

REMARKS ON THE ORIGINS OF THAO HUNG OR CHEUANG

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The paper that I originally presented at the conference in honor of Professor Gedney was unfortunately a version of another paper given some months earlier in Denmark concerning the epic poem entitled *Thao Hung or Cheuang*. That paper is slated to be published elsewhere, so for the present volume I would like to expand on my general topic of this poem and discuss first the question of geographical location (an issue of some controversy in Thailand today), then give some linguistic and historical characteristics of that location, and finally address some remarks to the gaps in our knowledge of the region generally and implications for further study. I hope that Professor Gedney will find these of interest.

At a panel discussion held during the Seminar on Isan Literature in 1979 at the Teacher Training College of Sakon Nakhon, several views were expressed on the origins of the poem. These ideas were summarized in a report of the seminar in the Thai journal *Lok Nang Sue* ("Discussion" 2523). In the same issue an analytical article appeared entitled "*Thao Hung or Cheuang*: Literary Masterpiece of Isan," by Khun Prathip Chumphol. I am very happy to see this interest blossoming in Thailand and I would like to suggest some additional information that may prove relevant concerning the origin of the poem.

1. The manuscript which Mahasila Viravong transcribed and published in 1943 was at that time in the National Library in Bangkok. It was a latania-leaf manuscript of some two hundred leaves written in the Lao alphabet. The original (which has since disappeared) was taken by the Thai army from Xieng Khwang in 1883 during the Ho wars (Mahasila 1953). This was the general period and region of the Kha uprisings, which were also known as the Soek Cheuang, or Cheuang wars, which I shall discuss below. At the end of the manuscript is a statement: "Chane Keo Ban Vang Ban is the one who wrote this manuscript for the honorable Opharat." Ban Vang Ban is

most probably what is nowadays referred to as Ban Ban in the north of Xieng Khwang province near the Hua Phan (Sam Neua) border. Since this is the original location of the document (and certainly this is by far the oldest and most complete version available to us), I believe we should begin our inquiry into its origins in this general area.

2. Before looking at possible geographical, linguistic, and historical clues in the area, the other versions should at least be mentioned.

a. The prose manuscripts of Luang Prabang. Finot (1917) lists three manuscripts entitled *Nitan Praya Cu'ong Lun*, one in Luang Prabang of fourteen fascicles, and two (numbers 76 and 147) in the École Française d'Extrême-Orient Library of eleven fascicles each. Another manuscript, entitled *Dutiyavaṃsamālīnī* (LP number 267), is considered by Finot to be a part of this as well, consisting of ten fascicles, the second of which is missing. The author of this version was said to be Buddhaghosa. The fate of these works is unknown to me, but *Tamnan Phraya Cheuang*, recently published by Chiang Mai University, is in fact a copy of this latter work, transcribed by a monk from Phrae during his stay in Luang Prabang in B.E. 2437–38. It is written in a curious mixture of Lao and Pali (Anand et al. 2524).

Since Finot's brief summary may not be available to everyone, I will quote it here.

En cūlasakrāt 480 (= 1118 A.D.), année du Chien (tao sět), à partir de la naissance de “notre” roi Lava Cakka Deva Rāja, régnait à Jirā, dans le Mu'oñ Jayanagara ou Mu'oñ Kha Xay (= Xieng Rai) un roi nommé Surucirapabbata-cūla-rāja, en thai *Praya Cōm Rat*. Il eut deux fils: 1) Cao Cu'o'ñ; 2) Kularucira Kumāra ou Cao Yi Cu'o'ñ Lun. Le roi sacra l'aîné comme “tao praya mahakasat” et le cadet comme “uparat sên mu'o'ñ.” Quand celui-ci fut en âge de se marier, il fut fiancé a Nañ Nōm Muon, fille de Nañ Mên, reine veuve qui régnait sur le Mu'o'ñ Mên.

A cette époque le mu'o'ñ Kua Rājadhānī ou Sākya avait un roi déjà vieux, connu sous le nom de Praya Kua. Il avait une fille, Ok kēo, et un neveu, Êñ Ka, qui avait épousé la fille du roi de Lābu (Laos). Praya Kua, apprenant que le Praya Luñ Xu'n, roi de Mu'o'ñ Nu'on Yañ Lanna (Xieng Mai) avait deux filles d'une grand

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beauté, se mit en tête de les épouser: après avoir essuyé trois fois refus, il eut recours à la force et envahit le Lanna en 503 (1141 A.D.). Le roi de ce pays demanda le secours de son neveu, l'uparat Cu'ôn Lun, en lui offrant son royaume et ses deux filles pour prix de la victoire. Le prince se rendit à cet appel: il tua le Praya Kua et mit son armée en fuite. Fidèle à sa promesse, le Praya Luñ Xu'n le sacra roi et lui donna ses filles en mariage.

Après trois ans de règne, Cu'ôn porta à son tour la guerre dans le Mu'ôn Kua Pakan, alors gouverné par la veuve du vaincu. Celle-ci fit une défense héroïque; mais assiégée dans sa capitale, elle dut capituler et donner sa fille Ok kèo en mariage au vainqueur, qui se fit sacrer roi et reçut l'hommage du Praya Videharat (Yunnan). Après avoir établi un vice-roi pour gouverner le pays, il retourna à Xieng Mai et épousa sa fiancée, la fille de Nañ Mên, qui fut sa quatrième femme.

Aux royaumes conquis par lui ajouta le Mu'ôn Kha Xai à la mort de son frère aîné. Son autorité s'étendit sur 84.000 mu'ôn. L'aîné de ses fils eut pour apanage M. Nay, M. Xien Ku'a et M. Hoñsavati (Pégou); le second M. Pakan, le troisième le Lan Xang (Luang Prabang), et le dernier Xieng Hung.

Il mourut à M. Pakan, âgé de 80 ans. Ses fils allèrent chercher ses os et les placèrent dans un that, à Xieng Mai.

b. A poetic version called *Thao Nhi Ba Cheuang* was discovered in a temple in Loei province and transcribed and published by Khun Danuphol Chayasind and Thongsuk Charumethichon (2523) at the Loei Teacher Training College. Although I have not read this version yet, it is said by the editors to be a shortened form of the Mahasila version.

c. A manuscript in the National Library, entitled *Thao Ba Cheuang*, is in bad condition (although it does not seem to be very old) and needs to be examined.

d. Apart from these complete manuscripts, all of which are long and detailed, there are many references to Cheuang in various

chronicles and legends, including the Ahom creation myth, the Northern Thai Chronicles, the legends of Khun Burom, the Xieng Khwang (Muang Phuan) Chronicles, the Black Tai Chronicles, the Khmu legends, the legends of other Austroasiatic groups, and probably in many other places still unknown to us.

As for Thao Hung, his name appears in the Luang Prabang Annals as the twenty-seventh king of Lan Xang:

Upon the death of Khun Kham, Khun Hung replaced him on the throne in C.S. 445. He took his army and made war against the Lao Kwak at Ngoen Yang or Xieng Sen for three years and was victorious. He had two children, one was named Prince Then Mo. (Chao Khammanh 2516)

Apparent cognates for Hung (/huŋ B4/), for example, Rung, Ruang, and Lung, occur in the myths and legends of the Ahoms, Shans, Sukhothai, and elsewhere.

The Khmu speakers of Northern Laos have legends about three characters who are kept separate (Smalley 1961): Cheuang, the messiahlike savior who will return to help the Kha peoples; Ai Nhi Kran, the Thao Nhi name that occurs throughout the poem in addition to Hung and Cheuang; and Ai Cet Hay (in the poem Cheuang is killed by Maen Ta Thok Cet Hay /mæŋ taa thoŋk cet hay/).¹

From the Stieng, an Austroasiatic group located in southern Vietnam, the following version was recorded (Gerber and Malleret 1946).

The Origin of the Stieng

At one time, all of the Moi were comprised of a single tribe who lived along the coast on the sea of China.

In this time, God descended from heaven and married a girl named Dai Chro Phek. From this union was born a son named Djieng, whom God took with him to heaven, abandoning the wife but giving her his permission to remarry.

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She married Brah Bat and had two daughters called Nang Rlieng Mah and Lokot Xieng.

Djieng lived in heaven with his father and learned magic and all things. When he became an adult his father reinstated him on the earth with his mission to instruct the people of his tribe. Djieng went to find his mother and lived with her.

He married a young girl named Lo'm that God had chosen himself.

Djieng was ingenious; he knew how to forge knives, scissors, swords, lances, hoes and other utilitarian objects, he knew how to weave baskets, build houses and cultivate the fields.

Lo'm, his wife, was a good housewife, good at growing betel and weaving cloth and husking rice, and doing everything around the house.

Djieng and Lo'm were immortal.

But one day, the troops of the Chinese sovereign arrived to do battle with the soldiers of Djieng. After many years of struggle, Djieng was about to succumb and he retreated towards the south, taking with him his troops and all of the population.

But along the way of their retreat, he abandoned some families and those troops too tired to follow him. Each time he left them some utensils for work, weapons, grains of all kinds and knowledge of their culture.

Lo'm abandoned the cloth and rolls of thread, and the machines for spinning cotton. She instructed the women how to weave cloth.

Each abandoned group formed a Moi tribe: Rhade, Mnong, Biet, etc.

It happened one day that the chief Djieng and his troops crossed a stream. Upon arriving at the other side it was necessary to blaze a trail through some thick brush made up of bushes called "tom rklang," a bush that snaps back with amazing rapidity.

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Continuing along the stream, the men who followed Djieng some distance back encountered a talking dog, so they asked him if Djieng and his troops had passed this way. The dog lied and said it had been a long time since Djieng had gone by, and to prove it he pointed out the clear stream and the "tom rklang" which revealed no trace of his passing.

Discouraged, the men judged it impossible to follow their chief; they decided to establish themselves on that spot and cultivate the ground; they did not suspect that the dog had lied.

This last group gave birth to the tribe of the Sodieng or Stieng.

As for Djieng, it is believed that with the last of his troops and his subjects he departed for a country a great distance away. He crossed the sea, and no one is heard to speak of him.

These are only a few of the examples of extant Cheuang legends. If we were to examine the oral traditions of northern Laos and northwestern Vietnam I am certain we could add a great many more. Some of these will be presented below.

3. There are, I feel, certain important areas now inhabited by Tai speakers that have been overlooked by many scholars, and, while it is true that the sources are few, what information exists has been largely ignored. I am speaking especially of historians and students of Tai literature. The area that I am referring to includes northeast Luang Prabang, Phong Saly, Lao Kay, Ha Giang, Lai Chau, Son La, Hoa Binh, Thanh Hoa, Nghe-An, Khammouane, Hua Phan, and Xiang Khwang provinces in northern Vietnam and Laos. For linguists the northern portion of this territory is most familiar; with a few exceptions the southern part, especially Hua Phan, Thanh Hoa, and Nghe-An, has been neglected by just about everyone.

Schafer (1967) has given us an excellent map (see figure 1) of the divisions of southeastern China and Vietnam during the T'ang dynasty (A.D. 618-907). The county of Ai depicted on the map covers approximately the territory of the modern province of Thanh Hoa, the county of Yen is now Nghe-An, Ch'ang is now Hoa Binh in the west and Ninh Binh in the east, Fu-lu is Son La, and Feng is Lai Chau. Of course, these locations are approximate, and the western

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boundaries certainly were not drawn at that time. I would suggest that Ai included Hua Phan, that Nghe-An included Xieng Khwang, and that Feng included Phong Saly. Schafer's "H.B." (horse and bridle counties) probably included Lao Kay and Ha Giang. We may thus define our territory as the basins of the Clear, Red, Black, Ma, Chu, Ca, and Ou rivers, and the mountains in between. On the South China Sea side, all these rivers provide excellent transportation from the coast to inland areas. Furthermore, most of this territory is inhabited by Tai speakers.

Schafer, who prefers to write his Chinese in reconstructed form, following Karlgren, gives the Middle Chinese rendering of "Feng" as "P'yong," a term which I believe is preserved in the names of Phong Saly, Phong Tho, Thai Phong, Kha Phong, Pong, and Pung.² Although he does not give us the reconstructed form of "Fu-lu," the first syllable may be cognate with the ethnic term "Bo" (/bɔɔ/) or "Bu," and both seem to be examples of confused ethnicity.³

The legend of the Pungs (or Pongs, etc.) involves the inhabitants of an ancient kingdom north of Luang Prabang (i.e., up the Nam Ou) and the motif of the indigenous princess marrying the foreign prince. In fact, all the areas under consideration have in common their plight of constant invasion by stronger conquerors, resulting in a subjugated populace that continues to live in a kind of power-dependency relationship. The subjugated race is placed in a position of quasi servitude, but because they are the older population they hold the key to the control of the local spirits and they have a more powerful magic. Thus, they must receive a modicum of respect from the conquerors and will always take part in spirit ceremonies. Such is the environment of Cheuang in all of his many guises.

The Black Tai renditions of Cheuang from the Sip Song Chu Tai provide excellent examples:

a. Version I from Muang Muoi:⁴

After the flood, the first human ancestors to be sent to earth were Pu Tao Suang (/suaŋ/) and Tao Ngoen (/ŋɛn). They arrived first at Muang Om and Muang Ai (/ʔom/, /ʔaay/). They went to Muang Lo (/lɔ/) but Tao Ngoen returned to Muang Om and Muang Ai, whereas Tao Suang took a wife and had a son named Tao Khun Lo. Khun Lo had many sons who went to rule in many places, for example:

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pu lɔp li kin m+atɰ caa
Pu Lop Li governed Muang Cha

li lɔn kin m+atɰ ʔyaa
Li Lon governed Muang Ya

khun ʔuan kin m+atɰ lun
Khun Ouan governed Muang Lung

pu laaɰ ɰaaɰ kin m+atɰ min
Pu Lang Ngang governed Muang Min

laaɰ kwaɰ kin m+atɰ puk m+atɰ meɰ
Lang Kwang governed Muang Puk and Muang Meng

But there was one son left, the last one, Pu Lan Cheuang:

luk lun baw mi naa
the last son had no ricefield

luk laa baw mi m+atɰ
the later son had no city

So Pu Lan Cheuang set out to find an appropriate place to rule, taking with him an army and many of his relatives, including Khun Lo, Khun Luang (/l+atɰ/), Khun Kwang (/kwaɰ/), Khun Tong (/tɔɰ/), and Khun Lew (/lɛw/). He travelled to Muang Chian (/cian/), It Ong Chiang Tae (/ʔit ʔɔɰ ciatɰ tɛ/) (probably Muang Tae on the upper Black River), and Muang Bu (/bu/) before arriving at Muang La (Son La), the Nam Bo Ka (/nam bɔ kaa/), and Chiang Ngoen (said to be another name for Muang La). Here he assigned Khun Kwang to remain and rule.

Lan Cheuang went next to Chiang Poek (/pɛk/) before arriving at Muang Muoi (/muay C1/) where he chased away Chao Am Poi (/ʔam pɔy/). This was a good place with caves, called Ya Mom and Ya Vai (/ʔyaa mɔm/ and /ʔyaa vaay/), and wide valleys. But it was too small for him so he left Khun Lo to rule there. He took his army and proceeded to Muang Ek (/ʔɛk/) which was too narrow, then to Muang Kway (Tuan Giao) which had three branches and was bordered by the mountains known as Pu Khaw Pang, Pu Khaw Kom, Khaw Tu, and Khaw Kut. This place was too small so he continued on to Muang Huak (/huak/) and stayed until he heard of a beautiful location with wide valleys, big enough for thousands of people. So he departed, going to Muang Ang (/ʔaɰ/), Muang Fang (/faɰ/), and Muang Chan (/can/), finally arriving at Muang Theng (/thɛɰ/) (Dien Bien Phu). There

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he set up his home at Ban Pae (/pɛ/), took a wife, and had a son called Khun Pae.

I would like to call the reader's attention to the passage concerning Khun Kwang. The word *kwang* is cognate with *khwang*, found in Ai Khwang in the poem of *Thao Hung*, the general who was assigned by Cheuang to rule over Muang Pakan. It is also the name of the people of the Black Tai lineage who have strict taboos against the killing of tigers. When a tiger dies the members of the Kwang must go to mourn beside the body (see Chamberlain 1977). Perhaps it is also related to the Hoang (Hwang) which occurs frequently in southern Chinese history as an ethnic term (see Schafer 1967).

When Khun Lo is said to remain at Muang Muoi, it is not clear whether it is the same Khun Lo who is Lan Cheuang's father. I suspect that since Khun Lo is considered to be a kind of ancestor of the Tai race, and because this is the Chronicle of Muang Muoi, this is an attempt to claim direct descendancy on behalf of the inhabitants. The Lo lineage occurs in a great many Tai groups, some of them quite widespread, such as the Tai Neua to the north of Sip Song Pan Na and the Yay of Nam Fa in Luang Nam Tha province, Laos. The origins of this name need to be studied further, but we note, in passing, that there was a county of that name in the T'ang-dynasty state of Kuang (see figure 1).

b. Version II from Muang Theng (Roux and Trân 1954:378ff.):

Restait Lan-Chuong, le dernier né qui, n'ayant ni terres pour y habiter, ni champs pour vivre, partit à la recherche d'un Mu'o'ng. Il marchait à l'aventure, allant partout, traversant les rivières, escaladant les montagnes. Il passa ainsi le Khao Vai, s'enfonça dans les forêts, se dirigea vers le Dan-To, remonta en pirogue le Nam-Bu, regagna le Khao-Fa et, marchant toujours au hasard, passa encore à Mu'o'ng-La. Dans sa course errante, il atteignit même le Nam-Bo-Ka puis Chiêng-Ngun, mais comme Chiêng Ngun était un tout petit pays, le voyageur ne fut pas satisfait et il se rendit à Mu'o'ng-Muôi. Là vivait un chef nommé Uk-Ak-Am-Poi. Le Tao demanda alors à Uk-Ak-Am-Poi la permission de se fixer dans le pays, d'en observer les mœurs et les coutumes, et d'épouser sa fille, Uk-Ak-Am-Poi ne fit aucune objection et accorda au

Tao toutes les faveurs que celui-ci sollicitait.

Une fois tout réglé, le Prince s'installa à Chieng-Li (Mu'o'ng Muôi) où il invita Am-Poi à venir fêter l'installation de sa nouvelle demeure. Puis il profita de l'occasion pour s'emparer d'Am-Poi et il le tua. La population, effrayée par ce crime, partit toute pour la Chine.

Mu'o'ng Muôi possédait au bord de l'eau de petites vallées où poussaient des *oi-nu*, qui sont des roseaux ressemblant à des cannes à sucre sauvages. Il y avait aussi de splendides grottes qui s'appelaient Ja-Bôm et Ja-Vai. Mais, malgré ces avantages, le pays formait un *phung* parsemé de rochers; les ruisseaux étaient encombrés de cailloux et cela ne plut pas au Tao. Il se transporta donc à Mu'o'ng-E. Mais Mu'o'ng-E était également un pays tout petit, encaissé et étroit comme un panier à riz. Le Tao ne voulut pas y rester. De Mu'o'ng-E il passa à Mu'o'ng Koài (Tuân-Giao). Ce pays comportait trois groupes de villages. On y voyait le Khao-Hang qui arrête le vent, le Khao-Kum. Dans les villages il y avait de très jolie femmes. Malgré tous ces avantages, le Tao voyageur trouva le pays trop petit et il n'en voulut pas. Il passa ensuite à Mu'o'ng-Ang qui ne lui convint pas non plus. De Mu'o'ng-Ang il arriva à Mu'o'ng-Fang, pays de marécages où croupissait une eau verdâtre, pays de buissons et de cailloux où il faisait froid, pays de rochers que l'on s'appelait Khèo-Mi parce qu'ils ressemblaient à des dents d'ours. Le pays était trop tourmenté et ses habitants ne plurent pas au Prince. Il y avait encore une autre raison qui fit que ce Mu'o'ng ne lui plut pas, c'est qu'il était habité par une espèce d'abeilles à ailes jaunes particulièrement méchantes.

De Mu'o'ng-Fang le Tao arriva à Mu'o'ng-Thêng, pays splendide, rond comme le cadre d'un van, harmonieusement courbé comme la corne du buffle. Mu'o'ng-Thêng était beau par ses rizières qui s'épalaient de chaque côté d'une rivière. Il était extrêmement peuplé. Cette fois, enfin, le Prince trouva tout à son goût. Il s'installa alors à Ban-Pë. Il

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s'y maria et eut un fils qu'il appela Khun-Pë. Lorsque Khun-Pë fut grand, Lan Chuong lui donna:

Khun juông comme *Pan*
Mo-Tan comme *Mo*

et les villages de Ban-Loi et de Na-Doi comme *Nhok*.

Khun-Pë, marié, eut pour fils Khun-Mun. Mais le cheval dépassa le buffle à la course et le fils mourut avant le père. Lan-Chuong éleva donc Khun-Mun, son petit-fils et, plus tard il le maria à Nang-Lit-Liêng qui mit au monde Tao-Pan.

Après la mort de Lan-Chuong, Khun-Mun remplaça son père à Mu'o'ng-Thêng.

c. Version III from Đặng Nghiêm Vạn et al. (1972):

This version is taken from a study on the La-ha ethnic group of Sip Song Chu Tai. The La-ha are a recently discovered member of the Kadai family from the vicinity of Than-Uyen, northwest of Muang Lo (see figure 2), Muang Muoi, and Muang La. They are called Xá Cha and Xá Pong (/poɔŋ/) by the Black Tai; Bủ-hả by the Khang; and Pụa by the Khmu (as well as many other names). They are considered by the Black Tai to have been the original inhabitants of the area. The *Kwam To Muang* from Muang Lo relates the following Cheuang episode which was alluded to briefly in the Muang Muoi and Muang Theng versions as well.

When Lan Cheuang arrived at Muang La he had to fight with the Xa people led by General Khun Quang. When Lan Cheuang advanced his troops past the Khao Hao hill to Muang Muoi, he was opposed by the Xa people there led by General Am Poi. After having lost so many battles he finally had to use a trick to capture Am Poi alive and retake Muang Muoi.

The Vietnamese text has a more elaborate version, based on the oral traditions of the La-ha people themselves:

Based on the traditions of the Khla Phlao people in the village of Noong Lay (Thuan Chau subprefecture), we know that the Xa people of Muang La and Thuan

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Chau mentioned above are their ancestors. The people say that Am Poi's real name was Pien (Khun Pien).

Lan Cheuang fought for a long time but he could not take Muang Muoi. Finally he had to take his troops to Muang Sai, sue for peace, and ask to marry Am Poi's daughter, whose name was Hao. Am Poi thought this was an honest offer and accepted. Lan Cheuang invited Am Poi to a wedding feast and he brought with him fifty soldiers to act as bodyguards. Lan Cheuang asked each of them to place their weapons in a rack and invited them to sit down at the table. Not knowing Cheuang's trick, Am Poi's soldiers hung their weapons on the rack. When Am Poi was drunk, Lan Cheuang sent one of his men to raise the weapons rack high up into the air and then he killed Am Poi. The girl, Hao, was so indignant at her husband for killing her father that she became speechless and could only mumble "urr . . . urr . . ." Therefore people at that time called her the Ur Hang girl.

After he had killed Am Poi, Lan Cheuang took Muang Muoi. The Xa people resisted fiercely but could not hold out and were forced to evacuate to different places.

The Pien alternate for Am Poi's name given by the people could very well be the Chinese general, Kao P'ien, who was sent there to chase out the Nan Chao invaders in the year 865. It is said (Schafer 1967:68) that he raided in Tonkin and seized the newly reaped harvest in Feng (P'yong) to feed his army. He became a great hero for suppressing the invasion and returning Chiao to the hands of the Chinese. This would also account for the northwestern Vietnam-eastern Szechuan connection regarding the location of the Kadai languages. These people were known to the Chinese as Liao (i.e., Lao) too, and this is probably the source of the modern ethnic term. The Lao of the upper Nam Ou River trace their origins to Muang Boum on the upper Black River, that is, in the former state of P'yong, hence the Pung-Luang Prabang connection mentioned in the legends.

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d. Version IV from Muang La (Hartmann 1981):

In still another version of the Black Tai Chronicles, this one from Muang La, Pu Lan Cheuang was one of the first ancestors to exit from the pumpkin and rule the kingdom of Muang Um and Muang Ai as well as Muang Ma (/maa C1/) and Muang Sat Kam Lang (/saat DL 1 kam A2 laaŋ A4/). Unfortunately, Hartmann has not yet published the rest of this chronicle so we do not know how the Cheuang episode differs from the other accounts.

4. South of the Sip Song Chu Tai, information is even more scanty. The five, ultimately six, *muangs* comprising the Hua Phan were alternately called Chu as well as Muang. They were:

1. Muang Sam Neua (/sam A4/)
2. Muang Xieng Kho (/khɔɔ A1/)
3. Muang Xon
4. Muang Sam Toe (/sam A4 tɕɕ C2/)
5. Kong Muang Xoi (/sɔy B1/)
6. Kong Houa Muang (/hua A1 m+atŋ A4/)

French sources such as Robequain (1929) and others considered the ancient kingdom of the Ai-Lao to be located in the region of Sam Neua and Xieng Kho (see figure 3 and Chamberlain 1972). We have already noted that the province immediately to the east of Hua Phan was Thanh-Hoa, formerly known as Ai, which I am sure included the Hua Phan as well. In Thanh-Hoa, the *chau* of Quan Hoa, Lang Chanh, Thuong Xuan, and Nhu Xuan are almost completely inhabited by Tai speakers. The Red Tai of Hua Phan claim to have originated in the districts of Hoi Xuan on the Song Ma in Chau Quan Hoa and Bai Thuong on the Song Chu (Nam Sam) near the boundary of Thuong Xuan and Tho Xuan (see figure 4 and Boutin 1938).

Like the other areas we have been discussing, the Hua Phan have a history of invasion:

... les Thai de Sam Neua prétendent qu'autrefois les Kha Pong était les maîtres du pays, et que leur capitale était à M. Peun, au S.-O. de Sam Neua: on

montre aussi dans cette province les murailles de terre qu'ils auraient construites dans leurs luttes contre les Laotiens de Luang Prabang; vaincus, ils se seraient dispersés largement autour de Sam Neua. (Robequain 1929:111)

And elsewhere:

On peut affirmer cependant que l'invasion du pays par les Thai fut loin d'être pacifique. Les récits légendaires chantant encore les exploits d'un Chef nommé Hat-Ang qui tenta, mais en vain, d'interdire par les armes l'accès de son territoire aux nouveaux venus. (Boutin 1937:70)

The *Carte Ethnolinguistique* (1949) records the Thai Phongs in the area of Hua Muang in Hua Phan, and slightly to the northeast of Muang Sen along the border region of Nghe-An, Hua Phan, and Xieng Khwang. They are listed as Thai speakers but so far I have not seen any data. The Pong are grouped by Boutin (1937:95) as belonging to the Kha.

In Thanh-Hoa there are traces of ethnic names that can be found in northeastern Thailand (Sakon Nakhon and Nakhon Phanom) and in adjacent Khammouane province in Laos, as well as in Nghe-An, especially in the Muang Sen-Cua-Rao area along the Song Ca. These are the Yooy (Du'o'i and Yuai) and Yɔ̌ (/ŋɔ̌/). The following passages are from Robequain (1929):

... for, if the Meuang of northern Thanh-Hoa say that they have been, for the the most part, fixed in that place since time immemorial, the Thai of the province have preserved a memory of long migrations: mostly made to come from ancestors at Dien Bien Phu, others from Luang Prabang. They did not occupy the country without violence, for they were diligent in chasing out the "Đuổi": they massacred them en masse, making sure these savages, very grand and peaceful, would not inhabit the valleys but the slopes of the mountains; one can still see, at M. Xia and Yen Nhan, the earthen ramparts with which they surrounded their villages, and one can still unearth in the ricefields, the debris of instruments which

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belonged to them. This eviction and these massacres were relatively recent: not longer than seven or eight generations according to the old people; thus it would have been after the decline of the Thai Ai-Lao kingdom.*

*The question remains obscure; this author did not describe the exhumed objects; and I have not been able to see them. The same name of these tribes chased by the Thai of Thanh-Hoa is not able to give any indication: in any case, they seem to have nothing in common with the Dioi, a Thai population which now inhabits Kwei Chow. One is able to reasonably suppose, it seems, that the Đuối were Khas. Macey notes a group of "Yois" in the Hua Phan and Cammon (cf. also De Reinach). (p. 110ff.)

Les Thai du Thanh-Hoá s'accordèrent à reconnaître que, parmi eux, le groupe le plus original, le mieux différencié, c'est celui des "Yô", qui occupe les deux cantons de Trịnh Vạn et Quân Nhân, dans le Thủồng Xuân, au Sud du Song Chu. Leur dialecte présente quelques particularités [Ils disent par exemple "fj" pour "fay" (feu), "hon" pour "hủn" (maison), "pay êt nhay" pour "pay lin" (aller se promener)].⁵ Les femmes y conservent plus jalousement qu'ailleurs leur costume traditionnel: veste ornée de boutons ou de brandebourgs, se prolongeant souvent en arrière par des basques, et, en avant, s'arrêtant au-dessous des seins; longue jupe que décore de son extrémité inférieure, un bandeau de motifs géométriques. Les jours de fête, la veste est remplacée par une tunique descendant aux genoux; sur l'étoffe d'un bleu sombre luisent d'un échat voilé de grand colliers d'argent. C'est dans ce groupe des "Yô" qu'une famille de seigneurs, celle des Câm, incinère encore les cadavres des hommes, dernier exemple vers l'Est de cette pratique laotienne. Les "Yô" du Thủồng Xuân entretiennent des rapports suivis, malgré la difficulté des communications, avec les Thai noirs du Qui Châu (Nghệ-An). (p. 118)

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Pertaining to the Yôoy, Seidenfaden (1967:103) notes their presence in Nakhon Phanom with the spelling “Yüai”:

The Thai Yüai live in the province of Nakhon Phanom. They are but few in number. These Yüai are fair complexioned and neat to look at, the girls being modest and timid, embroider beautifully. The Yüai . . . hail from the other side of the Mekhong.

The Yôoy speakers I encountered were living in the districts of Akat Amnuay and Wanoniwat in northern Sakon Nakhon province. Here the name was pronounced with a long /oo/. Reinach (1911:259) mentions them in Khammouane province as well:

Le territoire Cammon Province est partagé en sept muongs, plus quatre cantons indépendants dont deux habités pars les Khas, un par les Yoes et un par les Teks.

The Yo (Nyo) also occur in Nakhon Phanom and Sakon Nakhon in at least two variations: the Nyo of Tha Uthen who speak a language akin to that of Sam Neua, and the Yo of Sakon Nakhon who speak a Lao dialect. The former is also found in Khammouane, Laos. In the Muang Muoi Chronicle, Muang Nyo is mentioned as one of the original places for distribution of people via the pumpkin method. Still another dialect from a person who called himself Yo comes from Muang Sen in Nghe-An. This dialect appears to be related to Red Tai or Tai Moei with unaspirated stops developed from the Proto-Tai voiced series. But this dialect had lost initial *k* of the voiceless aspirated series like Phu Tai, that is, *khaa* ‘leg’ becomes *haa*, and so on. This same speaker reported that Yo was also spoken in Cua Rao, Khe Bo, Con Cuong, Qui Chau, and Phu Qui, all in Nghe-An. Also, in Nghe-An he related the existence of other Tais: /tay z ɿŋ,⁶ tay ɲaay,⁷ tay m ɿy,⁸ tay m+ɿŋ,⁹ tay koy/ (near Phu Qui).¹⁰

In adjacent Thanh Hoa he told of the /tay haat, tay pɔŋ, and tay khaŋ/.¹¹ Last of all, he noted that the Tai of Phu Qui write from top to bottom like Chinese, a point to which I will return later. As for /haat/, Robequain (1929:111) writes:

Les Thai des provinces limitrophes ont des traditions analogues: ceux de Phũ Qui (Nghê-An), que se disent originaires de Cao Bằng, auraient dû chasser, et aussi

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a une époque relativement récente, les Hat.

Boutin (1937) says that the Phou-Thay of Hua Phan are the descendants of the founders of Ba-thuc at Cao-Bang.¹² He states that they are the most numerous in the Kong of Hua Muang, especially along the valley of the Nam Neun (Song Ca) River, and that they are also to be found in the region of Nghe-An along the Song Ca and in the Phu of Qui Chau.

A large number of Phu Tai speakers now inhabit the northeastern Thailand provinces of Nakhon Phanom, Sakon Nakhon, and Kalasin. These Phu Tai have a tradition involving a Thao Ka /kaa B2/ at Muang Vang /vaŋ A4/ in Laos, but at least one article (Snoe 2521) speaks of this as recent history, occurring during the reign of Chao Anou in Vientiane. The author also associates Muang Vang with Vang Vieng (north of Vientiane along the Nam Song River), which I doubt very much. At any rate, this tradition deserves more serious investigation.¹³

Given the locations cited by Boutin along the Song Ca, which seem similar to those given for Yo or Nyo, I suspect that these two language groups have very similar origins. This is further supported by certain tonal-system characteristics such as lack of differentiation in words with long vowels and final stops (the D long column) which are shared by at least some dialects from each group.

Of course the term "Phu Tai" is ambiguous. If one asks the question "What do you call yourself?" to any of a great many Tais, they are likely to answer "Phu Tai," that is, "a Tai person." Thus we must exercise caution when examining the references to Phu Tai. I have included here only those works that speak of a particular ethnolinguistic group.

In Khammouane province, where many of these groups have migrated recently, the list of Tais is far from complete. In addition to having found informants for many of the Tai languages already mentioned, I have worked briefly with several other interesting groups.¹⁴

- The Tai Pao /paaw/ who originally may have come to Khammouane from Muang Pao in Hua Phan, but who lived for some time in Muang Lam (Phu Tuong) in Nghe-An, and along the Huai Chalap, a tributary of the Song Ca.
- The Tai Maen /mɛɛn/ who originally may have come from

Muang Maen in Hua Phan, but more recently from Xieng Mi, before moving to Khammouane.

- The Tai Kuan /kuan/ who are originally from Muang Khouane in Hua Phan.
- The Tai Khang /khaŋ/ of whose origins we know nothing.
- The Tai Bo /bo/ who are said by some to have come from Sam Toe in Hua Phan. There is no tonal differentiation in words with short vowels and final stops, which is in fact an areal feature of Hua Phan. This informant, and apparently his entire village, had dual identities as Tai Bo and Kha So, speaking both languages fluently and consistently.
- The Tai Kaleung /kǎlxɛŋ/ a Lao subgroup also found in Sakon Nakhon. Surat (1981) has described one of these villages in Thailand.¹⁵
- The Tai Kaloep /kǎlxɛp/ of whose origins we know nothing.
- The Tai Yeuang /ʔyɛaŋ/ who say they came from Hua Phan but do not specify the district (see note 6).

All of these languages, including some of the Nyo and Bo dialects, appear to have arrived in Khammouane province about one hundred years ago, following the Kha uprisings. Interestingly enough, the uprisings are remembered by these people as the Soek Cheuang (Cheuang War), so we know the Cheuang phenomenon is still very much alive. Robequain (1929:120ff.) describes the upheavals of that period:

En effet, vers 1875, des bandes de pillards venus de Tonkin et de Chine du Sud, et rassemblés sous la vague dénomination de Hô, s'installent à Muang Hang, sur la Song Mã, en amont de Sop Sim, et pillent toute la région. A la même date, les Kha des Hua Phan se révoltent, exaspérés par la tyrannie de leurs maîtres laotiens ou thai, et, affamés, descendent presque chaque année piller les villages du Thanh Hoá [en particulier dans le Thủồng Xuân et le Lang Chánh].

The Kha revolt of 1875 was led by none other than Pra-Nha Thao Nhi, a courageous chief who was purported to have received his instructions from the master of heaven. The king of Luang Prabang

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sent an army of Tai Lue soldiers from Muang Xai; they were not effective and eventually were assisted by the Siamese. After ten years, betrayed by one of his own people, Pra-Nha Thao Nhi was killed. His death marked the end of the revolt (Boutin 1937:96).

The fact that the leader was called “Nhi” indicates that he was considered by the Kha people to be a Cheuang figure. The name Nhi occurs not only in *Tao Hung*, but in a poetic version of the *Khun Burom*, where Nhi is the second son (Danuphol, n.d., 13). In other versions of this legend he is Cheuang, as, for example, in the Xieng Khwang Chronicles, where he is called Cet Cheuang, the brother of Khun Lo and the first ruler of Muang Phuan (Archaimbault 1967).

In many parts of Thanh Hoa the Tai groups are intermingled with the Meuung, as they are elsewhere mixed with the Kha and Kadai, and more recently with the Miao-Yao and Tibeto-Burman speakers. The Meuung have seemingly inhabited their territory for a long time, although no one knows much about their origins. Robequain (1929:109) gives us the following tantalizing statement, but so far the origins of the name he mentions have not been investigated.

La plupart des seigneurs mường prétendent descendre des vieilles dynasties annamites: les uns, de la dynastie semi-légendaire des Hùng Vũông, qui régnait sur les deltas du Tonkin et du Nord-Annam avant la conquête chinoise.¹⁶

It must be considered that many of these Tai-speaking groups may have been indigenous speakers of other languages before being deluged with Tai. This is certainly the case with the Tai Bo, and I suspect it may turn out to be the case with the Thai Phongs and Kaleungs as well (see note 15).

In the case of Maen and the Duoi (Yooy) there seems to have been an overlay of Southwestern-Branch Tai on a Northern-Branch Tai group. I say this with some hesitation for the Duoi, because we really do not know what they spoke, but the name is too suspiciously close to Yay and Dioi to ignore. The Maen language, however, is a distinct case of a language with vestigial Northern-Branch lexical items. Unfortunately, we know little about the Maen except that they are the hereditary enemies of the Tai Pao.¹⁷ Their name is of course important for the study of *Thao Hung* because it occurs throughout the poem, in the names of both real persons and spirits. “Muang Maen” is, in fact, one of the many terms for heaven used in the work.

We know that there were other speakers of Northern-Branch languages present in the area because of the existence of Saek in Khammouane and Nakhon Phanom, a language which has been thoroughly studied by Professor Gedney.

We can assume that there was a great deal of mixing of myths and legends as well as languages. We know this to be true of Khmu, Lao, and Tai Dam, so it must also apply elsewhere (see Ferlus 1970).¹⁸

Finally, we are aware that at one time the southern boundary of Thanh-Hoa was indeed the boundary with Champa, an Austronesian kingdom, and that the writing systems of Nghe-An have much in common with the Cham characters. Finot's list of alphabets (1917) should inspire us to investigate further the possible origins of the Sukhothai script in this region. At any rate, the Cham are mentioned in the *Thao Hung*, in the passage which reads:

b+atɰ faay tay siaɰ theet ciin caam kɔ thɰɰ
phaay kaay thɰɰ naay ɲoɰɰ fuuɰ ɲɛɛw

'To the south it [his kingdom] reached the Chin and the Cham
In the center it included the Nhaay and the Ngeo'

This places Thao Hung's kingdom north of Champa, and the Nhaay in the middle. The Tai Nhaay, according to the source from Muang Sen cited earlier, are now located in Nghe-An province, but they may have come from the north.

More intensive research into the origins of ethnic and personal names from the epic with those found in this area would, I feel, prove fruitful. But, as we have just seen, sometimes, as in the cases of shifting ethnicity, names may refer to geographical locations rather than to language or ethnic groups. Such would appear to be the case with the term "Keo" (Ferlus, personal communication), which obviously comes from the place name, Chiao (Giao), the principality in the Red River delta around Hanoi. Although today this refers to Vietnamese, it may once have referred to Tai (or other?) speakers who inhabited the delta in the past. Thus the character, Keo, in the poem may well have been Tai and not Vietnamese.

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Concluding Remarks

Thao Hung or Cheuang is an epic poem in the true sense of the word. It is not a history or a chronicle ordering past events. What historical content it possesses is more or less incidental to its lyrical quatrains and heroic themes of struggle, conquest, defeat, and revenge. We have seen that the history of northeastern Laos and northwestern Vietnam is fraught with such epic-producing upheavals and invasions as the ethnic conflicts between Tai and Austroasiatic, Tai and Kadai, Tai and Meuang, and ultimately between Vietnamese and all of these. As the Tais moved or were pushed westward, these conflicts occurred often, between Tai and Khmu, Tai and Lawa, and so on. My feeling is that our character is really two heroes in one skin, that Thao Hung is an ancient, mythological, conquering hero, and Cheuang is the embodiment of the spirit of struggle and revenge, a hero of subjugated people. The lineage and birthdates of these characters are of no importance because they are not one but many. We may imagine that at one time all Tai princes would have liked to claim descendancy from Cheuang; ironically, in their so doing, they were embodying the very essence of the opposition to their own invasion, as well as to their own Chinese and Vietnamese oppressors.

The historical value of the poem lies in the wealth of information to be found in the archaic language and in the personal and ethnic names, as well as in the names of geographical locations.

Thus, while caution is advised against too literal an interpretation of the poem, the opportunity for other kinds of interpretation is enormous. For example, in the Stieng legend, there is a talking dog that appears mysteriously after *Djieng* disappears; this is no accident. Kristina Lindell (personal communication) has already suggested that the Khmu Cheuang is related ultimately to the dog ancestor of the southern peoples, P'an-hu. Deriving from this ancestor are the celestial dogs, the dog that protects the dead and drives away evil spirits, the dog as food and sacrificial animal, the dog that brought rice grain, and the dog as ancestor (Eberhard 1968:42). If we look for these roles in the Stieng myth we find them all. Schafer (1967:107) has given the following version of the P'an-hu story:

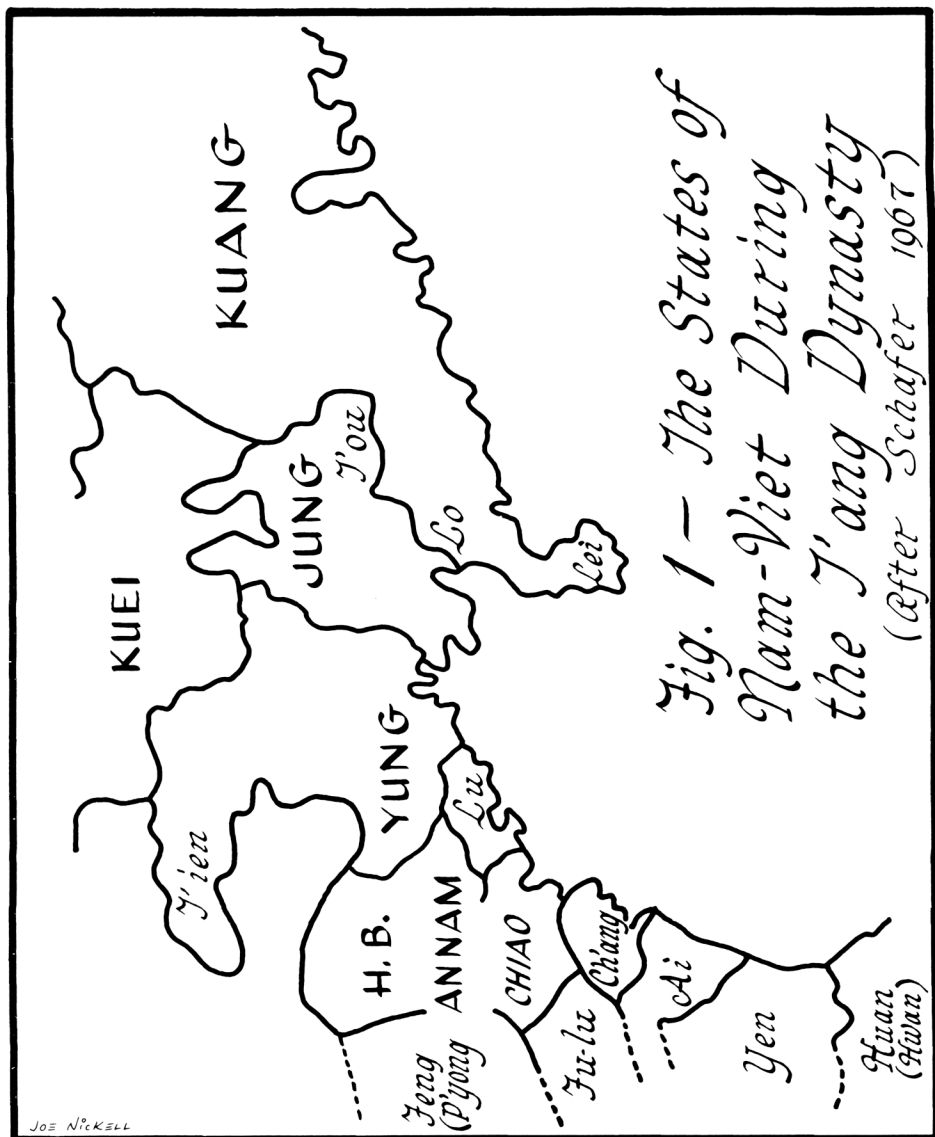
At the beginning of time, a king offered his daughter's hand to anyone who would bring him the head of his

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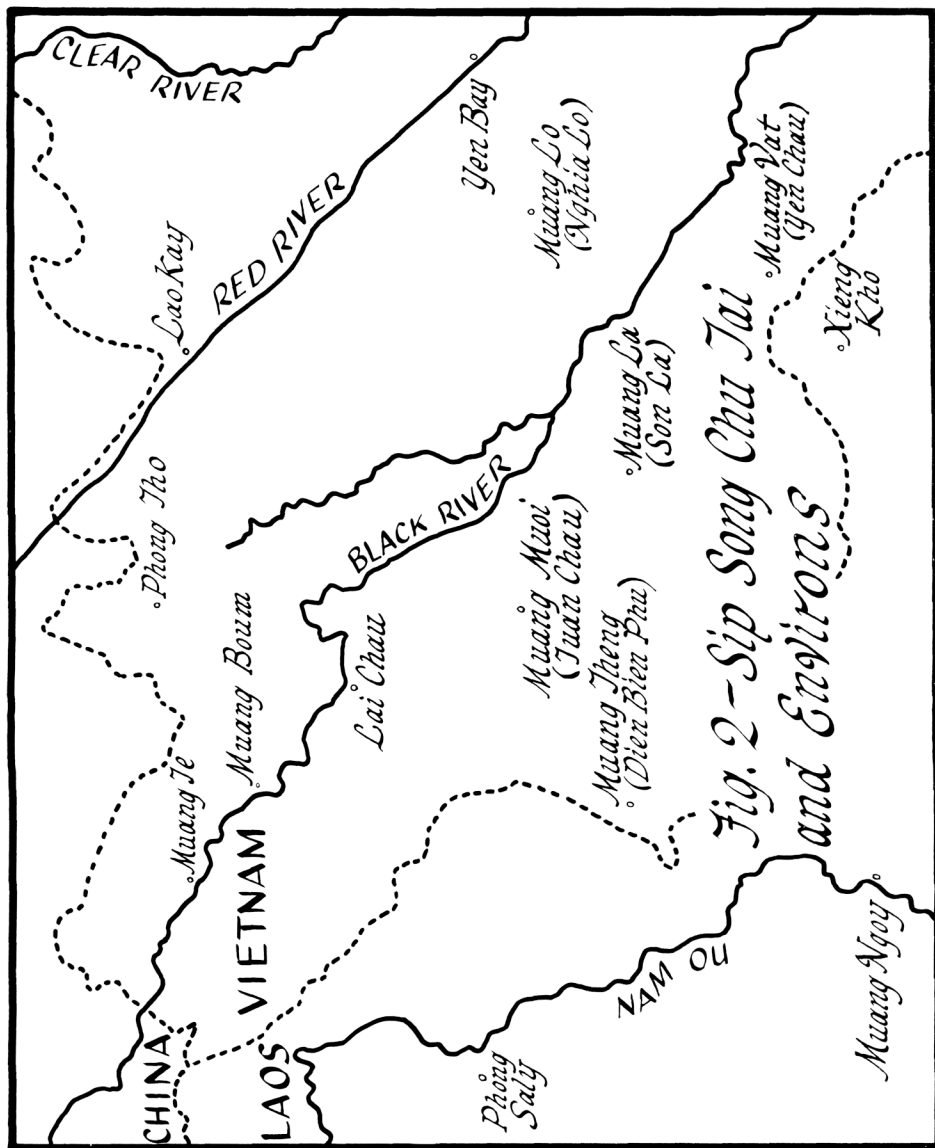
enemy, a captain of the western barbarians. A dog of the palace achieved the feat, and the reluctant king was obliged to give his young daughter to the animal, who took her off to a mountain in the south. She bore him six boys and six girls, the ancestors of the Man tribes of the southern wilderness. The descendants proliferated in Hunan and its borderlands in antiquity and gradually spread into the uplands of Nam-Viet.

The main centers of the P'an-hu myth were western Hupei and Hunan, and eastern Szechuan--in fact, the territory that seems to have been an original home of Kadai speakers. He was often called P'an-ku in Hunan, where he was invoked in cases of illness and revenge, and his ceremonies involved the beating of drums (Schafer 1967:44). (We are reminded that when Cheuang was born he was given a pair of silver tambours.) The drums are associated with the first couple, and the hanging and piercing motifs, all of which are linked to P'an-hu, whose body is the sky, and so it is heaven that is pierced. The Chinese characters for his name mean "platter-gourd" (Schafer). The gourd or pumpkin idea is widespread among the creation myths of the Black Tai and the Khmu, and is in turn related to the motifs of the lump of flesh and the cosmic egg, both described in Eberhard (1968, chain 42) as belonging to the Liao culture, again in association with hanging and piercing. The Ahom creation myth is an ideal example of these motifs. Indeed, Phā-tüw-chüng (i.e., *faa tua cheuang*) is the original ancestor, the metamorphosed sky (Grierson 1904).

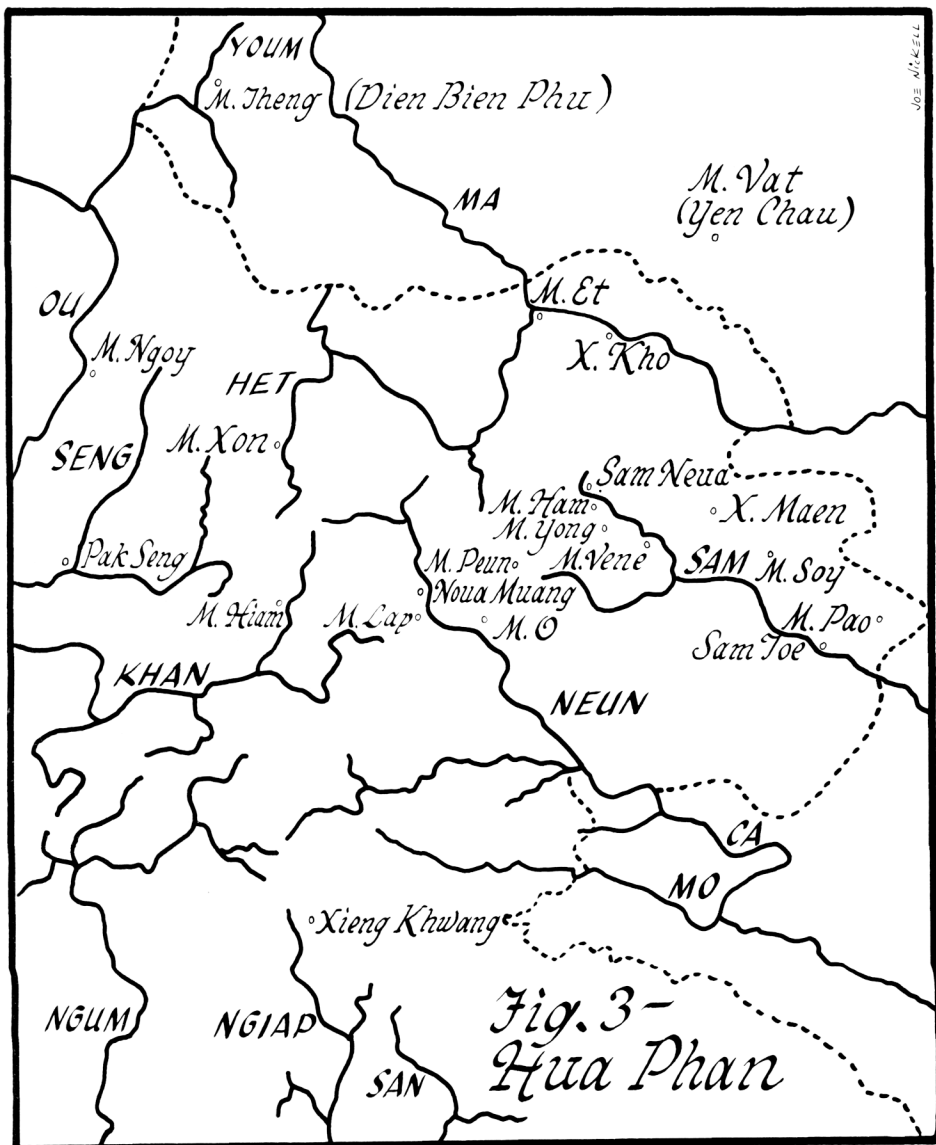
And so the connections continue, reaching further and further back in time, to a point where we can no longer identify separate ethnic groups, to a point where we realize that the epic of *Thao Hung* or *Cheuang*, as old and difficult as it may be for speakers of modern Thai, is in fact the poetic culmination of many long and ancient traditions, the mainland of Southeast Asia in a microcosm.



*Fig. 1 - The States of
Nam-Viet During
the J'ang Dynasty
(after Schafer 1967)*



*Fig. 2-Sip Song Chau Tai
and Environs*





*Fig. 4-
The Province of Thanh Hoa*

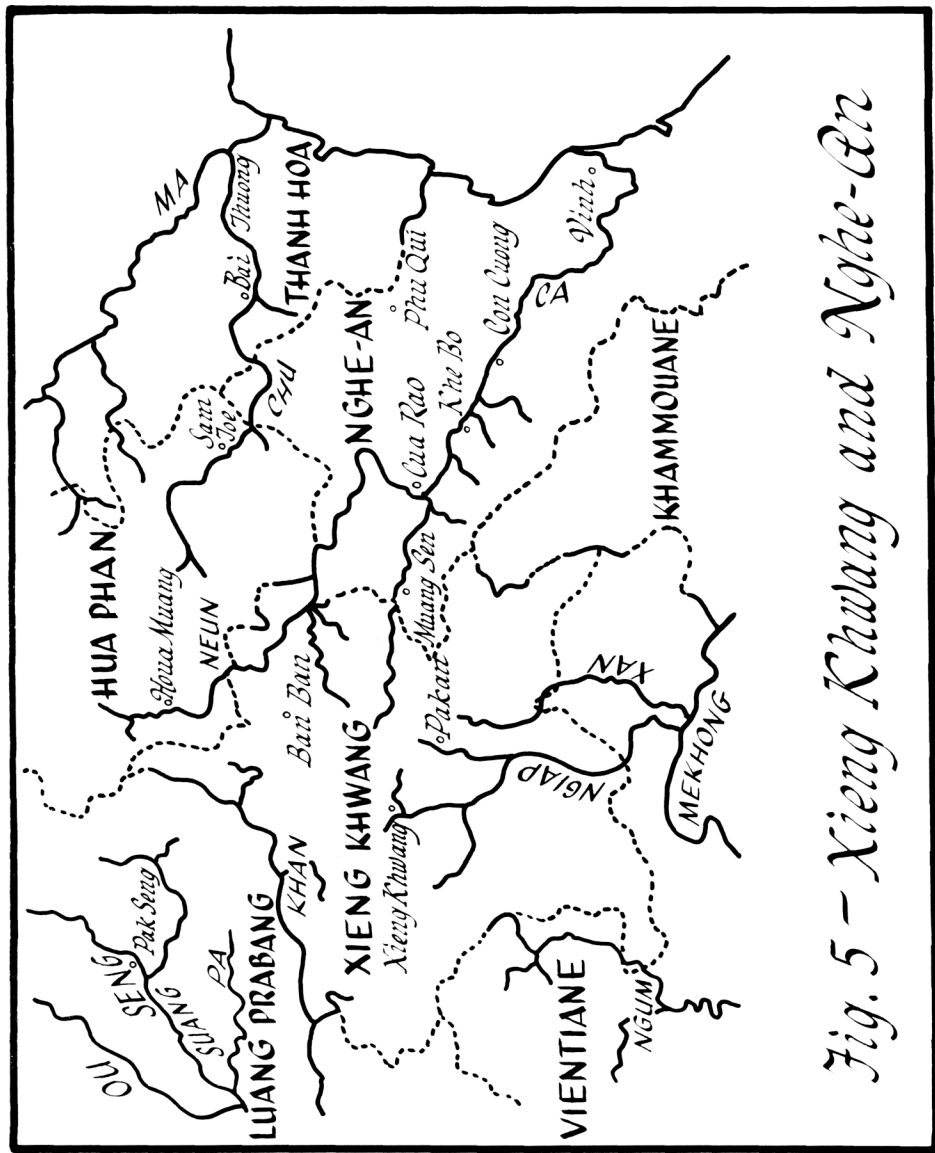
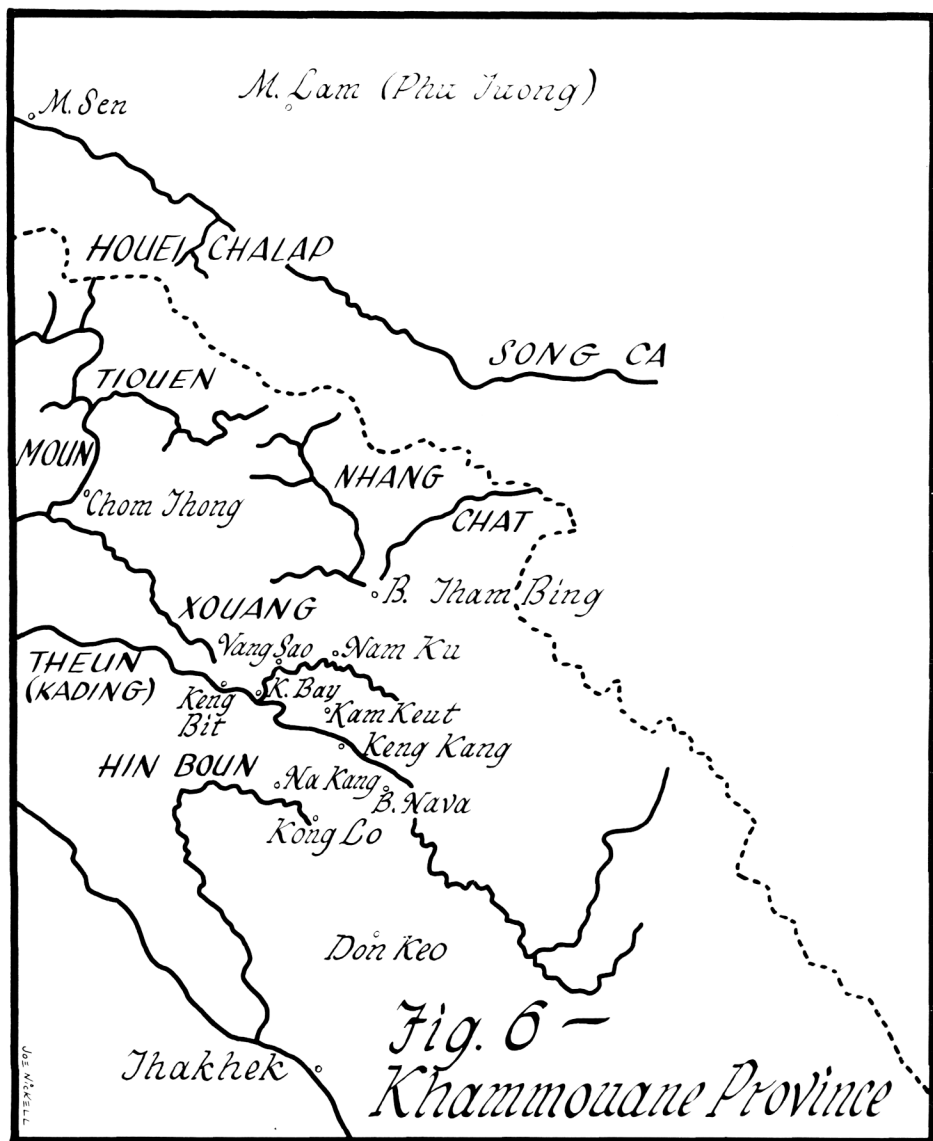


Fig. 5 - Xiang Khwang and Nghe-An



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Notes

1. The legend of Ai Cet Hay is a well-known folktale in Xieng Khwang and elsewhere in northern Laos. He is also listed in the Pre-Tai group of kings of Lan Xang, and there is a long poem of the same title, published by the National Library in Vientiane, in which he is treated as a kind of semicomical giant very much in the style of Rabelais (Prachit 1971). The title “Cet” is found in the names of all the early kings of Xieng Khwang, including the first king, Cet Cheuang (see Archaimbault 1967).
2. See Macey (1906, 1907) and Plunian (1905). This list might also include the Maak Taw Puj of the pumpkin/gourd myth.
3. See Fraisse (1949, 1950).
4. This version of the Muang Muoi Chronicle was obtained in Vientiane at Nong Boua Thong from Mr. Kam Bing, an elderly Tai Dam of the Lo-Kam lineage of Muang Muoi. When the Tai Dam first arrived in Vientiane after the battle of Dien Bien Phu, the elders attempted to reconstruct from memory the “Kwam To Muang” history according to the Tai of Muang Muoi. Each of the Tai Dam Chronicles differs in some respects from those of other Chu.
5. A Yo speaker from Muang Sen in Nghe-An also used the expression /pay naay/ ‘to go to play’, synonymous with /pay sɛɛw/.
6. This could be the Tai Yeuang now spoken at Ban Keng Kang on the Nam Kading River (see map 6), but formerly from further north.
7. Note the passage from the poem which reads:
phaay kaang thɤŋ naay ɲəŋ . . .
where this group is apparently referred to.
8. The Tai Moei (/mɔ̄ɤ C1/) are identical to the Red Tai but with slightly different tonal coalescences. They have the same lineages as the Chao Lo and Chao Vi.
9. The Meuang, technically a subgroup of Austroasiatic, are mixed with the Tai speakers in Thanh-Hoa in a very complex way (see Robequain 1929:93–151). Condominas (1980:265) reminds us that the name “Meuang” is Tai and that the political vocabulary of

Meuang is borrowed from Tai as well. The Yo speaker from Muang Sen with whom I worked called himself Tai Meuang, even though his language was Tai.

10. There is a Tai Koy mentioned in the Muang Muoi Chronicle as one of the original places where humans went to rule. Roux and Trân (1954) say that the name means “Siamese”; the Yai of Nam Fa say that /ʔii kui/ means “Westerner.” It could also derive from the “Qui” of Phu Qui. Diffloth (n.d.) notes that the Red River is also known as the Song Koy, but he does not say in which language.
11. There is a Tai Khang language spoken in Muang Kam Keut in Khammouane province. It is a P-group language, that is, Proto-Tai voiced stops have become unaspirated voiceless.
12. For a more thorough description of this kingdom see the introduction in Guignard (1912).
13. I have not yet seen a copy of a book entitled *Pravat Phu Thay*, written by Thawin Kasenrath and cited in Vilaivan (2520).
14. The linguistic notes on these languages will appear in a separate article. Unfortunately, due to lack of time I was not able to work extensively on any of them.
15. According to Surat (1981) the Kaloeng of northeastern Thailand say that they came originally from Muang Katak (/kãtaak/), which so far no one has been able to locate. More recently they came from Muang Phu Wa Naka Daeng (/phuu vaa naa kaʔ dɛɛŋ C3/), at the foot of Khao Ak Mountain (/khaw ʔaak/), in Muang Phu Wadol Savang near Kam Keut and Kham Muan in Khammouane province. (My informant from Laos was originally from Ban Kong Lo on the upper Hin Boun River, not far from this location.) The Kaloeng in Thailand also believe that they are descended from the Kha.
16. The name (Hùng) Vũông may be related because Vietnamese /v/ came from /y/ (e.g., Việt < Yüeh), and /y/ in this region of Laos and Vietnam is frequently pronounced [dʒ] or [z], which could become devoiced as [c], resulting in /c+atŋ/. This is all speculation, the real point of which is to include the Meuang as a viable ethnic factor in the conflicts of the region.
17. The origin of the Maen is difficult to discern. The grandparents of one informant from Chom Thong (see figure 6) came from Xiang Mi (so far unidentified), but that was not considered their place of origin. I suspect that this group may have come from

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Xieng Maen, about half-way between Sam Neua and Muang Soy.
The Maen have these interesting lexical items in their language:

/kua C4/ 'younger sister' (Yay from Nan Fa [Nam Tha]
has /kɔ/ 'elder brother')

/cuu C2/ 'younger brother' (Yay from Nam Fa has /cia/
'elder sister')

These are particularly interesting, first because the sexes are confused, and second because I have never encountered a Tai language in which the younger siblings are differentiated like this.

/h+at DL1/ 'waist' (Esquiroll and Williatte's [1908] Dioi: *heueut*)

/kɛet DL4/ 'to hurt' (Saek [Vilaivan 2520] *keet*⁵ 'ache'; T'en of the Kam-Sui family (Li) *ket* 35 'to hurt, as sitting on the rugged surface of a rock')

/l+k DS6/ 'child' (the vowel is Northern-Branch Tai)

/mǎŋjee / 'moon' (an alternate word used by children).
(Dioi: *thong*₁ *goue*₁ 'la lune dans les langages des enfants' -g₁ = ŋ; note also Pu-yi [Kweichow] *ŋuut*, *ŋuat*, *ŋui* 'moon')

18. For a more complete treatise on the interrelationships between these groups see Condominas (1980).

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