

Cultural Diversity and Ethnicity in Nakhon Sawan Province : Tai Dam

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Abstract

The purpose of this article was to explore the cultural diversity and Ethnicity in Nakhon Sawan. Important data were Tai Dam Community in Nakhon Sawan. The community area of Chao Phraya source or Nakhon Sawan Province is said to be a suitable location as residence and community. This is due to many supporting factors namely good geography and location, convenient transportation routes connecting to other regions, and diversity of ethnics and culture of each group whose identities are valuable and meaningful towards local people that have maintained tradition and culture of their ethnics by mixing with each others with respect to the diversity of culture and ethnics in Nakhon Sawan Province.

This article is about cultural and ethnical diversity was aimed to enable audience to learn about history of different ethnics immigrating to settle down in Thailand including Nakhon Sawan Province. After that, the audience can have some basic knowledge to understand the history of settlement and cultural identity of ethnic groups in Nakhon Sawan which are 1) Chinese 2) Lao Song or Tai Dam 3) Mon 4) Muslim 5) Vietnamese.

The organizers highly hope this article will be useful for learning about local history and cultural root of children and community as well as other organizations interested in using this article for learning and distributing knowledge about cultural and ethnical diversity in Nakhon Sawan Province further.

Keyword : Cultural diversity, Tai Dam

1.Introduction : Cultural Diversity and Ethnicity in Nakhon Sawan

Nakhon Sawan is another community with diversity both in terms of history and ethnic from the past to present. Something very interesting about this area is that people in different ethnics are able to blend with each other harmoniously.

Thai society has a long historical development. There have been people from different nationalities contacting with Thailand for a long time. Sujit Wongthes explained about society and culture of this area once called Suvarnabhumi before changing to be Siam and the current Thailand. In Historical and Cultural Map of Thailand (Siam), page 26, it was written that West – East meets at Suvarnabhumi which is a peninsula (of Thailand). Therefore, this is the connection between Indian Ocean on the west and Pacific Ocean on the east side. As a result, there were people from different nationalities both in the west and east settling down in Thailand both temporarily and permanently. There was ethnical and cultural mixture of people who became ancestors of current Thai people. Western civilization from India such as religion, alphabet, literature, and food (steamed rice) slowly became widespread among local village heads to use as a tool (technology) in governing and consolidating people and communities in the past to slightly grow into states scattering around Suvarnabhumi further. The East civilization from Han dynasty in the north and “Jek” in the south of China including

spoken language, weaving equipment, metal tools, food (vegetables) became part of lifestyle of local people.

Since global commercial movement expanded, people in multi-nationalities moved in a large number along transportation routes both on land and sea especially on Chao Phraya basin and coast of Andaman Sea and South China Sea. While old communities developed, new communities arose along the transportation routes. For example, in the northern part of Thailand, there was a big community developed in Ping river basin (Ban Wang Hai, Lamphun Province), Wang river basin (Pratu Pha). In the central part, there was a big steel mill community in Nan basin (Tung Yang, Khlong Pho, Uttaradit Province), Yom basin (Ban Dan Lan Hoy, Sukhothai Province). Particularly in Chao Phraya basin, there communities scattering every basin

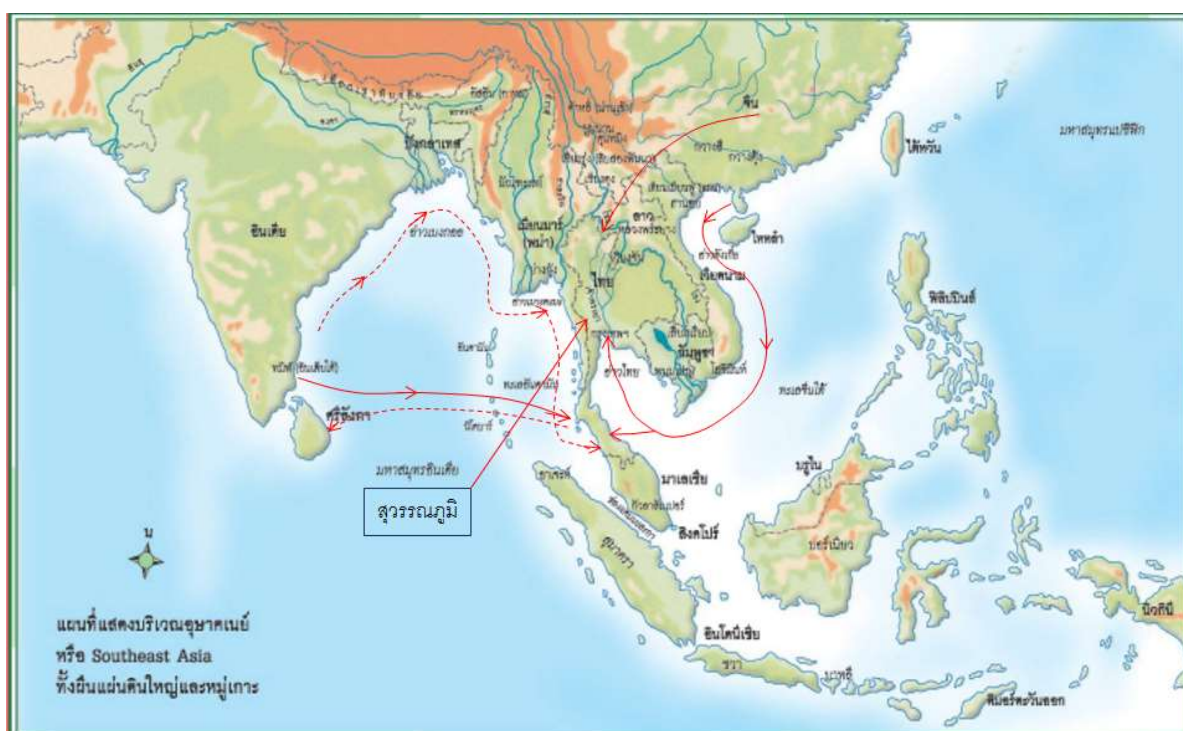


Figure 1: Historical and Cultural Map of Thailand (Siam), it was that West – East meets at Suvarnabhumi which is a peninsula (of Thailand). Therefore, this is the connection between Indian Ocean on the west and Pacific Ocean on the east side.

The south east Asia is also called “Suvarnabhumi”, which means golden land that is full of gold. There is abundant vegetation, animals, and natural resources, which attracted foreign sellers to trade their goods within this area and build up their prosperity. Since there were many people from outside settling around Chao Phraya basin area, there were more population with diversity of ethnics from the south of China immigrating to Mekhong river and Chao Phraya river.

2. Multiculturalism of Nakhon Sawan Province

Nakhon Sawan is an area with Chao Phraya river as the main river which is important to people’s lives in many aspects both transportation, consumption, and agriculture. This is also related to the abundance of natural resource and biological diversity of different kinds of plants and animals. It is an area where people in various ethnics lived and worked until it became a province with cultural diversity. According to a research conducted by Mr. Suchart

Figure 2: *Multiculturalism of Nakhon Sawan people in different ethnics living together with local Thai people*

Each ethnical group immigrating into Nakhon Sawan has different history of the period of immigration. It can be tracked from historical document and words of senior people who are able to give some information about immigration to Thailand and Nakhon Sawan Province. The characteristic and pattern of settlement, tradition, rituals, and occupation of the community can reflect the cultural identity of each ethnic.

3. The 3 factors affecting the settlement of people

1) Geology is a factor that determines the suitability of an area where houses or communities are located. The following things might be considered together namely weather, sources of water which are Chao Phraya river, Ping and Nan, high land and shelter, etc.

2) Nakhon Sawan is located close to material sources in the low land of water basin and mountains suitable for agriculture both rice fields and farming. Additionally, it is a transportation center with routes connecting the central to northern parts, as well as north-eastern part where factories are located.

3) Culture, convention, tradition, as well as beliefs of each group affect the decision to choose different locations to settle.

Additionally, the settlement of each group or ethnic depends on the purpose or needs of each of them. For example, Thai Puan, Tai Dam or Lao Song usually stayed in countryside with water source for consumption or abundant area suitable for agriculture or high land without flooding. As for Muslim or Chinese people, they usually gather and stay in the market or community area with convenient transportation to do some business or joining religious ceremony according to their beliefs.

In conclusion, the factors that affect location choosing are site and situation and natural environment of the community. These are important to settlement, development and survival of the community. Most major communities gathered and set up a community in an area with good climate and abundance suitable for agriculture or in a big river basin. Other things are supporting factors such as economic, social, and political factors which occurred after the community has already passed the setup period. The area around the origin of Chao Phraya river is one of popular places where groups of people select to live and work.

4. Cultural Identity of Tai Dam

Tai Dam lived around Guangzi, Yunnan, and Tung Gia. Tai Dam immigrated to Thailand in Thonburi period since they were caught in the war with Vien Tian Laotians at Muai and *Tang* cities (Somsong 1981, Page 6). Vien Tian Laotians moved to Saraburi, Ratchaburi, and Chantaburi while Thai Dam lived in Petchaburi.

From this evidence, it can be assumed that Tai Dam tried to move back to their home country in Tang while some of them did not want to go back and travel northward to live in Nakhon Sawan, Pichit, Phitsanulok, and Chainat, etc.

In Nakhon Sawan, Tai Dam live in different districts including Chumsang, Nong Bua, Paisalee, Kao Leaw, and Tha Tako, etc.

4.1 Residence and Lifestyle

Tai Dam lifestyle is usually simple. Their houses are the type that the first floor is lifted up high. Their occupations are planting, rice farming, pig farming, chicken farming. As for handicraft, men like to make basketwork while women like embroidery and cooking. Popular occupations are rice farming and planting on foothill. Animals used are buffaloes. There is a story that Tan (god) sent buffaloes to help human. Most dishes of Tai Dam use

vegetables as ingredients. These people know how to preserve food by fermentation. As for rice, in the past, they ate sticky rice but now it has been changed into steamed rice.

4.2 Language, tradition, and belief

Tai Dam community is at Kamang Sub-District, Chumsang District, Nakhon Sawan Province. They have maintained tradition and culture from the past including belief, spoken language, written language. The information found about Tai Dam in Kamang Sub-district, Chumsang District, Nakhon Sawan Province is as below.

Every year slogan of Tai Dam (Lao Song) is “In the top north of Nakhon Sawan is an area of agriculture. Tai Dam is famous for tradition and a great Buddha image called Luang Por Pan”

Currently, it has been found that Lao Song in Kamang Sub-District or Tai Dam are originally from Sib Song Ju Thai area, in Dam and Daeng River basin in northern Vietnam. Afterwards, they immigrated to Thailand for work and living. There is a shrine of Chao Por Thamaya that Tai Dam and Thai people within the village respect.



Figure 3 : Tai Dam clothes



Figure 4 : The Tai Dam believes in benevolent and malevolent spirits (Phi)

4.3 Clothing

An identity of Tai Dam is their clothes. Men wear shorts with narrow ends covering their knees in Chinese style called “Suang Ka Ten” or “Suang Kom”. The shirt for men has long sleeves with ends as wide as palms. The front of the shirt is cut through with silver buttons called Chon Shirt. For women, in daily life, they wear black-based fabric consisting of 3 pieces. The first one is black without any graphic, about 12 inch wide. The second one is black and white. The third one is about 1 foot wide with white straps connected to the end of the cloth. If their husbands die, they have to remove this ending piece for mourning. Their shirts have long sleeves, the front is cut through and put with silver buttons called Kom Shirt. Sometimes, there is a chest cloth called Biew with graphic stitched on both ends. Married men and women wear black or navy Biew in special occasions such as wedding. Tai Dam people wear a full dress called Hee Shirt made of dyed cotton. Men Hee Shirt covers the thigh with round neck decorated with red silk topped up with other colors with one strap button put beside. The sleeves are long with narrow ends. The lower end of the shirt is stitched with silk in different colors and small pieces of glass. On the side is cut from the end up to the waist and beautifully decorated. As for women, the shirt is bigger and longer with deep sharp neck and not cut in the front. The sleeves are narrow. It is put on together with long skirt cloth.

4.4 Food

Most of Tai Dam food is vegetables which can be easily found around the house or canals such as *Kratin Nue Som* , *Pha Phing Tub* , *Hoi Kom* , *Jael Ma Kean* and *Sticky Rice*. Some fruits they have are mango, papaya, Thai melon. These vegetables can be eaten together with chilli paste or used for making other types of food such as curry or spicy salad. Desserts are Tong Yib, Tong Yod, Foi Tong or coconut recipe such as Salim and Lod Chong.



Figure 5 : Tai Dam food,*Gang Nue Som* , *Pha Phing Tub* , *Hoi Kom* , *Jael Ma Kean* And *Sticky Rice*

4.5 Medical Treatment

Tai Dam believe in black magic so the illnesses are treated by local doctors using herbs and rituals to get help from local gods. Holy water is also used to cure some disease. Currently, medical treatment of Tai Dam has developed with the economic and social conditions. Those who are rich or hi-society people usually get medical treatment from a medical center or hospital. Tai Dam society is divided into 2 groups of high-society people from ruling class in Sib Song Panna and minority of ordinary people.

4.6 Occupation

The main occupation is rice farming both in low land and foot hill as well as fishing. Animals used are buffaloes. There is a story that Tan (local god) sent buffaloes to help human work. Therefore, buffaloes are involved in Tai Dam lifestyle from the past. It is the origin of the word “Ko Kud”, which is the symbol of patience, fighting spirit, and prosperity gained through the help of buffaloes.

In Tai Dam village, there are some tourist destinations as follows. Chao Por Thamaya at Kamang Temple is respected by Tai Dam. Praying to this shrine is to ask for permission to visit and blessings for good luck. Tai Dam regard Luang Por Thamaya as god of land who protects the community. Inside, there are other sacred Buddha images as follows.



Figure 6 *Chao Por Thamya Shrine*



Figure 7

Thai Dam Museum at Kamang Sub-District, Chumsang District, Nakhon Sawan Province

From a long history and ethnical diversity of this area in Nakhon Sawan, it can be said that this location is suitable for living and setting up a community. This is because there are a number of supportive factors such as geography, location, transportation routes to other regions, agricultural area for rice and other plants farming, as well as ethnical and cultural diversity with the identity valuable to local people. There is also the conservation of tradition and culture of each ethnic group by mixing well together. This is another beautiful history that reflects life of people in the origin of Chao Phraya River.

5. Conclusion

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