Late for Buddha: The Construction of Dara’ang (Silver Palaung) Religious and Ethnic Identity

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines how Theravāda Buddhism affects the construction of cultural identity amongst the Dara’ang, a highland ethnic minority group who practice a form of Buddhism associated with the old Tai Yuan kingdom of Lan Na. This particular form of Buddhism has waned in northern Thailand in response to the extension of Siamese or Central Thai hegemony, yet movements led by charismatic khruba monks attempt to revitalize these practices amongst the northern population, including the Dara’ang. This study analyzes how Dara’ang men and women draw upon their religious practices and beliefs, as well as the religious discourse of khruba monks, to construct a distinct Dara’ang identity, one that emphasizes a cultural affinity with the Tai people, while simultaneously resisting cultural assimilation and challenging the dominant representation of the group as an alien other within ‘Thai’-land.

Key words: Buddhism, Southeast Asia, Thailand, Dara’ang, Palaung
I dedicate this thesis to Jessica, for her love and support.
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GLOSSARY

Agieu: The Pale term for merit (see merit).

Baht: The Thai currency. At the time of the study, 28 baht was equal to 1 $CAN.

Bun: The Thai term for merit.

Da Bu Meung: The spirit specialist of the Dara’ang.

Dajân: The lay Buddhist specialist of the Dara’ang.

Gong mu: Pale for stupa (see stūpa).

Hmāp: Pale for de-merit (see de-merit).

Jao Thi: Local spirit lords. Most Dara’ang houses have a small jao thi house nearby their house that acts as a spirit guardian for the household. Jao thi are also propitiated in farmers fields.

Karnam: A Pale term denoting immaterial spirits who roam freely or inhabit natural objects such as rocks, rivers, and trees.

Karphrao: A Pale term for a personal spirit or soul possessed by human beings.

Khon Muang: See Tai Yuan.

Khruba: A title given to highly respected monks. A separate category of khruba, who are also ton bun (see ton bun), are renowned for their supernatural powers.

Kuti: Monastic residence.

Lan Na: Tai Yuan kingdom which dominated the region of northern Thailand and the surrounding region between the 13th and 16th century.

Merit/De-merit: Merit denotes an immaterial substance which is acquired through good deeds and contact with holy persons who serve as fields of merit. It helps determine the status of one’s rebirth. Large amounts of merit result in a favorable rebirth (ex. a wealthy man or god). De-merit is the opposite of merit; large stores of de-merit result in an unfavorable rebirth (a dog or a place in hell).

Miiang: Refers broadly to a Tai town, city, or country; an area over which a government has control.
**Pale:** Pale represents one of the three main branches of Palaungic languages. It is the language spoken by the Dara’ang of Thailand.

**Pali:** An ancient Prakrit language, best known as the language of Theravāda Buddhist scriptures, as collected in the Pāi Canon or Tipitaka.

**Rai:** 16000 square metres.

**Sala:** Open air pavilion.

**Sangha:** The organization of Buddhists. In Thailand, there exists a national Sangha centred within Bangkok.

**Stūpa:** A Buddhist reliquary. In Thailand, stūpa are commonly referred to as *chedi*. In Pale, they are known as *gong mu*.

**Tai Yuan:** The term Tai Yuan refers to the Tai of northern Thailand. They are also commonly known as Northern Thai or Khon Muang.

**Theravāda Buddhism:** Theravāda Buddhism, also known as the Southern School, represents the southern dispersion of Buddhism through Sri Lankha and into Southeast Asia. It is the predominant form of Buddhism found in Thailand, Burma, Laos, and Cambodia.

**Ton Bun:** Literally “person of merit,” ton bun are typically renowned for their supernatural power acquired through the large stores of merit or bun they possess.

**Tsao Meung:** Literally “lord of the area.” In Dara’ang villages, the tsao meung is the local spirit lord of the area.

**Wihan:** Large halls that house Buddha images and serve as the place where the laity can come to pray.

**Yong:** Pale for Buddhist temple.
"True 'Hill People' are never Buddhists” (p. 52), writes Edmund Leach in a 1960 paper on the categorization of upland and lowland peoples in Burma. This distinction was similarly employed by anthropologists working within Thailand to distinguish the cultural forms of lowland dwelling Tai from the Mon-Khmer/Tibeto-Burman speaking ethnic groups who reside in the mountainous northern and eastern areas of the kingdom. A division drawn through ecological distinctions, researchers have long focussed on the different modes of agricultural production practiced within each category, with irrigated rice farming in the lowlands, and swidden or shifting agriculture in highlands. While the particular mode of production found in each region is significant, Leach and others also noted ideological differences that distinguished highland people from their lowland neighbours. The highlands were seen as the domain of spirit worship or “animism,” with “some form of ancestor worship,” while Theravāda Buddhism, the religion of civilization, remained in the lowland valleys, emanating from the state centres of the Tai and the Burmans (Kirsch 1973: 9; Leach 1960: 52; Woodward and Russell 1989: 2).

While there is some basis for classifying societies in this way, the ethnographic representation of Buddhism as a lowland religion conceals the fact that this dichotomy arises out of indigenous categories of representation, and reflects local ideas regarding

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1. The term Tai refers to various groups who speak a Tai language (Tai Dam, Tai Mao, Tai Yuan, etc...). The term Thai refers to nationals of Thailand.
2. Theravāda Buddhism, also known as the Southern School, represents the southern dispersion of Buddhism through Sri Lanka and into Southeast Asia. It is the predominant form of Buddhism found in Thailand, Burma, Laos, and Cambodia.
the distinction between upland non-Tai peoples from the lowland Tai population (Moerman 1968: 154). As Kunstadner (1969) points out, the actual presence of Buddhism in the uplands and “animism” in the lowlands has little impact on this indigenous perception.

Lowland people are not inclined to regard hill people as Buddhists in spite of the fact that hill people's religious behaviour contains some elements also found among the Buddhist valley dwellers, any more than the lowlanders will admit that they, like the hill people, may be animists in that they serve a wide variety of non-Buddhist spirits (p.77)

Rather than being the objective categories of social science, these classifications represent the subjective categories of groups being classified by anthropologists and other researchers. Given the interests involved and the very unequal power relations at work, anthropology requires a more reflective stance towards the process of classification itself if we are to understand how Buddhism functions in terms of mediating upland/lowland ethnic relations and ethnic identity in mainland Southeast Asia.

Savagery and Civility in Northern Thailand

In Thailand, Buddhism is not a neutral description of a person’s religious stance; it signifies civility and national belonging. This association between Buddhism and civility has deep roots within Tai society. In order to understand the development of Buddhism as a symbolic system concerned with ethnic differentiation, it is useful to examine the position of Buddhism in the old Tai Yuan kingdom of Lan Na (1292-1774

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3. As Tannenbaum (1995) writes, “When lowlanders state they are Buddhist they are making an appeal to this civilizational aspect along with any religious claims. It identifies them as civilized along with members of other world religions and separates them from uplanders, 'hill tribes,' who have no religion” (p. 10).
CE), the political entity which once dominated the area that today includes northern Thailand, and where the majority of non-Tai peoples (including the Dara’ang) who are commonly described as “hill tribes” continue to live today.

The Tai kingdom of Lan Na, or “One Million Rice Fields,” dominated the region of northern Thailand and the surrounding region between the 13th and 16th century. Lan Na was less a centralized polity than a loose federation of semi-independent city-states united through oaths of allegiance and familial ties. Chiang Mai city was the centre of this rapidly expanding network, and it was from this city that the cultural influence of the Tai Yuan people radiated. As Lan Na reached its golden age (1400 to 1525 CE), its culture and political influence extended over the area of northern Thailand, northwestern Lao, Shan State of Burma, and the Dai areas of Yunnan, China.

During the time of Lan Na, Buddhism served as a cultural marker distinguishing Tai people from other non-Tai groups residing in the area. To be Tai meant living within the miiang, speaking Tai, and being nominally Buddhist. Those groups residing outside the miiang were referred to by the Tai as kha or sa, terms that could also mean “slave” or “servant,” although the precise origins of these labels is not known.

Within the Buddhist literature of Lan Na from the 15th century onward, kha were typically represented as uncivilized, animalistic, and even cannibalistic, but could, through the power of Buddhism, be civilized or made Tai (Rhum 1987: 99; Wijeyewardene 1986: 85-86). An example of this process can be seen in the case the Lua’ or Lawa, a Mon-Khmer speaking population who the Tai of Lan Na considered to

4. The word miiang refers to both the traditional Tai city-state and Thailand as a country. It may also be used to refer to more urban areas by rural dwelling peoples.
5. Kha includes Mon-Khmer speaking peoples, such as the Khamu, and Tibeto-Burman speaking peoples such as the Khachin. Tai raiding parties would frequently capture kha peoples as slaves.
be the autochthonous population of the region. On the mythological level, past lords of Chiang Mai made annual ritual sacrifices to Pu Sae Ña Sae, two powerful Lua’ spirits who reside in the western foothills of Chiang Mai city. These spirits were considered “cannibal demons” who, in the course of the ritual, were civilized through their conversion to Buddhism (Tanabe 2000: 297). Tanabe (2000) suggests that Tai Buddhist discourses may even have engendered the ethnic category of Lua’ itself:

It is not unreasonable to suggest that Lua’ as an autochthonous category came into being during the conquest of indigenous people by the Tai and was consolidated by Buddhist missionary discourse that regards non-Buddhist aborigines as living in a state of nature close to animality, but as capable of being civilized through Buddhist moral precepts and practices (p. 297).

Mangrai (1981: 223) similarly notes that the term Lua’ or Lawa (whose longer form is Damilawa) may derive from the Sanskrit term Damila, the same root from which the Sinhalese term Tamil derives. Evidence for this can be found in many of the Chiang Mai chronicles where the term Tamilla is used instead of Lua’ or Lawa when referring to this group. Other texts employ the word Milangka in reference to the Lua’, a term derived from Milakkha, the Pali equivalent of the Sanskrit term Mleccha or “savages” (Jonsson 2005: 37). In this relationship, the category Lua’ helped define what the miiang was not by identifying the Lua’ with the forest/nature and the forces of disorder. In opposition to these chaotic forces was the miiang, whose close connection with the civilizing powers of Buddhism could incorporate or repel the barbarism that lay along the periphery of its domain (Jonsson 2005: 20).

The process of incorporating new members into Tai society is commonly referred to as Tai-ization (Evans 2000), though Turton (2000: 11) suggests that given the close association between the miiang as a politico-social entity and Tai identity that the process
of Tai-ization might be better described as *miang-ization*, a term that echoes the Latin root *civis* of civilization. For Condominas, the process of Tai-ization was largely the result of a military expansion of Tai speaking peoples into Southeast Asia. As the Tai conquered new areas the subjected population, forced into a situation of servitude, would mimic the culture of their masters in the hope of reaching a better status, a process that Condominas argues was encouraged by the Tai themselves (Condominas 1990: 71). Leach largely rejected the idea of a military expansion of Tai people into the uplands of Burma, favouring instead a slow process of gradual migration and assimilation (Leach 1964: 39). The two positions are not mutually exclusive, and Tai expansion may have included elements of both, with local populations becoming incorporated into the Tai social body through a process of ethnic assimilation.

To the potentiality of becoming civilized (i.e. Tai) can be added another mythico-ritual role played by *kha* people through their role as indigenous people. This role framed the indigenous population, the Lua’ in particular, as having close connections with the spirits of the land. This association helped legitimize the power of the ruler, who ritually expressed his or her domination of the region using Lua’ representatives in ritual contexts. The *Tamnan Phünmìiang Chiang Mai* (Chiang Mai Chronicle), for example, tells how King Kawila (1781-1813 CE), the man responsible for restoring the Lan Na kingdom after centuries of Burmese suzerainty, entered Chiang Mai city through the Chang Phüak gate after “making a Lua’ carrying a basket on his back and leading a dog to enter first” (quoted in Tanabe 2000: 298). Another example comes from the Tai Khùn kingdom of Kengtung (Chiang Tung or Jengtung), where the state chronicle tells us that a mock expulsion of the original Wa inhabitants was performed at the coronation ceremony
of new kings up until 1897 CE:

When the golden palace had been built [at Jengkau], the Lvas [Lua'] living in Bânging and Bânhani were brought down [from their hills] to sit and eat their food on the gem-studded throne in the palace. While they were eating, the Lvas were driven out and the braya [king] took their place (Mangrai 1981: 230).

As the original inhabitants of the land, the Mon-Khmer speaking Wa were asked to play a legitimating role within palace rites, a role they also performed in other nearby Tai kingdoms (cf. Archaimbault 1964: 65-66). Their autochthonous status connected them to the land, particularly the spirits of the land who often bear names indicative of their Mon-Khmer origins.

**Constructing “Chao Khao”**

As Siam incorporated the kingdom of Lan Na into the emerging geo-body of Siam during the late 19th and early 20th century, the ritual relationships between the Tai Yuan ruling class and the kha dissolved. Old links between the lowland Tai and highlanders were severed and there was little official contact between uplanders and Thai officials between 1910 and the 1950s (Renard 2000: 70; Jonsson 1996: 180). In the lowlands, the newly constituted state of Siam was constructed along ethno-national lines. Borrowing ideas from Europe, King Vajiravudh (r. 1910-1925 CE) believed that within a given space (the area occupied by the nation) people should be culturally homogenous (Laungaramsri 2003b: 161). Vajiravudh employed the term “chat Thai” as a Thai term for “race” and “nation,” “chat” coming from the Sanskrit word *jati* meaning birth or caste

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6. Siam was renamed Thailand in 1939, leading to a shift in ethnonym from Siamese to Thai for English speakers.
Barme 1993: 15-18). Authentic Thais were those who were loyal to the Thai Race/Nation, Religion (*satsana*, generally understood to be Buddhism), and the King.\(^7\) The Tai-*Kha* dichotomy was transformed into the Thai-Alien spilt as the old ritual relations were exorcised from the royal courts, and the state came to be conceived as a geographical area containing a culturally homogenous nation (Renard 2000: 78-79).

While the position of non-Tai highlanders within the Tai social configuration has changed, highlanders continue to be represented as un-civilized, primitive, and alien (Laungaramsri 2003a: 38-32, 2003b: 163-166). Today, the term *kha* has receded from use and has been replaced by the term *chao khao* or "hill tribe," a category which similarly displaced the term *chao pa* or "forest people" which was in use during the nineteenth century.\(^8\) The term "hill tribe" was first employed officially in 1959 with the creation of the Central Hill Tribe Committee, and shortly thereafter within the context of the Tribal Research Center (Laungaramsri 2003a: 29). As the name suggests, the categorization is ethno-spatial, dividing people largely along a vertical axis (Vandergeest 2003:21). "Hill tribes" were considered to be those groups who lived at altitudes above 400 meters and

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7. Hayashi (2003) notes that, "Before it acquired its current general definition of 'religion,' the word *satsana* in the Thai language meant 'Buddhism inherent within the state' (*satsana prachom chat*). It was confirmed and perpetuated as the political and moral image producing leaders with political authority" (p. 279).

8. While the term *chao khao* literally translates as "mountain people" I use the term "hill tribe" as this term is the common English translation of this particular term. Because of its negative connotations, government offices have been attempting to purge the nomenclature *chao khao* from their operating procedures (Kwanchewang 2006: 381). Nevertheless, the distinction still remains. In 2008 new ID cards for all highland peoples were introduced into Chiang Dao. The new cards were light blue for those with citizenship and pink for those without. For those individuals with citizenship their ID cards are identical to everyone else's, regardless of ethnicity. For those individuals with pink, non-citizenship cards, important changes have taken place such as the removal of the designation "*chao khao*" from the cards as well as any mention of a person's "*pao*" ("tribe"). Instead, highland people have cards with the phrase "*buk khon peun thi sung*" printed on them, which translates as "highland dwelling person." However, those Dara'ang men and women who registered initially as "Tai Yai" (because Thailand lacked the ethnic category of Palaung or Dara'ang when they first crossed the border) found the words "*mai chai chao khao*" ("not a hill tribe") printed after the words "*buk khon peun thi sung*." It thus appears that "*chao khao*"/"hill tribes" remains a legible identity for government, although identification has shifted from positive attribution to an identification marked negatively through conspicuous absence.
practised swidden agriculture, while lowlanders lived in the valleys and flood-plains and practised irrigated wet rice farming (Kunstadter and Chapman 1978: 8). Nine ethnic groups were eventually classified as “hill tribes”: Lua’ (Lawa), Htin, Khamu, Hmong, Yao, Akha, Lahu, Lisu, and Karen (Bhrukasri 1989: 6), although other groups arriving later, such as the Padaung and Dara’ang, were similarly labelled by officials and others living within the area as “hill tribe” people.9

The category of “hill tribe” emerged as people living in the highland areas were being framed as a “problem” within the larger context of the Thai nation-state. The particular perception of the the “hill tribe problem” can be seen in the mission statement for development projects run by the Thai government in the year the term “hill tribe” was introduced, as set down by the former Director-General of the Department of Public Welfare:

1. To prevent the destruction of the forest and sources of natural streams by encouraging stabilized agriculture to replace the destructive shifting cultivation practiced by hill tribes.

2. To end poppy growing, by promoting other means of livelihood.

3. To develop economic and social conditions of hill tribes so that they may contribute to national development by promoting community development among the hill tribes grouped in settlements.

4. To induce the hill tribes to accept the important role of helping to maintain the security of the national frontiers by instilling in them a sense of belonging and national loyalty (quoted in Tapp 2005: 4).

These development goals are primarily oriented toward non-“hill tribe” lowlanders (i.e. Tai groups) in terms of their ultimate objectives of forestry protection, opium eradication, national development, and security. Highland people, economically disadvantaged and

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9. The most recent official Tribal Population Survey found the total “hill tribe” population of Thailand to be 914,755 (in 2002) or 1.4% of the total population of Thailand (Toyota 2005: 110; FAO 2002).
isolated from the state, were seen as soft targets for communist groups operating along the border regions, and their agricultural practices were considered destructive to the forests. The fact that many of these people were not ethnically Tai further placed them in a suspect category.

In response to these fears of the alien within, the government in Bangkok launched a number of programs to integrate and assimilate highland people into the nation-state, a mission that began in the 1960s and continues up to this day. As in early Tai history, Buddhism was to play an important role in the government's attempt to assimilate the upland groups into Thai society. In 1965 the government launched its thammajarik program, a state project whose goal was to promote the integration of “hill tribes” into the nation-state by sending missionary monks into the highlands to convert “hill tribe” people to Buddhism (see chapter 5). The project remains in effect today, as does the notion that “hill tribe” people pose a threat to the Thai nation-state, although the particular danger has shifted from communist insurgency and opium production to an emphasis on forest destruction that endangers the nation's watershed and, to a lesser degree, the trafficking of methamphetamine (Laungaramsri 2003b: 165-67).

Religion High and Low

Since Theravāda Buddhism is pre-dominantly found in the lowland areas, anthropological studies of Buddhism have largely focussed on Buddhist practices and beliefs within the context of Tai, Burman, or Khmer society. Many early studies concentrated on the relationship between Buddhism and spirit propitiation. Buddhism was variously seen as a “thin veneer” over a system dominated by “magico-animistic”
beliefs (Le May 1926; Obeyesekere 1963; Terwiel 1976, 1994), a system of complementarities wherein Buddhism performed one function and spirit worship another (Ames 1964; Kirsch 1977; Tambiah 1970), or two antagonistic systems, where Buddhism and spirit propitiation were conceptualized for the most part as separate, and sometimes conflicting, systems (Spiro 1967, 1982). The focus was thus on drawing distinctions between Buddhist and non-Buddhist elements within a religious system.

This early approach to Southeast Asian religions not only shaped studies of Buddhism in lowland societies but also influenced the way anthropologists conceptualized religion among the non-Buddhist highland ethnic groups. While many anthropologists followed the practice of examining religion within its local context, they borrowed from the lowland Tai and Burman society the idea that there was something different in general about the “animism” practised in the highlands that distinguished those traditions from Buddhism in the lowlands. “Animism” as a category of religious life is intimately tied with non-Buddhist practices and non-Tai people. With the emergence of the category “hill tribe” in the 1950s, “animism” formed the category (albeit a negative one, as its contents were primarily described according to what it was not) of “hill tribe religion.”

In actuality, religion in the highlands is quite heterogeneous in terms of indigenous religious traditions, and today many villages subscribe to either Christianity or Buddhism (c.f. Kammerer and Tannenbaum eds. 1996; Russell eds. 1989; Turton, ed. 2000). The spread of Christianity amongst upland ethnic minority populations in Thailand has been particularly pronounced, with between one third and one half of the population identifying as Christian (compared to one percent of the total population of
Thailand) (Keyes 1993: 268). This conversion to Christianity has frequently been cited as a means through which a distinct upland identity can be maintained vis-à-vis the predominantly Buddhist lowland Tai and Burmans (Gravers 2001: 22; Keyes 1993: 270; Platz 2003: 48). Kammerer (1990), for example, writes that, “conversion to Christianity by Southeast Asian mountain minorities is simultaneously a claim to difference from and a claim to equality with valley-dwelling Buddhists” (p. 285), while Tapp argues that “Christianity offers its minority converts an ideology which transcends the primary alternatives of assimilation to a Thai identity” (Tapp 2005: 65).

It is easy to see how Christianity, with its radically different soteriological goals and authority orientations, can contribute towards the production of differentiating discourses within the context of upland-lowland relations. For upland people it may serve as a claim to equality with lowland Buddhists, but for lowland Buddhists Christianity is typically perceived as a foreign religion and, in the case of Burma, one which is connected with the ex-colonial powers, a legacy which further differentiates highland ethnic groups in terms of where their political loyalty was and is thought to reside (Graver 1999: 22; Keyes 1993: 272).

While less strong than Christianity, Buddhism (both Theravāda and Mahayana forms) has had a significant influence on the religious culture of upland ethnic groups. Its impact can even be observed amongst groups who do not identify themselves as Buddhist. Walker (1984, 1985, 1992), for example, describes how the lowland concept of “merit” (Lahu: aw bon) has been incorporated into the religious culture of the Lahu Nyi of northern Thailand, while Du (1996: 71) notes how Lahu in China have transformed the Buddha into the Lahu high god Xeul Sha (Guisha). Many Wa villages in China and
Burma adopted Buddhism as their religion long ago and strongly identify themselves as Buddhist (Chit Hlaing 2009). A large portion of the Karen identify themselves as Buddhist (Keyes 1979; Kwanchewan 1988, 2003a, 2003b; Platz 2003; Stern 1968), and the Akha, who have largely maintained their indigenous religious traditions, have been converting to Buddhism in greater numbers in recent years. Finally, the Dara’ang people adopted Theravāda Buddhism centuries ago and practically all members of the ethnic group identify themselves as Buddhist.

**Buddhism at the Margin of the State**

The margins of the state typically serve as a place where religious diversity flourishes. In the case of Burma, Mendelson (1975: 233) suspects that Shan State has historically served as the refuge for heterodox Buddhist sects. In Thailand, the Buddhist Sangha (organization of Buddhists) is controlled by the state, with the highest office (Supreme Patriarch or Somdet Phra Sangharat) appointed by the king. The practices and doctrines which are propagated by the Sangha are not only “Tai” in character, but a particular form of Tai Buddhism, that of the Central Thai or Siamese people, which displaced other regional forms of Buddhism within the country in the early 20th century as part of Bangkok's program of national integration (see chapter 7, Ishii 1968; Keyes 1971; Tambiah 1976).

Buddhist movements that occur at the margin of the Thai and Burmese state have historically defined themselves in part against the practices found at the political and economic centre, typically through claims to greater purity, authenticity, or the revealed message of a charismatic religious figure. Such forms of Buddhism often allow for the
maintenance of local traditions and speak in a voice that resonates with the cultural and social conditions of people living along the margins of state power, including members of non-Tai ethnic groups whose indigenous traditions may be quite different from those of the dominant Tai. Movements such as these are occasionally millenarian in character, promising a radical re-configuring of social relations for those who absorb the message (Corlin 2000; Keyes 1977; Stern 1968).

Rather than considering Buddhism at the margins as a “superficial” reflection of the religion propagated by the centre, I approach these practices and beliefs on their own terms. Such a perspective follows Leach's (1968: 1) exhortation to anthropologists to consider religion in practice rather than only a philosophical system that can be known through reading its texts. In addition to helping us understand how people actually live a religion, this perspective helps avoids placing the anthropologist in the uncomfortable position of having to explain why “Buddhists” do not really understand Buddhism (Tannenbaum 1995: 204; see also Almond 1988, Gombrich 1971: 48-56).

Scholars of Thai Buddhism have been paying more attention in recent years to the relationship between Buddhism at the periphery and the centre (Jackson 1997; Parnwell and Seeger 2008; Tambiah 1984). Taylor (1993), for example, describes how the forest monk tradition of Thailand, a movement that existed largely in opposition to the settled Buddhism of the urban areas, was co-opted by the Bangkok élite and effectively transformed into a vehicle for extending state power to the peripheral areas of the kingdom. Related to the co-option of rural monks reputed for their spiritual attainments by an urban élite, Jackson (1997: 82) argues that the loss of authority by the Sangha (a situation brought on by numerous sexual and financial scandals) has created conditions
for a free-market of spirituality which is filled by monks along the periphery who are thought to be more pure than their urban brethren. Jackson's work on free-market spirituality draws attention to the relative heterogeneity of Buddhism in modern Thailand. Parnwell and Seeger (2008: 79) similarly focus on monks at the periphery, arguing that Buddhism is currently undergoing a process of diversification and “relocalization” in many rural areas. Their concern is primarily with the appropriateness of social engagement by monks, and as such focuses on diversification of doctrine by three contemporary development monks rather than the Buddhist practices and beliefs of the laity. Nevertheless, their attention to difference highlights the discontinuity within the Buddhist community, particularly at the margins of the state.

I am likewise concerned with the processes of differentiation, but consider Buddhism primarily in terms of its relationship to ethnic identity. My focus is not the spread of Buddhism per se, but the production of Buddhist discourses and practices in a community situated within the margins of the state. As Roitman (2004: 213) points out in regards to the “black” or “informal” economic market in Chad, the margins are not wastelands of emulation, but places where production occurs. Upland ethnic minority groups reside along and within the margins of the Thai state both conceptually (as alien others within) and geographically (within the border regions). To speak of Buddhism at the margins of the state is to speak of marginality in both these senses. As Tsing (1993: 13) reminds us, however, marginalization is also a process that people may work to counter. In this regard, de-marginalization (the processes which challenge the power of the centre to marginalize its other) is important for understanding the particular religious discourses and practices that emerge amongst marginalized people, phenomena which
often make claims to greater authenticity and piety, or in the case of millenarian movements, the revelation of a local holy person.

**Buddhism and Cultural Criticism**

Dara’ang people in Thailand challenge their marginal position, in part by appropriating the very discourses that connect Buddhism with a higher state of human morality and civility. In this dissertation I examine how these critical discourses are constructed, yet I also seek to address the theoretical problem of how people come to interpret their social position as problematic. While the agent of the Enlightenment naturally resisted domination, postmodern theorists have deconstructed the essential nature of the person as a liberty seeking individual, leaving us with a more contingent picture of being (cf. Foucault 1997: 290). Resistance therefore no longer can be located within an individual’s natural desire to be free, but must be sought after within the social and cultural structures that constitute a person’s worldview. With the death of the subject of the Enlightenment comes a new concept of subjectivity, one that fits well within the social constructionist framework of cultural anthropology and looks to the concept of culture as the location for critical reflection. Ortner (2005) argues that in order to understand critical consciousness (a consciousness that sees existing social configurations as problematic), one needs to pay close attention to culture as a system of public meanings. She considers social agents as endowed with a capacity for self-reflection, but this capacity is a Sartrian one, essentially empty, and must be enabled by culture. Social actors cannot stand “outside culture,” so there is no essential desire to resist or challenge one’s conditions. A critical stance towards the world arises from the complex, multi-
layered production of self - a self that is formed within the webs of signification that constitute cultural systems (Ortner 2005: 46).

If culture does play such a role in the production of critical subjects, what enables particular understandings to become persuasive to group members, and what factors might limit the form of self-consciousness that might develop? A critical understanding of oneself is, like any social phenomenon, the product of social forces. Some groups strive to change their social circumstances, while others accept their place within a given social hierarchy. Social inequality can become regularized, even defended by social actors who are most oppressed by the prevailing social structure as they become socialized into a world where they occupy a lower rung on the hierarchy. However, situations of crisis and dislocation can disrupt the interplay between socialized subjects and the objective conditions they experience (Bourdieu 2000). In situations of dislocation, new narratives may be required to make sense of changing circumstances, narratives that lead to new understandings of the relationship between oneself and others. In many cases, the situation of domination itself may develop out of conditions of rupture and change - the colonization of one group by another, for example, or the forced dislocation of a population that transports them into the place of a dominant other. Such conditions of crisis likewise break the regular pattern of social reproduction, creating conditions for new narratives of the self and the world to be constructed.

In his book The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion, Berger (1967) describes the process through which groups construct and maintain their religious worldview. In particular, Berger stresses the dialectic between culture as an objective, public system of meaning “out there,” and the individual who internalizes the
objective structures of reality, externalizing them once again in the course of their everyday practice. Self-understanding is a function of socialization, whereby the successfully socialized individual identifies with their role within the objective culture. Unsuccessful socialization leads to a condition where individuals feel lost and detached from the reality prescribed by the objective culture, a situation akin to Durkheimian anomie (Berger and Luckmann 1966: 24).

The way in which Berger uses the term “culture” is similar to the definition provided by Geertz (1973). For Geertz, “culture” exists as "a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which people communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life" (1973:89). “Culture” is therefore defined as a public system of symbolic meaning by which people develop a sense of themselves and others. It provides groups and individuals with meaning, shaping perceptions about one’s place in the world and one’s relationship to other people. For Berger, culture similarly provides the system through which an individual makes sense of the inherent chaos and absurdity of the world (Berger 1967: 22). And like Geertz’s symbolic manipulator, Berger’s social actor is primarily an intellectual subject. Culture is internalized and externalized by material “organisms,” yet social actors become confused, disoriented, or well adjusted to the world based primarily upon the ideological framework culture provides (Berger 1967: 19). The focus is on the “conversation,” or what contemporary theorists would call “discourse” (Berger 1967: 17; c.f. Butler 1990).

One problem with such a view, as Bourdieu (1977, 1990a) points out, is that social action is not simply a textual or discursive activity; life is lived in practice, often
(or according to Bourdieu, primarily) in a non-conscious or non-reflective mode. Bourdieu employs the term *habitus* to capture this non-conscious aspect of social existence.

The structures constitutive of a particular type of environment (e.g. the material conditions of existence characteristic of a class condition) produce *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively "regulated" and "regular" without in any way being the product of obedience to rules (Bourdieu 1977: 72).

While habitual action that the habitus engenders may be accompanied by strategic calculation or reflection, Bourdieu stresses the non-reflective, "pre-reflexive," or non-conscious aspect of action that the habitus enables (Bourdieu 1977: 94). Under conditions where there is a good fit between habitus and objective conditions, action is largely non-reflective and critical reflection does not typically arise (Bourdieu 1977: 164). This is not to say that subjects are *un*-conscious, but that they do not approach their world as an intellectual problem, or are typically reflexive about their own practice within the world. Rather, people’s behaviour stems from practical responses to social situations, whereby individuals and groups act according to the embodied history of the group (the right thing to do, or the proper way to act). Life is largely lived in practice according to habit, not in conscious self-reflection.

In this study of Dara’ang religion I examine the way embodied practices, specifically the embodied religious practices of the group, serve as a referent for self conceptualizations which challenge the existing ethnic hierarchy of modern Thailand, as well as the dominant ideology which constructs upland ethnic minority groups as "primitive" and "uncivilized." Discursive identity and its construction are important, but
equally so is the embodied identity of the group, which serves as material for self-reflection. This approach investigates the interrelationship between discursive, habitual, and reflexive elements of “identity,” a relationship which Boterro (2006) notes has not been adequately analyzed by social researchers.

Methodology

I first visited the Dara’ang village of Pang Daeng Nai in June of 2002. My senior supervisor, Dr. Michael Howard, had written a short book on the Dara’ang people of Thailand that focussed primarily on dress and identity (Howard and Wattanapun 2001). At the time I was a new graduate student working on my master’s degree in anthropology. My own interest was in religion, and as an aspiring scholar I was attracted to the possibility that Dara’ang Buddhism might present me with an understudied form of religious practice. My hopes were realized - Dara’ang religion did represent a different form of Buddhism than that propagated by the Thai Sangha of Bangkok, as well as the state sponsored Buddhism of Burma, and there was indeed little written material on the subject.

The Dara’ang communities of Thailand, recent immigrants from Burma,

10. Bentley (1987) employs Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus* to explain the sense of ethnic affinity people feel for those who have undergone similar experiences. This perspective calls upon anthropologists to focus on the non-reflective feelings people have towards their group. My own concern is not with this affective identification, but with the embodied history of the group itself, which can serve a similar function in terms of producing affective reactions (that is the proper way to behave so I am comfortable with that), as well as material for more self-reflection (this way of behaving is how we act).

11. While not denying that there is a place for reflexivity in Bourdieu’s work, Crossley (2001) notes “the nature and possibility of reflexivity are something of a mystery in his work” (p. 117). Other critics are harsher, arguing that his theory does not provide for any real role for self-reflection. Bohman (1997), for example, writes that because of the weight given to pre-reflective, habitual action, his theory does “not adequately equip practical agents with reflective and critical abilities that would make it possible to describe how they might initiate such transformative processes, or to understand how they might succeed in enlisting the cooperation of other agents in transforming social identities and conditions” (p. 181).
maintained a form of Buddhism that scholars typically refer to as “Yuan Buddhism,” a type of Buddhism which developed within the kingdom of Lan Na, and which was maintained to a greater or lesser degree by Tai Yuan people in northern Thailand, as well as various Tai speaking groups (such as the Tai Khün) and the Dara’ang of north-eastern Burma (see Ch. 3). While I was excited about this find, I found myself focussing on one particular set of ritual practices for my master’s thesis, those which surrounded the new year’s celebration (Ashley 2004). During my master’s research I stayed in Pang Daeng Nai for five months while conducting my fieldwork, living with the family of the village head. Time constraints meant that a deeper investigation of the significance of Lan Na Buddhist or Yuan Buddhist practices amongst the Dara’ang would have to wait.

I returned to Pang Daeng Nai in February 2007, this time accompanied by my partner, Jessica Wilson. I have had the good fortune to visit Pang Daeng Nai each year since my initial visit in 2002, and have been able to observe the rapid changes that the village was undergoing as households acquired more wealth. Thatch roofs gave way to corrugated metal, bamboo walls were replaced by teak or cinder block, and more and more households began acquiring motorcycles and televisions (the latter were run off car batteries). While frequent trips were useful for gathering sporadic information on rituals and social change, a much longer period of residency was needed if I was to learn the meaning Buddhism held for villagers.

When Jessica and I arrived in Pang Daeng Nai in March 2007 we had a small bamboo house built for ourselves on the edge of the village, a rudimentary structure with a balcony and kitchen, which was sufficient for our needs. I spent my days reading, writing, conducting interviews, and observing, while partaking in village life, as well as
tending to the rapidly growing population of chickens with whom I shared a living space. Jessica spent much of her time studying weaving and helping women develop new patterns for the local tourist market. We remained there until May 2008, when I travelled to Burma to investigate Dara’ang villages in Shan State. After a brief return trip to Pang Daeng Nai in July of 2008 to discuss my findings in Burma I returned to Vancouver, Canada, to write up my dissertation.

My investigation of religion in the Dara’ang village of Pang Daeng Nai is an ethnographic study. Ethnography is both a method and a product; it represents a holistic approach to research, one which tries to capture the forest along with the specific trees which are of interest to the researcher. Ethnography as a method typically involves the immersion within a particular setting, wherein the researcher takes part in the daily activities of those he or she is researching. The practice is closely associated with participant-observation, the art and science of participating in the daily life of the people one is working with, while observing their behaviour and noting their interpretations of what it is they are engaged in (Atkinson and Hamersley 1994; Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995). While no amount of time can allow one to know what someone else is thinking or feeling, long term fieldwork carried out with a sincere and open mind allows an ethnographer to gain not only information on the particular topic she or he is interested in, but information relating to many other aspects of the society in question. This commitment to “holism” is a particular hallmark of ethnographic research, allowing researchers to situate a particular aspect of cultural identity (in this case religion) within the larger social context of ethnic, gender, and class relations (Johnson and Johnson 1990: 167).
Observation is an important aspect of ethnographic work, providing the ethnographer with the means through which social practices become known within a “natural” or “real life” setting (Mason 1996: 61). During my fieldwork in Dara’ang villages I spent hundreds of hours observing religious rites and ceremonies, and countless more talking with participants about these practices. By living within a Dara’ang village, and visiting others frequently, I have had the opportunity to observe many rites a number of times, and despite the focus on Pang Daeng Nai, I actively sought out opportunities to observe the same rite or festival within different villages. In some cases I took on a more active role as a participant, at one point ordaining temporarily as a Buddhist monk along with several Dara’ang men in a Tai Yuan temple just south of Chiang Mai city.

Observation rarely took place in isolation, however, and was typically accompanied by unstructured or conversational interviews. This form of interviewing attempts to get at the meaning of complex behaviour without imposing any a priori categorization that may restrict the range of explanations and the answers a person might provide (Fontana and Frey 2000: 653). Throughout my fieldwork I was continuously conducting conversational interviews - with the village head, with various religious specialists (monks, the village dajān and the da bu meung), Tai Yuan men and women from town, teachers, government officials, people from nearby villages, Khruba Jao Theaung and the monks of Wat Den, as well as the non-specialist residents of Pang Daeng Nai. These interviews represent a long conversation in the tradition of Malinowski (1992), as I sought clarification, correction, and elaboration on a various topics through repeated engagement with interlocutors.

In addition to conversational interviews, I also conducted formal interviews with a
number of key informants. Interviews covering specific religious topics were conducted with the head of Pang Deang Nai, the local abbot, the village’s lay Buddhist leader (the dajān), and the village spirit specialist (the da bu meung). In addition to several informal conversations, I also conducted two formal interviews with Khruba Jao Theuang, both of which took place in his greeting room, an open-air sala where he meets with the dozens of daily visitors who come to seek his blessing. Polished elephant tusks frame the raised chair upon which he sits, and behind his seat there are always piles of offerings. While I’ve always found Khruba Jao Theuang to be pleasant to converse with, attempts to probe the life of a man framed as a saint, or, as Cohen (2001) notes for Khruba Bunchum, a dhammaraja (Buddhist sacral king), was a particularly memorable experience.

In addition to interviews, I conducted three surveys of Pang Daeng Nai village. The first survey (conducted in May 2007) collected information about population and household composition. Once the planting season began I collected data from each household concerning their agricultural activities. A final survey was conducted in March 2008 for every individual in the village (including monks) as well as those boys and girls studying outside the village at boarding or monastic schools. It excluded those people who had moved out of the village for permanent employment or marriage. The survey asked about the level of schooling villagers had obtained, knowledge of the Central Thai script (reading and writing), the Lan Na-Dhamma script (reading and writing), and an ability to read and write the Dara’ang language (using the Dhamma script). This survey also looked at whether or not men had been ordained, where they had spent their time as a temple boy, novice, or monk, and how long they had remained in robes.

The Dara’ang people of Thailand speak a variety of languages (Pale, Burmese,
Central Thai, and Tai Yuan being most common). I did not use a full-time translator during my research as I had been studying the Central Thai language for six years prior to the time I began my study and was comfortable conducting interviews in Thai. Most Dara’ang men and women living in Thailand speak Central Thai, having studied it in school and being exposed to it through the mass media. Those who had not studied Central Thai in school (older men and women) typically spoke a Tai language as a second language in Burma (Tai Yai, for example), and over the years have learnt Central Thai from television programs and radio. For those individuals who could not speak Central Thai (generally elderly women) I conducted interviews with the assistance of someone who could speak both Central Thai and Pale. I also studied the local dialect of Pale (see chapter 2) as I felt it important to learn the local language, and by the time I left I had developed a basic knowledge. For interviews conducted in Tai Yuan I relied on a translator (usually a younger Dara’ang man), but given the pervasiveness of Central Thai on television, radio, and music, not to mention the classroom, it was rare that I had to conduct interviews with Tai Yuan speakers who could not also communicate in Central Thai.

Ethnography is well suited for a variety of research projects, but was developed as a way to gain information about small social scale social groups, those that a researcher can come to know through face-to-face interaction. This approach is particularly valuable for studying situations which require a high level of trust, such as situations where the researcher is interested in “hidden transcripts,” those local forms of criticism raised about the prevailing power structures which are made behind the backs of the dominant other (Scott 1990). Hidden transcripts are important for understanding how subaltern
populations conceive of their relationship to a dominant other. Developing trusting relationships is necessary if one is to gain access to such discourses, and I hope that what I have written here does not violate the trust that people have shown me.

It is important to note from the outset some of the limitations of the material presented here. Despite efforts to engage with women about religion, ethnic relations, and Dara’ang identity, my analysis draws much more heavily on the perspective of men. The reason for this is that most public social interaction within Dara’ang villages remains largely sex segregated. While the presence of my partner within the village was invaluable for establishing close relationships with local women, the social division of everyday activities did not permit the same depth of information to be drawn from women as it did from men. It was not appropriate, for example, to remain in the women’s quarters during the rainy season retreat when elderly men and women take up temporary residence at the local temple (see Ch. 4), nor to sit late into the night conducting interviews with women, as I commonly did with local men. I attempt to include the perspective of women throughout, particularly in terms of local religious practices, but when speaking about religious discourses of ethnic identity, there exists a bias towards a male perspective.12

This ethnographic account was constructed primarily from my fieldnotes upon returning to Vancouver, Canada. While it remains my own interpretation of events I am confident that Dara’ang men and women in Pang Daeng Nai would recognize their own story within its pages. When I was first going into the field in 2002, Baas Terwiel said to me that a good study should be understandable to an educated member of the group in

12. It is interesting to note that the only other in-depth ethnographic study of Palaung culture was conducted by a woman, Leslie Milne (1924), and focuses primarily on the woman’s sphere of activity, including women’s religious practices, particularly the lives of nuns within Palaung temples of Burma.
question and tell them something they did not already know about their own culture. While I believe the theoretical discussions remain particular to the field of anthropology, and therefore may not be completely comprehensible to those outside the discipline as he might desire, I believe that the particular insights into the construction of counter-narratives which employ a discourse of Buddhism may present Dara’ang readers with a different way of reading their own cultural practices. As their religious practices change, as all religious practices do, perhaps this work will stand as one person’s account of Dara’ang religion at a particular period in time when the group was struggling for acceptance within mainstream Thai society.

Chapter Overview

In chapter two I present the setting and context of this study. I begin with a description of the Dara’ang village of Pang Daeng Nai, the history of its residents (beginning with the period when they lived in Shan State, Burma, and concluding with their present day situation within Thailand), and the problems the village has faced since it was founded in 1984. I conclude the chapter with a more general discussion of Dara’ang or Palaung society in general, its social divisions and sub-group classifications, and its political and institutional connections with various Tai societies.13

Chapter three examines Dara’ang religion as a cultural system that developed through contact with Tai neighbours. I demonstrate how the classificatory schemes

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13. Palaung is the common term used in English to refer to the Mon-Khmer speaking group who form the subject of this study. I use the term Dara’ang when speaking about the group of Palaung peoples who live within Thailand, as this is the term that they use themselves, and the term by which they are increasingly known by within Thai academic and government contexts. See chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion of ethnonyms and sub-group distinctions.
associated with this school of Buddhism (i.e. the tradition associated with the old Tai Yuan kingdom of Lan Na) become localized through a process of Dara’ang-ization. This discussion is continued in chapter four, where I describe Dara’ang religion in practice in order to demonstrate the interconnection between Buddhism and Dara’ang identity, and how this identity is reproduced from generation to generation.

Chapter five explores Buddhism as an inter-cultural space. The particular focus here is on education and ordination, as these practices have long served as a cultural contact zone for Dara’ang men. I consider how the relationship between Dara’ang and Tai communities is part of the group's embodied history/identity, and I examine both the continuities and discontinuities associated with the way this ethnic boundary has been negotiated both historically and within present day Thailand.

Chapter six is concerned primarily with the relationship between the Dara’ang of Thailand and the “khruba monk movement.” Khruba monks are holy men renowned within Northern Thailand for their supernatural power; their mission is a reviverist one, as they preach a return to the practices associated with Lan Na or Yuan Buddhism, and propagate this form of Buddhism amongst the upland ethnic minority groups. I examine the dual position that the Dara’ang occupy within this movement, as both exemplary Buddhists (a status they hold because they maintain the practices associated with Lan Na Buddhism) and an upland tribal people (a category that is in part defined by the absence of Buddhism).

In chapter seven I examine how the Dara’ang perception of embodying a more authentic Buddhist practice is connected with the construction of discourses that are critical of ethnic inequality. I argue that Buddhism does not serve as an ideological
legitimation of social hierarchy, but can also serve to construct critical narratives that challenge the marginalization of Dara’ang people within Thailand today. These narratives function in part through the process of symbolic inversion, and borrow from the millenarian discourse that runs throughout the khruba monk movement.

In chapter eight I conclude with a discussion of what these critical narratives derived through processes of cultural appropriation mean in terms of the material conditions Dara’ang people face within Thailand today. Furthermore, I examine the theoretical implications of this argument in terms of locating the concept of agency within culture, and how such a perspective links an embodied notion of ethnicity with a more discursive conceptualization of identity.
Chapter 2

Dara’ang Lands

The village of Pang Daeng Nai is located approximately 10 km east of the commercial and administrative centre of Chiang Dao district, an agriculturally rich valley situated along the shores of the Mae Ping (river) of Chiang Mai province. As you drive east from Chiang Dao town towards the mountains, you pass through the fields of irrigated rice and tobacco before climbing a steep hill along a newly paved road built in 1998 to provide access to a quarry that was never built. At the top of the hill are farms owned by lowland Tai Yuan (Northern Thai) farmers from the nearby village of Thung Luk. As you continue along the road the fields give way to forest and you encounter the first upland village in the area, a Lahu settlement situated right next to the road. A little further on you come to a Dara’ang village, or villages, known as Pang Daeng Nok and Pang Daeng Klang. This particular settlement was the product of a deal struck between desperate Dara’ang families and a Christian Lahu man - the latter offered land for the Dara’ang to farm on the condition that they convert to Christianity and provide him with cheap labour during harvest time. Just after Pang Daeng Nok, located directly across from a newly built Dara’ang Buddhist monastery, is a small dirt road heading up into the mountains of Sri Lanna National Park. Along this road is a school for local children, a sacred mountain (Doi Phrabat) complete with cave temple and monastic residents, and several upland

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14. The Tai Yuan are the majority ethno-linguistic group in northern Thailand. In English, they are commonly referred to as Northern Thai. They refer to themselves as Khon Muang, and most people in Thailand would use this term. Anthropologists commonly employ the term Tai Yuan, and I often use this label as it recalls the fact that this is the same group who dominated the region during the 15th century, and reflects the Dara’ang term for the Tai Yuan, which is Da Yün.
villages, including the Dara’ang village of Pang Daeng Nai.

Pang Daeng Nai lies at end of the dirt road, approximately one kilometre from the paved road. Other villages in the area include the Dara’ang villages of Huai Pong (which also includes a number of Lahu residents), the Dara’ang village of Mae Chon, and the Karen village of Tachilek. The area is sparsely populated, and though fields of corn, mangoes, rice, and beans cut swaths across the landscape, the area remains quite forested. In fact, the land here is officially designated as a forest reserve, and some villages (such as Huai Pong and Mae Chon) are located within the boundaries of Sri Lanna National Park. Pang Daeng Nai itself is pushed up right against the edge of this park, and the fields of several families are located inside its periphery. The struggle between local farmers and the state over land has marked the development of the village, and continues to present challenges for local residents today.

The actual village site of Pang Daeng Nai is located along a small river known as the Huai Hok. It sits approximately 500m above sea level, a figure that is significant on both a practical and a symbolic level. In Thailand, the “highlands” (Thai: peun thi sung) are officially defined as land over 500 metres or mountainous areas with an average slope of over 35 degrees (Department of Public Administration 2001: 37). The Dara’ang community of Pang Daeng Nai thus sit right on the border of the lowland-highland divide, a space inundated by as many presuppositions regarding the cultural distinctiveness of highlanders vis-à-vis the lowland Tai as ideas concerning the demarcation of the natural environment (Vandergeest 2003: 26).

At the time of my research, Pang Daeng Nai consisted of 56 houses inhabited on average by five occupants. Although there is a ban on new families moving into the
village, more houses are built each year as existing households grow bigger. In total there were 279 individuals living in Pang Daeng Nai, divided fairly evenly according to sex (139 male, 140 female). The village population overall is fairly young, with almost half (41.6% or 116 individuals) under the age of 20, and another third of the population (33.3% or 93 individuals) being between the ages of 20 to 39. Men and women aged 40 to 59 (16.5%) constituted another 16.5% of the population (46 villagers), and 24 individuals were over the age of 60 (8.6%).

The name “Pang Daeng Nai” literally means “the (inner) place where the earth is red,” and visitors to the village during the rainy season soon find out why this name is so appropriate.15 The village stands on a base of red clay which sticks to the bottom of one’s shoes when wet. This has the effect of making a person taller with each step, while seriously impeding one’s mobility. The bindings of sandals tend to snap off under the weight of the clay, and boots require a thorough scraping after even a short distance. Roads and paths through the village are not paved, and during heavy rain small rivers run through the village on their way to the Huai Hok river, which forms the southern border of the village site.

Despite the relatively small size of the population, Pang Daeng Nai itself feels quite crowded, as state land enclosures prevent the site from expanding. Most houses today are constructed on ground level out of cinder blocks and zinc roofs, yet this is a rather new mode of construction, and many houses continue to be built upon wooden posts, high enough for a person to walk beneath.16 When I first visited the village in 2002,

15. The term “Nai” means “inside,” distinguishing the village from nearby Pang Daeng Nok (“Nok” = “outer”).
16. In Burma, several Dara’ang families would typically live together in longhouses. When the Dara’ang first migrated to Chiang Dao, a few of these houses were constructed, but none remain standing today.
many of the houses had walls and floors made of split bamboo, and thatch was used to
cover many roofs. Few people today use thatch, as it is time consuming to maintain, and
those families that continue to favour a raised house design construct their floor and walls
out of teak or other hardwood trees.

**Flight From Burma**

The head of Pang Daeng Nai village is an elderly man whom I shall call A-Tun. A-Tun was 71 years old at the time of my study, and had been the head of Pang Daeng Nai since it was founded in 1984. He is a remarkable man well respected not only within Pang Daeng Nai, but also within Dara’ang communities across Thailand. His story represents the path of himself and one group that migrated from Burma, yet is similar in terms of many others who came to Thailand fleeing the violent civil war that erupted in Shan State.

The son of a Chinese man and a Dara’ang woman, A-Tun was the head of six villages in Burma (Nalang, Makhuntok, Huai Tum, Huai Tum Long, Nam Hu Song Ta, and Pang Yong) in the area of Loi Lai, a mountain located north of Meung Pan, between the Nam Taeng and Salween rivers (see Map 1). Families began moving to this area sometime in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in search of new land, many from the area around Kalaw where there still exists a high concentration of Dara’ang Re’ng villages today. They grew rice, beans, corn, and opium poppies along the mountain slopes using a technique of shifting agriculture. Other Dara’ang men and women moved

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17. I use pseudonyms throughout in order to protect the identity of my informants. Though some, such as A-Tun, may be easily recognizable to anyone familiar with Pang Daeng Nai’s history, I feel it is best to be consistent in terms of masking identities. All male Dara’ang names begin with “A-,” while female names carry no special marker.
Map 1. Shan State and Northern Thailand (not to scale).
to Loi Lai from other areas, including the old state of Kengtung from which A-Tun’s family had migrated when he was a teenager.\textsuperscript{18} By the 1970s there were at least twelve Dara’ang villages around the area of Loi Lai, each containing approximately 80 to 200 families. A-Tun recalls how a lack of good land was the reason for the initial move to Loi Lai:

The first to move to Loi Lai was my mother. Our village in Kengtung was so poor that people were having trouble getting enough to eat. Merchants coming from the Loi Lai said there was enough land for everyone there, so she moved with her new husband. I was young at the time, and went to Kengtung [city] as a novice. But she missed me and asked if I would come to Loi Lai. I eventually became headman there, a big headman, not the same as here, but the head of six villages.

While A-Tun does not remember the exact date he first moved to Loi Lai, he says it was sometime during the 1950s. Despite the political upheavals Burma faced during this time, A-Tun recalls that the early years of Loi Lai were quite peaceful. During this period, the fighting that marked much of Burma’s post-independence history was occurring primarily in northern Shan State. The situation changed following Ne Win’s military coup in 1962, as an insurgency spread throughout the country.\textsuperscript{19}

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\textsuperscript{18} Scott and Hardiman (1900) note that “there are very few villages of this race [Palaung] in Kengtung State. All that are known have been here for many years, but they believe their forefathers came from Tawngpeng” (p. 493). Howard and Wattanapun (2001) report, “Silver Palaung oral history says that they originally lived in Namhsan area. Around two hundred years ago (the date is not precise), some Silver Palaung moved to the Keng Tung area. A story is told among Silver Palaung today that the ruler of Namhsan at this time wanted to levy a tax on the people. It was to be a tax per room, but the ancestors of the Silver Palaung mistakenly believed that he was demanding that they fill a room with money and fled east to the area around Keng Tung rather than pay this heavy tax” (p. 21). Du (2007) similarly discusses a period of migration during the 1800s amongst the De'ang in China that was brought about through strife. “In the early nineteenth century the ancestors of De'ang people experienced large scale migrations following the crackdowns on their revolt against state control” (p.135).
\textsuperscript{19} In response to the growing civil war that erupted following the military’s seizure of power, the Palaung around Tawngpeng area formed their own nationalist insurgent army, the Palaung National Front (PNF), on 12 January 1963 under Kham Thaung. The PNF soon merged with the Shan State Army (SSA) and
\end{flushright}
the Shan National Independence Army became active between the Nam Taeng and Salween rivers, bringing the fighting close to Loi Lai. In the 1970s, the Communist Party of Burma also became active around Muang Nai and along the Nam Taeng River. These factions were joined by the Thailand Revolutionary Army (the merged Shan United Revolutionary Army and the anti-communist faction of the Shan State Army), which became active around Muang Pan between the Nam Taeng and the Salween rivers in the early 1980s (Howard and Wattanapun 2001: 75-76).

As these various groups moved into the area, fighting was now taking place in and around the Dara’ang villages of Loi Lai. Crops were seized, livestock stolen, and Dara’ang men were forcibly drafted to fight with various armies. At first the Dara’ang living around Loi Lai were able to buy the soldiers off with silver and gold, but as the

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operated its command in the areas around Namhsan and Namkham until 1966 when two battalions of the PNF broke away from the SSA’s 1st brigade and set up their own nationalist front. In 1968/9 these battalions split again, the 6th under Kham Thaung and Kyaw Hla allying itself with the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), and the 5th under three sons of the Tawnpeng Saopha (Khun Li, Khun Aye and Chao Nor Far) allying with the Kuomintang and the SSA. In 1970 the 5th’s base at Wang Mai was overrun by their rivals who had joined with the KIO, and Khun Li and Khun Aye were killed. Nor Far and his remaining troops then joined the Shan United Revolutionary Army (SURA) near the Thai border and Kham Thaung’s PNF forces became the Palaung State Liberation Organization/Party (PSLO) (Smith 1999: 220).

The PSLO and its armed wing Palaung State Liberation Army (PSLA) was officially formed in 1976 under Tar Khon Young. The PSLA had between 500 and 1,000 men operating in the Palaung heartland in the mountains between Namkham, Lashio, and Maymyo in the late 1970s. In October 1986, the PSLO was renamed the Palaung State Liberation Party (PSLP) under the chairmanship of Mai Aik Mong and operated with other ethnic resistance organizations under the National Democratic Front (PWO 2006: 10-11). Like many other ethnic armies, the PSLA/PSLP signed a cease-fire agreement with the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) in 1991. A small group of Palaung who disagreed with the cease-fire formed the Palaung State Liberation Front (PSLF) on 12 January 1992 under Mai Tin Maung (PSLF 2003: 50). The PSLF continues to struggle for an independent Palaung state but its locus of operation appears restricted to the Thai-Burmese border. Following threats to arrest the PSLA leadership, and citing increasing hardships faced by Palaung communities at the hands of Burmese forces, the PSLA officially hand over their arms on 21st or 29th of April 2005 (PSLF 2003: 22; PWO 2006: 12).

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s the PSLA and its previous incarnations controlled small areas around Namhsan and Namkham, but its impact on the local communities is difficult to assess. While the PSLA was not a large army and did not pose a much of a threat to Burmese government supremacy in the area, the fear that existed during the insurgency years is still remembered vividly in Namhsan. While significant for Palaung living in the north, the activities of the PSLA did not extend to Palaung communities in southern and eastern Shan state and many Palaung men and women from Burma had not heard of the PSLA before coming to Thailand.
conflict dragged on supplies became increasingly low and this strategy no longer worked. People began to hide in the forest to avoid forced conscription, sometimes only for one or two nights, but often for much longer as the situation demanded. A-Pong, the 63 year old spirit specialist (Pale: da bu meung) of Pang Daeng Nai whose family was one the early founders of the village along with that of A-Tun and one other family, remembers how he used to hide in the forest during this period.

The soldiers would sometimes come and set up camp in our village. They would be looking for people to fight with them, so we would hide in the forest. Sometimes they would stay one or two months! We’d have to grow plant crops in the forest and live off food from the forest. You’ve seen how much I know about plants. Well I learned a lot during that time. What to eat, what not to eat.

In the 1970s, as things became increasingly unbearable, many Dara’ang communities began to move towards the Thai border or urban areas of Burma such as Kengtung. A-Tun recounts how the Dara’ang were being pressured to move close to Burman cities. “When the Burmese soldiers came, we were told to move close to the Pamar (Burman) towns. We did not want to, because we are Dara’ang-Tai. . . That is why we moved to Thailand.” Tactics such as these were used by the Tatmadaw (Burmese army) to cut off insurgents from their base of support by moving the upland populations into areas controlled by the army (Smith 1999: 258-262; Wasana 2003: 52). Rather than moving close to Burman towns, the Dara’ang from Loi Lai decided to migrate towards the Thai border in search of peaceful areas to farm.

A-Tun recalls how the leaders of the six villages in Loi Lai made the decision to leave as a group. Those who wished to leave gathered near Wunsaria, where they camped for several days while waiting for everyone to arrive. In total 168 individuals made the trek from Loi Lai to Thailand. They travelled along the road to Meung Pan and then on to
Meung Ton, mostly crossing rivers and checkpoints at night and sticking to the forest whenever they could (Howard and Wattanapun 2001: 78). The group settled temporarily near Meung Ton, but this was in Khun Sa’s Shan United Army (SUA) controlled territory (Lintner 1999: 322-325). Dara’ang men were once again forced to work in opium fields and serve in the SUA army. The group therefore moved closer to the Thai border settling in the growing community of Dara’ang, Lahu, and Ho Chinese displaced peoples on Doi Angkhang Mountain.

The trip took approximately two weeks. It was long and arduous, and the group was constantly afraid of being caught by the Tatmadaw (Burmese army). Food was also scarce, and many Dara’ang families sold their valuables en route in order to buy rice, including many of their religious statues of Buddha and the Grandfather Rice Spirit. Women resorted to begging once everything had been sold. Many people became sick, and there were several deaths.

We couldn't travel fast because there were many children and older people with us. That's why it took so long. We were always afraid the Burmese army would catch us so we kept moving as fast as we could. We didn't even stop to bury our dead. We just placed them by the side of the road and covered their bodies with banana leaves (A-Tun, recounting the deaths that occurred on route to Thailand).

The group from Loi Lai arrived in the border camp on Doi Angkhang in 1983. No Lae, the first Dara’ang village in Thailand, had already been founded on the border two years previously, with assistance from the King’s Royal Project Agricultural Research Centre. This centre had been set up by the Royal Project on Hill Tribe Development and Welfare in conjunction with the Joint United Nations-Thai Programme for Drug Abuse Control in Thailand to develop high-altitude crop substitutes for the opium that many highland communities had come to rely upon as their primary source of income. In 1982
the King of Thailand, Bhumibol Adulyadej (Rama IX), visited the research centre and undertook a trip out to the Lahu village of Ban Khob Dang. The Dara’ang people who had been gathering in the area as refugees for several years were given an audience with the king in order to seek permission to settle permanently within Thailand. A small Dara’ang party, headed by A-Tun’s brother-in-law, joined a group of approximately 200 men and women from various ethnic groups, including Lahu, Shan, and Ho Chinese. They presented the king with several old Buddha images that they had brought from Burma, along with a complete set of Dara’ang Re’ng women’s clothing, and asked the king for permission to settle within Thailand. The king inquired as to why they wished to settle in Thailand, and the men explained how bad everything had become back in Burma. He then asked if they were Buddhists, and the men responded that they were. The king asked the group where they would like to settle, and as the Dara’ang representatives had never been anywhere inside of Thailand except around Doi Ankhang, they asked to settle there. The king granted them permission and told them they should settle close to the road. He then gave the group 5,000 baht to construct a new Buddhist temple. No Lae thus became the first Dara’ang village in Thailand and the Dara’ang entered into Thailand as its newest “hill tribe” population.

As Doi Ankhang was considered a forest reserve the Forestry Department limited the amount of land available to the new residents to 250 rai of land. This amount was barely adequate for the initial settlers, who were required to farm the land under the direction of the Royal Project.²⁰ The new village faced other difficulties, as the area was not securely under Thai army control. Khun Sa and his army still operated in the area and

²⁰. 1 rai of land is equivalent to 1600 square metres.
men were often forced to serve in the SUA, while both women and men were made to work in their opium fields. At this time Wa forces were also becoming active in the area and were attempting to wrest control over the opium trade from the SUA, and occasionally fighting would occur within the village itself.

Given the limited opportunities for employment and farming in No Lae, Dara’ang families soon began migrating further into Thailand in search of work. Many found work in the fields of fruit growers in Fang district. Through connections with businessmen in Fang district some Dara’ang men and women came in contact with a Ho Chinese man from Chiang Dao who was looking for workers to pick tea.\(^{21}\) Wages in the early 1980s were rising for farm labourers as many local men and women of Chiang Dao were moving to the city to work in Thailand’s expanding manufacturing sector. Large scale farming operations were thus looking further afield for cheap sources of labour and found a ready supply in the refugee communities from Burma which were growing along the border.

A-Yot, a 42 year old Dara’ang man who is now chair of the temple committee in Pang Daeng Nai, recalls moving to Chiang Dao when he was a teenager.

I went as a novice monk. I had been ordained in Burma, but was no longer a novice when I came to Thailand. While living at No Lae I re-ordained and moved to Chiang Dao as a novice. There was no temple at the time, but people supported myself and three other novices.

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\(^{21}\) Chiang Dao district is an important agricultural area. The principal commercial crops grown in the district include rice, tobacco, garlic, onions, chillies, cotton, and mangoes. The Ping River runs through the heart of the district creating a fertile valley given over primarily to wet-rice irrigation. The population in the lowlands of the district is predominantly Tai Yuan while the hills around the Ping river valley is home to a number of different ethnic minority groups, including Karen, Lisu, Lahu, Ho Chinese, Akha, Dara’ang, and recently Padaung. While technically within the Chiang Dao Forest Reserve, farmers from nearby Thung Luk villages had begun opening up tracts of land in the late 1970s to farm fruit, chillies, garlic, and other commercial crops (Wasana 2003: 64). This expansion into the highlands was fuelled by the construction of the Chiang Mai-Chiang Dao road which facilitated transportation of produce to expanding urban and global markets (Sakunee 2001: 53).
A-Yot recalls how at first three families moved to Chiang Dao where they were paid 2 baht per kilo of tea. Before the year was over the Ho Chinese businessman was looking for more labourers and sent his Dara’ang workers back to No Lae to look for others who might be willing to come pick tea. Upon returning to No Lae the families met A-Tun’s group from Loi Lai. As latecomers to No Lae these families did not have access to any farmland and their supply of rice that they had brought with them was running low. Fearing starvation during the coming winter 11 families from the Loi Lai group moved to Chiang Dao to work picking tea in late 1983. While the wages were low on the tea plantation, Dara’ang families were permitted to plant rice in the unused fields. While many men and women remember their time spent on the tea plantation fondly, most would only stay one year before founding the village of Pang Daeng Nai.

**Buddhist Foundations**

The founding of Pang Daeng Nai is connected with the presence of Buddhism in this highland area. While the community that developed around the tea plantation included several novices, the site lacked any temple structures. In order to pay proper respect to the Buddha on holy days, the Dara’ang farmers would walk approximately five kilometers along rough roads to a monastic residence (Thai: *sannak song*) and cave temple located on Doi Phrabat Mountain. The monastic residence was home to a Thai novice who offered to teach the children of the farmers at the temple, an offer which fit well with the experience of most Dara’ang men who had had likewise received their
education in the Shan monasteries of Burma.22

While enthusiastic about having their children educated, the distance from the village to the temple was long, and children had to cross 13 rivers during the rainy season in order to attend class. In order to take better advantage of the opportunity, several Dara’ang families living at Mae Chon began to seek out land closer to the monastic residence/cave temple. The novice monk who had been instructing the children put the families in contact with an older Tai Yuan man from Thung Luk village who had land in the area and who agreed to sell his 10 rai property to the Dara’ang for 2,000 baht. The land that was purchased was located inside of the Chiang Dao Forest Reserve, and he had no legal title to the land that was recognized by the state.

The founding of the village itself was marked by a highly auspicious event. I had heard the following story several times from Dara’ang men and women over the years, and one day asked A-Tun about it as he figures so prominently in the story. I was curious as to whether the event had taken place on his first visit to the area as some other people had said, or at some later date.

No, we had already been at Mae Jon [the tea plantation] for some time. Myself and the da bu meung [A-Pong, the village spirit specialist] were returning from Chiang Dao market where we were buying supplies. It was getting late and when we passed the cave temple the novice residing there asked us if we would like to come in and tam bun (“make merit”). So we stayed the night in the cave meditating and chanting. In the early morning we were woken by a loud cracking sound. The river that was just outside the cave, which had been dry for many years, was full of water! It had not rained that night (A-Tun, on the founding of Pang Daeng Nai).

The river that filled with water is the Huai Hok river, which today provides many

22. The term “Shan” encompasses a number of Tai groups who occupy the ex-Shan States of Burma. It most commonly refers to the so-called Tai Yai peoples, a Thai term which likewise encompasses a number of different groups. It is unclear whether the term is used by the Tai Khün people or not.
Dara’ang fields with water and for many years provided the village with its primary source of water for drinking, cooking, and cleaning.\(^{23}\)

The early years of Pang Daeng Nai were marked by a great deal of conflict between the new Dara’ang migrants, local Tai Yuan farmers, and, eventually, the Thai state. One afternoon during the course of my research I walked with A-Tun to one of his fields in order to pick some mangoes. Mangoes are one of the principal crops for farmers in Pang Daeng Nai, along with beans and corn. A-Tun can identify seven different types of mangoes that grow in the fields around Pang Daeng Nai, only a couple of which are sold on the market. As I was curious about the different types of mangoes, A-Tun took me around to see some of the trees growing in his own fields. After picking a few mangoes we stopped to rest on a shaded platform nearby the dirt road leading up to the village in order to have a taste. A-Tun explained,

> Across the road, where that house is now, was my first field. A Tai Yuan family came here and built a house right on top of my beans. We complained, even tried to bring them to court, but we had no citizenship and they did, so the courts did nothing. We don’t talk to them, and they live alone.

I knew the house well. When I was conducting my research for my master’s thesis in 2002–2003 the son of this same family murdered the son of A-Tun, who was also a good friend of mine and with whom I was staying.

> You know them. They killed my son. But he was released after five years. I don’t know where he went.

\(^{23}\) The story itself has interesting parallels to the founding myth of Namhsan. “The Namhsan Chronicle states that the people [Palaung], after several marches, passed through the Wah wilderness. We are told that at Pang–nawn, as they neared Tawngpeng, they found no water. ‘It was already dark, but the Chief, trusting to his virtue, invoked the spirits, saying, ‘I love my people very much. Be merciful, and cause water to come forth that they may drink.’ He trimmed a bamboo pole, and, when he thrust the sharpened end into the ground, water gushed forth out of the hollow bamboo as from a sprout. Not only did the people drink, but there was plenty of water in which to bathe” (Milne 1924: 19)
I didn’t push him to speak more upon this subject. The circumstances surrounding the murder are not a public matter. Yet I now realized that the problems the family had with this particular man ran much deeper than the recent trouble that led to the murder. There was longstanding tension here that had resurfaced violently, and I wondered if violence had marked the early days of the village. A-Tun explained,

Yes, there were problems. Someone set fire to A-Ngeun’s first house. It was right over there, where Oi has her field now. And A-Sam’s mother was attacked in her house. That may have been for robbery, because she had a lot of silver jewellery, but there was a lot of problems then.

Much of this tension grew around the issue of land. While the Dara’ang had purchased the land, there was no legal title, and racism towards highlanders who were considered “outsiders” and “not Thai” served a justification for pushing them off the land. The lack of citizenship status made the Dara’ang very vulnerable, because without citizenship they had no legal right to own any land in Thailand (see Appendix A). Yet trouble over land was by no means limited to small-scale conflict with local Tai Yuan farmers. The state also claimed this land as a forest reserve, and the attempt by state agencies to forcibly remove highlanders from the area led in 1989 to the arrest of nearly every adult Dara’ang man living in Pang Daeng Nai and surrounding villages.24

24. Chiang Dao Forest Reserve was created in 1973. In addition to the forest reserve system that limits the possibility of gaining legal title to the land, the Royal Forestry Department (RFD) uses a zoning policy since 1992 to determine which areas are considered to be the most sensitive and thus restricted in terms of human occupancy. There are three possible designations: Conservation Zones (C), Economic Zones (E), and Agriculture Zones (A). National parks, wildlife sanctuaries, and watershed class 1A and 1B areas are considered Conservation Zones. Economic Zones cover deforested areas that are suitable for reforestation in the form of commercial plantations and land reserved for landless farmers. Zone A covers deforested areas which are marked for allocation to landless farmers under the auspices of the agricultural land reform process. The village site of Pang Daeng Nai is situated within the Economic Zone and is thus at lower risk of eviction than other Dara’ang villages such as Mae Chon and Huai Pong which have been completely enclosed within the Conservation Zone of Sri Lanna National Park.
On 26 January 1989, at approximately 5:30AM when the village of Pang Daeng Nai was just waking up, about one hundred armed men arrived in seventeen trucks and encircled the village. The group was comprised with forestry officials and police officers. They called on all the men to come out of their homes and gather in the centre of the village, and then separated out the older men and those who were below the age of 18. The Royal Forestry Department agents then told the village that they would take these men to town and provide them with blankets and citizenship cards. One Dara’ang man, a son of A-Tun who was arrested at the time, explains:

I was only 17 at the time, but when I heard about the blankets I jumped into one of the trucks. It was very cold and my family didn’t have enough for the winter. I was so stupid. When the trucks took us to an open field outside of Chiang Dao we all knew that we had been arrested. I had just got married and my new wife was pregnant with our fist child. (A-Pan, age 30)

Another Dara’ang man who was arrested that day explained how the operation was racialized:

It was not only Dara’ang who were arrested [from other villages in the area]. It was also Lahu and Lisu men. And Khon Muang [Northern Thai or Tai Yuan] too! Really! But on the way they talked to the police. They told them that they weren’t chao khao so they were not encroaching on the forest. They showed them their ID cards. So the police let them out of the truck! (A-Pao, age 56)

Since 1983, watershed classification has also proved to be an important means through which the state conceptualizes the highland areas. Watershed areas are graded on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is the most sensitive area where no settlement or agricultural activities are permitted and 5 being areas where lowland farming is encouraged. Pang Daeng Nai village is situated in an area which is classified as class 4, a gentle sloping area where upland farming can take place with permission from the RFD. However, several families also have fields along the steep slopes of the mountains classified as class 1A and 1B watershed areas, and several Dara’ang villages are situated in the more sensitive areas inside the national park itself.
In total twenty-nine Dara’ang men from Pang Daeng Nai were arrested, which at the time was the entire population of adult men in the village. Other villages in the area, such as Mae Chon, also experienced the arrest of all grown men in the village. The prisoners were brought to Chiang Dao police station where they spent two weeks in jail before standing trial. One man explained that lawyers told them they faced a maximum sentence of 11 years and 8 months in jail, but if they confessed to forest encroachment the courts would lower their sentence to 5 years and 9 months. Not having any experience with the legal system or money to hire their own lawyer the men confessed. They were then moved to the provincial jail outside of Chiang Mai city to serve their prison sentence, leaving behind 120 women, children, and older men in the village.

While life was hard in jail for the men, it was equally difficult for those people left behind. Soon after the arrest, RFD officials arrived in the village and told the women that they should move. No assistance or location was offered, so lacking the means to settle anywhere else, the women remained in the village. Dan, who was a young girl at the time, recalls how many of the families would band together into one house.

We built our own houses. They weren't as sturdy as the one's the men made, we'd have to replace the boards often, but we did it. This house [pointing to her new house] was a long house then, and stretched all the way to Dao's house over there [a distance of approximately 15 metres from where her current house ended].

The first year the women brought in the remaining harvest of rice by themselves. When the following planting season arrived several months later, however, many were afraid to plant their fields fearing that they would also be arrested for forest encroachment. Am, now 46 years old, explained that the children and elderly were their primary concern.
We were already worried about our safety, if we would find enough food for our children or our parents. If we went to jail, what would happen to them? They couldn't get their own food. They were children!

After realizing that there were few options available to them, the women began to plant some rice, but the amount that they produced was not enough to meet the needs of the village and the villagers turned to NGOs and other organizations for help with food and supplies for the winter.

While the RFD and police did not force the remaining villagers out of the village, they did seize much of the land in order to plant teak. When the teak was young villagers were still able to plant some rice amongst the seedlings, but as the trees matured they effectively lost their land to the RFD. Today, the teak plantation wraps around the northern periphery of Pang Daeng Nai. Mango trees continue to grow amongst the monocrop of teak trees as a reminder that once the land was once under cultivation by the farmers of Pang Daeng Nai.

Lisu workers were initially used to perform the work of planting teak trees. During one of the frequent visits RFD officials made to the site, however, the remaining Dara’ang villagers managed to convince the officials to hire them on as planters. In a report conducted by the Highland Agriculture an Research Development Institute (HARDI), the authors states that the willingness of the RFD to work with the Dara’ang was related to their shared religious faith; “At first the authorities wanted to remove all the people from the community and relocate them out of the area, but when they saw that they were Buddhist, that they shared the same faith, this caused authorities to change their minds and hire them on as tree planters to reforest the area” (Phecharada et. al. 2007: 53; translation mine).
Between the years 1989 and 1995, Dara’ang villagers from Pang Daeng Nai were involved in the planting of teak around their village and several other locations around Chiang Dao. They were paid 40 baht a day for their work. While billed as a re-forestation project, many Dara’ang men express the view that a monoculture forest is not a “forest” (Thai: pa) but a “garden” (Thai: suan). The economic basis for the operation are further highlighted by the fact that many Dara’ang men and women report that forested land was also cleared in order to plant teak.²⁵

The RFD plan at the time was to replant the entire area with teak trees but the village head of Pang Daeng Nai managed to convince the officials to leave some of the land un-planted so that the village would not starve. A-Tun explains:

I told them that growing peanuts, maize, mangoes, these we already know how to grow, and grow them well. If you take the land away, we have nothing to eat, we have to learn and be taught new skills in order to survive.

This concern demonstrates a problem with the process of state enclosures. Unlike many peasant populations, the Dara’ang at the time had no legal rights within Thailand. This made migration to the city impossible for members of the village (cf. Marx 1976: 877ff.). In addition to the lack of mobility, Dara’ang men who might otherwise have worked illegally outside of the village had all been imprisoned. Survival thus depended on negotiating a position for the village within the margins of a state that was increasingly moving to control resources in the highland forested areas.

The Dara’ang prisoners were released on the Queen's birthday, 12 August 1992, after serving 3 years 6 months and 18 days of their sentence and were granted a pardon in

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²⁵. Wasana 2003: 88-89 also records reports from villagers about forested land being cleared to plant teak.
celebration of this event. They returned to a village that had changed dramatically since their imprisonment. While the RFD told the villagers that they could continue to live in the village as long as they did not clear any more forest, a great deal of land had been taken over by the RFD for teak plantations. The land south of the village site had also been demarcated as a national park on 1 August 1989, the same year that the men were imprisoned, so many people's fields were now within the boundaries of Sri Lanna National Park.

26. This was only the first of mass arrests that took place in the area. Subsequent arrests targeted other Dara'ang villages, and left Pang Daeng Nai alone. On 22 March 1998 a raid was conducted in Pang Daeng Nok. In total 56 men were arrested, of which 26 were Dara'ang. Unlike the arrests of 1989, however, this latest round was met with resistance on behalf of Thai activists who had become more organized in the wake of the 1997 constitution. Academics and NGOs were thus able to help free the Dara'ang men who were arrested in under a year (Sakunee 2001: 72).

More arrests took place on 23 July 2004, again in Pang Daeng Nok. Much like the first two arrests, armed officials from the RFD, border patrol police, and military arrived in the villages in the early hours of the morning with trucks and helicopters. During this most recent sweep 48 villagers were arrested including 19 Dara'ang, 25 Lahu, 1 Lisu, and 3 Tai Yuan men. The charges were the same as before: trespassing on forest reserve land. After petitions were filed by a number of different organizations in Chiang Mai and Bangkok, the Law Society of Thailand and its lawyers were able to get these men out of jail after only 48 days (Supara 2002).

An article which appeared in the Bangkok Post on 3 October 2004 suggests other motivations for the subsequent arrests that have occurred in Pang Daeng Nok and is worth quoting here at length as it demonstrates the way ethnic relations between highland minority people and lowland Tai are shaped by conflicts over natural resources with direct reference to the Paluang people:

The father-in-law of a well known politician who owns a quarry company wanted to open up a new project on Palai mountain in Chiang Dao district of Chiang Mai province, not too far from Pang Daeng [Nok and Klang] village. Construction of a road using government funds to the mountainous area was begun. The villagers who live around Palai mountain protested. Although the quarry project has not yet materialized, the road construction went on and was finished in 1998. That politician later became a deputy Minister of Agriculture. One day in March 1998, he inspected a “forest fire” in Chiang Mai and was asked by journalists where the haze came from. He immediately answered that it was the work of the hilltribes people who do the slash and burn clearing for agriculture.

Around the same time, there was a report of about 600 logs which were found in Chiang Dao forest reserve area connected to Sri Lanna National Park. The illegal logs were found along the road that was begun in July 1997 and finished in July 1998. It was widely rumoured that politicians were behind the illegal logging. Since those logs remained unclaimed in the area without “owners”, some villagers made use of some of them. Soon afterwards, perhaps to show his efficiency to reporters, the deputy minister ordered the arrest of members of hilltribes nearby the mountain that his father-in-law wanted to open up his quarry on and also near the road that was constructed to reach the mountain. They were arrested on the charge that they were trespassing in the forest reserve (Supara 2004).

27. Other villages, such as Mae Chon and Huai Pong, were completely enclosed within the boundaries
Today, Pang Daeng Nai is more stable. The village has negotiated a deal with the RFD so that they can remain on the land as long as they do not expand their fields. Villages such as Huai Pong and Mae Chon, which lie within the park boundaries, are not so secure, and some residents of Pang Daeng Nai avoid staying in these villages fearing that they might be raided. In 2007 the King’s Royal Project began moving into the area with the goal of developing the Dara’ang villages. Their presence within the village creates a more secure climate for the villages, but some fear a loss of autonomy if project workers are allowed to dictate what is planted and to whom products may be sold, as is the case in the Dara’ang village of No Lae. As I concluded my fieldwork it was too early to tell precisely what direction development would take, but it was clear from plans for village electrification and ground water projects that the Royal Project would likely have a major impact on the area in the years to come.

**Ethnographic Notes**

There has not been an extensive amount of research on Dara’ang/Palaung society. In English, the Dara’ang are commonly known as the Palaung, a term that comes from the Burmese language. Many Dara’ang people who migrated to Thailand had not heard of the name “Palaung” prior to leaving Shan state, and I use the term Dara’ang throughout this thesis when speaking about the Dara’ang of Thailand as this is the term the group is increasingly known by within Thailand, as well as being the term my informants prefer. I maintain the term Palaung when referring to the entire population of Palaung people in Thailand, Burma, and China as members of each sub-group refers to the entire population of the park. Sri Lanna Park covers 1406 km² of land in three districts of Chiang Mai province: Mae Taeng, Prao, and Chiang Dao.
using different terms.

Dara’ang in Thailand use the term “Dara’ang” to refer to all Palaung sub-groups, and Dara’ang Re’ng (IPA: da ra-ʔaŋ reŋ) to refer to their particular sub-group. The prefix “Da-” is attached to all ethnonyms, such as “Da Siam” for Central Thai, “Da Yün” for Tai Yuan, and “Da Gula” for “foreigner.” The term “ra-ang” is said to refer to the steep slopes and mountaintops where Palaung villages are typically found (Aye 1988: 222). “Re’ng” is Pale for the colour red and refers to the red horizontally striped skirts worn by Dara’ang women of this particular sub-group. In Burma, the Palaung people in Namhsan township refer to themselves as “Ta-ang” and in China the Palaung are part of the official De'ang nationality.28

The Dara’ang Re’ng are most visibly distinct from other sub-groups in terms of the clothing worn by women. This outfit consists of a red, horizontally striped tube-skirt known as a glāng, a long-sleeve blouse (salow) that opens at the front, and a set of rattan and silver hoops (nong) worn around the waist. Mon, a daughter of A-Tun and a strong proponent of maintaining the traditional style of clothing for women, recounts the origin of the distinct silver and rattan hoops.

A long time ago there lived a celestial being known as Nāng Doi Ngeun (Lady of the Silver Mountain). One day she descended to the land of humans to bathe in a lake with her seven sisters and was enjoying herself so much that she did not take care to watch out for possible danger. A hunter who was lurking nearby spied the ladies bathing and devised a plot to capture her. He produced a snare, which he used to capture Nāng Doi Ngeun. So bound, her imprisoned body was sent to the local lord (jao) who added more silver hoops around her waist to weigh her down so she could not fly away. This is why women wear the hoops today, in memory of their celestial origins.

28. The De’ang nationality in China also includes other Palaungic languages such as Riang. The 2002 census placed the total population of De’ang people in China at 17,935 (Du 2007: 136).
While dress is an important marker of ethnic identity, it is not the only cultural
trait that sets the Dara’ang Re’ng apart from other Palaung sub-groups. There are also
important linguistic distinctions that exist within the larger Palaung populations.
Linguists classify Palaungic languages in general under the Northern Mon-Khmer branch
of the Mon-Khmer family of languages. This branch includes four sub-branches: Mang,
Khasian, Khmuic and Palaungic languages. Palaungic languages are further divided into
an eastern and a western group. Eastern Palaungic languages include Danau, Riang, and
Palaung languages. The Palaung languages are divided into Shwe (Golden Palaung),
Rumai, and Ruching (Silver Palaung, Pale). The last of these, which I refer to throughout
this study as “Pale,” is the language spoken by most Dara’ang people in Thailand. This
sub-group (to the extent that it may be identified as an ethno-linguistic group) is also
referred to as Ruching, Ngwe Palaung, or Silver Palaung (Lewis 2009)

The most comprehensive overview of Palaung linguistic divisions comes from
Mitani (1977: 193), who draws upon the limited literature on Palaung languages (Luce
1965, Milne 1931, Ferlus 1974, Scott and Hardiman 1900: 707-709) to form a
classification of Palaung languages. Mitani identifies a Central Group (which include
groups such as the Milne's Katur, Kumkaw, Kwanhai, Pang Nim), a Northern Group
(Rumai and a group he refers to as the Ra-ang), a Southern Group (Darang, Yeseji,
Kyusao, and Palaung in the neighbourhood of Manton), an Omachawn group, and two
unclassified languages (Hupawng and Homau, the later of which may be in the Central
Group). Mitani's classification roughly corresponds to the common tri-partite division of
Palaung speaking people, with the exception of the Omachawn and the unclassified
languages. The Southern Group is most often referred to as Pale by linguists and I use

this label when identifying vocabulary specific to the Dara’ang Re’ng. 29

There has not been an extensive amount of research conducted on Palaung languages or sub-groupings due to the political situation in Burma. Leslie Milne, an English woman and member of the Royal Asiatic Society, conducted the only comprehensive study of a Palaung language and culture in the 1910s (Milne 1921, 1931). While valuable, Milne’s work focused on one sub-group, the Golden Palaung or Katur of Namhsan, and is of limited use when considering the cultural practices of the Dara’ang Re’eng sub-group. 30

*Kreu*

Palaung society is also divided into hierarchically ranked patrilineal lineages known as *kreu*. According to Palaung Cultural Association representatives of Namhsan, each Palaung sub-group has their own *kreu* system. 31 Palaung people living in Thailand, those of the Dara’ang Re’ng sub-group, divide themselves into eight *kreu*: La Guan, Bâk Noi, Siam Hrai, Hraw Brai, La Hñoi, Jeum Meung, Deu Bân Tâng, and Deu Bân Tia. La Guan is one of the larger groups and is considered very old. Deu Bân Tâng and Deu Bân

29. “The language of the Southern Palaung is so different from that of the Gold Palaung that the two peoples do not understand each other, so that for communication purposes Burmese or Shan has to be used. Phonologically, lexically, and grammatically Southern Palaung is so different from Northern Palaung that it can be regarded as a separate language rather than a dialect of the same language” (Janzen 1976: 2).

30. The following are a list of Palaung sub-groups provided by the Palaung Culture and Literacy Association. It represents a particular perspective, one which again comes from Namhsan, but which has the benefit over previous lists in terms of its diversity. The Dara’ang Re’ng would correspond with the *Ru Jing* on this list: 1) Samlong/Katur, 2) Ru Khrr (aka. Jobana), 3) Thiau Rai, 4) Tang Ma, 5) Kwan Hai, 6) Pang Nim, 7) Khun Hot, 8) NgûRot (Burmese call Amugin), 9) Ru Kwang, 10) Ru Kö, 11) Ru Haû (Hñh), 12) Ru Jing, 13) Ru Mai. These sub-groups are generally associated with particular villages. For example, the Samlong/Katur are located primarily in Namhsan while the Khun Hot are found in Khun Hot. Some groups, such as the *Ru Khrr* are found in several villages around Namhsan township (*Ru Khrr*, Arem, Om Côn, Om Diat, Pang Cong). It appears that each sub-group is distinct in terms of the clothing worn by women, although more research is required in order to determine the particular differences.

31. The Samlong/Katur, for example, have a seven part *kreu* division that consists of Ja Râi, Vai Lông, Ja Phrông, Van Mûng, Ja Khrrî, Ja Lâm, and Puû Mang (which means Prince).
Tia are closely related, although Deu Băn Tăng is considered higher status than Deu Băn Tia (tăng = big and tia = small in Pale). As a result, if a man from Deu Băng Tăng wishes to marry a woman from Deu Băn Tia he is required to take on the kreu of his wife and become Deu Băn Tia.

The kreu “Siam Hrai” is interesting for what it tells us about Dara’angization. This kreu was originally made for Shan men marrying into Dara’ang villages (“Da Siam” = “Shan” in Pale). According to elders in Pang Daeng Nai, it was later extended to include all men from other ethnic groups (Lisu, Lahu, Akah) who married into the village, as these men did not have a kreu (for non-Dara’ang women this was not an issue as they take the kreu of their husband).

A person’s kreu matters little in terms of day-to-day life. In Thailand, most men and women were assigned new family names from Thai officials based on their father’s name when they migrated. These are the designations that are important in terms of the state bureaucracy. Many younger Dara’ang men and women do not even think about what kreu they belong to until they are to be married, and even then it is more a concern for parents than it is for the bride and groom. In fact, kreu is most significant in the context of marriages. Dara’ang men and women are relatively free to choose whom they wish to marry, but given the hierarchical nature of kreu rankings, it was sometimes difficult in the past for men from Hraw Brai and smaller kreu like La Ñoi and Bắk Noi to find wives, given their lower status kreu. This has changed since coming to Thailand (where the pool of marriageable Dara’ang partners is quite small), but is still recognized by many elders who are involved in negotiating marriage prices, as the family of the groom is expected to pay a sum of money to the bride's parents. Knowledge of kreu is
also important within the context of wedding ceremonies, where the spirits of ancestors who watch over a household are informed about the arrival of a new bride into the family.

**Population**

It is difficult to accurately estimate the total number of Palaung men and women living in Burma, China, and Thailand today given the social situation in each country. Burma has not conducted a census since 1983 and did not collect information on ethnic affiliation at this time. The last complete census of Burma was conducted in 1931.32 This census reported that the “Palaung and Palè” population of Burma stood at 138,656 individuals.

Ethnologue (Lewis 2009) breaks down the Palaung population of Burma into three categories: Shwe, Ruching (Pale), and Rumai. It reports that the total population of Pale speakers is 272,000 (258,000 in Burma, 9,000 in Yunnan, and 5,000 in Thailand); Golden Palaung 150,000 (148,000 in Burma and 2,000 in China); and Rumai 139,000 (137,000 in Burma and 2,000 in China). These numbers are based on outdated and somewhat unreliable data (at least in the case of Thailand, where many Palaung are considered illegal migrants, and Burma), but provide a basic idea as to the number of Palaung people living in the region.33

32. Another count was made in 1941, but Japan invaded before the data could be analysed. A count was begun in 1953 and covered much of the urban areas, but was not completed. Since then conflict has prevented another census from being completed.
33. The number is likely much higher. The Palaung Women's Organization estimates the total number of Palaung people worldwide to be much higher at over one million (PWO 2006: 8). In Thailand, it is difficult to conduct a survey as there are a number of people living in the country illegally. Household numbers gathered from interviews with village heads for each village breaks down as follows:
* Mae Ai District, Chiang Mai Province: Huai Wai Nok (48), Huai Sai Khao (22)
Tai-Palaung Relations

The largest concentration of Palaung people and settlements are located in Namhsan township of Kyaukme district, in Shan State, Burma. The Namhsan Chronicle and Kangwantok Palê Chronicle trace the history of the Palaung people to the hills around the Shan town of "Se-lan," thought to have been located near present day Namkham. These early references to Selan point to a long historical association between the Palaung and the Tai speaking people in that they recount how the Palaung were driven from Selan by the Chinese, stories which differ very little from the those told by the Shan of Hsen-wi (Milne 1924: 18).

Prior to Burmese independence, most Palaung villages were integrated into the Tai feudal system (Howard 2005: 26). The old Palaung state of Tawngpeng was modeled on the Tai miiang, and Palaung villages outside of Tawngpeng gave tribute to a Tai lord (saopha or sawbwa). Prior to the colonial period Tawnpeng was a relatively autonomous state ruled by a Palaung saopha\textsuperscript{34} whose seat of government was located at Namhsan.\textsuperscript{35} Today this area is still majority Palaung, although politically it has been incorporated into the Union of Myanmar as a township and has been renamed Namhsan after its old capital.

Most Dara’ang men and women who now live within Thailand migrated from villages located in southern and eastern Shan State. In this area, Dara’ang villages

\textsuperscript{34} The last saopha was the 16th, descendent from Da Dwe Pha who was said to have begun his rule in 1753 in the reign of Alunghay (Singhanetra-Renard 2004: 1)

\textsuperscript{35} Namhsan is actually a Shan word which means “shaking water.” Palaung people still refer to it by its Palaung name Om Yeu (“trembling water,” om = “water”, “yeu” = shaking).
typically paid tribute to a Tai saopha or lord, whose seat of governance was the Tai mūang. The mūang fulfilled a number of functions for the Dara’ang. They were places for commercial as well as cultural exchanges. Many Dara’ang boys spent some time during their adolescents as novice monks within one of the urban Tai monasteries, as Dara’ang villages often lacked the facilities necessary to conduct an ordination ceremony (see Ch. 4). In the urban monasteries Dara’ang boys would learn to read and write the sacred Dhamma script, conduct rituals according to Tai styles, and import this knowledge back to Dara’ang villages. As in the case of many Tai-speaking ethnic groups, Buddhism is considered an important marker of Dara’ang ethnic identity, and the particular historical connection that exists between Dara’ang and Tai Buddhist practices provides an important cultural context for reflecting upon about ethnic relations within contemporary Thailand.
Chapter 3

Dara’ang Religion

During the time of the Buddha, the Buddha himself came to this region [Burma/Thailand]. Did you know this? He came, and all people from the different tribes (pao) wanted to pay their respects and give him offerings: Tai, Dara’ang, Lahu, Burman, and all the others. Each tribe wanted to be the one to offer the Buddha food for his midday meal, but there were so many people that all could not give him offerings. The ones who were able to give their offerings first were the Tai people. After they had presented the Buddha with his midday meal the Buddha blessed them and said, “You shall be rulers over your lands.” Since that time the Tai people have been rulers over their own country and have lived in peace.

The next people to arrive were the Burmans, but they were too late. The Buddha had already eaten his midday meal. The Burmans nevertheless asked the Buddha for a blessing, and he gave it to them, saying, “You shall be rulers over your lands.” As the Burmans left they threw the food that they had brought to the Buddha onto the ground. All the animals that had gathered around, the dogs, the pigs, the chickens, they started to fight over the food. Ever since then the Burmans have fought for power in their country and have never known peace.

The next to arrive were the Dara’ang, but they were too late. The Buddha had already left. So the Dara’ang asked the Tai if they could see the temple where they had offered the mid-day meal to the Buddha. They entered the temple and examined all the ritual objects used to pay respect to the Buddha. They learned the proper way to honour the Buddha. Since that time the Dara’ang people have continued to pay respect to the Buddha in the same way that was taught to the Tai. However, because they did not receive the blessing from the Buddha they do not have their own country. This is why the Dara’ang have a temple while other hill tribe (chao khao) people do not.

The Lahu were the last to arrive. When they found that the Buddha had already left they were upset. They asked the Tai people which way the Buddha had gone. They quickly headed off after the Buddha and did not stop to look at the temple. All they found was the tree under which the Buddha had stopped to rest. They presented their offerings to this tree. That is why the Lahu do not have a temple and always have a large tree at their village ceremonies. 36

Stories that connect the Buddha with a particular location, one which he is said to have visited as the Buddha or a place where he lived out a previous incarnation prior to

36. The above story was told to me several times while I was living in Pang Daeng Nai. The version presented here was recounted on the last uposatha day (occurring on the new moon of the tenth lunar month, known in Pale as “sadang ganyom do biah,” see table 2) prior to the close of the rains retreat and was recounted by the da jän, the village lay Buddhist leader.
achieving enlightenment, are common amongst Theravāda Buddhist populations of Southeast Asia. In Thai this genre of legends is known as *tamnan* and copies of *tamnan* texts can often found amongst the collected scriptures of Buddhist temples. The “Buddhological geography” which such texts present can also be seen depicted in paintings that adorn the interior of walls of older temples where, in addition to their pedagogical and decorative functions, they perform a similar role in establishing an association between the Buddha and a particular place (Thongchai 2004: 22).

Stories that connect a particular ethnic group with the life of the Buddha are not as common. The purpose of the above story is less about establishing the meaning of a particular location (a temple, mountain, or district) than the meaning of ethnicity in relation to nation-states that certain groups (Thai and Burman) have come to dominate. Rather than providing a “Buddhological geography,” the above story represents a kind of “Buddhological ethnology” dealing with questions of power and identity. It establishes not only a connection between the Buddha and particular ethnic groups, but situates these connections within a space where power is distributed unequally, particularly in regards to the matter of the political sovereignty of various groups.

Blessings are an important part of Dara’ang religious practice and are commonly given by elders and monks on ritual occasions. As seen in the opening story, the privilege of governing one’s own state is not reflected in the moral worth of the group, but of the blessing received from the Buddha himself. The Burmese, portrayed as less then ideal in their behaviour, nevertheless receive the blessing and subsequently acquire sovereignty over their territory, while the Dara’ang receive only the knowledge of Buddhist practice (no doubt valuable, but also acquired by all others except the Lahu). In the Christian
context, one is reminded here of the Old Testament story where Jacob tricks Isaac into giving him the blessing meant for Essau (Gen. 27: 27-29). It works nonetheless, as the blessing itself has an intrinsic power to bring about effects, irrespective of the morality of the receiver.

One of the remarkable aspects of the story is the way it sets up a mythological connection between the Dara’ang ethnic group and the Buddha as a relationship mediated through the Tai/Thai people. In certain respects it shares affinities with the stories of other marginalized groups in Southeast Asia who, through an accident of some sort, lose possession of literacy - knowledge that is historically connected with a particular religious traditions (Buddhism, Taoism, and later, Christianity). The Hmong, for example, tell stories of how their knowledge of literacy was lost when their books were destroyed traversing a great river, a crossing that the Chinese people made safely with their own books intact (Tapp 2005: 109-111). The Lahu recount how god wrote their books on rice paper and that they were forced to eat their books during a time of terrible hunger (Pun and Lewis 2002: 25). The Karen tell a similar story wherein Y’wa, the divine creator, gives out books to his seven children (ancestors of the major ethnic groups known to the Karen), but the Karen do not take proper care of their books, resulting in them being eaten by animals or destroyed by fire (Keyes 1995: 52). In all these cases a relationship is set up between one group who does not possess their own system of writing and another who does. Those who maintain their literacy invariably gain a great deal of power from their knowledge; power that is expressed in the form of the states that these groups (Chinese, Burmans, and Thai) control. The power of literacy must then be sought by the dispossessed in the scripts of other people, sometimes those of European
powers, and other times those of the dominant ethnic group of local nation-states.

Like many smaller ethnic groups of Southeast Asia, the Dara’ang do not have an indigenous script. They do, however, continue to use the Dhamma script for religious and secular purposes (see below), but recognize that it has come from the Tai people as the sacred medium for transmitting Buddhist truths. The significance of this possession and disavowal in terms of ethnic identity is discussed in chapter 7, but it is important to note, as the story of being late for Buddha shares a fundamental concern with distinguishing upland societies from those of the lowland Tai and Burmese based on connections made between knowledge and power.37 While the myth employs a similar trope to that used by lowland states, that of connecting Buddhism with the state itself, it does so in a way that appropriates Buddhism for the hills. The Dara’ang become Buddhist but do not become sovereign rulers of their own state. While sovereignty itself appears as something valued (one gains it through the blessing of the Buddha), also important is the proper behaviour, for without it your society will descend into chaos. While the story must be read as a state effect, it does not posit a possibility for gaining a state, nor even suggest that such a state is desirable in the future. Rather, it constructs Dara’ang society as distinct from other lowland and highland groups through a particular mythico-history of Buddhist localization.

The story of being late for Buddha is simultaneously concerned with both distinction and continuity. While highland literacy tales typically describe situations of rupture, whereby literacy is lost, the story is one of transmission. Dara’ang people become aware of Buddhist rituals through the first hand experience of the Tai/Thai

37. Scott (2009: 221-224) suggests that given the obvious connections between literacy and state power (census, tax records, law), nonliteracy can be read as a strategy for avoiding the state.
people. While this differs from the account given by Palaung chronicles in Namhsan (see below), it is significant in terms of the way Dara’ang people living in Thailand come to imagine themselves as a bi-cultural people (see Ch. 5). The myth is similar to the claims of authenticity made by religious groups who trace their genealogy through multiple generations back to an original mythical ancestor. However, rather than the exhaustive lists that are found in texts such as the Hebrew bible, the above story condenses the historical development of a religious tradition to a brief moment; a poetic expression of a lengthy historical process which, if expressed in an elongated form, would provide a claim to religious authenticity similar to the vignette presented here.

The story of the first encounter between the Dara’ang people and Buddhism highlights the way Buddhism serves as a cultural contact zone within which ethnicity is negotiated. Dara’ang Buddhism is presented within the villages of Thailand simultaneously as a religion shared with people from a multitude of ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, a system of beliefs and practices transmitted through Tai people, a form of practice which has been altered through its adoption by the Dara’ang community (i.e. one that is distinctly “Dara’ang”), and a discourse of cultural criticism which challenges the prevailing ethnic hierarchy of Thailand. The resulting syncretism is recognized as forming a complex totality of interacting parts, but the historical confluence of two distinct traditions within Dara’ang religious discourse remains important in terms of claims made on the authenticity of their Buddhist practice.
A Religio-Historical Relationship

The vast majority of Palaung people in Burma, Thailand, and China are Theravāda Buddhists. As is the case for many Tai speaking groups, Buddhism has become over time an important marker of ethnic identity, a cultural trait that sets Palaung villages apart from other upland ethnic minority groups and places them in particular relationship vis-à-vis the lowland Tai and Burman majorities. As the Palaung population in general are not a homogenous mass, the actual form of practice varies depending on the location, history, and idiosyncrasies of the specific group of Palaung people in question. Many Palaung villages send their sons to ordain in the monasteries of nearby towns, as most village temples lack the requisite number of resident monks and ordination hall (see Ch. 5). As a result, Palaung villages located closer to Burman towns tend to follow Burmese forms of Buddhism, while those with established links to Tai communities tend towards the form that predominates in that particular area. The Dara’ang communities that migrated to Thailand generally fall into the later group, and as such I will be dealing primarily with the relationship between Dara’ang and Tai Buddhism.

There has been very little written about Palaung Buddhism in general, and even less about the Pale ethno-linguistic sub-group who form the majority of Palaung people living in Thailand. In order to gain some historical perspective we must rely on accounts

38. The Joshua Project (2009), an evangelical Christian website that seeks to extend Christian teachings to “unreached” peoples, puts the number of Christian converts at 1% of the population, all of whom are Protestant. It also lists 9% of the Palaung population as practising an “ethnic religion,” as opposed to “Buddhism,” which they say is practised by 99% of the population. In my own field studies I have yet to encounter an individual who maintains the so-called “animistic” practices exclusively. In general, spirit and Buddhist oriented practices and beliefs co-exist, while Christian converts tend to reject spirit-oriented practices.

39. The term majority and minority refer not to the number of people but to their subordinate or dominant status, although in practice the terms are most often connected to a group’s relative population numbers.
provided by Leslie Milne (1924) concerning the Golden or Shwe Palaung people (specifically the Katur sub-group) of Tawngpeng. To what extent the history of Tawngpeng is inter-connected with the Pale speaking Palaung is unclear, but there are stories which link the two populations together and the linguistic similarities point towards a common ancestry. One such story is an oral history which recounts how approximately two hundred years ago the Pale Palaung moved to Kengtung after the ruler of Namhsan (then capital of Tawngpeng) levied a tax upon the people, which the Pale mistakenly believed asked for a room full of money, rather than a tax upon each room (Howard and Wattanapun 2001: 20-21). The Pale speaking population of Thailand still consider Namhsan as the old Palaung kingdom from which they originated, although few have actually made the trip.

It is unclear when the Palaung people in general first adopted Buddhism. Milne (1924: 312) recounts that the Palaung of Tawngpeng believed Theravāda Buddhism was first introduced to the Palaung by the Burmese King Bō-daw-hpaya (r. 1782-1819 CE) in 1782 CE, but suggests that the Palaung likely had some knowledge of Buddhism prior to this date, given the presence of Buddhism in the nearby Shan states of North Hsenwi and Mōng Mit since the sixteenth century. Anthropologist Shanshan Du provides a similar timeframe, noting “according to the historical record of imperial China, Theravāda Buddhism was introduced to the De’ang [Palaung of China] before the late eighteenth century” (2007: 136). Given the heterogeneity of Buddhism in the hills and the earlier presence of Shan forms of Buddhism in close proximity to Palaung villages, it is likely that Palaung Buddhism from its earliest days was influenced by different streams of
thought and practice. Burmese forms of Buddhism are strong today within Palaung towns located close to Burman population centres, while in and around Kengtung Palaung communities are more heavily influenced by the Tai Yuan or Lan Na tradition of Buddhism.

Most Dara’ang people who now live within Thailand migrated from villages located in southern and eastern Shan State where the Tai Yuan form of Buddhism was prominent. The tradition of Buddhism that predominated in this area prior to the 20th century is known somewhat problematically in English as “Yuan Buddhism” (or “Yûn Buddhism”), a term coined by the American evangelical missionary William Clifton Dodd (1923) in his post-humously published book *The Tai Race*. Dara’ang in Thailand similarly identify this form of Buddhism as being in the Tai Khûn style, the dominant Tai ethnic group of Kengtung, or with the Tai Yuan and the old kingdom of Lan Na. It differs from the dominant Central Thai or Siamese form of Buddhism in terms of its religious script, the form of their rituals, the pronunciation of Pâli, and the organizational structure of the temples that is much looser and non-hierarchical.

The label “Yuan” in “Yuan Buddhism” refers to the Tai Yuan people amongst whom this form of particular Buddhism arose. The Tai Yuan dominated the territory of northern Thailand and the surrounding region between the 13th and 16th century, and constitute the dominant group in northern Thailand today. Their “kingdom” was known as Lan Na, or “one million rice fields.” Lan Na was less a centralized political unit than a loose federation of semi-independent city-states united through oaths of allegiance and familial ties. Chiang Mai city, founded in 1296 CE by King Mangrai (1239-1311 CE),

40 Mendelson suggests that in addition to the state sanctioned traditions, the “Shan States provided a refuge for many centuries to sects chased out of Burma proper for ‘heretical beliefs’” (1975: 233).
was the centre of this rapidly expanding network and it was from this city that the cultural influence of the Tai Yuan people radiated. As Lan Na reached its golden age (1400 to 1525 CE) its culture and political influence extended over the area of northern Thailand, northwestern Lao, Shan State of Burma, and the Dai areas of Yunnan, China.

The spread of Lan Na's cultural influence included the transmission of the Tai Yuan tradition of Theravāda Buddhism to the various Tai polities within its orbit. By the golden age of Lan Na, Pāli texts written in Dhamma letters, a religious script derived from the old Mon system of writing, were circulating widely throughout the region (Penth 2000: 43). These texts travelled to the northern Shan states in the early fifteenth century, and it is possible that the Palaung communities of that area had some exposure to Buddhism at this time. As the Palaung ordained and studied in Tai temples, the script was brought back to Palaung villages where it was used to write religious texts in Pāli, Tai, and Palaung languages. Texts written in the Dhamma script can still be found in the monasteries of Namhsan today (Sai Kham Mong 2004: 257).

The supremacy of the Lan Na kingdom lasted until the mid sixteenth century when a succession crisis weakened the kingdom. A Burmese invasion in 1558 CE resulted in their control of Chiang Mai and most of the Shan states, effectively ending whatever degree of hegemony Chiang Mai enjoyed in the region. In 1774 CE Siamese troops helped drive the Burmese out of Chiang Mai, but the state of Lan Na never regained full independence, instead becoming a vassal of Bangkok. In the late 19th and early 20th century, when King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) was incorporating the disparate regions of Siam into a unified nation-state, the Lan Na tradition of Buddhism (as well as other regional Sanghas) was suppressed for the possible primordial attachments it might
engender amongst the local population (Keyes 1971). As a result, the northern temples were subsumed into a national Siamese Sangha (Buddhist organization) controlled from Bangkok, which discouraged the traditional practices of Lan Na Buddhism and undercut the transmission of Dhamma script literacy through its implementation of a secular educational system that used the Siamese form of writing for its instruction. Today, most northern temples rely on texts printed in Central Thai, and one must make an effort to seek out traditionalists who continue use the Dhamma script texts within ritual or educational contexts. This decline of the Dhamma script has also been accompanied by a general decline of rituals performed in the old Lan Na style, as well as a shift towards pronunciation of Pāli according to the standards of Bangkok. While the older traditions of Lan Na continue to be practised in some rural temples, they do so in an increasingly limited fashion.

A similar process has been underway in the ex-Shan states, which are undergoing a process of Burmanization that has curtailed Lan Na or Yuan Buddhist practices within the region. According to Sai Kham Mong (2004: 70), the last monks of the “Yuan Buddhist” tradition in Burma were forced to disrobe in 1815. As we shall see in chapter 5, control over ordination rights are important for controlling the development of independent sects, and the struggle over the power to ordain was a seminal moment in the development of the movement of Khruba Siwichai. Nevertheless, despite Sai Kham Mong’s assertion of its “disappearance,” one can also speak of the Lan Na or Yuan Buddhist traditions as existing within the purview of a dominant Sangha, as is the case in Thailand where the national Sangha controls ordination lines, but the form religious expression takes is more open to differentiation. It is primarily in this sense that I speak
of a Lan Na or Yuan Buddhist tradition, particularly given the fact that only official ordinations into the national Sangha are legally recognized within contemporary Thailand (see Ch. 5).

Kengtung city has been an important centre for the continuation of the Lan Na form of Buddhism, particularly insofar as the Dara’ang are concerned. Kengtung is dominated culturally, as well as politically prior to the Burman invasion, by the Tai Khün. This ethnic group is closely related to the Tai Yuan people, and their history is intertwined much more with that of Chiang Mai and Lan Na than the rest of the ex-Shan States.41 According to local history, King Mangrai subdued Kengtung, then a Lawa settlement, in 1243 CE with help of two Lawa brothers, Maha Khun and Maha Khein, after which time many Tai Yuan families settled there. Maha Khun was first appointed lord of the city, but was succeeded by Mangrai’s son in 1263 and since that time all the city’s lords were descended from King Mangrai (Sai Kham Mong 2004: 51). Tai Yuan began migrating to the region around this time and adopted the name Tai Khün or “Hkun” (Sai Kham Mong 2004: 168).42

On the cultural continuity of Tai Yuan forms of Buddhism, Sai Kham Mong notes that all Shan except those in Kengtung stopped using Dhamma derived scripts for religious writings from early twentieth century (Sai Kham Mong 2004: 82). Egerod likewise recounted in 1959 that the Tai Khün language written in the Dhamma script

41. Egerod (1959: 123) considers Tai Khün and Tai Yuan as “sister languages” and Grabowsky (2004: 2) notes that the Tai Khün, Tai Lú, and Tai Yuan are so closely related culturally and linguistically that one may speak of the “cultural region of the Yuan, Khün, and Lú.”
42. According to the Jengtung State Chronicle, the name Khün was adopted on advice from the sangha and astrologers who, upon examining the states horoscope, noted that the state belongs to the nām (nāma or name) of Rāhu, and thus faced the likelihood of instability. A group known as “The great Khüns” were brought forward, a people who had settled in the southern direction and who “wore black jackets mixed with white and had their hair cut at the hair line” (Mangrai 1981: 230). The Sangha said “these people were compatible with the state nām,” and thus the lord urged the Yuan to “give up their dress and to cut their hair in the manner of the great Khüns” (Mangrai 1981: 230).
remained “the sacred language of Buddhism in Kengtung State and thus the carrier of a strong and living religious tradition. The traditional Hinayana [Theravāda] literature is extant and promulgated in Khün” (1959: 123). The fact that Kengtung continued to use the Dhamma script, a form of writing that is intimately connected with the tradition that developed within Lan Na, is significant as the city and its surrounding area of influence is that from which most Dara’ang now living in Thailand originally migrated, as well as the area from which new texts written in the Dhamma script, including Palaung language materials, continue to be transmitted.

Buddhism was introduced to Kengtung from Chiang Mai sometime during this period. *The Pādaeng Chronicle* attributes the transmission to a Tai monk by the name of Nānagambhīra who travelled to what is today the island of Sri Lanka where he was re-ordained and brought this re-consecrated lineage to the various Tai principalities, including Chiang Mai and Kengtung (Mangrai 1981). As Karlsson (2009: 76) points out, much of the Tai Khün Buddhist culture continues to flourish today, although Burmese and Tai Yai monasteries have also been constructed around the city. He notes, however, that, “People belonging to a specific ethnic group almost exclusively use monasteries of that particular group for religious practice,” indicating the way in which Buddhism is used not only to signify a trans-national shared identity, but simultaneously delineates ethnic boundaries within the larger Buddhist community (Karlsson 2009: 76).

The Dara’ang people of southern and eastern Shan State tend to ordain at Tai monasteries. Many men now living in Thailand spent time as novices in a Tai Khün monastery, some living several years within the city of Kengtung itself. Today, Dara’ang villages across northern Thailand continue to conduct Buddhist rituals in a style similar to
that performed in Tai Khün temples and import texts written in the Dhamma script from Shan State, including Palaung language texts. They identify their style of practice as that of the Tai Khün people and recognize that it is closely related to the old Lan Na Buddhism of the Tai Yuan people.

When I first introduced the notion of Lan Na or Yuan Buddhism I said the term was somewhat problematic. This is because those who adopted this form of Buddhism did not refer to their tradition as such. Rather, the important designations at the time were ordination lineages, hence the attention paid to the re-ordination of Ńanagambhīra in the chronicles. As Kashinaga (2009: 19) points out, the term “Yuan Buddhism” is primarily used by outsiders to describe what is unlikely to have been a unified tradition, nor one which ever provided the basis for any overarching imagined community. Lan Na as a kingdom or region was not homogenous and there appears to be numerous divisions (nikai) within the Sangha based on ethnicity (Cohen 2001: 229; Kwanchewan 1988: 41, see chapter 6). Nevertheless, the term is useful for delineating the tradition of Buddhism whose practices are connected with the use of the sacred texts written in the Dhamma script which emerged out of the Tai Yuan centre of Chiang Mai, and thus it may be more accurate to describe this area historically as the religious-culture region of the Dhamma letters, which itself may have provided a basis for an imagined community based on a shared sacred script, rather than Yuan Buddhism.

Most criticism of the term Yuan Buddhism comes from a historical perspective that recognizes the decentralization and diversity of groups who used the Dhamma script. The significance of label, however, shifts somewhat in the contemporary period where there is a general revival of Lan Na Buddhist culture in the north of Thailand, and in
particular a religious revivalist movement for Yuan or Lan Na style Buddhism centred on khruba monks (see Ch. 6). In terms of my own argument, I am more concerned about the position of this history within the present, rather than the historical form it took within the actual kingdom of Lan Na or other historical Tai principalities. Given the way in which this form of Buddhism is currently conceptualized within northern Thailand as Lan Na style Buddhism, I choose to employ the term “Lan Na Buddhism” rather than “Yuan Buddhism” which denotes a tradition associated with a particular ethnic group. The use of “Lan Na Buddhism” is not meant to represent a unified, bounded tradition co-extensive with the old kingdom of Lan Na, but rather the particular perception of the tradition as it is seen within northern Thailand today, particularly within the context of the khruba monk movement. We shall see how this movement, and pride in the religious traditions of the group, affect the way in which Dara’ang people discuss not only their religious practices, but also their relationship with other ethno-linguistic groups, as well as territory where their villages are situated today.

Dara’ang Cosmology

Like most Theravāda Buddhist cultures of Southeast Asia, Dara’ang cosmology posits a cyclical universe inhabited by living beings, spirits, and deva (heavenly beings known as thewadā in Pale and Thai). The picture of the universe as presented to me by monks and elders in Pang Daeng Nai draws upon the Buddhist division of the world into levels into which a being can be reborn. The lowest world is hell (Pāli: niraya), which Pale speakers refer to as narai (from the Pāli niraya) or meung krum (“kingdom/land below”). This world is ruled by Phya Yom, from the Pāli term for the lord of the dead,
Yama. The next level of existence is that of the animals (Pāli: tiracchana yoni), followed by the sphere of ghosts (Pale: karnam; Pāli: peta loka), and the realm of asura (Pāli: asura loka), a species of “demons” or “titans” who once inhabited the top of Mount Meru, but were thrown down by Sakka and now reside in one of the lower realms. Human beings inhabit the fifth cosmological level of existence (Pāli: manussaloka). This is the most desirable realm to be born within as only human beings can achieve enlightenment (Pale: nipān, Pāli: nibbāna) and escape the cycle of death and re-birth altogether. Above the realm of humans are six heavens known in Pale as meung daeng (“kingdom/land in the sky”). The lowest of these heavens, (Pāli: Cūtummahārājikā), is the realm of the lords of the four directions (Pāli: Lokapāla). The next heaven is Tāvatimsa, the realm of Sakka (Pale: Sagia), lord of the devā, and also Inda, an Indic god who over time became identified with Sakka within the Theravāda pantheon but has historically existed as a distinct being. The next four devā realms do not figure prominently in the local ritual or mythological system of Pang Daeng Nai, except for the fourth level, Tusita heaven, where Bodhisattva Metteya, the future Buddha, resides awaiting his next rebirth. The upper cosmological levels rarely play significant roles in terms of religious practice or discourse, remaining the purview of scholars and erudite monks.

Within this cosmic-view, all beings are subject to reincarnation in any one of the levels of existence. The Pale term for reincarnation is gaet ge yam, or “life with death,” a transliteration that is closer to the Pāli emphasis on both re-birth and re-death than the English term “reincarnation,” as the ultimate goal is not to be re-born in a higher state but to escape the cycle of re-death and re-birth (Pāli: sansāra) altogether into a non-state
known as *nipān*. Escape or liberation from the cosmic cycle is considered desirable as all existence is characterized by suffering (Pāli: *dukkha*). The truth of *dukkha* and the path to liberation from *samsāra* was originally professed by Siddhattha Gotama (Pale: *Jao Sittat*), the Buddha of our current age who lived sometime between the sixth and fourth century BCE. The word Buddha means simply “enlightened one” and may refer to a host of different beings, although in the Theravāda tradition it is usually reserved for Siddhattha Gotama or a previous personage who performed a similar function by bringing the teachings to the world. In this aeon (Pāli: *kappa*)\(^{43}\) it is said there will be five Buddha's born to teach the *dhamma* (truth) to humankind.\(^{44}\) Siddhattha Gotama is the fourth Buddha of this aeon - the first three being Kakusandha, Konāgamana, and Kassapa. Metteyya, the fifth Buddha, has not yet been born in human form. As the next Buddha to come he plays an important role in terms of millenarian movements in Southeast Asia. In most contexts, the Pale term *Phra Phutta Jao* refers to Siddhattha Gotama; other Buddhas are typically referred to by their full name.

In practice it is difficult for the average man or woman to achieve *nipān* in this lifetime as it requires a world-renouncing lifestyle few are ready or able to take upon themselves. The religious goal of most people is not escape from the cycle of *samsāra*, but the accumulation of *agieu* (Pale) or “merit” (Pāli: *kusala, puñña*) in the hope of being born into a better life situation (i.e. a wealthy man or a celestial being in a pleasurable heaven).\(^{45}\) What state a person (or any being) is born into is determined by their actions or *kam* (Pāli: *kamma*). Good deeds produce merit while evil actions result in the

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43. Like people, the entire world is also subject to cyclical birth and death, with each aeon (Pāli: *kappa*) ending with the world of desires burning up and re-forming in a perfect state.
44. The term Dhamma is notoriously difficult to translate. It means teachings of the Buddha as well as the truth or way he professes. I generally leave the term untranslated.
45. The term *agieu* may be the same as the Shwe Palaung word for “profit” (Milne 1931, pt. 1: 201, 243).
accumulation of de-merit (Pāli: pāpa) or hmap in Pale. The greater the amount of merit one obtains, the higher up one will be born in the cosmic hierarchy, while those who acquire too much de-merit find themselves reincarnated as animals, ghosts, or an inhabitant of one of the hells. In addition to determining what cosmic level a person is born into, merit also conditions a human’s physical state (deformed, male, female, beautiful, ugly) and social position (beggar, farmer, king), as well as events that affect a person throughout their life-course.

Merit is important in terms of a person’s future births, but it is also commonly conceptualized within a Dara’ang and Tai context as a thing that can benefit a person in this lifetime, and can even serve as a protective force that charges inanimate objects. For example, at many village ceremonies young Dara’ang men run white threads held by the chanting monks from the temple or ho teu (central village post) to their motorcycles in the hope that the “charge” of merit will protect them from motorcycle crashes, one of the leading causes of death amongst men in Thailand today. People also speak of good fortune, such as winning the lottery, as resulting from a good accumulation of merit. Merit also serves as a means to exorcise malevolent spirits that are causing discord within households or making individuals ill, and is thus seen as a productive force in the here and now - a view which may run counter to the Pāli canon, but is integral for understanding the practice of Buddhism on the ground.

Spirits and other celestial beings are found in the Pāli canon, but they are subsumed by the greater religion of Buddhism, subject to the same cosmic laws that govern human existence. They die and are reborn, and because of this they are portrayed in the scriptures as seeking out the Buddha’s teachings so that they too can achieve
ultimate release from the cycle of rebirth. As previously mentioned, however, liberation is not easily attained, and is thought by many to take several lifetimes to achieve (the Jataka tales, a popular collection of stories which tell of the previous lives of the Buddha after he has expressed the desire to become a fully enlightened being attest to this lengthy interpretation). The immediate goal of Buddhist practice thus becomes the accumulation of merit, a force that in practice affects both the state of a person's future incarnation as well as one's immediate condition in the here and now.

People make merit or agieu in a variety of ways, including going to temple, giving alms to beggars and monks, participating in the construction of temples, and by following the five precepts laid down by the Buddha. People also share merit with spirits, as these beings do not have the opportunity to make merit on their own. In Dara'ang ceremonies, sharing merit involves pouring water into a receptacle while the monks chant Pali or read scriptures, during which time the giver recites the names of deceased relatives, types of spirits, and other celestial beings to whom they wish to transfer merit. The merit spirits are given by the living helps them achieve a better rebirth and is particularly important for those spirits who have been reborn in the lower realms of existence where suffering is both long and intense.

The multifarious ways merit is conceptualized in practice is important for understanding how it is used in discourses that address issues of social hierarchy. As mentioned previously, the amount of merit a person embodies is believed to affect their physical characteristics at birth, the social position a person is born into, and the general trajectory of their life-course. Wealthy and politically powerful people are thus thought to be worthy of their social position, as they must have made more merit in previous lives,
while the poor are thought to deserve their fate, as they are working out de-merit (Pali: hmāp) from previous existence. Merit is thus seen as intimately connected to power and social hierarchy (Hanks 1962), a situation Weber (1963) describes as “the most complete formal solution to the problem of theodicy” (p. 145). Furthermore, the rich are seen as being in a better position to make more merit than the poor, as they have the means to build temples and give more the Sangha. This results in the existing social hierarchy being recreated over many lifetimes due to an uneven playing field in the economics of merit (Keyes 1990: 84; Lehman 1996: 25). Or so the theory goes.

While it is true that Buddhism can serve to legitimate social inequality, Bowie (1998) argues that rather than representing a hegemonic explanation that all parties agree upon, this prevailing view of merit is biased towards an elite perspective of the relationship between Buddhism and society. In her study of merit and giving in northern Thailand, Bowie found that many people stress intention and a relative ability to give over the value of a gift in absolute terms (ibid.: 474). Following Scott (1985), Bowie argues that when situated within the framework of political economy, Buddhist merit can be usefully seen as an imposition by the poor upon the wealthy to be generous (Bowie 1998: 475). This approach provides us with an insightful view into the way merit is used as a “weapon of the weak,” wherein the view of merit as something which justifies the social hierarchy is primarily representative of a particular, partial perspective, one that is situated within the wealthier classes, and that alternative interpretations are also available, ones which are grounded in the lived experience of oppressed groups.

The flexibility and ambiguity of merit as a concept relates to the fact that it is not

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46. Terwell similarly refrains from ranking meritorious acts because of the complexity of contextualizing each act, noting that “the purity of the actors’ intentions and the usefulness of the act itself must be taken into account” (2001: 215)
the only explanation for why a person suffers or prospers. Luck, hard work, and oppression can all serve as reasons for why a particular person is poor, rich, or sick, independent of their store of merit (see Babb 1983, and Hiebert 1983 for related discussion in Hindu contexts). This is in keeping with the Buddhist doctrine that a person is free to make their choices within this life, and reap the rewards or punishments during subsequent rebirths (Obeyesekere 1968: 21; Gombrich 1971: 145). However, the ambiguity and flexibility of merit as an explanation make it a possible explanation for practically any event, while its indeterminacy leaves a space for multiple interpretations and conflicting arguments concerning the relative amount of merit possessed by an individual or group as expressed in the fortunes and misfortunes that befall them. As we shall see in chapter 7, this becomes an important source for constructing critical discourses which challenge the prevailing ethnic hierarchy of Thailand from a Dara’ang perspective, ones which go hand-in-hand with discourses concerning the authenticity of Buddhist practices of Dara’ang people.

**Religious Specialists**

The numerous categories of spiritual beings which are found within the Pāli canon of Theravāda Buddhism (the Tipiṭaka or “three baskets”) blend together with pre-Buddhist Tai and Dara’ang spiritual concepts to form a rich mosaic of complementary, syncretic, and at times contradictory ideas and practices. Within Buddhist cosmology spirits are generally represented simply as other beings trapped within the cycle of death and rebirth. Because they are subject to the dhamma (the truth revealed by the Buddha), Buddhism is considered to be the more powerful force and is often used as a way of
protecting people from spirit attacks. This can take the form of amulets of Buddha images and monks, tattoos using lines of Pāli, and song krau ceremonies where misfortune (spiritual or astrological) is dispelled through the power of Buddhism.

Spirit propitiation is not considered “Buddhist” by Dara’ang villagers, and the division between “spirit religion” (Pale: sasana karnam) and Buddhist religion (Pale: sasana phut) is marked by a division of labour between the lay Buddhist specialist (Pale: dajān) and the spirit specialist (Pale: da bu meung). The word dajān comes from the Pāli term acariya, which means “teacher.” He is responsible for overseeing all Buddhist ceremonies, household or communal, and acts as a mediator between the congregation and the Buddhist monks. In Pang Daeng Nai this role is filled by A-Mon, the 53 year old brother of A-Pong, the village da bu meung. A-Mon had been a novice in Burma for nine years, where he learned to read and write the Dhamma script and perform the rituals in the proper manner. “I rely on the books. I have many books, some hand written, others printed. Some are in the Dhamma script, others in Tai Yai, and some in Thai” (A-Mon). A-Mon had never ordained as a full monk, but underwent a temporary weeklong ordination, along with myself and several other men, during the course of my research.

A-Mon’s elder brother, A-Pong, serves as the village spirit specialist or da bu meung. The title da bu meung comes from the Shan language. Tannenbaum notes that it is the duty of the Shan “phu muong” to “keep the compound [spirit house] clean, place regular offerings made to the Tsao Muong, supervise his annual or semi-annual feasts, and act as the intermediary for villagers” (Tannenbaum 1995: 49). The Dara’ang da bu meung performs a similar function within the village, acting as a mediator between the spirits and villagers in a variety of ritual context, including feeding the village guardian
spirit (*tsao meung*), ancestor spirits, field spirits, and setting up barriers to prevent malevolent spirits from attacking people during Buddhist exorcisms. A-Pong explains that the position is commonly inherited, but is not dependent on familial lines. “My grandfather was a *da bu meung*, and my father. I learned from them. But it is a matter of knowledge. Anyone who knows how to perform the rituals can do it.” A-Pong’s son is currently studying to become the village *da bu meung* himself, and A-Pong’s brothers also assist him in performing his duties.

**Spirits**

The confluence of Buddhist, Tai, and Dara’ang religious categories results in a number of conceptual doublets. One of the most important of these doublets is the Pāli concept of *karphrao* (“soul” or personal spiritual essence) that is used along side the Pāli concept of *winyan* (Pāli: *viññāṇa*, commonly translated as “consciousness” to denote its non-permanent nature). In the Pāli canon, the idea of an immortal “soul” or personal spirit (Pāli: *atta*) is denied by the central doctrine of “no-self” (Pāli: *anatta*). Most Theravāda Buddhist systems in Southeast Asia, however, maintain a vestigial indigenous idea of a soul that passes on after a person has died. In Thai this is known as the *khwan* while in Burmese it is known as the *leikpya*. In his structural analysis of Thai Buddhism, Tambiah argues that the idea of a *khwan* in Thai and the *viññāṇa* (known as *wijnan* in Thai) perform complementary functions.

*Khwan* is associated with life and the vicissitudes of life; *wijnan* is associated with death and the vicissitudes after death. Both are spiritual essences that animate life; the *khwan* actively and the *wijnan* passively, or rather the former

47. Milne reports a similar term, *kar-bu*, used by Palaung living in the area of Namhsan (Milne 1924: 335)
as a variable substance, the latter as permanent. Their roles are reversed after death. The khwan dies for good (or becomes passive), but the winjan disengages itself from its mortal coil and leads a separate existence (Tamibahl 1970: 59).

In terms of everyday religious discourse the term winjan is rarely used. This is likely because of its more ambiguous status as a non-permanent consciousness. Most religious practices that target the life essence of a person focus on the karphrao. According to the abbot of Wat Pang Daeng Nai (Temple), the karphrao is a unified spirit possessed by both humans and animals that, after the death of its host, wanders freely for a time before finding a new vessel within which to be reincarnated. Occasionally the karphrao will remain in a disembodied state for some time, particularly if an individual's death occurred abruptly, such as in the case of an accident or murder. Deaths such as these are known as “bad deaths” because the person does not have time to come to terms with the fact that they were going to die. This causes their karphrao to cling to the world rather than seek reincarnation in another form. A wandering karphrao can cause problems for the family of the deceased as it returns to the places it frequented while alive, causing individuals to become sick and even lead to death. As a result, people who suffer from a “bad death” are cremated in the forest far from the village, rather than being laid to rest in the communal village graveyard (Pale: pâ reo).

The karphrao is not the only type of spirit that inhabits the Dara’ang landscape. Spirits which are found in inanimate objects such as trees, rivers, and rocks, as well as those that act as guardians over places (houses, villages, and fields), are known as karnam in Pale. When the spirit that is being referred to is considered an important

48. Milne (1924: 336) notes that in Namhsan the kar-bu is thought to be composed of many parts, 32 being the most common number given. The number 32 is the same as that given for the Tai khwan and likely was adopted along with other Tai religious concepts when Buddhism was introduced into the various Palaung communities (see Kirsch 1977: 253; Tamibahl 1970: 57-59 on khwan).
guardian spirit or lord over an area that is particularly important for the village as a whole
the term *kanya* is commonly used, as in *kanya raoh* for the guardian spirit (*kanya*) of the
village (*raoh*). The term *karnam* is also used for a wide variety of invisible, immaterial
spirits that are not bound to a particular location and are particularly feared as they can
take up residence in a person’s house causing people to become sick and die. Despite
their similarities, *karnam* and *karphrao* are distinct in the sense that *karnam* have already
undergone the process of reincarnation, while a *karphrao* remains connected to its old human form.

Like *karphrao*, *karnam* also have their respective Pâli doublet in the form of
*thewadâ* (Pâli: *devatâ*), although the distinction between these two concepts is more
defined than it is in the case of the *karphrao/winjan* doublet.49 *Thewadâ* differ from
*karnam* primarily in terms of their power and association with the Buddhist religion.
Spirits that inhabit very large trees, for example, are often referred to as *thewadâ* (Pâli:
*rukkha devatâ*), although many people will still use the term *karnam* (or *kanya*) for such spirits interchangeably. The spirit that protects the temple grounds (who resides in a small house just outside the main hall known as the *ho ta*) is always referred to as a *thewadâ*, as are the celestial beings propitiated at the opening of every village or household religious ceremony. The guardian spirit of the village is never referred to as a *thewadâ*, nor is the spirit of the forest, a fact that highlights the conceptual division between Buddhist and non-Buddhist fields of religious practice.

*Karnam* are both a malevolent force and agents of protection. It is common when children have become ill to propitiate the spirits of the forest (Pale: *karnam prae*) or river

49. Various other spirits, such as *pet* (Pâli *peta*) or “hungry ghosts” derived from Pâli texts also populate the Dara’ang cosmology, as do many spirits from Tai folklore (commonly identified by the inclusion of the Tai term for spirits, *phi*). However, these are generally classified within Pale language as types of *karnam*. 

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(Pale: *karnam iim*) in case the child has inadvertently offended one of these spirits by playing loudly within their domain or perhaps urinating upon an invisible *karnam*. Each Dara’ang house in Thailand also has a miniature house located nearby that is known by the Tai term *jao thi*, or “lord over the place.” Household members provide the *jao thi* spirit (considered as a special type of *karnam*) with offerings of food (rice with a bit of meat), water, flowers, and incense in the morning of each full, half, and new moon.

The belief in *karnam*, particularly their ability to cause illness, remains strong within Pang Daeng Nai. The pain brought on by chronic headaches or stomachaches are typically thought to be the result of spirit attacks, requiring a *song krau* ceremony (see below) or the propitiation of nature spirits. More often then not *karnam* remain invisible, but there are many stories told within the village concerning the form they might take. One such story was told to me over tea one evening by Dao, a 28 year old Dara’ang woman, about a problem with spirits they were having in their home.

A few days ago my mother-in-law went into the kitchen and found the pot of rice she was cooking overturned on the floor. She was home alone and nobody was around. Because it was strange she brought the pot of rice to the Ping River and emptied it into the water. She now thinks it was the *jao thi* (spirit of the place which watches over the house). She is going to go consult the *mau du* (spirit diviner) tomorrow... Before I moved in, the house had had trouble with *karnam* before. Once, a small headless bird flew in through the window. They caught it, but it was a *karnam*, so it made the household ill.

The *mau du* mentioned in the above story is a Tai Yuan woman who lives in Chiang Dao district. She is a seer who is frequently consulted regarding the cause of a spiritual illness. *Mau* is a Tai word meaning “specialist,” while *du* means “to see.” I visited her home several times while living in Pang Daeng Nai, and each time the prognosis concerned some spirit (a *jao thi* or a nature spirit residing in a river or tree) that
had been offended. In the case of jao thi, residents of the household were asked to offer the spirit a chicken. The particular style, she always said, depended on “the manner that you usually make offerings to the spirit. . . It does not matter what religion you are, the important thing is to perform the rites according to your own custom.” Her openness to other cultural traditions may be one reason why this particular Mau Du attracts many followers amongst highlanders such as the Dara’ang, as well as Tai Yuan from around Chiang Dao.

In addition to homes, each field is also said to have its own karnam or jao thi guardian spirit. Small houses similar to those outside of people’s residences are typically erected in fields where the guardian spirit of the area is fed once a year. A-Pong explained to me during a trip to feed the guardian spirit of his son-in-law’s field that the jao thi of the fields might be particular to a farmer’s field, or may reside in a nearby physical feature such as a mountain. Those that reside in the mountains or large trees may serve as the guardian spirit for several fields, and may be propitiated at a spirit house shared by several families. The spirits of fields do not therefore stand as the guardians of individual property rights, but rather as part of a cultural system mediating the relationship between the village as a group and the surrounding environment.50

50. Tambiah suggests that spirits in northeastern Thailand are guardians of household property rights: “Within the sphere of intra-village activities, phi rai phi naa (spirits of the rice field) are said to attack villagers. The belief is that each field has a resident spirit, and it is not unusual for farmers to set up shrines for them in their respective fields. . . Field spirits are essentially the guardians of the fields, and farmers dutifully make offerings at their field shrines before ploughing and after harvest. Field spirits are in this respect secondary and individualized counterparts of the guardian spirits of the village, who protect the collective agricultural interests of the entire village and are propitiated before ploughing and after harvesting. The offerings to the field spirits by individual farmers are made immediately after the collective offerings to the village guardians. Thus in a sense the phi na, as spirit owners of the fields, are guardians of household property rights, who are promised fees for their protective function” (Tambiah 1970: 316-317, emphasis mine).
Feeding the Lord of the Land

While households ideally feed the spirits of the house on each half, full, and new moon, and the spirits of the fields at least once a year, the most important spirit feeding ceremony rite for the community is the biannual feeding of the tsao meung or village guardian spirit. This is performed just prior to and following the Buddhist rain retreat season (see Plate 1). The ceremony takes place at the ho tsao meung, “ho” being a Tai word for palace, while “tsao meung” is also a Tai term meaning “lord of the land.” Because the tsao meung is considered a “chicken eating spirit” (Pale: karnam hom manian), the feeding of the spirits must be held on either the 3rd day of the waxing moon, the 13th day of the waxing moon, or the 8th day of the waning moon of any lunar month.51 The feasts mark off the “closing of the gate of the lord of the land” (Pale: wiin malaoh tsao meung) before the rain retreat begins and the “opening of the gate of the lord of the land” (Pale: gabi malaoh tsao meung) after the rain retreat has ended. It is an important time for younger Dara’ang men and women in particular, as marriages are prohibited during the period when the gates are “closed”. In the past, no outsiders were permitted to enter the village on this day, but this restriction has been lifted due to the increased mobility of both villagers and non-residents.

Preparation for this ceremony begins early. At 5:30AM, on 7 June 2007, I was woken up by A-Tun’s voice calling over the village loudspeaker asking every household to contribute either a small chicken or 30 baht towards the annual feeding of the tsao

51. According to the A-Tun, the type of sacrifice required in Dara’ang villages is dependent on the size of the village. The spirits of larger villages would require the sacrifice of pigs while the spirits of towns or larger would require buffalo. This differs from Tai Yuan villages who receive different offerings on a cyclical basis (two years of chickens then a year when a buffalo would be offered, for example) (cf. Rhum 1994: 77-78)
meung. As I made my way up to the home of A-Pong, the da bu meung, I could see that it was already a hive of activity. The feeding of the tsao meung requires the sacrifice of two chickens, and A-Pong was already engaged in selecting two from his personal stock. He explained to me that the two must be young birds, and the pullet must never have laid an egg. He killed the birds as he would any chicken, and brought them to his kitchen where his brother, A-Ngeun, was waiting to prepare them.

As the younger brother of A-Pong, A-Ngeun’s father and grandfather had both been da bu meung. He says he learned a lot about propitiating spirits from them, though had never studied like his older brother A-Pong. A-Ngeun explained that there are several restrictions when it comes to preparing food offerings for the tsao meung.

You can’t taste the food while it is being made. It is the same for the jao im [lord of the water]. Only after it has been offered can you taste it. And you cannot be pregnant. That’s why there are no women here, just in case they are pregnant and do not know it. You should not even be married, but you know, everyone is married. Some of us more than once [he laughs].

A-Ngeun prepared the chickens by boiling them whole along with ginger, garlic, onions, lemon grass, chillies, and other seasonings. In the nearby house owned by another brother of A-Pong, more chicken, noodles, and rice were being prepared for the entire village to eat, but the cooks were not bound to the same restrictions as those preparing the birds that would be offered to the tsao meung.

While feeding is an important aspect of the ceremony, food is not the only thing that needs to be prepared. As I entered the living area of A-Pong’s home several older men and women, who had come to help construct other items necessary for the ceremony, greeted me. These items include four small wooden swords, four small wooden guns, five small wooden spears, five small wooden crossbows, five centipedes
made of bamboo, and five bamboo chains. Forty small white flags of two kinds were also being fashioned, a triangle shaped flag known as a *tung* (considered male) and a more elaborate, somewhat human shaped flag known as a *yip yā* (considered female). These, one of the men explained, represent male and female, and are always used together in pairs. Preparing these items took several hours and gave me some time to question the elders about the ceremony itself.

A-Pong, the *da bu meung*, explained that the *tsao meung* does not reside at the spirit shrine, but must be sought by the spirits of the village. His “place” was in the district centre of Chiang Dao. When called, the *tsao meung* does not come alone, but is accompanied by a retinue of followers. These followers ride spirit horses and elephants, which they hitch to one of two platforms found within the gates of the shrine using the provided bamboo chains. Once the feeding is complete, the spirit helpers travel to the fields and use these small representational weapons to fight off problems, such as malevolent insects, diseases, and other spirits.

After the gate is closed no one can visit their fields or hunt in the forest for the rest of the day and all of the next day. If they do the spirits will shoot them. You can hear the shots, but you can’t see where they are coming from. If you are hit, it can be like a real wound, bleeding and causing death, or maybe you don’t hear anything, and a small black mark appears on your body, and you get sick (A-Pong).

A-Kham, a 62 year old Dara’ang man who moved to the village after his son married the daughter of the village head, explained that heading out to your fields during this time is akin to breaking the law.

It is like the guys who were caught by the police smoking *yaba* [referring to two villagers caught smoking methamphetamines the week before]. They knew it was against the law, and the police are now punishing them. The same is true for the
spirits. If you go hunting tomorrow, or go to the fields, and get hurt it is your own fault.

A-Pong says that the ceremony must be completed before noon, so at approximately 10:30AM he and several other men headed up to the tsao meung shrine to prepare the site. I followed them in order to observe its preparation. The shrine is located just north of the village, inside the teak plantation (see chapter 2). The site was chosen because of the way several trees grew together encircling a termite mound, which was taken as a sign that the site housed a powerful spirit. In order to house the visiting tsao meung spirit, the village had constructed two small houses, both on stilts, with one slightly higher than the other. Two smaller platforms, much closer to the ground, were also erected so that food could be offered to the helpers of the tsao meung. The entire shrine is enclosed by a fence constructed from bamboo, with a front gate that was only opened on ceremonial occasions.

Before commencing the ceremony, the men swept the site and wrapped banana leaves around the posts of each small house. The da bu meung then laid out the small wooden weapons for the helpers of the tsao meung and attached the bamboo centipedes to each of the four corners of the shrine using long bamboo poles, and one to the side of the upper spirit house. “These giant centipedes will go and eat the insects and mice in the fields,” A-Pong explained, “they come out with the arrival of the rainy season.”

The tsao meung is not the only spirit to be feasted on this occasion, and it is not the first to be invited. Just outside the shrine is a small wooden altar that is used to feed the spirits of the village (karnam raoh). In many respects, the calling of the village spirits is more elaborate than the calling of the tsao meung. Before many villagers arrive, the da bu meung prepares the altar, laying out three of each of the following items: two banana
leaf cones containing flowers, one tung and one yip yā flag, two candles, one small piece of banana leaf with dried tea leaves lain upon it, one small banana leaf with some cooked rice and a bit of boiled chicken, a bowl of cooked rice with a small amount of chicken in it, a folded up white bag with a bowl of uncooked rice containing a silver bracelet, a 20 baht bill, a small package of tea, and a stand made from a mango containing four tung and four yip yā. He also places behind these three collections of offerings a bottle of lao khao (strong liquor made from rice) and a cup for drinking.

The da bu meung began the ceremony by kneeling in front of the altar with hands pressed together. He then threw some uncooked rice upon the altar and invited the spirits to come eat, telling them what they have brought as offerings, and beseeching them to continue watching over the village. He then explained the purpose of the ceremony and requested that they go fetch the tsao meung. After the spirits of the village had been invited, the da bu meung took the bottle of lao khao and placed it within the upper house of the shrine. By this time many villagers have arrived at the site. They sat in front of the shrine, hands pressed together in a mode similar to that used at the Buddhist temple, prostrating themselves three times upon arrival. The da bu meung then placed the two sacrificial chickens that were prepared specially for the tsao meung within the upper house, along with two lit candles and two sticks of incense. He then laid out eight small offerings of food (rice with some meat laid out on a banana leaf) alongside the bamboo chains on the higher of the two platforms intended for the tsao meung’s helpers. These are intended for the riders of spirit elephants. Seven small offerings of food with bamboo chains were also placed on the lower platform for the riders of spirit horses. He then knelt before the platform and invited the tsao meung to come receive the offerings, employing
a mix of Pale and Tai Yuan language.

Sadhu, Sadhu, Sadhu. Oh nai jao. Oh nai jao. We invite you on this 8th day of the waning moon to come eat these chickens and drink this liquor. Come to Pang Daeng Nai. We invite you today, with the spirits of the village and the spirits of the forest, to come here to Pang Daeng Nai to eat and drink. We come today to close the golden gate, the silver gate, come and eat... 

The final spirit to be fed is the kanya pre (Spirit of the Forest, or spirits of the forest, as A-Pong explains that the spirits in general are addressed through a representative). The kanya pre is propitiated at a large tree close by the tsao meung shrine. It does not receive any food offerings. Instead, the da bu meung attached two large banana leaf cones to the top of two bamboo poles, each containing yip yā and tung flags, sticks of incense, and flowers wrapped in smaller banana leaf cones. The propitiation was similar to that performed at the shrine, inviting the spirits to receive the offerings, and informing them as to the purpose of the ceremony. Few people paid much attention at this point, and were already dishing out chicken from a large pot brought up from the village. The da bu meung finished by asking the kanya pre to keep watch over the area, and to forgive anyone who may have unwittingly offended any spirits of the woods.

As the da bu meung finished propitiating the spirits, lunch was served at the shrine. Women, children, and younger men ate from the communal pot of chicken and noodles, while older men, and a few elder women, ate the two chickens and drank the lao khao (strong rice liquor) that was offered to the tsao meung. A-Pong explained that the liquor and food used in offerings had medicinal value. “I don’t drink the liquor myself, as I try to observe the Buddhist precepts, but the liquor is believed to be medicinal after it has been offered to the spirits.”
I asked A-Pong over lunch about the different levels of spirits which were propitiated throughout the ceremony. He explained that in the past, the range of the *tsao meung* was the traditional Tai *miiang* or city-state, but today the area is defined more by the boundaries of the district of Chiang Dao. This makes sense historically speaking, since Chiang Dao was once a semi-autonomous *miiang* dominating this area. In many respects, the *tsao meung* itself, and its relationship to the village, is similar to that of the *nai amphoe*, or district chief. It does not reside at the shrine, but must be invited to visit, a task that is performed by the village spirits (*karnam raoh*) who are also propitiated during the ceremony. The *tsao meung* arrives with a retinue of followers who are powerful enough to help the village, but also potentially dangerous. Those who “break the law” and go into the fields or forest will be shot. While it is necessary to propitiate the *tsao meung* and the spirits in general, overall it is thought best to not have much contact with them, lest you unwittingly offend them.

After all the food had been eaten the ceremony was complete. The gates to the shrine would remain “closed” (they always remain closed when the shrine is not in use, but now symbolically thought of as “closed”) until after the rain retreat, when they would be “opened” again in an identical ceremony. Once the gates are closed, no marriages are permitted to occur, thus marking off the time for sexual unions from the period of increased ascetic restraint marked by the rain retreat (Pale: *Wa*).

As we shall see in chapter 4, the frequency of ritual observances during the rain retreat shift from within the household (where Buddhist scripture readings regularly take place and weddings are held) and spirit shrines, to the Buddhist temple site, and it is a time when many villagers attempt to observe the Buddhist precepts more carefully. In
addition to the division of labour (no monks attend the feeding of the guardian spirit), the fuzzy division between Buddhist and spirit religion is thereby marked temporally by the opening and closing of the spirit gates. Yet as we shall see in the next section, the separation between the two “systems” is not always so pronounced, and Buddhism and spirits frequently interact in ways that reveal the asymmetrical power invested in each system.

Sending Away Misfortune

Buddhism and spirits co-exist within a syncretic cosmological system, but the relationship between the two fields is an unequal one. Spirits, like humans, are subject to the laws of Buddhism, and as such occupy a weaker position within the hierarchy of ritual power. The power of Buddhism to bring fortune and repel misfortune, whether caused by astrological forces or spirits, can be seen quite clearly within the context of *song krau* ceremonies (literally the “sending away of adversity”).\(^{52}\) These ceremonies are commonly held as healing rites for individuals, households, or an entire village.\(^{53}\)

In Pang Daeng Nai, a village wide *song krau* ceremony is conducted each year at the *ho teu* (the central village post) just after the traditional new year celebration in April, in order to purify the village and send away spirits that may cause illness and strife for families (Ashley 2004, 2005). The *ho teu* is located in the centre of the village. It

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52. *Song* is a Tai word meaning “send.” According to Davis (1985), “khau denotes the celestial bodies which are responsible for human misfortunes. These celestial bodies are the 27 rksa marking the days in the moon’s passage around Mount Sineru, and more particularly, the *navagraha* or nine celestial deities. These deities are the Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, Saturn, Rahu, and Ketu. The latter two are personifications of the ascending and descending nodes, or the points of intersection of the lunar and solar tracks. Of the nine, Rahu is chieftain and the most dangerous” (p. 102).

53. In addition to Dara’ang villages, *song krau* are also performed by Tai Yuan, Shan, and Lawa peoples (Davis 1984: 99-121; Durrenberger 1980: 55; Rajadhon 1958: 5-6; Telford 1937: 168).
resembles a long pole with a tapered end, similar to the *lak muang* or *tsaii wan* found in many Tai villages (Tannenbaum 1990: 33-35; Terweil 1978: 166). Most Dara’ang villages, including Pang Daeng Nai, construct platforms overtop of the post for monks to sit upon during *song krau* ceremony. While people speak of the *ho teu* as being the residence of a spirit, it is not propitiated in the same way as other guardian spirits. The power of the village post is more abstract and depersonalized, and villagers generally have no reason for dealing with the *ho teu* except during the village wide *song krau* (see Plate 2).

In 2008 the village *song krau* ceremony was held on April 16, just after the end of Songkhran, the traditional New Year. In the early morning several young men constructed four large bamboo platforms known as *peun song* and placed them next to the village post. These platforms serve as rafts for malevolent spirits who will be carried out of the village at the end of the day’s ceremony. Throughout the morning, men, women, and children placed various items on this platform that are considered desirable by sprints, including candles, puffed pork skin, incense, tomatoes, bananas, sweets, flowers, tobacco, and rice. In order to represent the astrological influences of misfortune, A-Tun added to the pile several paper cut outs of the twelve animals of the Tai Yuan zodiac (rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, *naga*, snake, horse, goat, monkey, rooster, dog, elephant). Many villagers also placed a bit of their hair upon the platform as it too is connected with astrological configurations that might bring about misfortune. The removal of their hair from the village signifies the removal of any astrological influences that may be causing individual problems.

Many villagers also placed objects inside the small walled area of the *ho teu* itself.
Yon, a 58 year old woman, explained while placing a bag of clothing within the enclosed area of the *ho teu* that the merit (Pale: *agieu*) generated during the ceremony would charge any items placed within with beneficial powers. “But women cannot enter into the *ho teu*, or climb on top. We just drop in the bags over the sides.” Yon was expressing a common belief found amongst many societies of Thailand and Burma regarding the dangerous power of female genitalia. If a woman was to climb onto the platform, her genitals would be situated overtop of the *ho teu*, destroying its protective power (Terweil 1994: 124). Rather than enter the walled area of the *ho teu*, women drop bags of clothing and bottles of *somphoy* water (water containing *Acacia concinna* pods) over the edge of the enclosure. Men also bring bundles of bamboo, each containing several long bamboo poles, paper flags, and banners with the animals of the Thai zodiac stamped on them, and lay them tee-pee style over the central post. These will later be taken to the forest and placed against large trees as a means of sharing merit with the spirits of the trees.

Before the ceremony begins, the *dajân* constructs an altar (Pale: *bandang tong*) and invites the celestial beings to come and partake of the merit made during this ceremony. The *dajân* explained that he constructs an altar for every Buddhist oriented event. In Pang Daeng Nai, the *song krau* ceremony involves the chanting of Buddhist monks, so it is considered the domain of the *dajân*. There is no permanent altar at the *ho teu*, so he erected a temporary one out of wooden planks. He then laid upon the altar seven banana leaf cones, each containing two sticks of incense, two candles, two white flowers, a *yip-yā* and *tung* flag, and a small package containing some cooked rice and meat. The *dajân* then lit two candles and placed them on the altar before getting down

54. The *dajân* was unclear as to why there the number seven was significant, but suggested that it corresponds to the various cosmic realms and thus ensures the propitiation of all spiritual beings. Eliade
on his knees and, placing his hands together, called upon the various *thewada* in all the celestial realms to come and watch over the festival. Some gods and spirits were listed by name - *Phya In* (Skt: Indra), *Phya Phrom* (Skt.: Brahmā), *Phya Yom* (Skt.: Yama), *tsao meung* (Cadastral Spirit), *jao iim* (Lord of the Water), and *Kanya Kadai* (Spirit of the Earth, identified with Lady Thorani) – but the intention, he explained, was to invite all the spirits from the earthly and celestial realms. Several of those named, such as Indra, Brahmā, and Yama, are Indic gods, while others such as the *tsao meung* are Tai derived spirit lords or, in the case of the *jao iim*, local constructions. The final god, the *kanya kadai* is particularly interesting as it conflates a Dara’ang spirit category with one found in the Buddhist texts.55

While celestial beings are invited to partake in the ceremony, other precautions are taken to prevent malevolent spirits from interfering with the proceedings. Prior to commencing the ceremony, the *da bu meung* surrounded the *ho teu* with two ropes that would prevent spirits from entering the *ho teu* site. He explained that the two ropes used were known as a *ratcha māt*, a rope made of two parallel strips (approximately 5 cm apart) of grass, with two more strips plaited around these two to form a diamond shape pattern; and a *khā kheo*, a rope made by twisting two large pieces of grass together. Once the ropes were in place, he placed four *tā leo* (stars made from bamboo) around the *ho teu*, one on each of the four posts. These prevent spirits from seeing inside the *ho teu* and

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55. The ritual is similar to that performed by Tai Yuan people who build four armed altars to give offerings the lords of the four direction (Pāli: *Lokapala*), Indra (on top) and the Lady Thorani (at the base) (Davis 1984: 106). Some Dara’ang elders such as A-Tun know how to construct such an altar, but it is not commonly erected in the village of Pang Daeng Nai.

notes in his exploration of the religious significance of the number seven that the Majjihima-nikākya (II, 123) alludes to the conception of 7 heavens, a model of the universe that goes back to Bhrahmanism (Eliade 1964: 406). He also mentions other important associations with the number seven in Buddhism, such as the seven strides the Buddha takes after he has been born, corresponding to the “seven planetary heavens” (Eliade 1961: 305).
will later be brought with the *peun song* to the four corners of the village to prevent the spirits from returning.\(^5^6\)

This is a Buddhist ceremony, so I do not do much. But because it involves spirits I need to make these barriers. These will stop the spirits from seeing the *ho teu* and the people on the platform. The spirits may wish to stop them, as they are trying to chase the spirits out of the village (A-Pong, the *da bu meung*).

The ceremony itself is conducted upon the platform situated overtop the *ho teu*. When I first visited Pang Daeng Nai this platform and it’s supporting structure was made of wood, but since then has been replaced with a cement structure in order to support more men. Before anyone takes their place, the *dajân* installed a Buddha image, Buddhist scriptures, and a bucket of aquatic creatures (crabs, snails, and fish from the river) upon the upper platform. He also wrapped a bundle of threads around the top of the structure for the monks to hold onto while chanting. These white and red threads were hung off the platform, and householders took them and attached them to their homes before the ceremony commences. A grid of threads was also erected over the site itself, so that threads hung down for laypeople to hold onto during the ceremony itself. These threads, known by the Tai term *sai sin* ("precept threads"), are meant to purify the village through their ability to transfer merit sympathetically along their length; a process Rajadhon (1961: 85) likens to "an electric wire" charging up the objects it touches with merit.

The ceremony itself began just after noon. The village monk and resident novices

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56. This six pointed bamboo star, known as *tâ leo* in Pale, is common across Southeast Asia and is used by highlanders and lowlanders alike. The meaning differs slightly from place to place, but it generally revolves around spirits, illness, and protection. A drawing of one appears in Milne’s (1924) account of the Palaungs of Nahmsan, where it is described as follows: “The wise men make charms to keep the wearer safe in travelling, or from accidents, by scraping fibres from the bamboo poles of the bier on which a coffin has rested and interlacing them as in the accompanying figure” (1924: 266). Rajadhon writes that in Chiang Mai, “the *taleow* was used as a charm to prevent a dead person’s spirit from molesting the inmates of a house where death had occurred” (Rajadhon 1986: 146). Davis (1984: 163) describes the use of the *taa laew* by the Northern Thais to protect fields, as does Durrenberger (1980: 55) for the Shan.
took their place in the tower along with the village head and *dañan*. The actual ceremony is quite similar to that performed for household blessing ceremonies (see Ch. 4). The power to purify the village is generated by the monk and novices, who chant in Pāli and read Buddhist texts, such as the *Pana Parami*. As Tambiah (1968) points out, the recitation of Pāli is not meant to communicate the contents of the scriptures, but rather to generate power through the very act of recitation. This holds true for texts that are written in languages comprehensible to the laity as well, as Dara’ang monks and novices typically read different pages of the same text, or entirely different texts, simultaneously. In addition to chanting, the monk periodically stirred the water with the bundle of plants and blew upon it in order to sacralise it, a practice found throughout the Theravada Buddhist world of Southeast Asia.

After the monk and novices had finished chanting, the village head spoke, ordering all the *krau* associated with each day of the week to leave the village. He then asked that volunteers take the four *peun song* platforms out of the village. I followed the volunteers as they removed the four *tā leo* from the *ho teu* and carried the *peun song* upon their shoulders to a forested place situated at the corner of the village. They explained to me that the *peun song* would be left at the four corners of the village, where there were no roads for the spirits to find their way back. After the platforms were deposited, the men spit upon it, and fired off a gun to drive away the spirits that were carried out with the food. A *tā leo* was then erected in front of the platform, so that the spirits could not find their way back.

After depositing the *peun song* outside the village, we returned to the *ho teu* site. As we arrived, the village head was concluding the ceremony by blessing the crowd and
sprinkling them with water made sacred through the chanting. Men and women then took
the bundles of bamboo outside the village and laid them next to large trees in order to
share merit with the spirits of large trees that were believed to be the homes of powerful
spirits. Those who had placed items beneath the platform removed their bags and
returned to their homes to sprinkle their houses with the water made sacred by the power
of Buddhism. With the ceremony finished, villagers enjoyed the rest of the day off work,
with minor celebrations held in some homes to mark the final day of the New Year
celebrations.

**Appropriating Cultural Logics**

The *song krau* ritual establishes a distinction between the village site, purified by
Buddhism, and the world of spirits, associated with the wilderness. It marks of the
margins of the inner village, the space of humans, from that of spirits, the forest outside.
The *peun song* are deposited just outside the boundaries of the village. As Douglas (2002:
150) points out, “all margins are dangerous” and the body commonly serves as a
metaphor for thinking about boundary issues. In the case of the *song krau* ceremony, the
connection between body and expulsion can be seen quite clearly, with men spitting upon
the platform, expelling fluid from their body just as the village is expelling
spirits/adversity/misfortune from its boundaries.

This distinction needs to be understood within a broader symbolic system that
associates Buddhism with the village (Pale: *raoh*), and its opposition to the peripheral
forest/wilderness (Pale: *prae*). The dichotomy is important in terms how local discourses
of ethnic relations are constituted within Dara’ang villages, as it replicates the previously
noted lowland Tai discourse of associated Buddhism with “civilization” or the mìaung, and spirits with the forest or wild (Thai: pa) (Davis 1984: 81; Rhum 1994: 84). In the Tai context, this dichotomy is likewise mapped onto human beings so that those who live within the Tai mìaung come to be defined as civilized as opposed to those who live outside the mìaung, generally non-Tai peoples, who are constructed as the savage other (Turton 2000: 11). Buddhism comes to play the role within Tai cultural discourses as having the power to civilize the non-Tai other, effectively making them Tai in the process (see Ch. 5 for a discussion of official Thai state programs that continue to operate according this logic).

While scholars have paid attention to this dichotomy for lowland Tai groups (see collected papers in Turton 2000), it is important to recognize that such distinctions are also formed within the context of upland communities who have appropriated Buddhism from lowland states. The term appropriation implies not simply an acquisition, but a process of making something one’s own (de Certeau 1984: xiii). In all my time spent in Dara’ang villages, I have never heard someone speak of him or herself or the village as “wild,” regardless of the way the lowland Tai construct them. For the Dara’ang, like the Tai, the village constitutes the cosmological and cultural centre of their worldview, while the forest or wilderness represents the outer periphery marked primarily by its lack of human presence (Goody 1977: 214).

Spirits are generally equated with outside the village while Buddhism is associated with the inner, cultural space of human beings. The shrine of the tsao meung is always located in a forested spot at the periphery of the village, while the Buddhist temple is located at the border of the village. In Burma, where Dara’ang towns and
villages are spread out along mountain ridges. Buddhist stūpas (reliquaries) commonly mark the edge of the village, delineating the human settlement from the fields and the forest beyond. Similarly, the spirit shrines, be they tsao meung or something else, are typically located in a small patch of forest beyond the stūpa. Fields often contain their own shrines, small houses or simple platforms erected for the spirit of the field. The distinct space of the fields vis-à-vis the village is particularly marked during the feeding of the tsao meung described above, when entrance to this space is restricted to villagers. One can likewise see this distinction between inner and outer at the level of the household, where the Buddhist shrine is located within the home while the spirit of the household is situated in the yard outside. As I described above, this structure is also marked off temporally, as the gates to the tsao meung shrine are closed religious life turns inward towards the Buddhist temple during the rain retreat period.

While a correspondence exists between Buddhism : village and spirits : nature, these cultural dichotomies themselves should not be understood simply in terms of Buddhism : spirits : : inner : outer. Rather, as Rhum (1994: 11) points out for the Tai Yuan, it is a structure of nested hierarchies within which Buddhism and spirits constitute one set of oppositions. The Buddhist temple and tsao meung opposition represents a similar logic to that presented by the village spirits (karnam raoh) and forest spirits (karnam prae). Within the context of feeding of the spirits at the tsao meung shrine one can see a distinction presented between forest spirits and village spirits, both of which are given their own separate place within the spatial structuring of the ritual itself. Village

57. In Namhsan, Palaung villages are built along the ridges of mountains, so the layout is linear instead of circular. Nevertheless, the logic is similar. Buddhist temples are typically closer to the edge of the village, though close to houses and shops. Stūpas mark the edge of the village; beyond the stūpas are found the spirit shrines of the village.
spirits are invited to eat at an altar that is set in front of the tsao meung’s shrine (placed lower, as upper connotes the higher status of the tsao meung who is associated with the lord of the entire area), while the spirits of the forest are propitiated at a large tree away from the tsao meung shrine, in a more forested area. Field spirits, an intermediary category, are likewise distinguished categorically from forest spirits by being placed under the protection of the tsao meung, thus constituting another category of inner vs. outer. This point can be further illustrated by the fact the Tai Yuan village song krau ceremony described by Davis (1984: 104-121) does not employ Buddhist monks and can be performed by anyone who is familiar with the required texts. What is being drawn upon is not the symbols themselves (Buddhism, spirits, and so on) but the relationship of these symbols to other symbols according to a particular logic of practice.

What Rhum describes as “nested hierarchies” can be conceptualized as a system of transferable schemes of which hierarchical power relations are an important aspect. As Bourdieu (1977: 112) points out, ritual practice “effects a fluid, ‘fuzzy’ abstraction” which brings symbols into different sets of relationships depending on their context. What is applied in the case of ritual and mythological practice is not a fixed set of equivalencies, but transposable schemes that are learned through the bodily practice of group members. Principles of classification such as high and low, inside and outside, living and dead, are transferable to different ritual contexts, which provide the basis for innovation within rituals noted for their repetition and stereotypy.

The logic of rituals is a practical logic of transferable schemes, relying more on analogy than fixed equivalencies. This accounts for the ability of this logic to be appropriated by upland non-Tai people who are framed negatively within the ritual
context of lowland Tai society. One might find it odd that an upland group would ever adopt the religious practices of the Tai if one took the schemes noted by scholars of lowland Tai Buddhism to be fixed in terms of their equivalencies. Such works describe Buddhism not only as an aspect of civilization, but as a means of constructing the upland peoples as primitive savages (see Turton 2000). As discussed in chapter 1, non-Tai speaking autochthonous groups were commonly represented as uncivilized and animalistic in the Buddhist literature of Lan Na after the 15th century (Rhum 1987: 99; Wijeyewadene 1986: 85-86). Groups such as the Lua’ could be civilized, however, through their conversion to Buddhism. The forest is likewise constructed against the Tai mūang as an uncivilized, savage place, in part through the discourse of Buddhism that, concerned primarily with humanity, conflates the wild space of demons with the humans who occupy the forests. Davis (1984) notes that for the Tai Yuan the forest has a “negative and often pejorative” connotation, being the place of “[c]ontraband articles such as bootleg whisky and unregistered firearms” (p. 81). Into this category, defined in its opposition to the civilized centres of the mūang, are also placed “aboriginals, wild animals, and malevolent spirits” (p. 81).

The construction of the lowland Tai mūang as the centre of cultural/human activity against the upland forests/wilderness and its inhabitants via a religious discourse is well known to scholars of Tai religion. What is rarely noted, however, is that similar classifications of space and culture are likewise found amongst upland groups. Woodward (1996), for example, describes how Lhota Naga village founding rites draw a distinction between “culture and nature and that village founding and agricultural rites transform nature, which is associated with dangerous spirits and powers, into bounded
territories within which humans can live and prosper” (p. 135).

Without condoning the prejudices that are found within Tai ethnic discourses, it is important to note that such classifications, though historically and socially particular, are the product of common cultural processes for transforming continuous variation into discrete categories (Lévi-Strauss 1970: 54; Schrempp 1992: 19). In the case of the Dara’ang, the appropriated religious categories of Tai perform a similar classificatory functions within Dara’ang society that they do within their lowland context (Buddhism : spirits : : village : : forest : : culture : : nature), and because these schemes are transposable, depending on a fuzzy logic of analogy and association, they need not carry with them the same signifying functions that they do for the Tai. One can observe similar delineations of cultural space within Dara’ang villages as one does within Tai villages. The appropriation of this symbolic system does not only shed its pejorative ethnic connotation (those rooted within a Tai perspective), but as we shall see in chapter 7, can be inverted to critique lowland Tai society as being immoral vis-à-vis the upland regions using the language of Buddhism itself, and at times demonstrate a reverse prejudice towards the Tai people.58

Conceptualizing Buddhism in this way carries with it certain implications for the way scholars discuss the topic of Tai-ization. In his seminal paper on the topic, Condominas (1990: 71) argues that Tai-ization is a process of trying to better ones position vis-à-vis the dominant Tai other. He presents the absorption of non-Tai peoples (kha or sa) into the Tai society as the explanation for the rapid expansion of the Tai

58. In his discussion of Hmong shamanism, Tapp remarks how the alien power of the Other can be symbolically absorbed in order to be symbolically controlled. “This absorption of alien power is accomplished through the dissolution of the normal boundaries of the self and cultural identity; identity is submerged in a chaos of differences. The boundaries are then constituted in a new way, not merely reconstituted in a replicatory way” (2000: 97).
people into Indo-China. He writes that, “where they succeeded in consolidating their power, the Tai were able to strengthen their position through a policy of ‘Tai-ization’ of the subject population” (Condominas 1990: 45). While Condominas himself worked with non-Buddhist Tai, a similar picture is presented by Leach (1964) which closely associates becoming Tai with becoming Buddhist; “When, as not infrequently happens, a Kachin ‘becomes a Shan’ (sam tai), the adoption of Buddhism is a crucial part of the procedure” (p. 30).

While some Dara’ang men and women move to Tai towns and “become Tai,” most have remained in upland villages where they have continue to live in a distinctive fashion from their lowland Tai neighbours. It is only within the context of territorializing practices of the state that Dara’ang people have sought integration within dominant Thai society, as the economic base of their village (open expanses of forest usable for farming) has been enclosed by the Thai state leaving the communities without a viable means of production. And as we shall see, even the increasing proletarianization of the Dara’ang has not signalled a full shift in ethnic identity.

Those who see becoming Buddhist as part of a process of becoming Tai ignore what Dara’ang and other upland peoples do with Buddhism once they have adopted it as their own. Given the prevalence for Buddhist millenarian revolts by the Karen, it does not appear that “becoming Buddhist” has resulted in the assimilation of the Karen (Stern 1968). Similarly, the widespread adoption of Buddhism by the Dara’ang does not signal a process of becoming Tai, but rather the Dara’angization or Palaungization of Buddhism and other Tai rites and beliefs. Buddhism itself comes to represent another point of identification nested within a hierarchy of ever widening definitions of Buddhism.
Buddhism as a religion is described as international, a fact that allowed me to discuss alternative conceptions of Buddhism, such as those found in Taiwan, with Dara’ang men and women who recognized a commonality within the differences. State controlled traditions, such as those found in Burma and Thailand, provide a bureaucratic framework for intentionally integrating disparate regional and local traditions. Yet these local traditions are resilient, and people continue to identify with them as markers of ethnic or regional identity. Buddhism provides both a structure for imagining international and national communities, as well as localized identities that may themselves be in conflict with the ideals and practices of those who control the state apparatus.

In this chapter I have described Dara’ang religion as a cultural system that was appropriated from lowland Tai society. This shared religious field provides an important cultural contact zone between the two groups (see Ch. 5), but nevertheless the classificatory potential of Buddhism operates similarly in the case of the Dara’ang as it does for the Tai, providing the discursive and practical logic through which distinctions between inside vs. outside, village vs. forest, moral vs. immoral, us vs. them, and so on, can be constructed. In the next chapter I will demonstrate how these practical schemes of classification associated with religion are embodied within the group through ritual activities that re-present the past within the present, providing a continuity for the group throughout time by inculcating the practices of the group within the bodies of its members.
Chapter 4

Buddhism and Identity

In a village wide survey I conducted in 2007, every household in Pang Daeng Nai identified themselves as Buddhist.\(^{59}\) Elders interviewed at the village temple during the rain retreat typically described Buddhism as a set of practices and beliefs that linked the group to their collective past. As A-No, a 60-year-old Dara’ang man, put it, “To reject Buddhism is to forget our ancestors.” While Christian missionaries have found some converts amongst the Dara’ang in Thailand, Christians represent only a small fraction of the total Dara’ang population, and many who were forced to convert to Christianity in exchange for land have recently begun to identifying themselves as Buddhist once again.\(^{60}\) “Some people have come here to the village to preach about Jesus, but they have not found any converts. While both religions are good, to change is to forget where we came from,” explains A-Tan, a 73-year-old Dara’ang man.

When people commonly speak about “forgetting” they are referring to one’s inability to recall the past, a failure to bring an aspect of the past into one’s present consciousness. The notion that a group might “forget” their past can mean they are no longer able to articulate the group’s history for their members, and that members therefore are no longer conscious of how previous generations lived. However, this discursive construction of a group’s identity in relation to the past represents only one

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\(^{59}\) While some Dara’ang have converted to Christianity they constitute a small minority of the total population who generally identity with Buddhism. A similar situation may be noted for the Tai speaking peoples of Thailand.

\(^{60}\) This represents the experience of the Dara’ang of Pang Daeng Nok. The Dara’ang of Pang Daeng Nok were given permission to farm land owned by a Lahu evangelical Christian, but were required to convert to Christianity in exchange.
facet of social memory. The past is also preserved within the present in an embodied form, through the collective reproduction of past practices by the current generation. This bodily form of memory represents an important aspect of collective identity which intersects with the discursive form of identification in different ways, depending on its particular social context.

Embodied memory, what Connerton (1989) calls “habit memory” and Bourdieu (1977) labels “habitus,” is important for understanding the durability of group identity through time. Rituals imply repetition, the reenactment of past performances within the present (Davis 1984: 17). Religious rituals do more than simply imply continuity with the past; they explicitly recreate this continuity by reproducing events and practices that are believed to have occurred during the time of the religion’s founder (Connerton 1989: 44-45). Temporal and geographical distance which exists between the group and the religion’s past come together for the group within the act of ritual representation, a process of re-occurrence which is commonly structured according to local reckoning of calendrical succession.

Religious rituals, particularly those tied to calendrical succession, are important for ensuring that group members undergo the same experiences; experiences which past generations have also been exposed to (Bourdieu 1977: 80). While commemorative rituals typically call for a conscious recollection on the part by participants (for example, Canadian Remembrance Day celebrations which call upon “Canadians” to remember “our” experience during World War I and II), rituals also inculcate a sense or feeling of “we” by ensuring that all members of a group share a common experience. The shared affinity such an experience produces need not present itself to one’s consciousness, nor
be articulated explicitly to members of the group. Rather, it is situated within the bodily practices of members who sense a common affinity with individuals (i.e. members of religious or ethnic groups) who likewise underwent the same ritualized experiences (Bentley 1987: 32-33).

Religious rituals are not the sole means through which the past is maintained, but the formalism ascribed to rites sanctioned as sacred effectively limits the degree to which innovation is accepted as legitimate. While change occurs, it generally takes place within the limits of practical schemes set out according to the expectations of what group members consider the essential elements of a particular religious rite. Change is typically incremental, but even radical deviations from past performances require an acceptance on the part of participants that the essential elements of a ritual act have been maintained. These subjective expectations are themselves the product of a person’s participation in rituals which inculcate them with a particular way of understanding that is shared by all members of the group. Typically, these subjective expectations take the form of a fuzzy logic of analogy and simple contrasts. The Buddha is always placed higher than the ritual paraphernalia that is oriented towards spirits; if no Buddha image or symbolism is used, then those items which concern the most powerful spirit will be placed higher up, with those of more minor spirits placed lower. Methods of feeding spirits mirror the postures and practices associated with offerings made to the Buddha, and within the home the same postures can be seen when people make offerings to their elders. This chapter examines the structure of ritual activities within the village, with close attention paid to the embodied aspects of ritual practice.
Daily Rituals

The calendar is one of the most codified aspects of a group’s social existence (Bourdieu 1977: 97). In Dara’ang villages, collective Buddhist and spirit-oriented rituals are structured primarily according to the lunar calendar. In addition to large scale communal observations such as the closing of the gates to the tsao meung (local spirit lord) described in chapter 3, smaller observances take place on the traditional Buddhist uposatha days, those which precede the waxing, waning, and half moons (Pale: saengai teung, more commonly referred to by their lunar calendar designations of 1 kham, 8 kham, and 14/15 kham). For most of the year, the rituals that accompany these days are minimal. In the early morning, a member of a household presents offerings of dried meat or curry, rice, water, flowers, candles, and incense sticks to the small shrine of the guardian spirit of their house (Pale: jao thi). An older member of the family will also do the same at the Buddha image altar (Pale: yang phra) that is located within the main living area of each house. Home altars also represent the ancestor spirits of the household, but these spirits do not play a prominent role except during wedding ceremonies when a new household member is about to enter the home.

Uposatha days are also a time when Dara’ang monks do not go on their regular begging rounds (Pale: kep som). Most mornings, novices from the temple leave the grounds early to beg while families are in the process of preparing their morning meal. When begging, a monk or novice approaches the home and stands outside with downcast
Table 1: Village Rituals and Agricultural Cycle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Calendar*</th>
<th>Rituals</th>
<th>Agricultural Cycle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td><em>Songkhran</em> (Thai New Year, April 13-15)</td>
<td>DRY SEASON</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Village <em>Song Khrau Ritual</em></td>
<td>Preparation of fields</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td></td>
<td>START OF THE RAINS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Planting first crop of peanuts, rice, and maize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>Closing the gates of the <em>tsao meung</em></td>
<td>Harvesting mangoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Cadastral Spirit)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td><em>Khao Wa</em> (enter the rain retreat)</td>
<td>HEAVY RAIN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td></td>
<td>Harvest peanuts and plat second crop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Planting beans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>Adolescent's Festival</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td><em>Children's Festival</em></td>
<td>END OF THE RAINS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Awk Wa</em> (leaving the rain retreat)</td>
<td>Harvesting maize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>Opening the gates of the <em>tsao meung</em></td>
<td>Harvesting upland rice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>Feeding the <em>Kanya Um</em> (Water Spirit)</td>
<td>Harvesting beans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td><em>Makha Bucha</em> (Thai national holiday)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td></td>
<td>Work outside village</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* As many of dates of rituals listed here are decided according to the lunar calendar the Western calendar months should be read as approximations only. For exact dates, see discussion of individual rites.

eyes waiting for a member of the household to place some curry or rice into their alms bowl. If the family has no food to spare, the monks continue onto the next house without passing over any household until they have sufficient food for the day. Families that provide food receive a “blessing of thanks” from the monk or novice. This daily act is one of the primary means through which men and women in the village make merit. On
uposatha days, however, monks and novices remain at the temple and villagers bring their food offerings to the monks, a practical reversal which marks these days off as sacred, and shifts the religious activity from outside the temple towards its interior. This morning visit to the temple is for many people the extent of religious activity engaged in these days, although some elders will also make their way to the nearby stūpa (Pāli: gong mu, a reliquary, known as chedi in Thai, after the Pāli term cetiya) to make offerings after giving food to the monks (see chapter 6 for details about the stūpa of Doi Phrabat).

Buddhist ceremonies that occur at the temple are largely confined to the rain retreat period and special occasions such as the traditional New Year (Thai: Songkhran). During the remainder of the year, Buddhist services are held in people's private homes as a way of sacralizing the household space through the protective power of Buddhism. In order to hold such a reading (Pāli: reng hlu di pai), the host invites monks to read scriptures in their home over a two-day period.61 While most aspects of the ceremony are similar to those described below for temple ceremonies, certain special preparations are required before such a ceremony can be performed. The household must construct a raised platform (Pāli: ka chom) on the higher part of the house where visitors are greeted. This platform is constructed primarily of bamboo, with a cloth ceiling and a fence with thread tied around it (demarcating enclosed sacred space). Monks seat themselves upon this platform when they are reading the Buddhist texts, although often times there are multiple monks reading different texts simultaneously, so a few readers must sit upon the floor. While a number of different texts can be read, common ones include the Pañña Parami, Sut Mangalā, Mahalokawoti, and the Kīṭhakanto, the last of which is read

seven times in order to ensure the prosperity of the household. After each reading of the *Kitchakanto* the monk is given a small paper packet, the first containing 1 baht, followed by 2, 4, 8, 16, 32, and 64 baht. This symbolizes the doubling of wealth which is hoped will occur as a result of the ceremony. Following the reading the monk takes sacralized water (Pale: *üm mettä*, literally “water of benevolence”) and sprinkles it over the house as a form of blessing.

While these acts are primarily aimed inwards, that is to say towards the household sponsoring the event, they are also communal ceremonies that attract a large number of villagers, particularly in the evening when the day’s work has been complete. People who attend household readings of Buddhist scriptures help to defray the cost to the hosts by bringing with them rice for the meals that accompany the event. This ceremony is similar to those held at the temple, but differs somewhat insofar as the focus is on reading Buddhist texts (temple services often exclude scriptural readings outside of the rain retreat period). While many attendees can understand the languages the texts are written in (Tai Yuan or Pale), the monks often render the stories unintelligible by reading multiple texts simultaneously (c.f. Davis 1984: 187 for a similar observation amongst the Tai Yuan). As Tambiah (1970: 195) points out in the case of north-eastern Thailand, it is the sacred power of pronouncing the words themselves that is important in terms of the effectiveness of this ritual, not the message transmitted.

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62. While there are a number of different texts that can be read during a service, some are essential to every household reading: the *Paññā Parami*, the *Sut Mangala* and the *Kitchakanto*. The *Paññā Parami* recounts the perfection of wisdom by the Buddha and is read at the opening of every Buddhist ceremony held in Pang Daeng Nai. The *Sut Mangala* describes the thirty-seven mangalāni (auspicious things) that a person should partake in, including the avoidance of fools, associating with the wise, and honouring those worthy of honour. The *Kitchakanto* describes how to conduct a Buddhist ceremony and lists the required ritual items needed to properly pay respect to the Buddha (i.e. the number and types of flags, the number and position of bowls of milled and un-milled rice, etc.).
Rain Retreat

Throughout most of the year the religious activities of the lay community are not concentrated around the local Buddhist temple. Monks head out each morning into the village to receive alms, thereby providing people the opportunity to make merit at their houses, scriptural readings take place primarily within the context of homes, and the ritual calendar is punctuated more by marriages and household/field spirit feeding rituals than by collective temple observances. With the coming of the rainy season, however, the focus shifts from a dispersion of religious activity throughout the village body and its periphery to the interior of the Buddhist temple grounds.

Known as Wa in Pale and Vassa in Pāli, the annual rain retreat is a period of heightened religious activity. Wa officially begins on the first day of the full moon of the eighth lunar month (usually July), and ends on the first day of the full moon of the eleventh lunar month (October). The period is also marked off by the closing of the tsao meung (see Ch. 3); the gates of the house will not be open again until after the rain retreat season has ended. In the past, this was a time when young boys would undertake their temporary ordinations, further delineating this period as a time of restraint and an occasion for turning inward, although in many Dara’ang and Tai Yuan villages these temporary ordinations are now performed during the hot, dry season when schools are closed and there is little agricultural work to be done in the fields.

Throughout the rain retreat monks are expected to remain at the monastery where

63. Davis (1984: 180) notes that the custom of spending the rainy season in retreat pre-dates Buddhism in India, as ascetics would refrain from travel both due to safety reasons and out of respect for the doctrine of ahimsa (non-violence), as wandering might lead to the unintentional killing of small creatures when roads and paths are flooded. The Buddhist formulation of this doctrine is found in the Mahāvagga of the Vinaya Piṭaka, the Theravādan book of monastic rules.
they are residing at the commencement of vassa. In Thailand (where the rain retreat is known as *pansa*), the national Sangha has made it an official rule that monks not sleep outside of the temple where they have chosen to spend the rain retreat, and monks must seek permission from the abbot if they wish to leave the temple grounds. Also, no new ordinations can take place during this period and monks are encouraged not to disrobe. The turning inward during this time is further signified by the activities of monks and novices who do not go on alms gathering rounds during this period. Instead, villagers bring food every morning to the monastery, just as they do on *uposatha* (holy) days throughout the remainder of the year.

During the rain retreat villagers observe each holy day with temple centred activities. Major days (those of the full and new moons) during the rain retreat period are given their own Pale title:

**Table 2: Dara’ang Holy Days of Wa**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Khao Wa</th>
<th>“Enter the Rain Retreat,” celebrated on the full moon of the eighth lunar month</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Sadāng Kiah</em></td>
<td>Observed on the new moon of the eighth lunar month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Sadāng Kiah</em></td>
<td>Observed on the full moon of the ninth lunar month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Gang Wa</em></td>
<td>“Middle of the Rain Retreat,” observed on the new moon of the ninth lunar month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Sadāng Kiah</em></td>
<td>Observed on the full moon of the tenth lunar month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Sadāng Ganyom Deu Biah</em></td>
<td>Observed on the new moon of the tenth lunar month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Awk Wa</em></td>
<td>“Leaving the Wa,” celebrated on full moon of the eleventh lunar month</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Major holy days are marked by a similar set of practices. On the day prior to the full or new moon, villagers in Pang Daeng Nai put on finest clothes and visit the homes of their parents, grandparents, elder siblings, and the village head in order to gandaoh, a ritual act of seeking forgiveness for possible offences they may have caused and a request for blessing. At the home of A-Tun, the families of his sons and daughters begin to arrive shortly after breakfast, bringing trays full of food and other gifts to present to him and his wife. As families arrive, they seat themselves on the lower section of the home. Most Dara’ang houses in Pang Daeng Nai have a living area that is divided into two parts. The lower section is located close to the door, while the upper section (raised only a couple inches above the lower one) is situated away from the door. The upper section is invariably where the household’s Buddha image is located.

During the gandaoh ritual, A-Tun and his wife sit upon the raised section, denoting their higher status within the ritual complex. His children and grandchildren present their trays of offerings by first lifting them to their forehead, and then place them on the floor in front of the elders. A-Tun and his wife then lean over to touch the tray and recite a blessing in Pali, with some Pali phrases, for the givers as a way of bestowing a blessing. Once the blessing is given, the family members wash the hands of A-Tun and his wife. In the case of a young child who has been ill, A-Tun may might also their wrist tied with a piece of white string in order to bind their spirit and protect them from misfortune. The gandoah ritual is repeated throughout the day at the homes of various elders, and later, again at the home of A-Tun as villagers come to gandaoh him and his wife out of respect for his position as village head.

After blessing the younger generations, many elders pack their bedrolls and head
to the temple where they will spend the evening listening to sermons, saying their beads
(Pale: ble tish) and meditating (Pale: samadhî). These men and women, known as elders
(Pale: dā yâ) or precept keepers (Pale: hok kaem sin nai yong), head to the temple in the
afternoon of the day prior to the full or new moon (14 kham) and remain within the
temple grounds until the following evening.64 Men set up their bedrolls in the main
building containing the Buddha image (Pale: yong), while the women sleep in a nearby
building known as the jao rop. The sex segregation reflects the renunciation of sexual life
by the temple sleepers during their period of seclusion, but also indicates the relative
lower status of women to men within the context of many Buddhist ceremonies. Men
sleep in the area that houses the Buddha image, while women occupy a space that is
primarily used for storage. This same sexual division of space occurs within the context
of all Buddhist ceremonies, where women are located nearer to the back of the temple
hall while men are seated closer to the Buddha image and altar.65

Men and women who choose to sleep at the temple (usually those who are 50
years or older, the choice being up to the individual) take on eight precepts instead of the
usual five observed by laymen. All Buddhists are supposed to observe the five precepts:
abstain from taking life, abstain from taking what is not given, abstain from sexual
misconduct, abstain from telling lies, and abstain from intoxicants that cloud the mind.
Temple sleepers take on additional precepts: abstain from eating at the wrong time (after
noon); abstain from dancing, music, and shows, and from wearing garlands, perfumes.

64. 108 beads strung into a loop are used by Dara’ang men and women as an aid for meditation. There are
many ways of saying beads, but the most common include saying annica (impermanence) three times
around, then dukkha (suffering) five times around, then annatta (no-self or soul) seven times around.
65. Writing of the connection between space and status among the De’ang (Palaung) of China, Huang
writes that the explanation for this spatial arrangement is that “women are dirtier [than men] because they
give birth to children” (quoted in Du 2007: 137).
and bodily adornments; and refrain from sleeping on a high and big bed. While this is sometimes described as taking on three more precepts, the temple sleepers in fact take on somewhat different precepts from the five observed during laity, as sexual misconduct is transformed into complete abstinence in the later eight, while the five do not prohibit sexual relations between a wife and husband. Men who sleep in the temple dress in all white, a sign of high religious status, and women wear plain tops and little jewellery. Some women and men also demonstrate their ascetic status by shaving their heads for the rain retreat period and, in some cases, keeping it permanently short.

Temple sleepers perform many of the same roles that monks do for Buddhist communities and as such occupy a marginal status between the laity and the Sangha. As elders, temple sleepers are seen as embodying large stores of merit built up through previous lifetimes and thus act as fields of merit similar to the monks themselves. Their ascetic restraint, symbolized and produced through their adherence to the eight precepts, also contributes to the effectiveness of their blessings, just as the restraint of the monks contribute to their own ritual power (Tannenbaum 1995: 89-94). Temple sleepers, when performing their role as such, also occupy the same living space (the temple) as monks and novices.

This liminal state of being temple sleepers “betwixt and between” this-worldly and other-worldly status is most visible in terms of the morning offerings brought each major holy day to the temple by the laity (Turner 1967: 93). Offerings are given early in the morning, and rarely did I make it to the temple before the elders had woken up and begun their morning prayers. In the early dawn, at approximately 5:30AM, the temple sleepers rise, pay their respects to the Buddha image, and place a large tray at the foot of
their bedroll to receive their morning offerings. For the next hour or so villagers stream through the temple grounds, bringing offerings of food, sweets, candles, incense, and puffed rice to place before the elders and receive their blessing. The most common of these offerings is a sweet made from rice flour and sugar cane wrapped and steamed in banana leaves. Offerings are made both to the male elders in the temple and the female elders in the jao rop.

By 7AM the temple site is always a hive of activity, as children swarm around the temple sleepers, seeking the sweets their grandparents have been offered, but never intend to eat. A great deal of food is offered, too much for the elders themselves to consume, and as much of it is perishable the temple dogs eat well upon these days. Temple sleepers do not rely upon these offerings, as a meal is prepared upon these days for the monks and the temple sleepers. In some Dara’ang villages, such as No Lae, one household acts as a sponsor, but in Pang Daeng Nai the meal is paid for communally with temple funds.

Following the morning meal, a Buddhist ceremony is held at the temple. Four trays are set up near the front of the main hall to receive offerings brought by villagers - three small ones (representing the triple gems of Buddhism: the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha) and a larger deep tray shaped like a triangle (again representing the triple gems of Buddhism). As men and women arrive at the temple each place two candles, two banana leaf cones containing flowers, and two sticks of incense, along with some puffed rice, on each of the trays. When everyone has been seated (elderly men closest to the front, followed by younger men, and then women nearer to the back) the dajan (lay Buddhist leader) invites the monks to lead the congregation in reciting the devotion to the
triple gem and to give the five precepts to the laity. Offerings that are placed in the trays and some of the food that has been brought to the temple for the monks and elders are then placed before the monks who recite verses of Pāli over them while stirring a bowl of water which the abbott periodically blows on it in order to sacralize. A small amount of food is also offered to the Buddha image of the temple. At several points during the service when the monks are chanting verses of Pāli or reading Buddhist texts, the congregation pours water from small cups or bottles in order to share merit with the dead, spirits, and other celestial beings. Providing the dead with merit helps those trapped in unfavourable circumstances (such as being a wandering disembodied soul) achieve a better rebirth more quickly and is considered a way of making merit via the generosity of the giver.66

Most services, especially those held on major holy days (full and new moons) during the rain retreat, are accompanied by the reading of Buddhist texts by the monks. The actual texts that are read vary from occasion to occasion, and are usually chosen by the dañan in consultation with other elders, but certain core texts are always recited. The most prominent text is the Pañña Parami, a Tai Yuan account of the Buddha’s perfection of wisdom written in the Dhamma script. This text is often referred by villagers to as “the mother of all suttas” as it is recited at the commencement of every Buddhist ceremony. Other texts that are commonly recited include the Mahalokawuti, the Kitchakanto (a Tai Yuan manual on how to properly pay respects to the Buddha), and the Ya Pan Khao text

66. Keyes (1983: 281) points out that this transference of merit within a Buddhist context is a “re-working of the pre-Buddhist Indian practice of śraddha (Pāli sādhana), entailing the offering of food and other goods for use by the dead.” This practice is not unique to Dara’ang religion and can be observed in practically every Theravadin tradition (see Gomrich 1971: 227-243 and Obeyesekere 1968: 25-26 for Ceylonese; Spiro 1970 for Burmese: 124-128; and Tambiah 1970 for Isan Thai). Gombrich (1971: 226) points out one is not actually giving merit, but offering the chance to others to make merit by rejoicing at one’s own (pattānumodanā).
(a folk-tale wherein the spirit of the rice is portrayed as superior to the Buddha himself, see below). The ceremony ends with a blessing (Pali: *mangala*) given by the monk for the laity and the sprinkling of sacralized water over the congregation.67

Ceremonies such as these are performed on all holy days throughout the rain retreat and often accompany other rites and festivals. While all are instructive for the particular way in which Buddhism is practised locally, in the next section I will focus on one particular festival that takes place annually in the village in order to examine the way in which Buddhism is re-presented in a cyclical fashion. This is the festival of adolescence, an event wherein local teenagers act as “sponsors” taking on a share in the festival preparations. It marks a transition in their life course from a child to an adult community member with responsibilities for sustaining both their elders and the local temple.

**Festival of Adolescence**

Each year on the full moon of the tenth lunar month, on one of the days that bear the name *sadāng kiah*, the Dara’ang village of Pang Daeng Nai holds its annual village festival. This celebration coincides with the traditional sponsoring of that particular *Wa* holy day by the teenagers of the village. This festival is proceeded the following holy day by what might be called the “children's festival” the following new moon, where small children (who cannot possibly do the work required of them) act as the symbolic sponsors.

Temple festivals such as this are important in terms of the social network they

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67. Tannenbaum (1995: 114-116, 1996) has written in detail how, for the Shan people, the blessing constitutes the most important part of the service itself.
establish and maintain between other Buddhist communities, both Dara’ang and Tai. In 2007, the village of Pang Daeng Nai held their annual festival on September 25-26, though preparations for the festival began long before the actual date. Several weeks before the festival the village committee met to discuss who would be invited. It was decided that this year the festival would be kept small, so only two villages would be invited, Hoi Mak Leam, a large Dara’ang village in Fang District, and the newly emerging community of Dara’ang who were working at Pang Chang, Mae Sa, an elephant camp run for foreign tourists where several families from Pang Daeng Nai were employed. Invitations were printed up and sent out to the two communities. It is expected that whether or not a recipient is attending they will send back the envelope with a cash donation to defray the cost of the festival and to contribute to the temple fund, and that when those communities hold their own festival that the community of Pang Daeng Nai will be invited.

Villages that attend a festival such as this do so as a group and bring with them a “money tree” (Pali: ton reun), a small bush made from paper, wooden sticks, and other materials to which banknotes of various denominations are attached as leaves. This act is a “gift” in the Maussian sense that it brings with it the expectation that it will return in a different form whenever the giving village hosts its own festival (Mauss 1990). These bonds are not permanent and, once repaid, a particular village is under no obligation to maintain the relationship. Nevertheless, relationships between temples are often maintained over a long period of time and may include both Dara’ang and Tai villages in the network of exchanges.

Like all celebrations held during the period of Wa, the festival itself commences
on the day prior to the evening of the full moon (September 25th in 2007). In the morning, the elders of the village blessed those who came to *gandaoh* at their homes and then, after eating their mid-day meal, headed up to the temple where they would spend the night. At the temple, the *dajan* invited the numerous celestial beings to watch over the event and come share in the merit. This rite was performed in the same manner as that described for the *song krau* ceremony (Ch. 3), but was conducted at a permanent wooden altar located at the edge of the temple grounds.

The festive activities opened with a large procession through the village. Several older men and women had spent the morning constructing a large money tree at the home of the family who ran the village’s main shop. People began gathering outside the shop just after noon, where they drank lao khao (strong rice liquor) and tuned their instruments. Because the teenagers were the sponsors of this festival, many of the people who gathered were young. The teenagers were the ones who carried the money tree, while adults beat the long drums (*Pai*; *krung*) and gongs. “The drums must also be fed,” explained A-Tui, a 42-year-old man renowned for his musical ability, as he poured a shot of *lao khao* into the body of the drum, and packed on a layer of sticky rice upon the drum head.

The procession wove its way through the streets of the village up to the temple grounds where it circled the main hall clockwise three times before halting. The act of circling the temple is symbolic of the triple gems of Buddhism and is done at every festival, large or small, that the village holds. While the money tree is carried around the temple, other men carried trays upon which people placed cash donations, as well as offerings of candles, incense, flowers, and puffed rice. Another man carried a tray which
held the Buddhist texts that would be read during the festival’s sermons; the high status of the texts symbolized by the fact that a gilded parasol, a symbol of royalty, was held over top of them as they made their way around the temple grounds.

The first village to arrive at the festival was the party from Hoi Mak Leam. They came bearing a money tree, which would be transported up to the temple in a procession similar to the one previously described. As their truck arrived, men and women from Pang Daeng Nai greeted them carrying a tray of bananas, flowers, incense, puffed rice, two candles, and a cone of dried tea leaves. In addition to this traditional greeting tray, the party was met by two costumed figures known as tā phi lāk. These “spirits” (as the Tai word phi indicates) were two men dressed in old dirty clothes, one as a man and one as a woman. The faces of both were smeared with charcoal creating a dark mask that hid most of their features. The male spirit brandished a crossbow while the “woman” carried a basket on her back containing dried garlic and corn. The greeting of the tā phi lāk was a comic affair - the two stumbled around and could never quite get the crossbow to work, making adults laugh and children cry. Unfortunately, no one in Pang Daeng Nai knew any stories associated with the tā phi lāk, but A-Pong explained that they frighten away bre, beings which are similar to Azande witches described by Evans-Pritchards (1937: 42) insofar as they harbour malevolent powers within which are due to some internal being or substance.

There are no bre here [in Pang Daeng Nai], but there are in other villages. I have never seen a bre myself, but they exist. There are many in Burma, not so many in Thailand. I don’t know why. Some say they have red hair and green eyes, others

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68. Izikowitz notes a similar practice amongst the Lamet of Laos. “When a stranger comes to the village – a European or a Thai – he is honoured with the burning of candles which are presented together with flowers and eggs. This is a kind of greeting of welcome which they learn from the Thai people” (Izikowitz 2002: 205).
say they look just like you or me. And people often don’t know they are *bre*. But they are. If you eat with them, you can also become a *bre*. So we make sure they don’t come to festivals, when we are all eating together (A-Pong, on the practice of *ta phi lak*).

In addition to the regular religious ceremonies that take place at the temple, festivals are times of celebration and conviviality. For this particular festival, a bamboo stage was constructed on the grounds of the temple where songs were sung in Dara’ang and Tai languages, both contemporary and traditional. Elderly men demonstrated their dancing skills on stage, or within impromptu circles which formed around the temple grounds, a performance based on a form of martial arts. Attracted by the crowds, local Tai vendors also descended upon the event, setting up booths along the road selling ice cream, food of various kinds, alcoholic drinks, household goods, clothing, and toys. The presence of dancers, singers, and vendors gave the temple grounds a real festive feel, and for one night the usually dark, quiet streets of the village hosted a boisterous party.

**Festival Symbolism**

According to local A-Tun and other temple sleepers whom I interviewed at the temple, the annual village festival is oriented towards three mythological/spiritual subjects: the white crow, the rice spirit, and the spirits of the dead. The story of the white crow (*gā peuak*) is well known in many Tai communities (Archamibault 1972: 30; Davis 1984: 221-222; Swearer 2004:197-205; Tannenbaum 2006), but differs somewhat from the version I was told in Pang Daeng Nai.

Once long ago there lived a white crow who laid five eggs. Each of these eggs contained one of the five Buddhas: Kakusandha, Konāgamana, Kassapa, Gotama, and Metteyya. She laid these eggs in a big tree overlooking a river.
One day, while the crow was away, a strong wind came and blew the eggs out of the nest. They fell into the river below and were carried away. The lost eggs were found by five different men of merit, one of whom was the King of Thailand. The mother crow was so upset over the loss of her eggs that she flew all over the world looking for them. She flew until she was so exhausted that she fell out of the sky and died. When the five brothers, the future Buddhas, grew up they returned to the tree where they had been born to pay homage to their mother by giving offerings of rice. They had not met before. They made offerings for a long time - two or three months. For their reverence, their mother made herself known to them in the form of a crow's footprint.

While they were giving offerings of rice for so long they had to toss out the old rice to make room for the new. They threw this rice into the water. One day, the youngest of the brothers (the future Buddha) tasted the water and found it sweet. He invited his other brothers to taste it. One by one they each drank the alcohol. Finally, the oldest brother tasted it and said, "no this is not good, we must not drink this. It is surā (alcohol)." Before this time there were only four precepts. The fifth, that you should not consume liquor, was added at this time (recounted by A-Tun).

This version differs somewhat from the translation of the Tamnăn Ka Phû'ak, a Tai Yuan text provided by Swearer (2004: 197-205), but maintains many of its core features. The notable difference is the addition of the origin of, and prohibition against, drinking liquor, which is not found in any of the other recorded accounts. In Pang Daeng Nai the addition of this precept is "celebrated" by younger community members by drinking sato, a rice beer that can be bought in town. This is one of the few occasions at which this drink is consumed (rice spirits and regular beer being much more common).69

The festival itself is replete with food symbolism that contrast with the ascetic dietary restraints of the temple sleepers. One of the more direct rites concerning food that takes place during the festival is the honouring the Grandfather Rice Spirit, known in

69. The story is also important for the explanation it provides for the "crow feet candles" (Pâle: ten gâ). In Thailand, small clay lamps formed in the shape of crows feet are placed in small "boats" and placed into the river during the annual Loi Khrathong festival. These clay lamps are commonly associated with the story of the White Crow. Davis notes that in Nan, the floating of lights was not traditionally performed and represents a Central Thai practice (Davis 1984: 221). Loi Khrathong is not traditionally celebrated in Dara'ang villages and even today is not observed within the village of Pang Daeng Nai (although many people attend festivities in the nearby district centre). Nevertheless, the "crow feet candles" themselves do find a place within local Dara'ang religious practice, and during the evening of the festival hundreds of small candles were lit around the temple grounds in honour of the mother crow.
Pale as Nai Pan Khao or Pu Pan Khao. According to the legend told in Pang Daeng Nai:

A long time ago the Buddha was seated at a temple when he saw Grandfather Rice Spirit walk by without paying respect to him. He did not know that this was the Spirit of Rice. “Why did this person not pay me proper respect?” he thought. So he took off after him and dragged back Grandfather Rice Spirit to the temple. But Grandfather Rice Spirit escaped. So the Buddha chased the spirit down again and brought him back under his arm. Grandfather Rice Spirit escaped again and this time the Buddha carried the Spirit to the temple slung over his back. Finally the Buddha realized that this was Grandfather Rice Spirit.

The Buddha then told those who were assembled at the temple that he and Grandfather Rice Spirit were equals, as there can be no Buddha or people without rice. So the Buddha agreed to allow rice to grow taller than him [a sign of higher status]. If you look at rice, you will see that it grows just above the head of the Buddha (recounted by A-Tun, while preparing the box of rice at the temple).

In order to pay respect to Pu Pan Khao, a small wooden box with two compartments, one for milled rice and one for un-milled rice, is set up inside the temple. Throughout the day villagers bring rice to the temple and pour it into one of the two compartments. This goes on until the compartments are overflowing. Later, the rice is offered to the temple during the Buddhist sermon, at which time one of the monks will also read the accompanying text (Pu Pan Khao) that recounts the story of the Buddha's struggle with Grandfather Rice Spirit. The rite is considered important in terms of ensuring the productivity of the rice fields. The Pu Pan Khao text may also be read at other times throughout the year, but this is the only occasion where the box is used to receive offerings of rice at the temple.

70 Some households hold small ceremonies at the temple to thank the Rice Spirit for providing them with a good harvest. In Burma, Dara'ang households at Loi Lai also kept small statues of Grandfather Rice Spirit on their household altars which would be propitiated alongside the Buddha image and ancestor spirits. However, these images contained valuable metals and were all sold during the flight to Thailand in order to buy food along the way and I have not been able to find anyone who is still in possession of such a statue.

Du reports a De'ang story wherein the God of the Sky gives the original grains of rice to the Buddha in a wooden box to deliver to human beings. The largest kernel of grain (the Mother of Grain) pushes open the box and escapes, so the Buddha gives the box with the regular grain to the De'ang and instructs them to
The story and rituals devoted to Grandfather Rice Spirit likewise presents a set of oppositions relating to Buddhist asceticism and the productive power of spirits. Du (2007) believes that the Rice Spirit of the De’ang (Palaung) in Yunnan to be a survival from pre-Buddhist times. The fertility associated with Grandfather Rice Spirit (or Grandmother in the case of many De’ang and Dai contexts, see Du 2007: 144-145) is considered vital for the community’s survival, and the spirit himself is therefore elevated to a status equal to that of the Buddha, or, read another way, is represented as having an even a higher status as the rice is permitted to grow “above” the head of the Buddha (“above” being associated with higher status).\(^7\) The fertility of the rice, expressed through the production of food, is opposed to the asceticism of the Buddha and his restraint regarding the intake of food. That this rite should take place within the confines of the temple during lent, where temple sleepers have taken on ascetic dietary restrictions, suggests a relationship between restraint and productivity. Tannenbaum (1995: 89-94) notes that in the case of the Shan restraint is connected with power and protection. In the case of this rite, however, the Buddha himself is framed as unable to provide sustenance in the form of food for his followers. Asceticism and withdrawal is connected with power (marked by the ability of elders to bless and the protection it affords against spirits and misfortune), but the productive power of spirits is also recognized as being vital for the survival of individuals and the community for their this-worldly needs.

\(^{71}\) In China, Tai peoples of Yunnan are known as Dai.
Gender Roles and Festival Rituals

While most of the villagers enjoy the sights and sounds of the temple grounds, the “sponsors” of the festival, adolescent boys and girls were busy preparing food at a nearby home. The scene itself was quite boisterous, and some of the teenagers had snuck beer from their parents. Amongst a cacophony of singing, laughing, and teasing, several young girls sat preparing 1,000 small banana leaf packets containing a sticky, sweet mix of rice flour and sugar palm juice known as bom dang hraeng (“thousand great rice balls”). In Pang Daeng Nai, these sweets are only prepared for this particular festival, but in other Dara’ang villages, such as No Lae, these sweets are made each night of 14 kham during Wa. Later, when I travelled to No Lae to observe this practice, I found that adolescent girls in the village spend the entire night preparing these sweets at the home of the sponsor. “It is a time for flirting,” explained my host in No Lae, “festivals have always been the time when young men and women get to know each other.” In Pang Daeng Nai, on the nights of 14 kham when there is no major festival, the cooking of sweets is more dispersed throughout the village, with individual households preparing their own sweets to take to the temple in the morning to give to the temple sleepers.

While the girls prepare the bom dang hraeng, young boys took turns beating drums and gongs along the edge of the room, practiced traditional Dara’ang dances, and drank beer (a practice which is not usually condoned amongst adolescents). In certain ways, the scene reflects observable Dara’ang gender roles and serves as a model for the gender differentiation that is occurring at this particular life-stage: women sitting quietly in centre (representing the domestic sphere) engaged in the act of preparing food, and

men situated along the edge of the room (external sphere) engaged in drumming and
dance displays that mimic martial arts (sword, pole, and hand-to-hand fighting). Within
the temple this centre-periphery relationship is reversed, with men seated close to the
Buddha image deep inside the hall, while women are situated at the back and periphery,
in which case, being closer to the centre (Buddha) represents a disengagement from the
world (Buddhism as a world-denying religion), while distance from the altar represents a
distance from this dis-engagement, and subsequently an engagement with this-worldly
activity.

In addition to the *bom dang hraeng*, women were also responsible for making 50
rice balls (rice mixed with honey or sugar palm juice) known as *hom do gluan* (lit. “rice
and banana”) to be brought to the temple in the early morning (see Plate 3). Each rice
ball is about the size of a small orange and is topped with a slice of banana. In Pang
Daeng Nai these balls were made by On, a 32 year old woman whose family is well
known for their knowledge of traditional customs, but they were prepared at the same
household compound that was being used by the adolescent sponsors. “The balls must be
cooked three times,” On explained, “few people know how to do this anymore, or are
willing to do this, because it takes all night.” As in No Lae, preparing these offerings was
an all night task.

At approximately 4 AM, when the temple sleepers were just beginning to rise,
some of the men who had stayed up through the night began beating drums and gongs.
Slowly, about a dozen or so men and women rose to join the procession. Only a couple of
the adolescents made it through the night – most were asleep on resting platforms that
line the streets of the village. Accompanied by drums and gongs, the procession carried
the 50 bom do gluan and 1,000 bom dang hraeng through the village streets and up to the
temple, where they were carried around the main hall (yong) 49 times before being
brought in and offered to the Buddha image. The participants then placed the bom dang
hraeng sweets on a tray at the foot of the temple sleeper's bedroll. These were then taken
by the temple sleepers to the ho ta, a small spirit house located just outside the doors of
the main hall, where the spirit guardian of the temple. In order to offer the bom dang
hraeng to the spirit guardian, the temple sleepers (both men and women) placed the bom
dang hraeng on a tray, lifted them up to their forehead, and dedicated them to the spirit,
slowly turning to face each of the four cardinal directions. Two candles were then lit near
or on the ho ta and the bom dang hraeng packets were placed inside the house. After the
offerings were given to the guardian spirit, the dajan dedicated the bom do gluan balls to
the Buddha, and brought one outside for the spirits at the bandang tong (spirit altar). The
balls will later be discarded and eaten by temple dogs.

In Pang Daeng Nai, the symbolism behind the 49 bom do gluan rice balls and the
1,000 bom dang hraeng was not known, but the previously mentioned Tammān Kā Pā'ak
(Chronicle of the White Crow), as reported by Swearer (2004), provides a clue to the
origins of this practice.

Once upon a time before the Fully Enlightened One, the Lord Buddha, had
attained his nibbāna he was staying beneath a mango tree. At the time two
merchant brothers . . . took 500 carts [loaded with rice] to sell in Suvānabhūmi.
As they proceeded along the way, they came to the [mango grove] where the
Buddha was practising austerities. A group of divine beings (devatā) [who had
been watching over the Buddha] spoke to the merchants, “The Lord Buddha has
been fasting for forty-nine days. Please prepare food and drink and present it to
him as dāna.” The two merchants were delighted and prepared a thousand balls
of rice mixed with honey and palm sugar (madhupāyāsa) (Swearer 2004: 196).

In most stories concerning the Buddha the two merchants (Taphussa and Bhallika)
present the Buddha with this fast breaking meal after he has achieved enlightenment; the person responsible for presenting him with his life-sustaining meal that allows him to achieve enlightenment is a young woman named Sujātā (Malasekera 2003: 1186). While she does not appear in the above story, it is interesting to note that in the version of the Sujātā story recorded in Sri Lanka by Gombrich (1971), the Buddha divides the milk-rice, or Madhupāyāsa, he receives from Sujātā “into forty-nine parts, and having eaten it all he launched the bowl in the water, wishing that if he was that night to attain Buddhahood the bowl should be carried against the current. It swam upstream” (p. 88).

The two merchants are typically depicted as providing the Buddha’s first meal (also of rice-cakes and honey) after he has achieved enlightenment, at which time they became the first disciples of the Buddha. They are famous in Burma as they are said to have received hair relics from the Buddha that were to be enshrined on top of Mount Singkuttara, today associated with Shwe Dagon Pagoda in Yangon. The emphasis here is on the food the Buddha received after fasting, and it is possible that the practices in Pang Daeng Nai draw upon some version of this story.

Reincorporation

The exiting of the temple sleepers from the temple marks the end of the festival. On the day following the full moon (September 27th), villagers gathered at the temple for a Buddhist service in the early evening, but unlike many other services held throughout Wa, people brought donations that were offered to the temple. These included musical instruments, robes for the monks, and buckets containing soap, medicine, and other daily necessities. Cash donations were also provided, and the donations given by external
sources (sponsors such as Khruba Jao Theuang and village money trees) were also counted at this time. Expenses for the temple festival were subtracted from this amount, with the remainder going to the temple fund.

Following the ceremony, everyone was asked to leave the hall except for the temple sleepers. These elders were then given the eight precepts one final time before receiving permission from the abbot to return home. No one did, however, as a meal prepared by the adolescent sponsors was brought in for the elders. Temple sleepers eat this meal apart from the rest of the villagers, marking their heightened religious status, but simultaneously signifying their re-incorporation into the village, as unlike monks they now consume food after noon.73

After the meal was consumed, the temple sleepers prepared a tray for the adolescent sponsors containing three large banana leaf cones and an envelope containing a cash donation (3,580 baht in 2007) consisting of donations that have been made during the festival. The adolescent representatives approached A-Tun, who was in charge of the tray, and knelt with hands pressed together. He explained the importance of this festival and the value of upholding the traditions of the village, and then touched the tray and gave it to the young sponsors along with a blessing. This money was not actually kept by the adolescents; rather, it was donated back to the temple to be used to sponsor the children's festival held the following new moon. This festival is similar in structure to the adolescents’ festival, although it is less elaborate in terms of the festivities. Instead of adolescent villagers, it is children who act as the sponsors. Naturally, they are less able to do the required work of preparing meals and helping out than the adolescents, but

nevertheless play the symbolic role of sponsor in all the activities described above.

**Buddha’s Debt**

The closing of the rain retreat (*Awk Wa*, literally “leaving the rain retreat”) is marked by village celebrations similar to those held on other holy days during the period with people going to the homes of elders to pay their respects, elders taking up temporary residence within the temple grounds, and numerous ceremonies and rituals being conducted within the temple grounds. Yet while the rain retreat officially closes with *Awk Wa*, the end of this sacred time is marked within Dara’ang villages the following *uposatha* day by the presentation of *kong fen* to the village temple. This ritual, which I have not seen recorded anywhere before, deserves mention as an example of the Dara’angization of Buddhism which reflects local reconfiguration of Buddhist stories to reflect the local circumstances of relative poverty *vis-à-vis* the more wealthy lowland towns where many Dara’ang men are ordained.

*A kong fen* is constructed from three cylindrical baskets, each approximately 15 cm x 5 cm, tied together at the top to make a tripod (see Plate 4). One basket contains unmilled rice, another milled rice, and the other salt, each of which are wrapped in banana leaves. On the top of the *kong fen* is tied flowers, incense sticks, candles, and flowers wrapped in banana leaves. In the middle of the three baskets is placed a piece of ginger, with the stalk and leaves still attached. Around the outside is tied a piece of a monk’s robe, and around this a thin strip of monk’s robe cloth representing a monk’s belt. Into this belt is sewn a one baht coin. Every household that makes a *kong fen* brings it to the temple where it is tied together with other *kong fen* to make three large bundles, which
are then offered to the Buddha image by the *dajān*.

The reason for this act is provided in a myth that portrays the Buddha as a poor man in need of financial assistance:

The Buddha was a poor man, not rich man. He was very poor. Once, when he wanted to become the Buddha, he had to pay off his debt to a *phu sithi* [person of privilege, *sēṭṭhi* meaning “treasurer or a wealthy person” in Pāli] before he could become a monk. The man who he was indebted to would not let him go. So, the people of the world said, “We will pay it for him.” So each year we give 1 baht each to pay the Buddha’s debt. It used to be 25 *satang*, but now it is 1 baht (recounted by A-Tun at the *kong fen* ceremony).

The story itself is interesting as the Buddha is portrayed in the Pāli canon as a “prince” who renounces his kingdom in order to pursue the ascetic path to enlightenment. While this is likewise the popular representation of the Buddha’s life within Thailand and Burma, historians have questioned the portrayal of Siddhattha as a prince living a luxurious life, as the Shakya clan to whom he belonged was ruled by a federation of elected chiefs rather than a hereditary monarch (Keay 2001: 64). The emergence of “prince” Siddhattha, a figure of royalty and wealth, likely reflects a similar process of appropriation whereby the biography of the Buddha came to reflect the conditions of Buddhist rulers who adopted and supported Buddhism.

Dara’ang people in Pang Daeng Nai are quite aware of the Buddhist stories that paint Siddhattha as a wealth prince. Besides the literary references and temple murals, Siddhattha as prince is represented in Dara’ang/Shan ordination rituals in which young boys are dressed as princes and paraded around on horseback (or a person’s shoulders as a substitute) before changing into their monastic robes (see Eberhardt 2006: 128-29 on Shan ordinations; Milne 1924: 324 on Palaung in Burma). Nevertheless, Dara’ang men and women tell this story as an accompaniment to the *kong fen* rite and the idea that the
Buddha was a poor man is well known within the Dara’ang community. In order to understand the significance behind this rite, it is important to realize one of the meanings sponsoring an ordination ceremony has amongst Dara’ang and other Theravādin groups of Southeast Asia. An ordination ceremony can be quite expensive, and a sponsor receives a great deal of merit for their contribution (Eberhardt 2006: 125). In the Dara’ang context, it is common for the cost to be shared by the town or village, and thus the merit is shared collectively, although one person or household often acts as the principle sponsor.74 The “giving” of a son to the temple also serves as the means by which women obtain large amounts of merit, and many people consider it the duty of sons to ordain temporarily in order that their mothers should receive this merit, as women are not permitted to ordain as nuns within Theravāda Buddhism (Pāli: bhikkuni) (Keyes 1984; Kirsch 1985; Eberhardt 2006: 135-143). The assistance paid to the Buddha himself can thus also be read as a chance to acquire merit collectively by helping to facilitate the ordination of the greatest monk of all. The importance of being free from debt is a canonical requirement for ordination that must be stated during the ordination ritual, where those seeking to enter the Sangha are asked if they are free from debt (Pāli: anāno). This was one of the preconditions the Buddha placed on those who wished to join the order, likely as a way to prevent conflict between the organization and the laity over the matter of indebted or bonded men seeking refuge within the order. This retelling of the Buddha's life story thus reflects the social conditions of many Dara’ang people in Thailand and Burma, as poverty and debt may well prevent some people from entering the Sangha.

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74. Ordination in Thailand has taken on new meanings as the state strictly controls the process. See chapter 5.
Various groups throughout time and space have retold the story of the Buddha in such a way as to reflect their own traditions and connect his life with their own group and geographical location (Strong 1995: 3). It is quite possible that the kong fen represents a Dara’ang innovation, or perhaps it has been adopted from the Tai as well. It is also possible that in other Dara’ang communities the story is attributed to another past Buddha, although in the context of Pang Daeng Nai it is the Buddha of our age that this ritual is directed towards. Whatever its origins and development, the ritual act and the story itself represent an important aspect of a Dara’ang Buddhist practice, one which reflects local concerns with the relationship between the relative poverty of the group and the institutions of Buddhism.

Buddhist Identity

The rain retreat represents a withdrawal from worldly activities towards the temple grounds, both for monks and the lay population as a whole. Traditionally, this time was accompanied by temporary ordinations, when young boys would enter the Sangha as novices, and thus marked an important rite of passage for young boys as it was considered proper that every man should spend some time as a novice or monk prior to marrying. This contemporary practice has many parallels within the original impetus for this period; during the life of the Buddha, the rain retreat was a time when monks would cease their wandering and their engagement with the world and retire to the monasteries until the monsoon rains ceased. It thus marked a separation of monks from the laity whereby the monastic community could regenerate itself through group communion.

Today, the rain retreat likewise signals a time of turning inwards for the laity. For
many, it is a period of increased asceticism, signified by the taking on of additional precepts by elders and the recitation of the five precepts by younger members of the community. Food, which is usually given to novices and monks outside of houses, is presented at the temple instead, and communal ceremonies take place primarily within the main temple hall. In contrast to this increased asceticism and inward orientation, marriages (events marked by the symbolic incorporation of new members into the village) are prohibited, and the gates to the tsao meung, a spirit which demands offerings of liquor in opposition to the prohibition on intoxicants observed by monks, are closed.

Systems of classification such as those which separate inside from outside, Buddhism from spirits, asceticism from restraint, and so on, organize perception and structure practice according to processes of inculcation which are particular to the group. Individuals incorporate these generative schemes (generative because they become the basis for generating an infinite variety of practice) in part through their participation in ritual performances that present the structure of the world in a crystallized manner and call upon participants to take an active role in continuously re-materializing these structures throughout time. The reproduction that such inculcation calls forth does not occur mechanically. Rather, ritual practice is guided by a fuzzy logic that often relies upon a principle of contrarieties (up/down, male/female, inside/outside, Buddhist/spirits, spirits of village/spirits of forest, etc...). It is by this “practical sense” that social actors know which ritual implements to place high and which low, which are to be performed within the house and which outside, and what symbols are stronger and weaker (Bourdieu 1977: 112).

This fluid logic allows for the same symbols to be brought together in different
relations, as can be seen in the construction of nested hierarchies of inner and outer created out of distinctions made between Buddhism and spirit practices. This allows for substitutions and exclusions to be made based upon the practical sense of social actors, such as in the question of whether or not to use Buddhism within the village *song krau* ceremony described in chapter 3 (present in the case of the Dara’ang, absent in the case of the Tai Yuan village described by Davis 1984: 101-118). A similar deployment of inside and outside, or entering and leaving, can be seen in the context of the rain retreat. The entire period, marked by *Khao Wa* ("entering the rain retreat") and the closing of the gate of the *tsao meung* shrine, is a time of turning inward for the village, which signals the move from Buddhist ceremonies held within the home to the temple, the feeding of monks at the temple rather than on morning alms gathering rounds, and a prohibition on marriages which effectively prevents outsiders from being incorporated into the community. A homologous turning inwards is performed by individuals themselves, foremost being the monks who confine their movements to one temple for this period, as well as the temple sleepers who adopt the role of introverted ascetic, retiring periodically to the interior realm of the temple to meditate and reflect upon Buddhist texts.

The classificatory schemes of rituals both divide and unify, drawing the group together as one while simultaneously delineating social categories, often in a hierarchical fashion. Gender differentiation and stratification is perhaps the most visible distinction created within the context of Theravāda Buddhism, where women are excluded from full participation within the Sangha, as the order of nuns (Pali: *bhikkhuni*) is no longer in existence (Falk 2008: 97). The distinction between the sexes is drawn according to a similar analogical logic that structures other Dara’ang ritual activity. Within Buddhist
ceremonies, women sit near the back of the temple, away from the Buddha image and the monks, while men occupy the space nearest to the source of merit (the monks themselves). Sexual segregation during the time temple sleepers reside at the temple likewise connotes a subordinate position of women who occupy the jao rop while the men occupy the hall where the main Buddha image is housed. The ritual impurity of women can likewise be seen in non-Buddhist rites expressed in a similar ritual language of oppositions. Women are not permitted to climb upon the platform of the village post (Pale: ho teu), as the presence of their genitalia above the post would be disruptive to the spiritual power of the place. Within the various ritual contexts, women occupy a space that is below, behind, or outside that of men.

The position of women with regards to the temple is that of sustainers, reflecting the ideal social division of labour whereby women provide sustenance for the family through cooking, breast feeding, and their work within the house (see Keyes 1984: 230, Lefferts 2000: 66-69 on Thai Buddhist gender roles). Women of the family are the ones most likely to provide monks and novices with their daily meal, and are typically the ones responsible for the household cooking. Within the context of the rain retreat, young adolescent women are responsible for making the sweets and meals that are given to temple sleepers, particularly during the adolescent festival itself, but also upon other holy days within larger Dara’ang villages such as No Lae. Within this particular setting, women embody the mythico-historical role of Sujātā who provides the Buddha with a meal of milk-rice. Their role is one of reciprocity, providing the Sangha with its needs (including the bodies of their sons as novices), and receiving merit in return. While this role is important, it nevertheless connotes a ritually inferior position for women which,
given the ideological functions of Buddhism, helps legitimate the exclusion of women from other roles, such as the position of household head, participation in village meetings, and acquiring a secondary education, a field which was until recently connected with the role of novice.

Less obvious than the legitimation of gender hierarchies within Theravāda Buddhism is the division of society into age sets. Mythico-ritual categories cut up the continuous biological progression of an aging organism into discrete categories of social significance, from youth through householder to elder. The entire period of Wa in Dara’ang villages can be read as a series of graded steps (performed in reverse) marking off the life stages of individuals in the community, from child sponsor to adolescent sponsor, and household sponsor to temple sleeper, temple sleeper to monk (representing detachment from this world altogether). For young boys, becoming a novice was once considered a right of passage, and the significance of this role within contemporary Thailand will be discussed in chapter 5.

The role of elder (Pāla: ᵙᵃᵈᵃ ʸᵃ) is particularly significant in terms of age related classificatory schemes. In many respects, the act of becoming a temple sleeper represents for elders a rite of passage from householder status to that of elder, investing the individual with new responsibilities and restrictions, as well as new ritual potency. Elders perform ritual blessings, such as during the gandoah rites, and while they generally withdraw from public life, maintain a strong voice in regards to collective decision making.

Eberhardt (2006: 156) notes that for the Shan, taking on the role of temple sleeper is a period of re-socialization. Becoming an elder requires crossing a threshold, and the
transition is marked by a series of rites that are re-enacted again and again. Van Gennep’s (1960: 10-11) well-known division of rites of passage into three categories (rites of separation/pre-liminal phase, rites of transition/liminal phase, and rites of incorporation/post-liminal phase) is useful here for understanding this process. The first of these stages for the temple sleeper is marked by his or her leaving home and taking on the additional precepts at the temple. During their time in the temple the elders occupy a liminal category, not-laypeople but not-monks. This marginal status is also marked by the fact that they do not eat after noon and abstain from sex, as do the monks and novices, but they do not sleep within the monastic residences and wear white clothing instead of the yellow monastic robes. In this regard, Turner (1969: 125) noted in his development of von Gennep’s model that monasteries represent liminal places. While temple sleepers reside at the temple, their liminal status provides them with the ability to perform many ritual functions associated with monks – accepting donations of food within the temple and giving blessings to villagers. Upon leaving the temple, the elders are released by a monk, who once again gives them the precepts, and they consume a ritual meal in the afternoon, marking them as no longer bound by the constraints of the temple. Elders maintain their ritual effectiveness upon re-incorporation back into the community vis-à-vis their status as elders, accepting donations within their home and blessing younger members of the community.

Rituals produce transformations, but do so within prescribed patterns passed on from generation to generation. The transformations that individuals undergo throughout their life-course, from child to adolescent, adolescent to householder, and householder to elder, are marked and recognized in a common way for all members of a group. When
individuals perform rites they embody the history of the group, experiencing by enacting delineations of age and gender shared by all members of the collective. While people sense ethnic affinity based on the inculcation of similar habits, this sameness or difference does not require consciousness of the objective basis (Bentley 1987: 33). Commonality of experience is embodied, producing “proper” responses from those who have been similarly inculcated, and producing a sense of being familiar to each other based upon a shared sense of appropriate bodily practice. Religious rites, with their prescribed postures and roles backed up by a sacred authority, are particularly well suited for maintaining group identity through the habits that they inculcate. How one sits and where, when one sleeps and where, who cooks and who eats, who provides blessings and who receives them, all these roles are prescribed within the context of religious ceremonies and festivals according to the life stages of individuals.

In this chapter I have been primarily concerned with the reproduction of group identity through the capacity of religious rituals to construct a link between the past and present. This link is maintained through the bodily act of reproducing the past in the present. Members of the groups share an embodied identification with the group through their shared experience of participating in ceremonies, festivals, and rites of passage that are particular or presented as important to the group as a distinct group. Yet this form of identity, a sense of commonality, differs from a discursive or reflexive identification, whereby an individual is consciously called upon to articulate their identification with a group, or think through the identity of the group as a group. In the absence of situations that call forth a conscious reflection upon one’s identity (such as a crisis that dislocates an individual from the group), people typically act out of habit, doing what is done
because that is what one does. This distinction is particularly important in the case of cultural contact, when the naturalness of a group’s worldview may be called into question as it is confronted by an alternative conception of reality present within the beliefs and practices of another group (Bourdieu 1977: 168; Berger 1967: 45-46). As we shall see, while crisis, such as the conflict between Dara’ang people and the Thai state, call forth critical reflection upon matters of identity (see chapter 7), cultural contact itself can also be inculcated within the habitual behaviour of the group. We now turn to the particular dynamics of cultural contact in the religious field and what it means for Dara’ang identity.
Chapter 5
The Monastic Field

The Buddhist temple complex is a central feature of Dara’ang village life. Community wide gatherings, both religious and secular, are typically held within the large image hall of the temple. The Pale term for temple is *yong* - a word that refers specifically to the public building which houses a larger Buddha image, although it is also commonly used to refer the entire temple grounds. The *yong* proper is not the only building which occupies a temple complex, but it is usually the first to be built and villages lacking all other structures typically maintain a large hall for their Buddha image. Other temple structures include a monastic residence (known as a *kuti*) and a secondary hall known as a *ja rop* which serves as a storage space for the temple and doubles as a place for female temple sleepers to rest during the rain retreat season (see Ch. 4). A small spirit house known as a *ho ta*, which houses the guardian spirit of the temple grounds is typically located just outside the *yong*. Many Palaung temple complexes also contain a *stupa* (Buddhist reliquary, known as *gong mu* in Pale), but few Dara’ang villages in Thailand have constructed one, which the exception of No Lae. A fully functioning temple complex would also contain an ordination hall, known as a *sim* in Pale, but no Dara’ang villages in Thailand as of yet have constructed such a structure.

In Pang Daeng Nai, the temple site is located at the northern edge of the village, nestled into the growth of teak trees that were planted by the Royal Forestry Department after the mass arrests of 1989 (see Ch. 2). The site is a mix of structures, some which have replaced the function of older buildings, reflecting the piecemeal nature of its
construction over several years. The oldest structure is an old cinder block building which
once served as the main hall (yong), but is now used by the resident monks and novices
as a monastic residence (kuti) after a newer yong was erected in the late 1990s. In 2008, the
village was again constructing a new yong, a multi-tiered structure in the style of
Palaung temples in Burma, which is similar to the Shan architectural style. The site also
contains a ja rop, but lacks both a stūpa and ordination hall (see Plate 5).

The Chair of the Temple Committee (known by the Thai term, prathan kamkan
wat) and the Deputy Chair of the Temple Committee (rong prathan kamkan wat) manage
the affairs of the temple. They are responsible for overseeing and organizing maintenance
work and renovations on the temple grounds, as well as making sure that the needs of the
resident monks are being met. In Pang Daeng Nai, the Chair of the Temple Committee is
A-Yot, the 42 year old man who first moved to Mae Chon as a novice before Pang Daeng
Nai was founded. In addition to the lay caretakers, the temple also has an abbot who
resides at the temple. The abbot of Pang Daeng Nai temple is a 52 year old Dara’ang
monk who holds the status of Ma Taen. Like many Dara’ang temple heads in Thailand,
the current abbot of Pang Daeng Nai was ordained in Burma at the age of 20, having
spent 6 years as a novice prior to taking his full ordination. Originally he had settled in
the Dara’ang village of Huai Mak Liam in Fang District of Chiang Mai province, but
relocated to Pang Daeng Nai after being invited in 2003 to take up a position there as
temple head as the village lacked a permanent resident monk.

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75. The ranking for Dara’ang monks differs from the official ranking of the Thai Sangha. Monks and elder
men in Pang Daeng Nai provide the following ranking for levels of ordination, though the lack of monks
past the level of Ma Sang in Thailand caused interviewees to be unsure regarding the higher levels of
ordination:

1. Gabi (temple boy) 5. Ma Sang
2. Ja Rao (novice) 6. Yao Khu
3. Ganän (monk) 7. Sami
4. Ma Taen

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In addition to the abbot, novices and monks from other villages periodically reside at the village temple. In 2007 there were two novices living at Pang Daeng Nai temple, a 16 year old and a 14 year old, both originally from the Dara’ang village of Huai Mak Liam. While the novices primarily resided in Pang Daeng Nai during 2007-2008 their location is relatively fluid and they tend to travel back and forth between various temples. This process is facilitated by the fact that both boys have relatives located in most Dara’ang villages within the province. Boys from Pang Daeng Nai do not take up residence in the local temple because, as we shall see, they tend to favour teaching monasteries where they can obtain a secondary education.

The monastic village life is not arduous and many days there are few required activities monks and novices must perform. The day begins just before sunrise, at about 5:30 AM, with morning chanting. Around 7:30AM, when households are preparing their breakfast, novices head out on their morning alms gathering rounds (Pâlī: pindapâta). In Pang Daeng Nai there were only two novices at the time of my research, and one boy would carry a alms bowl (Pâlī: seu bit) to collect rice while the other would carry a multi-tiered food container used to keep curries and other hot dishes separate. The novices would travel from house to house, varying their route slightly each day, stopping outside of each home to silently await offerings. If the family had food to spare one of the household members would donate some to the novices; otherwise, they would pass on to the next house until enough food for the day was collected. Monks and novices in general are only permitted eat twice a day, once in the morning and once just before noon, but novices in Pang Daeng Nai would sometimes sneak food, especially when they visit the homes of relatives. In the evening, both monks and novices were expected to perform
another set of chants. If there were no special ceremonies or requests from villagers (such as a house warming ceremony), these activities would constitute their only daily responsibilities.

Every Dara’ang male ideally spends some time during his life as a novice or monk. As A-Yot explains, this was easier in Burma where well-established relationships existed between Dara’ang villages and Shan towns;

In Thailand ordinations require more papers. For years, we could not ordain, because we did not have the proper papers from the government saying we were allowed to stay in Thailand. Even today, older monks, such as the ma taen, cannot get officially ordained, because they don’t have the proper papers.

Although men who remain monks for many years are highly respected, monastic ordination is not considered a permanent vocation, and it is thought of as beneficial for men to spend even a short period of time in robes. In the past, ordination was considered an important rite of passage, but this has become less so in Thailand where opportunities for ordination are fewer and children are expected to complete a primary education prior to ordination.

Many young boys and older men today take part in temporary ordination programs offered by Tai Yuan temples. These programs do not require paper work, and as such are particularly popular with older Dara’ang men who did not have the opportunity to ordain when they were young. I attended one such program at Wat Pă Ngıu in Sarapi district of Chiang Mai province in December of 2007. Each year the temple hosts a mass ordination for young highland boys, mostly from Karen villages, around Chiang Mai. In 2007, the ordination was held on December 1st to celebrate the 80th year of the King’s ordination. In total, 125 young boys ordained as novices, and 25
men ordained as monks. Participants spent two weeks in robes, and the Dara’ang men felt that they benefited greatly from the instruction they received from the local abbot, Khru Bai Thanjai. A-Tun, the village head, was one of the men who ordained temporarily in 2007: “I spent many years as a novice, but always wanted to be fully ordained as a monk. Now I have a large family and many responsibilities, so this is not possible, but spending even this short time as a monk fills me with great joy.”

In order to be ordained as a full monk (Pale: ganān, Pāli: bhikkhu), a man must be at least 20 years of age.76 Prior to this time a boy may ordain as a novice (Pale: ya rao, Pāli: sāmaṇera). Only monks undergo the full ordination rites (Pāli: upasampadā); novices are usually ordained with monks, but only participate in the first half of the ceremony, which is known in Pāli as pabhajja. The difference between the two statuses is marked by the different rules the two groups must follow. Novices are required to observe 10 rules while full monks are bound by 227, as laid down in the Vinaya Pitaka. Expectations for monks and novices also reflect their different status. Novices are relatively free from censure if they break minor rules (such as eating at improper times), especially those who are quite young, while monks are viewed as more committed to the mendicant lifestyle and as such expected to obey all the monastic rules voluntarily. A-Yot explains that in Burma it was customary in the past for young Dara’ang boys to spend some time in the temple prior to being ordained as a novice, during which time they were known as gabi (equivalent to the Thai status dek wat or “temple boy”). Only after an extended period (some men reported over a year, others less) would a young boy be permitted to ordain as a novice. While the position of temple boy exists within Thailand,

76. The Pale term is derived from the Shan word for monk, khanan (Davis 2003: 189).
it is becoming increasingly rare, as primary education is now compulsory. Young boys who reside in temples today for their education typically ordain as novices, even if they are quite young.

As previously mentioned, despite the desire for many men to undergo an ordination, Dara’ang who wish to ordain in Thailand face several obstacles. In order to conduct an ordination ceremony, a temple must first construct a hall known as a sim in Pali (Pali: sima, Thai: ubosot). At present no Dara’ang villages maintain such a building. This requirement is doctrinal, but in Thailand the national Sangha and government also regulate ubosot construction. Several conditions must be met in order to transform a samnaksong, or monastic residence, into a full temple. These include the construction of an ordination hall, the permanent residence of at least five monks for a period of over five years, and permission from the Department of Religious Affairs (Hayashi 2003: 5). In Thailand, no Dara’ang village can meet these requirements set down in the Sangha Act, and even if they could they would nevertheless face problems as the temples are built within forest reserves or other protected areas claimed by the state. As a result, Dara’ang Buddhist temples in Thailand are not classified as full temples (Thai: wat thi dairaphraratchathan-wisungsima) but as monastic residences (Thai: samnaksong).

The regulation of the monasteries and the strict control over monastic ordinations, which emerged during the early 20th century in Thailand with the Sangha Administration Act of 1902, has several implications for Dara’ang temples in Thailand. The national

77. In Thailand, the term sima is typically used to describe the stone boundary markers that surround the ordination hall.
78. According to the Office of National Buddhism (2009: 6), in 2009 there were 19,805 temples where ordination rites could be performed and 15,466 temples without an ordination hall.
Sangha does not recognize Dara’ang monks who were ordained in Burma, and therefore they do not have the rights and privileges enjoyed by other monks. Some choose to re-ordain into a Thai temple, while others, particularly older monks who would lose their senior status due to the fact that they must first disrobe, continue in their role without official recognition. Some monks are also prevented from re-ordaining because they do not possess the proper identity papers necessary to register officially in Thailand. As a result the national Sangha does not officially recognize many of the abbots of Dara’ang temples in Thailand, who are generally older men from Burma ordained many years previously, and are thus recognized as having a high status within Dara’ang communities.

Despite the disruptions to everyday life faced by Dara’ang men over the past 50 years, and the difficulty of finding temples to ordain younger boys within Thailand, 45.5% of men (46 out of 101) in Pang Daeng Nai over the age of 10 have undergone ordination as a novice or monk. This percentage has been rising since the group migrated to Thailand: 60% of boys age 11 to 20 (12 out of 20) have spent some time as a novice or monk, compared with 39.4% of men age 21 to 30 (13 out of 33); 33.3% of men age 31 to 40 (4 out of 12); 30.0% of men age 41 to 50 (3 out of 10); and 45% of men over the age of 50 (9 out of 20). Many older men ordained in Burma when they were young, while most men under the age of 40 have spent most, if not all, of their life in Thailand. For many years these men did not have the opportunity to become novices or monks as

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79. As Thailand requires all children to attend primary school, young boys rarely ordain as novices, waiting instead until they have completed grade 6.
80. This differs from the situation in Tai villages where the number of men undergoing ordination has been steadily decreasing. In 2009 the Office of National Buddhism (2009: 1) reported the population of Buddhist monks at 258,163 and novices at 70,081 out of a total population of 63,396,000. The data for this survey was collected during December, when fewer men undergo a temporary ordination, but this general decline has also been noted by Terwiel (1994: 84) for boys who ordain during the rainy season; he reports that in 1970 there were 195,000 monks out of a total population of 36,100,000; for 1975, 213,00 monks out of a population of 42,000,000; and in 1986, 285,000 monks out of a population of 53,000,000.
there were not established connections with temples where they could undergo the ordination ceremony. This has changed over the past decade as government projects such as the Thammajarik program have extended into Dara’ang villages that provide boys and men the opportunity to undergo temporary and long-term ordinations. As a result, a larger percentage of boys aged 11 to 20 have been novices than those who have not.

**Sacred Scripts**

Despite their relative freedom, novices who reside in Pang Daeng Nai are expected to spend some of their time studying. In all Dara’ang temples of Thailand novices learn the Dhamma script so that they are able to read the Buddhist scriptures written in Tai Yuan and Tai Khün languages (which is quite similar to Tai Yuan), as well as the Central Thai script that constitutes the dominant form of literacy in contemporary Thailand. Many also study the modern Shan script so that they can read texts imported from Dara’ang villages in Shan State where these texts are widely used. They are also expected to memorize the Pāli chants used during village and household ceremonies. Some novices and monks will also study how to read Pale using the Dhamma script, although the lack of Pale texts in Thailand means novices are less likely to know how to read Pale then the Tai Yuan texts written in the Dhamma script.

The Dhamma script, known locally as the Tham script, derives from the old Tai Yuan kingdom of Lan Na. As previously mentioned, the Tai Yuan are the ethno-linguistic group who currently form the majority of inhabitants in northern Thailand, and are closely related to the Tai Khün people of Kengtung. Chiang Mai city, now the capital of Chiang Mai province where the majority of Dara’ang villages in Thailand are found,
formed the political centre of Lan Na, which at its height (15th century CE) influenced a large area stretching over present day northern Thailand, north-western Laos, north-eastern Burma, and parts of Yunnan in the People's Republic of China. The use of the Dhamma religious script became so identified with the kingdom of Lan Na that Penth refers to the area under the cultural influence of the kingdom as "the Culture of the Region of the Dhamma Letters" (2000: 43), a phrase which stresses the shared culture of those who made use of the script and its associated religious practice.

The origin of the Dhamma script is somewhat obscure. Up until the twentieth century two scripts were in use in the Lan Na kingdom, one for religious writing and one for secular documents. For mundane purposes such as court documents, a script known as Fak Kham (named after tamarind pods) was used. According to Veidlinger (2006: 15), this script was similar to the Sukhodaya script and probably developed out of a proto-Thai script based on the old Mon system of writing as well as the Tamil and Andra grantha scripts. The Dhamma script was initially reserved for writing Pāli texts, though it later came to be used (with some minor adjustments) for writing vernacular Tai and Palaung languages. Veidlinger says the Dhamma script likely also developed out of a proto-Thai script, but was more influenced by the Mon script in use in the city of Haripujjaya.

The inhabitants of Chiang Mai used the Dhamma script for both religious and secular documents up until the start of the twentieth century when the northern region was incorporated into the modern Thai nation-state. At this time, the northern temples were placed under the control of the Bangkok centred Siamese Sangha, which propagated its own form of religious practice, including the use of the Siamese or Central Thai script.
The introduction of secular, state run schools further undermined the authority of the Tai Yuan monasteries as they lost their traditional role as educators. Central Thai was the language of instruction in the state schools and the Central Thai script slowly came to replace the Dhamma script as the predominant medium for textual transmission. This gradual process of displacing the Dhamma script occurred in conjunction with a more active program to discourage the use of regional scripts amongst Tai speaking people within Thailand, such as the government authorized burning of palm-leaf manuscripts written in the Dhamma script in the 1940s (Swearer 1999: 203). As a result of these and other factors (such as the proliferation of newspapers and official documents which use the Central Thai script) the Dhamma script is rarely used in northern Thailand today except by some older Tai Yuan monks, scholars, and artists. Most of the published texts found in monasteries and religious bookstores employ the Central Thai script to write the Tai Yuan and Pali languages.

The historical adoption of the Dhamma script by Palaung people in general is considerably more obscure than its origin and development amongst Tai speaking groups. While it is unclear when the Dhamma script reached Namhsan, Pāli and Palaung language texts that use this script can still be found in the monasteries of the township today.81 As mentioned in chapter 2, the Palaung of Namhsan claim that Buddhism was introduced by a Burmese king, though it is possible that the transmission of a Tai style of Buddhism derived from Lan Na was also present very early on, given the close ties between the Palaung of Namhsan and the surrounding Shan principalities. The Dara’ang who migrated from Burma to Thailand came primarily from the area around the old Shan

81. Sai Kham Mong (2004: 257) mentions a manuscript entitled Wippassana Kanna collected near Namhsan that used the Dhamma script for Pāli, followed by Palaung words written in the Dhamma script.
state of Kengtung; an area that has been historically dominated by the Tai Khūn, who continue to use the old Dhamma script to this day.82

While living in Burma, many Dara’ang villages lacked large monasteries where young boys could be ordained. As a result, many boys travelled to the lowland Tai Khūn and other Tai temples to be ordained as novices. There, they learned to read and write the Dhamma script and perform rituals in the style of the Lan Na or Yuan Buddhist style.83 Upon returning to their villages this script was used not only for writing religious texts (Pāli, Pale, and Tai Yuan/Khūn manuscripts), but also for mundane documents such as village bookkeeping and letter writing. In effect the Dhamma script became an unrecognized Dara’ang script that many men, given the expectation that they be ordained at least temporarily, could at least read if not write.

The Dhamma script did not distinguish Dara’ang communities from lowland Tai prior to their move to Thailand, as both groups extensively used the script for religious

82. Egerod noted in 1959 that the Tai Khūn language and script remained “the sacred language of Buddhism in Kengtung State and thus the carrier of a strong and living religious tradition. The traditional Hinuara [Theravāda] literature is extant and promulgated in Khūn” (1959: 123). There are two versions of the old Yuan script used in Chiang Tung today, one for religious purposes and one for secular. The religious script used to write Pāli has eight vowels and thirty-three consonants, while the vernacular script has forty-one consonants (Sai Kham Mong 2004: 243). The term “Dhamma (Tham) letters” is most often associated with the script used to write Pāli, although the difference between the two are insignificant, having more to do with the shape of letters then the actual form (Dhamma letters are more rounded while Yuan and Khūn letters are more angular) (Finot 1917: 27).

83. Travelling as a novice or monk provides a means through which men can accumulate cultural and social capital in a way similar to that noted by Tsing (1993: 196-197) in the case of Meratus men in Southeast Kalimantan who translate travel and ethnic exchange into authoritative experience and local sources of power. Political efficacy in Dara’ang villages of Thailand is commonly described as possessing the ability to “speak convincingly” and being capable of mediating between the village an external powers, which commonly include Tai speaking agents. The head of Pang Daeng Nai at the time of my research, for example, spent four years as a novice at a temple in Kengtung city before moving to Loi Lae to become the head of a group of five villages there. He cites his experience dealing with non-Dara’ang people, his knowledge of the Tai Khūn (and by extension, Tai Yuan) language(s), his connections with other villages that he made during this time, and his literacy as important contributing factors in his political success. Ordination is by no means the only way through which one can gain such experience (the new assistant head of Pang Daeng Nai has largely built his own reputation through his work with NGOs), but the monasteries continue to act as spaces where men can acquire life experience outside their natal villages.
and secular purposes. However, the use of the sacred script took on new meanings within the social context of northern Thailand. Dhamma letters were now viewed as situated within a larger configuration of symbols and practices which made up the Lan Na or Yuan Buddhist tradition; a tradition that was, according to the khruba holy men of the Tai Yuan people themselves, more authentic then that being practised by the local Tai Yuan (see Ch. 7). Through their exposure to the religious revivalist movement of the khruba monks, Buddhism in the lowlands came to be seen by many Dara’ang as a diluted version of authentic religious practice. Sermons were shorter, pronunciation of Pāli words were closer to the Central Thai form of Buddhism, and the Dhamma script that had been used for centuries to record the dhamma was abandoned by the Tai Yuan.

The authenticity of religious practice was in part related to the ability to comprehend the texts written in the Dhamma script. As A-Mon, the 53 year old dajan of Pang Daeng Nai, explains:

> Without being able to read the Dhamma script you cannot read the old books. The old books tell you the proper way to pay your respects to the Buddha. They tell you what you need, the ritual equipment (upakorn) needed for a ceremony and what you have to say to properly pay your respects to the Buddha. You need the old books.

While ritual texts written in the Thai script and language are available, they are viewed as less efficacious than those written in the Dhamma script, primarily because authenticity of religious practice is seen to be connected with the relative age of a particular practice; as A-Tun explains, “Dara’ang Buddhism is older then that of the Thai, closer to that practiced in the time of the Buddha.”

84. Since the 1950s there has been a proliferation of a new Shan scripts, but within the area around Chiang Tung and in the monasteries the old Dhamma script is still used.
A related attitude towards the Dhamma script concerns the pronunciation of Pāli. There is no universal Pāli script. The Buddhist Tipiṭaka ("the three baskets," commonly regarded as the canon of Theravāda Buddhism) was passed on orally for centuries before being inscribed in local scripts. While it is pedagogically useful to have an easily recognized script for students of Pāli to work with (Central Thai students use Central Thai, Khmer students use Khmer, and so on), it raises questions about the proper pronunciation as the use of local scripts encourages dialectical differences in reading shaped partly by the associations students have regarding the particular script used. This is significant in ritual contexts as the proper pronunciation of Pāli remains important in terms of defining the effectiveness of a religious rite. The abbot of Pang Daeng Nai says that the Dhamma script represents the proper pronunciation of Pāli. This view is reinforced by the teaching of Khruba Jao Theuang, who likewise encourages his followers to return to the traditional Lan Na or Yuan Buddhist style of chanting, which he says is closer to the proper pronunciation of Pāli (see Ch. 6 for a detailed discussion of Khruba Jao Theuang).  

As young Dara’ang boys now attend public school and no longer receive their education at Dara’ang or Tai temples, the proportion of men who can read and write the Dhamma script has declined. A survey I conducted in April of 2008 in Pang Daeng Nai found that only 15% percent of men 20 years of age and older (11 out of 73) could read the Dhamma script. For this same group, those that could write the script was slightly less at 10.9% (8 out of 73). Age played an important role in determining knowledge of

85. The concern with proper pronunciation of Pāli can also be seen in the reforms of King Mongut of the Thai sangha and the creation of the Thammayut sect where it likewise functioned to distinguish the new sect from the dominant (Mahanikai) form of Buddhist practice.
86. Respondents were asked whether or not they could read and write the Dhamma script and the Central Thai script. Answers were obtained through self-reporting.
the Dhamma script. 28.5% of men over 40 (8 out of 28) could read Dhamma letters having spent time in Dara’ang and Tai monasteries in Burma and 21.4% (6 out of 28) could write the script. For men ages 20 to 40 only 6.6% (3 out of 45) could read the Dhamma script and 4.4% (2 out of 45) could write it. The only two boys below the age of 20 who could read and write the script were novices at the local temple, and both originally came from the village of Huai Mak Liam. No women of any age could read or write Dhamma letters, as they were not permitted to ordain as novices.87

Today many Dara’ang boys who ordain as novices do so at lowland temples where the old Dhamma script is no longer taught. While many of these schools are staffed by Tai Yuan monks, none of the curricula contain Dhamma script literacy. The use of Dhamma script has also declined throughout Shan State for secular writing with the introduction of new Shan scripts and Burmese as the language of instruction in state schools (Sai Kham Mong 2004: 70). Similar developments have taken place in Namhsan where a new Palaung/Ta-ang system of writing based on the Burmese script was created in 1972.88 Nevertheless, while several Palaung books and readers have been published using this new script, knowledge of it does not extend far beyond Namhsan, and Palaung temples in Burma primarily use Shan language materials in their services or copies of texts written in the Dhamma script. Dara’ang in Thailand, while recognizing a common ethnic identity with the Palaung of Namhsan, also maintain that their language is so distinct that they have difficulty comprehending the language used in Namhsan.

87. Compare this with the knowledge of the Central Thai script, which is much higher in Pang Daeng Nai, primarily due to compulsory primary education and government literacy programs. All respondents, both male (26) and female (27), between the ages of 10 and 20 reported that they can both read and write the Central Thai script. For those people ages 20 to 40, 86.6% of men (39 out of 45) and 42.5% of women (20 out of 47) responded they could read and write Central Thai. For villagers over 40 years of age, 39.2% of men (11 out of 28) and 9% of women (3 out of 33) responded that they were able to read and write the Central Thai script.

88. This script was developed by U Maung Kyaw, U Aik Maung, U Tun Kyaw and U Lum Kham.
In spite of the fact that the Dhamma script is losing ground, Dara’ang people living in Thailand continue to use the script for writing the Pale language. Village records are kept using the Dhamma script, Pale songs are written in the Dhamma script, and letters that are sent to family and friends in Burma commonly employ the use of Dhamma letters to write the Pale language. Besides the secular uses of the script, the majority of Buddhist texts within the village are also written in Dhamma letters. This includes both Pale language texts, such as the Jataka tales, and Tai Yuan/Khün language texts that form the majority of religious literature in Pang Daeng Nai and other villages. Pâli chanting books used to instruct novices in Dara’ang villages of Thailand also use the Dhamma script, although state distributed chanting guides are becoming increasingly common. Nevertheless, Dara’ang boys who reside in Dara’ang monasteries within Thailand are still expected to learn to read and write the Dhamma script, and it continues to be reproduced in Dara’ang monasteries across northern Thailand and Shan State.

**Education and Ordination**

Prior to the twentieth century, ordination in Burma and Thailand was the principle means through which young Palaung boys and girls received an education. In 1924, Leslie Milne described the educational system of young boys in of Namhsan as follows;

> Every monastery is also a school, taught by the monks, the scholars being all boys. There, besides learning the precepts of Buddhism, the children learn to read and write a certain amount of Burmese and Shan . . . The boys pay nothing to the monks, but the parents bring many presents of food; mats, robes for the monks and other things are also given to the monastery (Milne [orig. 1924] 2004: 319).

Today, state education in Burma has largely replaced this traditional form of instruction,
but many young boys in Namhsan township and other Palaung villages continue to receive their education in the monastic setting. Monastic education was also the norm in Thailand up until 1932, when a secular state run system of education was extended throughout the kingdom (Sparkes 2005: 131). While secular state-run schools are now found across Burma, Buddhist monasteries continue to operate as important educational centres for young boys in remote areas.

Young children in Thailand today are required to attend a state school up until they complete primary grade 6 (prathom 6). Prior to 1979, the minimum required level was grade 4 (prathom 4) and throughout the 1980s grade 4 remained the highest level of education for children in many rural areas as the schools lacked enough teachers to instruct the children at higher levels. This was particularly the case for children in the highlands.

Despite the difficulties recruiting teachers to instruct in remote areas, the state pushed hard to get schools into the ethnic minority communities. Often times these were the first state organizations to be set up in the area and, in addition to educating the children, teachers were responsible for disseminating and collecting official information for the state bureaucracy (Tapp 2005: 11). The curriculum was also structured in such a way to promote Thai nationalism among upland children from non-Tai ethnic backgrounds and instil in them a disposition for what constitutes “proper” Thai behaviour. These rural schools continue to act as vehicles for assimilation for highland children and have at times been resisted by local communities who view them as intrusions upon the autonomy of local villages (McCaskill 1997: 48-49; Tapp 2005: 11).

Dara’ang communities in Chiang Dao district have not resisted the introduction of
state run schools. On the contrary, access to education has been an important factor in determining the location of the villages themselves. This may reflect the different historical relationship Dara’ang people have to Tai institutions. Unlike many upland ethnic minority communities, the Dara’ang have a history of receiving an education in Tai monastic centres where the language of instruction was a Tai language and the script was the old Dhamma script of the Lan Na Tai kingdom, a script recognized as being Tai in origin. And despite the fact that the state school system in Thailand is officially secular, Buddhism continues to mediate many of the educational experiences for Dara’ang boys early on and provided the impetus for establishing a school in the Dara’ang area of Chiang Dao district. As described in chapter 2, Pang Daeng School itself began with the instruction of young Dara’ang boys and girls at the cave temple (a monastic residence, Thai: samnaksang) of Doi Phra Bat in 1983. This instruction was typical of the education young Dara’ang children would receive in remote parts of Burma, particularly those who would spend time as an un-ordained temple boy (Pale: gabi). Volunteer teachers from the nearby Tai Yuan village of Thung Luk began to travel to the cave temple to instruct the children in 1984, which led eventually to the construction of a new school across the road from the samnaksang built with funds provided by a Chinese Buddhist foundation. The elementary school opened its doors to children from the surrounding villages on 1 May 1987 (Sakunee 2001: 61).

In 2008 Pang Daeng School had two levels of kindergarten (anuban 1, 2) and primary education up to grade 6, with six full time teachers instructing 280 kids. Most of the teachers were Tai Yuan men and women from Thung Luk while one instructor was a Dara’ang woman from Pang Daeng Nai. As one of the first Tai Yuan teachers to work in
Before 1996 we had no funding. We were volunteers, and were mostly teaching at Thung Luk School. We now get money from the government, but it is not enough, so we have to ask parents for 300 baht per term per child attending the school. This is for kids up to grade 3. For grades 4 to 6, it is 400 baht.

While Pang Daeng School provides a basic education for many highland children, grade 6 does not provide significant opportunities for social mobility in Thai society. There are several strategies parents therefore pursue in order that their children can obtain a secondary education. The first is to enrol children in nearby state schools within driving distance of the village, but this strategy has not proved very effective. The distance is considerable (over 15 km for many schools) and students find it difficult to travel back and forth each day by motorcycle as the vehicle is often required for other family needs (bringing in the harvest, transportation to fields, hospitals, market, etc...). As a result, no students were pursuing this option at the time of my study.

Another means by which a secondary education can be obtained is to enrol within a private school. In 2008 there was one student from Pang Daeng Nai studying at an all girls private boarding school, paid for with the help of an American woman residing in Chiang Mai city. While this option is attractive it is also expensive as parents must pay the cost of tuition (1,000 baht per year) and living expenses. Students must also compete for positions in these schools, and parents from Pang Daeng Nai complain that the education children receive at Pang Daeng School does not provide an adequate preparation for the entry exams. The final option is to enrol in part time classes in Chiang Dao town where they attend school on the weekends. This option is by far the most popular, with ten families interviewed in Pang Daeng Nai in 2008 pursuing or having
pursued this option. Of these, only one Dara’ang girl had completed grade 12 (matayom 6).

Girls far outnumber boys in terms of attending private schools in Chiang Dao. Out of the 11 students from Pang Daeng Nai who had completed some level of study in Chiang Dao after finishing grade 6, only three were boys, none of whom was currently pursuing their studies. By contrast, in 2008 there were three girls actively attending school in Chiang Dao and two more pursuing options to continue their studies at the private boarding school. The gains made by these girls are nevertheless typically cut short, as girls receive pressure from their in-laws to leave school once they marry. As it is common for marriages to occur around the age of 15 or 16, few complete their secondary school education.

While the educational opportunities of Dara’ang children is in need of further study, particularly in terms of the different types of cultural capital children from Dara’ang backgrounds bring to the school as opposed to Tai children (Bourdieu 1973, 1986), what is of chief concern here is that young boys increasingly pursue their secondary education within Buddhist monasteries rather than the secular school system.

Historically, Buddhist monasteries in Thailand have acted as the institutions in which young boys from peasant backgrounds could receive an education and achieve social mobility. In a seminal essay on the topic, Wyatt (1966) showed that the children of peasant Thai farmers in pre-modern Thailand were able to use religious education as a means of entering the ranks of government civil service. This was made possible by the fact that monastic schools taught a range of secular subjects (astrology, law, medicine) in addition to religious subjects such as Pâli and Dhamma studies.
As the monasteries already served an education function, the government of King Chulalongkorn (r. 1868-1910) attempted to build the country’s modern educational system upon this pre-existing institutional framework. While reforms were instituted, the experiment did not last long, and Prince Wachirayan, the primary architect of the scheme, soon asked that the Ministry of Public Instruction take over the whole program, making education thenceforth the responsibility of the state (Wyatt 1969: 255). With the introduction of secular education across Thailand another avenue for social mobility opened up and the monastic schools lost their role as the primary educators of youth. Young Tai boys continued to ordain, but their education was now primarily in the hands of teachers in the employment of the state rather than monks. The monastic schools continued to provide an education, but ordination as a way of obtaining an education was primarily a path taken by poorer children (Tambiah 1976: 451).

This is the situation for many Dara’ang children seeking to continue their studies beyond the 6th grade. Pariyatidhamma secondary schools contain the largest number of monastic students in Thailand today (compared with monastic primary schools or universities) (McDaniel 2008: 106). In 2008 there were seven Dara’ang boys from Pang Daeng Nai undertaking a secondary education at three monasteries in and around Chiang

89. There are three major divisions of study within these schools: Pali language study (Palsueksa); Dhamma study (Dhammaseueksa, which includes ethics and general Buddhist subject matter); and “common” or secular subjects (Samanaseueksa) (McDaniel 2008: 106). Secular education follows the regular educational gradation, continuing on from grade level 7 to 12 (matayom 1 to 6). The religious education consists of 10 levels of ecclesiastical scholarship: Nak Tham 3, 2, 1, followed by Parien 3 to 9, in order of ascending difficulty. Nak Tham means “Skilled in the Buddhist Teachings” while Parien comes from the Pali pariṇīṭa, “knowing, recognizing, understanding” (Tambiah 1968: 105, Terweil 1994: 106). The Nak Tham exams deal with the teachings of the Buddha, the Vinaya (“code of monastic discipline”), and stories of the Buddha’s life. Novices who choose not to attend urban monastic schools can still study for these exams using Thai language state textbooks while remaining in their local village temples. This is indeed the case for many Dara’ang novices. The Parien exams, however, involve the study of the Pali language and require a level of knowledge that is rarely found amongst the monks of village temples. Novices and monks who wish to pursue Parien studies must attend monastic schools in urban areas. In 2008, only one man from Pang Daeng Nai was undertaking Parien studies, having already completed the first level.
Mai city. As the children ordain as Buddhist novices, there is no need for parents to pay tuition or living expenses.

While boys from Tai backgrounds also pursue their studies as novices in monastic schools, the situation of Dara’ang boys differs in terms of the institutional context within which they are situated. It is primarily in these differences that we see the way Buddhism, the state, and “hill tribe” identity intersect to open a limited space for Dara’ang boys to obtain an education, a space where ethnic minority identity is reinforced by the programs themselves, while simultaneously suppressed by the assimilationist project of constructing a national Thai identity.90

As Dara’ang communities are relatively new to Thailand, they have not developed the necessary links with larger teaching monasteries that would allow for the flow of novices to travel to the urban areas. The ties to temples such as Wat Den (see Ch. 5) and local temples around Chiang Dao are significant in terms of the social capital they allow Dara’ang communities to develop, but they do not provide a setting where young boys

90. Anderson (1991) provides several examples of how national identity develops out of common experiences, including the shared sense of “we” that is produced as young men from diverse backgrounds travel along a career path that takes them from the peripheral rural areas to the national centres (urban areas), progressively climbing up the institutional hierarchy, which in this case is the bureaucratic field of government (Anderson 1991: 121). In Thailand, the structure of the Sangha mirrors that of the civil service; those who wish to pursue the higher ecclesiastical ranks must travel the road to urban monastic centres where proper symbolic capital (i.e. credentials) can be obtained. Starting at the village level, there is a correspondence between the temple abbot (chao awat) and the village. At the level of tambol, the chao kana tambol corresponds to the tambol head; at the district (amphoe) level, the district head monk (chao kana amphoe) and the district officer; at the provincial level, the Sangha provincial governors (chao kana jiangwat) and the provincial governor; and at the regional level, the Sangha regional governors (chao kana phak) and the regional inspectors. Official consultation takes place between the representatives of the Sangha and those of the government from the level of district (amphoe) up to regions. Above the Chao Kana Phak stand the Sangha general governors (chao kana yai) and the Council of Elders (mahaatherasamakom), the later of which is in direct liaison with the Department of Religious Affairs (previously under the Ministry of Education but recently moved to the Ministry of Culture). The ultimate authority of the Sangha rests with the Supreme Patriarch (somdet phrasangharat) (cf. Somboon 1982: 51). While Dara’ang men do not commonly travel the full length of this long road, identity is rooted within the experience of participating within this particular field; a field that is structured in such a way that the roads to social advancement runs to the political and economic centres of power associated with particular national identities.
can receive an education. Rather than the well-established roads to monastic ordinations used in the villages of Burma, it is Thai state agencies that are primarily responsible for establishing links between temples in the urban areas and the Dara’ang villages of Chiang Dao district. In such cases, agencies target Dara’ang villages because of an ascribed “hill tribe” identity that ironically marks them as not-Buddhist in the terms of state projects which attempt to convert upland people to Buddhism in order to civilize, assimilate, and/or integrate them into a Thai social body.

**Thammajarik Project**

The primary organizations that are responsible for providing young Dara’ang boys of Chiang Dao with an opportunity to receive an education through ordination is the *Thammajarik* program and the Department of Social Development and Welfare. Initiated in 1965 by Pradit Disawat, head of the Tribal Welfare Division of the Department of Public Welfare, the Thammajarik program is a state organization that promotes the integration of highland ethnic minority groups into the state through the propagation of Buddhism (Swearer 1999: 214). Under the program, monks from Bangkok, the northeast, and the northern provinces are sent to live in the “tribal” villages of northern Thailand. There, they spend several months in the villages teaching people how to practice Buddhism in the ways common to Thailand (paying respect to the Triple Gems, giving offerings to monks, proper chants, etc...) (Keyes 1971: 563). Support for the Thammajarik program comes from a variety of state organizations including the Sangha,

91. A publication from the Department of Public Welfare that states the aims of the program as; “to strengthen sentimental ties [of Thai] with the tribal people and to create loyalties [of the tribal people] to the nation through development of strong beliefs in Buddhism” (Department of Public Welfare, quoted on Keyes 1971: 551)
the Department of Social Development and Welfare, and regular donations from Queen Sirikit (Platz 2003: 436).

The Thammajarik program was set up at a time when the loyalty of highland ethnic minorities were considered suspect by the Thai state due to their perceived susceptibility to communist ideology. The program maintains a decidedly integrationist, if not assimilationist, stance towards upland ethnic minority peoples (Platz 2003:476). It was scaled back after the collapse of the communist insurgency, but it nevertheless continues to operate a large facility at Wat Srisoda, which also serves as its northern regional headquarters, and smaller associated temples across northern Thailand.92

The temple of Wat Srisoda today serves as a large teaching monastery where “hill tribe” boys (primarily from Karen and Hmong backgrounds) receive a basic education. Most students study at the temple until grade 12 (matayom 6), but it is also possible to do a Bachelor's degree in social work, and the temple has ties to a number of other universities where it is possible for boys to continue their studies. In 2007 there were three Dara’ang boys studying at Wat Srisoda out of a total 420 novices and monks. All three boys had been convinced to go by an Htin Thammajarik monk who resides at the temple of Huai Pong, a Dara’ang village located nearby Pang Daeng Nai. These boys were not the first to attend Wat Srisoda. There were other boys who had previously been ordained as novices at the temple but had since left. Two of the boys were from Pang Daeng Nai, one was 17 years old and the other 16, and were in matayom 3 (9th grade) and matayom 2 (8th grade) respectively. Both were novices. The other Dara’ang boy was from Huai Pong; he was 15 years of age and was studying at the level of matayom 1 (7th

92. It is interesting to note that Wat Srisoda is also the same temple that Khruba Siwichai built and resided within while constructing the road up Doi Sutep (see Ch. 6).
grade). The boy from Huai Pong had not yet ordained at the time we first met, but shortly after participated in a mass ordination ceremony in Bangkok where he became a novice.93

While Wat Srisoda is the largest teaching monastery for “tribal” boys in northern Thailand, Dara’ang novices and monks take up residence in other monasteries outside of their village in order to pursue their studies. In my study area of Chiang Dao, these were also connected with the Thammajarik program and/or Department of Social Development and Welfare. For Pang Daeng Nai, Wat Pa Ngiu serves as an important monastery in terms of conducting ordinations and providing opportunities to receive a secondary education. The temple is home to two Dara’ang boys from Pang Daeng Nai, a 14 year old in matayom 1 (7th grade) and a 16 year old in matayom 2 (8th grade). Wat Pa Ngiu, located in Sarapi district just south of Chiang Mai city, does not itself contain educational facilities, but houses a number of boys who attend classes at the nearby teaching monastery of Wat Phra Non. Pang Daeng Nai was first put in contact with Wat Pa Ngiu through their connections with a government official from the Department of Social Development and Welfare. While the monastery now serves as an avenue for acquiring an education, early experience with the temple came in the form of temporary ordinations, as described above.

While the act of ordaining in urban monasteries is a relatively recent opportunity for Dara’ang people in Thailand, the practice itself has been going on for generations as Dara’ang boys in Burma commonly ordained in lowland Tai monasteries. Presently there

93. This mass ordination ceremony is held each year at Wat Benjamabophit Dusitwanaram, a royal temple located in Bangkok that serves as the national headquarters for the Thammajarik program. The first mass ordination was held at the temple in 1966 and has become an annual affair. A ceremony I attended in 2007 ordained 280 “hill tribe” boys, 3 of which were Dara’ang from Chiang Dao district. Many of the boys who are ordained at this ceremony are students at Wat Srisoda or an affiliated temple, although some undergo only a temporary ordination, choosing to disrobe and return to their villages shortly after the ceremony is complete.
are only a few boys that are pursuing their education at teaching monasteries, but the number of boys attending monastic schools has been increasing each year and there is no indication that this trend will reverse itself in the absence of attractive alternative options for acquiring a secondary education. On one return trip from Wat Srisoda to Pang Daeng Nai I happened to meet a Dara’ang father from Pang Daeng Nai who was bringing his son to Chiang Mai to request an ordination at Wat Srisoda. He had been encouraged to go by a visiting Thammajarik monk who was residing in the nearby village of Huai Pong. As we chatted, he explained that, “It would be great if he was ordained, because he could receive an education, but I don’t know if he will like it. If not, he can always come home.” The father was willing to let his own son, who was 13 years old at the time, make the decision for himself because, as he explained, he did not have a lot of experience with education, but felt that “it might find work, maybe something in the city, like a bank.”

Given the fact that the Dara’ang have been Buddhist for centuries, the focus of the Thammajarik program on Dara’ang communities is somewhat surprising; it is connected with the categorical ascription of Dara’ang people as a “hill tribe” (chao khao) population, a label which carries connotations of not-Buddhist, or not practicing “real” Buddhism (the term “hill tribe Buddhism” is sometimes heard in this regard). As the director of Wat Srisoda explained to me in an interview, Dara’ang Buddhism is not proper in terms of its practice, being closer to “a mix of ancestor worship and Buddhism.” Comments such as these illustrate the homogenizing lens through which many Tai people (and others) view upland peoples; a state highlighted by the fact that ancestral lines in general play a relatively minor role in Dara’ang religious life, less so than in the case of Tai Yuan religious practice (see Rhum 1994 for an analysis on
ancestors in Tai Yuan religious practice).

Notwithstanding the perception of its agents, the Thammajarik program stands in a rather different relationship vis-à-vis the Dara’ang communities than it does with other upland minority ethnic groups. The Thammajarik program was organized to convert upland ethnic minority groups to Buddhism, yet Dara’ang families see the program as an avenue for continuing a historical relationship of obtaining an education through ordination in Tai centres. Nevertheless, the program may fulfill its manifest function as an avenue for integration as Dara’ang individuals seek greater economic opportunities within urban areas, a shift in positionality that has become imperative given the enclosure of land around every Dara’ang village within the country.

**Fields of Contact**

The practices and beliefs associated with Theravāda Buddhism is something that Dara’ang and Tai peoples share. This shared religion includes the institutions associated with religious reproduction. The overlap between Dara’ang and Tai religious fields has long constituted a “cultural contact zone,” a term Pratt (1991) uses to refer to “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in context of highly asymmetrical relations of power” (p. 34). The theme of cultural contact zones as spaces of struggle will be taken up in chapter 7, where I will analyze the way in which Buddhism provides a discourse for expressing a critique of the existing social relations between Tai and Dara’ang peoples within Thailand. Nevertheless, while cultural contact zones can be spaces of struggle, they also represent locations where the boundaries of ethnic groups overlap, where new hybrid identities can emerge from a shared experience
within a common social field.

Conceptualizing cultural contact zones as social fields which overlap ethnic group boundaries allows us to consider a different type of hybrid identity, one which is based on a shared experience rather than cultural fusion. Hybridity is commonly described as a process of joining together two disparate identities, yet many people experience hybridity in a partial way through their participation in fields that they share with members of another group (in this case, an ethnic group). This form of hybridity, which is based on participation in semi-autonomous fields, is non-totalizing in terms of the identities produced. The production of a hyphenated identity within such conditions therefore does not signal a drift towards a change in ethnic identity (as discussions of Tai-ization commonly suggest), but an assertion of cultural similarities by a minority group vis-à-vis a dominant other; similarities which may exist prior to the arising of conditions that call forth their articulation.

In the case of the Dara’ang, participation in a shared religious field provides a basis for a self-identification as being “Dara’ang-Tai,” a term that asserts a shared cultural tradition, an overlapping social field, rather than a joining of two groups. A-Tun, the head of Pang Daeng Nai, describes the decision to move to Thailand as partly based upon this cultural affinity;

When the Burmese soldiers came, we were told to move close to the Pamar

94. The concept of hybridity has become particularly important in post-colonial literature, where the mixing of the dominant and dominated groups is stressed (see for example Bhabha 1985). Others scholars take a broader view of hybridity, such as Nederveen (2004: 69) who argues that hybridity is the norm for most societies.

95. As fields themselves are structured according to relative capital, they are commonly shaped according to the interests of the more powerful players. This is not to deny a relative autonomy to the Dara’ang religious field, but to stress that points of overlap (such as institutional structures) are sites where unequal power relations are at play, power relations which tilt the field in favour of the more dominant other (Rey 2004: 334).
(Burman) towns. We did not want to, because we are Dara'ang-Tai. Other villages, they are Dara'ang-Pamar [pointing to a calendar on the wall depicting photos of women from Namhsan] . . . They go to Yangon to study at the university and ordain in Burman towns, but we go to Tai temples and use a Tai alphabet [Dhamma script]. In Burma we were very close to the Tai Khun and Tai Yai people. That is why we decided to move to Thailand, because we are Dara'ang-Tai. The Burmese soldiers did not want Buddhism in the mountains, only in the towns.

The hyphenated Dara'ang-Tai identity (distinguished from a possible Dara'ang-Pamar identity attributed to some Dara'ang people still living in Burma, particularly those living in and around Namhsan) is closely linked with the experience of ordaining, using the Dhamma script, and the borrowing of other religious practices from the lowland Tai of Burma. 96 A-Mon explains that in Burma, many of the Dara'ang-Pamar villages no longer use the old Dhamma script, and instead adopt Burmese forms of writing. “Dara’ang-Tai continue to use the old script, or the new Tai Yai script. This new script is not the same, not even the same as the old Tai Yai letters, but I can read it now. There are other Tai alphabets as well, but we use the old one here.”

For Dara’ang men and women born within Thailand, a Dara’ang-Tai, or Dara’ang-Thai (the two blur together in terms of the signification), identity is felt through the process of undergoing a shared experience (education and mass media being particularly important), as well as the existential fact that they were born within Thailand and have never travelled back to Burma. Yet they frequently face challenges from those who see the Dara’ang as being aliens within the Thai national body, what Malkki (1995: 7, drawing on Douglas 2002) describes as seeing displaced populations as “matter out of place.” These challenges take various forms, such as the forced relocations and

96. See Anderson (1991: 13) for a discussion on the importance of a shared sacred script for forming pre-national imagined communities.
incarcerations described in chapter 2 (ongoing for several Dara’ang villages), comments men and women face from Tai speaking townspeople in Chiang Dao, and even from officials charged with “developing” the upland Dara’ang communities.

This non-recognition of belonging became clear to me one day while attending a training seminar on September 25, 2007, at the Queen’s Botanical Garden near Chiang Dao. The event, put on by the King’s Royal Project, had brought a group of Dara’ang women to the centre to demonstrate the types of flowers that could possibly be grown for sale on the Thai market. At the meeting, one of the officials asked a young Dara’ang woman (age 25) from the podium, “Where are you from, Burma?” “No,” said the young woman, “Thailand.” “No, no, where are you from before?” “Thailand,” she answered again, having never even visited Burma. “Well, in this country you cannot plant opium, you must find other crops.” The discourse reflects a common perception, one found even amongst officials charged with integrating the communities, that the Dara’ang and other non-Tai highlanders are not really “natural” residents of “Thai”-land (Weisman 2000).

Within Pang Daeng Nai, however, the Dara’ang-Tai cultural identity blends into a Dara’ang-Thai identity, a national identity expressing a multi-cultural sense of what constitutes the Thai nation.97 For older men, such as A-Tun and A-Mon, this identity is rooted in the shared cultural traditions that stretch back to the time when the Dara’ang of Thailand lived within Burma, and as such blends into the multi-cultural usage of the term. For younger members of the community, however, it has come to mean a sense of

97. In practice, the aspirated and unaspirated “T” or “Th” sound, so important to distinguish for ethnologists, was not considered significant by my Dara’ang informants in Pang Daeng Nai (as A-Mon pointed out during our discussion of the proper pronunciation of ethnonyms, in northern Shan State the term Tai takes on the sound “Dai,” but Dara’ang used their own terms, such as Da Yün to refer to groups such as the Tai Yuan). What is significant, however, is the contextual use of the term Tai. That is, whether or not it refers to a national identity within Thailand, or an ethnic identity for Tai speaking peoples.
national belonging that does not include ethnic assimilation, a statement of the fact that they are “really Thai,” as in, he is “really Dara’ang-Thai, he has citizenship” (A-In, 21 year old Dara’ang man), a status that the older generation who were not born in Thailand typically lacks.

That this ethnic and national hybrid identity should blend together is not surprising within the context of Thailand, where a cultural identity (such as being Buddhist) serves as the normative basis for a national cultural identity in Thailand. Buddhism, along with the “Thai people” and the monarchy, represent the three pillars of Thai national identity. As described in chapter 1, Buddhism is also considered a mark of civility that distinguishes the lowland Tai from the non-Tai highland population. As we shall see in chapter 7, however, this distinction itself can be appropriated, as counter claims concerning who is more “civil” are made by Dara’ang living in Pang Daeng Nai. Buddhism provides a common field within which a hybrid cultural identity may be constructed, one that legitimizes the position of the Dara’ang within the geo-body of Thailand.

**Reflections on Identity**

The construction of a Dara’ang-T(h)ai identity draws upon a historical relationship, one which is embodied in a shared religious practice. The extent to which this articulation existed within Burma is unclear; according to elders such as A-Tun and A-Mon, Dara’ang people in the southern and eastern parts of Shan state did conceptualize themselves in these terms. While a Dara’ang-Tai identity (like any hybrid identity) may challenge the ideology of cultural homogeneity within a nation-state (Nederveen 2004:
73), and thus stand as a critique of a particular current of Thai nationalist ideology that is arguably still dominant (Jory 2000; Hayami 2006: 283), there has been an increasing shift within the official state discourse in recent years towards multiculturalism (Sirijit 2009). As a result, such hyphenated identities are more likely to be embraced by state officials as a sign of successful integration of minority peoples into the larger Thai society, and thus reflect the new conditions of subjective production (cf. Buadaeng 2006: 380).

Yet despite years of assimilationist policies, a mismatch between subjective expectations and objective conditions continue for the Dara’ang of Thailand, and critical reflection on the nature of ethnic identity and relations is quite audible. One can observe quite clearly the radical shift that has occurred in terms of the ethnic relationship between the Dara’ang and the Tai, and a deep crisis for the displaced communities, as the Dara’ang relocated from Burma into Thailand (see Ch. 2). Rather than a relatively autonomous existence punctuated by tribute and mediated by exchanges (products, ideas, and people), as was the case in Burma, Dara’ang people in Thailand face the Tai as an alien other, “illegal migrants” who occupy land claimed by the Thai state. This radical transformation of ethnic relations has precipitated a crisis (material and ideological) for the Dara’ang communities of Thailand, a situation that calls for a reformulation of identity in the face of a nationalist ideology that idealizes cultural homogeneity within the political borders of Thailand.

In the remaining chapters I concentrate on the formation of critical religious discourses and the forms of critical subjectivity that they produce, such as narratives that challenge the existing structures of domination. In doing so, I probe the interrelationship between discursive and habitual elements of identity, a relationship that Bottero (2006)
notes is lacking within the sociological literature.
Chapter 6

Khruba and the Dara’ang

While the government of Thailand has had limited success in propagating Buddhism amongst highlanders, a group of monks known as khruba attract large followings from amongst the Tibeto-Burman and Mon-Khmer ethnic minority populations. The “khruba monk movement” attempts to revive a form of Buddhism associated with the old kingdom of Lan Na, the same form of Buddhism that was adopted by many Dara’ang communities of Burma centuries ago (see chapter 3). The fact that the Dara’ang continue to practice the form of Buddhism that khruba monks are attempting to revive amongst the Tai Yuan (commonly known as Northern Thai or Khon Muang) places them in a unique position within this movement, one which is at odds with their identity as a so-called “hill tribe” population which frames them as non-Buddhists.

A Model For Reality

The term “khruba” or “khuba” is a Tai term that means “revered teacher.” In the nineteenth century and earlier, congregations gave this title to local monks, most often elders or abbots, as a way of marking their respected status. The term is still occasionally used in northern Thailand today in this fashion, but the old system of titles has largely waned with the imposition of Siamese titles in early twentieth century by the Bangkok based national Sangha (“organization of monks”) (Kwanchewan 2002b: 4). In spite of

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98. Tai Yuan pronunciation of the term typically drops the “r.” I maintain it as this is the common pronunciation for Dara’ang people.
this displacement, the term “khruba” has not completely died out, particularly for abbots who maintain some of the older Buddhist traditions associated with the kingdom of Lan Na.99

While the title “khruba” was historically a marker of respect, a status one achieved through one’s religious devotion, there exists a class of khruba monks whose holiness is more ascribed by their birth, or at least more ascribed by virtue of good deeds they performed in past lives. These khruba monks are ton bun, a term which literally means “person of merit.” They are believed by their followers to possess large amounts of merit (Thai: bun) and miraculous/supernatural powers, which may include such abilities as levitation, resistance to the negative effects of natural elements (heat, rain, fire), and telepathy (Keyes 1971: 553). Unlike regular khruba monks who are generally older, khruba ton bun are typically recognized as such at a young age, often in their early twenties or earlier.100 It is this special class of ton bun khruba monk who constitute what Kwanchewan (1988: 14) calls a “Khruba monk movement.”101

Although khruba monks and ton bun have long been a part of the religious landscape of northern Thailand, the phenomenon of a “khruba monk movement” is relatively recent and can be traced back to the religio-political movement of the Tai Yuan

99. According to Casas (2008: 300-301), the term “khuba” continues to be used to designate ecclesiastical rank in Sipsongpanna (Yunnan, China), particularly for those monks who are the head of one or more temples.
100. Casas (2008: 300) reports that contemporary khruba monks in Sipsongpanna must be a monk for at least 20 years, meaning such khruba would all be over 40 years of age.
101. While Kwanchewan (1988, 2003a) often uses the term ‘Khruba movement’ or ‘khruba monk movement’ to refer to the followings of singular monks, I use the term ‘khruba monk movement’ more broadly to refer to the constellation of various khruba monks who follow the tradition of Khruba Siwichai. This is because contemporary khruba monks and their followers often draw explicit connections between each other as well as Khruba Siwichai in the form of songs, guest appearances at temple festivals, publications, and posters. It is important to note, however, that the individual style of a movement varies from monk to monk, and the movement as a whole is not centralized.
monk Khruba Siwichai (1878-1938CE). Born in Li district of Lamphun province, an area which was under the control of the Tai Yuan royalty of Chiang Mai at the time of his birth, Khruba Siwichai rose to prominence for opposing the take over of the northern Tai Yuan temples by the Bangkok based national Siamese Sangha. Once the centre of the kingdom of Lan Na, Chiang Mai became a vassal of Bangkok in 1774 CE when Siamese troops pushed the Burmese out of the northern region. The ruling Tai Yuan élite nevertheless continued to enjoy a degree of autonomy up until 1892 when the Siamese government took direct control of the administrative apparatus of the northern kingdom through the implementation of The Provincial Reorganization Act, a process of political subsumption which was completed in 1901 when Bangkok stripped the northern princes of their financial powers (Keyes 1971: 554; Renard 1996: 1974).

While the power of the Tai Yuan rulers was effectively whittled away over time, the autonomy of the northern temples was abruptly broken as Bangkok imposed its hegemony over the newly incorporated region. King Chulalongkorn (r. 1868-1910 CE) saw the “primordial” attachments to local traditions as a threat to establishing a unified nation-state out of the disparate regions that then constituted Siam, and moved to break these bonds by instituting a national Sangha under the control of the state (Keyes 1971: 551). In addition to incorporating all monks into a national bureaucracy of ranks and titles, ritual chants in Pāli were regularized along Siamese lines and recitations in regional dialects were discouraged. Today, the Siamese or Central Thai form of Buddhism has colonized most of the temples of northern Thailand, displacing the Tai Yuan style with rites and texts that are more characteristic of the Central Thai (Siamese) practice.

102. One need not be a khruba, or even a monk, to be considered a ton bun.
Prior to its incorporation into the national Siamese Sangha, Tai Yuan temples enjoyed a relatively high degree of autonomy and it was the loss of this independence that planted the seeds of the khruba monk movement. The ecclesiastical structure of Chiang Mai, for example, was divided into 23 or 25 clerical districts (muat ubosot), containing 97 urban and 243 rural monasteries (hua wat). Each district was relatively autonomous and was not required to seek permission from any state agents when conducting ordination ceremonies. Furthermore, the Sangha of Lan Na was also organized along ethnic and geographical lines in the form of nikai (Pāli: nikāya) which cut across the districts. In any one district there were as many as six nikai based on the ethnic origin of the abbot and his village. At the close of the nineteenth century there were 18 nikai in Chiang Mai: Chiang Mai, Chiang Saen, Nan, Thai, Mon, Lu, Nguarai, Nai Khoen, Khoen, Khrong, Phrae, Lua, Young, Mae Pla, Man, Ngio [Shan], Luang, and Luay (Cohen 2001: 229; Kwanchewan 1988: 41). How these nikai operated is not clear, but the existence of these divisions are nevertheless significant as they demonstrate the internal differentiation of Lan Na Buddhism not only in terms of local identification with a mūang or city-state (the most common pre-modern source of group identification amongst Tai peoples) but also a distinction drawn along lines of ethnic affiliation.

In addition to its organizational structure, the Lan Na form of Buddhism differed from its southerly Siamese tradition in terms of its religious script. For religious texts, Lan Na influenced temples employed the Dhamma script, a Tai script based on the old Mon system of writing that was in use at Haripunchai. This script was so interwoven into the fabric of the region that Veidlinger writes, “we can now virtually delineate the borders of Lan Na based on where manuscripts employing this script have been found”
(2006: 4), while the Siamese/Thai Sangha employs the Central Thai system of writing for their religious and secular documents. Although the Dhamma script continues to be used in Dara’ang temples today, it has largely disappeared from Tai Yuan temples, where the Central Thai script now predominates for both religious and secular texts (see chapter 5 for a discussion concerning the Dhamma script among the Dara’ang).

While the use of the Dhamma script and the maintenance of traditional ritual forms became important issues for later khruba monks such as Khruba Khao Pi (1889-1977 CE), it was the loss of autonomy that served as the initial point of contention for Khruba Siwichai (1877-1938 CE). With the implementation of the Sangha Administration Act of 1902 (applied to the north in 1910), Bangkok sought to control ordination lineages by requiring abbots to gain permission when conducting ordinations from the Sangha’s District Officer. Khruba Siwichai ignored the new regulations, citing local tradition and the monastic regulations set down in the Pali Vinaya (the monastic regulations set down in the Pali cannon) as well as making an appeal to local Tai Yuan custom. For his refusal to comply he was removed from his position as abbot of Wat Ban Pang and confined by the Siamese viceroy, Prince Boworadet, to Wat Phra That Haripunchai in Lamphun for one year, in 1915 or 1916, where he was required to study the Sangha Administration Act.

By this time Khruba Siwichai had already developed a reputation as a ton bun and large numbers of people travelled to Lamphun to “make merit” with him while he was confined (Keyes 1971: 557). Upon his release, Khruba Siwichai continued to run afoul of the Siamese Sangha; he persisted in performing ordinations without seeking permission from officials, and engaged in other acts of resistance such as refusing to decorate his
temple in celebration of King Vajiravudh’s (r. 1910-1924) ascension to the throne. As a result, he was twice sent to Bangkok to answer charges of relating to misconduct, both times being freed without punishment (Keyes 1982: 157; Renard 1996: 175).

After his second incarceration in Bangkok, Khruba Siwichai returned to Lamphun and turned his attention to building and restoring Buddhist temples and reliquaries. In 1938, one year before his death, Khruba Siwichai embarked on a final monumental project of building a road up Doi Sutep (mountain) to a sacred temple just west of Chiang Mai city. By this time his followers were legion and many of the thousands Tai Yuan, Karens, Lua’, Hmong, and people from other ethnic backgrounds came out to help with the project (Renard 1996: 176). These building projects and the support of people from a variety of ethnic backgrounds became a hallmark of Khruba Siwichai’s mission, and contemporary khruba monks continue to draw upon the labour of ethnic minority peoples during their own construction projects.

Several khruba ton bun since the time of Khruba Siwichai have taken up the mantle of the movement, each adding their own personal touch to the performance and adjusting their practices to the particular social and political context of their day. Nevertheless, there is a strong continuity in the form of practices associated with khruba monks. Most follow the ascetic practices of Khruba Siwichai (for example, vegetarianism, eating only one meal per day, and not sleeping for long periods of time).  

103. It was during the building of the road up Doi Sutep that Khruba Siwichai ran afoul of authorities again for ordaining his disciple, Khruba Khao Pi, a man who had been defrocked by ecclesiastical authorities for his own resistance activities against the national Siamese Sangha. Khruba Khao Pi’s attacks on the Siamese Sangha were even more vehement than those of Khruba Siwichai and in the end he remained outside the official Sangha organization, wearing white robes to distinguish himself from other monks who typically wear orange (“Khao” is Thai for “white”). Khruba Khao Pi also developed a reputation as a saint of upland ethnic minority groups for his work amongst non-Tai peoples, particularly the Karen (see Kwanchewan 1988, 2003a: 258-263, 2003b).

104. In this regard, Khruba Siwichai said that he modelled his behaviour on Maha Kasapa Thera, a disciple
wear brown or reddish-brown robes with the waistband tied high (as opposed to the saffron robes of most Thai monks), and wear a luk pra kham (a string of large wooden beads worn around the neck) (Kwanchewan 2003a: 243). Across northern Thailand, contemporary khruba ton bun monks continue to look to Khruba Siwichai as a model to emulate, including his insistence on maintaining Lan Na Buddhist practices amongst the northern population.

**Khruba Jao Theuang**

While there are several khruba operating in northern Thailand today, the most important for Dara’ang people is Khruba Jao Theuang Natasilo (see Plate 6). Khruba Jao Theuang was born on 20 February 1965 in the year of the dragon. His mother (La) and father (Mun) were both of Tai Yuan descent. His family name was Noreaung -

of the Buddha who strictly followed the practice of dhatanga (Thai thudong = asceticism). The thirteen thudong practices are: “Monks vow to wear robes made out of cast off cloth; they vow to use only one set of (three) robes; they vow to go daily on alms round for food and do not omit any house, no matter how poor the quality of the food offered; they restrict themselves to only one meal a day, which should not be eaten before dawn or after the noon hour; they eat out of the alms bowl; they do not accept food presented after the alms round; they dwell in the wilderness and there dwell under a tree or stay in the open air or in a cemetery; they vow to be content with what ever shelter is provided; an they must not lie down. It was (and still is) up to each monk how many, if any, thudong practices to follow and how long to practice each one” (Tiyavanich 2003: 56).

105. Kwanchewan (2003a: 255) notes that this style of dress was given meaning by Khruba Khao Pi. 106. Other khruba monks include Khruba Noi Khruba Noi Ekachai Ariyameti, who has built up a following amongst the Dara’ang of Chiang Rai. According to his own account, Khruba Noi was born in 1984. Khruba Noi claims that when he was 17 years old he fell ill, died, and remained dead for 15 days (“Luckily they didn't inject me with formaldehyde,” he joked during our interview). Miraculously, when they were preparing the coffin for burial he came back to life and decided to take up the monastic vocation in light of his experience. Khruba Noi explains that he follows the tradition of Khruba Siwichai and also has connections with Khruba Jao Theuang and Khruba Bunchum. Like other ton bun khruba monks, he is quite young and displays many of the symbols associated with his role as a continuator of the khruba movement, such as the wearing of reddish-brown robes, large beads worn around the neck (luk pra kham), and the practice of being carried on a golden palanquin when travelling short distances. When I visited him August of 2007, Khruba Noi was spending the rain retreat in a newly established Dara’ang village close to the Mae Sai border in a small hut that had been erected for him nearby the new temple grounds and was helping to construct a large Buddha image for the village temple. In honour of this image, he had given the new village the name “Mu Baan Phra Jaw Thong Thip Than Jai.”
“Natasilo” being the Pali name Theuang took after his ordination. The family lived in Ban Hua Dong, just south of Chiang Mai city, at house number 73/1, Mu 6, Tambon Khuamung, in Sarapi district of Chiang Mai province. His father, Mun Noreuang and mother, Na Rueang, had four children altogether: the first was a daughter named Tabtim Noreaung, the second child was a son named Paitun Noreaung, the third was Theuang, and the last child was a son named Sutad Noreaung.

Khruba Jao Theuang was raised primarily by his grandparents, Ta and Kham Phongpa. The family was quite poor and it was common practice at the time for young children to be raised by family members who no longer had children living at home. Khruba Theaung attended grades 1 to 4 (prathonz 1 to 4) at Ban Hua Dong School, and grades 5 and 6 (prathom 5 and 6) at Ban Sri Don Chai School, also in Sarapi district. From 1978 to 1981 he completed grades 7-9 (matayom 1 to 3) at Sarapi Pitayakhom School, and grades 10 to 12 (matayom 3-6) at Watthano Thaipayap school in amphoe (district) Muang Chiang Mai, from which he graduated in 1985.

Theuang was ordained as a novice at age 20 at Wat Hua Dong in his natal village on 28 April 1985, the year he graduated from high school. His preceptor was Phra Khru Chaisilawimon of Wat Phra Non Nong Phueng, Sarapi district, Chiang Mai province. Theuang completed his first level ecclesiastical exams (nak tham tri) the same year he was ordained, and his second level ecclesiastical exams (nak tham tho) the following year in 1986 at Wat Chuamung in Sarapi district. He also learned to read and write the Dhamma script during this period. He was ordained as a full monk (Pali: bhikkhu) on 25 May 1986 at Wat Huadong. His preceptor was once again Phra Khru Chaisilawimon of Wat Phra Non Mong Peung.
According to a pamphlet that is distributed at the temple, Theuang had already developed a reputation as a ton bun at a young age and showed signs of being spiritually connected to Khruba Siwichai (Jitrak n.d.). Jitrak writes that as a child, Theuang "always had an image of Khruba Siwichai hanging around his neck. If ever there was a day when the image of Khuba Siwichai was not around his neck, then that day he would experience a fever and become ill" (my translation). He also says Khruba Jao Theuang memorized the 9 levels of parami achieved by Khruba Siwichai from a newspaper article at a very young age. Jitrak recounts that Khruba Jao Theuang demonstrated a love of building religious monuments when he was young. "When he was a little child he would construct chedis and temples out of mud when it rained and showed an interest in photos of chedis and wihans from a young age" (Jitrak, n.d., my translation).

Stories such as these connect Khruba Jao Theaung to Khruba Siwichai, and insinuate that he is the actual reincarnation of Khruba Siwichai. This is the belief of many of Khruba Jao Theaung’s followers. Many informants, both Dara’ang and Tai Yuan, have pointed out to me that Khruba Jao Theuang was born on the same day (February 20th) of the year that Khruba Siwichai died, and have drawn attention to the physical resemblance between photos of the young Khruba Jao Theuang and young Khruba Siwichai. One such photo juxtaposing the face of each monk as a young man can be seen in the hall where Khruba Jao Theaung receives his guests, and the two faces are also found on either side of amulets that are frequently distributed at temple celebrations. While Khruba Jao Theuang himself does not openly proclaim to be such a reincarnation publicly, he does claim to be carrying on the lineage of Khruba Siwichai, and sees himself as the continuator of his tradition.
Like Khruba Siwichai, Khruba Jao Theuang is considered a *ton bun*, or “person of merit.” His disciples stress that he is a “*phra mi barami*” or “monk who embodies *parami*,” a message that is broadcast over the temples loudspeaker system during festivals. *Parami* are the ten qualities or “perfections” that lead to Buddhahood and the attribution of such qualities to Khruba Jao Theuang are indicative of the perception of him as a *bodhisattva* or Buddha-to-be, an ideal that is present within the Theravāda Buddhist tradition, but not as developed as it is in those schools which constitute Mahayana Buddhism.107 Related to these roles, Khruba Jao Theuang is widely believed amongst the Dara’ang of Thailand to be an *arhat* or “enlightened person.”

As with other *ton bun*, Khruba Jao Theuang’s followers say he possesses supernatural powers, including telepathy and clairvoyance. A-Mon explained some of his powers one day while we were descending from the stūpa of Doi Phra Bat, after conducting a ceremony there to commemorate *Makha Bucha* day.

Khruba knows when people die here [in Pang Daeng Nai]. He does! Once, when he came here, A-Saeng went to him to tell him that his wife had passed away, and he already knew! He knows things like that. . . He can also communicate with Khruba Bunchum just by thinking.108 They are connected that way. . . I saw his powers with myself. When we first came up to this mountain, there was no food, and Khruba said turn over some rocks. We

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107. Rhys David writes that, “The Ten Perfections (Paramita) are qualities a Buddha is supposed to be obliged to have acquired in the countless series of his previous rebirths as a Bodhisattva” (1917: 177). They are not prominent in the Theravāda Canon, likely representing a later development, and can be found set down in the Jatakas, the Buddhavamsa, and the Cārīyapiṭaka. They include: (1) perfection in giving (*dana*), (2) morality (*sīla*), (3) renunciation (*nekkhamma*), (4) wisdom (*paññā*), (5) energy (*viriya*), (6) patience (*khanti*), (7) truthfulness (*sacca*), (8) resolution (*adīṭhā*), (9) loving-kindness (*mettā*), (10) equanimity (*upekkhā*).

108. Khruba Bunchum Yanasangwaror (1966-present) is the most popular khruba monk operating in the region. Born in 1966, Khruba Bunchum has a attracted a large following amongst various Tai speaking peoples of Shan State, northwestern Laos, Sipsongpanna, and northern Thailand. His mother was Tai Lue and he has become particularly revered amongst the Tai Lue as a holy man, many of whom consider him the reincarnation of a Tai Lue holy man, Phra Phia Luang Phawong. His construction project and peregrinations take him across the traditional Lan Na world, and photos of him can be seen in temples of Sipsongpanna, Laos, Shan State, as well as Thailand. Previously, Khruba Bunchum resided in Burma, near the village of Ban Pasa only 20 kilometres from Mae Sai, but in recent years he has moved his base of operations into the province of Chiang Rai, Thailand (for a detailed discussion of Khruba Bunchum, see Cohen 2001: 236-239).
did, and there was food underneath. Then he stuck his staff into the ground and water came out for people to drink.

Khruba Jao Theuang took up the position of abbot at Wat Den (temple) on 9 March 1988. He says he was first invited to act as a temporary abbot, but as there was no one to replace him, he decided to stay and has resided at Wat Den ever since, notwithstanding his trips around northern Thailand and abroad. Like other khruba monks, Khruba Jao Theuang travels frequently, and mobility itself appears to be another feature that defines a khruba monk. Khruba Jao Theuang makes frequent trips around the area that was once Lan Na, and occasionally travels to other areas of the Theravada Buddhist world, such as Sri Lanka, India, Burma, Laos, China, and Cambodia. He also makes regular visits to Burma, as he says this country maintains the most authentic form of practice in the Buddhist world. Such travels map out a sacred geography isomorphic with the old kingdom of Lan Na, a religio-political memory that his revivalist movement draws on for its inspiration. This imagined historical community gives the khruba movement a trans-national character, one which imbues it with a transcendence over modern states which have at various times opposed Buddhism in some way (Cohen 2001: 244).

109. While the construction activities of Khruba Siwichai focussed primarily on urban temples, later in his career he increasingly made expeditions to restore temples in more remote areas of northern Thailand. Khruba Khao Pi, the disciple of Khruba Siwichai, is likewise well known for his travels in peripheral areas where he gained a large following among the Karen people (Kwanhewan 1988).

110. In Thailand, this is connected with the conflict between the Tai Yuan Buddhist Sangha and the Siamese Sangha in the early part of the twentieth century. In China and Laos, Buddhism was actively suppressed by a Communist state that was officially atheistic. In Burma, while the government declares itself Buddhist, it frequently moves against the monks, who have been at the forefront of opposition protests against the government.
Khruba and the Dara’ang

It was during such travels that Khruba Jao Theuang first encountered Dara’ang people of Thailand. In 1994, Khruba Jao Theaung was helping restore the wihan (main ceremonial hall) in the nearby village of Ban Thung Luk when he was told by the local Tai Yuan villagers about two Buddha footprints located on the top of the nearby mountain of Doi Phra Bat (“Phra Bat” means footprint in the Thai royal language), a site situated close to the Dara’ang villages of Chiang Dao, only a half kilometre away from Pang Daeng Nai and Pang Daeng Nok (cf. Swearer, Premchit, and Dokbuakaew 2004). Upon visiting the location, he decided to build a stūpa (Pale gong mu; Thai chedi) over top one of the footprints, and it was this project that first attracted the Dara’ang to his movement.

While Khruba Jao Theuang was visiting the site of the Buddha’s footprint, the Dara’ang villagers of Pang Daeng Nai heard that a khruba ton bun was in the area and went to offer their labour for the project. “We heard that a khruba had been working in Ban Thung Luk,” explained A-Tun, “but when we went to the temple he had already

111. The veneration of footprints of the Buddha seems to have begun quite early in the history of the religion and were commonly depicted during the aniconic period of Buddhist art (Strong 2004: 85). While there are many replicas and depictions of the Buddha’s feet in Thailand, including their auspicious signs, there are also hundreds footprints “stamped on mountain-top and river bank” (Damrong 1973: vi). Several Buddhist texts found across Southeast Asia state that the Buddha himself did not leave footprints, or if he did they would be immediately cleared so that no one would unintentionally step on them, so those that are pressed into rocks are highly venerated as they were willed by the Buddha to remain (Bizot 1971: 413). Strong (2004: 88) speculates that this is the reason why the footprints are so much larger than normal sized feet.

112. In Buddhism, stūpas were originally mound shaped structures used to house the remains of the Buddha (hair, teeth, bones) and objects associated with him (begging bowl and robes). Schopen (1997) writes how the “relics were thought to retain - to be infused with, impregnated with - the qualities that animated and defined the living Buddha” (p. 160). Tradition says that following the cremation of the Buddha’s body the remains were divided into eight parts and distributed to the rulers of nearby kingdoms. King Asoka (r. 274-236), after converting to Buddhism, is then said to have dug up these remains and distributed them over a wide area and that the mounds enshrined them took the form of stone or brick. In India stūpas take the form of hemispheres set upon raised basis. In Southeast Asia, there is a range of forms, but the most common design is that of a bell shaped mid-section set upon a raised platform.
gone. Then we heard one day that he was at Doi Phra Bat. So we went to pay our respects.” Several men who met Khruba Jao Theuang at this time report that minor miracles were performed during his visit to the summit, including making his staff stick into solid rock and creating food from the earth to feed the workers (see A-Mon quoted above).

There were other men who came with khruba, Thais who knew how to construct a stūpa. But they were there only for 10 days, and then they left. We were the ones who did the work. We didn’t do it for money. We carried up the cement, mixed it, and built the stairs up the mountain. And we continued to improve the site. My father and I built a set of brick stairs heading up to the stūpa, and a shelter to protect the men from the sun. We haven’t made one for the women yet, but we will. We also built a separate altar for spirits. We keep the site clean, though Tai Yuan from Ban Thung Luk, and even some Karen from Tachilek, come to use it (A-San, Dara’ang man, age 34).

Once the stūpa was nearly complete, Khruba Jao Theuang interred a clipping of his hair within it, infusing the monument with sacred power.\footnote{The veneration of cut hair is symbolic of the transformation of the bodhisatta Siddhatha from a layperson into a monk, the act of cutting his long hair performed upon going forth from his household in order to become a mendicant (Strong 2004: 76). The interring of hair by Khruba Jao Theuang echoes the famous story of hair veneration is that of Tappasu and Bhallika, who were given eight hairs of the Buddha after offering him sweets and taking refuge in the Buddha and the Dhamma. Strong recounts how during the time of the Buddha, stupa would be built to house hair and nail clippings in order to make veneration of the Buddha easier for those who could not travel to see him. “Hair relics and footprints serve...to make the Buddha present where he is not, both during and after his lifetime...They are, or were initially, substitutes for a Buddha who could not physically be present or remain everywhere” (ibid., 95). In one example, King Bimbisāra constructs such a stupa for the women of his harem, while another tale recounts how the monks of Jetavana monastery venerated a hair-and-nail stupa during the period of the Buddha’s meditational retreat (ibid. 72-73). Indeed, the hair relic itself, encased in the stupa of Doi Phra Bat, can also be seen as a substitute for the living khruba arahat or perhaps even boddisattva, but this does not mean that the hair maintains only symbolic properties. As Leach (1958) wrote of hair relics in Buddhism and other religious contexts, these hairs become “divorced from the personality of any particular individual and take on a power of their own in their own right” (p. 158).}

Stūpas were an important part of Dara’ang Buddhist practice in Burma. While attending a funeral observance held in Pang Daeng Nai, A-Chat, a 85 year old Dara’ang man from Pang Daeng Nok, explained that stūpas served as pilgrimage sites:

In Burma, every village has a stūpa (Pali: gong mu), but there are other stūpas that are
really important for Dara’ang, such as the Deun Si Ho Lung. This stūpa was right on the Salween River, and the waves would continually spray it with water, just like when we throw water on the stūpa! The river is making merit [he laughs]. On Deun Si Mon or Deun Si Paeng, [another Dara’ang man interjects, “usually in November”], yes, usually, Dara’ang would come from all over to the stūpa. Their spirit would be called; they would just have to go. I’ve felt it myself. People did not build this stūpa, it came from heaven - the Buddha himself built it. If I wanted to see any friends or relatives then all I would have to do is go to the stūpa then.

The stūpa on Doi Phra Bat has become the site for several annual ceremonies, such as a rain calling ceremony held each year at the close of the dry season, and serves as a site for mini-pilgrimages which are undertaken by men and women from nearby villages who frequently make the trek up the mountain to place offerings of candles, flowers, and puffed rice upon its base. The site fixes Khruba Jao Theaung’s merit upon the local landscape, and stands as a physical expression of the sacred space he and other khruba monks are mapping out across the territory once occupied by the kingdom of Lan Na.

In Pang Daeng Nai, Khruba Jao Theaung acts as an important patron for Buddhism in the village. He has provided complete or partial financial support during the construction of all major temple structures. Temple construction remains a problem for many Dara’ang communities who have migrated to Thailand, as the traditional source of raw materials (the forest) required to construct temples has been cut off by the state through the enclosure of the forest (see Ch. 2). Previously, temple construction depended primarily upon the mobilization of local labour, but now requires large amounts of money in order to buy raw materials (boards, bricks, mortar, and roofing). Poor villages thus face the serious problem of securing the resources necessary to complete their construction projects.

According to temple records, Khruba Jao Theaung contributed 70,000 baht
towards the temple hall currently in use in Pang Daeng Nai and 16,000 baht towards the construction of a new hall built in a style regarded as traditionally Dara’ang. He has also financed the construction of temples and other religious monuments in nearly every Dara’ang village of Thailand, either in terms of their initial construction or during renovations, and has sponsored temple festivals in many of the villages. In Pang Daeng Nai, Khruba Jao Theuang has also provided much of the furnishings for the temple, including the temple's Buddha images, cushions for the monks, pictures of Buddha images used to decorate the walls, fans, trays, candle holders, incense burners, and miscellaneous decorations that make up the main altar. He also opened up his monastery for young Dara’ang boys who would like to ordain as novices; an opportunity that five boys from Pang Daeng Nai embraced in the late 1990s, staying at the temple for five years before disrobing and returning to lay life.

Dara’ang men and women have reciprocated the assistance they have received by donating their labour towards the various construction projects undertaken by Khruba Jao Theuang. Following the construction of the stūpa, Khruba Jao Theuang invited the Dara’ang of Pang Daeng Nai and other villages to help renovate the temple of Wat Den where he was serving as abbot. According to Dara’ang men who worked on the renovations, the temple site was quite run down at the time. “It was full of dogs, everywhere, and the buildings were rotting,” explains A-Ong, a 42 year old Dara’ang man who worked on the renovations. Photos taken by Khruba Jao Theuang during this time show that the temple structures were decrepit with age and the grounds were not well kept. A-Ong again, “We would go to Wat Den during the winter, when there was not much work in the fields. Some people still go, but mostly it is Karen who work on the
temple now.” Trucks sent by Khruba Jao Theuang would pick up workers in the village and transport them to the temple site, where they would be fed and housed while they laboured. Financing for the project came primarily from the Tai donors, including wealthy patrons from Bangkok, while Dara’ang men from Chiang Dao and local Tai Yuan men from Ban Den provided their labour free of charge.

Today, the temple complex of Wat Den has been built up to the point where it has become a tourist attraction for group expeditions out of Chiang Mai city for foreigners and Thai alike (see Plate 7). The once dilapidated wihan has been transformed into a richly ornate building, complete with bas-relief artwork along the outer wall depicting Khruba Jao Theuang as a young monk. Khruba Jao Theuang has also added several large, open air sala (pavilions), a new ubosot (ordination hall), a set of bathrooms to accommodate festival attendees, a large kuti (monastic residence) for visiting monks, a dining room for monks, a new drum tower, a building for storing rice, a new spirit house for the guardian spirit of Den village, and a kuti for himself (complete with a space set up for greeting guests), mostly built with labour provided by Dara’ang and other upland ethnic minority communities. A large wall surrounds the temple grounds and giant stone mythical lions tower over visitors as they arrive. According to figures publicized by the temple in 2002, Khruba Jao Theuang had spent 120,756,256 baht on the temple site alone, and there have been many improvements made since that time (Jitrak n.d.).

The building activities of Khruba Jao Theuang are not limited to the temple of Wat Den. The construction of stūpas in remote areas such as the one where the Dara’ang villages of Chiang Dao are located is not atypical of khruba monks; constructing monuments constitutes an important dimension of the contemporary movement
Since the time of Khruba Siwichai, khruba monks have pushed out from the urban areas, bringing their mission to the margins of northern Thailand and, in the case of Khruba Bunchum, beyond into Burma, Laos, and China. Most of the construction activity focuses on stūpas and temple restoration, but also includes secular projects such as roads and schools. Construction and renovation projects undertaken by Khruba Jao Theuang includes numerous temples and stūpas throughout the provinces of Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Phayao, and Lamphun, as well as several projects in Burma.

**Constructing Buddhist Holy Lands**

The activity of constructing stūpas and temples across the territory of Lan Na represents a mapping out of the sacred space (Kwanchewan 2003a: 265). This mapping serves as a concrete reconstitution of the old Lan Na Buddhist world, actualizing the past kingdom within the present trans-national territory (known popularly known as the Golden Triangle region). Khruba monks play an important role in this process as “cosmocrators” responsible for bringing into existence this buddhadesa or Buddhist holy land (Cohen 2001: 241; Swearer 1981: 54). Within the boundaries of this imagined community they stand as both Buddhas-to-be (Pali: bodhisattva) and sacral kings (Pali: cakkavatti/dhammaraja), two interconnected concepts that were used interchangeably within the old texts of the kingdom of Lan Na (Cohen 2001: 241).114

114. Several scholars have similarly noted the bodhisattva ideal embodied by past and present khruba monks. Tambiah (1984: 306) writes how Khruba Siwichai was seen as “measuring up to the requirements of a bodhisattva,” and that his mission must be seen in part as associated with the millennium expectation of the coming Buddha Metteya. Echoing these words, Cohen (2001: 241) writes how, “The sharing of merit as a religious act highlights the dominant bodhisattva symbolism of the monument building in the modern ton bun movement of Khruba Siwichia.” In regards to other khruba monks, Kwanchewan (1988) writes how Khruba Wong claims “Khruba Khao is a boddhisattava. Many Buddhas in the past had predicted that he would be a Buddha in the future.” (quoted in Kwanchewan 1988: 150) and that the “intellectuals” who
Cohen (2001) discusses the particular dynamics of this re-constituted kingdom in terms of the mission of Khruba Bunchum. He points out that the revivalist sentiments of the movement of Khruba Bunchum and other khruba monks are expressed through a discourse of millenarianism. Yet rather than being apocalyptic in character, the khruba monk movements represent a type of active utopianism. The khruba monk movement has never been violent in practice, but actively resisted the incorporation of the Tai Yuan temples in its early years, and continues to provide an alternative to the practices sponsored by various state Sanghas (Thai, Burmese, Chinese) today. Conceptualized as actively constituting a trans-national Buddhist holy land, the actions of khruba monks construct an alternative to the modern states themselves, all of which (Burma, China, Laos, and Thailand) have been hostile to Lan Na style Buddhism at some point in their history.

Khruba Jao Theuang has constructed Wat Den as the centre of this reconstituted Lan Na Buddhist world. With its elaborate construction projects, the temple of Wat Den has come to resemble a royal temple. Khruba Jao Theuang has even constructed a local mythico-history linking the temple to past kingdoms that were said to occupy the area. The full name of his temple is Wat Den Sari Sri Muang Gaen Daen Singhagutara Nakon. Khruba Jao Theaung says that, “During the time of the Buddha,” the Buddha was born as a lion in the kingdom of Singhagutara Nakon, which stood on the place

propagated the ideology of Khruba Khao Pi used older texts, such as The Legend of Yonok Lok, to “legitimate Khruba’s being not only a ton bun but the Buddha to succeed Ariya Metrai” (Kwanchewan 1988: 151).

115. It is important to note here that other khruba monks likewise construct their own temples in similar ways. The reconstituted Buddhist world of Lan Na is thus multi-centred, just as the kingdom of Lan Na was itself a loose federation of semi-autonomous principalities (see Cohen 2001: 238 for a comparable description of Khruba Bunchum’s temple of Wat Donreuang).

116. A phrase that denotes not only the lifetime of Siddhatha, but his previous lives as well. Akin to “mythological time.”
where Wat Den is situated today. The word “singh” is an Indic term for lion, and statues of stylized and lifelike lions are prominently displayed around the temple grounds.

Khruba Jao Theaung says many years later another city called Gaen Nakon was built on top of the same location, and the Buddha visited this city as well. His visits infuse this location with power, and it is this mythico-history that the current construction of *Phra That Chedi 12 Rasi*, described below, taps into.

Tales such as these, known as *taman* in Thai, connect local geography with the life of the Buddha. They are quite common across the Buddhist world of Southeast Asia where the past presence of the Buddha is marked by signature traces such as a footprint, shadow, or a relic that he is said to have left behind. In the context of the khruba movement, the stories take on an added significance in terms of the potential for the khruba monk to revive the sacred associations embodied in the places themselves, thus actualizing a Buddhist holy land (*buddhadesa*) on earth. While this particular story was not connected with the temple prior to Khruba Jao Theuang's arrival, tapping such connections are common in terms of the construction of stūpa, and it was because of the Buddha footprint situated at the top of Doi Phrabhat that the stūpa nearby the Dara’ang villages of Chiang Dao was constructed.

Perhaps the most prominent sign of this reconstituted, and re-centred, Lan Na Buddhist kingdom is the large stūpa being constructed within the temple grounds, known as the *Phra That Chedi 12 Rasi* (“Stūpa of the 12 Zodiac Signs”). The stūpa itself is more of a collection of reliquaries, each representing one of the 12 stūpas of the old Lan Na world, constructed around one large stūpa. While the pilgrimage practices connected with these shrines are no longer widely known, in the past it was considered meritorious for a
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Animal Year</th>
<th>Stūpa Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rat</td>
<td>Phra That Chom Thong</td>
<td>Chom Thong District, Chiang Mai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ox</td>
<td>Phra That Lampang</td>
<td>Kokha District, Lampang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiger</td>
<td>Phra That Cho Hae</td>
<td>Muang District, Phrae</td>
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<td>Rabbit</td>
<td>Phra That Chae Haeng</td>
<td>Muang District, Nan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dragon</td>
<td>Phrat That Wat Phra Sing</td>
<td>Muang District, Chiang Mai</td>
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<tr>
<td>Snake</td>
<td>Phra Chedi Bodhgaya</td>
<td>Bodh Gaya, India</td>
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<tr>
<td>Horse</td>
<td>Shwe Dagon</td>
<td>Rangoon, Burma</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goat</td>
<td>Phra That Doi Suthep</td>
<td>Muang District, Chiang Mai</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monkey</td>
<td>Phra That Phanom</td>
<td>Nakhon Phanom</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rooster</td>
<td>Phra That Hariphunchai</td>
<td>Muang district, Lamphun</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dog</td>
<td>Phra Ket Kaeo Culamani</td>
<td>Tavatimsa heaven</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elephant</td>
<td>Phra That Doi Tung</td>
<td>Chiang Saen, Chiang Rai</td>
</tr>
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person to make a pilgrimage to the shrine associated with the year of one's birth (Keyes 1975: 72; see table 3).

One reason for constructing the Phra That Chedi 12 Rasi, according to Khruba Jao Theuang, is to compress the old pilgrimage sites into one place (Wat Den) in order to revive the Lan Na Buddhist tradition associated with these dispersed locations. The construction of the Phra That Chedi Sipsong Rasi is connected with Khruba Jao Theuang’s role as cosmocrator and represents a type of axis mundi which marks the navel of this reconstituted sacred geography (Eliade 1964: 168-9, 259-66). The stūpa thus stands as a condensed recreation of the sacred topography of the old Lan Na Buddhist world, one that presents Wat Den as a central location for Lan Na Buddhist
In their work on Christian pilgrimage sites, Turner and Turner (1978: 34-37) describe how the act of pilgrimage is similar to the liminal state a person experiences during a rite of passage. Pilgrimage in various forms play an important role within the khruba monk movement, notably in terms of journeys to places situated across the sacred geography of Lan Na (commonly a temple or stūpa) where the faithful participate in a combination of festive and contemplative activities. The construction of the Phra That Chedi Sipsong Rasi and the attempt to reconstruct old stūpas and temples across the old territory of Lan Na signifies an attempt to recreate the medieval pilgrimage practices associated with Lan Na.

Conceptualizing participation in the khruba monk movement as a liminal experience is useful for understanding the role it plays in shaping understandings of self in Dara’ang communities of northern Thailand. Within the context of the movement there exists a tension filled framing of the Dara’ang people as both a “hill tribe” population and exemplary Buddhists. While events held by khruba monks (building projects, birthdays, stūpa empowerment ceremonies, kathin festivals, etc...) bring together people from different ethnic and class backgrounds into settings of revelry and conviviality, such

117. On the importance of pilgrimage for creating inclusive communities across a diverse geographical and social landscape, Turner (1973) writes, “Where ... in the complex large-scale societies and historical religions are we to look for the topography of the inclusive, disinterested, and altruistic domain? The short answer ... is in their system of pilgrim centers.” (p. 206). Keyes (1975) likewise notes that the twelve shrines functioned to incorporate people into successively larger moral communities radiating out from the political and cultural centre of the Ping river valley to the entire Buddhist world (pp. 85-85).

118. Turner and Turner (1978: 18-19) identify four types of pilgrimages in the Christian world: prototypical, archaic, medieval, and modern. Medieval pilgrimages are those that originated in the European Middle Ages. While the term “medieval” refers specifically European history, the terminology of Turner and Turner’s typology is nevertheless useful for highlighting the fact that pilgrimage activities associated with the khruba monk movement are rooted in a past that is temporally congruent with the high middle ages of Europe and shares many of its structural features such as the existence of a nobility, an economy based on agriculture, and a monarchical form of government.
events are not marked by the condition of *communitas* noted by Turner and Turner (1978: 13,171) for Christian pilgrimage sites where distinctions of class and status are suspended. While the coming together of different groups may serve to construct a shared sense of community based upon a recollected historical connection with the kingdom and culture of Lan Na, the reconstitution of this historical relationship between Tai Yuan and ethnic minority groups is not one of equality. Nevertheless, as I will show in chapter 7, the liminal aspects of the ceremony, particularly the potentiality of the liminal state, where liminality is understood not only as a transition but also a case of “what may be” (Turner and Turner 1973: 3), is significant for understanding the effects that participation has on the formation of new Dara’ang subjectivities within the rapidly changing socio-cultural environment of northern Thailand.¹¹⁹

**Festive Spaces**

Every year, Dara’ang communities from across Chiang Mai province attend annual festivals at Wat Den. There are two major annual festivals. The largest by far is Khruba Jao Theuang’s birthday celebration, which takes place on a weekend close to February 20th, his actual date of birth. A smaller festival, though nevertheless quite popular, is the annual *khatin* festival, which held just after the close of the annual rain retreat. The *khatin* was traditionally a time when monks in Thailand would be presented with new robes, but the event has grown over time to become major temple fundraising events that includes the donation of all sorts of offerings, including household goods, bags, books, and money.

¹¹⁹. While pilgrimages are an important aspect of Buddhist practice, they are not an obligation. As Gombrich (1988: 90) points out, there is in fact no Buddhist word for “pilgrimage.”
The birthday celebration is by far the largest event held at the temple and attracts Dara’ang attendees from as far away as Shan State, as well as many Tai and Karen devotees from across the region. The presence of other khruba monks at these events, such as Khruba Bunchum Yanasangwaror, help draw many others to the temple and contributes to legitimating the position of individual khruba monks by situating them within a network of monks, all of whom trace their traditions back to Khruba Siwichai.

Given the scale of these large festivals, Khruba Jao Theuang frequently requests assistance from Dara’ang communities before, during, and after these events. In 2008, I travelled with a group of 15 Dara’ang men and women to Wat Den on February 15th by pick-up truck, which was sent from Wat Den by Khruba Jao Theaung, to observe the preparations for the annual birthday celebration. The official start of the festival was February 17th, but there was a lot of work to be done before the hordes of visitors arrived.

Upon arriving at the temple site, the younger men were asked to assist with the construction of stages and sound equipment, while the older men and women were requested to help clean up the grounds. I broke away from the group in order to find Khruba Jao Theaung, hoping to ask him some questions before the festival became too busy, but found that he was already receiving guests from Bangkok, including a Thai army official who was donating a large stone Buddha to the temple, along with a cash donation of 150,000 baht.

Monks such as Khruba Jao Theuang, renowned spiritual men who live outside the urban areas, attract wealthy city patrons who hope to make merit with monks they see as embodying a more authentic form of religious practice. There is a growing sentiment in Thailand that Buddhism in the cities has become decadent and corrupt, and that authentic
practice must be sought outside of these centres of wealth and power (Jackson 1997: 80). The search for moral purity, particularly in ascetic practices that are linked with magic or supernatural powers, takes urban religious seekers to more remote areas of Thailand, to the periphery of the state where Buddhism is considered purer from the defilements of the centre. As Jackson (1997: 82) points out, the loss of authority by the central Sangha (a condition brought about by numerous scandals involving money and sex), has created conditions for a free-market of spirituality, wherein charismatic monks like Khruba Jao Theuang can amass large numbers of followers and money by situating themselves at peripheral points and propagating a message of religious reform mixed with a heavy dose of magic (Thai: *saiyasat*).

This year, Khruba Jao Theaung is receiving his visitors in a newly constructed open-air sala, a large covered space, approximately 50 meters long and 10 meters wide. I wait patiently for my turn as several smaller parties present their offerings to Khruba and receive his blessing. He is seated at one end of the hall on a raised platform, and I approach the chair respectfully and present my offerings. “Ah, the Palaung farang,” Khruba jokes. “You’ve come early. Where are you staying?” I explain that I came early to observe the temple preparations, and that I was staying in a nearby hotel. I ask him about the festival plans, and if Khruba Bunchum will be attending. “Yes, tomorrow evening. He will come and stay here one night. Have you met him before?” I explain that I have not, but have read about him in an article written by another anthropologist. “We are very close, here, I have something for you.” Khruba Jao Theaung hands me an amulet that depicts himself and Khruba Jao Theaung together. I thank him and prostrate myself.

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120. *Farang* is a Thai term for “foreigner.”
three times before his seat before allowing other visitors to move forward. There is little
time for lengthy interviews during festival time.

As I leave the sala, I head over to check out what is perhaps the most striking
feature of the festival – the very large money trees that Khruba Jao Theuang is known to
erect for his birthday celebration and the temple’s kahtin festival (Plate 8). These trees
consist of large pillars standing approximately six metres high, with thousands of baht
worth of bank notes attached to wooden sticks forming leafy branches all along the
central shaft. In 2008, a large boat was constructed on the temple grounds carrying
twenty of these “trees of silver and gold,” but I have seen them on other occasions set-up
like a forest that visitors could meander through. The practice apparently began in 1988
shortly after Khruba Jao Theuang became abbot of Wat Den (Thai News 2006).

After taking some photos of the money trees, I walk down towards the front gate
of the temple to check out the shops that are erected. People come from all over to peddle
goods and entertainment outside the temple walls. Snack food, makeshift bars selling
liquor and beer, carnival rides, clothing, and household goods crowd the streets. This year
there seems to be many more venders than usual selling Shan products, such as food and
clothing. “The border is easier to cross now,” a vendor from Shan State explains.

Ethnic diversity is a distinctive feature of khruba monk movements, but the
multicultural dynamics are by no means simple. Some, like the Karen, have been long
time followers of khruba monks, passing on their allegiance from generation to
generation. Tai Yuan followers recognize their own history within the movement, which
harkens back to a time when they were not only the dominant ethnic group of northern
Thailand, but also much of the surrounding region. Some khruba monks are themselves
from mixed ethnic backgrounds, such as Tai Lü, Burmese, and Karen, can speak the language of ethnic minorities, and attract followers from these communities. Each group is situated within the movement in a particular manner and takes away similar but distinct messages from the various khruba monks.

There are no historical records concerning the involvement of past Dara’ang communities with khruba *ton bun*. Khruba monks did exist as part of the Theravāda Buddhist world of Shan State, as did *ton bun* in general, but they were embedded in a very different social context than contemporary khruba monks. As such, they were not engaged in a revivalist project and did not look to Khruba Siwichai, a Tai Yuan anti-Thai nationalist hero, as a model for their actions. Nor were the Dara’ang people seeking to revitalize their own cultural traditions, as the communities remained relatively intact despite the intermittent fighting that affected most of Shan State. Their involvement in the movement should therefore be understood primarily within the cultural, social, and political context of contemporary northern Thailand, and the recent history of civil war in neighbouring Shan State.

On February 16th the temple grounds became a hive of activity as people streamed in from all over northern Thailand, and even Shan State. In the early morning I encountered a group of Dara’ang who had travelled all the way from northern Shan State, their pom-pom hats and thick black and red bands on their skirts marking them as distinct from the Dara’ang of Thailand. “Three days travel,” they explained to me in a dialect of Pale somewhat different from that spoken in Chiang Dao; we were not able to communicate well enough for me to understand the details of their trip.

In the afternoon, the Dara’ang communities of Thailand began arriving in trucks.
Some came in the back of pick-ups, others, such as a large group from No Lae, arrived in the back of cattle trucks, with dozens of men and women packed tightly together, banners fluttering in the wind. The Dara’ang set up camp in one of the open-air salas. Most festival attendees stay in nearby hotels, but few Dara’ang can afford the cost of such rooms. They are therefore granted permission to stay in the open-air salas, or set up bedrolls along the back wall of the temple, along with other ethnic minorities, such as Karen from around Om Koi, and a few Akha from nearby villages.

Throughout the day, festival attendees busied themselves with shopping, watching stage shows, listening to Tai Yuan musicians, enjoying carnival rides, and eating free food. While men drank lao khao (strong rice liquor) at makeshift bars located just outside the temple walls, most Dara’ang women helped out cleaning plates for the communal kitchen, quite a large task as the temple provides free meals for everyone who wishes throughout the festival. Khruba Jao Theaung continued to receive visitors in his sala all day, but there are no major ceremonies until the evening.

At around 7PM, the atmosphere of the temple grounds changed dramatically as a motorcade carrying Khruba Bunchum arrived at the temple gates. Men and women rushed from all over to greet him as he made his way up the naga lined steps to the wihan (main image hall) of Wat Den. A party of Dara’ang men went to fetch Khruba Jao Theaung, whom they carried across the temple grounds on an elaborate palanquin to the wihan, where he and Khruba Bunchum paid their respects to the Buddha. Both monks were then carried, on separate palanquins, back across the temple grounds to the sala, where they were seated upon the raised dais, and quickly surrounded by hundreds of attendees. The two khruba monks greeted the crowd, and explained that the purpose of
the festival was to raise money for the construction and restoration projects both men were involved in. They then retired to the kuti (monastic residence) of Khruba Jao Theuang, again carried on their palanquins by Dara’ang men, to the accompaniment of drums and gongs. Once the two khruba monks had retired, most of the festival goers likewise headed to sleep.

Morning broke early. Some older Dara’ang men and women stayed up all night, listening to scriptures that were read over loudspeakers in the sala. At dawn, festival attendees lined a route that stretched around the temple grounds, from the kuti to the sala where the principal ceremony of the festival would take place. At approximately 6 AM, the two khruba monks emerge from their kuti. After situating themselves on their palanquins, a group of men, including a few Dara’ang from Pang Daeng Nai, hoisted the monks upon their shoulders, and started down the red-carpeted route to the sala. The crowd was quite large, and helmeted police officers pushed back devotees who threatened to block the monks’ progress. Dancing Tai Yuan girls followed behind, accompanied by drum and gong beats. From their palanquins, the khrubas threw money and sweets into the air, and people fell over each other in their attempt to catch the 20, 50, and 100 baht bills that floated down upon the crowd.

Upon reaching the sala, the two khruba monks once again installed themselves upon the raised dais. They then unwrapped the bundle of threads that hung down from a pyramidal structure, constructed from four decorated posts that had been built over the dais. The bundle of threads branched off from the top of the pyramid into a grid, which crisscrossed over the heads of the devotees. From this web, smaller packets of threads

121. Monks are prohibited from accepting or using money according to the Vinaya (monastic rules). In practice, the large majority of monks in Southeast Asia regularly accept cash donations and handle money.
hung down. This practice is identical to the one described in chapter 3; as the two monks began to chant, the crowd unwrapped the packets of thread and either held the loose end in their hand, or tied it around their head. This way, the merit that is generated through the monks chanting will be transferred through the threads sympathetically to those holding the strings. These threads maintain their power and are collected after the ceremony by the laity, who tie them around their wrists and bring them home to tie around the wrists of others. Once finished chanting, Khruba Jao Theaung blessed the crowd, and then invited those who wished to give offerings to come forward.

From the structure of the ceremony, and indeed the entire festival, a particular hierarchy of ethnicity can be delineated. As Leach (1964: 11) points out, rituals typically serve as a mean for expressing the status of people within a structural system. Not only do they make visible the implicit hierarchies of everyday life, holding them up in a crystallized form for both participants and observers, they remind participants of their social positions through manipulating their bodies into particular spatial configurations, imparting a subjective experience upon those individuals who participate (Connerton 1989: 88). In the Theravāda Buddhist rites of Southeast Asia, social ordering commonly takes the form of spatial proximity, positioning according to cardinal directions, left versus right, and relative height (high versus low). In chapter 4 I examined how these spatial arrangements operate within Dara’ang Buddhism, particularly how space differentiates the social positions of men and women within Dara’ang Buddhist temples according to a relative hierarchy of the sexes. Scholars of Theravāda Buddhism in Southeast Asia frequently note this sex based spatial ordering expressed through spatiality (Du 2007: 137; Moerman 1966: 141-144; Sparkes 2005: 142). The literature is
generally silent, however, when it comes to the way ethnic hierarchies are similarly expressed through spatial and temporal structuring at temple events that include participants from a diverse range of ethnic backgrounds.122

Throughout the ceremony, the khruba monks are situated higher than the laity, denoting their higher status, both as monks and as ton bun. But the seating arrangement of people in the congregation likewise signals social differentiation. As Tannenbaum (1995) writes of Shan temples and homes, “‘Inner’ [closer] has some of the same connotations as ‘higher’” (p. 63). The seating arrangements thus reveal aspects of the spatio-hierarchizing of ethnicity within the ritual context of the movement. To the right of Khruba Jao Theuang’s chair, and closest to him, was a section cordoned off for visiting officials and guests from Chiang Mai and Lamphun, who sat upon chairs, elevated above the rest of the crowd. Directly to the left of the chair was another large reserved area, this one reserved for wealthy donors who had come from Bangkok. Directly in front of the chair was an unreserved space primarily occupied by men from ethnic Tai groups (Tai Yuan, Tai Yai, and Central Thai) and behind them a space occupied by Tai speaking women. Finally, behind the Tai women, and furthest away from the seat of Khruba Jao Theuang, sat the Karen and Dara’ang followers.

In addition to their location during the ceremony, the position of various groups also reflected the order in which people were permitted to give their donations to Khruba Jao Theuang. The first to give donations were wealthy Tai and government officials,

122. The common assumption for many people is that the Buddha himself was opposed to the caste system of India. There is little evidence for this fact, although monks and nuns could come from any caste. In terms of the laity, the discourses of the Buddha do not go beyond mentioning that brahmin status is accomplished by deeds. As Gombrich says, “caste is accepted as a fact of life on par with other forms of status; to be reborn in a low and unimportant family is the result of demerit in this life, typically of failing to respect those of superior status” (1971: 305). This point is interesting given the fact that the Thai word for “ethnic group” or race (chat) comes from the Sanskrit word for caste (jāti).
followed by Tai Yai and other Tai donors, some of whom gave donations as individuals and others as village units. Tai village parties that arrived later were moved to the front of the large group by temple officials, and were permitted to give their money tree and receive their blessing before any of the Karen, Dara’ang, or the small group of Akha. Once all the Tai groups and individuals had given their donations and received a blessing, temple officials permitted the non-Tai ethnic minority groups to come forward. In this case, rather then accepting the money trees one village at time, Khruba Jao Theuang invited all the Karen people to place their donations together and blessed them all at once. He then did the same for the Dara’ang people. This undifferentiated treatment of village donations according to ethnic group was partly due to time constraints - the ceremony had been going on many hours - yet also highlights the differential treatment and positioning, expressed through their respective spatial and temporal locations, that ethnic minority groups experience within the movement.

While Kwanchewan (2003b: 276) writes about the utopian feeling of ethnic harmony that accompanied the construction activities of Khruba Khao Pi, the khruba monk movement does not result in a dismantling of ethnic differentiation or its accompanying hierarchies. In fact, several Tai Yuan men and women who attended the festival expressed their reservations to me about “chao khao” being involved, because “their Buddhism is not real Buddhism,” that their practice was a “satsana phut chao khao” (“hill tribe Buddhism”). Nevertheless, a diversity of ethnic identity is celebrated within his movement, and that of other khruba monks, but the entrance of upland ethnic groups into the movement takes place within a space opened up by the historical configuration of upland-lowland relations, particularly those existing during the time of
Khruba Swichai who serves a prototypical model for contemporary khruba monk movements. Khruba Siwichai was well known for his ability to attract Karen people who aided in the construction of various projects, including the road up Doi Sutep (mountain). Khruba Jao Theuang clearly identifies with this aspect of Khruba Siwichai’s life, and every year around Visakha Bucha day (usually late May) he makes a mimetic journey, accompanied by hundreds of Dara’ang and Karen followers dressed in their traditional outfits, up the road to the summit where the famous stūpa is located. The act itself is a commemorative ceremony in which the Dara’ang play the performative role of an upland non-Tai ethnic group, even though no Dara’ang helped with the construction of Doi Sutep or even resided in northern Thailand during the life of Khruba Siwichai (Connerton 1989: 47-71; Durkheim 2001 [orig. 1912]: 282).123

Funeral Rites

This supporting role can be seen quite clearly within the context of a funeral ceremony I witnessed at Wat Den on 10 May 2007. When a disciple of Khruba Jao Theuang passed away, Khruba Jao Theuang requested that Dara’ang men and women from Pang Daeng Nai, Pang Daeng Nok, and Mae Chon attend the ceremony, and sent two pick-up trucks to the village to transport them to Wat Den. The Dara’ang who made the journey had never met the deceased and their role in the proceedings was limited to their presence alone. They arrived at the home of the deceased and were welcomed over

123 It is interesting to note that the Dara’ang/Palaung are commonly presented as “Karen” on postcards, tourist brochures, and signs advertising “hill tribe treks” within Chiang Mai city. This is largely due to similarities in clothing worn by Dara’ang and Karen women. As Dara’ang refugees crossed the border in the 1970s and 1980s, police frequently listed their “tribe”/pao as “Karen,” as there was no bureaucratic ethnic category for “Palaung” or “Dara’ang” in Thailand at the time.
the loudspeakers by a man who announced the arrival of the “Palaung Daeng” (Red Palaung). They were given food and pickled tea, and then invited to take part in the procession to the cremation grounds. As the procession wound its way through the streets to the cremation site located at the back of the temple I asked several Dara’ang men and women about the practice. “We don’t know the man,” they explained. “We come because khruba asks us to.” As soon as the pyre was lit, the Dara’ang dispersed and headed for home.

This practice represents an old Tai Yuan tradition where members of the perceived autochthonous population (the Lua’ who occupied the land prior to the Tai Yuan) are invited to household events because their presence is considered auspicious (Hutchinson 1937: 169; Turton 2000: 25). Their auspicious status is tied to their perceived connection with ancestral spirits of the land. While they do not claim an autochthonous status, Dara’ang identity is framed within Thailand in general, and the khruba monk movement in particular, as a tribal people, and thus can fill the role once occupied by the Lua’ who have, by and large, assimilated into the cultural and social milieu of northern Thailand.

These models, that of a supporting cast for khruba monks who emulate the practice of Khruba Siwichai and Khruba Khao Pi, and the role of an indigenous people who lend an auspiciousness to family ceremonies, strain, however, when confronted with a strong Lan Na style Theravāda Buddhist tradition as is found amongst the Dara’ang. Their strict adherence to the very tradition the khruba monk movement is attempting to revive has created an unusual role for the Dara’ang within the movement as exemplary Buddhists, one which influences the way many villagers conceptualize their own
relationship to the dominant Tai Yuan population and the land upon which they live.

**Exemplary Buddhists**

While the Dara’ang are typically framed as a tribal people, the group enjoys a unique position within the movement not shared by other upland ethnic minority groups - that of exemplary Buddhists. According to Khruba Jao Theuang, Dara’ang Buddhist practice is that of the old style of Lan Na Buddhism, both in terms of its rituals and the pronunciation of Pāli chanting that accompanies them.

Buddhism in Pang Daeng Nai is done correctly. Much of this is because of A-Tun, and I do not know what will happen once he is gone. Kids today, they have motorcycles and their parents do not know where they are going . . . But I encourage them to keep their Buddhist practise, not to change them, even when Thai monks tell them to. (Khruba Jao Theuang, pers. comm.)

Khruba expressed to me on several occasions that Dara’ang Buddhism is similar to the style he is attempting to revive, but his praise for Dara’ang Buddhism is not limited to private conversations or interviews. At the kathin festival held at Wat Den on 17 November 2007, Khruba Jao Theuang explained to the crowd of attendees that “the Burmese way of pronouncing Pāli is more correct then that found in Thailand,” that it is “similar to the old Lan Na style,” and that “the Dara’ang pronounce their Pāli properly, unlike most Thai monks.” On this occasion, Khruba Jao Theuang had invited a number of monks from all over Chiang Mai to chant at the ceremony. The abbot of Pang Daeng Nai and No Lae were also invited to attend. Kathin is traditionally the time when villagers present monks with new robes, but at Wat Den the event has also become an occasion when Khruba Jao Theuang presents visiting monks with offerings that were donated to
the temple. As Khruba Jao Theuang prefers to conduct rituals in the old Lan Na style, he asks visiting monks to chant Pāli accordingly. The majority of monks present, including many Tai Yuan monks, required special instruction on how to chant in old Lan Na or Burmese style, and had to use texts written in the Central Thai script; the Dara’ang monks already pronounced Pāli in this particular fashion and could use texts written in the old Dhamma script of Lan Na.

Khruba Jao Theuang frequently chides the Tai Yuan people for abandoning the old Lan Na style Buddhist traditions and not being serious about their Buddhist practices. He also encourages the Tai Yuan people to respect the Dara’ang as fellow Buddhists who are “unlike most hill tribes” and “more like Thai” because of their strict adherence to the Buddhist religion. As the Dara’ang already conduct their practice in the Lan Na style of Buddhism, Khruba Jao Theuang urges the Dara’ang people not to give in to pressure to alter their practices. This position places him in opposition to the assimilative practices of state sponsored Buddhist monks. Because the Dara’ang are framed as a “hill tribe” minority, monks from the Thammajariik program (see chapter 5) and other sectors of the monastic community (students, social worker monks) frequently visit and live within Dara’ang villages with the intention of instructing them on “proper” Buddhist practice. These practices are invariably of the Central Thai variety of Buddhism promoted by the national Thai Sangha, which is in charge of educating those monks who participate in such programs. Dara’ang novices who ordain in temples in and around Chiang Mai city likewise learn to conduct rites in the Central Thai style, and this occasionally leads to tension when a younger novice or monk returns to the village and attempts to correct his elders. While it is difficult to ascertain what impact this message has on the community in
terms of maintaining their traditions (i.e. whether or not the community would be more receptive to change without the presence of Khruba Jao Theuang), the authority of Khruba Jao Theuang legitimates the resistance, and members of the community commonly cite his support for Dara’ang forms of Buddhist practice as being more authentic than those observed in lowland temples. “People come here and tell us to do this and that, but Khruba says not to change our practice. He says our way is the old way, the way closer to that of the Buddha,” A-tun once explained, commenting on a Tai Yuan social worker/monk who resided in Pang Daeng Nai for several weeks and encouraged the village to conduct rituals according to Bangkok standards.

**Marginal Charisma**

While certain groups make up a greater proportion of particular movements, Khruba monks do not appear to draw followers from groups with particular ethnic backgrounds to the exclusion of others. Some of their followers are quite wealthy, but the majority of people who make up the movement come from groups who are marginalized within Thailand. Groups such as the Karen and the Dara’ang have undergone social dislocation, either during the time of Khruba Siwichai (as was the case with many Karen communities) or more recently as civil war has engulfed Shan State (as is the case for the Dara’ang people, as well as the Shan). What they share is an experience of dislocation as the old feudal structure of the area shifted through feudalism and colonialism towards the model of the modern capitalist nation-state (see chapter 2 for discussion on the history and social conditions of Dara’ang people in Thailand).

Renard (1980: 210) argues that the historical participation of the Karen in the
movement of Khruba Khao Pi (the disciple of Khruba Siwichai who was well known for his activities amongst the Karen) was the result of a rupture in their relationship with the old royalty of Chiang Mai as it was incorporated into the Thai dominated state of Siam. The reforms imposed upon the northern principality led to devaluation in the price of their forest products as new imports flooded into the region, depressing the living conditions of the Karen and leading them to seek relief in the khruba monk movement. This argument is in line with Wallace’s (2003: 12), who observes that revitalization movements (a category that includes both millennialism and revivalism) generally occur in societies experiencing rapid social change accompanied by deteriorating social conditions resulting in increased stress (see also Corlin 2000; Hinton 1979: 91). Cohn (2004) similarly notes in his study of European millennialism that messiahs of divine/man like quality flourish not amongst the poor, but the poor “whose traditional way of life has broken down” (p. 52).

Such theories appear to hold for the Dara’ang of Thailand. Dara’ang men and women first encountered Khruba Jao Theuang shortly after the men of Pang Daeng Nai and surrounding villages were released from prison where they spent three and a half years on charges of forestry encroachment (see Ch. 2). The arrests placed a great deal of pressure on the village which extended past the time of their release, as much of the land that the village had been using for farming had been appropriated by the Royal Forestry Department (RFD) to be used as teak plantations. Furthermore, the community of Pang Daeng Nai and most other Dara’ang villages in Thailand have never been able to establish a secure village within Thailand due to their lack of citizenship and land rights. Social dislocation is also the experience of Dara’ang people living in southern and
eastern Shan State, most of whom have also been forced to abandon their villages in the face of violence and relocate closer to the relative safety of urban centres. Those groups who have resettled in Thailand face the added pressure of being separated from the majority of the Dara’ang population; with only 5,000 individuals, they represent one of the smallest ethnic minority groups in the country.

The revivalist message of Khruba Jao Theuang did not resonate with the so-called “animistic” practices of the Dara’ang (such practices are widely found across the entire ethnic spectrum of Southeast Asia), but the revivalist message of Khruba Jao Theuang did resonate with a local impetus to revitalize Dara’ang culture as a whole in the face of rapidly changing social conditions and repeated set-backs in terms of establishing a stable place within Thailand. According to Wallace (2003: 22), revitalization movements such as these emerge when a group attempts to re-construct their culture rapidly in the face of severe social pressures. From this perspective, the charisma of the khruba monks is not inherent in the property of their person (as is sometimes suggested when people speak of their “supernatural powers” which attract people to their side), but is located in characteristics that find them “socially predisposed” to express the political, social, and cultural needs of those who become their followers (Bourdieu 1991: 35). This point needs to be emphasized, as scholarship pertaining to religious figures like the khruba monks continues to have a tendency to interpret Weber’s notion of charisma as a property of a person rather than of his or her followers. Thus, Weber (1963: 47) writes of how “the prophet, like the magician, exerts his power simply by virtue of his personal gift.” But as

124. Keyes argues that a “superficial understanding of Buddhism” amongst the Karen was largely responsible for their attraction to Khru Ba Khao Pi (Keyes 1971: 565). Cohen similarly echoes this view, writing that “[Karen] knowledge of Buddhism and Buddhist doctrine was limited and their devotion appears to have been more skewed towards animistic beliefs in Khruba Khao Pi’s personal charismatic powers” (Cohen 2001: 232).
Mauss notes,

scarities, wars, arouse prophets, heresies; violent contacts broach even the
distribution of the population, the nature of the population, crossbreedings of
entire societies (as is the case with colonization) necessarily and precisely cause
new ideas and new traditions to rise . . . One must not confuse these collective,
organic causes with the action of individuals who are the interpreters more than
the masters of them. Constancy and routine can be the making of individuals,
innovation and revolution can be the work of groups, subgroups, sects,
individuals acting by and for groups (quoted in Bourdieu 1991: 34-35).

It is less a matter of extraordinary men and women than of extraordinary situations which
make some people predisposed, due to crisis and cultural frameworks, to become
“followers” of such figures. That such a relationship may result in an exploitative
relationship strengthens this point insofar as it highlights the fact that many charismatic
figures are by no means “extraordinary” in their moral concern for their followers.

From the standpoint of the Dara’ang participants, what is revitalized is not Lan Na
Buddhism or Tai Yuan Buddhism per se (understood as closely connected with a past
rooted in Tai Yuan political and cultural supremacy), but the traditions of the Dara’ang
community. The support of local cultural traditions under threat represents an important
feature of the khruba monk movement's popularity amongst upland non-Tai ethnic
groups. Scholars have similarly noted the permissive attitude khruba monks express
regarding the maintaining of indigenous traditions amongst the Karen (Kwanchewan
1988: 118; Yoko 2004: 242). Rather than recognizing a utopianism based on common
shared traditions, the Lan Na style of Buddhism propagated by Khruba Jao Theuang is
recognized by his Dara’ang followers as being at odds with the type of Buddhist practices
which are found in many ethnic Tai settlements of Thailand; a realization that marks off
the Dara’ang Buddhist community from the lowland Central Thai, as well as the Tai
Yuan who have shifted away from Lan Na style Buddhist practice. As we shall see in the
chapter 7, instead of serving as a vehicle of assimilation, Buddhism in this case serves as
a mode for differentiating the Dara’ang from their lowland neighbours, a perception that
draws upon the discourse of the khruba monk movement in its articulation.

Cultural Memory

Memory requires a place if it is to live beyond a single generation (Kenny 1999:
421). In this chapter I have presented the khruba monk movement as a place where the
memory of Lan Na Buddhism as a more authentic and distinct form of Buddhism resides;
this memory is embodied by khruba monks who reconstruct the ceremonies of the past
within the present. This ritual embodiment is akin to Connerton (1989: 46) and
Durkheim’s (2001: 282) commemorative ceremonies, as it binds the group (Tai Yuan and
other people of Lan Na) together by reminding them of their shared collective past. This
history is sustained through the bodily practices of those who participate in the festivals,
in the ritual re-enactments of Khruba Siwichai’s ascent up Doi Sutep, and in the
landscape of Lan Na itself, dispersed over the old geo-body of the kingdom in the form of
the twelve stūpas, and condensed within the confines of the temple of Wat Den as the
Phra That Chedi Sip-Song Rasi.

The meaning of the past, however, is not fixed or universal. The particular
position of “tribal” people within the movement is one that reconstructs the old ritual
relationship between the Tai Yuan people and the non-Tai ethnic minorities. This is
particularly evident within the funeral ceremony where Dara’ang people play the role of
auspicious guest, but is also evident in the supporting role Dara’ang and other groups
play for khruba monks in general, one which legitimates the monks claims to parami or charisma through their ability to attract upland (non-Buddhist) people to their side. This particular meaning is not, however, one that my Dara’ang informants ever expressed. From the perspective of the Dara’ang, their historical relationship with Tai peoples is not one of a supporting cast within rituals, but one of participating within a shared religious field of Buddhism. Their attendance at the funeral and other ceremonies is interpreted largely in terms of an obligation or repayment of services for the support khruba monks have provided the communities. When asked why their presence was requested at the funeral for one of Khruba Jao Theuang’s disciples (described above), A-Lap, a 38 year old Dara’ang man, explained,

“This is not the first time we were invited. I’ve been to two funerals here, and other people have been to more.”

“But you don’t know these disciples?,” I ask.

“No, we come because khruba asks us to. Because he gives us so much, we come to help him out.”

The fact that Dara’ang communities participate in events held by Khruba Jao Theuang because they feel they have an obligation to repay him does not mean that people do not wish to participate in temple events (although this is the case for funerals, which few people enjoy). Festivals draw large numbers of eager attendees, and khruba monks are believed to embody large stores of merit which they can share with those who “make merit” with them, a belief shared by Dara’ang and Tai Yuan followers.

Nevertheless, the particular message of the khruba monks that speaks to the cultural revival of the Lan Na Buddhist world resonates differently with the Dara’ang than it does with the Tai Yuan. For the Tai Yuan, the revival of Lan Na or Tai Yuan...
Buddhism refers back to a time when they, as an ethnic group, dominated the region politically and culturally. It is their history in the ethno-national sense of the term, connected with the historical incorporation of Lan Na by Bangkok during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. For the Dara’ang, the revivalist movement lacks this historical identification with a kingdom recognized as belonging to the group’s past. Rarely did my informants speak of their practices as Lan Na Buddhism. Rather, they spoke about their religion simply as Buddhist (sasana phut) or, when drawing a distinction between their practices and those of the lowland Tai, Dara’ang Buddhism. In conversations about the history of Dara’ang Buddhism, A-Mon, A-Tun, A-Pong, and others, would typically speak about the historical transmission of their practice through the Tai Khün people. What was important was not the historical links with the kingdom of Lan Na, but the recognition that the religious practices of the Dara’ang were authentic, or more authentic than that of the Central Thai. This perspective runs throughout the fabric of the khruba monk movement, stretching back to its origins as a resistance against the takeover of the northern temples by the Siamese Buddhist Sangha.125 As we shall see in the next chapter, this heightened authenticity of religious practice is significant in terms of the way critical discourses that challenge the subaltern status of Dara’ang people within the ethnic hierarchy of contemporary Thailand are constructed.

In addition to embodied history and stories, such forms of remembrance can be located within cultural contact zones where embodied practices become interpreted differently within particular discursive contexts. In such cases new subjectivities may be formed through a process of appropriation, whereby the meaning of the past is taken and

125. Kwanchewan (1988: 135) describes a booklet written by Khruba Khao Pi entitled The Two Religious Classifications (1951), in which Khruba Khao Pi refers to the Buddhism of Lamphun-Chiang Mai as authentic, and the Buddhism of the Siamese as “Burmese Christianity,” a counterfeit religion.
put to use in quite different ways than the original presenter may have intended (de Certeau 1984: xiii). Social actors may remake their present identity in reference to the past, but they do so in a way that is somewhat different than the involuntary incorporation proposed by Connerton and Bourdieu (Tanabe and Keyes 2005: 23). Embodied history and discursive identification are related in a dialectical fashion; the discursive negotiation of identity takes place in reference to the materiality of embodied history. In the next chapter we turn to an examination of this dialectic.
Chapter 7

Buddhism of Distinction

Buddhism as both a force for “developing” and integrating the non-Tai other remains part of the dominant discourse of Thailand, and continues to serve as the impetus behind official programs such as the Thammajarik project and the activities of social worker monks who operate in the uplands of northern Thailand (see Ch. 5). Nevertheless, while individuals and entire communities can and do become Tai (and vice-versa, as the kreu of Siam Hrai indicates in the case of Dara’ang people, see Ch. 2), the degree to which conversion to Buddhism and the adoption of Buddhist symbolism by non-Tai upland signals a shift in ethnic identity is frequently overemphasized.

Such a situation is not surprising, particularly given anthropology’s understanding of ethnic identity as rooted within structural oppositions between groups, a view famously professed by Leach (1964) in his classic Political Systems of Highland Burma. While Leach (1964: 30) identified the Palaung as an exception to the rule that no “Hill People” are Buddhist, many non-Tai ethnic communities have adopted Buddhism or aspects of Buddhism and show few signs of shedding their distinct group identity, at least not in any way that suggests Buddhism to be the cause (Hayami 2004; Keyes 1979; Kwancheon 2003; Platz 2003; Walker 1984, 1985). In fact, Keyes (1979: 22) notes that in the case of the Karen, Buddhism adapts itself to the local conditions, and while it remains institutionally connected with the national Sangha (generally required of Theravāda Buddhist monks within Thailand), it has nevertheless become absorbed into the ethnic community in question, becoming a component of the particular ethnic identity.
set. Also writing of the Karen, Hayami (1996) notes that Karen villagers were “well aware of the fact that Buddhism is the religion of the Thai,” but “because of historical differences in their relationship to Buddhism, they did not consider that the adoption of Buddhist practices in itself rendered themselves any less Karen as long as traditional practices were continued” (p. 347). As we shall see, this situation calls for a new understanding of ethnic and religious identity, one that is based not only on oppositions between religious groups, but upon a recognition of commonality within the religious group itself (which in fact becomes another form of recognizing differences between groups). Buddhism in itself is not a catalyst for becoming Tai, even when it is transmitted through a Tai society. This much is clear. But as we shall see, it can also serve as a means for drawing distinctions between upland groups and the dominant Tai population.

In addition to Tai-ization, there exists the related view that Buddhism is intimately connected with the spread of the Thai nation-state, a process more accurately described as Thai-ization to distinguish it from its ethnic implications. Buddhism is typically framed as helping “integrate” upland people into Thai society, with the idea that since it is intimately connected with Thai identity (ethnic and national), it must ipso facto spread such identity to those who adopt the faith (Platz 2003: 477). At its most extreme, Buddhism is described not as a “faith” but as an “ideology” which is imposed on upland people by the Thai nation-state (Tapp 2005: 65). The adoption of other faiths, such as Christianity, is thus believed to continue the process of drawing distinctions between upland and lowland peoples on the basis of different cultural traditions, and as such is rarely described as creating the same shifts in identity and allegiance as their Buddhist other (Kammerer 1990, 1996; Keyes 1995: 29; Tapp 2005: 65). Buddhism may be used
by states to extend their power, but it is important to recognize the mobility of Buddhism as independent of state and national groupings. Buddhism can climb hills – the case of the Dara’ang and Wa attest to that fact – but as Scott (2009: 100) points out, its presence among upland peoples does not mean they are recognized as civilized in the eyes of lowland societies.

The Buddhism is consciously employed as a tool for integration and assimilation by Thai officials does not mean it is accepted as such by the communities who adopt or have adopted the faith. This narrow perspective ignores the abilities of local communities to adapt Buddhism to their own requirements and desires. In the particular case of the Dara’ang, Buddhism has become a distinct religious practice through the meanings they attach to its local history, performance, and perceptions – in short, the ways Buddhism can serve as a form of counter-Tai-ization.\(^{126}\)

While the particular dynamics of the early historical adoption of Buddhism by Dara’ang people are unclear, a group who voluntarily appropriates the system of a dominant other can nevertheless construct differences out of similarities through the process of appropriation. In doing so, a marginalized group may deflect the power of the other’s ideological domination or, as Tapp (2000: 90) points out in the case of Hmong shamanism, absorb the power invested in its symbolic system in order to make it one’s own. The appropriation of Buddhism may therefore be read as part of a process of de-marginalization.

As Halbwach (1992) points out, religion can be thought of as a form of social

\(^{126}\) Similarities can be drawn here between upland peoples and the indigenous subversion of the culture of Spanish colonizers in the Americas, who made the Catholic religion their own. While the indigenous peoples had a system foisted upon them by the conquerors, as de Certeau (1984) notes, they “nevertheless often made of the rituals, representations and laws imposed on them something quite different from what their conquerors had in mind” (p. xiii).
memory, a representation of the past within the present. Religious or not, the past is a fertile field for appropriation, but this is particularly true in the case of rituals (which by definition represent the repetitive performance of past actions) and, more specific to the case of the Dara’ang, the memory of local Buddhist practices as representations of Lan Na Buddhism. It is also important to recognize that this appropriated world is not oriented solely towards the past, but towards the future. It is a proposed world that opens up the possibility for new configurations of future relations (Tanabe and Keyes 2005: 23).

For the Dara’ang of Thailand, identification with a Theravāda Buddhist tradition shared with the Tai Yuan and other Tai groups is strong. Dara’ang men have long ordained at Tai temples and recognize the shared history of their own Buddhist practice with those of many Tai peoples in Shan State, as well as the historical tradition of the Tai Yuan people of northern Thailand. Nevertheless, there is still a strong sense of differentiation, primarily expressed through a distinction of style (Bourdieu 1984: 68; Hebdige 1979: 17). This differentiation may operate in tandem with other forces that encourage people to think of themselves as belonging to national and trans-national imagined communities, yet the processes of constituting distinctions out of homogeneity remains, even when those engaged in such practices are completely unaware of the differentiating (i.e. anti-universal) function of their (universally oriented) religious practice and discourse.

**Buddhism and Symbolic Inversion**

While the ways of differentiating Dara’ang from lowland Theravāda Buddhism

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127. As Max Weber points out, it is “precisely those things which may appear to be of only minor social importance” which are often responsible for ethnic differentiation (quoted in Jackson 1991: 287).
should serve as a caution to those who suppose that the spread of Buddhism in the mountains will contribute to a dissolution of ethnic identity, it should not surprise anyone familiar with the historical diffusion of Theravāda Buddhism across Southeast Asia when considered from the perspective of the ethnic majority populations. Distinctions between Thai, Burmese, and Cambodian Buddhism constitute important markers of national identity.

Theravāda Buddhism can likewise distinguish ethnic minority populations from the dominant ethnic majority. Yet it also serves as the means through which Dara’ang people create discourses which symbolically invert the prevailing ethnic hierarchy of present-day Thailand, challenging the ideological legitimizations which support the traditional dichotomy of upland and lowland areas as civilized versus wild spaces. This finding not only questions the received wisdom that Buddhism in the uplands will lead to assimilation, but also challenges the view that Buddhism is primarily a conservative force that reinforces existing social hierarchies. While this view may hold true for Buddhist groups internally, the discourse shifts when we consider inter-group, or more specifically inter-ethnic and inter-class, relationships.

Many explanations that were given by Dara’ang people for the distinction between Dara’ang Buddhism and that of the lowlands draws upon perceived virtues that the Dara’ang people embody, virtues which are often opposed to those of the lowland Tai (Moerman 1968: 158 notes a similar situation for the Tai Lü). However, these virtues are not framed in terms of inherent superiority, but the practice of remembering and forgetting the proper performance of Buddhist rites. For example, the giving of flowers wrapped in banana leaf cones described in chapter 4 is commonly said to be “cleaner,”
drawing upon a common local (Dara’ang) assertion that lowland Tai Yuan are “dirtier” then the Dara’ang – a perception which inverts the common perception of “dirtiness” which is typically ascribed to upland villages by lowland Tai.

We wrap our flowers in banana cones because it is cleaner. This is the old way of doing it. They have forgotten how to do this in the Khon Muang temples. This larger cone, which holds the flowers in the smaller cones, is a Dara'ang innovation (A-Tun, Dara’ang man, age 71).

Dara’ang men and women similarly draw upon notions of time and patience, noting that the elaborate construction of the tham hao (lit. “dhamma palace,” referring to the raised seat that monks sit upon when reading texts) requires a great deal of labour, and that the length of sermons in Dara’ang temples have not been shortened, unlike those in lowland Tai Yuan temples which have been cut down to save time. As one man put it, while simultaneously invoking the concept of authenticity based on a perception of greater antiquity;

Our Buddhism is like that of the Khon Muang a long time ago. But they are no longer strict. They do not have patience. That is why they no longer practice correctly” (A-Rot, Dara’ang man, age 52).

These perspectives find support within the khruba monk movement, which gives a context for interpreting differences that draws upon the past; a form of social remembering that constructs Dara’ang practices as more authentic than those of the lowland Tai who no longer perform the rites correctly.

Social scientists have long recognized the ideological significance Buddhism holds for legitimating relations of domination (Berger 1967: 65; Hanks 1962; Lehman 1996: 259). This is especially true of the doctrine of karma, which Weber (1963)
describes as "the most complete formal solution of the problem of theodicy" (p. 145). As the position of an individual within a social hierarchy is considered a reflection of the amount of merit she or he has accumulated in past lives, their current location is justified in terms of the actions of their past lives. Furthermore, popular readings of the doctrine of karma posit a world in which wealthier members of society are in a better position to make more merit than their poorer counterparts, as they are able to give more material support to the Sangha and thus receive a larger return of merit than is possible by a poor person who has nothing to give. A good example of this “economy of merit” perspective, wherein it “takes merit to make merit” (Lehman 1996: 25), can be seen in earlier ethnographic attempts to rank the amount of merit a person receives for performing particular acts (giving to monks, becoming ordained, sponsoring a festival, building a temple, etc...) (Kaufman 1960 183-84; Mulder 1973: 7-8; Tambiah 1970: 146-147). As the construction of a temple or sponsoring a major festival (a kathin, for example) rank high on a relative scale of actions, wealthy members of society are considered to be in a better position to make more merit and thus maintain a higher position not only in this life but in subsequent lives to come. As for the poor, they suffer in the present and lack the financial means through which they might improve the conditions of their existence in future lives (Keyes 1990: 184). Karma and merit thus provide a "theodicy of good fortune for those who are fortunate" (Weber 1969: 271) and an explanation for why the poor suffer; what Berger (1967) describes as a "complete symmetry between the theodicies of suffering and happiness" (p. 65).

Buddhism and karma do function this way within the context of Dara’ang villages. Poverty, illness, and misfortune are frequently attributed to demerit, or at least
possibly resulting from demerit, while wealth, beauty, and good luck are similarly viewed as reaping the rewards of accumulated merit. However, when we shift our focus away from individuals within the village towards the ethnic hierarchy in general we see a different discourse forming within the village locale. Here, the poverty and suffering of Dara’ang people are not explained in terms of merit, nor is the wealth and power of the Tai (although the 'late for Buddha' in chapter 3 myth does posit a relative proximity to Buddhism resulting in sovereign power). Somewhat surprisingly, rather than a theodicy of suffering we encounter in the discourse of Dara’ang men and women a theodicy of prosperity. That is to say, we find a series of legitimizations for why social conditions amongst the Tai lowlanders are bad while those of the mountains are improving.

Last night I was watching the television and it said that it will rain for 10 days more. In the müang [Tai city/town] there is flooding. But here, the rain is good for the crops. We do not have too much, although it rains everyday. Khruba [Jao Theuang] said this would happen. He said that people in the city are no longer good. They rob and kill each other. If you are standing at the bank machine, someone might shoot you in the head! I have seen this on television. They no longer follow the dhamma [teachings of the Buddha]. Because of this there is flooding in the city. But here in the mountains people are good. Dara'ang people follow the dhamma. Khruba says that this is why our fields produce a lot while the fields in the city fail (A-Tui, Dara’ang man, age 38).

I would not want to live in the city/lowland towns (müang). The city is too dirty, too dangerous. I think I might die. Here in the mountains it is cool, no diseases. In Burma, Dara'ang did not leave the mountains, because in the lowlands there was malaria. I still cannot sleep when I am in the city . . . There is malaria here [in the village], but we would never live this low before. In the city it is worse. And the problems with crime. They make demerit (hmap) and have many problems because of this (A-Kham, Dara’ang man, age 60).

The idea that flooding and droughts in the lowland urban area is being brought about by moral deterioration is a common assertion within Pang Daeng Nai. People often speak of murders, theft, and corruption that they see on television as evidence of a general decline in the standards of human behaviour which result in the proliferation of natural disasters
and disturbances. Chiang Mai city, the central urban area of northern Thailand, is most commonly the setting for discussions concerning social or moral decline, although television newscasts bring daily reports from all over the country and other lowland places likewise serve as settings for describing moral decay.

The fields of Mae Taeng [district] are flooding. The water is rushing out of the mountains and into valleys. I heard Khruba said this would happen, because people do not live in harmony (samakhi) (A-Lap, Dara’ang man, age 42).

You see the south [of Thailand]? They kill each other. Buddhists and Muslims. They have cut off the heads of monks! That is why the mudslides destroy villages (A-Rot, Dara’ang man, age 52).

I don’t want to live in the city. While it can be boring here in the village, the city is too dirty and noisy. There are also many killings. I think it will get worse because of all the hmap (de-merit) (U, Dara’ang woman, age 27).

Dara’ang men and women often describe the lowlands in negative terms. In fact, many of the words used, such as “dirty” or “thieves,” are those which are used commonly by Tai Yuan people to describe upland ethnic minority villages (Davis 1984: 81). But being Buddhist, many Dara’ang also level accusations against the Tai Yuan for abandoning their Buddhist practices and not following the Buddhist precepts (i.e. make demerit), a practice which represents a similar symbolic inversion of the claim levelled by lowland Tai peoples against upland ethnic groups that they “have no religion” (Thai: mai mi satsana). Life in the uplands is peaceful from the perspective of many Dara’ang people because the Dara’ang are strict adherers to Buddhism, while life in the lowlands has decayed due to a distancing from the temple and the teachings of the Buddha.

Such a discourse runs counter to what one might expect to find - a theodicy of suffering tinged by Nietzschean ressentiment, where the evils of the lowlands would be explained primarily as producing de-merit (Pale: hmap) which will cause the dominant
other to suffer in future lives (Nietzsche 1999: 22; Weber 1969: 276). But like the millenarian discourse of khruba monks (see below), the prophetic statements regarding increasing natural disasters in the lowlands, and the corresponding perception of bountiful harvests in the highlands, are not oriented towards the future but concern action and social conditions in the present. It is a theodicy that explains not the wealth and power of the lowlands, but highlights the suffering of the Tai people themselves in relation to the unity (samakhi) of the Dara’ang communities.

In certain ways, this represents an interpretation that reflects a particular reading of Buddhist theology. The conditions of all living beings is suffering (Pāli: dukkha), whether rich or poor, and while there is a cosmological ranking of individuals according to degrees of suffering (particularly in terms of the lower realms or “hells”), there is no strict measurement to determine who is ranked higher or lower in terms of their rebirth, no objective referent that a person can consult. It is a highly subjective experience to decide who is working out de-merit and who is reaping the rewards. This ambiguity allows for local interpretations of the circumstances of one’s existence and can thus present challenges to hegemonic ordering schemes that others attempt to impose upon a society as a whole.

In this way, rather than legitimating social hierarchy (which it also does), Buddhism and karma represent a shared framework that structures an argument (albeit often a one-sided one) about the nature of social positions (Leach 1964: 278). While the outline of the theory of karma is accepted by both Dara’ang and Tai, rich and poor, the particular interpretation of how merit is made and what events are the result of karma can differ from observer to observer depending on their situation (Babb 1983: 166). In
interviews, no Dara’ang men or women explained the suffering of the Dara’ang people as a group in terms of karma. While the cosmological framework provides for “why us/why now” questions, the social injustice experienced by the Dara’ang at the hands of lowlanders was never articulated in terms of karma. In contrast, the suffering of the lowland Tai (floods, droughts, and crime) were frequently ascribed to acts of de-merit and no longer being strict in their Buddhist practice as a group.

Dara’ang explanations of merit and power differ from the situation noted by previous studies on social dynamics in the way karma is used to interpret the suffering of an entire group of people vis-à-vis the relative cosmological standing of another group. Merit in this case serves as a means of drawing distinctions between the conditions of Dara’ang communities through a symbolic inversion of the existing ethnic hierarchy and its accompanying ideology. Buddhism is here appropriated as a religion of the poor, with merit linked not to wealth but to strict adherence to Buddhism. The mountainous area where most Dara’ang live is represented in the discourse as a purer space, free from the diseases (i.e. malaria), corruption, and violence which pervades the cities (miiang), effectively reversing the dichotomy between miiang (city/town) and pa (forest, which includes the forested mountainous areas) found within Tai Yuan society, where the forest is presented as an immoral space opposed to the civilized miiang (Davis 1984: 81). The wealth of the lowlands is thus being destroyed by natural disasters, while prosperity is

128. My interpretation here benefited greatly from the insights provided by Kunzle (1978) on symbolic inversions in European broadsheets, wherein the social hierarchy, amongst other hierarchies, is inverted so that the master serves the servant, the horse rides the man, etc...

129. Contrast this view with the description of Tai Yuan space provided by Davis (1984) in his monograph Muang Metaphysics, “Political space [for the Khon Mang] is classified according to distance from the centres of culture and political power, along a continuum from the towns, through the villages, and into the forested wilderness. The word “forest” has negative and often pejorative overtones. Contraband articles such as bootleg whiskey and unregistered firearms are called “things of the forest wilderness” (khaung pua khaung thuean). Undisciplined and immoral people are designated in the same fashion” (p. 81).
growing in the uplands because the Dara’ang people have remained true followers of the Buddha and as such continue to exhibit proper moral behaviour.

**Millenarianism and the Khruba monks**

Such oppositional narratives regarding merit and religious purity typically draw upon the discourse of the khruba monk movement, where the Buddhist practices of the Dara’ang are celebrated as the authentic practices of Lan Na Buddhism. Why the khruba monk movement should operate in this fashion relates to the way it functions as a liminal space/cultural contact zone. In chapter 6 I noted that ritual spaces established by khruba monks (festivals, stūpas, temples) commonly serve as centres of pilgrimage, and that pilgrimages are quasi-liminal events wherein pilgrims move from one location (physical, spiritual, and/or social) to another (see Turner and Turner 1978: 10). Yet Turner and Turner (1978: 3) also note that liminality is “not only transition, but also potentiality, not only ‘going to be’ but also ‘what may be.'” The concept of liminality may be applicable to “all phases of decisive cultural change, in which previous orderings of thought and behavior are subject to revision and criticism” (Turner and Turner 1978: 2). As I described in chapter 6, the space of the khruba monk movement is not one of *communitas* or “anti-structure.” Ethnic distinctions and hierarchies are recreated within the official program of ritual observations in temple ceremonies, ritual relations that likewise draw upon the past. Yet the liminal space of “potentiality” provides the conditions of “counter-structure,” a state within which new subjectivities may be formed that are critical of the social position a person or group occupies.

The increasing prosperity that is perceived in the uplands and the increasing
suffering in the lowlands is not simply a matter of being Buddhist, but of performing Buddhism properly. The abandonment of the strict demands of Lan Na style Buddhism is viewed by many Dara’ang in Pang Daeng Nai as a contributing factor in the perceived general decline of morality in the cities, whose social order is intimately linked to adherence not only to the teachings of Buddhism, but also to proper practice. Such a conceptualization draws upon a strand of millenarian discourse that that runs through the preaching of Khruba Jao Theuang and all khruba ton bun monks (Cohen 2001: 240-241).

The term millenarianism comes from the Christian tradition and requires some qualification before it can be usefully deployed across various religious contexts. Within Christianity, millenarianism refers to the thousand-year period of blessedness preceding or following the second coming of Jesus Christ. The period for Christians is often associated with the end times, but for Theravāda Buddhists time is cyclical, with each end signalling another beginning. A world-period lasts for a kalpa (an extremely long period irreducible to a simple number of years) and its beginning and end are not associated with a Buddha. In fact, some kalpa contain no Buddhas at all, while our present kalpa has (or more accurately will have) five. What is common in both the Christian and Buddhist tradition, and what justifies the use of the concept, is, following a period of decline, the coming of a saviour/teacher and the creation of a utopia here on earth. While the Buddhas themselves are not associated with the destruction of the world, they are connected with its worsening state and regeneration. According to the scriptures, the time between the comings of Buddhas is marked by a period of decline. As Conze (1994) puts it, “In its full vigour and purity, it remains only for a short time; then follows a long period of
decay, and finally total disappearance, until a new revelation takes place” (p. 114).\textsuperscript{130} There have already been four Buddhas in the present \textit{kalpa}, and the fifth, Metteya, is believed to be residing in Tusita heaven waiting for the time when he will incarnate on earth (see Ch. 3).\textsuperscript{131}

Millenarian beliefs have long been an undercurrent of the khruba monk movement. Tambiah (1984: 306) writes that we must “necessarily associate the \textit{khrū bā} with the phenomenon of millennial Buddhism.” Kwanchewan (1988: 131) likewise notes how millenarian messages were present in the writings of Khruba Khao Pi, and that these reflected the beliefs of the people of Lan Na.

The Lanna people were implanted with the idea that the people’s immorality is a cause of calamity in and deterioration of society. To save the good people, Phya Dhamma, one vision of Phra Sri Ariya, the coming fifth Buddha, is coming in an unknown time. Both the deterioration of society and the rise of Phya Dhamma are results of the sanctions of the high deities. This idea is articulated explicitly in Khruba’s [Khao Pi] Pusat Sutta, Legend of Pho Cao Rai, and Legend of Yonk Lok.

While the various khruba monks draw upon the language of millenarianism, Cohen (2001) points out that this is not the discourse of the apocalypse, but one of active utopianism that seeks to construct a Buddhist holy land or \textit{buddhadesa} here on earth. “The 'millennial' language of these exemplars reflects their perceptions of a world of moral chaos and crisis and of a Dark Age that precedes creation of a new Buddhist utopia” (p. 243). As \textit{bodhisattva}, the khruba monks are instrumental in bringing about

\textsuperscript{130} The story of the general decline of the world is found in the \textit{Cakkavattisihanāda Sutta} of the \textit{Dīgha Nikāya}, which also states that this period will be followed by the arrival of the future Buddha, Metteya, who will come to restore the teachings of Buddhism to the world (Gombrich 1971: 289).

\textsuperscript{131} The most common belief in the Theravāda world is that Metteya would appear 5,000 years after the time of Gotama, a time originally unconnected with any future Buddha, but this belief varies according to locality or group and may in some cases be associated with the near future (Keyes 1977: 288).
such a utopia.

The khruba monk movement represents a type of religious revitalization movement, encouraging people to return to the strict practices of Lan Na Buddhism. Khruba Jao Theuang himself teaches that the present world is marked by strife and decay that results from this falling away from Buddhism. “People no longer follow the teachings of the Buddha,” he explains, “they no longer go to temple (Thai: wat) except on special occasions. There is no unity (samakhi), no peace” (Khruba Jao Theuang, pers. comm.). The solution is a revival of Buddhist observances in general, and a return to the strict practices of Lan Na Buddhism in particular, in order to bring about the constitution of a moral society through proper moral behaviour and a strict adherence to the teachings of the Buddha.

While the violence and suffering associated with the decline of Buddhism is evident to most Dara’ang people who have lived through years of war and oppression, what is particularly significant is the way in which many Dara’ang people from Pang Daeng Nai exclude themselves, their village, and even the entire Dara’ang ethnic group from the decline described by Khruba Jao Theuang. Instead, many Dara’ang men and women of Pang Daeng Nai point out that the conditions of co-operation and peace can be observed within their own village. Descriptions of suffering in the lowlands, cast in terms of moral decline and the abandonment of Buddhism, are contrasted with the strict adherence to Buddhism in Pang Daeng Nai and the general condition of unity (samakhi) that exists within the village. From this perspective, the utopian conditions that Khruba Jao Theuang speaks of will not be manifested in the lowlands but in the upland Dara’ang villages, which are already in the process of becoming such through the power of
Buddhism embodied within the community of Dara’ang practitioners.

**Counter Narratives**

The contrast between the Buddhist practices of the Dara’ang people, which are considered intimately connected with the identity of the group, and those of the lowland Tai Yuan serve as a moral critique against those who are seen as not acting like “good” Buddhists. It exists within the village as a “hidden transcript” (Scott 1990), creative acts which respond to the exclusion of Dara’ang people from full participation in Thai society and challenges the symbolic legitimacy of the dominant ethnic hierarchy which situates the Tai above the Dara’ang and other upland people by subordinating them as more primitive. The representation of Buddhism as more authentic in Dara’ang communities reverses this discourse of upland-lowland relations, making the upland areas the authentic abode of Buddhism, and the lowlands the home of barbarism and lacking in authentic religion.

Religious counter-narratives that draw upon the popular theme of flooding and droughts in the lowlands are particularly noteworthy with respect to the alternative explanation they provide for situations that are commonly blamed on upland peoples. Both the state and popular discourse of Thailand blames upland people for the flooding and droughts, particularly their clearing of mountain slopes which are associated with the past practices of swidden agriculture (Buergin 2000: 12; Laungaramsri 2000; Toyota 2005: 126). While some scholars have challenged the scientific legitimacy of such claims (see Forsyth and Walker 2008), “watershed management” has come to represent the principle legitimization for heavy state intervention into upland ethnic minority villages,
through increased surveillance, restrictions on movement, a proliferation of development projects within villages, and the suppression of upland farming. In the case of Pang Daeng Nai, the recent move of the King's Royal Project primarily employs a discourse of watershed management to legitimate most of its activities, and considers development as the primary means through which the waterways of Thailand can be protected. This focus on watershed management has largely replaced the older fears of communist insurrection and opium production, which in their day fulfilled a similar function in legitimating state intervention into the upland villages.

Local narratives that posit a religious explanation for these occurrences provide an alternative to the official state discourse; one that draws upon a cosmological framework shared by Tai and Dara’ang people. It is by no means the only critical discourse that can be heard, but it is a particularly significant one given the importance of Buddhism for ethnic Dara’ang identity. Religious narratives such as these respond to the scientific discourse of the lowlands “with irrelevance and impertinence in a different discourse” (de Certeau 1984: 17). They propose a clear alternative to the dominant state ideology, one that is similarly based on a moral model where wrong human behaviour (shifting agriculture and mobile villages) are responsible for the environmental ills suffered by those who live their lives according to the “proper” settled model of lowland mīăng or city (wet rice cultivation and residing in permanent cities and towns). Within the “back talk” of the village, it is the Dara’ang people themselves who live properly and thus do not suffer the ecological catastrophes experienced in the lowlands, who produce such events through their own moral actions.
Ideology and Ethnicity

The social memory of an authentic Buddhist practice serves as a place within which new narratives of cultural identity are constructed; identities which challenge the marginalized social conditions within which Dara’ang people live today. Buddhism challenges, rather than maintains, the status quo because the constrast occurs across, rather than within, ethnic group boundaries. As mentioned above, Buddhism as an ideological system legitimates poverty and misfortune through a theodicy of merit, yet can operate quite differently in terms of inter-group relations. One of the reasons for this is found within the limits of Buddhism as a hegemonic ideology – a limit that is partially determined by ethnic boundaries. While Buddhism is often treated as a hegemonic worldview imposing its theodicy upon the oppressed (Tapp 2005), such a conceptualization of religious ideology ignores the extent to which the subordinate groups are able to circumvent the socio-cosmological representation constructed by the dominant group (Scott 1985: 317), and in some cases, appropriate this representation for themselves.

In his comparative study of religion and oppositional movements amongst miners and textile workers in the USA, Billings (1990: 27), drawing on the work of Antonio Gramsci, notes that the creation of “autonomous organizations, or free spaces, that allow room for reflection independent of the ideological presuppositions of dominant groups” is a prerequisite for creating conditions in which religion can serve as the basis for oppositional stances against domination. While Gramsci’s ideas were developed in relation to class conflict, they are also useful for considering inter-ethnic relations, which
are also defined partly in terms of their class relations but are nonetheless distinct in terms of the processes of exclusion and inclusion that go into forming such groups. These processes of boundary construction and group ascription are themselves central for the formation of what Billings describes as “free spaces.” While anthropology rejects the idea that ethnic groups exist as self-contained, independent units, the constitution and maintenance of ethnic minority groups is contingent upon the social construction of boundaries on the part of a majority and minority. Within many highland ethnic minority communities of Thailand there exists less integration into the dominant majority, and subsequently less exposure to the ideological conditioning of state organizations controlled by the majority, such as the national Sangha and state run schools.

As mentioned in chapter 6, King Chulalongkorn recognized this struggle over symbolic domination quite clearly in the case of northern and northeastern Thailand, and in response, constructed a national Sangha to undercut the spaces within which an autonomous identity could be maintained. Local identification with Tai Yuan or Isan/Lao identity has not disappeared from the north and north-eastern regions, but with the expansion of the national Sangha into even the most remote villages, Buddhism no longer serves as the springboard for millenarian movements.\(^\text{132}\) In part this represents the degree to which Tai speaking peoples are integrated into a common “Thai” national identity. The same cannot be said, however, for marginalized ethnic minority groups. While not living in isolation, many ethnic minority peoples like the Dara’ang continue to reside in villages that are largely ethnically homogenous (which should be understood in terms of their assimilative capacity of villages to maintain a set of distinct cultural practices and ideas,

\(^\text{132}\) See Keyes (1977) and Murdoch (1974) for a discussion of the resulting Buddhist inspired millenialist movements that arose in the north-east prior to the religious domination of the region by the national Thai Sangha.
rather than in an essentialist sense). These conditions create a space for an autonomous religious field to develop, one that can still provide the discursive conditions that allow for Buddhism to serve the function of counter-narratives since they are not subject to the same disciplinary forces that weigh on the Buddhist practices of rural Tai villages.

Semi-autonomous ethnic spaces for religious developments help to explain not only the oppositional narratives themselves, but also the large followings of upland minority people that the khruba monk movement attracts. During the seminal years of the khruba monk movement, Buddhism in Tai Yuan communities likewise constituted a distinct religious field, and subsequently formed into a large-scale oppositional movement that rallied against the incorporation of the northern temples into the national Sangha. Over the years the temples of northern Thailand have increasingly come under the disciplinary gaze of the national Sangha (Keyes 1971). The same cannot be said, however, for ethnic minority communities such as the Dara’ang or Karen in Thailand, or for Shan communities in Burma, some of whom are in open revolt against the Burmese government.

This separation of the religious field and state controlled Buddhism along ethnic lines is noted by Hayami (2004), who writes in a recent study of Karen religion that the “adoption of Buddhism by Karen in the peripheries should not by any means be understood as subjection to the state,” and that they redefine “their position through embodied practices of [Buddhist] ritual” (p. 246). While Keyes (1971) attributed Karen millenarian and oppositional religious movements to a “superficial understanding of Buddhism” (p. 565), such a perspective ignores the constitution of new forms of Buddhist practice, and privileges the Buddhism of the state which the khruba monk movement and
other millenarian movements challenge. While the construction of alternative forms of Buddhism that take an oppositional stance have largely been suppressed in the context of Tai society within Thailand, de-facto ethnic segregation preserves a semi-autonomous religious field within Dara’ang villages that serve as the grounds for developing new ideas about Buddhism and its relationship to the social position inhabited by many upland communities.

Cultural Contact and Symbolic Violence

We’ve seen in this chapter how Buddhism can serve as a discursive framework for articulating an alternative vision of social reality, one that challenges the objective conditions Dara’ang people face within Thailand today. This articulated perspective reflects back upon the embodied practices of Dara’ang religion, the habitual performance of rites and ceremonies that constitute Buddhist practice within the community. Through reflection, these practices come to signify a distinctly Dara’ang identity, one constructed against the religious practices of the lowland Tai Yuan people.

Identity is predominantly a lived experience, a habitual act of being what one is, experienced at the level of affect rather than cognition (Bourdieu 1990: 108). Reflection is called forth primarily when a person or group is dislocated from an established process of social reproduction, when the taken for granted nature of the world is challenged. This commonly takes the form of a crisis, where the regularized forms of life no longer hold, where there is a mismatch between the a way of life, and the objective conditions a person or group come up against.

Cultural contact may also at times engender such a reflection, in so far as it de-
naturalizes the “normality” or “naturalness” of a particular group’s lifestyle (Bourdieu 1977: 168). Yet it is important to recognize that cultural contact can itself become an aspect of a particular group’s social practice. For centuries now, the Dara’ang and the Tai have interacted within various cultural contact zones (markets, monasteries, and marriages), and these relationships have become highly regularized. Yet the relationship between the two groups was historically embedded within a particular social context, the upland areas that today constitute Shan State and southern Yunnan, and within this context ethnicity was framed quite differently from what it is today in modern Thailand.

With the rise of Siam/Thailand as a modern nation-state, the relationship between highlanders and lowland Tai was altered in several ways. Of particular importance for highlanders was the rise of a territorializing discourse that claimed all forests and mountains within a given geographical region as belonging to the Thai state. Drawing upon European ideas of nationalism and race, the government of Siam/Thailand constructed the nation-state as culturally homogenous entity (Laungaramsri 2003b: 161). They believed those who lived within the borders of the Thai geo-body ought to share a common Thai cultural identity, and moved to implement programs that would ensure their assimilation into the Thai nation. Non-Tai highlanders, indigenous peoples or later migrants, therefore became aliens within the Thai geo-body, as their culturally distinctive traits marked them as other vis-à-vis the ethnic Tai majority.

While living in Burma, Dara’ang people existed within the shadow of an ideally homogenous nation-state (Burma for Burmans), but the extensive multi-ethnic landscape of Burma did not allow such an ideological program to be realized to any significant degree - researchers estimate that the ethnic-minorities of Burma make up about one third
of the population (Callahan 2003: 145). While their relationship with lowland Tai lords or Burmese officials was not one of equality, they were not confronted with a strong ideology of cultural homogeneity or alienation. The paths of cultural contact with the Tai were well established, and the flow of people and information was part of the experience of being Dara’ang. In fact, it was this established cultural contact zone that inspired the Dara’ang communities of Shan State to migrate to Thailand to escape the civil war, as they considered themselves to be “Dara’ang-Tai.” The government of Thailand, however, did not reproduce this relationship. In fact, according to Renard (1980: 210), it was this ruptured relationship at the end of the 19th century that first attracted the Karen to the khruba monk movement. Years of struggle over access to agricultural land and resources in the highlands has also left a mark upon the local Tai Yuan population of northern Thailand, many of whom have likewise adopted a rhetoric which others the upland ethnic minorities.

Dara’ang people within Thailand experience both physical and symbolic violence at the hands of the dominant Tai-speaking majority. The raids on villages and the incarceration of Dara’ang men described in chapter 2 has left an indelible mark upon the communities of Chiang Dao district, and many continue to face the threat of land expropriation today. Over the years, NGOs within northern Thailand have established links with the Dara’ang communities in an attempt to mitigate the physical threats the villages face. Yet the strongest challenges against the forms of symbolic violence Dara’ang people face comes from within the communities themselves. It is within the village that counter-narratives are constructed to challenge the representation of Dara’ang people as primitive “hill tribes” who destroy the watersheds, traffick drugs, and live in
unclean conditions. These narratives provide moral frameworks for maintaining self-respect as the communities move forward in their struggle for citizenship, land-rights, and the right to maintain their cultural traditions.

Yet on a deeper level, cultural discourses provide the material through which social actors come to understand themselves and their world. Culture, understood to be “an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life” (Geertz 1973: 89), provides people not only with a symbolic system through which to understand the world as it exists, but also the symbolic material for constructing criticisms about the world and their position in it. Taylor (1985: 15ff) argues that the capacity to reflect upon oneself is central to the concept of social agency. While the ability to self-reflect appears to be an innate aspect of human existence, people do not simply reflect ‘upon something’ (the object of consciousness), but ‘through culture’ (the medium of consciousness). As Ortner (2005: 46) points out, a critical understanding of oneself and one’s social position rests within the multiple layers of cultural consciousness, the levels of meaning which provide the frameworks through which people come to make sense of their reality. The configuration of cultural symbols may uphold a particular ideology (and therefore serve a conservative function), or may challenge the existing social structure (thus providing an ideological impetus for working towards change).

Religion is well suited to both purposes, as it typically refers to a reality that is not directly perceptible. In the case of conservative ideologies, the existing social structure may be legitimated by referring to an absolute authority or law that stands above the
material world we live in. Yet religion can also provide people with a framework for challenging the existing social order, an “extra-ordinary discourse” that typically emerges in the form of a “prophet or political leader who mobilizes the group by announcing to them what they want to hear” (Bourdieu 1977: 171). Such a challenge may also rise from below, from the rumblings of discontent, expressed in a religious language, which is already given to moral pronouncements. Either way, it is given shape by the cultural frameworks within which people operate; it is culture that allows for eddies of critical subjectivity to form.133

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133. Commaroff (1985) similarly notes the way in which the rituals of Zionism are appropriated by the Tshidi to produce a “transcendent synthesis; an integrated order of symbols and practices that seeks to reverse estrangement, to reconstitute the divided self” (p. 12).
Dara’ang ideology and practice borrow a great deal from lowland Tai groups. The two groups have been interconnected as far back as their historical records can tell us, and while it is perhaps impossible to verify, a distinct Dara’ang ethnicity may even be the product of a historical synthesis (political, social, and cultural), as a group of Mon-Khmer speakers engaged in cultural exchanges with the Tai.\textsuperscript{134} Yet despite the high degree of cultural borrowing, this process is not one of becoming Tai. While individual Dara’ang may indeed become Tai (and vice versa), cultural appropriation has not resulted in a loss of ethnic identity for the group as a whole. Appropriation entails a process of making something that was once external to a group their own, rather than making yourself like something else. Buddhism, though recognized by the Dara’ang as a Tai form of practice, has become an important marker of Dara’ang identity, and as I have described, is even used by Dara’ang living within northern Thailand to draw distinctions between themselves and the Tai majority.

While the long history of a Theravāda Buddhist tradition amongst the Dara’ang is somewhat particular (though by no means unique) amongst Southeast Asian highlanders, the issues discussed in this work speak to broader concerns about how minority populations resist cultural assimilation and symbolic violence through processes of cultural appropriation and symbolic inversion. There are some interesting connections,

\textsuperscript{134} See Lehman’s (1967) discussion on the Kayah, where he argues that the ethnogenesis of the Kayah can be traced to the close of the 18th century when Central Karen took over the teak extraction from the Shan and set up principalities based on a Shan mode.
for example, with what George Lipsitz’s writes about cultural appropriation in America.

Lipsitz uses the term “strategic anti-essentialism” to describe how an oppressed group may appropriate the cultural aspects of another oppressed group, such as the appropriation of Native American identity by blacks in New Orleans during Mardi Gras, to express oppressed aspects of their own identity (Lipsitz 2007: 205). While I have written about the matter of cultural appropriation primarily from the perspective of a minority group appropriating aspects of cultural identity from a majority, it is important to remember in the case of the Dara’ang of Thailand that the khruba movement itself is rooted in resistance to the Siamese form of Buddhist practice; that is, it is embedded within the history of another minority group’s relationship to a majority population. The Siamese/Thai government throughout the 20th century has attempted to suppress Lan Na or Tai Yuan forms of Buddhism, and the khruba monk movement grew out of a general resistance of Tai Yuan peoples to Bangkok’s hegemony. That the Tai Yuan today stand as an oppressor (along side the Thai state) in relation to the Dara’ang may contribute to the movement’s popularity amongst the Dara’ang and other highlanders, as the movement’s rhetoric and ideological thrust has always come from a minority position. This “strategic” use of Buddhism to counter symbolic domination may not represent a parody (as it does in Lipstiz’s work), but it does work against the essentializing discourses that define highlanders as uncivilized and lowlanders as civilized, in part due to the presence of Buddhism in the lowlands and its supposed absence within highland societies.

To what extent does this form of appropriation present challenges to the hegemony of the majority? According to Tapp (2000: 98), incorporating the ideology of
the dominant group (such as the Hmong’s appropriation of Chinese cosmology through shamanic rituals) represents a challenge to the centre by the periphery, as it poses a potential threat to the monopoly the centre has upon a particular symbolic system. While the parameters of the struggle are determined to a high degree by the dominant ideology (such as the structure of Tai forms of Theravāda Buddhism, along with their civilizing connotations), the meaning invested within particular categories may be transformed within the process of absorption, notably through processes of symbolic inversion, effectively launching a challenge upon the centre’s definition of reality itself.

Nevertheless, ideological structures, even hegemonic ones, are not static entities. Buddhism in Thailand is already losing grounds to other definitions of “civility,” those contained within the discourse of development (cf. Pigg 1992). The concept of “development” (Thai: phatana) or “being developed” affects the self-perception of Dara’ang living in the highland areas, as villagers increasingly describe villages in terms of those which are “developed” and those which are not. This was particularly noticeable in Pang Daeng Nai as the King’s Royal Project began working more intensely within the village during the time when I was conducting my fieldwork, constructing roads, demonstration fields, a water tower, backyard catfish ponds, running workshops on how to keep the village clean, and eventually building a large residence within the village for agricultural extension workers. As the agricultural extension workers and other agents began educating villagers, more and more people started to speak about village life in terms of being “developed” relative to their own past and to other villages, including those that are predominantly Dara’ang. This particular discourse even began to manifest itself within religious practices. Increasingly, I noticed that blessings given by A-Tun to
family members would wish that they become “more developed,” and “development” would insinuate itself into the prayers recited by monks during temple ceremonies, usually at the behest of village leaders. Development also became a mode for differentiating villages from one another. One Dara’ang elder described the Lahu of No Lae as “undeveloped” compared with Pang Daeng Nai, “their village is dirty, not developed like here,” and others levelled similar sentiments against highland villages within Chiang Dao district. This discourse presents a new framework not only for conceptualizing the relationship between Dara’ang and Tai, but also the relationship between Dara’ang and other highlanders. This discourse adds another layer to the religious distinction drawn between Dara’ang and other highlander’s described in chapter 3, where the Dara’ang myth of being late for Buddha distinguishes the Dara’ang along a continuum of closeness to the Buddha, stretching from the Tai through the Burmese to the Dara’ang, and finally to the non-Buddhist Lahu.

It is difficult to see what opportunities this new framework of ethnic relations based upon degrees of development may hold for constructing critical narratives, though already some villagers speak about the need for agroforestry and the superior quality of life in the forested upland areas, discourses that are appropriated from NGOs such as the Upland Holistic Development Project (a Christian NGO that works closely with Dara’ang communities, amongst other highland populations) and the Upper Mae Ping River Valley Foundation (Khrong Kan Lum Nam Ping Ton Bon). These discourses embrace the perception of highlanders as living close to nature; a common representation attributed to indigenous peoples the world over. As A-Mon once explained to me regarding Pang Daeng Nai’s community forest (an initiative launched by a coalition of NGOs in Thailand
that would make upland villages stewards of the forest), “We are people of the forest. We used to get everything we need from the forest, not the mìang. We can take care of the forest.” Others draw upon a similar idea of being close to nature to legitimate the village’s claim to being protectors of the forest - “We are khon doi (mountain people) because we live in unity with the forest and mountains” (A-Ngeun, 35 year old Dara’ang man) - a perception that challenges the state discourse which frames highlanders as forest destroyers (see chapter 2).

While discussions of development are becoming increasingly audible within Pang Daeng Nai, religion, particularly Buddhism, remains an important framework for making sense of the world, and while it’s significance has waned amongst state officials who employ new frameworks for constructing distinctions between lowlanders and highlanders, its influence as a worldview remains strong for the Tai population in Thailand as well as the Dara’ang. Throughout my time spent in Pang Daeng Nai, religion provided a principal framework for tracing a distinct Dara’ang identity. Discourses of religious identity affirmed Dara’ang practices as more authentic than those practiced within many Tai temples, more effective at maintaining community, and better at instilling a sense of morality. These discourses draw upon several sources, indigenous perspectives of what constitutes a distinct Dara’ang tradition, the millenarian and revivalist message of Khruba Jao Theuang, and a symbolic inversion of lowland characterizations of upland life.

Nonetheless, despite challenges mounted from a religious perspective, the narratives, practices, and processes examined throughout this work ultimately fail to transcend the problematic associated with the ethnic dichotomy itself. Through
embracing certain characterizations, and symbolically inverting others, the divisions between Dara’ang and Tai people appear strengthened to a greater degree than had been the case in Burma. In the struggle over land and the position of the Dara’ang and other upland peoples within Thailand, ethnicity is increasingly instrumentalized, as political and economic struggles are waged along ethnic lines. The discourse of religious authenticity engages this struggle on the symbolic level, but does not transcend the divisions or even the categories of highlanders vs. lowlanders that lay at the heart of the matter.

While the dichotomies that underwrite the social hierarchy may be left intact, we can nevertheless see within such challenges expressions of agency amongst a subjugated population, agency that is located within the arena of culture (cf. Ortner 2005). Ethnicity, like other forms of identity, is an effect of the generative practices and discourses that people are subjected to. Nevertheless, people are not determined by these practices and discourses; rather, the rules that govern the production of identity generate a compulsion to repeat the pattern, to reproduce the social reality to which they are subjected (Butler 1990: 145). This repetition can be seen in most theoretical models of social reproduction, from Berger and Luckmann’s (1966) externalization/objectivization/internalization model of socialization, to Bourdieu’s (1977) concept of habitus. Through the process of internalizing social roles, including a person’s ethnic identity, subjects are presented with a model for how to be what they are, to repeat the performance that, for minorities, includes reproducing their subordinate position.

Tactics of cultural appropriation and symbolic inversion provide a way for subaltern populations to challenge the identity constructions found within the dominant
ideology. Religion in particular is well suited for constructing alternative visions of the world because of its capacity to speak persuasively about circumstances that are other than those observable at that particular time. But it is not only religion as a cultural system that provides symbolic material for constructing new identities. In chapter 6 and 7 I have discussed how the revivalist message of the khruba monk movement provides Dara’ang communities with a cultural framework for understanding their own religion as more authentic than the practices that are found amongst the lowland Tai Yuan. The khruba monk movement may be seen as a social memory, a memory of a time when the Tai Yuan kingdom of Lan Na was the dominant cultural and political power in the region. Memory, Swartz (1996: 910) tells us, is a particular type of cultural system, one that can be appropriated just as like any other cultural system (religion, kinship systems, language, political ideology), one that may be adopted, transformed, and re-deployed by different groups.

Social memory can therefore provide another layer of cultural consciousness within which people situate themselves, a place from which to reflect back upon their social position, and a framework through which people can interpret their own experiences.135 Within the particular case of Dara’ang religion, the revivalist message of the khruba monks, which attempts to represent the past within the present, speaks to the religious practices already embodied by the group. It is possible that critical discourses based upon a rhetoric of religious authenticity may have formed without the influence of khruba monks, but there is little doubt that Khruba Jao Theuang helps legitimate Dara’ang claims that the community maintains a Buddhist practice that is more authentic.

135. For an overview of social memory studies see Fentress and Wickam (1992); Olick and Robbins (1998).
than that found amongst many contemporary Tai Yuan villages, and that these claims draw upon a historical framework associated with the kingdom of Lan Na and the history of the Tai Yuan people who have “forgotten” the practices of their ancestors.

Dara’ang cultural narratives of religious identity refer to the embodied practices of the group in such a way that it enables particular critical narratives to be constructed about the group’s social position. Embodied practices, what Connerton (1989) calls “social habit memory” and Bourdieu (1977) calls “habitus,” provide material not only for maintaining societies (through commemorative ceremonies and sheer inertia), but also for challenging structures of domination. While habit may be society’s “most precious conservative agent”, as William James (2007: 121-122) once wrote, it can also serve as a material foundation for constructing new critical interpretations about the social world, and therefore provide a material impetus for social change.

Embodied practices, those that are passed on through the bodies of successive generations, also provide for certain limitations regarding how a person or group might

136. Habitus represents a form of social memory similar to the concept of “social habit memory” proposed by Connerton (1989). Connerton distinguishes three types of memory: personal, cognitive, and habit. The first two of these have been studied extensively by psychologists and concern the personal recollection of one’s life history and the cognitive processes of the mind. The third category, habit-memory, concerns “the capacity to reproduce a certain performance” (Connerton 1989: 59), such as remembering how to play the piano. “Social habit-memory” is therefore the embodiment past experience in the present, which Connerton conceptualizes primarily in terms of commemorative ceremonies that provides groups with their continuity through time and space. The distinction between Connerton’s “social habit memory” and Bourdieu’s “habitus” is subtle but significant; their difference arising primarily from the different theoretical lineage each scholar is coming through. Connerton moves from the work of Halbwachs (1992) to formulate an idea of social reproduction based on a concept of social memory, while Bourdieu begins with structuralism, with its rules and regulations, and moves to develop a theory of bodily practice. According to Strathern (1996: 36), the outcome is a fine distinction between habit as a descriptive category into which Connerton inserts analytical content, and habitus as a theoretical construct that provides a key to understanding social behaviour. Put another way, and using Bourdieu’s own terminology, habit memory is the opus operatum while habitus is a modus operandi. Both scholars build upon the tradition of Durkheim, and both are more concerned with social reproduction than social change. In the end, the two arrive at a similar position, neither of which deals effectively with the question of social change as both stress continuity, reproduction, and inertia. Yet their difference remains significant, as Connerton’s position allows for a greater degree of self reflection on the part of individuals and groups towards their embodied practices, even if this reflection is largely conservative in character.
reflect upon themselves and their place in the world. Cultural narratives are not free floating constructs; critical reflection requires material upon which, and through which, to reflect (Ortner 2005: 46). Critical subjectivity therefore lies within the possibility people have, through cultural frameworks, to re-inscribe material reality with new meanings, material realities that both enable and limit the production of new possibilities. Reflection upon one’s condition is not disconnected from the habitual activities of everyday life, as Bourdieu’s notion of a social crisis might lead us to believe, but a process of re-interpreting the objective conditions of existence through cultural discourses (religious or otherwise) that refer back to the embodied reality of social actors. It is cultural narratives that allow social actors to break the cycle of repetition that social hierarchies depend upon for their perpetuation.

**Religion and Social Change**

The question remains as to what extent these narratives might enable structural changes to occur. In Southeast Asia, numerous mass movements have drawn upon millenarian discourses. In addition to the khruba monk movement, popular expressions of millenarianism among highland populations include the Ywa and Telakhon movements of the Karen (Stern 1968: 305; Hinton 1979: 90), the return of G’uisha amongst the Lahu (Young 1962: 10), and the Paj Cai movement amongst the Hmong (Tapp 2005: 77). These various movements bear a strong resemblance to the expectations of other dispossessed groups, including the cargo cults of Melanesia (Worsley 1957), the Ghost Dancers of North America (Mooney 1991), and the numerous millenarian movements that emerged amongst the poor of Europe during the Middle Ages (Cohn 2004). In fact,
as Scott (2009: 294) reminds us, virtually all mass struggles before the first quarter of the eighteenth century were articulated in religious terms.

This is not to suggest, however, that a militant mass movement is forming amongst those people who participate in the contemporary khruba monk movement of northern Thailand. While there was a time when this movement threatened the power of the Thai state, khruba monks today are much more accommodating and their resistance has given way to a revivalism which fits well with the shift that is underway towards a recognition of multiculturalism and regional identity within the kingdom. Nevertheless, for many people religious categories continue to provide the means through which the world is thought, and appropriated discourses are commonly employed in ways that the originators may not have foreseen or intended.

Even when the situation is not one of dramatic revolt, subtle forms of resistance in the shape of local narratives are important in terms of sustaining a community through their struggle (Fortmann 1995: 1055). As Scott (1990) points out in a passage which explicitly references religious discourses, how “could we understand the open break represented by the civil rights movements or the black power movement in the 1960s without understanding the offstage discourses among black students, clergymen, and their parishioners?” (p. 199). The same may be said of the political action such as the involvement of Dara’ang people in the large demonstrations held in Chiang Mai in 1997, the present legal battles over land rights which are occurring in many Dara’ang villages, the involvement of younger Dara’ang men and women in activist networks across northern Thailand, and the myriad of small scale acts of resistance (poaching, expanding fields into nearby forests, and avoiding government sponsored projects) that continually
take place in Dara’ang villages across northern Thailand. Such acts, explicitly political or otherwise, represent expressions of autonomy for members of these communities, a resistance to the governmentality imposed upon upland communities by the various organizations of the state. These are actions underpinned by an ideology of pride and self-worth, one that counters the dominant discourse that constructs upland communities as primitive and in need of guidance.

Religion is important for the possibilities that it provides. While difficult to define, religion always makes reference to something other than the objective reality to which people are subjected. In his study of agrarian revolt in Southeast Asia, Scott (1977) notes that “popular religion” contains “almost inevitably the seeds of an alternative symbolic universe - a universe which in turn makes the social world in which the peasants actually live less than completely inevitable” (p. 224). This interjection of a new possibility provides the symbolic means through which critical assessments of social identity may be formed, and as such, new frameworks for action within the world.
Appendix A: Citizenship and Identity Politics in Thailand

Dara’ang men and women in Thailand continue to struggle for citizenship rights within the country. In Thailand, individuals without citizenship cannot own land, and thus until the problem of citizenship was solved, Dara’ang farmers would remain in a highly precarious situation. While the situation has improved in recent years, a 1999 survey from the department of Public Welfare showed that 40% of “tribal” persons did not have citizenship (Vandergeest 2003: 30). While denying citizenship rights to highlanders, the Thai state has employed a number of different classification techniques aimed at governing the upland population over the past 50 years. In 1965, the Nationality Act granted Thai citizenship to anyone born in the kingdom whose parents were Thai nationals. This act excluded highland dwelling ethnic minority people in practice as most people had no means for proving that they had lived in Thailand for any length of time. Following the numerous conflicts which erupted in Southeast Asia in the late 1960s and 1970s, Thailand received a number of refugees from neighbouring countries. Thai authorities at this time began issuing “pink cards” to political refugees who came from Burma before 1976. The distinction between pre-1976 refugees (who can become citizens) and those who came later (and cannot become citizens) remains in effect today (Toyota 2005: 119). Between 1985 and 1988 the Social Welfare Department of the Ministry of Interior carried out a survey of “hill tribe” people and distributed light blue cards (1990 to 1991) to indicate their “hill tribe” (chao khao) status (Department of Provincial Administration 2001: 37). In 2000 another survey of “hill tribe” people was conducted with Japanese government funds and individuals who had never been issued
any other status (i.e. blue cards or refugee cards) were given green cards with red frames. Both these cards were not meant as a precursor to citizenship but as a means of governing the population. “Hill tribe” people who did receive these cards could apply for citizenship if they met the necessary qualifications. However, the requirements at the time were exceedingly complicated and only a limited number of individuals could manoeuvre their way through the bureaucratic red tape, which often required the paying of bribes to government officials (see Toyota 2005: 119-120 for a government published list of requirements from 1993).

While “hill tribe” people have had a difficult time gaining citizenship, the situation has improved in the past decade. On 28 August 2001 the government of Thailand decided to grant Thai citizenship to “hill tribe” children whose parents were permanent residents of Thailand and registered “aliens” regardless of where they were born (Toyota 2005: 124). In addition, those individuals, whether “hill tribe” or other ethnic minorities, who came to Thailand prior to 3 October 1985 are eligible for citizenship if they can prove their residency within the kingdom prior to this date (Department of Public Administration 2001: 38). Nevertheless, even with the increased pressure put on the state bureaucracy by the government the process remains quite confusing for both state agents and local highland minorities. A report released by the Commission on Civil Status and a Working Committee on Tribal People and Ethnic Groups found that of the 377,677 highland people who applied for status verification in 2002, 220,527 people were classified as illegal immigrants and could face deportation. This group constituted 58% of the total highland applicants (Toyota 2005: 124). While the number of people who have received citizenship has increased since 2000, there are
still many highland ethnic minority people who do not have citizenship rights today.

Currently (April 2008) 169 people in Pang Daeng Nai have Thai citizenship cards. This number has risen considerably in the past 10 years, as Wasana (2003: 92) reported in 2003 that only 77 people in Pang Daeng Nai had citizenship. While the number of Dara’ang who are receiving citizenship is rising, not having citizenship remains a problem.

Plate 2. Village Post (*ho teu*) during the annual *song krau* ritual.
Plate 3: Bom do gluan.

Plate 4: Kong Fen
Plate 5: Ceremony to mark new temple construction. Old yong in background.

Plate 7: Wat Den, Mae Taeng, Chiang Mai province.

Plate 8: Money trees at Wat Den.
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