

CHAPTER1

Introduction

Introduction

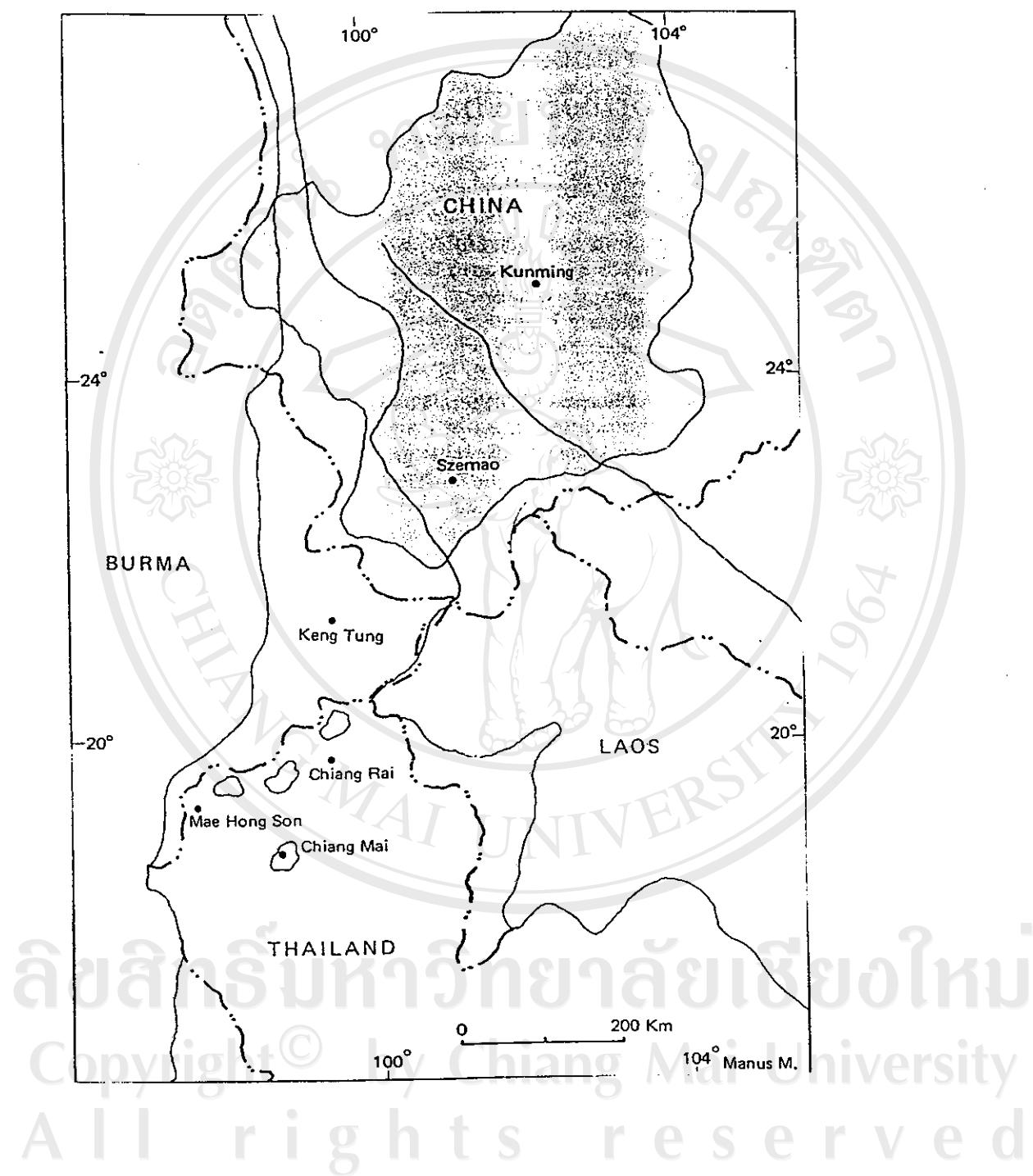
“Haw” is the ethnic term used among Tai-speaking people in northern Thailand, Laos, the Shan State in Burma, and Sipsongpanna in Yunnan, to indicate Yunnanese Chinese. As early as the 13th. century, Yunnanese Chinese had already appeared in northern Thailand. The period coincides with the period when mass Muslim settlement into Yunnan, mainly from Turkey, had begun. Muslims, who settled in the area, gained control over the land trade routes. They were mostly merchants. Some Muslim merchants maintained long-distance trading links with Burma, Laos and northern Thailand by crossing hills with ponies or caravans. They traded walnuts, chestnuts, velvet cloth and brass utensils and in the dry season returned with raw cotton, tea, opium, gemstones and sometimes grain to Yunnan before the rainy season (Hill, 1983:125-126). Some Muslims settled in major market towns in the regions and organized Yunnanese Muslim Communities.

Muslim communities had appeared in Chiang Mai by the late 1890s. They developed commercial activities in various retail enterprises such as selling fruit and vegetables, opening restaurants, grocery shops, etc, and cultivated direct links with the local economy. Yunnanese Muslims gradually evolved into successful “middlemen” in the community and then achieved status as permanent residents¹.

¹ Soonthornpasuch (1977) records that one Yunnanese Muslim man was given a Thai name. He was the leader of the first group of Yunnanese Muslims to settle in Chiang Mai. He was awarded a contract by the regional authority to deliver mail throughout the more remote areas of Chiang Mai province by using his trade pack animals, in addition to his usual trading business. He was later contracted to supply construction materials for the building of the Lampang-Chiang Mai railway. Finally, when the railway eventually reached Chiang Mai, he donated some of his land for its construction. Thus, in recognition of his long service to the government and his contributions toward public works, he was eventually given a Thai family name (Soonthornpasuch 1977: 56-57).

Map 1: Northern Thailand and Neighboring Countries

Source: Hill, 1983: 124



They were known as “Haw” by the local people; the Muslim community in Chiang Mai was called “Baan Haw”, which mean “Haw’s Village”. The majority of Yunnanese Muslims usually settled in urban cities as shopkeepers. Small numbers of Yunnanese resided in remote towns, villages, or hill tribe villages in Chiang Rai, Chiang Sean, and Chiang Khong as well as Chiang Mai as part of the process of their migration from Yunnan via Burma. Products from the hill tribe people were transported to urban cities by Yunnanese Muslim traders in those rural villages. Thus, Yunnanese Chinese functioned as “middlemen” between the upland and lowland. It was commonly recognized by people in Thailand that “Haw” had “never formed mountain villages of their own and never practiced agriculture” (Mote, 1960), no matter where it was a rural village or urban city.

Later in the 20th century, however, the picture of “Haw” among northern Thai people began to change with the arrival of Nationalist Chinese armies as well as civilian refugees from Yunnan. The chaotic situation in Yunnan increased during the 1940’s due to the escalating Japanese invasion and civil crisis between Nationalists (Kuomintang or KMT) and Communists (CCP). Considerable numbers of farmers fled to neighboring countries as refugees. When Communist finally won the civil war in 1949, a number of displaced Nationalist soldiers (KMT troops) fled to Burma and Laos. The Nationalist soldiers and their dependents also stayed in the frontier hills of Thai-Burma-Laos, arriving eventually in northern Thailand. Though they were never truly “Haw” in the former Muslim sense of the name, they were also termed as “Haw” by local people due to similar physical appearance and common Yunnanese language.

Thus, these Yunnanese Chinese groups who had never before constituted one coherent group, were branded with the same ethnic term, “Haw”, by northern Thai people, and later even by the State Classification. Today, people in Thailand identify the term “Haw” according to their own experience, understanding or prior interaction with Yunnanese Chinese. Those who have no interaction with Yunnanese Chinese derive their preconceptions from the media which often characterizes the “Haw” as opium traffickers, or from ‘urban myth’ which regards “Haw” as hill tribes peoples.

For this reason there has never been any clear historical precedent for the term “Haw”, hence the writer needs to define what in this context is meant by “Haw”

1-1. Background of the Study

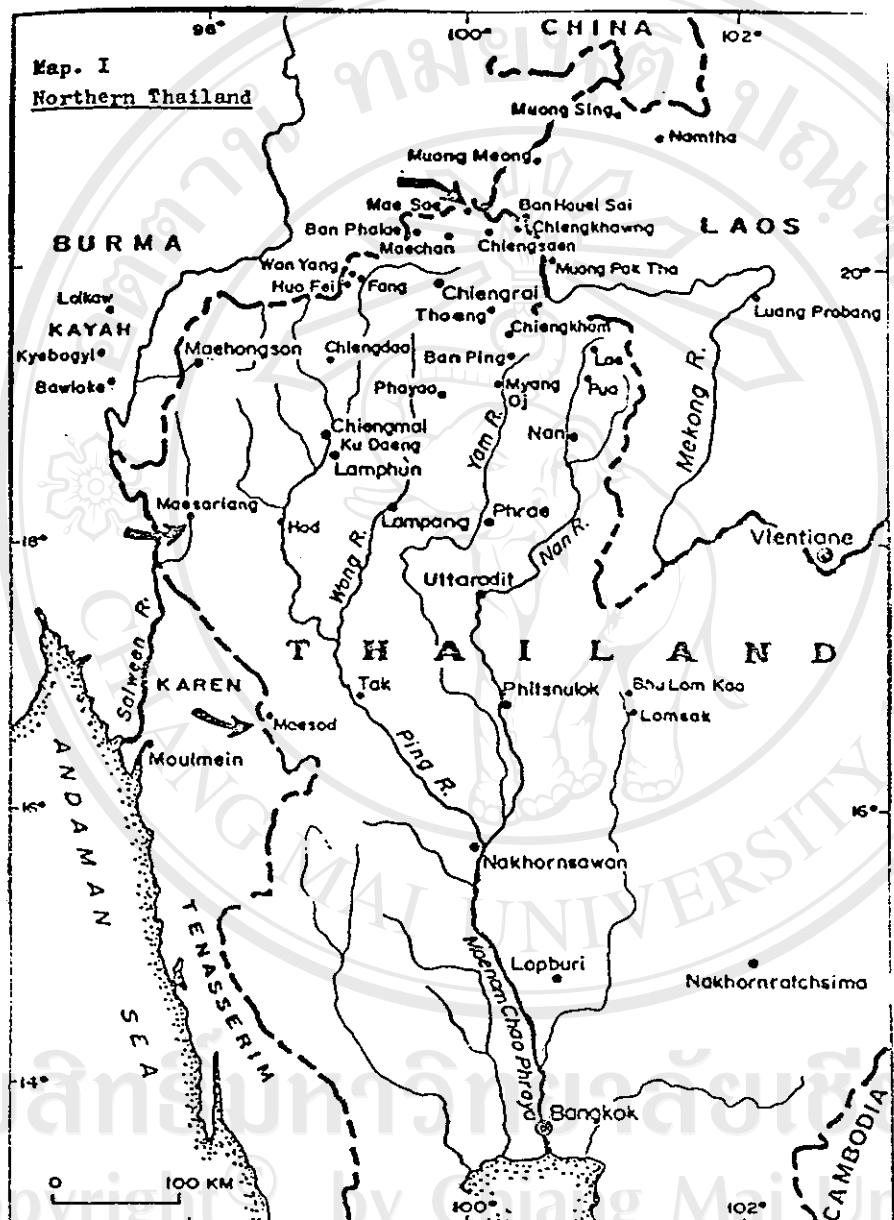
“Haw” which the writer has studied are Yunnanese Chinese who are related to the Chinese Nationalist army or “Kuomintang”(KMT) and, their descendants who have now been living in northern Thailand for at least 40 years². The population of KMT Yunnanese 1994 was estimated at 889,018, including former Nationalist soldiers, their dependents and Yunnanese civilian refugees, scattered in 77 villages in Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai and Mae Hon Son provinces (Chang, 1999).

After the end of the war in China in 1949, defeated Nationalists (KMT) went to Taiwan and established the Nationalist government there to oppose the Communist regime in mainland of China, with Chiang Kai-Shek as its leader. Units of the KMT army and civilian refugees had also previously fled to Burma. They organized guerrilla activities and tried to make forays into Yunnan. Their guerrilla activities became so aggressive that they were identified as terrorists by the Burmese government, and eventually persuaded by the United Nations to evacuate or disarm KMT armies in Burma. Evacuation of the KMT in Burma to Taiwan was organized in 1953, but only some troops actually withdrew to Taiwan. The remainder of the Nationalist armies moved into the hills of the Thai-Burma border and established military bases to keep open a chance to attack Communist China. After the second evacuation in the beginning of 1960s, the largest unit of Burmese-based KMT forces, who had refused to evacuate to Taiwan (the 5th and 3rd armies) entered Thailand. The total number of soldiers was 5,900, and civilian refugees was 10,000, most of whom were soldier's dependents (Chang, 1999). The two units of the Nationalist army were allowed to organize self-government in marginal areas of Chiang Rai, Chiang Mai and Mae Hong Song. The flow of Yunnanese refugees' migration continued throughout the 1960s and the number of KMT Yunnanese in these mountainous border areas increased significantly.

² This group of Yunnanese Chinese, or “Haw” will be called as KMT Yunnanese in this thesis.

Map 2: Northern Thailand

Source: Soonthornpasuch, 1977: 10



After their arrival, the dependents of the KMT armies and civilian refugees cleared forest for farming, practiced upland cultivation, grew potatoes, tea, maize and vegetable crops to make their living. Pigs and poultry were also raised in areas where the land was not large enough for agriculture. Trading was another area of economic activity that they practiced in Thailand. Once issued with temporary ID cards by the Thai government, they were free to leave their villages to trade gemstones, tea, and opium. As for KMT soldiers, the opium trade became the main source of finance for their military operations in Thailand. With their authority as soldiers and local perception as “Haw”, KMT soldiers soon expanded their trading and with the profits of trade controlled most of opium trading traffic in northern Thailand.

While maintaining their agricultural base, dependents of the KMT soldiers and civilian refugees (KMT Yunnanese) in reality depended on the financial support from the 5th army and 3rd army as well as the financial aid from the Nationalist government in Taiwan. Supported by the military structure of Nationalist armies, the KMT Yunnanese were able to develop infrastructure, establish Chinese schools, build Chinese temples, and establish necessary facilities in their villages. The village was totally Chinese in character, eating Yunnanese food, going to the Chinese school, speaking Yunnanese Chinese and celebrating Chinese traditions. The village was also encompassed by the authority of KMT military, and interacting with KMT soldiers was daily matter. This transplanted cultural environment lasted until all KMT villages were ordered to disarm and the Thai Ministry of the Interior came to control the villages directly in 1984.

Since then, the Thai government has shifted its polity and has integrated all KMT Yunnanese into mainstream Thai society, culture, economy and the political system. Various projects were imposed. The KMT villages were obliged to set up Thai temples, public halls and Thai schools in order to add a Thai element to their villages. Thai education, which uses Thai language as the medium of instruction, was imposed on all Yunnanese children with the hope that Thai schools would foster Thai values in the KMT Yunnanese population. Infrastructure and transportation to connect KMT villages to the cities were also improved at the same time. As a result

of those improvement and integration projects, the KMT Yunnanese were able to expand their economic activities and became increasingly involved in Thai society.

1-2. Statement of the problem

As a result of these national integration projects, the KMT Yunnanese have now been, to certain degree, absorbed into Thai culture and Thai society. The young KMT Yunnanese today, in particular, speak Thai fluently, enjoy Thai culture, and even behave like “*proper*” Thais.

While adapting to Thai culture, some sections KMT Yunnanese rigorously maintain their Yunnanese Chinese.

Contrary to the young generation, who are enthusiastically absorbing mainstream Thai culture, the old generations have been trying to maintain traditional social norms in the village. Providing Chinese education to Yunnanese children has been used as main tool of the preservation of Yunnanese values, culture and identity. Due to strong attachment by the older generations, Yunnanese culture and identity have been successfully overlaid on the young generations, consequently, the young Yunnanese today are more than ever caught in between in two cultures, Thai and Yunnanese, and two societies, nations and cultural community. In the midst of these socio-cultural changes in the villages, it can be questioned where the identity of this cultural group in Thailand truly stands.

This study aims to examine how an ethnic group, the KMT Yunnanese Chinese, has been able to maintain their identity and how they are going to deal with the major influence from the local Thai culture. In order to answer these questions, the historical background of their migration has been studied, especially in the detail related to the political context of KMT Yunnanese in Thailand. Secondly, the writer will discuss self-identification among the KMT Yunnanese, which may differ from generation to generation. Finally, this report will examine the position of the Chinese school, which plays a major role in transmitting Chinese culture, of its values and the expectation of the villagers.

1-3. Objectives

1. To identify the Thai policy and political relationship between the Thai government and KMT Yunnanese in the past
2. To examine the self-identification of the KMT Yunnanese and its complexity
3. To explore the value of the Chinese school to Ban Tham Santisuk villagers and their expectations

1-4. Research Site

This study was conducted in Ban Tham Santisuk (Tham Santisuk village), Mae Sai district, Chiang Rai province. The reason of this selection is because the complex cultural relationships in Ban Tham Santisuk were more readily identifiable than with other KMT villages for the following reasons:-

First, the village is one of the earliest KMT villages established during the 1950s before the two units of the Nationalist armies arrived in Thailand. As early as village's first establishment, a military-based Thai education was introduced in the village. All children in the village have been legally obliged to learn the Thai language. Because of Thai language penetration from an early stage, the middle-aged villagers acquired Thai proficiency and even villagers in their 50s and 60s today are also able to speak Thai and communicate in Thai as well.

Second, in contrast to the other KMT villages, most of which are situated in mountainous area, Ban Tham Santisuk is located in a small valley near the market town, Mae Sai. Since the land was too limited for villagers to practice agricultural activity, the villagers left the village and became paid labourers in the cities. For that reason, the villagers had greater indirect exposure to Thai culture and Thai people from an early period.

Lastly, the Chinese school in Ban Tham Santisuk is one of the famous Chinese schools among KMT Yunnanese in the north. Successive Yunnanese leaders have put their efforts in establishing their own Chinese school in order to maintain their cultural values. The Chinese school in Ban Tham Santisuk was founded shortly after

their arrival. It soon developed to junior high school level and now is expanding up to high school level with official recognition from both Thailand and Taiwan. Consequently, Ban Tham Santisuk has become a center of Yunnanese education among KMT Yunnanese and attracts interest from KMT Yunnanese in the other villages.

Thus, compared to other KMT villages, Ban Tham Santisuk has been exposed to Thai culture to a much greater degree. Concurrently, strong adherence toward the ethnic culture was still seen in the village through the instrument of the Chinese school. KMT Yunnanese in Ban Tham Santisuk have been living under the aegis of two cultures and two societies. While accepting Thai culture and living in Thai society on the one hand, they also try to keep their own culture and ethnicity on the other.

1-5. Scope of Study

Residents in Ban Tham Santisuk consist of those groups: former Nationalist soldiers, descendants of soldiers, civilian refugees, former Yunnanese merchants, Yunnanese immigrants from Burma and Yunnan, Yunnanese from the other villages, and non-Yunnanese women who have married to Yunnanese men. Focus groups are selected from those who have lived in the village from the beginning and their descendants. It includes former Nationalist soldiers, their descendants, former merchants and their offspring.

1-6. Research Methodology

The main data-gathering methods were based on documentary research, interviews, observation and sampling surveys with the use of questionnaires. Formal interviewing was introduced to substantiate facts and to fully understand present circumstances. Similarly, informal interviewing was introduced to gather casual opinions and in-depth interviewing for case study work to provide data for analysis.

1) First visit/ Introduction

Data gathering in Ban Tham Santisuk started in 2000, from the beginning of May. The purpose of the first visit was to observe the overall village situation and to introduce the researcher to the village headman. However, the writer was introduced by one of villagers to a Taiwanese woman who has been in the village for more than 5 years, teaching Chinese for Yunnanese children and taking care of Yunnanese orphans. She was able to speak Thai so the research project was explained to her in that language. This lady facilitated introductions to the village headman and the local ethnic Chinese leadership. The two leaders were delighted with the visit and allowed the writer to carry out the research.

2) Second visit / Observation

After question items were prepared, the village was revisited the following month and the Taiwanese lady's house provided accommodation for about a week since the village was hosting guests from Hong Kong who had come to visit KMT villages in northern Thailand. Luckily, the writer was able to join their excursions and visit other KMT villages in more remote areas. This occasion was exploited to observe the social systems in the villages and to learn more real facts about the KMT Yunnanese in northern Thailand.

3) Third visit/ Informal interview, key informant interview

This research was conducted when returning from the second visit one month later. To obtain information from villagers, informal interviews took place with children, young people, middle-aged people, elders, Thai residents and hill tribe residents in the village; both male and female, on a broad and extensive sample base. Sometimes informal *ad hoc* interviews were held wherever convenient; on the street, ice cream shop, at the Chinese school, noodle shop and in private houses if the circumstances dictated it. It was a worthwhile technique as it not only allowed an understanding of the social setting, but also made villagers feel more comfortable with the presence of 'researchers'. The fact that the researcher was not Thai made attention getting easier but there was enough language and ethnic commonality to be able to identify social norms.

Visits were simultaneously carried out to institutions in the village such as Chinese school, Thai school, Chinese temple, mosque and district office, to correct relevant information about the village. The ‘urban myth’ “Story” of Ban Tham Santisuk was corrected by formal interview with village headman, current Chinese headman, the first Chinese headman, and the Imam (Muslim leader). A nun in a Chinese temple, who knew a lot about the history of the village from the point of view of women, served as an important informant. Information about the current educational situation was gathered through interviewing Taiwanese social volunteer workers, the principal of the orphanage, and teachers in Thai and Chinese schools. In order to capture the outsiders’ views toward “Haw”, two Thai officials in Mae Sai district immigration office were interviewed. Both related how Thai and KMT Yunnanese are / have been viewed by Thais and what *position* in Thai society they hold.

4) Fourth visit/ Field observation, participation, participation observation

The fourth visitation was carried out in August. A Yunnanese woman, who had been to Japan and was able to speak Japanese was on hand to assist the researcher’s effort. This lady provided the base for the period of research and in staying with the woman it was possible to observe their daily life style and activities as well recording the stories she related about her generation and the Haw situation. Furthermore, she also provided introductions to various activities and gatherings. Such participation and participative observation gave an understanding of how the village was organized and who constituted the ruling group. What was more important was being eventually able to obtain some trust among villagers by observing and taking part in the village’s activities.

5) Fifth visit/ Distributing questionnaires and in-depth interview for case study

Questionnaires were produced for the fifth visit to the village and distributed to students in the Chinese school. The purpose was to understand the Chinese school in more detail. Students who were under elemental level 4 were eliminated from target of this investigation since they were too young to participate in the questionnaire design. Two classes from elementary school, level 4 and 6, and two

classrooms from junior high school, level 2 and 3, were chosen as target groups. The number of questions was fixed at 20, and included searches relating to their family issues, language usage issues, future plans, opinions toward Thai/Chinese school and their self-identification.

At the same time, informants for the case study were identified. Assistant of the village's head helped to classify villagers and further helped to conduct case studies. He arranged appointments with targeted informants for in-depth interviews, helping with translation and understanding, and created easy atmosphere allaying any of the villages' suspicions. In-depth interviewing was employed in the case studies in order to understand background, experience, expectation and self-recognition of each person. Villagers with a varied range of experiences, status, and occupation were carefully chosen.

10 % of total households were sampled in the village for this case study. Although the total number of Yunnanese household in the village in 2001 was statistically 185 families, about 50% of them have already moved out and were not living in the village³. Therefore, 12 informants were identified, who have different social status, occupation, memory, background, family composition and different perspectives. Informants included 6 women and 6 men. Due to the fact that the young generation numbers were limited and *had little time to be available*, informants for this case study were all age over 30s.

6) Further visit/

The fieldwork finished end of October. Contact was maintained with the village often, especially when there was some Chinese ceremonial - up to February in 2002.

7) Documentary research

In addition, documentary research was undertaken to justify and correlate the

³ Interview with the village's head in August 2002.

information gathered in the interview samples.

“Historical Record in Baan Tham” (1996) which written in Chinese helped to connect segment information about settlement history and history that was obtained from villagers’ narratives to complete one story. “Special Tasks 327”, unpublished official document written in Thai gave the perspective from the Thai government and revealed the relationship between KMT Yunnanese and the Thai government since 1960s.



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