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The Transmission of Written Genealogies and Patrilineality among the Tai Dam

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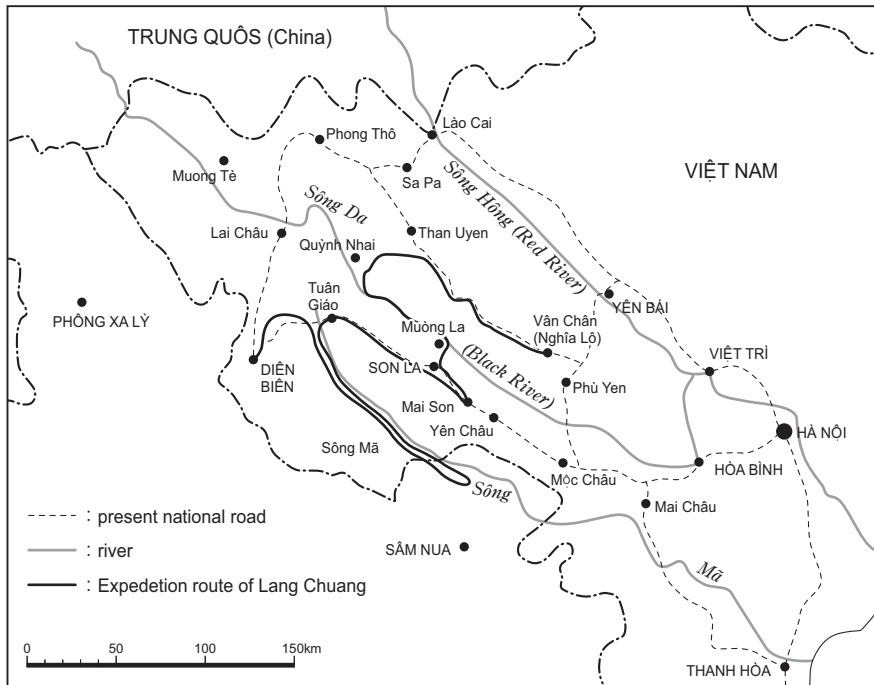
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1. Introduction: Specific characteristics of the Tai Dam among Tai-speaking peoples

Tai-speaking peoples live in the larger part of mainland Southeast Asia, including the southwestern part of China. Their population in Vietnam amounts to approximately four million, comprising 5% of the total population of approximately 76 million according to census statistics in 1999. In this article, I will focus on the written genealogies of the Tai Dam—a Tai-speaking people—based on my research in the Tai Dam villages of northwestern Vietnam.

Tai Dam (Black Tai) is not regarded as an official ethnic category in Vietnam. The official ethnic classification regards it as a local group of Thai, like the Tai Don (White Tai). The population of Thai in Vietnam amounts to 1.33 million (1999 census); however, the population of the Tai Dam is not officially published. By analyzing statistics of the ethnic population of each district, I estimated the population of the Tai Dam to be almost 600,000. In general, the Tai Dam are known as cultivators of irrigated paddy fields in the valleys of the Da River (Black River) and the Ma River.

At this point, I will provide a brief explanation of classification of local groups as Tai Dam and Tai Don. The Tai Dam often occupy different valleys than the Tai Don. In addition, they can be differentiated on the basis of various aspects such as language, material culture, ancestor worship, and clothing and shelter. Further, Tai Dam are a more homogenous group than the Tai Don. One of the reasons for this is that the valleys occupied by the Tai Dam are adjoining each other, such as Nghia Lo (Muang Lo), Yen Chau (Muang Vat), Mai Son (Muang Muak), Son La (Muang La), Thuan Chau (Muang Muai), Tuan Giao (Muang Quai), and Dien Bien (Muang Theng). In brief, their homogeneity is partially a result of the spatial continuity of the valleys they inhabit. Additionally, I assume that their homogeneity may also be influenced by politics. For example, the annals “*Quam To Muang*” are transmitted only among the Tai Dam, and the area presently inhabited by the Tai Dam corresponds closely to the expedition route of a mythical hero, *Lang Chuang*, whose stories are written about in the annals (see Map1). Moreover, as Hoang Luong (2000) and Takeuchi (2003: 694–695) pointed out, differences arose in the chiefs’ relationships in regards to their attitudes toward French colonial power; this led to the creation of local groups—in effect, the



Map 1 Northwestern Vietnam

anti-French Tai Dam and pro-French Tai Don.

Anthropological (ethnological) studies in relation to the French colonization began in the late nineteenth century. Ayabe (1956: 110) summarized the general cultural characteristics of the Tai-speaking peoples as follows: (1) speaking the Tai-Thai language, (2) professing Theravada Buddhism, (3) the prevalence of cognatic kinship and not having a surname, (4) earning their livelihood based on cultivating paddy rice fields with irrigation systems, and (5) forming a feudal hierarchical political system. However, ethnographies have pointed out that the Tai Dam (and also the Tai Don) are not Theravada Buddhists and they form a patrilineal kinship and transmit surnames from one generation to the next. Therefore, the Tai Dam are an exception among Tai-speaking people.

2. Patrilineal groups of the Tai Dam

The Tai Dam language includes only a few expressions that are influenced by the *Pali* text because the Tai Dam did not accept Theravada Buddhism. And like other Tai-speaking peoples in the pre-modern period, the Tai Dam formed a feudal political system known as *muang*. Therefore, researchers have attempted to find both the original and archaic socio-cultural characteristics of Tai-speaking peoples prior to the spread of Theravada Buddhism into Southeast Asia among the Tai Dam. However, the patrilineal transmission of the surname among the Tai Dam—which is a significant characteristic of their culture—is

not an original cultural contribution of Tai-speaking peoples, rather it is considered to be an East Asian element as will be mentioned later. Moreover, the Tai Dam have transmitted their own scripts such as Lao, which is derived from the ancient Khmer scripts. However, Tai Dam scripts have been written on paper, unlike many other ancient Khmer scripts that were written on palm leaves (*bai lan*) to write the *Pali* sutra. The Tai Dam have not written Buddhist scriptures but they have written literature, annals, divinations, customary laws, and genealogies using their own scripts. In this article, I will focus on the written genealogies of the Tai Dam in order to analyze the relationship between their written documents and patrilineality.

I would now like to speak briefly about the descent recognition of the Tai Dam. In general, many Tai-speaking villagers recall only those ancestors who are within their grandparents' generation. On the contrary, among the Tai Dam, those with surnames derived from the surname *Lo Cam* sometimes recognize ancestors from many generations. Even today, the custom to read the *Quam To Muang* annals in front of the coffin at funerals is sometimes maintained in Tai Dam villages. The *Quam To Muang* includes the myth surrounding their creation, the descent of their chiefs, and their achievements in reference to the histories of the Lan Xang kingdom and Vietnamese dynasties. With regard to commoners, until the colonial period, funerals provided people with the opportunity to repeatedly associate their lives with the history of the chiefs. Of course, in many societies, kings and privileged people often maintain the myth of their unilateral continuity with the first ancestor in order to claim legitimacy as rulers. The Tai Dam, however, appear to be more interested in their own descent than many of other Tai-speaking groups. In this article, I will consider how patrilineality is realized in the descriptions contained in the written genealogies of the Tai Dam and how this is related to their descent recognition.

According to custom, the Tai Dam transmit their surnames and properties patrilineally. Thus, anthropological/ethnological researchers have considered Tai Dam society to be divided into patrilineal clans or lineages (Guignard 1912: vii–viii; Izikowitz 2001(1951); Leroi-Gouhan et Poirier (eds.) 1953; La va Dang 1968; Cam 1998).¹⁾ However, the Tai Dam share neither the concept that those having a common surname are descendants of the same ancestor nor the custom of exogamy among men and women sharing surnames. Moreover, those with common surnames do not form action groups with economic, ritual, and political functions as do lineages in southeastern China. Therefore, in this article, I do not refer to those having a common surname as lineages or clans, but as the same surname group.

Focusing now on East Asia, it has been pointed out that three elements—(1) ancestral rites, (2) surnames, and (3) written documents on descent—are closely connected with the endurance of patrilineal kin groups (Tamura (ed.) 2000: 341). As just mentioned, the Tai Dam do not form corporate groups like the lineages found in southeastern China. Nevertheless, these three elements have to be taken into consideration to understand the kinship and descent recognition of the Tai Dam, since in fact, they conduct rituals for patrilineal ancestors, inherit surnames patrilineally, and transmit written genealogies. In this article, I will clarify the use of the written genealogy “*Xo phi huan*” as it relates to ancestor worship and the understanding of patrilineal descent.

3. Possession of written genealogies of the Tai Dam

Xo phi huan means a notebook (*xo* in Vietnamese, that is, Kinh language) on ancestral spirits (*phi huan* in Tai Dam). *Xo phi huan* has often been translated as *gia pha* in Vietnamese; in reverse, the Vietnamese words meaning family records, *gia pha* (家譜 in Chinese characters), have been translated as *Xo phi huan*. The fact that the Tai Dam word, *Xo phi huan*, includes a word borrowed from Vietnamese, *xo*, implies that the Tai Dam introduced the culture of editing written genealogies during a time when political relations existed between the Vietnamese dynasties and the Tai Dam chiefs, i.e., since the fifteenth century. However, the Vietnamese *gia pha* and the Tai Dam *Xo phi huan* are clearly distinct, as can be seen by the following points:

- 1) The genealogies, *gia pha*, transmitted by the Kinh—the ethnic majority in Vietnam—are written primarily in Chinese characters,²⁾ but *Xo phi huan* are written in Tai Dam scripts.
- 2) *Xo phi huan* are known as written genealogies, like *gia pha* in Vietnam; however, unlike *gia pha*, *Xo phi huan* merely enumerate the surnames and names of the dead individuals and do not indicate kin relations such as siblings and those arising from descent and marriage.
- 3) *Xo phi huan* are rare among the written documents of the Tai Dam. For example, since 1997, I found only six manuscripts of *Xo phi huan* and one genealogical note among Tai Dam documents [see Table 1]. On the other hand, with regard to the Vietnamese *gia pha*, Taga's study in 1960 introduced 222 volumes (Taga 1960); and these are only some of the documents because *gia pha* can often be found in the libraries and the Kinh villages.

Although I was unable to collect a large amount of data, the seven genealogical texts mentioned above are classified into two categories on the basis of form, content, and the eras in which they were written. Some were written in the colonial periods (before 1954) when the Tai Dam chiefs were ruling under the French authorities. Others were written after the Vietnamese Communist Party introduced market economy policies in 1987. In this article, I refer to the former as the written genealogies before socialist reform, because in this period in northwestern Vietnam, socialist reforms such as land revolution or agricultural collectivism were not executed under the Democratic Republic of Vietnam until the French withdrawal, caused by their defeat at Dien Bien Phu (referred to as *Muang Theng* by the Tai Dam) in 1954. The genealogies in this category correspond to village numbers 10 and 11 in Table 1. On the other hand, I will refer to the latter as written genealogies of the market economy era under the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. These correspond to village numbers 6, 7, and 9 in Table 1. I will concentrate on analyzing the genealogies that were written before socialist reform.

The three genealogies written before socialist reform, which correspond to village numbers 10 and 11 are those possessed by families with the surnames Cam and Bac Cam. These surnames are derived from *Lo Cam*, living in *chieng*, that is, the central administrative village of each *muang cuang muang*. Moreover, the editors of these genealogies are priests, *mo muang*, who preside over the communal rituals of *muang*. Here, I explain the terms

Table 1 Possession of written genealogies

Village Number	Number of WG	Number of households	Research year	Possessor (Age in 2002)	EGO of WG	Surname	Social status of the family before 1954	Written year	Writer	Site of collection
1	0	50	1998	–	–	–	–	–	–	Muang Quai
2	0	approximately 70	1999	–	–	–	–	–	–	Muang Lo
3	0	107	2002	–	–	–	–	–	–	Muang Than
4	0	68	2002	–	–	–	–	–	–	Muang Than
5	0	73	2002	–	–	–	–	–	–	Muang Than
6	1	?	2002	A(91)	A	Luang	<i>mo muang</i>	1980	A himself	Muang Muai
7	1	?	2002	B(72)	B	Luang	Commoner assigned official post	1990	B himself	Muang Muai
8	0	?	2002	–	–	–	–	–	–	Muang Muai
9	1	?	2002	C(61)	F	Lo	Aristocracy	1997	<i>mo ban</i>	Muang Muai
10	1	?	2002	D(69)	G (<i>an nha muang Muoi</i>)	Bac Cam	<i>an nha</i>	1950	<i>mo muang</i>	Muang Muai
11	2	?	2000	D(69)	grandfather of D	Cam	<i>an nha</i>	1917 and around 1920	<i>mo muang</i>	Muang Muak
12	1	?	2003	E(63)	E	Cam	Aristocracy	2003	E himself	Muang La

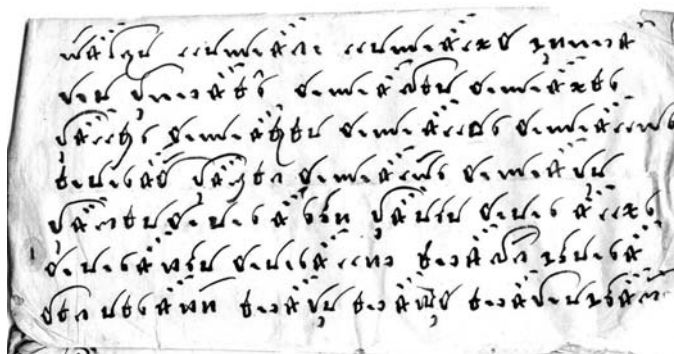


Fig. 1 Written genealogy of the Tai Dam chief's family of Mai Son written in 1919

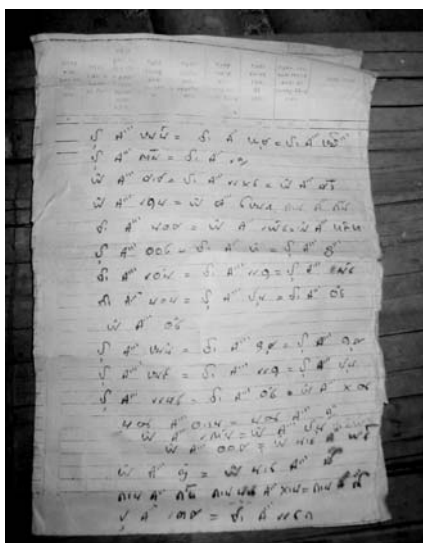


Fig. 2 Written genealogy during the market economy era (Son La in 2003)

muang cuang muang and *mo muang*, which tie into the traditional Tai Dam political system, before mentioning why the *mo muang* wrote the genealogies of chiefs.

The political unit of the *muang* was the assembly of villages, referred to as *ban*; *ban* is constituted by dozens of households. The territory of each *muang* often corresponded to a river basin. Some *muang* were subordinate to neighboring predominant *muang* and they formed units called *chau muang*. Many *chau muang*, formed by the Tai Dam and Tai Don chiefs, divided the geographical territory of present-day northwestern Vietnam for several hundred years until the first half of the twentieth century. According to descriptions in *Quam To Muang*, the *muang* were constantly either allies or in conflict with each other in regards to the succession of the title of chief, the acquisition of commerce profits against a backdrop of politico-economic power for each *muang*, or political relations with powerful neighboring states such as the Lan Xang kingdom or the Vietnamese dynasties. Therefore, the predominant *muang* within each *chau muang*, changed repeatedly. The predominant *muang* was referred to as *muang cuang muang* and the subordinate *muangs* in each *chau muang* were called *muang nok muang*. Notably, the central administrative, economic, and ritual village in the *muang cuang muang* was not referred to as *ban* but as *chieng*; it was here that the chiefs lived and governed all the *chau muang*, referred to as *an nha* or *chau muang* (Cam va Phan 1995: 275–349). *Mo muang* was the official post of the priest who presided over the communal rites and prayed to the spirit of *muang* (*phi muang*) for the peace and wealth of *chau muang* and the soul of the chief. In addition to this, the priest was responsible for writing ritual documents, annals, and genealogies.

Returning to the topic of written genealogies, the ones I could find that were written before socialist reform are limited to those that write about the descent of chiefs (*an nha*). In each text, the EGO is written as the then chief. Even in the genealogies written in the

market economy era, those with the surnames *Cam* and *Bac Cam*—which are derived from the surname *Lo Cam*—appeared primarily in order to transmit the written genealogies among the Tai Dam. Until the colonial period, the privileged class of Tai Dam society consisted of groups with aristocratic surnames—that is, families with surnames derived from the surname *Lo Cam* (aristocrat surname groups)—and some commoners with surnames unrelated to *Lo Cam* (commoner surname groups), but who were assigned official court posts. The former inherited administrative positions, rice paddy fields, and peasants to cultivate the fields and repair their houses. The latter could obtain salaries from the taxes paid by certain villages during the tenure of their posts. I found two written genealogies of families with the commoner surname *Luong*, corresponding to village numbers 6 and 7 in Table 1. However, we must note that both these genealogies were transmitted among the families of the court officers of that time, including *mo muang*.

4. Form and content of written genealogies

In discussing the characteristics of the written genealogies of the Tai Dam, I will exclude the written genealogy of village number 10 in Table 1 because the people who possess it do not refer to it as *Xo phi huan* but as a genealogical note about the *Muang Muai* chiefs. As mentioned above, the written genealogies referred to as *Xo phi huan* are divided into two categories on the basis of form and content: those written before socialist reform and those written during the market economy era. I will focus on the two *Xo phi huan* manuscripts of the *Muang Muak* chief in the beginning of the twentieth century before socialist reform. These manuscripts refer to almost 100 names of ancestors provided in ascending order from the EGO's father up to *Lang Chuang*, the grandson of the first founder of the Tai Dam. Regarding ancestors belonging to older generations, other names are included according to descriptions in the annals. In particular, *Lang Chuang's* achievements have been recorded with the use of several figurative expressions and archaic words. This is based on one of the annals—“*Tay pu xoc*”—that describes the ancient history of the spread of the Tai Dam. It is followed by a prayer, which consists of over 170 words. The prayer is for all the patrilineal ancestors whose names have not been included because they have faded to oblivion. On the other hand, the genealogies written in the market economy era merely describe dozens of surnames and names of the dead but include neither the citation from the annals nor the prayer for the dead.

As mentioned above, *Xo phi huan* written before socialist reform differs from those during the market economy era; however, they share important characteristics, which are explained as follows:

- 1) In *Xo phi huan*, the surnames and names of ancestors are written in ascending order by generation from close to far. For example, first, the names of the dead of the same generation as the EGO are written, followed by those of the EGO's parent's generation, then the EGO's grandparent's generation, and so on.
- 2) *Xo phi huan* merely enumerate the surnames and names of the deceased individual and do not indicate kin relations such as siblings and those arising from descent and marriage.

However, if this is true, then how can the EGO's generation ascertain the starting point in the description of *Xo phi huan*? This can be done by relying on the memory of the living; in other words, the kin relations of the dead, who are written about, are confirmed by the personal memories of the living. This point is common across all *Xo phi huan*. Moreover, the *Xo phi huan* written during the market economy era do not include the surnames and names of distant ancestors who cannot be recalled by living people. On the other hand, the *Xo phi huan* that are transmitted among the chief's family before socialist reform mention even distant ancestors who are recalled by the living. This leads us to question how the readers will be able to recognize the kin relations of the dead. In this case, the relations are ascertained by referring to another written text, *Quam To Muang*. As mentioned above, the *Quam To Muang* annals are transmitted by each *chau muang* of the Tai Dam and are read at funerals. The ancestors in the *Xo phi huan* of the chief's family include famous chiefs who have been written about in *Quam To Muang*. Therefore, the kin relations of ancestors whose surnames and names are written in the chief's *Xo phi huan* can be ascertained. When referring to the descriptions in *Quam To Muang*, we can ascertain and make assumptions regarding the surnames and names of patrilineal male ancestors, their wives, and unmarried sisters. However, unmarried sisters are only written about within the grandparents' generations of the EGO, so in reality, these names are basically limited to those that are recognized through the personal memories of the living.

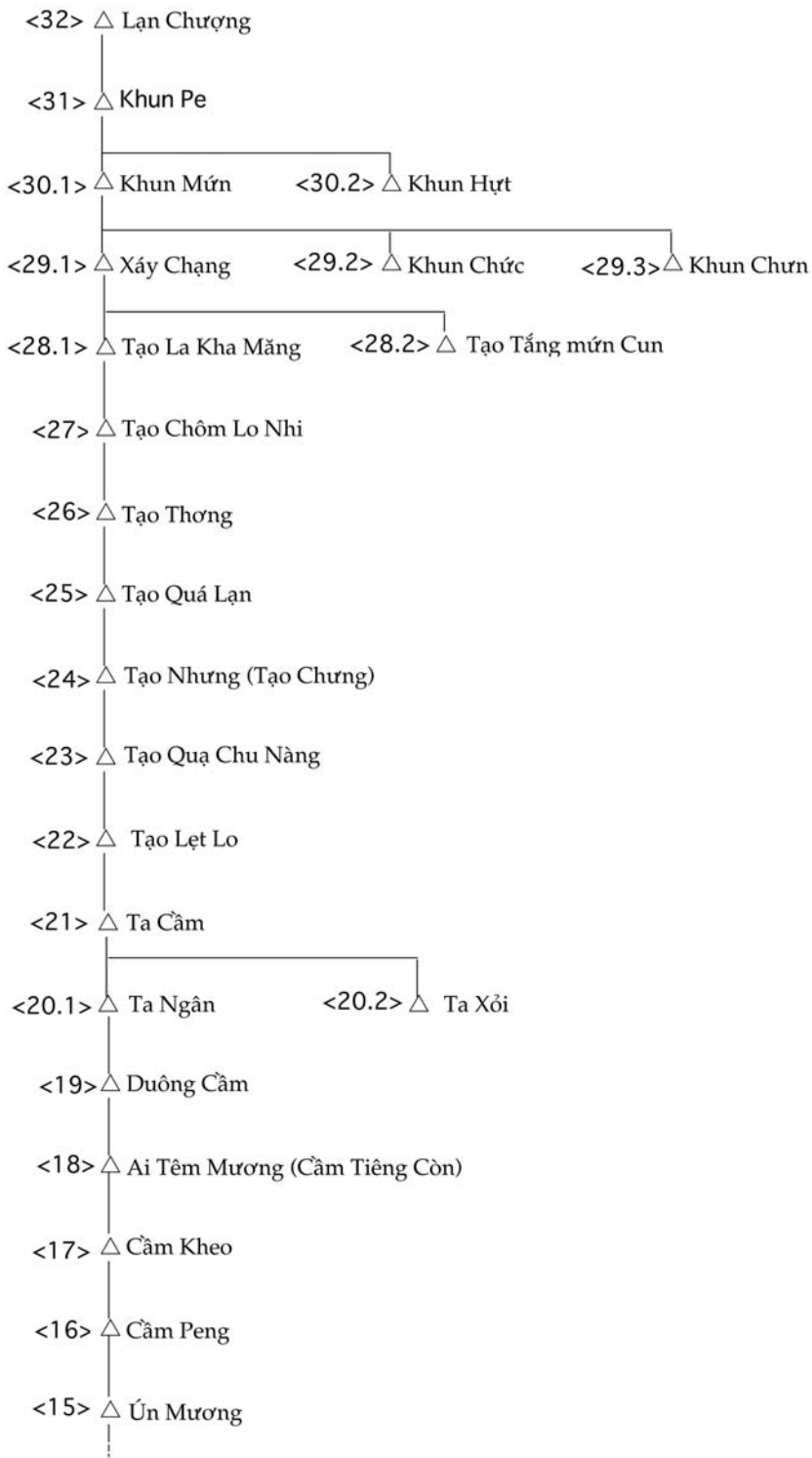
At this point, I would like to explain Tables 2 and 3. Table 2 is a genealogical tree created from a description in a manuscript of *Quam To Muang* at *Muang Muak*. Table 3 is a genealogical tree based on a *Xo phi huan* of the family of *Muang Muak*'s chief; this tree was obtained by referring to Table 2. Both manuscripts were written around the 1920s when *Cam Oai* (1871–1934) was the chief (*an nha*) of *Muang Muak*.

It should be noted that the ancestors that have been written about in both the abovementioned books are different. Table 3 was created by ascertaining the ancestors that have been written about in both books; however, they differ in terms of the number of generations from *Lang Chuang* to EGO (*Cam Oai*). In principle, I did not include females in Table 3—with the exception of *Cam La*, mother of *Cam Oai*—in order to enable a better understanding of the table. The reason for this is as follows: According to the description in the *Quam To Muang* at *Muang Muak*, *Cam Oai*'s real father, *Cam Chom* was allowed to change his surname from *Vi*³⁾ to *Cam* when he married *Cam La*, who was the real daughter of *Muang Muak*'s chief, *Cam Inh*. Due to this adoption and change of his surname to *Cam*, *Cam Chom* succeeded to the position of chief (*an nha*) after *Cam Inh*. The *Xo phi huan* of the family of *Muang Muak*'s chief is expected to patrilineally ascend from *Cam Inh*. Therefore, *Cam La* is the key woman who connects the patrilineal descent of *Cam Chom* with that of *Cam Inh*, which reaches up to *Lang Chuang*.

I would like to summarize the characteristics of the content of *Xo phi huan*. *Xo phi huan* do not describe kin and generational relations. On the other hand, descriptions in the *Quam To Muang* annals do describe the relations of the chief's families; however, the surnames and names written in *Xo phi huan* are not the same as those in *Quam To Muang*. In fact, numerous versions of *Quam To Muang* can be found; the details such as names of ancestors and kin relations differ among these versions. I can point out the inconsistency

Table 3 Genealogical tree based on a *Xo phi huan* of the family of Muang Muak's chief
 [Kashinaga 2005: 290–291 (Table 3)]





in the descriptions in *Quam To Muang* and the ambiguity of kin relations such as siblings and those from descent and marriage as an important characteristic of *Xo phi huan*. The mention of a large number of surnames and names in *Xo phi huan* are believed to describe many generations. In brief, not providing a clarification of the generations is an important characteristic of the *Xo phi huan* of the Tai Dam. Further, this ambiguity of generations is based on the Tai Dam's recollection of generations and descent.

5. Use of *Xo phi huan*

In this section, I explain the religion and beliefs of the Tai Dam in order to understand the purpose of writing the *Xo phi huan*. The Tai Dam are not Theravada Buddhists. They often conduct rituals to many kinds of spirits referred to as *phi* in their cosmology. The dead go up to the celestial world, *Muang Then* or *Muang Pha*, where they transform into family spirits, *phi huan*, which exist for the protection of their living patrilineal descendants in their daily lives. On occasions of domestic rituals or providing offerings, the spirits are invited to descend to a cell for ancestral spirits, *clo hong*, which is placed inside each house. The use of *Xo phi huan* is related to domestic rituals held once a year, called *xen huan*. *Xen huan* is one of two main domestic religious practices that are associated with the Tai Dam's ancestor worship. The second is another offering known as *pat tong*.

Pat tong is the offering made by households in which either of the householder's parents have died, regardless of whether they were living together or not. The families of aristocrat surname groups make offerings to ancestral spirits, *phi huan*, at the cell for



Fig. 3 Cell for ancestral spirits: *chong cam* (left) and *clo hong* (right) of a former aristocrat household (Thuan Chau in 2003)

ancestral spirits before lunch and dinner every five days. The families of commoner surname groups make offerings before lunch and dinner every ten days. The dates for the *pat tong* are determined by the following rules: The Tai Dam count the dates according to a rotating calendar using a ten-day cycle that also originated from ancient China; they also use a lunar calendar that again is derived from the Chinese one. For the families of aristocrat surname groups, the dates of the *pat tong* are fixed as *mu hai* and *mu huang*. In households of the commoner surname groups, the dates are not fixed according to their surnames, although within some neighboring villages with a common founder, the dates are fixed by surnames. So while families in one village with the surname *Ca* hold the *pat tong* on the date *mu hap*, those in other villages do not necessarily hold it on *mu hap*. Incidentally, in principle, only the male members of the household and the unmarried daughters or granddaughters of the householder are allowed to enter the cell for ancestral spirits (*clo hong*). It is interesting to note that even the householder's wife cannot enter this cell.

I would like to mention the *xen huan* ritual here. Currently, it is held on New Year's Day according to the Chinese lunar calendar (that is, the 1st of July according to the Tai Dam calendar). Until the beginning of socialist reform in the late 1950s, the *xen huan* ritual was held annually in each village in the Tuan Giao district on a day selected by the local religious practitioner, *mo ban*. In the *xen huan* ritual, the *mo ban*, unlike the official priest, *mo muang*, are permitted by the householder to enter the *clo hong* in order to pray to and feed *phi huan*. In more concrete terms, he calls out the names and surnames of each of the patrilineal ancestors in turn while dropping foods for offering through a small hole bored in the wall of the *clo hong*—the hole is likened to the mouths of the patrilineal ancestors (Kashinaga 1999: 18–19).



Fig. 4 Present-day *xen huan* held on New Year's Day (Tuan Giao in 1998)

Deceased male patrilineal ancestors of the householder and their dead wives are recognized as ancestral spirits. Married women would become ancestral spirits at the household of their husbands. Boys and girls who die before coming of age (16 years for men and 13 years for women) cannot become ancestral spirits; they become spirits of children, *phi cuat*, and remain in the celestial world. The *xen huan* ritual is comprised of the sacrifices of a pig and chickens, offerings, and feasts in order to obtain blessings of peace and wealth. During prayers, the *mo ban* or the ritual practitioner calls out the surname⁴⁾ and names of ancestors in the cell in order to invite them to partake of a meal with their descendants; this is according to the order written in the *Xo phi huan* if they have one. People of the households clearly recognize all the ancestors who are written about in the text. Therefore, after calling those ancestors who have been recalled, the ancestors whose names have been forgotten by living family members are invited for a meal. These ancestors are collectively referred to as “other ancestors.” As implied above, most families do not have written genealogies. In these cases, after dealing with the ancestors who can be recalled, the other ancestors, who are already forgotten, are collectively invited. To be more precise, the domestic ancestral ritual held once a year at households of aristocrat families, are called *lo lieng* and not *xen huan*. *Lo lieng* is also held on New Year’s Day and follows the same ritual process as *xen huan*. The most important thing to note in these rituals is that ancestors whose names are recalled are those who have ascended from within a few generations of the present householder, with the exception of the ancestors of the limited Tai Dam chief’s families whose names are maintained in written genealogies.

As mentioned above, the dates for the *pat tong* differ between the households of the aristocrat surname groups and those of commoner surname groups. In addition, the layouts inside the *clo hong* differ between the former and the latter. Specifically, in the former, the cell is divided into two parts—the cell for the patrilineal ancestral spirits of their families, *clo hong*, and the ancestral spirits of all families belonging to the aristocrat surname groups, *chong cam*. *Chong cam* is never created in the houses of commoner surname groups.

Families of aristocrat surname groups do not make offerings or pray at *chong cam* even on occasions of *pat tong* offerings and *lo lieng*. No other events for offerings or prayers are held in the *chong cam* cell. However, before the formation of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, a magnificent communal ritual—*Xen pang peng*—was held by the chief of each *chau muang* once every three years. The main purpose of this ritual for the chief’s family was to invite and host all the ancestors of the aristocrat surname groups right up to the first founders, *Tao Ngan* and *Tao Xuan*, who first came down from the celestial world to reside and exploit the earth. It was also held to pray for peace and wealth all over the *chau muang*. *Xen pang peng* was one of the 12 communal rituals for the spirits of *muang* (*xen muang*). At least one of these 12 *xen muang* rituals was held in each *chau muang* every year, and involved the sacrifice of black or white buffaloes for all inhabitants of the *chau muang*, who ate together.

For *Xen pang peng*, a temporary shrine referred to as *huan hong* is constructed near the chief’s residence outside the *clo hong* and *chong cam*, and all the patrilineal ancestors of aristocrat surname groups that are usually worshiped at the *chong cam* cell are invited. In the ritual, the priest, *mo muang*, enters the shrine and calls on the ancestors of the chief,

in particular, to partake of the feast. At this time, the *mo muang* reads the *Xo phi huan* of the chiefs' families. From among the *Xo phi huan* that I have collected are those entitled "Writing the document about *Xen pang peng* on the eighteenth of the leap February of the second year of the Khai dinh era"⁵⁾ and "*Xen pang peng* at the *huan hong* of Majesty *Cam Bun Oai*" (11 in Table 1).⁶⁾

The above argument on the descriptions and usages of the *Xo phi huan* can be summarized as follows. First, the characteristic description of *Xo phi huan* is that it does not indicate kin relations such as siblings nor those arising from descent and marriage; relations are recognized by the introduction of knowledge such as memories of the living and descriptions in the annals. *Xo phi huan* are recognized as the Tai Dam's written genealogies, but they are texts that provide insufficient descriptions of genealogical ties. Next, with regard to usage, *Xo phi huan* are recognized as documents pertaining to ancestor worship and rituals. In reality, the *Xo phi huan* of the market economy era are used for domestic rituals at the household level, while those before socialist reform were used not only in rituals for ancestors of the aristocrat surname groups but also for the communal ritual that all inhabitants of *chau muang* participated in. This was because the ritual—to pray to the ancestral spirits of the chiefs—was held as one of the memorial services for the spirits of *muang*. The fact that *Xo phi huan* were written for use in rituals is in contrast with the use of the old Chinese and Korean genealogies written in Chinese characters. The Chinese and Korean genealogies demonstrate the genealogical links from the founder down to the living as well as ties with prominent ancestors in order to emphasize the differences between their own lineage and other lineages and to promote unity within a lineage. Accordingly, very little is written about the negative aspects of ancestors, such as mental disorders, bankruptcy, gambling practices and prurience. This is because these genealogies were reported from memories and rituals, and they were also for the purpose of external publicity (Suenari 1998: 54)—to claim clear links with central history through the splendid achievements of ancestors in terms of the important official posts they held as well as to ascertain the descent relationship with them. However, the written genealogies of the Tai Dam lack this external political character because most of them do not address the political achievements of ancestors. Further, all of them are written in Tai Dam scripts, although the Tai Dam *chau muang* were regarded as clients by Yunnan province and the Vietnamese dynasties until the beginning of the twentieth century. Returning to the use of written genealogies, rituals for the spirits of *muang* were abolished in the late 1950s with the disorganization of the traditional political systems under the direction of the communist party. With regard to *Xen pang peng*, the last ritual was held at *Muang Muak* in the 1930s. Therefore, at present, all "*Xo phi huan*" are limited for use in the domestic ritual of *xen huan* or *lo lieng*.

6. Recent editing of written genealogies

Thus far, we have outlined the forms, content, and use of written genealogies. As mentioned repeatedly, their most important characteristic is that they are written in Tai Dam

scripts. However, people who are well-versed with these scripts are decreasing in number; in contrast, Vietnamese as an oral language and the *quoc-ngu* writing system are now more prevalent among the Tai Dam. The *Xo phi huan* of the market economy era have been edited under these circumstances. In other words, these genealogies were written in circumstances significantly different than those described above. This point is discussed below.

What was the level of literacy in regards to the Tai Dam scripts before socialist reform under the Democratic Republic of Vietnam? Most literate people appeared to belong to the privileged class of the Tai Dam polity and consisted of religious practitioners like the *mo ban*. For example, in the Son La Province (*Muang La*), “Commoners did not have opportunities for education. The Thai scripts, including the Tai Dam and Tai Don ones, were transmitted only among certain sections of the inhabitants. So, 90% of the inhabitants were illiterate” (Bo chi huy quan su tinh Son La (bien soan) 1995: 11). The proportion of 90% does not appear to be based on actual statistics; however, this can be interpreted as the fact that the transmission of Tai Dam scripts was restricted to a small group.

In 1955, the year after the French colonial armies completely withdrew from Vietnam, the government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam installed the Thai–Meo autonomous zone (later renamed the Northwest Autonomous Zone), where the learning of ethnic scripts was introduced. At that time, two kinds of Thai writing systems were invented for ethnic Thai pupils; these were mainly based on the Tai Dam writing systems. Thai writing systems were studied at some elementary and junior high schools from 1955 to 1969. To the extent of my knowledge, official statistics concerning the percentage of pupils in the autonomous zone do not exist. According to my calculation based on statistics pertaining to the autonomous zone in 1959, an approximate percentage of merely 10% of pupils aged 6 to 15 were attending school (Kashinaga 2000: 145). Therefore, I do not believe that the number of literate people in terms of Thai scripts augmented rapidly during the period of the autonomous zone (1955–1975). Learning Thai scripts in public schools continued until the education of languages and writing scripts were unified into the Vietnamese and *quoc-ngu* writing system in 1969, during the period of the Vietnam War. Later, the number of people literate in Thai scripts began to decrease. According to my research at a Tai Dam village in the Tuan Giao district in 1997, 12 (including two women) of 356 villagers were literate in the Tai Dam scripts. Literate villagers learnt these scripts during the period of the autonomous zone. As might be expected, all villagers below 50 years of age were illiterate.

Recently, Tai Dam villagers have begun to share a consciousness that traditional Tai Dam culture is decaying under the influence of the Vietnamese (that is, Kinh) and Western cultures. For example, looking at oral language, the Tai Dam have begun to incorporate many Vietnamese expressions into their own language. Experiencing these changes, they now regard that literacy in Tai Dam scripts represents the transmission of traditional knowledge and their own culture. Against the background of this consciousness of a cultural crisis, the so-called traditional intellectuals—meaning those who are literate—have voluntarily begun to write documents such as folk songs, literary works, and divinations by hand. Recent written genealogies are always produced by these people, most of whom are males over 60 years of age.

Recent *Xo phi huan* include only close ancestors within a few generations of the living writers. In other words, those holding *Xo phi huan* do not recognize ancient ancestors any more than those who do not possess *Xo phi huan*, in terms of number of generations. Whether or not they possess written genealogies, villagers often know from memory the founders of their own villages. However, they do not always recognize the detailed links between the founders and those living at present. As mentioned above, when inviting ancestral spirits in domestic ancestral rituals, the villagers collectively call on those ancestors whose names are forgotten. These ancestors are referred to as “other ancestors.” Therefore, written genealogies are not a necessity for the rituals. It follows from this that the genealogies written in the market economy era are not written solely for the purpose of use in rituals. Writing these kinds of documents necessarily demonstrates the transmission of literacy in terms of Tai Dam scripts in villages. In other words, they write genealogies as a representative action of their own culture against the backdrop of their awareness of declining traditional Tai Dam culture.

Note

- 1) On the other hand, Maspéro (1911, 1916) used the term ‘famille’ consistently. Later, Lafont (1955) followed his kinship study of the Tai Dam to use the concept ‘famille patronymique.’
- 2) Occasionally, *gia pha* are written in *quoc-ngu* scripts, which is one alphabetical writing system for Vietnamese. It is among those written after the formation of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in 1945 when the government authorized *quoc-ngu* scripts for national and official use.
- 3) *Vi* was also an aristocrat surname group in *Muang Xang* (Moc Chau), and is thought to be derived from the surname *Lo Cam*.
- 4) According to the custom of the Tai Dam, women change their surnames to those of their husband after marriage. Thus, all ancestors of a household should have the same surname.
- 5) The original title is “*Khai linh xong pi thang hai nhun xip pet cam lop xo xen pang pang quai.*” The second year of the Khai dinh era fell on A.D. 1919. The arrangement of words in the title does not follow the Tai Dam language, but the Chinese language. Accordingly, the writer (probably, *mo muang*) was supposed to be able to read and write Chinese. Further, in this title, the writer wrote February not as *buan xong* but as *thang hai*—in Vietnamese. It is comprised of eight sheets of paper—15 centimeters long and 30 centimeters wide—made of *do* (a type of genus *Broussonetia*) fibers and bound by cotton thread. On 10 of the 16 pages, Tai Dam scripts are written in Chinese black ink with a writing brush.
- 6) The original title is “*Xen pang peng huan hong po chau Cam Bun Oai.*” It is comprised of 35 sheets of paper—15 centimeters long and 24.3 centimeters wide—made of *do* fibers and bound by cotton thread. Two sheets, the front and back covers, are coated with wet tea leaves to prevent decay. On 64 of the pages, Tai Dam scripts are written in Chinese black ink with a writing brush. According to Cam Trong, who is the possessor and grandson of Cam Oai, the writer of this genealogy is Ha Van Nam (1887 ?–1980 ?) the last *mo muang* of *Muang Muak* (Mai Son).

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