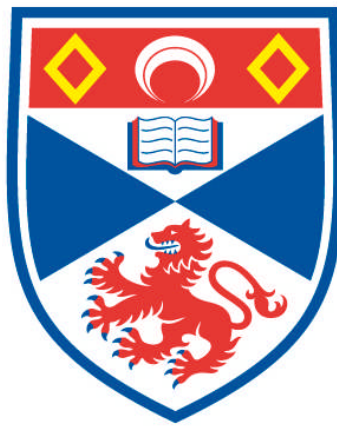


**IMAGES OF THE DAI : THE AESTHETICS OF GENDER AND  
IDENTITY IN XISHUANGBANNA**

**Anouska Komlosy**

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD  
at the  
University of St Andrews**



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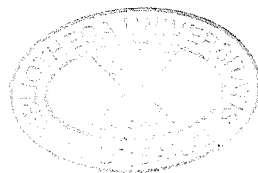
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**The Aesthetics of Gender and Identity in**  
**Xishuangbanna.**

**A thesis submitted to the University of St. Andrews for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy in the Department of Social Anthropology**

**Anouska Komlosy**

**2002**



## Abstract

This thesis is based on fieldwork carried out in Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan Province, China. The main focus of the work is the Dai people, one of China's fifty-five so called 'Minority Nationalities'. I aim to paint a picture of the complex processes through which Dai ways of being and images of them are created and recreated. This is not to suggest that the Dai constitute a bounded group. Although Chinese official discourse presents a static, rigid picture of the so-called 'Minority Nationalities', I hope to have demonstrated that the everyday experiences of those in Banna are governed by a fluid and dynamic relationality. Images of 'Minority Nationalities' abound in China, these images are multiple and often contradictory. The Dai are known throughout China for their beauty, a beauty often portrayed as highly erotic. In this thesis I explore the implications of this image and the role of the Dai in its formation and continuity. With this in mind I examine the ways that the striking Dai aesthetic is used in the intricate power plays of Xishuangbanna. This work examines aspects of the Dai lived aesthetic and as such it has chapters on tattoo, architecture and feminine beauty. Dai aesthetic knowledge is interlaced with strands of moral, philosophical and cosmological insight, thus this work also includes a chapter on morality, autonomy and cooperation. The penultimate chapter uses vivid ethnography of the Water Splashing festival as a example of play of identities in Xishuangbanna. The Conclusion reiterates that the processes by which images, identities and aesthetic understandings are generated, and by which limits are explored and transgressed in Xishuangbanna are dialogic in character. This work questions notions of acculturation, authenticity and classification whilst aiming to explore some of the multiple 'Images of the Dai'.

**Declarations:**

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- (ii) I was admitted as a research student in September 1996 and as a candidate for the degree of Ph.D. at the same time; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St. Andrews between 1997 and 2002.

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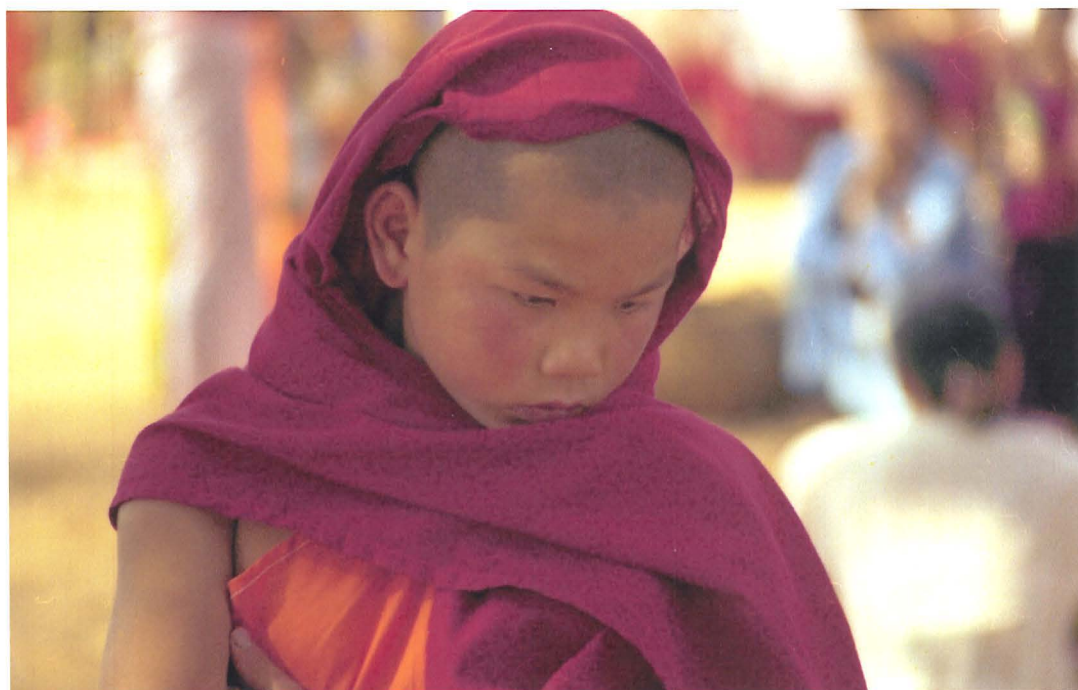
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## Chapter 1

### Introduction



## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Images of the Dai:

#### **The Aesthetics of Gender and Identity in Xishuangbanna, China.**

"Xishuangbanna - What place in China has greater fascination? In my mind it meant beauty, natural wealth, a subtropical paradise. A visit there is sure to be a rare experience in anyone's life" (Zheng Lan 1981 : 1).

### **Complexity and Change: Understanding Xishuangbanna**

Xishuangbanna, known affectionately as 'Banna', can be found in the Southwest of Yunnan Province (maps are provided in Appendix 8). The prefecture is neighbour to both Myanmar and Laos, and has a total of 966.3 kilometres of border, and covers an area of some 19, 112.5 square kilometres (Zheng Peng 1993 : 1). The climate is subtropical and so much of the land is dedicated to wet rice agriculture, or cash crops such as tea, sugar cane, rubber, tropical fruit, while maize is grown in more mountainous regions<sup>1</sup>. The 1996 government census found the area to be the home of peoples belonging to over eighteen so-called 'minority nationalities' including: Hani, Wa, Bulang, Hui, Jingpo and Dai.

This work focuses on the Dai. The majority of Dai living in Xishuangbanna speak the Daile language and are sub-classified as *Shui Dai* 水傣 (Water Dai) by Chinese academics. In this thesis I use the term Dai rather than Tai, as used in Tai /

Thai studies, as this is the Chinese label and, whatever our political sympathies, the people with whom I worked are to be found within the present day borders of the People's Republic of China. I also prefer to use the Mandarin term 'Xishuangbanna' 西双版纳, rather than the Tai *Sipsongpanna*, Mandarin being the *lingua franca* of the diverse peoples living in the area. The Dai are not the only people living in the area. Indeed, records show that their population has never been above sixty percent of the total (see population tables presented below and in Chapter Two). In recognition of the other peoples of the area, many of whom were slaves of Dai nobility, I use the Mandarin 'Xishuangbanna'.

Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture was established on January 23, 1953 (Zheng Lan 1981 : 11). Since then the area has seen immeasurable change. Much of the jungle has been cut down to make way for cash crops, and roads; hospitals and schools have been built. Diseases such as malaria, small pox and bubonic plague have been brought under control. Semi-nomadic forest dwellers (such as the Kucong) have been 'settled' ('brought down from the mountains'). At the same time landlords, mostly Dai, have had their property confiscated. There have also been periods of famine, especially during the sixties and early seventies. In the last fifty years the social and environmental landscapes of Xishuangbanna have changed radically, and all signs indicate continued transformation.

Xishuangbanna is spectacular in the diversity of its peoples and yet at the same time the Han Chinese presence is everywhere felt. The Chinese State makes its discourse heard and felt through television and the new roads down which trundle hundreds of blue state-owned trucks, through the telephone cables that criss-cross

the landscape, and the seemingly endless mini-vans filled with Han businessmen and the increasing numbers of tourists, and through the presence of children sporting trenchant red scarves.

### State Classification of the Peoples of Banna

In the 1996 official Chinese government census Xishuangbanna was found to be the home of over eighteen 'Nationalities.' Population figures from this census translated from 1996 Xishuangbanna statistical yearbook published by the area's statistics office are provided In tables 1:1 and 1:2 below.

	1996	1995	Difference	% Growth
Minority Nationalities	614,270	605,952	8318	1.37
Dai Nationality	288,090	284,639	3451	1.21
Other Minority Nationalities	326,180	321,313	4867	1.52
Han Nationality	216,566	211,820	4746	2.24

1. Minority Nationality Population.					
Unit	Figures	Total	Jinghong County	Menghai County	Mengla County
People	Sum	614,270	234,132	245,321	134,817
People	%	73.93	66.09	85.75	70.77
Divided according to official national minority status.					
Dai Nationality 傣族					
	Sum	288,090	124,897	110,390	52,803
	%	34.68	35.26	38.59	27.72
Hani Nationality 哈尼族					
	Sum	158,152	55,925	59,161	43,066
	%	19.04	15.78	20.68	22.61
Lahu Nationality 拉祜族					
	Sum	47,054	8,711	37,191	1,152
	%	5.66	2.46	13.00	6.05
Bulang Nationality 布朗族					
	Sum	34,686	5,102	29,508	76
	%	4.18	1.44	10.31	0.04
Li Nationality 黎族					
	Sum	33,539	12,979	4,165	16,395
	%	4.04	3.66	1.46	8.61

<b>Jinuo Nationality 基诺族</b>					
	<b>Sum</b>	17,735	17,263	31	441
	<b>%</b>	2.14	4.87	0.01	0.23
<b>Yao Nationality 瑶族</b>					
	<b>Sum</b>	16,438	2,048	29	14,361
	<b>%</b>	1.98	1.14	0.01	0.08
<b>Hui Nationality 回族</b>					
	<b>Sum</b>	3,312	1,400	1,635	277
	<b>%</b>	0.40	0.40	0.57	0.15
<b>Bai Nationality 白族</b>					
	<b>Sum</b>	2,384	1,436	441	507
	<b>%</b>	0.29	0.41	0.15	0.27
<b>Wa Nationality 佤族</b>					
	<b>Sum</b>	1887	531	1132	224
	<b>%</b>	0.23	0.15	0.40	0.12
<b>Zhuang Nationality 壮族</b>					
	<b>Sum</b>	1749	559	134	1056
	<b>%</b>	0.21	0.16	0.05	0.55
<b>Miao Nationality 苗族</b>					
	<b>Sum</b>	1996	481	162	1353
	<b>%</b>	0.24	0.14	0.06	0.71
<b>Lisu Nationality 傈僳族</b>					
	<b>Sum</b>	488	285	41	162
	<b>%</b>	0.06	0.08	0.01	0.09
<b>Jingpo Nationality 景颇族</b>					
	<b>Sum</b>	217	89	121	7
	<b>%</b>	0.03	0.03	0.04	-
<b>Menggu (Mongolian) Nationality 蒙古族</b>					
	<b>Sum</b>	152	94	26	32
<b>Buyi Nationality 布依族</b>					
	<b>Sum</b>	165	70	20	75
<b>Other Nationalities</b>					
	<b>Sum</b>	6170	2208	1139	2823
<b>2. Han Nationality 汉族</b>					
	<b>Sum</b>	216,566	120,132	40,759	55,675
	<b>%</b>	26.07	33.91	14.25	29.23

The Chinese State recognises fifty-six distinct peoples as living within the People's Republic of China (PRC). Those termed Han form the majority, comprising between ninety-two and ninety four percent of the total population. The remaining six to eight percent is constituted by 'Minority Nationalities' (*Shaoshu Minzu* 少数民族), such as the Dai people who are the focus of this work. Although the percentages may sound small, six to eight percent of the population of China amounts to more than ninety two million people. The term '*minzu*' derives from the Japanese '*minzoku*' meaning people or nation, and was used by Sun Yatsen during the Republican Period (1912 - 1949) as the basis of his Five Peoples Policy (Gladney

1998 : 117)<sup>2</sup>. Mackerras (1994 : 141) has explained that the definition of ‘nationality’ used most widely by Chinese academics and officials derives from that **“articulated by Stalin in 1913: ‘A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological makeup manifested in a common culture.’ Stalin goes on to emphasise that ‘none of the above characteristics taken separately is sufficient to define a nation.’ Moreover, even if one of these characteristics is lacking, then ‘the nation ceases to be a nation.’”**

It can be argued that the Chinese State has adhered to the policy towards the ‘minority’ people laid down in Article Three of the first Constitution, which was adopted by the First National People’s Congress on 20<sup>th</sup> September 1954. Extracts from the Article are provided below:

**“The People’s Republic of China is a unitary multinational state.**

**All the nationalities are equal. Discrimination against or oppression of any nationality, and acts which undermine the unity of the nationalities, are prohibited.**

**All the nationalities have the freedom to use and develop their own spoken and written languages, and to preserve or reform their own customs and ways.**

**Regional autonomy applies in areas where a minority nationality lives in a compact community. All the national autonomous areas are inseparable parts of the Peoples Republic of China” (Mackerras 1994 : 145).**



The implementation of this Article was no doubt an attempt to make up for the centuries of inequality suffered by the ‘minorities’ under the antecedent dynastic regime. However this passage is open to wide interpretation and the political standing of the ‘minorities’ has oscillated dramatically over the years<sup>3</sup>. Since the PRC was established in 1949 the ‘minorities’ have been subjected to two periods of forced assimilation: the Great Leap Forward, *Dayuejin* 大跃进 (1959-62) and The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, *Wenhua da geming* 文化大革命 (1966-76)<sup>4</sup>.

The ‘regional autonomy’ mentioned in the above passage does not equate with freedom from State control. To gain a deeper insight into the intricacies of the administrative concept of ‘regional autonomy’ see Appendix 1, where Articles 112 -122 of the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China are provided in full.

### **A Brief Glimpse at the History and Geography of Xishuangbanna**

At the time of my fieldwork Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture was considered an inalienable part of the People’s Republic of China, but there are extensive historical accounts of the region dating back to times before the birth of such political entities<sup>5</sup>. There is archaeological evidence that the Dai have lived in Xishuangbanna since the time of the Han dynasty (206BC-AD221)<sup>6</sup>. The relationship that Xishuangbanna has had with the rulers of China through its long past is complex and the extent to which the area was ever totally independent is a topic of tense debate<sup>7</sup>. The area was caught between Burma and China and paid tribute to both. Wiens suggests that the last possibility for independence came in

1895 when the colonial powers of France and Britain sought to turn the region into a buffer zone between their respective clients. But this plan was found to be impracticable (Wiens 1967 : 312).

There is some disagreement between Chinese, Dai and international scholars regarding the political organisation of the area prior to the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949. Some international scholars hold that the area was a Kingdom, whilst many Chinese specialists argue that the area was a 'tribal union'. Either way there was a King, *Chao Phaendin*, based in Jinghong 景洪, the present day Capital of the area, although the ambit of his influence over other officials is contested. The Taiwanese scholar Hsieh Shih-Chung (1990 : 3) argues that Xishuangbanna was a **“kingdom under the royal house of an unbroken family line since 1180”**. There were over thirty Chao rulers between 1180 and 1955 (Yun Gao 1998 : 22). Hsieh Shih-Chung argues that this King was the central symbol of Xishuangbanna Dai ethnic identity prior to 1953 when the Dai Autonomous Prefecture was finally established.

It is clear that Han influence over the area significantly increased after 1911. For it was in this year that, after twenty-two years of bloody civil war, the then King, Chao Gham Le turned to his suzerain State for help in the ongoing fight against the Prince of Mengzhe 勐蔗. This State was China whose rulers rapidly dispatched the general Ke Shuxun and his army to aid the King. The Prince of Mengzhe was defeated and the throne preserved. Coincidentally 1911 was also the year that, following the Wu Chang 武昌 Rising<sup>8</sup>, the Qing Dynasty 清朝 (1644 - 1911) was overthrown. The political uncertainty that followed induced the Dai King to request

the continued assistance of the Han general. As a result the Han general Ke Shuxun remained in Xishuangbanna (Hsieh Shih-Chung 1990 : 2).

During the Republican Period (1912 - 1949) Banna was the site of some intense anti-Han sentiments. Dai venerable elders in my host village spoke in considerable detail of the brutal treatment they received at the hands of Han soldiers. I was told profoundly disturbing accounts of forced billeting, rape, torture and near starvation. Thus to use Red Army rhetoric, in the 1950's Xishuangbanna's peasants were 'liberated' not only from repressive yoke of feudalism upheld by the previous exploitative regime, but also from the Guomindang 国民党 Nationalist Party soldiers who were billeted there.

Before returning to the situation in Xishuangbanna since 'Liberation', let me explain some of the historical changes in the administrative organisation of the area. In 1570, *Chao Phaedin* Dao Yin Ming divided the region into twelve districts. Indeed the name Xishuangbanna is a transliteration into Mandarin of the Dai term, Sipsongpanna, meaning twelve Panna's, that is twelve administrative units (literal translation 'ten thousand fields'). These administrative units, also called *Muang* (*Meng*), were ruled over by regional kings, the *Chao Muang* (Yun Gao 1998 : 23). Today the term *Meng* still features in many of the place names in Banna (such as Mengzhe mentioned above). It is also notable that the term for village in Daile, *Ban* (sometimes transliterated into Mandarin as *Men*) is also still used<sup>9</sup>.

In 1929 the then government of Yunnan Province reorganised the area into seven counties (Hsieh Shih-Chung 1990 : 5), but when the Autonomous Prefecture

was established on Jan 23, 1953 twelve administrative units were again set up (Zheng Lan 1991 : 11). However the number was reduced to five in 1957, and then further reduced to three counties in 1959. At the time of my fieldwork there were still three organisational counties, Jinghong (which has the same name as the Capital City found within it's borders), Menghai and Mengla.

### **An Introduction to the Heterogeneity of Banna**

Since 1953 the area has seen startling changes in its population's demography with the number of Han Chinese rising rapidly (the implications of this are discussed in some detail in Chapter Two). Furthermore the region's towns and cities are growing in accordance with a much improved transport system. Today Dai Buddhist Monks are occasionally seen in the local Discos and most young Dai whether living in the city or villages have pagers and Video Compact Disc Players. The population of Xishuangbanna is in constant flux, with people moving around to play, to work, to make money. Most, but by no means all inhabitants of Banna can speak or understand Mandarin, thanks to an extensive education program but also to the seductive and intriguing character of television.

The Dai have a reputation for gentleness amongst the Han majority. But this gentleness does not mean that there are no dissenting opinions on the status of their land. Take for example, an extract from an informal interview held with a Dai man who was a child in the 1960's and so experienced the harrowing tumult of the Cultural Revolution and the devastating famine that followed at first hand<sup>10</sup>:

"Sipsongpanna was not part of China before the 1950's. It was an independent country with it's own King and Army. Although many people carried guns, there was little violence because of the influence of Buddhism. Buddhism makes people good. But it makes people so good and accommodating that they turn stupid. We may have been good people but the Han and the Aini people they were not good and so our country was overtaken. After the Han arrived our King went to Kunming. He can no longer speak much Dai and his granddaughter cannot speak Dai at all. He was, should I say, forced or encouraged, to marry a Han girl. This was to prevent the continuation of Dai culture in his family. He cannot come back to Banna. The Chinese tricked the heir to the throne, a man belonging to the King's family. He became head of the Prefecture but he did not have the same power as the King would have had."

Animosity and prejudice is not only anti-Han. There are still many Han people living in the area who hold to Marxist evolutionary / materialist preconceptions concerning the Dai and 'minority' people in general. Such attitudes are clear in the following extracts from interviews with non-Dai locals:

~ "Minority people don't have anything worth researching. Maybe you think that their culture is very interesting and deep, but we see it as very simple, as nothing."

~ "Banna is an OK place but it would be better if it wasn't a minority area."

Why is that?

"Their culture's too poor. They don't have a culture<sup>11</sup> so the area is too dirty, poor."

But the Dai people have their own script and a rich cultural heritage.

"That is so, but their culture is too poor, it's lacking."

Despite the views expressed in the above extracts Dai-Han relations are in general far from acrimonious. There are numerous cases of Han-Dai intermarriage (see Chapter Two). Moreover the group of friends with whom I spent most of my time whilst in the city of Jinghong consisted of people of a myriad of 'minority nationalities'. They saw each other everyday, ate together, worked and played together and depended on one another in many ways. As an example of the way the Dai are often viewed by Han visitors to the area, I include below lyrics written by the *Di Qi Tian Yuedui* 第七天乐队 (Seventh Day Band). This song conjures images of the Dai Water Splashing ceremony as it was played out in the village of Manjing Men (see Chapter Seven for a detailed account of Water Splashing). The author of these words lives with the rest of his band in the City of Kunming the capital of Yunnan Province.

### Man Jing Village

曼景门

I think we will remember it all;

我想我们会记住它;

Those days, that village:

那些日子那个村落:

I think we should remember it all;

我想我们该记住它:

Those days, that village:

那些日子那个村落:

Sprinkle water Ah!

泼水啦!

Sprinkle water. Sprinkle water Ah!

泼水, 泼水啦!

Bountiful jokes flowing from everyone like running water:

盈盈的笑话伴着流水人家:

Joining the dwellers of their home was like a beautiful dream

Yet we experienced it;

多象场美梦却又经历着它:

As we took leave a rainbow suddenly appeared.

离去的时候突然, 出现彩虹.

I believe those colours must have emanated from their home.

我想那一定来自她们的家.

The rapport between the Dai and the other 'minorities' in the area is equally multifaceted. There are still today fewer marriages between Dai people and those of differing 'minority' nationality than there are between Dai and Han or Dai and non-Chinese, which may be a legacy of the past when the Dai ruled the area. The Dai language does not name many of the other groups indigenous to the area. Rather many of these peoples are still known to the Dai by the term 'ha' (ᨧᩢ᩠ᨦ) meaning subservient or vassal. Before moving on to discuss how I began to understand

Xishuangbanna I include a Table (1:3), which displays the Dai and Mandarin for most populous groups of the area. This table also makes explicit those groups for whom the Dai have no name, it should be noted that the Mandarin classification terms may also not coincide with the auto-denominations that these groups give themselves.

Table 1:3: Terminology referring to the thirteen most populous groups found in Xishuangbanna.			
Transliteration of the Mandarin name.	Mandarin.	Transliteration of the Dai name.	Dai
Dai	傣	Die	၃၆
Han	汉	Ho	၃၅
Hani	哈尼	Go	၃၈
Bulang	布朗	Pulang	၃၉ ၄၀
Hui	回	Paxi	၄၁ ၄၂
Jingpo	京破	Hong	၄၃
Zhuang	壮	Diezhuang	၄၄ ၄၅
Lahu	拉祜	Ha	၃၅
Yi	彝	Ha	၃၅
Yao	瑶	Ha	၃၅
Wa	佤	Ha	၃၅
Miao	苗	Ha	၃၅
Jinuo	基诺	Ha	၃၅



## **Ways of Gaining and Representing Knowledge: Learning to see the Beauty of Xishuangbanna.**

In this section I shall discuss my understandings of how I gained knowledge about Xishuangbanna. As anthropologists there is always the fear that our experiences or life paths have differed so much from those of the people with whom we work that gaining any understanding of them may well be impossible. By way of an introduction to this section I include the following comic tale from a Daoist collection, known as the Chuang Zi (Tzu), which should demonstrate that there is wisdom in accepting the possibility of understanding other ways of being:

### **The Joy of Fishes**

**Chuang Tzu and Hui Tzu  
Were crossing Hao River  
By the dam.**

**Chuang said:**

**“See how free  
The Fishes leap and dart  
That is their happiness.”**

**Hui replied:**

**“Since you are not a fish  
How do you know  
What makes fishes happy?”**

**Chuang said:**

**“Since you are not I  
How can you possibly know  
That I do not know  
What makes fishes happy?”**

**Hui argued:**

**“If I, not being you,  
Cannot know what you know  
It follows that you  
Not being a fish  
Cannot know what they know”**

**Chuang said:**

**“Wait a minute  
Let us get back  
To the original question  
What you asked me was**

*'How do you know  
What makes fishes happy?"  
From the terms of your question  
You evidently know I know  
What makes fishes happy.*

*"I know the joy of fishes  
In the river  
Through my own joy, as I go walking  
Along the same river."*

From the Chuang Tzu (Merton 1992 : 143 - 144)

The above dialogue explains that knowledge of others and empathy with them is enhanced by shared lived experience. This idea is reflected in the explanation of knowledge in the 'relational model' outlined in Ingold (2000). Drawing heavily on 'hunter gatherer' insights this model provides an alternative to genealogical assumptions<sup>12</sup> so prevalent in much Western thought. Ingold (2000 : 147) explains that knowledge can be generated through various activities including those of a linguistic character. A point also posited by the Norwegian philosopher Jakob Meløe. In the latter's discussion of the knowledge and skills of reindeer herding he writes: **"There is a rich and well ordered set of words, or concepts, that is proper to reindeer herding. This order and the intelligibility of each of its concepts, collapses if we cut off the links with the practice of reindeer herding"** (Meløe 1988 : 4000).

Ingold explains that knowledge is gained by sharing lived experience and therefore cannot simply be exchanged in verbal communication. He writes of knowledge that it, **"is not merely applied but generated in the course of lived experience, through a series of encounters in the which the contribution of other persons is to orient one's attention - whether by means of revelation, demonstration or ostention - along the same lines as their own, so that one can**

**begin to apprehend the world for oneself in the ways, and from the positions, that they do. In every such encounter, each party enters into the experience of the other and makes that experience his or her own as well. One shares in the process of knowing, rather than taking on board a pre-established body of knowledge"** (Ingold 2000 : 145 - 146).

Knowing here is something that one generates through participation. Ingold is not saying that there is no knowledge before the arrival of any new participants but rather that knowledge grows and changes with every new encounter. Therefore in order to understand another way of being we must engage with this ongoing process of knowing. Ingold's sense of the generation of knowledge resonates with the understandings of those who have called for a dialogic approach to gaining anthropological knowledge in the field<sup>13</sup>. Although the term was never used by Bakhtin himself (Holquist 1990 : 15) dialogism as a theory of knowledge has been generated from his writings. For Bakhtin: **"Life is dialogical by its very nature. To live means to engage in dialogue, to question, to listen, to answer, to agree, etc"**<sup>14</sup> (in Todorov 1984 : 97). As Holquist explains "Being" for Bakhtin is: **"not just an event, but an event that is shared. Being is simultaneity; it is always co-being"** (Holquist 1990 : 25). This means that 'nothing is anything in itself' (Holquist 1990 : 38). For Bakhtin sociality is of primary importance. Dialogic sociality can best be understood as an ongoing, energetic and creative process. A process which generates a heteroglossia of contested meanings (Holquist 1990 : 24).

Influenced by the teachings of Bakhtin, Tedlock and Mannheim (1995) have proposed that cultural knowledge be viewed as dynamic; as being constantly created

through a dialogical process. This theoretical stance has profound implications for long term fieldwork based ethnography. Not only should culture be viewed as always in the process of becoming but, as Tedlock and Mannheim explain: **“Once culture is seen as arising from a dialogical ground, then ethnography itself is revealed as an emergent cultural (or intercultural) phenomenon, produced, reproduced, and revised in dialogues between field-workers and natives”** (Tedlock and Mannheim 1995 : 2). This means that narratives told to a fieldworker can no longer be viewed as fragments of the ‘other’s’ culture, rather they are the ‘joint constructions of the ethnographer and the storytellers’ (Tedlock and Mannheim 1995 : 13). Thus ethnographers should be understood as both generating and observing culture (Tedlock and Mannheim 1995 : 15).

The ideal of participant observation based fieldwork has long been the norm for social anthropology. Yet it is only recently that the value of participating and sharing in everyday experience has been recognised. Such a fieldwork technique allows profound understandings of, or to use Leach's term (1982) 'insight' into other ways of being. Such insight cannot be quantitatively measured, as Leach himself makes clear: **"Social anthropologists should not see themselves as seekers after objective truth; their purpose is to gain insight into other people's behaviour, or, for that matter into their own. 'Insight' may seem a vague concept but it is one which we admire in other contexts; it is the quality of deep understanding which, as critics, we attribute to those whom we regard as *great* artists, dramatists, novelists, composers; it is the difference between fully understanding the nuances of a language and simply knowing the dictionary glosses of the individual words"** (Leach 1982 : 52).

By accepting that what I sought in Banna was not ‘true and bounded cultural concepts’, but insight and understanding of the Dai people with whom I interacted, I overcame my initial reservations concerning the adoption of the ethnographer's role. With all the asymmetries of power that it usually involves many scholars have felt uncomfortable at the prospect of taking on the position of researcher. Behar has touchingly captured the anguish such worries can cause a reflexive scholar. Of her own experience as a fieldworker she writes: **“I found myself resisting the “I” of the ethnographer as a privileged eye, a voyeuristic eye, an all-powerful eye. Every ethnography, I knew, depended on some form of ethnographic authority. But... I distrusted my own authority. I saw it as being constantly in question, constantly on the point of breakdown”** (Behar 1996 : 21).

In 1983 Barbara Du Bois called for a 'Passionate Scholarship', that is one which acknowledged the place of 'feminine' qualities such as intuition, feeling and belief (Stacey 1991 : 111). Early feminist scholars were eager to stress the central place of experience in understanding. They hoped that, as Renate Duelli Klein had urged, they could construct a methodology that incorporated an interactive framework with women studying women, so ending the exploitation of women as research objects (Stacey 1991 : 112). However these high hopes proved overly optimistic and many scholars since have questioned even the possibility of ethical field research<sup>15</sup>, a point I shall return to later in this section. For now it should be stated that by acknowledging that the ethnographer is engaged in a dialogic process which creatively generates meanings the fieldworker / research-subject dynamic can be transformed so that informants become interlocutors. Insights into the understandings of the ‘other’ can be generated through sharing lived experience with

these interlocutors. As I shall explain further below such lived experience is as much affective as practical, as much about laughing and crying together as learning how to sow rice or herd reindeer .

It should not be forgotten that even when the ethnographer tries to ensure that relationships created during fieldwork are based on reciprocity and empathy, there is still the possibility, even the likelihood of exploitative plays of power. However the dynamics between fieldworkers and their interlocutors are exceedingly complex and as the following words of Kirk and Miller make clear, the ethnographer will not necessarily hold a prestigious status whilst in the field: **"There are, no doubt, many examples of fieldworkers who never attained a status accorded by people studied of anyone more complicated than a hapless fool or a dull stranger. Nonetheless, fieldworkers in their [own] eyes grow wise through fieldwork"** (Kirk and Miller 1986 : 62).

Some feminist writers have commented that in many field sites the status of the ethnographer is more likely to remain low if they are female. As Penny Golde argues, when female ethnographers are not treated as androgynous or as honorary males they are likely to be regarded as children or even feeble minded beings in need of protection (D Wolf 1996 : 9). Although this may not be as unfortunate as it appears, for as Mencius said: **"The great man is he who does not lose his child's heart"** (Mencius, Book IV, Part II, chapter XII in Lin Yutang : 1963 : 226). Perhaps unsurprisingly I was not treated in a way fitting with any single one of Golde's categories. Whilst in my host's village I was on occasion looked upon as a

naughty and exasperating child, but then I was transformed into a trusted confidant, a respected scholar or a convenient cash dispenser as circumstances changed.

It is important to appreciate that even when we as fieldworkers feel lost and vulnerable we never leave behind our own positionality in global socio-economic power politics, nor should we overlook or ignore that of those with whom we work, especially in the name of 'cross-cultural sisterhood'. As Gorelick (D Wolf 1996 : 18 - 19) has pointed out, the 'ideology' of the equality of women espoused by some schools of feminism has inadvertently reintroduced the idea of 'value free' results. Such results ignore the complexities of the power relationships in which researchers and their subjects are, and can become entangled.

As I went to the field with the hope of engaging with my interlocutors on an egalitarian basis as possible I found that the best advice that I was given concerning my methodology was to 'go and make friends'. Without the intimacy, trust and hope, mutual enjoyment that these relationships entailed I could not have endured my time in China nor gained much insight into or understanding of what I encountered. However I am painfully aware of the ethical questions that my behaviour raises. Firstly no matter how close and egalitarian the friendships created in the field, the ethnographer can and usually does leave. Since returning to Britain I have had several harrowing phone calls with my hosts in the field, in which I was told not only that I was missed but also that my absence was making the male elder of the household sick. It has been argued by Stacey (1991) that the greater the intimacy of friendships cultivated in the field the greater the danger of exploitation and betrayal. As she writes: **"The lives, loves, and tragedies that fieldwork**

**informants share with a researcher are ultimately data - grist for the ethnographic mill, a mill that has a truly grinding power"** (Stacey 1991 : 113).

My experiences in the field forced me to recognize that Stacey may be correct when she writes that: **"conflicts of interest and emotion between the ethnographer as authentic, related person (i.e., participant), and as exploiting researcher (i.e., observer) are also an inescapable feature of ethnographic method."** Which means that **"elements of inequality, exploitation, and even betrayal are endemic to ethnography"** (Stacey 1991 : 114).

As mentioned earlier, such ethical conundrums have led scholars to ask if ethical research is ever possible. Patai (1991) argues that the power differentials between the first and third world mean exploitation is inevitable despite the good intentions of many researchers. However for Stacey (1991) an element of self-reflexivity, coupled with heeding the lessons of critical ethnography raised by Clifford (1986) and others, can allow ethnographers practicing long term, participant observation based fieldwork to: **"construct accounts that, however partial and idiosyncratic, can achieve the contextuality, depth, and nuance I consider to be unattainable through less dangerous but more remote research methods"** (Stacey 1991 : 118).

This is not to imply that making friends and sharing life experience is always easy and fun. My time in Yunnan certainly had its dull and downright terrifying times but with hindsight I have come to understand that these times also pulsed with the magic of experience and knowledge. As Herman Hesse has written in his fairy



tales: **'Even the scary strange days can bring a song, an experience, or a story with them'** (Hesse 1995 : 244). Hesse also talks of a gate through which our souls, if they are ready, can enter a place where dualities are transcended; where as he writes: **"you and I and day and night are all one"** (Hesse 1995 : 245 - 247). The most trying times of my fieldwork were not the boring or frightening but rather those instances when I felt most at home with my hosts or other friends. At these times I felt I was catching glimpses of Hesse's miraculous gate, but sadly it was then that I was most aware that it would be forever out of reach.

Given the fact that, as Leach (cited in Jackson 1983 : 39) has explained, fieldwork is an **"extremely personal, traumatic kind of experience,"** it is not surprising that Capp and Kleinman (1993) have called for the recognition that fieldworkers do **'emotion work'**. Not only is this a call for us to explore and acknowledge the emotional aspects of the worlds we investigate, but it also bids us to recognize the emotions that we as researchers experience. In the following extract Behar's haunting description beautifully captures the 'existential angst' that an anthropologist can face as they struggle to produce a credible ethnographic account: **"Loss, mourning, the longing for memory, the desire to enter into the world around you and having no idea how to do it, the fear of observing too coldly or too distractedly or too raggedly, the rage of cowardice, the insight that is always arriving late, and defiant hindsight, a sense of the utter uselessness of writing anything and yet the burning desire to write something"** (Behar 1996 : 3).

Before moving on to discuss the particularities of my own field-site, I wish to reiterate that a dialogic understanding of the generation of knowledge can be

profoundly helpful for a fieldworker hoping to gain insights into other ways of being. Such an understanding should help a fieldworker appreciate the necessity of learning everyday skills of the people with whom they are working. It should also aid in the helping them accept that meanings are contested and that heteroglossia inevitably leads to further interpretations always being possible. But I have argued here that any understanding of the generation of knowledge must also appreciate that shared affective / emotional experience can also create and recreate knowledge of negotiated meanings. Such an approach acknowledges not only that affective being, both is and can generate knowledge, but also that realms of the emotional and the practical blur. Far from being the product of indifferent attachment, knowledge can be generated through the learning of practical skills such as sowing rice or weaving but also by the sharing in the affective lives of our interlocutors.

Finally in this section I shall note the particular dangers of China as a field site and my experiences of it. The dangers are twofold. There is the ever present fear that those who openly associate with a foreign researcher will be targeted for questioning or worse. As M Wolf (1990 : 352) writes: **"It is unfortunate but true that in China one can still suffer serious damage for the expression of an unpopular opinion, no matter how innocent that opinion may seem to the unwary outsider"**. As far as I am aware my hosts' have suffered no direct negative consequences as a result of their hospitality to me. But as in the field, even as I write now, I am seriously concerned that I cannot know this for certain.

The second danger concerns the fieldworkers themselves. Although physical danger is minimal, many researchers have commented on the inconvenience of bureaucratic procedures for gaining permission to carry out research in China. I must

state that I was treated with polite respect and kindness by the authorities. As will be further explained below my Professor in Yunnan University helped me to get research permission. He also gave me a letter of introduction addressed to a high-ranking local official. By chance this official is also a Dai scholar (often cited in the chapters that follow), which may have been one reason why his reaction to my presence was to exclaim: 'the whole of Banna is open to you, go where you like'. He was fully aware of the site where I wanted to study. But, rather than move directly into my host village (known as Mengxiang in this work), I followed advice given to me by my Professor and acquired a room in a government sponsored guesthouse in Jinghong City, which I maintained through much of my fieldwork. I could come and go from this room at will and I was never asked where I was going or when I would be back even though I often spent more time away than in residence.

Other fieldworkers<sup>16</sup> have expressed displeasure at interference from the Chinese Public Security Bureau. I seem to have been very lucky in how I was treated, as I was never asked for my papers nor was my presence in Banna, Kunming or indeed anywhere in China questioned. From my arrival in Yunnan University I was pointedly open about my intention to carry out fieldwork with the Dai in Banna. I was also fortunate to be introduced to a lecturer at the Minority Nationalities College in Kunming. For the first few months of my time in China I met with him every week for informal lessons covering such topics as the social anthropology of China, 'minority studies' and academic Chinese language. Before long he moved to Yunnan University and so was in a position to introduce me to my future Professor there. I was deeply moved by the help and encouragement given to me by the Professor and his wife and as hinted at above, I followed his advice very closely. I

also made friends with local people of various backgrounds in Kunming. Not only did their sense of fun and loyalty make my time in China truly wonderful, but without their patient schooling in the Kunming dialect (*Kunming Hua* 昆明话) it would have been almost impossible for me to understand local Xishuangbanna (Banna) Chinese, despite my year of training in Mandarin (*Putonghua* 普通话).

Following a year studying Chinese at Yunnan University in Kunming, with the help of my Professor and the encouragement of my friends (especially those who have carried out 'minority' research themselves), I transferred to the Department of Visual Anthropology at the same institution. In order to do this I had to produce a detailed research proposal (with much kind help and advice from both Joanna Overing and my Chinese Professor) which was then accepted by the university and those in charge of issuing research visas. This meant I was given not only permission to carry out research amongst the Dai in Banna but was also entitled to carry a Yunnan University postgraduate identity card.

Once in Banna I found that the more informal my approach the more people were willing to talk to me. Thus I used a method that Jargensen (1990) has called 'unobtrusive casual questioning,' but which could equally well be called chatting or having fun with new friends. Jargensen's insights were actually very helpful to me as his work also advises the writing of all initial 'unfocused observations'. He also stressed the experiential as a most productive technique and explains that whilst formal interviews can generate knowledge, such a technique is best confined to the final stages of research when one is better able to choose the appropriate interlocutor and frame informed questions (Jargensen 1990 : 85).

My focus on the experiential and my informal approach meant that I quickly learnt to behave appropriately when in the company of monks and elders, how to water vegetables gardens, make glutinous rice cakes, to prepare everyday meals and barbecue speciality dishes for Han tourists, not to mention how to make the children giggle, and to recite the names of soap opera characters. I also attempted to learn to read, write and speak Daile, hoe rice paddies, sow rice and pick tea. As you can imagine in my short time in Banna I was not successful in all these endeavours but my efforts seemed to bring amusement and encourage people to engage with me. Only once some kind of a rapport had been established between my hosts and myself would they sit and talk of the cosmological, of their experiences during the Cultural Revolution or of the tragedies and joys of their lives<sup>17</sup>. A breakdown of how I spent my time in Yunnan is provided below:

### Research Timetable

<b>Time</b>	<b>Activity</b>
August 1997 - March 1998	Resident at Yunnan University ( <i>Yunda</i> ) studying Mandarin and making contacts in the Anthropology department and at the <i>Minzu Xueyuan</i> (nationalities college). Making friends in Kunming city.
April 1998	Trip to Banna to find contacts and witness the Water Splashing festival. Decide on Mengxiang, a village I had already visited and fallen in love with on a short visit to the area in August 1996, as my future field site.
May 1998 - August 1998	Mandarin lessons at <i>Yunda</i> . Learning Kunming <i>Hua</i> . Visiting other 'Minority Prefectures' in Yunnan. Establishing more contacts in the world of 'minority studies.' Informal lessons in Daile at the Minority Nationality College in Kunming.
August 1998 - October 1998	After a trip back to the UK to write a research proposal move to Banna. Introduce myself to local officials. Make friends in the city. Learn Banna <i>Hua</i> . Visit areas of different 'minority nationalities', learn of the different Dai peoples and visit areas where they live. Visit work units. Spend time in Mengxiang.
November 1998	Trip to Kunming / appendix operation ten days in hospital in Kunming recovery in England.
Late December 1998 - September 1999	Jinghong and Mengxiang, trips around Banna Formal lessons in Dai script at <i>Watbajie</i> / <i>Zhongfosi</i> . Visits to Jinghong city library. Time in Mengxiang village.

As you can see from the table provided above this thesis is based on fieldwork carried out in Yunnan from August 1997 - September 1999. This time together with three short trips made since then, has given me time enough to begin to gain some understandings of the area and begin to appreciate the manifold 'Images of the Dai.'

### Exploring the 'Aesthetic'

**"In the first place they have the gift of beauty which they rightly value above everything else, for it ensures their power to tyrannize over tyrants themselves"**  
(Erasmus 1508 [1971] : 89).

During my time in Xishuangbanna I became increasingly aware that the area, and the Dai people in particular, were known throughout China for their beauty. I assumed that this was an image of the Dai imposed on them by seedy businessmen and the like. I was disturbed by the number of times I was told of the staggering beauty of the Dai women, and viewed such comments as sad examples of the 'feminization' or eroticization of the 'minorities nationalities' in China<sup>18</sup>. However after spending time with Dai peoples both in Jinghong City and the village of Mengxiang, my main field site, it became apparent that 'beautiful / good' (*douli*), 'beautiful / lovely' (*dounam*) and 'graceful / slender' (*longnam*) are concepts of central importance to the Dai way of being. It is interesting to note that Dai also frequently use terms such as; *soinam*, meaning both 'beautiful / good and beautiful / lovely', and *namsak*, meaning 'the longer that one admires someone the prettier they become'.

There are also terms for someone's appearance to be beautiful or attractive without saying whether they are also beautiful people.

The Dai are not alone in their keen interest for the beautiful. For instance Witherspoon's (1977) intricate account of Navajo knowledge provides an example of the potentiality of the beautiful. Witherspoon tells us that amongst the Navajo: **"One is admonished to walk in beauty, speak in beauty, act in beauty, sing in beauty, and live in beauty. All things are to be made beautifully, and all activities are to be completed in beauty"** (Witherspoon 1977 : 153). Moreover for the Navajo **"the aesthetic experience - the creation of beauty - is simultaneously intellectual, emotional, moral, aesthetic, and biological"** (Witherspoon 1977 : 154).

Witherspoon's material provides an example of the inadequacy of 'modernist' assumptions concerning the realm of the aesthetic. As Overing (1989, 1996 and Overing & Passes 2000) has argued, there is a strand of Western thought which, strongly influenced by Kant and his notion of the distinct 'aesthetic judgement', assumes that beauty can only refer to itself (Overing 1996 : 260). As we have seen, this concept of a separate and self-referential realm of the aesthetic differs greatly from many indigenous views of beauty, and yet this philosophical standpoint is still prevalent in many academic circles<sup>19</sup>. It is this incommensurability that causes Overing (1996 : 290) to warn against the imposition of a universalist meta-language of the aesthetic onto the cosmological knowledges of the peoples amongst whom anthropologists work. It is necessary, she explains, to protect against the possibility of the hegemonic, ecumenical assumptions of modernist thought from seeping into our ethnographic accounts. With this aim in mind Overing and Passes (2000 : 18)

have called for a broader understanding of the notion of the aesthetic, and one **"where beauty in daily practice is understood as an expression of moral and political value"**.

Baumgarten, in his unfinished treatise *Aesthetica* (1750-8), was the first to coin the phrase 'the aesthetic'. Gadamer (1986 : 17) explains that he once defined the term **"as the *ars pulchre cogitandi* or the 'art of thinking beautifully'"**. If we remember that for many peoples, including the Dai, thoughts begin in the heart and then flow to the head (see Chapter Five), we can use this definition in a way to transcend the limitations imposed by the Cartesian mind / body dualism and the historical situated agenda of Baumgarten and his search for universals (see Overing 1996 : 280). However, in order for an exploration of the aesthetic to become more insightful, (to become an exploration of the understandings, generation and uses of something called beauty) it must be remembered that thinking / feeling and of course acting and existing beautifully are, especially for many indigenous Amazonian peoples, profoundly entwined with the moral, affective and convivial, that is with the creation and nurture of togetherness (Overing and Passes 2000 : 17 - 19).

Gadamer has argued that beauty has the capability of exposing the fluidity of barriers, such as those between the universal and the particular and the observer and the observed. He advocates the use of 'mystical language' such as the German term *Anbild*, when trying to comprehend images including those considered beautiful. *Anbild* refers both to the image and to the viewer and so it collapses the notion that beauty can only stand for itself, as he writes: **"it is true that we both elicit the image from things and imaginatively project the image onto things in one and**



**the same process"** (Gadamer 1986 : 17). Looking or viewing becomes dialogic, and meaning and knowledge are thus seen as generated rather than given, which takes us back to the discussion of knowledge in the previous section of this introduction.

Gadamer (1986 : 16) goes on to explain that beauty both encourages us to acknowledge the universal, and demands we recognise the individual (a philosophical stance similar to that of Hesse touched on above), this means that **"in the apparent particularity of sensuous experience, which we always attempt to relate to the universal, there is something in our experience of the beautiful that arrests us and compels us to dwell upon the individual experience itself."** Gadamer explains his point with the following example: **"An enchanting sunset does not represent a case of sunsets in general. It is rather a unique sunset displaying the 'tragedy of heavens' "**(Gadamer 1986 : 16).

The Dai aesthetic and also its striking beauty, highlight the unique appeal of the Dai way. This work aims to demonstrate that such appeal has a profound effect on the intricate plays of power at work in Banna. Overing (1996 : 263-265) has noted the benefit of understanding the capability of beautification to empower, she also explains that such an understanding is linked with wider issues of sociality. This thesis will explore the various ways that beauty is considered to empower, from within cosmological conceptions of potency to the creation of a respected and protected built environment in the construction of Dai style architecture. But, set within an area experiencing increasing 'ethnic tourism' and a place where notions of 'ethnicity' and locality are notably blurred (so that the Dai aesthetic is not reserved for those who call themselves Dai), this work also offers a critique of notions of

authenticity and representation. These concepts will be examined in more detail in later chapters (especially Chapter Six) but for now let me once again cite Gadamer whose views on what he has called 'the symbolic' are especially illuminating, for **"here 'representation' does not imply that something merely stands in for something else as if it were a replacement or substitute that enjoyed a less authentic, more indirect kind of existence. On the contrary, what is represented is itself present in the only way available to it"** (Gadamer 1986 : 35).

The ethnographic endeavour also aims at representation. With this in mind I have entitled my thesis 'Images of the Dai,' for not only do I attempt to provide images of them but I also hope to explore both how others image them and how they image themselves. The term image retains an element of the 'inauthentic' or 'created' and as such it may be considered a problematic choice. This property of the term should encourage the reader to note the possibility that these are fleeting images, contingent on a dialogical process within the generation of knowledge. Given that most Dai adhere to Theravada teachings there is in this insight an appropriate resonance with the Buddhist teaching of impermanence and constant change.

The choice of chapter topics in this work reflects those aspects of the Dai way of being that are most representative of them. That is those elements that are most cited in the construction of images of them. When trying to come to some understanding of what it is to be Dai, (that is how one can comprehend a situation where the very concept of Dai is ephemeral but where there is still a readily recognisable Dainess), it was the aspects tackled in this thesis that spoke most

eloquently to me of a Dai way of being. Having provided a brief overview of the position of ‘minority nationalities’ in Yunnan Province in Chapter Two, I go on to describe the most striking aspects, their tattoos (Chapter Three) and the image of Dai femininity (in Chapter Four). Chapter Five moves on to their morality that is the aesthetics of harmony and sociality. Chapter Six turns to their architecture and Chapter Seven to the Dai Water Splashing Festival, a rowdy celebration for which the Dai are known all over China. In the Conclusion I talk about two other aspects which are also central to images of the Dai, the use of language (the controversy over the simplification of Daile script and the widespread use of Mandarin) and the importance of Theravada Buddhism. The order of the Chapters is designed to show the reader images first of the Dai peoples, second of their philosophical and cosmological knowledge and then of their built environment. Chapter Seven provides a snapshot of how all these factors interact. The Conclusion sums up and provides further examples of my argument, namely the heterogeneity of the area and the creative manipulation of the images of Banna’s peoples, all be it within certain constantly explored limits (see Chapter Seven for a detailed theoretical discussion on creative transgression, limitation and the possibilities enabled through ideological hailing and citation). The situation is complex, with images being imposed from without, manipulated and changed but also maintained and constrained from within. The main paradox is that, what it is to be Dai is fluid and yet in any moment it is also fixed. This is not however something which needs to be overcome, it is simply everyday life in Banna. Let me now turn to another type of image which features in this work, namely the photographic.

## Photography and the Image

I have incorporated photographic images in this thesis for two reasons. Which although at first sight may appear contradictory can on second glance be seen to complement one another:

1. To provide the viewer with a clearer picture of an aspect being discussed. Thus I have for example photographs of the complex tattoo designs in Chapter Three and of house styles in Chapter Six.
2. At the beginning of each chapter I have provided an uncaptioned image whose ambiguity and openness allows the peoples of Banna to speak for themselves. These images may allow for an otherwise unarticulated expression of Banna to reach the reader. In so doing I do not claim that my photographic images provide pictures of the 'real' Banna, but rather that they may allow another vision, another 'way of seeing', to borrow Berger's (1972) term.

A photographer can conjure an image of an area through the careful choice and juxtaposition of images. But even before this, when a photograph is being taken, there is conjuring involved. A photographer can make use of an ambiguous yet potent force. Photographic images wield power precisely because of the magic involved in their production. The camera, a little black box, seems to have the mysterious capability to endlessly reproduce reality. But as Bourdieu (1990 [1965] : 77) has explained, we should not be too trusting in our acceptance of any such certainty. As he says:

**“Only in the name of a naive realism can one see as realistic a representation of the real which owes its objective appearance not to its agreement with the very reality of things (since this is only ever conveyed through socially conditioned forms of perception) but rather to conformity with rules which define its syntax within its social use, to the social definition of the objective vision of the world: in conferring upon photography a guarantee of realism, society is merely confirming itself in the tautological certainty that an image of the real which is true to its representation of objectivity is really objective.”**

Rather than frozen splinters of an external truth, photographs should be seen as products of dialogue. The photographer can only conjure an image of what they, as an agential force, see. As such, photographic seeing necessarily involves a creative manipulation. Halla Beloff (1985 : 15) has explained that no matter how persuasive a photograph is in its attempt to be a freeze framed reality fragment **“there is still the human agent who opens the shutter. The object is not just speaking for itself. There is always the mixture of information, accident, aesthetics and motive”**.

The photographer necessarily engages with what is to be photographed, moreover he or she 'manipulates' that with which they so engage. By framing, centring, focusing, light manipulation and other technical sleights of hand the photographer skilfully creates. Thus the image produced cannot be viewed as distinct from the photographer's agency, to quote Halla Beloff again: **"social agency's expectations, aims, assumptions will have led to selection, highlighting,**

**“censorship, beautification, uglification, all these being part of the formal and informal stock-in-trade of the photographer”**(Halla Beloff 1985 : 17).

Susan Sontag (1979) has suggested that photography empowers the photographer. It provides a way of appropriating the subject, so that perceived knowledge of the subject is experienced as power. For my part I can safely say that whilst in the field, I never felt I had 'appropriated the subject'. I was never totally knowledgeable and therefore never totally empowered. On the contrary, even towards the end of my fieldwork I still experienced the Dai world as though I was forever struggling against a tide of incomprehensibility. However, I gradually discovered that the presence of my camera did grant me a certain confidence. Through its presence I experienced a feeling of legitimation, not only in my eyes but also in the eyes of those around. Thus, for example, I was happy to attend my friend's city wedding, safe in the knowledge that the bride and groom were anxious for the photographs I could give in exchange for the privileged view they had allowed me. I experienced a similar sensation when attending Dai festivals in Xishuangbanna. In such contexts Dai revellers would determinedly seek me out to beg (or order) me to take photographs (but more about the photographic subject below).

My camera also enabled me to watch events such as the slaughtering of animals without shedding tears. My camera's view-finder allowed me a degree of engagement whilst simultaneously providing distance from the blood splattered machetes. I should at this point acknowledge the fact that my resolve had been bolstered by the advice of my Chinese photography teacher. He urged me to

photograph everything and anything interesting - whether it be shocking, disgusting or beautiful. His strength as a photographer, he explained, came from his ability to use his camera as a story telling device. He would even take photographs of protesting subjects as he saw their anger as a story worth recording in itself. Such an insensitive attitude seemed shocking at first, trained as I was to be as unobtrusive as possible. But on reflection his attitude helped me to accept the fact that some people would simply not want to be the subject of an academic or Western gaze. If I was willing to write about the people I encountered in the field, to talk about them in seminars, I should also be willing to photograph them. If a person experiences anger on being photographed, how much more insidious and underhanded to write about them without their blessing. (As an aside I should say that I feel it naive to assume that all those who shared their knowledge with me really grasped the use I was going to make of it). At least a photographic image can give voice to anger and disgust. As it happens I was nearly always encouraged to take photographs. Where I was not, my fear prevented me from shooting anyway. But I include my friends teaching here, to reiterate the fact that anthropological fieldwork itself is morally problematic.

I intimated above that photographs are the products of a dialogue, the subject engages with the photographer. Even a landscape has the capability to suggest how it can be photographed to best effect. Moreover a human subject can, within certain constraints of the photographic medium, influence creatively the image produced of him or her. Often the very presence of the camera induces subtle behaviour changes in the subject, as Roland Barthes says: **“Now once I feel myself observed by the lens everything changes; I constitute myself in the process of ‘posing’. I instantaneously make another body for myself, I transform myself in advance**

**into an image. This transformation is an active one; I feel that the photograph creates my body and mystifies it....In front of the lens, I am at the same time, the one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art” (In Halla Beloff 1985 : 185).**

From this quotation, it should be apparent that I do not envision a totally liberated, empowered subject (be that of a photograph or indeed of a Nation State). Any creative reciting of an interpellated positionality, must be intelligible. It could be said that the photographer and the subject are both skilled users of this medium, they employ it as a tool. Although a tool can indeed be used creatively, its very form imposes restrictions on the ways this can be done (R Wagner 1975 [1981]).

For my part it seems so obvious, when I look at certain of my photographs, that the subjects are aware of how they are presenting themselves to me, and the effect that such presentation will have on the final image. Such control over image production was strikingly explicit in Mengxiang, the Dai village where I lived for much of my time in China. The Dai people there loved to have their photographs taken. Any celebration or festival had to be photographed by me. Moreover, before I left every elder of the village had to have a portrait taken, an image for their families once they had departed. Young women were equally insistent, they would get dressed in their best sarongs and drag me around the village to find the most luscious palm tree by which to be photographed. On one occasion I took portraits of most of the young women at a fair, each one standing serenely, not wanting to smile lest their eyes look small.



To sum up then it can be said that for my part, photographs are the products of dialogues. Inherently ambiguous, like linguistic signs they suffer what Derrida has termed '*Differance*' - or slippage. A photograph can have no definitive meaning - it cannot be said to correspond to any external truth. As Victor Burgin has explained photographs are 'read,' as such they cannot be understood outside networks of meanings. Along this line Roland Barthes' last work '*Camera Lucida*' (1990 [1980]), examines in detail this capability of the photographic image. Photographs are capable of devastating seduction, of imparting to the viewer jolts of emotion, whether of disgust, joy, hate, despair or desire. Certainly one reason photography, and I would argue ethnographic writing, can generate such a strength of impact is the trickster's promise that they could never lie. Their ambiguity makes them dangerous yet compelling tools, and as such ones that must be employed cautiously.

By way of a conclusion I shall loosely outline my understandings concerning the generation of knowledge and its relation to the dialogical approach to the aesthetic. My work aims to explore the ways in which knowledge and understanding of the Dai aesthetic is created and continuously recreated. This has revealed a heteroglossia of continuously changing understandings of the meanings of beauty. What is perhaps most interesting is the way in which the Dai peoples themselves have grasped hold of and manipulated 'beautiful' images of them. My understandings of the situation in Banna which are presented in this work should be seen as the product of a succession of dialogues between myself and the peoples of Yunnan. It should also be recognised that this knowledge has been generated by both myself and my interlocutors and as such should not be viewed as translated cultural truth but rather as understanding gained experientially. This realm of shared experience

can only be understood once it is accepted that the boundary between the affective and practical realms cannot be taken as given. Thus in the chapters that follow I hope to engage the reader in the contested meanings, changing understandings and ambiguous realities I found in Banna.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The first tea planted in China was in Xishuangbanna's Menghai County. Also the regional temperature variation is surprisingly pronounced, tropical fruits will not for example grow in Menghai county, thus much more land there is dedicated to sugar cane and maize.

<sup>2</sup> This is discussed in detail in Chapter Two.

<sup>3</sup> See also Schein 2000: 68-74 for an exploration of the changes in attitude to the 'minorities' and their treatment as 'state subjects' in the post-Mao era..

<sup>4</sup> During these times the Maoist slogan **"the nationalities problem is in essence a class problem"** was used as a rallying cry for assimilation. Dreyer has explained that although officially the Cultural Revolution ran until 1976 the situation for the 'minorities' eased somewhat after 1971. This was due to the decline in power of Lin Biao, after which more 'pluralist' policies tolerant towards 'minority' practices were reintroduced (for example books were once again printed in 'minority' languages) (Dreyer 1996 : 291 & Y Ma 1985 : 22). See also Schein 2000 80-91 who provides a breakdown of Han images of the minorities from 1949-1990's.

<sup>5</sup> See Yun Gao 1998 : 1 - 54.

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed account of the Chinese position on the origins of the Dai people see Liu Yan 1999.

<sup>7</sup> From the Ming Dynasty 明朝, Imperial rulers employed a system of indirect rule whereby local lords were encouraged to pay tribute to the Chinese court. This *tusi* 土司 system was maintained into the Qing Dynasty (Yun Gao 1998 : 48 - 54).

<sup>8</sup> On the 10.10.1911 New Army soldiers based in Wu Chang mutinied. By the next day they had taken over the city. This revolt sparked the revolution, which allowed a new military government to declare itself, and caused the Qing Dynasty to topple (M Dillon 1998 : 265 & 349).

<sup>9</sup> These terms will feature throughout this work (especially in Chapter Five). It is worth noting here that the Dai cosmology incorporates spirits or ghosts that protect these administrative entities.

<sup>10</sup> Since the Peoples Republic of China was established in 1949 there have been two periods of forced assimilation to which the 'minorities' have been subjected. The first of these was the Great Leap Forward (1959-62) and the second The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-76). (see Dreyer 1996 : 291 & Ma 1985 : 22).

<sup>11</sup> The Chinese termed used by my informant here was '*Wen Hua* 文化', which can be directly translated as 'culture'. However this term implies the ability to be able to write, (in the traditional rather than Derridian way) as *Wen* 文 means 'character'. This is what caused me to pose my second question, because the Dai are one of only very few of the Chinese 'minority nationalities' that do have their own script.

<sup>12</sup> In this model things are considered to be discrete unit entities or '*things-in-themselves*' (Ingold 2000 : 138) which come into the world with ready made attributes (Ibid. 2000 :136).

<sup>13</sup> See for example Rapport & Overing 2000 : 116.

<sup>14</sup> Original source: Ed. and Trans. Caryl Emerson 1984 problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics (Appendix II).

<sup>15</sup> See for example Patai 1991.

<sup>16</sup> See for example Gladney 1991 : 106 - 107, for a detailed account of the problems encountered by some fieldworkers in contemporary China see Rack 1999 : 9 - 16.

<sup>17</sup> It must be said that some information especially concerning esoteric knowledge was not forthcoming. These problems are discussed in more detail in Chapter Three on Tattoo design.

<sup>18</sup> See Chapter Three for a detailed explanation of this process.

<sup>19</sup> Overing and Passes (2000 : 18) also make the point that a notion of 'the aesthetics of social existence' is not alien to Western thought. The Roman notion of *sensus communis* was understood by Vico as a 'sense of community', a concept which contained within itself not only the metaphysical and the political but also an aesthetics of morality.

## Chapter Two

### Situating the Dai:

### The Dialogics of State Classification and Creative Self- Identification.



**Chapter Two**  
**Situating the Dai:**  
**The Dialogics of State Classification and Creative**  
**Self-Identification.**

*The Good are attracted by Men's perceptions*

*And think not for themselves,*

*Till Experience teaches them to catch*

*And to cage the Fairies and Elves.*

*And then the Knave begins to snarl,*

*And the hypocrite to howl,*

*And all his good Friends show their private ends,*

*And the Eagle is known from the Owl.<sup>1</sup>*

This chapter is concerned with modes of classification, ways of labelling and being labelled. It aims to exemplify the obvious fact that these are creative processes with political agendas. In so doing it not only attempts to show the complexities of these agendas, but also to draw your attention to the vibrant creativity involved in the manipulation of state imposed static systems of classification. In what follows I hope to lead you on a journey through Yunnan Province and down into Xishuangbanna. In this work I aim to present an exploration of a dazzlingly dynamic world.

Since E. Leach's 1954 classic work on the fluid nature of the boundaries between the Tai speaking Shan and the Kachin (Jingpo) in Highland Burma, scholars have been aware of the shifting character of identity in the region. More recent scholars have again begun to address the multivalency of notions of identity be they ethnic or local<sup>2</sup>. Thus it is not surprising that what I found in Xishuangbanna was so fluid, so kaleidoscopic, that all I can provide is a series of tableaux, somewhat like photographic images. But rather than being contained by the frame of a photograph, these images are captured on a page, subjected to a certain enforced linearity and as such can only provide partial glimpses into the vibrancy of life in Yunnan.

I hope to lead you through the labyrinthine trail of Xishuangbanna's cultural landscape, allowing you to grasp the complexity of the 'multiple identities' and diverse discourses of the area. I shall first provide a brief look at the official classification of the peoples of Yunnan. As explained in the introduction, this classification system divides people in to '*shaoshu minzu* 少数民族' or minority nationalities also translated in places as 'ethnic groups' (Fei Xiaotong 1990, Harrell 1995, Ma Yin 1994, Mackerras 1995). I shall then go on to describe the situation in Xishuangbanna at the time of my fieldwork. Finally I shall relate the uses of the term 'Dai', and in so doing examine the generic use of this term, both by my interlocutors and by the authorities (see for example Zheng Xiaoyun and Yu Tao 1995, Ma Yin 1994 : 262 - 268). I shall then provide a brief overview of the categories in which the Dai people of Xishuangbanna are further subdivided, while finally discussing the assumptions, increasingly prolific in current political / multimedia milieu, that those considered to be *Shui Dai* 水傣 Water Dai, (a term which is roughly equivalent to

the category Daile / Lue / Lü used in Tai studies), are the only 'authentic' Dai to be living in Xishuangbanna. It could be argued that this postulation is reinforced by assumptions held by both Chinese and overseas anthropologists who visit the area. However the situation is clearly dialogic, and it would be too simplistic to assume that the Dai peoples themselves were not involved in such a labelling process (on dialogics and contestation of Southeast Asian identities see Wood 1997, for Chinese 'minorities' see Oakes 1993 & 1997, Gladney 1998, Rack 1999, Litzinger 1998 : 241, 2000 among others).

Two dimensional, static, universalist models which aim to divide peoples into clearly defined groups can only produce reductive approximations. Clearly each term, each name referring to a people, speaks of a spectrum of individuals rather than a homogeneous mass. This means that the ways in which a term is interpreted are necessarily multitudinous. This much is obvious without even taking into consideration the various ways in which others will perceive those who fall within this or that category.

In what follows I use terms such as Han or Dai as tools in what I see as an ongoing translation process. Thus I use such names to help paint a picture of the situation as I found it in Xishuangbanna during my field work. I try to use all terminologies in a way that remains faithful to the way the various inhabitants of Xishuangbanna employ them, whilst simultaneously making them comprehensible to you. A dangerous game indeed, but one in which I am inexorably caught. I use terms such as 'Dai', with flexibility, with contextuality. There is paradox, there is contradiction, but perhaps there is no need for this to be overcome.

## **Yunnan Province and the Rhetoric of Classification**

Let me now turn to Yunnan, which lies on the southern extension of the Qinghai - Tibet plateau. The province covers an area of some three hundred and ninety thousand square kilometres <sup>3</sup> a staggering 94% of which is mountainous. According to Heberer's 1985 data sixty-nine of the one hundred and twenty-eight counties in Yunnan are in "mountainous regions", thirty-three in mountain and valley regions and only twenty-six are entirely on the plains (Heberer 1989 : 67 - 69). Vast altitude variations, ranging from over six thousand to only seventy metres above sea level, account for the striking climatic variations of different regions in the province. The mountains and rivers (the upper regions of the Mekong, Irrawaddy, Red River, Yangtze, Salween and Pearl River are all in Yunnan) make travel difficult. This coupled with the extensive climatic variation, are the main reasons given in the Chinese literature for the proliferation of 'ethnic groups', or 'minority nationalities' identified in the province (Shan Ren 1998 : 5).

The tremendous task of identifying and classifying the peoples of China that was undertaken in 1953 proved particularly irksome for researchers working in Yunnan. Nation-wide, over four hundred groups put their names forward for registration. Of these four hundred, two hundred and sixty were from Yunnan. Commenting on this, Fei Xiaotong writes: **"No situation anywhere else is as complicated and complex as that in Yunnan"** (Fei Xiaotong 1990 : 13).



Only after twenty years of research, was the last group, the Jinuo mapped. From 1979 onwards official literature identified twenty-six 'ethnic groups' as living in Yunnan these are the:

Han, Yi, Bai, Hani, Dai, Zhuang, Miao, Lisu, Hui, Lahu, Wa, Naxi, Yao, Zang (Tibetan), Jingpo, Bulang, Buyi, Pumi, Ahchang, Nu, Jinuo, Deang, Menggu (Mongolian), Shui, Man (Manchu), and Dulong peoples

In order to provide some insight into the difficulties faced by those trying to administer such a diverse province, I have provided below a breakdown of Yunnan's administrative units:

<b>Table 2:1. The administrative units of Yunnan Province (adapted from Yunnan Sheng Di Tuce. Zhao Dinghan 2000: 13).</b>			
	<b>In Total Yunnan has: 3 municipalities. 5 prefectures. 8 autonomous prefectures. 12 county municipalities. 80 counties. 29 autonomous counties. 7 areas under municipal jurisdiction.</b>		
<b>Name in Chinese</b>	<b>Name in English</b>	<b>Names of the administrative units in each area</b>	<b>Classification of administrative units in each area</b>
昆明市	Kunming Municipality	Wuhua district, Panlong district, Guandu district, Xishan district, Dongchuan district, Chenggong county, Jinning county, Anning municipality, Fumin county, Yiliang county, Songming county, Shiling (stone forest), Yi autonomous county, Luquan, Yi and Miao autonomous county. Xundian, Hui and Yi autonomous county.	1 municipality 5 areas under municipal jurisdiction 8 counties
曲靖市	Qujing Municipality	Qilin district, Xuanwei municipality, Zhanyi county, Malong county, Fuyuan county, Luping county, Shizhong county, Liuliang county, Huize county,	1 municipality 1 district 7 counties
玉溪市	Yuxi Municipality	Hongta district, Jiangchuan county, Chengjiang county, Tonghai county, Huaning county, Yimen county, Eshan, Yi autonomous county, Xiping, Yi and Dai autonomous county, Yuanjiang, Hani and Yi autonomous county.	1 district 8 counties

昭通地区	Zhaotong Prefecture	Zhaotong municipality, Ludian county, Qiaojia county, Yanjin county, Daguan county, Yongshan county, Suijiang county, Zhenxiang county, Yiliang county, Weixin county, Shufu county.	1 municipality 10 counties
文山壮族苗族 自治州	Wenshan, Zhuang and Miao Autonomous Prefecture	Wenshan county, Tanshan county, Xichou county, Maguan county, Qubei county, Guangnan county, Funing county, Malipo county.	8 counties
红河哈尼族彝族 自治州	Honghe (Red River), Hani and Yi Autonomous Prefecture	Gejiu municipality, Kaiyuan municipality, Mengzi county, Jianshui county, Shiping county, Mile county, Luxi county, Yuanyang county, Honghe county, Liuchun county, Pingbian, Miao autonomous county, Hekou, Yao autonomous county, Jinping, Miao and Yao autonomous county.	2 municipalities 11 counties
思茅地区	Simao Prefecture	Simao municipality, Puer, Hani and Yi autonomous county, Zhenyuan, Yi and Hani autonomous county, Jingdong, Yi autonomous county, Jinggu, Dai and Yi autonomous county, Mojiang, Hani autonomous county, Ximeng, Wa autonomous county, Menglian, Dai and Lahu autonomous county, Lancang, Lahu autonomous county, Jiangcheng, Hani and Yi autonomous county.	1 municipality 9 counties
西双版纳傣族 自治州	Xishuangbanna, Dai Autonomous Prefecture	Jinghong municipality, Menghai county, Mengla county,	1 municipality 2 counties
临沧地区	Lincang Prefecture	Lincang county, Fengzhuang county, Yun county, Yongde county, Zhenkang county, Cangyuan, Wa autonomous county, Shuangjiang, Lahu, Wa and Bulang autonomous county, Gengma Dai and Wa autonomous county.	8 counties
德宏傣族景颇族 自治州	Dehong, Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture	Luxi municipality, Reili municipality, Lianghe county, Yingjiang Longchuan county.	2 municipalities 3 counties
保山地区	Baoshan Prefecture	Baoshan Municipality, Shidian county, Tengchong county, Longling county, Changning county.	1 municipality 4 counties

大理白族自治州	Dali, Bai Autonomous Prefecture	Dali municipality, Xiangyun county, Binchuan county, Midu county, Yongping county, Yunlong county, Eryuan county, Jianchuan county, Heqing county, Weishan, Yi and Hui autonomous county, Nanjian, Yi autonomous county, Yongbi, Yi autonomous county.	1 municipality 11 counties
楚雄彝族自治州	Chuxiong, Yi Autonomous Prefecture	Chuxiong municipality, Shuangbai county, Mouding county, Nanhua county, Yaoan county, Dayao county, Yongren county, Yuanmo county, Wuding county, Lufeng county.	1 municipality 9 counties
丽江地区	Lijiang Prefecture	Lijiang, Naxi autonomous county, Yongsheng county, Ningjiang, Yi autonomous county, Huaping county.	4 counties
迪庆藏族自治州	Diqing, Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture	Zhongdian county, Deqin county, Weixi, Lisu autonomous county.	3 counties
怒江傈僳族自治州	Nujiang, Lisu Autonomous Prefecture	Lushui county, Fugong county, Lanping, Bai and Pumi autonomous county, Gongshan, Dulong and Nu autonomous county.	4 counties

From table 2:1 it can be seen that eight of the sixteen greater administrative units which constitute Yunnan Province are 'Autonomous Prefectures', they are:

**Wenshan, Zhuang and Miao Autonomous Prefecture**

**Honghe, Hani and Yi Autonomous Prefecture**

**Xishuangbanna, Dai Autonomous Prefecture**

**Dehong, Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture**

**Dali, Bai Autonomous Prefecture**

**Chuxiong, Yi Autonomous Prefecture**

**Diqing, Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture**

**Nujiang, Lisu Autonomous Prefecture**

Table 2:1 also shows that even where an entire prefecture has not been given 'Autonomous' status, it is often the case that several of the counties within its borders do have such status. To give one example; although Lincang Prefecture is not considered 'Autonomous', the following counties can all be found within its borders:

**Cangyuan, Wa Autonomous County**

**Shuangjiang, Lahu, Wa and Bulang Autonomous County**

**Gengma, Dai and Wa Autonomous County**

Thus the administrative responsibility at the 'County' level can be shared by as many as three different nationalities, although this situation is rare. Moreover an 'Autonomous Prefecture' of one nationality may have within its borders one or several 'Autonomous Counties' of differing nationalities. For example Weixi, Lisu Autonomous County is to be found within the borders of Diqing, Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, similarly Gongshan, Dulong and Nu Autonomous County lies within Nujiang, Lisu Autonomous Prefecture.

I move now from the administration of the area to the demography. Table 2:2 provided below gives a breakdown of population figures from 1995. In line with the government criterion determining eligibility for '*minzu*' (民族) status, all twenty-six groups listed above had a population of over four thousand. The 1995 Survey of Yunnan Province constitutes the most readily available official figures.

<b>Table 2:2. 1995 Yunnan Province 'Minority Nationality' Population Figures<sup>4</sup></b>			
<b>Total 13,550,000</b>			
Yi 彝	4,160,000	Jingpo 景颇	121,000
Bai 白	1,390,000	Bulang 布朗	84,000
Hani 哈尼 (Aini) 爱尼 <sup>5</sup>	1,290,000	Buyi 布依	37,200
Dai 傣	1,060,000	Pumi 普米	31,000
Zhuang 壮	1,040,000	Ahchang 阿昌	29,000
Miao 苗	907,000	Nu 怒	26,500
Lisu 傈僳	578,000	Jinuo 基诺	17,700
Hui 回	559,000	Deang 德昂	16,400
Lahu 拉祜	409,000	Menggu 蒙古 (Mongolian)	13,300
Wa 佤	359,000	Shui 水	8,100
Naxi 纳西	278,000	Man 满 (Manchu)	6,500
Yao 瑶	178,000	Dulong 独龙	5,500
Zang (Tibetan) 藏	116,000	Others <sup>6</sup>	829,800
1995 Yunnan Province total population figure (including Han people): <b>39,896,300</b>			
Minority Nationality population is therefore <b>34.1%</b> of the total.			

These tables, presenting the administrative units and population figures of Yunnan, give testimony to the impressive heterogeneity of the area. By making such data readily available the Chinese State is showing its acceptance of such diversity. Indeed, the revival of both local and 'ethnic' traits in conjunction with the present Chinese administrations promotion of diversity is well documented (see for example Ma Yin 1994, C. Smith 1996. Liu Tao Tao and Faure 1996. L. Schein 1997 & 1998. Rack 1999 and the brilliant work of Gladney 1991, 1994 & 1998). In Yunnan, itself, diversity is hailed as one of the 'splendours' of the province. Seeking to increase wealth in the area through tourism, the State-run popular media is overrun with references to the 'colourful richness of culturally diverse Yunnan'. It could be said that such press coverage attempts to counteract a deeply embedded prejudice against the 'minorities' held by many Chinese. The Han people who, it should not be forgotten, constitute approximately 92% of the Chinese population are usually represented as holding intensely derogatory views of the 'minority nationalities'.

Many Han Chinese, especially those from affluent areas such as Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou, feel areas such as Yunnan to be violent and unstable. But I would argue that Harrell's notion (1995 [1997] : 26) of an, **“innate, almost visceral Han sense of superiority”** is an essentialising vilification. The Han people are anything but a homogeneous mass. Indeed Gladney goes so far as to outline the “dubious nature of Han-ness” (Gladney 1991/1996 : 318), questioning the very usefulness of the category, given the diversity of peoples labelled as Han. Having spent many hours discussing minority issues with those whose identity cards state they are Yunnanese Han, from senior academics to escort girls and rock musicians, I know that there are many with a profound respect for the peoples sharing their province.

In order to both counteract any residual prejudice and to encourage nationwide solidarity much of the official rhetoric concerning the ‘minority nationalities’, especially that aimed at a Chinese audience, is filled with references to harmony and progress. In this milieu the diversity found both in Yunnan and China as a whole, is presented as a force that unites its people, an awe inspiring bond of difference of which to be proud<sup>7</sup>. I shall present below three examples of manifestations of this rhetorical genre.

**Example 1: “Bells chime to celebrate new millennium”**

This example comes from the caption to a photograph by Lu Zhongqiu to be found in the 28.12.99 edition of the ‘The China Daily’:

### **"Bells chime to celebrate new millennium**

A technician applies finishing touches to the Chinese Harmonious Chimes (*Zhonghua he zhong*), which were installed at the Working People's Cultural Palace in Beijing. The chimes, built and installed in three arrays, weighing 17 tons, features 108 bells of various sizes. The upper array has 34 bells, representing the 31 municipalities, provinces and autonomous regions on the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan. The middle array is made up of 56 bells representing China's ethnic groups. The lower array has 18 standing for the 18 historical periods in Chinese history. A top Chinese State leader is scheduled to strike the chimes at midnight January 1 to mark the start of the new millennium. They will also be used during a gala celebrating the year 2000".

This example demonstrates the rhetoric of inclusion to which those labelled as ethnic groups are subject. The 56 peoples found in China are celebrated here as an inalienable part of the nation, which are nonetheless divided into distinct aspects. The peoples of China are also expected to adhere to a unified history of China, represented by eighteen of the chimes on the monument, and yet the official rhetoric clearly leaves room for a degree of heterogeneity, for diversity. It is interesting to note that the Nationalist rhetoric and that concerning 'ethnicity' in China are intertwined, furthermore they have been so intricately conjoined by the use of discourse concerning peace, harmony and progress.

**Example 2: *Ren Min Bi* 人民币: The Peoples' Currency.**

As we have seen official rhetoric today aims at inclusion not, as during the infamous Cultural Revolution, (which ran from 1966 until the early seventies although some commentators say that it did not end until Mao's death in 1976<sup>8</sup>) assimilation. Difference is tolerated, provided it does not threaten the sense of overarching unity. Diversity and unity are no longer presented as diametrical opposites. This message is ingeniously disseminated to the Chinese people. Everyday millions of Chinese people come into physical contact with evidence of this official acceptance of diversity. This is in the form of the designs embossed onto Chinese Paper money (See Appendix 2 for examples). As Schein writes: **"Passed daily from hand to hand, these diversely head-dressed, cheery tokens served to remind all Chinese of the multiethnic makeup of the Chinese polity"** (Schein 1997 : 90).

Not all of the so called 'minority nationalities' are featured on the currency designs. Only those peoples with the largest populations, but interestingly these are also the groups who inhabit politically sensitive areas. Thus the Mongolian people, the Tibetan and the Uygur (Muslims from Xinjiang) feature, as do the Gaoshan (peoples indigenous to Taiwan). The use of money seems particularly brilliant. Not only could it be understood as an honour to be pictured on the notes, but the imagery also seems to imply that by being one with the Peoples Republic of China, by promoting harmony, the represented peoples will be financially more secure. Having said that, as Schein points out the blue one hundred *kuai* note (replaced in 2000 by a red note with an image of Mao alone<sup>9</sup>) depicts Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, Liu Shaoqi



and Zhu De, so that: “the progression from small to large dominations left no doubt as to the ultimate relations of authority” (Schein 1997 : 90).

The Dai are notably absent from the money designs. Not only do they have a relatively small population but also, despite their prior ‘landlord’ status (discussed below), the image which has grown up of them is one of fragile beauty and pious tranquillity. It seems that there would be little need to remind the Dai of the benefits of harmonious relations with the Nation State, as they are seen to pose little threat to the status quo.

### **Example 3: The Rhetoric of Expo '99.**

In 1999, one hundred and forty eight years after the first exposition held in London, Kunming (capital city of Yunnan Province) hosted an international horticultural exposition which became known as, Expo '99. By coincidence, 1999 was also the fiftieth anniversary of the advent of the Peoples Republic of China. Expo '99 was promoted as a symbol, not only of international good will and the hope of world peace, but also of the solidarity of all the Chinese peoples since the establishment of the Peoples Republic.

The Exposition consisted of a series of exquisitely crafted gardens. Numerous countries were represented, as well as various Chinese provinces. The Yunnan garden was designed specifically to vividly demonstrate the harmonious coexistence of Yunnan’s diverse ‘minority nationalities’. Three features of the garden specifically aimed to show the solidarity of the peoples of the area; the

'Nationalities Forest', the 'United Square' and the 'Shining Sun and Moon'. The following quotation is from the press release provided by the organisation responsible for designing the garden (my translation):

### **Nationalities Forest**

The twenty-six stone pillars carved with totems typical of each of the nationalities have been designed to express the congenial relations between the nationalities living together in Yunnan. The pillars, forming two lines of concentric circles form the main construction of this garden, they provide a material expression of the rich cultural diversity to be found in Yunnan.

### **United Square**

The pillars spoken about above enclose an area known as United Square. Here the ground has been paved with tiles forming elaborate patterns. This circular area aims to convey the fact that all the nationalities are united and thus together face a bright and prosperous future.

### **The Shining Sun and Moon**

The patterns of concentric circles found on the ground of the United Square, together with the crescent shaped flower terrace form a design depicting the sun and moon shining together, once again expressing solidarity.

(With the kind permission of the artist, examples of the designs carved into the stone pillars of the 'Nationalities Forest' are provided in Appendix 3.)

Organisers of Expo '99 wanted to encourage its visitors to extend their stay in Yunnan province. With this aim in mind much of the literature that focuses on the Exposition also provides enticing accounts of Yunnan's 'minority' areas. Take for example the volume: 'Approaching the Exposition, Expo '99', published by the Yunnan's Peoples' Press, which encourages visitors to explore areas such as, Dali Bai Autonomous Prefecture, Lijiang home to the Naxi people and Zhongdian in the Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture of Diqing, not forgetting of course Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture (Guo Fangming (ed) 1998 : 68, 236 - 240).

In official literature, such as that published with visitors to Expo '99 in mind, the Dai are portrayed as a beautiful, gentle, loyal nationality. Although they occupy border areas, rather than being depicted as peripheral, they are, not surprisingly, represented as being of central importance to China. In a book published as part of a series celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the People's Republic, entitled: *The Magnificent Spectacle of the Dai Culture*, the reader is reminded that the Dai have often been loyal defenders of Chinese borders. The Dai were, we are told, especially valiant in their opposition to the aggressive colonial aspirations of the British in the late nineteenth century. The author then goes on to explain that those Dai people who do leave China, for destinations such as Myanmar or Thailand, carry their homeland in their hearts, and before long hope to return. This love for their homeland results in the profound patriotism inherent in Dai morality (Ai Hua (ed) 1999 : 168 - 170)<sup>10</sup>.

It is interesting to note that most of those involved in the production of *The Magnificent Spectacle of Dai Culture* (1999) were of Dai descent. This is a

reminder against the naiveté of assuming that official representations of the Dai are solely Han impositions. The processional formation of representations is dialogic. The Dai themselves are capable of and willing to influence the State's image of them. Xishuangbanna itself is an example of this, for it has become famous throughout China as the State's own tropical garden, and yet is also known for being the home of the Dai. It must not be forgotten that this is an immensely complex political situation, and as such a reflection of the sensitivity of the relations between the State and its 'minority peoples'. Given the history and the population dynamics of the area, it is not surprising that there is some underlying resentment (not often openly expressed for obvious reasons) concerning the present status of Xishuangbanna as a Prefecture of the Peoples Republic of China.

### **Relationality in Xishuangbanna**

I will now turn to the relationality of the different groups of Xishuangbanna itself. The 1996 Xishuangbanna statistical yearbook reports that, in addition to the Han, members of over eighteen minority nationalities live in the area. Today there is a high degree of interconnectedness between groups in the area. The extent of interaction between the groups prior to 'liberation' is however hard to establish. Textual evidence is either in Mandarin or Dai script and as such does not provide much insight into the understandings of the other groups. However it is clear that since 'Liberation' the dynamics of the area have undergone a profound change, with the percentage of Dai people in the overall population falling dramatically. This change is reflected in the post 1953 population figures for the area. Figures in the first table (2:3) below were compiled by researchers just after 'Liberation'<sup>11</sup>.

Nationality	Total Pop.	% Pop.	Nationality	Total Pop.	% Pop.
<b>Total</b>	238,165	100	<b>Ahke</b>	137	.06
<b>Dai</b>	125,918	52.87	<b>Yi</b>	987	.42
<b>Hani</b>	41,691	17.51	<b>Sanda</b>	571	.24
<b>Bulang</b>	18,669	7.84	<b>Hui</b>	508	.21
<b>Lahu</b>	15,664	6.58	<b>Wa</b>	484	.20
<b>Yao</b>	899	0.40	<b>Kucong<sup>13</sup></b>	148	.06
<b>Youle<sup>14</sup></b>	4,866	2.01	<b>Others</b>	4,340	1.82
<b>Benren<sup>15</sup></b>	3,345	1.41	<b>Han</b>	17,905	7.52
<b>Xiangtang</b>	2,033	.85			

Compare these to the figures shown in Table 2:4, below which displays population figures compiled in 1990, for the fourth Chinese National population survey. Note that by 1990 the percentage Han population had jumped by nearly 20%. Table 2:5 presents the variations in the percentage populations of the Dai and Han peoples for the dates 1953 - 1996.

Nationality	Total population	% Population
<b>Total</b>	796,352	100
<b>Dai</b>	270,405	33.96
<b>Aini / Hani</b>	153,946	19.33
<b>Lahu</b>	46,790	5.88
<b>Bulang</b>	32,990	4.14
<b>Jinuo</b>	17,698	2.23
<b>Yao</b>	14,796	1.86
<b>Yi</b>	38,724	4.8
<b>Hui</b>	3,288	0.42
<b>Wa</b>	2,546	0.27
<b>Zhuang</b>	1,702	0.21
<b>Miao</b>	2,189	0.27
<b>Other Minorities</b>	9,738	1.23
<b>Han</b>	201,540	25.32

Year	% Population of Xishuangbanna	
	Dai	Han
1953	52.87	7.52
1990	33.96	25.31
1995	34.81	25.90
1996	34.68	26.07

The vast majority of those registered as Han who moved to the area during this time live in the cities (such as Menghai and Jinghong), in factory work units, or on one of the eleven State run farms. But this is not exclusively the case as can be seen by the following ethnographic examples, the first two come from Mengxiang, the village of my fieldwork, and the surrounding area, whilst the third concerns the wife of a close friend of my host who lived in a nearby hamlet.

### **Illustration 1:**

In 1997 a northern Chinese Han woman bought the right to develop Mengxiang village temple as a tourist site. After giving the village several thousand Chinese dollars, the woman was free to sell tickets at the door of the temple. At the time of my fieldwork she was known in the village as the 'Han boss woman' and was not much liked. She had a reputation as avaricious. This was not helped by the fact that despite having lived in close proximity to the villagers for a number of years she was unable to speak Dai, furthermore she lived outside the village perimeter, scarcely mixing with the villagers. She did have one woman living with her, a relative also of Han descent.

Each morning the two women prepared the temple, sweeping the grounds, clearing rubbish and chasing errant pigs out of the complex, much to the amusement of any watching villagers. Each day the 'Han boss

woman' or her young relative invariably ended up shouting at the temple's young resident monks, whom they viewed as naughty and lazy. They had even less respect for the abbot of the temple. He was from Myanmar and as he spoke the local Dai dialect he made no effort to speak Chinese. I have never seen them even try to communicate. The abbot spent most of his time in the nearby town returning to the temple only in the early hours. The Dai people in the village laughed at his antics, but did not view them as necessarily affecting his spirituality, (Buddhism teaches that one should not speculate on the workings of others' Karma, although they may also have been unwilling to tell me as a *gala* or white foreigner)<sup>17</sup>. The 'Han boss women' on the other hand frequently berated that he was 'some monk', gambling and going off on his motorbike all the time. She warned me not to trust such Dai men and to ensure I marry a Han man.

I was visited in the village by a high ranking monk who had recently returned to the laity. He was quite horrified at what the 'Han boss woman' had done to the temple. He explained that although she had rebuilt areas of the temple complex, these were not meritorious acts. Her motives were solely profit oriented, and for him it was clear that she cared nothing for Buddhism. His own temple prides itself on the work it does to, as they put it, 'preserve and encourage' Dai culture. As

such he appeared to resent this Han woman, who as far as he was concerned, was using this Dai sacred site for her own personal gain. The local villagers on the other hand displayed less annoyance than amused disdain. They tolerated her berating and smiled when they greeted her.

By posing for photographs at the temple, village children made money out of the tourists, whose increasing numbers, were the result of the 'Han boss woman's' activities (see Chapter Five). In addition, women from most village households made extra money by selling food stuffs to these tourists. They prepared delicacies such as: bamboo-steamed sweet glutinous rice; barbecued fish, chicken, frog, and snail kebabs, boiled peanuts and corn on the cob. Every evening during the tourist season (roughly April - July/August) the women would gather at the base of the staircase leading to the temple and set up rows of barbecues. Whilst haranguing the tourists to buy, they had to continuously fan the charcoal on the barbecues. This was not easy work, and despite the laughter and jokes many of the women would not return home until after dark, exhausted from the physical exertion, but content with the financial rewards of their evenings work.



There was clearly a great deal of animosity and distrust between this 'Han boss woman' and the Dai villagers. Having said this the villagers were no doubt aware of methods that could ensure her speedy departure. Remember that the Dai people wield much political power in the area. Furthermore this woman was to all intents and purposes alone in the village. Given the fact that she had a son several thousands of miles away, it would probably not have taken much, despite financial incentives to the contrary, to provoke in her an irresistible desire to leave the area. However the work she did in the temple attracted visitors and this was seen by many villagers as beneficial. The tourists, at the time of my field work, arrived in relatively small numbers, yet they spent enough money in the temple compound to make their visits welcomed. The privacy of the village was maintained as few Han tourists ventured past the temple gates. Thus despite the frequent and disparaging mutterings on both sides, the relationship between this "Han boss woman" and the Dai villagers was to a certain extent mutually advantageous and consequently carefully nurtured by both parties.

#### **Illustration 2:**

A few hundred metres away from Mengxiang village a Han couple originally from Wenshan, nearly a thousand kilometres away, had

constructed a small two bed cabin. Not only was this cabin in a style totally unlike most Dai houses (see Chapter Six on architecture), but it was noticeably smaller and less comfortable. There was no electricity and hence it was lacking many of the amenities enjoyed by most Dai villagers.

This Han couple was cultivating land owned by my Dai host. I was told that they took no rent for the land. If this couple did not cultivate the fields they would remain unplanted. My interlocutor explained that when this couple had come to live here she saw they had nothing to live on and asked them if they would plant her land, they agreed. When I asked the Han couple why they had moved to Xishuangbanna, they explained that it was so beautiful how could anyone not move there. My Dai friends were easy and relaxed in their company and treated their home as their own, offering me hot water to drink and soap with which to wash (I was covered in mud from my feeble attempts to help my friends hoe the land in preparation for the rice harvest). The Han couple more or less ignored my friends but were courteous enough.

I never heard my Dai friends discuss this couple, as they were apt to do about the 'Han boss woman' introduced above, but when asked they

said nothing more than that they were 'good people'. Moreover when they met the Han couple face to face they would greet them using the titles 'Da Ma' and 'Da Di'ah' meaning respected or great mother and father, respectively. There was no readily expressed animosity between this Han couple and the villagers. The Han couple had little to do with the villagers, indeed they rarely exchanged visits hereby maintaining a conspicuous social distance.

### **Illustration 3:**

On one occasion I was taken by two of the villagers to visit a friend of theirs on the Myanmar border. He was a Dai man, living in a Dai village but his wife was Han. This fact was pointed out to me as soon as we arrived. They praised the woman for her fluency in the Dai language, for the way she had adopted the Dai style of dress, and for her long straight black hair which was tied up into a bun, like that of the Dai women of the village.

My friends joked that she was 'already Dai', whilst simultaneously making clear that she was a Han girl who had married into this Dai village. The woman herself was friendly and chatted to me happily in the local Chinese dialect as she sat shredding cabbage with a machete and

mixing it with copious amounts of chilli. She explained that this was a Dai dish and that the Dai especially love to eat spiced raw vegetables, but she said as she had spent so much time with the Dai she too loved this dish. Had I not been explicitly told, I would not have been able to tell that this woman was of Han descent and had not been bought up as Dai. There must, I am sure have been subtleties in her behaviour that would have given her away to one more versed in Dai ways than myself. But it seemed to me that she was making no effort to distinguish herself from among those with whom she lived.

There seems to be a tendency amongst many of the Han people who move to the area to adopt characteristics which are associated with the Dai people<sup>18</sup>. Thus, for example, Han men can often be found sporting tattoos in the Dai script (See Chapter Three below). Similarly, in Jinghong it is common to see men and women of all nationalities, sporting bracelets received in blessing at the central Dai temple. I would say that the belief in the spiritual capability of the monks, transcends the divisions between groups in Xishuangbanna. Feuchtwang (1996 : 171) has reported that Han peoples in north Yunnan's Three-River Basin consult Naxi Shamans (*Dongba*). Similarly in Xishuangbanna local peoples, and indeed visitors to the area of all nationalities, seek the monks for blessings, healing and fortune tellings. This can be seen as a demonstration of the fact that notions of ethnicity and locality can become blurred, so that things Dai can come to stand for things from Xishuangbanna. This is still the case despite the fact that the Dai now officially

constitute little over thirty percent of Xishuangbanna's population. Indeed this may be an overestimation for in addition to the official Han population, there is also a 'floating population' of migrant workers, many of whom have no 'registered permanent resident' (*hukou* 户口) cards, and are consequently not included in official figures<sup>19</sup>. However as Pieke (1999 : 4-5) has pointed out, any assumption that there is a clear division between *hukou* and non-*hukou* migrants would be misleading. Pieke explains that those who have temporary registrations blur the boundaries. Moreover, although migration was present long before decollectivisation (1978) the present breakdown of the work unit (*danwei* 单位) system and the concomitant mass shift in employment (known as going out to sea, '*xiahai*' 下海 in Mandarin) means that movement of workers is inevitable and indeed necessary.

A substantial number of Xishuangbanna's Han population arrived before, or during the Cultural Revolution. Many of the early Han migrants were trained doctors, engineers and agriculturists. However today most of the newcomers are unskilled. It should be noted that it is not just Han registered migrants who have moved into the area since 1953, for as Zheng Peng explains, members of many groups including the Naxi, Pumi, Deang, Ahchang, Dulong, Man, Tibetan, Nu, Lisu, Mongolian, and Jingpo have also moved down to Banna. These, like the Han, are mainly recent immigrants, many moving to the area as cadres after 'Liberation.' Intermarriage is not uncommon amongst most of the peoples living in Xishuangbanna, and Zheng Peng (1993 : 29) notes that such frequent intermarriage has made it impossible to tell members of different groups apart.

In her 1999 thesis M. Rack (1999 : 208) reported that in conjunction with the findings of Gladney, it was not uncommon in her field site of West Hunan for

people's identities to shift, and for there to be inconsistencies between self identification and the classifications found on *hukou* cards. Likewise I found that in Xishuangbanna it was not unusual for members of one family to hold identity cards of several different 'minority nationalities' and even to disagree with the identification recorded on their official papers. Whilst in Xishuangbanna I made friends with a young guide. He often made a point of telling me that he was, and he used the English phrase, of 'jungle people'. When questioned further he explained that he was of Kucong descent and expressed intense displeasure that his identity card labelled him as Han. In fact his paternal grandfather, who was Kucong, was married to a Han woman. By stressing his relatedness to the Kucong people he was choosing to trace his descent through the patriline. Curiously when choosing his ethnic affiliation he had not taken into account his relatedness to the Jinuo people, even though his mother was Jinuo. To add to the complexity, he also had matrilineal cousins of both Dai and Bai nationality. This case shows that parents are afforded some flexibility concerning the choice of nationality recorded on the identity cards of their children. A further example is shown below:

Generation	Gender	Nationality
+1 Patrilineal	Female Male	Dai Han
+1 Matrilineal	Female Male	Lahu Lahu
Ego	Female Male	Lahu Dai
-1	Male Male	Dai Dai

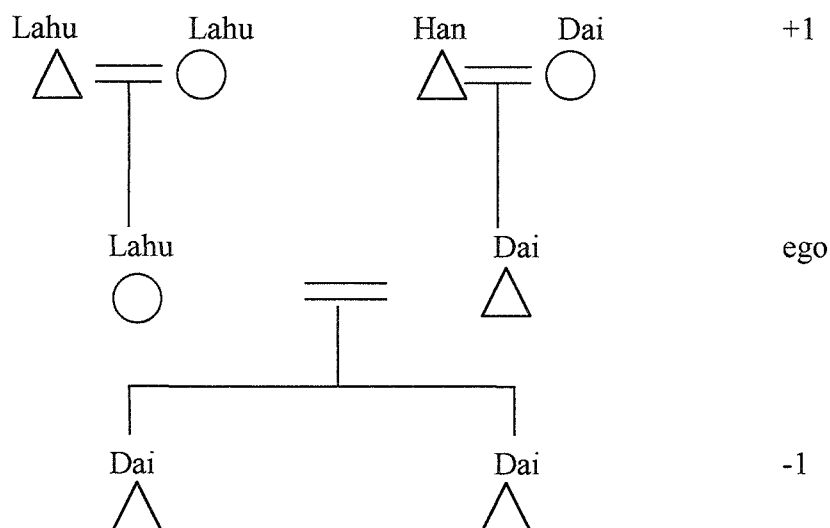


Fig. 2:1. Kinship diagram showing relations of family members of the above table (2:6).

The couple (ego's generation) and their youngest son still live on a State Farm. Being a government *Danwei* (work unit) they ought only to have one child but, as their two sons were born more than eight years apart the two were allowed.<sup>20</sup> My informant explained that as far as she was concerned, despite what was recorded on their identity cards, they lived as Han nationality. Her mother's people were unable to speak the Lahu language and her husband was of mixed descent. She said that normally people trace their descent through their father's line. Thus she chose to register her children as Dai, like their father. However, this was an informed choice as she felt that her children would be afforded certain advantages by having this identity, (as the Dai are the majority in the area and so wield a considerable amount of political and economic power). Thus when circumstances call for it, it is not uncommon for people to adopt their mother's nationality, as indeed her husband had done.

Despite the fact that many of the people living in Banna do not contest their identity (when in a Dai village the majority of the people living there know they are

Dai and have no problem with this ), my point here is that the boundaries around these groups are fluid (see Chapter Six for an explanation of the permeability of the boundaries around the household and its 'core of belonging'). It is even the case that those registered as being of different 'minority nationalities' frequently attend the rituals and festivals held by other groups. Thus for example, the Dai of the village where I carried out my field work often attended festivals in the nearby Wa villages. As indeed Wa, Han and Bulang peoples came to join in any festivities held in the village. Furthermore, Chapter Seven of this thesis examines how the Dai 'Water Splashing' in Jinghong has been adopted by peoples of many nationalities. This dialogic spirit is further reflected in the ethnography provided below.

### **New Year on Jinuo Mountain.**

My Dai friend, Ai Long, insisted that I come with him to 'play' at this Jinuo festival. I was fascinated by the fact that this Dai man wanted so much to visit Jinuo mountain and so I took time to travel with him. Ai Long explained that in the Jinuo language the New Year festival is referred to as '*Te Mao Ke*'. In 1999 this celebration took place on the fifth and sixth of February, with drumming and dancing carrying on well into the night on both days.

A Number of Ai Long's friends travelled with us to attend this event. The diversity displayed in our group was quite astonishing: There



was one Han man, two Flower Belt Dai men and one Water Dai girl<sup>21</sup>, a Naxi man, not to mention an errant foreigner<sup>22</sup>. I asked them why they all wanted to go. The resounding answer was - '*to have FUN - it will be lively, bustling and interesting!!!!*' At that point I was freezing and exhausted, with the prospect of a sleepless night followed by an intensive 'fieldwork' day ahead of me. I did not share their enthusiasm, but I was to be pleasantly surprised.

We finally arrived at Jinuo Mountain at about 2.00 am. Our host was one of Ai Long's oldest and closest friends. He was Jinuo and although he had previously lived in Jinghong city he had returned to Jinuo mountain to marry. He lived slightly outside the village in a 'work unit' attached to the school. His young wife was a teacher, which meant they were entitled to occupy three small rooms. The kitchen and store room were separated from the bed room by a narrow alley, down the middle of which ran a gully serving the free standing taps. They lived a detached existence, being somewhat spatially separated from those living in the village below. On seeing their living quarters I realised that people of non-Han descent could occupy typical 'cadre' style housing and yet still speak their own 'minority' language and have no wish to leave

their communities. This surprised me as I had somewhat naively assumed that cadres were all of Han descent.

On the day of the festival I was woken early by the sound of drumming. My excitement rose with each beat. Before we could make our way to the parade ground we had to negotiate our way through a small town which was heaving with people, and where market stalls had been set up wherever there was a space. Many types of Dai people were there, in addition to Han tourists and even a couple of foreigners. Representatives of various Jinuo villages lined the road up to the parade ground. They were all singing Jinuo songs and carried the names of their respective villages on large, brightly coloured, wicker banners. These signs took the plaited form similar to the *'da liao'* protective talisman used by Tai peoples throughout much of Southeast Asia (see Chapter Six). The women were also carrying gongs, cymbals and rattles. Two men balanced a huge drum between them. On the back of each Jinuo man's jacket was a sun, providing and demonstrating both protection and strength. Each of these had individual characteristics, having been embroidered by the owner's mother. Some of the women's costumes also displayed these talismans, although as a rule the jackets of the women had several not just one sun, see the colour plates below:



Fig. 2:2. Jinuo Sun designs.

On arriving at the parade ground, the first thing I noticed was the amount of press who were present. Han Chinese cameramen and photographers were everywhere. There were police too, many police, but they were mostly laughing, some were even drinking with the revellers.

The meeting started off with announcements first in Mandarin then in Jinuo language. These announcements concerned the progress of the area generally, and then explained a little about the celebration itself, outlining the order of events. This was followed by three to four hours of dancing. This went on until lunch time when everyone dispersed only to regroup in the afternoon for the athletics competitions. The most spectacular dance was referred to as, 'the Dance of Jinuo History', it was said to depict a time before, a time when the Jinuo were learning how to do things. The commentator explained that the dancers were

performing the parts of primitive men, who due to their inability to make fire were forced to eat raw meat.

The dances were watched not only by a thronging crowd, but also by the head of the Jinuo people, resplendent in his colourful robes. He remained seated with a few other leaders on the parade ground itself. They were subjected to an almost constant barrage of flash photography.

Although most people left the parade ground at midday, this was more to escape the repressive heat than to eat. Despite the heat and dust most of the revellers had been munching away on something or other all day. As I watched I noticed that most of the snacks for sale were what is known as 'Dai Flavour' foods. Dai women, noticeable in their sarongs, sold little plastic bags filled with purple sticky rice, pickled vegetables and sticky rice pudding wrapped in banana leaves.

The afternoon's activities were considerably less well attended than those of the morning, again this must have been to do with the intense heat and choking dust. But nevertheless there were many activities in which the keen could compete, and many did so, including

many of non-Jinuo descent. There was: archery / long bow, stilt walking, target practice with bean bags and balloons and spinning tops.

Throughout the day people were coming and going to eat and sleep as they wished. The faces comprising the laughing crowd constantly changed. Generally the event felt well organised and yet there remained a carnivalesque quality to the gathering. No doubt the sheer number of revellers made the event hard to control. But I witnessed no unpleasant scenes and the police and troops present seemed to enjoy the occasion as much as the other spectators. It was an event to be filmed, watched, appreciated and for the Han especially the day's events were to be marvelled at. Han people seemed to be having fun rushing into the arena to have their photos taken in front of the dancers. In the afternoon the huge Jinuo drums were the sites of further frenzied posing and photo taking.

For an anthropologist with a special interest in 'ethnicity' the events were most marked by the heterogeneity of the peoples in attendance. Indeed there was perhaps even more diversity than I myself noticed for there is no way of telling the 'minority nationality' of those wearing western style clothes. Take for example the group of friends

with whom I had come to the celebration, among whom there were Han, Naxi and Dai peoples all dressed in a very similar way.

I want to draw the readers attention to a further three aspects of the day's events before I move on to the next section. These are: the use of Han characters by Jinuo people, Dai people wearing Jinuo clothes, the unceasing participation of many different groups in the Jinuo activities and cases of misidentification:

1. One Jinuo woman, shown below, had the following characters embroidered into her shirt: Qing 庆 (Celebrate) and Ji 基 (Jinuo).



Fig. 2:3. Jinuo woman.

This does not seem particularly worthy of mention until you remember that these are Chinese Characters mostly associated with the

Han (and Man) peoples. Clearly this woman is aware that the event will be attended by people who will be able to read these characters. Moreover either she, or someone close to her, has been taught to write these characters.

2. The Flower Belt Dai friend, who took me to this Jinuo festival, insisted on wearing a Jinuo jacket. Unlike most groups in the area (amongst whom it is usual for the women to wear the distinctive dress of their groups), Jinuo men are often seen wearing jackets characteristic of their own people. To look at Ai Long that day, with his faded jeans, bare chest and Jinuo jacket one would think he had spent his whole life working Jinuo land. For Ai Long to wear such a jacket was a way of demonstrating his link to the Jinuo generally and to his friend in particular. Although he would not have expressed it in this way I feel that he was displaying his solidarity with and his love for his Jinuo friends.

3. As the day progressed the line between spectator and participant thinned allowing for further plays of identity. The morning had been filled with formal dancing, Jinuo people dancing, others watching. But in the afternoon people of all nationalities joined in the games. Ai long was

mistaken for Jinuo as he raced up and down the bamboo ladder and fell off the stilts, whilst his little brother's girl friend (also Dai) was mistaken for a Han girl as she sulked and struggled to find shade.

Chinese official rhetoric deals with the dramatic diversity of Xishuangbanna by portraying the different peoples as brothers to one another. As explained above this is an example of the official stress upon unity; the Chinese phrase used is: '*fazhan ge zu renmin de datuanjie, developing unity between the people of all nationalities*' (Ai Zhuang (ed) 1997 : 31). This policy is reflected in the curiosity which many Han Chinese are now displaying for the so called 'national minorities'. Thousands of Han Chinese people flock to participate in non-Han festivities in Xishuangbanna. I propose that this participation may be a way of claiming these people as Chinese. This at first sight seems paradoxical. Indeed to use Lévi-Strauss' terminology (Rapport and Overing 2000 : 14-16) the Chinese official State policy is clearly both *anthropophagic* and *anthropoemic*, for official rhetoric encourages notions of inclusion in the Chinese state whilst stressing difference between the so-called 'minorities' and the Han majority<sup>23</sup>.

The Chinese State no longer strives for total assimilation of the 'minorities' living within its borders. As we have seen official policy now promotes a certain diversity. However by fanning the flames of Nationalism and encouraging a longing for economic development, it ensures a degree of togetherness in which, as the rhetoric goes; 'the Chinese brothers can march forward together'. The motives for pursuing such official policy are clearly complex and I cannot presume to understand them all, but it is clear that for many of those peoples classified as



'minority nationalities' there can be no 'National Pride' unless they are first allowed to feel a pride in their own people, which can only come about if the State recognises the differences between her peoples. And yet tourism to minority areas is encouraged. Interest in minority areas is promoted by the presence of 'minority' theme parks (such as those in Kunming and Jinghong, see the Conclusion). Awareness is further raised by documentary style television programs broadcast nearly everyday. Moreover access to 'minority' areas has been improved by the introduction of affordable internal flights and improved roads<sup>24</sup>.

Today Xishuangbanna is famous throughout China as an alluring travel destination. The Xishuangbanna 1997 Government Yearbook includes a section entitled: 'Doing all we can to establish tourism as a good example'. Here recent achievements are clearly laid out. For example it is noted that the number of hotels rose from 6 in 1990 (none with Star ratings) to 41 in 1996 (6 with Star ratings) (Ai Zhuang (ed) 1997 : 29). This article also details future plans to promote tourism; to this end communications are to be improved, cities and small towns developed, rain forest reservations established and protected, accessibility to 'nationality culture areas' is to be increased, and travel across the borders (with Myanmar and Laos) encouraged. All this is to be done with the view to **'develop Xishuangbanna into a beautiful, clean, hygienic, cultured and polite tourist site'** (Ai Zhuang (ed) 1997 : 30).

The recent encouragement of tourism could be considered not only demeaning but also a sinister exoticization of the 'minority' peoples. The State's activities can be seen as 'othering' the 'minority nationalities', and thus to be

brandishing the language of alterity. The fact that the State policy both includes and excludes, may then not be so baffling after all, as Rapport and Overing explain, “**in all systems of alterity there is at least some interplay of the principals of *inclusivity* and *exclusion* which together provide the rules and norms for such interaction**” (Rapport and Overing 2000 : 12).

Since the establishment of Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous prefecture in 1953, State rhetoric has made much of the stratified nature of the ‘Pre - Liberation’ social organisation, in which the Dai were politically dominant landowners, stressing how the *Jie Fang Jun* (Liberation / Red Army) ‘liberated’ the area from vicious feudal overlords, freeing bonded serfs as well as slaves (see for example Zheng Lan 1981 : 7 - 10). The political advantages of denouncing a prior ruling system are obvious. However surprisingly I found much unofficial local rhetoric also painted the Dai in an inimical light. For example, a young Aini woman told me that when she was a child, she was so afraid of the Dai that she would hide whenever they were near. When I asked why, she said she had been told by venerable members of the Aini community that the bamboo pillars of Dai temples rested on the heads of murdered Aini Children.

This gruesome imagery shows that, contrary to the image of unity found in much tourist literature, historical animosity is still articulated in the area. The relationship between the Aini and Dai groups is clearly complex, the Aini were not the slaves of the Dai prior to ‘liberation’. Today they are referred to as *Gô* Ⴃ in Daile rather than *Ha* Ⴃ, which means vassal or slave. The term *Ha* is used by the Dai when talking about the Lahu, Yi, Yao, Wa, Miao and Jinuo peoples<sup>25</sup>. Today

most Dai people are aware that this is a politically sensitive issue. My friends would often correct themselves mid-sentence, replacing the Dai, *Ha* for a less derogatory Mandarin term. However I noticed on more than one occasion that my Dai friends were not sure of the names they were supposed to use for different groups. The local market town was a kaleidoscope of diversity and so we often came across peoples from a number of different groups. On such occasions my Dai friends would shrug when I asked them to help in my classification of other peoples. If I pushed for answers they invariably replied that they were Wa people, but it is likely, given the diversity of the people that they so classified, that this was not always the case. I suspect that the term Wa has simply replaced the Dai *Ha* in everyday usage.

The status of non-Dai local peoples was compromised in the eyes of the Mengxiang villagers by the fact that women from the nearby hills frequently journeyed down (especially on festive occasions when the village hosted bustling markets) to beg for rice or cash. When in the Mengxiang these women, also classified as Wa by the villagers, were not courteously treated. They were not invited to eat with the Dai or offered water as is normally the case when guests visit (even Han farmers, who brought their sows to engage the services of the household's boar, were either given hot boiled water, or helped themselves to cool well water, from shaded clay pots on the veranda). However these non-Dai women were uninhibited in their entry into Dai household complexes and they were often given food stuffs to carry away. This could be seen as a remnant of the Dai people's previous status as feudal overlords and the '*Noblesse oblige*' which accompanied such a position.

The following myth translated from a book on the marriage customs of the area by the Chinese anthropologist, Bi Jian, provides another example of the complexity of both the relationships of the Dai with those groups around them, and of the ways in which the Dai are represented. Note the disparaging attitude of the young Dai monk towards the Hani girl, and also note the fact that there is no retribution, other than his own guilt, for the manner in which he treats her.

### **Hani Influence on the Dai Marriage Ceremony.**

'A long time ago, a young monk was walking in the country with his Master. Before long they came across a young Hani girl hoeing the soil. The Master turned to his Disciple and foretold that one day, when both the youngsters were fully grown, this Hani girl would, without a doubt, marry the monk. On hearing this, the monk was very upset. From his point of view, his social status was so much higher than that of this mountain girl that such a match was impossible. To marry such a girl would be below him. The young monk was thus very disconcerted by his Master's prediction.

The next time this monk saw the Hani girl he was alone. He approached her and asked to borrow her hoe. She thankfully agreed, under the impression that he was going to help her in her labour. Instead

he took the hoe and smashed her over the head with it. He then left her for dead, her blood mixing with the soil of the field. As she was lying there, an old Dai couple came along and, seeing her in such a state, took her home. Even once she was fully recovered, she continued to live with the couple and they began to look upon her as a daughter.

A few years later, the young monk, (now returned to lay life) met and began to court a beautiful young woman, who had caught his eye at a Dai fair. They fell passionately in love with one another.

Before long a son was born. One day as he was breast-feeding and stroking his mothers head, he discovered a huge scar<sup>26</sup>. He asked his mother how this had happened, she related the whole gruesome story. Her husband who was sitting next to her suddenly remembered the girl who he had violently clubbed and left for dead so many years before. At the realisation that his wife was in fact that very same girl, his whole being was filled with remorse. In order to symbolise the true love that he felt for his wife he took some white thread and tied it around each of their wrists. This meant that the couple would never be apart and thus he pledged his life to be true to his Hani girl. So even today at Dai wedding ceremonies you can see banana leaves which are said to

symbolise the hats of the Hani people and the use of white thread which binds the couple together in their love' (Bi Jian 1998 : 84).

Such examples of the coexistence of multiple and contradictory narratives are to be expected. The situation in Xishuangbanna is highly complex, the number of narratives about the groups of the area is vast; hence it is not surprising that they sometimes contradict one another. It should be apparent that the Dai peoples of Xishuangbanna are enmeshed in an intricate web of relationality that includes both Han and other peoples of the area. From an administrative point of view it has been viewed as necessary by the Chinese State to identify and classify the Dai as a distinct people. Not surprisingly on closer investigation these artificially imposed borders become hazy. Let me provide another ethnographic example here, which concerns the celebration of Chinese New Year in Jinghong City.

I stated above that the central Dai Temple in Jinghong acts as a meeting place for peoples of many nationalities and as such transcends 'ethnic barriers'. My observations at Chinese new year in 1999 further confirm this. Dai New Year is not until April, yet on this auspicious February date the temple was a hive of activity. Although most of the visitors were Han tourists many Dai were also present. Dai women arrived from villages near the temple, recognisable by their sarongs, golden hair pins and offerings of glutinous rice and tapers. However also present were some city dwelling Dai whose outward appearance made them indistinguishable from the Han visitors.

The abbot, as always, blessed all those who wished him to, irrespective of their nationality. Han and Dai (and British) people knelt side by side at his feet, hands in prayer position, eyes respectfully downcast. The blessing included the giving of bracelets, the reading of sutras and the sprinkling of holy water. One Han couple had travelled from the country to have a statue of a Chinese god blessed by the Dai abbot, expressing the point that monks are considered so auspicious by many Han Chinese that their powers cannot be contained within imposed ethnic boundaries.

Friends of mine in Jinghong city who are of Aini descent, pointedly opened their café throughout Chinese New Year. They told me directly that as they were not of Han descent there was no reason to celebrate this Han festival. Their own New Year celebrations are held on the first of January each year.

### **Dai, Thai or Tai: Tai speaking groups in Banna.**

For those scholars involved with the international tradition of Thai / Tai studies, the Dai people of Xishuangbanna are considered to be members of the Tai populations who inhabit lands from Assam in India, through China, Laos, Burma, Cambodia, Vietnam and Thailand. Before assuming that the classification system used by these scholars is free of political agenda, it is worth exploring the work of Wijeyewardene, a Thai scholar with a particular interest in issues concerning the Thai / Tai distinction. Wijeyewardene urges scholars not to forget that: **“‘Thai’ is a construct of the emergence of the nation state of Siam-Thailand, ‘Tai’ a creation of colonial officials and missionary scholars who tried to make sense of the**

**cultural diversity and inter-relatedness of the peoples of Southeast Asia and Southern China”** (Wijeyewardene 1994 : 1). Indeed it is the American missionary Clifton Dodd, who is said to have discovered the Tai language family (Wijeyewardene 1990 : 49). His major work published in 1923 and entitled *‘The Tai Race: The Elder Brother of the Chinese’* was the result of many years travel in Southeast Asia. The work highlights the similarities of the different Tai groups discovered by the author, and has been employed as useful rhetoric by those wishing to promote the idea of a re-unification of the Tai peoples<sup>27</sup>.

The classification criteria used to identify the Tai, by scholars such as Dodd, privileged language. Some have argued that such a rigid method of classification has led scholars to ignore the links between those seen as Tai and their neighbours of different linguistic stock. Tapp (2000) warns that past theorists may have been guilty of over emphasizing the distinctiveness of cultural traits belonging to groups in the area. Anthropologists of the area, buying into the myth of ethnographic ‘authenticity’ which focused on notions such as ‘cultural contamination’ and ‘acculturation’, were keen to mark ‘their’ people out from the dominant Thai population (Tapp 2000 : 358). Thus Tapp urges theorists not to overlook the importance of shared economic circumstances and shared histories in the creation of ethnic identities. By providing examples through out this thesis of the interplay of identities among the peoples of Xishuangbanna I hope this work will contribute to Tapp’s project.

Of those peoples who have been classified as Dai in Xishuangbanna, the majority call themselves Daile (ᨾᩣ᩠ᨦ) and speak a dialect of Tai known as Daile, which has its own script (simplified since ‘liberation’, although all religious texts



still use the original). These people (known as the Tai Lue, also spelt Lu or Lü, in the Thai / Tai studies literature, and Shui Dai or Water Dai in Chinese) were politically dominant in pre ‘Liberation’ Xishuangbanna. (The ‘Pre - Liberation’ political history of Xishuangbanna is given in the Introduction.) As part of his fact finding mission to Southeast Asia, Clifton Dodd visited Xishuangbanna in 1919. During his time in Banna he came to know the Le people. The book he produced outlining the characteristics of each of the Tai groups he ‘discovered’ includes the following description of the Daile: **“The Lü impressed me as less civilized than any Tai people I had ever met. They are less polite and deferential, more talkative, even rude in their manner. But they are less timid, more sturdy, more hospitable, and more receptive. After all their rudeness is only external. It is Bohemianism run wild”** (C Dodd 1923 : 188).

Although Dodd, like most outsiders who visit the area, focused on the Daile, Xishuangbanna is home to a number of other Dai peoples. Table 2:7 below displays the names of these other groups. The table is included here only to provide some idea of the diversity of Tai speakers in Banna:

Name in Daile	Name in Chinese	Main area where found
Pa Shee	Hui Dai 回傣	Menghai county.
Dai Long	Shui Dai 水傣 Han Dai 汉傣	Menghai county near the border with Myanmar. Also seen near Jinuo Mountain and in Jinghong.
Dai Ya	Hua Yao Dai 花腰傣	Mengyang town and Jinghong city.
Dai Zhuang	Zhuang Zu 壮族	Jinghong municipality.

It should not be assumed that this table tells the whole story, for there may well be other Dai peoples living in Xishuangbanna, especially in Mengla county on the border with Laos, an area with which I am not overly familiar. The last entry on the above table, that of the Zhuang people, is included here because in Daile these peoples are classed as being Dai, even if in Chinese they are seen as a distinct minority<sup>28</sup>.

The above table is compiled from two main sources: From the wisdom of my interlocutors in the Buddhist temple in Jinghong City and information given to me by Chinese academics. When I enquired into the correct classification of the villagers of my fieldwork site, all those I asked told me they were Daile. All those, that is, except many of the actual villagers, who simply stated that they were Dai Mengxiang, (that is the Dai of the village where they live)<sup>29</sup>. Once again there appears to be a mixing of notions of locality with those of ethnicity.

Similar problems of classification were encountered by the anthropologist Moerman, who carried out his fieldwork among the Lue of Northern Thailand, a group considered by many Thai / Tai scholars to have a strong cultural affinity with the Daile of Xishuangbanna. Moerman (1965:1216) states that **“the Lue cannot be identified - cannot, in a sense, be said to exist - in isolation.”** Moerman concludes that, in his view, the most reliable method of ethnic identification is self labelling, thus he states that:

**“I can at this point, attempt a preliminary answer to the question of, “Whom did you study in the field?” I studied a community of people who call themselves**

**and their language “Lue.” Their neighbours also call them “Lue,” but I do not know in what ways and to what extent their language and behaviour are similar to those “Lue” communities elsewhere” (Moerman 1965 : 1221).**

However O’Connor, writing on Tai peoples generally, notes the flexibility and fluidity of this category. He criticises Moerman for asking, “Who are the Lue?” as the very question assumes that the Lue are a ‘concrete whole’. O’Connor, in an argument similar to Tapp’s outlined above, explains that those engaged in Tai studies need to accept the complexity and ambiguity uncovered by studies of the region. With this in mind he proposes three changes be adopted namely that; discursive power relations be acknowledged, the historical contingency of notions of ‘place’, ‘activity’ and ‘person’ be recognised and that we move away from the notion of the Tai as a static ‘timeless whole’ (O’Connor 2000 : 39). O’Connor concludes by saying that we may still find it hard to define exactly who the Tai are, but by accepting that there can be ‘continuity in change’ we can move closer to understanding the Tai regions (O’Connor 2000 : 47).

In relation to self ascription it is interesting that those members of the Dai community in Xishuangbanna, who at present view themselves as ‘protectors of the Dai culture’ (such as certain high ranking monks in the central temple in Jinghong, some members of the Buddhist Association, and some influential dancers and singers also working in the capital), stress the unifying nature of the Daile language. This is said to be the ‘authentic’ language of the Dai people of Xishuangbanna. The political implications of this can be seen when it is noted that when explaining the importance of the Daile language to the people of Xishuangbanna the monks used

the Chinese term *biaozhun* 标准 or standard, thus linking Daile to standard *Putonghua* 普通话 (Mandarin). The language which as Dwyer expresses, **“stands at the pinnacle of a metalinguistic hierarchy which mirrors the vertical basis of power in China today”** (Dwyer 1998 : 68). Mandarin Chinese is also, according to Dwyer, considered to be China’s default language or **“the sun around which minority - language planets orbit”** (Dwyer 1998 : 79). By likening Daile to *Putonghua* the monks are claiming a certain legitimacy for the language. Perhaps not surprisingly then, Daile is also the language of those who wielded the most power in ‘Pre -Liberation’ Xishuangbanna. It was the language of the nobility, the slave owners and the religious elite centred around Jinghong City. Today it is the Daile who have become famous throughout China. Furthermore the Daile are usually assumed to be the only Dai group living in Xishuangbanna. This means that they have more say in directing the dialogue that creates images of the Dai than do speakers of other Tai languages in the area. This situation reflects the ‘Pre - Liberation’ power dynamics and is, I feel, being constantly reinforced both by the Daile in Jinghong (the political and economic centre of the prefecture) and by visitors to the area, be they tourists or academics. I myself was encouraged by both Chinese academics and local Dai officials to work with the Daile (*Shui Dai*). One visiting foreign anthropologist went so far as to try and dissuade me from visiting the north of the prefecture (home to the *Dai Ya*) as I would waste my time with ‘politically peripheral people’.

## Conclusion

To conclude, let me reiterate that official discourse presents a static, rigid picture of the 'minority nationalities'. However the everyday experiences of the Dai are governed by a fluid and dynamic relationality, where State imposed categories can be manipulated in creative plays of identity (Schein 2000 : 69 makes a similar point for the Miao and Litzinger 2000 for the Yao). This incongruity is to be expected, for Nation State classificatory discourse usually falls short of accurately representing the complexity found on the ground. I would argue that the present Chinese administration is all too aware of this, and has tried, however imperfectly to rectify the situation within China's borders. However the terrible tragedies which have resulted from previous policy decisions must never be forgotten.

Sautman (1997 : 75-95) argues that present Chinese policy concerning the 'minority nationalities' incorporates a considerable amount of 'racial nationalism'. By promoting 'a-scientific' myths of common descent from the Yellow Emperor, and relatedness to the Dragon for all Chinese peoples, Sautman argues that the Chinese use racial characterizations to unify their people, which is much to the detriment of those who live within China's borders and yet fall outside the racial category of 'Chinese'. He sees the use of such myths as politically perilous and as the cause for such tragedies as those witnessed in Tibet. However Dikötter in the same volume cites Chinese scientists who have used serological studies in an attempt to prove the common descent of all China's minority peoples. The work of Zhao Tongmao for example concludes that, and I quote Dikötter:

**“The Han were the main branch of all the different population groups in China and that all the minority groups ultimately belonged to the ‘yellow race’: The political boundaries of the PRC, in other words, appeared to be founded on clear biological markers of genetic distance. The political implications of racial discourse for minority groups in the PRC are clear in the government’s promotion of China as the ‘homeland of the Modern Yellow Race’” (Dikötter 1997 : 30).**

From the Chinese academic and tourist literature concerning Yunnan province which I have studied, it seems that there has been a subtle shift in the type of rhetoric employed. Rather than recourse to the past, to a common descent, recent unifying rhetoric places more emphasis on the future. Such discourse gives prominence to the possibilities of ‘development’ and economic growth. It looks forward to a utopia which can be achieved only if all the peoples of China stand up and march forward together as brothers.

As previously noted, Rapport and Overing (2000 : 12) have stressed that any system of alterity necessarily mobilises notions of both inclusion and exclusion. The future oriented Chinese official discourse concerning the ‘minority nationalities’ manipulates a particularly interesting interplay of these concepts. The system of alterity which they have devised, employs a language of exclusion that delineates who is not Han, yet it simultaneously includes all in the overarching category of *Zhongguo Ren* or Chinese person. The category Chinese consists of all those who live within the borders of China, as Gladney writes: **“for Westerners, *Chinese* is an ethnic designation. Whereas, in China, *Chinese (Zhongguo Ren)* refers to those**

who live in China, minority or otherwise. Whether they like it or not, those residing in China are Chinese (citizens at least), though perhaps not of Han ethnicity” (Gladney 1991 / 1996 : 318, emphasis from the original). The Chinese rhetoric on alterity excludes in order to include. Difference is manipulated as a bond to create and maintain unity.

My argument here has been that close examination of the boundaries between ‘minority nationalities’ of Yunnan Province, exposes them as predictably hazy, fluid, or permeable. Indeed any system of rigid ethnic classification is likely to be baffling. ‘Ethnicity’ as a concept is almost ludicrous in its impossibility. It is ephemeral, mercurial, but mostly it is a trickster. It refuses to be captured, to be caged to become totally comprehensible. Michael Fischer (1986) has also commented on the nebulous quality of ‘ethnicity’ as lived experience. Whilst reviewing new autobiographical narratives concerning ethnic identity he outlines three sentiments which I feel can also elucidate Dai experiences. In what follows I shall first provide the lines of thought that Fischer (1986 : 195 – 196) has mapped out and then relate each in turn to the Dai lived world.

**“First, the paradoxical sense that ethnicity is something reinvented and reinterpreted in each generation by each individual and that it is often something quite puzzling to the individual, something over which he or she lacks control. Ethnicity is not something that is simply passed on from generation to generation, taught and learned; it is something dynamic, often unsuccessfully repressed or avoided....In so far as ethnicity is a deeply rooted emotional component of identity, it is often transmitted less through cognitive language or**

**learning (to which sociology has almost entirely restricted itself) than through processes analogous to the dreaming and transference of psychoanalytic encounters”.**

By using this quotation I do not mean to imply that I have adopted a psychoanalytic approach in my understanding of Dai identity. However the concept of ‘dreaming ethnicity’ I find deliciously seductive. Dreams are often contradictory, hazy and nebulous in a way which is similar to notions of ‘Dainess’. I have aimed here to show the contextuality of boundaries between the peoples of Xishuangbanna and to demonstrate that they are continually in flux, the product of never ending processes of generation and regeneration. It should not however be forgotten how quickly and subtly a dream can become a nightmare.

Fischer’s (1986 : 196) second point is that **“such a process of assuming an ethnic identity is an insistence of a pluralistic, multidimensional, or multifaceted concept of self: one can be many different things, and this personal state can be a crucible for a wider ethos of pluralism”.**

This notion of multidimensional identity radiates from the material on Xishuangbanna. This is shown in the following ethnographic examples which have been explored in some detail above:

- The experiences of the young ‘jungle people’ guide.
- The Flower Belt Dai man who attended the Jinuo New Year festival dressed in a conspicuously Jinuo jacket.



- The Han woman who lives as a Dai woman with the friend of my host in Mengxiang village.
- The Lahu woman who said that she and her family lived as Han.

A crucial aspect of this multidimensionality is the interplay between notions of ethnicity and those of locality. It is here where seemingly contradictory notions can fuse. Thus many of the villagers with whom I lived repeatedly told me they were ‘Chinese Dai’. This statement is supported by a tangled web of motivation, and there is certainly an element of political necessity in such comment, but also a degree of National pride (it must be remembered that the standard of living is much higher in Xishuangbanna than it is across the borders in either Laos or Myanmar).

The third sentiment I use from Fischer (1986 : 196) is that, , **“the search or struggle for a sense of ethnic identity is a (re-)invention and discovery of a vision, both ethical and future-oriented. Whereas the search for coherence is grounded in a connection to the past, the meaning abstracted from that past, an important criterion of coherence, is an ethic workable for the future. Such visions can take a number of forms: they can be both culturally specific (e.g., the biblical strains of black victories over oppression) and dialectically formed as critiques of hegemonic ideologies (e.g., as alternatives to the melting pot rhetoric of assimilation to the bland, neutral style of the conformist 1950’s)”**.

In relation to the Dai of Xishuangbanna we have seen how their past identity as feudal overlords has given way to notions of a beautiful, peaceful and attractive people. This is clearly a future oriented identity construction which draws on certain

aspects of past life, such as dress, architectural style and Buddhism. The generation of such a detailed weave of identities is an ongoing process and clearly the result of dialogue. It is a dialectical power play between the Chinese Nation State and the Dai people. Moreover the Dai people are not a homogenous mass, and as a result the symbols, metaphors and cosmological concepts employed in this play have multitudinous meanings. Throughout this chapter I have tried to demonstrate both the polyphony and creativity involved in this play whilst also remembering that 'systems of alterity' and the concomitant formation of social boundaries are the tools of hegemony.

Acceptance of the multivocality and contradiction inherent in the construction and maintenance of identities is a powerful critique, not only of notions of 'ethnicity' which stress the maintenance of 'borders', but also of the whole notion of 'authenticity' as it is applied to indigenous groups or indeed 'minority nationalities' (see for example Wood 1984, 1993 & 1997, Oakes 1993 & 1997, Gladney 1994). A further ethnographic example of the inadequacy of such concepts is provided by Gow. His work dismantles the still all too pervasive, "acculturated / traditional" dichotomy. With reference to fieldwork among native peoples living near the Bajo Urubamba river in eastern Peru, Gow explains why a Barthian stress on boundaries between ethnic groups is unhelpful when trying to understand the everyday lived worlds. The people with whom Gow lived referred to themselves as '*de sangre mezclada*' or 'of mixed blood,' thus they did not identify with any one of the groups indigenous to the area. Gow gives examples of the complexity and fluidity of notions of identity expressed by these peoples, most of whom share a degree of relatedness with the Campa or Piro groups, as he writes:

“Even among those people said to be Piro there were those who could not speak that language, and the same was true of certain Campa people with respect to the Campa language. More confusingly, whether a person was Piro or not seemed to depend on who I talked to: the same person would be identified by one person as Piro, by another as Campa, and by a third of *moza gente*, a term which can be translated as ‘mestizo’. Still more confusingly, individual people would change their self-identification from one occasion to the next. One woman contrasted herself as a Piro woman to some visitors who were Campa, while a week later she announced to other visitors, ‘¡Yo Campa!’, ‘I am Campa!’”(Gow 1991 : 5).

Rather than focusing on the continuity of their descent with the Piro, Campa or other groups indigenous to the area, the everyday speech of the Bajo Urubamba peoples focused on the local school and title to their land (this is similar to the expectations of O’Connor concerning the Tai notions of ‘place’, ‘activity,’ ‘person,’ explored above). To understand their sense of belonging, which Gow explains was visible in their self-assured and happy demeanour, it is crucial to appreciate the concepts of relatedness as voiced by these people. This requires the recognition that these people experience a sense of continuity which is inexplicable by recourse to such terminology as ‘acculturated’ or ‘inauthentic’.

The fact that the notion of ‘bounded authentic indigenous groups’ still pervades and is indeed at the centre of international world politics is clearly demonstrated by Rapport and Overing (2000), in their explanation of Homi Bhabha’s term the ‘unhomely’. In this article they discuss the United Nations

document 'Article 21' which, they write, **"calls for all nation-states to *conserve the shared cultures, the united cultures of their respective indigenous peoples*"** (Rapport and Overing 2000 : 368, emphasis in the original). With increasing economic dependency, encouraged by the ever expanding 'Development' industry, the number of 'ethnic conflicts' and the implications of pernicious Nationalism, the influence of such static terminology must not be underestimated.

When trying to understand the notions of continuity and belonging held by other peoples it is helpful to remember as Stuart Hall (1997 : 1-3) explains, that identification is a construction **"always in process. It is not determined in the sense that it can be 'won' or 'lost', sustained or abandoned. Though not without its determinate conditions of existence, including the material and symbolic resources required to sustain it, identification is in the end conditional, lodged in contingency. Once secured, it does not obliterate difference...It requires what is left outside, its constitutive outside, to consolidate the process"**.

Processes of identification are necessarily dialogic. Having said this, as is made clear by the work of Bakhtin in his struggles against totalitarianism, the balance of power is all too often asymmetrical. Bakhtin explains that the more dialogue, the more negotiation involved in the generative process, the greater the possibility of equality (Gladney 1998)<sup>30</sup>. From my time with the Dai I have learnt that in trying to understand what it means for them to be labelled as 'Dai' and to be self-identified as Dai, it is necessary for me to accept that the processes by which this category is continuously regenerated are both playful and unpredictable. They do invest heavily in the creation and recreation of a sense of belonging (see Chapter

Five and Six) but this does not alter the simple fact that ways of becoming and being Dai are changing. It is the images used in these dialogic processes of change (those aspects that are seen as being particularly Dai) that are the focus of this thesis. Wagner (1975 : 82) in his discussion of the self has explained that those who take their personality constructions too seriously become neurotic. In order to avoid neurosis, to avoid conflict there needs to be an acceptance of polyphony, of contradiction, change and perhaps most importantly, difference.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> William Blake 1996 : 47.

<sup>2</sup> See for example: Honig 1992. Faure and Siu 1995. Pieke and Mallee 1999. Harrell 1995. Solinger 1995, Gladney 1991 / 1996, 1994 & 1998, Rack 1999, Litzinger 1998, 2000.

In Tai studies Evans 2000 and O'Connor 2000 on the nebulous character of the category Tai.

<sup>3</sup> China has a total land mass of 9.6 million square kilometres (Ma Yin 1994 : 1).

<sup>4</sup> Wei Hui (ed) 1996 insert.

<sup>5</sup> Although the Aini are classified as Hani under the State imposed group categories they consider themselves to be distinct groups. There were many wars between the two groups in 'Pre-Liberation' times and some animosity still lingers.

<sup>6</sup> This category includes those peoples who have migrated to the area, or whose ancestors did so but their populations are not large enough to be included in this table. Peoples such as the Koreans, Uyгур or Dong could feature here.

<sup>7</sup> Other Asian nations have also adopted this strategy for uniting their peoples. Indonesia's 'unity through diversity' policy is particularly striking (See Wood 1997 & Hendry 2000).

<sup>8</sup> See M. Dillon 1998 : 65-67.

<sup>9</sup> By June 2002 new fifty, twenty and ten RMB notes (all with images of Mao alone on the front) were also in circulation a long side the designs described in the main text. These new designs form the fifth series of RMB notes. As yet the five, two and one notes have not been redesigned. Of most relevance to the discussion here is the fifty *kuai* note which depicts Lasa on its reverse.

<sup>10</sup> Ong reports that these Confucian sentiments are also invoked when deals are being made between mainland Chinese and *huaqiao* 华侨 (overseas Chinese). Ong (1996 : 72) gives the following poetic couplet, probably by the poet Liu Po, which provides a moving example of these sentiments:

**'Time will not age the migrants heart,**

**High Mountain passes can not break the longing for home'.**

<sup>11</sup> In the 1950's researchers were sent out by the Mao's government to compile data on all the different peoples living within China's borders. Most of these studies were Marxist in tone, aiming to establish the evolutionary stage of each group. The Dai were found to be 'feudal' (*Daizu shehui lishi diaocha, minzu wenti wu zhong cong shu* 1983).

<sup>12</sup> From: *Daizu shehui lishi diaocha, minzu wenti wu zhong cong shu*. 1983. Xishuangbanna Zhi Er.

<sup>13</sup> These people are now considered to be 'a branch of the Lahu nationality' (Duan Jinlu (Ed.) 1991 : 144).

<sup>14</sup> Later the Youle people became officially know as Jinuo, this pronunciation being closer to these peoples name for themselves (Zheng Peng 1993 : 26).

<sup>15</sup> Please note that some of the peoples mentioned in table one, such Benren, were not considered to be in large enough numbers to constitute being a 'national minority' by later researchers. Thus they fall under 'others' in later tables.

<sup>16</sup> Compiled from figures provided by Zheng Peng 1993 : 24 -29.

<sup>17</sup> Take for example the Dhammapada Ch. IV. v50.

**"Let one regard**

**Neither the discrepancies of others,**

**Nor what is done or left undone by others**

**But only the things one has done oneself of left undone."**

<sup>18</sup> Siu (1993 : 19) and Siu & Faure (1995: 17) have noted the historically 'malleable "Chinese" condition'. In the same way my data from Banna shows the negotiated and on going process which defines what it is to be Han or Dai, and by extension Chinese.

<sup>19</sup> Solinger (1995 : 113)) reports that a total of between fifty and seventy million people make up this floating population of China. J. Gittings reported in the Guardian on 21.8.2001 that the abolition of the *hukou* system has been proposed.

<sup>20</sup> The penalties for members of 'minority nationalities' having more than the allowed number of children are not nearly as severe as city dwelling Han. In some areas (such as Nujiang) the penalty for an extra child is nothing more then a fine of 300 RMB (about £23).

<sup>21</sup> These terms will be explained below.

<sup>22</sup> These terms will be explained in more detail later in the chapter. For now the reader can think of them as simply Dai - as this is what appears on their identity cards.

<sup>23</sup> Feuchtwang has stated that in order to explain the revival of rituals in some areas, they must be seen as both embedded in the socialist market history in which they are found (following Siu 1990) and as

possessing their own “cyclical rhythms of time and secular moments of change” (Feuchtwang 1998 : 50). So in order to understand the revival of any given festival both its discursive history and contemporary context must be taken into account, thus such revivals should not be viewed as simple backlashes against a previously intolerant State. I take a similar line in explaining the popularity of ‘minority festivals’ such as Dai Water Splashing in Chapter Seven below. Such celebrations have multiple and complex meanings, so that concepts such as ‘subversion’ or ‘tradition’ are too simplistic when taken alone to provide much insight.

<sup>24</sup> I talk elsewhere in my thesis, especially Chapter Three, about tourism and the role the Dai play in the manipulation of their image for the touristic gaze. The empowerment that such manipulation could provide was noted by Guan Jian (1989 ) where he called for ‘host ethnic participation’. Kiyoshi also notes the link between ethnic tourism and what he calls ‘cultural revival’, also he does concede that transformations in Xishuangbanna have led people to express their ‘ethnic cultures in new ways’ (Kiyoshi 2000 : 121). Oakes has explored the possibilities and problems arising out of the ethnic tourism impinging on the Miao in Guizhou (1998). This work also provides a detailed analysis of the impact of minority theme parks in the area.

<sup>25</sup> It is interesting to note that a similar linguistic division has been noted by Evans (2000 : 270) concerning the Lao use of the term *Kha* or slave, when referring to most ‘tribal’ peoples (his term).

<sup>26</sup> Dai children are breast fed until they are toddlers, however it is likely that this version of the tale has been censored. It is more likely that in the Dai version the Hani girl’s husband discovered her scar whilst making love.

<sup>27</sup> It is interesting to note that Wijeyewardene explains that in his views it is unjustified to accuse Thai governments of pursuing an irredentist line concerning the Tai peoples.

<sup>28</sup> There has been much written on the Zhuang, especially those living in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Prefecture. They are often represented as the most ‘Sinefied’ of the Tai peoples (Pranee Kullavanijaya et al. 1996, Katherine Palmer Kaup 2000).

<sup>29</sup> This stress on the importance of locality for the Dai is a repeated theme throughout this thesis. Leach highlighted the centrality of locality in the cosmological thought of Tai speakers when he wrote: “A Shan’s first loyalty then is to a place not a kin group” (Leach 1954 [1993] : 213).

<sup>30</sup> See Chapter Seven below for a more detailed exploration of the plays of power and Bakhtinian dialogics.

### Chapter Three

## Protection, Pain and Distinctiveness: Tattoo and the Aesthetics of Identity.





### Chapter Three

#### **Protection, Pain and Distinctiveness:**

#### **Tattoo and the Aesthetics of Identity.**

In this chapter I shall explore the ways in which tattoo is used to express the aesthetics of group identity. I look at the roles that tattoo has in the Dai world and how these are changing. I explore the differences in the designs adorning the male and female form and conclude that these are a matter of degree rather than kind.

The most notable capacity of tattoo in contemporary Xishuangbanna is its use in the creative expression of affinity with the Dai peoples. Understandings of these markings are grounded in Dai cosmological knowledge concerning the efficacy of inked tattoos. Of particular interest is the way in which tattoo can be alluring, tantalising, and as such is used to attract women. This aspect has been subtly manipulated by owners of tattoo parlours in Jinghong as will be shown below. The central point of this chapter is however that the meanings of tattoo are multitudinous and shifting and as such it is the perfect tool for expressing identity (however complex this may be) in present day Xishuangbanna. For although the meaning and style of the tattoos sported by Dai people in Xishuangbanna are multiple and making the decision to ink one's skin in this way clearly distinguishes one as either being Dai or having a strong affinity with them and their homeland, Xishuangbanna.

Banna is a complex and vibrant area, to give you some idea of the place of tattoo within this rapidly changing and diverse context I shall set the scene with a description of the evening when I first became interested in Daile tattoo. It was that evening when I began to grasp the fact that understanding tattoo was crucial to comprehending the complexities of Dai ways of being. On the night in question I was staying in Jinghong City having spent the day in the temple learning Daile language. Noticing I was likely to be alone for the evening a group of friends, (who were of Dai, Han, Lahu, Naxi and Aini) decided to take me dancing at the ‘Top Boy’ Disco. As we walked in I was quickly disorientated by the stinging strobe lights which seemed to cause a dislocation of time and space<sup>1</sup>. The music was painfully loud and banging. They were playing mainly Western commercial, Uplifting House, but this was interspersed with Canton (Guangdong 广东) Techno and a few Beijing cuts now and again. Many of the girls (mostly aged between fifteen and twenty) were dancing opposite each other in same gender couples. Their movements were slight; a side ways swaying of the head which flowed delicately through their entire bodies. There were also several groups of men dancing, some of these men displayed a rhythm which can only be described as idiosyncratic whilst others were shadow boxing or incorporating Taiqichuan into their movements. The men’s dancing style was more diverse than that of the girls, possibly a reflection of the fact that their ages also varied more. There were a few trendy young city boys but the majority were middle aged men of various backgrounds. Interestingly there were also a couple of very rich, older men known as elder brother (*dage* 大哥) or boss (*lao ban* 老板) to most of those present. They only very rarely danced preferring to watch from their reserved area summoning those to whom they wished to chat.

That evening one of my friends, Xiao Li, seemed more confident than I had ever seen him before. He was strutting about and dancing, his white vest glowing under the UV. Xiao Li's permanent residence card stated that he was of Han parentage. I also knew that he was married, was a kick boxer and worked for one of those '*lao ban*' also in the club that night. As he saw me he came over to proudly show me the newly inked tattoos which now marked the tops of his arms just above the curve of his triceps. The tattoos were incantations written in the Daile script. He was unaware of the exact meanings of the lettering, never having had the opportunity to learn the script. He explained that he and some his friends had travelled to a remote Dai village where one of the group had relatives. Once there Xiao Li had voluntarily undergone the tattooing process initiated by a venerable male elder. Xiao Li was eager that I appreciate how intense the pain was that he had been through to acquire this adornment. He explained that he had subjected himself to the inking because now he had such tattoos people could see how strong he was<sup>2</sup>.

My anthropological imagination was captured, here was a young Han man indelibly marking his body with what I had considered to be a 'symbol of Dai identity'. As I watched him laughing and sparring on the dance floor, notions began flowing through my head: Thoughts of how tattoo was viewed generally in Chinese society and how these views might differ from the Dai; how Xiao Li's tattoos demonstrated that the boundary between these two worlds is fluid. Moreover I was struck once again by how ingeniously individuals manipulate such boundaries, even to the extent that notions of 'ethnic identity' and 'locality' become indistinguishable.

In Banna tattoo is a potent and multifaceted symbol, understandings of which can provide profound insight into the complex dialogics that constitute the relationships between the groups and individuals, between the Dai and the Han, or indeed between the Dai and other peoples of the area. Moreover, detailed exploration of the meanings inherent in tattoo can also shed light on the relationship between the genders. It is the very diversity of the meanings invested in the tattoos found in Xishuangbanna that accentuates it as a form of creative expression worthy of exploration.

Unfolding the coherency embedded in the web of meanings surrounding tattoo as a method of creative expression was challenging. This was because, where my fieldwork had uncovered a multitude of meanings for tattoo, much of the academic material on the subject seemed only to focus on one or other of the meanings. The main exception to this is Gell's work 'Wrapping In Images' (1993). Some of Gell's claims are mildly disturbing, he does for example, (whilst invoking Sperber's (1985) proposal for an 'epidemiology of cultural representations') liken tattoo to a 'dermatological complaint' (Gell 1993 : 19). Nevertheless many of Gell's insights are magnificent. Developing the work of the psychoanalyst, Anzieu, Gell provides a detailed analysis of the possible functions of tattoo. Table 3:1 below, compiled from his 1993 text, provides a simplified outline of Gell's analysis of Anzieu's work on the power of tattoo in, *The Skin Ego* (1989):

**Table 3:1.** Based on Gell 1993 : 31 - 38.

Function 1	SUPPORT. (following Maertens.)	Tattoo provides an extra skin. Enveloping an otherwise exposed social person. An example would be the tattoo of Western sailors or soldiers.
Function 2	CONTAINING. (following Turner.)	Tattoo makes manifest the function of the skin as a container.
Function 3	PROTECTION. (following Reich 1929)	Here we have the notion of the 'character armour'. Tattoo both protects and constitutes the (social) person.
Function 4	INDIVIDUATION. (following Maertens.)	Tattoo is the symbolic scar indicating separation from the mother and her renunciation.
Function 5 & 6	INTERSENSORALITY & SEXUAL EXCITABILITY.	It is the locality of tattoo that gives it its relevance here. The meaning of tattoo is inherently linked to its position on the body.
Function 7	LIBIDINAL RECHARGING.	Tattoo as an expression of sexuality. To view tattoo is to be in a position of seduction. It induces a sexualised looking.
Function 8	REGISTRATION. (following Bettelheim)	Tattoo as a separation from the mother and a pre-emptive castration. Tattoo becomes a permanent reminder of the inescapable, external social milieu.
Function 9	SELF-DESTRUCTION.	Tattoo as a self-inflicted skin disease. Tattooed skin is skin turned against its owner. It is Masochistic self punishment.

Anzieu views the skin as double sided, it both protects the 'primal cavity' of the body yet also reveals and communicates the internal state to the outside world. In understanding tattoo in the Dai world it is the concept of 'character armour' outlined in 'Function 3' of the above table that is most enlightening. For it is here that Gell explains the idea that the skin can be a boundary, a boundary between an individual and group, between various selves and one, which can be manipulated, and creatively used. Here tattoo is seen as having both protecting and constituting capabilities. Gell's work incorporates Maussian notions of the social person, a category distinct from the inner-self. For Gell then tattoo is seen as a 'technique of

the body' both reflecting and creating the social person as a 'distinctive type of social and political being' (Gell 1993 : 3)<sup>3</sup>.

Michelle Rosaldo, drawing on her work with the Illongot, provides an incisive critique of the Maussian stance on personhood. She writes; **“an analytic framework that equates “self/individual” with such things as spontaneity, genuine feeling, privacy, uniqueness, constancy, the “inner” life, and then opposes these to the “persons” or “personae” shaped by mask, role, rule or context, is a reflection of dichotomies that constitute the modern Western self. And in this case “our distinctions prove misleading as a frame on which to hang Illongot constructs”** (M Rosaldo 1984 : 146). Like Rosaldo I would have to question the assumed universality inherent in Maussian notions of the social person. As the ethnographic material provided below (see also Chapter Five) is aimed to demonstrate the Maussian notions seem to be at odds with Dai knowledge which does not radically separate an inner and outer self. Indeed in Buddhist thought any notion of an unchanging, permanent self is considered mere delusion<sup>4</sup>. In the words of one Buddhist teacher: **“Personality or individuality is, according to Buddhism not an entity but a process of arising and passing away, a process of nutrition, of combustion, of grasping”** (Malalasekera 1982 : 15). Moreover the delusion of an unchanging self is a powerful negative force. In the words of the Buddha: **“The self is a cruel master”** (Fussell 1985 : 79). Through attachment to the self we grow afraid, this fear leads to hate and greed, which in turn leads to more fear.

In Buddhist thought the illusory self-image is maintained by a number of 'props'. These props include such notions as gender distinction and occupation. A

self-image constituted by such props is, according to Theravada teachings, a dangerous thing to hold on to. Buddhism teaches that clutching to such spurious concepts can ultimately lead only to suffering (*Dukkha*)<sup>5</sup>. *Dukkha* arises when the self-image is lost or threatened, which is inevitable because of the fragile nature of this projection. The Buddhist teaching is that people cling to a particular self-image to gain a feeling of security, yet, paradoxically, all such attachment can ultimately provide is a sense of loss and dismay.

The perception of a distinct and stable self can only be impermanent. The fragility of the illusion of the self is reflected in Daile cosmological knowledge which teaches that thirty-two (or more) souls, each capable of movement, come together to constitute an individual. The direction and extent to which these souls move can be influenced, this ability is an important factor in healing and protection rites. Tattoo is part of the process that guides and controls this capriciousness, but this control originates as much from the individual as it does from the wider culture. As the self is transitory the tattoo defines, yet also dissolves, the distinct self through a mercurial process, uniting and dividing self from other, internal from external.

Thus what I take from Gell is his ideas concerning the dialogic relations of the inner and outer body, and the possibility of an ebb and flow in the meanings of tattoos. **“What tattooing reveals...is an inside which comes from the outside, which has been applied externally prior to being absorbed into the interior. The basic schema of tattooing is thus definable as the exteriorisation of the interior which is simultaneously the interiorisation of the exterior”** (Gell : 1993 : 39).

These concepts can be viewed as an expression of the ‘character armour’ presented above (Function 3 in Table 3:1). Here the skin, as a boundary, is seen to both link and divide. Although he covers every possible meaning that could be invested in tattoo, Gell’s work places undue emphasis on the role of tattoo in enforcing societal domination. Adapting Mauss, tattoo becomes a ‘technique of the body’, a way of **“reconstructing personhood according to the requirements of the social milieu”** (Gell 1993 : 3). Thus the individual is further contained, however unknowingly, for having a tattoo. In what follows I hope to show such concepts do not do justice to the sparks of energy and individual transgressions so apparent in Banna.

There is a Durkheimian feel to much of the work on the subject of tattoo. Being marked with tattoos is often presented as a form of individual expression for us in the West, but an imposed mark of collective society for other peoples. Such lack of attention to individual creativity is criticised in the work of M. Strathern (1979). She argues that what, at first glance, appears to be societal uniformity may be an example of individual expression. As Strathern writes, feminists have critiqued cosmetic beautification in the West for the role it plays in hiding the true identity of women. The Western notion of a distinct inner and outer self is on display once again here. It is thought that by decorating the outer self, the ‘true’ inner self is harder to see. Following the argument women that submit to excessive cosmetic decoration are in danger of losing their identity. Strathern refers to this as the ‘paradox inherent in the process of beautification’. However this is not the case for Hageners who, as Strathern writes; **“exploit the cosmetic paradox in an opposite way: they do not believe that decorating the body hides the inner self. I would**



argue that the physical body is disguised by decorations precisely because the self is one of their messages” (Strathern 1979 : 243).

The positive side to the ethnocentric bias mentioned above is that it has produced some stimulating work concerning the transgressive potentiality of tattoo within our world. The exploration of which helps to highlight the creative potential inherent in tattoo as an aesthetic form. Tattoo is still not part of the mainstream. Indeed much of the literature concerning it sees it as a form of ‘inventive art’, as part of a new revolution in cultural practice, challenging our preconceptions (at least in the eighties) as Dada had once shocked (Vale & Juno 1989 : 199). This new literature is perhaps epitomised in the work of Vale and Juno (1989), for as they explain: **“Art has always mirrored the zeitgeist of the time. In this Post-modern epoch in which all the art of the past has been assimilated, consumerized, advertised and replicated, the last artistic territory resisting co-optation and commodification by Museum and Gallery remains the Human Body. For a tattoo is more than a painting on skin; its meaning and reverberations cannot be comprehended without a knowledge of the history and mythology of its bearer. Thus it is a true poetic creation, and is always more than meets the eye. As a tattoo is grounded on living skin, so its essence emotes a poignancy unique to the mortal human condition”** (Vale & Juno 1989 : 5).

Such ideas are far from the biological determinism of Lombroso, a renowned late nineteenth century social thinker, who likened tattooed ‘criminals’ to tattooed ‘savages’, whose designs were simply visible manifestations of their position as less evolved beings (Gell 1993 : 14). Western tattoo is now increasingly being portrayed

as part of a wider phenomenon constituting an 'alternative' society. Tattoo is accepted as a creative expression of discontent, a way of reclaiming the body. As Tseëlon explains: **"The current craze (of tattooing) is not practised as a tribal sign of belonging, but as an individual sign celebrating identity and claiming the body"** (Tseëlon 1995 : 119). Foucault expounded that the docile body was **"subjected to a machinery of power that broke it down and rearranged its parts. This 'political anatomy' was also 'a mechanism of power'. It increased the forces of the body in economic terms of utility and diminished them in political terms of obedience"** (Sheridan 1980 : 149). Tattoo can be seen as one way of exploring the limits of this repression. The designs add nothing to the utility of the body, rather they can advertise the limits of societal influence on it. Bataille (1986), Foucault (1973) and Butler (1997, 1999) amongst others have taught that although there will always be limits, there will also, in lieu of this fact be transgression. (For a detailed exploration of power and transgression see Chapter Seven below.)

As Huck explains: **"Body decoration provides a means of control over oneself which is otherwise diluted by wider society and its prejudices and expectations"** (Huck 1998 : 6). Such notions are further voiced by one of her informants who states: **"Going through the whole process of getting pierced and tattooed is like a modern-day ritual that balances out the alienation this technological society has created"** (Huck 1998 : 9). Within this literature there are realms of feminist knowledge, which I do not have time to explore here. These writers highlight the control of the feminine body, the way it is objectified, viewed and distanced from its inhabitant. Art, and image manipulation generally, has contributed to such a controlling discourse (see for example Berger 1972). Tattoo

has become part of an innovative revolutionary movement that has played its part in deconstructing such constraints. Having provided a hint at the potential inherent in tattoo, the ways it can be manipulated, and the stories it can tell, the Dai ethnographic material shall now be explored.

### **Tattoo amongst the Dai.**

The brief description of the disco at the beginning of the chapter aimed to bring to life the ever changing diversity of Xishuangbanna. Dai tattoo should not be considered outside of this diversity<sup>6</sup>. I aim here to demonstrate the multivalency of tattoo and so explore its multiple meanings in Banna at the time of my fieldwork. I also hope to show that tattooing (*yud* ວຸດ in Daile, *wenshen* 文身 in Mandarin), despite incorporating non-Dai meanings, is still a powerful tool in the creation of Dai identity in Xishuangbanna.

Chinese ethnography relating to Dai tattoo deals mainly with the historical context and ‘traditional’ meanings of the practice<sup>7</sup>. The work of Wang Guoxiang cited below provides a detailed description of the types of designs sported by the Dai and as such is a good introduction to the topic (note the differing designs for nobles and commoners, it is of interest that I have only seen black designs in contemporary Xishuangbanna).

**“Tattoo, using needles to pierce decorative designs and patterns onto the body, constitutes a form of painting. In former times aristocrats possessed dark red or vermilion chequered designs, the designs of the common people were**

black. In Mengla county I shot photographs of ‘*pa ya*’ dragon chequered, vermilion designs.

Tattooing is normally carried out between the ages of fifteen and twenty, For a body to be magnificently tattooed a number of sittings must be endured. Tattoo has a relationship with ‘totems’, ‘coming of age’ and ‘marriage’, not to mention ‘adornment’. Torso designs are of five kinds: (1) *Animal* – dragon (snake), tiger, ‘*qin*’ a mystical beast resembling an elephant, and peacock. (2) *Buddhist*, pagoda. (3) *Figures* - (*Payaman*, the monkey god, *Numan* etc.). (4) *Scripts* - Dai script, Myanmar script, Thai script, esoteric symbols and Buddhist sutras in the Pali language. (5) *Decorative pattern* – fish scale designs, lotus petal designs, earthworm lair designs, water droplet cluster decorative pattern, etc. The meanings of the designs are profoundly interesting, moreover the design symmetry displays a musical rhythm” (Wang Guoxiang 1994 : 49 my translation).

### **To be Human is to have Tattoo, to have Tattoo is to be Human.**

It was explained to me by a Dai abbot, Du Zai, that tattoos indelibly mark one as human. He expressed the concept in the following terms; ‘**to be human is to have tattoo; to have tattoo is to be human**’.

Du Zai went on to explain that everyone should be tattooed so that after death your body is recognised as human. If your skin is not marked there is a danger that it will be used to make a drum. Du Zai’s comments hints at the dark power which many monks have the capability to wield. Most monks do not wish to invest

in karmic relationships and so are deterred from practising as sorcerers, however they can and do wield this power when necessary. The work of Li Ziquan further confirms this, he writes: **“Corpses without tattoos will have the skins removed to make large drums for the Buddhist temples and will suffer being beaten down through the ages”** (Li Ziquan 1989 : 19).

Du Zai also narrated the cosmological story laid out below. His words provide another example of the capability of tattoo to express humanity. They also tell of the intimate relationship between the Dai and the Dragons (*nag / naga* in Thailand and India) who also inhabit their world.

'Long ago a Dragon transformed to take the form of a girl. She was strikingly beautiful so much so that a prince was so attracted to her that he asked her to marry him. Permission was granted and not long after they were married a baby was born. The baby was gorgeous and every one who came in contact with the child loved him. However there was a rule in the palace that he was only to bathe in cold water. If you used warm water he would change back into a serpent as his mother was a Dragon. Everyone in the palace adhered to the rule as they were unwilling to risk losing the precious child. One day an old woman was minding the child, she didn't believe the rumours of the child's hidden Dragon nature and felt bad that he always had to be bathed in cold

water. She thought it wouldn't hurt for him to have a warm bath. But as soon as his skin touched the water he sure enough turned into a serpent. On hearing the commotion this caused, his mother charged in and grabbed the child, shutting her eyes she instantaneously transported herself back to the realm of the Dragon King. As she stood before the powerful being she implored him to transform the child back to human form. The Dragon King looked at the child but could see only his Dragon nature, and thus refused. The Dragon woman beseeched him explaining that the child's father was human. The Dragon King again looked at the child, this time noticing the tattoos with which the child had been marked whilst living in the earthly palace. On seeing these tattoos the Dragon King conceded that the child was indeed human, consequently he transformed him back to human form. Mother and child both returned happily to the palace'.

To reiterate, these notions concerning the origins of tattoo, show how the practice and identity are indisputably linked for the Dai. The Chinese ethnographer, Li Ziquan gives the following examples of Chinese Dai proverbs, (possibly not from Xishuangbanna, he does not specify the locality) which, show the necessity of tattoo to mark humanity: **“Leopards and tigers have their patterns, if man has no design what is he?”** And again; **“the toad has wrinkles, how can it be that man has no tattoos?”** (Li Ziquan 1989 : 19) By extension then to be Dai is to have tattoo, as Li

Ziquan quotes: **“Those with tattoo are Dai, those without are Han or Hani people...After death, only those with tattoos can be identified by these ancestors, the others remain unrecognised...Those with tattoos will also be Dai in the next life”** (Li Ziquan 1989 : 19).

Although Li Ziquan’s statements about the nationalities of those with tattoos is over simplistic, it is also clear that tattoo can be used as a way of stating one is Dai, or of claiming affinity with the Dai in the multi-cultural forum. Tattoos are so potent in this regard that they can even act as passports. While on the bus from Kunming down to Banna, I was told by a young Dai man that he was not in the least apprehensive about crossing the border between Simao Prefecture and Banna. The border guards, he explained rarely asked to inspect permanent residence cards of men with tattoos in Daile script like his own. I will come back to the complexities of ‘ethnicity’ later on but for now I want to turn to exploring the ways in which Dai tattoos are used as a tool in the expression of gender.

### **Tattoos Designs of Dai Women**

Bearing in mind the above passage, which explains how the Dai view tattoo as an indicator of humanity, it seems surprising that so many writers have assumed the tattoos displayed by women to be of little significance. Such views are common in other Asian countries, as the following example from Japan exemplifies. In Japanese thought the female form is marked by the very absence of tattoo. Below is provided a photograph of a tattoo depicting the Kabuki playboy, Benten Kozo. In the opera Benten’s character was a thief by trade, but one so beautiful that he could

disguise himself as a woman. Thus attired he could pilfer even more loot. In the Kabuki opera, Benten is eventually caught and the absurd scene culminates in the exposure of his tattooed and, hence, very masculine body (Fellman 1986 : 82 - 83).

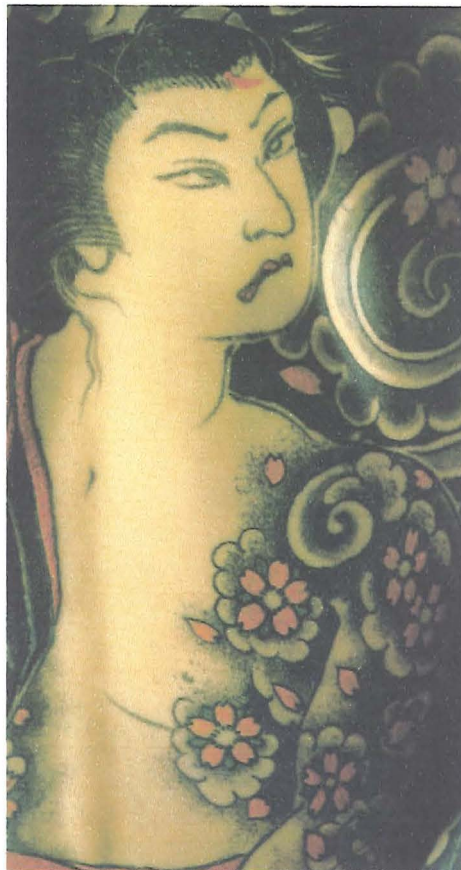


Fig. 3.1. Japanese Kabuki playboy tattoo.

There is much work on the Dai which takes a similar stance. Take for example the work of Li Ziquan (1989) who stresses that few Dai women were tattooed prior to 'Liberation', his rhetoric implying that there are even fewer cases in the post liberation era.

Yet I came across many Dai women in Xishuangbanna with tattoos. This perhaps more understandable given that I was told by Du Zai (a venerable Abbott) all Dai women should ideally have tattoos. These tattoos ought to be on the inside of



the wrist. In his opinion the archetypal design sported by Dai women would be like the one shown below. (This was copied from the design displayed by a twenty-year-old Dai girl in Jinghong).

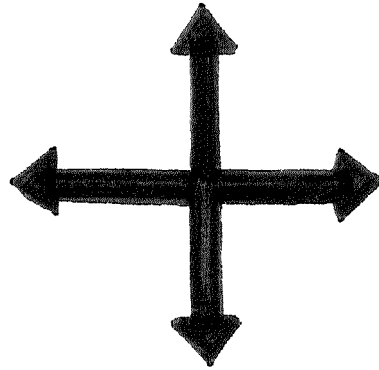


Fig. 3:2. Archetypal female Dai tattoo design.

From my observations I found that women over thirty were more likely to have tattoos although, as the design shown above proves, I also have Dai friends in their early twenties who display designs. I have not seen any girls under the age of fifteen sporting tattoos however it seems likely that it would not be hard to find such girls, especially in rural areas.

There is great variation in both the positioning and style of women's tattoos. Some women display elaborate flower designs, such as those shown below, trailing up onto their forearms.

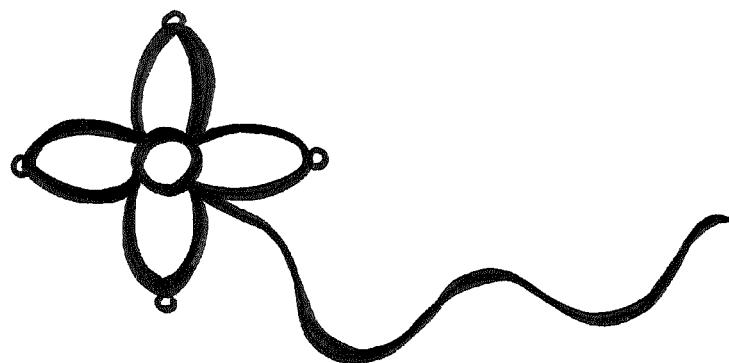


Fig. 3:3. Flower tattoo design.

In Mengxiang village I was told that women (like Dai men) were tattooed when they are still young, usually between eight and eleven years old. It is normally a paternal relative, father, brother or uncle who tattoos the child. My own Dai 'elder sister' has a few sporadically tattooed dots on her outer forearm. She explained that as a seven-year-old child she had run away from her uncle who was trying to tattoo her wrist, because the pain of the four sharp needles digging into her flesh was too great. The tattoo was never finished. My elder sister was, even as a seven year old child, considered enough of an independent being to be able to make this decision. She told me how the adults of her household had laughed at her but that even they had come to agree with her and accept that the pain was not always worth the benefits provided by the tattoo.

Finished designs displayed by Dai women are small, usually only four or five centimetres long, and simple. They tend not to be in Daile script (although this is not always so as will be demonstrated below), which many tattoos displayed by men are. This is because women's designs, not being verses from the Buddhist sutras are rarely invested with as profound an esoteric meaning as those displayed by men, but this does not mean that they are not capable of transmitting other messages including those of identity and belonging. In what follows I shall briefly explore why it is that the designs sported by women are so different from those of Daile men. A fact that led Tannenbaum, writing on the Dai Long / Shan peoples just across the border in Myanmar to state that, "**women rarely have tattoos other than ones to prevent or cure illness**" (Tannenbaum 1987 : 695). As we have seen women's designs also speak of Daile identity and humanity. And yet the differing tattoo designs of Daile men and women reflect the fact that the genders are viewed as having their own

distinct powers. Daile sociality is based upon the harmonious and respectful co-operation of those wielding these powers. As Terwiel, writing on Theravada Buddhist tattoo in North Thailand, explains; **“women are excluded from wearing ‘proper’ amulets and it will be hard for a woman to find a tattooer who would willingly invest her with magical tattoos. The most obvious reason for this almost total exclusion from this aspect of religious life lies in the fact that women are considered antithetic to many kinds of magical power from time to time because they exude potentially dangerous power every month during menstruation”** (Terwiel 1994 : 78).

A full discussion of the potential of feminine power is provided in the next chapter for now I would like to explain that some tattoo designs inked onto the forearms of women are imbued with magical power. These designs, though small and in no way as elaborate as those found inked onto the skin of men, are able to protect women from dangers such as difficult childbirth and the power that they wield works in harmony with that the women themselves display.



Fig. 3:4. Magical designs sported by Dai women.

The glyph, which looks like our zero, represents the Daile letter ‘*Wa*’. I was told that these glyphs were used to represent the *Wa* people. I have a strong

suspicion that, despite his grave countenance, my interlocutor thought that this was a hilarious joke, especially when it is remembered that ‘Pre - Liberation’ the Wa 佤 (Mon-Khmer speaking) peoples were referred to as Ha, vassal or slave (see Chapter Two). Other of my Dai friends tried to confuse me in a similar manner by saying tattoos displaying the Daile ‘*Wa*’ O character meant ‘*Wo*’ 我 (I / me) in Mandarin Chinese, because of the phonetic similarity between the two. Both these explanations, enlightening as they are about the linguistic word play and sense of humour of the area, tell little of the esoteric meaning of these tattoos. However I was also able to find out that these glyphs do have the capacity to protect. It is said that if the body is covered in ten thousand such forms the skin becomes so strong that not even bullets can penetrate it.

Tannenbaum has explained that for the Dai Long in Myanmar this ‘*Wa*’ tattoo can “**cause others to have loving kindness towards the bearer,**” and so has considerable magical efficacy (Tannenbaum 1987 : 696). She goes on to explain that such tattoos can also form part of a cure or prevention of an illness.

Women also sport other tattoos of the type that Tannenbaum would term medicinal, some of which are invested with considerable power. Such tattoos do more than effect a cure on a passive body, for the tattoo dialogues with the potency inherent in the patient, and thus a cure is effected with, instead of on, the patient. Take, for example, the tattoos of an old woman in Mengxiang village. The woman was, at the time of my fieldwork, already in her seventies. She was the mother of six boys, sadly only two of these children survived into adulthood. After the fourth child died she was taken to see a venerable elder of the community who could it was

hoped enact a cure to prevent her two remaining children from dying. This cure entailed her undergoing the pain of a small black ink tattoo on the chest. The tattoo was in Dai script and consists of two characters (*duo wa*), these characters can protect both the old woman and the remainder of her children. The fact that the tattoo is on the chest is interesting, as this part of the body being the locus of the heart is treated with much respect by the Dai. Thus it is incorrect to view women's designs as *a priori* non-potent, it is rather that men tend to have a larger number of more potent designs on parts of the body that are thought of as more powerful, such as the head or chest. Indeed many of the designs sported by women can also be found on the wrists of men. The designs provided below can be found adorning the wrists of both men and women in Banna.

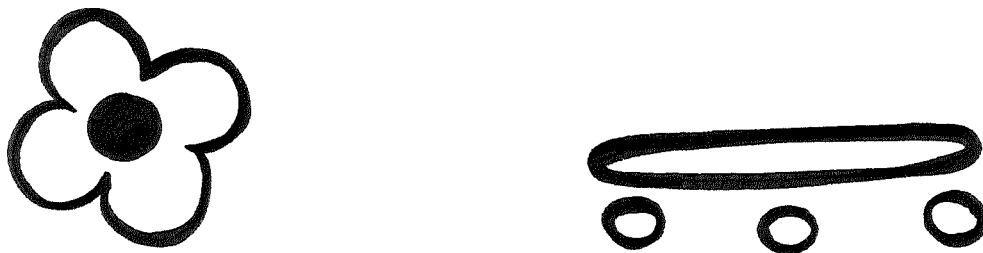


Fig. 3:5. Tattoo designs sported by both Dai men and women.

### **Tattoo Designs of Dai Men.**

Prior to 'Liberation' most Dai men displayed tattoos that covered their chest, back, upper arms and thighs also extending in some cases to the head. Bearing in mind Terwiel's explanation that it is the higher parts of the body that are more respected, the positionality of such designs is not surprising. See below for some

examples, taken from the work of (a) Wang Yizhi and Yang Shiguang (1990) and (b) Wang Guoxiang (1994).

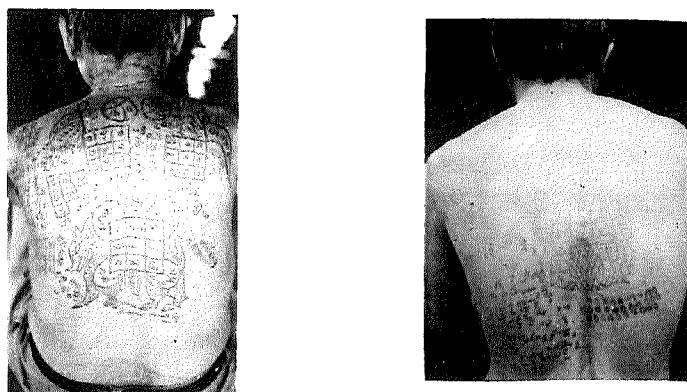


Fig. 3:6. Magical tattoos displayed on the backs of Dai men.

In order to understand the meanings inherent in such designs, let me first return to Tannenbaum's stress on the capacity of tattoo to act as medicine. As she says: **"Shan tattoos are not decorations; they are medicine, in the broad sense, and can be thought of as analogous to vaccinations against various diseases"** (Tannenbaum 1987 : 695). For Tannenbaum, tattoo draws on both Buddhist and Animistic beliefs, which she sees as integrally related, and which are **"derived from a single worldview structured on the existence of morally neutral power"** (Tannenbaum 1987 : 694). Her representation of Tai cosmology thus moves away from those of theorists such as Spiro, who view Buddhism and Animism as distinct spheres, whilst also querying the assumptions of those theorists, such as Tambiah, who view Buddhism as the dominant religion, incorporating Animism. Tannenbaum's brilliance lies in her insistence that the Dai Long / Shan cosmology is coherent, moreover her notion of a morally neutral power forming the foundations for this cosmology is also interesting, although agency would be perhaps a less loaded and hence less problematic term than power. This agentic strength has a

tendency to flow yet it is captured in tattoo, and captured with greater intensity in those displayed primarily by men, whose inner strength and ‘greater merit’ allows them to use such a powerful tool. Rather than the elaborate designs of the elders, young men in Xishuangbanna today often display simple tattoos, some examples of which are shown below:

1. This is the Buddhist Dharma wheel (*Fa Lun* 法轮). It represents the teachings of the Buddha, the benefits of righteous conduct, the laws of karma (cause and effect) and the illusionary nature of all things, including the self. The Buddha set the wheel of law in motion with his first sermon in the Deer Park near Benares.

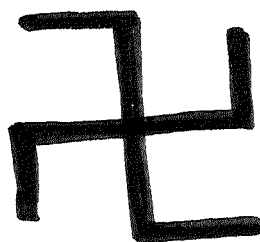


Fig. 3:7. Tattoo design displaying the wheel of law or ‘wanzi’.

This design (which can face both clockwise and anti-clockwise and is known as *wanzi* in Mandarin) is also interpreted as a symbol of immortality and luck (as *wan* means ten thousand or infinity). The clockwise design can be found painted on the chest areas of Buddha statues (an example of this is to found amongst the effigies discovered at Qingzhou, Shandong Province in 1996 and dating from the Northern Wei [386-534] to the Northern Song [960-1126] Dynasties) where the design represents the ‘seal of the heart of the Buddha’ (W Eberhard 2001 : 280-281).

2. The explanation of this design, also likely to represent the *Fa Lun*, is interesting in that I was told that it represented the Han (Mandarin) Chinese character 'tian' 田 which means field. This design thus represents the Dai link to the agricultural way of life, and in the words of one of my interlocutors 'we Dai are peasants and so should be tattooed with the character for field'. There must also be a deeper esoteric meaning.

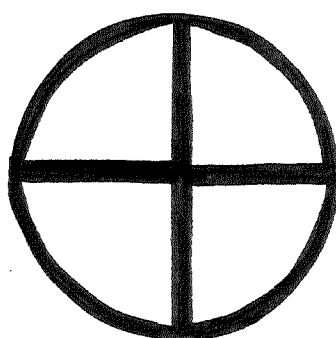


Fig. 3:8. Esoteric tattoo design.

3. This set of symbols Daile for 'Banna / Panna', the shortened version of Xishuangbanna (Mandarin Chinese), Sipsongpanna (Dai). This was tattooed on the forearm of a Han man in his early forties. He had originally come to Banna as a soldier, had fallen in love and subsequently married a young Dai girl. He now lives as Dai, speaks Dai and has predominantly Dai friends. His claim to being Dai is indelibly marked on his arm.



Fig. 3:9. 'Banna' tattoo design.



The agency inherent in tattoo is highly potent and as such should be carefully controlled. Knowledge of how to wield this power is primarily, now if not before 'Liberation', in the hands of monks. Substantial quantities of sacred texts were destroyed during 'Liberation' and then again during the 'Cultural Revolution'. Before these tumultuous times every tattooing master possessed a hand-copied manuscript of tattoo designs. Li Ziquan reports that this consisted of **“a vast collection of detailed pictures covering human forms, those part-human part-beast, animal forms, those of birds, reptiles, insects, plants, utensils, tools, knives, architecture, Buddhist tattoos, cloud patterns, incantations and decorative tattoos. The book also contains captions explaining the functions of the form”** (Li Ziquan 1989 : 19 - 20). Despite a concerted effort to find one of these books I was unable to do so. Those in Mengxiang village were said to have been burned during the Cultural Revolution (only the Sutra of the Rice Goddess, translated in the next chapter, managed to survive this time) and the monks in the Central Temple of Xishuangbanna in Jinghong City were also unable (or possibly unwilling given the esoteric and politically sensitive material it would contain) to locate a copy.

Many of those who have not been educated in Theravada Buddhist temples but who have tattoos in Daile script are unaware of the depth of meanings invested in their designs. Most of such men that I spoke to were very willing to admit this, for knowledge of the multiple and profound meanings of a tattoo has no bearing on its efficacy. Moreover, those who did possess such knowledge were often unwilling to divulge such powerful esoteric teachings to a foreign girl such as myself. Other theorists have also come across this problem whilst exploring Dai tattoo. Terwiel,

despite the fact that he spent most of his life as a Buddhist monk in Thailand, writes: **“Most of the present-day tattooing is part of an esoteric tradition and the specialist will only grudgingly give information about the spells and the powers inherent in his ancient art”** (Terwiel 1979 : 157).

Such issues are possibly even more sensitive in Xishuangbanna. The Dai people are well aware that the dominant discourse sees all such magical notions as fanciful and somewhat backward, certainly contrary to many educational programs in the area. Thus one is often met with polite smiling excuses when asking too probing a question. This means that the brief outline of the esoteric meanings of tattoo offered in this chapter is necessarily shallow. However to reiterate once again the meanings invested in tattoo are both manifold and contextually variable thus although its use in the spiritual domain is obviously important, the meaning of tattoos radiate beyond the magical realm.

Provided below are some examples of tattoos sported by Dai men. Both of the sets presented, encapsulate profound depths of esoteric knowledge. They are for the most part Buddhist Sutras written in Daile script. Tattoos using this script offer protection and increase strength. The first set of photographs provided below depicts the forearm tattoos of a venerable old Dai man from the village where I lived. He was very proud of his tattoos and very willing to be photographed. He was tattooed in his early twenties and explained to me that they afforded him much protection.

The second set provided below depicts newly inked tattoos of Aiud a man in his thirties. Aiud grew up in Daluo, a town on the border with Myanmar. His tattoos

were interestingly carried out by an Abbott across the frontier in Myanmar. The magical symbols on his shoulders and arms are zenithed by a black inked dot tattooed between his eyes. This is notable because the most powerful tattoos are to be found on the most revered parts of the body. The head, as the locus of eight of a persons souls is of special significance in Dai cosmological thinking (more detail about the localities and capabilities of souls is given in Chapter Five). Once again Aiud was very proud of his tattoos and although he did not want his face photographed, he was happy to let me shoot the other designs.



Fig. 3:10. Photographs of Dai esoteric tattoo designs.

Another example of potent esoteric designs are shown in the diagrams below. Both of these designs were drawn for me by Aile, a young grandfather in Mengxiang village. I had asked him to write out the exact version of the tattoos on his chest and back. This he did not do, but he did sketch the abridged version I have reproduced here. He said that the image represented the Buddha himself, surrounded by fragments of sutra. When he returned with the piece of paper on which he had scribbled down the designs he explained to me that each Daile character was symbolic, standing for a longer piece of sacred text. This means that even those who can read Dai text and so name the characters cannot understand its meaning. This can only be accessed by those with a profound knowledge of the Sutras. I have no way of knowing if Aile was aware of the detailed meanings. He certainly got agitated at my probing questions; whether through frustration at not being able to divulge arcane knowledge or embarrassment at his own lack of comprehension, I cannot know.

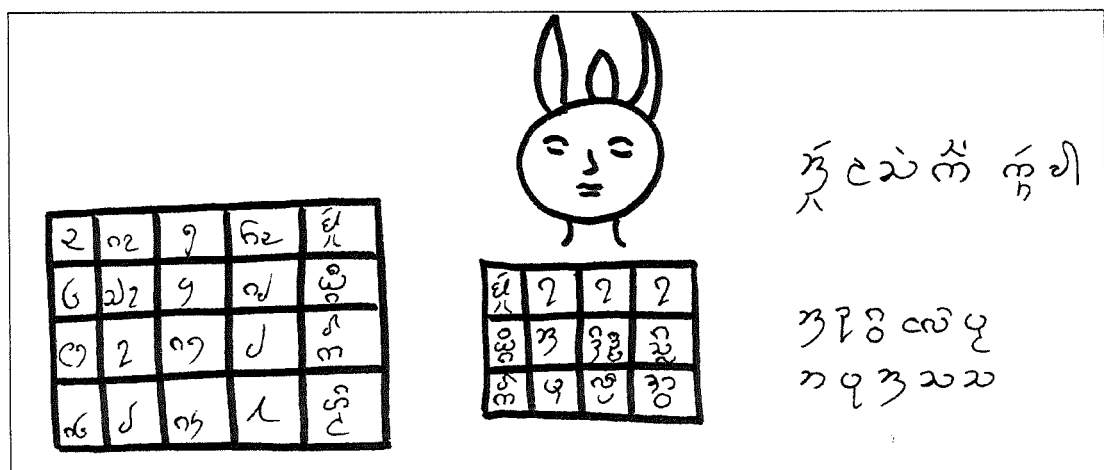


Fig. 3:11. Aile's tattoo design.

Tannenbaum talks about similar designs, which depict demons with rectangular bodies. She has classified such tattoos as ‘protective barrier’ or ‘kat’ tattoos. These tattoos also have the capacity to protect, as did those of Aile depicted above. However, in contrast to Tannenbaum’s findings, Aile was adamant that the image on his torso depicted the Buddha and not a ghost, spirit or demon. Although it is hard to speculate on the belief of my interlocutor here, bearing in mind that although the Chinese State endorses Buddhist Practice, it does not allow what it sees as ‘backward’, ‘animistic’ or worse still ‘shamanic’ religions, Aile’s reaction, especially as he was talking to a foreigner, is not surprising.

During a conversation with monks in the central temple in Jinghong I learnt that for the agency inherent in the tattoo to be activated, the bearer must adopt at least one of the five Buddhist precepts (*Pancha Sila* in Pali), which are (the Pali for each of the precepts is also given, from Fussell R 1985 : 97 - 108):

- ‘The rule of training to refrain from injury to living things’  
*Panatipata veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*
- ‘The rule of training to refrain from taking that which is not given’  
*Adinnadana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*
- ‘The rule of training to refrain from sexual immorality’  
*Kamesu micchachara veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*
- ‘The rule of training to refrain from falsehood’  
*Musavada veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*
- ‘The rule of training to avoid intoxicating drinks’  
*Sura-meryaya-majja-pamadth-ana veramani sikkhapadam samadyami*

These precepts are, as Christmas Humphreys makes clear, aspirations or vows and should not be thought of as commandments. The Buddhist layman is usually expected to adhere to all five of these basic moral guidelines (C Humphreys 1997 : 153). Thus the bearer of a tattoo who must abide by one of these is not being asked to hold to any detailed or extensive moral code. As my interlocutor made clear, there is no guarantee that the bearer will necessarily be a 'good' person. As in Myanmar it seems that the tattoo of the Xishuangbanna Dai is in and of itself morally neutral (Tannenbaum 1987). Thus tattoos can be designed specifically for the person who sports them, and can be efficacious no matter what the intention of the bearer. Thus one of my interlocutors explained how as a young man he had wanted to go to war with Vietnam (1979) so his father tattooed him with the texts concerning the Four Heavenly Gods, the power of whom is formidable, and he lived to tell the tale.

The ambivalent potency of tattoo is further exemplified by the photograph below. It shows part of the mural painted on an outside wall of Mengxiang village temple. The image is part of a series of paintings, which depict the life of King Songpamied. This image shows an assassin who has been hired to kill the King's two young children. The tattoos graphically display to all who view the mural the fierceness of the hired killer. On this occasion he was persuaded by the official also shown here, not to carry out his grisly task. And after a few more adventures the children were happily reunited with their father.



Fig. 3:12. Plate from the story of King Songpamied, showing the tattoo designs of an assassin.

Thus it can be seen that for the Dai tattoos both outwardly display strength and yet also act as a source of vigour. This is where Gell, who explained so eloquently the ways that tattoo can act dialectically, can aid in understanding the Dai understandings of these designs. It should be clear that those with tattoos not only gain strength from the tattooing process but by being able to stand the pain of the tattoo they also prove themselves inherently strong. due to their ability to protect the bearer Dai tattoo can be seen as part of what Turton (1991) calls the ‘practices of invulnerability’. Such practices form part of everyday life in the northern Thai area where he carried out his field work. He explains that invulnerability is part of a wider cosmological framework which aims to transcend duality and provides the following outline:

fear	courage	invulnerability
weakness	power/strength	omnipotence
ignorance	knowledge	omniscience
death	life	immortality
suffering	the eightfold path	extinction of suffering

(Turton 1991 : 156)

Turton's focus is on the verbal formulae which can be recited to protect against such things as weapons, fire, teeth (of tigers, bears or poisonous serpents) attack by spirits and much more. Take for example the following categories from a teachers 'invulnerability text':

- to make officials and princes love you
- to prevent children crying
- to make spirits afraid of you
- for success in trading
- for invulnerability against teeth
- for invulnerability against guns
- to prevent fevers
- to prevent house theft
- to attract young women.

These capabilities of verbal formulae are very similar to those of tattoo, as should become evident through the examples given below. The point that Tannenbaum makes about the importance of tattoo as medicine is also of interest here as it links the concept of invulnerability to that of souls. For the tattoo can prevent the untimely movement of the souls as one way of curing, this is also achieved by the tying of thread around the wrist (interestingly also the site of many tattoos, especially for women) during blessing ceremonies. As tattoos interact with the souls of their bearer they can also act as a marker of humanity and concomitantly Dainness as their ability to act as a 'passport' at border areas demonstrates.



We have seen that it is too simplistic to take the view, as many theorists have (see for example Yang Shiguang 1990 : 726), that it is Dai men who have tattoos whilst Dai women do not. The fact that the Dai link tattooing to the very concept of humanity makes this notion somewhat spurious. Moreover I hope to have demonstrated that there is only a difference of degree in the potency inherent in the tattoos sported by men and women, reflecting the differing potencies of men and women. How then does tattoo help delineate the gender categories of the Daile? The answer lies in the manner in which tattoos help to accentuate certain characteristics which in the Dai world are gendered.

To be male for the Dai is to be strong. Indeed the term commonly used for the category 'man', Aizai, also means brave or valiant. To be male is to be able to endure the hours of pain needed to produce intricate tattoos. In the words of Duzai; 'the pain of tattoo is good': It both proves the bearer's own strength and in part provides the strength of the tattoo. Not to be able to display such strength would be acutely embarrassing (certainly this was the case before 'Liberation'), and taken to the extreme not having intricate tattoos would lead to your gender category as male being open to question.

Xishuangbanna has been the site of radical historical changes over the recent centuries, thus it is interesting to note that Carl Bock writing in the late eighteenth century also states the importance of tattoo in attracting women. In the narrative he produced of his journey through upper Siam and Lao he writes **"the Lao men undergo the ordeal [of tattoo] for the sake of women"** (Bock 1884 : 170). As Li Ziquan writes **"tattoos are manly, without them one is not a man...those without**

are *yanlibaixiu* (immature), uncouth youth, savages lacking courage” (Li Ziquan 1989 : 19). I was told that for many men in their sixties not to have elaborate tattoos covering much of their torso and thighs would be unthinkable. One young man told me, that when his father was young (in the fifties) an unadorned man would be too embarrassed to wash with the other men. Instead he would go off alone to distant waters to avoid the humiliation. This point is exemplified by the work of Yang Shiguang. Yang who has documented the following women’s song, a piece not from Xishuangbanna but rather Dehong, also a Dai Autonomous Prefecture in Yunnan Province. Despite the regional difference I feel it to reflect the views of many older Dai women in Xishuangbanna (my translation):

“Your skin yellow and slippery,  
 As ugly as a field chickens’ thigh.  
 The frog’s back, legs and arms are coloured so beautifully.  
 You are not even worthy of the company of frogs.  
 Quickly go and tattoo some designs.  
 If you have no money, I will take off this silver bracelet to give to you.  
 If you have no coloured lines (tattoos) what kind of man can you be?  
 If you have not undergone tattoo piercing what truth from your heart can you speak?  
 You are afraid of pain, go and live with the field chickens!  
 You will not undergo tattoo piercing, go and use the women’s yellow rattan fold!  
 Ah, who still wants to speak to you?”<sup>8</sup>

Strength thus made manifest in tattoo is undeniably attractive. Indeed one of my good friends explained to me that the whole point of getting a tattoo was to make ones girlfriend think you beautiful. Zhu Liangwen, writing on the Dai in Xishuangbanna, has explained that; **“the young men used to be tattooed all over their torso and upper legs, which, besides testing courage and fortitude in the**

**painful acquisition of them, also emphasises their muscular attractions”** (Zhu Liangwen 1992 : 109).

The tattoos make men aesthetically pleasing to women, they act as a compelling, infatuating enticement. As Li Ziquan narrates tattoos **“are mighty and magnificent to behold, and loved by all the ladies. Unadorned men cannot find wives”**(Li Ziquan 1989 : 19).

### **Han Notions of Tattoo.**

For many of the Han Chinese flooding into the area after ‘Liberation’ tattoo was far from viewed as an expression of inner strength, Buddhist devotion or humanity. Nor indeed was it viewed as aesthetically pleasing, even less an attribute which women would be proud of in a spouse. For the Han tattoos have a much more negative image. Dutton’s work has shown that in the past tattoo was used as a form of “ink punishment”. In the Han world, rather than being a display of humanity, it was used to shame and alienate the deviant. This negative image was ardently manipulated by ‘black societies’, Mafia style organisations. They used tattoo to brand their members, inducing dread and / or respect in those that sported the designs. Dutton argues that for the Han peoples tattoo was seen as the **“mark of the excluded”** (Dutton 1998 : 180).

However Dutton goes on to show that in contemporary China tattoos exhibited by prisoners can be seen as marks of private or individual rebellion. From my experience I would say that tattoos are still not accepted by mainstream China.

However, at least in Yunnan, there is a vibrant youth culture flowering. This movement is built on two main intertwining strands: One focused on Disco / Popular House (China House / Techno Party) music and the other on Rock (*yaogun* 摇滚) music. Many Chinese Rock musicians romanticise about the life style of non-Han groups, especially the Tibetans. This trend is reflected both in the melodies and style of dress of many of these artists. Perhaps the most well known popular tune to incorporate Dai music is '*Hui Gu Niang* 灰姑娘' (Cinderella) by Zheng Jun. This track, very popular in the late nineties, fuses Dai gourd melodies with whining rock guitar. '*Hui Gu Niang*' was so popular at the time of my fieldwork that I often heard it blasting from the stereos of CD / tape shops in Jinghong and Kunming. Perhaps unsurprisingly then (also given satellite Music Television) tattoo has been embraced by the style gurus of this Rock realm. Most Rock musicians in the area, many of whom have performed live gigs in Banna, have tattoos of some description. Most of these depict Chinese dragons or demons, although butterflies and abstract designs are also to be found. What is interesting is that most of these designs are either engraved by the bearer himself or by a close friend. There were until recently very few tattooing machines in Yunnan, thus most of the designs are in single colours although some are surprisingly intricate. In 1999 as I was preparing to return to the UK my friends in Kunming were scouring my books on the Dai for suitable tattoo designs for themselves and fellow band members.

With about ten buses and ten flights a day between Kunming (the capital of Yunnan Province) and Jinghong, Xishuangbanna cannot be thought of as isolated from such trends (see Chapter Two for a detailed account of the connectedness of Banna). Indeed many of my friends made frequent journeys to and from Banna, but

dancers, singers and tourist guides made the most frequent visits. People with small businesses also make frequent journeys. I knew one young Dai woman in Jinghong, in her early twenties, who made the arduous twenty-seven hour bus journey every couple of weeks to buy clothes for her small fashion shop. Most of the monks sheltering in the central temple of Jinghong had spent time in Kunming, with many having attended some form of higher education there.

Villagers make less frequent trips, but I would say that it was not unusual for them to do so. Although both men and women make excursions away from the village, the men do tend to travel further afield and to stay away for longer periods of time (see Chapter Five which discusses the travel of women). This means that most of those living in Banna, at least those with easy access to the roads, are well aware of the intricacies of the wider multi-cultural context of which they are part. They are aware of, influence and are influenced by prejudiced notions concerning tattoo. They cannot be considered ignorant either of the idea that tattoo can be a sign of deviance, nor of the dynamic youth culture, which to a certain extent can be seen as glorifying it.

The changing attitudes towards tattoo are also influenced by images of the West. The posters shown below were to be found in a predominantly Dai area of Jinghong City:



Fig. 3:13. Tattoo parlour advertisements in Jinghong.

Drawing on notions of the heightened sexuality attributed to foreigners, the posters advertise the benefits of having a tattoo engraved in this parlour. Interestingly, by stressing the alluring capacity of tattoo, such advertising has much in common with those Dai notions which see tattoo as necessary for attracting a partner. However I would stress that for many of those in Banna who view the posters the fact that the couple are Western implies they are having an illicit affair, which although not rare in the Dai world, still does not form part of the discourse exemplifying the benefits of tattoo.

The final aspect of this labyrinthine story I wish to explore concerns non-Dai script tattoo, with which many young Dai are now being adorned. I have touched briefly on the influences of the Rock realm, and one can find a few young Dai boys in Jinghong City with long hair, guitars and tattoos. Other notions come from aspiring to be members of gangs or 'black societies'. A common tattoo for a gang member to have is shown below:



Fig. 3:14. 'Endurance' tattoo design.

This is the Chinese character is Ren 忍 (*od* <sup>3</sup>) in Daile) which directly translated means endurance, or strength in the face of hardship. The meaning of this character was explained to me by a young Jinghong city kick boxer, he said:

'this character is a knife over a heart with a spot of blood on the side. This means that even in this bleeding heart there is a strong knife. The knife causes the suffering and simultaneously provides the capability to endure it'.

It is striking how similar this explanation is to the way that pain endured during the tattoo process is said generally by many in the Dai lived world to empower designs with their efficacy.

Times of hardship, especially in love are often accompanied by self-scarification. In Xishuangbanna a young man suffering from unrequited love is likely to have his ear pierced, to show his suffering. Whereas a girl in the same situation

may well cut her hair. More dramatically, in Yunnan it is not uncommon for young girls, of both Han and Dai descent (although mainly city dwellers) to have scars on their arms. I was told by several such girls, on different occasions, that although the scars were self induced they were the remnants of past traumatic encounters with love. These were usually cigarette burns or short knife cuts, usually to the back of the forearms.

Despite my anthropological training I was disturbed by this practice. One evening a young friend of mine, drunk and crying after having just split up with another boyfriend, showed me the fifty or so scars she had running up her forearms. She explained that they were all the result of unrequited love. By having the strength of will to inflict such pain on the self, these girls are making manifest the internal anguish they are going through. It is also a very powerful tool as the following scene should show.

On another evening in Kunming I was sitting in my friend's café trying to ignore a noisy table of card players sitting opposite us. The group was mostly men in their early forties. One young woman who was with them repeatedly told them she wanted to leave, to no avail. She was cajoled into staying and given more to drink. The woman however got more and more agitated, and her whining became audible to all in the room. People began to look over at the table and smile in embarrassment, these smiles were met by the equally wide grins of the men playing cards. But they still made no move to take the woman home and continued to play, only stopping to fill her glass with beer. For a while all was quiet, then suddenly there was a smash and tinkle of broken glass. I jumped and looked up, as did every



one in the room not least the owner of the beautifully decorated little café, fearful of another *Heishehui* 黑社会 fight. But this time, rather than an infiltration of Mafia style ‘brothers *xiongdi*’ 兄弟, the disturbance was caused by the young woman. By this time she was trembling, crying and threatening to cut her forearm with the bottle she had just smashed on the wooden table. With much yelling and shoving the young woman was immediately escorted, in the protective arms of the man with whom she had arrived, to a waiting taxi.

As with tattoos the scars are invested with meaning, they provide strength for the future whilst displaying strength in the present. Such depictions of painful emotion are not something of which to be ashamed. Taken in this context the fact that many girls have tattoos of hearts or the Chinese character for ‘love’ 爱, is not surprising. Many young girls also have tattoos of their own names, I have seen characters such as Sea Wave or Lotus Blossom, engraved indelibly into young girls upper arms.

### **Conclusion.**

To conclude let me try to bring together the strands of this complex web of meaning invested in tattoo. By seeing tattoo as medicine Tannenbaum forces us to take it seriously, compels us to notice its role as an irreplaceable constituent of the Dai / Shan cosmology. However focusing solely on the healing and esoteric powers invested in the tattoo of Xishuangbanna would be to deny the importance that it plays in the expression of both gender and ethnic/local identity. The concept that bodily adornment can become a tool in the expression of identity is certainly not

new in anthropology, and indeed much Amazonian ethnography focuses on this problem. A characteristic example is Elsie Lagrou's work with the Cashinahua of Brazil. She writes: **"Identity is thus understood as a process inscribed in and on a person's body"** (Lagrou 2000 : 24).

By sporting such tattoos the bearers are boldly yet silently defying Han mainstream society whilst simultaneously proving their own intrinsic strength (perhaps to be able to do this). It is all too easy for the theorist inadvertently deny the creative agency of those who use tattoo as a cultural tool. I do not wish to overemphasise the role of the individual. Thus following Wagner, I am aware that cultural tools become imbued with aspects of a culturally constructed morality, so that in the dialogical process of the construction of cultural meanings, tools can be said to use humans as much as we use them (Wagner 1975 : 76). But that the ways in which cultural tools can be used is not fixed and that as a result there is plenty of room for creative expression. Dai tattoo can be seen as a good example of how the meanings inherent in cultural tools are contextual. What is an expression of devotion to the Buddha in one forum, can become proof of a valiant manliness in another and a marker of group identity in yet another. Moreover in Xishuangbanna tattoo speaks of being Daile and of having a strong affinity to Xishuangbanna. It is the diversity of these meanings that paradoxically provide tattoo with its coherency, it is this diversity that has allowed me to somewhat arbitrarily separate it out from the other complexes in which it is embedded and discuss it here as one of the aspects of being which articulate what it is to be Daile. It should be clear that in Xishuangbanna, tattoo is indeed imbued with complex, multitudinous and interwoven meanings and is so much more than a 'dermatological complaint'.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> In the UK there are rules concerning the length of time these lights can pulse as they can induce fits. They are less concerned with this in Xishuangbanna where strobes can run continuously for several minutes at a time. The dancers revelling in the hypnotic trance induced by the unceasing alternation of pitch black and blinding iridescence.

<sup>2</sup> The word he used here was the Chinese '*Lihai*' 利害, the meaning of which is does not accord that well with the English notion strong. '*Lihai*' seems to imply a more intense yet ephemeral strength. It is also in my view a less transitory state perhaps because it is less dependent on embodied physical fortitude.

<sup>3</sup> I shall provide a detailed exploration of the Dai notion of the 'self' in Chapter Five.

<sup>4</sup> This teaching of the non-ego is called *Anatta* in Pali and *Anatman* in Sanskrit

(C Humphreys 1997 : 32). This is explained in more detail in Chapter Five.

<sup>5</sup> *Dukkha* – this is the Pali. *Dukkha* is the first of the Four Noble Truths and one of the Three Signs of Being with *Anicca*, impermanence and *Anatta*, unreality of self (C Humphreys 1997 : 70).

<sup>6</sup> Of the ethnography concerning tattoo in the area Terwiel (1979) has set the practice in its historical context, at least for Thailand.

<sup>7</sup> See also Yang Shiguang 1990.

<sup>8</sup> Yang Shiguang 1990 : 725-726.

**Chapter Four**

**Images of the Dai: Towards an Understanding of the Feminisation  
of Xishuangbanna.**



## Chapter Four

### **Images of the Dai: Towards an understanding of the feminisation of Xishuangbanna.**

This chapter will explore the images of Dai women that abound in Xishuangbanna. These images are to be found in the tourist literature, on bill boards and personified in the form of escort girls and guides who walk the streets dressed in a distinctively Dai style. There is no doubt that, in the present period of mass 'ethnic tourism', the essentialised image of a young beautiful Dai woman has come to represent Xishuangbanna. As such not only the Dai people but also the area can be said to have been feminised (Gladney 1994, Schein 1997 / 2000). The erotic appeal of the area is further heightened by the open acknowledgement that it is from Banna that day trips to visit the exciting 'lady-boys' of Myanmar can be arranged.

Given the much reported androcentric attitudes prevalent in much of China, despite government policies specifically designed to combat inequality<sup>1</sup>(see for example Wolf 1985, Judd 1994, Croll 1995, Jacka 1997), the representation of Xishuangbanna as feminine could be viewed as politically perilous. However I argue here that there is more to the acceptance and promotion of the Dai woman as the image of Xishuangbanna than a yielding admission of inferiority. The Dai themselves manipulate images of feminine beauty, and indeed even promote the feminisation of Banna. This chapter is a exploration of why this should be the case. I shall begin with a brief outline of the insightful work of Gladney and Schein (among others), who have pointed to the creative possibilities in these images. In what

follows I hope to show that the Dai associate feminine beauty with potency rather than tameness. Images of Dai women are unthreatening to outsiders but they also speak of realms of cosmological power and moral obligations.

### **The Feminising Touristic Gaze**

Images of Dai women have been unashamedly used for the promotion of Xishuangbanna as an exciting travel destination. The Dai are known in much of China for their tantalizing allure. As Gladney writes:

**“The image of the Dai (Thai) and other minority women bathing in the river has become a *leit - motiv* for ethnic sensuality and often appears in stylised images throughout China, particularly on large murals in restaurants and public spaces. School children are often encouraged to make wood block prints of Thai bathers and other exotic representations of minorities” (Gladney 1994 : 103).**

Tourist literature about Xishuangbanna rarely fails to touch upon the enchanting character of Dai women, or the exotic beauty of their svelte figures, enhanced by tight sarongs. Take for example the following description:

**“When you are in the Dai regions, you will be fascinated by the graceful bearing of the Dai women. Their slender and graceful figures, and their close – fitting and elegant skirts highlight their spiritual beauty. They are the touching**

musical notes in a melody of the green Dai regions” (Zheng Xiaoyun and Yu Tao 1995 : 1-2).

Travellers to the area (at least the ones who can afford the 540RMB flight) are confronted with just such an image of Dai grace before they even reach Jinghong. The advertising campaign of *Yunnan Hangkong Gongsi* 云南航空公司, the airline responsible for most of the flights to and from Xishuangbanna (some ten to fifteen flights a day depending on the season), includes posters and almost life size cardboard cut-outs of an air stewardess dressed as a Dai girl. The girl in the advert, as shown below, is the epitome of accommodating politeness.



Fig. 4:1. Yunnan Air advertisement.

As they make their way to the hotels in Jinghong, visitors cannot fail to miss the numerous images of Dai women which adorn the streets of the city. A statue of a young Dai dancing girl takes her place outside the bus station, inside which the walls are painted with murals depicting more Dai women. One newly built tourist hotel seems to rely on the strength of Dai women to prevent it falling down, ironic when it is remembered how much the establishment may depend financially on the ability of such images to attract its guests. See the pictures below:



Fig. 4:2. Feminine images from the streets of Jinghong.



The feminisation of Xishuangbanna can be viewed as part of what both Gladney (1994) and Schein (1997) have called China's 'internal Orientalism'. As such it constitutes part of the more general treatment of those labelled as 'minority nationalities'. As Schein writes **"the figure of the ethnic Other in post - Mao China was for the most part represented as female... The effect was of infantilizing and trivialising. Yet these representations were also imbued with a kind of warmth - albeit patronizing - and an intense fascination"** (Schein 1997 : 74 - 75).

I have talked in the Introduction and Chapter Two about the treatment and classification of the 'minorities' by the Chinese State. Here I want to draw the readers attention to the eroticising and feminising aspects of this process. Gladney, interestingly argues that this is more than just a concomitant of Han notions of inherent superiority, as Harrell (1995) and others might argue. Rather, Gladney explains, erotic and feminine images of minority peoples are expressive, they aid in the creation of a coherent Han definition of self, which can transcend the fracturing tendencies of deep rooted regionalism (see for example Siu 1993, Rack 1999). In Gladney's terms, **"it is the repression and control of sexuality among the Han, and its open representation among the minorities, that demonstrates the important role eroticization of the engendered minority Other plays in the Han construction of self"** (Gladney 1994 : 108).

The representation of both 'minority' peoples and areas, should be understood as part of a dialogic process of identity construction and contestation in which both parties change and influence one another. To turn again to the work of

Gladney, **“many of the reforms in China, whether they be in spheres related to the market economy, privatised agriculture, or religious and political freedom, were first allowed in minority areas, and these often directly influenced the nature and force of change among the Han”** (Gladney 1994 : 94). As Siu has explained what it is to be Chinese or indeed Han does not constitute **“an immutable set of beliefs and practices, but a process which captures a wide range of emotions and states of being”** (Siu 1993 : 19). Throughout this thesis there are examples of the ways in which the Dai influence the Han people around them. It is of relevance to the argument of this chapter that many non-Dai women in Jinghong adopt the sarongs and hair styles thought to be characteristic (*tese* 特色) of the Dai.

Images as concepts have no finalised referent, meanings can shift. It is here that the potentiality of empowerment lurks. For Butler terms such as “queerness” or “gayness” can be reclaimed to empower the labelled, as rappers have reclaimed “nigger.” Such a label **“gestures toward a referent it cannot capture. Moreover, the lack of capture constitutes the linguistic possibility of a radical democratic contestation, one that opens the term to future re-articulations”** (Butler 1997a : 108). This theme will be returned to throughout this thesis, for now suffice it to say that there is a potential for expression in the image of Dai femininity that the Dai themselves utilize. Such a reaction is not only shrewd it is also empowering, as Gladney writes: **“Minorities...by allowing the objectivizing gaze of the state-sponsored media, establish their identity and right to a voice in their own affairs, appropriating and turning, whenever possible, these objectivizing moves to their own benefit. In this way, the maintenance and assertion of minority**

**“culture,” no matter how exoticized or contrived, may be seen as a form of resistance”** (Gladney 1994 : 117).

The Dai are not the only people to have reclaimed a feminised image, Schein reports that for the Miao of Guizhou 贵州, the celebration of the image of the adorned Miao girl **“has special significance because in making her a symbol they were claiming her as their own, as contrastive with the dominant culture rather than simply constitutive of it. The phenomenon confounds the uncritical application of Said’s Orientalism paradigm in the Chinese-minority context, because it shows that (at least some) Miao were not mute objects of representation, but rather active subjects engaged in the moulding of their own self - representation”** (1997 : 86).

Before exploring Dai notions of femininity, and thus moving some way towards understanding what these images mean to the Dai peoples, it should be said that non-Dai women in China also wield considerable power, (and arguably always have) even within the confines available to them in a still predominately androcentric environment. A detailed analysis of the meanings attributed to the feminine image amongst non-Dai peoples in China is beyond the scope of this thesis, but Jaschok and Miers explain that through the life stories presented in their 1994 volume the **“once ubiquitous stereotype of the long - suffering, meek, submissive Chinese woman as simply a victim of family interests, a vision of compliance and self - sacrifice, stands thus revealed for what it is - a stereotype in need of reappraisal and an empirical content”** (Jaschok and Miers 1994 : 9, see also Wolf 1974, Bray 1997 & Stafford 2000).

From my experience of two years field work in China I feel that the advice of Yü Rongling is as pertinent for contemporary Chinese women as it was for those of pre-liberation times, she warned: **“Don’t let anyone tell you Chinese women were the spineless creatures Westerners like to believe”** (Yü Rongling in Cusack 1958: 23).

### **Images of the Feminine in Dai Cosmological Knowledge**

To understand the meaning of the images of Dai women that proliferate in Xishuangbanna it is necessary to explore the broader context of Dai cosmological understanding of the feminine. As Overing writes: **“the symbolism of gender or sexuality may be situated within a complicated network of meanings having to do with the material universe, forces beneath and above the earth, thus worlds beyond society, as well as with relationships between humans – with kin and affines, men and women. Such symbolism may well also be about relationships among humans, animals, and plants, and between all of these forces and beings of other worlds”** (Overing 1986 : 141 -142).

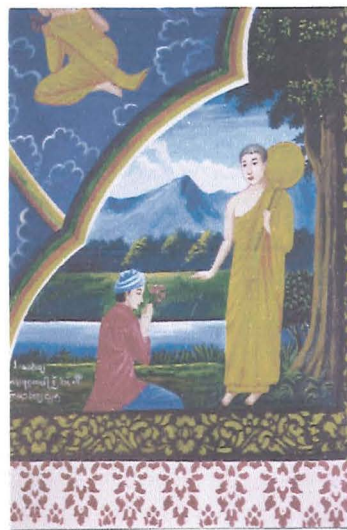
Such a broad framework, capable of contextualising ideas about gender, is as important for the Dai case, as that of Amazonia, about which Overing writes. There are many sutras, legends and myths that could be analysed here but the story of Prince Vessantara (Weisandala in Dai) provides two particularly lucid images of the feminine and so shall be explored below. This story forms one of the *Jatakas*, the Buddhist scriptures which, together with the *Avadanas*<sup>2</sup>, provide insight into the daily lives of Bodhisattva’s<sup>3</sup>. These texts vividly convey the suffering that those who aim to attain enlightenment must endure (Sangharakshita 1993 : 435 - 436). The

*Vessantara Jataka* describes a previous incarnation of Gotama Buddha<sup>4</sup>. During this incarnation as Prince Vessantara (Weisandala) the Buddha to be learns complete lack of attachment to worldly illusions. This he accomplishes by fulfilling the vow to give away whatever is asked of him. Sangharakshita (1993 : 436) makes the point that this *Jataka* shows “**that absolute non-attachment to worldly things is an integral part of the Bodhisattva ideal**”. I hope it will become apparent below that this *Jataka* also provides insight into a number of other facets of the Dai everyday lived world. Indeed through understanding such tales the sacred and the everyday realms can be seen to blend. Keyes (1984) provides a similar argument concerning the relationship between the everyday lived world of the rural peoples of North and Northeast Thailand and such texts as the Weisandala sutra, which he considers to be part of the ‘Buddhist popular culture’.

Weisandala’s tale is particularly relevant for the people of Mengxiang village, where I did my fieldwork, as it formed part of the murals hand painted onto the outside of their village temple. Whenever the villagers went to the temple complex they were confronted with these brightly coloured images. As the temple complex also formed part of a short cut to certain parts of the village, including the school, villagers passed through it on an almost daily basis. Moreover, an abbot explained that due to its capability to bring rain the *Jakata* of Weisandala is one of the most important Theravada texts. This ability is called upon when the text is read in full during *Dan Tam*, a harvest festival which takes place during Buddhist lent (that is between *Haowassa* [*guan men jie*, closing the door] and *Ochwassa* [*kai men jie* opening the door] celebrations during the rainy season. The chanting of this *Jakata* takes place over fourteen hours (6am to 8pm). Great merit and protection are

afforded to those who listen to the monks. Below are the photographs I took (with the permission, and under the interested gaze of the village abbot) of the images depicting the Weisandala Jataka painted on the outer walls village temple. Each photograph is accompanied by a translation and also some explanation of the art / scriptures as provided by a venerable abbot of the Central Temple in Jinghong<sup>5</sup>.

### Vessantara Jataka



1. This image depicts a poor person who has been walking. As he was walking he came across Pamalia, on seeing him he performed obeisance to him by presenting him with lilies. (The Abbot told me that it is generally accepted that this dedication took the form of seven lily stems, although only six are depicted here).



2. Pamalia Ting took the lilies up to heaven. Once there he dedicated them to the empyrean Pagoda.



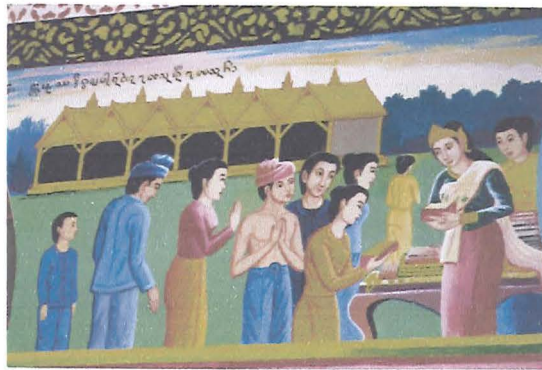
3. Here he is seen dedicating the flowers to the Pagoda (ငမာ သာဓု နှူဆော်).



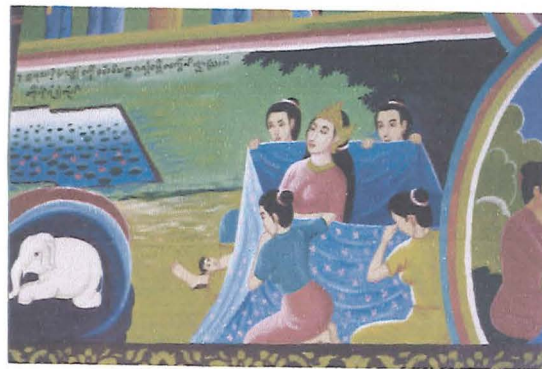
4. Once Pamalia returned to earth he went in search of Sakamundi. He wanted the Buddha to divulge the life story of Gotama Buddha's ninth incarnation<sup>6</sup>. The woman depicted here is Sakamundi's mother, Pusadi ( ပုဆိ သာဓု )<sup>7</sup>.



5. Once Pusadi came down to earth she grew up to be the wife of the king, thus she was also the mother of the Buddha during this incarnation.



6. Pusadi gave much food to the poor, in fact she gave them whatever alms they wanted or needed, thus proving she was pure of heart.



7. Before Pusadi gave birth to Sakamundi she dreamt of a white elephant. In her dream the elephant was also pregnant. Once the elephant had given birth the calf was given to Pusadi.

Ten months after her dream Pusadi gave birth to her own child. The birthing site was on the roadside. As had happened in her dream an elephant appeared and gave her its offspring, a white baby elephant<sup>8</sup>.



8. Sakamundi in this his ninth incarnation is called Weisandala. Once Weisandala reached sixteen years of age he married Madi ( မိမိ ).





9. The white elephant calf, given to Weisandala's mother, grew up with him. Wherever this elephant went, if there was a drought, it would rain. In one place called *Galinggala* (ကတ္တီကတ္တီ) it had not rained for seven years. The people of this district heard that Weisandala had an elephant, which could bring the rain. Thus seven people came to his palace to ask him to give them the elephant, he freely gave the animal away.



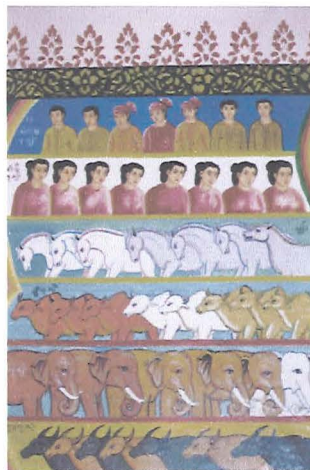
10. The seven people took the elephant and left.



11. The elephant then went to *Meng Galinggala* and it rained.



12. Some subjects of Weisandala's father were not at all happy that the young prince had so freely given away the precious elephant. They went to see the king to express their displeasure. They were worried that if Weisandala inherited his father's throne he would give everything in the kingdom away, this they thought could not be good.



13. This picture has, according to my informant, been drawn in the wrong place on the temple wall. It represents something that has not yet happened in the story. It depicts the price of the two children sold later in the story, namely one hundred female slaves, one hundred male slaves and one hundred of each of the animals drawn.



14. The people wanted Weisandala to leave the palace, and go to the forest to become an ascetic. This he does, taking with him his wife and two young children, a little boy called Zha Li and a girl called Gan Ha.

Whilst they are on the road four people approach him and ask him for the horses of their carriage. As is expected of one so pure of heart he freely agrees to their demands. This leaves the family with no way of continuing their journey.



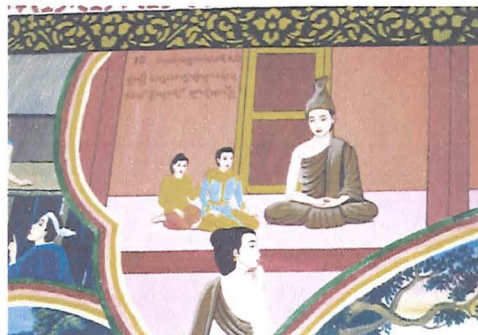
15. They are deep in the forest and some lions appeared to help them pull the carriage. My informant explained that this drawing is incorrect, the animals that appeared were definitely lions not the deer depicted here. However not long afterward two people came along and asked Weisandala to give them his carriage, this he freely did. I was told that they were too afraid of the lions to ask for them.



16. Giving all these things away meant that the prince and his family had to walk through the forest. As they were walking they came across a house on which was hung a sign, explaining that all ascetics were welcome to stay there. This house was called 'heavenly house'.



17. Knowing his son's character his father, the king, sent a bodyguard, Panzadamud (ပန်ဇာဓိတာ မုဒ ), to protect him and his family. The bodyguard was under strict instructions not to let any one approach the family. Once again according to my informant this picture is in the wrong place.



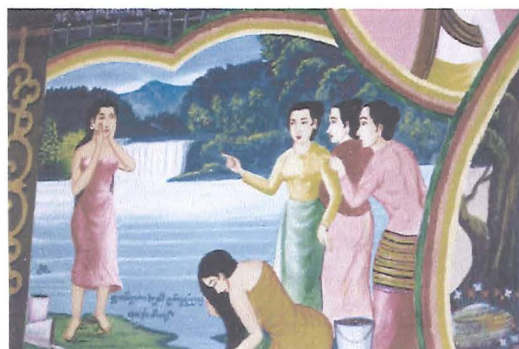
18. Weisandala and his family all became very pious, they are all now ascetics.



19. (Here the story switches to another location.)

The old man (who is called Zhuzagapam) depicted here has returned after a two or three year absence to collect the gold that he had entrusted to his friend. He soon discovered that his friend had spent all the gold, (၆၅) believing the old man would never return. As he had no gold to give his friend he gave him his daughter, Amidada

( နှိမ့်အိတာ ), instead. Amidada was an especially good wife to Zhuzagapam. She washed his clothes everyday and often gave him massages. She was such a good wife that the other men in the village began to curse their own wives, telling them to become more like Amidada.



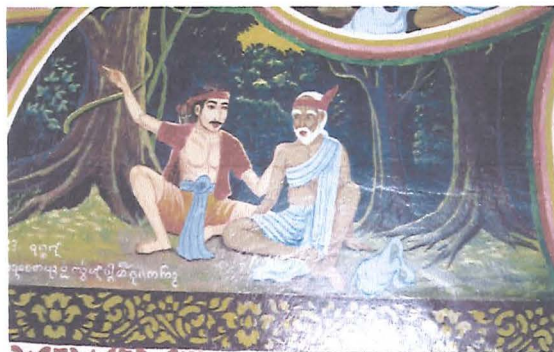
20. When Amidada went to the river to wash or collect water all the other wives cursed her.



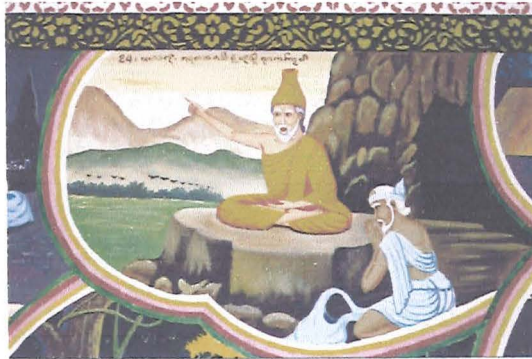
21. After this she was so distraught she said she would never go down to the river again. Her husband told her not to worry, he would go down to the river and collect water for her. But she said that that was just impossible. After all who ever heard of a man going to collect water? She went on to say that if he did not find some children to help her she would leave him and go home.



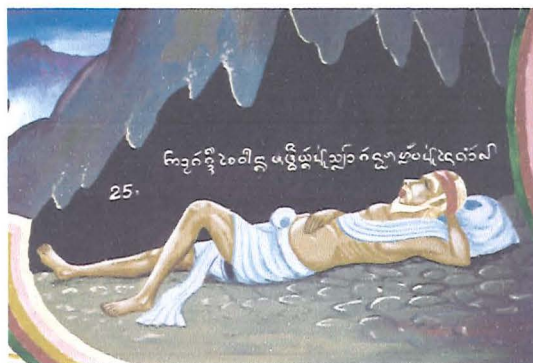
22. Thus the old man Zhuzagapam went to find Weisandala's bodyguard. On seeing him the bodyguard, Panzadamud, wanted to kill the old man. He set his dogs on him but Zhuzagapam climbed a tree and avoided being hurt. From the safety of the tree Zhuzagapam began to lie to the bodyguard. He told him that the King wanted Weisandala to return home to the palace. The bodyguard believed him.



23. The bodyguard, restraining his dogs, called the old man down from the tree. He then proceeded to tell him the way to where the Prince and his family were living.



24. The old man then ran into another ascetic called Azuda (အုဒ္ဓါ). The old man lied to him too, explaining that as he was so old now he no longer wished to stay at home, but rather wanted to renounce the world and live the life of an ascetic.



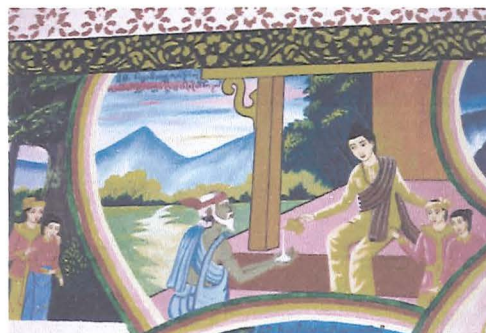
25. The old man then carried on to the home of the Prince and his family. Once he arrived he decided to sleep one night before approaching the family. This was because the Prince's wife, Madi, was still at home and the old man thought she would never allow the children to leave.



26. That night Madi had a very frightening dream. She dreamt a man came out of the forest and cut off both her arms. On waking in the night she went to find Weisandala because she was so afraid. However they had now become ascetics, and Weisandala misunderstanding her intentions, would not at first speak to her. He told her that, now they had renounced the world, they could not make love. Madi slowly explained to him that she had not come to him in order to make love but out of fear induced by her nightmare. On hearing of her experiences Weisandala was happy, he interpreted her dream as foretelling the approach of someone who would ask to be given the children. The prospect of being able to give more things away made him happy.



27. The next morning the children's mother went out to gather some wild fruit. She told their father to look after them and not to let them leave his side.

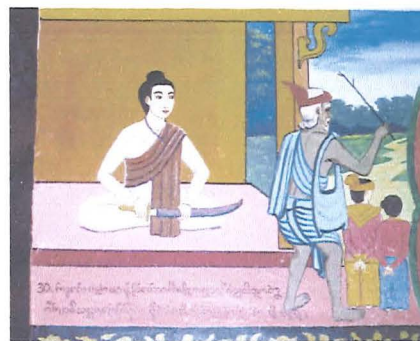


28. The old man then arrived at the family's complex and asked their father for the children. The children overheard his request and ran away. They hid amongst the water lilies of a nearby lake.

On seeing this the old man accused Weisandala of giving the children a sign that had made them run away. The father denied this false accusation and set out to find his children. He had to call them three times before they would come out of hiding. Once the children had returned he handed them over to the old man.



29. As soon as he was handed the children he made a whip and began to beat them. However the old man fell over and the children managed to run away. They ran back to their father.

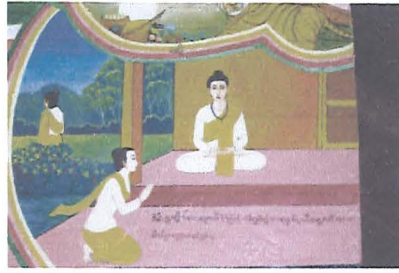


30. The children ran home and told their father how they had been treated. On hearing this, their father was not happy. Thus in his heart he felt an urge to cut off the old man's head. This was not good because as a world renouncer he was supposed to be able to give things away (even his own children), with no negative feelings.



31. While all this was going on the children's mother was prevented from returning home by forest spirits. These spirits transformed into lions, leopards and tigers to block her path.





32. On returning home she asked her husband about the children's whereabouts, he remained silent, not even uttering one word. She went on and on at him, eventually he cursed her. He had hoped that this would make her forget about the children. He asked her where she had been all this time, thus accusing her of being with another man. She denied his accusations and went straight back to trying to find out where her children were. Her husband fell back into silence; he just could not speak.



33. She searched everywhere for the children. But she could not find them. In her sorrow she passed out. On seeing this, her husband took her in his arms and comforted her until she regained consciousness. When she was able to understand he told her the truth about the children's whereabouts. On hearing the truth, she asked why he had not told her before, he explained that he was worried she would die of a broken heart.



34. The god Payain had seen that Weisandala was good, able to renounce the world so completely. However he wanted to test him one last time. Thus Payain

changed his appearance into that of a young man and went to Weisandala's home. As soon as he arrived he asked Weisandala for his wife.

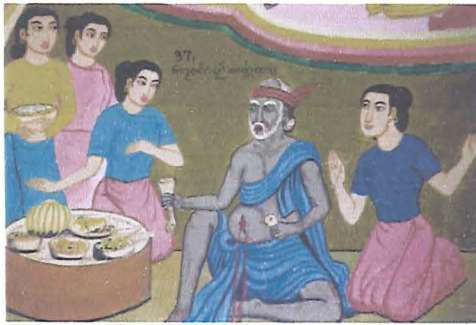
Weisandala freely gave over his wife. Payain gave her back at once, explaining that he had just come to test Weisandala's heart one last time.



35. That night the children and the old man slept in the forest. The old man constructed a hammock for himself, as he was afraid of dying from insect bites and being attacked by animals such as tigers. The forest spirits changed into the image of the children's parents and so the children slept soundly in their arms.



36. Then the spirits decided the prices for the children. They forced the old man to go to Weisandala's father, the King, to collect the money and goods they could demand in return for the children. The old man was reluctant to go to the King's palace to get the money but the spirits forced him. It became impossible for him to resist; he could not leave the path. Weisandala's daughter was very expensive, one thousand gold pieces and one thousand head of each of the things depicted on plate thirteen, whereas his son was cheaper needing only one hundred gold pieces and one hundred of each of the things depicted on plate thirteen.



37 - 40. In the palace the old man was given copious amounts of food to eat. He ate so much that his stomach distended and he died. On his death all the valuables that had been given to him were given to Weisandala's daughter. The children begged the King to make their parents return to the palace. Thus everyone went to find Weisandala and get him to return. They went to the forest, on seeing each other they were all so moved that they passed out. However the Heavenly God helped them to regain consciousness and they all went back to the palace together.

Following Keyes (1984) I wish to draw your attention to two representations of the feminine which are present through out this *Jataka*. The first, exemplified by Madi, can be seen as a patient nurturer who gives up all, even her children, to further her husband's progress towards enlightenment. The second is to be found in the figure of Amidada, the morally compromised wife of the despicable Zhuzagapam, whose pitiful circumstance gives her the moral justification to demand material retribution from her husband.

The second representation will be addressed in more detail first. Amidada has been forced to marry a man she does not love. Moreover it is implied in the story that despite this misfortune she is the perfect wife, providing her somewhat lecherous husband with many sexual favours. This is implied in the massages she gives him, Keyes explains that this is also how Zhuzagapam is described in Thai – Lao oral renderings of this story. As Keyes writes (1984 : 234): **“Such a relationship is likely to lead the woman to seek some sort of material advantage from the man in return for yielding to his unwanted sexual attentions”**. Moreover Keyes also points out that as Zhuzagapam’s actions ultimately lead to his death (see picture 37 above) the moral consequences of such a relationship are considerably more severe for the man than for the woman. Keyes uses this representation of the feminine found in Buddhist scripture to help explain the actions of Thai prostitutes. Thus he sees Thai female sex industry workers as ‘modern Amittatapanas’ (Amidada) who **“have often found themselves constrained by circumstances beyond their control – often a consequence of coming from rural families in deep financial trouble – to enter into sexually exploitative relations with men. Under such circumstances, a woman can seek, like Amittatapana, to effect some temporary gain through the money paid to her by her undesirable ‘clients’”** (Keyes 1984 : 237).

In relation to the situation in Xishuangbanna understanding this *Jataka* may well provide some insight into unravelling what at first sight appears to be the passive acceptance of the ‘feminisation’ of the area by the Han. It may seem that the Dai are accepting an inferior position, female against male, weak against strong. And yet rereading the story above should make it clear that within such a

relationship the moral upper hand falls on the side of the woman. Those Dai men and women involved in the promotion of Dai femininity as the image of Xishuangbanna have a knowledge of Buddhist texts, such as the Weisandala Jakata explored above, which teach that when constrained to give what under different circumstances would not usually be given, women have the moral right to demand material compensation. Ultimately this may be degrading but through the workings of Karma the perpetrator will have to pay. Thus bearing in mind the huge power of the Chinese State and the futility of resisting its encroachment, it does not seem surprising that the Dai so readily encourage the promotion of the Dai woman as an essentialised image of Xishuangbanna.

Let me return now to the other image of femininity highlighted by Keyes in his 1984 article, that of woman as nurturer. In order for this image to be understood in its full complexity, it is necessary to explore the way women are portrayed in Buddhist philosophy. This will involve looking at women as they are depicted in the Dhamma, exploring the feminist critique of Buddhist practice and highlighting the difficulties of the notion of 'menstrual pollution'. However the exegesis provided below should also highlight the fact that although the two images laid out by Keyes are clearly distinguishable in the above *Jataka*, they are harder to separate in the philosophy. For the Dai, I would argue that women are respected for their capacity to embody both or either of these images.

As has been stated earlier Buddhist sutras stress that in achieving enlightenment all worldly dichotomies, including that of male / female must be transcended. This means that the Buddha is neither male nor female and yet is both.

Thus it should be possible for either gender to reach Nirvana. Feminist critiques have commented on the fact that examining the Buddhist teachings does not explain why Buddhist women are still repressed by their men (Chatsumarn 1991, Cabezón 1992 & Gross 1993). The importance of the work of feminist scholars should not be underestimated. Nonetheless I wish to challenge the universality of this assumption. It is through notions of gender complementarity, difference and co-operation that this seeming contradiction can be overcome.

Even those writers on the region, such as Tanabe (1991 : 188) who view menstrual blood as “a morally degraded entity” concede that **“such pollution of menstrual blood, while constraining women’s activities, also however, represents a power destructive to men’s mental and emotional stability and their magical efficacy”** (Tanabe 1991 : 189). The antics of Queen Camdevi is an oft cited case in point<sup>9</sup>. In the words of Davis (1984 : 66):

**“Queen Camdevi, the heroine, defeated the aboriginal chieftain by offering him a gift of a hat. The hat had been daubed with the queen’s menstrual blood, and once the chieftain had placed it on his head, his notorious fighting powers were destroyed for ever”.**

A young Dai man of the village where I carried out my fieldwork gave me the following narrative about Zhao Jingham and his two wives, the story provides another example of the power of items which have come into contact with menstrual blood:<sup>10</sup>

Long ago before the pagoda of the village was built there were many huge bees living in this area. These bees were the size of people

and were so unfriendly that they would kill adult villagers and abduct small children for food. These huge bees took soil and used it to build the hillock on which the temple is built today. The Heavenly God (Meng Fa) looked down and saw that the people of the village were deeply distressed. To help alleviate their suffering he took a huge sword and cut the earth letting water run freely in the new trench. This new water supply meant that the people could move up to the present village site. But even after the move the bees went on pestering the people, causing unimaginable hardship and misery.

At that time the King of the area was called Zhao Jingham(ဇော်ကျော်). King Jingham set out to kill all the bees but nothing was of any use, arrows and bullets wouldn't penetrate the bodies of the bees. Eventually he strengthened his arm using soil and tattoos and tossed a precious red jewel at the bees with such strength and force that they fell.

King Jingham had two wives, an elder and a younger. The elder wife resided in Menghai but the king went with his young wife to Jinghong. He said he was going to war. But he did not return and as time went on his older, first wife became more and more angry.

In revenge she took the precious stone her husband had used to rid the village of the bees, which was now set in gold, and went out to destroy it in anger. She took the jewel and draped it in a woman's sarong, then placed it in the glutinous rice steamer. Eventually after being steamed for a long time the stone exploded and was destroyed. At this point the king and his young second wife, still in Jinghong, died<sup>11</sup>.

The jewel in this tale was destroyed through prolonged steaming. But this destruction was only possible because the elder wife first draped the jewel in a woman's sarong. Interestingly women's sarongs in Mengxiang should not be hung up high to dry. This is because they are, through their association with menstrual blood, loci of dangerous power. In the story of Queen Camdevi above menstrual blood was shown to be particularly dangerous when it comes in contact with the head of a man hence the inadvisability of hanging sarongs at head height.

Terwiel (1976 : 397) links the avoidance of women, practised by Theravada Thai monks, with female wielding of power. Thus although monks confer a spiritual power known as *metta*, **“women are associated with magical power that is believed to be diametrically opposed to that of the monk”**. This power can emanate from her, through her breath, as is demonstrated by the chanting and blowing techniques used by both male and female healers, but also through her menstrual blood. The power is so strong that anything that has a close association with this substance, such as a sarong, has magical properties.



Although constitutive of Dai cosmological knowledge, concerns of the power of menstrual blood in the everyday were not readily articulated by women in Mengxiang. It should be noted that their attitude may be the effect of very extensive 'education initiatives' carried out by the Chinese government. My best friend in Mengxiang explained that when a girl experienced her first menses her 'life did not change much'. When pushed my friend agreed that women should not go to the temple during their periods. However she was quick to point out that as women should visit the temple regularly it is possible for elder women to go in place of menstruating women. Those who do go to the temple take clothes of those who cannot or do not want to (who may be either men or women), these clothes are blessed by the monks and offer protection when returned to their owners. Thus the prohibition was not viewed as a problem as merit could be passed on to the menstruating woman with the help and co-operation of fellow household members. It is also the case in Mengxiang that household members are likely to know when one of their women is menstruating, during this time they advise against going to the temple as it could result in sickness or the Buddha being unable to protect the woman in question (my interlocutor could or would not articulate why this was the case beyond saying that women are not clean at this time). This attitude of Mengxiang villagers is, at odds with that of an abbot in the Central Temple in Jinghong who denied that women should not enter the temple during their periods. He said that provided they used the adequate 'wrappings' now available there was no reason why women needed to avoid the area. However given the potency attributed to menstrual blood the implications of this statement are hard to assess. On the one hand it could represent the response of one familiar with Western

Feminism and Chinese rhetoric against superstition, but it could also be viewed as a denial of feminine potency.

My friend in Mengxiang also explained that couples should not make love during the woman's period (her exact words were should not 'move' in bed) but that the couple could still sleep in the same bed. She explicitly said that her husband had no problem with this. She went on to tell me that when a young girl first begins to get her periods she should go to a female elder of her choosing to be blessed and make offerings. In Dai this is known as *Suma Mertao*, which literally means to apologise to the venerable old mother. However this merit making ceremony is a way of making amends for any transgressions of the rules of respect and it also forms part of ceremonies such as engagement and house building (see Chapter Six below and Turton 1978 : 115 for a discussion of the transgression of village community rules in Thailand). *Suma* should be done by all women at least three times during a normal year (especially at the beginning and end of Buddhist lent and at the Dai New Year). Moreover men as well as women perform *Suma* to the elders (both male and female) as a way of incurring blessing. The women I spoke to seemed unworried by their monthly periods, they were not something to be concerned about. Yet their treatment of sarongs, reluctance to visit the temple and the prohibition against sexual relations during menses does indicate that menstrual blood is imbued with a cosmological importance.

Ahern (1975), clearly influenced by Douglas (1966) attributes the capacity of Chinese women to pollute to their ambivalent status as outsiders. Notions of pollution she argues are used to disguise the real power that women have over their

husband's family. As she writes: **"Once the polluting nature of the sex act (which begins the child's development), menstrual blood (which becomes the child's flesh and bones), and childbirth (which brings the child into the husband's family) is established, the source of a woman's power is obscured, if not rendered invisible by a layer of negative sentiment"** (Ahern 1975 : 214). For the Dai, women are not outsiders, marriage is both uxorilocal and virilocal, and residence is dependent on need rather than jural rule (see Chapter Five below). It is important to remember that Dai women in Mengxiang are respected within the household, often being in control of household finances and deciding for themselves when and where they will work. As noted in Chapter Three, gender relations among the Dai are marked by a clear and articulated sense that men and women are very different. Cosmologically this difference is manifest in the understanding that women have their own power distinct and dangerous to that of men and most especially to monks. Having said this, the relationship between men and women is not viewed antagonistically rather, as will be explored below and in the next chapter, the Dai stress the complementarity of the genders made possible through the responsibility that each being has to ensure that they do not harm others. The practice of not placing sarongs at head height can be viewed in this light, as mindful action taken by women to ensure that they do not harm the men of their household.

Helpful in comprehending Dai cosmological understandings of the feminine is the scholarly work of Chatsumarn (1991) on Thai Buddhist women. In line with much of the feminist critique of Buddhism, Chatsumarn comments on the enormous ideological gulf between textual and practised Buddhism and explains that much of the Buddhist Dhamma stresses the equality of the genders. As Schuster (1985), who

has written extensively on the Chinese female Bodhisattva Guan Yin, explains representations of female entities in Buddhist texts can provide a positive image both of and for Buddhist women: **“The female Bodhisattvas in texts such as the Lotus, the Vimalakirtinirdesa, the Vimaladatta-pariprccha and the sumati – sutra are all wise and eloquent women who engage the most prestigious of the Buddha’s disciples in subtle debate and vanquish them ignominiously. There is no question in these texts that these women, ideal types though they are, are infinitely superior in intellect and virtue to all the males present save the Buddha himself”** (Schuster 1985 : 90).

When questioned about gender equality in Buddhist texts a venerable *henan* (retired abbot) in Jinghong told me the story of Bamado ( འཇམ་དབང་མཚན།). Bamado is said to have lived five thousand years ago. He was not a kind man, but rather cruel, unjust and lacking in respect for those around him. He carried out many evil deeds. However in line with the workings of Kamma (Karma) the evil returned to him. In the *Anguttara - Nikaya* the Buddha says: **‘All beings are the owners of their deeds - their deeds are the womb from which they sprang, with their deeds they are bound up, their deeds are their refuge. Whatever deeds they do - good or evil - of such they will be the heirs’** (in St Ruth 1998 : 56) As his Kamma caught up with him Bamado was turned into a woman. As a woman he married and gave birth to two children, a boy and a girl. At this time it is said he / she began to realise how hard it is to be a woman and how much they should be respected. He / she then began to do good, to respect the enlightened ones and the elders. Suddenly Bamado fell into a deep chasm from which he / she looked up and saw the stars. After this he once again turned into a man. He is said to have then written many

sacred texts explaining how women should be respected. This story together with those cited above (about Zhao Jingham and Queen Camdevi, and especially the story of Water Splashing to be discussed later in this work) teach of the importance of respectful behaviour and the dangers of disregarding the needs and wishes of others, especially household members. They teach that women have their own power that can be used to not only to nurture the *Sangha* or household but also to defend themselves. Moreover those women who are wronged have the moral power to demand compensation.

Chatsumarn argues that those passages of textual Buddhism which can be seen as demeaning to women are late introductions to the Buddhist teachings. As such they display the ‘cultural tendencies’ of the historical period in which they were written rather than the teachings of the Buddha. Chatsumarn goes on to explain that Thai Buddhist notions of female ‘pollution’ are of this genre, late cultural impositions on an otherwise egalitarian Buddhist Dhamma.

Before turning to look at more of the insights provided by Chatsumarn it is interesting to look briefly at the work of Campbell (1996) on the three Yanas (vehicles) of Buddhism. Campbell is also a feminist scholar primarily of Lamaism. Campbell’s use of the work of Kalu Rinpoche is helpful in highlighting feminist understandings of notions of female ‘pollution’ in Buddhist philosophy generally. Kalu Rinpoche<sup>12</sup> has taught that each of the three Yanas could cope with consuming a bowl of poison<sup>13</sup>. Campbell’s analysis of the Rinpoche’s teaching explores how each of the Yana’s classification of women can be understood in relation to how they view this poison. Her findings are summarized in the table below:

Table 4:1.		
Yana	How the Yanas treat poison. (Kalu Rinpoche)	How the Yanas view and classify women. (Campbell)
<b>Theravada (Hinayana)</b>	Avoid eating the poison.	Women are a real physical enemy and therefore must be rejected or denied.
<b>Mahayana.</b>	Eat the poison whilst knowing the antidote.	Women deserve compassion due to their inferior birth. Whilst being conceptualised as essentially empty in nature like men <sup>14</sup> .
<b>Vajrayana (Lamaism)</b>	Eat the poison deliberately transmuting it to nectar through the realization of emptiness.	Women are manifestations of other worldliness, embodiments of emptiness or transcendence which may be incorporated through controlled sexual relations, that is through Tantric ritual.

Thus both Campbell (1996) and Chatsumarn (1991) see Theravada Buddhism as viewing women as impure, something that has to be avoided. Chatsumarn explains that for Thai Theravada Buddhism the notion that a **“woman is a stain on celibacy...is taken quite literally, and monks will not come into direct contact with a woman. Women are looked down upon and viewed as a hindrance to the spiritual development of the monks”** (Chatsumarn 1991 : 25).

Chatsumarn claims that this image of women is reflected by the lack of ordained Bhikkhuni (nuns) in Thailand. Indeed those women who have dedicated their lives to the Dhamma (*Mae Jis* in Thai) are alienated in Thai society. Chatsumarn explains that these women are in her view ‘marginalized’, ‘under-educated’, and ‘economically unsupported’. She then goes on to link this extremely low status of the *Mae Jis* to the customary androcentric attitude in Thailand, made so glaringly visible by the passive acceptance of the exploitation of women in the ‘tourist trade’ (Chatsumarn 1991 :36-44).

However the work of Chatsumarn itself hints that women do have a voice even in a male dominated world. As women in Theravada area are thought to be in possession of 'five woes' they also wield 'five powers', as shown below (Chatsumarn 1991 : 26-33):

<b>TABLE 4:2. WOMEN'S POWERS AND WOES.</b>	
<b>WOMEN'S FIVE WOES.</b>	<b>WOMEN'S FIVE POWERS</b>
That she must leave her family at marriage.	Her form.
That she must suffer pain of menstruation.	Her wealth.
That she must suffer pain of pregnancy.	Her relatives.
That she must suffer pain of childbirth.	Her sons.
That she must work hard caring for her husband.	Her morality.

Bearing this in mind Keyes' first representation of the feminine in Theravada Buddhism takes on a new dimension. He moves away from the feminist stance of pure male domination towards notions of gender complementarity: **"Both males and females must confront the problem of worldly attachment, and if they seek liberation from the "suffering" that attachment entails, then they both must traverse the Path taught by the Buddha. However, they will not traverse the Path in the same way because by "nature" males and females are inclined to be attached to the world in different ways. The characteristic tension between worldly attachment and orientation towards Buddhist salvation for females and males is expressed in distinctive sets of gender images derived from the source of the Buddhist world view"** (Keyes 1984 : 226).

Keyes' work raises the question that some feminist scholarship may have misrepresented the position of women in Theravada Buddhism. Keyes does not

interpret the lack of Buddhist nuns, and the larger amount of merit making activities undertaken by women (such as *Suma* activities explained above), as a concomitant of their inferior 'polluted' position. Instead he sees their role of nurturer as a path to salvation, as valid and worthy as that of entering the *Sangha* (monkhood) undertaken by the men. As he states, **"while men, especially in Southeast Asia where the temporary membership of the Sangha is well developed, are sometimes Buddhists, devoting much of their lives to the attachments they have in the world, women are more constant Buddhists"** (Keyes 1984 : 230). Thus women as mothers nurture not only their children but also the *Sangha* itself, both in giving up their sons to it and by the constant giving of offerings. It should also be remembered that offerings made to the Buddha, feed the Buddha (an example of this is provided in the Sutra of the Grandmother Rice Soul discussed below).

In Mengxiang it was the women who were responsible for taking the monks' food to the temple each day. Each day members of eight households would take food to the temple. The village space was divided into clusters of houses accordingly, these clusters rotating the responsibility of providing food. Each day one venerable elder woman from each cluster would deliver rice and dishes to the temple. The night before a house would provide food a sign was hung on the gate of the household complex (a yellow sign with a red border and red Daile lettering). This sign indicated that this was the day to take food to the temple. Early the next morning the female elder of the household would make her way up the steep concrete steps to the temple, deftly balancing a heavy yoke, containing at least two dishes and glutinous rice over her shoulders<sup>15</sup>.



The following example demonstrates that the Dai respect of motherhood entails more than a reverence for the nurturer. On many occasions when offerings are made to the Buddha (*dan*), string dipped in vegetable oil forms part of the oblation. In January 2001 I visited a *henan* (retired abbot) on the occasion of his fortieth birthday. He was preparing copious offerings for four monks who were coming to his house to read a sutra of particular interest to him. It is not unusual for retired monks to choose to perform such merit making ceremonies on notable birthdays. Amongst the offerings, which included wicker money trees, meditation cushions and glutinous rice, were lengths of white string steeped in vegetable oil. I was told by a venerable *henan*, also present, that this was representative of the Dai peoples' respect for motherhood. In explanation he retold the following tale:

Once there was a pure white female crow (*ga piek*). She laid five beautiful eggs. However she was starving and she knew that if she did not eat soon she would surely die. So she set out to find food. While she was away the tree in which she had made her nest was blown down and a flood scattered her eggs. They were scattered in five directions. Each was so beautiful that it was adopted by who ever found it. The first was adopted by a chicken, the second by an ox, the third by an eagle, the fourth by Gotama Buddha and the fifth by Airelia (Maitrea the Laughing Buddha of the future). The eggs soon hatched and five boys were born.

However before this, the white crow's (the mother of the boys) body died and her spirit went to heaven. As she died she beseeched her children to never forget their mother no matter where they were born, as she could never forget them. The five boys grew up and in due time became monks in the same temple. When they were studying they each told their story (that they were born from the eggs of a beautiful pure white crow). In this way they discovered they were brothers.

Each of the boys harboured a sincere wish to tell their mother that they loved and remembered her. Now they were together again, and in the hope of seeing her again, they took white string and tied it so that it resembled the three pronged foot of the crow their mother. They placed the string claws in a pan and boiled them in vegetable oil. As a result of their actions the boys mother heard their prayers and appeared to them flying beautifully in the air above them. She blessed her children and thanked them for remembering her. She told them that her heart was now satisfied and so she wished them happiness and safety for their whole lives. This story tells of the necessity to respect the mother.

From this tale it can be seen that for the Dai the role of mother is to be respected not only for the nurturing it entails, as outlined by Keyes, but also for its creativity<sup>16</sup>. The mother should be respected not only for feeding and providing alms but also for giving birth to the monks, for being the source of the *Sangha*, which together with the Buddha and the Dhamma (teachings) make up the three refuges of Buddhism.

### Complementarity

Keyes explains that as a result of their everyday lived experiences Thai Theravada women are better able to comprehend the Buddha's teachings on suffering. As Keyes writes **“an understanding of this teaching comes more “naturally” for women than for men, for men have to break from their normal life routines and enter the Buddhist Sangha before they can temper their passionate natures with the knowledge of religious truth gained through adherence to the discipline and the study of the texts (see Keyes 1983b)”** (Keyes 1984 : 232).

Thus the work of Keyes is invaluable in providing an alternative to the view that women are seen as inferior beings in communities influenced by the Theravada Buddhist Way. As Keyes points out men and women in these communities are viewed as different and indeed follow different paths but this does not mean that these paths are hierarchicalised. Gender is a means of distinguishing groups of actors among such peoples as the Daile, but it does not follow that gender distinction is used to subordinate people. As I have stated above Mengxiang villagers certainly

stress gender difference, after all they live in a world where illusory dualities have not yet been transcended. When asked, for example, why men and women wore different clothes they stated that it was so they could see the difference between them, so implying a fundamental difference, albeit one that requires the use of certain cultural tools, such as dress to make it explicit. The outward display of this difference is seen as very important. I was encouraged at every opportunity to wear a sarong. On one occasion I was told that a young girl was crying because she was so terrified by seeing a girl in trousers.

Notions of difference in the West seem to rest on ideas of inequality, so that often in Western thought what is different is viewed as inferior, something which needs to be excluded or else assimilated, changed, developed (much has been written on this topic, but see for example Fabian 1983 and Overing 1985). The disturbing potential of this rhetoric of alterity has been noted by Corbey and Leerssen, as they write: **“The constructing of Otherness can be detected at the root of much injustice and suffering; it is a topic which cannot be studied without eliciting a certain amount of ethical discomfort”** (Corbey and Leerssen 1991 : xvii). However, I would argue that for the Dai notions of difference rest on ideas of co-operation (see Chapter Five below). Alterity, notions of the Other need not be derogatory. Corbey and Leerssen for example argue that **‘alterity is in itself ethically neutral’**. The difference between the Self and the Other is interpretative and need not lead to the belittling of the Other. Although this is contingent on the Self being fluid and willing to be changed by the Other. As Corbey and Leerssen write: **“The unknowability of that otherness which yet, by lying contiguous to our cognitive purview, invites acquaintance; which cannot become known in its**

own terms and which, in the process of becoming known, changes the subject to which it becomes known: that relationship is fundamentally hermeneutic. It ceases to be an epistemological mousetrap or an invitation to guilt if we can deal with that relationship on the basis of respect for the separateness between the **Other and oneself, and a willingness to let the Other change one**" (Corbey and Leerssen 1991 : xviii). Or as Gladney so succinctly writes: **"The recognition of equality rests on the admission of difference"** (Gladney 1998 : 119). The Dai narrative (provided below) of the origin of female pregnancy told to me by a young man in Mengxiang village is an ethnographic example of the possibility of complementarity of the genders:

Long ago it was not women who gave birth to children but men. Then men did not carry the baby in the stomach, instead the unborn child was to be found in the calf<sup>17</sup>. At that time there was a couple, the husband was pregnant with the child in his leg. One day his young wife saw a mango growing on a tree that she wanted to eat. She asked her husband to go and get it for her, he replied that that was impossible given the young child he was carrying in his leg. His wife said not to worry but to pass the child over for her to look after. The woman put the child in her stomach and from that day on it was women who gave birth to children as the men lost this capacity.

Co-operation and mutual aid are the themes here. The woman here looks after the baby in return for the help of her husband. This notion of co-operation is also vividly apparent in the Sutra of the Rice Soul. A parchment onto which this Sutra had been painstakingly hand copied was lent to me by the venerable male elder of my host household. He was adamant that I should translate it. When I took it to the Central Temple in Jinghong to ask for help in this pursuit the monks seemed thrilled at the idea, saying they thought no one else had realized just how important this Goddess was<sup>18</sup>.

The sutra called འཛོལ་འཛོལ་ལྷོ་མཚོ་ལྷོ་མཚོ་ *Tam Yaguanhao* in Daile<sup>19</sup>, Sutra of the Grandmother Rice Soul, has been studied by some scholars in China<sup>20</sup>. They stress that the sutra shows the co-operation between Buddhism and the so-called ‘animistic’ beliefs of the area. Without getting into the intricacies of the ‘Big and Little Tradition’ debate, it can be said that most Chinese studies of the Dai people that I have come across view Dai cosmology as animistic, *a la* Tylor, offset by the ‘higher’ Buddhist doctrine. This sutra can be read as an interface between the two. As Guo Jiaji explains **“when Buddhism was spread into the Dai – inhabited areas, the Pazhao (Lord Buddha) had a quarrel with Pasanmudi<sup>21</sup> as to whether the Rice or the Buddha was the King; when Buddhism had more or less established itself, the quarrel developed into a direct confrontation between Pazhao and Yahuanhao (Yaguanhao Grandmother Rice Soul)”** (Guo Jiaji 1998 : 112). Guo Jiaji then goes on to provide a version of the Sutra somewhat different to that provided below. Although his version of events is considerably more confrontational than the one I have translated, both ultimately display the need for

co-operation both between the genders and between the Buddha and the spirits among the Dai.

A similar point is made by Ai Liu in his work on Theravada Buddhism, “*Nanchuan Fojiao yu Daizu Wenhua* 南传佛教与傣族文化” (1993). He interprets the story of the Goddess’s encounter with the Buddha as the culmination of a clash between Buddhism and the indigenous religion. However Ai Liu (1993 : 57) also makes the point that the Goddess has the highest possible status in Dai cosmology and is venerated as such. This respect is displayed by the vast number of offerings made to the Goddess throughout the agricultural cycle, including during times of rice planting, harvesting and threshing. I was told that this sutra was read out each year, by the old man of the household, in the fields, during the planting of young rice seedlings (*Daile ga*) in May (Gregorian calendar). This ensures that the Soul of the rice will protect the crop and make it bountiful<sup>22</sup>.

The work of Phya Anuman Rajadhon (1961) on Thai attitudes to the Rice Goddess seems to provide insight into the way in which such notions of respect, are constituted in Dai cosmology. As he writes “**the matter of making offerings to the rice and the rice Goddess no doubt comes from the belief that various things have life; whether a human being or an animal or plant, everything has something abiding in it which is called Khwan. If the Khwan is not constantly present, the living thing dies. Rice is regarded as having life and a Khwan, and so the Khwan of the rice must be treated in such a way as to cause it to remain present and not slip away, for this might cause the rice not to flourish or cause it to die**” (Anuman 1961 : 25). As souls are not static but can rather flow they must be

treated with respect to prevent them from taking flight. This will be explored in more detail in Chapter Five below, but suffice it to say here that these cosmological views can be seen in the way the Daile treat each other in the every day. As a brief example it can be noted that when asked for a definition of the word 'stupid' I was told that stupid people are those who bully children, those who do not treat children with respect. Thus respect and co-operation are meaningful aspects of Dai conviviality.

The concepts of complementarity, co-operation and mutual respect are vividly present in the cosmological example of the *Tam Yaguanhao* translated below. Before I turn to the translation I want to make one last point concerning co-operation between the genders. Given the fact that in much of textual Buddhism (as explained above) gender distinction is but an illusion to be overcome, the fact that Gotama Buddha here appears in his male aspect is telling. There is clearly a gendered cosmological trope being played out here. This is particularly telling for the case of Xishuangbanna. In Banna the Rice goddess is to the best of my knowledge, always represented as female. This is not the case in all Tai areas. Durrenberger (1980) recounts a similar version of this tale from Myanmar in which the Rice Soul (*khon khau*) is not gendered. I was also told of a Grandfather Rice Soul in Dehong, Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture. When I asked the male elder of my household in Mengxiang about the Grandfather he explained that he did not know anything about him. After contemplating the idea he expressed genuine sadness at the fact that the couple (Grandmother and Grandfather Rice Souls) had to live so far away from one another. But he found no difficulty in accepting the existence of such a being.



It is impossible to speculate on the reasons for the gender variation of the Rice Soul in different areas, but I would like to draw the readers attention to two interesting points. The first is that Dai women in Banna enjoy much respect and a considerable autonomy. Secondly following Leach (1960) it is possible that the Dai of Banna have been influenced by Indian cosmological thinking. The Indian Hindu pantheon includes a Rice Goddess who bears a striking resemblance to the picture shown below. This picture was presented to me by a senior monk in Jinghong as being Yaguanhao, but if you look closely you can see that despite the Thai lettering this image was produced in Bombay. Of course this does not explain why valley people in Myanmar or Dehong have a male Rice Soul. I shall now provide a translation of the Sutra:



Fig. 4:3. The Grandmother Rice Soul, Yaguanhao.

This Sutra begins with a short introduction in the Pali language, which explains that a person should venerate and perform obeisance to this Sutra. The narrative of the Sutra then begins by explaining that, on the day in question, eight people had gone to perform obeisance to the Buddha, each of them carried this out in different ways. The venerable abbot who aided in the translation of this text explained that there was a deeper meaning, in his words: **‘We all do things in different ways but ultimately we all perform the same acts’**. He seemed to be explaining that alterity need not lead to hierarchialisation.

### *Tam Yaguanhao*<sup>23</sup>

#### **The Sutra of the Grandmother Rice Soul.**

No matter who they are, men and women are all permitted to hear this sutra.

There was an epoch called *‘yofolai’* when Sakamundi had still not achieved *Parinirvana*<sup>24</sup>. During this time in a place called *‘Meng Lazhagahanagang’* he imparted this Sutra. Listening to him speak were four kinds of people; Bhikkhu / Monk, Bhikkhuni / Nun, good men and faithful women.

These were the kinds of people who came to the meeting to hear the Buddha speak the Sutras. In the temple complex there was also a huge rice grain that transformed into a person (Yaguanhao) and the Four Mighty Heavenly Gods.<sup>25</sup> (*Si Da Tianwang* 四大天王 in mandarin. The names of each of these in Dai script is shown below):

1. ၁ ၈ ၂ ၁
2. ၇ ၀ ၀ ၂
3. ၅ ၀ ၀
4. ၅ ၀ ၂ ၀

The supreme deity (colloquially referred to as *Laoda* 老大 in Banna Mandarin but *Pia Pom* ပျာပုံ in Dai) was also present<sup>26</sup>. Many Dragons and lesser gods also came to see the Buddha. These beings all asked Yaguanhao, the Grandmother Rice Soul, why she had this name. They were interested in questioning her because, unlike all the others present, who were performing obeisance to the Buddha, she was not. Indeed many of those present wanted to laugh at her for this inappropriate behaviour. Those present asked her many times exactly why she did not perform obeisance. They all said that the Buddha was mightily important and that therefore she should do obeisance. She was asked by all the beings present, by the Dragons, Gods and people why she was not performing what was expected of her. Yaguanhao was not angry with her questioners, rather she very politely answered, 'I am called Yaguanhao.' On hearing her response those present went to ask Sakamundi, the Buddha, about her. They started by explaining to him that there is a being who calls herself 'Yaguanhao' Grandmother of the Rice.

That day the Buddha wanted to tell the Hua Zang 化藏 Sutra . As soon as he opened his mouth everybody's questions were answered. Once he had finished telling the Sutra he explained and answered questions about his previous lives. He said he could answer all the questions from

Heaven to Earth, no matter who was to ask them. For he, as Buddha, understood all things.

Ahnanda, the Buddha's disciple, went over to Yaguanhao in order to invite her to where the Buddha and his other disciples were sitting. Yaguanhao was asked to see the Buddha so he could answer any questions she might have.

Once she had gone over to where he was sitting, the Buddha asked her why everyone had come over to ask 'him'<sup>27</sup> why she was called Yaguanhao. She explained that she simply is Yaguanhao - Grandmother Rice Soul. Sakamundi then proceeded to ask her where she was from, to which she openly answered - 'I am not from anywhere, but I am from here, I am from wherever people are from. I dedicatedly contribute important substance to the lives of the people. No one helps the people more than I do'.

On hearing this many gods and people came to ask her questions. But despite this curiosity they were all still unaware of her importance. She is, in actuality, very important and very intelligent.

However the Buddha knew her true importance, even though the unenlightened people lacked this insight. Her importance was so great that the Buddha himself knew of her eminence.

But due to the ignorance of the others, Yaguanhao said: 'If nobody knows me I will now say good-bye and leave to go to *Sahara*.' As

she left she went on to say: 'All the peoples of the world want to go about their business. They need to do obeisance to the Buddha, but no matter who they are they all still need to eat.'

And thus she left, and she left for sixteen years<sup>28</sup>. She left to go to a dark place<sup>29</sup>. During the time she was away the people still carried on planting grain but nothing would grow well and the weather was extremely hot<sup>30</sup>. As a result many people died of starvation. During this time it was impossible to find even one grain of rice.

The gods were aware that many people had died, thus they went to do obeisance to the Buddha and to ask for an explanation as to why this was happening. They could not understand why so many people had died. The gods were deeply troubled at the plight of the people during this time.

Thus they all listened to the Buddha. He too was full of regret, the people had shed many tears, and they had nothing to eat and nothing to wear. They were in a piteous state. The Buddha thought about the times when he was alive<sup>31</sup>, that is, the one thousand stories about when he wanted to be reborn as man<sup>32</sup>. As he was speaking the Buddha realized that no matter who you are you must eat in order to be able to live. People need to eat both dishes and rice<sup>33</sup>, and only once they have eaten can they be happy. He understood that whatever you want to do in life you must first eat in order to be able to do it. Only after you have eaten can you do the things you set out to accomplish. This is the case until you die only then will you be able to not eat (and not be able to eat).

Having had this realization the Buddha was very concerned about the people and their lack of food. Thus, representing all the people and animals he went to ask Yaguanhao to come back to the peoples' world. He underwent this journey because so many people were in such difficulty and because so many had died of starvation.

The Buddha said he would take upon himself the responsibility of getting Yaguanhao to return.

(The text now has a line of Pali text: မြဟာလ္လိဂံ *Ma Ha Ga Lun Ga.*)

The Buddha had much empathy with the people at this arduous time. Thus he wanted to encourage Yaguanhao to return so life could go on as it had before she left.

Before the Buddha left (to see Yaguanhao), when he was still sitting on his lotus throne, he placed his bag by his side, in the same manner as he did when he was going to speak the Sutras. Yet he was not now going to speak the Sutras but was rather going to go and find Yaguanhao and get her to return<sup>34</sup>.

The Buddha left the temple complex to go and find Yaguanhao. He was already aware of her whereabouts. She had gone to wash. She was very far away in a very dark place<sup>35</sup>. It was here that the Buddha went to speak to her. (Here again the text switches into the Pali given below. As with all the Pali in this Sutra the meaning is reiterated in the Dai which I have translated).

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Once the Buddha had spoken Yaguanhao performed obeisance to him, thus giving him grain to eat. The Buddha saw her very clearly, he knew he could trust her. He asked her to come back. They came together to a place called '*long shu*'. Yaguanhao was a little embarrassed that the Buddha had come so far especially to find her. In her reticence she kept hiding behind a tree, peeping around first one side then the other. On seeing this, the Buddha understood clearly that she would definitely come back but that she was presently just shy of him.

Thus the Buddha called to her and read a Sutra in the Pali language.

(This text is shown below):

တေ ည ဝိ ဇေ ဣ တေ ဣ ဣ ဣ ဣ ဣ ဣ ဣ ဣ

The Buddha reached to hold Yaguanhao's hand to both stop her being shy and to stop her running away. At this she once again performed obeisance to the Buddha. Thus respecting the Buddha, she explained that for several thousand years (indeed tens of thousands of years), thousands (and indeed tens of thousands) of people have all needed to eat and drink water in order to be able to achieve Buddhahood. They must eat in order to be able to live and worship the Buddha. All types of beings, both human and animal need to eat. On hearing this Gotama Buddha understood. Yaguanhao explained again that no matter what you want to do you have to eat to be able to do it. She used a metaphor to help the Buddha understand her importance in providing food. She explained that she could be likened to a fishing net. If you want to do anything 'this worldly' or if you want to strive to reach

Nirvana, you have to eat, you need to eat before you can make offerings to the Buddha.

Yaguanhao came back to the peoples' world. The people were able to see that the goddess had transformed into grain (rice). Everyone tilled the ground and planted fields, it was all good. They had enough rice to eat. They could improve their lifestyles and everybody was very happy. Thus many people became initiated into the worship of the Buddha.

The Buddha said that once everyone had had enough to eat they could listen to the Sutras. Moreover they could obey the five pillars and be good people, help others. The Buddha explained that there are many good things that people can do once they have eaten.

Thus Yaguanhao returned to the world of the people.

(The text then has the following extract in Pali:)

ආ ඉ ඤායෙතං චා චිකාචි පු චුච්ඤ  
 ඛෙ ඛෙ ඛෙ ච චි චු ච චු චු චු චු චු  
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As every home, every village, every place can suffer from hunger, please everyone write down this Sutra and place a copy in every home. In this way everyone can respect and venerate Yaguanhao. Whatever you want to do in life first make offerings<sup>36</sup> of rice, of fruit or money.



Whatever you want to give is okay but if you want to do something make sure you do it well.<sup>37</sup> You should do everything with a real (true) heart. If the people respect Yaguanhao wherever you go you will not be hungry. Wherever you go you will have friends and relatives bringing a smooth and beautiful life<sup>38</sup>.

The four types of people who had been listening to the Sutra all understood. The men and women, estimable people and even the Dragons, all now understood Yaguanhao's meritorious deeds. These deeds were indeed very good, very helpful and very important to everyone. Everyone understood this now.

After hearing this Sutra the four Heavenly Gods, like the people, now trusted and believed in Yaguanhao. All the people listened to the Buddha telling this Sutra and as they did so they all understood. Yaguanhao is a good Goddess, all the people and even the Buddha now believed in her. Everyone was thus very content and happy.

The example of Yaguanhao shows not only the importance of complementarity but also the potentiality of the feminine in the Dai ontology. The power of young beautiful femininity is further displayed in the temple art shown below. The photograph is also one of the series taken of the art hand painted on the outside of the temple walls in the village where I carried out my fieldwork, like those showing the story of Prince Weisandala above.



Fig. 4:4. Nantolani.

This image depicts a section from the life of Sakamundi, the final incarnation of Gotama Buddha. It shows Sakamundi just after he attained enlightenment sitting under the Boddhi tree. This sacred Boddhi tree was attended by a young girl called Sotia. Sotia often came to make offerings to the tree. On seeing the emaciated form of Sakamundi, who had been fasting for forty-nine days, she believed the spirit of the tree had appeared to her. Sakamundi envisioned forty-nine parcels of rice, one for each of the days he had been fasting. He took this as a sign that he should eat the offerings Sotia had bought. Once he had finished he needed confirmation that he had been correct in eating.

Thus he took the plate Sotia had given him and approached the river. As he approached he said if he had indeed been correct in eating let the plate flow up the river, against the current. The plate was indeed carried up the river.

Sotia gathered grass and wove a cushion for Sakamundi to sit on as he meditated. As he sat on the cushion it transformed into the most beautiful and precious cushion imaginable. It was so wondrous that Mara<sup>39</sup> began to covet it.

Mara sent his daughters to try and tempt the Buddha away from his place of meditation. Sakamundi simply ignored the advances of the girls. He declared that they would age suddenly, and so they did. Thus old and withered they returned to their father. At the sight of his hideous aged daughters Mara became infuriated. Given this slight and his jealous yearning for the Buddha's cushion, the maleficent Mara became determined to defeat Sakamundi.

Mara launched an attack against Sakamundi. Infuriatingly every weapon that approached the Buddha turned into beautiful harmless flowers. The evil one then stubbornly declared that the Buddha's cushion was rightly Mara's own and demanded Sakamundi's compliance. At this point Sakamundi put his hand into the ground and pulled out Nantolani, a beautiful girl with long hair. Nantolani squeezed the water out of her wet hair; it formed a torrent washing away Mara and his hordes. Thus Mara was defeated.

Although my informant, a monk of the Central Temple, spoke of Nantolani as nothing other than a beautiful young girl, in the discipline of Tai studies she is known as the Earth Goddess. The Chinese ethnographer Ai Liu (1993) explains this very clearly. He shows that in the Pali scriptures there appears a male earth god named Dharanira. The female version of this name would be Dharani. Add to this the Dai language prefix '*nan*' which denotes the female gender and you get Nandharani in Pali (Ai Liu 1993 : 69), a name strikingly similar to the Dai Nantolani given to me by my informant.

## The Potency of Hair

The most striking characteristic of this Goddess is her hair. This hair is long and potent, within it there is even the power to protect the Buddha from hordes of evil demons. Ai Liu (1993 : 69 - 70) provides another myth in which the Nandharani's hair is the conduit for the water of the everlasting heavenly river. Within her hair this water spirals for a thousand years, only then flowing slowly out for mankind's benefit. Moreover it is said that the water which flows from her hair has the power to wash away sins.

Bearing this in mind may help us to gain greater insight into notions of feminine potency. Dai women are, as we have seen, celebrated for their beauty. Moreover in Theravada Buddhist belief, as explained by Chatsumarn (1991), a woman's form is one of her five powers. As Dai women are viewed almost universally as beautiful, especially, although not exclusively while young, their 'form' and beauty are intertwined. Despite the wide variety of Dai groups in Xishuangbanna most Dai women have long hair, an attribute which is generally thought of as beautiful. In Banna it is not at all unusual to see a girl with hair down to her knees, although most Dai girls keep their hair between shoulder and waist length.

The hair is said to have a soul which can be displaced by cutting. This can result in illness. I was deeply chastised by women in Mengxiang when I had my hair cut. But their tone soon became comforting as they told me how quickly it would grow back. I should also reiterate here that young Dai women who are suffering

from unrequited love often cut their hair. Short hair, and willingness to risk the illness cutting could induce, show the pain of the lover. I was told that before ‘Liberation’, Dai men also had long hair. Today it is unusual, although not unheard of for young Dai men to have long hair. However images of young, beautiful Dai girls with free flowing hair abound in Banna. Take for example these photographs, taken of statues and art works adorning the streets of the Capital Jinghong:



Fig. 4:5. Images of Dai girls with free flowing hair.

Hair has long been a topic of anthropological interest. Frazer (1929 : 231) links the potency attributed to hair to its proximity to the head soul which can be dislodged if not treated with the proper respect. Leach has explained that other early thinkers saw hair as symbolizing ‘fertility, soul-stuff or individual power (*mana*)’ (Leach 1958 : 160). Leach explored the possibility of understanding the near universal importance of hairdressing by incorporating the psychoanalytic approach of Charles Berg. Leach argues that the potency of hair may be the libidinal power of the psychoanalyst, but he also argues that this symbol’s association with sexuality is far from *unconscious* (Leach 1958 : 157). I do not wish to enter into a detailed exploration of psychoanalytic understanding of hair here as I see it as my chore to outline the Dai exegesis. However crudely put, the psychoanalytic position sees

shaving the head, (like monks do) as representative of castration and dishevelled hair as “ascetic repudiation of the very existence of sex” (Leach, after Berg 1958 : 149)<sup>40</sup>. This may or may not be the case, what is clear from the ethnography however is that the Dai exegesis on the potency of hair is considerably more complex. Hair is potent for a number of reasons, one of which is its power of attraction which could be similar to Western notions of the libido. It is to another possible reason for the potency of hair to which I now turn.

We have seen how important Rice and the worship of the Rice Soul is for the Dai people. Phya Anuman Rajadhon explains how in Thailand rice, in the form of offerings, bridges the gap between the mundane and spiritual realms. Thus the fact that Dai women wash their hair in water that has been used to wash rice takes on new relevance. Women’s hair has frequent contact with a cosmologically potent substance and is in its turn rendered powerful. An abbot at the temple of Jinghong told me of the bravery of one young legendary woman named Namgalani (although the abbot did not say she was the Earth Goddess talked about above, the similarity in the name is striking). Namgalani had gone deep into a mine to dig for precious stones. The tunnel collapsed but luckily she had recently washed her hair using rice water. She wrapped her hair around her head and this enabled her to live for seven days.

Rice water is said to make the hair black and strong, although women, especially the young are just as likely to complain about the smell and inconvenience of using it as they are to comment on the benefits. The long hair of women in Mengxiang should be tied back most of the time. Only at night, in bed should the

hair be loose. When leaving the house the head should be covered with a scarf (*had hoar* རྩོམ་ལྷོ་ in Daile).

The wearing of scarves by young Dai women is more apparent in Menghai County than in Mengla or Jinghong. Although older women of most areas wear scarves the young women of Mengxiang were much more consistent in their donning of this garment than women of other areas I visited. Young girls of two or three could often be seen wearing scarves. Although older girls even into their teens often chose not to do so. There did seem to be a large amount of personal autonomy in this regard. Children and middle aged women wore the same bright cotton scarves but elder women donned white or pale pink towelling scarves, of much heavier fabric (see photographs below):



Fig. 4:6. Headscarves

When asked why women wore scarves in this area the women replied that it was the correct thing to do. When pushed they explained that it was due to the cold. Although the area is sub-tropical its high altitude does mean that there is an

occasional frost. Another possible explanation and one that Yasser, an anthropologist specialising in Hui studies, agreed with (although not one articulated by any of my informants), is that the Buddhist Dai of Menghai have been influenced by a community of Islamic (*Pa Shee*) Dai who have been living in the region for at least two hundred years.

The scarves of the young women produce a cacophony of bright colours, the most popular being purple, pink, blue or yellow floral designs, always clashing marvellously with the brightly coloured sarongs and tops of the young and middle aged women. In the morning the women of my household always tied up their hair before doing anything else. The younger women also applied copious amounts of white face powder. The young mother of the household, Mer Yixiang, explained to me that women should not comb their hair in the house. But should tie their hair up in a tight bun whilst standing on the porch. It is possible that such a blatant display of dangerous potency would be disrespectful to the household spirits (*phi huen*). Mer Yixiang also explained that women should be especially careful not to let their hair flow freely near monks, I would argue that this was inappropriate as it would attract the monk, distracting him from his path (having said that, most young men find their future spouses when still in the *sangha*). Despite, or maybe because of, such prohibitions, free flowing hair was seen as the most attractive. It was not uncommon for young women to let their hair down for the photographs they demanded I take of them, these photographs would then be put up either on the inner partition of the house or on the outside wall near the main entrance. Interestingly middle aged women and very young children would pose with their hair tied up and flamboyantly



adorned with plastic flower, brightly coloured combs or tinsel (see Chapter Five below)<sup>41</sup>.

There is another cosmological example of the power of Dai women's hair known throughout China. This can be found in the narrative of the legend of the Water Splashing Festival, held at the Dai New Year. (Dai New Year is held in their sixth calendar month rather than the first, see Chapter Seven for a detailed exegesis of Water Splashing Festival.) This cosmological story has many versions and is depicted in a multitude of places throughout Xishuangbanna; it was for example embossed, in the form of a bronze sculpture onto the lobby of the government owned hotel. This legend is also celebrated in the form of a huge screen, decorating the central square of Jinghong, images from it are shown below:



Fig. 4:7. Images of the defeat of a demon.

The version of this story, provided below, was given to me by Fragrance, a young Dai girl from Mengham (Galanba).

A long long time ago there was a king, an evil king, who liked to possess everything that was beautiful. The demands he made on his people were high. He demanded not only various offerings but also beautiful women. When he saw a beautiful young Dai girl he would want to control and enjoy her. Eventually he had accumulated seven wives; all of whom were young and beautiful. Yet this old, evil king's tyranny did not cease, in fact his bullying of the people only got worse.

One day the girls would take it no more. They served the evil king much wine and lulled him into a deep sleep<sup>42</sup>. Taking a strand of her hair one of the girls managed to sever the great evil King's head from his shoulders. As it rolled to the floor it burst into flames, threatening to consume the whole area. The seven girls splashed water on the head for three days, until the flames abated.

The images below are taken from Shi Zhihua's (1992) book outlining different versions of the legend:



Fig. 4:8. Shi Zhihua's drawings of Nanlimananna.

All the versions Shi Zhihua provides stress the power wielded by the young beautiful girls in overcoming the demon. The young girl who told me this story, Fragrance, took much pleasure in drawing my attention to this fact. She had been forced through circumstances in her life to battle her own demons. Her life story is given in more detail in Chapter Five below.

To conclude this section it should be reiterated that hair among the Dai is considered to have potency. There are multiple reasons as to why this should be the case. Hair has a close association with the soul(s) of the head. Hair is also washed and treated with rice water, a potent substance. But it is also beautiful and as such it has an attractive force.

### **Political Wisdom and Local Identity**

Before concluding this chapter I shall provide one last example of a representation of feminine cunning in the Dai world. The tale demonstrates the feminine potential for political skill and loyalty within the Daile world. The young woman in this story was living with the family of her husband. However the

disreputable behaviour of her father-in-law meant that her loyalty was still with her natal family. This legend was told to me by a young married couple as an explanation of why people from Mengxiang were ill-advised to seek a spouse in Mengga. As they spoke they were both laughing and interrupting one another. The place names in this narrative have been changed.

'A long long time ago a prince from Mengga and a princess from Mengxiang got married. But the father of the bridegroom was an evil person who would not listen to his son's pleadings and decided to wage war against Mengxiang. As the two areas border one another he was determined to take over the land of Mengxiang and so become king of both areas.

With this aim in mind the evil king kidnapped his son's wife and would not let her return to her people. Despite being in captivity the princess was still allowed to go down to the river and wash her long hair. She was given a gourd to rinse her hair with. Wanting to help her people, she placed a note warning of the imminent attack into the gourd and set it afloat hoping it would make its way all the way down stream to Mengxiang.

The women of Mengxiang used to go and bathe in the river at the front of the village (that is before the river was turned foul by the run off of a local factory). One day, they discovered the gourd, with its concealed message, and ran back to warn the villagers of the imminent attack. Thus Mengxiang was prepared when the invaders arrived. There ensued a hard battle but the people of Mengxiang successfully protected their territory.

The evil king of Mengga was furious that his plans had been ruined and he ordered the death of both his son and his young wife. They were killed with their heads buried in the earth and their bodies upside down above.

From that time on men and women from these two places may not marry. It is said that if they do they will die or else their children will not be able to do anything (such as be successful in business). When I (the husband) was young there was a couple but when their children died they got divorced.

It is perfectly acceptable for Dai people to marry people from any other area, such as Menghun, Da Menglong, Mengla, Jinghong. It is just

not acceptable under any circumstances to marry someone from Mengga. Although it is fine to visit their town and attend their market celebrations.'

### Conclusion

This chapter has been an exploration of Dai notions of femininity in the light of the striking feminisation of Xishuangbanna. My fieldwork did not include a survey of sexual tourism and I do not feel qualified to comment on it in any great detail but it must be mentioned here. It is clear, even if only from the gaggles of made-up girls loitering outside the numerous all night 'hairdressers' and 'massage parlours' in Jinghong, that there are a large number of prostitutes in the area. I was told by young city-dwelling Dai women that these girls were not Dai. In line with much local prejudice they were said to be poor Han from Si Chuan Province 四川省. There seems to be little evidence of the strict attitude to public sexuality or prostitution that was characteristic of the 1989 - 90 'Six Evils' campaign<sup>43</sup>. Closely related to prostitution are the considerable problems with drug use in the area. I have seen one Save the Children report (1997) which states that almost all the female sex workers they interviewed were also drug users. Unsurprisingly the Chinese government has recently stated that there is a problem with HIV in the area. On a recent visit (Jan. 2001) I noticed a number of new clinics had been established possibly in connection with this more open acceptance of the problem. Given the financial incentives of promoting the image of Xishuangbanna as the home of beautiful Dai women, and the Dai respect for the feminine image it seems unlikely

that these images will cease to be promoted in the future, even if the full scale of the problems associated with sexual tourism are acknowledged.

The allure of Dai women is often cited in China. On one occasion I heard: **“Bring back a ‘sao duo li!’”** shouted across the security barriers of Kunming airport. The middle aged Chinese businessman who was making the demand was advising his friend to bring back a beautiful Dai girl on his return from Xishuangbanna. What is so telling about this statement is the fact that the Chinese businessman used the Dai for beautiful girl rather than the Mandarin. The Dai are so renowned for the beauty of their women that many Han I spoke to about my fieldwork, even those living as far away as Shanghai or Beijing, could say ‘beautiful girl’ in Dai. It is also interesting to note that a transliteration into Mandarin could (depending on the tones used) mean: Elder brother’s wife / sister in law – *Sao 嫂*, Much - *Duo 多*, Beautiful *Li 丽*.

The Dai are well aware of the financial benefits of encouraging tourism to the area, and of the ability of beauty to attract. There is a Dai saying that beauty is sweet like honey. Beautiful flowers have bees buzzing round them. Beautiful people and places attract people to them. The use of the feminine image should not, I have argued be understood in relation to its beauty alone. Nor as an expression of Dai inferiority, but should rather be appreciated within the wider cosmological context. As Overing has written: **“The symbolism of gender is often associated with highly complex theories of energy in the universe, and therefore to reduce the meaning of such idea systems to the political one of male dominance over women would be absurd”** (Overing 1986 : 141).

For the Dai this wider cosmological context is a place where thoughts come from the heart and youthful feminine beauty holds awesome power to protect and alter reality<sup>44</sup>. A world where those who have been forced into a morally dubious position are justified in demanding material compensation and where gender relations are characterised more by complementarity than by dominance and subordination. No wonder then that the image of a beautiful woman is accepted as representing Banna, for not only does she embody cosmological agency but in these times of change and rapid development, when she may have to yield and give more than she may want, she is morally justified to at least gain materially.



## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> 1992 Law of the PRC on the Protection of Rights and Interests of women. First law defining specific rights for women (Croll 1995 : 142 - 144 / The law is written out in full on pages 184 - 192). However Judd writes in 1994, after the implementation of the Law that: **“There is no differentiating feature in Chinese life that is more profound, continuing and asymmetrical than gender”** (Judd 1994 : 257).
- <sup>2</sup> Avadanas (Sanskrit) are stories or collections of stories which illustrate the life of a hero (C Humphries 39 : 1997).
- <sup>3</sup> A Bodhisattva is a being who has gained enlightenment but who remains within the wheel of Samsara for the prime objective of helping others to liberation from the suffering which is life (N Schuster 1985 : 90).
- <sup>4</sup> My informant, an abbot of the central temple Jinghong, told me that Gotama Buddha attained enlightenment on his tenth incarnation. Thus the Vessantara (Weisandala) Jataka tells of his ninth incarnation.
- <sup>5</sup> It is interesting to note that although I worked directly with a number of monks, the one who helped my translation of this teaching went by the title Maha, meaning he was highly skilled in the Pali language.
- <sup>6</sup> Sakamundi and Gotama are both names referring to the same enlightened being. Sakamundi (Shakya Muni means the sage of the Sakyas. A title used by those of non Sakya heritage (C Humphreys 1997 : 162).
- <sup>7</sup> At this point in his narrative my informant told me that Pusadi’s compassion for her fellow women was also exemplified in another sutra. Here Pusadi asks for ten things which would improve the lives of women, these include; hair remaining black even in old age and the body not changing after giving birth.
- <sup>8</sup> The Dai have three terms for what we in English would term white, one for skin tone, one for elephants and one for other animals such as pigs or chickens and inanimate objects.
- <sup>9</sup> See Tanabe 1991 : 189.
- <sup>10</sup> For another version of this story see Zhu Depu 1996 : 145.
- <sup>11</sup> This story is painted on the inner walls of a small shrine dedicated to Zhao Jingham. This shrine is to be found in a small village behind Mengxiang. The village of the shrine was seen, by the Dai villagers if not the authorities, as the centre of the district, even though Mengxiang was considered to have the most important Temple.
- <sup>12</sup> Rinpoche literal meaning - ‘Precious One’. An honorary title given to certain Lama’s (*Huo Fo* 活佛 Living Buddhas in Mandarin) C Humphreys 1997 : 158 / 204.
- <sup>13</sup> Theravada is the oldest school of Buddhism. It can be argued that there are only two Buddhist Schools, Theravada and Mahayana. However given the marked practices of Lamaism it is often considered a distinct school, as too is the Zen of Japan (C Humphreys 1951 : 11 – 12).
- <sup>14</sup> Within all Buddhist schools, reaching non-duality is reaching emptiness. Emptiness is neither being nor non-being, neither Nirvana nor Samsara, it is the ultimate Enlightenment. Interestingly the main duality to be transcended is that of self / other. The ego is that illusory body which clings to false separate identity, and to attain enlightenment the ego should be dissolved. Rita Gross (1993) has suggested that any stress on gender, including that found in Buddhist practice, is a constituent of the ego. Hence Buddhism and feminism should work hand in hand to construct an androgynous society, thus transcending the world-embracing ego.
- <sup>15</sup> It is interesting to note here that in relation to the status of Chinese women it has been argued that it is their association with nurturing, with motherhood, that has led to their continued subordination (Jacka 1997 esp. 190 - 195). However, although he dismisses Wolf’s notion of the uterine family as inadequate in providing an understanding of women’s motivations, Stafford reminds us that we must not underestimate the importance of the nurturing capacity of women. For it is most often women who *yang* 养 (nurture) those around them. As he writes **“yang is central to Chinese kinship, and to the production of Chinese relatedness, and women, rather than men - in spite of ideologies to the contrary - are the key agents of it”** (Stafford 2000 : 124).
- <sup>16</sup> Phya Anuman Rajathon (1952 : 174) reports that the ghost of a mother who dies in child birth (*phii prai*) is greatly feared in Thailand.
- <sup>17</sup> At this point my informant pointed to his right leg, but when asked was unsure whether it was the right leg or left leg. He saw this as an unimportant detail. It should be noted that both men and women

were aware of this tale. I was given two identical narrations of this story one by a young man and the other by his young sister-in-law.

<sup>18</sup> The monks linked my interest in the Goddess to the fact that my name in Dai, which they had calculated for me, included the term Na as in Sipsongpanna (Xishuangbanna), which means field or land.

<sup>19</sup> Yaguanhao is represented by the Chinese characters: 雅矣毫 *ya huan hao*: 谷魂奶奶 *gu gui nai nai*, 谷魂婆婆 *gu gui po po*.

<sup>20</sup> The Dai / Tai term for soul is transliterated in a number of different ways: *Huan* is the usually adopted by Chinese scholars, *Kuan* or *Khwan* by Thai scholars, *Khon* by those working in Myanmar, I prefer Guan as it seems closed to Banna Daile pronunciation (See Chapter Five for a more detailed exploration of this concept).

<sup>21</sup> A Dai leader of ancient times who is credited with being the first to teach the Dai people how to plant and cultivate rice.

<sup>22</sup> Yaguanhao is also called to protect the rice once it has been stored (see Guan Jian 1992 : 32).

<sup>23</sup> It should be noted that this is not a word for word direct translation of the Daile text. I worked through the text with the venerable abbot who explained to me in the local mandarin dialect those Daile terms (some of the Buddhist concepts were very testing) I was not able to understand. Due to the nature of the dialogue between myself and the kind abbot, who spent many hours on this task, I feel that what is reproduced here is insightful and as accurate as possible.

<sup>24</sup> Christmas Humphreys gives the following definition of Parinirvana: **“The state of Nirvana achieved by one who has completed the incarnation in which he achieved Nirvana and will not be reborn on earth”** (Humphreys 1984 : 146).

<sup>25</sup> The present changes in the cosmological thinking of young Chinese is reflected by the current attitudes concerning these gods. On asking one young woman the Chinese names for the four Heavenly Gods she replied, Liu Dehua, Fang Xueyou, Li Ming and Guo Fupeng. She had provided me with the names of the most famous, if somewhat unhip, Chinese pop stars who have accepted the title of ‘the Four Heavenly Kings’. When asked again to provide the names of the actual gods, she replied ‘of the gods? How should I know?’ Some information about the Four Heavenly Kings as constituents of the Han ontology are displayed in the table below:

Name in Mandarin (Pinyin).	Direction with which they are associated.	Colour with which they are associated.	Object they carry.
<i>Chi Guo Da Tianwang.</i>	East.	White.	Pipa, Chinese guitar.
<i>Guang Mu Da Tianwang.</i>	West.	Red.	Dragon.
<i>Zhen Zhang Da Tianwang.</i>	South.	Blue/green.	Sword.
<i>Duo Wen Da Tianwang.</i>	North.	Green.	Umbrella.

To have the blessing of all these gods with you is to have a smooth and easy life. In China today the blessing of these gods is expressed in the saying; 风调雨顺 *Feng tiao yu shun* which is roughly taken as meaning ‘good weather for crops’ or having an easy time of things, but which directly translated means ‘suitable wind, suitable rain’.

<sup>26</sup> The Abbot who was aiding in my translation of this Sutra made a point of explaining to me that the supreme deity did not have a wife. Having transcended the gender duality this ecumenical being has no need for one.

<sup>27</sup> It should be remembered that the Buddha is neither male nor female, and yet is also both. The Buddha has transcended mundane, earthly dualities. Yet in this Sutra it seems that the gender categories are being played with. Thus it is the Buddha, in his male aspect, who is the main actor here.

<sup>28</sup> There is some discrepancy here with other sources. Some say that the Rice Soul went away for six months, some say six years and one other source, held in Beijing says, sixteen years. My informant, a venerable abbot, thinks the most likely is that she left for a period of six months. This he explained was a reasonable amount of time for her to leave. While she was away, although there was no rice, the people would have been able to find noodles to eat and so not too many people would have died of starvation. Sixteen years or even six years is too long a time. If the Goddess was absent for such a length of time it would surely have resulted in a huge number of deaths.

<sup>29</sup> My informant made it clear at this point that other sources say that the Goddess left to go to the sea.

<sup>30</sup> My interlocutor used the local dialect term *Bu hao zai*, 不好在 to explain what he meant (remember how much notions of locality and ethnicity have blurred in the region). Directly translated this means 'not good to stay' (see Chapter Five).

<sup>31</sup> It should be noted that while explaining this part of the tale my informant went into great detail about how, if the people were starving the Buddha would automatically be in the same situation. This is because the Buddha is dependent on the people, and the offerings they make to him, for food.

<sup>32</sup> This refers to the *Benshen laili*, 本身来历 in Mandarin.

<sup>33</sup> A word should be said here concerning what is or is not food. The colloquial term for food in both Mandarin and Dai is rice, although the Dai tend to mean glutinous rice when they use the term and the Han tend to mean white rice, although not exclusively. By dishes, the Sutra is talking about the meat or vegetable accompaniments to rice. The Dai tend, despite their Buddhism, to eat manly pork and cabbage dishes, flavoured with garlic, Mono-sodium Glutamate and copious amounts of chilli.

<sup>34</sup> My informant explained to me that by this gesture the Buddha was letting the people feel that nothing had changed. By leaving his bag on his lotus throne he was in fact still sitting there delivering Sutras.

<sup>35</sup> So dark, explained my informant, that it is as black as when you close your eyes.

<sup>36</sup> My interlocutor explained to me that there is overtones of the Chinese concept of *Gongyang* 供养 here, this can be seen as a need to provide for elders or parents due to the restraints of filial piety.

<sup>37</sup> The Dai version mixes here the concept of well or good with polite, thus to do something well is to do something whilst simultaneously respecting the relationality that is the everyday. There is also similarity here with Confucian thought.

<sup>38</sup> Implied in these ideas of smoothness and beauty are notions of health and prosperity.

<sup>39</sup> According to C. Humphreys Mara is **"the personification of evil in Buddhist mythology"**

(C Humphreys 1997 : 125).

<sup>40</sup> This position has been critiqued by Obeyesekere 1984, who argues that Leach's division of public and private symbols is a Western construct (1984 : 46). He explains that matted hair is a public symbol recreated by each individual who adopts it, especially as matted locks unlike the shaven head of monks, are optional for the Hindu aesthetic. The matted locks of these ascetics have multiple meanings, including the divine *lingam*. The matted locks are symbolic and, argues Obeyesekere, like all symbols they exist on many levels both personal and public. Moreover the understanding of these symbols must be contextual (Obeyesekere 1984 : 37).

<sup>41</sup> It could be argued that free flowing hair symbolizes 'free' sexuality, but I hope to have demonstrated that the potency of hair cannot be reduced to this alone.

<sup>42</sup> In the literature this girl is called, Nanlimananna. Although my informant did not know the story in that much detail (Shi Zhihua 1992).

<sup>43</sup> A crack down on public sexuality, including pornography and prostitution following the troubles of Tiananmen 天安门, in the belief that such 'feudal' practices incited democratic rebellions.

<sup>44</sup> Such notions are not unknown in the anthropological world. J. Overing has written that **"beauty for the Piaroa was a social accomplishment, tied to reason and the control of emotions"** (Overing 1989 : 9).

## Chapter Five

### Dai Relatedness:

### The Moralities of Autonomy and Co-operation.



## Chapter Five

### Dai relatedness:

#### **The Moralities of Autonomy and Co-operation.**

This chapter aims to provide some insight into Dai notions of relatedness. The ethnography collated for the last chapter included life stories, mostly although not exclusively of women, which vividly demonstrated that the Dai place great emphasis on personal autonomy. Tai peoples stress the necessity of respect, especially of those older or spiritually wiser than oneself (see for example Tambiah 1973, Turton 1978 & Yang Busheng 1990). This is reflected in the use of a hierarchicalised personal pronoun in Daile and behaviours such as bowing when greeting, and stooping when walking in front of someone. One should also ensure that when sitting one's head is lower than the heads of the venerable and it is discourteous to point ones feet at others especially monks or effigies of the Buddha. In this chapter I hope to show that such respectful behaviour, obviously a guide to correct moral interaction (as what is meritorious is also what is respectful), is also intimately linked with notions of personal autonomy and independence. This emphasis on respect and the moral understandings which accompany it are fundamental to Dai ways of being. Thus the topics covered in this chapter should bring the reader closer to an understanding of the core understandings of what it is to be Dai.

Ideas concerning the interrelatedness of personal autonomy and cooperation are not new in anthropology, take for example these words of Tim Ingold written in

answer to B eteille’s 1986 article on ‘Individualism and Equality’, “**commitment to the whole does not so much limit as underwrite the expression of individual autonomy. *Holism and individualism are thus not necessarily opposed***” (Ingold 1986 : 130 emphasis in the original).

The first part of this chapter is concerned with Dai notions of relatedness and community and as such will provide some insight into the importance of harmonious co-operation to the Dai. The second will explore Dai notions of the self and autonomy. Throughout this chapter, but especially in the conclusion, Dai ethnography will be involved in a dialogue with Western theories on notions of the Self, the individual and sociality. My aim in doing this is not to ‘fit’ the ethnography into Western born Theory, rather I hope to use the theory as a tool in cultural translation. The incorporation of such theory can help in the understanding of the complex cosmological knowledge presented here. As Henrietta Moore (1994 : 47) has written: “**Bringing different models or philosophies close to each other, and maintaining them in a productive tension where one may not clamour louder than the other, is what anthropological interpretation should be all about**”. Thus my approach, (following J. Overing 1985, and especially 1990), will be to use Western theory as an aid in the comprehension of indigenous knowledge.

### **Kinship Theory and Dai Notions of Relatedness**

Perhaps the most damning critique of ‘Grand Kinship Theory,’ is that of Schneider (1984). Schneider warns of the dangers inherent in the rash application of analytical categories such as ‘kinship’. As he writes: “**It is said that by smashing**

**the atom we break it into its component parts and thus learn what those parts are and what they are made of. This may hold for atoms. But a smashed culture does not break up into its original parts. A culture which is chopped up with a Z - shaped instrument yields Z - shaped parts: a culture which is chopped up with tools called kinship, economics, politics, and religion yields those parts” (1984 : 198).**

Studies based in Southeast Asia have long challenged notions of rigid kinship systems. To give but a few examples, Embree's 1950 study saw kinship in Thailand as having a 'Loose Structure'. Murdock (1960) went further and suggested major organising principles were not to be found in Southeast Asian systems. Feminist scholars such as Ann Hale (1984) have attacked these studies for failing to assert the 'structural significance' of female roles. The lack of female voices in these works is indeed striking. Yet it seems unnecessary to dismiss these works out of hand. From my experience it does not follow that by acknowledging feminine agency we need view the Dai way as structured by formal jural rules. I hope that the ethnography presented below will confirm this.

The Chinese anthropologist Zhou Qingsheng (1993) classified the Dai's kinship system as being of the Hawaiian type. The Dai do indeed stress the separation of the generations, a point commented on by earlier Chinese scholars such as Tian Jukang (1949). Zhou Qingsheng (1993 : 26) however, goes so far as to attribute the Dai with 'age grades'. Tambiah (1973 : 129) describes a similar situation in Northern Thailand as 'a kinship terminology divided into generational strata'. However I feel the idea of a life cycle to be more appropriate for not only

does this evoke the possibility of rebirth, a central feature of Dai cosmology, but it is also a more flexible notion, and so capable of reflecting the creative dynamism I found whilst in the field. In the Dai world a person's life cycle passes through the phases of; child, courting youngster, (monk, if male and the opportunity / will arises), parent and venerable elder.

It is widely accepted that societies classified as Hawaiian often display deviations from Morgan's (1870) model (Keesing 1975 : 105). Unsurprisingly, for the Dai 'kinship system' to be so classified several such discrepancies must be overlooked. For example, the Dai not only stress generational difference as the model dictates, but (unlike the model) they also distinguish seniors from juniors within each generation, with the exception of ego's grandchildren. Moreover within ego's parental generation, terms referring to siblings (or first cousins) younger than the parents are distinguished according to the gender of linking parent whilst terms delineating those elder than ego's parents are not (as shown in table 5:1 below):

<b>Table 5:1.</b>				
Male kinship terms				
Dai kinship term	English kinship terms covered by the Dai			
Ai ao.	Father's younger brother.	Father's younger male cousin.		
Bo long.	Father's elder brother.	Father's elder male cousin.	Mother's elder brother.	Mother's elder male cousin.
Ai na.	Mother's younger brother.	Mother's younger male cousin.		
Female kinship terms				
Dai kinship term	English kinship terms covered by the Dai			
Yi ah.	Father's younger sister.	Father's younger female cousin.		
Mer long.	Father's elder sister.	Father's elder female cousin.	Mother's elder sister.	Mother's elder female cousin.
Yi na.	Mother's younger sister.	Mother's younger female cousin.		



Whilst in the field I discovered that my initial preoccupation with delineating a formal kinship structure alienated me from the everyday experiences of the people with whom I was living. Charles Stafford (2000) has made a similar point concerning Han Chinese Kinship, notorious for the rigid patrilineages most famously outlined by Freedman. Stafford writes:

**“Chinese kinship has often been assumed to be the rigid and non - incorporative kind. I have suggested that such a view is, however, partly the product of a particular definition of kinship, and of a particular way of doing anthropological research. Not surprisingly, the reality is that in China, as elsewhere, people *make* kinship - it is of course, never simply ‘given’ to them by birth - and patrilineal ideologies, however powerful, are forced to compete in a crowded field of ideas about the ways in which relatedness is produced”**  
(Stafford (b) 2000 : 52).

### **Teknonymy in the Creation of Belonging and the Importance of Locality in the Dai world.**

One way through which relatedness is constantly iterated and reiterated, created and recreated in the Dai world is through the use of teknonymy. This term is defined by H. and C. Geertz (1968 : 355) as **‘the practice of designating adults according to the names of their children’**<sup>1</sup>. Prior to becoming parents young Dai were referred to by their personal names (for most Buddhist Dai these have been calculated from the almanac by a high ranking monk). Personal names were also used between spouses of all ages but only in the most intimate of contexts; the

presence of even a household member would induce the use of the appropriate teknonym. This teknonym is an extension of the name of the first born child, irrespective of the gender of that child. If however a couple have two sons the younger of whom becomes a monk, then his parents may opt to take his name rather than that of his elder brother. For example a baby girl, Yixiang, is born to a couple, from then on her parents are known as Mer Yixiang and Bo Yixiang, that is mother of Yixiang and father of Yixiang respectively.

If however the eldest child is a boy who goes on to join the ‘*sangha*’ (becomes a monk), things become slightly more complex. While the boy is still young, the situation is the same as that for the example of the little girl Yixiang provided above. Thus if a baby boy, Aizai was born to a couple, his parents would from then on be known as, mother and father of Aizai. However as the boy reaches different levels of learning within the monkhood both his own and his parents’ names change. Simply put, a monk starts as a “little monk/novice”<sup>2</sup> and after he is twenty-one he becomes an abbot<sup>3</sup> and so changes both his title and status (see table 5:2 below). Although he may also be given a new name by his teachers.

<b>Table 5:2.</b>				
Colloquial Dai	English Transliteration	Buddhist Term	English Transliteration	English Translation.
ᄢ	<i>Pa</i>	ᄢᄢᄢᄢ	<i>Samanian</i>	Little Monk
ᄢ	<i>Du</i>	ᄢᄢᄢ	<i>Pishu / Bhikkhu</i>	Abbot

The level ‘*Du*’ is further subdivided as shown in table 5:3 below (lowest level shown at the top of the table, so the monk proceeds from *Sadi* to *Sahalaza*):

Daile	Transliteration
၁၆	<i>Sadi</i>
၁၁၆	<i>Sami</i>
၆၂	<i>Huoba</i>
၁၁၁၆	<i>Sahalaza</i>

There are also specialist titles, such as *Maha* ( မှာသာ ), which indicate a high proficiency in a specialized area, this particular example refers to an expertise in the Pali language. In explaining to me the different titles and levels of knowledge to which such titles refer, a young abbot used the metaphor of an opaque mug. From the outside one is unable to see the level of water in the mug, just as one is unable to see the level of learning, which has been achieved by a man. Moreover as one rises up the levels shown in the table above and gains learning, it is as if the mug is being filled with water. Using this metaphor the *Sahalaza* has the most water in his mug. I was told that in the past there was a monk in Banna who had achieved this level but there is no one claiming this title at present. Thus although, as my informant explained, the level '*Du*' is like an arm to a hand, from it comes various other division of monk, Theravada Buddhism (at least in its Xishuangbanna manifestation) does not impose these divisions onto it's monks. I was told by my teachers at the Central Temple that no member of the '*sangha*' would mind if a monk did not take any of these various titles, indeed a monk could in theory remain a '*pa*' all his life and no one would look down on him.

It is accepted that in the past there were no divisions between the monks. These levels of achieved learning are seen as a late addition to the ways of the *sangha*. In some areas monks are expected to take exams to move from one division to another, this is not the case in Banna. In Banna monks are free to decide for

themselves whether they should change division, and hence their name. It is interesting to note that in the Central Temple, the largest monastery in Banna, no abbots have changed their names, they all go by the generic title of '*Du*'. The head abbot of the temple, whose impressive physical presence was matched only by the aura of calm and laughter, which surrounded him, also went by this title '*Du*' despite his apparent ability to take a higher division title if he so wished.

The names of a monks' parents change as the monk takes on different titles. Thus the mother of Aizai becomes 'mother of the little monk Zai', and then 'mother of Abbot Zai', as her son rises within the monkhood. The names of his father, follow the same pattern. These names change again once the monk returns to the laity. If a monk in Mengxiang returns to the laity having only reached the level of 'little monk' his parents will become known as 'Mer De'at Zai' and 'Bo De'at Zai', although as I understand it these titles change regionally in Banna. If, however the monk returns to the laity having achieved the rank of abbot he becomes known as Henan, thus for this example our monk becomes 'Henan Zai', and his parents become 'Mer Henan Zai' and 'Bo Henan Zai'. This is outlined in the table below:

<b>Table 5:4. Terms of address for the mother of a monk</b>	
<b>Term in Dai</b>	<b>Term in English</b>
Mer Aizai	Mother of Aizai
Mer Pazai	Mother of little monk Zai
Mer Duzai	Mother of Abbot Zai
Mer De'at Zai	Mother of retired little monk Zai
Mer Henan Zai	Mother of retired Abbot Zai
The terms of address are the same for the father of the boy, except that Mer is replaced with Bo.	

The changing of the parents' names with the title of the monk takes on a deeper significance when we take into account Keyes' work on the transference of Merit in popular Theravada Buddhism. Keyes (1983 : 274) explains that by

becoming a novice or a monk a man becomes a “field of merit” for the laity. Moreover in some cases a monk is in a position to generate merit which can be transferred to others. Keyes (1983 : 275 - 6) explains that this possibility is made explicit in the Ordination of novices during which they must read a sermon that includes *anisamsa pavaja* (Pali) or ‘*Blessing the Ordination*’. These texts, found in Northern Thailand, Myanmar, Laos and Yunnan, are commentaries on important merit making rituals. Keyes (1983 : 278) provides a translation of one such text which includes a detailed breakdown of the merit that one whose son, slave or husband becomes a monk, can expect. As merit can be transferred in this way Gombrich (cited in Keyes 1983 : 283) has suggested that ‘proffering merit to others is functional for kinship solidarity’. It is my suggestion here that the use of the teknonymy explained above may be a manifestation of this merit transference. This teknonymy (when it involves the titles of monks) may be an articulation and acceptance of this merit<sup>4</sup>.

In order to understand the implications of the adoption of teknonymy among the Dai it is helpful to compare it to the even more complex form practiced by the Piaroa of the Orinoco Basin, Amazonia (Overing / Kaplan 1975.) For the Piaroa teknonyms are ‘relational’ terms, and they have the ability to transform affinal terms into cognatic ties (1975 : 170). Moreover it enables a degree of flexibility which can be used to political advantage. The teknonymic classification can thus be creatively manipulated when making claims of relatedness to a renowned *ruwang* (shaman) - or indeed in distancing oneself from a *ruwang* whose influence is waning (1975 : 181).

Thus for the Piaroa teknonymy enables a transformation process, I hope to demonstrate here that for the Dai teknonymy manifests a similar potentiality. Rather than acting as a bridge between kin and affinal groups as it does among the Piaroa, Dai teknonymy reiterates and animates belonging within a household group and by extension within the local group. Teknonymy through a continual and dialogic process of naming, perhaps made more necessary today by the fluidity of the category 'Dai', contributes to a sense of belonging. This capability of teknonymy is also noted by H. and C. Geertz, who write of the Balinese that **“the common application of a teknonym serves to underline this social identification of man and wife as a single unit”** (H. and C. Geertz 1968 : 359) and again for the Penan in Borneo **“tekonymy has the function of focusing attention on the marital couple as joint procreators by classifying them together socially under the single name of their child, and setting them apart from the immature, the childless, and the aged”** (H. and C. Geertz 1968 : 372). In order to appreciate the depth of significance of the Dai use of teknonymy and hence to understand their concepts of belonging and relatedness, it is necessary to understand more about the household, thus I move now to explain a little about Dai residence, marriage and divorce.

### **Flexibility in Dai Residence, Marriage and Divorce**

After marriage a Dai groom usually lives with his brides family for anything up to three years. During this time he is expected to work with his wife's family. The anthropologist Zhou Qingsheng (1993 : 21) reported that the Dai display 'matrifocal post-marital residence'. However what I found during my fieldwork was much more flexible, a couple would live and work where they were needed<sup>5</sup>. This meant that

residence could be both virilocal and uxorilocal, but due mainly to financial constraints, only very rarely neolocal. Most Dai households consist of between four and six people spanning over three generations<sup>6</sup>.

Nevertheless not spending at least some time in his wife's natal home would cause a young man to become the subject of gossip and be in danger of losing the respect of members in his community. However if a young man was needed to work in his natal home he could legitimately opt to stay with his wife's family for only a few months. One friend of mine, Aiyang, stayed in the house of his parents-in-law for just a year. He was incredibly vocal about how boring he found life in their village and complained bitterly about how much harder he had had to work there. His wife's family live in hill country where the principal crop is maize. Aiyang enacted for me several comically histrionic demonstrations of lugging baskets filled with the heavy crop down the steep hill side. He explained that he was overjoyed to get back to his father's flat paddy fields. Moreover his father's village is on a main road which means many more people come and visit, making life much more fun. There were two reasons why Aiyang could return, accompanied by his new wife, to his father's village after only a year. Firstly, his wife has a younger brother who could do the work which Aiyang had been doing. Secondly, his father needed him to work his land. Aiyang did have four elder brothers but sadly all but the eldest had passed away by this time.

Although there are a multiplicity of factors contributing to the flexibility of Dai residence, at the risk of being accused of economic determinism it should be explained that although Xishuangbanna is now pretty stable economically, this was

not always the case and there are still people who struggle to find enough food (especially recent Han economic migrants to the area). As explained in the first two chapters of this thesis, in 1953, four years after the establishment of the People's Republic of China, Xishuangbanna Dai autonomous Prefecture was established. Mao's government brought with it improvements in health care and transportation. However poorly thought through agricultural policies initiated during the 'Great Leap Forward' and again during the 'Cultural Revolution' heralded times of scarcity and great hardship (Heberer 1989 : 60 - 61)<sup>7</sup>. Xishuangbanna has a surprisingly unpredictable climate (the winter of 1999, for example, saw unexpected frosts in Menghai district which killed a substantial part of the sugar cane crop and many of the less hardy tea trees). It is not surprising then that many of my friends spoke of times of famine when they were growing up. In such unpredictable political and climatic conditions flexibility was an important principal for an unbending residence rule could have cost lives.

As will become clear from the narratives presented below, marriage among the Dai is most often spoken of in terms of love. Indeed the Dai are known throughout China as a romantic people. But unions are usually cemented by goods being exchanged on both sides. Women take items with them when and if they move to their husband's home and they in return are presented with jewellery by their parents-in-law. However by far the most treasured item to be given to a young wife is her belt, like the one shown in the diagram below:



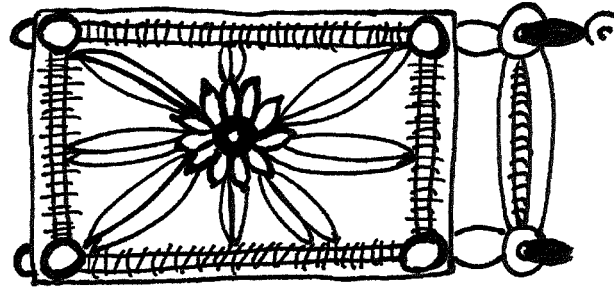


Fig. 5:1. Dai silver belt.

Such belts cost more than an average household's annual cash income and are of great importance to married Dai woman. Unmarried women have similar belts though not of the same quality. The belts given at marriage are from a husband to his wife and as such are not considered to be from his household, unlike most of the other gifts presented to the young bride. A husband who does not provide his wife with a genuine belt is in grave danger of being the subject of acrid gossip. The wife of such a husband will be pitied but will also lose the respect of some of her peers. As one young woman in her thirties berated:

"Ailong next door, he drinks, he loves to drink more than anything. He only drinks, so that his wife doesn't have a belt or a bra. He is a gold smith so he can make money but when he does he just drinks it away. His father lives in their house and he constantly tells him to pool his money but he just doesn't listen. His wife curses him too but there is nothing she can do about him". (Note the reference to pooling, a key point which will be returned to below).

Women such as Ailong's wife can if they wish divorce their husbands. There is little stigma attached to divorce, many of the inhabitants of Mengxiang had been divorced, one man was living with his seventh wife. Either party can petition for divorce provided that they can pay up to 2000 RMB (about £150), the agreement is finalised by the woman returning her silver belt to her husband. The fluidity of household residence, resulting from high divorce rates, coupled with the fact that marriage is likely to take one spouse far from his or her natal home mean that the use of teknonymy, which reiterates the permanent links between a married couple through their children, can be seen as a way of demonstrating and reinforcing a sense of belonging to the local group.

Ideas of relatedness within the village are extended to locality. As cited earlier, Leach (1954 [1993] : 213) writes that **'the 'Shan's primary loyalty is to his locality rather than kin group as such'**. O'Connor (2000 : 41 - 42) notes that Tai groups are more reliant on 'place-defined groups' than their neighbours. O'Connor explains that 'animism' invests places with power. Such power, he goes on to explain is also generated by household or village closure (such as with the use of *Liao* talismans discussed in Chapter Six below). Kiyoshi (2000) makes the point that even in contemporary Xishuangbanna village (*man / ban*) and district (*meng / muang*) spirits play a role in Dai notions of locality. As he writes: **"It should be added that each guardian spirit of BAAN and MUANG does not completely cease to produce Tai Lue (Daile) consciousness and their locality based on their cosmology in spite of changing space since the Liberation"** (Kiyoshi 2000 : 123)<sup>8</sup>.

Adoption of teknonymy is part of an ongoing reiteration of belongingness. As a 'mark', to use Derrida's (1991) term, teknonymy for the Dai is reiterable thus necessarily polysemic<sup>9</sup>. We have seen how it can be used as a tool of incorporation, it is also clearly a sign of respect (only those of younger generation are openly referred to by their given names). Teknonymy could also be shown to demonstrate the Dai cosmological acceptance of the transience of the self. It is to this cosmological knowledge of the self that I now turn.

### **The Self, Autonomy and Co-operation**

Dai cosmological knowledge of the self arises from the intricate interplay of ideas stemming from Theravada Buddhism and an ancient spiritual philosophy. There is no way that I could hope to provide a detailed exegesis here. Rather I hope to be able to explain the links between autonomy and co-operation through an exploration of the idea of *ga'ma* (in Daile, in Pali *kamma*) that is the consequences of intended action<sup>10</sup>. I shall then go on to explore Dai notions of 'soul' (*Guan*) as they reflect ideas of fluidity, potentiality and responsibility.

The complex philosophical notion of *kamma* has been succinctly explained by Phra Medhidhammaporn in his 1988 work, "Sartre's Existentialism and Early Buddhism", he writes:

**"The Sanskrit word 'karma' (Pali, *kamma*) literally means action or deed. But in Buddhism it means only 'intentional' or 'volitional' action, not all**

action. The Buddha, like Sartre, defines action or *karma* by intention or will (*cetanā*)." Medhidhammaporn goes on to cite Gotama Buddha: "Intention, is what I call action. Having intended, one performs action by body, speech or mind." (Anguttara-Nikaya v.I63.)...For the Buddhist, intentional or volitional action necessarily implies moral responsibility in the sense that the doer of action will experience its result" (1988 : 147-149).

The Buddhist concept of Morality (*sila* in Pali) is perhaps best understood by considering the Latin root for the term namely *moralis* meaning manner, custom or way of life. Sangharakshita explains that: "By the figure of speech according to which qualities belonging to the cause are attributed to the effect, an action is termed immoral when it springs from a mental state (really a congeries of states) dominated by the three unskillful or 'unwholesome' roots of greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dvesa*) and delusion (*moha*), and moral when it proceeds from mental states characterised by the opposites of these, that is to say, from non-greed, non-hatred and non-delusion" (Sangharakshita 1997 : 165). This means that ways of life, ways of being together, that radiate non-greed (generosity), non-hatred (respect) and non-delusion (humility and grace) are essentially moral, characteristics expressed in the everyday lived world of the Dai, as the examples of respectful behaviour provided at the beginning of this chapter demonstrate. In line with the Buddhist stress on the importance of intentional action this concern with moral action does not result for the Dai in a community which readily articulates negative judgements of others. Although respectful behaviour and generosity are prized it would be highly immoral and indeed futile to openly confront offensive actions of

others (see Chapter Two Endnote Fifteen). This is not to say that judgements are never made but rather that the stress is on conviviality and harmony.

However it must be recognised that the Buddhist Dharma teaches that the notion of an unchanging, pervasive self which is capable of choosing is an illusion. Moreover it is not *kamma* which binds to *Samara* (the cycle of rebirth). Rather it is personal desire to reap the rewards of action which leads to rebirth. Buddhism teaches that it is clutching to the idea of an unchanging self, which leads to suffering (Humphreys 1984 : 106). As one Buddhist text explains (Santideva's *Bodhicaryavatara* Chapter 8 Verse 135): **"If one does not let go of self, one cannot let go of suffering as one who does not let go of fire cannot let go of burning"**. I am reminded here of Wagner's (1975 : 82-84) advice that we should not cling too tightly to our constructions of the self lest we become neurotic.

The Buddhist self is ever changing, insubstantial, this means that any attempt to conceptualise it as a stable entity is painful. According to Buddhist teaching the person is constituted by five aggregates, to once again quote Phra Medhidhammaporn: **"these aggregates neither singly nor collectively constitute any permanent self, nor is there to be found a self apart from them"** (1988 : 101). These five aggregates are; corporeality, feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness. It is the consciousness which is involved in volitional action and hence is linked through *kamma* to a complex web of moral responsibility. But like the self, the consciousness is fleeting, ever changing. To quote the Buddha, **"just as a monkey, faring through the dense forest catches one bough and letting it go, catches another; even so, that which we call mind (*citta*), thought (*mano*),**

consciousness (*vinnana*), that arises as one thing, ceases as another, both by night and by day (Samyutta-Nikaya XII61)” (Medhidhammaporn 1988 : 133). This notion of sameness and difference is carried through into Buddhist notions of rebirth, it is the death consciousness which causes the rebirth consciousness to come into being. These two consciousness, those of the dead entity and the entity that is reborn as a result of that death, are neither the same nor different. To once again quote Phra Medhidhammaporn (1988 : 146) “as it is said in the Visuddhimagga: “because the series is continuous, there is neither identity (*ekata*) nor diversity (*nanata*)”. In a similar way although the doer of intentional action will reap the results, the doer of the result and the experiencer of a result are neither the same nor different (ibid : 148).

I shall spare you any more Buddhist exegesis on the self, you will appreciate its complexity. It should be apparent that the Buddhist notions of the self are deeply social, for all volitional action produces *kamma*, through which we are joined in fields of relatedness from which the only escape is to achieve nirvana. The Buddhist understanding of Morality (*sila*) rests upon the knowledge that any division between the doer and the experiencer of an action is purely illusory, thus all intentional action must have moral consequences. Rather than morality being understood in terms of simple judgements good or bad, it is seen as a ‘way of life’ through which it is possible to minimise the harm one does to others and hence to oneself through hateful, greedy or delusional action.

Mauss (1985 : 13) wrote that Buddhism sought the annihilation of the *Moi*, at least for the monk. Mauss’ discussion traces concepts of personhood across linear

time from the 'tribal stage' during which individuals are capable of constructing a 'personnage'. His evolutionary framework then outlines a 'classical stage' of *persona*, following which, accompanied by the rise of Christianity, we find notions of the *personne*. Mauss then explains that only on the peculiar Western stage do notions of the *Moi* develop (Mauss 1985 especially 21 - 22 & Overing & Rapport 2000 : 180 - 181)<sup>11</sup>. Carrithers objects to the evolutionary implications of Mauss' theory. He explains that if the definition of the *Moi* is: **"A conception of (1) the physical and mental individuality of human beings within (2) a natural or spiritual cosmos, and (3) interacting with each other as moral agents"** (1985:236), then the Buddhist exegesis of the self, which clearly situates the individual in a moral cosmic order, must by Mauss' own definition, be a *Moi* philosophy. What is questioned here are the evolutionary overtones in Mauss' work, in which he sees Buddhist communities as incapable of appreciating the benefits of a *Moi* philosophy. It can be argued rather that Buddhism accepts the possibility of the *Moi* and understands its seductive appeal but teaches that it is essentially an illusion. Thus any desire to cling to it as real will result in pain and suffering. To return to Mauss' point you cannot annihilate that which does not exist but you can recognise the folly in clinging to it and so be freed from its lure.

As I move now to talk about Dai notions of the self please bear in mind the complexities of rebirth and consciousness explained above. I shall start this section by providing an extract from a *Jakata* concerning prince Weisandala a previous incarnation of the Gotama Buddha. We saw in Chapter Four that during his incarnation as Weisandala the Buddha learnt complete lack of attachment to worldly illusion. As part of this lesson he was asked to give away his own children. The

extract provided below concerns the reaction of the Prince's wife, Madi, on finding her children missing. I include it here as my teachers at the Central Temple in Jinghong thought it the most important text concerning the soul.

"When Madi discovered that her children were missing she fainted. Weisandala called her soul back. To do this Weisandala said 'wake up my princess, speak beautiful things, smile my princess, wake up! Do not let your soul leave the house for the forest. Do not let your soul be in other people's stomach. Wake up. Darling get up.

Soul, do not be inside a tree.

Soul do not be in the grass.

Soul of the head do not be in the forest or in a cave, quickly return!

Do not be in water, by the river or whirlpool, quickly return!

Soul if you have changed into a bee, butterfly or flower quickly return.

Soul if you have changed into a male or female god in heaven you must return.

Soul if you have changed into a male or female dragon, or a male or female snake you must return.

No matter if your soul has changed into a being not of this planet it still must return to your body. You should not die here, quickly live.

Soul do not be changing into the snow on mountains, quickly return.

Even if your soul has changed into a dolphin it must return. No matter if your soul is on a cliff face it must return.

Even if your soul is hiding under the stomach of a elephant it must return. If it has turned into an elephant, a horse, lion or giraffe the soul of your head must not wonder aimlessly I request its return.




Quickly come back, do not reach Nirvana, return! Beloved return. Even if your soul is deep in a well it must return. If it is down a well I will touch it so that it will return. If your soul has gone to a beautiful lake it must return. If your soul has gone to the desert it must return. If your soul has gone deep into the earth, it still must return.

Quickly return my beautiful, my eyes, my heart quickly return my loved one."

This text demonstrates the transmutability and fragility of the soul, but also note the reference to the soul of the Madi's head. This is interesting in that it highlights the multiplicity of Dai Souls (*Guan*, see Chapter Four). The Chinese anthropologist Guan Jian (1992 : 22) reports that according to the Daile each person has thirty-two souls. However my teachers in the Central Temple taught that it is possible for a person to have more, for example some people are known to have extra head souls. Moreover highly spiritual people, such as enlightened monks, can see the souls of others. Terwiel, writing on Tai peoples in Assam India, translates the term *Huan* (*Guan*, *Khwan* in Thai ) as 'element of vitality'. I have preferred to use the term 'soul' here as this is the English translation of the Mandarin (*linghun* 灵魂) which my interlocutor used when explaining this concept to me. Having said that the notion of vitality is interesting as it is certainly the case that, as demonstrated by the sutra above, a soul's untimely removal from the body results in illness (Tambiah's 1970 : 58, Guan Jian 1992: 33, O'Connor 2000 : 45). Further evidence for this is found in the fact that if the hair soul is inadvertently dislodged, sickness can follow hair cutting (see Chapter Four). Souls grow or flourish under good conditions, if

however things are not going well and a person looks troubled their soul is said to be like an ‘unopened flower’.

In line with Frazer (1929 : 230), Guan Jian claims that the main soul is that of the head. However, despite the importance placed on the soul of the head in texts such as that of Weisandala above, I was told by my teachers in the Central Temple that the most important soul is that of the heart. Thus ideally action should be guided by your heart which for the Dai is also the site of love, anger, bravery, fear and understanding. It is said that significant ideas and feelings (terms not so easily distinguished in Chinese or Daile<sup>12</sup>) arise in the heart then move to the head as they become transformed into action. This is reflected in the fact that the direct translation for the Daile term to understand (*ho zai* ) is ‘to place in the heart’.

As understanding flows from the heart to the head so vitality flows between souls occupying a body, as too souls can also flow out of the body. This fluidity is reflected in healing and blessing techniques which involve the tying of thread around the wrist (Guan Jian 1992 : 23-15). These threads protect the bearer from unwanted movement of souls. But I would argue that these threads also form protective barriers against the negative vitality of ghosts (*phi*) and other harbingers of misfortune. For the Dai boundaries be they of the body, the household, village or even those between the Dai and other groups, are necessarily permeable. Households and villages are both protected by spirit barriers (similar to the white thread of healing and blessing), which prevent the entrance of harmful spirits but do not hamper the flow of positive energy such as that which emanates from the

temple<sup>13</sup>. As O'Connor (2000 : 45) writes: “For groups - a family, village, *muang* and others - the container is a building or plot that can be ritually marked or defended. Of course such containers' contents are people, not *khwan*, but like the soul-stuff in their bodies, these come and go rather freely”.

Guan Jian (1992 : 24) reports that on death Dai souls become ghosts (*phi*). This may be too simplistic a view as it was explained to me, both by my teachers at the Central Temple in Jinghong and several Mengxiang villagers that death can be good or bad. A good death being of old age and taking place in the home. If death is good all the souls of a person remain together and are consequently reborn together. As I was told by one young man in the village:

'Those who die a 'good' death, automatically change into children at death. These children can fly back to their villages and are reborn. They choose where to be reborn and so they choose to be reborn to people who they like'.

But bad deaths also occur. When I asked my friends in Mengxiang what was meant by a bad death, I was told of an unfortunate woman who had died of a horrible illness that made her swell up<sup>14</sup>. What was worse she died in hospital, away from home. After such a death, souls separate and harmful ghosts can come into being. The monk who taught me about 'souls' was reluctant to talk too much about ghosts (*phi*) but he did give me the rather clipped statement that: ‘ghosts are people, people are ghosts; ghosts fear people, people fear ghosts’. He went on to explain

that ghosts, like people, are mortal and by a complex process of death and rebirth (through the stages *seong*, and *deongleng*) they eventually become monkeys and then people again in a continuous cycle<sup>15</sup>.

To sum up so far, we have seen that according to the doctrine of *kamma* people are all linked in a complex web of moral responsibility (see also Endnote Nineteen). Moreover the Dai concept of the soul is fluid, with vitality flowing not only between the souls of one person but also between people. This flow of agency is reflected in the fluid life cycle discussed above and again in the frequent changes of name adopted through teknonymy. It is through these ideas that belongingness is expressed and reinforced - although I was never told explicitly I would also argue that commensality, especially the sharing of sticky rice which, is eaten with the hands and is rubbed soft before it is eaten, is also highly symbolic of the togetherness of the household group. It should be apparent that for the Dai notions of autonomy and co-operation are united. Before concluding I want to provide some narratives which I hope will further demonstrate how these ideas are experienced in the everyday lived world of the Dai. The first was given to me by my good friend Fragrance, she told me:

I ran away from home with the help of my middle school teacher. I found a job in the city and now I clean rooms. I was the only one to graduate middle school from my village. All my friends from my village are now married with children. Most, well, all the other girls of my village marry at fifteen to sixteen and no later. My parents wanted me to get

married not attend school, so I was only given ten *kuai* (about 80p) a week while at school. It wasn't enough to buy food so at that time I was too thin. I've put on a lot of weight now. At that time, if I went home, my mother would sometimes hit me, all she would talk about was me getting married. They want me to marry this one boy, he is good looking. He honestly and truly likes me but I don't like his character, he is too mischievous. I hate him to death.

I have an older brother who is twenty-one but he's under no pressure from my parents to get married even though most men in my village marry at his age, once they have returned to the laity. My brother was a monk for five years.

Many men in the village wanted me but I still did not want to get married. When I was in primary school (*xiao xue* 小学) I wanted to be a member of a council or a director. My teacher was very taken aback by my dream.

I feel that the cultural level (*wenhua shuiping* 文化水平<sup>16</sup>) of the Dai people is too low and that they should study more. At the moment the number of Dai people who study is too small. I am not afraid of hard

work, as long as I can make money to buy books I am happy. But I am angry because now my parents and my brother want nothing to do with me as I ran away from the village.

I want to learn English now, so I can get better work in the hotel. To be able to communicate with foreigners who all tend to speak English. My life is much better now, much better than before. I have put on much weight and am healthy and free.

Since the time this narrative was taken down, Fragrance has been promoted at work. Her bosses have praised her on several occasions, much to the chagrin of her fellow workers. She no longer has to clean rooms and her daily contact with foreigners, means that her English is rapidly improving. She has returned to her village several times and despite her father's disapproval of her western- style dress she has been accepted. On these visits home she would normally spend most of her time in the homes of her friends, not wishing to be with her parents. However during one of her recent visits, her mother waited up until two in the morning. Fragrance's mother, far from being angry at the lateness of her daughter's return, begged for her forgiveness, explaining through tears that she was wrong to have been so harsh with her and that she regrets having beaten her. When I left the field the two were still reconciled, both happy with the other's life choices.

Each time she returned home, Fragrance gave money out of her pitiful wages to her family. She often spoke of wanting to visit her village and was painfully disappointed when her work meant she was not able to attend festivals. Although she had very little time off she would spend most of her free time visiting her parents. She knew what she wanted out of her life. I would argue that the neglect and beatings that she received from her parents during her early teenage years gave her the moral right to disobey their choice of marriage partner and to leave the village. (It is interesting to remember here that for the Dai the definitive display of 'stupidity' is being violent towards children). However despite her refusal to marry she did not sever all the links to the village of her birth, the village that according to Dai cosmological knowledge, she chose to be born into. Thus despite the morally extreme circumstances Fragrance did not let her own autonomy, what she calls her freedom, destroy her links to her home. She helps with household chores while she is at home, although she complains bitterly about the harshness of agricultural labour, and she voluntarily gives much of her wages to her parents.

From Fragrance's narrative we can see that although parents are often involved in the choice of a spouse, stress is placed on autonomous decision making. The Dai legend concerning 'bride capture' translated from the work of Bi Jian (1988 : 75) and given below (my translation), provides some insight into what can happen when parents do not heed their children's wishes.

"A long time ago, the intelligent, beautiful and kind daughter of a rich family loved a diligent and brave but poor young man. They were truly in love. However the girl's parents were totally against the match.

They had already found their daughter a potential spouse of more suitable social and economic status. Their daughter however was resolute in her refusal to marry the man of her parents choosing, through tears she expressed her determination to marry no-one but the poor boy. However her parents paid no heed to her complaints, instead they went ahead in their preparations for her wedding, surreptitiously arranging the date for the match with the wealthy family. When the girl found out about her parents' plans she was heart-broken. She secretly arranged to meet her lover just outside the village. She wanted to think of a way in which she could marry her chosen lover at the earliest possible date.

One night, the girl arranged a secret meeting with her lover just outside the village. In a pleading tone she told him everything. As he was listening to her words he became so angry his face flushed purple. Bending forward he whispered 'little sister we will run away! We shall go to a place far away'.

'Elder brother, running away is never a solution. We shall do this: you return home and clean up a bit, without giving away our plans, ask your relatives in the village to come to your house, and wait for the



person who will marry us. Then in the still of night come here and collect me, we will hold a wedding ceremony'.

The brave young man went off to organize everything. In the still of night he "captured" his beloved and took her to his home where they held a wedding ceremony. By the time the girl's parents discovered she was missing, she had already spent the night in her new house, and what has been done cannot be undone. There was no way that her parents could still disagree with the match. After three days the bride bravely returned home. Two days later the groom asked two eloquent matchmakers to accompany him to the girl's home and make an offering to his father-in-law. His father and mother-in-law were very merciful, and held a grand wedding ceremony for their daughter, presenting the couple with copious gifts. The young couple were now free to live their lives together".

Bi Jian (1988 : 75) goes on to explain that, as a **"result of these events, young men and women in the Dai world who wish to marry but encounter the disapproval of the bride's father, are generally all free to use "capture" as an option in cementing the match"**.

Having discussed the expression of autonomy in spouse choice and the flexibility of life cycle stages and the solidifying effects of teknonymy, I want now to turn to Dai notions of co-operation and the moral importance of work. In relation to this the Han scholar Yang Busheng (1990 : 597) writes that the ethical standpoint of the Dai **“is one of labouring together, conviviality, co-operation, and free equality.”**

### **Co-operation and Conviviality**

Dai households form clusters of usually four houses. As well as sharing the responsibility for taking alms to the temple, household members from such clusters have a tendency to work together, but this is not a definitive rule. This is not surprising when you take into account the fact that these houses are spatially near to one another. Members are often related as householders try to build new houses near to their parents. Although this is becoming more and more difficult as new building and architectural techniques mean that houses are lasting longer and longer. Houses which used to have to be replaced every five or so years are now built to last indefinitely (see Chapter Six). The description of fishing provided below demonstrates the ways in which members of different households can co-operate.

Ponds for breeding fish belong to individual families. Use rights having been granted by the State after the money for creating the ponds was provided by a sugar factory near by, in compensation for the

pollution caused by run off from its plantation. Vegetables and herb nurseries are cultivated along the fish tank's narrow banks. It is usually the youngest woman of a household who tends these plants, using a perforated gourd and a metal bucket they must be watered every day. My friend, Mer Aiham, explained to me as she scampered up and down the slippery banks that women should tend to these vegetables. Moreover she said it is because the men do not want to do it that they get the women to.

That day the two men, (distantly related neighbours) who had accompanied us to the pool, caught fish using a nylon net. They stood opposite each other one on each side of the pond. Then one of them slowly collected the net by hooking it up and fish were caught in it as it trailed through the water. Eleven fish were caught that time. Several of these fish were given to a young relative of the family. He had just that day returned to the laity after several years as a monk and the fish were for his 'girlfriend' (they were soon to be engaged). This boy did not live in any of the households of the people present. However his household belonged to the same cluster of houses as those that had built the fishponds originally. The fish were collected in specially adapted baskets like that shown in the diagram below:



Fig. 5:2. Fish baskets.

On another occasion, there was myself and my friend, Mer Yixiang, and Mer Yixiang's husband's elder brother (Bo Aiyud) and his daughter-in-law Mer Aiham. Mer Aiham and Mer Yixiang live next door to each other, both their households stemming from the apical male, Mer Yixiang's father-in-law, the venerable elder of my host household. On that evening it was peaceful and cool by the fish pool, with sounds of Dai singing drifting from the stereos of a distant village.

As we approached Bo Aiyud stopped what he was doing and helped us to catch fish using the nylon net. In between watering the chilli and fennel Mer Aiham helped Bo Aiyud disentangle the net, under unceasing

direction of "slowly, slowly!" Once this task had been completed he held one end of the net and Mer Yixiang grabbed the other. Everyone was cheerful anyway but all present began laughing heartily as Mer Yixiang (rather small in stature) had to tie the net to a bamboo pole and hold this precariously above her to get enough reach.

While we were waiting for the fish to catch themselves in the net, Bo Aiyud helped his young daughter-in-law collect water for the vegetables. This required considerable strength as it involved hurling the bucket down the steep bank and then hauling it up again full. Interestingly he later took over watering the vegetables, using the same gourd as his daughter-in-law (Mer Aiham). This contradicts what Mer Aiham said about women tending to the plants, but demonstrates both the ethic of helpfulness which seems to run through Dai relations and the flexibility of the gender division of labour<sup>17</sup>.

Amongst the fish ponds can be found small bamboo huts, like the one pictured below:



Fig. 5:3. Bamboo hut.

These structures are usually built on stilts above chicken pens. This particular one was very small but absolutely beautiful, perfect in its elegant simplicity. The two households of Mer Yixiang and Mer Aiham had constructed this hut. Inside there was a wooden bed with a straw filled mattress covered with an opaque cotton mosquito net. Apart from a few pairs of flip-flop sandals there was not much else inside. Outside on the narrow veranda, there was hung a small round mirror, the same as that on the veranda of the main house in the village. Also on the veranda was an assortment of different baskets.

When asked what this little building was for a young teenage boy replied through a cheeky grin that it is a 'sleeping place'. Mer Yixiang

added laughing that it is for two people to sleep in. She explained that it is dangerous for a person to sleep out in the fields alone due to the threat from both ghosts and people: "There are thieves amongst us Dai people so we are afraid to sleep there". Given the communal sleeping arrangement in Dai houses (see Chapter Six) these huts provide couples with much needed privacy.

In a broader anthropological context the importance of work to the creation of convivial sociality has been noted by Passes (2000). He explains that the Pa'ikwené an indigenous group of French Guyana **"appear to understand that the joint action of words and work is itself not just intrinsic to but generative of sociality"** (Passes 2000 : 20). Conviviality is thus produced through work, but this concept of work cannot be distinguished from social aspects, the chatting and playing which accompany it.

The Dai also stress the importance of togetherness and co-operation in work, moreover work is always accompanied by laughter and play. Phya Anuman Rajadhon (1961 : 42) found the same in Thailand:

**"They have an uproariously gay time while they sort out the straw from the threshing floor. One can imagine that this is fun, for it is a simple sort of play mingled with work. This is work that they gladly and willingly help one another do".**

I was often told of the importance of work, especially agricultural labour. These sentiments are further reflected in the following myth told to me by an influential abbot: "Originally gourds (*sang* 𑜇𑜡) were round, not only that but the benevolent Yaguanhao (the Grandmother Rice Soul<sup>18</sup>) had given them the ability to fly. Thus it was easy for people to catch them and so they always had plenty to eat. But a venerable mother Mer Hamleng, knew that people needed to work to be good. Thus she took a big stick and hit all the gourds one by one so they changed shape and the people would benefit by tilling the land and working together". It is through work that there is a possibility of co-operation. Such unselfishness and generosity that this engenders corresponds to a good, moral way of life (*sila*).

This moral imperative for agricultural labour among the Dai has been commented on by Han socialist scholars. Some theorists have gone so far as to demand that Dai moral notions be adopted on a grand scale. As Yang Busheng writes: **"The Dai nationality's ethical thinking is very rich. Their moral standards are also perfect. In the building of a brilliant and advanced socialist civilisation this is a precious resource. We should actively move to explore it"** (Yang Busheng 1990 : 607). As we saw in Chapter Two, the State rhetoric now calls for 'unity in diversity'. This call for the acknowledgement of Dai moral standards should be viewed in conjunction with this, an acceptance that the Han can learn from the so-called 'minority nationalities'.



For the Dai, the emphasis on co-operation with core household members applies even when labour is carried on outside the agricultural field. This is not an infrequent occurrence as there are many opportunities to make extra money informally. All money gained should ideally be bought back and pooled. These words of Mer Yixiang explain this:

I haven't been for a couple of years but in the past I used to frequently visit Jinghong to buy and sell chickens. I used to travel with a friend of mine. Just two women together! We used to stay in the main agricultural market. Such good fun! The money I got I combined with that of my husband for the household. We co-operate as a couple. If my husband did not share the money he earns doing business, Bo Tao (her father in law, eldest male of the household and the most respected member) would curse him.

Only the very old are exempt from this moral imperative to pool, for they will need money in death. For example when the eldest woman from the house in which I lived goes to pick tea-leaves (which she does even though she is in her eighties), she doesn't tell her family how much she earns, and nor are they expected to ask. Having said this her husband does pool the money that is dedicated to him in *Songya* ceremonies. I was told that when making contributions to the household to make sure to give money to him and not to the old woman who would hoard it until she died. She would get so furious about this that the whole family would laugh at

her and berate her for her 'ugliness' (a concept associated with anger<sup>19</sup>). Respect, then, was most readily given to those members of the household who successfully weaved individual autonomy with household responsibilities. Children too are expected to demonstrate these skills, as shown in the sequence of events presented below:

Two young mothers with whom I was talking suddenly fell about laughing, not an uncommon occurrence but this time rather than being the result of my idiocy, it was the appearance of one of their daughters (Yixiang) that caused the outburst. The eleven-year-old was clearly exhausted, her usually neatly swept back hair was in a terrible mess and black smudges of charcoal streaked across her face. But she was also glowing with joy. She strutted about the veranda proudly showing off the nine *Mao* (there are one hundred and thirty *Mao* to the pound) she had just made.

Yixiang's mother struggled to stop laughing long enough to tell me that her daughter had woken up especially early that morning having decided somewhat out of the blue, that she needed to make money to 'play' with. With this in mind she had gone into business with her friend living next door. They barbecued small tubers, over charcoal in a tin

washing up bowl, and sold them to weary road side travellers. She had been out for hours to accumulate her pitiful nine *Mao*, yet she was delighted with her earnings. Her expression was that of pure glee as she stuffed the tattered notes lovingly into the small pocket of her inner-vest, made by her mother especially for the purpose<sup>20</sup>. After a few days the young partners realized, with the help of unceasing adult teasing, that the profits were not worth the labour.

Before long the children of the village had come up with another idea for making money. Following in the footsteps of young Dai girls living at more famous tourist sites, the children dressed up and patrolled the temple grounds, demanding money from tourists in exchange for being photographed. Preparing for this activity was quite a feat. First of all the little girls had to spend an hour or so putting on their best sarongs, whitening their faces, applying lip stick and getting their mothers or other women, who happened to be around, to tie up their hair and decorate it with tinsel and plastic flowers. Next they had to learn the appropriate Mandarin Chinese terms of address for the tourists. The little girl from my household would spin around the house giggling and repeating to herself 'auntie auntie photo two *yuan*, uncle uncle photo two *yuan*'. She even made me teach her the English in the unlikely event of a

foreigner arriving. At first this little girl was happy to be getting dressed up and earning money, sometimes up to five *kuai* a day (with thirteen *kuai* to the pound this was considered a good wage). But the novelty soon wore off. She soon started complaining about it to her mother. On one occasion her mother told her to stop being stupid and hurry up as she had seen other little girls, dressed up and on their way to the temple. At the same time her mother took some of her daughter's money explaining that she needed it to buy vegetables. What had started off as the choice of the little girl soon turned into a means of the household earning money, as a result it became Yixiang's responsibility to continue doing it even after she no longer wanted to. See photographs below for how the girls were made up.



Fig. 5:4. Mengxiang village children dressed up for tourists.

## Theoretical Discussion and Conclusion.

Two theoretical issues have been tackled in this chapter:

- The need to move away from confusing individuality with cultural individualism and to accept the inadequacy of Dumont's equation of hierarchy to holism. This failing being exhibited in the work of Mauss briefly explored earlier. As Rapport explains, **"individuality, pertains to our being-in-the-world courtesy of distinct interpretative prisms, whereby, to paraphrase Simmel, each of us engages with the world as other; each of us inevitably represents an independent seat of consciousness"** (1997:174).
- The importance of accepting the capability of individual agency to animate ways of togetherness. To quote Rapport again, **"without a fund of discourses the individual would not have the means of making sense, but without this work of interpretation, this individual use, discourse would not achieve animation in public life"**(1997:176). He goes on to say **"there can be no socio-cultural environment (no 'community') without individual consciousness of that environment, without individuality"** (1997:200). However we should not expect that an 'individual / society' dichotomy is a universal phenomenon.

For the Dai everyday life is governed by multiple moralities some of which stress autonomy and others co-operation; some the importance of equality and others the necessity of joyful conviviality. And yet the Dai do not sever notions of autonomy from those of co-operation<sup>21</sup>.

These sentiments are also to be found in the Han Chinese world, there are for example marked similarities between these ideas and those found in Confucian thought. The Confucian saying:

**'To practice humanity depends on oneself.**

**Can it depend on anyone else?'**

is explained by the scholar Ding Wangdao (1997 : 67) who writes **"no one can live alone, isolated from other men; therefore a humane spirit is indispensable for all people. In living and working together, people should be helpful and co-operative, respectful and friendly to each other, so that there is warmth and harmony. Only when people are like this is it possible for there to be social progress, peace and happiness"**. These are the sentiments that as we have seen embody the Buddhist teaching on Morality (*sila*) and Dai ways of being together.

A similar point has been made by Strathern (1988 : 69), who writes that **"sociality is uncovered in the investigation of relations between individuals"**. As Cohen explains, **"Strathern's position was that society is misconceived as an entity *apart from (or over and above) individuals. Rather society is its relationships, among individuals, institutions, between individuals and institutions"*** (emphasis in the original). Cohen goes on to explain that it is perfectly possible that, **"I am simultaneously an individual, and yet part of relationships: unique but conventional"** (Cohen 1994 : 152-153).

Strathern's point is further reflected in the work of Baier, a moral philosopher who writes on 'Rights and Co-operation'. Baier (1994 : 246) explains that we are only individuals to the extent that we are members of a group, a group

that recognises individuals. Thus she says **“rights are the tip of the moral iceberg, supported by the responsibilities that we co-operatively discharge and by the individual responsibilities that we recognise, including responsibilities to co-operate, in order to maintain common goods”**.

Riches and Prince's (1999) work on New Agers in Glastonbury provides further insight into the complex interweavings of the individual and community. Riches and Prince explain that there is a **“distinctive New Age conception of the human person - whose existence, we shall argue, permits the holistic cosmology to sustain the validity of individual practice”** (1999 : 170). The New Agers have a concept of individualism, but it is different from that of mainstream Western Individualism. The New Agers accept autonomy and freewill but also acknowledge the salience of responsibility and respect. Thus **“holism clearly functions as context to individualism, both abutting it as a separate domain and also containing it (the holistic individual)”** (1999:184).

The similarity between the Dai ethnography and that of the New Agers is striking but I do not feel that Dai individuals would see themselves against, or even within a greater context of sociality. As Riches and Prince explain, for the New Ager it is the holistic which controls and informs the individualistic. For the Dai this relationship is more fluid, so that notions of the self and the community are balanced, given equal weight. For this reason the Ingoldian notion of **‘dwelling perspective’** is of help in trying to understand Dai cosmology. This notion of, ‘being in the world as opposed to confronting a world ‘out there’” (M. Harris 2000 : 49),

encompasses within it a notion of dialogue, not only between the individual and the lived environment but also between individuals.

In conclusion I suggest the use of the Banna dialect term '*Zai*' as a tool in understanding the complex interplay of the individual and community in the Dai world. The term '*Zai*' is found in both Daile and the Xishuangbanna Mandarin dialect, however the meaning varies in each. The Dai people, being mostly bilingual make word plays on the meaning variation. *Zai* (different tone to *Zai* meaning heart) in Daile means 'is'. Thus if someone said it's cold today, one could respond '*Zai ya*' meaning 'it is!' But *Zai* is also used to mean yes. So that in answer to the question, 'are you married?' I would answer '*um Zai*' 'not is' i.e. no. The term is slightly harder to explain in Mandarin as we do not have a similar concept. *Zai* in mandarin means to be in a place. Thus in answer to the question: 'Is your mother at home?' The positive reply would be *Ta zai* 她在 she is in place. The two terms are similar but not identical. The Dai use this term to describe either Xishuangbanna generally, their village or their home in particular as *Hao Zai* - 'good to be', or 'good to be in,' that is 'a good place to be'. By this they mean that life is good, it is comfortable. It is good to be. Perhaps the best way to understand the complex interplay of the moralities of autonomy and co-operation for the Dai is to say, as they do that they '*Zai*', they just are. This is being and being well; being in a place, living and loving harmoniously, '*hao zai*'.



## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> For an explanation of teknonymy in the Chinese kinship system see Feng 1936. Feng gives a detailed account of the changing meanings of kinship terms in different historical periods. He concludes that teknonymy is the only explanation for certain violations in the generation principle in the Chinese kinship system (namely “**the fact that mother’s brothers and wife’s brothers are designated by the same term *chiu*, mother’s sisters and wife’s sisters by the same term *yi*, father’s older brothers and husband’s older brothers by the same term *po*, father’s younger brothers and husband’s younger brothers by the same term *shu*, father’s sisters and husband’s sisters by the same term *ku* (*hsiao ku*)**”). (Feng 1936 : 59)

<sup>2</sup> *Panoi* in Dai, *Xiao Heshang* 小和尚 in Mandarin *Samanian* in Pali (this is the transliteration given to me by my teachers in the Central Temple in Jinghong, Keyes (1983) spells this term *samanera*.)

<sup>3</sup> *Du* in Dai, *Pi Shu* in Pali, ‘*Da Fo Ye*’ 大佛爷 in the local Mandarin dialect, meaning ‘Big Buddha Paternal Grandfather’. It is interesting to note that Tibetan Lama’s in Yunnan province do not use this title in their local Mandarin dialect. Rather they prefer *Ho Fo* 活佛 which translates as ‘Living Buddha’.

<sup>4</sup> There are obvious implications for gender hierarchy here. I am not in a position to answer the question of to what extent parents are disappointed by the birth of a girl who is unable to make this merit. But I would suggest that there are many ways of making merit and that most rely on the individual. Moreover as I hope I explained in Chapter Four women have their own potency, their path of nurturer is especially meritorious.

<sup>5</sup> Guan Jian (1992 : 12) writing on the Daile in Banna, provides an account of rather strict residence rules, he states that a husband will move to his wife’s village for a varying period of time (as I found) but he goes on to explain: “**If the wife is the only daughter or the youngest one in the family, the husband will live in her family for his whole life. But if the husband is the only son or the youngest in his family, they may finally live in the husband’s village**”. This does fit with Aiyang’s case below, as he was the youngest in his family. However as I state in the main text, fertility regulations and agricultural reforms have meant that residence today has to be flexible.

<sup>6</sup> This may seem small but fertility regulations, currently enforced by the central government in Beijing, mean that the Dai are only permitted to have two children - although as they have ‘minority nationality status’ the fine for an extra child is low.

<sup>7</sup> Heberer (1989) explains that much of the land in Xishuangbanna had been under slash and burn agriculture. When farmers in the area were forced due to central government policy to switch to grain production the land had been too drained of nutrients to be able to sustain the new crops. Moreover vast tracks of forest were cleared making wood products almost unavailable. Xishuangbanna now has five nature reserves, Manggao 49km<sup>2</sup>, Mengyang 210 km<sup>2</sup>, Menglun 76km<sup>2</sup>, Mengla 210km<sup>2</sup> and Shangyong 80 km<sup>2</sup> a total of 625 km<sup>2</sup> (Ai Hua 1998 : 65) please see Appendix 4.

<sup>8</sup> Please bear in mind that although there are *Meng* Spirit Shrines, worship of these spirits is frowned upon by the Chinese State.

<sup>9</sup> See Chapter Seven for a more detailed theoretical discussion of Derrida (1991) and the notion of reiterability and shifting meanings.

<sup>10</sup> The doctrine of *kamma* holds a central place in Theravadin knowledge. As Keyes (1983 : 261) writes: “**In the second Noble Truth, the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering, the Buddha posits the ultimate cause of suffering as “craving” or “desire” (*tanha*). *Tanha*, in turn, leads one to act, and these actions (*kamma*) have their consequences (*vipaka; phala*), whose character depends upon whether the act itself was morally positive (*puñña*) or morally negative (*papa*)**”.

<sup>11</sup> These terms can be explained as: *Persomage* = individuals are conceived of as ephemeral bearers of a fixed stock of names, roles and souls in clan possession, there is no inner conscience. *Persona* = individuals are free and responsible, independent and autonomous citizens of the state, legal persons with civic identities. But they still have no inner life and no individual conscience. *Personne* = individual indivisible and rational, unique sacred soul serves as foundation for all political economic and legal institutions.

*Moi* = increasing self-interestedness and self-knowledge.

(from Rapport & Overing 2000 : 180-181).

<sup>12</sup> Take for example the Chinese characters *xiang* 想 (to think or miss) and *dong* 懂 (to understand) both of which incorporate radicals representing the heart.

<sup>13</sup> These spirit barriers (*liao*) are discussed in detail in Chapter Six.

<sup>14</sup> It was the case that during *Hawasa* (*Guanmenjie*), (the beginning of Buddhist lent which runs from the end of July to the end of October) this unfortunate woman was given offerings by her relatives outside the temple as it was believed she could not go into the temple.

<sup>15</sup> In contrast to what I was taught by my learned interlocutor, Tambiah (1973 : 146) reports that in northern Thailand monkeys are considered to be 'lost and degenerate human beings' in an inversion of Darwinian evolutionary theory.

<sup>16</sup> This is a direct translation, although literacy level may be closer to Fragrance's meaning.

<sup>17</sup> The main exception to this flexibility is the slaughter of large live stock. Cows and pigs are said to cry before they are killed and women in the village were afraid to come in too close contact to death (see Chapter Six below).

<sup>18</sup> See Chapter Four for a detailed account of Yaguanhao.

<sup>19</sup> This is consistent with Buddhist doctrine. In *Anguttara Nikaya* the Buddha tells Queen Mallika why some women are beautiful. Keyes (1983 : 263) explains that the "**Buddha says that anger has been the cause of ugliness and that the lack of anger, despite provocation, has been the cause of beauty**" (Similarly greed is the cause of poverty and generosity the cause of wealth).

<sup>20</sup> Women usually keep money in such inner pockets. You can now buy bras of reinforced synthetic fabric in the market with such pockets sewn in.

<sup>21</sup> O'Connor (2000 : 45), in what I consider to be a misreading of the Dai notion of conviviality (or at least not applicable to Xishuangbanna), views the Tai *khwan* (*guan* soul) as 'restricting individual autonomy'. The *khwan* can leave the body and it needs the help of other members of the community to lure it back. Thus O'Connor argues that personal autonomy is restricted. But it could just as well be argued that, as the elders help protect those whose souls may have a tendency to flee, the group enables the individual to be whole. Once again as I have argued above, there can be no autonomy without community.

**Chapter Six****Dwelling in the Dai World: Conviviality and Architecture.**

## Chapter Six

### **Dwelling in the Dai World: Conviviality and Architecture.**

**“Architecture connects reason and emotion, goodness and beauty, ethics and psychology, practical concepts and aesthetic appreciation so that they all merge, fused as one, encapsulated in the physical form of the building”** (Wang Sheren in Ditton 1998 : 208).

This chapter explores Dai ways of dwelling. I have chosen the term ‘dwelling’ here following Humphrey who notes that **“dwelling, expresses felicitously the concept of something which is both process and artefact”** (Humphrey 1988 : 17). I also take from Ingold the notion of ‘dwelling in the world’, so that the creation and recreation of the built environment can be thought of as a process of engagement with and at the same time manipulation of the world. Those aspects of the world I shall focus upon in this chapter will be images of identity and cosmological knowledges. The chapter will guide the reader through the spirit barriers of a Daile village to allow for the exploration of the changing architecture of Xishuangbanna. It should also make clear the animated character of the Dai house and the inappropriateness of assuming that this can be annihilated by what seems, at first glance, to be a crude form of acculturation. As noted in the last chapter Terwiel, translated the Thai / Tai term ‘*Guan*’ as, ‘element of vitality’. This Dai soul or vitality, tangible in the dwelt environment, is still very much alive in Xishuangbanna.

### **Togetherness Lived: Dwelling in the Dai House.**

Carsten and Hugh-Jones have explained that: **“The process of kinship and the process of the house are so thoroughly intertwined as to be one process”** (Carsten & Hugh-Jones 1995 : 40). In the same volume, this point was reiterated in relation to Southeast Asia by Waterson who explained that in much of this area; **‘house idioms dominate as ways of expressing ideas about kinship’** (Waterson 1995 : 54). I would argue that notions of Dai relatedness are no exception to this.

In his innovative writing on the notion of ‘house societies’, Lévi-Strauss aimed to provide an explanation of Kwakiutl social organisation. In this work Lévi-Strauss attributes to ‘the house’ the ability to unite opposing principals, such as descent and affinity, endogamy and exogamy. Thus he writes:

**“On all levels of social life, from the family to the state, the house is therefore an institutional creation that permits compounding forces which, everywhere else, seem only destined to mutual exclusion because of their contradictory bends...By putting, so to speak, “two in one” the house accomplishes a sort of inside-out topological reversal, it replaces an internal duality with an external unity”** (Lévi-Strauss 1982 : 184-185). He goes on to explain that **“with the “house” societies, we see the formation of a system of rights and obligations whose criss-crossed threads cut through the lines of the network it replaces: what was previously united separates, what was previously separated unites”** (Lévi-Strauss 1982 : 187).

Levi-Strauss' categorisation of certain societies, (from as diverse a selection of areas as, Native North America, historical Europe, ancient Greece, feudal Japan, island Indonesia, Melanesia, Polynesia, New Zealand, Madagascar and Africa) as 'house' based societies has been criticised for a number of reasons not least for his evolutionist assumptions. In Levi-Strauss' framework 'house' based societies fall between those classed as kin based and those with class based social orders (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995 : 10). I hope to demonstrate that for the Dai the house does indeed unite, and can therefore be seen as both reflecting and creating Dai togetherness. However in order to understand the processes by which this occurs it is necessary to examine the dwelt structures themselves. As Carsten and Hugh-Jones (1995 : 21) have pointed out such an undertaking is lacking in the work of Levi-Strauss.

Cunningham (1964), in what Waterson (1990 : 171) has called 'one of the best known of all anthropological analyses of house symbolism and uses of space', made the point that built structures, such as those constructed by the Atoni (shifting cultivators of Indonesian Timor who speak a Malayo-Polynesian Language), could communicate cosmological knowledge. Space is divided to convey messages concerning the positionality of gender, rank and relatedness. Thus the house **"may be like a mechanical model of the cosmos as conceived by the people. The Atoni are explicitly concerned with 'order' as expressed in the house, and so much in their social and political order is related in form and naming to it. However, the references extend beyond the social order: space and time, man and animals, man and plants, and man and supernatural are conceived to be ordered by**

principals related to those expressed in the house, and symbols involving all these occur in the house” (Cunningham 1964: 66-67).

Bourdieu too has explained that architectural structures themselves both create and perpetuate social order. The material specifics of dwelt structures encapsulate symbolic knowledge, creating and recreating ways of togetherness. As he writes: **“Inhabited space - and above all the house - is the principal locus for the objectification of the generative schemes: and through the intermediary of the divisions and hierarchies it sets up between things, persons, and practices, the tangible classifying system continuously inculcates and reinforces the taxonomic principles underlying all arbitrary provisions of this culture”** (Bourdieu 1977 [1993] : 89). Bourdieu’s analysis of the Berber house uncovers some interesting associations and is based, understandably given his structuralist bent, on a series of oppositions such as male : female :: outside : inside :: light : shadow and so on (Bourdieu 1973 : 102). Bourdieu’s interpretation of his ethnography is highly sophisticated, for he goes on to expound on the fact that symbolic meanings shift contextually. He explains (Bourdieu 1973 : 104): **“It is therefore both true and false to say that the external world is opposed to the house as male is to female, or day is to night, or fire to water, etc., since the second term of these oppositions divides up each time into itself and its opposite”**. A sentiment further reflected for the Berber in such idioms as: ‘My brother is my enemy, my brother’s enemy is my enemy’. Bourdieu explains that here is an example of an “a : b ; b1 : b2” structure. This he says is one of the most powerful and yet simplistic structures to be employed in ‘mythico - ritual systems’. We may be able to question Bourdieu’s universalist and positivist stance, but it is interesting to note that like the house itself

this 'a : b ; b1 : b2' structure **"cannot oppose without simultaneously uniting"** (Bourdieu 1973 : 105)<sup>1</sup>.

Bourdieu's intricate and systematic structural analysis of the Kabyle (Berber) house has been criticised for presenting a picture divorced from the everyday experiences of the people who live in the structures he describes. Indeed both Bourdieu and Cunningham focus solely on cosmological order and the maintenance of social structure. Their work does not allow for contestation, or place enough emphasis on the changing and multivalent character of meanings. Nor does it leave room for agential creative individual dwellers. Carsten and S. Hugh Jones (1995 : 37, this point is also reiterated throughout the volume) warn against such a static approach and call for the recognition of the contradictory and multiple meanings which are often voiced by the occupants themselves. As they explain (1995 : 44-46) the use of a structuralist approach can mean that the **"multifaceted character of the house tends to get lost"**. They go on to say **"houses together with the people who inhabit them are mutually implicated in the process of living. Houses have many aspects. None of these can be understood as static pre-given structures, whether these are of the material kind or mental projections of a structuralist sort. They are born, live, grow old, die and decay... Houses, like bodies, are complex, multifaceted entities"**.

This chapter hopes to highlight the ways in which the Dai house is implicated in ways of togetherness. There are ways in which the house, like the teknonymy described in the last chapter, encourage local affinities. For the Dai, architecture and cosmological knowledge are intricately linked, what is more changes in their



architectural style should not be thought of as a simple case of cultural assimilation or ‘Hanification’. I shall therefore examine the changing meanings associated with the house in Xishuangbanna, given the rapidly changing population dynamics of the area and the ever expanding tourist industry. I shall also examine the notion of authenticity as exemplified by the dwelt structure known as the Phoenix stilt-bamboo house. A primary aim of this chapter is to explore how architectural style is being used, both by the Dai themselves and by outsiders, in the creation of an image of the Dai which contributes to the allure of Xishuangbanna as a desirable travel destination.

In Xishuangbanna at the time of my field work, Dai peoples lived in houses displaying a number of different architectural styles. What has become known as the ‘traditional’ Dai Phoenix stilt-bamboo<sup>2</sup> (*ganlan* 干栏 in Mandarin) house, a stilted structure described in the literature as constructed out of bamboo and wood<sup>3</sup> are now seen alongside constructions of brick or concrete. The degree to which these newer designs follow the pattern of the ‘stilt-bamboo house’ varies. Some of the brick houses have pillars made of bricks, while others are actually two storey, although the ground floor is used solely for storage<sup>4</sup>. Although as Grant Evans points out (Evans 2000 : 172) this space may well be used to house members of the Han Chinese ‘floating population’, especially in villages bordering on the capital Jinghong (see Chapter Two). This phenomenon causes the Dai to joke that where they used to house pigs they now house Han Chinese. Evans also makes the very serious point that many of the Dai are dependant on the rent that they receive from these paying guests (despite their lowly accommodation) and as such they are

vulnerable to the whims of the local government who may choose at any moment to crack down on this informal arrangement.

The variations of different house styles are explained below:

**1. Phoenix stilt-bamboo house:**



Fig. 6:1. Phoenix stilt-bamboo houses.

Wooden houses of this type have been much praised by Chinese academics for their design genius. The Chinese ethno-architect Zhu Liangwen (1992 : 76 - 78) outlines the possible origins of this design. He explains that the stilt houses are said by some to be based on earlier tree houses which appear in Dai legends. He goes on

to state however that the most popular account of the building of the first stilt house is to be found in the collection of Dai legends which recounts the genesis of their lived world. This text entitled: 'The Prosperity of Human Beings', contains a section about the role of the valiant leader Payashanmudi in the building of the first Phoenix stilt-bamboo house. It was as a result of a long and arduous process of trial and error that Payashanmudi was able to come up with a house design that could protect his people from tropical storms. Long ago there was a cataclysmic flood which killed many Dai. The population did however recover and before long their cave dwellings were over crowded. Filled with compassion for the suffering of his people Payashanmudi led them on a search for more suitable dwellings.

The first design that he produced was based on the shelter of taro leaves. He had noticed that rain drops slide off them leaving the ground beneath dry. His construction was based on four thin tree trunks and a roof interlaced with branches and thatched with taro leaves. Unfortunately this structure did not withstand the batterings of the next tropical storm and all those sheltering within were drenched.

Payashanmudi continued to look for a solution. The next design he proposed was called 'the seated dog'. This structure had a steeply sloping roof and was thatched with straw (so resembling a seated dog). This design was more successful and at first those sheltering within it were kept dry, but then the wind changed direction and once again all those beneath were soaked. Payashanmudi, by now furious, was determined to come up with a design that could protect his people. Indeed he displayed such indomitability that he moved the gods to aid him. Zhu Liangwen gives the following account of what happened next: **"One of these**

divinities transformed himself into a golden phoenix and launched into flight from high heaven down to the mortal world. As the god descended towards Shanmudi, he summoned up a mighty storm. Flying through this he floated to the ground, calling out, “O, Pa Ya Shanmudi. Look here and observe carefully how my wings resist the wind and shed the rains”. As he said this, the golden phoenix raised himself high on his slender legs and stretched out his neck, wings and tail to show how a roof could be made to shelter mankind against the inclemency of the elements” (Zhu Liangwen 1992 :78, see also Yun Gao 1998 : 142 - 143).

Provided below is a diagram, reproduced from the work of Zhu Liangwen, which shows the similarity between the bodily form of a phoenix and the structure of the stilt-bamboo house. Also provided below are diagrams produced by the Chinese ethno - architect, Jiang Gaochun, which show the capacity of this same design to give protection from the heat of the sun, as well as keeping the lived area well ventilated<sup>5</sup>.

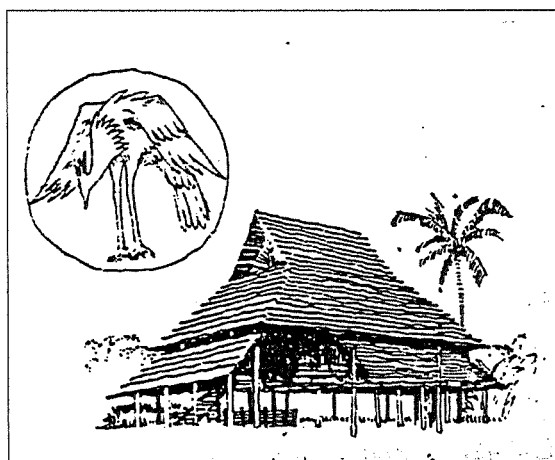


Fig. 6:2. Diagram showing the Phoenix House of the Dai, from Zhu Liangwen 1992 : 79.

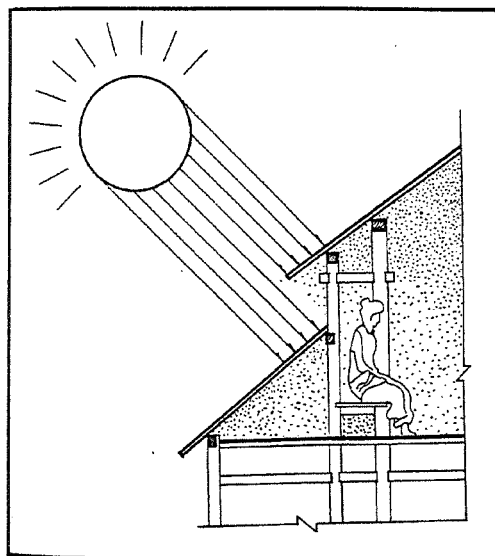


Fig. 6:3. Diagram showing how the Dai Phoenix house design protects inhabitants from the heat of the sun (from Jiang Gaochun 1997 :161).

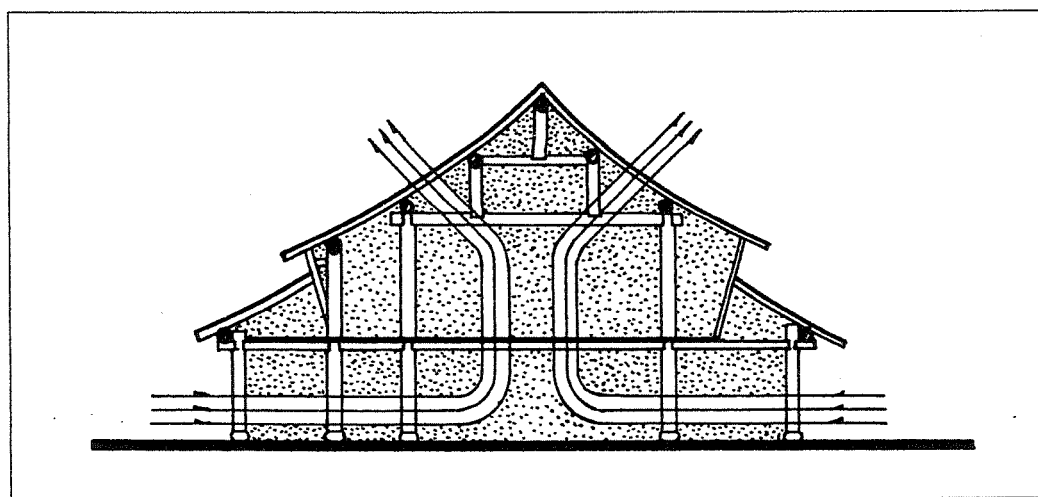


Fig. 6:4. Diagram showing the ventilation system (*tong feng* 通风) of the Dai Phoenix stilt-bamboo house (from Jiang Gaochun 1997 : 162).

## 2. Brick and wood house based on the Phoenix, stilt - bamboo house design.

Houses of this type take the same basic form as the stilt - bamboo house described above, they differ in the use of brick rather than wooden pillars. This is clearly illustrated in the photograph below, that depicts houses in a village of Jinghong county:



Fig. 6:5. Brick and wood house.

**3. Two storey brick house influenced by the Phoenix, stilt-bamboo house design.**

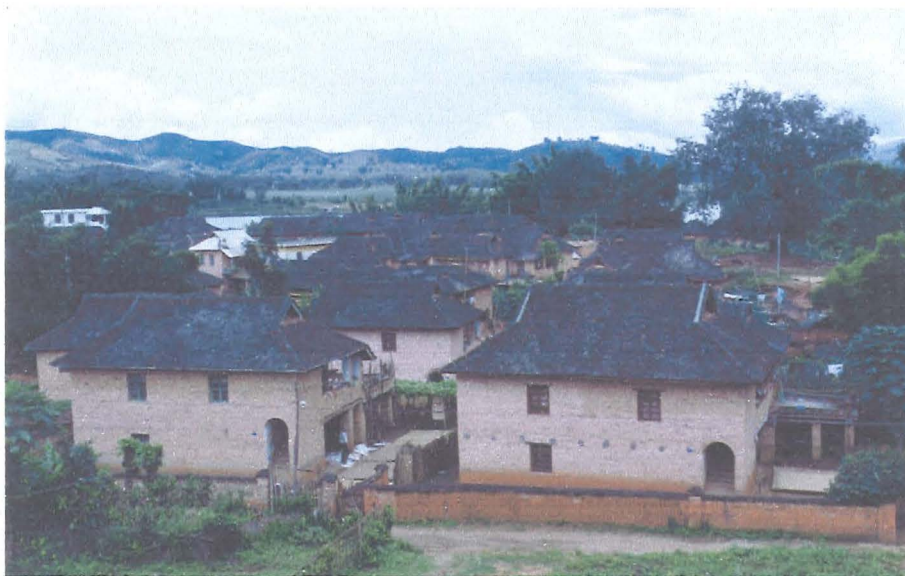


Fig. 6:6. Brick house.

This is the style of house in which I lived during my fieldwork. The reader can see from the photograph provided above that unlike the Phoenix stilt-bamboo house this style of house is two storey, with the lower floor being totally enclosed. However the family do not use this area for anything other than the storage of farm implements such as the tractor. Animals are not kept under the house, a practice

frowned upon by the hygiene conscious cadres sent down to the area since ‘liberation’ (being far from the City there are no Han migrants to house)<sup>6</sup>. Rather the pigs are kept in a specially constructed pen behind the house. There are various other features worth mentioning here:

- The gabled roof, similar in design to that found on the Phoenix, stilt- bamboo house, covers the veranda, living room, sleeping space and kitchen.
- In Phoenix stilt-bamboo houses the gabled roof covers the stairway, while in this brick design the stairway is totally enclosed.
- The exposed washing area is at a slightly lower level to the rest of the upper storey.
- The wall encloses the house compound, but none the less has gateways to the three neighbouring household compounds. The household itself forms a unit of action, however as the layout of the houses demonstrates the barriers around the houses are selectively permeable. There is a network of entrances and gateways to each of the houses from within the outer wall.
- Also note the layout of the houses, for they do not form straight lines, nor are houses situated directly opposite each other. This is in line with the two rules, governed by complex geomancy and notions of respect, that is when sleeping one’s head should face east and one should avoid pointing one’s feet towards another persons head, that Yun Gao points out in her 1998 thesis on ‘vernacular architecture’. Namely; **“two neighbouring houses can neither exactly face each other on the two sides of the road nor stand on the same line on the one side of the road”** (Yun Gao 1998 : 150).

#### 4. White tiles and blue glass: The future of Dai architecture?



Fig. 6:7. White tile and blue glass new house style.

This style of house causes distress amongst tourists, it was the rantings of one such troubled traveller that inspired the phrase ‘white tiles and blue glass’. He explained that the building of such monstrosities was an unforgivable Hanification of the area, something which must be stopped if the Dai culture were to be saved. At the time I refrained from arguing with him but here I shall do my best to explain why this is not the case. It must first be noted that it is the Dai themselves who chose this style of house. Moreover there is still much about this design that is influenced by the Phoenix stilt-bamboo style. For instance only the upper storey is used, while the lower is left for the storage of farm equipment. There is a veranda on which people can gather, and an area which can be used for washing. By far the biggest room of the house is the living room which is flanked on either side by the kitchen and the sleeping rooms. There is however some innovation in the division of sleeping space. Unlike the Phoenix stilt-bamboo house, the sleeping space of the children and adults has been divided (see the floor plan provided below). This nevertheless does not change the overall arrangement of the rooms (it must be remembered that in the Phoenix stilt-bamboo style houses the sleeping room always has two doorways, one



used by the elders and the other by junior members of the household). It is this sleeping area that will be the focus of the next section for it is arguably the core of the household.

### **Belonging and relatedness**

For the Dai, as with us all, ways of relatedness, ways of being together are multiple. In the Dai world there are levels of togetherness, so that ways of being with non related but fellow villagers differ from those between related neighbours and so on. As with Tambiah's data<sup>7</sup> concerning Northern Thai peoples (Tambiah 1973: 132) houses are grouped in clusters or compounds enclosed by a fence or wall. Although members of household clusters are often socially close, spending most evenings together in one or other of their houses<sup>8</sup>, chatting, laughing and watching television or video compact disks, the most profound intimacy is usually expressed among those living in the same house.

The Dai use the term *Huen / Hun* to describe the house, a term that refers both to the material fabric and to the people who live within. Freedman (1969: 13 cited in Knapp 1999 : 11) has written that for the Han Chinese "a house is a family", and indeed the Dai also stress the closeness of people who live together<sup>9</sup>. During my fieldwork I made the mistake of asking my young host (the in-married spouse of the household) when was she going to return 'home' to visit her parents. She replied that she was home, and laughing explained that she was going to visit her parents' 'home' at the end of the week. Thus I would argue that the notion of 'home' for the Dai is fundamentally intertwined with the on-going household group. The

architecture of the Dai house and those that live within it interact in such a way as to create a sense of belonging, a process that will be explained below. This sense of belonging is always in flux, for it is a process of becoming. This is demonstrated by the fact that the group to whom one feels one belongs, the place one calls 'home' can change. I am reminded here of the work of Nigel Rapport and Andrew Dawson, who write that: **"One is at home when one inhabits a cognitive environment in which one can undertake the routines of daily life and through which one finds one's identity best mediated - and homeless when such a cognitive environment is eschewed"** (A Dawson & N Rapport 1998 : 10).

The levels of togetherness in the Dai world are imbued with a liquidity made obvious to me as I experienced the 'routines of daily life' in Mengxiang. Friends and relatives often came to stay from other villages, and days are marked by continual visiting. People gather to sit and chat on the verandas of each others houses. Friends and relatives come and go as they please and, depending on the personal ties to the householders, wander in and out of the house as well. However this chapter argues that each Dai person moves within this fluid conviviality from what I have come to understand as a 'core of belonging'. This core of belonging is reinforced by numerous aspects of the Dai lived world, including the architecture of the house, daily commensality and the teknonymy discussed in Chapter Five. In a similar way belonging, not only to a household group but to the Daile community, is created through an ongoing process of manipulation and acceptance of those aspects discussed in this thesis – such as tattoo, images of the feminine, language etc.

The core of belonging of a household consists of those people who spend most (if not all) their nights together in the sleeping room of the house. Each couple has their own bed surrounded by a mosquito net (often an opaque cotton box but increasingly semi-transparent nylon), but there are no solid partitions between the beds. Unmarried couples and those who feel they need more privacy can spend some nights in the working huts set up in the fields or near the fish tanks (*tian peng* 田棚 in Mandarin, see Chapter Five).

In many Dai houses the beds are arranged in order of generational seniority. However this was not the case in the house where I carried out my fieldwork, as the youngest daughter slept between her parents and grandparents. Although once again, as Tambiah (1973: 135) has pointed out, there are always two doors to the sleeping room, one for the use of the parents and the other for the children and in-married spouse. As in North Thailand the younger generation do not usually use the door which leads to the elders' area of the sleeping room. If there is a teenage daughter who is still unmarried, an elder son would be encouraged to sleep in a separate room outside of this sleeping area. However I would still include him in such a core of belonging as he would be free to come and go from this area during the day, something which other visitors to the house, related or not would be unable to do (see floor plans provided below), with the possible exception of children who used to live there but have since moved away for marriage, employment or education. For example when the parents of the daughter-in-law of the household where I lived came to stay, they like me, would sleep on piles of sleeping mats arranged on the floor of the living room, and did not venture behind the screen. However when their daughter returned to her natal home she would spend her nights in the sleeping

area<sup>10</sup>. To reiterate, my hosts' household consisted of an elderly couple, their second son, his wife and their daughter, and another boy from his (the second son's) first marriage who was also there intermittently. It was only these few who were allowed into the sleeping room. Next door lived the elderly couple's eldest son and his wife, their eldest son, who was married and had two young children (a total of six people). Once again it was only these few who were allowed behind the partition<sup>11</sup>.

My notion of a 'core of belonging' although not based on rights and obligations, has much in common with the term 'degrees of interiority' (Tambiah's 1973, Turton 1978 : 121) adopted by Southeast Asia specialists. Recently the work of Yun Gao has suggested that this "principal of interiority", which she claims is apparent in both vernacular and temple architecture, can be understood as **"the further into the house one moves, the greater the rights and obligations one has"** (Yun Gao 1998 : 152). Yun Gao takes this notion from Tambiah who explains that for the Northern Thai, the sleeping room was the most intimate and most sacred place in the house. It is the site of the ancestral shrine, and so those who have not been introduced to the ancestors may not enter lest they cause offence. In recognition of the spiritual closeness of the ancestors in this part of the Northern Thai house the floor is raised, so that members of the household have to step up onto this area (Tambiah 1973 : 134 - 135). In Xishuangbanna the sleeping area, even of new houses, was indeed imbued with the presence of spirits, as such it was partitioned off, and only householders were allowed inside. As Yun Gao explains the **"bedroom is the most important space in the house, both in the sense of privacy and sacredness"** (Yun Gao 1998 : 127).

The doors to the sleeping room are usually kept shut, except for very short periods of time when, for example, someone may be looking for something from inside (all the family's money and other treasured items, such as condensed milk and biscuits imported from Thailand or Qing Dynasty 清朝 silver coins were kept behind this partition)<sup>12</sup>. Below are provided floor plans of each of the houses shown in the photographs above (I have not included the brick and wood house based on the Phoenix stilt-bamboo house design as they tend to have the same room layout as the Phoenix stilt-bamboo houses themselves). It must be remembered that the floor plans represent houses I have visited. Moreover, as no two houses are exactly the same these plans should not be considered absolute types.

a. Phoenix bamboo style house, Ganlanba (Mengham):

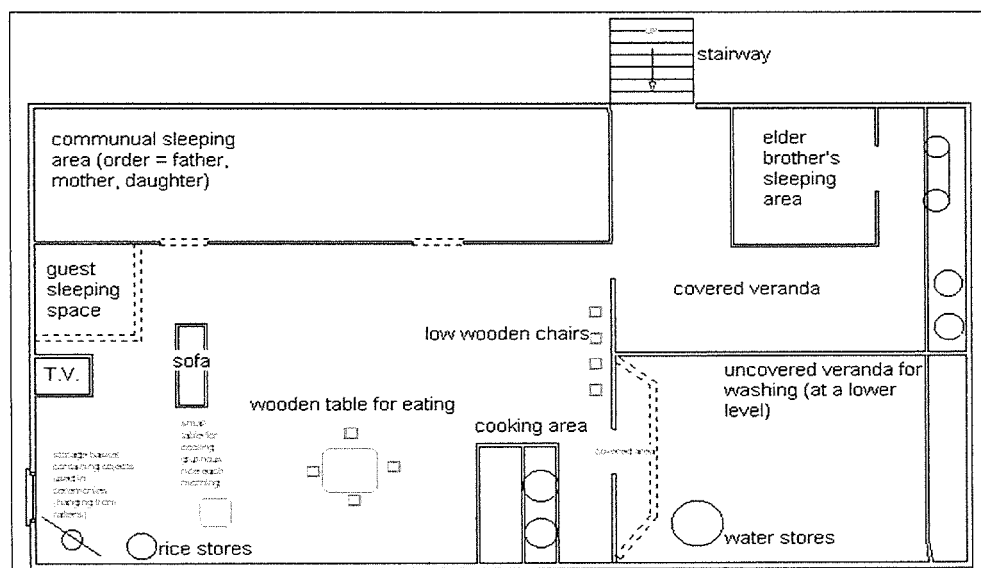


Fig. 6:8. Phoenix bamboo house plan.

- b. Two storey brick house influenced by the Phoenix, stilt-bamboo house design:

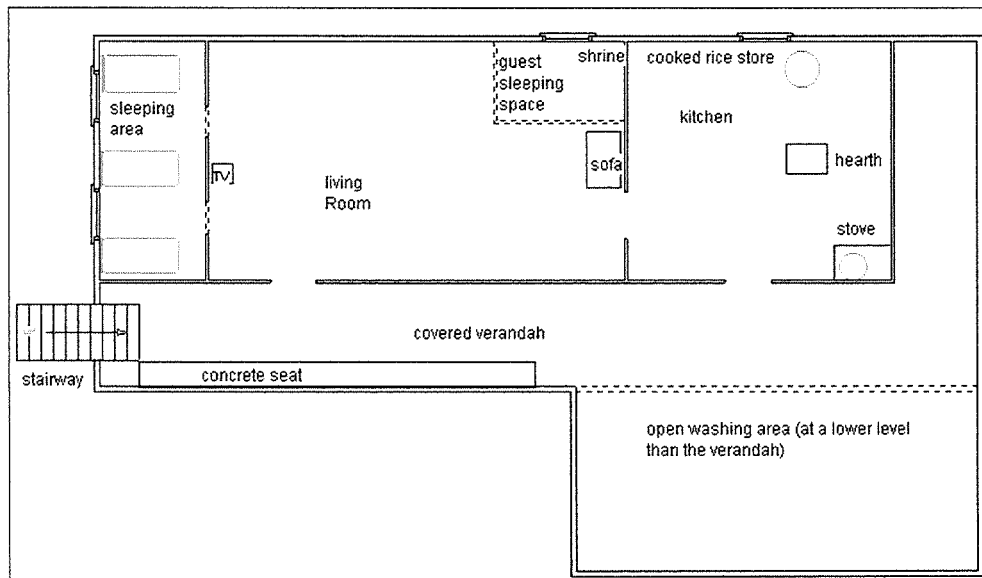


Fig.6:9.Brick house plan.

- c. White tiles and blue glass:

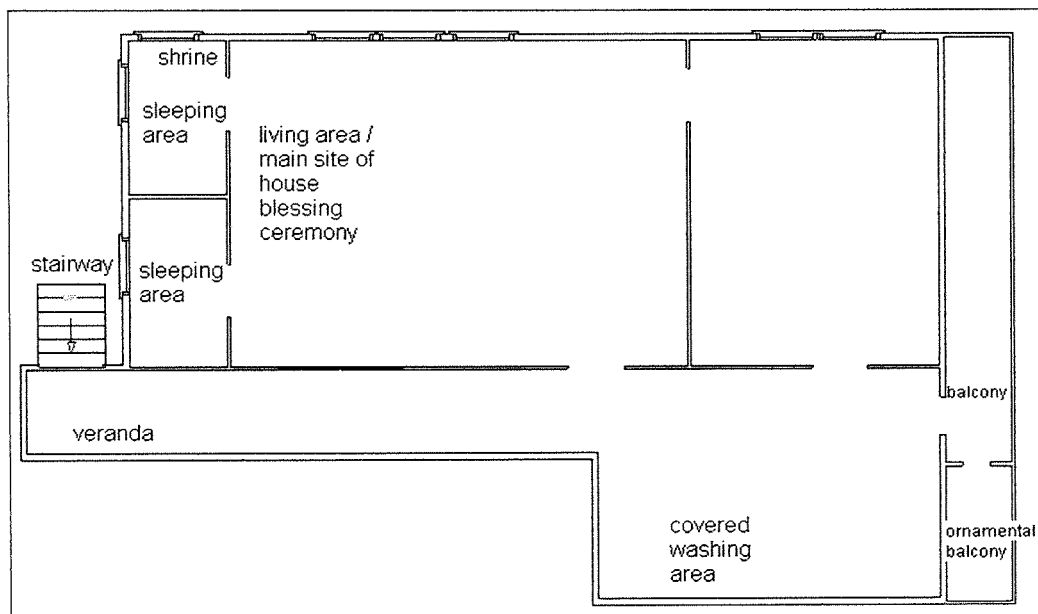


Fig. 6:10.White tiles and blue glass house plan

Having examined the layout of Dai houses, with the sleeping area providing a core of belonging imbued with spiritual presence (note also the presence of shrines in the living space which mean that this area too is protected), I shall now turn to talk about ways of protecting lived spaces and the cosmological significance of other structures in the Dai dwelt environment.

### **The Dai Dwelt Environment and the Spirit World.**

**“Houses are dynamic entities. Their vitality comes from a number of sources - most obviously from the people who live in them but also from the materials used in building, from life-giving rituals, or from the movement of the heavenly bodies which often determine their orientation....houses are far from being merely static material structures. They have animate qualities; they are endowed with spirits or souls, and are imagined in terms of the human body”** (Carsten & Hugh-Jones. 1995:37).

Turton, for the Northern Thai, and Yun Gao, for the Dai of Dehong and Banna both provide detailed accounts of the ‘ritual’ processes by which Phoenix bamboo style houses become imbued with vitality, and can be seen as fundamentally linked to wider cosmological forces. These include offerings to guardian spirits, exorcism of the earth or offerings to the *nagas* (serpentine dragon like creatures who live under the earth) and tying the soul (*Guan / Kuan*<sup>13</sup>) to the principal posts of the new house (Turton 1978 : 114 - 119, Yun Gao 1998 : 106 - 114 / 137-138).

As I was not lucky enough to witness the house building ceremonies for Phoenix stilt-bamboo style dwelling I shall not describe these ritual practices here. It should be understood that the building of new houses often includes rituals adapted to the new materials, however even when this is not the case I would argue that the houses are still imbued with cosmological vitality. In trying to understand the ebullient Dai dwelt environment an important initial undertaking is to look at the inhabitants of this environment. It should not be forgotten that, as explained in Chapter Five, among these inhabitants number spirits and ghosts. These beings inhabit the domain not only of the house (*hun / huen*), but also of the village (*ban*) and the local district<sup>14</sup> (*muang / meng*), whether the houses in the village are of Phoenix stilt-bamboo or Blue Glass and White Tile style<sup>15</sup>. As well as these tutelary spirits there are also wandering spirits from which people need to be protected.

I have explained earlier in the thesis that ghosts can come into being on the advent of a 'bad death', after which the souls (*Guan*) of a person can separate. My interlocutor explained that ghosts and ancestors live in another world. Their world is like ours but their day is our night and concomitantly our day is their night. Candles should be burnt when making offerings to inhabitants of this other realm because at the time of the ceremonies it is dark in their world, and the light from the flames enables them to find their relatives. Among those spirits who do not get reborn there are both benevolent and dangerous ghosts. I was told that most benevolent ghosts go up to heaven whilst some malicious ghosts, rather than remain in the spirit world, go down to hell. Harmful ghosts can also be found wandering in cemeteries. However for a short period after death all souls wander, lost and crying, not aware of where



they are. This is why one should not cry when a person dies lest you attract the ghost's attention and they recognise you and choose to stay despite their spectral form. After a seven day period it is said that the 'Old Man God' (*Meng Fa*) gives the souls medicine, allowing them to forget their villages and cope with being dead.

The living need to be protected from the dead. This is because the living are constantly offending the dead through their inattention to them. The living do not mean to do this but rather are hampered by the fact that although the dead have the capability of seeing the living, the living are unable to see the dead. Thus all ghosts are potentially furious with people and their anger may induce in them the will to cause illness. One young man told me that this situation came about because the 'Old Man God' '*Meng Fa*', believing that there would be land disputes if the living could see the dead who also dwelt on their land, thought it best to prevent those still living from being aware of those already dead.

Thus, although one could say that the Dai envision a vertical cosmology, with heaven above, hell below and the peopled world in the middle, the boundaries between the levels are somewhat permeable, for ghosts can also inhabit the peopled world. Moreover as I have explained the last chapter; '**ghosts are people and people are ghosts**'. Thus any distinction between these categories is necessarily perspectival.

There are two main ways of protecting the villagers from harmful spirits and ghosts, one is the strategic placing of spirit barriers (*liao / talio* in Thai, Turton 2000, *daliao* 达辽 Mandarin from the Thai) and the other is making offerings at various

shrines, including those dedicated to past leaders of the area, the ancestors (at the *Xiuban* in Daile) and perhaps most importantly those at the village heart (*Zaiban* in Daile), explained below.

*Liao*: (See photographs below)



Fig. 6:11. *Liao*.

These spirit barriers are made from six sticks (*dok*) - interweaved and tied together with fine grass thread. They are able to distinguish between ghosts and people, luck and misfortune, fortuity and calamity so preventing evil substance from entering places protected by them (Jiang Gaochun 1997 : 186 -187). Only men make them, although I was explicitly told by one young woman that this is due to a lack of will rather than ability on the part of young women<sup>16</sup>. A young male interlocutor told me that he was never formally taught to make *liao*, rather he had just copied his father's technique. These talismans are found above door ways and adorning village gates. Every year *liao* are also placed in paddy fields, which takes place once the replanting of the rice seedlings has taken place. This practice is carried out by each household, and is usually the responsibility of an elder, although in the house where I lived the old man was too sickly for the walk down to the fields. Thus his son Aizai had taken over. Each year Aizai goes to see the *Bozhan* (ritual specialist - a eminent

but retired abbot who not only has a firm grasp of Buddhist teachings but is also a specialist in interpreting the almanac) to be told the most appropriate day for placing the *liao*.

The *liao* placed in the fields only have one layer of interwoven sticks but those woven for house boundaries are more elaborate with seven layers. The layers are interwoven to produce a complicated lattice work. It was explained to me that the fields need less protection than the house as the house has people living in it, so it does not matter if the *liao* placed in the fields are less intricate<sup>17</sup>.

Insight into the protective capability of the *liao* may be gained by exploring the work of Alfred Gell<sup>18</sup>. Gell has reported the magical use of intricate patterns in many parts of the world to trap demonic powers (e.g. Celtic Knot Work or the Indian *Kolam*, sand designs produced each morning by women on the threshold floor. Interestingly these Indian designs are associated with the auspicious *naga* -serpent deity). Gell's argument is a complex one, with a foundation in cognitive psychology. Put simply Gell saw pattern as 'tacky' that is sticky or attractive. As patterns attract the eye they also attract the attention of the power it has been designed to protect against. Such designs, stand **"for the idea of (demonic) attention being drawn into the pattern, being tantalized by it, while being thus rebuffed and rendered impotent"** (Gell. 1998:90). Using this theory it is tempting to suggest that the *liao* may work by mesmerizing wandering ghosts with their intricate pattern and then ensnaring them.

This dual power of charms to attract and protect has also been noted by Stafford (2000). Stafford provides many examples of how Chinese households ‘attract the good’ and ‘deflect the bad’. Closed doors prevent the entry of evil but open doors too can provide protection (as the gate way to Mengxiang was open, and yet the presence of the *liao* offered protection). Thus red thread, Daoist talismans and brightly coloured charms (mainly produced for *Duanwujie* 端午节 Dragon Boat Festival, held on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month) adorn many doorways (Stafford 2000 : 94 - 95). These offer protection from evil (*bixie* 辟邪) lurking outside the doorways but also encourage luck and helpful ancestors to enter.

Of all the built structures in the village one of the most noteworthy is the ‘*Zaiban*’ the village heart. This simple, grey concrete shrine was the site of important annual rites held to ensure the safety and happiness of the villagers. I include a discussion of it here to demonstrate the importance of the spirits called upon in these rites within the Dai lived world and to show the impossibility of assuming a separation between the material structures found in the village and the cosmological energies which permeate it.

The rites are carried out on behalf of the entire village by my host Aizai. Ordinarily the blessing would be the responsibility of his father but, as expressed above sadly he is too frail and sickly for the responsibility. The blessing occurs once every year, in the eighth month of the Dai calendar (June in the Gregorian calendar). Each year, as the time approaches Aizai once again makes a special visit to the *Bozhan* (ritual specialist) who consults the almanac to decide upon an appropriate date. When deciding, the specialist must also take into account the weather. Once

the day has been set, the *Bozhan* uses the loud speaker system to announce it to the village.

The ceremony takes place in the very early morning, but before it can take place Aizai must accumulate four chickens each over half a kilogram in weight (1 *jin* 斤). Watched by the gathered villagers, Aizai slaughters these birds at the site of the village heart. The chicken blood is allowed to ooze into the ground in offering. The carcasses are then scorched and cleaned using fire after which the tips of the wings are severed and left for the ancestors, the rest of the carcasses are taken back to be consumed by the family. Once the carcasses have been cleansed Aizai utters the blessings. He explained that he could not remember exactly what he said each year. There was not a set rule but rather he just ‘used his mouth’ to ask the village spirits and *Meng Fa* (Old man god, the Dai in Mengxiang used the Mandarin term heavenly god, *Tian Wang* 天王 when telling me about this deity) for protection during the coming year. Once the blessings have been given, everybody goes home. By this time every household in the village has donated 10 *kuai* (about 80p). This money is used to buy vegetables and other ingredients for a feast and in the evening the whole village came to Aizai’s house to celebrate. When my interlocutor said ‘whole village,’ he was referring interestingly only to the male inhabitants. One female friend of mine explained that such gatherings were no fun and could also be dangerous due to all the drunk men lurching around. These celebrations have a tendency to become unruly with drinking going on well into the night.

The layout of the village intimately reflects Dai cosmology. There are four gates, each of which is protected by a *liao* spirit barrier (see photographs above).

*Zaiban* and *Xiuban* shrines are placed at the base of auspicious Bo trees. Other cosmologically significant structures in the village include wells and pagodas. Wells which fall outside household compounds are elaborately decorated to attract benevolent spirits. Mirrors are also incorporated into these structures as protection, ghosts catching sight of their own hideous reflections will scare themselves enough to flee, forgetting any harmful intentions. The village where I carried out my field work, Mengxiang, lies at the bottom of a small hill, on the summit of which sits a temple and two pagodas. These emanate with spiritual vitality and are attributed with flesh, bones and a heart (Kiyoshi 2000 : 129).

The eldest pagoda in Mengxiang village temple is known to be more than three hundred years old and is renown in the area for protecting the village - even against Japanese bombs. The golden pagoda on the other hand was recently constructed by the august monk Zhao Wenzhom from Myanmar. He is revered throughout Xishuangbanna with many Dai households including his image on offering shrines<sup>19</sup>. This may well be the result of the influence of monks from Myanmar as the border was only thirty or so miles from my field site. Moreover the head abbot of the village temple was himself from Myanmar. The villagers assured me that Zhao Wenzhom could fly (although the Jinghong Central Temple monks scoffed at this suggestion). He is also said to have constructed the village golden pagoda in a staggering seven hours, between ten in the evening and five the next morning. The pagoda does not house very many relics in its heart area, only some jewels, gold and Chinese Qing Dynasty 清朝 (1644-1911) coins contributed by the villagers.

Each year celebrations are held for the pagodas in Xishuangbanna. Each has a different tale of origin, take for example this story referring to the construction of the largest pagoda in Banna - *Tatchaimengchang*:

It is said that 2000 years ago there were two eagles, one which flew from the east and one that flew from the west. They simultaneously caught sight of a green jewel. They jealously fought over it, both pecking at it as they flew. Below them sat a monk, far advanced down the path towards enlightenment, who had a peaceful heart. He told the birds that they should not fight, that the stone could not belong to either of them. They were afraid of the monk and let the stone fall. The emerald fell, and this beautiful precious stone became embedded deep in the earth. The monk then lit a fire and poured water into the ground (a blessing ceremony) for the birds (I was told as this was narrated to me not to forget how hard it was to light a fire 2000 years ago, with no matches and only flint). The monk then built a pagoda for the stone.

Today there is still a pagoda on this site, but now that people are wealthier, the pagoda is bigger and more beautiful to reflect their change of fortune. To understand the rebuilding of the pagoda it is worth noting that Theravada Buddhism teaches that it is more meritorious to rebuild religious architecture than it is to preserve the old.

As the presence in the village of pagoda and spirit shrines, cannot be understood without situating them in their cosmological setting, so house designs need to be seen as embodying more than the physical materials used in their construction. The following ethnographic scene from my own fieldwork further exemplifies the ways in which cosmological notions of the house are experienced by the Dai people.

### **Cosmological Aspects of the House: Aishuai's**

#### **New House Blessing**

3-5/4/98.

This consisted of three days of celebration dancing and singing known as '*hein num mai*' in Dai or '*shang xin fang* 上新房' in Banna *hua* 版纳话 (local Mandarin dialect). The first night of the celebration was marked by singing which lasted until three in the morning. The guests at this evening meal were all young, that is not yet of elder status. Although people continued picking at the bitter vegetable and spicy pork dishes (a pig had been especially slaughtered to feed the guests) which had been provided by the host family until well into the night, the focal point of the proceedings was not the food but rather the microphone which was passed around the male and female guests. The revellers sang solos, each following a formula but adding their own improvisations onto



it. As the ceremonies for the house blessing had not yet taken place the men were sitting, drinking powerful spirit, in the main downstairs room of the house - a room which would, after the ceremony, be used only for storage. The women were gathered in a small adjoining room towards the back of the house. There were fifteen women present, their ages ranging from the early twenties to late thirties. Unlike the men they were all sitting around one table, drinking only sweet wine and tea.

Despite the apparent drunkenness everyone listened to the solos quietly, so showing respect. Only rarely did anyone look directly at a singer. Appreciation was demonstratively shown by both men and women, loudly shouting '*gha kha shwae*' (in Daile) during any (hesitant or purposeful) pause. At one point a young woman from Mengyang (many kilometres to the Northeast), who had recently married into the village, began to sing. She was very nervous and complained through an uncertain smile that she had a 'jumping heart'. Her young husband left his friends drinking and came to the doorway to gently tell her not to be nervous. Everyone shouted '*gha kha shwae*' particularly vigorously during pauses in her singing to both encourage her and to prove how much they were enjoying her performance. The expression '*gha kha shwae*' is hard to define, in this context it was used as an assertion of happiness and

approval. To digress slightly, this expression is also used by Jinghong City dwellers of all nationalities as a local version of the Mandarin expressions '*gan bei*' 干杯 (literally dry glass that is cheers) or '*gan yi kou*' 干一口 (literally dry one mouthful - used by those who don't want to get into excessive or competitive drinking bouts). This can be seen as another example of things Dai coming to stand for things of Xishuangbanna.

Returning to the first night of celebrations for Aishuai's house blessing, it should be noted that of the guests, there were nearly twice as many men as women. I asked the women why this was so, and they explained that most of the women at the dinner lived in the village, whereas many of the male guests had travelled from nearby towns and villages. My friend Yiwan, expressing some displeasure stated: "Oh the women are at home, their husbands don't bring them with them to play".

The preparations for the next day's celebrations started at dawn. When I arrived at Aishuai's house he was still in bed. The alcohol in his system allowed him to sleep through the clattering made by the women clearing up from the night's festivities. I wandered back to my host's, and half an hour later Aishuai's sister's daughter, an impish five year old,

came to pick me up and walk me to the site of the cow slaughter. The site was behind the village on the narrow path between two large fish pools, and we were noticeably the only women present. The sun was just coming up, its rays defused by the morning mist staining the sky blood red. By the time we arrived the cow was having its throat slit with a machete; it was then hit over the head with a hammer three times and immediately butchered. On returning to the village, one young woman asked me whether I had been afraid of what I had seen. I said no - but she said she had been afraid to go. Why? I asked. "Because the cow was going to die", she answered.

It was the young men, sitting in the cool shade of an especially erected canopy in the courtyard of Aishuai's house, who beat the beef into mince, mixing generous amounts of chilli and garlic into it as they went. The chilli had been fried first in a huge vat over the fire, producing nauseous fumes which filled the courtyard, choking all present. The reeking smoke was met with ironic comments about how fragrant the chilli was, causing people to break into giggles all around me. Whilst the men were preparing the beef, the women were busy packing cooked glutinous rice into little pink, yellow and blue plastic bags. A single bag would later be placed next to everyone's bowl. During the meal I noticed

that occasionally a bag would be shared by two people, but this only happened if the pair were not hungry and were close relatives or friends. This rice was presented to Aishuai by relatives living in the village.

At about 11.00 am, venerable old men began gathering in groups, either at the bottom of the stairs or just outside the back gate of Aishuai's house under a *Bodhi* (*Bo-tree* / *Ficus religiosa*), readying themselves for the festival that was about to begin. Before long women of all ages arrived, each carrying an enamel bowl filled with bottles of beer and money. Those who had close ties of relatedness to Aishuai also bore new quilts and blankets. Downstairs Aishuai's mother arranged special items on two low round wicker tables. These were then adjusted and added to by an elder female relative, who had already adopted the white head-dress of the most senior women (unlike Aishuai's mother). The two tables were laden down with sweets, bananas, tapers, root vegetables and medicine, all placed on silk. White cloth and a ball of thread used in blessings was also placed on one of the tables. A bowl of chicken pieces and a whole baby cooked chicken covered with a green banana leaf roughly sown together to form a cone, and decorated with pink bougainvillea flowers, was the most eye catching of the items on the trays<sup>20</sup>. Later during the ceremony, when it was given in offering to the

house spirits (*phii hen*), the leaves were removed by a male elder to reveal the chicken.

An offering shrine to the house spirits was situated by the back gate of the household compound. The oblations were placed on a plastic tray and consisted of alcohol, grain, cooked glutinous rice and tapers. When the ceremony was about to begin, the tray was placed next to a green glass (*Lancangjiang*, 澜沧江 Mekong the local brewery) beer bottle on the bottom step of the house. The two wicker tables, (mentioned above), were placed on ground level. Aishuai quietly swung a bag and a sword over his arm and went to the bottom step where his father was waiting. His father then lit two tapers and attached them, one on either side, to the bottom step. The beer bottle did not in fact contain beer but rather a colourless corn spirit produced in the village. A glass of this potent liquor was measured out and then poured onto the ground of the first step - an oblation for the ancestors I was told. Aishuai's father then recited sutras and other blessings.

Aishuai and his father then made their way up the stairs followed by those carrying the wicker tables of offerings. Next followed the other male venerable elders present. These male elders were followed in

turn by those women who had brought the enamel bowls brimming over with offerings. Next to make their way up the stairs were two men in their thirties carrying a bamboo pole between them. Swinging from the pole were the severed heads of the pig and cow slaughtered for the occasion, and some crumpled plastic bottles containing colourless spirit. Finally the youngest of the guests went upstairs. All the gifts and offerings were laid out in main upstairs room opposite the venerable male elders, who were by now positioned under the window sitting on newly bought plastic mats under a shrine to Zhao Wenzhom. The room sparkled with the vivid colours of the women in their head scarves and sarongs, stunning against the grey and navy blues of the elders' outfits sitting facing them.

It was the eldest male members of the village who blessed the householder couple that day, and interestingly not the official head of the village. Aishuai and his wife knelt opposite the old men, hands in prayer position. Tears were flowing down the cheeks of Aishuai's wife. Everyone else was chatting away and laughing happily, making such a din that her sobs were inaudible. Blessings and sutras were recited by the three eldest men. Then, starting with Aishuai, the same three elders tied white string around each of the couple's wrists so that man and wife

each ended up with three knotted bits of thread around each of their wrists. The sweets that were on the wicker trays were then thrown in the air for the women and children to catch. There were joyful smiles and a giggling commotion as the treats flew through the air. Aishuai was then instructed to dip the vegetables on the tray into vegetable oil and throw them into the sleeping room where a shrine had been set up.

Throughout all of this Aishuai's wife continued crying, her eyes were so red and swollen I thought she had been punched. However watching her I began to think that her tears were those of happiness, that she was overcome by the enormity of having built this new house. But I was later told that her tears were the result of the grief she felt at the loss of her father who had died only a couple of months before. It was the presence of all the venerable elders on that day that reminded her of her profound and still unhealed loss; her father should have been there to bless the house.

Whilst the couple were being blessed Aishuai's father was conscientiously noting down (in Daile script) exactly what each person had given the household. I was told that this was just for remembrance

sake. Once he had finished he also blessed the couple by tying white thread around each of their wrists.

Once the blessings were over the older men stayed upstairs to eat a meal consisting primarily of garlic and chilli beef with glutinous rice. The young women went down stairs and had a similar meal at tables placed as they had been for the singing the night before. The elder women however went to their respective homes to eat. Later in the afternoon the singing started up again and went on throughout the night. This singing was to carry on until well into the night of the third day of the celebration, even though all the ceremonies were now over. Singing is an indispensable part of the house blessing celebration. The louder the singing resonates through the village the better. That afternoon my friends laughed as they warned me that, just like the night before, the amplifiers had been set so loud that no one in the village was going to get any sleep that night.

The final day of the celebration saw another feast. I was told that, using leftover meat, a meal was to be prepared for Han guests (friends, local officials and business partners).



This celebration took place in the ‘white tiles and blue glass’ structure shown above. Thus showing that the new house style in no way encourages the occupants to live a ‘Hanified’ life style. It is especially interesting to note the shrine to Zhao Wenzhom and the throwing of the vegetables into the sleeping room where a shrine had been put together. Even during the ceremony only the householder, Aishuai, entered this area.

### **The Dwelling in Ideological Dialogue**

The house blessing also serves to instruct the householders, in this case Aishuai and his wife, in the correct way to live in the house. During the blessing ceremony the elders explain how to live in harmony, as is expected of the householders. Of a similar ceremony held in Northern Thailand Turton writes:

**“Not to put too fine a point on it, the elders, who represent the highest political authority at the village level, are granting the house, and the jural and economic rights that go with it to the new occupants” (Turton 1978 : 119).**

Turton also makes the point (1978 : 123) that the house and house symbolism can be seen as a locus of relationships, not only of those within the house or even the village, but also what he calls ‘nature’ or the wider cosmological context. Thus he explains that there are three sets of political / spatial relationship involved in house symbolism, namely:

- Relationships, between social units within the village community sphere.
- Relationships between these units and the highest social unit, the State.

- Relationships between social units and ‘nature’, so to speak, the material world which the social units transform in production.

Thus Turton gives voice to the politics of the house and exposes its position as part of ideological power plays. As he clearly states; **“I want to consider the house as a unit in a set of political spaces, and architectural symbolism not merely as a system of classification but as part of ideology”** (Turton 1978 : 114). Haagensen (1982 : 113 - 114), also working in North Thailand, explains that any study of architectural forms should include an assessment of its ‘ideological functioning’. It seems that the ideological use of the house can be seen as dialogical, with ideological forms and meanings being appropriated and re-appropriated by both sides. To explain I shall cite a rather long extract from Turton’s work. Please remember he is referring to Thailand’s feudal past.

**“On the one hand there is the establishment and development of local communities directly appropriating from nature, so to speak, with their own ideas of legitimate ownership and attempted control over supernaturally granted benefits of fertility and so on. On the other hand there is the process of their incorporation within higher and wider political units with a somewhat different idea of ownership and access to supernatural power. In these processes ancestral spirits would appear to have been transformed into spirits of small localities wider than original kin groups, and these spirits have in turn been transformed into either royal ancestors and / or spirits of social units subordinate to a higher social level, in turn represented by a higher order cult.**

At the same time there would appear to be a certain amount of *two-way appropriation of ideological forms*” (Turton 1978 : 130).

Bearing in mind the dialogic nature of the claiming of images and meaning of the house, there are two aspects of its use in Xishuangbanna that I feel need to be illuminated here. The first concerns the house and house building in China’s contemporary politico-economic context. The second orbits notions of authenticity and the creation of Xishuangbanna as an alluring scenic spot.

Following the harsh excesses of the Cultural Revolution and the eventual rise to power of Deng Xiaoping in 1978 the agricultural communes began to disband. From the end of the 1970’s large units of production were broken up. Both the management of and income from land were redistributed to farm households, producing a smallholder production system known as the ‘household responsibility system’. This meant that although land was still collectively owned, people were often free to build on it. These changes have led to house building becoming the ‘principal manifestation of private wealth’ (Feuchtwang 1996 : 169). Pressures from the ever increasing population and the need for secure investment means that there **“has been a craze of house building in the last decade”** (Feuchtwang 1998 : 67). Writing on the house and family in rural China, Li Weisha has explained the phenomenon in the following terms: **“Because land is collectively owned in rural areas and individuals only have use rights for it, the house is an important part of the family property”** (Li Weisha 1999 : 236). In the same volume Li Zongmin makes a similar point: **“The housing boom took place in part because of pent-up demand for housing but also, to an important extent, because the house is the**

major capital item that is privately owned. Investment in houses is a secure, safe way of saving. Houses become a symbol of the living standard of the household” (Li Zongmin 1999 : 253). From the early eighties the spiralling need for housing in China as a whole led to demand far exceeding possible production. The dissatisfaction caused by this situation has been graphically represented by this cartoon drawn by the satirical artist Hua Junwu (1991 : 227):

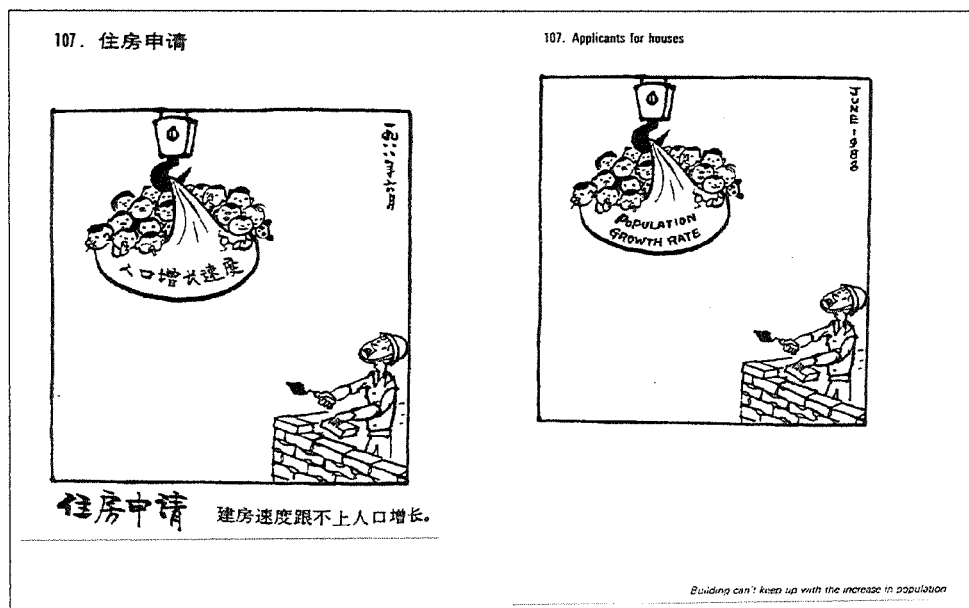


Fig. 6:12.Hua Junwu cartoon.

The recent trends in house building in Xishuangbanna (the increasing size of the houses being built and the incorporation of new facilities such as blue glass windows, running water and electrical sockets) should be viewed from within the wider context of this housing boom. Thus the ‘blues glass and white tiles’ style of house shown above can be seen as a conscious claim to status and a display of wealth by the householder Aishuai. He has incorporated new technologies, as such he is demonstrating his familiarity with the Han world. As Feuchtwang has explained such “buildings and new houses, which most families even in poor

regions have been so busy building in the past decade, are the physical features of local distinction, pride, power and rivalry” (Feuchtwang 1996 : 161). But Aishuai’s choice of architecture is not only an aping of Han style for, as explained above, this style of house is also much influenced by the Phoenix bamboo style. Having said this, there are increasing attempts in the area to encourage the building of houses which are aesthetically similar to the Phoenix stilt-bamboo style, seen as the epitome of the Dai way.

### **Architecture and the Creation of Authenticity.**

It what follows I shall explore the use of Dai architecture and its conception as beautiful in the creation of images of ‘authentic’ Dai. With this in mind I shall first turn to Gadamer who has written on understandings of beauty.

Gadamer explained there has been a tendency in the West to view what is beautiful as incorporating what is essentially ‘true’, as he writes: **“Plato describes the beautiful as that which shines forth most clearly and draws us to itself, as the very visibility of the ideal. In the beautiful presented in nature and art, we experience this convincing illumination of truth and harmony, which compels the admission: “This is true”** (Gadamer 1986 : 15).

Humphrey (1988) has called for us to appreciate the house as an expression of identity. She claims **“we need to think about the conceptual principals by which dwellings are constructed, about identity in relation to people’s creation of their intimate environment”** (Humphrey 1988 : 18). It is often the case,

especially in tourist literature, that the ideas expressed by Gadamer and Humphrey are often conjoined. It is assumed that a beautiful built environment is the only true or authentic representation of an identity. In relation to the material presented in this chapter it is dangerously misleading to assume that the Phoenix stilt-bamboo style house, represented throughout the tourist literature on Xishuangbanna as beautiful, is the only possible true expression of Dai identity. As one local Han taxi driver explained, *zhende Daizu* 真的傣族 (real Dai) live in *chuantong zhufang* 传统竹房 (traditional bamboo buildings / Phoenix stilt-bamboo houses), *jiade Daizu* 假的傣族 (fake Dai) live in concrete houses (*ping fang* 平房). The political implications of such thinking are ominous.

This tendency, to merge the two ideas laid out above is explicit in much writing on the area. In the work of Zhu Liangwen, the Phoenix stilt-bamboo style is said to express the ‘social consciousness’ of the Dai people. Moreover Zhu argues that differences in the cultures of the Han and Dai can be clearly seen in their respective architectural styles.

Bearing these differences in mind Zhu writes: **“Thus it can be clearly seen that the contrasts between the Han and Dai historical experience, religious traditions, economic and political organisation, plus their interaction with their natural environments, resulted in societies with a markedly different social awareness and ways of manifesting group identity, which comes across very clearly in their architectural styles” (Zhu Liangwen 1992 : 85).**

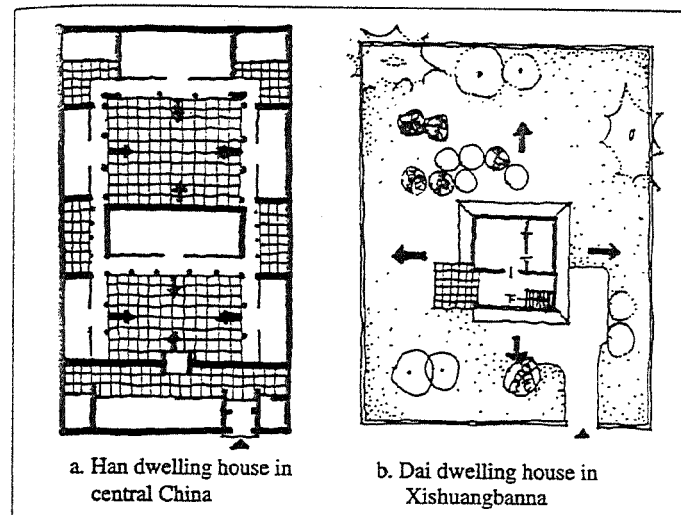


Fig. 6:13. Showing the differences between Han and Dai architecture (from Zhu Liangwen 1992 : 85).

By 1995, his worries about the loss of Dai culture through the rapid modernisation of their architecture inspired Zhu Liangwen to lead a project which aimed to build new Dai houses with modern amenities but incorporating what he calls ‘traditional dwelling characteristics’<sup>21</sup>. Zhu’s architectural company worked with both local officials and Dai householders to come up with and build new designs. Zhu explains that in recent years the Dai have incorporated much ‘Han style’ into their building techniques. He argues that houses, such as those displaying the ‘blue glass and white tiles’ style shown above, not only offer no protection against earthquakes but their unsightliness seriously damages the ability of the Prefecture to attract tourists. However Zhu goes on to explain that ‘traditional’ building techniques require much timber, with the concomitant felling of the forest (he gives figures of 60-70m<sup>3</sup> of timber per new house) gravely endangering the natural resources and ecological environment of Xishuangbanna. Thus the motivations for his project were two fold, firstly to help maintain the attractiveness

of the area to the tourist industry and secondly to help protect the 'natural environment'.

The first of the new dwellings was built in Menghai county. This house measured 200.25m<sup>2</sup> and cost a total of one hundred and twenty thousand Chinese dollars, approximately nine thousand two hundred pounds. Of this the Dai householder paid seventy thousand eight hundred Chinese Dollars and the Xishuangbanna Prefecture Architectural Bureau contributed forty thousand, two hundred Chinese dollars. A further ten thousand Chinese dollars, used for the cost of tilling the roof, was donated by a Limited company based in Guangxi Province 广西省.

The house had the following characteristics:

1. Given the importance that the living room has to Dai families, as a place to discuss official business and entertain guests, the designers decided not to include a hearth in this area. However a window was incorporated into the outside wall to maximize light.
2. Separate bedrooms. Interestingly Zhu Liangwen explains that this was in order to prevent any inconvenience caused by the varying habits of members of the different generations living in the house. As we saw from the 'blue glass and white tiles' design above newer Dai houses often have separate bedrooms. However this is still the biggest difference between these buildings and those of the Phoenix stilt-bamboo style.
3. An indoor bath room for privacy, and a toilet in accordance with the wishes of the householder.



4. The space under the house was left free to be used for storage of both farm equipment and animals.
6. A front veranda, as this is the hub of social activity in any Dai household.
7. A decorative and practical outdoor terrace, to make use of the shade provided by the eaves of the house.
8. The roof incorporates IMS technology, which is a cheap, suitable solution for outlying districts due to the fact that it can be constructed on the spot and offers protection against earthquakes.

A photograph of the house is shown below:



Fig. 6:14. House designed by Zhu Liangwen.

Please also see Appendix 5 for the plans of both this house and others designed by Zhu Liangwen's team. It should be obvious from the photograph and my descriptions of everyday life in the village of my fieldwork that there are some fundamental differences between the house design produced above and older models. To reiterate the most fundamental difference is the separate sleeping compartments for each generation, which is much more in line with Han traditional

architecture then with Dai (Knapp 1999 : 11)<sup>22</sup>. However it is hard to predict the change that this will have on the lived experience of the Dai. As I have stressed above the sleeping arrangements of the Dai household creates and continuously recreates togetherness, thus I would predict that such a change could have a profound affect possibly distancing the generations within a household. Having said this, the sitting room and the veranda are also crucially important to the Dai everyday, as was appreciated by Zhu Liangwen and his team. It is unwise to speculate but as Tambiah has pointed out the terms for house and village can be used interchangeably. It is possible that the changing sleeping arrangement may decrease household solidarity, and this in turn may lead to a more intense expression of local or village wide identity.

The project engineered by Zhu Liangwen was endorsed and welcomed by many local Dai people, demonstrating the ways in which the new architectural styles are being used in image creation. These houses incorporate new technologies and are considered *grand and innovative*, yet they are also seen to be ‘authentically Dai’, or at least as making claims to be so. Thus these designs form part of a tangled web of ideological power plays, in which attractiveness for touristic consumption, statements about wealth and financial security, local and Dai identity all play a part. As meanings can shift and change, contradict each other and even disappear, so the meanings of the Dai house can be expected to change. This is also evident in the example provided below, concerning the Daiya or Hua Yao Dai 花腰傣 (Flower Belt Dai) from Yuxi 玉溪 (Southwest of Kunming City, Yunnan Province). The following extract is adapted from an interview held with the principal architect of the project discussed below.

### **A Flower Belt Dai Village Lasting Tradition Improvement Plan.**

Villagers approached the lecturers of an architectural school in Kunming for help in planning improvements to the village. This they did with the explicit intention of attracting tourism and hence making money. The plan has been worked out so that those villagers who can afford it, or those whose houses are considered too dilapidated, can commission a new house to be built. All such new houses will follow the new architectural plans.

After an initial trip to the village and long consultations with the villagers we produced a number of different designs to allow the villagers some choice in the new layout of the houses and of the village as a whole. The design that the people of the village liked best was the one that most resembled their original houses<sup>23</sup>. This was a two storey brick house, with a large patio on the second floor on which grain could be dried. We, the architects, are more than aware that the economic dynamics of the village are bound to change now that some villagers will have new houses, but we do not feel responsible for such uncontrollable outcomes as the villagers themselves approached us. We have done our best to provide plans which maintain the flavour of their traditional

building techniques and yet incorporate running water, bathrooms and electricity. There is nothing more we can do.

Our aim, as designers, was to provide an alternative to the 'white tile and blue glass', square buildings, ('ping fang' in the local dialect), which are springing up all over Yunnan. These buildings are popular because of the ease with which they can be kept clean. Such buildings are cheap and quick to construct but they stand out violently against the other buildings in the village. This can be seen in the photograph (provided below) which shows this Hua Yao Dai village. The 'ping fang' in this photograph is the recently constructed school. The plans also included public toilets for the use of the tourists expected to visit the newly developed village. These tourists were expected to enter the village through an elaborate gate also serving as a ticket booth, similarly designed by us.



Fig. 6:15. Photograph showing the still undeveloped Hua Yao Dai village<sup>24</sup>.

Such projects as this could be seen as evidence that the peoples of Yunnan are clutching at the opportunities generated by the recent governmental encouragement of tourism to so-called 'minority areas'. These Daiya / Hua Yao Dai people approached a company to help them improve their homes, thus allowing them to retain their so called 'traditional' life style whilst simultaneously seeming to embrace the rhetoric of 'progress' and 'development' endorsed by the Chinese State.

Oakes, writing on another so called 'minority' or *minzu*, the Miao peoples in Guangxi Province has expressed distrust for the governments policy of "Cultural Preservation", which seeks to protect the '*minzu* tradition'. This tradition is portrayed as a whole way of life, one which is dominated by kinship, so that the household is the sole unit of production. Oakes explains that such labelling can become an avenue of capital accumulation for the state, and **"can result not only in the state's ideal of cultural development for "backward" regions, but in their continued subordination and dependence on unequal exchange relations, that is, their continued colonisation"** (Oakes 1998 : 149).

However this is too simplistic an analysis of a clearly very complex and dynamic situation. Local peoples are manipulating images for the touristic gaze, while at the same time images of who they are and / or who they should be are being imposed on them. As Oakes himself writes: **"Even as tourism introduces processes that increasingly link villages to the outside world, threatening to dislocate and alienate them, it simultaneously allows them to continue the ongoing redefinition of place in new terms"** (Oakes 1998: 37).

Architecture and the house in particular can be the locus of diverging, ever changing and contradictory meanings. The construction of these meanings is, as Turton (1978) pointed out, two-way. Thus we can see the building of new houses, like those by Zhu Liangwen in Banna and the '*Chuantong Yanxu*' group in Yuxi, as contributing to what Oakes, drawing on the work of Wood (1993), has called '**local appropriation of touristic place representations**' (Oakes 1998 : 70), where the building projects are the result of long term negotiations between ethno-architects and local people. Although it could be argued that the rhetoric of the State has been such that these people felt they had no choice but to develop, I feel such an argument does not do justice to the foresight and understanding of those who have engaged in these projects. These projects can be seen as one way in which negotiated representations can be manipulated to redefine a sense of place, and hence the images not only of locality but also of individual and group identity. As Wood has explained: "**Tourism can provide a renewed sense of ethnic identity and an economic rationale for the preservation of that identity**" (Wood 1984 : 370).

Taking this argument further Wood has argued that we need to develop an understanding of tourism which highlights not tradition "**but its on-going symbolic reconstruction; not authenticity but its attribution; not inherited identities but relational, improvised and contested ones; not internalised values as much as available templates and strategies of action; not culture but cultural invention and local discourses - the central questions to be asked are about process, and about the complex ways tourism enters and becomes part of an already on-going process of symbolic meaning and appropriation**" (Wood 1993 :66).

## Conclusion

To understand the architecture of Dai dwellings we need to situate their materiality within the wider cosmological settings of which they are part. For dwellings, as explained at the start of this chapter, are never static material objects but part of the process of living. For the Dai the everyday lived world is intertwined with the spirit world. So much so that the house, the locus of everyday activity is itself dynamic, it has vitality, a soul (*Guan*). In Phoenix stilt-bamboo houses the seat of this soul lies in the two great supporting pillars. However Dai architecture has transformed and many houses no longer have such pillars. Yet I argue here that this soul has not died in Xishuangbanna. Despite the changes from bamboo, to wood, brick and most recently cement, the cosmological and political importance of the house to the Dai is still salient.

The Dai are themselves aware that their changing architectural style has a profound affect on the environment. They were encouraged by the central government to stop building with wood due to the rapidly decreasing forest. However the government is also actively promoting tourism to the area and sightseers do not want to travel hundreds, thousands of miles to visit villages of 'white tiles and blue glass'. This has led to joint efforts between Han and Dai to develop an architecture which can marry amenities, such as running water and indoor bathrooms, with a recognisably Dai style. This was shown above in the work of Zhu Liangwen in Banna and the 'lasting tradition' improvement plan in Yuxi.

In both these cases the Dai villagers have actively sought the help of Han specialists, thus it would be too simplistic to assume the Dai are not involved in the creative manipulation of Han images of them. By incorporating these new architectural styles, the Dai are safeguarding a tourist industry; but it cannot be assumed that they are the passive victims of acculturation - the process is clearly dialogical.

We saw at the beginning of this chapter that Humphrey (1988) associated the house with identity. This notion was developed by Carsten and Hugh-Jones who explained that the house, despite its concrete form, was a dynamic and fluid entity. Indeed it was this dynamism that allowed people to use the built environment to identify with a locality. As Waterson explains: **“The built environment provides one of the major means by which people construct for themselves a sense of place”** (Waterson 1995 : 57).

Far from being static solutions to environmental problems, built forms are the result of lived experience, an engagement with the world. This idea has been explored by Tim Ingold, who writes, **“the forms people build, whether in the imagination or on the ground, arise within the current of their involved activity, in the specific relational contexts of their practical engagement with their surroundings... In short, people do not import their ideas, plans or mental representations into the world, since that very world, to borrow a phrase from Merleau-Ponty (1962 : 24), is the homeland of their thoughts. Only because they already dwell therein can they think the thoughts they do”** (Ingold 2000 : 186).



For the Dai, 'engaging with the surroundings' entails ongoing and complex negotiations with both cosmological beings and the Chinese Nation State. Changing Dai architecture cannot be understood without acknowledging the roles of both ethnic tourism and the recent housing boom which followed decollectivization. Once this is acknowledged it follows that changes in the aesthetics of houses in Xishuangbanna do not make them more or less authentically Dai. Dai 'homes' are as much composed by who lives and plays in them as they are about what materials are used in their construction (come and play / *guo lai wan le ga* 过来玩了嘎 in Banna hua / *ma el no* in Daile, is a phrase one hears constantly in the Mengxiang, not to mention Jinghong and Kunming). Thus as Rapport and Overing (2000 : 157) have explained, an anthropological understanding of the concept 'home' is needed which stresses the flow of individuals.

I have argued here, following Tambiah (1973) and Turton (1978) that a household's 'core of belonging' consists of those who share the sleeping room. The Dai have long used the terms for house / home and village / locality interchangeably. Perhaps, then, as sleeping rooms in new houses are increasingly divided the notion of the core of the household will shift to those who share the veranda, already an important gathering place. Given the fact that, in some households, the eldest son is encouraged to sleep in a room that looks on to this area this may not be far from what happens in Phoenix stilt-bamboo houses today. One could speculate that this change could increase local solidarity as the centre of the house changes to one that faces outward. Paradoxically, the changes in Dai architecture, far from representing a 'Hanification' (as feared by Zhu Liangwen and the tourist board amongst others), could reflect (and stimulate) an increasingly vigorous Dai sense of unity. A solidarity

encouraged by the proliferation of images produced for the touristic gaze and the present tolerance of 'diversity'. Although it should not be assumed that such a Dai sense of unity would be in conflict with greater Chinese nationalism. Houses or 'homes,' rather than being coercive institutions, enforcing societies structural boundaries (as for example Knapp and Tambiah can be seen as arguing), can enable transgression. Take for example the use that Aishuai has made of new architectural style to demonstrate his wealth and thus challenging his status as a member of a 'backward minority'. Thus as **“individuals live in movement, transition and transgression”** so the concept of 'home' must allow for paradox and transgression (Rapport and Overing 2000 : 161 - 162).

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> It is tempting to cite Lao Zi 老子 here (Jiang Chengan 1997 : 3): **“Tao gives birth to the unified thing (One), the One splits itself into two opposite aspects (Two), the Two gives birth to another (Three), the newborn Third produces a myriad of things. The myriad of things contain the Yin and Yang within themselves as opposite forces, both of them (Yin 阴 and Yang 阳) are unified with harmony in the invisible breath”.**

<sup>2</sup> Archaeological findings date the first stilt house in China to the late Neolithic age. It is thought that this style of house used to be found in a much wider area than it is today. There is evidence that this style predominated in much of the Yangtze River valley and Southern China. For a history of the stilt house (*ganlan* 干栏) in China see Yun Gao 1999 : 54 - 55 / 65.

<sup>3</sup> Take for example these words of Zhu Liangwen (who writes in English here): **“The stilt houses are perfectly adapted to subtropical climatic conditions, while the resonant symbolism expressed through their actual frames and structures has ensured their unique features have been handed down unchanged through unnumbered generations”** (Zhu Liangwen 1992 : 26).

<sup>4</sup> It is interesting to note that in ‘pre-Liberation’ times there were strict rules regulating the house building styles of Dai peasants and aristocracy. Common people were not permitted to have wooden floors, planks, walls or tiled roofs (Zhu Liangwen 1992 : 98). Nor were commoners allowed to build houses using more than forty columns. Village headmen could have houses of up to one hundred columns. The paramount ruler of the area was expected to live in a dwelling with no less than one hundred and four columns (Zhu Liangwen 1992 101, see also Yun Gao 1998 85 - 92).

<sup>5</sup> For detailed architectural diagrams of Phoenix stilt - bamboo houses see Yang Gusheng 1983 : 215 - 214, Zhu Liangwen 1992 : Especially 92 - 110, Yun Gao 1998 : 156 - 161).

<sup>6</sup> No animals are kept here, except cats who sleep here at night. Cats hold a special place in Dai cosmology, one cannot eat them because they, like us, wash. Moreover there are stories of cats transforming into human shape, especially the female form. Take for example the story of Yinanmiao: A long time ago there were two families who were particularly close friends. They were so close that they decided there must be some kind of union between any children born into the two families. Thus if a boy was born to each of the families they would be brothers, similarly if two girls were born they would be sisters, and if a boy and a girl were born they would marry. Before long a son was born to one of the households, but no child was born in the other household. However a kitten was born. In keeping with the promises made between the households the kitten was taken by the now grown up boy and looked after with much loving care. As the kitten grew, under the influence of such loving devotion, it changed into a beautiful girl and the couple fell in love and were married.

Another interesting if not particularly relevant point about cats in the Dai world is that the Dai character *na* (𤝵) is said to be a cat's nose.

Yun Gao also notes that, for the Dai, cats **“may live together with human beings inside the house. The cat enjoys most human privileges, and this allows them to move in and out of the house... Of all animals they are in a sense closest to human beings”** (Yun Gao 1998 : 143 - 144). For an insight into the cat in northern Thai cosmology see Tambiah 1973 : 140).

<sup>7</sup> For a detailed overview of Tambiah's work and how it fits into ethnography concerning the house in Southeast Asia more generally see R. Waterson 1990 : 179 - 182.

<sup>8</sup> Having said this the evening meal is usually eaten separately, except during festivals or when guests are present.

<sup>9</sup> Knapp (1999) makes the point that of the **“Confucian Five Relationships (Wu Lun 五伦) that are proper to the ordering of Chinese society, three operate within the confines of a families' dwelling: those of father and son, husband and wife and elder brother and younger brother”** (1999 : 11). Knapp goes on to explain that **“the physical layout of each dwelling also served as a template, stating and guiding familial relationships in which each person had his or her proper place”** (Ibid).

<sup>10</sup> See also Yun Gao 1999 : 152 - 153.

<sup>11</sup> For a more detailed look at the relations of this family and for other household variations see Chapter Five.

<sup>12</sup> I should like to remind the reader here that the Dai people amongst whom I lived practice both virilocal and uxrilocal marriage. They, unlike the Northern Thai amongst whom Davis worked (Davis 1984), did not see any difficulty in two affinally related women sleeping in the same room. Davis explains that for the northern Thai every woman carries with her the essence of her clan spirit. As spirits of different clans cannot live together without causing strife there is a concomitant difficulty

when female affines live together. This is the explanation for the uxorilocal nature of residence patterns in the area where Davis carried out his fieldwork.

<sup>13</sup> See Chapter Four for a detailed exploration of the *Guan*.

<sup>14</sup> Officially offerings to the local spirits are frowned upon in Xishuangbanna. This is because the practice is considered 'backward' and 'superstitious', but they also threaten the present regime drawing as they do on a 'pre-Liberation' delineation of land ownership. For Turton it is through these offerings that the ideology of the feudal state reaches into individual households, as explained in the text above. However the state with which the Dai people of Xishuangbanna are forced to engage is no longer a feudal Tai kingdom but rather the People's Republic of China. Offerings to certain *muang* spirits did take place when I was in Banna but I do not have enough information to assess the ideological implications of these (see Chapter Four). These are a recent revival but are also clearly part of the present political dialoguing between the Dai and the Chinese Nation State (Siu 1990).

<sup>15</sup> Interestingly Tambiah notes that for the Northern Thai peoples the terms *ban* and *hun/hen* are used interchangeably (Tambiah 1973 : 132) further reinforcing the idea that for Tai speakers locality is a central cosmological concept. See also Leach 1954 and Chapter Two.

<sup>16</sup> It is interesting to note here that the same young woman was on several occasions quick to attribute her inability to work technological items, such as a *BP ji* (pager) or video compact disc player, to her gender.

<sup>17</sup> Phrya Anuman Rajadhon reports the use of similar structures in and around Bangkok when he was a boy. However he says that they were used for purely practical purposes, such as to warn against trespassing or to remind owners not to allow their cattle to wonder over the rice fields (Phrya Anuman Rajadhon 1986 : 146).

<sup>18</sup> See Chapter Three.

<sup>19</sup> In her 1998 Yun Gao states that "**there are no Buddhist altars in houses in Sipsongpanna. Yet in De Hong, each house has an altar**" (Yun Gao 1998 : 132). However I think these offerings to Zhao Wenzhom are arguably Buddhist shrines. Perhaps there has been a recent change in Xishuangbanna due to a more tolerant governmental policy and more movement across the border with Myanmar.

<sup>20</sup> Unfortunately I am unable to provide a detailed 'symbolic exegesis' here. As with the meanings of Tattoos discussed in Chapter Three, my interlocutors were reluctant to part with detailed esoteric knowledge. Perhaps when I return, so demonstrating trustworthiness, this will change.

<sup>21</sup> This section is based on an interview held with Professor Zhu in Kunming 1999 and on a report, dated 8.4.99, produced for the Xishuangbanna Dai autonomous Prefecture Architectural Bureau and the architecture department of Yunnan Ligong University, written by Zhu Liangwen.

<sup>22</sup> Knapp explains that Han (*siheyuan* 四合院) architecture displays "graduated privacy". Insiders and outsiders as well as the different generations are all clearly delineated in the lay-out of the courtyard house (Knapp 1999 : 11).

For studies of the architecture of other, minority nationalities in China see Mckhann (1989) on the Naxi and Bamo Qubumo (2000) on the Nuosu.

<sup>23</sup> The houses which were preferred have two floors. Unlike the houses of the Dai in Xishuangbanna there are separate bedrooms for the parents and children, unexpectedly according to the designers who have carried out fieldwork among the Hua Yao Dai, it is the female children who sleep downstairs. Post-marital residence is somewhat flexible, it is usually patrilocal but this is not a definitive rule. Choice of residence is dependent on the number of people living in a household. Thus, as with the people among whom I carried out my field work, if a household is short of labour a son-in-law may well move in with his wife's family. Thus residence is flexible and dependent on need and co-operation rather than upon rules (see Chapter Five).

<sup>24</sup> See Appendix 6 for the architects plans for the new houses, village gate and public toilets.

## Chapter Seven

### **Play, Laughter and Celebration as Tools in the Exploration of Limits: 'Water Splashing' in Xishuangbanna.**



## Chapter Seven

### **Play, Laughter and Celebration as Tools in the Exploration of Limits: 'Water Splashing' in Xishuangbanna.**

**“Contradiction and struggle are universal and absolute”**

(Mao Zedong 1937 : 344).

**“True open seriousness fears neither parody, nor irony, nor any other form of reduced laughter, for it is aware of being part of an uncompleted whole...True ambivalent and universal laughter does not deny seriousness but purifies and completes it. Laughter purifies from dogmatism, from the intolerant and the petrified; it liberates from fanaticism and pedantry, from fear and intimidation, from didacticism, naiveté and illusion, from the single meaning, the single level, from sentimentality” (Bakhtin 1968: 122-123).**

This chapter aims to provide a further example of the beauty, magic and complexity of Xishuangbanna. With this in mind I shall discuss the Water Splashing Festival as it manifested itself in the Dai New Year celebrations of 1998 and 1999. I hope to paint a detailed picture, and one that is filled with complementary, overlapping and contradictory aspects, not least the on going problem of this work – the difficulty of describing the Dai world which is at once static and fluid. The ethnography and discussion which follows provides a further example of many of the themes of this thesis. Thus the heterogeneity of Banna and the fluidity of

boundaries between those labelled as belonging to different 'nationalities' should be evident from the ethnography provided. Moreover the difficulties of taking the category 'Han' as a given are once again demonstrated. The boundaries between group identity and local affinity are also once more exposed as porous. The reactions of the people of Banna to the touristic gaze of the outsider and the possibility of reclaiming and creatively manipulating meanings are also discussed. These issues are brought into dialogue with Western theory on transgression and the potentiality of the playful exploration of limits.

Much has already been written about '*SongKran*' the Thai New Year Water Splashing Festival (see for example Phya Anuman Rajadhon 1954 & 1961, Tambiah 1970, Bancroft 1984 & Seesalab 1989). This shares many elements with Water Splashing Festival of Xishuangbanna, which occurs at the end of April (*leung ho* the sixth month in the Daile calendar). Before moving to the ethnography of Xishuangbanna a brief account of the Water Splashing Festival as it has been described in the anthropological literature of Southeast Asia shall be provided.

### *Songkran*

The term *Songkran* is a Thai word meaning to move, here it refers to the Sun which moves into the sign of Aries at this time of the year (Yang Lizhen 1990 : 696). According to the Thai (and Dai) calendar, Aries is the first of the twelve belts of Heaven and the Sun's movement into it constitutes, astrologically, the beginning of a new year, despite the fact that this occurs in the sixth month<sup>1</sup>. The Thai term *Songkran* is now used by many Southeast Asia specialists to refer to the New Year

festival held in many countries, including Myanmar, Laos and China. This festival often includes 'Water Splashing' as a focal point of its celebrations. *Songkran* usually runs for three days that is from the 13-15 of April each year, although the New Year officially starts on the fifteenth<sup>2</sup>. Much detailed ethnography has been written concerning this festival thus I shall not go into the minutiae here. Suffice it to say that these festivals contain several well documented events, the playful and joyful qualities of which should not be underestimated. These include:

- Firing of bamboo fireworks.
- Games such as boat races and amusements including betting.
- Singing and dancing.
- Washing ceremonies, of elders, monks and/or Buddhist effigies.
- 'Water Splashing'.

These activities feature in my own ethnography provided below, thus I shall not go into detail about the first four here. However 'Water Splashing' and the marvellous Carnivalesque energy that it expends will be the main focus of what comes below and so I shall dedicate the next section to it.

### **'Water Splashing'**

The Chinese scholar Cheng Qian (1990 : 684-693) explains that 'Water Splashing' originated in the Indian Brahmanical practice of bathing in the river each year to wash away sins. In the Brahmanical texts 'Water Splashing' is a time when the gods come to the land of the living to assess the sins of the people. Cheng Qian assumes that as this is a time when the Supreme Being is close to the people it is a



good time to ask him for future abundance. Thus by splashing water people are begging for abundance. Bearing in mind the influence that the Pali language has had on the Dai way of being and having a knowledge of the local climate Cheng Qian provides a functional explanation of 'Water Splashing'. April is the most arid month, thus by splashing water at this time the Dai are inducing the rains to come (Cheng Qian 1990 : 692).

In much of the anthropological literature the 'Water Splashing' which takes place during *Songkran* is presented as a transgressive force, provoking a breach of the conventional hierarchy. For example Bancroft (1984 : 9) writes that at this time; **"naughty boys wait behind street corners. When they see someone wearing fine clothes they throw water at them"**. Furthermore Tambiah (1970 : 293) explains that: **"During *Songkran* (New Year) festivities a certain amount of licence is allowed. Young people throw water on everyone indiscriminately"**. 'Water Splashing' then is often high spirited with the potential for unruliness, indeed it had to be banned in certain areas of Bangkok. As Phya Anuman Rajadhon (1954 : 28) writes: **"The water throwing later degenerated into vicious forms, children, unrestrained and not satisfied with throwing clean water, used coloured or even muddy water instead. Their elder brethren followed their examples. Thus water throwing went beyond bounds and gradually became unpopular"**. 'Water Splashing' may have become unpopular in nineteen fifties Bangkok but it is far from unpopular in Xishuangbanna today. It also enjoys a certain celebrity in non-Dai areas of China, even in Beijing people flock to the 'Minority Theme Park' to take part in Water Splashing each April<sup>3</sup>. I would argue that it is the way that the 'Water

'Splashing' has 'gone beyond bounds', the way that it can be both unruly yet viewed as harmless by the State, that maintains its popularity.

Chinese scholars such as Yang Lizhen (1990 : 706-707) are quick to downplay the links that the Dai 'Water Splashing' has with that found in other Southeast Asian countries, focusing rather upon the individual, artistic and creative characteristics of the celebrations found in different areas. Such denial of international influence on the Dai living within China's borders is in line with State political rhetoric which plays on the 'Chineseness' of minority peoples<sup>4</sup>. Having said that such an approach also encourages a less diffusionist approach than that offered by the likes of Cheng Qian. This is beneficial because although it may be the case that the transgressive elements of 'Water Splashing' do contribute to its popularity any analysis should also leave room for indigenous cosmological exegesis (Overing 1983, Moore 1994).

### **Dai New Year in Xishuangbanna.**

Although the Dai New Year officially lasts only three days, the last day of the old year, a liminal day and the first day of the new year, in Xishuangbanna this festival is celebrated for over a week. In the years 1998 and 1999 'Water Splashing' festival celebrations in the region were held on at least ten consecutive days, beginning on the ninth and running until the nineteenth of April. The account given here details events of four days only, the thirteenth to the sixteenth of April 1999, this is enough to vividly display both the diversity of the area and the carnivalesque vibrancy of this time.

### Dragon Boat Race, Jinghong City.

For the Mekong River Dragon Boat races of the thirteenth of April 1999 the weather was scorching (about 38°C), but despite the repressive heat the spectators numbered about thirty thousand. The banks of the river were inundated with police, mainly up to their knees in the muddy water struggling to keep the enthusiastic crowd away from where the boats (*xiao her* 小船 in Daile *long zhou* 龙舟 in Mandarin) were about to begin their races. The loud speakers blurted out information about the races, first in Daile and then in Mandarin, all around banners flew in red stripes with lettering both in Mandarin and Daile. The boats were to be rowed by teams, some of which were of mixed gender. I spotted others which were all male, although a city dwelling Dai friend of mine, Aiwang, explained to me that the teams should be mixed. Aiwang also said that there was no fixed rule about how many rowers should be in each boat but that it was usual for there to be between twenty-three and twenty-seven. There is normally an odd number because of the drummer who, beating time, acts as cox.

Initially the boats made a spectacular tour of the river. They sauntered from the starting posts to the old bridge a few hundred

metres away and back again. Then, to the sound of jubilant cheering, the races began. These consisted of laps of the river, from one bank to the other. The boats raced in pairs just one lap at a time. The winners won government sponsored cash prizes of between one thousand and two thousand Chinese *Yuan* a considerable sum.

The crowd watching these dramatic races was awesome with its splashes of pink, green and blue not to mention copious amounts of glittering gold tinsel. Hani people, with their red and black outfits adorned with sparkling silver coins and studs, had travelled into town to join the fun. Some 'Flower Belt Dai women (Daiya)' (from Puwen or Mengyang) displayed darkly embroidered tunics and glinting head-dresses of silver chains. There were also thousands of Han girls with their flip flops and mini skirts, platform shoes and red lipstick, hot pants and pig tails, milling around. Not to mention the throngs of Dai girls, elegant in their sarongs, and the many Han girls emulating the Dai style of dress and hence flaunting their affinity with Xishuangbanna. I talked to many of these girls and they were explicit about their wish to be beautiful, dressing in sarongs like the Dai is seen as one way of realising this wish. That day even I was asked by a grumpy taxi driver: "the Dai costume is so beautiful what possible reason do you have for not

dressing like the Dai girls, you are in Banna after all?" Interestingly my Aini friend who was with me was not impressed with the girls in the crowd. As we wondered around she was quite disparaging about the 'Dai' look with its make up and tinsel, 'very arrogant' she said.

As the races were in progress people on the banks were noisily chatting, laughing and eating roasted kebabs. The crowd gathered in little pockets around the kebab stalls where people selected their snacks from the skewers upon skewers of meat on display. There were little chunks of gristle and whole chicken feet - there were even whole chickens, squashed flat and skewered. Bundles of rice were also being bought and children were gleefully clutching little green parcels of banana leaves which concealed sticky rice pudding - sweetened with red sugar, 'traditional Dai flavour' food<sup>5</sup>.

Down the river, past the newly constructed bridge the scaffold for bamboo fireworks (*bang fie* in Daile, *gao shan* in Banna Hua) was set up - pointing sensibly away from the crowd, as these bamboo rockets do have a tendency to blow up. The sturdy structure sporadically let its missiles blow. It is said that these missiles take all the old troubles away and frighten away new ones with their explosive - Boom!!!!!! As they

hurtle into the air. These bamboo devices are propelled high into the air, and I was told by one venerable elder that the higher they travel and the less smoke they generate the better<sup>6</sup>. Wherever these rockets are to be let fly venerable male elders gather to watch and comment as they go whizzing into the air. They are the main attraction of any Dai fair (*ganbai*). In Mengxiang I noticed that these fireworks were often the subject of conversation, men going so far as to describe them as 'a beautiful and magnificent manifestation of Dai culture'. Having said that on the day of the boat race most of the crowd seemed a bit too preoccupied with the boats to take much notice, although there were about one hundred people gathered to watch as the rockets were set up. This gathering included little monks (*pa noie* in Daile) dressed in their distinctive saffron robes, sitting, like great thinkers, on distant rocks.

Throughout the races the crowd stayed behind the police line. Although this line did keep moving forward towards the Mekong's waters to accommodate the pushing crowds. There were only a couple of angry exchanges between the police and over eager spectators. At one point the police made everyone who was squatting stand up, this was so the television cameras could get nice shots of everyone watching the 'minority' festivities enthusiastically<sup>7</sup>. The army also watched from

designated seats in the middle of the observation stands, clapping and laughing. Yet there seemed to be little tension between the crowd and the officials. Just an apparent acceptance that the activities were not arranged specifically to antagonise the police.

As the races drew to a finish the sun was still pounding down covering everything in an almost blinding curtain of harsh white light that dulled my senses. Revellers were guzzling iced water and munching on watermelon. Vendors were making a fortune by selling wicker fans in various guises, assorted peak caps and other cheap hats. There were a few abbots from the Central Temple among the throngs, but not that many as most were busy preparing for the next day's celebrations which were to be held at their temple.

By about three in the afternoon amongst muttered complaints about the heat, most people were leaving the river banks. The revellers wanted to go home and sleep through the afternoon, gathering their strength for the evening of celebration that lay ahead.

### Evening Party and Lantern Launch on the Mekong

That evening the riverbank was again the site of merrymaking. A huge stage was constructed for various entertainers and next to this a disco tent banged out 'China House' music. There were many stalls selling barbecued meat, fish, chicken feet. Cafes and little bars sprang up all around but just for the evening. As there had been during the day there were Dai girls in sarongs, Han girls in sarongs, Dai and Han girls sporting hot-pants, mini skirts, glitter makeup and platform shoes. But the girls were more heavily made up than they had been during the day and now they were joined by Dai boys, with tight fitting tops, accentuating scrawny muscles, hair gel and black trousers. A few of these boys were alluringly made up, one had dyed his hair a scintillating copper, adorned his eyes with mascara, and sported snug flares and platforms. Walking next to him was a stunning transsexual, as far as I am aware she is the only one of her kind in Banna and famous for it. That evening her long hair floated over a slick full-length dress, she was by far the most stunning person I saw all night. She blessed me with a smile and a wink as she was escorted past.



Along the pebbled beach of the riverbank there were hundreds of people milling around. A huge video screen had been erected, on which subtitled Chinese films flickered. Far below, near the edge of the murky water, there was a gathering of venerable elder Dai men and women. They had with them their tractors and had built a magnificent bonfire. This fire was used to launch huge paper lanterns many feet in diameter and about twelve feet high. The elder men were concerned about the high winds and their disquiet was reflected in their constant agitated instruction to the younger men attempting the launch. The lanterns were painted with simple, colourful designs of animals and flowers. As the lanterns were launched high into the air they took with them requests to the ancestors and other heavenly spirits, note books, pencils, money and clothes were attached to the wooden frame at the bottom as indicators for what was needed by the people<sup>8</sup>.

Twelve lanterns were to be launched in total, one for each of the twelve districts of Xishuangbanna (the area was divided into twelve administrative units from 1570-1957, Zheng Lan 1998 : 11). Interestingly those launching the lanterns were all from Jinghong county. I was told by Mengxiang villagers that they do not launch lanterns during New Year although they do at other times of the year, including during the

festivities for the beginning and end of Buddhist lent, (*Ochwassa* and *Haowassa*). The next day (the fourteenth) similar lanterns were to be launched from the main square in Jinghong City to accompany the huge government sponsored fashion show.

### **Morning Parade Through Jinghong City**

The festivities of the fourteenth started with a parade that commenced at the government headquarters in Jinghong City and made its winding way to the Central Temple about five kilometres away. A golden seated Buddha travelling in the back of a white truck, driven by a monk, fronted the cavalcade. This was followed by another car, which dragged the sign displaying the year (1361) by the Dai calendar and the name of the Central Temple, flanked by large paintings of two white rabbits. This was interesting as by both the Chinese and Dai calendars, the year 1999 was the year of the rabbit. Thus this sign depicted a concurrence of belief between the Han and Dai communities. Then came two beautiful young Dai girls carrying a banner welcoming the Dai New Year.

Behind these brightly dressed young girls were two intimidating demonic figures (*Yak* in Daile). They had masks of black and red, but their bodies' were swathed with white cloth. It is worth noting here that on death Dai people are dressed in white. Then came between forty and fifty monks from the temple, forming a saffron barrier between the diabolical figures and the laity behind. Behind the monks came laymen playing drums and gongs. Then came elder women with white shirts, and dark coloured sarongs, making deep shades of blue, green, purple and black flow warmly against the saffron ahead. Next were the younger brightly dressed women carrying white banners (*dong* in Daile). Such banners are also to be found in other Southeast Asian countries, the divergent forms these flags took in Banna had characteristics of both 'victory flags' and '*meng chalang*' described in such detail by Phya Anuman Rajadhon<sup>9</sup>.

Then came four girls all dressed in scarlet red and each carrying the Buddhist flag. The flag is yellow and red and depicts the wheel of life (Dhammacakka in Pali, Fa Lun 法轮 in Mandarin). Following them were men with more white temple banners and a flag of blue, yellow, red and white. Following them were more female elders and two middle-aged men carrying a huge gong hanging from a bamboo pole. Then came a group of

female dancers each with cymbals and finally a few young boys carrying bamboo poles and a broken banner. The whole procession was kept in line by a strutting monk armed with a megaphone. Traffic stopped and city dwellers watched, bewitched by the music - beating on and on in a methodically spiritual way. The monks in their saffron robes and the young girls in their sarongs were like splashes of paint bright against the pale, watching ghosts. And at the head of it all was the golden, ever smiling, tranquil Buddha. This procession provided a powerful image for the people of Jinghong, through a combination of beauty, music and magic it spoke eloquently of Dai ways, Dai beauty, Dai peace and Dai presence.

Once the procession arrived at the Central Temple most of the participants dispersed and the banners were lent against trees. The one and only Dai pop band began to set up and the big gong sounded from in front of the temple.

### **Washing the Effigy of the Buddha**

As they arrived some of the female elders placed small candles and white flags at the base of the Buddha effigy that had been carried

around the city and was still in the back of the truck. Later when the effigy was moved for the ceremony many of these offerings fell discarded onto the floor. Inside the Central Temple female elders took more small candles out of red wicker baskets carried from their homes. Sitting in a circle around one of the Temple pillars, they carefully prepared their offerings. They left their purple Thai bags where they had been sitting as they went to make their offerings. They all trotted barefoot outside one following another, to make their offerings of sticky rice, bananas and candles. They raised their oblations up to head level between hands in prayer position, then placed them on one of the three shelves of the wrought iron offering stand. They then made their way to the small concrete pagoda (covered with thick yellow paint) where they made further offerings of bananas, rice and small candles. Finally the elders made offerings at the donation box in the main temple. These consisted of newly printed Chinese dollars squashed against the creamy wax of the tapers and dropped into the box<sup>10</sup>.

Outside by the stage men and women had begun dancing and drumming. The microphone aided commentary job was taken in turns by the Deputy Abbot of the temple and the secretary of the Xishuangbanna Buddhist Association, an important member of the laity. They welcomed

people to join the dancing using both Dai and Mandarin. As more and more people began dancing the dynamics of the group changed so that between the young Dai girls and the elder Dai women were interspersed Han tourists, business men and local people of various nationalities.

After the dancing the monks began to chant *sutras*, at this point the abbot in charge of the temple took the microphone. The monks all shuffled up to stage on which the elfin-looking, Thai Buddha effigy stands permanently opposite but facing away from the main temple. The monks were followed by worshipping elder women. Young girls were standing in two rows facing each other, with their white powder, lipstick and plastic flowers. Then the water pouring began, a scaffold of bamboo covered with gold and silver foiled paper had been constructed. Starting with the Abbot, then the monks, elder men, women and finally Han and other nationality tourists, (all being photographed by loved ones). Those present took turns to pour water over the other Buddha effigy (the one that had been taken around town and then placed next to the platform). A bamboo scoop was used to take water and pour it into the bamboo tube which channelled water down over the Buddha's head. If they were unable to get hold of the bamboo water scoop worshipers used little silver teapots or even plastic water bottles to help in the washing of the

Buddha. There were numerous smiles and although the atmosphere was tranquil, the air was filled with laughter.

### Dai Pop.

That evening I was caught between going to the central square in Jinghong City which was hosting the government organised celebrations or making my way back to the temple which was hosting some Dai singing. Given my questionable anthropological bias for the 'authentic', I predictably made my way to the intimate temple gathering. As I got there an outside stage was being set up, and groups of teenage monks were hanging around watching excitedly. The doors to the main temple were open and all the lights were on even though everyone was outside, it seemed to emanate a strange empty peace. The elfin Thai Buddha effigy was lit so it sparkled in the darkness, and with all the glistening flags the atmosphere was magical.

That evening the crowd was all Dai (at least I heard no Mandarin spoken and all the women present were wearing Dai style sarongs), the tourists having all been lured to the City square. The girls were as always like painted dolls in sarongs, glistening tinsel and fake plastic flowers,

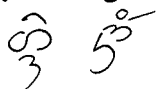
there were also a few girls in hot pants and platform shoes, and quite a few with mobile phones. As the audience enjoyed the band they all sat, some on the floor others on the few chairs taken from the school rooms adjacent to the main temple. The band played the same songs they had performed earlier in the day, these were mostly on the theme of love but they also played one about the importance of learning to write the Dai script (*ga ha la, ga ha la, hien hien gum dai*). The band was set to perform all night (see photographs below on one of the Band's album cover).



Fig. 7:1. Images from the Dai pop band's album cover.



## 'Water Splashing' in Jinghong City.



The 'Water Splashing' in Jinghong City is supposed, by government decree, to start at noon. I naïvely thought it would be easy to get a bus out to Mengxiang before then. Carrying my notebooks and camera I made my way to the bus station well ahead of the noon dead line. Before long a bucket of freezing water followed by peels of laughter landed on my head from a window high above. I protected my things the best I could but decided, after a small fit, that the wisest thing would be to take my belongings back to my room and join in the water battles about to erupt on the city streets. Having learnt the year before that the colourful pump action water pistols they sell everywhere are of no use against buckets, I bought a red plastic bucket and scoop. I hesitantly ventured back onto the streets, to be met by a barrage of shouts from about thirty laughing faces:

"Foreigner!!!

Foreigner!!!!!!

HELLO,

HAAALLOOOOO,

HIILLOO,

FOREIGNER!!!

HEELLOOO,

HALOOO."

Foreigner!!!

Eh!!!!

Eh!!!!

Eh!!!!

"SPLASH THE FOREIGNER" "SPLASH THE FOREIGNER" "SPLASH THE FOREIGNER" "SPLASH THE FOREIGNER" "SPLASH THE FOREIGNER".

It only took a few seconds for my clothes to be soaked through, for my shoes to be squelching and my hair drenched. At this point I realised that it no longer mattered how much I got splashed, and so the fun began.

It soon became obvious that a bucket full of water ran out amazingly fast. The only way to keep my bucket full was to join the rush to the restaurants, shops and even strangers' houses. Most of the public taps, which had been installed to water the plant displays, had been turned off however a few still trickled out water. I learnt all too fast that waiting ages for your bucket to fill up was a dangerous business, you became an all too easy target.

As I was warding off attackers I noticed processions of people from different work units and some advertising trucks promenading their way around the City. These workers despite numbering several dozen per group were splashed mercilessly by all those they came across. There was a lot of camaraderie, although the air seemed taut with violence. The antagonism seemed directed in the large part only against non-local people, Westerners being the epitome of non-local seemed to get the brunt of the aggression. Little buckets of water were hurled into my face, stinging my eyes so much my vision was temporarily impaired. And people thought nothing of totally surrounding me and drenching me continuously, until breathing was difficult.

I soon discovered that the most formidable force perhaps predictably was the groups of Wu Jing 武警 soldiers circling the city. These young men are the equivalent of special-forces police. Although not military personnel they train in martial arts and have a vicious reputation. On the day of the festival they were far from on duty yet they sported their telltale uniform. They moved through the city in well-organised teams soaking anyone in their path (although it must be said that they also got splashed in their turn). After my initial humiliating

encounter with them they encouraged me to join their ranks temporarily, and gain some much-needed breathing space.

When I was all out of water some people watching from the safety of their apartment took pity on me and dripped some out of their second floor window for me to catch in my bucket and use as ammunition. There was also an amount of chivalry involved at the public taps, where young men often held others back so I could fill my bucket without too much danger. Although before the day was out I was to get several entire cauldrons of freezing water poured over my head. There were also many more occasions for running battles between people with machine gun water pistols.

At one point I bumped into some people I knew, they desperately implored me not to come too near them as my presence would mean that they got splashed more. But then they paradoxically proceeded to scream:

"SPLASH THE FOREIGNER"

泼老外 (泼那个鬼子)

to attract attention to me and engaged in running battles with those who dared to attack. I seemed to add an element of danger and excitement to their skirmishes.

These young men, stripped to the waist, were more organised than most in their approach. In almost pack like formation they proceeded to terrify young girls with war like cries "YO!!!!!! YO!!! YO!!! YO!!!! YO!!!! YO!!!!!!." The girls would scamper away, screaming (and laughing). Interestingly their 'boss' drove along behind us very slowly inspecting our progress, totally dry and hence most regal in appearance. Finally we arrived at a hotel with a swimming pool. Most people were thrown in, fully dressed, except of course the 'boss'. Although these antics were met with cries of: "don't splash our own people!" There were several near physical fights as other gangs tried to splash the girls with us.

Walking alone and drenched back to where I was staying I was struck by how many people gleefully commented on how much luck I had been showered with. Perceiving sarcasm cracking through their smiles, I began to mull over the day's experience. As I ran through the streets that day I had been welcomed, splashed, smiled at, splashed and

splashed and splashed often painfully, and with water that was putrid. Interestingly I was attacked most often when alone<sup>11</sup>.

I quickly came to the conclusion that the water splashing had left me feeling weak, alone and alienated. When I talked to my local friends about my experiences one young woman said: "there is no racism in China, not like in America, people just wanted to wish you more luck for next year because you are a foreigner," (So I must need more luck!). Even with these words the sting of alienation was reinforced<sup>12</sup>. But after longer conversations they did explain that in Jinghong City the 'Water Splashing Festival' had become a way of showing discontent. It was a way of delineating insiders from outsiders, Banna people from outsiders. But interestingly it was not seen by many as a way of distinguishing Dai from Han. I would argue that the other activities of the New Year celebrations were effective in this way. It is hard to distinguish between City dwelling Dai people and their Han neighbours, indeed any distinction whether it be based on language, dress or custom would be hard to maintain. However I had noticed during the day that those dressed in 'tradition' Dai attire, so actively displaying their 'Dainess', did not participate in violent running water battles. They did attend the day but in isolated processions, headed by trucks of musicians and dancing

women. Other revellers did splash these processions, but having spoken to a number of people I gathered that the general feeling was that the Dai should be treated honourably. The Dai also attracted the attention of the many visiting tourists and not surprisingly the T.V. cameramen and press photographers tended to focus their attention almost exclusively on them.

### Mengxiang Village Fair

The last festivities that I shall describe here occurred in Mengxiang. I include this here to allow the reader to understand a little of the heterogeneity of the festivities which compose Dai New Year in Banna.

Dai villages form organisational and ritual clusters. On the 16<sup>th</sup> Mengxiang was the only village in its particular cluster of five villages to hold the market like celebrations which are known as *Ganbai* (in Daile). Throughout the morning of the sixteenth members of the other villages made their way, either walking or crammed into the backs of tractors, to the host village. Despite the seemingly isolated nature of the village the celebrations attracted revellers of other nationalities (mainly Wa

and Hani), and many local Han people, from the nearby town, State farm and factory work units. However I overheard some disparaging comments made by Mengxiang villagers at the arrival of the other nationalities, especially the Wa people, as it was generally thought among the Dai that they had only come to beg for food<sup>13</sup>. The Han on the other hand seemed to be well tolerated, as least there was no outward sign of any animosity. Interestingly there were no other foreigners and very few if any Han people from outside Xishuangbanna.

From early in the day the Dai men were concerned about the success of the launch of the *gao shan* fireworks, described above. In the past these fireworks were made in the village but now only a specialist firework 'master' from the nearby town makes them, selling his wares to villages all around the area. At about 2.30 p.m. the men met to carry the fireworks down to their launch site. Men from each village in the cluster formed groups then proceeded to the launch site in processions, accompanied by the rhythmic beating of gongs and drums.

While this was going on women from the other villages made their way to the houses of friends and relatives in Mengxiang. Once there they joined other women chatting and feverishly putting on their



makeup. The storerooms under many of these houses were overflowing with women of all ages struggling with sarongs and the much prized silver belts used to hold them up. Whilst on many of the verandas (where the light was better) numerous younger women flitted about applying face powder and lipstick and attaching artificial flowers to their hair in a flurry of excited chatter and mirth. The women were overjoyed at my arrival, or rather the arrival of my camera, at their request I went through several films taking pictures of each of them in turn exhibiting their best sarongs and most precious jewellery. Interestingly the elder women tended not to show off their silver belts as much as the younger women did. This may be the result of Buddhist teachings concerning the ill effects of 'attachment' to material goods, alternatively it could be due to the fact that those exhibited by the younger women were often much more valuable, thanks to recent economic growth. Many groups of friends were wearing sarongs of the same ornately patterned fabric, I was repeatedly told that it was friends not relatives, although some of the friends may also be relatives, who proudly displayed their mutual amity in this way.

At the *gan bai* there were many games for people to play. These included betting games, with cards and huge dice decorated with a

different animal on each face allowing you to bet on which animal will land face up. Men and women bet as much as each other, although they usually played the games in single gender groups, young monks also took an avid interest. Other games included catching bottles of beer, spirits and cigarettes with wooden rings from an impossible distance, once again the women partook as much as the men. All these games were held both in the temple grounds and on cleared land below. Dotted between the amusements were stalls selling food and soft drinks and even some selling toys. One toy stall was selling cap guns to young monks, who once armed ran hither and thither through the crowd avoiding their abbot and leaving chaos in their wake. The celebrations went on for several hours, well into the night, when sounds of singing and dancing emanating from the temple grounds could still be heard throughout the village.

Such *gan bai* gatherings occur many times through the Dai ritual calendar. They are viewed by the villagers as times of great excitement, but the younger women especially expressed to me their worries about all the money they would have to spend both in preparing for the *gan bai* and whilst attending it. Hsieh Shih-Chung's (1990 : 5) work on ethnicity in pre-Liberation Xishuangbanna likens *gan bai* to the potlatch as both are ways of redistributing wealth. He explains that these gatherings

were so prominent a part of the Dai's cultural repertoire that the Han addressed the Dai as Bai Yi (using two syllables due to differences in pronunciation of Bai in Dai and Mandarin<sup>14</sup>).

### Digression

As a prelude to the dialogue I hope to establish between the ethnography laid out above and Western theory I want first to situate myself more clearly in the colloquy. I will do this by including a short extract from my fieldwork diary. It is one of a number of passages which I call 'digressions'. This particular one was written on finding out about the Brixton Bombing in London. I include it here because it displays a shocked realisation on my part that I was trapped, trapped in something from which there is no way out. Moreover it can be seen to be a demonstration of a response to an 'interpellation', a notion which will be expounded below.

"Me! I'm lost here, trying to deal with this perceived racism against me whilst there are white supremacist bastards blowing up my mates in London. Forever caught in something I don't want to be part of.

What does it matter why the Dai have certain ways, we should be concentrating on what makes us the same, not these petty little differences that divide us into subgroups of subgroups of subgroups, fuck's sake. Despite the beauty of their way I can't help feeling it's ludicrous and hypocritical to be dwelling on it.

But:

**Through seeing difference in all its beauty,  
we can understand similarity in all its purity.**

I HOPE.

Yet the similarity is as illusory as the difference and so we are muddled, and so people fight, striving to forge an impossible concrete reality, even if that reality is of hate - and people fight, fight so violently and with such determination simply because it is all nothingness. The gold paint of the pagodas is, on closer inspection peeling to reveal the concrete beneath, just as nails from bombs penetrate the skulls of children, shocking people into hatred.

Both these show the fragility of worlds.

Both show the horror of change.

Both show the depth of misunderstanding and the arrogance of assuming I even understand it at all.

I am no longer sure I know what I see or how I am seen yet I still feel this passage has a useful story to tell. What caused the distress that was channelled through into the above 'digression' was the overt recognition of me as an outsider which resulted in the barrage of hails of 'foreigner' to which I had been subjected to for the duration of 'Water Splashing'. If we accept, following Althusser (1971 : 175) that; **"ideology has always-already interpellated individuals as subjects"**, then it

can be said that what I found so distasteful was the blatant manifestation of the process by which ideology 'recruits' its subjects. Rather than solely categorising me as 'foreigner' this constant hailing was at once both creating and recreating me as such. Although I do not wish to reduce the profound cosmological practices of peoples such as the Dai to a soulless deterministic apparatus of ideology, for to do so would be to negate indigenous knowledge, I would still argue that ideology is ingenious in ways of asserting its influence. Moreover its 'material existence' takes innumerable forms to the extent that, as stated in the first of Althusser's (1971 : 170) conjoint theses, **"there is no practice except by and in an ideology"**. Using this rhetoric 'Water Splashing' both serves ideology and is a manifestation of it.

This may be the case but it must also be a gross oversimplification, for it disregards both 'agency' and 'creativity'. To understand the workings of agency within an ideological universe the second of Althusser's theses (1971 : 170) needs to be examined, namely; **"there is no ideology except by the subject and for subjects"**. Using this thesis it follows, as Butler (1997 : 11) has explained, that the subject is the seat of agency, moreover this agency is enabled through the very process of being subjected to power. Thus the situation is ambivalent, **"power not only acts on a subject but, in a transitive sense, enacts the subject into being...A power exerted on a subject, subjection is nevertheless a power assumed by the subject, an assumption that constitutes the instrument of that subject's becoming"** (emphasis in the original). And how does the subject come into being? Here we return to Althusser (1971), who explains that the subject is constituted through a continuously repeated process of hailing, of interpellation. This notion of interpellation is complex. Subjects are hailed into innumerable, overlapping and

conflicting ways of being, the game is in balancing these calls<sup>15</sup>. For the ethnography presented above the two most striking hails are those of group identity – to be Dai, Han, Hani and so on, and those of locality, to be from Banna, Kunming, Sichuan or elsewhere. Yet it is implicit in the way that these labels are constantly defined and redefined that those so constituted can question and alter the limits of their categorisation.

The work of Derrida (1991) is instructive in understanding why there should be room for agency within this necessity for repeated interpellation, for reiteration. Derrida explained that for something to have meaning it must be quotable, thus it must contain within it the potential for being reiterated. Moreover the acquisition of meaning is a process, a process of repetitions. Derrida moves on from the work of Austin by explaining that this meaning is uncontrollable, it takes forms unimagined by the originator. Meaning, he says is uncontrollable because of this imperative of repeatability. So that, **“every sign, linguistic or non-linguistic, spoken or written (in the usual sense of this opposition), as a small or large unity, can be *cited*, put between quotation marks; thereby it can break with every given context, and engender infinitely new contexts in an absolutely nonsaturable fashion”** (Derrida 1991 : 97). Derrida gives the by now famous example of the signature. A signature can always be repeated otherwise it would not be a signature, and yet no two signatures are alike. In Derrida’s (1991 : 107) own words, **“a signature must have a repeatable, iterable, imitable form; it must be able to detach itself from the present and singular intention of its production. It is its sameness which, in altering its identity and singularity, divides the seal”**. This means that inherent in the iterability of meaning lurks the possibility that this can fail. Even when a

signature is repeated successfully there is always the possibility that this process could have failed, a potent absence ever present within it. This is the foundation for Derrida's notion of '*Differance*', as every sign includes in it both absence and presence it conjures a polysemia of meanings. Thus successful understanding can only ever be provisional, never complete. Meaning can always be different from any intended, moreover any understanding will be imperfect due to temporal postponement.

To be intelligible we must repeat, as we have to repeat we must adhere to certain limits, but given the possibilities of *Differance*, these limits can enable. As the signature successfully reproduced contains within itself the possibility of its having been faked, so any limit contains within it the possibility of it being transgressed. As Bataille (1986 : 63) writes: **"There exists no prohibition that cannot be transgressed"**. Transgression needs limits as much as limits need transgression; the two are conjoined in a complex dialogue which constantly feeds back on itself, from which there can be no escape. As Foucault (1973 : 35) eloquently explains:

**"Transgression, then, is not related to the limit as black to white, the prohibition to the lawful, the outside to the inside, or as the open area of a building to its enclosed spaces. Rather, their relationship takes the form of a spiral which no simple infraction can exhaust. Perhaps it is like a flash of lightning in the night which, from the beginning of time, gives a dense and black intensity to the night it denies, which lights up the night from the inside, from top to bottom, and yet owes to the dark the stark clarity of its manifestation, its harrowing and poised**

**singularity; the flash loses itself in this space it marks with its sovereignty and becomes silent now that it has given a name to obscurity”.**

In this chapter another element has been the focus of attention, and hence perhaps it could be used as a metaphor to explore the conundrum, the double bind of transgression. Paradoxical water, which even when crystal pure has the strange ability to distort. Water with its inability to reach the pinnacle of gaseous freedom without radical character transformation, whilst simultaneously remaining free to frolic and flow in seemingly endless ways, water is perhaps an equally fitting metaphor to aid in the understanding of boundaries, and the ways of transgression. To appreciate the ways in which water is capable of transgression you need look no further than how it manages to vividly display the porosity of the boundaries between bodies<sup>16</sup>.

By exploring the ethnography presented above the travesty water is capable of making of boundaries should have become apparent. ‘Water Splashing’ is known throughout China as a ‘Dai tradition’ which attracts the participation of thousands of non-Dai peoples. The participation in New Year festivities where notions of ‘Dainess’ and ‘Bannaness’ blur has the effect of increasing the cohesion of local peoples against outsiders, thus simultaneously highlighting and blurring the notion of ‘Dai’. Making clear once again that there is a core notion of what it is to be Dai, as there is a core of belonging in their houses, but that the limits of this concept are ever transgressed and explored, in this case through ‘Water Splashing’. This paradoxical situation is reflected in water itself. Water is too often seen as powerless, the very term ‘watery’ implies weakness, and yet this element has the



capacity to move mountains. This is exemplified by these words attributed to Lao Zi  
老子:

**“There is nothing in the world more soft and weak than water, yet for attacking things that are hard and strong there is nothing that surpasses it, nothing that can take its place”<sup>17</sup>.**

And yet water does not wield power absolutely, it cannot wash away all boundaries. As a stream can both unite and divide so the water splashed in the celebrations described above can both bless and alienate, coalesce and segregate. When oil is spilled on water the colours it produces merge, flow and become distinct because of the movement of the water below, so too in Xishuangbanna the movement of water caught my eye and made lucid the complex fault lines of the aesthetics of identity, locality and gender.

Such a complex situation has been described by Bakhtin as ‘polyphony’. For Bakhtin existence is necessarily dialogic, there can be no monologue, for as Holquist (1990 : 38) writes, the **“Bakhtinian *a priori* is that nothing is anything in itself”**. As explained in Chapter Two above, the less dialogue, the less negotiation, the less freedom there is. In Bakhtin’s own words: **‘When dialogue ends, everything ends. Thus dialogue by its very essence, cannot and must not come to an end’** (Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* cited in Gladney 1998 : 106). Such a pluralist notion may be of use in getting to grips with the cacophony of voices which sometimes vie against each other, sometimes cancel each other out and sometimes merge and transform in the ethnography presented above. The following list of actors in the celebrations may remind the reader of the intricacies of the situation:

the rural Dai elders, the young transsexual Dai, the Xishuangbanna police, the Han tourists, the foreigners, the Han girls dressed as Dai, the young Hani girl who disliked the Dai countenance but still went to take part in the festivities, the government officials hosting Dai 'traditional' dances in a city which has been transformed by the Han presence, the monks trained in Thailand trying to ensure a level of 'authenticity'. This list could be extended almost indefinitely but it serves to show the multiplicity of voices and the importance of not reducing the celebrations to solely a play of power.

There is an incredible similarity between those activities presented above and the Bakhtinian carnivalesque. Carnival is the display of otherness, the ultimate expression of heteroglossia. Bakhtin (1965 : 89) explains that through play and laughter the carnival can overcome fear allowing for new outlooks on life, and exploring imposed limits. For Bakhtin laughter is related to free speech, times of laughter such as the feast which followed the end of the austere medieval Lent could be seen as **"a temporary suspension of the entire official system with all its prohibitions and hierarchic barriers. For a short time life came out of its usual, legalised and consecrated furrows and entered the sphere of utopian freedom"** (Bakhtin 1965 : 89). And yet such transgression was necessarily short lived: **"This truth was ephemeral; it was followed by the fears and oppressions of everyday life, but for these brief moments another unofficial truth emerged"** (Bakhtin 1965 : 91). Bakhtin never states that the carnival works solely to reinforce the power of the status quo, nor does he say that it provides a viable alternative; rather like the imagery of Foucault's lightning metaphor given above, the carnival provides a flash

of inspiration, a hint that things need not always be as they are. 'Water Splashing' too, with its multitude of expressions shows that there are alternative ways of being.

Theorists have long been interested in laughter (see for example Freud's (1916 [1991]) work on the relation of jokes to the subconscious or Douglas (1975) on the Laughter of Dogs and social communication), but I would argue that it is only recently that anthropologists are beginning to appreciate the profound potency of laughter when used as a cultural tool. Overing (2000) for example, explains that amongst the Piaroa of the Venezuelan Amazon emotions are convivial, as such they are not only felt but thought, totally deconstructing the Western rational / emotional dichotomy. Amongst the Piaroa laughter is efficacious, when used by the shaman it aids in the creation of a desirable state of sociality (Overing 2000 : 15). Thus we should not be surprised that play and laughter, as displayed in 'Water Splashing' are efficacious in the exploration of limits.

This chapter should not be read as a call for the Dai to realize the potential for transgression inherent in 'Water Splashing', for the wielding of power is a necessarily dangerous vocation. As meaning in Derrida's notion of *'Differance'* is ever subject to 'essential drifting' so too transgressive actions are imbued with ambiguity. As Butler (1990 [1999] : xxvi) explains: **"The mobilization of identity categories for the purpose of politicisation always remain threatened by the prospect of identity becoming an instrument of the power one opposes"** (see also the Zijderveld quotation at the end of this chapter). Rather what I hope to have shown here is the way in which the 'Water Splashing Festival' can be seen to

demonstrate the presence of multiple voices and multiple if ambiguous meanings in the context of Xishuangbanna, as I found it during my fieldwork.

## Conclusion

By way of conclusion I shall reassess the possible explanations for ‘Water Splashing’, including one that has been all too neglected in this chapter, that is the indigenous cosmological understanding. I explained above that Chinese scholars have provided diffusionist theories concerning the origin of the ‘Water Splashing’ in *Songkran* New Year celebrations. Drawing on the fact that the Indian Pali language seems to have greatly influenced Dai culture and the Buddhism of the Dai, writers such as Cheng Qian have proposed that ‘Water Splashing’ has origins in India. A notion of the washing away of sins, combined with the honouring of elders who needed the help of their younger relatives to cleanse their bodies and the need to attract the attention of the gods and hence encourage them to send rain, caused ‘Water Splashing’ to be passed down. However, like Yang Lizhen, I would argue that it is important to recognise that there are regional attributes. The ethnography presented above includes within it a number points I wish to draw the readers attention to:

1. The sheer number of voices:

There are the voices of different genders; male, female, transsexual.

Different ‘nationality’; such as the Han, Dai, Aini and Wa.

Different locality; foreign, Chinese, Yunnan, Xishuangbanna.

Different age: from child to elder.

Different social status from monk to female elder. This means that indigenous exegesis must by necessity be multifaceted.

2. The way that the festival is celebrated in different localities, with the 'Water Splashing' being much more conspicuous in the 'multi-ethnic' city context.
3. The visibility of the Dai way of being throughout *SongKran*. This is encouraged by the State as a tourist attraction. However the large number of tourists has the unexpected effect of unifying the local people. As one of my friends explained, 'Water Splashing' despite being initially a way of giving blessing has also become **'a way of delineating insiders from outsiders, Banna people from outsiders'**. But, as stated above, the celebrations are not seen by many as a way of distinguishing Dai from Han.
4. At no point did any of my interlocutors express the Carnavalesque aspects of 'Water Splashing', (such as the tumultuous play, disregard of status as held in the everyday and copious amounts of liquid spilt), as a way of releasing pressure, hence reinforcing the status quo. Such an explanation would, in my view, be alien to the Dai cosmology. However these aspects do provide a glimpse of another way of being, where the Dai and the Han are indistinguishable on the one hand and paradoxically where the Dai wield more power on the other, this is after all a Dai 'tradition' which thousands of Han take part in.
5. Throughout this thesis it has been explained that though there is a core understanding of what it is to be Dai, reflected in their tattoo, female attire,

architecture etc, this notion is also fluid, it's boundaries are ever subject to exploration by both those who call themselves Dai or Daile and others. This chapter has been a final explanation of this contradiction, that need not be overcome or explained away. The theory presented here does however provide some insight into both why this contradiction exists and why it is necessary. For it is this contradiction, this capacity for '*Differance*', and the possibility of heteroglossier and dialog that it enables which is the agential spark, the possibility of creativity and freedom.

To conclude I wish to take the readers mind back to Chapter Four and the courageous antics of Nanlimananna, who managed to kill the demon terrorizing her people. Using a strand of her hair, this beautiful young woman severed the head of the drunken demon, who had forcibly taken her as one of his seven wives. As the grisly head fell to the ground it burst into flames, it took seven days for Nanlimananna and her co-wives to put them out. 'Water Splashing' is said to commemorate the bravery of this young woman and to show the people's willingness to help her in overcoming the evil tyranny of the demon. This story shows the potentiality for 'Water Splashing' to generate solidarity. As indeed it did when I was in Banna. 'Water Splashing' had acquired a significance for the people of Banna as against outsiders. Through it boundaries of locality and group affinity had been blurred and this blurring provided a hint of another way of being, it turned the Han / Dai hierarchy on its head. This quaint 'tradition' of a 'minority nationality', so attractive to the tourists, has a darker side. This I experienced as an outsider, for it tells stories of the contestation of identities. The festival is avidly promoted by the Dai themselves as a tourist attraction and yet in its manifestation (at

least in Jinghong City) it also shows a dissatisfaction at the 'touristic gaze' (Urry 1990), for 'the air was taut with violence'.

It is not surprising that there are multiple reasons for 'Water Splashing'. Siu (1990 : 790) writes of the Chrysanthemum Festivals in Xiao Lan a market town of the Pearl River Delta, South China that: **"The festivals had created for the participants specific social identities and historical consciousness to which successive generations have attached their own self-interested readings"**. Thus in attempting to understand the complexities of festivities such as 'Water Splashing' it is necessary to acknowledge that there is always; **"more than one historical memory involved: the combination of different histories and reckonings of place and change"** (Feuchtwang 1998 : 56)<sup>18</sup>. These meanings may be contradictory and clichés over turned (Zijderveld 1979) for they can be constantly negotiated through dialogue. But this dialogue can be playful, rowdy or boisterous, (as in 'Water Splashing') and as such can expose a carnivalesque potentiality, a hint at another way of being. I shall end this chapter with a wonderful quote from Zijderveld that shows how laughter can transgress limits: **"In our mirthful playing with traditional and routinized meanings - either as 'professionals' or, in everyday social life, as 'laymen' - we have a chance to subdue clichés to our ingenuity and wit, and, thus to relativize their power.... the 'charisma' of humour is doomed to routinize and give way to the power of clichés. Yet, at least for the duration of the laughter it elicits, humour demonstrates that clichés are not invincible and not anthropologically 'essential'. Although for a short while, in much humour clichés are being bound, and the reign of their power transcended"** (A. Zijderveld 1979 : 102).

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The Dai have a lunar calendar which has both Indian and Chinese elements. The monks at the Central Temple explained to me that there are twelve months, but every four years the ninth month is repeated. The ninth month was repeated in 1999 and so will not repeat again until 2003. However Tannenbaum (1984 : 507) reports that this only occurs every three years.

<sup>2</sup> See (ed) N. Seesalab 1989 for a wonderful introduction to this topic.

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter Eight for a description of the water splashing activities held each day in the Jinghong theme park.

<sup>4</sup> See Chapter Two.

<sup>5</sup> 'Dai flavour' foods that were also sold in Jinuo New Year celebrations discussed in Chapter Two. There are a number of similarities between the two occasions, from the number of press to the heterogeneity of the crowd.

<sup>6</sup> Tambiah (1970 : 286-294) provides a detailed description of the firing of similar rockets during the Thai *Bunbangfai* (Merit of Firing Rockets) Festival. Tambiah explains that during this festival the trajectories that rockets take when fired are read as omens. Although the festival is primarily a rain making ritual held in the sixth lunar month in Thailand (Tambiah also states that rockets are fired during *Songkran* in Thailand).

<sup>7</sup> This is an example of the State use of the media in the promotion of the 'unity through diversity' policy adopted by the Chinese Central Government (see Chapter Two for a detailed discussion of this policy).

<sup>8</sup> Dai cosmological thought can be understood to be vertical in orientation. I was told by Mengxiang villagers that there are three planes of existence, our own, one above and one below. One way that contact can be made with the inhabitants of the higher plane is by the use of *gaoshan/ bang fei* bamboo fireworks and paper lanterns both of which are propelled high into the air.

<sup>9</sup> Phya Anuman Rajadhon (1986 : 148-166) explains that these flags, which can take many forms, all serve as a charm to divert the evil eye. However I was told by a female elder that if you dedicate such flags they can help you get into heaven. After death you can use them to climb into heaven which is seen as being vertically above.

<sup>10</sup> It is interesting to note that the wicker money trees made by Mengxiang villagers for merit making ceremonies often incorporated Thai and Chinese paper money.

<sup>11</sup> I noticed that physical fights between men (in both Kunming and Banna) often follow this pattern as well. When a person (usually male) is to be informally punished for some transgression, if he is alone he is thought to be all the more deserving of the beating as there is no one willing to stand up for him.

<sup>12</sup> This feeling reached its climax during the unsettled time following the NATO bombing of Kosovo.

<sup>13</sup> See Chapter Two for a description of the interaction between the Dai of Mengxiang and the Wa peoples from the surrounding hills.

<sup>14</sup> The character that the Han had chosen to represent 'Yi' in the above terminology means 'barbarian,' a term unacceptable to the Communist policy of 'ethnic equality' thus their name was officially changed to Dai, following the term they use to describe themselves.

<sup>15</sup> Hirst (1979) offers a detailed critique of Althusser's notion of interpellation. Hirst points out that for interpellation to work subjects must have the capacity to recognise when they are being hailed. As he writes (Hirst 1979 : 65) "**something which is not a subject must already have the faculties necessary to support the recognition which will constitute it as a subject**". Following Hall (1996), it could be argued that once hailed the subject is discursively constituted rather than instantaneously formed. Agency is manifest within this discursive process.

<sup>16</sup> See the work of M. Shildrick (1997) for an interesting take on the 'leakiness' of bodies as a foundation for postmodernist feminist ethics, incorporating Derrida's concept of '*Differance*' and Foucault's notion of embodiment.

<sup>17</sup> L. Giles (ed) 1905 [1950]: 46.

<sup>18</sup> See Chapter Two endnote no.16.



**Chapter Eight****Conclusion: Drawing Our Journey to Xishuangbanna to an End.**

## Chapter Eight

### **Conclusion: Drawing Our Journey to Xishuangbanna to an End.**

This thesis has been an exploration of images of the Dai and the aesthetics of identity and gender in Xishuangbanna. Whilst studying in Xishuangbanna I was told of the following Dai saying:

**“As an uncarved piece of wood is of no use,  
so a person needs a teacher to learn”.**

In this work I have used the knowledge I gained through my experiences with many wise and patient teachers in Yunnan to paint a picture of the complex processes through which Dai ways of being are created and recreated. This is not to suggest that the Dai constitute a bounded group. Although Chinese official discourse presents a static, rigid picture of the so-called ‘minority nationalities’, I hope to have demonstrated that the everyday experiences of the Dai are governed by a fluid and dynamic relationality. This thesis explores the play of power as it is wielded by both the Chinese authorities and Dai individuals. For although most of those registered as Dai speak a language which Western scholars call Tai, their lived world is thoroughly enmeshed with that of China.

The images of ‘minority nationalities’ that abound in China are multiple and often contradictory. The following extract is an example of the conflicting views that can be held about non-Han peoples. It is the reconstructed dialogue between myself and Little Cypress, a young model in Kunming City. The interview took place in

January 2000 on one of my return trips to China. By the time of the interview I had known Little Cypress for two years.

How did you come to be a model?

I became a model after my art teacher encouraged me to try out.

Do you enjoy the work?

I find the work difficult, there is a lot of pressure, especially during cat-walk work, I always sweat loads during cat-walk work. Most of the modelling work I get is cat-walk work.

Do your parents mind that you are model? Do they think it is a good career choice?

My parents would support me whatever I did, and I think I have taken the best road. I only work two weeks out of the month, but when I am working I can do up to twelve hours a day. However normally there are no more than two or three such long days in a row, and I earn about 2000-3000 RMB a month. Kunming is a good place to be a model, there is lots of good work.

Do you usually go to the shows alone?

Most of us models belong to a group (*tuan ti* 团体). Famous brands like *Li Ning* [makers of running shoes and sports clothing] have their own model teams.

Which kind of shows do you like least?

We do shows all over the country.

Really, where do you like best?

I think Shanghai is the most beautiful place I have been.

Tell me more about the shows you dislike.

We do shows for big bosses and foreigners. Often we have to dress in minority costume, like for the government 'Expo '99'. The show was meant to show people from the most primitive to the modern.

What costume do you wear?

I wear that of the Yi Nationality, but there is no rule about which girls play which minorities. We change the colourful costume we wear during our career. I don't like to dress in minority costumes because it feels like I am wearing a part of history. Kunming is already developed, so why should I wear these clothes? They should, in my view, be put in a museum. One American company worker told me that Kunming was even 'post-modern' (*houxiandai* 后现代) in appearance. But such outfits still express something that we in the city don't have and to that extent it is good that we still wear them. I am very proud of the costumes worn by my modelling group. They are very very beautiful.

In the above dialogue Little Cypress is expressing the view, held by many but by no means all of those I spoke to in Yunnan, that the 'minority nationalities' are backward. However her comments also convey her rather romanticised, almost 'noble savage' view of the 'minorities'. For Little Cyprus the 'minorities', and their

costumes are part of the exotica of China, something of which they should be proud. What is most telling about her views on the status of so-called 'minorities' is her discomfort at being associated with the underdeveloped 'minorities' when she feels herself to be part of 'post-modern' Kunming.

Attitudes to the Dai tend to be especially romantic, and as stated before images of them are often highly eroticised<sup>1</sup>. I have included the following extract from my field notes as, contrary to this essentialistic erotic image the passage gives voice to the diversity of ways of being Dai in Jinghong. The extract from my field notes describes an evening in November 1998 that I spent with my friend Beauty. Beauty's father was brought up to be a noble in the palace of the Dai King in Jinghong, whilst her mother grew up in a Dai village just a few hours from the city. The family now live in Jinghong City, where Beauty is a hardworking and highly qualified member of a utilities work unit.

This afternoon I went to Beauty's flat. The flat is part of a complex, organised by her work unit, where she lives with her parents and younger sister. On the way I walked past the home of a Dai singer. This singer, now in her fifties, is famous in Banna (she has even worked closely with American ethnographers interested in Dai 'traditional' music). When she is not busy performing in government sponsored shows she runs a little guest-house / restaurant which specialises in 'Dai flavour hot and sour dishes'. This small building stands out as being the only one of the Phoenix stilt bamboo style in the vicinity<sup>2</sup>. That day the eminent

singer was not at home but her young niece (an older brother's daughter) and daughter were tending the little shop (*xiao maibu* 小卖部) they run just to the left of the guest-house. The young girls were sitting on low wooden stools in the middle of the pavement. The singer's daughter, dressed in a sarong, was knitting, while the niece, Jade, was just hanging out and chatting with her cousin. Jade's *BPJi* (BP 机 pager) could be seen bulging in the back pocket of her tight pale blue jeans. The curve of her figure was also enhanced by a brightly coloured stretch vest. Jet black, fashionably cropped hair framed her heavily made up face, all glitter and glaring cherry lipstick. This chirpy, smiling girl seemed to be the epitome of Banna youth 'cool', a style which transcends all 'ethnic barriers'. That day Jade was really chatty, anxious to tell me all the latest gossip about friends we had in common. Apparently, it had rather shockingly transpired that one of the young out-of-town DJ's who work the clubs in Jinghong had been punched by a local Dai girl.

After a while Jade had imparted all the news she wished, and I walked the last few metres to Beauty's flat. Once let into the flat by her mother, I found my friend huddled up in an oversized, navy blue shirt sitting on a little wicker chair, in my view far too close to the TV. She was watching an exceedingly popular Taiwanese soap opera, about the

antics of a naughty, witty young girl called Xiao Yenzi. As she saw me Beauty turned off the television. She was quite talkative that evening, especially when we got onto the topic of her long hoped for trip to Kunming. Beauty's mother, as always, was all smiles and calm. While we were chatting and playing with their rather spoilt white lap dog, the father of the household and his friend, also a member of their work unit, came home in time for supper. This friend was a wonderful looking old man. He said he was of Han descent and had come down to Banna forty years ago soon after Liberation. He was originally from Fujian 福建 and he talked with a wistful fondness of the sea near his home. He has been back home since moving to the tropical landlocked Banna, but only once, and by that time he was already old. Since being in Banna he has learnt Daile, the language he used to speak with Beauty and her family. He was quick to praise the Dai nationality as especially good hosts. He was also keen to raise what he saw as the many differences between Dai and Han 'culture', although he was not very forthcoming on what these might be. After much deliberation he explained that people eat chilli down in Banna which they do not in Fujian 福建, Guangdong 广东, Shanghai 上海 or Guangzhou 广州.

A luscious meal of egg and pork dishes, bean curd and lotus root accompanied by cold beans and bamboo shoots dipped in chilli tomato salsa-like dip, was spread out on the low, round table in front of us. This generous array of dishes was served with white rice rather than the glutinous rice most popular with Dai living in the country. After dinner Beauty and I went for a short walk down to the bank of the Mekong River (*Lancangjiang* 澜沧江 in Mandarin). We followed the walkway along the river behind the housing complex. We could see the new bridge, then still under construction, but proudly lit, spanning the murky river. The construction of this bridge coincided with massive rebuilding projects in Banna. These plans were undertaken to make the area a more appealing destination for visitors to 'Expo '99' in Kunming. All the buildings along the River walkway were to be flattened to make way for a pedestrian pathway (a project now completed). As we walked between the fated structures I asked Beauty what she felt about the river, in response she turned to me and said "this is my mother river, it has always been here bringing me water to drink".

Later Beauty told me that she thought the refurbishment of Jinghong was beneficial. She explained "Jinghong is too messy (乱), lawless and dirty. Making the roads wider and cleaner will help improve



the situation". However she did not seem overly worried about it, for her answer revealed a trusting acceptance that the rapid changes were for the best.

This extract demonstrates the diversity of ideas and values held by Dai people living in Jinghong. Jade, with her figure hugging outfit and love for Jinghong nightclubs, seems to embody the erotic image of the Dai and all the problems of rapid modernisation. Whilst sensible Beauty is almost her opposite. Beauty works hard, and although of a noble family (spared in the Cultural Revolution), she is a model worker in a government run work unit. These two girls both differ considerably from the daughter of the famous singer, Jade's cousin, who dressed in her sarong, sat demurely knitting while Jade babbled to me gossip concerning Jinghong's resident DJ's. The above passage from my field work diary illustrates the changing diversity of Xishuangbanna and again highlights the issues of 'authenticity' recurrent in this work, while the attitudes of the friend of Beauty's father shows that not all Han view the Dai as backward or as people with whom they would not want to be associated.

### **Thesis Summary**

As explained in the Introduction the main aim of this thesis is to explore those aspects of Dai lived experience which are used in the construction of images of them. The Introduction (Chapter One) and Chapter Two of my thesis aimed to situate the Dai peoples within and against the nationalist rhetoric which delineates Xishuangbanna as an inalienable part of the People's Republic of China. Although

Chapter Two was designed to also unravel the polyphonic and contradicting aspects of understandings concerning Dai ways of being. The everyday experiences of the Dai seemed to be governed by a fluid and dynamic relationality. Unsurprisingly this was very much in contrast with the static classificatory discourse of the academy and State. In Chapter Two I also discussed the dialogic character of the processes of identification. I pointed out that these processes, by which categories such as Dai are continuously regenerated, are both playful and unpredictable. I then went on to demonstrate the multitudinous ways in which the Dai create and recreate, change and manipulate the image of 'Dainess' held by themselves and others. However it should also be apparent that there is still, despite the fluidity a recognisable 'Dainess' to be found.

Another aim of this thesis has been to explore the ways that the striking Dai aesthetics are used in the intricate power plays of Xishuangbanna. As such this work examined various aspects of the Dai lived aesthetic (of the 'beautiful'), either by Dai themselves or indeed others. This involved unravelling the strands of moral, philosophical and cosmological insight with which aesthetic knowledge is interlaced. In Chapter Three I engaged in this project through an exploration of the vibrant art of tattoo, attempting to disentangle the contextual knowledge and meanings inherent in tattoos sported in Banna. Such designs can cure, protect and demonstrate the strength of their bearers. In Chapter Three I also explained that the sporting of tattoos can be viewed as a defiant stance against the mainstream Han aesthetic. For many of the Han majority in China tattoos mark out the barbaric or criminal. However, although those with such indelible designs run the risk of being considered uncivilized or exotically 'other' by some Han, the popularity of tattoos, especially in Jinghong,

could be seen as a challenge to such prejudices. The Han aesthetic, like that of the Dai, is neither static nor uniform, and many Han in Banna have skin inked with Dai script blessings. It is also the case that many young people in Kunming admire the ‘*shaoshu minzu fengge*’, (minority nationalities style) ‘少数民族风格’, and before I left the city several of my friends were considering Dai designs for new tattoos.

In Chapter Four I discussed the feminisation of Xishuangbanna as a desirable location and the eroticisation of images of Dai feminine beauty. Indeed, I explained that such images are exploited in attempts to attract tourists to the area. On the other hand, in Dai cosmological thought, youthful feminine beauty can wield power to protect and impart change. This chapter also notes the moral consequences of placing women in compromised positions, such as forcing a woman to give more than she may want (examples would be prostitutes forced to sell themselves to survive in hostile, uncaring environments or a girl sold against her will into marriage). In such unhappy situations Theravada Buddhism, as practised by the Dai, teaches that the woman is morally sanctioned and able to demand and receive material compensation in recompense for the damage done to her honour. I have argued that Xishuangbanna is represented by feminised and often erotic imagery, thus it is not too far a leap to see Xishuangbanna itself as playing the role of the unwilling bride or compromised prostitute in the scenario laid out above. Such a stance helps in understanding the attitudes of the Dai to the changes taking place in their region. Chapter Four’s exploration of moral issues was continued in Chapter Five. Here I showed how understandings morality, co-operation and autonomy are enmeshed with the complex of ideas encompassing Dai cosmology, aesthetics and identity. Chapter Five led the

reader on a detailed exploration of the interplay between autonomy and conviviality, highlighting the importance of co-operation in Dai personal morality.

Chapter Six explored Dai architecture and the ways in which it is seen as characteristic of the beauty of Xishuangbanna. This is not a simple issue, for not only are there new Dai architectural styles but the move away from 'traditional' bamboo or wooden structures does not inevitably sever links between the Dai house and cosmological knowledge. Hence this chapter presents a critique of an oversimplified conception of acculturation. In this chapter I also made the point that changing architectural styles cannot be understood without acknowledging the role of 'ethnic tourism' and the housing boom that followed de-collectivisation. These factors, together with the understanding that house architecture is intimately connected with everyday lived experience and cosmological knowledge of the environment, mean that it is inappropriate to rashly judge which of the Dai house designs embody 'authentic Dai style'.

Chapter Seven provides the vivid and colourful example of the 'Water Splashing Ceremony' which plays out the intricate workings of the dialogic processes by which aspects of Dai lived experience (including Theravada Buddhism, ethnic tourism, images of feminine beauty and so on) contribute to the changing and multiple images of the Dai. 'Water Splashing', a component of the Dai New Year celebrations, includes surprisingly rowdy festivities which can be seen to hint, in carnivalesque style, at the possibility of other ways of being.

For the remainder of this conclusion I shall examine some issues which I feel to be of importance but which I was unable to tackle in great detail within the main body of this work. They are included here as they further emphasize the fundamental point of this thesis, namely that the processes by which images, identities and aesthetic understandings are created and recreated, and by which limits are explored and transgressed in Xishuangbanna, are dialogic in character. The three short sections on Language, Tourism and Buddhist Political Power which follow provide further examples of the dynamic polyphony at play in Banna. They also highlight once again the thorny problems of authenticity and identity. The lived experience of those in Banna includes concerns about identity and authenticity which are entwined with the complexities of global tourism, state education systems, government sponsored media and interactions between local and state leaders, with their respective, and often hidden, agendas. The first section, on language, is important as it highlights the complexity of any attempt to ensure that all the peoples of Banna are literate. What language should they be trained in? The language of one or other of their parents, or that of the State? The point is that these people may remain dispossessed if they are not competent in Mandarin. The monks in the central temple are well aware of this and do teach their adepts Mandarin whilst also teaching Daile and interestingly Thai.

The section that follows concerns international tourism and 'ethnicity'. Provided here is a detailed look at the 'minorities' theme park of Jinghong. This section allows the reader a deeper comprehension of the issues of tourism in Banna. The industry is reliant on the lure of the exotic, in this case that of 'minority nationalities' and most especially Dai women, famous for their beauty. This section reiterates the role that

the Dai can play in the formation of images of them. However it should be remembered that they may have little choice in how they portray themselves if Banna is to remain a desired tourist attraction.

The third section talks about the interaction of the State and Buddhism in Xishuangbanna. Unlike most of China, Xishuangbanna has a large population of followers of the Theravada Buddhist Path. With international financial support from Thailand, and frequent visits by renowned monks from Myanmar, the temples of Banna hold an interesting position within the Chinese Nation State. The monks, many of whom speak perfect Mandarin and have attended universities in China, are adept at protecting what they see as their Daile cultural heritage whilst also promoting the development of the area in line with central government proposals and guidelines.

### **1. Language in Xishuangbanna**

The first matter I wish to explore in this section concerns the languages used in Xishuangbanna. There are several language groups represented in the area. However, except where a minority language speaker has been employed, formal education is usually in Mandarin<sup>3</sup>. I visited one Wa village where there was a Han nationality teacher who nonetheless taught the children in their native Wa, but I understand this is unusual and the nearer one gets to town centres the more likely that education is in Mandarin.

Interestingly, most Dai households have televisions (and even remote hillside villages of non-Dai groups usually have one or two for the village) which means that

even those not educated in Mandarin are likely to be exposed to it on a daily basis in their homes, not to mention when dealing with bus drivers or market traders<sup>4</sup>. There are a few broadcasts in Aini and Daile each week and from my experience they are very popular with speakers of these languages. Video Compact Disks are also popular, again these are usually in Mandarin (although their technology often allows for a Cantonese option), except for the few Thai disks which circulate the villages. It is also important to note that despite education usually being in standard Mandarin, many northern Chinese (and actually even my friends from Kunming) claim not to be able to understand Banna *Hua*, the local Mandarin dialect(s). This means that non-local Mandarin speakers (tourists, or investors for example) are in the difficult position of having pretty much their every word understood, but not being able to understand the conversations of those around them. The following extract from my notes shows some of the problems I had adjusting to such a complex language environment.

Last night I went to drink tea with Beauty and some of her friends in Ya Fu (a large coffee house in the centre of Jinghong). Beauty was not dressed up that night, just sporting a white polo shirt and jeans, she nevertheless looked particularly sparkly and happy. She was sitting next to her class mate, a plump Dai woman in her late thirties who teaches Mandarin in a local school. Before long the conversation turned to the languages used in Xishuangbanna. I asked a question in which I used the term 'Chinese' (*Zhongguohua* 中国话 / *Zhongwen* 中文) to refer to Mandarin (*Putonghua* 普通话). Beauty, rather curtly, informed me that

this was incorrect and could be construed as offensive. She explained that the 'minority nationality' languages, such as Dai or Aini were also Chinese, just as she too was Chinese. Thus Mandarin could be correctly referred to as *Hanyu* 汉语, the language of the Hans or *Hanhua* 汉话, the speech (dialect) of the Han's but not *Zhongguohua* 中国话.

A further interesting question concerning language use in Banna is that of the contextual application of the two Daile scripts which are currently used in the area. The so-called New Dai Script is used by the government when publishing information-handouts and the local newspaper. This new script is also taught to students who wish to learn it in government run schools and colleges (including the *Minzu Xueyuan* 民族学院, the Minorities College in Kunming), whereas the old script is taught in most temple schools and is the script used for sutras, and other sources of cosmological knowledge such as almanacs, medical manuals and historical accounts. There are also vast numbers of poems, stories, legends and epic tales written in the old Daile script. This ancient script is said to have been created in Dai calendar year 639 (Gregorian Calendar 1277) by the Buddhist Abbot Du Yingda. His creation was heavily intertwined with the Pali cannon of Theravada Buddhism (Zheng Peng 1993 : 174). A brief examination of the ancient script can be found in Appendix 7.

As Zheng Peng explains, the ancient Daile script is incredibly complex: **“Pronunciation of Daile is comparatively diverse and its method of phoneticisation is not unified. Thus one character can be pronounced in a**



**number of different ways, and one sound also has many ways that it can be written. This makes it hard to write books, print or produce typing fonts. It also means that Daile script is not easy to learn or disseminate as it is hard for children to apply”** (Zheng Peng 1993 : 175, my translation).

Zheng Peng goes on to explain that these difficulties with the Daile script meant that in August 1953, on the basis of the extensive requirements of the Dai masses, the Xishuangbanna Dai Nationality Autonomous Prefecture ‘Second All Nationality All Walks of Life Representative Assembly’ decided to reform the original Dai script. This assembly established the ‘Xishuangbanna Dai Nationality Autonomous Prefecture Script Improvement Committee’ to discuss the problem and come up with a solution. Then in 1954, with the help of the China Science Academy Linguistics Research Institute and the People’s Representatives of Yunnan Province, the new committee proffered a ‘Xishuangbanna Dai Script Improvement Plan’ (*Xishuangbanna Daiwen gaijin fangan* 西双版纳傣文改进方案). The plan, which included rationalisation of the ancient Daile script, was approved. By 1955 moves were begun for the dissemination of New Daile (Zheng Peng 1993 : 175 – 176).

However the popularisation process was riddled with problems. Some of which have been outlined by Zheng Peng:

- **As old Dai script was no longer taught only the elderly were able to read it. As a result it was feared that knowledge (be it medical, moral or**

cosmological) which was encapsulated in old Dai texts would be lost as these texts became intelligible to fewer and fewer people.

- When transliterated accurately, in accordance with the new Dai script, some phonemes did not reflect their original pronunciation.
- Use of the old Dai script was not restricted to Xishuangbanna Dai peoples. It was also used by Menglian Dai, Bulang people, Tai Yun in northern Thailand, Myanmar's Dan Bang Tai Yuan and the Tai Lao in Laos. The new Dai script was only understood by those within China's borders making international communication in the region difficult (Zheng Peng *ibid*, my translation).

Zheng Peng (1993) explains that it was for these reasons that the resumption of the use of the ancient Daile script was requested. However this reversal was not complete, and it was agreed that the return to the old Dai script would occur only where scientific and academic knowledge would otherwise be lost. Today it is generally recognised that the method of transliteration needs to be standardised. But attitudes concerning this issue are still not unanimous. Although Zheng Peng (1993 : 176) hopes that further discussion will solve this complex issue it was certainly a matter of contention in Banna at the time of my fieldwork.

## **2. The appeal of Xishuangbanna: ethnic tourism in a tropical paradise.**

The second issue I wish to raise here concerns tourism to Xishuangbanna. Local officials see tourism as the route to development for Xishuangbanna. Thus it is

not surprising that an astounding two million Chinese and foreign visitors were encouraged to visit Xishuangbanna in 1996 alone (Zhang Gexin 1997 : 3). By 1998 the tourist literature reports that there are over twenty legitimate travel agencies in Xishuangbanna organising tours for these visitors (Yang Shengneng 1998 : 105 – 106). To provide some insight into the workings of these agencies, provided below are extracts from my translation of the Jinghong International Travel Agency's press handout:

Jinghong international travel agency was the first to be established in Xishuangbanna, with independent corporate organisation and legal qualifications. This specialised travel company is also approved by the National Travel Office, and works in conjunction with the regulations laid down by the Jinghong City travel office.

The agency's assets include advanced business capabilities, excellent telecommunications, and a fleet of specialised travel vehicles, not to mention fully trained travel agents and skilled interpreters, fluent in many languages including English, Japanese and Thai.

The agency provides a variety of package and non-package holidays to both Chinese and non-Chinese clientele. However the agency also has expertise in organising, international (business) conferences and individual and group business trips, student exchanges and so much more!

The agency policy is to put the customer first – reflecting our concern for both our reputation and the quality of the service we provide. As a result we hope you will choose us to accompany you on your journey to our mystical and wonderful green land.

Within the sphere of ethnic tourism in Banna, of particular interest to this work are the dynamics of the Jinghong National Minorities Park (*Minzu fengqing yuan*, 民族风情园 Nonglingnan Road Jinghong). This park is promoted as the home of many tropical plants and animals among which can also be found exhibitions of

Dai, Hani (Aini), Jinuo, Bulang, Yao and Lahu peoples. As visitors to the park enter its gates they cannot fail to notice the towering Xishuangbanna Liberation Memorial Plaque, and if they are lucky they will also notice the peacocks which scratch around in the surrounding well tended flower beds. Before they can enter the rest of the park to admire the ‘colourful’ (*Wuyanliuse* 五颜六色) fruit and medicine trees and the extraordinary, rare grasses, visitors must wander past an intricately carved stone representation of Water Splashing (Zhang Gexin 1997 : 15 – 16). They can stroll around the small zoo<sup>5</sup> or attend activities such as Cock fighting 斗鸡, elephant riding, have a Hani style massage or visit the out door stadium which has dance shows three times a week. The following performances are advertised on the ticket to the park:

Dai Zu: Peacock (*kongque* 孔雀) and elephant foot drum (*xiangjiaogu* 象脚鼓) dances.

Hanizu: Bamboo tube (*zhutong* 竹筒) dance.

Jinuozu: Big drum (*dagu* 大鼓) dance.

Yizu: Reed pipe (*lusheng* 芦笙) dance.

Lahuzu: Three cord (*sanxian* 三弦) dance.

‘Modern friendship’ dancing.

Elsewhere in the park there are daily performances of the Water Splashing festivities (*Poshuijie* 泼水节), and also the thread tying ceremony which forms part of Dai wedding celebrations. Visitors can enjoy all this for twenty RMB (about £1.60) a ticket.

The following extract from my field notes concerns the daily Water Splashing festivities held in the park. I include it here so you can compare it to the April

festivities described in the last chapter and because it provides some insight into the appeal of Xishuangbanna as a tourist destination .

6.5.98

Yesterday I went to the 'Minzu fengqing yuan' again. It seemed to be particularly full of spitting, gawking fat northern Chinese businessmen. They were dressed in cheap suits that clashed stylistically with the matching peaked caps they had been given to wear by their guides, for instant recognition. As they wandered round the theme park in long crocodiles they smiled, much enjoying this opportunity to 'play together' (*yiqi wan* 一起玩) in Xishuangbanna. Each crocodile followed an elegantly made up female guide, dressed in sleek Dai style sarongs. This was not enough of a distraction, for the businessmen still stared and pointed at me as though I too was an exotic exhibit in this living museum.

I spoke to a few of the girls working as dancers and guides inside the theme park. Most of these girls, dressed up as one or other of the 'minority nationalities', considered themselves to be a member of the 'nationality' whose representative costume they wore. For example I met a Jinuo girl from Jinuo mountain and an Aini girl from Ganlanba (see maps in Appendix 8). However many of the guides who work for one of

the many Jinghong based travel agencies are Han despite their Dai style sarongs.

The workers at the theme park with whom I spoke all seemed content but then they do have quite a well paid job (unemployment is very high in Jinghong) and are provided with modest accommodation on the grounds of the theme park. Most of the workers are recruited in their home villages by representatives of the theme park who travel around the country looking for suitable employees. I was told by a Bai girl working in a similar attraction in Kunming that this is also the recruitment procedure adopted by the Minority Village theme park in the city.

Like myself, most of visitors to the 'Jinghong Minzu fengqing yuan' seemed to be making their way to the daily Water Splashing activity that was about to start. Each of the participants had to pay ten *kuai* (RMB about £0.80) for the chance to engage in an 'authentic' water splashing experience. Before long theme park workers, most of whom were trained dancers dressed in Dai style clothes (colourful sarongs for the women, and baby blue or pink baggy suits, with embroidered hems for the men), and tourists, dressed in similar Dai costumes hired for the occasion,

began to hurl water at each other. This caused much screaming and laughing. The 'authentic' ambiance was threatened only by the pink plastic bags and garish red caps which the revellers, dancers and tourists alike, were wearing to prevent their hair getting wet. The water splashers each had a plastic basin which they refilled at one of two huge cauldron-like concrete wells. These founts were decorated with depictions of Dai girls bathing topless.

Many of the female visitors, who had paid their ten *kuai* and got dressed up in their Dai style sarongs, were none the less too shy to join in the water fights. Many women stood around the edges laughing nervously behind raised hands, from where they had frequently to ward off their more adventurous friends and colleagues who tried to drag them into the fracas. It is scenes like this that are partially responsible for the image of the Dai as a fun loving people with easy going ideas on sexuality. These Han women are happy to watch, and excited to be near to such risqué behaviour, but they are still hesitant to join in. However the relish with which many of the visitors do participate could be understood as caused by the excitement of experiencing such an exotically other way of being.

Once I returned from the park I asked a young Aini friend of mine:

Who designed, built and paid for the 'minority theme park' in Jinghong?

On hearing my question, much to my surprise, she fell about laughing. Eventually, after what seemed an age she calmed down enough to ask: "How could I know? Ahh it must be the government! She replied. Well, I asked, how does the government know what Hani or Dai ways of being are like? My friend answered: "How could they not know? They must know because inside the government there are Dai, Aini and other 'minority nationalities.' So the government must know how these people live."

Gladney (1994) explains that such 'minority' theme parks should be viewed as demeaning representations of colonised peoples. He argues that, in line with a Marxist – Maoist evolutionary scheme, the peoples are represented as backward, exotic attractions. Bearing this in mind it is interesting to look again at the above extract from my field notes. Not only did my Aini friend accept that those in the local government were capable of understanding Dai or Hani ways because the officials themselves are Dai and Hani, but those workers with whom I spoke seemed happy to work in the park. My point is not that such parks are good or worthy, as I sympathise with Gladney's argument. However it should not be forgotten that those represented in such theme parks may not be troubled by them and may even embrace them as welcome bringers of employment and providers of recognition of their ways of being. As Hendry explains (2000 : 104) such parks can be seen as embodying an



utopian ideal, in this case that of the 'Unity through Diversity' rhetoric explored in Chapter Two. The implications of this and the questions it raises about authenticity and identity shall be explored further in the next section.

### **3. Buddhism, tourism and power.**

The 'minority nationality' influence in the local government of Banna mentioned by my friend in the above extract takes me onto the last issue I wish to raise here, namely the role of Theravada Buddhism and the monks in particular, in the complex power plays of ethnic tourism and the images of the Dai that are created and sustained by it.

The forging of links between the government of Xishuangbanna and Buddhism were apparent in the last chapter where I noted that the procession which proceeded the Buddha effigy cleansing aspect of the Dai New Year celebrations began at the government offices in Jinghong, before winding its way to the Central Temple just outside the city. This temple has over seventy young monks training to be abbots at any one time. Most of whom are Dai, but there are some Wa novices, although as yet there are still no Han, although an abbot suggested to me that this was a future possibility. Those young men who pass through the temple will be given the eminent title of *Henan* when they return to the laity. Thus they will hold much respected positions in their villages should they decide to move back. There are also other opportunities for such eminent figures and many do go on to work for the government. Contrary to the commonly held belief that Buddhism is purely 'otherworldly' in orientation, it is not unusual for Buddhism to be entwined in the political sphere<sup>6</sup>. As Ian Harris has explained (1999 : 1) some Buddhist practitioners

have always been tempted to **“influence the political process in a direction conducive to the continued well-being of the Buddha’s teachings and the maintenance of stable Buddhist institutions”**. Harris goes on to make the interesting point that it is not only kingship which is authorized by the Buddhist textual tradition: **“The Buddha’s own utterances also seem to give support to the idea of republican or socialist systems of political organisation”**. Buddhist organisations have also questioned and in some cases challenged the political realm surrounding them. As Harris writes: **“There is plenty of evidence...of significant Buddhist involvement in anti-colonial movements of protest, particularly since the Second World War. Similarly, new or revamped Buddhist organisations with a strongly nationalist, reformist, socio-activist, therapeutic or reactionary-fundamentalist character are much in evidence throughout the twentieth century”** (Harris 1999 : 19).

Together with the Buddhist Association of Xishuangbanna the temple organises educational poster campaigns, such as a recent information bulletin on the possible ways of becoming HIV infected. Monks at the temple have also managed to import a computer font for the ancient Daile script which will enable easy printing of materials. They spend many hours translating Thai and Burmese Buddhist texts into Daile and even Mandarin and English to facilitate learning. Perhaps most interestingly they have recently started a school for young Dai girls where they can learn the ancient Daile script. As explained above this would usually not be available to those not attending a temple school (female elders in Mengxiang village did have some knowledge of Dai script. This I was told resulted from many years study in the temple as an elder).

The monks at the Central Temple see themselves very much as protectors of the cultural heritage of not only the Dai people but of Xishuangbanna. I have noted elsewhere in this work that in line with the 'Pre – Liberation' power dynamics of the area, the Daile are often assumed to be the only 'authentic' Dai in Banna. I would argue that this has much to do with their association with powerful international Buddhist institutions which have the ability to promote their causes.

Tourists from China and Southeast Asia flock to the Central Temple, the site of which is said to have been visited by Sakyamuni Buddha himself. Although the temple has been rebuilt four times since then, the last modifications finishing in 1990. This sacred temple is to be found within the grounds of what is now Manting Park, a popular scenic spot about two kilometres outside Jinghong City. This park has iron wood (*Mesua Ferrea*) groves, statues, a white pagoda, a replica of an ancient eight sided pagoda, elephants, and numerous peacocks, not to mention tight rope artists and other impressive performers and dancers. If visitors are hungry they can enjoy the tea shops and numerous Dai flavour barbecues stands. Tourists must pay to enter both the park and the temple complex itself and are often tempted to part with their money at one of the numerous stalls selling souvenirs, such as 'minority nationality crafts' or Dai style sarongs. Once inside, the categories of 'tourist' and 'worshiper' seem to blend into one another as visitors and locals alike are blessed by the senior Abbot.

Evans, writing about the recent renovation of Banna and the planned rebuilding of the palace of the 'Pre – Liberation' Daile King of Jinghong, has stated

that once the plans are finished **'the Han will have created their own Dai Disneyland'** (Evans 2000 : 179). The plans will certainly make the area more of an attractive tourist destination and it is a stated aim of the local government to promote the area as such. But what Evans is missing is the role of the Dai themselves in these plans, I was told by one monk that he is helping in the designs for this new palace. There is anger at the levelling of the palace that occurred during the Cultural Revolution but from those I spoke to the feeling was very much that it is better to rebuild it than to have none at all. By promoting tourism the monks should not be seen as aiding in their own destructive 'Disneyfication' but rather as astutely ensuring themselves some political leeway. They have established themselves as 'protectors and promoters of the Dai's cultural heritage'. With this position comes the ability not only to influence what is or is not considered culture, that is, to influence decisions on what is worth preserving, but also the capability of suggesting what will be a lucrative tourist attraction. This may play into the hands of the government in that they too want to promote ethnic tourism in the area, but it is also a position from which they can influence the future of Banna.

## **Conclusion**

In this conclusion I have aimed to provide the reader, not only with an overview of the argument and ethnography presented in this thesis, but also with some further evidence for my assertion that the Dai constantly and creatively influence the plays of power in Xishuangbanna. This does not mean that the area can be considered a Tai state, uninfluenced by its geo-political setting inside China's borders. Not only would this be inappropriate for those who were disenfranchised by the Dai prior to 'Liberation', but it would also be to underestimate the uses that many

Dai people have made of the opportunities provided by the Chinese State. Moreover it would be overly simplistic and I'm sure offensive to accuse such people of having been 'Hanified'. I know of one young, very successful Dai restaurateur who would be most put out by the suggestion that his new flat, blue jeans and 4x4 car made him in anyway like the Han. There is resentment, especially concerning the tragic periods of famine and terrifying repression of the past, but there is also an often expressed gratitude and a sense of excitement and expectation for a richer future.

The images explored in this thesis: that of the Dai tattooed with esoteric designs; the elegant, svelte Dai woman; the peaceful, co-operative and respectful Dai; the wet rice cultivating Dai living near their land in Romantic Phoenix style houses; the fun loving Dai of Water Splashing Festival and the learned saffron-robed Buddhist monks, were the images of the Dai most readily presented and commented on, both by themselves and by others at the time of my fieldwork. These images rest upon deep cosmological understandings. Thus for example tattoos protect and strengthen the bearer, and young women have their own potency which must be controlled but which can also be unleashed to devastating effect. The point is however that the meanings of these images are multiple, contradictory and often contested. The young Aini girl who was told that the pillars of Dai temples rest on the severed heads of murdered Aini children will not look on the statues of Dai women that adorn the streets of Jing Hong in the same way as a Han business man who has learnt that Dai women are some of the fairest in China.

There are however other images of Xishuangbanna, images of a primitive, backward area in need of development. It is generally agreed that the best route to

development is through tourism, more specifically ethnic tourism. This move brings in its wake new fears of assimilation, acculturation and lack of authenticity. Many of the questions raised by these fears have been discussed in the preceding chapters. This work has explored how the meanings of all these images are being creatively manipulated by the Dai themselves all be it within certain limitations imposed both from within and without the permeable, shifting boundary between Dai and non-Dai. Comprehensibility depends upon citation so transgression and limitation are intimately linked as the dazzling power of lightening is dependant on the black of the sky to paraphrase Foucault.

This journey to the diverse and complex, yet *Meili de Banna* 美丽的版纳 (Beautiful Xishuangbanna) is at an end. I hope that it has shown the area to be as truly ‘fascinating’ as the words of Zheng Lan promised at the beginning of this work. I end with a Dai aphorism told to me by a venerable monk, which tells of the importance of acknowledging those who help one. In this case it is all my friends in China and elsewhere who have allowed me to experience so much.

**“When you eat rice do not forget the fields  
When you eat fish do not forget the sea  
When you drink water do not forget the well  
When you eat honey do not forget the hardships  
of those who helped you acquire it”.**

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> This is discussed in some detail in Chapter Four of this work.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter Six.

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed exploration of education in Xishuangbanna see Hansen 1999 : 87 – 158. Of particular interest is his discussion on minority schools (131 –134) where he makes the point that special boarding schools have been established to improve attendance rates of children from rural areas. Hansen does state (1999 : 158) that many cadres and teachers aim to ‘break’ the strong Dai identity in the area. Although this may be the case for some, I feel that it is certainly not so for the schools I visited. Many educators may feel that it is in the interest of their students that they learn good Mandarin but I don’t think that this is the same as aiming to break a student’s ‘cultural identity’. It is important to recognise that the state rhetoric has changed since times of forced assimilation. I have also met teachers of Dai nationality who most certainly do not want to break their students ‘Dai identity’.

<sup>4</sup> Before Liberation the lingua franca of the area was Dai and I have visited Wa villages, remote from Han centres, whose inhabitants speak better Dai than they do Banna *Hua* (the local Mandarin dialect).

<sup>5</sup> Due to the cramped conditions I found this almost unbearably disturbing, I complained to a high ranking monk to see if he could put some moral pressure on the organisers of the park, although he told me he had spoken to them I do not know how successful this was in improving conditions.

<sup>6</sup> For a moving and controversial account of Buddhism and politics in Sri Lanka see Tambiah 1992. This work, banned in Sri Lanka, provides a detailed account of the Singhalese Buddhists’ role in perpetuating anti-Tamil hostilities and explains how and why some Buddhist monks could have turned to violence.

## **Appendix 1.**

### **Constitution of the People's Republic of China.**

(Adopted at the Fifth Session of the Fifth National People's Congress and promulgated for Implementation by the Proclamation of the National People's Congress on December 4, 1982, Published 1994).

#### Section VI

### **THE ORGANS OF SELF-GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL AUTONOMOUS AREAS.**

ARTICLE 112: The organs of self-government of national autonomous areas are the people's congresses and people's government of autonomous regions, autonomous prefectures and autonomous counties.

ARTICLE 113: In the people's congress of an autonomous region, prefecture or county, in addition to the deputies of the nationality exercising regional autonomy in the administrative area, the other nationalities inhabiting the areas are also entitled to appropriate representation.

Among the chairman and vice chairman of the standing committee of the people's congress of an autonomous region, prefecture or county there shall be one or more citizens of the nationality or nationalities exercising regional autonomy in the area concerned.



ARTICLE 114: The chairman of an autonomous region, the prefect of an autonomous prefecture or the head of an autonomous county shall be a citizen of the nationality exercising regional autonomy in the area concerned.

ARTICLE 115: The organs of self-government of autonomous regions, prefectures and counties exercise the functions and powers of local organs of state as specified in Section V of Chapter Three of the Constitution. At the same time, they exercise the power of autonomy within the limits of their authority as prescribed by the Constitution, the Law of the People's Republic of China on Regional National Autonomy and other laws and implement the laws and policies of the state in the light of the existing local situation.

ARTICLE 116: The people's congress of the national autonomous areas have the power to enact regulations on the exercise of autonomy and other separate regulations in the light of the political, economic and cultural characteristics of the nationality or nationalities in the areas concerned. The regulations on the exercise of autonomy and other separate regulations of autonomous regions shall be submitted to the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress for approval before they go into effect. Those of autonomous prefectures and counties shall be submitted to the standing committees of the people's congresses of provinces or autonomous regions for approval before they go into effect, and they shall be reported to the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress for the record.

ARTICLE 117: The organs or self-government of the national autonomous areas have the power of autonomy in administering finances of their areas. All revenues

accruing to the national autonomous areas under the financial system of the state shall be managed and used by the organs of self-government of those areas on their own.

ARTICLE 118: The organs of self-government of the national autonomous areas independently arrange for and administer local economic development under the guidance of state plans.

In exploiting natural resources and building enterprises in the national autonomous areas, the state shall give due consideration to the interest of those areas.

ARTICLE 119: The organs of self-government of the national autonomous areas independently administer educational, scientific, cultural, public health and physical cultural affairs in their respective areas, protect and sift through the cultural heritage of the nationalities and work for a vigorous development of their cultures.

ARTICLE 120: The organs of self-government of the national autonomous areas may, in accordance with the military system of the state and practical local needs and with the approval of the State Council, organize local public security forces for the maintenance of public order.

ARTICLE 121: In performing their functions, the organs of self-government of the national autonomous areas, in accordance with the regulations on the exercise of

autonomy in those areas, employ the spoken and written language or languages in common use in the locality.

ARTICLE 122: The state provides financial, material and technical assistance to the minority nationalities to accelerate their economic and cultural development.

The state helps the national autonomous areas train large numbers of cadres at various levels and specialized personnel and skilled workers of various professions and trades from among the nationality or nationalities in those areas.

## Appendix 2

### Money design in China

(Exchange rate depending, there are approximately 13 *Renminbi* to the pound / 8 to the Dollar. *Renminbi* 人民币 means 'Peoples' Currency', also know as *Yuan* meaning dollar - like the Japanese Yen. The colloquial term *kuai* is used in everyday speech. There are 10 *Mao* (colloquially known as *Jiao*) to 1 *Renminbi* .and 10 *Fen* to the Mao.)

#### 10 *Renminbi* Note:



Depicts members of the Han 汉 and Menggu 蒙古 (Mongolian) Nationalities. Mongolian people are officially said to be found in: Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region, Jilin, Liaoning, Heilong Jiang, Xinjian Uygur Autonomous Region, Gansu, Qinghai, Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, Hebei and Henan. Han people are officially said to be distributed all over the country.

#### 5 *Renminbi* Note



Depicts members of the Zang (Tibetan) 藏 and Hui 回 (Islamic) peoples. Tibetan people are officially said to reside in Xizang: (Tibet) Autonomous Region, Qinghai, Sichuan, Gansu, Yunnan. Hui People can be found in: Ningxia Hui Autonomous

Region, Gansu, Anhui, Henan, Hebei, Qinghai, Shandong, Yunnan, Beijing, Tianjin, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region.

### **2 Renminbi Note**



Depicts members of the Wei Wu'er (Uygur) 维吾尔族 people and Yi 彝 Nationality. Uygur people are officially said to be found only in Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. Yi people can officially be found in: Yunnan, Sichuan and Guizhou.

### **1 Renminbi Note**



Depicts people of the Dong 侗 and Yao 瑶 Nationalities. The Dong can officially be found in: Guizhou, Hunan and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. The Yao are officially said to live in: Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, Hunan, Yunnan, Guangdong and Guizhou.

### **5 Mao Note**



Depicts members of the Miao 苗 and Zhuang 壮 Nationalities. The Miao are officially to be found in: Guizhou, Hunan, Yunnan, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, Sichuan and Guangdong. The Zhuang reside in: Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, Yunnan, Guangdong.

### 2 Mao Note



Depicts members of the Buyi 布依 and Chaoxian 朝鲜族 (Korean) peoples. The Buyi are officially said to be found in Guizhou whilst Korean people can be found in: Jilin, Heilongjiang and Liaoning.

### 1 Mao Note



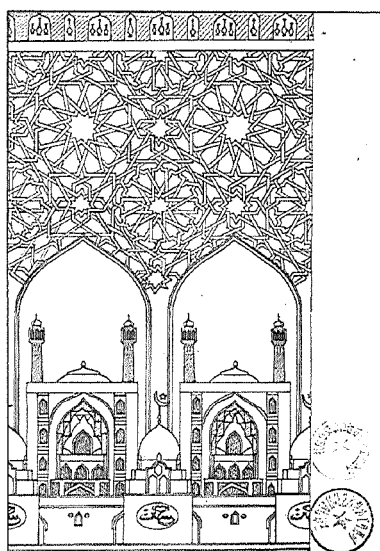
Depicts Gaoshan 高山 and Man 满 (Manchu) peoples. The Gaoshan are to be found in Taiwan. The Man people are officially said to reside in Liaoning, Heilongjiang, Jilin, Hebei, Beijing and Inner Mongolia Menggu Autonomous Region.

## Appendix 3

### Kunming Exposition '99

Examples from the designs carved into pillars in the 'United Square' of the Yunnan garden. The pillars depict designs representative of each of the peoples of Yunnan, four examples are shown below to give the reader some idea of the detail and beauty of the display. I owe a debt of gratitude to the artist who wishes to remain nameless.

#### Designs representative of the Hui and Tibetan peoples

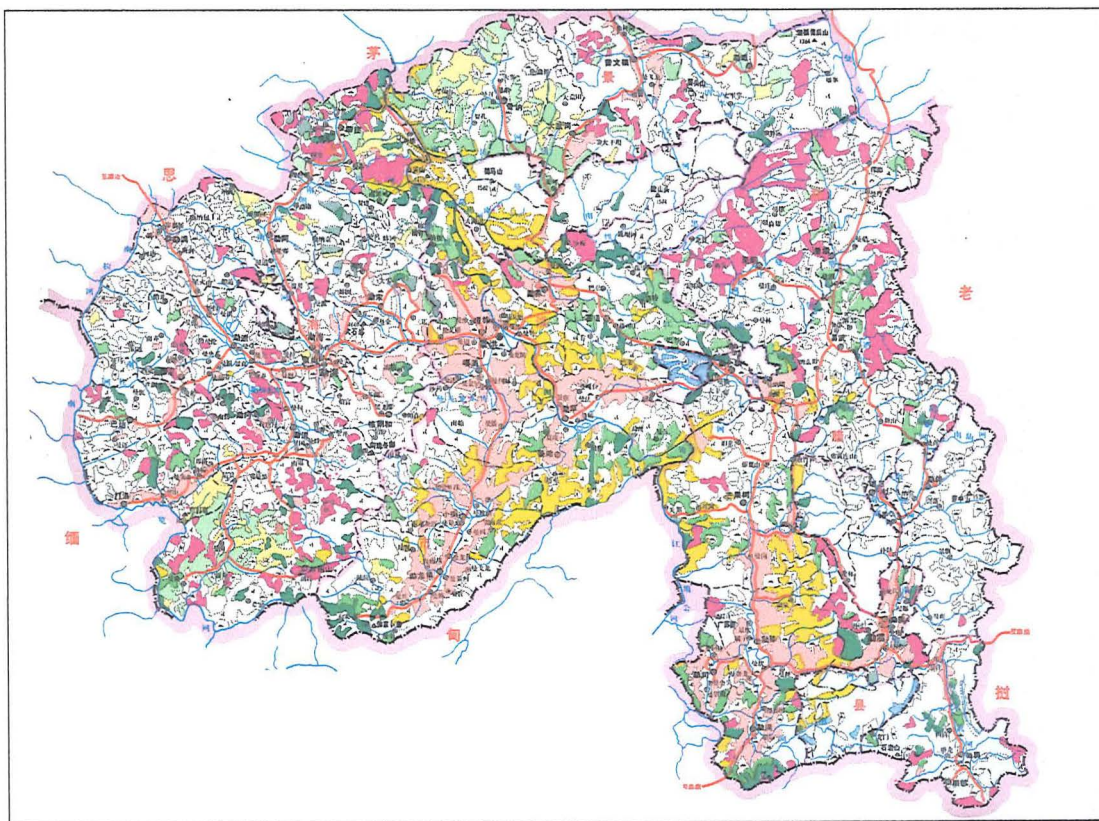


#### Designs representative of the Dai and Naxi Peoples.



### Appendix 4

Map showing the distribution of Nature Reserves in Xishuangbanna (from Ai Hua 1998 : insert between 38 -39).



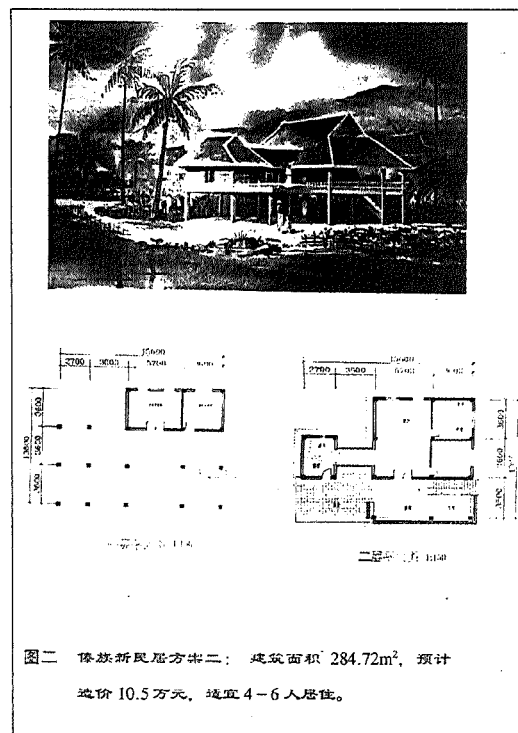
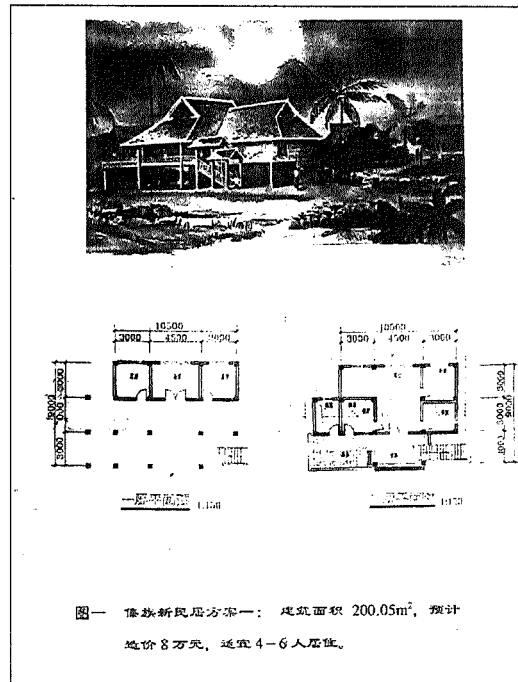
Key: To Appendix Four Map

Country Border		Public Road		Uncultivated Land		Triangulation Point		Dominant Forest Type	Nearly mature Forest	Middle-age Forest	Sparse Woodland
Prefecture Border		Bridge		Waste Land		Nature Reserve Centre		Si Mao Pine Yunnan Pine			
County Border		River		New Growth Forest		Nature Reserve Office		Poplar, Sassafras, Phoenix, Tung, Chinese Ephedra, Alder, Chinaberry etc.			
Village Border		Reservoir		Swidden Forest				Paper Mulberry, Evergreen Chinquapin, Camphor, Phoebe Nanmu, Oak etc.			
Ecological Zone		Lake		Felled Forest				Evergreen broad-leaf forest			
Prefecture Capital		Mountain Peak		Pasture				Plantation		Bamboo	
County Capital		Average Altitude	759	Arable Land							
Village		Highest Point		Nature Reserve							
Hamlet		Shrub Forest		Highest Altitude	1999						



## Appendix 5

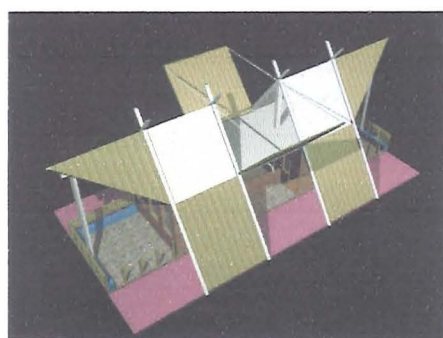
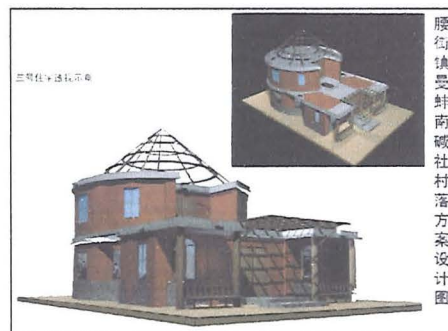
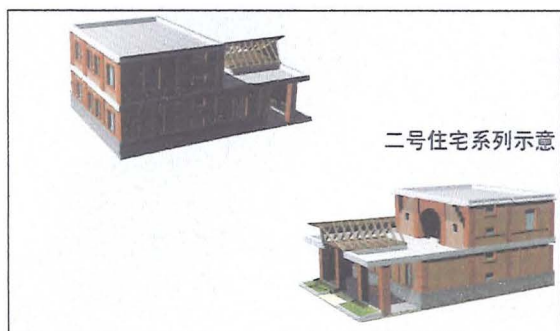
Plans for the 'Dai style' houses designed by the architect Zhu Liangwen.



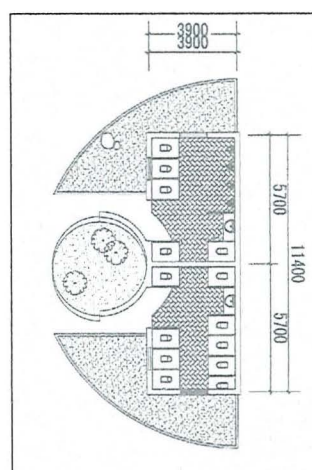
## Appendix 6

### Designs for the Flower Belt Dai village Improvement Plan.

House designs from which the villagers could chose their preferred house.



Village gate and ticket booth.



Plans for the public toilets.





Three triple compound vowels

၎င်းတို့  
 သို့မဟုတ်  
 ၎င်း

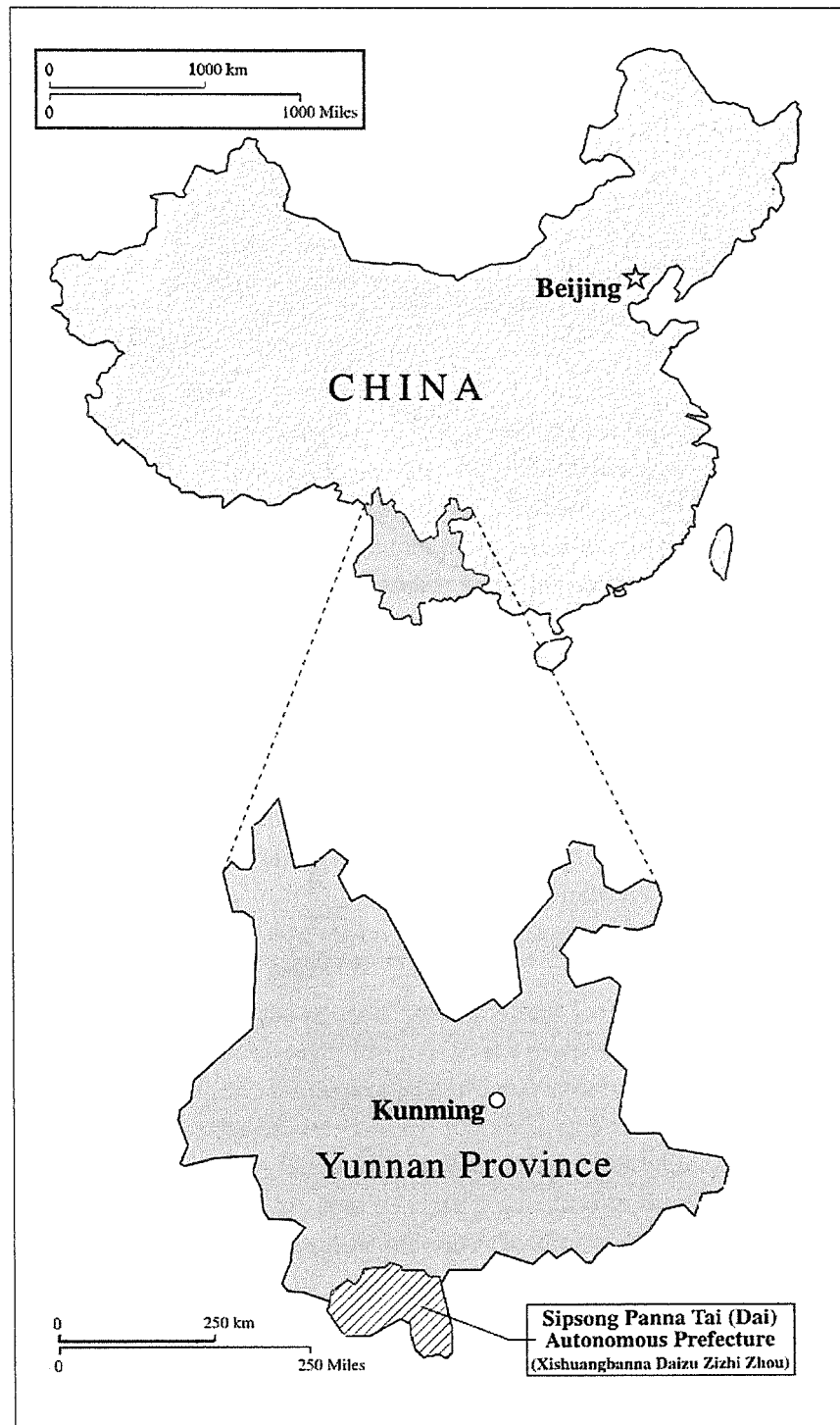
Below are provided some examples of simple words and their composition:

Gold: Ha	၆	Am	ံ	Ham.	ံ
Chicken: Ai	ဲ	Ga	ဲ	Gai.	ဲ
Chilli: Pa	ာ	Ik	ါ	Pik.	ါ
Tiger: Sa	ာ	Er	ါ	Ser.	ါ
Village: Ba	ာ	An	ါ	Ban.	ါ
Person: Ga	ာ	Un	ါ	Gun.	ါ

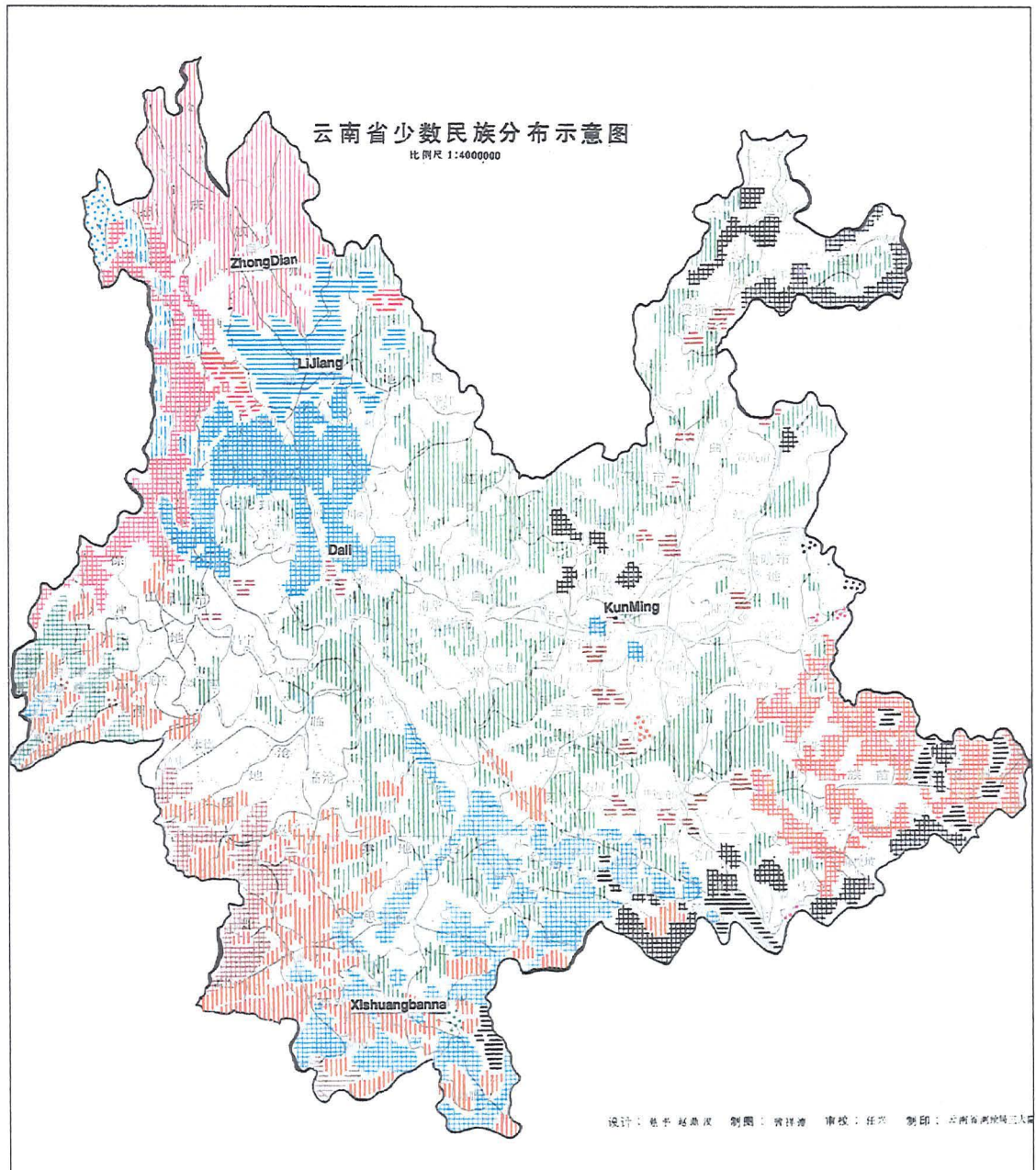
## Appendix 8

### Maps

























- a. The location of Xishuangbanna in China (adapted from Hansen 1999 : ix).



b. The distribution of 'Minority Nationalities' in Yunnan as officially mapped.



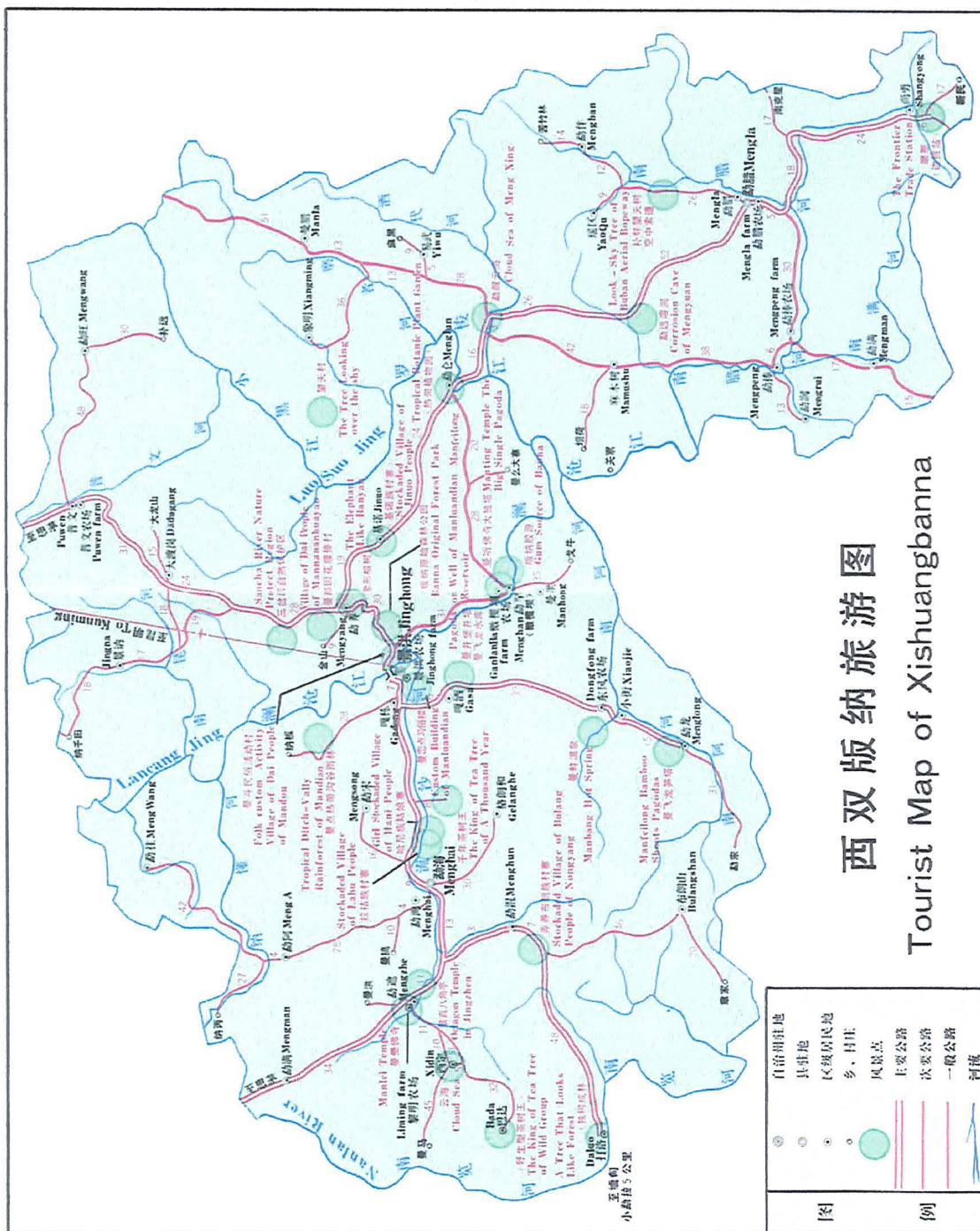
## Key to Appendix 8b. Map.

Map Key			
Shading on Map	Indigenous people (minority nationality)	Shading on Map	Indigenous people (minority nationality)
	Yi		Yao
	Bai		Tibetan (Zang)
	Akka (Ha Ni)		Bu Lang
	Zhuang		Pu Mi
	Tai (Dai)		A Chang
	Miao		Nu
	Li Su		De Ang
	Wa		Mongol
	Hui		Du Long
	La Hu		Ji Nuo
	Na Xi		Bu Yi
	Jing Bo		Shui

Map from Yunnan Shen Qing (1996 - Yunnan People's Press)  
(Translation A. Komlosy)

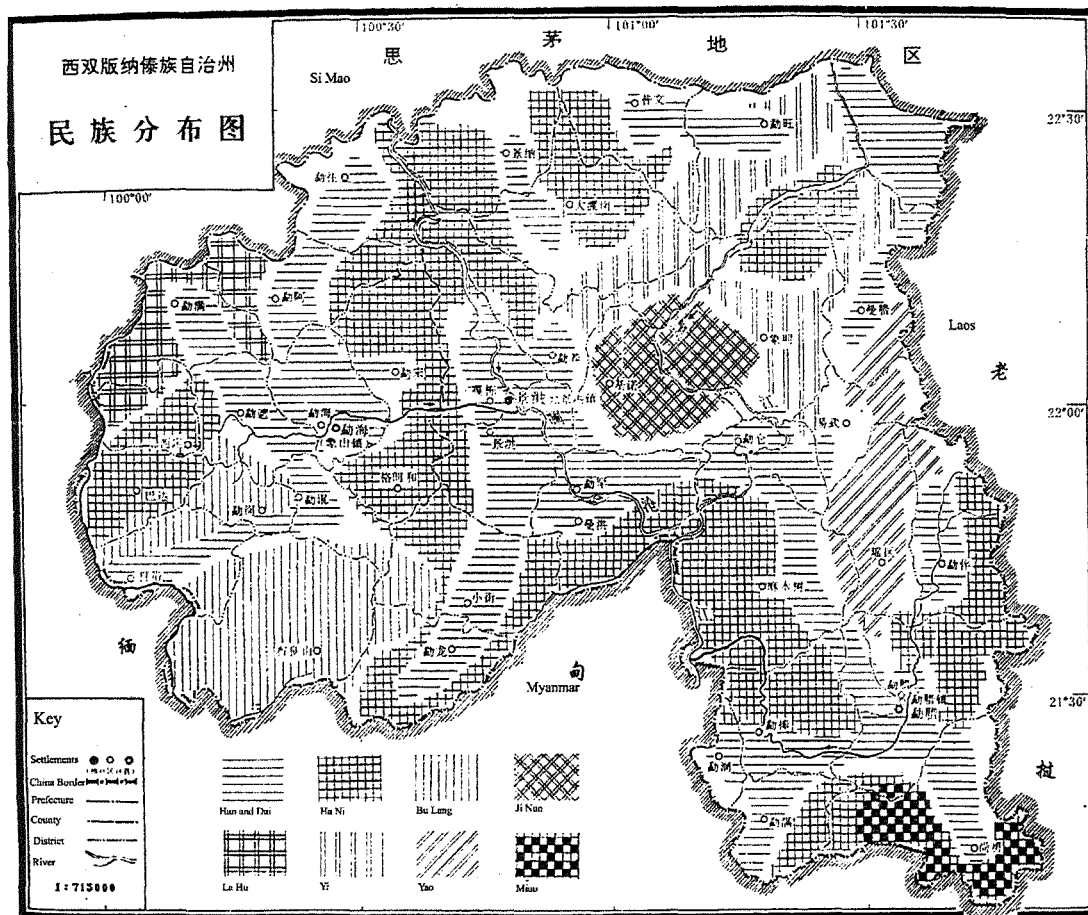


c. Local map of Xishuangbanna, showing administrative divisions, towns, roads and major tourist attractions (from Yang Shengneng 1998 : Insert).



西双版纳旅游图  
Tourist Map of Xishuangbanna

d. The distribution of 'Minority Nationalities' in Xishuangbanna as officially mapped (from Zheng Peng 1993 : Insert).



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