

Tai Name of the Year and Tai New Year

Monthip Sirithaikhongchuen (Mahamoong, Muang Zae),

Lue Dai Library, Maesai, Chiang Rai, Thailand

Dated: The Year Of Puek Jai (Choud Year or Year of the Rat)

B.E. 2551.

So far, we do not yet know exactly, indeed we know very little about the political and social circumstances in which the Tai family group began to use a calendar that would result in the celebration of this New Year Day. So, instead of repeating legend as history, I shall bring your attention to the astrological calculation that helps us arrive at this New Year Day.

In so doing, I shall venture to suggest that this particular calendar was earlier used by all branches of the Tai ethno family groups, for instance, Thai, Lao, Tai-khun, Lue, Tai Dam and Shan. Today, we see members of the Tai ethno family groups celebrating also a few other new year days: some celebrate Songkran in April which has become common to nearly all South and South-east Asians; and others join the celebration of the First of January. The Songkran and the Gregorian New Year obviously come from India and the West respectively. Some branch of the Tai family celebrates even the Chinese New Year.

In the Tai astrological vocabulary, *ming* means *name*, name of the year, the month and the day, defined according to the star groups or constellations, or according to the season of the astrology (*hora*) of the East. This science also is based on the calculation of the movement or path of the moon. The star groups are called *nakkhatta* in Pali and *naksatra* in Sanskrit. In the Tai ethno family group there was a custom of using the name of the star groups in calculating the years, months and days and time for everyday life. This calendar is used to tell the day and date in everyday life. For example, *karpsun* year (Year of Monkey), *lupkai* month (Month of Pig) *hoonghao* day

(Day of Rooster). We can say that people used *ming* to tell the year, month, day and date in everyday life. This was very important in the agriculturally orientated life. Up to this day the Tai race from the North and North-East of Thailand, Tai Yai, Khuen, Lue, Tai Nua, Ahom Tai (In Assam of India), Laos, Tai Lum, Tai Leng and Tai Khao (In Vietnam) still use this calendar system. Only the Central Thais and the Southern Thais no longer using it. Instead, they use the Khmer calendar system. Even the Thai government use the Khmer calendar.

Here we need to understand is, in astrology that uses the lunar month and star groups in the astral world the names are taken from animals in our world. This concept is now popular also to the Tibetan and Chinese. All the animals and the star groups are assigned to match each other symbolically and use indirectly. But in *hora* astrology that use the path of the sun as basis, they have to use the movement of astral bodies in the universe directly.

Names of the Years

There are twelve *son years* or rather *child year* in a year cycle; and each with a name. They are:

1. *Jai* known as the Year of the Rat
2. *Pao* Year of the Ox,
3. *Yee* Year of the Tiger
4. *Mao* Year of the Rabbit or Cat,
5. *Si* Year of Naga/ Big Snake
6. *Sai* Year of Snake
7. *Si Nga* Year of the Horse
8. *Med/Mod* Year of the Goat
9. *San* Year of the Monkey
10. *Hao* Year of the Cock
11. *Sed/ Med* Year of the Dog and

12. *Kai* Year of the Pig/ Elephant.

And there are other 10 *Mother years* each with a name. They are:

1. *Karp*
2. *Lup*
3. *Hai*
4. *Muang*
5. *Puek*
6. *Kud*
7. *Koat*
8. *Hoong*
9. *Tao* and
10. *Ka*.

When the *Mother Years* are rotationally combined with the *Son Years* until the last one from each set meets, which is *ka* and *kai*, we get a sixty-year cycle. It begins, for example, 1. *Karp Jai* with the first mother year of *karp* combining with the first son year of *jai*. 2. *Lup Pao* where the second mother year of *lup* is assigned to the second son year *pao* and so on. When both sets of year run out at the same time, we complete one cycle of 60 year, and we then start again at year one of *Karp Jai*, meaning we begin a new cycle. In fact, not just year, but also the months and also the days are calculated in this sixty-cycle.

With the coming into existence of this calendar, there evolved customs and cultures around this the calendar. For example, there are 60 Time in a day, five days in a Market (market-day cycle) , two markets in a week, three weeks in a month, two Months in a cycle (60 days) and six Cycles in a Year.

In the past, this sixty-year-cycle of Mother-Year and Son-Year system, was used by the Tai people to calculate the calendar era, record events and chronicles and also to give names to children.

In giving names, for example, the name **Ai Noan** is given to a boy who is born on the fourth day (Wednesday) or *Hai Med* (Goat day), the third waning day of *Kod Yee* month (Tiger month or the third lunar month), in the year of *Kar Med* (Year of the Goat), Culasakkaraja Era 1364. It will be understood immediately by a Tai who is well versed in this calendar that on the third waning day of the third Lunar month (Lem Jeing in Tai or Duan Ai in Thai) of the year 1367, Ai Noan will be three years old.

But now the Thai, the most economically advanced group of the Tai family group, have borrowed the year name from the Khmer, instead of using this Tai calendar name. The twelve-year cycle is 1-Choad, 2-Chalu, 3-Kham, 4-Thaw, 5-Marong, 6-Maseng, 7-Mamia, 8-Mamae, 9-Wok, 10-Raga, 11-Jaw, and 12-Goon. Anyhow the meaning is the same as Tai or Thai names such as...Noo=Rat, Woe=Ox, Hser=Tiger, etc.

How did the year names come into existence? Astrological experts still have different views as to how the year names were given according to constellations. Some said the names were given since the ancient civilization times of the Egyptians and the Persians. Some said it was part of the ancient Indian culture, but some who studied ancient Chinese culture said it was Chinese art and later spread throughout Asia and South-East Asia. Still, some argued that after studying the 12 year names there are no Chinese words in the names such as....*Jai, Pao, Yee, Mao, Si, Sai, Si Nga, Med, Sun, Hao, Sed, and Kai*. Although the year name system was first found in Chinese history its origin may not have been Chinese. So, the system was not invented by the Chinese. According to some, the Chinese only began using the year-name system during the Western Han Dynasty 220-20 BC. It could be that the Chinese adopted this system from a certain race, who migrated into China at that time. Some historians have found in the history of Sung-Nu tribe that the method of calculating time by using Year name

system of Mother Year- Son Year came from the Pai Ti custom. These tribesmen were nomads, herding animals in the plains. The Year name(*nakkhatta*) such as *Jai, Pao, Yee* were from the Pai Ti language. According to some historians, *Hsu Han Sae*, the leader of Sung-Nu who lived near the land of the Pai Yee, lost a battle to his brother. He fled to live with the ruler of the Western Han. He brought the system of the year name with him and the knowledge spread throughout China . From then, the Chinese have been using this system.

However, after several generations the Chinese changed the Pai Ti names into Chinese. The ten names of *Ton Fah*(Mother Year) are *Jae, Hii, Ping, Ting, Oo, Ji, Gerng, Sin, Yen* and *Gui*(10) . The twelve names of *Ging Lin*(Son Year) are *Jue, Jau, In, Mao, Choen, Sue, Oo, Woei, Sern, Yau, Si* and *Hai*(12). When the 10 Mother-Years and the 12 Son-Years are combined the result is the sixty-year cycle. The Chinese call the sixty-year cycle *Liu Sue Jay Jue*.

At present the Pai Ti constellation year name system is not only used by all Tai ethno family groups, but also by Chinese, Khmer, Vietnamese and Indians. The names have also been changed to local languages. The Chinese call the Year name system *Ging Lin (Sue Eua Ging Lin)* and The Indians call the twelve constellation year name system (*Dva-dasa rasi*.) Although some academics believe this year name culture came from *Si Han*(Western Han) before it spread throughout Asia, they do not agree that it was invented by the Chinese. Actually, they insist, the Chinese “borrowed” it from Pai Ti. I also believe that The Tai people also borrowed it from Pai Ti who invented this system first and that the Pai Ti should be highly honored. But of all the people who use this Pai Ti year name system only the Tai people are still using it in everyday life up to this day. Some even suggest putting the Pai Ti into the Pai Yue group. (*Yue* or *Yee* One hundred Race group). Here is it possible to pose a question: were Pai Ti the ancestors of the Tai race? As I have no answer myself, I would like to leave it some learned researchers.

Tai New Year and Year name Basis

Of those who are using the Pai Ti system of Year name as a custom to calculate time, days, months and years for their own use, they consider the first new moon day of the twelfth month as the last day of the old year, and day of the first waxing moon day the first day of the year or New Year's Day. The first month in Tai is called *Lern Jeing*. Yuan (Yonok), Laos, Thais, Khuen, and Lue call this month *Doen Ai*. The Chinese, Vietnamese and Khmers also consider the first day of the first month as New Year's Day up to this day. All the people in the Tai ethno family group have considered this day as New Year's Day for generations. [Lern Jeing or the first month of Yuan is two months faster than Tai and Thai. The first month of Khuen and Lue is one month faster than Tai and Thai. This is according to where the Hora was taken from.]

Any Tai ethno family group, including Thai and Laos celebrate four different New Year Occasions or Rites. They are the Songkran in Thai, the Gregorian New Year's Day, the Chinese New Year's Day and the Tai New Year's Day.

Songkran Newyear

This falls in the month of April (The Fifth Month in Tai and Thai. The Sixth Month in Khuen and Lue and the Seventh Month in Yuan) It is also known as Water Throwing Festival and falls in summer. This water festival is the Hindu Indian custom which has spread with Buddhism to Tai ethno family groups. Now it has become a Buddhist custom in Asia, especially in South-East Asia which the Tais are concentrated. According to historians, the Thais adopted Songkran Day as official New Year's Day only during the reign of Rama the Fifth (B.E. 2432, A.D. 1889).

Gregorian World New Year's Day

This day mostly falls in *Lern Jeng* or the first Tai month (That is...the second month or *Lern Kum* of Khuen and Lue, and the third month of Yuan.) All over the

world it is the first of January. Thais adopted this day as official New Year's Day in B.E. 2483 or A.D.1940 and have been using it up to this day.

Chinese New Year

This day falls in February and sometimes in March. In another way the third month in Tai (The Fourth month of Khuen and Lue; The Fifth month of Yuan.) The Tai Nuea, Tai Suang, and Tai Tong in Yunnan of China have taken this day to be their New Year's Day.

Tai New Year's Day

This day has been considered to be New Year's Day by the Tai Race for almost 3,000 years. It falls on the first waxing day of the first month (Lem Jeing) according to the constellations. This is the ancient wisdom and custom of the people of Asia. For South-East Asians this day falls mostly in November and sometimes in December.

But the New Year's Day according to 60 Year name calendar of the Tai Race has been forgotten. Only the Tai Yai people (*Tai Long* living in the present Shan States) still consider this as a special day and continue to celebrate it up to this day.

It is written in The Thai history that this Tai New Year's Day was celebrated from the Sukkhothai period to the middle Ayutthaya period. Although people from the high society have changed to using the Gregorian New Year's Day, which is calculated by the movement of the sun, the middle class and the lower class are still using the Tai New Year's Day. This is because they have to depend on the season and weather to make their living on agriculture and the months are calculated by the moon and the constellations.

Conclusion

If we calculate the years, months, days and time according to the *hora* science of the South-East Asians which use the 60-year cycle year name system as said the

new moon day of the twelfth month is considered to be the last day of the year. So the first waxing day of the first month or *Lern Jeng* or *Lern Ai* is New Year's Day. It will be a cycle of every year. Our ancestors have used this calendar system to celebrate New Year's Day by giving alms with newly harvested rice. This means it is the end of cultivation, harvest and produce of the last crop of the old year. In another it was the end of the 60 cycles (360 days).

Finally, I want to request every Tai in the Tai ethno family groups, wherever he may be, to recognize the first day of the first month (Lern Jeng or Lern Ai) as the New Year's Day of all the Tai ethno family groups. Even though the first of January is recognized as the official New Year's Day by the Thai government, we need the further generations to know the real Tai New Year's Day of our common ancestors. It is the duty of every one of us that this shared cultural value is revived and promoted so that it lasts forever.

Reference

- The Custom of Thai New Year's Day (Doen Ai), Bhddhachak (in Thai)
 - December, A.D. 2002.
- 125 Years Thai Calendar, By Luerd Samakkam. B.E. 2500.
- The Shan Calendar and New Year, By Khur Hsen (in Tai) A.D. 1999.
- Thai New Year History. Column 13, Matichon Daily Newspaper (Thai). A.D. 2004.
- Fing Ma The Twelve Thai Race Groups. By Praphan Kulwinich. B.E. 2546.
- The Twelve Thai Year Names. B.E. 2547.

Appendix

Difference in Year Names

- Chue Chu, Khau Niw, Mao To, Sem Loong, Sue Ser, Woo Mar, Wei Yang, Sem Khau, Yiw Jii, Shu Kau, Khai Ju. (Chinese Names.)
- Jai, Pao, Yee, Mao, Si, Say, Si Nga, Med (Mod), Sun, Hao, Sed (Med), Kai. (Tai race Names)
- .Chuod, Chalu, Kham, Taw, Marong, Maseng, Mamia, Mamae, Wok, Raka, Jaw, Goon. (Thai Names)
- .Noo, Woe, Hser, Pamgtaai, Ngerk, Ngoo, Ma, Pae, Ling, Gai, Mar, Moo. (Tai Names)
- . [Mar, Moo, Noo, Gai, Hser, Pamgtaai, Ngerk, Ngoo, Ma, Pae, Ling, Gai] (Tai Nua starts with Mar)