

Chapter Two: Historical Continuity and Cultural Connectivity on Tai Aiton and Tai Yai

This chapter aims at discussing about the Tai historiography and its role in reviving Tai-ness and the historical continuity between two groups: Tai Aitons and Tai Yais. Tai history has a long history of its own. Historiography means the study of historical writing when it combines with the word ‘ethnic’. The word ‘ethno-history’ refers to the use of records of literate groups to help write their history (Tylor, 1999: 191). Thus, the chapter aims at bringing some light to the historical consciousness through the Tai’s writing by reviewing Tai historiography. Initially, the stories of Tai people had been questioned with the will of the ruler in colonial period and the enthusiastic native academic. Later on, in the post-colonial period, many countries started to build their own nation. India and Thailand are exclusive examples. Their history was one of the tools of integration, from diversity to unity. Rhetorically, the history has been told in different ways. Gradually, the viewpoint of the native people has come into the area of authorship, and so the work of ethno-history has emerged in Tai studies or Thai studies (both countries).

Thus, the first part tries to explain about how the past can be utilized as a tool through the historical writing. Then, the Tai history of both the groups would be discussed including the history of migration from both of Tai groups and the story of Suekapha, who was the heroic figure among Tai Aitons and Tai Yais and their historical consciousness. All these three parts/themes represent how Tai Aitons and Tai Yais use history as the tool of revival.

5.1 Tai Historiography and Technology of Printing on Tai Aiton and Tai Yai

“The writing of history can begin only when a present is divided from a past”

(Tom Conley wrote in Translator’s Introduction in

“The Writing of History” from Michel de Certeau 1988: viii)

Human beings have sense of time; the present is in between the past and the future. All the individuals accumulate memories and transfer it to each generation and that is what society carries with itself. Norms, tradition, manners, customs, everyday-life and belief in

every society are all the legacy of time. Hence, the past cannot be seen through naked eyes, and historical writing has functional for seeing the past through the writing.

History derives from Greek word '*historia*' and it means knowledge acquired by investigation. Historiography is the writing of history. Human beings have recorded events, the important phenomena, their beliefs etc. History is the mirror of the society from the historian's point of view. E.H. Carlyle (1982) gave a comment on the concept of historiography that the important role of the historian is, to choose the appropriated event and fact. Then, he should judge what is worth to write and what is not. Selective facts and events undeniably make partiality in the historical writing. Thus, it can be understood that the use of Tai historical writing has been studied along with the history itself.

The quote of Tom Conley (1988) reflects that the past becomes valuable if the individual or the society in the present time wants to utilize it. The nostalgic feeling comes with the romanticized idea like the wave of thoughts that were perceived during the renaissance period. The desire to bring something back to life, it came out into the cultural movement in Italy. The rediscovery of Greek's art or Greek's philosophy reflects that the past has always been utilized for some reason. The renaissance period represents the transition between the Middle age and the Modern age. Michel de Certeau (1988) adds that in the middle age, history has a clear-cut time in modern western history. It means that, the sense of writing history has changed. The separation of time reflects that religious story is no longer in the style of writing, not anymore. Moreover, De Certeau adds that the establishing of the otherness in the modern historiography³ constructs the past, the tribes, the mad, the child and the third world as the other. The dichotomy of self/other or civilized/babarian demonstrates throughout imperialist writing this way. (De Certeau,1988: 3)

While the history makes the sense of otherness according to Michel De Certeau (1988), the technology of printing also creates the idea of language of power and national consciousness. Benedict Anderson (2015) says about "the uses of technology of printing that print-languages laid the bases for national consciousness" (Anderson, 2015:44) Anderson explains that "firstly, the printing makes all the knowledge in the vernaculars for all people, secondly print-capitalism gave a new fixity to language and helped to build

³Modern historiography is not concerned with God and the religious issue began to reduce. Then, the natural facts and rational explanation are provided in the historical writing. The advent of Renaissance and Reformation contributed a lot in the development of historiography such as, Romanticist historiography, Humanist historiography, Positivist historiography, Marxist historiography, Annales etc.

the image of each periods and thirdly print-capitalism created languages of power, which means that the dominant language is elevated to a new politico-cultural eminence” (Anderson, 2015: 44-45).

Tylor has described that Ethnohistory means the use of records of literate groups to help write their history (Tylor, 1999: 191). Tais have a writing culture for their religious records and the dynasty’s record. Tai Aitons use the word ‘*Lik Kheu Mung*’. At the same time, Tai Yais use the word ‘*Peun*’ refers to the history. For making Tai history as the ethno-historical representation, some original Tai words (such as ‘*Lik Kheu Mung*’, ‘*Peun*’) are used which refer to history. Later, these Tai words have been changed for putting across the word history, and from the Tai words into ‘recognized’ words like *Buranji*, *Tamnan*, *Pongsawadarn*, and *Prawattisart*.

Focusing on Tai historiography, Ahom *Buranji* is the important Tai historical writing from the side of both Tai groups who are living in Assam as well as in Thailand. Furthermore, the history of Tai Yai people has been told in ‘*Tamnan*’⁴ *Suwanna-Khomkham*’ and ‘*Tamnam Sighanawatkumar*’ and ‘*Pong Saowadahn*’⁵ *Yonok*’. Those are the important Tai’s stories through which Tai people wrote about their own histories. Before going to analyze the use of Tai historiography, knowing the location of Tai history in the context of Assam and Thailand is necessary.

5.1.1 Tai historiography in the context of Assam

The historical writings are the product of time and space in each and every society. Looking at the picture of Indian historiography it can be noticed that the first phase of Indian historiography was in hands of the colonialist elitism and nationalist elitism. According to Ranajit Guha (2010), colonialist elitism and bourgeois nationalist elitism were the dominant group who produced the writings. For him, the nationalist idea is the reaction of/against colonialism. Thus, the nationalist and colonialist writing were the product of British rule in India. Having a Marxist orientation, Guha also focused on the classes of the writers with a particular emphasis on who were the elite historians.

Besides the approach of doing research on Tais, there is the use of Tai historiography that needs to be clarified. The primary sources of the Tais in Assam are *Burannji*, *Lik Kho Mung* and the individual records.

⁴ Tamnan means legend.

⁵ Pong Saowadarn meansthe history of Dynasty

a. Buranji

Buranji has a root from Tai Ahom language, *Bu* means ‘ignorant person’, *Ran* means ‘teaching’ and *Ji* means ‘store’. Another word in Assamese is *Itihas* that refers to the historical writing, but it is close to Hindi orientation and thus it is related to the history of the likes of the Mughals or the Hindu dynasties. Hence, using the word *Buranji* that refers to the legend of Tai Ahom kings and the rulers of Assam. The Tai writing culture prefers using the word Buranji. Renu Wichasil (2002) studied Ahom manuscripts and Tai Yai manuscripts. Wichasil translated *Ahom Buranji* by Golap Chandra Barua from English into Thai. Interestingly, she used the word ‘*Pongsawadarn Ahom*’ instead of using ‘Ahom Buranji’. She analyzed Ahom Buranji’s content which describes the story of Ahom Kings which is similar to the story in Thai’s Pongsaowadarn.

b. *Lik Kheu Mung* or *Lik Kho Mung*

‘*Lik Kheu Mung*’ or ‘*Lik Kho Mung*’ was not mentioned in colonial period, but it had been studied during the 1980s. One reason is that *Lik Kheu Mung* was written in Tai. The translated version of ‘Ahom Buranji’ from Ahom language into English became more popular than *Lik Kheu Mung* since 1930. The readers who didn’t know Tai, prefer reading the translated version. Another reason is that the 1980s was the time of Linguistic turn and the movement of Tai literacy. The Tai’s languages which are not necessarily Ahom, started to become a subject of study for the linguists, the Tai scholars and Thai scholars.

c. Individual records

Tai Aiton people have the writing culture. ‘*Jong Lik*’ or ‘*Chong Lik*’ or a store of books or a small library is always located inside the Tai Aiton temple. Moreover, all the Tai houses have the individual records inside ‘*Jong Fra*’ (a worship house or Buddha house). Mostly, the records were written about the Buddhism, the Buddha and the auspicious moment or important events.

These sources play important roles in doing Tai’s research in Assam. And Ahom Buranji seems to be the inspiration for all scholars.

5.1.1.1 Tais in Assamese history: the marginalized history in modern era

“*In the history of India as a whole, Assam is barely mentioned.....*”

Edward Gait 1930, pages viii

What is undeniable about historical sources is the approach of the study. Looked at all the approaches in Tai historiography, it can be roughly generated into three parts following the period and the context.

Firstly, Tai historiography in the period of British Rule 1826 to the Independence in 1947, Initially, William Robinson (1841), William Wilson Hunter (1886) and Sir Edward Gait (1905) were the western scholars who studied about Assam and its history. Edward Gait is the prominent historian who produced his knowledge in the historical writing. Gait had got the inspiration to write the history of Assam from the Mughal conquest and the struggle of the Ahom people against it. But once he started to study, he found that all the Indian histories have never mentioned about Assam. So, he wrote the history of Assam. However, Gait was not the first western scholar who came to Assam. He mentioned that William Robinson and William Hunter were the initiative scholars who wrote about the history of Assam.

Robinson wrote *Descriptive Account of Assam* which was published in 1841. Robinson mainly mentioned about Ahom kingdom and Tai Khamtis. It might be, because the Ahoms were in throne at that time. He wrote about Khamtis who were inhabited in Sadiya with the other groups like Mishimis, Singphos and Nagas. For him, Khamti was the most powerful group among all the groups. From his point of view, knowing about Khamtis and the situation in Sadiya was good for the British Raj.

“Khamtis in the plunder of our frontier districts;” and “The Abors (Khamtis) were always looked upon as the allies of the ancient Assamese government” (Robinson, 1841:363)

Robinson’s writing is the only one historical writing which talks of Assam history. Starting from the natural science, geographical data, population, climate, zoology, botany, the quality of the soil to the history, of tribal people and their cultures, politic etc. were the topics that he wanted to write about along with all the background of Assam. The purpose was the tea plantation investment. Hence, Robinson’s work represents the willingness of Administrators to write history.

Politically, in 1833, it marked that Purandar Singh was made Raja of Upper Assam as a native ruler on the condition that he had to pay a yearly tribute to the British Rule. Gait mentioned from the report to Government that *Puranda Singh* is the best fitted person to become the head of the state by his countenance and his abilities. Later, in 1838, he was expelled from the throne due to his failure in the administration. Later on, it seems that

Ahom dynasty is gone from the pages in history of Assam⁶. Although, the business of tea plantation, mines, etc. were established along the way. (Gait, 2016: 308) Besides that, the technology of printing in Assam was started in 1836. Thus, Assamese literature emerged in the form of mass product during the 1880s.

Intellectually, it marked that William Wilson Hunter wrote *The Indian Empire: Its People, History, And Products* in 1886 for paying attention to the tea plantation business. He talked of Assam as 'Home of Tea Plant'. So, a few lines of Assam paid attention to the tea plantation and its development. (Hunter, 1886:504) Although, it is worth mentioning that he added his impression towards Indian culture. His work was a representative of modern historical writing by his investigation of the primary sources. Following is the quotation from Hunter which reflects that he uses many aspects in writing such as the natural science, the primary data and the rhetoric.

*“Early travellers reported that the tea-plant was indigenous to the Southern valleys of the Himalayas; but they were mistaken in the identity of the shrub, which was the *Osyris nepalensis*. The real tea (*Thea viridis*), a plant akin to the camellia, grows wild in Assam, being commonly found throughout the hill tracts between the valleys of the Brahmaputra and the Barak.”* (Hunter, 1886: 504)

These works helped Sir Edward Gait to gain more knowledge about Assam but it was not enough for Gait. Apart from these two books, Gait's book '*The History of Assam*' (1905) is the most prominent work in this context. Gait had written the history of Assam by the help of *Deodhai* or the priest for translating *Ahom Buranji*. Gait contributed not only the knowledge but also presented the long history of people in Assam. At the same time, Golap Chandra Barua was the clerk of the office of Deputy Commissioner, Lakimpur. He was a young well-educated Assamese who helped Gait a lot for the translation of the Tai records as well as Assamese records. Furthermore, Golap Chandra Barua had published Tai Ahom language and legendary stories with Ahom scripts in the book titled "Linguistic Survey of India" (Nartsupha and Wichasin, 1998:171).

On the other hand, Assamese people and the Bodos tried to form some groups to fight for the right of socio-economic development such as Ahom Association (1893), All Boro Chatra Sanmilan (1918), Kachari Sanmilan (1921), or Kachari Students Association

⁶ Gait mentioned that McCosh wrote the parody of Ahom king that "*The present representative of this once powerful dynasty. Now, he resides in Jorhat in noisy pomp and tawdry splendor: his resources limited to that of a zamindar; his numerous nobility reduced to beggary or to exist upon bribery and corruption; and his kingly court (for he still maintains his regal dignity) more resembling the parade of a company of strolling players than anything imposing or sovereign.*" (Gait, 2016: 308)

(1922). Due to the British rule economic policy had invited many tribes, especially the Muslim Bengalis, Hindu Bengalis, Nepalis, Biharis and Marwaris to play important roles in trading, business, industries, workers etc. (Pitipat and Inchan, as cited in Gurudas Das, 1997) However, the rapid change in Assam created many problems to the elite people who were Tai Ahoms. From gaining high status during the Ahom dynasty, after 1833, Tai Ahoms and other groups seemed to be in trouble with receding economic condition. Not only about the status was the problem among the Tais of Assam, but also Ahom's culture and language disappearing because of the backward-life style. Thus, the ideology of 'incorporation' was used as the tool of revivalist movement.

After Sir Edward Gait wrote *The History of Assam* in 1905 with the translation of Ahom manuscript attached in the appendix. Then, the translation of *Ahom Buranji* was published in 1930 by Golap Chandra Barua. Moreover, Golap Chandra Barua wrote *Dictionary of Ahom Assamese English* in 1920. These books are the prominent history books of Assam. All the Tai records have been analyzed heavily during the 1930s and continuously discussed until the 1980s. Even the Thai's historiography got many inspirations from the Ahom Buranji.

Interestingly, Jyoti Prasad Agarwala in 1935 made a film named '*Jyomoti*'. This film was adapted from Lakshminath Bezbaroa's play, *Jyomoti Kunwari* (1915), which talks of the Ahom princess *Soti Jyomoti* who was the wife of prince *Gadapani*. Unfortunately, there was the Purge of the princess of the king Sulikphaa. He had to fight back. Later on, when he lost, he escaped and stayed with the Nagas outside Ahom kingdom. Then, Sulikphaa's soldiers caught Jyomoti and tortured her asking the whereabouts of her husband. But she sacrificed herself for her husband and never said anything about him. The first film of Assam represents the brave and honest heart of Ahom princess and the harmony between the plain tribal people and the hilly tribal people.

In this period, All Assam Tribal League also has been founded in 1933. With this, the revivalist movements emerged. In 1893, '*Ahom Subha*' had been founded in Sibsagar on 13 May 1893 with the leadership of Padmanath Gohain Boruah. Later, Ahom Subha had emerged in all the small districts all around Assam state such as, Ahom Subha in North-Lukhimpur and Tezpur (1902), Jorhat (1909), Dibrugarh (1910), Sadiya (1916), Nagaon (1920) Golaghat (1921) Nazira (1920) and North Guwahati (1930). All these associations connected with the willingness to keep connection from village to the sub-division. In 1910, Ahom Sabha was changed into 'Ahom Association or All Assam Ahom

Association (AAAA). AAAA's main principles contain determination to revive the Ahom culture, language, ritual and the belief. (Pitpat and Inchan cited in Gogoi, 1994)

During 1930-1940, the demand for autonomy or self-determination among the Ahom started increasing. AAAA's principles changed into the requesting for the right in education and public service from the government. Moreover, Ahoms wanted to change their caste from 'Backwardness' into the minority status and required the separate electorate. (Pitpat and Inchan, cited in Phukon, 2001) The political movement seems to be the demanding of all the Tais at that time. At the same time, in 1953, the Ahom Studies Section was established in the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies of the Assam State in Guwahati (D.H.A.S). After the emerging of the Ahom Studies Section, the Tai historiography became more academic.

During the British Rule, history has been very conscious towards the Indian's education. Ahom Buranji was one of the influences pertained to the historical writing of the modern historian in the British Rule. Hence, the primary sources were playing the important roles in the historiography. After the independence, some Assamese literature and Tai historiography got published.

5.1.1.2 Tai historiography after the independence until the present

The ideology of 'cooperation' among tribal people was increasing after the independence. The demand for self-identification did not only represent that they requested for ethnic identity but also the right to get the higher quality of life in term of education and some public policy. According to Girin Phukon (2001), as the Act of 1935 was affected to the Tais in Assam because the fixed status and fixed caste as Backwardness, they could not gain equality of opportunity. The All Assam Ahom Association or AAAA's chairman *S.N. Buragohain* submitted their Memorandums in 1943 but it failed. Then, the only way to preserve their rights was to revive their languages and culture. Later another group emerged in 1943. This new group, All Assam Ahom Student's Federation (AAASF) became the supportive group to the AAAA. The work of the young people encouraged the idea of cooperation in the other Tai groups. Thus, in 1944, All Assam Tribes and Races Federation have been founded. Moreover, in 1953, Ahom status was fixed by The Constitution of India as 'Other Backward Classes' (OBC). The OBC caste effected to their rights again.

The revivalist movement amidst the Assamese majority group was not easy. But AAAA still worked so hard in publishing the Tai historical writings. According to Sumit

Pitipat and Damrongphon Inchan (2003), these are the names associated with the revivalist movements and the associations in Tai groups, mostly Ahoms were the leaders.

In 1953, Ahom Studies Section in the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies of Assam was emerged as the hub of Ahom knowledge.

In 1955, The Tai Historical and Cultural Society of Assam (THCSA) was formed by J.N. Phukan.

Again in 1962, All Assam Mohan Deodhai Bailung Sanmilan (AAMDBS) was formed by the Ahom priests from three clans such as Mohan, Deodhai and Bailung. This association argued that Ahom people should revive the original Tai beliefs, because at that time, Tai Ahoms started converting themselves into Hindus. Not only the Tai Ahom religion, AAMDBS revived Tai Ahom tradition, ritual and Ahom language, but also, later on, Central Tai Academy that has been founded in Patsaku worked toward this orientation.

In 1963, Buddhist Society of Phralung Culture (BSFC) took the mission for studying about Ahom religious philosophy. Tanuram Gogoi was the first chairman of it. This association took initiative towards establishing the Buddhist society in Assam. It was in such a way that, to be mentioned, at Disangpani, the first Buddhist temple was built because of the influence of BSFC.

In 1964, All Assam Tai Student's Association (AATSA) was formed in Shillong for encouraging the Tai language and cultural centre in Dibrugarh University. Moreover, AATSA supported Tai researchers to do the research in Southeast Asia. And AATSA wanted to preserve the Tai Ahom historical places. The prominent work of AATSA was the journals about Tai culture. Weekly journal named '*Mungtai*' and fortnightly journal named '*Pulanchi*' are good examples.

In 1965, All Assam Tai Sabha (AATS) was the initiative association for Tai Studies. In 1967, there are three associations that emerged with the influence of AATS such as Ahom Tai Rajya Parishad at Guwahati, The All Assam Ahom Association at Gargaon and the Mongoloid National Front at Dibrugarh. Later, three leaders of those associations combined them in the same year under the name 'the Ahom Tai Momgolia Rajya Parishad (ATMRP).

In 1971, the political movement emerged again under the name of Ujani Asom Rajya Parishad (UARP) requested the separation from Assam State. Sibsagar, Dibrugarh and Lakhimpur were requesting for the independent state status, but it failed. Later, UARP changed their association into the political 'Janata Party'.

In 1975, All Assam Phralung Sangha (AAPS) or Furalung Sangha tried to bring the Phralung belief back. AAPS promoted Phralung among the Tai Ahoms and convinced them to convert from Hindu into Phralung. So, the Ahom rituals have been revived since the 1970s; among them rituals such as *Ompa* ritual, *Saiphari* ritual, and *Me-Dam-Me-Phiare* noteworthy.

Intellectually, Tai historiography after independence was a cooperation of Tai scholars both from Assam and the other countries. The work of Tai Ahom was increasing with the well-educated Tai scholars and the linguistic's turn in the 1980s. These are the prominent Tai historiography works.

G.A Grierson wrote *An Ahom Cosmology* in 1904 with the translation and a Vocabulary of Ahom language in Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society. Grierson was working on many Tai groups, but his prominent work was a survey of languages in India.

In 1954, Sarnat or *Sung Pattanotai* from Thailand who visited Assam under '*the Buddhist Dhamma Yatra*' project. It was the religious project which was related to the situation of revivalist movements in Assam after the independence. Sarnat was the first Thai scholar who visited Assam. He published a book named as *Yiam Tai Ahom Sai Lueand Kong Rao* or *Visiting Tai Ahoms: Our relatives*. His work defined Ahom as Thai's relatives. The word *Pi Thai Nong Tai* (Thais and Tais brotherhood) was used. Sarnat wrote the book from his memory along with Ahom Buranji same as Edward Gait did, Tai records, British's records etc. Later on, in 1955, Banchop Panthumetha; the linguist from Thailand visited Assam. The Ahom records were shown to her by the Ahom scholars of Assam. '*Gale Mantai*' in Khamti word means the visiting Tai village. Panthumetha used linguistic approach to focus on Tai groups of Assam. These were two prominent Thai scholars who were interested in Tais of Assam after the independence.

Now the focus can be on the wave of scholars studied about Tais in Assam. J.N Phukan was the first Ahom scholar who reviewed all historiography of Ahom. According to Renoo Wichasin (2002), J.N. Phukan was the journal's editor '*Likpantai*'. (Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies of Assam's journal) His publications include *A Study in the Titles of Ahom Kings, Ministers and Other Functionaries of the State* (1970), *Documentary History of Ahom Vol. 1 Chao Lung Siu Ka Pha* (1998). Another Ahom scholar is Ye Hom Buragohain who is the Tai Ahom Studies specialist at Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies. Her works are useful for Tai Studies scholars in Assam as well as other countries, because she wrote, in Assamese and English both, books such

as, *Old Unit of Times of the Tai People in Northeast India* (1981), *The Tai Phake of Assam* (1998) and many more journals as the co-author.

The work of B.J. Terwiel, *The Tai of Assam: An Ancient Tai Ritual* in 1981 described about old rituals of Ahom. He could read Ahom manuscripts. During 1979-1980, he was a visiting-lecturer at Dibrugarh University. Moreover, he published *Tai Ahom and the Stars: Three Ritual Texts to Ward off Danger* (1992), *The Origin of Mankind in Ahom Literature: Towards a Contextual and Regional Analysis* in 1998 and *Revivalism in Northeast India: A Case of the Ahomsin* 2002. Thus, Terwiel has produced Tai historiography continuously.

Thai scholars who are interested in Tais of Assam from 1980s like Wilaiwan Kanithanan (1982), Charttip Nartsupha and Renoo Vicharsil (2009) produced many Tai historiographies with modern historiography approach. Kanithanan wrote about 'Kwan' or the spirit in Tai belief and she is interested in the Tai language as well as the Tai belief. On the other hand, Charttip Natsupha focused heavily on the revivalist movement in Ahoms. And Renoo Vichasin wrote many books about Tai Ahoms such as, *The Tai Ahom Rank of Chao Lung: A Study Based on The Ahom Buranji* (1987), *Direction Words on Tai Languages* (1995), and the very important work *Pongsaowadarn Tai Ahom or Ahom Buranji* (Thai translation) in 1996.

Stephen Morley, a linguistic researcher from Monash University, Australia also worked on the project of Tai languages of Assam. He wrote many books and all the books are written in Tai, Assamese and English. All the books he wrote were produced by the sheer cooperation from the Tai people. Thus, as gratitude, many books are sent to the Tai communities where he used to work with. He wrote the *Lik Kheu Mung Tai Aiton* or History of Tai Aitons (1999) and the *Lik Son Kam Tai* or the lesson of Tai Aiton language. (1999)

In The 1980s was the time of linguistic turn. The issue of identity emerged in many groups to seek their self-identification and the legitimacy of their rights in many nations. So, the history was used as a tool of cultural nostalgia. The issue of cultural preservation came with the question of what is not Tai culture? What is the authenticity? And Which part in history can be used as the cultural representative? Although, many historical writings mention about the exact date but B.J. Terwiel gave a comment that the writing might have been connected with the promotion of Tai identity. (Terwiel, 1989: 125) Yasmin Saikia (1999) also argued that Buranji was the remaking history by the revivalists.

5.1.2 Tai historiography in the context of Thailand

5.1.2.1 *Tai Historiography and the marginalized history in Modern Era*

As a consequence of the literature reviewing, the question of history becomes a main task for scrutinizing all the ideologies among Thai intellectuals. Therefore, the way of writing history in Thailand is studied here. According to Charnwit Kasetsiri, the historiography in Thailand has three concepts; the first concept is '*Tamnan*' which is related to Buddhism and the kings who patronized the religion, the second is '*Phongsawadan*' which mainly talked about the history of dynasties and the third is '*Prawatsat*' which is a modern way of writing history, and it is related to the idea of nation-state building project. (Kasetsiri, 2015: 5) On the other hand, Tai Yais use the word '*Peun*' referring about history. But the word has never been used by any Thai scholars.

Because history is not in the hands of ordinary people at first stage, so how does it happen in the other part of the world can be an important question. Let's start with the meaning of '*Tamnan*' or Legend in Thai Dictionary which was published in 2011 explaining the meaning of '*Tamnan*'. It means the stories of the places or people or the events which are related to the past and the religious tales or myths. According to Charnvit Kasetsiri, '*Tamnan*' was written by '*Ruesi*' or hermit, '*Chipakhao*' or a religious man who wore the white cloth and '*Kruba arjan*' or teacher; these three types of religious men were the most active leaders of the old society and mostly '*Tamnan*' was written in Pali. Secondly '*Phongsawadan*' or Chronicle which is derived from Pali words; '*vamsa*' and '*avatara*' means the history about dynasty which it is related to the king whom Thai people believe to be a demigod (in the sense of the legitimate authority to rule the kingdom).

Moreover, it tells us the story about the events in those days. For example, during the seventeenth century, there were many '*Phongsawadan*' like '*Phraratchaphongsawadan Krung Sri Ayutthaya Chabap Luang Prasoet*' (The Luang Prasoet Chronicle of Ayutthaya) which was written in seventeenth century by Luang Prasoet who was a royal astrologer to describe the lineage of the dynasty and the activities of the kings, his patronages, wars, memorable events etc. And thirdly, '*Prawatsat*' derived from Pali and Sanskrit words; '*Pravatti*' and '*Sattha*' means the history of knowledge. This word was used widely during King Rama VI (1910–1925), Vajiravudh who coined this word for Thai academicians instead of using '*Phongsawadan*'. The word '*Prawatsat*' has been used since Thai modernization in the late eighteenth century until the present.

In nineteenth century, '*Prawatsat*' was a new turn for Thai scholars because it was used for many approaches to write 'history' from the west. At this time, the first

‘technology of Thai Printing’ arrived here in Thailand. It turned out that this was the main factor to promoting stupendous knowledge during 1830s. Thenceforth, ‘*PrawatsatThai*’ or Thai history had been told by the working-class thinkers, but the acceptable writings mainly were written by the elite writers. With the concept of looking at the historiography as the tool of building the nation, this study concerns about Tai Yai. Hence, the concepts of ‘*Tamnan*’, ‘*Phongsawadan*’ and ‘*Prawatsat*’ are reviewed before doing the fieldwork.

History studies about the past. Furthermore, history can lead us for rethinking about the present. The nature of history represents the events. Events represent the significance of time and space. So, the researcher tries to locate the recorded events in Thai society which is related to Tai Yai in Maehongson and the historical data which are produced during modernization in Thailand.

It is vital to note that Thai modernization had arrived with the coming of the colonization period as well as the westernization. Most of the history was produced during this period have many reasons, the higher literate people, the technology of printing and the rise of nationalism. The researcher tries to focus on the historiography which it is the tool of nation-building so that the ‘modernity’ and ‘history’ are the main discussing concepts of historiography.

5.1.2.2 Tai historiography and Modernity in Thailand

Unlike India, Thailand has never been colonized by any foreign countries. But the internal colonialism in Thailand was fruitfully processed during modernization. Thus, the revivalist movements are also to be different. In Thailand’s context, the dichotomy of self/other comes with the dichotomy of traditional/modernized. While the Indian Nationalist Movements were going against the British Rule, but Thai-Revivalist Movements were going against the centralization of the Thai government. Moreover, the modernization in Thailand created rapid change. Thai elite groups wanted to re-identify themselves as the real Thai by the ideology of neo-traditionalism. The Thai authenticity seemed to be a valuable heritage during the nation-building period. The elements of being a Thai consists of being loyal to the Nation, the Buddhism and the King. Hence, it affected many ethnic groups’ social and cultural set-up in Thailand when the boundary, language, and beliefs were fixed up. Tai historiography in Thailand’s context then, is conscious about the compromise between Tai groups and the nation state.

The world today is known as the ‘modern world’. However, we must look at the modern word itself which is derived from Latin word ‘*modernus*’ that combined two words from Latin ‘*modo*’ meaning just now and ‘*modus*’ meaning measure. ‘Modern’ was first

used in 1585. Summing it up, then, ‘modern’ means the time that represents characteristic of a period extending from a relevant remote past to the present time. On the other hand, modernity was popularly discussed during the twentieth century when the world has been called ‘modern’. Modernity refers to the processing of being modern. The questions for this part are; when the ‘modernity’ starts? And what actually is the meaning of ‘modernity’? What is the meaning of modernity in Thailand? And, what is the relationship between modernity and Tai Yai historiography?

Modernity started in the west in the fifteenth century and it was fruitful in the context of the enlightenment in eighteenth century. On the other hand, modernity in Thailand started in the early of nineteenth century, it was the time of King Rama V who reformed the bureaucracy and declared the announcement of Slave Abolition Act. Thus, he is regarded as one of the great kings among Thai people. During his time, the hardest task was to reconcile many races in Thailand. Hence, he became the Siam King when he was only 15 years old. The young king traveled to many countries to see the development out there. Thus, he had visited abroad which include places like Singapore, Java, Malayu or Malaysia, Burma and India. Unfortunately, he acceded to the throne with the threat of colonization by France.

Chis Baker and Phasuk Pongpaichit (2009) explained that Siam was remade as a nation-state in the end of nineteenth century because of the colonization threat and the threat from various groups of people inside the Kingdom. So, the nation constructed by this process was novel. The areas collected within the borders had very different histories, languages, religious cultures and traditions. Especially, the idea of nation, unified nation-state, nationality, national identity and centralized nation-governing bureaucracy were imposed from above.

For the use of Tai historiography, this part discusses about the type of Tai historiography. The researcher surveyed the historical writing on Tai historiography which has been started since the nineteenth century and which got published in the twentieth century until the present day (2017). Tai historiography can be divided into three periods by following the timeline.⁷ It is as follows;

The first period of Tai historiography in Thailand with the Neo-Victorian ideology starts in the end of nineteenth century and continues until the 1950s.

⁷The research divided the Tai historiography into three periods. Regarding the theme of the historical writing and the context of that period which are related to the main aspect of those works.

According to David Streckfuss, the conceptual foundation of Thai mono-ethnicity had already been laid in the 1950s and early 1960s. During the early nineteenth century, Siam had various groups living within their territory. The nation-building project tends to homogenize Thailand. Streckfuss uses the term ‘mono-ethnicity’ and ‘mono-culture’ in this context. (Streckfuss, 2012 :421-420) Thus, Tai historiography in Thailand was written with many approaches such as the romanticization of unified Thailand, orientalist approach and the ethnic approach.

In 1885, Terrien De Lecouperie wrote the *Cradle of the Shan Race* by collecting primary sources from Chinese records. He believed that the western origin of Chinese race and the Shan were from the Southwest China’s Sichuan Province. Then, the Shans developed their communities and formed into Nanzhao Kingdom. (Yongjia, 2010:4)

Initial work on Tai historiography by Thai Scholars include works by people like Cham Boonnak or Phraya Pragitworachak. He worked on *Pongsawadahn Yonok* in 1906. He was the first Thai scholar who got interested in the ethno-history. He used the manuscript and the archaeological evidence for composing the history. He also translated the Lanna inscriptions and compiled the history of the northern Thai people. His work mentioned about how the ‘Yonok’ could build their dynasty. ‘*Tai-Yonok* or Tai Yuan people conquered the land in the north. Then, the legend talked of ‘*Singhanawat Kumar*’ who was the descendant from Nanzhao Kingdom. This book described about the Lanna history while Siam’s politics was being changed by the idea of centralization during King Rama V and King Rama VI. Thus, the writing of Lanna Dynasty reflects the idea of homogenizing Thailand. Moreover, Thai elites started to study about the other part of Siam with the modern historiographical approach. *Pongsawadahn Yonok* talks of the legend and the history of Dynasty.

W.C. Dodd wrote *The Tai Race Elder Brother of the Chinese* in 1923. He is one of the most important historians of Tai historiography. Dodd’s work talks of the Tai race that lived in the Northern part of Thailand, Burma, the southern part of China, Yunnan and Guangdong and some part of Vietnam. Dodd mentioned that Tai race was the elder brother of the Chinese. His book *The Tai Race, Elder Brother of the Chinese* was published in the early twentieth century. His work was an ethnographic writing. His journey started from Burma, through China, and Laos to Vietnam. The exploration on the southern part of China inspired him to think of the origin of Tais. He got some Chinese records which were written about Nanzhao Kingdom. Dodd wrote that Thai has a Mongolian origin, and they lived in Altai Mountain. Later on, Chinese drove all the Thais out from Altai Mountain to Nanzhao

Kingdom and to the Southeast Asia of the present. Luang Wichitmattra (1930) and Praya Anumarnratchaton (1940) were Thai historians who agreed with Dodd. However, this theory was rejected by many scholars, because W.C. Dodd had not enough historical evidence to prove that.

The second period is the idea of Tai Race and the romanticization of the great race during the 1930s-50s, Thai nationalism was rising especially among the Thai elite scholars. They wanted to write a history within the theme of building a nation. Thus, history of migration from Altai Mountain was acceptable for the nationalist historians. Luang Wichitmattra (1930) wrote '*Lak Thai*' (หลักไทย) which argued that Thai origin is in Altai Mountain.

Praya Anumarnratchaton (1940) who wrote *Reaung Chonchart Thai* or (The story about Thai race) also believed that Thais were Mongolian who lived in Altai Mountain. After these three books were read by many Thais, the idea of Thai migration was linked with the great Thai race or Pan-Thaism. Thus, '*Thai origin was Altai Mountain*' becomes a grand narrative in Thai historiography. This idea leads to the mono-ethnicity. According to Streckfuss, most of the Tai-language speaking people (Siamese, Lao, Shan, Phuthai etc.) became Thai nationals and the members of the Thai race. (Streckfuss, 1999: 420) After that, the approach of Thai historiography pointed out to the mono-ethnicity in the nation. The origin of the Thai's land has been the main question in doing research about Tai/Thai.

The third period is to find origin of Thai people and the anthropological linguistic turn. Amidst the idea of making mono-ethnicity, there are only two Tai historical writings about Tai which are not Thai. Boonchuay Srisawat (1952) published '*Samsib Chat Nai Chiang Rai*' (Thirty Races in Chiangrai) and '*Thai Sip Song Panna*' (1955). These two books used Anthropological approach to focus on Tai groups in the Northern Thailand. He described that Thai race is not a small group. Thai or Tai in the Northern part can use Thai but they call themselves as Tai/Dai.

The linguistic approach shows that Thai/Tai speak the same language family. Wolfram Eberhard published *A History of China* in 1969. He wrote that Thai languages are related to the Chinese. He added that Thais were settled down in the South of China, Northeast India and the Northern part of Southeast Asia. Later on, Dr. Paul K. Benedict who had the hypothesis about the linguistic linkage between Tai, Kadai and Austronesian said that the origin of Tais is in the South of Central-China before they

migrated to the other parts. (Schliesinger, 2000: 22) Afterwards, the Tais have been driven by the hardship of the semi-desert North in the regions nearby Mongolia from the war and forced to be migrated to the South at an early period following the courses of the yellow river in China. (Gogoi, 1968:2). According to Max Muller, the original seat of the Tai or Siamese branch of the Indo-Chinese people, called Shan by the Burmese, was in Central Asia and it was from that area that these people were the first to migrate towards the south and settle along the rivers, the Mekong, the Menam, the Irrawaddy and the Brahmaputra (Phayre, 1883 cited in Gogoi, 1968:3) When the small group of Tai people migrated southward from the Yangtze river region, they formed cities (chiang) and *muangs* under the rule of sovereign or chao-muangs (Schliesinger, 2000:29)

5.2 Tai: the great race and the origin of Tai Aitons and Tai Yais

“Ethnie are nothing if not historical communities built up on shared memories”

Anthony D. Smith

5.2.1 The meaning of ‘Tai’ and the origin of Tai

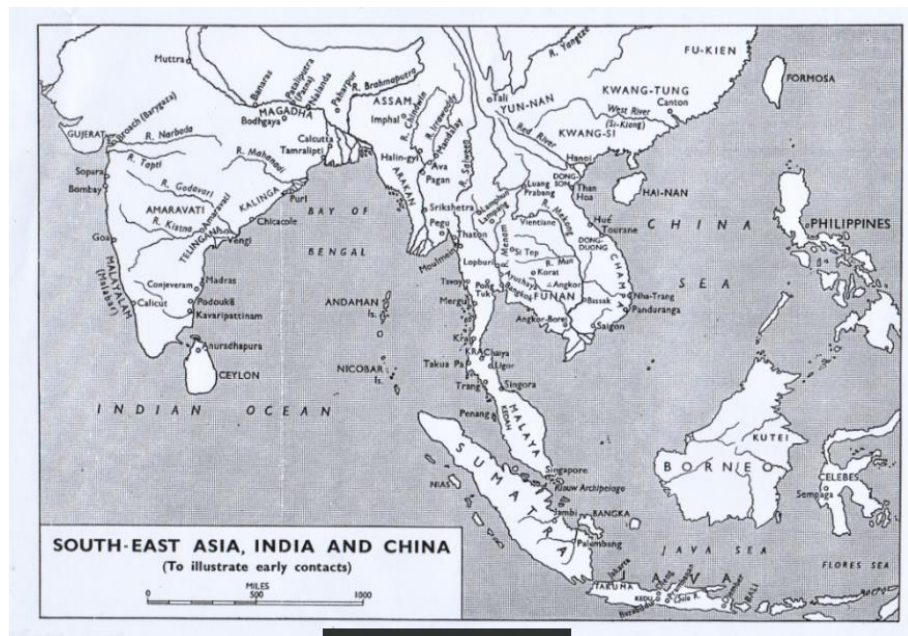
The word ‘Tai’(太) in Chinese means ‘big’ or ‘god’. In Tai (ໄທ) Thai means freedom. Tai in Tai Ahom means the people who are heaven-born. (Barua 1930:18) The word ‘Tai’ nowadays refers to the group of people who live scattered over the Southeast Asia, the Southern China and Northeast India. Tai people usually call themselves as ‘Kon Tai’. This is a way to use ‘Tai’ first which is then accompanied by the place they belong to or the dress. For example, ‘Phu Tai’ means Tais who live in the highland, ‘Tai Dam’ or ‘Black Tai’ means Tais who always are in the black dress etc.

The etymology of the word ‘Tai’ is related to the Tai historiography and the findings of each scholar. Since the cultural diffusion was a popular approach to understand the connectivity of the groups, it comes along with the strong belief in evolutionism and the lineage history. The work of the Oriental westerners points out that Chinese culture merged into every culture, for example, Terrien De Lecouperie (1885), W.C. Dodd (1923), Wolfram Eberhard (1969) talk this way.

These works mentioned about a place called ‘Nanzhao’ wherefrom the Tais come. The collected data of these books come from the Chinese records along with their point of views. De Lecouperie described that the Southwest China’s Sichuan Province was Shan’s origin. Later on, W.C. Dodd added that Thais have a Mongolian origin, and they lived in

Altai Mountain. *Nanchao* or *Nanzhao* or *Nong Sae* was the kingdom of the Tais before the Chinese expelled them from Nanchao toward the south. Eberhard used the linguistic approach to do research on Chinese language and the history of China. He mentioned that Tai language is similar to the Chinese. For Eberhard, there were two kinds of cultures in the south of China; first, the culture from Sichuan, where the Tibetans lived following a nomadic lifestyle. And secondly, Yao culture which is then mixed their culture up with other groups and then became Tai. Tai/Dai culture had a prominent way of living, such as the wet-rice cultivation is worth mentioning. Later on, they migrated from Sichuan, Guangdong and Guangxi to Shan state, Thailand, and Laos.

Thus, Tai is the word that the oriental western scholar tried to search in the Chinese records. Eberhard found the word ‘Yue’ (越) that refers to the people who inhabited from the West of Yunnan, Guangdong to Hainan. Eberhard believed that ‘Yue’ was the group of people who are mixture of Yaos and Tais.



Map 5: The South-East Asia, India and China Map.

Source: Cowan, C.D, and Wolters, O.W., *Southeast Asian History and Historiography*, Cornell University Press, London, 1976.

The origin and the migration of the Tai leads all the scholars think of the recording remains. It is worth mentioning about Tai Muang Mao. According to W.C. Dodd, Tai Maos was the first Tai group who recorded the chronology of their own kingdom. The name of Tai Maos represents that they lived nearby the Mao River or *Shweli* river in a Burmese region. The present Mao is located in the borderline between Burma and China. The Mao

kingdom has reached its peak in the middle of the thirteenth century, when the Tai Mao and their migrating kin groups, the Tai Yai and Ahom, dominated most parts of northern mainland Southeast Asia. Their dominance stretched from Mekong in the east over upper Burma into Assam. (Schliesinger, 2000: 36-37) During twelfth century, Mao kingdom had to face with the war from Kublai Khan. 1252 was the year of the big migration for Tai Mao people, as they lost Nan-Chao, the capital of Muang Mao to Ming dynasty.

Thus, it is possible to think of the beginning of big wave migration of Tai Mao to Assam and Maehongson, Thailand in the early thirteenth century. Interestingly, the history of Tai Luang in Thailand got started recording as early as the fourteenth century.

Here the focus can be on the word Nanchao or Nanzhao or NongSae which is a Tai word. '*Chao*' means the elite or the president. However, during 1950s the problem of Nanzhao was being discussed, that only one word '*chao*' (which is related to Tai language) does not mean that Nanchao is the Tai kingdom. Moreover, the investigation about Nanchao found that there is no historical and archaeological evidence and not even any mentioned records about Nanchao was to be found. Nowadays, '*Nanchao*' kingdom is an unacceptable suggestion for the origin of Tais. But the Nanchao theory throws the light to the new idea of Tai origin, that it can then be said that the South-East Asia and Southern China can be the original homeland of the Tais (Gogoi, 2011: 4).

The possibility of linguistic linkage (Tai-Kadai speaking) theory is very much accepted by many scholars nowadays. It is, because the discovery of the archaeological evidence leads to the idea that '*Tai origin is here (in the South-East Asia, the South China and the North-East India), not everywhere*'.

5.2.2 Origins of Tai Aitons: The History of Migration and Ethno-History

According to Puspadhar Gogoi (1996), Tai Aitons call themselves as '*Tai Aiton*' while Assamese people call them as '*Aitonia*'. The word '*Aiton*' comes from two Tai words; '*Ai*' meaning '*brother*' and '*Ton*' meaning '*high*'. But, Padmeswar Gogoi (1968) said that the name '*Aiton*' comes from the place '*Mueng Aiton*' in Chindwin Myanmar. However, the etymological meaning to some extent sustains as coming from a particular place does not dispel the preceding possibility. So, '*brother of high hill*' or '*high spirited brother*' remains for the Tai Aitons.

Assamese people once called Tai Aitons as Aitonias. Jaya Buragohain (1998) mentioned that the Aitons migrated to Assam from the upper Chindwin Valley in Burma during the middle of the 18th century when Alongphaya king, the founder of the Kongbung

Dynasty built up an extensive kingdom by conquering tribes and states within and outside Burma. In order to avoid the war and the Burmese rules, they migrated from the place 'Aiton' and settled down in the Ahom's territory. According to G.H. Luce, and Burma inscriptions during 1289, Mongol captured Pagan (Burma) and Shan, and hence, the realm must have been a shamble. Thus, the war in Burma is the main factor toward the migration also.

Before this, they lived in a place called 'Aiton'. Tai Aiton believe that they migrated from '*Khao Khao Mao Lung*'. It was in the upper Chindwin Valley in Burma. '*Khao Khao Mao Lung*' was believed to be the border-region between Burma and the South-Western Yunna in China. Buragohain (1998) interviewed Sri Mahendra Shyam of Borgaon about '*Khao Khao Mao Lung*'. Shyam said that this place was a part of 'Mung Mao Lung' from where the Ahoms came. Then, Aitons shifted to the place called 'Mong Kong' or 'Mongkaung' and lived in the place called 'Aiton'. (Buragohain, 1998: 57-58) But there is no evidence or record about the mentioned name of 'Khao Khao Mao Lung' in Aiton historical records or Lik Kho Mung. Geographically, Mung Kongis is located in the northern part of Shan State and it is quite far from Taunggi, the capital city of Shan state.



Map 6: Mong Kung Map.

Source : https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mong_Kung_Township

According to Stephen Morray (1999), *Tai Aiton History: Treaty between the Aiton and Turung* is the first historical text which was written from Aiton's perspective in 1820s after the British conquest of Assam. And the second text is *the Book of History from the time of the our respected ancestor Chaw Tai Lung up until Sukhapha*. The manuscript starts with the history of Aton's kings. The story goes this way -

In the ancient time, *Chaw Tai Pum* who was the king of ‘*Meung Eu Meung Khon*’, came to rule *Mao Lung*. He had five sons (Murray, 1999: 20)

- a. Chaw Tai Lung, who ruled Meung Yon.
- b. Pa Miu Pum who ruled his father’s place
- c. Kham King Pha who ruled the Ava country
- d. Ket Pha who ruled Nuk Cok Nong Mon
- e. Pheu Chang Khang who ruled Meung Mit Kup Keng Nau

In the manuscript, it is mentioned that the second son who ruled Meung Mao died. So, there was no king in Meung Mao. God in the heaven saw all this, and then He sent *Yot Pha Mok Kham Naeng* who came down from the heavens and took *Chaw Pa Miu Pum*’s wife to be his own. After that he had a son, he returned to heaven, his son was named as ‘*Chaw Su Khan*’ who was still in his mother’s womb when his father left. Later on, Chaw Tai Lung came and took the mother of *Chaw Su Khan*, to be his own wife.

Pheu Chang Khang was the youngest son who had three sons 1. *Chaw Su Yot Pha* 2. *Su Kham Pha* 3. *Sukapha*. Pheu Chang Khang died when he was seventy years old. Chaw Su Yot Pha ruled in Tai Eum, His second son Chao Su Kham ruled Tai Pong. And Sukapha ruled his father’s land, *Meung Mit Kup Keng Nau*. Chaw Su Khan Pha took the son of Chaw Yot Pha. His name was Chaw Tai Ciu. Chaw Su Khan Pha sent him to rule *Mau Wu* and *Kang Taeu Phake*.

Later, *Chaw Su Khan Pha* came to meet *Sukapha* and told him that he would like to kill *Chaw Tai Lung*; but Sukapha felt disturbed, so he moved to *Meung Ma Nun*.

When *Chaw Khai Pha Tai Khang* became a king, he said that he is going to follow his brother, Sukapha, and look for him. He travelled until he arrived *Meung Nun*. But he was confused as he could not find his brother. So, he stayed in the jungle and died. *Chaw Khai Pha*’s son was named as *Chaw Ai Te* who settled down there in *Meung Nun*. Thus, *Meung Nun* refers to Assam.

Purana Assam Buranji speaks of the place called ‘*Aiton*’ in the Patkai region (now it is located in Burma) and during the 13th century Aiton was one of the colonies of Sukapha. (Buragohain, 1998: 58)

On the other hand, the study of ‘*King Sukapha and His Journey to Assam: The Manuscript Evidence*’ of Yehom Buragohain mentions that “the sons of Chao Taipung were *Ai Chao Tailung* (the first son, Chao Tailung), second son was *Ngi Pameopung* and the third son was *Phuchangkhang*. Chao Taipung divided his country amongst his three sons. He gave Mongyin to Chao Tailung, Maolung to Pameopung and

Mongmitkupkengdao to Phuchangkhang”. (Buragohain cited in Morray, 1999) Then, Morray thought that there is a similarity of this story to the Ahom’s manuscript and Aiton’s manuscript. Moreover, the name Sukhapha was there in Aiton’s manuscript.

According to Aiton’s manuscript, Sukapha was the son of *Pheu Chang Khang* which it is related to the historical agreement of Dr. Puspa Gogoi.

Jaya Buragohain (1998) studied about Aiton migration through the primary source ‘*Lik Kho Mung*’ which is written in Tai. Buragohain wrote that ‘*Lik Kho Mungs*’ from Borgaon gave a small account on the origin of Aiton. The Aiton’s origin was *Mong Hi Mong Ham* from where they migrated to *Mong Kwang* and later on to Doi Pat Kai. They have migrated again to Nam Siri, Metek Mlang and Nam Chang Chup. During Ahom Kingdom, they gained higher status. Some Aiton people became ‘Buragohains’ or the commander-in-chief. Then, they migrated to Rang Dai Chung near Nam Kachcha (Kasay pani). Again, they shifted to Marangi then moved to Dhalagur. Nowadays, they settled in two districts namely, Golaghat and Karbi Anglong. Their villages are Banlung, Ahomani, Kalioni, Balipathar, Tengani etc.

5.2.3 Origins of Tai Yais and the history of migration and ethno-history

“Only one tree cannot be called a forest, one family cannot be called a village”

Tai Yai Proverb

The history of a group can be orchestrated through a sense of belonging or togetherness. And that kind of history is also a kind of instrument in the construction of that very particular group’s ethnic identity. Thus, the researcher started with a mention of a Tai proverb here to elucidate that togetherness is the main tool in making sense of ‘Tai-ness’ amidst the unstable situation from the past until the present. Looking back to the Tai Yai history, this part thus tries to focus on the history of migration and how Tai Yai people live and use the history as a tool of the revival of ‘Tai-ness’ through their everyday life.

Arguing from the point of historical perspective in viewing the history of migration of Tai Yais since 13th century, Maehongson city formation can be taken into account, because, this period can well talk about the shared history between various groups in Maehongson province. Moreover, the nineteenth century fact, that the significant period of the notion of modernity has arrived with a romanticized idea about ‘Tai the Great race’, should also be counted here. Then and thus, Tai history mingled with the nationalist ideology later on. What matters here, therefore, is that the formation of nation is based on the shared history as well as the history of ethnic groups. In mid-twentieth century,

nationalism spreads out through the progress of industries and the people of those industrial nations seek out for the ‘national interest’ or ‘national identity’ and ethnocentrism. (Smith, 1999:7)

With the survey of all the documents, it comes as no surprise that Tai Yai history cannot be studied as a single unit, because the Tai history comes along with the history of Shan State and the chronicle of Thai kingdoms and Lanna Kingdom which are related to the foundation of Tai Yai community in Maehongson. And the interviewing data can refill the vivid explanation.

5.2.3.1 The meaning of Tai Yai

Asking the question ‘Who is Tai Yai?’ can also bring out many dimensions of an ethnic identity. It is, as if, oneself is concerned how others look at him/her, and, how oneself looks at himself/herself. Thus, it is an important question of self-awareness. Moreover, who actually have the right to give a name to one group can be the question of ethnic identity. In the past Thai people or *Kon Mueng* used to call Tai Yais as ‘*Ngew*’ (เงี้ยว), and this particular term has literally no meaning. The only meaning that can be drawn out for ‘*Ngew*’ is thus a derogatory one. In Myanmar, people know them as ‘Shan’, ‘Shyam’ or ‘Sam’ and these signify probably specific geographical locations. Nowadays, ‘Tai Yai’ generally means the group of Tai people who migrated from Shan state, Myanmar to stay in Thailand.

5.2.3.2 History of Tai Yai Migration

“Tai Yais formed their community without the idea of nation in fourteenth century”.

Prasert Pradit

It's well known that ‘Thai’ is not ‘Tai’. The word ‘Thai’ is used for uttering the meaning for Thai citizenships and the Thai nationality. Conversely, ‘Tai’ is used for calling the ethnic group. There are at least thirty thus named ethnic Tai groups who have settled in Thailand. Among them, the researcher focuses only on Tai Yai history.

The history of Tai Yai cannot be found in the mainstream history. Here, the researcher’s interview of the Tai Yai historian and the other villagers is noteworthy. Pradit Prasert said that the trace can be traced back to seven hundred years ago, when Tais and Burmese migrated to Maehongson easily by crossing across the *Salawin* river to Maehongson and other border cities. In eighteenth century, the history of Tai Yais got included in the Chaingmai history. It was the time when Chao Keaw Maung Ma surveyed

this area for catching the wild elephants amidst deep forest nearby *Pairiver*. *Chao Keaw Maung Ma* found various types of people in many areas, and he convinced them to settle down together in Ban Pongmoo. Later on, he found another group nearby Maehongson river, and he convinced them to build a village. Since then, *Ban Pongmoo* or *Ban Pangmoo* is the first village in Maehongson province.

In 1856, as the record holds, the migration of Tai Yai people who escaped from the war in Shan state to Maehongson happened, and they started to settle down especially mingling with the Tai Yais who already lived here. There is the record of the head of the village names '*Pagamhong*' who developed the village along with '*Changalay*'. Both had a good relationship with Lanna kingdom by sending the contribution to the king every year.

In 1858, at the same time, the British developed a kind of forest industry and hugely invested in the Maehongson area. They needed workers and the shift of Tai Yai workers from Shan state was greatly initiated.

In 1866 the prince of Mongnai and Prince of Mawkmai fought a war in Shan state. After that the prince of Mawkmai decided to settle down in Maehongson. At that time, it was in 1874 '*Changalay*' got married with the daughter of Mogkmai king (*Chaowfa Koran*) and later on *Changalay* had been promoted by the Lanna king to rule Maehongson province as '*Payah Singha raja*'.

Tai Yai history was included in the history of Chaing Mai, Lanna Kingdom, since Chao Keaw Muang Ma brought his charisma to convince the various groups to stay peacefully together.

In the year of 1900, a kind of reformation happened in Siam. With the coming of colonization from French military, the Siamese elite learnt how to use concept of 'race' to reunite the various people into 'nation-state' or 'chat' in Thai. The nation was defined by the land and language, and that means that the Tai Yai people who lived in the reign of King Rama V, were to be defined as 'Thai'.

The Shan people as well were considered to be of the same race as Thai, with the romanticized historiography and the concept of under the Siam's king reign, everyone will be saved from harm and war. During the reign of King Rama V, there was a Tai leader who was given the surname from the Siam central governor as '*Chulla Bud*' It means '*the son of King Chullachaomklao*'. It can be clearly seen, hence, the notion of nation as the father of land gets represented here.

Then, the 1976 history of Maehongson can be considered. It explains that Tai Yai (Yai meand big) were the big group of people who formed this province along with Karen and Burmese. So, by this time, Tai Yai, as a strong identity group started to get a place in the national history. Since then, Tai Yais in Maehongson called themselves as ‘Tai Yai’ who are different from Thais. At the same time, they became absorbed into Thais. Nowadays (2019), the story of Tai Yai people has been telling from many Tai Yais unlike before which were told by Thai elites. With the supportive institute “*Tai Yai Studies Institute*”, Tai Luangs or Tai Yai scholars have a space to identify themselves and recollect all the memories about the past. Tai Yai Institute has been found in 2008 with the development project to change Maehongson provice into living heritage city. Since 2008 until present days, Maehongson province started to promote the concept of heritage city and tourism. Tai Yai’s history plays an important role to make a content in reaffirmation Tai identity and all the ethno-history helps Tai Yais to revive Tai Yai language, traditional dress, festivals and rituals.

This chapter uses the historical approach to look at the Tai historiography in the context of Assam as well as Thailand. It describes the significant historical events which are related to Tai historiography. The colonialism and the state formation are the main approach on writing history. Thus, history is a tool for both Tai groups.

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Map

Mong Kung Map

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