

THE T'IN (MAL), DRY RICE CULTIVATORS OF NORTHERN THAILAND AND NORTHERN LAOS

by

William Y. Dessaint*

Although they are the third most numerous among the highland peoples of Thailand—surpassed in numbers only by the Karen and by the Hmong (Meo)—the T'in (Mal) are perhaps the least known of all these mountain populations.

In physical appearance, the T'in resemble the Khmu, the Lamet and other Proto-Indochinese peoples. Many of them are rather short and stocky. Their hair is generally black and their complexion tends to be slightly darker than that of their neighbours in the adjacent valleys. Physical anthropologists would classify them as Palaeo-Mongoloids (Eickstedt 1928:176-187; Credner 1935:154).

Most travellers who come into contact with them are struck by their frequently despondent look. Frank M. LeBar sums up the impressions of most of the very few travellers who have written about them when he refers to their "generally dejected appearance" (LeBar 1964:128). This might be a symptom of chronic malnutrition due to their marginal economy. It might also be a result of the prevalence of malaria, tuberculosis and other diseases caused by deprivation, infection or parasites. It might finally be linked more generally to the disruption of their traditional culture and ancestral values, for they have long been dominated by lowland societies.

There is little justification, however, for some of the statements made by H. Warington Smyth who, writing about the T'in and some closely related peoples, contended that "they are spirit-worshippers almost entirely, and for the most part, are singularly stupid" (Smyth 1898:I, 171-172). However, this traveller went on to concede that "notwithstanding their wild and savage mien, we found our Kas gentle harmless folk, patient and enduring on the march, and good climbers" (Smyth 1898:I, 172). Elsewhere, he had already described them as "a perfectly wild people, wearing only the smallest strip of cloth, with a long metal hairpin stuck through the hair rolled up behind, and often a flower in the lobe of the ear. They are short and fleshy, and though not prepossessing, we subsequently found some of them to be good hard workers, and quiet, simple creatures" (Smyth 1895:I, 46-47).

Ethnic identity

Part of the people under consideration usually call themselves Mal, hence *phūam mal* (Mal people) and *ngäng mal* (Mal language). This ethnonym is probably related to a word meaning something like "soul", "life force" or "life essence" in their own language.

*The New University of Ulster, Coleraine and Londonderry, Northern Ireland.

However, some of those living in Thailand and all of those living in Laos normally use a term of Tai (Yuan or Lao) origin to designate themselves: Prai (Pray) in Thailand and Pai (Pay) in Laos. The etymology of Prai or Pai is rather doubtful. Perhaps the most likely possible derivation is from a word meaning "commoner, lawless person, vulgar person". David Filbeck notes the resemblance of this term to the Yuan word "phay", meaning thatch, but he is understandably puzzled as to what semantic process could extend the meaning of that word to designate an ethnic group (Filbeck 1978:5). Another explanation often given to this author in Nan province is that it comes from a word meaning "forest, jungle." It may be highly significant that the groups calling themselves Prai or Pai tend to be the groups which are most acculturated to their lowland neighbours and which have the most numerous loan words from lowland languages. Although we have no proof of this, it seems quite plausible that they also called themselves Mal before they borrowed their present ethnic designation from the Yuan or the Lao.

The Yuan (Khon Müang, Thai Lanna) frequently employ also the term Lua', Lwa' (ลาว) or Lawa (ลัวะ) for the T'in as well as for other Proto-Indochinese groups in northern Thailand. This term is sometimes applied to any of the Mon-Khmer and Palaung-Wa speakers in northern Thailand—the Lawa and the Khmu as well as the people with whom we are now concerned—in order to distinguish these various peoples from the later arrivals from China, including speakers of Tai-Kadai, Miao-Yao and Tibeto-Burmese languages. The terms Lua', Lwa' and Lawa are seldom used of themselves by the people to whom they are thus applied, except in a few villages where people normally use them only when speaking to outsiders.

The Thai (Siamese) usually refer to the people under study as T'in, Tin, Thin (ถิ่น). It is preferable to transcribe this word as T'in, because the apostrophe indicates that the phoneme /t/ is aspirated, whereas the transcription Tin does not indicate aspiration and the transcription Thin might lead to some confusion as to the pronunciation of the initial phoneme. Some authors spell it Htin, following O. Gordon Young who rendered it in this way undoubtedly because of his long connection with the Lahu in the Shan State of Burma (Young 1961:51-54). In the romanization of Burmese and other languages spoken in Burma, the aspirated "t" is transliterated "ht" in order to distinguish it from "th" representing the "th" sound which occurs in Burmese as in English. In Thai, the word ถิ่น ("t'in") means "place, locality, location, domain, domicile." The expression Chaw T'in may therefore be understood as meaning "the locals", "the people native to a place", "the native inhabitants of a place." It is frequently taken to imply that the T'in were the original inhabitants of the area where

they live or, at least, that they were established in that area before the arrival of the Thai and other speakers of Tai languages. In any case, the term T'in is not used by the persons it is purported to designate, except when they are talking to government officials or other outsiders. In fact, some of the people to whom it is applied claim that it has pejorative connotations and object to its use. We are using this term here because it is the most widespread, but we do so only with strong reservations since it is not fully accepted by the people to whom it is applied.

In Laos and in Thailand, the term Kha or Ka (คำ) is often applied to a large number of Proto-Indochinese groups speaking a wide variety of Mon-Khmer languages. The T'in are therefore frequently lumped together with many other ethnic groups under this name. It is often stated that this is the word meaning "slave" in Lao. Its Thai cognate is defined as "servant, attendant, slave." Whether this etymology is correct or not, it is so widely held that the term is definitely derogatory even though some of its derivatives are not at all felt to be objectionable (cf. "civil servant" in English). The term Kha Che (Kache, Kaché) is also found in the literature, covering both the T'in and the Khmu and sometimes also the Lamet (Smyth 1895:I, 46-47; Smyth 1898:I, 171-172; McCarthy 1900:67-70, 92-94; Graham 1924:133-137). The term Tiê likewise covers several Proto-Indochinese ethnic groups (Mouhot 1868:316). The term Kha is also often found in combination with another ethnonym. It is sometimes abusively used in such compounds as Kha Mu (the proper combination for the Khmu would have to be Kha Khmu). Thus, one comes across the combination Kha T'in and its variants (Kha Tin, Kha Thin, Kha Htin, Ka tin, Katin) in a number of publications (Embree and Thomas 1950:73-75; Boon Chuey 1963a:229-236; Boon Chuey 1963b:183-187). Similarly, the combination Kha Phai (which also has several variants) is sometimes used especially in Laos. The term Kha and all the combinations based on it are not used and are firmly rejected by the T'in.

There are also combinations based on the word P'u (พູ) meaning people, hence P'u P'ai (also transliterated in a variety of ways). These appellations are all equally disowned by the people concerned. They prefer to be called Mal in some areas, Prai or Pai in other areas.

Linguistic background

A large majority of the scholars who have looked at T'in linguistic materials—including David Filbeck, the only person who has actually made a systematic study of the T'in language—now regards T'in as a Mon-Khmer language (Kraisri 1963:179-183; Smalley 1963:189-201; Thomas and Headley 1970:402-406; Filbeck 1971:22-23; Filbeck 1978:13-16).

The case for placing T'in in the Mon-Khmer family is a strong one, for it has been amply demonstrated that T'in is fairly closely related to Khmu which is itself generally considered to belong undoubtedly to the Mon-Khmer family. Comparisons of a word list of T'in with word lists for Khmu yielded 39% cognates in the case of T'eng Khmu (on the basis of a word list compiled by Henri Maspero) and 53% cognates in the case of Luang Prabang Khmu (on the basis of a list provided by William A. Smalley). There seems to be therefore at least lexical evidence for regarding T'in as part of a Khmuic sub-group of the Mon-Khmer family. Comparisons of T'in with other Mon-Khmer languages show less close, but still undeniable, relationships at least as far as vocabulary is concerned (Thomas and Headley 1970:402-406, 410-416; Filbeck 1971:22-23; Filbeck 1978:16-32).

Carl F. and Florence M. Voegelin do not specifically mention T'in. However, their classification of Khmu, Lamet and other related languages would imply that T'in would be placed in the Palaung-Wa family which they consider to be quite distinct from the Mon-Khmer family. They believe that the Palaung-Wa languages and the Mon-Khmer languages could be grouped together only at the very general level of a phylum or of a macrophylum (Voegelin and Voegelin 1966a; Voegelin and Voegelin 1966b).

Wider groupings have been suggested by other scholars. Henri Maspero and Wilhelm Schmidt grouped Mon-Khmer (including Palaung-Wa) languages together with Munda and Annam-Muong (that is, Vietnamese-Muong) languages under the term of Austroasiatic. Paul K. Benedict largely followed them in postulating a large grouping of Proto-Austrian languages, including a Mon-Khmer-Annamite sub-group as well as Thai-Kadai-Indonesian and Miao-Yao sub-groups (Benedict 1942:576-601). Gordon Luce also used the term Austro-Asiatic either as a synonym of Mon-Khmer or as a wider term including Mon-Khmer languages.

Michel Ferlus, who studied various languages of northern Laos, would place T'in—at least provisionally—in a large group of languages which he calls northern Austroasiatic. He thus links T'in not only with Khmu and Lamet, but also with Palaung, Wa and a number of other languages in the same general area. This is consistent with the classifications established long ago by Henri Maspero and Wilhelm Schmidt (Ferlus 1974:48, 55).

Among the T'in, villages tend to be endogamous. There are no lineages, clans or other social institutions involving more than one village. Political structures, such as they are, exist only at the village level and religious rituals are mainly centred on the village spirit. Furthermore, all villages produce more or less the same things so that they live in relative autarky. As a result, contacts between people from different

villages and different areas have always been very limited, at least until the recent displacement of population in some districts. In these circumstances, it is not surprising that there is a great deal of dialectical divergence within the language.

There are minor differences even in the speech of people from neighbouring villages and the dividing lines between dialect areas must consequently be somewhat arbitrary. David Filbeck differentiates between two branches of T'in in Thailand, one branch spoken mainly in Thung Chang district and the other spoken in sixteen villages of Pua district and four villages of Thung Chang district (all in Nan province). He further distinguishes at least three dialects in the first branch and three dialects in the second branch. Two of the dialects of the second branch are spoken in one village each and the other one is spoken in the remaining eighteen villages (Filbeck 1971:23-25).

Settlement patterns

The T'in live in Nan province, Thailand, and in Xagnabouri (Sayaboury) province, Laos. They are more especially found in the mountain ranges between the Mekhong and the Mae Nam Nan.

Their ethnohistory is very obscure. O. Gordon Young suggested that they originally came from the south, possibly from Malaya (Young 1961:51). It seems very unlikely that any serious argument to support such a bold hypothesis could be found. In fact, it seems fairly well established that the ancestors of the T'in now living in Thailand came from Laos. Boon Chuey Srisavasdi thought, in 1963, that the first elements came to Thailand only "about thirty-five years ago" (Boon Chuey 1963a:230). This would mean around 1928. However, the same author stated elsewhere that they had reached their present habitat many centuries ago and that "the Kha T'in maintain that they inhabited the province of Nan long before the Siamese migrated from China into the present domain of Siam" (Boon Chuey 1963b:185). The archaeological knowledge of the area being very fragmentary, it is quite impossible at the moment to verify any statement of this sort. Perhaps, Boon Chuey Srisavasdi obtained this bit of information from someone who meant, in a more general way, that Mon-Khmer speakers preceded Tai populations in that part of the world. Frank M. LeBar, writing in 1964, estimated that they had been settled in Thailand for "forty to eighty years", which would mean that they came to Thailand between 1884 and 1924 (LeBar 1964:128).

The author of these lines has been led to believe that at least some numerically important groups came from Laos to Thailand in the late nineteenth century as a result of internecine warfare in Laos, involving highlanders and lowlanders, as in Müang Ngoi in 1876. Other waves may have come both in earlier times and in later times. There is little doubt that migrations have taken place in both directions and not only

from Laos to Thailand. Such migrations have always been determined by the attitude of officials on either side of the border, by the local situation in regard to law and order and at the same time by the availability of suitable agricultural land at a specific time in a particular place (Dessaint 1973 : 10).

Most of the T'in live around the headwaters of the Mae Nam Nan and some of its tributaries in the north-eastern part of Nan province in Thailand and in the adjacent north-western part of Xagnabouri province in Laos. The river valleys in this general area are occupied by several Tai groups (Yuan, Lü, Lao) while the higher mountains are settled mostly by Hmong (Meo) and Mien (Yao) who migrated southwards from China in relatively recent historical times, that is within the last hundred years or so.

T'in villages are mainly located at moderate altitudes, varying from about 300 metres to about 1,300 metres. Most of the villages are scattered below mountain ridges between 600 metres and 1,200 metres above sea level. Preferred village sites are comparatively flat spots on mountain slopes, as close as possible to a reliable source of drinkable water.

The villages vary greatly in size. Some villages contain more than a hundred households while many others consist of only four or five households. Villages are often made up of several hamlets with varying degrees of autonomy. Thus, one village well known to the present author in the early 1960's included ten hamlets with eighty-three households and five hundred and sixty persons. Three of these hamlets had an effective headman or assistant headman. Not only are villages often made up of scattered hamlets, but there are also many houses isolated in the jungle or in jungle clearings. Thus, three of the hamlets in the village mentioned included isolated houses or groups of houses (Dessaint 1973 : 12-13).

In many areas, T'in villages and hamlets are disseminated among the settlements of other ethnic groups. Thus, when going from one T'in village to another T'in village, one may have to go through, for instance, a Mien (Yao) village, then through some Hmong (Meo) villages and finally through another Mien (Yao) village. However, village cohesion is very strong and each group maintains its ethnic identity to a remarkable degree (Dessaint 1975 : 11-13).

The largest villages tend to be those which have a relatively sound economic basis, most often provided by the production of *miang* (pickled or fermented tea leaves which are chewed as a mild stimulant). A large proportion of the bigger villages are located at comparatively low elevations where ecological conditions are, in many cases, more favourable to agriculture than at higher elevations. The people living in large

villages tend to migrate less frequently than those living in small villages, mainly because large villages are usually more prosperous than small villages and their inhabitants are therefore less inclined to move away. However, individual households may break away from large villages from time to time.

Village gates with carved wooden spirit posts still exist here and there, but they tend more and more to fall into disrepair through neglect as the ancestral way of life is increasingly disrupted and the religious traditions are gradually weakened.

The members of several households living in the same settlement normally cooperate in the building of a new house. They may be related, but not necessarily so. The household which has received assistance will usually repay it by contributing labour when the households which have taken part in building the new house find themselves in need of help for house building, agricultural work or some other major task.

Each house is located preferably in close proximity to the house of the mother of the lady of the house. According to the traditional rules, which are followed whenever it is not too inconvenient to do so, every house should face west and the entrance porch, reached by a ladder or a log, should be at the western end of the house. People should follow a north-south orientation when they lie down to sleep, probably because the dead follow an east-west orientation when they are taken out of the house on their last voyage.

The houses, always on piles, are usually made of bamboo with a thatched roof and a sort of balcony or verandah in front of the entrance. Wood is used in house construction, always for the piles, sometimes for the floors, occasionally for the walls. Wood is used most frequently in the larger villages which are most affluent and have been most exposed to outside influences. The roof is covered with thatch made of rice straw, palm leaves or other leaves.

When the mountain slope is fairly steep, the roof may overhang in such a way that the family rice pounder can be placed under the overhanging portion of the roof. Otherwise, the rice pounder is placed either beneath the house or under its own shelter. One enters the house by climbing up a notched log or a wooden ladder leading to the balcony or verandah.

A shallow bamboo box, square or rectangular, is filled with sand and set on the split-bamboo floor to serve as a fire-place. As T'in houses do not usually have any windows, the interiors sometimes become rather smoky. A sort of bamboo tray hangs

over the fire-place. Meat is kept there to be smoked. For instance, a monkey brought back from the hunt may be left there to dry, his hands hanging down the side of the bamboo tray.

A corner of the house is generally partitioned off as a bedroom and there is occasionally more than one bedroom. Guests are preferably entertained on the balcony or verandah. It is not customary for them to enter the bedrooms. Such a breach of family privacy would be considered to be very bad manners and would be very offensive to the members of the household.

Apart from such items as rattan mats used for sitting as well as for lying down to sleep, there is seldom any furniture at all. Most houses have a granary set on piles somewhere in the vicinity of the house. If not, the rice is stored in large rattan containers inside the house.

Villages are moved whenever their inhabitants estimate that the soil available for cultivation within a reasonable distance has become too poor to make its cultivation worthwhile, when sickness occurs too frequently in a village, when some accidents have taken place in a village area or when a series of bad omens has been observed. Village stability tends to be much greater than among highlanders who live at greater altitudes such as the Lisu and the Hmong (Meo).

Demographic basis

In 1961, Garland Bare, a missionary of the Church of Christ in Thailand, estimated that there were between 12,000 and 35,000 T'in in Thailand. In his frequently quoted popular account of what he calls "the hill tribes of northern Thailand", O. Gordon Young, a member of the United States Operations Mission in Thailand, placed the number of T'in in Thailand at 18,900 (Young 1961:51). He undoubtedly obtained this figure by multiplying 126, the number of T'in villages in Thailand, as estimated by Garland Bare, by the completely arbitrary figure of 150, taken as a credible average population per village. This resulted in a very crude estimate, probably too high at that date. This figure was repeated by Frank M. LeBar in the note on the T'in which he included in his useful gazetteer of the peoples of mainland South-East Asia (LeBar 1964:128).

A little later, Boon Chuey Srisavasdi advanced a figure of "about 16,000" for the T'in of Thailand (Boon Chuey 1963 a : 230). He further stated that "about 6,000" of them lived in the communes of Bo Klüa Nüa and Bo Klüa Tai (these two communes belong to Pua district and they are situated in the extreme north-eastern corner of Nan province which is at the same time the extreme north-eastern corner of Thailand). The same author wrote elsewhere that "in the province of Nan, there are about 3,500

Kha T'in living in 126 villages of their own, without any outsider among them" (Boon Chuey 163b:185). There may have been a typographical error, but 3,500 would have been far too low a figure while 35,000 would have been much too high a figure at that time for the number of T'in in Nan province.

The present writer collected detailed demographic data from village headmen in 1963-1964. Table 1 presents an abbreviated version of the detailed figures obtained for the total population of the communes (*tambon*) of the two northernmost districts (*amphur*) in Nan province (*changwat*), which were at that time the only communes in Thailand to contain T'in settlements.

Table 1 - Estimates of the T'in population in Thailand in 1963-1964 (Dessaint).

District	Commune	T'in Population
Thung Chang	Pon	233
	Ngop	173
	Lae	692
	Chiang Klang	1,356
	Total for Thung Chang district	2,454
Pua	Bo Klüa Nüa	4,458
	Bo Klüa Tai	3,792
	Sathan	1,616
	Silalaeng	2,228
Total for Pua district		<u>12,094</u>
Grand total for Nan province (and for Thailand)		14,548

The Tribal Data Project (Tribal Research Centre, Hill Tribes Welfare Division, Public Welfare Department, Ministry of Interior of Thailand) was carried out in 1971-1972. The population data for the T'in may be summed up as follows (see Table 2).

Table 2 - Estimates of the T'in population in Thailand in 1971-1972 (Tribal Research Centre).

District	Commune	T'in Population
Thung Chang	Pon	769
	Ngop	445
	Lae	911
Total for Thung Chang district		2,125
Chiang Klang	Pua	748
	Chiang Klang	1,778
Total for Chiang Klang district		2,526
Pua	Bo Klüa Nüa	6,813
	Bo Klüa Tai	3,941
	Sathan	2,217
	Silalaeng	4,772
Total for Pua district		17,743
Müang Nan	Du Phong	126
Total for Müang Nan district		126
Mae Charim	Phong	246
	Mo Müang	355
Total for Mae Charim sub-district		601
Sa	Yap Hua Na	276
Total for Sa district		276
Grand total for Nan province (and for Thailand)		23,397



Figure 1. T'in highlanders usually build their houses in small jungle clearings,



Figure 2. T'in villages overlook valleys frequently shrouded in early morning mist.



Figure 3. Dogs, pigs and chickens scavenge under and around houses.



Figure 4. Very young children spend much of their time on the back of their mother or elder sister.

It must be noted that, in recent years, the number of districts in Nan province increased from five to eight. Thung Chang district was divided in two, part of it forming the new Chiang Klang district. Pua district was also partitioned, but the new Tha Wang Pha district does not include any T'in village. Mae Charim sub-district, now a district, was detached from Müang Nan district. Whereas T'in villages were found in only two districts in 1963-1964, they were reported in six districts in 1971-1972.

While there were T'in villages only in the northern part of Nan province in 1963-1964, six villages with a population of just over one thousand were reported in the districts of Müang Nan, Mae Charim and Sa in the central part of the province in 1971-1972. However, most of the T'in population—a little more than 95.7 per cent—was still living in the northern part of the province according to the population estimates of the Tribal Data Project in 1971-1972. The heaviest concentration is still to be found in the communes of Bo Klüa Nüa and Bo Klüa Tai, which belong to Pua district and which are located in the extreme north-eastern part of the province of Nan, along the border between Thailand and Laos.

The total figure of 23,397 given by the Tribal Data Project in 1972 is substantially higher than the total figure of 14,548 advanced by the present writer in 1964. First of all, the difference may be partly accounted for as natural increase, because of the very high birth rate and the gradually declining death rate. A natural increase of the same order as that for Thailand as a whole—that is about 3.2 per cent per year which would make a compounded increase of 28.65 per cent for a period of eight years—does not seem unreasonable. Such an increase would then bring the total of 14,548 in 1964 to a total of 18,716 eight years later. These figures are, of course, purely hypothetical for there are not sufficient demographic data to calculate whether or not the natural increase of the T'in population in Thailand took place at a rate comparable with that of the population of Thailand as a whole between 1964 and 1972. In addition, there seems to have been a substantial net immigration from Laos during that eight-year period, although it is practically impossible to estimate the number of people involved. Finally, there is no doubt that many of the T'in in the relocation centres have been counted twice by the enumerators of the Tribal Data Project: once in the population of their original villages and once in the population of the relocation centres. In the 1971-1972 estimates, the figures for relocation centres in Nan province were given as 769 persons at Phae Klang (Thung Chang district), 503 at Don Kao (Chiang Klang district) and 2,284 at Paklang (Pua district).

No detailed demographic data are available for the T'in population of Xagnabouri province in Laos. George Tubbs, a missionary who operated in that area about 1960, guessed their numbers to be around 5,000 to 6,000, but it may be considerably more at present in spite of some emigration to T'in areas in Thailand (Dessaint 1973:13-14).

Economic system

The economic system is essentially a subsistence system and there is no attempt to maximize production. It is based primarily on the shifting cultivation of rice of the glutinous variety. Some maize, vegetables and condiments are also grown. Secondary economic activities include raising domestic animals, hunting jungle animals and collecting jungle products.

Land is not owned by any individual or group. It is there to be used by anyone who so wishes. Whoever clears a piece of land enjoys its usufruct until he abandons it, but no claim on a piece of land can be maintained by anyone who does not work it.

These usufruct rights are occasionally sold for a small sum, the price depending on the amount of work involved in clearing the land and on how much vegetation remains to be cleared. It is the labour that has been performed on the land and not the land itself which is sold, for there is no concept of land ownership in the traditional *riit* (customary law).

A plot of land that has been cleared may also be loaned to someone who will grow a crop on it. Some gift or service is expected in return as a compensation for the labour expended on clearing the field.

While the rice crop in a given swidden belongs to the one who sowed it, vegetables, condiments and everything else growing in it may be picked by anyone. Trees growing in cultivated swiddens may be cut down and taken away by anyone. Animals that happen to be in planted fields may be hunted by anyone at all and not just by the cultivators of the fields. In fact, the latter have exclusive rights only to the rice which they have cultivated, not to the fields themselves or to anything else which grows on them or which happens to be on them.

Villages do not have an exclusive territory of their own for agricultural purposes (what French geographers call a *terroir*). Any area may be cleared, no matter how far from the village or how close to other villages. Therefore, people from several villages may be working fields in the same area and their fields may be interspersed among fields worked by Tai, Hmong (Meo) or Mien (Yao) as well as by T'in.

During the cold season, in January and February, jungle areas selected for use as swiddens are cleared of their vegetation with jungle knives. Trees which are in the way and which are not too big are felled with axes. Whenever possible, an old swidden which has lain fallow for some years is cleared again since this involves less hard work than clearing a new area which may include many big trees and much tough undergrowth. The best results are obtained when the vegetation has been burnt thoroughly so that little of it survives and the weeds are therefore kept under control without too much difficulty. The conditions for this are much more likely to exist in an area which has already been used as a swidden and which has later been taken over by secondary growth than in an area which has always remained virgin jungle. At least as far as the T'in are concerned, the complaints often heard that highlanders destroy valuable forests have little basis in fact for a number of reasons, not the least of which is precisely that these dry rice cultivators tend to use the same areas over and over so that they destroy almost exclusively useless secondary growth and very seldom valuable primary forests.

After an area has been cleared for cultivation, the vegetation which has been cut down is left to dry in the sun until towards the end of the hot season. Once the vegetation is dry enough, in April or May, the new swiddens are fired and the ashes are left on the spot to serve as fertilizer.

If there are any large trees which would have required too much effort to bring down, they are left standing in the field, charred as they are. The swiddens are planted shortly after they have been fired, that is about May or June, just before the monsoon rains start. To plant rice, holes are made with digging sticks and the seeds are sown by hand. Some weeding is carried out at least once per growing season, mainly by women and children who use a small digging tool for this purpose. Various methods are used to scare away the birds which would otherwise eat much of the rice during the weeks immediately preceding the harvest.

Certain varieties of fast growing rice may be reaped in August, but the main harvest takes place in November or December. The work is done entirely by hand, the rice being cut with sickles. Threshing is also done by hand, a common method being to beat bundles of rice against a bamboo frame. The cultivators may also thresh the rice by trampling it under their feet. Men and women take the rice to their village in back baskets carried with the help of a strap across their foreheads. The crop is stored in granaries or in houses, the containers used in the latter case being closely woven in the same fashion as floor mats and kept in some corner of the house where they tend to be much too frequently visited by rats.

The swiddens are generally used for one year only, two years at most. The main reason for this is not that the soil becomes exhausted after such a short period, but rather that the weeds become very difficult to control after the first year of cultivation whereas firing a field destroys most of the vegetation quickly and thoroughly. Although there is no regular fallowing system as such, a field is usually cultivated again every few years if the villagers have not moved too far away in the interval.

No attempt at terracing is made, but irrigation is not unknown by any means. Some of the villages around the headwaters of the Mae Nam Nan, the Nam Wa and the Nam Mang have adopted wet rice cultivation to replace, at least partly, the traditional dry rice cultivation.

Agricultural work is essentially a co-operative undertaking, usually involving a few households living in the same hamlet or village. People who co-operate in this manner may or may not be related, but they often include a couple with their married daughters and their sons-in-law. They generally keep track of the number of man-days of agricultural work which has been contributed and they normally expect the beneficiaries of such help to reciprocate with comparable help either for agricultural work or for house building or for some other major task. The household which receives such assistance is expected to provide food for all the workers as long as the co-operative work lasts. A man may sometimes work on someone else's field in return for some of the crop. Cash being still very little used in the highlands where the T'in live, wage labour is not employed except in very unusual circumstances.

As already indicated, the main food crop is rice of the glutinous variety, similar to the rice grown by the Khmu and by the Yuan, the Lü and the Lao who live in the valleys just below the T'in in the provinces of Nan and Xagnabouri. In view of the simple technology and unsophisticated methods, the yields tend to be very low. As there is normally no irrigation and no terracing, the crops are highly dependent on local climatic conditions, especially in terms of timing and quantity of rainfall, so that yields are very irregular. Rice plants can withstand very heavy rains without being damaged, but the eroding effect of heavy rains is very detrimental to the soil. As suggested by the author many years ago, terracing the fields would greatly improve conditions for rice cultivation as it would control erosion and retain water at each level as needed. Of course, this would entail enormous investments in labour (Dessaint 1973: 15).

Apart from glutinous rice, the T'in grow maize, millet and a large variety of vegetables and condiments such as gourds, squash, capsicum, cucumbers, egg-plants, Chinese mustard and chili peppers.

The major commercial product grown by the T'in is tea whose leaves are pickled to be used as *miang*. This is chewed like betel, especially after meals, by some of the lowlanders as well as by the T'in themselves. Salt, ginger, peanuts and sundry other things may be inserted in the small ball of *miang* before it is chewed. *Miang* is produced from the leaves of wild tea in most of the T'in villages situated near the headwaters of the Nam Pua, the Nam Khwang and the Nam Khun. Producers of *miang* peddle it from door to door in the lowland villages. They usually spend the money thus obtained in the village shops, bringing back home various manufactured items such as blankets, cloth, ornaments, tools, pots, pans or electric torches. It is also common for valley people to go up to the highlands in search of *miang*. Instead of paying cash for it, they usually barter it for glutinous rice or other products. Back in their own villages in the lowlands, they sell it or exchange it at a small profit.

Miang is not the only stimulant commonly grown by the T'in. Betel and tobacco are also cultivated mostly for their own use. Opium cultivation is very rare, although one or two remote villages used to have opium fields which they maintained both for internal consumption and for trading purposes.

Apart from some lean dogs scavenging in and around the villages and hamlets to eke out a meagre subsistence, the most conspicuous domestic animals are pigs and chickens. The pigs are sometimes penned up and fed with rice bran, banana stems and other rejected parts of vegetable foods. They are also often left to roam about and look for their own food. Chickens are let loose and they must fend for themselves. Their diet may, however, be supplemented with a little rice, maize or millet thrown around for them in the morning and in the evening.

While most households own pigs and chickens; only a few own cattle. This includes both water buffaloes and zebu cattle. These animals are also largely left to search for their own food. Both water buffaloes and zebu cattle may be sold to the lowlanders. In addition, people from the valleys sometimes rent water buffaloes from the T'in when they are short of draught animals for ploughing and harrowing their irrigated rice fields in June and July. On the other hand, horses and mules are very seldom found in T'in villages.

Chickens, pigs, dogs and cattle are all used at times for sacrifices to the spirits. In the case of cattle, sacrifices are performed as village undertakings, for no individual household can normally afford such an expense.

The T'in have no need for draught animals themselves, for they do not use carts or ploughs. They do not use any pack animals either, except sometimes oxen. They generally carry their loads themselves in back baskets, supported by means of a

strap across their foreheads, or in shoulder bags which they often sling on their backs also with the strap across their foreheads. Women usually fetch water in small bamboo sections which they frequently hang at both ends of a small flexible bamboo pole. In recent years, these bamboo sections have sometimes been replaced by metal pails or jerry cans whenever these have become available.

Hunting is always important and may become vital whenever the harvest has been particularly mediocre. Hunting is mostly done with crossbows and arrows. A great variety of jungle animals, such as wild fowls, wild rabbits and wild pigs, is hunted mainly to be eaten. Other animals are killed primarily for their horns, including the rhinoceros which is now virtually extinct in the area. Yet others are sought mostly for their skins, for instance deer, bears and tigers, but the flesh of most of these animals is also eaten.

Fishing is economically less important than hunting. Fish are most often caught in nets, but sometimes poison is placed in a section of a river to kill the fish which happen to be in it or to venture into it.

Collecting provides subsidiary resources which are particularly welcome in case of poor crops and food shortages. Wild fruit, wild honey, medicinal herbs, benzoin, sticklac, firewood and numerous other jungle products are gathered in small quantities, mainly by women and children. The T'in seek these commodities either for their own use or to sell them or exchange them for rice whenever they visit the lowlands or when trading caravans or individual pedlars come up to their own villages or hamlets.

Salt, as an exchange commodity, is a major source of cash or rice. At least until the recent disturbances in the area, salt was collected by a simple technique in two communes near the headwaters of the Mae Nam Nan, namely Bo Klüa Nüa and Bo Klüa Tai (whose names mean respectively northern salt well and southern salt well). Until recent years, salt was both rare and precious in the mountains of southern China and northern South-East Asia where there is still a high incidence of goitre. It was often used as an exchange standard. In the not very distant past, the T'in living around the salt wells in the northern part of Nan province largely controlled the salt production of the area. Lowlanders used to come to get salt in exchange for rice or other commodities. They took it by zebu caravan or on elephant back to other parts of northern Thailand and northern Laos. This was a slow method of transport—ox caravans went from Müang Nan to Bo Klüa Tai in twelve stages, that is in twelve days—but it was a very profitable activity for the lowlanders who organized and led these ox caravans until recent times. In Müang Nan, they sold it for several times what it had cost them in Bo Klüa Nüa or Bo Klüa Tai.

Most containers, utensils and other articles in everyday use are made by hand in each household. Many old men and old women spend much of their time making handicrafts. Occasionally surplus handicrafts, such as rattan mats or rattan baskets, are exchanged for sundry items or sold for trifling sums to the inhabitants of the lowlands.

The T'in occasionally hire themselves out as agricultural labourers to their mountain neighbours, the Hmong (Meo) or the Mien (Yao). However, this tends to be considered as a last resort only; therefore it is seldom done unless cash is badly needed for some specific purpose. It is only rarely that they work as domestic servants for more affluent valley people such as Thai civil servants or police officers and Chinese merchants or shopkeepers.

In T'in society, there is hardly any need for trade within the village since everyone produces more or less the same goods. Trade with other T'in villages is also negligible for the same reasons. If anyone has a surplus of a given product—vegetables, condiments, tobacco, betel, fish, wild fruit, wild honey or whatever—he or she gives it away to one or more of the other villagers. The person or persons who distribute surplus goods in this manner may already have received gifts from the person or persons to whom these surplus goods are distributed. If not, it is likely that those who received such surplus goods will give something in exchange for them, now or later. In any case, surpluses are not sold within the village. They are either given or exchanged.

Everyday life

As in the case of most other peoples in that part of the world, the staple food is rice. Like other populations of the lowlands and lower highlands, but unlike the mountaineers living at higher altitudes, the T'in eat almost exclusively glutinous rice as a basis for their diet. In practice, every meal consists of steamed glutinous rice accompanied by various boiled or raw vegetables such as squash, cucumbers or Chinese mustard leaves. Sometimes a piece of meat is on the menu, particularly if a deer, a monkey, a wild pig or some other wild animal has been brought back from the hunt or if a chicken or a domestic pig has been sacrificed to the spirits for some special occasion. Much use is made of condiments, especially of numerous varieties of hot peppers.

The preparation of meals is a fairly simple matter, but one of the most time-consuming and back-breaking tasks among the many daily chores of T'in housewives and their daughters is husking rice. A foot-operated rice-pounder is used for pounding rice. The sound of rice pounding is, together with the barking of dogs and the grunting of pigs, a sure sign that one is approaching a village in the jungle, usually long before one can see it. It is also a familiar noise which always starts long before dawn and sometimes goes on till late at night in every village and hamlet.

Water is usually drunk after meals and between meals. Tea, brewed from the leaves of semi-wild plants, is also a common drink. Alcoholic beverages made from unhusked rice or maize are drunk mainly at festivals.

Stimulants in common use are *miang*, tobacco and betel. *Miang*, which—as we have seen—is made from pickled or fermented tea leaves, is chewed by everyone after meals and between meals. Many men, women and even children are in the habit of chewing betel. People of all ages and both sexes frequently smoke cheroots or pipes. On the other hand, opium is not in general use. Opium addicts are relatively few and a high proportion of these few consists of older men already retired from active life.

Villagers used to make their own clothes, but their traditional costumes are increasingly replaced by garments similar to those of their lowland neighbours. The men now mostly wear shirts without collars and trousers with short and ample legs, all made of the same sort of dark blue cloth. The women now tend to favour the same kind of clothes as their sisters living at lower altitudes: blouses and *phasin*, i.e. cylindrical skirts reaching down to the ankles, similar to the sarongs of Malay and Indonesian women.

The T'in are generally too poor to be able to afford the beautiful silver jewelry common among the highland groups living at higher altitudes. They must content themselves with necklaces, armlets, bracelets, anklets and other ornaments made of coloured beads.

The life cycle

When a woman is about to give birth, her mother, her mother-in-law and other village women come to the house—partly out of curiosity, but also to provide moral support and eventually to help delivery. The woman clings to a rope hanging from the ceiling while she gives birth to the baby on the floor. It is usually her husband who cuts the umbilical cord and buries the placenta. A string is attached to the wrist of the newborn baby in order to prevent his *mal* from leaving his body. The woman remains for some days close to the fire together with her baby. She eats only a little rice and salt during that period.

Personal names now used by the T'in seem to be entirely of Tai origin. The T'in were given surnames several decades ago—in the sixth reign of the present dynasty—in the same way as the lowland population of Thailand. Very often, the same surname was given to all the inhabitants of a village and this is still noticeable nowadays as a result of the strong village stability in T'in society. When a woman marries, she does not normally take her husband's surname if it is different from her own, but a man marrying a woman from another village and moving to his wife's village is expected to change his surname in favour of his wife's surname.

There are few problems associated with the process of growing-up in these tightly-knit communities where everyone is regarded as more or less related to everyone else. Puberty takes place quite gradually and smoothly. No *rites de passage* are observed in this connection and it is not considered to be a crisis.

Pre-marital sexual relationships seldom occur, for they are very strongly disapproved by the village spirit to whom a calf must be sacrificed if their prohibition is broken. Prostitution would be quite unthinkable and simply does not exist in traditional T'in society.

Courtship tends to be brief, because marriage often takes place shortly after puberty at least for the girls. It is usual for the girls to marry at a very early age, frequently when they are about thirteen or fourteen. This is especially the case if the girl's parents need additional help, for they will then have her husband to work with them. Boys marry somewhat later, typically around the age of eighteen or nineteen.

When a young man wishes to marry a young girl, he requests his parents to contact the girl's parents. The latter will give their reply after consulting their daughter. If all parties concerned agree, the village *khawcam* (shaman and priest) selects an auspicious day for the wedding and the boy moves to the girl's parents' house where he stays until the morning of the wedding day.

The village *khawcam* plays a leading part in the wedding ceremonies which take place both at the house of the boy's parents and at the house of the girl's parents. Much simpler wedding ceremonies are performed when it is not a first marriage for the girl.

The bride and the groom both don new clothes, the bride adorning herself in addition with beads, flowers and other ornaments. The village *khawcam* and other men first go to the groom's parents' house. The groom throws some rice husks around him for good luck. The village *khawcam* and other men dip sticks in and out of a bowl filled with fresh water and rice husks uttering appropriate formulae at the same time. Then, they drink rice alcohol through long reeds used as drinking straws. The groom thus takes leave of his parents' house spirits. Later on, the bride and her father go and fetch the groom to bring him to their house. A ceremony, similar to the one just described, is conducted at the bride's parents' house where the groom is thus introduced to the house spirits. He will have to worship them as if they were his own ancestors.

Village endogamy is common practice and strongly reinforces village cohesion and village unity. Miscegenation is relatively rare, even though T'in villagers often live in close proximity to other ethnic groups. There is some intermarriage with the

Khmu and with the Tai whose marriage regulations and cultural values are generally compatible and present many analogies with those of the T'in, but we do not know of any cases of mixed marriage with Hmong (Meo) or Mien (Yao).

Polygyny is not practised both for economic and for ideological reasons, but serial monogamy is quite current and few individuals go through adult life with the same marriage partner. It is a relatively simple matter for either the husband or the wife to initiate divorce by contacting the village elders and they frequently avail themselves of this solution to terminate a marriage. Sterility is a common cause for divorce and marriage stability tends to be particularly low for childless couples. Chronic ill health is another acceptable reason for requesting a divorce. Adultery, homesickness on the part of the husband if he came from another village and incompatibility between the husband and his father-in-law may also result in breaking up a marriage.

When a person approaches death, the village *khawcam* and other men come to drink rice alcohol and provide solace for the survivors.

When a person dies, the village *khawcam* and other men wrap his or her body in a mat which they attach to a bamboo pole. In this fashion, they take the body to a burial place somewhere in the jungle. Only men with strong *mal* can participate in these last rites, for the spirits haunting the burial ground may prove to be too dangerous for women and children. Men are buried without anything, but women are buried with a small provision of rice, tobacco, betel and *miang*. The grave is then covered with leaves and branches. Back in the village, a household ritual is performed to strengthen the *mal* of the surviving members of the household.

Ten days later, another ceremony takes place in the house to divine the fate of the deceased person. It is believed that every person becomes a spirit after death, so that he or she is eventually reunited with his or her parents. The spirits of deceased relatives thus live on in the house. Food offerings must be made now and then to these parental and ancestral spirits of the house. Such continuity again reinforces family unity and social cohesion.

The family unit

The basic social unit is the matrilineal family which may be of the nuclear type or of the extended type. The nuclear family, comprising a man, a woman and their children, is common. The extended family, consisting of a nuclear family, plus the husband (or husbands) and the child (or children) of one or more married daughters, is ideal within the context of T'in cultural values.



Figure 5. Many economic and social activities are shared by husband and wife.



Figure 6. Yuan (Northern Thai) clothing styles increasingly replace T'in traditional dress.



Figure 7. Husking rice is a major chore which is done by women and especially young girls.



Figure 8. *Taleo* are placed on the roofs of houses where religious ceremonies are performed.

Matrilocal residence entails bride service. Once he has moved to his bride's parent's house, a young man must work for his new household. If he gives satisfaction and if he gets along with his affinal relatives, he may remain in this household for up to several years. The longer the period of matrilocal residence and bride service, the stronger the marriage ties are. A practical limit to the duration of matrilocal residence and bride service is that imposed by the size of the house. If the household includes several married daughters with their husbands and children, sooner or later there comes a time when the house becomes overcrowded. A new house is then built co-operatively for the eldest daughter together with her husband and children.

Each married daughter eventually gets her own house, except the youngest daughter who stays in the parental home together with her husband and children. It is the youngest daughter, together with her husband, who will take care of her parents when they become old. It is also the youngest daughter who will inherit the house when her last surviving parent dies. Her husband will then become the head of the household.

Caring for the parents in their old age as well as for the children in their early life is an extremely important function of the family unit. It is an essential factor in the very strong sense of continuity which exists in the family unit. This sense of continuity is necessarily through the female line, for husbands may move out of the household to be replaced by others. A supernatural sanction and a permanent thread are provided by the worship of parents and ancestors after their death.

In such a system, it is obvious that female children are more desirable than male children. A daughter will not only continue to contribute her labour to the household economy during the early stages of her marriage, but she will also bring in an additional man who will contribute his labour for a period of years. In the case of a youngest daughter, she and her husband will contribute their labour to the household for an indefinite period. In addition, a youngest daughter will repay the care her parents gave her in early childhood by making sure that they do not starve when they become too old to produce enough rice for their own needs. By contrast, a son moves away from his parental home just when he becomes fully grown and therefore he ceases early to contribute to the manpower and economy of his original household.

Childless couples are likely to adopt a girl lest they become destitute in their old age. The adopted girl may be one of the daughters, though not the youngest daughter, of a relative with a large family.

Patrilocal residence traditionally occurs only when a household has no daughters. It is not regarded as desirable for the bride because of the obvious disadvantages of patrilocal residence for the female party. Patrilocal marriages therefore tend to involve only girls who come from relatively low status households.

The descent system is bilateral, that is descent is reckoned both through the mother and through the father. There are no lineages, clans or other social institutions based on kinship apart from the family and the household.

Status differences are based more on age than on sex and kinship terms reflect this by stressing age rather than sex. For instance, one talks about one's elder sibling or younger sibling rather than about one's brother or sister. Distinctions are made for the grandparents, for the parents' siblings and for the spouse's parents, in each case to indicate whether they are related through the mother or through the father. Differences between lineal and collateral relatives as well as between consanguineous and affinal relatives are also expressed in the kinship terminology. Distant relatives of a person's own generation are casually called elder sibling or younger sibling, according to the relative ages of the persons through whom they are related. Thus the kinship group may often include most of the members of the village community.

The village community

The T'in do not constitute a tribe or tribes. There is no tribal consciousness at all. Loyalty is limited to the village and does not extend to any larger entity. While language and culture are common to all T'in—with some dialectical and local variations—their institutions and their leaders are different in each village. There are no institutions and no leaders with power or influence in more than a single village. There are no such things as clans or lineages cutting across village lines. Even the religious beliefs and rituals are largely peculiar to each village as they are centred on local spirits. There is no social, political or ideological organisation above the village level. The village community is therefore a self-contained social, political and ideological unit.

The village community is a very closely knit group made up of households and individuals many of whom are related by kinship ties. Villages being largely endogamous, the fabric of village society is very tight and there are strong pressures for harmonious social relations within the village community. The endogamous unit includes all the population of the village, so that no one is excluded on the basis of class or caste. In fact, there are no such things as classes or castes to divide loyalties. Everyone in a particular village may participate in the social life of the village and marry within the village.

There is a deeply democratic attitude which tolerates only comparatively minor differences in social status and personal influence. As no one has much power or much wealth, there is no solid basis for social stratification. Individual differences in status and prestige are based primarily on age and secondarily on sex.

The village council is certainly a very ancient traditional institution, whereas village headmanship is probably a much more recent office, at least in its present form. The meetings of the village council being quite informal, everyone may be present and all married men resident in the village may participate in the discussions, but in practice only household heads have a real say in it.

The most influential members of the village council are naturally men who enjoy a high status and a high prestige owing to their age, their experience and their reputation for sound reasoning. Age is very important not only in itself, but also for the amount of experience and the degree of wisdom which are often associated with it. It is usually a group of elder men which, next to the village *khawcam*, takes the leading part in weddings, funerals and many other rituals. Wealth seems to be a factor mainly to the extent that it may reflect personal qualities, native intelligence and special skills.

Normally the most influential man in the village council is the village *khawcam*. He is, by virtue of his office, a man with high status and high prestige. His authority is limited to the religious field, but he also has great influence in political matters.

A person may be recommended for the position of village headman by the retiring headman. He is selected by the village council, but he has to be appointed by the district officer. He is likely to have already enjoyed high status and high prestige before his appointment to this office. The essential function of the village headman is to form a link between the administrative apparatus of a modern state and the traditional organisation of a village community. He is responsible for the application of government directives in his own village. He is supposed to assign numbers to each house in the village and to keep count of the members in each household. He assesses each household in order to levy house tax for the central government. He has to make sure that every household which makes liquor purchases a licence from the district office. He must provide unpaid labour from his village to work on road construction, maintenance and repair. He must delegate villagers to work without pay on such projects as building schools and teachers' houses or carrying loads for touring officials trekking in the jungle. The village headman is also expected to pass on to the villages varied information regarding national laws (including laws affecting forestry, hunting and fishing) as well as advice from specialised agencies concerning agricultural methods, health care, etc. Finally, he reports serious crimes to the police authorities. For all these services, he receives a small monthly stipend from the state.

The village headman may appoint assistant headmen, especially if some outlying hamlets are administratively attached to his village. He sometimes also delegates his duties and responsibilities to minor office holders for specific purposes.

The *riit* is an unwritten code which includes all the traditions, customs and laws of the T'in (cf. the *adat* of the various Indonesian peoples). It determines socially acceptable behaviour and socially acceptable beliefs. It is solidly anchored to the social organization based on the matrilineal extended family and linked to ancestor spirit worship.

Verbal quarrels, physical fights and all other types of behaviour which disturb the peace and harmony of village life are offensive to the village spirit. Whenever he is angry, the village spirit may vent his wrath upon any member of the village or on the village as a whole by causing sickness, epidemics, crop failure or natural calamities. Consequently, infractions of customary law are the concern of the village community as a whole. This is one of the keys to the high degree of harmony in social relationships which is observed in T'in society.

Disputes within a household are a private matter, although elders or other outsiders may be called upon to help solve the problem. Disputes involving more than one household are usually mediated by outsiders, most often elders. Serious infractions of customary law are not very common. They are dealt with by the village *khawcam* acting more or less as a judge in consultation with the village elders acting as a sort of informal jury. Punishment is usually in the form of fines or sacrifices which are required to expiate the fault committed as it is considered offensive to the village spirit. Very grave cases call for ostracism, that is actual expulsion from the village.

Religious traditions

In T'in society, religious traditions are extremely important. Religious beliefs and rituals do not form a separate part of life, divorced from ordinary activities. On the contrary, they are thoroughly integrated with the social organisation and with everyday life. They are fully consistent with the necessity of earning a living and the desirability of maintaining good health.

The T'in strive to attain and maintain harmony between themselves, the natural world and the supernatural world. Essentially, the good things of life depend on good crops to ensure a plentiful food supply and on good health to enable one to enjoy this abundance. In the present state of their medical and meteorological knowledge, both health and crops are dependent upon unknown factors. The responsibility for bad health and poor crops is therefore attributed to supernatural forces.

The supernatural world is full of spirits who are not necessarily intrinsically evil, but who may become harmful when they are offended even if this is only by inadvertence. It is therefore necessary for one to exercise caution and to be tactful when dealing with unknown forces. One must propitiate spirits whenever one undertakes an important activity, including major agricultural work. Offerings and sacrifices must be made to the spirits on various occasions, sometimes by the village *khawcam* and sometimes by the household head.

Discontented spirits are believed to harm health and crops, causing sickness and food shortage. Sacrifices must consequently be performed at appropriate times, often preventively, to propitiate potentially malevolent spirits. All spirits can eventually be appeased, but they can never be controlled.

There are no formal religious institutions and no full-time religious specialists. Everyone may participate in religious rituals, although the more crucial parts are played either by the household head or by a religious specialist.

A village *khawcam* is selected from among the men of the village, the methods of selection being some form of divination. He is usually selected by his own predecessor when the latter retires. If the previous incumbent has died without having named his successor, a new village *khawcam* is chosen by one of the most influential men in the village. A *khawcam* is primarily a sort of middleman between the village spirit and the village population. His role is believed to be determinant for the welfare of the villagers. He has some authority in the village, for he has to make sure that every villager observes certain ceremonies and respects certain tabus. He alone can perform sacrifices and make offerings to the village spirit on behalf of the village as a whole. His role is essential in judging infractions and settling disputes as well as in wedding ceremonies, funeral ceremonies, house blessings and all annual rituals which concern the whole village community. He is therefore a highly respected figure with a very high status within his own village. However, he is only a part-time specialist and he is also a rice farmer like everyone else in the village.

Apart from him, there are various other part-time religious specialists. These are otherwise ordinary villagers who have learned special formulae necessary to perform certain rituals. They are always adult males, but they do not need any special qualifications. Some know formulae with curative powers, others have memorized incantations against witchcraft, while yet others may be competent to deal with particular types of spirit. Each of these specialists must put his skill at the disposal of the village community with little or no remuneration for it.

The relationship between religion and medicine cannot be overstressed, sickness being considered to be a symptom of disharmony between the affected person and the

spirit world or at least a particular spirit. There are many kinds of spirits in the spirit world. There are village spirits, field spirits, jungle spirits and numerous spirits associated with various natural features and natural phenomena. There are also the innumerable spirits of the dead, for everyone becomes a spirit after death. As in many other societies, the spirits of persons whose lives ended through violent death or who died in somewhat unusual circumstances are very much feared.

Human beings are believed to have more of less *mal*, a concept which may perhaps be translated as "life force" or "life essence" rather than "soul". It is not altogether clear whether *mal* can be counted, but some persons state—as some of the lowlanders do—that they have thirty-two *mal*. Loss of *mal* is deemed to have been caused by offended, angry or evil spirits. The loss of part of one's *mal* is said to result in sickness and the loss of all of one's *mal* is thought to provoke death. *Mal* may be cajoled into reintegrating the body of a sick person, thus leading to his or her recovery. For this, a ceremony involving the reciting of incantations and the sacrifice of an animal is necessary.

Diagnosis is arrived at through divination. Once the cause of sickness has been determined, a religious specialist sacrifices an animal—sometimes a pig, more often a chicken—for blood is believed to be indispensable to appease an offended spirit and to retrieve lost *mal*. He then makes offerings, accompanied by the appropriate formulae, to assuage the wrathful spirit and to entice the lost *mal* to return to the patient's body. These offerings consist of some of the flesh of the sacrificed animal as well as other food, not forgetting things that are normally taken after a good meal, such as *miang*, tobacco and betel. A string is then attached to the wrist of the sick person in order to keep the *mal* tied to him or her.

If a patient does not recover even after all the appropriate herbal remedies have been applied, all the necessary animal sacrifices have been made and all the relevant curative formulae have been recited by trained specialists, his or her condition is often attributed to the evil practices of a warlock.

In such circumstances, it is generally believed that a warlock has inflicted serious illness upon his victim by causing a foreign object to enter the unfortunate person's body. It is then indispensable to call upon the services of a specialist proficient in the art of sucking intruding objects out of a victim's body. Witchcraft is sometimes said to have been introduced from the lowlands, but the T'in themselves are often accused of witchcraft by their lowland neighbours. It does not seem to be very frequent for someone to be convicted of witchcraft, but, when this happens, traditional law requires the most severe punishment.

Sexual relations between unmarried partners may be offensive to the village spirit as well as to the house spirits of the female party and it must be atoned by the sacrifice of a calf or a pig. Sexual relations involving married partners, on the other hand, offends only the husband of the female party while the village spirit and the house spirits remain unconcerned. There is certainly a direct relation with the fact that fornication involving unmarried girls is extremely rare while adultery involving married women is quite common.

There is a holiday every ten years, but it does not always fall on the same day in all villages. On this holiday, no work is supposed to be performed in the rice swiddens. Certain other tabus, which may vary from one place to another, are also observed to prevent the village spirit from being offended. The villagers often go out of the village on that day, the men sometimes hunting or fishing, the women and children sometimes fishing or collecting jungle products.

The religious calendar and the agricultural cycle are very closely interconnected for rice as the staff of life is so important that the main annual religious ceremonies are directly related to its cultivation.

At least as far as rice is concerned, the agricultural cycle may be considered to begin shortly after the rice harvest when each household head selects and lays claim to the area which he intends to clear to grow his next rice crop. He performs a simple ritual to request formally the local spirits to vacate the field so as not to be inconvenienced by the destruction of vegetation by metal and fire (two dangerous elements).

The first important ceremony in the annual cycle is the New Year which coincides with that of the lowlanders and takes place in the middle of April. On the first day, the spirits of the old year are noisily driven out of the village. On the second day, there is a ban on travel from village to village because of the spirits who are believed to be wandering about. On the third day, the village *khawcam* and other men visit each house and recite incantations to ask the spirits of the old year to leave the premises and the spirits of the new year to be kind to the inhabitants. They dip sticks in and out of bowls containing fresh water and rice husks, then they drink rice alcohol specially prepared for this occasion (they drink it through long "straws" made of reeds). Offerings are placed on each path or trail leading in and out of the village to entice potentially malevolent spirits to leave the area. Once he has drunk enough rice alcohol, the *khawcam* may become possessed by the village spirit who makes his will known through the mouth of the *khawcam*.

Just before rice is sown, the village *khawcam* sacrifices a pig whose owner is compensated by the village community. He offers some pork to the village spirit and asks for his blessing as sowing is about to start. After this little ceremony has been performed, the *khawcam* may plant his field and the other villagers follow suit.

Before the rice begins to show its head, the *khawcam* sacrifices a chicken to the village spirit and begs him to preserve the crops from the insects which could ruin them at this stage. Each household head is expected to sacrifice a dog to the spirit of his field, making a plea for a good crop as he accomplishes this ritual.

When the rice begins to show its head, a major festival lasting several days is held. The *mal* of rice is invited to a feast in the hope that this will ensure a good crop. During the first few days, the villagers make musical instruments and gather various foods in preparation for the festival. Each household head brings home a small sample of the new grain which symbolizes the *mal* of rice. He then makes offerings of food to the *mal* of rice and sacrifices a chicken in its honour, asking at the same time for an abundant crop. The new grain is later brought back to the field where vegetables, betel and other things are left as offerings. On the last day of this festival, sweet glutinous rice is made while various tabus are observed. Offerings of these sweets are made to the village spirit and a chicken is sacrificed for the occasion.

At harvest time, *taleo* are made out of bamboo strips and are placed at strategic spots as a protection against evil spirits. When the rice is threshed, red flowers, steamed rice, betel nuts and candles are disposed around the threshing mat again as a protective measure against potentially noxious unknown forces.

When a field is abandoned after the harvest, a little ceremony with food offerings is performed so that the field is formally returned to the spirits which normally reside in it.

On certain occasions, the village *khawcam* sacrifices a calf to the village spirit in order to keep the village free from epidemics. The owner of the calf is always at least partially compensated by the other villagers.

Recent trends

Although their villages are often remote, the T'in are never totally isolated. Knowledge of other languages may be taken as a good index of the frequency and intensity of their relations with their neighbours belonging to different ethnic groups. Most T'in men have at least a working knowledge of Yuan, while most T'in women have only a smattering of that language. There are some villages in the Lao province of Xagnaboury whose inhabitants now speak only Yuan (Ñuan), although they still

call themselves "Pray". A small number of T'in men especially among those who purchase opium from highlanders, also have a reasonably good knowledge of Hmong (Meo).

However, contacts with the outside world are very limited under normal conditions. As we have seen, miscegenation is never very widespread. T'in social organisation, religious traditions and cultural values discourage it. Migration to the lowlands by individuals is also quite rare. The family unit and the village community are too closely knit to favour it.

There are of course some commercial relations. The T'in who live close enough to large lowland villages with shops and markets—such as Lae, Sop Kon and Pua—make occasional trips there for trading purposes. They bring *miang*, vegetables, jungle products (including the skins of deer, bears, tigers and other wild animals). In exchange for their goods, they obtain rice, medicines, blankets, cloth, clothes, towels, matches, pots, pans, axes, sickles, electric torches, beads, ear-rings and a wide range of other manufactured items. The more isolated villagers have only very infrequent contacts with outsiders, including valley people who visit T'in villages with pony or ox caravans in search of *miang*, mainly during the cold season. Once in a while, a quack may arrive in a T'in village with hypodermic needles and some pills to fleece the trustful villagers. Chinese shopkeepers down in the valleys also sometimes take unfair advantage of the T'in who are not always familiar with current prices and trading practices. As a result of unhappy past experiences, many villagers prefer to avoid all contacts with the outside world which furthermore is believed to be full of unknown and dangerous spirits (Dessaint 1975: 13–15).

The T'in have shown only moderate interest in Buddhism and they have been quite unenthusiastic about Christianity. Four or five villages have Buddhist temples, but they have become quite dilapidated as they are totally neglected by the local population. In the presence of outsiders, some individuals profess to be Buddhist and some of them occasionally attend a Buddhist ceremony or festival in the lowlands. However, these individuals constitute only a tiny minority and they do not practise Buddhism on anything like a regular basis. While peasants in the nearby lowlands observe both animistic practices to ensure good health and good crops and Buddhist practices to accumulate merit for their afterlife and for their rebirth in their next life, the T'in observe only animistic practices on a regular basis.

In the past two decades, American Protestant missionaries have visited many T'in villages and one of them even spent some years in a T'in village. However, the number of converts is very small and these very few converts are marginal individuals already more or less estranged from T'in society.

Social and cultural changes have taken place, especially as a result of formal schooling and government projects. Mass media generally do not reach more than a tiny minority of the T'in and their impact is therefore still very limited (Dessaint 1975: 18-19). Road construction has led to more convenient and more frequent contacts with the lowland population. These contacts, which may take place in T'in villages as well as in Tai villages and market towns, sometimes have far-reaching consequences.

In the 1960's and 1970's the Border Patrol Police has had an increasing influence on the social system and social behaviour of the T'in in Thailand. The presence of troops in some districts has also had considerable effects on the local population. The displaced persons who have spent a number of years in relocation camps have, of course, suffered severe disturbances in their social structure and their social life as well as in their material welfare and in their personal feelings.

The processes of acculturation and assimilation have undoubtedly been going on for many generations and there is no doubt that some lowlanders in northern Thailand and northern Laos have T'in ancestors. However, the very strong social fabric and the equally strong conservative tendencies among the T'in make this process extremely slow. The rate of acculturation is definitely slower than that of the linguistically related Khmu and not necessarily faster than that of the Hmong (Meo) and Mien (Yao) who have migrated from China in quite recent periods and who have firmly maintained their own identity within the framework of the modern state of Thailand.

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Figure 9. What future for today's T'ni children ?

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