

## Interpretation of Migration History in Rural Development Age : Written Documents and Other Sources of History

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## **Interpretation of Migration History in Rural Development Age: Written Documents and Other Sources of History**

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### **1. Introduction**

This paper focuses on historical expressions in the changing process of worshipping guardian spirits by three Tai Lue villages (N, D and T) in Thawangpha district, Nan Province, Northern Thailand.

The Tai Lue people are a Tai-speaking group who now inhabit mainly the Xi Shuan Pan Na Autonomous Prefecture in Yunnan Province, China with some of them dispersed in Northern Laos, the Shan states in Myanmar and in Northern Thailand. Before the Chinese revolution, they had formed the Sipsong Panna chiefdom in Yunnan.

Most of the Tai Lue in Northern Thailand migrated from Sipsong Panna, now in Yunnan Province, China, during the past two centuries. Northern Thailand had been ruled by the Burmese from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century. At the end of the eighteenth century, the ruler of Lanna kingdom in Northern Thailand drove out Burmese influence, and took several Tai-speaking groups, including Tai Lue in Sipsong Panna, into Northern Thailand to recover from the devastation of their land by their land by the war against the Burmese.<sup>1)</sup>

The occupants of the three Tai Lue villages in Thawanpha migrated from Muang La in the eastern part of Sipsong Panna to Thawangpha in the nineteenth century.

Hastrup has pointed out, “Traditionally, records were the only acceptable evidence of history, but from anthropological perspective recollections are equally valid material for the reconstruction of the past not ‘in spite of’ but precisely ‘because of’ the significant cultural selection inherent in them” (Hastrup 1992: 10). In this paper, under this perspective, I will treat several sources of history and focus on the marginalization of written documents.

In this paper, I first focus on the old written documents of their migration history and their modern interpretation. I point out that this interpretation is related to reforming of their traditional culture in the part of their rural development movement. Second, I focus on other new historical expressions, such as statues and portraits of their historical heroes. These new expressions of their history appeared during the process of changing their guardian spirit ritual, especially in the 1990s when traditional culture was being reformed. I examine the meaning of the appearance of several new expressions of their history. Through this, I try to examine the present position of the written documents of migration history.<sup>2)</sup>

## 2. An Old Written Document about the Tai Lue Migration and its Modern Translation

Here I introduce an old written document in Tai Lue script found in N village, which describes the migration of three Tai Lue villages in Thawangpha.<sup>3)</sup> They migrated from Muang La in Sipsong Panna to Thawangpha because of an internal disturbance in Sipsong Panna, and then were given the land in Thawangpha Basin by the chief of Nan.

The following is the general meaning of the document. (See Chart 1 Map of Thawangpha Basin)

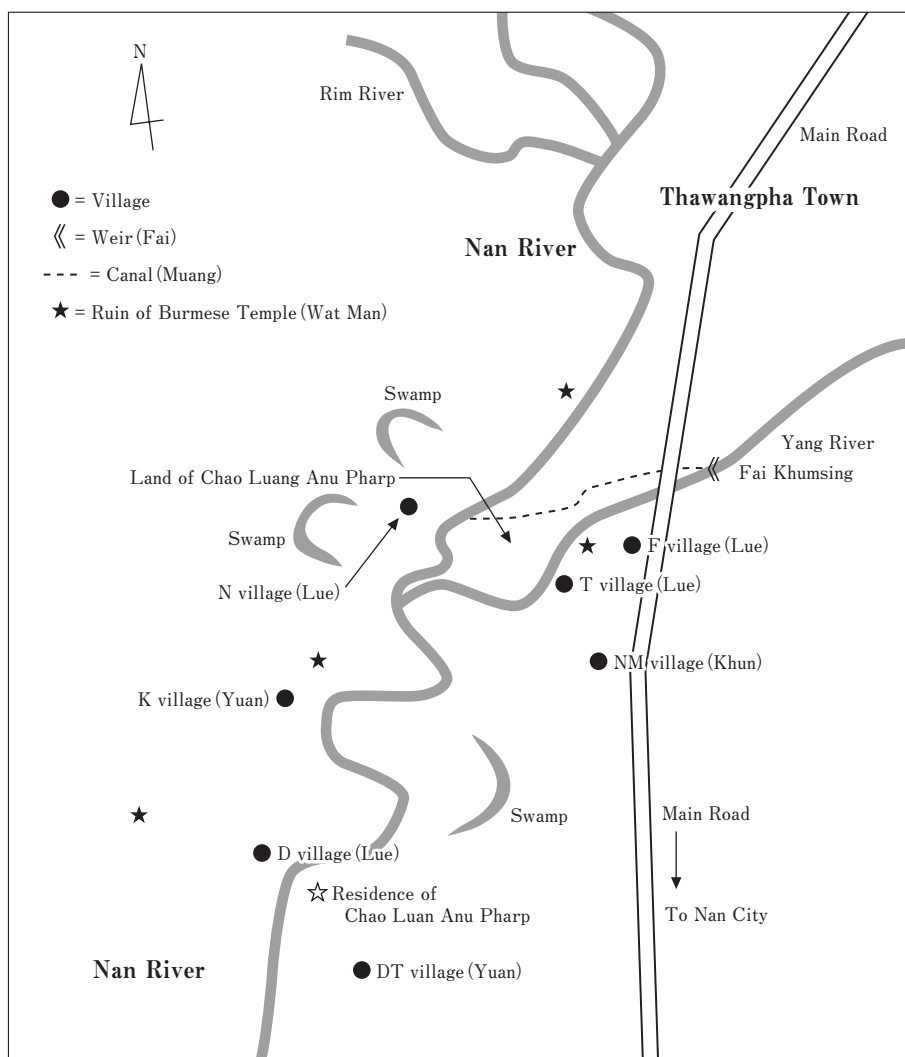


Chart 1 Map of Thawangpha Basin

Since 1822, in Sipsong Panna, Chao Maha Wan had been fighting with Chao Mom Noi to contend for the throne of Sipsong Panna. Also, principalities controlled by the lord of Sipsong Panna had separated into two groups and fought each other. Muang La, which was one of the principalities, joined the army of Chao Mom Noi. Chao Mom Noi allied with Lan Sang and Nan. They fought against Chao Maha Wan but were defeated. Then Chao Raja But and Chao Kham Mon, the son of Chao Muang Nan (the chief of Nan), and the army of Muang La retreated to Thasen. Raja But and Chao Kham Mon took Chao Muang La (the chief of Muang La) to meet Chao Muang Nan. Chao Muang Nan gave the new land and the weir named Fai Khumsing to the people of Muang La. Chao Maha Wong became Chao Muang Nan, and he took Chao Muang La to meet the king of the Rattanakoshin Dynasty in Bangkok. The king of Rattanakoshin gave the title of Phaya La to Chao Muang La.

Since they settled in Thawangpha, the Tai Lue people have held the ritual called *Chao Luang Muang La* every three years. At the ritual, they celebrate several guardian spirits who constitute the pantheon of Chao Luang Muang La, the chief spirit. It used to be held at the ritual site situated in N village.

In 1984, the statue of Chao Luang Muang La, chief spirit, was erected at the ritual site in N village, instead of a spirit shrine with a red roof. At that time, a commemorative document was published. It included the history of the Tai Lue migration translated from an old written document in Tai Lue script, as explained above, into modern Thai (Pechun 1984: 9–12).

In this translated version, it is mentioned that N village was the first settlers' village. In the end, it mentions that D village and T village separated from N village, and that WP village (now in Chiang Kham district in Phayao province) also separated from N village.

However, D villagers claim that D village was the first settlers' village for the following reason: the legend of Chao Luang Anupharph, who is said to have been the leader of the Tai Lue and who lived in D village when they migrated to Thawangpha, exists in D village. According to this legend, his residence was in the territory of D village, and his lands were in D village and T village.<sup>4)</sup>

N village and D village both claim to be the first to be settled, and express their migration history from their own standpoint.

Which is the historical fact? Here, I try to examine the question using historical evidence.

Actually, D village may be the first settlers' village for the following reasons:

- (1) According to the legend of Chao Luang Anupharph in D village, his residence was in the territory of D village, and his lands were in D village and T village. There are villagers in D village who inherited the lands of Chao Luang Anupharph.<sup>5)</sup>
- (2) Before the Tai Lue settled in Thawangpha basin, there were Burmese temples called Wat Man. The ruins of the temples were in T village and near D village. Before the Tai Lue migrated to Thawangpha, this area was ruled by the Burmese like other parts of Northern Thailand. So it can be said that people had lived in the surroundings of D and T villages before the Tai Lue migrated to Thawangpha.

(3) In the surrounding area of N village, the course of the Nan River winds among many swamps and traces of old watercourses. It shows that this area is floodable.<sup>6)</sup>

Taking into consideration the three points mentioned above, it is more likely that N village was settled after D village.

This is the historical reconstruction of the Tai Lue migration from a historian's perspective, but there are other histories that have been memorized, interpreted and passed on by indigenous people too.

In the next chapter, I will examine their interpretation of history in the context of the changing process of the Tai Lue guardian spirit ritual.

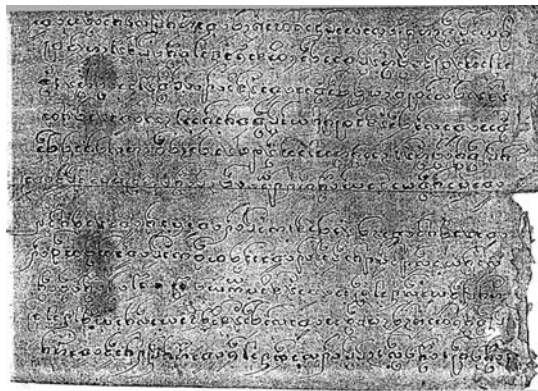


Fig. 1 Tai Lue document of migration history

### 3. Changing Ritual and Building of Historical Monuments

As mentioned above, three Tai Lue villages held their guardian spirit ritual together after they migrated from Muang La to Thawangpha. (See Chart 2 Ritual Process and Chart 3 The Pantheon)

Since 1979, N village has played an important role in rural development because the village leader was honored as the best village leader throughout Thailand. Since then, the ritual has changed with rural development in this area.

In 1984, a statue of the chief spirit, Chao Luang Muang La was built in place of the red spirit shrine, expressing hope for the development of N village. It was then that a change in the ritual began, but it also changed more drastically in the 1990s.

In 1990, the ritual was enlarged to promote it amongst outsiders including tourists, and by school teachers who visited their origins, Muang La. But only N village, which led the enlargement of the ritual, benefited from it. Therefore, a psychological conflict occurred between N village and D village. D village could not benefit from the enlargement of the ritual even though the village plays an important role in the ritual: the descendants of the

chief of their origins, Muang La, and many of the spirits comprising the pantheon of Chao Luang Muang La, live in D village. In 1996, the ritual site split into two places, N village and D village. T village joins the ritual held in N village.

Through the changing process of the ritual, various historical monuments have appeared, such as the statue of Chao Luang Muang La (N village, 1984), the spirit shrine of Chao Luang Anupharp (D village, 1991), the shrine of Chao Luang Muang La (D village, 1996), the portrait of Chao Luang Anupharp (D village, 1996), and the statue of Chao Luang Muang La, riding a horse (D village, 2000).

These monuments commemorate two historical heroes, Chao Luang Muang La and Chao Luang Anupharp. They do not appear in the old document which describes historical events, but are memorized in Tai Lue villages. Chao Luang Muang La is a guardian spirit for the three villages, and is said to be the chief of Muang La and to have died on the battle field. Chao Luang Anupharp is said to have been the leader of the Tai Lue when they migrated to Thawangpha. However, the legend of Chao Luang Anupharp has been narrated mainly in D village, so it can be said that Chao Luang Anupharp is a historical hero for D village.

The appearance of these monuments relates to the enlargement of the ritual which N village led, and the movement of D village opposed to the movement of N village. The construction of Chao Luang Muang La's statue, and the migration history translated into modern Thai in the commemorative publication are one of the claims of history by N village. And many historical monuments, which appeared one after another in D village are part of their opposing movement.

The construction of the spirit shrine of Chao Luang Anupharp was their first movement toward cultural independence from N village, using their own historical hero. After the ritual splitting, D villagers constructed the shrine and the statue of Chao Luang Muang La. Then, they succeeded in establishing their own historical hero separate from N village.

There is a story of Chao Luang Anupharp in D village. In the olden times, Chao Luang Anupharp killed many villagers, so D village is not rich, and never will be so because of the effect of his karma. One day, one young boy of D village, who worked in Bangkok, asked the fortuneteller how to solve the poverty problem of D village. The fortuneteller said that a special shrine of Chao Luang Anuparp must be built to subdue his wandering soul.

According to their oral history, in olden times, the ritual had been held in D village during the first age of migration. There are two legends about moving the ritual site to N village from D village. In version one, a sacrificial buffalo escaped to N village while the sacrificial ceremony was being held, so the ritual site was moved. In version two, a powerful evil spirit exists in the swamp near N village. Chao Luang Muang La moved to subdue it, so the ritual site also moved. N villagers tend to tell version one, as they think it shows that Chao Luang Muang La did not like D village, and D villagers tend to tell version two. The separation of the ritual in 1996 occurred as a result of this legend.

Although the two heroes are Tai Lue historical heroes, this movement of constructing monuments through village-development competition shows building a village identity more than a Tai Lue identity.

**Chart 2** Ritual Process

Thawangpha (1990.12)

Three days in December. Three villages (N, T, and D) conduct the ritual together at the ritual site in N village.

1<sup>st</sup> day: The N villagers visit *Chao Muang* (the descendant of the chief of Muang La, wearing a blue dress living in D village) in D village, *Khap Lue* (Tai -Lue folk song) sung by two male singers from N village and two female singers from D village. The houses of spirits scattered among the three villages are gathered to the ritual site in N village. *Chao Muang* and *Mo Muang* (the priest of *Chao Luang Muang La*, wearing a red dress and living in N village) moves to the ritual site and prays for *Chao Luang Muang La*.

2<sup>nd</sup> day: three villagers parade to the ritual site. On the way there, *Chao Muang* and *Mo Muang* pray to the Elephant God and Horse God. After reaching the ritual site, *Chao Muang* and *Mo Muang* pray for *Chao Luang Muang La* and each spirit of the *Chao Luang Muang La* pantheon. They conduct a sacrificial ceremony (buffalo, cow, and white pig and black pig). The first slaughterer stabs each animal slightly with spears made of wood and cuts each animal with a flat knife, and then the 2<sup>nd</sup> slaughterer gives the finishing strokes. Then, they offer the meat of the animals to the spirits. Several kinds of amusement such as *Khap Lue*, a video film taken in Sipong Panna, *Dontri Phunmuang* (Northern Thai traditional music) and sports games are performed. Amulets of *Chao Luang Muang La* also are sold.

3<sup>rd</sup> day: A ceremony for U (one of the spirits), the sacrifice of a white pig is conducted. *Khap Lue* and *Su Khwan* (blessing ceremony) for *Chao Muang* at D village and *Mo Muang* at N village are performed.

**Chart 3** The Pantheon of Guardian Spirits

Name	Village	Name	Village
Chao Luan Muang La	N	Muan Chieng Khu	D
Chao Fa Phu Kam	D	Pak Bo	D
Nan Phom Kiao	D	Bo Tuang	D
Nan Kham Daen	D	Suan Tang	D
Nan Maen	D	Muang Luk	K
Lam Muang	T	An Liang	F
Hab Maat	N	Muak Kham	N, T
Chiang Fai	NM	Tao Muk	N
Chieng lLan	N	No Kaeo	N
O ka	T	Bang Tong	N
Chiang Phuak	D	U	N
Nam Pat	D	Saen Sae	T
Pan Saen	N	Ban Liang	T
Pan Sa	NM	Ho	D
Pan Met	D	SanKharat	DT

Reference: K and DT are the Tai Yuan (the largest Tai-speaking group in Northern Thailand) villages. F is the village of the Tai Phuan people who migrated from Xiang Khuang in Laos. NM is the village of the Tai Khun people who migrated from Kengtung in Burma. Each spirit has its own special priest and is regarded as living in the village where the priest lives. Tai Lue priests sometimes moved to non Tai Lue villages because of marriage or other reasons. (See Chart 1 Map of Thawangpha Basin)



#### 4. Changing Sources of History from Written Documents in Old Script to New Media

In the changing ritual process, the ritual's main practitioners have changed from traditional ritual specialists, such as the spirit priest, to "the group for village development" including people such as schoolteachers. The appearance of new media for expressing their migration history is related to this process.

In this chapter, I will examine this change of the sources of Tai Lue migration history. For this, I refer to the text of the ritual and *Khap Lue* (traditional Tai Lue folk song).

Besides the historical documents and monuments explained in the former chapters, *Khap Lue* is also a medium of transmission of migration history.

Traditionally, on the second day of the guardian spirit ritual, one male singer sings a song inviting spirits (Khap Cheon Thewada) to the sacrificial ceremony. The following is the text of this song. It refers to their original place:

Three years have gone by, everybody listen to me please, they said like this and I said it. It's time for our traditional ritual. I would like to invite Chao Luang Muang La accompanied by Chao Fa Phukkam [one of the spirits under the control of Chao Luang Muang La] to come here and receive our offering. Today I would like to offer you, the spirits, delicious *laap* [minced meat], *kaen* [soup] and the small glasses of whiskey which I already have prepared for you. You (Chief spirit, Chao Luang Muang La), who stay in Muang Ho (China), have a great number of descendants and all of them want to see you, so please come.

In fact, you stay in a very far away town, the Sipsong Chu Thai<sup>7)</sup> in Muang Ho, but we really want you to visit both day and night time. Please come here with Chao Fa Phukham followed by the 32 spirits.

We, as your descendants, are looking forward to your visit. Please come to receive several kinds of food including *laap* black pig, chicken salad, one hundred small glasses of whiskey and another thousand big glasses of whiskey. Please come to enjoy with me. After drinking, please come and tell us at what points we neglected our ancestors' traditions. We desire to see you come visit the *Kam Muang* [ritual site]. Come here please, after sunset everybody comes here. If Chao Luang Muang La is very busy, Chao Fa Phukam please come. We would like you to explain what kinds of mistakes we have made. There are a great number of people providing various kinds of whiskey, and some selling *khanom* [a dessert], some gambling, some selling whiskey, and some selling food while others sell dresses and ornaments. I notice that the best sellers, however, are cigarettes and *mien* [pickled tea leaf], but according to the traditions of Chao Muang La, none of them will do their selling for three days of this ritual.

Finally, we fully hope that you will protect us, protect our monastery and our village, and protect us from all kinds of danger. Even if we travel somewhere we want you to please come to protect us from accidents. Especially, for those who have become soldiers, please guard them from the enemy because they protect our nation's border.

Khap Cheon Thewada was made and sung by a male singer of N village, and its



contents are written in modern Thai script in Chang Khap's notebook. The former part refers to inviting spirits while the latter part refers to the scene of the ritual when this song was sung. This suggests that the first half has been transmitted from olden times and the second half is a later addition. Traditional Tai Lue song texts were usually written in Tai Lue script, so the former part of this song also might have been written in Tai Lue script. The latter part refers to the soldiers who protect the border area. After the socialist revolution in Laos, tension was palpable on the border area between Laos and Thailand until 1988. This song reflects this historical background.

However, since 1990, Khap Cheon Thewada has not been sung. Since Chang Phi, a flutist, died in 1992, the role of Chang Khap has declined even further. In place of Chang Khap, a group of village women sing new style Lue songs with dancing in the ritual. Very few young people are interested in *Khap Lue*, and Chang Khaps in N and D village have no disciples. In the 1999 ritual, Chang Khap disappeared at last.

Beside the written documents about Tai Lue migration history mentioned in chapter 2, the way of holding the ritual and the pantheon of spirits was written in Tai Lue script. However, the pantheon is explained not only by this written text but also oral tradition. The information of oral tradition makes up for that lacking in the written text about ritual. It can be understood from both sources that the pantheon is envisaged as an army troop and recalls the memory of migration caused by the defeat in the war. The knowledge of the ritual was in the hands of the ritual specialists such as Khao Cham (priests of spirits) and Mo Muang (priest of chief spirit), based on the written text about ritual and oral tradition.

Through the process of the ritual changing, the ritual's main actors changed from these ritual specialists to a new ritual-organizing group such as school teachers. The decline of the role of Chang Khap is also connected. Nowadays, most people cannot understand Tai Lue script, so after the 1990 ritual, programs for the ritual written in modern Thai, instead of the old written document, were supplied to participants. Transmitting knowledge of the ritual via the ritual specialist, thus became less important and it can be said that knowledge of the ritual began to be accessible to ordinary people.

The Knowledge of the Tai Lue migration history also began to be available to ordinary people. Most of people could not understand written documents of their history in Tai Lue script, as mentioned above. The modern Thai version of the history of migration of Tai Lue and the historical monuments, such as the statue of Chao Luang Muang La and the picture of Chao Luang Anupharp, are media through which it is easier for ordinary people to understand the knowledge of the ritual and the history of their migration. These new media are planned by new actors such as the leaders of village development and express the history from their standpoint. It can be said that they are the sources of history which have been interpreted in the context of rural development. Through this changing process, the old written documents which traditional ritual specialists have kept have been marginalized.



Fig. 2 Khap Lue in D village, 1990

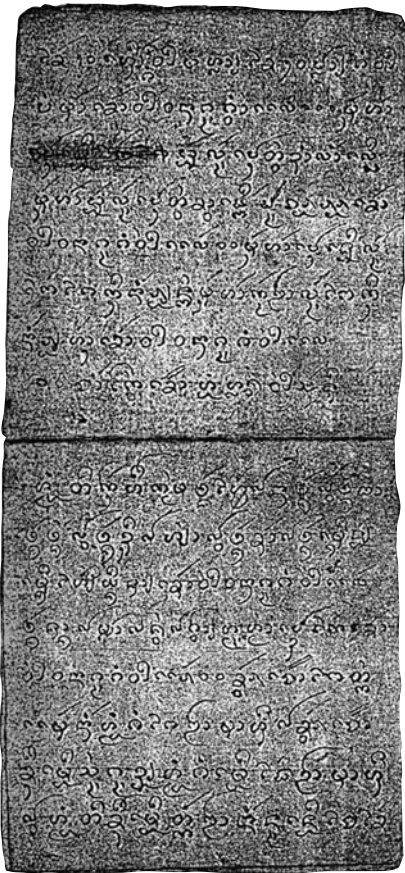


Fig. 3 Written text of the ritual

## 5. Conclusion

In this paper, I have focused on the migration history of three Tai Lue villages in Thawangpha.

N village and D village both claim to be the first to be settled, and express their migration history from their own standpoints. According to the historical reconstruction of Tai Lue migration from a historian's perspective, it is difficult to accept that N village was settled earlier than D village.

However, there are other histories memorized and interpreted by indigenous people. After 1984, especially in the 1990s, N village led the enlargement of their guardian spirits' ritual which three Tai Lue villages held together, then began to claim a view of history centered on N village. Then, an opposing movement by D village occurred, claiming the D village-centered view. The construction of the Chao Luang Muang La's statue, and the migration history translated into modern Thai in the commemorative publication are one of N village's claims. On the other hand, D village based their historical claims on their own historical hero, Chao Luang Anupharp.

Nowadays, most of people cannot understand the written documents of their history in Tai Lue script. In the changing process of the ritual, the new media such as translation into modern Thai and the historical monuments appeared, and the old written documents were marginalized. Through these media, it became easier for ordinary people to understand the knowledge of the ritual and the history of their migration. These new media planned by the leaders of rural development are the sources of history which have been interpreted in the context of rural development. Historical facts are irrelevant to them.

## Notes

- 1) About the details of this history, please refer to Rattanaphon and Grabowsky's works (Rattanaphorn 2000) (Grabowsky 1999).
- 2) I have conducted research in Thailand since 1990 till now, including the term I studied at Chiang Mai University, from 1990 to 1991, with permission from the National Research council of Thailand. This paper is based on this research. I presented the research result in my papers which are mentioned in Bibliography.
- 3) This document has been held by one villager. Another document was found in the local temple. It describes details of reclamation of the area.
- 4) The weir named *Fai Kumsin* given by the chief of Nan for the Tai Lue appears in the old written document. It is said that it was situated near T village. According to the legend of D village, the land of Chao Luang Anupharp was near T village, so *Fai Kumsin* might refer to the land of Chao Luang Anupharp.
- 5) There are villagers in D village who inherited the lands of Chao Luang Anupharp.
- 6) This kind of floodable place is very prosperous if water control can be managed. N village succeeded in managing water control, so their economic condition became much better than D village.
- 7) Sipsong Chu Tai is in Vietnam; it must be Sipsong Panna.

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