People at the Rim: A Study of Tai Ethnicity and Nationalism in a Thai Border Village

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Anthropology
University of Toronto

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Abstract

Based on ethnographic research in Ruam Chai, a large and remote village in northern Thailand, this dissertation seeks to examine the emergence of ethnic identity and nationalistic consciousness of the Tai people within the context of Thai nation-building, state development, and the history of the area in the 20th century. The Tai—generally known as the Shan—are the predominant residents of this multi-ethnic frontier community, once occupied by the notorious opium warlord, Khun Sa, prior to absolute control and administration by the Thai state in 1982. These people migrated from various areas of Myanmar’s Shan State over different periods of time, for a variety of reasons. Due to their illegal immigration, the Thai state classifies them into different non-citizenship statuses according to their migration background as well as survey and registration periods. As a result of recent revisions of the Thai Nationality Act, the documented Thailand-born offspring of these displaced Tai, whose parents’ statuses fall into certain non-Thai categories, meet the nominal requirements for becoming naturalised.

Within the theoretical framework of constructivist approach and the notion of ethnic dynamism and nationalistic sentiments as a cultural practice in borderlands, this dissertation suggests the investigation of the Tai ethno-nationalism through three
interconnected levels of analysis: village or community, national, and transborder. On the village level, while the Tai acknowledge their ethnic diversity and have a logical, conventional system of identification among themselves; they maintain ethnic boundaries amid interactions with village members of other ethnic origins, and (re)construct identities in response to both internal and external forces. On the national level, a nation-building process has induced a stronger sense of “being Thai” to both Thailand-born Tai children and pre-existing generations of Tai. This process emphasises ethnic homogeneity—through the employment of the Thainess concept—and exclusion of the Non-Thai from the Thai, where categorically ineligible Tai are driven to embrace outlawed conduct to secure Thai citizenship. On the transborder level, movements back and forth as well as relationships across various international borders have played a vital role in constructing Tai identity and imagining the nation of the Tai people, both in Ruam Chai and beyond.
Acknowledgments

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Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1 Locating the Problem

Ethnicity as well as nationalism emerge and exist everywhere—from the least developed society to the most technologically advanced country—in varying forms and in different degrees (cf. Cohen 1996). Both socio-cultural phenomena have become popular issues of research in academia, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s when a body of knowledge on the subjects was explored and published extensively (Eriksen 2002:1). In the globalised world, where most people’s lives rely heavily on a cyber-based information technology that is capable of sending out data, news, capital, values, and even ideology from one side of the world to the other in the blink of an eye; circumstances relevant to ethnicity and nationalism have been increasing in number and extent. This contrasts with the anticipation made by prominent social theorists like Karl Marx, Émile Durkheim, and Max Weber, who indicated that in rapidly changing societies—characterised by the emergence of modernisation, industrialisation, and individualisation—such related circumstances would subside and disappear eventually (Giddens 2001:171; Eriksen 2002:2). Their predictions have not been borne out. Instead, ethnicity and nationalism prevail vigorously worldwide; and they many times give rise to misunderstanding, conflicts, and even genocide. The Holocaust and the civil war between the Sinhalese and the Tamil in Sri Lanka are recent typical examples.

Thailand, a modern Southeast Asian “geo-body” (Thongchai 1994) which emerged in the late 19th century1 (Chai-anan 2002:49), is often absurdly depicted as an ethnoculturally homogenous sovereign political entity in national(ist) narratives (see Chanwit 2008; Keyes 2006b; Anan 2005; Pinkaew 2003b). Such an imagined community (Anderson 1983), formerly the Kingdom of Siam, is nothing but an illusion obscuring the fact that Thailand is inhabited by residents of diverse ethnic backgrounds, whose ancestors came from elsewhere, or were born in or relocated to the county since the Western concept of

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1 This historical fact clashes with the mainstream national history of the country, which claims that the first Thai kingdom is Sukhothai (1238–1438).
“border” and their demarcation technology were unknown in Siam and her neighbouring kingdoms. The distorted perception of ethno-cultural singleness has a great impact on the policy of nation-building which mainly focuses on the homogenisation of citizens through a recently invented ideology: so-called “Thainess” (Wyatt 2003:1), another illusion that has never been clearly defined (Anan 2005:226; Thongchai 1994:5-6, 9, 169). By disregarding the very essence of the country’s ethnic pluralism, the term “Thai”—treated as a collective national identity—has been imposed on all legally recognised subjects of the state. Meanwhile, the aforementioned nationalist practice also discriminates against ethnic minorities, who are viewed as “Non-Thai” (see Keyes 2006b; Reynolds 2002; Pinkaew 2003b; Prasit 2001). These marginalised people cannot avoid becoming victims of structures, who eventually turn into “actual agents” struggling within these structures (Bourgois 2003:143). Last but not least, it is noteworthy that such a misconception plays an unfortunately central role in shaping assumptions as well as shaping a conventional paradigm; both of which are difficult to shift and difficult to deconstruct to allow for the unbiased investigation of ethnic groups in the Thai society (Anan 2005:226).

Owing to conflicts between Myanmar’s military government and ethnic minority insurgents, which erupted and have been brought into view for decades; geographical conditions at Thailand-Myanmar boundary, which facilitates illegal transborder movements; and Thailand’s economic growth particularly in an industrial sector, which requires a great deal of workforce; Thailand has become an ideal destination for a massive influx of ethnic peoples from Myanmar. Most, if not all, of them entered Thailand unlawfully to break free from the oppression of their military junta as well as to find better economic opportunities. Among thousands of migrants from Myanmar is the “Tai” [taj2].

2 In fact, the Shan State is inhabited by a wide range of Tai-speaking groups, which readers would see in forthcoming chapters. It is my intention to use the term “Tai,” as a collective ethnic identity and nationalist sentiment, for the people whose languages are classified under the same family. Such identity and consciousness have been formed after the emergence of Shan State in a milieu of nationalist movements (see Samerchai 2009).

3 According to Jit (2001:356), the term “Tai”—as a language and a language family—(see Diller 2002) could be pronounced in two ways. On one hand, the term is pronounced “Thai” (ไท) [aspirated] by the Thai people in the central, northeastern, and southern regions; the Laotians in the northern, central, and southern regions; the Phu Thai in Sipsongchuthai; and the Phu Thai in northern Vietnam. On the other hand, “Tai” (ไต) [un-aspirated] is pronounced by Thais in Northern Thailand, the (Tai) Lue in Xishuangbanna, the (Tai) Lue in the northernmost area of Laos, including the Tai Long and the Tai Khamti in the Shan State, who commonly use the consonant “n”
or widely known to many people—Western explorers, missionaries, colony’s officers, and even intellectuals (e.g., Leach 1954; Keyes 1995a; Tannenbaum 1987) in particular—as “Shan.” Despite a wide range of their subgroups, in Thailand they are stereotypically designated “Thai Yai” by both authorities and the Thai society in general.

Over the past years, although Tai speakers were studied by both Thai and foreign scholars in many aspects—traditions, language, history, political movements, and immigration, for instance; it appears that the number of researchers solely devoted to ethnic dynamism of this group is very limited. On that account, as raised by Sunait Chutintaranond—a leading Thai historian—in the wrap-up session of the International Conference, Performing Arts, and Exhibitions on Shan Studies recently organised in Bangkok⁴, “We still don’t know much about the Tai as an ethnic group.” His view conforms to Somphong’s standpoint, “We only recognise the Thai Yai from their group’s name. Our knowledge on their actual society, language, and culture is very little” (Somphong 1995:18). What the Thai people, and probably other ethnic groups, know about the Tai has been primarily drawn from a series of false impression, largely created by mass media: their involvement in drugs, insurgencies to the Government of Myanmar, and illegal immigration. As a result, a body of knowledge on ethnic consciousness of the Tai has not been widely produced and distributed (Anan 1995:9).

Apart from the fact that generally “ethnicity and self-formation processes are relatively new areas of interest in Thai society, and they have yet to be substantially examined” (Anan 2005:232), a possible reason as to why research on ethnic dynamism of the Tai is still in an early phase is twofold. Firstly, compared to scholars working on ethnic identity formation of the hill tribes (e.g., the Hmong, the Lahu, the Akha, and the Karen), the Chinese, and the Muslims; there is a small number of academics whose attentions are specially paid on the Tai people over the given issues. Secondly, as the most crucial drawback to both Thai and foreign scholars, due to the nature of research issue which is

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(non-aspirated) instead of the consonant “n” (aspirated) in almost every word. Despite the difference in pronunciation, therefore, Jit (2001:356) indicates that Tai (ไท) and Thai (ไทย) are the same word. As an ethnonym/self-reference, however, it should be noted that the terms “Tai” and “Thai” (including Thai Yai) are pronounced differently. That is to say, “t” in the former is a non-aspirated allophone while “th” in the latter is an aspirated allophone.

⁴ The event, which was organised for the first time, took place at Chulalongkorn University during October 15 to 17, 2009.
ethno-politically sensitive, it is unlikely to receive permission from the Government of Myanmar to conduct ethnography, or even short-term research, in the Shan State—the current largest bounded, imagined domain of the Tai. Alternatively, an endeavour might be rewarding if a study is informally conducted through a visit or cultural exchange, for example, the research on Tai communities and their cultural maintenance carried out by Thammasat University’s team of anthropologists (see Sumit and Samerchai 1999; Sumit et al. 2002). Accordingly, since the publication of Leach’s notable book, “Political Systems of Highland Burma” (1954)—which deals with Kachin-Tai structural opposition relations, no traditional ethnography on the consciousness of Tai ethnicity and nationalism have been done in the Shan State. Regardless of this obstruction, there has been an enthusiastic movement, initially promoted by Thai governmental organisations, on “Tai Studies” since the 1980s (Keyes 1995b:137; 2006b:107). Over the past two decades, this academic trend has sparked considerable interest of Thai and non-Thai scholars, those from the Australian National University (e.g., Wijeyewardene 1990; Terwiel and Ranoo 1992; Diller 1994) under an academic activity called the “Thai-Yunnan Project” are at the forefront, in studying Tai-speaking subgroups both in Thailand and particularly nearby countries. Among Thai anthropologists themselves, it appears that a number of monographs based on ethnographic research conducted outside the country has been increasing significantly. This fashion is clearly reflected through samples of work in several geographic areas such as India’s Assam (see Suddan 2009; Damrongphon 2002), northern Vietnam (see Yukti 2007; Phichet 2004; Sumit 2001), and China’s Yunnan Province (see Yos 2001; Wasan 2005; Aranya 2007; Sumit and Samerchai 2003). In spite of that, there is a small amount of intensive fieldwork carried out on the Tai (see, for example, Niti 1995, 2004; Wandee 2002; Amporn 2008) mostly in North Thailand, a next-door-neighbour to Myanmar’s Shan State and a region, perhaps, harbouring the largest Tai populace outside their homeland. This excludes those whose predecessors had settled in Thailand since ancient times.

The subjects of this study are the Tai and their offspring—born in or outside Thailand—who migrated to the country from different areas of the Shan State, which has been completely annexed to Myanmar since the end of the Second World War. Most of them came directly to Ruam Chai, a village in northern Thailand once occupied by Khun Sa—a late infamous drug warlord—while many others inhabited some places in the
northern region prior to a relocation to this large, multi-ethnic community. The arrival of these people did not comply with the Thai state’s immigration regulations. Therefore, they live their lives with difficulty in Thailand as stateless people or, in other words, the “others” on whom the Thai authority exerts Foucaudian “technology of power” (Keyes 1995b:137) by restricting their free movements as well as by classifying them into varying non-citizenship statuses. Such strategies have been employed in order to detach them—Non-Thai—from the entire registered “Thai” nation.

Even though the collective identity issue introduced previously is not new to those who work on ethnicity or nationalism, its “place” remains crucial in the present-day academic circle since it could be a focal point of investigations about migrants, displaced people, and stateless persons, who fall into situations where “identities are increasingly coming to be” (Gupta and Ferguson 1992:9). It would be even more interesting and challenging if we look into the identities of these people in frontier areas because, as Flynn (1997:312) suggests, “[b]orderlands, both literal and figurative, are sites where political, cultural, and social identities converge, coexist, and sometimes conflicts.” Moreover, the border regions are also “an interstitial zone of displacement and deterritorialization that shapes the identity of the hybridized subject” (Gupta and Ferguson 1992:18).

In the light of these rationales, the study of the Tai people who are on the periphery, both geographically and socially, of the Thai state seeks to find explanations for the following research questions: a) How have ethnic identities and the nationalist consciousness of the Tai in Ruam Chai been constructed/reconstructed in the face of interactions with internal and external forces? b) To what extent do the nation-building of the Thai state as well as the Tai’s need to be naturalised citizens have an impact on ethnic identities and nationalist sentiments of the Tai? c) In what ways has the border affected and influenced an ethnic identity formation as well as a national consciousness of the displaced Tai people?

I hope that this dissertation would widen a horizon of knowledge on Tai ethnicity and nationalism, which reveals power-embedded relations between the state and the Tai issues that have been raised by the narrowest of margins. In addition, it is an expectation that my study would contribute to the development of anthropology of borders, both in the international context and, especially, in Thailand, where this branch of the discipline is still
in its early phase. Furthermore, due to the fact that over the past years in Thailand “research on ethnic groups has less impact on the Government’s policy-making; and they fail to promote acknowledgement in an ethnic diversity and respect for a dignity of ethnic people as human beings to the whole society” (Anan 2005:232), the study would urge the Thai government to perceive ethnic circumstances from a holistic, multi-angle perspective. It would also encourage the Thai state to deal with stateless people and related problems from root causes. Above all, I expect that this ethnography would be an alternative channel to transmit “voices” of marginalised people to be “heard” and “recognised” by Thai society, where the misconceptions about the Tai and other ethnic groups, including stateless peoples, are still extant.

1.2 Conceptualisation of Tai Ethnicity and Nationalism

This research examines the Tai ethnicity and nationalism within a conceptual framework, which is articulated by three thematics. Each of them will be discussed in detail as follows:

1.2.1 Ethnicity, Nationalism, and Their Relationships

When it comes to the term “ethnicity,” for many people, there is a tendency to simply think of it as a cultural group or ethnic category to which they consider or believe that they belong or they observe. Ethnicity may also have been a category required to complete an ethnic background section in an official document, a visa application form, or a criminal record, for instance. As a research issue, ethnicity has gained considerable interest from academics since the late 1960s (Eriksen 2002:1), more specifically after the best-known seminal book of Fredrik Barth’s “Ethnic Groups and Boundaries” (1969a) was published. Although a modern sense of this “open-ended concept” (Fee and Rajah 1993:243) was first used by W. Lloyd Warner during the Second World War (Sollors 1996:vii) and the definitions of ethnicity have been increasing in number, people who write about or research on ethnicity seem to avoid giving the meaning of the term (Eriksen 2002:11). Abner Cohen (1996:370) states that this ambiguous term “has been defined in a variety of ways, depending on the discipline, field experience, and interests of the investigators.” Here, the term is not simply employed in a sense that most people might understand.
Instead, it is used specifically in a relational way to refer to the way in which people attach themselves to a particular social entity “in the course of social interaction” (Cohen 1996:370) with members of other groups, as described by Eriksen (2002:12-13),

Ethnicity is an aspect of social relationship between agents who consider themselves as culturally distinctive from members of other groups with whom they have a minimum of regular interaction. It can thus also be defined as a social identity (based on a contrast vis-à-vis others) characterised by metaphoric or fictive kinship [...]. When cultural differences regularly make a difference in interaction between members of groups, the social relationship has an ethnic element. Ethnicity refers both to aspects of gain and loss in interaction, and to aspects of meaning in the creation of identity. In this way it has a political, organisational aspect as well as a symbolic one.

In the next subheading, the concept of ethnicity will be explored with the view that ethnicity does not naturally exist in a vacuum. Rather, it, as well as defining ethnic groups, is a cultural construction, which has been formed through discursive practices (Barker 2008:249) in the face of power relations between ethnic groups, who try their best to protect interests of their own group.

Another word that is commonly referred to by scholars whose work associated with an identification of ethnic identities is “nationalism,” a recent research issue in anthropology, compared to its address in political science, macrosociology, and history (Eriksen 2002:97). Described by several anthropologists as a “variant of ethnicity” (Eriksen 2002:100) or “transformed ethnicity” (Banks 1996:156; see Smith 1986), nationalism tends to go hand in hand with ethnicity even though the building of certain nation-states could happen in the absence of an ethnic concern (Eriksen 2002:7, 97, 115-118). In general, many people are aware of nationalism as something relatively political in character. They also think that nationalism has little or nothing to do with nationalist ideologies. Patriotic sentiments, in fact, are all around, and they have been represented symbolically and literally in our day-to-day lives. As Eriksen suggests, “the nation is not just reproduced through state social engineering and major upheavals such as war, but also through everyday practices. For one thing, sport is a ubiquitous presence in most contemporary societies, and it often has a nationalist focus.” (Eriksen 2002:101; emphasis in original). Despite the fact that the term has been differently and widely defined by intellectuals from several fields of study, in general, explanations for an emergence of
nations tend to fall into one of the two opposite models: modernism and parennialism (Banks 1996:129).

The first model—modernist viewpoint—maintains that nationalism is a political doctrine that has been brought into view since the 18th century, and has been diffused throughout the world subsequently (Banks 1996:125). Among influential elucidations within this paradigm, which has generated extensive arguments and has produced substantial publications in academia since the 1980s, is that proposed by Ernest Gellner and Benedict Anderson. Through his prominent work, Gellner, who produces a European-based “econo-historical argument” (Banks 1996:129) states that “[n]ationalism is primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent” (Gellner 1983:1). Such a definition implies that a nation-state—as a phenomenon formed in modern societies, which its emergence is in a close connection with industrialism—is “a state dominated by an ethnic group, whose markers of identity (such as language or religion) are frequently embedded in its official symbolism and legislation” (Eriksen 2002:98). Based on his explanation, social conditions characterised by the embodiment of high culture, cultural homogeneity, and standard education system account for manifestation of nationhood sentiments (Banks 1996:126).

Meanwhile, a “techno-historical argument” (Banks 1996:129) on the rise of nations proposed by Anderson is a parallel development. Unlike Gellner, according to Banks, Anderson does not rely his rationalisation profoundly on a European context; and he scrutinises nationalism “more as a process than a conscious ideology” (Banks 1996:124). In addition, his perspective on nationalism is more anthropological than Gellner’s, and it is his argument that induces us to a study of ethnicity (Banks 1996). “Nations,” as defined by Anderson (1983), are “imagined communities.” The most crucial condition that gives rise to nationalist consciousness is “print capitalism” and print technology, which are represented in forms of cultural texts ranging from a census to a map, and a museum (Anderson 1983:163-185). These state’s tools allow people to visualise a political entity known as a “nation,” which in point of fact “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson 1983:6). Thongchai (1994)’s account for the coming of Siam corroborates Anderson’s “constructivist”
explanation (Thongchai 2009). In “Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation,” Thongchai suggests that Siam had been imagined through a map, a recently invented text, or in his words, “[a] map created a nation” (Thongchai 1994:174). Anderson’s idea is also significantly reflected in the dissertation of Amporn (2008), who argues that not only do the cross-border flows of Tai mass media—pop music in particular—play a vital part in forming imagined community of Tai migrants in the city of Chiang Mai, but also their imagined transnationality.

On the other pole of the discourse, parennialism—or primordialism as called by Thongchai (2009), which was pioneered by Anthony Smith, argues that socioeconomic conditions regarded as the crucial factor for the emergence of nations, according to modernism, could only unify people impermanently (Smith 1986). What would be capable of maintaining an “ethnic”—an ethnic community which has become apparent prior to nation-states—is a myth-symbol complex that comprises myth, memories, values and symbols (Smith 1986:15-16). Such a complex was distributed among members of societies, and was transmitted from generation to generation until ethnic communities reemerged as nation-states in the modern world (Banks 1996:130). According to Smith, the ethnie indeed could bring about a cultural uniformity, one of essential prerequisites for nationhood as asserted by Gellner (Banks 1996:129). In ancient times there was an idea that seems comparable to the notion of national identity created in modern societies. Additionally, there were also movements that bear a resemblance to the present-day’s nationalist feelings, particularly a yearning to take back an occupied territory and an antagonism towards the threat of any other ethnic category (Smith 1986:11-13). In brief, within a parennial-based framework, the origin and growth of recent nations is linked to pre-existing state of ethnicity as well as ethnocentrism (Suthep 2005:37). Therefore, as Isiksal (2002:8) suggests; compared to Gellner’s social roots of nations and nationalism, Smith “provides more cohesive theoretical explanation on the relationship of ethnicity to nationalism.” His postulation has been verified by ethnic revivals taking place in different nation-states at the present time (Isiksal 2002:13).

It should be noted here that this dissertation seeks no conclusion whether or not nationalism (or “ethnic community” to use Smith’s term) has been a phenomenon which appeared and coexisted with human beings a long time ago, or if it is an “invention” of
modern-industrial societies the same way Gellner, Anderson, and many others have tried to
tell us. This dissertation is, instead, an effort to contend that ethnicity and nationalism are
related concepts and twin circumstances (see also Banks 1996; Isiksal 2002; Eriksen 2002;
Donnan and Wilson 2001), and that it is impractical to examine them separately (Calhoun
1993:235). An exploration of nationalism would allow for a better understanding of states’
vital roles in shaping the identities of their subjects (Banks 1996:122)—especially illegal
migrants, which you shall see from the case of the Tai in Ruam Chai. Furthermore, a lack
of sufficient attention on ethnicity by Gellner and Anderson (see Banks 1996) is
responsible for an inability of their arguments to demonstrate a close relationship between
ethnicity at a local community level and nationalism at a state level (Eriksen 2002:99).
Therefore, this dissertation—still, through the Tai case—is ambitiously aimed to fill that
gap by showing how tightly ethnicity is interwoven with nationalism on the
aforementioned two levels of the phenomena. The picture of a fluid nature of ethnic
identities and nationalist consciousness of the Tai people in a frontier area; that is to say, a
switch from being an ethnic group or ethnic minority to being a nation upon border-
crossing (cf. Eriksen 2002:119), would be also presented in this thesis.

1.2.2 Tai Ethnicity within a Constructivist Approach

In general, the two opposite conceptual models widely employed in research on ethnicity
and relevant phenomena are primordialism and situationism.⁵ According to primordialism,
which focuses on a psychological manifestation of an ethnic group (Cerroni-Long
1997:60); the awareness of a common ancestor, language, religion, origin, as well as bio-
physical characteristics are embedded in the perception of an ethnic group’s members by
means of so called enculturation. As a result, the members have a sense of belonging, and
adhere to their own group. This approach treats ethnicity as “a permanent and fundamental
aspect of human identity, expressed either alone and for its own sake, or in relations with
differently ethnic others” (Banks 1996:185). Meanwhile, situationism (e.g., Barth 1969a
and 1969b; Cohen 1969; Nagata 1974) proposes that social, economic, and political
circumstances directly influence ethnic identities formation. This approach holds that

⁵ It is also called “circumstantialism” or “instrumentalism” by some writers.
Ethnicity is a dependent variable that could be changed or manipulated according to environments as well as socio-cultural and politico-economic contexts. Even though cultural features or contents have a marginal place in situationist approach, their importance could be thought of only as “diacritical markers” (e.g., dressing and language) and “value orientations” (e.g., morality and social norms) of an ethnic group, not determinants of ethnicity (Banks 1996:13). Despite such a polarisation, nowadays numbers of scholars working on ethnicity widely acknowledge the complementarity of the two approaches. Nagata (1974), among others, who once remained herself in a situationist niche when exploring the formation of Malay identities, suggests that “both the circumstantialist and the primordial approaches to ethnicity can be accommodated” (Nagata 1981:111). This proposition is also reflected in Keyes’s point of view raised by Gladney (2004:157-158): “Most theorists now conclude that ethnicity cannot be reduced to a means-ends calculus or primordial attachment, but must involve a combination or dialectical interaction of two main aspects of identity: culturally defined notions of descent and sociopolitical circumstance.”

In addition to the integration between the two approaches, the development of situationist-based ethnic studies has given rise to constructivism, “a coherent theory of ethnicity” as described by Sokolovskii and Tishkov (1996:192). The new approach underlines “the contingency and fluidity of ethnic identity, treating it as something which is made in specific social and historical contexts, rather than (as in primordialist arguments) treating it as a ‘given’” (Sokolovskii and Tishkov 1996:190). The strong points of constructivism could be summarised as follows:

Constructivism has a special significance for these reasons. First, sensitivity to context which could be viewed as the basic feature of relativistic theories of ethnicity. Their stress on its relational character and situational dependence made it possible to study ethnicity in the contexts of different ‘levels’ and ‘contextual horizons’: the transnational (as in Wallerstein’s theory of the world system) and within the nation-state (M. Hechter’s theory of internal colonialism), between groups (F. Barth’s theory of ethnic boundary maintenance) and within groups (psychological theories of reactive, symbolic, demonstrative ethnicity, stigmatized identity etc). These approaches are cumulative from the point of view of scale. Second, all of these approaches converge on the problematics of descent and kinship in ethnic identity formation, and these could be viewed as a common conceptual field for testing different hypotheses. Third, the specific experience of
the post-communist world, particularly Russia, contains a plethora of examples of constructed and mobilized ethnicity, thus forming a unique field for possible integration of the constructivist and instrumentalist perspectives. (Sokolovskii and Tishkov 1996:192)

Constructivist perspectives on ethnicity emerged and have been molded within postmodern paradigm. This results in an idea that regards ethnicity as a phenomenon created through discursive practices in a specific socio-historical context (Barker 2008:249-250), and an emphasis on dialogue of groups’ members instead of their ethnic identities and boundaries in the face of power relations (Sokolovskii and Tishkov 1996:192). In this approach, ethnic identity is not considered as a fundamental condition of a society, but a social/cultural construction or a tradition “invented” only in the modern history of humankind (Hobsbawm 1983). As Gladney indicates, “the formation of ethnic identity in the modern nation-state is a process of dialogical interaction between self-perceived notions of identity and sociopolitical contexts, often defined by the state.” (Gladney 2004:159). In a similar way to Gladney’s view, Keyes also clearly states that ethnicity is “the product of the rise of the modern nation-state” (Keyes 2006a:3).

In Thailand, the very first systematic exploration of ethnic identification of Tai-speakers—specifically, the Lue—was conducted in the mid-1960s (see Moerman 1965). However, it is the constructivist-influenced work produced in the first half of the 1990s that laid the foundations for a subsequent development of research on Tai identity and nationalism. In the paper entitled “Thailand and the Tai: Versions of Ethnic Identity,” Wijeyewardene focuses on Thailand’s national boundaries, which have been created presumably in modern times by the Thai state (Wijeyewardene 1990). He suggests that a nation-building process has led to an attempt to fill those boundaries with Tai/Thai-speaking peoples, whose ethnicity—which in fact is “various and malleable” (Wijeyewardene 1990:71)—is constructed in connection with the invented “three social facts: being Tai (or Thai), speaking Tai (or Thai), and being Buddhists” (Wijeyewardene 1990:66). Such identities have been deliberately imposed on citizens of multifarious ethnic

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6 In the second half of the 1990s, there were some field researches carried out in Mae Hong Son Province. These works, of which concentrations are not on ethnicity and nationalism, include a belief system and religious ideology of the Tai (Durrenberger 1983b; Eberhardt 1988), and their agricultural and economic life (Durrenberger and Tannenbaum 1990), for instance.
origins across Thai territory, which in the premodern time its supremacy had never strived to “bring Tai-speakers under unified rule” (Wijeyewardene 1990:49). As a modernist and constructivist, five years after the publication of the aforementioned work, Keyes’s argument on an identity of the Tai in Thailand and nearby nation-states was made through his paper, “Who are the Tai? Reflections of the Invention of Identities” (1995b). Keyes argues that even with a creation of genealogical records—i.e., myths—in ancient times, the Tai speakers did not “situate them as members of communities defined as Tai” (Keyes 1995b:139). In his view, the category Tai “have been invented by others and by themselves” (Keyes 1995b:152), and their nationalistic sense has a close association with the formation of modern nation-states and the emergence of globalisation. As he puts it,

[T]he recognition of kinship among (some) Tai-speaking peoples is a product not of objective linguistic or ethnolinguistic characteristics but of ethnic and national processes activated first by the creation of modern nation-states and then by the recent intensified flows of people, goods, and information across the boundaries of nation-states. (Keyes 1995b:137)

Due to the domination of the constructivist viewpoint in the academic circle together with a significant growth in Tai studies, anthropological studies—particularly those produced by Thai scholars—on the ethnicity of Tai speakers have been increasing in number. These ethnographies, which many of which were conducted outside Thailand, are based on the notion that ethnicity becomes visible in the face of power relations that are exemplified by various forms of symbolic negotiation between Tai people and a dominant ethnic group. Among Thai anthropologists that develop their work in this direction is Yos, who wrote “Lak Chang”7 (2000, 20018), a monograph on a reconstruction of Tai identities in a rapidly-growing rural area of China’s Dehong Dai–Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture in Yunnan Province. In the same way as Keyes (1995b:151), Yos’s idea was in part drawn from that of Tanabe (1991:3), who states: “the ethnic identity of a particular group is constructed in a continual and complicated process not only by external forces and arbitrary labeling by outsiders but also by their own social process of creating a self-image” (cf. Cohen 1969). Based on his fieldwork, Yos argues that winds of change

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7 The pseudonym of his research village.
8 An English edition of this book was published in 2001 (see Yos 2001).
generated by globalisation along with the favourable political atmosphere in the Chinese society since the 1980s onwards has provided the Tai with more opportunities to assert their existence as an ethnic group. This ultimately leads to the reconstruction of identities for the Tai people in Lak Chang for negotiating with the Han Chinese, who currently intrude onto their geographical and cultural spheres.

Inspired by Tapp (1989)’s argument that accentuates the formation of ethnic identities in the context of a historical consciousness, and Sahlins (1985:55)’s view that looks upon culture as “the organization of the current situation in the terms of a past”; Yos explains the way in which the Tai have tried to define their identities from certain cultural aspects already created in their original traditions, and to rearrange their cultural values in order for them to conform with economic, social, and political conditions (Yos 2002:23). His research on the reconstruction of Tai identity, therefore, is a study of Tai people’s resistance to hegemonic Chinese culture through three crucial cultural symbols, the idea motivated by Leach’s three principal characteristics of Tai communities (see Leach 1954). These symbols are rice, as a representation of the Tai peasant community; poi [pɔj⁴] (event, festival, celebration), as a symbol of Tai belief and their devout adherence of Buddhism; and marriage, as a part of a Tai community reproduction process (Yos 2000:234-245). The examination of Tai-Chinese symbolic opposition is also found in Aranya (2007)’s ethnography. Influenced by Appadurai (1996)’s concept of “community sentiment,” Aranya, who follows in the footsteps of Yos—her supervisor—indicates that the Tai people in Ruili and Mangshi⁹ are in favour of the consumption of Thai products such as traditional dresses, cosmetics, and shoes brought into their land through overland trade routes and the Mekong. Despite a higher price, the Tai, who seem to have a sense of ethnic connection with the Thai in Thailand, would rather buy Thai commodities, of which quality—in their eyes—is much better than that made in China and Myanmar. To the Tai, on one hand, the use or possession of Thai products symbolises higher socio-economic status. On the other hand, “objects” from the land of their “kin” are employed as “cultural strategy” (Aranya 2007:226-232) in the stabilisation of Chinese hegemony by the Tai, who have been in the context of “historical suppression” (Aranya 2007:233) for centuries.

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⁹ The towns close to Myanmar – Chinese border. Both of them are located in the Dehong Dai–Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture.
The exercise of a past, which could be either mainstream history or legend, as a critical ground in the construction of ethnic identity is what Yos describes as “the fabrication of a past in the practice of self-identity creation” (Yos 2000:225). This practice is observable from the way in which different ethnic groups—such as the Hui—have defined their identities. According to the national survey, of ten Muslim nationalities in China, the Hui is the largest in terms of population number, and they form the country’s second largest minority group (Gladney 2004:152). By virtue of the fact that the Hui people live dispersively—both in urban and rural areas—across the nation, and that they “do not have a language of their own, but speak the dialects of the other ethnic groups with whom they live, mainly the Han” (Gladney 1998b:37), and they “generally do not have the peculiar dress, literature, music, or the other cultural inventories by which more ‘colorful’ minorities are portrayed” (Gladney 2004:152); it is relatively difficult to pinpoint with any certainty who the Hui are and what their shared distinctiveness could be. The group’s considerable heterogeneity brought on difficulty to the ethnographer during his multi-sites fieldwork, as he admits, “the more I traveled, the less I found that tied all of these diverse peoples together into one ethnic group” (Gladney 2004:153). Because of the limitation of primordialism and situationism in an identification of the Hui, according to the author, the construction of Hui identity needs to be examined through a “dialogical approach” (see Gladney 1991, 1998b, 2004), which stresses “a dialogical interaction of shared traditions of descent with sociopolitical context, constantly negotiated in each politico-economic setting” (Gladney 2004:152).

Gladney’s intensive fieldwork enabled him to discover that the Hui in Quanzhou City in southern Fujian Province, many of whom have already converted to other religions and have incorporated numerous Chinese cultural aspects into their lives, distinguish themselves or construct their identities with reference to a traceable “past.” Such a past is, in fact, a story recounting the arrival of their Arabian and Persian forebears since ancient times. Compatible with the claimed past, innumerable historical artifacts as well as archaeological sites, particularly tombs of Hui members making a substantial contribution to the Chinese Empire in different roles from the 11th through 19th centuries including that of Hui ancestors from Arabia and Persia (Gladney 1998b:139), found in the area have been employed as crucial supporting evidences in the assertion of a genealogical relation to their
Hui ancestors. By doing this, they were recognised—after the failure of the previous effort—as an official minority nationality by the State Commission for Nationality in 1979 (Gladney 1998b:135-136) like their Hui counterparts in other regions, who were registered in such a title many years earlier (Gladney 2004:155). Accordingly, the affirmation of being the direct descendants of foreign Muslims, which is regarded as the most important—and the most beneficial—identity of the Hui in the southeastern coast of China, is the “important texts of their present Hui identity” (Gladney 1998b:139).

Apart from the Hui case, the maneuvering of the past as a means of constructing an identity, which abides by existing situations or sociopolitical contexts, could be scrutinised through Tai-speaking people. Among the various Tai subgroups is the Tai Long [taj^4-lo:ŋ], the major Tai group most prominently occupying the western sphere of Nam Hkong [nam^5-kho:ŋ]—also widely known as “Salween”—in the Shan State, who, as Samerchai explains, try to restore or redefine their identity by making use of legends in a process of revitalisation of ethnic consciousness (Atsama 2000:146). In other words, this cultural practice is “the reinvigoration of the past to benefit the present” (Samerchai 2009:204). The Tai Long—specifically those inhabiting major towns in the northern region of Shan State—, according to Samerchai (2009:117)—have established a strong local cultural network, which has hopes for preserving Tai culture as well as for reviving their own roots. Such a network recently created certain symbols—based on best-known Tai myths—in particularly Selan, a large village established in the vicinity of Namkham in northern Shan State, to glorify their heroic figures and to underline the importance of the area as the birthplace of Tai civilisation. The manipulated legends include great Tai kings—Hso Khan Pha and his younger brother’s act of bravery, and Princess Monla’s

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10 Members of the Tai Long tend to identify themselves simply as “Tai.” Compared to other Tai-speakers in the Shan State, the Tai Long group represents the majority, especially in the eastern part of Shan State. Despite the fact that there are several Tai subgroups in Shan State, in Thailand they are usually referred to as “Thai Yai.” See details on different Tai subgroups in subsequent chapters, Chapter 4 in particular.

11 Tai settlements in the Mao Basin—commonly regarded as the core area of the ancient Mao Kingdom, which at the present time culturally includes Tai communities in southwestern Yunnan and that in Northern Shan State.

12 The town of Namkham is located near Shweli River (or called “Nam Mao” by the Tai and “Lung Chuan Chiang” by the Chinese), which forms a part of Myanmar-China boundary.

13 See details in Chapter 2.
tragic story.\textsuperscript{14} Against a background of rigorous politico-cultural domination policy imposed on all ethnic minorities by Myanmar’s military junta, the Tai Long residents of Selan have redefined and reinterpreted—with reference to the mentioned legends—archeological traces found in the area as sacred domains of the Tai. Interestingly enough, although in the past the local people might be aware of these ancient remains, they did not look at them as sacrosanct spaces (Samerchai 2009:118).

In order to prevent the fragile relationships between themselves and the Burmese government from getting worse, the aforementioned signifying practice has been operated strategically through Tai cultural symbols, which are constructed compatibly with the Burmese culture. This could be epitomised by the building of Princess Monla Shrine, which displays a statue of her, and of other memorials to justify the story about the Tai Princess and to assert her relevance to those sites. Moreover, another important shrine was constructed for keeping figures of legendary Tai kings. Local people know that the sculptures represent Hso Khan Pha and his brother even though the actual names of the two are not revealed publicly. They only call the two figurines—as a whole—“Sao Kao Mong,” literally the Lord of Nine Towns, of which the meaning is the same as “Ko Myo Shin”\textsuperscript{15} in Burmese language (Samerchai 2009:118-119). It is clear that the Tai people in Selan decided to make their ethnic consciousness come alive by exploiting the story of Princess Monla not just because it is quite popular among both the Burmese and the Tai\textsuperscript{16}, but also because many Burmese people worship the Princess as nat—a guardian spirit in Burmese supernaturalism which has been upheld since ancient times.\textsuperscript{17} This act reflects, as Samerchai (2009:122) states, “the recognition of a cultural value shared between the Burmese and the Tai, the assertion of Tai existence in the Burmese history, and the negotiation with the Burmese on the ground that—to some extent—there is connection in Tai and Burmese historical roots.” Despite that, to differentiate or detach themselves from the Burmese, the Tai have produced a discourse regarding the Princess in their own version, which is distinct from that narrated by the Burmese in a chronicle and a

\textsuperscript{14} According to the widely-known legend, Princess Monla was sent from the Mao Kingdom to be the consort of King Anawratha, the great ruler of the Bagan Kingdom in Burmese history.

\textsuperscript{15} Or Koumyoumin in Spiro’s monograph (see Spiro 1967:97).

\textsuperscript{16} Her story has been narrated in novels and movies several times.

\textsuperscript{17} Melford E. Spiro defines the term as “a class of supernatural beings who are more powerful than man and who, therefore, can affect him either for good or for evil” (Spiro 1967:41).
historically-based novel (Samerchai 2009:113-115, 123; see also Khin Myo Chit 1979). By the same token, the form and meaning of Sao Kao Mong (Hso Khan Pha and his brother) sculptures have been adapted brilliantly from Ko Myo Shin and Palei Yin, the brother-and-sister nats of Burmese origin (Samerchai 2009:39; Michio 2010) worshipped first by the Burmese and later adopted by the Tai, particularly those in the western region—geographically marked by Nam Hkong—of Shan State. On one hand, this cultural practice indicates an attempt to disengage the significance of Sao Kao Mong from the Burmese culture, and simultaneously to situate such a rearranged symbol in the context of “Tai-ness” that is substantiated by the legendary history. On the other hand, it could be viewed as the revitalisation of the ancestor-spirit worship, which was the archaic tradition of the Tai people prior to an embrace of Buddhism (Samerchai 2009:123-124; and see also Samerchai 2001:150-160).

The employment of the “past” in the awakening of nationalist consciousness and in the construction of the identity of the ethnic Tai could also be found in Thailand. Let’s consider the Tai Long in Piang Luang—Chiang Mai Province’s border village—as a concrete example. According to Wandee (2002), the Tai in that area tend to intentionally select certain persons and events as a part of their historical consciousness construction process. Those key figures are Hso Khan Pha, the most famous and respected legendary king of the Tai Long; King Naresuan the Great, the Thai king highly admired by the Tai for his courageousness and victoriousness over the Burmese; and General Moheng, a devout Buddhist Tai who fought the Burmese military regime all of his life. The chosen event for historical consciousness construction is the Panglong Agreement (Wandee 2002:113-131). As the author explains, the preference for the aforementioned individuals and incidents are meaningful to Tai people in varying respects. To begin with, Hso Khan Pha is the first ruler—according to Tai legendary history—who succeeded in uniting Tai kingdoms as well as in fighting against Sino and Burmese armies. Bringing him up as a

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18 Piang Luang is one of the biggest Tai settlements in Thailand. Its location is by the side of Thailand-Myanmar border. The village will be mentioned here and there in this dissertation.
19 Despite his distinct place in the Tai history, Hso Khan Pha and his brother have not been fully recognised by some Tai-speaking groups, specifically the Tai Khuen of Kengtung—the biggest city and the centre of Eastern Shan State. This is because they are more likely to connect their history to the Lan Na Kingdom—in what is now northern Thailand—rather than the land of the Tai Long on the west side of Nam Hkong (see Samerchai 2009:206).
significant historical figure allows for the imagination of an over-arching Tai community. Next, King Naresuan the Great, who in fact was the mighty king of Ayutthaya Kingdom of premodern Thailand’s central plains, is important to the Tai in that he was a powerful warrior, who set the Tai-speaking Siamese free from the Burmese—the enemy of both Tai and Siamese people\textsuperscript{20}. Furthermore, when Tai principalities were attacked by the Burmese, the King moved his army to come to the Tai’s rescue. Last but not least, General Moheng is reckoned as a role model—an earnest fighter for freedom—to a great deal of active Tai militants. In terms of the momentous occurrence, the Panglong Agreement is remembered as a contract—agreed and signed by representatives of the Burmese—led by General Aung San—and other ethnic minorities on 12 February 1947.\textsuperscript{21} The refusal to give independence back to the Tai people (and other ethnic minorities), as clearly declared in the Agreement, by successive Burmese military governments—after the assassination of General Aung San on 19 July 1947—lit the fuse for increasing hostilities and a continuing series of insurgencies. Meanwhile, the political milieu in the Shan State has forced many Tai people to take refuge in Thailand (see Wandee 2002:131).

The above examples reveal that in spite of identifying themselves as people of the same ethnic rubric, and having a shared history; the Tai people in different places tend to use distinctive legend or history corresponding to their socio-political contexts in the awakening of ethnic consciousness and the construction of identity. This argument is corroborated by Thanwa (2007)’s study of displaced Tai in the city of Chiang Mai. According to his research, the Tai people in Piang Luang, who have lived in Thailand for many years, construct an identity by employing a history (i.e., the story of King Naresuan the Great) that is concordant with the conventional history of the Thai people. On the contrary, the displaced Tai workers in Chiang Mai’s urban area, whose community is still

\textsuperscript{20} Although Thailand officially has established a diplomatic relationship with Myanmar since the late 1940s, it is unable to refrain some Thai people from the thought passed onto generations for over two centuries that their 417-year-old Ayutthaya Kingdom was completely ruined—as a result of warfare instigated by the Burmese in 1767. Therefore, Burma/Myanmar is still considered an “enemy” to many Thai people up to the present. Meanwhile, in the eyes of the Tai in Shan State including those who fled to other countries, the Burmese are their enemy because they have ruled and oppressed them for centuries (even though at some point in history—e.g., during the British colonisation—the Tai enjoyed their autonomy to some extent).

\textsuperscript{21} Additional details will be discussed in Chapters 2 and 6. See Appendix A for the text of the Pangluang Agreement.
unsettled and less compact due to their recent unlawful arrival, use another set of “past” stories in the maintenance of ethnicity. In so doing, they have brought to the fore a long history of ethno-linguistic connections between the Tai and the Thai. Through these imagined ties, they have claimed the current reigning King of Thailand as their own *hkun haw hcam* [khuːn¹-hɔː¹-kham⁴], literally translated “Lord of the Golden Palace” (Thanwa 2007:16).

The researches on ethnicity of the Tai speakers discussed earlier clearly reflect the importance of the “past” as an effective instrument employed in the construction of ethnic and national identity. To explore ethnicity as well as nationalism within a constructivist approach, however, I argue that not only should a historical condition be taken into account, but also a geographical aspect—more specifically “borders” and their vicinities—where allow for strong manifestations of ethnic identity and a sense of being a nation. This leads to another strand of my conceptualisation that follows.

### 1.2.3 Ethnicity and Nationalism as a Cultural Practice in Borderlands

Anthropology of borders is a relatively new domain of interest within the field of anthropology. It represents an area of growing intellectual concerns with the particular social, economic, and political circumstances of people dwelling around borders, including explorations of border culture and the process of identity formation in frontier zones (Flynn 1997). In fact, anthropological research on multi-layered social phenomena known to us today as “ethnicity,” and its twin—“national identity,” which is “a fundamental force found at all [state’s] borders” (Donnan and Wilson 2001:5)—was pioneered by Fredrik Barth in his well known study on the Pathans in mid-1950s (Banks 1996:13). The ethnonym “Pathan” is designated to groups of people, whose economic lives are considerably diversified, occupying “Pathan country,” the geo-cultural region covering some part of northwestern Pakistan and some part of southeastern Afghanistan. Despite its vast territory, Barth only focused on Pathan country’s borderland—more specifically, the southern region—to investigate ethnic boundaries between the Pathan and the Baluchi, an ethnic tribe also found in this zone. According to his research, due to sociopolitical conditions as well as the detachment from Pathan identity—as a result of war, accident or crime (Barth 1969c:124), this group of Pathan—particularly adult males—“have become
socially dislocated” (Banks 1996:15); and their social status in the society is lower than that of most Pathan. Instead of strongly asserting their “Pathan-ness,” they “exercise agency in choosing to become Baluchi” (Banks 1996:15), whose sociopolitical structures allow for an unconstrained assimilation. In so doing, not only do they possess a social space, which is inaccessible to them in their own group, but also lower or put an end to a sense of inferiority to their Pathan counterparts (Barth 1969c).

Following Barth’s Pathan study, major global political events suddenly and drastically changed the last two decades of the 20th century (see Donnan and Wilson 2001:2; Berg and Houtum 2003:1). These sociopolitical changes were responsible for the rapid development of anthropological works—both quantitatively and contextually—concerning people living in and around interstates’ border areas. Issues of those researches range from ethnicity to nationalism, migration, transnationalisation, displacement, and gender; and their geographic areas cover international boundaries across the world (see, for example, Alvarez 1995; Flynn1997; Carsten 1998; Donnan and Wilson 1994, 2001; Pinkaew 2006). In addition to the world political climate during the aforementioned period, another crucial ground to which anthropologists have given substantial attention is the study of borderlanders—their identities in particular—stemming from the unique qualities of frontier zones. As Donnan and Wilson (2001:64) indicate, “borders are liminal zones in which residents, wayfarers and the state are continually contesting their roles and their natures. As a result, borders and border people have identities which are shifting and multiple.” On that account, borderlands could be considered as spheres of interplay and contest of socially-constructed identities (see Grundy-Warr and Dean 2003); and, in some cases, an interstate peripheral domain could turn into a “deeply placed stable identity, a
way in which locals define themselves and their relationships to others” (Flynn 1997:312-313). The border regions are also a “corridor of opportunity” for people—such as the Shabe in the Bénin-Nigeria borderland—who “can easily move across the border within their binational territory” (Flynn 1997:326).

In an agreement with Flynn’s viewpoint: “Boundaries exist in order to separate as well as to be crossed” (1997:326), therefore, I argue here that “borders” might seem to be successful in distinguishing one state from others politically, but these imagined “lines” often fail to disengage people’s lives socio-culturally and ethno-nationalistically. In other words, borders are linking lines rather than countries’ disconnecting points (see Martínez 1994; Flynn 1997; Carsten 1998; Wandee 2002; Amporn 2008; Aranya 2007, 2008). This perspective is described as a “discursive anti-border” (Farrelly 2003:73), which most Thai scholars tend to employ to contest and destabilise a mainstream discourse on the national boundary in their studies of Tai dwellers in the frontier zone of northern Thailand adjoining Shan State’s southern region. This area is regarded as the “contested Southeast Asian border zone” according to Farrelly (2003:64).

Among a small number of researches on the ethnic Tai in such a borderland, there are a few prominent anthropological studies—conducted by Thai academics—which fundamentally deal with ethnic identities constructions and nationalistic consciousness formations. All of these works underline a border as a setting that significantly influences the way in which ethnicity and nationalism have been constructed.23 Through this conception, Wandee (2002) clearly states in her master’s thesis that an ill-defined Thailand-Myanmar boundary at Piang Luang has led to the development of distinctive identities of the Tai people. These identities are constructed as an ethno-nationalist practice, which is based on a historical consciousness. The awareness of their “past” does not emerge from nowhere, but it comes out of intelligent and intentional selections of certain momentous events and heroic figures as discussed previously. The researcher also suggests that the locally redefined meanings of the border—either as a line or a zone—

23 This notion is also found in Grundy-Warr and Dean’s research (2003) on ethnic-nationalism of the Kachin and the Karenni, whose settlements are in the border areas close to China and Thailand, respectively. As they indicate, “there are significant differences in the way the border has affected the politics of ethnicity and nationhood, and that these are related to distinct geopolitical relations and social relations across political boundaries” (Grundy-Warr and Dean 2003:93).
from time to time generate the modification of Tai identities, by means of revitalisation or invention of traditions, to which conforms the ever-changing social context.

Piang Luang\textsuperscript{24} was explored once again as a locus of identity manifestation, and of the contestation for sociopolitical place by Tai women (Pinkaew 2006). Based on a “feminist critique of nationalism” (Pinkaew 2006:68), the researcher concentrates on Tai women exiles’ roles in the reconstruction of Tai identities, and in the active participation in political struggles and Shan national movements. With respect to an association between a border and nationalist consciousness, the writer points out that this frontier village “represents a liminal zone which allows for the possibility and the construction of the imagined Shan homeland” (Pinkaew 2006:76). The embodiment of the nation has been exercised through different practices, which exist in spaces clearly and definitely occupied and controlled by males. Even though women start to play more vital roles by serving in the Tai army, unfortunately, their responsibilities are viewed as “a reproduction of the domestic sphere where home was extended into the army” (Pinkaew 2006:82). This situation, therefore, results in the neglect of their roles and the subordination of their “place” to males’. To receive the recognition from the society, particularly male counterparts, and to set themselves free from “the traditional Buddhist worldview of men vis-à-vis the world of sacredness and wisdom” (Pinkaew 2006:82), they broke out from the nationalist movement (i.e., the Tai army), which is firmly claimed by males. Their agency has been exercised not only to challenge the established male-dominated nationalist movement, but also to search for a new space in the domestic sphere; or, in other words, “to create a new site of difference” (Pinkaew 2006:83). Besides the focus on the border as a site of power relations and negotiations between men and women in the face of nationalist projects, the writer suggests that the border is a place where the Tai people are able to strongly maintain their identities. This observation is exemplified by a Tai teaching in the village’s alternative school. Such a cultural practice, in fact, is strictly prohibited in formal education systems both in Thailand and Myanmar (Pinkaew 2006:77).

\textsuperscript{24} Although the writer uses a pseudonym for her research site, some readers, who are familiar with the setting and who previously read Wandee’s thesis (2002), can tell what the real name of the village or where the location of her field site is.
Moving from the Thai-Myanmar border to the frontier zone in northern Shan State, there is another explanation on how the border is related to the formation of nationalism of the Tai Long in Selan—mentioned earlier—and nearby cities like Muse and Namkham. According to Samerchai (2009:121-122), the Tai Long choose the borderland in the Mao Basin as the sphere of cultural practice, where certain Tai symbols complementary to hegemonic Burmese culture have been constructed to awaken the sense of “Tainess,” for several reasons. Firstly, this area is historically important as a place closely linked to the Mao Kingdom and Hso Khan Pha, the historically accepted “great king” of the Tai. It is also the domain where the Tai people on the both sides of the boundary have been culturally homogenous since ancient times. Thus it is suitable to reinvest in this relationship in order to manifest what it meant to be “Tai”—as the Great Nation—although they are separated by the international political boundaries. Secondly, unlike the southern region of the Shan State, this borderland is politically peaceful because it is not used by the Myanmar government as a military base to eliminate ethnic insurgency movements. Finally, owing to the sound transborder trade, an economic status of the Tai people in Selan, nearby cities, including those in Yunnan’s Dehong area is comparatively high. Their financial support, therefore, could be used as a resource essential to the cultural practice that brings the Tainess to life. For these reasons, not only do the cultural practices result in an emphasis on nationalist consciousness and a construction of collective Tai identity in that frontier region, but these also generate similar consequences in the border area mainly inhabited by the “Tai Noe,” alternatively known as “Dehong Tai,” on the Chinese side (Samerchai 2009:205-206). The attempt to expand the sense of Tainess across the borderline, nonetheless, seems to be at variance with what actually happens in the frontier zone of the Dehong Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture in Yunnan Province. That is to say, instead of attaching themselves to the Tai dwellers in northern Shan State, the Tai people in such a domain focus on the (re)definition and (re)construction of group’s identities in the course of power relations with hegemonic Chinese people and culture (see Atsama 2000; Yos 2000, 2001; Aranya 2007, 2008).

\[25\text{ See more details in the next chapter.}\]
In essence, on the ground of the mentioned conceptual formulation, I seek to demonstrate how “ethnicity”—as a micro-level phenomenon—and “nationalism”—as a macro-level movement—are interconnected, and how both are complementary to each other. Transborder-level practices would also be presented to show that a “border”—as a sphere of identity formation, interaction, and negotiation—has a significant impact on the Tai’s drive to (re)define group’s identities as well as to imagine their nation. Meanwhile, the constructionist approach would be employed to explain that ethnicity and a sense of nationhood of Ruam Chai’s Tai residents have been culturally constructed. The two associated phenomena have been shaped within discursive practices amid power-embedded relations among people from different Tai subgroups and between the Tai and other ethnic groups in the village, between the Tai and the Thai state, and between the Tai from the both sides of the boundary.

1.3 Research Methodology

Despite the fact that the research for this dissertation was guided by University of Toronto’s Research Ethics, which disallows researchers to conduct a study prior to an approval of their protocol, I travelled to Thailand in early 2004 to carry out proto-fieldwork. During this time I conducted a rapid survey of the village and gathered fundamental information on situations along Thailand-Myanmar border. Moreover, general data on the field research site were collected from different sources, both in the area and in university libraries located in the cities of Chiang Mai and Bangkok. I also established connections with related individuals, organisations, and institutions; for example, Ruam Chai’s authoritative persons and scholars, the National Research Council of Thailand, Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre, Thammasat University, and Chiang Mai University.

Due to the Thai Government Scholarship regulation, which specifies that scholarship recipients who spend more than six months in Thailand for their research will not receive an expense during an exceeding period, my residency in the field was discontinuous. Therefore, my discontinuous 14-month-fieldwork—based on the reflexive or narrative approach to ethnography within the postmodernist practice, which “involves a dialogue between informant and ethnographer” (Ferraro 2008:108) and focuses on the
“voices of the research subjects and informants” (Barrett 2002:151)—needed to be broken into three phases as follows.

The first period took place from January to July 2005. Upon arrival in Thailand in early January, I called Jawmlern—recommended by a Tai friend who was doing his doctoral degree in engineering at the University of Toronto—to ask for his opinion on where I should stay during the fieldwork. Jawmlern, a Tai male in his early fifties who has lived in this village for more than 25 years, suggested a few places. I eventually chose the guesthouse called “Hern Tai” (literally translated “Tai House”) for convenience and security reasons. Located near important places in the village, the guesthouse is owned by a senior male, who has been regarded with respect from most villagers.26 Living under his care, in my view, not only made me feel safe in the area once ruled by the infamous drug warlord, but also allowed me—as a “stranger”—to gain some “trust” from Ruam Chai residents. During the first few months in the field, I did not try to collect data as much as I possibly could nor interview locals since the first contact. Rather, I spent a lot of time to make myself officially and unofficially “known” to the local people, and to make myself familiar with physical features of the village. Having casual conversations with such villagers as staff at the guesthouse, petty traders at the village marketplace, teachers at the village school, and even family members of the guesthouse’s owner not only decreased people’s worries or suspicions about my presence, but also gave me chances to acquire interesting viewpoints as well as useful information from everyday conversations.

During the first stage of the fieldwork, I met some key informants—or alternatively known as “research collaborators” (Ferraro 2008:108)—who later introduced me to other informants or gave me recommendations about whom I should speak with or interview. This technique for developing a research sample is called “snowball sampling.”27 In this period there was an important village’s tradition—a novitiation ceremony—which allowed me to observe an ethnic manifestation of the Tai for the first time. I also got to know a group of Buddhist monks from Bangkok and Chiang Mai City that came to Ruam Chai to

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26 See more details in Chapter 3.
27 Snowballing is a metaphor for one if sampling techniques used to obtain informants. Researchers would make an initial contact with people in their field research sites. Through these people, the researchers would be recommended or introduced to other informants like a snowball rolling down a hill picking up snow, a researcher rolls along “picking up” informants.
create a Tai language and culture camp for the children during a summer break. During the camp, I was fortunate enough to receive permission to take a basic Tai class, to observe all kinds of cultural activities, as well as to establish a relationship with a group of Tai children, who play vital roles in conserving and maintaining Tainess. Through this connection, I hired an active female member of the group to work for me as an interpreter. Since a great deal of people in Ruam Chai are able to communicate in standard Thai, and a small number of them can speak Northern Thai dialect—my mother tongue—I rarely encountered a significant language barrier problem while being there. I only asked my interpreter to explain some unfamiliar words or sentences once in a while or during interviews with certain elderly people, whose authentic Tai accent was hard to understand. Generally speaking, most time in this stage was devoted to the establishment of rapport with locals, to search for potential key informants, and to clarify my status and role as a researcher and a graduate student (as opposed to a government spy or a naturalisation inspector). The reason for the clarifications of status and role were made is to manage some kinds of expectations of people. For example, certain stateless people might think that I could help them to get naturalised. Moreover, I surveyed the village physically, and pieced together a significant amount of data regarding ethnic and settlement backgrounds, local history, and social problems in order to prepare for further fieldwork in the next stage. During part of the research, I made an arrangement to interview a high-ranking official of the Internal Security Affairs Bureau in the Department of Provincial Administration (DOPA), on stateless situation in Thailand (hence the possible misinterpretation of my purpose).

The second period of fieldwork started in October 2005 and ended in March 2006. After being acquainted with local people and the area, I earnestly began collecting qualitative data related to the research questions by employing participant observation, semi-structured and unstructured interviews, and life history as the primary data-gathering techniques. I also conducted in-depth interviews with certain key informants, and had discussions with other people on the same topics to validate the data. Please note that key informants for life history and semi-structured interviews—both in this period of fieldwork and the others—were carefully selected from villagers of different backgrounds to ensure a gender, age, and ethnic balance. Major incidents which occurred during the second field
research phase were the Tai New Year, the village’s most important celebration, and the
Shan National Day, both of which unified a great number of Tai people from Ruam Chai,
nearby villages, and other places. In regard to the second event, I unconventionally crossed
the Thailand-Myanmar border to make observations at a venue in a relatively large
settlement for exiles of Tai and other ethnic origins.

With a travel grant from University of Toronto Graduate School, the final
fieldwork phase was carried out from early January to early March in 2007 to gather
additional data, the Shan National Day in particular. I also did more fieldwork in Ruam
Chai, and consequently conducted documentary research in libraries at Chiang Mai
University in the city of Chiang Mai, and then at Thammasat University in Bangkok. Aside
from that, before leaving the country, I spent a few days in Chiang Mai City to interview a
Chiang Mai University professor, who is specialised in costumes of Tai-speaking people;
and the editor of the Shan Herald Agency for News (SHAN). Even though the fieldwork
came to an end, I occasionally contacted—through oversea calls—the interpreter, family
members of the guesthouse’s owner, and certain key informants for their further
elucidation on some points, and for updates on current situations, stateless problem in
particular.

Traditionally and ethically, anthropologists tend to use a pseudonym for their
research site, village, or community. Initially, I wanted to retain the original name of the
field site because the name of the village is significant in terms of local history and
politics, and it is relevant to the formation of Tai ethno-nationalist identity. Additionally, I
thought it is unlikely that one could conceal the real name of such a prominent place; and
that while the village name is fictious, readers familiar with the subject and geography
might discern the locus from clues provided in the writing. Despite these reasons, I chose
to pseudonymise the research village name and anonymise the location of certain places to
prevent any unexpected consequences that could affect the privacy and the safety of
informants and other members of the community. Additionally, all names of Ruam Chai
residents mentioned in this dissertation are pseudonymous, in compliance with the
University of Toronto Human Subjects Ethic Guidelines, specifically that research
participants’ identity shall not be revealed.
1.4 Towards the Three Levels of Analysis

After the completion of my fieldwork in Thailand, I struggled for a few months with the questions of how to categorise the great deal of data obtained in the “field” and how to present my analysis. It is often presumed that conducting fieldwork is the most challenging stage in a research process; however, the post-fieldwork mission is even more demanding. Several months of time-consuming interview transcription and thorough data reviews enabled me to discover that the abundant data could be roughly sorted into three folders.

The first folder keeps data concerning classifications among Tai speakers, assertions of Tai identities, and relationships between the Tai and other ethnic groups in the village. The second folder held data about the Thai state’s categorisation of ethnic minorities, problems and situations on stateless people, struggles for naturalisation, and the formation of a sense of Thainess arisen from sociopolitical mechanisms. The third folder keeps data on border crossings, nationalist consciousness, participations of Tai people from Ruam Chai in the Shan National Day celebrations, and connections between Tai people beyond the frontier.

Having been carefully examined, the data in the three folders provide three robust levels of analysis: village or community, national, and transborder. It follows, then, that the data can be systematically analysed via the three different chapters, each representing a level or layer of analysis. This way of data analysis and presentation allows for a dynamic and holistic study of ethnicity and nationalism. In other words, instead of focusing only on social facts within a field, as a custom practised in the past, we should consider relationships between problems in the research site and larger contexts. Furthermore, for extensive understanding of the phenomena, in many cases we need to look at those social facts beyond the state frontiers. Even though each folder of data is presented separately in each chapter, the analysis of ethnicity and nationalism of the Tai people in Ruam Chai cannot be fragmentary. The data in the three levels, are, in fact, interconnected and complementary, as readers shall see from this volume.
1.5 Outline of the Dissertation

Excluding the introduction and conclusion, this dissertation is divided into five main chapters. In Chapter 2, readers are taken into the world of the Tai through an account of who the Tai are and where they live. Information on ethnonyms given to them by other ethnic groups, and on the actual “self-references” they employ to categorise themselves is also provided in this chapter. Another point raised here is a conclusion on what ethnic title should be applied to my research subjects, and why they should be called that way. The chapter is ended by a discussion of the Tai’s migration and interweaving into the background of the socio-econo-political fabric of modern Thailand. Chapter 3 primarily deals with the ethnographic data that includes geographic setting, historical development, population profile, marriage, families and kinships, belief systems and religions, languages, costumes, food, social organisations, and economic life. As the first level of analysis, Chapter 4 is concerned with ethnic dynamisms within Ruam Chai. More specifically, this chapter is written to demonstrate ethnic differentiations among Tai subgroups, and relationships between the Tai people and other ethnic groups in the village. From this chapter, readers will see the ways in which the Tai people attempt to maintain and construct ethnic identities and boundaries, which have been affected by internal and external forces. Chapter 5 is devoted to the examination of statelessness, the village’s most critical problem. Readers can begin to realise the asymmetrical relationships between the Thai state and displaced Tai, which are reflected in the government’s ethnic minorities classification and naturalisation process. This chapter also demonstrates the employment of the “Thai/Thainess” and “Thai Yai” discourses—created in Thai society—by the Tai people in the construction of their ethno-nationalist identities. Another crucial point discussed in this chapter is a growing sense of Thainess among the Tai although they have been treated as the “others.” This chapter is ended with the information on the current situations of the statelessness in Ruam Chai. Chapter 6 relates to the ethno-nationalist consciousness manifested through a patriotic event—the Shan National Day—organised in a shelter-like village located in the Shan State very close to the Thailand-Myanmar boundary. Ethno-nationalist identities constructed as a result of cross-border movements of the Tai from Ruam Chai and those from the other side of the Thai state’s fringe, as well as
sociocultural ties between the Tai people from the both sides of the frontier are the other two central issues elucidated in this chapter.

1.6 Transcription Guide

The transcriptions found in this dissertation rely on two different romanisation systems: the Royal Thai General System of Transcription (RTGS) for Thai words, and the British System for Shan-English Transliteration for Tai words. The first system is determined by the Royal Institute of Thailand—which is primarily based on the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). However, RTGS has an exceptional rule for the sounds ข/ค, ภ/พ, and ท/ธ. These aspirated consonants, instead of being represented with kʰ, pʰ, and tʰ as suggested by IPA; they are rendered as “kh,” “ph,” and “th,” respectively. This rule has been held to differentiate them from non-aspirated consonants ก(k), ป(p), and ต(t). This system is considered standard and it is officially followed in the country despite the lack of tone marks and vowel distinction (see Appendix D).

Due to an absence of a “single complete or standard system for transliteration of Shan script” (Crosby et al. 2009:7), as suggested by Khuensai Jaiyen—the Shan Herald Agency for News (SHAN)’s editor and notable Tai intellectual, I will follow the British System for the Shan-English Transliteration (see Appendix E). To ensure that readers would be able to read Tai close to native speakers, speech sounds are provided in parentheses. The speech sounds of the Tai words in this dissertation derive from the “Taiyai (Shan) – Thai Dictionary” (TTD) recently published by the Institute of Languages, Arts, and Cultures, Chiang Mai Rajabhat University (2009). Instead of relying on widely-used tonal symbols, according to TTD, numbers “1,” “2,” “3,” “4,” and “5” are superscripted after a word to represent one of the respective tones: rising, low, falling, high, and exceptional falling (short-vowel sound). It is worth to note that the above systems are not applied to specific names for people and places appearing in the dissertation.
Chapter 2
Who are the Tai?

Difficulties of ethnic labeling are chronic to mainland Southeast Asia and especially severe among the so-called ‘tribal Thai.’  
(Moerman 1965:1217)

It is not my intention to follow Moerman (1965)’s naming custom in his article on the Tai subgroup known as the Lue, where he refers to the entire ethnicity by this inclusive term: “The Lue cannot be identified—cannot, in a sense, be said to exist—in isolation” (Moerman 1965:1216). This nomenclature reveals how the Tai have been ethnically distinguished and delimited in the context of northern Thailand. As well, although my study has partly inspired by Keyes’s article “Who are the Tai? Reflections on the Invention of Identities” (1995b), which suggests that “Tai” (or Thai) is an ethnic classification politically invented with a close link to the making of a geo-body known to us as Thailand, this chapter title has least connection to it. Instead, this chapter will take its name more appropriately from the fact that the people whom I have studied always call themselves “Tai” with each other while non-Tai (external) scholars and general people employ a variety of names for their own purposes.

Fundamentally, this chapter is concerned with the history of the Tai, as well as ethnonyms given to them by different groups of people. Besides, issues on their settlements—both inside and outside Thailand—including their migration from the Shan State to Thailand will be discussed afterwards. Please note that the origin of the Tai that is related to this research will be explored in the succeeding chapters.

28 At that time Moerman used the term “Thai” instead of “Tai.” Over the past few decades, however, the term “Tai” has become more popularly used and widely recognised among academics, anthropologists in particular.
29 An ethnic group considered a part of the Tai-speaking people in mainland Southeast Asia and certain regions of the continent.
2.1 A Brief History of the Tai

The history of the Shans of Burma is bound up with that of their neighbours and kinsmen, the Shans of Yunnan and of the Cambodia River regions—from whom they sprang and with whom they have had to do. (Cochrane 1915:45)

The history of an ethnic group known as “Tai” has been widely studied and argued over the past century (Winai 2002:30). Most prominent academics suggest Tai history is “a potent blend of fact and fantasy” (Conway 2006:33). The relegation to “legend” of the ancient Tai settlements as well as the disagreement on the establishment-years of the Tai principalities (see Anan 1995, and Yos 2000) lead to the so-called “legendary history” or, in Leach’s term, a “proto-history” (1960:53). A number of Western scholars such as Elias (1876), Scott and Hardiman (1900-01), Cochrane (1910), and Sao Saimong Mangrai (1965)—an eminent Tai scholar—build their separate historical studies on different and individual Tai chronicles, which have been compiled and kept in Mandalay (Yos 2000:4). To cite an example, Cochrane shows his opinion on the method in which the Tai had recorded their history in ancient times:

Like the Burmans, the Shans, in their legends, take delight in giving very early dates for the founding of their old towns, vestiges of which may be found in nearly all of the so-called ‘Shan States.’ But, these legends are manifestly post-Buddhist, and created to flatter their pride of Shan Kings and kinglets who would connect their origin with the great Rajas of India. (Cochrane 1915:51)

Yos (2000:5-6) attests that several Tai chronicles are consistent in that the Tai are descended from the same ancestors, Khun Lu and Khun Lai, who came from the celestial

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30 For more details on the Tai history, please see Somphong (2001) [published in Thai], Elias (1876), and Cochrane (1915).
31 At that time, certain academics used “Cambodian River,” or “Great Cambodia River” (Yule 1968:292), in favour of the more precise “Mekong River.”
32 Scholars from Western societies have studied the Tai history since mid–19th century, and their studies seem to focus on the Tai in Shan principalities, which were the British colonies (Yos 2000:4)
33 Of all the Tai chronicles, Hsenwi Chronicle would seem to have a significant influence to the study of Tai history in the Shan State (Yos 2000:6).
world through a golden ladder around mid–6th century. The two brothers lived in a city called Hsenwi. Because of their charisma, they were asked to be the leaders of a pre-existing people. Around 568 AD they found a city called “Mao” or “Kosamphi,” which later became the centre of the Tai Kingdom, and then they sent their offspring to govern different principalities in the Mao Basin.

The genesis of the Tai people has been described as a “legendary history,” which is incongruous in terms of date. This results in disagreements among forefront Tai intellectuals such as Sao Saimong, who points out that “[t]he theory of Shan migration is well known, but no one has been able to put his finger on the exact manner how this happened” (Sao Saimong 1965:15). As a result, “Tai legends and chronicles could not be taken into account as a total solid effective historical evidence” (Samerchai 2009:42). The origin of the Tai people, however, could be summarised as follows.

It appears that there is no clear history or record of the emergence of the Tai. They split into numbers of subgroups, and they call themselves and have been labelled according to dialects, colours as well as designs of costume, including geographical regions in where they have lived. The settlement patterns of the Tai disperse over a wide area ranging from China’s southern Yunnan to the Salween Basin. Some groups moved westward as far as today’s State of Assam of India, and then established their “mong” [məŋ⁴], while some of their counterparts migrated to northern Vietnam (see O’Connor 34). There are at least six assumptions proposed by Western scholars about the original home of the Tai. For details on these assumptions, please see Winai’s article (2002:32-34).

34 Samerchai suggests that the story of Khun Lu and Khun Lai is a legend invented after late 18th century (Samerchai 2009:57).
35 In Thai the term is pronounced “Saenwi”
36 Or in 835 AD in some chronicles.
37 The term is also spelled Košhanpri, which literally means nine Shan (Tai) states (Yule 1968:292; see also Samerchai 2009).
38 There are at least six assumptions proposed by Western scholars about the original home of the Tai. For details on these assumptions, please see Winai’s article (2002:32-34).
39 The river is known among the Tai as “Hkong” [kʰɔŋ⁴] or “Nam Hkong” [n̂am⁵-kʰɔŋ⁴]. “Nam” [n̂am (high tone) in Thai and /nam⁵/ in Tai] is a short form of “Mae Nam,” literally a river. The Tai as well as the Thai (including some other Tai-speaking groups) habitually put the term nam before a river name. From this point, thus, it is logical to follow this practice by using “Nam Hkong” for “Salween.”
40 The Tai people pronounce this term as merng and, according to the British System for Shan-English Transliteration; the term is spelled mong (see Appendix E). Meanwhile, in most Shan State maps, the term is spelled “mong.” So hereafter, “mong” will be used when mentioning cities, towns, and villages appearing on the Shan State map (see Figure 1). The term denotes “world, country, land, province, town, city, urban” (Dommern and Sathienpong 1999:383). Please note that the term is spelled and pronounced “mueang” (or variably “muang”) in Thai. In “History of Lan...
Scholars and historians have assumed that the various cultures of Southeast Asia have known about the Tai people for centuries. According to certain intellectuals, the first Tai kingdom, which was located in the valley on the left side of the Yangtze, is called “Nanchao.” Among others is William Clifton Dodd who indicates that the Ai-Lao, an ethnic people living in southern Yunnan during the Han Dynasty, established Nanchao.

By 629 A.D. they had “developed and formed the agglomeration which became the great seat of Nan-chao, which afterwards extended in all directions,” and lasted over six centuries. The seat of this kingdom was at Tali-fu, western Yunnan. (Dodd 1996:13)

His proposition, however, has been contested by Backus (1981), who reveals that the dialect spoken by Nanchao leaders is Lolo, which is classified as a dialect in Tibeto-Burman language family. In addition, their children’s first names are based on the last name “Na,” mueang means “city state; autonomous or semiautonomous principalities that varied greatly in size and influence. The mueang was centered on a town or city and included surrounding rural areas. Some were little more than large villages, but others were powerful and exercised their power over other mueang that served as tributaries.” (Sarassawadee 2005:249). In some writings, such as Scott (1982), Milne (2001), and Leach (1954), this word is romanised as “mông” while in Chang’s article (1944), the term is spelled “meng.” Another version of the spelling is “müang” (Wijeyewardene 1990:49), “mung”—the term the Kachin has “directly borrowed from the Shan möng” and “myo” (township) in Burmese (Leach 1954:122).

For example, de Lacouperie (1885), Dodd (1996), Sao Saimong Mangrai (1965), Htin Aung (1967), and Tzang Yawnghwe (1987). Among others, Leach suggests that Nanchao is the empire of the Shan (Leach 1954:36).

He is a missionary evangelist of the Presbyterian Church USA and an explorer, who played a key role in the expansion of Protestant missions from northern Thailand into southern China.

Unlike Dodd, Yin-Tang Chang—a Chinese scholar—indicates that Nanchao Kingdom was established during the Tang Dynasty (Chang 1944:63).

Winai (2002:35) notes that scholars from late 19th century onwards have been influenced from Western concepts and theories regarding the original homeland of the Tai. Under the pressure from imperialism, the recognition about the origin as well as the glory of the Tai in the past proposed by Western academics has resulted in the so-called “Pan-Thai-ism.” A historical writing, a Tai history in particular, tends to centre on issues that support the State’s ideology. Therefore, the origin of the Tai; the saga of legendary kingdoms like Ta-Mung, Lung, Pa, and Thian; and Nanchao and the immigration of the Tai to escape the Chinese powers have been instilled in Thai education since after the Second World War. Winai also states that although “Nanchao is the first Tai kingdom” has become out-dated theory for Western intellectuals since the 1960s, numbers of Thai academics still fix themselves to the ancient kingdom, which is a romantically-constructed history (Winai 2002:35).
names of their ancestors. This characteristic has not been found in the Tai culture. In his view, therefore, we cannot regard Nanchao as the kingdom of the Tai (Anan 1995:10).

“Nanchao as the Tai kingdom” is an assumption that has also been critically challenged from some Chinese historians, who propose that the origin of the Tai should be in Guangxi and the eastern part of Yunnan (Winai 2002:36). The Tai gradually migrated from the mentioned areas to the west via the northern part of Vietnam and Lao, including moving southwardly from the Yunnan frontier zone to the northern vicinity of Myanmar and Thailand (Winai 2002:37). Winai (2002:43-44) is among the Thai scholars who disagree with the Nanchao conception. He raises a question, if Nanchao had been occupied by the Tai, why there is not any trace of any Tai-speaking group or Tai culture in the place that is the central area of Nanchao, the kingdom that remained for several centuries. According to his fieldwork, he claims that he had never discovered evidence showing that there is a Tai settlement between Xishuangbanna and Yunnan cities of Tali and Kunming.

Sisakra Vallibhotama, a leading Thai archaeologist and anthropologist, also rejects the Nanchao assumption by proposing that the Tai-speaking group in Thailand, who shares the same culture with other Tai-speaking groups in nearby countries, did not come from Nanchao, and that their origin, in fact, is in present-day Thailand.

Fundamentally, I have never been interested in the theory of the origin of the Thai people in Thailand, which Thai educational institutions as well as most people in the country have strongly believed that we migrated from China or south of China like Yunnan and Nanchao, or somewhere around that region. That is because I never believe that all or most Thai people in the country are descended from those who moved southwardly from China. It is a foolish belief in race, which cannot be put into a logical and scientific explanation. […] The people in present-day Thailand, in fact, are the offspring of diverse ethnic groups. This continuing diversity is apparent according to our history. (Sisakra and Sujit 1991:2-3)

Until now, there is still no conclusion about the Nanchao hypothesis. Many academics are still working on the issue, and tend to base most of their studies more on ancient Chinese written evidence, which seems to be the only primary source for historical research (Winai 2002:50).

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46 The Thai people call Xishuangbanna “Sipsong Panna.”
The conclusion on the Nanchao-origin theories is beyond the scope of this study. Some academics, nevertheless, believe that the invasion of Kublai Khan’s Sino-Mongol troops instigated the southwardly movement of the Tai peoples. Ancient Chinese chronicles indicate that Tai history could date back around two thousand years, and that the Tai have lived in the Mekong, Ayeyarwady, and Nam Hkong watersheds (Somphong 2001:55). The Chinese documentary evidence coincides with Cochrane, who suggests that although it is difficult to conclude on when the Tai first appeared in the region, it could be assumed that they have occupied that geographic domain as late as early Christian era (Cochrane 1915:44), and with O’Connor who points out that “[t]he race began to spread into Burma from South-western China about two thousand years ago” (O’Connor 1928:34-35).

According to the Hsenwi Chronicle, in the 11th century Tai kingdoms in the Mao Basin were established, and the kingdoms had more military powers. However, their glorious time came to an end. The Tai kingdoms could not resist the more powerful army of the Bagan Kingdom, which was ruled by King Anawratha (Yos 2000:6-7) and since then they were under the control of the Bagan Kingdom. In 1287, the Mongol army conquered the Bagan Kingdom; therefore, the Tai people were freed from the latter. The Tai kingdoms started to establish a number of small principalities (Cœdès 1966:129-30). Several chronicles consistently indicate that the Mao Kingdom, or “Mok Khao Mao Luang,” literally White Flower-Great Mao, reached its peak during the reign of “Hso Khan Pha” (Somphong 2001:126). Hso Khan Pha solidified a number of Tai principalities, and expanded the territory of the Tai kingdom (Thanwa 2007:4). It is the first Tai kingdom that became so powerful that they had been occupying other kingdoms ruled by other ethnic groups (Somphong 2001:120) for a certain period of time. Some historians do not agree on the period of the Hso Khan Pha’s reign. Wyatt, whose studies are primarily based on Burmese evidences, suggests that the reign of this most famous Tai ruler should be around 1152–1205 whereas Jia Yan Jong, whose studies are based on

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47 In his book, “Shan” is used in favour of “Tai.”
48 Bagan had been the capital of several ancient kingdoms in Myanmar. It was located in the dry central plains of the country, on the eastern bank of the Ayeyarwady River, 145 kilometres southwest of Mandalay.
49 Or “Suea Khan Fa” in Thai sources. He is also referred to as Khun Suea Khwan Fa in some books.
Chinese evidences, argues that the king acceded to the throne in 1336 (Yos 2000:8-9). The Tai respect Hso Khan Pha as their hero king. The saga of the king has become one of the best-known legendary stories among the Tai to date (Somphong 2001:116).

The rapid growth of the Mao Kingdom under Hso Khan Pha was considered a threat to the Chinese Empire. During his powerful and glorious reign, Hso Khan Pha attempted to strengthen the power of the Mao Kingdom by taking over tributary states in today’s western Yunnan, which were still under the Chinese control at that time. Since 1338 onwards, although the Mao Kingdom had been attacked by the army of the Chinese court several times, the Mao Kingdom—or the Tai Kingdom—still remained powerful and had never been defeated by the Chinese. As a result, a diplomatic strategy was employed to negotiate and convince the mighty Tai ruler to give allegiance to the Chinese emperor with the promise that the Mao Kingdom and other Tai principalities would still have power to rule themselves. Being tricked to enjoy their sovereignty, the Tai had been awarded of the Chinese’ gradual political domination in its own land (Yos 2000:9-11). The whole kingdom was eventually seized by the Chinese army. This led to the downfall of the Mao Kingdom in 1449 during the reign of Hso Lu Pha, or as pronounced Suea Lu Fa in Thai (Somphong 2001:126). Despite the collapse of the Mao Kingdom as an independent politico-administrative unit, “Mong (city) Mao” still remained the land where Tai people referred to as their own and had its own chiefs until 1950 (Somphong 2001:126).

The history of the Tai people exists within the context of the (re)establishment of kingdoms and states (principalities), the warfare among themselves, and its being ruled by certain ethnic groups, and its being occupied by nearby kingdoms, including Western power since the 16th century. In terms of a Tai-Burmese relationship, the Tai have had a

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50 The golden age of Mao Kingdom under Hso Khan Pha was 1344 (Somphong 2001:126).
51 Somphong points out that the downfall of Mao Kingdom is one of the crucial turning points in Tai history for the fact that some parts of Tai territory became an area of land under the power of Chinese Empire. Eventually, that area was completely attached to China due to the arrival of the modern concept of “border” to the region (Somphong 2001:270). Meanwhile, posterior to a demarcation of the border between British Burma and China, most parts of Tai soil have become the “Shan State,” a northeastern state of Burma.
52 Some parts of the Tai principalities located on the eastern side of Nam Hkong were occupied by Thailand during the Second World War. At this time that parts were collectively called “Saharat Thai Doem,” literally “Former Thai States” for the fact that prior to the annexation of the British many principalities in that region were tributaries of Lan Na Kingdom, which was completely amalgamated to the Kingdom of Siam during the Bangkok Period (1782–present).
political and sociocultural relationship with the Burmese for over a thousand years (Somphong 2001:198-199). Since Burmese kingdoms were more powerful, the Tai, unavoidably, had to surrender and pay tribute to Burmese kings. At certain stages of the history, the Tai, however, gained independence from the Burmese. For example, the fall of the Bagan Kingdom resulted in the rise of the southern Tai kingdoms at Pinya and Ava, where Tai power not only established itself on Burmese soil, but also reached as far as the kingdoms of the Mon and the Rakhine from 1287 to 1531 (Somphong 2001:205).

The Tai-ruled Ava Kingdom was beaten by “Taungoo,” a new Burmese kingdom, which was ruled by great kings such as Tabinshwehti (1516–1550) and Bayinnaung (1516–1581). King Bayinnaung’s army eventually conquered the south Tai kingdom, and then attacked and seized all other Tai principalities. As protectorate states of the Taungoo Kingdom, those Tai principalities were forced to pay a great deal of tribute to Burmese kings, and Tai chiefs, known as saohpa [tsaw³-pha?5]. had to send their heirs to the Burmese court, including their daughters, sisters, or nieces to be queens or consorts of Burmese kings. Moreover, whenever Burma had warfare with recalcitrant Tai states or with nearby kingdoms, they had a duty to support the Burmese army in terms of warriors, weapons, and food (Somphong 2001:215-217).

After the reign of King Bayinnaung, the centre of Burmese power was shifted from time to time, and from one dynasty to another. The Tai states attempted to gain independence from the Burmese, but their efforts never came to fruition. Despite the fact that the Burmese kingdom became a colony of the British Empire, the Tai never enjoyed any taste of true freedom or anything like it at all. It seems that they were destined to be “out of the frying pan into the fire.” Simply, their sovereignty was handed in from one power to another, by default. The Tai states were colonised by the British because the Burmese Kingdom (or the Upper Burma55 as defined by its coloniser), whose centre was

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53 Although the southern Tai kingdoms were ruled by Tai leaders, the northern Tai people do not consider the southern Tai kingdoms as true Tai kingdoms. Instead, they think of Ava and Pinya as kingdoms of the Burmese, their most important rival (Somphong 2001:205).

54 Saohpa, or chao fa in Thai and sawbwa in Burmese, means a petty prince or the “Lord of the Sky” (Sao Sanda 2008:14). A short form of this term is sao (or chao in Thai), which could be used as both a second or third pronoun and a title (e.g., Sao Saimong Mangrai).

55 Burma or officially “Union of Burma” has been replaced by “Myanmar,” officially Union of Myanmar, since 1989. Please note that in this dissertation when referring to the country since 1989 onwards, the new country name will be employed. In spite of that, the term “Burmese” still appear
based in Mandalay, lost the third Anglo-Burmese War in 1885. The British claimed that
Tai states were Burmese protectorate states because they had paid tribute to Burmese kings
since ancient times. Therefore, according to the British, it was rightful for the British to
annex the Tai territory, which had considerable natural resources—teak and gemstone ores
in particular. In administrative terms, the British considered Burma—and by extension, the
resource-rich Tai principalities—merely a province of British India.

In 1887, the British divided Tai territory into two regions. More specifically, they
delineated North Shan States, with Lashio as the administrative capital; and South Shan
States, with Taunggyi as the administrative one. Both regions are on the left side of Nam
Hkong. For the Tai territory that was located on the right side of Nam Hkong, the British
assigned Kengtung to be a political centre, which governed 33 other small cities. During
this colonial period, the British brought several developments to the Federated Shan States.
In terms of administration, a policy known as “indirect rule” was implemented in the land
of the Tai people. That is to say, the saohpas were allowed to govern their states in a
traditional way. Those Tai chiefs, however, were still under the control of the British
through its commissioners and officials sent to different Tai states to control and advise the

In the course of the Second World War, Japan had extended its presence decisively
into Burma by 1942, pushing the British out temporarily. Later on, General Aung San, who
previously was supported by the Japanese army, had a conflict with Japan and he wanted
to expel the Japanese troop from Burma. He formed an anti-Japan group, and joined hands
with the British. After Japan lost the war, the British came back to re-occupy their former
colony. Shortly after that, General Aung San gathered people from several sectors to make
a demand for independence from the British. On February 7, 1947, a number of saohpas
from several states, as well as Kachin and Chin representatives, came to Panglong56 for a
meeting chaired by General Aung San. The General addressed several ethnic groups and
called for their participation in requesting sovereignty from the British. According to his

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56 “Panglong” or “Pang Luang” (in Thai) is a Tai mong located in southern Shan State.
speech, once Burma’s having gained independence, all states shall be politically unified for as long as ten years, and then regain their sovereignty and have their own governments (Prani 1985:215). All participants at the meeting supported his proposed idea. Hence, on February 12 in the same year, a covenant known as “Panglong Agreement” was made (see Appendix A). General Aung San’s life, however, was not long enough to witness the end result of the agreement. On July 19, 1947 during the meeting of the Executive Council (of the interim government) to draft a constitution, the General, six of his cabinet ministers, and some other high-ranking officials were assassinated by a gang of armed paramilitaries.

Subsequent to a persistent protest of Anglo-colonisation, which resulted in riots broken out in many parts of the county, Burma gained its hard-won independence from the British Empire in that same year\(^57\), and had the first general election. Sao Shwe Thaik (or “Chao Suai Tai” in Thai), Prince of Yawnghwe\(^58\), was elected Burma’s first president, and was in the office from 1948 to 1952. After that, he worked as the spokesperson of the Burma Congress until 1960. His wife, Sao Nang Hearn Hkam—the Mahadevi\(^59\) of Yawnghwe\(^60\), was elected a member of parliament during the 1956–1960 term. On March 2, 1962, General Ne Win staged a coup d’état, which has resulted in a socialist ideology, and the country has been ruled by the current military regime since then.

The Panglong Agreement has never been recognised by the Burmese military government, leaving significant participatory ethnic groups wholly dissatisfied. Certain nationalist policies, such as the promotion of Burmese culture and the compulsion to use only the Burmese language in schools across the country, have combined to suppress and subvert the cultures of larger ethnic groups, such as the Tai, the Karen, and the Mon. These ethnicities maintain that Ne Win’s military regime has tried to suppress them as well as to assimilate or dissolve their nations (Bunthiam 2005:264). Therefore, a number of anti-

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\(^{57}\) The British did not directly give independence to the Tai and other ethnic groups such as the Chin, and the Kachin; instead, with a hope that Burma would do the same to those states, they handed over the territories of those ethnic groups to Burma. Apparently, the British policy turned out to be a big mistake because those states have not gained autonomy yet. The Federated Shan States under the British’s indirect rule, therefore, has become the Shan State of the Union of Burma (Myanmar).

\(^{58}\) Or “Yong Huai” in Thai and “Nyaung Shwe” in Burmese. Yawnghwe is a Tai mong a few kilometers north of Inle Lake, one of Shan State’s most famous tourist attractions.

\(^{59}\) A royal title assigned to a queen of Tai principalities.

\(^{60}\) A daughter of Hkunsang Tonhoong, Prince of Hsenwi.
Burma armies have arisen, led, for instance, by the Tai, the Karen, and the Mon. Meanwhile, some Tai people, ruling-class members in particular, sought refuge in other countries, such as the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and Canada.

Furthermore, a mass of Tai people left their homeland for Thailand, especially in Thai provinces that are bordering Burma. There are numerous ethnic Tais residing in areas that are under control of Tai armies; the Shan State Army (SSA), for instance. Some of the displaced Tai people voluntarily serve the Tai armies with a hope that their homeland will regain independence some day. At present, the Tai have an administrative and political organisation known as the “Restoration Council of the Shan State” (RCSS). In Bangkok on April 17, 2005 a group of saohpas led by Sao Hso Khan Pha—also simply known as Sao Hso, a son of Sao Shwe Thaike, proclaimed the Shan State independent from Myanmar, and the establishment of Shan State’s displaced government. Supported by Lieutenant General Yawd Serk, SSA’s leader and RCSS’s chairman, the Shan State Congress was established in December 23, 2008 at Loi Tai Leng, the headquaters of SSA. The goal of the newly-formed organisation—allied by Tai armies and other non-Tai insurgent groups—is to fight against the the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), the official name of the military government of Myanmar, in order to achieve the autonomy of the Shan State.

### 2.2 **We are Tai: Varying Ethnonyms Given to the Tai**

We are Tai, the great nation belonging to this land. We are Tai. We should look back on our own roots, Understand and treasure our [past] history …

(Excerpted and translated from the song “Hao Pen Tai” [haw⁴-pe:n¹-taj⁴]⁶⁴)

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⁶¹ The illegal migration—for fleeing the Burmese military regime’s oppression or for finding jobs in Thailand—of the Tai as well as other ethnic groups to Thailand continues to exist although the Thai government has tried to prevent this problem.

⁶² The same name as the hero king of the Tai as mentioned earlier.

⁶³ Sao Shwe Thaike was seized by Ne Win’s soldiers, and later was imprisoned and accused of threatening the military government. He mysteriously died in jail after eight months of imprisonment. With Thai government’s approval, his family took refuge in Thailand. In late 1960s the family migrated to Canada. His eldest daughter, Sao Ying Sita, lived in Canada for a short time before moving to New York City to work for Time Inc.

⁶⁴ Literally translated “We are Tai.”
This section shows how the Tai have been recognised and labelled with different ethnonyms by neighbouring ethnic people, as well as by the people who colonised them. I will begin with “Shan,” the term popularly used by most Western writers. Then, ethnic titles given to them by the Chinese will be discussed, followed by the discussion of “Ngiao,” a term the Thai in the northern region usually call the Tai. “Thai Yai” is a popular and formal title most Thai, Thai authorities in particular, use to classify the Tai as a minority group. Then, the term “Tai,” as an “emic ethnonym” with which the Tai prefer to identify themselves, and by which they prefer to be categorised by others.

2.2.1 Shan

It seems that scholars from the Western societies are acquainted with the term “Shan,” and they are in favour of this ethnonym over the others. Formerly, this term only appeared in travellers’ or missionaries’ daily notes, or colonial officers’ reports (e.g., Sangermano 1893; Dodd 1996; O’Connor 1928). Leach’s “Political Systems of Highland Burma” (1954) provides interesting and insightful information on interaction between the Kachin and the Shan (Tai). The book allows the academic world to know more about the groups. With reference to the term, Leach points out that,

> The word in this form is derived from the Burmese. The English geographical expressions Assam and Siam are related terms. The Kachin (Jinghpaw) equivalent for Burmese shan is sam. The Burmese apply the term Shan fairly consistently to all the inhabitants of political Burma and of the Yunnan-Burma frontier area who call themselves Tai. In the west and south-west of Burma this involves some ambiguity since the Burmese distinguish Shans from Siamese, although both groups call themselves Tai. But for the north-east Burma the definition is clear enough. (Leach 1954:29)

Dodd presented data that conforms and supports Leach’s idea.

> Shan is the Burmese term. The origin of it no one seems to know though there are some conjectures. Some writers think it has a common origin with Siam and other

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65 Sangermano used “Sciam” in favour of “Shan.” As he put it, “All that tract of land which extend from 25° to 20° north latitude, between the Chinese province of Junan [Yunnan], Siam and the kingdom of Ava, is inhabited by a numerous nation called Sciam [Shan], who are the same as the Laos” (Sangermano 1893:43).
writers rather indignantly reject that opinion. To the Burman and to most English writers who get their knowledge of Tai history from Burma the term Shan is the appellation for those people who call themselves Tai. (Dodd 1996:218)

A late Thai etymologist and political icon for student movements during the 1970s like Jit Phumisak has findings that support what Leach had discovered previously. He indicates that Shan is a term that the Burmese have used to call the Tai in the Shan State, the Kachin State, as well as the Tai in some areas of India (Jit 2001:7). The Burmese also employ the term “Tai” to refer to the Thai (non-Tai) in the northern region of Thailand, and to the (Tai) Lue in the Xishuangbanna area in Dai66 Nationality Prefecture in Yunnan Province of China (Jit 2001:13). Although the Burmese always call the Thai people in the Chao Phraya67 Basin “Yodia,”68 generally, they employ “Shan” when mentioning the people having Tai background. This view, therefore, has been handed down to the westerners. The western people, however, do not exclusively apply Shan to all Tai people. Instead, they use the term to distinguish the Tai who live outside Thailand and Laos. Additionally, several Westerners formerly called the Tai in Myanmar “Burmese Shan,” and called the Tai in southern part of China “Chinese Shan.” They sometimes referred to the Tai in Burma and Assam “Western Shan,” and the Tai in China and Tonkin “Eastern Shan”69 (Jit 2001:15-16).

Jit (2001:16) states that the term “Shan” has been recognised by the Westerners since mid–24th Buddhist century. The oldest usage of the term can be found in the document written by Symes (1969) in 1795. As Yule and Burnell (Jit 2001:16) suggest, the term had not widely used until after the Anglo-Burmese War in 1824–1826. The Westerners, who went to Burma to conduct a survey or study of this ethnic group always

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66 The term “Dai” is another variation of the term “Tai.” It is officially and exclusively used in China.
67 The Chao Phraya is Thailand’s most important river. It consists four main tributaries, Ping, Wang, Yom, and Nan. The four tributaries come to merge in Nakhon Sawan, a province that administratively divides the North from the Central.
68 The word is transformed from “Yodaya,” a term that the Burmese use to call “Ayutthaya,” a kingdom that existed for 417 years before the rise of the Thonburi and Bangkok Periods. Ayutthaya is now a province in the central region.
69 Westerners in ancient times also called the Tai other ethnic names such as “Sham” and “Siam,” which the latter of which has the same sound as the term applied to the Thai (non-Tai) in Thailand. For example, Simon de la Loubère, King Louis XIV’s ambassador to the Ayutthaya Kingdom during 1686–1688, applied the term “Siam” to all Siamese and the Tai in his record (Jit 2001:17-18).
use the term “Shan” as employed by the Burmese (see Cochrane 1910, 1912, 1915; Milne 2001; Colquhoun 1885; Elias 1876; Hallet 1885; O’Connor 1928). Scott, an English official working in Burma during colonial times, describes how the British had perceived this ethnic group,

The Burmese call them Shans, and since we took over the area which is called the Federated Shan States and is the ancestral and latter-day home of the race, we call them Shan, and so they will remain, whatever they may say. (Scott 1982:202)

Jit provides an interesting conclusion regarding the term Shan,

Shan in both Burmese and English, including in other western languages has a meaning that includes all the Tais, who live outside the Chao Phraya Basin and Laos [and] Siam is the same term as Shan, and Sem in Mon language. It has been used to refer to the Tai without any socio-political barrier, in general. (Jit 2001:19)

2.2.2 The Tai in the Perception of the Chinese

According to Somphong (2001:5), the Han identify the Tai by considering their ethno-physical appearances. For example, “Pai-i” (or Bai-yi) the White-Shirted; “Jinchi” the Golden-teethed; “Yinchi” the Silver-teethed, “Hoeichi” the Black-teethed. The Han also apply other titles such as Liao, Lao, Maang Maan, Yue, and Yi to the Tai. The way in which the Han identify other ethnic groups is fascinating. As Jit explains,

It is a custom for the ancient Han to call other ethnic groups with denigrating titles. They seemed to stereotype the region south of the Yangtze as uncivilised land, and to label ethnic groups in such areas with the term maan [rising tone], which denotes barbarians. (Jit 2001:365-366)

The above point conforms with Dodd’s notion in his famous book, “The Tai Race: Elder Brother of the Chinese,” which says that “the present-day Chinese […] regards all surrounding peoples as inferior barbarians” (Dodd 1996:3). In his view, the Tai, in fact, who descended from the Ai-Lao “are older residents of China than even the Chinese themselves” (Dodd 1996:3).

From his research on ancient Chinese documents, Somphong discovers that several terms were employed by the Chinese to identify the Tai. He points out that titles the
Chinese have given to Tai-speaking groups have changed from time to time. This could be summarised as follows. “Yue-Bai Yue” is the oldest ethnonym the Chinese call them. It means the hundred groups of barbarians, and it appears in historical records of the Han Dynasty. The term “Yue” itself denotes those who have tattoos on their bodies and those who have short hair. “Siam” or “Sayam” is an ethnic title that appeared during the late Han Dynasty period (25–220 AD). Another term is “Maan,” which was widely used when the Tang Dynasty (618–907 AD) ruled the empire. Although “Maan” is used in reference to several tribes, the “Maan-i” is the one whose culture is most similar to the present-day Tai. “Bai-i” was coined during the Tang and Song Dynasties periods (618–1279 AD). The Chinese identified the Tai as “Bai-yi,” which means the white-shirted people that symbolises the state of being uncivilised. Wearing white shirts is a mark of being uncivilized in the view of the Chinese during that time. This ethnic title was used until the Yuan, Ming, and Qing Dynasties periods. Generally, Bai-yi could be divided into two subgroups, “Da Bai-yi” and “Xiao Bai-yi.” The Da Bai-yi is the Tai living in the vicinity locally known as “Tai Khong” or “Dehong” in Chinese, while Xiao Bai-i is the (Tai) “Lue” in Xishuangbanna. Additionally, there is the term “Dai,” which is a general ethnonym for the Tai-speaking people and the (Tai) Lue in China. This title has been used since the Chinese Revolution in 1911 (Somphong 2001:43-45).

Currently, the Dai is one of China’s official 56 ethnic groups. Most of them have settlements and earn their livings in Xishuangbanna’s Dai Autonomous Prefecture of Yunnan Province. According to China’s fifth national census on November 1, 2000, the populations of the Dai is 1,159,000 persons (Wang 2004:138); compared to the whole number of ethnic minority groups in China which is 106,430,000, roughly one percent of the total ethnic populations combined (Wang 2004:10).

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70 The Tai “Tai Khong” refers to the Tai whose settlements are south of Nam Hkong. They could be categorised into two broad groups. The first group is dwellers astride China-Myanmar border zone such as Mueang Mao, Mueang Chaefang, Mueang Wanthiang; while the other groups live in the vicinities of Mueang Khon, Mueang Ti, and Mueang La. The latter group is also known as “Tai Nuei” or “Tai Ler.” Although the both groups have the same dialect, their scripts are different. That is to say, while the former use the alphabets of the Tai in Shan State, the latter use the alphabets that are similar to those of the Tai Ahom in Assam (Yos 2000:2-3).

71 “Dai” is the pinyin spelling of the term “Tai.”
2.2.3 Ngiao

The title “ngiao” appears to be an ethnonym that the people in the northern region of Thailand or locally known as “Lan Na” are familiar with and have heard for a long time. Where the term is derived from is still unsettled. Anan Ganjanapan, a Thai anthropology professor of Chiang Mai University, states that the Northern Thai—as the common subgroup “Lan Na”—call themselves “Khon Mueang,” usually refer to the Tai speakers as “ngiao,” a name taken from a Tai city (Anan 1995:7-8). In his famous book, Dodd designated this ethnic name to the “western Shan” dwelling on the western side of Nam Hkong (Dodd 1996:205). According to Prani’s indication, Ngiao emerged as a city in the Tai legendary history (Prani 1985:72). The city of Ngiao was established and subordinate to “Pa,” a crucial city of the Nanchao Kingdom.

During the final phase of the fieldwork in February 2007, I had a conversation with a Thai art professor at Chiang Mai University, who has conducted research on Tai-speaking ethnic groups’ histories and cultures for years. Regarding the term “ngiao,” he articulates,

The term “ngiao” has appeared and has been perceived by the people in Lan Na since the ancient times. The term itself represents both an ethnic group, and a territory. In terms of the ethnic group, to the Lan Na people, the Ngiao are people

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72 I use the Thai-English transliteration system suggested by the Royal Institute of Thailand. Some people may use other systems. For example, Dodd (1996) and Conway (2006) use “ngio” while Sarassawadee (2005:205) uses “ngieo.”

73 Niti (2004:6) points out that not only do the northern Thai people call the Tai “Ngiao,” but the Thai people in the central region also use this ethnic term for the various Tai groups.

74 Lan Na was a kingdom, once ruled by the Burmese for over two centuries, and later by Siam. Chiang Mai is the centre of Lan Na. At present it is an upper part of Thailand’s northern region. The Kingdom of Lan Na was founded in 1296 by King Mangrai (1261–1311). Literally, it means “the country of a million rice-fields” (Cœdès 1966:130). For the meaning and boundaries of Lan Na Kingdom, please see Sarassawadee (2005:11-17).

75 Besides the people in Lan Na, the Lao people also use the term “ngiao” for the Tai (Prani 1985:71).

76 In Jit’s view, after the glorious time of “Chiang Mai as a centre of the Lan Na Kingdom” was over, Lan Na was subordinate to Siamese kingdoms in the central plains. The Siamese treated the Lan Na people as subjects or slaves because of their former subordination to the Burmese for over two centuries. To respond to this, they called themselves “Khon Mueang,” which means civilised people who live in cities (Jit 2001:371-372).

77 According to Dodd (1996:218), “The western Shans include not only the Ngio but the Ahoms of Assam and the Khamti of the settlements west of the Irrawaddy.”
whose original settlements are ranging from present-day southern Yunnan Province of China to the Nam Hkong Basin. In terms of the territory, ngiao is an area that once used to be a part of Lan Na Kingdom. The perception of the term could be seen from names of some local food in the North of Thailand, including a song tune called thamnong phleng ngiao (interview with Thianchai Aksorndit, February 19, 2007).

According to “Chiang Mai Chronicle: The 700th Anniversary of Chiang Mai Edition,” (Udom 1995) I have discovered that the term “ngiao” first appeared during the reign of King Tilokarat (1441–1487), the ninth king of Lan Na Kingdom. Interestingly, the terms “ngiao” and “yiao” were interchangeably used. From the reign of King Kawila (1782–1816) onwards, the term “yiao,” however, has never been found in the chronicle. During the reign of King Tilokkarat, the Lan Na Kingdom was so powerful that its power reached the vicinity of the Ngiao. As Sarassawadee describes,

To the west, Lan Na expanded into the Shan States, taking over Mueang Laikha, Mueang Nai, Sipho, Mueang Yong Huai, and other areas. Tilokarat swept the countryside of Greater Tai families and resettled 12,328 people in Lan Na. (Sarassawadee 2005:80).

It appears that the term in different dictionaries has a negative meaning. For example, in the Northern Thai Dictionary of Palm-Leaf Manuscripts “ngiao” is defined as the “title for the Tai Yai. At one time, it is referred to as a subgroup of the Shan, more recently to all the Shan and now considered as pejorative by many Shan.” (Aroonrut Wichienkeeo et al. 1996:160). Another dictionary, “Lan Na–Thai Dictionary: Mae Fa Luang Edition”—compiled by Udom Rungrueangsi (1990:313), suggests that the term not only refers to a large snake or naga, but also denotes “an ethnonym for the Tai Yai with a disrespecting implication.”

No matter how the term “ngiao” has been formed and how long it has been settled in the perception of the people in Lan Na and Laos, the Tai “do not acknowledge the name of Ngio as belonging to them, insisting that they should be known as Tai” (Dodd

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78 In the Thai edition of the “History of Lan Na,” when discussing about the Tai people and their cities that had a relationship with Lan Na or were under the rule of Lan Na, as well as the conflicts between the Tai in Lan Na and the Siamese Government, Sarassawadee (1996) always uses the term “ngiao,” while in the English edition, apparently, he prefers to use the terms “Shan,” the “Tai Yai” or the “Greater Tai.”

79 See the discussion about this term in the next subheading.
1996:218); and labelling them with this ethnonym is incorrect (Prani 1985:71). The reason why the Tai people prefer not to be called “ngiao” is that most feel that the term is disrespectful and insulting to them (Niti 2004:6).

2.2.4 Thai Yai or Tai Yai

There are two systems to spell this ethnonym, “Thai Yai” (ไทยใหญ่) and “Tai Yai” (ไทใหญ่). In his article “The Study of Tai Yai (Shan) Language and Scripts,” Somphong clarifies the use of the two spellings: “The terms Thai Yai (ไทยใหญ่) and Tai Yai (ไทใหญ่) refers to the same ethnic group, the Tai. Thai Yai has been widely used for a long time while Tai Yai has been introduced recently after the classification of Tai family language (Somphong 1995:19).

It has been assumed by the Thai people, old generations in particular, that the Tai-speaking people was divided into two subgroups: the Thai Yai and the Thai Noi, literally Greater Thai and Lesser Thai, respectively (Wijeyewardene 1990:48). The Thai Yai are actually the Tai people who live in the Nam Hkong and the Mao Basins while the Thai Noi are the Tai who settled down in the eastern Mekong Basin in Laos and Vietnam. The latter moved to the south, and then became the people of Lan Na, Lan Chang, and Sukhothai. Thus, the “Thai Yai” relates to the “Tai,” which refers to an ethnic people dispersedly dwelling on the west side of the Mekong that covers the Nam Hkong and upper Ayeyawadi Basins (Sisakra and Sujit 1991:89), and “should probably include the Ahom and other Tai groups of Assam” (Wijeyewardene 1990:48). The Thai people have been familiar with the term “Thai Yai” and usually identified themselves as “Thai Noi” since ancient times. The titles Thai Yai and Thai Noi were already in common use as late as the 17th century. During his ambassadorship in the Ayutthaya Kingdom, Envoy Simon de la

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80 Wijeyewardene (1990) spells “Tai jai.”
81 yai means “large, big, great; main, superior, major; in charge, in command” (Dommern and Sathienpong 1999:552).
82 noi means “little; small, diminutive, not much; few, not many” (Dommern and Sathienpong 1999:249).
83 The Lao people pronounce this “Lan Xang.” The term means “The Land of Million Elephants.” It is the Lao Kingdom, which was established in 1354.
84 An early kingdom in the area around the city of Sukhothai, in north central Thailand. It existed from 1238 until 1438.
Loubère\(^{85}\) (1642–1729) recorded that the Siamese identified themselves as Thai Noi and called those living in the northern mountains and other groups Thai Yai or “Great Siams” (Niti 2004:7).

Niti suggests that the central Thai at present usually identify the Tai—both those in the Shan State and those in many areas in the northern region of the country—with the ethnic term “Thai Yai.” Although they never call themselves with such name, they are aware of that usage (Niti 2004:5). Conway says that the Tai were named “Tai Yai” or Shan Proper because “they formed the largest group of Tai in the Shan States” (Conway 2006:13). Despite the fact that the term “Thai Yai” or “Tai Yai” have been formally and widely used verbally and in writing, several intellectuals in Tai Studies and other disciplines, anthropology in particular\(^{86}\), would rather use the term “Tai” in their studies because it is a self-reference title, which represents the identity of the Tai as a whole.

There is another ethnonym that more or less relates to the term “Thai Yai.” That is “Tai Long.” Bunchuai Sisawat (1960), a Thai ethnologist, says that both terms refer to the same ethnic group. “Long” [loŋ], or luang\(^{87}\) in Thai, is a Tai word denoting “large or great.” Thai anthropologists such as Sumit and Samerchai, who are specialised in Tai-speaking group studies, suggest that the term “Tai Long” widely used in the Shan State denotes an ethnic group known as Thai Yai in Thailand (Sumit et al. 2002:5). In my research village, as well as in other Tai-occupied areas in Thailand, generally, many Tai people identify themselves as “Tai Long” while the others identify themselves by using other Tai subgroup ethnonyms. The issue is elaborated in Chapter 4.

### 2.2.5 Tai

In general, many Thai people tend to think that “independence or freedom” is the definition of the term “Thai” (alternately spelled as “Tai”). A notion of the term in this sense has been passed down from generation to generation since the Ayutthaya Period. At that time the term had nothing to do with an ethnonym; instead, it indicated a social status

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\(^{87}\) It means “great; public, state, government; royal” (Dommern and Sathienpong 1999:527).
of individuals (Luang Wichit Wathakan 1969:95-99). “Tai,” therefore, does not simply mean “independence or freedom” as many people may understand. In fact, the term denotes a native, an inhabitant, a man, a people, or a person, who have or has permanent settlements (Wijeyewardene 1990:48; Xie Yuan Zhang 1989; Jit 2001:355).

In the latter usage the term does not simply mean “man as a human being,” but a “social(ised) person or people” (Jit 2001:357-358; Pinkaew 2003b:158). This discourse leads to Pinkaew’s argument: “‘Tai’ refers to ‘society’ people or people of the mu[e]ang, as distinct from the non-Tai who live in the hills” (Pinkaew 2003b:158).

Jit also explains that in the Shan State, the Tai people tend to describe their country as a land of *Loi Samsip, Tai Samsip* [lɔj1-sa:m1-si:ja:s-m1-taj4-sa:m1-si:p4], literally means “Thirty Mountains and Thirty Tai Groups” (Jit 2001:354-364). With respect to “The Thirty Tai Groups,” not all of them are considered Tai. As Bunchuai puts it,

> Most of them are hill tribes people, not the Tai. The number of their population in the Tai country is as much as the whole number of Tai population. The Tai, thus, call the hill tribes people Tai to please them so that they could live in peace with other ethnic groups. (Bunchuai 1960:22)

Based on an etymological method, Jit suggests that “Tai” in this context implies “persons, people, residents,” and that this original meaning might be already forgotten. He also suggests that the meaning is identical with the term “Tai” used in traditional Laotian language and literature (Jit 2001:360). This reveals the probable ethnic strategy of the Tai in their attempt to contest or retaliate against the Han, who have insulted them since ancient times (Jit 2001:365).

Although several scholars use “Shan,” or “Thai Yai/Tai Yai” in their writings, they admit that “Tai” is the term this ethnic group has identified themselves with (see Yule 1968: 291; Somphong 1995:18, 2001:3; Niti 2004:4-5; Winai 2002; Bunchuai 1960). Even

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88 Somphong (1995:18) indicates that the Tai call themselves “Tai” without the term “Yai” as a modified part to signify the linkage between them and the “Thai Noi.”
89 Cœdès (1966:131) calls the people in Thailand, the Shan State, and Laos “T’ai.”
90 Xie Yuan Zhang (1989) indicates that the meaning of “Tai as Free” has been used since the 17th century.
91 Jit’s proposition concurs with Dodd’s statement, “[I]t is not only possible but probable that the Tai-speaking race called themselves Lao from the earliest times. For this word “lao” in their language originally meant “man” or “person” (Dodd 1996:7).
Sir James George Scott (1851–1935), a Scottish journalist and colonial administrator who helped establish British colonial rule in Burma, concluded that “[t]he proper name of this people is not Shan, but Tai, and among themselves and with most of their neighbours they are always Tai” (Scott 1982:202).

Based on my intensive fieldwork, the majority of the Tai in the research village are inclined to identify themselves as Tai, and to relate other cultural aspects with this ethnic title. They call their native country “Mong⁹² Tai” [məŋ⁴-taj⁴] (see Sao Sanda 2008:15), and their language lik⁹³ Tai [liːk³-taj⁴]. Therefore, this is sufficient rationale to refer to the subjects of this research as the “Tai.” However, it appears that the Tai in Ruam Chai have increasingly acknowledged the term Thai Yai, and it has currently become a crucial part of their identity construction. This can be observed in the following chapters.

In the first stage of fieldwork, I interviewed—both formally and informally—Jawmlern, the former president of “Prachakhom” Ruam Chai, literally Ruam Chai Civil Society, for several times. He has lived in Ruam Chai since the Khun Sa time, and worked as a teacher in school established by the opium warlord. Jawmlern has been locally respected and recognised as the person who is knowledgeable about Tai history and culture. With such qualifications, he is the first person, from whom the local people had suggested me to ask information. At the very first time I met him, it was clear that he usually refers to his ethnic background and his Tai fellows in the village “Thai Yai.” Apart from Jawmlern, the workers at the guesthouse, where I stayed during the fieldwork, use this ethnonym when they talked to me in the beginning.⁹⁴ The term is also primarily used in an annual report of Thoed Thai Subdistrict Administrative Organisation, including in documents written by Khrueaduean (2005) about the local Tai populace.

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⁹² This word is spelled and pronounced “เมือง” (mueang) in Thai.
⁹³ lik could mean alphabets, script, language, as well as literature.
⁹⁴ After they know me and when they feel more comfortable with me they use the terms “Tai” and “Thai Yai” interchangeably.
2.3 The Tai People: From Past to Present

At present, although the settlements of the ethnic Tai have been dispersedly established in such different countries as Yunnan and Guangdong Provinces of China, Assam State of India, northern region of Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand; most of the Tai population lives in the resource-riched plateau nourished by Nam Hkong and its tributaries.\footnote{Besides Nam Hkong, the Tai soil is also fertile from other two important rivers, the Mekong and the Ayeyawadi.} The land of the Tai in present-day Myanmar is formally called “Shan State.” The state’s capital is Taunggyi, which has become important both politically and economically since the British colonisation. Geographically and administratively, the Shan State is divided into three regions—North, South, and East\footnote{East Shan is located on the eastern side of Nam Hkong.}—where their administrative centres are Lashio, Taunggyi, and Kengtung\footnote{The Thai call this city “Chiang Tung.”}, respectively (Akkhani 2005:149).

The Shan State is populated by roughly eight million people.\footnote{Conway (2006:11), who obtained data from Scott (1999)’s “Burma, A Handbook of Practical Information,” indicates that at the end of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century the population of Shan State was around one million.} Of this number, the Tai constitute 68 percent of the population from several ethnic backgrounds ranging from the Paluang (or Ta-arng), the Pa-o (or Taungsu), the Wa, the Kachin, the Dhanu, the Intha, the Lahu, the Akha, the Kokangnese, the Padaung (or Kayan), the Lisu, the Yang-lam, the Liju, the Indian and the Chinese immigrants, to the Burmese (Akkhani 2005:144-145). According to a survey conducted by the Myanmar authority, an official population number of the Tai in the Shan State in 1989 is approximately 3,880 thousand. In contrast to the number provided by the Burmese military government, the Tai insurgent groups argue that an actual Tai population is close to eight million (Khachatphai 1997:34). Martin Smith, a British journalist and writer specialising in national Burmese affairs and its ethnic minority affairs, reveals in his book the doubtful validity of the demographic statistic reported from the Myanmar authorities, “Shan nationalist leaders claim ethnic Shans make up just over half the state’s estimated six million inhabitants; the State Law and Order

\footnote{Saimong Mangrai suggests that the rate of growth of the Tai population in Shan State in early 19\textsuperscript{th} century was slow. The population numbers of the Tai in 1901, 1911, 1921, and 1931 were 1,236,357; 1,348,740; 1,433,542; and 1,506,337, respectively (Saimong Mangrai 1965:7).}
Restoration Council (SLORC) puts the figure at just 1.64 million out of a total 4.25 million." (Smith 1994:58). The reason as to why the Myanmar-surveyed demographic statistics of the Tai and of other ethnic groups is doubtful is the fact that a precise ethnic group census has not been made since the last British survey in 1931 (Smith 1994:17). Moreover, an inaccuracy of the statistics has been affected from the Second World War, and then the political turmoil that has erupted since 1948 (Smith 1994:17). The latter circumstance is the most crucial factor influencing the radical decrease of the Tai population in the Shan State.

Since the military government came to power in 1962, those who speak out or act out against the government have been imprisoned, tortured, and killed. Myanmar’s military junta has oppressively imposed its centralisation and “Burma-nisation policy” (Kaise 1999:28) on the Tai and other ethnic minorities. This, as well as being forcibly relocated to remote and underdeveloped areas, has caused a great number of Tai to leave behind their motherland, in particular for the nearest safe place, Thailand.

The migration of the Tai from the Shan State to the geographic area of present-day Thailand has taken place since the imperialism of the Lan Na Kingdom, continuing sporadically through the 18th and 19th centuries (Kaise 1999:2). Early Tai settlers, over time, had established their communities in such provinces as Mae Hong Son, Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, and Tak (see Figure 2).

Mae Hong Son, one of Thailand’s most ethnically diverse provinces, is inhabited by a great number of the Tai, who form the majority population of the province (Kaise 1999:2). Based on the purpose and time frame of the migration, the Tai who have migrated to Mae Hong Son could be divided into three groups or movements. The first movement came to the area to clear land for farming at a time when the modern-sense of “borders” was unknown. The second group was the Tai who escaped from wars, both the wars among Tai mongs and the Anglo-Burmese wars. The last group was subjects of British Shan State, who crossed the border for trading and for working in the forest industry. The latter group has since settled there permanently.100

100 For more detailed research on the Tai in Mae Hong Son, please see Niti (1995, 2004), and Kaise (1999).
Fig. 1: Shan State map.
Fig. 2: Thailand map.
Having served as the centre of Lan Na Kingdom for centuries, and now the most developing city of northern Thailand, Chiang Mai has experienced the Tai migration since ancient times. In particular, during the reign of King Kawila (1782–1861) who in 1782 was appointed from the Siamese court to govern Chiang Mai\(^{101}\), and, during this “faced [a] severe manpower shortage, due to the continued long warfare” (Sarassawadee 2005:131).\(^{102}\) King Kawila employed strategies of both persuasion and the “capture and herd” method of people from different ethnic groups—including the Tai—from both within and outside the Lan Na Kingdom. King Kawila did this to populate Chiang Mai and other devastated areas of the kingdom.\(^ {103}\) As a result, Tai communities as well as Tai temples are still evident throughout the city of Chiang Mai along and nearby vicinities.\(^ {104}\) Festivals and cultural activities specific to the Tai are still organised and celebrated there.\(^ {105}\)

In Chiang Rai, Thailand’s northernmost province, the Tai established their communities, and have lived there long enough to be, one way or another, assimilated into the northern Thai culture (Bunchuai 2004:49). The Tai in Chiang Rai Province have settled down in several ban(s), the short form of muban(s) which, in the Thai language, means villages, of different amphoe(s) or districts. For example, Ban San Pa Ko and Ban Hua Fai of Mueang District, Ban Ton Hang and Ban Mueang Ho of Mae Chan District, and Ban Sop Ruak of Chiang Saen District. Mae Sai District, however, has more Tai residents than other districts due to its location, where it shares the boundary with the Shan State within

\(^{101}\) At that time, Lan Na was a tributary state of Siam Kingdom.
\(^{102}\) According to Chiang Mai Chronicle, at that time there were only nineteen hundred men (Sarassawadee 2005:131).
\(^{103}\) King Kawila’s reign is known as the time of “Kep phak sai sa, kep kha sai mueang” or “put vegetables into baskets, people into towns” (Kraisri n.d.; English translation, Kraisri 1965).
\(^{104}\) See Wandee (2002)’s anthropological research on the construction process of Tai identity in Chiang Mai.
\(^{105}\) During the final phase of the fieldwork, I met several Tai scholars at a symposium on the Tai’s Collective Knowledge organised at Chiang Mai Rajabhat University on February 18, 2007.
Myanmar. Ban Ruam Chai of Mae Fa Luang District is another location outstandingly inhabited by the Tai, who have settled down since both pre- and post-Khun Sa Era.

Located south of Mae Hong Son and Chiang Mai, Tak is another frontier province where larger concentrations of people with Tai origin could be found. Mae Sot, the most economically important district of the province, comprises a wide range of ethnic groups. Among others is the Tai people. Not only do the Tai dwell in the town of Mae Sot, but also in villages close to the Myanmar border. Like the Tai in other places, in the past the Tai in Mae Sot filled specialised economic niches such as long-distance traders, agriculturalists, artisans, gemstone dealers, and workmen in forest plantations, to name but a few. In spite of the influence of the more pervasive Thai culture, they still maintain their ethnic identities and preserve their unique, Buddhist-influenced traditions as well as ways of life.

Apart from the Tai who are descendants of Tai settlers migrating to Thailand a long time ago, there are those fleeing from the Burmese military regime’s tyrannical and oppressive rule that has taken place for more than four decades. The ethnic Tai exodus has been continuing, and the number of refugees has been increasing significantly since 1996, a year that Khun Sa’s MTA surrendered to the Myanmar army.

To prevent Tai civilians from supporting the newly-established SSA, considered an insurgent army, the Burmese military regime initiated a relocation scheme, forcing over 300 thousand Tais from more than 14 hundred villages in the central part of the Shan State to move to areas controlled by the Burmese military. Thus, massive influx of Tai people has fled to Thailand since 1996. According to the Shan Human Rights Foundation

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106 Administratively, Mae Fa Luang split from Mae Chan District on April 1, 1992. At that time, the status of Mae Fa Luang was a subdistrict. It was upgraded to be a district on December 5, 1996.
107 Khun Sa was one of the most notorious narcotic warlords, the leader of Mong Tai Army (MTA), and the former president of SSRC. Myanmar authorities reported that he passed away on October 28, 2007, after being under a house arrest by the Myanmar military government for 11 years.
109 Another reason is that the Burmese government wants to use the land for Nam Hkong hydroelectric projects, which include four dams on Nam Hkong in regions populated by ethnic minorities that are fighting for autonomy from Myanmar’s military government (Shan Women’s Action Network 2003:2).
(2003:6), the number of the Tais living in exile in Thailand in 2002 is approximately 150 thousand. Under the protection from Tai insurgency groups, most of them live in shelters found along the border while some of them have been absorbed into pre-existing Tai communities located in frontier zone on the Thai side (Kaise 1999:34).

In spite of the fact that Tai groups have attempted to petition the Thai government and associated organisations to recognise the status of the Tai in exile as refugees, progress along these lines has been slow. Consequently, there are no formal Tai refugee camps along Thailand-Myanmar boundary. As the matter of fact, since 1998 onwards Thailand has limited the role of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) to give aid only people in refugee camps. The Tai in exile, therefore, have not been aided in terms of accommodation as well as other basic needs.110 As illegal immigrants, they have to live in fear by hiding themselves in frontier zones whereas some of them survive by hiring themselves out with no work permits. The latter group, hence, has been taken advantage of, assaulted, and, worst of all, they are at risk of being deported any time (Shan Women’s Action Network 2003:7).

The Thai government has been well aware of the contradictions and inherent difficulties in this problem from the beginning. On one hand, certain Thai governmental organisations have given “unofficial” aid in relative secrecy to the burgeoning number of Tai refugees (regardless of their official status). On the other hand, for national security reasons and for controlling illegal border-crossings, the government classifies them as phu phlat thin sanchat phama, literally, “Displaced People with Burmese Nationality.”111 This group includes different ethnic groups from Myanmar, namely the Mons, the Karens, the people with Laotian origin, the people with Thai origin, and the Nepalis, who illegally

110 Thailand cannot give aid to the displaced Tai people along the border openly for fear that this would ruin the relationship with the Burmese military government. Yet, conversations with anonymous Tai villagers, confirm that much-needed private Thai aid and foreign assistance is being discreetly brought to border villages within the Shan State.

111 Thailand does not apply the term “refugees” to people escaping danger from their home countries. Instead, the term “displaced people” is used formally. This is because, as Kaise indicates, “Thailand is not a signatory of the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, which defines the term and rights of refugees. The Thai government and officials avoid using the term “refugee” to avoid giving the impression of being bound by these instruments. But these people are generally recognized as refugees” (Kaise 1999:1).
entered Thailand prior to March 9, 1976\textsuperscript{112} and live in provinces along Thailand-Myanmar border. These displaced people got into Thailand at different periods. For example, those in Mae Sai District have settled down in Thailand for more than 45 years while those in Ruam Chai—the target of my interest—mentioned earlier came to Thailand around twenty to twenty-five years ago (Khachatphai 1997:67-70).\textsuperscript{113} Please note that further information on the Displaced People with Burmese Nationality and other non-citizenship statuses designated to illegal immigrants is available in Chapter 4.

To summarise, an attempt has been made in this chapter to introduce readers to the world of the Tai by discussing the sketch of their history. Although establishment years of Tai kingdoms are still questionable and debatable, several ancient documents as well as legendary narratives indicate that the Tai people—regardless of subgroups—have settled down and come into existence in present-day Shan State and nearby regions for over two centuries. The Tai people in the mentioned geographic context never enjoy a real uninterrupted freedom despite the fact that they used to have the most powerful and glorious political domain known as Mao Kingdom. From being tributary states of the Chinese Empire and the Burmese and Lan Na Kingdoms, the Tai people were colonised by the British, and currently is under the jurisdiction of Myanmar. Ethnonyms given to the Tai by other ethnic groups as well as their preferred self-preference are also provided in this chapter. Besides that, this chapter deals with the brief description of the Tai migration into

\textsuperscript{112} According to the Ministry of Interior, the displaced people who entered the Thai Kingdom prior to March 9, 1976 will be considered as the “former displaced people,” whom the Thai authority allows to stay temporarily. Later, they will be deported from the Kingdom. For those who entered the Kingdom after the aforementioned date will be regarded as “illegal immigrants,” and they will be deported more immediately. In theory, the former displaced people should be evicted from Thailand. But the fact is that these people have permanent addresses, and have been permitted to do certain jobs. Furthermore, the government allows their children, who were born in the country, to study in Thai schools. For the above reasons, it would be taken for granted that the Thai authority would not send the children back to their “home” country. Having been educated in Thai schools, the children of the displaced people have adopted Thai culture, and would be assimilated into Thai culture, eventually. De facto, these children will become Thai people although they have not been granted Thai citizenship (Khachatphai 1997:68). According to Kaise (1999:35-36), Thailand’s lenient policy towards the displaced people is a crucial factor encouraging the Tai to come to Thailand increasingly. “They come because they feel sure that the Thai government would never push them back to Burma.” (Kaise 1999:36).

\textsuperscript{113} Both Mae Sai and Mae Fa Luang are border districts of Chiang Rai Province.
Thailand and their settlements in the country. The next chapter will be solely concerned with the Tai in Ruam Chai, my field research site. I will present the big picture of Ruam Chai from different aspects ranging from geography to history, administration, demography, and culture. One of the highlights of the next chapter is the historical background of Ruam Chai, the village once was considered a “twilight zone” governed by the late notorious wardlord and narcotic-trafficker called “Khun Sa.”
Shan settlements are almost invariably associated with a level stretch of ground irrigated for wet-rice cultivation. The houses vary a good deal in type of construction and pattern of grouping, but the settlements are permanent. (Leach 1954:213)

3.1 Entering the Field: Location and Access

Ruam Chai, literally translated “Confederacy,” is located in the northernmost changwat114 known as Chiang Rai, which is 785 kilometres from Bangkok. The province is known for its spectacular views of mountain scenery, a diversity of highland ethnic people, and Mae Sai, a border market town that is busy all-year-round. This market offers a variety of products from both local areas and from other countries like Myanmar and China, as well as the Golden Triangle.115 The province shares its border with Myanmar for 130 kilometres and with Laos for 180 kilometres. Chiang Rai is covered for the most part with forests and high mountains, the heights of which range from 1,500 to 2,000 metres above the sea level. The central area of the province is the watershed from the surrounding mountains at 410 to 580 metres above the sea level (Chiang Rai Province Office 2005:14).

Chiang Rai City—or as it is officially called Amphoe Mueang Chiang Rai—is situated in the Mae Kok Basin. Having been founded by King Mang Rai (1239–1311) in 1262 and then left unattended by the King, who moved south and established the city of Chiang Mai in 1296, Chiang Rai had been in the shadow of the latter city for centuries. It was only during the reign of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V: 1853–1910), who was

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114 Changwat (province) is the first level of Thailand’s regional administration system. Each changwat is composed of a number of amphoes (districts). An amphoe is composed of a number of tambons (subdistricts). Finally, a tambon is made of some mubans (villages), the smallest political unit in the system. When mentioning their own villages or others, the local people are more likely to use a short version, ban (Thai) or wan [waːn] (Tai), followed by a village name.

115 This infamous delta marks the political boundary and economic trading area between Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand. In addition to the standard goods moving through the region, it is still considered as one the world’s most intensive opium-producing areas.
commanding the administrative reformation, that Chiang Rai was reformed, modernised and appointed a province of 18 districts.\footnote{In the beginning, there were only ten districts. Some of them have become districts of Chiang Mai and Phayao while another has become Phayao Province.}

Regardless of its eco-political inferiority to Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai Province has many positive aspects, particularly its geographic location, a number of natural tourist attractions, as well as highly diverse ethnic mosaic\footnote{Apart from the Khon Mueang, ethnic groups in Chiang Rai Province includes the Tai, the Akha, the Lahu, the Mian, the Karen, the Lisu, the Hmong, and the Kuomintang Chinese descendants (Phisht et al. 2001:21-25).}, all of which contributed to the enhancement of the economic and tourism potential of the province. What makes Chiang Rai ready to be one of the international trade hubs in the Mekong subregion and no less important than other cities are its being developed as one of the two northern-Thai provinces to serve as gateway to a region called “the Economic Quadrangle;” its area adjacent to the Mekong, which offers the most convenient water transportation between Thailand, Laos, China, and Myanmar; and its own international airport.

It would seem that Chiang Rai is not destined to be the outstanding major cities in the North. Given that Chiang Rai is rich in distinctive quality, the province has been forced to deal with many problems in recent decades. These problems range from drug production and smuggling in frontier zones to border disputes, deforestation, and stateless people. The deforestation appears to be the most serious problem that has continently been solved by several governmental and non-governmental sectors. One of the most successful projects that have been launched to improve the quality of life and eradicate the socio-economic problems are the royal development projects established in the area, a reforestation and water conservation enterprises according to the royal initiation of HM King Bhumibol Adulyadej, or King Rama IX (the present King of Thailand), and his immediate family members. These concerns could be seen from, for example, the Doi Tung Development Project, which was initiated by the Princess Mother\footnote{Literally translated “Flag Mountain.”} or “Mae Fa Luang”\footnote{HM King Bhumibol Adulyadej’s mother, who passed away in 1995.} in Mae Fa

\[\text{Phisht et al. 2001:21-25.}\]
\[\text{The name was originally coined by the hill tribes in the area, who would see Her Royal Highness descend from a helicopter on her frequent visits to this area. In the eyes of the hill tribe locals, the landing of the helicopter that transported the Princess Mother to remote areas was poetically likened to the} \]
Luang District, in which my field research site is located. The project aims to support hill tribe people in the Doi Tung and surrounding areas. In so doing, their traditional practice of swidden agriculture (often used for opium poppy cultivation) has been replaced with growing high-value economic crops as well as handicrafts—particularly hand-woven textiles—production. This sustainable development project has played a vital role in reviving the destroyed forestland in this area, while reducing the production of opium poppies. It has also provided legitimate and more stable jobs to the local populace. Consequently, the ecological system has significantly been improved, while the living standards of the locals have continuously been upgraded for over two decades.

Chiang Rai Province aims to deal with unclear-status people by focusing on basic rights and the national security issues, based on the 2005–2008 provincial development plan. This includes a plan to survey undocumented cases to prevent new groups of illegal immigrants. Although some of them, mostly hill tribe people, have already been granted citizenship, a great number of people, particularly the Displaced People with Burmese Nationality, have still been struggling to survive amid discrimination, racial stigmatisation, and general exploitation from the opportunists of society in general.

Although the distance from the city of Chiang rai to Ruam Chai is 66 kilometres and it takes about half an hour by car from Chiang Rai City to Mae Chan, and approximately forty minutes from Mae Chan to Ruam Chai, it would seem that Ruam Chai cannot be reached easily. The actual trip takes a long time on the only accessible road with narrow, steep, curving path. Only those who are accustomed to driving on this route spend about half an hour from Mae Chan, or less than one hour from Chiang Rai City.

descent of a divine mother who has been sent from the heavens to ease their troubles. Thenceforward, she (and the area she endowed) became known as Mae Fa Luang.

121 A town, as the seat of Mae Chan District, situated north of Chiang Rai City, and south of Mae Sai District.
Fig. 3: Chiang Rai Province map.
From Mae Chan to Ruam Chai, one passes through several hill tribe villages nestled along both sides of the road. Winding along the steep ridges of mountains as high as 1,500 to 2,000 metres above sea level, a certain part of the route to Ruam Chai appears incredibly dangerous. The changing road conditions even add to the thrills of driving along this route to Ruam Chai. In a rainy season, the route would not only be slippery but sometimes be blocked with fallen rocks and landslides. In the cool season, the frequent thick fog makes one feels like driving into the misty land with poor visibility condition. Thus, the best time for the travel seems to be during the dry season, even then it seems that the route would never be easy on travellers. Its visibility conditions are affected by smog and smoke caused by farmers’ fires as they clear and prepare their soil for the next planting season.

Having passed through this curvy and steep path for over half an hour, the height level of the topography starts to drop, and then reaches of Samakkhi, a relatively big village of the Yunnanese Chinese. Less than five minutes after that reveals the sight of Ruam Chai’s eye-catching concrete village sign decorated with long drums replica placed on its both sides. Ruam Chai, a large village in the area of roughly twenty square kilometres is mainly covered with steep hills and highlands with a small amount of flat area at its central part. Its geographic location is seemingly perfect for having a settlement and, thus, calculating Khun Sa had chosen this to be the first gathering point and headquarters for his growing army. This naturally-charming village is located in the Nam Kham [nam⁵-kham⁴] Basin approximately eight hundred metres above sea level, within a national forest reserve, which is comprised of the Nam Kham Forest and Mae Chan Forest. Although Nam Kham is considered as a major natural source of water in this area, local people mainly consume unchlorinated water sent to their home through a water-distributing system locally called *prapa phukhao* (mountain tap water). The water supplied

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122 One of Tai musical instruments. The common Thai musical instruments are the long drum, the cymbal, and the gong.
123 Local people sometimes call—in Thai—“Maenam Kham” or “Mae Kham” as variations. Literally, it means Golden River. Nam Kham is a small river, which starts on a high mountain in Mae Fa Luang District. It is 85 kilometres in length and runs through Ruam Chai, Mae Chan District, finally merging with the Mekong in Chiang Saen District.
124 Ruam Chai and other villages in this region are located in the national forest reserve of 400,625 rais (1 rai is equal to 1,600 square metres). Some parts of the forest have been invaded and destroyed. Currently, only 331,410 rais are remaining (Mae Fa Luang District Office 2005:2)
to this system is drawn from streams\textsuperscript{125} up in the mountain and sent to consumers. They also use water from a well(s), dug within their house compound, together with the mountain tap water. Apart from the aforementioned sources of water, villagers rely their cultivation on “Nawng Long”\textsuperscript{126} [nəːŋ lɒŋ] (Big Pond), the only reservoir in the village. The reservoir receives water from rain and from streams flowing from mountains.

In terms of the village territory, Ruam Chai’s boundaries are adjacent to Ban Phatthana of Thoed Thai Subdistrict in the north, Nam Kham in the south, Ban Samakkhi of Mae Salong Nai Subdistrict in the south and east, and Ban Loi Hkam of Mae Salong Nai Subdistrict in the west. Beyond Ruam Chai to the northwest is the narrow and steep road leading to Thailand-Myanmar border. This border point is about thirty kilometres away from Ruam Chai. On the Myanmar side, just a few steps from the borderline, locates village for the Tai exiles and other ethnic groups from the Shan State called “Peing Hpa,”\textsuperscript{127} which is under protection of the SSA, Loi\textsuperscript{128} Kaw Wan\textsuperscript{129} Base.

3.2 Historical Setting: A Transition from Loi Hkam to Ruam Chai

\begin{quote}
The land called Ruam Chai, 
What did it look like in the past?
We would like to remind you the story
To be a lesson, not to provoke hatred or anger
Ruam Chai was known as Loi Hkam,
Where the conflict happened.
We lost our brothers and sisters’ lives
Because of the misunderstanding.
\end{quote}

(Translated from Ruam Chai School song, “Ruam Chai Wanni,” literally translated “Today’s Ruam Chai.”)

As narrated by Khrueaduean (2005), Ruam Chai is located in the area that was once a converging point between the Lan Na Kingdom and Mong Tai, through which travellers as well as long-distance traders passed or briefly stayed over in ancient times. Among the

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{125} Namely, Huai (stream or creek) Doi Khruea, Huai Doi Saeng, and Huai Mai Sang.
\textsuperscript{126} Thai people call “Nong Luang.”
\textsuperscript{127} Or “Phiang Fa” in Thai pronunciation.
\textsuperscript{128} Or \textit{doi} in Thai. The terms means mountain, mount, hill (Domnern and Sathienpong 1999:160).
\textsuperscript{129} In Thai this placed is pronounced “Doi Ko Wan.”
\end{flushleft}
long-distance traders were two well-off brothers from Hsenwi (in present-day northern Shan State), who passed this trading route and rested their caravan at a place in what today is Ruam Chai. The two brothers saw a nearby hill and thought that it was a good location to build a pagoda.\(^{130}\) Reasoning that its top would be a good place of worship for local people and travellers, the two brothers built the pagoda, sculptured two crow images from gold, and placed the relic of the Buddha and the golden crow images into the pagoda.

Based on the legend passing through generations, the moment that the two brothers placed the requisite Buddha relic in the pagoda happened a miracle. That is to say, a golden crow surrounded by hundreds of other black crows flying, proclaimed over the ceremonial site for seven days consecutively. The pagoda was thence named “Phrathat Ka Kham,” literally Golden Crow Pagoda.

\(^{130}\) The Tai people and their neighbours such as the Burmese, the Karen, and the Thai believe that those who contribute to Buddhism by having a pagoda(s) or a temple(s) constructed would earn great merit, which allow for good status and properity in their next life.
Although, legend says that the pagoda was built in 638 AD (Khrueaduean 2005:9), there is not any written evidence of the official establishment of the village. It was probably soon after, or as a result of, the existence of the pagoda. Based on an unpublished document written by Khrueaduean (2005), aside from the Tai, no other ethnic groups have come to settle in this area during the intervening years. He asserts that the very first settlers were the Tai, who called their village “Loi Hkam,” literally translated “Golden Mountain.”

Later on, there had been a malaria epidemic in Loi Hkam and that had caused many to die. The villagers had abandoned Loi Hkam, and later founded a new village on the west side of Nam Kham, which became locally known as “Loi Hkam Nai” (Inner Loi Hkam) or “Loi Hkam Mai” (New Loi Hkam). The original Loi Hkam had been uninhabited until 1944 when the Tai from Mongsart of the Shan State came to reestablish the village of approximately twelve households. Having become more settled, the village was a home to a significant number of Tai migrants from Mae Sai and Mae Chan areas and, particularly, those from the Shan State. Having been governed under the oppression and civil war in Myanmar, the Shan State became no longer a desiring homeland to many Tai people (including other ethnic groups), and thus, a great number of them left behind their country of origin for safe and peaceful places.

Situated in the perfect place, Loi Hkam has not only attracted civilians, but also Tai insurgent groups who have transformed the little peaceful misty village into a trading centre and an excellent strategic location. In 1962, an army led by Po Te Wing had established their base in Loi Hkam. Followed by Chang Si Fu or best-known as “Khun Sa” in 1976. Khun Sa’s Shanland United Army (SUA)\textsuperscript{131} drew a great deal number of oppressed Tai people both from the Shan State and Thailand to come to Loi Hkam to join the army. As a result, the population in Loi Hkam increased in numbers, and the community size grew rapidly. I was informed that during the high point of Khun Sa time in Loi Hkam, his army comprised over two thousand soldiers.

Jawmlern had originally migrated from Kengtung and lived in Mae Sai for a short time. He is among many other people coming to Loi Hkam during the Khun Sa Era. He recalls his first arrival,

\textsuperscript{131} At first SUA was created. After the “Loi Hkam Battle” in 1982, Khun Sa formed his new army called SSA, which later becomes MTA.
I had no relative and I didn’t know any single person up here. I walked up to the small temple on the hill, where I saw a prominent white pagoda. I was greeted by around fifty-year-old monk. I told him that I need to buy a plot of land to build a house on. The monk said I don’t have to buy it, just ask from phuyaiban [village headman]. Taking his advice, I went to see the person who’s in charge of this matter. Then, I got a plot of land, where I built a small house on.

During the Khun Sa Period, not only did Khun Sa develop his army, but also the community as a whole. The village plan had carefully been designed and enacted. The village rules were implemented and orders were strictly practised. With Khun Sa’s impetus, a larger and more comprehensive development of the village took place. Construction of the Central Field—Ruam Chai’s largest multi-purpose space, an old and new Chinese school buildings, a hospital, a power station, and a printing house were accomplished. Many of these have still operated at present. Khun Sa’s ultimate intentions are, however, debatable, since much of the infrastructure, industry, and discipline brought to the village directly benefited his army, first and foremost.

Not only did the spread of para-military discipline into everyday social activities make the village more efficient, but also result in a tighter watch on an area that might be under constant threat. Khun Sa’s soldiers could only benefit from a local power source, available fresh water, and medical care on demand. The printing house itself began as a part of Khun Sa’s propaganda machine. Yet, the peripheral benefits of this largesse allowed the community to upgrade their education, general health, and economic prospects.

Khun Sa’s army’s involvement in drugs was believed to be over 70 per cent of the drug trade occurring along the Thailand-Myanmar frontier and wholly under the control of his army (Khachatphai 1983:264). Naturally, this was a growing concern of the Thai Government. The Thai government was forced to acknowledge that the SUA was a threat to national security and that it could turn the relationship between Thailand and Myanmar sour (still called Burma at the time). The mounting pressure from the government of Thailand, various affected countries, and the United States in particular (Wijeyewardene

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132 At present, the pagoda is painted in gold-yellow.
133 Phuyaiban is a formal Thai term for the local village (administrative) headman. The local people, particularly those in some areas in North Thailand, always call a village headman pholuang.
1990:65), compelled Khun Sa to leave the country in 1980. He then moved his army to a new base at Mueang Song, a village approximately five kilometres from the old base. However, his influence and entourage was still evident in Loi Hkam.

Accordingly, the Thai government decided to eliminate his power by sending the Border Patrol Police (BPP) force to accomplish the mission called “Loi Hkam Battle.” BPP officials attacked his army during January 6–8, 1982. Khun Sa’s army, as a result, moved their troops to the border area, and kept on producing and selling drugs. At last, the BPP completely destroyed Khun Sa’s headquarters on January 21, 1982. This second attack pushed Khun Sa and his remaining soldiers to Myanmar territory at Doi Laeng, opposite Chiang Mai’s Mae Ai District. To take revenge on the Thai authority, many buildings and the police station in the town of Mae Sai were burned down by Khun Sa’s troop (Wijeyewardene 1990:66).

After the battle ended, the Thai government removed Khun Sa’s army from the area, and then reorganised the village administration by assigning officials (actually soldiers and BPP officials) to guard and administer the area directly. Furthermore, officials from the DOPA were assigned to help needy people in the village. A local volunteer force was raised by the Interior Ministry to report news as well as to inform villagers of security issues. All these practices were conducted in order to ensure that Loi Hkam and surrounding villagers would be peaceful and secured (Khachatphai 1983:266).

Interestingly, the Thai government organised a press conference to inform the public of the purposes of the elimination of Khun Sa’s headquarters at Loi Hkam. Apart from prohibiting the movement of drug traders, one reason was “to legalise Loi Hkam as a village under the absolute Thai sovereignty” (Khachatphai 1983:265).

In the view of the Thai State, Khun Sa was a “dangerous person” while in the eyes of some Tai people, he is a drug trader who destroyed a dream of the Tai nation as a whole after he had surrendered his army to the Burmese military regime in 1996 (Withun 2005:33). Yet, he is a person whom many people still value as a hero who, as one local says, “in fact helped build communities of Chinese and Burmese immigrants and the ethnic Lisu people in the area. […] Without him, we could not have come this far with roads, electricity, schools, and farms” (Achara 2001). Among those who have admiration for the
drug warlord is Kamhker, a Tai male in his mid-thirties. In a conversation with him on the history of the village, he provides an interesting viewpoint on Khun Sa,

    To me, drug is not dangerous because it was used as a tool to fight the Burmese government’s power. He [Khun Sa] had tried very hard to bring independence to the Thai Yai people. Without the drug, how could we afford to buy weapons so that we could fight with the Burmese junta? Should he be accused of getting involved with drug business to save the nation? He might be condemned as a bad person, but I look at it differently. I think Khun Sa deserves respect and admiration.

After the 1982 expulsion, Loi Hkam was renamed “Ruam Chai.” The former name, however, has still been referred to by some local people. Describing the village on the west side of Nam Kham as “Loi Hkam Nai” as mentioned earlier, people call the Old Loi Hkam—the present day Ruam Chai—“Loi Hkam Nok” (Outer Loi Hkam) while some would call it “Loi Hkam Kao” (Old Loi Hkam). The village is called differently depending on the occasions and with whom the villagers are communicating. Although the locals, seniors in particular, still prefer to call their village the former name “Loi Hkam,” the village is referred to as “Ruam Chai” when the local people interact with outsiders in order to prevent confusions from the Old Loi Hkam and the New Loi Hkam. Sengmong, one of my contacts, who is in seventies, told me one of the more practical reasons for using the new village name. He said many years ago he took a songthaew134 from the town of Mae Chan back to the village, and he asked the driver to drop him off at Loi Hkam. When the songthaew arrived at the Old Loi Hkam, the driver did not stop because he thought that Num had meant New Loi Hkam. “Now I’d rather call it Ruam Chai instead of Loi Hkam. I don’t want a driver to drop me off at Loi Hkam Nai,” says Sengmong.

    The ceasefire and the reorganisation of the village under “absolute Thai sovereignty” brought unprecedented order to the community without the shadow of Khun Sa’s criminal activity. Older inhabitants and descendants and relatives of Khun Sa’s soldiers created an influx of people to Ruam Chai continuously. These newcomers not only included the Tai fleeing from the turmoil in the Shan State (to where Khun Sa had fled), but also those Tai who had been persuaded by their relatives or friends already resident in

134 Jitney, taxi-bus, a small bus with bench seating along the sides (Domnern and Sathienpong 1999:405). It is, actually, a pickup truck transformed to a public transportation.
Ruam Chai. As word spread, it also brought a number of Thai hill tribe people and the Yunnanese Chinese. Among the people coming to Ruam Chai before, during, and after Khun Sa Period, most of them entered Thailand illegally. This resulted in the stateless people problem at both local and national levels.

Hpalong, one of Ruam Chai’s most respected man in his early eighties, who has been in Ruam Chai for more than 20 years, told me in his old Tai accent, through my interpreter, why and how he came to Ruam Chai.

It’s been over twenty years already. I brought my family from Mongyaw. It’s very far from here. It is located thirty kilometers from Hsenwi. When I got here the village looked quite underdeveloped. Because I know how to play drums and how to ka nok [ka: 3-no:k 5] and ka to 135 [ka: 3-to: 4] that I had learned from a monk at a temple since I was about nine or ten years old, they 136 invited me to come here [Ruam Chai] to teach those things. We took a car from Mongyaw passing through Lashio, Mandalay, Taunggyi, and Kengtung. We eventually reached Thachilek 137, where Pholuang [headman] Parnjarm was waiting to pick us up. He, then, took us here.

Apart from the aforementioned ethnic groups, the Thai people from different regions have moved to the village as well. Some of them are government officials whereas others are married to local Tais. Somsi’s mother is a typical example of how people are brought to Ruam Chai. Somsi is a friendly and talkative Thai woman in her late thirties from Saraburi Province in the central region. She runs a small restaurant near the Central Field. Her mother remarried to a Tai man, and then moved from a town in Saraburi to this mountainous border village. After visiting her mother for quite some time, she decided to settle down here. Somsi recalls how she felt when seeing Ruam Chai for the very first time:

About nine years ago 138 when I came here to visit my mother, I freaked out at the sight of the village. Can you imagine the picture of a group of men with M-16 rifles coming [from the other side of the border] to join the Tai new-year celebrations? […] If my memories serve me right, I haven’t seen Thai Yai soldiers in the village

136 He means Parnjarm, Thoed Thai first headman.
137 Thachilek is Myanmar’s border town locating opposite Thailand’s Mae Sai Town.
138 Interview on February 2, 2007.
for five to six years. I remember that seven to eight years ago several of them usually came in and went out as if Ruam Chai was their homeland.

In the mean time, they didn’t have the O Bo To\textsuperscript{139} or a hospital. The road was so underdeveloped. I still remember the red-dust road back to the old days…six years ago if my memory serves me correctly. When the rainy season arrived, didn’t even think about going out. In the wintertime, it was so cold, and the fog was thick […] I felt unsafe during the first few months here because the way they governed the village was still traditional. I was just a newcomer, so I had to be very careful. The village rules were very strict. For example, if someone got caught that he or she steals someone’s cooking pot, they will hang the pot around that person’s neck, and embarrass that person by walking around the village and calling out the people to have a look. The judgment was made by the leader of the village. They didn’t even need a cop.

Nine years went by. Somsí feels that she fits in with this place, and that she becomes a part of this community. Even though she may decide to stop doing the business in the future, she would consider remaining in Ruam Chai,

Although I may not run the restaurant or wouldn’t have any job up here, I’d love to have a house in this village because of the good weather. I don’t want to live down there. If I had a job down there, I’d prefer to commute, not move out permanently. Ruam Chai is now more convenient. [Asked if isn’t it too far from a health service] Well…actually it’s not far. You can just reach the hospital in less than ten minutes.

Sukanya, Ruam Chai School’s former teacher in her early fifties, is among the government officials sent to work on their duty in Ruam Chai during the first few years after the ceasefire. She shares me with her first impression upon her first arrival over 20 years ago:

I came to Ruam Chai in 1985. At first, I thought that it was only a hill tribe village located on the mountain. So, I brought a lot of dried food. When I got here, it’s not what I had thought at all. It’s a developing village of the Tai. In the beginning, my job was so challenging. Students couldn’t speak Thai at all. Neither did most villagers. […] To be honest, before coming here my knowledge about this place was zero. I hadn’t even known that Ruam Chai or Loi Hkam was once the land occupied by Khun Sa. After getting used to the area and getting to know the locals,

\textsuperscript{139} “O Bo To” stands for \textit{Ongkan Borihan Suan Tambon}. The term literally translated “Subdistrict Administrative Organisation,” a local-level administration organisation found in every Thailand’s subdistrict. Local people habitually refer to this organisation in a simple way. For example, instead calling “O Bo To Thoed Thai” (Thoed Thai Subdistrict Administrative Organisation), people in Ruam Chai mention it as “O Bo To.” This is also a practice in other areas.
I’ve felt sorry for them. Also, I have a good rapport with the children and their parents. This makes me feel like I want to live and die with them.

Ruam Chai is now a much larger and somewhat-modern frontier community. Since the area has become more peaceful and secured under the BPP officials’ administration and arm force’ defense, even tourists are increasing in number. Although Khun Sa has gone, his former headquarters have still been maintained as a “historical attraction,” which is one of selling-points of Ruam Chai (Thoed Thai Subdistrict Administrative Office 2003:5). Nevertheless, Ruam Chai is closely watched by the authorities due to its peripheral location, which is not far from the base of United Wa State Army (UWSA), one of the minority insurgent armies that resist Myanmar’s military government, which bases itself on the Myanmar side of the nearby border; while the SSA also has a base nearby, as mentioned previously.

3.3 Administrative Structure and the pawk System

Ruam Chai both lies within and relies on Thoed Thai Subdistrict; in the same manner that Thoed Thai Subdistrict lies within Mae Fa Luang District, and those lie within Chiang Rai Province. Thoed Thai Subdistrict consists of 18 villages, of which the villages, Ruam Chai (the focus of my field research) is the most sizable. Of all the villages in the Subdistrict, Ruam Chai is the biggest, as it has historically received the most attention since the Khun Sa Period and the direct intervention of the BPP. It is considered the most important as an economic centre but also serves as a nucleus of the O Bo To.

The village of Ruam Chai is divided into 11 pawks [pɔːkʰ] or clusters. While relatively close to each other on the map, the village and pawks are divided by hilly terrain, forest, and a few streams. All pawks are taken care of by kae pawk [kʰɛː2-pɔːkʰ] or heads of a cluster, who are responsible to the authority of the village headman (pholuang, or officially called phuyaiban). Instead of having the usual village headman, Ruam Chai is administered by kamnan, a chief of subdistrict, who serves as the head of Ruam Chai at the same time. According to Jawmlern, this traditional administrative system was introduced to Ruam Chai in 1982. At that time, Parnjarm, the only local who had Thai citizenship, was appointed to be the headman. Because Ruam Chai became larger, which was hard to
govern effectively, he split the village into seven pawks. The numbers of pawk have jumped from seven to 11 due to the growth the village is still experiencing.

Most pawks lie on both sides of the village’s main road (see Figure 5). They have their own characters—each of them is like a hamlet or small neighborhood, and their distinct characters are related to ethnic origin and migration background of resident members. All pawks could be described in order as follows.

Pawk 1 (Pawk Nueng [pɔːkɛ̃-nɯ̩ŋ]) locates at almost the northern end of the village. Many people in this cluster migrated from Mong Ngen, a town approximately one hundred and fourteen kilometres northwest of Kengtung. These groups of people identify themselves and have been called Tai Ngen or Tai Mong Ngen. However, as most of the pawks host a mix of distinct émigrés, some members of this cluster are the Tai Long, Tai Lue, and Tai Khuen, who migrated from other areas in the Shan State. An exemplary couple (following) are from distinctly different villages and have somewhat different inherent traditions. The husband—locally known as “Hkertai”—is Tai Khuen from Mongyarng while the wife—“Moherng”—is Tai Lue from a hamlet in China’s Xishuangbanna. The husband himself serves as the official ceremony leader of the village. Other members are the Tai Long from eastern Shan State. Only few of the Tai Long in this cluster came from the Shan State’s northern or western regions. For example, “Paohkam”—in her late fifties—who is a senior dancer and trainer of a traditional Tai performance called “Seng Tai” [sɛːŋ-taj] is a native of Hsipaw. She has lived in Ruam Chai for more than three decades.

South of Pawk 1 is the location of Pawk 2 (Pawk Song [pɔːkɛ̃-sɔːŋ]). It houses the village meeting hall, the community health office, as well as the Chinese shrine. Most population of this cluster are the Yunnanese Chinese and the Tai. The well known Tai people who live in this pawk include the current kamnan, whose wife is of Tai Lue background; Hpalong, an elderly respected man—mentioned previously—from

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140 The Tai Ngen as well as other subgroups of ethnic Tai found in Thoed Thai are elucidated in Chapter 4.
141 The ethnic names in this section are terms of self-identification.
142 Paohkam told me that she started practising Seng Tai when she was eight years of age. See details of this performance in Chapter 4.
Mongyaw\textsuperscript{143} in northern Shan State whose expertise is involving a traditional Tai performance; and “Mohkeo,” a gracious lady in her mid-eighties who came from Mongyai\textsuperscript{144} in northern Shan State. She is the mother of Muling, a mid-forties Tai male whose his roles will be presented to in Chapter 6. These are some of the diverse people who welcomed me into the village.

The most densely populated area of Ruam Chai is Pawk 3 (Pawk Sam \([\text{p}/:\text{k}^{5}\text{-sa:m}^{1}]\)). This cluster consists of a marketplace, restaurants, grocery stores, barbershops, a photo lab, photocopy shop, electronics stores, karaoke bars, and other entertainment areas. This pawk also hosts Thoed Thai Subdistrict Office, a mosque, and including and the songthaew stand. This cluster has been chosen and settled primarily by numbers of Chinese. Some of them run household businesses of making and selling pickled vegetables, Yunnanese sausages, and fermented soybean curd. The Chinese live among the varietous Tai as well as Thai people from the northeastern region, whose specialty is in restaurants and restaurant businesses.

Pawk 4 (Pawk Si \([\text{p}/:\text{k}^{5}\text{-si}^{2}]\)) is considered the heart of the village. Wat\textsuperscript{145} Ka Kham, literally translated “Golden Crow Temple”\textsuperscript{146}—a monastery in where the aforementioned Golden Crow Pagoda is located—is the village ceremonial centre. It lies on the hill in the northeastern part of the cluster. At the temple foothill, where there are short and steep steps leading to the hilltop, stands the location of \textit{jai wan} \([\text{ts}^{4}\text{-wa:n}^{3}]\) or the village pillar. Another important place in this cluster is the morning market where transactions are routinely performed from 5:00 to 8:00 a.m., but some stores stay open all day. The Central Field or locally known as \textit{Sanam Klang}, the village outdoor activity centre, is located only a few steps from the morning market. The field houses football and basketball fields, a performance stage, a hostel renovated from the old Chinese school\textsuperscript{147}, and an unfinished construction that is supposed to be the community multi-purpose

\begin{footnotesize}
\renewcommand{\baselinestretch}{1}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{143} It is approximately thirty kilometres from Lashio.
\item \textsuperscript{144} Mongyai is a subdistrict of Lashio.
\item \textsuperscript{145} Monastery, wat, temple (Domnern and Sathienpong 1999:459). In fact, the Tai use the term \textit{jawng} \([\text{c}/:\text{ŋ}^{4}]\) for temple, but the Tai in Ruam Chai usually use \textit{wat} in favour of \textit{jawng}.
\item \textsuperscript{146} Khruedauean (2005:8) points out that the temple was built in 1935.
\item \textsuperscript{147} Around ten to fifteen commanders from the Pha Mueang Task Force of the Third Army Area are in charge of taking care of Thoed Thai’s security. They use some rooms in the hostel as an office and chambers.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
The Central Field is the centre of most public activities held by both the village as well as local government agencies. It is also a venue, where the Tai and the Chinese always organise their New Year celebrations.

The easternmost cluster adjacent to Pawk 4 is Pawk 5 (Pawk Ha [po:kh₄-ha:³]). Geographically, it is the biggest cluster. This pawk is significantly covered by forest and mountains with small and widely scattered rice and soybean fields. It was the location for Khun Sa’s previous residence and headquarters and a burgeoning tourist attraction. In this cluster there is currently a small weaving hall for the Housewives Group or locally called “Klum Maeban”¹⁴⁹, a ceramic factory established by volunteers of Japan’s Ministry of Post and Telecommunications, and the Grace Mission Church. Khun Sa’s former soldiers and their families constitute the major members of the cluster. Some members are families of SSA soldiers migrating from different areas in eastern Shan State. One of my contacts, “U-mong”—a Tai male in his mid-twenties, lives in this pawk. His father has been in the army since the Khun Sa Period, and is now serving the SSA at Loi Kaw Wan Base. His parents are native of a Tai village near Myanmar-China border. Another contact, “Wansai,”—a 15-year-old schoolgirl—said that her mother is Tai Yang from Mongkerng in western Shan State. Her views on citizenship and transborder relationship issues will be presented in Chapters 4 and 5, respectively. Tai ethnicities form the majority of the cluster, yet there are some people with Chinese and Akha backgrounds. Among the Tai themselves, the Tai Long is the biggest group with a handful of the Tai Khuen and the Tai Ngen.

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¹⁴⁸ Although the building is undone, as a result of a budget shortage, it is sometimes used as a venue for certain social gatherings.
¹⁴⁹ The group will be discussed in details later in this chapter.
Fig. 5: Sketch map of all pawks (clusters) in Ruam Chai.
Pawk 6 (Pawk Hok [pɔːk⁵-hɔːk⁴]), just west of Pawk 4, hosts “Hern Tai,” the
guesthouse in which I stayed during my fieldwork. There is also a store for products by the
Housewives Group. Most people in this cluster are the Tai and the Chinese, with a small
number of the Khon Mueang\textsuperscript{150} and the Thai from the central region. The owner of the
guesthouse is Saimong, who lives there with his wife and their children. Among others
who stay from time to time, permanent residents include the family of the late Hkamhwum,
a courteous Tai lady from a noble class. They migrated from Mongyai, a town near Lashio.
Hkamhwum’s house sits near the guesthouse, which was a convenient arrangement for
them. At the corner of the entrance to the Chinese school nearby, there is the house and
store of Heo-ngern—in her mid-forties, one of my key informants, whose parents came
from Mongpu in eastern Shan State.

Pawk 7 (Pawk Jet [pɔːk⁵-tset⁴]) is located just south of Pawks 4, 5 and 6. Local
people divide this pawk into three neighbourhoods: upper, middle, and lower. The upper
part is close to the O Bo To Office and the reservoir. Most residents of this part migrated
from Tachilek area. The middle area lies close to the village’s main road. Finally, the lower
part is the quarter attached to Nam Kham. This cluster is the location for Ruam Chai
School, which comprises the public kindergarten and primary school (located in Ruam
Chai) and the secondary school in Mae Salong Nai Subdistrict. It also includes a private
Chinese school officially called “Da Tong.” Locally, the former—both the one in Ruam
Chai and the other in Mae Salong Nai—is known as Rong Rian\textsuperscript{151} Thai (Thai School)
while the latter is known as Rong Rian Chin (Chinese School). There is also the O Bo To
Office in this cluster. Not far from the Thai School, the house of my interpreter,
Yawthkam—in her early twenties, was built conveniently near the village reservoir.
Certain active members of Klum Tai Num, literally Tai Youth Group\textsuperscript{152}, such as Htiseng
and Jarmhawm (and also Yawthkam) also live in this cluster, specifically the upper part.
While many people of this cluster are the Tai Long, mostly came from Tachilek, Mongloi,

\textsuperscript{150}It refers to the Northern Thais or the Lan Na people.

\textsuperscript{151}Rong rian in Thai means a school. The Tai people pronounce hong hen [hoːŋ⁴-heːn⁴] for the
term. However, they use both versions interchangeably depending on with whom they have
conversation. From my observation, they always use rong rian when talking to outsiders, while
using hong hen among themselves.

\textsuperscript{152}From this point onwards, the group will be simply referred to as the “Tai Num” [taj⁴-nuː:m⁴]. It
will be described in great details in the topic of “Social Organisations” in this chapter.
Mongyarng and other areas in eastern Shan State, some Tai Khuen could be found in this cluster as well.

Bound by Pawk 7 in the north, and by Pawk 11 in the south, Pawk 8 (Pawk Paet [pʰɔːk⁵-pɛtʰ²]), houses the Tai who mostly came from Mongloi and Mongyarng in eastern Shan State just as those in Pawk 7. There are some people identifying themselves as Tai Khuen. Sengmong and Hernhkam, a brother and a sister in their early seventies from Mongloi, for instance. This cluster is the location for the village’s cremation field. At the southern end of the cluster, there is a small bridge built over Nam Kham. Beyond the bridge is the territory of Mae Salong Nai Subdistrict, where there is the unpaved and dusty way to a hill. On the hill, there is a recently-finished Tai temple called Wat Ka Khao, literally White Crow Temple. On the temple compound locates a huge Buddha image, which can be seen from a distance. Jawmlern, who was already introduced in Chapter 2 and above in this chapter, is the member of this cluster.

Pawk 9 (Pawk Kao [pʰɔːk⁵-kaw³]) is beyond Pawk 1 to the north. The incongruity of pawk placement will become evident—particularly on the map—as the number moves above the originally intended seven-pawk system. The majority of the Tai residents in Pawk 9 came from Mongsart, Mongtoom, and Mongkarn. According to the local administration, this cluster has officially become another village. Although only ten clusters are located in Ruam Chai, the local people of the original village still consider Pawk 9 as a part of their pawk system, and vice versa. Please note that some parts of Pawk 1 and Pawk 2 extend over Nam Kham, a natural border between Thoed Thai Subdistrict and Mae Salong Nai Subdistrict. A numbers of people of the two clusters live on the far bank of the river. The areas of overlapping administration were originally a part of Thoed Thai Subdistrict before. After upgrading the status of Mae Fa Luang District in 1996, the areas on the farther (relatively western) side of the river were attached to Mae Salong Nai Subdistrict. Despite this geopolitical unit difference, the “west-bank people” feel still attach to Ruam Chai. In other words, the local people continue to think that they are in the same cultural milieu.

Viewed as the most remote and southernmost pawk of all, Pawk 10 (Pawk Sip [pʰɔːk⁵-siːp⁴]) is adjacent to the village of Samakkhi. The homelands of most people in this cluster are Mongpu and Mongpeng in eastern Shan State. Compared to other clusters,
Pawk 10 is very strong in terms of maintaining Tai culture. Led by and supported from “Hakhker,” the 59-year-old head of Pawk 10, they have their own Seng Tai troupe. Having been taught Tai scripts as well as culture, the younger generation of this pawk has a stronger sense of and a stronger investment in their cultural roots. I will explore this point in details in Chapter 4.

Pawk 11 (Pawk Sip Et [pɔːkʰ- sǐːpʰ-ʔeːtʰ]) lies between Pawks 8 and 10. It is the gateway to Ruam Chai from the south. Its south border touches Samakkhi. At the meeting point between Samakkhi and Ruam Chai’s Pawk 11 locates a small bridge crossing Nam Kham. Not far from the southern side of the bridge (on Samakkhi side), there is a checkpoint, where a few police officers are on duty diurnally. Beyond the bridge, on the left side of the main road to Ruam Chai, there are a few stalls selling pork, which is quite popular among the locals and residents of nearby villages. This cluster is the home of a temporary private post office. It also hosts the Mae Fa Luang–Mae Chan Area Development for Security Project, Ruam Chai Tai Church, including the Nam Kham Basin Development Project. Saimong’s new house and his relatives’ residences are also located in this pawk.

3.4 Village Demography

According to the annual report of the O Bo To, in 2005 the village comprises 8,515 people from 2,337 households. Of this number, 4,313 are male and 4,202 are female (Thoed Thai Subdistrict Office 2005). This statistics significantly differs from the data gathered by the village at the same period, which shows that the total population from all pawks is 4,879

153 A kind of Tai traditional performance.
154 In 1994 the cabinet had a resolution to establish this project—under the administration of the Thai army—to expand the great success of the Doi Tung Development Project to nearby areas. By employing an integrative development strategy, the project aims to deal with crucial issues arisen in the frontier zone by focusing on problems ranging from rapid growth of population number to illegal immigration, personal status designation, deforestation, and narcotic.
155 Mae(nam) Kham Development Project—or Khrongkan Phatthana Lum Nam Mae Kham—is initiated and funded by a non-governmental organisation called PLAN Thailand. The Project, by coordinating with local organisations such as the O Bo To, aims to support various forms of activity ranging from environment conservation to cultural events, and supplementary career promotion in areas watershed by Nam Kham.
In my view, the statistic provided by the O Bo To is more valid and trustworthy as it relies on DOPA database, which has been collected more systematically and has been linked to other demographic profiles.

The population statistics from the O Bo To, however, made me wonder why it does not look like there are many people in the village. “If you look at it from the surface, you’ll feel like our population size is small. Indeed, we do have a lot of people,” Heo-ngern, who always talked to me in Northern Thai dialect—unlike many other Tai in Ruam Chai who tend to speak only Tai and Central (standard) Thai, explains. I kept asking her, “Then, where are they?” She replies, “They’ve gone out [of the village] to work. As you have observed, most people who still live here are children and the elderly.” Information from Somsi conforms with that of Heo-ngern, “Seven years ago, there’re tons of the Tai. They lived here. They didn’t go anywhere. Lately, a lot of them have left the village to work in big cities like Chiang Mai or Mong Kawk [mɔŋ kʰò:kʰ] (Bangkok).” I received the same explanation from the kamnan, who also clarified the questionable population number surveyed by the village. He said that the missing data could be a caused by the absence of the people during the survey.

### Table 1 Ruam Chai population surveyed by the Village in September 2005.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pawk</th>
<th>Population number</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>339</td>
<td>367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>353</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>193</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>418</td>
<td>401</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>133</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>395</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>239</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotal</td>
<td>2,361</td>
<td>2,518</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

156 This number excludes the population from Pawk 9, which is now another village of Thoed Thai Subdistrict.
In spite of the uncertainty of the data on population number, compared with the “official” data collected by the Bureau of Registration Administration through Mae Fa Luang District Office, the village survey has an advantage for its population classification by ethnic background. Yet, this data, including ones conducted by governmental organisations, is still open to question. Based on the intensive ethnographic research, plenty of illegal immigrants seem casual about their ethnicity. Some villagers even conceal their original ethnic identities by using new ones because, as their understanding, this would be beneficial when applying for Thai citizenship. Their understanding is nothing but a persistent rumour because ethnic background is not the only criterion the Thai state looks at when granting someone a citizenship. Furthermore, a language barrier and miscommunication between surveyors and villagers during the survey also resulted in the inaccurate data collected from many cases, either names or ethnic titles are misspelt. These controversial points will be raised and discussed in length in Chapter 5.

Table 2 Ruam Chai population divided by ethnic background.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pawk</th>
<th>Lahu</th>
<th>Akha</th>
<th>Mian</th>
<th>Lisu</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Tai</th>
<th>Lua</th>
<th>Palong</th>
<th>Lue</th>
<th>Thai</th>
<th>Wa</th>
<th>Special cases</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>332</td>
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<td>205</td>
<td>706</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>73</td>
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<td>22</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>93</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>126</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>354</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>44</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>819</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>74</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>19</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>743</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>467</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>286</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>355</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>2,233</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>1,149</td>
<td>4,879</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The column “Special cases,” represents the people arriving Ruam Chai recently, who still have unclear status while the column “N/A” represents the people whose ethnic background is unclassified.

Data from Table 2 reveals that the Tai, and the Lue who is a part of the Tai-speaking groups, represents the major ethnic groups of the community. Next is hill tribe
people—or known as *chao khao*\(^{157}\) in Thai, which includes the Lahu, the Akha, the Mian, the Lisu, the Lua; and other two ethnic groups called the Palong\(^{158}\) and the Wa. The Chinese, largely Yunnanese, population is behind the Tai and the hill tribe people. According to a large number of students with Chinese background who attend Ruam Chai’s Chinese school and my observation of Chinese households in the village, it is very likely that the number of the Chinese in Ruam Chai from Table 2 is much less than the actual number. It is possible that during the survey in 2005 many Chinese, who had already got Thai citizenship, had gone to work or were living somewhere outside the village. This generates the error of the data and missing cases. The people with Thai ethnic background form the village’s smallest ethnic group. However, the population of this group, according to Table 2, is not likely to be reliable or considered as the actual number. If we counted government officials, traders, and Thai people married to the locals, I believe that there would be a greater number of population with Thai ethnic background. My postulation is verbally supported by Somsi,

At first, there were only four to five (Thai) families. Not many Thai people were found here. As far as I remember, there were only four Thai-owned restaurants. We (the restaurants’ owners) anchored in Ruam Chai almost at the same period. Nowadays the number of the Thai is uncountable because we have lots of government officials working at the [Thai] school, the O Bo To, and the hospital. Some of them are from the North, the Central, and the Isan.\(^{159}\)

Somsi, who often boasts that, with reliable sources in her hands, she knows “a lot” about Ruam Chai seems to overlook the fact that there are several people with Thai ethnic background who came to this place before her and those restaurant owners. Take Sukanya

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\(^{157}\) The Department of Provincial Administration’s Central Registration Bureau defines *chao khao* (or officially version, *chao thai phukhao*) as nine ethnic groups dwelling in highlands, at the altitude of 500 metres above the sea level, predominantly in northern region and some parts of the central region of the Kingdom. These highland ethnic groups embrace the Karen, the Hmong, the Mian, the Akha, the Lahu, the Lisu, the Lua, the Khamu, and the Mlabri (Panthip 2004b:35-36). Some Karen and Lua, however, do not live in the mountains any more (Vienne 1989:36). Pinkaew (2003a:29) points out that the term “chao khao” is an “official discourse” invented by the Thai State, which “clearly lumps every group of highlanders under the same category, regardless of their distinctive cultural identities and histories.”

\(^{158}\) Certain scholars argue that the Palong, who call themselves “Ta Ang,” should be classified as *chao khao* because their political development is still in a tribal level (http://www.mhsdc.org/interest1.htm).

\(^{159}\) Literally, the northeast. In this context it means the northeastern region of Thailand.
who arrived in Ruam Chai in 1985 as a concrete example. Although she no longer lives in Ruam Chai, her vital role in the Mae(nam) Kham Basin Development Project allows her to travel from Mae Chan to the village regularly. She is among a handful of people in the community who have fought for the displaced people, particularly children who were born in Thailand, to be naturalised as Thai.

Despite the great number of people, less than half of them have Thai citizenship. The hill tribes and the Chinese are the village’s ethnic groups that the majority of whom already entitled “Thai” de jure. Most Tai in Ruam Chai who do not have any citizenship are regarded as the Displaced People with Burmese Nationality. Some of them have been labelled as the Illegal Immigrant from Myanmar, the Highlander, as well as the Highland Community. These issues will be elucidated in greater detail in Chapter 5.

3.5 Marriage Tradition

Generally, the union of a man and a woman in the Tai culture could be classified into three main types. The first one, a couple loves each other and their parents are pleased with their marriage. The second one, both of them are in love, but parents of either a woman side or a man side disapprove with their relationship and try to obstruct their marriage. The couple eventually gets married despite the parents’ disagreement. The third one, parents of both sides manage, in this sense means that there is a prior commitment between the two families, the marriage for their children (Yos 2000:109).

In Ruam Chai, endogamy is ideal and preferable to the Tai, although inter-ethnic marriages have increased in numbers. The marriage tradition of the Tai here is similar to those of the Tai in other regions. That is to say, the tradition is composed of three stages; respected persons or parents from a man’s side are sent to ask a woman from her parents, arrange the engagement, and finally the wedding. However, it is hard to see a traditional Tai wedding ceremony in Ruam Chai. “The old fashion is now scarcely practised,” says Heo-ngern, the guesthouse owner’s cousin in her early forties, who is originally from

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160 For details on Tai marriage, please read “Shan at Home” (Milne 2001:75-85), and for details on marriage, family, and kinship system of the Tai in Yunnan Province, please read “Lak Chang” (Yos 2000:97-140).
Mongnang on the west side of Nam Hkong. She first came to Ruam Chai in 1985, three years after the Loi Hkam Battle.

Sengjing, a 32-year-old guesthouse staff, provided me with interesting information on the “idealised” marriage life in her original village in the Shan State in the old days. She said that in a village-level Tai society when a man is attached to a woman, he would write her a love letter. Only if the woman has the mutual feeling, she then writes him back. The relationship is gradually developed until the man comes to visit her at home, traditionally in the evening—a time women are supposed to work on weaving, pounding rice with mortar, or doing other kinds of domestic work. “If the girl’s parents like the man, they allow the love birds to talk on their own. If the parents don’t like him, they stay present in front of the man and their daughter at all time. If the man doesn’t go home, the parents never go to bed,” she added.

I asked Sengjing whether a man and a woman are allowed to spend time together outside the woman’s house. She said that it is a custom that a man and a woman, who are lovebirds, do not have a date in public. They normally see each other at the woman parents’ house or at a temple. The only chances they meet in the public are during some occasions such as Poi Awk Wa [pɔ:j⁴-ʔɔːkʰ²-waː²] (End of Buddhist Lent Celebrations) and Poi Sawn Nam [pɔ:j⁴-ʔɔːn⁴-namː⁵] (Water Festival), which villagers will go from house to house both within and outside their community to perform kan taw [kan³-tɔː⁴] or to ask for forgiveness for bad things they previously did from elderly people and monks, who will—in return—give them blessings, teaching, and exhortation. The lovers, however, are not supposed to perform this custom by themselves; instead, they are always accompanied by a group of people (e.g., friends and relatives) and are watched over by the woman’s parents.

The dating period varies from case to case. Once the couple decides to get married, the man informs his parents and/or respected seniors to prepare for the “sound out” while the woman informs her parents on this matter. Sooner or later, the man’s parents and/or

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161 The Tai term poi [pɔːj⁴] means a celebration, festival, and religious ceremony. The Khon Mueang in northern Thai cultural context as well as the Tai-speaking groups in other regions, such as in Xishuangbanna (see Yos 2000, 2001) use this term in the same or similar meanings. Interestingly, the Burmese have the term pwe, which has a close pronunciation to poi, for a spectacular feast such as theatre, dance, music, and marionette.

162 An elder ceremony.
respected seniors (or in many case a matchmaker is then assigned to carry out the process), who is called *kon ma yawn* [*kon*:4-*ma*:4-*jɔ:n*4], ask the woman’s parents accompanied by other senior relatives whether they are pleased to allow their daughter to marry the man. Interestingly, during the sound out stage, *kon ma yawn* states that they come to buy *neng soi pi* [*ne:n*-so:j*-pi:*4], literally a young tea leaf, as a purpose of their visit. The fact behind this double-meaning word is that, commonly, the Tai in Mongnang on the western side of Nam Hkong as well as other Tai rural societies who grow tea for a living, have a custom of selling tea leaves before the first drops of rain touches the tea leaves. It is believed that such young tea leaves are high in quality. They call these superb tea leaves “*neng soi pi,*** and apply this term to an “untouched” girl: *sao soi pi* [*sa:w*-so:j*-pi:*4]. “They compare a virgin girl to a budding tea leaf because, technically, the rain-untouched young tea leaves are soft. When making tea, such tea leaves would release the most wonderful smell and sweet flavour,” says Sengjing.

Upon hearing such metaphorical dialogue, if the woman’s parents have no reason to refuse, they would say that they are pleased to sell the tea leaves. This would lead to a discussion about a bride price and engagement. The value of the bride price depends on an economic status of the groom’s family. Traditionally, the bride price given to the bride’s family is in forms of cash and jewellery made of gold. As Sengjing explains about the bride-price custom back home by comparing with that practised in Thailand,

> It depends on the agreement on both sides. Mostly, the bride-price is money and gold. The cost of the wedding is paid by a groom’s family. In my hometown, they don’t really ask a lot of bride price as they do in Thailand. If they ask a lot of bride-price, people would gossip that a bride’s parents *khai luk sao kin* [literally in Thai, to sell a daughter for a living]. The bride price has been asked because it would ensure that the economic status of the groom is secured.

On the contrary, if the parents of the woman do not like the man, and the best quality “tea leaves” transaction is unsuccessful, Sengjing points out,

> The couple would then run away. What they normally do is that a man goes to a woman’s house and wait outside until the woman’s parents go to bed. Then he would signal the woman to come out and meet him. After that, the man would take

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163 According to Leach (1954:213), “a man must pay a cash bride-price for his wife to his wife’s father and he pays it even if the girl is his own father’s brother’s daughter.”
the woman to his house. Having stayed at the man’s house for three to seven days, the man would bring the woman back to her house. The wedding ceremony would then be organised because, after all, it’s too late for the woman’s parents to stop them.

After an engagement, both families get ready for Poi Kin Hkek [pɔ:jˈkì:n-khɛ:k²], literally a “wedding celebration.” They would decide where to hold the wedding. According to the tradition practised in her hometown, Sengjing explains,

If a bride is going to live with the groom’s family, the groom would pick up the bride and bring her to his home, where the wedding would be held. If a groom is going to live with the bride’s family, the wedding would be arranged at the bride’s parents’ house. That is to say, if the bride’s parents have only one daughter, the groom is expected to marry in, but if the groom is the only child, the bride must marry out.

Regarding the wedding feast, Sengjing told me that the people in her village always celebrate for the couple only one day, and that the feast is relatively small and simple. Her story conforms to Yos’s findings which suggests that while the Tai in the Shan State tend to have simple weddings, the Tai in Yunnan Province always have big ones. Based on his ethnographic research in a Tai village in Yunnan, a wedding feast normally lasts three days and three nights. A host would provide food for four meals a day, 12 meals in total (Yos 2000:111).

As far as I learned from some elderly villagers, the romantic tradition of “neng soi pi” narrated by Sengjing has never been observed in Ruam Chai. Heo-ngern said to me “when the Tai people here get married they no longer keep to the old ways. They’d love to be modernised. Some of them don’t even put on Tai traditional dress on their wedding day.” While the Tai in Ruam Chai still follow the three steps of marriage mentioned earlier, some changes have occurred. Teenagers have more freedom in terms of dating and making a decision about their future spouse, although their parents still keep eyes on them.
3.6 Family Life

The Tai people use the term *hern* [ŋaw³-hə:n⁴] for a house and family, and the term *ngao hern* [ŋaw³-hə:n⁴] for the head of a family. Like in many modern societies in different parts the world, a nuclear family is an ideal type and it is favourable among the Tai. Yos explains the characteristics of a family in the Tai peasant society that it is typical for them to have a small family composing of a father, a mother, and their children. Some families, however, could be described as an extended family when a son’s wife moves in, and they have children later on. It is also common that, having settled, the couple would move out to live in their own house, which is usually located in the same compound or in the neighbourhood. Ideally, the youngest son is a child who still lives with his parents. He is expected to take care of the parents, and he would eventually inherit the house from them (Yos 2000:97).

Both nuclear and extended families have been found in Ruam Chai. For the extended one, each family is usually occupied by two to three generations. Although children no longer live with their parents—often because they have left the village to work in other places—they usually bring newborn babies back home and ask their parents to take care of them. For those who are still in the village and have not yet married, they always live with parents while those who already got married would either stay with parents or live in their own house.

Being familiar with the family of Saimong, the owner of Hern Tai Guesthouse, I would like to describe his family and kinship in this part. Although his family and kinship cannot represent the whole Tai families and kinship systems in Ruam Chai, information on his inter-ethnic marriage as well as relations among kinship is interesting. It also could partly reflect the pictures of Tai family life in this multi-ethnic border village.

Saimong, in his mid-sixties, first came to Ruam Chai in late 1970s, and decided to bring his family here in 1979. I heard that he had served the American-supported secret army in Laos in the 1960s. He and Jarmka (his wife), who is originally from Laos, have three children. The first son and the middle daughter now live and work in the United States; while “Senglao”—the youngest daughter, who recently graduated from a public university in Chiang Rai, helps her parents take care of the guesthouse business. Saimong had been a vice headman for many years. In 1977, having a good command in English,
Saimong was appointed as an interpreter for an “important” talk between Khun Sa and Joseph Nellis, US government’s representative. At present, not only is he the owner of the village’s first and best guesthouse, but also a business partner for a tea plantation and factory as well as a fertiliser dealer.

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**Fig. 6:** The kinship diagrams of the three sisters.

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164 The dark gray symbols represent kin who live in Thailand while the white symbols represent kin who live in the Shan State and the United States.
Before Saimong, Jarmka, and Senglao moved to a new house built on a hilltop in Pawk 11, they had lived with the other family’s members under the same roof of the house located in the same compound as the guesthouse. Those members include Saimong’s mother (who will be referred to as Grandma hereafter) in her late eighties, Heo-ngern, and three young girls who are under Saimong and his wife’s protection.

I was informed that Grandma was born to a Tai father and a Lan Na (northern Thai) mother. She was born in Ban Mo of Wiang Lakon, the former name of Lampang, where her mother’s hometown is. Grandma’s parents had joined her father’s family, crossed the border, and settled down in Mongloi-Mongyarng when she was very young. Later on, Grandma’s family had moved to other locations and finally ended up with Mongnang on the west side of Nam Hkong. Grandma got married to a Chinese merchant, who had been travelling to many places for business. Heo-ngern, who always has a rich sense of humour, told me “Grandma said she’s lazy. Most Tai people are farmers. She didn’t want to work in rice fields or farmlands. So, she picked a Chinese trader as her spouse.” Grandma’s marriage became an exemplar for her two younger sisters, who, consequently, were married to Chinese merchants as well.

Heo-ngern is the daughter of Grandma’s youngest sister. She said her mother is three years younger than Saimong. Technically, she is Saimong’s cousin and Grandma is her aunt. She was married to Jarmka (Saimong’s wife)’s younger brother, who passed away a few years ago. To Jarmka, Heo-ngern is her husband’s cousin, yet they are sisters-in-law from the other side. Heo-ngern has other four siblings. While her younger sister is now living with her mother in Tachilek, the border city on the Myanmar side, her elder sister and Longtip—the eldest sibling—live in Ruam Chai. Longtip owns a construction materials and tool store. He is married to a Tai woman from Xishuangbanna. They have two sons and a daughter. Another elder brother of Heo-ngern inhabits a town in the Shan State.

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165 From what I heard from Heo-ngern, in western Shan State father’s parents are called awk [ʔɔːŋkʰ] (grandmother) and hting [θiːŋ³] (grandfather) while mother’s parents are called nai [naːj⁴] (grandmother) and pu [puː³] (grandfather).
166 The name of the city and province south of Chiang Rai and west of Chiang Mai.
167 Heo-ngern told me that Mongloi and Mongyarng are located not too far from Kengtung, and that it is common to address the names of these two mongs together. Because the two mongs are neighbours, people who migrated from those mongs always refer to these two places as if they are the same mong.
Sengjing, the guesthouse staff, is the wife of Hkamlek, Saimong and Heo-ngern’s 39-year-old cousin. Genealogically, Hkamlek is the son of Grandma’s second sister. They have a 10-year-old son, who is now studying in Grade Five in the Thai School. Hkamlek’s mother is now living with his family. She came here after Grandma, who was living with Saimong’s youngest brother in Kengtung at that time. Hkamlek and Sengjing live in a house located in the same compound as Saimong’s new house in Pawk 11.

Heo-ngern told me that in Mong Tai her mother had lived with Grandma’s family, and that Saimong’s father had introduced a Cantonese merchant friend (her father) to her mother. After marriage, her parents moved to Mongnang to run a grocery trading business. Saimong followed his father’s footsteps by introducing Sengjing to Hkamlek. In fact, Sengjing is not a stranger to Saimong’s family. Her grandfather and Grandma’s husband were close friends, who treated and respected each other as their own brother. In other words, she could be considered the granddaughter of Grandma.

It is apparent that Saimong’s family is relatively big, and he has many relatives in Ruam Chai, Kengung and other locations in the Shan State, including the United States. His old house in Pawk 6 is a meeting place for his relatives, who always come to visit Grandma, the eldest kin of the family, and gather during festivals. They also come to help whenever the guesthouse is busy, particularly in the cold season, which is considered a high season. Sengjing commutes from her house in Pawk 11 to the guesthouse everyday to work. She always brings her son to the guesthouse before school during the weekdays. After school he usually watches TV at the thatch-roofed bamboo pavilion between the parking area and the garden of the guesthouse. He plays in the guesthouse compound by himself, with a Chinese boy from the next door, or sometimes with Longtip’s children, who normally drop by after school and on the weekend.

Regarding gender roles in the Tai family, men and women are expected to play different roles. Ideally, Tai men, as the head of a family, are persons who earn money to support their family. They need to have knowledge concerning careers, agriculture and animal husbandry, for instance. In addition, they are supposed to be knowledgeable and skillful in Tai culture along with taking part in different community activities. Finally and equally important, the society expects them to pass on knowledge and experiences in career and Tai traditions to their children. Unlike men, women are expected to associate
themselves with domestic tasks ranging from cooking for other family members to purchasing house supplies, and making or buying clothes for their family members. On Buddhist holidays and important events related to the religion, Tai women have a duty to prepare offerings, food, dessert, and many other things as a crucial part of their merit-making. Even so, this gender-based rule of division of labour is not fixed as the Tai, both male and female, in Ruam Chai work together on several pieces of work for the most part.

3.7 Religion and Belief Systems

Most Tai people adhere to Theravada Buddhism (Schliesinger 2001a; Yos 2000; Crosby et al. 2009), which corresponds to Leach’s account on Tai identities, in which he says “[a] most important criterion of group identity is that all Shans are Buddhist” (Leach 1954:30); and to Yos’s research on the identity reconstruction of the Tai in Yunnan, which he states “Buddhism is crucial to Tai identities in a village-level society. To be the Tai is to be the Buddhist” (Yos 2000:240). These fieldwork-based explanations could be supported from a statement made by one of my key informants after being asked, “What are things the Tai in Ruam Chai cherish?” he answered, “Besides the [Thai] King, it’s Buddhism that we hold in a high esteem.” Having seen the Tai, elderly people in particular, going to Wat Ka Kham—the centre of faith and religious activities—on Buddhist holidays, I was not surprised at his answer. Most villagers consistently go to the temple on days marking important events related to the Buddha to make merit, practise dhamma and meditation, or to listen to a sermon. Furthermore, almost every Tai tradition is significantly intertwined with Buddhism. As Yos describes, “Buddhism and its beliefs have tremendous influences on the Tai’s ways of life and worldviews” (Yos 2000:169).

Most Tai in Ruam Chai are devout Buddhists. Among the Five Precepts, which form the basis Buddhist morality for laypeople, the first one—I undertake the training rule to abstain from taking life—appears to be the most crucial to the Tai (and many other people from different ethnic groups adhering to Buddhism). This religious belief considerably affects their endemic vegetarianism. They avoid consuming meat and fish, the eating of which involves the taking of life, according to the doctrine. This does not mean that all Tai people practise strict vegetarianism nor do even the most devout practise it at all times. Instead, many of them do eat meat, but in an extremely minimal amount.
The following conversation I had with Saimong and his relatives reveals the interplay between Buddhist teachings and traditional Tai food habits as well as customs.

**Jaggapan:** You mentioned before that the Tai in Mongnang who slaughter and sell meat for a living aren’t supposed to live with other people in the village.

**Sengjing:** That’s right. Even those who catch fish and crabs from a river have to live in a separate pawk or [separate] villages. When these people go to a temple, they don’t mingle with other group of people. They gather and sit by the temple hall doors.

**Heo-ngern:** No one wants to marry to descendants of these “meat sellers” because they are burdened with sin. Actually, we don’t exclude them; instead, they cut off themselves from us because they’re aware of the sin they’ve committed. Now they are more developed and educated; some of them start marrying people outside their own group.

**Jaggapan:** What about the Tai on the east side of Nam Hkong [where Kengtung is the centre]?

**Heo-ngern:** Those who “sell meat” are well off and they wear big glowing yellow gold chains. They don’t care much about the Buddhist teachings. But people on my side [west of Nam Hkong] still believe in the doctrine and practise the old ways. The people who eat meat don’t even call it “beef” or “pork.” They call these meats with other names like *hpak leng* [phak⁴-leːŋ¹] (red vegetable) for beef and *hpak hkao* [phak⁴-khaːw¹] (white vegetable) for pork instead. Nowadays Grandma still calls them *hpak leng* and *hpak hkao*.

**Sengjing:** Whenever she asks me to make pork or beef curry, she always use the analogic terms.

**Grandma:** Right, *hpak leng…hpak hkao* (smiling and then laughing).

**Jaggapan:** Why don’t they use the actual terms for that meat?

**Sengjing:** They just don’t call it [by that name]. Elderly people who observe the precepts or regularly “go to the temple” usually avoid using the actual terms. Some of them don’t eat meat while some who still eat meat would rather use other terms like *mak kawn nam* [maːk²-kɔːn¹-nam⁵] (hog plum) for clam, *mak hker hperk* [maːk²-kʰɛː¹-phɛːk²] (white eggplant) for an egg, *hpak kut loi* [phak⁴-kʰuː¹-loːj¹] (mountain/wild fern) for chicken.
Saimong: Those who “go to the temple” always practise this way, and they have kept practising until now.

Heo-ngern: There’s a funny story about an elderly woman, who wanted to eat chicken curry. So she told her child that she wants to eat the “fern” in the backyard. Then, her child made a fern curry rather than a chicken one [She burst into laughter after she finished the story].

Apart from these food habits, the attachment to Buddhism (and partly to Brahmanism and animism) of the Tai could be also viewed through the different pois that take place all year round. Among others is Poi Sang Lawng [pɔːj-ː-saːŋ-ː], the novitiation ceremony. Around the last week of the fourth month or lern si [ləːːn-ː-siː] (March) to the first week of the fifth month or lern ha [ləːːn-ː-haː] (April) according to a lunar calendar, the Tai in Ruam Chai usually organise Poi Sang Lawng—a three-day event, which begins at a house and ends at a temple. In other Tai communities, this ceremony might be organised on any day in March prior to the Buddhist Lent Day. Each family which has young male(s) at a suitable age to become a novice, usually has Poi Sang Lawng organised. After the hair is trimmed and head of a boy is shaved by his parents, other senior family members, and village’s respected figures; his body is adorned with vividly colourful costume, and his face is made-up; the parents and relatives will bring him to perform “kan taw” to respected people in the village. Before the final day, in the afternoon all the novices-to-be, parents, relatives, and well as guests gather at the Central Field. Participants show their blissful feeling by dancing, together with the novice-to-be who are sitting on their male relatives’ shoulders, along rhythmic and rousing music produced from the traditional musical instruments: kawng kon yao [kɔːŋ-ː-kɔːn-ː-jaːw4] (long drums), mawng serng [mɔːŋ-ː-səːŋ-ː] (a set of gongs), and seng [sɛːŋ-ː] (cymbals). After that, the Sang Lawng procession slowly

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168 In this context, he means those who are strictly religious.
169 Sengjing informed me that Poi Sang Lawng in 2007 primarily took place at the Central Field rather than at houses of novices to be, and that it is the biggest Poi Sang Lawng ever organised in the village to celebrate the 80th birthday of HM King Bhumibol Adulyadej which falls on December 5, 2007.
170 For example, in 2008 the Tai in Chiang Mai City organised Poi Sang Lawng at Wat Ku Tao during March 21–23.
171 Sumit and Samerchai suggest that there is no rule to determine the age of a boy to be novitiated. However, the Tai people have a story has been told from generation to generation that, “whenever a boy knows how to prevent a thieving crow from stealing his sweets from him, he is ready to be novitiated” (Sumit and Samerchai 1999:39).
moves from the Central Field via the marketplace, and eventually arrives at the temple. The ceremony and celebration continues until the evening. The boys would be ordained by an abbot the next morning. In preparation and to show their respectful humility, their worldly colourful dress and face-painting are removed and replaced by simple robes and unadorned faces. The boys are fastened with saffron ropes, marking the sacred, simple status of a novice. Under the sign of saffron ropes, these boys begin to learn dhamma and to observe the precepts for weeks or sometimes months, as determined by the abbot. However, their novitiates are usually over just before the beginning of the new academic year of the school.

While Buddhism is the major religion of the Tai in the village, Christianity is predominantly practised by some hill tribe people. There are five Christian churches located in the village (Khrueaduean 2005:27); as a result, a small number of Tai have converted to Christianity. Sengjing, a strict vegetarian and devout Buddhist, provided me with insightful information.

Sengjing: In Mong Tai I saw some [Tai] people practising Christianity, but essentially most of us are Buddhists.

Jaggapan: What about the Tai in Ruam Chai? Has any one converted to Christianity?

Sengjing: Hardly any. Among others are the disabled who have difficulties working for a living. The Tai who converted to Christianity mainly live in Pawk 5 and Pawk 11. The churches in Pawk 5 and Pawk 11 are administered by the Tai while the one in Pawk 10 is administered by the Akha.

Jaggapan: I saw a Tai church in Pawk 11.

Sengjing: Actually, it was my house before. My husband sold it to them. Then they renovated the house and have turned it into a church. As far as I know, there aren’t any Tai who go to this church. Formerly, a lot of Tai kids went there to learn Tai and Chinese. Those who don’t have money to go to the Chinese school would come to this church. I heard that the teacher tried to convince the kids to convert to Christianity, so they left the Church. Now, there’re no more students.

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172 The doctrine, the Buddha’s teaching, the Law (Domnern and Sathienpong 1999:244).
173 For those who are not in a mainstream schooling system, they usually expand their novicehood for months or years. Some of them, who are willing to become a monk, would be ordained when a time has come—traditionally at 21 years of age.
Yos states “...theoretically, even though the Tai have realised that Buddhism and animism are different entities, practically, several occult beliefs coexist and blend in rituals and daily life of villagers” (Yos 2000:171). The Tai regard Buddhism as central belief to their lives, yet traces of the previous animistic and Brahmanic beliefs are a mixture that has been amalgamated with mainstream Buddhist doctrine for some time. These imported (or pre-existing) beliefs and practices cannot be detached from the Buddhism practised by the Tai people. This could be exemplified by pois in the fifth month (April) of the lunar calendar. In this month the Tai in Ruam Chai celebrate the hot and humid summer time by having Poi Sawn Nam [pɔːj⁴-sɔːn⁴-nam⁵] (Water Festival), which starts from April 13th, and it normally lasts for one to two weeks. Apart from making merit and doing the ritual bathing of Buddha images and the resident monks, the Tai also clean their houses and throw water on each other. The most important part of this poi is the performing of kan taw to monks, parents, senior relatives, as well as a community’s respected people.

Additionally, the Tai perform an annual ceremony of worshiping the village’s pillar. As an ideal practice, people from each family would bring buckets of nam sompoi [nam⁵-soːm³-ffɔːj²]—water mixed with soap pods, sand, and gravels; a bucket or tray of
talew [taː-lɛː:w]—hex sign made of bamboo; auspiciously-named leaves; leaves and barbed plants especially embued as a sign of prevention or warding against ill luck or evil spirits; sacred thread; joss sticks and candles; and put them in the village pillar shrine. The villagers will gather around the shrine while any monk or monks present say a prayer specific to the occasion. After the ceremony, they would bring the aforementioned materials back to their house. They will sprinkle soap pod-mixed water and scatter the sand and gravel around the house compound. The hex sign and the leaves are tied onto or over entry gates in an elegant and festive bough or wreath-like display. They believe that these sacred materials will prevent the house and its members from all dangers as well as bad spirits.

After Poi Sawn Nam, in the same month, the Tai have Poi Lu Kawng Mu Sai\textsuperscript{174} [pɔːj⁴-luː²-kɔːŋ⁴-muː⁴-saːj⁴], literally the tradition of building a sand pagoda—as a Buddha puja, which is decorated with colourful paper flags and flowers. In late April Poi Nu Hpai [pɔːj⁴-nuː¹-phaj⁴] or a fire rocket tradition takes place. The Tai make rockets and launch them, ostensibly, to worship the Buddha. At the same time it serves to remind Indra—the god of war and weather—to bring the rain to them when the rainy season has come, in re-enactment of Indra’s legendary releasing of the rains with a great and noisy thunderbolt.

Chao Pho Doi Saeng (Sao Hpaw Loi Seng – Tai), the village’s guardian spirit is another example of an animistic belief and practice of the Tai dwellers of Ruam Chai. Chao Pho Doi Saeng Shrine is located beyond Khun Sa’s old house in Pawk 5. The villagers do not have a certain schedule to worship him. Instead, they perform a ceremony individually whenever they encounter a life crisis or before they organise important events.\textsuperscript{175} Some of them go to the shrine to make a votive prayer as well as to make a votive offering. I was informed that women are not allowed to access to the shrine as they are thought of an “unclean” entity—due to their menstruation, who could ruin the sacredness of the place.

Another instance is when I went to Pawk 2 to interview “Peunmong,” a 55-year-old male from northern Shan State. He has been in Ruam Chai for over 30 years and is now the head of Pawk 2. He specialises in making long drums and some other crafts. During the

\textsuperscript{174} In some Tai communities Poi Lu Kawng Mu Sai and Poi Nu Hpai might be organised in lern hok [lør:n¹-hɔː:k⁴] or the sixth month (May).

\textsuperscript{175} More details on this point will be presented in Chapter 6.
interview, I observed several kinds of barbed plants and a sickle were attached over the main door to the house. I asked him the reason behind this practice. He said, “My daughter recently had a baby. So, I put up the barbed plants to prevent hpi [ph:i]—ghosts—and other evil spirits from entering the house to harm the baby. I put up the sickle to cut off bad invisible beings that might get into the house the harm the baby.” This belief, in fact, is not new to me as some Thai people in rural areas share the same belief, but they practise it differently. They hang a barbed-plant-garland from a monkey apple tree onto a fence around a house to prevent a demoness from entering the house compound to eat entrails and infants. Alternatively, some Thais—those in rural areas in particular—put sharpened utensils such as a knife, a sickle, and a scissor under a mattress, where a baby sleeps, for the same reason stated by Peunmong.

A rite of passage, such as a funeral, also brings forth older beliefs and practices embedded in the Tai culture. Sengjing compares the funeral rite in her hometown and that in Ruam Chai.

Jaggapan: Do the people have a funeral at home or a temple?

Sengjing: [In my original village] if a person dies at home or in the village, a funeral takes place at home. If he died at another place, we don’t bring a corpse home. And we don’t bury the corpse in the village’s cemetery, which we call pa hew kon\(^{176}\) [pa:²-he:w³-ko:n⁴ (human’s cemetery)]. The died-out remains of the villager would be buried in a separate cemetery, which we call pa hew hkek [pa:²-he:w³-khe:k² (visitor/stranger’s cemetery)]. Pa hew hkek is the cemetery for people from another village who died in our village, and for the village’s members who die a violent death.

Jaggapan: You just said if a person dies at home or in the village, a funeral is held at home. What about those who die outside the village? The funeral is organised at a temple?

Sengjing: Not at all. We don’t bring a corpse of a person who dies outside the village back to the village. When the proper time has come, monks go to that place to perform a ceremony.

Jaggapan: The Tai in Ruam Chai still hold that belief?

\(^{176}\) In Tai, kon [ko:n⁴] means person or human.
Sengjing: I don’t think so. They have funerals at home for those who even died at a hospital outside the village. This is very different from that in my hometown.

The Tai belief and practice concerning death and a funeral in Ruam Chai has changed not only about the notion of “die in” and “die out,” but also on the location of a cemetery. Traditionally, a cemetery location is supposed to be in the northwest of a village because it is the direction of the Hindu deity, Rahu, a deity concerned with misfortune. In the amalgamated Tai belief-system, northwest is the direction of misfortune (Sumit and Samerchai 1999:52). The cemetery in Ruam Chai, however, is located in Pawk 8, specifically in the south of the village. Although it is against the tradition, “Senior people chose this location because it’s not too far from the village and the land is big enough to accommodate ceremony attendees,” Jawmlern explains.

Like the Tai, as well as the Thai, in other regions, the Tai in Ruam Chai attach themselves to the belief about an auspicious name given to a newborn baby according to his or her birthday. Due to a strong belief in astrology, an auspicious name-giving (including a propitious time-determining) custom has been passed down from Tai forebears to their descendants. The following quotation is the conversation I had with Kamhker, his father, and my interpreter one evening during the second phase of the fieldwork.

Jaggapan: It seems to me that most Tai in Ruam Chai have both Tai and Thai names. In your case, your Thai name is Phatthana and your Tai name is Kamhker.

Kamhker: Yes. Thai names are officially used in ID cards and house registration while Tai names are called by family members and local people.

Jawmseng: To give a name to a baby, we pick an auspicious consonant for him or her. Those who are born on a Monday use ka, hka, nga.¹⁷⁷ My son was born on a Monday. So, his name should begin with ka, hka, or nga. I picked ka for his name.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ The Tai pronounce consonants by adding the vowel “a” (short vowel) to the consonants.
¹⁷⁸ According to Tai astrological rules (even though Tai and Thai consonants and vowels differ in numbers [and form]), it is suggested to persons whose birthday falls on Sunday that their names should begin with the following vowels: a (ง), a (ง), i (ิ), i (ี), u (ุ), u (ู), e (เ).
Yawthkam: What about my name? I was born on Monday.

Jaggapan: Your name is Yawthkam, isn’t it?

Yawthkam: Yes, it is.

Jawmseng: Your name is pretty good. Because you were born on Monday, the second syllable of your name should begin with hka. Keep in mind that “women look at the last syllable, men look at the first one.”

Now, I shall move on to another important Tai belief, which is concerned with a cultural manner of sam ya [sam⁴-ja:³] or sap ya [sap⁴-ja:³], literally pigment tattooing. The Tai, predominantly men, in the Shan State and beyond are known for their tattooed bodies. They tattoo their bodies for several reasons: to reveal patience, strength, and manliness; to make their bodies aesthetic as well as reverenced according to a traditional cultural value; to be adored and admired by other people; and to protect themselves from any harm caused by warfare, bandits, animals, or other evils (Saisom 1994:2). In spite of its popularity among men, some women could have special magic formulae tattooed on their bodies from being possessed by ghosts. More specifically, for those whose khwan—a soul—on their heads are “thin” or “hollow,” it is customary to have their heads tattooed to prevent the possession of ghost through their heads (Sumit and)

and a (โ). For those who are born on Monday, their names should begin with consonants k (ก), kh (ข), kh (ค), kh (ฆ), and ng (ง). For those whose birthday falls on Tuesday, their names should begin with consonants ch (จ), ch (ฉ), ch (ช), s (ซ), ch (ฌ), and y (ญ). For those whose birthday falls on Wednesday, their names should begin with consonants d (ฎ), t (ฏ), th (ฐ), d (ฑ), th (ฒ), and n (ณ). For those whose birthday falls on Thursday, their names should begin with consonants b (บ), p (ป), ph (ผ), f (ฝ), ph (ภ), and m (ม). For those whose birthdays falls on Friday, their names should begin with consonants s (ส), s (ษ), s (ส), l (ฬ), and h (ฮ). For those whose birthday falls on Saturday, their names should begin with consonants d (ด), t (ต), th (ถ), th (ท), th (ธ), and n (น). There is an equivalent set of rules for those born during the night. Tai custom also determines what consonants should not be used in naming.

179 For example, U-mong was born on Sunday, and the first syllable of his name begins with vowels. Meanwhile, Yawthkam was born on Monday, and the last syllable of her name begins with consonant hh (หร) in Thai.

180 As Milne points out: “[a] Shan boy is considered to have reached manhood when he has been tattooed. Until he has enough courage to endure the painful and trying operation his status is that of a child. […] Tattooing on the legs is chiefly practised as a decoration: it is a sign of manhood; no girl recognises the fact that a youth is a man of a marriageable age until his legs can show the blue markings” (Milne 2001:66-67).
Samerchai 1999:55). In addition, some women could have tattoos on one of their arms or on the tip of their tongue when “they are crossed in love” (Milne 2001:68).

While tattooing is a cultural manner related to magical or spiritual beliefs, it could be considered and is used as an ethnic marker (see Saisom 1994; Niti 1998). There is an old Tai saying, “Without tattoos, you are not Tai” (Sumit and Samerchai 1999:54), which goes hand in hand with the statement made by Htunjing, a 75-year-old astrology/healer/fortune-teller who lives in Pawk 7 and who has tattoos in different parts of his body: “To know which one is Tai or not is by seeing his tattoos, which clearly differ from tattoos of the Burmese, the Khon Mueang [Lan Na], and other Tai-speaking groups.” His view might draw from the fact that in ancient times most males in the Lan Na Kingdom traditionally had their waist areas tattooed with dark blue pigment which distinguished them from the Laotians, whose midriifs bore no tattoos. Meanwhile, the Tai counterparts were often recognised by their preference for tattooing the legs—from waist to knees—under specific formulae (see Figure 9). This practice was also popular among a number of Khon Mueang men, who had their legs marked from the lower part of the waist to the half-length of thighs. Another element that makes leg tattoos of the Tai unique is the design, which usually comprises fish scales at the waist, square frames with tigers (or singha) inside on both thighs, and fish-scales at end of the knees. To elaborate this manly symbol, tattooists would add leaves and flowers to the design (Saisom 1994:21). Further major distinction is reflected through the type of script employed. That is to say, the Tai, including the Laotian and the Burmese men for instance, tend to make use of their own local scripts in their tattoos. On the contrary, owing to the influence of Khmer occultism, it is common for Thai men to have their bodies ritualistically and symbolically marked with Khmer script—structured in various forms of “yantra”—rather than their own calligraphy (cf. Tannenbaum 1987). This is also true for many Khon Mueang males in North Thailand who not only make use of their own script, but also the Khmer script in their tattoos.

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181 Tannenbaum (1987) suggests that the Tai people use both red and indigo/black pigments in their tattoos. The use of such colourants is related to types or purposes of tattooing. That is to say, tattoos for an attraction of fondness, admiration, and for a strengthening of vocabulary memorisation and speech communication ability are traditionally in red. Meanwhile, tattoos for a prevention of harm caused by animals and weapons are always in indigo or black.
Tattooing is still highly valued by older generations and by those who were born in Mong Tai, such as Sengmong, Htunjing, and the venerable Harnseuk—a Tai man from a nearby Inner Loi Hkam who occasionally visit Saimong’s family and recently passed away at the age of 109. Despite the enthusiasm and acceptance of handing down traditional Tai culture—without the fear of being marginalised for it—the tradition and importance of tattooing has, of late, had little influence on young Tai men in Ruam Chai, who seem to enjoy living their lives in a more modern and cosmopolitan way. Clearly demonstrated, the emerging Tai population not only has come from far and wide to dwell in Ruam Chai, but also continue to move throughout the quadrangle in search of work and prosperity which they can bring home to family. It may be surmised that their endeavours elsewhere have had an impact on “fitting in” and staying below the official bureaucratic “sight-lines,” to some degree. Tai-specific tattoos could only hinder this anonymity.

Fig. 8: A Tai monk of Wat Ka Kham and his tattoos.

I would like to conclude this section with the data on Ruam Chai’s ratio of religious adherence that I received from late Hkersen, a former sarawat kamnan—a subdistrict inspector, whose kindheartedness and rich sense of humour were behind his tough look. He told me that around ninety per cent of the villagers practise Buddhism. Five per cent
identify themselves as Christians, mostly hill tribe people such as the Akha and the Lahu, while four per cent as practitioners of pure animism, and one percent as Muslim. An additional group of the Tai goes to the Christian church for economic reasons as suggested earlier. Regarding Islam, the people from about ten Yunnanese (Chinese) families are the major Muslim population in Ruam Chai. There is only one Muslim family that stands out, originally from Tachilek; the Burmese and the Tai apply the ethnic term “Kala” to any Indian-looking people. This particular Muslim family is Kala and the head of the family serves as an imam and a religious teacher.

3.8 Language Context

Tai language is a crucial part of our culture. If we do not preserve it, it will be faded and gradually die away. Then, the Tai nation would no longer exist. (Nanthariya 2002:413)

Linguists classify Tai language as a subgroup of the Tai-Kadai language family. This subgroup is known as “Southwestern-Branch Tai” (Diller 1994; Li 1977), which includes

Fig. 9: Harnseuk and Sengmong.
several languages. Southwestern-Branch comprises much of the cultures already discussed, such as Tai Dam (Black Tai), Tai Daeng (Red Tai), Tai—proper or major—(Tai Long or Thai Yai), Tai Lue (Dai), Tai Khuen, Tai Khamti, Central Thai (of Thailand), Lan Na (Northern Thai, Khon Mueang, or Tai Yuan/Yon), Isan (Lao-related varieties as spoken in northeastern Thailand), Lao, and Zhuang. Some scholars suggest that Tai and Lan Na languages and alphabets could be categorised under the same group. Sharing a great deal of vocabulary with the Khon Mueang, rather than with the Central Thai people, whose dialect is considered Thailand’s lingua franca, the Tai language and alphabets could be classified under the same group with that of the Lan Na language (Ranoo 1994:2).

If Tai and Lan Na—widely known in the upper part of Northern Thailand as “Kham Mueang”—languages were purported to have a close link, then there would be a question why almost every Tai person in Ruam Chai is more likely to speak—besides their own Tai dialects—Central Thai, instead of Lan Na, which is the local dialect of Chiang Rai and other areas in North Thailand. During the fieldwork, there were only a few Tai people talking to me in the Lan Na dialect. Among them are Heo-ngern, whom I previously mentioned, and Hkamnawng, a mid-twenties female staff of the Subdistrict Office. Hkamnawng had furthered her education in Chiang Rai City and stayed there several years before coming back to Ruam Chai, undoubtedly bringing the Northern Thai dialect back with her.

This fact reminds me of the pre-fieldwork stage when an official from the Hill Tribe Development and Welfare Centre in Mae Chan took me to Don Mun, a nearby village north of Ruam Chai, to monitor his project at a primary school there. At the school, I saw a big sign attached to a building saying: “If you can’t speak Thai, who else would believe you’re Thai people.” I kindly asked the principal the reason for having that sign. He said that most students in the school are descendants of hill tribe people, who, while already having Thai citizenship, hardly speak Thai to their children. As a result, their children have difficulties communicating with teachers who always use Thai as a means of communication. The school, therefore, as designated by the Ministry of Education, attempts to promote Thai (specifically the central dialect of the Ministry) as a “standard

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182 This “text” clearly reflects the Thai state’s essentialism in the construction of “Thai/Thainess” discourse as a crucial part of its nation-building process.
language” spoken at school (cf. Diller 2002). The effort is a great success. If we choose to view this scenario through the perspective of “nation-building,” a standardised Thai language is a powerful and useful instrument deliberately deployed by the Thai government to unify people from various ethnic backgrounds. This imposes a sense of “Thainess” upon the hill tribe people. The Tai people in Ruam Chai are no exception to this intended influence.

Three main Tai dialects widely spoken in Ruam Chai include Tai Long, Tai Khuen, and Tai Lue. Tai Long is, in fact, predominantly spoken in northern and southern Shan State (Ranoo 1994:1). Tai Khuen is popular among the Tai Khuen in eastern Shan State of which centre is at Kengtung; and Tai Lue is a mother tongue of the Tai Lue (Dai) in Xishuangbanna and surrounding places, including some areas in eastern Shan State, Laos, and Thailand. Despite the divergence in dialects, there is not any critical communication problem among people from several Tai subgroups in Ruam Chai.

Nevertheless, the Tai in different parts of the Shan State have different alphabets (Ranoo 1994:7-8). The Tai in northern Shan State—specifically in the vicinity of Namkham, Muse, and Selan—use traditional alphabets called lik to yao [li:k^3-to:^1-ja:w^4] (long-shaped alphabets) or lik hto ngawk [li:k^3-tho:^2-ŋɔ:k^3] (bean sprout-shaped alphabets), which is the same as those used in the Dehong Dai–Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture in Yunnan Province. Meanwhile, the Tai in northern Shan State in the areas south of Namkham and Selan towards southern Shan State’s cities such as Mongkerng, Mongnawng, Mongnai, Laikha, Taunggyi, Larngkhur, and Mawkmai, use Tai alphabets called lik to mon [li:k^3-to:^1-mo:n^4], literally round-shaped alphabets. The reformation of Tai by having existing alphabets modified and combined, with addition of tone marks in the 1960s—a period of Tai language and cultural revival movement in the Shan State—allows the people to be able to learn Tai with ease. In eastern Shan State, Tai subgroups identified as the Khuen, the Lue, and the Yong have their own alphabets, which are similar to Lan Na ones. However, lik to mon has been widely used among the Tai in this region as well.

At least three main Tai dialects have been found in Ruam Chai, as mentioned previously. In the eyes of many Tai people in both the village and somewhere else, the dialect that is regarded as standard and prevailing is Tai Long, which is mainly spoken
among the Tai, particularly those on the western side of Nam Hkong. However, the Tai Long dialect in Ruam Chai is not the same as that used in areas located on the west side of Nam Hkong. Instead, the Tai in Ruam Chai tend to speak Tai Long of Awk Hkong \[?ːkʰ-kʰoːŋ\], literally the east-bank of Nam Hkong, accent, which—suggested by Heongern—is believed that is more “sweet-sounding” than Tai of Tok Hkong \[tːkʰ-kʰoːŋ\], literally the west-bank of Nam Hkong Tai, accent.

In Ruam Chai it is common for the young generation of the Tai to be able to speak at least three varying languages: Thai, Tai, and Mandarin. Not all Tai children go to the Chinese School, except those whose families can afford tuition fees. However, this is not always the case. I was informed by Sengjing and a few others that parents who are willing to send their children to the Chinese School—yet cannot afford the tuition fees—can ask the kamnan or respected seniors to talk to the Chinese School’s principal to receive a tuition fee waiver. The children normally go to the Thai School during the daytime, and then go to the Chinese School for two hours in the evening (on weekdays) and about half day on Saturday and Sunday. Interestingly, the Tai children who go to the Chinese School are given Chinese names and clan names, which is always “Chang”—the Chinese clan name of Khun Sa (Chang Si Fu). For those with Chinese background (for instance, from intermarriage between Tai women and Chinese men), they use the clan name of their Chinese fathers.

The popularity and utility of the Mandarin language and the influence of the Thai language through the education system and mass media seems to have impacted on the younger generations of the Tai in Ruam Chai. As Kamhker said to me one day, “Presently, luk awn \[luːkʰ-ʔɔːn² (children)\] no longer speak real Tai. They speak Tai mixed with Thai. When the Tai from Mong Tai talk to them, they usually ask, “what did you say?” or “what does it mean?”. Because of the continuing acknowledgment of the importance of preserving Tai identity, the Tai Language and Tai Culture Summer Camp was initiated by a group of Buddhist monks from Bangkok known as “Saeng Thian,” literally “Candle

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183 See more details in 4.1.4 in Chapter 4.
184 Although Mandarin is taught in the Chinese School in Pawk 7, after school the children with Yunnanese background are more likely to speak with their parents and relatives in Yunnanese Chinese.
Lights.” It was introduced to Ruam Chai in 2002. Apparently, this activity demonstrably enables youngsters to read and write Tai scripts, to speak proper Tai, and to connect more to their history and cultural roots. The fruit of this effort is easily exemplified by Yawthkam. Yawthkam and her friends are leading members of the Tai Num, active participants from its inception in Ruam Chai. Originally novices with no knowledge of Tai reading and writing, they are now competent enough to serve as masters of ceremonies; hopefully, to pass on this knowledge to younger generations. Yawthkam and Jarmhawm were appointed to be masters of ceremonies for the recent Tai New Year and Shan National Day, for instance.

3.9 Housing and Land Ownership

They live in simple huts made of bamboos thatched with straw; some are raised up on posts with their underpart used as cow-folds, and some are built directly on the ground. (Chang 1944:63-65)

My romantic notions about traditional Tai houses in Ruam Chai left me expecting what the Thai people call ruean khrueang phuk—structural members of a wooden-bamboo-mixed house tied in place with rattan. The Tai in Ruam Chai, however, do not build traditional houses as their counterparts in rural areas both in the Shan State and Thailand do. At the first sight of this village showed me houses constructed with more permanent materials and more modern design compared to Tai houses found in a village in Mae Hong Son Province, which,

[are built on wooden posts, the main floor elevated about six feet above the ground. The floors and walls are made of split bamboo or planks. The front part of the house is often an open veranda. Here, people spread out rice to dry in the sun, make bean cakes, repair baskets, or do other household jobs. Inside, there is a large room open at the front. When people come to visit, they sit here on the floor and

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185 See more details in the next chapter.
186 For an elaborate description of how to choose a site and to make a traditional Tai house in northern Shan State in the early 1900s, please see Milene (2001:98-113). For the similarities and differences between the housing of Tai Long, Tai Lue, and Tai Khuen in Thailand, please see Schliesinger (2001b).
talk. Meals are eaten in this room, the family gathered around a small low round table. At night people withdraw to the enclosed sleeping room at the back of the house. On the eastern wall of each house is an altar with a Buddha image. There is also a separate cooking area or kitchen, where rice and food is cooked over wood fires which burn in clay stoves.

Each house has an elevated shed, which contains large baskets where the rice from the last harvest is stored. Under the houses are stacked stocks of firewood, tools, and perhaps some boards or bamboo for future use. Buffaloes, used for ploughing, sleep either under the rice granary, the house, or in a separate shed. Chickens and ducks have the run of the house compounds until night, when they are put in roosts. (Durrenberger 1983a:113-114)

Formerly, houses in Ruam Chai were built from natural materials found in the locale. The walls were built of sun-dried, clay-and-straw-mixed bricks, and then were plastered with cement. Some house walls were filled only with bricks without being plastered. The roofs were covered with lalang grass thatches or corrugated metal. Sukanya provides me with information on the houses of the Tai and the Chinese she had seen during the beginning of her teaching career in this frontier community. One of her interesting points is Khun Sa’s influence on a house design.

Sukanya: Long ago the village was very lovely. There’re no fences between houses. Almost every household had kitchen garden, where they had enough vegetables to eat in the household, and to share with their neighbours. Most houses were built under the support [both finance and workforce] of Khun Sa. So, they look the same. Later on, some people earned a lot of money from a drug business, from working in Taiwan [Those who went and have gone to Taiwan are predominantly the Yunnanese Chinese] as well as in Bangkok and other cities in the country rebuilt their houses in a modern style. We failed to convince them to conserve and improve their traditional houses. They reasoned that now it’s difficult to find lalang grass to make thatches. They also said that living in an old-fashion house causes them several problems ranging from bugs to rain.

Jaggapan: Was there any particular housing style designated by Khun Sa?

Sukanya: Yes, there was. The structure of Khun Sa’s housing style looks similar to that of Teacher Nuansai’s house. That is to say, most houses were built in a U or L shape. And commonly the roofs were covered with corrugated plates.

187 Nuansai, a teacher at the Thai School, is a daughter of the late Hkamhawm, whose house is located in Pawk 6 not far from Hern Tai Guesthouse as I mentioned earlier.
Jaggapan: Is Khun Sa’s housing style still available?

Sukanya: Yes, there are some left. I think you already saw that style from the hostel in Pawk 4 and some houses near the west entrance to the Central Field.

Sukanya’s point of view on the changing housing style corresponds to Kamhker’s position. I mentioned to him during an everyday conversation that I hardly see a traditional Tai house in Ruam Chai. Kamhker clarified: “I should say that we barely have a traditional Tai house. Actually, our elderly people want to live in that kind of house, but they have to build houses as their children, who go out to work and send money home, like it. A lot of modern houses that you’ve seen were built less than ten years ago.” The “modern houses” he just brought up are typically one-storey, concrete-structured buildings, tile-roofed, and not raised above the ground; therefore, having no area beneath the dwelling.

Fig. 10: A typical Tai Long house in a Tai village near the town of Kengtung in eastern Shan State.
Fig. 11: A typical *hkeng hpala* attached to a Tai house in the town of Mae Sot, Mae Sot District, Tak Province.

Besides the modern house, I saw a few bamboo huts in Pawk 5 and some old-fashioned, two-storey wooden houses; among others are that owned by Sengmong and Hernhkam, the Tai Khuen aged brother and a sister in Pawk 8, mentioned previously. Several two- or more-storied concrete buildings owned by the Chinese sit in the marketplace in Pawk 3. During the second phase of my fieldwork, the kamnan’s new house in Pawk 2 was under construction. His new house is the largest, modern, two-storey house owned by the Tai that could compete with that of the Chinese, according to my interpreter and some other villagers. In general, houses of the Tai are smaller and less beautiful compared to those of the Yunnanese Chinese, who “tend to send their children to Taiwan. Then their children send money back. Big and good houses here are always owned by the
Chinese. The Thai Yai [Tai] people who do a so-so job are not as rich as them. That’s why we can’t afford a big house,” says Heo-ngern.

Regardless of old or new and big or small, most Tai houses that I visited always have a *hkeng hpala* [kheːŋ²-pha-laː⁴], literally a Buddha image altar, placed on the eastern inside wall of the houses. Traditionally, the hkeng hpala is supposed to be an extended part of the outside wall188 (see Figure 11), but—if my memory serves me right—I have not noticed the display of this custom in Ruam Chai. Jawmseng (Kamhker’s father) explains that “it was a tradition to have the kheng phala in a herñ mai sang [hə:n⁴-maj⁵-saːŋ²] [bamboo house] Unfortunately, living in a concrete house does not give us much chance to make it like the traditional one.” In many Tai societies, houses of wealthy families are always equipped with elaborate hkeng hpala, which not only signifies their high spirit in Buddhism, but also their socio-economic status.

Because Ruam Chai is situated in a so-called “military area” and the national forest reserve, which is under the control of the Department of Forestry, none of houses and buildings’ owners have any type of property right. They are allowed to build houses, do business, and carry out farming for designated areas. Theoretically and by law, they cannot buy or sell the lands they have occupied and maintained. Despite the fact that they do not have the right on land, the local people usually buy and sell parcels of land informally either out of compulsion towards economic custom or simply with disregard for the land’s designation. As Somsí explains:

*Somsí*: It’s pretty pricey to buy a plot of land here despite the absence of a land title indeed.

*Jaggapan*: I heard that the village is a part of the national forest reserve. How could the people sell or buy lands without permission from the authorities?

*Somsí*: It’s possible because they have a sell-and-buy document or a sort of certification paper. The price of the land depends on how good the relationship between a seller and a buyer is. If you have money, things seem much easier.

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188 Buddha image(s) and other offerings are placed on a box-shaped altar, of which one side (inside a house) is permanently opened, from inside a house.
In the past, Ruam Chai people earned an ownership of their parcels of land through the permission of a Khun Sa or his representative, as Jawmlern indicated earlier. Some of them, such as Saimong, had claimed a big plot of land by investing their workforce in clearing up a land once overtaken with trees and grass. At first Saimong had owned a big piece of land, and later had given some to Yunnanese Chinese families, who are now his neighbours. One family now runs a small grocery store on the right side of the guesthouse while the other owns the biggest Yunnanese Chinese restaurant on the left side of the guesthouse. According to Heo-ngern, around six to seven years ago, Saimong wanted to expand his guesthouse business, he had to buy some of his original land back from the grocery store’s owner with the value more than one hundred thousand baht. He also wanted to expand his business to nearby land on the other side of Nam Kham (in Mae Salong Nai Subdistrict area), but the price of that land is too high, so his plan has been put on hold for now.

### 3.10 Tai Costumes

*If we wear our own ethnic clothes, our culture still carries on. During the Tai New Year, when we wear the Tai dress, our hearts are filled with good feelings. Being so far away from our country can’t stop us to wear our clothes.*

(interview with Heo-ngern, February 3, 2007)

Not being so different from many people in other cultures, the Tai in Ruam Chai, regardless of subgroups, are inclined to wear contemporary dress in everyday life. For those who are not familiar with the Tai, it is hard to differentiate them from other people, or to identify any singular ethnic people. However, elderly people, women in particular, still maintain their traditional manner of dressing, such as wearing a *hpa sin* [phaː³-siːn³]—simply call *sin* [siːn³]—(traditional tube skirt) and distinctly braiding their hair. Moreover, before leaving home to work in farms, shop at the market, make merit at the temple, or socialise with people for any occasion, the elderly females—or those who keep to the tradition—tend to *hken ho* [kheːn⁴-hoː¹] or to wrap their hair with a strip of light-coloured

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189 For rich information on a costume of different Tai-speaking groups in the Shan State, please see Conway (2006), and for that in Thailand please see Bunchuai (2004) and Schliesinger (2001b).
cloth or towel. White or creamy white clothes are the most popular colours, among the others used. To denote a Tai subgroup, a particular braiding style is a key just as the men could be symbolized through tattooing. For example, Tai Long women are more likely to create twist buns at the back of their heads whereas their Tai Khuen and Tai Lue counterparts tend to make higher topknot buns on their heads.

There are some Tai Lue and Tai Khuen women that follow the hair-braiding method practised by their Tai Long counterparts. For example, Moherng is the 60-year-old Tai Lue wife of mid-sixties Hkertai, Wat Ka Kham’s ceremonial leader—mentioned previously, placing her in the community’s eye and a position of leading by example. Moherng explains to me that “living among the Tai Long people, I just want to do the same thing they do.” On the other hand, Leun—a 50-year-old Tai Khuen female who is a weaving trainer for the Housewives Group—provides me quite a different opinion: “They [the Tai Khuen] have changed. They are now living in Thailand. They want to be Thai.” To Leun, these Tai Khuen women think that to have a lower knotted bun could bear a resemblance to a Thai women’s hairstyle; however, Thai women—specifically in Lan Na culture area—no longer braid their hair in their daily lives. Leun is possibly using the term “Thai” much more broadly, referring to women in pre-modern Lan Na Kingdom.

Generally speaking, in Ruam Chai, the costume of Tai men from different subgroups appear to be nearly indistinguishable. Their traditional clothes include long-sleeved vests—buttoned at front, and loose-legged trousers of the same colour. The preferred colours are more specific for the men and include creamy white, light brown, grey, and indigo. There are only two popular vest styles: the Tai Mao and the Tai Long. The apparent limitation in choices seems to stem from a more practical standpoint and that the men tend to be less expressive through their clothing than the women.

In December 2005, a few days prior to the Tai New Year Celebrations, Sengjing said that Jarmhker had bought a lot of Tai clothes for sale from the border town of Mae Sai. She also asked me whether I want to have one to wear to join the Tai New Year parade. I had no idea how to pick the right one for myself. She then recommended that I should buy the Tai Mao style because I would have a “younger look” compared to the Tai Long style.
The Tai Mao-style male vest differs from the Tai Long one in the way that it has embroidered lines on the hem of the vest’s body as well as pockets. Based on my observation, this style is popular among young Tai men in Ruam Chai. They wear it with their standard baggy trousers known in Tai as kon yong [koːn¹ˈjoŋ⁵] or kon hong yong [koːn¹-hoːŋ²-joŋ⁵], which have the same design, regardless of Tai Mao or Tai Long style. In any high-profile poi, they wear a white shirt, and then cover the shirt with the vest. To dress in the full costume, they wrap their head with a headband or simplified turban made from a light-coloured fabric; pink has been the most popular but not the only colour. They also use light yellow and creamy white fabric. To have the perfect look, they also fasten their trousers at waist with the same colour cloth as the turban.

Fig. 12: Elderly Tai women were going home after making merit at Wat Ka Kham.

In the distant past, before going to farms or when travelling, the men customarily wore a broad-brimmed flat hat—called kup [kuːp⁴]—on their turbaned head, carried a shoulder bag, and wore a short sword. Conway points out that in the 19th century, Tai men in the Shan State always knotted their long hair on the side or top of their heads before
donning a turban cloth (Conway 2006:51). This practice no longer exists in the Shan State or in other Tai communities.

In spite of the similarities in dress, we may differentiate Tai Lue men from other Tai counterparts by their silver, gold, or jade bracelets (Bunchuai 2004:105), and we could distinguish Tai Khuen men from their Tai Lue fellows by looking at the colourful costume. As Bunchuai says, “Tai Khuen men are in favour of vivid-coloured dress. Their turban-cloths, vests, trousers, and sashes are in different colours. They prefer pink, dark green, dark blue, or white for the turban-cloths, while the sash is usually in black. […] They would put on these colourful costume when having celebrations such as a wedding or New Year” (Bunchuai 2004:61-62). Meanwhile, we could distinguish Tai Long men from those of other Tai subgroups on the basis of the former’s red tattoos (Schliesinger 2001b:145).

Fig. 13: Young Tai men got together for the Tai New Year parade in December 2005.

The way Tai women in Ruam Chai dress could be considered a significant ethnic identifier, despite the fact that they normally do not wear traditional costume in a daily life. Whenever there is a poi or any Buddhism-related event, they are inclined to wear a wide range of ethnic dresses. Like their male Tai fellows, the Tai Mao-style dress is the most
popular among Tai Long ladies. The Tai Mao-style costume consists of a front-buttoned and hem-embroidered long-sleeved blouse, a hpa sin, and a turban. Tai Mao-style hpa sin is composed of three equal parts: top, middle, and bottom. While the top and the bottom parts are the same fabric used to make the blouse, the attached middle one is always a shimmery, multi-coloured, vertical-striped, handwoven textile. To complete this dressing style, one has to wrap her head with a rabbit-ear-shaped turban of the same fabric as the hpa sin’s middle part.

![Tai girls in traditional costumes.](image)

A less popular Tai Long-style costume is also worn by the Tai Long women. According to Heo-ngern, “Tai Long style is the simplest among all other Tai dresses.” Their simple costume uses a light-coloured long-sleeved blouse, a basque-shaped bodice that crosses over in the front, a half horizontal-striped half solid-coloured hpa sin, and a turban. The horizontal-striped part is a multi-shade of colours ranging from red to crimson, purple, pink, and yellow. The lower part’s colour matches the upmost stripe.
While the Tai Mao and Tai Long-style costume are preferable and popular among the Tai Long women, the Tai Ngen counterparts have their own unique ethnic dress. As Schliesinger describes,

[Tai Ngen dress] consists of a dark sarong with pink, yellow, blue, and green horizontal stripes at the upper part of the phaa [pha] sin, a short-sleeved vest of plain black or dark blue color with long colored fringes hanging down from each armpit to the knees and a white turban. They decorate themselves with silver belts, necklaces, earrings and bracelets. (Schliesinger 2001b:145)

Figure 15 shows Yawthkam in a Tai Ngen dress although ethnically she identifies herself as Tai Long. She is among a handful of Tai women in Ruam Chai, who possess a wide range of Tai dresses from other ethnic backgrounds than their own. This helps her show her representation of all groups in the village. Being the Master of Ceremony for the 2007 Shan National Day Celebrations at Peign Hpa on the other side of the Thai-Myanmar border, Yawthkam was wearing the Tai Ngen costume—made by a Tai Khuen dressmaker in Inner Loi Hkam—for the first time.

The other two Tai female costume styles that might be found in Ruam Chai are the Tai Khuen and Tai Lue. In general, Tai Khuen women in village-level societies usually wear a ser pat [sɔː\(^3\)-pat\(^5\)]; a bodice crossed over the front, long-sleeved blouse, the half horizontal-striped half solid-coloured hpa sin described previously; and the matching turban. My friend, Thianchai, Chiang Mai University professor specialising in Tai arts and culture, indicates that fundamentally Tai Long and Tai Khuen hpa sin share similar designs with different colours. Schliesinger suggests that Tai Khuen hpa sin are in varying colours, but the popular ones are light green, violet, and dark red while their blouses and turbans could be either a vivid colour or a creamy white (Schliesinger 2001b:126). Tai Khuen women from a ruling class show their status with a finely-crafted hpa sin, of which a middle part is typically made of green silk or satin. The bottom part is beautifully embroidered with silver or gold threads and is ornamented with silver or gold beads or sequins.

Because the Tai Lue constitutes a minor population of the Tai in Ruam Chai, Tai Lue women are rarely seen in their ethnic costume at social events or at temple pois. I did not see Jarmhawm, Yawthkam’s close friend and neighbour, who has Tai Lue background,
wearing this traditional ethnic dress when I was there. The only Tai Lue dress I saw in the village is that of Paohkam, a traditional Tai (Long) performer and trainer whose house is located in Pawk 1, as mentioned earlier. At any rate, Tai Lue female dress looks similar to that of the Tai Khuen, except for their hpa sins that “might include bands of ikat and bands of tapestry weave, the latter described as “running water” pattern” (Conway 2006:101). Thianchai advised me that an easy way to distinguish Tai Lue dresses from Tai Khuen ones is by the colours. Tai Khuen women are in favour of using “sweet colours” whereas Tai Lue counterparts customarily prefer dark colours such as black. My friend’s basic observation might be partly true, yet I have seen exceptions with at least two Tai Khuen women of Ruam Chai and Inner Loi Hkam, whose blouses are basically black.

![Figure 15: Yawthkam in a Tai Ngen dress.](image-url)
Compared to their female counterparts, Tai men are less likely to wear traditional dress although some of them wear Tai baggy trousers with contemporary shirts or T-shirts. I also have learned that a few, if any, of the Tai brought their old textile master-pieces to Ruam Chai. The reason behind this, as some villagers indicated, might probably be the weight limit of their belongings when they escaped to Thailand. They could only carry their belonging as light as possible. Other informants said, being attacked unexpectedly by Burmese soldiers, the villagers did not have a time to grasp even a small piece of cloth. The only thing they could bring with them is their body. Instead of starting with traditional materials and weaving new textiles to make their clothes, as they used to do in Mong Tai, many of them prefer to buy fabric from a market which is cheaper and more convenient than buying raw materials for the weaving. Interestingly enough, contemporary Lan Na-style female costume has influenced Tai dress increasingly. As Sengjing has noticed, “the Tai people here apply [northern Thai methods to their style of dress] more. They make their dresses more modern. When I was in my hometown, the Tai Mao blouse is front-buttoned. Now, it looks pretty much like that of Lan Na women.”

A further and not-unexpected issue under such conditions and pressures is that many Tai youngsters may not know how to wear the typical Tai dress of their own subgroups. Being provided with the detailed information demonstrated to me by Professor Thianchai, I raised the issue of mixed Tai dress during a conversation with Moherng. Many Tai girls in Ruam Chai have taken to wearing a “mixed” Tai costume, probably due to enthusiasm and unstructured exposure to the styles. For example, in Figure 14, the second girl from the right hand side puts on Tai Ngen blouse and Tai Mao hpa sin. This is one of several instances I noticed while I was there. Yawthkam, who has a number of traditional Tai dresses in her collection, told me that she had never questioned what the “correct” way of wearing Tai costume is until she accompanied me to interview people on this matter. Yawthkam is now much more particular about not mixing elements of

190 To certain readers, it may appear as if I had misused the authority of my position to make tendentious remarks to villagers, which might have had the effect of making people aware of their ethnic identity by putting on the “correct” (sub)ethnic costume. However, Tai costumes and particularly Tai subgroup identities (see Chapter 4) are subjects of considerable local discussion. For example, many Tai Num members, including Yawthkam, were excited upon learning that I had a book on costumes of different Tai subgroups. They asked me to show them the illustrations in the book, and they later discussed among themselves each of the costumes with enthusiasm and
different styles. Moherng says “It’s all right to wear the costume that way, but they *am ap kan* [?am²-a:p³-ka:n¹] (don’t match).” This demonstrates that the Tai subgroups are not necessarily offended by mixed styles but do appreciate and respect their origins. It also apparently reflects a variety of costumes and flexibility of people in their wearing “their own” and others ethnic costumes.

Here, I make the point that ethnicity of the Tai-speakers in Ruam Chai cannot simply be solely identified by considering daily or formal costumes. Rather, other aspects of ethnicity such as dialect should be taken into account. How the Tai in Ruam Chai distinguish among themselves by using dialects of speakers would be touched upon in the next chapter.

### 3.11 Eating Habits

In Ruam Chai there are several restaurants but only three genres of food served: Thai, Isan (Northeast Thai), and Yunnanese Chinese. Most of the restaurants are dispersed along the both sides of the village’s main street in Pawks 3, 4, and 6. There are also Tai food stalls at the market near the village pillar shrine and the songthaew stand. Having low income and unique food preferences, in general, the Tai here are unlikely to buy food or eat out of their household, except when they attend pois or social events. Instead, they would rather cook and eat with their family’s members. It is habitual for the Tai to go to the market every morning although many of them have refrigerators to keep foodstuffs fresh.

Tai food is simple and mild-flavoured. Sengjing commented, “not too hot, not too salty, and not too sour,” which concurs with my experience. Most recipes usually have five ingredients or less. At a colloquium on the Tai’s Indigenous Knowledge at Chiang Mai Rajabhat University in February 2007, I received a handout indicating that there are as many as 37 Tai cooking methods, each requiring little skill. I spoke with Heo-ngern about Tai cooking:

*Jaggapan:* You just said that the Tai Long is the simplest compared to other

interest. In the discussion, most of them agreed that certain costumes looked too elegant to wear in a real life. Meanwhile, some of them compared and contrasted the ethnic dresses of their own groups to those of other Tai subgroups, who lived both inside and outside of Shan State.
subgroups.

Heo-ngern: Yes, they have simple costume and food. Each meal comprises about two dishes of food: chilly paste and vegetable curry. It’s very easy to make the vegetable curry. While boiling water [in a pot], you roast a hto nao [tho:²-naw³]. When the water boils up, break the roasted hto nao into pieces and then put them in the pot. Then, clean vegetable you got from a kitchen garden or the market, pinch off the vegetable, and put them into the pot. That’s it.

Jaggapan: Do they put in chillies or other ingredients?

Heo-ngern: Yes, they do. Besides chillies, they usually put salt and coriander. If we make a Chinese cabbage curry, we also put pounded ginger.

Fig. 16: hto nao, a crucial ingredient always found in kitchens of the Tai people.

The hto nao that Heo-ngern mentioned above is considered the “must-have” ingredient, always found in every Tai kitchen. Sengjing says: “as it could make food delicious.” Not only is it a favourite among the Tai, but also it is a favourite of their neighbours, the Khon Mueang, who have long adopted this technique to their cookery. The Tai in Ruam Chai

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¹⁹¹ It is pronounced thua nao, literally translated “decayed bean” in Thai.
usually buy hto nao from the market or directly from producers in Pawks 1 and 7. With its simple process, hto nao is sometimes made at home. Just easily, soften the seeds of soybeans by boiling them for as long as seven hours or more. Then drain and ferment the boiled soybeans for approximately three days. After that, finely crush or pound the brownish, fermented soybeans in a mortar (some people may use a grinding machine), and mould the paste by hand into a small ball and press it between a plastic sheet and a glass sheet to produce flat disks, approximately ten centimetres or longer in diameter and two millimetres thick. Finally, put the hto nao disks on a bamboo rack and then dry them in the sun usually for one day. If the hto nao are well dried and kept in a place with a proper temperature, they could last for months (Arunsri 2003:279-281).

One of the popular Tai dishes is *hkao soi* [khaw³-sɔːj⁴], rice vermicelli in red oily soup prepared from pork, pork-blood curd, and tomatoes. It is flavoured with hto nao, dried red chillies, salt, and coriander. The popular side dish for hkao soi is *nang pawng* [naŋ¹-pɔŋ⁴], deep-fried cow skin. In Ruam Chai, it is convenient to buy hkao soi at food stalls in the market or along the roadside. You may also find this food at several pois such as Tai New Year, feasts for a wedding, a housewarming, or a funeral. Interestingly enough, hkao soi is also popular among the Khon Mueang, but this food is called in another name, *khanom sen nam ngiao*, literally vermicelli in a ngiao-style curry.

The staple menu of the Tai is food primarily made of several kinds of vegetables. Since the Tai are keen adherence to Buddhist precepts as discussed earlier in the religion and belief system section, meat and fish are not major food for them.

*Jaggapan:* What kind of food do the Tai here usually make?

*Sengjing:* The Tai are in favour of making Chinese cabbage curry, pumpkin plant [young leaves and gourd flesh] curry, and unripe [young] jackfruit curry. We also use an unripe jackfruit to make salad. Ingredients we usually use are tomatoes, shallots, coriander, chillies, salt, MSG, and hto nao.

*Jaggapan:* What about meat? What kind of meat do they eat?

*Sengjing:* Personally, I don’t eat beef. I eat only pork.

*Jaggapan:* In general, do the Tai eat beef?

*Sengjing:* Very little. Generally, we eat pork and chicken. In the village [in the Shan
State] that I used to live in, most households raised chickens. Once in a while, we would eat fish because we didn’t catch them by ourselves, and not many [Tai] people do fishing for a living. The people who slaughtered animals and sold the meat lived in another pawk. They didn’t mingle with other people. They didn’t even sit near other people when making merit at a temple.

**Jaggapan:** Are the Tai in Ruam Chai strict about that manner?

**Sengjing:** Not at all. People here who slaughter animals or sell meat don’t detach themselves from other villagers.

**Jaggapan:** Do you have an explanation for why those who slaughter animals or sell meat shouldn’t live in the same pawk or village as other people?

**Sengjing:** Because their careers are related to taking life.

**Jaggapan:** If they don’t do that, we wouldn’t have meat to eat.

**Sengjing:** That’s so true, but we don’t eat meat everyday. We usually eat meat once a week or once in a while.

Sengjing also provides information on a change in Tai food consumption, and on exceptional eating habits found in Saimong’s family, where Tai, Lao, and Chinese cultural practices have converged.

**Jaggapan:** Is the Tai food the people in the village usually eat similar to what they ate in Mong Tai?

**Sengjing:** Not really. Tai food here is mixed with Thai food. The Tai in Mong Tai basically don’t put sugar in their food and don’t eat sour fruits with sugar either. They eat sour fruits with salt and chilli powder blended with pounded hto nao.

**Jaggapan:** You mean the Tai actually don’t like sweet-flavoured food?

**Sengjing:** Exactly.

**Jaggapan:** Then, why did the hkao soi you made for me the other day taste sweet?

**Sengjing:** Its sweet flavour is from the shallots. I never put sugar in any kind of food, except a dessert.

**Jaggapan:** So, the Tai food here isn’t one hundred percent authentic?

**Sengjing:** I’d say no.
Jaggapan:  You’re from Kunhing, which sits on the western side of Nam Hkong. Do the Tai there eat plain rice or glutinous rice?
Sengjing:  Most of them eat glutinous rice.192

Jaggapan:  I’ve been here for months, yet I never see any people in Saimong’s family eat glutinous rice.
Sengjing:  We do eat it, but once in a great while.

Jaggapan:  What is your rice type preference?
Sengjing:  Mostly, I eat plain rice.

Jaggapan:  I always see you and other people in this family eat rice with chopsticks. Do the Tai in your original village eat rice with chopsticks?
Sengjing:  Almost never. They’re more likely to eat food with bare-hand and spoon.

Jaggapan:  So, the people in this family usually use chopsticks because Saimong has part-Chinese background?
Sengjing:  I think so.

Jaggapan:  Sometimes, I also see Lao food on the table.
Sengjing:  Jarmka [Saimong’s wife] is Laotian. So, we eat both Tai and Lao food. The Lao food that we usually make consists of several kinds of paste, such as nam pu [nam²-pu:¹ (crab paste)], fermented fish paste, and chilli paste. We eat them with fresh vegetables.

3.12 Social Organisations

The handout I received from the conference on “Tai Indigenous Knowledge” mentioned earlier indicates that in a traditional village-level Tai society, its members are classified by their age groups and stages of life, which is known as Sam Pan Chet Sen [sa:m¹-pa:n¹-tse:t⁴-se:n⁴], literally “Three Stages of Life and Seven Age Groups.” This classification is regarded as a social mechanism in creating a community network together with designating positions of leaders, both sociopolitical and cultural.

192 This fact is also confirmed by Yin-Tang Chan who points out that the Tai people “eat glutinous rice only, and sell the ordinary rice to their neighbours in exchange for their other needs” (Chang 1944:63).
The Three Stages of Life, which are structured by productive participants in village life, are as follows:

1. *Pan Num-Sao* is the first stage in which teenagers learn about their own society, traditions, and culture.

2. Next is *Pan Hpawban-Meban,* “The Househusband and Housewife Stage,” whose members are supposed to play vital roles in economic activities and family life.

3. The final stage, *Pan Kon Htao,* comprises senior members who contribute to society by serving as political and ceremonial leaders as well as by supervising younger members on several matters ranging from eco-politics to socio-culture.

Parallel with the aforementioned three stages of life, a village-level Tai society also relies on the Seven Age Groups, which will be describe in order as follows:

1. The first categorisation of the seven age groups starts with *Sen Luk Awn Lek,* which includes infants to 6-year-old children, who are considered as being in a pre-age group period and having much the same responsibilities as toddlers anywhere, mostly to observe.

2. Next is *Sen Luk Awn,* which consists of seven to 12 years old members, who will be instilled with information about roles and responsibilities and even given some of these responsibilities.

3. *Sen Luk Awnn Hat,* the third age group, is formed by members whose ages fall between 13 to 18 years. They are expected to learn basic customs and values of the society; and to get prepared for being leaders in certain areas.

4. Nineteen to 30 years of age members constitute an age group called *Sen Kon Num,* whose members are to acquire knowledge about suitable ethnic ways of life and the meaning of marriage and family life, and to participate in the selection of a youth group’s leader.

5. *Sen Kon Hkrao,* 31 to 42 years age group, are supposed to take part in developing a village.

6. *Sen Kon Long* encompasses adult members, whose age between 43 to 52 years old that is an ideal age for serving a village as leaders.
7. The members whose age is 53 years old and up falls in the last age group, *Sen Kon Htao*, an elderly people group. Members in this age group are knowledgeable and skillful in performing ceremonies, and in giving younger generations of the village advice regarding sociopolitics as well as cultures.

Social organisations in Ruam Chai have been created in compliance with the notion of the Seven Age Groups concurrently with the Three Stages of Life enumerated above. The Village’s crucial and active organisations include the Tai Num, the Housewives Group, and Khana Kammakan Muban (the Village Committee).

The “Tai Num”—officially called in Thai as Klum Yuwachon Suepsan Watthanatham Tai Ban Ruam Chai (Ruam Chai Youth Group for Maintaining Tai Culture)—has played a vital role in conserving Tai culture for over six years. Their activities have gained more interest and support from villagers at large. In the past, the village had only one youth organisation known in Thai language as Klum Tai Anurak, literally “Tai Group for Conservation.”¹⁹³ However, over the past five years its status and roles have been contested by the Tai Num, which is newer and clearer in terms of the group’s activities. Tai Anurak’s leader tried to convince Tai Num to affiliate with them, but the Tai Num refused, reasoning that their ideals differ from that of the Tai Anurak. As Jarmhawm, the secretary of the Tai Num, points out,

*Jaggapan:* I heard from Yawthkam that the Tai Anurak wants your group to join theirs. Why is that?

*Jarmhawm:* Because their young members are irresponsible. They’ve seen that our members have high responsibilities. Our group also has solidarity, and we help each other to do and manage things. They said that we live in the same village, why don’t we join together? It looks like we’re not compact if we still have separate factions.

*Jaggapan:* What do you think about their persuasion? Do you want to attach your group to theirs or want to be independent?

*Jarmhawm:* No one in our group wants to join them.

*Jaggapan:* Why? Don’t you think if you’re with them, you’ll receive more funding to do several activities and your activities would run smoother?

¹⁹³ The group will be simply called “Tai Anurak” hereafter.
*Jarmhawm:* We don’t think so. If we’re with them, we’d lose freedom in everything, and we’d have to listen to them because he [Tai Anurak’s leader] is older than us. Above all, our group’s ideal is different from theirs. While they focus on sports, we’re most likely to work on matters concerning the Tai language and culture.

Personally, I have been familiar with Tai Num’s leading members since the beginning of my fieldwork, when I took part in the Tai Language and Culture Summer Camp in 2005. I also observed and participated in other activities organised by their group such as a monthly meeting, Tai performance at a school in Inner Loi Hkam, and a stage decoration for the Shan National Day at Peing Hpa in 2007. They usually kept me informed on activities through my interpreter (Yawthkam), who is an executive member of the group.

The origin of the group can be traced back to summer 2002, when a group of Buddhist monks known as Klum Saeng Thian—literally translated “Candle Lights Group”—launched a project in Ruam Chai for the first time. Most members of Saeng Thian, who came to Ruam Chai, are Tai monks that live in several monasteries in the Bangkok area. These dedicated monks have joined forces in conserving and publicising Tai language and culture. They travel throughout Thailand, the northern region in particular, initiating projects for the purpose of instructing participants in Tai language and culture.

In that year, the first-ever Summer Camp in Ruam Chai gained enormous interest and had over two hundred participants, both children and adults. It inspired a group of young adults to set up their own cultural group. Their group, with knowledge and financial supports from the Saeng Thian, was officially established in the summer of 2003. There were only ten members in the beginning. At present, the Tai Num has over three hundred members comprised of youths from all pawks. Each year, membership in the Tai Num is automatic, once children sign up for and participate in the Summer Camp, which usually

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194 Henceforth, this activity will be mentioned as the “Summer Camp.”
195 Or “Seng Ten” [sɛnː-ɛːn] in Tai. This organisation was found by a group of Buddhist monks—from various ethnic backgrounds—in Bangkok to do social-working activities as well as to encourage solidarity of communities. The Summer Camp in Thoed Thai is among many others projects of the group.
196 The group will be simply called “Saeng Thian” from now on.
takes place from early April to mid May. The roles of the Tai Num in maintaining the ethnic identity of the Tai will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Locally called “Klum Maeban” and officially known as Klum Phatthana Satri Ban Ruam Chai—literally Ruam Chai Women’s Development Group, the Housewives Group has been developed from a women’s activity group with an unclear direction to an established organisation of over six hundred members from every pawk. As a person who initiated this organisation, Sukanya, told me how the Housewives Group got started,

The group was accidentally started in the year [1985] that I’d arrived. Before that, villagers didn’t have a group like this. It was about the time of the end of the Buddhist Lent when the chief of soldiers on duty at Ruam Chai came to me and asked if I can find Tai women to take part in a football match during Poi Awk Wa Celebrations. Then, I asked help from Jarmka [Saimong’s wife] to recruit about eleven people to join a team. After the football match, we came up with selling food at fairs in the village. We then set up the Housewives Group, which remains until now.

The group has an office in their store building in Pawk 6, and it is led by Jarmka, who has been the chair—by election—of the group since the beginning. To be a member, one has to pay an application fee for two hundred and twenty baht. As members of the Housewives Group, not only do they have the opportunity to earn income from various economic activities, but also—in case of death of the group’s member—their family would receive eight thousand baht for organising a funeral.

In terms of supplementary-income activities, the Housewives Group is divided into several subgroups based on members’ expertise and interest. These subgroups include textile weaving, dressmaking, food producing (e.g., dried-shrimp chilli-paste, pork rinds, preserved bamboo shoots, and hto nao), cloth flower-making, and food selling, for instance. Apart from the supplementary-income occupations, members also occasionally participate in other activities voluntarily. Opportunities and ways of contributing include: providing a workforce in social and Buddhist-related events; selling food at the Central Field during the Tai New Year Festival or at Peing Hpa during the Shan National Day Celebrations; and providing food and drink to groups or organisations having a meeting or seminar in Ruam Chai or nearby areas.
Textile weaving, which is done in a weaving hall in Pawk 5 and also at the Housewives Group Store in Pawk 6, brings the most income to the group’s members. Handwoven textiles are sold to the Doi Tung Development Project, which provides the Housewives Group raw materials and determines the designs and colours of products. In the beginning, the Group sent certain members to have training at the Doi Tung Development Project. These original trainees then came back to transmit this knowledge to other members. At first, ten percent of the wages weavers received from the Project were deducted by the Group for shipping, electricity costs, and loan repayment for the looms. The Group now deducts only five percent from each weaver’s wage since the loans were repaid. Once again, Sukanya shares with me the story of the Housewives Group,

At first, they just made garments such as Tai dresses and student uniforms, and they did some other [economic] activities. Unfortunately, these projects were done and lacked a continued development. Some chief officers from the Doi Tung Development Project—to whom I used to show our handwoven textiles—paid a visit to us one day. They asked our group to work for the Project. Delightedly, we sent members to have additional training aside from their original weaving skills. Now the members have an assured market. This is totally different from what happened in the past when some people encouraged them to produce things, but they didn’t find a market [for their products] in the Village.

An important political organisation, which administers all affairs within the village, is the Village Committee. Jawmlern provides me information on this organisation,

\textit{Jaggapan:} Who is the president of the Village Committee, and what does the organisation look like?

\textit{Jawmlern:} A kamnan is the president of the Committee, which is broken down into seven sub-committees: Central, Governance, Reception, Education, Culture, Women’s Affairs, and Youth’s Affairs. The Central subcommittee appointed by the District is composed of the kamnan, the kamnan’s assistants, and a subdistrict inspector.

\textit{Jaggapan:} Are the heads of all pawks on any subcommittee?

\textit{Jomlaern:} No, they are not.

\textit{Jaggapan:} How do they fix a meeting day?
Jawmlern: They usually have a meeting on the third or the fourth day of a month. After a monthly meeting of village headmen and subdistrict headmen at the District, the kamnan calls for a village meeting with the Village Committee and all pawks’ leaders. After that, the pawks’ leaders circulate news to have a meeting with villagers in their own pawk. Normally, they have a meeting once a month, except when they have emergency matters.

Jaggapan: In terms of the village development, how do the heads of the pawks allocate tasks to their villagers?

Jawmlern: After a meeting with the Village Committee, they assign their villagers a task. Normally, we assume that each family will send a representative to work on an assigned task. If a family’s representative doesn’t show up, that family is charged a fee. It depends, though. Some pawks don’t charge their villagers for an absence, but they need to inform their pawk’s leader before hand why they can’t come.

Jaggapan: Besides the national law, does the Village Committee implement any rule to keep the village in order?

Jawmlern: We have the 14-Point Code for the administration the village, which states: shall not [act] against the country’s law; shall not destroy the forest; shall not possess any deadly weapon; shall not discriminate against other ethnic groups; don’t gamble; shall not commit adultery; shall not bring any illegal things to the village; shall not defame other people; shall not look down on other cultures; shall not bring drugs [either to use or to sell] to the village; shall not do any transaction on fake products in the village; shall not accommodate strangers without informing the kamnan or other authorised individuals; shall not persuade or lure women into prostitution; and shall not live without doing anything.

Jaggapan: How does the village penalise those who act against the code?

Jawmlern: They have four levels of punishment: warning, providing the temple with thirty tins or more of sand, working for the village for three days or more, and being expelled from the village.

Alongside the Village Committee, Ruam Chai has a special form of organisation called prachakhom, literally a “civil society.” This category of organisation originated from the Thai Government’s policy to encourage people in the society of all levels to participate in doing different activities in their communities, solving local problems, and making a community development plan. Theoretically, a civil society functions under the “participation of people” process. Therefore, in the civil society, people who share the
same goals or interests would take part in solving problems or making a decision without being influenced by any party. On an equal basis, members of the civil society would think of a solution, make a decision, enact the task, and take responsibility in a group under the laws and ethics of the society. This would allow the community’s members to learn together, to have love for and solidarity with each other, and ultimately to have a sense of belonging within their society (Department of Provincial Administration 2008).

I was informed by Jawmlern, the former president of Prachakhom Ruam Chai (Ruam Chai Civil Society), that the present committee of the Ruam Chai Civil Society consists of six committees who were selected by representatives from all pawks, 30 voting families per one pawk. Practically, a civil society would perform its duty in coordination with other civil societies, both in a village and supra-village levels; that is subdistrict, district, and province. Additionally, as the representatives of villagers, they work together with or monitor roles and functions of local government organisations such as the O Bo To. For example, O Bo To’s village development project cannot be conducted unless they receive approval from the Ruam Chai Civil Society, and a signature of Ruam Chai Civil Society’s agent. Equally important, Ruam Chai Civil Society committee also plays vital role in affirming a status of individuals who apply for Thai citizenship that they have lived in the village (permanent address), commits no illegal act, and disassociates with drugs.

3.13 Economic Activities

Ruam Chai’s economy is not primarily based on paddy-rice growing; which is one staple economic life of the Tai—the “lowland-living” (Keyes 1995a:5) ethnic group—as observed by Leach (1954:30) in the 1950s: “all Shan settlements are associated with wet rice cultivation,” and by Chang (1944:63) in mid-1940s: “[t]he Shans are a settled and agricultural people. They cultivate almost exclusively rice.” Their observations cannot be applied to a Tai village called Piang Luang, at Thai-Myanmar border in Chiang Mai Province. A great number of inhabitants in Piang Luang are recent arrivals from the Shan State. Living in Piang Luang for less than ten years, they have no fields to grow rice as they might have done previously in their home country. Only small numbers of the Tai, whose ancestors arrived much earlier, have farming lands and still do wet rice planting (Wandee 2002:78).
During the first phase of my fieldwork, apart from introducing myself to the locals and getting familiar with the new environment, I surveyed the economic life of villagers. I have discovered that there are restricted paddy fields in this village and, surprisingly, that rice is not the community’s main crop, although it is considered a major food of the people. I was later informed that the locals used to grow plenty of rice along the area which is now Nawng Long to some parts of Pawk 5. Because of the shortage of water many years ago, the place that was once paddy fields is now replaced with the reservoir (Nawng Long). Although they may now have enough water to nurture rice, paddy fields are very limited and insufficient for most families. The majority of rice fields in Ruam Chai are concentrated in Pawk 5. U-mong whose house is in this pawk provides information on wet rice as well as other crop-cultivation.

**U-mong:** We don’t have many rice fields [in his pawk]. Roughly, there’re ten *rais*¹⁹⁷ or more rice fields. My family has about two to three rais.

**Jaggapan:** Your family grows wet rice in that plot of farmland?

**U-mong:** That’s correct. My father always comes down [from Loi Kaw Wan] to do it.²⁰⁸

**Jaggapan:** Does your family cultivate other crops like dry rice?

**U-mong:** We grow a lot of dry rice for over ten rais at the [other side of Thailand-Myanmar] border.

**Jaggapan:** Your family doesn’t have dry rice field on this side of the border?

**U-mong:** We have none. We plant only wet rice here [Ruam Chai]. At the border we also grow many things like corn, sesame, peanuts, ginger, and soybeans.

**Jaggapan:** How does your father do with those crops planted at the border?

**U-mong:** He sometimes brings home dry rice to eat, and corn to raise chickens.

Unlike Tai villages in the Shan State (Sumit et al. 2002:10), a Tai settlement in Yunnan (Yos 2000), and a number of rural societies in Thailand; Ruam Chai economy does not

¹⁹⁷ *rai* is a measurement of land equal to 1,600 square metres (Domnern and Sathienpong 1999:433).

²⁰⁸ His father serves the SSA at Loi Kaw Wan Base. See details in Chapter 6.
primarily depend on growing crops. Furthermore, their self-sufficient agricultural production has not been operated through the so-called “Exchange Labour Gangs” system (Durrenberger 1983a:114), which is very common and crucial in every step of cultivation—wet rice in particular—in many traditional Tai societies. As Sengjing puts it, “In Mong Tai people still practise a traditional labour-exchange, which we call ao wan kan [?aw¹-wan⁴-kan¹]. In Ruam Chai, we don’t have the labour exchange [gangs] any more. You have to pay at least one hundred baht to hire someone to work for you from eight to five with a one hour lunch break.”

Apart from cultivating some minor crops, the Tai in Ruam Chai sell local products such as vegetables and foodstuffs at the market. They also produce handwoven fabric, make mulberry papers, and hire themselves out as labourers in construction sites and tangerine or tea plantations, to name but a few. However, many families have income from money sent to them by their children, who mostly work in restaurants, construction sites, gas stations, karaoke bars, nightclubs, and bathhouses in big cities all across Thailand. With respect to Tai women who are in a “nightlife business,” Somsi says,

After graduation, many Tai girls have left the village for different destinations. I hardly hear that they work in factories. Most of them work in restaurants in Bangkok, Ratchada and Huai Khwang areas in particular. Some of them go to the South to work in the cities of Phuket and Hat Yai. For those who know Mandarin, they go abroad such as Taiwan, Malaysia, and Singapore to work. They send money to their families. Their parents build and furnish new houses for them. Honestly, I don’t want to be offensive. Tai girls are known for their beauty. A difficult situation forces them to get involved in this kind of business… a “special career.” Meanwhile, Tai men are more likely to work in restaurants or construction sites.

Besides the difficult socioeconomic status, family expectations are another factor that pressures young Tais to make a “fortune” by doing a “special career,” as Jarmhker points out:

Many young Tai, both boys and girls, left school after they finish Grade Six. Their parents think that to be “able to read and write” is good enough for their children to work to support them. They don’t think that with limited education, how difficult lives their children would be in the future. They only see that their children have a duty to support them. Some underage Tais have to work as waiters or waitresses and service boys at gas stations. Some good-looking Tai boys don’t have to be low-
paid workers because they get help from sugar mommies [and daddies] while girls are not much different. If they don’t have sugar daddies, they might earn money from “a job like that.”

Kamhker, who returned home after spending many years outside the village as a novice at a temple in Mae Chan Town, and later as a worker in Bangkok provides insightful analysis of a fact regarding Ruam Chai economy,

**Jaggapan:** As far as I see, generally, the economy of Ruam Chai is pretty good.

**Kamhker:** It’s quite good because most of our income is from Bangkok, Taiwan, and other places. Young Tai girls, who are in the same generation as Yawthkam or younger, deny revealing what they do. I used to live in Bangkok, so I know what kind of work they do. Some are sexual masseuses, some are sex workers, some are minor wives of rich men. For a good image of us [the village], we have to deny that we have Tai girls who do that kind of job. But truth is truth, we can’t run away from it. Anyhow, a lot of Tai from our village do normal jobs. We’re better than others in that a hard life has pressured us to be good and hard-working persons. For example, we work in Bangkok. Thai people earn up to ten thousand baht a month, but they’re still lazy. Meanwhile, we [the Tai], who earn as little as five thousand baht a month, have to do as best as we possibly can to please our employers to keep hiring us. If they don’t hire us, we have no place to go. If we decide to return home, as you might see, we would have a hard life. Thus, we should be satisfied with what the employers would give us.

**Jaggapan:** So, a lot of young Tais have gone out to work?

**Kamhker:** Yes, because there’s very limited jobs to do up here.

Although it would seem that a great number of working-age Tais have left Ruam Chai with ease to make their fortunes in Bangkok or elsewhere, most of whose who have no Thai citizenship need to get permission from Mae Fa Luang District if they want to leave the designated area.

**Jaggapan:** I heard that to leave the village for a particular reason or to work in other places, one has to apply for a permission. Some people apply for a permission to leave for ten days, but they’ve gone for months or years.

**Kamhker:** A difficulty in dealing with the complicated local Thai bureaucracy system forces them to do that. When applying for the permission, they’re asked to provide information on address or workplace they’re going to live or work
in. How could they specify about that? So, they told officials that they’ll be away for ten days. But practically they were gone for ten months or more, and then come back to renew the permission after they get a long-term hire.

In conclusion, Chapter 3 provides general information about the village and the Tai people of Ruam Chai, which is connected to the data in the next few chapters. In the presentation and discussion of the Tai in this chapter, I suggest that cultural patterns among the Tai have changed over time and space. The focus on these data may lead some readers to the impression that this thesis emphasises such cultural aspects as the major components that the Tai in Ruam Chai have defined as the essence of their identity. In fact, the thesis is conceptualised within the constructivist approach, which holds that the ethnic identity of the Tai people has been created through discursive practices in a specific socio-historical context in the face of power relations.

Ruam Chai is a relatively big developing community, which comprises multi-ethnic groups. This border village has developed from a twilight zone occupied by the recently deceased, infamous opium warlord into a village “absolutely” controlled by the Thai state; and from a forbidden area for outsiders to a village best known for its historic attributes and rich culture. As readers may realise, contents in several sections of this chapter clearly demonstrate the village’s critical problems, such as insufficient farmlands, threatened Tai language and culture, and the citizenship issue. The fact that there are several Tai subgroups—Tai Long, Tai Khuen, Tai Lue, and Tai Ngen, for instance—in the community raises a question of ethnic boundary, which cannot be simply determined by the dialects that they have spoken, or the costumes that they have worn, or any other cultural markers. Ethnic classification among the Tai as well as other phenomena regarding ethnicity in Ruam Chai will be examined—on the village or community level—in the next chapter.
Chapter 4
The Boundaries Within

The Tai may seem to be classified in a number of groups, but they are in fact the same family. In the past the territory of Tai Kingdom covered a very large area. At a later time, they were in factions and they had warfare among themselves. The size of their land thus is smaller and smaller. (interview with Saimong, February 23, 2006)

“Thai Yai” is an effective term the Tai people in Ruam Chai and elsewhere in Thailand have acknowledged as their official ethnonym. The term “Thai Yai” is often used by the Tai themselves when they interact with the Thai, other ethnic groups in the country, and with any authority. They also use this term increasingly when presenting themselves through different forms of modern “text.” In everyday reality, the Tai/Thai Yai always refer to themselves as “Tai.” Interestingly, the Tai continue to concurrently classify their different subgroups according to names of sub-ethnic group, mong, and locality, even down to the colour of clothes (Bunchuai 1960:98).

In the famous study of ethnic relations between the Kachin and the Tai in the plateau of Burma, Leach (1954:32-34) bases his rough classification of the Tai on the categorisation made by the Burmese. The Burmese had traditionally distinguished the Tai into three groups: Burmese Shans (Shan B‘mah), Chinese Shans (Shan Tayok), and Hkamti Shans. The Burmese Shans includes the Tai people dwelling in what is today Myanmar’s Shan State. The Chinese Shans encompass those in former Tai principalities located in China’s Yunnan Province, particularly in the southern areas of Tengyueh and the west of Nam Hkong. This group also includes the Tai in Bhamo and Myitkyina, who migrated from Yunnan. The Last group is Hkamti Shans, which, in fact, is a subgroup of the Burmese Shan.199

It would seem that Leach’s broad Burmese-based classification of the Tai fails to provide an accurate notion of ethnicity. In fact, the Tai settling down in the Shan State, Yunnan, Assam, the northern region of Vietnam, and Thailand could each be categorised

199 For the details of subgroups of the Hkamti Shans (Tais), please see Leach (1954:34-35).
into several groups. For example, the Tai dwelling on the east side of Nam Hkong, where Kengtung is the administrative centre, identify themselves as “Khuen” or sometimes “Tai Khuen.” The Tai (Dai) in Xishuangbanna whose settlements are located in Jinghong (spelled “Chiang Rung” in Thai) and its vicinity—including some areas in eastern Shan State—is known as “Lue” or alternately “Tai Lue.” Both Tai-speaking groups, although have been stereotypically called “Shan” by the Burmese or “Thai Yai” by the Thai, have their own scripts and dialects, including other cultural practices, which differ from that of the Tai Long. Their dialects, as well as that of the Tai Long and other Tai subgroups, were classified as “Southwestern Tai” in the Tai-Kadai language family as mentioned in the previous chapter whereas their scripts are very similar to that of the Lan Na and the Laotian.

Penth (1986:248) provides interesting information regarding the scripts shared among the Tai-speaking groups mentioned above by indicating that the Mon-derived script widely used in the old kingdom of Lan Na, which known as Tham, was formerly used in Hariphunchai (Haripunjaya) Kingdom, where had the political centre in what today is Lamphun—the city south of Chiang Mai—during 1250 to 1300. Not until as early as 1400 that Tham was introduced to the Yuan—or sometimes known as Tai (Thai) Yuan (or Yon), Khon Mueang, or Lan Na of the Lan Na Kingdom—and then was diffused to Luang Phra Bang (in what today is Laos), Kengtung, and Jinghong through monks and their disciples, who promoted Theravada Buddhism in those regions. The adopted Tham script, however, was modified in a small degree by the Khuen, the Lue, and the Laotian (Keyes 1995b:140). To have a common script, in Keyes’s argument, is the building of collective sense of nation before the formation of modern nation-states,

[F]rom the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries, there was an “imagined community” (to use Ben Anderson’s term), constituted by those who shared the same texts (mainly Buddhist) written in one of the variants of the Tham script. In other words, Yuan [Lan Na], Khün [Khuen], Lue, and Lao (albeit with a qualification to be noted in a moment) constituted subgroups of a larger community. This community was shattered when these various subgroups were divided between modern states—Burma, China, Laos, and Thailand. (Keyes 1995b:141)
Projected as the first level of an analysis, this chapter intensively examines the social reality of how the Tai in Ruam Chai define and re-define themselves within a multi-ethnic milieu. This chapter also deals with other forms for Tai ethnicity on a village or community level, which is central to the exploration of ethnic relations as Wijeyewardene writes,

> It is important that ethnicity be looked at the community level. It is here that individuals define their own identity, and, sometimes, in terms of that identity [individuals] destroy their neighbours’ very right to exist. Yet, these identities are the product of unique histories and the trajectory of the history of any community is the product of “accident”, not immutable law. (Wijeyewardene 1990:68)

The socio-cultural phenomena that I will further discuss range from the hegemonic status of the Tai Long to the Conservation of “Seng Tai”—a kind of traditional Tai performance, Poi Pi Mai (Tai New Year Celebrations) as a reflection of Tai identity, the reconstruction of Tai identity through the Summer Camp, the role of the “Tai Num” in conserving and asserting Tai culture, and the relationships between the Tai and other ethnic groups in the village. To further elucidate these issues, it is now worth looking at the ethnic classification among the Tai themselves.

### 4.1 Being “Tai” among Different “Tai”

Khuensai, a middle-aged Tai scholar and SHAN’s editor, has lived in Thailand since 1971. Jawmlern introduced me to him on the Shan’s National Day 2007, which took place in Peing Hpa on the other side of the border. The first meeting did not allow me to interview him or talk about the village in greater details; however, he asked his secretary to provide me his business card for further contact. Having completed the final-phase of my fieldwork, I left Chiang Rai for Chiang Mai in late February to interview him, and that was before I came back to Toronto. The very first question I asked him concerned the ubiquitous terms “Thai Yai” and “Ngiao.” Khuensai, who is a native of Mong Tai, confirms that he had never heard about these two ethnonyms before he left his homeland for a new home in Chiang Mai.
Jaggapan: The Thai people in the northern region [the Khon Mueang] are more likely to call the Tai “ngiao.” When did you first hear the term?

Khuensai: I heard about the term shortly after I had arrived in Thailand. Before that, I had never heard about it.

Jaggapan: How long have you been in Thailand?


Jaggapan: What part of Tai country are you from?

Khuensai: I was born in the North, grew up in the South, and then lived in the East. I’m a real Tai.

Jaggapan: What city or town in the North were you born in?

Khuensai: My hometown is very close to the [Myanmar-China] border.

Jaggapan: If I’m right, you must have a Tai Mao background.

Khuensai: That’s correct. My paternal grandparents are Tai Mao, but my maternal grandparents are Tai [Long].

Jaggapan: Generally, are Tai Mao and Tai Long dialects different?

Khuensai: Yes, they are.

Jaggapan: What about the alphabet?

Khuensai: Well, the alphabet that we [the Tai] use are a modern form. The Tai Mao have their own alphabet, which is older than the former one.

Jaggapan: I heard that the modern Tai alphabet was in a simplified version.

Khuensai: That’s right. The modern alphabet comes in a round shape while the old ones are square-shaped.

Jaggapan: Then, Tai texts appearing in books or websites are written with the modern alphabet?

Khuensai: That’s right.

Jaggapan: Let’s go back to the term “ngiao.” Have you ever asked the Northern Thai as to why they identify the Tai with such a term?
Khuensai: When I first arrived here [in North Thailand], I took a [Central] Thai class. One day I read a book, which I found the sentence, *ya ao ya kha ma chim khiao, ya ao ngiao ma pen phuean* [do not pick one’s teeth with a lalang grass, do not be friend with the Ngiao]. I was surprised. I thought to myself why the Thai have such an idea? Later, I heard an expression, *ngu ngiao khiao kho* [snake, ngiao, sickle, hook]. To me, this negatively implies that the Ngiao people can’t be straight [honest]; they have to be curved [cheating or dishonest] all the time.

Jaggapan: What about the term *ngiao hua chok* [or *ngeo ho jawk* (*ŋeːw̃ hoː tsoːk*) in Tai, literally knotted-hair Ngiao]?

Khuensai: I also heard about this one, but its meaning isn’t as negative as the former ones.

Jaggapan: How do you feel when people identify you with the term Ngiao although you and the Tai people, in fact, never use this term as a self-reference?

Khuensai: Well, most Tai people don’t like it at all because the term has a negative implication as I just said.

Jaggapan: Have you heard the term Thai Yai when you lived in the Shan State?

Khuensai: Never.

Jaggapan: You have any idea why the Tai people in Thailand usually call themselves Thai Yai?

Khuensai: Well, the people here [in Thailand] have started calling us Thai Yai first. As we know, there are the Tai Long [Big Tai] and the Tai Noi [Lesser Tai]. The Tai Long is the Tai while the Tai Noi is the Thai. That’s how the story goes and that’s all we know.

Jaggapan: Is it possible that the term Thai Yai [in Thai] is translated from the term Tai Long [in Tai]?

Khuensai: It’s possible. I think it’s more likely that the term [Thai Yai] has been used since Field Marshal Por (1897–1964)’s Reign. I don’t think it was used before that.

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200 Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhram, or widely known as Chomphon Por (Field Marshal Por) to the Thai people, is the third prime minister of Thailand, who was in the office for two terms, namely from 1938 to 1944 and from 1948 to 1957. The name “Por” is an initial standing for his first name, “Plaek.”
Here is another confirmation from Longtip, Heo-ngern’s eldest brother.

**Jaggapan:** When you were in Mong Tai, had you ever heard the term Thai Yai before?

**Longtip:** Not at all.

**Jaggapan:** If they don’t use the term Thai Yai, what term do they use instead?

**Longtip:** They only use the term Tai.

**Jaggapan:** And what about the term Ngiao?

**Longtip:** They don’t know that term either.

In Khuensai and Longtip’s viewpoints, including that of most research collaborators in Ruam Chai, the Tai in the Shan State do not call themselves “Thai Yai” or “Ngiao.” His point of view on the term Thai Yai is supported by Bunchuai, who says “the Thai Yai in Shan State do not call themselves Thai Yai. They only call themselves Tai” (Bunchuai 1960:99). Although these two ethnonyms might be new to the Tai who have just set their feet on the Thai soil as the two terms do not exist in the Tai vocabulary system in Mong Tai; for those who have lived in Thailand for a long time, the terms have been repeatedly referred to and eventually become a part of their life. At this point, I would like to conclude that in Thailand the term “Ngiao,” which suggests an unpreferable meaning, has been commonly used in Lan Na cultural context while “Thai Yai” has been generally used to refer to either Tai immigrants or descendants of Tai who came (or were relocated) to this “geo-body,” to employ Thongchai (1994)’s term, since the ancient times. Interestingly enough, it would seem that the Thai people, including their government, generally label the Tai—regardless of subgroups—from the Shan State with the term Thai Yai. These Tai people have been treated as a single ethnic group.

This misconception, however, has been contested by ethnologists as well as ethnolinguists, whose research clearly reveals that the Tai—both in the Shan State and

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201 The discourse on Thai Yai will be discussed in details in the next chapter.

202 The Tai descendants, who got Thai citizenship, usually identify themselves and are referred to as *khon thai chuea sai thai yai* (Thai with Thai Yai background).
other countries—are, in fact, heterogeneous, possessing their own ethnic classification system that will be shed light on in my research going forward. According to the results of the fieldwork, the Tai in Ruam Chai categorise themselves internally by considering at least four attributes: subgroup, location/hometown, region, and their relationship with Nam Hkong (the Salween). These attributes are discussed as follows:

4.1.1 The Classification of the Tai by Subgroup

The Tai, the Khuen\textsuperscript{203}, and the Lue fall into this type of categorisation. In the case of the Tai, who are referred to as “Tai Long” generally and habitually identify themselves as “Tai” without the modifying term “Long.” In Ruam Chai, therefore, if somebody introduces himself or herself to you as “Tai,” the probability that the person has Tai Long origin is relatively high. To compare with the phenomenon in Ruam Chai, I asked Heo-ngern how the Tai Long, who form the majority of dwellers in the Shan State on the west side of Nam Hkong, call themselves, she replied, “Tai Long or Tai Mong Hao [taj\textsuperscript{4}-m\text{\`o}n\textsuperscript{4}-haw\textsuperscript{4}] (The Tai of Our Country).” Meanwhile, the young generation of the Tai Long like Yawthkam, who was born and brought up in Ruam Chai, points out that she grew up with the term Thai Yai, and that the term Tai Long came to her ears for the first time in a Tai language class—one of crucial activities of the Summer Camp—at Wat Ka Kham. “Even though I’ve been familiar with the term Tai Lue [because the family next door to her parents’ house in Pawk 7 is of the Lue origin], the term Tai Long or other Tai subgroups had no real meaning when I was young,” says Yawthkam.

An official survey on the classification of the Tai subgroups in Ruam Chai has never been conducted. Yet, it has been widely acknowledged that the Tai Long is the

\textsuperscript{203} Some people believe that the Khuen (or Tai Khuen) got their ethnic name from the river in Kengtung, which instead of running southwardly like many other rivers; it runs northwardly until it merges with the Mekong. The nature of the river that runs northwardly is described in their language as khuen. Therefore, the river is called Nam Khuen while Kentung and the people living in this area are called Mong Khuen and Tai Khuen, respectively (please see the legend of Kengtung in great details in Rujaya Abhakorn (2002:185). Jawmlern told me that in Xishuangbanna there is a river called “Lue,” and it is possible that the Lue (or Tai Lue) got their ethnic name after the river. Thienchai, an expert in Lan Na and Tai cultures, possesses a different viewpoint. He told me that if the Tai Lue have a tradition in naming or calling their group after the river, they would pick a name of the main river—Lan Chang (Lancang Jiang or Lan-Ts’ang Chiang in Chinese) or widely known as Mekong—not a tributary.
village’s largest Tai subgroup, and that their dialect is the main Tai accent in this area. Bunchuai (1960:98-99) states that the term “Tai Long” has been used by the Tai in the Kachin State and in the Sagaing Division of Myanmar as a name for the Tai in the Shan State; while the term Tai Long (in Tai) has the same meaning as “Thai Yai” in Thailand. The meaning of “Long” is synonymous to “Luang.” He also states that perhaps the term “Thai” (ไทย) was invented even after the term “Tai” (ไท) had been used, “the term Thai of our country probably was created after the term Tai since the Tai in India, Burma [Myanmar], Yunnan Province of China, and northern Laos, all call themselves “Tai.” The terms that they put after the term Tai are names of cities, names of locations, or forms [or colours] of dress” (Bunchuai 1960:98-99).

For the Khuen and Lue counterparts, I have discovered that every so often the two groups in Ruam Chai add the term “Tai” to their ethnonyms; and that they do not have a rigid rule for when they should say “Khuen” or “Tai Khuen,” “Lue” or “Tai Lue.” The people I talked to do not seem to be aware of the reason for using the term; therefore, they do not always use it in a strictly logical manner. This issue leads to further questions as to what exactly they call themselves; and at what point in their history the term “Tai” became an integral—or optional—part of their ethnic self-labelling. Despite the insufficiency of ethnographic evidence, for the time being it could be deduced that the way the Khuen and the Lue has attached the term “Tai” to their actual identity might be more or less in connection with a collective consciousness of being “Tai,” which has been invented since the emergence of the Shan State or Mong Tai as a single political unit. This nationalist awareness has been developed significantly since the Burmese military regime broke the Pang Long Agreement in 1958 (Samerchai 2009:203). Nevertheless, at first both groups

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204 Luang and yai are Thai words. Luang means great; public, state, government; royal (Domnern and Sathienpong 1999:527) while yai means large, big, great; main, superior, major; in charge, in command (Domnern and Sathienpong 1999:552). The Thai people sometimes combine these two terms as yai luang, which means immense, enormous, tremendous, huge, mammoth, gigantic (Domnern and Sathienpong 1999:552).

205 Anna Polonyi, University of Toronto anthropology doctoral student who conducted fieldwork in Laos, told me from her experience that the Lue in Udomxai identify themselves as “Lao Lue.” Meanwhile, Samerchai indicates that customarily the Lue in Xishuangbanna are inclined to employ “Tai” followed by a city name as a self-reference when interacting among the Lue themselves. However, their ethnic identity is shifted to “Lue Tai” in the milieu of inter-ethnic interaction (Samerchai 2009:10).
simply identified themselves as “Khuen” and “Lue” without the term “Tai” as a prefix (Samerchai 2009:5). 206

Even though we might have a set of possible explanations for that questions, the use of the terms “Khuen/Tai Khuen” and “Lue/Tai Lue” are still problematic, even in an academic world. Moerman (1965), who tried to investigate the Lue in Chiang Kham in northern Thailand, only mentions this ethnic group without this prefixation. On the other hand, Wijeyewardene uses the term “Tai Lue” in the beginning of his article when referring to these people in Xishuangbanna of China and in northern Thailand, and then he only uses the term “Lue” with no “Tai” as a prefix.

Links between the Tai Lü of Xishuangbanna and north Thailand are not hard to find if looked for in the right places. In the market of Jing Hong (Chiangrung) are Thai goods which have come overland from Mae Sai in a few days. Villagers have been in Thailand and others have relatives there. In Thailand the evidence comes even more easily. Many northern Thai whose ancestors have lived there for generations may be referred to as “Lü” or “Yorng”—sometimes interchangeably. (Wijeyewardene 1990:50)

[...]

In Mae Sai and elsewhere in Chiangrai province, and in the northern districts of Chiangmai, there are recent [...] Lü communities. There are also communities in Lampang and Lamphun. These communities became visible with the visit to Thailand of the last king of Sipsongpanna in 1987. (Wijeyewardene 1990: 51)

Based on my fieldwork experience, I have found that, generally, the Khuen and the Lue in Ruam Chai do not always describe themselves by fixing the term “Tai” before their ethnonym. In certain situations, however, the term “Tai” is added to the ethnic terms, and the term “Thai Yai” is used as a self-reference term as well. In sum, while the Khuen simply label themselves as “Khuen,” they also might substitute “Tai Khuen” for no immediately apparent reason. In exactly the same fashion, the Lue in this village describe themselves as “Lue,” yet also use “Tai Lue” interchangeably. This practice is inconsistent, as you can see from the series of dialogues I had with Hearnhkam and Sengmong, the aged Khuen sister and brother from Pawk 8.

206 Samerchai indicates that in the old days the Khuen preferred not to be called “Tai” because they looked at the Tai (Long), the majority of people living on the western side of Nam Hkong, as a different ethnic group (Samerchai 2009:203).
Jaggapan: All residents of Paw 8 have Tai Long background?

Hernhkam: We have Tai Long, Tai Khuen, Muser [Lahu], and Hke [(khe:²) Chinese].

Sengmong: Yes, a lot of Tai Khuen.

Jaggapan: Can you speak Tai Khuen? [At that time I did not know he and his sister are of Khuen background].

Sengmong: I know how to write Khuen [He did not answer my question].

Jaggapan: If I can ask, are you Tai Long?

Sengmong: No, I’m not Tai. I’m Khuen. There’re two types of Thai Yai [He means the Tai and the Khuen are two categories of Thai Yai]. Thai Yai [I think he probably means Tai by Thai Yai, but he picked the wrong term in this situation] and Khuen are the same.

Jaggapan: Ah...you’re Khuen.

Sengmong: Yes, I’m Khuen.

Jaggapan: Your sister is also Khuen?

Sengmong: That’s right.

Jaggapan: And the man who sat by you?

Sengmong: He’s Khuen, too.

Jaggapan: I got you. That’s why I didn’t see Tai Long script on his tattoos. So, your family is Khuen?

Sengmong: Yes, and Wat Ka Khao [White Crow Temple] is the temple of the Khuen. [Its] Monks are also Khuen.

Jaggapan: Do the Khuen people call themselves Tai Khuen or simply Khuen?

Sengmong: Just Khuen. Tai and Khuen are different groups. The Tai Long or Thai Yai live on the west side of Nam Hkong while the Khuen live in and around Kengung.
The inconsistency of self-reference also happens with Hkertai, a Pawk 1 resident in his mid-sixties and a ceremony leader of Wat Ka Kham. He himself is of Khuen background while his wife, Moherng, also in her sixties, is Lue.

**Jaggapan:** How long have you been in Ruam Chai?

**Hkertai:** Over twenty-two years [interview on February 17, 2006].

**Jaggapan:** What Tai subgroup do you and your wife belong to?

**Hkertai:** I’m Tai Khuen, and my wife is Tai Lue.

**Jaggapan:** You are Tai Khuen while your wife is Tai Lue. So, what language do you and your wife speak to each other?

**Hkertai:** Khuen and Lue words are alike [his answer implies that both languages are spoken in their family].

**Jaggapan:** I saw a Khuen script posted on the wall at the front of your house. Is Khuen Script similar to the Tai [Long] one?

**Hkertai:** Not at all.

**Jaggapan:** Do you also speak Tai [Long]?

**Hkertai:** Yes, I do.

**Jaggapan:** Before coming to Ruam Chai, where else did you live?

**Hkertai:** We came here directly from Mongyarng [Hkertai’s hometown in the Shan States].

**Jaggapan:** What does Mongyarng look like? Is it the location of the Khuen?

**Hkertai:** It’s the Tai Khuen’s town. All residents speak Khuen.

**Jaggapan:** Is there any Tai Long.

**Hkertai:** There’s no Tai Long. They live in the west [of Nam Hkong] while the Lue live in Xishuangbanna, which is located in Mong Hke [the country of the Chinese].

**Jaggapan:** Are there a lot of Khuen in Ruam Chai?

**Hkertai:** I don’t know an exact number of them.
Jaggapan: How do you know who is Khuen and who is Tai Long?

Hkertai: They don’t tell me, and I don’t ask them. So, it’s hard to tell if they are Khuen or Tai Long. I just think that they could be Tai, but if they speak in Khuen accent, then I could know their ethnic background.

In another occasion, I had a conversation with Moherng while she was visiting her neighbours in Pawk 1.

Jaggapan: What Tai subgroup do you consider you are a part of?

Moherng: I’m Lue.

Jaggapan: Instead of Lue, why didn’t you said you’re Tai Lue?

Moherng: I’m Tai Lue.

Jaggapan: Which one is correct?

Moherng: Lue and Tai Lue are the same.

Jaggapan: Why is the term “Tai” attached to the term “Lue”?

Moherng: Well, it’s Tai Lue [Although she didn’t answer my question, she finally picked “Tai Lue”].

Jaggapan: So, is the woman sitting next to you also Lue?

Moherng: No, she’s Tai Mong Ngen.\textsuperscript{207}

Jaggapan: What about the woman who’s making a mulberry paper over there?

Moherng: That one is Tai.

[Then I asked Hkamla, a woman who just arrived]

Jaggapan: And you’re Lue or Tai…something?

Hkamla: I’m just Tai.

Jaggapan: Just Tai or Tai Long?

Hkamla: It’s Tai Long.

\textsuperscript{207} Tai Mong Ngen (or Tai Ngen) will be discussed in the next subheading.
Jaggapan: In this pawk, Tai Lue, Tai Ngen, and Tai Long live side by side. Do they have any communication problem?

Moherng: Although we speak in different accents, we understand each other. These different accents are reflected from an old saying, *Tai Long pak wan Tai Lue pak chang* [Tai Long speak sweet, Tai Lue speak unflavoured].

Another interesting example is the case of Hkamlu, a Khuen woman in her early fifties whose tasks are to take care of supplies and kitchen utensils of the Housewives Group, and the inn located in Pawk 3. Hkamlu came from a rural area in the vicinity of Kengtung, and has lived in Ruam Chai for over thirty years. On the day that I interviewed her and certain members of the Housewives Group at their office and store—located next to Somsi’s restaurant in Pawk 3, she told me that she is “Khuen” not “Tai Khuen.” To the question of what ethnic terms she prefers to identify the Tai Long and the Lue, she replies, “I call the Tai Long *pi-nawng tai* [piːⁿəːŋ tajː] (Tai brothers and sisters), and call the Lue just Lue.” When I asked Hkamlu about her Tai subgroup background, not only did she provide me data on her ethnic origin, but also shows me the way she differentiates the “Khuen” from the “Tai Khuen.” Coming from a rural area in the Shan State, she described herself as “Khuen Ban Nok” (the Countryside Khuen) which distinguishes herself from the “City Khuen” and Tai subgroups, who are entitled by the term Tai attached to their ethnic group’s name. In this sense, it could be interpreted that the Khuen living in a city would be identified as “Tai Khuen” whereas the Khuen in countryside would be simply marked as “Khuen.” The information obtained from Hkamlu, however, has not yet been supported by any kind of evidence. The issue needs to be further investigated.

In spite of the inconsistency in identifying their ethnicity, it is evident that members of these Tai subgroups—Tai, Khuen, and Lue—all possess an ethnic consciousness. They may acknowledge similarities, such as spoken languages, between the groups, but at the

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208 Meanwhile, Leun (in her sixties); a member of the Housewives Group and a teacher of handwoven textiles who originally came from Mong Len, a town not far from Mae Sai, and has lived in Thoed Thai for more than 30 years, said, “Tai Long speak in a soft tone. Tai Khuen accent is quite hard, and Tai Lue accent sounds pleasant.”

209 The nomenclature difference revealed by Hkamlu actually helps to demystify the inconsistencies the Tai people use interchangeably among themselves. Without realising what they are doing, some are calling themselves “City Tai” or “Countryside Tai,” depending upon their experiences and confidence. For some, it is a matter of pride while, for others, it is a matter of humility.
same time they appear to consider their own subgroup as a different social entity. Importantly, as I argued earlier, the Khuen and the Lue infrequently refer to themselves by gluing the term Tai to their ethnic labels; this conforms with what I heard from Longtip—a Tai Long man and Heo-ngern’s brother who was born in Panglong and raised in Mongnang—who says “I hardly hear they use Tai Khuen as a self-reference. In general, the Khuen say hao pen Khuen [haw⁴-pe:n¹-khw:n¹ (we are Khuen)]. The same to the Tai Long and the Lue, who habitually assert hao pen Tai [haw⁴-pe:n¹-taj⁴ (we are Tai)] or hao pen Lue [haw⁴-pe:n¹-lw:?type (we are Lue)].” Khuensai, a Tai scholar and journalist, expressed his idea on this point: “The Tai Long customarily refer to themselves as Tai while the Khuen and Lue just characterise themselves Khuen or Lue without the term Tai.” To the question of why at present the term Tai has been prefixed to their epithets, he responded, “First, it’s about an identity that they’ve searched for. Second, they probably follow the footsteps of the Thai people, who label their fellows in different regions as Thai Isan [Northeastern Thai], Thai Klang [Central Thai], or Thai Nuea [Northern Thai].”

Saimong, the owner of the guesthouse in where I stayed during the fieldwork, who agrees that the Khuen and the Lue are different from the Tai Long—particularly in their accents and the alphabetical systems—asserts that the groups have a collective awareness of being Tai and of being relatives. He told me that the Tai Long at times describe the Khuen and the Lue as “Pi-nawng Tai Lue Tai Khuen” [pi:³-nɔ:ŋ⁵-taj⁴-lw:?type⁵-taj⁴-khw:n¹], literally Tai Khuen and Tai Lue brothers and sisters. He also mentioned a number of Lue peoples in Yunnan, who would rather declare “Hao Pen Tai” (we are Tai) instead of saying “Hao Pen Lue” (we are Lue).

### 4.1.2 The Classification of the Tai by Location or Hometown

The second type of ethnic categorisation centres on towns, cities, or localities in where the Tai have lived or, in the case of those in Ruam Chai, from where they were born and in where they used to live. For example, being born in a city in northern Shan State close to

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210 Both Tai cities are located on the west side of Nam Hkong.
211 Somphong (2001:5) suggests that the Tai people in southwestern Yunnan identify themselves according to their town or city name. For example, Tai Mao, Tai Mueang Wan, Tai Mueang Khon, and Tai Mueang La. Please note that there is a settlement called “Mao” on the Chinese side close to the Myanmar-China border. Its residents are locally known as “Tai Mao,” the Tai native to the Mao.
the Myanmar-China boundary, Khuensai identifies himself as “Tai Mao.” This city was once under the power of the Tai-ruled kingdom known as Mong Mao. Tai people in Ruam Chai also characterise those who are from the Mao Basin, which covers Namkham, Muse, including nearby cities and towns, as “Tai Mao.”

During the fieldwork, I had difficulty finding people who are of the Tai Mao origin. Yawthkam, my interpreter, and I visited house after house to ask for people with Tai Mao background. Most informants seemed to be uncertain whether the Tai Mao are available in Ruam Chai. Some of them even told me that they had never met any Tai Mao before in the village. Moherng is a Lue woman who has been in Ruam Chai for almost thirty years. Asked whether the Tai Mao are available in the village, she replies, “I don’t know where they are. I never see them.” However, I was lucky enough when Heo-ngern—Saimong’s cousin and the guesthouse staff—said she had heard that there is a small handful of Tai Mao in Ruam Chai, and one of them is “Kawnjerng,” a monk in his mid-twenties at Wat Ka Kham.

Kawnjerng, a Tai Mao from Namkham, has been in Ruam Chai for over ten years. His Tai Mao accent is so strong that I find it hard to keep up with what he says. Banchop Phanthumetha, a Thai dialectologist in Tai, who made trips to many areas in the Shan State in 1956, encountered the same problem: “My understanding of Tai Mao on a conversational level is limited. I believe that the Thai Yai [Tai] in other areas would also find Tai Mao language not easy to understand, although both of them speak Tai.” (Banchop 1983:67).

Yawthkam has noticed that Kawnjerng accent obviously is not that of the Tai Long although she understands what the monk has said. Kawnjerng is among Tai monks who teach Tai language to children at the Summer Camp. Because of his distinctive accent, I asked him what Tai accent he speaks in class. He said, “I use Tai Long accent. Sometimes I speak Tai Mao accent accidentally, and this make the children confused.” To the question

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212 Some scholars may suggest that the Tai Mao got their ethonym after Nam Mao, which forms a part of Myanmar-China boundary.
of how different the Tai Long and the Tai Mao are, he states, “They are the same. Everything is similar. What makes them different from each other is just the accent.”

In addition to Tai Mao, there are more specific ethnic categorisation in the area. Cities, towns, or even smaller political units are used to define the Tai subgroups, for example, Tai Ngen\(^{213}\), Tai Lem\(^{214}\), Tai Mongpu, Tai Mongnang, Tai Mongnawng, Tai Mongloi, Tai Mongyarng, Tai Kengtung, Tai Hawng Leuk, and many more. It would seem that the Tai in Ruam Chai would classify the Tai Ngen, along with other groups, as a separate Tai subgroup, the same way they do with the Tai Long, the Khuen, and the Lue.

As a matter of fact, the Tai Ngen are considered a subgroup of the Tai Long, who predominantly occupy a town called “Mong Ngen.” The dialect of the Tai Ngen is similar to that of the Tai Long, according to most of my key informants.

Hkamlao, a Tai Ngen member of the Housewives Group in her early forties, whose husband has Tai Long origin\(^{215}\), said Mong Ngen is named after a river that runs through the town. Although Sengjing used to live in Kunhing\(^{216}\), she never saw or knew about the Tai Ngen when she was there. Regarding the term “ngen” itself, Sengjing told me that the term has different meaning in different conversational contexts. For example, *kat ngen ngen* [kat⁴-ŋɛ:n⁴-ŋɛ:n⁴] means “very cold” while *ngen hkaw* [ŋɛ:n⁴-kʰɛ:⁴] means to squeeze someone’s neck.

To ensure that the information on the Tai Ngen I got from the fieldwork is valid, I sent an e-mail to Sao Charles, a Tai immigrant (now Canadian) from a ruling-class family of Laikha (a city in the Shan State).\(^{217}\) He then contacted Khuensai, and later forwarded me

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\(^{213}\) Most Tai Ngen live in Don Mun (the separate village neigbouring Pawk 1 of Ruam Chai) and Pawk 1. Some members of the Tai Ngen are found in Pawk 5 and Pawk 8.

\(^{214}\) Yumyen, a member of the Housewives Group, came from a border town called Monglem, which is located on the Chinese side in Yunnan Province. She has been in Ruam Chai for more than 20 years. Although she describes herself as “Tai Lem” to me, her real ethnic background is Lue. At one time she said, “I’m Lue from Monglem.” Clearly, she has multi-ethnicities such as Lue, Tai Lem, and Lue from Monglem. She said that currently she speaks Tai Long, and that her Lue accent is almost gone. This is a difficult concept to express. Her ancestry may have multiple ethnicities, but her current behaviour expresses *intraculturalism*, within specific Tai cultures.

\(^{215}\) Her husband is a relative of Yawthkam’s father.

\(^{216}\) A Tai town located on the west side of Nam Pang, a tributary of Nam Hkong. Because of hundreds of islands in the river, the town is named Kunhing (Burmese) or Konheng (Tai), which means *thousand islands*. Please see Figure 1.

\(^{217}\) I met Sao Charles in Toronto in 2004. He is the person who provided me with his contacts in Chiang Rai Province.
the e-mail he had received from Khuensai, who explains about Mong Ngen and the Tai Ngen.

Mong Ngan (Mong Ngen/Mong Ngaen) is south of Mongkhark (71 miles northwest of Kengtung). Tai Ngaen doesn’t mean they are of a different Shan [Tai] group. It only designates where they are from. A lot of Tai Ngaen joined the resistance [to the Burmese military regime]. Most of their retired members are in Chiang Rai and some in Chiang Mai. Two of them in fact are my neighbors in Piang Luang\(^{218}\), where my family is. […] My neighbor says Tai Ngan are basically Tai Long, but as they live near to Wa and En, their Shan [Tai] is a bit heavier sounding like their neighbors. They also sometimes wear clothes like them so it is easy to make a mistake in designating them as a different Tai group (letter to author, January 28, 2008).

Fig. 17: Members of the Housewives Group. From left to right, Tai Long, Tai Lem, Tai Lam (from Mong Len)\(^{219}\), Khuensai, and Tai Ngen.

\(^{218}\) A border village in Chiang Mai Province.
\(^{219}\) Compared to other informants, Leun is the most confused about her ethnicity. In the first interview, I asked her whether she is “Khuen” or “Tai Khuen.” She said she is “Tai Khuen” and her husband is also Tai Khuen. In another interview (together with Hkamlu), after Hkamlu told me about the diversity of the Tai and then provided me some examples such as Tai Lam, Tai Leng, and Tai Khuen; Leun said she is “Tai Lam.” I asked her what her real ethnic background is, she said, “When I was there [Mong Len], I’m Tai Lam. Now I live here. They call me Thai Yai.” “So, you’re not Tai Khuen?,” I asked her again to recheck. She confirmed, “I’m Tai Lam.”
According to a research report on the Tai society and culture of Mai Mok Cham\textsuperscript{220}, however, members of the Tai Long and the Tai Ngen do not think that they are utterly alike nor that they are the same group. The relationship between the groups is power-embedded, which is based on an inequality as Shalardchai points out, “In Mai Mok Cham, Mae Ai District, Chiang Mai Province, the Tai [Long] and Tai Ngen live side by side. They sometimes perform a ceremony together, yet on an unequal basis. So, it has a very small space for the subordinated Tai Ngen to show their identity” (Shalardchai 2002:162). On the contrary, in Ruam Chai the Tai Ngen play a vital role in several occasions, an annual Poi Sang Lawng (Novitiation Ceremony) in particular, although they might be regarded inferior to the Tai Long in terms of population size. Based on my observation of the ceremony in late March 2005, in the evening of the day before the ordination day, there was a gathering of the local people at the Central Field. Among other Tai subgroups fellows, Tai Ngen women looked remarkable in their unique ethnic dress. Their “place” in this context was considerably prominent as only Tai Ngen girls had been appointed to carry a sign of the poi made of cloth (see Figure 18). For those who do not know that the poi is the event for all Tai subgroups in the community, they may think this ceremony is specially organised by the Tai Ngen. In my opinion, compared to other Tai subgroups, the Tai Ngen seemed to be the most cohesive and distinctive in this happening. The solidarity of the Tai Ngen could be found, as Heo-ngern who has several Tai Ngen friends says, “The Tai Ngen has more harmony [than other Tai subgroups]. It’s not that easy to marry a Tai Ngen girl. Because Tai Ngen are very compact, if you have a Tai Ngen wife, and you have a fight with her, you don’t just fight with her, but with of the whole family. The Tai Long is different. We’re more likely to see who’s right or wrong.”

“Tai Mongpu” is another group fitting into this classification. This ethnic title is especially assigned to the residents of Pawk 10 by the local people, and at the same time it is an ethnic brand widely used among the Tai in the given pawk. Whenever people know that I was going to Pawk 10 to visit or to interview my informants, they would often say, “Ah, you’re gonna see the Tai Mongpu” or “a whole bunch of Tai Mongpu live there.” The reason behind the truth is that most of Pawk 10 dwellers migrated from Mongpu, a small

\textsuperscript{220} A border village—predominantly inhabited by the Tai—in Tha Ton Subdistrict, Mae Ai District, Chiang Mai Province.
town in Kentung Township of the Shan State. Pawk 10, therefore, is sometimes referred to as “Mongpu,” the name which is common among the locals.

Besides immigrants from Mongpu, a small number of the Tai in Pawk 10 migrated from Mongpeng, Mongloi, and Mongyang. Jawmseng, the former headman of this pawk who served his duty for over two decades, said that initially this pawk comprised only five households of the Tai from Mongpu. The Chinese and the Akha have started living in Pawk 10 for around five to six years. Hakhker, the present pawk headman who has been in this position since 1996, added details to the information I received from Jawmseng. He said that formerly the land in Pawk 10 was occupied by the Chin Haw (Yunnanese Chinese), who moved out after Khun Sa had bought their land. Asked what makes Tai Mongpu different from other Tai subgroups in the village, he says, “We are authentic Tai Long while those living in Kengtung are Tai Khuen or Tai Lue.” It is evident that, according to Hakhker, the Tai Mongpu might consider themselves as a distinct group; however, they tend to attach themselves to the Tai Long.
The categorisation of the Tai with respect to locations, towns, or cities is not exclusively found in Ruam Chai. This practice also exists in many Tai societies in other countries. Take the Tai-speaking group known as “Tai Tai Khong” or “Dehong Dai” as a concrete example. They predominantly inhabit the south side of Nam Hkong in Dehong Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture of Yunnan Province. Chinese scholars are more likely to call them “Dehong Dai” or “Tai Nuea” (Northern Tai), and sometimes Tai Mao, Tai Mueang Mao, or Tai Mueang Khon. Western scholars are inclined to refer to this subgroup as the Chinese Shan, Mao Shan, or Shan of Yunnan (Yos 2000:2-3).

4.1.3 The Classification of the Tai by Region

I heard the terms “Tai Pawt Hawng” [taj⁴-pɔ:t⁴-hɔrn²] and “Tai Pawt Jarn” [taj⁴-pɔ:t⁴-tsa:n⁴] for the first time while having a conversation with Paohkam, a senior female resident of Pawk 1. Literally, Tai Pawt Hawng means the Tai from the North while Tai Pawt Jarn means the Tai from the South. The latter term could also apply to those from the eastern part of the Shan State. Paohkam and her husband left Hsipaw—a city in northern Shan State—when she was around twenty-two years of age, and she has never gone back to her hometown since. In Thailand, the couple lived in Mae Hong Son, Chiang Mai, and Mai Mok Cham before settling down in Ruam Chai. Although Paohkam is ethnically Tai Long from Hsipaw, she inclines to describe herself as “Tai Pawt Hawng,” rather than “Tai Long” or “Tai Hsipaw.” This is “because I was born in that area, and although I haven’t been in my hometown for more than thirty years, I still speak with my Tai Pawt Hawng accent,” says Paohkam.

In the past, different mongs in the present-day Shan State and those in present-day Yunnan Province were ruled by saohpa [tsaw³-phaʔ⁵]—hereditary prince or princely Tai ruler/chief. Among autonomous mongs were those federated to each other through consanguineal and affinal relationships. These saohpa-ruled principalities subordinated to superior neighbouring kingdoms such as Ava of the Burmese and Lan Na of the Khon.

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221 The first “Tai” has mid tone while the second one has rising tone.
222 They sometimes call the Tai from northern Shan State “Tai Ner” (Northern Tai) or “Tai Kao” (Old Tai).
223 Or “Zaboà” in Sangermano’s spelling. He chose to define the term as “petty prince” (Sangermano 1893:43).
Mueang (alternatively known as the Tai Yuan or Tai Yon) in present-day upper northern Thailand, and into some neighbouring parts of China. When Burma was colonised by the British, all Tai mongs which submitted tribute to the Burmese kingdom were automatically annexed to British Burma. This also included Tai mongs having tributary relations with the Lan Na Kingdom. The British claimed that those Tai mongs used to pay tribute to the Burmese court. Once occupying the realm of the Tai, the British divided the country of the Tai into two regions: North and South\textsuperscript{224}, given the reason that it was for the benefit of administration and control.

Regarding the regional division in the Shan State, Khuensai explains,

In point of fact, north and south regions have been separated since the Federated Shan States were colonised by the British. At the given time, Hsipaw, Mongyai, and Hsenwi were in Pawt Hawng [northern region]. In Pawt Jarn [southern region], specifically, south of Hsipaw onwards were locations of many mongs such as Yawngwe, Laikha, and Mongnai. At that time, Pawt Awk [eastern region] wasn’t created yet. Thus, Pawt Awk was considered a part of Pawt Jarn. We now have three regions. The Burmese created a new [eastern] region. In sum, during the colonial time, there were only two regions: the North and the South. Now, we also have the East.

Based on the ethnographic research, I was informed by research collaborators such as Saimong, Heo-ngern, Sengjing, Jawmlern, and Paohkam—who are in agreement—that most Tai in Ruam Chai are Tai Pawt Jarn (in this sense, Tai Pawt Awk [taj\textsuperscript{4}-pɔːtʰ\textsuperscript{4}-ʔɔːk\textsuperscript{2}] is included), and that the population size of Tai Pawt Hawng is so small that they can “count the heads” of them. Among these small numbers are Paohkam who is from Hsipaw as mentioned earlier; Hpalong is from Mongyaw in the vicinity of Lashio Township; Mohkeo, who came from Mongyai; and Peunmong, the 57-year-old leader of Pawk 2 who migrated from Narpen—a village not far from Mongyaw.

One could conclude that, prior to the British colonial administration, the Tai may not have or rarely constructed their ethnicity based on the region where they had lived or had come from. My humble assumption seems to concur with Khuensai’s point of view. He suggests that prior to the British annexation of the Shan State and the classifying of their subgroups by region, the Tai were more likely to define themselves in a manner of

\textsuperscript{224} For more details, please read in Chapter 2.
“a people of a particular mong.” Although the Tai have recently started referring to themselves regionally, this practice does not prevail in Ruam Chai. Some key informants like Saimong—whose homeland is Laikha—instead of saying that he is Tai Pawt Jarn, identifies himself as “Tai Pawt Kang” [tajʰ-ːpʰ-tʰ-kəŋ] (Tai from the Central Region). Technically, there is no central region according to the state administration.

### 4.1.4 The Classification of the Tai by Using Nam Hkong as a Boundary

This type of group identification appears to be as important as the first two approaches, or—based on the fieldwork—sometimes it is even more significant than the others. Geographically, by using Nam Hkong as a barrier, the Shan State is divided into two realms: the East and the West. The Tai who live in an area east of the river usually identify themselves or is known as “Tai Awk Hkong” [tajʰ-ːʔɔ:kʰ-ːkəŋ] whereas their counterparts inhabiting in a zone west of the river tend to describe themselves as or is called “Tai Tok Hkong” [tajʰ-to:kʰ-kəŋ]. Occasionally, the people use “Tai this side” and “Tai that side” in favour of the aforementioned terms. For example, Heo-ngern who is a native of Mongnang located on the west side of Nam Hkong always mentions the people and the land on the west side “Tai that side,” and calls the people and the land on the east side “Tai this side.” It is very possible that if she still lived in Mongnang, the people and the land on her side would be called “Tai this side,” not “Tai that side,” in her perception.²²⁵ Heo-ngern further explains that Tai Awk Hkong and Tai Tok Hkong are titles used to refer to the Tai holistically. On an individual level, a Tai usually describes oneself by referring to a village, town, city, or region one lives in or comes from. “When you meet a Tai person and you ask him or her what Tai subgroup he or she belongs to, that person is more likely to tell you that he or she is a Tai from a specific location like Tai Kengtung, Tai Ban Loi Hkm, Tai Mong Thai [Thailand], or Tai Mongpu. In my case, I came from Mongnang, so I’m Tai Mongnang.”

The classification of the Tai into two broad groups—Tai Awk Hkong and Tai Tok Hkong—by the nature of geographic feature (Nam Hkong) is not a practice without any

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²²⁵ Sometimes she calls the Tai in Shan State “Tai Mong Hao” (Tai of our country), and refers to the Tai in Thailand as “Tai Mong Thai” (Tai of Thailand).
supporting reason. Rather, this categorisation is strengthened by a set of explanations that make the Tai from the both sides of river ideologically different when they perceive themselves and recognise each other. Heo-ngern is a person who used to live in areas of both Tai Tok Hkong and Tai Awk Hkong. She was born and raised in Mongnang, and went to Taunggyi to pursue her bachelor’s degree in chemistry. During a school break, she usually visited and stayed with relatives in Kengtung, and sometimes crossed the border to Ruam Chai to visit Saimong—her cousin—and work in his guesthouse and his wife’s salon for making money to pay tuition fees. Having experiences in areas of both Tai Tok Hkong and Tai Awk Hkong allows her to see the dissimilarity of the two groups. In her eyes, the Tai Tok Hkong have a high degree of conservativism; that is to say, they still maintain traditional Tai beliefs and practices, including living their lives with ethic-abiding. Her viewpoints on the Tai Tok Hkong could be considered from the following quotation,

Most Tai in Ruam Chai migrated from the Awk Hkong around the [Thailand-Myanmar] border areas, villages or subdistricts in Kengtung vicinity such as Mongpu and Mongpeng. So, the culture of the Tai in Ruam Chai is the reflection of that of the Tai Kengtung. Here we have only a handful of Tai Tok Hkong. The Thai Yai on my side [west of Nam Hkong] restrain themselves from taking creatures’ lives. In my village, those who kill animals and those who don’t [kill animals] live in separate clusters. We don’t even have people who catch fish, except Hkamlek’s father because he’s Chinese.226 Besides, gambling, including card playing, can’t be seen anywhere in my village. They believe that a tiger would bite those playing cards. So, the people don’t do it because they’re afraid of that.

[…] 

Women in my area don’t drink alcohol. Once getting married, people hardly divorce. Any woman who got divorced would be thought of as a bad lady. We don’t have an adultery problem because we know all other villagers. If one does something wrong, most people in the village would know about it. So, I could say that we almost don’t have any social problem. […] The Tai in Tok Hkong still hold on to old beliefs. For example, when cooking rice they need to turn a rice pot three times to make rice ready to give offerings during the morning procession of monks. Also, on the wan kat mong [wan⁴-kaːtʰ-məŋ⁴ (a day of town or city market)] of the kat ha wan [kaːtʰ-ʰaː³-wan⁴ (five-day markets)]227, the people must

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226 Hkamlek is Heo-ngern’s cousin and Sengjing’s husband.
227 “Kat Ha Wan” is a market system of the Tai people in the Shan State. In each week, the market (similar to a weekend market) is organised in five days and is rotated through five locations. The area that Heo-ngern used to live in (Mongnang) has Mongnawng as a market centre, which is surrounded by numbers of villages, subdistricts, and towns. Only five places are selected to have
behave, and must not do things wrongs. In the morning of wan kat mong, they’re not supposed to cut firewood. They have to do that in the evening of the day before. The Tai Awk Hkong and Tai in Ruam Chai no longer hold this belief. [...] We don’t have ramwong. We only have ka nok [mythical bird dance], ka to [mythical four-legged creature with horns dance], and seng tai [Tai’s traditional performance]. Tai Tok Hkong women still wear hpa sin [ankle-length, tube-shape skirt] and have their hair knotted traditionally. People there keep maintaining their old way of using alliterative words after a sentence.

In terms of the differences between the two groups, Heo-ngern says,

The Tai from both sides [of Nam Hkong] differ in certain things. The Tai Tok Hkong always support their children in their education while the Tai Awk Hkong don’t really see its [education] importance. In the past, a lot of Tai Awk hong around Kengtung area didn’t have Burmese ID cards while people on my side [Tai Tok Hkong] always have them. Also, the Tai Awk Hkong are modernised. Take the Tai in Kentung as an example. Those who do butchering for a living always wear big gold necklaces. The Tai on my side still have an old belief [in karmic actions].

Nevertheless, Heo-ngern admits that currently Tai Tok Hkong societies have been changed. Many Tai Awk Hkong workforce have brought back ideas and practices to their homelands after working in Thailand for quite some time. She also says that the Tai on her side are more “modernised”—or thansamai as she put in Thai word—owing to the influences of mass media, the excessive use of consumer electronics, and in their acultural manner of dress.

In the same manner as the Burmese in ancient times, who recognised the two regions as separate cultural areas and called them in different names—i.e., Kamboza for the West and Khemmarat for the East (Samerchai 2009:25), Heo-ngern, evidently, perceives the Tai Tok Hkong and the Tai Awk Hkong as groups being in oppositional

the market. The market organised in Mongnawng is called Kat Mong [kaːt̚-məŋ] or Kat Weng [kaːt̚-wəŋ] while the market organised in Mongnang is called Kat Nang. The other three markets are Kat Jart [kaːt̚-t açʰ-tʰ], Kat Hawng [kaːt̚-hɔːŋ], and Kat Jarn [kaːt̚-tsə'n].

228 Ramwong is a kind of an entertainment. It is, in fact, a couple dance around a dance floor in a circle direction. Ramwong is very popular in Ruam Chai during the Tai New Year, and in Peing Hpa during the Shan’s National Day. Those (mostly men) who want to dance need to buy a ticket first. Then, a female dancer would be picked. After that, they would dance until a song is stopped. If one wants to have another dance, he has to buy a new ticket.

229 In this context, Heo-ngern means immorality, unethicality by “modern.” The more the people are modernised, the less people are ethical religiously.
poles. More specifically, the former is in a conservatism or ethicalism pole, while the latter is in a modernism or unethicalism one. An explanation behind this argument is that the “Tai Awk Hkong are modernised because they are closer to Thailand [which is a relatively modern country in the eyes of most Tai people],” says Heo-ngern. It has been known that people in the eastern region of the Shan State, which is found on the east side of Nam Hkong, have established relationships with the Thai people through culture, kinship, trading, and tourism for a long time. Thai television serials, movies, songs, fashions and other various forms of consumer products are considerably favoured on the other side of the border, particularly in the Awk Hkong region. Consequently, this modernisation from the Thai has been passed onto the Tai Awk Hkong conceptually and materially, and hence the Tai Awk Hkong are viewed as modernised in the eyes of their counterparts (the Tai Tok Hkong), who are inclined to preserve traditional ways. Based on a number of conversations I had with Heo-ngern, I have discovered that she would seem to include the Tai in Ruam Chai as a part of Tai Awk Hkong not simply because Ruam Chai is located on the east side of Nam Hkong, but the Tai in Ruam Chai have been “modernised” by the Thai.

Fig. 19: Ka Nok.
Fig. 20: Ka To.

Fig. 21: Seng Tai from Pawk 10.
In responding to Heo-ngern’s didactic opinion, Jawmlern—a Tai Long male from Kengtung area who represents the Tai Awk Hkong—points out that the Tai Tok Hkong seem to be able to maintain certain old Tai practices, yet they have been culturally dominated by the Burmese in many ways ranging from cuisine, language, dressing, and naming. To describe the people in the Awk Hkong tract, where the Khuen and the Lue form the majority of the region’s population, instead of concentrating on their modernised ways of thought and practice, he tends to stress the similarities of the Tai Awk Khong and the Khon Mueang. “The spoken language of the Tai Awk Hkong sounds like that of the Khon Mueang in northern Thailand. Apart from that, the Buddhist doctrine in that region [Tai Awk Hkong] has been influenced by that of Chiang Mai,” says Jawmlern. To mark a difference between the two groups, he mentioned that the Poi Sang Lawng, which is annually organised in Ruam Chai, is similar to that of the Tai Awk Hkong; who are more likely to hold a ceremony at the home of parents or sponsors, and then take the novices-to-be to enter a final ceremony at a temple together. On the contrary, the Tai Tok Hkong are in favour of having a ceremony in a public sphere such as a rice field (after the harvest season) or in a community space. All novices-to-be take part in the ceremony at one place, and they will be ordained at a temple eventually.

Another difference between the two groups is accent and vocabulary. As Heo-ngern explains,

The accent of Tai Tok Hkong is hard while that of Tai Awk Hkong is soft like Thai language. We Tai Long [who live in Tok Hkong] still use alliterative words after sentences. This makes our accent naive-sounded. About word usage, the Tai Tok Hkong have borrowed several words from the Burmese. Sometimes the two groups don’t understand each other because they use different words. For example, the Tai Tok Hkong call a mother of a mother nai [naːì] and call a father of a mother pu [puː]; and call a mother of a father awk [ʔɔːk] and call a father of a father hting

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230 Unlike Jawmlern, Banchop (1983:25) suggests that Tai language at Mongnawng (in the Tai Tok Hkong region) is considered a standard Tai because it has not been influenced much by Burmese.

231 Heo-ngern informed me that Sengjing used to have a Burmese name. She got her present name at Kengtung. Sengjing told me later that all members of her family have Burmese names.

232 Lan Na people or sometimes referred to as Tai Yuan/Yon.

233 Khuensai told me that after the Shan State gained an independence from the British, for fourteen years the Tai government tried to create a standard Tai to be used throughout the country. The standardisation of Tai was discontinued when the Burmese forcibly occupied the Shan State. The Tai in the Shan State have different dialects, and they have developed new words used in their groups. Until now, the Tai still do not have a lingua franca.
The Tai Tok Hkong use different words. Another example is a word “tea.” While the Tai Awk Hkong in Kengtung area use nam la [nam⁵-la:³], those in Tok Hkong use nam neng [nam⁵-neːŋ³]. I still speak the Tok Hkong accent up to these days. I speak with the accent even when talking to Saimong [Heo-ngern’s cousin and Hern Tai’s owner], who can speak Tai in both Tok Hkong and Awk Khong accents very well. That is because he was born in Laikha and then went to Kengtung to study with white people.

The spoken language of the Tai in Ruam Chai reflects their Awk Hkong origin, and it is locally known as “Kengtung accent” because the majority of the Tai in Ruam Chai came from different villages and towns in the Kengtung area. Having been influenced by Thai media and education, it is, however, unavoidable for them to adopt Thai words and accents as a part of everyday life. Heo-ngern discussed with me the mixed accent of the Tai in Ruam Chai: “Some years ago my relative came here to visit me and other kin. He had difficulty communicating with the locals [who speak a mixed accent of Thai and Tai Awk Hkong]. You’ve been here for months and you’re familiar with the Tai Awk Hkong [Ruam Chai] accent. If you go to the region of Tok Hkong, you’ll find their language quite hard to understand.”

Sengjing had initially learned Thai language while visiting a relative in Taunggyi and learned it once again upon arrival in Ruam Chai. She admits that although she has Tai Tok Hkong background and speaks the Tai Tok Hkong accent with her husband, she has to use the mixed accent or only Thai accent when talking to her son. “If I speak to my son in Tai Tok Hkong accent, he’ll understand only a small part of it, and he’ll ask me to repeat that word or sentence.” I asked Sengjing which accent the Tai always use in their mass media; she said that Tai Tok Hkong is a standard accent which most Tai singers use when performing and recording, and that the dialect is also widely used in Tai dramas, which are usually shown on cable TV in Ruam Chai. I also received the same response from Yawthkam and some members of the Tai Num, who told me that songs they always sing and play for a dance show are in the Tai Tok Hkong accent.

Interestingly, the findings I obtained from the field correspond to Samerchai (2009)’s account on ethnic dynamism of the Tai-speaking people on the both sides of Nam Hkong. Due to differences in terms of historical development and cultural roots (e.g.,

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234 Khuensai said in certain areas in northern Shan State, people call tea “yeu.”
Buddhist sect and script), the Tai Long, the ethnic group primarily occupy the west side of Nam Hkong whose identities have been shaped in a close link with the dominant Burmese culture, were inclined to identify themselves as a distinct ethno-social entity to the Khuen and the Lue, the residents of the eastern hemisphere of the same river who tended to view that they share several respects with the Lan Na people, and vice versa. Amid the hot wind of nationalism blowing across the Shan State, however, enormous effort have been made not only to lessen the strong sense of such dissimilarities, but also to bridge the two imagined, separate domains through meaningful and crucial practices. These practices include the revitalisation of the glorious past to unite all groups of Tai-speaking people in the Shan State, and the re-introduction of the Buddhist sect—adopted from the Lan Na Kingdom—well-established in the eastern region to the western domain, where its Buddhist doctrine has been under the shadow the Burmese-based Buddhism for centuries (Samerchai 2009:203-212).

From the above four models of Tai subgroup categorisation, I argue here that although the Tai do not base their classification methods on scientific theories as ethnologists have in mind when exploring ethnic people (Keyes 1995b:137; 2006b:90), the Tai in Ruam Chai have a *logical*, traditional system in identifying who they are and in distinguishing other Tai subgroups from their own. In their views, the Tai from all subgroups are similar and culturally connected to each other; however, they acknowledge that different Tai subgroups have unique dialects and other forms of identity. It is also clear that their classification system is not rigid and that ethnic identities mentioned in the four categories are, in fact, interconnected. This results in the multi-layering of Tai identity. For example, Kamhker, who describes himself as “Tai Long,” could be “Tai Mongpu” according to his hometown, yet he might be referred to as “Tai Awk Hkong” because Mongpu is located on the east side of Nam Hkong. This could apply to Mohkeo, a Tai Long elderly female from Mongyai. She may identify herself or is defined as Tai Long, Tai Mongyai, Tai Pawt Hawng, or Tai Tok Hkong. In short, each of their systems for classification is simple, clear, ancient and well-reasoned; for example, subgroup versus village/town/city; east-side versus west-side (of Nam Hkong); and sweet accent versus harsh accent. But the act of classification—the necessity in every culture to identify within one’s owned population the relative attitudes, orientation, and likelihood of prosperity—
seems to have many forms of classification expression, even recent innovations, such as the reflexive adoption of electronics (e.g., cellphone and internet) versus a reliance on older social communication systems (e.g., a face-to-face contact while shopping at a village morning market or making merit at a temple). This suggests that the ability to classify is not rigid, and, in fact, evolves creatively and contextually. The systems used to categorise appear quite definite and are used in a consistent manner, regardless of geography or historical epoch.

The Tai in Ruam Chai classify themselves according to the criteria discussed earlier; in practice, however, they do not directly ask what Tai subgroup an individual belongs to. As Khuensai states, “In the first contact, we don’t ask one’s Tai background. If we talk to a person for a while, we could tell where that person is from by his or her accent. If that person came from the North, his or her accent would sound strange. For those from eastern Shan State, they use several words different from standard Tai [Tai Long or Tai Tok Hkong].” In the case that individuals are asked their ethnicity, Heo-ngern points out, “They don’t tell that they are Tai Long or other subgroups. They would just say that they are Tai. Normally, people don’t ask what Tai group you are associated with. They’d rather ask what mong you come from.” The significance of locality over ethnicity in ethnic classification of the Tai has been acknowledged since ancient times. As Schliesinger indicates:

[F]or the Tai people, ethnicity and ethnic identification is not only a question of dialect and origin but is also determined by locality. It is an ancient custom among the Tai of Southeast Asia to link their group name with their locations. Wherever they set up a village (ban), they form into a heterogeneous group, many having a separate cultural name or even a totally new ethnic label. We can find this tradition as far north as in China, where the Tai Mao are in fact Tai Yai [Tai Long] but those living in or coming from the region of the former kingdom of Muang Mao insist [on being] named “Tai Mao”. One reason for the appearances of such ethnic labels might be the isolation and limited contacts between different groups emphasized by the distances and the scant population in the past. Another reason might be the topography and certain physical features of the landscape. The latter theory includes the strong perception of spiritual beliefs in Tai culture, observed in the objects of the natural surroundings. Many Lue communities in Nan province of Thailand, for instance, still honor the village spirits of their former locations in Laos. A third reason is the notion of social sphere implied in the locally shaped concepts of ethnic relations and their symbolic and economic implications.
For any or all of these reasons, also those Tai people who in fact belong to a well established and labeled ethnic Tai group, may decline to take this name, and emphasize being distinct by adopting another name for themselves. (Schliesinger 2001a:84-85)

In Ruam Chai, and perhaps other places, based on the four models of ethnic classification discussed earlier, it is clear that the Tai are in favour of attaching their identity to “places” more than to “Tai”—a hegemonic self-reference. Rujaya (2002:183) argues that the inclusion of different Tai-speaking groups—such as Tai Long, Khuen, Lue—as one is an invented tradition not found prior to the 19th century. Diverse Tai subgroups, therefore, do not have a collective sense of being “Tai” for a reference mark is not a nation nor an ethnic group, but a locality. This can be understood through the Lue, who tend to highlight their identity as residents of a particular town (or village or city) rather than being “Lue” or being “Tai.” The Lue in one place, thus, intend to have a unique costume to differentiate themselves from their fellows in other towns or cities. Please note that this is probably situational. That is so say, in interacting with other Tai, their locality of origin may be salient. But in interacting with non-Tai, their Tai identity may be emphasised.

4.2 The Hegemony of the Tai Long

Compared to other Tai subgroups in the village, the Tai Long is the largest in terms of population size. Their identities—dialect in particular—are more prominent than those of their fellows from smaller Tai subgroups. The Tai Long, therefore, have relatively powerful influence over the others. Their ethnic identities and boundaries remain strong and clear as we have observed from different pois, the Seng Tai Group, and Tai language, and the Summer Camp. All of these factors tend to generate a species of superiority of the Tai Long.

Living in the Tai Long-based community as well as being surrounded by friends who are mostly from Tai Long families, children born to parents of other Tai subgroups origins—such as the Lue, the Khuen, and the Tai Ngen—have difficulty maintaining their customary accents. Their accents, thus, become more and more Tai Long and/or Thai-mixed Tai Long. For example, Sengmong’s granddaughter—who is of preschool age—

235 The Seng Tai Group and the Summer Camp will be discussed later.
speaks Tai Long to Sengmong and other family members who have Khuen background. Likewise, Jarmhawm—whose father is Lue and mother is Khuen—admits that although she understands both Lue and Khuen, she is unable to follow words spoken exclusively with those accents. Htiseng, who acknowledges his Lue heritage, cannot speak the language of his origin at all. Hence, in interacting with friends both at schools and in different neighbourhoods, and among fellows in the Tai Num—who possess a wide range of Tai subgroup backgrounds, both Jarmhawm and Htiseng always use Tai Long as means of communication.

An ethnic over-representation and a cultural dominance of the Tai Long results in a false conclusion that Ruam Chai is solely occupied by a single group of the Tai, which I duly mis-concluded during the first stage of the fieldwork. As discussed earlier, there are several Tai subgroups in the village, and the Khuen is one among the others. Although the Khuen could be found in any pawk, most of them settled in Pawk 8. While visiting the biggest Khuen family in this pawk, I asked Sengmong the reason why the Khuen do not organise their cultural events even though they have their own traditions and enough people to help out, particularly when they have their own “cultural space”—Wat Ka Khao (White Crow Temple), fundamentally a Khuen-managed installation. Instead of replying directly to my question, Sengmong gave me an interesting view, “All Khuen are now the Thai Yai like other Tais.” It would seem that Sengmong, and many other Tai dwellers in the village as well as a great deal number of Thai people, have a misconception about the term “Thai Yai,” which is a widely-employed controversial ethnonym in the Thai society. It is often presumed that such ethnic brand could be applied to all Tai subgroups in the Shan State and to those migrating from the Shan State to Thailand. Ideally and actually, the term “Thai Yai” should stand for the Tai Long (or simply “Tai”) alone (see Bunchuai 1960; Sumit and Samerchai 1999; and Sumit et al. 2002).

To sum up, no matter how the Tai in Ruam Chai identify themselves or their fellows from different subgroups by concentrating on one of the four main attributes, the fact is that the term “Thai Yai” has already been adopted, and it plays a central role in forming the identity of the Tai in Ruam Chai. This powerful ethnonym is gradually imprinted on young Tai generations born in Thailand as well as those migrating from somewhere in the Shan State. This issue will be explored in the next chapter.
4.3 Pawk 10 and the Conservation of “Seng Tai”

As the southernmost cluster of Ruam Chai, Pawk 10 has been developed from being a 5-household-homestead in the past to a cluster of over a hundred households at present. Most residents are immigrants from Mongpu, a subdistrict in Kengtung Township on the eastern side of Nam Hkong. As a result, this pawk is known among the Ruam Chai people as Mong Pu, and its inhabitants are locally called Tai Mongpu. To the locals, it would seem that the names “Mongpu” or “Tai Mongpu” are synonymous with the name “Pawk 10.” I asked members of the Tai Num, in a general group discussion, “What is the most crucial characteristic of Pawk 10?” “Tai Mongpu,” all members promptly replied, almost in unison!

Pawk 10 is located next to Samakkhi, the Yunnanese Chinese-based village. The Tai from Pawk 10 interact with their neighbours mainly in an economic sphere. Jawmseng said that in Pawk 10 most Tai, except those who learn Chinese at a school, do not speak

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236 Traditionally, the flags are used by the (Tai)Khuen as well as the Thai people in the cultural context of Lan Na during the Songkran Festival.
Chinese at all. The Chinese in this village in previous generations usually spoke Tai when dealing business with Tai people or when contacting them for other matters. Nowadays, however, “the offspring of the Hke [Chinese] cannot speak Tai. They only speak Hke—either Mandarin or Yunnanese—among themselves and speak Thai with us.” He further states that in spite of this side-by-side location, the residents of Pawk 10 rarely take part in activities held by the residents of Samakkhi, even their New Year celebrations. Instead, they are more likely to join activities organised at Wat Ka Kham, the Central Field, including other places in different pawks on all occasions, although their pawk is relatively far from the others.

Since the distance between Pawk 10 and the others pawks is so great, dwellers of this pawk whose economic status does not allow them to afford any kind of vehicle have difficulties in commuting between their pawk and the village’s central neighbourhoods. For instance, the children from Pawk 10 who signed up for the Summer Camp at Wat Ka Kham were specially served. Because of the distance and the lack of transportation, certain monks were assigned to go to Pawk 10 to teach the children. Jawmseng explained that in the past it took approximately one hour to walk to Wat Ka Kham to make merit or attend religious ceremonies. It even took much longer time for children to walk to the school in Pawk 7. At present, they no longer walk that far to go to the school; rather, they just cross the bridge over Nam Kham to a nearby school in Samakkhi. The reason why most children from Pawk 10 initially went to the school in Ruam Chai, based on Kamhker’s explanation, is as follows:

In the past Samakkhi Shool had a very limited number of classes. Their highest class was prathomsueksa pi thi sam [equivalent to Grade Three]. Besides, Ruam Chai School had a lot more Tai students while Samakkhi School was packed with Chinese ones. So, they [including himself] preferred to mingle with Tai students rather than the Chinese ones. At that time only few Tai children studied at Samakkhi School. Now they have more grades, and so most children from our pawk go to this school. Plus, they go to the Chinese school in Samakkhi rather than the one in Ruam Chai.

Another important concern for Jawmseng is that Pawk 10 is quite some distance from the main village temple (Wat Ka Kham), although there is a newly founded temple (Wat Ka Khao), closer, near Pawk 8. There is a relatively recent Catholic church established in
Pawk 10; however, none of the people in Pawk 10 are converted to Christianity and the church’s current function is not clear.

Like his son—Kamhker—Jawmseng is apparently concerned about the alienation or eroding of their culture when the cultural centres are not within easy reach or reference: “Now other religion spreads in our pawk. We’re Buddhists, who don’t have a lot of money to build a temple in our own community. I wish there was a charitable person come to build a temple or a monastery for us.” The church he mentioned earlier is, in fact, a one-storey concrete building that is used as a residence and a place of worship for Akha children. Kamhker informed me that these children were brought from several villages on the mountains to study at Samakkhi School by the Akha leader known to the locals as Kha Yoe. He bought land from some Tai people, and then asked permission from the pawk leader to set up the church. Kha Yoe, however, does not live in Pawk 10. Kamhker said that the Akha leader always travels to different villages to monitor churches that were built in the same manner as that in Pawk 10.

In addition to Tai Mongpu—as an important identity of Pawk 10—the Tai in this pawk are also renowned for their best cultural preservation. One of Buddhist monks organising the Summer Camp told me that the Tai of Pawk 10 are notably enthusiastic about all activities concerning Tai culture, and even Jarmhawm—Yawthkam’s female close friend and an active member of the Tai Num—who said, “Their spoken language sounds more Thai Yai [Tai] than ours. Unlike us, they barely mix Tai and Thai in their conversation. This can be seen in other pawks as well, but Pawk 10 is the best in terms of traditional Tai speaking.” Furthermore, a traditional performance called Seng Tai is another essential and endemic signature of Pawk 10.

4.3.1 **Seng Tai: The Maintenance of Tainess through a Performance Art**

After Jawmseng stepped down from his position as the pawk leader, Hakhker—a Tai Long male in his late fifties who hires himself out as a construction worker—has taken over the position. In addition to being the appointed chief of Pawk 10, Parnjarm (the former kamnan) also asked Hakhker to take care of the Seng Tai troupe. The Seng Tai troupe was previously directed by Hpalong, a senior master of traditional Tai music and performance
who lives in Pawk 2. When he was in his late seventies and his health did not allow him to direct the troupe, he gave it up to Parnjarm, who realised that Tai people in Pawk 10 are in unity and eventually asked Hakhker to lead the Seng Tai troupe. Hakhker, with tremendous support from people, both in Pawk 10 and other clusters, has directed the troupe since 1996.

In the Taiyai (Shan)–Thai Dictionary (Institute of Languages, Arts, and Cultures 2009:160) seng [sɛŋ⁴] is defined as a classical music band while in Ruam Chai the term is prefixed to the term “Tai,” and is widely understood as a kind of Tai traditional variety show. The Tai people—both in Ruam Chai and, perhaps, elsewhere in Thailand—sometimes simply explain to outsiders that this is the performance of “Li-ke”²³⁷ Thai Yai” rather than its original name; and people who used to watch this show are more likely to call it with the new name as well. I have discovered that Seng Tai found in Ruam Chai fundamentally resembles another Tai performance art known as “Jat Tai” [tsaːt³-taj⁴], which from time to time is called Li-ke Thai Yai likewise. According to Nanthawat Chatuthai (2008), a scholar of Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre (SAC) in Thailand who wrote a summary of Jat Tai performance²³⁸ and later publicised on SAC website, Jat Tai is not a li-ke as tourists, media, or even scholars may understand. This issue is also raised by Anan Nak-khong (2008:5), a Thai musician and ethnomusicologist:

In general, people usually explain that Jat Tai is Li-ke Thai Yai. This misconception may cause confusion in some degrees to those who are familiar with patterns of “Li-ke” or “Yi-ke” in the folk culture of the Central Thais. Despite the same core concept—short-sing songs, live band, and drama—Jat Tai has several distinctive characteristics that we need to understand. Particularly, ceremonial contents found in the performance.

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²³⁷ The term is defined as a “musical folk drama, traditional melodrama” (Domnern and Sathienpong 1999:446). Li-ke is a popular traditional entertainment of the Thai—particularly in the central region, which—inspired by a religious practice of Muslims, whose ancestors came from Persia, was created during King Chulalongkorn the Great (King Rama V, 1853–1910) (see Anan Nak-khong 2008:10).

²³⁸ The Tai performance, the 37th cultural show organised by SAC, took place at SAC Convention Hall on March 21, 2008.
Based on the above notices, thus, we could make a conclusion that Jat Tai and its correlate, Seng Tai, should not be unquestionably called Li-Ke Thai Yai despite the basic similarities between them.

I shall now move on to an issue of the origin of Jat Tai, which might have been influenced more or less from a Burmese stage show called “Zat Pwe.” It is possible that the term “zat” was transformed into the term “jat” (tsa:t³) by the Tai people so that they could pronounce the term easily in a Tai way. They then replaced the Burmese term “pwe” (or poi in Tai) by the term “Tai” to eliminate the hegemonic Burmese culture symbolically. My assumption is partly supported by Anan Nak-Khong, who has conducted a comparative study of Tai and Burmese music. As he points out, “Jat Tai may not be originated by the Thai Yai [Tai], but it is adapted or modified from Zat Pwe, a popular Burmese show normally performed at night. Or in retrospect, Jat Tai might be the root of Zat Pwe. It is common that arts influence each other” (Anan Nak-Khong 2008:11).

My speculation, nonetheless, somewhat differs from information that Wandee (2002) gained from her fieldwork. Wandee indicates in her master’s thesis on the construction of Tai identities at Piang Luang that the data she received from a respected elderly man of the village shows that Jat Tai was invented by a hku maw [khu:⁴-mɔː¹]239 named Awtiya (or Awjaiya according to Paohkam, one of my contacts in Pawk 2) about sixty years ago. Here is what she had heard from her informant:

In the past the Tai did not have Jat Tai. We had only a sword dance, ka nok, and ka to. When we were colonised by the British, Awtiya was asked to bring “ka nok” and “ka to” to show for the British, who [after the show] offensively said that the Tai people only have nonspecial performances that show humans in animal-like costumes, who dance along to music made by a few pieces of percussion. Having heard such insulting words, Awtiya came home hurt and started thinking about creating a stage performance and developing dance movements. He also searched for new musical instruments, which some of them are of the Burmese and some of them were newly invented. Moreover, he composed songs and recruited women to be dancers. After that, the performance was made for the Saohpa of Hsipaw, who was very impressed and later gave Awtiya money to buy more musical instruments. Later on, they invited leading actors and actresses to sing the new songs and to play their roles in plotted stories. Since then, this kind of show has gained more popularity. (Wandee 2002:105-106)

239 To the Tai, any individual who is specialised in a particular subject(s), and pass on his or her knowledge and skills—either basic or advance—to other people shall be called “hku maw.”
Regardless of the arguable issue of who first created this performance art, the show known as “Jat Tai” in other Tai areas in Thailand is always called “Seng Tai” by the Tai in Ruam Chai. Two of my contacts confirm that in their hometowns the show is usually called “Seng Tai.” Sengjing told me that in Kunhing the term “Seng Tai” is popularly employed by most local residents while those literate in Burmese are inclined to apply “Jat Tai” to this genre of performance. In his childhood in Laikha, Saimong said; whenever there were important pois in the town, there was always Seng Tai—among other kinds of entertainments, which was under the patronage of the Saohpa of Laikha.

It is customary for Seng Tai (or Jat Tai) to get started at around 8:00 p.m. or later and ends after midnight or sometimes very late in the morning. The show begins with a dance of young girls as an overture. After that, more mature actresses and actors appear on stage to sing solos or duets, including showing their ability in impromptu poetry. Then comes a time for a drama, which is traditionally based on legendary stories or some of them are newly plotted. In general, a story of the drama is supposed to be relevant to the nature of the ongoing poi. For example, if performers are invited to entertain audiences in Poi Hku Maw Tai [pɔj'-khu:⁴-mɔ:¹-taj⁴] (or simple called Poi Hku Maw)—a festivity to commemorate the contribution of Tai scholars, philosophers, teachers, writers, poets, and the like—the stories and performances are normally about the value of Tai language learning. If they show in Poi Sang Lawng, it is common to hear performers talking or singing about the importance of novice ordination in their play. Another example, in a poi like a funeral, a story will have a content focusing on doing good deeds in this life in order to go to heaven in the next one (Wandee 2002:106).

As previously stated, owing to their solidarity, Pawk 10 was selected by the former village leader to sustain Seng Tai. This harmony is the pride of the residents, who think of it as a unique quality that differentiates them from Tai people in other pawks. As Hakhker puts it,

People in other pawks are less cooperative because they migrated from different places [in the Shan State]. Unlike us, most people here [in Pawk 10] came from the same area. So, they are quite obesiant, and it’s easier to ask them to do something for the pawk. When making merit, we do it together, which is different from other pawks, whose residents are more likely to make merit individually. Plus, whenever
Ruam Chai has any social event, a lot of people from Pawk 10 usually participate in it, and after we leave, obviously, there’s less people remaining at a venue.

In addition to their unity, the performance troupe under the official title “Klum Watthanatham Seng Tai,” literally translated “Cultural Group of Seng Tai,” has been supported by two other persons: former director Hpalong, who still plays key roles as a consultant and as a playwright; and Paohkam, whose expertise includes performing, writing play scripts, and teaching young girls from different paws to dance and sing in a traditional way. During the second phase of my fieldwork, I found that Yawthkam and two other friends from the Tai Num often went to Paohkam’s house in Pawk 2 to have the dance training and singing training. Yawthkam admits that she has difficulty learning how to sing classical Tai songs, which are full of archaic words and sayings only found in poetry, although she herself is a gifted performer.

It was around early December in 2005 at the Tai New Year Celebrations, taking place at the Central Field, where I had a chance to watch a performance of Seng Tai for the first time, and to talk to Hakhker as well as other members of the troupe about it. Hakhker told me that Ruam Chai’s Seng Tai troupe is the only one in Chiang Rai Province. “There used to be a troupe in Mae Sai, but they didn’t remain united. Since their group wasn’t strong, it finally dispersed.” He also said that the troupe from Ruam Chai are often invited to perform a show in Chiang Rai Province and other provinces such as Chiang Mai, including at Peing Hpa, a temporary border settlement of the Tai as well as those from other ethnic backgrounds.

Apart from the Tai New Year and the Shan National Day Celebrations, Poi Hku Maw annually organised at Mai Mok Cham, a Tai village in a frontier zone of Chiang Mai Province—is another occasion in which Hakhker never misses to bring his troupe to participate. Paohkam, who had lived in Mai Mok Cham for five years prior to a relocation to Ruam Chai, said that the Seng Tai troupe from Ruam Chai is the only one which does

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240 Poi Hku Maw has been organised yearly in Mai Mok Cham for over three decades. This 3-day-poi takes place on the 13th, 14th, and 15th days of the waxing moon in the 3rd lunar month (February), which the Tai call lern sam [lern-sam]. Paohkam informed me that formerly the people did not have Poi Hku Maw on the aforementioned days, but they had it earlier in the year. In 1975, however, villagers decided to reschedule the event to be held on the day that HM King Bhumibol Adulyadej paid his first visit to their village. Since then, the locals always have Poi Hku Maw on the given dates.
this kind of performance, a popular show which always takes part in the poi there. The Seng Tai group is no longer available in Mai Mok Cham with the performers becoming aging; and, more importantly, without the full local support or the drive to preserve the dying heritage by younger generations, most of whom have had to go out of the village to study or work in towns or cities.

Although there are several Tai communities in northern Thailand, Poi Hku Maw is available only at Mai Mok Cham. I asked Paohkam the reason why Mai Mok Cham has been selected to host this event. She said she had heard that an elderly man, who compiled biographies as well as the works of several famous Tai intellectuals, initiated a ceremony to recall and pay respect for late Tai scholars in Mai Mok Cham for the first time. Since then, the poi is exclusive to this Tai community, and it has become a remarkable identity of the village. This is also true for other pois such as Poi Sang Lawng in Mae Hong Son which is considered the most well known among the Tai and Thai people in the country. Meanwhile, Poi Pi Mai Tai [pɔj4-pi:1-ma:j2-taj4] (simply called “Poi Pi Mai”) in Ruam Chai boasts the biggest Tai new-year celebrations in Thailand, according to several research collaborators of mine.

4.4 Poi Pi Mai: The Tai New Year Celebrations

In Ruam Chai the Tai people usually have Buddhist-related pois organised all year round. Poi Pi Mai, nevertheless, is the most notable event that they long for every single year. According to the brochure I was given by one of the Poi Pi Mai 2005 staff, the event was first initiated in the Mao Kingdom in 93 BC; and the influences of the Burmese and Chinese powers, who occupied the land of the Tai at that time, resulted in the discontinuity of the traditional Tai new year celebrations for centuries. In 1966 Poi Pi Mai was revived by the Tai people in the Mao Basin. Since then, the tradition has been expanded to and practised in many Tai settlements. In 1986, Tai people living in Thailand celebrated their new year for the first time in Districts of Fang, Mae Ai, and Chai Prakan of Chiang Mai Province. Hpalong and Jawmlern introduced this poi to Ruam Chai around 1996. In the first two years, the poi, which included activities like an oration on the history of Tai New Year and an offering of food to monks on the New Year Day, was held at Wat Ka Kham.
Since the poi became bigger and more popular, the Village Committee decided to move the venue to the Central Field, which is still the standard venue for Poi Pi Mai.

Based on the Tai lunar calendar, a new year starts on the first waxing moon in the first lunar month—or known as *lern seng* [lə:n¹-tse:n¹], which usually falls in November or December. The Tai—who like to celebrate whenever they have a chance as Khuensai says, “There an old saying that those who are obsessed about pois are only the Tai and kings.” organise an event to mark the beginning of the year. Apart from being the first month of the year, the given month is also a harvesting time for cereals such as rice and sesame. It is a tradition that the Tai would cook newly-harvested rice, and then bring it along with several kinds of food and offerings to make merit at the temple. Alternatively, some of them may make *hkao puk nga* [khaw³-pu:k⁴-ŋa⁴]—pounded glutinous rice mixed with ground sesame seeds—and then offer it to monks and/or distribute it to relatives as well as neighbours.

During the second stage of my fieldwork, I had a chance to partake in the 10th Poi Pi Mai, which was organised during December 1–5, 2005. In that year, the first waxing moon in *lern seng* fell on December 2. I was informed that the given New Year celebration is more special than the ones organised in the village over the past years. Because the New Year Day (December 2) is close to the King’s birthday (December 5), the Village Committee came to a decision to have an event not only to welcome the (Tai) year 2100, but also to celebrate an auspicious occasion of the King’s birthday, which is considered Thailand’s National Day and Father’s Day as well. Thus, I had no doubt I would see several important persons taking part in the opening ceremony. As expected, there were Ruam Chai respected seniors, local officials, the principals of the Thai and Chinese schools, soldiers, local politicians, including high-ranking officials from Mae Fa Luang District and Chiang Rai Provincial Office.

Throughout the five days of the doubly-significant event, there were several forms of activities ranging from a parade to an alm-giving ceremony at the Central Field, religious ceremony at Wat Ka Kham, traditional sports (*len seng* [lə:n¹-tse:n¹]), ka nok and ka to, long drum show, stage performances, music show, children in ethnic costume contest, singing contest, and the highlighted activities: the Gratitude and Loyalty.
Expressing Ceremony as well as the Candle-Lighting Ceremony in Honour of His Majesty, King Bhumibol Adulyadej the Great.

### 4.4.1 Tai New Year’s Eve: My Participant Observation

The atmosphere of Ruam Chai on the day before the New Year’s Day was palpably vibrant. All day long, a series of event announcements was spread out in all directions through speakers installed at the Central Field. It was apparent that the traffic on the village main road was busier than usual, and that the number of visitors—both Tai and non-Tai from different places—was so large that there was no vacancy at Hern Tai and nearby accommodations. After lunch, I went to the Central Field where I saw many staff members busily setting up tents, installing lights, and decorating the main stage. Meanwhile, several local and non-local traders were preoccupied with setting up a Ferris wheel while some of them were arranging food, candies, or other kinds of products on their tent-stalls.

The focal point of the venue was the main stage located between the two entrances of the hostel, which once used to be Khun Sa’s Chinese school. At the southern end of the Central field I saw a smaller stage exclusively built for Seng Tai. I later went by the Seng Tai stage to talk to Hakhker who was taking a break from helping out his Pawk 10 fellows to finish up the decoration of the Seng Tai stage. Before he continued his work, Hakhker said that I should join Poi Pi Mai parade, which would be taking place in the evening. His enthusiasm when talking about the parade—not to mention the eagerness of other people such as Sengjing, Heo-ngern, and some Tai Num members towards the event—made me really wonder how big and important the procession is. This skepticism would be unravelled in the next few hours.

It was not until around half past four that I started putting on a Tai Mao style dress\(^{241}\), which I had bought from Jarmhker the other day. I went to the front area of the guesthouse where Grandmom, Heo-ngern, and Sengjing gave me some compliments. Because none of the guesthouse staff members were available to join the parade, I walked along the main road to Phu Kham Market, accompanied only by Hkamlek—Sengjing’s

\(^{241}\) For details on Tai Mao style dress for both men and women, please read from Chapter 3.
husband—and his son and niece, who were in vividly-coloured costumes. Phu Kham Market, the place from where the parade traditionally starts, is located next to the bridge over Nam Kham in the area of Mae Salong Nai Subdistrict. On the way to the meeting spot, I was greeted by other Tais some of whom were going to the Central Field while the others were heading off to join the parade.

Upon arrival at the Market, I saw hundreds of people gathering in the great open space. While most participants were having conversations with friends in their own groups, some of them enjoyed playing traditional Tai music, which created a lively atmosphere. Sengjing’s husband brought his son and niece to get together with residents from his pawk. Waiting for the parade to start, I spent time talking with some Tai Num members, who were appointees to the front row of the procession. They were in charge of carrying the parade sign, the King’s photograph, a Thai national flag, including silver and golden-coloured pedestal trays. This front part of the parade was behind the Ruam Chai School Marching Band, whose members with diverse ethnic background wore a wide array of colourful ethnic costumes. Not far from the Marching Band, Hakhker and some staff members were busy checking the readiness of the procession, which not only is composed of the Tai people from Ruam Chai, but also from the nearby village of Inner Loi Hkam as well as visiting Tais from other settlements in Chiang Rai Province.

At around half past five the Band started playing a song, and shortly after that the parade got started. Interestingly, during the procession men and women did not mingle with their fellows of different gender. More specifically, women groups were in the front part while men groups as well as traditional Tai musicians—whose members are all male—were in the back part of the parade. The separation of gender is also found in other sociocultural contexts within the village. For example, in the village temple hall laymen and laywomen always have separate domains. However, the pattern of gender-based separation found in the temple hall is the reverse of that in the parade. That is to say, during a public religious ceremony, the women’s sector is behind the attending supplicants. A common religious tenet of the Tai people in this village is that the front sector is reserved for men. The given patterns, however, were not stringently followed within the parade formation, which tended toward a more utilitarian arrangement than a
formal arrangement. The marching band was mixed as needed. As well, the Tai Num members walked side by side regardless of their gender.

The participants of parade left Phu Kham Market and then crossed the bridge over Nam Kham to Ruam Chai side. Thereafter, they walked along the village main road, where both sides were crowded with cheering people. Less than half an hour after its kickoff, the procession reached the Central Field. Once all parts of the parade had arrived, the people gathered at the basketball court facing the main stage. The opening ceremony, however, could not begin at that time because Chief Provincial Officer, the representative of Chiang Rai Governor and the chairperson of the ceremony, did not arrive yet. Thus, Jawmlern and a female teacher from Ruam Chai School, the Masters of the Ceremony, went up on the stage to greet the people in both Thai and Tai languages. They provided the audience with information on the 5-day-schedule of the event, and then traced the history of the village and tourist attractions in Ruam Chai.

During the ceremony, I went to the Tai culture booth, which was on the right side of the basketball court. It was next to a medical service tent of Mae Fa Luang Hospital. At the tent that housed the Tai culture booth, which displayed Tai history and culture and sold traditional Tai dresses, I had a short conversation with Jawmlern’s wife—the booth keeper, who was busy selling merchandise to visitors. Later on, I walked to another side of the basketball court, where many members of the Housewives Group were preparing food and drinks for sale in the biggest tent found in the Central Field, and Tai Num members were working in their public relations and general affairs tent. In this poi, the Tai Num—led by Htiseng—was in charge of providing visitors general information about the event as well as making loudspeaker announcements. They were also selling flowers and garlands for performers, singers, and contestants. To raise funds for the activities, they would sell handmade wooden key chains and CDs concerning the Summer Camp, Tai music, as well as biographies of Tai scholars. Htiseng said that apart from taking care of this affair, the Tai Num also provided two performances as a part of participating in this festivity. Moreover, Yawthkam, Jarmhawm, and another female member of the group were appointed the Masters of Ceremonies for stage performances. I was with Tai Num members until one of the masters of ceremonies announced that the chairperson had arrived. Then, I moved to the basketball court to socialise with the people.
Since an expression of high respect to the King marked to the first part of the ceremony, the chairperson went up to the stage to place the silver and gold-coloured pedestal trays, and then bowed to the King’s picture. After that, the kamnan (subdistrict headman) reported to the chairperson general information and objectives required to organise the event, and, as the representative of villagers, he praised the graciousness of the King. Later on, he led the villagers in bestowing blessings in the Tai language upon the King, and then in singing the Royal Anthem and “Sadudi Maha Racha” (Celebration of the Great King).

The next step was that the Governor of Mae Fa Luang District invited the Chief Provincial Officer to deliver a speech to officially open the King’s Birthday Celebrations and Poi Pi Mai. His speech is excerpted and quoted as follows.

Dear Mae Fa Luang District Governor, Her Excellency Laongkan [Chiang Rai parliament member], headmen of villages and subdistricts, distinguish guests, the Tai people, as well as other groups of people who are gathering here this evening. Because Chiang Rai Governor has an urgent affair in Chiang Mai Province, I was appointed by him to chair an opening ceremony of the 10th Tai New Year and the King’s Birthday Celebrations.

On this occasion, I feel delighted and honoured to take part in the opening ceremony. From what the Governor of Mae Fa Luang just said, this activity not only reveals the loyalty, but also the solidarity of the Tai people. Today’s presentation would have not been possible without your efficient teamwork. […] The Governor of Chiang Rai kindly asked me to pass his words to all of you that he has admired the unity of Tai brothers and sisters and their loyalty to the monarchy. The way most Tai in Mae Fa Luang District […] respect for laws of the country and follow policies of the Government is praiseworthy. The Tai brothers and sisters also join hands in fighting a drug menace, cooperate with officials in every matter, as well as always keep their eyes on persons or things, drugs in particular, that could threaten the national security.

In addition, His Excellency Chiang Rai Governor asked me to inform Tai brothers and sisters living in Chiang Rai Province, Mae Fa Luang District in particular, that although many of you have yet been granted Thai citizenship for which you have applied, we have made an effort to deal with different complicated issues in order to get Tai brothers and sisters Thai citizenship as well as Thai IDs according to the policy of His Excellency Thaksin Shinawatra, the Prime Minister242. …

242 The 23rd prime minister of Thailand, whose government was protested for its tremendous corruptions and non-transparent administration. The protests set the stage for the coup d’état that ousted him in 2006.
Upon the completion of his speech, a group of Tai children went on to the stage to sing Tai songs as well as a Thai patriotic song called “Rak Kan Wai Thoed,” literally translated “Let’s Be United (as the Thai),” which originally was recorded in 1971 partly because of the national concern about the expansion of communist insurgency and separatist movements in the 1970s. Essentially, the song encourages the Thai peoples in different places and from diverse ethnic backgrounds live in harmony, and it reminds the Thai people to be concrete in protecting the nation and the monarchy. Interestingly enough, throughout the song, there is a repetition of the following refrain—translated into English—several times.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Let's be united. We all were born on the same land.}\\
\text{No matter what region we were born in, we are Thai.}\\
\text{Difference in ethnic descent or culture is not a barrier.}\\
\text{Those who were born under a Thai flag are Thai people.}
\end{align*}
\]

Recently, the song was covered and it has been used by the Thai Government (Thaksin’s government in particular), through the policy of the Ministry of Defense, as a TV campaign to strengthen the unity of the people in the nation and, ultimately, to solve or lessen the separatism problems in the southern border provinces, where are predominantly inhabited by Muslims of Malay background. In my view, the song was purposefully selected by the Tai. That is to say, it reflects the feelings of the Tai people, who have attempted to show the representatives of the Thai state that they are loyal to the Thai nation and the monarchy—two of the three supreme national institutions: nation, religion, and monarchy, that Thai citizens should strictly bear in mind—although many of them were born outside the Kingdom of Thailand or some of them were born in the country, but have yet citizenship granted. This emphasis on their royalty to the nation and the monarchy could be considered as a form of “weapons of the weak,” to use Scott (1985)’s conception, in negotiating with the Thai state in the continuation of their residency as well as the naturalisation process. An issue regarding their status as “Displaced People with Burmese Nationality” and other crucial related points will be scrutinised in more details in the forthcoming chapter.

A performance on the main stage got started right after the opening ceremony had
finished. In the meantime, audiences were piling up in front of the Seng Tai stage, and numbers of people—mostly men—who want to dance, were gathering at the *ramwong* (circle dance) place that is close by the Seng Tai stage. All activities at the Central Field went well until nearly midnight when Jawmlern, who was on the main stage, started counting down to mark a turning point of the year. The moment that the New Year had begun, a group of Tai people on the stage started singing Tai songs, and some people were launching fireworks and traditional hot-air paper balloons. The atmosphere was more enjoyable when several Tai men made cheering sounds whereas the others, including “ka nok” and “ka to” performers, were dancing with joy and happiness on the ground in front of the main stage.

The countdown ceremony almost came to an end when the people, once again, sang “Rak Kan Wai Thoed” together. A few men in front of the stage raised and waved Shan and Thai flags. Shortly after that, they went up on the stage to do so, and finally came down to run around the front-stage area. I closely observed the event at the west side of the basketball court where I later was greeted and blessed by the Tai Num members and other Tais. The ceremony finished right after Mae Fa Luang Governor granted the people new-year blessings. Although the official ceremony came to an end, other entertainments like Seng Tai, ramwong, and games-of-chance activities did not stop until the break of dawn.

Seeing the unity of the Tai people, which resulted in the success of Poi Pi Mai, truly impressed me. I was even more amazed to hear from Jawmlern later that the Tai people did not ask for financial support from the O Bo To at all. On the contrary, they got their budget for organising Poi Pi Mai from money donated by the people from all pawks as well as leases paid by traders who sold food, drinks, and other kinds of goods, and by those who had certain entertainments such as Ferris wheel and game-of-chance activities at the event.

I went back to the Central Field several times during the remaining days of Poi Pi Mai. One night, I was introduced to a few soldiers, whose ages are in between late teens and early twenties, serving the SSA that is based on a mountain called Loi Kaw Wan on where Peing Hpa—a shelter-like village at Thailand-Myanmar border—is located. These soldiers crossed the border to join the Tai New Year Celebrations in Ruam Chai. Not having been to the border on that side before, I asked them how difficult a journey from
their base to Ruam Chai—and vice versa—by crossing the mentioned boundary is. Numharn, a relative of Jawmlern’s wife, said, “If it’s complicated, I wouldn’t have been able to come all the way down here.” His answer did trigger my curiosity about what the border in that area looks like. I tried to envision the process of a border-crossing for these Tai soldiers, the people from Ruam Chai, and those living in the frontier zones who have no proper immigration documents. These fascinating issues will be critically examined in Chapter 6.

I also asked Numharn whether the people at Peing Hpa and his fellows at the military base at Loi Kaw Wan organise Poi Pi Mai. Instead of answering about a festivity for the Tai New Year, he told me that the people up there have a poi to celebrate and express their loyalty to the monarchy on the birthday of the King of Thailand, whom is called by the honourable Tai word “hkun haw hkam.” This information did not surprise me at all. I have heard that a formal Tai monarchy no longer exists in the Shan State. There are some people who are members of saopha(s) families—each saopha is a “Lord of Heaven”—living in different areas in the Shan State. A large number of Tai people revere the Thai King as their own saopha. This fact was confirmed by my Thai writer friend, who visited the Shan State about ten years ago. He had seen portraits of the Thai King and that of members of the Royal Family in many Tai households. My academic trip to a village of the Tai Long in Kengtung Township in early December 2010 also allowed me to observe this fact.

Not only does Numharn uphold the present Thai king, but also venerate King Naresuan the Great (1555–1605). He pointed out that both Tai civilians and especially soldiers have a high respect for King Naresuan the Great for his powerful ruling of Ayutthaya (1350–1767), one of the former Thai kingdoms, and heroic lead in gaining Thai independence from the Burmese Hanthawaddy Kingdom.²⁴³ King Naresuan the Great (1555–1605) was a powerful king who extended Thai influence over the region. He captured the Mon kingdom of Ayutthaya in 1569, which had previously been independent. This conquest marked the beginning of Thai control over the region. Numharn added that his people have been veneration and respect for King Naresuan, and his descendants, the kings of Ayutthaya.

²⁴³ At that time, the residents of Ayutthaya were known as “Yodia” among the Burmese, many of whom of them still use the term to denote the people of Thailand.

²⁴⁴ Hanthawaddy Kingdom was located in the land once occupied by the Mon. King Tabinshwehti of the Burmese seized the kingdom of the Mon, and then established Hanthawaddy as the centre of the Toungoo Dynasty (1486–1752). Led by King Bayingnaung (1551–1581), who is called by the Thai as “Phu Chana Sip Thit”—the Conqueror of the Ten Directions, Hanthawaddy was the most powerful kingdom in that region. Ayutthaya was a tributary kingdom of Hanthawaddy from 1569 to 1584. Hanthawaddy or is now Bago (Pegu) is located approximately eighty kilometres northeast
Great’s bravery and victory on the battlefield was widely known to neighbouring kingdoms—particularly to an important rivalry like the Burmese. Ayutthaya enjoyed its peace and prosperity for almost two centuries until it was completely ruined in 1767 by the Burmese army of King Hsinbyushin (1736–1776).²⁴⁵

Numharn’s story that the Tai soldiers feel deep respect and admiration for King Naresuan the Great conforms to Wandee’s master’s thesis, which indicates that at the time the Burmese army was going to defeat Hsenwi of the Tai, having a good relationship with Tai rulers, King Naresuan the Great moved his troops with a hope to save Hsenwi from the Burmese. Unfortunately, his mission was not accomplished because he got very sick and died in Mongharng, a town assumed to be located in the Shan State. Because of his triumphs over the Burmese as well as other neighbouring kingdoms, and the friendly spirit he had for Tai states, Tai soldiers—who are eager to conquer or gain independence from the Burmese—highly regard him as a great and heroic king. Many Tai soldiers carry on them a King Naresuan the Great amulet while fighting with the Burmese. The amulets were made by the cooperation between Field Marshall Sarit (1909–1963), a former Thai prime minister from 1958 to 1963; and Sao Noi Sawyanta, a former leader of a Tai insurgent group (see more details in Wandee 2002:118-25). The King Naresuan the Great amulets were produced three times already, and Numharn proudly informed me that he possesses one from the first lot, of which were made only one thousand pieces. At present the first lot amulet is very difficult to find and is in a high value among collectors. “Most people who have the first lot amulets are senior soldiers or those who used to serve the army,” he added.

Because it was the first contact and I did not want to make them feel uncomfortable, I tried to limit the number of questions and sub-points. I also avoided spending a long time with them for fear that my presence with them may create suspicion among local officials, such as the Thai soldiers who were on duty at the Central Field. The conversation, thus, with SSA soldiers was ended with a promise that I would cross the

²⁴⁵ Seven years after losing independence to the Burmese, Phraya (a royal service title) Tak, who later became King Taksin the Great (1734–1782), unified the country and then established a kingdom called Thon Buri (1767–1782). Thon Buri was the capital for only 15 years before it was replaced by Rattanakosin or widely known as Bangkok.
border to visit Peing Hpa even if I had no idea how to get there and to what extent is an
unofficial border-crossing safe for me. The three Tai troopers stayed over night in Ruam
Chai, and went back to their base on the next day.

Taking part in Poi Pi Mai at Ruam Chai not only allows me to realise the
significance of village solidarity that promotes the great success of the event, but also to
gain insight into other thought-provoking issues. The given points include an attempt by
the Tai people to express their identity and culture through various kinds of activities. They
also have a strong belief in a close tie between the Thai and the Tai, and demonstrate their
aspiration to become “Thai” through the patriotic song. The way they relate the King’s
birthday to the Tai New Year celebrations is another demonstration of this. The Tai appear
to be assuring the Thai authorities of their gratitude for and their loyal support to the Thai
monarchy—one of the three supreme national institutions. This cultural practice, as they
probably bear in mind, might be one of strong points or mechanism used to negotiate with
the Government at the time they deal with immigration and citizenship difficulties.

4.5 The Awakening of Tai Identity: The Chinese School,
the Summer Camp, and the Vital Roles of the Tai Num

4.5.1 The Chinese School

Ruam Chai has been inhabited by the Chinese since as late as the glorious time of Khun
Sa. Popular legend has it that Khun Sa’s father was Chinese, and that when he took control
over Loi Hkam there were many Chinese men working for him. The Chinese cohorts
brought their families to the village while some of them were married to local Tai girls or
Chinese from nearby communities. With the growing number of the Tai and the Chinese
population, Khun Sa established a school where children and young soldiers learned,
among their subjects, Mandarin. The school was founded in the northernmost space of the
Central Field. In 1975, however, the school was relocated to a new site. In the wake of the
Loi Hkam Battle in 1982, the village committee handed over the school to Chiang Rai
Provincial Elementary Education Office, which has undertaken the curriculum and
instruction—standardised by the Ministry of Education—in Thai at Ruam Chai School
since then. The displaced Chinese School was re-established and its buildings were built on land immediately adjacent to Ruam Chai School in Pawk 7.

According to the school report, the Chinese School, or officially called “Da Tong\textsuperscript{246} Witthayakhom School,” was originally founded in 1968 with the patronage of phulak phuyai, “a person of importance” (Domnern and Sathienpong 1999:331).\textsuperscript{247} The school did not have a name until 1976. There are now over nine hundred students in daily attendance, from kindergarten through the ninth grade. The school provides instruction on different subjects ranging from Mandarin to mathematics, English, computer, science, social studies, and moral education. Although the school has been utterly financially supported by donations and grants (Mathieson 2006), students are required to pay tuition fees in different rates between 700 to 3,060 baht per an academic year, according to their level of study. This amount of money seems relatively small to people with better economic status like the Chinese, but not to the Tai, most of whom hire themselves out for agricultural or construction work and/or depend on money sent home by their family members working somewhere outside the village. Thus, many Tai families cannot afford the tuition fees of the Chinese School. In spite of this, I was informed by Sengjing that if any Tai parent with a limited household budget would like their children to be educated at the Chinese School, they may kindly ask the kamnan or any respected people of the village to talk to the principal in person to have their child’s tuition fees waived. No matter how difficult their lives are, many of them strive for earning money to send their children to learn in the Chinese School, as Sengjing says, “Even though they don’t have money, they must find it somehow!”

Da Tong Witthayakhom School is regarded as the best Chinese-instructional school in that area, comparable to the Chinese school at Doi Mae Salong.\textsuperscript{248} Not only is it popular

\textsuperscript{246} Da Tong in Chinese means “One Family Under the Sky” (Mathieson 2006).

\textsuperscript{247} Although the school was opened by the Nationalist Kuomintang communities in 1968, it has been believed that the school was mainly patronaged by Khun Sa. I have discovered that besides the Chinese School, who avoids to associate Khun Sa as the former school supporter, the Thai School also tries to eliminate or distort memories of Khun Sa by mentioning in the school website (on the school history page) that in 1982 “the officials of the Thai government came to the village to wipe out a troop.” The name of the notorious warlord never appears in Ruam Chai School-version history of the village.

\textsuperscript{248} A name of the mountain and Chiang Rai’s famous tourist attraction, the location of Thailand’s biggest community of Kuomintang descendants, who have dwelled in the given area since 1961.
among the locals, but also favoured by people from nearby villages like Loi Hkam and by Chinese people living in villages close to the border. Nevertheless, over the past few years the total number of students has dropped from over one thousand to nine hundred or so. Sengjing clarifies the reason for this, “Some students go to a Chinese school in Samakkhi because of its lower tuition fees.” On top of financial factor, as Kamhker said, some people living in a distant area like Pawk 10 are willing to send their children to the school located closer to their residences such as the Thai public school and the Chinese private one—both are in Samakkhi.

Since the distance between my accommodation in the guesthouse and the Chinese School is less than five minutes walk, I always observed a familiar routine during weekdays after the Thai School. It was a whole bunch of students walking in a single row on both sides of the village’s main road to the Chinese School—for an evening class—around half past four, and to home around half past six. In the same manner but different time, on Saturday and Sunday, the children go to the school before 8:00 a.m. and go home at around 3:00 p.m. Because of the limited time, students are encouraged to attend class everyday, and the school has no public holiday, except for the Chinese New Year celebrations. According to Heo-ngern, seven to eight years ago (interview in 2006) the Thai and Chinese schools had different academic years; that is to say, the Chinese School—as it relied on Taiwanese education system—started its first semester in early March, whereas Ruam Chai School’s second semester was about to finish in early March, followed by a summer break. As a consequence, students who studied in both schools did not have a school break at all. This issue was resolved at a later time. The Chinese School gave up its Taiwanese-based school year system and now follows the Thai academic year instead.

Based on conversations that I had with several Tai people, because a lot of Tai children have less chance to further their education in a higher level due to a family’s low income and/or the lack of Thai citizenship, sending their children to learn Chinese will eventually give the children a better “opportunity,” as it could be an asset when applying

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249 Because this village has the same name as the former name of Ruam Chai, to avoid confusion, local people usually call this village “Loi Hkam Nai”—Inner Loi Hkam—or sometimes “Loi Hkam Mai”—New Loi Hkam.

250 This point will be clarified in the next chapter.
for a job. The recognition of the worthiness of Chinese language is reflected in a statement made by one of my informants, “It doesn’t matter if they don’t have a university degree. Graduating from the Chinese School is good enough for getting a job.” The young Tai generation might be able to access to higher levels of education as some of them have Thai citizenship—and the ability to receive educational loans from the government—granted. Yet the value of sending children to the Chinese School continues to exist. This is partly because they still believe that “knowing Chinese” will get them a job with ease. As a dream for those who possess an excellent academic performance, going to the Chinese School would pave a way for a “scholarship” to complete their education in Taiwan. The term “scholarship” that I heard from some villagers, in fact, is not a “true scholarship” in Kamhker’s eyes. “Actually, a scholarship to study in Taiwan can’t be called a scholarship. They just give you a seat to go abroad, and they deal with visa issue for you. Oh, one more thing, they give you some money to buy an air ticket only. When you get there, you have to work and study. That’s how it goes,” Says Kamhker.

Among Tai people who send their children to the Chinese School, Sengjing seems to stress the importance of “knowing Chinese” noticeably. She spends a lot of money with her son’s education at both the Chinese School and a private tutorial class from Monday to Friday after the Chinese School. She proudly told me that in Pawk 11 only her son and Longtip’s (Heo-ngern’s eldest brother) children study in the Chinese School. The following conversation reflects her opinion towards the benefits of learning Chinese.

**Jaggapan:** Why do most Tai children have to go to the Chinese School? Lacking Thai citizenship doesn’t prevent them from applying for a job or continuing their education at a higher level?

**Sengjing:** It would be better to know several languages. They will have more knowledge, and those who have citizenship, after they finish Grade Nine, they could further their study in Taiwan.

**Jaggapan:** The principal of the Chinese School told me that certificates from the Chinese School are not recognised by the Ministry of Education. Students can’t use their certificates to apply for a high school or college. The certificates are acceptable only when they go to study in Taiwan or at some Chinese schools in Chiang Rai Province.

**Sengjing:** That’s correct. Anyhow, if they know both Thai and Chinese, they’ll find
it easy to apply for a job.

*Jaggapan:* Do children want to study Chinese, or is it an urge from parents?

*Sengjing:* For the most part, it’s a parent’s will. Frankly, they don’t want their children to be uneducated like them.

While having knowledge in Chinese is central to Sengjing as an “opportunity” or as a “cultural capital” (Bourdieu 1986) to have a job and probably to be selected to go to Taiwan, the opportunity is viewed from a different angle by Kamhker, who suggests, “I think children should study Chinese. The influence of China is now increasing. Our country is not far from China. Knowing the language would be very good for trading.” Jarmhker’s point of view goes along with Kamhker’s, “In the next fifteen years [interview in 2006], China would become a global economic giant. When we have a chance to learn Chinese, we should grasp it.” Even so, Jarmhker—who often expresses her ideas straightforwardly—indicates that in fact the Tai in Ruam Chai send their children to the Chinese School because of a social value rather than an appreciation of its advantages. As she puts it, “Now there are more Tai children at the Chinese School. Tai parents send their children to the school because they follow in the footsteps of the Chinese. A few years after graduation, many children speak or write Chinese no more. Frankly, they just imitate the Chinese. That’s the nature of the Tai.”

No matter what the goal of attending the Chinese School is, I heard from certain contacts that Tai students are good at Chinese and that some of them have impressive academic achievements. Kamhker points out, “Students who usually get the highest scores in Chinese are those of Tai background, not the Chinese students.” Yawthkam is among Tai students who are highly competent in Chinese. Upon graduation from the Thai and Chinese schools, she got a job as a teacher in Chinese at a private school located in another district of Chiang Rai Province. She said to me one day, “Ajan[251], if I got an ID card[252] and go back to the Chinese School, I would get a scholarship to study in Taiwan.” I strongly

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[251] “Ajan” is a Thai word rooted in Sanskrit, meaning professor, instructor, teacher, lecturer, and mentor (Domnern and Sathienpong 1999:568). Yawthkam and other people in the field usually address me by this title (with or without my name) because they know that I have a teaching job in a university in Thailand. In Thai and many other cultures, it is a custom to respectfully and honorifically address those who “give knowledge” to other people with such title.

[252] The people in the area usually use the term “ID card” to connote “Thai citizenship.”
believe that if Yawthkam and other Tai children have Thai citizenship, they would have more chances to access higher education as their friends with Chinese and other ethnic backgrounds do.

Establishing a good rapport with members of the Tai Num makes me realise that almost all members of the group are students of both Thai and Chinese Schools. Htiseng, a diligent student and well-liked among teachers and friends, is among a handful of the members who do not attend the Chinese School. I asked him why he avoids the Chinese School. I changed the conversation topic once I had noticed uncomfortableness on his face. I kept that curiosity to myself until the day I heard a story of Kaew, a teen girl of Isan-hill tribe origin who is under the protectorate of Saimong’s family, who does not study Chinese either. “Kaew doesn’t learn Chinese. She just came here last year [interview in 2006]. If she wants to study it, she needs to begin with a basic course. She might be embarrassed [to show up in a class of very young students].” What I learned from Sengjing is true because, as far as I know, those who have no knowledge in Chinese and want to enroll in the Chinese School are required to begin with a fundamental lesson at a kindergarten level. In my view, economic factors are actually not a problem for Htiseng if he asks for a tuition waiver. He has good academic qualifications and he is a relative of the kamnan’s wife. If he is eager to study in the Chinese School, his teacher from the Thai School or the kamnan would definitely ask the principal to waive the tuition fees.

In addition to the Chinese language, which has become more favourable and influential among the Tai, the absorption of the Thai language directly through education and indirectly through various forms of mass media has a significant impact on the ability of new generations of the Tai to remain fluent in their own language. Sengjing’s son is a good example. She indicates that if it could be reckoned in percentage, her son—who is now studying in Grade Five—speaks Tai around sixty percent and Thai or Chinese around forty percent of the time. She also said that the Tai language her son speaks could not be considered “real Tai,” but it is “modified Tai.” The following dialogue between Sengjing, her husband, and me portrays a problematic language issue in Sengjing’s family.

*Jaggapan:* What Tai accent does your son speak?

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253 Htiseng is the cousin of Jarmhawm, whose mother is a relative of the kamnan’s wife.
Hkamlek: He habitually speaks Thai-mixed Tai.

Sengjing: When we say something in Tai to him, he usually asks me “what did you say?”

Jaggapan: You mean that he doesn’t understand what you and your husband say?

Hkamlek: Sometimes he doesn’t know.

Jaggapan: So, you and Sengjing mainly talk to him in original Tai?

Hkamlek: Yes, we usually do that.

Jaggapan: Do you speak Thai to him?

Hkamlek: Of course, we do.

Sengjing and Hkamlek’s son is illustrative of many other Tai youngsters having difficulty speaking Tai in a traditional way. As Jarmhawm, one of the children trained at the Summer Camp in the first year, points out:

Speaking of Thai Yai [Tai] language and youth nowadays, I can say that it’s in a hazardous situation. Almost all of them use Thai words in their speaking. I mean they speak Thai in Thai Yai accent. They barely speak original Thai Yai. If we talk to them in Thai Yai, they won’t understand. Plus, some children can’t even grasp meaning of Thai Yai songs.

The Tai in Ruam Chai, in fact, have been aware of this dilemma. They used to have Tai class at Wat Ka Kham as well as individual classes taught by Jawmlern, for instance. Nonetheless, those exertions were not powerful enough to resist a fast-flowing stream of Thai and Chinese popular culture, which is essential and beneficial in the perception of most local people. The given stream became more rapid, and there was a tendency that the archetype of Tai language might be vanishing. Hence, an attempt by a group of people from outside the village to revive Tai identity has been made.

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254 Jarmhawm is now studying in a public university in Chiang Rai Province.
255 Interestingly, in most everyday conversations, the term “Thai Yai” is commonly and unintentionally used by Jarmhawm and other Tai residents in Thoed in favour of the term “Tai.”
4.5.2 The Summer Camp

The atmosphere within Wat Ka Kham’s compound comes alive again after the end of Poi Sang Lawng in late March or early April (in some years). It is widely known that during a school break around mid–April to mid–May—prior to the start of an academic year of the Thai and Chinese schools—over one hundred children congregate at Wat Ka Kham to take part in an activity officially called the “Local Morals and Culture Instruction Project,” or simply known as the “Tai Language and Culture Summer Camp,” or the “Summer Camp” according to the children. The Summer Camp was first introduced to Ruam Chai in 2002, and it has since been organised every year.256

Approximately one month prior to the commencement of the Summer Camp, the Village Committee, which have been contacted by an organiser in Bangkok, would appoint all pawk headmen to circulate the news of this activity to residents in their paws as well as to gather numbers and names of children interested joining this event during the school break. A few months after I started the first period of my fieldwork, Heo-ngern made a casual remark that monks from Bangkok would be coming to teach Tai to the children. She asked me whether I would like to learn the language. I expressed my interest, and asked her to give my name to the head of Pawk 6, where my accommodation in the guesthouse is located. In the mean time, a series of questions popping in my head included why people in this village have to ask monks from somewhere far away to instruct Tai to their children, why it is essential to teach the language to them, and there is any serious problem happening to their Tai communication.

I participated in the Summer Camp for a while until I became acquainted with the team of monks who are organisers and instructors. Saimao, the head of the team that is a part of a Bangkok-based Buddhism foundation called “Saeng Thian” mentioned in Chapter 3, told me how the idea of organising the Summer Camp was formed.

Before running this project, I never came to Ruam Chai. A friend of mine, who is a monk, visited this village. When he returned to Bangkok, he told me that Ruam Chai is a village of the Tai people, yet the children know very little about their own language. He also said that local monks don’t take seriously the teaching of Tai to

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256 I was told by Yawthkam that the Summer Camp in 2007 was cancelled because of the absence of Kawnjerng, Wat Ka Kham’s Tai Mao-origin monk who serves as a coordinator and one of the teaching staff.
younger generations, and that children hardly visit the temple. For that reasons, I helped him to write up a project proposal [submitted to Saeng Thian Foundation], and then in 2002 I joined his trip to Ruam Chai. Since then, we continue the project every single year.

In recruiting monks to be volunteers for this project, Saimao indicates:

Although the project is small, we publicised it to temples in our network. At the same time we asked [for help from] friends from other temples who are available and willing. Before they became a staff in our team, we told them that this job is voluntary and that land transportation fees will be provided. Generally speaking, monks joining this activity don’t make demands for anything. They’re happy to come here.

Interestingly enough, more than half of the monk and novice volunteers have Tai background. There are two groups of these: those who are travelling directly from a temple in Piang Luang, and those who were ordained in Piang Luang and come from different temples in Bangkok area. Several of them are holders of a certificate in Pali studies (from the third to the ninth level) or holders of a bachelor’s degree from Buddhist universities. A few of them have even earned a master’s degree. The latter includes Saimao, who studied social work at the university I went to for a master programme.

Saimao provided me with additional information regarding the project. He said the Summer Camp is organised through cooperation between Saeng Thian and Wat Ka Kham’s monks and novices. He further explained that the project has been primarily funded by the Saeng Thian as well as by the private sector, which donates either money or materials necessary for several kinds of activities. Regarding Tai textbooks, he added, “We received aid from Tai organisations, both domestic and international, such as the Shan Culture and Education Central Committee.” To run the project without a hitch, there is tremendous backing from Ruam Chai villagers, who not only contact local people and organisations, but also provide confections, snacks, and prizes for children.

According to Saimao, the project initially aimed to organise the activity only at Ruam Chai. After the Summer Camp got started for a few days, however, he was contacted by the headman of Inner Loi Hkam, who requested his team to go to his village to have Tai children there trained. Saimao also mentioned that children from Pawk 10 started joining the Summer Camp in the third year (2004) of the project. As he says,
At the start, we didn’t think of Inner Loi Hkam at all. In the first year once they knew that we were having the Summer Camp here [Ruam Chai], they came and said that they would like us to teach their children too. So, we sent our staff to Inner Loi Hkam. They went to Inner Loi Hkam in the morning, and came back to Ruam Chai in the evening. Because Inner Loi Hkam is a bit far from here, we hired someone to transport the staff. Regarding Pawk 10, in the first year we knew very little about the area. Although we were informed that there are eleven pawks, we had no idea where each pawk is located. In the second year, we knew more, but didn’t survey the village. Then, in the third year the headman of Pawk 10 contacted the kamnan, who later came to talk to me that Pawk 10 is pretty far and the children there have a commute problem. So, we managed to have a vehicle to transport them.

My experience as a participant of the Summer Camp in 2005 was immersive. The training schedule began around 8:00 a.m. and ended at no later than 4:00 p.m. Each day prior to the start of class, participants—led by monks and novice staff—gathered in Wat Ka Kham main hall to pray in Pali. I found that in addition to Tai class and performance training, instructors provided the children with knowledge about morality and dhamma. They also taught kids to sing songs, of which the content revolves around the significance of Tai language, culture, and Tai identity as a nation. Moreover, they invited speakers from both inside and outside the village to speak on a wide range of subjects. Their subjects most often addressed the dangers of drug abuse, the history of the Tai and Ruam Chai, the continuation of education, children’s rights, women’s roles and rights, careers in the community, Thai map and the origin of the Thai, and the functioning of the O Bo To.

Tai teaching took place in the main hall and in a few buildings within the temple’s compound. There was a division of the attending body into separate classes according to age group of the learners. Meanwhile, a performance-training class occurred outdoors in the temple’s compound. The performance class was divided into groups by the interests of the children such as drum and gong hitting, a sword dance, and other kinds of dance. The participants were trained in performance by local seniors as well as by older children. Although the performances were practised in late afternoon as usual, some groups of children intended to return to the temple in the evening to get their shows prepared for the Summer Camp closing ceremony, which usually takes place around mid–May.

Over and above that, the Summer Camp had certain activities playing a part in maintaining Tai tradition as well as strengthening relations of the Tai both inside and
outside the community. The given activities included the practice of “kan taw” (elder ceremony)257 at respected seniors’ houses prior to the start of the Summer Camp, volunteer work at house pois (such as the poi at Hpalong’s house), and a field trip to Peing Hpa. The last activity has resulted in a cross-frontier establishment of rapport, which allows the Tai Num members chances to cross the border to perform their activities at Peing Hpa at a later time. Therefore, not only does the Summer Camp awaken the Tai children to asserting their ethnicity and to take pride in their cultural roots, but also unites the people in the villages to work together without consideration for age, gender, or “place” in society.

Fig. 23: A speaker (teacher) from Ruam Chai School was giving a lecture on children’s rights and women’s roles and rights in Wat Ka Kham main hall.

Serving as the chief of the staff, Saimao has put a lot of effort and time in this project. His experience permits him to discern problems, and foster the positive development of the Summer Camp participants.

257 See details of this custom in Chapter 3, and later in this chapter.
In the first year, children came here just to be able to write and read Tai. They set their minds on lessons provided. The first year went by and it seemed that children’s development wasn’t obvious. When we had the Summer Camp in the second year I found that they paid more attention to our activities, and that their understanding of Tai had improved. Besides, they have better manners, and the way they talk to and treat monks is impressive. They told me that in the past they felt uneasy about going to the temple, and they didn’t know why they should go to the temple. This Summer Camp gives them an opportunity to have more interaction with monks and the religion. [...] In terms of local culture [performances], our staff can’t train them by ourselves. We ask villagers or children who know how to dance to help us. Because the children didn’t know much about Tai dance, in the first year of the project we contacted a group of children [who get trained at a summer camp organised in Piang Luang] from Piang Luang to travel here to teach Ruam Chai children to dance. Since then, their performing skills are better and better, and now they are good enough to pass on those skills to other younger members.

By the same token, children who take part in this project for its fifth consecutive year express viewpoints on a significant progress they have achieved from the Summer Camp, executive members of the Tai Num among them.

**Jaggapan:** Before all of you joined the Summer Camp, did you speak Thai-mixed Tai?

**Jarmhawm:** Yes, we did. Even now we still speak in that way, but in a lesser degree.

**Jaggapan:** In the past you were just beginners. Now you become more competent in Tai. How have your roles changed?

**Yawthkam:** Lately, we assist the monks by teaching the language and by taking care of small children.

**Jaggapan:** How do you feel about helping the monks out by teaching Tai to younger fellows?

**Htiseng:** We feel like we’ve expressed our gratitude to the monks, and at the same time we’re so proud of being able to pass on the earned knowledge to other people.

**Jaggapan:** Before having been taught by the monks, could you read Tai?

**Together:** Not at all!

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258 The group interview was made during the second stage of my fieldwork in 2006.
Jarmhawm: We couldn’t even write our own language. When a monk showed us Tai scripts for the first time, many of us thought that it’s Burmese language. We also couldn’t understand authentic Tai. If they didn’t mix Thai and Tai words in conversation, we wouldn’t understand at all.

Jaggapan: So now you guys are able to grasp the authentic Tai?

Jarmhawm: Yes, but we still speak Tai mixed with Thai words at times.

Fig. 24: The passing down of culture from generation to generation.

It could be said that the Summer Camp initiated and organised by Saeng Thian monks and novices is an attempt to encourage not only children, but also the Tai people from the whole community to become aware of the importance of Tai language as well as other identities of the group. In fact, the restoration of Tai language and culture by using a temple as a centre of activities is not a phenomenon exclusively existing in Ruam Chai. Rather, this cultural practice is also found in other Tai settlements in both Thailand (e.g., Piang Luang in Chiang Mai) and the Shan State. In the Shan State, where Tai is the mother tongue of the majority of the population, Tai is not a part of the curriculum in any schools. As a result, Tai is taught only at a village temple during a school break (Sumit and
Samerchai 1999:36), and this allows for the maintenance of Tai language in a village located in Maymyo.\footnote{Maymyo or Pyin U Lwin is a city located about seventy kilometres east of Mandalay. The former Tai village became a hill station of British Burma during the colonial period.}

The villagers are still competent in Tai because they speak their language in daily life. Although children only use Burmese at schools as a mandate, they are able to learn Tai scripts at their temple. The temple, therefore, plays a vital role as a centre of conservation and dissemination of [Tai] culture. A cultural instruction at the temple is not restricted to only the language teaching. It also includes the revival of traditions and folk recreation. (Sumit et al. 2002:13)

The recent effort of the Tai in Thailand and the Shan State in revitalising their language is by no means a new phenomenon to the Tai in the Shan State. In reality, the Tai in the Shan State have made attempts to restore the language for a long time. Banchop, a renowned Thai expert in Tai, who made a trip to the Shan State in 1956, indicates that a Tai language revival movement had already emerged by the time she arrived there. Nevertheless, their goal is not easy to accomplish, as she points out:

> The Burmese and the Tai have established political relations for more than five hundred years. The state policy that mandates students in the Shan State to learn Burmese has resulted in the assimilation of Burmese to their lives. This has an effect on their thought. When they think about something, they are inclined to think in Burmese words. It is very difficult to preserve their original language although the people are trying to speak Tai, and avoiding Burmese words. (Banchop 1983:75)

The situation which happened over a half century ago in the Shan State as described is not much different from that encountered by the Tai in Ruam Chai. In the larger picture, the Summer Camp is successful in stimulating youth and many people in the community to become more conscious of their ethnic identity. Given that this awakening movement has occurred amid the influence of more powerful Thai and Chinese cultures, nobody knows how long this cultural practice would last or what the future of Tai language would be. The lack of interest from older children, as Jarmhawm suggested, may portend a difficult hurdle or even a division within the village as the children reach their adult positions here. At present, owing to the existence of Tai insurgent groups as well as the Burmese military
government’s strict policy known as “Myanmafication,” which emphasising “national reconsolidation” rather than “national reconciliation” (Lintner 2003:187), Tai is not allowed to be taught in schools in the Shan State. Tai teaching thus could only be done outside the mainstream schools. Therefore, Thailand, which is home to thousands of Tai immigrants, has become the centre of Tai learning (Somphong 1995:25).

4.5.3 The Roles of the Tai Num in Maintaining Tai Identity

After the Tai Num was officially established in 2003, under the guidance of Saeng Thian monks and Jawmlern, members of the group have performed different activities concerning the conservation of Tai culture, which is one of the group’s objectives. Although the group’s activities budget primarily comes from the Saeng Thian, they sometimes receive limited funding from the O Bo To, who “hardly supports us,” says Jarmhawm. To run activities on a minimal budget, at times members of the group have to spend their own money to cover the cost of costumes for performances and the cost of travel to events venues.

Among other activities, “kan taw” is a crucial ceremony that Tai Num members practise every year. It is a ceremonial asking for forgiveness, blessings, and esteemed teachings from elderly people, community’s respected persons, as well as patrons of the group. In practice, a kan taw giver(s) would bring a bowl filled with flowers, joss sticks, candles, sweets, and other offerings to a kan taw receiver. After the kan taw giver (or the head of the group) proclaims the purpose of the visit, the offerings bowl is presented to the receiver. Later on, the latter would grant blessing and/or give an advice and teachings to the former. Refreshments might be provided after the ceremony.

Traditionally, the Tai Num practise kan taw three times a year. The first time is done during a cerebration of Poi Sawn Nam in the 5th lunar month (April), which normally coincides with the beginning of the Summer Camp. The second time is made in

\[260\] In the 5th month (April) or lern ha, the Tai in Ruam Chai celebrate the hot and humid summer time by organising Poi Sawn Nam, which starts from April 13th and it normally lasts for one to two weeks. Apart from making merit and doing the ritual bathing of monks, the Tai also clean their houses and throw water to each other. However, the most important part of this poi is the performing of kan taw to monks, parents, senior relatives, as well as community’s respected people.
the 8th lunar month (July), during which the Tai customarily have a religious event to offer monks bathing clothes and other offerings prior to the Buddhist Lent. The third time is performed in the 11th lunar month (October). On this occasion, the Tai always organise Poi Hpala Long Mong [pɔːɭ-pha-laː-təŋ-mŋ-ŋaŋ] and Poi Awk Wa (End of the Buddhist Lent Ceremony). During the time of these two pois each household would make a *hkeng sang put* [kheŋ-saŋ-pu:t]²⁶¹ and install it in the front area of their house compound. The *hkeng sang put* is a bamboo castle-like stand created to place gifts and food presenting Lord Buddha who, based on a well known story of him, returns from preaching to his mother in heaven during the Buddhist Lent (see Figure 26).

In addition to *kan taw*, the Tai Num, which is noted for their impressive performances, often receives invitations to present their shows (such as ka nok, ka to, sword dance, to name but a few) at pois organised both within and outside the village. The most popular and widely known pois are: Poi Sang Lawng, Poi Awk Wa, and the Summer Camp closing ceremony. They also participate in maintaining the religious identity of the Tai by taking part in several events such as making merit on the Tai New Year day, offering big candles on the occasion of the Buddhist Lent, and practising dhamma at the village temple.

Another mission of the Tai Num is to sustain Tai language. To do this, they volunteer their services as Tai language instructors for young children at the Summer Camp. Because of their competence in the Tai language and their graceful manners, certain members of the group—such as Yawthkam and Jarmhawm—are always appointed by the Village Committee to be masters of ceremonies at different important pois. Besides that, all Tai Num members make a habit of writing Tai proverbs on wooden signs, which are posted on trees in Wat Ka Kham’s compound. These large, clear plaquards not only provide children and other visitors opportunities to expose themselves to Tai writings, but also transmit knowledge regarding Tai values and ideology, ultimately leading to the realisation of the significance of Tai language and culture. In playing this crucial role, the group members admit that they still mix Thai and Tai in their spoken language, but to a minimal degree compared to what they habitually did in the past. They purport they are

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²⁶¹ It is called *hkeng ta put* [kheŋ-taː-puːt] in some places.
able to read and write the standard Tai widely used in the Shan State, which becomes the ceremonial default for instruction in Ruam Chai.

Fig. 25: U-mong, the (former) president of the Tai Num, led members of the group to perform “kan taw” to Saimong during Poi Sawn Nam in 2005.

The Tai Num has gained a reputation of note to the multi-national Tai community after they took part in the Shan National Day in 2007 at Peing Hpa, where they were assigned to be in charge of several tasks, including decorating a stage, performing Tai dance, mastering a ceremony, and participating in the National Day parade. Yawthkam and other two fellows of hers were at the frontline of the parade to carry pedestal trays that placed flags of the Shan State, the SSA, and the RCSS, respectively; two members of the group held up the event sign and the rest gathered with other parade participants.

²⁶² Or locally known as Wan Jat Tai [wan⁴-tsaːtʰ³-taj⁴] or Wan Jer Jat Jeung Tai [wan⁴-tsəʔ⁵-tsaːtʰ³-tswəʔ⁵-taj⁴], literally translated “Tai National Day.”
Taking part in the Shan National Day in both 2006 and 2007 allowed me to learn that in 2007 the Tai Num has been considerably recognised not only by the Tai people at Peing Hpa, but also the SSA, which was the prime organisation hosting the event. This could be seen when the group was invited to attend a meeting in preparation for the event. Yawthkam and Nummong\textsuperscript{263} were the group’s representatives attending the given meeting. The roles of the group on the Shan National Day in 2007 were totally different from that in 2006, where the group’s role could be described as unimportant and very limited. To the question of why the group has gained trust from the host to be in charge of several tasks, Yawthkam indicates, “I think it’s because we used to go up there with the Master [Saimao]

\textsuperscript{263} A Tai Long young man, whose house is located in Pawk 2. While studying in the last year at the highschool, he worked at Saimong’s guesthouse.
to teach Tai to children. After that we visited them once in a while to organise recreational, sport, and charity events. For all of these, they saw that we really wanted to help them.” Beyond their ability to contribute in person, the members of the Tai Num are famous for their solidarity and demonstrable competency in Tai cultural activities.

“I’m so proud and happy that our children know how to read and write our own language,” Jeumharn—the owner of Ruam Chai’s only photocopy centre and photography shop—expressed his opinion towards the “young blood” of the Tai in this village. Upon the establishment of the Tai Num, it is apparent that children and youth have played more vital roles in conserving Tai culture, and that the degree of their participation in the village’s important pois have been increased significantly. Jawmlern observes that this results in the decrease of the adults’ burden of responsibility: “The very first groups of children trained in the Summer Camp have helped us in many respects. So, people in an older generation like me don’t need to play every single role as we did in the past. At present, we just look after them from a distance and give them advice.” Moreover, Tai

Fig. 27: Tai Num members at the frontline of the parade on the Shan National Day at Peing Hpa (February 7, 2007).
Num’s key roles, energetic participation, and their self-started activities could challenge the negative critique on Tai culture made by Somsi, who says, “I feel like their culture is in decline. They don’t pay enough attention to their culture. They also don’t improve or preserve traditional dances like ka nok, ka to, and long drum hitting. This is very different from people in the past, who were serious in practising performances, and in training children.”

In spite of the aforementioned consequences, Jeumharn expressed his opinion by saying that “In the next ten years or so, Thai Yai tradition would no longer exist [in this village].” His position might seem exaggerated; yet it is realistic. The Tai people of Ruam Chai dwell in a place bounded by the rigorous promotion of Thai usage in schools, the influence of Thai in mass media, as well as the popularity of Chinese, which could put their ethnicity in jeopardy. Therefore, the maintenance of Tai culture is the challenging mission of the Tai Num; while having over three hundred members, only 15 of them—who are in an administrative board—usually run and participate in activities. Active members such as Yawthkam and Jarmhawm have realised that it is necessary to search for children from younger generation, and then get them trained in order to take the place of senior members, who have to “go out” to continue their education and/or to work in other places after they graduate from schools in Ruam Chai. At present, Jarmhawm—who had Thai citizenship granted in January 2006—is an undergraduate student of a public university in Chiang Rai Province while Yawthkam has gone to the city of Chonburi to work and study for a high vocational certificate after she became naturalised in 2007. Besides that, Nummong left the village for Bangkok to work, and study in an open-admission university.

It is certain that, despite the lack of some active members, the Tai Num’s remaining executive members—for example, Htiseng—still work hard as the group’s leadership core in performing different activities to retain Tai culture and identity. Meanwhile, other

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264 Interview in February 2007.
265 Chonburi Province’s central city located approximately one hundred kilometres southeast of Bangkok.
266 According to a telephone conversation with Yawthkam on October 1, 2008; in May 2007 she and another hundred or so Tai people in Ruam Chai received Thai citizenship, and a Thai ID cards conferment ceremony was organised at the Chinese School’s meeting hall.
267 Nummong left Ruam Chai in 2006. He was naturalised in 2007.
members who no longer live in Ruam Chai are willing to come back to help out their friends as often as they can. For instance, Jarmhawm, whose university is not too far from the village visits her family and takes part in activities of the group from time to time, or Yawthkam—who lives very far from the village—still keeps in touch with Saeng Thian monks and her Tai Num fellows. She told me on telephone\textsuperscript{268} that she plans to go back to Ruam Chai during Poi Pi Mai in late November to visit her family and to help out the group’s work.

### 4.6 Ethnic Relations between the Tai and Other Ethnic Groups

Ruam Chai is not a setting occupied exclusively by the Tai, but also residents from other ethnic backgrounds, the Chinese and the hill tribe people in particular. I tried to ask several key informants whether there is any ethnic conflict in the village. All of them gave me the same answer; that is to say, people in this village live in peace and there is no hostility between ethnic groups. Sukanya, the former teacher of Ruam Chai School, points out, “The local people don’t have any cultural dispute. All groups get along well with each other.” Saimong, the owner of the guesthouse and the former vice headman, also provided information that conforms to Sukanya’s words.

**Jaggapan:** Because this village is home to various ethnic groups such as the Tai, the Chinese, the Akha, and the Lahu; have you ever heard or seen any conflict among the given groups during Khun Sa Period and at the present time?

**Saimong:** Well, we always remind villagers not to separate ethnically. Instead of saying “You are Chinese, we are Tai,” we regard people from all ethnic backgrounds equally as the people of Ruam Chai. […] Whenever there is an argument that might lead to an ethnic clash, we will warn the people firmly not to cause any problem.

In addition to the verbal warning method mentioned earlier, the coexistence of people from multi-ethnic backgrounds is controlled by at least two rules of the aforementioned 14-Point Code for the village administration—shall not discriminate against other ethnic groups, and shall not look down on other cultures. As Jawmlern puts it,

\textsuperscript{268} A telephone conversation on October 1, 2008.
As far as I am concerned, an ethnic conflict has never been found here. Generally speaking, the local people are generous, considerate, and non-acquisitive. It seems that current news [reported by mass media] tend to focus on the disintegration in language, religion, and ethnic culture. So, we’re afraid that one day we might encounter separatism as a problem. For this reason, we strictly follow the rules that prohibit ethnic discrimination and disrespect. From the past to the present, not only do we respect, but we also help each other regardless of ethnicity or religion. […] Two years ago\textsuperscript{269}, the Fourth Army Region Commander took Muslims from the South [where a separatist movement prevails] to make a study trip in Ruam Chai. The main reason of the visit was to study why people from [at least] four to five ethnic groups with [at least] three to four different languages are able to coexist peacefully. Some places [this group] previously visited are populated with only three ethnic groups or have only two religions, yet they still have a fight. Anyway, the reason that we live side by side without any problems is because we are interdependent and we treat people from different religions and ethnic groups on an equal basis.

In spite of the romanticised picture of the multi-ethnic border community, my intensive fieldwork allowed me to discover that in the midst of friendship and harmony among villagers, some Tai people possess hidden negative thoughts about people of different ethnic origins. I will discuss this issue through the lens of interaction between the Tai and other two ethnic groups—the Chinese and the hill tribe people—who play key roles in the village’s economy and politics, respectively.

4.6.1 The Tai and the Chinese

Despite the fact that no one can tell when exactly the Chinese—or known to the Tai as “Hke”—started migrating to Ruam Chai, it could be assumed that the very first settlers of Chinese origins might have arrived there slightly before the late 1960s, during the period that the original Chinese School was established. During the Khun Sa Era, a number of Chinese migrated to the area, and some of them held important positions in his army. After Khun Sa got expelled from the village and Thailand, several members of his entourage surrendered to the authorities and decided to settle down there. Besides those who served the opium warlord’s army, the village has been filled with a small group of Muslim Yunnanese Chinese, or locally called “Chin Haw.” After the Thai military force stormed and purged the village in 1982, the Chinese from both Myanmar’s Shan State and China’s

\textsuperscript{269} Interview on January 17, 2006.
Yunnan Province have increased in number. As a result, the Chinese have become the village’s second largest population.

I was informed by several informants that most Chinese in Ruam Chai are Yunnanese Chinese, who are descendants of the three main clans: the Yang, the Chen, and the Chang. However, Jarmhker—Heo-ngern’s close friend whose house and small grocery is located near the Chinese School, clarifies, “Actually, they are the Kokang Chinese, who have their own dialect. I’m not quite sure how they differ from the Chinese at large.” The Kokang Chinese that Jarmhker mentioned earlier is, in fact, an ethnonym applied to the Burmese Chinese, whose settlement locates in the northern part of the Shan State. The area is known as “Kokang”—Myanmar’s self-administrative region. Aside from Heo-ngern, I rarely heard villagers mention the Kokang Chinese. According to my fieldwork, the Chinese in Ruam Chai tend to identify themselves as Yunnanese Chinese, and call their dialect Yunnanese Chinese. Moreover, those who run restaurant business always have Yunnanese dishes in their menu.

In general, the relationships between the Tai and the Chinese is characterised by an intermarriage and interdependency. I have discovered that several Tai, mostly women, married the local Chinese. As a result, many of children and adults in Ruam Chai are mixed Chinese-Tai, and this inter-ethnic marriage creates family ties to both groups. Apart from the affinal relations, the linkage between the two groups includes a broadly inter-cultural interdependency. Saimong—whose late father is of Chinese origin—represents a concrete example. When his current neighbours first arrived in Ruam Chai, they had no place to live. Saimong offered his land to them to build houses on both sides of his house (and guesthouse) compound. They have become good friends, and connections have been maintained by younger generations of the families. As members of the village, the Chinese usually cooperate with their Tai fellows in several affairs as well as participate in some Tai pois. For example, there were Chinese stage performances at Poi Pi Mai; and a number of Chinese women joined the village’s Housewives Group, who made and sold food at Peing Hpa during 2007 Shan National Day celebrations. Having a long-term interaction creates cross-cultural adoption between the two groups. This could be exemplified from the older

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270 As mentioned in Chapter 3, Tai students who attend the Chinese School will be given “Chang” as their Chinese surname. For those whose father is Chinese, they will retain their Chinese family name.
generation of Chinese who are able to speak Tai and usually communicate with their Tai fellows in Tai. On the flip side of the coin, some Chinese traditions such as eating with chopsticks and Yunnanese Chinese cuisine have been found in many Tai households.

The Chinese have played a significant economic role since Khun Sa’s time. Today’s village economic base is primarily controlled by certain Chinese families, whose heads were Khun Sa’s aides-des-camps. One of my key informants points out that among the small number of Khun Sa’s entourage, those with Chinese background had higher economic status than those with Tai one: “Khun Sa had several Tai assistants, but they didn’t earn a lot of money. They had authority in commanding manpower, not in administering financial matters of the army. So, [the status of] the Thai Yai is lower than [that of] the Chinese. Although Khun Sa’s mother is Thai Yai, he had greater affinity for his Chinese assistants.” This anonymous informant expressed her opinion as if she never knows that Khun Sa’s father is of Chinese origin.

Because the Chinese play a key role in the village’s economy, the Tai consider the Chinese as the wealthiest group in the village. As Heo-ngern says, “The Chinese are the richest because they’re patient and hard-working. They also have good ideas about making a living. The Tai aren’t so diligent as them. We’re not rich like them because we only do so-so jobs.” Nevertheless, some well-off Chinese people have been gossiped that their wealth is not transparent. At least two key informants of mine are in agreement that the Chinese who seem to be moneyed not only receive financial support from their children who work in Taiwan, but also from former illegal earnings. An unidentified informant’s answer to the question of “What main reasons have made Ruam Chai become a relatively developed village and a market centre in this border area?”:

The growth of Ruam Chai was mainly generated by [the illicit] drug business. The next factor is money sent home by those who’ve left the village to be [part of the] workforce in Taiwan. But before the Chinese had money to buy Thai ID cards for their children and then send them to Taiwan, they got involved with that kind of business. In short, the Chinese are clever. They were in the dark first, and adapted themselves once they’ve found the light. Then, they send their children to study [and work] in Taiwan or do something else.

In addition to the view that the Chinese come to be rich from selling drugs, the Tai look upon them as those who have illegally received Thai citizenship by the means of locally
called “buying ID cards.” Another unnamed informant indicates that the Chinese are able to buy ID cards from corrupt government officials as they have higher economic status.

You may wonder why the Thai Yai, who have been here for a long time, don’t have ID cards [Thai citizenship]; why some Akha have no ID cards; and why every Chinese has ID cards. Well, that’s because the Chinese have money. They just bought a house registration certificate from an Akha’s family. If there’re five people in their family, they pay fifty thousand baht to them. That’s why some Akha don’t have ID cards, and some Chinese got the cards from making use of the right of the Akha. So, there’s no single Chinese without Thai ID cards in this village.

However, not every Chinese family is rich enough to acquire the cards. A number of them had to take a private sector loan in order to have enough money to buy the cards. One of my informants suggested that the Chinese are required to pay over one hundred thousand baht or more to obtain the cards. Worse than that, for those who bought ID cards for their children, with a hope that they would go abroad to work and send money back home to pay debt and to build a new house, their dreams never come true and they are still heavily in debt because their children cannot go abroad for some reasons.

The interaction between the Dehong Tai and the Chinese in southwestern region of Yunnan Province, which rests on power-embedded relations, results in the employing “rice” and “Thai dress” as key symbols to contest the Chinese superiority (see Yos 2000 and 2001; Aranya 2007). Such situation could be also viewed through the geo-economic sphere of the (Tai) Lue in Jinghung—the centre of the (Tai) Lue in Xishuangbanna—where has been noticeably invaded by the Chinese, who are more diligent in terms of business. In contrast to the cases in Yunnan, the Tai in Ruam Chai may have negative perceptions of their Chinese fellows as mentioned above, yet overall, it could be said that they insist on maintaining good relationships with the latter, more in keeping with the general social expectations of all ethnicities in the village. As Kambker points out, “Even though they amusingly call us Thai Yai Hto Nao, the Chinese and the Thai Yai here live

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271 The Akha is one of the nine hill tribes that are eligible to apply for Thai citizenship.
272 Besides the Akha, the Chinese in Ruam Chai have bought household certificates from members of other hill tribes, such as the Lahu.
273 Hto nao literally means rotten beans. It is one of the most important ingredients in Tai cuisine. See more details in Chapter 3.
side-by-side in harmony. We don’t abhor each other. This is quite different from the case of the hill tribes.” Kamhker’s last quoted sentence clearly suggests his negative attitudes towards the hill tribe people, which from time to time appeared in several conversations I had with him. He even distinguishes the Chinese in Samakkhi from those in Ruam Chai: “Actually, the Chinese in Samakkhi are not real Chinese. They are mixed with the Akha and the Lahu. So their class is lower than that of the [real] Chinese in Ruam Chai.” His discriminative viewpoint gives rise to the next elucidation of what the Tai mind-set on the hill tribes appears to be.

4.6.2 The Tai and the Hill Tribes

The area of Mae Fa Luang District has been somewhat densely inhabited by the hill tribes or widely and officially known in Thailand as chao khao. Some hill tribes set up their own villages and detach themselves from other ethnic groups while the others live in milieus predominantly occupied by other ethnic groups. In Ruam Chai, where hill tribes such as the Akha, the Lahu, and the Lisu are considered minorities, social contexts that the Tai and the hill tribes are more likely to encounter are ranging from schools to marketplace, neighbourhounds, and government sites. At schools, both the Thai School in Pawk 7 and the one (a high school) located near Mae Fa Luang District Hospital in Mae Salong Nai Subdistrict, Tai children have chances to communicate with their hill tribe friends through Thai for the most part, and Tai from time to time.

The village marketplace and neighbourhounds are other settings of sociocultural interactions between members of the Tai and the hill tribes (including the Tai and other ethnic groups) as either sellers and buyers or service-givers and service-receivers. The interaction in the given sites also includes the songthaew stall, a situation which allows for the confrontation between songthaew drivers, who mostly are of hill tribe background, and Tai (and other ethnic group) passengers. The Central Field where several pois—Poi Pi Mai (Tai New Year Festival) in particular—are usually organised and hill tribes people from both the village and nearby come to visit; and many pawks where hill tribe members live among Tai neigbours. Apart from the schools, the marketplace, and the neighbourhounds, the social interactions between the hill tribe people and the Tai (including village members of other ethnic origins) always take place at main government offices such as the O Bo To,
the Community Health Office (locally called *anamai*\textsuperscript{274}), Mae Fa Luang District Hospital, as well as the Subdistrict Office.

\textbf{Fig. 28:} Hill tribe women selling vegetables at Ruam Chai Market.

Owing to the hill tribes’ legally recognised citizenship status and their political ambition to become a kamnan (a subdistrict headman) as well as other important political positions, as Jarmhker suggested, it would seem that they are more enthusiastic than the Tai in playing a part in the most important local and administrative organisation like the O Bo To. These facts could be gleaned from Somsí’s opinion:

Looking at the village-level politics, all leaders are the Akha, not the Thai Yai nor the Chinese. For the Chinese, when they finish Grade Six at the Chinese School, they would go to Taiwan to make money. Meanwhile, having had some compulsory education, Tai girls tend to get married or work whereas Tai guys are more likely to look for jobs. They don’t really care for or get involved with political matters. The Akha are different. They know English [by learning primarily from churches] and they continue their education. When they have

\textsuperscript{274} *Anamai* in Thai means health (Domnern and Sathienpong 1999:555). The local people simply call the place *anamai* instead of the full name, *sathani anamai* (a health service station).
higher education, they come back here to get involved with politics. As you may already know, the chiefs of two O Bo To\textsuperscript{275} have Akha background.

Generally speaking, although the Tai view that the hill tribes may have Thai citizenship, possess higher economic status and education, some members of the given groups have prominent niches in the local political system, and the hill tribes no longer hire themselves out as labourers to farms—as Jeumharn and Kamhker suggested; the hill tribes are still innately inferior in the eyes of most Tai people. Having such attitudes significantly affects Tai-hill tribe intermarriages, as readers shall notice from the following conversation between Kamhker and me.

\textit{Jaggapan}: Is the marriage between the Tai and the hill tribes people popular in this village?

\textit{Kamhker}: Not at all.

\textit{Jaggapan}: Why’s that?

\textit{Kamhker}: The Tai sees that the Chao Khao is still the Chao Khao, after all. They are different from us. We adhere to Buddhism while they hold to animism. Another issue is cleanliness. The Chao Khao are known for their uncleanliness. They’re somewhat dirty. After they have meals, they just put dishes or plates right there, and then their dogs come to lick those dishes or plates. We don’t practise this way. They’re human like us, but their class is lower than ours. By lower class I mean they don’t improve the way they live that has been practised for a long time. Anyway, although a lot of people still live in that way, some of them should have better lifestyle now. We don’t always stigmatise them. If they change the way they live, we can accept them.

\textit{Jaggapan}: Is there any Tai person in Pawk 10 got married to the Akha or the Lahu?

\textit{Kamhker}: Nobody.

\textit{Jaggapan}: I asked some members of the Tai Num the reason why the Tai are not willing to marry the hill tribes.

\textit{Kamhker}: It might sound very offensive if I use the term “dislike.” Let’s say “unpreferable.” The Tai don’t prefer to marry the Chao Khao.

\textit{Jaggapan}: Is it possible that the Tai regard their status higher than that of the

\textsuperscript{275}“O Bo To Thoed Thai” and “O Bo To Mae Salong Nai.”
hill tribes?

*Kamhker:* For sure. Well, we’re comparable with any other ethnic groups across the world. The others may look at us as lesser because we’re a minority group, whose culture seems to be less developed than theirs because we don’t have a continuous development and we usually move from one place to another. By the way, we don’t really disfavour them. We sometimes visit their houses. I remember that at times when I called on houses of the Chao Khao, they usually served me pounded sesame-mixed sticky rice. I ate that because I didn’t want to upset them. Their houses were made of teak, but they look messy because they put stuff everywhere, and their houses look dirty because they spit out red betel juice on floors. Although their houses are furnished with expensive electrical appliances, their lifestyle is still unchanged.

While the Tai bear in mind that the hill tribe people have lower social status, the latter think of the former inferior to them in terms of citizenship status. As Jarmhker shared her story with me,

Chao Khao men, who have higher education and Thai citizenship, said to my Tai female friends that Thai Yai women are beautiful, but they don’t want to marry them because they are illegal aliens. If this happened to me, I would ask them what standard they use to judge the Thai Yai without ID cards “aliens.” I would ask them this question because the meaning of the given term is very negative.

Nonetheless, to the Tai, deep down inside, being seen as citizenship-less inhabitants are painful observations; and it makes them inferior to the hill tribes in several respects such as the hill tribes’ higher education and better employment opportunities, and in taking roles in developing the village. As Kamhker indicates,

The Chao Khao already have ID cards, but we still don’t have. Although now we’re able to study up to at least Grade Six, we still have no ID cards. What do we study for? After graduation, do they give us a certificate? No, they don’t. Or if they do, can we use that certificate to apply for jobs? No, we can’t because our certificate is not recognised by employers. Even jobs in the village like a caretaker at the child day-care centre or a nursing assistant at the hospital, they never put us in full-time positions, and our salary is very little. Obviously, our rights are limited. This is one of the reasons why our children are less likely to pursue higher education, which normally takes a long time to finish. And when they finish their schools, their certificates are not acknowledged. So, in their eyes, to be able to read and write is enough to find survival jobs to support themselves and their families. This causes a quality problem to our people, who lack knowledge. Also, we don’t
have a chance to develop the community [as the chief or members of the O Bo To]. So, we know very little about this matter. In contrast to us, Akha [and some other hill tribes] children have been supported in several matters from both governmental organisations and their churches. Plus, because they have ID cards [citizenship], they’re interested in studying as high as they can both in the country and, for those who are brilliant and got scholarships from the churches, abroa.

Amid the Tai’s conflictual feelings of pride in a higher social status and the Tai’s actual inferiority in citizenship status, their negative attitudes towards the hill tribes are not absolute, indeed, almost compassionate: Kamhker suggests that the hill tribes would be more accepted if their perceived lifestyle were improved. According to his opinion, despite the unpopularity of Tai-hill tribe intermarriage, reconsideration would be made on a case-by-case and tribe-by-tribe basis. Thus, once in a while, a marriage between a Tai woman and a man from the Akha tribe takes place in the village. Alongside Kamhker, Heo-ngern, who still resists full acceptance of the hill tribes to some degrees, is open-minded enough to listen to their opinions, and she admires them for encouraging children to pursue higher education.

Even though they have ID cards, rank, or privileges of any sort, they’re still the Chao Khao in my eyes. However, if they have good and creative opinions, we will both accept and respect them. […] Nowadays, the Chao Khao such as the Akha, the Lahu, and the Lisu support their children to study at least to the bachelor degree level. This is a very good idea. Don’t you think?”

To conclude, this chapter is concerned with the presentation and analysis of the data regarding ethnic dynamism and the construction of Tai identity at the village level. Based on intensive fieldwork, I have discovered that, of all Tai subgroups, the Tai Long is the most hegemonic and influential in terms of population size and cultural representation, which produces the marginalisation of the smaller Tai subgroups’ ethnic identities and boundaries, both intentionally and unintentionally. The data gained from the field also reveals that the Tai people in Ruam Chai have rational criteria—subgroup, locality, region, and nature of geographic feature (Nam Hkong)—to differentiate among themselves. This internal classification system reflects the diversified identities under the ethnonym called “Tai,” and clearly indicates how the Tai construct their multi-layering identities at the same
time. Even though certain identities have been shaped in connection with cultural aspects (e.g., dialects) and place of origin, which essentially suggest primordialism, the crucial message in this chapter is the creation of Tai identities through discursive practices—the core content of a constructivist approach to ethnicity. One of supporting evidence for this argument could be drawn from the way in which the Tai employ Namhkong (the Salween) in their categorisation of their fellows in the Shan State and those in Ruam Chai into the “Tai Tok Hkong” (The Tai from the west side of Namhkong) and the “Tai Awk Hkong” (The Tai from the east side of Namhkong). These two identities have been formed on the basis of two antithetical sets of discourse. From the perspective of the Westside people, the Tai Tok Hkong are described as traditionalists who strongly conserve their culture and strictly adhere to Buddhist morals. These characteristics are in opposition to that of the Tai Awk Hkong, who are less moralistic and yet more materialistically modernised owing to a close link with Thailand, a representation of “modern” country in the eyes of the Tai. Meanwhile, the Eastside people look at the Tai Tok Hkong, who seem able to maintain archaic traditions, as those whose of cultural ways are in many respects dominated by the Burmese. Given this rationalisation, the culture of the Tai Tok Hkong cannot be considered “authentic” in the Tai Awk Hkong’s opinions.

Against a background of all internal and external forces threatening Tai distinctiveness, the Tai people, with great support from both local people and outsiders, have tried to actively maintain and construct identities in different forms. Among others is the conservation of a traditional performance art called “Seng Tai.” Not only does such cultural practice portray how the Tai formulate the identity from what already existed in their society, but also solidifies community ties as well as strengthens connections with Tai communities in other places. Besides the Seng Tai, the Tai people revive and construct their identity through the organisation of Poi Pi Mai. On one hand, and on the surface, the Poi is viewed as the biggest and most joyful celebration of the year. On the other hand, it is a signifying practice in that Tai identity has been strategically constructed with reference to Thai state’s supreme symbols (i.e., nation and monarchy) in order for the displaced Tai to be able to negotiate with Thai authorities for a continuation of residency and/or an acquisition of Thai citizenship. Furthermore, the Tai people of this valley village construct their ethnic identity by means of having the Summer Camp organised during a school
break every year. Such a cultural practice is not simply an activity for language, culture, and moral instructions. It is, in fact, an instrument that the Tai people have used to instill a sense of Tainess onto younger generations through historical narratives, patriotic songs, and other forms of cultural text. This powerful device also awakes the Tai in Ruam Chai to realise the value of their ethnicity amid the domination of Thai language at schools, the preferability of Mandarin instructed at the Chinese School, including the impact of mass media and globalisation. Equally important, the Summer Camp gave rise to the Tai Num, which currently plays a vital role in the assertion and maintenance of Tai ethnicity, including the transmission of their knowledge in Tai culture to the next generations. The practices handled by the displaced Tai, which have resulted in the construction of ethnicity, nevertheless, have proceeded in an atmosphere of a fierce and powerful state-run practice—the nation-building project—emphasising the homogeneity of its population by making use of the Thai/Thainess concept. What the displaced Tai in Ruam Chai would do to cope with this situation is the issue we will explore in the following chapter.
Chapter 5
Becoming “Thai”: The Politics of Difference

People can’t choose what they will be born to be. If they can, they will choose to be born into good circumstances. No one tries to become a people without citizenship.
(interview with Jarmhker, January 18, 2006)

The dynamics of Tai ethnicity were explored and analysed at the village level in Chapter 4. In this chapter, the power-embedded relations between the Tai people and the Thai state is examined within the national context. To understand the roots of the phenomenon, my analysis with the general discussion of the problems of “stateless people,” ethnic classification, and naturalisation in Thailand is conducted. Later in this chapter the picture of state-villagers’ interactions is elucidated by providing the way the Thai state exercises its powers in Ruam Chai on one hand, and the way the displaced Tais challenge the powers of the Thai state on the other. The following section is devoted to the related issues of the building of the Thai nation, nationalism, and a dichotomous discourse on the “Thai Yai.” At the end of this chapter, which describes Ruam Chai’s current citizenship situations, I also demonstrate how an awareness of being “Thai” has been increased and how the displaced Tai people have attached themselves to their new home, Thailand.

5.1 Stateless People, Ethnic Minorities, and Naturalisation in Thailand

Like many other countries in the world, Thailand has difficulties dealing with problems of illegal immigrants and stateless people. According to Mahidol University’s Population and Social Research Institute, it is estimated that there are up to 2.4 million people illegally living in the country. The same study also shows that 248,866 upland residents are without citizenship, 41,000 people were born in Thailand without citizenship, and 109,836 people are living in refugee camps along the borders (Pravit 2004). With such overwhelming numbers, Thailand is the host of “perhaps the largest stateless population in the world” (Mydans 2007:4.4). Among those illegally residing in Thailand are immigrants from Myanmar, including Burmese and other ethnic groups, who have entered the country at
different periods since the 1960s as a consequence of political reforms and the Burmese military regime’s forcible suppression of minority groups. A large number of displaced people from Myanmar are not considered refugees.\textsuperscript{276} They are called “illegal immigrants” instead (Pinkaew 2003b:169)—since Thailand is not a signatory to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention or the 1967 Protocol. The Thai government has allowed the displaced people to stay in the country temporarily (leaning toward “indefinitely”) (Pornpimon 2005:1-2) and has cooperated with different domestic and foreign organisations to provide humanitarian aid to these people.\textsuperscript{277} This considerably affects the relationship between Thailand and Myanmar because a number of ethnic minorities—the Karens and the Tais, for instance—opposed to the Burmese government have fled to and lived in Thailand. A misreading that Thailand has harboured those guerillas is a major source of distrust between Myanmar’s military junta and the Thai government (Khachatphai 1997:156; Pornpimon 2008:137).

Besides the illegal immigrants from Myanmar, Thailand is inhabited by several ethnic groups unlawfully entering the country from its neighbouring states, entering at different times. These people are designated as so-called \textit{chon klum noi}—ethnic minorities—and given non-citizenship statuses by the Thai government. Official discourses about “\textit{chon klum noi},” which is translated into English as “ethnic minorities,” have been extant in Thai society since the Cold War Period (Pinkaew 2003b). The way in which the Thai state designates certain groups as “ethnic minorities” is the demonstration of politically-constructed ethnic classification, and the reflection of the Thai government’s capricious policies towards ethnic people. For example, presently the Chinese—once regarded during King Vajiravudh’s reign (r. 1910–1925) as “The Jews of the East” (Wyatt 2003:216; see also Murashima 1988:94) and during the mid–20\textsuperscript{th} century as an ethnic minority (Pinkaew 2003b:162)—are not entitled with such a term because the Thai state no longer considers them a serious threat to national security; and they have become a crucial

\textsuperscript{276} As of December 31, 2007, Thailand had 396,700 refugees and asylum seekers from Myanmar (World Refugee Survey 2008a:31). It is estimated that up to 200,000 ethnic Shans (Tais) who escaped from forced relocation and ethnic persecution in Myanmar, are now living in Thailand (World Refugee Survey 2008b). It was recently estimated that there are 80,000 Burmese immigrants in Chiang Mai, and most of them are of Tai origin (Tawngtai 2009).

\textsuperscript{277} Thailand has allowed the UNHCR to provide aid to illegal immigrants living along Thailand’s border areas since 1998.
part—economically and politico-culturally—of Thai society as a result of intermarriages and the state’s successful assimilation strategy. This is also true for the cases of the Khon Mueang (or Tai Yon/Yuan) in the North and the Khon Isan (or Lao) in the Northeast (Pinkaew 2003b:162), including many other small ethnic groups (e.g., indigenous and native hill tribes), most of whom—if not all—were already naturalised and well integrated into mainstream Thai culture. The existence of these groups of people, in the eyes of the Thai state, are not considered as a danger to the government administration and *khwam pen thai*—the “Thaiess.” For this reason, the “chon klum noi” (ethnic minority) status is not applied to them. To the Thai government, those who deserve such a designation are recent illegal migrants to the Kingdom (e.g., refugees from Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia). The official categorisation of ethnic minorities, therefore, has arisen to effectively deal with people with different migration backgrounds and ethnic origins, who (are assumed to be more likely to) cause problems for the nation (see Khachatphai 1983, 1997). However, to be consistent with the analytical use of the term “ethnic minority” in the social science literature, the term “non-citizenship status(es)” will be employed in this dissertation instead.

Of the 18 official “non-citizenship” statuses278 within the Thai government’s classificatory scheme, as far as I am concerned, as least four of them are found in Ruam Chai. These four groups are referred to as the Displaced People with Burmese Nationality, the Highlanders, the Highland Communities, and the Illegal Immigrants from Myanmar. Details of each group are discussed as follows (Civil Registration Division, Bureau of Registration Administration, Department of Provincial Administration 1999:1-4).

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278 The 18 ethnic minorities (non-citizenship statuses) classified by and under the control of the DOPA include the Vietnamese Immigrants, the Former Nationalist Chinese Kuomintang, the Chin Haw Immigrants, the Independent Chin Haw, the Former Malaya’s Chinese Communists (presently called “Thai Development Participants”), the Thai Lue, the Lao Immigrants, the Nepali Immigrants, the Displaced People with Burmese Nationality, the Illegal Immigrants from Myanmar, the Labours from Myanmar, the Displaced People with Burmese Nationality who have Thai Origin, the Highlanders, the Immigrants of Thai Origin from Kong Island (Cambodia), the Illegal Immigrants from Cambodia, the Mlabris (Mrabris), the Highland Communities, and the Illegal Labours (Wandee 2002:236).
Displaced People with Burmese Nationality refers to individuals from Myanmar, who are members of ethnic groups such as the Mon, the Karen, the Thai Yai, and the Burmese, and entered Thailand before March 9, 1976. Living in the midst of fights between the Burmese government and ethnic minorities over the political reforms and under poor economic conditions, people living in border areas on the Myanmar side have illegally crossed the border, and then have resided in nine Thai border provinces of Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Tak, Mae Hong Son, Ratchaburi, Kanchanaburi, Prachuap Khiri Khan, Chumphon, and Ranong. Having registered within this category, they were issued pink cards.

Highlanders is the label designated to hill tribes and other ethnic groups that coexist with the hill tribes in the highlands and to those who moved from high areas to the plains (Pantip 2004b:36-37). Those registered as “Highlanders” are blue-card holders. In general, the Highlanders occupy mountainous zones in the northern, western, and (some parts of) northeastern regions of the country, which include 20 provinces. Officially, there are nine major “hill tribes”: the Karen, the Hmong, the Mian, the Akha, the Thai Yai, the Burmese, and the Mon. Highlanders whose ethnic backgrounds are not hill tribes (but are from ethic groups such as the Thai Yai, the Burmese, and the Mon) that entered Thailand as late as October 3, 1985 were given “legal immigrant” status, according to the Cabinet’s resolution on August 29, 2000.

Footnotes:
279 It is apparent that most, if not all, Thai official documents refer to the Tai from Myanmar’s Shan State as “Thai Yai.”
280 The reason why this date has been strictly held is that it was the day on which the Ministry of Interior implemented an order prohibiting individuals from Myanmar entered Thailand illegally. Those who violate the order will be treated as “illegal immigrants.” Meanwhile, individuals entered the country prior to that date will be recognised as “legal immigrants,” according to the resolution of the Cabinet on August 29, 2000, and they are eligible to request khon tang dao (alien) status. Their descendants born in Thailand have rights to apply for Thai citizenship. Before that, on March 17, 1995 the Cabinet came to a decision to allow individuals from Myanmar who illegally entered the country after March 9, 1976 to stay temporarily. These illegal immigrants from Myanmar will be sent back to their home country. In practice, however, deporting these displaced civilians is deemed nearly impossible because of the insufficient capacity of local officials and, more importantly, for humanitarian reasons.
281 Highlanders whose ethnic backgrounds are not hill tribes (but are from ethic groups such as the Thai Yai, the Burmese, and the Mon) that entered Thailand as late as October 3, 1985 were given “legal immigrant” status, according to the Cabinet’s resolution on August 29, 2000.
282 Highlands are defined as an average slope of more than 35 percent or an altitude of at least 500 metres above the sea level.
the Lahu, the Lisu, the Lua, the Khamu, and the Thin\textsuperscript{284}, which are grouped under the two categories: \textit{chao khao dang doem} (the Native Hill Tribes) and \textit{chao khao nok} (the Non-Native Hill Tribes).\textsuperscript{285}

The Native Hill Tribes (or known as \textit{Chao Thai Phu Khao}—Thai Hill Tribes) are considered as Thai people, who have no official documents because they are not included in the national census and their settlements are too remote to access civil registration services provided by government organisations. This category of the hill tribes are naturalised by the 1992 Regulations of Central Registration Bureau related to Determinating Thai Citizenship Lists in Civil Registration for Thai Hill Tribes (amended in 1996).\textsuperscript{286} Meanwhile, the term \textit{Non-Native Hill Tribes} refers to those who migrated from countries such as Myanmar, Laos, and China. Since they were not born in Thailand, their descendants cannot be granted Thai citizenship, according to the Nationality Act (the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Revision) 1992.\textsuperscript{287} On October 3, 1995, the Cabinet made a resolution to determinate the alien status to the Non-Native Hill Tribes who have settled in the given 20 provinces.

\textit{Highland Communities}\textsuperscript{288} refer to three groups of people: native hill tribes who have not been surveyed by the Thai authority since 1969 (officially censused in 1999); legal immigrants who entered Thailand by October 3, 1985; and illegal immigrants who

\textsuperscript{284} In the 2000 Regulations of Central Registration Bureau related to Determinating Personal Status in Civil Registration for Highlanders, the Thin is not included in the nine major hill tribes. Instead, the Mlabri is included in the list.

\textsuperscript{285} The statistics from the Hill Tribe Welfare Division, Department of Public Welfare reveal that in 1997 the total population of the nine major hill tribes was 774,316. Of this number, 214,127 people were granted Thai citizenship as a result of the implementation of the 1974 Regulations of Ministry of Interior related to Determinating Thai Citizenship in Civil Registration for “Hill Tribes” and the 1992 Regulations of Central Registration Bureau (an organisation in the Ministry of Interior) related to Determinating Thai Citizenship Lists in Civil Registration for “Thai Hill tribes,” which was revised in 1996. Therefore, at least 560,189 hill tribesmen had not been issued Thai citizenship yet (Supphachai 2002). Please note that in 2000 the Central Registration Bureau implemented the Regulations related to Determinating Personal Status Lists in Civil Registration for “Highlanders.” Apparently, the implementation of these regulations portrays the way the Thai state has classified them from time to time.

\textsuperscript{286} Currently, they are naturalised by the 2000 Regulations of Central Registration Bureau related to Determinating Personal Status Lists in Civil Registration for Highlanders.

\textsuperscript{287} According to the Cabinet’s resolution on August 29, 2000, children born between December 14, 1972 and February 25, 1992 to parents registered as Highlanders that entered Thailand by October 3, 1985, are eligible to have Thai citizenship granted.

\textsuperscript{288} This non-citizenship title, in fact, should be called “People in Highland Communities;” however, on a card, the first two words are omitted.
entered the country after the given date. From 1997 to 2001, the Thai government launched a master plan for the development of the environment and the control of drug-plants in the highlands. To achieve these goals, one mission was to conduct a census of populations living in high areas in the aforementioned nine provinces. Upon completion of the census the total population numbered 873,713. Of this official statistic, 496,326 were already naturalised while the remaining people were given non-citizenship statuses, such as the Displaced People with Burmese Nationality or the Independent Chin Haw. Individuals who have never been registered under any non-citizenship status were required to prove their status as well as a migration history within one year after the Cabinet resolution on August 29, 2000. Anyone whose status was recognised was issued green cards.289

The designation of *Illegal Immigrants from Myanmar* is given to individuals who unlawfully entered Thailand from Myanmar after March 9, 1976 and have settled in one of the nine provinces mentioned earlier. Orange cards are official documents received from the authorities. Compared to the other three categories, people in this group technically have the lowest status because they have no right to apply for both Thai citizenship and alien status, and they are not allowed to leave a restricted area under any circumstances.

Table 3  The four non-citizenship statuses and the colours of the cards found in Ruam Chai.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-citizenship statuses</th>
<th>Colour of the cards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Displaced People with Burmese Nationality</td>
<td>Pink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highlanders</td>
<td>Blue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highland Communities</td>
<td>Green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illegal Immigrants from Myanmar</td>
<td>Orange</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the four designated non-citizenship statuses found in Ruam Chai, the Displaced People with Burmese Nationality represents the biggest group, to which most, if not all, Tai people belong. The Tai are also identified as Highlanders, Highland Communities, and Illegal Immigrants from Myanmar.290 Therefore, it could be said that Ruam Chai is

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289 Because the green card for “Highland Community” is edged with a red stripe, the Tais in Ruam Chai, and probably in other places as well, call the card *bat si khiao khop daeng*, literally translated “green with red edge card.”

290 See more details in the next section.
composed of both lawful and unlawful Tai immigrants. Regardless of their status, any persons—particularly those who are illegal immigrants—in all four categories are allowed by the Thai government to live temporarily in restricted areas. Moreover, they have a right to residence and they are permitted to do certain jobs specified by the government. In terms of health care, if they can prove that they have paid an income tax, they are eligible to receive medical services at public hospitals under the “Thirty-Baht Health Care Scheme,” a controversial project launched during Thaksin Shinnawatra’s government to help people with low income. Regarding education, children born in Thailand to parents designated one of the four non-citizenship statuses mentioned above are given the right to free-of-charge compulsory education in public schools. Fortunately, some excellent students are also provided with free lunch coupons and scholarships even though they do not have Thai citizenship.

For over three decades, the Thai governments, particularly the one led by Thaksin, have attempted to find resolutions to deal with the stateless people situation. The problem was taken into account as one of the national agendas during the reign of Thaksin, who announced, “All people in the country must have clear status. However, this doesn’t practically mean that everyone will be naturalised” (Anonymous 2005). His government also established a strategy, according to the Cabinet’s resolution on January 18, 2005 to solve the stateless people problem. The strategy was divided into two projects: 1) the project to survey and register individuals whose name and information have not been recorded in the civil registration database; and 2) the project to accelerate the process of granting legal status to over half a million stateless people who have lived in Thailand for a long period of time (Pantip 2006). In addition, under the guidance of the National Human Rights Commission, in January 2005 the Cabinet made a resolution to abandon the rule

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291 Although the Thai government only allows them to live “temporarily,” as far as I am concerned, none of the stateless Taïs in Ruam Chai were sent back to their home country.
292 One Canadian dollar is approximately thirty Thai baht.
293 Yawthkam (the former pink-card holder) and Htiseng (the green-card holder) said, regardless of a type of sickness, patients are required to pay only thirty baht for a treatment and prescription. To be entitled a member of the “Thirty-Baht Health Care Scheme,” one needs to complete an application form and submit it to the kamnan or appointed persons. After that, the form will be sent to related organisations. Once the application is approved, an applicant will be contacted for picking up a membership card.
294 The highest level of compulsory education in Thailand is Grade Twelve.
made by the Ministry of Education to specify the statement “Lack of Civil Registration Document” on stateless children’s education certificates. As a result, the children could use their certificates in applying for a job or in continuing their education at a higher level. Nevertheless, the stateless people are still in a bind. Even though their children are allowed access to free compulsory education, and to go to colleges or universities (if they can afford to); students without Thai citizenship are ineligible to take a loan from the government’s Education-Loan Fund Project. Besides, stateless people—regardless of non-citizenship status—are required to petition the authority\(^{295}\) in charge of their locality if they desire to travel beyond restricted area. They also need to ask a subdistrict headman or an authorised individual, as a guarantee person, to sign their request forms. Those who seek out-of-restricted-area jobs need to have a job offer letter or employment document\(^{296}\) to support their request. Facing these difficulties and time-consuming processes, many people would rather sneak out and live in fear, whereas some of them spend a much longer time than the time allowed, as Yawthkam said, “They have requested [the authority] for a ten-day travel, but never come back until ten months or so pass by.” While travelling or working outside their areas, stateless people are usually mistreated or “squeezed” for money by officials even though they have appropriate documents. In some worse cases, according to what I was told by certain key informants, some stateless women were sexually assaulted by police officers. These are only a handful of examples of how hard the stateless people’ lives are, and that is one of the crucial reasons why they are striving for Thai citizenship.

Among the aforementioned Ruam Chai’s four non-citizenship statuses, only stateless people born to parents, living in Thailand, with the classification as Displaced People with Burmese Nationality, Highlanders, and Highland Communities have a right to apply for Thai citizenship. A recognised birth is an individual who has a hospital-issued birth certificate or, in case that they do not have official documentation\(^{297}\), a local,

\(^{295}\) In the case of stateless people in Ruam Chai, they have to make a formal request to “go out” of the restricted area with an appropriate reason(s) to the Governor of Mae Fa Luang District.

\(^{296}\) Many people in Ruam Chai complained: “How could we get a job offer without going outside of the restricted area to find it?”

\(^{297}\) Among older generations, people giving birth in remote areas, particularly frontier zones, usually did not rely on a hospital delivery because their houses were too remote to get to a hospital in time. In some cases they depended on a traditional midwife. This situation causes a complex
trustworthy guarantee-person is required. Formerly, people categorised into each of these non-citizenship statuses had to follow different naturalisation rules. In the case of the Displaced People with Burmese Nationality, their citizenship application depended on Section 7 bis. of the Nationality Act 1965 (No. 2), as amended in 1992. This to state that people born in the Kingdom of Thailand of parents who are aliens in the Kingdom will not receive citizenship and thus are living in the Kingdom without the legal authority to do so. To grant citizenship to persons born in the Kingdom to alien parents, an interior minister will do so on a case-by-case basis according to regulations made by the Cabinet. Like the Displaced People with Burmese Nationality, people born in Thailand to Highland Communities parents, who came to Thailand as late as October 3, 1985, are eligible to apply for Thai citizenship by following the same law. In contrast to the two counterparts, Highlanders—both native hill tribes and their descendants—need to petition for naturalisation in compliance with the 2000 Regulations of Central Registration Bureau related to Determinating Personal Status Lists in Civil Registration for Highlanders, at a district office. This rule, however, is not applied to Highlanders whose ethnicity is officially recorded in a temporary civil registration as Thai Yai or Chin Haw. Instead, they needed to follow the aforementioned Section 7 bis. of the Nationality Act when applying for citizenship. Moreover, those who fall into this group but cannot prove that they were born in Thailand, such as the Non-Native Hill Tribes, are required to apply for an alien status instead of Thai citizenship.

In short, making a request for naturalisation according to Section 7 bis. of the Nationality Act is relatively complicated and time-consuming, and more importantly the granting process is finalised by only one person—an interior minister—in Bangkok, the country’s centre of power. Meanwhile, a naturalisation process under the 2000 Regulations of Central Registration Bureau related to Determinating Personal Status Lists in Civil

problem to those born in a traditional way and do not have a birth certificate. As Mydans (2007:4.4) points out that a 43-year-old Thai woman got a citizenship application refused by officials since she does not have “proper” documents and then she offered them her birth date “scribbled on a palm leaf by her mother.” Later on, she has become a “real” Thai upon the presenting of DNA test results as a proof of her right to Thai citizenship.

Their parents are required to apply for *alien* status like that of “Displaced People with Burmese Nationality” children.

Formerly, the Thai Yai and the Chin Haw who are classified as Highlanders were not allowed to apply for Thai citizenship.
Registration for Highlanders is less difficult because a decision to issue someone citizenship is made by a district governor or an appointed person at a local administration level.

Being concurrent with pressures from human rights agencies, the government realised that the nationality act mentioned above is unrealistic. It cannot reasonably handle hundreds of thousands of applications for naturalisation forms and many required supporting documents from across the nation. Such a time-consuming process has resulted in an increasing number of the backlog. Hence, the fourth revision of the Nationality Act 1965 was made and then implemented on February 27, 2008 to respond to the current situation as well as to accelerate the naturalisation process. According to Section 23 of the newly-introduced nationality act, individuals born in the Kingdom to alien parents who have continuously resided in the Kingdom, possess a temporary civil registration, behave well and contribute to society or the country, are eligible to make a request for having Thai citizenship determined in a civil registration document to a registrar of a local district office or that of a local administrative organisation 90 days after the implementation of the Act (see Appendix C).

With the implementation of the new nationality act and the assistance from several parties, the stateless people have more hope to be naturalised. However, they still have to face difficulties while petitioning for naturalisation. Such dilemmas have been caused by different factors, ranging from an inefficiency of bureaucracy at the local level to government representatives’ lack of attention to the problem and lack of knowledge about the new law. There is also an inadequacy of information disseminated from related authorities. The number of stateless people, therefore, is still considerably high. In addition to this formidable wall of obstacles, the stateless people, most of those who were born and have been raised in Thailand throughout their entire lives, have been marginalised, mistreated, and exploited due to misconceptions about them. They are always viewed as the “alien other,” an artificial and not belonging in Thai society.

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300 This new citizenship law is also applied to their children, who were born prior to the implementation date.
301 The Lawyers Council of Thailand’s Human Rights Sub-Committee on Ethnic Minorities, Stateless, Migrant Workers and Displaced People; the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand; and Thammasat University’s Faculty of Law, for instance.
5.2 *Kon Am Mi Mong*: The People without a Country

The insurmountable problems the stateless people have confronted with and the injustices they have been struggling against seemed to be the main issues I had heard during interviews or while I was having daily conversations with the villagers. In light of this, Kamhker—who knew somewhat about my research, said to me one day, “Wherever you go in Ruam Chai, people will mention these issues to you. I guess you would probably get bored of listening to stories about citizenship request.” Since the lack of citizenship is the central problem of the village, most people thought that my study was solely concerning citizenship matters. Some even mistook me as a spy sent by the government to get “deep” information, which would be used as a tool to deal with individuals who had had citizenship granted unlawfully. The possible reason for this misconception might be the fact that on February 5, 2002 the DOPA revoked the citizenship of 1,243 people in Mae Ai—Chiang Mai Province’s district near Thailand-Myanmar border—on suspicion that they were registered as Displaced People with Burmese Nationality prior to the naturalisation and card-granting processes. The DOPA believed those people gained citizenship unlawfully with the help of corrupted local officials (Ekachai 2005:1-2). For that reason, as I observed during the very first months of my fieldwork, key informants and villagers in general were fairly cautious and rarely mentioned the statelessness and citizenship issues.

Among a great deal of stateless people in Ruam Chai, I found that Jawmlern is remarkably au courant with regulations and procedures related to the naturalisation petition. Besides, he is the most active resident in terms of requesting citizenship not only for himself and his family members, but also for his stateless fellows. His advocacy and the position as the (former) president of Ruam Chai Civil Society brings him tasks as the village liaison and other several important bureaucrats from time to time regarding

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302 [kon:4-’am2-mi:4-məŋ4].

303 After a series of protest, DNA tests, as well as a fighting through the justice system, on September 8, 2005 the Supreme Administrative Court demanded Mae Ai District give the citizenships back to the claimants. On the same day, however, the chief of DOPA announced that for a national security reason the villagers would get their citizenship back, according to the command of the Supreme Administrative Court, only if their Thai citizenship documents are approved by Mae Ai District.

304 He got Thai citizenship in January 2006.
problems with and requests for naturalisation. For example, Jawmlern has liaised with a member of parliament, a senator, a secretary of the Council of National Security, and the former prime minister (Thaksin). Jawmlern, therefore, could be regarded as a guru in the matter of village-level statelessness alongside his rich information on the village history and Tai culture. Interestingly enough, he is the first person who mentioned to me the term *kon am mi mong*, which literally means the people who have no country. At times, he uses the term when referring to himself and other Tai people who belong to nowhere and have to live their lives as the stateless people. As he resentfully stated, “*kon am mi mong* are not welcomed by any country. I feel like destiny determines us to become solitary people.”

According to data surveyed by the DOPA in August 2008\(^3\) (see Table 4), Ruam Chai’s total population was 7,878. This number comprised 2,329 people that have Thai citizenship, and 5,549 non-Thai people. Among the non-Thais are 199 people whose citizenship has been identified as Chinese while most of the rest of the people are the Tais, who have been designated to fall into any category of the four non-citizenship statuses discussed earlier. Please note that the village non-Thai residents also include many people whose status is defined by the government as *khon tang dao* (aliens). Having such a great number of the stateless people could lead to problematic issues, which were raised to me by Kamhker:

Ruam Chai has been developed rapidly amid the exploitation of limited resources on the mountains. The government keeps thousands of people in this restricted place. If they can’t go out, how are they going to survive? [...] A district governor or related persons seem to pay less attention to this problem. Besides, we really can’t ask for help from them because we don’t have Thai IDs [citizenships]. This is a sensitive area. The authority would keep an eye on any person who tries to take a stand.

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\(^3\) The data has not been officially disseminated yet. With help from a friend working at a district office in North Thailand, I got this confidential data in early October 2008.
Table 4 Ruam Chai population divided by citizenship (August 2008).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Citizenship</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thai</td>
<td>1,114</td>
<td>1,215</td>
<td>2,329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Thai</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>2,789</td>
<td>2,561</td>
<td>5,350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>3,998</td>
<td>3,880</td>
<td>7,878</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DOPA, Ministry of Interior.

5.2.1 The Survey and Classification of Non-Citizenship Statuses in Ruam Chai: The Power of the Thai State, a Disorganised Operation of Government Staff, and a Non-Neutrality of Local Leaders

My fieldwork shows that although the displaced Tais in Ruam Chai have been registered under the four non-citizenship statuses, they are less likely to associate their identity with their official “brands” designated by the Thai authorities. Instead, they seem to distinguish themselves by referring to the colours of their cards: pink, blue, green, and orange. This categorisation of non-citizenship statuses reflects the “technology of power” or “biopower” (Foucault 1998) the Thai government employs to manipulate its subjects, which has operated as a crucial mechanism in creating Thailand as a nation state, taken for granted as an ethnically and culturally homogenous geo-body (Keyes 2006b:103; Pinkaew 2003b:157).

The first survey done by the Department of Public Welfare (DPW) dates back to 1976. The target groups of the survey were the hill tribes. Upon the completion of the survey, the DPW issued only a document specifying their ethnic background and other information to the locals. After 1976, the village population increased to a great number as a result of migrations of people from both the Shan State and other frontier zones in northern Thailand, and because of the arrival of Khun Sa’s army. One year after the Loi Hkam Battle in 1983, the second official survey was conducted, and the data was then transmitted to Mae Chan District.\(^{306}\) Upon request by Mae Chan District, the DOPA sent

\(^{306}\) At that time Ruam Chai relied on Mae Chan District.
its officials to Ruam Chai to register and determinate the “Displaced People with Burmese Nationality” status to the village residents, who subsequently were granted pink cards.\textsuperscript{307}

Between 1990 and 1991 another survey took place in Ruam Chai to determine status and to issue “Highlanders” (blue) cards to people whose ethnicity was classified as any group of the nine major hill tribes. Not only did the hill tribes—who were previously surveyed and registered by the DPW in 1976—show up to complete a survey form and to have blue cards granted, but the Tai who had already been provided pink cards, and those had been surveyed in 1983 and not yet been granted ID cards were also participating in this event. As a result, masses of Tai people had been issued both pink and blue cards.

Recalling those days, Jawmlern criticised such an ineffective operation of the government staff.

Actually, the pink cards were valid for six years. Once they got expired, the [Mae Fa Luang] District had no power to issue the renewals. The District had to wait for a command from the Department of Provincial Administration. Without a valid card, villagers who went to Mae Chan or Mae Sai for business always got charged because they couldn’t present a valid card to police officers. Later on, officials came to Ruam Chai to conduct a survey and to issue blue cards to Highlanders. A lot of Tai people, whose pink cards were expired, rallied to get the blue cards [despite the fact that they are ineligible]. Some years later, the blue cards got expired, and once again the officials didn’t come to renew the cards in time. Shortly after that, government staff got here to renew the pink cards, and so the villagers rushed to have their pink cards renewed. This caused a huge confusion. […] In my opinion, this is a failure in duty of the officials from the Department of Provincial Administration and related government agencies. They didn’t know if who is hill tribes, and they didn’t really take this matter serious. Whoever requested for having a Highlander status determinated, they [officials] always accepted their requests.

After the survey of Highlanders and the granting of blue cards during 1990 to 1991, the authority sent its officials to the village a few times (once every six years or so after the expiration) to renew the cards.\textsuperscript{308} During the first blue cards renewal, villagers were strictly required to hold only one card. That is to say, if one decides to keep a pink card, the blue one will be cancelled automatically, and vice versa. Because most Tai people thought that

\textsuperscript{307} Saimong said the DOPA is in charge of surveying and granting cards to those classified as “Displaced People with Burmese Nationality” while Mae Chan District is in charge of doing the same for those classified as “Highlanders.”

\textsuperscript{308} Pink cards were renewed four times already.
the pink cards were issued prior to the blue ones; if the Thai government has a policy to naturalise the stateless people, pink-cards holders should be given first priority. As a result, a lot of Tais chose to retain the pink cards. Meanwhile, there are numerous Tai villagers who intentionally and unintentionally decided to keep their blue cards.³⁰⁹

However, it was reported that numbers of people had still kept both cards, but one of their cards was revoked when discovered by the authorities, eventually. As Jawmlern pointed out,

The problem is that villagers didn’t tell or show officials that they have two cards. Although profiles and information of such persons [who have two cards] were well recorded in a database, if the officials don’t have that database at hand or if they have it but they didn’t compare two sets of profiles and information [by the time the villagers were interviewed], it’s pretty difficult for them to know whether villagers have two cards. Anyhow, Mae Fa Luang District has the two separate files for the Displaced People with Burmese Nationality and the Highlanders. When persons [who have two cards] contact the district for certain business like informing the birth of their children; if they request the district to add a name of their children in their temporary civil registration for Displaced People with Burmese Nationality [who hold pink cards], the district will check the files. Once they found out the truth, the file of the Highlanders [who hold blue cards] of those persons would be cancelled [or vice versa].

Apart from the aforementioned surveys of Displaced People with Burmese Nationality and Highlanders, there were two other surveys conducted in the village in 1993 and 1999 for the Illegal Immigrants from Myanmar and the Highland Communities, respectively. Wansai, an orange-card holder, said that some Tai villagers whose status was determined to be that of the Illegal Immigrants from Myanmar, in fact, used to live in Ruam Chai, especially in Pawk 5. Later on, they—family members of soldiers serving the SSA—were allowed by the SSA to cross the border to reside in Peing Hpa. Having lived in a poor

³⁰⁹ I was informed that there were a great deal of Tai people who were surveyed and registered in 1983 and they did not have pink cards issued. When government officials came to Ruam Chai to survey and determinate status to Highlanders, they were a part of that survey and received blue cards. Thus, during the first blue cards renewal, they only had their blue cards renewed because they do not have pink ones. Please note that, although they have blue cards, they are not recognised as “Highlander” because their original ethnic backgrounds were recorded in a temporary civil registration as “Thai Yai.” This excludes certain cases that—intentionally and unintentionally—misinformed the officials that they are Hill Tribes. As a result, they are recognised as “Highlander,” and—like members of the nine major hill tribes—they need to request to have Thai citizenship by following the same regulations as the hill tribes.
condition without any job, they, therefore, moved back to Ruam Chai. Along with those who unlawfully entered Thailand after March 9, 1996, they were assigned the “Illegal Immigrants from Myanmar” status by the Thai authority. Regarding those who were registered as Highland Communities, after the survey it appeared that this non-citizenship status was comprised of both people who entered Thailand before and after October 3, 1985. As discussed earlier, only the former are considered the legal immigrants, and their descendants born in Thailand are eligible to become naturalised.

From the above discussion, it could be said that Thai state’s surveys of non-citizenship statuses, particularly the one conducted during 1990 and 1991, demonstrates the eagerness of the Tai to be officially recognised as well as the Thai state’s unorganised and mismanaged surveying process. This circumstance not only happened in Ruam Chai, but also in other villages throughout the country. With respect to the inefficient operation of the government staff, Jawmlern told me that the staff who surveyed and issued cards to villagers are officials from the DOPA in Bangkok, and not from the district. As a result, there was more likelihood for them to face great difficulties and to make mistakes in conducting the surveys because of a language barrier; and more importantly a lack of knowledge in ethnic identity, birthplace, as well as the migration history of local people.

Above and beyond the comment on the enterprise of the state representatives, villagers also spoke about the lack of neutrality of their leaders. An anonymous informant from Pawk 10 said that during the survey of the Highlanders many Tai residents had asked the first and former kamnan to guarantee that they were hill tribes, but he refused to do so. Having been requested by his entourage, however, their made-up hill tribe ethnicity was certified by the kamnan. His contradictory behaviour of honesty in duty and discrimination has become a negative memory for many Tai residents in Ruam Chai. As Kamhker’s father shared the story with me, he had heard the former kamnan saying that he is not willing to assist the Tai people in the naturalisation process with the worry that once they got Thai citizenship, it would be difficult for him to manipulate them. The story told by Kamhker’s father concurs with that of Sukanya, who clearly pointed out “He [the first

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310 Administratively, “kamnan” is the head of a subdistrict. Because Ruam Chai is the biggest village of Thoed Thai Subdistrict and it is the seat of Thoed Thai Subdistrict Office, its village headman, therefore, not only plays a role as a political leader of Ruam Chai Village, but also of Thoed Thai Subdistrict.
kamnan] said [if the Tai people got citizenship] they would be intelligent. So, it would be better not to help them. Just leave them that way.” Sengmong, an elderly Tai Khuen resident in Pawk 8, told me the same story, but he provided more details.

The former kamnan said “don’t help the [Tai] Khuen to get Thai citizenship.” An official, who issued an ID card, asked me which card I will keep. I replied that I’d like to keep the blue card with a Thai Yai as my ethnicity. The kamnan told the official not to allow me to keep the blue card, or else I would have gotten Thai ID card [nationality] by now. He did say so. He may now feel sorry for what he had done to us. He’s been paralysed for six years now, and he can’t see anything. […] It’s the result of his karma. He wished his son had become the chief of the O Bo To. Who else’s going to vote for him. We don’t have Thai cards [citizenship], so we can’t vote. At last, the Akha won the election, and has become the chief of the O Bo To Ruam Chai.

The former kamnan handed over his power to his right-handed man instead of his son, who is less influential and less popular among the locals. Unlike his ex-boss, the present kamnan has become aware of the necessity for the Tai to become lawful Thai citizens. Hoping to get more supporters in the next kamnan election, he has encouraged the Tais to become naturalised. Equally important, those naturalised Tais could be potential voters for his ex-boss’s son in the next election for a chief of the O Bo To.

5.3  The Displaced People with Burmese Nationality: A Vulnerable Identity of the Tai

We don’t want to be Tai of Burmese nationality.
(interview with Jawmlern, January 17, 2006)

The classification of non-citizenship statuses by the Thai state indicates that not only is it “a significant mechanism of political and cultural incorporation and the transformation of ethnic diversity, or non-Thai identification, into the modern Thai nation” (Pinkaew 2003b:170), but also a contradictory marginalisation. That is to say, on one hand, people might have been marginalised by being hindered, depowered, alienated, or pushed out to live at the edge of the society. On the other hand, people might have been marginalised

311 Interview on February 25, 2006.
from being absorbed to the core of marginalisation process and having their cultural needs and identity ignored. In other words, the more the people partake in the process, the more they have been marginalised (Anan 2005:179-180).

In the case of both illegal immigrants from the Shan State and those born in Ruam Chai, the Tai people are treated as the “alien other” and are classified as particular non-citizenship statuses to be detached from the Thai people and to be excluded from being Thai people. Because a great many of them are Thai language illiterate, they have difficulties in getting the right information on regulations and policies related to their status by themselves, and the probability of being denied such necessary information from the authorities is relatively high. Therefore, they have no choice, but to depend on a “marginal way of getting information about their marginality” (Vail 2007:12) from their Tai fellows such as the kamnan, Saimong, and Jawmlern. At the same time, they also are drawn into the marginalisation process, which is ingeniously operated in government-owned schools. Thai values, thoughts, beliefs, as well as worldviews are directly and indirectly transmitted through Thai—the national language—to young Tai generations. Besides that, a high-ranking soldier that gave a talk on rights and roles of Thai civilians to stateless Tai children at the Summer Camp in 2005 could be considered as a good example of how young Tais in Ruam Chai have been socially marginalised. With such praxis, their consciousness of “being Thai” has been developed little by little, but somehow—without the Thai citizenship—they have never been legally recognised. Such political marginalisation, which, according to Rigg (2003:150), is one of the major causes making ethnic minorities in Southeast Asia become marginalised people.

The Thai Government’s decision to label the Tai people as “Displaced People with Burmese Nationality”—an aspect of the contradictory marginalisation—was stemmed from the idea that the Tai people unlawfully migrated from Mong Tai or the Shan State. The Shan State is currently considered under the jurisdiction of Myanmar, which makes the Tai people “autonomous immigrants” from Myanmar and a delicate political situation. In fact, both in historical and sociocultural dimensions, the Tais are more likely to be opposed to the Burmese for the Burmese are invaders in their perception. The Tai, along with other ethnic minorities in the country, have also suffered the Burmese military regime’s oppression. Nonetheless, research conducted by anthropologists from Thailand’s
Thammasat University indicates that, although the Tai people in several villages in Maymyo area have adopted negative attitudes towards the Burmese, and even have sayings such as “Don’t want the Tais to become the Burmese, don’t want the Tais to befriend with the Burmese, and don’t want the Burmese to enter the village,” hostility or sour relationships between the Tais and their Burmese neighbours have never really existed. The “Burmese” that the Tais abhor or are against, thus, primarily refers to the Burmese junta as well as their officials (Sumit et al. 2002:13). As Heo-ngern indicates the way in which some group of the Tai avoid associating with the Burmese authority, “Formerly, the [Tai] people in Kengtung area never wanted to have Burmese ID cards.”

In spite of having been under Burmese sovereignty for over six decades—since the Burmese junta broke the Panglong Agreement—the Tai people have always called their homeland “Mong Tai,” the country (or the land) of the Tais. For that reason, it is deeply painful for them to be designated “Displaced People with Burmese Nationality.” “Not even a single Tai person likes the term,” says Sengmong. It could be said that the arrival of the Thai officials to survey and provide a status to the Tai immigrants in Ruam Chai generated lightheartedness as well as disappointment, right after they learned that they will have to be called by such a term. As Saimong states,

They didn’t have IDs or any kind of papers. So, they’re very happy when the [Thai] authority sent its staff to register and give them IDs. Anyway, knowing that they will be called by the term consisting of Burmese citizenship, villagers said, “we are not Burmese. We are Tai!” Somehow, we had no choice but accept it because a decision was made by the authority. Well, they don’t like it at all. Even when they lived in the Shan State, they never admit that they are Burmese.

Likewise, Jawmlern expresses his opinion on this matter.

Since I received the pink card for the Displaced People with Burmese Nationality, I never like the term “Burmese” at all. Neither do other villagers. Regardless of a history, language, and everyday life; the Thai Yai have no link to the Burmese. We Thai Yai are not the Burmese. They and we are different ethnic groups. Why do they add “Burmese” to the term? It’s all right if they call us “Aliens from the Shan State.” To associate us to the Burmese is really upsetting.

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312 Maymyo, literally May Town in Burmese, is currently known as Pyin U Lwin. Its location is approximately seventy kilometers northwest of Mandalay. During the colonial period, the city served as the British military post and later hill station.
The Tais hope that they would be able to reside in Thailand legitimately and to be naturalised some day. Yet, because of the illiteracy or limited knowledge of Thai language as well as the need for IDs, the Tais have no alternatives but to bitterly accept their non-citizenship status as the “Displaced People with Burmese Nationality.” However, this is not the case for Jeumharn who contested the state power by choosing to have Highlanders status instead.

I don’t like the term from the very first moment I saw it. When I was asked to choose between the pink and blue cards, I decided to take the blue one. Having the blue card [for Highlanders], at least it could make me feel like I’m still a Tai who lives in the highland. That’s what I think. […] Most old generations of the Tai didn’t know much about this. They couldn’t read or write Thai. So, people believed the [former] kamnan when he told them to take pink cards. But I took the blue card because “I’m Tai and I don’t have Burmese citizenship!”

While most Tai people are unhappy with the nationally-sensitive term to which the Tai were designated, a Tai scholar and journalist like Khuensai views this issue not so serious as the question of why certain groups of hill tribes, who entered Thailand after the Tai immigrants, got Thai citizenship before the Tai people.

There are no Tai people [either] from Loi Hkam313 or anywhere else pleased with such a term. Though we don’t like it, we can’t do anything because it’s the government’s decision. It’s been a while, and now we get used to the term. As long as we can live here and have jobs, if they want to call us that way, just let them do it. Anyhow, there’s a thing that we don’t really understand. Why did some groups of people [i.e., the hill tribes] who had come to Thailand after us gain citizenship before us? We’ve been here for over thirty years, but we still don’t have Thai citizenship.

Owing to the fact that “none of the Shan [Tai] who fled Burma [Myanmar] consider themselves as belonging to Burmese nationality” (Pinkaew 2006:87) as well as the reason of the convenience in speaking, it is common for the displaced Tai people in Ruam Chai—and anywhere else in Thailand—classified in this category to simply identify themselves as “pink-card holders”314 or phu plat thin—the “displaced people”—as a substitute to their official status title. Despite their compliance with the state’s classification and exclusion,

313 Khuensai usually calls the village “Ruam Chai” and “Loi Hkam” interchangeably.
314 Or blue, green, and orange-card holders for those in other non-citizenship statuses.
the designated label does not bring them any privilege. Rather, it turns out that these people fall into a whirlpool of marginalisation and discrimination. The only possible way to escape from being “kon am mi mong” is to acquire a Thai identity card, a crucial hallmark of Thai citizenship.

5.4 Thai Identity Cards and the Challenging of the State Power

To the displaced Tais in Ruam Chai, Thai ID card or “bat (card) prachachon (people/citizen)” as widely called in the country is important for several reasons. First, and most important, Thai ID card could make them officially Thai. As Hpalong—a well known and respected elderly man in his early eighties from Pawk 2—who always proudly identifies himself as a Tai person, claimed, “If I have a Thai ID card, I will [legally] become Thai.” With such official papers, they would no longer have to fear of being threatened or exploited by police officers at check points while leaving the restricted area for some business in the town of Mae Sai, the town of Mae Chan or nearby places. This gives them freedom of movement, just as their Chinese and hill tribe counterparts always do, to leave Thailand for studying or working abroad. As Yawthkam noted, “Many villagers said that a Thai ID card is more precious than a first-prize lotto. In their eyes, to have the Thai ID card is to have a new life for they can go anywhere they want to and they need not to be afraid of anything. Besides, they won’t be unfairly treated by their employers.” Meanwhile, Kamhker views the Thai ID card as a great opportunity for young Tai generation to access to higher education.

Yawthkam plays a vital role in the Tai Num, yet she has no Thai ID card. So, she gets stuck here. She can’t attend any sort of training in Chiang Mai or Bangkok. Well, our village doesn’t want a great development project from the government. It’s all right if the government doesn’t bring a high education up here. We just need ID card, rights, and permission to go down. With that, we can travel to other places to work to support families and ourselves. From that point, if we have enough funds, we could take a leap towards a higher education.

315 By the time of an interview, February 17, 2006, Yawthkam had a status “Displaced People with Burmese Nationality” (a pink-card holder).
Unlike Yawthkam and Kambkher, Jarmhker, a pink-card holder, seems to focus on the personal benefit of having a Thai ID card. She embarrassingly said that she had never been to Bangkok, and her travelling experiences were limited only to the upper part of the northern region. Given these reasons, she regards the Thai ID card as a “laissez-passer” that will allow her to fulfil a dream of travelling across the country.

To have Thai ID card—or in other words, Thai citizenship—is paramount to them. Therefore, a number of villagers try to challenge state power, which is marginal at the edge of the country. That is to say, instead of surrendering to their destiny, they choose to exercise “agency” in the face of statelessness by embracing outlawed conducts in their acquisition of Thai citizenship.

The first tactic used by stateless people is a “subrogation.” Among those employing this strategy—mostly well-to-do Chinese—are some of the Tais born outside Thailand and illegally entered the country prior to March 9, 1976. These people, designated with pink cards, are unqualified to apply for Thai citizenship. Their non-citizenship status as “Displaced People with Burmese Nationality” could be shifted to only an “alien” status if an official request was made. As a result, some unqualified people would rather take a risk by paying money to hill tribes such as the Lahu and the Akha for replacing members of the hill tribes’ families—both those who are still alive and those who passed away but their deaths have never been reported to the authorities—whose names appear in temporary civil registrations and blue or green cards. Once the deal between buyers and sellers was done, with assistance from either certain powerful village persons or district officials, they assume the identity of the persons whose names appear in the documents and go to the district office to apply for Thai citizenship.

The second strategy conducted by some displaced Tais is “ethnicity switching.” Based on an anonymous informant, whose family has lived in Ruam Chai for over thirty years, his father told an official that his ethnic origin is Wa instead of Tai when the authorities came to the village to survey and determine the status of the locals during 1990 and 1991. To the question of why his father abandoned Tai in favour of Wa as his and the family ethnicity, he replied, “My dad said the Wa is a hill tribe as well.” It seems that his

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316 In the perception of most Tai and Thai people, the Wa are notorious for producing and trafficking drugs. The Wa are also considered as invaders of Tai territory.
father has a misconception about the term “hill tribes” as, in fact, in Thailand the Wa are not officially recognised as a hill tribe and they are not included in the nine major hill tribes either. If his father had picked one of the nine major hill tribes as his ethnic background, he, altogether with all his family members, would have been naturalised according to the Cabinet resolution previously discussed. Apart from the aforementioned reason, this informant explained, “At that time, a drug problem wasn’t so serious. The leader [the first kamnan] suggested that if my dad tells the authority that he’s Thai Yai, he might be in trouble or might later be deported.” On that account, all members in his family are registered as Wa in Thai official documents. Interestingly enough, none of them adopted a clan name, a customary practice by the Wa; they have a Thai last name instead.

The anonymous informant also describes his feelings about having ethnicity switched in the official documents, “It’s pretty conflictual for me to give up my real ethnicity for another one. When I encountered government officials or travelled to border areas, I sometimes felt uncomfortable for being stared at as Wa. Honestly, I really hate that, but what can I do? It’s too late.” At present, although he holds a blue card, he is hopeful that the Thai government would grant him and his family members citizenships some day. “This year [2006] some people of Wa [both real and fake] ethnicity happened to have Thai citizenship granted. This is a good sign for me because in the past, those registered as Wa had difficulties in applying for citizenship.”

The above case is an example of the Tais who have replaced their ethnicity with one of the nine major hill tribes for the benefit of citizenship acquisition. Although the locals might know individuals who employ this tactic, they are inclined to keep it a secret from outsiders.

5.5 The Making of the Thai Nation, Nationalism and the Dichotomic “Thai Yai” Discourse

Despite the fact that the ideas of “nations” and “nationalism” have been formed in the Western society since the 18th century, they “became central to people throughout the world” in the 20th century (Huntington 2005:107). In what is now the modern nation called Thailand, it is believed that the two concepts were introduced to the Siamese court since the reign of King Mongkut (Rama IV, 1804–1868) as a response to the pressure of
Western expansionism that came into existence in the region around the late 19th century (Pinkaew 2003b:161; cf. Cohen 1993:196). The arrival of the aforementioned two ideas is one of the factors resulting in the replacement of the name “Siam”317 by “Thailand” in 1939, seven years after the conversion from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy, in the reign of King Prajadhipok (Rama VII, 1893–1941).

During the period of absolute monarchy, particularly after the completion of demarcation of the borders between the Siamese “geo-body” and its Western-colonised neighbouring nations in 1908—late in the reign of King Chulalongkorn318, there was the emergence of a process of collective consciousness of the Thai people. This process, however, came to prominence in the reign of King Vajiravudh (Rama VI, 1881–1925), who gave precedence to an idea of “Thainess,” which was based on “the shared national heritage of the Thai language, Buddhist religion and loyalty to the ruling Chakkri monarchy” (Pinkaew 2003b:161).

Therefore, it could be said that the creation of “Thainess” in this era was significantly influenced by “monarchical nationalism,” or “elite nationalism” in Wyatt’s term (2003), which has its essence as follows:

The heart of nationalism under the absolute monarchy is that everyone could become Thai people regardless of race [ethnicity] or language. However, to be a real Thai person both physically and mentally or not we need to consider whether that person is loyal to the monarchy, the country, and Buddhism. In this sense, the difference in race [ethnicity] is of no consequence in the making of “Thainess” to the people of Siam. (Anonymous 2008:6)

After the decline of the absolute monarchy in 1932, however, monarchical nationalism, which fundamentally regarded a monarchy as the focus of loyalty, was superseded by an idea emphasising chat319—a “nation”—as the most crucial entity. This changeover also led

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317 Although the Ayutthaya Kingdom was referred to as “Siam” or “Sian” in historical documents recorded by the Chinese, Europeans, as well as those in neighbouring kingdoms; the term “Siam” was not officially recognised as the country’s name until the reign of King Mongkut (Anonymous 2008:5).

318 The making of the given borders had started since the reign of King Mongkut.

319 The Thai term “chat” is derived from the Sanskrit/Pali “jāti,” which means, “that which is given at birth” (Keyes 2006b:105). However, in the Thai context, the word “was initially used to mean people who share a common language and culture, and subsequently came to mean a national, political community or nation” (Pinkaew 2003b:161).
to the notion, which holds that Siam is the country or nation of the Thai people. For this reason, the original country name was substituted by “Thailand” whereas the residents of this nation are collectively called “Thai,” and their nationality was changed from “Siamese” to “Thai” (Anonymous 2008:6).

In addition to the modification of the country name as well as the collective ethnicity and nationality, in the 1930s the military government determined Thai to be an official language used in the compulsory educational system. This could be viewed as an effective instrument employed by the Thai state to promote the study of the national history in schools as well as to diminish a sense of ethnic distinction among its multi-ethnic population. The state-designated lingua franca, moreover, would allow the majority of people in the country to begin “to think of themselves as being members of a Thai nation, no matter what domestic language they spoke or what local traditions they followed” (Keyes 2006b:105). According to Pinkaew (2003b:161), the institutionalisation of the Thai language is a part of “the military government’s project of national assimilation” specially imposed on individuals of Chinese origin, who during the reign of King Vajiravudh were stereotyped as “a threat to the Thai nation” (Pinkaew 2003b:161). The given assimilation project was undertaken in coexistence with the policy of national integration of indigenous people (Keyes 2006b:106).

It could be deduced from the above circumstances that, therefore, the concepts of “Thai nation,” “Thai people”, and even “Thainess” were deliberately invented as a basic ideas of nations and nationalism, which became apparent since the reign of King Mongkut. In other words, in pre-modern Thailand, the conceptualisation of “Thai” as a nation did not exist (cf. Wijeyewardene 1994). An “imagined community” (Anderson 1983) perceived as “Thai” is, in fact, as Keyes points out, “a product of a politics of culture closely linked to the building of modern states and the shaping of national identities” (Keyes 1995b:136). Besides that, he proposes transnationalism as another cause of the Thai ethnic and national community.

[T]he recognition of kinship among (some) Tai-speaking people is a product not of objective linguistic or ethnolinguistic characteristics but of ethnic and national process activated first by the creation of modern nation-states and then by the recent intensified flow of people, goods, and information across the boundaries of nation-states. (Keyes 1995b:137)
The “nationalism” concept substantially reemerged in the regime of Plaek Phibunsongkhram (1897–1964), an ultranationalist leader who redefined the notion of “Thainess” and expanded a realm of the “imagined” Thai community, which embraced not only domestic residents, but also Tai-speaking people beyond Thai political borders (Keyes 2006b:106). During the Second World War, under the concept of “Thai race,” Phibunsongkhram promoted a national campaign called the “Great Thai Empire,” which ambitiously aims to include “all the people of Thai stock, wherever they may be settled, into a single State with Siam as its nucleus” as Crosby points out (Keyes 2006b:106). At the same time, with backing from Japan, he also undertook “the campaign for a return of the lost territories” (Ivarsson 2008:60), which led to Thailand’s seizure of “lost” lands in Laos and Cambodia by France and some parts of the Shan State—Kengtung and Mongpan—by Britain (see Wyatt 2003). Furthermore, to accomplish his nationalist ideology, Luang Wichit Wathakan (1969)—influenced by Thai race studies of Western scholars (Keyes 2006b:106)—was appointed to write a history of the Thai race. The crux of the “invented” national history underlines shared kinship and origin of the Thai/Tai in different localities, and a scattered migration of the Tai after the Chinese invasion. Despite the discontinuity of the Thai nationalist campaigns since the surrender of Japan in 1945, Pan-Thai-ism still has a place and plays a vital role in academia. Since the 1980s, ethnic groups—both within and outside the country—assumed to have Thai/Tai background have drawn enormous attention from Thai scholars, and it has “led to an extraordinary amount of linguistic, ethnological, and historical research about people subsumed under the rubrics of “Tai” ” (Keyes 2006b:107).

Since the Second World War onwards, ethnic homogenisation still remains a crucial ground for the establishment of the Thai nation. Alongside that idea, the Thai state has initiated a reverse direction of nation building by utilising ethnic categorisation as a mechanism to detach non-Thai people from Thai ones (Pinkaew 2003b:161). The first-ever official survey of hill tribes in the late 1950s best exemplifies such a strategy. Additionally, due to problems regarding countless immigrants, who illegally crossed Thai frontiers from neighbouring countries and elsewhere as discussed earlier, the non-citizenship statuses

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320 Unlike Phibunsongkhram’s nationalism policy, although the Kingdom of Siam used to expand its power and territory to nearby kingdoms, it never intends to bring Tai-speaking people in those places to be under the same political unit (Wijeyewardene 1990:49).
classification project has been implemented to embody the non-Thai. In terms of ethnic uniformity, it is noteworthy to say that the Thai state has attempted to unify ethnic identities of residents from a wide range of cultural backgrounds by imposing the word “Thai” on their ethnicity. As Wijeyewardene indicates,

[T]here is constant pressure to stress the “Thainess” of the citizenry. Malays are “Thai-Islam or “Thai-Muslim”, the Lao of northeastern Thailand are “Thai-Isarn”, and the rather derogatory use of “Lao” for the inhabitants of north Thailand was replaced early this century by the terms “Thai-Yuan” and “Lannathai,” neither of which has much currency among the inhabitants (except academics), who prefer to call themselves either “Thai” or “Khon Mùang”, the “people of the müang”. There is also a move to have the hill people think of themselves as Khon Thai-chaw khaw, perhaps to be translated as “hill Thai”. (Wijeyewardene 1990:68)

5.5.1 The Dichotomisation of the “Thai Yai” Discourse

“Thai Yai” (Bigger Thai/Thai Proper–Tai), an analogical ethnonym to “Thai Noi” (Lesser Thai–Thai) that primarily refers to Tai-speaking groups in the Shan State as well as those who have lived in Thailand since ancient times, is a discourse significantly invented in the Thai society. As already discussed elsewhere in this dissertation, the Tai people in the Shan State do not identify themselves as “Thai Yai,” and most Tai residents of Ruam Chai whose motherland is the Shan State did not welcome the use of the term until they stepped onto Thai soil. Regardless of origin background, Tai children have been familiar with the term since they were very young. They are more likely to use “Thai Yai” than “Tai” or their Tai subgroup ethnonyms in daily life.

Scholars prefer to make a specific distinction of the Tais—both those living in and coming from the Shan State and (native) Tais in several parts of the country—by their subgroups such as Tai Yai/Tai Long, (Tai) Khuen, and (Tai) Lue. The public and Thai authorities in particular always verbally and textually classify the Tai people as “Thai Yai.” Because the term is determined and recognised by the Thai state, as demonstrated in government documents, it eventually becomes an official self-reference of the Tai. Under a

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321 Although the term “Thai Yai” may have emerged since the Ayutthaya period as it appeared in the record of Envoy Simon de la Loubère from the French court, looking from the perspective of nation building and nationalism, its present meaning has been recognised and widely used since the Second World War.
nationalism campaign, the manipulation of Tai ethnicity by the state, in reality, is not only apparent in Thailand, but also several other countries. For example, a designation of “Dai” to the (Tai) Lue in China, and a redefinition of Tai-speaking groups in Vietnam (Pichet 2004:108-109). This situation is also clearly found in Myanmar where more than one hundred ethnic groups are present, yet only eight groups are officially recognised by the ruling military junta as “major national ethnic races.” Among the recognised groups are the Tais—with a numerous subgroup—who have been put under the same ethnic umbrella—the “Shan.”

The discourse on the “Thai Yai” could be considered from two opposite poles. One aspect of the discourse highlights that the Thai Yai, both in the Shan State and Thailand, whose forebears came or were captured and brought to the country since ancient times, have close ethno-cultural links to and share the same ancestors with the Thais. Also, the magnificent richness of Thai Yai culture has been praised by the public and promoted by authorities as seen from festivities (e.g., Poi Sang Lawng) organised in northern Thai cities such as Mae Hong Son, Chiang Mai, and Chiang Rai. The opposing discourse is on Thai Yai immigrants, who fled from the Burmese regime’s oppressive rule. In the latter discourse, these immigrants are viewed by both the Thai government and society as civilians of Myanmar, who embrace Burmese nationality. Worse than that, the Thai state is inclined to presume that many of them have engaged—directly and indirectly—with Tai armies against the Burmese military regime.

Within the domain of this dichotomic discourse, the term “Thai Yai” is a beneficial mechanism employed by both the Tai people and the Thai state. On one hand, the Tai immigrants in the Ruam Chai and elsewhere in the country make use of the term as a *supra-ethnicity*, which encompasses all Tai subgroups, when interacting with authorities and people outside their group, especially the Thais. The Tai people also use the term for justifying their existence in Thailand as they usually claim—considerably supported by an oral tradition and a national history (Niti 2004:8-9)—that “the Thai Yai and the Thai Noi are brothers.” That assertion is reflected in Hakhker and Peunmong’s viewpoints, respectively.

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322 This conviction, hence, gave rise to the “Displaced People with Burmese Nationality” as discussed previously.
Elderly people said that “our” Thai is younger brother, and the Thai Yai is elder brother.\textsuperscript{323}

In the old days, actually the Thai Yai and the Thai Noi were brothers. We’re from the same family. I can’t remember all details. What I know is that they’re the Laos, the Thais, and the Thai Yai. Thai Yai is the oldest, the Thais is the middle, and the Laos is the youngest.

There is a further application of the term in generating the identity \textit{Khon Thai Chuea Sai Thai Yai}, literally “Thai people with Thai Yai origin.”\textsuperscript{324} Jawmlern is a concrete example of the Tai, who has attempted to portray this constructed identity aside from his original one. As he puts it, “I see myself as Thai with Thai Yai background. Although I don’t have Thai citizenship, my mind tells me that I’m Thai. […] We are Thai. We live in Thailand. Thailand isn’t made up of only the Siamese Thai.” When having both formal and casual conversations with him, Jawmlern normally presents the given identity as revolving around Tai-Thai tight-knit connections, linking Tai history to Thai and Lan Na histories, mentioning a story of Tai settlement in Mae Hong Son, emphasising the similarities of Tai and Thai cultures, and asserting Tai and Thai loyalty to the same monarchy.

The history has it that the Thai share a bloodline to the Thai Yai. We have the same heroes such as King Mang Rai\textsuperscript{325}, King Ram Khamhaeng the Great, and King Naresuan the Great. […] The Thai Yai people have taken shelter under royal protection since 1856. Historical evidences indicate that Chan Ka-le or Phaya Singharat, Mae Hong Son’s first ruler, is of Thai Yai origin. So, the Thai Yai is a native of Mae Hong Son. […] Thai and Tai cultures are quite similar. We have several things in common such as a history, ways of life, and a king. We’re the same \textit{chuea chat} [race/nation]. The name “Shan” the Burmese have called us is actually from the word “Siam.” Thus, in a broad sense, we are Thai likewise although our accents, groups’ name, and traditions differ in a small degree.

On the other hand, as a nationalistic instrument, the term has been used by the Thai state to \textit{include} first and then \textit{exclude} the Tai. During the Second World War, the Thai Yai people

\textsuperscript{323} Apparently, by using the given possessive adjective “our” in his statement, this key informant seems to include himself to be a part of the Thais, despite his “Displaced People with Burmese Nationality” status.

\textsuperscript{324} Certain cases use \textit{Khon Thai Chuea Sai Tai} (Thai people with Tai origin) instead.

\textsuperscript{325} King Mang Rai established Chiang Rai, and later founded Chiang Mai as the centre of Lan Na Kingdom. It is believed that his mother is the daughter of the ruler of Chiang Rung (Jinghong), the centre of the (Tai) Lue.
from the Shan State were drawn to fill up an ideological image of the Great Thai Empire. Later on, the term Thai Yai is used to basically refer to illegal Tai immigrants, who subsequently were designated different non-citizenship statuses. In other words, the Thai Yai who were once highly regarded as “elder brother” of the Thai Noi are now “strangers” or “aliens” in the latter’s eyes. This process is described as “the other of the same” (Shalardchai 2002: 157). That is to say, in certain situations, for example, the era of the Second World War, we (the Thai) treated “them” (the Tai) as “we.” In other circumstances, we take “them” as the “other.” This could be seen from the exclusion of Tai people categorised as “non-citizenship statuses” (non-Thai) from the Thais. As a result, in the Thai society the displaced Tai and other groups of people with non-citizenship statuses are always perceived as the “alien other;” and no matter how hard they try to ethnically, culturally, and historically relate themselves to the Thais, the fact is that they have never been recognised due to a lack of citizenship and (in some cases) an illiteracy of central Thai.326

A sense of alienation deeply felt by the Tai people in the field site is illustrated by the following two situations. One day at the Summer Camp in 2005, a colonel who was in charge of the Thai Army’s Mae Fa Luang–Mae Chan Area Development for Security Project (located in Pawk 11) was invited to give a talk to children. The topics of his talk ranged from the territory of Thailand to the origin of Thai people, the settlement history of the Thais, the loss of Thai territory to Western powers, Thailand’s neighbouring countries, drug problems, and, interestingly, rights and roles of Thai civilians. After his presentation, a leading member of the Tai Num made a critical comment to me on the way the colonel tried to instill a sense of “Thai things” in the Summer Camp participants, the majority of whom technically are non-Thai. This member also said, “Didn’t he realise that most of us still suffer from a lack of Thai citizenship?”

Another situation occurred in the same year at Poi Pi Mai (Tai New Year) fair which took place at the Central Field. Tai children were recruited to sing “Rak Kan Wai

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326 Thai people in Thailand, who generally speak central Thai, are usually made to believe that they are more superior to the Tai speakers in the Shan State or Xishuangbanna, the Laotians in Laos, including the Thais speaking local Thai dialects (Shalardchai 2002:160).
Thoed” (Let’s Be United)\(^{327}\) on the stage. Tai Num members like Htiseng and Yawthkam, who also participated in that “grand show,” admitted that it was a moment of high spirits while they sang that song—the content of which underlines the solidarity of Thai people in the nation despite their ethnic and cultural distinctions—yet, at the same time they had such sharp painful feelings inside. “I’m kind of resentful. Although we deeply love the [Thai] nation, religion, and the King; we have no idea what we are singing that song for because we don’t have a citizenship … we are not Thai,” says Yawthkam.

To wrap up this part, Thailand, as a modern nation, has been created since the late 19\(^{th}\) century as a result of the spread of colonialism. Over time, the building of Thai nation has always concentrated on the homogeneity of its multi-ethnic “subjects” under the vision of “Thainess.” Additionally, at a certain point in time, the Thai nation was nationalistically defined on the basis of the idea of “Thai race,” which resulted in an ambitious attempt to expand its “ethnic and national community” (Keyes 1995b:137) beyond the borderlines. Thai nation-building proceeded by carrying out not only an integration policy, but also by means of classifications that differentiate the Thai from the non-Thai people. Such power-embedded relations along with the existence of and interplay between the Thai Yai discourses, which have been manipulated by the Thai state and the Tai people, would eventually allow the term “Thai Yai” to be incorporated into the thoughts, beliefs, everyday practice, and the very ethnicity of the Tai.

5.6 An Increase of “Thai” Consciousness and an Attachment to the Thai State among the Tai People

No matter how the idea of “Thainess” and the dichotomic discourse on “Thai Yai” might have an enormous impact on the ethnic identity of the Tai people in my research village, a sense of being Tai persons continues to exist as demonstrated in the following cases. To begin with, Sengjing shared with me a story of her son, who, along with his classmates, took an educational tour to Wat Ka Kham. Upon arrival at the temple, his teacher asked students to get into two groups, “Thai” and “Tai.” It turned out that her son, despite his

\(^{327}\) See the translated, excerpted lyrics for this song in Chapter 4.
Thai citizenship\textsuperscript{328}, joined the Tai group instead of the Thai one. The reason why he aligned himself with his Tai fellows is “He knows that his parents are Tai. So, he told his teacher that he’s a Tai person,” says Sengjing. Next, to the question of what you would say if someone asks, “Do you identify yourself as Thai or Tai?”; unhesitatingly, Jarmhker replies, “I would say I’m Tai. I’m not ashamed for being Tai. Even though they cut my flesh and bones into pieces, every single bit of my body belongs to Tai.” Finally, to the same question, Hkamnawng—a woman working as an administrative staff at Thoed Thai Subdistrict Office—answers, “I’m just Tai. I can’t change it, right? Although I’m Tai, I was born on Thai soil. I grew up here. I learned Thai language. I attended Thai schools. Speaking of which, I could consider myself as a Thai person. Anyhow, it’s just different because I’m still Tai.”

Nevertheless, a tendency to present their identity as \textit{Khon Thai}, a Thai people, has drastically increased among the Tai residents in the field site—particularly those who have been given non-citizenship statuses. As Jeumharn maintained, “I’m now Thai, but I don’t have an [Thai] ID card. I’m still a Highlander [blue-card holder]. […] Deep down inside I feel like I’m Thai, who hasn’t got a citizenship yet.” Aside from Jeumharn, all Tai children born in Thailand to parents of different non-citizenship statuses think of themselves as Thai. This could be observed from the cases of Wansai and Htiseng. Although Wansai is designated with the Illegal Immigrant From Myanmar status just like her parents, she said “I’m Thai even if I’m descended from the Tai. I was born in Thailand. The [Thai] King said that those who were born in Thailand are Thai, didn’t he? That’s what I think.”\textsuperscript{329} Meanwhile, Htiseng, who holds the Highland Community status (green card) admits that his hope to be naturalised is minimal, yet he regards himself as a Thai person by giving the reason that “I’ve resided in this village for a long time. Besides, I was born in Thailand and I’ve learned in a Thai school.” Voices from the two youths conform Sukanya’s points of view. “Tai students here look at themselves as the people of Thailand.

\textsuperscript{328} He got Thai citizenship at birth according to “jus sanguinis.” His father used to have a blue card and later got Thai citizenship granted before his son was born.

\textsuperscript{329} On February 18, 2001, His Majesty the King gave a royal speech to the Cabinet that “Those people have existed in the country for a long time, but they are not real Thai yet. They were born and they have lived in Thailand, yet they have not received benefits from being Thai. We need to treat them fairly. If nobody cares for them, they would feel neglected by us. And this would affect the national security.” (Pantip 2004a).
They do everything the same way our Thai students do. [...] When it comes to a citizenship issue, they become unhappy because they question who they really are. This is an inferiority complex of my students.”

Parallel with the increased awareness of being Thai is an intense sense of loyalty to Thailand that the people in this border community have developed over several decades. As far as I am concerned, almost none of the Tai locals regardless of their birthplace—the Shan State or Thailand—long to go back to their motherland even if Mong Tai would gain independence from Myanmar in the future. This is in contrast to Jarmtawng, a famous 28-year-old female Tai immigrant and activist in Thailand, who claims, “What the Thai Yai and other ethnic groups have dreamed of is to go home, to earn a livelihood in their motherland, to learn their language and history, to have a free movement with no fear of the Burmese, and to determine their own lives and future (Wandee 2005:107).” The following standpoints of informants of both gender and a wide range of age support my findings.

**Yawthkam:** I asked my parents whether they hope to return to the country of the Thai Yai. They said they have no problem to go back there because they’ll never get a Thai citizenship somehow. For me, I’m not going back for sure because I was born here. If I got a Thai ID card, I would be in Thailand. It’s okay to visit relatives and places once in a while, but not living there permanently. I feel more comfortable and secure living in a democratic country like Thailand. If I move there [after our freedom is back], we’ll never know when the Burmese will occupy our country again. In fact, although many people have very little hope to be naturalised, they don’t want to go back. They said Thailand is peaceful.

**Htunjing:** No, I’m not going back. I’m living in Thailand, and I’ll die for her. When our country was in turmoil we ran away. It’s dishonourable to go back when in the future we would have our country back. Some adults may return though, but their descendants, I think, won’t be pleased to come along because they have freedom here to do things they want to do like learning Tai history. Think back to when we were in Myanmar. We didn’t have freedom at all. We couldn’t study what we want to study.

**Jarmhker:** Someone asked me if I would move to Mong Tai when our country is back. I said to the person that I won’t go there because I’ve lived in this “pattern” all my life. Anyway, I’d love to see how it feels to visit the land of my ancestors. For the time being, I only see my future in Thailand.
**Jawmlern:** I won’t go back. Many elderly people migrated from the Shan State said that although Thailand is not their birthplace, she will be the last land of their lives. Plus, our children were born here, and they are Thai people. We [older generations] are now Thai, too. We’re loyal to the Thai nation, Buddhism, and the monarchy. So I hope the Thai government to differentiate us from the Thai Yai in the Shan State. Most Thai Yai that [illegally] migrated to Thailand and that escaped the danger from Myanmar to live in this peaceful country don’t want to go back. We hope our kids will get Thai IDs some day. Being here doesn’t mean that we forgot Tai fellows back home. We always think of our brothers and sisters, who have been oppressed by the other nation.

Of the four research collaborators listed above, it would seem that Jawmlern has attempted to assert the rightful existence of himself and other Tai people in the village by claiming the right of citizenship for those born in the Kingdom, and by linking their Thainess to the supreme Thai institutions. At the same time, for his sake and for the sake of other Tai fellows, he has tried to characterise Tai immigrants in Thailand as a different group from the Tai in the Shan State. It might be possible that he looks at me as a representative of the Thai government, who could spread his words to the authorities and the public, although in the village my presence was recognised as an anthropologist, a graduate student, or a teacher. As a result, an alignment of the Tai to the Thai state as well as the construction of Tai ethno-national identities, which are pertinent to that of the Thai people, were usually brought to the fore in conversations.

### 5.7 Current Citizenship Situations in Ruam Chai

Regarded as a “new-year gift” from the Thai government, 13,827\(^{330}\) stateless people were granted Thai citizenship on January 2, 2006. Among the new Thais are 283 people—mostly Tai persons—from Ruam Chai. To the state, this event is considered as the biggest citizenship approval in the Thai history (Wattana 2006). To the Ruam Chai people, besides the Loi Hkam Battle in 1982, this is going to be another most remarkable memory for

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\(^{330}\) Of this number, 4,272 were immigrants to Thailand while 9,555 were children born in the country. Those who got Thai citizenship this time were made up of 2,279 Vietnamese, 3,175 Burmese, 6,363 Highlanders, 704 Nepalese, 28 Tai Lue, 287 tribal people, 978 Chin Haw, and 13 from Former Malaya’s Chinese Communists (currently known as “Thai Development Participants”) (Wattana 2006).
having the first ever group of Tais who got Thai citizenship as Jawmlern stated. Previously, there might have been some Tai people who had citizenship given through illegal means, namely subrogation and ethnicity replacement discussed earlier. A special case was Bunhtawng—Htiseng’s uncle, who was a champion of a national bodybuilding tournament and later got citizenship in order to be able to represent Thailand at an international bodybuilding competition abroad. “Because he lacked Thai ID card, he was brought to meet phulak phuyai 331, who later paved the way for him to get citizenship,” Yawthkam explained. This occasion, nevertheless, is the first time that the Tai people, whose ethnicity is classified as “Thai Yai” not something else (e.g., Akha and Lahu), were naturalised according to the Section 7 bis. of Nationality Act 1965 revised in 1992.

Regarding the mass citizenship approval, Interior Minister ACM Khongsak Wanthana, one (and the last) of the interior ministers under the government directed by Thaksin, pointed out that he and his staff carefully and systematically carried out inspection and confirmation processes, which took place on three levels of administration: district, provincial, and national (Wattana 2006). Interestingly, Khongsak granted citizenship to a great number of stateless people at one time after he had taken the position for only five months. His decision, of course, brought about doubt to some parties because in the past, despite Cabinet shuffles during the Thaksin Era and former governments, the Thai state never gave the green light for naturalisation of thousands of stateless people before. To respond to public suspicion, he explained:

It is my policy to grant nationality as quickly as possible, as I consider it has a huge impact on people’s lives. Many children and young people face difficulties in their studies and work without Thai nationality, even though they were born in Thai territory. […] To qualify for citizenship, applicants have to show that they do not pose any risk to national security, could be of benefit to the Kingdom and paid taxes. […] I am pretty sure that all of them are qualified to be Thais. In the worst case, if a mistake has been made in the approval processes, we should be able to trace it. (Wattana 2006)

331 The term means senior or person of mature age. In this context, however, it refers to an important person or high-rank official.
332 As far as I heard from some informants, each stateless Tai people, who has an income and lives in Ruam Chai is required to pay an income tax of six-hundred baht per year.
He also revealed that, in the past, naturalisation processes were relatively delayed since previous ministers, particularly those of Thaksin’s government, had their own agenda and measures in solving the stateless problem. All of them, however, took national security as the most important issue, which caused hesitation in approving citizenship to the stateless people (Wattana 2006).

One week after the announcement of the biggest citizenship approval, Yawthkam and I went to the Subdistrict Office to observe the lists of people who recently received citizenship, which were posted on a notice board in front of the Office. The information on the board allowed me to learn that in Mae Fa Luang District, approximately six hundred people became naturalised. Of this number, almost half of it are Ruam Chai residents. I also discovered that the majority of the successful citizenship applicants are the former blue-card holders with a handful of the former green-card ones. Yawthkam, although glad to see the names of her friends and neighbours on the board, could not hide the sadness in her eyes. She later expressed her disappointment in words, “Why did latecomers [to Thailand] get citizenship before people who arrived here a long time ago?”

To complete the historic citizenship-granting process, on January 23, 2006, Mae Fa Luang District organised an ID card granting ceremony—chaired by Chiang Rai Governor—to the people at the hall in the Chinese School. Afterwards, the grantees from three subdistricts of Mae Fa Luang District took an oath to be Thai people to the King and the Queen’s pictures, government officials, and local religious leaders from different ethnic groups. Not only did the event create happiness for the naturalised Tais and the whole community, and bring hope to people waiting to be legal Thai citizens; but it also led to a criticism of the authorities, which granted citizenships only to elderly people and children, not to individuals in need, that is to say, persons in the workforce. Villagers also commented that there is not a single Tai person identified as Displaced People with Burmese Nationality (pink-card holders) who had received Thai citizenship.

A few months after I finished the last phase of fieldwork around the end of February 2007, however, over one hundred Ruam Chai people became naturalised. The Tais becoming Thai citizens at this time comprised people of blue, green, and pink card categories. The last group included Yawthkam and her Tai Num fellows and other Tai people from different pawks, especially those from Pawk 5, in where former soldiers of
Khun Sa and their families reside. In this regard, Mae Fa Luang District held a ceremony at the Chinese School to hand out ID cards to the new Thais. Yawthkam said that she and Tai Num comrades had a dancing performance called “Hao Pen Tai” (We are Tai) at the ceremony. Yawthkam did not tell me whether she and her group chose this show on purpose. Yet, in my view, the performance has significance in that it could be interpreted as a clever assertion of their original identity (Tai) over the new one (Thai) in front of representatives of the Thai state.

While many displaced Tai immigrants have become Thai citizens and many more villagers would receive Thai citizenship in the near future, there is very little hope of being naturalised for some people. Among others are Htiseng and Wansai. Htiseng was registered as Highland Community (green-card holder) like his parents and other family members. He was born in a small village in Mae Sai District without a birth certificate. Although Mae Sai is specified as his birthplace in a temporary civil registration, he is ineligible to apply for citizenship because he lacks a document confirming that he was born in Thailand. The only possible solution to this problem is to visit Mae Sai and find some people, as guarantors, to confirm his birth. However, his parents, who originally came from Tachilek in the Shan State, left Mae Sai a long time ago and they no longer have contacts in that village. Therefore, it seems to be difficult for him to find guarantors.

Identified as Illegal Immigrant from Myanmar (orange-card holder), Wansai—a Tai Num member living in Pawk 5, was born in Thailand without a birth certificate just like Htiseng. Nevertheless, her situation is more serious than Htiseng’s in that the Thai government does not allow orange-card holders to apply for Thai citizenship or even an alien status. “I need to have a Thai citizenship like other people. When I see my friends who got citizenship, I’m really jealous of them. I’ll wait until I have it anyway,” says Wansai.

Even though the implementation of the Nationality Act 1965 (No. 4), as amended in 2008, would make naturalisation applications and citizenship approvals much easier and realistic, several problems still remain. That is to say, a lot of people are unaware of the new law as a result of insufficient public relations. They are also unknowledgeable about

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333 Yawthkam told me that she does not have a birth certificate. Because she was born and grew up in Ruam Chai, she has no problem to request local respected people to be guarantors of her birth.
rights of stateless people, including citizenship application procedures. As Htiseng said “I know very little about this matter, so I have no idea how to deal with it.” Furthermore, looking from a different perspective, not many relevant officials are clear enough about the newly-implemented citizenship law, therefore, not only they are unable to provide eligible stateless people with the correct information, but some of them are reluctant to assist the stateless people to get through citizenship-granting processes. For these reasons, since the implementation of the aforementioned act in early 2008, of over three hundred thousand eligible people across the country, only about five thousand cases became naturalised (Wiphawi and Chiraphong 2009:21).

Apart from the previously discussed Nationality Act, the Thai state—through the operation of the DOPA—formerly introduced the 2005 Ministerial Order on Civil Registration Regulations designated for Aliens. This Order was cancelled and substituted by the 2008 Ministerial Order on Civil Registration Regulations and Rates of Fees designated for People without Thai Nationality (PTN). The conflict between the newly implemented Ministerial Order and the 2004 Regulations of Central Registration Bureau regarding the Issuing of ID Cards to PTN and the 2004 Regulations of Central Registration Bureau regarding the Issuing of ID Cards to PTN who receive special permission to live in the Kingdom led to the introduction of the 2008 Regulations of Central Registration Bureau regarding the Issuing of ID Cards to PTN. The commencement of the new Regulations has resulted in the replacement of old ID cards, of whose colours depended on the non-citizenship status of the people each belonged to, by light-pink ID cards for all groups of registered non-Thai individuals. In fact, the PTN ID cards project has been carried out upon the emergence of the two 2004 Regulations, of which not every status of registered non-Thai people—for example, the khon tang dao (aliens)—has their ID cards substituted.334 As of now, most Ruam Chai’s Tai residents from all non-citizenship statuses, including those from other statuses are PTN ID card holders. Among others is Sengjing, the former green-card holder, who got a new ID card in July 2007.

Like Thai national ID cards, on the front of the cards, in addition to photo and other essential information, there is 13-digit personal number—issued by the DOPA—of which

334 Presently, those who registered as khon tang dao are required to hold both a khon tang dao card and a PTN ID card.
the sixth and the seventh digits signify holders’ non-citizenship category (e.g., Displaced People with Burmese Nationality, Highlanders, Thai Lue, Chin Haw Immigrants). The title of non-citizenship status is also printed on the card, below the 13-digit personal number. In
the view of one anonymous DOPA official, whom I had interviewed on the telephone in
late September 2010, the distribution of PTN ID cards has been conducted in hopes of
putting and end to a clash of real non-citizenship status and a card type in possession. For
example, some people are Chin Haw Immigrants, who theoretically are supposed to hold
yellow ID cards, but they were registered—by mistake or on purpose—as Highlanders,
who would be issued blue (or some other colours) ID cards instead. The 2008 Regulations
of Central Registration Bureau related to Issuing ID Cards to PTN require registered PTN
whose ages fall between five and 70 to have such cards. For those who already have old ID
cards, they could make a request to have a PTN ID card at a district or local registration
office of their location.

In closing, the situation of stateless people has been a major problem in Thailand
for several decades. Owing to somewhat permeable borders, sound politico-economic
situations, including humanitarian policy and practice, the country has attracted a great
number of people from neighbouring countries, particularly Myanmar, where ethnic
minority groups have been oppressed by the military regime. For national security reasons,
the classification of non-citizenship statuses came into existence as a mechanism employed
by the Thai state to deal with the masses of illegal immigrants and unregistered native
ethnic groups. According to my fieldwork, at least four of 18 official non-citizenship
statuses designated by the Thai state are found in Ruam Chai. These designated categories
are the Displaced People with Burmese Nationality, the Highlanders, the Highland
Communities, and the Illegal Immigrants from Myanmar. Among the aforementioned four
groups, only people born in Thailand and registered as any of the first three non-citizenship
categories are qualified for naturalisation following the fourth version of the Nationality
Act 1965, which has been in effect since late February 2008. Meanwhile, instead of
surrendering to be given an alien status—upon request—and to be treated as the “alien
others,” some unqualified people contest the Thai state powers by using illegal means to
acquire citizenship. Despite the considerable benefits of the new law, many eligible
individuals still live their lives as non-Thai citizens due to certain barriers, especially the state’s ineffective distribution of information as well as officials’ insufficient knowledge about the given act.

Parallel to the Thai state’s nation-building project is the construction of Tai ethno-national identities. These identities have been formed with reference to the “Thai/Thainess” and “Thai Yai” discourses, which were invented in the context of Thai sociopolitics, and the latter has become a popular self-reference among the Tai in Thailand nowadays. The two discourses have been employed not only by the Thai state to include its subjects in and exclude the “alien others” from the imagined community, but also by the Tai people in the creation of their new identity, the “Thai with Thai Yai background.” The Tai people also construct certain identities in response to non-citizenship statuses, some of which are linked to Burmese (i.e., the Displaced People with Burmese Nationality), given to them by Thai authorities. In spite of the well-maintained Tai identities and boundaries in their everyday practices as discussed in Chapter 4, a feeling of being “Thai people” including a loyalty to the Thai nation-state among the Tai residents of Ruam Chai has increased and become stronger due to the Thai state’s effective imposition of the “Thai/Thainess” ideology on its residents from a wide range of ethno-cultural backgrounds. A sense of “Tai” nation and a bond with Mong Tai, nevertheless, remain in the Tai people’s minds, as we shall see in the next chapter.
Chapter 6
In Search of the Nation

Whenever I cross the border to Peing Hpa, I feel that I set my feet on the Tai soil. (interview with Nummong, February 4, 2007)

The last two chapters of this dissertation focus intensely on village-based ethnic dynamism in Ruam Chai; and take a broader view of constructed ethno-national identities in the middle of power-embedded relations between the Tai people and the Thai state over the controversial issues of being non-citizens and being a stateless people, respectively. The level of analysis for the current chapter, however, is beyond the village and the Thai territory. That is to say, it is fundamentally devoted to an exploration of circumstances in one of the most crucial events of the Tai, the National Day, which takes place annually at Myanmar’s politically and militarily marginal zone. Following that, the relationships between the Tai in Ruam Chai and their fellows on the other side of the frontier are discussed in detail. Prior to a presentation of these points, I will shed light on a place that serves as the scene of the story, including key issues with regard to the “border” in this context.

6.1 Peing Hpa: The Village of Political Exiles on a High Mountain in the Shan State

Located precisely on the borderline drawn across a mountain locally called “Loi Kaw Wan,” “Peing Hpa”—literally means as high as the sky—is a relatively large village established and protected by an insurgent army widely known as Shan State Army-South (SSA-S), which is commonly and simply called “Shan State Army (SSA).” I was

335 In my view, the inhabitants of Peing Hpa could be described as “exiles” or “asylum seekers” because they are the exiles from their original homeland, which is under the Burmese authority. Although to many people, Peing Hpa is located in the Shan State, which is a part of Mynmar, the authority in this area is the SSA—not Myanmar’s military junta.

336 The SSA-S, which is active along the Shan State’s southern border with Thailand, is different from the original SSA, an inactive insurgent army based in northern area of the state, and hence become known as Shan State Army-North (SSA-N). Please note that the SSA mentioned in
informed that the village name had been chosen from several names, created and proposed by the village seniors. The current name was chosen by Kawnjeun, the commander of the SSA, Loi Kaw Wan Base. Interestingly enough, I have found that the Tai in Ruam Chai, with no firm rules in regard to this situation, alternately refer to this village as either Peing Hpa or Loi Kaw Wan. Nevertheless, Peing Hpa is usually applied to the village itself. Meanwhile, Loi Kaw Wan has a broader scope of meaning: specifically, the name indicates the village and the nearby Tai army base as a unit. Due to its high-altitude location, Peing Hpa is also referred to as “Nuea Doi” (Thai) or “Ner Loi” [nəː’-lɔːj] (Tai), which literally translates as “on top of the mountain.” The Tai in Ruam Chai describe their act of travelling from their village to Peing Hpa as “to go up there.” Equally interesting, the people of Peing Hpa are more likely to call the Tai village (Ruam Chai) on the Thai side “Loi Hkam,” the original village name.

Because of a short distance which is approximately thirty kilometres and a well-paved, asphalt-surfaced road, except the last ten kilometres of the route, it is not too difficult for the Tai in Ruam Chai to make a trip to Peing Hpa. Although motorbike is the most popular vehicle villagers use to reach there, a pickup truck or a songthaew is usually used to take the mass of people to Peing Hpa when there are important meetings and other events. Among individuals usually travelling between the two villages is Muling (Mohkeo’s son)\(^3\), who always drives his pickup truck loaded with foodstuffs and other kinds of essential products to Peing Hpa. Additionally, as a coordinator appointed by the Village Committee of Peing Hpa, he occasionally takes both Thai visitors and foreigner visitors—from NGOs as well as charitable organisations—to the village on the mountain.

From what I learned from the local people, there are two ways to get to Peing Hpa from Ruam Chai: the main route and the shortcut. The main route is cut through Phaya Phrai; a multi-ethnic village of the Akha, the Hmong, and the Chin Haw, which has been developed and promoted as Chiang Rai Province’s new location for tea plantations. This road is in a better condition than the shortcut, and cars and trucks to run on with ease.\(^3\) At

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\(^3\) They live in Pawk 2. See details in Chapter 3.

\(^3\) Despite a car-friendly condition, people who are willing to cross the border to Peing Hpa need to park their cars and any other types of vehicle on the Thai side.
the end of the road locates the Thai checkpoint (hereafter will be referred to as “the checkpoint”), which stands adjacent to the bamboo fence of a Thai outpost, guarded by a few Thai soldiers who keep their eyes on movements across this “unconventional” pass. Meanwhile, the narrow, steep, unpaved way called “Mae Mo Route” shortcut takes one through Mae Mo, the village of the Akha, the Lahu, the Lisu, and the Chin Haw. The only ideal mode of transportation on this locally-known track is motorcycling.

Despite the fact that the main route is safer and more direct, certain Tai Num members and other key informants explained that many people from Ruam Chai prefer to visit Peing Hpa by taking the alternative way because they want to avoid Thai soldiers and a border-crossing process at the checkpoint. Among those who regularly use this route is U-mong339, whose twin sister has taught at Loi Kaw Wan School since 2002. Their father serves the SSA by taking charge of one of the two SSA guardhouses. He himself used to teach at the School for a couple of years before moving back to Ruam Chai. For these reasons, he is by no means a stranger to Peing Hpa, and he is always permitted to travel via the Mae Mo Route. He pointed out that not everyone from Ruam Chai is able to reach Peing Hpa by taking this route, and that only “familiar faces” would be allowed to pass through it all the way. Moreover, as he explained, it is not always easy to take the shortcut. That is to say, at the time when people encounter Thai soldiers who are patrolling the area, they have to cancel their trip or take the main route instead. His information concurs with a story told by Nummong, who often crossed the border to visit and help out his Peing Hpa friends and residents during important events, the National Day in particular. He indicated that although the shortcut is easy and convenient, those who take it must keep in mind not to travel in groups because “this will be too obvious to Burmese soldiers. Their outpost is nearby. Plus, if patrolling Thai soldiers see that, they will accuse us of an offence for this route is actually closed by the Thai army.”

Yawthkam, who sometimes accompanies her father to Peing Hpa, explains why people are more likely to take the alternative route.

Generally, although there are two ways to get to Peing Hpa, most people prefer to take the Mae Mo Route because it’s easy to get in and out [of the border].

339 Tai Num’s former president.
Yesterday [February 7, 2006] this route was temporarily closed. They [SSA soldiers] asked people to use the main pass so that the number of visitors could be counted by Thai officials. Even so, they let my father and me in because they know my father very well. Having passed through the first SSA checkpoint, we encountered another one before reaching the village. At this checkpoint, if they don’t really know you, they’ll never allow you to get through. […] Most people from Peing Hpa, who don’t have an ID card, usually take this way when coming to the Thai side. U-mong’s sister has an ID card, but she always crosses the border via this Mae Mo Route because the main route is farther and it’s more complicated to cross.

In addition to Yawthkam’s explanation, another reason the shortcut is more preferred among the locals is that they could take a motorbike with them all the way to Peing Hpa. To them, this route is much more convenient compared to the main route, where almost any kind of vehicle is prohibited from crossing the border. I discovered this when I went to Peing Hpa with Tai Num members, who had been assigned to decorate a stage two days prior to the 60th Shan National Day in 2007. At the venue for the event, I observed a number of motorbikes of youths from Ruam Chai and some border villages. Those teenagers came to Peing Hpa to participate in a football tournament, one of many activities organised during the National Day celebrations in that year.

Before receiving permission to cross the border on the main route, visitors are required to park their vehicles at roadsides or in parking areas not far from the checkpoint. This rule, however, is not applied to certain persons such as Muling, SSA officials, and Peing Hpa representatives, who have received special permission from the Thai authority to bring their vehicles across the frontier. At the checkpoint, which is always guarded by one or two Thai soldiers, visitors would be asked their name, address, and purpose of visiting. After this process, if their request to cross the border is approved, they will be required to leave an ID card, which will be returned to holders before they cross the border back to the Thai side. In case of group visiting, only few people would be asked to leave their ID cards. For those who are considered “familiar faces” with regularly travel via this route, there is no need to show or leave any ID card.

My first border-crossing experience is a vivid example. With help from Muling, my first trip to Peing Hpa was made one day prior to the 59th Shan National Day in 2006.

340 The 59th Shan (Tai) National Day.
Besides me, other passengers loaded into Muling’s pickup truck. These others included a few Shan Women’s Action Network (SWAN) staff members and some Tai men from other cities. Upon arrival at the checkpoint, the soldier on-duty did not seem to be very strict in monitoring the passengers. He only asked Muling about types and quantity of loaded articles as well as the total number of passengers. Although names of all passengers were asked afterwards, the same officer had not asked us to leave each of our ID cards. In my view, our ID cards were not required because we were accompanied by Muling, who is well known among local Thai officials. However, when I crossed the border to join the Shan National Day celebrations in 2007, a Thai soldier asked me to leave my ID card in three other border-crossings to Peing Hpa. If these trips were led by Muling, it would be very likely that I would be exempt from an ID card requirement.

Having gone through a checking procedure and been granted a permission to enter another country, visitors simply cross the border, which is marked by a relatively crude barricade. At the centre of the barricade displayed a trilingual wooden signboard with the message “Thailand-Myanmar Borderline. No Entry” written in Thai, English, and Tai, respectively. What is striking in my view is not the signboard itself, but the Tai message that appears on the bottom line. Since the Thai state regards this “created line” as the official Myanmar-Thailand border as it is clearly portrayed on the signboard, technically, one of the three languages should be Burmese rather than Tai. Thus, it could be reckoned that, to some extent, the Thai state has acknowledged the existence of the Tai in practical terms of both nation and space. Accordingly, once a visitors’ first step is beyond this barricade, in the perception of both the Tai people and the Thai State, they reach the territory of Peing Hpa, a part of Mong Tai.

Peing Hpa residents barely travel across the border to Thailand, if it is not of the utmost importance, as Jerngharn—Yawthkam’s father—remarked. Most people who commute over the borderline are individuals granted a temporary permission from Thai soldiers at the checkpoint to work, primarily as tea-leaf-pickers, in tea plantations located around the frontier zone. Some Peing Hpa villagers, who receive special permission, also come to the Thai side for a specific business such as to purchase foodstuffs and other essential goods in Ruam Chai. U-mong explains a procedure which Peing Hpa inhabitants have to go through when crossing the border to Thailand.
In general, many people from the village [Peing Hpa] cross the border regularly to collect tea leaves. The border-crossing process isn’t that complicated. They just simply pass the checkpoint. Besides their name, before they leave in the morning and when they come back in the evening, they’re required to write down [their time spent] on a paper at the checkpoint. They also have to tell a soldier at the checkpoint the reason for their trip. Then, the official would allow them to go out. If they want to come down to Ruam Chai, they need a special permit issued by the Thai Yai army [the SSA], who officially informs a soldier at the checkpoint with name(s) and the number of such a traveller(s) in advance. After the traveller(s) pass this checkpoint, they still have to show the permit to an official at Pha Chi Checkpoint. With this permit, the official would allow him [or them] to further their journey. Some of them might stay over night in Ruam Chai because the duration of the visit is clearly specified in the permit.

Replying the question if there is any resident of Peing Hpa—either with or without permission—who tried to escape to other places instead of crossing the border to work in a tea plantation or to do some business in Ruam Chai, Jerngharn points out, “It’s very hard for them to sneak out. Although they may run away to a place as far as Fang and Chiang Rai City, I am always appointed to do the follow-up and get them back. Our undercover agents are everywhere.”

Founded in 2001, Peing Hpa, a village established in the mountains to be a shelter for people in exile, is situated at the altitude of approximately 12 hundred metres above sea level. Most areas of the village are hilly. The largest open space was created by villagers and soldiers by levelling an area in the dusty red soil. This artificial flat area has become the multi-purpose compound of Loi Kaw Wan School, frequently in use for any school or village activity, including the aforementioned Shan National Day Parade. In brief, according to the administration, the village is divided into seven pawks, all of which accommodate as many as three thousand asylum-seekers. Apart from the elementary

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341 When crossing the border back to Peing Hpa in the evening, they need to report to a Thai officer the amount of money they are bringing out of Thailand.
342 Normally, any severely sick person who needs a special treatment at Mae Fa Luang Hospital is always allowed by the SSA or the village headman, who would issue a patient or his/her family member a letter of permission. The given letter would be presented to a Thai officer(s) to receive allowance to enter Thailand.
343 From the border, it is the second and the last checkpoint before reaching Ruam Chai.
344 The name of a town and a district in Chiang Mai Province.
345 Peing Hpa’s population in February 2006. I got this number from an exhibition organised at Loi Kaw Wan School on the Shan National Day in 2006.
school with 20 teaching staff and over three hundred students, the village’s major places include a Buddhist temple, three churches, a hospital, two orphan houses—separately for boys and girls, a textile-weaving building, a kindergarten, a rehab house for drugs, and “jai wan” or a village pillar in Pawk 5. The central area of the village is the school compound, which is the regular venue of important events as well as traditional festivities.

Due to the scarcity of farming land on the mountains and the fact that nearly all villagers lost or did not bring their belongings when fleeing from the Myanmar military regime’s oppression, their living conditions are below par. They live in small crudely-built huts made of materials available in the area—such as wood, bamboo, grass, and leaves of large timber trees. Peing Hpa residents earn a living by growing dry rice, corn, ginger, sesame, and many kinds of vegetables. In addition, several families cut broom-grass and sandalwood and sell them on the Thai side. However, as I was informed by certain key informants, it could be noted that the main career of the people in this village is to hire themselves out as transborder labourers in the tea plantations mentioned earlier. Most, if not all, goods and products consumed in Peing Hpa are purchased on the Thai side, mainly at big Chinese-owned groceries in Ruam Chai, and brought back to the village. As Jerngharn points out, “The people up there depend on Thailand a lot. Rice and many other kinds of food are from Thailand. So is the water. From head to toe, they got things from Thailand, not from Mong Tai.”

The majority of people in this border community came from different parts of the Shan State, particularly that on the east side of Nam Hkong (the Salween). Apart from the Tai dwellers, who constitute the village’s largest ethnic group, Peing Hpa is inhabited by the Akha, the Lahu, the Lisu, the Chin Haw, and the De’ang. Tai Long is the spoken language used by most Peing Hpa Tai residents as it is in Ruam Chai. However, according to Htiseng, the Tai Long accent spoken in this village is “so strong that we [Tai Num members] have difficulty following it. Even when we pay close attention to what they say, we still don’t understand it.” He also expresses an idea of why the Tai in Ruam Chai and Peing Hpa speak differently. “It’s probably because we’ve lived in the Thai society, where mass media has a great impact on the way we speak. For this reason, our Tai [Long] accent

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346 U-mong told me that doctors working at the hospital are “Thai Yai who are very educated. They are sent from the city of Chiang Mai.”
347 Or widely known in Thailand as “Palaung.”
is pretty much different from theirs. When talking to them, if we combine Thai and Tai words in conversation, they seem to be confused. So we have to speak original Thai Yai with them.”

Fig. 29: Tea plantations at the border.

If the limitation of water resources were not a central problem to villagers\textsuperscript{348}, Peing Hpa would be a very good location for settlement not only because of its magnificent scenery, but also because of its temperate climate. As SWAN staff member noticed, this village is as perfect a place as one could expect to establish a shelter for asylum-seekers: it is so close to the border that Burmese soldiers, who are on guard at an outpost not far from the village, are fearful that their attack—by using bombs or other lethal weapons—might inadvertently harm lives or destroy properties on the Thai side. Any damage caused by the Burmese attack would definitely affect the relationship between Thailand and Myanmar.

\textsuperscript{348} Peing Hpa residents are concerned with a limited natural source of water. The only nearby water source on their side is a stream called “Wala.” Therefore, their living relies heavily on water from the Thai side, specifically from tea plantations. Yawthkam said that villagers of Peing Hpa regularly pipe water from the tea plantations’ watering system. “If they [tea plantations’ workers] don’t turn on water, Peing Hpa people have no water to use,” she added.
Locating in a lower altitude with the Burmese military camp close at hand, Peing Hpa cannot be used as a military base in spite of the fact that it is a very good place to live. Therefore, the Tai would be at a disadvantage if under a blitz by Burmese troops, the same staff added.

On top of the increasing number of its population, Peing Hpa residents are now coping with materialistic developments, which have resulted in dramatic changes to the village. As Yawthkam puts it, “Peing Hpa has become more developed. There are more buildings. The concrete temple that you see today is new. The old one was made of wood.” Wansai’s remark also gives vivid details on the changes in the village: “In the past I saw a lot of big trees and wild animals. The village is more growing now; many trees were cut down and those animals are disappearing from the area.”

The developments that the two Tai young women had mentioned are financially supported by Tai communities in Thailand, abroad as well as various NGOs. The latter includes a German organisation called “Health Without Frontier” (HWF). During a visit to Peing Hpa to take part in the Shan National Day Celebrations in February 2007, I met Htun, a Tai male in his late fifties who was born in Namkham in northern area of the Shan State. Having been raised up and completed his education in Germany, Htun moved to Thailand to work for HWF, which has a branch in the town of Mae Sai. Based on his brief explanation, he usually works in Peing Hpa for approximately ten days a month. His duties are to educate villagers on HIV-AIDS and to medically assist those who live with it. Htun said that in this shelter-like village, over ten per cent of all sick people are suffering from HIV-AIDS.

6.2 Border: A Blurry and Compromising Marker of a Nation-State’s Sovereignty

The Thai-Myanmar borderline is 2,401 kilometres in length. An inequitable agreement between the Siamese court and British Burma created this arbitrary land division in the first half of the 19th century. The agreement ended in 1894 (Leng 1980:12). This demarcation not only produces a factitious “line,” which supposedly separates the two nation states—Thailand and Myanmar—but also detaches people who belong to the same ethnic or kinship groups. Prior to the division, these people were native to the marginal
areas of Siam, a “nonbounded kingdom” (Thongchai 1994:74), whose territory was not simply defined by borders in a modern sense. Rather, it principally relied on how far a king’s powers could radiate to. In other words, the more power the king possesses, the bigger his kingdom is. This point is elucidated by Thongchai in his famous book “Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation,”

Siam before the last decade of the nineteenth century was not like “an old axe,” but a continuous, patchy arrangement of power units where people of different overlords mingled together in the same area while only spies were working close to the frontier towns of one another. And those areas far from the center of the kingdom might be generously given away for the sake of friendship. In this case, the border would shrink a bit. It did not matter. In fact, throughout Southeast Asian tradition, as one scholar remarks, “marginal territorial concessions were not viewed as fatal to the kingdom. As long as the essence of sovereignty [the center] was unimpaired, such concessions were a legitimate instrument of policy.”

The sphere of realm or the limits of a kingdom could be defined only by those townships’ allegiance to the center of a kingdom. The political sphere could be mapped only by power relationships, not by territorial integrity. Thus to talk about the frontiers of a sovereign unit—anakhet khopkhanthasima—meant those marginal authorities in the remote townships or those chiefdoms at the margin of the sphere of power rather than the frontier space itself. (Thongchai 1994:79)

In certain consequences, the creation of the border in this region has turned a great deal of Siamese subjects into the “others,” that is to say, the citizens of British Burma (and then Myanmar). Among these “others” are the “Displaced Thai,” as labelled by the Thai authorities, in Tanintharyi Division of Myanmar (Thirawut 2007). The given frontier hinders relationships and coexistence of inhabitants in Tha Ton (in Thailand)–Sop Yon (in Myanmar) area, a geographical-cultural context primarily drained by two rivers—the Kok and the Yon. Prior to the official establishment of the borderline, through this watershed, people from various ethno-linguistic backgrounds constantly socialised, dealt business, maintained traditions, and strengthened kin ties among themselves (Ekachai 2005).

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349 Certain people describe the figure of Thailand in comparison to an ancient axe. The northern, the northeastern, and the southern regions, under this imagination, are thought of as axe head, an axe, and a helve, respectively.


351 Other examples—as a result of the making of other boundaries between Siam and her neighbours, which in the meantime were colonised by Western powers (Britain and France)—are people of Thai origin living in several northern areas of Malaysia, and in Cambodia’s Koh Kong.
Furthermore, the border on the Thai side politically splits a Tai-culture area. The Tai temple in Piang Luang[^352] is a concrete example. The whole space of the temple is politically divided into two quarters. The first part is occupied by the Thai state while the second one is under Myanmar’s sovereignty. In spite of that, a strong sense of kinship as well as ethnic identity of the Tai people on both sides of this artificial line still remains (Wandee 2002).

Although Peing Hpa is located along the same boundary as the cases discussed above, its emergence as a refugee shelter stems from different politico-historical conditions. It was set up purposely by the SSA to host the Tai and people of other ethnic groups, who broke free from cruel and unjust treatment in their home country. Compared to many other villages on the Thai side, Myanmar side, or those which effectively straddle the demarcation, Peing Hpa is relatively new; and there is no trace of any early Tai settlement on its current location. Moreover, despite the fact that it situates in a geographic context touching the officially-acknowledged fenceline of Thailand and Myanmar, as clearly indicated on the signboard on the barricade, its space beyond the checkpoint is claimed by the SSA. This uniqueness allows the identities and culture of the Tai people from Peing Hpa and Ruam Chai to be connected. At the same time, it also enables a border-crossing process to be more practical and flexible than other Tai localities along the same borderline, where their freedom of movement is under Myanmar’s absolute control. As a result, even though a fixed line is drawn on a map, to be practice, the checkpoint—which is viewed as a door to Peing Hpa and to the Thai side—has a significantly high degree of negotiation, as seen from the way in which Peing Hpa and Ruam Chai residents cross the border back and forth with little difficulty. This phenomenon is not new to the locals, as Jeumharn confirms, “It’s been like this since Khun Sa’s time, not just recently. There’s no reason to be worried. It’s quite normal that Thai Yai soldiers up there would come here to buy food and other things.” The similar actions could be noted when observing Thai soldiers at the checkpoint and the adjacent outpost who frequently cross the borderline “to buy food, vegetables, and they sometimes hang out or drink with folks in Peing Hpa. They do this under cover, and they don’t wear their uniforms when visiting the

[^352]: Chiang Mai’s border village, which is primarily populated by the Tai. Compared to other Tai communities in Thailand, it is famous for Tai political movements as well as ethnic identity assertions.
village,” says Nummong. Interestingly enough, such a negotiation would be considerably intense for a few days during the Shan National Day Celebrations, which a massive influx of people from Thailand pass the checkpoint to partake in the event.

Like a number of frontier regions along Thailand-Myanmar boundary, where the usual borderline markers are absent (Wandee 2002:111), the missing checkpoints and missing barricades render the exact position of the border unrecognisable to the general populace. As Yawthkam puts it, “If there’s no [Thai] soldiers on guard, I think that not many people could tell where exactly the borderline is. The two countries are so interwoven and overlapping that the Tai territory could be misperceived as the Thai one.” Her view corroborates Nummong’s statement, “They look like pretty much the same area.”

In spite of the unclear borderline and the lack of permanent barriers such as barbwire, fences or walls; the locals, in fact, have a good sense of the “border.” Hakhker, among the others, suggested that the marker of the boundary is the main road to Peing Hpa. “The border is the road to the village. The south side of the road is in the Thai territory and the north side of the road is Myanmar.” Jerngharn, whose view on the border location concurs with Hakhker’s, elaborates the point, “To be specific, the borderline is around the midpoint of the road. The left side of the [invisible] line is Thailand while the right side of the line is Mong Tai.” With the given borderline, there is a high possibility for people travelling along this road to set their foot, either knowingly or accidentally, on one land and move to another in the twinkling of an eye. “U-mong mentioned this. He said if I walk along the road I would be able to step on both lands,” Yawthkam’s recollection supports her father’s clarification.

Among all of my research collaborators, it would seem that U-mong is the person who provided the best information on the border in his details. Not only did he reveal to his Tai Num fellows and to me an exact setting of the demarcation line—the middle of the road—but also a significant natural landmark indicating the border: the big tree at the entrance to the village. The given spot was an old location of the checkpoint for quite some time. He also indicated that the dividing line was drawn along the ridge of the mountain, one of crucial geographic features employed to “create” the boundary. “If a [water] current

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353 Although the Tais call the land “Mong Tai,” many of them sometimes unintentionally speak of their own country “Myanmar.”
354 The borderline on the given ridge passes through from Loi Kaw Wan to Loi Kaw Mong.
flows down from the ridge onto the right side, it’s the territory of the Thai Yai. Likewise, if a current flows down from the ridge onto the left side\textsuperscript{355}, it’s the land of the Thai,” says U-mong.\textsuperscript{356}

![Fig. 30: Peing Hpa’s main road. The right side of the road is the residential area of the village (Courtesy of Maya McLean).](image)

The two countries’ cutoff point on Peing Hpa’s main road leads me to an interesting observation. Entering the village for the very first time, it was noticeable that at certain parts of the road, a line of bamboo fence—which I thought of as a marker of the border—and other constructions such as the kindergarten and four to five huts came into view on the left side of the road. When I was there during the Shan National Day Celebrations both in 2006 and 2007, it was common to see SSA flags placed along the left side of the road. I also witnessed, in my most recent and last visit to Peing Hpa\textsuperscript{357}, a group

\textsuperscript{355} Phaya Phrai’s rice fields and tea plantations on the Thai side are primarily watersheded by the creeks and streams running down from the ridge of Loi Kaw Wan.

\textsuperscript{356} He explains this by assuming that he turns his back to the checkpoint, and faces the village main entrance.

\textsuperscript{357} February 8, 2007.
of newly-trained Tai soldiers and their trainers on standby for a regular practice or for a military training show at Loi Kaw Wan School Field, specifically on the main road’s left margin. From the above circumstances, it could be said that these Tai entities and bodies are located in the land under the jurisdiction of the Thai state, and thus their presence could be considered as the intrusion into Thai territory; in other words, a “threat” to the Thai state’s sovereignty.

Fig. 31: SSA flags are decorated along the left margin of Peing Hpa’s main road while Shan State flags are placed on the right one.

My scepticism as to why the Thai state permits such practices was eliminated by Jerngharn. He explained that the Thai authorities in fact never allow Peing Hpa residents to have their buildings constructed in the Thai territory. Yet “exception is applied only to old houses and buildings that have been there since the beginning. Further construction is strictly prohibited.” More importantly, according to the same informant, the most crucial rule villagers of Peing Hpa must keep in mind is that “they [Thai state] forbid guns or bombs to be brought onto the Thai side.” This regulation is applied not only to civilians, but also to SSA soldiers. For example, those soldiers mentioned in the former paragraph
were unarmed. In terms of SSA flag-decorations in the Thai domain, I was informed that, under a mutual agreement, the Thai state allows the locals—presumably, led by the SSA—to practise this custom temporarily, only during the time they celebrate the national day.

Owing to an ideal location, which is not too far from Ruam Chai, as well as a relatively high level of border-crossings, the Tai from both Ruam Chai and other areas in Thailand—or even Tais from abroad—have more chances to visit their fellows in Peing Hpa. The signification of this transborder movement of people, however, is not simply a return to the land of the Tai. Instead, it demonstrates a close link between the two communities, which not only brings about a dissolution of the geopolitical boundary, but also a strengthening of a sense of Tai nationalism as well as the construction of Tai identity. To illuminate my argument, an important annual event of the Tai officially known as “Shan National Day” will be examined below.

6.3 The Shan National Day: A Narrative from the Border

On February 7, 1947 the Tai, the Kachin, and the Chin appointed their representatives to attend a conference chaired by General Aung San at Panglong. On the same day, a telegraph sent to them by the British viceroy in Taunggyi indicated that the meeting among saohpas in Taunggyi in March 1946—on the destiny of the Shan States after they gain independence from the British—had created a discontentment to several figures of a Tai political movement, who became aware of the impotency of their saohpas at the given meeting. As a result, the viceroy called for a meeting that led to a resolution to establish the Shan State Council, a body of seven civilians—principally from the aforementioned Tai political movement—and seven saohpas. The meeting also gave rise to the Shan national anthem and the Shan national flag.

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358 A Karen leader also got an invitation to attend the conference, but he could not make it because he was in the middle of a meeting to establish a political union of the Karen. Nevertheless, a Karen representative was sent to the conference as an observer. A Kayah observer attended the conference as well.

359 This conference gave rise to the Panglong Agreement. See more details in Chapter 2.

360 Petty princes. The term saohpa is pronounced chao fa in Thai and sawbwa in Burmese.

361 Formerly, each Shan (Tai) state had its own flag.
The resulting flag (the current emblem of the Shan State) has a background or field of three horizontal stripes in the colours yellow, green, and red. These three colours are representative as follows: Yellow: Buddhism and the complexion of the Tai; Green: the land of the Tai which is fertile and full of natural resources, and equally the Tai people who love peace; and Red: the love for nation and the bravery of the people. Centred over this field is a white circle—symbolically, the moon—which represents purity, being just, and veracity of the Tai. Accordingly, February 7, 1947 “is a defining moment in the record of the Shan history as a modern nation” (Sai Wansai 2006), and is marked as the National Day of the Tai people since then.

Initially known as “Wan Hkur Tai” [wan⁴-ʰkaʰ⁴-taj⁴] or “Wan Jat Tai,” [wan⁴-tsaː³-taj⁴] literally means “Tai National Day,” the day was changed to “Shan National Day” due to the fact that the Shan State is not solely inhabited by the Tai people, but also other ethnic groups, who participated side by side with the Tai in requesting Shan independence. Even so, Ruam Chai villagers are more likely to use the original name and a recent one, “Wan Jat Thai Yai”—Thai Yai National Day—interchangeably. In fact, each year celebrations for the Shan National Day are normally organised by Tai communities across the world such as that in the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan, Thailand, and even Myanmar. But it would seem that there are two places that draw much interest from the public—both Tai and non-Tai—for their capabilities to show military powers. These two locations are Loi Tai Leng⁶⁶² and Peing Hpa (or widely known among the locals as Loi Kaw Wan).

### 6.3.1 The 59th Shan National Day

During the second phase of my fieldwork⁶⁶³ I had a chance to take part in the 59th Shan National Day at Peing Hpa. It was the third celebration of the event since the establishment of the village in 2001. To mark the occasion, a variety of activities were organised; and the ceremony for the opening of a new school building was another crucial programme of the

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⁶⁶² Loi Tai Leng (or “Doi Tai Laeng” in Thai) is a mountain in the Shan State. Its location is close to Mae Hong Son’s Pang Mapha District (Thailand). It is claimed by the SSA and is used as their headquarters led by Lieutenant General Yawd Serk, who also serves as chairman of the RCSS.

day. A few weeks prior to the event, the organiser—primarily composed of Peing Hpa’s respected seniors and high-ranking SSA officers—circulated lik mawk [li:k³-mɔ:k²] or letters of invitation⁶⁴ to many of Ruam Chai’s prominent figures. Among the people who were on a guest list was Saimong. The content in the letter included a schedule and details of different activities. In addition, there was a statement in the same letter asking cooperation from guests not to bring audio and video recording devices, including cameras, to the venue during the event in order to tighten the security. The rule, however, did not apply to individuals receiving permission from the organiser. My crucial means of recording data while “being there” was limited to memorising incidents and what I heard from other attendees, and then jotting down these data on a pocket notebook.

With the generosity of Muling, I travelled to Peing Hpa along with SWAN staff and guests from elsewhere in North Thailand on the eve of the National Day. Owing to the fact that Peing Hpa is under SSA protection, and that its location is next to the Burmese outpost, I was concerned that my security could be in jeopardy if the village was suddenly under attack. More importantly, as an official Thai state representative, to cross an international boundary frivolously without receiving written permission from the government is considered an illegal act and a serious breach in discipline for Thai government officials. I risked my future career attending for the very rich cultural, political, and social information available during such a gathering. The National Day itself, in its infancy at Peing Hpa, is celebrated within sight of a very hostile military’s outpost, the eyes and ears of an oppressive regime. The Shan National Day could vanish literally without notice, perhaps violently. Since I may not have another opportunity to visit Peing Hpa, I felt I had no choice but to challenge the Thai State’s power by risking possible offence as to be able to capture these unique moments.

Finally setting foot on the very land of the Tai, the principal of Loi Kaw Wan School, Senghkam (U-mong’s unidentical twin sister), and a few of her teaching staff who gathered around the village entrance were waiting for our arrival. This gracious group

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⁶⁴ Interestingly, in the letter the phrase “Tai National Day” was put in parentheses after “Shan National Day.” It is thought-provoking that although the term “Shan” has been employed in this context to emphasise that the national day is for every single ethnic group in Shan State, the term “Tai” is more powerful and nationalistic to portray their ethnicity as well as to unite all groups of Tai people as one.
escorted us along the village’s main road to the new school building, which would be used as an accommodation for guests and visitors. The long, one storey concrete school building is alongside the aforementioned multi-purpose compound and opposite a stage specially set up for the event. On the compound between the building and the stage lies the village’s important public sphere. Although it was a late afternoon by the time we got there, villagers and soldiers were still busy with stage decoration, lighting and flagpole installations, food preparation, and sundry tasks. The atmosphere of the school compound was so lively that I could not stop myself from surveying the activities and from having conversations with locals. I also attended an exhibition that was displayed in the first room of the school building. The content of the exhibition included Tai history and culture, Peing Hpa’s general facts and figures, SWAN’s information on Tai migration and the Myanmar government’s relocation project, including pictures of Tai people who were tortured or killed by Burmese soldiers.

The dinner was hosted by the principal in a cafeteria behind the stage. After the meal, Senghkam, who looks cheerful and hospitable and knows about my rapport with Tai Num members, kindly asked her colleagues—Nawhkam and Sengjawmhpna, Tai males in their early twenties—to show me around. The two Tai men are close friends. They have known each other since they were in Mong Tai. Myanmar tyranny forced them to leave their home country behind. Since they are well-educated the village committee appointed them to teach at the school rather than serving in the army. We took approximately an hour to walk around the compound and to have a quick look at some activities in the field. Before the tour came to an end, we dropped by the exhibition room, where students were trying to finish up their work. I showed the two friends my appreciation and then left them to supervise the students on decorating display boards and cleaning the room.

My plan to mingle with local people who were gathering at the ramwong (circle dancing) in the school compound was thwarted by the dramatically dropping temperature and gusty wind that night. At that moment, I completely understood why Sengjing kept telling me to bring warm clothes, as many as I possibly can. She even mentioned an old Tai saying, *lern sam kat ji ji* [lə:šə:n¹-sə:mm¹-kət⁴-tsiː³-tsiː³]—literally, it is terribly cold in the (Tai) third month (February), to demonstrate for me how much more

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365 See details of this form of entertainment in Chapter 4.
cold it is up here in comparison with the cold season in her hometown. For that reason, I went to the room next to the exhibition to go to bed. It took me awhile to get to sleep due to the loud sound of stable rhythmic Tai music from the ramwong outside.

As expected, on February 7, 2006, villagers, guests, and visitors got up very early in the morning to get prepared for participating in or watching a parade. I walked to the Buddhist temple located on the hill in Pawk 5, the starting point of the parade. When I got there, a lot of people in a wide array of vibrantly colourful ethnic costumes were gathering in the temple compound. Regardless of age, gender, or ethnicity; residents from the same pawk got together to form rows in their section, ordered from Pawk 1 to Pawk 7. Each section was led by a pawk headman. At the head of the procession, there were over ten youths responsible for carrying Shan State flagpoles. The flagmen were followed by three young ladies of Lahu, Tai, and Akha origins, who respectively held pedestal trays with folded flags—RCSS, Shan State, and SSA—on top. Interestingly enough, I was able to notice a Tai girl wearing a mixed costume. Instead of wearing Tai dress of her own subgroup, she had combined a Tai Ngen shirt and Tai Mao tube skirt. Even though I did not know whether she wore this on purpose or out of ignorance, when I returned to Ruam Chai I mentioned this to Tai Num members one day. To maintain Tai culture, as one of the group’s missions, they have agreed that a proper way of dressing must be strictly followed, and a right knowledge of Tai dress must be passed on to younger Tai generations.

Approximately at half past seven, the parade travelled at a leisurely pace from the temple hill to the school field, where organised rows of SSA soldiers were at attention. Upon arrival, horizontal rows of people from all pawks faced the stage, whose eye-catching multicoloured bamboo background could be seen from a distance. Beyond the front rows were tables and chairs for a small number of high-ranking SSA officials and a few well-dressed respected senior Tai male figures. At 8:00 a.m., a ceremony of flying three flags, which had been carried by the three girls mentioned in the previous paragraph, was performed; and all participants sang the Shan national anthem afterwards.

*The Tai are the race of the King.*

*The Tai national flag resembles the moon.*

*The national flag is formed with three seams.*

*The moon in the universe brings peacefulness.*

*And lights up in the darkness.*
Our nation is courageous.
We are united.
We are truthful, and honest.

[Shan national anthem, translated by Pinkaew (2006:73)]

Later on, a master of ceremonies invited a Buddhist monk, a senior Tai man, and leaders of the Lahu and the Akha\textsuperscript{366} to deliver speeches. In their presentation, a story of the Panglong Agreement and the birth of the Shan National Day were underlined by the monk whereas Shan State’s traditional political system during pre-British colonisation and the country under the Burmese domination were central issues stressed by the Tai speaker. The last two speakers, the Lahu and Akha leaders, greeted the audience in Tai before speaking to the audience in their own languages.

After the speeches, participants in the ceremonial domain were kindly asked to stand up and orient themselves to the stage, which was located in the north of the school compound. To them, as residing in Peing Hpa and most areas in northern Thailand, the north is the direction of the Shan State’s locality. They then were invited to bow down three times in this direction for showing their respects to the Tai nation, the SSA, and the RCSS. And that was how the Shan National Day ceremony in that year was completed.

During lunchtime, villagers, guests, and visitors had food provided by the organiser. In the meantime I was based at a public relations pavilion, where Senghkam and Numharn, the soldier I had conversation with during his visit to Poi Pi Mai (Tai New Year Festival) in Ruam Chai in 2005, were on duty. Although Senghkam was busy with persuading people to make a donation—for funding this event or supporting different activities of the village and the school in other occasions—and with recording donors’ names and other information, she found the time to introduce me to several important persons such as the Peing Hpa headman. Besides, she introduced me to her father, an SSA soldier, who had been on guard at the venue during the event. Socialising at this spot also allowed me to have words with Jerngharn (Yawthkam’s father), who was called by the organiser to come up here for guarding the venue.

\textsuperscript{366}In Peing Hpa residents with Lahu and Akha backgrounds have their own leaders, who are under the supervision of the village headman.
In the afternoon, while many people enjoyed themselves shopping for local Tai products or gambling, a huge crowd gathered at the school compound to take part in a typical tribal dance. The dance, known as “Ja Khue,” is a tradition of the Lahu, not the Tai. The dance normally takes place as a crucial part of Lahu New Year celebrations, but it is occasionally held to welcome, honour, and express gratitude to their guests. As explained by an elderly Tai male, in addition to its original significance, Ja Khue has been chosen to be one of key constituents of the national day in Peing Hpa as it not only entertains people, but also symbolises the solidarity of residents from all ethnic backgrounds. The participant dancers were clearly comprised of the Tai from both sides of the border as well as members of different ethnic groups from Peing Hpa and Thai villages. Undoubtedly, vivid colours of ethnic costumes made the atmosphere of this circle dance even more inviting. Interestingly, in the afternoon the Peing Hpa headman and several teaching staff of Loi Kaw Wan School, despite their Tai origin, changed their own ethnic dress to Lahu costumes to join the dance with other villagers and soldiers.

For the dance itself, people gathered around a pine tree placed on the school compound and each dancer holds hands with dancers on their left and right. Energetic music is produced by the musicians on minimalist instruments (e.g., a drum and a “lusheng”—a traditional wind instrument made of bamboo and a gourd). Dancers half-jumped and half-walked—in a stable pace—counterclockwise about the pine tree. The number of circles is not fixed; instead, it depends on a number of participants. That is to say, the more people join the dance, the more circles will be created.

The dance continued throughout the afternoon. I spent most time mingling with audience at the outer ring until the arrival of Nummong, who informed me to get ready for departure. On the way back to Ruam Chai, while sitting in the back of a pickup truck—owned and driven by the son of Ruam Chai’s former kamnan, I had an unofficial interview with Nummong and Awnghkam, another passenger from Pawk 1 of Ruam Chai.

Awnghkam, in his early thirties, was born in a small village in the vicinity of Kentung in the Shan State. His family migrated to the northern region of Thailand when he was only one year old. Working in Bangkok, he always visits Ruam Chai during important pois such as Poi Pi Mai Tai and Shan National Day celebrations. For the Shan National Day this year (2006), he went up to Peing Hpa every day to help the local people to make preparations.
Along the curvy and steep road to Ruam Chai, besides informing me on border situations and geographic characteristics in this region, he called to mind the warfare between the SSA and Burmese armed forces in 2002. Seeing that he is somewhat knowledgeable in this regard, and is familiar with the locals in Peing Hpa, I asked him whether he wants to serve the army like many other Tai males do. “I can’t do that. I already got Thai citizenship,” he replied. He paused for a few seconds and said, “Although I can’t serve in the army, I can help or support them in other matters.”

Fig. 32: Ja Khue dance at the 60th Shan National Day in Peing Hpa (February 7, 2007).

Nummong, a young Tai Long male referred to elsewhere in this dissertation several times, was in Grade Eleven during the original field research. He was born in Ruam Chai, and was educated in both Thai and Chinese schools. During the 59th Shan National Day he was a volunteer, who lent his helping hand in conveying necessary equipments from Ruam Chai to Peing Hpa. He also joined a local music band as a guitarist and a singer, and teamed up with his peers who participated in a soccer tournament. Despite his young age,

he is keen on Tai history and many other things, the politics of the Shan State in particular. While I was talking to Awnghkam, Nummong showed a good deal of interest and jumped into the conversation from time to time. Leading up to issues of his birthplace in north of Thailand, Thai education, as well as a perception of Thainess, I asked him whether he identifies himself as “Tai” or “Thai.” “I’m Tai. Even though in the future I might have Thai citizenship, I’m still Tai,” Nummong responded straightaway.368

To me, the above two cases are interesting in that they share “something” in common in spite of the differences in birthplace, age group, and even “nationality.” That “something” is an intense sense of Tainess, which, apparently, cannot be restricted within a particular geopolitical unit. Rather, their nationalistic awareness of what it means to be “Tai” prevails everywhere, and it could be constructed even at the edge of a state or across an international borderline. Nummong and Awnghkam are among many other Tai people from Ruam Chai, who not only devote their time, workforce, and money to make their national day celebrations happen once a year, but also to help their fellows on the other side of the border as much as they possibly can. As a consequence, close relationships between people from the two geopolitical spheres have been established. This issue will be explored shortly.

6.3.2 The 60th Shan National Day

Since the commemoration of the 59th Shan National Day in 2006, it was not until 2007 and the final stage of my fieldwork369 that I had a chance to revisit Peing Hpa. During the “going back” period, apart from conducting more interviews, I was lucky enough to cross the border three times in order to observe the event from the day before to the day after the National Day. The Shan National Day Celebrations in 2007 was considered momentous because it marked the Shan State’s 60th anniversary, or what Nummong bitterly referred to as “sixty years that our country has been occupied.” The Tai’s celebrations took place shortly after the Thai people across the country and worldwide had organised a variety of activities throughout 2006 to honour the 60th anniversary of the accession to the throne of King Bhumibol Adulyadej. To the Tai in Ruam Chai (and perhaps in other places in...
Thailand), the coincidence of number “60” appearing in the two different incidents signified a great auspiciousness for their national event because the Thai king has been respected and held in highest regard as if he is “hkun haw hkam” of the Tai. As Sengjing puts into words, “The Tai people here love His Majesty the King. He kindly grants the Tai people the chance to live in Thailand. He doesn’t deport us.”

On that account, the celebration of the 60th Shan National Day was very well prepared and managed. Upon my arrival in Ruam Chai, villagers’ enthusiasm about the event was quite obvious. According to Yawthkam, Peing Hpa’s National Day organiser invited several important persons and representatives of social organisations—the Tai Num, the Housewives Group, and the Tai Anurak—from Ruam Chai to attend meetings in order to assign responsibilities to each party. Regarding the responsibilities, it appeared that the Housewives Group was appointed to take care of cooking food for staff, guests, and visitors whereas the Tai Anurak was in charge of organising sports events. Meanwhile, the Tai Num, represented by Nummong and Yawthkam at the meetings, was appointed to do several things ranging from selling polo shirts (for raising funds) to decorating a main stage, performing Tai dances, and being masters of ceremonies for stage shows. Compared to the previous year, most active members of the Tai Num admitted that their group played more vital roles, and that they were proud to be a crucial part of the event this year. Jarmhawm, one of executive members, expresses her feeling, “I was very glad and honoured to be Thai Yai, who had a chance to give some help to my people at Peing Hpa. Although the things we did might be seemingly small and unimportant, we were pleased to take care of them. Above all, this opportunity allowed us to show other people that we love our nation.”

During the last week prior to the Shan National Day, Yawthkam and other Tai Num members were occupied with selling the polo shirts in Ruam Chai and nearby villages. Initiated by the SWAN, the given shirts, available in male and female designs and in several colours, were made in Chiang Mai City. On every shirt, while front left pockets were embroidered with a combined pattern of the Shan State map and flag (see Figure 33), the upper backs of the shirts were decorated with an embroidered leaping tiger in a circular Tai text, which could be translated into English as: “The Shan National Day and the Appreciation of His Majesty the King’s Royal Grace on the Occasion of His 60th
Anniversary of the Accession to the Throne.” The reason why a tiger has a special “place” and meaning in many cultural contexts of the Tai is due to the fact that an image of “tiger”—suea (Thai) or ser [səː] (Tai)—represents Hso Khan Pha, the greatest king in a legendary Tai history. Hso Khan Pha has been admired and respected for his accomplishment in unifying Tai principalities and expanding the territory of the Tai kingdom. Such a high esteem is reflected through an image of a tiger’s head or whole body used as decoration on and at many places such as the polo shirts, a stage at Poi Pi Mai, and a stage at the Summer Camp closing ceremony.

Fig. 33: A sample of polo shirts sold during the 60th Shan National Day in Ruam Chai and other places in Thailand.

Another interesting activity which took place in Ruam Chai concerns a ritual in preparation for the National Day. The ritual is called lu sao mong [luː²-tsaw³-məŋ⁴], literally means “to present offerings to the ruler of a mong.” This practice was performed at the Shrine of Chao Pho Doi Saeng, the village’s guardian spirit, in Pawk 5. It is customary that the Tai in Ruam Chai would have this ritual performed prior to important pois such as the National Day and Poi Sang Lawng for good fortune and auspiciousness.
Appointed by Peing Hpa’s National Day organiser, Jerngharn managed to contact a Chinese senior male from Pawk 6 to perform the ceremony. He also provided the ceremony performer with food and offering items, which included chicken, pork, seasonal fruits, liquor, candles, and joss sticks. After the offering ceremony, the Chinese man carefully examined boiled chicken legs to divine the success of future events in Peing Hpa.

6.3.2.1 Two Days Before

It was a chilly and misty morning in the late cool season of Thailand’s northernmost province. Jarmhker, whose house and shop are close by, stopped her songthaew at the front gate of the guesthouse, a meeting point for a dozen of Tai Num members, who were going to decorate the stage at Peing Hpa. Having been invited by the group previously, I joined the trip to give them a hand and to make observations at the same time. During the journey, Jarmhker admitted that she had never been to Peing Hpa before even though she has lived in this region for a long time. Yet she confirmed that on the National Day of this year she would cross the border to assist her Housewives Group friends to cook and sell food and drinks. Her words certainly surprised me because they reveal that her former standpoint towards Peing Hpa has totally changed. About a year earlier (in 2006) she clearly stated that she will never visit Peing Hpa as she does not want to see Tai people’s poor and difficult lives, a miserable experience she had at a young age:

To be honest, I already went through hard times, and knew what that painful feeling is like. So I don’t want to recall those days any more. My wound has been healed; I don’t want to make it worse. Anyhow, although I’d like to help, I don’t think I will make a difference to those people. Without my presence, Peing Hpa would not go down hill. And despite my visit, the situation there wouldn’t have gotten better. I never think in a bad way for the village. I just don’t want to get involved.

After approximately forty minutes, via the Phaya Phrai (main) route, we arrived at the checkpoint. Jarmhker did not accompany us to the village. She only dropped us off and then went back to Ruam Chai. We were transported to Loi Kaw Wan School by a pickup

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370 She owns a pickup truck, which is modified to be a songthaew from time to time. Local people usually hire her to transport them to other places. I used to hire her to take me to a bus terminal in the city of Chiang Rai.
truck, presumably owned by the SSA. At the school compound, the principal and a number of teachers were busy getting everything set. Meanwhile, along with new SSA soldiers, some teaching staff members (e.g., Senghkam) had been militarily trained in one sector of the compound. As the principal pointed out, all teachers here are required to take part in a military training to get them ready to fight in case that the village is under attack by the Burmese armed force.

Since the first moment I saw the school compound, it was evident that the degree of celebrations for the 60th Shan National Day was considerably greater than that in the previous year. Three stages were well-established along the north edge of the compound, far enough from each other to be separate performance venues. The main stage—the rightmost one—was used for performing a National Day ceremony and for variety of performances, mostly traditional Tai and hill tribe dances. The middle stage was made exclusively for Seng Tai from Pawk 10 of Ruam Chai. And the leftmost one, the smallest of the three stages, was designated to be a show place for Tai singers, both professionals from the town of Mae Sai and amateurs from Ruam Chai and Peing Hpa. In addition to the three stages, the general size of venues was expanded to accommodate all kinds of entertainment: a gambling building; as well as snack, food and drinks stalls owned by sellers from Ruam Chai and other border villages on the Thai side.

Due to a shortage of time, Tai Num children immediately started their work as soon as they finished having a short conversation with the principal. While the children helped each other to drape the front part of the main stage, tables, and podium with multicolour cloths; under the close supervision of Commander Kawnjeun, soldiers working with villagers were installing flagpoles and placing cut styrofoam letters and numbers on the background of the stage. At the same time, some of them were thatching a bamboo hut next to the school building, which would be used as an exhibition hall during the event. Running out of materials in the middle of work, Nummong had to borrow someone’s motorbike and rode it across the frontier along the shortcut route at least twice to buy materials in Ruam Chai. Yawthkam, who subsequently was asked to arrange flowers for the event, also went down with her female friend—by motorbike—to Ruam Chai to purchase more flowers and other necessities.

371 The commander in chief in charge of the SSA-S, Loi Kaw Wan Base.
The mission of Tai Num was accomplished eventually. Nummong, who is known to the locals, introduced us to Commander Kawnjeun who was present at the compound at the time to direct his soldiers working on the preparation. He was thankful for such substantial support from the Tai Num members, some of whom even skipped school for the work. Jarmhker appeared at the compound around half-past four, shortly after we had saluted and said goodbye to the commander. It was our visit that changed her firmly set mind about visiting Peing Hpa for the first time on the National Day. She crossed the border to check whether the children were ready to go home. She did not seem to be wanting to go back, but she stayed on a little longer. It seemed that the first experience in this “as high as the sky” village left her with a positive feeling. We made it to Ruam Chai roughly an hour later, and Jarmhker dropped off these children at home in their pawk.

6.3.2.2 The Day had Finally Come

Saimong, accompanied by his daughter and other three young girls under his family’s support, left Ruam Chai for Peing Hpa very early in the morning. His wife, the president of the Housewives Group, had been up there since yesterday. She stayed over night to get things ready in preparing food and drinks for guests and for sale. Shortly after Saimong and his family had gone, Jarmhker arrived at the guesthouse to pick up Maya, a master’s student in anthropology from Simon Fraser University and me. Nummong, who had been assigned to take pictures at the event, also joined the trip. Since cameras and other audio-visual recording devices were strictly prohibited, I kindly asked him to carry my camera and take pictures of people and atmosphere of the event for me. Apart from Maya and Nummong, we had more passengers: Dongmei, a Chinese lady in her early

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372 Maya conducted field research on ethnic textiles in Ruam Chai and nearby villages. I met her during the last phase of my fieldwork.

373 Some readers may find that I avoided the prohibition of the use of audiovisual equipment by asking another person to take photos with my camera. The fact is that Nummong is well recognised by the organiser and high-ranking SSA (Loi Kaw Wan Base) officials. He was among photographers and journalists allowed by the organiser to take pictures of the event in that year. After the 2007 Shan National Day Celebrations, a staffperson of the event said to me that I should be allowed to take pictures if they know that I am a researcher who will only make use of the pictures for academic purposes.
fifties who owns the village’s biggest and most famous Yunnanese-Chinese restaurant, and a few other Housewives Group members of Chinese background.

Upon arrival at the checkpoint, we passed through the border-crossing process, mentioned earlier. We were not the only party who was crossing the border at that time. The checkpoint was so overwhelmed with people that a couple of Thai soldiers, who were in charge of monitoring movements across the border, could not inspect the identity of every single individual. I was informed at a later date that the influx of visitors to Peing Hpa during the 60th Shan National Day comprised well more than Ruam Chai’s Tai and its various ethnic groups. Many similar groups and ethnicities were visiting from a number of villages in the peripheral areas of Mae Fa Luang District as well as Tai people from different places in the northern region of Thailand; for example, Mae Sai Town, Chiang Rai City, Fang Town, and Chiang Mai City.

Fewer than twenty steps beyond the barricade we reached a Peing Hpa guardhouse located close by the village name sign. Although a transportation service was available at the guardhouse to carry people to the venue, Maya, Nummong, and I decided to talk a walk after seeing two overloaded pickup trucks. A few seconds from there we walked through the bamboo village entrance. There were trilingual—Tai, English, and Thai—welcome messages placed on the beam of the entrance. It took us about fifteen minutes to get to the school compound via the village main road, where we amused ourselves by purposely crossing the invisible demarcation line.

We first dropped by at the tent-pavillion of the Housewives Group. Continuing, we visited an exhibition hall, where Tai history and pictures of Tai costumes, Tai saohpas, Loi Kaw Wan School activities, SSA female soldiers’ training, and Tai people who were tortured and killed by Myanmar soldiers were displayed. Apparently, this particular exhibition attracted considerable attention from visitors. The most striking exhibition could not be anything else but the portraits of His Majesty the King and Her Majesty the Queen of Thailand, which were placed on the highest spot in the hall. In regard to the Tai’s loyalty to and admiration for the Thai monarchy, I also saw a printed (drawing) picture of King Naresuan the Great being displayed at a nearby bamboo pavilion, which was used as a public relations and donation place as well as a souvenir shop.
When the National Day parade was about to approach the venue, we rushed to a guest building—a bamboo building without walls on the right side of the main stage, where Saimong and other distinguished guests had been seated. Around half-past eight, the parade, which mainly contained groups of people from all pawks and a company of SSA soldiers, arrived in and then oriented to the main stage. Looking from the guest building, I clearly spotted Yawthkam and other two Tai Num members—male and female—at the front of the parade. These three youngsters were in charge of holding the pedestal trays holding the flags of the Shan State, the SSA, and the RCSS that would be used in a flag-flying ceremony.

This year’s National Day ceremonies remained simple despite the significant increase in attendance. In structure and execution, it barely differed from the one organised a year earlier. That is to say, after the commemoration had begun with a flag-flying ceremony, key figures were invited to deliver speeches afterwards. Finally, ceremony attendees showed their respect to the three flags, each flag standing for the nation (Shan State), the army (SSA), and the (interim) government (RCSS), respectively. It is worth noting that most speakers, such as a Buddhist monk from a temple in Chiang Rai City, Commander Kawnjeun, and SWAN’s representative each emphasised the Panglong Agreement as a crucial message in their speeches. This is due to the fact that not only has this historic contract been regarded as the origin of the formation of the Shan State as a modern nation; but also a critical moment with reference to the emergence of “the Union of Burma” (Sai Wansai 2006). This view is reflected in this statement: “If there is no Panglong Agreement then there is no Union of Burma.” (Oo 2009). In the eyes of the Tai people, the Agreement—both the document itself and its content—is consequently the symbol of Tai nationalism, which has been reproduced and presented repeatedly on the National Day as well as in different contexts in other occasions. Such a nationalistic memory has been passed down verbally, textually, and pictorially, including through poems and songs, from generation to generation for over six decades. In Peing Hpa, the story was displayed in the exhibition hall as well as the stage; and was even printed on card-like tickets for the National Day’s special dinner. In Ruam Chai, Jawmlern painted a depiction of the notable conference organised in Panglong on February 7, 1947; this is on display in the Khun Sa Museum. Moreover, information on the Panglong Agreement and
Myanmar’s military regime’s refusal to return independence to the Tai people is always transmitted to Tai children who partake in the Summer Camp.

Once the ceremony on the stage was finished, new male SSA soldiers were called to have a military presentation in the school compound, followed by the presentation of the female SSA soldiers. Students from Datong School (the Chinese school in Ruam Chai) performed the Lion Dance and Chinese martial arts immediately following the soldiers. At a later time, journalists, both Thai and foreign, got together at the guest building for a press conference, given by Commander Kawnjeun. In the mean time, most guests and villagers went to the cafeteria to get free lunch. Some of them chose to buy food instead from sellers who had travelled from the Thai side. Among other sellers was a Chinese woman, Somsi’s neighbour, who normally does not sell food at all. She came to Peing Hpa only for selling noodle soup.

In the afternoon while a great deal of people were having a good time at the Ja Khue dance area, many other visitors and locals gathered in front of the smallest stage to watch a concert, took their chances at nearby gambling place, attended the exhibition, or went shopping. Some of the various goods available were clothes, hto nao\textsuperscript{374}, indigenous herbal medicine, music CDs, and books from traders, primarily from Mae Sai Town. For those who are fond of a traditional entertainment like Seng Tai, they needed to wait for many hours because the show would not start until eight in the evening.

Meanwhile, Sengseuk, a welcoming 27-year-old Tai Long schoolteacher, took Saimong’s family members, Maya, and me to visit a hospital in Pawk 7, which is pretty far from the Shan National Day venue. Within this simply-built, one storey concrete building, I observed a minimal number of beds and scant medical equipments. Hospital service, therefore, is limited to general sickness treatments and minor surgery. For emergencies and serious cases, patients are usually transferred to the hospital in Mae Fa Luang District, Sengseuk explained. Having been in Peing Hpa for over four years allows him to be competent in Thai communication. His knowledge of Tai history and culture, including the geography of the Shan State, is very impressive. Based on a conversation with him, which lasted the entire afternoon, his nationalistic ideology seems very strong, and he never feels hopeless about saving the nation. He strongly believes that the Tai will gain their

\textsuperscript{374} See details about this must-have Tai ingredient in Chapter 3.
sovereignty back some day. “If you have a chance to come here again next year and you don’t see me, it means that I might be somewhere in Mong Tai, striving for independence,” says Sengseuk.

After the visit to the hospital, we dropped by a few churches, and then returned to the school compound, where we ran into Nawhkam and Sengjawmhpa, the two male teachers I had met a year ago in Peing Hpa. Unfortunately, we did not have a long conversation with them as they were in a hurry to get somewhere for work. Later on, while Sengseuk showed the others around, I went straight to the Ja Khue dance ring, which was full of plenty of participants even though it was a late afternoon. The sound of drums, which produced a lively and infectious beat, was audible from almost anywhere in the village. People kept dancing round after round as if there was no tomorrow. The tribal dance finally came to an end around 5:00 p.m.

In the evening most villagers, especially Tai women, dressed up in their finery, which was obviously more elaborate than the outfits they had worn during the day time. Tai Num female members, who had got together at the rear of the main stage, also were in beautiful Tai costumes—in diverse designs (e.g., Tai Long, Tai Ngen, and Tai Khuen)—because some of them had been appointed to be masters of ceremonies while the others were supposed to perform a few traditional Tai dances on the stage tonight. I socialised with Tai Num members for a short time before going to join Sengseuk, Maya and Saimong’s family members at the Housewives Group tent, where its members were busy with preparations of a Yunnanese hot pot for dinner. The dinner was organised at a recently paved and stepped hill close to the concert stage around the leftmost edge of the school compound. To be able to have this special meal people needed to buy the aforementioned ticket from members of the Housewives Group or appointed individuals. One ticket, which costs one thousand baht, covered a meal for six people. We got a ticket from Saimong, who already went back to Ruam Chai in the afternoon.

The closer it was to the seven o’clock dinnertime, the louder the sound of Tai music and announcements from all the stages and entertainments in the school compound grew. Visitors who already held tickets started coming into the dinner area decorated and

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375 In Ruam Chai and nearby areas, Yunnanese hot pot is considered the most expensive and luxurious meal.
illuminated with a lot of simply-made, handcrafted kerosene lamps. Diners were seated on a mat with short-legs round table in the middle. Food and drinks had been served from mat to mat afterwards. Nummong, one of the guitarists and singers for a performance that night, showed up and was with us for a short time to have some food. He then rushed down to the stage to get prepared for his show.

After the meal, while nearly all of us preferred to be entertained at the concert, I made my way to the main stage to watch Tai Num members and other groups’ shows. From there I went to the next stage, where its multi-generational audience area was packed with fans waiting to see Seng Tai performed by Hakhker and residents from Pawk 10 of Ruam Chai. We were at Peing Hpa until 11:00 p.m. Sengseuk walked us to the checkpoint, where I got my ID card back. We then took a pickup truck of Saimong’s family’s friend back to Ruam Chai.

6.3.2.3  A Day after the National Day

My plan to finish a fieldnote on the 60th Shan National Day was cancelled when Saimong’s daughter and Maya had convinced me to revisit Peing Hpa with them and some Housewives Group members, who were expected to go up there for cleaning up, packing dinnerware, and gathering culinary materials to be brought back to Ruam Chai. Jarmhker, one of a few members, who owns a car, picked up us first and then three other people in other pawks. Sengjing, who never travels to any part of Mong Tai since she had left her hometown for Thailand over ten years ago, also joined the trip to help out. “I’ll bring some [Tai] soil out there back to Thailand to grow trees,” she said proudly and excitedly.

Upon completion of a border-crossing procedure at the checkpoint, we directly went to the school compound. A lot of people, both from Peing Hpa and Thai areas, continued to celebrate the event for another day although this year’s National Day was over. Apparently, most entertainments were not much different from the day before. These entertainments included Ja Khue dance that again attracted numerous participants, both civilians and soldiers, all afternoon.

Coming back to Peing Hpa that day not only allowed me to have informal interviews with Sengseuk and some local people, but also to meet Jawmlern, who subsequently introduced me to Khuensai, a well known Tai scholar and editor of Shan
Herald Agency for News, whom I have mentioned in this dissertation several times. Khuensai came to Peing Hpa for a crucial meeting, which was attended by high-ranking SSA soldiers, the village (Peing Hpa) committee, and further guests I did not know. Because of limited time, I could not find a chance to have an interview with the Tai scholar. Yet he suggested that I visit him at the office in Chiang Mai City for a long discussion in the future. I eventually made the arrangement to have an interview with him one day in late February 2007, right after the last phase of fieldwork was finished.

Our “Ruam Chai group” left Peing Hpa around half past six in the evening. Nummong, who stayed at Peing Hpa the night before, joined our trip back to Ruam Chai. I dropped by at the checkpoint to get my ID card back from a soldier, who revealed that during the national day week the border had been very busy; and that, according to his record, on the National Day alone, more than one thousand visitors from the Thai side went to Peing Hpa. The number is relatively high, and it demonstrates how genial the Thai state is with the given checkpoint.

During the journey to Ruam Chai, Nummong told me how happy he is assigned to play a vital role at the event. He also proudly brought up what Kawnjeun said to him earlier: “We think of you not as a guest, but our relative.” Nummong’s story reminds me of Jarmhawm’s words, “They always welcome us,” when responding to my question regarding relationships between the Tai people from the two villages. Although her view cannot represent the opinion of all the Tai in Ruam Chai, it is very likely that she is not the only person who looks upon Peing Hpa in this fashion. In their eyes, Peing Hpa is not merely a poverty-stricken place for Tai victims—and people from other ethnic groups—persecuted by the Burmese military regime. Instead, it is the most reachable and welcoming spatiality of “Mong Tai.” This nearest Tai-occupied space is meaningful in that it enables them to have a sense of heartfelt inferiority as the “other,” “displaced people,” “alien” or any other discriminative labels in Thai society lessened on one hand, and to have a perception of ethnological “sameness” and nationalism provoked on the other.

No matter what the reason of participation in the National Day from person to person might be, or even though it is a straightforward one given by Heo-ngern: “To take part in the National Day is to save the nation,” the collaboration of Tai people from the both sides of the interstate boundary in making the National Day Celebrations happen
reflects enduring good relationships between Ruam Chai and Peing Hpa. These connections do not start and end only in the milieu of the National Day, but they have been established and reaffirmed many times in various contexts, as we shall see in the following part.

6.4 Relationships beyond the Frontier

Heo-ngern, who did not have a chance to partake in the National Day at Peing Hpa in both 2006 and 2007 because of her duty at the guesthouse, indicated transborder connections between Tai people. She said that the SSA used to ask for help from Housewives Group members to place and stitch military signs on soldier uniforms. The Housewives Group members usually transported decorated uniforms across the frontier for distributing them to soldiers at Loi Kaw Wan Base. However, an incident that Heo-ngern, as an assistant of the Group’s president, and most members never forget is a big fight between the SSA and Burmese troops in 2002, which resulted in the victory of the former. Despite the lack of a budget, the Group raised funds from locals and Tai people in other areas for purchasing raw materials to make food for the Tai army. During the time of war, as Heo-ngern recalled, members of the Group had to wake up as early as three o’clock in the morning to prepare food for over six hundred SSA soldiers everyday for over a month.

In addition to the Housewives Group, I was informed that many people in Ruam Chai have supported the Tai army. U-mong and Senghkam’s father, Yawthkam’s father (Jerngharn), Hkamlu’s son—who died at the battle in 2002, and Wansai’s stepfather are some instances of untold numbers of villagers, mostly males, directly contributing to the nation by serving the army. Interestingly, as Yawthkam said, some hooligans were usually sent to be trained in the army or to work for Peing Hpa by their parents, who hope that their children would be more well-disciplined, and would learn something from living a hard but purposeful life.

Among people who have established and maintained good relationships with the SSA and Peing Hpa are U-mong’s family members. U-mong’s father has been in a military profession since Khun Sa’s time while he himself used to teach at Loi Kaw Wan School

376 He is now working as a construction worker in Chiang Rai City after leaving the army some years ago.
for a couple of years. Although he no longer works there, he regularly travels to Peing Hpa for visiting his family. His sister—Senghkam—was sent, presumably by the SSA, to learn English and computer skills in Chiang Mai City. She has worked as a teacher in Peing Hpa for over seven years now. Having been familiar with locals as well as having his family members up there cannot prevent him from considering Peing Hpa as his second home. “Because I often go there, my ex-students still recognise and respect me, and I’m always greeted by local people wherever I go,” says U-mong.

In terms of kin ties, it is common to have marriages between Tai from Ruam Chai, mostly females, and that from Peing Hpa. After marriage, some women continue to live in Ruam Chai whereas their husbands, who serve the army, come to see their wife once in a while. Many of them got permission from the SSA to live with their husband in Peing Hpa. Some people in the latter group, however, moved back to Ruam Chai because, as Wansai explains, “There’s no future to live their lives on the mountain with no job. That’s why they wanted to return so that they can find a job to make money in Thailand.”

Yawthkam, who usually accompanied Jerngharn (her father) to Peing Hpa, said that she has several relatives from her maternal grandmother’s side up there. Meanwhile, although he has no relative in Peing Hpa, Jerngharn claimed that he treats or respects some people as his own relatives. As he puts into words, “I see them as my own family. The four of us came from a northern area of the Shan State together. We worked for Khun Sa. After his surrender, my friends served another Tai [SSA] army while I decided to live on this [the Thai] side.” Because of his rapport with the SSA and Peing Hpa’s respected seniors, from time to time he is appointed crucial responsibilities such as a security officer during the Shan National Day, and a person who arranged a ceremony at the Shrine of Chao Pho Doi Saeng as discussed earlier. He is also in charge of distributing rice, salt, and cooking oil to people in Ruam Chai who are in active service to the SSA and Peing Hpa.

Since Wansai’s stepfather used to serve the army and he spent many years in Peing Hpa, his family’s relationships with villagers up there still remain even though his SSA service already came to end. She exemplified such connections: “Many pregnant women [in Peing Hpa] are afraid of being delivered by a local doctor who doesn’t use an anesthetic. So some of them came to Mae Fa Luang Hospital to give birth, and spent at least one month convalescing after a deliver at my house.” Therefore, it could be deduced
from the above cases that bonds between Tai people from the two spheres are not solely limited in the nationalistic or military milieu. Rather, they expand into other social settings, and take place on different occasions.

As an active social group in Ruam Chai, the Tai Num embraces young Thai-born (and a small number of children born elsewhere in Mong Tai) generations of the Tai. The group has been well recognised not only in Ruam Chai, but also in Peing Hpa despite its recent establishment. Since their first official visit—led by a few monks from the Saeng Thian—around five years ago, the group launched a yearly-based programme to visit students and organise a variety of activities at Loi Kaw Wan School on the Children’s Day. Moreover, their roles at the National Day have been played actively since 2006 onwards. Nummong, one of the group’s executive members, expresses his view towards the refugee shelter on the mountain: “Every time I visit there I feel warm at heart. I gain some trust from local people. I feel like we are relatives, who understand and support each other genuinely.” With regard to Tai Num’s roles during the Shan National Day, he points out, “Although we don’t live there and we can’t join the army, we’re very proud of playing a part in the great success of the event.” “It’s our pleasure and honour to help out or to do even small little things for the Thai Yai people. Despite unimportant duties, we can show people that we love our nation,” Jarmhawm added.

Making activities possible at Loi Kaw Wan School as well as playing a part in the aforementioned nationalistic incident allowed them to have more chances to visit their parents’ homeland, and to realise certain facts they will never truly understand without seeing them with their own eyes. As Wansai notes, “It’s so good to get together with a lot of Tai people in Peing Hpa. Still I have a deep sorrow for their misfortune. They used to live in a fertile and big land, but they are now restricted in a small and mountainous area not good enough for growing [wet] rice.” Jarmhawm’s viewpoint is compatible with that of her Tai Num younger friend, “Even though we’re so unfortunate to live our lives as displaced people in Thailand, we still have a chance to access compulsory education. We have almost everything. Compared to their lives, ours are much better. They share the same Thai Yai background with us, but their living conditions are much worse than ours in many respects...housing, education, and other opportunities.”

377 The Thai government designated the second Saturday of January as Children’s Day.
Aside from the mutual relationships explored in the previous paragraphs, many Tai people in Ruam Chai have maintained their connections with relatives in Mong Tai, particularly Tachilek, Myanmar’s town bordering Thailand’s Mae Sai Town; and Hawng Leuk, a subdistrict in the vicinity of Tachilek Province. Hawng Leuk is composed of 12 villages, predominantly populated by the Tai, each of which has its own temple. Three main factors facilitating trips to those areas include their locations that are a moderate distance from the border, an uncomplicated border pass application process at a local immigration office on the Thai side, and affordable fees required by Myanmar Immigration. For those who seek a journey to visit family or friends beyond allowanced areas, or who want to take a trip to as far as Kengtung, for instance, Myanmar ID card is strictly required.

Among others who still have contacts in these areas, and once in a while pay a visit to them, are families of Yawthkam, Jarmhawm, and Htiseng. The three friends at times accompany their parents to visit kith and kin in Hawng Leuk. To get there, according to Yawthkam, they usually take a songthaew or ride a motorbike to the border town of Mae Sai. On the other side of the border, at Tachilek marketplace they take another songthaew—mostly owned by the Burmese—along a well-paved road to a village of their family or friends. However, as more convenient and secure means, some Tai people from Ruam Chai prefer to meet their relatives in Mae Sai, or even bring them, both legally—with permission from Mae Sai Immigration Office—and illegally, to Ruam Chai. Heo-ngern and Sengjing are among others that habitually get together with their families from Mong Tai in Mae Sai. Heo-ngern’s mother and younger sister reside and make a living as petty traders in the border town of Tachilek for the time being, whereas Sengjing’s mother now and then travels from Kunching—on the west side of Nam Hkong—to visit her and family.

On the other side of the coin, it is not unusual to have visitors to Ruam Chai from Hawng Leuk as well as other areas in the Shan State. By the time I carried out field

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378 The Mae Sai–Tachilek Pass, one of Thailand’s busiest borders.
379 A border pass is a crucial official document that Thai citizens or individuals with legal status designated by the Thai authority—such as the Displaced People with Burmese Nationality—need to present at the checkpoints, both in the border towns of Mae Sai and Tachilek.
research in Ruam Chai, Yawthkam introduced me to her maternal cousin, who is a novice practising the dhamma at Wat Ka Kham. Being a holder of a priest ID card issued by the Myanmar authority, who has clear contact information in Thailand (Yawthkam’s family address), he had no difficulty crossing the border to the Thai side in 2006. In fact, he came to Ruam Chai before that and stayed at Yawthkam’s parents’ house for a short time. Regarding his first visit, without a border pass, he secretly swam across the Mae Sai River, Myanmar-Thailand’s natural boundary in that region, instead of crossing the border through a regular means.

Nummao, a 21-one-year-old resident of Mong Pu, is another case who reached Ruam Chai five years ago as a visitor. Yet his short-term stay seems to have become a very long one after he said that his stay should be extended to four to five years before going back. At first he got a job at a small construction materials shop owned by Longtip, Heo-ngern’s elder brother, and he stayed at Saimong’s house temporarily. He is now living with his aunt (mother’s younger sister) in Pawk 10. His father and Hakhker have known each other since they were young, but the latter knew that Nummao is his friend’s son only recently. To the question of how he got through a border-crossing procedure, he explained that he was asked to show his Myanmar ID card and to inform a reason of a trip—relative visitation—to a Thai immigration officer, who later granted him a 7-day-permit to stay in Ruam Chai. Nevertheless, seven days turned into years as he continues to overstay his permit. Having been asked whether or not he is worried about his overstay as he might be in trouble when returning and then being checked at the border, he replies, “I don’t think a Thai immigration officer would assign guilt to me. If he asks me where I am heading to, I’ll simply tell him that I’m going back to Myanmar, and then he will let me go. I think I should be all right.”

The aforementioned Ruam Chai–Peing Hpa relationships and connections between Tai people in Ruam Chai and their fellows in different localities of the Shan State are a projection of Thailand’s compromising border security and law enforcement, which could be considered as a doubled-edged sword. That is to say, it significantly facilitates transnational travelling of people as seen from the way in which Ruam Chai inhabitants make trips beyond the frontier to participate in the Shan National Day or to visit family

380 Her mother’s elder brother’s son.
and friends from time to time. Meanwhile, Peing Hpa’s residents—both those who cross
the borderline with permission and those who sneak out—are able to come into the Thai
side for working in nearby tea plantations, purchasing foodstuffs as well as other essential
materials. In case of serious illnesses, visitors are treated at Mae Fa Luang Hospital. It also
allows Ruam Chai dwellers serving the SSA or working as a teacher or other positions in
Peing Hpa to call on their family or to join various pois taken place in their home village.
On the flip side, however, a non-strict control over transborder movements as well as a
lack of a follow-up monitoring of individuals who received short-term permits to reside in
the country are a drawback and one of the crucial features which worsen chronic dilemmas
of illegal immigration and stateless people. The Thai state, who has profoundly realised
this fact, needs to find effective measures and resolutions to handle the situation;
otherwise, a goal to eliminate this problem from the nation would be probably out of reach.

In summary, the present chapter is an attempt to demonstrate a border as a
geopolitical realm to where a small extent of Thai state powers has been diffused. It is also
a domain that local individuals, who cross the dividing line back and forth without
permission, have challenged the supremacy of the Thai state repeatedly. The bottom line is
that the marginal sphere of the nation-states of Myanmar (or Shan State in the perception
of the Tai) and Thailand is a zone where ethnic identity as well as a nationalistic perception
of the Tai people are proclaimed and (re)constructed, as evident by the Shan National Day
Celebrations at Peing Hpa. This patriotic event is a powerful cultural practice, which
clearly represents the construction of Tai ethno-national identity by maneuvering of the
past and connecting with one of Thai state’s supreme institutions—the monarchy. In terms
of the past, the Tai people exploit the narrative of the legendary Tai king who brought
principalities together to form the great Mao kingdom many centuries ago. The best-known
is the story of Panglong Agreement, the most influential, recent past, which generated the
collective nationalistic awareness of being one people from a wide array of Tai subgroups,
which did not exist in olden times, when they tended to think of themselves as residents of
particular localities (i.e. mong/principality) rather than members of the same imagined
(Shan) community. Meanwhile, the Shan National Day, particularly the one in 2007, was
linked to the 60th anniversary celebrations of King Bhumibol Adulyadej’s accession to the
throne. The way in which the Tai people employ “Thai/Thainess” ideology in the construction of their ethno-nationalist identity is found not only in the milieu of the national day, but also in the course of power relation between them, as the displaced people, and the Thai state in the struggle for rights and nationality.

Additionally, the findings from my research suggest that the created international border cannot obstruct a consciousness of the “Tai” nation and bonds between Tai people from the both sides of the boundary although it is meant to separate the nation states and to hinder free movements of people. At present, nobody could predict the fate of the Shan State. As long as the “nation” of the Tai is still under the shadow of Myanmar’s militaty junta, Tai’s insurgency against Burmese rule as well as a desertion of their homeland continues to exist, and hence a continuation of Peing Hpa and the Shan National Day Celebrations at this village. So long as the given frontier remains compromised to a relatively high degree, and the border does not exist as a strong blockage to crossings, it is more likely that the Tai from Ruam Chai would keep supporting and taking part in the Shan National Day and other events as well.
Chapter 7
Conclusion

7.1 The Opening

This dissertation is an earnest ethnography of the Tai people in northern Thailand generally and how the Tai identity came to be constructed within the context of Thai nationalism, state development, and the history of the area in the 20th century. The Tai people, who are the research participants, are the predominant residents of Ruam Chai, a large multi-ethnic village in the mountainous, frontier zone, once occupied by one of the most wanted opium warlords—Khun Sa—prior to absolute control and administration by the Thai state in 1982. These people migrated from various areas of Myanmar’s Shan State over different periods of time. The reason for transborder migration varies from case to case: to join Tai insurgent groups based along Thailand-Myanmar boundary; to break free from the oppression of the Burmese military regime which emerged in the early 1960s; and to seek better socioeconomic opportunities in Thailand. Due to the illegal border-crossings of the Tai, the Thai state strategically classifies them into different non-citizenship statuses according to their migration background as well as survey periods and registration periods. As a result of recent revisions of the Thai Nationality Act, the documented Thailand-born offspring of these displaced Tai, whose parents’ statuses fall into certain non-citizenship categories, meet the nominal requirements for becoming naturalised.

In spite of difficult lives lived in a severely restricted area, which primarily rely on minimal income sent home by family members who have left the village to hire themselves out; their cultural ways are still very much the same as that of their fellows in “Mong Tai,” a term which always refers to their homeland. Even though wet rice cultivation no longer serves as an economic mainstay, way of life, and central identity of the Tai in Ruam Chai; their members, particularly older generations, pursue their ordinary lives as devout followers of the Buddha’s teachings. The strong adherence to Theravada Buddhism, which exists side by side with and complements animism, could be observed within most, if not all, rituals and festivities taken place all year round at the village’s important public spheres. Tai food also demonstrates the way of living considerably influenced by one of
the five major precepts, which discourages individuals from taking lives of creatures. For this reason, many kinds of vegetables are essential ingredients of Tai dishes. Along with such unique cultural ways are their simple, colourful costumes, which could have been made at home. Elderly people, mostly females, still wear traditional dress and wrap their knotted hair with a turban in daily life, whereas youngsters are inclined to be exposed to such fineries only during special occasions. Moreover, the Tai people take great pride in the continued use of their own language, both spoken and written, in the face of Thai domination—through state compulsory education and media—and Chinese popularity—through local private schools. Another crucial part of their life is social organisations, which were established in accordance with traditional classification of stage of life and age groups. These organisations include Klum Tai Num (the Tai Youth Group), Klum Maeban (the Housewives Group), and Khana Kammakan Muban (the Village Committee). By the local cooperation of these agencies with each other and external sources of support, the Tai have persistently preserved their identity in the face of serious problems resulting from their statelessness.

### 7.2 The Three Levels of Analysis and the Study of Constructed Tai Ethnicity and Nationalism

Throughout this ethnography, I have attempted to elucidate how ethnic identity and nationalistic consciousness of the Tai have been constructed in the face of interactions among the Tai themselves; between the Tai and members of other ethnic groups; interplays between the Tai and the Thai state; and relationships of the Tai residents in Ruam Chai to Tai people beyond the borderline. Additionally, it is my intention to propose that any investigation of ethnic dynamism should not zoom in exclusively on the context that a particular ethnic group exists and a sphere that power relations between an ethnic group and state become visible. Rather, for a clearer, multi-angle picture of such phenomenon, an academic lens needs to focus on an “ethnie,” to use Smith’s term (Smith 1986), or ethnic community across international boundaries. My postulation shall be discussed, on the basis of these interconnected levels of analysis as follows.

Ruam Chai is a multi-ethnic community mainly inhabited by the Tai, the Chinese, and the hill tribes such as the Akha and the Lahu. As the village’s largest ethnic group, on
the surface it appears that the Tai are homogenous to a greater extent in terms of ethnic background. In fact, they recognise the diversity of their collective; and they have a logical, traditional system of identifying their subgroups and in distinguishing other Tai subgroups from their own. Such a method is based on the following characteristics: subgroup, locality, region, and nature of geographic feature (Nam Hkong, also known as the Salween) in particular. Nam Hkong, Shan Shate’s main transportation artery, separates the modern nation of the Tai into two broad geo-cultural realms—the East and the West—where their historical developments and cultural facets have been regarded as somewhat different not only by the Tai from the both sides of the river, but also by their neighbour and rival, the Burmese, since ancient times (see Samerchai 2009). The Tai classification systems (i.e., East of the river or West of the river) make a good starting point for understanding how they view themselves in an objective sense. The conventional categorisation systems of the Tai are by no means immutable, and identities formulated on the “four aspects” basis are noticeably relational and situational. This, in part, generates the multi-layering of Tai identity. Despite the heterogeneity with respect to subgroups, by the employment of hegemonic Tai Long identity as a core culture, the Tai members in Ruam Chai have been unified into a single ethnic rubric—“the Tai.”

The construction and reconstruction of Tai identities in Ruam Chai is the relational process conducted by both locals and outsiders. For the endeavour from the inside, the research findings clearly shows that Tai residents have exerted themselves to conserve a classical performance called “Seng Tai” even with the lack of financial support. Another instance could be scrutinised from the organisation of an annual event like “Poi Pi Mai” or Tai New Year celebrations, which not only demonstrates local cooperation between the Tai and members of other ethnic groups, but also that between Ruam Chai and nearby villages. On one hand, this lunar calendar-based occasion draws a great deal of Tai people and other ethnic groups from both Ruam Chai and different places to partake in the village’s most entertaining social gathering. On the other, it allows for the presentation of Tai identities, which have been intelligently created in accordance with hegemonic Thai national identities/culture, in the presence of the Thai government’s representatives. Underlying the above-mentioned practices is an effort to transmit Tai culture—specifically, language—to the young blood of the Tai community owing to the growing concern of a cultural
domination imposed from the country’s power centre through “national channels” (Banks 1996:154), namely, mass media and the Thai-influenced schooling system. A cultural ascendancy also originates in the periphery of the state, namely, Ruam Chai, where Mandarin has gained more popularity because it is regarded as cultural capital in the eyes of the Tai people. The attempt to keep their language alive, however, is not a powerful enough impetus to counter internal and external cultural threats. As a consequence, the Tai Language and Culture Summer Camp—simply known as “the Summer Camp”—has emerged as a cultural enrichment force since 2002, at the initiation of a group of Tai Buddhist monks from both Bangkok and other places and with the support from the local people. Not only does this activity give rise to the awakening of Tai identity in the entire village, but also the establishment of the “Tai Num,” whose crucial role in the conservation of Tai culture and identity has been widely acknowledged by both the Tai fellows in Ruam Chai and those in Peing Hpa, a shelter-like village on the other side of the boundary between Myanmar and Thailand.

The Tai, regardless of subgroups, form Ruam Chai’s largest ethnic entity, and, while several members occupy important village positions, such as a traditional group leaders and heads of clusters, these influential positions do not pave the way for the Tai to take control of politico-administrative and economic affairs of the subdistrict with which Ruam Chai is aligned. In contrast to the Tai people who strive to have citizenship granted, most hill tribesmen, who were already naturalised, have better opportunities to access higher education, and to accumulate various sorts of cultural capital. By virtue of these perogatives as well as a significant support from hill tribe voters, candidates of hill tribe background are more likely to win local elections. The elected hill tribespeople eventually hold high positions in the local administrative organisations. Meanwhile, Ruam Chai’s economy is predominantly in the hands of certain Chinese families, whose economic niche has taken root in Ruam Chai since the Khun Sa Era. Nevertheless, a number of Tai residents are inclined to think that their cultural status as well as living standard is generally better and relatively elevated compared to that of the hill tribes even though discrimination against other ethnic groups is strictly prohibited according to the Village Administration Code. For this reason, any interethnic marriage between the Tai and hill tribesmen is relatively undesirable in comparison to that between the Tai and the Chinese,
which is somewhat common in the village.

Thailand has dealt with problems that have arisen from hosting thousands of illegal immigrants from her neighbours, Myanmar in particular, for several decades. Categorisation and registration are among a number of measures implemented to attempt to solve the problems inherent in illegal immigration. The classification of individuals who have entered Thailand unlawfully, falling into a variety of non-citizenship categories, is the “technology of power” or “biopower” (Foucault 1998) that the Thai state has deployed to turn the “docile bodies” (Foucault 1975) of those non-Thai subjects into the “alien others.” Of all non-citizenship statuses designated to Tai residents in Ruam Chai and elsewhere in the country, the “Displaced People with Burmese Nationality” seems to be the most unpleasant and undesirable title as it declares them to be Burmese. As propitiatory and dependent refugees, the Tai have not been in a position that enables them to disagree or negotiate with the Thai authority. However, they are made to incorporate this feckless identity as a part of their marginality and “other-ness.” The Thai state also exercises its power by controlling bodies of its “displaced people” to the restricted area (i.e., Ruam Chai), for which it insists the state must grant permission on a case-by-case basis for mobility beyond the village borders. In the middle of this unfortunate kismet, comparable to the situation of Thai citizens whose income lies below poverty line, those who were officially registered to one of the non-citizenship statuses are entitled to receive a standard health service with a minimal cost under the government’s health insurance program. Moreover, the children of displaced persons born on Thai soil are permitted to access education for free until Grade Twelve, after which they can seek higher education with financial support from parents or by their own means. Above all, the state’s ongoing emendation of the 1965 Nationality Act is responsible for increasing the chances for eligible displaced individuals born in Thailand to have citizenship granted.

With regard to the non-citizenship classification of the Tai people and other ethnic groups in Ruam Chai, the Thai state—through the operation of the DOPA—sent their staff from Bangkok to the village in different periods (starting in the early 1980s) to survey and then issue ID cards to the locals. After the first few surveys were carried out, it appeared that many people possessed two statuses and two ID cards due to the lack of systematic management, lack of rigorous measures, as well as lack of knowledge about the ethnic
backgrounds of the local people. In an ID card renewal process at the local district office, villagers had to choose only one “right” status when the “multiple status” fact was disclosed. However, difficulties continued to exist since some people did not pick their actual status, both by chance and on purpose, because they misunderstood that their chances to become naturalised would increase when registered to a specific status. Amid the glimmering light of hope of becoming a legalised citizen of the Thai nation-state, those who were not qualified to apply for nationality whatsoever have no choice but to embrace outlawed conduct in their acquisition of nominal Thai citizenship.

Alongside the problem of stateless people is the building of the Thai nation, which underlines the homogeneity of its citizens through the manipulation of “Thai/Thainess,” a nationalist discourse constructed as a counteraction to the threat of foreign imperialism and colonialism during the late pre-modern era of Siam Kingdom. The ideology of Thai/Thainess,” which has never been clearly defined, has been (re)interpreted, employed, and widely diffused in Thai society over the past century. At the present time, the Thai state uses it as a mechanism to detach the “Non-Thai” from the “Thai” for the sake of “national security.” Such a discursive practice rests upon the view that Tai-speaking people from Shan State and elsewhere, who illegally appear in Thai territory, are the “others” even though they actually share several historical/cultural aspects with the Thai people, and that they were integrated into the “imagined” Thai nation conclusively during the Second World War.

The construction of “Thai nation” policy made at a state level has had a significant impact on the ethno-nationalistic consciousness of the Tai people at a local level. Tai children born and raised in Thailand, who have lived their entire lives exposed to and instilled with the ideology of Thai/Thainess from every direction, have developed a strong sense of being “Thai” even though they have been classified as “Non-Thai,” and marginalised by Thai society. Older generations of the Tai people are found with the same disposition. Having been in Thailand for more than two or three decades, their emotional alignment with their generous host country has been gradually increasing. Few of the older generation have any plan to return to their geographic homeland, even if the Shan State achieves its goal of independence. In the light of this fact, the identity of the displaced Tai has been shaped through the convergence of and negotiation between the (re)constructed
ethnic identity as “Tai” and the growing patriotic awareness of becoming “Thai.” In other words, the idea of Thai/Thainess has been woven into the very fabric of the Tai world in the course of discursive practice. This conceptualisation is illuminated by the following strategies deployed by the Tai: 1) the adoption of the term “Thai Yai” as a supra-ethnicity even if it has no real meaning in their homeland; 2) the assertion of a close link between the “Thai Yai” (Tai) and “Thai Noi” (Thai); 3) self-identification with the newly constructed identity—the “Thai with Thai Yai background”; and 4) the attempt to associate themselves with the Thai through certain cultural symbols. The Tai people make use of the above strategies in order to gain recognition from the Thai society as well as to justify their existence in Thailand. Given these strategies, the Tai people—both those who have already obtained citizenship and, especially, those with different non-citizenship statuses—still remain in the circle of stigmatisation and alienation. As a result, another strand of ethnic and nationalist consciousness of the Tai people needs to be formulated in connection with the land of the Tai.

In the face of Thai “nation-building” the Tai have been classified as “non-Thai” while expected to behave as modern Thai. Resultantly, both young and old Tai persons have a stronger sense of and compulsion toward “being Thai,” yet no direct route allowing them to become Thai citizens, except at the caprice of the Thai state. With little apparent value in mainstream Thai society, the Tai find that they must return to their roots for stability and cultural self-esteem. The nearest geographical centre that is both welcoming and accommodating for the Tai way of life, in and around northern Thailand, is Peing Hpa, a village within the Shan State. Peing Hpa has become a simulacrum of the Tai domain and a necessary physical space where the Tai are themselves, first and foremost, without being “others” or “outsiders.”

Peing Hpa, a recently-founded village predominantly populated by Tai asylum-seekers, is established on a high mountain in the southeastern fringe of Shan State, itself nestled in Myanmar at the Thai border. Located approximately thirty kilometres from Ruam Chai, Peing Hpa is most often accessed by Tai who live and/or work on one side or the other. This transborder mobility has been closely monitored by both Thai and armed Shan State Army troops. Daily movements across this unconventional pass are mostly made by Peing Hpa residents, who hire themselves out as a workforce in tea plantations.
along the border on the Thai side. Meanwhile, some people from Ruam Chai take trips to Peing Hpa from time to time to visit relatives who serve in the SSA or work in the village school. There are regular visitors from Ruam Chai who transport foodstuffs and other necessities, including guests and the staff of NGOs. Given the regular trips, most Tai residents from Ruam Chai would rather cross the border to Peing Hpa during the first week of February for taking part in the Shan National Day, which took place in Peing Hpa for the first time in 2004.

The organisation of the Shan National Day in Peing Pha in one function, can be seen as the maneuvering of the past as a means of constructing Tai identity. In the same context, the past is also employed to awake the awareness of the Tai as a nation, which did not exist in the land of the Tai in former times (see Samerchai 2009). Having been once regarded as the path to freedom, the Panglong Agreement—the very memorable “past” of Shan State’s modern history—is now the major political symbol the Tai have used to disgrace the Myanmar military government as well as to imagine their nation. On the Shan National Day in both 2006 and 2007 (in which I participated), the story of the Agreement—in verbal, textual, and pictorial forms—was of paramount importance. Not only was it narrated by all key speakers invited to deliver speeches during the commemorative ceremony in the morning, but also presented in an exhibition, which drew considerable attention from participants. Artists who took part in the event consistently had in their performances patriotic songs concerning the Agreement. Hso Khan Pha, the legendary Tai king, is another use of the historical past that has its special place in many social contexts, including the Shan National Day. The Tai King—depicted as a tiger, was portrayed on the centre stage background in the village’s school field, the major event venue. Hso Khan Pha as a tiger was also reproduced and presented on polo shirts made to sell for raising funds for organising the Shan National Day and other village affairs.

Interestingly, the key Tai signifying practice was coupled with remarkable and best-known Thai symbols. This practice is exemplified by the Shan State’s 60th celebrations (in 2007), which was linked to the 60th anniversary of the accession to the throne of Thailand’s present king (in 2006). Due to their high respect for the Thai King as their own “hkun haw hkam,” the Tai people viewed the coincidence of the two occasions as auspiciousness for their nationalist project. The same symbol-aligning practice was also
demonstrated by the display of portraits of the present Thai King and Queen at the highest spot in the exhibition hall, and of a printed portrait painting of King Naresuan the Great in the outdoor. It could be argued from the research findings that the ethno-nationalist consciousness of the displaced Tai is not born out of a vacuum; rather, it has been fabricated from ashes of their own history with reverential inclusion of certain identities of the Thai nation. In other words, the Tai people make use of “Thai/Thainess” in the construction of their ethno-nationalist identity and sentiments (cf. Samerchai 2009).

The Shan National Day at Peing Hpa is the demonstration of the borderland as a central socio-political sphere that allows for the construction of ethno-nationalist identity, and as a transitional zone that leads to a switching of identity from being the Tai “others” to being the Tai “nation” once they cross it. Equally important, it reveals the magnitude of the phenomenon, which expands beyond the international frontier to Ruam Chai and other Tai communities in Thailand. During the Shan National Day week, a multitude of Tai people in Ruam Chai responded to the event with great enthusiasm. Most local social organisations and individuals, regardless of gender and age, join hands with their fellows in Peing Hpa in many respects to make this most important patriotic event commemorations happen. This has strengthened transborder relationships between the ethnic Tai in both communities, relationships which are not begun nor ended simply within the milieu of the National Day, but have been established and reaffirmed time after time, sometimes by different people across generations. In addition to the connections with Peing Hpa residents, the Tai people in Ruam Chai maintain social ties with their relatives in other parts of the Shan States.

It may seem that my work is solely devoted to the explanation of how movements back and forth across various international borders have helped to construct Tai identity—both in Ruam Chai and beyond, whereas less attention is given to other kinds of mobility between Ruam Chai and other Thai towns or cities that play a part in shaping the ethnicity of the Tai. In fact, the formation of Tai identity in Ruam Chai is partly influenced by movements of Tai people within the Thai state. Young village members have left the village after graduation from the local school to further their education or work in other places, most of them usually come back during important occasions such as the Tai New Year and the Shan National Day. Students who are members of the Tai Num always visit
the village during school breaks to participate in Tai Num activities and to volunteer their services at the Summer Camp. While this small group of youths with a growing worldview and experiences from the outside have tried to conserve their culture, many teenagers who have been exposed to cosmopolitanism in urban areas like Chiang Mai City and Bangkok come home with their new identity (e.g., Bangkokian Thai manner, lifestyle, and accent). These affectations are always being observed by the locals. Some adult villagers, who are active in and/or in charge of conserving culture, have established networks with Tai communities and organisations during their participation in trainings, workshops, conferences, or events concerning Tai culture outside the village. For instance, a relation between Ruam Chai and other Tai communities is exemplified by the performance of the Seng Tai troupe from Ruam Chai in a festivity organised to commemorate the contribution of deceased prominent Tai intellectuals, held in a Tai village in Chiang Mai Province. Another example was the participation of prominent Ruam Chai residents in an International Conference, Performing Arts, and Exhibition on Shan Studies, which took place in Bangkok in 2009. Such academic connections with external organisations and individuals, including accumulated knowledge on Tai culture and other related subjects obtained from the outside form a supplemental development in the construction and continuation of Tai ethnicity. Furthermore, Tai traders commonly take trips to a marketplace in the border town of Mae Sai to buy specifically Tai products such as traditional clothes, herbal medicines, calendars, and music CDs, and later sell them in Ruam Chai. The given practices become subtly essential for the livelihood and cultural self-esteem of the Tai people, most of whom are not allowed to travel beyond their restricted area; yet these operate on another level as an aspect of Tai identity assertion.

7.3 The Future of the Tai People in Thailand

The geo-body (Thongchai 1994) known today as Thailand has been populated with a great number of Tai-speaking people for centuries. The people with ethnic Tai background in Thailand—regardless of subgroups or place of origin—are arguably those whose ancestors came to settle in the area in ancient times; and those who fled their home countries (i.e., Myanmar, Laos, and China) in recent years as a result of political upheaval, civil war, and policies of deliberate oppression. Most, if not all, people in the latter group, of which Tai
residents in Ruam Chai are a part, are viewed as *khon tang dao* (aliens)—due to their unlawful immigration—who have been categorised by the Thai state into different non-citizenship statuses. Based on immigration history and periods of survey and registration, at least four non-citizenship statuses given to the Tai people have been found in Ruam Chai: the “Displaced People with Burmese Nationality,” the “Highlanders,” the “Highland Communities,” and the “Illegal Immigrants from Myanmar.” The Tai of these categories, particularly those under the “Displaced People with Burmese Nationality” label, have been allowed to live in the country temporarily. However, due to the Thai government’s lack of a definition of a time frame for the “temporary” residency, they continue to live in Thailand, and nobody can tell how long they should reside in the country. Khachatphai Burutphat, the former Secretary-General of Thailand’s National Security Office expresses his idea with respect to this issue, “It is impossible to force the Thai Yai civilians who have [illegally] resided in Thailand for several decades to leave” (Khachatphai 1997:83). He also proposes a central strategy to deal with these people, “In the future it is essential to assimilate them culturally to become Thai” (Khachatphai 1997:85). Among different nationalist projects of the Thai state, it would seem that the national education policy, of which Thai has been promoted as an official language, has gained considerable success in absorbing many Tai people, as well as other ethnic groups, into Thai society.381 In the eyes of the Thai state, compared to other non-citizenship ethnic groups, “the Tai could become Thai with less difficulty through a cultural assimilation by reason of their language, religion and other aspects of culture are similar to that of the Thai” (Khachatphai 1997:85). This fact is exemplified by young generation of Ruam Chai embracing both “Tai” and “Thai” in their hybrid identity. As days go by, the Thai consciousness imprinted on the Tai peoples’ minds has played more a vital role in shaping the awareness of who the Tai are even though the Tai themselves have more cultural capital and public spaces to proclaim what it means to be Tai, while the Thai state has compromising nationalist policy which focuses more on the cultural and ethnic diversity of its subjects (see Pinkaew 2003b).

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381 Although the Thai state tried to induce the Muslims in the southern border provinces to be authentic Thais by changing *pondok*, a traditional Islamic school, to secularly private schools teaching Islam, their “repressive assimilation strategies” (True 2004) of Thai-isation failed to assimilate the “Thai” Muslims in the Southern border provinces into the mainstream national culture (see Suthep 2005:223-250).
The emendations of the Thai Nationality Act and related regulations in recent years have given rise to the increasing acquisition of Thai citizenship among young Tai residents of Ruam Chai. Upon the possession of legal Thai status, certain important rights that they previously longed for fall into their hands. These privileges encompass the right to pass on Thai citizenship to alien wife and children, the right to immigrate to and live in the country, the right to earn a living in the country, and the right to possess real property in the country. Other advantages of being legal subjects should be mentioned here. For example, those of work-force age would receive labour costs in the same rate as other Thai people; and they do not have to be afraid of being threatened and maltreated by officials. Becoming Thai has also opened up more opportunities for children and youths. For example, they are eligible to apply for the Government Student Loan Fund, and for scholarships to study abroad like their friends of Chinese and Hill Tribe backgrounds. Yet these recently naturalised Thai cold not be called “authentic Thai” in the eyes of mainstream Thai society. To a certain degree, they still remain at the edge of Thai society because they are not entitled to enjoy complete benefits the same way their Thai-born counterparts are. That is to say, they are unable to serve some Thai governmental organisations, and they are unqualified to apply for nomination to any level of democratic election, for which applicants need to be Thai at birth.

While nowadays in Ruam Chai the situation of statelessness is getting better, not enough attention from both the locals and the higher authorities has been paid to other central issues arising in the village. Notwithstanding that many young members might have gone out to work or continue their education, “docile bodies” of most Tai people are still under surveillance in this place, where dilemmas caused by the severe imbalance between population number and agricultural space or secure jobs have become more visible. This circumstance raises the need for urgent, practical resolutions. The provision of jobs-at-home and guaranteed markets as well as the conservation or management of natural resources need to be conducted at the same pace. If the Thai state or Thai society would give a reasonable amount of help and integration to improve living standards and, at the same time, would allow for a perpetuation of the Tai ethno-nationalist identity, the Tai people could live with pride in their culture and contribute even more to the current nation-building program of the Thai state.
Appendices
Appendix A
The Panglong Agreement

THE PANGLONG AGREEMENT, 1947

Text of the Agreement signed at Panglong on the 12th February, 1947 by Shan, Kachin and Chin leaders, and by representatives of the Executive Council of the Governor of Burma

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A conference having been held at Panglong, attended by certain Members of the Executive Council of the Governor of Burma, all Saohpas and representatives of the Shan States, the Kachin Hills and the Chin Hills, the members of the conference, believing that freedom will be more speedily achieved by the Shans, the Kachins and the Chins by their immediate co-operation with the Interim Burmese Government, have accordingly, and without dissentients, agreed as follows:

(I) A representative of the Hill peoples, selected by the Governor on the recommendation of representatives of the Supreme Council of the United Hill Peoples, shall be appointed a Counsellor to the Governor to deal with the Frontier Areas.

(II) The said Counsellor shall also be appointed a member of the Governor's Executive Council without portfolio, and the subject of Frontier Areas brought within the purview of the Executive Council by constitutional convention as in the case of Defence and External Affairs. The Counsellor for Frontier Areas shall be given executive authority by similar means.

(III) The said Counsellor shall be assisted by two Deputy Counsellors representing races of which he is not a member. While the two Deputy Counsellors should deal in the first instance with the affairs of the respective areas and the Counsellor with all the remaining parts of the Frontier Areas, they should by Constitutional Convention act on the principle of joint responsibility.

(IV) While the Counsellor in his capacity of Member of the Executive Council will be the only representative of the Frontier Areas on the Council, the Deputy Counsellor(s) shall be entitled to attend meetings of the Council when subjects pertaining to the Frontier Areas are discussed.

(V) Though the Governor's Executive Council will be augmented as agreed above, it will not operate in respect of the Frontier Areas in any manner which would deprive any portion of these Areas of the autonomy which it now enjoys in internal administration. Full autonomy in internal administration for the Frontier Areas is accepted in principle.
(VI) Though the question of demarcating and establishing a separate Kachin State within a Unified Burma is one which must be relegated for decision by the Constituent Assembly, it is agreed that such a State is desirable. As first step towards this end, the Counsellor for Frontier Areas and the Deputy Counsellors shall be consulted in the administration of such areas in the Myitkyina and the Bhamo District as are Part 2 Scheduled Areas under the Government of Burma Act of 1935.

(VII) Citizens of the Frontier Areas shall enjoy rights and privileges which are regarded as fundamental in democratic countries.

(VIII) The arrangements accepted in this Agreement are without prejudice to the financial autonomy now vested in the Federated Shan States.

(IX) The arrangements accepted in this Agreement are without prejudice to the financial assistance which the Kachin Hills and the Chin Hills are entitled to receive from the revenues of Burma and the Executive Council will examine with the Frontier Areas Counsellor and Deputy Counsellor(s) the feasibility of adopting for the Kachin Hills and the Chin Hills financial arrangements similar to those between Burma and the Federated Shan States.

SIGNATORIES


For the Kachin Committee: Myitkyina: Sinwa Nawng, Zau Rip, Dinra Tang Bhamo: Zau La, Zau Lawn, Labang Grong

For the Chin Committee: U Hlur Hmung, U Thawng Za Khup, U Kio Mang

For the Burmese Government: Aung San


Source: Online Burma/Myanmar Library (2011).
Appendix B
The Thai Nationality Act 1965


Given on the 21st day of July, B.E. 2508 (1965)

Being the 20th Year of the Present Reign.

His Majesty King Bhumibhol Adulyadej has been graciously pleased to proclaim that:

Whereas it is expedient to revise the law on nationality,

Be it, therefore, enacted by the King, by and with the advice and consent of the Constituent Assembly in the capacity of the National Assembly, as follows.

Section 1.
This Act shall be called the “Nationality Act, B.E. 2508 (1965).”

Section 2.
This Act shall come into force on and from the day following the date of its publication in the Government Gazette.

Section 3.
The following shall be repealed:
(1) The Nationality Act, B.E. 2495;
(2) The Nationality Act (No. 2), B.E. 2496;
(3) The Nationality Act (No. 3), B.E. 2499;
(4) The Nationality Act (No. 4) B.E. 2503.

Section 4.
In this Act:
“Alien” means a person who does not have a Thai nationality;

“Competent official” means the person appointed by the Minister for the execution of this
“Minister” means the Minister taking charge and control of the execution of this Act.

Section 5.
The acquisition of Thai nationality under Section 9 or 12, the loss of Thai nationality under Chapter 2, or the recovery of Thai nationality under Chapter 3, shall be effective upon its publication in the Government Gazette and shall have an individual effect.

Section 6.
The Minister of Interior shall take charge and control of the execution of this Act and shall have the power to appoint competent officials and to issue Ministerial Regulations fixing fees not exceeding the rates annexed to this Act, and to exempt any person as he thinks fit from fees for the following:

1. Application for naturalisation as a Thai;
2. Certificate of naturalisation as a Thai;
3. Application for recovery of Thai nationality.

Such Ministerial Regulations shall become effective upon their publication in the Government Gazette.

Chapter 1
Acquisition of Thai Nationality

Section 7.
The following persons acquire Thai nationality by birth:
1. A person born of a father or a mother of Thai nationality, whether within or outside the Thai Kingdom;
2. A person born within the Thai Kingdom except the person under Section 7 bis paragraph one.

Section 7. bis.
A person born within the Thai Kingdom of alien parents does not acquire Thai nationality if at the time of his birth, his lawful father or his father who did not marry his mother, or his mother was:
(1) the person having been given leniency for temporary residence Kingdom as a special case;
(2) the person having been permitted to stay temporarily in the Kingdom;
(3) the person having entered and resided in the Thai Kingdom without permission under the law of immigration.
In case the Minister deems it appropriate, he may consider and give an order for each particular case granting Thai nationality to any person under paragraph one, in conformity with the rules prescribed by the Cabinet.
The person who is born within the Thai Kingdom and has not acquired Thai nationality under paragraph one shall be deemed to have entered and resided in the Thai Kingdom without permission under the law on immigration unless an order is given otherwise according to the law on that particular matter.

Section 8.
A person born within the Thai Kingdom of alien parents does not acquire Thai nationality, if at the time of his birth, his father or mother was:
(1) Head of a diplomatic mission or a member thereof;
(2) Head of a consular mission or a member thereof;
(3) An officer or expert of an international organization;
(4) Member of a family, either as a relative under patronage or servant, who came from abroad to reside with the person in (1), (2) or (3).

Section 9.
An alien woman who marries a person of Thai nationality shall, if she desires to acquire Thai nationality, file an application with the competent official according to the form and in the manner prescribed in the Ministerial Regulations.
The granting or refusal of permission for acquisition of Thai nationality shall lie with the discretion of the Minister.

Section 10.
An alien who possesses the following qualifications may apply for naturalisation as a Thai:
(1) becoming sui juris in accordance with Thai law and the law under which he has nationality;
(2) having good behavior;
(3) having regular occupation;
Section 11.
The provisions of Section 10 (4) and (5) shall apply if the applicant for naturalisation as a Thai:
(1) has rendered distinguished service to Thailand or has done acts to the benefit of official service, which is deemed suitable by the Minister;
(2) is a child or wife of a person who has been naturalized as a Thai or has recovered Thai nationality; or
(3) is one who used to have Thai Nationality.

Section 12.
Any person being desirous of applying for naturalisation as a Thai, shall file an application with the competent official according to the form and in the manner prescribed in the Ministerial Regulations.

Chapter 2.
Loss of Thai Nationality.

Section 13.
A woman of Thai nationality who marries an alien and may acquire the nationality of her husband according to the nationality law of her husband, shall, if she desires to renounce Thai nationality, make a declaration of her intention before the competent official according to the form and in the manner prescribed in the Ministerial Regulations.
Section 14.
A person of Thai nationality, who was born of an alien father and has acquired the nationality of his father according to the law on nationality of his father, or a person who acquires Thai nationality under Section 12 paragraph 2 is required, if he desires to retain his other nationality, to make a declaration of his intention to renounce his Thai nationality within one year after his attaining the age of twenty years, according to such form and in the manner as prescribed in the Ministerial Regulations.
If, after consideration of the said intention, the Minister is of opinion that there is reasonable ground to believe that such person may acquire the nationality of his father or a foreign nationality, he shall grant permission, except in cases where Thailand is being engaged in armed conflict, or is in state of war, he may order the dispensation of any renunciation of Thai nationality.

Section 15.
Except in the case under Section 14, a person who has Thai nationality and other nationality, or who acquires Thai nationality by naturalisation shall, if he desires to renounce Thai nationality, file an application with the competent official according to such form and in the manner prescribed in the Ministerial Regulations.
The granting or refusal of permission for renunciation of Thai nationality shall lie with the discretion of the Minister.

Section 16.
With respect to an alien woman who acquires Thai nationality by marriage, her Thai nationality may be revoked if it appears that:
(1) The marriage was effected by concealment of facts or making any statement false in material particular;
(2) She commits any act prejudicial to the security, or conflicting with the interests of the State, or amounting to an insult to the nation;
(3) She commits any act contrary to public order or good morals.

Section 17.
With respect to a person who has Thai nationality, by reason of his having been born within the Thai Kingdom of an alien father, his Thai nationality may be revoked if it appears that:
(1) He has resided in a foreign country, of which his father has or used to have nationality, for a consecutive period of more than five years as from the day of his becoming sui juris;
(2) There is evidence to show that he makes use of the nationality of his father or of a foreign nationality, or that he has an active interest in the nationality of his father or in a foreign nationality;
(3) He commits any act prejudicial to the security or conflicting with the interests of the State, or amounting to an insult to the nation;
(4) He commits any act contrary to public order or good morals.
The Minister in the event of (1) or (2), and the Court in the event of (3) or (4) and upon request of the public prosecutor, shall order the revocation of Thai nationality.

Section 18.
When there exist circumstances suitable for maintaining the security or interests of the State, the Minister is empowered to revoke Thai nationality of the person who acquires Thai nationality under Section 7 Bis. paragraph two.

Section 19.
The Minister is empowered to revoke Thai nationality of a person who acquires Thai nationality by naturalisation if it appears that:
(1) The naturalisation was effected by concealment of facts or making any statement false in material particular;
(2) There is evidence to show that he still makes use of his former nationality;
(3) He commits any act prejudicial to the security or conflicting the interests of the State, or amounting to an insult to the nation;
(4) He commits any act contrary to public order or good morals;
(5) He has resided abroad without having a domicile in Thailand for more than five years;
(6) He still retains the nationality of the country at war with Thailand.
The revocation of Thai nationality under this section may extend to children of a person whose Thai nationality is revoked in case such children are not sui juris and acquire Thai nationality under Section 12, paragraph two and the Minister shall, after the order for revocation of Thai nationality has been given, shall submit the matter to the King for information.

Section 20.
A Committee shall be set up consisting of the Under Secretary of State for Interior as chairman, a representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Director-General of the Department of Administrative Affairs, the Director-General of the Police Department and the Director-General of the Public Prosecution Department as members, having the duty to
consider the revocation of Thai nationality under Sections 16, 17 (1) or 18, 19. Where circumstances appear with respect to any person that his Thai nationality may be revoked, the competent official shall submit the latter for consideration of the Committee. After consideration, the Committee shall refer its opinion to the Minister for direction.

Section 21.
A person of Thai nationality who was born of an alien father and may acquire the nationality of his father according to the law in nationality of his father shall lose Thai nationality if he obtains an alien identification card according to the law on registration of aliens.

Section 22.
A person of Thai nationality who has been naturalized as an alien, or who has renounced Thai nationality, or whose Thai nationality has been revoked, shall lose Thai nationality.

Chapter 3.
Recovery of Thai Nationality

Section 23.
A woman of Thai nationality who has renounced Thai nationality in case of marriage to an alien under Section 13 may, if the marriage has been dissolved by whatsoever reason, apply for recovery of Thai nationality.
In applying for recovery of Thai nationality, a declaration of intention shall be made before the competent official according to the form and in the manner prescribed in the Ministerial Regulations.

Section 24.
A person of Thai nationality, together with his parent while not becoming sui juris, shall, if he desires to recover Thai nationality, file with the Competent official an application according to the form and in the manner prescribed in the Ministerial Regulations within two years from the day of his becoming sui juris under Thai law, and the law under which he has nationality.
The granting or refusal of permission for recovery of Thai nationality shall lie with the discretion of the Minister.
Rates
(1) Application for naturalisation as a Thai = each time 5,000 Baht
(2) Application for naturalisation as a Thai for a child of the applicant, who is not sui juris
    = each time 2,500 Baht
(3) Certificate of naturalisation as a Thai = each copy 500 Baht
(4) Substitute of the certificate of naturalisation, as a Thai = each copy 500 Baht
(5) Application for recovery of Thai nationality = each time 1,000 Baht
(6) Other applications = each copy 5 Baht

Source: Economic and Commercial Section of the Consulate General of the People’s
Appendix C
The Thai Nationality Act (No. 4) 2008

Nationality Act (No.4)

B.E. 2551

Given on the 19th day of February, B.E. 2551 (2008)

Being the 63th Year of the Present Reign

His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej has been graciously pleased to

proclaim that:

Whereas it is expedient to revise the law on nationality, Be it, therefore, enacted by the

King, by and with the advice and consent of the Constituent Assembly in the capacity of

the National Assembly, as follows.

Section 1. This Act shall be called the "Nationality Act (No.4), B.E. 2551"

Section 2. This Act shall come into force on and from the day following the date of its

publication in the Government Gazette.

Section 3. In Section 4 of the Nationality Act B.E. 2508, the following shall be added

between the words “Alien” and “Competent official”:

“Committee” means a committee who holds responsibility for nationality consideration.

Section 4. Section 5 of the Nationality Act B.E. 2508 shall be repealed and replaced by the

following:

“Section 5. The acquisition of Thai nationality under Section 9, 12 or 12/1; the loss of Thai

nationality under Chapter 2; or the recovery of Thai nationality under Chapter 3 shall be

effective upon its publication in the Government Gazette and shall have an individual

effect.”

Section 5. Section 6 of the Nationality Act B.E. 2508 shall be repealed and replaced by the

following:
“Section 6. The Minister of Interior shall take charge and control of the execution of this Act and shall have the power to appoint competent officials and to issue Ministerial Regulations fixing fees not exceeding the rates annexed to this Act, and to exempt any person as he thinks fit from fees for the following:

(1) Application for naturalisation as a Thai;

(2) Certificate of naturalisation as a Thai;

(3) Application for recovery of Thai nationality.

Such Ministerial Regulations shall become effective upon their publication in the Government Gazette.”

**Section 6.** The following shall be added as paragraph two of Section 7 of the Nationality Act B.E. 2508 as amended by the Act B.E. 2535 no.2:

“Father” in (1) means a person having been proved, in conformity with the Ministerial Regulation, that he is truly a father of the person even though he did not register marriage with the mother of the person or did not do a registration of legitimate child.”

**Section 7.** Paragraph two and three of Section 7 of the Nationality Act B.E. 2508 as amended by the Act B.E. 2535 no.2 shall be repealed and replaced by the following:

“In case the Minister deems it appropriate, he may consider and give an order for each particular case granting Thai nationality to any person under paragraph one, in conformity with the rules prescribed by the Cabinet.

The person who is born within the Thai Kingdom and has not acquired Thai nationality under paragraph one shall reside in the Thai Kingdom under conditions stating in the Ministerial Regulation, but principles of national security and human rights have to be considered as well. Nevertheless, the person shall be deemed to have entered and resided in the Thai Kingdom without permission under the law on immigration when there is no such Ministerial Regulation still.”

**Section 8.** (2) of Section 11 of the Nationality Act B.E. 2508 shall be repealed and replaced by the following:

“(2) is a child, wife, or husband of a person who has been naturalised as a Thai or has recovered Thai nationality”

**Section 9.** The following shall be added as (4) of Section 11 of the Nationality Act B.E. 2508:
“(4) is husband of a person with Thai nationality”

**Section 10.** Paragraph four of Section 12 of the Nationality Act B.E. 2508 shall be repealed and replaced by the following:

“When there is the announcement under Section 5, the competent official shall issue a certificate of naturalisation as a Thai as evidence.”

**Section 11.** The following shall be added as Section 12/1 in Chapter 1: Acquisition of Thai Nationality of the Nationality Act B.E. 2508:

“Section 12/1. According to following situations, the applicant may apply for naturalisation as a Thai for persons without Thai nationality, but having residence in the Thai Kingdom:

(1) A curator under an order of the court may apply for naturalisation as a Thai for incompetent persons who has evidence proving the birth within the Thai Kingdom. In this case, such persons shall be exempt from possessing the qualifications under Section 10 (3) and (5) and making an affirmation to loyalty to Thailand of the persons shall lie with the discretion of the Minister.

(2) With a permission of the children, a ruler of public foster home in conformity with the Minister may apply for naturalisation as a Thai for children of their responsibility who are not sui juris in accordance with Thai law and have been staying in such foster home not less than 10 years. In this case, such persons shall be exempt from possessing the qualifications under Section 10 (1) and (3)

(3) A Thai who adopted a child may apply for naturalisation as a Thai for the adopted child who are not sui juris in accordance with Thai law, has been done a registration of legitimate child not less than 5 years and also has evidence proving the birth in the Thai Kingdom.

In this case, such persons shall be exempt from possessing the qualifications under Section 10 (1) and (3) Application on naturalisation as a Thai for the others under paragraph one shall be in conformity with the Ministerial Regulation.”

**Section 12.** Section 13 of the Nationality Act B.E. 2508 shall be repealed and replaced by the following:

“Section 13. A woman of Thai nationality who marries an alien and may acquire the nationality of the husband or the wife according to the nationality law of them, shall, if he or she desires to renounce Thai nationality, make a declaration of his or her intention before the competent official according to the form and in the manner prescribed in the Ministerial Regulations.”

**Section 13.** Section 14 of the Nationality Act B.E. 2508 as amended by the Act B.E. 1535
no.3 shall be repealed and replaced by the following:

“Section 14. A person of Thai nationality, who was born of an alien father or mother and has acquired the nationality of his father or mother according to the law on nationality of his father or mother, or a person who acquires Thai nationality under Section 12 paragraph two or Section 12/1 (2) and (3) is required, if he desires to retain his other nationality, to make a declaration of his intention to renounce his Thai nationality within one year after his attaining the age of twenty years, according to such form and in the manner as prescribed in the Ministerial Regulations.

If, after consideration of the said intention, the Minister is of opinion that there is reasonable ground to believe that such person may acquire the nationality of his father, mother, or a foreign nationality, he shall grant permission, except in cases where Thailand is being engaged in armed conflict, or is in state of war, he may order the dispensation of any renunciation of Thai nationality.”

Section 14. The following shall be added as paragraph two of Section 16 of the Nationality Act B.E. 2508:

“Revocation of Thai nationality in paragraph one shall lie with the discretion of the Minister.”

Section 15. Section 17 of the Nationality Act B.E. 2508 shall be repealed and replaced by the following:

“Section 17. With respect to a person who has Thai nationality, by reason of his having been born within the Thai Kingdom of an alien father or mother, his Thai nationality may be revoked if it appears that:

(1) He has resided in a foreign country, of which his father or mother has or used to have nationality, for a consecutive period of more than five years as from the day of his becoming sui juris;

(2) There is evidence to show that he makes use of the nationality of his father, mother, or of a foreign nationality, or that he has an active interest in the nationality of his father, mother, or in a foreign nationality;

(3) He commits any act prejudicial to the security or conflicting with the interests of the State, or amounting to an insult to the nation;

(4) He commits any act contrary to public order or good morals. The Minister in the event of (1) or (2), and the Court in the event of (3) or (4) and upon request of the public prosecutor, shall order the revocation of Thai nationality.”

Section 16. Section 20 of the Nationality Act B.E. 2508 shall be repealed.
Section 17. Section 21 of the Nationality Act B.E. 2508 as amended by the Act B.E. 2535 no.2 shall be repealed and replaced by the following:

“Section 21. A person of Thai nationality who was born of an alien father or mother and may acquire the nationality of his father or mother according to the law on nationality of his father or mother shall lose Thai nationality if he obtains an alien identification card according to the law on registration of aliens.”

Section 18. Paragraph one of Section 23 of the Nationality Act B.E. 2508 shall be repealed and replaced by the following:

“Section 23. A man or woman of Thai nationality who has renounced Thai nationality in case of marriage to an alien under Section 13 may, if the marriage has been dissolved by whatsoever reason, apply for recovery of Thai nationality.”

Section 19. The following shall be added as Chapter 4: Committee on Nationality Consideration, including Section 25, 26, 27, 28 and 29 of the Nationality Act B.E. 2508:

“Chapter 4.

Committee on Nationality Consideration

Section 25. The Committee on Nationality Consideration shall be set up consisting of:

(1) The Under Secretary of State for Interior as chairman;

(2) Representative from Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Foriegn Affairs, Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Labour, National Security Council, the Office of Attorney General, the Office of Royal Thai Police, the Office of National Intelligence Agency, the Narcotics Control Board and Internal Security Operations Command as members;

(3) Expertises on Nationality appointed by the Minister not more than 6 persons as committees.

Director of the Department of Provincial Administration is a committee and a secretary of the Committee and two officials of the DOPA shall be appointed as secretary assistants by the Director.

Section 26. The expertises shall hold office for a term of two years and shall serve for only two terms.

Section 27. The Committee shall give recommendation and opinion to the Minister. The discretion of the Minister under Section 7 bis, Section 9, Section 11, Section 12, Section 12/1, Section 14, Section 15, Section 16, Section 17, Section 18, Section 19, and Section 24 and the enactment of the Ministerial Regulation are considered with the
recommendation from the Committee.

Section 28. The Committee shall have the power to appoint the Subcommittees.

Section 29. Provisions on the Committee on Administrative Consideration

under the Law on Administrative Procedure shall be allowed to come into force for the appointment and the vacation of the Expertises and the meetings of the Committee and the Sub-committees."

Section 20. Rates of fees stating in the Nationality Act B.E. 2508 shall be repealed and replaced by the rates of fees in the end of this Act.

Section 21. Paragraph two of Section 7 of the Nationality Act B.E. 2508 as amended by this Act shall be affective for a person born before this Act comes into force.

Section 22. Paragraph three of Section 7 bis of the Nationality Act B.E. 2508 as amended by the Act B.E. 2535 no.2 and by this Act shall be affective for a person born before this Act comes into force.

Section 23. A person of Thai nationality born within the Thai Kingdom, but his nationality was revoked by Section 1 of the Declaration of Revolutionary Party no.337 on the 13th of December, B.E. 2535 and a person who was born within the Thai Kingdom, but did not acquire Thai nationality by Section 2 of the Declaration of Revolutionary Party no.337 on the 13th of December, B.E. 2535, including children of the persons who were born within the Thai Kingdom before this act comes into force and did not acquire Thai nationality under Section 7 bis paragraph one of the Nationality Act B.E. 2508 as amended by the Act B.E. 2535 no.2 shall acquire Thai nationality from the day this Act coming into force if the person has evidence on civil registration proving the domicile within the Thai Kingdom for a consecutive period till the present and having good behaviour, or having done acts to the benefits of official service. The persons already acquired Thai nationality with the discretion of the Minister before this Act comes into force are exempt.

After 90 days from the day this Act coming into force, a person possessing the qualifications under paragraph one shall apply for Thai nationality registration into the civil registration system towards a district registrar or a local registrar at the district of his present domicile.

Section 24. Ministerial Regulations, Declarations, Rules or Orders under the Nationality Act B.E. 2508 and the Nationality Act B.E. 2535 no.2 shall be affective unless they are confictual with provisions in this Act. When there is the enactment of Ministerial Regulations, Declarations, Rules or Orders under this Act, the previous ones shall be repealed.

Section 25. Within 180 days from the day this Act coming onto force, Section 27 of the Nationality Act B.E. 2508 as amended by this Act shall not be affective with the
discretion of the Minister under Section 7 bis, Section 9, Section 11, Section 12, Section 12/1, Section 14, Section 15, Section 16, Section 17, Section 18, Section 19, and Section 24 and the enactment of the Ministerial Regulation under this Act.

Section 26. The Minister of Interior shall take charge and control of the execution of this Act.

Countersigned by:

Surayuth Chulanon

The Prime Minister


Rates of Fees

(1) Application for naturalisation as a Thai each time 10,000 baht

(2) Application for naturalisation as a Thai for a child of the applicant, who is not sui juris each time 5,000 baht

(3) Certificate of naturalisation as a Thai each copy 1,000 baht

(4) Substitute of the certificate of naturalisation, as a Thai each copy 1,000 baht

(5) Application for recovery of Thai nationality each time 2,000 baht

(6) Other applications each copy 100 baht

### Appendix D

**The Royal Thai General System of Transcription**

#### Consonants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter</th>
<th>Initial Position</th>
<th>Final Position</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ก</td>
<td>k</td>
<td>k</td>
<td>กา = ka, นก = nok</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ข ฃ ค ฅ ฆ</td>
<td>kh</td>
<td>k</td>
<td>ขย = kho, คุย = suk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ง</td>
<td>ng</td>
<td>ng</td>
<td>งำ = ngam, งัง = song</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>จ ช ฉ ชี จี</td>
<td>ch</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>จีน = chin, จำนำ = amnat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ซ ศ ษ ส ษ</td>
<td>s</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>ซ่า = sa, ชาส = kat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ญ ร ฎ ฏ ด ต</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>ญย = yat, ระย = chan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ธ น ท ฑ ฒ ถ ท ธ</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>ธีกา = dika, ธุ = kot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ธัต</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>ปัตมา = patima, ปะรา = prakot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ธัฑ</td>
<td>th</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>ธาน = than, ธัช = rat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>กษ ศก ห ฬ</td>
<td>k</td>
<td>k</td>
<td>กษัตริย = monthon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ฬ</td>
<td>k</td>
<td>k</td>
<td>ภาน = than, นัก = nat</td>
</tr>
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</table>

*Note: The consonants in Thai are often used in clusters.*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter(s)</th>
<th>Initial Position</th>
<th>Final Position</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| ณ น       | n                | n              | ประณีต = pranit, ปราณ = pran  
ณอย = noi, จณ = chon |
| บ p       |                | p              | บ = bai, กบ = kap |
| ป p       |                | p              | ป = pai, บป = bap |
| ผ พ ภ     | ph              | p              | ผ = pha  
พงศ์ = phong, รัพ = lap  
สำเภา = samphao,  
สapa = lap |
| ฝ ฟ       |                | p              | ฝั่ง = fang  
ฟ้า = fa, เสิร์ฟ = soep |
| ภ ม       | m                | m              | ภม = mam |
| ย y        |                | -              | ยาย = yai |
| ร n        |                | n              | รอน = ron, พร = phon |
| ต พ ฬ     | l                | n              | ตาน = lan, ศาล = san  
กีฬา = kila, หาฬ = kan |
| ว w        |                | -              | วาย = wai |
| ห ฮ        | h                | -              | ห = ha  
ฮ = ha |
### Vowels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter</th>
<th>Romanisation</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>–ะ, –ๅ, รร (with final), –ำ</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>โปร = pa, วัน = wan, สรรพ = sap, ม่า = ma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>รร (without final)</td>
<td>an</td>
<td>สรรหา = sanha, สรรศ์ = sawan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>–ำ</td>
<td>am</td>
<td>ว่า = ram</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>–ิ, –ี</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>มี = mi, มิติ = mit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>–ュ, –ย</td>
<td>ue</td>
<td>นึก = nuek, หริย = rue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>–ุ, –ู</td>
<td>u</td>
<td>คุ = ku, หรู = ru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>แ, –ะ</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>เละ = le, เล็ง = leng, เล่น = len</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>แ, –ำ</td>
<td>ae</td>
<td>และ = lae, แต่ง = saeng</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>แ, –ำ</td>
<td>oe</td>
<td>เล бо = loe, เหลิ่ง = loeng, เลือ = thoe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>แ, –า</td>
<td>ia</td>
<td>เนียร = phia, เลียียน = liian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>แ, –ำ</td>
<td>uea</td>
<td>และ = le, เลือก = lueak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>แ, –ำ</td>
<td>ua</td>
<td>มุ้ง = phua, มัว = mua, รวม = rum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ใ, ฿, ฿, ฿, ฿</td>
<td>ai</td>
<td>ไทย = thai, สวิท = sai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>฿, ฿</td>
<td>ao</td>
<td>ม้า = mao, น้าว = nao</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>–ย</td>
<td>ui</td>
<td>ดูย = lui</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>฿, ฿</td>
<td>oi</td>
<td>โฉย = roi, ดอย = loi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>฿, ฿</td>
<td>oei</td>
<td>เลีย = loei</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>฿, ฿, ฿, ฿, ฿</td>
<td>ueai</td>
<td>เลียย = lueai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>฿</td>
<td>uai</td>
<td>มาย = muai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>฿</td>
<td>io</td>
<td>สิว = liio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>฿, ฿</td>
<td>eo</td>
<td>เรอ = reo, เลือ = leo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>฿, ฿</td>
<td>aeo</td>
<td>เหลือ = phlaeo, แมว = maeo</td>
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<tr>
<td>฿, ฿</td>
<td>iao</td>
<td>เลียย = liaa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>฿, ฿</td>
<td>rue</td>
<td>ฏุ้ง, ฏุ้งย = ruesi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>฿</td>
<td>ri</td>
<td>ฏุ้งย = rit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>฿</td>
<td>roe</td>
<td>ฏุ้งย = roek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>฿, ฿</td>
<td>lue</td>
<td>ฏุ้งย = luesai</td>
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**Source:** Royal Institute of Thailand (2011).
### Appendix E
The British System for Shan-English Transliteration

#### Consonants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shan</th>
<th>British</th>
<th>Variations</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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<tr>
<td>ૠ</td>
<td>k</td>
<td>g</td>
<td>ꜙ m Kokang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ૡ</td>
<td>hk</td>
<td>k, kh</td>
<td>ꜙ m Hkun (ruler)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ૢ</td>
<td>ng</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>ꜙ m nga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ૣ</td>
<td>s</td>
<td>z</td>
<td>ꜙ m Sakoi, Samka (name of place)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>૤</td>
<td>hs</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>ꜙ m Hsipaw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>૥</td>
<td>ny</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>ꜙ m Nyi Awng (a Wa name)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>૦</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>ꜙ m tap (army)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>૧</td>
<td>ht</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>ꜙ m htau (plow)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>૨</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>ꜙ m Namtu (name of River)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>૩</td>
<td>p</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>ꜙ m Pangmi (name of place)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>૪</td>
<td>hp</td>
<td>p</td>
<td>ꜙ m Paahawm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>૫</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>ꜙ m, faifa (electricity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>૬</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>ꜙ m Mongmit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>૭</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>ꜙ m Yawnghwe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>૮</td>
<td>r</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>ꜙ m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>૯</td>
<td>l</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>ꜙ m, Lawksawk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>૰</td>
<td>w</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>ꜙ m Wanli (Good day)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>૱</td>
<td>h</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>ꜙ m Hut Harn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>૲</td>
<td>(a, e, i, o or u, according to vowels)</td>
<td></td>
<td>ꜙ m Oo Ngao</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>૳</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ꜙ m An Tai</td>
</tr>
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### Vowels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shan</th>
<th>British</th>
<th>Variations</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>မီ</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>u (sometimes)</td>
<td>မီးချင်း (Möngpan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>မီးမီး</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>aa, ar</td>
<td>မီးချင်း (Kokang)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ငြ</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>cc</td>
<td>ငြေ (Hsihseng)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ငြေး</td>
<td>ay, e-</td>
<td>ia</td>
<td>ငြေး (Kehsi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ငြေး</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>ic</td>
<td>ငြေး (kyaukma)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ငြေး</td>
<td>u</td>
<td>oo</td>
<td>ငြေး (Kengtung)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ငြေး</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>oe</td>
<td>ငြေး (Hopong)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ငြေး</td>
<td>aw</td>
<td>or</td>
<td>ငြေး (Mawkmai)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ငြေး</td>
<td>ü</td>
<td>eu</td>
<td>ငြေး (MöngKing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ငြေး</td>
<td>ö</td>
<td>ur (urh), er, oc</td>
<td>ငြေး (Mönghsu)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ငြေး</td>
<td>ao</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>ငြေး (Paohawm)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ငြေး</td>
<td>ao</td>
<td>aao</td>
<td>ငြေး,ကြာ (Tonglao)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ငြေး</td>
<td>iu</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>ငြေး (Kiuhoong)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ငြေး</td>
<td>eo</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>ငြေး (Nawngkoo)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ငြေး</td>
<td>iao</td>
<td>eow</td>
<td>ငြေး (Nawngliao)</td>
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<td>ငြေး</td>
<td>ai</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>ငြေး (Möngyai)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ငြေး</td>
<td>ai</td>
<td>aai</td>
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<tr>
<td>ငြေး</td>
<td>ui</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>ငြေး,ဟီ (Kathpui)</td>
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<td>ငြေး</td>
<td>we</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>ငြေး (Yawnghwe)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ငြေး</td>
<td>oi</td>
<td>oy</td>
<td>ငြေး (Loilem)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ငြေး</td>
<td>au</td>
<td>y, ai</td>
<td>ငြေး (Möngmai)</td>
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