

SECTION IX

FROM THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY

THE TAI BEFORE THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY

A Perspective from Chinese Records

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The term "Tai" is used to refer to a number of ethnic groups who speak a Tai language, share a common culture and probably have a certain genetic linkage among them. The Tai peoples today are widely spread from Hainan Island in China in the east to Assam in northeast India in the west, and from twenty-eight degrees north latitude in the Chinese province of Hunan in the north to the middle of the Malay Peninsula in the south.

As Southeast Asia is generally considered to be divided into two main cultural areas, one influenced by Indian culture and the other by Chinese culture, similarly the Tai can be divided into two groups: one more influenced by Chinese culture, consisting mainly of those groups officially recognized by the Chinese government as the Dong, Shui, Buyi, Maonan, Mulao, Li and Zhuang (Chuang)* in southern China, as well as the small clusters of Tai speakers such as the Tho and Nung in northern Vietnam; and a second, more influenced by Indian culture (or Theravada Buddhist culture), consisting of the Ahom, Shan, Thai, Lao and the Dai in the Chinese province of Yunnan. This paper will focus on the second group.

The purpose of this paper is to sketch aspects of the latter group of the Tai before the thirteenth century in the border areas between upper Southeast Asia and Yunnan, based on the analysis and assessment of Chinese source materials.

THE YUEH: THE ANCESTORS OF THE TAI-SPEAKING PEOPLES

In China, since the Xia (Hsia, circa 2000–1600 B.C.E.) and Shang (circa 1600–1100 B.C.E.) dynasties, many historical documents have been accumulated in which thousands of ethnic groups were recorded. However, dependable data dealing with the Tai emerge only in the Yuan Dynasty in the thirteenth century. Before the Yuan Dynasty, it is merely suggested that there are

some affinities between the present-day Tai and the ancient ethnic groups who shared certain cultural traits with the Tai and inhabited the same region.

The Yueh, although a small portion of them may have been the ancestors of the present-day Vietnamese, are firmly considered by Chinese scholars today to be the ancestors of the present-day Tai. As far back as the Shang and Zhou (Chou, 1100–475 B.C.E.) Dynasties, the term "Yueh" was mentioned in Chinese literature, e.g., the *Yi Zhou Shu* and *Zhu Shu Ji Nian*. The term Yueh, occasionally "Bai Yueh" ("the hundred kings of Yueh"), is a generic name used to refer to numerous ethnic groups sharing cultural characteristics and widely distributed throughout southern China. The "Geographical Record" of the *Han History* (written by Ban Gu, 32–92 C.E.) points out, "From Jiao-zhi [Chiao-chih in northern Vietnam] to Hui-Ji [Hui-chi, present-day Hangzhou in the southern Lower Yangtze], there is a seven or eight thousand li [*li* = half km] distance in which the Bai Yueh are interspersed yet separately named" (*Han Shu Dili Zhi*). There exist various names for the Bai Yueh, i.e., the Dong Yueh, Ming Yueh, Xi-ou Yueh, etc., mentioned in Chinese records before and after the Han Dynasty. It is possible that one of the various names may actually refer to several ethnic groups, and that one group may be referred to by several names.

The ancient Chinese called most of the peripheral non-Chinese peoples in southern China "Man" ("barbarian") or "Yi" ("foreigner"). However, it is significant and remarkable that when the Chinese referred to certain southern ethnic groups by using the term "Bai Yueh," thereby distinguishing them from the Man and Yi, there must have been some particular cultural aspects differentiating these groups from the Man and Yi, who were considered to be more backward by contemporaneous Chinese. According to Chinese records, the cultural characteristics of the Bai Yueh can be summed up thus: 1) they were inhabitants of the valleys and lowlands and had many customs connected with water or rivers; 2) they were cultivators of wet rice; 3) they lived in houses raised on piles above the ground; 4) the men, and sometimes the women, used to tattoo their body; 5) they used bronze drums in rituals or on important occasions; and 6) they spoke a Yueh dialect. Evidently the characteristics of

* The names of people, places, and works are in accordance with the Chinese Pinyin spelling system except for well-known terms which are cited as in conventional practice. Following some terms, an English equivalent or an alternate spelling is offered in brackets.

the Bai Yueh link them with the present-day Tai. Perhaps the most convincing evidence is the linguistic relation between the Yueh and Tai languages. In the *Shuo Yuan* (written by Lu Xiang, 77–6 B.C.E.) and *Yue Jue Shu* (written by Yuan Kan during the Eastern Han Dynasty), the lyrics of a Yueh song and other Yueh vocabulary were recorded with Chinese phonetic symbols. These indicate not only a phonological and semantic but also a syntactic similarity between Yueh and Tai, especially with one of the Tai dialects, the Zhuang language (Jiang Ying-liang 1983, 75–80; Li Gan-fen et al. 1980, 6). A portion of the Zhuang people still call themselves "Bu Yueh" ("Yueh people" in the Zhuang dialect).

In the sixth century B.C.E. the Yu Yueh, a kind of Yueh people living in the Lower Yangtze nearest to the central Chinese region, established two kingdoms, Yueh and Wu Yueh. Both of these kingdoms were involved in wars among the Chinese states during the Spring and Autumn (770–476 B.C.E.) and Warring Kingdoms (475–221 B.C.E.) periods. Simultaneously the Yueh and Wu were also engaged in a long conflict. In 493 B.C.E. Gou Jian, king of the Yueh, was taken prisoner while in battle with the Wu. Later, Gou Jian, once released, led his troops to erase his previous disgrace and destroyed the Kingdom of Wu in 473 B.C.E. In 334 B.C.E., the Yueh Kingdom was engulfed by Chu, another, stronger state. Finally, the Chu Kingdom also could not succeed in escaping the same destiny and was annexed by the Qin (Chin) Kingdom in 223 B.C.E.

After unifying China in 221 B.C.E., Chin Shih-huang-ti, the Emperor of the Qin Dynasty, sent an expedition said to have been composed of five hundred thousand men to the Yueh region and set up the three commanderies of Nan-hai, Kuei-lin, and Hsiang. In 207 B.C.E., as the Han Dynasty began to replace the Qin, Governor Chao To of the Nan-hai commandery, a Han Chinese born in Zhengdin, Hebei province, assumed the title of king of the Nan Yueh Kingdom. In order to consolidate his rule in the Yueh area, Chao To pursued a series of policies urging intermarriage between the Chinese and Yueh people and the dissemination of advanced Chinese skills and technology. In 112 B.C.E. Han Wu-ti, the third emperor of the Han Dynasty, conquered the Nan Yueh Kingdom. Along with the establishment of nine commanderies in the Yueh region, numerous Chinese migrated into the region from northern China. These events mark the beginning of the process of sinicization of the Yueh in southeastern China. Afterwards the name "Yueh" disappeared gradually from Chinese historical records. The descendants of the Yueh were in part completely sinicized and in part were given other names, e.g., the Liao, Li, Tu, Ge, Dong, Zhong, Liang, Zhuang, etc., which appear in Chinese records after the Han Dynasty. This part of the Yueh, distinctly influenced yet not absorbed by Chinese culture, eventually formed what today are the Tai distributed throughout southeast China.

THE DIAN KINGDOM AND THE DIAN YUEH

If it is to be recognized that part of the Yueh peoples had been dispersed over the southwestern area of China since the Qin and

Han Dynasties, then the portion of the Yueh in the central Yunnan plateau received an impact from the north similar to that received by the other portion in the southeastern area of China. The penetration of Zhuang Qiao (a general of the Chu Kingdom) with his troops into the central Yunnan plateau during the period of the Warring Kingdoms and the construction of the "Wu Chi Dao" ("five-foot-wide road") through the stony mountains leading from Sichuan (Szechuan) into Yunnan during the Qin Dynasty initiated the process of Chinese political, military, and economic involvement in the affairs of this part of the Yueh, named "Dian" ("Tien"). This process, however, became more noticeable after the establishment of a commandery in Yunnan during the Han Dynasty.

The earliest description associated with the ethnic groups in the southwestern region of China appears in the *Shi Ji* ("Historical Record") written by the great historian Sima Qian (Ssu-ma Chien, 146–86 B.C.E.). Sima Qian stated:

There are tens of chiefs of the southwestern foreigners; the Ye Lang [tribe] is the greatest one. To the west [of the Ye Lang], there are tens of kings of the Fei Mo [tribe], of which the Dian is the greatest; to the northeast [of the Dian], there are tens of chiefs, of which the Qiong Du [tribe] is the greatest. All of them knot their hair, plough the fields, and live in villages. In addition, from the east side of Tong Shi [present-day Bao Shan in the west of Yunnan], northward to Ye Yi [present-day Da Li, or Tali] there are the people named Shun Kun Ming, all of whom plait their hair, migrate following cattle, have no steady residence, have no chiefs, and can be spread over a distance of thousands of li.

From other Chinese records the Ye Lang is known as one of the Yueh groups, loosely associated with today's Tai speakers in Guizhou province and northwestern Guangxi; the Qiong Du and Shun Kun Ming are known as a part of the Di Qiang groups, who are Tibeto-Burman speakers. As for the Dian, they may have had a close relationship with the Yueh as indicated by the evidence from archaeological excavations unearthed in Yunnan (Yunnan Bowuguang 1956; Yunnan Bowuguang 1959).

The Dian people had inhabited the central Yunnan plateau as early as the neolithic age. Around 330 B.C.E., General Zhuang Qiao invaded Yunnan from the north and established the Kingdom of Dian by taking the area of Lake Dian as the center. As the "Southwestern Foreigners Record" of the *Shi Ji* narrates, "He [Zhuang Qiao] changed his dress to accommodate local customs and further his dominion" (Sima Qian). Besides the people of the Dian Kingdom, some Dian tribes called Lao Jin and Fe Mo settled to the northeast of the Dian Kingdom. From the records of the *Shi Ji* it is known that there were two main ethnic groups populating Yunnan during the Western Han Dynasty. One tribe lived in villages; the men knotted their hair on the top of their head and the women, on the back. The other was nomadic, migrating frequently, and plaited their hair. According to reports on the excavation of the Lijiashan site (dated 550±105 B.C.E.) and the Shizhaishan site (dated 475–206 B.C.E.) in the areas

of Lake Fuxian and Lake Dian in central Yunnan, the basic cultural features of the Dian people were as follows: 1) They exhibited exquisite craftsmanship in bronze working—twenty-five bronze drums were unearthed from the two sites, which indicates the importance of this instrument in their rituals and social life. 2) They lived in pile dwellings which are depicted by bronze models with two stories (the upper level for people and the lower for domestic animals) and thatched roofs. Many ritual scenes are depicted on these bronze models, most of which show the ceremonial killing of cattle and human victims. 3) They were divided into three classes: a) Aristocracy—the men of which did not participate in productive labor, but served as leaders in war, and the women usually took charge of religious rites associated with agriculture, and the supervision of slave labor; b) Freemen—the people who provided the basic component of manpower in war and production; and c) Slaves—the war captives from the Shun Kun Ming, who were pressed into humble and strenuous labor and service as human victims (Yunnan Bowuguang 1975; Yunnan Bowuguang 1956).

In 112 B.C.E., Han Wu-ti conquered Nan Yueh and subdued the Ye Lang. In 109 B.C.E., according to the *Shi Ji*, the Han Court dispatched Ba and Shu troops from Sichuan. After they defeated the Lao Jin and the Fe Mo, the Dian king surrendered to them, i.e., to the Han Court, upon their arrival. Subsequently the Han Court founded the prefecture of Yi Zhou in Yunnan and conferred a gold seal upon the Dian king as a symbol officially authorizing his ruling status and reign within his domain (Sima Qian). Surprisingly, a gold seal with four Chinese characters inscribed "Dian Wang Zhi Yin" ("the seal of the King of Dian") was discovered in the Shizhaishan cemetery, which authenticates these records in the *Shi Ji* as reliable (Wang Ning-sheng, 1980, photo 4).

After the Han Dynasty the name "Dian" also disappeared from Chinese records. The disappearance of the word "Yueh" resulted from this group's being directly impacted upon by the Chinese, whereas the decline of the Dian mainly resulted from the pressures exerted on them by the large Di Qiang groups as they were pushed by the Chinese southward from Sichuan into Dian territory (Liu Xiao-bing 1985, 41–49). Under the continuous Di Qiang influx, perhaps a portion of the Dian were absorbed by the Di Qiang, while the other portion migrated from central Yunnan to southeastern Yunnan, and perhaps some even to northern Laos and Vietnam. In southeastern Yunnan and western Guangxi some archaeological sites dating from after the Han Dynasty depict the direction of migration of this portion of the Dian people by elements of the Dian culture. There probably is a connecting link between the above-mentioned Dian and what are now known as the Tai Ya ("the flower-waisted Dai") inhabiting both banks of the Yuan river (the upper Red river) and that part of the Zhuang in southeastern Yunnan known among themselves as the Bu Dai, Bu Zhuang and Sha.

However, unlike the Dian of central Yunnan and the Yueh of southeastern China, the Dian Yueh, inhabiting the region between western Yunnan and northeastern Burma during the Western Han Dynasty, were not pressured by the Chinese or Di Qiang as were the Yueh and Dian. Perhaps these circumstances

were instrumental factors in permitting the acceptance of Indian culture by the Dian Yueh later on.

During his reign (140–86 B.C.E.), Han Wu-ti sent the envoy Zhang Qian (Chang Chien) to the central Asian states to enhance political and economic ties in order to deter harassment from the Xiong Nu in the north. When Zhang Qian was in Da Xia (Bactria, or present-day Afghanistan), he saw some merchandise made in Shu (part of Sichuan) and imported from Shen Du (the ancient Chinese name for India). Returning from Da Xia to China, he reported to Han Wu-ti what he had seen and suggested the exploration of the overland route connecting Sichuan to India via western Yunnan and northern Burma, which was a shortcut from China to India for trade. Han Wu-ti accepted the suggestion, but when the Chinese envoys reached the banks of the Jin Sha River (the upper Yangtze) they could not continue forward to complete their mission because of obstruction by the Kun Ming, one of the Di Qiang groups. However, the envoys did obtain information about the Dian Yueh. Both monographs, the *Shi Ji* and the "Zhang Qian Biography" of the *Han History* narrate the above event. It is stated that as far back as the last century B.C.E. the region between Tongshi and upper Burma had been peopled by the Dian Yueh, whose state, according to the *Shi Ji*, was also called "the Kingdom of Riding Elephants" probably because of the widespread use of elephants. Based on the *Shi Ji* and the *Han History*, the area inhabited by the Dian Yueh is known to have consisted of the regions of the Chinese Shan and the Shan state of Burma. In other words, the distribution of both the Dian Yueh and the Shan are identical. As to whether the Dian Yueh were the ancestors of the Shan, Chinese records do not directly provide any evidence. The Dian Yueh are hypothesized by Chinese scholars to have been one of the Yueh groups because of the linguistic association of "Dian Yueh" with "Yueh," and the ancestors of the Shan because of their coterminous distribution.

THE SHAN AND AI-LAO

In 69 C.E. the Eastern Han Court founded the prefecture of Yong-chang (Yung-chang) in the western and southwestern area of Yunnan. Afterwards, to the west of the Yong-chang Prefecture, namely, the western area of Dian Yueh during the Western Han, Chinese records mention a so-called "Shan Kingdom," and an ethnic group called "Ai-lao" in the Yong-chang Prefecture, the previous eastern area of the Dian Yueh.

The first reference to the Shan is in the *Later Han History* (written by Fan Yu, 398–446 C.E.) which records that Yong You-tiao, the king of the Shan, sent emissaries with tribute to the Han Court. In another chapter of the same book, the author continues: "In the first year of Yong Ning (120 C.E.), Yong You-tiao of the Shan Kingdom sent emissaries again to the court offering congratulations, presenting musical and magical performances: [the magician] is able to regurgitate water, dismember himself, and change heads between horses and oxen." In addition, the author also mentions that "(In 131 C.E.), the Yie-tiao Kingdom and Shan Kingdom beyond Ri-nan sent ambassadors with

tribute" (Fan Yu). Because Ri-nan is the southernmost part of Jiao-zhi, the present Ha-tinh province of central Vietnam, some Chinese scholars think that the Shan State was contiguous to Ri-nan and the boundaries of the Shan Kingdom extended from Vietnam in the east to Assam in the west. The boundaries, in fact, included the whole northern region of mainland Southeast Asia except for northern Vietnam (Huang Hui-kun et al. 1985, 11). However, it is unlikely that the Shan Kingdom occupied so vast a territory. A differing opinion is that the eastern border of the Shan Kingdom did not even cross the Salween River. It is speculated by some scholars that the reason why the *Later Han History* refers to the Shan in 131 C.E. as being "beyond Ri-nan" is that at that time the ambassadors of the Shan Kingdom came to China by sea through the Malacca Straits rather than overland and debarked in Ri-nan (Liu Xiao-bing 1985, 14).

Some Chinese historians suggest that the Shan, i.e., the Dian Yueh, were even the ancestors of the Ahom, Shan, Thai, Lao and Dai in Yunnan because of the overlapping distribution of the areas in which most of these peoples live today. The basis for this view is that the term "Shan" is another way to pronounce "Siam" or "Syam" in Sanskrit, and that "Shan" originated from the name that the Burmese used to designate the Tai people. The contemporary Jinpo (Kachin) still call the Tai "Lasam" or "Asam," and the Wa, De-ang (of Bonglong), and Bulang of the Mon-Khmer speakers in Yunnan still call the Tai "Siam" (Huang Hui-kun et al. 1985, 9). This view intimates that the Shan of the first century of the present era are the Shan of today and that the name Shan has been used to refer to the Tai by the Tai's neighbors for almost two thousand years (!).

The opposite opinion is that the kingdom of Shan was established by a Tibeto-Burman speaking group and not by the Tai. Some historical books written in the Ming Dynasty are cited as evidence to support this opinion. One of these books states:

Burma, namely the land of the ancient Zhu Bo, [was] called the Shan Kingdom during the Han Dynasty. In the middle of the Yong-yuan period of He-di [of the Eastern Han], the king [of Burma] presented new music and a magician, [who] was able to spit fire, dismember himself, and change heads between horses and oxen. [Burma was] called the Piao [Pyu] Kingdom during the Tang Dynasty, and also paid tribute in the Zhen-yuan period [of the Tang Dynasty]. [Burma was] called the Burma Kingdom during the Song Dynasty. Shi-zhu of the Yuan [Kublai Khan] conquered it, [the king] was granted as the king of the Burma Kingdom in the middle of the Da-de period [of the Yuan Dynasty]. (Shen De-fu 1576-1642, vol. 4)

Proof quoted from another book shows that from the time of Yong You-tiao (the king of Shan in the Han), Yong Qiang (the king of Piao in the Tang), and Yong Han (the king of Burma in the Ming) to that of Yong Ji-ya (the king of Burma in the Qing), the word "Yong" continued to be used as a surname for as long as 1700 years (Tu Shu-lian 1736-1796). This seems to suggest an affinity between these names.

In several Chinese historical works recording the Shan, the ethnic group Ai-lao, who mainly inhabited the west and south-west of Yunnan, are also mentioned. The *Hua Yan Guo Zhi* (written by Chang Ju in the 350s of the present era) states that the Ai-lao people bored their noses, tattooed their skin, cultivated various crops, raised silkworms, and developed superb weaving skills. In 69 C.E. Liu Mao, an Ai-lao prince, submitted to the Chinese Emperor Liu Zhuang (Ming-di) of the Eastern Han, seventy-seven minor Ai-lao chiefs and 51,890 families, comprising 553,711 persons. This event resulted in the foundation of the Yong-chang Prefecture, which is recorded in the *Later Han History*. The population statistics for the Ai-lao are probably too precise to be reliable, but at least from these indications the Ai-lao were not a small group.

There is a polemic among Chinese scholars regarding what present-day people the Ai-lao can be associated with. The first viewpoint quotes the words "Ai-lao, namely Pu people in Yong-chang" from the *Bai Pu Kao* (written by Dong Nan in the Ming Dynasty) as evidence, and further deduces that the Ai-lao were equivalent to the "Pu-zi Man" in the *Man Shu* (or *Yunnan Zhi*, written by Fan Chuo in the 820s of the present era) and "Pu Man" in the historical books in the period of the Ming and Qing Dynasties. Their descendants are believed to be the Wa, Bulang, and De-ang groups spread along the border areas between Yunnan and Burma who speak a Mon-Khmer language (Fan Guo-yu 1958, 27-28). The problem with this view is that no evidence demonstrates that the Pu-zi Man were equivalent to the Pu Man. The second opinion asserts that the Ai-lao were Tibeto-Burman speakers. The weakness of this opinion is that its proof originates only from the idea that the Ai-lao had the same demographic distribution as the Kun Ming (a Tibeto-Burman speaking group in the Western Han Dynasty) (Huang Hui-kun et al. 1985, 13-19). What is ignored, however, is the fact that the Ai-lao basically were operating in the southwestern region of the Yong-chang Prefecture connected with northern Burma, even though in some Chinese records some Ai-lao people were mentioned in northern Yunnan. The third opinion asserts that the Ai-lao were the descendants of the Dian Yueh, because the *Teng Yue Zhou Zhi* (written by Tu Shu-lian between 1736 C.E. and 1796) points out "Teng Yueh was called the Dian Yueh by Zhang Qian in the course of the Western Han, recorded as the Ai-lao by Fan Yu's work [the *Later Han History*] in the course of the Eastern Han." In addition, some similarity in customs and vocabulary between the Ai-lao and the Yueh were listed as evidence; thus, as the Yueh were the ancestors of the Tai, so the Ai-lao were too (Liu Xiao-bing 1985, 54-63).

It is interesting to note that the Ai-lao are regarded by some as the ancestors of the Tai and are so cited by some Western scholars in their works (Wood 1959 (1926), 32; Hall 1968, 169). But the reason for Western scholars purporting the Ai-lao to have been the ancestors of the Tai is different from that of Chinese scholars. There are two reasons forming the basis of this assertion by Western scholars. One is that the "Ai" in "Ai-lao" is a function word, and the "lao" in the "Ai-lao" signifies "Lao." Therefore, "Ai-lao" is equivalent to "Lao." However, it is clear in the *Later Han History* that the name "Ai-lao" originally was not

the name of an ethnic group but the name of a person who was a chief of what is later referred to as the "Ai-lao." When Ai-lao became powerful, his name was extended to the group. Usually a personal name can be assumed as a name for a group, but a group's name is never assumed as a personal name. The other reason is that Nan-chao was supposedly set up by the Tai. The "Southern Barbarians Record" of the *New Tang History* (written by Ouyang Xiu, Song Qi, and others in 1060 C.E.) states that the "Nan-chao are the descendants of the Ai-lao, a kind of the Wu Man [black barbarians]." Western scholars merely quote the initial section of the passage to evince that the Ai-lao were the ancestors of the Tai. The Chinese, however, disregard the initial section. A common practice among ancient ethnic groups often was to pretend to assert to be descendants of a great person or people in order to show that they were of outstanding origin. Even though this initial section may be true, it can only be concluded that the Ai-lao, together with the Nan-chao were "a kind of the Wu Man." The Wu Man are undoubtedly identified with the modern-day Tibeto-Burman language speaking Yi (or Lolo). It is quite clear from a variety of evidence drawn from archaeological excavations, inscriptions, historical documents, etc., that the kingdoms of Nan-chao and Da Li were established by the Yi and Bai rather than by the Tai. It is no longer debated in China today that there was any relationship between Nan-chao and Ai-lao.*

THE TAI DURING THE PERIOD OF NAN-CHAO AND DA LI

In 738 C.E., Pi-lo-ge, the chief of the Wu Man, united six Wu Man tribes around the region of the Er-hai (Erh Lake) in central western Yunnan and founded the Nan-chao Kingdom. When Nan-chao reached the height of its power and splendor, its sphere of influence included Yunnan, western Guizhou, southern Sichuan, and parts of upper mainland Southeast Asia. Thus all of the regions populated by the Dian, Dian Yueh, Shan, and Ai-lao were controlled by Nan-chao.

In the Nan-chao period the name related to the Tai underwent a remarkable change in Chinese records. The first characteristic of this change is that many names referring to the Tai emerged in Chinese historical books. The *Man Shu*, for instance, mentions at least a dozen different names related to the Tai. The other characteristic is that the name given to the Tai by the Chinese clearly stems from certain customs of the ancient Tai associated with their black teeth, gold teeth, silver teeth, tattooed legs, tattooed faces, etc., or from certain names of the places inhabited by the Tai, such as Mang Chang, Mang Sheng-kong, Mang Zha, Mang Shi, etc. The Tai people still refer to "village" as "mang." Besides these changes, the description of the distribution of the Tai is also much more specific. According

to the *Man Shu*, the Tai groups inhabited mainly the regions of the three prefectures of Zheng-xi, Yong-chang, and Kai-nan. These regions included the valleys of the upper Irrawaddy, Salween, Mekong, and Red Rivers. Also the Nu-Wang Kingdom ("where a woman rules") which is assumed to have been associated with the "Ba Bai Xi Fu Kingdom" (the Chinese name for Lān Nā) is mentioned in the *Man Shu* to have been located somewhere in northern Thailand.

Probably what are now the branches of the Tai in these areas had formed in the course of the Nan-chao reign (eighth to tenth centuries). In the upper Irrawaddy and Salween valleys the "Gold Teeth" can be assumed to have been predecessors of the Shan; in the upper Mekong valley, the "Mang Man" can be similarly considered to have been the predecessors of what are now the Tai Lue; and in the upper Red River, the "Bai-yi" or "Shen Liao" can be regarded as predecessors of the Tai Ya of the Yuan River (the upper reaches of the Red River in Yunnan), and the Black Tai, White Tai and Red Tai in Laos and northern Vietnam.

Characterized by numerous ethnic names, specific territory, political, military, and social activities, many Tai groups were accordingly mentioned in Chinese records of this period, reflecting the advanced historical role established by the Tai in southwestern China and northern Southeast Asia. Two conditions promoted the development of the Tai at that time:

The enlargement of the Tai chiefs' power

Nan-chao achieved its administration of the Tai through the chiefs of the Tai groups. The Tai groups bore the burden of military service for Nan-chao with their own weapons and rations. "When there is fighting or war, they summon them (to enlist)" (Luce 1961, 43). During the 860s of the present era, Nan-chao attacked Jiao-zhi in An-nan several times: Tai troops in the valley of the Red River were called up every time, and were designated the "Bai-yi Dare-to-die Army" (Ouyang Xiu et al. 1975). Along with the frequent wars of the Nan-chao period, the power of the Tai chiefs rose gradually. In the "Nan-chao-de-hua Inscription" erected in 766 C.E., one of the rewarded Nan-chao generals is referred to as "Zhao Long Xi Li" (Chao Lung Hsi Li) (Xian Da 1962, 328). There also is the same title for an official position in the Sipsong Banna Kingdom. Due to the practice of using the title of the official position as the person's name in Sipsong Banna, the Nan-chao general, Zhao Long Xi Li, may have been the chief of the Mang Man groups.

The decline of Nan-chao after the late ninth century

The internal scramble for power and profit became more acute among the ruling class of Nan-chao after the late ninth century. In 902 C.E. a Qing Ping Guan (minister of Nan-chao) named Zheng Mai-si usurped the power of Nan-chao and founded the kingdom of "Da Chang-he," which resulted in the destruction of Nan-chao. Not long thereafter, "Da Chang-he" was replaced by three other kingdoms—"Da Tian-xing" (928–929 C.E.), "Da Yi-ning" (929–936 C.E.), and "Da Li" (957–1254 C.E.). Duan Si-ping, one of the heads of the Bai Man (white barbarians), relying on

* Charles Backus, *inter alia*, put to rest speculation that the Nan-chao kingdom was Tai in his *The Nan-chao Kingdom and T'ang China's Southwestern Frontier* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) — Ed.

the support of other heads of the Bai Man, established the Da Li Kingdom. Therefore the Da Li Kingdom had actually been under the control of the feudal separationist rule since its inception. During the eleventh century the king of the Da Li Kingdom was killed, or forced to resign sovereign authority due to separationist conflicts. The power of the Da Li Kingdom never measured up to the position of ascendancy reached by Nan-chao.

The development of the Tai is chiefly manifested in a northward territorial expansion. From the "Geographical Record" of the *Yuan History* (written by Li Shang-chang, Song Lian, Wang Wei and others between 1369–1370), it can be noted that in western Yunnan, King Yi-mou-xun (I-mou-hsun) of Nan-chao once conquered the Tai groups of the Gold Teeth, Black Teeth, and others in the present-day Shan area in 794 C.E. and forced these Tai groups to migrate to the interior of Yunnan. But by the Da Li period, the Tai reoccupied the region and became the dominant people. In southwestern Yunnan, the prefecture of Kai-nan (or Yin-sheng Fu in present-day southern Yunnan, centered in Jing Dong) was formerly inhabited by Hani (Akha) and Bulang, but was seized by the Tai groups of the Gold Teeth and Bai-yi in the late ninth century. Nan-chao was forced to relocate its Kai-nan administration from Jing Dong to Wei-chu (present-day Chuxiong in central Yunnan). In southern and

southeastern Yunnan the part of the Tai group of Bai-yi formerly inhabiting the valley of the Middle Red River marched along the valley northwards into the Upper Red River Valley, combined with the indigenous Bai-yi and became the dominant group. Some Bai-yi continued on into central Yunnan and left their traces in the annals of local history.

EPILOGUE

In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, very few Chinese historians paid much attention to the Tai. The Tai groups seem to have been inwardly preparing for the emergence of their many states in the next century. Indeed, it was opportune for the Tai when the Da Li Kingdom, in the north, lacked the energy to attend to external affairs; because of internal chaos, Pagan, in the west, had not extended its reach to upper Burma, and Angkor, to the south, got bogged down in war with Champa.

By the thirteenth century, a relatively clear line of historical progress of the Tai began to form in Chinese records and in many local chronicles written in the Tai language. The history of the Tai entered into a vigorous era, which David Wyatt (1984) called "a Tai century."

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