CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Spreading apparently from Chiang Mai in present-day northern Thailand, and assimilating on its way elements of previously existing local cults, Theravada Buddhism was adopted as a legitimating cult by the ruling classes of Sipsong Panna (Chinese: 西双版纳, Xishuangbanna) at some point between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries AD, becoming a fundamental element within the identity of the Tai Lue, the dominant ethnic group in the area.

Throughout the twentieth century, Sipsong Panna was progressively incorporated into the Chinese polity - first the Empire, then the Republic and finally the People's Republic of China (PRC), although up until the creation of Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture (XDAP) in 1953, and according to ethnographic work carried out in the region by Chinese specialists at that time, the traditional features of local Buddhist practice remained arguably unchanged.

After the end of the 1950s; however, and with the beginning of the Maoist political movements in the PRC, Buddhism was identified as a major element in the extant political structure of 'old' Sipsong Panna, and subsequent Chinese Communist Party (CCP) policies and campaigns attempted to dismantle the religious administrative framework in Sipsong Panna. Particularly critical was the Cultural Revolution period, when expressions of ethnic identity on the part of the minority groups were severely repressed. In Sipsong Panna, the different political movements of the Maoist period caused the massive destruction of temples and shrines, the return to secular life for most monks and novices, as well as an overall interruption of religious practice among the Lue[1].

[1] On the contemporary history of Buddhism in Sipsong Panna, see Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

The changes of leadership in the CCP and the PRC between 1976 and 1978 brought this period of overt repression to an end; the Cultural Revolution was soon deemed to have been a negative event that had put in danger harmonious relations between the Han and the rest of ethnic groups inside the PRC; religious practices among ethnic groups were again tolerated by official ideology, and consequently, and as it happens all over the country since the beginning of the 1980s, a process of reconstruction of temples and shrines and overall recovery of Buddhist practice has taken place in Sipsong Panna.

The process of recovery of Buddhist practice in Sipsong Panna has continued to this day; since the 1980s, the number of monks and novices within the Sangha[2] in the region has increased or has stayed relatively stable, and the Xishuangbanna Buddhist Association (XBA) - set up during one of the few peaceful interludes during the Maoist era, was re-established in 1980, and at the beginning of the 1990s a new regional central temple, called Wat Pajie, was built on the outskirts of Jinghong City –in Lue *Chiang Hung*, the old capital of Sipsong Panna state and nowadays the administrative center of XDAP. From 1994 until 2008, this temple was the seat of a Buddhist school training novices and monks from Sipsong Panna as well as from other areas in Yunnan Province, and in January 2004, Tu Longjom was crowned as the first *Khuba Muang Sipsong Panna* (the highest religious authority in the region) since the Cultural Revolution. Finally, in the spring of 2008, the Buddhist school moved from Wat Pajie to the new Wat Luang Muang Lue, a temple built outside of Jinghong City, with funding from a commercial company from Liaoning Province in China, and this now seems to represent the renewed strength of Sipsong Panna Buddhism.

However, it may be argued that, in spite of this recovery and of the continuing influence of the Buddhist monks at the level of local communities, changes in the political, social and economic structures in Sipsong Panna have created a completely different context within which Buddhist practice takes place today, and which places certain obstacles upon its development and even its continuity. As part of this project, I aim to understand the present local, political, economic and cultural process configuration related to the recovery and parallel institutionalization of Buddhism in

[2] The term 'Sangha' refers here to the community of monks and novices living in Buddhist temples and supported by the local communities.

Sipsong Panna, taking into account the multiplicity of institutional and individual agents involved in it.

1.2 Research Objectives and Questions

1.2.1 Research Objectives

The main objectives of this project are:

a) To understand the interactions between different agents, discourses and social phenomena in the contemporary process of the institutionalization of Buddhist practice in Sipsong Panna, and

b) To examine the role of members of the local Sangha in the institutionalization process, emphasising the internal heterogeneity of the community of monks.

1.2.2 Research Questions

In relation to the above objectives, I will answer the following research questions: What different social agents and institutions are involved in the regulation of Buddhist practice in Sipsong Panna? What is the nature of the participation of local monks in the regulation of religious activities? Plus, can the local Sangha be considered a homogeneous entity in terms of the relationship its members have with the institutionalization process?

Also, how does the institutionalization process work? What are the different modes in which this process takes place? How are contemporary economic and educational institutionalization phenomena related to the re-establishment of institutional bodies in charge of regulating religious activities? What is the role of the representation of Buddhism (for example, within the tourism industry) within this context? And finally: How does the institutionalization process affect the maintenance of Buddhist traditions, as well as the overall development of Buddhism in Sipsong Panna?

1.3 Literature Review and Project Rationale

The Tai Lue is arguably one of the ethnic groups in the PRC that has received a lot more attention from academic scholars since the end of the 1980s. The importance that Sipsong Panna has acquired as one of the main tourist destinations in the PRC since the beginning of the 1990s has undoubtedly played an important role in the generation of this interest in the area, and the changes it has experienced as part of its integration into national and regional trade markets.

Nevertheless, and although Tai Lue identity had been a matter of academic interest since Michael Moerman´s research among the Lue in Phayao Province in northern Thailand in the 1960s[3], it was only after the local revival of Buddhism had started and foreign researchers were allowed to visit and work in Sipsong Panna in the mid-1980s, that particular interest in the links between Theravada Buddhism and Lue identity arose – an interest clearly seen in Hsieh Shih-chung´s 1989 dissertation on the subject, as well as in Heather Peters´ 1990 paper on the recovery of Buddhist practice in the region. The process of religious "revival" has also been documented by Japanese scholar Kiyoshi Hasegawa, who has conducted research on this topic area since the end of the 1980s, and has published several papers on Lue culture and the impact of tourism in Sipsong Panna on Buddhism (Hasegawa 2000, 2002, 2003; see also Kang Nanshan 2009).

Arguably, Hasegawa, as well as several other authors, have approached the issue of Buddhist recovery in Sipsong Panna from the perspective of an inherent conflict between the Chinese Communist State and the local government on the one side, and local Buddhism on the other. Following official representations of Buddhism produced since the 1950s on the part of the State, specialists´ accounts have tended to understand traditional Lue religious identity as being, at least in part, at odds with the CCP's political and economic goals in Sipsong Panna, and have argued that the regulation of religious practice in the area on the part of the State has been aimed at controlling the potential role of Buddhism as a source of alternative and sometimes oppositional identities in relation to the political and economic project of the PRC. On the level of political identity, loyalty to the so-called "Chinese Nation"

[3] See Moerman (1965, 1968).

(中华民族, *Zhonghua Minzu*) allegedly excludes identification with previous political structures at the local level or present nation-states bordering the PRC, while the religious and cultural links between the Lue and other groups outside the borders of the PRC also call into question the unifying discourse promoted by the CCP[4].

These contradictions are supposedly reflected in the ongoing conflict between the state education system and traditional temple education in Sipsong Panna (see Hansen 1999, 2004); and according to this interpretation, the hegemonic tendencies of the public school and the transmission of social values and identities related to belonging to that "imagined community", that is, the "Chinese nation", demands, if not the outright suppression of, but at least a limitation on monastic education in the region. Thomas Borchert (2005(a), 2005(b), 2007, 2008) has dealt specifically with the role that Buddhist education plays in the construction of ethnic identity among Lue males in Sipsong Panna, and his research is focused primarily on the dynamics of the relationship between state and religious education in the region and the influence of both these forms of socialization on the construction of contemporary Lue identities. According to Borchert, Buddhist education programs established at Wat Pajie and other monasteries in the area by the local Buddhist elite, are aimed at educating Lue novices and monks, both as members of the national community and as part of a distinct ethnic group recognized as such by the State: the *Daizu* or "Dai" - a group with their own cultural peculiarities (see Chapter 5 of this dissertation). In this sense, the monks there can be seen as the legitimate preservers of the traditional culture of the Lue[5].

Local notions of belonging to an imagined Chinese Nation have been further brought into focus by the re-opening of China's borders and the subsequent recovery of trans-border mobility on the part of the local population, a fact which has allowed for the revitalisation of traditional, cultural and religious links between the Lue and other groups inhabiting the Upper Mekong region. Khampeng Thipmuntali (2000) and Paul Cohen (2000, 2001) have dealt with the religious ties (expressed in the form

[4] On these issues, see Borchert, 2005(a), 2005(b), 2007 and 2008; Davis 2003, 2005; Hansen 1999, 2004; McCarthy 2000, 2004, 2009. For a discussion of the relationship between Buddhism and economic action in Laos, see Evans 1993.

[5] See Borchert 2008: pp. 134-5. For a discussion of these ideas, see the Conclusions section in this dissertation.

of trans-border pilgrimages) between different Lue and Tai communities inhabiting the area of the so-called "Economic Quadrangle" (constituted by territories in the PRC, Myanmar, northern Thailand and the Lao PDR), discussing how these links may foster the development among these groups of a "sense of belonging" to a broader community than that promoted by their respective nation states[6]; therefore creating an implicit political challenge to the respective states and their nation-building projects.

These topics have been also explored in the work of Sara Davis (1999, 2003, 2006), as well as by Wasan Panyagaew´s research (2004, 2010), and these specialists have been particularly concerned with how centralizing, nation-building policies on the part of the PRC have pushed many Lue to look for a recovery of their old ties with neighboring Lue or Tai communities abroad, a process said to be led by a "pan-regional alliance of monks" who are making use of the traditional, "pre-modern" ways of communication between Tai peoples in northern mainland Southeast Asia (Davis 2003)[7].

This interpretation maintains, more or less explicitly, the alluded conceptual dichotomy between the State on the one hand, and local Buddhist groups on the other, and following this basic state-control dichotomous framework (see Ashiwa and Wank 2009: 5), several authors have neglected or minimised the importance of Buddhism within the political and economic project of the State in Sipsong Panna[8]. An exception to this trend is Susan McCarthy (2000, 2004, 2009), whose work has emphasised the role of the CCP Government in the preservation and promotion of local cultural traditions (including religious traditions). Furthermore, through her comparative study of the cultural politics of three different *minzu* in Yunnan Province (including the Dai of Sipsong Panna), McCarthy has shown how local discourses claiming respect for cultural specificities take place, not in opposition to state policies and ideologies, but within the legal and institutional framework of ethnic policy and regulations

[6] For a discussion of the concept of the Tai-speaking groups using the Tham script in the Upper Mekong region as an "imagined community", see Keyes 1995: 141, 145 ff.

[7] See also Borchert (2007; 2008: pp. 136-7) and Keyes 1992: "[The] case of the Lue will lead…to a consideration of how transnational linkages which are increasingly relevant…may stimulate [an] imagining of communities which are not the same as those with roots in national discourse" (7, quoted in Diana 2009: 195). For a strong critique of the notion of a transnational Lue community, see Diana 2009: pp. 195-7.

[8] Borchert has claimed; for instance, that "[t]he PRC has not tried to engage Buddhism on any kind of ideological level. Instead, the state's general response has been to abolish it, control its forms, or ignore it" (2008: 137).

developed by the PRC itself. Although, in my opinion, McCarthy's analysis presents important problems concerning explanations for the production and maintenance of consent among minority groups in the PRC, her study represents a fresh perspective in comparison to previous accounts which are focused on an irredeemable antagonism between the State and local ethnic and religious groups – accounts which further hinder a greater understanding of Buddhist practice in Sipsong Panna, for they generally imply a homogeneous internal representation of the local Sangha (see the next section of this chapter).

Without wishing to neglect the value of previous research conducted on Sipsong Panna Buddhism, I believe there is still a need for a comprehensive study of the processes determining the contemporary recovery and maintenance of religious practice among the Lue; as such a study will help give an account of the complex interactions that have taken place between the different actors and fields of social practice within the process of institutionalization of local Buddhism, and according to the values and guiding principles established by the Chinese State – those often accommodated and promoted by local religious actors.

1.4 Conceptual framework

As pointed out in the previous section, academic accounts concerned with the contemporary situation in terms of religious beliefs and practices in the PRC (as well as in other socialist states), have tended to look at the relationship between religious traditions and state goals of nation-building and economic development from a position of inherent conflict. This conflict is commonly related not only to purely ideological issues[9], but to specific political and economic issues, such as the implementation of territorializing policies or the promotion of market economy practices on the part of states (see Ashiwa and Wank (2009) for a discussion).

With respect to Buddhist practice in Sipsong Panna, since the period of its overt repression, Buddhism has remained an important referent for Lue identity in the region, and local monks still to a certain extent (especially in the countryside) play their traditional role as transmitters of traditional culture and moral values among the

[9] On the alleged anti-religious nature of Marxist thought, see; for example, Stuart-Fox 1983 (in relation to Laos) or Borchert 2005(b) – who focuses on the situation in post-1980 PRC and Sipsong Panna.

Lue community. Nevertheless, and as Hsieh (1989: 239) has pointed out, long-term political and economic action on the part of the Chinese State has created a new context within which Lue Buddhist practice is now able to take place. Religious freedom in the PRC is today guaranteed for five officially recognized traditions: Buddhism, Islam, Taoism, Protestantism and Catholicism in the 1982 Constitution, as well as by the 1984 Law on National Regional Autonomy and other state-promulgated laws[10]. However, while repression is not anymore a part of the CCP policy framework with regard to religious traditions in the region, religion itself is still broadly presented in the official discourses as a symbol of social and cultural backwardness, and as an obstacle to socialism and economic modernization, and so it arguably remains a sensitive political issue (see Borchert 2005(b)).

As mentioned in the previous section, and taking into account this dichotomous state-control framework (Ashiwa and Wank 2009: 5), some specialists working on Lue Buddhism have tended to neglect or minimise the importance of Buddhism within the political and economic project of the State; however, this attitude may obscure a full comprehension of the dynamics of Buddhist practice in the region - overlooking the active role that the state plays in the creation and regulation of an institutional as well as symbolic space for the development of religious practices.

In my opinion, two factors help to explain the importance of religion in general to the PRC and the local government of XDAP, and of Buddhism in particular. First, once the period of overt religious oppression in the PRC ended, the legitimacy of the Government in relation to the 'ethnic minorities' in the country (少数民族, *shaoshu minzu*; see especially Chapters 2 and 4 of this paper) became dependant on the implementation of long-abolished ethnic policies regarding the preservation and promotion of local minorities´ cultural (including religious) traditions, policies which could be understood as negative, in the sense of not allowing religious practices to take place. Thus, there has been an active effort on the part of government agencies to produce and regulate a space for religious practices to

[10] On the protection of minorities´ religious practices, see; for example, the 'Law on National Regional Autonomy of the People's Republic of China' (*Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Minzu Diyu Zizhifa*), Cap. 1, Art. 11, in which mention is also made of "non-legitimate" religious activities - broadly those which may "destroy social order, harm public health or interfere with the state education system". This last point is concerned in particular with the Buddhist Lue in Sipsong Panna.

take place, as well as sustain claims on the part of the State to political legitimacy - as the protector of Buddhist practices among the Lue and other groups, and, as Ashiwa and Wank have put it: "the presence of religion in state institutions shows that the state is a modern, enlightened state that acknowledges religion" (ibid.: 8). Secondly, and related to this, several elements of local Buddhist tradition in Sipsong Panna are now officially represented as a potentially valuable ideological tool regarding the state's current goals in terms of "social harmony"[11].

I would like at this point to clarify two points in relation to the nature of "state action", as understood throughout this study. First, no state or government at any level (for my present purposes I will not distinguish between these institutions) is a monolithic structure; there are conflicting interests and forms of competition within, as well as among the different collective and individual agents. Second, instead of focusing on the repressive and coercive aspects of state action, my project will consider the "organizational" (ibid.: 6), educatiional and formative aspects, as well as "the institutional effects of the routine operation of the state's bureaucratic-legal structures in implementing 'religion'" (ibid.).

In Sipsong Panna, specific regulations concerning Buddhist practice have long been established by the local government. Although Buddhism is not the only religious tradition present in Sipsong Panna (there are Christian and Muslim communities in the region as well), it is undoubtedly the most significant in terms of numbers of adherents[12] – and therefore in terms of relevant state policy as well. It is in this sense that I believe that the official status of Buddhism in Sipsong Panna may be compared, at least in a broad sense, to its status in several other countries of Southeast Asia (such as Thailand, Myanmar, Laos or Cambodia), where Buddhist traditions stand as an important (if always contested) element in the articulation of state legitimacy. On the other hand; however, the scope for such comparison must be limited, for Buddhism (or any other religion for that matter) can never fully act as a

[11] Ann Anagnost states, "[f]rom 1986 on, religious belief…became recognized as an ethical basis for everyday life that was at least as effective (if not more effective than) socialist ethics in producing good civic behaviour" (1994: pp. 235-6). See also Goossaert (2005: 4): "The notion of religion was and is often understood as meaning an entity with a potentially positive role to play in helping to cement the spiritual unity and moral values of the people".

[12] According to members of the XBA, more than 90% of the around 300,000 Tai inhabiting XDAP are Buddhists.

support for state ideology in the PRC. As Ann Anagnost has stated, "although religion is allowed some value as a viable ethical system at the present stage of China's social development, it is still clearly one that will be transcended by the historical progression of Chinese society towards socialism and a secularized world view" (Anagnost 1994: 236). In any case, state regulations provide a space for the development of Buddhist practice, while at the same time allowing the local government to appear as a legitimate protector and supporter of religion – and religious actors in Sipsong Panna may be willing to "accommodate the state institutions as modern 'religion' in order to ensure their existence in the new order" (Ashiwa and Wank 2009: 8).

Relations within the field of religious practice cannot be reduced in a simplistic way to that of opposition between state regulation and local traditions; on the contrary, I understand Buddhist practice in Sipsong Panna as an essentially fragmentary and heterogeneous field in which religious actors "also work to position themselves within the state's discursive institution of 'religion'" (ibid.: 14)[13]. While acknowledging that conflict among parties is often an important element of this framework (as reflected in the problematic management of the new Wat Luang Muang Lue, described in Chapter 4), my paper will look at the relationship between the State and the local Sangha in Sipsong Panna in terms of its "symbiosis"[14], and will highlight the "multiple political processes, including competition, adaptation and cooperation, as well as conflict" (ibid.: 5) that takes place.

In short, and following Ashiwa and Wank, I will strive to understand the relationship between state structures and religious practice in Sipsong Panna as, "not simply a history of conflict between state and religion but rather processes of interactions among multiple actors that comprise the making of modern religion and the modern state" (ibid.: 2).

This paper will thus offer a view of religious practice in Sipsong Panna which is focused "on the *institutionalization* of 'religion' in both the state and religions

[13] "This gives the religions the legitimacy of state recognition, letting them openly conduct activities, and reinforces their claims for resources" (ibid.).

[14] The term is used by Philip Taylor in relation to the position of Buddhism in present-day Vietnam: "[s]ymbiosis seems a more fitting term to describe contemporary state-*sangha* relations than notions of competition or co-option" (2007: 28).

through processes that are *mutually constitutive*" (ibid.: 6; my emphasis). Ashiwa and Wank define institutionalization as "the process by which situations adapt to institutions", which in turn are defined by Sweet, Sandholtz and Fligstein, as rules that "constitute community, shaping how individuals see themselves in relation to others, and providing a foundation for purposive action" (ibid.: 8). Ashiwa and Wank are referring basically to "formal institutions, mostly in the state, that are codified in constitutions, laws and policies", although importantly they also consider "informal institutions as networks, practices, and ideas in society as dynamically interacting with formal state institutions" (ibid.).

The fundamental process with which this study will be specifically concerned is the institutionalization of local Buddhist traditions in relation to the modern categorization of religion in Sipsong Panna over the last 30 years; that is, the impositions, accommodations, negotiations, contestations and rejections involved in this process. Here, institutionalization is mainly referred to using three different conceptual fields, all of which are related to the institutionalization of local religious traditions according to modern ideas of religion (see next section of this Introduction). The first of these fields, which I call "formal institutionalization", is related to the (re-)apparition of state agencies and legislation in charge of regulating religious practices, as well as to other, informal institutions such as ideas and practices related to them. The second field of study deals with what is "economic institutionalization" - the process(es) of adaptation among Buddhist traditional institutions to formal and informal structures related to the market economy and consumerism – in particular through links to the tourist industry in the area. The last process of institutionalization is that of Buddhist education in Sipsong Panna, which at present is undergoing a transformation towards a model based on Thai and Chinese conceptions of modern education (see also 'Organization of the Thesis', in this chapter). I follow this three-way conceptual division for reasons of analytical effectiveness and clarification, as in reality, the three fields of activity overlap, and the phenomena ascribed to one or other of them (see also 'Analytical Units') can surely be interpreted from a different, even divergent point of view. Once again, the emphasis here is on describing the general process of institutionalization among local traditions according to modern conceptions of religion, while at the same time emphasising the role of local religious elites within it.

1.4.1 The Institutionalization of Modern 'Religions'

According to Ashiwa and Wank, different specialists have argued that the appearance of religion as a modern concept can be seen most clearly in the "colonial interactions" after the late nineteenth century, in which the colonizers tended to present ideal images of themselves as "modern" through the separation of state power and religion; the State was defined as political authority, and religion as a framework of individual beliefs. The local assimilation of colonial discourses provoked this, such that "[t]o enlightened elites in non-European countries, 'being modern'…required the simultaneous reform of indigenous practices to appear as 'religion' and the institutionalization of religion as a category within the state's constitution and administration" (ibid.: 2).

Obviously, this process was not limited to the colonial context, but extended also to "Asian countries that…struggled against colonization and to create their own modern state" (ibid.). These countries (Ashiwa and Wank mention the examples of Thailand, Japan and China) have since tried to create an enlightened "modern" civilization of their own design by reforming traditional ideological and political systems.

In the case of China, religion as a category was imported in the late nineteenth century in the context of the crisis of the imperial system, and "as part of modern state formation" (ibid.), together with other areas originating within the framework of the modern Western nation-state, such as 'market', 'nation', 'education', 'science', 'police', 'the law', 'tourism' and, 'bureaucracy'. This idea of religion, as influenced by the universalism, rationalism and positivism within Western scientific thinking, was ascribed to the field of individual beliefs; therefore helping create a dividing line between the spheres of the public and the private, and supporting the ruling class' acquisition of political authority. In all the above-mentioned Asian countries, "[e]lites worked to define modern 'religion' in scientific terms to exclude 'superstition' and to delimit religion in secular terms as individual belief. This took institutional form in constitutions, laws, and policies that defined religion and its place in the centralized state" (ibid.: 7).

This process of symbolic and institutional re-ordering took place in China after the beginning of the twentieth century, when the New Policy Reform (新政, *Xinzheng*) was introduced by the imperial government (ibid.: 9; Goossaert 2005: 3). The Republican state that came to replace the Empire in 1911-2 relied for this re-organization on modern definitions of religion developed in other countries (in particular, in Japan during the Meiji era). An important part of the construction of a modern concept of religion in China was the establishment of a dichotomy between religion and superstition (see also ibid.: 2), a dichotomy further consolidated during the "Smashing Superstition" campaign of 1929[15]. However, it wasn't until the middle of the twentieth century that a coherent, "modern" religious policy was implemented by a Chinese state: As Ashiwa and Wank point out, "[a]fter the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 the [Chinese Communist] Party developed a comprehensive modern definition of religion. Religion was scientifically defined as having universal features, such as logical theosophy, scriptures, a professional clergy, and fixed religious sites" (Ashiwa and Wank 2009: 9)[16]. The right of freedom of beliefs was included in the 1954 PRC Constitution: "Citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy the freedom of…religious belief" – a statement clearly related to a modern conception of religion as an individual beliefs system[17]. A bureaucratic apparatus was designed and

[15] "In this context, religious reforms were adopted as part of a larger set of reforms aimed at modernizing China´s bureaucracy, society, economy and military. State rituals were gradually abandoned and the protection formerly extended to local orthodox cults was withdrawn; notably, temples…were targeted for destruction and re-use as schools or other state outfits…. Many elements of religious reform first mooted during the last decade of imperial rule came under full fruition under the Republic. Notably, the early Republican leaders attempted to adopt religious policies congruent with the various Western models of a nation-state, either directly or mediated by the Japanese experience. In spite of their variety, these models had in common the separation of state from religion, defined as something independent from politics, and the recognition by the state of a legal status and some privileges to one or several churches organized with their own clergy, laity, places for worship, educational institutions, etc. These models thus equated religion with church, as they were based on a modern Christian conception of religion" (ibid.: 3-4) . Here, I will not be dealing with the situation of religious traditions under the Confucian state. For a comparison between that situation and the "modern", nation-state context, see ibid., *passim*.

[16] This definition included only the five traditions officially recognized by the state: Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Catholicism and Protestantism; see ibid.: 5.

[17] Vincent Goossaert has produced a good summary of the meaning of this freedom: "[I]n imitation of the Japanese and Western constitutions, the various Chinese constitutions (promulgated from the advent of the Republic in 1912 up to today) have recognized religious freedom (*xinjiao ziyou* 信教自由). But this religious freedom is hedged about with limiting conditions, in particular a restriction to "religions" deemed authentic, which are separated from the "superstition" that the Republic of China, especially with the Guomindang regime from 1927, and the People's Republic of China committed themselves to eradicate" (2005: 4).

established at the national level, with ramifications at all administrative levels of the State down to the county. Broadly speaking, the aim of this apparatus was to regulate religious activities and to make sure that religious practices and beliefs accorded with official Marxist ideology regarding religion. The Bureau of Religious Affairs (predecessor of the current State Administration for Religious Affairs) was thus set up in 1954 as a ministry under the State Council (ibid.).

The CCP also created a multi-level structure aimed at acting as a "representative" of religious communities around the country; the "religious patriotic organizations" located, as with all other non-Party organizations, under the authority of the United Front Work Bureau (统一展现部, *Tongyi Zhanxian Bu*; ibid.: 10). One of the organizations set up was the Chinese Buddhist Association, to which the XBA now belongs[18]. As we shall see throughout this paper, this organization, as well as the local state Bureau for Ethnic and Religious Affairs (BERA), are the main, formal institutions involved in the accommodation of modern ideas of religion in Sipsong Panna.

Buddhism, in Sipsong Panna and elsewhere, was and still is a fully institutionalized religion; the Sangha in particular can be considered one of the oldest institutions (not only religious) still active. In this sense, it might be argued that this study should deal not with institutionalization, but with "re-institutionalization" or with "institutional transformation", that is, the passage of certain religious institutional forms dominant within Sipsong Panna Buddhism. In spite of this, I have chosen to focus on the processes of adaptation on the part of Buddhist institutions in Sipsong Panna to *current* institutional models (understood in a broad sense to include also ideas and practices related to formal institutions) related to modern definitions of religion dominant in official discourses in the PRC, and heavily influenced as well by

[18] According to a CCP document known as 'Document 19', the task of the religious organizations is "to assist the Party and the government to implement the policy of freedom of religious belief, to help the broad mass of religious believers and persons in religious circles to continually raise their patriotic and Socialist consciousness, to represent the lawful rights and interest of religious circles, to organize normal religious activities, and to manage religious affairs well. All patriotic religious organizations should follow the Party's and government's leadership. Party and government cadres in turn should become adept in supporting and helping religious organizations to solve their own problems" (ibid.). Apart from the Chinese Buddhist Association, the other seven "religious patriotic organizations" are the Chinese Daoist Association, the Chinese Islamic Association, the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, the Chinese Catholic Religious Affairs Committee, the Chinese Catholic Bishops' Conference, the Chinese Protestant 'Three Self' Patriotic Movement, and the China Christian Council – see 'Document 19', Ch. VII. On 'Document 19' and the XBA, see Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

conceptions coming from Thailand and even international institutions, and therefore I will focus, not on the traditional, but on the contemporary avatars of local Buddhist institutions. As stated in the previous section, the emphasis of this study will be on the formal, economic and educational aspects of the institutionalization of Sipsong Panna Buddhism, and although this ordering may seem arbitrary, due to the diverse nature of the processes included in the categorization, the three main categories are all related to the formal and informal institutionalization of local traditions according to modern ideas of religion dominant in the PRC and Thailand.

1.4.2 Local Agency

As French scholar Vincent Goossaert has pointed out, religious policies implemented by different Chinese states since the late Empire have allowed local religious actors to become "fully autonomous, and ready for engagement with [the] processes of institutionalization" (Goossaert 2005: 19), and even in the case of the PRC, where violence determined religious policy for most of the Maoist period, such policies "were not entirely destructive, but worked to the advantage of certain religious leaders, groups and ideas that were more or less aligned with the progressive project of the state" (ibid.). This positive aspect of state religious policies is often seen by commentators and by religious actors themselves, as having facilitated the "renewal" of religious traditions that were allegedly seen as decadent during the pre-modern period (ibid.). Nevertheless, and as Goossaert himself has warned, we should not "avoid questioning assumptions taken for granted by the renewal discourse held by institutional leaders", a discourse which usually tends to represent current forms of religious practice as "true", in contrast to a previous context determined by heterodox or "backward" practices[19]. It is thus necessary to question "if institutionalization was not destructive of certain practices and ideas in the same time as it was a political road to survival and adaptation" (ibid.: 20).

[19] Goossaert discusses the problem of this "renewal paradigm" in his paper (ibid.: 19 ff.). According to him, the interpretations of this "renewal…have often been partisan" (ibid.: 20).

In order to clarify these issues, it is necessary to look at the relationships between different agents at the local level[20], for "the institutionalization process was not limited to questions of national leadership and political representation but, more importantly, implied a reinvention of liturgical and disciplinary norms, of training and initiation procedure, of recruitment and admission. Only through fieldwork can such effects of state-induced institutionalization be fully evaluated" (ibid.; see also Ashiwa and Wank 2009: 11).

In any case, we must keep in mind that the institutionalization of local religious traditions according to contemporary ideas of religion does not proceed "through an imposed state hegemony but rather through interactions among multiple actors in the state and religions" (ibid.: 5). Contemporary religious practice in Sipsong Panna can therefore be understood as a field of struggle composed of a multiplicity of actors trying to normalize, oppose and adapt or accommodate to the institutionalization of religious traditions in the region: Against the representation of Buddhism in Sipsong Panna as a uniform and homogeneous practice, it is fundamental to look at the differences within the diversity of groups both within the community of monks and the lay community of supporters, many of whom hold diverse and often divergent attitudes regarding the institutionalization of Buddhist practices. In this sense, this study aims in particular to highlight the complexity of the position held by the local Buddhist elite within the religious sphere, as both preservers of traditional culture (see Borchert 2008) and (not necessarily consciously or voluntarily) agents of religious transformation.

While there are important differences in the levels of negotiating power on the part of the actors who constitute the field of religious practice, and specific "objective interests" can be certainly identified behind the processes of the institutionalization of religious practice in Sipsong Panna[21], it is necessary to go beyond establishing any simplistic correlation between discourses related to the field of religious practice and

[20] "The nature [of] and problems [with] the whole process of institutionalization is best understood when looked at [at the] local level with cases of clerics declining to join, of rival associations, of difficult negotiations between the associations and local authorities, and indeed of uncertainties about who is qualified to join or not" (ibid.).

[21] As Ashiwa and Wank note, these processes are always political (2009: 8). See Borchert 2005(a) and (b), for an interpretation of the relations between the state and the Sangha of Sipsong Panna in terms of the "interests" of both parties.

the specific interests on the part of actors, for "economic functions and 'objective interests' are always located within other, encompassing structures, that may be invisible even to those who inhabit them", and we must be aware of "how easily structures can take on lives of their own that soon enough overcome intentional practices" (Ferguson 1990: 17). Therefore, instead of being concerned with "uncovering" the "real" interests or the "hidden intentions" behind the actions of those actors interacting within the field of religious practice[22], the study of religious policies and the overall involvement of the State in the construction of modern religion in Sipsong Panna must focus on exploring the ways in which discourses and initiatives related to such construction are produced and put into practice (ibid.: 18).

This study will thus take a "decentering" approach to power, locating "the intelligibility of a series of events and transformations not in the intentions guiding the actions of one or more animated subjects, but in the systematic nature of the social reality which results from those actions" (ibid.). This is not to deny that the institutionalization of religious practices in the PRC and Sipsong Panna has involved an exercise of power – the process may very well serve power blocs and the interests of certain specific actors and institutions, but in a different way than any of the "powerful" actors imagined (ibid.: 18-19). As Ashiwa and Wank have noted, "institutionalization is unpredictable" (2009: 8), and "planned interventions may produce unintended outcomes" (Ferguson 1990: 20). No matter whether such outcomes may "end up…incorporated into anonymous constellations of control…that turn out in the end to have a kind of political intelligibility" (ibid.), it is fundamental to remain aware of the risk of analysing the process of religious institutionalization in Sipsong Panna as simply motivated by the intention of the State to control religious practices on the part of the locals.

Paraphrasing once more Ashiwa and Wank in relation to the situation in the PRC, the politics of religion in Sipsong Panna may be seen as "constituted by ongoing negotiations, among multiple actors, including state officials, intellectuals, religious adherents, and businesspersons, to adapt religion to the modern state's definitions and rules even as they are continuously being transgressed" (2009: 8). My paper will therefore focus on "the processes of politics as seen in the negotiations and

[22] See Ashiwa and Wank 2009: 1.

interactions of actors to control discourses, representations, and resources to fit situations and practices into the modern category of 'religion'" (ibid.: 3). This will involve the analysis at different levels of discursive as well as material (especially economic) processes related to local religious practice, emphasising the active role on the part of both the state and local communities in the production, reproduction and contestation of modern, official versions of Buddhist practice.

On the other hand, and in spite of the fact that I am dealing with a religious minority group, this study will be mainly concerned with institutional processes, not with *beliefs*, a stance also taken by contributors to the important and recent volume on religion in China edited by Yoshiko Ashiwa and David Wank, and while acknowledging the importance of issues related to beliefs and meaning on the part of religious actors, I have chosen not to discuss beliefs, "but rather decided to delineate how the concept of modern religion has been, and is being, made within the process of state making in China" (ibid.: 17). Regarding my own focus on Sipsong Panna, a small area within the PRC inhabited by a Buddhist minority, and as I have already emphasised, I am particularly concerned with the participation of local religious agents in this process, highlighting the heterogeneity of the field of religion, both in relation to the state, and to the internal transformations within the local Sangha.

Figure 1.1 below shows the process of the institutionalization of Buddhist practices in Sipsong Panna, as well as the actors involved in the process. The horizontal link points to the (diachronic) current process of transformation and institutionalization of local Buddhist practices, from the practices linked to the power of the *chao* (the traditional ruling class) and the pre-modern polity of Sipsong Panna, to those related to a 'modern' conception of Buddhism as promoted by the State. This process of the institutionalization of local religion is inseparable from the parallel, identifiable economic, social as well as legal-administrative processes that have taken place in the region over the last 30 years (although their roots may be traced back to long before that period).

Although the process of institutionalization of Buddhism may be understood as diachronic, following a temporarily progressive direction from left to right, it is important to keep in mind that the two conceptual fields designated 'Traditional Buddhist Practices' and 'Modern Buddhism', are only tools designed to help gain an

understanding of the institutionalization process, and that the characteristics summarily described as particular of each field overlap; Buddhism was in the past also "institutionalized" within the Sipsong Panna polity, while at present traditional religious practices (such as the cult of spirits) are still maintained in the region. The aim of this study is thus to give an account of the processes related to the institutionalization of local Buddhism, while avoiding essentializing both the 'traditional' and 'modern' religious practices as such.

The vertical link in the diagram represents the involvement of different social actors in the institutionalization of Buddhism in Sipsong Panna; the box lists the main agents involved in this process, from state and entrepreneurial agents to academics, monks and the community of lay followers. Although power inequalities might obviously be identified among different agents, as stated, this study offers a 'decentered' vision of power and, consequently, the diagram emphasizes non-hierarchical positions within this field.

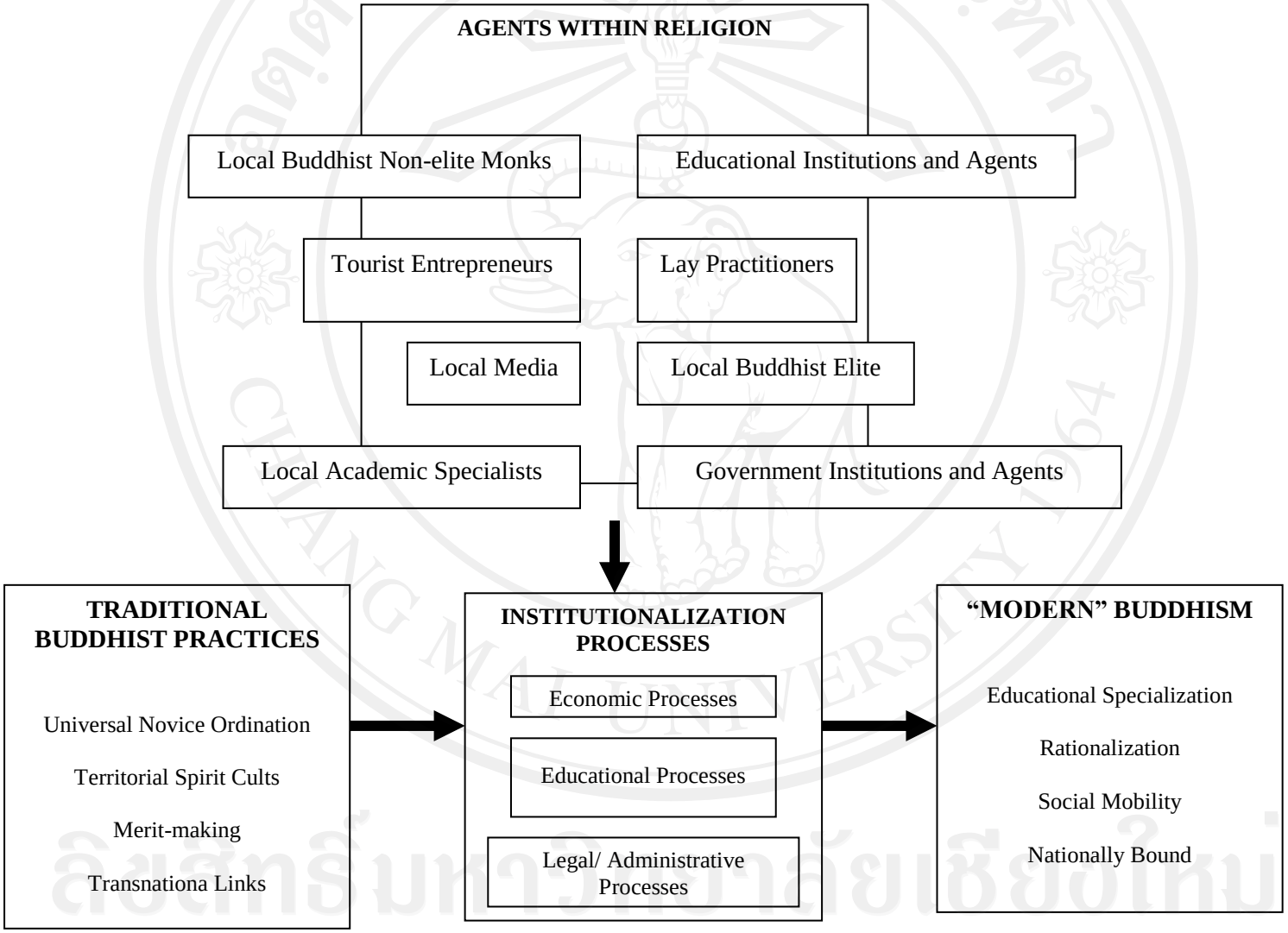

Figure 1.1: The institutionalization of Buddhism in Sipsong Panna

1.5 Research Methodology

1.5.1 Scope of the Project

The aim of this study is to give an account of the contemporary dynamics that exist within the process of the institutionalization of Buddhist practice in Sipsong Panna, Yunnan Province in China. Although the study is in principle focused on the current configurations that exist within the field of Buddhism in the area, it will also be necessary to take a historical approach, in order to understand the historical formation of such configurations. As the origins of the current socio-economic and political conditions determining religious practice today can be traced back at least to the beginning of the 1980s, this paper will deal with the phenomena related to the process of recovery thereafter initiated. The main focus will be on the role of the local Buddhist elite within the process of the institutionalization of Buddhist traditions.

1.5.2 Research Site

Although the geographical scope of the study is basically confined to Sipsong Panna (specifically the area of Sipsong Panna at present integrated into XDAP), my field research included data from other sites related to the trans-border contacts between the Lue in Sipsong Panna and the Lue or Tai monks in Thailand, Myanmar and Laos. The geographical ‘base’ for what I have called the local ‘Buddhist elite’ is located in Jinghong City, the administrative capital of XDAP, and in particular the main temple in the region: Wat Pajie.

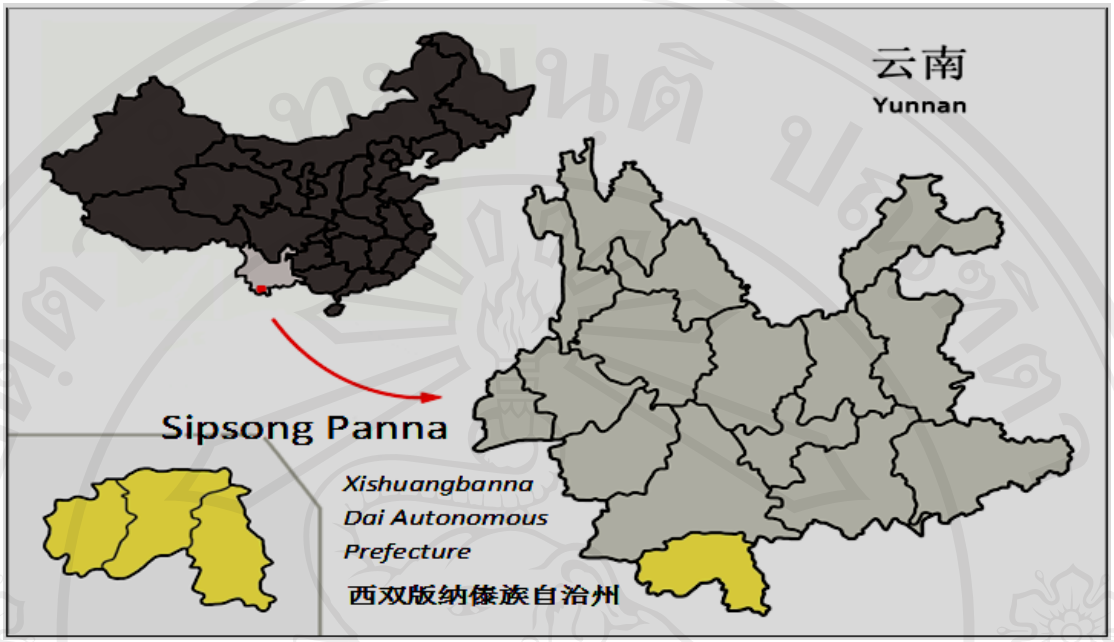

Figure 1.2: Location of Sipsong Panna within the PRC

Figure 1.3: The 'Economic Quadrangle'

1.5.3 Analytical Units

The following analytical units can be described as empirically-grounded methodological tools constructed with the aim of limiting the scope of the research and clarifying the relations between different actors and discourses involved in the configuration of the field of Buddhist practice in Sipsong Panna. Such relations can be analysed according to different levels and dimensions, but they all overlap in the sense that they are all aimed at highlighting the links between economic, political and cultural transformations in Sipsong Panna, and the different individual and corporate actors involved in the institutionalization of local Buddhist practice – as well as in the occasional contestation against such process.

a) The Regulation of Buddhist Practice

Concerning the practice of Theravada Buddhism in Sipsong Panna, the local BERA is the government institution in charge of supervising religious activities in the area, and the BERA is helped in this task by a 'grassroots' organization: the XBA, which was also set up by the Government but is run mainly by local monks and former monks (*khanan*). The goal of both institutions is to implement and to watch over the observance of established legislation regarding religious practices – concerned specifically with issues such as the construction of religious sites, the organization and celebration of religious festivals, the import of Buddhist items and articles from abroad, the relation between religious practices and the implementation of education policies.

This unit is constituted by the formal and informal relations between different recognized agents and institutions involved in such regulation, mainly state officials and monks, and former monks that are part of the XBA, as well as, to a lesser extent, local monks and lay followers. The focus of study here will be on the everyday, informal politics involved in the regulation of religion.

b) ‘Engaged Buddhism’

In the last few years, members of the Sipsong Panna Sangha have been involved in the implementation of two social relief projects funded by foreign agencies. The participation of the local monks in such projects will be explored in relation to the specialization of the social role of the Sangha through its partial incorporation into state as well as global structures.

c) Buddhism and the Tourism Economy

The recovery of Buddhism in Sipsong Panna since around 1980 has gone hand in hand with the development of a buoyant tourist industry based on the exploitation of the region´s natural and cultural resources. As an important cultural marker for the Tai Lue, Buddhism has become linked with the tourim industry, both materially and symbolically, mainly through the management practices of outside entrepreneurs.

Although the inclusion of Buddhist sites in the tourist circuits of Sipsong Panna has been limited, the involvement of the local monks in the massive project of Wat Luang Muang Lue provides a unique opportunity to explore issues related to “economic institutionalization” and the symbolic and material position of the Buddhist monks within cultural hierarchies in Sipsong Panna – as well as to discuss the problems arising from it.

d) Temples and Public Schools

This section deals with processes related to the creation and development of a formalized Buddhist education system in Sipsong Panna, and its progressive incorporation into state educational structures. The continuing importance of novice ordination in the region as the main form of socialization among the Lue arguably poses a challenge to the state project of nation-building and economic modernisation at the local level. In response to this challenge, the State has worked through different means to ensure nine-years of universal compulsory education is in place for Lue boys.

In line with State efforts, the number of Lue monks and novices studying in public educational institutions has steadily increased during the last 30 years. The chances for social mobility that state education provides in the new context of XDAP,

can be seen as an important motivation for Lue boys and their families to choose education at public schools over that provided by the temples. In any case, the local monks have responded to this challenge by creating a proper Buddhist education system, and since the mid-1990s a boarding school for monks and novices has been functioning at the main regional temple. Depicting the transformations that have taken place within Buddhist education in Sipsong Panna over the last fifteen years will help highlight the process of institutionalization that has occurred within monastic learning.

e) Trans-Border Religious Networks

Traditionally, Lue monks in Sipsong Panna travelled regularly to neighboring Buddhist areas in the Upper Mekong region, and were also visited by their counterparts coming from those areas. Such contacts, restricted during the political campaigns of the Maoist period and the regional conflicts in Indochina between the 1950s and the 1970s, were renewed during the revival of religious practice which took place in Sipsong Panna from the beginning of the 1980s, when monks from eastern Myanmar and northern Thailand crossed the border to help their counterparts and relatives in Sipsong Panna rebuild temples and reconstruct the process of Buddhist ordination. The Chinese Government has long tried to regulate this trans-border traffic of monks – occasionally expelling foreign monks from the country. Nowadays, educational trips for Sipsong Panna novices and monks are generally regulated; but in spite of this, 'irregular' contacts between monks from both sides of the border continue unabated.

1.6 Methods of Research

The main method used in my research was an ethno-methodological approach, that is, the collection of data related to actors in the field of religious practice through extensive and intensive participant observation, individual and group interviews, and the collection of life stories regarding particular monks. However, in order to avoid the shortcomings of such an approach[23], the information provided by agents was not

[23] In this particular case, the ethno-methodological emphasis on the role of individual agency may imply an "instrumentalist" vision of religious practice which fails to give account not only of alleged

only cross-checked with other agents´ information, but also with data collected through participant observation. In addition to this, and as a previous step, I also carried out a study of legislation concerning the regulation of Buddhist practice, as well as the formal organization and relations among the different offices in charge of regulation of Buddhist practice.

1.7 Organization of the Study

As explained in the previous sections, the organization of this thesis is based on the identification of three different conceptual fields related to the contemporary institutionalization of religious traditions in Sipsong Panna. Although these conceptual categories may overlap, I believe this organization will help clarify the current processes of institutionalization in Sipsong Panna Buddhism, as well as the important role the local Buddhist elites play, from a historical perspective.

In order to provide some background and facilitate the comprehension of contemporary issues related to Buddhist traditions in Sipsong Panna, the following chapter will offer a brief historical introduction to Sipsong Panna Buddhism, as well as a summary of the main features of Lue religious practice in the pre-PRC period, before focusing on its vicissitudes following the creation of XDAP in 1953, and the carrying out of state ethnic and religious policy on the part of the local government. Special attention will be given to the PRC's ethnic policy foundations and shifts since its first implementation in the 1950s.

The third chapter of the study will focus on the processes of formal religious institutionalization that have taken place in Sipsong Panna, especially since around 1980 when the ethnic and religious policy of the PRC was recovered following changes in the leadership of the CCP and the Government at the national level. The narrative will focus on the re-establishment of State organizations and legislations related to the regulation of Buddhist practice in Sipsong Panna, as well as on the spread at the local level of contemporary conceptions of modern religion and on the role of the local Buddhist elite in these processes. Some phenomena related to

primordial attachments to tradition, but, most importantly, of structural and systemic constraints on agency.

instances of contestation or resistance against institutionalization will also be highlighted.

The fourth chapter will deal with processes of what I have previously called "economic institutionalization", concerning the development of a tourist industry in Sipsong Panna and the role that Buddhism (and its representation) have played within it. The construction and operation of Wat Luang Muang Lue, seat of the new regional Buddhist school, and the subject of tourist exploitation, will be dealt with at length. Again, the role of the local Buddhist elite within this framework and the conflicts arising from their participation in the current commoditization of local Buddhism will be given special relevance.

The fifth chapter of the dissertation will focus on another fundamental field of the institutionalizing process; that of education. Here, I will deal with the effects that the implementation of state educational and linguistic policy, as well as the massive influx of Han migrants into Sipsong Panna, are having on conceptions and practice of Buddhist temple education. The focus will also be on the recent development of a formal Buddhist school in Sipsong Panna, and the prospects and contradictions determining this effort on the part of the local Sangha to adapt traditional temple schooling to modern conceptions of education dominant in the PRC and Thailand.

Lastly, my final chapter will draw some conclusions on the different trends within the religious institutionalizing process, taken from the narratives of the previous chapters. The conclusions will include a critique of the idea of a Buddhist "revival" taking place in Sipsong Panna, emphasising the limits imposed on the development of local Buddhism by the institutionalizing process.