

Buddhism on the Border: Shan Buddhism and Transborder Migration in Northern Thailand

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This paper examines the transformation of Shan Buddhism in the border area of Northern Thailand. Shan and other ethnic groups have a long history of migration between Northern Thailand and the Shan State of Myanmar; the migration continued even after the border was demarcated at the end of the nineteenth century. Recently, the migration has become unidirectional—from Myanmar to Thailand—and the number of migrants is growing steadily. An anomalous situation exists in this area: a fluid border crossing of people, goods, and information in spite of rigid border control by the Thai government. In the religious sphere, the Thai government has been institutionalizing and standardizing “Thai Buddhism” since the early twentieth century. The government’s efforts seem to have succeeded, resulting in the unified organization of “State Sangha” and a systematized curriculum for monastic education. In the process, local Sanghas (Buddhist monastic communities) in the kingdom have been integrated into the State Sangha of Thailand. However, Shan Buddhism in the border area has not been totally assimilated into Thai Buddhism and maintains its unique seasonal festivals, religious rites of passage, practices using Shan manuscripts, and temple architecture. By focusing on the movement of people in the border area, where strong state control and a porous border coexist, this paper analyzes the important role of border migration in the continuation and development of Shan Buddhist practices in Northern Thailand.

Keywords: Buddhism, Thai-Myanmar border, Shan, transborder migration, Sangha, lay Buddhists

I Buddhism and the State Border in Thailand

Historically, as was the case in most traditional states of mainland Southeast Asia, the kings and lords of Siam¹⁾ made efforts to promote Buddhism in and around the capital by

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1) The name “Siam” is used here to refer to the kingdom before World War II. Strictly speaking, it was in 1939 that Prime Minister Phibun Songkhram replaced “Siam” with “Thailand.”

donating lands, constructing monasteries, and providing supplies and remuneration to the Buddhist Sangha. The Kingdom of Siam in the Ayutthaya and early Ratanakosin periods consisted of a central region directly ruled by the king, and peripheral regions, each ruled by a chief under the overlordship of the king. In distant regions, there were semiautonomous principalities with a tributary relationship, such as Chiang Mai, Lam-pang, and Lamphun in the north; and Nakhon Si Thammarat and Patani in the south. The peripheral regions and semiautonomous principalities had their own Buddhist traditions, and even different religions from the center of the kingdom; in fact, even in the central region, various traditions of Buddhism and lineages of Sangha coexisted. Therefore, although the king's authority and control over religious affairs did not extend past the central region, religious differences did not pose problems as long as the chiefs and their subjects accepted the political authority of the king. Because the Siamese state at that time was not based on the concept of territorial sovereignty demarcated by national borders, it was not necessary to unify all Buddhist traditions and Sangha organizations within its territory.

A change in the relationship between religion and territory came about in the late nineteenth century. Confronted by European colonial powers, Siamese leaders strove to transform the traditional kingdom into a modern nation-state. They demarcated boundaries between the kingdom and neighboring British and French colonies, centralized the administration, and instituted mandatory primary education and military conscription across the country. The kingdom was molded into a nation-state with territorial sovereignty (Thongchai 1994), and parallel to this reformation, Buddhism was institutionalized and standardized. King Chulalongkorn enacted the Sangha Act of 1902 to incorporate local Sanghas into the unified Sangha organization of Siam.²⁾ Prince Wachirayan reformed the examination system of monastic schools in 1893 and established a standardized curriculum for nationwide monastic education in 1910 (Ishii 1975). Thus, Siamese leaders imagined "Thai Buddhism" as a state religion corresponding to the character of the newly molded nation-state³⁾—a centralized structure covering the whole country and standardizing Buddhist teachings within the kingdom. The Sangha Acts organized monks and novices in the kingdom into a hierarchical framework that can be described as "State

2) Chinese and Annamese (Vietnamese) monks and monasteries were exempted from the Sangha Act, since they belonged to the Mahāyāna tradition; the Theravāda tradition is dominant in Thailand. There are also a small number of Theravāda Buddhist monasteries that do not belong to the State Sangha of Thailand, such as Burmese and Mon monasteries.

3) Even though the government of Thailand has never constitutionally defined Buddhism as a state religion, Theravāda Buddhism has been given special treatment as "the religion of the nation" (*satsana pracam chat*).



Map 1 Maehongson and Its Surrounding Area

Sangha”: a unified, legally acknowledged Sangha organization—the only model permitted and supported by the central government.⁴ Since this religious reformation, all monks and novices in Siam have been required to belong to the State Sangha and learn Buddhist doctrine under the standardized curriculum, at least in their formal monastic education.

Many researchers have focused on the institutionalization of the State Sangha and its impact on local Sanghas and Buddhist traditions in the peripheral regions of Thailand; some have examined the incorporation of local traditions into Thai Buddhism; and others have studied the disobedience or resistance to the authority of the State Sangha. Most researchers have limited the scope of their inquiry within the borders of the Thai state and have based their studies on the perspective of center-periphery relations. In contrast, this paper reviews the relationship between Buddhism and the territoriality of state using a case study on Buddhist practices among the Shan in Maehongson, a border area of Northern Thailand.

4) While the Sangha Acts have been revised and amended several times, the idea of a unified Sangha and standardized monastic education within the kingdom remains unchanged.

Maehongson may be viewed not as a peripheral region but as a borderland between modern nation-states, a social space where opposing momentums coexist: cross-border flows and the incorporation of local practices into national standards by the central authority.⁵⁾ Sometimes the two have a symbiotic relationship, which accounts for the rapid rise in the number of immigrants from Myanmar into Thailand since the 1990s. The economic and administrative incorporation of the borderland into each nation has created a disparity between the two sides of the border and spurred the migration of workers from Myanmar into Thailand. The accelerated migration of Myanmar workers has prompted the Thai government to control and incorporate local practices more strictly. Thailand's reaction has widened the disparity between the two sides and led to a revision of relevant laws to suit the local situation. An example is the legalization of unskilled migrant labor from neighboring countries, which in turn has led to more migrant workers. In order to study Buddhist practices among the Shan in the borderland, this paper pays attention to the opposing momentums coexisting in the borderland: the incorporation by the central authority of local Buddhist practices into Thai Buddhism, and the transborder flow of Buddhist traditions, which enables the continuation of local Buddhist practices.

This research also focuses on the role of Buddhist laypeople's practices. As noted above, the religious reformation of Thailand involved the government's institutionalization of the State Sangha by exerting control over ordained and monastic education, though not Buddhism as a whole. It is worth noting that the principle of the imagined Thai Buddhism is represented by the unified organization of the State Sangha, which leaves the traditions and activities of lay Buddhists beyond the purview of the religious administration. The traditions seem to be regarded as part of the Buddhist culture of the kingdom in the eyes of religious administrators. This principle may be seen in the restructuring of government ministries and agencies in 2002: the former Department of Religious Affairs in the Ministry of Education was divided into the Office of National Buddhism under the direct control of the Office of the Prime Minister, and the renewed Department of Religious Affairs in the Ministry of Culture. The former is in charge of the administration and support of the State Sangha, while the latter controls and supports other religious organizations and activities within the kingdom—Protestant, Catholic, Islamic, Hindu, and Buddhist activities in the “cultural sphere,” as well as Buddhist festivals and traditions at the national and local levels. This shows the division of Buddhism in the religious administration: the State Sangha, which represents unified Thai Buddhism; and Buddhist festivals and traditions, which are considered cultural activities and are sometimes lauded

5) For ethnographic studies on the borderland's situation in mainland Southeast Asia, see Walker (1999), Kato (2004), Hayashi (2004; 2009), and Horstmann and Wadley (2006).

as exemplifying the diverse cultural heritage of the kingdom. The Thai government has paid more attention to the administration of the State Sangha than to Buddhist traditions. The incorporation of local Buddhist practices in the borderland also reflects this division. On the one hand, the State Sangha rigidly controls and closely protects local Sanghas; on the other, local Buddhist traditions, especially lay Buddhist practices, draw much less interest from religious administrators. The administrators' lack of interest is not a bad thing, however, because lay Buddhists are allowed to practice their customs and traditions without government intervention. Due to the division of Buddhism in religious administration, local Sangha and lay Buddhist traditions of the Shan in Maehongson have experienced different processes and degrees of incorporation into Thai Buddhism.

This study will first examine the situation in the borderland of Maehongson, describing the process of incorporation of local Sangha, and then focus on lay Buddhist practices and the border crossing of lay intellectuals.

II Maehongson: The Borderland of Northern Thailand

Maehongson, one of Northern Thailand's provinces that shares a border with Myanmar (Burma), is located in a mountainous area in the Salween River basin. Around 80 percent of it is forestland. The province is the most thinly populated in Thailand, and the majority of its estimated 250,000 residents are rural folk, scattered along the hillsides and valleys. There is no statistical information on the ethnic composition of Maehongson's population, but this author estimates that one half of the rural population is Shan while the other half is composed of *chao khao* (mountain people of Thailand); Tibeto-Burmese speakers such as Karen, Lisu, and Lahu; and Meo-Yao speakers such as Hmong. The urban population consists mainly of Shan and people from other regions of Thailand, such as Thai Yuan (*khon mueang*), ethnic Thai (Siamese), Sino-Thai, and Isan (from Northeastern Thailand). With the exception of the urban area, the landscape and ethnic composition of Maehongson are more similar to those of the Shan State of Myanmar than to Thailand. Maehongson Province comprises five districts (*amphoe*) along the Thai-Burma border. This research deals with data from the central part of the province—Maehongson District (*amphoe mueang Maehongson*) and Khun Yuam District (*amphoe Khun Yuam*). The provincial capital is in Maehongson District.

Maehongson has a history of ceaseless movement and circulation of people, goods, and information. Before the nineteenth century, the mountainous area of Maehongson marked the frontier between the state of Lanna (Chiang Mai), the Shan principalities, and the Karenni (Kayah) chiefdom. It was remote from the Burmese kingdom in Upper

Burma and the Siamese kingdom in the Chaophraya Delta. There is little information available on this area before the nineteenth century; it is presumed that a few of its inhabitants were from the Karen, Kayah, Pa-o, and Shan ethnic groups. Over the years, Shan as well as members of other ethnic groups steadily migrated from neighboring areas into this low-population area. Thus, since the middle of the nineteenth century the population of the province, especially the Shan population, has been increasing.⁶⁾ Most Shan inhabitants have settled around the valleys.

At the end of the nineteenth century, national boundaries were drawn in this frontier area. The British, who seized all of Burma after fighting three Anglo-Burmese Wars, placed the neighboring Shan principalities under their protection in 1886. Siam (Thailand) had been trying to extend direct control over Lanna since the end of the nineteenth century. In 1894, Great Britain and Siam demarcated the boundary between the British-ruled Shan States and Lanna territory (Northern Thailand), and Maehongson was incorporated into Siam's territory (Thongchai 1994, 108). However, even after the demarcation of national boundaries, people continued to move freely across the border between Maehongson and the Shan States. Because the border runs through the mountains, neither of the two central governments could exert effective control over the area.

Since World War II and the independence of the Union of Burma (Myanmar) in 1948, the boundary has been recognized by the Union of Burma and Thailand. Because of incidents along the Thai-Myanmar border and Myanmar's seclusion policy since 1960, trade at the national border points stagnated. However, local trade and cross-border migration remained a common practice. Some people crossed the border in search of new fields for cultivation, others to visit relatives or marry their betrothed on the other side of the border. Not surprisingly, these were undocumented immigrants.

It has been difficult for Thailand and Myanmar to control border crossings in the mountainous region. Although Thailand enacted the Immigration Act and Nationality Act before World War II, the weak enforcement of laws gave immigrants the opportunity to acquire Thai nationality. Throughout its history, Maehongson has served as a gateway to many immigrants who have been absorbed into Thailand; most of the residents in the area are descendants of immigrants from various regions of the Shan States.

As well as gradual migration, there has been rapid and intensive migration into Maehongson because of battles between Myanmar government troops and antigovern-

6) According to Niti's overview, there are several reasons for the growth in the Shan population during this period: fighting and bandits in the southern Shan States, which drove the Shan into this area; Maehongson's location along the trade route between Lanna (Northern Thailand) and the Shan States or lower Burma; and the gathering up of the Shan population into settlements by the expedition team from Lanna in 1831 (Niti 2004, 12–23; also see Niti 2006).

ment ethnic forces along the Myanmar-Thai border. In the 1950s and 1960s, migration was seasonal. When battles escalated in the dry season, Karen and Shan asylum seekers crossed over to the Thai side, where they remained for a while. In the rainy season, when the fighting temporarily stopped, the Thai government would push the asylum seekers back home. However, in the 1970s the asylum seekers multiplied and most of them remained in Thailand because the Myanmar military had gained the upper hand against the antigovernment ethnic forces. To deal with this situation, the Thai government shifted its policy from “push them back” to “count and control.” Asylum seekers from Myanmar and individuals whose nationality could not be determined were admitted in Thailand as temporary residents and issued identification cards specifying their status: “asylum seeker” (*phu lop ni khao muang cak phama*), “displaced person” (*phu phalat thin*), “highlander” (*bukkhon bon phuen thi sung*), etc. In this context, “temporary residents” meant “permanent residents” with permission to work within certain districts or provinces in Thailand.⁷⁾

When Thailand’s economic growth accelerated in the late 1980s, the economic disparity between Thailand and Burma widened, and the number of undocumented immigrants from Myanmar swelled in Maehongson. The political turmoil in Myanmar after 1988 and the forced mass relocation of locals in the Shan State after 1996 hastened this trend (Grundty-Warr and Wong 2002). Since the 1990s, Thailand has opened its doors to unskilled workers from neighboring countries, a policy shift that has allowed most new immigrants to be registered as “foreign laborers.”⁸⁾ Nowadays, Maehongson’s economy depends heavily on the labor of these immigrants, in the same way that the Thai economy depends on foreign workers from neighboring countries.

Although it was the shift in policy for hiring foreign labor in the 1990s that sped up migration from the Shan State, the mid-1970s was the turning point in the immigrants’ gaining legal status in Thailand, when the government permitted temporary residence for immigrants and asylum seekers. Before the mid-1970s, it was easy for immigrants to acquire Thai nationality; because of the weak enforcement of registration for residents in the area, they were readily assimilated into the host society. After the mid-1970s, the

7) The ID cards have been issued at different times for different reasons. Their color varies according to the type: orange for “asylum seeker,” pink for “displaced person,” sky blue for “highlander,” etc. (Krittaya 2005). Since 2004, the Thai government has issued new types of documents to holders of ID cards to standardize the design or prepare them for Thai citizenship. There are two types of documents: the *bai samkhan thin yu* (certificate of residence) issued by the district office and the *bai samkhan pracam tua khon tangdao* (alien identification paper) issued by the police. Both are called “passport” by local people.

8) A certain number of immigrants do not seek any legal status because of the high cost of registration. They are regarded as “illegal immigrants” who will be deported if arrested.

government tightened its border control and strictly enforced the registration of residents. When it became harder for immigrants to get Thai nationality, there was a social change in Maehongson. Settlers who had arrived before the mid-1970s were able to acquire Thai nationality. The same applied to their descendants, who were born and grew up on Thai soil, where they received higher education. As Thai citizens who have retained their Shan ethnicity, these early settlers and their descendants are better off than newcomers (those who arrived after the mid-1970s and their descendants), who are not granted Thai nationality. The latter are given only “temporary resident” status, and as “foreigners” or “aliens” (*khon tangdao*) they are at a disadvantage legally and economically. Without legal protection, they are paid lower wages than Thai citizens. Early settlers and their descendants hire newcomers to do agricultural and unskilled labor, while they themselves take on better-paying jobs outside their community or province (Tannenbaum 2009, 18). The Thai-born descendants of early settlers call the newcomers *Tai nok* (foreign Shan/Shan from outside), which has a negative connotation. Although Maehongson has a long history of Shan migration, Thailand’s immigration laws and strict border control since the 1970s carved a cleft between the earlier settlers and newcomers among Shan in Maehongson.

It is necessary, however, to say that both groups still have an ethnic identity as Shan that bridges the cleavage. They live in the same villages and communities, share the same language in everyday communication, and follow the same religious practices in both Buddhist and spirit-worship traditions. They often use the ethnonym “Tai” to distinguish themselves from Thai (Siamese). Maehongson still offers a more hospitable environment for Shan immigrants than do other parts of Thailand.⁹

III History of the Sangha and Monasteries in Maehongson¹⁰

This section reviews the history of Sangha and monasteries in Maehongson, which was conceived as a borderland. To put it simply, this history is the gradual process of incorporating the local tradition of Shan Buddhism within Thai Buddhism, backed by the

9) For the situation of Shan immigrants and their communities in Chiang Mai province, see Amporn (2008), Aranya (2008), and Farrelly (2009).

10) This paper describes mainly the history of monasteries and sects of Sangha in Maehongson District and its neighboring area. This research does not cover the northern, northeastern, and southern districts (Pang Ma Pha, Pai, Mae La Noi, and Mae Sariang) because their histories and social backgrounds are different from the central part of the province. For the social history of Maehongson from the perspective of its incorporation into Thailand, see Niti (2004; 2006).

enforcement of the state. However, the incorporation was not straightforward and remains partial.

The Shan's Early Settlements and the Establishment of Monasteries in Maehongson

The Shan population of Maehongson has been increasing since the middle of the nineteenth century. The conflict between Mawk Mai and Moeng Nai (Shan principalities) in the southern Shan States circa the 1850s and 1860s triggered a mass Shan migration to Maehongson and neighboring villages (Wilson and Hanks 1985, 34–36). As the Shan increased in number, they formed new villages; Maehongson was one of them.¹¹⁾ When villages were established, the Shan inhabitants constructed their monasteries in the same way as did other Theravāda Buddhists. The first Shan monastery in Maehongson, Wat Cong Kham, was established in the middle of the nineteenth century. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, laypeople invited senior monks from the southern Shan States to be the abbots of the newly erected monasteries.¹²⁾ As most of the Shan in Maehongson were immigrants or the descendants of immigrants from the southern Shan States, the monks and monasteries of Maehongson were affiliated with the Sangha in the southern Shan States. This means that Maehongson shared a network of monks and monasteries as well as religious practices—such as methods of using texts, ways of chanting Pali stanzas, monastic education procedures, and Buddhist festivals—with the southern Shan States.

By the mid-nineteenth century, this area gained increasing attention from neighboring polities. The British had taken possession of lower Burma—including Moulmein (now Mawlamyine), a port city at the mouth of the Salween River—and were becoming interested in the timber resources of the upper Salween area. Lanna was also beginning to devote more attention to the British influence over the west. Since Lanna needed to establish its influence on the western frontier with the Shan States and Kayah territory, the ruler of Lanna nominated a local leader as the *cao mueang* (ruler of a *mueang*) and set up Mueang Maehongson as a *mueang na dan* (frontier state) in 1874.¹³⁾ Because of its subordination to Lanna as a tributary state, Maehongson came under Lanna cultural influence. The number of Thai Yuan people from Lanna who settled in Maehongson

11) It is said that Cao Kaeo Mueang Ma, the head of the expedition team from Lanna, named Maehongson in 1831. The expedition team from Chiang Mai captured and trained wild elephants there. “Maehongson” means “the river (*mae rong* or *mae hong*) of training or teaching (*son*)” (Sammak-ngan Watthanatham Cangwat Maehongson 2006)

12) See also Niti (2006, 32).

13) The first ruler of Maehongson was Chankale, who was given the name “Phraya Singharat” by the ruler of Lanna.

grew, and the Lanna tradition of Buddhism was introduced. The oldest Lanna monastery in Maehongson, Wat Muoi To, was established by the second ruler of Maehongson, Cao Nang Mia, in 1889. She invited a senior monk from a Lanna monastery in Mawk Mai in the southern Shan States to be the first abbot. After that, other Lanna monasteries were established in Maehongson, and abbots invited from the Lanna area presided over them.

From that time until World War II, the Shan and Lanna traditions of Buddhism coexisted in Maehongson. Monks and novices divided into two sects of Sangha that were independent of each other. The Shan sect was called *koeng tai* and the Lanna sect *koeng yon*.¹⁴⁾ The distinction between the Shan and Lanna sects lay in the way Buddhist practices were carried out. The Lanna sect used Pali scripture in the Tham script, while the Shan sect used the Burmese script. The difference in scripts resulted in a difference in the pronunciation of the Pali stanzas, making it impossible for monks and novices of the two sects to join in rituals and recite stanzas together. The names of the sects mentioned above do not reflect the ethnic affiliation of their members, as both had monks and novices from the Shan and Tai Yuan groups. It was quite common for Shan villages to have monks and novices from the Lanna sect in their monasteries and for Shan parents to send their sons to Lanna monasteries, and vice versa. The rulers (*cao mueng*) of Maehongson also gave their patronage to both sects of the Sangha.

Relationship between Shan and Lanna Sects after Demarcation of Boundary

The traditional tributary relationship between Lanna and Maehongson did not last long. Great Britain and Siam demarcated the boundary between the British-ruled Shan States and Lanna in 1894. Siam incorporated Maehongson into its territory on the grounds of the tributary relationship between Lanna and Maehongson. According to the Sangha Act (1902), the local Sangha of Lanna (Northern Thailand) was integrated into the State Sangha in 1910 (Keyes 1971, 556). Later, the provincial Sangha of Maehongson was formed, and the first chief monk (*cao khana cangwat maehongson*) was appointed in 1925.¹⁵⁾ The chief monk, Phra Khru Wiriyamongkhon Sangkhawaha (in office 1925–29), was a Shan who had been born in Maehongson and served in the office of the abbot of

14) *Koeng*, which means “religious sect,” is a derivative of the Burmese “*gain*.” *Yon* is the ethnonym by which the Shan call the Tai Yuan of Lanna. *Tai* is their ethnonym for themselves. In this context, *koeng* means a tradition of monks’ practices.

15) The chief monk of Maehongson here refers to the provincial chief monk of *Maha-nikai*. The monastery of *Thammayut-nikai* had not yet been established in Maehongson at that time. During this author’s research in 2005, there were only five monasteries (*wat*) and 15 hermitages (*sammak-song*) of *Thammayut-nikai* in this province. At the time of writing, they had not formed a provincial Sangha organization in Maehongson because of the small number of monks and monasteries. They were directly affiliated with the northern regional Sangha of *Thammayut-nikai*.

Table 1 Chief Monks of the Provincial Sangha of Maehongson

Name	Term of Office	Monastery	Place of Origin (Ethnic Group)
1 Phra Khru Wiriyamongkhon Sangkhawaha (Khruba Kham Wiriyō)	1925–29	Wat Muoi To (Lanna)	Maehongson (Shan)
2 Phra Khru Wiriyamongkhon Satsanathada (Khruba Inta)	1930–33	Wat Muoi To (Lanna)	Maehongson (Shan)
3 Phra Khru Wiriyamongkon (Bunruea Tilakun)	1933–40	Wat Klang Thung (Lanna)	Maehongson (Shan)
4 Phra Ratchawirakon (Bunma Nyankhutto)	1941–67	Wat Muoi To	Yasothon (Thai Isan)
5 Phra Yanwirakhom (Kham-ai Wannō)	1967–89	Wat Don Cedi	Maehongson (Shan)
6 Phra Ratchawirakhom (Bunrak Supanyo)	1989–2010	Wat Kamko	Maehongson (Shan/Yuan)

Source: Samnak-ngan Watthanatham Cangwat Maehongson (2006), supplemented by author.

Wat Muoi To (see Table 1). From a legal perspective, the two sects of Buddhist Sangha were integrated into the State Sangha of Siam.

Even after the demarcation between Siam and the British-ruled Shan States established territorial sovereignty in the border area, the free flow of people across the border did not abate. Furthermore, at the end of the nineteenth century, the British Bombay-Burma Trading Company started logging operations in Maehongson. This led to Shan and Karen labor in-migration. Not only did the British create jobs, but they also provided local people with prime commodities from lower Burma via the Salween River route. In spite of its annexation to Siam, Maehongson enjoyed prosperity derived from the British colonial economy. While Maehongson was politically affiliated with Siam, it was economically linked to the British colony. The double affiliation was reflected in Maehongson's religious sphere.

The enforcement of the Sangha Act (1902) changed the coexistence of the two sects in their own names into an integrated provincial Sangha. However, the two sects remained distinct beneath the surface. The State Sangha at that time promoted monks of the Lanna sect to positions of responsibility in the organization. The abbots of Lanna monasteries were appointed as successors of provincial chief monks. This shows that in order to control the local Sangha, the State Sangha itself leveraged Lanna connections via Chiang Mai, which became the administrative center of Northern Thailand.¹⁶⁾ The Lanna sect had an advantage over the Shan sect in the provincial Sangha organization.

16) The Lanna sect and its monasteries were also the local delivery institutions of the primary education program. The first elementary school in Maehongson was established in Wat Muoi To in 1923, and the monks were involved in secular education as teachers at this early time.

Because the source of their predominance was Lanna connections with Chiang Mai, not Bangkok, Lanna monks did not abandon their Buddhist practices. On the other hand, the ceaseless migration of Shan people sustained ties between the Sangha and monasteries in Maehongson and the Shan States. Some monasteries in Maehongson town, and most of those in rural areas, observed Shan Buddhist traditions. Therefore, the practices of each sect remained untouched, and the religious traditions of both sects continued to coexist under the name of the provincial Sangha organization until World War II (Murakami 2009a). The standardization of the religious practices of monks and novices had yet to be achieved. Some elderly laypeople, especially those who had been monks or novices before World War II, could still identify the affiliation of monasteries, Lanna or Shan, in the old days.

Actual Integration of Local Sangha into the State Sangha

World War II drastically altered the political and economic landscape of Maehongson. British companies left, and economic ties with the Shan States were severed. The economic prosperity that had been achieved under British colonial rule dissipated. Former ties with the Shan States were not restored. Maehongson, which had enjoyed a crucial border position between Myanmar and Thailand, became the most remote area of Northern Thailand. The change of the religious order in Maehongson may be seen shortly before the economic and political change.

After the death of the third chief monk in 1940, the State Sangha appointed his disciple, a Maehongson-born Shan of the Lanna sect, as the candidate for the fourth chief monk. Unfortunately, the candidate fell ill and died during his trip to Chiang Mai for the installation ceremony in 1941.¹⁷⁾ The State Sangha then appointed a monk from Northeastern Thailand (Isan), who was not Shan, as the fourth chief monk. This monk was also made the abbot of Wat Muoi To, one of the most important monasteries in Maehongson. The fourth chief monk, Phra Ratchawirakon (Phra Bunma Nyankhutto), was born in 1902 in Yasothon Province, Northeastern Thailand, and was ordained as a monk there. After the ordination, he moved to Bangkok. He lived in Wat Prasatbunyawat and studied at the monastery school in Wat Bencamabophit, in Dusit District.¹⁸⁾ After his graduation,

17) Interview with the former chief monk, Phra Ratchawirakhom, at Wat Kamko in September 2005.

18) Phra Plot Kittisophon, the abbot of Wat Bencamabophit and chief monk of the Northern Precinct (*cao khana monthon phayap*), nominated Phra Ratchawirakon to be the chief monk of Maehongson (Keyes 1971, 556; Samnak-ngan Watthanatham Cangwat Maehongson 2006, 109–111). In 1954, Phra Ratchawirakon moved up to the position of *Sangkha-nayok*, or clerical prime minister, and in 1960 he was appointed as the *Sankharat* or Supreme Patriarch of the State Sangha (Jackson 1989, 96–97).

he was dispatched by the State Sangha to disseminate state monastic education in Northern Thailand. He taught at a monastery school in Phrae Province for one year and in Mae Sariang, in the southern town of Maehongson, for five years, until his accession to office.¹⁹⁾

Phra Ratchawirakon was committed to advancing state monastic education and prohibited monks and novices from learning or using texts of the Shan and Lanna traditions (Keyes 1971, 557). Thai became the language of instruction in all monasteries, and texts authorized by the State Sangha have been used in monastery schools since Phra Ratchawirakon's time. Examinations on the knowledge of Buddhist teachings (*nak tham*) and Pali (*parian*) are set in Thai. In this manner, the scripts and way of pronouncing Pali scripture in monastic education have been standardized in Maehongson. The State Sangha organization had a centralized and hierarchical structure corresponding to the Bangkok-centered administration system, and the Sangha of Maehongson fell into the bottom layer of this structure. Now, monks and novices who wish to advance through the ranks in the State Sangha organization move from local monasteries to monasteries in large cities such as Chiang Mai, Bangkok, etc., which have higher-education institutions. This setup discourages Shan monks and novices from acquiring Shan literary knowledge. As a consequence of the integration of local Sangha, Shan monasteries in Maehongson have been unable to fill the role of educational institutes for Shan literary knowledge. Even now, most boys are temporarily ordained as novices, but they are educated in Thai and learn to recite Pali with Thai pronunciation. Basic knowledge of the Shan scripts is hardly taught in Shan monasteries in Maehongson.

There is not enough space here to describe the situation of the Lanna sect of the Sangha in Maehongson, although it would be the same as that of the Shan sect as discussed above. Elderly lay followers recalled that the sects of the Sangha in Maehongson actually disappeared in the era of the fourth chief monk. The coexistence of the two sects ended, and the unified Sangha organization was effectively established in Maehongson (*ibid.*; Murakami 2009a).

Shan Buddhist Tradition without Institutional Support

With regard to monks and novices, the government's efforts since the early twentieth century seem to have succeeded in creating a unified organization in the State Sangha and standardizing the curriculum for monastic education in Maehongson after World War II. As a result, the Shan Buddhist tradition in Maehongson has lost institutional support. However, it has not been totally assimilated into Thai Buddhism and still maintains its

19) The biography of Phra Ratchawirakon here is based on the publication by the Provincial Office of Culture of Maehongson (Samnak-ngan Watthanatham Cangwat Maehongson 2006, 109–111).

unique style of practices in seasonal festivals, religious rites of passage, the usage of Shan manuscripts, Pali recitations, and monastery architecture. Following are two examples of Shan Buddhist tradition that are still observed in Maehongson today: the manner of Pali recitation using Shan pronunciation and the migration of monks from the Shan State to Maehongson.

Even though Pali recitation with Thai pronunciation has been standardized, Pali recitation with Shan pronunciation can still be heard in Buddhist rituals in Maehongson. When all lay attendees are Shan, monks often recite the phrase “Worship of Three Gems” and “Five Precepts” with Shan pronunciation. These phrases are recited by a lead monk at the beginning of all Buddhist rituals, and lay attendees repeat them after the monk. Usually, most lay attendees are old people who are familiar with the Shan pronunciation of Pali. Monks adjust their manner of Pali recitation to suit the lay attendees’ preference. When monks recite the Pali stanzas as a group, they switch to Thai pronunciation in accordance with the standardization of the State Sangha. Because monks recite Pali phrases with Shan pronunciation only when lay attendees are involved in the recitation, the difference in pronunciation does not affect the group recitation of Pali stanzas by monks.²⁰⁾ Even though the manner of Pali recitation has been standardized among Sangha members, the Shan Buddhist tradition of Pali recitation has been kept alive in the sphere of Buddhist practices among laypeople.²¹⁾

While the relationship between the Sangha of Maehongson and the Shan State was severed after World War II, the flow of monks and novices from the Shan State to Maehongson continued without interruption, like the migration in the secular domain. As is well known, Theravāda Buddhism in mainland Southeast Asia—Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Thailand—inherited the Lankawong tradition of Sinhala Buddhism and shares the same set of Pali scriptures and precepts for monks. Therefore, theoretically and practically, monks and novices who are properly ordained in each country are admitted to be “ordained” in the same Theravāda tradition. However, according to the framework of the Sangha organization in the modern nation-state, they are divided by national borders. Shan monks and novices who are ordained in the Shan State belong to the Sangha of Myanmar, and those who are ordained in Maehongson belong to the Sangha of Thailand. In principle, therefore, monks and novices from the Shan State are not legally

20) When laypeople from Shan and other groups are in attendance, monks recite all parts in Pali with Thai pronunciation and all lay attendees follow the manner of Pali recitation that the monks choose.

21) It is also interesting that most monks of the younger generation who have not learned the Shan scripts and the Shan pronunciation of Pali can recite the Pali phrases of “Worship of Three Gems” and “Five Precepts” with Shan pronunciation for laypeople. The monks surveyed said they learned them from what they heard in their youth—before their ordination.

admitted as members of the State Sangha of Thailand, but most of them assume such roles in Maehongson nevertheless.²²⁾ Although monks and novices from the Shan State are legally defined as “foreign monks,” they are commonly understood to be members of the local Sangha in Maehongson.

Recently, the number of monks and novices in Thailand, especially in rural areas, has been dwindling. The advancement and growing importance of secular education divert young males’ interest away from monastic education. Meanwhile, experienced and ambitious monks and novices are inclined to migrate from rural areas to large cities for higher education.²³⁾ This situation exists in Maehongson as well. While Maehongson is famous for its lavish novice ordination ceremonies—many young boys are ordained—novices rarely stay longer than a few weeks, except the children of immigrants from the Shan State. The depopulation of the ordained leaves room for Shan monks from the Shan State, who are invited to the vacant monasteries of Maehongson and perform duties for laypeople. Some novices from the Shan State have Maehongson-born Shan sponsors who provide material support for their ordination ceremony and monastic life.²⁴⁾ However, if monks and novices from the Shan State wish to be members of the Sangha in Maehongson, they are required to learn Buddhist teachings in the Thai language. At a minimum, they have to learn the recitation of Pali with Thai pronunciation so they can participate in group recitation with other monks during Buddhist rituals.²⁵⁾

The above two examples show that Shan Buddhists continue to maintain certain unique practices even after the formal integration of the local Sangha into the State Sangha. The local borderland context allows the Shan to preserve their own Buddhist traditions in Maehongson. The two key factors in the preservation of the Buddhist tradition are: Buddhist practices in the lay domain and transborder migration. The next section focuses on lay intellectuals and the Buddhist manuscript culture among Shan in Maehongson.²⁶⁾

22) If a monk wants to become an official member of the State Sangha of Thailand, he needs to be “re-ordained” according to the procedure prescribed by the Sangha Acts of Thailand. Some monks came to Maehongson as novices and were ordained in Thailand to become members of the State Sangha.

23) For research on the dynamics of the population of monks and novices in Thailand, see Channarong (2008).

24) The religious “parent-child” relationship between Maehongson-born Shan sponsors and the sons of immigrants from the Shan State has been analyzed (Murakami 1998).

25) After the age of the fourth chief monk, the succeeding chief monks did not officially prohibit the teaching and learning of Shan script and literary knowledge. Even now, there is no prohibition. However, there is an unspoken rule that monks and novices from the Shan State have to adopt the Thai style of recitation of Pali and that Thai should be used in formal monastic education.

26) Stephan C. Berkwitz *et al.* underline the significance of the research on the Buddhist manuscript culture and say that “these manuscripts as material culture and as ritual icons often lay at the center of elaborate socioreligious systems that developed around their production and use” (Berkwitz *et al.* 2009).

IV Lay Intellectuals and Manuscript Culture among Shan in Maehongson

Many researchers refer to the traditions of manuscript-offering and manuscript-recitation among Buddhist Tai peoples—the Tai Yuan in Lanna, Lao in Laos and Northeastern Thailand, and Southern Thai (Dhawatt 1995; Suthiwong 1995; Iijima 2009). The Shan are also earnest donors of and listeners to the recitation of Buddhist manuscripts. The practices of manuscript-offering and manuscript-recitation for merit-making are widespread among Shan in the Shan State and Tai Noe in the Dehong area of Yunnan, China (T'ien 1986; Zhang 1992; Jotika 2009; Jotika and Crosby 2009; Cochran 1910; Crosby and Jotika 2010). Manuscripts are offered and recited in some Buddhist rituals in Maehongson, too. The manuscripts offered to monasteries are reverently called *lik long* (great manuscripts) in Shan.²⁷⁾

Lik long are commentaries on Buddhist texts and instructive stories adapted from Jataka tales. The *lik long* are written in verse, in vernacular Shan²⁸⁾ and Pali in Burmese script. Most *lik long* are in their original form—folded paper manuscripts (*phap sa*)—but some are printed as books today. Recently, ordinary laypeople have begun to substitute manuscripts with printed materials sold at market bookstalls or by book vendors, because of the high cost of transcribing the manuscripts. However, they never omit the offering and recitation of *lik long* in rituals. Pious and wealthy laypersons still offer *lik long* manuscripts to monasteries. In most other Tai Buddhist religious practices, laypeople offer the manuscripts and monks recite them before a lay audience. But in the case of the Shan, the donors, reciters, and audience are all laypeople.²⁹⁾

For generations these manuscripts have been passed down among the Shan by transcription, as folded paper manuscripts decay easily. The transcribers of the manu-

27) *Lik* means “scripts/letters” and all kinds of “the written.” *Long* means “big/great.” Barend J. Terwiel labeled Shan manuscripts written in verse and read to an audience as *lik ho* (Terwiel and Chaichuen 2003). He did not use the term *lik long*. Jotika and Crosby used the term *lik luong* or *lik long* (Jotika and Crosby 2009; Crosby and Jotika 2010).

28) Most *lik long* are written in “old” Shan script. In the mid-twentieth century, the government of the Shan State revised its script. The script used before the revision is still used in writing manuscripts and is called “old script.” The new script is usually used for secular writings (cf. Sai Kam Mong 2005).

29) In central Thailand, there is the genre of performance by lay performers (ex-monks) called *suat kharuehat*. This style of performance was derived from *Phra Malai Klon Suat* beginning in the early Ratanakosin period (Brereton 1995, 129–132). However, *suat kharuehat* performers veered toward entertainment and the genre lost its religious value. Bonnie P. Brereton states that “their repertoire is overwhelmingly devoted to slapstick comedy and the subject of Phra Malai is little more than a vestige” (*ibid.*, 137).

scripts are lay intellectuals called *care* in Shan.³⁰⁾ *Care* is not a profession and is not licensed by any voice of authority; it is the role of a layperson in Buddhist practice.³¹⁾ The transcription is done on the occasion of manuscript-offering to monasteries by pious laypeople, who pay a *care* to transcribe the old *lik long*. Monasteries stock these manuscripts in the stacks of their libraries; some laypeople also keep them in their houses. *Lik long* refers not only to the offering, but also to the act of reading aloud or reciting before an audience during rituals. The reciters of *lik long* are also called *care*. Listening to a *care*'s recitation of *lik long* or a monk's chant or sermon is also a merit-making process for laypeople.³²⁾

In Maehongson, manuscript-recitation is performed in Buddhist rituals along with manuscript-offering (see Tables 2 and 3). Of the Buddhist calendrical rituals, only two—*Poi Cati* (sand pagoda festival) and *Haengsom Koca* (merit-making for the dead)—include the recitation of *lik long*. However, non-calendrical rituals, such as funerals, ordination rites, and *Paritta* recitation rites for houses entail the recitation of *lik long*. During the 12 months of this author's intensive research, October 1995 to September 1996, Buddhist rituals with the recitation of *lik long* were observed 17 times: at funerals 12 times, at an ordination twice, at merit-making for the dead twice, and in a *Paritta* recitation rite for a house once. *Care* who are famous for their fluent tone recite *lik long* almost 60 times a year.³³⁾ In addition to recitation in rituals, there is a tradition among male lay precept-holders (*po sin*) of reciting *lik long* on Uposata days (*wan sin*) during Lent. These recitations are done for personal reasons of the reciters themselves; sometimes reciters do it to study and practice the recitation of *lik long* by pious laypeople. While the practice of recitation on Uposata days is on its way out, recitations and manuscript-offering are never omitted in Buddhist rituals. Therefore, Shan in Maehongson have frequent opportunities to hear the recitation of *lik long*.

30) The word *care* is derived from the Burmese word *saye*, which means "scribe," "clerk," or "secretary." This word may be transliterated as *cale*, *tsale*, *care*, or *zare*. Crosby and Jotika explain that *care* is the honorific term for poet-readers who compose, copy, or read *lik long*; it originally referred to the secretary of a *cao fa* (*sao pha*), a Shan ruler of a *moeng* (Shan principality), because of its meaning ("clerk" or "secretary") (Crosby and Jotika 2010, 2–3).

31) Most *care* cannot make a living from their remuneration. They usually work as farmers, menial workers, and so on. Some of them also use their literary knowledge to practice trades such as making talismans or amulets, tattooing, fortune-telling, herbalism, and affliction rites. Practitioners of these techniques are called *sara*. Some *care* earn their living as *sara* because of the higher remuneration for *sara* activities.

32) The recitation of *lik* is called *ho lik* in Shan. The monk's chant and sermon are called *ho tara*, which means "reciting *Thamma*" or "reciting Scriptures." *Ho* means "to read aloud or recite."

33) This figure is obtained from the author's September 2009 research on Maehongson *care*'s activities. Two famous *care* in Maehongson revealed that they had been invited to recite *lik long* in Buddhist rituals more than 60 times in the past year.

Table 2 Recitation by Monks and *Care* in Buddhist Calendrical Rituals

Lunar Calendar	Name of Ritual (Occasion)	Monk		<i>Care</i>	
		Chanting of Pali Texts	Sermon	Recitation of <i>Lik Long</i>	Offering of <i>Lik Long</i>
5 th month	<i>Sangkyan</i> (new year festival)	○	○	–	–
	<i>Kanto</i> (“to pay homage”)	○	–	–	–
6 th month	<i>Mae Wan</i> (“to restore village”)	○	–	–	–
	<i>Wisaka Bucha</i>	○	○	–	–
7 th month	<i>Poi Cati</i> (sand pagoda festival)	○	○	○	–
8 th month	<i>Khao Wa</i> (beginning of Lent)	○	○	–	–
9 th month	<i>Tang Somto</i> , <i>Poi Caka</i> (rice-ball offering)	○	○	–	–
10 th month	<i>Tang Somto Long</i> (great rice-ball offering)	○	○	–	–
	<i>Haengsom Koca</i> (merit-making for the dead)	○	○	○	○
11 th month	<i>Ok Wa</i> (end of Lent)	○	○	–	–
	<i>Kanto</i> (“to pay homage”)	○	–	–	–
	<i>Poi Loen Sip-et</i> (11 th month festival)	○	○	–	–
12 th month	<i>Poi Sangkhan</i> (robe-offering)	○	○	–	–
1 st month					
2 nd month					
3 rd month	<i>Makha Bucha</i>	○	○	–	–
4 th month					

Table 3 Recitation by Monks and *Care* in Other Buddhist Rituals

Name of Ritual (Occasion)	Monk		<i>Care</i>	
	Chanting of Pali Texts	Sermon	Recitation of <i>Lik Long</i>	Offering of <i>Lik Long</i>
<i>Masa</i> , <i>Lumla Sangkyo</i> (funeral)	○	○	○	○
<i>Poi Sanglong</i> (ordination)	○	○	○	○
<i>Wan Parik</i> (<i>Paritta</i> recitation rites for houses)	○	–	○	○

The Shan have used their script since early times. Their literary knowledge (before the introduction of general education in the Shan States in the early twentieth century) had been inherited by a limited number of literate people. Among the Shan, it is customary for young boys to spend time as *kapi kyong* (“monastery servants”) and then be ordained as novices. Some are also ordained as monks. Because the Shan have used Pali Tripitaka in the Burmese script, since they were under the influence of Burmese Buddhism,³⁴ there are many loanwords from Pali and Burmese in Buddhist writings such

34) It was in the sixteenth century that Shan Buddhism came under Burmese influence (Sai Kam Mong 2005). In the 1950s the Shan State Sangha Organization (*Mukcum long sangkha cueng tai*) produced a new Shan script for Pali, which it recommended for the transliteration of Pali. However, this script is not widely used among laypeople. In most manuscripts and books, Pali is still written in the Burmese script.

as *lik long*. Therefore, Shan monastic students learn how to read and write the Shan script, Pali in the Burmese script, and Burmese loanwords. Their novitiate and monkhood vary in length from a couple of weeks to several years. It is normal for them to spend at least three months in “Buddhist Lent.” Most learn enough basic knowledge of the Shan script to be literate in regular settings, but not enough to deal with *lik long*.

Because of the need to learn multiple languages—Shan, Burmese, and Pali—and acquire expert knowledge of Buddhism, the number of intellectuals who have enough skills to use Buddhist writings such as *lik long* is limited to a few eager and already literate learners. Shan people call these intellectuals *care*. As we have seen above, *care* are the scribes and reciters of *lik long*. In addition to literary capability, a *care* must also have the skill for reciting *lik long*, which are written in verse. When a *care* recites *lik long*, he has to read out the rhyme correctly and fluently in a “beautiful voice” for his audience. It is worth noting that a *care* should be a good reciter as well as a specialist in literary knowledge. The *care*’s literacy is important for oral performances of *lik long*.³⁵⁾

Care and learned monks share a basic literary knowledge because both have invested the time to learn it in monastic orders. Some learned monks also have the skill to transcribe and recite *lik long* and teach their skill to disciples, both the ordained and laypeople. Monks are seldom engaged in the transcription and recitation of *lik long*; *care* (lay intellectuals) take charge of these activities. The usage of *lik long* and the activities of *care* may be described as another avenue for the transmission of Buddhist knowledge among the Shan.

In Shan manuscript culture, *Pali Tripitaka* are kept as articles of value in special monastery cabinets. They are not considered “articles of daily use.” For this reason, *lik long* are more familiar to laypeople than are *Pali Tripitaka*. *Lik long* are offered to monasteries for several Buddhist rituals and are frequently read aloud by *care* for a lay audience. The Buddhist knowledge contained in *lik long* is transmitted and reproduced by written transcription and oral performance. It has been circulated widely in the Shan States and beyond. Shan consider *lik long* and *Pali Tripitaka* to be sources of merit. The practices of manuscript-offering and manuscript-recitation show that *lik long* is an excellent source of merit due to the intelligibility of its content presented as oral performance, not its authenticity as scripture. The Shan believe that the teachings of the Lord Buddha are passed on not only by the Sangha but also through manuscripts transcribed and recited by lay intellectuals. Notwithstanding the enduring importance of the Sangha and *Pali Tripitaka* in Shan Buddhism, the practice of lay intellectuals utilizing manuscripts written

35) For the relationship between orality and literacy in the Shan Buddhist tradition, see Murakami (2009b).

in verse in the Shan script is another line of transmission of Buddhist teachings and literary knowledge among the Shan.

V *Care* in Maehongson: Border Crossing and Persistence of Shan Literary Knowledge

The administration of the State Sangha and standardized monastic education, as we have seen, pervades all the monasteries in Maehongson. The State Sangha prescribes what monks and novices should learn. They have to learn Buddhist teachings in Thai and recite Pali stanzas in the Thai script pronounced according to Thai convention. Few monks or novices have the opportunity to acquire Shan knowledge in monasteries, since the Shan script and Shan literary knowledge are no longer taught in monasteries. Because literacy in the Shan language gives them no advantage in Thailand, younger Thai-born Shan tend to lose interest in the Shan script. The number of Shan-literate among Thai-born Shan is dwindling, so that it is getting hard to find successors to the role of *care*. However, since manuscript-offering and manuscript-recitation are important in the transmission of Buddhist teachings among the Shan, laypeople, especially from the older generations, constantly perform these practices when the occasion arises. They donate earnestly and listen to recitations of Buddhist manuscripts. *Care* are still asked to transcribe and recite *lik long* on these occasions.³⁶ Thus, although the activities of *care* are still in demand in Maehongson, the number of *care* has been decreasing.

In order to examine *care*'s activities and their influence on the transmission of traditional literary knowledge among the Shan, this author carried out a survey on *care* in Maehongson.³⁷ In this research, 60 well-known *care* were selected and their personal data was collected: age, sex, place of birth, nationality or residence status, occupation, experience of secular education, experience of ordination, monastery where they were ordained and resided, teachers from whom they gained Shan literary knowledge, ability

36) As manuscripts have been partially substituted by printed scripts, requests for the transcription of *lik long* are declining. However, devout and wealthy laypersons still offer *lik long* manuscripts. Some abbots also ask *care* for transcription to preserve old *lik long* kept in their monasteries (Jotika and Crosby 2009).

37) Sixty *care* in two districts, Maehongson and Khun Yuam, in the central part of the province, were interviewed with the assistance of Care Saw of Maehongson in August and September 2009. This research was carried out with the cooperation of Professor Kate Crosby and Jotika Khur-Yearn of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, who had already done research on the subject. For their research on *care* and *lik long*, see Jotika and Crosby (2009) and Crosby and Jotika (2010).

to use *lik long* (recitation, transcription, and writing), age at which they first undertook the role of *care*, frequency of manuscript-recitation in the last 12 months. Of the 60 *care*, 54 were male and six female. The average age was 66.5 years, and almost half the *care* (29) were in their 70s and 80s (see Fig. 1). It seems that *care* in Maehongson are confronted with the problem of aging, and the extinction of Shan literary knowledge is a real threat. Nearly half the *care* (28) had been born in the Shan State and moved to Maehongson. The percentage of migrant *care* was high compared with the percentage of migrants in the Shan population of this area. Most *care* from the Shan State had permission for temporary residence in Thailand.³⁸⁾

Not all *care* had sufficient skills to both recite and transcribe *lik long*. All 60 *care* interviewed answered that they could recite *lik long*, but only 17 could transcribe it. This shows that the basic activity of an ordinary *care* is to recite, not transcribe, *lik long*. Most of the *care* had experience in reciting *lik long* in Buddhist rituals.³⁹⁾ Because the recitation of a volume of *lik long* takes too long for common Buddhist rites, it is rare for a *care* or a group of *care* to recite a whole volume at once.⁴⁰⁾ Normally, *care* recite part of a *lik long*; the length depends on the time allotted for it—an hour or two, on average. Several *care* take turns at recitation, about 15 minutes each. This is not a demanding task for an ordinary *care*. On the other hand, the transcription of *lik long* is carried out for whole volumes of a manuscript during a certain period of time upon the request of a client. Because transcription requires concentration and is more time-consuming than recitation, only 17 of the 60 *care* surveyed were proficient in the transcription of *lik long*.⁴¹⁾

If we consider the age at which those surveyed first undertook the role of *care* and

38) There were eight “highlander” cardholders, nine “passport” holders, one “asylum seeker,” one “foreign worker,” and four undocumented. Most of them cited oppression by the Myanmar government as the reason for their migration. Some stated that their itinerant trade or the selling of manuscripts to Maehongson had set off the migration.

39) The exceptions were monks and female *care*. Some monks are regarded as *care* because of their ability to recite *lik long*, but they seldom recite in Buddhist rites in Maehongson. Female *care* also seldom recite *lik long* in Buddhist rites. They recite *lik long* mainly for female precept-holders or for themselves on Uposata days at monastery rest houses.

40) It would take four to eight hours to recite an entire volume of *lik long*. For example, *Cintamani-yatana*, one of the most popular titles in medium-length *lik long* in Maehongson, consists of six chapters plus an introductory chapter. It takes 40–45 minutes to recite one chapter at normal speed, and four to five hours to recite the whole volume. However, funerals of high-status monks are regarded as special occasions, and the whole volume is recited at such times (Crosby and Jotika 2010, 5).

41) While proficient *care* can compose short writings such as verses, there are few *care* in Maehongson who can compose new writings as *lik long*. This could be the case outside Maehongson as well. Historically, great Shan writers who compose famous *lik long* have been few and are highly regarded as *khu mo lik tai* (masters in Shan literature) (Khun Maha 1970; 1998; Murakami 2009b).

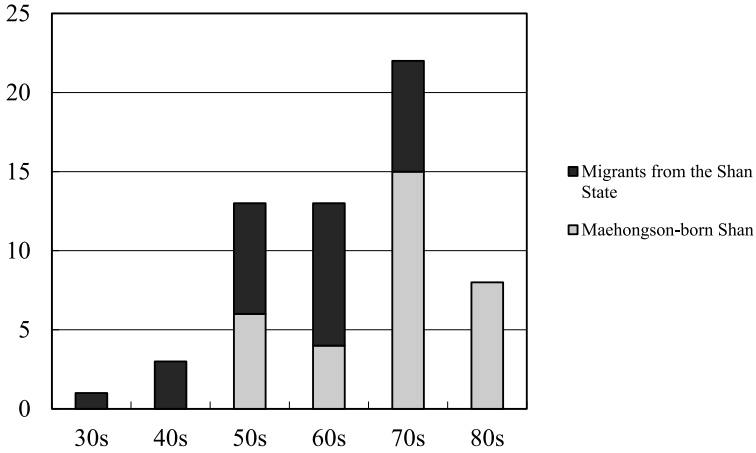


Fig. 1 Age Distribution of *Care* in Maehongson

migrated from the Shan State, a pattern emerges in their acquisition of literary knowledge. While most of the *care* undertook the role in their 40s, some started when they were 20–30 years old, and the youngest was 14 (see Fig. 2). Most of the *care* who started their careers in the 10–30 age bracket were ordained as novices for several years, and some were ordained as monks. They had a talent for recitation from a young age and had been trained by masters—both monks and *care*. When masters and people around them accepted their ability, they could start to undertake the role of *care*. After years of experience, they became seasoned and proficient *care* and served as teachers or masters for others. On the other hand, most of the *care* who took on the role when they were 40–60 had been ordained as novices at a young age but had left monastic student life after a short time. After spending years earning a livelihood for their families, they got interested in religious life and literary knowledge and started to learn how to recite *lik long* from proficient *care*. These people were also the elder precept-holders (*po sin mae sin*) on Uposata days. The levels of skill vary according to ability and dedication. *Care* may be divided into two types based on the age at which they first undertook the role: The first category, small in number, includes proficient *care* who took on the role while they were young (10–30 years old); the second type, the majority, consists of ordinary *care* who took on the role when they were 40–70 years old.

Of the 17 Shan *care* who did both recitation and transcription of *lik long*, 12 were migrants from the Shan State while 5 were born in Maehongson. Of the 12 migrants, 6 belonged to the first category of *care* (started young) and the remaining 6 to the second type (started when 40–70). All five Maehongson-born *care* who engaged in both recitation and transcription were classified into the second category. Considering that *care* learn

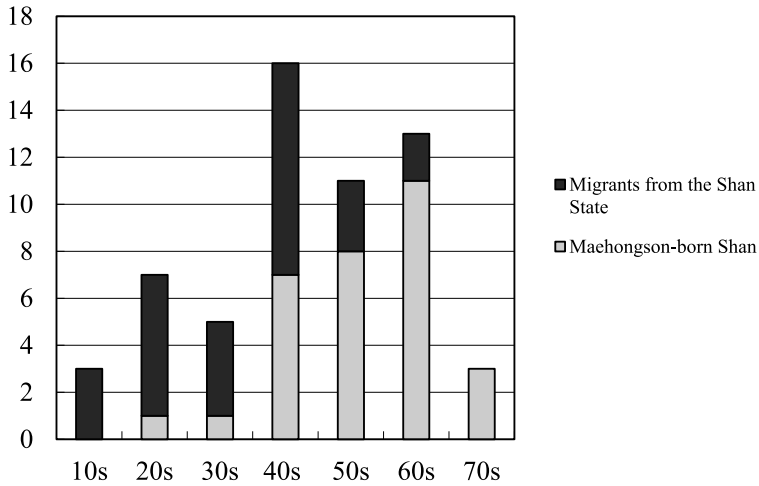


Fig. 2 Age at Which the Role of *Care* Was Undertaken

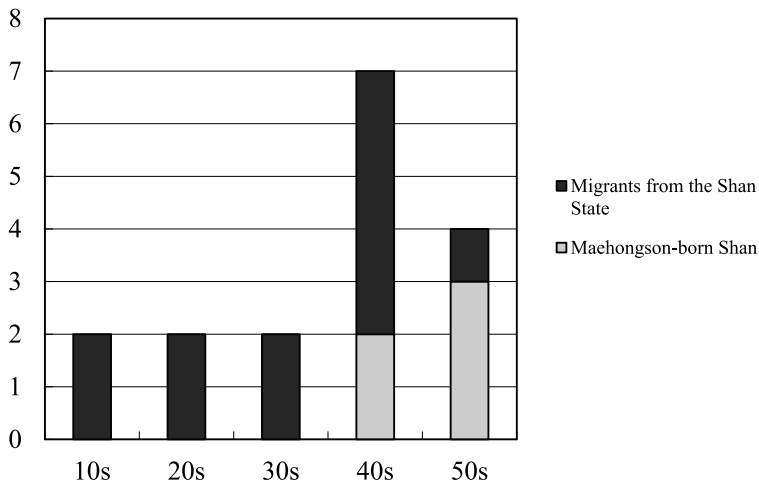


Fig. 3 Age at Which the Role of *Care* Who Do Both Recitation and Transcription Was Undertaken

recitation first and develop their transcription ability later, the second type of *care*'s transcription ability would not be as high as that of the first type. The six who entered the role while young and engaged in both recitation and transcription may be considered proficient *care*; all of them were migrants from the Shan State (see Fig. 3). This shows that migrants from the Shan State play an important role in the dissemination of Shan literary knowledge and Buddhist practices, such as manuscript-offering and manuscript-recitation, in a setting of a growing shortage of *care* among the Maehongson-born. Now-

adays, most of the famous *care* in Maehongson are migrants from the Shan State.⁴²⁾

However, from the opposite perspective, it may be said that more than half the *care* were Maehongson-born Shan (32 of 60; 28 migrated from the Shan State). As we have seen, ordinary *care*—most of whom were born in Maehongson—started to learn the recitation of *lik long* when they were older (40–70 years). Since monks with sufficient skill to recite and transcribe manuscripts are disappearing in Maehongson, it is mainly proficient *care* from the Shan State who take on the role of teacher for Maehongson-born Shan who have an interest in Shan literary knowledge. We can see from the pattern of transmission of Shan literary knowledge that Shan State-born proficient *care*, who are small in number, take on the role of masters or teachers for ordinary *care*, who are the majority of Maehongson-born *care*. Notwithstanding the problem of aging among *care*, a certain number of *care* continue to exist among Maehongson-Shan because *care* from the Shan State offer them training.

This also points to the role of laypeople in the transmission of Shan literary knowledge outside of the monastery. Most of the male *care* (51 of 54) had been temporarily ordained as novices or monks and had acquired a basic level of Shan literary knowledge. For *care* from the Shan State, monasteries in their homeland still acted as the educational institutions for the passing on of Shan literary knowledge. *Care* who were ordained in Maehongson before the time of the fourth chief monk also had a chance to acquire Shan literary knowledge in monastic education. Even after the standardization of monastic education, they could learn privately from senior monks.⁴³⁾ However, when questioned about their training period, most *care* said that they acquired a basic knowledge of the Shan script while they were novices, but not enough for the recitation of *lik long*. They continued with their training and practiced recitation after leaving monastic life. Some *care* had embarked on journeys and learned from several teachers in various places as laypersons. Their training as *care* was not completed in their monastic education. In extreme cases, ordination and monastic education were not necessary to take on the role of *care*.

The six female *care* in the study, none of whom had a chance to get a monastic education, are notable examples.⁴⁴⁾ They acquired literary knowledge and recitation skills

42) Two famous *care* are Care Saw of Maehongson and Care Numtum Maana (aka Care Awn) of Haui Pha village. They had recited *lik long* more than 60 times in the 12 months before the survey.

43) There are some monasteries in rural areas of Maehongson where monks still teach the Shan script and literary knowledge (personal communication with Professor Nicola Tannenbaum, April 2010).

44) The exception was Pa Mule. She spent three months as a *yase* (female ascetic) in a monastery, where she had a chance to learn the recitation of *lik long* with a monk. For her brief biography, see Crosby and Jotika (2010, 8).

from their fathers or husbands, who were proficient *care*. Three male *care* in the study had not been ordained as novices or monks either. A 65-year-old Maehongson-born *care* who had not received a monastic or secular education said that he had learned the basic Shan script from his father and senior relatives at a young age. He started to train as a *care* when he was already pushing 60. The above cases show that a monastic education is not an absolute requirement to become a *care*. Unlike the “general literacy” taught in secular institutions of a modern nation-state, a *care*’s skill and knowledge are “limited knowledge.” Such knowledge is acquired by a limited number of persons dedicated to its religious role and handed down from masters to students.⁴⁵⁾ The masters are both monks and *care*. Regardless of status, be they monks or laypeople, those who have the proficiency to recite *lik long* are regarded as masters. This style of personal teaching does not require the institutions of Sangha and monastic education.

When the local Sangha in Maehongson were incorporated into the State Sangha, Shan literary knowledge was formally excluded from monastic education, as there was no room for Shan literary knowledge in the State Sangha. However, in spite of the lack of institutional support, Buddhist teachings and Shan literary knowledge have been passed on among the Shan outside monasteries and schools. The Buddhist practices of laypeople—manuscript-offering and manuscript-recitation—assume a significant role. Since the manuscripts, *lik long*, are written in vernacular Shan with Pali words, the audience can understand their contents and enjoy the rhyming compositions. *Care* are primarily specialists in the oral recitation of manuscripts. It may be said that the Shan manuscript culture depends upon the lay, vernacular, and oral character of lay activities (Crosby and Jotika 2010, 13). These practices are outside of the scope of the Sangha Act and the Thai government’s religious administration.⁴⁶⁾ This is how *care* who migrate across the border from the Shan State invigorate Buddhist practices in Maehongson.

VI Conclusion

Since the early twentieth century, the Thai government has passed laws to promote the

45) Crosby and Jotika describe the receiving of *Surasati*—the initiation for *care*. When a student raises the level of recitation to perform for an audience, the master gives them a slip of paper on which the letters *su-ra-sa-ti* are written and makes the student swallow it. *Surasati* is the Shan name of Goddess Saraswati (Crosby and Jotika 2010, 9–10).

46) Nowadays, these Buddhist practices by laypeople are defined and lauded as local culture or “local wisdom” (*phumi-panya thongthin*) by urban elites and Thai government officials, who are inclined to emphasize their cultural significance but not their religious aspect.

institutionalization and standardization of Buddhism in Thailand by exercising control over Sangha and the monastic education system. The concept of “Thai Buddhism” is represented by the unified organization of the State Sangha, the use of Pali scriptures written in the Thai script and read in Thai fashion, and the learning of Buddhist teachings from Thai-language texts. This idea of “Buddhism” emerges from the legislation of the Sangha-centric, Pali-centric, and literacy-centric scheme. It covers only Buddhist practices related mainly to the Sangha and the ordained; a huge portion of Buddhism—lay Buddhist practices—remains outside this scheme. The activities of *care* and the transmission of Shan literary knowledge in Maehongson remind us of the significance of lay Buddhist traditions.

As we have seen, local Sangha and lay Buddhist traditions have different extents of incorporation into the state’s standard. While local Sangha have been gradually incorporated into the State Sangha over a century, local lay Buddhists are free to practice their religious traditions without government intervention. However, it is irrelevant to see this situation as a dichotomy: rigid control of the central government over the local Sangha versus free and vigorous activities of local lay Buddhists with the border crossing. The opposing momentums have a symbiotic relationship. The increasing incorporation of local Sangha is causing the depopulation of Maehongson-born Shan monks in rural areas, while the demand for monks crossing the border into Maehongson is growing. Because monastic education has lost its function as an educational institution for Shan literary knowledge, *care*, especially proficient ones, are decreasing in number and aging. However, the imbalance between supply and demand for *care* activities creates an opportunity for immigrants who have Shan literary knowledge from their upbringing in the Shan State: they can take on the role of leading *care* in Maehongson. The incorporation of local practices into national standards by the central authority does not impact the local movement of people across the border and vice versa. Even though they restrict each other, they have a symbiotic relationship.

We can see two forms of Buddhism in Maehongson: One is the Buddhism that is demarcated along national boundaries and is institutionalized and standardized by government legislation; the other is the lay Buddhist practice that is mainly passed on outside the Sangha and is invigorated by transborder migration. It would be a mistake to think that these two forms of Buddhism vie against each other or are in conflict. The former does not try to incorporate the latter as a whole. It does not prohibit the activities of *care* using *lik long* or the Shan manuscript culture. Since the legislators for Thai Buddhism give importance to the Sangha, Pali scriptures, and monastic education in Thai, they unintentionally leave room for lay Buddhist activities.

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