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Majorities, Minorities and National Boundaries

The complex relations forged between ethnic groups in mainland Southeast Asia over time is one of the best-known features of the ethnography of the region. Many scholars have documented these phenomena and interpreted them with great insight. Of these scholars the late Professor Sir Edmund Leach was perhaps the most insightful. It is with respect, affection and sorrow that this newsletter records his death. Many members of this department, past and present, were students, colleagues and friends.

The particular aspect of the Thai-Yunnan Project that has to do with ethnic groups across national boundaries was not directly a response to the work of Leach, though that body of research and writing informs it. The issue was raised at the recent meeting of the Asian Studies Association held in Singapore, and we hope to publish a collection of papers on the topic in the near future.

The problem, or the set of problems, is of course not new. What we hope to achieve in the immediate future is, first, a preliminary taxonomy of the kinds of relations that may be identified in the interplay of ethnic groups and national boundaries. The paper presented by Ananda Rajah at the Singapore conference and the line of argument of the paper by Thongchai Winichakul (and presumably expanded in his recent PhD thesis) perhaps indicates there is much more mileage to be had out of Leach's paper on 'The Frontiers of Burma'. Boundaries and frontiers are still matters of interesting debate.

The second immediate aim is to provide a short collection of case studies which will both illuminate and bring under scrutiny any initial taxonomy.

It may be said that taxonomies are only as useful as they help describe the processes of the natural world and the immediate aim is to provide enough comparison to make useful generalizations about the phenomena that confront us. A very preliminary paper by Wijeyewardene at the Singapore meeting suggested that among the situations that face us in the region, were the following:

1) There are groups such as the Tai who are dominant in one or more of the nation states involved, but are minorities in others - dominant in Thailand and Laos, but minorities in China and Burma; at peace in one, in insurrection in the other.

2) Minorities such as the Karen and Mon-Khmer groups such as the Lua have something like autochthonous status in many of the countries of the region, manifest until quite recently by traditional rituals and payment of tribute. The obvious differences in the position of Karen on the one hand, and Lua and Wa groups on the other, show the very preliminary nature of this taxonomy.

3) Groups such as the Hmong and the Yao, and also, perhaps, the Lisu and Akka, have an ancient history of residence in China, but are recent newcomers in mainland Southeast Asia proper. Consideration of the problems arising from this particular categorization again focuses attention on the Sipsongpanna-southern Yunnan region.
4) The Mon need attention of their own. To some extent the reason for this is shared by the Karen. They both were rulers of historic states, and now have large populations across national boundaries, but do not dominate in any nation state. In the case of the Karen the states were the muang-type principalities of the Pa-O, and the anomalous Kayah. The question may also be raised as to the validity and implications of the view that the ancient kingdom of Haripunchai was not Mon, but Lua, and Chamathevi a Lua princess educated at the court of Lavo.

5) Finally, there are the Chinese, whose complex roles throughout the region have in recent years not had as much attention as they did two decades ago. Or, rather, the emphasis has moved from the community studies of Freedman, Skinner, Willmott and Amyot, among others, to more detailed studies such as those of Jennifer Cushman and Kevin Hewison.

A more considered version of such a taxonomy will at best provide a framework for discussion of the problems of both politics and social relations as well as of more theoretical analysis.

The paper then went on to survey the Tai-speaking groups of the region. In doing so it was suggested that the LÝ had a special relation with the Kingdom of Thailand which allowed relatively unrestricted movement in and out of the kingdom. Fieldwork subsequent to the conference suggest that this is mistaken. It is time that the LÝ of Mae Sai appear to be able to move without much restriction into Sipsongpanna either through Burma or Laos, but their residence in Thailand is strictly controlled. New migrants are illegal. Old migrants who have not been given citizenship are extensively disadvantaged. Those that have permission to reside at all are issued 'pink cards' which describe the holders as refugees of Burmese nationality. Special authorization has to be obtained for the holder to move out of Mae Sai district.

It is hoped to provide a more detailed description in the projected volume mentioned above.

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The Soviet View on Southeast Asia
(1951)

T.H. Rigby

[In the next three or four numbers of the newsletter we will print extracts from the MA thesis submitted to the University of Melbourne in 1951 by Professor T.H. Rigby (Department of Political Science in the Research School of Social Sciences), an authority on contemporary Soviet affairs and the Soviet constitution. The extracts relate to Burma, Thailand and the countries then best known to the world as Indochina. Professor Rigby's comments accompany this extract.]

Burma

When we turn to Burma, we find the general Soviet interpretation of post-war developments essentially the same as in Ceylon. But the Burma case requires some unexpected twists to give it convincing appearance, and this renders the example of Burma of
That Britain went to the lengths of granting Burma independence is explained by the fact that the British authorities returning to Burma after the war found there a powerful armed force of patriots determined to fight for the complete liberation of their country from imperialism. But independence was ceded 'on terms advantageous to the imperialists alone', this being made possible by the betrayal of the national liberation movement by the Burmese bourgeoisie. 'It must be emphasized that the essential prerequisite for granting Burma formal, illusory "independence" was the temporary emergence to the leadership of the national-liberation movement of undependable, wavering petty bourgeois elements.' The Burmese 'right socialists', alternatively referred to as representatives of the petty bourgeoisie and of 'bourgeois elements', are held to play essentially the same role in Burma's revolution as the Congress Party in India, the Kuomintang in China, or the Masjumi and National parties in Indonesia.

An interesting sidelight here is the Soviet view of Aung San. As one responsible for the January 1947 agreement with Britain and an opponent of the Communists, Aung San is represented as a traitor to the national cause. However, his murder in July 1947 is attributed to the 'imperialists', to the British secret service working through Burmese right-wing politicians. The British, it seems, objected to his 'emphatic nationalistic demands'. Apart from the fact that the 'imperialists' are not in the habit of murdering nationalist leaders, even when they are more dangerous ones than Aung San is represented by the communists to be, the contradiction in these assertions is obvious. The contradiction arises from the effort to discredit Aung San as a patriot, at the same time as directing the widespread popular respect for his patriotic services into 'anti-imperialist' channels.

The means by which the British were supposed to have rendered Burma's independence fictitious were the financial agreement of May 1947 'under which the British banks virtually retained full control over Burma's finances', the agreement of October 1947, and the defence agreement signed in August of the same year, which 'virtually perpetuated British military control over the country'.

It must be admitted that these agreements do much to safeguard 'imperialist' interests in Burma and preserve considerable ties with Britain, but as in the case of the British agreements with Ceylon, it is necessary to give a very garbled version of them in order to represent them as powerful brakes on the country's economic development and vital restrictions on its political sovereignty. Similarly the strength of the People's Volunteer Organisation was no doubt a major factor in determining the early withdrawal of British authority, but only by a grievous misrepresentation of the sentiments and aims of the then British government can it be asserted that but for the Burmese threat of force the transfer of authority would have been delayed indefinitely.

In leaving Burma with 'fictitious' independence, the Soviet case proceeds, Britain also left her with the 'puppet' government of Thakin Nu. This government immediately showed itself such an energetic agent of British imperialism that the people's patience was soon exhausted, and after a few months they rose in a nation-wide revolt.
Meanwhile the British were at work, employing 'the new colonial methods of "democratic socialism"' to reassert their authority. One such method was said to be the 'deliberate and systematic dislocation of Burma's economy'. However the only evidence offered of British efforts in this direction was the obstacles placed in the way of the nationalization of British interests. While the demand for compensation to the owners of nationalized enterprises contained in the agreement of October 1947 undoubtedly represents a serious embarrassment to the Burmese government in the implementation of its nationalization programme, especially in its present financial position, it is hard to see how the slowing up of nationalization, if it has a 'disorganising' effect at all, could have such a drastic one as to be equivalent to an effort to 'starve the country into submission', as the Soviet writer puts it. In any case, one may wonder how British imperialism is to be aided in the exploitation of Burma's resources by the 'deliberate and systematic dislocation' of the country's economy.

The chief other device employed by British imperialism in Burma, we are told, is 'the systematic disintegration of the Burmese state, its artificial dismemberment, the creation of political chaos'. British agents have been active amongst Burma's minority nationalities, the relatively backward Shans, Kachins and Karens. In the case of the last they have succeeded in stirring up a full-scale revolt against the Burmese government. The aim of this was stated to be to create a situation which would 'serve as an excuse for military intervention, like in Malaya, in order to strangulate the popular forces working for Burma's national liberation. Under the pretext of protecting British nationals and British interests the ruling British circles are considering dispatching British troops and naval forces to Burma'. It is not explained why this military intervention failed to eventuate. But the economic confusion caused by the Karen revolt is held to register the success of this part of British policy.

The reason why Britain pursues this programme of political disintegration and economic disorganization of Burma is in order to apply pressure on the Thakin Nu government. There are two questions here which is hard to see how Soviet writers could answer. 1) If, as is claimed, the 1947 agreements effectively subject Burma to imperialism, despite the granting of 'formal' political independence, why does Britain still need to press for concessions? 2) Why, if Thakin Nu and his government are the faithful puppets of imperialism that they are represented, is it necessary for the British to use such violent methods to bring them to heel? Even if the Soviet viewpoint is liberally understood, so that the 1947 agreements and the policies of the Thakin Nu government 'essentially' serve imperialist interests, without satisfying them completely, the cataclysms invoked by the British to gain 100 per cent satisfaction look like a steam-hammer employed to crack a nut.

In order to give some reasonable basis for their view that the British are responsible for the economic and political difficulties of the Burmese government, Soviet writers would have to represent the present Anglo-Burmese relationship as involving a threat to imperialist interests. But that would imply that the Thakin Nu government had gained Burma's independence on fairly advantageous terms after all, and that it had been pursuing reasonably
'progressive' policies since independence was achieved, and this would remove the justification for the present communist-led revolt against that government. This justification must be preserved intact, since the 'right-wing' socialists represent the greatest possible threat to communist interests in Burma. If the communists had loyally supported the Thakin Nu government, the latter's difficulties would have been greatly reduced and it would have had a good chance of carrying out measures effectively to reduce the distress of the population and to make a beginning with modernization along socialist lines. But the communists are not interested in reforms, however radical, which do not lead in the direction of association with the Soviet bloc, thus contributing to 'the interests of the proletarian revolution on a world scale'. It should be repeated that the communists must prevent at all costs any development which might suggest that 'real' independence and progress is possible in Southeast Asia other than under communist leadership.

Meanwhile the Burmese communists have established their Yenan, which they claim includes half the country's population. In this area 'people's committees' have been set up, under whose direction land reform is being carried out. Rural cooperatives are being established.7

The communist-controlled movement purports to be a national united front of the proletariat and petty bourgeoisie, primarily the peasantry, directed against the imperialists, the landlords and the bourgeoisie. This front is 'lead by the proletariat, headed by its communist party', and dates from 1949. Its aim is the establishment of 'new democracy' in Burma and it disposes of a 'people's democratic army'. Translated into concrete objects its 'new democracy' at first appears to resemble closely the 'Marxist' program of Thakin Nu. Both aim at 'land to the tillers' and the socialization of foreign owned enterprises. But the 'united national front' deny that land reform and socialization can be achieved with compensation to former owners; while the Thakin Nu government is bound to observe the latter, their opponents claim that only simple confiscation is either just or possible. They also argue that as the imperialists will not give up their interests without a fight, only armed struggle against the imperialists and their local supporters and apologists can win Burma 'genuine' independence.8

Soviet publications are a very poor source of information on the Burmese 'national-liberation movement' and the territory it controls, comment on this being confined to the generalizations just mentioned. I have met no recent mention of the distinction between 'red-flag' and 'white-flag' communists, apart from vague references to imperialist efforts to split the 'popular movement'.

* Professor Rigby comments:
It is odd reading something one has written four decades ago on a topic one has not done serious work on since. newsletter readers will be far better able than I to evaluate the Soviet views reported here and my comments on them. The chief pleasure of my brief foray into Indo-China area studies was encountering the fascinating historical and ethno-cultural complexity of the region, on which the Thai-Yunnan Project is now throwing new light. I need hardly add that Soviet scholarship on the area, including that on its political aspects, is
now immensely more professional, and less ideological than it was in the late Stalin era.

The Luchuan Local Regime in Thai history

Li Xiang Yang

The period at the end of 13th to the beginning of 14th centuries was a turbulent period for Tai society, mainly because of the intensity of wars between Tai political units. The aims of war changed from being solely concerned with the taking of captives and the looting of property, to the annexation of territory and political power. The annexation of territories disrupted the division of the local administrative areas, and created contradictions between local regimes and the feudal dynasty. The rise and fall of Luchuan local regime in Tai history is an example of this process.

Luchuan was one of the six administrative areas in the Tai area of southwestern Yunnan Province during the Yuan Dynasty in the 13th century. The Ming Dynasty changed its name to Luchuan-Pingmain Pacification Commission and designated it a Tai hereditary headman's area at the southwestern frontier. Its central area was what is now Ruili, Longchuan and the southern parts of Lianghe and Luxi counties in Dehong Dai-Jingpo A.P. During the hundred years covering the end of the Yuan Dynasty to the beginning of the Ming, the influence of the Tai hereditary headman, Si's family, expanded from that central area. The Luchuan Tai hereditary headman occupied vast areas surrounding the centre of Luchuan, and ruled the Tai as the largest of various minorities. It formed a local regime resisting the Ming Dynasty. The activities of the regime constituted an important chapter of Tai history, especially of the Dehong area in Yunnan, Burma and Assam. Though it was in theory a local regime under the Yuan and Ming dynasties, it had a quite complex relationship with the central government. Sometimes, the Luchuan hereditary headman's regime showed respect and submission to the central government, but at other times, when it felt its power was greater, confrontations with the central government often occurred, even full-scale war - the famous Luchuan battles of the Ming Dynasty. With the loss of these battles, the Luchuan local regime withered away.

The rise and fall of the Luchuan Tai Regime may be divided into three stages:

1. The period of Si Ke Fa (1340-1371)

   During its last years, the feudal Yuan Dynasty was tottering under the attack of peasant uprisings in Central China which greatly crippled the control of the central government. During this period the Tai Headman of Luchuan, Si Ke Fa, seized the opportunity of asserting the independence of his regime, which became stronger day by day and emerged as a power to be reckoned with in the Tai area. Si Ke Fa expanded his influence to external areas and annexed the neighbouring tribal areas of Luchuan. He dismissed the local headmen of the occupied areas and granted this land to those he considered meritorious under his leadership. The Yuan Dynasty tried many times to suppress the rebellion, but their efforts were inconclusive. In 1355 Si Ke Fa sent his son Mansan to the Yuan imperial court to pay tribute,
whereon the Yuan Dynasty was forced to ignore Si Ke Fa's past actions and set up the Pingmain Pacification Commission. Si Ke Fa was appointed the Pacification Commissioner and his actions were legalized.

Si's Genealogy of Luchuan records: 'Even the ethnic groups from Siam, Jingxian (a kingdom in Northern Thailand), Jinglao (Laos), Zhengmai (Chiangmai), Zhengdong (in Northern Burma), Cheli (Jianghong), and Baigu (Rangoon) respected Si Ke Fa as an overlord and paid tribute.' It is doubtful that those ethnic groups were really respectful and submissive, but it shows the strong influence of Sa Ke Fa.

2. The period of Si Lun Fa (1381-1399)

In this period Si Ke Fa's grandson succeeded to his father's post. He made further advances on his ancestral heritage and took the influence of the Luchuan regime to the height. Li Si Cong wrote in his Bai Yi Zhuan: 'The region inhabited by Bai Yi is Luchuan and Pingmain, a thousand li10 southwest from Yunnan, is an area about ten thousands square li, bounded by Jingdong at its east, Cheli at its southeast, "Eight Hundred Concubines Of King" at its south, Mainguo at its southwest, Jiali at its west, Xitian Guci at its northwest, Tufan at its north, Yongchang at its northeast.' This indicated the vast areas controlled by the Luchuan Tai Regime at that time.

The expansion of Luchuan influence impelled Si Lun Fa to try to cast off control of the Ming Dynasty. Though he sent his envoy with tribute in 1384 and accepted the appointment as Luchuan-Pingmain Pacification Commissioner, the next year he and his troops attacked Jingdong, and also united other minorities and sought to attack the interior of Yunnan Province. The Ming armed force won the battles in Moshale and Dingbian. Due to the loss of these battles, and perhaps for other reasons, civil strife happened against Si Lun Fa. This was suppressed by the Ming army and Si Lun Fa re-occupied his post. At the same time, the Ming Dynasty set up several headmen and administrative organizations in Si's family-controlled area, so that the Ming Dynasty strengthened its own control over the Luchuan area.

3. The period of Si Ren Fa (1413-1442)

After the death of Si Lun Fa, his son Si Xing Fa succeeded to the post (1404-1413). In 1413, Si Xing Fa abdicated in favour of his younger brother Si Ren Fa. The Ming Dynasty appointed him as Pacification Commissioner. On the one hand Si Ren Fa showed respect and submission to the Ming Dynasty, and on the other he started a policy of military expansion. He first captured neighbouring hereditary headmen's areas, such as Mubang, Ganya, Nandian, and then further areas, such as Mengding, Lujiang, Wandain, Tengchong and Mengyang. About 1440, he had re-occupied most of the areas which were under the rule of Su Lun Fa at the height of his power. It caused great menace to the security of the southwestern frontier of the Ming Dynasty.

In 1441, the Ming Dynasty ordered Wang Ji and Jianggui to lead an army of 150,000, called up from Hunan, Guizhou, and Sichuan Provinces, and launched the famous 'Three Campaigns over Luchuan' of Ming history. At the end of the third campaign, the Ming army made an agreement with Si Ren Fa's youngest son Si Lu Fa, promising him the headmanship, and set up a boundary stone tablet on the bank of the Irrawaddy River and restricted Si's family to Luchuan. On the stone
tablet, was carved: 'You may not cross, until the river dries up and
the stone is smashed.'

After the victory in 'Three Campaigns over Luchuan' by the
Ming Army, the Luchuan Tai regime withered away.

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Translations

Oracle Chicken Bones of the Wa People in Ximeng, Yunnan

Li Yangsong

On the eve of Liberation the Wa people living in the highlands
of Ximeng, Yunnan, were still part of a patriarchal slave system of
the final stages of primitive society. Their daily life still
preserved several of the customs of primitive society.

In 1956-57 the author participated in an investigation of Wa
society and history, and collected source materials concerning the
oracle chicken bones of the Wa people. Through the interpreter, Ai
Pai (a member of the Wa), the author conducted a detailed interview
with a 'Moba' (a ritual specialist) from the Wa people. The editing
and publication of this investigation has definite value as reference
material for research into the religion and beliefs of primitive
society.

The use of chicken bones for divination is commonly known as
'reading the signs of the chicken' (kan ji gua). Before Liberation
this was almost a universal custom in the daily life of the Wa people.
In order to seek good fortune and avoid adversity, or to find the
solution to thorny problems, the ritual specialist was called in to
'conjure the spirits' and read the signs of the chicken. The Wa do
not raise chickens for eating but for reading the signs and calling up
the spirits. In all important religious ceremonies chickens are used
for divination, for example, in:
- carving a wooden drum: four chickens and one rat will be used;
- slaughtering an ox: two chickens and one rat;
- building a house: five chickens and three rats;
- cutting an ox's tail: twelve four chickens and six rats;
- building a place to house wooden drums: two chickens and six rats;
- calling up the great tree spirit: one chicken and two pigs.

In addition, in dealing with sickness among the village people, marriage, funerals, battles with outsiders, the beheading of people and punishment of thieves, etc., divination by chicken bones must be employed before taking action.

For divination, the age (usually a young chicken is used), sex and colour of the chicken do not matter; all kinds can be used.

The divination is carried out by the ritual specialist (Moba). He directs the religious activities of the village, and is usually an elderly person with considerable knowledge who is held in high esteem by the people. A ritual specialist's duty is usually to 'conjure the spirits' for people in the village who share his clan name, but he must also take part in productive labour.

When the ritual specialist engages in divination and conjuring up the spirits he is usually not paid by the people, but when he calls up the 'great spirits' he is paid a small reward, for example, two dollars ban kai (local currency before Liberation) or a few kilograms of millet.

Because chicken bone divination is a universal aspect of daily life for the Wa people, most of them have some common knowledge concerning divination,...but they cannot supersede the authority of the ritual specialist.

Passing on the functions of the ritual specialist is not achieved through a hereditary system, but by choosing a person with the same clan name to be an apprentice. Normally, when the ritual specialist conjures up the spirits his apprentice will act as an assistant, learning the trade at the ritual specialist's side. In time the apprentice will carry on the skills of the ritual specialist and this will be acknowledged by the villagers.

On some occasions, when conjuring spirits for others, the ritual specialist will take the opportunity to allow his apprentice to personally take part in order to give him training. This would include divining and chanting, and the ritual specialist sits beside the apprentice helping him with words to a chant or correcting mistakes, etc.

There are many rites associated with chicken bone divination among the Wa people, all essentially follow the same procedure but with minor differences. Here I will only discuss the process of chicken bone divination associated with illness.
The First Stage: Preparation

First, the host [the one seeking divination] selects a chicken and then goes to the ritual specialist to explain the subject of divination. He prepares a small pot (containing water), a bowl of rice, ginger, salt and a banana leaf, and carries these to a place outside the village gates where the spirits are conjured up. The ritual specialist uses a knife that he usually carries around with him to whittle four bamboo divining strips as fine as needles and one bamboo needle with which to stab the chicken. The host assists the ritual specialist by placing the pot on a triangular rock and burning...
firewood to boil the rice.
The Second Stage: Chanting and Divining

When the preparations outlined above have been made, the ritual specialist begins chanting while killing the chicken. He takes two bones from the chicken, discarding the exterior muscle. Ensuring that the left and right thigh bones retain their original configuration, he ties them together at the base so they form a 'V' shape. He then takes the bamboo strips and inserts them into the small holes in the bones.

If it is not easy to find small holes in the thigh bones, the ritual specialist takes a relatively course bamboo strip and forces it into the bone until the bone marrow is squeezed out of the bone, exposing the small holes. When these are cleaned out, the bamboo strips can be inserted.

Each position or orientation of the chicken bones implies a certain meaning from which can be judged good or ill omens.

The Third Stage: Interpreting 'Chicken Symbols'

When the ritual specialist has finished preparing the chicken bones, he begins interpreting the meaning of their divinatory symbols. During divination he must correctly position the 'V'-shaped bones, with the back arch of the bones facing outward and the concave side facing the person seeking divination, otherwise the divination will be mistaken.

If at the end of the divination the omens are good the ritual specialist will boil the chicken meat, salt and ginger in the pot. According to the customs of the Wa people the ritual specialist can eat this chicken meat, but it is taboo for the host to eat it. Everyone respects this taboo.

If the omens are bad, the ritual specialist can throw away the oracle chicken bones, or bury them, and ask the host to kill another chicken for divining.

If the omens are particularly bad (the Wa people consider the worst omen to be when no small holes can be found in the chicken's bones), the ritual specialist will throw away the bones and the chicken meat, and kill another chicken to begin the divining process anew. It has been said that on some occasions when the omens are bad four or five chickens have been killed until good omens have appeared. Such occasions are mostly limited to divination relating to illness.

Finally, when the chicken divination rites are over, the ritual specialist will present the oracle chicken bones to the host for preservation. The host will hang these in a predetermined corner of his/her own home....

The custom of divining by chicken bones is very widespread among the Wa people in the highlands of the Ximeng region. Methods of divination are more or less the same in each place, but each village has different interpretations of the divining symbols. Each has their own interpretations, but within each village there are common regulations and interpretations.

Here I will only introduce the good and ill omens of divination according to a ritual specialist from the Wa people of Wanbunong.

First, it is necessary to understand the meaning of four positions of the oracle chicken bones: up, down, left and right. According to ancient custom, the four positions of the oracle chicken...
bones have the following meanings:
- the upper left of the bones indicates the realm of the spirits;
- the lower left indicates the realm of the parents (including deceased parents);
- the upper right indicates the realm of other people;
- the lower right indicates one's own realm.

During divination the bamboo strips must be inserted according to given circumstances; they cannot be changed at will. Their positioning will change according to whether the holes in the chicken's thigh bones are great or few, toward the top or the bottom of the bones....

Before the ritual specialist conjures up the spirits, he cannot willfully vary the number of bamboo strips he inserts into the thigh bones; the standard procedure is strictly observed.

The ritual specialist's interpretations of the oracle bones can depend upon the matter he is being asked to divinate. Different interpretations of the way the bamboo strips fall can be given according to whether answers are being sought on matters such as illness, hunting, sowing crops, marriage, funerals, trade or travel.

Briefly, there are sixteen basic portents for the different signs of the oracle chicken bones, eight being good omens and eight being bad omens. An example of these portents is listed below for reference [refer to the illustration for each number]. The eight good omens are:

1) Signs for people and the spirits are good, an illness will pass;
2) Others will not come to rob;
3) The master is at home; if visitors come the [evil?] spirits will feel afraid;
4) Others will not take your things;
5) Your parents will not die;
6) The master is at home, comfortable and well;
7) Others will come to rob, but because the [parents?] are home everything is fine;
8. The master and parents are at home, all is well.

The eight bad omens are:
9) There are no people or spirits, an extremely bad omen;
10) The master is not at home, a bad omen;
11) The spirits will not come, a bad omen;
12) Everyone will die;
13) The spirits will eat people;
14) Others will come to rob;
15) The spirits want your child;
16) Others will come to cut off your feet.

Of the good omens listed above, only the first can be said to be unreservedly good. Each of the other seven are open to different interpretations, so that it is difficult for the person seeking divination to hit upon the good omen they are seeking. Thus it is common in the process of divination to hear people say "this portent is the best", or 'this portent is a little better' (meaning that this sign is not the ideal one), and so on.

Of the bad omens, number nine (above) is clearly the worst. If the ritual specialist happens to come up with this portent, which
is considered the least favourable, he will immediately throw away the oracle bones and the chicken.

If the portents of numbers ten to sixteen are turned up, then the oracle chicken bones will be thrown out, although the ritual specialist will still eat the chicken's meat.

Thus, because the Wa people mainly raise chickens for religious rites and to conjure up the spirits, it is in fact the ritual specialist who eats most of the chickens. It can therefore be seen that in Wa society the ritual specialist enjoys many benefits. On the surface, it seems that the ritual specialist reads the potents of the oracle chicken bones according to the natural way they fall. However, he bases his interpretations upon the indications of the so-called 'spirits'. He uses his powers to fool the people and win their trust.

How was it that ritual specialists came into being? It is possible to draw some conclusions from the breakdown in official positions of Wa society in Ximeng, and from what we know of the origins of ritual specialists in late primitive societies.

Before Liberation, there were four different kinds of positions of responsibility in Wa society: Wolang, Moba (ritual specialist), Touren (chieftain) and Zhumi. They shared out the work and co-operated in the management of all village affairs.

The results of our on-the-spot investigations show that the Wolang (a clan chieftain) was selected by a clan sharing the same name when a village was first established. As the village was constructed and developed, [the Wolang] gradually became the village chieftain.

Initially, the Wolang was responsible for politics, religion and all village affairs and the scope of his powers was very wide. Later, the development of society brought a relatively detailed division of labour, and the Wolang's authority was limited to managing the spirits and important village affairs.

The Moba (ritual specialist) handled religious activities and conjured up the spirits for the Wa people. He was not a political leader. [His role has been described above.]

The Touren and Zhumi were both positions which appeared rather late....'Zhumi' means a relatively wealthy household. The Zhumi was originally not a chieftain nor a political leader. But because of his superior economic status, he had considerable influence in society.

[Thus it can be seen that] the Wolang was initially both a political and a religious leader, whereas the Moba (ritual specialist) was a new position which, as a result of social development, grew out of a division of the Wolang's powers....

When [these findings] are combined with observations concerning oracle bones in the latter period of [China's] Neolithic age, we believe that religious beliefs were already present in matriarchal society. However, it is not possible to find a ritual specialist specifically responsible for 'conjuring the spirits'. At the beginning of patriarchal society there was still no such ritual specialist. It was not until the latter period of primitive society that ritual specialists were separated off from clan chieftains.

For example, archaeological discoveries of oracle bones from the Longshan and Qijia Cultures [Chalcolithic period, 4,000 years ago] prove that at that time there were ritual specialists who specialized in religious activities. They used the bones of oxen, sheep, pigs and
deer as materials for oracle bones. These oracle bones were fired on one side and cracks would appear on the other side. Ritual specialists would read the patterns of these cracks and divine the portents. These oracle bones bear close resemblance to the oracle chicken bones of the Wa people of Wanbunong in Ximeng.

In addition, indications that there were ritual specialists in the period of the Longshan and Qijia cultures is demonstrated by research into wine vessels from the Neolithic period. Society of that time was comparable to the period of military democracy in latter primitive society. In many respects it also resembles the character of the society of the Wa people of pre-Liberation Ximeng.

In sum, investigations of the oracle chicken bones of the Wa people of Wanbunong in Ximeng provides concrete material for our research into the divination customs of ancient people and the meaning of those customs....

Translated by Terry Narramore

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AN INVESTIGATION OF MARRIAGE AMONG THE TAI OF SIPSONG PANNA

Edited by Song Enchang

1. Organizations of Single Youth

Single male and female youths have their own respective organizations with their own leaders. The leader of single male youth is known as Nai Ou, while that of single female youth is known as Nai Shao. [Both] are elected at the time of the water splashing festival.

The responsibilities of the Nai Ou and Nai Shao are to lead single youths in matters of marriage and in religious activities. In particular, they are responsible for teaching youths to abide by regulations concerning male-female activities, the selection of a partner and proposals of marriage. They mediate in disputes between young men and women, between youth inside and outside the village and between young men in the village. With regard to common religious activities they organize the public celebrations at the opening and closing of the gate festivals and the water splashing festival. For the water splashing festival they organize the setting off of fireworks, and the males go from door to door taking up a collection of funds. This collection serves as a common fund, and is used for such things as the purchase of piglets to give to poor families who then raise them. When the pigs are slaughtered the meat is divided up for a feast. With regard to matters of marriage, the main task of [these leaders] is to organize activities for the wedding ceremony. For example, before a marriage is formalized, a couple will present wine and food to the Nai Ou and Nai Shao, and then the Nai Ou and Nai Shao will call the youth of the village together to eat and take part in the marriage celebrations. If one seeks a young woman in another village as a partner, one must have the permission of the Nai Ou of that village beforehand, otherwise one could be thrown out of the village by its young men.

In some villages there are single youths who have their own
land on which they cultivate rice, peanuts, cotton, sugarcane, etc. The produce from this land is used as payment for the public activities of the single youths.

2. Tattoos and Dyed Teeth

In the past, males of seven or eight years of age would begin applying tattoos to their bodies and, at the same time, would prepare to enter a temple. Most tattoos are applied in blue dye, but some are applied with red dye. Tattoos are known as man ke. Some men covered their whole body with tattoos, including their face, around their eyes and ears. Designs of tattoos included tigers, leopards, dragons and Tai words. It was believed that tattoos could protect the body, and some men even tattooed words which meant they were impervious to knives and spears. Although some women followed the custom of having tattoos, it was not as common as among men and women only tattooed the area of their left wrist.

Tai youths use an ancient custom to dye their teeth in order to preserve them. The method is to first fire the smoke and ash out of some chestnut wood, and then bake the ash on a strip of iron over a charcoal fire. The ash is then smeared on the teeth with one's fingers. The dyeing of teeth usually begins from the age of fourteen or fifteen. The wood, ash and iron strip are prepared by young women. Teeth are normally dyed in the evening, in the village, particularly at the places where young women gather at night. The dyeing of teeth was originally a method of preserving teeth, but, from this beginning, it came to be appreciated for aesthetic value, and it was thought that the blacker one's teeth the more beautiful was one's appearance.

3. Courtship and the Spinning of Cotton by Young Women

The majority of Tai people in Sipsong Panna grow cotton, and some barter in cotton with the Hani people of the highlands.

By the twelfth month of the Tai calendar, after the opening of the gate festival, the rainy season has ended and the women go out to pick cotton which they spin into cloth at night. The young single women again begin to talk love with the arrival of the opening of the gate festival and they turn from harvesting cotton to harvesting a marriage. For the purpose of spinning cotton in the evening, a group of young women living close to each other, of similar age and character, would normally raise a kind of platform in a vacant spot near their homes. Such platforms are normally three to five metres square, and some of the larger ones are raised about a metre above the ground on wood and bamboo, complete with several steps. Young single monks help to construct these platforms, though some are prepared by the father's of young women.

After the evening meal, the young women would take their spinning wheels and cotton and go to their own platforms. They also take along cigarettes, implements for dyeing teeth, peanuts, sugarcane, loquat, tangerines, shaddock and other sweets, which they would use to entertain young male callers, especially the ones they liked. They would sit around a fire, spinning cotton and talking love with the young male callers. Once they reach the stage where they have fallen in love, the young women put away their spinning wheels and invite their young men back to the family home. In some large villages more than ten of these sorts of platforms still remain.
example, in Mang'a of Jinghong there are eleven platforms....

When the Tai women of Mengzhu have harvested the cotton, the remaining single women of each village, including divorcees and the few young widows, join up in small groups and find vacant places in the village where they can spin cotton in the evening. To avoid the cold of night they light a fire, and each group surrounds themselves with woven bamboo fences complete with a simple door....At night young men would bring them blankets and musical instruments and visit the women they love....

4. Proposals and Engagement

For the young single people social intercourse mainly occurs in the dry season between the opening and closing of the gate festivals, that is, the slack agricultural period. Apart from attending festivals, single male youths take their opportunities to visit young women when the latter gather in the evening outside their village homes to spin cotton. This sort of activity has a special collective character. After a couple falls in love, they progress to the second stage, that is, from collective to individual activities. At this time the man can go directly to the woman's home and the woman can stay with the man. The parents will not interfere. Even though this is an individual activity, the man can still invite male friends around. These male friends help each other find partners, and they are especially useful in looking for a partner outside the village.

When a couple are in love, the man can stay in the home of the woman's family. Because the parents do not interfere, the family home becomes a place where daughters can associate with male friends. According to custom, if the young woman's boyfriend comes to visit, the parents and brothers will get out of the way and retreat to the sleeping quarters. Because a young woman can stay with the man she loves before marriage, if the man brings along some friends they too can stay in the house....Although monks cannot marry, they may court and make friends with women. However, they must return to the temple before they go to bed because they have to sound the temple bell.

In seeking a partner, if it so happens that there are several sisters in one family it is quite natural for several young men to seek them all out, either at the same time or one after another. According to the principles governing marriage outside the clan, several brothers can intermarry with several sisters of another family, and each brother can change the sister he chose. In the process of selecting a partner some male teenagers, who have already joined a teenage organization but who do not have a partner, may accompany older males...in the search for friends. This is a form of education and is a part of the process of selecting a partner. In sum, those who are the parents, brothers and sisters of a young woman want to create the most suitable conditions to make the selection of a partner convenient....

Engagement can be divided into two periods. After a couple has agreed to become engaged, first the mother on the male's side, normally accompanied by her sisters, goes to the young woman's mother to seek her opinion. Usually the young woman's mother is also assisted by her own sisters. Only after the woman's side has agreed, is the engagement formalized and the conditions of marriage set. The agreement of marriage is determined by the men: witnesses on the male
side being the young man's father and the father's brothers-in-law, while attending for the female side are the young woman's father and the father's brothers-in-law. The content of the agreement includes such things as the period of time the husband spends in the wife's home, dowry, and the adoption by the male side of the wife as a daughter if they do not have a daughter. After the agreement is settled, a banquet is held in the young woman's family, but only the males can attend.

5. The Wedding Ceremony

On the eve before a young man goes to live with his wife a banquet will be held for family and friends, and friends of the young man will present [the new couple] with gifts. When the time comes for the young man to go to stay with his wife, five or six of his intimate friends will then carry blankets and other things to the wife's home. Before they enter the home, the women of the wife's family welcome them by splashing the groom with water and offering them sweet drinks, etc. In an effort to avoid being splashed by water the groom covers his head with the blankets brought by his friends. The [groom] presents the wife's father with two candles, but if the father has died these are given to the wife's mother. These serve as a kind of offering. If the family of the groom is well off, when he and his friends go to the wife's home they will take along some wine and food to entertain the wife's family and friends. After three days of celebration in the wife's home, with everyone decked out in their best attire and food aplenty, the newly married couple go to the man's home to meet his relatives and the man then returns to [his wife's home] again.

After [the newly married couple] enters the house, they receive the greetings of the elders. In receiving greetings, the man and woman form separate groups with their respective companions. The man and woman sit below the elders, and in between the bride and groom is placed a cooked chicken, two candles, and two bottles of wine. The village chieftain offers greetings first, then some of the elders [place a string around the wrists of the couple]. Following this, the newly-weds present money to the wife's parents. At least 2 yuan in ban kai [local form of currency] is presented, or greater amounts of 4, 6, 8, or 10 yuan.

On the evening of the wedding ceremony, the male side will have prepared a pre-determined number of 'wooden slaves' (mu nu) [carved figures]. These will first be presented to the highest ranking chieftain of the village, the 'Ba Long', and to those who have organized the ceremony....For example, the marriage customs of Man'gen in Mengzhu are as follows: when a young couple marries the groom's family presents the bride's family with forty 'wooden slaves', each one being valued at fifty cents in local currency. If the wife has been married and divorced, the groom's side presents the bride's side with twenty 'wooden slaves'. If the groom comes from outside the village to stay at the bride's home, he must present the 'Zhao Man' [local leader] with a pair of chickens, a bottle of wine, a string of betel nuts and a pair of candles. When the period of living in the wife's home is completed, if the couple leaves the wife's village presentations must again be made to the Zhao Man. If a man from an outside village who comes to his wife's home is unknown to the village
chieftain, the man must present a greater number of 'wooden slaves' than usual, perhaps eighty rather than forty. Because the respective Lords of Mangzhu and Jinglu did not have any contact, if a young man from one village marries into the other he must present an extra twelve 'wooden slaves', of which four will belong to the village and eight to the meng.

When the groom goes to live in the bride's home, the young men in the bride's village have the custom of putting the groom through trials. The most common sort of trial is for a few young men to pull down the woven bamboo walls and screens inside and outside the bride's home and to then invite the groom to build things anew. To fulfil this requirement the groom will seek a few of his companions to help out. According to custom, the newly-wed man and woman are accompanied in their sleep respectively by two male and female friends. But on the morning of the second day they return home and their replacements sleep outside the main rooms. Even on the night of the wedding the newly-weds must show that they have really fallen into sleep, otherwise it is considered that the ceremony has been spoilt. On the morning of the second day the groom returns to his parent's home and then goes back to the bride's house in the evening, sometimes accompanied by friends. On the third day of the marriage the groom's mother will take some rice flour to the bride's home and will familiarize herself with the bride's family and friends.

When the groom is living in his wife's home, the parents can distribute produce and tools such as hoes, ploughs, oxen, domestic pigs, seeds, etc., according to the economic circumstances of the family. In cases of divorce, however, the man has the right to reclaim property and take it back to his own home. On the bride's side, her friends present her with clothing, cloth, etc., and some will hold a banquet for family, friends and neighbours. The bride's companions also prepare a wedding banquet for the bride.

6. Hierarchical Features of Marriage

Although the 'Daimeng' class [Tai peasants] may marry into the 'Zhao' [leadership] class, they must first raise their status by the payment of money. For example, youths of the Daimeng class can purchase Zhao class status. Another example is Manfei, an old Daimeng village of Menghai. It is said that that the gui da, that is the young men of the mengma class in Mandong, cannot marry women from Manfei, but the men of Manfei have the right to marry Manfei women. The affects of the hierarchical nature of marriage are also felt in distinctions between wealthy and poor villages. Manniu is one of the fifteen villages of Jinghong. Each household has a share of 125 na of land. Manniu is a Daimeng class village. Manling is a poor village which rents paddy fields from Manniu. Because of this many young women in Manling want to marry into Manniu village. In Tai society there is the phenomenon of marrying one's wife's sisters such that when a man marries an elder sister in one family, if she dies then the man becomes married to the younger sister. This is a way of preserving the husband's presence in the wife's family home. If either one of a married couple dies, the living partner severs all connection with the partner who has passed away. This is achieved when the living partner places a length of string on the coffin of the deceased before the funeral. Then one of the elders cuts the string
with a knife, and the next morning a chicken is slaughtered as the final meal of the deceased. This indicates that all connection with the dead partner is broken.

7. Male-Female Inequality

In Tai society inequality between the sexes appears in all aspects of life. Even in eating, men eat first and then the women follow. The clothes of men and women are washed separately, and men sleep before the women. Parents teach their newly-wed daughters to cherish their husbands; to cease mixing with other young men to avoid provoking their husbands' suspicions; to patiently wait upon their husbands; to do the cooking; and to speak in a mellow voice. Inequality is also reflected in the following: when the man wakes up the wife must follow him; the man must sit first before the woman can sit; the woman must wait for the man to take three helpings of food before she begins to eat; and when sleeping together the woman's head must be lower than the man's head.

8. Establishing a New Family

In the Tai society of Sipsong Panna matriarchal communal families suited to the development of a private, feudal economy no longer exist. Families with many daughters gradually break up into individual families as the daughters marry according to relative age one after another. The typical family was one in which the youngest daughter remained at home to support the parents, so that for a time it was common for the youngest daughter to carry on [the family]. After Liberation, however, not only was the system of inheritance through the youngest daughter broken, the increasing patriarchal power that went with it also fell apart. Although after a woman marries she stays in her mother's house, according to Tai customs as soon as a man and woman become a married couple...they begin to work their own fields, grow vegetables and raise pigs, and some couples even raise oxen for sale so that they can accumulate their own property. Such property becomes the basis for starting their own family. Of course, when they become formally married, the parents of the wife, and also the husband's parents, will give them some farm animals and farm implements, and help them build a house on a portion of land. When a daughter starts her own family, her parents will, if conditions permit it, give her an ox and some pigs and chickens. Relatives and friends may also present her with chickens and other such domestic animals. A house will be built with the help of other village members. In a Tai family the women take care of the property; oxen, horses, pigs and chickens are all managed by the women. Even when the men do business deals they need the approval of the women and will discuss matters with the women first. Sons and daughters of some wealthy families have their own property such as pigs and chickens, and some of the sons work their own fields.

9. Bearing Children

Tai women give birth in their homes. Women giving birth for the first time are assisted by the elderly and middle-aged women who have experience with childbirth, and the husband also helps with the birth. Women who have experience of childbirth, after their first or second child, give birth with the assistance of their
husbands....After the birth, a bamboo star is placed on the wooden stairway signifying the household has a new-born child. When the men of the village see this they know not to enter the house because if they do they will have to take on the duties of an adopted father. Although the village women can enter, women from outside the village cannot, otherwise they will have to be adopted mothers. When a woman has given birth, her female relatives, friends and neighbours will each present her with chickens and eggs. The woman who has given birth will return the compliment to the women who present her with gifts should they later give birth. For a whole month after giving birth a woman is forbidden to eat rooster, bramble finch and yellow-beaked or yellow-clawed chicken. For one year she is forbidden to eat peanuts and a certain kind of gourd. Women who have just given birth will stay in the home for about a week....After that time, if the child is a girl the elders of the family sacrifice a chicken and place offerings of cloth spinning implements, cooking utensils, etc. on a table, and place strings around the wrists of the mother and child, and recite some greetings. This is repeated after another month has passed. If the child is a boy, after one week the same family elders sacrifice a chicken and place offerings of a flute, a huqin [stringed instrument], and a set of scales on a table, and recite some greetings, and place strings on the wrists of the mother and child. This is repeated after another month has passed.

The baby is named during either the opening or closing of the gate festivals. The principal way of determining a name is according to the time of birth. There are fixed lists of names: one is carved on a golden bamboo cylinder, another is written on white cloth. The Tai of Sipsong Panna employ two kinds of seniority rankings among their children. One is a mixture of rankings which makes no distinction between the sex of the children, but which depends upon the order in which children are born. The other ranks children according to their sex, boys being ranked separately to girls. In Meng'a, however, an only daughter can be given the name 'Yu Wen'. The name 'Wen' can be given to either the first born boy or first born girl.

If the youngest son or daughter fall ill, they can be given to adopted parents (an adopted father is known as a 'Bo Lin', and an adopted mother as a 'Mi Lin'). The adopted parents will place strings around the child's wrist and pray for its health....

10. Divorce

Divorce is a very simple matter. If the man initiates the divorce and his economic conditions are relatively good, he pays one ox, or, if he has no ox, an amount of money of equivalent value. Such settlements are proportionally shared out among the woman's family, friends and village chieftain. If the woman initiates the divorce, she must pay one ox or the equivalent value in money. Because poorer people cannot afford to pay a divorce settlement, they arrange divorces between themselves. Although either one of the couple can seek another partner before the divorce, they cannot re-marry. In particular, divorcing couples see festivals, for example, Buddhist festivals, as a chance to once again engage in free social intercourse. They regard the quest by their family and chieftains to collect the fee for divorce as being similar to the way their family
collect the fee for engagement.

There are, of course, many reasons for divorce. One of the most common reasons is that during festivals, for example, building a new house, becoming a monk, religious festivals, [couples] use the opportunity of banquets and entertainment to regain free social and sexual intercourse, causing married people to separate. Once both parties and the chieftains have arrived at a decision, each partner will not only take back the property they had at the time of marriage, but will also divide the property they accumulated since the marriage, for example clothing, work tools, farm animals, domestic animals and birds, food, money, etc.

The Tai of Meng'a formalize a divorce by having each partner pull on either end of a white cloth which is then cut down the middle by one of the partners. In a similar way, a few people use a candle which is cut down the middle. If the woman initiates a divorce, then according to a formal divorce regulation, a white cloth is placed in a bowl and two candles are put on top of the cloth along with a predetermined divorce fee... The fee is given to the male partner, and the white cloth is cut as described above. When the woman pays the man the divorce fee she normally also says su ma, which means she apologizes. She may also say that from now on you [her husband] are a bachelor and I am a single woman, and we can each look for another partner....

Translated by Terry Narramore.

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the irrigation system of mengjinghong,
xishuangbanna: its distribution and management

Translated and edited by Dao Guo-dong et al.
from an oral account by Dao Xue-xing

The Dai of Xishuang Banna have operated a comprehensive irrigation system since early times. From offices of the Commissioner of Pacification [svaen-vi] and each Meng [Mueng] down to those in each huoxi [ho sip] and village, specialised staff were involved with infrastructure repair and water distribution.

The Zhaolong Pasa [Tsao-long Pha:sa:t] who administered internal affairs (sometimes referred to as Doulong Pasa, one of the eight great Kazhen [Khatsueng]), was also responsible for finance and water management. The Banmenlong (also called Banmenglong) was the chief official responsible for the water management area of a large canal or ditch and he was assisted by a Banmennan. Within the water management area, each village also had a Banmen and elected two persons to cooperate with the chief and assistant official. These two elected personnel were often the Banmen of the village at the head of the canal [the water-head] and of the village which received water last [the water-tail]. Such a selection ensured coordination in the system and prevented the upper village depriving the lower of water. Thus a water management hierarchy operated from the Zhaolong Pasa down
to the village Banmen. An example is the large Menlanyong canal of Mengjinghong, over 30 hua li [15 kms.] in length and with an irrigation area encompassing Manhuomeng, Manlian, Mansha, Mannongkan, Manhuisu, Mandonglao, Manla, Manmonan, Manmolong, Manfengnan and Manjinglan. In addition to its chief and subordinate water management officials, there were two assistants: one the Banmen of Manjinglan at the water-head, and the other Banmen of Manhuomeng at the water-tail. These Banmen were also the heads of the irrigation small groups composed of village Banmen. They were responsible for mobilising ditch repairs, investigating the canals, allocating water distribution and enforcing the water regulations.

Water distribution was calculated by the number of fields in each village and, within the village, in terms of the distance from the irrigation canal. The Naxiu and Nadang (two fields in Manjinglan) each had an area of 100 na but the Nadang field was further from the water supply and received water only via a small ditch. Consequently, it was allocated two jin of water while Naxiu, located beside the irrigation canal and able to be irrigated directly from it, received only one jin and five liang [the Chinese translator notes that these jin and liang are not the usual Chinese units of weight, but rather special designations for rate of flow].

A criss-cross of branch channels distributed water to the paddy boundary and a bamboo tube imbedded in the bund allowed water to enter each field. A hole of the appropriate size was drilled in the bamboo tube to permit only the correct amount of water to flow through. Irrigation officials used a specially-made, awl-shaped bamboo measuring device incised with jin and liang gradations (see accompanying Figure) to determine the size of the hole.

Each year the canals were repaired during the fifth and sixth months of the Dai calendar. Pigs and chickens were then sacrificed to the water-spirit at a ceremony for 'Opening the water' and the work undertaken by each village was inspected in the following manner. A raft containing yellow cloth was launched at the top of the canal system in Manhuomeng and was accompanied in its passage by Banmen beating gongs. If the raft became stranded or obstructed, the village responsible for that section was fined and ordered to undertake further repairs. After the raft arrived at the water-tail, the yellow cloth was unloaded and a second offering made at the white pagoda of Manhuomeng.

Prior to this undertaking, the head of the discussion chamber ordered the Banmen, the Mengdang Banmen and the Nanlongda, who managed cultivation and expedited rent, to supervise repair of the canals and protection of the seedlings. The command was as follows: 'The rains have arrived and it is planting season. Each village should repair the irrigation canals to ensure a smooth supply of water to each field for the irrigation and growth of our rice shoots.' The Banmen of each Meng and the Nalondga informed the people: regardless of the amount of 30, 50, or 70 na fields in your village, you should calculate your water needs. Each family should take hoes, knives and other tools to repair the canals. The channels should be repaired from 'head to tail' so that every field can receive water. Arguments and fighting should not occur when the water is distributed.

If a number of na within the village were planted with seedlings but still awaited
water, the chief ought to inform the Banmen and Nalongda. They ought
to devise a method to repair the canals and equalise water
distribution. Be it the land of a commoner or the Commissioner of
Pacification, none should lie waste.

The Banmen ought to inspect the canal and fields thoroughly
each market-day (once every five days). If fallowed fields were found,
the Banmen and Nalongda should arrange for their cultivation. If some
villagers failed to undertake canal repairs and fallowed their
farm-land in response to receiving no water, they were penalised 30
tiao [ha:p] per hundred na at tax collection. Where fallowing
resulted from the Banmen failing to allocate water, he should bear the
tax-burden.

Chiefs who cultivated land in the village but resided in town
must comply with summons from the Banmen to join in canal repair.
Whether chief or commoner, all must contribute labour or be fined in
accordance with the ancient rules.

In the tenth month, after transplanting, each village was
required to erect wooden stakes five cun [16.7 cm.] in girth and six
chi [two metres] in length around the periphery of the village
paddy-fields and make a fence to keep out oxen and horses. Those with
livestock should tend them carefully and tether them in the grazing
area. If livestock transgressed and damaged crops then compensation
should be paid by the owner of the field where the animals entered.

The villages responsible for irrigation canals were stipulated
as follows:
1) Mengyaiwa responsible for the Menlongmanyawa canal;
2) Mannongfeng and Manguang responsible for the Menlongbangfa canal;
3) Mandu, Manguanglong and Manzhen responsible for Menzhenai canal;
4) Manjingfeng and Mansao responsible for Lanxing canal; and
5) Manjinglan responsible for Menlanyong canal.

Translated by Irene Bain.

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an investigation of tattoos
among the dai of xishuangbanna

Li Ziquan

Dai traditions concerning tattoos

1. Traditional accounts of the origin of tattoos
1) In ancient times, our ancestors ate raw meat and subsisted by hunting. They used bunches of leaves and animal skins to conceal their bodies and offer protection. From long usage, the patterns of these coverings became imprinted on their flesh and did not fade.

2) In ancient times, our ancestors often dreamt that their bodies were adorned with beautiful patterns of flying birds and roaming beasts. When they awoke, their bodies were indeed indeliably printed with wonderful designs.

3) The Bing bao sang ni sha meng ('On why the Dai have tattoos') tells us that long ago our ancestors lived by rivers and lakes where they caught fish and prawns for food. In the vast river hid a huge monster called Mianzelun which constantly raised the wind and waves to harm the people. The Mianzelun specialised in mauling people who made a living from the waters, particularly those who exposed their white legs by not wearing trousers. As the Dai lived in the tropics, they were unaccustomed to wearing trousers and always entered the water bare-legged. Mianzelun flaunted his strength by ripping apart great numbers of people, causing the Dai ancestors to call a meeting and devise a counter-strategy. It occurred to the people that the sap extracted from the leaves of the maisegeng tree could be used to dye their legs black (Dai women use it to stain their teeth) and it would not fade for a long time. Thereafter, the Mianzelun did not dare to molest the Dai.

4) In times past, there was a Dai youth of unsurpassed bravery who sought the light of the sun. Day and night, year in year out, he searched throughout the world in all weathers, but always moving toward the east. He inscribed the four cardinal points on his chest with charcoal to prevent losing his way. Trudging through the deep forests for many years he faced frequent threats from fierce animals and cleverly sought protection from them by emblazoning images of animals such as tigers, leopards, wild boars and lions on his body.
Yet these pigment and charcoal pictures were not permanent and were easily smeared by sweat or rain. To prevent this, the youth cut thorns from a tree and squeezed sap from its leaves to tattoo indelible images on himself.

5) Mapomiaopo ('The Story of the White Cat and the White Dog') records how a man drew dragon feet. A Dai youth named Yanzaipan cast his fishing-net upon the waters and caught the seventh Princess of the Dragon King. The Dragon King hurriedly dispatched his Minister to secure her rescue. The Minister arrived at the house of Yanzaipan. Yanzaipan threatened that if he was not given the luminous pearl from the head of the Dragon King, he would kill the Princess and make a meal of her. The Minister pondered the matter deeply as the luminous pearl was a unique treasure of the Dragon King and he would be as good as dead without it. So the Minister offered another priceless treasure called the pearl of the dragon's tail instead. This pearl could grant all wishes and so Yanzaipan eagerly agreed to collect it from the palace of the Dragon King. Yet he feared the water-dwelling dragon ghosts which specialised in eating humans and so he told the Minister that his poor swimming prevented him from attending the palace. The Minister replied that this posed no problem, Yanzaipan need only draw dragon's feet upon his own to become like a flood dragon and to enter the water without fear. Yanzaipan followed these instructions and was able to obtain the pearl which made him a Shatie (very wealthy man).

6) Zhaomengyangruohei ('Worshipping the Dragon'). In olden times, the Prince of the Zhaomengyang tusi [hereditary chief] possessed great strength and skill in martial arts. One year a long tree toppled into a dragon's cave. The Zhaopianling [tsao phae:n din 'Lord of the Land'] feared that the Prince would usurp his position and planned to trap him. He ordered the Prince to dive into the water and retrieve the tree, hoping that the attempt would kill him. When the wife of the Prince (the Dragon Princess) heard of this evil scheme she travelled from Mengyang to investigate the matter. She saw that her husband had become a great dragon in Nanliujing and, in his anger, had created a raging water tempest which engulfed the territory of the Zhaopianling. The Zhaopianling was terrified and implored the Dragon Princess to placate her husband's anger. The Dragon Princess retorted that she was the pimeng (local spirit [phi mueng]) of this place and that on the fifth day of the seventh month in the Dai calendar a sacrifice of 1,200 eggs should be tipped into the Mengyang river as an offering for her. Thenceforth the Zhaopianling designated a sacrifice to the Meng, at which time a flawless black ox (valued at fifteen yuan bankai) would be offered and the whole Meng would undertake sacrifices. Since then, the weather has favoured the crops and both man and beast have lived in peace.

7) 'The Colourful Snake King (Huashewang)' (Yiwu place-name). Once there was a Zhaomeng [tsao mueng in Lue] of the Dai dwelling in Puer who had a beautiful daughter. One day the colourful Snake King forced the Princess into his cave to coerce her consent to marriage. The Princess swore death rather than agree to such a proposal. There was a poor Dai youth of the area who daily collected fire-wood for a living. He was brave and honest and delighted in righting injustice.
After the loss of his daughter, the Zhaomeng issued a proclamation that whosoever saved her would become his son-in-law (fuma). The poor youth risked life and limb to kill the colourful Snake King and was rewarded with the Princess in marriage. The Princess made a mark beside her husband's ear to signify their betrothal. The Zhaomeng regretted his offer and attempted to pull the youth into a dragon pond to kill him. Instead of dying however, the lad became son-in-law of the Dragon King. Meanwhile, the Princess refused to re-marry and remained constant in her affections. At last her patient search for him was rewarded and she became first wife, and the daughter of the Dragon King his concubine.

8) Nanmozong ('The Story of the Great Boa') A widow gave birth to a beautiful daughter. One day, when mother and daughter were walking in the mountains they came across a bunch of mouth-watering mangoes. The mother announced that if someone could secure her these mangoes she would give them her daughter. At that moment, the great boa coiled about the trunk and dislodged the mangoes with his tail. The two women were delighted with their gain which they quickly gathered up and ate before turning homeward. When the snake had slithered down, the women were nowhere to be seen. Fortunately the boa met a rooster rooting around for food. The snake inquired after the two women but the rooster replied 'I don't know'. The boa [finally] traced mother and daughter to their home and slept in the chicken coop. When the cock crowed the daughter awoke and, on seeing the snake, rushed to tell her mother the news. They asked the snake to sleep beside their fire pot. During the night the snake attempted to heat water to get warm and, in so doing, transformed into a handsome Dai youth. The two women were overjoyed. The snake then announced his abiding love for the girl promised in exchange for mangoes and pleaded that her mother not renege. When elder sister saw the younger girl's good fortune, she also went into the mountains. There she trussed a snake and dragged it home to her bedroom only to be devoured during the night.

9) The Dai are descended from a dragon. The Sutra says that those who like to live along the river are dragons. In order to recall their ancestor the Dai tattoo their legs with a dragon-scale pattern (similar to fish-scales). Some people cap their teeth with gold to imitate those of the dragon.

10) Shepo ('The Story of the White Tiger King') One day a lone girl became thirsty while collecting fire-wood in the mountains and drank a handful of water from a pond. After returning home she became pregnant and some months later she gave birth to a daughter called Shao Shepo. The mother asked her daughter about the pregnancy. She realised that her daughter had eaten faeces of the White Tiger King and became pregnant. When the girl was grown she went in search of her father, the White Tiger King, and he admitted paternity. The girl then became his Princess, married the Dragon King's son and became a Nanzhaomeng (wife of the Zhaomeng).

11) Bamoufang ('The Story of the Pig King') In early times there were no monks and the world was only controlled by a King who invested rank willy-nilly upon the animals. The wild boar was appointed King
Pig and gifted the three great treasures of the great umbrella which upholds heaven (the wind, sun and rain). The King considered the umbrella should be armed with sharp weapons - awe-inspiring sharp teeth - so that even the most fearsome on earth would not dare approach.

12) The new daughter-in-law of a Dai household was very lazy and failed to rise even after the sun was high. Her mother-in-law was a diligent woman and greatly aggrieved by this state of affairs. Yet every time she sought to drag the girl from her bed she hauled her son out by mistake, much to his displeasure. She thereupon devised an ingenious solution and marked his ankle with charcoal to prevent further mishap when she sought out the girl.

13) The tusi feared the escape of his domestic servants and especially of his body-guards. He therefore cut marks on their bodies to discourage their flight and facilitate their return.

2. Traditional accounts of tattooing from the Buddhist classics

1) At a time now forgotten, the land was devastated by floods, the villages and montaine terraces of the Meng all submerged and it seemed the surging waters would engulf the Buddhist temples. The octagonal pavilion (a repository for Buddhist classics and chants) contained a great many sutras of the pazhao. The monks fled in confusion, seeking to save themselves. Only one young monk remained still and pondered how to save the sacred works. He was suddenly inspired and taking an iron needle, threw off his robes and began to painfully puncture the scripts on his skin.

2) The Buddhist follower Dishading (a Lohan) journeyed on foot to the Dragon City where he dressed as a beggar and sought alms. The Dragon King and his daughter took human form and came to see him. They found him to be of most pleasing appearance and the Dragon Princess was enamoured, despite opposition from her father. After the Buddhist follower departed, the Princess found herself pregnant and soon gave birth to a son. When the child grew-up he asked his mother about his father and she informed him accordingly. He then left home to seek him. The young man also became a monk and attained the status of priest at twenty years of age. The Dragon King also thought to take religious orders but the Buddhist elder replied that a dragon was not suited to be a monk. The Dragon King fervently sought to devote his body to Buddha and determined to act as a throne for him. He coiled himself up and positioned a lotus on top (Buddha was born within the lotus-petals and the Era of Sakyamuni is also termed the Lotus Period). The Dai monks admired the devotion of the Dragon and began to tattoo dragon scales (shaped as fish-scales) on their legs as a mark of respect and shared faith.

3) Bianhadelanglai ('The Tiger Drags the Crown Prince'). The Crown Prince of Mengdekasu was only seven day's old when a tiger bounded up to his bed in the Palace. The Zhaomeng, Princess, Minister and servants were all aghast, but the tiger neither mauled the child nor dragged him off. Instead, it used the claws of its front paw to draw three indelable marks on the boy's body and stood a spear beside
his bed. When the Crown Prince grew up he displayed great valour and was enfeifed as Zhaomeng.

4) Mosanhuo. A young woman abandoned her baby boy and it was carried off by a tiger who raised it with the help of Shangyaxi (the wild monk). They collected several dozen medicinal herbs and prepared a black liquid wanapi with which they tattooed a tiger-skin pattern on the boy. The effect on the boy was miraculous, he would not deign to be touched and struck out at all who approached. Weapons could not harm him but bounced or veered away instead. On reaching adulthood he was chosen by a Zhaomeng to be his son and named Jiangangxing (son of a tiger and a wild monk). He later became a zhaomidi monk.

5) Hansanyang. A Zhaomeng ordered that aluan be captured and killed outside the city and the brains sacrificed for heaven to consume. The heavenly spirit Baying became a ferocious tiger as large as an elephant and carried off aluan for the wild monk and the tiger to rear. They cared for aluan well.

6) The Tiger King was a master of tattooing. The book of divination states: 'Once there was a Bashehong (Tiger King) who told Baying (The King of Heaven) 'I am the complete man, skilled in all things. I know magic (fortune-telling and tattooing) and medicine and can revive the dead.' Baying considered this could truly be so, but also retained some doubt. One day, Baying dressed as a pauper and came before the self-proclaimed hula (diviner), Bashehong. He asked him, 'Is Baying in heaven?' to which Bashehong replied, 'He has come to earth'. Baying inquired further, 'In which village of what Meng?' Bashehong responded, 'He stands beside me'. Thereupon, Baying believed in him deeply and the people believed in him also. (according to Hinayana Buddhism and the original religion of Xishuang Banna investigation materials).

3. Latter-day Accounts of Tattooing [This section comprises a string of quotations collected by the interviewers]

'Tattooing is the li (regulation) of the Dai. The tusi [hereditary headman] has ruled that those who are not tattooed will be beheaded.' 'Those with tattoos are Dai, those without, are Han or Hani peoples'. 'Tattoos are manly, without them one is not a man.' 'Those with tattoos are heroes, true and brave men of ability. Those without, are yanlibaixiu (immature), uncouth youth, savages lacking courage. They are treated with contempt and teased by females.' 'The blacker the men are (their whole bodies tattooed), the better.' 'They are mighty and magnificent to behold, and loved by all the ladies. Unadorned men cannot find wives.' 'Those with tattoos can dwell among the Dai and pass without impediment; un-tattooed, one risks being murdered and beheaded.' 'After death, only those with tattoos can be identified by their ancestors, the others remain un-recognised.' 'Those with tattoos will also be Dai in the next life.' 'Those with tattoos can transform into tigers and their red tattoos and magic incantations make them immune to bullets. Those who scramble for medicinal herbs, those who tear apart and consume raw meat and those who run amock can become tigers.'

Some explanations were closely related to Buddhist beliefs,
such as 'Those with tattoos will ascend to heaven after death.' 'Those who were officials in this life will continue to be nobles of the Zhaomeng in the next. Those who were commoners can attain the status of good persons in the coming life.' 'Corpses without tattoos will have the skins removed to make large drums for the Buddhist temples and will suffer being beaten down through the ages.' 'Those with tattoos will be reborn as humans, the rest will become red deer, muntjac and such wild animals.' 'Those with tattoos will be born good in the next life, but those without will become balcony pillars which are defecated against.' 'Tattooing indicates one has been a monk and a believer in Buddha.' 'Women with tattoos will be reborn as men.'

4. Proverbs concerning Tattoos

'Ha yang nai ha gun yang nai, ha gun zhe wu nai si li nai', the gist of which is: 'the stone-oyster and the legs of the frogs are patterned, if elder brother's are not so, he is not a man.' 'She nai hei gun zhe hei nai', which may be rendered as: 'leopards and tigers have their patterns, if a man has no design what is he?' 'She yue yao yue nai, gun zhe yao yue yue hu'. The gist being: 'Leopards and tigers have patterns, youth ought also to have designs.' 'Ha lai bin dai, ha lun bin he', or 'the toad has wrinkles, how can it be that a man has no tattoos?' 'Those men without ability are also without tattoos.' 'Those with tattoos are men, those without are women.' 'Those with tattoos are true men, those without are white water buffaloes.'

The Tattooing Process

1. Tattooing Masters

Most masters are Kanglang (ex-monks, also called Sanla or sorcerers, a term for those in villages with religious occupations). They are conversant with religious ceremony, the Dai script and religious scriptures, with magic (divination and fortune-telling), healing and herbal medicine, singing, dancing and music-making, and with drawing, moulding Buddha-statues and with temple decoration. Some are adept in martial arts and the use of various weapons. Some monks are also sorcerers.

Knowledge of tattooing is usually transmitted from master to pupil but, as it was mysterious, it could not be passed to outsiders or women and only inherited from father to son or immediate family member. Those without sons or nephews may transmit their skill to outsiders, but only those who have paid well, provided a banquet and offered obesences.

2. Collection of Tattooing Illustrations

Each tattooing master possesses a hand-copied book of tattoos, a vast collection of detailed pictures covering human forms, those part-human part-beast, animal forms, those of birds, reptiles, insects, plants, utensils, tools, knives, architecture, Buddhist tattoos, cloud patterns, incantations and decorative tattoos. The book also contains captions explaining the function of the form. The master carries the book with him, hangs it in the street or displays it so that people can make their choice of designs from those for good luck, wealth, protection against spirits, troubles and disasters, weapons, for maintaining intelligence and good health, and for enjoying the
good-life. Whatever one wants, the master can supply it.

3. Instruments

Instruments are the key to tattooing. The Travels of Marco Polo (1287) provides the earliest account of tattooing instruments: 'five needles are combined and inserted into the skin until blood is drawn'. The instruments of recent times are a great improvement and very easy to use. The best are made of cuprite, but iron and stainless steel are also used. The metal is cast into tubes comprising three sections with each section having a different function. The first section is the main needle, a copper tube 17 cm. in length and 0.9 cm. in diameter with the tip cleft in two or four points which are pushed together somewhat like a modern fountain-pen nib. This stylus can dispense ink or other colourants. The second tube is 18 cm. long and one cm. in diameter with screw threads at either end for attaching the other tubes. It is this part which the master holds. The third part is a diamond-shaped block of lead (or sometimes a lead ball) which is 12 cm. in length and 1.5 cm. at its widest. The major function of this section is to increase the pressure being applied. The three parts form a single copper needle 40 cm. in length and weighing about 200 gm. There are six types of needle with two, four, six, eight, ten and twelve points. The two-pointed needle is the finest and the coarsest is that with twelve points. Fine needles are used to tattoo detailed patterns and the coarse needles to tattoo simple religious incantations and linear decorations.

4. Ink

Tattooing ink consists of pigment and medicine, so it contains a colour, cure and spiritual component.

a) Colourant: is only for decoration and is not tattooed deeply into the skin. Lampblack or sap from indigo leaves is mixed with gall from a bear, red deer, ox, pig or fish. Lampblack is obtained by making a fire of kindling soaked in with pine resin in a large covered pot. The ash will collect on the underside of the lid. Common Chinese black ink may be substituted for these pigments.

b) Curative: This medicinal liquid is made by very experienced tattoo masters who collect up to several dozen medicinal herbs which they wash, dry and place in a special wooden tub. In pulverising the herbs the use of iron tools is prohibited and only bone utensils such as ox or red deer horns may be used for cutting or crushing the ingredients. The crushed herbs are put in a new cloth bag and compressed with a stone to extract the medicinal liquid. It is said that this type of medicine comprises a mixture of numbing, hot and bitter tastes. The animal gall is used as an antiphlogistic to both kill disease and prolong life.

c) Spirituality: is also obtained from herbs mixed with gall and ash produced from paper inscribed with religious quotations. Otherwise, a precious stone is used to rub a stick of compressed-ink powder to make wanshapi which can be used to prevent injury from weapons.

Herbal dyes are generally dark green or light blue. Red is produced from a fruit-juice called 'moxi' but cinnabar is also used. Colours are divided into aqua, dark green, black and red, with red being the most spiritual.
5. Anaesthetic

There are two types of anaesthetic, namely herbal medicine and opium. The herbal medicine is specially collected and infused by the master using the utmost care to prevent poisoning the recipient. Indeed, most masters are old sala of long experience. As the herbal medicine is slow to take effect its anaesthetising effect is poor and clients must be men of brave heart and fortitude. Opium is a form of poisonous anaesthetic which has a very rapid and effective result. The amount administered must be measured with extreme care however, (usually an amount equivalent to the tip of the little finger) as there have been cases of death from overdose.

6. Tattooing Ceremony

Three or four different sorts are common in different areas and, in recent times, these have also been influenced by religion.

a) Secrecy. The tattooing is often undertaken deep in the mountains or on an 'isolated island' with the aim of increasing the mystery of the event. Isolated islands are places surrounded by water, symbolising separation from the world. The remote mountains and the dense forests are similarly far from human settlement. Tattooing is a kind of cruel 'art' and one must undertake aesthetic training and leave behind the secular world. In a gloomy and silent place the tattoo ancestors make their presence felt for only in the absence of human interruption will the tattooing ceremony be successful. During the ceremony a spirit altar to the tattoo ancestor is prepared using bamboo to make a large square box (50 cm. square) upon which 5 chi [167 cm.] of new white cloth is spread. A paper umbrella is erected on the box and a roll of cloth, some rice, bananas, sugar cane, candles etc. are added to symbolise the spiritual place of the tattoo ancestor bohuwubucha. The tattooing master first worships the spirits and prays for protection of the process. He then gathers all those wishing to be tattooed into a group which collectively kow-tows and prays for protection against festering sores and for potent tattoos.

b) The Buddha Provides a Proof. The tattooing master (sometimes an elder monk acting in a part-time capacity) tattoos the monks and young boys in the temple and the ceremony is the same as that for worshipping Buddha.

c) Evidence of the Buddha's Decree. The tattooing master applies the tattoos in the octagonal pavillion (a repository of Buddhist sutras). In this case an ex-priest (kanglang) is not suitable as it would be inappropriate for him to show his skill in the temple. The Buddhist superior or guba inscribes the magic figures (as the greater the spiritual knowledge of the individual, the more efficacious is the symbol).

d) Witness by the ancestor. The tattooing master places a spirit altar in his house. A picture of the tattoo ancestor is hung above and it is fearful to behold, with hair and beard forming a spiky mane, round eyes and long, sharp, protruding teeth. Its fiendish body is hairy from head to toe and it holds a magic tablet called an ang in each hand. The offerings are as above. Sometimes the tattoo master goes to the house of those who wish to be tattooed to hold a ceremony and tattoo. Tattooing masters are often itinerant as this provides a chance to display their skill. Tattooing may be undertaken in the
recipient's house, in which case a commercial transaction is involved, but no ceremony.

7. Prohibitions pertaining to those with tattoos
   1) Do not kill living thing.
   2) Do not commit theft.
   3) Do not indulge in unnatural relations between the sexes.
   4) Do not cheat people.
   5) Do not eat food which others have consumed or food which has been gnawed by rats.
   6) Do not walk beneath a bridge (as others can stand over your head and the tattoo will lose its efficacy.).
   7) Do not pass beneath the awnings of a bamboo house.
   8) Do not pass by a woman's skirt which is drying on a clothes-stand.
   9) Do not pass beneath an angled luffa (Luffa acutangula) growing on a trellis as the luffa resembles the female genitals in shape and is unclean.
   10) Do not pass beneath a bamboo tub.
   11) Do not partake of dog-meat or lamb
   12) The common people are not permitted to tattoo the pattern of the tiger (this is for those of tusi rank, but this regulation is falling into disuse).
   13) Do not permit strangers to visit your house in the month following tattooing. A sign should be placed at your entrance to prevent such an occurrence.

   Tattooed persons should adhere strictly to these precepts or their tattoos will become ineffectual and unable to prevent injury from weapons. Those who bear tattoos to which they are not entitled or who consume prohibited foodstuffs will rot and their brains become addled.

8. Payment of the Master
   The master will strike a price and receive payment before beginning a tattoo. According to our investigations the highest price is forty yuan bankai (Dian [Yunnan] currency under the old system). The usual sum is about ten yuan, but can be as little as one yuan or some eggs and cotton. There is no uniform price and fees are determined freely between the parties concerned. If sons of the higher ranks of tusi request tattoos then the price can be raised and, conversely, greatly reduced for impoverished persons.

   If an official hosts a banquet to offer thanks to a famous tattooing-master he may have a feast and slaughter a pig or ox, but the common people offer vegetarian dishes and, at a bare minimum, may only tender a meal of simple fare.

9. Age of tattooing
   This can vary greatly, ranging over 10 years old to about 50. Most people are tattooed between 12 and 30 years of age with some being tattooed in two stages: on the waist and legs when they are 15, and then on the back and chest when they are 20. Most people consider the best age for tattooing is between 20 and 25 years of age. If a recipient is only 12 or 13 years old at the time of tattooing the bones and the muscles are not yet full-formed and as the skin
stretches with later growth the pattern becomes distorted, unclear or even disappears. People around 20 years of age are considered to be fully-developed. Those who request tattoos at around the age of 50 do so to obtain longevity. Women are only partially tattooed, generally on the backs of their hands and wrists at about 20 years of age.

10. Positioning of tattoos

The Dai use both full-body tattooing and individual tattoos. Some interviewees stated that the Dai-Lue subdivision of the Dai (the Water Dai) tattoo the whole body whilst the Dai-nie subgroup (the Land Dai) are only partially tattooed, but this is not a strict distinction.

a) Full-body tattooing includes the head (skull, forehead, temples, bridge of the nose, behind and before the ears, on the lips, tongue and back of the skull [occipital bone]), all of the neck, both shoulders, the indentation above the collar-bone, the chest (flanks, arm-pits, belly and waist) upper arms, fore-arms, wrists, back of the hand, the skin between thumb and fore-finger, the knuckles, the back (buttocks and pelvic region, excluding the genitals), thighs, knees and calves. (The feet are generally not tattooed, but in our investigation we encountered a number of cases. These people are referred to as 'iron-feet'). Some people also tattoo their joints.

b) Partial body tattooing involves the upper-arms, wrists, back of the hands, the back and calves, all of which are embossed with simple linear patterns, incantations or magic symbols such as birthdays, names or humorous patterns.

11. Method of tattooing

The copper needles should be sterilised either by boiling or rinsing in herbal medicine before tattooing commences. The same process is repeated after tattooing to avoid transmitting disease. The tattooing master must worship the tattooing ancestor and pray for a safe and smooth operation. He then asks the recipient his time of birth as this may be either hard or weak (indicating a favourable or cruel fate in life). The tattooing treatment varies accordingly. If the treatment for favoured persons is administered to those of less fortunate disposition these poor souls will suffer sorely and even risk death. After ascertaining the time of birth, the strength of the pulse is checked and the complexion of the recipient is classified as being red, purple or black. Again, these require different tattooing treatment. If persons of a black complexion are tattooed three times they will become immune to injury from weapons.

The recipient is rubbed all over with antiseptic until the tattooing-master considers the person protected. Then he is administered opium as an anaesthetic.

c) The drugged individual is laid face-down or up on a grass mat and two or four strong persons steady the limbs. The tattooing-master squats beside the body (Dai people are accustomed to sit on the ground) with his feet astride or pressing down upon the part to be tattooed. He bends over and holds the tattooing stylus upright with the thumb and first two fingers of his right hand (as if holding a caligraphy brush) and makes a fist of his left, leaving the thumb and fore-finger extended to steady the stylus. He punctures the skin to a depth of 1 mm. with a downward movement and blood appears when the nib
is retracted. The master tattoos in a rapid, tapping, free-form manner.

If all goes well tattooing normally requires about one week, but if redness or swelling occurs the healing process will require much longer. On the first day the left leg is tattooed, on the second the right, the third day is for recuperation, on the fourth day the hands and arms are tattooed, on the fifth the back, on the sixth the chest and on the seventh the head. If the person is very strong, a so-called iron-man, the whole process can be completed in three to five days. Inflammation and fainting will occur for the next one or two days and the whole body will be feverish. No solid food should be consumed for four days. Instead the recipient can drink more water and take some brown sugar. On the third or fifth day scabs will form and on the fifth or seventh day these will peel off and reveal the tattoo, but this time differs. Some people take 15 days to be tattooed in four stages with three to four days of recuperation between each session. Indeed, some people even take five years between the ages of 15 and 20. At 15 years of age the legs and chest are tattooed and at 20 the back and waist. In summary, the tattooing times vary according to the stamina of the individual and sometimes an accident may occur during tattooing and severe inflammation or overdose may kill the recipient.

12. Tattooing for different sexes

Before the 1950's about 95% of all males now over 50 years of age were tattooed. Fewer people are tattooed in the areas near the interior and around the cities. Females were not generally tattooed, but this depended on location as tattooed females are relatively common in the Damenglong district of Jinghong County.

13. Ranks of tattooing

In times past, there were different classes of Dai tattoos. The Xinan Yi Fengtu Ji ('Record of Customs Among the South-western Barbarians') (11th Year of Wanli, Ming Dynasty [1583]) records that those from the the lower social ranks were only tattooed on the legs, higher ranks on the waist and officials on the shoulders. This tattoo ranking system lasted until recent times. Previously, only the nobility could be tattooed with lions, tigers and dragons or with the colour red, and commoners had to content themselves with linear patterns on their calves and forearms. Those who disobeyed this ranking system would be punished or ridiculed or their flesh rot and death result. The officials of the tusi; military officers (kunhen [Khun Ha:n]), elephant officials, horse officials, spear officials, sword officials, and his body-guards and the kunhan of large villages were required to bear tattoos with magic symbols to ensure protection against weapons. Monks were tattooed on the shoulders and novices on the fore-arms. The common-people could be tattooed on the feet and hands.

With the evolution of society, weakening of the tusi system and especially commercialisation of the tattooing system, the tattooo-masters have become money-minded and ignore the tattooing stipulations. Commoners can now tattoo any pattern whatsoever as long as they can pay. Many patterns are now popular among the masses and may be tattooed on any part of the body.
14. Types of tattoos

As tattooing is a popular Dai custom and links between religion and sorcery are strong, a great many types of tattoo can be found.

1) In tattooing it is the scars which form the pattern and the most common colourant is black.

2) Inlaying involves inserting gold or silver, a precious stone or a piece of flat metal on which a tattoo picture is carved into a cut. The skin then heals over the embedded object.

3) Swallowing a piece of flat metal on which a tattoo picture is carved or burnt paper on which a tattoo was drawn.

4) A tattoo picture marked on a piece of flat metal or paper is placed in a cloth bag and hung around the neck on a piece of string, worn on the arm or hung from the waist.

5) A tattoo pattern is drawn on cloth which is stiched to form a special, spiritual, tube-shaped wrap which is draped over one shoulder.

6) Tattoo pictures are drawn on pieces of white spirit clothing which is worn by mounted horse-men going into battle.

Tattooing is an agonising process and some have been known to run away when they could bear the pain no longer. Others have abandoned the attempt mid-way through fear, have fainted, bitten through the tip of their tongue, gnawed the pillow to a pulp or torn the mattress. The last three methods listed above have been developed as substitutes for such suffering. The Dai consider that only the technique has been changed, the significance is still the same.

The protective function of religious and superstitious tattoos

Tattooing the tiger Shehonglong protects the bearer against the tigers and leopards of the forest and against injury from weapons. Tattooing the Tiger King Bashehong protects the body and prevents injury from weapons. Tattooing the tiger and the religious term sheang gives great courage and prevents injury from weapons. Tattooing the tiger eating the pig Shelaimou signifies protection against weapons because even the pig which is flexible and fleet of foot can be consumed by the tiger, king of the beasts. Tattooing the seven-sectioned tiger can prevent injury. It is said that the Tiger King Bashe can divide into seven segments during a fight and that each segment goes in a separate direction. There are eight cardinal points but Bashe has only seven segments (four limbs, a head, body and tail) because Buddha did not give the Tiger King food. The seven-sectioned tiger is a tiger spirit similar to the tiger cub [biao] of the Han Chinese. The story of the seven-sectioned tiger is explained in detail in the text 'Bashelong'. Tattooing the King Pig Bamou protects the bearer from being gored by a boar while in the mountains. Similarly, dogs will not dare to bite or, if they do, their teeth will fail to penetrate. Tattooing the Pig King and the incantation Mouxishuang, or the Pig King and the three umbrellas of Bamoufang protects against knives and spears. Tattooing the pig spirit Moufang protects the bearer from injury by animals. Tattooing the gecko and religious quotations grants protection similar to that received from parents. Tattooing this symbol on the mouth gives eloquence and an appreciative audience. Geckos are classified as having one or two tails. The
two-tailed gecko signifies civil and martial skill, capability and universal success in business. The Gecko King had five hundred followers. Tattooing the black-scaled insect Mianbu protects the bearer from poisonous snakes or centipede bites or, if one is bitten, the animal will fail to secrete its poison. Tattooing the mole cricket Mianzhuang gives the bearer priority in becoming an army officer. Tattooing the monkey Ling gives the bearer intelligence and cunning. Tattooing a belt of linked monkeys Linglainayao engenders respectful admiration of the bearer and fearlessness in the face of death. Tattooing the peacock Luoyong gives beauty to the bearer. Tattooing the peacock spirit Jinnali grants beauty and protection. Tattooing the golden bird makes the bearer liked by all and also gives protection. Tattooing the phoenix Bahong protects the spirit of the bearer. Tattooing the Ox King Bahuai and a religious quotation prevents illness. Tattooing the Sheep King and a religious quotation earns the bearer trust and grants persuasiveness. Tattooing the Snake King prevents dog-bites and makes one fleet of foot. Tattooing the King of the Beasts Yuzhai gives protection from disasters as he is controller of the world and only he can prevent calamity. Yuzhai can fly and is empowered to travel everywhere. The text Laishaomeng provides a detailed account. The tattoo Moyalong is the great sorcerer, the tattoo ancestor and can empower the bearer. Tattooing the great sorcerer and the symbol ang can prevent disasters and offer protection against demons. Tattooing the great spirit Bayaman gives protection against spears and grants success in commercial affairs. Bayaman opposed the Buddhist monks and also went naked. His disciples killed even their own parents without conscience in order to become his tattooing pupils. Tattooing immortals gives protection against spears. Tattooing the great spirit Padong of the pointed head and covered eyes or the Pamao (also with a pointed head) gives protection against knives and all other forms of threat. Tattooing the great spirit Mianyanzhuang makes the bearer quick-witted. Tattooing the greatest spirit Lahu gives unsurpassed bravery and protection from weapons. Tattooing the classic text ‘Tanmu’ gives protection against illness or injury from weapons. Tattooing the text title ‘A, la, han’ does likewise. Tattooing the incantation Kata or the symbol Xin or Ang protects against spirits and weapons. A tattoo of the Pali character abanduo (exactly one thousand ‘o’ characters must be tattooed or the symbol lacks efficacy) acts like armour and can protect against bullets and spears. Tattooing the Buddhist Pazhao and adding the incantation Kata puts fear into ghosts. Tattooing the Buddhist pagoda Pagewa or the Buddhist temple Pasa grants the protection of Buddha. Tattooing the Buddhist jewel Pazhaoxiangse prevents pain, illness or attack by ghosts when travelling at night. Tattooing the great Buddhist ghost Papi prevents injury from knives and prevents guns from firing. Tattooing the Dragon King Bala gains protection from the dragon’s spirit and prevents drowning. Tattooing the Lion King Shexin grants beauty, protection by the spirit and prevention of injury from weapons. Tattooing the lotus Nanmo prevents one from sinking more than waist-deep or drowning while swimming, fording streams or working in the water. Tattooing the great bell Gongpalang grants beauty and prevents the bearer being drowned by water spirits. Women who tattoo a cross [+] show that they are truly Dai. Those who tattoo a weaving loom Hanpi evince their womanhood and will become men in the next
Similarly, women who tattoo the weaving loom Shabi will remain Dai in the coming life and those who are tattooed with an inverted triangle will not be used as temple drum-skins after death. Tattooing the head with Mao or Guohe protects the head from being beaten or, if one is killed, restores life the following day. Those who tattoo religious scripture and the incantation Molie will have heads of iron which cannot be penetrated by weapons or shattered by an explosion. The tattoo Mohelie works similarly and also protects the head from being struck by rocks. Tattooing a triangle made up of three dots prevents fainting. Tattooing Pali script on the tongue gives eloquent speech which is pleasing to listeners. On the neck it offers protection against weapons. It prevents the wrists from being bound or becoming sore. On the chest, waist and back it prevents injury from spears and before and behind the ears it prevents the skin rupturing if struck. Tattooing Yan on the shoulders prevents the bearer being trussed by even the strongest bonds. Tattooing Mianbu on the arms or hands gives protection against poisonous snakes and prevents sore joints. Tattooing scissors on the hands and feet prevents attack by water monsters, snakes or crabs and guards against drowning. Tattooing a red Mao on the chest causes the opponent's gun barrel to explode or fail to fire. Tattooing a snake pattern on the thighs prevents attack by dogs or leopards. Three swords tattooed on the calves give great courage. Tattooing a concentration of black tattoos on the arms, chest and back produces thick skin which weapons cannot penetrate. Tattooing rhomboid shapes on the joints prevents rheumatism and arthritis. Tattooing one's own name on the neck, arms or chest prevents one becoming lost. Tattooing one's birthday on the hands or wrists will ensure longevity.


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the correct attitude and approach for handling legal cases

1. Five points of partiality which must be avoided in handling cases.

   Great and lesser Chiefs, when handling affairs you must guard against the following:
   1) Mandaxiadi: In dealing with disputes between parties, one should acknowledge the just and identify the unreasonable. Do not confuse true and false. Do not favour family, friends or your wife and thereby distort truth.
   2) Tangshaxiadi: If you hold a grudge against one appellant, do not use this opportunity to take revenge and perjure his case.
   3) Benpaxiadi: Do not use your power to pervert justice.
   4) Liupaxiadi: Do not take bribes.
   5) Baxiadi: You should ascertain the standing of each appellant,
be he Zhao, Ba, Kun, Han or doctor, and deal with him accordingly. If you treat criminals or miscreants with fairness, they will be grateful. They will treat you as a relative thereafter and bear no grudge. Do not favour those with money or power, or consider that might is right. The actions of a man are not reasonable just because he is a Baxina (wealthy chief). Do not consider that such-and-such a person is my relative, my friend or enemy, that a person is fortunate or hapless, rich or poor; nor consider that a loafer is lazy, that a person fears caring for ghosts or lets them run amock, or is stupid, mute or taciturn, that the poor are unlucky or that the wealthy possess good fortune, or that one Meng is large and another small; such thoughts may cause you to favour or discount the appellant.

2. Cases of insubordination cannot be appealed. Common people who seek to oppose the tusi [hereditary chief], monks who oppose their superiors and servants who oppose their masters all display lack of gratitude and ignorance of reason. Appeals from these people cannot be heard. Those who show no such opposition should be treated well.

3. Key-points to be observed when solving cases. Criminals ought to be judged in accordance with the severity of the crime, for instance, theft of money should be dealt with as the crime of stealing money. One should pass judgement which accords with the wealth of the individual; is he rich or poor, an official, or from a large or small Meng? Is he a great or petty merchant? If a commoner, what is the value of his property? Only he who acts with these factors in mind can be considered a just man. It is unjust if a case is solved by one of the great chiefs without the other three in attendance. It is unjust if the four great chiefs sit judgment in a state of anger. It is also unjust if a woman presides over a meeting of these four great chiefs. If any of the three situations above applies when a case is concluded, the findings are invalid and the case should be re-opened.

4. Three methods for investigating cases. Yudimisha:

1) In seeking to determine how many among a number of suspects were involved in a crime, each should be interrogated separately. The details of the crime should be collected carefully and put down in writing after the interrogation. Each suspect should also write a confession and this should be checked against the others.

2) When interrogating the suspect, one should observe his or her face.

3) One should learn whether the ancestors, parents and the suspect himself, is of good character.

Only after observing these three points can one determine the guilty. If judgement still cannot be passed, one should read the scriptures, sacrifice to the spirits, light a fire or boil water and place an object into either, then have the suspect extract the item and ask the spirit to surmise whether the person is good or evil.

These regulations have stood from ancient times and if they are not applied then crime will become habitual.
5. Fines applying to localities which violate pacts

1) Fines applying to violation of a security pact:

   If Mengs A and B have a mutual security pact but Meng B fails to send troops to assist Meng A in resisting enemy invasion and attack, then Meng B will be penalised 33,000 liang (1,650 kilograms) of silver in accordance with the treaty. The same fine applies if Meng A is derelict in defending Meng B.

2) The three pacts which apply between large Meng, between small Meng, between Banna and between chiefs:

   The 110 chiefs of the large Meng assembled and requested Bamahuosun to establish three pacts as follows:
   Rule 1 Show loyalty and honesty and act on one's words
   Rule 2 Show mutual esteem and mutual trust
   Rule 3. Show friendly cooperation and mutual respect.

   (Here follows a list of fines as they apply to large Meng, small Meng, Banna, chiefs of the 'huailang' rank, chiefs below this rank and village chiefs. Temples which break with these three rules are not fined but need only offer atonement with candles.

Translated by Irene Bain.

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News

from East Asian Studies, Princeton University, New Jersey, USA. Emeritus Professor F.W. Mote writes: 'I am ... at present working on a project which I call "China's absorption of Yunnan 1500-1800"... I hope to visit Yunnan for some months during academic year 1990-91, principally to talk with historians from the minority peoples about their historical traditions, after which I intend to visit Thailand to compare notes with scholar friends there.'

from the Department of Anthropology and Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, New York, USA.

Mr Leshan Tan has written with extensive comments on the translations in the newsletter. We appreciate his comments and welcome similar correspondence from others. Mr Tan says that the writers of Daizu Shehui Lishi Diaocha did not have anthropological training and some use of terminology is not standard. He also points out that the ethnographies were recorded within a particular political context and should be interpreted as such.

Recent publication


The editors of Ethnology have announced the award of the first George Peter Murdock Prize for excellence in ethnology to Norma Diamond,
Professor of Anthropology at the University of Michigan, for her paper 'The Miao and poison: interactions on China's frontier', Ethnology XXVII (1), 1988: 1-25.

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chinese materials in the anu library relevant to the thai-yunnan project
(This list uses the Wade-Giles system of romanization, which is that used by the Library)

periodicals:

YŸn-nan shih fan ta hsŠeh hsŠeh pao: che hsŠeh she hui k— ksŠeh pan (Journal of Yunnan Teachers' University: Philosophy and social science edition). 1980+
(OS/Ch/Per)
YŸn-nan she hui k— hsŠeh (Social sciences in Yunnan) 1984+
(OS/Ch/Per)
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YŸn-nan min tsu kung tso (Research works on minorities in Yunnan) 1984+
(OS/Ch/Per)
Fu yin pao k‡n tzu liao D5: Chung-kuo shao shu min tsu (Reprints of articles from Chinese newspapers and journals D5: National minorities in China) 1978+
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Min tsu hsŠeh pao (Journal of nationality researches) No. 1, 1981+
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(OS/2224.4/4019)

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YŸn-nan t'ung chih kao
(General history of Yunnan)
(OS/3248/0.85)

Tien hsi
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(OS/3248/1342.1)
Tai tsu shih
(History of Tai people)
(OS/UNCAT/1326564)

Survey
Tai tsu she hui li shih tiao ch‡
(A survey on the society and history of Tai people)
(OS/UNCAT/1324802)
Hsi-shuang-pan-na Tai tsu she hui tsung ho tiao ch‡
(A comprehensive survey of the Tai society in Xishuangbanna [of Yunnan])
(OS/2224.4/1222)
Lin-ts‡ng ti ch’Ÿ Tai tsu she hui li shih tiao ch‡
(A survey on the society and history of Tai people in Lincang district [of Yunnan])
(OS/2218/7347)
Te-hung Tai tsu she hui li shih tiao ch‡
(A survey on the society and history of Tai people in Dehung [of Yunnan])
(OS/2218/2320)

Culture
Tai tsu wen hua
(Culture of Tai people)
(OS/UNCAT/1434068)

Literature
Tai tsu wen hsÝeh t‡o lun hui lun wen chi
(Symposium on Tai literature)
(OS/UNCAT/1124550)
Tai chia jen chih ko
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(OS/UNCAT/958647)
Tai chia jin lien hua
(Fourteen short novels about the peoples of Tai and Sani)
(OS/UNCAT/943175)
Tai tsu min chien chœan shuo
(Folk tales of Tai people)
(OS/UNCAT/1123017)
Tai tsu min chien ku shih hsÝan
(Selected folk tales of Tai people)
(OS/UNCAT/1327857)
Hsi-shuang-pan-na Tai tsu min chien ku shih
(Folk tales of Tai people in Xishuangbanna [of Yunnan])
(OS/5790/2077)

Amusements
Tai tsu wu tao
Costume
Tai tsu Ching-p— tsu fu shih tsu liao
(Costume of the peoples of Tai and Jingpo)
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Miscellaneous Works
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A selection from the ANU library holdings
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author names according to their own spelling where known)

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Sipsongpanna)
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praweáníá mya’lua’/ Somsak Suwaphab (Traditions of Muang Luang)
Acc. no. 1435858
riát baán 12 khl¹á’ mya’ 14/ Tawee Swangpanyangkoon (12 village rites
14 muang traditions)
Acc. no. 1435859
108 kham boáráán thai lyá/ Tawee Swangpanyangkoon (108 ancient Tai LÝ
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Acc. no. 1435860
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A DS 588 . C 52 . B8

** project bibliography

The Project will in time create a data base available to all members and others who may have a use for it. As a first step we have the first draft of a bibliography with well over a thousand items already entered. This draft is being distributed with a view to eliciting suggestions, additions, corrections from readers of the newsletter.

If you wish to receive a copy of the printout please complete the form and return it to the Editor, Thai-Yunnan Project newsletter, Anthropology, RSPacS, ANU, Box 4 Canberra, 2601, Australia.

Please send me a copy of the printout of the Project Bibliography.

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1V.A. Maslennihov, 'Uglublenie krizisa kolonial' voi sistemy imperializma', Voprosy filosofii No. 4, 1951, pp.91.
2E.M. Zhukov, in Krizis kolonial'noi sistemy, p.21.
4See Zhukov, op.cit., p.22.
6Alexandrov, op.cit., p.12.
7M. Lavrichenko, 'Bor'ba krest'ianstva kapitalisticheskikh stran za zemlyu i mir', Bol'shevik, No. 5, 1951, p.51.
8V.A. Maslennikov, op.cit. p.93.
9Mr Li Xiang Yang of the Yunnan Institute of Southeast Asian Studies is currently a Visiting Fellow in the Department of Anthropology.
10li = half a kilometer.
11Chinese scholars also refer to this period as 'primitive commune society' (the terminology may be regretted, but must be faithfully rendered)--Translator.
12A religious belief which seeks to bring a good harvest and prosperity to a village and also tests the courage of the village youths--Translator, based on author's footnotes.
13Chants usually concern ancestral history and the hopes of those seeking divination--Translator, based on author's footnotes.
14Known in Chinese as shuan xian, this expresses good will for the future and is sometimes performed with new-born babies as well.
--Translator.
15Where possible, the Lue term is given in square brackets [ ] at its first occurrence in the article.