

УДК 398.22(=582.334)(510)
DOI 10.25587/SVFU.2019.15.36594

Qu Yongxian

Institute of Ethnic Literature CASS

TAI ETHNIC GROUP IN CHINA AND TAI EPIC (based on the materials of Chinese researches)

Abstract. This article introduces the Tai ethnic group in China, and then discusses the Tai epic in the context of dualistic beliefs. The Tai ethnic group is one of 55 minorities in China; its several branches reside in different areas, but mainly in Yunnan Province. According to historical documents, Tai groups have been developing for hundreds of years separately and as a result, there are four Tai dialect areas: the Sipsong Panna (Xishuangbanna) Tai dialect groups, the Daikong (Dehong) Tai dialect groups, the Hong-Jin Tai dialect groups, and Jinping Tai dialect groups. Most of them have adopted Theravada Buddhism from Thailand or Burma before the 14th century while maintaining primitive belief. However, some Tai groups kept only primitive belief without any influence of Buddhism all the time. As a result, Tai people practice a kind of dualistic beliefs, and this system influences the connotation and inheritance mode of Tai epics.

This article is based on the data of “Tai Origin Epic Study” project funded by the Young Scholars Funding of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS). The study used theoretical material mainly from Chinese researchers. Through literature study and several field expeditions in Tai villages Southwestern China, the author found that there are dualistic styles of Tai epic, existing both as oral tradition and as written manuscript. Although there are various forms of epics in different Tai branches and whether are oral songs or written texts, all Tai poetries share the same rhyme rule. For one thing, the most popular rhythm is the Tail-Waist rhyme which functions just like a chain of rings; for another thing, the rhyme in oral tradition is more outstanding and beautiful than in written texts.

Keywords: epic, epic study, Chinese epic, Tai ethnic group, Tai epic, oral tradition, dualistic beliefs, primitive belief, Theravada Buddhism, Chang Khap.

Цю Юнсянь

Тайская этническая группа в Китае и тайский эпос (по материалам китайских исследований)

Аннотация. Эта статья знакомит с этнической группой тайцев в Китае, а затем обсуждает эпос тайцев в контексте дуалистических верований. Этническая группа тай является одним из 55 меньшинств в Китае; несколько его ветвей находятся в разных районах, но в основном в провинции Юннань. Согласно историческим документам, группы тайцев развивались в течение сотен лет отдельно и, как следствие, есть четыре группы тайских диалекта: Сипсонг Панна (Сишунанбанна), Дайконг (Дэхонг), Хонг-Джин и Джинпин. Большинство из них приняли тхеравадский буддизм из Таиланда или Бирмы до 14 в., сохранив при этом примитивную веру. Однако некоторые тайские группы все время придерживались только примитивной веры без какого-либо влияния буддизма. В результате этнические тайцы Китая практикуют своего рода дуалистические верования, и эта система влияет на способ обозначения и наследования тайских эпосов.

Эта статья основана на данных проекта «Исследование происхождения тайского эпоса», финансируемого Фондом молодых ученых Китайской академии общественных наук (CASS). В исследовании использовался теоретический материал в основном китайских исследователей. Посредством изучения литературы и в результате нескольких полевых экспедиций в тайские деревни на юго-западе Китая, автор обнаружил, что существуют тайские эпические стили как в устной традиции, так и в письменной рукописи. Хотя

QU Yongxian – Associate Researcher, Institute of Ethnic Literature (IEL), Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), Beijing, China.

E-mail: quyongxian@126.com

ЦЮ Юнсянь – м. н. с., Институт этнических литератур, Китайская Академия общественных наук, Пекин, Китай.

E-mail: quyongxian@126.com

существуют разные формы эпосов в разных тайских ветвях, будь то устные песни или письменные тексты, все тайские поэзии имеют одно и то же правило рифмы. С одной стороны, самый популярный ритм – рифма «хвост-галия», которая действует как цепочка колец; с другой стороны, рифма в устной традиции более выдающаяся и красивая, чем в письменных текстах.

Ключевые слова: эпос, эпическое исследование, китайский эпос, тайская этническая группа, тайский эпос, устная традиция, дуалистические убеждения, первобытная вера, Тхеравада буддизм, Чанг Хап.

Introduction

The Tai ethnic group is one of the 55 minorities in China, with a population of 1.2 million according to the Chinese National Census in 2006. It is a well-known fact that the Tai ethnic group is instinctively a poet. The unlettered and unsophisticated folk have their traditional past-times and recreations at social gatherings, one of which is singing their songs extempore. Furthermore, Tai is one of the few minorities who created their written systems.¹ At present, there are not only hundreds of epic singers whom are called Chang Khap (Zhangha) in Tai lue village Sipsong Panna, they still sing epic orally, but also thousands of manuscripts of Tai epics preserved in Buddhist temple (Wat). Since the 1940s, some Tai epics and related datasets have been published both in Chinese and in Tai language. For example, the Batamaga Pengshangluo [1] is the creation epic found mainly in Sipsong Panna (Xishuang Banna) Prefecture, and the Chuangshiji [2] is the creation epic found mainly in Daikong (Dehong) Prefecture. Meanwhile, as the Tai epic plays an important role in the field of Chinese epic, many scholars have devoted enthusiasm on Tai epic study. As the Tai culture has been influenced deeply by Theravada Buddhism, some scholars even equate Tai literature with Buddhist literature. Actually, that is not the case; Tai literature is root in both the Tai native oral tradition and Buddhist culture. The same rhyme rule function like a gene code derived from common underlying culture.

Tai Ethnic Group in China

According to linguistic classification, Tai language belongs to the branch of the Tai-Kadai languages family [3]. As Tai people mostly reside in different basins or valleys along with rivers in Yunnan Province China, such as Ruili (Mengmao) River, Nu River, Lancang River, etc., they could be divided into four different linguistic groups, that are the Daikong Tai dialect groups, the Sipsong Panna Tai dialect groups, the Hong-Jin Tai dialect groups, and the Jinping Tai dialect groups [4, p. 13]. While the former two groups believe in both Theravada Buddhism and Primitive Belief, the latter two groups are basically unaffected by Theravada Buddhism, only keep Primitive Belief. As a fact, “In Tai history, Theravada Buddhism and Primitive Belief have coexisted at least 700 years” [5, p. 79].

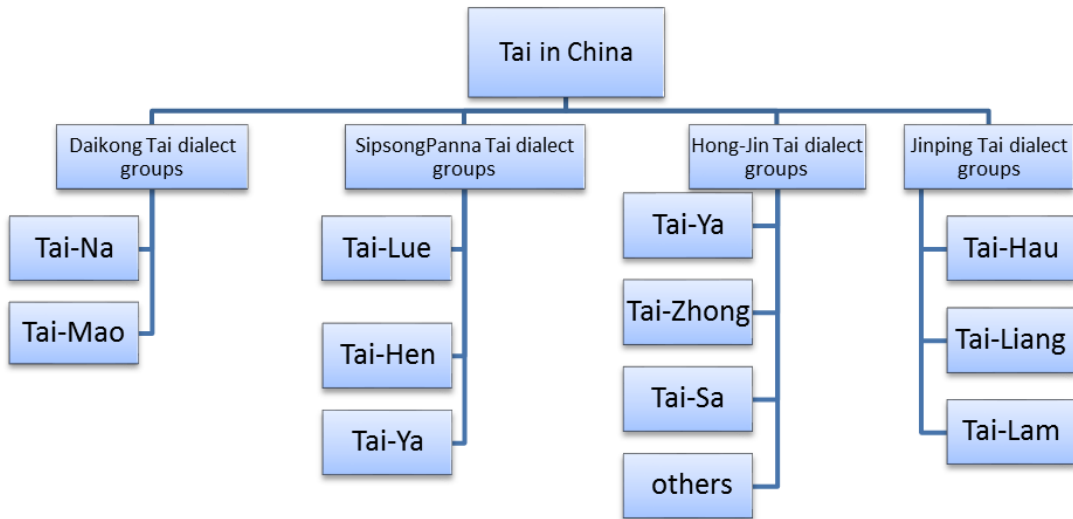
All Tai people identify themselves as Tai (Dai) while confronting outsiders, however, it is true that there are different branches in each Tai dialect group, and most of these branches have appellations to refer to themselves. For example, Tai-Lue mainly live in Sipsong Panna Prefecture who get most attention from both domestic and international scholars; Tai-Na live in Daikong Prefecture, who is acquiring more and more attention of scholars focusing on various topics, for example, the article Kinship and Marriage in Daikong [6, p. 61]; moreover, Tai-Ya, Tai-Sa live in Xinping County, Tai-Zhong live in Yuanjiang County, Tai-Hao live in Jinping County, as showed following (table 1).

Why there are so many different branches of Tai ethnic group in China? The following story may bring some information:² Long time ago, Tai people lived in Meng Xi (Kunming), there were so many people that they battled each other for food, water, and other limited resources. As a result, some Tai groups left to search for a new world southern led by their chivies. Some of them were strong enough to be the vanguard teams, while some of them were noble members, who were richly dressed and marched more slowly, and they failed to catch up the vanguard teams. Thus, they made an agreement that the vanguard teams should cut down banana stems as road markers. However, the laggard ones found that the banana stems had grown new leaves already, and they thought the vanguard teams had gone too far to catch up. Therefore, they decided not to migrate anymore, and stayed behind becoming

¹ Among these 55 minorities, only a few such as Tibetans, Mongolians, Naxi, Yi, Korean, Tai people have created and used scripts in their history.

² This story was narrated by Li Meizhen who live in Manle village, Xinping County, Yuxi City, recorded and translated by author in October 28, 2013.

Table 1



neighbors with other ethnic groups, such as the Hani ethnic group, Yi ethnic group. For example, the Tai-Ya now living in Xinping County is one of these noble ones, and “Tai Ya” literally means the laggard Tai.

This story is shared among many Tai groups with some difference in details. It hints that Tai people couldn’t associate with each other any longer after their separation while migrating southward and westward. Consequently, they developed respectively the dialects, scripts, and other fields during a long period, these factors together create different branches.

Based on statistics from the year 2000, the Daikong Tai Dialect is spoken by almost 623 thousand people, the Sipsong Panna Tai dialect is spoken by about 330 thousand populations; about 186 thousand Tai people belong to the Hong-Jin Tai dialect groups, and more than 20 thousand people speak the Jinping Tai dialect. Obviously, The Dai Kong Tai dialect is the most widely popular, because many Tai groups immigrated from Mengmao (Ruili). More situations are showed in the following chart [7, p. 355].

Table 2

Tai dialects in China

Tai Dialect		Distribution Area Prefecture/City: County	Population
Daikong Tai dialect	Daikong-Baoshan dialect	Daikong Prefecture: Ruili. Yingjiang, Longchuan, Lianghe. Baoshan City: Longling, Baoshan, Thengchong, Shidian.	377,000
	Menglian-Gengma local dialect	Simao City: Menglian, Jinggu, Lanchang, Zhenyuan, Ximeng, Puer, Jingdong, Simao, Mojiang. Baoshan City: Changning. Linchang City: Shuangjiang, Gengma, Changyuan, Yongde, Linchang, Fengqing Zhenkang, Yunxian.	246,000
Sipsong Panna Tai dialect		Xishuangbanna Prefecture: Jinghong, Menghai, Mengla. Simao City: JiangCheng.	330,000

Hong-Jin Tai dialect	Yuanyang-Xinping local dialect	Honghe Prefecture: Yuanyang, Honghe. Yuxi City: Xinping.	186,000
	Yongren-Wuding local dialect	Chuxiong Prefecture: Yongren, Wuding, Luquan, Dayao.	
	Maguan local dialect	Wenshan Prefecture: Maguan.	
	Yuanjiang local dialect	Yuxi City: Yuanjiang.	
	Lvchun-Shiping local dialect	Honghe Prefecture: Lvchun, Shiping, Ji- anshui.	
Jinping Tai dialect		Honghe Prefecture: Jinping.	20,400

As a transnational ethnic group, several Tai branches are similar to the Thai/Shan/Lao people in neighboring countries respectively. For instance, the Tai-Lue and Tai-Hen in Sipsong Panna Prefecture is similar to the Thai people in Chiang Mai, northern Thailand, and they share the Lan Na culture [8, p. 116]. The Tai-Na and Tai-Mao in Daikong Prefecture are identical to the Shan people in Northern Burma. The Tai-Lam in Maguan County and the Tai-Hao in Jinping County are similar to the Dai people in Dien Bien Phu, northern Vietnam; as a result, each Tai branch has been affected separately by their neighbors in religion, script and other fields.

At present, Tai people in China practice a kind of dualistic beliefs system. “Buddhist culture has strongly broken in and occupied almost all areas of Tai culture, however, the Primitive Belief has tenaciously retained in every field. This kind of dualistic beliefs embody Tai culture more distinguishing feature” [9, p. 84]. On one hand, the Daikong Tai dialect groups and the Sipsong Panna Tai Dialect groups have been influenced deeply by Theravada Buddhism, which came from Burma and Laos. Then, the Tai lettering system was created separately based on the Brahmi script to translate Buddhism Sutras. Furthermore, Tai people have developed four shapes of scripts, which are Tai-Le script, Tai-Lue script, Tai-Pong script, and Jinping-Tai script; the two former are applied widely and rooted in the Windows system already. The Tai-Pong script is applied mainly in folk purposes, and the Jinping-Tai script is no longer used nowadays. On the other hand, the HongJin Tai dialect and Jinping Tai dialect groups have kept their Primitive Belief all the time, without any influence from Buddhism and nearly no own letter system.

The Tai Epic in the Context of Dualistic Beliefs

The Tai literature has experienced such a history of development; in the early phase, there was only oral tradition such as ballads and other ritual songs that reflecting the old age of collection and hunting. One of representative works is *The Ancient Ballads of Tai* [10], which collects 63 songs, from short to long, and from simple to complicated. Then those short songs gradually developed into medium-length narrative poetry with several plots, while they remained oral tradition; for instance, the *Phoenix Love Poems (Fenghuang Qingshi)* [10, pp. 90-124] has 5 separate sections and each with its own distinctive content yet is so well integrated, gradually describing the growth, acquaintance, love, and marriage of a couple.

Later, Buddhism arrived Tai area and brought script, which had a revolutionary impact on Tai literature. Most Chinese scholars in Tai/Thai studies field, Zhang Gongjin, Xiao Yaohui, for example, believe that Theravada Buddhism arrived Southern China around the 7th century A.D., no later than the 14th century [11, pp. 286-288]. Tai script derived from the Grantha alphabet, and the sacred writings of the Buddhist religion as inscribed on palm leaves in the old days. Tai literature proper, as distinguished from the purely spiritual oral tradition side, therefore began its written form. Not only Buddhist literature enriched the contents of Tai narrative poetry just like injecting fresh blood into one body, stimulating the culmination of Tai literature; but also Buddhist temples have been training a large number of Tai monks to be knowledgeable person while the Buddhism had rooted in Tai society deeply and extensively. Many ex-monks have recorded down some oral tradition, and so that there are both oral epic and written epic in Tai tradition. From then on, Tai literature developed in parallel with oral and written forms.

Until around 1800 the Tai drama emerged, which was a new thing developed from ceremony and was influenced by Yunnan drama (Dian Ju). Some Tai intellectuals adapted epics into drama scripts, and then encourage singers to perform; Dao Anren¹ was one of the representatives. At present Tai drama thrives principally in Daikong Prefecture, however it is another new way to inherit the Tai epic.

According to the traditions and customs of the past, 8-9 years old boys were sent to Buddhist temples by their families to be Sami (young monk); It's actually equivalent to going to school and getting an elementary education, and Buddhist temples are similar to educational services, where they can learn about preaching, Tai writing, calendar, and so on. They would resume secular life until normally 18 years old, and most of them became ordinary peasants. Meanwhile, only a few people stay in temples for further study and became high-lever monk. If they chose to resume secular life and they would get the title of XaNaan (KangLang), which means senior intellectual. Generally speaking, these ex-monks are good at both Buddhist sermons and Tai writing. They have the ability to narrate Buddhist stories to the common people, especially female who cannot get the access to education; "During the Buddhist lent period (August-October) when many people repaired to the Wat (Buddhist temple and monastery) to hear sermons preached by the monks and to observe certain religious commandments and to do other merit making, certain literate persons, usually ex-monks, took the opportunity to read from a book of such kind of literature to the congregation during their leisured intervals" [12, p. 52].

Meanwhile, these XaNaan know well of Tai culture, so that they can record down those popular oral songs as text; and they play an important role that helping one epic singer practices to be a Chang Khap. One Chang Khap normally would apprentices several XaNaan as master during different study phases. For example, the female Chang Khap named Yu Wangjiao has three masters; the former two helped her learning Tai letter and elementary melody, and the third master guild her gain more achievements by composing new songs for her. Chang Khap must visit their own masters every festival, for one thing they bring some gifts to express gratitude; for another thing they request more new songs (written as poem text). Then they take the text and practice repeatedly until they can perform orally without text. Actually, many XaNaan are famous singers themselves, such as XaNaan Ying.² Overall, these ex-monks are from Tai villages and know well Tai tradition, they can serve both sides as a medium that, not only translate and narrate Buddhist sutras to Tai side, but also they can absorb folk motifs into poetry texts, which mainly are kept in Buddhist temples.

Because of the dualistic beliefs, Tai epics diverse in content, text, and the inheritance mode among different dialect groups. On one hand, a few Tai branches such as Tai-Ya, Tai-Zhong, Tai-Lam mentioned above have no script so that they have only kept oral tradition. On the other hand, most Tai people such as Tai-Lue and Tai-Na who practice dualistic beliefs have developed their epics also in dualistic ways that both the oral tradition and written text.

Nowadays, all Tai groups still enjoy abundant oral tradition; there are many ritual songs recited by presbyter while celebrating wedding, new baby's birth, or a new house, temple, bridge, and so on [13]. Most of Tai ritual songs are related with Buddhism, "Tai villagers gather in Buddhist temples during the ceremony season, they worship not only the Buddha but also other native gods, who do not belong to Theravada Buddhism originally. However, these native gods appear in temples, and enjoy the offerings in a dignified manner" [14, p. 27]. Aside from that, the oral singer Chang Khap in Sipsong Panna and Moxam (Moha) in Daikong still sing kinds of narrative songs during festivals. Tai people love these singers so much, and there is a folk adage that "No Chang Khap in Life, No Salt in Food". At the same time, it is easy to find Epic manuscripts, which are called Lik or Tham; they are kept in temples as the form of broadly defined Buddhist sutras. According to the teachings of Buddhism, Tai people believe that they may gain great merit by copying manuscripts and dedicating to temples. As a result, most Tai Epics manuscripts are inherited mainly through the preservation by temples and the performance during Buddhist activities and other community activities.

Furthermore, some Tai epics have been published both in Chinese and Tai script, aside from the origin epics as mentioned above, there are also the heroic epics *Lakga Sipho* (Langaxihe, meaning

¹ Dao Anren, male, lived from the year 1872 to 1913, a Tai Headman, was the 24th Tusi of Ganya Xuanfusi (Propaganda department in Yingjiang County).

² XaNaan Ying, male, lived from the year 1903 to 1977, was bored in Sipsong Panna, he stayed in Wat for 15 years, and he began singing at the age of 16.

the monster king with ten heads) and *Lakga Sipsongho* (Langaxishuanghe, meaning the king with twelve heads) which both derived from The Ramayana and spread in different Tai areas separately. In addition, the epics *Lifeng*, *Haiham* (haihan), *Xiangmeng*, *The Elephant with Three Ivories*, *The Elephant with Seven Heads and Seven Tails*, etc., are widely spread.

It is necessary to emphasize that hundreds of Aluang-type epics, which originated from Buddhist Jataka but also absorbed native stories. According to The Five Gold Eggs [15, p. 415], Buddha experienced 550 times of trial in various identities such as raven, snake, frog, clamshell, and so on, so that there are almost 550 Aluang-type epics, these Aluangs are some kind of heroic Buddha incarnations. Actually, this is a universal literary form among Tai/Thai traditions; “Thai traditional written literatures is in the main religious. Even stories of a romantic nature, which deal with kings and queens, with giants and divine beings, were inspired from Buddhist and Hindu mythology. In fact such stories are fairy tales in their developed form. At first, these consisted of stories drawn from the well-known Jataka tales or Buddhist Birth Stories. Later on no doubt indigenous folk-tales were incorporated in this class of literature. They are written in a certain style of composition in the simple language of the people to be read for the benefit of the unlettered ones” [12, p. 52].



Pic. 1. The Tai epic manuscripts kept in Mangshi Daikong Cultural Center (photo by Qu Yongxian, 2013).



Pic. 2. The Tai Expert Yue Xiaobao work in the Intangible Cultural Heritage Center in Mangshi Daikong (photo by Qu Yongxian, 2013).

There are probably three systems of deities in Tai culture because Tai people practice the Dualistic beliefs. The first system is of nature spirits, such as the grain sprit, tree sprit, and well sprit; the second system is of ancestor gods, including mainly the Pi Man (Zhai Shen) and Pi Meng (Meng Shen); the third system is Buddha and other gods from the Buddhist Scripture, engendering related narratives and ritual activities. These three systems of deities, “Although they do not govern each other, each system plays a unique role in Tai culture. Whatever the harvest activity, auspicious ceremony, or other misfortunes, they all impact deeply on Tai culture all-around. We can find abundant images of these gods in stories, fables, poems, and so on” [16, p. 216].

These dualistic beliefs definitely have significant impact in Tai epics. For one thing, generations of Tai monks (most are ex-monks) translated the Buddhism Sutras into Tai language. “A large number of Indian stories and other religious literature had spread to Tai society with Buddhism, and so that Tai literature has been affected by Buddhism for a long time. Through selection, absorption, and restructuring, Tai people had created a new world of poetry based on the original tradition. There is a peak of Tai literature, and that is the prosperity period of Tai epic” [9, p. 69] the Aluang-type epics are the combination of Buddhism Sutras and Tai fabulous tales. For another thing, Tai ex-monks absorb the folk stories and compose them into manuscripts. “There are 84,000 Buddhist Scriptures written in Tai letter, a large number of them are from Tai myth, legend, and story, which have been restructured and processed into the scriptures” [16, p. 70], the Aluang-type epics have absorbed a lot motives from Tai native culture, for example, the Aluang Gold Frog, Aluang Gold Antelope, Aluang Gongxiang, Aluang White Snail, and so on.

Briefly, Tai epics not only stem from the Buddhist Sutras, but also native oral tradition. Taking the “Bu-Ya” motif for instance, which means grandfather and grandmother and belong to the ancestral gods, had been recorded in many epics, such as the creation epic Batamaga Pengshangluo and Chuangshiji. There is no doubt that “Bu-Ya” motif root deeply in every Tai/Thai culture. Based on some field works around Tai/Thai communities, we can find that the myth of BuSanggaxi YaSangasai, is shared in the Sipsong Panna Tai dialect area, describing Grandfather Bu Sanggai and grandmother Ya Sangai create and mend the world; At the same time, the myth of Bu Sanfa Ya Sanlin spreads mainly in the Daikong Tai dialect area, which describing how grandfather built the sky and grandmother weaved the earth. Other Tai groups also share the similar myths of ancestors creating the world with homologous names, such as BuXi YaXi, BuThen YaThen, BuRe YaRe. It is important to note that the status of these ancestral gods has declined and became sub-gods. However, it is generally believed that this “Bu-Ya” type myth and related beliefs are actually an ancient indigenous tradition that existed a long time before Buddhism arrived,

The Characteristic and Rhyme of Tai Epic

Although Tai people are diverse groups, they share some key characters and the same rhyme in both oral tradition and written epics. Firstly, in most Tai poetry, one verse is generally composed of two lines; and one strophe is usually composed of two verses. The words in one line are unlimited, 3 or 5 words can compose a short line, and 15 or even more words can also compose a long line. Taking the verses from Hai Gahan (Five Gold Eggs) [17, p. 47] for example as following, both the first and second lines are composed of 13 words; these two lines constitute one unit of rhyme together:

тсем³³ ан³³ пи³³ лан³³ ван⁵⁵ тсам⁵⁵ ли³³ нам⁵⁵ ку³³ сен⁵⁵ пәң³³ тсе⁵⁵ тсом¹¹,

тсан¹¹ так⁵³ сау¹¹ тсу³³ хан¹¹ на¹¹ тсау³¹ лок⁵³ хак⁵³ хон³⁵ лом¹¹ коп⁵³ во⁵⁵.

IPA:

tsem³³ an³³ pi³³ lan³³ van⁵⁵ tsam⁵⁵ li³³ nam⁵⁵ ku³³ sen⁵⁵ pəŋ³³ tse⁵⁵ tsom¹¹
tsaŋ¹¹ tak⁵³ saw¹¹ tsu³³ xan¹¹ na¹¹ tsau³¹ lok⁵³ hak⁵³ xon³⁵ lom¹¹ kop⁵³ vo⁵⁵

Translation:

*It is a felicitous moment in the propitious month that year,
He named his beloved son Hanna, it is a kind of buffalo name.*

Secondly, the rhyme is the master key of Tai poetry; it functions like a bridge, linking up all the lines one by one, and making the singer narrate epics easily and smoothly. Tai poetry usually complies with the Tail-Waist type rhyme (Yao-Jiao Yun), literally the rhyme on the tail and waist position of one line. The last word of the first line begins the rhyme (shown in bold letters), then another word rhymes back in response on the second line. Generally, the two rhyming words share the same compound vowel. Taking the strophe from The Zhao Mahe [18, p. 5] for instance, the first line and the second line are rhymed on [om³⁵], the third line and the fourth line are rhymed on [a¹¹].

ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ
ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ
ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ
ᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ

IPA:

tsäu³¹phu¹¹läŋ³³pen³³von⁵³hup⁵³tsəŋ³³näm⁵⁵**tsom³⁵** ᄠ
se³⁵taŋ⁵⁵hoŋ³⁵haŋ⁵⁵häu⁵³lai³⁵**phom³⁵**pən³³pəp⁵³ ᄠ
tsu³³taŋ⁵⁵xun³⁵hoŋ³⁵ho³⁵xäm⁵⁵te¹¹ha¹¹let⁵³la¹¹**tsa¹¹** ᄠ
läŋ³³van³³ho³⁵hə³³läm⁵⁵peu³³**ma¹¹**pəŋ⁵⁵kum⁵⁵ ᄠ

Translation:

*The King his majesty is sitting there on the throne,
Even his name can overawe people to kneel.
The king has a powerful name that Deletlatsa,
Living in the resplendent and magnificent palace.*

Through more examples from OBin and Samluo [19] as following, we find that in the former verse, the end word [mon³³] in the first line rhymes with the word [hom³³] in the second line, which is on the waist position; the situation is similar in the latter verse, the third line and the fourth line are rhymed on [təŋ⁵⁵] and [ləŋ⁵⁵].

ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ
ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ
ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ
ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ ᄠᄠᄠ

IPA:

lat⁵³läi³³keŋ⁵⁵tɔŋ⁵⁵man³¹peu¹¹mon³³ ♪
kon⁵⁵ka⁵³käm⁵³tɛk¹¹hon³³läi⁵⁵lum⁵⁵ ♪
man³¹peu¹¹mon³³keŋ⁵⁵tɔŋ⁵⁵ ♪
li³³lu³³hu³⁵fäŋ⁵⁵heŋ¹¹xɔŋ⁵⁵lɔŋ⁵⁵mon³³tɔŋ³¹

Translation:

*Kingtuanɡ is a prosperous place,
gathering businessmen from all corners of the country,
Kingtuanɡ is a luxuriant place,
jingle bell on the horse and oxen with kinds of goods.*

In addition to the Tail-Waist rhyme, there are also End Rhyme and Repeated Rhyme in Tai poetry. Taking the verse from One Hundred and One Flowers (Lang Jingbu) [20] for the example of End Rhyme, the two lines rhyme on the end words [la⁵⁵] and [ma⁵⁵].

མཁོ རྒྱུ་བཟུང་བའི་མཉམ་འབྲེས་ལྷན་ཁང་གི་མཉམ་འབྲེས་ལྷན་ཁང་།
རྒྱུ་བཟུང་བའི་མཉམ་འབྲེས་ལྷན་ཁང་གི་མཉམ་འབྲེས་ལྷན་ཁང་།

IPA:

mə³³läŋ⁵³ma¹¹ha¹¹la³³tɕa¹¹tsäu³¹xäi¹¹fä⁵³läŋ¹¹tsuŋ³³thiŋ⁵⁵pəŋ¹¹məŋ⁵⁵la⁵⁵
tsäŋ¹¹sop¹¹li³³seŋ³⁵van³⁵xan³⁵tsu⁵⁵läŋ⁵⁵pəŋ⁵⁵mə⁵⁵lat⁵³xo⁵⁵ma⁵⁵ ♪

Translation:

*The king of supreme speaks to the girl,
He is a gentle and cultivated king.*

The Repeated Rhyme means two or more words rhyme in one line itself, as the example below which is also from O Bing and Sangluo:

མཉམ་འབྲེས་ལྷན་ཁང་གི་མཉམ་འབྲེས་ལྷན་ཁང་།

IPA:

thauŋ³⁵ma⁵⁵ho³⁵məŋ⁵⁵həŋ⁵⁵saw³⁵mə³³kaŋ³³law³⁵let¹¹ɔk¹¹

Translation:

The early morning, the sun rises from the east gradually.

Thirdly, the rhyme in oral tradition is more graceful than in written text. In oral poetry, the rhyme is more rigorous that not only the first and second lines rhyme each other, but also the second and the third, the third and the fourth, and so on. The following example is a celebrating song for a new house, which is called He Xinfang Ge [17, pp. 171-172]. It shows that every line rhymes both with the former line and the latter line, and the rhyme works like a string running through the whole song:

Translation:

*Long time ago,
a huge fire destroyed the world,
all beings were exterminated
and nothing left in the land,
there is just flood everywhere.
The god dropped some lotus seeds to the earth,
and lotus seeds sprouted and grow up,
then there are flowers with four petals with gold colors,
they became four directions as east, south, west, and north.
Then the mountains appear as pillar of the world,
the water was divided into five rivers,
and there is flood on the land,
there was no human being yet;
and no plants neither.
Only the gold rattan spread before the elephant appeared,
the rattan was twining with the tree,
Only the red grass grew before the buffalo appeared,
and buffalo had eaten all the red leaves and left naked limb.
There was no king of human beings,
but the rabbit sat on the moon,
The moon will wax or wane.
The Sanglu and Sanglai they eight gods,
flying down from the heaven,
four ones become female,
four ones become male.
People reproduce themselves,
and built the magnificent Hohong city.
People Went through mountains to search for wetland,
stacked the woods to get fire.
heaped embankment to make rice field,
reclaim wasteland to be dry field.
Took three bunches of rice shoot to grow,
took three bunches of straw to cover the roof.
Some Tai groups migrated to Sibо and Hojing,
that were fertile new land
some Tai groups migrated to Gengma and Hobeng,
that were places of fortune.
So the god create the world,
then hundreds and thousands of villages emerged,
and millions of household appeared.
Tai People always said that,
sons do not live crowd in one house,
just like boars do not eat in one groove.
The house is too crowd to live together;
So we build a new house here.*

Conclusion

To sum up, the Tai ethnic group is one unique minority in China, for historical and cultural reasons, there are different branches in mainly four dialect areas. Most Tai groups believe in Theravada Buddhism, at the same time they adhere to Primitive Belief, and then generally practice a kind of dualistic beliefs. These dualistic beliefs are embodied in Tai epics. Not only we can find the preaching of Buddha but also native myths and tales that reflect Primitive Belief in epics.

Based on the description above, among different Tai groups there are writing communities who believe in Buddhism, and non-writing communities who don't believe in Buddhism, therefore they create and develop diversiform literature; however, all Tai poetry whether oral tradition or written text have many characteristics in common and follow the key rhythm rule, and the Tail-Waist rhyme is the mostly popular. Furthermore, the rhyme is more excellent in oral tradition than in written text. That is because all Tai people share the same root of native culture and primitive belief, which are a kind of basic and important cultural gene affecting every Tai group.

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