A Place of Belonging in Myths and Memories: The Origin and Early History of the Imagined Tai Khuen Nation (Chiang Tung/Kyaingtong, Myanmar)

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This study is about a borderland between three dominant cultures: the Burmese, the Chinese, and the Siamese/Thai, i.e., the former Shan State of Chiang Tung. The region of Chiang Tung (also transcribed Keng Tung, Kyaingtong) lies in the Eastern Shan State of Myanmar/Burma in Upper Southeast Asia and borders on Thailand, China, and Laos. The majority of the people living in Chiang Tung are called Tai Khuen. This paper explores the origin and early history of the imagined Tai Khuen nation in Chiang Tung through myths and memories recorded in the *Chiang Tung Chronicle* (CTC). Myths and memories may be used to tell us something of what a people has held and holds to be of lasting value. Important for a common imagined community is a myth of common ancestry. The CTC narrates the way in which the Khuen people understand the origin and early history of the place where they live—the "imagined Khuen nation." The myths and memories recorded in the CTC express a sense of place and belonging for the Tai Khuen people.

Keywords: borderland, narratives, Chiang Tung, Kyaingtong, Myanmar, imagined nation, Tai Khuen, Upper Southeast Asia

Introduction

The region of Chiang Tung (also transcribed Keng Tung or Kyaingtong; its classical names in Sanskrit are Khemaraṭṭha and Tuṅgapūri) lies in the Eastern Shan State of Myanmar/Burma in Upper Southeast Asia, between the two great rivers Salween and Mekong, and bordering on Thailand, China, and Laos. Considering its exposed situation in a borderland between larger and more powerful nations, it is no surprise that myths and memories of the origin and early history of Chiang Tung evoke a sense of place and belonging for the Khuen people. Legend is a powerful force for binding people together in a sense of shared origins. Myths and legends may give an indication of what a people has held and holds

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to be of lasting value. A sense of belonging to a specific geographic place, the place of domicile or place of birth, and the sense of belonging to a group of people who have something in common are essential for many people in engendering a sense of their own unique identity. Central in this paper is a specific geographic place, and the people who consider it to be their place of belonging.

Following the influential writings of Benedict Anderson (2006) and others, we can see a nation as a socially constructed community, imagined by the people who perceive themselves to be part of that group: "It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson 2006, 6). There is reason to consider Chiang Tung to be such an imagined nation in the minds of the Khuen people. Central to an imagined community is, arguably, a myth of common ancestry. Therefore, this paper will focus on the myths and memories that narrate the origin and early history of Chiang Tung, which the Khuen people consider to be their place of belonging.

The myths, legends, stories, and historical narratives[1] we will use in this study are taken from a Tai-language chronicle, the *Chiang Tung Chronicle* (CTC), translated by Sao Saimong Mangrai into English and called by him the *Jengtung State Chronicle* (Sāimöng Mangrāi 1981, 208–279).[2] Tai chronicles (*tamnan*) are of two general kinds: a secular *mueang* chronicle, which is primarily about the history of a royal line, dynasty, or kingdom; and a more sacred narrative, which concentrates on the history of Buddhism or local Buddhist temples or sculptures (Sarassawadee 2005, 3–5). The CTC is a *mueang* chronicle about the history of the city-state of Chiang Tung, but it includes a number of mythological, sacred, and Buddhist elements, especially in the first half of the text, which deals with origins and early history.

1) In this article these will be described as "myths and memories" for the sake of simplicity.

2) This translated version is only one of several preserved versions of the CTC. There are at least two more versions that have been transcribed into the Thai script, but not translated. They are published as: *Tamnan Meuang Chiang Tung*, transcribed by Thawi Sawangpanyankun (Chiang Mai: Chiang Mai University, 1984); and *Tamnan Mangrai Chiang Mai Chiang Tung* (Chiang Mai: Social Research Institute, 1993). Only the English translation by Sao Saimong Mangrai has been used in this study. He translates the name of the document as *Jengtung State Chronicle*, but in conformity with recent literature I will instead refer to it as *Chiang Tung Chronicle* (CTC). The extracts follow the English translation by Sao Saimong Mangrai but have undergone stylistic revision to make the text more readable.

A Borderland

In the map from 1918 pictured in Fig. 1, the exposed location of Chiang Tung, lying between the powerful cultures of the Burmese, Chinese, and Siamese/Thai, is evident. This location, in between more powerful empires, has made the whole Chiang Tung area a borderland from a historical point of view. Since ancient times, it has been a crossroads for trade connecting Yunnan/Chiang Rung in the north, Taunggyi/Ava/Mandalay in the west, Luang Prabang in the east, and Chiang Rai/Chiang Mai in the south. The ethnic majority living in Chiang Tung are called Tai Khuen and consider themselves to be an ethnic group comparable to the Tai Yuan, Tai Lue, Tai Dam, and others within the larger group of Tai-speaking peoples.[3)]

The principality of Chiang Tung was established during the late thirteenth century, when King Mangrai of Chiang Rai/Chiang Mai conquered the area from the Lua ethnic group and populated it with Tai-speaking people. The defeat of the Lua people and the establishing of Chiang Tung by Mangrai is a myth of Khuen common ancestry, a myth that has been repeated during its long history and is still repeated today in oral and written narrations.

It is clear that the Khuen people in Chiang Tung have always been aware of its exposed situation in a borderland between larger and more powerful nations. Their vulnerable, exposed location, with major powers on all sides, makes the whole area a borderland with frontiers with China, Laos, and Thailand as well as a natural frontier—high mountains and the Salween River—with the rest of the Shan States in Myanmar. This study is therefore not a study of borders between nation-states. It is instead about a borderland between three dominant cultures: the Burmese, the Chinese, and the Siamese/Thai, i.e., the former Shan State of Chiang Tung.

The History of Chiang Tung and Its Position vis-à-vis Larger States

During its long history of being situated between the more dominant cultures of the Burmese, the Chinese, and the Siamese/Thai—and, from the nineteenth century, the colonial powers—the Tai Khuen of Chiang Tung have experienced both cultural highs and disasters. Ever since its origin in the thirteenth century, Chiang Tung has been part

3) They use the name Khuen for themselves, but the Burmese call them Shan, grouping them together with all Tai-speaking peoples in Myanmar. Thai people call them and all Tai-speaking groups outside Thailand Tai Yai (Big Tai). The Shan in Myanmar, including the Tai Khuen, often call themselves simply Tai.

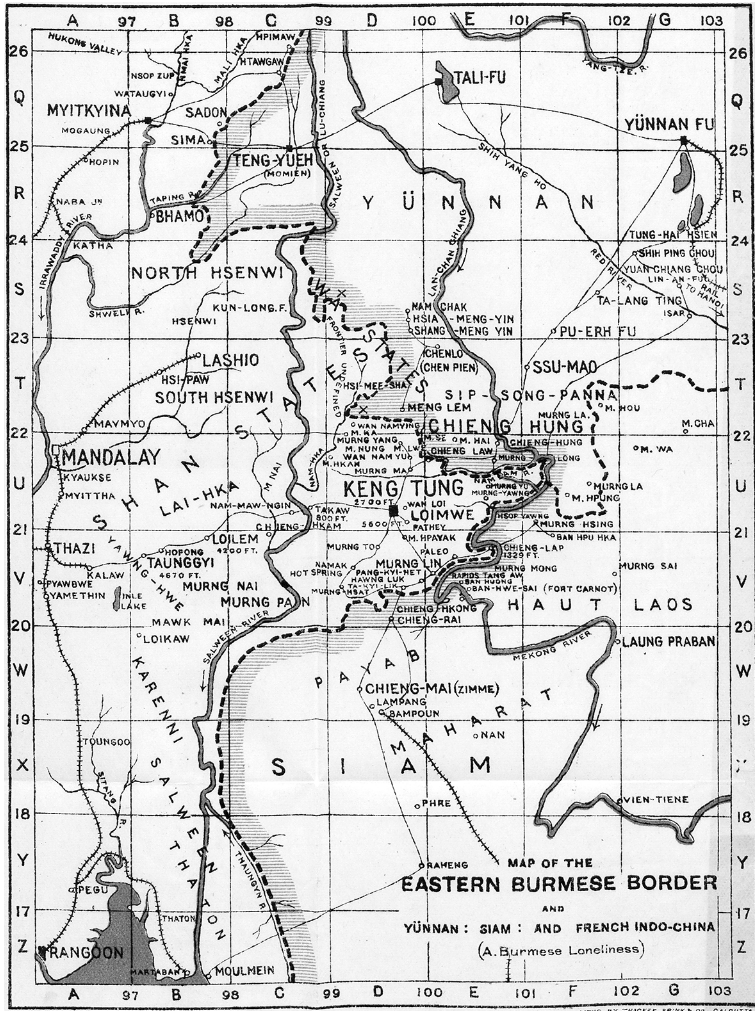

Fig. 1 Map of the Eastern Burmese Border and Yunnan, Siam, and French Indo-China
Source: Enriquez (1918)

of a political power game.

The aim of the Tai people in establishing Chiang Tung in the north was to create a buffer against China (Sarassawadee 2005, 100). From the thirteenth century onward, Chiang Tung was part of the northern Tai cultural area called Lan Na, which consisted of a few large and many smaller autonomous or semi-autonomous principalities or city-states (*mueang*). These ancient *mueang* were, of course, not the same as a modern "nation-state," nor was Lan Na itself a nation-state. They were connected via intricately

knitted relationships with one another and with the central and most important city-state, Chiang Mai. Two or more *mueang* could overlap with one another and possessed multiple loyalties and identities. For more details about the historical characteristics of these city-states, see Grabowsky (2004, 31–40). Thongchai Winichakul calls the border between different *mueang* a "border without boundary line," and he also points out that small city-states paid tribute to bigger ones, and that it was not uncommon to pay tribute to two competing ones (Thongchai 1994, 75, 97). The borders between nation-states in Upper Southeast Asia today owe much of their existence to colonial state making and have divided people who share much of the same culture and language. The toponym Lan Na is today often used by Thai scholars to refer only to the eight provinces of what is today Northern Thailand, namely, Chiang Mai, Lamphun, Lampang, Chiang Rai, Phayao, Phrae, Nan, and Mae Hong Son. But the term Lan Na can also be used to refer to a larger area, Greater Lan Na, comprising not only the eight northern provinces but also the whole region east of the Salween River, including Chiang Tung. Sometimes Chiang Rung in Sipsong Panna, Yunnan, and part of northwestern Laos are included in Lan Na.

From the beginning, relations between Chiang Mai and Chiang Tung were very close; and the ruler in Chiang Mai sent princes to rule the area, although later on the rulers of Chiang Tung established a succession of their own (Sarassawadee 2005, 100–101). The connection with Chiang Mai was never totally broken, even when the whole of Lan Na fell to the Burmese in 1558. Lan Na was under Burmese rule for more than two hundred years before it swore allegiance to Siam in 1774. However, it was not obvious that Chiang Tung should be included in the nation-state of Burma/Myanmar as it is today. Several times in the course of Chiang Tung's history, its future was affected by political decisions or accidental occurrences. The reason why Chiang Tung was neither recognized as an independent state nor incorporated into a neighboring state can be seen as having depended on a number of political decisions during the last two hundred years.

One of these political decisions was made by the ruler Sao Mahakhanan in the early nineteenth century, when he decided to flee from the Siamese invaders and received help from the Burmese to rebuild and repopulate Chiang Tung. The conflict with Siam started in 1802 with an invasion by forces from Chiang Mai, Lamphun, and Lampang, and nearly all the members of the ruling family of Chiang Tung were relocated to Chiang Mai. The only one who escaped was a prince of the ruling family, later known as Sao Mahakhanan. He fled north to Mueang Yang and years later got help from the Burmese to drive away the Siamese and rebuild and repopulate Chiang Tung. The conflict with Siam escalated in the middle of the nineteenth century when Siamese forces from Bangkok besieged the fortified city wall of Chiang Tung several times. The attacks failed, and during the 40-year-long reign of Sao Mahakhanan Chiang Tung gradually recovered

(Ratanaporn 1988, 308–311; Grabowsky 1999, 55–59, 68; Smith 2013).

Later, another political decision that had crucial significance for the future of Chiang Tung was the British decision to conquer the area in 1890. This was a decision the British made after several years of uncertainty. When they conquered Upper Burma and the Shan State in 1886, they did not at first cross the Salween River and enter Chiang Tung. Instead, they considered the Salween to be a natural border and halted at it. The Salween was a natural and cultural border between the more Burmanized Shan states in the west—Western Shan, as J. George Scott called this area (1900–1)—and the more Tai-ized Shan state east of the Salween, i.e., Chiang Tung. Northern Tai chronicles mention Salween as the western and Mekong as the eastern border of Lan Na (Grabowsky 2005, 3–4). The reasons for not annexing the trans-Salween Shan State were military, administrative, and political (Sāimöng Mangrāi 1965, 217). The ruler (*saopha*) of Chiang Tung, Sao Kawng Tai, had already broken away from Burmese control in 1881 and had executed King Thibaw's envoy. The British knew that the ruler was feared, and that may have been one reason why they waited before they dared to enter the trans-Salween area.

Instead of annexing the trans-Salween Shan State, the British sent Lieutenant G. J. Younghusband as a spy to Chiang Tung. Upon his return, he recommended that the British Empire not be extended across the river:

> The Kiang Tung province in the hands of the British can never be anything but a source of weakness to the integrity of the Burmese kingdom. . . . The soundest policy would appear to be to hand over the province to the Chinese; not as a possession, but as a tributary State, making certain stipulations, for trade and defence against aggression, favourable to British interests. (Younghusband 2005 [1888], 13–14)

On his recommendation the British toyed with the idea of letting China take over all rights over Chiang Tung. But, as we know, they changed their minds. And when the ruler Kawng Tai died, the British decided, for fear of the French who had settled on the other side of the Mekong, to overrun Chiang Tung and integrate it into the rest of the Shan States and the British Empire.

Another political decision that affected the future of Chiang Tung was made as late as 1947, during the negotiations for Burmese independence from the British. During the negotiations between ethnic leaders and the Burmese at the Panglong Conference, Sao Zing Zai was sent as the representative of Chiang Tung's ruler (*saopha*). During the Evidence of Witnesses at Maymyo on April 21, 1947, he had the option to choose whether Chiang Tung wished to remain in the Shan States Federation or be annexed as a part of Siam/Thailand. Documents from this hearing testify that he chose the more successful Burma (Aung Tun 2009, 252–254). This decision must also be seen in the context of

recent history: during the Second World War Siamese aircraft had dropped bombs on Chiang Tung, and Thai troops ruled the city from 1942. Chiang Tung become a province of Thailand as Saharat Thai Doem until the end of the war.

Myths and Memories: The *Chiang Tung Chronicle*

Chronicles like the CTC were inscribed by hand on palm leaves and tied into bundles, or were folded manuscripts written on paper produced from the bark of the *sa* tree. They were often copies of earlier manuscripts, and many versions of a given manuscript can therefore exist. The historiographic importance of these chronicles is controversial. They were not composed for purely historiographical purposes. They were recopied many times over long periods, and several were probably handed down orally over many generations. Political chronicles (*tamnan mueang*) like CTC have a strong hagiographic character, imagining the golden history of a specific dynasty. To separate myth from reality is often impossible, and for this study it would also be pointless.

The CTC does not deal only with the Khuen; other ethnic groups are also important in the CTC, including the Chinese, the Lua/Wa/Loi, and the Tai Yuan from Chiang Rai/Chiang Mai. Another important focus of the CTC is the way in which Chiang Tung was established as a future Buddhist center through a visit by the Buddha himself.

The main theme in the first half of the CTC is the place itself and how it became a place to live in for the Tai Khuen ethnic group. It covers the origin and early history of Chiang Tung. This theme—the origins of the place and of the Khuen people—is not only the focus of oral and written legends. It is also a central focus in the annual Songkran festival in April. In this festival, not only Khuen but also the remaining members of the original ethnic group inhabiting the area, Tai Loi people, play an important role. I will return to this later.

We should not consider the CTC to be a written literary work. It is, rather, a compilation of myths, legends, and historical events, with many parts of the chronicle probably having very ancient oral roots. The version of the CTC which we are considering here begins in ancient times and covers the period down to 1935. As Saimong Mangrai (1981, 204) points out, events before paragraph 99 are interlaced with legends and supernatural happenings. It is these myths and memories that are of central interest to us here. Donald K. Swearer holds that "myths and legends may be used to tell us something about the history of a people, but, more significantly, they give a commentary on what a people has held and holds to be of lasting value" (Swearer 1976, 4). The myths and legends in the CTC tell us what the Khuen people understand and believe about the

origin and early history of the place where they live—the "imagined Khuen nation." As Yuval Noah Harari puts it, "Every person is born into a pre-existing imagined order, and his or her desires are shaped from birth by its dominant myths" (Harari 2014, 128). The imagined order of the Khuen people is a Buddhist worldview including myths and memories of the origin of the Khuen people and their place of belonging, i.e., Chiang Tung.

The myths and memories written down in the CTC do represent a living tradition, revealing a definite self-awareness on the part of the Khuen people. We should note that some rudimentary pamphlets were also produced recounting these myths. One, titled "The Four Hermits & Naung Tung Lake," was produced and distributed by the Khuen Cultural and Literature Society of Kengtung in 1997. However, this living tradition of the origin and early history of Chiang Tung is, as far as I know, preserved and transmitted only by a number of elderly men with a particular interest in history and tradition. These are more or less the same individuals who organize the annual Songkran festival in Chiang Tung.

Should these elderly men be seen as representative? Both interest in the stories and the ability to remember and transmit them may depend on class, education, gender, and age. The fact that it is mainly older males who transmit these myths and memories does not mean that the younger generation does not have any knowledge of them, but I believe that these myths and memories are losing their importance.

Another imagined community—a Shan imagined community—now seems to be increasingly significant among the Khuen people of Chiang Tung. In recent times, due to the long struggle over more than 70 years for an independent or federal Shan State, the imagined nation of a united Shan State has had an increasing profile. Modern media and popular culture (Ferguson 2008; Amporn 2011) form a basis for such a Shan imagined community. The Shan New Year celebration in November, with Shan flags, long drums, dance performances, and traditional sporting competitions, has increased in importance since the beginning of the 1990s. This has already affected the people in Chiang Tung, and I believe that it will continue to do so even more in the future. The myths and memories of the origin and early history of Chiang Tung and the imagined Khuen nation may belong to the past and present, but maybe not the future.

It should be borne in mind, however, that an imagined Shan nation is a relatively recent concept. It has its origin in colonial times, as the "Frontier Areas" that were administered separately from "Burma proper," but it was not until 1922, when the British administration created a federated system with a Northern and a Southern Shan State, that the concept of a united Shan State was born (Aung Tun 2009, 167–185). Before that time the administration was decentralized and diverse, without any notion of unification of the different Shan States. Therefore, the new federation was not popular among the

local *saopha* rulers, as it reduced the traditional hereditary rights which allowed them to rule their states. This British-generated federation was the first time the different Shan States were united, and it was a step toward an imagined united Shan nation. Thus, the Khuen people in Chiang Tung have access to different and sometimes competing myths and memories and different sets of loyalties, which may change over time.

A Buddhist Sacred Place

The CTC connects Chiang Tung with the Buddhist world through an alleged visit by the Buddha himself to the region. Justin McDaniel (2002), Swearer (1987), and others have demonstrated that local historical chronicles have been used in other places to connect territory with the lifetime of the historical Buddha. According to the CTC, the place where Chiang Tung was later established was for a long time uninhabited and consisted of a huge lake with several islands that today are hilltops within the town. The Buddha is said to have stood on a hilltop in the lake and to have made a prophecy that a sacred Buddhist city would be established there:

> After the Tathagata has attained Nibbana there will be a hermit coming from the north who will drain away the water of the Dammilap Lake. Six hundred and twenty-nine years after the Nibbana of the Tathagata a king will bring the Sasana and establish it in this state. (*Chiang Tung Chronicle* §12)

This prophecy made by the Buddha makes the place a sacred landscape, with Buddhist sites as symbolic markers of authority for the local rulers. It is also stated in the CTC that the Buddha left eight hairs of his head, which were later enshrined in the golden stupa of Wat Chom Kham on one of the hills in Chiang Tung: "Lord Buddha together with forty-nine disciples (*arahant*) came to the Subhasudebba Hill. There he left behind eight hairs of his head. Ananda Thera took the Lord's iron staff and planted it in the ground" (*Chiang Tung Chronicle* §12).

This Buddhist geography, with a sacred relic from the Buddha himself planted in the ground and enshrined in a sacred stupa, establishes an association between the Buddha, the place of Chiang Tung, and the Khuen nation. This sacralization of the place legitimizes Chiang Tung as a Buddhist center and predicts that it will become a Buddhist sacred place—a Buddha-land (Buddhadesa).

The Chinese Impact

Following this Buddhist prophecy, the CTC establishes a connection between the place and the Chinese Empire. The CTC describes how the place was made habitable by the Chinese. It relates how 150 years after the nirvana of the Buddha, four Chinese princes came to the area and emptied most of the water out of the huge lake. It is related in the CTC that the four princes were also hermits, practiced meditation, and attained supernatural powers. The legend relates that when the four princes said farewell to the emperor, he asked them to let him know if they found suitable places for settlement. After the four princes had been to several different places, they came, it is related, to Comsak Hill,[4)] where they saw the writing and the mark of the staff that Lord Buddha had planted into the ground. The CTC states that a hermit was predicted to come from the north and to drain the lake dry, and that a new kingdom would arise: "Truly, in time to come, a hermit named Candasikkhatunga Rasi will come from the north and drain this lake dry, and a future kingdom will arise bearing the name of that hermit" (*Chiang Tung Chronicle* §22).

The legend relates that the four hermits stayed for seven years and dried out the lake. Only enough water was left for a small lake, which still exists in the middle of the town. The hermits realized that the place was suitable for the construction of a city and returned home to their father, the emperor, and told him this. The emperor gave orders to one of his chiefs to relocate and build a city there. The chief took a large number of families with him, and they started to grow rice. However, the Chinese had difficulty cultivating the soil. The rice plants produced no grain, and the Chinese people starved and many died. After three years, the guardian spirits of the place were not pleased with the Chinese people and told them to leave, which they did: "After three complete years the state's guardian spirits were not pleased . . . saying, 'We do not like the Chinese and are opposed to the construction of the city by them; we shall construct one ourselves in the future'" (*Chiang Tung Chronicle* §31).

As we have seen, this legend about how the area was made habitable includes the acts of the Chinese emperor and his princes. But it also tells us that the place was not suitable for Chinese to live. The CTC notes that the spirits of the area did not want the Chinese to settle down in the place where the Tai Khuen would later live.

The CTC (§82–86) returns later to the relationship with the Chinese and tells of an attempted and unsuccessful invasion from China. Not long after the establishment of Chiang Tung as the home of the Tai Khuen people, the Chinese emperor became aware

4) Comsak Hill is the hill in Chiang Tung where the Roman Catholic church and the big Buddha statue stand today.

of the new settlements. He maintained that he had instructed his son to drain the lake to establish villages and towns. He therefore asked for tribute in the form of rice and elephant tusks:

> The emperor deputed a Chinese man named Yu Ve-ya to come down [to Jengtung] to demand tribute, saying, "You must give 1,000 carrier poles of rice and 1,000 elephant tusks. If that is not possible, give 10 elephants and 100,000 silver [coins]." (*Chiang Tung Chronicle* §82)

The CTC relates how the ruler of Chiang Tung, Namthum, ordered the elders to negotiate with the Chinese. The negotiation failed, and the Chinese besieged the town and started to dig a tunnel with the purpose of forcing an entry. However, the Chinese commander was shot dead by a crossbow. The Chinese changed tactics and started to dam up the river "to create a lake as of old" (CTC §83) and flood the people out. The Chinese, who had made the Chiang Tung valley habitable by emptying most of the water from the huge lake, were now in the process of filling the whole valley with water again. Namthum responded by sending a raft floating down the river to the place where the Chinese were damming the river. The raft (presumably through supernatural means) caused several Chinese soldiers to be struck by lightning, and many died. The rest fled. The story of the attempted invasion from the Chinese ends with a victory for the defenders. This story conveys a sense of pride for the ancient past with Chiang Tung's successful defense against the powerful nation in the north:

> At that time the *braya* gave orders for a raft to be made . . . and, after an invitation to the *deva*, the raft was floated down the river until it stopped at the place where they [the Chinese] were damming the river. Lightning struck that place, and many Chinese died; [the rest] could not stay and all fled. Henceforth the state became happy, prosperous, and stable without a break. (*Chiang Tung Chronicle* §86)

The CTC also tells shortly thereafter of a further attempt to make Chiang Tung a vassal of the Chinese. The emperor ordered an army to come down to defeat the kingdom. But in Chiang Tung there was a renowned warrior, Saengto, who had discovered a jewel in a hornets' nest. He became famous because he fought with the help of an army of hornets and defeated the Chinese invaders. He chased the Chinese army all the way to the emperor, and the palace filled with hornets. The emperor was terrified. Saengto was invited to stay at the palace and marry the emperor's daughter, and he succeeded the emperor. The legend continues that Prince Saengto and his Chinese wife had three sons who became rulers of Alawi (Chiang Rung), Bolaem (Mueang Laem), and Chiang Tung. This legend, told in CTC §89–98, narrated by Scott (1901: II, 1, 398–399), and communicated orally to me, ends with the formation of an alliance between these three city-

states, in Sipsong Panna, Yunnan, and Chiang Tung. The third son became the ruler of Chiang Tung, succeeding King Mangrai and his son. In this way, power in Chiang Tung originates partly from China.

From the Chinese perspective, Lan Na (of which Chiang Tung formed part) was considered to be a vassal state called Babai-Xifu—later Babai-Dadian, abbreviated to Babai—and Chiang Tung was called Menggen (Liew-Herres and Grabowsky 2008, xiii, 20–21; Grabowsky 2010, 205). It is interesting to note that important Lan Na chronicles mention the Chinese only sporadically (Liew-Herres and Grabowsky 2008, 23), but that in the CTC the Chinese play an important role. It is, however, likely that there were many folk stories about the Chinese in the past, but that most of these stories were removed from the official histories of Lan Na in later times. When Captain William C. McLeod visited Chiang Mai in 1837, he was told by local people about a Chinese invasion and how the people of Chiang Mai had tricked the Chinese in a competition to build pagodas. Local people had, he was told, built a high mound of earth with some brickwork on the top, to make the Chinese believe that the people of Chiang Mai were very numerous (Grabowsky and Turton 2003, 317–318; Grabowsky 2010, 201–202).

The contradictory role of the Chinese is particularly worthy of note, both as creators of the place where the Khuen people came to live and as an enemy who tried to use the same procedure in reverse as a weapon to defeat the Khuen, i.e., to fill the whole valley with water again. This is an important part of the myth and memories of the imagined Khuen nation. We have seen here how myths and memories about the defeat of and emancipation from a powerful ancient empire—whose importance is increased further by its role in the founding of the city itself—can play a potent role in constructing an imagined community and nation.

Lua: The "Earthborn" People

As early as the third paragraph of the CTC, Chiang Tung is described, among other things, as Dammilap, the land of the Damilas. "Damila" derives from the Pali language and refers to the Tamils of South India or Sri Lanka. The original inhabitants of the Chiang Tung valley were an ethnic group of Mon-Khmer origin called Lua or Lawa by the chronicles.[5] They seem to be compared to the Tamils because of their darker skin and because they

5) Lua, or Lawa, people speak a Palaungic Austroasiatic (Mon-Khmer) language. Sao Saimong Mangrai spells the name Lva in his translation of the CTC. Other names for them used in different chronicles and inscriptions are Damila, Milakkha, and Kha (slave). The Wa people living on both sides of the Myanmar/China border have their origin in the Lua people who escaped from the Tai conquerors.

were not Buddhists. The CTC describes the Lua people as being autochthonous: born from the soil of Chiang Tung. They are described as the original inhabitants of the place and as having been born out of a gourd. Many years after the Chinese had left the place, the legend relates, the seed of a striped gourd took root and bore many fruits, and then:

> The [seeds of the gourds] scattered and fell into the footprints of oxen, buffaloes, elephants and rhinoceroses and [from them] were born the Lvas who inhabit the country. . . . They built villages and towns and from among them came village heads and regional chiefs. The person whom they chose as their leader was called Mangyoy, and [he] came and lived at Jengkaeu as their overlord for the whole state. (*Chiang Tung Chronicle* §32)

The CTC relates how the Lua people constructed villages and towns all over the region and chose Mangyoy as their leader. He settled in Jengkaeu, at the place which is now Chiang Tung.

The CTC (§60–69) continues by describing how the Tai people came to power in Jengkaeu town, where the Lua people were living. It relates how one day King Mangrai, the founder of Chiang Rai and Chiang Mai, chased a golden deer, a stag. The stag had been created by the gods, and it lured the king into the wilderness in the north. The story narrates how the king was close to catching the stag but failed again and again. Every time the king failed to catch the stag, the place where this happened was given a name. This legend establishes names for places that would become the homeland of the Khuen people:

> The stag acted as if it was lame in the leg, and the *braya* [ruler] chased it for seven days. . . . He reached a place where he thought he had caught up with the stag and dived to seize it, but failed. That region is now known as Mongnom. (*Chiang Tung Chronicle* §61)

The golden stag finally disappeared, and the king had to go back home, but he found that the places he had been to were good locations in which to settle:[6)]

> Braya Mangrai collected his forces and returned home. There Braya Mangrai spoke to the gathering of ministers and officials, saying, "I went to hunt a golden stag and saw a country in the north inhabited by the Lvas where we can build our settlements. We shall take our forces to fight [the Lvas] and drive them all away and will create villages and towns." (*Chiang Tung Chronicle* §62)

King Mangrai therefore started to fight against the original inhabitants. The legend goes that he established himself as the ruler of Chiang Rai. In order to capture Chiang Tung,

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6) A similar story is told about Prince Chao Luang Kham Daeng from Phayao, who chased a golden deer and came to the mountain of Chiang Dao, north of Chiang Mai. That legend establishes the names of places where the Tai people would live in the future (see Swearer *et al.* 2004, 63–67).

he sent infiltrators to bring division to the Lua court of Mangyoy. First, Mangrai sent his two sons with armies against the Lua chief, but this attempt failed. He then chose two Lua leaders loyal to him and sent them to conspire in the Lua court. After three years they were ready to assist in Mangrai's invasion, for by then they had come to be trusted and had been promoted to important positions at the court. They sent a message to Mangrai that it was time for him to act, and so he sent an army north to the Lua city. Mangyoy, who trusted the two spies, was persuaded that the Chiang Rai army was huge and impossible to fight. He therefore tried to escape but was captured.

The CTC thus relates how King Mangrai defeated the Lua people and established the principality (*mueang*) of Chiang Tung. After the Tai ruler conquered Chiang Tung, the Lua people in the region were displaced and most of them moved northward and westward. Those who escaped are today called the Wa and live farther north on both sides of the border between China and Myanmar. The CTC relates that Mangrai commanded his son Namthum to go and rule the state which was on the same spot where the Lua ruler had had his palace.

Namthum brought with him two monks and four Buddha images from Lan Na, from the old Mon (Haripuñjaya) Buddhist tradition, in order to establish Buddhism in the new city and embody the prophecy made by the Buddha. The *Padaeng Chronicle* (Sāimöng Mangrāi 1981, 99–147) describes in more detail how the Flower Garden (Suan Dok or Puppharam) Buddhist tradition and the Red Forest (Padaeng) Buddhist tradition later reached Chiang Tung from Lanka through Ayuthaya and Chiang Mai. Today, the monastic order in Chiang Tung is proud of its ancient heritage, with an old local Buddhist calendar and a unique tradition of Pali recitation. The Khuen monastic order has so far resisted pressure from Burmese authorities to abandon local traditions in favor of Burmese monastic traditions.

It is interesting to note that the Burmese and the rest of the Shan States are of less importance in the CTC in relation to Chiang Tung's origin and early history. The Burmese King Bayinnaung's military actions in the Shan States and Lan Na during the sixteenth century are obviously mentioned, but before that time the Burmese are not mentioned at all. In the CTC there is no connection made between the Bagan Dynasty and Chiang Tung. Despite this, the modern Burmese military has made great efforts to Burmanize the region and to convince the inhabitants, through art and architecture, that Buddhism was established in Chiang Tung by the Pagan Dynasty.[7)]

7) For details, see Karlsson (2012).

Tai Khuen and Tai Loi

The CTC continues with a story about the origin of the Tai Khuen ethnic group. Issues of confrontation and coexistence between two ethnic groups in Southeast Asian myths and legends are often resolved with a marriage between the two groups, for example, when a Tai prince married an indigenous (Mon-Khmer) woman and a new political entity came into being grounded in this marriage (Évrard and Chanthaphilith 2013, 65–66). But in our case, there was no coexistence, only a confrontation, with the victors settling down in the same place—Chiang Tung—from which the indigenous Mon-Khmer people had fled. The victors did not fuse with the indigenous people. Instead, a new group of inhabitants for Chiang Tung was formed through a political decision to populate the area with a loyal people on the part of the victors from Chiang Rai. A neighboring Tai people were persuaded to settle down in Chiang Tung, together with a group of soldiers from Chiang Rai. King Mangrai, or his son Namthum, had to populate the newly conquered town as most of the Lua people had fled. As a replacement population, they selected a group of Tai villagers called Khuen who were living south of the town. The CTC describes them as dressed in special clothes and as having their hair cut in a special way. They were given cowrie shells as payment to persuade them to move to the new town. At the same time, soldiers from Chiang Rai were commanded to settle down together with the Khuen people. The CTC relates that they had to change their clothes and hairstyle in order to integrate: "Thereupon, the *braya* had the gong sounded amongst the people, urging them to give up Yon dress and to cut their hair in the manner of the great Khuens" (*Chiang Tung Chronicle* §81).

It is interesting that the CTC mentions that the new inhabitants were to use similar ethnic markers in clothing and hairstyle. This must have been intended as a way of speeding up the integration of the two peoples, necessary because the Chinese were not far away and it was important to fortify the town quickly before Chinese troops entered from the north.

People from the autochthonous Lua ethnic group who could not escape apparently "begged to be the humble subjects of the kingdom's hills" (CTC §69) and moved up into the mountains around Chiang Tung. They are today called Tai Loi, meaning Tai people living in the hills. They have, over a long period living in the periphery of the Khuen people, changed their cultural, religious, and ethnic identity in such a way that they are now a Tai subgroup and members of the same political-economic system as the majority Tai Khuen. During their long relations with the Tai Khuen they have also adopted Buddhism and speak a Tai language, but with a lot of substrate linguistic material from the Lua (Palaung Mon-Khmer) language. Tai Loi are called Wa Kut by Scott (1900: I, 1,

517–518), meaning "those Wa who were left behind."

The relationship of dependence and loyalty between the Tai Khuen and the Tai Loi was established historically through symbolic actions connected with the Chiang Tung royal court and relating to rights to the land. One of these was the integration of the displaced Lua/Tai Loi into the ceremony to install a new Khuen ruler (*saopha*). The coronation ceremony in the Chiang Tung palace (*haw*) included a symbolic banishing of the Loi people. A group of Tai Loi chiefs were called down from the mountains to the palace and placed on the throne to symbolize the previous rulers. They were given a meal, but before they could finish it they were carried away from the throne. Thereupon the new Tai Khuen ruler ascended the throne and finished the meal. Thus, during the coronation ceremony the old inhabitants were symbolically driven out of the land and banished. The CTC narrates the first symbolic takeover with the following words:

> . . . when the golden palace had been built, the Lva living in Bangung and Bangham were brought down [from their hills] to sit and eat their food on the gem-studded throne in the palace. While they were eating, the Lva were driven out and the *braya* took their place. (*Chiang Tung Chronicle* §80)

It would appear that this symbolic banishing was carried out during every installation of a new ruler (*saopha*) from the thirteenth century until the late nineteenth. The last of these symbolic takeovers occurred when Sao Kawn Kiao Intaleng was installed as *saopha* in 1897 at Chiang Tung palace (Sāimöng Mangrāi 1981, 284n45). Interesting similarities can be recognized in ancient Luang Prabang in the relationship between the Lao people and another "earthborn" Mon-Khmer-speaking group called the Khamu/Kasak. The opposition there was played out in an annual ritual game like hockey, which the Lao always won against the autochthonous people (Stuart-Fox 1998, 51).

The connection between the Khuen and the original inhabitants said to have been born from the soil of Chiang Tung, the Tai Loi, did not end when the coronation ritual ceased. Just as the displaced Tai Loi were made part of the ceremony to install a new Khuen ruler (*saopha*), the Tai Loi people were brought into the Songkran festival, and they remain part of this festival until today.[8] It seems likely that Intraleng wanted to maintain a direct connection with the people of the soil of Chiang Tung living in the mountains outside the city. He chose a group of Tai Loi from a village north of Chiang Tung to perform a drumming ceremony at the Songkran festival. This was intended to increase the prosperity of the Khuen nation, and Scott wrote, "it is considered essential to the public welfare that this ceremony shall be performed every year" (Scott 1901: II, 1, 440).

8) For a more detailed study of the Songkran festival in Chiang Tung, see Karlsson (2013).

The Songkran Festival

The Songkran festival in Chiang Tung is a celebration of the New Year, with clear fertility symbolism and offerings to the spirit of the town (Sao Mueang). There are also traditional recitations (known locally as Mat-recitations) to the spirit by a group of elderly Khuen men. We know that Songkran was certainly celebrated as a fertility ritual in the late nineteenth century. It is generally believed among local people that in earlier times a crafted phallus was brought to the river, a ritual which was believed to generate prosperity for the Khuen nation. Scott writes about the Songkran procession. Under the heading "Phallic Ritual," he states that an "indecent figure is paraded and obscene antics indulged in all along the route" (Scott 1901: II, 1, 440). I have been told that the procession that today accompanies the drum to the river was once called "sending the phallus" instead of "sending the drum." Scott also mentions that a spirit in the shape of a frog was thrown into the river and that the feast was held every year because it was believed to be essential to public welfare.[9)]

The reason for celebrating Songkran is laid out in the CTC. The chronicle states that the festival has its origin in preventing a serious drought that occurred more than six hundred years ago:

> That year the Khuen state had a great drought and the *braya* asked astrologers concerning the drought and absence of rainfall. The astrologers reverenced the *braya*, saying, "This Khuen state is a state with the Moon *nam*. It is meet that a representation of Rahu with the Moon in its mouth be made, sand *cetiya* be constructed on the Sangkhan's day of departure, and then men, elephants, and horses be readied to go in procession to pay reverence on the bank of the Khuen River." (*Chiang Tung Chronicle* §112)

Tai Khuen believe that the festival has been celebrated every year since the great drought of 1410 CE. A group of Tai Loi people, the remains of the defeated indigenous people, are engaged in the festival, in which they play an important though subordinate role, drumming in a 24-hour-long performance during which water is splashed endlessly, believed to ensure prosperity and wealth for Chiang Tung and the imagined Khuen nation. Tai Khuen say that when the original role of Tai Loi in the coronation ceremony came to an end, Tai Loi acquired a role in the annual New Year Songkran festival. All this was probably invented by the ruler Intraleng and is believed to ensure the survival and con-

9) According to this legend, astrologers advised the ruler to fashion a frog, Rahu, and to build *cetiya* (stupas) in order to prevent droughts. I have witnessed how people from Chiang Tung, on the second day of the festival, make a frog out of mud and clay by the river and put a paper moon in its mouth. The master of ceremonies also invites a spirit from the mountain to install itself in the frog. During the last days of the Songkran festival, people make sand stupas and venerate these.

tinued existence of the nation. A performed drama about an imagined community, the Songkran festival links local people to their collective past and to their place of belonging.

Two of the main themes during the festival are fertility and the nation's well-being. These two themes are actually one and the same, as fertility is the basis for the prosperity of the imagined Khuen nation. This is expressed when two Tai Khuen men sitting face to face at a table in front of the drum read aloud a dialogue in the Khuen language. They read questions and answers about the drum and the reason for the drumming. The dialogue makes clear, in seven points, that the drumming is performed so that the bad luck of the old year will disappear, and to welcome the New Year, bringing good luck, water for the farmers, and prosperity for the nation. The dialogue then continues by stating that the drum is beaten also to ensure good luck, good health, and the strength to fight any enemies for the ruler. In sum, the dialogue states that the Songkran festival, with its drumming by the Tai Loi people, is intended to establish fertility, sovereignty, and power for the Tai Khuen nation.[10)]

The Songkran festival is a performed narrative about the history of Chiang Tung and the imagined Tai Khuen nation. It is celebrated as a special local traditional event, deeply embedded in the old history of Chiang Tung and the Tai Khuen people. It is a cultural performance of sovereignty, power, and national identity but also of dependence and loyalty between Tai Khuen and Tai Loi, the original inhabitants of the place.

Conclusion

Myths and memories can tell us a good deal about what a people has held and holds to be of lasting value. Important for an imagined community is a myth of common ancestry. Chiang Tung, today part of Myanmar, has long been a borderland between important empires. Myths and memories about the origin and early history of Chiang Tung that incorporate its relationship with these empires therefore have an important place in the mind of the Khuen people, as we can see in the CTC.

It is possible to distinguish at least three key themes in the myths and memories of the origin and early history of Chiang Tung expressed in the CTC. First, the connection between Buddhism and Chiang Tung is recognized in the CTC when it narrates the visit by the Buddha to the site and his prophecy that a sacred Buddhist city would one day be established there. As the Khuen people see it, they have fulfilled this mission. They are today proud of the ancient Buddhist tradition they practice and believe that it is much

10) I witnessed this dialogue in 2011, 2013, and 2016. I was also given an oral translation of the dialogue.

more original than those of their neighbors, the Burmese and the Thai.

Second, the place where Chiang Tung came to be established is described in the CTC as a borderland and a buffer between the Chinese and the Tai people from Chiang Mai/Chiang Rai. The Chinese were important in making the place habitable, but they were not allowed to settle down. The Khuen people turned back an attempted invasion by the Chinese. It is believed that the Chinese failed to take over Chiang Tung because the local guardian spirits did not want them on their soil.

The third central theme in the CTC is the role in the origin and early history of Chiang Tung of the original inhabitants, the Lua/Tai Loi, born from the local soil. Both the coronation ceremony installing a new Khuen ruler (*saopha*), which took place up to the nineteenth century, and the Songkran festival, still practiced today, express memories of domination and dependence between the Tai Khuen and the defeated Lua/Tai Loi. They express a struggle for the rights over the land—a struggle for an imagined Khuen nation.

The myths and memories written down in the CTC today constitute a living tradition that reveals the self-awareness of the Khuen people. The CTC tells us about the way in which the Khuen people imagine the origin and early history of the place where they live—what can be described as the "imagined Khuen nation." These myths and memories express a sense of place and belonging for the Tai Khuen people. However, it is not certain that the myths and memories of the origin and early history of Chiang Tung have a future. As discussed above, the myths and memories are preserved mainly by elderly people. It is myths and memories about a united Shan nation which may be the future. The predominant "imagined community" for the people of Chiang Tung appears to be increasingly the wider Shan community rather than the local Khuen community.

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