CHAPTER 2
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 The Tai Lue

The Tai Lue of Sipsong Panna[1]in Yunnan Province, are one of the so called "minority" groups within the PRC that have received significant attention from scholars during the last couple of decades[2]. The importance that this region has attained as one of the main tourist destinations in Yunnan since the mid-1980s has played an important part in this interest towards the Lue and the transformations Sipsong Panna has experienced as part of its inclusion in the national and regional trade markets[3].

The Lue language is one of the several different Tai dialects spoken in the upper Mekong region. In the PRC, this language is classified within the Tai family (known in Chinese as 壮, or *Zhuang*)[4]; Lue is closely related to other Tai languages

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[1] Although this study is focused on the Sipsong Panna population officially classified as 'Dai' by the PRC, I prefer to use the term 'Lue' (sometimes spelt Lü or Lüe in scholarly works) to designate the group, as the official category *Dai* or *Daizu* (傣族) includes several Tai-speaking peoples using distinct dialects and inhabiting different areas in Yunnan Province, and that have not traditionally been considered (and they would not consider themselves to be) Lue. The Lue make up approximately one-third of the total population of the *Daizu*, currently adding up to around 280,000 to 300.000 members, and thus constituting the most important of Sipsong Panna´s ethnic groups numerically, totaling around 35% of the total population of the prefecture (see Hansen 1999: 88). In this paper, the terms 'Tai' and 'Lue' are used interchangeably when referring to the Sipsong Panna context.

[2] See for instance Hsieh 1989, 1995; Peters 1990; Hasegawa 2000, 2002, 2003; Hansen 1999, 2004; Davis 1999, 2003, 2005; Borchert, 2005, 2007, 2008; Wasan 2004, 2008, 2010; Casas 2008.

[3] See Hansen 2004.

[4] Most of the dialects within the southern branch of the Tai language family are included within the *Daizu* category, even although many of them are mutually unintelligible – see Keyes 1992: 21. The relationship of the Tai-Kadai languages to the Sino-Tibetan linguistic family is disputed. Although traditionally linguists have tended to group the Tai-Kadai family together with other families within the Sino-Tibetan group, at present this opinion is considered problematic even by Chinese specialists – see for instance Chen Baoya and He Fang:'A Preliminary Study of the Basic Pedigree Structure of the Sino-Tibetan Language Family', in the *Journal of Yunnan University for the Nationalities* (云南民族大学学报, *Yunnan Minzu Daxue Xuebao*), Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition (哲学社会学版, *Zhexue Shehuixue Ban*), Vol. 21, No. 1, January 2004. See also Keyes 1992: 6 ff.

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spoken in eastern Myanmar (for example, Tai Khuen in Shan State), northern Thailand (Tai Yuan) and Tai dialects in northern Laos. Prior to the establishment of a firm Chinese administration in the region and the large-scale arrival of Han migrants in the area, Lue was the dominant language and *lingua franca* in the interethnic "symbiotic context" (Hsieh 1989: 52) of pre-modern Sipsong Panna[5]. Apart from the Lue population in Sipsong Panna, several communities in Thailand, Myanmar and Laos continue to use the Lue language, in spite of the standardization of the education systems and national languages in all the above-mentioned states. The Lue language is still the main daily communication tool used by Tai community members in Sipsong Panna – especially in the countryside, where there are fewer Han migrants than in the towns, and where the need to learn the Han language as a means of social mobility is not as pressing as in the urban context.

2.2 Theravada Buddhism in Sipsong Panna

Apart from these linguistic links, the Lue of Sipsong Panna share several cultural markers with other Tai ethnic groups in the Upper Mekong region – such as the cultivation of rice in valley plains, their belief in spirits[6] and, most importantly, a centuries-long relation to Buddhist traditions. The date of arrival of Theravada Buddhism in Sipsong Panna is still uncertain and subject to much discussion. According to Khanan Sam Sao (Kang Nanshan), a Lue scholar, Buddhist textual and ritual practices were introduced into the region via Kengtung by members of the Suondok and Padaeng sects in Chiang Mai, then the capital of the confederation of states known as *Lanna*, in northern Thailand. Buddhism was then adopted as a legitimating cult by the local ruling classes at some point between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries AD, when the polity was known as 'Lue' (see Hsieh 1989: 332, n.

[5] On the relations between lowland and upland groups within Tai polities and the concept of muang, see Condominas (1990) and Turton (2000). Borchert links (mistakenly in my opinion) political de-centralization and dialectal diversity during this period, and according to him "the relative weakness of the cao phaendin [the king of Sipsong Panna]…is reflected even today in the widespread view that there is no standard version of the Dai-lue language. Although what is spoken throughout the region is essentially mutually intelligible, pronunciations, tones and words vary widely" (2008: 116). Standardization of written and spoken languages and the consequent trend towards linguistic hegemony are related to the spread of a universal educational system, phenomena arguably associated in turn with the birth of the modern nation-state. On these issues, see for instance Guo 2004, esp. pp. 93 ff.

[6] See Tan (1990) on the fusion of previous religious practices and Buddhism in Sipsong Panna.

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11). Members of the Padaeng and Suondok sects brought with them the *Tham* script[7] into Sipsong Panna, and so the Lue traditional writing system, still used in the local temples, is practically identical to the one still used in monastaries in Kengtung, in present-day Shan State, and in turn is also derived from the Tai Yuan script in northern Thailand[8].

There are; however, signs pointing to the existence of a previous Buddhist tradition in Sipsong Panna, and according to François Bizot "in the lived space of villages, these previous schools transmitted teachings of a tantric nature, of an Indian type and with a peculiar monasticism; difficult to identify and in total contradiction with the orthodoxy of the Pali canon" (Bizot 2000: 511; my translation). This tradition, which has disappeared from the rest of the Southeast Asian peninsula, has nevertheless survived partially among Mon-Khmer-speaking communities inhabiting the mountainous areas of the Upper Mekong region (for example, the Blang in Sipsong Panna), and who may have been 'converted' to Buddhism in an earlier period than the Tai-speaking groups surrounding them. This ancient type of Buddhism can be differentiated from its posterior forms by particular ordination and costume markers; it is characterised by an ordination of several days, whose most important rite takes place in a temporary sacred pavilion made with fig tree wood (*Ho Dio*; see Chapter 3, on the ordination of Khuba Longjom); the sacred formulae used in the rituals are mostly uttered in the local language; the monks are distinguished by a costume and accessories without parallel in the posterior Mahavihara tradition, such as the use of a tiara and a walking stick, and most, the

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[7] So designated by scholar Hans Penth "since it was first used primarily as a vehicle to convey the teachings of Buddhism in a form more accessible to Tai speaking peoples" (Keyes 1995: 140).

[8] "The Yuan script was brought to Kengtung by the Yuan people of Lan Na in the thirteenth century when they moved into that area…The Hkun [Kheun] area of Kengtung was culturally, racially and politically under the influence of Lan Na until the mid-sixteenth century. The Hkun script…is no doubt Yuan, and it is still very much a Yuan script" (Mong 2004: 171 ff.); see also Mangrai 2002: 3 ff.: "Within the five above-mentioned states where Khün [Kheun] script was in general use [Kengtung, Muang Laem, Sipsong Panna, Laos and Chiang Mai], there seems to be little doubt that their culture and the Sasana [Buddhist religion] came from Chiang Mai, in the south, as recorded in the Padaeng chronicle". This script was also (and still is) used by the Blang (Chinese: 布朗族, *Bulangzu*, *Bulang*), a Mon-Khmer group related to the Lawa/Lua of northern Thailand and inhabiting the highlands of western Sipsong Panna, practicing Theravada Buddhism as well. On the relationship between the Bulang and the Lue, see Hsieh 1989: 52 ff. On the Tai scripts and the Tham, see Keyes 1995: 139 ff. For a discussion of the concept of the Tai-speaking groups using the Tham script as an "imagined community", see ibid., 141, 145 ff. On the academic (and politically determined) controversy concerning the date of introduction of Theravada Buddhism in the area, see Davis 2003: 200 (n. 6).

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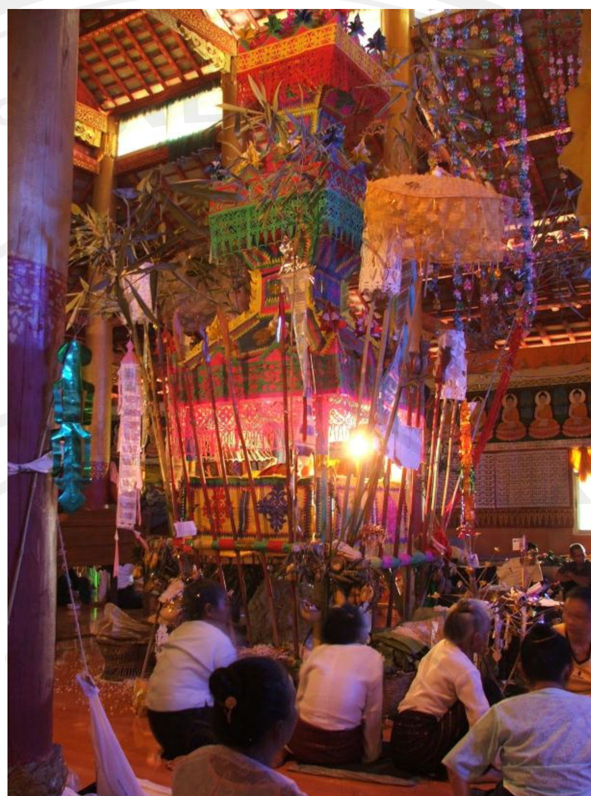

Figure 2.1: Lue villagers attend a ceremony inside the *vihaan* (Ordination Hall) of a Buddhist temple in Sipsong Panna (Image: Roger Casas)

monks do not collect their food, but receive it from villagers – who either offer rice and other products gathered from their own land to the temple, or cultivate the monastery land in exchange for an opportunity to make merit and also to use a proportion of the harvest[9].

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[9] According to Bizot, the Singhalese orthodoxy was introduced in Lamphun (the ancient capital of the Mon kingdom of Haripunchai, in present-day northern Thailand) at the end of the fourteenth century by Samana, a Burmese monk called upon by the then-king of this city-state. This orthodox tradition was soon adopted by local elites, and reinforced by the mission of the Tai monk Dhammagambhira to Ceylon in the fifteenth century. Upon his return to Siam, Dhammagambhira founded the *fai* (sect) *Padeng* in Chiang Mai – which from then on would compete with the *fai Suandok*, followers of Samana who favored a monastic discipline related to Buddhist traditions prior to Singhalization, such as the reception of food in the monastery on the part of the monks. In this sense, and according to Bizot, the conflict informing the divisions among the Sangha between the partisans of the Mahavihara and the "conservative monks" during the second millennium, would conceal this more ancient and fundamental conflict between the partisans of the *pintipata* (the pali term referring to the daily collection of alms; *bhintibat* in Lue) and those opposed to it – the *araññavasin* or 'forest monks', and those of the 'village monks' (*gamavasin*). See Bizot 2000: 520. Regarding the collection of alms in Sipsong Panna, a typical feature of monastic practice in Thailand or Myanmar, Kang Nanshan has stated that "[i]n Sipsong Panna, monks and novices have not gone on morning alms walks for several hundred years; local lay followers volunteer to send food to the temples instead. If a village temple is

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2.3 The Lue Temple and Novice Ordination

In the same manner as for many other Tai societies in Southeast Asia[10], Buddhism in Sipsong Panna traditionally revolved around merit-making and the practice of *dana* (Pali) or *tan* (Lue) - the virtue of giving, exercised mainly through the various religious festivals (also called *tan*) informing the Lue calendar, but also through the daily food offerings by which villagers provide the means of subsistence to the Sangha.

Each Lue village had its own temple-monastery (although exceptionally two or even three villages would share one), and Lue males were expected to become monks at their village temple[11] at least once in their lives, usually for a few years during their childhood or youth, although there were no fixed norms regulating when to enter the Sangha or for how long. The basic hierarchy inside the temple was the one existing between those still training to become monks (novices or *Pha*) and the monks (*Tu*), although once a novice had become a monk around the age of twenty, there was a whole system of grades of monkhood he could attain while being part of the Sangha[12]. Charles Keyes has summarized the fundamental importance for Theravada societies of ordination in terms of merit-making:

> "The man who becomes a monk or a novice accumulates great merit for himself; he also serves as a 'field of merit' for the laity in that the offerings made by the laity to the Sangha are defined in all Theravada traditions as being the supreme moral acts through which the laity acquires merit; and, at least in some cases, he generates merit that can be transferred to others" (Keyes 1983: 274).

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short of food or is hosting monks visiting from other temples, local novices are sent to ask for food in nearby villages, or to call villagers to send food to the temple. Since the late 1980s, all village households have been divided into several groups, and each group is assigned to send money, rice and vegetables to the village temple on certain days. If there are only a few monks and novices in the temple, one or two families will be responsible for providing these items to the temple on a daily basis." (Kang Nanshan 2009: 54)

[10] Many Tai-speaking groups inhabiting mountainous areas of mainland Southeast Asia do not practice Theravada Buddhism. See Condominas (1990).

[11] In past times there was arguably, as there is today, a relative amount of mobility among novices and monks within temples across Sipsong Panna and neighboring regions.

[12] On the different grades forming the religious hierarchy in 'Yuan Buddhism' areas (basically those of Tai-speaking and other groups in the Upper Mekong region), see Kang Nanshan 2009: 52, and Bizot 2000: 515. See also Kang 2009: 51-2 on the discipline of the pha. Within the temple, older novices are known as pha long, while the younger ones are called pha noi. Boys preparing to enter the temple as novices (kha yom) must also live in the monastery for a few months prior to their ordination.

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Arguably, having a son ordained as a novice represented the most important way to make-merit for Lue parents (see, for instance Keyes 1997, esp. Ch. 3). The relative importance of novice ordinations in relation to monk ordinations among the Lue in Sipsong Panna can be seen in the prominent role of novice ordination halls within local temples (in Lue: *viharn*, also translated as 'hall of prayers', because most ritual ceremonies take place within it)[13].

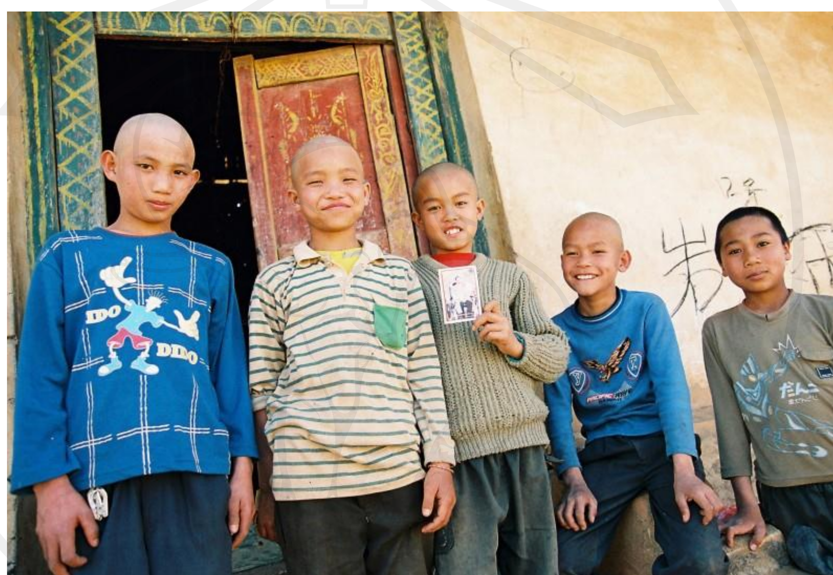

Figure 2.2: A group of novices-to-be (*kha yom*) in a village in the Muang Hai area - February 2005 (Image: Roger Casas)

Traditionally, the temple stood as the main institution for cultural transmission among the Lue, for it was practically the only place where someone could learn to read and write the Tham script, and therefore spending more or less time in the Sangha was also a fundamental scale by which the group would judge the social status of individuals[14]. Unlike in the case of Siam-Thailand and other Theravadin polities in Southeast Asia, where Buddhist traditions underwent profound

[13] This feature of Lue temples is also shared by monasteries in northern Thailand, where novice ordination was also traditionally more common than monk ordination, in contrast with the importance of the latter in central Thailand – reflected in turn in the prominence of the *ubosot* (In Lue: *bosut*; In Pali: *uphosata*) in Siamese temple compounds. As we shall see, although undermined by the spread of the compulsory state education system and the overall economic development of the region, the custom of novice ordination is still widely practiced in Sipsong Panna at present (see Chapter 5 of this dissertation).

[14] See Yang 1984: 148-51, Zhu 1993: 34 ff., and Hansen 1999: 109-10. Also Kang Nanshan 2009: 28-9.

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reforms during regional processes of nation-building and territorialisation, Buddhist practice in Sipsong Panna remained intimately related to the agricultural cycle and village life of the Lue, and apparently no emphasis on textual studies and monastic education, nor on meditation practices, developed[15].

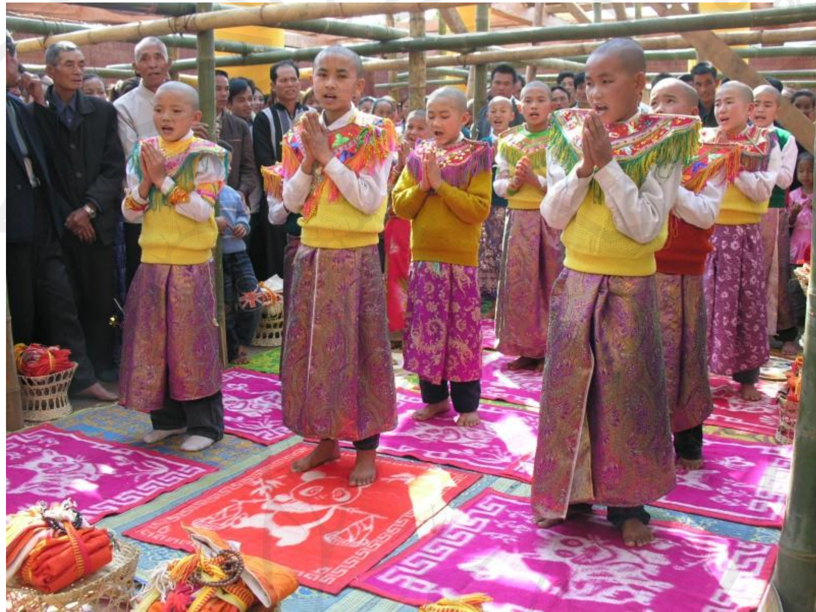

Figure 2.3: Novice ordination ceremony in a village in the Muang Hai area - January 2008 (Image: Khanan Kang)

Therefore, at the time as the establishment of the PRC and XDAP, Buddhism in Sipsong Panna was a tradition closely related to agricultural practices, one that blended elements from the Mahavihara traditions coming from what is today northern Thailand around the fifteenth century, as well as from previously Buddhist traditions whose traits can still be identified among the Lue and among some other ethnic group inhabiting the area, and co-existed with previously dominant spirit cults (in fact it is arguable that they can be separated as different traditions). Buddhism

[15] See Borchert (2008) on the concept of "Buddhist modernism" in relation to Sipsong Panna. Regarding meditation practices, Kang Nanshan has stated that "[o]nly a few Tai Lue novices used to take meditation in the past. When I was a Samanera, I seldom saw novices practicing meditation. Some local elders told me they had practised meditation when they were Samaneras, although it seems that only senior Bhikkhus [monks] or old laymen who followed the Eight *Sila* (precepts) undertook meditation.…Since the beginning of the 1990s, monks who have studied in Thailand have often practiced meditation in the temple when returning to Sipsong Panna. The monks at Wat Pajay [Wat Pajie in this paper] usually practice meditation in front of Buddha images for about five to 30 minutes during morning and evening prayers" (2009: 45-6).

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fulfilled a fundamental socializing function through the nearly universal practice of novice ordination; this shifting body of religious specialists would take charge of ritual ceremonies "wherein meaning is socially communicated" (Keyes 1985: 9), while the "scholastic" study of texts as well as meditation practices were clearly underdeveloped – the main marker for local males´ social status would be not the acquisition of knowledge contained in texts or displayed in rituals, but a whole form of education transmitted and learned also through corporeal and social (non-religious) practices. The temple structure was arguably not tightly centralized, and so the regional religious hierarchy was loose and incapable of exerting a tight control over village temples (on this issue, see Chapter 3). In spite of this, the ideological role of Buddhism in traditional Lue society should not be underestimated. Buddhist dogma and practices helped legitimate the role of the *chao* ruling class, who acted as patrons of religion and donors, sanctioning social differences through the connection between worldly power or social status, and merit-in-store[16].

2.4 The Integration of Sipsong Panna into the Chinese Nation-State

The gradual incorporation of Sipsong Panna into the Chinese "geo-body"[17] was to affect local Buddhist practice - also gradually. In 1895, and with the exception of small areas which were to become part of British Burma and of French Laos, the region was formally included within the borders of the Chinese Empire through the agreements signed by representatives of the Empire and of the British and French governments, and which confirmed the borders to be set between China, British Burma, French Indochina and Siam – borders which have remained virtually unchanged until today[18]. Following this incorporation, the Republican government, which succeeded the Empire in 1911, took measures to affirm its control of the border areas, mainly inhabited by non-Chinese populations.

At the local level, the policy of the Republican government was allegedly aimed at keeping the traditional political system of the *chao* in place, but

[16] On the connection between merit and power in the Theravada world, see Keyes 1983: 267 ff, and Reynolds (2005). As mentioned earlier, Borchert has neglected the ideological role of Buddhism in traditional Lue society. On traditional Buddhism in Sipsong Panna, see Kang Nanshan (2009).
[17] The concept of a "geo-body" was firstly promulgated by Tongchai Winichakul and applied to the case of Thailand in his *Siam Mapped* (Tongchai 1994).
[18] Keyes 1992: 11-12; see also Tongchai (1994).

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subordinated to a newly founded Han administration. In 1913, the *Pu-si Yanbian Xingzheng Zongju* (普思沿边行政总局: Central Bureau of Pu-si [Pu´er and Simao] for the Administration of the Border Areas, transformed in 1924 into the *Pu-si Zhibian Zong Bangongshi*, 普思支边总办公室: Central Office of Pu-si for Supporting the Borders) was set up in Cheli (an old Han name for Chiang Hung-Jinghong), and Sipsong Panna was divided in eight administrative regions (区, *qu*; see Hsieh 1989: 154). According to Hsieh, the new administration defended in theory the equality between Han and the "barbarians", while at the same time emphasising the need for the former to "civilize" the latter[19]. This accords well with what several authors have identified as national-level policies, educational or otherwise, essentially aimed at achieving the assimilation of non-Han groups into Han culture[20].

In Sipsong Panna, the establishment of an administration on the part of the Republican government is said to have been the first significant interaction between the Han and the local population (ibid.: 169). According to Hsieh, this interaction was difficult due to the demands of the administration – and got more problematic due to the internal strife within both the governments of Yunnan and Sipsong Panna at the end of the 1920s, which allegedly affected the local population, provoking anti-Han movements in that and the following decade (ibid.: 160 ff.).

Concerning religion in Sipsong Panna, Buddhism and the village temples were considered by the Nationalist administration to be closely linked to the power of the *chao*, and therefore the local government took measures aimed at affirming the role of Chinese education in the area in order to limit the power of the local ruling class (see Chapter 5). However, due to internal strife among different Nationalist factions, the war against the Japanese[21] and the civil war against the Communists, the constant problems plaguing government administration secured that these measures were never fully implemented, and by the end of the civil war in 1949 the influence of the Central Government and of Chinese culture among non-Chinese populations

[19] This emphasis is clear in the "13 Principles of Governing the Frontier" established by the then-commissioner-in-chief of the Bureau, Ke Shuxun. See Hsieh 1989: 155 ff.
[20] On the national-level policies, see for instance Dreyer (1976). More on the situation in Sipsong Panna during this period can be found in Hansen (1999). Obviously, the Han as an official category were also a creation of the times.
[21] The Japanese bombed Sipsong Panna during the war as part of their campaign in Burma – hindering efforts on the part of the Thai Government to spread pan-Thaism in the region. See Hsieh 1989: 173.

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in Sipsong Panna remained arguably weak – in fact, and always according to Hsieh, the Tai administration remained effective until 1952 (ibid.: 176).

2.5 Ethnic Policy and the Repression of Buddhism

According to several authors (see Connor 1984), the origins of ethnic policy in the PRC must be found in the contact between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and non-Han ethnic groups during the civil war against the Guomindang (GMD - the Nationalist Party), which convinced CCP leaders that cooperation with these groups would be necessary not only to win over the GMD, but to govern a potential new state. In any case, the official attitude of the CCP government towards ethnic "minorities" within the territory of the newly created state differed widely (at least in spirit) from previous approaches (there are important differences between; for instance, Republican and Communist conceptions of ethnicity and "national community" – see; for example, Dreyer 1976 or Harrell 1995)[22]. In any case, claiming to do away with discrimination and oppression on the part of the Han majority, and building their policy upon Marxist-Leninist ideals (Harrell 2001: 31), the CCP state granted overall recognition of ethnic diversity in the PRC, carrying out an ethnographic project to identify and categorize the different "minorities" inhabiting the territory of the PRC according to "scientific" criteria[23]. This massive project, set up in the 1950s to identify

[22] The CCP became concerned with the "ethnic question" after its break with the GMD in 1927; forcing the Communists to pay more attention to the populations inhabiting the hinterland of the Republic of China. From then on, the CCP would plead for the support of non-Han groups - offering the right to secede from China in case the CCP won the war. This offer was withdrawn once the war was over and the PRC was founded in 1949; the right to "self-determination" for ethnic groups (民族自决, *minzu zijue*) was then changed to that of a limited "regional autonomy" (民族区城自治, *minzu qucheng zizhi*). Curiously, the right to self-determination for non-Han groups, inspired also by the example (and political guidance) of the Soviet Union, was first proclaimed by the GMD in 1923. Nevertheless, this was arguably a simple political manoeuvre, for Sun Yat-sen, the same as later leader Chiang Kai-shek, clearly favoured the assimilation of 'minority' groups into the Han majority. See Connor 1984: 67 ff.

[23] The project was officially known as 民族识别, *minzu shibie*, a term which could be translated as 'ethnic differentiation'; see Harrell 2001: 39 ff. (esp. p. 42); Fei (1981); Schein 2000: 81 ff.; Tapp 2002. Apart from geostrategic and border security concerns, Harrell has highlighted the importance of non-Han areas for the economic development of the CCP State (2001: 51 ff.), first as they are territories rich in natural resources which were directed at the factories in the east of the country, providing them with raw materials – while at the same time serving as markets for manufactured products. Second, as territories with little or no population pressure, they were considered ideal to receive the surplus population from the Han-overpopulated areas of the east of the country. A third factor is added nowadays - the importance of ethnic tourism. On "internal colonialism" in the PRC, see Gladney (1994) and Schein 2000: 74 ff.

the groups that were to be part of the official ethnic classification[24], included an investigation of the social and economic conditions of each group according to "an avowedly scientific scale of material stages of social process (derived from Morgan and Engels, refined by Lenin and Stalin)". The project was thus to establish an inherent evolutionary scheme, placing each group into it "so that every citizen of the PRC is defined as belonging to a group that is more civilized or less so" (Harrell 1995: 9; see also Connor 1984: 201-2)[25].

In any case, the 1954 state constitution defined the PRC as a "unitary, multinational state" (MacKerras 1994: 145). The document granted freedom to "use and develop non-Han languages and scripts, customs and ways" of non-Han groups within PRC territory. According to the text, "regional autonomy applies in areas where a minority nationality lives in a compact community. All the national autonomous areas are inseparable parts of the PRC" (ibid.), although unlike the Soviet Union, the PRC state did not grant autonomous regions the right to self-determination; instead, the system of regional autonomy granted official recognition to non-Han groups and explicitly set out to make them "masters in their own land". Accordingly, non-Han members are entitled to occupy most of the executive posts in the governments of the autonomous areas[26].

Following the principles of regional autonomy, after the beginning of CCP rule, local authorities made efforts to cooperate with the leaders of non-Han groups in "national autonomous areas"[27]. A strong emphasis has since also been put on the training of minority cadres, and of Han cadres to willingly devote themselves to

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[24] See Harrell: "The Communist project has been the most explicit and systematic in its process of definition" (1995: 9). On the process of "ethnic identification", see Harrell 1995: 23-4 and 2001: 39 ff.; a detailed account can be found in Gregory Eliyu Guldin, *The Saga of Anthropology in China. From Malinowski to Moscow to Mao*, M. E. Sharpe, London and New York, 1994, 205 ff, while Fei Hsiao Tung, 'Ethnic Identification in China' (in ibid., *Towards a People´s Anthropology*, New World Press, Beijing 1981) offers the "official" point of view of a Chinese anthropologist.

[25] On the similarities between the Marxist conception of historical and evolutionary stages of "development", and that developed in the US at the end of the 1950s by Walt W. Rostow, see Rist 1997: 90 ff.

[26] While there is a requirement for the head of the local government to be a member of an ethnic minority, such a requirement does not involve the head of the CCP in the area, a position which holds more power than any other position in the local government – and which consequently has been always occupied by a member of the Han majority. See MacKerras 1994: 156; also Harrell 2001: 48, fn. 11.

[27] See Dreyer 1976 on the "united front" and the "reform by peaceful negotiation".

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"minority work" (民族工作, *minzu gongzuo*)[28]. Early on; therefore, ethnic policy in the PRC attempted to avoid the two extreme "evils" which could compromise the CCP administration of non-Han areas: Han chauvinism and local nationalism. In spite of the efforts at achieving a balance; however, there were frequent and radical swings in the official ideology regarding which one was a more important problem (MacKerras 1994: 146).

The pre-PRC socio-political system of Sipsong Panna was identified as having been a "feudal landlordship" (see Hsieh 1989) in the ethnographic work carried out in the region by Chinese specialists during the 1950s. As was the case in the rest of the country, at first cooperation with the local elites was promoted; some of those who had worked with the CCP and helped it gain control of the area in the final stages of the civil war against the GMD were assigned to occupy political positions in the new political structures (ibid.). During the first years of CCP rule, local political and economic institutions as well as cultural "peculiarities" at the local level were respected in order to facilitate the transition from a "feudal" to a "socialist" society. Buddhism was considered an integral part of local Tai culture[29], and therefore in Sipsong Panna, as happened in many other areas in the country with an important component of non-Han populations who were followers of an specific cult, after the establishment of XDAP in January 1953, the implementation of ethnic and religious policies became entangled[30]. However, Buddhist religion was also identified by government specialists and officials as a major support for the extant political structure of the Sipsong Panna kingdom[31], as well as an obstacle to the carrying out of economic reform, and; therefore, subsequent CCP officials would persistently pursue dismantling the religious structure in the area.

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[28] See Schein 2000: 95: "According to Moseley (1966: 7-8), the term originally referred to the project of securing the solidarity of different nationalities after their territories had been militarily subdued, and it proceeded according to the tenets of Marxist-Leninist theory on the national question. It remained until later decades for the term to become normalized as a form of work that involved development projects, social research and other more technocratic dimensions". See also Harrell 1995: 24.

[29] Data on Buddhist religion in Sipsong Panna is presented in Yang (1984) and Dao (1984), both papers being part of the wider research work carried out in the area during the 1950s. On the work of identifying and classifying the minorities in Sipsong Panna, as well as on the socio-economic research carried out by Han ethnologists and cadres, see Hsieh 1989: 193 ff.

[30] This is demonstrated by the current fusion of the (previously separated) Bureaus of Ethnic Affairs and of Religious Affairs in XDAP. On this government bureau, see Chapter 3.

[31] See; for example, Yang 1984: 151.

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After an early period of restraint and cooperation with the local political and religious elites, the Land Reforms (土地改革, *tudi gaige*) in 1956 marked the beginning of a series of measures aimed at radically changing the political and social landscape of the newly created XDAP, and at consolidating CCP control of the area[32]. This new attitude put an end to the previous, conciliatory policy which emphasised cooperation between the CCP and the local political and religious elites, and included efforts at undermining the power of the local Sangha and the Buddhist temples. During the land reform period, as well as during the consecutive movements of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, Lue monks were imprisoned, forced to participate in political re-education, and finally to disrobe; temples and shrines were either destroyed or used as granaries or schools, and Buddhist texts were publicly burned. Similar consequences were derived from other contemporary, 'minor' political movements such as the 1958 "democratic extra-tutoring" (民主补课, *minzhu buke*) campaign, whose aims were to reinforce the "democratic reform" (民主改革, *minzhu gaige*, another term for the Land Reform) started in 1956, or the "four clean-ups" movement (四清云动, *siqing yundong*) in 1964-5[33].

In spite of a brief period of relief at the beginning of the 1960s, during which time a conciliatory approach on the part of the CCP was restored[34], CCP policies in Sipsong Panna severely affected Buddhism in the region, effectively causing the overall interruption of religious practice among the Lue. Many local monks, together with an important but still undetermined part of the local population, fled at this time to Thailand, Laos or Burma[35]. Some of them would return to Sipsong Panna after the

[32] On the policies and their application during the so-called "socialist movements" in Sipsong Panna, see Hsieh 1989: 188-235 and Peters 1990: 344 ff.. On the Land Reform in Sipsong Panna, see Hsieh 1989: 211 ff.
[33] See Hsieh 1989. According to Hasegawa, in 1964 "the suppression of religious activities became more violent" (2000). This author also mentions that resistance movements arose among local peasants at the beginning of the 1960s: leaflets printed in Tham script were distributed among locals, warning them of the consequences of stoping the practice of both *lieng* and *taan* (ibid.; by *lieng* Hasegawa refers to the religious ceremonies concerned with the territorial spirits).
[34] This was; for instance, the time of the establishment of the Xishuangbanna Buddhist Association (see next chapter).
[35] See Hsieh 1989: 215 or Hansen 1999: 102-5 (focused on the impacts on monastic education).

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political and economic reforms at the beginning of the 1980s, while others would remain part of the Lue diaspora around the world[36].

The Cultural Revolution was a particularly critical period for Lue Buddhism. As is well known, CCP political ideology at the time stressed the absurdity of cultural differences and demanded assimilation of minority groups into Han culture. Expression of ethnic identity on the part of the minority groups was thus severely repressed. In Sipsong Panna, the "autonomous" status of XDAP was abolished in 1966, remaining suspended up to 1984, and the attacks on Buddhist practice and the destruction of religious sites increased. However, although the Cultural Revolution was arguably *the* most critical phase for Lue ethnic identity and the practice of Buddhism in the area, it is believed that around 50% of the monks in the area had already left the Sangha by 1957, due to political pressures (Hansen 1999: 105, based on estimates)[37].

Amid the destruction of the political movements, many locals tried to save religious items such as books or Buddha images, burying them in the ground. However, the most obvious practices, and the ordination ceremony in particular, remained suppressed until reforms came at the end of the 1970s. The loss of local knowledge was such that the effects of the political movements during the Maoist era are still today apparent in Sipsong Panna[38]. As we shall see in the next chapter; however, the death of Mao Zedong and the end of the Cultural Revolution would mark the return to the previous, considerably more moderate policies on the part of

[36] Many of the Lue who fled into Laos left in turn for Europe or the US when the Communists took over in 1975. Nowadays, most Lue communities in exile are concentrated in Taiwan, France and the USA. It is estimated that around 4,500 Lue live today in the US. See Kang Nanshan, 'The Survival of Tai Lue Traditional Culture in the U.S.: Possibilities, Similarities, and Modifications', Unpublished MA Dissertation, Columbia University, 2005.

[37] This estimate does not correspond with the official figures on monks and novices at the start of the Cultural Revolution (see Table 1, Chapter 3). While the 1975 PRC Constitution retains the concept of regional autonomy (still referring to "a unitary multinational state"), MacKerras considers that the concept was in fact "downgraded" (1994: 152). Indeed, regional autonomy was effectively abolished in most areas; autonomous institutions were abolished and had to wait until the beginning of the 1980s to be re-established. MacKerras makes no mention of outright repression of cultural practices either. A detailed history of Sipsong Panna during the Cultural Revolution is still to be written; the best account so far is Hsieh´s (1989: 224 ff.); see also Peters 1990: 347, and Hansen 1999: 105-8.

[38] It is obvious that the violence of the political movements made a deep impression upon Lue villagers. Most elders who experience the violence are not keen to talk about what happened – maybe because they are aware also of the volatility of CCP policies.

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the CCP, and this would mean the recovery of a space for the development of Buddhist practice in Sipsong Panna.

2.6 Summary

Buddhism has historically been a fundamental cultural marker for the Tai Lue of Sipsong Panna, and importantly for my purposes, this was a cultural tradition shared with several other groups (mainly Tai-speaking groups) inhabiting neighboring regions and polities in what are today's Yunnan Province in the PRC, in Myanmar, Laos and Thailand. Moreover, Buddhism was a deeply embedded marker of Lue society, as the Sangha and the temples were the main institutions of socialization, through the custom of novice ordination. At the same time, this "embeddedness" made Buddhism an important ideological factor for the reproduction of power structures.

Although the Chinese Empire was a permanent player in the dynamics of the region (the same as the Burmese Empire; see Giersch 2006), it was not until the end of the nineteenth century that the previously independent kingdom of Sipsong Panna was integrated under the administration of, firstly, the Empire, then of the Republic of China. The inclusion of the small kingdom in the processes of centralization and national construction of China was to have important consequences for local Buddhism; although during the first half of the twentieth century this integration was weak, the political movements and campaigns of the Maoist period in particular were to have important effects on local Buddhist practice in Sipsong Panna, provoking its almost total interruption.

The intensity of the violence unleashed during the Maoist period may lead us to think that *repression* has been an inherent characteristic of CCP policy towards ethnic and religious minorities since the creation of the PRC in 1949. However, it must be remembered that, soon after it came to power, the CCP State established institutional mechanisms aimed at the recognition and integration of such groups into state structures and the regulation of cultural (including religious) practices. In this sense, the formal, state institutions responsible for regulating the Buddhist "revival" that has taken place in Sipsong Panna since 1980, were the same as those established

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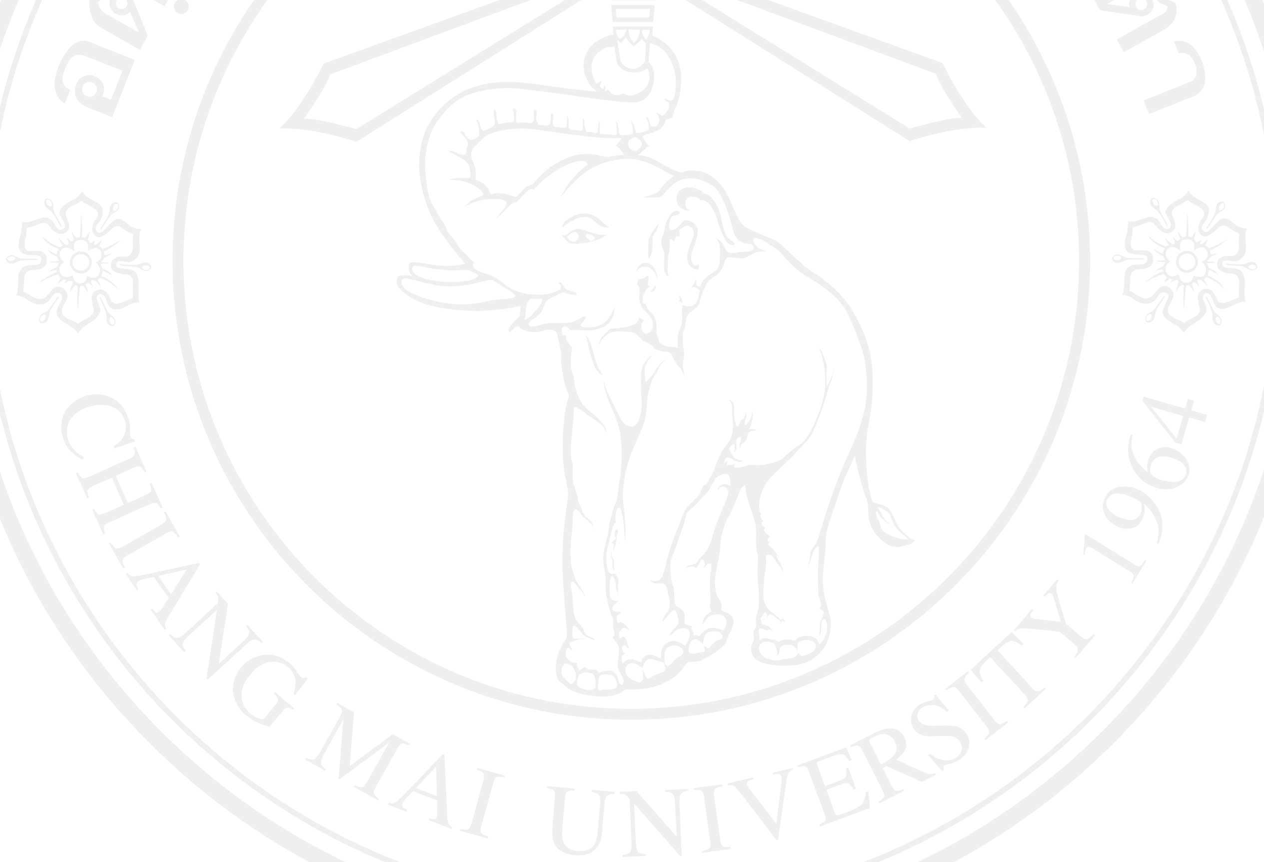
in the 1950s and 1960s. The periods of repression represent the temporary failure and abolition of such mechanisms, not their intended function.

Nevertheless, during the first decades of CCP rule the institutionalizing process was arguably not strong, due mainly to the inconsistencies and violent swings in government ethnic and religious policy. Only from 1980 onwards can we speak of proper institutionalization of local religious traditions into modern ideas of religion, and of the participation of local religious actors in such a process.



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