Thai-Tai: An Exploration on an Important Factor in Ecological Ethnogenesis - The Interdependence of Forest Ecology and Ethnic Diversification -

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沖縄大学地域研究所
Thai-Tai: An Exploration on an Important Factor in Ecological Ethnogenesis

— The Interdependence of Forest Ecology and Ethnic Diversification —

Gang Liu*

Translated by Bixia Chen

I focus on the interaction of historical change and environmental change, and clarify that Thai people are the offspring of Baiyue people, have assimilated Buddhist culture. I think the natural environment of rainforest and cultivation in the forest is the medium between the integration of the two factors and is the life zone of Thai people.

Key words: Thai-Tai group, congenetic heterogeneity, integration with the Han culture, integration with Buddhist culture, forest ecology

要約

この文章は、すでに『地域研究』第2号で翻訳掲載された「仏—廢民族集団形成の生計的要因についての考察—同源異流と森林生態の相互作用—」の英訳である。秦学は国際的学問分野の一つで、欧米の学術領域からも多くの関心が寄せられている。今回の英訳はそのためである。本文は、中国側に住む僑族の歴史的変遷と環境変化的相互作用によって生まれた結果に着目することによって、僑族が「百越」群を末裔と小乘仏教との結びによって生まれた民族集団であることを明らかにした。さらに、両者が結びつける媒介として働き込んだのが、熱帯雨林における森林生態や森林農耕など要因の存在、すなわち僑族の存在の「生命環」であることと試みて考察した。

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Introduction

This research note was based on my report delivered in the Thai Study Symposium in Kunming, China at the end of 2004. My report drew a lot of attentions with its contribution to the present Thai research. And European researchers wrote to ask me to publish my research report as soon as possible. It is regrettable that I was not able to rewrite the report during the past two years. At last I revised this research report in a hurry in order to publish in the No. 2 of Area Studies.

The Thai nationality who live in the southern part of Southwest China and the Tai who live over a wide regions including South China and northern part of Southeast Asia have developed from the ancient nationality group of Bai Yue. Since the Qin Dynasty, the Bai Yue nationality group divided and developed into the present distribution of the Bai Yue nationality group of Zhuang, Buyi, Dong, Li, Shui, Mulam in China and Thai in Southeast Asia etc. In this report, I would like to discuss why Thai differs from the other nationalities in the Bai Yue nationality group, and why there are groups who believe in Theravada Buddhism and those who do not believe in Theravada Buddhism among Thai

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nationality. In other words, what is Thai and what does Thai mean? Here I report my findings based on my field surveys in the Thai-Tai habitat in South China and northern part of Southeast Asia over the past 20 years.

I focus on the interaction of two factors in the development of Thai nationality: one is forest ecology and the other is belief in Theravada Buddhism. Thai people live in an agrarian society. Thai people can be divided into two different groups based on whether they believe in Theravada Buddhism or not. Thai was created to refer to these minor nationality people since the nationality identification in 1950's. At the same time, there exist some other minor nationalities such as Bu Yi, Dong, Li, Shui, Mulam and Gelao that developed from the ancient Bai Yue nationality group. Thai people insist on their identity, in particular for those living in the areas nearby Burma and Laos and Thailand, such as Xishuangbanna and Dehongzhou in the south and southwest of Yunnan province. Thai people in the above mentioned areas have preserved traditional Thai culture such as rice growing, colorful dress, traditions and customs. Most importantly, Thai people in these areas believe in Theravada Buddhism. In particular in Xishuangbanna, all people believe in Theravada Buddhism. I also found that those who believe in Theravada Buddhism also preserve ecological forests, which is very important to understand the basis of Thai nationality. In other words, when the forest degrades, the particular culture of Thai people also would tend to disappear. Thai people would change to intensive cultivation, in other words, they would turn to be similar to the Han nationality. With the above mentioned transformation, Thai people abandon Buddhism and become the Han nationality. In contrast, when Thai people live in a well preserved ecological forest, the ideology of Thai people is in harmony with Buddhism. The Thai nationality would have continued with an agricultural life, belief in Buddhism and living under ecological forest conditions if their lives had not been interrupted by the establishment of new China in the 1950’s and other external factors.

I. The Historical Background of Thai-Tai

1. The Historical development of Bai Yue-Liao-Tai-Thai

In 221 B.C. Qin Shi Huang conquered 6 kingdoms and established the first unified empire in Chinese history. Qin Shi Huang conquered Yang Yue and set up the institutional organizations of Gui Lin, Nan Hai, Xiang Jun there and commanded criminals to move into these areas to live with the original Yue people for 13 years. In this way, the aboriginal Yue people began to experience division and integration. The historical process was recorded in Shi Ji · Nan Yue Lei Zhan No 53. Nevertheless, the central dynasty strengthened the control of these areas after Zhao Tuo was appointed as the head of Nanhai County.

In fact, Bai Yue referred to various branches of Nan Yue. When the nations of Wu and Yue during the Chun Qiu and War Nations Periods died out, and the people moved here and there, and further divided and integrated and at last formed various groups, which included Ju Wu, Yu Yue, Dong Ou, Min Yue, Nan Yue, Xi Ou, Lou Yue. Wars among these groups occurred from time to time and people suffered a lot from the wars. Thus, it was recognized that people should unify the various groups and a new group name of Liao appeared. In other words, Liao or Jiu Liao came into being.

The early Bai Yue groups referred to an ecological group who moved to the south of China after the Neolithic period. Bai Yue people featured a particular ecological culture with their different ecological living environments. The cultural features of Bai Yue were recorded in the literature.

In about 400 B.C., people living in similar ecological environments were unified and the Wu and Yue nations came into being. However, in such a wide region, unification in a political and cultural sense never existed. In other words, Bai Yue in a cultural sense is meaningful rather than Yue Nation in a political sense.

According to genetics research, Bai Yue groups are divided into two main groups: East Yue centering in Zhejiang and the
West Yue centering in Xishuangbanna. According to genetic anthropology, DNA chromosomes provide an accurate analysis of nationality classification. The Bai Yue group people possess of three major features. Some nationalities who have had contact with the Bai Yue people were also found to possess some of the particular features of Bai Yue people. Here I focus on discussing West Yue people. I think the conclusion based on genetic analysis should be cautious. External people assimilated by the culture and language of Bai Yue were excluded from the genetic research because of the principle of historical research of heterogenetic congene. In fact, the research should include Sichuan and Chongqing regions (Wang, 2004).

Historical records were listed as follows.

Xin Tang Shu • Nan Man Zhuan Xia states that the Nan Ping Liao group lived in the areas from present Wulong County and Nanchuan County of Sichuan province to Tongzi County, Zhengan County, Dazheng County, and Wuchuan County of Guizhou province. These areas' topography featured lots of river valleys and flat land. Malaria outbreaks occurred from time to time in these areas. There were poisonous grasses, sand lice and pit vipers in the mountains. People lived in high houses and entered the houses by stairs. These houses were named Ganlan. Women wore a dress, named Tong Qun, which was made of two pieces of cloth with the neck put inside the two pieces of cloth. The king's family name was Zhu, and he was called King Jianli. Another group called Wu Wu Liao lived where there was a lot of miasma. People who were affected by miasma were not able to drink medicine so that their teeth had to be pulled out to feed them medicine. From the above historical records, we can see that these groups were assimilated by the Han nationality. In Zhen Guan 3rd year (629 A.D.), an ambassador brought money and goods to these areas and these areas were appointed to be under the command of Yu zhou (Chong qing) (You, 1998). The above mentioned groups of people have similar traditions as current Thai people.

2. Orientation of Thai nationality

Thai-Tai integrated other nationalities in its history. Thus, Thai-Tai is a complex with multiple structure. But what is the ethnic boundary of Thai-Tai? People who called themselves Thai or Dai and lived among the groups of Zhuang Dong nationality in Yunnan province were identified as Thai nationality in the 1950's. The identification was based on the social and historical conditions and people's free will. But a taking a further look at Thai people, we can find complicated characteristics of cultivation patterns and ecological cultures. For example, some people believe in Theravada Buddhism, while others do not believe in Buddhism; some were engaged in rice growing, while others cultivated crops on dry land. Classical Thai language refers to records in sutra used by a branch of Thai groups called Thai Gen who lived in the current Meng Lian County in Si mao area. A certain researcher who studies the Thai nationality pointed out that classical Thai language has been the communication tool not only for every branch of Thai groups, but also for all Thai people domestic and abroad. If classical Thai language disappears one day, communication among all Thai people will be impossible (Liu, 2004).

Thai nationality was not the same as Dian or Yue in history. The ethnic boundary of Thai nationality expanded or narrowed with the area which was influenced by Buddhism. The presently called Thai nationality was defined on the basis of political identification in the 1950's. From the historical and cultural aspects, Thai people can be divided into two groups of belief in Buddhism and belief in Confucianism. Thai people who do not believe in Buddhism should also include the nationalities of Dong, Bu Yi, Shui and Zhuang, and even ancestors of some Han nationality people in current Sichun and Chongqing areas. Shi Ji • Xi Nan Yi Lei Zhuan records a wide distribution of Bai Yue groups in Southwest China. Bai Yue in these areas can be divided into East branches of Lou Yue and Xi Ou and West branches of Dian Yue, and Chan. The east branches mostly lived in the west part of Guangxi,
East of Yunnan, North of Vietnam and the west branches mostly lived in Yunnan, Laos, Burma and North of Thailand.

II. Ecological orientation of Thai nationality

1. Through my surveys, I found that religion was the major means to maintain the nationality of Thai. In other words, when the religion that people believe in changes, the nationality of Thai people will also change. To take the typical habitat of Thai nationality in Xishuangbanna, Yunnan as an example, the cultural orientations of Thai people to the north and the south of Lan Chang River differ. This is because the ecological and geological environments to the north of Lan Chang River changed a lot. Thai people living to the north of Lan Chang River did not believe in Buddhism and conducted intensive cultivation, thus, the features of ecological culture of these Thai people disappeared. In other words, it is easy to understand the nationality of Thai through its assimilation of Buddhism or Han culture. Lots of people who are between the above mentioned two situations are called Han Thai. Han Thai people who live in De Hong area in particular possess more remarkable features of cultural and ecological factors than the other Han Thai people, because the De Hong area has the advantage of natural conditions such as large areas of wide fertile land. With the blessed forests and fertile land, Thai people were able to obtain the necessities with less time and labor than Han people. Such precondition enabled Thai people to enjoy more leisure and to worship Buddhism. Thus Thai people believe that their culture excels the Han culture. In other words, it is possible for us to classify nationality through the above mentioned facts.

Then what is the culture of Thai nationality. I think that Thai culture refers to the particular ecological culture of those offsprings of Bai Yue groups who lived in the high land basins and river valleys in present Southwest China and the continent part of Southeast Asia. After interactions with other cultures over time and assimilation of Buddhism, the particular ecological culture of Thai people came into being and became the Thai nationality's ethnic boundary.

2. Chinese literature records that Bai Yi who lived in the south of Yunnan and Laos organized a suicide squad and fought with the local government in the An Nan area (Fan Zhuo, Man Shu, Vol. 4). Le Shi, a historical record in the Thai language states that in 1180 (Song Chun Xi 7th year), a great Thai leader named Pa Ya Zhen unified all the people in the nearby 30 basins in Xishuangbana and established the Jing Long Jin Dian Nation centering on Thai people. Pa Ya Zhen declared himself to be subordinate, together with King Zhao Fa to the dynasty. Then Pa Ya Zhen accepted a tiger shaped gold seal from Pu Ti Yan (refer to Duan Xinzhi who was the king of Da Li during Nan Song Dynasty) and was designated in charge of the area. When he received the title, heads from Pa Ya Jin Hong, Meng Jiao (Vietnam), Lan Na (North of Thailand), Lan Zhang (Laos) came to express their great congratulations and a ceremonial Di Shui (meaning "dripping water" in English) was performed.

It is true that many people living in the basins call themselves Thai. But what is Thai(Dai) and what does Thai (Dai) mean. Though people might think that all Thai people believe in Buddhism (i.e. Thai nationality such as Shui Thai, Xiao Thai and Thai Le in Xishuangbanna), actually we know that some Thai people believe in Buddhism, while others do not. Thai people living in these basins began to flourish since 10th century after development and integrations over a long period. Su Ke Tai Nation which was established in 1238 started the history of the nation of the Thai people. In fact other Thai nationality groups experienced lots of transformations during this period (He, 200439-56; Duan, 2004:57-61; Fan, 1991-3, 1989 supplement; Pan, 2001-1). In other words, Thai people in this area began to adjust to society and culture. As is well known, there was thick miasma in South China, which was the natural barrier against the central government's control, and which was also the boundary of Han culture. When the ambassador, Lu Jia, from the central government arrived, Zhao, who was the king of the Nan Yue
felt terrified and wrote a letter to the empire to apologize. He wrote "I was the chief of the Man Yi who was your subject and I was isolated and discriminated against by Gao Hou; I thought that he had written you to slander me; I heard Gao Hou killed all of my clans and excavated graves of my ancestors, which was why I was in despair and invaded the boundary in Changcha (Shi Ji·Nan Yue Lie Zhan No. 53)". In addition, Shi Ji·Suo Yin in the same Lei Zhan states that people living in the south were violent and thus called Lu Liang (the same words as "violent" in Chinese). Thus we can see that thick miasma was the barrier against the expansion of Han culture. It was a historical issue how to expand the influence of Han culture. According to Shi Ji·Nan Yue Lie Zhan, Qing Shi Huang sent over 500,000 soldiers to fight with Yue people and unified these areas and established Guilin, Nanhai, and Xiangjun in the Lingnan area.

But what is known of those Thai people who do not believe in Buddhism? I classify the Thai people group who lived in the present areas of Cangwu, Yulin, Hepu, Jiaozhi, Jiuzhen, Nanhai, and Rinan in Guangdong as Thai people group who did not believe in Buddhism, and are called Liao people. That is because people in the above mentioned areas lived nearby Han people and had lots of contacts with Han people. According to Xin Tang ShuNan Man Zhan (2nd Volume), in about Xianqing 3rd year, Duo Husang, the chief of Duo Sheng Liao people who lived in the Luo area of the present Gulin declared himself to be subordinate to the central government. The same book also states that Ge Liao in the present Yibing, Luzhou in Sichuan, the chief was addressed as King with respect and named "Po Neng" and a flag was lifted when he moved in the local area. The record suggests that transformation to Han culture started.

As seen through the distribution of Tai group people, the Thai-Tai group that live in Assam in India originally developed from the Thai people group that now live in the De Hong area in China. But it is very interesting that the Thai-Tai group people in Assam, who do not believe in Buddhism at present, differ in culture from the two branches of Thai Na and Thai Le in De Hong area. In addition, Thai-Tai group people in Assam possibly developed from the ancestors of Thai Na people. According to the Thai Chinese Dictionary, Ahom refers to a branch of Thai people who moved to Assam in India in 1700 of the Buddhist Calender (1157 A.D.). Ahom moved in Yuan Dynasty about 700 years ago from Meng Mao Nation in present Ruili County, Dehong State.

The fairy story of Grandpa Grain Spirit reflects the interaction process of culture of ancestors of Thai people and Buddhist culture. Grandpa Grain Spirit-the harmonization of Thai and Buddhist cultures discusses the successful blending process of two cultures from contradiction to harmony (Liu, 2004, p127). Religious rites have played an important role in the life of Thai people (Liu, 1992). For example, a profound knowledge of water, forest, and rice growing is full of profound philosophy. During the 1980's, I have been to nearly all Thai people villages in the Red River Valley and villages to the east of Lancang River and investigated the similarities and differences of each branch of Thai people at with the respect to living environments and cultures. Some researchers (Fan, 2000, p1-14; Fan, 2004, p20-29; Zheng, 2004, p38) illustrate folk culture factors to discuss the kindred of Zhuang, Thai, Tai, Lao, and Chan nationalities. The folk culture factors studied included the essential glossary of their language, people's corporal measurements, migration, housing, food, place names, belief in "heaven", folk song rhythm, music, fairy tales of the moon, custom of moving into a new house, belief in "Du'e"(a water monster), agricultural ceremonial rituals by the chief in spring, usage of timbale, piping Lusheng (a reed-pipe wind instrument), chewing a betel nut, bathing in the same river by both males and females, cattle worship and so on. They conclude that people of Bai Yue group who were close to Buddhism developed into the Thai, Tai, Lao and Chan nationalities, while those who were close to Han culture developed into the Zhuang, Dong, and Bu Yi nationalities.

3. Concerning the Thai people living in the Red River
valley, as above mentioned, I surveyed in 1985. And another researcher (Zheng, 2002) also presented a paper on this aspect. Here I summarized as follows based on my own surveys and his research.

In the upper stream of the Red River, Thai people mostly live in Xinping County, and most of them are Hua Yao Thai nationality. In addition, Hua Yao Thai people also live in Qi Ma Ba in Luchun county. Thai people consist of three major branches of Thai Li, Thai Ka, and Thai Ya. In the lower stream of the Red River valley, there live branches of Thai Duan, Thai Le, Thai You, Thai You Luo, Thai Li, Thai Lang, and Thai Liang. These Thai people do not belong to Hua Yao Thai, but usually add some words such as Black, Red, and White to their nationality names.

Thai people commonly live in a house called “Tu Zhang Fang”, which is almost the same as Li nationality people. “Tu Zhang Fang” is the typical architecture of the Li nationality. In the Red River valley, houses of Li people are almost the same. Li people settled in the Red River valley earlier than Thai people. It is possible that Thai people were influenced by Li nationality culture. Thai Ka people in the upper stream of the Red River valley mostly live in Mosha Town and Yaojie Town, whose self-called name related to their culture. The word “Ka” in the nationality name means “Han people”. They are also called Han Thai by other nationalities. It is said that Thai Ka people integrated with the Han nationality over time. Similar process occurred in Menglaba in Jinping County. All Thai people are called Hua Yao Thai except Thai Le (Shui Thai) and Thai Lang (Black Thai). There are branches of self called Thai Duan, Thai Le, Thai You, Thai You Luo, Thai Li, Thai Lang, Thai Liang in the areas in the middle and lower stream of the Red River valley. These branches of Thai people favor blackening teeth, and live in one storied, two storied or three storied “Tu Zhang Fang” that are made of soil.

As is well-known, quite a few of nationalities live together in the Red River valley. A majority of them are Ha Ni, Yi, Han, Bai, La Gu, Zhuang, and Miao nationalities. Thai nationality is not one of the largest groups. Here I take two counties of Xinping and Yuanjian as examples. In Xinping County, the number of Yi people, Thai people, and Han people are 116,416, 38,594, and 75,816, and account for about 47.3%, 15.8%, and 30.8% of the total population respectively. The other major nationalities consist of Ha Ni, and La Gu. In Yuanjian County, the number of Ha Ni people, Yi people, Thai people, and Han people are 65,096, 37,196, 20,051, and 39,334, and account for about 38%, 21.9%, 12%, and 23% of the total population respectively. Thai people in these two counties live in “Tu Zhang Fang”. Hua Yao Thai people in the upper stream of the Red River valley have the freedom to choose their spouses, which is the same as other Thai people. Thai people originally lived in the tropical area of the river valley, and used to fall in love and marry at an early age. In general, when young people became to 16, 17 years old, or even younger, they began to “Mao Pao”, “Pao Shao” (both words mean to court) during various festivals. The most typical festival is “Gan Hua Deng.” People from different branches were not allowed to intermarry in the past. People were allowed to intermarry within the same branch; moreover, people mostly intermarry in the same village. Every spring, all villagers gathered under the big banyan tree to hold ceremonial rituals, and they killed pigs and cattle beef. In the ritual, people offered sacrifice to the dragon to pray to heaven for favorable weather and a bumper grain harvest. On the Spring Festival, January 1st of the lunar calendar, people used to blacken their teeth and get tattoos. At present many people, in particular youth, attend school, and even work outside the area. Some people can speak Chinese; however, their ethnic language is still mainly used in Hua Yao Thai people’s lives.

The change of festival culture, which is the symbol of traditional culture, also implies the external impact and influence. The relatively large scale “Gan Hua Deng” in Mosha Town was revived on February 27th, 1991. The festival of “Gan Hua Deng” was also revived in the other areas almost at the same time, and became the most ceremonial ritual in
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this area. In about 1932, a large scale terrace in Thai nationality area in Xinping and Yuanjian counties was constructed (Xinping County Annals · Min Guo). This project also suggests external impact and influence on Thai culture.

4. In a word, we might summarize that Thai nationality is a people group of those who have assimilated Buddhist culture and Han culture. In other words, Thai nationality has a long history, its kindred distributed in South China and the north of Southeast Asia. And close relatives of Thai nationality include Zhuang, Buyi, Dong, Li, Shui, Mulao, and Gelao nationalities in China, and people groups who use the same or similar language in Vietnam, Laos, Burma, Thailand, and India. According to the survey and identification in the 1950's, people who speak Zhuangdong language, and called themselves Thai or Dai were identified as Thai people based on the social and historical situations and people's free wills. It is not enough to understand the development process of Thai-Tai people only with the recognition of Thai culture being between Buddhist and the Han cultures. Thai people live nearby water, worship Buddha and believe in Buddhism. From the tradition that Thai people believe in the spirit and soul, self cultivate and self principle, we can see that Thai people possess the ethnic characteristics of self principle, but not universal love. These above mentioned features distinguish themselves from other offsprings of Baiyue people. Even in the same group, Thai people divided in accordance with various external ecological and cultural factors over a long period. One major feature is whether Thai people believe in Theravada Buddhism. The difference of people's lifestyle under a distinguishable forest ecology and tropical natural environment decides the historical division. Thai nationality has assimilated Buddhist culture, which is distinctive from other offsprings of Bai Yue people.

III. The nationality group assimilating Buddhist and the Han cultures

We know from surveys that religion is the major means for Thai people to sustain their nationality. The nationality of Thai changes with the change of their belief in religion. In addition, the preservation of religious belief depends on the surrounding ecology. The nationality of Thai people also changes with the ecological change. For example, when Thai people have a life pattern of ecological environmental orientation, they would be close to Buddhism, choose to live nearby water, live in Ganlan, pour water on Buddha, offer goods and money to Buddha, read scripture and mediate. When the ecological environment changes, Thai people turn to Han culture, and conduct intensive cultivation. From longitudinal point of view, some Thai people who do not believe in Buddhism also live nearby water, but turn more easily to Han culture. From horizontal point of view, I take the internal transformation of Thai people in Xishuangbanna, in particular to the north of Lancang River, as an example. Thai people in Xishuangbanna live in an area blessed with abundant water, and were attached to Buddhism and distinguished by their Thai traditional culture and customs. But, after decades of social transformation, Thai people in Xishuangbanna began to divide. An obvious trend of changing to Han people was found in the Thai people in the north of Lancang River who live surrounding Puwen because they live nearby Han people group. The internal reason for such social change is because the ecological system and environment to the north of Lancang River have experienced radical change. Thai people in the north do not worship Buddha so much as those in the south. They conduct similar intensive cultivation as Han people. Thus, ecological culture of Thai nationality is degrading.

2. I think that, before nationality identification, Thai nationality can be divided into three types as follows: integration with Han culture, integration with Buddhist culture, or being between these above two conditions. In other words, it is better to understand the nationality of Thai people through its integration with Han culture or Buddhism, which is of great significance to integrate nationality people and
understand their culture. For example, the trend of integrating with the Han nationality is very obvious. Though a nationality's name could not be easily changed, the dynamics of a nationality would never degrade. A nationality is always changing and adapting to great changes in Chinese society. For example, for the monks in Buddhist temples, teaching in only one language has changed to bilingual teaching, and changes of their housing, dress, building timber, habits and even their senses of values (values about forest and water).

The Thai nationality is a group of people who display ecological features, whose culture is one that integrates ecological, social, and cultural factors.

From a political category, the Thai nationality is fixed. But as seen from cultural, ecological and traditional factors, the Thai nationality is always changing.

3. Compared to the distinguished ecological factors existing among Thai people in Xishuangbanna, Thai people in the Dehong area are distinguished by their assimilation of Han culture. Other groups of Thai people also strongly tend to integrate with Han people. Thai people called Han Thai distributed in a wide areas are between those two situations. These Han Thai people are inferior in the aspects of ecological environment and social culture to the Thai people that live in Xishuangbanna and Dehong area. For example, Thai people cluster in Dehong state, and have fertile land.

The Thai nationality has been superior on ecological culture. They used to look down on the surrounding the Han people. "He He Tuan" is a discriminating name that Thai people called the Han people. But in what aspects is Thai nationality superior to the Han nationality? Based on my surveys, I found that Thai nationality is superior in its ecological environment and social culture to the Thai people that live in Xishuangbanna and Dehong area. For example, Thai people cluster in Dehong state, and have fertile land.

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As was mentioned above, it is recorded in historical literature that there lived "Baiyi" in the areas of the east of Yunnan, and Laos in about the 5th century A.D. Baiyi suicide squat was organized to fight with the local government in the An Nan area (Fan Zhuo, Man Shu, Vol. 4). In the 10th century A.D. of the Yuan Dynasty, in the southwest, Baiyi (refer to Thailand) flourished most. Tofan was to its north, and Jiaozhi (Vietnam) was to its south. Traditions and customs are nearly the same in this area (Yuan Lijing, Yunnan Zhi Liu).

Historical records in Thai language states that in 1180 (Song Chun Xi 7th year), a great Thai leader named Pa Ya Zhen
unified all the 30 basins in Xishuangbana and established Jing Long Jin Dian Nation centering on Thai people. Pa Ya Zhen declared himself to be a subordinate, together with King Zhao Fa, to the dynasty. Then Pa Ya Zhen accepted a tiger shaped gold seal from Pu Ti Yan (refer to Duan Xinzhi who was the king of Da Li during Nan Song Dynasty) and was designated in charge of the area. When he received the title, heads from Pa Ya Jin Hong, Meng Jiao (Vietnam), Lan Na (North of Thailand), Lan Zhang (Laos) came to express their great congratulations and a ceremonial Di Shui (mean "dripping water" in English) was performed. Pa Ya Zhen had four sons. Lao En Leng, the eldest son, was named Shi Cai Yi Lan Na Jing Xian; Yan Bian, the second son, was named Shi Cai Ye Meng Jiao; Yi Han Leng, the third son, was named Shi Cai Yi Lang Zhang; San Kai Leng, the forth son, was named Shi Cai Yi and inherited the crown. The above records show that the Thai-Tai group had developed greatly around the 12th century. And political unification based on Buddhism has played a great role in the progress of the Thai nationality.

Conclusion

I focus on the interaction of historical change and environmental change, and clarify that Thai people are the offspring of Bai Yue people, having assimilated Buddhist culture. I think the natural environment of rainforest and cultivation in the forest is the medium between the integration of the two factors and is the life zone of Thai people.

Acknowledgements

I have been engaged in ethnic research for more than 20 years. I report this research note to discuss my new findings on the forming and development of Thai nationality.

In the first part of the the 1980’s when I surveyed Hua Yao Thai in the Qimaba of Luchun County, Li Xianyou, the head of the county at that time did me a great favor. I would like to express my appreciation to him here. I feel sorry that one of the most respected researchers on Southwest Chinese Local Ethnic Studies passed away recently.

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Zhang Yuejin, 2004. Cultural Influence on Thai People as see through the Name of Every Month in Thailand.