Tai Culture as yet which are similar to those of the Tais of Southeast Asia and Northeast India. Originally they lived in a common region possessing common element of culture. In course of time, however, different Tai groups developed their separate culture and civilization independently in different parts of Southeast Asia. As they lost contact with each other since the days of their migration there is however no longer homogeneity in the Tai culture maintained by them. Despite this fact, it appears that the basic traditional traits of Tai culture have survived among different Tai groups who now inhabit the South and Southeast Asian countries. It may confidently be observed that there is no direct or indirect contact between the Ahom rural farmers in Assam (India) and Dai farmers in China, yet they share certain common cultural values and in many cases these are identical even to the smallest details.

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- Most of the facts and information stated in this paper are based on the author’s Anthropological participatory method of observation and field investigation.

## Socio-Economic and Human Development of The Tai Communities of Northeast India : An Empirical Study

Pranjal Protim Buragohain

### **Introduction**

The Tai is a generic term used to denote a branch of Mongoloid population of Asia and is known by different appellation in different countries of South East Asia, viz., Shan in Myanmar, Thai in Thailand, Tai-Ahom, Tai-Khampti, Tai-Turung, Tai-Phake, Tai-Khamyang and Tai-Aiton of Northeast India. The Tai-Ahom of Assam is one of the sub-branches of the greater Tai race who had ruled Assam for about six hundred years from 1228 AD to 1826 AD until it lost its power to British by Treaty of Yandaboo that took place between the king of Burma and the East India Company where neither Ahom king nor any of his delegate took part. Thus, although, the Tai-Ahom had a glorious past in the history of Assam as well as great Tais of the South East Asia, yet it had lost its power suddenly and that too under a mysterious circumstance. Further, this is the community that had prevented the Mughals to enter into the South East Asia. On the other hand, five other Tai communities, viz., Tai-Khampti, Tai-Turung, Tai-Phake, Tai-Khamyang and Tai-Aiton are also found in Assam with very few numbers. This paper is an attempt at studying the socio-economic and human development status among the four Tai sub-branches, viz., the Tai-Ahom, Tai-Phake, Tai-Khamyang and Tai-Turung, out of the six sub-branches found in the state of Assam, India. The backdrop of the study is that although the Tai-Ahoms ruled the state continuously for about 600 years, yet today their socio-economic and human development status is not at all satisfactory. Similar is the fate for the other sub-branches of the Tai people of the state.

The tool used to narrate the development status among the Tai branches of Assam is the Human Development Index (HDI) - a measurement of average achievement of the countries as developed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and has become popular ever since the first publication of the Human Development Report in 1990. Although the HDI has been used widely to gauge the level of different countries, regions, states, districts at the

international, national and state level, yet, the UNDP has stressed upon the calculation of the HDI at disaggregate level. According to UNDP (1995), “calculating the HDI for different groups of a population holds a mirror up to society, revealing its strengths and weaknesses. Many countries have already undertaken exercises to disaggregate their HDI by geographic region, by gender, by ethnic group and by income class. These disaggregated values reveal serious disparities requiring policy attention (p.22).” Thus, the UNDP has given importance on the calculation of HDI at the disaggregated level and one such attempt was successfully carried out for the Nepal in its Nepal Human Development Report (2009). On the other hand, following the UNDP’s methodology, Corrie (1995); Chetia (2003); Stanton (2007); Basumatary (2010); Chalam (2010) and Buragohain (2012) had constructed the HDI either for a community or for different religions or for different ethnicity. The present paper is, thus, such an attempt to construct an HDI for the Tai-Ahoms, Tai Turungs, Tai-Khamyangs and Tai-Phakes of Assam. Further, review of existing literature on the socio-economic and human development status among the four Tai branches has revealed that not a single comprehensive study on the socio-economic and human development status among the four Tai groups have been made so far. This adds significance to the present study. However, it is to be mentioned here that ample numbers of studies are found with respect to the socio-cultural-historical-political and linguistic arena of the Tai communities mentioned here. Some of the notable studies of worth mentioning are: Buragohain (1996); Gogoi (1968, 1976); Rajkumar (1980); Teriwiel (1981); Guha (1983); Sarma (1986); Goswami (1986); Buragohain (1992); Gogoi (1994); Gogoi Nath (2002); Kakoty (2003); Phukan (1973, 1994, 2003, 2007); Phukon (1990, 2010); Baruah (1985, 1993, 2005); Gogoi (2006); Baruah (2007); Nartsupha and Wichasin (2007); and Buragohain (2008, 2013).

#### **Source of Data :**

The study is based on both the primary and secondary source of information. For the primary source of information, 7 districts of Assam with a greater concentration of the Tai-Ahom population was selected purposively. Then from each district two development blocks are selected randomly. Finally, on the basis of pilot survey, from each block at least two Tai-Ahoms villages were selected for household survey and from each village 15 per cent of the sample households were collected randomly. The number of selected villages for the survey came to be 55 and the number of households as 941. On the

other hand, since the Tai Phakes and Tai-Turungs considered for the study are very less in number and they concentrate only in a few villages of Assam and therefore, all the Tai-Turung and Tai-Phake people living villages were considered for the survey and collected maximum possible number of samples. Similar is the case for the Tai-Khamyangs also. The Khamyangs are presently concentrated in a few villages of Sivasagar, Charaideo, Golaghat, Jorhat and Tinsukia. However for the present study, only Sivasagar district was considered as the concentration of the Tai-Khamyangs. Thus, the sample households are considered for the Tai-Phakes, Tai Turungs and the Tai-Khamyangs has become 129, 244 and 200 respectively. The primary data are collected through well designed household interview schedule and through observation method. The secondary level of information has been collected from different books, government reports, and research papers.

**Methodology of the Study :**

The socio-economic status of the Tai-Ahoms, Tai-Phakes, Tai Turungs and the Tai-Khamyangs are studied by considering some variables such as type of family, religion, sex ratio, literacy rate, occupational status, per capita income of the households, housing and living status. On the other hand, to reflect the overall development of the communities, the Human Development Index (HDI) has been constructed by considering achievement in Health, Education and Standard of Living.

Based on the UNDP methodology, in this paper, an attempt has been made to construct the Human Development Index for the Tai communities under study. However, data on the internationally standard indicators such as Life expectancy at birth, Expected Years of Schooling and adjusted real GDP per capita (PPP\$) are not feasibly retrievable or available for the Tai communities of the Assam for the study. Therefore, proxies or surrogate (substitute) measures are employed in the construction of HDI for the Tai communities. Moreover, to calculate the income index, the per capita State Domestic Product has been considered instead of real GDP per capita (PPP\$). The variables considered to construct the HDI for the Tai-Ahoms are: Infant Mortality Rate, Adult Literacy Rate, Mean Years of Schooling and Per capita Income. Moreover, it is to be noted here that the value of infant mortality rate has been reversed to make the dimensional index unidirectional. On the other hand, the Goalposts considered for the calculation of HDI are given in the Table 1 below:

**Table: 1 Goalpost for Calculating the HDI for the Present Study**

Indicator	Maximum Value	Minimum Value
Infant Mortality Rate	54 (Assam)	0
Adult Literacy Rate (%)	100	0
Mean Years of Schooling (yrs)	15	0
SDP (Rs.)	304666	33954 *

\* The maximum and minimum values for SDP refer to the highest and the lowest per capita SDP in the country Goa and Bihar respectively for 2014-15.

Given the above framework, the sub-indices for the different dimensions are calculated using the following standard formula :

$$DimensionIndex = \frac{ActualValue - MinimumValue}{MaximumValue - MinimumValue}$$

After finding the respective value for the three sub-indices, an aggregate of them is obtained in terms of their geometric mean as follows:

$$HDI = \sqrt[3]{I_{Life} * I_{Education} * I_{Income}}$$

Let us now discuss the socio-economic features and the human development status among the Tai-Ahoms, Tai-Khamyangs, Tai- Turungs and Tai-Phake in the following two sections :

## Section : I

### Socio-Economic Features of the Tai-Ahoms, Tai Khamyangs, Tai-Turungs and Tai-Phakes

In this section of the paper, an attempt is made to highlight the socio-economic features of the Tai-ahoms, Tai-Khamyangs, Tai-Turungs and Tai-Phakes.

#### Religion :

Religion is a very important socio-economic variable that has the impact on the economic development and the growth of population. In the present study, it has been observed that the Tai-Ahoms are virtually the follower of Hinduism. However, almost all the households have also practised some of their tradition ritual activities like worship to their forefathers, Mei-Dam-Mei-Phi, Ompha Puja etc. Of late, a few Tai-Ahom families started to follow Phuralung as their religion. On the other hand, the other communities under the study, viz., the Tai-Khamyang, Tai-Turungs and the Tai-Phakes are the followers of Buddhism.



**Language :**

The Ahoms are the speakers of the Assamese language as they abandoned their Tai language long time back. However, some priests of the community still preserve the language and the scripts. During the field survey, it has been observed that a few people, especially from the Bokota-Parijat-Nemuguri area of the Sivasagar district have the knowledge about the language. Thus except a very few of the community don't know their language and script. On the other hand, few Tai-Khamyangs, Tai-Phakes and Tai-Turungs are bilingual. They used their respective dialects for conversation with the family members while for conversation with others they used Assamese as a medium of communication. Of late, it has also been observed that the languages of the Tai-Khamyangs, Tai-Phakes and Tai-Turungs are also in the verge of extinction.

**Type of Family :**

Family is a social organization and action-reaction of the human beings is centred to this unit. In India, generally joint family norm has been observed. However, with the changing circumstances, beliefs, norms, values and attitudes towards life have made some changes towards the family norm from a joint to nuclear one. From the following Table: 1, it has been observed that the sample households from the Tai-Ahoms, Tai-Khamyangs, Tai-Phakes and Tai-Turungs mostly maintained nuclear family status.

**Table 1: Distribution of the households by Family Types**

<b>Family Type</b>	<b>Tai-Ahoms</b>	<b>Tai-Khamyangs</b>	<b>Tai-Turungs</b>	<b>Tai-Phakes</b>
Nuclear Family	806 (85.65)	185(92.5)	236(96.72)	84(65.12)
Joint Family	135 (14.35)	15(7.5)	8(3.28)	45 (34.88)
Total	941(100.00)	200(100.00)	244 (100.00)	129(100.00)

*Souce: Field Survey*

**Sex Ratio :**

Sex ratio is an important social indicator to measure the extent of equity between males and females. The sex ratio for the selected Tai communities has also been calculated and the sex ratio of the the Tai-Ahoms, Tai-Khamyangs, Tai-Turungs and the Tai-Phakes are respectively estimated at 875, 721, 931 and 948. On the other hand, as per the Census 2011, it is 954 for Assam and 940 for India (2015). The estimated sex ratio among the different Tai communities are shown in the Table:2.

**Table 2: Distribution of the Communities by Sex Ratio**

<b>Sl. No.</b>	<b>Name of the Tai Branch</b>	<b>Sex Ratio</b>
1.	Tai-Ahoms	875
2.	Tai-Khamyangs	721
3.	Tai-Turungs	931
4.	Tai-Phakes	948
5.	Assam	954
6.	India	940

*Source: Field Survey*

Thus, from the Table: 2, it is clear that the sex ratio among the different Tai communities/tribes is not favourable. This needs urgent attention from the demographers and policy makers.

**Educational Status :**

Education is another important socio-economic factor that has strong influence on the demographic features of any population and on economic development of any community. According to Szirmai (2007), education is both an end and means. It is one of the basic human rights and a developmental goal in its own right. But, education also contributes to the realization of other developmental goals (UNESCO, 2002). Functions and tasks ascribed to education are: (i) promotion of economic growth and development; (ii) modernization of attitudes and mentalities in society; (iii) contributing to important development goals such as increased life expectancy, improved health and reduced fertility; (iv) political socialization, promotion of a sense of civic responsibility, contributing to national integration and national political consciousness in developing countries; (v) reducing social and gender inequality and increasing social mobility and (vi) contributing to personal growth, development and emancipation. Researchers like Kendrick (1961), Herbinson (1965), Schultz (1961, 1971), Becker (1967, 1993) etc. have found that investment on education plays the most crucial for the rapid development of the American economy. According to them, investment on education is more worthwhile than investment in physical capital such as in dams, roads, bridges etc. Schultz, in fact, pioneered the human capital theory, according to which individuals were willing to invest in their own education so that they would be

able to earn a higher income in the future. Thirlwall (2003) mentioned that there are three main ways in which education can improve growth performance. These are: (i) education improves the quality of labour, and also the quality of physical capital through the application of knowledge; (ii) education has a spill-over effect (externalities) on other sections which offset diminishing returns to capital and (iii) education is one of the important inputs in R&D and for attracting FDI. Anand and Kanbur (1991) found that infant mortality rates are negatively correlated with social spending and income growth and that social spending had a stronger impact. For example, campaign for child vaccination can lower infant mortality much more quickly than can income growth, and at a low cost. Barro and Lee (2010), on the other hand, estimated the rate of return in education and found that return to human capital varies across different levels of education. Thus education is very much essential not only for rapid development of a country but it has also been considered an essential requirement for rapid economic development of a community. Realizing the importance of education in one's life an attempt has been made to study the educational level of the sample population. In the present analysis, literate person has been defined according to the definition of Census of India and accordingly a person who is of seven years age and can both read and write any one of the language is considered as literate. From the following Table 3 it is observed that literacy rate of the Tai Communities are higher than the State (73.18 per cent) and national average (74.04 per cent).

**Table 3 Distribution of Sample Population by Their Literacy Rate (in Percentage)**

<b>Name of the Tai Branch</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
Tai-Ahoms	98.62	97.96	98.18
Tai-Khamyangs	95.25	90.45	92.85
Tai-Turungs	90.00	78.90	84.45
Tai-Phakes	96.00	90.00	93.00
Assam	78.81	67.27	73.18
India <sup>#</sup>	82.14	65.46	74.04
Assam	78.81	67.27	73.18

*Souce: Field Survey, <sup>#</sup>Census 2011*

**Occupational Pattern:**

Occupational pattern is an important indicator that reflects the progress of a country. Meinam mentioned that economic progress of a nation can be judged on the basis of occupational pattern of its population.

All the Tai sub-branches of Assam are traditionally agriculturists. However, over the times, with the spread of education and economic development, occupational mobility is observed among the Tai-Ahoms, Tai-Khamyangs, Tai-Turungs and Tai-Phakes which is clearly visible from the Table: 4.

**Table 4 Distribution of Respondents by the Nature of Occupation**

Name of the Tai Branch	Agriculture	Government Service	Private Service	Business	Others	Unemployed
Tai-Ahoms	48.92	13.92	4.57	10.52	10.00	12.03
Tai-Khamyangs	45.00	24	4	11.5	0	15.5
Tai-Turungs	49.18	10.24	0.82	0.82	13.28	25.66
Tai-Phakes	68.9	17.8	3.1	8.6	0	1.60

*Source: Field Survey*

It appears from the study that most of the respondents of the different Tai groups are engaged in agriculture and hence they depend on agriculture for their livelihood. Apart from agriculture they are also engaged in different occupations such as government services, business etc.

**Family Income :**

Income has profound influence on the socio-economic status of a family. In calculating the monthly income of a sample household, income received from salary, the money wages received daily, weekly, and monthly by husband, wife and other members of the family, computed market price of the agricultural produce of the family and earnings through the supplementary sources together have been taken into consideration. Table 5 gives the distribution of sample households on the basis of monthly family income of the Tai-Ahoms, Tai-Turungs, Tai-Khamyangs and Tai-Phakes.

Table 5 Distribution of Households by Monthly Family Income

Family Income in Rs. (Monthly)	Tai-Ahoms (in %)	Tai-Khamyangs (in %)	Tai-Turungs (in %)	Tai-Phakes (in %)
1000-5000	425 (45.16)	88 (44.00)	77 (31.56)	87 (67.44)
5001-10000	243 (25.82)	17 (8.50)	70 (28.69)	42(32.56)
10001-15000	105 (11.16)	29 (14.50)	19 (7.79)	0
15001-20000	71 (7.55)	4 (2.00)	20 (8.20)	0
20001-25000	32 (3.40)	62 (31.00)	13 (5.33)	0
25001-35000	35 (3.72)	0	16 (6.56)	0
35001-50000	12 (1.28)	0	16 (6.56)	0
Above 50001	18 (1.91)	0	13 (5.33)	0
Total	941 (100.00)	200(100.00)	244 (100.00)	129 (100.00)

Source: Field Survey

From the Table 5 it appears that among the surveyed households from different Tai Communities, most of the families are belonging to the lower income bracket whose income ranges from Rs. 1000/ to Rs. 5000/. The per capita annual income of the sample Tai-Ahoms is Rs 55313/; whereas the per capita annual income of the Tai Khamyangs is estimated at Rs. 37827/. The per capita annual income of the Tai-Turungs is estimated as Rs. 39516/. Finally, the annual per capita income of the Tai-Phakes is found as Rs. 60280/. Thus, we have observed that the per capita income of the Tai-communities of Assam is lower than both the states (Rs. 60621/) as well as the nation (Rs. 88533/) as a whole during 2014-15.

### Housing and Living Condition

Better housing and living condition is very much essential for a quality life to live. It also reflects the standard of living of the people. Better housing and living condition means a healthy disease free environment that increases working capacity of the people and the income as well. According to Lou *et al.* (1990) and Hart (1998), the housing is one of the basic necessities of man. The quality of housing conditions is directly related with the health status of the family. While Braubach and Fairburn (2010) lamented that housing is a fundamental human right and has been identified as one of the determinants for health and quality of life. Thus, as per the latest data available, households having pucca houses for the State were 27 per cent and 20.4 per cent were Kutcha in 2011; while that for India was 61.9 and 12 per cent respectively. And from the table:6 it has been observed that the same is higher for the Tai-Ahoms and the Tai-Khamyangs and much lower for the Tai-Turungs and the Tai-Phakes.

Table 6 **Distribution of Households by the Type of House**

Type of House	Tai-Ahoms (in%)	Tai-Khamyangs (in %)	Tai-Turungs (in %)	Tai-Phakes (in %)
Kutcha	449 (47.72)	28 (14.00)	155 (63.52)	69 (53.50)
Pucca	313 (33.26)	127 (63.5)	48 (19.67)	13 (10.00)
Semi- Pucca	179 (19.02)	45 (22.50)	41 (16.80)	47 (36.50)
Total	941 (100.00)	200 (100.00)	244 (100.00)	129 (100.00)

*Souce: Field Survey*

Apart from the type of living house, while discussing the housing and living condition in the present study, it has been tried to discuss some other parameters such as toilet facilities, bath room facilities, and drinking water facility etc. to access the housing and living condition of the community.

The toilet facility of the sample households of different Tai branches are shown on the following Table7.

**Table 7 Distribution of Toilet Facility**

<b>Type of Toilet</b>	<b>Tai-Ahoms (in %)</b>	<b>Tai-Khamyangs (in %)</b>	<b>Tai-Turungs (in %)</b>	<b>Tai-Phakes (in %)</b>
Scientific Flush Toilet	198 (21.04)	124 (62.00)	24 (9.84)	74 (57.30)
Pit	711 (75.56)	76 (38.00)	184 (75.41)	30 (23.30)
Open	32 (3.40)	0 (0)	36 (14.75)	25 (19.4)
Total	941 (100.00)	200 (100.00)	244 (100.00)	129 (100.00)

*Source: Field Survey*

Thus, from the above Table 7 it has been observed that majority of the sample households from the Tai-Khamyangs and the Tai-Phakes have used scientific flush toilets; while for the Tai-Ahoms 75.56 per cent and for the Tai-Turungs 75.41 percent of the respondents use pit toilets. Thus it can be concluded that the toilet facilities among the sample households is to some extent satisfactory.

**Table 8 Distribution of Source of Drinking Water Facilities**

<b>Type of Toilet</b>	<b>Tai-Ahoms (in %)</b>	<b>Tai-Khamyangs (in %)</b>	<b>Tai-Turungs (in %)</b>	<b>Tai-Phakes (in %)</b>
Pond	59 (6.27)	0	9 (3.69)	0
Tube well	800 (85.02)	153 (76.5)	181 (74.18)	115 (89.10)
Water supply	45 (4.78)	0	50 (20.49)	5 (3.9)
Own Pump	23 (2.44)	37 (18.5)	2 (.82)	0
Common Source	14 (1.49)	10 (5.00)	2 (.82)	9 (7.00)
Total	941 (100.00)	200 (100.00)	244 (100.00)	129 (100.00)

*Source: Field Survey*

From the above Table 8 it appears that most of the people of Tai-Ahoms, Tai-Khamyangs, Tai-Turungs and Tai-Phakes used tube well. Thus it can be concluded that the drinking water facilities of the sample households are satisfactory as the households under the study have greater access to safe drinking water than both State (69.9 per cent) and national average (85.5 per cent) in 2011.

Use of electricity is also an important socio-economic variable. Thus in our study, an attempt has been made to highlight the sources of lighting. The following Table: 9 shows the distribution of households having access to lighting of different sources.

**Table 9 Sources of Lighting**

<b>Source of Lighting</b>	<b>Tai-Ahoms (in %)</b>	<b>Tai-Khamyangs (in %)</b>	<b>Tai-Turungs (in %)</b>	<b>Tai-Phakes (in %)</b>
Electricity	495 (52.60)	186 (93.00)	206 (84.43)	106 (82.2)
Kerosene	403 (42.83)	14 (7.00)	31 (12.70)	23 (17.80)
Solar	43 (4.57)	0	7 (2.87)	0
Total	941 (100.00)	200 (100.00)	244 (100.00)	129 (100.00)

*Source: Field Survey*

It has been observed from the above Table: 9 that most of the sample respondents have used Electricity as a source of lightening which is a good indicator for development.

Source of cooking energy is also an important socio-economic variable as the use of some fuel for cooking in general cause health hazard, basically to women and children in the form of indoor air pollution. Thus it is very much essential to use the fuels that produce less smokes and fumes.



Table 10 Distribution of Sample Households by Source of Cooking Fuel

Source of Cooking Fuel	Tai-Ahoms (in %)	Tai-Khamyangs (in %)	Tai-Turungs (in %)	Tai-Phakes (in %)
L.P.G.	248 (26.35)	27 (13.50)	96 (39.34)	54 (41.10)
Firewood	567 (60.26)	159 (79.50)	148 (60.66)	76 (58.90)
L.P.G/Firewood	126 (13.39)	14 (7.00)	0	0
Total	941 (100.00)	200 (100.00)	244 (100.00)	129 (100.00)

Source: Field Survey

The above table shows that most of the people used firewood as a source of cooking energy. Use of LPG is still not encouraging.

Thus, it appears from the above discussion that the socio-economic status of the Tai-Ahoms, Tai-Khamyangs, Tai-Turungs and Tai-Phakes is satisfactory in some aspects viz., literacy rate, occupational diversification, access to safe drinking water, electricity; and in some other aspects it is not satisfactory i.e. per capita income, sex ratio, housing, and source of cooking fuel.

## Section : II

### Status of Human Development among the Tai-Ahoms, Tai-Khamyangs, Tai-Turungs and Tai-Phakes

In the second section of the paper, an attempt has been made to analyse the status of human development among the Tai--Ahoms, Tai-Khamyangs, Tai-Turungs and Tai-Phakes. The status of human development has been discussed broadly in three fronts, viz., achievements in health, educational attainment and standard of living.

#### Achievements in Health :

Health is considered as a vital component of growth and development of any country, state or even to a particular community. It is a very important component of human development. Ill-health leads to capability deprivation and hence poverty, which again stands for a low standard of living implying

low intake of food, malnutrition, lack of basic amenities such as poor housing, clothing, safe drinking water and sanitation facilities. Thus, health is very important component for people's all-round development and that is why according to WHO (1946), "health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity". In this section, therefore, an attempt has been made to analyze the achievements in health among the Tai sub-branches of Assam.

**Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) :**

The infant mortality rate is another important indicator that represents human development. The IMR is low usually in a developed society and vice-versa. It is also considered as the most important component of mortality and can represent human well-being quite fairly. This variable can be considered as a proxy to the Life Expectancy variable where the data for life expectancy at birth is not available. Infant mortality rate is defined as the ratio of total number of child died to total number of child in the age below one. Thus it represents the probability of death of child within his/her completion of first year. The Table: 11 gives us an idea about the infant mortality rate (IMR) among different Tai branches and that of Assam and India.

**Table 11 : Infant Mortality Rate among different Tai-Communities**

Sl. No.	Name of the Tai Branch	Infant Mortality Rate
1.	Tai-Ahoms	18.87
2.	Tai-Khamyangs	33.33
3.	Tai-Turungs	52.75
4.	Tai-Phakes	52.63
5.	India*	40
6.	Assam*	54

*Source: Field Survey, \*SRS (2014)*

It appears from the Table:11 that the IMR of Tai-Ahoms and the Tai-Khamyang is better than the national average. On the other hand, the IMR of Tai-Turungs and the Tai-Phake is worse than state and national rate.

**Educational Attainment :**

Educational attainment is another component of human development. Education is an essential component for expanding opportunities of the human being. It also builds human capacity and expands human freedom. Education is the factor that has an impact on all kinds of human development outcome (Mehrotra and Delamonica, 2007). It has the deep influence on various activities of human being. For example, educated parents can make better decisions about the family size, health care facilities and nutritional care to be provided to the children and many more. Education can also help one to generate self-esteem and gain confidence to do something worthy. It increases employability thereby one's income and reduction of poverty in turn improves social status. Thus, education enhances opportunity, builds capacity and expands freedom and these are the reasons why educational attainment is an essential component of human development. It is to be noted here that long time back the importance of education to the society has been recognized. 7th Century BC Chinese philosopher Guan Zhong quoted that "If you plan for a year, plant a seed. If for ten years, plant a tree. If for a hundred years, teach the people. When you sow a seed once, you will reap a single harvest. When you teach the people, you will reap a hundred harvests". Since then education has been considered important for the well-being of the society. The HDR 2010 recognized that education expands possibilities. In this section, therefore, attempt has been made to analyze the educational attainment of the Tai-Ahoms, Tai-Khamyangs, Tai-Turungs and Tai-Phakes.

**Adult Literacy Rate :**

The Adult Literacy Rate is one of the important components of human development index. In fact, it is considered as the most important parameters of educational attainment as it paves the way for further learning and training in the formal sector (India Human Development Report, 2011). Without education people are crippled as it adds value to a person's life and plays a crucial role in his/her overall development. Further it adds tremendous value to society at the macro level. There is a strong correlation between lack of literacy and poverty, both in the economic sense and in the broader sense of deprivation of capabilities (UNESCO, 2006). Therefore, the present study is to compare the level of education and adult literacy which is calculated as one

of the most important parameters of educational attainment. The adult literacy has been defined as the percentage of population aged 15 and above who can read and write with understanding and also do simple mathematics used in day today life. The estimated adult literacy for different Tai branches of Assam under the current study are shown in the following Table 12

**Table 12 : Adult Literacy among different Tai-Communities**

<b>Sl. No.</b>	<b>Name of the Tai Branch</b>	<b>Adult Literacy Rate</b>
1.	<b>Tai-Ahoms</b>	98.07
2.	<b>Tai-Khamyangs</b>	96.05
3.	<b>Tai-Turungs</b>	78.28
4.	<b>Tai-Phakes</b>	87.09

*Source: Field Survey*

#### **Mean Year of Schooling :**

The mean year of schooling is another indicator that has been used in recent years instead of adult literacy to calculate human development. Mere ability to read, write and arithmetic have little influence on scientific, reasonable decisions of the people on various aspects of life that can have enhanced their quality of life. Barro-Lee, in this context, commented that school enrolment ratio or adult literacy rates concepts do not relate to the stock of human capital that influences current decisions about fertility, health and so on. According to the UNDP, the mean years of schooling is the average number of years of education received by people ages 25 and older in their lifetime based on educational attainment levels of the population converted into years of schooling based on theoretical level of education attended. However, in our country since the population is entering into labour force as early as at 15 years and hence to calculate mean years of education 15+ population group has been considered. For the present study, we have estimated Mean Years of Schooling for the selected Tai communities of Assam which is in the Table 13.

Table 13 : Mean Years of Schooling among different Tai-Communities

Sl. No.	Name of the Tai Branch	Mean Years of Schooling (in years)
1.	Tai-Ahoms	9.88
2.	Tai-Khamyangs	10.13
3.	Tai-Turungs	6.82
4.	Tai-Phakes	8.02

Source: Field Survey

**Standard of Living :**

The per capita income is the best measure to reflect the standard of living. Therefore, the achievements in living standard are measured by considering per capita income of the Tai-Ahom, Tai-Khamyang, Tai-Turung and Tai-Phake sample households. Income has profound influence on the socio-economic status of a family. Standard of living of a family depends on the income of the family. Without sufficient income, a family cannot enjoy a decent living standard. The Table: 14 shows the estimated per capita annual income of the households under study. It has further been noticed that the per capita income of the different Tai groups under study are lower than both the state and the national average.

Table 14 : Per Capita Income among different Tai-Communities and Assam and India (2014-15)

Sl. No.	Name of the Tai Branch	Per Capita Income (in Rs.)
1.	Tai-Ahoms	55313
2.	Tai-Khamyangs	37827
3.	Tai-Turungs	39516
4.	Tai-Phakes	60280
5.	Assam	60621
6.	India	88533

Source: Field Survey

**Human Development Index for the Tai-Ahoms, Tai Khamyangs, Tai-Turungs and Tai-Phakes**

After a brief discussion about the different indicators of the HDI and different components of HDI which promotes economic growth and human development, following the methodology as mentioned earlier, the Human Development Index (HDI) for Tai-Ahoms, Tai Khamyangs, Tai-Turungs and Tai-Phakes is being calculated. As we know that the HDI is a geometric mean of three indices, viz., life expectancy, educational attainment and income index and therefore, we calculate each of them individually and then apply geometric mean method to calculate HDI for the Tai branches of Assam.

**Table 15 : Human Development Index for the Tai-Ahoms, Tai Khamyangs, Tai-Turungs and Tai-Phakes**

Community	Health Index	Educational Attainment Index	Income Index	HDI= $\sqrt[3]{LEI*EAI*II}$
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Tai-Ahoms	0.651	.820	0.222	0.491
Tai-Khamyangs	0.383	0.818	0.049	0.248
Tai-Turungs	0.023	0.619	0.069	0.099
Tai-Phakes	0.025	0.703	0.481	0.204

*Source: Author's calculation*

Thus, it appears from the table that among the Tai branches of Assam, the Tai-Ahoms are comparatively in better position than the Tai-Khamyangs, Tai-Turungs and Tai-Phakes.

**Conclusion :**

The paper is an attempt at studying the socio-economic status and human development among the Tai-Ahoms, Tai-Khamyangs, Tai-Turungs and Tai-Phakes. From the study, it can be concluded that socio-economic status among the Tai groups under the study is not satisfactory when we compare these with state and national average. This is also same with respect to the Human

Development aspect of the communities/tribes. It needs urgent attention from the government to uplift these communities for a harmonious growth of the State of Assam. For their improvement, government must take responsibility to provide quality education and health care facilities. Besides these, government should also provide employment opportunities and on-the-job training facilities. Moreover, in a country with numerous tribes/castes/communities, it is need of the hour to know the status of development of communities so that on the basis of their development level, community specific targeted policy can be undertaken to uplift their backwardness. There lies the importance of constructing human development index for different tribes/castes/communities.

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## Understanding Konyak- Ahom Relations Through Folk- Narratives

N. Nyejat Konyak

The konyak Naga in India have a rich store of orally transmitted traditions. Documented and reproduced here is the oral narrative of the konyak Nagas, the story of the eldest daughter of Wang/Angh (chief) namely watlong, who got married to an Ahom raja. The lore tells that the Ahom raja who fled from his enemies, stayed there for a considerable time until political conditions in the valley had improved. The Ahom raja had fallen in love with the konyak girl and married her. Her name was Watlong. The Ahom raja stayed in several places in the Naga Hills' and after having taken his Naga wife Watlong to Sibsagar, remained in close contact with her family, before Watlong died. The last request of noble woman Watlong to her husband was after death, her body should be taken back to the Konyak land and buried there. As per as her wish, when she died her body was taken to her homeland and buried at Na-gini-mora, which literally translated as 'Naga-lady-die'. In this paper I examine the story of Watlong in detail by presenting stories, songs and objects of evidence handed down through generation which is traditionally carried out through the specific oral narratives among the konyak Naga.

**Keywords:** Konyak Naga; Ahom; oral narratives

History often tends to present the view-point of the dominant party or the group who actually had sponsored the writing of such historical record. Owing to its own methodological limitation, history fails to put forward the "other side of the History" of which we get to read in the vast world of Oral Tradition and one of them is Folk-narratives. Folklore is an essential element of oral tradition. Folklore is a dynamic force; it is a responsible partner in the reconstruction of a new order, it is the creator of its own methodological limitation.

Sociologically, folklore provides a holistic experience of life, shared collectively, and territorially in all spheres, activities and aspirations that give a distinct social and cultural identity. Folk narratives provide an essential clue to the evolution of people's social, emotional and cultural life and is an index to their ethical and aesthetic norms and sense of values. Often folk-narratives come in the form of myths; yet myths are not always mythical in our perception

but to the natives it is living reality. Myths in a folk-narrative are an essential and deliberate presentation although they carry a fictional overtone that diminish and limits its realism. Time and space in folk-narratives are usually undermined and uninterrupted that suits both the narrator and the listener".<sup>1</sup>

Oral tradition have been rather encouraging, being immensely influenced by the contributions of Jan Vansina on African oral tradition.<sup>2</sup> Over the years the use of oral sources enlarged the scope of oral history in the Western societies; an identical exercise in historical reconstruction has been going on in the tribal communities in certain other parts of the world. Although oral tradition and oral history have several common problems of technique and interpretation, their characteristic, subject matters are still quite different. Nonetheless, oral history and oral tradition are now being taken up simultaneously in a meaningful way.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, oral traditions are the 'documents of the present' which is based on memory as an active recreation of what once was. Both oral history and oral traditions are being recognized as the representation of those who were denied their rightful place by the archival sources of historical research.<sup>4</sup> This reconstruction of history through oral sources then refers to works based on oral traditions as well as data collected from personal reminiscence- also known as the 'oral history' (or the 'biographical approach in modern sociological literature). In the same manner, these techniques are now accepted as valid methodological and theoretical means for exploring history.<sup>5</sup>

In this paper, an attempt has been made to examine the konyak –Ahom relations as reflected in the folk-narratives of the konyak Naga. These narratives invariably present the group's first-hand experienced with the Ahom and their subsequent attempts to establish good-neighbourly relations with the Ahom.

### **The Legend :**

A popular legend among the konyak tribes of Nagaland is the story of the intermarriage of an Ahom king with the konyak chief daughter.<sup>6</sup> The konyak tradition narrated here, is a beautiful young lady Watlong daughter of the chief, who was born of Longmoi *Angh* (chief) of Tanhai village (located in Mon district, Nagaland).<sup>7</sup> Watlong lost her father at the early age; so her mother sought a home in her uncle's village of Wanching (located in Mon district, Nagaland). Her uncle, the *Angh* (chief) of Wanching took them into his household and raised her as his own daughter. Meanwhile, in the Ahom capital, the autocratic Sulikpha or Lora *raja* on the advice of Laluki Borpukhan ordered the mutilation of all members of the Ahom ruling family in order to disqualify

them from contesting for the Ahom throne in the year 1679-1681 A.D.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, Godapani (1681-1696 A.D), the heir-apparent, fled to the hills and through his sympathizers escaped via Ponkong and Tanhai villages and took up shelter in Wakching village (Mon District, Nagaland) and made it his home. Traditionally an Ahom king was selected from among the blue blood of royal families. There was another custom that a prince selected for the throne should not have any scars on his body. Taking the advantage of this the Lora Raja attempted to inflict injuries or scars on the bodies of the able princes so that none of them could claim for the throne.<sup>9</sup> Godapani's wife, Joymoti, who swore by biting her finger that she would not tell anyone about his whereabouts, so she was tortured to death by Lora Raja or Sulikphaa after the failed interrogation. While hiding in the jungle near a village close to the Assam plains for long time, Godapani stayed in several places in the Naga hills, and eventually Godapani reached Aokeang Morung<sup>10</sup> (located in Wakching village Mon District, Nagaland). Wakching village then was divided into five clans — these were Palang, Pala, Aokeang, Tupong, Angpang and each clan had separate Morungs with an *Angh* (chief) attached to it. Out of these, the *Angpa* (great chief) were from the Palang clan. The villagers noticed Godapani; he was caught and brought to the house of the Aokeang *Angh* (small chief, Morung).<sup>11</sup> When he reached Aokeang Morung, lightning and thunder rolled nine times from the sky. The Aokeang Morung could not give him shelter due to their belief of the phenomenon as a bad omen. So, they decided to help the Ahom prince and he was sent to the house of the *Angh* (chief) of Palang Morung.<sup>12</sup> Ultimately the thunder and lightning stopped immediately to prove that the stranger Godapani was of a royal birth. Godapani lived like the son of the Palang *Angh* (the great chief). The Ahom Raja learned the value of life and accepted the law of Wakching village as they were doing their best to save his life from his enemy. The villagers from Palang Morung cut his hair, dressed him in traditional Naga attires and assigned him the local name Bongyong Tikshshai to help perfect his camouflage.

It was stated that many omens were witnessed in the Ahom kingdom during the period of exile of Gadadhar Singha. The cultivation of paddy and vegetables were down and there was no harvest. The Ahom people started to enquire about the omens through the astrologer and prophets. They found in their calculation that the ruler (realm) of the country was in konyak land. If he could be brought back and enthroned, the evil of the country would end. So the Ahom people went in search of their king in the konyak country, no one could recognise their King and they returned back to their kingdom. A second

attempt was made by the people of Ahom, an old wise man immediately recognised the king's eyes and face of the changed raja and identified him. However, the Ahom raja did not trust the people who had come to call him, and hence put on a disguise by putting on the same attire as the people of Wakching and pretend not to recognise his people. Subsequently a singer from Assam was bought inside the morung, who sang a song in Assamese language about how everything was failing apart in the plains. The Ahom prince heard the song and as the only person in the Morung to understand the meaning of the song- started to shed tears on hearing the words. Nobody else had understood the Assamese language, and this is how the Ahom soldiers identified him and brought prince Gadadhar back to their land and reclaimed his kingdom. However, the Ahom king could not regain the happiness that he felt in the hills; Joymoti, his former wife, had been killed by her tormentors and he was missing his beloved Watlong whom he had met and fall in love with her when he was in Wakching. In the olden days the men folk and the Ahom prince usually visited Wanching Morung to exchange songs and dialogues where they learnt a lot not only about the person whose praises are sung, but also about the collective history of the village and the people. A kind of courtship begins when young males from their dormitories (among konyak villages they have a dormitory for both male *Baan/Morung* and female *Ywo*) visit young females in theirs and acquaintance is struck. The beauty of Watlong captivated Gadadhar. He told his Ahom people that there was a beautiful girl named Watlong *Angya* (chieftain daughter) at the village and he wished to marry her.

Coming back to the story, the royal attendants went to the konyak village in search of Watlong (chieftain daughter). However, she was afraid to go to Assam, and in order to protect her, the villagers told the attendants that she had died in the meantime. But Gadadhar Singha had seen Watlong in his dream and so the king ordered all women from the villages to be brought to his palace. As told, all the women went down to Sibsagar but were dressed in identical clothes to confuse the king. One after the other they were brought before GadadharSingha. When it was Watlong's turn he recognized her immediately and said 'hoi' (yes). Gadadhar Singha ascended the throne in 1681 (after the coronation he took the Ahom name Supaatpha and the 'Hindu' name Gadadhar Singha).

The Ahoms approved the wishes of Gadadhar Singha (Godapani) and allowed him to marry Watlong Angya (chieftain daughter). As a gesture of binding relationship between them, the Ahom raja granted Mezenga Borthar, Lingiri and Pukhiri Chunpura lands to the *Angh* (chief) of Wanching and

Wakching Until very recent times, the *Angh* (chief) of Wanching used to collect an annual revenue of Rs.140 from his share of land grants.<sup>13</sup> Subsequently the wedding ceremony was performed and the Ahom king invited the Palang *Angh* (chief) and Wanching *Angh* (great chief) to the Ahom court for his wedding. They bade farewell to their beloved daughter Watlong by arranging a feast, the whole city was in a festive mood, drums were beaten and a groups of people were singing and dancing in a place called Bihuber (Sivasagar). Some attendants came up to the Ahom capital and did not return and settled in Baligain near Sontok and Sripur near Charaideo. Gadadhar Singha presented a buffalo to each and every villager involved and special presents were given to some of them. Wakching and Shangnu (Mon District, Nagaland) were granted to make annual trips to villages in the border areas to collect 'taxes' in the form of livestock, when the (konyak villages) went for errand they too carried small gifts of ginger, betel nut leaves, yam, chilly etc.<sup>14</sup> In addition, Wanching were gifted text documents and a shovel-shaped heart metal object which is kept in the village even to this day (Figure 1). Furthermore, a bowl was gifted to Wanching, which was later presented to Chui village as well as a cock-shaped piece of iron.<sup>15</sup> Before Watlong left for the plains, she had asked her sister Shianglih and the villagers to remember her at the time of the yearly Aoleang festival and said: During every Aoleang festival, throw the blooming flower of '*Jitwangpeang*' (*Erythrina Indica* tree- a special kinds of flower that bloom in March and April) into Dikhu river, so she could remember her village by seeing the floating flowers down in Assam. Her request to throw flowers into the Dikho river are reminisced in a song.



**Figure 1. Shovel-shaped metal object given by the Ahom king, kept at Wanching village. Photograph by the author, 2017.**

<i>Shongwan gnaomaa watlongsab</i>	<i>Watlonggot married toan Assam king</i>
<i>Poknolan-tan shiangli-a</i>	<i>Shianglih follow her.</i>
<i>Watlongwangya sümlan-a</i>	<i>Watlong queen of us.</i>
<i>Lun he jonmai</i>	<i>secret love.</i>
<i>Shongwangnaomaawatlong sab</i>	<i>she is crying inside the large house.</i>
<i>Yongnok-longktishama o-ao</i>	<i>Watlong got married to an Assam</i>
<i>King Yongtiam pong.</i>	<i>Missing her people.</i>
<i>Pang wangiöo lingpua</i>	<i>Blessing of üoling (Aoleang) should</i>
	<i>be conveyed</i>
<i>Jitpongmiüwalaa.</i>	<i>The Jitpong flower reminds you.</i>
<i>Yeiangmapongbojitpongmawan.</i>	<i>you remember when you see the</i>
	<i>jitpong flower on</i>
	<i>the Dikhu river.</i>

The konyak tradition also tells us that Sheanglih obeyed her sister and threw flowers called 'Jitwang peang' (*Erythrina indica*) in the Dikhu river every year during the Aoleang festival.<sup>16</sup> According to the konyak legend, the most important and best known object relating to the Watlong story, is the slab of rock 'Longtem (called Longtemlongnyu at Tanhai) that is today located on the way up to the village, right next to a National Highway leading to Assam. On it there are different marks, which were explained by the konyak as imprints of the visit of the Ahom King had left on it. Roughly in the middle of the stone, right next to the imprint of the royal walking stick and the marks of the royal buttocks, circles can be seen where he had placed his beer mug and foot plate. Another shape is understood as a hoof mark of the royal horse. It was on this stone the Ahom king sat on it when he visited his wife's village of origin.<sup>17</sup> The konyak tradition says that the grandparents used to predict prophesy through this stone. So the villagers were afraid of the stone and did not even touch it. (Figure 3)



**This slab of rock, where the Ahom king GodadharSingha used to sit on. Photograph by the author, 2017.**

The konyak legend also says, the King took the name Gadadhar Singha after the coronation. Watlong agreed to marry him but she requested her husband that she wished to see her parents once. Accordingly, the king made a road from konyak land to Assam for the parents of his wife Watlong as well as the King promised her, that he would bring his princess Watlong to the Naga hills once a year. Watlong accompanied Gadadhar at the time when he returned to his home state but unfortunately she fell sick on this journey to the plains and died in the place called Naginimora (present sub-division of Mon district).<sup>18</sup> The road laid through Naginimora (Lehkaan) and Borhan is known as Longmoi Ali.<sup>19</sup> The last request of the princess Watlong to her husband was after death her body should be taken back to the konyak land to bury there. As per as her wishes, when she died her body was taken to her homeland and buried there at Naginimora. The place where she breathed her last is still known to those who travel by that road. It is an unostentatious monument of a royal spouse but for the tradition, one would not associate it with Assam's history. Naginimora means the place where the Naga Ahom princess was buried. It exists till today as a mark of matrimonial relation between the konyak Naga and the Ahom.<sup>20</sup>

### **Notes and References**

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2. Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History*, University of Wisconsin Press, 1985.
3. C.L. Imchen "History of the Relations between the Nagas and the Valley Kingdoms", in F.A. Qadri (ed.), *Society and Economy in North-East India, Vol-2*, Regency Publications, New Delhi, 2004, p.115.
4. Elizabeth Tonkin, *Narrating Our Past: The Social Construction of Oral History*, Cambridge University Press, 1995; Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, Oxford University Press, 2000; Robert Perks, *The Oral History readers*, Routledge New Fetter Lane London, 1998.
5. C.L. Imchen, *op.cit.*, p.116.
6. Christopher von FurerHaimendorf, *Return to the Naked Nagas*, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1976. The Buranjis are one of the important corpuses of information on the Ahom history. Some of the popular Buranjis include Golap Chandra Barua (ed.), *Ahom Buranji from the Earliest Times To The End of Ahom Rule*, Spectrum Publication House, Guwahati, 1985, p.268. So considering the Ahom Buranjis and the oral tradition records of Konyak and Ao the King had married two Naga girls: Also see A. Mackenzie, *The North-East Frontier of India*, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 1888, (reprint, 2016), pp. 91, 93, 101, 145-148.
7. C.L. Imchen, *op.cit.*, p.120.



8. Alban von Stockhausen, "Watlong the Naga Queen: negotiating local identities through narratives" in *Asian Ethnicity*, Vol. 17, No.3, 353-369, 2016. Journal of Institute of Southeast Asia Studies, Singapore, p.355; Based on oral interviews with the village elders, Shri Nyakwang of Shangnu village and Yanang of Ponkong village on April 2018.
9. Based on oral narratives recorded from village elders Shri Thanglongkonyak, Tinglong, and K.Weangna, Ex-chairman Mon Town Council, on January, 2018. For the names of person, I use the spellings as they are given in the context of each sources.
10. Based on oral narratives from village elders Shri Thanlongkonyak *op.cit.*, January 2018; The *Morung/Baans* were a self-governing institution aiming to impart social instructions and trained men to channel fertility into their community. However, women are forbidden to enter the morung except on certain ceremonial occasions. Among the konyak villages of Nagaland, the clan, the *khel* and the village has its own *Morung/Baan*, which is determined by its historical heritage. If a certain clan has established a village the position of the clan in the village it is held high esteem and wields greater authority in the village affairs. The Konyak villages, has a girl's dormitory called *Ywo/Morung*.
11. *Angh* of Palang (head chief) Morung belongs to the chiefly house. The clan is the further extension of kinship system in Konyak society. Every clan is usually represented by a chief.
12. Based on oral information recorded from village elders Shri Lihwang, T. Manching, Tonyei, Shahlem, S.Shaopa, Konangenyei and Mrs. Shongna of Wakching village Mon, Nagaland on 13th January 2018. Also see Christopher von FurerHaimendorf, *op.cit.*, p.33
13. Based on oral narratives from wakching village elders Shri S.Shaopa, *Ibid*, 13th January 2018. Also see Edward Gait, *A History of Assam*, Lawyer's Book Stall, Gauhati, Assam, 1906, (Reprint 1984); M. Alemchiba, *A Brief Historical Account of Nagaland*, Publisher Naga Institute of Culture Kohima, Nagaland, 1970.
14. A man at Wakching later told us that this Ahom wedding present was beaten to create a sound when heavy thunderstorms or winds approached the village. This had been the only 'use' of the object for the villagers; Government of Nagaland, Revenue Department, "*Naga khats* in Sibsagar, No. 55, 1928; The question of management of the *Naga khats* was discussed at length in Mr Gunning's note of 12-1-1918. From letter No. 4400 Rc, 5-12-1921; Based on Sir William Reid's orders dated 17-11-1921; P.D.Gogoi. "The Konyak Naga: A Case Study of the Hahchra Naga Village" in *Proceedings of North-Eastern India History Association*, Twentieth Session, Dibrugarh, Assam, p.195. Whatever is collected from the Assamese villages is shared by all in a community feast. The term 'tax' is also no longer used; A practice which continued. Until September 1922, the Konyak Nagas were given right to collect taxes in Keliki (Sibsagar) which included taxes on the products of agricultural harvest, betel nut, fishing lake called *bheels* were allowed to them. Even *paik* (labourers) were attached to them. For the management of lands and transaction of business officers versed in Naga dialect called *Naga-Katakies* were appointed. See J.P. Mills., *The AoNagas* Macmillan London, 1926, P.11: *The LhotaNagas*, Macmillan London, 1922, pp.1-2.
15. A practice which continued. Until September 1922, the Konyak Nagas were given right to collect taxes in Keliki (Sibsagar) which included taxes on the products of agricultural harvest, betel nut, fishing lake called *bheels* were allowed to them. Even *paik* (labourers) were attached to them. For the management of lands and transaction of business officers versed in Naga dialect called *Naga-Katakies* were appointed. See J.P. Mills., *The AoNagas* Macmillan London, 1926, P.11: *The LhotaNagas*, Macmillan London, 1922, pp.1-2.

16. Oral narratives recorded from elders/singers Shri Mewang, MrsNangkhamAnghya and TulishAnghya of Wanching village Mon Nagaland on 4th January 2018; Based on oral narratives recorded from Shri W. Shaopong, Lonkmong, ThanglongKonyak, MetjenKonyak of Tanhai village Mon, Nagaland on 5th January 2018. The AoleangMonyu is the festival of konyak and it happens in the first week of April. Also see J.H.Hutton, *The AngamiNagas*, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1969, pp.384-385; *op.cit*, Alban von Stockhausen, p.356.
17. MetjenKonyak "Ahom-Konyak Relations" in *Indian Journal of Tai Studies, Vol. IX*, October, 2009, pp.142-43; The slap of rock is considered as a pride to the konyak people. This stone shows the symbol of good relations with the Ahoms.
18. Suresh Kant Sharma and Usha Sharma, *Discovery of North-East: Geography, History, Culture, Religion, Politics, Sociology, Education and Economy. North-East India. Vol.1*, Mittal Publications, North-Eastern India, 2005, pp.145-48.
19. The Tanhai village elders said the name 'Longmoi Ali' was name after watlongfather in honourof their matrimonial alliances.
20. Naginimora is one of the sub-division under Mon District where the WatlongWangya (chieftain daughter) was buried. And it shared border with Bihubar, Assam; L.Metjen, *op.cit*, pp.142-43.

***Book Review :***

**Prof. Girin Phukon's Book on :**

*Tais of Northeast India and Southeast Asia*

**A study of Ethno-cultural Linkage**

DVS Publishers, Guwahati, Assam, 2019, P. 339, Price 750

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It is my pleasure to have paged through Prof. Girin Phukon's book as noted above, and deeply impressed with it, I would like to make my searching comments and observations under the following headings so that other readers may come up with their own valuable opinions, as an old Chinese saying goes, to cast a brick to attract jade.

**1. An Expatiation upon the Tai Culture on a Monumental Scale**

It is not surprising to me that Prof. Phukon has written a book on the Tais of above-mentioned two extensive geographical regions and China. The reason is that he came into contact with me in 2014 telling me he would conduct a fieldwork in China, specifically in southeast and southwest China, which was an investigation into the cultural elements among the Tai there. I answered him with a beaming yes, because I have travelled quite a lot in some of these areas for fieldwork, and I did have a predilection for retracing these places and exploring new ones. Prof. Phukon came to China for the fieldwork, but its scope was significantly reduced to Yunnan only, excluding Guizhou, Guangxi, Guangdong and Hainan provinces or autonomous region, because of time and fund constraints. I lent a helping hand, escorting him for the complete study tour of the regions from Xishuangbanna to Mengmao, Ruili, Dehong prefecture, the journey into the old home from which the Tai in India originated.

A revelation to me is that Prof. Phukon did complete his book and had it published so soon. As I told him, his book is magisterial, a page-turner. I finished reading the book at one sitting. I am wowed by his book's geographically

wide region for his studies of the traditional Tai cultural links. It includes six countries, namely, northeast India, a number of regions of Myanmar, all over Thailand and Laos, northern Vietnam and the five southern provinces of China (namely, Yunnan, Guizhou, Guangxi, Guangdong, Sichuan and Hainan<sup>1</sup> (pp.1,2, 34,248,250,287,291).<sup>2</sup> However, he adds two other countries of Cambodia (pp.34, 253,288) and Malaysia (pp.253, 288), increasing the number of countries to eight. Regrettably, he does not describe the Tai in last two countries.

At first, I do not understand why the living area of the Tai is of epic proportions. In China, we believe that the Tai are the people who is named the Dai, the counterpart of the Thai in Thailand, the Lao in Laos, the Shan in Myanmar, and some Tai in Vietnam. The Dai in China is concentrated in Yunnan's Xishuangbanna and Dehong prefectures only. Therefore in China, the Dai/Tai area is not that enormous.

Reading Prof. Phukon's book, I understand his reason. He cites this approach: "The word 'Tai' is almost self-evident and generally speaking the Tai people are those groups who speak Tai languages which have been recognized as Tai", and "...the use of 'Tai' with linguistic level is inadequate and therefore it is necessary to include other criterion. In view of this, the term 'Tai' is used for all who share not only Tai speech but also cultural aspects. The concept Tai, therefore, should not be used to indicate a specific lingo-racial group." "Therefore, the 'Tai' refers to all the groups and sub-groups of a race who call themselves as 'Tai' and are the speakers of Tai language. "(p.2) "The 'Tai' is neither primarily a racial nor political name, although it is common to speak of a Tai race and we have a country called itself Thailand." (p.248) "The word Tai used in this study refers to a particular linguistic group which is found throughout the Southeast Asian mainland from as far west as Northeast India to as far South as the Malay Peninsula. "The Tai people are all those groups who speak Tai languages which have been recognized as Tai. ...For the purpose of this study, the term 'Tai' is used for all people for whom we may assume a Tai culture, i.e. if they share not only Tai speech, but also other aspects of culture which may be considered 'typically Tai'."(pp.287, 288) It is for this reason that the Tai in China also include the Dai and other ethnic groups in Zhuang-Dai language branch under Zhuang-Dong or Kam-Tai language group, Sino-Tibetan language family. Prof. Phukon claims that in China alone there are more than ten branches of the Tai. On top of the Dai, the Tai families in China also refer to the Zhuang, the Buyi, the

Dong, the Mulao (Mulam), the Shui, the Maonan, and the Li (pp. 1, 47,51);<sup>3</sup>In northeast India, states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur, there are 7 groups of the Tai, namely, Tai Ahom, Tai Aiton, Tai Khamti, Tai Khamyang, Tai Phake, Tai Turung and Tai Lai (pp.1, 251). However, it eludes me that Prof. Phukon introduces the former six groups, leaving the last one of Tai Lai undiscussed. In the broader or more extensive ethnic groupings, Prof. Phukon reckons that the Tai are numbered approximately 100 million. It is indeed a full spectrum of ethnic groups of the Tai across such a vast region, forming a wide scope of studies.

In 1990 when the 4<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Thai Studies was held in Kunming, some participants suggested that since the Thai referred to the majority of the people in Thailand, it is best if the word “Tai” would be used to refer to all other Tai peoples. It is a good idea. In Chinese we have a general term for all Tai peoples, that is, Tai, which was used by linguist Fangkuei Li in his book *A Handbook of Comparative Tai*.<sup>4</sup> It is also useful to address other groups of the Tai in foreign countries.

## **2. A Quasi-Ethnography of Non-Material and Material Culture**

Reading Prof. Phukon’s book is like reading a semi-ethnographic work. Although not attending each and every aspect, it covers an exciting treasure of the Tai’s cultural elements, including the non-material and material culture (or intangible and tangible culture popularly described at present). I appreciate the author’s division of culture into non-material and material, although it is not a new division. It is special when all cultures are classified as non-material or intangible. If I remember right, the term “intangible culture” was first used by United Nations Educational, Science, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as early as the 1980s. Before that, we used the term “spiritual culture.” UNESCO’s definition of intangible culture states that “Intangible culture is the counterpart of culture which is tangible or touchable, whereas intangible culture includes song, music, drama, skills, crafts, and the other parts of culture that can be recorded but cannot be touched and interacted with, without a vehicle for the culture. These cultural vehicles are called ‘Human Treasures’ by the UN. The reason why UNESCO emphasized the first aid to intangible culture, I venture a conjecture, is that compared with the tangible one, the intangible culture is much easier to disappear. For instance, when a singer dies, his/her art perishes. When an artisan dies, his/her handicrafts or artifacts remain, from which his/her workmanship is comparatively easier to be retrieved.

In the light of UNESCO's definition, the word "intangible", I think, refers to the cultural products that are invisible and thus untouchable. For example, the singing is invisible and untouchable, thus non-material and intangible, while a pottery is visible and touchable, thus material and tangible. Someone argues that the technology and process of the tangible culture is intangible. However, the skills and crafts cannot be part of the intangible culture, because the two also reside in the tangible culture. The most important criterion is that the cultural end products or heritages are visible, touchable or not. That is why traditionally we divide them into tangible and intangible cultures or material and non-material cultures.<sup>5</sup>

Now at least in China, all kinds of culture, including paper, cloth, wares, and other handicrafts, are classified as intangible, with the tangible or material culture seemingly being lost. However, the law of the unity of opposites is the fundamental law of the universe, and the world is composed of contradictions, like spears and shields. If a spear disappears, how can a shield justify its existence? Sure enough, it becomes non-existent. The same is true with tangible and intangible culture: Where is the intangible culture if there is no tangible one?

Prof. Phukon divides the Tai culture into these two kinds, that is, socio-religious and material cultures, namely, intangible and tangible cultures. I reorganize his classification according to the definition of tangible and intangible cultures, that is, the former includes religion (pantheon, *khwan* and *dam* belief), *muong-baan* organization, *pi-nong* bond, language (spoken one and script/manuscripts), etc. and the latter is inclusive of wet-rice, *na* culture, textile and weaving, food, etc. By cultural heritage, Prof. Phukon means "a broad spectrum that includes almost everything that a people possessed in the past and has come down to them to the present. "(p.85) Among a galaxy of the Tai cultural elements, I am most interested in the following :

**Tai Ahom's pantheon :** The Ahom uphold that the creation of life takes place from a giant gourd or a golden egg(pp.92,93). This myth is similar to many ones of other ethnic groups. For example, Pan Gu, the creator of the universe in Chinese mythology, separates heaven and earth by sitting in a chicken egg.<sup>6</sup> A myth very popular among the Miao and Yao people tells that Fu Xi and Nü Wa, a couple of brother and sister, survive the deluge by riding in a giant bottle gourd (calabash) before they get married to give birth to their human posterity.<sup>7</sup>

According to the legend of origin of the Tai Ahom, it was Lengdon, the God of Heaven, who sends his two grandsons, Khun-lung and Khun-lai with

nobles, attendants and others down to rule the earth by a golden ladder(p.97). Another version is that Lengdon, lord of heaven, sends down two princes Kuhn Lung and Khun Lai to rule the earth. Similarly, in Chinese mythology, the snake-holding god is so touched by the story of a Foolish Old Man who is set to remove Wangwo and Taihang mountains that he sends two sons of Kua E to go to the old man's help.<sup>8</sup> There is a tree called *jianm* standing high at the center between the heaven and earth, which is created by Huang Di (Yellow Emperor) and used by Fu Xi as a ladder between the heaven and earth.<sup>9</sup>

Prof. Phukon lists a rich assortment of religious elements in the Tai's common belief system. The first one is the concept of soul, namely, the *phii*(spirit). I learned this word in Laos when I was working for the improvement project of No. 13 road there. The Lao have a shrine standing on a wooden post. Mostly, the *phi* means evil spirit or ghost among the Han. I remember when my mother passed away and was cremated and buried, my father urged us to close the door immediately behind us, otherwise my mother's spirit would come in. Here the dead person's *phii* is harmful, like a devil. The Tai Ahom have more *phiis*, such as *phii ruen* (family spirit), *phii muong*(kingdom/country spirit), *phii ban* (village spirit).

The *khwan* in the Tai language, which pronunciation is very probably from Chinese character *hun*, meaning soul. It is very popular among the Han. When a kid is scared stiff, some adults will call back his/her *khwan* which has been frightened and spirited away from the kid. When working in a Hani village of Chudong in Mojiang county, Yunnan, I was told that if a person gets a start, he or she is comforted by receiving a cooked chicken, recalling the *khwan* to reside in the body again.<sup>10</sup> In any case, Prof. Phukon's account of Tai Ahom's *rik khwan* (soul-calling) is vividly presented in quotations from the mantra chanted by the priest (pp.113-114).

Spirit and ancestor worshipping includes *om pha* (a grand worship of all gods and spirits) and *me dam me phi*(a grand community worship of ancestors), which are very special rituals. They are also practices in many villages among the Han and other ethnic minorities. At homes of the Han in west Yunnan and Guizhou, many shrines are sacred to ancestors.<sup>11</sup> There are also many ancestral halls in the villages of Anhui, Jiangxi, etc. in east China.<sup>12</sup>

Omens and astrology are special intangible cultural heritages. Chicken-bone divination is also popular among China's ethnic minorities. However, some of the Hani people in Chudong village, Mojiang, Yunnan, forgot how to divine by chicken bones.<sup>13</sup>

Tai Ahom's burial practice, *lak-ni*(calendar, sixty as a cycle for days, and years, not for 12 months), *pi-nong* bond are of special interest for outsiders.<sup>14</sup>

In gender role, the Tai women enjoy a higher status than their counterparts in other communities. *The Tai village society has no tradition of discrimination against women such as covering the face with a veil or other prohibitions that restrict the freedom of women from seeking success in life.* I was told that among some of the Han of China, the men look down upon the females as unclean. For example, when it rains, a husband is to collect the clothes drying in the sun. *He does not use his hands, but a bamboo pole in order not to touch the women's clothing. The Tai have no such taboo. Among the Tai Ahom, dowry system is completely absent.* However, I remember a prediction in 1994 when I was working in Laos that Mr. Basu, an Indian engineer, not a Tai, would give an immense amount of money as the dowry when marrying off his daughter in future. According to a Chinese myth, in remote antiquity, Huang Di, the Yellow Emperor, fought nine engagements against Chi You but failed. He won the battle only with the strategy offered by a lady with a human head and bird body.<sup>15</sup> Nü Wa, a goddess, was said to be the creator of mankind, once formidable enough to stop the gap where the pouring rain leaked from the sky.<sup>16</sup> Friedrich Engels agrees with the idea of Charles Fourier(1772-1837), one of the French utopian socialists, that in any societies, the degree of women's emancipation is the natural yardstick taken to measure that of the emancipation of all mankind.<sup>17</sup> If the disadvantaged groups of people including women are emancipated, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' idea will be translated into reality, that is, a society "in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all."<sup>18</sup>

The Tais are a literate people who possess not only a spoken but also written language. So fortunately, they keep their records on the surfaces of tree leaves or bark or paper made of paper mulberry, which is the reason we can read these records called manuscripts. These manuscripts are also found among China's Dai people. I am most interested in these manuscripts, for I expect them to tell the untold history (for instance, that of the Tai Mao or Tai in northeast India) before the 13<sup>th</sup> century when no written Tai records are found, on a historical period. Prof. Phukon paints a sorry picture of conserving the manuscripts, urging people and institutions concerned to conserve them well, which is a glaring and pressing problem in the Tai and other parts of the ethnic peoples across the world. I am wondering why Prof. Phukon omits the



detailed description of a great tangible cultural heritage - handmade paper for writing manuscripts on. If only the manuscripts are translated and published as China's pattra-leaf manuscripts (some of which have been published in Chinese).

Prof. Phukon elaborates the Tai's wet rice cultivation and *na* culture, including the rituals, festivals, kinship, water management, housing, which are related to rice cultivation. He demonstrates the relationship between rice cultivation and the concept of *baan* and *muong*. I would like to read his argument if *baan* and *muong* (under which the state is the manager of a community and the social members are more mutually cooperative, and the result of the Tai's management of water, wet rice) bring about Karl Marx's Asiatic mode of production that will lead to Oriental despotism or absolutism, or centralized state power. As a scholar on politics, Prof. Phukon is expected to give a political-anthropology explanation of these phenomena.

Sericulture is the basis of spinning and weaving which practice continues in most of the Tai villages, including those in China. The Tai Ahom's *muga* and *endi* silk are very singular. The foremost Dai brocade is woven in Gasa town of Xishuangbanna, Yunnan, China, but the leading crafts woman complains that few young people would like to learn how to weave it. The Tai dress and its ornaments are characteristic mostly on women, not on men, which is the same case among the Tai in China.

Prof. Phukon gives a lot of example of special foods among the Tai, such as rice cooked in bamboo tubes, sour fish, pork, chicken, duck, vegetables (including bamboo shoots), and rice wine, mustard seeds, eggs of red ants, cocoon seeds of *endi* and *muga* worms, frogs, areca nuts, pickled tea (I saw it in Mae Salong, Chiangrai, northern Thailand). However, he does not list the typical Dai food among Yunnan's Tai, that is, the uncooked ground pork or beef (called *duosheng* in Chinese) and blood, and *sapie* (the beef or pork or fish with bitter juice boiled from a cow's intestines),<sup>19</sup> and river moss in Luang Prabang, Laos.

As an outsider who knows some aspects of the Tai in China, I am most interested in those of northeast India, and Prof. Phukon does give a detailed description of them. As a native there, Prof. Phukon is in a position to tell his observations and quote most relevant literatures.

Fieldwork is rewarding not only in understanding more of the Tai's world, but also in feasting your eyes visually. As enjoying the terrific and jaw-dropping landscapes in Yunnan, Prof. Phukon poetically observed in Thailand :

*The village is situated amidst the tranquility and scenery of the surrounding area. Standing at the rice field (na) at the midst of the village, one can see a rim of hazy blue mountain in every direction as one's eye sweeps the horizon. When viewed from a distance, the village stands imposingly above the glittering lushly green rice paddy. (p.199)*

That is the reflection of the Tai's idyllic, archaic world, nothing dystopian.

Lavishly illustrated, the description of the Tai's cultural elements is graced with over 60 photos (some fuzzy ones leave much to be desired), three sketch maps, one schematic diagram, one table, and an index.

### **3. In Search of an Ethnic Identity of the Tai in Northeast India**

It takes great effort of Prof. Phukon to have brought together a raft of sources from that vast Tai world of southern China, northeast India and Southeast Asia. I think this is the reason why Prof. Phukon reckons that his book in question "is the first work of this kind ever done in this unexplored area", and he hopes "this work will fill up a research gap and create an avenue for further research." (p.ix,17)

Constrained by the limited availability of time, fund and human resources for field- and desk-bound work, Prof. Phukon is brilliant enough to leverage them by sampling not the modern but the traditional or archaic cultural elements from parts of the Tai world. To serve this purpose, he resorts to "a reinterpretation of existing literature and systematic arrangement of facts and ideas based on field observation." I think that the latter is the anthropological method of participatory observation, but except with the Tai Ahom, his staying with the most of the Tai is too short (mostly about 10 days, not at least a cycle of one year). That is why I opine that many hands make light work, that is, to team up with researchers from countries or regions concerned to cooperate in this gigantic and phenomenal work.

What is more difficult is that Prof. Phukon has to compare those sources he gathers from different literatures and field observations. In his comparison, he zooms in on the common or homogeneous cultural heritage. Why not the discrete, different or heterogeneous cultural heritage? As he realizes, in the course of time, the different Tai groups developed their separate culture and civilization independently in different parts of Southeast Asia. As they lost contact with each other since the days of their migration there is however no longer homogeneity in the Tai culture maintained by them (p.vii). For instance,

the Tai Ahom are now non-Buddhists, and their dead are not to be cremated but buried (pp.229, 226). Now with the fast-growing migration and urbanization prompted by globalization, the traditional Tai culture is vanishing very quickly, ostensibly in their language and dress. In recent decades, cultural change has been the repeated subject for anthropological studies. Such being the case, the scholars like Prof. Phukon have to go against the current tide to search for the opposite – the common or even the survived cultural elements of the Tai. As Prof. Phukon reports, Edu-Misimi and Tai Khamyang, two languages of northeast India, were declared in 2006 as “endangered” languages which may be extinct for ever if no appropriate measure is taken for their preservation, and recently the UNESCO has declared Tai Ahom language not only as “endangered” but as “extinct” language (p.274).

He has two assumptions or hypotheses: (i) The Tai culture was, by and large, homogeneous towards the end of the first millennium A.D; (ii) There are sufficient numbers of traditional aspects in various Tai cultures which have changed so little during the last nine and half centuries (p. vii,24).Based on those assumptions, Prof. Phukon writes that this study is undertaken to project or demonstrate the cultural linkage among the Tai in its varied manifestations in the background that originally they lived in a common region possessing common elements of culture (pp.vii, viii, 17, 21, 23, 290, 298).

However, to find out or understand the common cultural elements is not Prof. Phukon’s purpose. What he aims at is to see how homogeneous those elements are. This is the reason he takes great pains to bring together and compare the cultural elements of the Tai from different parts of the world.

Yet, to see how homogeneous those elements are is not Prof. Phukon’s purpose either. He “is to establish ethno-cultural linkage of the Ahom, Lue, Tai Mao, Shan and Tai Yuan of China, Myanmar, and Thailand respectively.” (p.23) He succeeds by demonstrating the full spectrum of the Tai culture, and, to use his words, the eloquent testimony of common cultural linkage among the Tai of northeast India and Southeast Asia, including southwest China(p.298).

However, the establishment of the Tai’s cultural linkage is not his ultimate purpose. As Prof. Phukon puts it, a comparative study of most of the Tai speaking groups would boost our understanding of the original features of their identities, which have been in common, as well as empirical knowledge about the individual characteristic of each particular Tai ethnic group (p.290). Although mentioning casually in a long paragraph, he actually points out his

final purpose of his writing of this book-their identities. However, it is not “their identities”, but the ethnic identity or simply ethnicity of the Tai in northeast India where the author now lives. Most of the Tai, such as the Thai in Thailand, the Lao in Laos, the Shan in Myanmar or the Dai in China, have their own ethnic identities already, generally speaking, no need or no pressing demand for them to establish their own ethnic identities so far.

Why is it the ethnic identity of the Tai in northeast India? What is the reason the Tai identity in northeast India matters so much? It is determined by the Tai living in northeast India. As is known to all, originally there were many independent kingdoms in northeast India, not included in greater India. After India was reduced to a British colony in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the northeast India fell into the British India. After the British colonialists left India in 1947, it came to be part of India to the present. Because the Indian government has paid less attention to its northeast part, the latter remains the economically least developed and poorest region compared with other states of India. Politically, groups of immigrants from outside had serious ethnic clashes or riots with the local people. Those factors made the indigenous people prone to be independent from India. For this reason, the Tai people are in search of an ethnic identity to justify themselves for their movement of national rejuvenation and revival. In the strict sense of standing towering like a giant among peoples of the world, it is like the Communist Party of China and its government now urging the whole country to realize the China Dream – the rejuvenation and revival of the Chinese nation.<sup>20</sup> The search for the Tai’s ethnic identity is reinforced by Prof. Phukon’s other works. He once wrote a paper about the Tai Ahom entitled *Search for Tai-Ahom Identity in Assam*.<sup>21</sup> He also edited one book on the Ahom movement in Assam.<sup>22</sup> Actually, a crop of Indian scholars is making such kind of research.<sup>23</sup>

Although Benedict Anderson argues that nations and nationalism are respectively imagined or man-made communities and consciousness,<sup>24</sup> they two do exert a tremendous influence on the behaviors or actions of a given nation.

We conclude that the Tai’s identity is to be established as a revival of cultural nationalism in order to remove their ethnic anxiety or uncertainty. If it is Prof. Phukon’s real purpose of writing this book under review, I am sure that he is successful in doing so – as an ethnic group the Tai in northeast India does share a similar cultural linkage with their *pi-nongs* in Southeast Asia and China. Even given the Indian government aid like the case of this book, I dare

to say, he is not expected to write a book about the heterogeneous cultural elements between the Tai across India, China and Southeast Asia.

#### **4. A Book Teeming with Clerical, Printing or Ignorant Errors**

To put it bluntly, the publisher failed to do a masterly job of editing Prof. Phukon's book, compromising the reader's good impression of a stand-out scholarly book. The tangible ones are listed as follows.

The underlined parts should be deleted: (1) Common Belief System: Concept of Soul: (p.99); (2) Tai Yuan Village: Its Nature and Character is the home of... (p.198).

Introduction to Tai-Kadai People: ..... (p.313): Author's name should be added to this entry in the bibliography.

Back cover: The introduction to Prof. Phukon is cut off abruptly, leaving itself incomplete.

It would be best if the transliterations of the original language (pp.137-138, 225, 271) are translated into English.

The wrong use of capital letters: (1) Underlined letters should be small ones: Research (p.2), Agriculture(p.3), Essence of life(p.12), Handmade paper(p.272), of Rice (p.199), However, the Agriculture is the... (p.196), In any case, Rice has been... (p.178), The Author is in the Rice field of Tai Shan in Namkham, Myanmar (p.181), Some of the Languages are... (p.248), Shoot, Frog (p.235), Pig (p.238), Observation (p.229), each Ethnic group (p.241), traditional Yarn (p.217), House (p.225), and Bamboos (p.225); (2) Underlined small letters should be capitalized: Religious beliefs (p.119).

Wrong spelling of some words: Lnter (p.79) should be Lintner; Steaward (pp.307, 319) should be Steward; Barlie(pp.179, 244) should be Berlie; Dood(p.81) should be Dodd; Myanma(pp.259, 260) should be Myanmar; Shyam should be Siam(p.323); Tonal Sap(p.193) should be Tonle Sap; Chinagmai(p.198) should be Chiangmai; Arunachal (p.1) should be Arunachal Pradesh; Tongking(p.285) should be Tonkin; Shanxi(p.37) should be Shaanxi; Now a days(pp.205, 163) should be Nowadays; grinded and grounded(pp.229, 237) should be ground; following (p.99) should be fallowing; when die (p.120) should be "when dying"; A instrument (p.201) should be "An instrument"...

Wrong use of some words: Annexure 1(p.324): Since the annexure is the only one, the numeral 1 is to be deleted. The fine shade of annexure and appendix: An annexure is a document added to cite a proof mentioned in a dissertation or thesis while an appendix is added to the end of a dissertation or

thesis, containing the matter that helps emphasizes the purpose of the subject matter of the dissertation or thesis. An annexure is used often in the field of economy and commerce while an appendix is mostly used in the fields of researches. In this light, appendix is to be used here.

Old names should be replaced by new ones, such as Guangzi (p.1) and Kwangsi (p. 289) by Guangxi; Kuechu (p.287) and Kweichow(p.159) by Guizhou; Zechuan (p.287) by Sichuan; Kwangtung (pp. 2, 287) by Guangdong; and Sipsong Panna (pp.40, 106,281) by Xishuangbanna.... Admittedly, some of them are used in quotations, but the notes to them give clear explanations.

Some terms are not unified, such as Saa chi and Sanchi (pp. 272, 273, 278), sanchi-pat (Saa Chi Pat) (p.266); lak-ni (p.151), Laknis and Lak-Nis (pp.269, 263); Poi Kin Khao Mao (p.171) ; Poi Kin Khao Mau (p.171); muga, endi and Muga, Endi (pp.215,234) ....

Me Nam,Chao Phaya (p.250): Me Nam (Menam) is another name of Chao Phraya, that is, a river has two names. Mulam, Mulao (p.43): the two names refer to the same people, as Prof. Phukon puts it, the Mulao are also called Mulam (p.51)....

Indian Union, Union of Burma, Royal Kingdom of Thailand, Peoples' Republic of China, Peoples' Democratic Republic of Laos, and Democratic Republic of Vietnam(p.44): These names should be renewed or rewritten respectively as Republic of India, Republic of the Union of Myanmar, Kingdom of Thailand, People's Republic of China, People's Democratic Republic of Laos, and Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

The people called "Tai"are very widely spread in several parts of Southeast Asia that include China, Vietnam, Myanmar, and Laos, Thailand and India(p.33): China belongs to East Asia and India to South Asia, neither to Southeast Asia. In view of this definition, the title of the book *Tais of Northeast India and Southeast Asia* is not completely correct, for Southeast Asia does not include China.

### **Notes and references**

1. Hainan is one part of China, not to be listed at the level of countries, p.34.
2. The page numbers are those in Prof. Phukon's book under review, similarly hereinafter.
3. Girin Phukon. *Tai of Northeast Indian and Southeast Asian: Their Ethno-Cultural Linkage*. Personal communications, August 2014.1,2
4. Fang-kuei Li. *A Handbook of Comparative Tai*. Hawaii: The University of Hawaii Press, 1977; Fang-kuei Li. Ding Bangxin, trans. *A Handbook of Comparative Tai*. Beijing: Tsinghua University Press, 2011(in Chinese).

5. See also Neil M. Judd. *The Material Culture of Pueblo Bonito*, 1954; Yin Sahoting, He Xuehui, eds. *The Material Culture of Yunnan* (book series), published by Yunnan Education Publishing House, 2000.
6. Yuan Ke, sel. & trans. *One Hundred Chinese Myths Selected and Translated*. Shanghai: Shanghai Classics Publishing House, 1980. 1
7. Ibid. 16
8. Ibid. 79
9. Ibid. 30
10. See also Qu Yuan (c.340-278 B.C.)'s poem *Calling Souls*, recalling the souls of kings of Chu kingdom in the Warring States period. It is the imitation of soul-calling practice popular among the local people.
11. Chen Jianming. Fieldwork notes, June 2019.
12. Chen Jianming. Fieldwork notes, June 2016 and July 2017
13. Chen Jianming. Fieldwork notes, 2011.
14. Karl Marx claims, "Religion is the sigh of the creature overwhelmed by misfortune, the sentiment of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people. "But the religion seems not that serious among the Tai.
15. Yuan Ke, sel. & trans. op. cit. 60
16. Ibid. 10,13
17. Karl Marx, Frederick Engels. *Selected Works of Mark and Engels*. Vol. 3. Beijing: The People's Publishing House, 2013. 610 (in Chinese)
18. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. *The Communist Manifesto*. New York: Bantam Bell, a Division of Random House, Inc. 1992.36; Karl Marx, Frederick Engels. *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1990, 2nd edition. 61. As the Westerners put the parts before the whole (such as the mailing address), Marx and Engels put individuals before all mankind.
19. Uncooked blood as a dish observed in Mangtuan village in Lincang and Manzhao village in Xishuangbanna, Yunnan, China, June 21, 22, 2019.
20. In 2005, Mr. Terry Carter, the British, the husband of Lei Yi, one of my college fellow students, once discussed with me his up-rootedness during his teaching of the English language in Yunnan Normal University. He was absent from his home in Nottingham, the UK for several years. Another example: In Chudong village of Mojiang county, my next-door neighbor is a married couple of Dao Zhengzhong and Li Zhongmei, with the man as a Dai and the wife as a Hani. Their only son followed his father's ethnic identity as the Dai. The son sought a job in Kunming, the capital city of Yunnan, China. When learning he was a Dai, the human resources manager agreed to have a Dai who could speak the Dai language. However, he was disappointed that the son could not speak any Dai language, for he stayed mostly in her mother's Hani village. The son lost the job before he got it. These are the conflicts resulting from different ethnic identity.
21. Girin Phukon. Search for Tai-Ahom Identity in Assam: In Retrospect. In Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, ed. *Proceedings of the 4th International Conference on Thai Studies*. Kunming: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences, May 1-13, 1990. Vol. IV. 376-384
22. Girin Phukon, ed. *Documents on Ahom Movement in Assam*. Moranhat: Institute of Tai Studies & Research, Assam, India, 2010

23. From the four volumes of *Proceedings of the 4th International Conference on Thai Studies* (Kunming: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences, May 1-13, 1990), I read M. N. Phookan and T. Shayamacharan Singh's *A Comparative Study on Some Thai Groups of the People of Assam, India*; Joya Buragohain's *Some Aspects of Culture of the Buddhist Tais of Northeast India*; Chao Pouspa Gogoi's *Tai Literature of Northeast India*; Romesh Buragohain's *The Tais in Northeast India: A Look into the Factors and Processes of Tai-Ahom State for Nation in Early Medieval Assam: 1228-1250*; Chao Nomal Gogoi's *New Light on the History of Assam: Based on Ahom Buranjis*; Sachchidan and Sahai's *Remoulding of Soul: Investigation into a Thai Belief System*; Kiran Kumar Gogoi's *Religious Culture of the Tai Ahoms*; J.N. Phukan's *The Ahoms: The Early Tai of Assam and Their Historical Relations with Yunnan*; T.R. Saren's *Indians in Thailand*; Sakdi Rattanachai's *Some Observations About "Yonok" - "Yunnan"*; Nirmal Praha Bardoloi. *Rati-Sewa of Assam – A Study of Cultural Contact with China*. I believe that more works on the Tai of northeast India have been published (see the bibliography of Prof. Phukan's book *Tais of Northeast India and Southeast Asia*), but for me, the ill-informed, the only source is *Indian Journal of Tai Studies* edited by Prof. Phukan, which I deem is the foremost of its kind on the Tai, especially those in northeast India. See also He Ping. *The Nationalism and the Movement of National Revival Among the Tai Ahom in India*. *World Ethno-National Studies*, 2001(1). On the other hand, Prof. Phukan could have used more Chinese literatures in the book in question.
24. Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London : Verso, 1991; Benedict Anderson. *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World*. London : Verso, 1998