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## ***Abom ALuang / Lik ALuang: oral tradition and written manuscript of ALuang narratives in Dai ethnic group***

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**Abstract.** The Aluang narratives, comprising hundreds of stories, constitute a core component of the Dai ethnic epic tradition. Aluang does not denote a specific figure but rather encompasses the 550 incarnations of the Buddha prior to attaining enlightenment. These incarnations manifest in three evolutionary typologies: Aluang as flora/fauna, Aluang as semi-divine beings, and Aluang as humans, reflecting a progressive spiritual hierarchy. While individual narratives vary in content, they share recurring motifs that form interconnected a motif chain. Through structural analysis of three representative Aluang stories, this study reveals a highly consistent narrative architecture. By examining the identity typologies, motif chains, and narrative structures among dozens of Aluang narrative texts (including oral and written versions), it demonstrates that Aluang narratives exhibit profound resonances with global heroic traditions. The research highlights three key contributions: firstly, systematically mapping the Buddhist cosmology embedded in the Aluang's evolutionary typologies; secondly deciphering the trial-awakening-transcendence logic within motif chains, which mirrors the Theravada Buddhist framework; Thirdly identifying a cross-cultural heroic paradigm (exceptional origin—trials—apotheosis) based on the Proppian functional analysis. These findings position Aluang narratives as both a repository of localized Buddhist wisdom and a bridge for comparative studies of ethnic epic traditions. Methodologically, this study innovates a tripartite analytical model integrating religious symbolism, motif networks, and structural poetics, offering new pathways for researching oral traditions in ethnic minority cultures.

**Keywords:** Dai epics; Aluang narratives; Buddha incarnations; motif chains; narrative structure; heroic epics; Theravada Buddhism; typological analysis; structuralist poetics; cross-cultural comparison

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*Научная статья*

## ***Abom ALuang / Lik ALuang: устная традиция и письменная рукопись повествований Алуанг в этнической группе дай***

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**Аннотация.** Повествования Алуанг, включающие сотни историй, составляют основной компонент этнической эпической традиции дай. Алуанг не обозначает конкретную фигуру, а скорее охватывает 550 воплощений Будды до достижения просветления. Эти воплощения проявляются в трех эволюционных типологиях: Алуанг как флора/фауна, Алуанг как полубожественные существа и Алуанг как люди, отражая прогрессивную духовную иерархию. Хотя отдельные повествования различаются по содержанию, они разделяют повторяющиеся мотивы, которые образуют взаимосвязанную цепочку мотивов. Благодаря

структурному анализу трех репрезентативных историй Алуанг это исследование выявляет весьма последовательную архитектуру повествования. Изучая типологии идентичности, цепочки мотивов и повествовательные структуры среди десятков повествовательных текстов Алуанг (включая устные и письменные версии), он показывает, что повествовательные тексты Алуанг демонстрируют глубокие сходства с мировыми героическими традициями. Исследование выделяет три ключевых результата исследования: во-первых, систематическое отображение буддийской космологии, встроенной в эволюционные типологии Алуанг; во-вторых, расшифровка логики испытания-пробуждения-трансценденции в цепочках мотивов, которая отражает структуру буддизма Тхеравады; в-третьих, выявление кросс-культурной героической парадигмы (исключительное происхождение-испытания-апофеоз) на основе функционального анализа В. Я. Проппа. Эти результаты позиционируют повествовательные тексты алуанг как хранилище локализованной буддийской мудрости и мост для сравнительных исследований этнических эпических традиций. С методологической точки зрения это исследование вводит трехчастную аналитическую модель, интегрирующую религиозный символизм, сети мотивов и структурную поэтику, предлагая новые пути для исследования устных традиций в культурах этнических меньшинств.

**Ключевые слова:** эпосы дай; повествования Алуанг; воплощения Будды; цепочки мотивов; повествовательная структура; героические эпосы; буддизм Тхеравады; типологический анализ; структурная поэтика; кросскультурное сравнение

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## Introduction

In my hometown, the Dehong Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan Province, China, people often narrate numerous ALuang tales, which is call “Abom ALuang” in the Dai Language, Abom means story, and ALuang is the heroic figure endowed with good fortune, characterized by kindness, integrity, intelligence and bravery. With the assistance of deities and monks, all of ALuang consistently triumphs over ordeals and adversaries.

These ALuang tales primarily stem from the Jataka tales. Influenced by Theravada Buddhism from South Asia region, the Dai people have, over the course of their long history, continuously translated and adapted the Jataka into Dai language poetry manuscripts. These texts are referred to as “Lik ALuang” in the Dai language. Lik means the poetry manuscript.

ALuang narrative is a vital component of the Dai epics tradition. Dai people say that there are hundreds of epics, with a staggering 550 ALuang poems alone. Therefore, the study of ALuang narratives unquestionably constitutes a crucial topic within the realm of Dai epics, not only is it voluminous, but it is also rich in content, serving as a significant carrier of Dai culture.

Since 2009, I have conducted numerous field surveys mainly in the Dai ethnic region of Yunnan Province, and several times in South East Asia region. My field work had mainly revolved around the Dai epics traditions, approaching from various angles: firstly, I had searched for the epics manuscripts, most of which are stored in Buddhist temples in the form of cotton paper, written in the Dai language. Secondly, I had interviewed storytellers in villages, who were particularly fond of narrating ALuang tales. Thirdly, I had examined the inheritance and development of Dai epics, observing people reciting the handwritten copies in temples and adapting some ALuang poems into dramas performed on stage, made into a film or TV show.

## The Category about ALuang

### *Abom ALuang / Lik ALuang*

The name ALuang [ʔa<sup>33</sup>lɔŋ<sup>55</sup>] is pronounced in the Dai language; the origin of ALuang would be explained in some manuscripts or stories, such as *Ga Po*, *Hai Ga Ham*. The *Hai Ga Ham* is well-known in Dehong Dai region, also translated as *The Story of Five Divine Eggs/ Wuke Shendan De Gushi*, or *The Origin of ALuang / ALuang De Qiyuan*), it is as following:

“In a primitive forest named Goose Guogong, there was a giant tree with a hollow in its roots. Inside the hollow, there was a nest containing five bird eggs, shining like gem. One day, a storm with strong winds and heavy rain blew through, scattering the five eggs to different locations.

The second egg fell into the buffalo realm, reincarnated in the womb of a mother buffalo, became the second Buddha.

The fourth egg fell into a river on human world, picked up by a woman, and a handsome young boy emerged from the cracked egg, named Guotama Buddha.

Among these 5 Buddhas, the Gautama had to undergo a total of 550 times of practices before achieving Nirvana. He underwent 549 incarnations, successively as plants, animals, orphans, riches, and princes, experiencing the hardships of life. Finally, he attained enlightenment and became the Buddha. All of his incarnations are referred to as ALuang, and each incarnation story is called an ALuang story” [1, p. 391].

During my several investigations from 2009 to 2016 in Yingjiang County, Dehong Prefecture, I had come across similar manuscripts multiple times in some temples. Besides, most Huolu (chanting leader) whom I had interviewed could chant these texts or narrate the tales.

It is necessary to present the formulation of Aluang narrative poem here. The following verse is excerpted from *Xiang Gao Guan (nine gemstones)*, the underlined words indicate the rhyming parts [2, p. 413–415]:

טע.

[illegible]

חוט הענין למסלול הוא שכל אדם צריך להימנע מלעבור את גבולות המוסר, וכל אדם צריך להימנע מלעבור את גבולות המוסר.

[illegible]

על פי חוקי המבחן, המבחן יתקיים ביום שבת, 17.12.2022, בשעה 10:00 בבוקר, בחדר 101, בניין 10, מכללת אשדוד. המבחן יתקיים בחדר 101, בניין 10, מכללת אשדוד.

Ժողովարհ էլլ յո տլօ ճի սին զլիս անկղ յլլիլ եւ չն ուի նոյն ձոմ թիլ:

IPA:

pəŋ<sup>33</sup>nai<sup>43</sup>seŋ<sup>33</sup>lau<sup>33</sup>maŋ<sup>53</sup>sa<sup>53</sup>ka<sup>53</sup>jan<sup>35</sup>heu<sup>53</sup>san<sup>35</sup>loŋ<sup>33</sup>məŋ<sup>53</sup>jəŋ<sup>53</sup>na<sup>35</sup>fa<sup>35</sup>xəŋ<sup>53</sup>jaŋ<sup>33</sup>ha<sup>35</sup>taŋ<sup>53</sup>tai<sup>35</sup>su<sup>11</sup>,  
 phai<sup>31</sup>lɔi<sup>31</sup>tsuk<sup>35</sup>tsək<sup>11</sup>phək<sup>11</sup>səm<sup>11</sup>mək<sup>11</sup>ki<sup>33</sup>lɔn<sup>43</sup>kəŋ<sup>11</sup>kan<sup>31</sup>tat<sup>11</sup>jot<sup>43</sup>seŋ<sup>35</sup>mu<sup>11</sup>paŋ<sup>53</sup>to<sup>53</sup>nai<sup>35</sup>jau<sup>43</sup>.  
 lai<sup>35</sup>le<sup>53</sup>ma<sup>33</sup>nən<sup>43</sup>pɔ<sup>53</sup>ʔən<sup>33</sup>ka<sup>11</sup>lɔi<sup>31</sup>ju<sup>43</sup>tsən<sup>11</sup>na<sup>11</sup>ta<sup>33</sup>tek<sup>43</sup>xau<sup>53</sup>ʔan<sup>11</sup>toi<sup>53</sup>hən<sup>35</sup>,  
 tsən<sup>11</sup>tək<sup>35</sup>mə<sup>53</sup>na<sup>53</sup>sen<sup>35</sup>sət<sup>35</sup>tuw<sup>33</sup>kaŋ<sup>33</sup>ŋi<sup>53</sup>fan<sup>53</sup>kan<sup>53</sup>thu<sup>35</sup>wu<sup>35</sup>wa<sup>35</sup>ma<sup>35</sup>lai<sup>53</sup>sə<sup>35</sup>mi<sup>35</sup>ma<sup>43</sup>wo<sup>53</sup>kai<sup>53</sup>paŋ  
 tai<sup>53</sup>ju<sup>11</sup>tam<sup>53</sup>kən<sup>35</sup>ti<sup>33</sup>nən<sup>33</sup>to<sup>53</sup>jau<sup>43</sup>.

jam<sup>53</sup> nǎn<sup>43</sup> xīn<sup>53</sup> xǎu<sup>35</sup> to<sup>33</sup> sāt<sup>35</sup> to<sup>33</sup> men<sup>33</sup> to<sup>33</sup> kan<sup>53</sup> tǎn<sup>53</sup> lon<sup>35</sup> jǎn<sup>53</sup> ma<sup>53</sup> lum<sup>53</sup> kǎn<sup>33</sup> tǐ<sup>33</sup> tǎn<sup>53</sup> nǎn<sup>43</sup> wan<sup>33</sup> pa<sup>11</sup>.

haŋ<sup>33</sup>xǎu<sup>35</sup>jǎŋ<sup>53</sup>ma<sup>53</sup>tǎk<sup>35</sup>ʔǎn<sup>33</sup>jok<sup>43</sup>kǎn<sup>33</sup>hǎu<sup>31</sup>het<sup>11</sup>tsǎu<sup>31</sup>to<sup>33</sup>thən<sup>11</sup>fǎ<sup>43</sup>lan<sup>43</sup>lak<sup>43</sup>nǎm<sup>35</sup>na<sup>11</sup>thiŋ<sup>53</sup>kən<sup>53</sup>w  
a<sup>33</sup>nǎi<sup>35</sup>.

tǎŋ<sup>53</sup>ka<sup>33</sup>to<sup>33</sup>ju<sup>11</sup>nǎm<sup>43</sup>to<sup>33</sup>ju<sup>11</sup>loi<sup>33</sup>tǎŋ<sup>53</sup>loŋ<sup>35</sup>kɔ<sup>53</sup>tsǎŋ<sup>11</sup>tǎk<sup>35</sup>tsi<sup>11</sup>jaŋ<sup>11</sup>thaŋ<sup>11</sup>tan<sup>31</sup>lat<sup>43</sup>xan<sup>35</sup>su<sup>11</sup>tham<sup>35</sup>kǎn<sup>35</sup>  
jǎu<sup>43</sup>,

hǎu<sup>53</sup>tǎk<sup>35</sup>jɔ<sup>53</sup>ʔǎu<sup>33</sup>to<sup>33</sup>lǎu<sup>33</sup>pen<sup>33</sup>xun<sup>35</sup>thiŋ<sup>53</sup>kən<sup>53</sup>mu<sup>11</sup>loŋ<sup>33</sup>tǎn<sup>35</sup>tsǎŋ<sup>11</sup>lǎi<sup>31</sup>tsǎm<sup>53</sup>le<sup>53</sup>.

Translation<sup>1</sup>:

In the dense forest, Prince Ganta forges a path through thorns, (low pitch)

Witnessing hills adorned with a myriad of flowers, a vibrant sea of red. (high pitch)

In Ganta's vision that day, (high pitch)

Countless animals gather for a meeting amidst the trees. (low pitch)

At that moment, they are scheming in the jungle. (low pitch)

Preparing to elect a king to lead their lives. (high pitch)

Creatures from land and water consult with each other, (high pitch)

Deliberating on who should be crowned the king. (low pitch)

As mentioned above, the rhythm of Dai narrative poetry generally follows a couplet rhyme scheme. In this pattern, the final word (excluding sentence-ending particles, and so forth) of the first line rhymes with the third-to-last word of the second line. The final word of the third line introduces a new rhyme, and then the third-to-last word of the fourth line rhymes with it, and so on.

The excerpt above is taken from Chapter Three in ALuang narrative poems, *Xiang Gao Guan (nine gemstones)*. The third chapter primarily narrates the protagonist, Gan Ta's quest to save the people of Mengbaranasi by seeking the magical herbs and elixirs. He would rescue them from a plague. After bidding farewell to the old man who taught him martial arts and gifted him with divine bow, crossbow, and precious dagger, ALuang encounters animals gathering in the dense forest, who are in the midst for electing a king. Witnessing this scene, Gan Ta roars loudly, causing all the birds and beasts to flee in fright. However, the turtle moves too slow, and the owl cannot discern directions during the daytime. Gan Ta stops them, seeking their assistance. Later, with their help, ALuang overcomes the demon king, obtaining the magical herbs and elixirs he sought tirelessly.

### 550 ALuang narratives

According to the narration of *Hai Ga Ham* above, there are totally 550 incarnations, who were the identity of ALuang. Hence, theoretically, there are 550 ALuang narratives in total.

The word ALuang does not refer to a specific individual but is a general term for a type of heroic person. In different stories, he may have different names. Most ALuang are described as having a handsome appearance, a kind and courageous heart. They undergo various ordeals, acquire extraordinary capacities, and ultimately overcome opponents on their experiences of life. In each incarnation, whenever ALuang is in danger, the divine helper always is there to give him a hand.

As the earliest published books, *The Collection of ALuang Stories in Yunnan Minority Literature Materials VII* (Yunnan 1980) gathered 40 of the most well known ALuang tales. Nowadays, we can find more ALuang tales in new publications, such as *The Synopsis of Dai Old Manuscripts in Dehong Autonomous Region of Yunnan, China* [4], *The Synopsis of Dai Old Manuscripts in Menglian County of Yunnan, China* [5], and *The Synopsis of Dai Old Manuscripts in Gengma County of Yunnan, China* etc. [6].

In these ALuang stories, some have been translated and published in Chinese, such as *The ALuang Wearing Wood Chips Clothes / Chuan Muxieyi de ALuang* [7]. *Golden Crown ALuang / Jin Huangguan ALuang* [8] etc. However, most of ALuang tales remain as manuscripts in the Dai language circulated only in Dai areas. Besides, some ALuang narratives have been lost the written text, only oral tales persist.

Some ALuang narratives poem are only published in Dai language, these publications in Dai language have limited readership, due to the relatively small Dai population in China, as well as differences between the the traditional Dai script and the improved new Dai script, and variations between the Dehong Dai-le script and the Xishuangbanna Dai-Lue script. In order to broaden the

audience, in most cases, people choose to publish in bilingual edition, including the Dai language and Chinese translations, sometime alongside with the images of manuscript.

The translation of names would also lead to confusion. Some are transliterated using Dai language, such as, *ALuang Shangjiexi*, *ALuang Ye Thong*, etc. were published in Dai pronunciation names. However, it is challenging to accurately translate Dai pronunciation into Chinese. Therefore, in most cases, a meaning-based translation is adopted, for example, *ALuang Ba Som* (*Sour fish ALuang*) is named as *Suanyu ALuang*. For a particular story, different names arise in different places. For example, *Lang Jinbu* is also referred to as *One Hundred and One Flowers*.

In this paper, efforts will be made to estimate various translated names while adhering to the objective reality. Specific situations will be analyzed case by case, using the most widely recognized names.

### ***Three stages of ALuang incarnations***

Some scholars have pointed that ALuang tales reflect the different stages of life, they are the metamorphosis of Buddha. “The incarnations of Guotama are divided into three stages: the first stage corresponds metamorphosis in plants and animals, totaling 33 generations; the second stage corresponds metamorphosis with a human head and animal body (semi-divine and semi-human), totaling 35 generations; and finally, the metamorphosis takes place in the human realm, leading ultimately to the Buddha-hood” [9, p. 273].

The following table lists some representative tales. In the first stage, ALuang reincarnates as plants and animals [2, p. 401–402]. In the second stage, ALuang takes on the form of semi-human, semi-divine, with strong mythological elements. In the third stage, ALuang reincarnates as a human, and there are numerous works in this category. From being a poor orphan ALuang becomes to a wealthy person, and finally reaches the status of a prince.

Table 1

**ALuang in different stage of life**

3 stages	Tales' names (the name in translation)	The incarnations
Plant	ALuang Dieng Xiu (the Green Melon ALuang)	Green melon
	ALuang Mak Phit (the Chili Pepper ALuang)	Chili pepper
	ALuang Ba Xam (the Golden Carp ALuang)	Golden carp
	ALuang Mi Xam (the Golden Bear ALuang)	Golden bear
Animal	ALuang Ni Xam (the Blue Sheep ALuang)	Blue sheep
	ALuang Nu Lai (the Four Legged Snake ALuang)	Four legged snake
	ALuang Kop Xam (the Golden Frog ALuang)	Golden frog
Semi-divine	ALuang Pha Xam (the Golden crown ALuang)	Can fly on stone
	ALuang Surya (the Surya ALuang)	the son of the Sun god
Semi-human	ALuang Ye Thong (the Pocket Faced ALuang)	Meat skin pocket face
	ALuang Ho liu (The Only Head ALuang)	Only head person

Human being	ALuang Ba Som (the Sour Fish ALuang)	Orphan
Orphan	ALuang Ri Lao (the Shooting Stars ALuang)	Orphan
	Zhang Tset Ho Tset Hang (Seven Headed Seven Tailed Elephant)	Orphan
Rich	WanXiang Bianmeng	Rich
	Hom Saam Yaam (Princess Fragrant Three Times one Day)	Rich
Prince	Maak Ta Sipshuang Lang (Twelve Princess' Eyeballs)	Prince
	ALuang Saam Taa (the Three Eyes ALuang)	Prince

These ALuang tales representative above are both in written tradition and oral tradition. On the one hand, they are transmitted in the religious domain in the form of Buddhist scriptures, “*Lik ALuang*”; On the other hand, they are also transmitted orally, “*Abom ALuang*”.

Whether in the prose form or the rhymed poems form, they are collectively referred to as the ALuang narratives. Although each one has its unique details, the ALuang narratives share the similar motifs.

#### **The main motifs of ALuang narratives**

Motif is a well-known term in the field of folklore, and refers to a recurring theme or idea in various tales. Motifs can transcend tales across different ethnicity and eras, making the motif analysis an essential method in oral tradition studies.

Extracting and analyzing the motifs of ALuang tales contribute to a deeper understanding of this narrative tradition, providing a recurrent cognitive framework for further exploration of ALuang narrative tradition.

Motifs can be composed of a series of events or themes within a single storyline, creating logical and temporal continuity in the development of the narrative. These ALuang tales, whether the short ones or long epics like *Zhao Shutun* and *Naga XipHo*, do share similar storyline.

The protagonists undergo similar experiences, and these events form a logical continuity in the development of the narrative, creating a motif chain: **Extraordinary Birth > Ordeal or Obstacle > Voyage > Helper > Unknown world > Treasure or magic > Adversary or Persecutor > Return with Victory > Princess or other lady > Throne**. Each one in details as following:

#### ***Extraordinary Birth***

ALuang always has an extraordinary birth, and it is a process of continuous progression, that is from plants to animals, from semi-divine-semi-human to human. As a human being, it progresses from physical deformity to normal appearance, from an ordinary person to an esteem prince.

For examples, the golden frog ALuang was born as a frog, the white conch ALuang was born as a conch; the Surya ALuang is the son of the Sun god; the only head ALuang has only head without body parts; the three eyes ALuang was born with three eyes, and so on.

Most ALuang undergo a qualitative transformation after enduring various trials and tribulations, ultimately he acquires a complete body, or transforms from ugliness to beauty, or ascends from an ordinary person to a royalty. This progress from a peculiar and humble beginning to a perfect and majestic end creates a strong contrast, beginning and end resonate with each other.

#### ***Ordeal or Obstacle***

With the extraordinary birth, then ALuang always faces some obstacles or challenges, whether it's persecution by others or encountering challenges with monsters.

Challenges usually happens at the beginning of the story, take the *Seven Headed Seven Tailed Elephant* for an example, there were two orphan boys, as the younger brother cried, the elder brother

promised to find a magic seven headed seven tailed elephant to for him. A neighbor overheard and reported it to the king, who then forced the elder brother to search for the elephant and imprisons the younger brother as a hostage. Faced with such a challenge, the elder brother embarked on a voyage to find the magic elephant.

Challenges also serve as obstacles, as seen in the *Shooting Star ALuang*, in order to win the princess' hand, he underwent numerous hardships, firstly shooting stars with a magic bow and arrow, secondly confronting monsters in the forest, and obtained the magic milk.

Challenges or obstacles are the initial motifs and reasons for ALuang's distant voyage, playing a crucial role in propelling the story forward.

### ***Voyage***

In order to overcome challenges and go through the ordeals, most ALuang usually embark on voyage. In the *Seven Headed Seven Tailed Elephant*, for instance, the elder brother set out on the journey, venturing deep into the primeval forest and crossing mountains to find the elephant. In the forest, he encountered a monk who provides guidance and assistance, ultimately leading him to the magic elephant.

In the *Red Tusks White Elephant*, for another example, ALuang entered a forest where reside thousands of demons, and defeated these demons.

During the voyage, heroes ALuang traverse perilous unknown territories, facing various ordeals, it reflects the hero's adventurous spirit and courage. The voyage is one core motif of heroic epics tradition and an essential path for hero to grow and transform.

### ***Helper***

In all ALuang narratives, there are always some helpers or mentors, who often portrayed as deities, wise monks, fairies, or other magic animals with extraordinary powers. Some of them bestow precious treasures, others impart knowledge and skills, and some provide guidance.

The most important helper is the celestial god "Khun Sika", a god residing in the heavenly palace, who has omniscient insight and appears whenever ALuang is in peril to offer assistance. Another important helper is the monk retreated in the forest, called as "Parasi", representing the Buddhist influences, also frequently provides help and guidance to ALuang on his voyage.

In *One Hundred and One Flowers*, for instance, the 101 ALuang babys faced persecution and were successively saved and protected by a pig, an elephant, and a monk. In *Shooting Star ALuang*, the orphan was adopted by Parasi, and learned knowledge and martial arts from him. In *Bamboo Shoot leaves ALuang*, he defeats all of invaders with the magical gemstones, which was gifted of a tiger and a Naga.

The ultimate victory of ALuang is based on these assistance and guidance of helpers. These helpers enable ALuang to acquire new skills, understand special mission, and gradually becomes a powerful and mature person, and becomes a real hero.

### ***Unknown world***

The destination of ALuang's voyage is an unknown world, like primeval forests, dark caves, distant overseas, ever death. These places are filled with magic, demons, or other mysterious forces, posing both challenges and miraculous happenings to ALuang.

The most frequently mentioned destination in ALuang narratives is the "Mengpai", a generic term for places inhabited by demons and monsters, usually is surrounding by forest.

In *The White Conch ALuang*, the conch was abandoned and placed on a bamboo raft which drifted into the Mengpai, where he was picked up and raised by the Demon mother. There, he learned mysterious magic skills and, upon leaving, obtained a magic staff that controls life and death as well as a pair of flying boots.

In *The Sour Fish ALuang*, he made a fish jar, and ask a merchant to sell it oversea during their voyage by ship, after 7 years, the merchant brought back an ivory to him, which inside contain a princess, her jewels, and warriors. The sour fish jar is actually a substitute for ALuang's own voyage.

In *One Hundred and One Flowers*, 101 ALuang were persecuted to death multiple times by a malicious queen, but in the end they were back to life through a reviving drug.

The Mengpai, forest, oversea kingdoms, and even the situation of death mentioned above, all represent the unknown realm, also the places of ALuang's trials, and the locations where his transformation occurs.

### ***Treasure or Magic***

On the ALuang's voyage, the helpers often bestow special treasures to aid in completing tasks or overcome challenges. Some present magical weapons, such as precious knives, swords, bows and arrows. Some bestow magical artifacts, such as a divine staff that can determine life and death, a potion capable of bringing the dead back to life, or an enchanted object that can turn stones into gold. Some teach the magical skills, how to fly, how to control Naga, or how to shape shift. Monks usually offer wisdom and guidance, imparting Buddhist teachings, divination, and predictions.

These magic treasures or symbolic magic are crucial elements for ALuang's success.

In *Pocket faced ALuang*, he made a wish using a Naga ball that "to build a bridge made of gold and silver to the palace", remarkably, he achieved this goal and ultimately won the princess's hand.

The motif treasures or magic endows ALuang narratives a mystical quality, making them highly captivating.

### ***Adversary or Persecutor***

The competitors and threats in opposition to ALuang are those who either challenge him or persecute him. These adversaries include demons, landlords, ministers, kings, or other dangerous animals.

In *The ALuang Jidagongma*, a malicious landlord repeatedly tried to trap ALuang, by placing him in a cowshed, throwing him into a river, locking him in the fireplace and tossing him into the forest.

In *The Four Legged Snake ALuang*, there were ten neighboring princes who proposed to marry a beautiful princess, but the king arranged for the princess to marry the four legged snake. So that those ten suitors felt insulted and furious, and this led them to unite and wage war. The four legged snake led the army of his father in law to defeat thousands of adversarial soldiers.

As antagonistic forces, these opponents create tension and conflict, simultaneously highlighting ALuang's bravery, his outstanding performance stands out, enhancing his heroic image and legendary aura.

The conflicts between justice and evil is a perennial key motif in heroic epics, and these conflicts serve as the stimulus that makes ALuang's narratives captivating and engaging.

### ***Return with victory***

Most ALuang end his voyage and return, manifesting the victory. Some achieve the initial goal of treasure hunting, others overcome demons, some escape from persecution, some rescue the trapped princess, and some defeat the rivals.

In *Seven Headed Seven Tailed Elephant*, the elder brother ultimately found the divine elephant, and rescued the imprisoned younger brother.

In *The Shooting Star ALuang*, he shoots a star, searched the demon's milk, and won the princess at last.

In *One Hundred and One Flowers*, the 101 ALuang children escaped persecution from the malicious queen, ultimately returned and saved their birth mother by winning the national cockfight.

Hero's victory symbolizes the triumph of justice, upon returning home, ALuang has undergone metamorphosis, acquiring higher abilities.

### ***Princess or other ladies***

There are always some female characters in ALuang narratives, often including princess, mother, and sister. Some ALuang would encounter princess during the voyage and eventually marry her.

For example, in *Seven Headed Seven Tailed Elephant*, ALuang was such a vice and brave young man, so that the demon king even asked the lotus princess to marry him.

In *The White Conch ALuang*, the king held an activity to choose a son-in-law, and ALuang was luckily selected to marry the princess.

In *The Sour Fish ALuang*, he made a sour fish jar, which led to the acquisition of a precious ruby and, subsequently, marriage to the princess.

In *One Hundred and One Flowers*, ALuang rescued their imprisoned birth mother from the dungeon, and they were finally reunited.

The presence of female characters, whether princesses or other ladies, signifies marriage and family, highlighting the hero's sense of responsibility and this contributes to ALuang's holistic growth.

### **Throne**

In most of ALuang narratives, the protagonists eventually become kings. Some ALuang characters are initially ordinary persons, then ascend to a throne by marrying a princess. Others, born as princes, still have to undergo a series of challenges to win the throne.

In *Ai Jie Huan*, ALuang wandered into the demon realm, fell in love with the demon princess, married her, and inherited the throne of the demon king.

In *Red Ivories White Elephant*, ALuang rescued the princess whom he was abducted by demons from a cave; then they escaped into a kingdom, honored as a guest by the king. However, the princess' father misunderstood that his daughter was captured by that king, so he led to a battle. The truth was revealed at last, and both kings abdicated in favor of ALuang.

The motif of inheriting a throne emphasizes hero's leadership and broader sense of responsibility. This motif implies a new social and political situation, and ALuang would bring a new happy life to the people.

Based on these main motifs introduced above, it is not difficult to find that the ALuang narrative tradition is similar with the well-known "Magic Tale". As we know, in the Aarne-Thompson tale type index system, Tales numbered 300 to 749 essentially constitute the main motifs, such as "magic adversary, magical or enchanted husband (wife) or other relatives, magic challenge, magic helper, magic object, magic power or knowledge, etc." [11, p. 7].

In one word, despite the diverse content of numerous ALuang narratives, they share remarkably similar plots, forming a motif chain akin to the genre of Magic Tale.

### **The Potential Structure of Aluang Narratives**

The ALuang narratives not only share similar motifs but also exhibit comparable narrative structures. The following explores three ALuang tales, delineating their narrative structures and investigating the connections among them.

#### **The first case: *The White Conch ALuang***

Take *The White Conch ALuang* as the first example, since this tale is widely circulated and its plot is representative. The general content is as follows:

"The queen of Meng Balanaxi had a dream in which a bright star fell into her hands, then she became pregnant. However, when she gave birth, it was a white conch shell. This angered the king, who ordered both the mother and child to be killed. The minister, feeling compassion, decided to rescue them. He secretly placed the white conch shell on a bamboo raft and let it drift downstream.

The white conch shell floated downstream to Meng Pai, the dwelling place of demons. Some days later, the shell cracked, opened and revealed a handsome boy, ALuang. Raised by the demon mother, ALuang grew day by day. At the age of sixteen, he discovered there were piles of white bones around him. He then realized that he lived in the demons' world. He decided to leave his demon mother and search for his human mother. Before parting, the kind-hearted demon mother gave him a magical crossbow and a precious knife, instructing him that in times of trouble, he should clap the ground three times, and she would come to help.

Leaving the demon world, ALuang passed through Meng Zhanba kingdom, where the king was in the process of "throwing the crown to choose his 7<sup>th</sup> son-in-law" for his 7<sup>th</sup> daughter. Surprisingly, the king's crown, thrown into the sky, seemed to have eyes and circled before landing on ALuang's head. As a result, ALuang became the 7<sup>th</sup> son-in-law chosen by the king.

However, the six brothers-in-law of the six princesses opposed fiercely, presenting various

challenges in an attempt to kill ALuang. With the covert assistance of the demon mother, ALuang eventually defeated his opponents and became the king's most favored 7<sup>th</sup> son-in-law of Meng Zhanba, and became the new king" [9, p. 239].

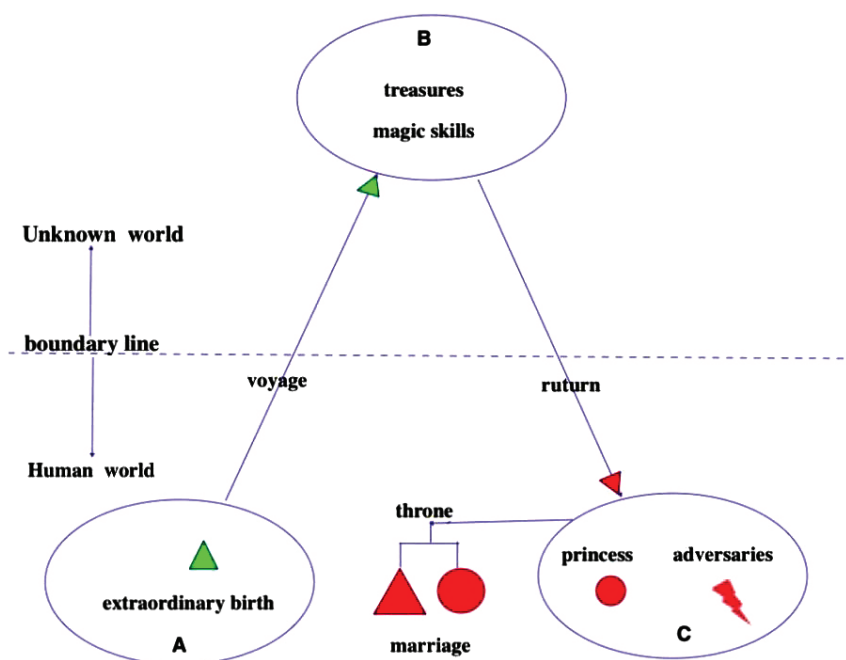


Fig. 1. The behavioral trajectory of the white conch ALuang

The plots are showed above: ALuang (as triangle shape) was born in a kingdom (ellipse A), but was exiled due to his extraordinary birth, and drifted to the demons' world (ellipse B). The dashed line represents a boundary, one side being the human world and the other side being the unknown world. ALuang grew up in demon realm, learning magic skills, and in a sense, the demon mother became his helper (as star shape). When ALuang grew up, he bid farewell and returned to the human world (ellipse C), winning the love of the princess (as circular shape). However, he also faced persecution (as lightning shape) with six adversaries here. ALuang overcame those challenges, ultimately married the princess, and took the throne. From the peculiar origin in the beginning to later ascending the throne, ALuang's identity has undergone a fundamental change, and thus, the color of the triangle has shifted from green to red.

Many other ALuang tales conform to this kind of narrative structure, such as *Seven Heads Seven Tails Elephant*, *ALuang and His Bow and Arrow*, *The Red Ivories White Elephant*, *The Mountain Sparrow ALuang*, *AiJieHuan*, *The Selling Leaves ALuang*, *The Pocket Faced ALuang*, *The Fragrant Rice ALuang*, *The White Maggot ALuang*, *Twelve Princess' Eyeballs*, *The Shooting Stars ALuang*, *The White Ant ALuang*, *The Lancha ALuang*, *The Only Head ALuang*, etc.

#### The second case: *One Hundred and One Flowers*

Taking *One Hundred and One Flowers* as the second case, also known as *Lang Jinbu* in Dai language, it is another well-known and quite popular ALuang tale. The storyline is as following:

"The King of Mengba Lanaxi, although had married six queens, he had no children. In his old age, he found another poor girl in a remote village, named Lang Jinbu, as she had eaten 101 crabs (which implies a strong reproductive capability) and he made her the seventh queen. Unexpectedly, a war broke out, and the King had to go to battle. While Lang Jinbu was in a coma after giving birth, the six bad queens brought in a dog and threw the 100 male infants and one female infant into a pigsty, hoping these children would be trampled to death in the pigsty.

When the king returned after chasing away the enemy, he learned that Lang Jinbu had given birth to a dog and immediately banished her to the cowshed. The six queens then conspired with a fortune teller to trace the whereabouts of the 101 children, but they were unsuccessful, as these children had been saved by a mother pig, then a white elephant, and then an old man in the mountain.

Later on, the six queens send some maids to search for these children, they were discovered and quickly poisoned to death. The old man buried them and then 101 flowers bloomed on their graves. Upon discovering these flowers, the six queens immediately had them dug up and thrown into a river.

An elderly couple picked up these flowers from the river and brought home. The old man who saved the children died with resentment, and turned into an immortal deity. He prepared and sprayed some reviving drug on the flowers, which immediately transformed into 101 children.

The immortal deity gave them a rooster and guided them to challenge the king in a national cockfight. They defeated all the opponents, even the king lost the cockfight. The 101 children refused every reward deceptively, only demanded a woman, their birth mother. They found and brought out Lang Jinbu from the cowshed and they finally reunited. At last, the king found out the truth and gave the six malicious queens punishment they deserved” [12, p. 1693].

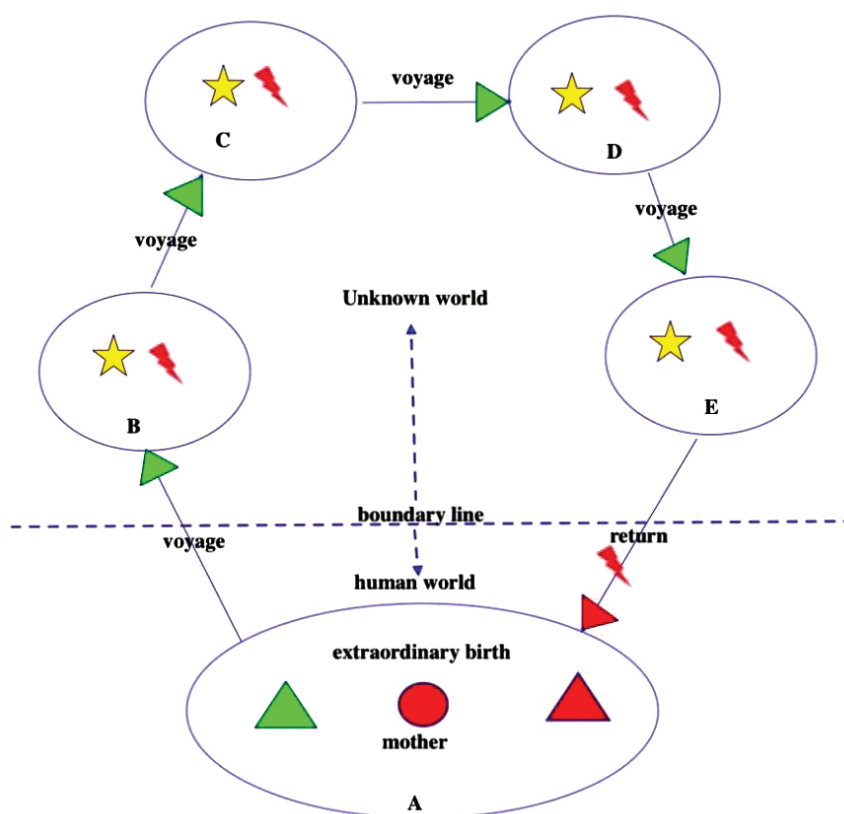


Fig. 2. The behavioral trajectory of the 101 Aluangs

The plots are shown above: 101 babies ALuang were born in kingdom (ellipse A), persecuted by six evil queens, hidden at the pigsty (ellipse B), they were protected by the pig mother; they faced persecution again and move to the elephant realm (ellipse C), protected by the elephant; faced the third time persecution, and they moved to the mountain (ellipse D), protected by an old man. However, they were killed and buried (ellipse E), then turned into 101 flowers. As they were discovered by the six queens, cut down and thrown into the river, floating back to the human realm. In the end, they revived to life and back to Kingdom (ellipse A), and rescued their mother (as circular shape).

The dashed line is the boundary, one side is the human realm, and the other side is the exotic realm. 101 babies ALuang endure multiple persecutions and undergo metamorphosis, including death. During each conflict, there are always the helper (as star shape).

Some other ALuang tales also fit this narrative structure, such as *ALuang Jida Gongma*, *the Bamboo Shoot Leaves ALuang*, *O'en Han and His Friends*, etc. In the type structure, ALuang always face multiple persecutions, even experience death, but with the protection of helpers, they ultimately transform into a new state of life.

### **The third case: *The Sour Fish ALuang***

There is another type of storyline where ALuang himself doesn't personally embark on a voyage, but instead, his substitute makes the voyage, it is the representative of ALuang. Taking *The Sour Fish ALuang* as the third case, also named *ALuang Pa Som* in Dai language. The storyline is:

"In Meng Kaling Kalie, there was a poor orphan who chopped wood and gathered leaves every day to exchange food. One day, he accompanied fishermen to catch fish in the river, while he failed to catch any fish, each fisherman gave him one. He took the fish home but couldn't bear to eat them all. An elderly beggar who was actually a celestial being came and instructed him pickling the fish into a jar.

He asked a merchant to take the sour fish jar to sell oversee, however after 7 years of unsuccessful sales, the merchant brought it to the king's palace. The king and queen tasted a bit the sour fish and regained their youth, turning young and beautiful. In gratitude, they placed a precious ruby inside the fish jar.

As the fish jar returned home and the orphan mistakenly thought that the fish had not been sold, thus he asked another merchant to sell it in Meng Dakasuo. Again, after 7 years of no sales, the merchant brought it to the king's palace. The king found a shining ruby inside the jar and he mistakenly thought this was a gift for proposing to the princess. The king had the wizard perform divination, and the result indicated that it would be an auspicious marriage. So that they used magic to shrink the princess, some soldiers, a white elephant, a black horse, placing them inside an ivory, handed it over to merchant.

The merchant returned and gave the ivory to the poor young man. He casually leaves the ivory on a fence and continued chopping wood every day. 5 days later, Princess Lang Zhanda came out from the ivory, and the two became husband and wife.

When the king of Meng Kaling Kalie learned about it, he ordered the poor man to send his wife princess Lang Zhanda to the palace. The poor man firmly refused, so that the king sent hundreds of warriors to capture them. Princess Lang Zhanda poured out of the ivory, a thousand soldiers emerged, engaging in the fierce battle and defeating them.

Undeterred, the king issued an ultimatum to the poor man: within 7 days, he must send Princess Lang Zhanda to the palace, or they would face execution. The poor man, riding the white elephant, flew to Meng Dakasuo for seeking help from his father-in-law. The king put a large army into the ivory for the poor man to take home.

On the 7<sup>th</sup> day, when the king of Meng Kalingkalie sent his army to attack the couple again, Princess Lang Zhanda poured out the ivory, releasing the mighty soldiers. The king's army was defeated, and the king was killed by the poor man. The people recommend ALuang to be the new king of Meng Kaling Kalie" [13, p. 141].

The plots were shown above: the orphan ALuang was born in Meng Kaling Kalie (ellipse A), received inspiration from the deity, he made sour fish jar (cylinder), which was taken by a merchant to an oversee kingdom (ellipse B). In return, it exchanged back an invaluable ruby (as hexagon shape). Then the sour fish jar was taken by another merchant to another oversee kingdom (ellipse C). In return, it exchanged back for an ivory, inside which was a shrunken princess along with her dowry. After obtaining the princess (as circular shape), ALuang faced wars from enemy (as lightning shape). With the princess's assistance, ALuang ultimately defeated the adversaries and became the new king.

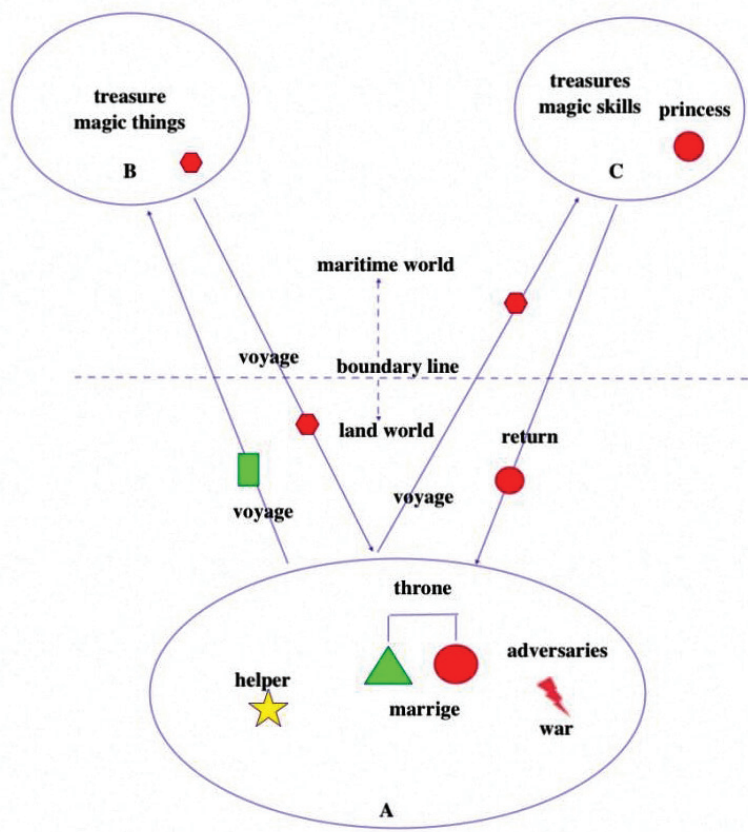


Fig. 3. The behavioral trajectory of the sour fish Aluang

The dashed line represents the boundary, with one side being a landlocked world and the other side being a distant maritime world.

Through the analysis of the three cases above, the narrative structure of the ALuang tales can be simplified into three core motifs: an extraordinary birth, a voyage to the unknown realm for ordeals and growth, and the return with a bride becoming his wife and accessing the thrown of the Kingdom.

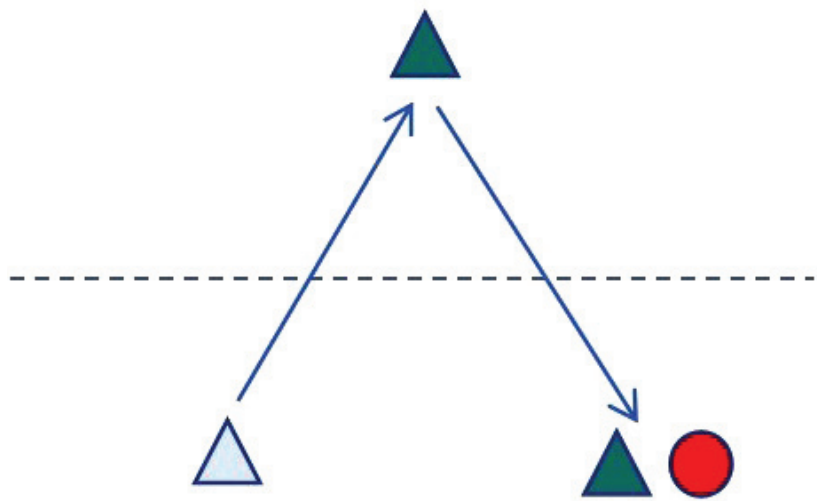


Fig. 4. The simplified behavioral trajectory of all Aluangs

From the analysis above, despite numerous ALuang tales, there is a highly similar narrative structure among them. Lauri Honko pointed that folk artists and singers, when engaging in oral storytelling, have a pattern in their minds referred to as the Mental Text. When they perform, narrate, or sing, this Mental Text serves as the foundation upon which they construct their stories [14]. Narrative structure is similar with Mental Text, both being cognitive processes used to simplify, simulate, and represent information.

### **Regionally literary**

Actually, ALuang narrative tradition is a regionally literary phenomenon with Buddhist influences. They are not only prevalent in Dai ethnic areas such as Dehong, Xishuangbanna, Lincang, and Puer in China, but also prevalent in Southeast Asian countries especially in Northern Thailand, Northeastern Myanmar, and Northern Laos. While the names vary in different regions, the content remain similar.

For example, what is known as *Hai Ga Ham* in Dehong Dai region is referred to as *Ga Po* (*White Crow*) in Thailand, Myanmar, and Laos. What is known as *White Conch ALuang* in Dehong, it is called *Golden Conch* among Thai people, and *Tao Hei Si* among Lao people. What is known as *Twelve Princesses' Eyeballs*, is called *Tales of Roselle* in Thailand, and *Twelve Sisters* or *Zantatso Pa* among Shan state in Myanmar, etc.

This phenomenon is attributed to the factors associated with the spread of Theravada Buddhism. Most ALuang tales are derived from Indian Jataka tales, as the Dai scholar Dao Chenghua says, "The Jataka tales traveled from India to Myanmar, through the Thai ethnic regions in Myanmar, and then spread to the Dehong Dai region" [3, p. 131].

Those ethnic groups had not rigidly translated the Jataka tales but have continuously localized the foreign Buddhist narratives throughout a long history. As the Dai people, based on traditional aesthetic standard and ideal, they process and modify these Buddhist narratives, adapting them to align with the Dai poetry. On one hand, they translate the Jataka into Dai language manuscript, conforming to the rhythm rule and poetic structure of the Dai literature. On the other hand, they absorb local traditional narratives into the Jataka tales.

Nowadays, we would find many manuscripts in temples, ALuang narratives are transmitted both in written form, which adhere to the rhythmic rules of Dai poetry, and the form of oral form.

Besides, the ALuang narrative is very popular in the Dai ethnic group, especially in the Dehong Dai Autonomous Prefecture, thus folk artists have adapted the ALuang narrative poetry into Dai dramas. In the history of Dai drama, among the 330-plus Dai dramas, over 70 of them were related with Buddhist narrative, adapted from ALuang narratives poems. For example, the drama *Lang Tuihan*, *Mo heng Kap*, *Bingju Bingni*, etc. Drama giving the ALuang narrative a new stage performance form.

### **Conclusion**

ALuang narrative constitute an important part of the Dai epic tradition, undoubtedly deserving research in-depth.

Although the ALuang narrative originates from the Buddhist Jataka tales, they have been adapted into Dai ethnic narrative poetry. From another perspective, ALuang tales are collection of heroic voyage narratives of the Dai people, ALuang serving as a general category for various incarnations of Buddha.

This article first analyzes the scope of ALuang tales and categorizes ALuang into three main identity types at different stages. Secondly, it extracts the motifs of ALuang tales, analyzing its content and specific features. Finally, it constructs mental maps for ALuang tales using three cases to reveal their narrative structure.

ALuang narrative is similar with other heroic narratives worldwide. The Indian epic *Ramayana* is one important example, it narrates the exile of Prince Rama and his quest, with the help of the monkey king Hanuman, to rescue his wife during his voyage. The well-known Chinese epic *Xiyou Ji* follows the voyage of Tang Monk and his disciples to the Western Paradise, facing 81 challenges along the way. In the end, they succeed, and underwent transformation, becoming deities.

Ordeals and growth is a universal theme shared by various civilizations, it is highly appealing, leading to continuous literary creations in each era. In modern times, examples like *Harry Potter* by J. K. Rowling fit this narrative pattern. As known to all, the protagonist, Harry Potter, is a typical representative of a young man, he has a very peculiar origin, being the child of a wizard and a common person. After losing his parents, he becomes an orphan and is forced to go into a different realm, the magic world, to learn and confront evil forces. Eventually, he masters the powerful magic and defeats his adversary, becoming a genuine hero. Additionally, there are other examples which had been adapted into movies, like *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Hunger Games*, *Guardians of the Galaxy*, and so on, all adhering to the similar pattern.

These narratives celebrate features like bravery, wisdom, justice, reflecting a shared understanding of heroic themes across different cultures. The Dai ethnic group indeed have rich literary resources, and the narrative themes of ALuang also have similar potential for exploration.

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