
Moving Dai: Stories from the field, part II *

By Wasan Panyagaew

Department of Anthropology

Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies

Australian National University

Returning home

In the last week of April 2004, I was in a house in the southwestern zone of Sydney. Uncle Lee, in his late fifties, an overseas Hmong from Laos, had driven me here from Cabramatta rail station. It was Uncle Le's house, an old friend of Uncle Lee, in his mid sixties. Both of them, with their families, had moved to Australia some three decades ago. Whilst the escape story of the Lee family from Laos began in the early 1970s, the Le family had re-started their mobile history in the late 1970s. Uncle Le, his mother, his wife and his four kids, had fled from Muang Singh, via the Laos capital and Thailand, to Australia. Uncle Le and his mother were Lue people originally from Muang Long, in the Sipsong Panna area of China.¹ They are former members of the royal family of one of the twelve Lue principalities.

This was my first visit. So I introduced myself briefly, telling them about my 'moving Dai' project, adding that in two days' time I would be going back to Sipsong Panna. Uncle Le's old mother ('Grandma') then asked me how it would be possible to get to her old home, Sipsong Panna, from northern Thailand. She had once been to Mae Sai, in Thailand, visiting her relatives there, about five years previously (at that time Bangkok Airways and Thai International Airways did not operate the Chiang Mai-Jinghong route). She sadly told me how a boat operator along the Mekong had refused to let grandma 'come back home' because of her age at that time, when she was already in her late seventies. Although the experience had clearly been traumatic for her, I continued asking her about her migrating life. Grandma smiled and started to tell me her adventures, which had begun in 1949, perhaps just a month before the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) finally defeated the KMT (Guomindang) in Keng Hung, now called Jinghong. From Keng Hung, with her second, Han, husband, she had carried her kids (one daughter was left in Muang Long and lives there today) and escaped to Muang Singh, via Muang Ham along the Mekong to Muang Pong and Muang Mang, where "Gala [the French] accommodated me", said Grandma. Escaping to Australia, this time taken by her son, was therefore Grandma's second international move.

Uncle Le also told me how when he was about ten, led by his mother and his step-father, his family had left Sipsong Panna during the civil war in Keng Hung, and moved to Muang Singh, then a French colony. He grew up there, still in Lue country. He became a Laotian national. Perhaps because of his life course and experiences at a young age, Uncle Le said, "politics is in my blood." He wished to be a governor of Muang Singh, intending to help the peoples of that town. Uncle Le explained that it was this desire which led him to move down to study in the Lao capital (Vientiane), in the School of Law and Politics, in 1958. Two years after that, he moved up to Luang Namtha where he worked in the local government until 1962, when the town was attacked and finally controlled by the Communist Party of Laos. Having returned to Vientiane, he continued working in the Minister of the Interior and studied hard particularly at English. In the mid 1960s, he got a scholarship from the Colombo Project. So he already

Before I left that night, Grandma brought a tape cassette player out from her bed room, to share with me her favorite Kam Kap (Lue oral poetry). Seemingly, she listened to it every night.

had experience of Australia before arriving here as a refugee. On his first visit, he lived in north Sydney for a year. From 1970-1972, he was appointed as a head of Tha Fa district in Bo Kaew province, rather than Muang Singh as he had hoped. A few years before his second migration took place, he had been the secretary of one minister who had mysteriously died in Berlin. Uncle Le escaped from the Lao capital in 1978, just a few days after he attended the cremation of his boss. From his sad eyes, I could see that Uncle Le deeply missed his country but I wondered whether he considered Muang Long or Muang Singh as his real homeland, it seemed to be both. Last Dai New Year (in 2003) he had planned to visit Sipsong Panna with his friends, using Chiang Mai airport as a meeting place. However, Uncle Le himself could not make it. One of his friends, another Lue who had settled in Perth, made the trip, and after coming back, this friend burned VCDs of Xishuangbanna films and sent him copies of these, together with VCDs of 'Music Tai'.²

It was exciting to find that Music Tai products had circulated all the way from Jinghong in China to a house in southwest Sydney, to Uncle Le via his Lue friend in Western Australia. That evening, the two uncles and I had *Kow Nhoom* (rice-noodle soup) that his wife had prepared for us, while modern Dai music played in the background.

Before I left that night, Grandma brought a tape cassette player out from her bed room, to share with me her favorite *Kam Kap* (Lue oral poetry). Seemingly, she listened to it every night.

Breaking News

On 27 April 2004, in the evening, I flew from Sydney back to Chiang Mai, via Bangkok, spending a total of about ten hours on two airplanes. When the Thai Boeing landed at Chiang Mai airport, looking outside through the window, and seeing the sky, green trees, and *Doi Suthep*, I felt at home.

Breaking news on television in the late morning of 28 April 2004 made me shake my head, waking me up to the real world, with the number of dead bodies of Muslims in the far south of Thailand. Actually, one could think it was not really a surprise. A couple of months earlier, sequences of shot policemen and bombs in the state offices had been reported. There sequential attacks, operated by the ‘southern insurgents’, still continue until today.

This southern violence reminded me of what had already happened in the north of Thailand in the past hundred years, a very similar tragedy, when the Siamese state started to restructure local powers and imposed new taxations which let the officials exploit the villagers. Thinking further about the Lanna language, which had not been taught in schools, and was indirectly not allowed in classrooms, so that the traditional script was left behind and finally almost

disappeared from the northern ways of life, it was easy to imagine and understand why the “separatists” in the south, as they are called by the Thai state and media, tactically chose to burn state schools or bomb police stations.

Up to Mae Sai

This trip was my follow-up fieldwork, and I had three destinations in mind; Takeelek in Burma, Muang Singh in Laos, and Jinghong in China. However, I could not revisit the young abbot I had met last time in the Lue town in northwestern Laos.

About a week after my arrival, from Chiang Mai bus station my first destination was Mae Sai, a border town on the Thai-Burma frontier, about 250 kilometres northwards. I could have gone straight to Mae Sai in about four hours by direct bus, but decided to stop overnight in Chiang Rai city, visiting a friend and wandering around one of the oldest centres of the Tai states (1262) that late afternoon.

Next morning, from Chiang Rai I headed up to Mae Sai by a local bus, which usually leaves from the city every half an hour, from 6 am to 6 pm. The ticket costs twenty-five baht. Along the road,

back and forth, all the buses stopped at the patrol police check points, in Mae Chan district, to let officials check the passengers’ ID, minority cards, passports, or border passing documents, as usual.

The image of Mae Sai as the poor hometown of the northern prostitutes lured into the Thai-skin trade in Bangkok, as illustrated in *Carabao’s* famous song, *Mae Sai*, has changed dramatically. Some of the press reports can perhaps reflect what has happened in this small but busy border town. For example, it was reported (in *Manager* online) that the second bridge connecting the Thai side to the Burmese side, designed for caravans of cargo trucks to haul produce/commodities from Thailand to Yunnan in China and back, was almost complete. And it was reported that the road links between Mae Sai and Sipsong Panna, via Takeelek-Keng Tung-Meng La (the casino centre) had been improved (it was officially opened on 1 July 2004.) The only obstacle that remained for the Burmese (reinforced by the Thai and the Chinese)



Planting rice in Muang Long. Wasan Panyagaew

government to deal with involved negotiating with two powerful minority forces, the Wa and the CPB (Communist Part of Burma), who control these two special regions (number 2 and 4 respectively), to ensure travel security, while the role of the Shan State Army seemed to have become obscure.

Not surprisingly as result of these developments, Mae Sai, one of the biggest centres of the Lue community in Thailand, is slated to soon become one of the most important cross-border trade centres in this upper Mekong region (the two others are Chiang Saen, and Chiang Khong). The road link between Mae Sai and Sipsong Panna may paradoxically be much more significant to the locals than is currently imagined. For Lue exiles, particularly in Mae Sai, who were forced to leave their homeland for this region in the late 1940s and the mid 1960s, are now being pulled back again by the red Giant which once hunted them, and reconnecting with their old country.

Crossing to Takeelek

Takeelek market in early May 2004 seemed a little quiet and sleepy, though. The local bus or motorcycle drivers and tourist guides were still doing their jobs as usual. After I had passed through the Burmese check point, they immediately greeted me, pulling excitedly at my hands, and attempting to offer me exotic packages; supposedly exciting tourist places, 'special massages' or 'a pretty girl.' On the black market, groups of mobile street vendors of both sexes, scrambled to advertise their goods - packs of cigarette, such as *Marbollo*, shavers, telescopes, and porn films. "Nhang Po Mai Pi? Only a hundred baht for six packs", one guy offered persuasively.

Maha, former senior monk of the Central Temple of Xishuangbanna (CTX) now in his late thirties, was waiting for me in his music shop, which had opened two years previously. I had first met him the year before, when I was doing fieldwork in the region. Today I had come to visit him for updated data on the circulation of the 'Music Tai'.

Maha had had a fascinating life. Born in the mid 1960s in Muang Yong (the Shan state of Burma), he was one in a group of cross-border monks from that town who were brought to study in a northern Thai monastery in the early 1980s, by the then abbot of Wat Suwan, called Tu Lung. Maha studied and lived for about eight years in Lamphun province, Thailand, where a majority of the population have ancestors who were forced out of Muang Yong to resettle in

the region almost two hundred years before, and still speak a Lue dialect, known as Yong. Achieving the highest degree of Buddhist studies, he became known as Maha.

In the late 1980s, Maha came back home and he moved up to a village in Muang Long, his mother's original hometown in southern Sipsong Panna. There, in China, he renewed the temple building and formed the village monastery and became abbot. Significantly, he also began to introduce modern musical instruments and the 'new culture' associated with them into his new community. The then abbot organised the local laity to form a village band and began to write Dai pop songs. Initially, he translated them from the *Thai Luk Toong* music. Many of the songs written by Maha later became legendary hits such as 'Dai girls go to dance in a Han country' on the New Star album (1997), and *Akara* (Tai script), which won the Golden Song Prize in the third national competition on a music television program, presented by the Xishuangbanna Television Station (BNTV), in 1999. In the early 1990s, he was invited to move to the CTX, to join the Xishuangbanna Buddhist Association, to be a deputy abbot of the temple, and to develop the Banna Sangha. Maha had already played a crucial role in inventing Dai traditions for a decade. At the CTX, supervised by the abbot, he continued to develop his Dai song-writing skills and organised the laity to form another band which later became New Star, the legendary Dai pop band of Xishuangbanna, who released their only album in 1997.

About two years after that, Maha decided to disrobe. He moved back to Muang Yong to take care of his old mother, then got married and settled down in Takeelek. Still, he continued his musical career. Firstly he produced his own album (with two younger friends); one year after that he opened a music shop and began to distribute Music Tai albums, which are transported to him soon after their release in Xishuangbanna. Then he would later distribute them to other sub-suppliers in the region. The business was going well, Maha said. At present, not only are Shan and Dai musical albums circulated and re-distributed in this region through Maha's business networks but also other Tai entertainment and cultural items produced in the form of VCD films or tape cassettes. In March 2004, he decided to open a new branch of his music shop in Muang Yong. Now he looks forward to distributing 'Music Tai' from Takeelek to Lamphun, while Shan commodities have been

‘exported’ to his Shan counterpart in Chiang Mai city since 2003.

In Lamphun

Partly inspired by my talk with Maha, just a day before my trip to Jinghong I went to visit Tu Lung to get another piece of the jigsaw about the ‘moving Dai’.

In the abbot’s building of Wat Pra Bath (Pa Xang district), up the hill on top of the mountain where the pagoda is, Tu Lung was taking a nap in his *Kuti* (monk’s hut). He was looked after well by his followers. One that I met was a former monk from Muang Yong, presently settled in Mae Sai. Although he was partly disabled, just a few days before Tu Lung had still been able to travel to pick up two young novices, who had crossed from Muang Yong to study in his monastery. He seemed to be happy, particularly when hearing stories about his Dai student monks in Sipsong Panna.

Half an hour passed. I did not want to disturb Tu Lung much more, so I asked him a direct question; whether he had written his autobiography or whether anyone else was working on his great story of taking monks from Muang Yong to study in his former temple in the 1980s, and then ten years after that accommodating, formally and informally, about forty Dai monks from Sipsong Panna (also some others from Keng Tung) in his present monastery to study.

“No, but why don’t you write it up!” Tu Lung said.

I did not commit myself, but thought about the possibilities of following his suggestion. It seemed to me that if I wanted really to accomplish this, I would have to return to the CTX to meet Tu Lung’s students at the centre of the Banna Sangha.

Back to Sipsong Panna, Muang Pa-La-Na-Si!

About one hour out of Chiang Mai, the small Thai Airways plane landed at Jinghong airport. It was about 1.35 p.m. on 12 May 2004, Dunk, the 26-year old Dai superstar, song writer and member of the band called ‘Dai Dynamo’ came to pick me up on his scooter. We were happy to see each other again.

Along the road to Dunk’s place, on both sides of the city-airport express way, Dai farmers were harvesting in the yellow-green rice fields. The harvest was from *Na Jieng* (the fields cultivated in November). Some fields had been left for the harvested rice to dry;

others had not been because they had been harvested with a modern machine. Many fields were burning. After the harvests, farmers burn them before they plough the new fields for the annual rice cultivation, locally called *Na Pii*, in the coming monsoon (in June).³ The sky surrounding the airport and Jinghong city, therefore, was a little smoky.

Only eight months had passed since I had left in August 2003 but the capital centre of Xishuangbanna had changed dramatically. The highway from Jinghong southwestwards to Meng La had been completed, only a toll gate was still under construction. Northwards of Jinghong, the express way, which is designed to link Kunming, via Banna, to Bangkok (and so also via Lan Na), had also been under construction around the clock. About 400 kilometres of the express way from Kunming to Simao had also been finished (it was opened in early 2004). Air flights between Jinghong and Chiang Mai had been intensified by Thai Airways, which had launched this new route at the end March 2004, while Bangkok Airways had began services along this route in October 2001. Up north of the city, only about four kilometres along the Mekong, a hydro-power dam, a mega project joint-ventured by the Thai and Chinese metropolitan capitals, was in the first phase of its construction (it is expected to be completed in 2008). In the southern zone of Jinghong city, en route to Ban Tin Park, the village temple was being rebuilt, the old Lue architecture being replaced by a modern Dai-Thai temple style. Opposite this (re)construction site, a new office of HIV/Aids prevention and care centre (directed by a secretary of the Xishuangbanna Buddhist Association, under the supervision and support of UNICEF) had just opened. For the patients’ privacy, though, it has to be operated behind a townhouse, I was told by Nhan Mai, aged 25, who has worked as a part-time staff member in the centre since 2003. He is a former Dai student monk from Wat Pra Bath, having been there for almost about ten years, where he had first taken part in the HIV/Aids workshop (in northern Thailand). He is the most recent Dai monk from Xishuangbanna to have left Wat Pra Bath in the last two years. After the Dai New Year in 2004, Nhan Mai decided to disrobe. He would soon be getting married. In the inner city, along the roads, on both sides of the streets (and actually also in tourist spots around Xixhuangbanna), one could see lots of posters and banners publicizing the new tourist campaign of the Dai country, “Sipsong Panna, Muang Palanasi” (see below).

On television, as I saw in Dunk's place, the new discourse about Sipsong Panna was represented in different ways, through ads (about ten minutes long for the full version), the Dai weekly series (three times a week on BNTV2), and one pop song on MTV request programs (on three local channels, as occasionally requested by fans). The popularity of the controversial slogan, "Sipsong Panna, Muang Palanasi", which has been spread throughout households in Xishuangbanna since April of 2003, eventually led Dai Dynamo Corp (who were established in July 2002) to seize the chance to reproduce the discourse in their own way. The song *Sipsong Panna, Muang Paranasi* written and performed by Dunk, on the Dai New Year album which was released in mid April 2004, became a big hit over night.

Going to visit my abbot

On the first day of my arrival in Jinghong, in the late afternoon, I went to the CTX to visit and 'Suma' (pay respects to) my abbot, who became Kruba Muang of Sipsong Panna in January 2004. However, it was not until the third week of my trip that I had a chance to have a long conversation with him. That day I saw Kruba twice, at noon and night.

Born in 1960 in a border town in southwest Xishuangbanna, bordering the Shan state of Burma, two years after *the Great Leap Forward* broke out, "I grew up in the battlefield", Kruba told me. Because of the civil war along the borders years earlier, his father had encouraged him to be ordained as a novice when he was 13. Perhaps it was a way to distract him from joining the Shan State Army, Kruba explained. However, just months after his ordination his parents had to escape to Keng Tung. There the novice spent his teenage life, studying in the Buddhist monastery. Significantly, when Kruba was 16, his mother passed away. One year after that, he moved to Rangoon, studying there for three years before returning to Keng Tung. In the early 1980s, Kruba and his colleague crossed to northern Thailand for further study. The then young monk studied and lived in Chiang Mai at a city temple, where his senior from Keng Tung had been earlier. This temple is situated in the Kuen descendant community of Chiang Mai city (historically, the Kuen of Keng Tung were forced to resettle here during warfare in the late 18th century). Kruba lived in this city for three years. He also became multi-lingual. He is fluent in Lue, Kuen, and Kham Muang, also Burmese, Shan, Thai



A street in Jinghong, Yunnan, China. Wasan Panyagaew

Kruba lived in this city for three years. He also became multi-lingual. He is fluent in Lue, Kuen, and Kham Muang, also Burmese, Shan, Thai and Chinese. When he speaks to me, Kruba always switches between Thai, Lue, Kuen and Muang.

and Chinese. When he speaks to me, Kruba always switches between Thai, Lue, Kuen and Muang.⁴

In 1986, his father passed away. That year was a turning point in his life. He had been about to disrobe, more than twice, but never did it. His father left a request with Kruba to visit relatives in his fatherland. The journey back to Sipsong Panna to visit his father's hometown was the beginning of Kruba's mission in the Dai country. In the Yuan sect of Buddhism, not all Kruba would necessarily be recognised as *Ton Boon*⁵ although Kruba Muang has practiced in a similar way to Ton Boon. He first reformed

the Buddhist monasteries of his new hometown - rebuilding the temple and the pagoda, getting the young locals ordained, teaching them Tai script and Buddhism. Paradoxically, in 1987, this abbot of a small town temple inspired a group of young locals to form the very first Dai pop band. This was partly to fulfill the promise he had made to himself in Keng Tung, Kruba said. The instruments were transported from Kunming, because Jinghong then still did not have any of them. What happened in this countryside then? The officials came to see the abbot, soon after the 'new culture' of this music spread throughout the community, questioning whether it was a monk's

business to form the band. Kruba responded to them sincerely, maintaining that it was useful, entertained the people, and could help the local government to promote Dai cultures. Finally, as Kruba put it to them, it does not break any laws, so why not?

Two members of the band formed in Kruba's former temple later became leading members of the legendary Dai pop band of Xishuangbanna, *New Star* in which Maha was involved. The other two members of this legendary band were from a village in Muang Long, where Maha had also organised the young locals to form a Dai pop band, as mentioned earlier, about one year after Kuba's transportation of the band's instruments in Muang Jae.

Through our long conversations, at noon and at night, I discussed many things with Kruba. One that remains in my head was his comment on the controversial slogan,

'Sipsong Panna, Muang Palanasi.' He did not appreciate it, not even in the version re-produced by Dai Dynamo Corp. Kruba could not accept the metaphor nor the message that the advertising



Pets and novices in Chiang Rai. Wasan Panyagaew

company was trying to convey. Actually, he knew very well what had happened in the Banna tourist industry and the commoditization of the Dai country, in regard to sex in particular. First of all, he commented, the spelling in the new Dai script is wrong ('Varanasi' is pronounced in Dai 'Pa-La-Na-Si', but the letter *L* [la] should be *R* [ra] instead, since the name refers to Benares – a town believed to be the place where Lord Buddha preached his first sermon). Second and most importantly, for Kruba (and some of his fellow monks I talked to) the new discourse represented by this slogan is another way to confuse the Dai laity with a newly reconstructed history.

Though according to some Tai legends, Keng Hung is sometimes called little Benares.

The abbot and his fellow monks

Since 1993, as Abbot of the CTX, and Director of the Xishuangbanna Buddhist Association, Kruba (with Maha) has devoted his life to encouraging his fellow monks and the Dai laity to re-form the Buddhist Sangha and establish a Buddhist monastery school at the CTX, which held its first class in 1994 and formally opened one year after that.⁶ Currently the school has four branches in four towns in the countryside: Muang Hai, Muang Ham, Muang La, and Muang Long. From statistics I received from a secretary of the Xishuangbanna Buddhist Association (in May 2004) there are currently about 573 temples, 215 pagodas, 600 monks and 5,000 novices, respectively, in Sipsong Panna. Of course, not all this is simply the result of Kruba's own devotion. A lot of it is the result of inherent Buddhist Dai spirituality. Presently, Kruba Muang has four deputy abbots, who actively undertake duties, working with him at the centre of Banna Sangha (traditionally and historically the centre of the Sangha was Wat Luang situated in 'Vieng Pha Krang'). Let us learn a little about these four deputy abbots: Tu Kham, Tu Thap, Maha Luang and Maha Noi. They are all graduates of Wat Pra Bath taught and closely supervised by Tu Lung.

The two Maha, both from Muang Long, went down to Lamphun (via Muang Yu, Muang Yong, Takeelek and Mae Sai) just months before Tu Kham, who was one of eleven Dai monks and novices formally sent to study in the Thai Buddhist monastery by the Association. These eleven arrived at Wat Pra Bath in the early 1990s. In common with other Dai monks and novices, who increasingly came across the borders to the northern Thai monasteries from the early 1990s on, Tu Thap came to the temple in 1992.

There were many places and social spaces in Thailand they could not or should not move in. However, after a year or two, when they were able to speak and read Thai fluently, nobody suspected them of being aliens, unless someone asked to check their ID cards or passports.

There were about forty monks and novices from Banna in Wat Pra Bath, at that time. According to the four deputy abbots the Dai cross border students set up their own association there. The organization had a leader and committees selected from a formal and an informal group; the former being called 'air link' (those who went by air) and the latter called 'ground link' (who went overland). They had a monthly meeting to organise their affairs and to supervise newcomers. It must have been through their seniority system that their moral agenda (to develop the Buddhist Sangha in Banna) was effectively reproduced among students who went abroad. Most of those whom I met during fieldwork said that when they returned home they would first come to 'report' to the CTX, waiting for what job assignments the temple would arrange for them. Some might have to go back to their village temples. Some might just disrobe in a couple of years or soon after that. However, there was a strong sense of moral obligation among them, as among other border crossing monks. All the cross border student monks wanted to work for or support the centre of Banna Sangha in some way; Nhan Kham and Nhan Non for example after getting disrobed and married, still work in the temple; the former is the temple's IT support person. His jobs are publishing the Tai texts and maintaining/developing the Tai fonts he has brought back from Chiang Mai in the last decade. The latter is a temple driver.

One might wonder how waves of these Dai student monks were able to cross the borders? According to stories about Wat Pra Bath, the process was unbelievably simple; there was at that time no difficulty about using a border document to cross over to the Shan state of Burma (to visit relatives, festivals or such like). Then from the Takeelek-Mae Sai border town, things would be even easier, usually the abbot or senior monks, either Thai or Dai, would

come to pick up the Dai student monks. Definitely, travel on Thai soil was still restricted and in fact some of them were arrested (usually on their return) but were soon released after ‘a clear up talk’. There were many places and social spaces in Thailand they could not or should not move in. However, after a year or two, when they were able to speak and read Thai fluently, nobody suspected them of being aliens, unless someone asked to check their ID cards or passports. Ironically, thanks to these tactics of subterfuge the ‘ground link’ were able to stay in Thailand longer than the ‘air link’. Some of the former group, therefore, after finishing their studies in the northern Thai monastery, headed down to Bangkok or nearby provinces such as Samuthsakorn, through contacts of their seniors, school mates, or the new ethnic networks which they had been able to establish, owing to the length of their stay in Thailand.

Since 2002, there seems to have been no one from Xishuangbanna in Wat Pra Bath according to Nhan Mai. All those in the legendary first group have gone home, continuing their Dai life in their own country either as monks or laity. However, almost all of them have become active members of the Sangha, the powerful body at the centre of Xishuangbanna Buddhism.

Currently, the CTX headquarters, under Kruba Muang, is divided into four operating units, under the four deputy abbots who look after secular affairs, Tai Buddhist texts and publications, Buddhist monastery education, and Buddhist sites and temple construction respectively. Tu Kham, Tu Thap, Maha Luang and Maha Noi, the former leaders and senior committee members of the border crossing Dai student monks at Wat Pra Bath, direct each unit. In early June 2004, they were busy selecting and sending several groups of their students abroad to study in Thai (in Bangkok), Burmese (in Rangoon), and Chinese (in Guangdong, Shanghai and Beijing) monastery schools. But now they made sure that all students going abroad would have properly authorised ID cards and passports.

Of course, this was not the first time the CTX had sent the students who had graduated from the temple to study further in those cities, but it was the biggest and the most significant movement since the initial move in the early 1990s, a secretary of the Association told me. This is particularly so in the case of Thailand, where the Dai monks can easily survive by disguising themselves as Thai, but have never had the chance to

study formally in state schools (where they need both a passport and a school certificate, which usually most of them do not have). A few years ago four senior monks were selected to study in Sri Lanka. It was hoped these four would later come back to develop English classes at the CTX: however, sadly one of them died. Years earlier, a short introductory course on Thai language had been opened for locals, whether Dai, Han, Akha and others who need it for their jobs or businesses. The regional economic development which has taken place, boosted since the 1990s, has intensified and complexified competition among the peoples of this borderland.

On The Move

On 11 June 2004, a few hours before I left Jinghong, I went to see Kruba again, asking him to bless me, “I am going back to write up your story in my thesis.” He gave me a Dai turban, telling me to wear it. Kruba would like to see me look Dai. Of course, I wore it. He laughed a little, then gave me another present. It was a *Golden Yantra*, a magical charm, which would protect me from bad luck, particularly when I am on the move, Kruba said.

Footnotes

* This piece continues my narrative of my search for ‘the Lue of Sipsong Panna’ in China, who also live in Laos, Burma, Thailand and now in other countries overseas. For the previous part, see *Thai-Yunnan Project Bulletin*, Number 5, (November 2003): 12-14.

¹ Throughout this story the names Sipsong Panna and Xishuangbanna, or Banna for short, will be used interchangeably.

² ‘Music Tai’ is the term used to refer to modern Lue music, which has recently been created in Xishuangbanna.

³ The Muang and The Lue calendars are systematically the same. However, the former begins one month earlier than the latter. The Muang calendar system, in my view, is still useful to apply to understand a circle of the annual activities in Xishuangbanna, see also Richard Davis, “The Northern Thai Calendar and Its Uses”, *Anthropos*, 71, 1976: 1-30.

⁴ For the Muang language (Kham Muang) see Richard Davis, *Muang Metaphysics*, Pandora 1984.

⁵ See Paul T. Cohen, “Buddhism Unshackled: The Yuan ‘Holy Man’ Tradition and the Nation-State in the Tai World”, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 32 (2), pp 227-247 June 2001.

⁶ The school is still not yet registered as part of the state education system.