The term “Tai” commonly refers to peoples in Thailand, Laos, Burma, south China, north Vietnam, and northeast India who speak a Tai language, whereas “Thai” refers to citizens of Thailand. One of the fifty-five officially recognized Chinese ethnic minorities is the Dai minzu, which comprises several, but not all, Tai-speaking groups in China (the Zhuang and the Dong minzu, for instance, speak Tai languages as well). The Dai category consists of different Tai people whom the Chinese called Baiyi prior to the ethnic classification in the 1950s. To distinguish among the different Baiyi, the Chinese applied names such as Dry Baiyi (Han Baiyi), Colorful-Waist Baiyi (Huayao Baiyi), and Water Baiyi (Shui Baiyi). These categories are still used by some Chinese, and some Tai also use these terms when speaking Chinese. The Dai minzu comprises Tai groups such as the Tai Nua, Tai Beng, Tai Duan, and Tai Lue (Lüe/Le). The Tai Lue are also called Xishuangbanna Dai or simply Xidai in Chinese, but they usually call themselves simply Tai, unless they need to distinguish themselves from other Tai groups. In 1992, 1,025,402 people in China were classified as part of the Dai minzu. The majority live in Yunnan Province, where they are the fourth-largest minority (together with the Zhuang), constituting 2.73 percent of the total population (1990) and 8 percent of the minority population (Yunnan tongji nianjian 1991: 96).

Chinese researchers distinguish four major Tai (Dai) dialects and scripts. The written language of the Tai Lue in Sipsong Panna is developed from a script closely related to Sanskrit (Pali script).1 The script and spoken language of the Tai Lue and the other major Tai group in Dehong County (called the

Tai Mao, Mao Shan, Chinese Shan, and Tai Nua) are mutually unintelligible. Today there are Tai Lue living in Laos, Burma, Thailand, and Vietnam, but the majority still live in Sipsong Panna. Anthony Diller estimates that between five hundred thousand and one million people speak Tai Lue dialects (Diller 1994:12). In the 1950s, when the Chinese government promoted the development of new scripts for minorities, the Tai Lue script was simplified and standardized. This “new Tai” (xin Daiven) was used in schools, newspapers, and other local literature until the local government decided to revive and standardize the “old Tai” script (lao Daiven) in 1987. This policy was reversed in 1996, when the government again returned to “new Tai.” None of the other minorities in Sipsong Panna who speak different languages has a script. The Akha are officially classified as part of the Hani minzu, for whom a script was created in 1957, but this script was based on the Luchun dialect and is not used by the Akha in Sipsong Panna.

Sipsong Panna Tai [Chinese: Xishuangbanna Dai] Autonomous Prefecture was established in 1953 and comprises the counties of Menghai and Mengla and the city of Jinghong, where the prefectural government is seated. Of the 798,086 people who live in the prefecture, almost 36 percent (278,955 people) belong the Dai minzu, while the second-largest group, the Han, constitutes 26 percent. It was only after 1949, when the CCP took complete control of Sipsong Panna, that Han immigration on a large scale commenced. Thus the fact that the Han in Sipsong Panna today make up nearly one-third of the population, and more in the capital of Jinghong, is a recent development. The other major minzu are the Hani with 19 percent, Lahu with 6 percent, Bulang and Yi with 4 percent each, and Jinuo with 2 percent. These minzu comprise peoples who have historically lived in Sipsong Panna with the Tai and use various self-appellations, such as Akha, Akhe, Jinuo, Lahu, Sanda, Phusa, Blang, and Khmu. The Tai historically inhabited the most prosperous plains in this subtropical region, while before 1950 other groups lived higher up in the moun-

2. See also Lebar et al. 1964: 206–14.
3. When the Communists took over Sipsong Panna at the end of the Republic, there were four counties: Cheli (Jinghong), Fohai (Menghai), Nanqiao (Mengzhe), and Zhenyue (Mengla).
5. All figures are from the prefectural Bureau of Statistics and are based upon a 1993 census.
tains and rarely interacted socially with the Tai, who regarded them as inferior *kha* (slaves). As in the case of the Tai Lue in Ban Ping village in Thailand described by Michael Moerman in 1966, the primary ethnic distinction made by the Tai in Sipsong Panna was between hill and lowland people, paralleling the dichotomy of jungle and state. The groups exchanged commodity goods, such as Tai salt and rice for Akha cotton and noodles. Silver pieces had been exchangeable for goods since the seventeenth century, but commodity exchange was still important in the 1940s (Chen Han-Seng 1949: 54).

Theravada Buddhism became widespread in Sipsong Panna during the fourteenth century and is still the dominant religion today. Most Tai villages have a small Theravada temple and monastery, but, like other Tai Lue in Laos, Burma, and Thailand and the Siamese (Central Thai), the Tai Lue in Sipsong Panna also respect spirits (*phi*), such as household, personal, village, and *meeng* ("local principalities" governed by local Tai princes) spirits. In China the Tai, Blang, A'chang, and Khmu in Sipsong Panna, Simao, Lancang, Dehong, and Baoshan are Theravada Buddhists.

Sipsong Panna is a subtropical region with a rainy season and fertile land, especially on the plains where the Tai live. According to official statistics, more than 80 percent of the population are peasants, and the most important crops include wet-rice, sugarcane, coffee, hemp, tea, fruit, and not the least rubber, which is cultivated on state farms established in the 1950s. The non-Tai ethnic groups live higher up in the mountains in villages that are generally more poor and where living conditions are harsh. Large forest areas have been logged to plant rubber trees, and this has often resulted in disputes between the Han employees at the state farms and the local Akha, who depended on hunting in the jungle. The area is still rich in teak, sandalwood, medicinal plants, and (dwindling numbers of) wild animals. Especially since the early 1990s, the tourist industry has been booming, as has foreign trade after the opening of the borders with Burma and Laos. Most tourists are Han, but international visitors from Taiwan and especially Thailand are on the increase.

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6. *Kha* is a common Tai derogatory term for proto-Indochinese groups who speak various Mon-Khmer languages and live in the hills and highlands of Yunnan, Burma, Thailand, Vietnam, and Laos. The term probably means "servant," "attendant," or "slave" (Sayawadhna 1990: 75–76).

7. See also Moerman 1966 on spirits in Lue communities in Thailand, and Tanabe 1988.
Some Thai financially support the development of Buddhism in Sipsong Panna, and many seem to be on a nostalgic search for remnants of an “original” Tai culture. The most important festival of the Tai is New Year (now popularly known in China as the Water Splashing Festival), which traditionally started on the sixth day of the sixth month of the Tai calendar and continued until the sixth day of the seventh month. Today the festival is celebrated for three days, during which hordes of tourists flock to Jinghong. Splashing water on one another is now allowed only on one official day. For tourist purposes, the local park (and even ethnic theme parks in other parts of China) arrange their own small Water Splashing Festivals as well as other staged exotic rituals, such as those of the Wa people.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE TAI IN SIPSONG PANNA

According to the recorded history of the Tai Lue, Chao Bhaya Cheeng was the king, the chao phaendin, who in 1180 first established the Tai kingdom called the Golden Palace of Jing Rung. He was the ancestor of the following chao phaendin, who possessed the highest level of power in Sipsong Panna until the Chinese government abolished royal titles in 1950. Under the chao phaendin and the central government were the princes (chao panna and chao meeng), who ruled in twelve subdistricts called panna and subdivisional meeng. The princes, whose positions were also hereditary, ruled relatively independently in their districts. The chao meeng ruled together with the chao guan, who were heads of the local governments, but whose positions were not hereditary. Villages also had other local headmen who were not members of the chao class, but whose positions were legitimized by the prince. The chao meeng were allowed to communicate directly with the Chinese government and to accept official Chinese titles. Attempting to secure control over the local princes’ activities and government, the king had his own “middlemen” who

8. For a study of the Tai calendar, which starts in the year 638 of the Western calendar, see Gao Lishi 1992: 102–12.
lived in privileged villages outside *chao meeng* rule in order to keep an eye on the princes (Hsieh 1989: 111).

It is still a matter of dispute whether Sipsong Panna was an independent kingdom and state before the twentieth century and from what point it must be considered part of the Chinese state. Shih-chung Hsieh has argued that little attention has been paid to the state of Sipsong Panna because it was never recognized as a state by the leading imperial powers (Hsieh 1995: 302). The kingdom of Sipsong Panna was one of four small Tai kingdoms (Sipsong Panna, Lan Zhang, Keng Tung, and Lan Na) whose governments and populations had frequent and extensive contacts with one another. All of these neighboring states were designated as regions under administration of the Chinese empire, but their only obligations were to pay tribute to China and not attack the empire. With the creation of the modern nation-states in the twentieth century, they became part of four different states: Lan Na became part of Siam (later Thailand), and Lan Zhang first became part of the French colony of Indochina, then of the state of Laos. Keng Tung was first colonized by the British and then became part of Burma. And finally, Sipsong Panna was incorporated into the Chinese state, except for Meeng Wu and Wu De, which were occupied by France in 1895, annexed to French Indochina, and therefore later became part of Laos (Chen Han-Seng 1949: 4).

In the capital in Sipsong Panna, the king ruled together with a central government in which the local princes were represented at meetings. According to Hsieh, the kingdom of Sipsong Panna formed an effective and centralized government at least until the twentieth century. It was not a protectorate of China or Burma, and it had absolute rights in military and foreign affairs, economic activities, and internal governance (Hsieh 1995: 304). The kingdom also had its own recorded laws (in Tai script) concerning, for instance, criminals, penalties, and commoners’ obligations toward the *chao* (Jiang 1983: 434–37). The Chinese imperial system during Yuan and Ming of appointing local hereditary chiefs (*tusi*) as local rulers was also employed in Sipsong Panna, but imperial authority was only nominal. Apart from six *panna* that the Tai king agreed to leave for direct rule by Chinese magistrates after revolts in 1728, the successive *chao phaendin* and the *chao meeng* remained the Tai rulers in the rest of Sipsong Panna. They also kept their officially appointed posts as *tusi* until Sipsong Panna was declared liberated by the Communists in 1950.
After the establishment of the Republic in 1911, the Chinese administration in Sipsong Panna expanded, and the area was divided into districts administered by Chinese magistrates. On lower levels of administration, the common baojia system was introduced as in other places in China. This was a hierarchic system in which one unit, the bao, consisted of ten jia, while one jia was made up of ten families. The local heads of bao and jia in Tai areas were normally Tai, and the system was intended to connect the magistrate’s office above with the local level below. The Republican government also encouraged Chinese peasants and soldiers to settle in Sipsong Panna, and in 1940 it granted special privileges to Chinese peasants from Siam who wanted to grow tobacco in the area. During this period of increasing Chinese dominance, the establishment of Chinese schools became for the first time part of a strategy to integrate Sipsong Panna and its population into the Chinese state. The chaophaendin had lost much of his former power, and the local population was subjected to heavy tax burdens due to the double government system (Chen Han-Seng 1949: 25). In spite of several incidents of protest against Chinese rule and economic exploitation during the time of the Republic, there were no large-scale united revolts against the impositions of Chinese rule.

In 1944 the king of Sipsong Panna, Chao Mhoam Lhong Khong Gham, died and his stepson, Chao Mhoam Gham Le, became the last king. At that time Chao Mhoam Gham Le (with the Chinese name Dao Shixun) was only fifteen years old and studied in a secondary school in Sichuan. Therefore, two brothers of the previous king were successively appointed as prince regents and given Chinese official status (Commission for Work with Historical Accounts of Sipsong Panna Tai Autonomous Prefecture, ed., 1987: vol. 1: 99-100). Members of the royal class and the Tai government of Sipsong Panna were deeply split by the political and ideological struggle between the Chinese Nationalists and Communists. Some of the chao, among them the regent prince, supported the Nationalists, who had allowed coexistence of the Tai political system and the Chinese administration, while other prominent chao supported the Communists. One of the most famous Communist supporters was Chao Tsengha (Zhao Cunxin), who was chairman of the external cabinet of the Tai government and who became the prefect of Sipsong Panna after the Communist victory. By 1950, when Sipsong Panna was declared “lib-

11. Many Chinese insist that the prince never actually became king.
erated," many Tai had fled to Thailand and Burma, where some took refuge with leading Chinese Nationalists.

The Communists adopted a successful strategy of cooperation with parts of the Tai upper strata, thereby avoiding large-scale revolts against the final abolition of royal titles and the traditional Tai government and political system. Chinese names of places and counties in Sipsong Panna based on the Tai’s own names were adopted. In spite of protests from some members of the other ethnic groups in Sipsong Panna, the new local government was a Tai—not a Hani or Tai/Hani—autonomous government and the Tai name of the kingdom was adopted as the name of the new autonomous prefecture, which was established in 1953. Most likely this was an important part of the Chinese government’s strategy to avoid major conflicts with the Tai in the early stages of the PRC. Many of the leading chao from the former Tai kingdom received government positions in the new autonomous prefecture. The last king never returned to live in Sipsong Panna, but continued to enjoy high prestige among the Tai. He obtained a position in the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference in Yunnan, and his descendants were given very good employment and educational opportunities. While the government adopted a cooperative attitude toward the chao phaendin, chao meeng, and other important members of the central Tai government, local headmen maintained or even increased their authority in the villages when the chao lost local power. It was only in 1956, when campaigns for land reform were launched all over Sipsong Panna, that their power and authority were broken as well.

**Schools during the Republic: Buying Students**

Unlike in Lijiang, Confucian education never gained widespread influence in Sipsong Panna. Only members of the royal family participated in limited private Confucian education and one scholar mentions that there were two private Confucian schools in Mengla County by the end of the Qing in 1911 (Zou 1992: 1). Education of male novices (pha), however, in the local Buddhist monasteries (wat) was widespread and common among the Tai and Blang. When the Nationalist government created new districts and subdistricts in Sipsong Panna in 1911, it also set up the first Chinese schools. These schools were meant for children of both locals and Han immigrants. Through the teaching of Chinese, the government hoped to break the authority of the
chao class and the influential Buddhist monks who conducted all education of Tai boys in the monasteries. Only some members of the ruling chao class—those who had contacts with the imposed Chinese rulers, and some of whom had private Chinese teachers as well—understood and spoke Chinese. The lack of knowledge of Chinese was regarded as a major obstacle for the imposition of Chinese rule, and already in 1912 the head of the Chinese government of Simao and Puer reported to the provincial government about the urgent need for developing Chinese education in Sipsong Panna (Xiao 1993: 125). After this the Nationalist government started primary “citizen schools” at the bao administrative levels. In 1935 a “simple normal school” (jianyi shifan xuehao) was started in Fohai (Menghai), and in 1946 the first secondary school was established in Cheli (Jinghong).

In 1921 the Yunnan provincial government issued regulations for expanding border education in the hope that this would promote the integration of these areas and consolidate Chinese control. The new regulations had to be followed in all border regions where the majority ethnic groups were non-Han and where the cultural level was regarded as utterly backward. The goals of promoting education in border areas were very ambitious: all citizens between the ages of six and fifty who did not know Chinese were obliged to attend “border education” (bianjing jiaoyu); by 1943 education should be universal among all peoples in border areas; and between 1931 and 1937 all areas should establish primary, secondary, and simple normal schools, mainly to teach the Chinese language (Jiang 1950: 285–86). With regard to minority students, the Chinese administration in Sipsong Panna was obliged, in principle, to refrain from claiming tuition fees, to provide financial support for food and clothing, and to exempt Tai families who sent one or more children to school from paying the household tax.

However, the new schools had to be financed through the tax system, and the existence of the double government (Tai and Chinese) created heavy economic burdens on the population. There were taxes and fees for nearly everything—houses, leprosy prevention, the militia, magistrate’s services, the chao government, slaughter, and so on. Among the heaviest burdens, according to Chen Han-Seng’s study, were taxes that financed education: the general education tax for the establishment and maintenance of the schools, and the tax that supported boys attending Chinese schools. According to Chen, these
two taxes constituted as much as 35 percent of the total household tribute (Chen Han-Seng 1949: 47–49).

Since few Tai voluntarily sent their children to the Chinese schools, a quota system was introduced forcing each medium-sized village to send at least one boy to school in the nearest larger village. This rule was very unpopular among the Tai, and in 1936 it sparked a revolt in Cheli. The government maintained the quota system but allowed the villages to choose whom to send away to school. This became an economic burden for Tai villagers, who started to pay boys from Han, Akha, or other local groups to fill their quota and go in their stead. Some poor Tai families would rent out a son to attend the unpopular Chinese school for fifty yuan and some unhusked rice (Chen Han-Seng 1949: 23). Most older interviewees recalled the Republican schools as very unpopular, and agreed that it was common to pay poor Tai—or, more often, Akha or Han—to attend them. One of the few interviewees who had himself attended a citizen school in Simao recalled,

Everybody had to pay for the Nationalists' citizen schools and each small district was told how many students it had to send to the school. Our district had to provide six or seven students. I was sent, and the whole village paid my family for that. The Tai were the rulers and they sometimes paid other ethnic groups to go to the school. Nobody wanted to send their children to the school. They preferred that they worked at home, and people always said that children would turn Han if they went there. They feared that their children would become like the Han and maybe leave the village and the family. They feared assimilation [tonghua]. If children cried, parents would threaten them by saying, “The Han are coming!” and immediately the children would stop. Whenever Han people came to the villages, even in the 1950s, children would run away in fear.

Jiang Yingliang, the well-known researcher who was a magistrate in Cheli in 1945 and a member of a research group that had to prepare a plan for changing the local administration, points to additional reasons why Chinese education failed in this period: most schools were not started on the Tai plains but higher up in the mountains, where most Han lived in fear of malaria; the Tai students did not get the preferential treatment they were entitled to,
and although the royal family supported Chinese education in public, it was in fact against it. Therefore, most students in the new schools were Han, many schools operated only on paper in order to get financial support, and, finally, in 1942 all schooling stopped in Sipsong Panna due to Japanese bombing of the area (Jiang 1950: 288–89).

Only among the royal family and the families of officials in the Tai government seat and palace (Xianyigai) of Jinghong did it become common to send children to the new schools. I interviewed one former student of the primary school connected to the palace, Mr. Dao. Mr. Dao’s father had been a high-ranking member of the central Tai government, and in 1933 Dao started in the primary school where about thirty boys and girls (many of them Han) studied Chinese. All teachers were Han except for one Tai official who taught Tai script. Like most other Tai boys at the time, Mr. Dao became a novice in the temple after he graduated from the school. In 1941 he was one of the few Tai who continued on to secondary education at the simple normal school in Menghui, where most students were local Han or Hui. All teachers were Han, and students studied for one year.

Jinghong was the area of Sipsong Panna where Chinese education was most developed in this period, though still very limited. According to official statistics from 1938, there were fourteen schools with a total of 696 students (Xiao 1993: 126). We do not know which ethnic groups the students belonged to, but all information points to a majority, or at least a large proportion, of Han students. In accordance with the Nationalist government’s wish to promote education in border regions, Yunnan Province started one of its special border area schools, Southwest Border School (Xinan Bianjing Xuexiao), in Jinghong in 1947. This school consisted of a primary and a secondary school for educating minority cadres loyal to the Chinese state. Students were recruited mainly from the chao class, because the Chinese government needed the cooperation of the nobility and the local administration in order to gain the trust and loyalty of the common population. The school enrolled two hundred students, but due to serious political and financial instabilities, it func-

12. Members of the royal family and the central Tai government normally adopted the Chinese name Dao or Zhao, whereas Tai commoners have no surnames. Male Tai names start with Ai, and female names with Yi. Several interviewees said that when they went to school before 1949 the (Han) teachers would give them the “scholarly name” of Dao even if they did not belong to the chao class.
tioned for only a short time (Xiao 1993: 126–27). One of the few (incomplete) statistics on school attendance in Sipsong Panna during the Republic shows a generally very low number of students. In 1945, when Lijiang was reported to have 73 percent of children attending schools, the whole of Sipsong Panna had 15 percent and Fohai (Menghai County) only 1 percent (TMJFG 1992: 52).

A few American missionaries also worked in the area between 1913 and 1944. They did not succeed in converting many locals, who were firm believers in Buddhism and their own spirits. However, the chaophaendin and the Tai government agreed to rent some land for the missionaries to set up a hospital and school. The missionaries had language problems and indeed difficulty persuading people to convert, so they brought in a small group of Tai from outside Sipsong Panna who had already been converted and relied on them to spread the Christian message to the local Tai. There were around thirty to forty students in the school, which taught the Tai language in addition to English (Zha 1993: 142–49).

THE COMMUNIST PROJECT
OF SPREADING SCHOOL EDUCATION

After the PRC established control in Sipsong Panna in 1950, it sent large numbers of mostly Han cadres, teachers, and work teams to the area. By establishing friendly contacts with the locals, they were to disseminate knowledge of the CCP and its policy, set up a new government, initiate land reform, recruit adult students for cadre training, and start new schools. Special research teams conducted the economic and political investigations that later served as the basis for accomplishing land reform and provided the new Chinese government with its first thorough knowledge of the social and political system among the Tai in Sipsong Panna. Researchers concluded that socioeconomically, Sipsong Panna was mostly a “feudal manorial landlord system” (fengjian lingshu zhi), a low evolutionary stage. Their finding of remnants of “primitive society” (in the form of collectively owned land in villages) and “slave society” convinced researchers that the mode of production among the Tai was more backward than that of the Naxi (and of course the Han).13

Especially in a border area such as Sipsong Panna, where knowledge of
the Chinese language was so limited, where the former ruling class still pos-
sessed symbolic authority, and where Buddhist temples were the centers not
only of religion but also of education, it was essential that the new Chinese
government quickly foster loyal cadres who could act as connecting links
between commoners and the government. For the same reasons, it provided
special treatment for members of the upper class who did not flee the coun-
try (which quite a few did). Many of them received positions in the
autonomous government established in 1953, when all previous royal titles
and positions were abolished.

After 1950 an increasing number of Chinese migrants, most of whom were
Han, came to Sipsong Panna. In spite of the trouble they encountered, most
of these cadres, teachers, and workers on newly established state farms were
convinced that their presence greatly benefited the Tai and the other minzu
in the area. They saw their mission as developing, civilizing, and integrating
this outpost of the PRC. One of them expressed very clearly the general point
of view of Han immigrants at this time:

Already in the 1960s the Tai were quite civilized [kaihua]. They welcomed
us and wanted to learn Chinese. Many Han were sent from all over China
to help develop Sipsong Panna. If we Han had not come, this place would
not have developed. The Tai welcomed us because they realized that we,
as a more advanced [xianjin] minzu, could help them develop this place.
I believe that Sipsong Panna is the place in China where education has devel-
oped most rapidly because the sudden influence of Han culture was so

Communist work teams (gongzuo dui) traveled all over Sipsong Panna and
selected representatives from villages who would receive a short-term edu-
cation, usually at the Normal School in Menghai (which moved to Jinghong
in 1956) but sometimes at the Yunnan Institute of the Nationalities in
Kunming. In villages, work teams usually chose a younger man who had been
a monk and therefore knew Tai script. If somebody knew a bit of Chinese,
this was also regarded as an advantage. Most of the young men who received
short-term cadre training would return as local administrators at the village
level. Members of the royal family in Jinghong and the central Tai govern-
ment who agreed to cooperate with the new Chinese government received
government positions, but in the countryside, work teams normally chose
poorer peasants, rather than so-called landlords and headmen, to receive cadre
or teacher education. However, in the first seven years of Communist rule
in Sipsong Panna, until land reform started in 1956, work teams and Chinese
cadres generally adopted a policy of cooperation with the village headmen.
By doing so they were able to persuade the local population to participate
in mass meetings and to let their children attend school. By 1956–57 most of
the highest chaomeng had already been moved to Jinghong in order to break
their local authority, which might obstruct the work teams’ policies.

In 1953 the new prefectural government gathered all primary school teach-
ers in Sipsong Panna for a one-week course in Tai script. Additionally, a spe-
cial minority class was started in the Normal School to train teachers who
knew enough Tai to communicate and teach the Tai script in schools. The
hope at this time was that the introduction of the Tai language in schools
would eventually cause people to abandon their tradition of sending boys to
the monasteries. At this time there were twenty-three primary schools and
one normal school in the whole of Sipsong Panna. Eighty percent of the stu-
dents were non-Han. The first regular junior secondary schools were estab-
lished in 1958 in each of the three counties (Jinghong, Menghai, and Mengla),
and the first Blang and Jinuo primary schools were established in 1956.

In the first years of the People’s Republic, Tai script was taught in many
of the new primary schools in Tai villages and in the special minority class at
the Normal School. Schools sometimes invited monks to teach Tai, because
few teachers were able to do so. In the beginning the Tai script used in schools
was the same as that used in monasteries. No other minority languages were
taught, and in all non-Tai villages in Sipsong Panna the children learned only
the Chinese language and script. The “old Tai script,” as it was called by the
Chinese, was not standardized, and in the early years of the PRC there was
a great demand for Tai books. A few village schools experimented with teach-
ing one class of Tai pupils in Chinese only and teaching another basic Tai before
turning to Chinese studies. The teachers from that time whom I interviewed
did not doubt that the students in the Tai class performed best in school. One
of these schools resumed the experiment in 1993 and even used some of the
teaching material in “old Tai” from the early 1950s.

In spite of these early attempts to establish education in old Tai, it was
quickly decided to make a simplified version of the Tai script in line with the
new government’s wish to simplify Chinese characters and to create new scripts
for minorities. In 1954 a few Tai who knew Chinese well and were proficient
in the Tai script were asked to propose a simplified form of Tai script, the so-
called “new Tai script.” They also created a simple dictionary and some teach-
ing material. The Panna Newspaper, written in new Tai, was started in 1957.
Publication was suspended between 1966 and 1972, and between 1993 and
1996 the paper was printed in the old Tai script. Thus, by the mid-1950s three
writing systems were taught to the Tai in Sipsong Panna: Chinese in all schools,
new Tai in some schools, and old Tai in all monasteries. The locals’ attitudes
toward the new script were divided, as they are today. Some Tai argue that
the simplified script is much easier to learn and therefore more practical, while
others argue that since Buddhist texts and traditional Tai stories taught in
the monasteries are in the old Tai form, children are cut off from their own
tradition when they learn the new form of Tai. With the recent increase in
contacts across Sipsong Panna’s borders, some argue that the old Tai is advan-
tageous for learning standard Thai.

If you have learned the old Tai script, it is very easy to learn the simplified
version, whereas those who know only the new Tai script maintain that they
are completely unable to read the old script. This is of course quite similar
to the situation of readers who have learned only simplified Chinese charac-
ters. However, there is a gender-specific dimension to the difference between
new and old Tai. Because only Tai boys studied in the local monasteries, they
were also the only ones who learned old Tai. Those Tai girls who learned any
Tai script at all always learned new Tai. The new and simplified Tai script that
was taught in the schools was created to eradicate illiteracy, but it had the
side effect of actually dividing the Tai, who no longer had one common script
that at least most boys would study. Today a whole generation has learned
only the new Tai script (and/or Chinese) in school and is unable to read old
Tai, unless they are male and have had the opportunity to learn it in a
monastery.

One of the Tai who participated in editing the first Tai teaching material
was Zhao Xi, who was born in 1933 and was a novice for nine years. He was

14. Like most other names of interviewees in this book, this is a pseudonym.
just about to become a monk when he decided to return to secular life in 1951 because the new government offered to give him a free education in the Normal School. Zhao’s story gives a good picture of how the work teams propagated communism, the difficulty of starting new Chinese schools, and Tai commoners’ attitudes toward the new administration in the early 1950s.

**Zhao Xi’s Story**

I was a student in the Normal School from 1951 to 1952 in a special class for Tai. All students had to know Tai script, so most of us were former monks. We learned Chinese and studied the policy of the Communist Party and the new principles. We also studied geography—China’s geography. We did not know that China [Zhongguo] was not a foreign country [waiguo]. For us Burma, Thailand, Laos, and China were all foreign countries, but in the villages people did not even know that there was a border between them and Burma or Laos. In the Normal School we learned that Sipsong Panna was part of China. [Then in 1954 Zhao was sent to be a teacher in a Tai village:] In the evenings the work team showed films from the Soviet Union about socialist society, about how the Soviet Union used machinery in agriculture and how education was necessary to achieve this kind of development. Therefore, many people wanted to try to go to school. They themselves built a thatched house for the school building.

On the first day of school, more than two hundred people attended the classes. They were between eight and nineteen years old. Some had been novices before, and some were still novices. There were more than fifty in each class. After a very short time, students did not show up anymore. They preferred to work in the fields, some married, the novices had no time for school work, and for some it was too far to walk. Every evening we teachers visited families to talk to the parents about this. We helped if somebody was sick, we arranged for old people to take care of cattle while the children were in school, and so on. Since I had been a novice myself, I understood the conditions in the temple. I knew that during the daytime, the novices did not study the Buddhist sutras. Therefore, I told the monks that the things they taught the children did not contradict what we taught them—that the teachings complemented each other. I told them that the Communist Party was not against their form of education or against their religion.
HISTORY OF EDUCATION IN SIPSONG PANNA

We also arranged activities such as ball games, singing, dancing, and so on to make the school more attractive. And nobody had to pay for anything—oh yes, only the few who were richer than the others, otherwise it was all free. Not like today, when it is so expensive to have a child in school.

Society changed very, very slowly here. In the 1950s everybody still considered the chaophaendin, the meeng, and the pia [local headmen] to be the highest authorities. It was very important that people saw that the new government worked together with the local Tai leaders. That proved to them how important their local leaders were.

The initiation of land reform in 1956 in Sipsong Panna politically marked the beginning of a period when powerful Party leaders considered the local minorities ripe for organized struggle against their former leaders. Unlike Central China, where struggle against landlords was supposed to be like a hurricane (jifeng baoyu), in the border areas redistribution of fields and deprivation of local landlords' power was adopted as a "peaceful consultation" (heping xieshang). The advantages of the reforms were carefully explained to the ruling class, who were to be treated leniently and allowed to keep some fields (XDZG 1986: 84–90). The struggle against local headmen was often carried out as a so-called "back-to-back struggle" (bei dui bei douzheng) in which the peasants did not face the headman directly, in order to avoid harming the "unity of the minzu." By 1957 land reform was completed, but had been resisted directly in at least one short-lived revolt by one of the former chaop meeng in cooperation with Nationalists on the Burmese side of the border (Hsieh 1989: 214).

The period of land reform between 1956 and 1957 was presented by some interviewees as a brief "high tide" of Chinese education in Sipsong Panna. One mentioned that people were excited about the prospect of dividing fields among themselves and therefore cooperated with the work teams and teachers who wanted them to send their children to school. Other reasons were that people were freed from paying taxes if they let their children attend school. Some parents also thought that sending their children to school could prevent their own family from being criticized in the same way as other local headmen and landlords. However, apparently few people were convinced of

15. Extracts from 1994 interview.
the relevance of the content of the Chinese education, and many children quickly dropped out of school again.

The policy of conducting “peaceful consultative reforms” was firmly criticized in 1958 as an expression of a revisionist policy of cooperation with feudal lords and granting border areas special treatment. In the same year, the Great Leap Forward was launched and People’s Communes were set up all over Sipsong Panna. The period from the land reform movement onward was marked by a number of political campaigns. The reidentification of classes during the “additional teaching of democratic reform” (minzhu gaige buke) in 1958 and the “four clean-ups” (siquing yundong) in 1964–65 caused a large number of Tai to flee the country. Former Tai leaders were criticized at mass meetings, all contacts across international borders were prohibited, and many monks and novices returned to secular life in response to antireligious policy. The palace of the chew phaendin, the Tai government building, and the nearby major temple of Sipsong Panna were completely ruined in 1957, and the area was converted to a state-owned rubber plantation. Mr Zhao Xi recalled,

It was all chaos! It was even more chaotic than the Cultural Revolution, which was carried out mainly in the cities. All contacts across the [international] borders, which had always been very common in Sipsong Panna, were forbidden. A lot of people were branded as spies because they had family members across the border. We could not marry Tai on the other side of the border any longer, or even write letters. Already in 1962 there were only a few monks left, and a lot of temples were destroyed. A lot of people escaped to other countries.

During this time the government also became more conscious of the content of the teaching material in minority languages. For instance, in 1959 the central government decided that all teaching material in minority languages should be directly based upon ideological teaching of “socialism, communism, and patriotism” (TMFFG 1992: 201). Although the Tai tradition of sending boys to the monasteries was criticized, many boys still became novices

16. This state farm is still functioning today. The temple is a complete ruin; its stones, pillars, and other materials as well as those from the palace have been used by the state farm. The government has now started to reconstruct the palace area as a tourist attraction.
for a time. For this reason, schools were dominated by female pupils. Before 1958 some schools tried to solve this problem by arranging special “novice classes” (beshang ban), in which novices were taught at a special time of the day or even inside the monastery. However, most teachers from this time recalled that Chinese education was still not popular. Students often came only every second or third day, or dropped out after a few months or years. Religious influence was especially strong south of the Mekong River, and school attendance was low. The Normal School had problems convincing its Tai students to complete their studies; one student from 1956–59 recalled that about half of the students in his class dropped out before graduation. Generally speaking, the number of students in schools was inversely proportional to the number of novices in temples. In times when religion was severely suppressed, school attendance also was strongly encouraged (or even enforced), so the number of novices fell while school enrollment rose. Thus, figures show that school attendance was relatively high in Sipsong Panna in 1958 and during the Cultural Revolution, and fell again when the political pressure to attend Chinese schools lessened. For instance, in Mengla County in 1953, in 15 schools with 950 students, the enrollment rate was 13.8 percent. In 1958 in 40 schools with 3,310 students, the enrollment rate was 50 percent. This fell to 28 percent in 1962, increased to 62 percent with the start of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, and increased again to 92 percent in 1975 (Li Guangpin 1992: 127).

In the whole of Sipsong Panna in 1950 there were 11 schools with 390 students and 22 teachers. In 1957 the number of schools had increased to more than 100, with more than 9,000 students, and in 1964 there were 400 schools, more than 35,000 students, and more than 1,000 teachers (Zhou Houkun 1992: 148). According to interviews, enrollment figures are exaggerated because schools and village authorities tended to over-report and did not subtract the many students who quickly dropped out. In line with decisions of the Yunnan provincial government concerning education in border regions, most of Sipsong Panna’s schools at this time were part-time schools where students worked in the fields in the afternoon, or “simple reading schools” (jianyi xuejiao) where they studied only minority script, Chinese script, spoken Chinese, and mathematics (TMJFG 1992: 186). Until 1958, when each of the three counties in Sipsong Panna started a junior secondary school, the only post-primary school was the Normal School. From 1965 to 1968 there was also one “part-work part-study” school and an agricultural school.
However, the figures clearly show that the Chinese government put a lot of effort into establishing schools to spread knowledge of subjects such as Chinese language, culture, and history in order to integrate the people of Sipsong Panna into China and ensure the authority of the state.

Although Chinese education spread steadily throughout Sipsong Panna since the 1950s, it did not manage to pull the Tai boys out of the monasteries. The increased number of schools should be seen in relation to the large number of monasteries and of novices and monks studying Buddhist texts in the Tai language. In 1950, compared to the 11 Chinese schools and 390 students, there were 574 temples, 930 monks, and 5,550 novices registered. For the first time Tai girls were able to get a school education, but for most Tai parents, the prospect of having a child educated in a Chinese school was not economically or culturally attractive and was considered irrelevant to daily life. Nevertheless, the government, the work teams, and an increasing number of enthusiastic teachers (mainly from outside Sipsong Panna) managed to multiply the number of Chinese schools by ten within the first seven years of Communist rule, and for the first time in Sipsong Panna increasing numbers of Tai pupils in villages attended Chinese schools at least for a short period of time. However, the most dramatic increase in school attendance took place in periods when policy became very restrictive and antireligious. This forced large numbers of monks to return to secular life and prevented many boys from becoming novices. During these times more children attended schools because they had no alternative and because local cadres stressed the need to send children to Chinese schools. Buddhist training in the Tai language was regarded by the Chinese government as a direct obstruction to the development of the only real and proper form of education—that in Chinese schools.

**Prohibition of monastic education during the Cultural Revolution**

According to my interviews, the number of monks and novices fell dramatically as early as 1957, perhaps as much as 50 percent. After the launch-

17. I have no exact figures; the interviewees estimated this on the basis of their own knowledge of the large number of monks who returned to lay lives.
ing of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, all novices and monks were compelled to discard their yellow robes and to resume a secular life, and many monks fled the country. Buddhist images and temples all over Sipsong Panna were smashed, and books written in Tai script were burned. Only a few temples were saved, because some people were able to convince Red Guards that they were useful for purposes such as storing grain. Some important books in Tai script were saved by people who buried them in the woods. For almost fourteen years no Tai novices were trained, and teaching of the old Tai script was conducted only in families where the father or grandfather secretly taught children to read.\textsuperscript{18} The Tai reacted with tacit acceptance; most seem to have swallowed their anger and accepted the conditions. “We were angry, but there was nothing to do \textemdash \textit{shengqi, mei banfa}!” said one Tai man in his fifties.

In the initial phase of the Cultural Revolution, national policy demanded that border areas be treated with caution, but this view was quickly criticized, and struggles began in minority areas against rich peasants, landlords, members of the aristocracy, and monks. In Sipsong Panna large numbers of revolutionary work teams, students, and teachers arrived to carry out the revolution. Since most members of the local government belonged to the \textit{chao} class, many of them were paraded on Nationalities Street, sent to the villages to work as peasants, and replaced by Han officials\textsuperscript{19}.

One of the fiercest border-region campaigns was that to “politicize the frontiers” (\textit{zhengzhi bianfang}) in Sipsong Panna between 1969 and 1971. Former stages of the Cultural Revolution in border areas had been severely criticized for upholding the revisionist ideas that these areas needed special treatment and that minorities were in some respect different from the Han:

Yunnan is being polite at the frontiers, practicing revisionism at the frontiers, engaging in excessive peacefulness at the frontiers. This excessive peacefulness is just an excessive step toward capitalism. You are afraid that people will flee. Why be afraid of that? If bad people run away, let them do so. The

\textsuperscript{18} Although education in monasteries was, and still is, reserved for boys, quite a few girls have learned in their homes to read and write Tai.

\textsuperscript{19} See Hsieh 1989: 231–33 on the fate of \textit{chao} during this time.
The campaign brought a second round of establishing People’s Communes in the border regions and provoked large-scale and violent struggles against so-called rich peasants, landlords, aristocracy, and “spies” among minorities. Due to the government’s former strategy of cooperating with religious leaders and the nobility in minority areas, there remained many “remnants of feudal society.” These were ferociously attacked and smashed in these areas. Sipsong Panna was no exception.

The Cultural Revolution was carried out most directly in Jinghong, where schools closed down and teachers (almost all Han) went to Simao to participate in revolutionary education for three months. Some students stayed in the secondary school to participate in the struggles; others returned home to their villages. In the countryside, primary schools continued to function, and new junior (and a few senior) secondary schools were started in production teams and communes after 1970. Many Buddhist and other texts in Tai (old and new) were burned, and the teaching of Tai in schools was prohibited. As in Lijiang and the rest of China, all teaching was now in Chinese, and the most important subject was the ideas and sayings of Mao Zedong. Some Tai interviewees who were teachers in small villages at that time recalled that they were not allowed to teach Tai script, but that they often used spoken Tai to explain. Otherwise, pupils would not understand. Most teachers were Han who came, or were sent, in large numbers from other places in China to “carry out revolution” or “learn from the peasants.”

There were many pupils in schools during the Cultural Revolution when all religious activities were suppressed, but the number began falling immediately after the policy relaxed after 1979. According to Zou Zhenxie, as many as 102,017 students attended primary schools in Sipsong Panna in 1975 (Zou 1992: 3). In A Survey of Sipsong Panna Tai Nationality Autonomous Prefecture it is argued that 12,444 students started in primary schools in 1970, but 44 percent dropped out before graduation in 1975 (XDZG 1986: 147). Although my interviews confirmed that most children under eighteen attended school for short periods of time during the Cultural Revolution, the first figure is
remarkably high considering that the entire population of Sipsong Panna was less than five hundred thousand at this time. Probably many schools over-reported enrollment and did not calculate those who dropped out.

The extremely repressive policy of the Cultural Revolution has been strongly criticized by the Chinese government since 1979. In publications and official reports about Sipsong Panna, the policy of this period is condemned for having harmed the “unity of the minzu” by suppressing religion, Tai script, and monastic education. Yet Han cadres and teachers engaged in education have always regarded the Buddhist education of boys in Sipsong Panna as the main obstacle to the development of Chinese education. Only the oppressive policy of the Cultural Revolution managed to abolish this kind of education, to stop the development of Buddhism and the spread of the Tai script, and to enroll large numbers of Tai students in Chinese schools. No Chinese cadres, teachers, or educators in Sipsong Panna would say that the policy of the Cultural Revolution was in any way a good policy. Nevertheless, it did bring about some of the changes that the central government and most Chinese cadres desired for Sipsong Panna: increased influence of Chinese language and culture and decline of Buddhist and Tai traditions.