

THE ORTHOGRAPHY OF THE TOPONYM LĀN NĀ

by

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The toponym Lān Nā, historically a name for the kingdom of Chiang Mai and its dependencies and at present an appellation for the eight northernmost provinces of Thailand, is found to be spelled either with or without *mai thō*: ล้านนา or ลานนา. The former is understood to mean '(country of) a million paddy fields' while the latter supposedly signifies 'area of paddy fields'.

'A million paddy fields' quite easily makes sense since there are other numerical expressions as พันนา (*phan nā*: 'one thousand paddy fields') and หมื่นนา (*mūn nā*: 'ten thousand paddy fields'), which refer to administrative districts. 'Area of paddy fields' presents somewhat of a problem because ลาน does not seem to be attested for a vast geographic region but only for a restricted open place surrounded by trees, a fence or hills, for example a garden, a yard, a field etc.

My palm leaf copy of the Chiang Mai Chronicle spells Lān Nā variously with or without the *mai thō*, whereas Notton's printed version of the Chronicle¹ indicates the *mai thō* throughout. Phongsāwadān Yōnok², a modern compilation of earlier sources, spells Lān Nā with the *mai thō* but drops it in the table of contents. Mūlasāsanā in its printed form³ omits the *mai thō*. Jinakālamāli⁴ does not seem to mention the toponym. Present-day writers usually prefer the orthography without *mai thō*.

The Chiang Mai National Museum is in possession of an inscribed stone slab⁵ which probably originates from a monastery in the neighbourhood of Chiang Mai. The inscription reports for C.S. 915, third month, first day of the waxing moon (about November - December A.D. 1553) certain grants to a monastery 'by the King who rules over the two countries, Lān Chāng and Lān Nā': สมเด็จพระมอฬัฎฐะตนะเสวยราชพิภพทั้งสองแผ่นดินล้านช้างล้านนา. Here, Lān Nā and Lān Chāng (the former kingdom of Luang Phra Bāng) both carry the *mai thō*. Since the setting up of inscribed stone slabs recording royal decisions had to be properly supervised and witnessed by the authorities, one can conclude that, in the sixteenth century, for persons connected with both the *saṅgha* and the secular administration, Lān Nā meant '(country of) a million paddy fields'.

As for Lān Chāng, Coedès⁶ already has shown that in the sixteenth century it signified 'a million elephants'.

1. Camille Notton, *Chronique de Xieng Mai*, Paris, 1932.
2. พระยาประชาภิจักรจักร์, เรื่องพงษาวดารโยนก, กรุงเทพฯ ฯ (ร.ศ.) 126
3. พระพุทธพุกาม พระพุทธญาณ / กรมศิลปากร, ตำนานมูลศาสนา, พระนคร พ.ศ. 2482
4. G. Coedès, "Documents sur l'histoire politique et religieuse du Laos occidental", *BEFEO* (25) 1925, pp. 36-140.
5. Registration no. 6/2516.
6. G. Coedès, "A propos des anciens noms de Luang Prabang", *BEFEO* (18.10) 1918, pp. 9-11; G. Coedès, "Documents sur l'histoire...", pp. 72, 139.