

Chapter Four: Ethnographic Description on Tai Yai

“I have simply tried to give a series of pictures, by pen, camera and paint-brush, of some of the people who live in northern Shan States, trying to write of them from their own point of view, and to show them as they appear in their daily life”

Leslie Milne, Shans at Home (2001), p. Xi.

Ethnographic writing lies between the scientific description and the diary of the anthropologist itself. This kind of anthropological method leads the researcher to move beyond what is real or fake, to talk about what’s happening to the communities. In the work on “Shans at Home” (2001), Milne explained in the introduction part of the book that he wanted to show the life of Shans in their everyday activity in 1906 rather than producing scientific data.

This chapter tries to present the holistic data as the ethnographic writing on Tai Yai of Ban Pangmoo, Maehongson, Thailand. The holistic data of Tai Yai represents the background of the village. Moreover, the ethnographic data aims to represent the daily life of Tai Yais from their own point of view. Through participant observation, interviewing and focusing on group methods reflect that one can gaze but cannot understand the action, activity, ritual, sign etc. unless one speaks and participates with others.

7.1 The background of Maehongsonand and Ban Pangmoo village

“Mists throughout whole three seasons, the Kong Mu (Monastery) that scrapes the sky, verdant forests, gentle people, beautiful customs; renowned land of sunflowers”

Maehongson’s slogan (1987)⁸

Maehongson is located in the northern part of Thailand. Thai people have a belief about Maehongson that it is a city of mystery because of its location, which is far from the capital city (Bangkok) and the other provinces. Deep inside the dense forest, the people of Maehongson can maintain their own culture. And the tourist’s gaze points out that Maehongson is one of the exotic provinces in Thailand.

⁸The official provincial slogan promoted by the Thai government in 1987. At that time, Prem Tinsulanonda was the Thai prime minister.

Maehongson has many zig-zag roads. These winding roads signify that the Maehongson province as a city is surrounded by mountains. Maehongson is the most mountainous province in Thailand, and the climate of this province is always cool and covered with mists all the time of the year. Its location brings about a peaceful environment to the entire town as people cannot come and visit this place easily. It is the reason why so many ethnic groups in Maehongson can still maintain their cultural practices and languages from Thai assimilation.

Maehongson is situated at around 349 kilometers away from Chiang Mai. It is located in the north-western part of Thailand, next to this province Shan State, Kachin State and Kayah State in Burma. The eastern neighboring province of the city is Chiang Mai. The southern part of it connects with Tak Province. Thai people give the name to this province as ‘Mueng Sam Mohk’ (the city of mists in every season). Since ancient times, Maehongson is the border city between Thailand and Myanmar. This geographical location becomes very important in the sense of an identity-building process that can have a history uninterrupted by external factors.



Map 9: Maehongson and its districts.

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The city of the mist has seven districts; 1. Maung Maehongson 2. Khun Yuam 3. Pai 4. Mae Sarieng 5. Mae La Noi 6. Sop Mei 7. Pangmapa: 45 sub-districts and 402 villages. The population of Maehongson is diverse consisting of Thai-Lanna or ‘Kon-Mueng’, Tai Yai or Tai Yai, Hakka People or ‘Chin Hor’, Burmese. Around 63% of the population is hill tribe people consisting of Hmong, Yao, Lahu, Lisu, Akha, Lua, Pa-O and Karen (the largest population in Maehongson). Mostly, they are farmers who cultivate rice, tea, crops etc. (Boonchaley, 2008:10)

Hilly area is suitable for all kind of cultivation especially rice cultivation. It gives a lot of benefits to Tai Yai or Tai Yai people who live here for thousand years. So, it can be said that these people were well settled there with everything they needed at hand, and, it helped them to preserve their past history, customs and traditions.

7.1.1 Tai Yais of Maehongson

7.1.1.1 Who are the Tai Yais?

In Shan State of Burma, the word Tai Laung is used to call the Tai people of the state. In Thailand, most people know Tai Laung as Tai Yai. The history of Tai Yai migration from *MongMao* kingdom has been told among Tai Yais as follows.

There was a wife of a Tai prince, Kesini who was pregnant. One day she was lying on the balcony. Suddenly one big bird caught her and flew her to a nearby tree because the bird thought of her as food. She was shocked and cried out loud which eventually chased the bird away. After that, she delivered the baby right there on the tree. Later on upon hearing the cry of the baby, an ascetic came and asked them to stay with him. Once the boy grew up, he got Veena from Indra (God) as a gift. He got special power, while playing that vina he could tame all the elephants and they would follow him wherever he goes. After the boy knew his past, that his father was a prince, he went to that kingdom to find his father. But his father already passed away, so he claimed and inherited the throne as king of that kingdom. And the kingdom named MongMao because of his mother who always felt nauseous since the big bird caught her. (In Tai language, feeling nauseous is called "Mao") Thus, the kingdom was called Mong Mao since then. (Wichasil, 1996: 255-256)

According to Renoo Wichasil (1996) the story of Tai Yai dynasty started as many people believe when *Khun Lu* and *Khun Lai* climbed down from the sky to rule Mong Hee, Mong Hum and Mong La, all these cities were located beside Khong river. *Khun Lu* ruled *Mong Hee* and *Mong Hum* and *Khun Lai* ruled *Mong La*. They had 100 children, 1,000 grandchildren and 30,000 great-grandchildren. At that time, nearby Salween River, there was no leader to rule the place. *Khun Lu* and *Khun Lai*'s children divided all cities to rule among them. Till 1107 A.D. *Su Khan Fa* expanded Tai kingdom from Yunnan til Assam. In 1412 A.D. the war between Tai Yais and Burmese broke out which eventually ended in 1655 A.D. *MongMao*, *MongNai* and *Hsipaw* were soon under the Burmese kingdom. At that time, many Tai Yai people migrated from Shan State to various places such as China, Maehongson, Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Assam and Laos.

Nowadays, Tai Luangs or Tai Yais live in many countries such as Shan state in Burma, Southern China, Northeast India, Laos and Thailand. These Tai people, once they settled down and built the village, they would call the village “*Maan*” or “*Ban*” followed by the name of the village such as BanPangmoo. Tai people tend to have their houses nearby the river and the mountains because their lives are attached to agricultural life and seasonal plants. So, Maehongson is the perfect place for Tai people, having immediate access to both rivers and mountains.

The history of Maehongson can be traced back to the eleventh century when the archaeologist found the debris of the historical places and the tombs inside Pangmapha cave, Mueng district and KhunYuam district. From the oral tradition, which was collected by Pradit Prasert, a local historian of Tai Yai Studies Center of Maehongson, it is known that the memories of Tai ancestors can be traced back to more than 150 years ago. Ja-reh or well-informed person in the village has told him about the history of their migration from Shan state, most probably from *Mawkmai*, *Mong Nai* and *Lankher* located not too far from Salween River.



Map 10: Map of Shan state.

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According to the archaeologists and local historians such as Rasmi Choocongdej and Prasert Pradit, the settlements of people of Maehongson can be narrowed down into four points;

7.1.1.2 The migration of Tais

Tai Yais live in the abundance of the forest and fertility of the soil. Maehongson suits all kinds of the plantation. The name of some villages uses the same name as the village in Shan state from where they have migrated such as *Meuang Pon* village. At first, Lua or Lawa people were the indigenous people of the state. Later on, Tai Yai people occupied the plain area and the Lawas had shifted to the hilly areas. Tai villages were starting to form in the Maehongson area since then.

7.1.1.3 The extension of Tai village

Tai people gradually settled down in the plain area and nearby the river. Moreover, tribal people like 'Lua' or 'Lawa' had to migrate to the hilly area. From the fourteenth century to the sixteenth century, the story of Burmese generals who conquered Maehongson has been written as the history of BanDon village. Ban Don village was the battlefield of the battle fought between Burmese general named '*Pa Ga Sor*' and *Prahchaotilokaraj* of Lanna kingdom.

7.1.1.4 The coming of Kon-Meung during 1400-1850

Pongsaowadarn Yonok or Yonok annals that has been written during 1850 A.D. mentions that Maehongson was the border city of Lanna kingdom and Burma. For this reason, Maehongson needed to be protected, the king of Lanna persuaded people from other provinces of the northern part of Siam such as Chiang Mai, Prea, Payao and Chiang Rai to settle down in Maehongson. So, this time Tai's culture had met Lanna culture for the first time.

At that time, Lanna king ruled Maehongson with the idea of Princely State. There was a strange tradition in Lanna kingdom among its people, which states that the Yuam city (in Maehongson) was a buffer city, to punish or teach the prince of Lanna if he misbehaves. The king would then send him to rule Maehongson. In that sense, Maehongson had a bad image as a deserted city or abandoned city. But in 1442, Phrachoatrilokraj, the king of Lanna had declared that MeuangYuam as one important city in the Lanna kingdom.

Later on, Kon Meung or Lanna people had started to migrate from their own place to Maehongson. In 1559, *Bayinnaung* King of *Toungoo* Dynasty conquered the Lanna kingdom. The Burmese king then ruled Lanna for more than 200 years. In 1771, Phraya Jaban rose to power and with the help of the King of Thonburi expelled the Burmese power from Lanna territory. But Phraya Jaban refused to be a vassal of the king which infuriates him. Later on, the King of Thonburi caught Phraya Jaban and he died in jail.

In 1782, when the Burmese army pushed again into the frontier area, the fragmentary states of the Lanna kingdom could not repel the attackers. Chiang Mai became a deserted town. At this time King Rama I rose in power and soon he expelled the Burmese invaders from the city of Chiang Mai. He, then, reinstated King Kawila in Chiang Mai and asked him to revive the city strengthening the borders. King Kawila used the policy of ‘Pluck vegetable in the basket and collect people into the city’ from King Rama I. At first, he asked people to stay in Vieng Pa Sang until he got assured that the number of people was enough for rebuilding Chiang Mai. Then he shifted those people from Vieng Pa Sang to Chiang Mai in 1794.

In the reign of King Rama I, under his protection, King *Kawila* was rebuilding the kingdom. The war with Burma often happened to expand the territory. The Tai people in Maehongson were under the protection of Siam and Lanna. Thus, Tai Yais also settled down in Maehongson, Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai and they were helping King Kawila to rebuild the kingdom.

7.1.1.5 Tai Yais in Thai modern history

The history records that “in the time of King Rama III of Chakri Dynasty (1831), he wanted to know more about Chiang Mai province and its territories, and he also needed wild elephants from these territories. Later on, the king of Chiang Mai named Phra *Chaow Mahotrapradesh Rajabodi* asked *Chow Keaw Meungma* to find the wild elephants and observe all the area.

Chow Keaw Meungma scouted all the areas near Pai river because he believed that the villages will be located just near the river. After many days of traveling, he found a good plain area to stay, for catching wild elephants and also the land was very fertile. He noticed that many wild pigs would come here often. He asked all the Tais who already settled down scattered around the Pai river to settle down here and form a village. *Chow Keaw Meungma* asked *Pa Ga Mong*, a Tai Yai to become a leader of these people.

After the village got formed, *Chow Keaw Muengma* went into the jungle to find wild elephants. He also sent ‘*Sean Gom*’, *Pa Ga Mong*’s son in law to invite Tai and other groups to form another village in the place called “*Mae Rong Son*” which meant the river of training elephant.

Pa Ga Mong and *Sean Gom* sold the teakwood and sent those woods through the Salween River to Burma. After gaining a lot of profits, they also sent a tribute to the King of Chiang Mai (Lanna Kingdom).

Over time, the economy of Meahongson was developed because of teakwood business. The advancement of the wood business not only invited Tai Yais but also Karen people to settle down in Khun Yaum, another district in Maehonson. At that time, plain tribes and hill tribes could stay in peace under Chan Ga Le's rule.

In 1874 A.D. *Chan Ga Le* gained a new status. He became *Phraaya SinghaNattaraja* after he was succeeded by *Chow Nang Maywadi*.

In 1900 during King Rama V, the process of centralization was introduced in Thailand. Maehongson was ruled under the central government of Siam. Later on, in 1910, Maehongson became a province of Siam.

From the history, we could see that Maehongson was one of the important buffer towns since ancient times. Not only being an arena of various battles, but also the area of Maehongson was a temporary camp for Burmese soldiers. Moreover, the fertility of the soil and the abundance of forests were the main reasons for Tais to settle down in Maehongson. The history of Maehongson was produced by the available records of the databases and diaries maintained by the archaeologists, historians and local historians and all records are kept in the Tai Yai Studies Center. The narrative in the history seems to be smoothly synchronized with Thai nation history and also that of the other tribals like Lua, Karen people.

7.1.2 Ban Pangmoo village and historical outline

7.1.2.1 Pangmoo Village: the first community of Maehongson

The history of Maehongson is related to the foundation of Pangmoo village. More than 150 years ago Tai Yai people lived in this region for several generations. The evidence from 'Ja-reh' (means the knowledgeable person) talked about the significance of handing over the oral history as well as the teaching of the local script from one generation to the next. This is a tradition for them. The oral history tells us that Tai Yai people migrated from Shan State, the eastern part of Myanmar. There is a record of three cities like, Mawkmai, MongNai and Lankher which were the places where these people belonged to. The story of this migration can be seen in the oral narratives or folk-tales.

During the 1830s Tai Yai people used to travel across the border without the concept of the boundary of nation-state. They chose to practice cultivation for their livelihood in Maehongson. After the harvesting, they would go back to Shan state with the crops.

Pangmoo village was founded in 1831 which can be known from the record written by the Thai central government. When *Chow Keaw Meung Ma* came to this place with the

order of the Siamese King to catch wild elephants, he had to observe this location. Later on, the prince named '*Chow Keawmungma*' (found in the historical records) asked Tai Yai people who are scattered throughout the area to settle down in Pangmoo village during 1856. Eventually, they started to occupy the nearby areas and the village got extended to Maehongson town.

The name of Ban Pangmoo comes from the story of pigs. In the time of 1831 when *ChoawKeawMungma* visited here and found that so many pigs used to come to this place and eat Saltlick. 'Ban' means village and 'Pang' is a slight variation from the word 'Pong' which means Saltlick. And 'Moo' is 'pig'. This story goes as follows that *ChoawKeawMungma* saw the pigs when he was hunting for elephants and suddenly realized that this area was suitable for building a community. The story is passed from generation to generation, that Pang Moo village is the first village of Meahongson where the Tai people started their first habitat in this land. Therefore, the sense of belongingness comes later to the heart of Tai Yai.

7.1.2.2 Ban Pangmoo village in the present day

Ban Pangmoo village is one of the villages under the Pangmoo sub-district⁹. Ban Pangmoo is village number 1 in Meung district, Maehongson province, Thailand. It is located 7 kilometers away from the Maehongson main city.

The northern part of Ban Pangmoo is connected with *Ban Goong Mai Sak*

The southern part of the village is connected with Meaung District, Mahongson

The eastern part is connected with *Huay Poo Ling* sub-district

The western part is connected with *Ban Tung Kong Boo* and *Ban Sob Soy*

7.1.2.3 Geographic data

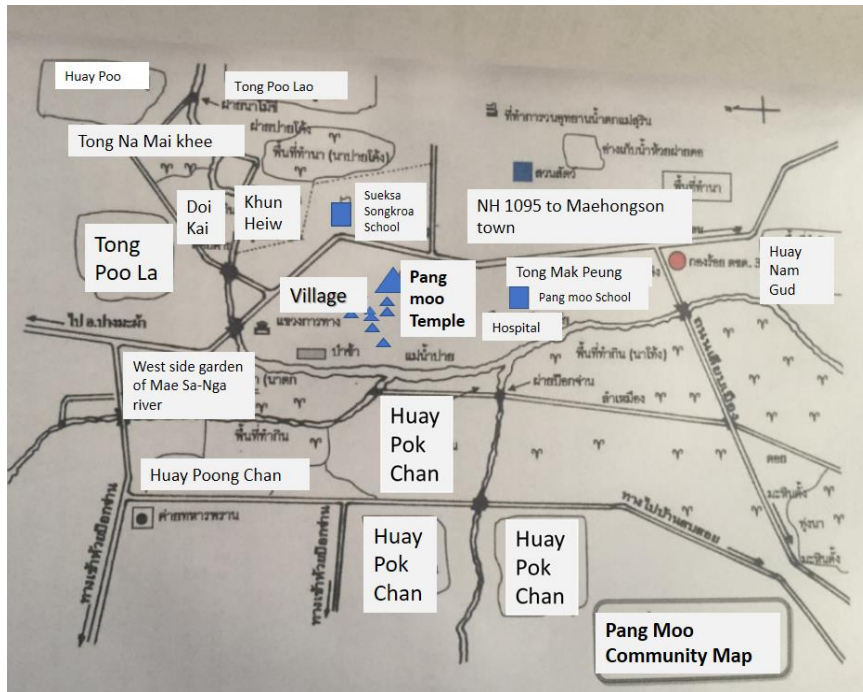
Ban Pangmoo is in the plain area but surrounded by mountains and rivers. The village is a square-shaped area.

The local people divided the land into 3 sections based on the usage purpose: rice cultivation area, orchard or farming area and residential purpose

There are two rivers in this region: Pai and Sa-gna. Ban Pangmoo is located nearby the river and amidst small mountain ranges surrounding it from multiple sides. One of the villagers (age 35) said that this was a good and suitable location for their ancestors. And, thus, Tai Yais are attached to rice cultivation. The main crops produced in this village are

⁹Pang Moo Sub-district consists of 13 villages, 1. Ban Pangmoo 2. Ban Kung Mai Sak 3. Ban Thung Kongmoo 4. Ban Nai soi 5. Ban Mai 6. Ban SobBong 7. Ban SobSoi 8. Ban Mai Ngae 9. Ban Mai SaPae 10. Ban PaKho Loh 11. Ban Khun Klang 12. Ban Chan Mung 13. Ban Doi Sang

rice, sesame and peas. Tais of Ban Pangmoo divides the land into 12 areas such that the plantation area is located separately from the residential area. These cultivation areas of the village are; 1. Huay Poo 2. Tong Poo Lao 3. Tong Na Mai khee 4. Doi Kai 5. Tong Poo La 6. Khun Heiw 7. Tong Mak Peung 8. West side garden of Mae Sa-Nga River 9. HuayPoong Chan 10. HuayPok Chan 11. Huay Nam Gud and 12. The plain area in HuayPok Chan



Map 11: Land Using in Pang Moo village.

(Collected map from the field in the year of 2017)

The map shows that Tai Yais usually build their houses away from the plantation area which is located nearby the river. By doing so, the irrigation system can be managed easily. The village was formed before Maehongson was a hard-to-access place. But over time the transportation got developed and well connected and today it is easy to come to the village by the National Highway no. 1095.

The climate in Pang moo village is Tropical Savanna Climate Koppen. In the rainy season, there would be heavy rainfall and in the summer the temperature will be around 42 Celsius. During this time, all the areas become dry. The village usually sees three seasons through the year. Summer starts from February until May. Rainy Season starts from June until October and winter starts from November until February. The lowest temperature during the winter season is around 9.5 Celsius.

7.1.2.4 The fertility of Pangmoo land

Pangmoo is surrounded by the mountain and situated on the bank of two rivers. The fertility of soil suits for plantation and rice cultivation. Tai Yai people do rice cultivation twice a year and they never leave the land without any plantations. With the help of the government on artificial rain and a good irrigation plan, Tai Yai people cultivates good number of crops throughout the year. The main crops are rice, soybean, sesame, peanut, local bean, garlic, chili, pumpkin, corn, cucumber etc.

7.2 Social Structure of Tai Yai, Economic and Agricultural Lif

The population of the village is around 2,700 people. Mostly they are Tai Yais who has already got Thai citizenship, and their number counts approximately 2,300. The other 300 people do not belong to 'Thai' (as they don't have Thai citizenship). They belong to Tai Yais from the Shan State who just have settled down recently. Furthermore, in addition to this, 100 Karen people also live in the village.

7.2.1 The social structure of Tai Yai

Tai Yai people of Pang Moo village have been living in that area for more than 200 years. The main population of the village are Tai Yai. So, they are the dominant groups in the society but the rest of the population in the village is Karen, and the new Tai group from Shan state and Kon Meuang or Lanna. As Tai Yai is the dominant group, they have a right to set the policy in the village freely.

The village is divided into 12 poks¹⁰ which are given the name following the flowers or Pok in Tai Yai word by the villagers. For instance, *Pok Mang Si* (Rose group), *Pok Khao Tak* (Jasmin group) etc. Each of these groups of Pok has to take care of their own area. Moreover, Pang Moo village gives an important role to the elderly people based on their own specialist skills. All the elderly (*Kru*) are highly knowledgeable in both history and art and craft skills.

- a. *Chay Keangrangdee*, Local Irrigation builder
- b. *Mongkol Chuwong*, Pan Soi artist (Paper artist)
- c. *Mala Chom Chey*, Mon Seug Drummer
- d. *Duangrat Teerawatboonchai*, Banana leave artist
- e. *Nitat Kamboon*, Tai irrigation system manager
- f. *Sawai Rakrien*, Pansoi and Jong Para artist

¹⁰ Pok means a group of houses in Ban Pangmoo village

g. *Sumit Roongamolwichay*, Tai Yai sweets maker.

Sawai Choowong, age 86 years old, who resides in Pangmoo village and a ‘Pan Soi’ artist by profession loves to tell all the memory in the village.

“I learned how to make Pan Soi when I was young but I was not that good to call myself as Pan Soi artist. A few years back, after I got retired from my hard work in the rice field. I devoted my life more about Tai Yai’s culture. ‘Pan Soi’ is one of my skills which I have learned and revised from the elders last five years ago. Now, there are two Pan Soi artists left in the village.

“Pan Soi is the Tai Yai paper artwork. We learn how to cut and decorate ‘Jong Para’, Funeral’s Pan Soi and temple’s decoration. Just five years ago after I became a Pan Soi maker, many students from the school and Tai Yais who are interested in Pan Soi. They would come to my house and learn from me.”



Figure 7: Sawai Choowong, Pan Soi Artist took picture with his Pan Soi works

7.2.2 Economic Cooperation.

Pang Moo has so many economic cooperation groups that can be summarized as table following with the year of establishment namely;

The name of group	Year of establishment	Activity	Membership
1.Fai Pang Moo	1977	Water management	70
2.Health Club	1979	Small hospital	30
3.Rice cultivation of Pangmoo	1982	Discuss and find the solution of all the issue of rice cultivation	82
4.The user group (Pai river)	1985	Environment concern	76
5.Pan Soi	1998	Preserve Pan Soi	5
6.Elderly people sport club	2005	Health club	32
7.Organic vegetable products	2000	Concern more about the farmer and the consumer	6
8.Village funding	2011	Economic capital	350
9. Elderly people club	2011	Health condition	231
10.Tua Nao	2011	Shop	8
11.Tua Paelor and TuaPaeyi	2011	Shop	9
12. Woman's club	2011	Social work	167
13. Sesame oil	2011	Shop	16
14. Organic rice	2013	Shop	30
15. Art and craft from crops	2013	Shop	10
16. Tau Nao	2015	Shop	10
17.Tai Shirt	2015	Shop	NA
18.Tourism in Pangmoo	2015	Tourism	NA
19. Tai Yai Sweets	2015	Shop	NA
20. Tai Yai Craft	2015	Shop	NA

Table 4: The economic cooperation groups collected from the field in 2017.

All the groups are formed by the villagers' concern for their own lifestyle and agricultural products. Tai Yai people have been facing many problems since 1979 about the rice cultivation and irrigation system. Tai Yai people plant rice in their field twice a year. Whenever they have a free time, they prefer to gain more money from what they already have in hand, for instance, trading crops, plant vegetables and produce cultural products such as Tai cloths and the handicraft.

But the cultural issue has been started in 2005 when the *Pan Soi* group was established by 5 elderly people with the aim to preserve their own art and craft which is disappearing, Pan Soi is the paper and tin artwork which is related to Tai Yai's belief. Buddhist myth tells about Jong Para which was made to welcome the Lord Buddha who just came back from the preaching to his mother in *Dowadeung* heaven during the time of Poi Ok Wa. Later on, Pan Soi is always made for decoration in Jong Para. Especially, in Tai Yais funeral, Pan Soi is made for the dead person.

From 2011 to the present date (2019), the economic groups have been supported by the Government for encouraging the farmers along with the cultural product commodity. In the year of 2015, the Tourism group has been formed with good cooperation from young people and villagers. 'Home Stay of Pangmoo' is one of the promoted slogans of the Pangmoo community. Around 5-10 families prepare their houses for home-stay tourism as these houses are raised house with traditional Tai style. Those 12 Poks¹¹ play an important role as each of them has to represent their own everyday-life styles.

7.3 Family and Clan System

Tai Yai family system in the Pangmoo community has the concept of nuclear family. Some family has 8-10 generations. Though Tai Yai people practices monogamy, but extra-marriage can be found nowadays. For Tai Yai, marriage is attached to both family (groom's family and bride's family).

After marriage, Tai woman would shift from her house and stay with her husband's family. Later on, they may decide to stay separately and build a new house of their own. After getting married and staying separately, they would come back and perform the ritual with the family.

¹¹Pok or Mok means Flower in Tai Yai, in this context Pok is used to call 12 zones in the village such as Pok Dok Rak, Pok DoK Bua Tong etc.

7.3.1 Kinship and clan system

In Tai Yai society, Tai Yai boys or girls have to learn the kinship terms. Learning how to call their relative is an indirect way to learn the hierarchy in the family.

Hierarchy in the Tai Yai kinship system can be divided into the father side and mother side. In the chart, Ego is the one who has to call the relatives above to his/her status and below to him/her status. The kinship term in this chart shows the sequence of the hierarchy in 10 generations.

Tai Yai Kinship Terms

Father (Por)		Mother (Mae)	
Pu	Father's father	Ta	Mother's father
Ya	Father's mother	Yay	Mother's mother
Lung	Father's brother	Lung	Mother's brother
Pa	Father's brother's wife	pa	Mother's brother's wife
Aao/Aa	Father's brother, Father's sister	Na	Mother's brother, Mother's sister
Pi-chay	Brother	Nong-chay	Brother
Pi-sao	Sister	Nong-sao	Sister
Len	Grand son, Grand daughter	Len	Grand son, Grand daughter
Lohn	Grand child	Lohn	Grand child

Table 5: Tai Yai Kinship Terms

Moreover, pseudo kinship is also applied to respected persons outside the family tree and used in the same manner as the relatives. Tai Yai gives the importance to father's side more than that of the mother. Patrilineage is related to inheritance. Thus, the Tai Yai boy's status is higher than that of the girl. The kinship relationship is important in the Tai Yai community because Tai Yais need more labour for working in the rice cultivation and for the vegetable plantation. All the kinship terms not only represent the relationship between generation to generation, but these terms are fixed for the duty, activity, rights, rules etc.

7.3.2 Status and role of men and women

In the past, people used to get married in the community itself but nowadays, many young people prefer to get married to Thai boys/girls or marry people from other

communities. One of the key informants who is 27 years old, male, said that he prefers not to marry any Tai Laung women because he has noticed that they are very dominating.

Tai Yai community is a patriarchal society. But women also play an important role such as the leaders of many groups. For instance, Wallapa Keanrat, age 42 talked of her everyday life that

“Most of the time my mind is always thinking about business and how can I myself preserve all Tai Yais culture”

Wallapa is the leader of two prominent groups which are the Women club and the sesame oil producer group. Sometimes, the head of the sub-district asks her to go for the meeting and arrange the meeting in the village on his behalf. Not only Wallapa, but also Nang-OonPakkasam age 47, the head of Tai Yai’s shirt group told that

“After my husband died, I do everything so that I can earn some money. And making of Tai Laung dress for promoting of Tai culture and also source of income as well. Some of sinh or wrap skirt is imported from Shan State, Burma. I have to make a list and order those stuff. Sometimes, I go to Shan State and select all the dress by myself.”

7.4 Beliefs, Religion and practices

Tai Yais have the faith in goodness. Regarding Buddhist philosophy, if one is doing a good thing, one can get a good thing in return. But in everyday life, Tai Yais have so many beliefs in ‘*Phi*’ (spirit) or supernaturals. Many key Tai people explain about the belief in *Phi* and there are two kinds of *Phi*.

- a. *Phi Arak* or good spirits have the power to protect Tais and the village from a bad spirit itself such as *Phi ChaoMaung* or the ancestor spirit.
- b. Other spirits are living everywhere such as *Phi Nam* (Water spirit), *Phi Din* (Earth spirit), *Phi Pa* (Jungle spirit), *Phi Doi* (Mountain spirit), *Phi Toong* (Rice field spirit), *Phi Yuggaso* (Tree Spirit) etc. These *Phis* are benevolent as well as malevolent looking at the deed of the people.

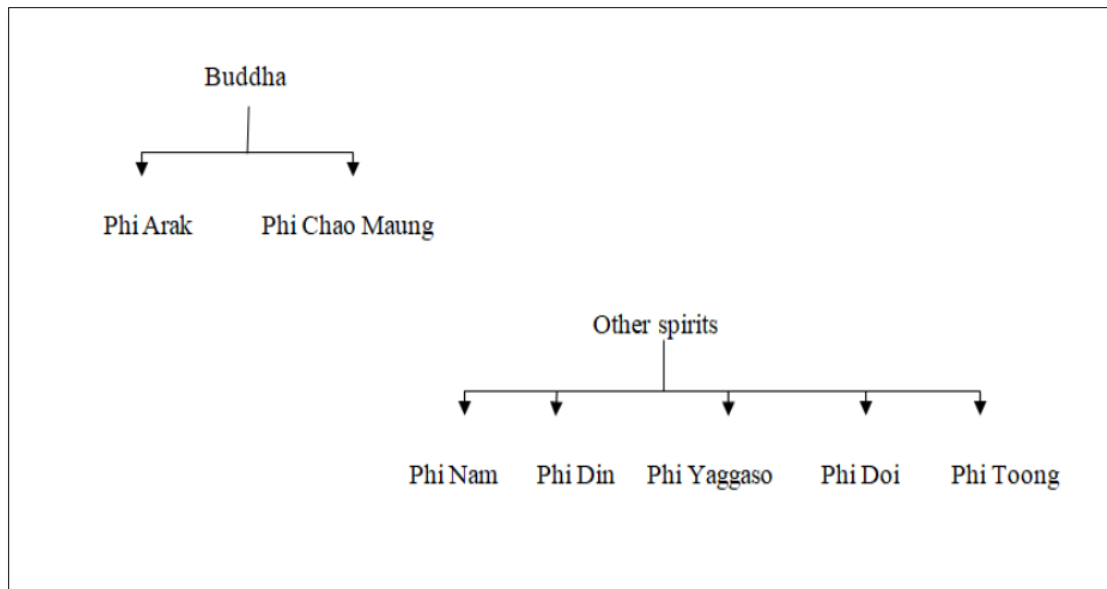


Figure 8: Tai of BanPangmoo belief.

Moreover, Tai Yai believes in auspicious day, auspicious time and auspicious occasion. For example, about travel belief, if anyone want to travel on Sunday, she/he must clean the face before traveling and if you want to travel on Monday, one must sleep before going, or Tais should not have a wedding ceremony in January etc. It is a taboo.

7.4.1 Life cycle ceremony of Tai Yai

In Tai Yai's life, one grows up along with the helping of relatives and the community. Socialization process starts in the family. Tai boys and girls learn their own duties in the house and community. Moreover, when the member of family or community lose his/her life or some of the member is born or sick, that time Tais will also learn and absorb Tai belief and tradition. Tai life cycle ceremonies are birth ceremony, wedding ceremony and death ceremony.

7.4.1.1 Birth ceremony or “Thon-Lern or Aab-Lern”

Once a Tai baby is born the birth ceremony is arranged according to the baby's gender; in case of a boy, the birth ceremony would be held 3-4 times. On the other hand, in case of girl, the birth ceremony would be arranged for 2 times. The first ritual for Tai boys happens when the baby is one month old, this ritual is called “*Man Ga Lah Ton Lern*”. For the baby girl, this ritual should be arranged before she becomes one month old because they believe that if they perform this ritual after one month, the baby girl will grow up with stubbornness. In this first month ritual, parents bring a candle to invite guests or the elder

people. The ritual starts with bathing the baby with the water that put gold and silver in the bucket and dress the baby with all the jewelry and the white thread that must be tied with the blessing word from relatives and elderly people. (Tai would bless like *Aoong Mang Gaam Lah* or you grow up with prosperity)

The second and third ritual is “*Mang Gah Lah Kham Sang*”. It should be arranged in between 7-21 years of age. In a Buddhist society, a boy or man should become a monk for the biggest, good deed that one can do in his life for himself and for his family.

7.4.1.2 Wedding ceremony

Tai Yai boys and girls get married when they grow up and fall in love with each other. With permission from each other’s family, the boy has to pay respect to the girl’s family by asking her parents and the elders and talk about the engagement and the date of the wedding ceremony. After the discussion, the girl’s family will fix the auspicious day and time for the engagement and the wedding day. There was no card invitation in the past at least 40-50 years ago, Tais always invite guests with a candle but if someone in the guest’s family is not at home, they will not leave the candle at the house because Tai Yais believe that it will bring bad luck to the absent one. So, they may come the next day again.

On the wedding day, the boy has to put some money in a small envelope to pay for the entry in the bride’s house where the bride’s relatives will make an invisible door with their own gold necklace. At the Tai Yai wedding, the groom usually has to find a good diamond or precious stones for the bride and the bride has to prepare for the coat of the ring. Moreover, the groom has to prepare “*Aoup Song Mang Ka Lah*” which has, 2 bunches of bananas, 2 bunches of fermented tea leaves, 2 bunches of sugar cane and banana leaves in fishtail shape wrapping altogether. After that, both the family will tie the groom and bride’s wrist with white thread. The elderly people bless them saying in Tai “I wish you would become a good parent as *PorSang MaeSang*¹²” and then the couple would give a package of fermented tea leaves and two pieces of banana to the guests.

7.4.1.3 Death ceremony

When Tai Yai people die, the death ritual starts not at home but in the temple. No one is allowed to bring the dead body back to the village because Tai Laungs believe that if the dead body passes by the house, it will bring bad luck to the rest of the people. If a

¹²*Por Sang, Mae Sang* are Tai words, using for giving a status to the father of Sanglong and the mother of Sanglong.

Tai monk is dead, Tai people can keep the dead body for a year but if a pregnant woman is dead, she should be buried or burned immediately. And there won't be any cremation on 9th waxing crescent day and on 9th waxing gibbous day. In case of young people, they should be cremated from the head to toe.

7.4.2 Rituals of Tai Yai in a year

For the Tais, Buddhism is not only a religion, but it's a way of life. Besides, Tai Yais believe in a kind of 'superstition' in terms of ancestor spirit and auspicious time. The life of Tai Yai from the first day of birth until death is related to these rituals.

Tai Yai rituals

Serial No	Name of The ritual	Name of the month	Detail of the ritual
1	'Garb SomOou' in Tai Yai or 'Boon Koa Mai' in Thai	'Lern Jeng' (the first month of Tai Yai calendars). December in the Julian and Gregorian calendars	The ritual is related to the story of Buddha. Tai Yais believe that the more one donates rice after cultivation, the further one can reach on the path of the enlightenment. Tai Yai's will, thus, offer food to monks and the elderly ones in the village.
2	'Poi KarbSom Boon Joa Kao Kum'	'Lern Kum' in January	Tai Yai's would offer food to monks for 3 or 5 or 7 days. Interestingly, they believe that they should not bring out their rice from the barn during this month, or they may not get a good amount of rice in the following harvest.
3	'Poi Lu Kao Yakoo'	'Lern Sam' is in February.	It is the time of sharing the food. Tai Yai's would share their red sticky rice, sugar, coconuts and peanuts in making a special sweet and sharing it with all the villagers. Another ritual is 'Poi Low'. It happens following the Tai lunar calendar. Tai Yai's will fetch wood and burn the staff together at the temple premises.

4	'Poi Sang Long'	'Lern Si' in March and the first week of April	The big Tai Yai festival is 'Poi Sang Long' is celebrated during this time. The festival is the celebration of young boys who want to become a monk. The boys have to shave their heads and wear the garments along with a crown-like a prince. Then the procession would be held to announce that all the boys would turn themselves to be monk soon. After the ritual, being monks, the boys have to learn Buddhist religious philosophy and Tai Yai cultural norms.
5	'Keun Jong Pi Mai'	'Lern Ha' in the mid of April	This ritual is all about the new year festival. There will be the splashing of water games, donations, and 'Gun Tor' which means that all the Tai Yais have to apologize to the monks and the elders.
6	'Poi Ja Ti'	'LernHok' is in May	Visakha ritual happens during this time. Tai Yai people fetch sand and give it to the temple to build something.
7	'Wan Pa Lik'	'Lern Jed' is in June	Tai Yais offer food to ancestor spirits. This ritual is called 'Wan Pa Lik'. Besides, they will carry some tanks full of water and sand along with some special sacrificial stuff that may have a hexagonal shape.
8	'Tang Som To Loung'	'Lern Pad' in July	In July, August, and September accordingly. These three months have the same ritual. It is called ' <i>Tang Som To Loung</i> '. These three months are the month for practicing the dhamma. The other villagers cook a special ricedish called 'Kao Madhupayas' for them
9		Lern Gao in August	

10		Lern Sib in September	
11	'Han Som Go Ja'	'Lern Sib Ed' in October	Tai Yai would pray for their ancestors at the temple and offer food to monks. Moreover, the market called 'Gard PidLern Sib Ed' will open all day, all night. The procession of 'Jong Para' or the small temple would be built modeling a temple.
12	'Poi Wang Ka Pa', 'Poi Pai Loy' 'Poi Long Pong Choa Tai Yai', 'Lu Sang Gan' and 'Sang Kathin'	'Lern Sib Song' is in November	During this month, there are so many rituals like; 'Poi Wang Ka Pa', 'Poi Pai Loy' 'Poi Long Pong Choa Tai Yai', 'Lu Sang Gan' and 'Sang Kathin'

Table 6: Tai Yai Rituals in a year

It can be said that the whole life of Tai Yai is attached to Buddhism and ritualistic ways of living. This can certainly promote a sense of togetherness. More importantly, Maehongson is now developing and promoting tourism sector. For this reason, all the cultural programs have been promoted to show case the richness of culture and history in Maehongson province. This can accelerate the process of finding old past along with a distinct identity formation of the Tais. But one cannot ignore a side effect of it, that it may construct a possibility of linearity damaging other dimensions of histories yet to be explored.

7.5 Tai Yai House, Dress and Food

Tai houses are constructed as pile houses with wooden columns. Woods are the main materials for the floors and the walls. The roofs are thatched with leaves. The square form of the house has a big verandah and a lot of space. Ground floor mostly is used for relaxing, doing craftwork etc. Nowadays, their houses are constructed with semi-cement and semi-woods following Thai style. In the village, only ten houses are raised house at present.



Figure 9: Tai Yai House

The traditional dresses of Tai Yai womenfolk are '*sinh*' (Wrap skirt), '*Sue Tais*' (Tai Yais blouse) and hairpins which are made of silver and gold. Some of them put the flower instead of hairpin. Tai Yai women love to wrap their hairs and clip with beautiful hairpin. They love to use colourfull *sinh* and it should be matched with the colour of the blouse. Man generally wears '*Konh Tai*' (lower garment) of various colours, '*Sue Tak Poog*' (Tai Yai men's shirts) and '*Toog*' (bag). It is interesting to note that knife is also the main element of Tai Yai traditional dress for men. Knife signifies that Tai Yai men are warriors. Both men and women wear '*pha-pok-hua*' (head turban).



Figure 10: Tai Yai Women dress.



Figure 11: Tai Yai men and women dress.

Food of Tai Yai almost is made up of soybean and rice which are the main crop of Tai people in Maehonson. ‘Tua Nao’ is the main product of Pangmoo Village. ‘*Nam Prik*’ or chili dip is there always in every meal which adds ‘*Tua Nao*’ or fermented beans and other ingredients. Boiled food is also in their main course. Moreover, they cook many salads which depend on seasonal vegetable for example, bamboo shoot, star fruit, vegetable fern etc. The sweets of Tai Yai are *Kao Pook Nga Dam*, *Aalawa*, *Suaytamin*, *Kaotomtua*, *Kaopong*, *KaoTokPun*, *KaoYakoo* etc. which are made of *Pang* (Rice Flour), *Nga* (black sesame), *Kao* (rice) etc.



Figure 12: Tua Nao or Fermented Beans.



Figure 13: Tai Yai Meals.

7.6 Language and Folklores

“*Kham Tai*” in Tai language has 19 consonants, 12 vowels, 13 combined vowels, 6 tonal marks and 3 diphthong consonants. The scripts used in Tai language is called “*Lik Tai*”.

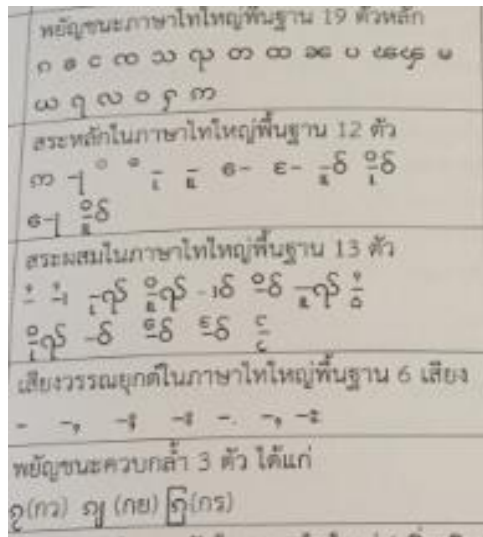


Figure 14: Tai Yai Script

Tai Yais have their own script and most of Tai people still use Tai language for communication. Tai writing tradition comes together with that of the Buddhist society. Most of the Tai boys have to learn Tai script while being trained as a monk. Moreover, in Ban Pangmoo village, Tai folktales have been told from generations after generations in Tai language. Traditional language is also included in the Tai calendar which shows Tai script and Tai auspicious day that hang on every Tai house.

Fifty years ago, Tai language was taught at temples where only boys could study till 2007, when Tai Yai Studies Center was founded by local historians and Tai academicians. Tai language school was also set up including the collection of research papers on Tai culture and language at Tai Yai Studies Center. Since then Tai language has been taught in this center with a proper curriculum. This center is not only restricted to Tai people but Thai people also can join and nowadays not only boys but girls also study Tai script.

7.7 Identity movement and Political issues

In 1900 A.D. King Rama V introduced centralization to Thailand politics. Maehongson was ruled under the central government. Later on, in 1910, Maehongson became a province of Siam. There was no political movement against the Thai central government from the Tai Yai people and the other ethnic groups in Maehongson. In 1939, Siam was renamed Thailand and also put forward the idea of Thai-ness based upon the shared national heritage of the Thai language, Buddhist religion and loyalty to the ruling Chakkri monarchy. (Laungaramsri, 2003, p.161) At that time self-identification based on a sense of shared language, religion, and showing loyalty for Thai king was created among all ethnic groups in Thailand. The modern Thai state begun in the late 1930s with fixing Thai as the official language, many schools had Thai language as the compulsory subject. From 1950 till present day, many young Tai Yais have to speak Thai and learn the Tai language at the same time. But if someone has to move to another community, he/she will have no chance to learn the Tai language.

For shared Buddhist religion, as Tai Yais are Buddhist so there is no cultural exclusion of Tai people. Many of Tai Yai's rituals are almost the same as that of Thai. Lastly, Tai Yai shares loyalty to the ruling Chakkri monarchy because of the story that their previous leader got a Surname from one minister of the central government as '*ChulChulabud*' means Son of King Rama V in the 1860s demonstrating their good relationship in the past. This means that Tai Yai are in good terms with Thai central government since they settled down in Maehongson until today.

Since Tai Yai Studies Center formed in 2007 as a community college in Maehongson. The first Tai International Seminar of Tai Yai Studies held in this center. Later on, Tai Yai Studies Center created the website "www.Taiyai.org" that produces Tai culture content and arrange many Tai cultural program such as Tai language school, Tai dance and Tai music through the website.

The Tourism Authority of Thailand had the slogan “Amazing Thailand” since around 1990 A.D. and Maehongson became one of the exotic destination places in the northern part of Thailand. In late 20th century, Tai Yai people’s ritual and ceremony like Poi Sanglong was shown in many tourism magazines. Then, Tai Yai Studies Center was found in 2007 and started its first research work on “*Living Heritage City, Maehongson Province*” in 2008. In This project, they tried to study about history, cultural tourism, the way of life, etc. and tried to find away to develop tourist spots which will be linked with government sectors, private sectors and community. After that, the sense of revival of Tai-ness in Maehongson had been stimulated by the tourism. For example, many Tai Yai ethnic food products have been made for tourists in Ban Pangmoo village since 2011 until today which is demonstrating their culture to the rest of the world. Also promotion of Poi Sanglong as the largest event for tourists has opened a way to exhibit the Tai tradition and their rituals protecting their ethnicity.

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Map

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