

# From Sipsongpanna to Chiang Kham: The Reconstruction of Lue Identity in Contemporary Thailand

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## ABSTRACT

*A new Tai Lue identity is produced when Tai Lue people in Chiang Kham District, Thailand involve in local cultural revival and economic development. This new identity is a Thai-Tai Lue identity: "Lue Muang Thai", as they call themselves, and is constructed based on their situations in and expectations of contemporary Thailand. Sipsongpanna, as an important cultural symbol of Lue, still plays an important role in constructing the new Lue identity, but Chiang Kham Tai Lue elites clearly know differences between Lue Sipsongpanna and Lue Muang Thai. For ordinary Chiang Kham Tai Lue, their Lue identity comes from the Lue villages in Thailand without any reference to Sipsongpanna. Lue identity is a strategy for them to gain more resources and capital. This is why Lue identity has been strongly performed in public spaces, while it is hard to find any performances of "Lue" identity in their family life. The "Lue Chiang Kham" identity emerges as one product in the process of constructing a new Tai Lue identity.*

**Keywords:** Thai-Tai Lue identity; Lue Muang Thai; Localized Lue identity; Lue Chiang Kham

## INTRODUCTION

Due to their cultural distinctiveness and origin in Sipsongpanna, the Tai Lue in Thailand have caught the attention of scholars inside and outside Thailand. Moerman demonstrates that the Lue in Chiang Kham use different names for themselves: Tai Lue, Khon Muang, Thai, etc. contingently, situationally, and interactionally, when they meet different groups, "in order to identify and account for the survival of ethnic entities" (Moerman, 1965, p. 1225). He also considers that Lue is a self-identification that is "essentially political in origin" (Moerman, 1965, p. 1222) and the Lue in Chiang Kham "feel a vague nostalgia for 'the old country'" (Moerman, 1968, p. 154, as cited in Keyes, 1992, p. 2). Based on Moerman's

research, Keyes expands the study of the Lue to three countries and claims that material culture, especially textiles, has become a self-consciousness maker of ethnic identity for the Tai Lue in Thailand since the growth of tourism in Northern Thailand commercializes ethnic crafts, and the legend of Sipsongpanna makes Lue textiles authentic and marketable in Thailand (1992, p. 18). The logic behind these arguments is that the Tai Lue's identity is fundamentally based on an origin in Sipsongpanna. Even though Moerman views Tai Lue from an instrumentalist perspective, he still believes that Sipsongpanna is the most profound source of identity for Tai Lue in Thailand.

Cohen disagrees with these ideas and raises an argument that "Lue identity is constructed in the context of Thai national culture and development" (1998, p. 56). He explains that Lue cultural distinctiveness has already lost as Lue assimilate into Thai society. However, since the 1970s Lue elites led villagers to reconstruct Lue culture, rewrite history and utilize resources in order to develop the economy under Thai nationwide governmentality (village administrative units, rural economic development, Thai cultural revival campaigns, rural developing projects, etc.). Furthermore, this economic development process contributes to how "[t]he state has become 'part of the village'" (Cohen, 1998, p. 56) and leads villages to build a contemporary Lue identity in relation to the Thai nation and national culture – as Cohen says, "national culture constructs Lue identity" (1998, p. 57).

Long also raises an argument that the Lue identity of Tai Lue in Chiang Kham "is not in the history and outside Thailand but in the present and the inside Thailand" (2012, p. 13). She points out that although Sipsongpanna provides an historical memory for the Lue Chiang Kham and an important foundation for Lue identity, they have already developed a binary identity as both Lue and Thai. For Long, they construct their history in such a way as to selectively revise some parts and forget others in order to legitimize living in Thailand and express a strong sense of Thai nationality and Thai identity. However, Cohen just focuses on the changing environment and shifting governmentality in Thailand and those influences on the construction of Tai Lue identity. He neglects Sipsongpanna as a cultural symbol of Lue identity still playing a role in the reconstruction of Lue identity. Long analyzes the changing ethnic identity of Chiang Kham Tai Lue through previous literature and historical opinions on how the Chiang Kham Tai Lue view their history and identities. But her work lacks engagement with the dynamic process of Lue identity construction and how different Lue people view Lue identity.

This paper agrees with both Long and Cohen that Tai Lue identity is constructed under the influence of Thai culture and society. Tai Lue identity is reconstructed based on Tai Lue's situations in and expectations of Thailand, showing cultural distinctiveness, differing them from other Tai-speaking ethnic groups, especially the Tai Yuan, and destigmatizing themselves from the stigma of 'prisoners of war' and 'quasi-hill people', and legitimizing their residence in Thailand and membership as Thai. This article demonstrates the reconstruction of this Lue identity and the important role of Sipsongpanna as a symbol of the Tai Lue. It also explains different views towards Lue identity among ordinary and elite Lue people in Chiang Kham, as well as showing how Lue identity is a strategy for them to gain more resources. Another identity, localized Lue identity (i.e. 'Lue Chiang Kham'), has been fostered by efforts at local cultural revival.

## A BRIEF INTRODUCTION OF CHIANG KHAM AND THE CHIANG KHAM TAI LUE

Chiang Kham is located in Northern Thailand, bordering Laos, belonging to Chiang Rai province before 1977. After Phayao was designated as a province, Chiang Kham was demarcated as part of Phayao province. In Chiang Kham the Tai Yuan people are in a majority followed by the Tai Lue. Chinese Huo and other ethnic groups make up a small part of the total population.

Ancestors of the Chiang Kham Tai Lue came from what is now Muang La county in Sipsongpanna, China. In Chiang Kham, Tai Lue villages are named after the Muangs they migrated from. For example, the Lue Baan Man came from Muang Man, the ancestors of Baan Yuan migrated from Muang Yuan, Baan Waen follows Muang Wean, etc. Muang Man, Muang Wean, Muang Yuan, all refer to regions under Muang La in Sipsongpanna. There are many causes behind the Lue's migration to Thailand, such as marriage, trade, wars, etc. The main reason is war, including wars between Sipsongpanna<sup>1</sup> and China, inner wars within Sipsongpanna, and wars among states in Southeast Asia; these caused the Tai Lue to forcibly or voluntarily migrate south from Sipsongpanna (Long, 2012).

In pre-colonial periods, manpower was the most important resource in Southeast Asia compared to land or treasure. The defeated were treated as prisoners of war and forced to labor for the victor. Most Lue were forcibly migrated to Thailand in the early Chakkri dynasty (Rama I period). Two centuries of rule by Burma had depopulated Chiang Mai. Supported by Bangkok, the then-rulers of Chiang Mai launched several policies and wars against small Tai states in the northern Mekong regions, including Sipsongpanna. The policies and wars were known as "pick up vegetable into the baskets and catch slaves into the town" (เก็บผักใส่ซ้าเก็บข้าใส่เมือง, *Kep Phak Sai Sa Kep Kha Sai Muang*) (Cohen, 1998; Long, 2012). After the wars, many Lue from Sipsongpanna were taken to Northern Thailand as prisoners of war and laborers. Some of them also chose to flee from the communist regime after the establishment of the People's Republic of China.

The ancestors of many Lue in Chiang Kham were first placed in Nan, then they moved to Chiang Muan in contemporary Phayao province, finally settling down in Chiang Kham. Although Lue did same labor work for the rulers of Chiang Kham like the local Tai Yuan, their social positions were much lower than the Tai Yuan as they were migrants, prisoners, and sojourners. They missed Sipsongpanna, they felt "a vague nostalgia for the old country" (Moerman, 1968, p. 154, as cited in Keyes, 1992, p. 2). In the past more than 200 years, the Lue suffered a humiliating history as war slaves, as well as the stigmatization brought by communism in the middle 20th century (Anukunwathaka, B.E. 2556). They chose to hide their Lue identity that gave them shame and stigma and gradually assimilated to the majority group of Northern Thailand, Tai Yuan. As Schliesinger observed and recorded, "prior to the 1980s, the Lue of Thailand commonly avoided calling themselves Lue, for fear of ethnic discrimination. The Lue assimilation into Thai nationality was

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<sup>1</sup> Sipsongpanna has officially and totally belonged to the People's Republic of China since 1950s. Before that, Sipsongpanna was a semi-independent Lue kingdom.

almost complete in the 1980s. They spoke standard Thai, wore mainstream clothing and built houses in Thai design” (2001, p. 73). They not only unconsciously assimilated into the Tai Yuan identity, but also took the initiative to integrate into Thai society in order to be free of discriminatory labels. Moerman mentioned that “villagers now more often feel themselves to be citizens of a nation rather than members of a disadvantaged minority group...their distinctiveness is now being lost into the stream of national culture” (Moerman & Miller, 1989, p. 317, as cited in Cohen, 1998, p. 49). Diligence in agriculture and trade was a way for them to bury the past, set up a new image and build an ethnic boundary between them and the Tai Yuan (Cohen, 1998; Long, 2012; Moerman, 1968).

As local cultural revival campaigns and rural tourism developed in Thailand and as China reopened the national border in the late 1970s, Lue elites grasped the opportunity to initiate economic development projects and Lue cultural revival movements with the support of the Thailand government and domestic and foreigner scholars (Anukunwathaka, 2011; Boonchaliew, 2009; Schliesinger, 2001). The new Lue identity was constructed as a result of these cultural and economic campaigns.

## THE RECONSTRUCTION OF LUE IDENTITY IN CONTEMPORARY THAILAND

The reconstructed Lue identity is the Thai-Tai Lue identity or “Lue Muang Thai” as they call themselves. It is a response to their situations and expectations in Thai society, made in order to gain economic and social resources which are not related to their ancestor’s time in Sipsongpanna. However, Sipsongpanna is still their important cultural and historical symbol. Their distinctive culture and unique history distinguish them from other Tai-speaking ethnic groups in Thailand, especially the Tai Yuan. As they are involved in local cultural revival campaigns, the localized Lue identity ‘Lue Chiang Kham’ emerges.

## THE CONSTRUCTION OF THAI-TAI LUE IDENTITY

The Thai-Tai Lue identity (Lue Muang Thai) is a result of a series of cultural revival campaigns consciously initiated by Chiang Kham Tai Lue elites; ethnic elites and broad structural forces constructed the new Lue identity (Adlparvar & Tadros, 2016). The annual Tai Lue festival (สืบสานตำนานไทลื้อ) is a large-scale cultural performance that plays a crucial role in the construction of Lue identity in Chiang Kham—even for all Lue in Thailand. Ordinary and elite Lue people have different attitudes toward this reconstructed new Lue identity, but elites’ ideas still have an influence on the way ordinary Lue see themselves. The constructed Thai-Tai Lue identity is performed differently in private and public places; it is hard to find lifestyles different to “Northern Thai” in private spaces but the Lue identity is strongly expressed in public places.

The Tai Lue festival first started being held in 1994 when the Tai Lue had already lost their cultural distinctiveness and assimilated into Northern Thai society. The secretary of the Tai Lue association in Thailand, Pi Kham Pik shared with me that a Tai Lue rural teacher named Sawai Choesa-art (ครูไสว เชื้อสะอาด) in Baan Yuan

realized that the Lue had already lost their own culture and ethnic identity, so he led some Lue teachers and Lue civil servants to hold the first Tai Lue festival. Sawai Choesa-art thought teachers and civil servants were knowledgeable and wise, so they should take responsibility to inherit Lue culture. Pi Kham Pik remembered that the first Tai Lue festival was small, without a stage to perform, and without the Tai Lue association in support. Old people dug out old methods to cook Lue traditional snacks and festival-goers ate them together. Although the festival was small, it attracted the eyes of local governments. Since then, local governments have supported the Tai Lue festival to develop local tourism. Every year, Pi Kham Pik writes the festival proposal and submits it to the Phayao provincial administrative organization to apply for funds. After activity funds were promised, some leading activists would have a meeting with leaders of the Lue villages in Chiang Kham to discuss how to hold the festival and how to display Tai Lue culture. Gradually, the festival model was fixed and the Tai Lue associations were established.

The annual Tai Lue festival contributes to the revival of Tai Lue culture and Lue traditional snacks have been revived. *Khap Lue*, the traditional Lue singing style, has been learned and sung. Lue traditional clothes started being worn and became popular among the Lue. Both Pi Jina and Pi Kham Yan told me they started to wear traditional Lue clothes and dresses when they joined the Tai Lue festival. Traditional Lue children's games were also played in the festival and spread to daily life.

Lue organizations (Tai Lue associations in different provinces and the Tai Lue association of Thailand) have been established. Chiang Kham as the main place of the Tai Lue has been emphasized, and some people think that Chiang Kham is the capital of the Lue in Thailand (Long, 2012, p. 14). Lue culture has been revived and protected. Nagel (1994) proposes the concept of "the shopping cart" to illustrate that ethnic boundary construction, such as size, composition, forms of ethnic organization, etc. determines the shape of the shopping cart, while ethnic culture is what is put in the cart, such as dress, art, music, symbols, myths, etc., and these explain the meaning of the ethnic group. Therefore, "boundaries answer the question: who are we, and culture answers the question: what are we" (Nagel, 1994, p. 162). The new Lue identity has been constructed during the process of holding and joining the Tai Lue festival, which also gives the meaning of what it is to be Lue.

The reconstructed Tai Lue identity is not based on their history of originating from Sipsongpanna, but is rather based on their cultural distinctiveness in contrast to other Tai-speaking ethnic groups in Thailand, especially the Tai Yuan, and is aimed at building an identity away from the stigma of being prisoners of war and quasi-hill people, fueled by textile commoditization (Keyes, 1992), and aimed at residential legitimacy and membership in Thai society. Sipsongpanna is not only the foundation of their historical memory (Long, 2012, p. 13), but also provides cultural distinctiveness. Sipsongpanna and Chao Hmoam Kham Le, the last king of Sipsongpanna, are important symbols to show cultural uniqueness that can be commodified for tourists. In all public activities, such as the annual Tai Lue festival, ancestor-worshipping ceremonies and local public fairs, "Sipsongpanna" can be heard and seen in background music, in host's speeches, and on promotional photos or paintings. Tai Lue popular music and songs imported from Sipsongpanna are embraced to show their distinctiveness from the Tai Yuan. The photo of Chao Hmoam Kham Le is displayed to visitors in the temple of Baan Man and Tai Lue

Museum Hall in Baan That Soup Waen to show that they were once subjects of the king of Sipsongpanna.

The newly-created Sipsongpanna Tai Lue culture, under Chinese ethnic tourism, has been appropriated by Chiang Kham Tai Lue elites to add to their cultural authenticity. On April 5, 2021, Tai Lue elites Pi Kham Pik and Kru Nong introduced my colleagues and me the local cultures and customs in the Tai Lue textile museum of the Baan Yuan temple. As soon as we entered the museum, two Pi performed a small ritual of drinking tea by saying “*tawkok saii, saii, saii saii saii, saii*” to welcome us as customers, with the explanation that tea is traditionally used to show the hospitality of Tai Lue. “*Tawkok saii*” is a slogan in Sipsongpanna shouted out when people drink to boost a fighting spirit but is never used in tasting or drinking tea. Moreover, the six-time shout of *saii* in “*tawkok saii, saii, saii saii saii, saii*” was created in a 2002 song released by a famous singer in Sipsongpanna to match the rhythm of a song produced for promoting ethnic tourism in Sipsongpanna. I asked the younger brother of Pi Kham Pik whether they normally shout out “*tawkok saii*” when they drink tea and his response was “never”. Peacock is another cultural symbol that Lue Chiang Kham elites appropriate from Sipsongpanna, where peacocks are Tai mascots created by Chinese ethnic discourses under the rubric of Chinese ethnic tourism. In recent years, the streetlamps placed on the road between Baan Yuan and Baan That Soup Waen have been built in peacock models. Elderly people in the two villages cannot explain the reason, but Pi Kham Pik and Pi Kham Yan, two Lue Chiang Kham elites, both of whom have been to Sipsongpanna several times and gained knowledge there, gave an account that the peacock is an ethnic symbol of the Tai Lue. Although cultural symbols that newly appropriated from Sipsongpanna have not been widely accepted by Chiang Kham ordinary Tai Lue, cultural authenticity and exoticness of Chiang Kham Tai Lue have been added and spread as Lue elites introduce them to tourists or customers. Further, this is a method to make their culture more attractive and marketable.

Destigmatization is another purpose of reconstructing the Tai Lue identity. During the 2016 Tai Lue festival, Ladawan Wongsriwong, the head of the Tai Lue association in Thailand, said that “Tai Lue is not a hill tribe, Tai Lue is an ethnic group” (ไทลื้อไม่ใช่ชนเผ่า ไทลื้อคือชาติพันธุ์), illustrating that the Tai Lue had their own kingdom in Sipsongpanna and have rich forms of culture, including a spoken and written language. This speech responds to the stereotype that the Tai Lue is a quasi-hill tribe, which as partly come from the commercialization of Lue textiles since the 1970s, when hill tribes’ handicrafts started being marketed (Keyes, 1992).

Culture and history are two basic materials used to construct an ethnic group (Nagel, 1994, p. 161). Besides reviving Lue heritage and constructing a new culture, the Lue Chiang Kham also revise their history to manifest their expectation about having an identity in Thailand. Their revised history is inscribed in murals of the temple of Baan Man, drawn in the pictures hung in the Tai Lue Museum hall in Baan That Sop Waen, and performed in the drama named *From Sipsongpanna to Lanna*<sup>2</sup> in the annual Tai Lue festival. In their revised history, they attribute their migration more to the invasion of the Mongols and the civil wars in Sipsongpanna, which

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<sup>2</sup>The drama described here is based on a video (โยชิโน คำแก้ว, 2016).

caused people to willingly and voluntarily flee to Lanna, Northern Thailand. Although some wars between Tai states are mentioned, especially the policy of “*Kep Phak Sai Sa Kep Kha Sai Muang*”, they tend to describe their movement as a gathering people to develop and restore Lanna. In the drama, their migration to Lanna is interpreted as them being “invited” by soldiers to live in Nan where there was an abundance of land. This revised history erases the story of their past where they are laborers and prisoners of war. Instead, they develop new images that Tai Lue are peace lovers and hard-working people, living peacefully and harmoniously with others. Their ancestors were invited to Lanna to construct this place, so they are legitimized in living in Thailand and being members of Thai society. As Friedman concluded, “the discourse of history as well as of myth is simultaneously a discourse of identity; it consists of attributing a meaningful past to a structured present. Objective history, just as any other history, is produced in a definitive context and is a particular kind of project” (1992, p. 194). At the end of the drama, pictures of the Thai King, Thai Queen and Nang Dan Kham, the princess of a migrating royal family from Sipsongpanna, are successively carried on the stage, to show they are subjects of the Thai King but they also pay respect to the Tai Lue royal family. From the order of the pictures, it can be seen that two layers of identity are shown: Thai and Tai Lue, and that the former is more prominent.

## LUE IDENTITY AMONG LUE ELITES AND ORDINARY LUE

Lue elites and ordinary Lue have different ideas about Lue identity, although the former’s ideas can have impacts on the latter. Pi Kham Pik is a Lue elite who knows Lue’s migratory history, has traveled to Sipsongpanna several times, has mastered the Lue language, and considers that she is Lue because of her Lue ancestors from Sipsongpanna. However, her 23-year-old niece Bath cannot speak the Lue language and does not know any Lue history. When I asked her why she thinks she is Lue, she spent one day to consider and said, “I live in a Lue village so I am a Tai Lue”. In her mind, Lue identity is not about the history of Sipsongpanna, but stems from living in a Lue village in Thailand. Her 25-year-old brother also gave me the same answer. Long (2012) shows how few ordinary Lue in Chiang Kham know their own history. Like Bath and her brother, their Lue identities stem from the Lue village they live in rather than Sipsongpanna. When questioned more deeply, both Bath and her brother cited the annual Tai Lue festival and Tai Lue snacks they eat at the festival to certify their Lue identity. These responses refer to constructions developed by Lue elites for ordinary Lue to define themselves as Lue. Differing from Nagel’s perspective that ethnic boundaries and ethnic culture are separated (1994), their answers prove that ethnic culture as a symbol can draw up ethnic boundaries and it is hard to separate boundaries from culture.

While Lue elites consciously learn their own history and yearn to travel to Sipsongpanna, they clearly know they are Tai Lue in Thailand, not Lue in Sipsongpanna. Pi Kham Kaew, a young Tai Lue elite in Baan Waen, shared with me his experience of traveling to Sipsongpanna. “When I was in the car passing through Muang La, my tears cannot help flowing down. This is the place where my ancestors lived.” However, it does not mean they look forward to living in Sipsongpanna or becoming Lue Sipsongpanna. Rather, they have a clear mind about the differences

between Lue Sipsongpanna and Lue Muang Thai. Pi Kham Kaew emphasizes several times in front of me that Lue Muang Thai treat their textiles, traditional clothes and dresses as ethnic symbols of Tai Lue identity and he is proud of protecting and inheriting Lue textiles and clothes that are now nearly lost in Sipsongpanna. Pi Kham Pik shares the same idea.

The differences between Lue Sipsongpanna and Lue Muang Thai are an important dimension manifesting that there are 'Thai-Tai Lue' and 'Lue Muang Thai'. Besides maintaining Lue traditional dress, Pi Kham Pik and Pi Kham Yan cite the way they treat the Lue royal family to certify that they are Lue Muang Thai and not Lue Sipsongpanna. Chao Hmoam Dan Kham is a Tai Lue princess who migrated from Sipsongpanna in the 1950s and lives in Bangkok now. A life span-extended ritual (สืบชะตา) was held for her by Lue from seven provinces (Chiang Mai, Payao, Phrae, Nan, Chiang Rai, Lamphun, Lampang) in Wat Rangsi Sutthawat, Doi Saket District, Chiang Mai on 18 September, 2020. In the evening before the ritual, a small party was held in Baan Luang Nuen, a Tai Lue village in Doi Saket District. People joining in the party dressed in Tai Lue traditional clothes. Mae Pa, a Tai Lue cultural activist in Baan Luang Nue, emphasized over loudspeaker several times that Chao Hmoam Dan Kham is the symbolic mother of all Tai Lue in Thailand.

Further, when I stayed in Chiang Kham in April 2021, Pi Kham Pik, Pi Kham Yan and Pi Kham Noi were busy collecting fresh vegetables and Lue snacks, mailing them urgently to Chao Hmoam Dan Kham in Bangkok. In her car, Pi Kham Yan told me since Chao Hmoam Dan Kham is the symbolic mother of all Lue in Thailand, they must treat her well and saw her request as an emergency. This is the difference between Lue Sipsongpanna and Lue Muang Thai; the former cannot publicly respect their former Lue royal family. I continued to ask whether there are some conflicts between being Thai and being Tai Lue and being a subject of the Thai King while still respecting the Lue royal family. Pi Kham Yan firmly answered "No". She stated that being Thai is the result of being born in this country and being subject to the Thai King is because of being Thai. Being Tai Lue is because of her ancestors and her respect to Lue royal family is due to her ethnic identity as Tai Lue.

## THAI-TAI LUE IDENTITY IN PRIVATE AND PUBLIC SPACES

Thai-Tai Lue identity is a compound identity. Thai identity is much stronger in private spaces and Tai Lue identity is performed in public places. The unbalanced performance in different spaces explains how the 'Thai-Tai Lue' and Lue identities are consciously constructed to respond to contexts and for some purposes—cultural distinctiveness, destigmatization, expectation, legitimacy and membership, etc.

At the end of 2018, I spent two days living with Pi Jina's aunt family. The food they eat is Northern Thai cuisine and the language they speak is *Kam Muang* (คำเมือง), a Northern Thai dialect. Pictures of the Thai King and Queen are hung on the walls. Except for the fact that the aunt spoke Lue with me, I cannot tell the differences between a Lue family and other Northern Thai families. In April 2021, I spent around 10 days staying with Pi Kham Pik's family. Except a word for the fact that the name 'ไทลื้อ' (Tai Lue) is attached to a wall in the courtyard to show their Lue identity, the situation is the same as in Pi Jina's aunt family. "The ethnic home is the first habitat of ethnicity—it is the starting point, where people learn their first words

in the ethnic language, both the spoken and the unspoken” (Georgiou, 2001, p. 311). The fact that the young generations in Pi Jina’s family, and the family of Pi Jina’s aunt, and Pi Kham Pik’s family, can all speak Kam Muang and Thai and cannot speak Lue, shows that their homes are in the first place to be Thai and Khon Muang (Northern Thai), rather than Lue, which can be further interpreted as meaning that for them being Thai and Khon Muang is the priority.

However, Lue identity is strongly displayed in public spaces. Lue symbols, such as pictures of Chao Hmoam Kham Le and songs from Sipsongpanna, are hardly seen or heard in their private family spaces, but these symbols are deliberately displayed in public spaces. As mentioned above, pictures of Chao Hmoam Kham Le are placed in the temple of Baan Man and the Tai Lue Museum hall in Baan That Sop Waen. Songs brought from Sipsongpanna are played at festivals or fairs. Tai Lue textile museums are constructed. Lue Chiang Kham, even Lue elites, rarely wear Lue traditional clothes in their daily lives. However, Lue traditional clothes must be worn to attend important fairs, meetings and conferences. For example, nearly every Tai Lue at a local fair held on the 7 April, 2021 wore Lue traditional clothes. Ethnic identity is chosen to be performed according to its utility and the meaning of social contexts (Nagel, 1994, p. 155). In public spaces, Lue identity is emphasized to show their distinctive culture. Cultural distinctiveness is a foundation with which to commoditize their culture and distinguish their ethnic identity from other Tai-speaking ethnic groups in Thailand. Lue identity has been utilized as an instrument to gain economic capital and social capital. Ethnic networks have been set up and extended by establishing Tai Lue associations and building cross-border Tai Lue ethnic networks.

A form of Tai Lue festival has been introduced in Sipsongpanna by Lue elites from both Thailand and Sipsongpanna since 2017. The second Tai Lue festival in Sipsongpanna was held during Chinese Spring festival in 2018. This festival was not only joined by Sipsongpanna Lue elites, but also attracted Lue from Thailand, Laos and Myanmar. In the second day of the festival, all Lue elites from different countries attended a conference on “ethnic culture promoting the development of tourism” held in Baan Chang, Muang Yang, Sipsongpanna. Ethnic transnational mobility and connectivity provide a cultural strategy for cross-border ethnic groups to engage in cross-border business (Diana, 2013; Panyagaew, 2005, 2007; Rowedder, 2018; Siriphon, 2008). Normally, ethnic elites lead cross-border connections (Li, 2004; Davis, 2005). In the conference, Lue elites from Chiang Kham actively discussed with Lue elites in Sipsongpanna about the commoditization of Lue culture and the successful experience of Tai tourism in Sipsongpanna. Chiang Kham Lue elites also hoped that they could cooperate with Lue elites from Sipsongpanna in terms of the development of cultural tourism, and tourist-route formulation that would guide Han Chinese tourists to Chiang Kham. At the same time, they introduced Lue hand-made textiles and clothes to Lue elites from Sipsongpanna. In this sense, Lue identity is treated as an instrument and strategy to gain more resources and enhance reputation in public spaces.

What must be pointed out is that Thai identity and Lue identity are not in binary oppositions in daily life. In public spaces, Lue identity is utilized as a strategy and instrument to gain more capital and resources. This is the reason that Lue identity is emphasized in public spaces. My informants confirm that because Lue

and Thai believe in the same religion and share a similar culture, there is no conflict involved in being both Thai and Tai Lue. Both identities are integrated and cannot be separated, rather one or the other side is dynamically and interchangeably underlined as a strategy to gain resources depending on the context.

## THE PRODUCTION OF 'LUE CHIANG KHAM' IDENTITY

As Chiang Kham Tai Lue are involved in local cultural revival, the localized ethnic identity of 'Lue Chiang Kham' is produced. It is not the result of local autonomy as in Keyes' analysis of Lue identity in Muang Sing, Laos (1992). Chiang Kham is far away being an autonomous and isolated region. Localized ethnic identity as 'Lue Chiang Kham' is the consequence of the governmentality of Thai society, the participation of Chiang Kham Tai Lue, and contact among the Lue of different regions. The identity of 'Lue Chiang Kham' emerges along with the construction of a Chiang Kham Lue community.

Chiang Kham Tai Lue have experienced cultural movement, especially since 1994 when the first Tai Lue festival was held. The cultural movement is also the process of the construction of Lue community and the production of 'Lue Chiang Kham' identity. Local Lue are involved in the annual Tai Lue festival initiated by local Tai Lue elites, organized by Tai Lue association, supported by local Thai governments, and participated in by local Tai Lue. The Lue Chiang Kham community is produced in the process of state building, strategies of economic development and local empowerment (Walker, 2009, p. 3). At the beginning of the festival, a long parade to show Tai Lue cultural items is held. Each village selects people to join a team to show the symbol of their village in the parade. For example, the team of Baan That Sop Wean holds tributes donating to a Pagoda, Baan Yuan performs the story of "*Kep Phak Sai Sa Kep Khon Sai Muang*", Baan Man is about donating a Don (Buddha Banner) to a temple, Baan Don Mok performs the production of textiles, Baan Wean shows Tai Lue drums, etc.

The performance of the parade is not fixed but slightly changes every year. Each village collectively negotiates the symbol and how to display it. The drama *from Sipsongpanna to Lanna* is performed every year in the festival. While many main actors are professionals from universities, a lot of the performers are local Lue. They mainly perform in the side stage to show why and how their ancestors migrated to Lanna and perform traditional customs. They embody their history with imagination and expectation, immersively experiencing it. This process encourages villagers to think about who they are and what represents their identity, further promoting a sense of belonging and local subjectivity (Appadurai, 2005, p. 212), as well as 'imagining' their community through negotiation and creation (Tanabe, 2008, p. 2).

Although the festival's organization has been contracted to companies since 2016, local Lue must still join the parade and perform the drama, Pi Kham Pik told me. Chiang Kham is the origin of the Tai Lue festival and the festival held in Chiang Kham is the biggest in Thailand. Many members of the Tai Lue Association of Thailand, especially those with leadership positions, are also from Chiang Kham. All these phenomena make Chiang Kham the Lue capital in Thailand and local Lue are proud of it. The identity of 'Lue Chiang Kham' gradually appeared, differing them from Lue in other regions.

The pictures and murals of their migratory history, the textile museum in Wat Baan Yuan, the Tai Lue Museum hall in Wat Baan That Sop Waen, preserving traditional houses (such as the house of Mae Tao Saeng Da), these practices and more, are built and protected during the cultural movement. They provide local knowledge and are symbols of Chiang Kham community and learning centers for teenagers to learn their own history and culture. The sense of belonging rises when they are there. The niece of Pi Kham Pik shared with me she will take her friends to these places because these places represent Lue Chiang Kham. The Chiang Kham locality is materially produced (Appadurai, 2005, p. 209) as illustrated by the Chiang Kham *Lai Nam Laii* textile pattern, which is an important symbol representing the 'Lue Chiang Kham' identity. If a textile pattern is treated as a process of community construction, the Chiang Kham *Lai Nam Laii* textile pattern is the boundary to demarcate Lue Chiang Kham from the Lue in other regions, according to Anthony Cohen (1985).

The *Lai Nam Lai* (running water pattern) textile pattern as a symbol of Chiang Kham Tai Lue is influenced by the governmentality of Thai society. The growth of tourism in Northern Thailand since the 1970s has commercialized the crafts of ethnic groups (Keyes, 1992). Lue textiles with their special characters and delicate patterns have also been promoted in the tourism development process. Thai development projects, such as the One Tambon One Product, contribute to the *Lai Nam Lai* textile pattern as a symbol of 'Lue Chiang Kham' identity. For Thai developing projects "the community is seen as a basis for strategic engagement with the market" and villagers' self-reliance is promoted as depending on local resources and wisdom (Walker, 2009, p. 12). This notion, in turn, facilitates local people learning their own local wisdom and promoting local resources and knowledge.

The Lue in Chiang Kham respond to governmentality from above by setting up cooperatives with the support of governments or developing projects to produce textiles. Material textiles give the Lue another market identity. Tai Lue traditional dress and the *Lai Nam Lai* pattern were not popular until the creation of the annual Tai Lue festivals according to my key informants in Chiang Kham. The public performance of Tai Lue culture in the annual Tai Lue festival promotes a local Tai Lue consciousness to produce and wear traditional clothes, and the *Lai Nam Laii* pattern is also strongly linked to the Lue Chiang Kham identity.

The production of the *Lai Nam Lai* pattern is not limited to Chiang Kham. The Tai Lue in other regions of Northern Thailand also produce *Lai Nam Lai* but with different patterns. In turn, different *Lai Nam Lai* patterns represent Lue identities in different regions. For example, the owner of the Lue Lai Kham brand in Chiang Khong told me he learned textile production in Chiang Kham 20 years ago, but he has already developed the *Lai Nam Laii* pattern to a Chiang Khong style. This means the proposition from Keyes (1992) that the legend from Sipsongpanna makes Lue textiles meaningful, is questionable. The meaning of Lue textile patterns comes more from their lived experiences and expectations of living in Thailand. The phenomenon that different regions have their own *Lai Nam Laii* pattern contributes to the fact that Lue Chiang Kham women only wear dresses made of Chiang Kham *Lai Nam Laii* pattern when they join important public activities and rituals and other important conferences to show their membership to Lue Chiang Kham. Even I, an outsider and not a Tai Lue from Thailand, could tell Lue from different regions based on the

pattern of dress they wore when I attended the ritual of Nang Dan Kham. Local pride from the paragon of Lue culture appears when they wear clothes made of local patterns, as one of my informants shared with me: "Lue clothes of Chiang Kham style are the authentic ones while Chiang Khong Lue clothes are like Hmong's".

Textile patterns strongly linked with local identity lead to an interesting phenomenon. A Tai Lue official reflected that textile producers do not have motivation to create and develop new weaving styles and patterns. Other patterns of Lue textiles are mostly imported from Laos. Compared to the economic benefit of textiles, it seems the Lue Chiang Kham do care about the cultural values and ethnic identity that are attached to the textiles they produce. This phenomenon is opposite from the conventional understanding of the classical Marxist perspective that commoditization makes producers alienated from products. Instead, the commoditization of textiles in Chiang Kham under this cultural movement is a way to promote the producers' identity.

## CONCLUSION

Ethnicity is constantly constructed, created and negotiated (Laungaramsri, 2003, p. 157). The Lue's cultural distinctiveness has been lost in Lue Chiang Kham's long history of assimilation into Northern Thai society. This paper emphasizes that a new Lue identity is constructed to respond to the Tai Lue's situations in and expectations of contemporary Thai society, in contrast to the opinion that Lue identity comes from history and outside Thailand (Keyes, 1992; Moerman, 1965). The new Lue identity, as Thai-Tai Lue, or Lue Muang Thai as they call themselves, is formed to highlight a distinctive culture which can distinguish them from other Tai-speaking ethnic groups, destigmatize their war slave and quasi-hill people stigma, and gain more social capital and economic capital in Thai society and the Tai Lue world.

Since the birth of the nation-state, ethnicity has become a more significant factor in social relations (Keyes, 1996, p. 153). Lue identity functions as an instrument and strategy for them to obtain more resources, which can be seen from their different cultural performances in private and public spaces. Lue identity is emphasized in public spaces where they can gain their more capital and resources.

Sipsongpanna as a Lue ethnic symbol still plays an important role in constructing their Lue Muang Thai identity, since Sipsongpanna and other symbols attached to the word Sipsongpanna can add cultural distinction and authenticity and make their culture more exotic and marketable. Chiang Kham Tai Lue elites actively make a connection to Sipsongpanna and bring new Lue cultural forms from Sipsongpanna to make their culture more interesting and attract more tourists. However, it needs to be pointed out that Lue elites' connection to Sipsongpanna does not mean their new Lue identity has a conflict with Thai identity. On the contrary, there is no conflict between Thai identity and Lue identity, but being Lue can support becoming Thai. Lue elites clearly know they are Lue Muang Thai, understand the differences between Lue Muang Thai and Lue Sipsongpanna, and use the Lue identity to legitimate their membership as Thai. Especially for ordinary people, Lue identity comes from living in Lue villages in Thailand without relations to Sipsongpanna at all. Lue culture as constructed by Lue elites can be used by ordinary Chiang Kham Tai Lue to explain who they are and what it means to become Lue.

As the Chiang Kham Tai Lue are involved in local cultural revival and nationwide economic development, the new identity of 'Lue Chiang Kham' has emerged. If the identity of 'Lue Muang Thai' is constructed to distinguish them from the Lue in other countries and other Tai-speaking ethnic groups in Thailand, then the identity of 'Lue Chiang Kham' is built to distinguish between the Lue in different regions in Thailand. The 'Lue Chiang Kham' identity is one outcome of the process of the construction of Lue Muang Thai identity. As Chiang Kham Tai Lue continue reviving the production and wearing of Lue textiles, and joining the Tai Lue festivals, the sense of local belonging and local pride also grows.

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