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*The Central Position of the Shan/Tai as 'Knowledge Brokers' in the Inter-ethnic
Network of the China-Burma (Myanmar) Borderlands*

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Abstract

This paper arises from work I have done on the China-Burma border between 2001 and the 2007, with background of work with Shan both in Burma and in North Western Thailand in the 1960s. It will be about the place of the Shan in the network of ethnic and trade relations on this border will raise questions about Shan Monastic traditions. On the one hand I have worked on the nature of Wa (Pirok) Theravāda Buddhism and the history of the Wa 'kingdom' of Ban Hong, and the Shan have played a central role as source of knowledge about Buddhism and of kingship, providing models of both for these Wa. A number of interesting questions arise about the Shan sources of models of Buddhist monastic organisation here; and it is quite clear that Wa 'kingship' was based upon the Shan notion of a *Caofa* or *Cao Məng*. The second focus (during most of 2003, mostly at Ruli/Meng Mao) has been the cross-border, inter—ethnic trade system chiefly in gemstones and jade. In this context the Shan have played a central role as what anthropologists have called 'cultural brokers' The Shan uniquely have been in a position to mediate between conflicting Burmese, Chinese and Thai conceptions about precious stones, making this trade network work smoothly.— since the Shan on these borders know how to 'be Chinese' (as Tai Nə), to 'be Burmese' (as *Tai Mau* and/or *Tai Tau*, and even to be 'within the Thai cultural and political orbit'.

I. Introduction What follows is the result of several sessions of fieldwork in the Burma-Thailand-China borderlands, sessions in which the Shan have figured significantly, either directly or otherwise. These results will be seen to constitute as many question as apparent conclusions. The work in question began with my field study of Shan communities in North West Thailand (Mae Hongson) in 1967-68, chiefly concerning the grammar of the language, the cognitive structure and organization of Shan Buddhism, and the definition of the ethnic category 'Shan' (Tai Long) in the context of intergroup political relations in the Burma-Thailand-China region (see, e.g., Chit Hlaing 2007e, Lehman 1987.). Then, briefly in 1997, I started a new line of relevant research on the China Burma border. It began with a focus on the organisation of the interethnic cross-border trade (mainly the gem trade), went further in the Summer of 2001 with field work amongst the Buddhist Pirok Wa of Ban Hong, continued for eleven months during 2003, largely at Ruli, but also at Tengchong, in China, and at Myitkyina and Mandalay in Burma (again on the gem trade (Chit Hlaing 2003a, 2004), and finally, during the Summer of 2007 at various places along the Yunnan-Burma border, including a period at Ban Hong itself (Chit Hlaing 2000d). The central idea of this paper, in any case, is the proposition that the Shan identity is organized at the interface of political and economic relations amongst China, Burma and Thailand and at the interface, also, between upland

‘tribal’¹ people (Kachin and Wa as my examples — see Chit Hlaing 2007a,b), on the one hand, and ‘civilised’ (state possessing and literacy possessing urbanised) lowland peoples, on the other hand. What I want to do here, then, is simply to explore, in large measure tentatively in the hopes of provoking discussion, this proposition from various angles and in various field research contexts.

II. The Pivotal Position of Shan in the Cross-Border Gem Trade.

1. The Gem Trade at Ruili and Tengchong

With regard to the jade and gem trade in particular it is remarkable how differently the very idea of jade, its evaluation, its very purpose is understood by the Chinese on the one hand, and the Burmese on the other. Jade, in the trade jargon of the business is held to fall into three qualities: A, B. and C. A quality, the best jade, is in general, the very green stone (though with different subtleties of shade and brilliancy and translucency (they tend to say ‘transparency’) depending upon which area of mines it is from: Mogaung, Hpakant, or Singkhaling Khamti. When Burmese look at a piece of jade what they are concerned with is first if it is genuine (not artificially ‘improved’ — by heat treatment) A quality. If it is, it is ‘gem’ quality, so the best jade is understood as intended for jewellery. If it is, say, B quality, then the question is first whether it can be treated to look like A quality — and so be set in precious metal for a ring, earring or other jewellery. If not, it is best used for carving or for a better grade of the ubiquitous jade bracelet; and if it is a B quality bracelet it is likely to be treated ‘almost’ as gem quality and the bracelet quite possibly cut and polished in, say, Mandalay. If it is C quality, basically it is headed just to the China market, as is much also of the B, and chiefly to the mass-production jade bracelet and pendant factories in Guangzhou — essentially ‘junk’ jade (it is the Guangzhou people above all that are the mass purchasers of raw jade, as most jade is of C quality at best). Why? Because, from the Chinese point of view the whole cultural point of jade is its use as a stone for beautiful carvings. No doubt the origin of this is the fact that really until early Ming period, the Chinese took their jade not from Myanmar but from Xinjiang, and Xinjiang jade is ‘white’, that is, the grayish-white known as ‘muton fat’ jade. It cannot well be put to use for anything except carving (thanks to an anonymous member of my audience at my lecture of 14th November, 2003 at Yunnan University, for reminding me of this with respect to the history of Chinese ‘jade culture’).

So, when I was working in Teng Chong and speaking with prominent jade

¹ I use this word, ‘tribe/tribal’ to refer to any and all kinds of socio-political forms that *lack* a state (monarchy, principality, republic...); it is simply a residual class and does not denote any particular organisational form. What most of those forms lack is any distinction between ruler and subject (cf. Leach 1960 and 1954), although there seem to be some intermediate or indeterminate cases, such as, say, the Nuosu Yi of Southwestern China (Hill 2004), with their distinction between black-bone (*Nuo*, chiefly) and white bone (commoner) groups such that it seems that the latter, under black bone chiefs, may have the legal status of perpetual minors; the latter conclusion applying even more clearly to the Moso because that goes a long way to accounting for the fact that Moso commoners do not save in exceptional circumstances undertake anything like formal marriage (Cai and Shi). In neither case

merchants not from the overland Chinese community centred here and in Burma, in the jade market there, I was somewhat surprised to find that they were not, certainly not in the first instance, when seeing a piece of raw stone offered, concerned with classifying it as A, B, or C quality, although they knew that A must fetch a better price than B and B better than C. Rather, their first consideration and the first thing talked about was whether one could see in the stone a good possibility of carving it into something beautiful: a figure, a floral piece, an abstract form, or whatever. Moreover, what often suggests such a possibility to the artist-carver has to do with the distribution of colours (orange, black, etc. and not necessarily green at all), and even the 'inclusions' (basically flaws from a gem-orientated point of view), so that a B or even C quality stone may seem highly desirable for purchase that would be considered unappealing and of poor quality and low market price in the Myanmar market. In this same connection, they are far less concerned with which mine it seems to be from because that is chiefly important in determining how nearly a stone may make acceptable jewellery. □

In fact, in common Chinese usage, one is hard put to talk of jade (*yù*) as being in any sense a kind of gemstone (*baoshi*) since the intention is to use it for carving, whilst in Burmese *kyauk myet* (gem) includes jade (*kyauk sein* — literally 'green' [*sein*] stone; the name itself illustrating how jade is idealised to its gem quality, since most ordinary jade is far from being uniformly green and much of it is not green at all). For, from the Myanmar point of view the intention is to use the stone for a jewel. Of course most jade is not gem quality, but then most rubies, sapphires and even diamonds are not gem quality either □.

We see how very unlike the Chinese and the Burmese ways of even thinking about jade are, This is typical of the distributed knowledge problem in my study. But how, then does the trade network function as a reasonably smooth system of trade and interaction across these ethnic and cultural divides? But let me make a sharp turn in my presentation and consider some facts that may, I think, bear upon a solution, namely, certain 'cultural brokerage relations and bicultural identities amongst the peoples involved in this trade,

2. Shan/Tai~Dai and Other Ethnicities and Cultural Brokerage Functions

I have been concerned *inter alia* with the place of the Dai (Shan) (and the Kachin / Jingpo) in this network of relations and trade (especially in the gem and jade trade). They, after all, are the major indigenous peoples of the area — much more so than the Chinese even; and they have historically controlled the sources of jade and rubies and sapphires in their midst. And yet they are puzzlingly not prominent in the trade, though they do have a place in it. Fortunately, my familiarity with Shan language and ethnography, and with the literature on the Jingpo allowed me to do at least some ethnography on this matter on both sides of the border.

Partly as well, this has been, especially regarding our main research site at Ruili, also a study of a typically ethnic-mosaic border community. Here one can see directly the interaction, in trade and in the physical, social and institutional organisation of the city, a striking instance of the whole border region and its ethnic mosaic structure of mutual dependencies. Within the city one passes in a matter of well under a kilometer from a neighbourhood essentially an expression or reflection of aspects of Myanmar, to one reflecting the organisation and feeling of Indo-Pakistani-Bangladeshi communities in the

Myanmar-South Asian borderlands to China, as if one were moving from one country and culture to another. This is characteristic of border communities, as is the sense of the social separation, commerce aside, of these communities and in fact their fluidity as to what place they feel they 'really' belong to as 'home' however long they have been here — and, of course, the great degree of mobility back and forth across supposedly 'controlled' national borders, not uncommonly involving alternation in how a person moving within this transnational network will identify himself or herself ethnically.

In this connection I have had to work out the dynamics of the history of the ethnic network, e.g., why it was that, after the Second World War, the first Burma-derived community to make a place for itself in Ruili as a new entrepôt for the cross-border trade was the Burmese-Indian Muslim (in Burmese, *kala* – 'Indian', though often having lived for generations in Myanmar) population, which, however, to-day is so marginal to the gem trade except as itinerant carriers and smugglers of stones, though large and prominent as an enclave next to the gem-and-jade market.

As for the Dai / Shan, they fit in in two different ways. On the one hand they function locally in Ruili as a service community for the trading communities, especially Dai from outlying rural places in Dehong and from immediately across the border, mainly Nam Kham, as sellers of produce and of Myanmar derived products of household and religious (Theravāda Buddhist) use for the bazaar-market — this came out clearly in my wife's detailed study of the major bazaars and markets of Ruili. On the other hand, and more directly, they are the key group for the connection in Ruili's (and indeed Yunnan's) trade with Thailand because it is the Shan State of Myanmar that has the nearest common border with Thailand and Thailand is perhaps the major center in Southeast Asia of the international trade in gemstones: rubies, sapphires, and so on — as well as (since 1995) the source for the China market of increasingly important additions to the market's array of truly foreign gemstones, especially the African Ruby. It is of considerable interest that this connection with Ruili is largely a function of families involved in marriages, made during the 1950s and 60s in Myanmar between Chinese (mainly Yangon-based overseas Chinese, largely Fujianese) and Dai/Shan from Yunnan (often from Ruili - Meng Mao itself) marriages giving these Chinese traders with Thailand a privileged access to Yunnan's Dehong Dai area and its gem market.

Further regarding the Shan, mainly in old Mōng Mao (the old Tai town immediately on the North side of modern Ruili□), they serve the rest of the Burma Theravāda Buddhist population by housing all the Buddhist temples and monasteries in the area. In this connection we made a study of the monks and monasteries in Ruili and in Old Mōng Mao, not least their very important Burma connection, where most important Dai Monks are trained, even those from Dehong as far away as Mang Shi.

In any case, the Shan (see especially Hasegawa 1998, Tapp and Walker, 2001) are a pivotal group. On the one hand, the farther one goes North into Yunnan, the more Sinicised they are, quite self consciously, and in that context, as well' as dialectally, they are Tai Nə, i.e., Northern Shan (or what it is called in Burmese Shan Tayok, Chinese Shan. Yet these same people, as they move South to the Burma border, will often claim identity as Tai Mau, Shan of the Nam Mau, or Shweli River, to emphasise, instead their Burma orientation. On the other hand, these same Shan, especially within Burma, will, on the Thai border prefer to emphasise their linguistic and cultural connection with the Thai, and all this puts Shan/Dai in a special brokerage relationship, able to negotiate amongst

competing cultural systems effectively, particularly as between Chinese and Burmese. This has played a significant role in the gem and jade trade in this area, as I illustrated above.

Moreover, the Shan play an additional pivot role in this trade network. For, the network extends Southeastward through the Shan State over the Thailand border, partly because much of the processing and international marketing of stones is centred at Bangkok, as well as because, at least since 1995, African ruby has entered this network and market with increasing prominence by way of Thailand. The Shan connection with their linguistic and cultural relatives of Thailand makes them the brokers and carriers of the latter aspect of this trade, since they have 'a place' in the cultural, political and historical context in all three of the relevant countries. But even more: Shan political history has been heavily involved in expansion along trade routes of this part of the world. This is not to deny the idea that the Shan are in some sense to be understood as largely a rice-growing farming society of these upland valleys, but the involvement in trade is always prominent, in particular in the political economy of the Shan states and principalities². It was striking to me, in my 1967-68 field work that, although the men of, say, Mok Camphei village kept insisting that they were simply farmers, an extraordinarily large proportion of them kept getting involved in the cross-border cattle trade — not infrequently losing their investment badly only to be sucked into it again in a following year. And, for instance, the history of several Shan statelets has been a history of expansion in search of new trading connections. Thus, the chronicle of the founding of the state of Meng Pai North of Chiang Mai in the early 19th Century as such an expansion from the trans-Salween Shan state of Məng Maw. And the distant Shan state of Pai Lin on the Cambodian side of the Thai-Cambodian border was the result of a discovery in about 1890 (by a wandering Shan adventurer) of the Pai Lin sapphire fields. This adventurer, known as 'The Hunter' *Lung Musu*, at once went back to Myanmar, in fact to Rangoon, where there was a considerable Shan merchant community. He showed them the stones; they realized they were excellent gems, and organized, first, an expedition to survey the field, and then a recruiting network in states like Laikha, Mok Mai and Məng Nai, to find Shan families to settle at Pai Lin. Having found such families, this consortium

² It is far from accidental that Shan capital towns were invariably market towns, with the markets being nodes on the traditional five-day market cycle, the market and its traders going from one such town to the next on such a circuit. And (cf. Scott & Hardiman 1901 *passim*) it seems that perhaps the bulk of the revenues to the state came not from land taxes but rather from market fees and fees for the associated gambling operations. So important was this that some Shan states paid bribery fees to Wa and other upland raiding communities in order to ensure that mule caravans from China could get through to the Shan towns in question. The Shan town markets were also focal points for both political and economic relationships with the uplanders, and the significance of such relationships can be found in the common fact that Shan state administration commonly included ministerial officials (*heng*) charged with formal relations with specific upland peoples. Moreover, if one looks at any map of the range of Shan states, one finds that, yes, a Shan state always centred on one or a collection of upland valleys, commonly terraced with paddy fields, but it was nearly always also strategically placed on marketing and trading routes, so that the states seem to form one vast network of trading systems.

of merchants arranged for caches of supplies to be paced at day-stages along the way so that the new settlers could make the long trek to Pai Lin comfortably — a recruitment and advance organisation of settlement in pursuit of trade that was also a big part of the story of the founding of the aforementioned Məng Pai.³

In more current terms, it is significant that more than one family prominent in the trade is Shan (from Burma, with one branch (and shoppe) in Rangoon, one branch and shoppe in Ruili, one branch in Mandalay (where they are part of the gem cutting and wholesaling system chiefly) and one in Bangkok (giving them a more comprehensive link to the international gem market beyond what is available in Rangoon). And for all sorts of historical reasons old and recent, these Shan families from Burma have come to, and intermarried with women from Ruili/Məng Mao and also with Shan women from Thailand

This wants elaboration because I think I must make it clear what I mean by ‘knowledge brokers’ here. It is simply that as I stated earlier on, the Shan here know how to think like Burmese, like Chinese and like Thai having regard to their understanding of the market, so that they are often in a good position to mediate amongst competing bases for evaluating (and then pricing) stones! But let me go into this from a comparative standpoint resulting from my 2007 work at Ruili.

I give you the story of a Burmese political refugee in Ruili, whom I shall call U Khin Maung. He came here in the later 1980s and somehow got into the gem market there (he had had a very different profession in Burma). Now at first, even during my long work with him there in 2003, he was still only part of what I may call the marginal part of the market, part in fact of a sort of open-air line of small buyers and sellers recurrently at risk of being pushed out of the market by the Chinese merchant shoppes. His Chinese language was minimal only. His one advantage was his being a highly scientifically educated Burman with a more than ordinary grasp of Burmese ways and practices; he was also a good ‘study’ and was eagerly learning about stones, and their

³ There had been a young monk at Meng May, known for his preaching skills. The Caofa Meng May asked this monk to serve as his recruiter because of his skill at persuasive talk, but the monk refused, saying he intended to remain in Orders for life. So the Caofa threatened to arrest and execute his father, to which the monk responded, saying that it was sad, but his father was a good man and would be rewarded for his Merit in the next life. The Caofa then made further such threats only to get a similar reply until he threatened the life of the monk’s mother. At this, the monk decided to leave the Sangha and be the recruiting agent for the Cao Fa. I relay this tale here because it says a good deal about Shan Buddhist notions of Merit Transfer (one’s mother is, after all, one’s chief source of Merit because of her upbringing of her son, and the son must always acknowledge that Merit debt). I note also that this gives evidence of the classical Burmese sources of much of Shan Buddhist thought; for, we find a strikingly similar tale in the Glass Palace Chronicles (Luce and Pe Maung Tin 1923) concerning the summoning to Pagan by Kyanzitha of a dependent chief called Thet Minkadon (Kadon, Chief of the Sak) from the borders with what must to-day be India’s Manipur. I say Shan Buddhist thought advisedly because this tale made so much sense to quite ordinary Shan villagers when I told it to them from the historical source I had heard (it was in fact a well-known popular tale).

chemistry and geology. By 2007, though, he was prominently installed in a proper shoppe-stall in a newly constructed building full of such stalls (typical of the Chinese market arrangement). And he was now prosperous. How did this happen? Of course, it was partly a matter of time, for by now he'd been here about twenty years. But more, his two sons (now in their early twenties) had, after all, grown up in China and speak excellent Chinese and are literate in it. From late 2003, furthermore, they had both been sent back into Burma to do undergraduate work at the college at Lashio ((a branch of Mandalay University). Returning, the boys were in a good position to be brokers between the Burmese and the Chinese ways of understanding the market. One is U Khin Maung's right hand in his own shoppe, and the other is engaged to a young woman *from* a Ruili Chinese family, and he goes back and forth in the trade between Burma and China. The point is that the U Khin Maung family (*U Khin Maung, Daw Mi Mi mi-tha-su*) can function with the right connections and understandings of both the Chinese view of stones (gems and jade etc.) and the Burmese. In consequence, U Khin Maung has finally developed a Chinese-type appreciation of the degree to which what Burmese think of as jewellery stones can be often more advantageously thought of as stones for gem-*carving*! And this has led to his trading in a whole series of so-called semi-precious stones from Burma that he had hitherto not seen as of first-class value in the market.

This is the sort of situation the Shan are, and long have been in because of their historical ability, indeed necessity to adapt their entire ethnic identity and its markers to China and to Burma (see now, e.g., Sun Laichen ms nd, 2000 and see, finally Fernquest 2007 for extended historical evidence of the Shan as people who knew, how to think of themselves and of their political order of *məng* ruled by Cao Fa as client states of China and as client states (minor thrones in the Buddhist system of lineages of thrones defining ideological legitimacy— Chit Hlaing 2003b) as a of Burma who, however, had an historically central role in Burma, having ruled at Ava during the late 14th-early 15th Century, when Ava (in the First Ava Period/ *pathama Inwa khit*) was the main successor state to Burma's first major throne, Pagan.

III. The Shan as a 'People Between': Shan Models for Upland Peoples and The Shan as 'Civilised Uplanders.

1. Ban Hong, The Hulu Kingdom of the Pirok Wa

During the last reign of the Ming dynasty in China, in 1647, an official (a general in fact) was sent to Yunnan to reorganise and firm up imperial administration there, as part of defending the Ming against further encroachment by the conquering Manchu Qing. It was particularly important to try and arrange good relations with the uplanders, not least the troublesome Wa. In what is now Cangyuan Xing (county), he decided to find Wa 'leaders' and he then appointed them to office; in particular he appointed one of the most important of these as King (*wang* in Chinese) of the local (Pirok dialect speaking) Wa; the royal title was later supplemented by the Chinese administrative rank of *tusi* (native administrator-cum-tribute collector see, e.g., Yang Hui 2000, Fiskesjoe 2000, Chit Hlaing 2007a), but the original grant was in fact as 'king', and this was recognised officially until the Peoples' Republic in the 1950s. Now, what is of interest for us is that until then the Wa had no role for a king and no such rank. However, they certainly knew about such a position because of their long history of relations with the Shan, and thus it was the Shan idea of a king that they borrowed for their new 'ruler'. They coined a Wa

term for it, which was a translation of the Shan *caofa*.⁴ I shall omit here much detail about the kingdom in question, some of it documented, much of it controversial and contradictory. The royal family took this seriously. Whilst they maintained the Wa custom of patrilineal alliance marriage (entailing marrying a woman from a designated ally lineage in one generation, reversing the direction of marriage in the next, and so on), it was also an apparently invariant custom to take one of the additional wives from some Shan ruling family; to have a Shan queen was taken to be necessary for being royal in Shan eyes, and thus a basic necessity for legitimacy. For, systematic recognition by, and relations with Shan royal houses was deemed essential. I myself have seen old (early 20th Century) photographs of the Ban Hong king in Shan princely regalia⁵, and I was told that this was indeed used as ceremonial dress, not least when visiting, or being visited by Shan royalty, which is something the kings of Ban Hong and their family did routinely. And, of course, the royal family (my informants were from both the lineage of the kings — in fact the old ex king himself — and that of its hereditary marriage allies — the ex king's maternal uncle) all spoke, and still speak fluent Northern Shan, (*Kam Tai Nə*) even 'at home' amongst themselves, although they maintain ethnic Wa identity.

In turn, this led to the Shan 'style' becoming popular amongst the Pirok Wa villages up in the hills above and round about Ban Hong; an example of how they symbolized their attachment to the court and its kingdom. So, for instance, village women have long since adopted informal dress is a direct copy of Shan women's dress, though for formal occasions they still wear a 'Wa' costume of sorts. And within the precincts of any of these villages one always finds the usual Shan *cauy məng*, the 'Heart of the Place' — carved wooden 'post' on a covered platform, and whilst there's a Wa word for this, everyone also knows its Shan name. Above all, however, there is the fact of Pirok Wa Theravāda Buddhism.

2. Origins and Origin Legends and the Nature of Wa/Shan relations

The history of its coming to these Wa is uncertain because there are two partially conflicting versions of it. Here is the one I was given in the village of Mang Long, above Ban Hong, in 2001: In about 1897, the Cao Məng at Ban Hong invited a Shan monk from somewhere in what is now Cangyuan county to come to the area to preach/teach Buddhism to these Wa. He came and settled at Nam Hong (

⁴ For example, consultants of mine of the family in 2003 said that the king was called *caofa* in Shan, but others said it might have been the lesser Shan title of *caomeng*.

⁵ If memory serves me, the picture was taken in connection with the early 1930s 'Ban Hong Incident', the British invasion of Ban Hong, an invasion that, on the one hand showed that the British in fact accepted his claim to be a Shan-style 'prince' of a proper domain and, on the other hand, was motivated by Ban Hong's attempting to exercise a claim to some mines in the British Burmese Shan States — a claim, incidentally, based upon the historical fact that the Pirok Wa lands in which those mines lay had been the domain of a vassal of Ban Hong's from about the time of the original foundation in the 17th Century

Nam Roang, in Wa⁶ — ‘near the water’, and began his mission thence. Soon enough, though, the Wa chased the Shans from there owing to some tension between them, and now it is inhabited by Wa only. Next came a Wa monk, dead now only these ten years, who was a Buddhist teacher to Kong Tien village [his tomb is there too, but it is nearly impossible for me to reach in this rainy season because of a big river to cross and no road or bridge]. And then there has been big influence from Məng Tin, and from the charismatic Chinese teacher [Li Lao Wu] now over in Wa State in Myanmar.

We can see several things of interest from this story. First the ambiguity or ambivalence in earlier relations between Wa and Shan here; something highly uncharacteristic of the present day but no doubt a phenomenon prior to the conversion. I suggest that one must distinguish between Wa (and other uplander) attitudes to lowlanders themselves, who are often seen as exploiters, and Wa/uplander attitudes towards ‘civilisation’ as represented by such lowlanders. I have written elsewhere about this (e.g., Lehman, 1967a, and Chit Hlaing 2007a,b). Then, we note that the forms of Buddhism here have apparently come from several directions within the Shan orbit, *via* different preaching monks. I do not need to go into detail here, but one or two facts will at least raise interesting questions for discussion concerning how much of Wa Buddhism is of Shan origin and how much of other origin. It is entirely Theravāda, and in village houses one often finds, for instance, pictures of Shwedagon Cedi and other major Myanmar shrines. But for example, two different scripts are in use here: one is used for sermon books the sort that are found in Shan houses frequently, from which lay readers (*carei* in Southern Shan at least) often read at various rituals such as funerals. This is the *lik Tai* of the Tai N and the Tai Mau, although many Wa monks can also read, or at least recognize, the southern Shan script and even some Burmese. This is consistent with what is known in Burmese Shan areas as *kəng man*, Burmese-style Buddhism. The other is used for actual scripture, and this is *tam*, the religious script of the Northern Thai and Northern Lao. This is more consistent with Shan *kəng yon*, the Northern Thai (*yuan*) scriptural and ordination tradition.⁷ The latter tradition, one has to suppose, is also the origin of the fact that Pirok Wa monks, as well as monks and novices in Tai monasteries near in the Ximeng area well to the east (where the Wa are not Buddhists and maintained their traditional religion and headhunting rites until the 1950s) wear skull caps as part of their dress — in turn, it has got to be this latter tradition, or some Northern Thai or even Lao version of it that had earlier influenced Wa before conversion. For, words like *bun* for

⁶ Note that the first word is a plain Tai loanword; the second is more interesting. The source is simply obscure as a word meaning ‘near’ or ‘the side of’ or the like, but the alternation between the two forms (*roang*, *hong*) shows the typical alternation between Thai, Northern Thai and Lao initial r+ a diphthong with the Shan initial h (cf. Thai *ruan*, Shan *hən* ‘house’) plus a plain vowel (*ua>o* — cf. Thai *luang* and Shan *long*, meaning ‘great’). It is then significant that it is as a Shan style place name that the place is known even to the Chinese, for whom it is the official place name.

⁷ *kəng*, after all is the Shanised form of the Burmese *gaing*, in turn from Pali *gaṇa*, ‘community’, signifying a particular ordination tradition within Theravāda. Which also subsumes a distinctive tradition of scriptural rendition and recitation form.

instance, referring to the personal essence of ‘merit’, that are characteristic of specifically Pirok Wa adaptations of their previous ideas about cosmology and the spiritual essence of persons to Buddhist ideas are clearly of Tai language family origin but not Shan (*mun*, as in *kung—mun* for ‘qualities and the fruits of merit’ Pāli *guṇa* and *puñña*) — cf., above, the place name Ban Hong, where Wa say, when explaining the name of the kingdom, that the first word is a Wa word meaning a place for ‘coming to rest’, although clearly it is an old Tai (but again not Shan) loan and means, in fact, a ‘settled’ place (Southern Shan/ Tai *Taɯ wan*, Northern Shan/ Tai *Nə man*). What is at issue here is the proposition that Shan influence on Wa culture was in force well before the Pirok conversion under Ban Hong, and more widespread amongst Wa also, and that it seems to have come from Tai (*kəng yon* Shan? Lao, Lue?) farther to the east. If so, the later conversion must have been naturalized, so to say, into this earlier layer of Tai cultural influence.

What is far more obscure is the origin of Pirok Wa Buddhist monastic organization, which seems to be reminiscent of certain Northern Lao (and Lue?) characteristics. For, in these villages, there is usually a sort of monastery-temple with an image and scripture books and so on, and other ritual paraphernalia, but it is (a) without the requisite ritual boundary stones (*sima* in Pāli, *sen* in Shan, from Burmese *thein*), so that ordination cannot validly take place there. The ‘monk’ in such villages, moreover, is generally at least no more than a very senior novice and has never undergone *upasampada* higher ordination; moreover the novices he may have with him and whom he instructs in reading and writing the two religious scripts, need not always reside there. They often have permission to sleep at their parental homes if they are young and lonely. Thus, it is not a genuine monastery. Furthermore, ordinations take place only at distant places where there is a real monastery and abbot, commonly with rather charismatic attributes to judge by what villagers say about him — sometimes Wa, sometimes Tai of one or other kind. Even further (it is worthwhile mentioning here that the field investigation of this during the Summer of 2007, was conducted with Wa monks, mostly at Cangyuan city⁸, the capital of that county was conducted in a mixture of Chinese and Shan, which the monk informants used quite easily — all in all, we can say that the position of the Shanhan for the Wa is indicated by the use of Shan language as their *regional* lingua franca), it is the villagers themselves who, having eventually come to recognize the worth of the resident ‘monk’ will recommend to the distant abbot that he be made a *pha* (the Shan title, again, for monks and other exalted objects beings imbued with great merit, the Buddha included). And then he goes to the distant site and it seems (I can’t be certain yet) he is then given higher ordination. I am led to wonder at all this and ask where if anywhere in the larger Tai/Thai area one may find models for this Wa form of monastic organisation.

The other version of the relationship between Pirok Wa conversion and Ban Hong royal policy I got in 2007 from the old ex king of Ban Hong. He insisted that there was no direct instigation of the conversion, although, he said, there was definitely a policy of encouraging it. But what is especially interesting is the recorded royal family tradition about the origins of the first king. His family is said, in this legend to have come from

⁸ The existence of Wa monks in genuine monasteries with Shan as well as Wa monks and novices in a major city that is now a county capital and has been a Chinese-and-Shan town for centuries serves as an indication of the extent to which the Wa Buddhism is taken seriously by both Wa and Shan.

‘Burma’, more precisely, from a place he identifies with Mandalay, although they have yet another legend identifying themselves with a lake near Kunming. They are said to have arrived in their Ban Hong location over 250 years ago, and this at least is about the time of their first appointment as kings. But what is significant here is that these legends place the Wa, symbolically within the two respective orbits of Burma and China, and make their Buddhism part of a purported primordial identity. This is, of course, consistent with a fairly old connection with Buddhism and, historically, it indicates a clientship with the Shan going well back beyond the 17th Century origin of Ban Hong kinship; and this in turn is supported by the etymological evidence of Tai widely distributed loanwords in Wa mentioned earlier in this paper. In any case, the Mandalay legend (and the Kunming one) are typical of the widespread tales amongst upland peoples throughout Mainland Southeastern Asia laying a symbolic claim to the amenities of civilisation in the context of the hegemony of the lowland states by asserting that in ancient times they too had states, cities and even writing, all of which were lost because of their subordination to the lowland peoples (see Lehman 1967a)

It has to be understood that the royal policy encouraging if not indeed actively pursuing conversion of the Pirok Wa to Theravāda Buddhism had an important political motive. In fact it was seen as necessary to the recognition of the Ban Hong Kings being recognized as such by the various nearby Shan *caofa*. Parallels exist for this elsewhere in Mainland Southeastern Asia. The Maharajas of Manipur, who were ethnically Tibeto-Burman speaking Meithei had themselves adopted Hinduism as early as the 16th Century, in order to deal as equals with nearby Hindu princes and even kings in Bengal. But they pursued the conversion to Hinduism of the general Meithei population for the best part of two centuries until, in the 18th, a Bengal Hindu proselytising movement made it possible to invite Brahmins to Manipur to convert the population.

Let me turn briefly to yet another fact that demonstrates the Shan-conceptual foundations of the Pirok Wa kingdom of Ban Hong, the official name of the kingdom, the *Hulu* kingdom. *Hulu* is the Chinese word for a bottle gourd (*Lagenaria sp*). It comes from yet another origin tale of the royal lineage, according to which their first ancestor emerged from a bottle gourd. Note that this is not a claim about the Pirok or any other Wa group as a whole, whose original ancestors are said generally to have emerged from a cave; it’s only about the royal line. This bottle gourd origin legend echoes directly a similar origin legend belonging to Tai speaking peoples to the East, Lao and Lue (see, e.g., Proschan 2001) So we can say that it gives the Ban Hong royal line an explicitly Shan-like, or rather Tai-like cosmological foundation and basis of authority.

3. Varieties of Buddhist Thought and Practice Amongst Wa and Other Uplander Shan Clients

3.1. Wa

And now let me return to consideration of questions concerning Wa Buddhism, in order to pursue the nature of the client-like relationship to Shan. In the Pirok Wa Buddhist villages, the merit (*bun*) of the household, in particular of the house owner is, in the final analysis, ‘owned’ by the local ‘monastery’, by the Buddhist religion and its institutions. When the householder dies, his *bun* is sent to, and somehow resides at the monastery, and so do any religious scriptures he may have kept at his Buddhist house altar. This seems to say a good deal about the client, or subordinate nature of Wa

relationships to Buddhism as a Shan-civilised institution. It is Buddhism, but Buddhism *manqué*.

3.2 Kayah

Once again, there is a parallel example to be adduced, As I have written elsewhere (Lehman 1967b Kayah) The Kayah (Red Karen, Karenni), a Central Karen people living South of the Shan State on the Shan plateau in Burma, have been clients of the Shan. Indeed, Kayah ethnogenesis took place towards the close of the 18th Century when Central Karen, who had been labourers in the teak forests for Shan, took over the teak extraction on their own behalf, forced the remaining Shan into a settlement⁹ to serve as their metal smiths (making both iron tools and ceremonial bronze frog drums), and formed several smallish Shan-style principalities, where, in fact, their word for the prince was *sophrya*, an obvious Thai loanword for Lord/King (*cao phraya*)¹⁰. The charismatic cult, addressed to a Kayah deity also called Lord (*sophrya*) that gave these princes authority was not Buddhism and in fact the Kayah were used to any Buddhist sources. And yet the Buddhist sources are plainly obvious, such as the fact that the ceremonial building is called *haw*, the Shan word for ‘palace’, and the main ceremonial structure that defines the, the *iy luw* post, is in every detail a copy of the Shan form of the Burmese *tagundaing* (Shan *tam khon* spelling pronunciation of the Burmese *tagun*, ‘pennant’), the Buddhist ‘flag-pole’ celebrating the victory of the Lord Buddha over Mara and his demons found in every and *cedi* (‘pagoda’) precinct. The Kayah court was modelled upon a Shan court and the formal costume of the king was that of a Shan prince; and the chief queen was called, as in Shan, by the exalted Pāli title of *Mahādewi* (‘great goddess’), as in Shan.

However, where, in the Eastern range of Kayah settlement, across the Salween river and over the Thai border, in Mae Hongson province, the Kayah villagers are still, and have been all along in a more direct relationship of clientship and dependency upon Shan villages. In this context, the Shan insist upon considering the Kayah a sort of inferior variety of Buddhists. The Kayah seem to accept this and each Kayah household (unless converted to Christianity, for instance) has a Buddhist altar inside, but the Shan do not allow the altar to have an image; only leaves of a plant standing for such an image, and no Kayah village has, or can have, its own monastery or monk. Indeed, until my own time there (late 1960s) few if any Kayah had been ordained, and of those, fewer still, if any, as more than mere novices.

3.3 Kachin

I have also pointed out elsewhere (Chit Hlaing 2007a) that the Kachin/Jinghpo political system known as *Gumlao* was supported by explicit borrowing of Buddhist principles of ‘equality’ in merit taken directly from the Shan they associated with.

IV. Conclusion: Shan: In Between the ‘Civilised’ Lowlands and the Wild Hills.

⁹ The settlement was given the Kayah name of *phrey lave*, meaning where the Shan [*phrey*] are kept (*lave* has an explicitly causative meaning, ‘to put something down and keep it there’).

¹⁰ Note that it is a Thai title, but with a distinctly Shanised phonetic form regarding the initial consonant — Thai *c* being in at least Southern Shan, *ts*.

It is commonly said in general works on Southeastern Asia that one can divide the peoples into two categories: lowland peoples with cities, kingdoms, writing and World Religions (largely Buddhism in the Northern Mainland) and ‘tribals’ in the hills. This goes back to the first (Heine-Geldern 1923) monograph on the anthropology of South East Asia. However, as I showed long ago (Lehman 1967a), this is an inaccurate idealisation. For instance, a great many Karen, especially Pwo and Sgaw have lived for an indefinitely long time in the delta plain of Lower Burma, although it is true that even they consider the hills to the East as, if not their proper homeland, their ever-available refuge from the hegemony of the Burmans, the Mon, and the Thai, and the home of their close ethnic relatives. And, central to this paper, we consider the Shan, who, though living in valleys and subsisting upon irrigated rice and having towns, principalities, writing and Buddhist religion and its institutions, nevertheless systematically inhabit uplands. More exactly, their lands are invariably in valleys and/or actual alluvial plains (most particularly, this is the case of the Tai Mao (Maw Shan), whose domains, especially of their primate principality, Məng Mao, is defined by the plain of the Shweli river (*Nam Mao*).

What I have tried to show in the present paper is that the Shan constitute a major instance of a people ‘in between’ in several senses. They have all the characteristics that make them represent civilization according to the ideology of the unambiguous lowland kingdoms and (with caveats) of the Chinese likewise — for the Shan (Dai, as their name is written in Putonghua Pinyin romanisation) do not usually figure in historical Chinese representations as ‘barbarians’ (*man*, etc.); rather, like Burmese, Thai and so on in South East Asia (the *Nan Yang* or Southern Ocean), and indeed kingdoms elsewhere in Asia, they are represented as, shall we say, ‘less civilised’ than China itself (cf. Fiskesjoe 2000, Giersch 1998, 2001). Nevertheless, the fact that their home is indeed in uplands can be seen to make a difference, at least in the eyes of the truly lowland states and empires. Nor is this merely a matter of naked geography. What is significant here is the way Shan states related to surrounding tribals in the hills in their very midst (see above). The *systematic* patron-client relationships had no noticeable parallel for the real lowland kingdoms; when tribals figured in the political sphere of those kingdoms it had to be by special, negotiated treaty (cf. Jónsson 2006 on the Mien/Yao in Northern Thailand, and rev, by Chit Hlaing, 2007d, and Lehman 1967b for Kayah); otherwise the lowland states proper simply kept them at bay, largely rejecting the uplanders’ claims to even systematic trade relations (Lehman 1963). Moreover, it is hardly accidental that no Shan kingdom ever even claimed to figure as a major throne in the Hindu-Buddhist ideology of the lineage of thrones (see above, and see also Fernquest 2007); they were always strictly client states (to China as well as to Burma and Northern Thailand/Lanna, and earlier in history to Nanzhao~Dali), and more particularly invariably based their claim to legitimacy as thrones in this ideology upon (a) their former clientship to Nanzhao and (b) the fact that Shan once *also* ruled in Burma during the latter part of the First Ava period.

This is intimately bound up with the circulating-trade network of relations amongst the Shan principalities and their history of geographic expansion — from the Tai Khamti and Phaké of North Easternmost India to Pailin over the Thai-Cambodian border, and from Mangshi in central Yunnan in China south to the Southern Shan State in Burma. Nor can one omit mentioning the constant presence of Shan merchant communities in

Burma and in Thailand (in Rangoon, in Bangkok, in Phrae as institutionalised representatives of the trade-and-political networks of the Shan principalities proper.

In short, within the lowland empires the Shan have always been (say with the exception of their rule at Ava) upland *minority* peoples, and within the hills they have always been the *outpost* of the Buddhist-defined lowland civilization, representing and purveying that civilization amongst the tribals of the hills – thus serving, and in an almost unique position to serve as cultural brokers, more correctly knowledge brokers, in the sense this paper began with.

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□ မောင်ချစ်လှိုင်