

CHAPTER 4

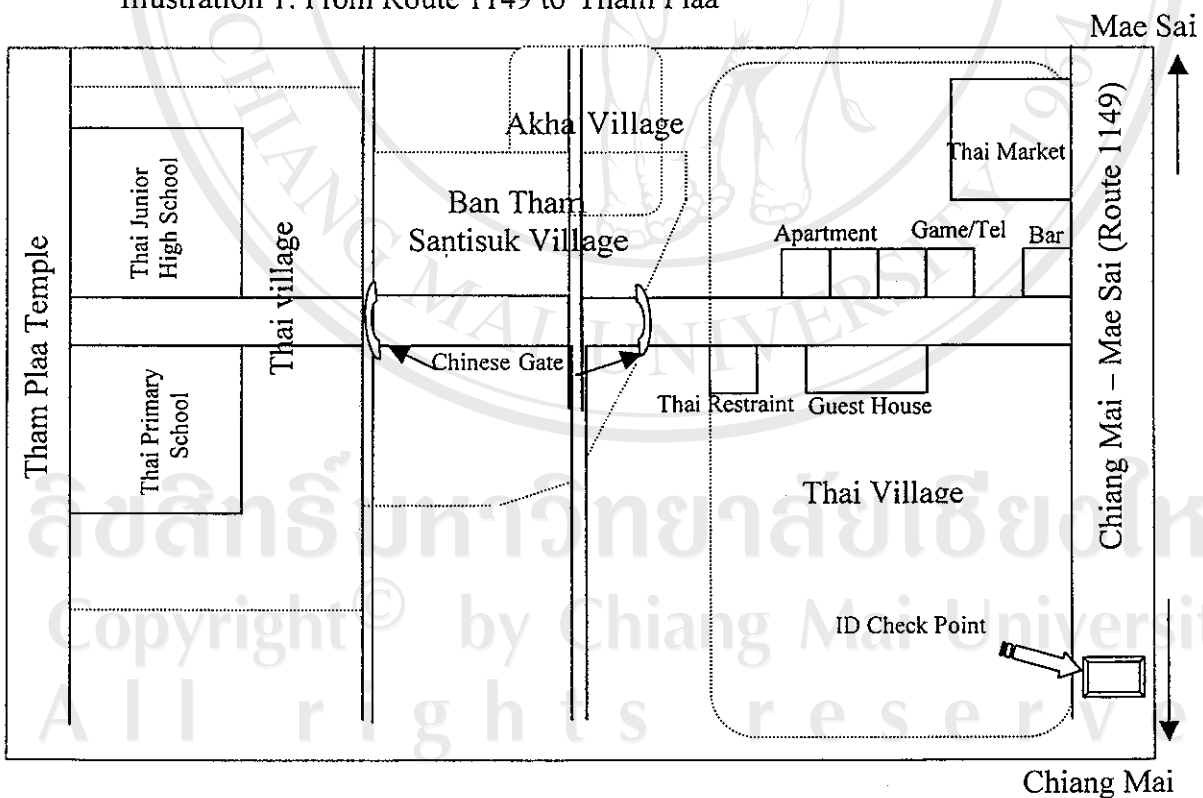
Ban Tham Santisuk Settings

Introduction

In this chapter, Ban Tham Santisuk village is described in detail, including its physical setting, population, economy and socio-political condition. By putting 'flesh' on the image of the village, an attempt is made to ascertain that the place they live/grow up play significant role to construct people's cultural identity.

4-1. Ban Tham Santisuk in Perspective

Illustration 1: From Route 1149 to Tham Plaa



Ban Tham Santisuk Village is located near the Thai-Burma border in Chiang Rai, only 12-kilometers southwest down from Mae Sai. The village is 300 square kilometers, in a forest reserve valley²⁶. The village is situated near a state highway, Chiang Mai – Mae Sai (Route 1149). The highway is 2 kilometers distant from the village and it takes about 15 minutes to reach the village to reach on foot. It also takes only about 10 to 15 minutes to go to Mae Sai from the village by car, motorbike or bus. Buses from Mae Sai take passengers everywhere in Thailand, including Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Bangkok and northeast part of Thailand. All buses from Mae Sai are stopped at a checkpoint which is located near the village and the border patrol inspect passengers' ID cards.

A wide metalled road branches off from the route 1149 to the village. At the beginning of the road, around the T-junction, there are many Thai owned shops scattering around, such as a game shop, beauty salon, butcher's shop, mobile service, grocery shop, small bar and a market. There are also several Thai villagers with rickshaws at the beginning of the road to bring people to the village. The road starts from a Thai village, passing through Ban Tham Santisuk and ends in another Thai village at the foot of a mountain. There is a Thai school, a Thai temple, and a cave in which several Buddhist images are enshrined in the latter Thai village. This cave is called as "Tham Plaa" and one of tourist spots in Mae Sai.

The road, which branches off from the route 1149, runs through the middle of the village where two branches of a stream cross. Ban Tham Santisuk starts from a gate on which is written, "Welcome to Ban Tham Santisuk" in both Chinese and Thai. Two-story modern homes become noticeable when it enters the village. These residential houses form a line alongside the road. Each house has open corridors with several chairs and two pillars at a gate. Almost all villagers exhibit the pictures of KMT soldiers in their homes who might be their fathers, grand fathers or themselves. Red long paper banners with Chinese poems, made by the head of the family, are attached to the pillars. Although the buildings are modern, some of the older, simpler

²⁶ District Official Document 2001.

houses also still seen amongst the newly rebuilt houses. Old low wooden dining tables and chairs are also still used. During the daytime, elderly villagers relax while sitting on chairs in the veranda in front of their house. You can see some of the old villagers still smoke long cigarettes.

Ban Tham Santisuk is a well-organized small village. It is affluent well equipped and with facilities as following,

1) Morning market

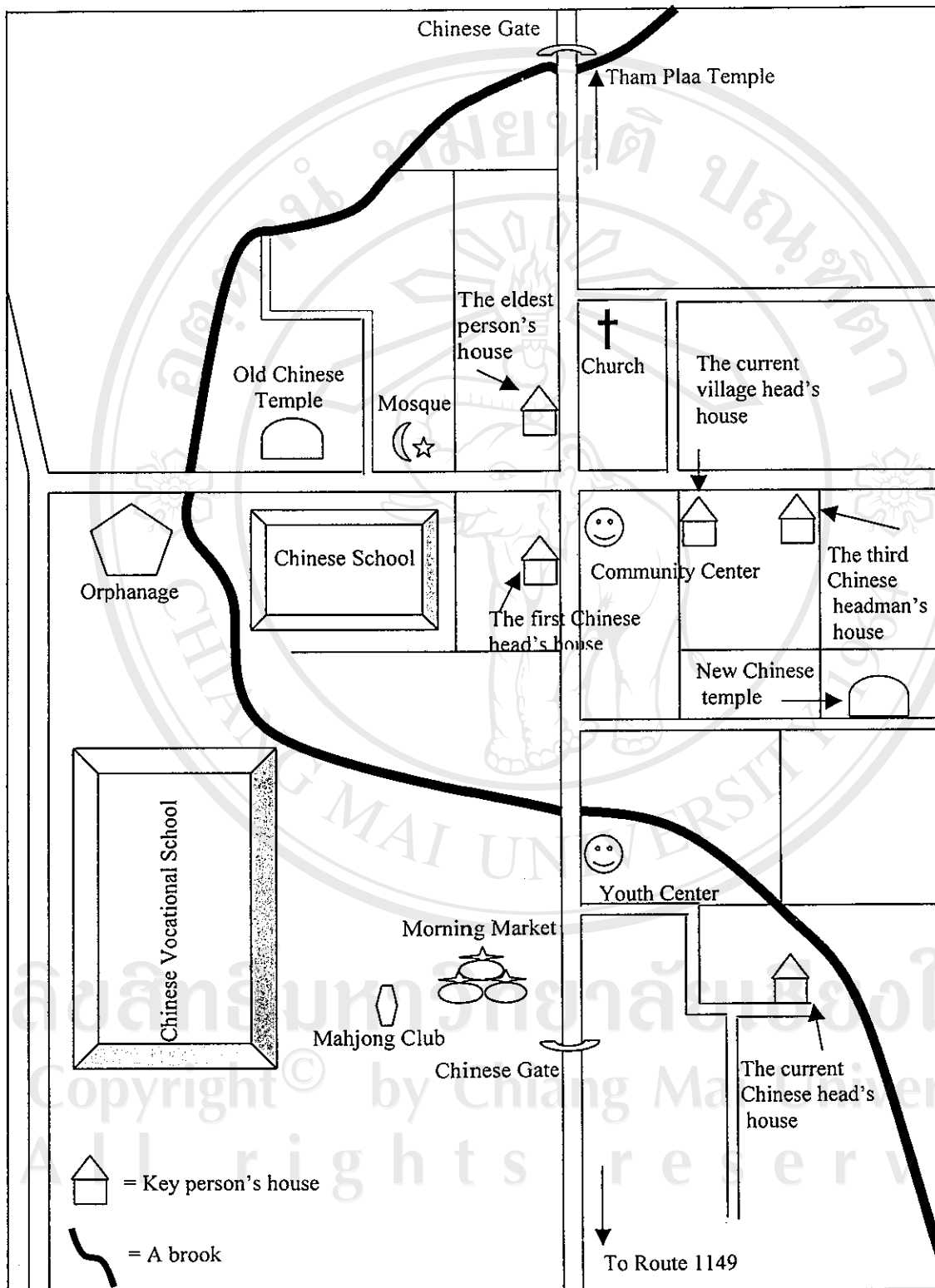
Near the village's gate, there is a morning market on the left side of the road. People sell various kinds of goods including meat, sweets, bread, rice, Chinese food, Thai food, Muslim foods, daily necessities, clothes and ceremonial goods for Chinese traditions. Merchants are mostly Chinese women. Many hill tribe women also bring their agricultural products from their villages and sell them outside the market. It costs 20 baht per month if they want to get a booth inside the market. Those people who cannot afford 20 baht line up their goods on the ground and sell like hill tribe women do. Two languages, Thai and Yunnanese are the official languages for negotiation in the market.

The market opens around 5:30 a.m. and closes around 11:00 am. The most crowded time is around 7:00. That is the time when many children come back from the Chinese school and stop by to look for something to eat before they go to the Thai school. After Chinese merchants close their shops in the afternoon, Thai villagers come to sell Thai noodles, sweets and lottery. The market is occupied by Thais and becomes a social space for Thai villagers.

2) Youth Center

There is a Youth Center in front of the morning market. Usually, the village headman and his assistant stay there and manage the various issues in the village, such as citizenship problem and infrastructure problems, as well as organize village's activities.

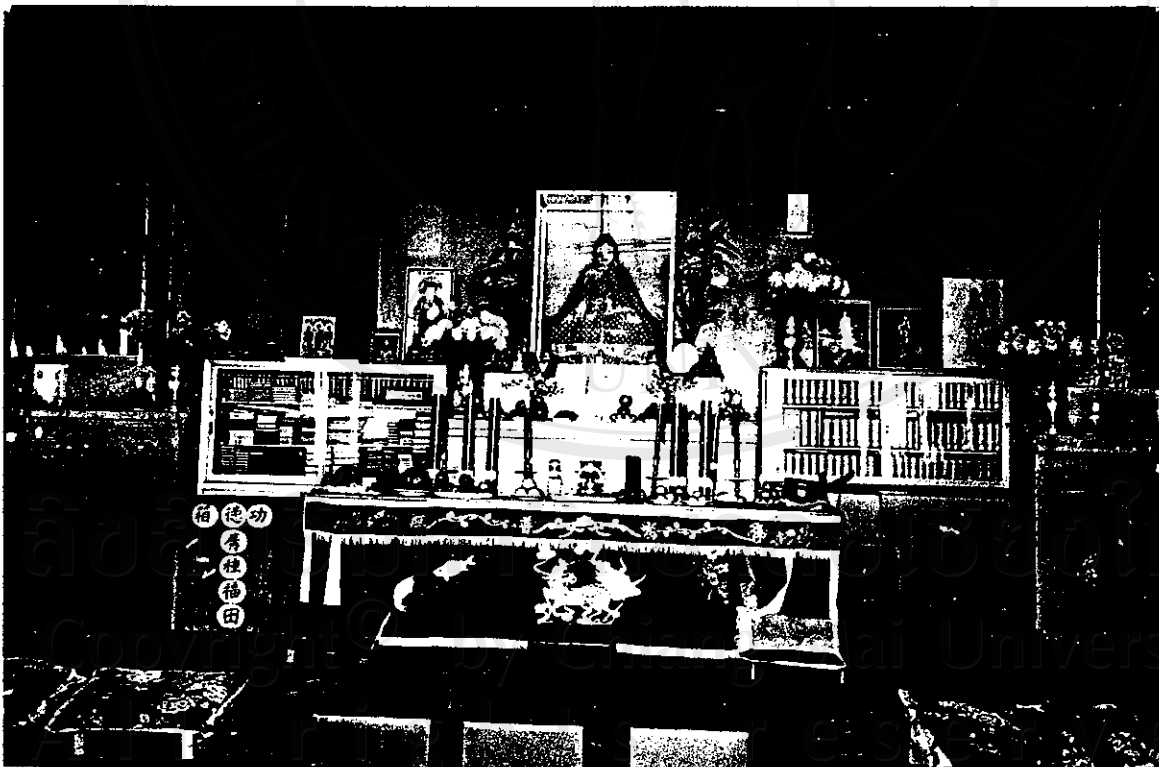
Illustration 2: Ban Tham Santisuk Outlook



3) Religious institutions

There are a total of four religious places of worship in the village, including one Mosque, one Church and two Chinese temples of the Mahayana Buddhist sect. One of two temples has been in the village since the establishment in 1954. The other one was recently built in 1995 according to local belief that, “it is desirable for a village to have a pair of temples”²⁷. Religious celebrations, such as the Vegetarian festival and chanting sutra rituals, usually taken place in the new temple. A nun in the new temple looks after a few Chinese orphans by offering a place to stay and sending them to schools both Thai and Chinese. The old temple is located in front of the Chinese school and is now in the process of expanding its site (see figure 1). Every morning, one can hear the sound of an old Yunnanese woman reciting a sutra.

Figure 1: The Chinese Temple in Front of the Chinese School

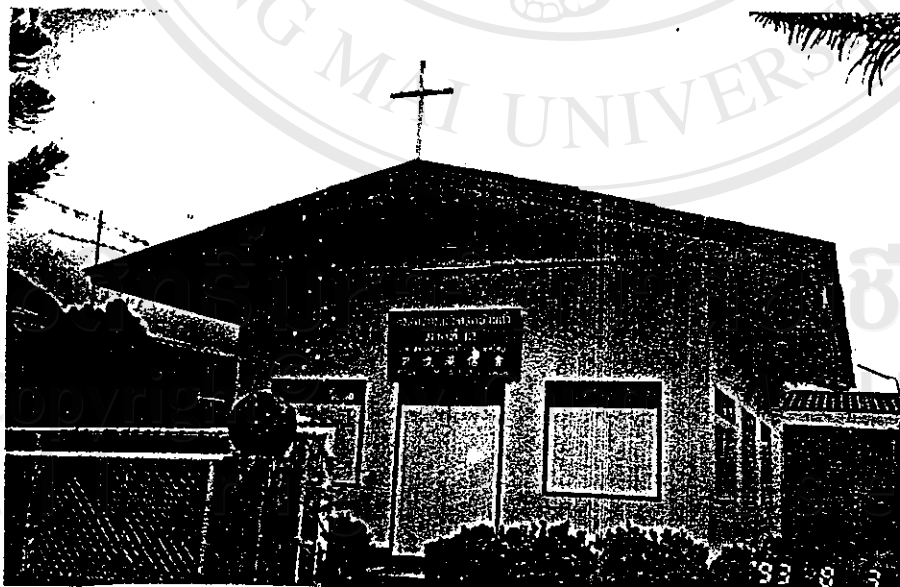


²⁷ Interview with a nun in this temple.

Figure 2: The Mosque in the Village



Figure 3: The Church in the Village



4) Community center

Community center was opened in 2000 by a Taiwanese social worker, who worked in an orphanage in Pha Thang for 12 years. She moved into Ban Tham Santisuk some years ago and bought a three-story house. While teaching at the school, she organized various gathering occasions for the children. Eventually her house became a community center for the children in the village. She opened the ice cream shop on the first floor, Chinese library on the second floor, and dormitory on the third floor for orphan children to communicate, study, and stay in the village. For the children's entertainment, she sometimes shows Chinese movies in the library and holds various events for children in the ice cream shop throughout the year. When there is such an event, lots of young people gather at the ice cream shop to participate in various activities together. She speaks only Chinese when conducting her activities to encourage children to speak more Chinese.

5) Orphanage

An orphanage is located in a little bit further past the Chinese school. It was built by a charitable Taiwanese woman in 1990²⁸. According to the principal in the orphanage, there were about 30 children, aged between 10 to 20 years old in 2001. Their living expenses, educational fees, and everything else are all covered by the Taiwanese lady's donations – she sends 150,000 baht every month. The money is divided between the three orphanages, which she has in Thailand, and each gets 50,000 baht a month. Each receives 70 baht for boys and 100 baht for girls every month towards their educational and daily basic needs. Though orphanages basically accept children less than 15 years old, all children are able to stay until they finish Thai high school.

Most of the children in the orphanage are from Pha Thang and Mae Sot where the orphanage for the KMT Yunnanese was first build. The living conditions in those villages were poor and there were only Chinese schools up to elementary level in the villages. In order to provide the KMT children with a more proficient Chinese

28 Interview with a Taiwanese woman in the community center.

education, the donor built orphanage in Ban Tham Santisuk with the hope that children in Pha Thang and Mae Sot would be able to go Chinese school up to junior high level. That is why, students who have finished the maximum level of Chinese education from their village are sent to the Ban Tham Santisuk by their parents to maintain their schooling.

6) A mahjong club

There is a mahjong club behind the morning market. It serves as a social gathering place, especially for the older Yunnanese in the village. The club is owned by a Yunnanese man. His wife is Thai and opened a Thai noodle shop next to the mahjong club. Young and middle-aged villagers also go there to play sometimes, especially on special occasions, such as Chinese New Year, Chinese full moon ceremony, and so on. Even though not frequent, these occasions provide a good opportunity for the different generations to talk and exchange ideas.

7) The Chinese School

Figure 4: The Chinese Vocational High School



The Chinese school was established right after the village was founded in 1954. The school offers from kindergarten to junior high level but is not officially recognized by the Thai government. There is a high school level vocational Chinese school in the village. Both Thai and Taiwan governments formally approved this school as a private vocational high school and the certification from this school can be used to apply for jobs in Thailand as well as Taiwan (see figure 4). Though the construction work has already done, the school has not opened yet because it has not had enough budget to recruit a sufficient number of Chinese teachers.

8) Other facilities and institutions

Besides these facilities, the village has own water supply (see figure 5), and many shops and institutions are located around the morning market. There is one barbershop, run by a Thai family, and a drugstore, run by a Chinese family, next to the morning market. The drug store is only for first aid and does not have many pharmaceutical products so villagers must to go Mae Sai if they are badly injured and need to see a doctor. Opposite the drug store, there is a tailor shop and a Thai noodle shop whose owner is a Thai lady from the northeast region and married to Yunnanese man from this village. There are three TVs inside the noodle shop and children, both Thai and Chinese, often gather to play games after school.

Figure 5: Water Supply in the Village



4-2. Demographic Setting

Table 1: Population of Ban Tham Santisuk

Age	Male	Female	Total
a) Under schooling age 0-5	29	43	72 (13,5%)
b) Elementary school level 6-11	26	30	56 (10,5%)
c) Junior high/high school level 12-17	46	73	119 (22%)
d) After high school 18-49	47	72	119 (22%)
e) More than 50	74	99	173 (32%)
Total	222	315	539 (100%)

(District Official Document 2001)

Table 1 shows the demographic distribution by age in Ban Tham Santisuk in 2001. There are 539 residents and 195 households; 10 Thai families and 185 Yunnanese families, including 102 families who had Thai citizenships and 83 families who had Alien cards²⁹. The village consisted mainly of the elders, women and children, as the middle-aged villagers consisted only 22% of the total population. The graph shows that 46% of villagers are young people, but the number of original young villagers is much less than that as it includes those who came to study at the Chinese school in Ban Than Santisuk. The villagers were, and are, all expected to work and support their families when they became old enough, so the villagers usually leave the village after they graduate from the Chinese school.

However, the village has never experienced serious depopulated situation. There has been always an inflow of population of Yunnanese from other KMT villages as well as Burma and Yunnan. Especially after the village became a flourishing entity during the 1990's, many people from other villages including non-KMT Yunnanese people moved to the village to exploit perceived opportunities. A major group among them are Independent Yunnanese who don't have legal Thai ID card. They try to identify themselves as hill tribes or children of ex-Nationalist soldiers so that they may have chance to legalize their status in Thailand. Therefore, those people usually do not stay long. They leave the village as soon as they obtain some sort of ID card.

Besides inflow of people from other villages, a U-turn phenomenon of original residents has been observed. Those who had left the village have returned with their families for the purpose of providing their children with a Chinese education and Chinese environment. And the number of these returnees is steadily and surprisingly increasing every year.

4-3. Economic Setting

The villagers in Ban Tham Santisuk have never been a productive unit since the establishment. They were used to raising pigs and chicken in the village while sending their children to work outside the village. Some of them were engaged in regional trade between Thailand and Burma and became successful middleman in Chiang Mai. According to the village's head, only 10 % of villagers belong to high-income occupations such as traders, private businessmen and landowners. About 90 % of villagers are low-incomers such as livestockers, wage laborers or carrying on small business, including shopkeeping, taxi drivers, retail sellers and Chinese teachers in the village, whose income is about 3,000 per month³⁰. This amount is less than adequate, so the finance of each household largely relies on funding from outside the village. One woman in her age 30s, whose husband is working in the construction field in Taiwan, receives around 10,000 to 25,000 baht per month. One old couple in their age 60s, whose daughter is studying in Taiwan, receives about 1,000 to 5,000 per month when she is able to make some extra money from her part-time job. Even though it is not large amount of money, remittance from Taiwan is enough for provide the living expense in the village.

Some of those who are working in outside of village are active in the field of communication such as translators or guides. Taiwan is where they generally go to look for work. Since the beginning of 1990s when the Taiwanese government restricted international migration policy, however, the villagers have started to look

²⁹ The information come from the village's own investigation.

³⁰ A salary of Chinese teacher is about 3,000 baht per month. Animal rising can earn 2,000-3,000 bath a month. One can make 1,000 to 4,000 baht by selling rise depends on villagers' demand. As for daily employers, the average of daily income for heavy work is about 100 baht and 40-50 baht for light work; an average of monthly income is about 1500 baht.

for jobs in Bangkok. Their business partners were likely to be Chinese. Among them, one of new business ventures, which is becoming popular in Thailand among the young villagers, is to open a 'working abroad' Brokerage Company. It takes an effort to find people in Thailand and organize formal labor migration procedure to Taiwan. This occupation is particularly in vogue among people who have been to Taiwan and used their skills in terms of being a bridge between the two countries.

4-4. Socio-Political Setting

The village has been under Thai administration for about a decade. Although, all important messages in the village are still announced in Chinese and only Chinese is written in a notice board in the village. Moreover, important affairs in the village are always handled by the Chinese committee, which consist of the Chinese headman, the several senior residents, the village headman and his assistant.

The Chinese committee has been organized since the village was established in 1954. A meeting is held every month to discuss matters in the village, which are related only Yunnanese residents. Requesting the government to provide ID cards, finding donations to improve Chinese school, scheduling the village activities, managing finance in the village and keeping the village security are all issues that Chinese committee is responsible for³¹. In fact, at the behest of the Chinese committee, there are still two armed guards who patrol the village every night.

On the other hand, administrative affairs in the village are handled by the village headman. The village headman must have Thai citizenship and requires a good command of Thai language since he/she has to deal with relevant Thai authorities. The current village headman was appointed by the villagers in 2000. His mother is Thai and father is a former KMT soldier and it would appear that the Chinese headman and village headman cooperate together and manage village's affairs well. Whenever the Chinese headman need to go to state institutions, for

³¹ Chinese headmen have been holding a post as president in the Chinese school from the period.

example, the Chinese headman will always bring the village headman to deal with Thai authorities.

At the same time, the absolute authority of the Chinese committee over the village is also recognized but to a degree resented, especially so by women and young people. Some women complain that there are completely excluded from the decision making in the village. In the same way, the young people in the village feel dissatisfaction with the social norms in the village controlled by the Chinese committee. Top-down way discussion is the norm and no one challenge what the Chinese committee has already decided. Some villagers are even suspicious about the way the Chinese committee manage village's finance. Various donations from outside have been given to the village but it has never been transparent to the public. Since the usage of donations are never made public, villagers are not able to see and prove if the donations were used for public benefit properly or not. As an example, there was a dispute about land property between the Chinese committee and one poor family. In order to expand the one of village's institutions, the Chinese committee asked one family, who seemed to the poorest family in the village, to move. After a resident of the house refused to leave, the children of the house failed to achieve their expected grades in the Chinese school. Furthermore, for few weeks after this event, there were ad hoc inspections of their house to find some faults which would require them, to vacate and (then) leave the village.

The seniors and ex-KMT soldiers, who constitute the Chinese committee, are still highly respected in many ways. They try to unite the village under the old tradition. They organize Yunnanese ceremonies and festivals and place pictures of Sun Yat-sen (Sun Wen), who was the leader of one of biggest Taiwan revolution, "Xinhai geming", and enshrine a Taiwanese flag on the stage(see figure 6). Of course there are also Thai kings' pictures and the Thai flag next to them.

The village has adapted to the needs of time. Compared to previous years, interaction among the villagers has become weak and occasions for family gatherings lessened. There is even a new power-base appearing in the village, consisting of the

young villagers expect equality in the village. This new power-base is based on economical achievement rather than the seniority, and therefore, will probably lead to conflict over the next generation. Still, various kind of Chinese celebrations, worship rituals, village events and daily activities in the village are still matters of great importance to all.

Figure 6: Taiwanese National Celebration Day

