

Ethnicity and the Dara-ang (Palaung) in Thailand¹

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Abstract

This study is about an ethnic group called Palaung, who are known as Pale by the Burmese and the Shan people. During 1982-1984, a group of around 200 Palaung people migrated from Doi Lai, Shan State in the southern part of Myanmar to No Lae Village, Fang District, Chiang Mai Province in the northern part of Thailand. The village is located approximately 5-6 kilometers north of the Ang Khang Royal Project on the Thai-Myanmar border. The group that moved to No Lae call themselves “Dara-ang ren” or “Red Dara-ang” and speak the Dara-ang language of the Palaungic branch of the northern Mon-Khmer sub-groups, Austroasiatic language family. This paper provides brief information about Palaung language classification, the migration into Thailand, locations and demography. Based on Barth (1969)’s “ethnic boundary” and Hobsbawm and Ranger (2000)’s “invented tradition”, the Dara-ang at No Lae have established their own ethnic identity both by an adaptation of the old and an invention of the new, namely dissemination of information about HM the King’s permission to stay at No Lae, women’s beautiful dresses and rattan or bamboo waist hoops, the legend of their ancestor “Roi Ngoen” and the dance, the ritual of making offerings to village guardian spirits and naming.

Keywords: Dara-ang, Palaung, Identity, No Lae, Thailand

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บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้เป็นการศึกษากลุ่มชาติพันธุ์ที่ชาวพม่าและชาวไทยใหญ่เรียกว่า “ปะหล่อง” หรือ “ปะเล” ชาวปะหล่องประมาณ 200 คน ได้เดินทางจากคอคอดตายในรัฐฉาน ทางตอนใต้ของประเทศพม่า เข้ามาในประเทศไทยระหว่างปี พ.ศ. 2525-2527 และได้เข้ามาตั้งหลักแหล่งอยู่ทางตอนเหนือของประเทศไทยที่บ้านนอแล อำเภอฝาง จังหวัดเชียงใหม่ บ้านนอแลตั้งอยู่ห่างจากโครงการหลวงอ่างขางขึ้นไปทางทิศเหนือประมาณ 5-6 กิโลเมตร เป็นหมู่บ้านที่อยู่ชายแดนประเทศไทยและประเทศพม่า ชาวปะหล่องที่โยกย้ายเข้ามาที่นี่เรียกตนเองว่า “คาระอางแดง” ภาษาคาระอางอยู่ในสาขาปะหล่อง (Palaungic branch) ของกลุ่มย่อยมอญ-เขมรเหนือ ในตระกูลภาษาออสโตรเอเชียติก บทความนี้ให้ข้อมูลเบื้องต้นเกี่ยวกับการจัดแบ่งภาษาปะหล่อง การเคลื่อนย้ายเข้ามาในประเทศไทย หมู่บ้านและจำนวนประชากรของชาวคาระอางกลุ่มนี้ในประเทศไทย จากแนวคิดเรื่อง “พรมแดนทางชาติพันธุ์” ของเฟรดริก บาร์ท (1969) และแนวคิดเรื่อง “ประเพณีประดิษฐ์” ของเอริก ฮอบสบอว์ม (2000) ผลการศึกษา ปรากฏว่า ชาวคาระอางที่นอแลสร้างอัตลักษณ์ทางชาติพันธุ์ของกลุ่ม ทั้งจากการปรับใช้ของเก่าในบริบทใหม่ หรือใช้รูปแบบเก่าเพื่อเป้าประสงค์ใหม่ รวมทั้งยังมีการประดิษฐ์ประเพณีเพื่อให้เข้ากับสังคมใหม่ด้วย ไม่ว่าจะเป็นการเล่าเรื่องการเมืองที่มีพระบรมราชานุญาติให้อยู่ในประเทศไทย เครื่องแต่งกายของชาวคาระอางและการสวมแหวนหอยหรือไม้ไผ่ที่เอว ความเชื่อเรื่องการเมืองเป็นลูกหลานของนางหรอยเงินและการฟ้อนรำ “นางหรอยเงิน” หรือพิธีกรรมปีละครั้งเพื่อเซ่นไหว้ศาลประจำหมู่บ้าน รวมไปถึงจนกระทั่ง การตั้งชื่อให้แก่เด็กชาวคาระอางด้วย

คำสำคัญ: คาระอาง, ปะหล่อง, อัตลักษณ์, นอแล, ประเทศไทย

1. Introduction

Dara-ang or Palaung is one of the ethnic groups of which a majority is in Shan state, Myanmar, some in southwestern Yunnan, China and a small number in northern Thailand. There are not many studies on this group of people. Most of the existing works were done by British officials or Christian missionaries. Almost all of them are about the Palaung who live in the northern part of Shan State, but there are almost none about the ones who live in the southern part of Shan. There might be some studies about the Palaung in China-De'ang as they are called by the Chinese, but it is a very difficult source for those who do not know Chinese. In Thailand, the Dara-ang people were first mentioned in various newspaper articles and weekly magazines in 1993 and in a short introductory report about the groups by Sarapi Sila, also in 1993. The Palaung came to settle in Thailand between 1982 and 1984, so this explains why there is no study of the group available before their first arrival. An ethnographic approach to documentary research, integrating field surveys, interview and participatory observation, is used in this study. With reference to Barth's ethnic boundary (1969), together with Hobsbawm and Ranger's invented tradition (2000), this paper aims to investigate the Palaung language classification, the migration of the Dara-ang people into Thailand, the locations and demography in Thailand, and the Dara-ang ethnic identity.

2. The Palaung language classification

Palaung belongs to the Palaung-Wa branch of Mon-Khmer in the Austroasiatic language family (Schmidt, 1906; Sebeok, 1942; Shafer, 1952; Thomas & Headley, 1970; and Diffloth, 1974). Diffloth (1974, p. 480-484), based on Thomas and Headley's 1970 lexicostatistic calculations and some other findings, further classifies Austroasiatic language family into 3 subfamilies – Munda, Nicobarese and Mon-Khmer. The Palaung language belongs to the Mon-Khmer subfamily. Figure 1 below illustrates how it relates to the rest of the Austroasiatic language family.

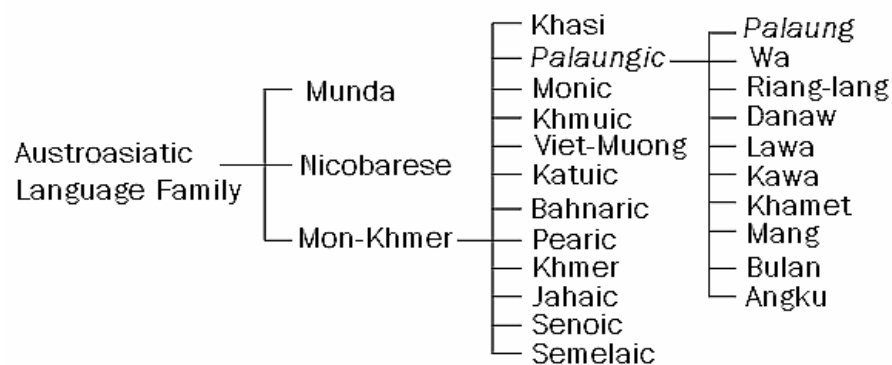


Figure 1. Austroasiatic Language Family (Diffloth, 1974, p. 480-484)

As seen in Figure 1, the Palaung language, formerly known as Palaung-Wa, is divided into Palaung, Wa, Riang-lang, Danaw, Lawa, Kawa, Khamet, Mang, Bulan and Angku. Later, using lexicostatistic study, Mitani (1978, manuscript p. 3) divides Palaung into two groups - a western group and an eastern group as shown in Figure 2. Although he mentions the shortcomings and inaccuracies of the data, the result obtained "...seems to be realistic from the geographical point of view...". The western group consists of Palaung and Riang, whose speakers mostly live "...in the Shan State of Burma, parts of Yunnan to the west side of Salween." The eastern group consists of Wa, Angku and Lamet, whose speakers live in "...the area between Salween and the Mekong with some southward extension into northern Thailand, while Angku and Lamet extend from Kengtung mainly eastward, especially across the Mekong" (Mitani, 1978 manuscript p. 3-4).

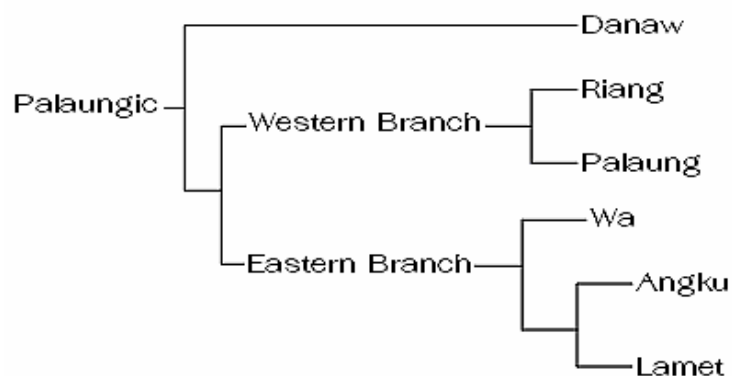


Figure 2. Mitani's (1978) Classification of Palaungic Languages

The Palaung first moved into Thailand between 1982 and 1984. This group of Palaung settled at No Lae village, on top of Ang Khang Mountain (Doi Ang Khang) in Chiang Mai Province. They call themselves Dara-ang. Based on Diffloth's classification (1982), Kasisopa (2003) puts the Dara-ang language next to the Darang language which is spoken in Shan State, Myanmar as in the following figure:

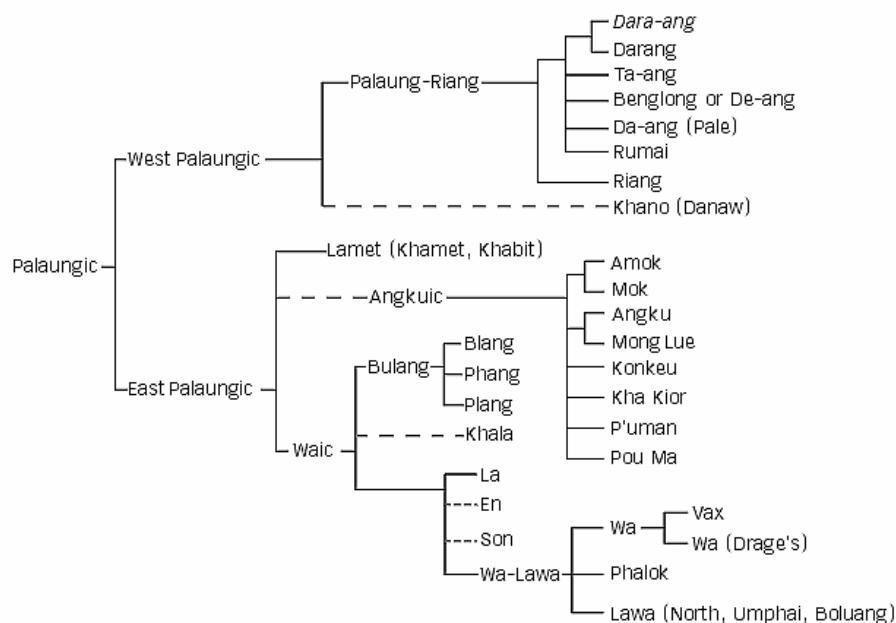


Figure 3.

Diffloth's (1982) and Kasisopa's (2003) Subclassification of Palaungic Languages

3. The Migration of the Palaung into Thailand

As mentioned above, the Palaung people live in Myanmar, China and Thailand. In Myanmar, Palaung communities can be found throughout Shan State and southern Kachin State. They can be found in Shan State from Namhkam in the north, near the Chinese border, to Muang Mit and Namhsan in the west, to Kalaw in the southwest and to the east around Kengtung near the Thai border.

The Palaung who live in the mountain areas in the north of Shan State are called Shwe or Golden Palaung by the Burmese and the Shan. According to Grimes

(2003, p. 686), there are about 500,000 Shwe Palaungs in Myanmar. This group calls themselves “Ta-ang”. Next, the Rumai group mostly lives in the area north of Tawnpeng. They are known as Rumai. There are about 137,000 speakers of Rumai in Myanmar. The group living around Kengtung and Kalaw call themselves “Di-ang”. They are known to the Burmese and the Shan as Pale (Palay), Ngwe or Silver Palaung. There are about 190,000 speakers of Pale (Palaung).

A small number of Palaung people live in Dehong region in Yunnan Province in southwestern China. In Bauer’s review of Yan and Zhou’s 1995 book (1998, p. 168-182), the Palaung in China used to be called “Benglong”. The name Benglong is a pejorative reference to the group, so it was replaced by the Palaung autonym “De’ang” in 1985. There are about 15,462 speakers of De’ang which consists of three dialects, [naʔang], [pu le] and [ro mai].

In Thailand, No Lae village- the area of this study is the first official Palaung village. It was established in 1984. The village borders Thailand and Myanmar. It is located on top of Doi Ang Khang at the height of 1,350 meters above sea level. No Lae is in Mon Pin Subdistrict, Fang District of Chiang Mai Province. The Palaung in this village migrated into Thailand between 1982 and 1984 to escape fighting between the Burmese and various ethnic groups in Myanmar. The fighting in Myanmar started in 1948 after Myanmar gained its independence from the British and after the failure of the Pang Luang Agreement in 1947. Most of other ethnic groups have begun to take refuge in Thailand since then – Karen, Lisu, Lahu, Akha, Tai Yai or Shan, and Mon². However, the Palaung people in the southern region of Shan State remained unaffected³ until 1962 when General Ne Win set up a military government after which various ethnic insurgent groups were suppressed and the fighting began to disrupt the lives of the Palaung. They found themselves caught in the middle of undeclared wars between the Burmese army, the Shan and Wa rebel groups during 1970s and 1980s.



Map 1. Movement from Myanmar into Thailand

Around 1982, a group of about 200 Palaung from Doi Lai arrived at the border area on the Myanmar side. Doi Lai is located between Keng Taung and Muang Pan about 15 kilometers from Doi Ang Khang (see Map 1). The leaders of the group – Kham Hieng, Nai Mo Mon Heng and other leaders, with help and words of encouragement from the Lahu leaders at Khop Dong village and the Haw Chinese at Khum village, had a chance to meet HM the King when he visited the Ang Khang Royal Project in 1982. They asked for his permission to stay in Thailand. HM the King let them live within Thai territory at No Lae village, about 5-6 kilometers north of Ang Khang Station. Recalling the incident, Nai Mo Mon Heng retold it as follows:

I'm Nai Mo Mon Heng, I came from Doi Lai in 2525 (B.E.). (We) stayed along the border barbed wire fence. Thai soldiers asked whether we'd like to stay in Thailand. We said 'yes' but the soldiers said that we could not stay, it's not right. "That's o.k" I said. Then, Luu Sang of Khum village, told us to stay and wait for HM the King's visit. HM the King came. The Palaung women presented him with traditional dresses and we offered him 7 antique Buddha images. We asked for his permission to stay in Thailand. We told him all about our sufferings. HM the King asked us what tribe we were. I answered "Palaung sir, and there are no Palaung in Thailand." HM the King asked around whether there were any ethnic Palaung in Thailand. Some said "yes". "Are you Karen?" - "No, we're not Karen." "Are you Shans?" - "No, we're not Shans, we're Palaung sirs." Finally, one of the foreigners who used to be a soldier and fought with the Japanese (in Burma) said that there were no Palaung in Thailand and HRH Princess Sirindhon confirmed that there were no Palaung in Thailand. Thus, HM the King granted us the right to live in Thailand. He asked us about our beliefs. "We're Buddhists, sir." There were monks and novices among us, so HM the King gave us 5,000 baht to build a shelter for them. Finally he said "where are we going to have them stay?" - I said "I do not know" - "Wherever this road ends, let them settle there" was HM the King's word.

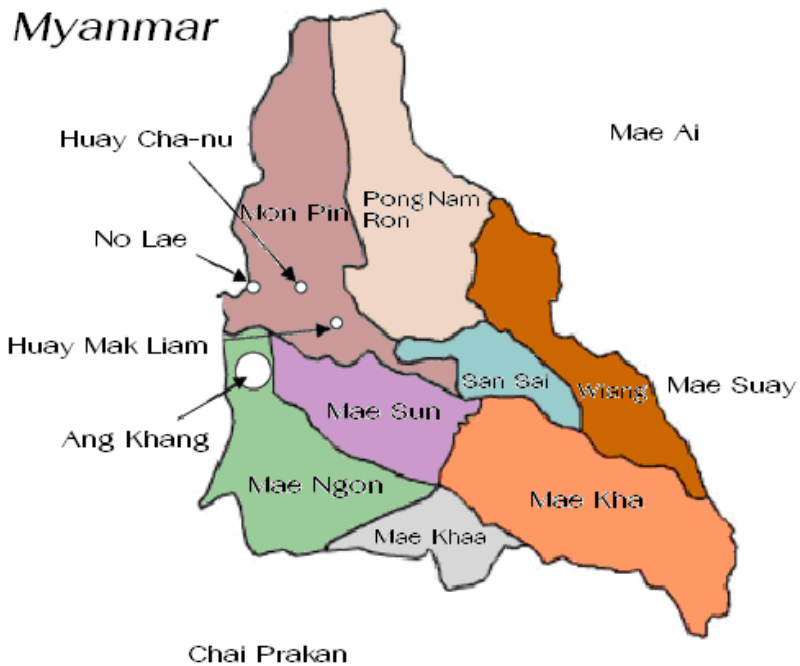
Even though he said his Thai was not good at that time, Nai Mo Mon Heng retold the historic event in very minute detail. It must have been retold so many times and will be forever.

4. Locations and Demography of the Dara-ang in Thailand

No Lae started out with about 200 Dara-ang in 1984. It was enlarged when news about their peaceful life in Thailand spread. More Dara-ang people came across the border to seek help from relatives at No Lae. However, since the village is on top of Doi Ang Khang, which has little space for housing and rice growing, most of the villagers, have to earn their living by working for the Ang Khang Royal Project. Nevertheless, there is not enough work for everyone. Some of the Dara-ang have to illegally move out of No Lae to work in the orange or longan orchards and stay with their employers in Mae Chan District. Moreover, between 1985 and 1987, there was still heavy fighting going on between Khun Sa, the leader of Shan United Army, and the Wa group on the Myanmar side of the Thai-Myanmar border. Some of the villagers at No Lae decided to look for a new place to settle; they went to establish a new village in Chiang Dao District. From 200 dara-angs in 1984, to 634 in 2002, the population at No Lae now (2008) numbers around 900.

Today, Dara-ang villages can be found in 3 districts of Chiang Mai Province – Fang, Chiang Dao and Mae Ai Districts. In Fang, next to No Lae village is Huay Cha-nu or Suan Cha village. Huay Cha-nu is the unofficial name of an area comprising a small group of houses where the Dara-ang from No Lae live. They work as employees in orange orchards and onion fields. Suan Cha is the official name of the village whose population is “khon muang or Northern Thai” – the owners of the orchards and fields. At present, the Dara-ang population of Suan Cha is about 930.

The third village in Fang is Huay Mak Liam or Huay Mae Ram village. Some villagers moved from No Lae to settle in a deserted part of Khon Muang community of Wiang Wai Village. They earn their living by growing edible plants and crops as they used to do in their home village in Myanmar. Nowadays, there are about 2,000 dara-ang speakers at Huay Mak Liam. It has the fastest rate of population growth of all the Dara-ang villages in Thailand.



Map 2. Dara-ang villages in Fang District

In Chiang Dao District, there are Dara-ang in Mae Chon, Pang Daeng Nok, Pang Daeng Nai and Huay Pong villages. The first three families from No Lae moved to work as tea gatherers at Mae Chon around 1983. Later, more Dara-ang people came across the border into No Lae, and most of them moved further on to Chiang Dao. They settled down at Pang Daeng – formerly affiliated with Thung Luk village, Chiang Dao Subdistrict, Chiang Dao District. Now the village is named Mai Pattana (Pang Daeng Nai) village with a population of 255. They grow rice, maize, beans, and soyghum. They have also opened their village to tourists. They have adapted their traditional ways of living to cope with a scarcity of resources because their village is set right in the middle of a forest reserve (See Howard & Wattanapun, 2001; Nattapoolwat, 2001). It was the arrest of all the men of Pang Daeng by Chiang Dao police and forest officers in 1989 that brought the Dara-ang people to the attention of the public. They were charged with illegal entry and cutting down trees in a reserved area.

Next, in 1994 Dara-ang newcomers, who had just moved from No Lae, came to build a new community, Pang Daeng Nok, next to Pang Daeng Nai. The villagers of Pang Daeng Nok converted to Christianity on the advice of a Lisu landowner who let them live on his land. Members of Pang Daeng Nok are about 100. The third Dara-ang village in Chiang Dao is Huay Pong village. According to Chiang Dao Local Administration, Huay Pong is just a group of Dara-ang people who gathered together at the end of the tourist elephant ride trail and it is not an official village. However, the community has grown to about 22 households.

Huay Sai Khaw is a Dara-ang community in Mae Ai District. According to Srisook (2002), it is a Lahu village of 36 Lahu households and 6 Dara-ang households. They moved from No Lae in 1994. By 2002, it had grown to 12 households. The Dara-ang in this village are Christians.

In all, there are 8 Dara-ang villages in Chiang Mai Province – No Lae, Huay Cha-nu, Huay Mak Liam villages in Fang; Mae Chon, Pang Daeng Nai, Pang Daeng Nok and Huay Pong in Chiang Dao; and Huay Sai Khaw in Mae Ai. The total Dara-ang ethnic population in Thailand is approximately 4,500-5,000.



Map 3. Dara-ang villages in Chiang Dao District

5. Dara-ang ethnic identity

Previous ethnographic studies of the Palaung are mainly works done in Myanmar during the 1960s, especially those of Milne (1910, 1924). Some bits and pieces of information about the group are mentioned, mostly in written records of British colonial officers and Christian missionaries – Symes, 1800; Yule, 1858; Cameron, 1912; Scott and Hardiman, 1900; and Lewis, 1906. Decades later in 2001, Howard and Wattanapun (2001, p. 5-14) give a very good summary of these works. However, all of the literature is mainly based on the Palaung in Myanmar, especially the Golden Palaung and Rumai (Palaung) in the northern areas of Shan State. The first and only report about the Dara-ang (Palaung) in Thailand that has to be mentioned is the work by Sila (1993, p. 25-39). She gives a short overview of the Palaung, their difficulties in Myanmar, the Palaung in Myanmar and their ways of living. In this study, field work was conducted at No Lae village, Fang District with field surveys, interviews, and participatory observation between 2004 and 2008.

The No Lae Palaung call themselves “Dara-ang ren” or “Red Dara-ang”. They are silver Palaung, but they prefer the autonym “Dara-ang” to the name “Palaung”. However, they accept the name Palaung with no hard feeling since the word “Palaung” has no pejorative meaning for them, except for the fact that there are many different groups of people known as “Palaung” to the Burmese and the Shan. The villagers at No Lae have to lead their lives in a new environment. Even though their village is quite close to the Lahu people of Khop Dong village and to the Haw Chinese of Khum village, they were familiar with these people back in Myanmar. Furthermore, since there is not enough land for them to grow rice, either for their own consumption or for sale, they have to work for the Ang Khang Royal Project. They have to buy things from markets. That is to say, they have to deal with Thai people and a new economic situation for them.

Thus, this study is based on Barth’s concept of “ethnic boundary” (1969, p. 300-301) which states that

The boundaries to which we must give our attention are of course social boundaries, though they may have territorial counterparts. If a group maintains its identity when members interact with others, this entails criteria for determining

membership and ways of signaling membership and exclusion.

What is more, the ethnic boundary canalizes social life – it entails a frequently quite complex organization of behavior and social relations. The identification of another person as a fellow member of an ethnic group implies a sharing of criteria for evaluation and judgement... On the other hand, a dichotomization of others as strangers, as members of another ethnic group, implies a recognition of limitations on shared understandings, differences in criteria for judgement of value and performance, and a restriction of interaction to sectors of assumed common understanding and mutual interest.

Also, included in the analysis is Hobsbawm's (2000, p. 1) "invented tradition" which is defined as follows:

The term 'invented tradition' is used in a broad, but not imprecise sense. It includes both 'traditions' actually invented, constructed and formally instituted and those emerging in a less easily traceable manner within a brief and dateable period – a matter of a few years perhaps – and establishing themselves with great rapidity....

'Invented tradition' is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.

As a result, this section is divided into 6 parts: the Royal permission; Dara-ang dress; the angel "Roi Ngoen" and an ethnic dance; an ethnic village, the closing of the gate ceremony "ka bi khai bak"; and becoming Thai.

5.1 The Royal permission

The story that they were granted permission to live in Thailand by HM the King has been told repeatedly by the villagers at No Lae, in fact, by all the Dara-ang in other villages as well. The Royal permission seems to have secured them all the rights as people of Thailand. Some of No Lae villagers say that being the people of HM the King even protects them from bad spirits. They do not have to put a bamboo-made taboo signs to ward off all bad spirits around their newly built house anymore.

The Palaung are fervent Buddhists, just like the Shan in Myanmar. Usually, in every Palaung village, there is a Buddhist temple. At No Lae, there is a place for monks and novices, but it is not yet a proper Buddhist temple. Giving the 7 antique Buddha images to HM the King is a symbol that they are proud to declare that they are Buddhists like the Thai people. And that HM the King gave them 5,000 baht to build a place for the monks and novices when they first met him is always attached to the end of their retold story of the Royal permission.

On the Sixtieth Anniversary Celebrations of HM the King's Accession to the Throne in 2006, all the Dara-ang in Thailand gathered at No Lae to pay tribute to him by adapting their traditional custom of the "blessing of health to flow like everlasting water" or "suep chata naam -in Thai- suep 'to carry on, to further' chata 'destiny, fate' naam 'water'". This is the custom that they used to perform for respected elders back when they were still in Myanmar. The idea of this ritual originated from leaders of No Lae, together with officials of the Ang Khang Royal Project. The Dara-ang from 8 villages in Chiang Mai, hundreds of them, stand in succession from the water source to the temple with all the women dressed up in their beautifully decorated ethnic blouses. A boy and a girl, born to a good and happy family, are chosen as representatives of purity and longevity. They collect water in a small mound of clay. Then, they hand the water down the line, from hand to hand, from the water source to No Lae temple. Finally, the water is offered, with prayers, to Prince Bhisadej Rajani, the Director of the Royal Development Projects. Prince Bhisadej, as a representative of the Dara-ang in Thailand, takes the sacred water to HM the King – the water as a symbol of purity, health and an everlasting happy life.

5.2 The Dara-ang dress

Details about the Dara-ang women's dresses can be found in Howard and Wattanapun (2001), Howard (2005, p. 24-40) and Deepadung and Patpong (2009). Again, presenting the women's dresses to HM the King, is a symbol of offering themselves as his devoted subjects. The dresses of the Dara-ang women, together with rattan or bamboo and silver waist hoops, make them very distinctive from other ethnic groups. However, the traditional dress of the men is like that of the Shan people and they have dressed alike for a long time. Also, both Dara-ang women and men always carry shoulder bags as part of their attire.

At No Lae, women, both adults and young girls, weave their own cloth using a backstrap loom. They use commercial yarn bought from markets in Fang, but they dye the yarn with natural dyes. They weave cloth for their tubeskirts (glang) and shoulder bags (hu). They buy material from the market for blouses (salop) because it is soft and has bright colors. The color of the tubeskirts is usually red – dark red or crimson for the elders, bright red for the young. They also weave cloth to make shawls, scarves and shoulder bags for tourists.

Almost all of the women at No Lae wear their ethnic costume in daily life. The adults wear their tubeskirts up to their chests and wrap around a piece of white cloth, then they put blouse over the tubeskirts. The young women and girls wear it around their waists and put t-shirts under the blouses. The reason they give for this is that wearing a tubeskirt so high up to the chest is uncomfortable. No Lae women use commercial towels as their headwear instead of the traditional headcloth (kamai). Girls have to wear the traditional dress to school at Khop Dong village every Friday and the Lahu kids, theirs too. The most significant symbol of Red Dara-ang identity is the waist hoops. They believe that the hoops are symbols of animal traps related to a legend about a Dara-ang ancestor.

5.3 The angel “Roi Ngoen” and the traditional dance

“Roi Ngoen” is the name of an angel who comes down to earth with her sisters. She is caught by a Lisu hunter who uses hoops to trap her. Since the Red Dara-ang are descendants of Roi Ngoen, they have to wear waist hoops to remind them of Roi Ngoen and to protect themselves from bad things. These hoops are made of bamboo or rattan. Usually, Red Dara-ang wear 3 kinds of hoops – the first

one is a coil of thin black lacquered hoops called “nong vong”; the second kind is wider than the first, it has red color with vertical stripes, and is called “nong ren”. The red hoops can be worn after a woman has stayed overnight and observed the 8 Buddhist precepts at the shelter for lay persons in the temple compound during the Buddhist Lent period. The third is a beautiful patterned silver hoop which is called “nong roen”. Nowadays, this silver hoop is made of aluminum or some cheap silver-colored metal.

The legend of the angel “Roi Ngoen” is also the basis of a Dara-ang ethnic dance. All of the ethnic groups in Thailand have their own ethnic dance – Lahu have a kind of “ritual dancing” and a gourd pipe; Lisu have “a New Year’s dancing” and a gourd pipe; Shan or Tai Yai have “king ka la dance or a peacock dance”. The Dara-ang have their traditional musical instrument called “ding”⁴. Milne (1924, reprinted 2004, p. 215) mentioned that the Pale in the southeastern Shan are “...the professional dancers. Those men give lessons to the village lads.....but make a little extra money by their dancing or giving lessons... Palaung girls rarely dance, but among the Pale clans it is fairly common for the women and girls to dance, as well as men.” The traditional “ding” instrument, the traditional dance and the legend of “Roi Ngoen” are combined to form a “Roi Ngoen Dance” for the Dara-ang in Thailand. According to No Lae leaders, “when we were in Myanmar, there were various groups of soldiers, we were not happy but here in Thailand, we are happy. People from the Ang Khang Royal Project, teachers of Khop Dong School and the Dara-ang villagers agree that we should have some kind of our ethnic dancing, so today we have “Roi Ngoen Dancing”. This dance is performed on various occasions, mostly for tourists during the winter high season, for special events in Chiang Mai, sometimes for special guests at No Lae.

5.4 An ethnic village

Some of the selected kids from Khop Dong School have part-time jobs during weekends and winter holidays as youth tour guides. No Lae village is situated on the Thai-Myanmar border with one military post in the vicinity of the village. On the opposite mountain top, on the Myanmar side of the border, is a Burmese outpost. No Lae is a tourist attraction spot both in terms of being a border area and a very authentic ethnic village. Whilst maintaining their ethnic way of life, the villagers

have also adapted to cope with the economic conditions of living in a market system. Sitting on the veranda of their houses, women in dara-ang dress weave with black strap looms. They weave material to make products for tourists. Some of them even go to other dara-ang villages in Fang and Mae Ai to bring back hand-made products for sale at No lae, especially during the high season in winter. Today, thanks to Ang Khang Royal Project officials, No Lae women use natural dyed colors. Howard and Wattanapun (2001, p. 67) said that “Silver Palaung women in Thailand no longer use natural dyes, although they sometimes did before coming to Thailand. Now they tend to use pre-dyed thread.” The villagers have revived their skills with natural dyes.

This, therefore, also shows how they have changed gradually from an agricultural society to a market society. They grow crops, fruit, tea and flowers for the Ang Khang Royal Project, but they do not grow rice, which they buy from markets. They weave not only for their own use, but also for tourists.

5.5 The Closing of the gate “ka bi khai bak”

Even though their lives depend on the market system, the Dara-ang at No Lae still practice many forms of animist rituals, especially the ones that have to do with an agricultural cycle. The most important ritual is the closing of the gate ceremony “ka bi khai bak”. The ritual is usually held before the Buddhist Lent day, in the eighth lunar month. The villagers prepare things to make offerings to spirits at a village shrine or “da mu muang”. The shrine is a twin shrine for spirit guardians of the village. They help to ward off all the bad luck and protect the village from evil. They give blessings for the whole village for the coming year. This ritual also helps in binding the whole community together. After the closing of the gate, no wedding is allowed during the 3 months of the Buddhist Lent Period, until the opening of the gate “vek khai bak” which is performed after the end of the Buddhist Lent, in the eleventh lunar month. The villagers explain that each year they still make offerings at the village shrine because the guardian spirits will also help with the produce that they grow for the Royal Agriculture Project. They have adapted their indigenous learning and beliefs to suit the market crops.

On the same day as the closing of the gate, villagers also make offerings to house spirits or spirits of ancestors and to forest spirits. Making offerings to spirits when someone falls sick is a normal practice at No Lae.

5.6 Becoming Thai

Most of the Dara-ang at No Lae have no Thai citizenship, which is true for all the Dara-ang in other villages as well. As non-Thai citizens, they have no opportunity for higher education, no chance for a good job, no access to a proper health care and, of course, no good life. Even though their lives in Thailand are much better than when they were in Myanmar, almost all the Dara-ang in Thailand hold either a blue identification card for highlanders or a booklet for alien residents. Without proper citizenship cards, if they want to travel outside Fang District, they have to get special permission from district officials. Applying for Thai citizenship is a very complicated matter which is worth another study, so in this paper only naming is discussed.

For the Dara-ang at No Lae, obtaining a Thai citizenship is as important to them as maintaining their ethnic identity. To become Thai people, they, not only have to adopt Thai names, but also acquire last names. For new born babies to have good health, according to Dara-ang belief, naming depends on the day they were born. For example, on Sundays, names have to begin with initial glottal stops – Ang, Ing, Ai; on Mondays, names have to begin with initial velars – Kong, Kham, Ngen; on Tuesdays, names have to begin with palatals – Young, Yung, Chan, etc. Nowadays, there are names such as Worawit, Chanachot for boys and Chanchira for girls - the Thai people usually have Pali or Sanskrit first names which have positive meanings.

Like the Burmese and other ethnic groups in Myanmar, the Dara-ang do not have family names.⁵ Nevertheless, in Thailand, having a last name is obligatory, so the Dara-ang adopt names of loved ones – their father or mother's name or their wife or husband's father or mother's name, as their last names. It is a real innovation for the Dara-ang as well as a nightmare for local administrative registrars or teachers at schools. They simply do not understand why brothers or sisters of the same parents have different last names.

6. Conclusion and discussion

In sum, this paper provides an overview of the Palaung language classification, their movement into Thailand, locations and demography of the Dara-ang (Palaung) in Thailand. Dara-ang ethnic identity is also discussed, in the last section. First, Royal permission to settle in Thailand and being devout Buddhists, on the one hand, helped make it easy for the Dara-ang people to blend in with the Thai. On the other hand however, it made them different from the other ethnic groups living in Thailand. Moreover, women dressed up with rattan or bamboo waist hoops make their ethnic identity very distinctive. All this can be explained by Barth's "ethnic boundary" on how to identify a member of the group and how to differentiate themselves from others.

Second, the "Roi Ngoen" legend and the Dara-ang ethnic Roi Ngoen dance are good examples of Hobsbawm's "invented tradition" which "...is the use of ancient materials to construct invented traditions of a novel type for quite novel purposes (Hobsbawm, 2000, p. 6)". Even so, in the case of the Dara-ang people, this invented tradition of ethnic dance functions at a local level, not at a national level as described by Hobsbawm. This traditional dance is also a strategy for facilitating Dara-ang relations with Thai society and those with various other ethnic groups.

Third, the closing of the gate to make offerings to the village guardian spirits has the main aim of creating harmony and prosperity for villagers. This ritual is also an adaptation which "...took place by using old model for new purposes" (Hobsbawm, 2000, p. 5). Since the villagers' prosperity now depends on the crops and flowers they grow for the Ang Khang Royal Project as well as the Thai market system, this ritual can also be explained by Barth (1969, p. 301) who noted, "Entailed in ethnic boundary maintenance are also situations of social contact between persons of different cultures: ethnic groups only persist as significant units if they imply marked difference in behavior, i.e. persisting cultural differences".

Finally, this ethnic identity section moves from grand opening and Royal consent to the small family matter of naming. In order to both maintain their ethnic identity and adapt to Thai custom, the Dara-ang continue to name their children using proper initial consonants according to the day they were born, as well as bestowing Thai names in accordance with Thai traditions and law. This can be

explained by Barth's statement "...Yet where persons of different cultures interact, one would expect these differences to be reduced,..." (1969, p. 301).

Endnotes

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2. See Deepadung & Dumsa-ard, (2007).
3. The Golden Palaung in the northern part of Shan State also had an insurgent group called the Palaung State Liberation Party.
4. "Ding" is a stringed-musical instrument that is usually played during courting. Formerly, when a young man sang his love song at young woman's house, his friends played this "ding" for him. However, nowadays, the elders said that "they use letters and cassette tapes; no boy learns to play ding anymore".
5. The last name system of the Thai people was initiated by King Rama VI in 1913.

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