

Chapter Five: Ethnic-Identity through “Poi” And Wet Rice Cultivation and Language

The word ‘Poi’ is derived from Pali word which means tradition. ‘Poi’ is used among Tai people (who use South-Western Tai Language) to refer festival, celebration and religious ceremony. In Tai societies, there is a plenty of ‘Poi’ which can be divided into different occasions of Tais’s lives such as rites of passage or rites of transition, healing rites, fertility rites, calendrical rites and festive rites or rites for social auspiciousness. These ‘Pois’ are attached to Tais from womb to tomb. These Tai’s tradition is bound to Tais. Both the Tai Aitons and Tai Yais share the same cultural practices in *Poi*.

Tai’s life is attached with Buddhism and agricultural life. In chapter 2 and 3 explained about the life of Tai Aitons and Tai Yais. There are a lot of rituals and ceremonies in one Tai’s lifetime which can be divided into three ceremonies; 1. Buddhist ceremony 2. Cultivating ceremony 3. Life cycle ceremony. *Poi Sanglong* is Buddhist ceremony and life cycle ceremony and *Poi Sangken* is Buddhist ceremony and cultivating ceremony.

This chapter represents the importance of Tai festival (*Poi* or *Poy*), Wet-Rice cultivation and Tai language as the revival movement. “Poi” is the celebration of ethnic identity and *Poi* brings about the sense of belonging and togetherness among the Tais. For Tai Aiton or Tai Yai community in Maehongson, Thailand, the researcher chooses to study “*Poi Sanglong*” for analysis on revival movement because *Poi Sanglong* ceremony is one of the famous annual festivals among Tai Yais in Maehongson, Thailand since 1990s¹³. And *Poi Sangken* of Tai Aitons of Banlung Mantai, Assam, India as the unit of analysis because *Poi Sangken* is the biggest annual festival among the Tais in Assam to celebrate their New Year festival.

¹³ In 1990s was the time that Tourism Authority of Thailand promoted the slogan “Amazing Thailand”.

8.1 ‘Poi’: The Celebration of Ethnic-Identity

8.1.1 Poi Sanglong of Tai Yai of BanPangmoo community, Maehongson, Thailand: A Case Study

Poi Sanglong is a kind of ritual. ‘*Poi*’ means festival and ‘*Sanglong*’ means young boys who want to become novice for a short period of time (ten to fifteen days). *Poi Sanglong* is counted as the greatest making merit among the Tais. Because it is a life cycle ritual for a Tai Yai man which means this ritual is the making a good man process as the Buddhist successor. A life of a Tai Yai is attached with Buddhism for his or her whole life. As a Tai Yai baby, he or she has to go to the temple since he/she is in mother’s womb. Tai Yai boys are to be socialized by family and society in such a way that they have to purify themselves and gain another status when they turn into seven to fifteen years old and twenty-one years old. At the same time, a Tai Yai girl has to learn how to be a good woman and housewife. *Poi Sanglong* is a kind of ritual which reflects a prescribed passage to coming of age and achieving adulthood for Tai Yai boys.

Poi Sanglong is not only found in Tai communities in Thailand but also is Shan State, Southern China and Assam, India. In Thailand, *Poi Sanglong* is also known as “*Buat Lukkeaw*” (*Buat* is to ordain or *Pabbajja* in Pali-Sanskrit and *Lukkeaw* means a crystal) which means the boy who is ordained; later on he will become as pure as a crystal. In Shan State, *Poi* or *Poy Sanglong* is one of the biggest festivals same as *Poi Sang Jan* (in Tai Yai, *Thingyan* in Burmese) or *Poi Songkran* or *Poi Sangken* in Tai Aiton community (Water festival).

8.1.2 The Ritual and the process.

‘*Poi Sanglong*’ or ‘*Poi Lern Si*’ is observed in March and April every year. The big Tai Yai festival is called ‘*Poi Sanglong*’. The festival is the celebration of young boys who are ordained as novices. Their parents and Psuedo parent confer to tonsure upon boys. And then the boys have to change their dress along with wearing crowns like a prince. The procession is held to announce that all the boys would turn themselves to be monks soon. After the ritual, being monks, the boys have to learn Buddhist religious philosophy and Tai Yai cultural norms. *Poi Sanglong* is usually held once a year in Maehongson (the field area). April seems to be a joyful month for Tai Yai or Tai Yai people. During summer season, Tai Yais harvest their rice and others crops and before the festival this harvesting comes to an end. Hence, it is the time to take some rest after the agriculture work. The festival becomes a kind of recreation activity besides being a means of social-solidarity.

8.1.3 Origin Myth of Poi Sanglong

The Tai word 'Lern Si' is used to refer the month of March and April, and Poi Sanglong, which is the biggest festival among Tai Yai, is celebrated during this time. The word 'Poi' means festival, 'Sang' or 'Choa Sang' is called novice. And 'Long' or 'Ar-long' is related to Buddhist myth about the Buddha when he was a prince. Later, he had decided to become a monk without any hesitation, this story becomes the origin myth (Buddha myth) about Poi Sanglong. One such story has been written by Su Nunta of Ban Kun-or, Jogmae city in Myanmar. 'Arnon Tatong Pan' or 'the question of Arnon'¹⁴, becomes relevant here. Back to 200 years ago, the story tells us about the question of 'Sanglong', the Arnon monk to Buddha.

Once Arnon monk asks the Buddha that if people brings their own sons to join this ritual what would happen to them. Buddha says that their parents will be in heaven for 8 eternities. If they don't have any son, they can be 'Por Kham or Mae Kham'¹⁵ and they will be in heaven for 4 eternities. Moreover, the story talks about the story of the king, and the rich people holding Poi Sanglong. The story goes this way. An ugly as well as poor boy wants to become the Sanglong, but all the rich people deny him. He is an ugly son of a widow woman. Unfortunately, they didn't have enough money to have the arrangement of the ritual. But that poor boy had merits. He made God Indra feel like helping with mercy. So, Indra took care of him until he became more beautiful with all gems and gold-tinted clothes. And, thus, he could become a Sanglong.

For Tai Yai people, a boy is more important than a girl. But, it does not mean that women are always dominated by men. When the boys have to be Sanglong, the girls also become an important part of the ritual, as they have to learn the entire woman's works. At least, for Tai Yai people, the equality is maintained like this. Both the sex has their role to play.

The festival Poi Sanglong is arranged with a Sanglong procession that others, who do not belong to Tai Yai community, must feel what this community believes in. Tai Yais

¹⁴Arnonor Ananda was a first cousin of Gautama Buddha and one of his ten principal disciples. Amongst the Buddha's many disciples, Ānanda stood out for having the most retentive memory

¹⁵The Tai word, Por means father and Mae means Mother. Kham means gold. This word refers to meritorious people who want to support the Sanglong who is not their own child in this festival. Later on, Por Kham or Mae Kham would be like adoptive father and adoptive mother.

celebrate their own identity through this festival by dressing and practicing their own ritual. Hence, this festival has many symbols and many processes. The researcher collected all the data by visiting the field during 25th March-7th April 2016 when the festival was celebrated. It can be noted that, before discussing about the festival or the procession, some instruments and associated material items are required to discuss which has an immense importance. They consist of:

1. Drum '*Klong Gonyao*'. It is a long drum. A different from *Klong Gonyao* is called '*Klong Mong Seung*'.



Figure 15: Tai Long Drum

2. '*Ko Long*'. This is a Sanglong's dress. A Sanglong must wear *Ko Long* which is different from day to day dress of a boy.



**Figure 16:
Sanglong's dress**

3. Sanglong's essentials like '*Go-jor*' (carpet) and '*Tan Nam Tao*' (Water-Jug), utensils.



Figure 17: Go-Jor

'*Tee Kham*' is a golden umbrella. Every Sanglong uses one each umbrella in the time of procession.

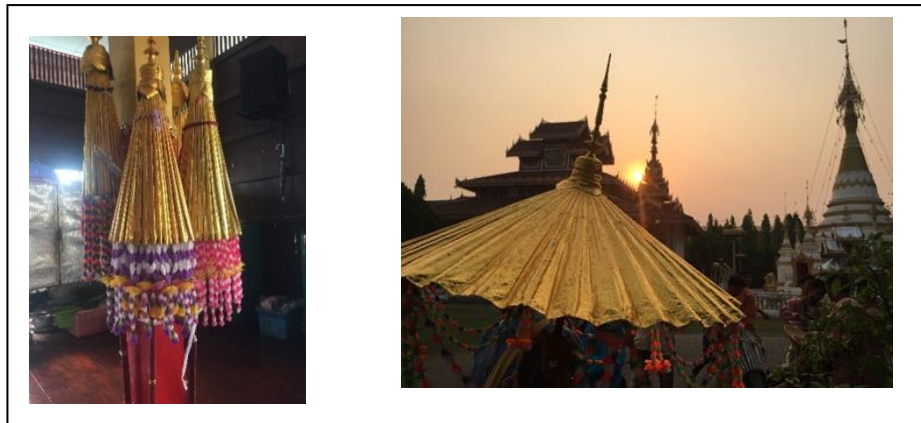


Figure 18: Tee-Kham

4. '*Kolor*' the associated materials for monks and the temple.
The temple arrangements are as follows;
 - 4.1 '*Oob Choa Para*' comprising of flower, incense, candle, coconut, medicines, cigarette, betel nut etc. Tai Yais would put all of these items into the basket. This basket is called '*Oob*'. Here '*Choa Para*' means the Buddha.



Figure 19: Oob Choa Para

5.2 '*Ton Patae Sa*', the word comes from a Burmese word. It refers to the particular tree in Buddhist myth. It is made of bamboo, Colourful paper is used especially of silver and golden one, colourful thread, and a decoration with cushion, mattress, mosquito nets, trousers, shirt, hair, flute, medicines, notebook, pencil, pen, soap, bowl, etc. And the people or Sanglong's relatives donate these to the temple and pray that in next life they should become rich.

5.3 '*Ton Kojong*'. It is made for the temple. '*Ton Ko Jong*' is made of bamboo and banana leaves. It is decorated with a pot, a pan, a dish, bowls, spoons, forks which are covered with colorful threads.



Figure 20: Ton Kojong

4.2 '*Pok Kao Tak*' is made of bamboo and puffed rice with colourful paper.



Figure 21: Pok Kaotak

5. *‘Ten Ngeun Ten Kham’*, *‘Mog Ngeun Mog Kham’* and *‘Gun Tong Pan Tong’*. These three decorative materials are the symbolic of wealth. *Ten Ngeun Ten Kham* is the candle and incense-sticks that would be used in the temple after the ritual. It is decorated with silver colour paper and golden colour paper like a tree. And it is a part of Tai Yai’s traditional art work or *Pan-Soi*. And *‘Mog Ngeun Mog Kham’* is made of silver colored paper and also golden paper. The word *Nguen* means silver in Tai and *Kham* means gold. And *‘Gun Tong Pan Tong’* (Jar with the flower and leaves). It is made of flower and leaves.



Figure 22: GunTong PanTong



Figure 23: Mog Ngeun, Mog Kham

6. *‘Mo Nam Tao’* consists of nine different kinds of leaves and seasonal flowers. All These leaves signify good luck. They are used to freshen up and these flowers would be offered to Buddha image at the main temple.



Figure 24: Mo Nam Tao

7. '*Ko Loo*' or the 'big bowl' contains with rice, dry fish, pickled fish, fish sauce, onion, garlic, and salt for temple and for the Sanglongs.



Figure 25: Ko Loo

8. '*Ton Ngeun*' is the money tree for the temple. The money comes from Parent of Sanglongs or relatives who donated beautifully decorated money to the temple as a donation.



Figure 26: Ton Ngeun

10. 'Plik Ka La' contains yellow robes (*Sanggan*) for Sanglongs after changing their statuses from a boy to be a novice. Moreover, mattresses, pillows, blankets, soaps, toothpastes, toothbrushes, dishes, spoons and slippers etc. which are mainly for the Sanglongs as well.



Figure 27: Plik Ka la

8.1.4 The process of Poi Sanglong Celebration (4 days celebration from 31st March-3rd April 2016)

1. Preparation and meeting

At the beginning of Poi Sanglong, If any Tai Yais can afford the will arrange their children to be 'Sanglong'. After that, a meeting will be held to announce how many Sanglongs would participate in that particular year. And the main people (the host) are be called '*Ta ka Long*' or '*Chao Poi Long*' who will pay for everything, because they are the richest people having and charismatic effect in the community. After the meeting, the news would spread person to person. If somebody wanted their children to become Sanglong but without money can join as *Chao Pab Poi* (shared host). In the past the contribution of the poor people was not fixed but nowadays there is a fixed rate which is fixed by the main host.

'*Choa Pab Poi*' calls meetings of the hosts to discuss with agenda;

- The date and the management
- The amount of Sanglong
- The place
- The guest
- The temple
- Preparation
- The regulations in Poi Sanglong
- The meeting of '*Tapae Sanglong*'

'*Tapae Sanglong*' is the one who has to take care of the Sanglong. A Sanglong should have at least 3 to 5 TapaeSanglongs or, sometimes more people than that. They have to take care of the Sanglong's materials and offer rides on their shoulders. Moreover, they have to carry all the stuffs like carpets, pillow, Jar, Betel Nut etc. When they have a meeting, they would meet each other and have the rehearsal with some dances with the Sanglong by giving the Sanglong some riding on their shoulder. All the drummers would also practice the rhythm.

- The elderly people meeting - The host requested suggestion from the '*Ju Kohn Tao*' (elderly people)

After the meeting, Tai Yai people have to promote this festival, which is called '*Tok Ten, Tok Hor Neng*', because, in the past, there was no invitation card. It happened only by person to person. When they go to promote, they would carry invitation gift made of tea leaves and water to head of the village, and then, the head would announce the news to the villager. '*Tok Ten*' is a custom that talks of young man and woman carrying sets of candles and incense sticks for the promotion of the festival. It is a good way to make them know each other. And '*Tok ten*' is usually done because people want to spread the news far and wide.

2. Preparation of the place for Sanglongs

All the relatives of the Sanglong would come and prepare the place for the Sanglong.

- a. The Sanglong's house which is called '*Keng-Sanglong*', would be built as the temporary house for the Sanglong. It is one metre above the ground for staying, sleeping and also praying.

Along with this, '*Soom Man Tab*' is built for the guests at Sanglong's house. It was made as an eating space and sleeping space. If any guest comes to bless Sanglong, a ritual is called '*Hong Khwan Sanglong*' (comforting Sanglong) is observed. '*Soom Mue*' is built for *Hong Khwan Sanglong* ritual.

- b. Temple

Inside the temple premise, a '*Soom Man Tab*' would be built for all the guests. Bamboo is the main material used, and '*Bai Plung*' (Teak leaf) provides the roof. Nowadays, some places use steel and tents instead of bamboo. This is done for the preparation of the feast as well.

3. Preparation for Sanglong's and food

For the procession of the Sanglongs, many things have to be prepared. For example, '*Ton Ko Jong*', '*PokKhoaTak*', '*Mok Nguen*', '*Mok Kham*' etc. are needed (which is mentioned earlier). It is, because everything has to be ready with the Tai Yai's arts and crafts and paper decoration. '*KhoaTak Pun*' and '*Khoa Pong*' are the main sweets made of puff rice and sugar cane. It takes around ten days to make puffed rice. '*Khoa Moon Hor*' is another sweet which has to be prepared the day before the festival.



Figure 28: Food preparation



Figure 29: KaoTak KaoPong and KaoMoon Hor

All these preparations are to be done at least one day before the festival, and all the children and their parents along with '*Tapae Sanglong*' have to come to the temple for having the Sanglongs' hairs shaved by the monks with the help of the Sanglong's relatives.

In the past, Sanglongs had to stay in the temple before the festival started for three to seven days. Monks taught them how to pray and behave in a good manner, if they chose to become monks. Until the shaving day, Sanglongs would play 'Hide and Seek' games

and TapaeSanglong were to find them out. But nowadays, this kind of game becomes extinct.

8.1.5 Transformation of Sanglong in Poi Sanglong festival

The festival was held in *Panglor* temple in Maehongson town. There were 12 Sanglongs and 3 Janglongs. Poi Sanglong festival was celebrated in April, 1-3, 2016. Before Poi Sanglong, the festival simply started with the tonsure ceremony. On 31, March, 2016 at Wat Panglor (Panglor Temple), Maehongson the ritual had been started with the sound of Tai Yai music instruments. Fifteen Sanglongs were sitting on the chair and their *Por Kham* and *Mae Kham* (father and mother of Sanglong) would stand behind them. After tonsure ritual, Sanglong would clean themselves with water and perfume and wear white dress. Then, they would ride on Tapae Sanglong's shoulder because their feet should not touch the ground. At night, they would stay in '*Keng Sanglong*' or the temporary house for Sanglong.



Figure 30: Tonsure ritual

Day 1 – ‘Wan Hak’

In the first day morning, the Sanglong's parents and TapaeSanglongs along with the hosts would take the Sanglong for taking bath with Son Poy water and perfume. After that, the Sanglong has to dress up with the prince's dress and be ready to go to temple. The researcher interviewed Sanglongs about their feeling before they become Sanglong.

“I come from Ban Pangmoo. Today I feel a little bit excited because I have seen this festival many times. So, I accomplished my family's wish as well as my dream to become a ‘Sanglong’ today” the name of the boy is JJ, Kittibhum Chaiyon, eleven years old, studying in class 5. (Personal interviewed on 5th, April, 2016)

At the same time, an important ritual starts. *Pang Choa Mung* is the name of this ritual. 2-3 people with a horse would go to worship the ancestor spirit and invite the spirit to possess the horse. After that the horse would walk to the temple. Tai Yais believe that the ancestor spirit will look after all the festival and have it accomplished without any difficulties.



Figure 31: Pang Choa Mung ritual

Sanglongs would reach the temple, they would sit in front of all the monks. They would pray '*Panchasilla*' and make '*Kun tor*' or ask for forgiveness from the monks. After that, Sanglongs have to ride on their Tapae Sanglong's shoulders. Their feet should not touch the earth. The Tapae Sanglongs would dance even if they are carrying the Sanglong on their shoulders. The drummers and all the musicians would love to show their own dancing skills too. While they are enjoying, the Sanglong's parent and their relatives too can join the carrying of the Sanglong on their shoulders. Some of them throw puffed rice and flower to the Sanglongs. Crackers are fired to announce that this festival has begun. Tai Yais believe that the sound of crackers can protect all the evils as well. After the dancing, the Sanglongs would go to worship ancestor spirits at the ancestor shrine. The Sanglong procession starts from the temple to the shrine along with the musicians and their relatives.

The head of Tapae Sanglong would pray to the ancestor spirit and ask them to look after the Sanglong and the festival. After that the Sanglongs would go to the main host's house and have lunch there.



Figure 32: TapaeSanglong is carrying Sanglong

In the afternoon, the Sanglongs would visit their relative's houses and get all the blessings from them. Tai Yais believe that if any of the Sanglongs comes and visits their household, it would fetch good luck to them later on. The Sanglong's relatives treat them well with juices, food and money. Elder people in their family bless and tie white thread on their wrist (it is called in Tai Yai as *Phuk Khwan*). After that the Sanglongs would pray with the reciting of Pali hymns for them. At night, the main host would arrange a dinner, a Tai Yai's concert and cinema shows for the Sanglongs and their guests.

It can be mentioned here that besides, Tai Yai people join this festival, Tais from Shan state also love to join. Sanglong's family who has relatives in Myanmar would invite their relatives to come to Maehongson and join as a guest. Some family of Thailand want to maintain Tai Yai culture, and that is why they pay more to the musicians of Shan State, Myanmar to showcase the traditional culture and invite the musician and Tapae Sanglong to come and perform their best.

Day 2- '*Wan Kham Keak*' - Ko loo Procession, Sanglong visiting houses, Hong Kwan, Kham Kaek

The ritual starts around 9 o'clock in the morning, the Sanglong's procession would start walking from the temple to the main town. The procession has its own hierarchical arrangement, starting from '*Jeejay*', '*Oubchao Para*', the horse, '*Ton Taepae Sa*', '*Ton Ko*

Jong, *PokKhoatak*, *Tien Nguen*, *Tien Kham*, *Ton Nguen*, *Ton Kham*, *Gun Tong*, *Pan Tong*, *Mo Nam Tao*, *Ton Nguen*, *Ko Loo*, *Plik Ka La*, *Sang Gan*, Mattress and pillows, Sang Longs, all the musicians and their instruments, then the others materials along with people.

Today's Tai Yais would love to wear their own traditional dress while carrying all the Sanglong's stuffs. The procession would walk around the town inviting others to share the merit. People in the town would love to prepare water and juices for all the people in the procession.

Hong Kwan Sang Long would be arranged in the evening at the temple. The Sanglong's parents would prepare twelve food items such as Tua Nao, Stir fried pork with vegetable, soup etc. for Sanglongs. *Ja-reh* would pray Tai Yais hymns for them in Tai language.



Figure 33: Jareh and "Hong Kwan Sang Long ritual"

At night, people would come and visit Sanglongs's houses if they get the invitation. If they are the guest, they will give some money and put it inside the envelope. The guests would have dinner after talking to Sanglong's parent. After the dinner, Sanglong would bless the guest with Buddhist hymns.

Day 3- *Wan Kham Sang*

On this day, *Jang Long* and *Sang Long* would gain new status. The ritual for Jang Long starts in the early morning at 4-5 am. They walk clockwise round the main temple for three rounds by riding on TapaeSanglong's shoulder. Then, they have to come and sit in front of monks and ask for permission to become monks in Pali words. On this very day, *Ja-reh* would read Tai Yai ascription (*Tom Lik*) and pray for Sanglongs and Janglongs. After that, the monks would change their white dress (which they wore already

inside ‘*Ko Long*’ dress) into the yellow robe. Then all the novices have to learn Buddhist Philosophy and Tai Yai language and culture.



Figure 34: Sanglong is changing the dress



Figure 35: Sanglong becomes a novice

Today, the reporters and various Television Channels would come and cover the ceremony and take interview. Entire festive environment has been documented by the media houses. Poi Sanglong is supported by Tourism Authority of Thailand along with the local people and non-governmental organization.

8.1.6 Poi Sang Long in Tai-Aiton of Ban Lung Mantai Village, Assam

Tai Aiton of Banlung Mantai don't use the same word for calling this festival but similar as Poi Sanglong. The festival is also called as “*Poi Khamsang*” (young boy who is from 10-20 years old) and *Kham-Key*. (for a man who wants to become a Buddhist monk or *Bhiksu*) Poi in Tai Aiton refers to ceremony or festival and “*Khamsang*” means a boy

or man who wants to attend in Buddhist ordination ceremony (*Pabbaja*). Tai Aiton community gives the importance to the son as son can become a monk to through the ordination as it is the greatest making merit among Tai's belief.

Poi Khamsang in Tai Aiton village is a ceremony where young boys (Sanglong) of the village are ordained for novice. *Poi Khamsang* in Tai Aiton would be held individually and it is not fixed in every year because it depends on each family's convenience and the schedule of the boy. The story of Poi Kham Sang is related to Buddha life as well as Tai Yai people.

The story of Buddha has been told to recall 'Lord Buddha' when he was a prince "Siddhartha Gotama". Later on he decided to leave his palace in search for the truth of life until he found the middle path for enlightenment. Tai Aitons believe that the ordination is the greatest making merit in one's life and if a son in one family becomes *Choa Sang*, the parent and his relative feel so proud. The age of Khamsang should be from 5-19 years old and *Choa-Key*'s age should be above 20.

In Banlung Mantai village, temple is located in the heart of the village. Chao Ke or monk also once used to be Khamsang. The latest Poi Khamsang in Banlung Mantai village was celebrated in 19-21 March 2006, all khamsangs were ordained as *Sramanera* (a novice monk). There are three days arrangements that same as Tai Yais. The first day, the boys would wear prince dress but not in fully dress up and walk around entire village on foot in the late morning after that they would get invited for lunch. That night Khamsang would stay at "Song Lang".



Figure 36: Song Lang



Figure 37: a part of the performance to tell a story of Lord Buddha in Banlung Mantai village, March 2006

On the second day, KhamSangs have to pray *Pancha Sila* (five precepts) or in Tai Aiton “*Kamsil ThomTra*” (the five precepts) and again wear royal dress but that day many people would love to carry them to walk around the village on their shoulders in the morning and KhamSangs would have lunch in any houses that invite them. In the evening, KhamSangs would change their prince dress into white shirt and Tung. (Wrapped skirt for men, it can be in any colors) And Tonsure ritual would do it by the evening.



Figure 38: KhamSang parade Day 2

Lastly on third day, KhamSangs would ride on the Chariots (*Jeaw* in Tai Aiton language) that was carried by men and in the evening they would get offered the robe to wear from senior monks. Later on, they will stay in the monastery as long as they want.



Figure 39: KhamSang parade on Day 3



Figure 40: From Khamsang to become Sramanera (a novice monk)

“*Por Ling*” and “*Mae Ling*” (father and mother who raise *ChoaSangs*) are the main sponsor, he or she can be anyone who wants to make merit in this celebration. Each KhamSang may have to spend at least Rupee 100,000 for overall celebration.

After they become a novice monk, the elder monk would teach him all the Buddhist rules or *Vinaya Pitika* (Buddhist scripture), Tai tradition, Buddhist literature, Pali language etc. After 2006, there is no Poi Khamsang celebration was observed in the village because all the children in the village are engaged with their studies and tuitions and most of Tai boys don’t want to stay inside the monastery as it is a solitude life.

8.1.7 Poi Sanglong/Poi Khamsang celebration of Tai Yais and Tai Aiton identity

The process of Poi Sanglong or Poi Khamsang is full of symbolic act of cultural reproduction, cultural orientation¹⁶ and revival of Tai Yai/Tai Aiton identity. Poi Sanglong/Poi Khamsang is related to Buddhist ceremony and by looking critically at the festival Sanglongs refer to unknown boys who have decided to become a part of the society through the procedure of ordination. In term of symbolic act, the tonsure and the belief of untouchable the earth reflects the idea of purity. According to Buddhist belief says that hair shows sensuality and ego. Hence, hair needs to be cut off for forsaking sin. The boys would have to be tonsured. In the sense of dirt, tonsure is related to sex pollution and to eliminate ego. It is possible to think of Mary Douglas (1984) who mentions that “what goes for sex pollution also goes for bodily pollution” At this moment Sanglongs would feel like their bodies and minds were cleaned. Then, they have been bathed with aromatic water. After taking bath, they should be in the white dress (white which signifies the purity or peace) before wearing the prince’s dress. Sanglongs should not let their feet touch the earth reflects that they are not like an ordinary people. So, this kind of hygiene ritual signifies the preparation stage before the most sacred part of the ritual. *TapaeSanglongs* or *PorLing/MaeLing* seem to be special person who can carry the prince on their shoulders and for *PorLing/MaeLing* are the sponsor who support ChoaSang in economic and their personal life from before the celebration until they become ChoaSang. So, it is not only Sanglongs or khamsang who gain new status but also *TapaeSanglongs* and *PorLing/MaeLing* who become like theirs pseudo-parent. Lastly, they would wear the yellow robe to gain new status as novice/monk.

¹⁶ A cultural orientation is an inclination to think, feel or act in a way that is culturally determined. It defines the basis of differences among cultures such self-identity, interpersonal relationships, communication, resolving conflict.

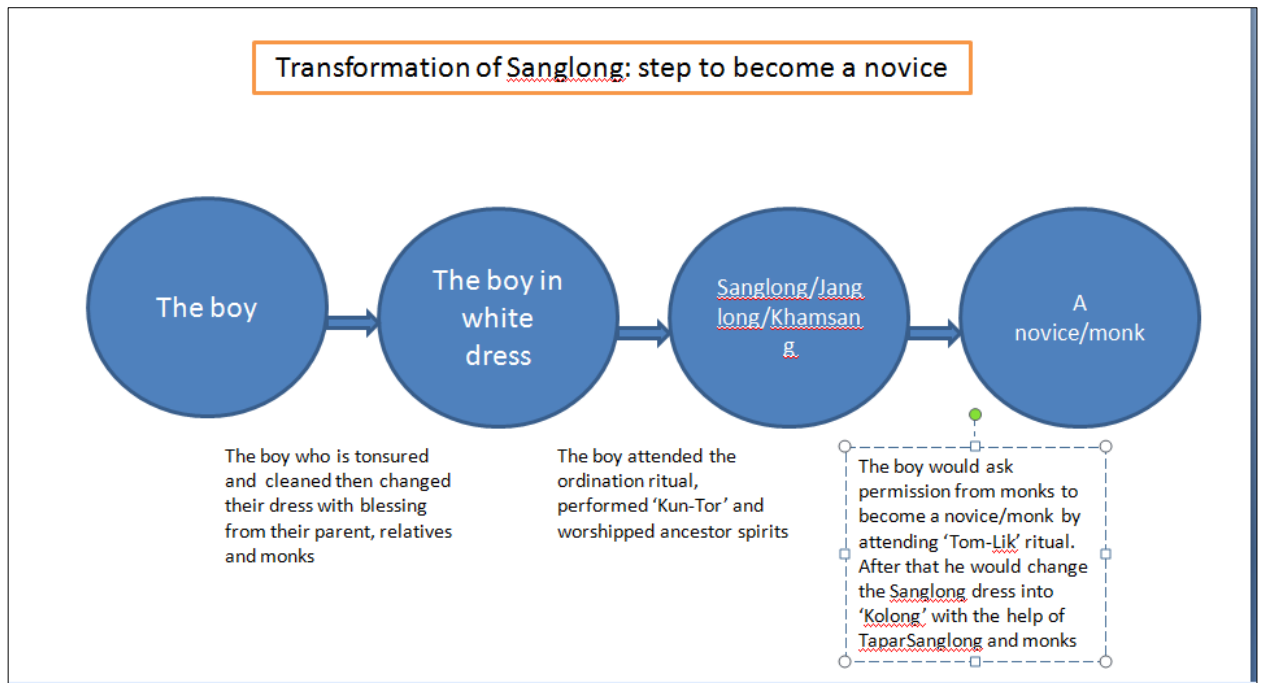


Figure 41: Transformation of Sanglong/Khamsang

The festival makes the Sanglongs see things in a completely new way that they are not an ordinary boy/man through the ritual. Becoming novice or monk in Buddhism reflects that they bring merit for their family. Beyond that becoming as Sanglong in Tai Yai society is extremely high prestigious status. Due to Buddhist belief, man should attend ordination ceremony to inherit the religion once in his life for making a great merit. The way that Sanglong parade is walking around the town reflects that this festival needs all the people to see and all the music in the parade attract all the people to come and celebrate together no matter whether they are Tai or not. What is undeniable about inheritance is that Sanglongs/Janglongs/KhamSang have to inherit Tai culture as well as Buddhism for the next generation. They keep performing this ritual from generation after generation. Hence, this gives sense of belongingness and sense of inheritance.

Socially, Poi Sanglong expresses cultural orientation. The process of Poi Sanglong and Poi KhamSang create many spaces for example, space of interaction and space of self as a Tai boy. Cultural orientation has been conducted within the family first. When the member of the family has decided to send their boy to become Sanglong/KhamSang, the family has to tell the story about Buddha life and the story of their own male relatives who used to attend Poi Sanglong /Poi KhamSang in the past. The boys would feel like Poi Sanglong/Poi KhamSang festival is a part of their childhood life. On the other hand, the girl would learn how to prepare an artificial flower for the festival along with helping the

family in the preparation process. Thus, the festival represents that Tai boys and girls have to concern about the gender roles. They have their own role to play in the ceremony. In Tai Yai community, the photographs were taken in Poi Sanglong festival every year. Each of Tai family would decorate the wall with Sanglongs pictures who are the member of the family. The photograph represents the status in the family. Mostly, the budget of Poi Sanglong is around 50,000 baht to 150,000 baht in Thailand. For each KhamSang in Tai Aiton community has to spend at least rupee 100,000. Moreover, for this grand preparation needs help from all relatives and the villagers.

Poi Sanglong helps Tai Yai or Tai Aiton people to recollect the good old days in the past by telling Poi Sanglongs story. Hence, Poi Sanglong marks the identity formation. People are inspired by the photographs and the oral tradition. The researcher has noticed during the time of fieldwork that the story of Poi Sanglong is a kind of prestigious story. Focusing heavily on the preparation of Poi Sanglong creates many spaces of celebration of identity. Firstly, the meetings (The meeting of ChoaPab Poi, the meeting of TapaeSanglong and the meeting of elderly people) create the space of reaffirmation of identity. The meeting starts with many discussions. The main issue would be the objectives of performing Poi Sanglong festival. All the objectives point out about that this festival has benefit to Buddhism and Tai Yai culture. Moreover, when the mass-media helps Tai Yai people to promote the festival. Poi Sanglong has become one of the must-visit festivals in the northern part of Thailand. Moreover, Poi Sanglong was registered as Thailand's intangible heritage in 2018. Hence, Tai Yai people feel proud of their own culture. Certainly, the festival promotes a sense of togetherness and represents their identity.

It is important to observe that Sanglong as the medium between the profane space and sacred space who can bring the merit to people in his community. Also, Sanglong is the Tai Yai representative. Interestingly, the meeting of elderly people expresses the hierarchical society. The elderly people would talk of the right way to perform this festival and reaffirm that all the process is never changed. Along with that they would explain all the meaning of the ritual. Moreover, the festival creates the space for social interaction. For example, when Chao Pap Pois or the hosts may come from different community to the meeting, the meeting would help them to know each other than before. Similarly, Sanglong group would stay in the temple for ten to fifteen days. Emotionally, it expresses that Sanglongs would have the feeling of attachment among each other, attachment to community and attachment to family. Being as Sanglongs/Khamsang, they are weaving Tai Yai and Tai Aiton culture identity. Especially in their generation, the boys (who used

to be Sanglongs) would become friend and never forgot their peer sanglongs in their life. Along with this, the festival also creates bonding between the community members, religious tolerance, identity consciousness for which we see the traces of revival of Tainess.

8.2 Poi Sangken in Banglung Mantai Village, Karbi Anglong, Assam, India (collected data on Poi Sangken in April, 2016-19): A Case Study on Spring Festival

The new year of Tai people is celebrated around 13 April – 15 April every year in accordance with the Tai Lunar calendar. The word ‘Sangken’ is used to refer to the festival among the Tais in North-East India. Poi Sangken is one of the rites for social auspiciousness, calendrical rites and festive rites. According to Tai Lunar Calendar, the time of Buddhist New Year is held differently in every year, such as in 2016 the New Year time was at 10:43 pm 52 seconds on 13rd April, in 2017 and the new year time was at 04:56:29 am on 14th April.

Poi Sangken is held at the same time of Rongali Bihu in Assamese festival. Not only Tai Aitons celebrate Poi Sangken but also the other Tais such as Phake, Khamyang, Turung, Khamti inhabited in Assam. Poi Sangken among Aitons can be seen as a cultural performance and ethnic identity. Tai Aitons celebrate Poi Sangken along with their religious practices and most of the Tais in Assam celebrate Buddhist New Year together without any boundary among the Tai groups. Poi Sangken festival is also celebrated in all South East Asia countries. Poi Sangken among the Tais in North East India is performed for Tais. It reflects that Tais are still performing their own culture and continuing existence of the group.

The story of Poi Sangken is in buddhist myth, is as follow; *once upon the time, there was a boy “Dhanapala” who was intelligent, got a challeng riddle from Kapila Brahma, who was the god with four heads and he thought that he is the intelligent person in the world so he challenged Dhanapala to answers the riddles, if he could do he will give his head to him. Later on within seven days, Dhanapala could answer all riddles. Kapila had to give his head in a big gold bowl by asking his seven daughters to carry it to Dhanapala each for a period of one year. Sangken refers to this occasion that Kapila’s head changes and the year changes too. In this festival, Tai Aitons would offer food to monks and observe the five precepts, bathe Buddha stutes clean the temple and stupa and play water game.*

8.2.1 Preparations of Poi Sangken

The first day of Sangken festival, Tai people do not count as a new year day. That day is the sign of the coming of the end of the year. Tai Aitons of Banlung Mantai would prepare the place for the festival. All the boys of the village would love to come and help others elderly people. In this festival, all male members of the village have to carry Buddha statues from the main temple or '*Jong*' to the place where Aitons call '*Jong Fhra*'. On the other hand, girls and female members would prepare the food, flower, candle, incense sticks, popped rice and cloths which are used in the ritual.

8.2.2 The first ritual '*Khan To Fra*'

Each and every Aiton families would prepare a long cloth (*Pha Sue Fra*), candles (*Simee*), incense sticks (*Simeehom*), flowers (*Bok ja*), popped rice (*Kwaotak*), fruits and sweets and a Tai traditional flag (*Tung Khon*) to temple.

In the evening of the day (12nd April) Tai Aitons women would make the pavement with the long clothes or *Pha Sue Fra* because the monks and the other men who were to carry the Buddha images will walk over these clothes to the small building where the Buddha images are to be kept (*Jong Fra*). This ritual is called '*Khan Tokfra*'. It is the ritual in which Tai people shift all the Buddha images from the main temple to another building nearby the temple for letting people sprinkle water onto the Buddha images for two days before the New Year arrives.



Figure 42: Aiton women put long cloths (*Pha Sue Fra*) as a path from temple to *Jong Fra*

That night in the main temple (*Jong*), Tai Aiton men and boys sat in the front rows and women and girl sat behind men. The monks (*Choa moon, Choa Key*) sat in the seats reserved solely for them next to the principal Buddha image in the temple. The place for sitting delivered a sense of the hierarchy; which is, the top position is Buddha images, the next the monks, descending to those men in the front rows and women were in the last row.



Figure 43: all villagers sat inside Jong before shifting Buddha images

According to Sangken calendar for the ritual, the good time was celebrated by the astrologer at 10:43 p.m. and 52 seconds, which was the time for shifting and carrying the Buddha images from the main temple to the small building or Jong Phra.



Figure 44: Chao Key and Tai Aiton men are carrying Buddha images to Jong Phra and women are dancing to celebrate the first ritual

The ritual started with the prayers for 10-15 minutes before auspicious times, all the men would get ready to carry all the Buddha images while some of the women would start a kind of dance in front of the monks who first carries the Buddha image out. Some of the people would come forward and form a row for spreading flowers, coin and popped rice on the long cloth pavement until the people carrying the image reach *Jong Fra*.

There are two different naming of the Buddha Images. When they were in the main temple, Tai Aiton called them as 'Fra', but when all Buddha images were in *Jong Fra* they were called as '*Fra Nung Din*' which means that the Buddha images are on the earth/ground. After the ritual was carried out properly, some people plan about the ritual of the next day morning and the evening. So, this Poi Sangkan festival made Tai people busy with the rituals and their relatives.



Figure 45: Fra Nung Din

8.2.3 The second ritual 'Fra Nung Din worshipping'

Every woman in Aiton families would be preparing the food in very early morning and the food for offering is called as '*Kaow Som Fra*'. After that they go to the temple. Tai Aitons start the day with praying and offering the food and the flower to the monks. After praying, they have to sprinkle water over the 'Fra Nung Din' (Buddha Images). Tai Aitons would carry water by walking to the river near by the village and pour the water

over the Fra Nung Din for three times, the first time is for the virtues of the Buddha, the second time is for the virtues of the Buddha's teaching, and the third for the monks.



Figure 46: Kaow Som Fra

The Banlung Mantai village is located near by the Dhansiri river or Nam Lung. Basically, Tai Aiton at Banlung maintains an agriculturalist life. The river as well as water is very important to them. Water from Dhansiri river o Nam Lung is used for pouring the water onto *Phranung din* 3 times. Aitons believe that after pouring the water into the Buddha image, the water would change into something sacred what Aitons call as “*Nam Metta*”. (*Nam* means water and *Metta* means goodness)

After that pouring water onto Buddha images, Aitons would go to the main hall and wait for the blessing of the elders in this village. There are some Tai Aiton people who want to ask the elders about the Buddha's teaching formally or some Buddhist legend. At this occasion, the elderly people play an important role, the elder who is the leader of this meeting could read Tai fluently as Aitons call Choa -Jareh and he could give the answers to any query about Buddhism. Aiton people would sit together, the elders as they used to sit together. After that, a group of women would come and make some tea for everyone and distribute the snacks for the ones who have finished the water ritual.



Figure 47: Sharing snacking and tea after worshipping

After spraying water to PhraNung Din, everyone has to sprinkle water to every stupa and every Jong in the village. The whole day, Aitons would spend thus only in the village temple.

These are the hierarchy of the ritual and the classified places in the temple of BanlungMantai during Poi Sanken. It can be as follow;

- a. *Jong* (the main temple)
- b. *Jong Phra*(the temporary temple is build for Buddha images)
- c. *Kong wu* (stupa)
- d. *Tat*(small temple)
- e. *Bhodhi* tree (tree of awakening)

The place for the rituals in the Buddhism is symbolic. So, wherever Buddha image or the idea of sacrifice to Buddha is, the place has to be changed from the profane into the sacred one immediately.

8.2.4 Observance of the Third Ritual ‘*Kong Wu* and *Zu Tong Pae* worshipping’

There is a big monastery in Kalioni where to every Tai people would come during Poi Sangkan. Every Tais would prepare ‘*KhaoSomFra*’ for the monks, along with flowers, snacks, *simee* (candle), *simee hom* (incense stick), *Tung kon* (Tai Flag) and *Khao-tak* (puffed rice) to Kalioni temple.

At Kalioni, the weather was cool and there was a big river naming Kalioni same as the village’s name. Temple is popular because the most sacred ‘*Kong Wu*’ or stupa is only in Kalioni. At Kalioni, Tais practice the same as they do in the village temple. First, they

have to sprinkle the water to the Buddha images at Jong Fra and every Kong Wu, Tat and Bhodhi tree.

At Kalioni temple, we could see many Tai people. As we can identify Tai people from their dresses. For example, if someone is from Tai Aiton group the main color that he/she uses is green and black and the pattern of the wrap skirt he/she wears is different from the other groups. As we have seen, Tai Kamyang will use red, yellow and white as the main color and Tai Turungs use purple, black, and blue as the main ones. Tai Phake wrap-skirt is different from the other Tai groups. While Tai Aiton uses the flower pattern Tai Phake would use the strip pattern. They all come for worshipping and play the water game among the other Tai group members.



Figure 48: Kalioni Temple



Figure 49: many groups of Tai in Assam are celebrating Poi Sangken in Kalioni Temple

8.2.5 The fourth ritual ‘the time for celebrating the new year’

Aiton people follow the Lunar calendar for the new year and the new year starts regarding the lunar calendar. On the first day of the new year, Tai Aiton men would carry the Buddha images back from *Jong Fra* to the main temple again after two days. All the

Buddha images are kept in the pouring water would by now believed to be clean, and it is the important that everybody who joins in this ritual is to observe the precepts of Pancha Sila¹⁷. This ritual thus represents that the new year has been started with purity.



Figure 50: Tai Aitons started the new year with praying before shifting Buddha images

Tai Aiton people are to wait for the auspicious time for the start of a new year. This time, the ritual is performed at Jong Phra and Jong. The main materials are used in this ritual such as the long cloths (*Pha Seu Fra*), flowers, popped rice, coins and candles. Tai Aitons would lid the candles at night. The temple is really brightened up with the candle lights. Before the ritual begins, the musicians would carry a big drum and other musical instruments. They played Tai music for the ritual. Some elder women would dance and lead the row of monk and men while the men were carrying the Buddha images on the cloth pavement from *Jong Fra* to *Jong* which takes only for five minutes. Then the Buddha images were kept in the main temple again. The monk led Tai Aiton pray with holy environments. After the prayer, the ritual comes to an end.

¹⁷The five commandments in Buddhism



Figure 51: Shifting pured Buddha images from Jong Phra to main temple

8.2.6 ‘Cleaning day and *Khan To Sala*’

On the day of the New Year, it is the time to splash water, but this time it is on to the monk. Tai calls this ritual ‘*Khan To Fra* or *Khan To Sala*’. After the water game, Tai Aiton people would clean the temple. All the boys and men enjoy with the water game while women and some men clean the temple. After cleaning, all people of the village will have food together in community feast.

The next activity on this day is to visit relative’s house. Normally Tai Aitons would visit their grandmother or grandfather and ask them to give blessing for the new year. Aitons grandparents would bless in Tai, ‘*Jinn dee Uu Dee*’ meaning ‘Have a healthy life and good living’. And grandparents or elderly people would perform ‘*Phouk Khwan*’ by tie sacred threads around wrists.



Figure 52: Khan To Fra

8.2.7 Tai Yais and Songkran festival: A Case Study on Spring Festival

'*Poi Lern Ha*' is held on 13-15 April in every year. Tai Yai calls this ritual as '*Keun Jong Pi Mai*', this includes splashing of water game, donation, and '*Gun Tor*' which means that all the Tai Yais are to apologize to the monks and the elderly people. Tai Yai Songkran festival is called as '*Poi Son Nam*' or '*Poi SangJan*'. The word "*Sang*" means "*Brahma*" (The story of *Kapilais* similar with Tai Aiton) and "*Jan*" means to fall, when these two words are combined together, it refers to the story of Brahma as *Kapila* and *Dhanapala* after *Khun Sang* or Brahma cut his head, he had to hold his own head and clean it with water every day as one day in hell, it is equal to one year in the world, so when *Khun Sang* cleaned his head, it was called as "*Son Nam*" or "*Poi Sonnam*".

According to Tai Yai's *Pubsa* (manuscripts), Buddha said to *King Prasennajit* at *Savatthi* that this month is the time to offering the food to Buddha and other monks. Buddha asked him to worship and pour the water onto Buddha statues and elderly people. After that Buddhists follow this tradition.

In Ban Pangmoo village, there are three days celebration for *Poi Sang Jan*; The first day is called as "*Wan Sang Kan Long*", second day is called as *Wan Nao*, and third day is called *SangKran* Day. The first day of *Poi Sang Jan* is held on 13th April every year. All the Tai Yais usually make "*Khao Moon Hor*" (Tai Yai sweets made of rice flour, sugar and coconut wrapped with banana leaves) and prepare food and the essentials for offering to monks at the temple. This day, Tai Yais would clean the house.

The second day is called "*Wan Nao*", *Wan* in Tai means Day and *Nao* means rotten which is related to the story of Brahma's cutting head. Tai Yais believe that Brahma's head is rotten on the second day so Tai people have to clean all the dirt. Today Tai Yais would clean their bodies and cloths and pour water onto Buddha images and stupas. They would build "*Keng Son Phra*" same as "*Jong Fra*".

The third day is the New Year day. '*Kan Tor*' ritual should be performed before pouring the water to Buddha statues. Tai Yai people believe that parent is the first Buddha which means if one can't feed or take care of their own parent how one can take care of others. There are two kinds of *Kan Tor*;

1. *Kan Tor Por Mae* (To ask for forgiveness from parent and elderly people)

Tai Yai people would offer snacks, flower, incense sticks, candle and popped rice to apologize to parent and elderly people. There is a blessing from parent and elderly people like "*Ou Dee Kin Wan*" which means the as "*Jin Dee Ou Dee*" in Aiton. (It means have a healthy life in Tai)

2. *Kan Tor Phra Song* (To ask for forgiveness from monks)

This ritual has to be held after *Kan Tor Por Mae*. Tai Yai people would go to temple in early morning on 15 April and they would bring flower, incense sticks, candles, water, and perfume and popped rice. *Kan Tor Phra Song* means pouring water to Buddha images and monks.

3. *Son Nam* (Splashing Water)

Tai Yai people would spend the day of New Year for pouring water onto Buddha images in the temple or in their own houses. They would build a particular place for pouring water where they call as '*Jong Son*' for letting all Tai Yais come and worship Buddha statues.

Poi Son Nam is often used for calling *Songkran* festival in Thai culture. For the perception of Tai Yai's people '*Poi Songkran*' is not their culture but it is Lanna culture or Thai culture. Instead of using the word *Poi Songkran* into using *Poi Son Nam* reflects that Tai Yais want to show that they have their own culture even it is similar with the Lanna culture or Thai culture.

Therefore, *Poi Sangken* or *Poi SangJan*, *Poi SongKran* is celebrated in Tai Aiton community and the other Tai groups in Assam and Tai Yai community of Thailand. This festival has numbers of rituals in which the social relation, symbol of purification and the social hierarchy play significant role. Hence, strong cultural interactions also have taken place in historical times.

According to Yos Santasombat (2005), a Thai anthropologist of northern Thailand, ethnicity cannot be treated as a primordial given. Ethnic groups redefine themselves and are redefined by others. The fluidity of identity can be shown in the form of cultural performance and it strongly represents all the context of ethnicity among the Tai Aitons and Tai Yais. In *Poi Sangken* of Tai Aiton community reflects the social solidarity among Aitons groups. Interestingly, the ethnic identity is constructed by the interaction between different Tai groups for example, in Kalioni temple, Tais or the others groups can identify each other by the dresses (the textile and colours) they wear and the language they use. In *Poi Son Nam* of Tai Yai community of Thailand, Tai Yais call this festival as *Poi Son Nam* instead of using *Poi Songkran* because they want to differentiate themselves from the majority people (Thai and Lanna people).

8.3 Wet-rice farming and the ethnic identity maintaining: Wet-rice cultivation among Tai Aitons and Tai Yais

Rice is the staple food for Tai people. The relationship between Tai people and Rice culture appears in their beliefs, folklore and worshipping. In Tai Aiton cosmology, as mentioned in chapter 4-5, the belief system is starting with Buddha and other supernatural such as *Fi Sumong* (village guardian spirit), *Fi Dam* (ancestor spirit), *Fi Nam* (water spirit), *Fi Hoong* is spirit of the tree, *Nang Khon Khao* (goddess of Paddy fields) and in Tai Yai cosmology, the belief system starts with Buddha, *Phi Arak* (ancestor spirit) and the other spirits such as *Phi Nam*(water spirit), *Phi Din* (earth spirit), *Phi Toong*(rice field spirit) *Mae Phosop* (goddess of grain and paddy). All these belief systems is related to rice culture.

Tai people live their lives in subsistence economy. Both of Tai Yais and Tai Aitons are the rice growers including vegetables and crops. Their houses and agricultural farms are not in the same area but not too far from the villages. Tai Yais of BanPangmoo live nearby *Sa-Nga* River and *Pai* River, on the other hand, Tai Aitons of BanLung Mantai live nearby Dhansiri River. The location of both villages is good for rice cultivation especially wet-rice cultivation.

In Banlung Mantai village, the rainy season starts in June after the rain and the soaked land, Tai Aitons would start going to their rice fields. There is a ritual for sowing; it is called *TaKa* or nursery land for the spout. In this ritual, the head of the family would call all men in family to pray for the Buddha at *JongLik* and pray for their luck from earth spirit and rice field spirit (*Fi Din* and *Fi Na*) for the first sowing of the year. And Tai Aitons believe in the auspicious day, they have to select the good day “*Wan Di*” to plough the land according to Tai astrology. After sprouts are ready, Tai Aitons would transplant into the rice fields and pray to *Fi Din* or *Fi Na*. All women in the family including girls would take part of this activity. Tai Aiton would perform “*Cham Na*” or transplanting seedlings ritual by praying for Lord Buddha and *Fi Din*, *Fi Nam* for blessing them a good production. In the past (30-40 years ago) *Kwai* or buffalo is used to help Tai Aiton people in sowing and plough, nowadays most of Tai aitons use tractor, power tillers.

After 5-6 months, in harvesting time it becomes all women’s works. *WanDi* or good day for harvesting has to be selected according to Tai astrology book. This ritual is called “*Hon Khao*” and women do all the ritual. After selecting auspicious day, all women in the family or neighbors would come and help each other.

Tai Aitons believe in *Nang Khwan Khao* or goddess of paddy. The ritual would start with praying for *Nang Khwan Khao* but this ritual nowadays is extinct because of most of the harvesting will be done by the workers. After that they would carry grain to granary, and it is done by male. Tai Aitons keep grain in big baskets which is made of bamboo, mud and cow-dung inside the granary. In the past, Tai Aiton husked the rice with wooden mortar but nowadays they also use rice husking machine. And lastly the time for eating new rice be a small ritual of taking new rice is observed with family members, relatives and village members and it would come at the same time as Bihu in Assamese culture in January.

In Tai Yais of BanPangMoo, Maehongson, Thailand, the rice worshiping goes together with all steps of growing rice. Tai Yais start rice cultivation in wet season starting from May-June. Before rice plantation, Tai Yai would pray or *Phi Choa Mung* or *Phi Arak* for blessing them a good cultivation and good products, after that they would worship *Phi Fai* (irrigation spirit) with *KhaoTok* (popped rice) and flower including meats or sweets. The first ritual is called “*HagNa*” or the first-time cultivation. This ritual starts with *Phi Nam* (water spirit) and *PhiDin* (earth spirit) worshipping by making *SongLor* (*made of bamboo*) to keep food inside for *NangKhawKhao*. Tai Yais would plant rice only seven clumps for the first day and they have to select the auspicious day or *WanDi* according to the astrology calendar, then the next day they can continue plant the rest of rice. Tai Yais used buffalo (*Kwai*) in the time of plough and sowing in the past. Nowadays most of Tai Yais use tractor because it is faster than buffalo. In the past, *HongKwanKwai* ritual was there in BanPangmoo. It is the ritual for letting the buffalos from each farm to the forest and worshipping buffalos with a bouquet of flower ties on buffalo’s horn then worship the spirit with rice, banana, a pair of candles, flower two bouquets, two threads, and *NamSomPoy* (it is a holy water with *Som Poyleaves* that Tai Yais believe, it gives a good refreshment and protection from evils). This ritual would do after Sowing seven days to apologize for buffalos. After letting all buffalos go to the forest, Tai Yais believe that *Phi Pa* or *Phi Doi* (mountain or forest spirit) will take care of the buffalos then for a week. Tai people would go and bring them back to the village. Nowadays, this ritual is not found because people use tractors for sowing.

In the harvesting time, Tai Yai women would harvest first seven clumps of rice and that is called “*Khao Panna*” which Tais believe that there is paddy spirit. Tai Yais would pray to *KhaoKwanNa* that “*the more I eat the rice will remain the same*” After the harvesting, “*GunTor PujaKhaiYa Ja Kai*” the family leader would use the big hand fan

blows on the grain, if some grains blew outside, they would collect it and keep it inside the special basket for offering to *MaePhoSop* or *NangKhanKhao* for next year.

Gin Hua Khao Mai or eating new rice ritual would be arranged in December or January, Tai Yais would make “*TangSomTorLuang*” or making a basket of food and fruit and bring it to temple, they always make “*KhaoPuk*” (Tai sweets made of black sesame and sticky rice) from new rice.

Rice for Tai people is not only a staple food but also it reflects Tai food system from production to consumption. As Tai people settle down not too far from the river and select plain area to settle Tai village because Tais concern more about wet rice cultivation which is related to water system, soil fertility and rainfall pattern. The researcher made the wet rice cultivation process as a table for understanding the process and the wet rice cultivation culture among both groups.

Wet-rice cultivation process	Tai Aiton, Assam	Tai Yai, Thailand
1. Location of the village	Tai Aitons village is located nearby NamLung or Dhansiri river	Tai Yai village is located nearby Pai River and Sa-Nga River.
2. Timing	In June is the rainy season in Assam.	In May-June is the rainy season in Maehongson, Thailand.
3. Worshipping	<p>1. <i>Ta Ka</i> or rice seedling ritual, <i>Cham-Na</i> or transplanting TaiAiton would pray for Lord Buddha and then Phi Din Phi Na to protect their seeds.</p> <p>2. <i>Hon Khao</i> Harvesting ritual, <i>NangKhwankhao</i> worshipping</p>	<p>1. <i>HagNa</i> or rice seedling ritual, Tai Yai would pray for Phi ChoaMung and Phi Fhai, Phi Din and Phi Nam to protect rice seedlings and then they would plant <i>KhaoKwanNa</i> 7 clumps on the auspicious day.</p>

	<p>3. <i>Jin Khao Mai</i> – eating new rice in January</p>	<p>2. <i>Hong Kwan Kwai</i> or buffalo worshipping or <i>GunTor Kwai</i>. 3. <i>Hong KwanKhao</i> or <i>GunTor Pu ja Khai</i> <i>Ya Ja Kai</i> 4. <i>Gin Hua Khao Mai</i> - eating new rice in December-January</p>
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Table 7: Wet Rice Cultivation Culture in Tai Aiton and Tai Yai

8.4 Language

During the 1930s-50s, Thai nationalism was rising especially among the Thai elite scholars. They wanted to write a history with the theme of building a nation and the link of linguistics. The work of Chit Phumisak (1981) who studied on etymology of the word Thai, Tai and Siam. After the 1980s the linguistics turn gives many benefits to Tai Studies for the Tai origin explanation and the idea of using Tai word to identify group of people that it is full of the idea of nation-building and state-formation.

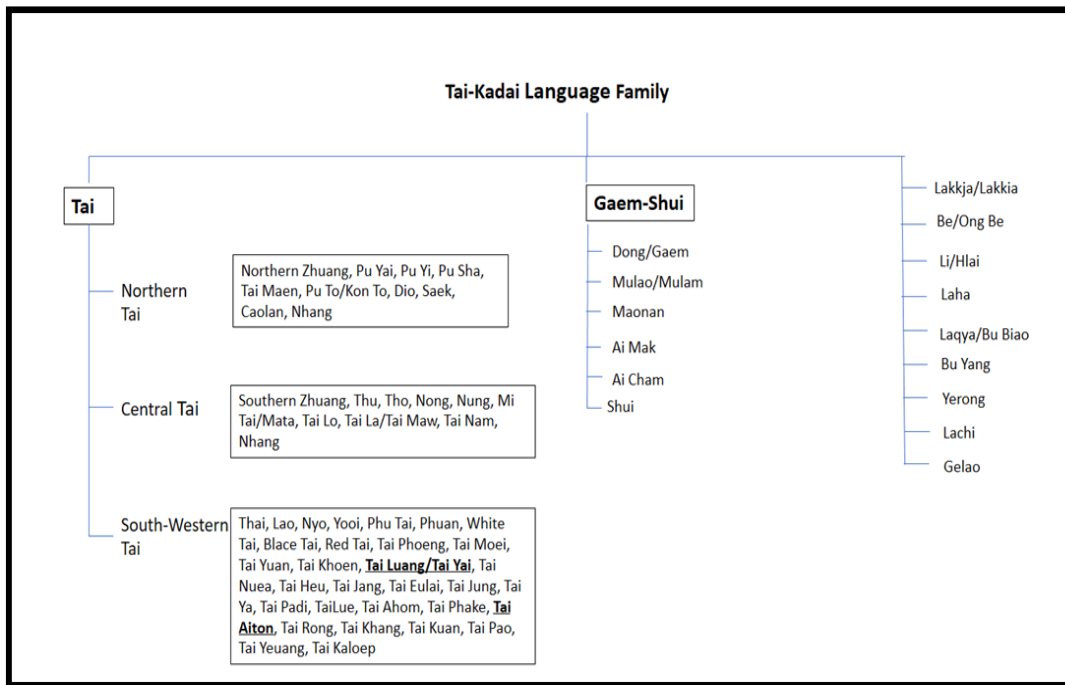


Figure 53: Tai Kadai Language Family

The table explains that In Tai Aitons and Tai Yais language are in the same South-western Tai Kadai language. Tai Aiton community of Banlung Mantai, Tai language school was established during the 1950s while the Buddhist missionaries or *Dhamma Duta* came to stay in the village temple and started the school. In Tai Yai community of Ban Pangmoo, Tai language is used in everyday life. Moreover, the Tai School is established officially by Tai Yai Studies Center in the year of 2000 until the present.

American linguist Paul K. Benedict (1972) also mentioned that Tai language has similarities with Kadai language group especially with the Indonesian Kadai family “the True Indonesian substratum on the Asiatic mainland is represented by four scattered languages in China, Northern Tong King and in the Isle of Hainan which represent a single linguistic stock by Benedict called Kadai. The recognition of Kadai stock which shows numerous points of contacts with Thai, opens the way to a new interpretation of the latter as a distinct member of an archaic Thai, Kadia, Indonesian complex”. Eric Scneidenfaden (1967) supported Benedict hypothesis. According to him in 2000 B.C. or 1500 B.C. the Mon-Khmer occupied the South Yunnan and Tai-Kadia people migrated towards north to Yangtze River valley. They fought with Chinese for about 2000 years, and they finally migrated to south and settled in South East Asia.

8.5 Convergence of Tai culture

The researcher selected *Poi*, Wet-Rice cultivation culture and language to highlight the similarities between Tai Aitons, Assam, India and Tai Yais, Maehongson, Thailand. Both of the Tai groups share many similarities mainly they have faith in Buddhism and having the agricultural life that brought about similarity in belief systems and ceremony. Moreover, Tai language that is similar with each other. Speaking the same Tai language makes the sense of one-ness and sense of belonging to Tai ethnic group. One good example is the word *Ban* means village, is used in both the areas.

Both of Tai groups follow Buddhism and their lives attach to Wet-rice cultivation that bring about the same belief system and their cycle of life goes along with the agricultural life. It reflects through ritual in a year and *Poi* which Tai Aitons and Tai Yais have in common throughout the year.

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