Cultural Circles and Epic Transmission: The Dai People in China Ou Yongxian

Introduction

The Dai¹ ethnic group in China and the Thai people in Southeast Asia² can all be broadly divided into two cultural groups: a Buddhist cultural circle and another circle centered around indigenous religion. Within the Buddhist circle, the Dai people practice Theravada Buddhism, celebrating the Songkran³ Festival and using a writing system created by their ancestors long ago with the result that poems were often recorded as written texts or books very early in their history. Within the indigenous circle, the Dai communities in China are generally referred to as "Hua-Yao Dai" ("Colorful-Waistband Dai," in connection with their vivid clothing), and they adhere to folk belief or animism. These communities have little or no literacy education; consequently, their poetry has been handed down orally from generation to generation. Interestingly, in both of these Dai cultural circles, the poetry employs a key technique that can be termed "waist-feet rhyme" wherein the last syllable of one line rhymes with an internal syllable in the succeeding line. This feature—which is discussed in detail below—is embedded in both the oral and written traditions and is an important enabling device within the poetry of the Dai people.

¹ The "Dai" ethnic group is officially recognized in China; however, internationally these peoples are often designated as "Tai" or "Thai," especially in Southeast Asia. In this essay, I use "Dai" instead of "Tai" or "Thai" according to official Chinese regulation.

² I performed fieldwork in Northeast Burma, mainly in Kengtung and Tachilek, Shan State, and in northern and northeast Thailand from April 20-29, 2012, conducting interviews in Shan villages such as Ban Hant and Ban Kosai. From May 5-20, 2012, I again worked in northern and northeast Thailand—mainly in Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Nan, Sukhothai, Kalasin, Nakhon Phanom, Sakon Nakhon, Surin, and Sakon Nakhon—and also in some Thai villages, such as Ban Songkhwai, Ban Kotwa, Ban Maesamai. I engaged in additional fieldwork within northern Laos—mainly in Xiangkhouang, Louang Namtha, Oudomxai, Phôngsali, and Vientiane—and conducted interviews in some Thai villages, including Ban Nasy, Ban Puxi, Ban Pasak, Ban Luang, Ban Namfa, Ban Tongdy, Ban Thapao, Ban Donpoy, and Ban Lakham. Finally, fieldwork was performed in northwest Vietnam—mainly in Tinh Lào Cai, Tinh Lang Son, Tinh Lai Châu, Tinh Điện Biên—and further interviews were conducted in Thai villages such as Ban Liang, and Ban Uva, among others.

³ In Chinese (and from an outsider's perspective) the festival is called "Po Shui Jie" ("Water-Sprinkling Festival"), but in the Dai language—especially in Xishuangbanna Prefecture—it is referred to as "Songkran Bi Mai" ("Songkran New Year"), just as it is in Thailand and Laos.

Subgroups of Dai People in China

The Dai ethnic group is one of 56 minorities in China, with a population of 1,159,231 according to the Chinese National Census in 2000. Its people live mainly within Yunnan Province in southern China, especially in the Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture and the Dehong Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture. They also live in other areas, such as Gengma County, Menglian County, Jinggu County, Xinping County, Yuanyang County, Pu'er City, Lincang City, and so on, mostly residing in basins or valleys along the Nujiang River, Lancangjiang River, Junshajiang River, Yuanjiang River, and Honghe River.



Map 1. Yunnan Province, China.

According to their own terminology and names, there are widely varying Dai branches in different areas, such as the Dai-lue⁴ ("Dai living along the Lue River") in Xishuangbanna Prefecuture, the Dai-le⁵ ("Dai living along the Lancang River upstream from Burma") in Dehong

⁴ [tai⁵⁵lui³¹]. Because there are different Dai dialects and scripts, international scholars generally use the International Phonetic Alphabet—as I have done here and throughout the essay—to transcribe the Dai language. See further Appendix I and Appendix II.

⁵ [tai⁵⁵lə³⁵]. In Chinese "Dai-le" is often wrongly pronounced as "Tai-na."



Map 2. Dehong Prefecture and Xishuangbanna Prefecture, Yunnan Province.

Prefecuture, the Dai-yat⁶ ("Dai who lagged behind or separated from others") and Dai-sai⁷ ("Dai living in Gasa Town") in Xinping County, the Dai-dam⁸ ("Black Dai") in Maguan County, and so on. However, some outsiders distinguish only three broader groups—the Shui-Dai (from the Chinese word *shui* ["water"] and thus understood as "Dai who live along rivers"), the Han-Dai (from *han* ["dry"] in Chinese and referring to Dai who live in farms within dry areas), and the

- ⁷ [tai⁵⁵saai⁵⁵].
- 8 [tai55dam33].

⁶ [tai⁵¹jat²⁴].

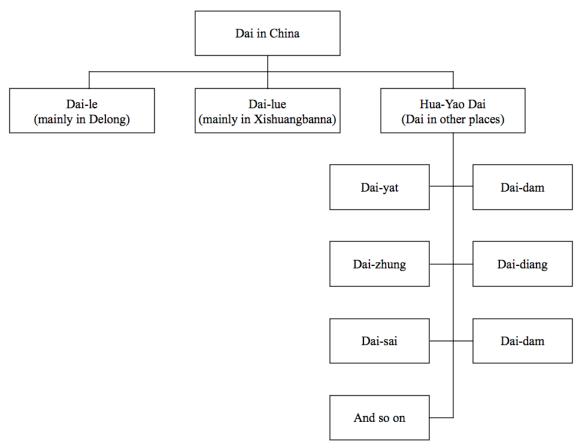


Fig. 1. The branches of Dai in China.

Hua-Yao Dai (a "catch-all" category for all other Dai subgroups)—but such classification is not accepted among the Dai people themselves.

Why are there so many branches of the Dai population in China? The historical reasons are complicated, but the following narrative provided by Thao' enkai, a 50-year-old man from Luosa Town, Magua County, may contain relevant information of a previous migration (Qu 2010):

A long time ago, all Dai people lived in a kingdom named Meng si.⁹ There were so many people residing together that they battled each other for food, water, and other resources. As a result, some Dai subgroups left southwards led by their chief men, searching for a new world. Some people were strong enough to be the vanguard team; some people were too weak to catch up. Among these migrants, some people were nobles in precious dress and they marched more slowly. Therefore, they made an agreement: the vanguard team should cut down the banana stems as road

⁹ Meng si (also referred to by some other Dai as "Meng xi" or "Meng qi") is considered to have been the capital of the ancient Dian Kingdom and is now known as Kunming City in Yunnan Province. There are many meanings of "meng" that range from "kingdom" to "city," as, for example, in the Dai word "Mengkok" used to refer to the Thai capital Bangkok.

marks so that the laggard groups might follow them by these marks. However, when they found that the banana stems had grown new leaves, they thought the vanguard team had gone too far to be caught. So they decided not to pursue anymore; they then stopped and stayed with other kinds of ethnic groups, such as the Hani and Yi peoples. For instance, "Dai-yat" means "the laggard Dai;" it is one of these left-behind Dai groups.

This is a famous story spread among many Dai communities with varying details,¹⁰ and we may make some tentative conjectures accordingly. The Dai people may have migrated southward along rivers, passing through jungles on the way. Eventually they could not associate with each other any longer, and most of them migrated to southeast Asia, with a small number of them lagging behind and sharing the area with other ethnic groups. As a result of these various movements, different Dai groups may have seen their own culture influenced to different degrees by the cultures of others, and the Dai people thus developed along different branches that now bear their own unique characteristics with regard to dialects, religions, customs, dwellings, foods, and so on.

At present, the Dai language in China has been categorized into four distinct dialect groups. The Dai-lue dialect is used by 360,000 people, most of whom live in Xishuangbanna Prefecture; 480,000 people speak the Dai-le dialect, mainly within Dehong Prefecture; the Hong-Jin dialect is employed by 150,000 people, mainly in the Honghe River and Jinshajiang River basins;¹¹ and the Jinping dialect is found mainly in Jinping County and is used by more than 20,000 people.¹² Among the four dialects, the Dai-le dialect is the most widely spoken. For instance, Dai people in Lingcang, Jinggu, Menglian, Lancang, and some other areas all speak the Dai-le dialect because they migrated long ago to each of these locations from Mengmao.¹³ At the same time, the Dai-le dialect is similar to the Shan language in Shan State, Burma,¹⁴ and to that of the Tai-Ahoms living in Assam State, India.¹⁵

¹⁴ For example, when I did my fieldwork in Kengtung and Tachilek Counties, Shan State, during April 2012, I could communicate with the Shan villagers in the Dehong Dai language.

¹⁰ For instance, the story is also told in places such as Mosha Town, Xinping County, and even in Northern Laos. It is also found in some publications (see, for example, Feng Huaiyong 2008) and on some internet sites.

¹¹ Because there are so many diverse subgroups in these areas, their languages are further divided into five local subdialects: Yuan xin, Wuyong, Maguan, Yuanjiang, and Lu shi.

¹² On the classification of dialects, see Luo Meizhen 1993.

¹³ Mengmao, also called Mengmaolong, is considered to have been the capital of the Dai's ancient Guozhambi Kingdom from 567 to 1448 CE; it is now called (in Chinese) Ruili City in Dehong Prefecture. For further details about the Guozhambi Kingdom, see Dehong Dai Study Society 2005.

¹⁵ Many Tai-Ahoms scholars have been visiting Dehong Prefecture in recent years in order to trace their history and ancestral culture; they believe that their ancestors migrated from Mengmao to Assam State, and they have scriptures called *Buranjis* written in old Tai scripts that record such a history. For more details see <u>http://taiahoms.ning.com</u>.

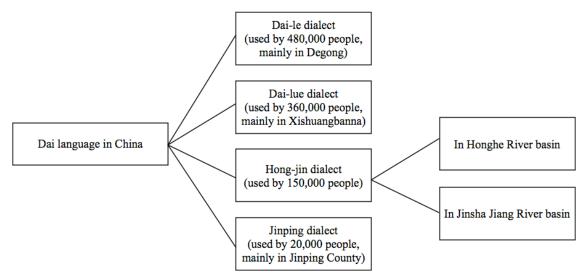


Fig. 2. The four dialects of the Dai language.

The Dai People in Two Cultural Circles

As mentioned earlier, a large number of the Dai people—mainly in Xishuangbanna and Dehong Prefectures—lie within a Buddhist cultural circle, having been influenced by Theravada Buddhism from Burma or Laos, and they therefore share similar characteristics such as their celebration of the Songkran Festival and the employment of writing systems to record and transcribe the Buddhist scriptures. The Dai people in China have actually created and developed four separate kinds of scripts, and three of them are currently in use: the Dai-le script (called "Duo-tho nook" ["Bean-sprout-shaped script"] by the Dai) used mainly in Dehong, the Dai-lue script (also called "Duo-tham" ["Classic script"]) employed primarily in Xishuangbanna, and the Dai-pong script (also referred to as "Duo-mon" ["Round-shaped script"]) used mainly in Mengmao.

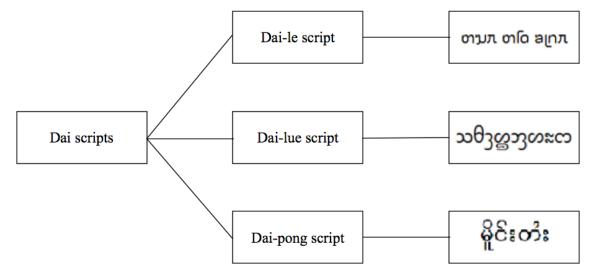


Fig. 3. Three kinds of Dai scripts in current use.

The Dai-le script is close to the Dai-pong script in both shape and phonetic system, and both of them are similar to the Shan script. The Dai-lue script shares similarities with the Lao and Thai scripts. Although these scripts display differences in their shapes, they all stem from Brahmic script. At present the reformed Dai-le and Dai-lue scripts are referred to as the New Dai scripts, which are used by publishing houses, schools, internet sites, and other official domains. However, the traditional Dai scripts are used more widely among the general population, particularly in temple settings.¹⁶

Just a small number of Dai people live within the indigenous religious cultural circle, mainly along the Yuanjiagn and Honghe Rivers; most of them are Hua-Yao Dai in Yuanjiang County, Xinping County, Yuanyang County, such as the Dai-yat, Dai-sai, Dai-zhung, Dai-la, and Dai-dam mentioned above. Such Hua-Yao Dai subgroups migrated southward into northwest Vietnam¹⁷ and northern Laos,¹⁸ constituting a



Fig. 4. A Dai-luo elder who was pasturing cattle when I arrived at Lengdun Town, Yuanyang County, Honghe Prefecture. Photo by author. For more information on this and other photos, consult the eCompanion to this essay.

¹⁶ Buddhist monks must learn the traditional Dai script in order to help villagers transcribe the Buddhist scriptures written via this method. Many Buddhist scriptures are preserved in temples (called "Zhuang" in Dehong and "Wat" in Xishuangbanna), and the monks often recite or chant these scriptures for people in ceremonies, especially during the three months of Vassa.

¹⁷ The Thai people are identified officially as one of 54 ethnic groups in Vietnam, and they reside in the northwest region, mainly in Điện Biên, Lai Châu, Sơn La, and Lào Cai Provinces. During my fieldwork there (July 14-24, 2012) I found that the Thai people in Vietnam can be divided into three subgroups—the Black Thai ("Thai-dam"), White Thai ("Thai-khao"), and Red Thai ("Thai-diang")—that all refer to themselves as [tai⁵⁵], and they do not hold to Theravada Buddhism. They are similar to the Dai-dam and Dai-khao in Jinping County, Yunnan Province, Southern China (where I performed fieldwork during July 25-30, 2012). As a Dai, I can chat easily with these Thai villagers in the Dai language.

¹⁸ Many people consider there to be three main groups in Laos: the biggest one is the Lao-luong group whose members reside in valleys and maintain a rice-planting culture; the second is the Lao-thing group (including such peoples as the Khmu) settled among the mountainsides and holding to slash-and-burn cultivation; and the third is the Lao-song group (mainly the Hmong and Yao peoples) found among the highest mountains and employing both shifting and swidden cultivation methods. Within such a categorization, the Thai people are placed within the Lao-luong group. During my fieldwork in Xiengkhuang, Luang Phabang, and Louang Namtha Provinces (July 3-14, 2012), I found that the Thai people in Laos can themselves be divided into two main parts. On the one hand, the Lue, who are actually from Xishuangbanna, practice Theravada Buddhism and are virtually indistinguishable from the Dai people; on the other, there is the Putai group, consisting of Black Thai, White Thai, and Red Thai from Vietnam. However, both groups refer to themselves as [tai⁵⁵], and I could chat with the villagers in both the Thai and Dai languages.

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special Putai¹⁹ group including mainly Thai-dam ("Black Thai"), Thai-diang ("Red Thai"), and Thai-khao ("White Thai"). These Putai people then continued a migration into northeast Thailand. Although these Dai are usually divided into different branches, they do indeed share some similar characteristics: first, all of these Hua-Yao Dai subgroups adhere to indigenous religious practices and therefore do not believe in Buddhism or celebrate the Songkran Festival. Rather, they enjoy traditional Chinese festivals, such as the Spring Festival and the Mid-Autumn Festival. They are clearly much more profoundly influenced by Chinese culture than by Buddhist culture.²⁰ Second, they inhabit relatively smaller regions. For example, the Dai-sai dwell mainly in Gasa Town, Xinping County; the Dai-zhung are found in Lijiang Town, Yuanjiang County; and the Dai-khao are in Mengla Town, Jinping County. And very importantly, these Hua-Yao Dai do not in general employ any scripts for written communication or recording purposes.²¹

Different Cultural Circles, Different Epic Traditions

The Dai peoples within the Buddhist cultural circle have similar epic traditions, and these epic traditions have been influenced by Buddhism. For example, in Xishuangbanna there is the creation epic *Ba Ta Ma Ga Pheng Shang Luo* ("The God Yinphra Creates the World"),²² and in Dehong there exists another creation epic, *Gulao De Hehua* ("The Ancient Lotus").²³ Despite their different names, these creation stories exhibit great similarities in terms of content. In both epics there is an original couple—the husband's name is Bu sang ka xi²⁴ and the wife's name is

¹⁹ The Putai people reside in northeast Thailand, mainly in Kalasin, Nakhon Phanom, and Sakon Nakhon Provinces. During my fieldwork in these places (May 15-30, 2012), I found that all Putai people there maintain a particular culture—as with the Putai in Laos—wherein they are deeply invested in indigenous religious practices but also influenced by Buddhist culture at the same time. For instance, they celebrate the Mangfei Festival as a call for rain in May or June, just after the Songkran Festival in mid-April.

²⁰ They also employ the traditional Chinese calendar and have absorbed many Chinese words into their dialects, such as the name Yuhuangdadi (the supreme deity of Taoism). Most of them also use traditional Chinese family naming practices.

²¹ The Dai-dam and Dai-khao in Jinping County have previously used a script; it came from northwest Vietnam as the Thai people migrated northward back into Southern China. A few Thai elders still use this script in Vietnam, but this Jinping Dai script is in danger of extinction within China, and few people can read and write it today.

²² Ba Ta Ma Ga Pheng Shang Luo is the Chinese pinyin transcription of this epic's title; in the Dai language itself, the epic's name is pronounced as [pap³¹tham⁵⁵maak¹¹kaa¹¹phəŋ¹¹saaŋ³⁵lo⁵⁵]. The epic is found for the most part in Xishuangbanna Prefecture, and it has been published in several versions; see, for example, Ai Wenbian and Ai Lin 1981. Dai people will invite a singer home to sing this epic when they celebrate the completion of a new house, and this creation epic is a necessary element within the repertoires of the professional folk singers (*zhanga*) in the region.

²³ *Gulao De Hehua* is the Chinese title, but in the Dai language it is called [mo³³luŋ³⁵kam¹¹phaa¹¹]. The epic is found primarily in Dehong Prefecture, and because there are no professional singers in Dehong, this kind of epic is preserved by means of manuscripts in temples, with the monks usually reciting the epic for villagers from August to November annually. This epic has not yet been published.

²⁴ The Dai call him [puu¹¹saaŋ³⁵kaa³³sii³⁵], or [puu¹¹saaŋ³⁵kaai³³] for short. [puu¹¹] means "grandfather."

Ya sang ka sai²⁵—and just as Adam and Eve in the Bible, they become the first couple in a Secret Garden, created by the supreme god—in this case, Yinphra.²⁶ It is my belief that Yinphra in these epics is actually the god Indra from Brahmanism. Additionally, *Gulao De Hehua* explains the Ancient Age as a Lotus Age, and the lotus is, of course, an important symbol of Buddhism.

Second, these epic traditions have also been influenced by Indian culture. For instance, as several Chinese scholars have shown, the heroic epic *Langa Xihe* ("The Monster with Ten Heads")²⁷ from Xishuangbanna and its Dehong counterpart, *Langa xishuanghe* ("The Monster with Twelve Heads"),²⁸ have both been influenced by the famous Indian *Ramayana* epic.²⁹ But thanks to the existence of their scripts, the Dai people record most of their epics as Buddhist scriptures, and the oral poetry has thus become textualized. In the Dai language these epic texts are referred to as [lik⁵³] or [tham⁵⁵].³⁰

In contrast, within the indigenous religious cultural circle, the epic tradition has not been influenced by Buddhism or Indian culture, and these Dai people have never heard of the above epics. In this circle, all narrative poetry is transmitted as oral songs, called [xaam⁵⁵], and the songs exhibit little outside influence other than that exerted by the Chinese culture. Interestingly, though the epics of the Buddhist cultural circle are not found within the circle of indigenous religion, the opposite is untrue, and the songs of the indigenous religious cultural circle do indeed make their way to other Dai communities. For example, though the song *Ebing Yu Sangluo* ("Ebing and Sangluo")³¹ goes by different names in different locations—in Dehong

²⁷ Langa xihe is the Chinese transcription, but in the Dai language it is actually pronounced as [laaŋ¹¹kaa¹¹sip³¹hoo³⁵]; [laaŋ¹¹kaa¹¹] means "monster" and [sip³¹hoo³⁵] means "ten heads."

²⁸ Langa xishuanghe is again the Chinese version; its actual pronunciation in the Dai language is [laak¹¹kaa¹¹sip³¹soŋ³⁵hoo³⁵]. [sip³¹soŋ³⁵hoo³⁵] means "twelve heads."

²⁹ Such studies have focused on the relationship between *Langa Xihe* and the *Ramayana*, on the different versions of *Langa Xihe*, or on the transformation process of specific characters. See, for example, Li Jiang 2010.

³⁰ [lik⁵³] and [tham⁵⁵] both refer to the Buddhist scriptures in general, including all epos. Actually, Dai people do not have a distinct word for "epic;" instead, they have the word [\gg aa³³pom¹¹] for "story," the word [xuuu⁵⁵] for "history," and the word [xaam⁵⁵] for "song."

²⁵ The Dai refer to her as [jaa³³saaŋ³⁵kaa³³saai³⁵], or by the shortened form [jaa³³saaŋ³⁵kaai³³]. [jaa³³] means "grandmother."

²⁶ When Yinphra created these humans from clay, he originally forgot to make the wife's breast, an omission he rectified by incorporating some clay from the husband's palm; people now claim that this is why men always wish to touch a woman's breast!

³¹ *Ebing Yu Sangluo* is the Chinese title of this song, pronounced in Dai as $[\gg o^{31}pin^{11}saam^{35}lo^{55}]$. $[\gg o^{31}pin^{11}]$ is the name of a poor, beautiful, and young girl, who is the fifth girl in the family ranking. $[saam^{35}lo^{55}]$ is the name of a charming wealthy young man, and he is the third boy in his family ranking. $[saam^{35}lo^{55}]$ falls in love with $[\gg o^{31}pin^{11}]$ when he travels to her hometown of Kengtuang, but his mother disapproves of their love because they are not in the same social stratum. $[\gg o^{31}pin^{11}]$ goes to find $[saam^{35}lo^{55}]$ after she has conceived, but she had been hurt by his bad-hearted mother and then died in the forest while giving birth. $[saam^{35}lo^{55}]$ chooses to die for love when he learns the truth, cutting his throat beside her coffin. Both of them then ultimately transform into two bright stars in the sky, now called $[\gg o^{31}pin^{11}]$ star and $[saam^{35}lo^{55}]$ star.

Prefecture it is called *Ebing Sangluo*; in Xinping County the Dai-sai call it *Lang'e Sangluo*;³² in Maguan County the Dai-dam call it Lang'e Luosang; and in Yuanjiang County the Dai-la call it Zhausang Nang'e³³—its actual content (of a tragic-romantic, Romeo and Juliet type) remains virtually the same in both the Buddhist and indigenous religious cultural circles. Such songs were transmitted orally for many years before ever being written down, and this long evolutionary process has now led to songs that range from relatively simple poems to epics spanning many thousands of lines.

In the different cultural circles, then, the Dai people transmit their poetry in various ways, with written and oral traditions now coexisting in many areas. In Xishuangbanna and Dehong

Prefectures, within those circles that do make use of written transmission, one can actually find hundreds of thousands of handwritten copies of epics, mainly in temples. Often an elder will copy poems for villagers to use in worship or prayer; Kalong ("Big Bird")³⁴ and *Lang Jinbu* ("The Lady Who Eats Crabs")³⁵ are, for instance, the most common songs that villagers employ in conjunction with asking for offspring. At present, the local government's Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Center works to obtain and protect these precious manuscripts written in the Dai traditional scripts, and local scholars are working to transcribe the traditional scripts into the new scripts while also producing translations. Consequently, many Dai epics and songs have now been published in both the Dai and Chinese languages; examples include the aforementioned Ba Ta Ma Ga Pheng Shang Luo and Langa Xihe, as well as Xiangmeng ("The Hero Xiangmeng"),³⁶ Qitou Qiwei Xiang ("The Elephant scripts. Banyan village, Menghai County,



Fig. 5. Manuscripts employing traditional Dai Xishuangbanna Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan Province. Photo by author.

³⁵ Lang Jinbu [laan⁵⁵tsin³³puu³³] is Dai; [laan⁵⁵] is "lady," [tsin³³] means "eat," and [puu³³] is "crabs." In Chinese publications the name is translated as Yi Bai Ling Yi Duo Hua ("101 Flowers").

³⁶ Xiangmeng [sɛŋ³⁵məŋ⁵⁵]; [sɛŋ³⁵] is "diamond," and [məŋ⁵⁵] is "kingdom," referring to the prince. This heroic epic has been published in several versions both in the Chinese and Dai languages; see further Wang Song 2007.

³² [laan⁵⁵ \gg o³¹saam³⁵loo⁵⁵]; [laan⁵⁵] is "lady," and [\gg o³¹] is the girl's name—the fifth one in family ranking. [saam³⁵] refers to the third one in the ranking system, and [loo⁵⁵] is the boy's name.

³³ [tsau³¹saam³⁵naan⁵⁵≫o³¹]; [tsau³¹] is analogous to "gentleman" or "lordship."

³⁴ Kalong [ka³³ lun³⁵] is Dai; [ka³³] is a kind of bird/crow, and [lun³⁵] means "big" or "huge." Sometimes this song is also called [ka³³ phək¹¹], with [phək¹¹] meaning "white" and implying that the bird is sacred, affordable only to the king. This song has not yet been published as a separate volume, but the story is found in some publications under the Chinese title of Wu Ke Jin Dan De Gu Shi ("The Story of Five Golden Eggs") or A Luan De Lai Li ("Who is A Luan?"). See Ai Feng et al. 1995.

with Seven Heads and Seven Tails"),³⁷ and *Qianban Lianhua* ("The Lotus with One Thousand Petals").³⁸



Fig. 6. An elder (pictured in the center) selling his manuscripts during a ceremony on October 11, 2009, in the Menghuan pagoda, Dehong Prefecture. Photo by author.



Fig. 8. A performance of *Na Du Xiang* ("The Precious Door") as part of the celebration for a new house in Mangshi Town, Dehong Prefecture, on September 28, 2009. Photo by author.

સર્વા સુરક્ષ સુરક્ષે હુર્યુ. કુકુ જ (અદ્વે અને અ છે કે ન્દ્રે છે. મુખ્ય સુરક્ષ સુરક્ષે હુર્યુ. કુકુ જ (અદ્વે અને અ છે કે ન્દ્રે છે. ອາຊີ້ສະເໜີງອາ ທາຊີຊີ ບໍ່ຖືເອາດູ ນູເອີ ບໍ່ຖືໃລ ນູເອີ ພາຍີ ລາໃນ ၀) အားစ်ကန်ကို အျားစွေ စသားစီ တွင် ကန်း တွင် ကန်းစည်းစားစွေးကော် က ويومون بالمحمد ولي المحمد والمحمد والمحمد والمعالية والمعالية والمعالية والمعالية والمعالية والمحمد والمحم က်စိုက်ပို့ရှိ သို့ရက္ခရီးဒီ ... မက္ကြန်ရဲ့ဆို ကားရသြား ဆိုရန် နို မိုး Bressmerther massel as By an of Broy grand on a ເມືອງ ເຊິ່ງ ເຊິ່ စစ္တရ နစ္တြားခွက်ကြွန်း ကြွမ်းကို ရှိပြားကို ကျွန်းကို ကျွန်း စရီစ الده بحقيده مروع مولي في وما مالك والدولي والمعالية والمعامة သင်္ဂသိမ္မွာတွေကို ရခွဲကူးမိုပြား ရဲမိုပညာမာက္ဆက္နက္ခ ဦတာမြို့ရဲ ໃດເບລີຊີ ບາດເດກ ກູດ ເຊິ່າຄະແບດ ເດ ເຊາະເຫຍາ 2510 ເຕາ ແລະ အခြန်ရ သင်္ဂဆ တိုးစင်ဖွဲ့တစ်ရှိရှိတာညီကွဲမှာ ယုံးလောက်တဲ့ ကူမည် မက္ကေရာက်တွေ့ မက္ကေရာက်ရာကိုက္ကေဆာက္က ကိုက်က္က ကိုက်က် Budar Strange gud is is a strange series of the strange was generation and wind and a day of the က်ခန်းကျက် ကို သို့ကြည်နှင့်နှင့် ကျွန်းကျက် ကို ကျည်းနေရာ

Fig. 7. The manuscript of *Ba Ta Ma Ga Pheng Shang Luo* (written in traditional Dai-lue script), preserved in the temple of Banyan Village, Mengzhe County, Xishuangbanna Prefecture. Photo by author.

All of the narrative poetry described above derives from folk stories, Buddhist Jatakas, or a combination of the two sources. For those songs employing Buddhist material, it is easy to imagine that long ago monks adapted Jatakas to fit within the form of Dai songs as a tool for more easily explaining Buddhist tenets while at the same time also adapting Dai folk stories for

inclusion within Buddhist manuscripts. In Dehong Prefecture, there are now hundreds of A-luan poems—such as *Qingwa A-luan* ("The Golden Frog A-luan"), *Jin Lingyang A-luan* ("The

³⁷ *Qitou Qiwei Xiang* is a Chinese translation, but the Dai call this song [tsaaŋ³¹tset¹¹ho³⁵tset¹¹haaŋ³⁵]; see Dao Jinxiang 1988.

³⁸ *Qianban Lianhua* is again the Chinese translation; however, the Dai refer to it as [mo³³hɛŋ³⁵kaap¹¹]. The song has been published in several versions; see, for instance, Dao Jinxiang and Dao Zhengnan 1981.

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Golden Gazelle A-luan"), and *Da Yezi A-luan* ("The A-luan Who Sold the Huge Leaf for Life")³⁹ —and all of these songs are clearly related to the written tradition of the Buddhist Jatakas. On the other hand, there are still Dai folk singers performing epics and other songs orally; these singers are called *zhangha* or *moha*,⁴⁰ both terms meaning an "expert in singing." In Xishuangbanna, the *zhangha* perform their songs primarily within the context of important ceremonies, such as the ceremony for a newly completed house, the wedding ceremony, the *sheng he shang* ("monk promotion") ceremony, and so on. And in Dehong, the *moha* usually dramatize songs such as *Lang Thuihan*⁴¹ and *A-luan Gongguan*⁴² in varying festival contexts.

In the indigenous religious cultural circle, where the Dai people rely on oral rather than written traditions, folk singers regularly engage in performances of narrative poetry. For example, each May in Xinping County the Dai-sai and Dai-yat celebrate the Hua-jie Festival, where people will sing songs with each other, and elders often sing ancient songs in conjunction with daily rites (see Fig. 10).⁴³ The Dai-la folk singers in Yuanjiang County also celebrate a special festival called the Mengmian-Qingge Festival, when they sing songs while hiding their faces behind beautiful handkerchiefs decorated by hand



Fig. 9. The *zhangha* Yuyan, a professional singer famous among the Dai-lue people in Xishuangbanna. Photo by author.

⁴¹ Lang Thuihan is the Dai title, and it is called [laaŋ⁵⁵thui⁵⁵xam⁵⁵] in the Dehong Dai language, but in Xishuangbanna people call the song *Zhao Shu Thun* [tsau³¹shuu¹¹thun⁵⁵], and it has another well known translation as *The Peacock Princess*. It has been published in several versions; see Ai Die et al. 2009.

 42 [a³³loŋ⁵⁵kuŋ³³kon³³]; this song concerns the story of Buddha being incarnated as a poor boy named [kuŋ³³kon³³].

³⁹ In the Dai language the word is pronounced as [$\gg a^{33} lon^{55}$], though it is actually Burmese in origin and refers to a hero who is brave, kind-hearted, and handsome; usually he is the incarnation of Buddha. Many of the songs about [$\gg a^{33} lon^{55}$] have been published as books; see Ai Wenbian 1988. *Qingwa A-luan* is [$\gg a^{33} lon^{55} kop^{11} xam^{55}$] in Dai; [$kop^{11} xam^{55}$] is "golden frog." This song is centered around the story of Buddha being incarnated as a golden frog. *Jin Lingyang A-luan* is [$\gg a^{33} lon^{55} ne^{55} xam^{55}$] in Dai; [$ne^{55} xam^{55}$] means "golden gazelle" and this song thus narrates the incarnation of Buddha as a golden gazelle. Finally, *Da Yezi A-luan* is [$\gg a^{33} lon^{55} ton^{33} lon^{55}$] in Dai, with [$ton^{33} lon^{35}$] meaning "huge leaf" and the tale thus revolving around Buddha's incarnation as a poor boy who sold a type of huge leaf in exchange for life.

⁴⁰ [tsaŋ³³xap⁵³] or [mo³⁵xaam⁵⁵].

⁴³ Hua-jie Festival is a Chinese name, literally translated as "Flower-Street Festival." During this festival people dress in colorful costumes and gather in the street to make new friends, shop, or engage in conversation. The street thus looks just like a "flower-street." The festival also provides an opportunity for adults seeking lovers; during the festival anyone—married or not—is free to hunt for a lover. Love songs are covertly performed, and women will feed their lovers sticky rice, salted egg, and fried ricefield eel, while men will give their lovers a silver bracelet, ring, or other jewelry as gift. The couple can then have further contact or even sex. Dai-yat people are free to find lovers before marriage, but after becoming married, they can renew these former relationships only during the Hua-jie Festival.



with cross-stitched patterns (see Fig. 11).44

Fig 10. A Dai-yat elder performing during an evocation ceremony on July 28, 2010, in Mosha Town, Xinping County, Yuxi City. Photo by author.



Fig. 11. The Mengmian-Qingge Festival is held only among the Dai-la group during mid-May every year in Yuanjian County. Photo by author.

Key Features of Rhyme in the Dai Epic Tradition

Several Chinese scholars have previously investigated the evolution of Dai literature, with one of the most prominent being Wang Song, who discusses four relevant periods of this evolution in his 1983 monograph *Daizu Shige Fazhan Chutan* ("A Study on the Evolution of Dai"). The main points of his exposition—with which I agree—are as follows. In the first period, there was only oral tradition in the form of myth, ballad, and other simple songs. During the

second period, all of these simple songs evolved into long narrative poetry; however, they still remained exclusively in the realm of oral tradition. Then, with the arrival of Buddhism during the seventh through fourteenth centuries, the Dai people created their scripts, and their literature entered its very important third period when much of the poetry began to be recorded and textualized. Finally, the fourth period extends from 1919 up through the present, and it is during this period that Dai drama

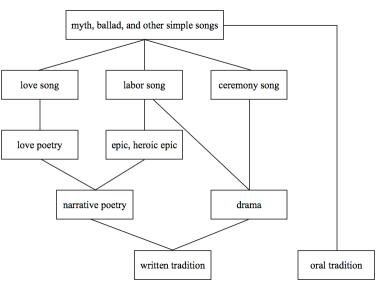


Fig. 12. The evolutionary history of Dai literature. Based on Wang Song 1983.

⁴⁴ In Chinese, *mengmian* means "mask" and *qingge* means "love song." During the festival, men and women gather under large trees in the village, and they can sing call-and-response style either individually or in groups while also enjoying food and drink. The songs are highly formulaic in content, diction, and melody.

emerges as a new thing, thriving principally in Dehong Prefecture.

Whether more connected today with oral tradition or written practices, all types of Dai poetry still share certain important features. First, though the length of the poetic line is unrestricted and can be shorter or longer as desired, the number of syllables in a single line is always odd and not even. Taking verses from *Galong* (written in Dai-le script) as an example, we can see that both the first and second lines consist of 13 words:⁴⁵

| 1. ԾՈս յոս սն പնե օսռ ալեռ ոն ոլեռ ոլ | tsem ³³ an ³³ pi ³³ luum ³³ van ⁵⁵ jaam ⁵⁵ li ³³ ŋaam ⁵⁵ ku ³³ |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| บ)ทน ก(ม ม ม ม ม ม ม ม ม ม ม ม ม | sɛn ⁵⁵ pəŋ ³³ tse ⁵⁵ tsom ¹¹ |
| 2. ซกе ตา บโยซย์ อหย หไย ซออ มเา ตา | $tsa\eta^{11}tak^{53}saw^{33}tsw^{33}xan^{11}naa^{11}tsau^{31}\ lok^{53}hak^{53}$ |
| aโnc ฯโคธ JГn oโo⊻° | xon ³⁵ lom ¹¹ kop ⁵³ vo ⁵⁵ |

Second, every two poetic lines constitute one unit of rhyme and express a single viewpoint. In the verses below from the poem *Zhau Mahe* ("The Quick-Witted Man Named Mahe"),⁴⁶ for instance, the first and second lines rhyme with each other on the syllable [$5m^{35}$] (which is marked in bold type), and the third and fourth lines rhyme with each other on the syllable [aa^{11}].⁴⁷

| ן. סס מוַפאח טוא סוַחט מוַט מטָח חאד אואכ י | tsau ³¹ phu ¹¹ laŋ ³³ pen ³³ voŋ ⁵³ hup ⁵³ tsəŋ ³³ ŋam ⁵⁵ tsəm³⁵ |
|--|--|
| 2. սՈ տIոռ սլոշ ցIոռ ցօռ վառ ալյեշ | se ³³ taaŋ ⁵⁵ hoŋ ³⁵ haaŋ ⁵⁵ hau ⁵⁵ laai ⁵⁵ phɔm³⁵ |
| u[и nʃu。 | pəŋ ³³ ŋɛp ⁵³ |
| 3. Ծվ տіոռ әլис գլոс գլօс әեռ տնе | tsur ³³ taaŋ ⁵⁵ xun ³⁵ hoŋ ³⁵ ho ³⁵ xam ⁵⁵ te ¹¹ |
| പിന പe ൗle , | let ⁵³ laa ¹¹ tsaa ¹¹ |
| 4. പո oln գիշշ գիշ հեթ որօ թլե ովիս ենեչ։ | laŋ ³³ vaaŋ ³³ ho ³⁵ hə ³⁵ lam ⁵³ peu ³³ maa¹¹ pɛŋ ⁵⁵ kum ⁵⁵ |

Third, the most consistent type of Dai rhyming technique is to employ what in Chinese is called *yao-jiao yun*, or "waist-feet rhyme," wherein the last syllable of a first line functions as a line-ending rhyme-unit corresponding to an internal rhyming syllable within the second line, usually designated as the third syllable from the end of line. The above passages from *Galong* and *Zhau Mahe* exemplify this type of rhyme, as do the verses below from *E'bing Yu Sangluo*.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ These verses from *Galong* are from a handwritten copy that was produced by Li Mingliang, more than 50 years old, who lives in Xiangpa village, Mangzhang Town, Yingjiang County, Dehong Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan Province. There are no line numbers in this Dai manuscript. I translate these lines as follows: "At the propitious moment, the king named the beloved son as Hanna; it is a classic name in the buffalo kingdom."

⁴⁶ *Tsau Mahe* [tsau³¹maa¹¹ho³⁵] is the Chinese pinyin transformation of the Dai language title, which refers to a quick-witted man who always helps people solve their problems.

⁴⁷ I translate this passage as follows (from *Zhau Mahe* 1997:4): "The King his Majesty is sitting in the throne; even his name can overawe people to kneel. The king's name is Deletlatsa; he has a great reputation, living in the resplendent palace."

⁴⁸ The passage (from E'bing Yu Sangluo 1960:10) can be translated as follows: "kenton is a prosperous place; the merchants from all corners gather here. The beautiful and fertile land kenton, cows and horses bring various merchandise here with their bells ringing every day."

2. าเนก าไข ายง ต႐ิาe **ตุเน** มุบุc มุเยกง

3. ษไหอ บโอย ษเน าโเกิม **ฮามกม**,

lat⁵³lai³¹keŋ⁵⁵təŋ⁵⁵maan³¹peu¹¹**mon³³** kon⁵⁵ka⁵³kam⁵³tɛk¹¹**hon³³**lai³⁵lum⁵⁵ maan³¹peu¹¹mon³³ keŋ⁵⁵təŋ⁵⁵ li³³lu³³hu³⁵faaŋ⁵⁵heŋ¹¹həŋ³⁵ləŋ⁵⁵mon³³ tən³¹

However, in addition to waist-feet rhyme, simple end-rhyme does also appear occasionally in Dai poetry, as in the passage below from *Lang Jinbu*, where the two lines rhyme on the end syllables [laa⁵⁵] and [maa⁵⁵]: ⁴⁹

| 1. ษ() | mə ³³ lam ⁵³ maa ¹¹ haa ¹¹ tsaa ¹¹ tsau ³¹ xai ¹¹ faa ⁵³ laŋ ³³ |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Ծβи ळնոռ ս()ne မ()nռ վл , | tsum ³³ thiŋ ⁵⁵ pəŋ ¹¹ məŋ ⁵⁵ laa ⁵⁵ |
| 2. ฃทธ มโกร ซโทย ซากาณ ซาการ มาก อานิ | tsaŋ ¹¹ sop ¹¹ li ³³ seŋ ³⁵ vaan ³⁵ kaan ³⁵ tsu ⁵⁵ |
| վոռ սՈոռ եՈռ վտ Ձլօօ եԼռ օ | laaŋ ⁵⁵ pɛŋ ⁵⁵ mɛ ⁵⁵ lat ⁵³ xo ³¹ maa ⁵⁵ |

Further examples from diverse Dai poetries—from Xishuangbanna and Dehong but also from other Dai subgroup locations—can help demonstrate the degree to which all of these poetries follow the same rules for rhyme.

Xishuangbanna is well known as a residence region of the Dai people, with the Dai-lue group being prominent there. The Dai-lue dialect is different in tone from the Dai-le dialect, and their two scripts are different in shape; however, the verse and rhyme structures of the poetry remain similar. The following passage is from the famous heroic epic *Xiangmeng*:⁵⁰

| 1. င်ဟင်ခ ဣ၁၅ဧ ၈သေဌ ၆၆ ရက <u>ျင်ဘ</u> ,ေ | hoo ⁵⁵ tsai ⁵⁵ kvaaŋ ¹³ sɛɛn ⁵⁵ tii ⁵⁵ hak ⁵¹ phai ³⁵ |
|--|---|
| 2. တဗႝဒုဒ္သရရှိရှော်ရှုရှာဒုနှစ်ကေဝူဧနီဖြော့ | tiit ⁵⁵ daŋ ³⁵ naaŋ ⁵¹ naat ³³ kɛɛu ¹³ teet ⁵⁵ |
| <u>င်ခ</u> ေသလ္ကရိုလ်စေဇော်ဝရာဗိန်ဗိသ | tsai ¹¹ sa ⁵⁵ lii ⁵⁵ nəə ³⁵ teeu ⁵¹ vii ⁵¹ ni ³³ naa ⁵¹ |
| လေက္ခဝိမဝေခဝေခြောရှင်မြန်မီ | leek ³³ tsuuu ³³ vaa ³³ vaa ³³ naaŋ ⁵¹ xam ⁵¹ fə ⁵⁵ |
| [ႜ] ဃၥပုနိမ္မရီလဥမျှ <u>ေကြာ</u> ေ | phaap ³⁵ məəŋ ⁵¹ lum ³³ <u>faa¹¹</u> |
| 3. ပါဌဂဍ ေဝေ့ေရေ <u>ော</u> ာ္ရသူတွေ၀ | piin ⁵⁵ kuu ³³ tsau ¹³ phɛɛn ³⁵ <u>faa¹¹</u> sa ⁵⁵ mə ⁵⁵ |
| ဘွမ်င္ဂံေဝမ <u>်ိဳမ္ ၆၈</u> | ≫en ³⁵ teem ⁵¹ <u>hooŋ⁵¹</u> |
| 4. တဗ်ဒုဂ္ဂရှိချောင <u>္ခင်တ္တရ</u> ံဘန္နမ္တေလ | tiit ⁵⁵ tsaŋ ³³ xun ⁵⁵ looŋ ⁵⁵ phoom ¹¹ see ⁵⁵ |
| ဌာ ဂ်ဂဒ္ဒမီရှင်ေဍါနေ, | naa ⁵¹ xa ³³ tsəəŋ ³⁵ jai ³⁵ |
| | |

In these verses we can see that the poetry not only employs the traditional waist-feet rhyme, but it does so in an even more complex fashion, with the final syllable of every line (rather than every other line) being followed by a corresponding internal rhyme in the subsequent line. Rhyme structures in the poetry from Xishuangbanna can thus be understood as more

⁴⁹ A loose translation of the two lines is as follows: "Then the king is sitting in the throne, and he speaks to the lady tenderly." These verses are found on page 20 of a handwritten copy produced by Li Mingliang (see note 45).

⁵⁰ I translate this passage as: "Look at the queen Nangxamfei; she is so beautiful like a goddess; she accompanies the king in the great palace every day. The bodyguard and the Ministers lined up, one by one to swear allegiance to them." The verses are from Ai Ping 1986:36.

rigorous and perhaps even more aesthetically pleasing than in the poetry from Dehong, and one possible reason for this increased complexity may be the greater frequency with which the songs are performed orally in Xishuangbanna, even alongside the tradition's textualization. The rules for rhyming in oral poetic narratives seem to be much more regular and strictly adhered to than in the case of written poetry. Here is a further example from *Xiangmeng*, with all of the interlinked rhyming units underlined (Ai Ping 1986:37):

| 1. ထဗ်ဒ္ဒ ဒရှသေျငဲခ ၐၐဢ႖ႍၔၐၒႝ႖၀ဗႝ ၓၓဗႝ႖ၭႍၣႍၛႍႄ, | The queen consistently abides by the Buddhist discipline; |
|---|---|
| 2. ဌၣၛႍၜႄ႙ၣၛႍၜႄႄၛၣႍၯႍၜႍႍႄႍႜႍႜႍၣၛၜႄႜႍ ၯၟၖ <u>ႄႄႄ</u> ႄၛၣ | She prays to Buddha and gods, |
| 3. ဌ၁ရှင်္ဌြနစမှ <u>သ</u> ိုင်္ဌဝ၂ဧဂၷရှင်္ခမှင်္ခခေဒ္နှ | Asking for children; |
| 4. ဌာရိဘင်္ဘာရာဦ <u>နင်</u> နိုင်ငံရာလေရိုင် ရှိနိုင်လေချင်နိုင်ငံရာနေအသ | The gods are delighted; |
| 5. ဂၝဂဗႝဒ္ဒၝၒိႆႍၐၹဆဌၴႄႝဒၟဌ၁ရဟၥၛႜႋႋဍျယၩႄႝႍၯၙၔႍ, | Then the queen gets the boy as a gift from gods; |
| ၀၂၉၉ စုဗီယခ်နည်မိမ့်ချိန်ဦရာ ၂ပတချင့်ခြံခ်ရှိခ်စွဲလ .6 ရှာ | She becomes debilitated day by day, |
| 7. ယ၁မှဥ်ငှဘွေဗ်င္ခ ဎႝႃၖ တေးရှင်ော်ရ <u>ှက်၁ၔ</u> င်လဒ္ဒ¤ဍျဟဗ်င်ေး။ဒ <u>ုငါ</u> ္ရ, | Like a flower is fading, |
| 8. သဥမျင္ဆာဥ္ ဂမ္မပေဌ ဌ၁၈ ပဝိုေ <u>၅</u> ၿငိႇ | Because the fetus is growing every day in her body; |
| 9. သမီဝေခဲ့လွှ <u>်</u> ခါမဦစိုင်ဦခင်လ <u>ွှိခါမ</u> ဝေနီ ၇. စာရီ <u>ဝေ</u> ခဲ့ရောင်လွှ <u>ိခ</u> ါန | The big day arrives at last, at a wonderful moment, |
| 10. ဌာရှီရေမြရှိစ်ကေဝူဧ င်ထဲ ဒွဗ် ၿဗီဝူနေ့ <u>တွာ</u> ေ, | She gives birth to a cute prince; |
| 11. ဂုဘတရှၔင်ဲဌၒြးရှၔဌ၁ရှၐၐႄကၔႄၐၐႄကၝႄၣၟ | The minister records the important thing, |
| 12. ဂဌ <u>ဝ၁</u> ေ်ငံလင်မှဌ် ဒုဝျဗဝဌ ယ၁မှမ္မ၁ <u>၌</u> اء, | And he names the prince a brave name, |
| 13. ဌ၁ရ ဂၩၔႄၷၗၣၟၖႝၟၔၟၛၣႍ <u>ဌၧၔ</u> ၮၣဌယၒႝႜၛႍ | His name is Rama, the great prince; he is the eldest |
| ပဉ္ခတ္ခ | child of the king. |

In Dehong Prefecture, the Dai people also maintain a thriving oral tradition, and the singing of such poetry is ever-present. For example, when one village celebrates the completion of a new temple, pagoda, road, entertainment center for the elderly, or even a bridge, members of other villages will arrive bearing gifts and beating gongs and drums in congratulation; they will then also choose a representative (usually a 30- to 50-year-old female) to sing songs flattering to the host. The host will in turn provide a gift and select someone to sing a courteous song in response. In addition to such spontaneous performances, the government also often provides public singing stages during state holidays such as National Day, International Working Women's Day, or the Spring Festival, during which the government will invite famous folk singers to sing songs praising the party's policy, socialist system, and beautiful nature.

The following song is of the first, more spontaneous type and was performed in the Dai language by a Dai-le elder named Qu Zaiwu in February 2008. In this gracefully recited poem celebrating a newly completed house (in Zhanxi Town, Yingjiang County, Dehong Prefecture) the complexly interlinked rhyme structure is also present:

| 1. ፓ <mark>მ</mark> л | 0 |
|--|---|
| 2. Ծոе օl շo շn មյոշ ուն թնոչ | A huge fire destroyed the world, |
| מושת מזא ייא אראר מע חוה ' מופי אז אראר אראס מא | flaming everywhere; |
| 3. տГо պյս უຩе ຩፄຠ ຒոc, | Everything was exterminated, nothing left in the land, |
| 4. רעטד שאד דוא אוי אוי אוי אטע דעט אוי אטע א | Just water left everywhere. |
| 5. эլис անс ъпе თնс то պил нլо | The god dropped some lotus seeds |
| чГис ојме чГих гдја , | upon the original land; |
| 6. าเอe ซเย ดป์าe นให ลยภ , | The lotus seeds sprouted and grew up, |
| 7. סאפ סאכ אטר טאט אנס אשת שנאס שאפ רוטפ . | They bloomed with four petals of golden color. |
| 8. ոlue പുn പրո սՈս տնe ոլտ ել(ոռ , | Four petals became four directions, |
| 9. סור שלה אטי עיטג שנוחד סור פורי . | And mountains emerged as pillars of the world. |
| 10. | Water became five rivers, |
| 11. տՈռ မ()ոռ പមច ထլမօ ခլမe. | And flooded the land. |
| 12. പ്രം այս ոս ենռ эլил, | No human being existed yet, |
| 13. אח ul שטת שניס סון ס טר טעכ אשא , | Not even kinds of trees; |
| 14. | We know only the "He xam" grew before the elephant emerged; |
| 15. אוח איניס אנג אנוחד. | Rattan grew, twining the trees. |
| 16. աlo aŊn თŊาe უլյи თlnռ alฆռ , | We know only "Yaliang" grew before the buffalo emerged; |
| 17. ויעת מועד אוא אר טנסד אואס , | Buffalo eat all the leaves of "Yaliang," |
| 18. אינטא אβספ אואס אוסג אנטא א | Leaving the limb only. |
| 19. ษ()กก าเนก ษ() ผไษก หหง ผก บไ ษผิก าเนc, | There was no king among the humans; |
| 20. ույշռ ոս սևո տևշռ Վո տԸոռ սՈոշ տՈտe | Just the rabbit sat on the moon; |
| voo , | |
| 21. თоо սՈշ սլฆе ч@и ցוฆс . | The moon waxed and waned. |
| 22. Ծոе ษ฿ռ ฃlոc ሓլ e ฃlոc ሓլฃռ ៦oc uŊთe | The eight Sanglu Sanglai gods come down to |
| ``000 , | earth at last, |
| 23. סוסס אנחת פנחת יוח. | Flying down from heaven. |
| 24. บนิย ๖๐๐ มมา บทิห มทิกภ, | Four gods become females; |
| 25. บนิย ססס אטי טוא משא. | Four gods become males. |
| 26. אשר אוישר טוחס דעומי ס נו א, | People reproduce themselves, |
| 27. თոο սՈи ႪՈ ցլос әլոդ . | Build the Kingdom Ho Hong. |
| 28. מחפ אנחת אוּד שנ)סכ יונא טוּסכ טופ אנסס, | People went through mountains to search for wet land; |
| 29. ԾՈՉ ԵԼԵ ԾՈՉ ԾԱՑ ԾԱՅ ԴԵՆ ԱՆԴ | They stacked the wood to make fire. |
| 30. מחפ חופ סאפ טופ געס מט מחשר אות , | They heaped the embankment to make the rice field, |
| 31. տնe ule alπ ցՈտe ցու. | And assarted the wild hill to make the dry field. |
| 32. one הס חום טושכ שוח שוופ טווא שות , | They took three bunches of rice shoots to cultivate |
| 33. ฮโก ซโษင ซ(โทс ษโย บโท ษไหอ. | And took three bunches of straw to cover the roof. |
| 34. | Some people migrated to distant Sibo and Hojing- |
| 35. ulne υበոπ ຫຼլօc υ[ነາe, | Both places have fertile land— |
| 36. | And some people migrated to Gengma and Hobeng; |
| | |

| So the god finished creating the world. |
|---|
| Hundreds of thousands of villages emerged, |
| And various households emerged. |
| Thinking about that, my dear friend, you have |
| several sons living together; |
| People always say that two boars can't eat in one |
| groove, and two sons can't live in one house. |
| The house is too crowded for you, |
| so we build a new house here |
| |

The Dai-yat are a subgroup who lagged behind during the southward migration and today live in Mosha Town, Xinping County, Yunnan Province, in the valley near the Ailao Mountain. They have not been influenced by Buddhism and have no script, so they have maintained their singing tradition even until the present without the influence of outside forces. Here again we find the interlinked rhyme structure (though in this case employing syllables in various line positions for the internal rhyme unit) in a love song from the Hua-jie Festival:⁵¹

| 1. he ¹¹ kun ⁵³ hɔŋ ³¹ he ¹¹ hεu ²⁴ | Sing the song one by one, |
|--|--|
| 2. $sin^{55}xam^{53}k\epsilon u^{24}k an^{53}kha^{53}$ | Listen to the girl and boy, |
| 3. he ¹¹ kun ⁵³ hɔŋ ³¹ he ¹¹ tswaŋ¹¹ | Sing the song one by one, |
| 4. siŋ ⁵⁵ xam ⁵³ nɯ ²⁴ kwaŋ³¹ kən ⁵³ | This verse answers that. |
| 5. ka ²⁴ həŋ ³¹ lei ¹¹ ti ³¹ ko ³³ loŋ ⁵⁵ hεu ²⁴ | I long to sing yet feel anxious; |
| 6. ka ²⁴ kɛu ²⁴ lai ¹¹ ti ³¹ la ³³ ko ³³ loŋ ⁵⁵ xam ⁵³ | I love to sing though out of verse. |
| 7. loŋ ⁵⁵ xam ⁵³ tok ¹¹ vai ³³ khau ¹¹ | Forgetting verses as rice drops down, |
| 8. aai ³³ ti ⁵⁵ kun ⁵³ thau¹¹ va ²⁴ hu ³¹ va ²⁴ vaai ⁵³ | I am so embarrassed before the elder people. |
| 9. aai³³ ti ⁵⁵ tsu ¹¹ səŋ ⁵⁵ sau ⁵³ va ²⁴ hu ³¹ jaŋ ³¹ | So bashful to confront the girl, |
| 10. ko ³³ loŋ ⁵⁵ xam ⁵³ tok ¹¹ vai ³³ ko ²⁴ | Let the songs be like leaves flying away. |
| 11. aai ³³ ti ⁵⁵ tsu ¹¹ ko²⁴ su ¹¹ va ²⁴ hu ³¹ va ²⁴ vaai⁵³ | So shy to face my lover, |
| 12. aai³³ ti ⁵⁵ tsu ¹¹ səŋ ⁵⁵ sau ⁵⁵ va ²⁴ hu ³¹ jaŋ ³¹ | So shy to sing songs with you. |

Beyond my fieldwork in southern China, I also performed fieldwork in northeast Thailand, northwest Vietnam, northeast Burma, and Northern Laos, and the findings of this essay are applicable to the more general situation throughout Southeast Asia. The Thai people in Thailand, Laos, and Burma are in the Buddhist cultural circle, while the Thai people in northwest Vietnam along with some Thai people in northern Laos are in the indigenous religion's cultural circle, but all of them share a similar poetic tradition with the same epics, songs, stories, and rhyme structures as those discussed here as being important among the Dai.

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⁵¹ On the festival, see note 43. This particular song was sung in March of 2011 by a Dai-yat elder named Bai shaochang; he was born in 1938 in Mosha Town, Xinping County. I transcribed this song in IPA and then translated it into English.

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Appendix I: Dehong Dai script (Dai-le script)

| Consonants | | | | | | | | | | |
|------------|-----|----|----|-----|----|----|-----|------|----|----|
| | ٦ | Э | n | υ | ບ | Ы | n | ω | 2 | U |
| | ka | xa | ŋa | tsa | sa | ja | ta | tha | la | ра |
| | w | А | ц | 0 | ŋ | ຠ | ą | Ŋ | И | |
| | pha | ma | fa | va | ha | °a | kha | tsha | na | |

| | vowers | | | | | | | | | |
|----|--------|----|----|-----|-----|----|-----|-----|------|----|
| | | ß | Π | Ŋ | Ļ | ر٥ | U | þ | Ŋ | ٦ |
| | а | i | е | ε | u | 0 | э | ш | ə | аш |
| ນ | lນ | | | | ູບ | ເນ | ປນ | βn | (ງນ | |
| ai | aai | | | | uui | oi | əi | wi | əi | |
| 0 | lo | ۵۵ | Λο | Ŋo | | | | ٥Ŋ | (lo | |
| au | aau | iu | eu | εu | | | | шu | əu | |
| H | lu | вн | ŊА | Ŋы | ្រម | LA | ព្រ | ßн | (ម | |
| am | aam | im | em | εm | um | om | эm | um | əm | |
| И | Ιи | Øи | Πи | Ŋи | Įи | ίи | υи | Øи | ĺи | |
| an | aan | in | en | εn | un | on | on | un | ən | |
| n | In | ۵n | Πn | Ŋn | Į٥ | լո | լլո | βn | (In | |
| aŋ | aaŋ | iŋ | eŋ | εŋ | uŋ | oŋ | oŋ | աŋ | əŋ | |
| U | lu | ßu | ſυ | Ոս | ĮU | լս | լյս | վս | (ງິນ | |
| ap | aap | ip | ep | εр | up | ор | эр | шр | əp | |
| თ | lთ | ßთ | Ŋω | Ŋთ | ຼເຫ | ເຫ | ഗ്ര | მთ | (ໄຕ | |
| at | aat | it | et | εt | ut | ot | ət | ut | ət | |
| ٦ | ท | ฝา | ໃາ | Ŋ'n | เา | ເາ | ՍՂ | ุใก | (ິາ | |
| ak | aak | ik | ek | εk | uk | ok | эk | uk | ək | |

Vowels

| | | 1 | ones | | | |
|----------|----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| Mark | | л | е | 0 | <u>ا</u> | С |
| IviaiK | | | ~ | ` | • | 1 |
| Tone | 33 | 55 | 11 | 31 | 53 | 35 |
| Examples | oıyn ("big leaf") | യ്വറл ("remember") | oryne ("lighting") | ອາເງກອ ("watering") | ຫເງກອ ("belly") | ອາເງກດ ("jump") |

Tones

| Consonants | | | | | | | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|--|--|--|
| High-pitched consonant | Low-pitched consonant | Phonetic symbol | High-pitched consonant | Low-pitched consonant | Phonetic symbol | | | |
| ဘ | ى ئى | 2 | 23 | ဘ | ph | | | |
| က | С | k | දා ප | g | m | | | |
| ම | 9 | х | ບລ | 3) | f | | | |
| Se | டு | ŋ | SO | 0 | v | | | |
| Ð | 3 | ts | Sz | ಲ | 1 | | | |
| သ | ß | S | S | 5) | h | | | |
| ย | ယ | j | 3 | ŝ | d | | | |
| တ | G | t | O | ċ | b | | | |
| ຍ | ۵ | th | 03 | CO | kv | | | |
| SJ | 5 | n | ത്ത | 3 | XV | | | |
| b | 63 | р | | | | | | |

Appendix II: Xishuangbanna Dai script (Dai-lue script)

Vowels

| 1011015 | | | | | | | |
|--------------|---|-------------|----|----------------|----|------|-----|
| Single vowel | | | | | | | |
| Short vowel | | Long vowel | | Compound vowel | | | |
| رر | a | С | aa | 5 | ai | ၃၂ | aai |
| θε | i | θ | ii | Ч | ui | | |
| Э | u | ч | uu | မြ | ui | ေ—၆၂ | γi |
| S—2 | e | େ— | ee | ၅ | oi | ۵ | əi |
| SS-20 | 3 | <u>ଜ</u> େ— | 33 | g | au | ာဝ | aau |
| <i>5—2</i> | 0 | _3 | 00 | βg | iu | ೮–ರಿ | eu |
| -28 | э | —Q | 33 | ೯೮-9 | εu | G | γu |
| -B& | u | 8 | աա | | | | |
| e-95 | Ŷ | c-0 | ٧X | | | | |

| Tones |
|-------|
|-------|

| | High-pitched | | | Low-pitched | | | |
|----------|----------------|------------------|-------------------|------------------------|------------------------|-------------------|--|
| | 1 | 5 | 3 | 2 | 6 | 4 | |
| Mark | | 6 | е | | 6 | e | |
| Tone | 55 | 35 | 13 | 51 | 33 | 11 | |
| Examples | ဂ်၁ ("leg") | ුටර ("fence") | ුටෙළ ("slave") | රිට ("couch grass") | රිට ("tree crotch") | ြာe ("defame") | |