CHAPTER 5
THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF BUDDHIST EDUCATION

5.1 Introduction

The Buddhist revival in Sipsong Panna has brought about a recovery of novice ordination, and with it traditional temple education, in which local boys enter the temple for an indefinite period of time, usually staying at least a few years in the Sangha. As we have seen in Chapter 2, traditional Buddhist education in Sipsong Panna was arguably of an informal kind, an "action-oriented education" (Samuels 2004) focused mostly on training in the rituals and daily monastic practices, as well as on the shaping of the conduct of monks and novices – and not on textual learning or scholarly studies; most novices and monks were not even relatively familiar with the Pali language, and had limited knowledge of the canonical Buddhist scriptures and even of the vernacular texts. No centers of learning developed in Sipsong Panna, and Buddhism remained basically a local tradition inextricably linked to the cult of the spirits and to the agricultural practices of the Lue[1].

When Sipsong Panna was integrated into national Chinese structures, monastic education as a means of social reproduction came into conflict with the intention of the different Chinese governments to establish and consolidate public state education in the area. Unlike in the case of Thailand, this conflict has evolved through the mutual exclusion of the public and monastic education systems, and this situation has forced the local Sangha to develop their own answer to the expansion of State education. In this chapter, I will focus on the educational project carried out by members of the Buddhist elite during the last fifteen years, a project centered upon the adoption of an educational system based on Thai and Chinese models – a context within which educational reform (including religious education) has been fully

[1] For a list of Buddhist Lue rituals, see Kang Nanshan (2009); for a detailed description of the rich ritual world of a closely related culture (that of northern Thailand), see Davis (1984).

developed. The continuing tension between traditional temple education and government policies will therefore be understood within the framework of the institutionalization of local, traditional forms of socialization and transmission of knowledge, into modern forms of 'education'.

5.2 Monastic versus Public Education in Sipsong Panna

According to several authors[2], the relationship between traditional, monastic education and the State's school system has been determined by "tension" and "conflict" for at least around a century. Since the period of formation of the nation's "geo-body", different Chinese governments have allegedly tried to break the power of Buddhist temples as loci of social reproduction through the establishment in Sipsong Panna of schools aimed mainly at the teaching of Chinese language and cultural values related to the "Chinese nation".

At that time (end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century), knowledge of written and spoken Chinese was almost inexistent among the different non-Chinese populations inhabiting Sipsong Panna. Unlike in other peripheral regions of the Empire, such as Lijiang, Confucian education was never really popular in Sipsong Panna; according to Hansen, there were only two private Confucian schools in Mengla (a township in eastern Sipsong Panna) by the end of the Qing empire, and only some members of the ruling *chao*[3] understood and spoke Chinese (1999: 93-94). This lack of knowledge of the Chinese language on the part of the local non-Chinese population was regarded as a major obstacle for the imposition of Chinese rule early on, and already in 1912, just after the demise of the Empire, the head of the Nationalist Government in the area (see Chapter 2) reported to the provincial authorities on the urgent need for developing Chinese education in Sipsong Panna (ibid., 94). Subsequently, the first Chinese public schools (intended to include both locals and Chinese immigrants) were set up in the area, while the new administrative division of the area was developed. Through the teaching of Chinese language, "the government hoped to break the authority of the *chao* class and the influential

[2] See for instance, Hansen 1999 and 2004, and Borchert 2005(b).
[3] The *chao* were the ruling class of landowners in Lue traditional society; see Hsieh 1989: 106 ff.

Buddhist monks who conducted all education of Tai boys in the monasteries" (ibid., 93-4)[4].

In 1921, guidelines for expanding "border education" were set by the central Nationalist Government, and a quota system was established to get boys into state schools[5]. However, the attempt to establish state education as an alternative to temple education in Sipsong Panna failed; most schools were not open in the lowlands but higher up in the mountains in order to avoid malaria, and the Tai students did not get the preferential treatment they thought they were entitled to according to their traditional dominant position in the social hierarchy of the region, and to these reasons one might add the deeply ingrained mistrust towards the Han Chinese on the part of the local Tai, and the lack of overall support from the royal family for the expansion of Chinese education in the area. In fact only the royal family and the families of officials in the local government and the palace in Jinghong sent their children to Chinese schools; most students in the new schools were Han, and when in 1942 all schooling stopped in Sipsong Panna due to bombing of the area by the Japanese army, the Nationalist project of establishing Chinese schools and expanding the use of Chinese language in this border area had arguably already failed (ibid., 95-96).

Nevertheless, these failed attempts at integrating Tai boys into Chinese secular schools can be seen as a first step at the local level in the institutionalization of local traditions into modern conceptions of education.

5.3 A Contested Tradition: The 'New Tai Script'

The creation of a new administration under CCP rule in 1953 involved a renewed effort towards the establishment of Chinese education in Sipsong Panna and the expansion of Chinese language in the area. According to Hansen (1999: 100), in

[4] How the goals of nation-building were entangled at the time with traditional conceptions of Chinese cultural superiority is reflected; for instance, in Article 7 of the "13 Principles of Governing the Frontier" elaborated in 1913 by He Shukun, the first Nationalist chief of government in Sipsong Panna: "The barbarians don't know the Han language, so we must first emphasize education…Children of the barbarian officials should all enter into schools. We will teach them speaking first, then simple characters, then more complicated sentences, so on and so forth…They cannot follow the old custom of sending children to the temples to be monks and to learn Burmese books only. If they don't know the Han language, they will face much difficulty in their work" (translated in Hsieh 1989: 157-58).

[5] According to this system, each medium-size village was forced to send at least one boy to the nearest Chinese school. Facing this new regulation, local villagers started paying poor Tai, Akha or Han to attend the schools instead of their own children. See Hansen 1999: 95-96.

the first years of the PRC, the old Tai script was used as a means of teaching in public schools[6]. However, in spite of these early attempts, soon the local government began conducting work aimed at reforming the existing Lue script. In the framework of a wider, national-level project aimed at reforming and standardizing existing scripts (and creating new ones), in 1952 a team sent by the Academy of Social Sciences and directed by linguist Fu Maoji arrived in Sipsong Panna to conduct research and prepare the reform of the traditional Lue script[7]. In 1953, the Second People's Congress of the XDAP approved the reform of the traditional script, and a local 'Committee for the Reform of the Dai Script', composed of seven members, was formed (Hsieh 1989: 244). Guldin has described how the process of standardizing non-Han languages at a national level involved the cooperation of members of the "national minorities"[8]; and as Hansen has pointed out, in Sipsong Panna this process involved the collaboration of a few local Tai who, apart from being proficient in the old script, knew Chinese well (Hansen 1999: 100), including the last Chao Phaendin of Sipsong Panna - Chao Mom Kham Lue, who acted as an advisor and assistant to Prof. Fu. The reform and subsequent use of the new script was ratified by a national-level commission in 1955 (Hsieh 1989: 244).

[6] Hansen mentions that a few village schools experimented with teaching one class of Tai students in Chinese only and teaching basic Tai in another before turning to the study of Chinese; the teachers she interviewed all agree that the students in the Tai class performed better in school (1999: 99). On the other hand, some of the teaching materials from that period were also used when the "new Tai" script was abandoned in favor of the old one, at the beginning of the 1990s – see below.

[7] On the role of Fu Maoji in this project at a national level, see Guldin (1994). According to this author, the main phase of the project took place in the mid-1950s, when around 700 trained specialists were sent into minority areas in fourteen different provinces to conduct research on 42 languages (Guldin 1994: 133). The process began earlier in Sipsong Panna probably due to the existence of a script with an old tradition among the Lue.

[8] Due to this, "[s]ome ethnologists felt that their work had indeed helped include the minorities in the Liberation" (Guldin 1994:134).

Figure 5.1: A Lue manuscript written in the 'old Tai script' (*to tham*)
(Image: Roger Casas)

Several dictionaries and teaching materials in the 'new Tai script' (新傣文, *xin daiwen*) were then produced[9], and the script became the standard for official use and bilingual education among the Lue. Apart from a hiatus between 1987 and 1996, when the old script was again recovered for official use[10], and of course during periods when use of minority languages and scripts was banned (especially during the Cultural Revolution; see Hansen 1999: 106), the 'new Tai' has been the Tai script officially in use in XDAP. As a result, two scripts, apart from Chinese, are at present in use in Sipsong Panna; while the old script is still studied by novices and monks in the local temples, the new script is used in official documents and signs or within the state education system – although to a very limited extent, as we will see in the next section.

[9] The publication of the Banna Newspaper (using the new script) started in 1957, being suspended from 1966 up to 1972 (Hansen 1999: 100).

[10] Hansen 1999: 100, 126; see also Hsieh 1989: 244: "in 1987, after the new writing system had been used for 32 years, the People´s Congress of Xishuangbanna passed a resolution to decide to resume the old style of Dai character. Apparently this was so because of the support for the old script on the part of the last *chao phaendin*". Hsieh interpreted this as a symbol of "a resurgence of traditional Dai identity" (ibid., pp. 244-5, 247). Keyes comments that the new script is not popular among the Lue in Sipsong Panna (1995: 142); however, local attitudes towards it seem to be mixed. For a more detailed account see Hansen 1999: 109 ff.

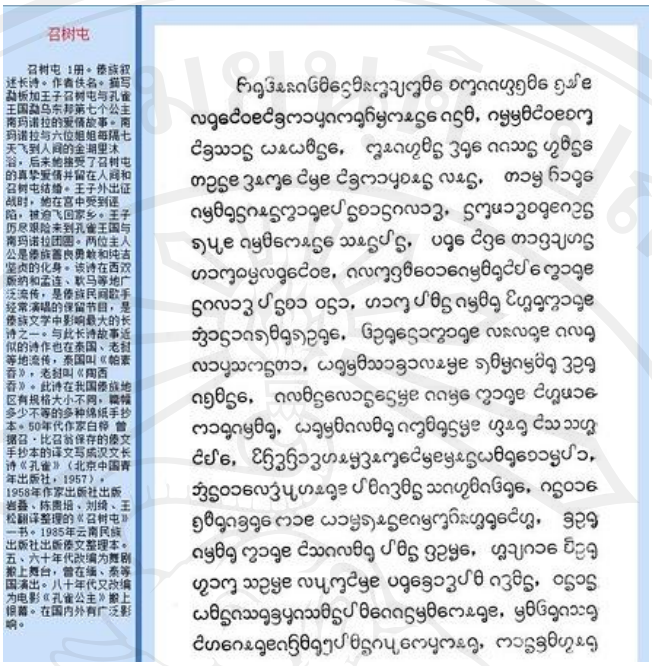

Fig. 5.2: Text written in the 'new Dai script'

In any case, the creation of the new script and the attempt at imposing a standardized writing system upon disparate and heterogeneous written traditions for the purposes of centralizing education and its contents, can be seen as another factor in the institutionalization of local ways of knowledge within modern notions of education among the Lue in Sipsong Panna.

5.4 Socio-Economic Conditions

As discussed in previous chapters, soon after the establishment of XDAP, the Land Reform and subsequent political movements in the PRC inaugurated an era of repression of Buddhist practices in the area. From the end of the 1950s until the end of the 1970s, and especially during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), temples and other religious sites in Sipsong Panna were destroyed or damaged, monks and novices were forced to disrobe or flee to neighboring countries, and Buddhist practice in the area was completely disrupted[11]. The teaching and use of Lue script (both traditional and new) was banned during this period, which can be said to have represented a step

[11] See Hsieh 1989: 210 ff.

backwards in terms of the process of educational institutionalization on the part of the State – at least in terms of the integration of Lue boys into that process.

After the changes at the top of the CCP between 1976 and 1978, the re-establishment of freedom of religion in the PRC, and the recovery of monastic ordination and Buddhist practice in Sipsong Panna, the process of educational institutionalization resumed; however, the return of Lue boys to the temples at the beginning of the 1980s created a problem for the local government and its goal of expanding state education and the study of Chinese language, as most Lue boys chose to become novices in the village temples rather than become students in public schools, and the number of Tai girls in schools was far greater than that of boys (Hansen 2004: 65).

This problem has been gradually and relatively resolved by the transformation of the socio-economic context in Sipsong Panna over the last 30 years. Due to the massive influx of Han migrants, most students in public schools, especially in the urban areas of Jinghong City or Menghai Township, are nowadays Han Chinese children, whose families would see the learning of local languages simply as a hindrance to the potential progression of their children within the extremely competitive Chinese education system – an opinion shared by more and more non-Han families too. Furthermore, apart from within the school system itself, the learning of Chinese is considered necessary for daily interactions between individuals and groups in multicultural Sipsong Panna. Local, minority languages have thus been almost totally excluded from public school curricula, even in those schools where the majority of children belong to groups other than the Han. In this context, more and more Lue families have come to recognize public schools as the main avenue for upward social mobility in the current economic context, and opt for getting their children into the state system.

In any case, and apart from these social factors, the local government has also relied heavily on the implementation of legal measures in its attempt to reduce the influence of the temples. The 'XDAP Regulations for Ethnic Education' (西双版纳傣族自治州民族教育条例, *Xishuangbanna Daizu Zizhizhou Minzu Jiayu Tiaoli*) specifically state that boys must wait until graduation from the 9-year compulsory

education system before being ordained as novices[12]. Ultimately, the application of this legislation depends on the local conditions in any particular area – factors such as the strength of the custom of ordination among boys, or the willingness on the part of local educational and governmental authorities to implement the regulations. In many areas in Sipsong Panna, boys ordained as novices simultaneously attend public school – devoting most of their daytime to the school, and returning to the temple in the afternoon to do temple chores and study the religious script (that is, when they are not enrolled in boarding schools).

Nevertheless, it is argued here that the implementation of relevant legislation is an important instrument on the part of the Government in preventing local boys from getting ordained. Nowadays the families of boys willing to enter the temple as novices are exposed to threats from education professionals and members of the local offices of the BERA, with the imposition of fines if the boys are ordained. Very often the parents themselves, confronted with this possibility, discourage the boy from entering the temple. This situation is resented by many locals, some of whom even see it as contravening the freedom of religion allegedly defended by the PRC Constitution. In any case, the decision to enter the local temple and become a novice on the part of a boy is not only a matter of free choice determined by the current socio-economic conditions in Sipsong Panna.

Cooperation between local monasteries and the public system of education seem to have been the logical solution to the contradictions between temple and government education. However, while in the 1980s and 1990s there were some attempts at establishing special classes for novices, combining Buddhist and public curricula, they were abandoned after a few years, and it can be argued that in general

[12] Art. 35 of Ch. 4 of the regulation reads: "Religion must not interfere with schooling and public education, it must not obstruct the implementation of compulsory education. The parents or guardians of appropriately aged boys and children, believers in the Theravada Buddhism, must observe the 'Law on Compulsory Education of the People's Republic of China', and send to school their children or wards in school age, to receive compulsory education. Those boys and children in the age of attending the first stages of compulsory education must not enter the temple to become novices". The regulation was issued for the first time in 1993 and re-issued without changes (at least regarding this particular article) in 2005.

there has been little coordination between the Buddhist authorities and the state education system (ibid.)[13].

Whatever the case, and with public schools becoming the sole avenues for social mobility and practically the only option to obtain a recognized education, the monks have to choose between joining educational institutionalization and integrating Buddhist training within the state system, or facing the decrease and eventual disappearance of monastic education in the villages.

5.5 Wat Pajie and the Buddhist Institute

In response to the pressures caused by the increasing expansion of exclusively secular state education, the local Sangha has engaged in a project to promote and *redefine* Buddhist training, adapting it to the demands of modern conceptions of religion and education dominant in the PRC and, especially, Thailand, from where the main influence in the establishment of the Buddhist Institute arguably derives.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, by the end of the 1980s efforts on the part of XBA members were focused on the reconstruction of the region's religious center. At that time, the late Maha Kheun Kham, then Abbot of Wat Wat Phra Phuttabaat Taak Pha in Lamphun Province (northern Thailand), visited Sipsong Panna and expressed an interest in bringing local monks to Lamphun to further their education. Maha Kheun also met Mr. Dao Shuren and members of the XBA, and the organization decided to send a group of Lue monks to Thailand (Wasan 2010: pp. 48-9). After the President of the YBA had in turn paid a visit to Lamphun to discuss the details of the trip, Mr. Dao negotiated with the Chinese authorities, but only ten monks were granted permission to obtain a passport (interview with Mr. Dao Shuren, December 2009). According to Wasan, before their trip "the delegation was also required by the Chinese government to take 'another orientation program', to learn about rules and law, information, and how to behave as Chinese citizens, during their stay in Thailand" (ibid., 49).

Apart from this group ("part of a mission envisaged by the Association"), many other Lue monks went to study at Wat Phra Phuttabaat Taak Pha during this period:

[13] An exception to this is the recent recognition on the part of the State of the Buddhist courses imparted at the main temple-schools in Sipsong Panna, Wat Pajie and the new Wat Luang Muang Lue. See below.

"Most of them hoped to improve their knowledge by studying in a Thai monastery, and at the same time to experience life in Thailand" (ibid., 50). The number of Lue monks at the temple in Lamphun reached around 40 at the beginning of the 1990s; most of these monks made the journey by themselves, even on foot, using the old paths that link Sipsong Panna, Shan State in Myanmar and northern Thailand. Some of these monks undertook the trip after establishing contact with Maha Kheun in another temple, and being invited to join the community led by him in Lamphun (interview with a senior monk belonging to the XBA, Kunming - December 2009).

After completing their three-year education program in Thailand, the group sent officially by the XBA returned to Sipsong Panna at the beginning of 1994. Several other monks who had been studying in Lamphun or in other locations within Thailand came back to the PRC around that time, while others remained in that country to pursue further studies. According to Wasan (2010: 51), since that time the number of these "border-crossing monks" has gradually decreased, although the number of Lue monks pursuing an education in Thailand is still significant.

Once back in Sipsong Panna, members of the group sent by XBA in 1991 were responsible for the establishment at Wat Pajie of a Buddhist school, for novices and monks from Sipsong Panna and other areas in Yunnan Province. The structure and curriculum of the Buddhist Institute (云南南传上座部佛学院, *Yunnan Nanzhuan Shangzuo Bu Foxueyuan*, Yunnan Theravada Buddhism Institute) therefore basically followed the model established for monastic education in Thailand – including a curriculum which follows the Thai *Nak Tham*[14].

Although at the time of the establishment the Central Government granted permission for the establishment of the school, no funding was granted, so the XBA had to look elsewhere for sources of funding. Some other Buddhist temples in the PRC helped the XBA, while the bulk of the money was sent over to Sipsong Panna by Thai donors (see Chapter 3 of this dissertation). In the beginning, and until the main

[14] On this, see Borchert 2005(b): 257-8 and 261 ff., and Kang Nanshan 2009. The *nak tham* curriculum was first instituted in Thailand (then Siam) by Prince Vachirayan (then Sangharaja or head of the Thai Sangha) at the beginning of the twentieth century, during the period of the administrative centralization of Buddhist education (see Ishii 1986: 90 ff.). For a detailed account of education at Wat Pajie and the different curricula taught at the temple at the beginning of the 2000s, see Borchert 2005(b); see also Hansen 1999: 114-5, and Davis 2003: 180, 192. For a vivid description of the atmosphere at the temple-school at the end of the 1990s, see Davis 2005.

school building was built in 1997, lessons were imparted in the building that would eventually become the kitchen of Wat Pajie. In 1997, the school building was completed - with dormitories, classrooms, a computer room and several offices. To staff the school, the XBA relied on the monks who had officially or unofficially travelled and studied at Wat Phra Phuttabaat Taak Pha in Lamphun. Some of them would later disrobe, while others remained in their local communities, and yet others would come to Wat Pajie to form part of the "mission".

A fundamental figure in this process and in the development of Buddhist education in Sipsong Panna is arguably that of Tu Kham Tin, a monk originally from Muang Ham, and the only member from the original group that travelled formally to study at Wat Phra Phuttabaat Taak Pha and who remains in the Sangha today. Tu Kham is Vice-Head of the XBA and a member of the local CPPCC, and the virtual 'Number Two' within the Sipsong Panna Sangha. On the other hand, he has remained closer to the Buddhist ideal of the *Ton bun* through his asceticism, an intense missionary work which has led him to look for support among and establish links with dozens of temples (particularly within the PRC), and his commitment to the educational "mission" – he established a school for novices in the temple of Ban Suan Moun, next to his native village, where he is also one of the abbots. Tu Kham clearly sees the future of the Sangha as linked to the public education system and to the adaptation of Chinese and Thai notions of culture and modern religion, through the improvement of the cultural level and quality (*suzhi*) of Lue monks and novices.

In any case, during the initial stages of the Buddhist Institute most of the education imparted at Wat Pajie was centered on Buddhist subjects (mainly the study of the local script and ritual texts), although there was also training in the Chinese language (see Borchert 2005b). However, apart from the religious training proper, after its creation in 1995 the managers of the school worked towards the gradual regularization of the curriculum imparted at the Buddhist Institute, by promoting the teaching of secular subjects in common with the official, national-level curriculum for secondary education – and Chinese language in particular[15]. Finally, in 2004 the school was granted *zhongzhuan* (中专, secondary vocational school) status by the

[15] According to both Hansen (1999: 115) and Borchert (2005(b): 257), permission to open the *Foxueyuan* was contingent upon the teaching of Chinese language at the school.

provincial government, and so the degrees granted by the school are now recognized nationwide. This status was (and continues to be) contingent upon the teaching of national curriculum subjects by professional teachers belonging to the staff of the Jinghong Technical School (技术学院, *Jishu Xueyuan*, previously 师范学院, *Shifan Xueyuan* or Normal School) and in the Chinese language.

Figure 5.3: The Buddhist Institute at Wat Pajie
(Image: Khanan Sam Sao)

Either with recognized diplomas or without them, for around fifteen years dozens of monks and novices have gone through Wat Pajie as a first step in pursuing a Buddhist education within the PRC or abroad. Mirroring contemporary contacts with neighboring countries and beyond, students have also received occasional lessons on Thai language and, when foreign teachers are available, English language. After completing this hybrid religious and secular curriculum, students graduating from the school can follow on to study at the provincial Buddhist Institute in Kunming (云南佛学院, *Yunnan Foxueyuan*), where the teaching of national-level curriculum subjects is in turn imparted by professors belonging to the Yunnan Nationalities University (云南民族大学, *Yunnan Minzu Daxue*), allowing students to obtain a tertiary vocational education (大专, *dazhuan*) diploma. Since October 2004, this new *Foxueyuan*, located in Anning near the provincial capital Kunming, has admitted monks belonging to the

three schools of Buddhism present in the Province: Mahayana, Tibetan and Theravada Buddhism. At present; however, Lue students coming from Sipsong Panna make up the bulk of the students.

Figure 5.4: The first batch of Wat Pajie students with recognized diplomas during their graduation ceremony at the Temple - January 2008 (Image: Roger Casas)

Apart from the above-mentioned Buddhist Institute in Kunming, students have had the chance to follow further education in Buddhist schools inside the PRC (the Nanhua Foxueyuan in Guangdong, the Yuanming Jiangtang in Shanghai, and the Fujian Foxueyuan are just some of the Mahayana Buddhist schools inside the PRC admitting students from Wat Pajie), in Thailand (Wat Sri Khun Kham in Phayao, Wat Pak Nam in Bangkok and the new campus of Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University in Wang Noi, near Ayutthaya), or even Sri Lanka[16].

5.6 The New Buddhist Institute at Wat Luang

As mentioned in the previous chapter, in March 2008 the Buddhist Institute moved from Wat Pajie to the new compound of Wat Luang Muang Lue. At present,

[16] On the political and financial issues related to the pursuit of an education on the part of Lue monks within the PRC and Thailand, see Borchert 2007.

the school lodges around 130 boarding students, mostly Lue monks and novices, but also members of other local *minzu* such as the Wa and Bulang, as well as a handful of novices from other Lue areas in Yunnan Province, and even from the Lao PDR. Due to the large number of students boarded at the school, the provincial office of the United Front Work Department has helped fund the school, providing it with a total of around 700,000 RMB between 2008 and 2009. Apart from this government aid, the school is maintained by the daily donations tourists make in the *viharn* to maintain the monks and novices living in it, as well as by occasional donations on the part of local Lue communities[17].

The students at Wat Luang follow the combined Buddhist and secular curricula described above in relation to Wat Pajie. Under school statutes, Buddhist subjects must constitute 60% of the curriculum, and secular subjects the remaining 40%. Generally speaking, the teaching of secular subjects at the Institute takes place in the mornings, while that of Buddhist topics takes place in the afternoons. While most of the students belong to different levels of the *zhongzhuan* curriculum, around 50 novices are now enrolled in a single junior secondary class (初中, *chuzhong*) opened in October 2009 as part of the *Zhou Di Er Zhongxue* (州第二中学, Prefectural Middle School No. 2), in which lessons are taught by teachers belonging to that school. This has meant an important extension in the outreach of the school, towards younger students, in relation to Wat Pajie. On the other hand, the organization of school time resembles that of public boarding schools in the PRC, with students subject to a strict regulation of daily activities, from morning prayers until review lessons in the evenings. Continuing with the tradition of physical labor and the "action-oriented pedagogy" carried out at Wat Pajie, and which Borchert has deemed part of the "informal" education of the novices (Borchert 2005(b): 260 ff.), the students themselves take care of the maintenance of the school.

[17] The amount collected daily in the form of donations ranges from a few hundred to a few thousand RMB. According to the monks, the level of donations has decreased since the opening of the site.

Figure 5.5: The school at Wat Luang during its construction - August 2007 (Image: Khanan Sam Sao)

5.7 Problems of Integration

At present, formal, integrated Buddhist education in Sipsong Panna seems to be on its way towards consolidation and expansion; however, compared to the local public education system, its relevance is still relatively limited, and according to data collected by the XBA, in 2009 there were 4,244 monks and novices in the region, of which 2,958 were enrolled in government funded schools or Buddhist (recognized) schools. The percentage of monks enrolled in the latter (basically the students at the Buddhist Institute in Wat Luang Muang Lue) is very small, and most of the novices and monks studying at any level are doing so at government primary and secondary schools, where the teaching of Buddhist subjects (or, for that matter, of local language and culture) is almost totally excluded.

The institutionalization of Buddhist education in Sipsong Panna is proceeding according to contemporary models of education dominant in the PRC and Thailand – and ultimately, in the West. The school is thus understood as a separate and specialized space where time is rationally organized according to discipline and educational necessities, where specific subjects with standard contents are taught by a body of professionally trained educators through standard means (textbooks, etc.), and

where evaluation of students´ progress is carried out through a standardized and centralized system of examinations.

Figure 5.6: A class at the Buddhist Institute in Wat Luang (Image: Roger Casas)

Although certainly some common elements of traditional temple 'education' remain, the overall content of education within government schools is arguably very different to that of Buddhist temple education. Those Tai Lue boys educated in government schools are allegedly more exposed to Han language and culture, and further from a traditional Lue identity – in fact, in order to succeed in the public school system and in the labor market, they must remain aloof from the fundamental markers of that identity, including the language. In the temples, in contrast, boys are educated in a style alien to the "Chinese nation", and closer to the identity of a trans-border religious and linguistic community[18].

The homologation of education carried out at the Buddhist Institute could be described as an attempt to find a middle way between these two extremes: teaching boys the essentials of traditional practices and the specific "ethos" related to Lue male

[18] As Charles Keyes states, "[t]he boys who go to the schools often do not attend Chinese secular schools as well, in contrast to the situation in Laos or Thailand. They not only learn a different system of writing from Chinese, but they also learn the traditional form of writing rather than an officially approved reformed Dai [Tai] orthography developed by Chinese scholars. Moreover, this schooling also contributes to Lue being able to imagine themselves as part of a larger Tai world" (1992, p. 26). For a critique of the conception of a "larger Tai world" or trans-border cultural community, see Diana (2009), as well as Keyes (1995).

identity (markers such as the Tai language and the old script, religious rituals, monastic discipline, etc.), while at the same time preparing the monks to be part of the Chinese nation, providing them with the necessary skills (Chinese language, national-level curriculum, etc.), and therefore with more options for upward social mobility in the new socio-economic context[19].

However, this 'middle way' is still striving to find a balance. While the teaching of Buddhist doctrine and scriptures (In Lue: *Tham*; In Pali: *Dhamma*) obviously plays an important part in the curriculum, the most relevant training for the students at the Buddhist Institute is arguably that related to the secular subjects imparted by Han teachers from the local Technical School, which furthermore is ultimately determinant in terms of the grades necessary to have access to higher stages of education, and of individual upward social mobility[20].

In accordance with Soviet ideology, and as I described in Chapter 2, at the time of its founding, the PRC granted equal status regarding the law to all citizens within its territory, whatever their ethnic affiliation (Harrell 1995: 23)[21]. In this context, and as Stevan Harrell has pointed out, "there is no a priori assumption that any one group…is innately superior…In fact, there is no a priori assumption that the center consists of a particular group" (1995:23). Furthermore, "the goal is not ostensibly to make the peripheral peoples more like those of the center, but rather to bring them to a universal standard of progress or modernity that exists independently of where the center might be on the historical scale at any given moment" (ibid.).

However, the fact remains that the Dai, as well as members of other ethnic groups, must assimilate Han culture as much as possible in order to succeed in the school system and the labor market. Conversely, failure on the part of non-Han groups to adapt to an education system which transmits cultural values basically alien to them is generally interpreted as proof of the inherent "backward" character of

[19] On these issues see also Borchert 2005(b).

[20] In relation to this continuing symbolic subordination of local culture, the religious character of the curriculum followed by students at the Buddhist Institute is not recognized by the State as such, for the emphasis is put on the "language" element of the training: the class is officially labelled "Dai [Tai]-Han Bilingual Class" (傣-汉双语中专班, *dai-han shuangyu zhongzhuan ban*). As Borchert (2005(b): 264) notes, the "Buddhism class" was and is almost always referred to by teachers and students as the "Dai-language class", but this is also, as Borchert himself implicitly hints, a recognition of the linkage between Buddhist training and the old Tai script. Due to the shortage of Tai teachers, the secular subjects at the Buddhist Institute are always taught in Chinese language.

[21] See Chapter 3, n. 33.

minority cultures (including language), as well as of the superiority of Han language and culture. The logical response to this understanding of the problem as a matter of "cultural deprivation" on the part of the non-Han groups[22], is thus to increase education in the Chinese (Han) language and culture. In this sense, the educational system, in conjunction with cultural discrimination (it is irrelevant here whether such discrimination is positive or negative), serves in the reproduction and legitimation of the system and in maintenance of the subordinate position of the non-Han minorities *vis-à-vis* the Han majority, through the symbolic production of "backwardness" and of a veritable "structure of permanent deferral"[23] regarding non-Han groups, a structure by which such groups are forced to adapt to a model in which nevertheless it is impossible to succeed as long as they are part of the 'minorities' – that is, as long as they remain attached to practices related to their original cultures.

The process of institutionalization which the Buddhist elite is promoting through the reform of Buddhist education, arguably reinforces the system responsible for the reproduction of these symbolic inequalities, and in spite of the increasing participation of Lue boys (with or without robes) in public schools, there is also a certain contestation among locals against this process. In this sense, school absenteeism and the continuing relevance of temple education can be interpreted as a rejection on the part of locals of a public school system which not only disregards local culture and traditions (especially Buddhism), but is often seen as prejudicial regarding their survival. As Charles Keyes has written, among the Lue "wat schools have become the source of significant passive resistance to the Chinese state's efforts to put the Lue into a pliable minority box" (1992, p. 26).

[22] The term is taken from the study on socio-linguistics by Labov (1972).

[23] This term has been used by scholar Gary Wilder to refer to the symbolic domination of Western colonial powers on the colonized. As Hansen (1999: XV) points out, "[i]n many respects Chinese education in Sipsong Panna resembles the education established by colonial powers for indigenous peoples in other parts of the world" (see also ibid., 165). The fact that the symbolic and material subordination of non-Han groups may take place as an "unintended consequence" of minority policies is irrelevant for the argument displayed here: I admit the effects of such policies may work in the same way that the effects of the "development apparatus" work in Lesotho, as described by James Ferguson, that is: "behind the backs or against the wills of even the most powerful actors"; but in any case this does not affect my argument. As with Ferguson, I believe that "the outcomes of planned social interventions can end up coming together into powerful constellations of control that were never intended and in some cases never even recognized, but are all the more effective for being 'subjectless'" (Ferguson 1994: 18-19).

In any case, we must keep in mind that, at present, it is also the Buddhist elite of Sipsong Panna that is trying to integrate Buddhist education into public education system structures as part of the broad project of religious institutionalization and the adaptation of local traditions to modern conceptions of religion and education.

5.8 Summary

Since the time of the formal integration of Sipsong Panna into the Chinese Empire at the end of the nineteenth century, the different central governments in China have striven to consolidate public education in border areas as a means to cement the allegiance of the "peripheral peoples" to the "Chinese nation". In Sipsong Panna, this has included an effort to curtail the continuing socializing influence of Buddhist temples. While the Republican government failed to carry out this project, the founding of the PRC represented a rejuvenation of efforts to consolidate public education in the area, and included the creation of a new alphabet aimed at facilitating the integration of Lue boys into Chinese schools.

Throughout the history of the PRC, and due to ideological and political reasons, state and Buddhist education have remained separated. To counteract the continuing strength of temple education, the Government has relied on legislation preventing boys from ordaining until they have completed the 9-year compulsory education; however, the ongoing socio-economic and cultural transformations in Sipsong Panna account for at least the partial success of state of discourses regarding the benefits of public, 'modern' education over traditional temple education in Sipsong Panna. The symbolic association of the Chinese language with modernity, and the arrival in Sipsong Panna of new patterns of economic production and consumption, together with the dominant presence of Chinese language in the national and local media, administration and educative system, explains at least in part the increase in school attendance of Lue boys – often at the expense of temple education and novice ordination.

Confronted with the prospect of the eventual demise of temple education, the monks have striven to integrate Buddhist education (reformed according to Thai standards of religious training and discipline) within the state system.

While, as Borchert (2008) has argued, Buddhist practice in Sipsong Panna has not gone through a State-led, modernising process such as the one undergone by the Sangha in other Southeast Asian countries, the educational effort promoted by the local Buddhist elite since the 1990s does represent a change from previous patterns of religious practice. As argued earlier, traditional Buddhism in Sipsong Panna revolved around the practice of *tan* and the nearly universal ordination of local males; temple 'education' was determined by what Jeffrey Samuels has labelled "action-oriented pedagogy" (2004), a form of socialization in which strictly textual education or knowledge of Pali language or meditation had little room. In this sense, the regularization of the training imparted at the Buddhist Institute can be interpreted as another instance of the local Buddhist elite's participation in the institutionalization of Lue religious traditions, through the integration this time of Buddhist education into State structures according to modern conceptions of "religion".

While this integrative project has partially succeeded, internal contradictions in the relationship between the temple and the government school systems (articulated especially in terms of the absence in the latter of education on local culture and languages) remain unabated, perpetuating the general symbolic subordination of Buddhist education in Sipsong Panna and; therefore, acting as a hindrance to the development of the project. These internal contradictions are also noticed by locals, and in this sense the continuing strength of temple education at the village level and the refusal to participate in the government education system can be considered as an instance of "passive resistance" against the institutional and educational project of the state and the local Buddhist elite.