

# Introduction: Upland Peoples in the Making of History in Northern Continental Southeast Asia

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## I Purpose

Scholars are beginning to recognize that upland peoples matter profoundly to the history of continental Southeast Asia. But exactly what role upland peoples played in the making of this region remains a largely neglected issue. Though historians acknowledge the wide spatial distribution of upland ethnic groups, they often try to squeeze them into the frameworks of nation-states. The idea of the nation-state endorses the views of single, or dominant, ethnic groups; and this naturally leads to heavy reliance on interlocking concepts such as borders, state space, non-state space, and transnationality. But the arrival of globalization in upland continental Southeast Asia has spotlighted factors other than space, whether it be state or regional space, as crucial for understanding upland peoples. Global capitalism is undermining the old hierarchies of space, particularly those between areas within nation-states; global economic ties can even enhance the status of constituent parts vis-à-vis the nation-state itself. Such shifts draw attention to the importance of non-space related topics, namely cultural and social fluidity between regions, and political and economic linkages that transcend nation-states. Though globalization promotes homogenization and conformity, thereby seemingly eroding differences between regional space units, it is equally true that some upland peoples have formulated strategies for maintaining their own cultures and societies in the face of increasing outside contact over time. They constantly alter tactics to meet ever-changing circumstances, and an enquiry into such strategies can render a perspective for plotting the position of upland peoples in the past as well as in the present.

This set of research papers seeks to probe the role of upland peoples in the making of history in the lowland polities of upper continental Southeast Asia from the eighteenth

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until the twentieth centuries. Infused by a desire to move beyond scholarship's still dominant paradigms of nation-state and development, which downplay upland history, the papers focus on investigating upland strategies for interaction with lowland polities and societies, and the extent to which upland peoples contributed to the foundation of lowland Tai (Tay)<sup>1</sup> polities. The authors, four anthropologists and one historian, were either members of, or associated with, the five-year joint research project titled "History of the Hill Peoples in the Tay (Tai) Cultural Area," which I coordinated at the Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, between 2006 and 2010. This multidisciplinary project aimed to augment histories of northern continental Southeast Asia by rethinking the roles played by upland peoples, and the papers here build on the debates conducted at project meetings. They explore the realities of upland-lowland relationships on the basis of empirical data gathered either from extensive fieldwork or from deep reading of indigenous, Chinese, and Western historical sources. Two of the papers deal with case studies from the area west of the Salween River, a part of the Tai world on which little research has been done since the days of Edmund Leach.

One central issue addressed is: Was the upland-lowland relationship essentially as antagonistic as James Scott has claimed in his highly controversial book *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (2009)? According to Scott, upland peoples deliberately chose a material lifestyle (residential location, agricultural techniques, rejection of written scripts) and ideology and a flexible social organization in order to fend off the encroachments of lowlanders and to protect themselves from incorporation into the administrative systems of padi states (Scott's term for lowland states). Upland peoples embraced the ideals and aspirations of egalitarianism, freedom, and independence, and it was only by designing and securing a mode of living and a social structure of "escape" that they succeeded in maintaining their autonomous lifestyles. Scott proposes state evasion and state prevention as key concepts for rethinking past and present discourse on state formation in particular and civilization theories in general. Anxious to overcome nation-state based interpretations of history, he argues that intentional statelessness was the reverse side to state formation by classical kingdoms and their successor modern states in Southeast Asia.

The clarity of Scott's prose, the erudition of his writing, his provocativeness, as well as his reputation for standing on the side of marginal social groups have no doubt facili-

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1) In this special issue the Tai (Tay)/Shan languages used in Yunnan and areas west of the Salween River are Romanized according to the Shintani system (see appendix to Daniels's paper in this issue), but in the introduction I mostly use "Tai" rather than "Tay" and "muang" rather than "mäng," as is common in Thai and Lao studies.

tated the circulation of his ideas. But does his central hypothesis of antagonism stand up to scrutiny? Trenchant criticism from reviewers has demonstrated that many of Scott's key concepts, particularly manpower and large refugee flows from the lowlands to the uplands, are not grounded in empirical evidence (Lieberman 2010). Another obvious shortcoming is that while purporting to narrate history, Scott fails to document the chronological changes that took place in the societies of individual or multiple upland ethnic groups; in other words, there is remarkably little "history." His synthesis relies largely on scattered secondary sources and references to studies of maroon societies in America and Africa, the relevance of which is often unclear, and frequently questionable, to upland peoples in Southeast Asia (Daniels 2010).

One vital matter, not fully discussed by previous reviewers, is whether the concept of a comprehensive history of all upland societies in Zomia is viable or not. Scott's justification for it rests on the presumption that upland societies in Zomia share a common upland political and social culture that transcends differences in ethnicity and lowland political power. He identifies antagonism as the common factor in upland history. To be sure, oppression by lowland regimes is embedded in the historical memories of some upland ethnic groups (for instance, see Kataoka's paper in this issue), yet there is no empirical evidence to substantiate its role as a key concept in a universal history of upland peoples. Lowland political power is far more intricate than Scott admits. The sheer size and sophistication of Chinese and Burmese dynasties meant that they could muster greater resources than lowland polities administered by Tai and ethnic groups. In fact, most Tai polities owed fealty to either one of these two supreme outside powers, while simultaneously claiming authority over the upland peoples in their domains. A complex hierarchy of supremacy based on military might and political power molded relations between Tai polities and Chinese/Burmese dynasties, as well as associations between larger and smaller Tai regimes. Therefore, it is difficult to conceptualize all lowland political regimes as uniform entities; the term "lowland" denotes an array of political organizations of vastly different size and nature. By blanket categorization, Scott misses the role of lowland power hierarchies in upland history.

Scott's argument is seriously flawed by a lack of relevant empirical evidence, and his claim to be writing a comprehensive history of upland societies can only be described as dubious. But this is not to say that the writing of the histories of upland peoples is impossible, or senseless. On the contrary, I contend that such histories are meaningful because they offer new interpretations of lowland history. Empirical evidence that some upland peoples actually played roles in the making of lowland history can aid us in formulating histories of continental Southeast Asian polities that encompass both the upland as well as the lowland. The major task that we face in writing such histories is the con-

firmation of the realities of various hill societies. A host of topics awaiting clarification readily comes to mind. What cultural and social institutions did upland peoples deploy in their relationships with lowland polities? What did upland peoples aim to achieve by polity building? What notions of authority and government did upland peoples embrace? Was upland peoples' adoption of outside religions such as Buddhism and Christianity an expedient way of consolidating their own societies in times of immense threat? What was the significance of mobility in their relations with different ethnic groups? Why did upland-lowland conflict arise in the first place? How was it resolved? The range of issues is far too broad for full coverage in this issue, and contributors have been able to address only a fraction of them.

## II Symbiotic Relationships between Upland and Lowland

Though this set of papers aims to critique Scott's notion that upland societies are deliberately formed in opposition to lowland societies, it should be made clear from the outset that the authors do not share his belief in the generic nature of upland societies in continental Southeast Asia and southwest China. I should reiterate that precious little evidence has been furnished to substantiate Scott's claim of a common political and social culture in upland societies; the intense diversity of political and social organization among upland ethnic groups makes the postulation of a universal upland society impractical and renders the writing of a general history of Zomia next to impossible. Nevertheless, given the multitude of upland ethnic groups living in distinct societies, it is possible to clarify the actualities of upland-lowland relationships in particular areas. By investigating individual case histories of circumscribed upland-lowland contexts, the authors attempt to reveal the roles played by upland peoples in specific lowland and upland polities, and provide benchmarks for rethinking the intricacy of the uplands in the Tai world.

Two actualities that emerge strongly from the case studies are (1) the symbiotic nature of upland-lowland relations, and (2) the dynamism inherent in upland societies and cultures. Scott, and indeed many others before him—particularly Leach (1954)—have stressed the opposition inherent in the upland-lowland dichotomy, but the evidence marshaled by contributors illuminates the interdependent nature of the relationship. As confirmed in the papers by Kataoka Tatsuki and Christian Daniels, hostilities, in some cases prolonged struggles, definitely did arise. Conflict festered, and sometimes came to a bloody end, when traditional institutions for mediation collapsed. It is abundantly clear that lord-vassal relationships proved progressively inadequate for managing upland peoples in Tai polities under the new political, social, and economic conditions that

emerged from the eighteenth century (discussed below). Though violence broke out at times of stress and strain, it did not constitute the essential nature of the relationship. Interdependence and collaboration were enduring features, as demonstrated in the papers by Nishitani Masaru and Nathan Badenoch, Nathan Badenoch and Tomita Shinsuke, and Kojima Takahiro and Nathan Badenoch. For instance, in their analysis of the case histories of Lanten leaders, Badenoch and Tomita identify upland peoples as network builders, both on the valley plains as well as in the hills, who contributed to the foundation of the lowland polity in Luang Namtha. Daniels substantiates that upland Ta'aang and Jingpo (Kachin) participated in the administration of a tiny Tay polity in southwest Yunnan as officials and mercenaries respectively. Nishitani and Badenoch reveal how periodic markets located at contact points between upland and lowland societies benefit both parties. It is only by building up an inventory of cultural, historical, and social criteria that we can begin to construct a framework for understanding the individual histories of upland ethnic groups. The papers here intend to contribute to this enterprise.

Though Scott mentions the notion of symbiosis on occasion, he does not invoke it as a key analytical concept. He comments on “a kind of cultural symbiosis in which the hill allies, or some of them, came to more closely to resemble their valley partners” (Scott 2009, 273), but he does not discuss it as a fundamental part of upland-lowland relations. This is curiously odd in view of the fact that a growing body of empirical research has already identified interdependence as an undeniable component. Historians of the Tai (Tay/Shan) and the Thai have drawn attention to the important ritual functions performed by the original inhabitants, Luwa or Wa groups, in Chiangtung and Chiang Mai for centuries after conquest by the Tai (Mangrai 1981, 201–204, 230; Aroonrut 2000, 138–140). Volker Grabowsky has cited indigenous sources, the *Chiang Khaeng Chronicle* and other texts, to demonstrate that diverse upland ethnic groups collectively known as the kha (subject/slave) possessed ritual functions as lords of the territorial guardian spirits and commanded a strong economic position in the polity of Chiang Khaen, in northwestern Laos.<sup>2)</sup> The close relationship between the kha and the Tay has been substantiated for the formation of the Sipsong Panna polity in southern Yunnan (Liew-Herres *et al.* 2012, 15–18). Goran Aijmer (1979) has demonstrated that myth and ritual create and endorse

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2) He cites a wide array of hard evidence. For instance, the cawfaa secured access to valuable upland resources such as forest products, iron, and copper mines by matrimony to an upland leader's daughter during the latter half of the nineteenth century. The cawfaa of Chiang Khaen utilized the manpower of upland peoples; he organized 100 females and 100 males presented by upland peoples as a token of their submission in 1792–93 into tribute- and tax-paying villages. Tay commoners in Müang Sing, the capital of the Chiang Khaen polity since the late nineteenth century, depended heavily on Akha, Yao, Hmong, Lanten, Kui, and Lahu for harvesting their rice (Grabowsky 2003, 113–117; Grabowsky and Renoo 2008, 11–12).

a sort of kin relationship between the Tai and the diverse upland ethnic groups (kha) in Laos. Such cases attest to the pivotal role played by upland groups in the power structure of Tai polities as providers of ritual services as well as economic and manpower resources. Likewise, despite the practice of slave trading, there is little evidence to substantiate Scott's claim that lowland regimes depended on widespread large-scale slave raiding for supplies of manpower.

### III Turbulent Change in the Uplands

Anyone attempting to trace the long-term history of upland ethno-scape cannot ignore the huge demographic, political, social, economic, and ideological changes that swept over the uplands of northern continental Southeast Asia during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These changes disrupted upland life, forced reconfiguration of the ethno-scape, and sometimes even led to serious conflicts with lowland polities. Upland societies have not stood still over time; they have continuously adapted themselves to meet fresh challenges, no matter whether compelled to migrate or choosing to stay put. Clashes inevitably arose as upland societies strove to adjust to new circumstances. Reports by colonial officials and anthropologists have been the principal source of information so far, but since these documents describe the post-eighteenth century period, a time of turbulent change for upland societies, scholars should be wary of accepting them at face value. Inadequate attention to historical context can impair the creditability of arguments founded on them, as seems to have been the case with Scott.

Since the contributors write about upland peoples at specific points in time, to appreciate the particularity of their case studies from the historical perspective it is insightful to elucidate the turbulent change and situate it in a synchronic context. All the case studies deal with the southern Yunnan/Upper Myanmar/northern Laos zone, which falls within what the Japanese linguist Shintani Tadahiko has dubbed the Tai (Tay) Cultural Area (TCA). The TCA extends from western Vietnam in the west to Assam (India) in the east, and includes Yunnan as well as parts of Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand. Viewed from the perspective of a common script, that part of it which lies east of the Salween River equates with Hans Penth's "Culture of the Region of the Dhamma Letters." Most ethnic groups in the TCA came under the political and cultural influence of Tai polities and Theravada Buddhism.<sup>3)</sup>

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3) Shintani first advocated the concept of the TCA (1998). For a collection of articles on the TCA part of northern Laos, see Shintani *et al.* (2009). For a major collection of articles on Buddhism and Islam in northern continental Southeast Asia, see Hayashi (2009).

The eighteenth century undoubtedly constituted a pivotal point in the history of northern continental Southeast Asia. It was marked by the weakening of the political authority of indigenous regimes, a sharp increase in upland population, the advent of new patterns of long-distance trade, and the expansion of commercial crop cultivation. Waves of political, demographic, and economic change flowed through southwest China and spilled over into northern continental Southeast Asia.

The Tai occupied a different political and sociological plane from upland ethnic groups. The Tai dwelt in villages that were subordinate to the rulers of polities (also known as states or statelets), whereas many upland ethnic groups generally did not generate regimes capable of exercising cohesive, long-term political authority (some exceptions are discussed below). The possession of polities determined the way in which the Tai interacted with Chinese and Burmese dynasties. Since Tai polities were organized on the lord-vassal principle, their rulers easily acquiesced to subordinate relations with dominant outside political powers, recognizing themselves as vassals of Burmese and Chinese dynasties. Tai rulers pledged allegiance to the Burman monarchy, submitted tribute to him as proof of their fealty, and sent their sons to stay at the Burmese court as hostages for their good behavior. The Chinese court exacted loyalty by incorporating them into the Chinese bureaucratic system as ranked officials, known as either *tusi* 土司 (military native officials) or *tuguan* 土官 (civilian native officials), which I translate as native officials.<sup>4</sup> Though this brought Tai rulers under the indirect rule of the emperor, Chinese control did not extend to internal affairs and these rulers continued to administer their own subjects as before.

Some historians of the Tai refer to polities run by *tusi* and *tuguan* as tribal domains, and their leaders as chieftains (for instance, Liew-Herres *et al.* 2012, 38). I have chosen to avoid the word “chieftain” and favor the term “native official” in order to avoid unnecessary confusion with leaders of upland ethnic groups, such as the Akha, Jingpo (Kachin), or Yao, who are sometimes known as chieftains in English. In upland societies with an egalitarian bent for decision making by consensus, chieftains were not hereditary rulers but merely representatives elected to negotiate with outsiders (Leach 1954; Daniels 1999). Their authority was limited, and they lacked the ability to coerce individual members of their societies to abide by agreements. The Tai occupied distinct conceptual space and maintained polities that ran on different principles from the political organizations of upland ethnic groups.

Since the late fourteenth century, Chinese dynasties administered the non-Han

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4) The *tusi* 土司, or military native officials, came under the supervision of the Ministry of War (*bingbu* 兵部), while the *tuguan* 土官, or civilian native officials, were supervised by the Ministry of Personnel (*libu* 吏部).

polities on the southwest frontier through the native official system of indirect rule. During the Yongzheng (1723–36) era, the Qing Dynasty stepped up its policy of incorporating non-Han native officials in Guangxi, Guizhou, and Yunnan Provinces into regular administrative units through the policy of *gaitu guiliu* 改土歸流 (literally, “abolish native officials in order to inaugurate direct governance by [imperial officials]”). In Guangxi, this resulted in the elimination of Zhuang native officials of large polities, leaving only small-sized native official polities on the border with Vietnam. During the fifteenth century powerful Naxi native officials at Lijiang 麗江, in Yunnan, used military force to acquire extensive territories in southeast Tibet (in Sichuan), and their successors continued to administrate them until the seventeenth century. Secular rule over these territories by Naxi native officials was realized by their role as sponsors and protectors of the Karma-pa sect, the dominant sect among the Tibetans there. The Ming Dynasty acquiesced to such aggression as a means of preventing incursions from Tibetan forces, but the Qing eradicated this Naxi polity in 1723 (Yamada 2011). Native officials of relatively large polities in Yunnan, such as Sipsong Panna (Chinese ranked title; Cheli Xuanweishi [車里宣慰使 or Cheli Pacification Commissioner]), survived along the long frontier facing Burma, but only under uneasy circumstances. Native officials everywhere suffered loss of prestige and authority as the Qing Dynasty tightened its control over the non-Han populations in the Southwest.

Despite the Qing failure to dismember the Sipsong Panna polity in 1728–29, Kato Kumiko argues that it did succeed in undermining the authority of the paramount leader (the native official) at Ceng Hung by issuing lower-rank native official titles to the hereditary princes (*caw mäng*) who owed him allegiance. This measure elevated the position of Mäng Cë, the largest and most influential constituent domain (*mäng*) on the west bank of the Mekong, and made him a potential rival to the paramount leader. Kato substantiated that Qing officials paid Mäng Cë a 16 silver *tael* (*liang* 兩) annuity for assistance rendered in the suppression of the 1728 “revolt” of Mäng Ham, and showed that they granted the hereditary prince of Mäng Cë the highest-ranking native official title among all the domains on the west bank (Kato 2000, 45–47). Even though Qing bureaucrats were able to exert only nominal control over the Tai populace, administrative changes put the polity under closer imperial surveillance. For the Sipsong Panna polity, the 1720s constituted a turbulent decade during which external threats from the Qing exacerbated existing rifts among the contending hereditary princes of the polity.

What further eroded the political power and authority of native officials was the population explosion of eighteenth-century China, which spawned large-scale Han migration to all provinces in the Southwest. As valley basin populations in parts of Yunnan under Qing administration reached saturation levels, Han migrants began to infiltrate



native official territory on the Yunnan frontier, and many eventually passed over into Upper Burma and northern Laos (Nomoto and Nishikawa 2008, 15–34). As Han migrants settled in the mountains, upland peoples unable to adapt to, or unwilling to accept, the new social and economic environment moved farther south into the hills of Burma, Laos, Vietnam, and Thailand in search of land and game. During the eighteenth century, hordes of Han males flocked to the Munai 募乃, Maolong 茂隆, and Bawdwin (Chinese: Bolong 波龍) silver mines in the territory of native officials (Giersch 2006), as well as to the tin mines at Gejiu 箇舊 (Takeuchi 2003, 4–7). Reportedly over 10,000 miners worked at Munai during the 1730s; 70 percent to 80 percent of the miners on the frontier were Han migrants from Jiangxi 江西 and Huguang 湖廣, while the rest hailed from Yunnan and Guizhou (Giersch 2006, 133–135). Swelling hill populations put pressure on land and food resources. Needless to say, large numbers of single Han males living in transient upland societies could be a recipe for social unrest.

New trading patterns emerged almost concurrently with these political and demographic changes. According to C. Patterson Giersch, the shipment of copper to the China market and the import of continental Southeast Asian cotton from the late eighteenth century incorporated the Yunnan-Southeast Asia trade chain into the regional trade system of China for the first time, despite trade connections since ancient times (Giersch 2011, 52). Giersch explains this phenomenon as circulation, which he defines as something “more than mobility or trade, for circulation implies long-term relations of repeated flows that transform society” (*ibid.*, 39). He shows that the circulation of copper and cotton resulted in indigenes throughout Yunnan and northern continental Southeast Asia (“borderlands” in Giersch terminology) producing “goods for sale in China or Burma” (*ibid.*, 52). He contends that this gave rise to new patterns of circulation after the fall of Du Wenxiu 杜文秀 and his Dali Sultanate, which marked the end of the Panthay Rebellion (1856–73). He concludes that these patterns emerged in response to British and French colonialism, steamship technology, and the Qing internal tax system. The characteristic features of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were the shift in major exports from copper to tin and opium, and the economic decline of western Yunnan. One important commodity for upland peoples not emphasized by Giersch was tea (Nishikawa 2011).

Tea and opium remained the principal cash crops well into the twentieth century. Han migrants promoted the cultivation of tea and opium poppies as well as cotton, thereby expanding the commercial economy into the uplands in response to the demands of long-distance markets (Takeuchi 2010, 117–143). Han traders traveled around the mountains purchasing tea and transported it to Pu'er 普洱 by mule caravan for processing. The tea gardens lay in the mountains east of the Mekong River, within the Sipsong Panna polity.

Han traders procured tea from indigenous growers as collateral on usurious money loans, but heavy burdens led to the outbreak of a major revolt by upland Woni 窩泥 (now classified as Hani) subordinate to Mǎng Ham as early as 1728 (Daniels 2004). Takeuchi Fusaji has documented mid-eighteenth century cases of Han migrants purchasing hill land from Woni villagers to plant tea themselves at Yiwu 易武, a Tai domain on the east bank of the Mekong River subordinate to Sipsong Panna that was responsible for producing tribute tea (*gongcha* 貢茶) for submission to the Qing court (Takeuchi 2010, 122–124).

Han involvement in the growing and processing of tea at Yiwu and Mǎng Haay deepened as tea gardens passed over to Han ownership. Ann Maxwell Hill pointed out that Han tea companies exercised strong control over tea processing by the early twentieth century (Hill 1998, 79–86). Nishikawa Kazutaka, who traced the expansion of Pu'er tea exports to Hong Kong via Saigon between 1889 and 1928, substantiated that exports escalated considerably after 1912 and peaked in 1925; the construction of the Hanoi–Kunming railway by the French in 1910 expedited the shipment of tea, and the establishment of Fudian Bank 富滇銀行 branches, set up by the Yunnan provincial government after 1912 in the treaty ports of Mengzi 蒙自 and Simao 思茅—which opened to foreign trade in 1887 and 1897 respectively—facilitated the financing of its trade. Nishikawa demonstrated that Han migrants from a single place in Yunnan, namely Shiping County 石屏縣, controlled tea production at the main growing centers of Yiwu and Mǎng Haay, and that by the early twentieth century Han had transferred high-quality tea processing skills to some Tai and other ethnic groups in order to satisfy increased market demand. Railways, new financing facilities, and the spread of technical skills linked tea production in the remote polity of Sipsong Panna to the huge markets of urban south China (Nishikawa 2011, 41–48).

Long-distance trade chains that stretched from China in the north to Myanmar and Thailand in the south drew the uplands into closer contact with the outside world. Faced with increasing commercialization from the eighteenth century onward, native officials were sometimes compelled by circumstances to sell their land to Han settlers to obtain money. Since native officials depended on the revenue from this land for local administration and private income, the transfer of indigenous land to the Han had extremely adverse effects on upland society as well as contributing to environmental degradation. Takeuchi revealed how land alienation and forest clearance for exploitative commercial agriculture by Han immigrants deprived some non-Han swidden cultivators in upland northern Yunnan of their livelihoods, and drove them to revolt in 1821 (Takeuchi 1992; Daniels 1994). Sources record 70 or more disturbances and uprisings involving non-Han and Chinese Muslims (Hui 回) between 1796 and 1856 in Yunnan (Atwill 2005, 54–63). The deterioration of the political authority and economic foundations of native officials

exacerbated violence. The ineptitude of Chinese and Burmese dynasties, and Tai polities as well, to serve as what Victor Lieberman has described as supra-local regulatory authorities in the mediation of disputes (Lieberman 2010, 344–345) was a factor behind the high incidence of violence in upland northern continental Southeast Asia, a truth that has been downplayed by Giersch (2006) in his otherwise excellent book.

Northern continental Southeast Asia and southwestern China were interconnected regions that experienced similar demographic and economic influences during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The demarcation of borderlines since the late nineteenth century has not shattered the north-south links. The emergence of a politically strong and economically powerful China since the late 1990s has once again drawn northern continental Southeast Asia into the orbit of the China market. Present-day Chinese investment in natural resources as well as rubber cultivation in northern Laos and northern Myanmar can be seen as a revitalized extension of post-eighteenth century trading patterns, albeit under extremely dissimilar political and economic conditions. Since the tightening of administration by modern nation-states, especially in Yunnan, Laos, and Thailand, upland societies have experienced profound changes. Permanent settlement, transfer to non-opium commercial crops, the prohibition of swidden agriculture, and other factors that have compelled young people to migrate to work in cities have profoundly altered upland life.

## IV Main Themes

Broadly speaking, this set of research papers addresses the subjects of polity building by upland peoples and the patterns of interaction between upland peoples and lowland polities/societies.

### *Polity Building*

Most histories of Thailand, Myanmar, and Laos choose to ignore, or to moderate, the role of minority peoples in the making of their history. Historians seem to be reluctant to assess objectively the parts played by non-mainstream peoples in the formation of modern states. Needless to say, their disinclination is closely related to contemporary politics, and any serious reassessment entails scrutinizing “official state history” accounts of minority peoples.

One refreshing exception is *A Short History of Laos: The Land in Between* by Grant Evans, which devotes a lengthy nine pages to the historical experience of the Hmong (classified as Miao in China) in Lao national history, a remarkably brave and unique

undertaking. Evans elucidates the role played by Vang Pao, the Hmong officer who rose to the top of the Royal Lao Government army, as the commander of an ethnically mixed military force (Evans 2002, 136–144). By accurately relating the participation by upland leaders in twentieth-century Laotian politics, Evans shows how the traditionally taboo topic of upland experience can be synthesized to form a broad, accurate multi-ethnic national history. In his reassessment, Evans argues that the contribution by upland peoples to the Laotian revolutionary movement has been overestimated (*ibid.*, 134–136). The integration of upland into lowland mainstream history clearly involves impartial reevaluation, and Evans’s efforts set an example for historians of Thailand, Laos, and Myanmar.

Though none of the articles tackle the thorny subject of writing national history, they do address the topic of pre-modern polity-building activities. Scott asserts that upland peoples did not aspire to state formation, but a growing body of empirical evidence indicates that the reality of the situation is far less simple and much more intricate than he makes out. The Hani/Akha claim to have maintained a short-lived shamanic chiefdom at a fortified city in Yunnan called Tm-lang (Talang 他郎, present-day Mojiang 墨江), which was reputedly eliminated by lowland Tai (Geusau 2000, 137–142). The Ta’aang definitely embraced polity-building aspirations, for they founded Tawng-Peng—a Tai-style polity in northern Burma—sometime during the late eighteenth century, which relied for revenue on the sale of tea (Kojima and Badenoch’s paper in this issue). Though we know that some upland peoples did set up various forms of polities, scholars have interpreted their behavior in different ways.

Kataoka argues that the Lahu did not negate outright the notion of states, or the idea of founding their own state; it was their desire to maintain political independence from the Qing Dynasty and Tay polities that inspired the formation of a multi-village polity in the mountains of southern Yunnan (Kataoka 2007, 93–96; Kataoka’s paper in this issue). Leo Alting von Geusau construes the failure of the Hani/Akha to unify their clans at Tm-lang as marking “the beginning of a new stage in the centuries old process of marginalisation,” and as providing justification for the non-state based Akha alliance system (Geusau 2000, 139–140). The study by Daniels, which is based on indigenous sources, examines the Ta’aang attempt to usurp political power in Mäng Khön, a tiny Tai polity in Dehong, southwest Yunnan, and concludes that cultural and religious proximity to the Tay enabled the Ta’aang to participate in lowland administration. So the issue, then, is not one of state evasion or even state prevention, but what sort of independent polities, or social organizations, upland peoples aspired to. Their motives are an important aspect awaiting clarification as well. At the same time, it cannot be denied that some upland peoples evinced a readiness to participate in lowland polities, and by doing so

resigned themselves to coping with the demands of administration and taxation.

In the past, historians of the Tai, whether in northern Thailand, Laos, or Yunnan, have emphasized Tai political dominance over the non-Tai (for instance, Stuart-Fox 1998), but the findings of the papers in this issue indicate that this simple scenario is far from clear-cut. This point comes through strongly from Badenoch and Tomita, who have combined oral history with reports by Western observers to elucidate how three upland ethnic groups—the Lanten, Sida, and Bit—pioneered the settling of the Luang Namtha basin and were subordinated to Tai political control only later. Their evidence reveals an overall theme of upland peoples directly participating in nurturing and shaping the political and economic development of the Luang Namtha basin. Therefore, they reject the notion of a core Tai culture in the foundation of *muang*, and instead emphasize the diversity of ethnicities, “worldviews and belief systems” involved in *muang* creation. These conclusions, however, leave many issues unresolved. For instance, after the death of charismatic leaders (Dang Yon Hak in the case of the Lanten), why were upland ethnic groups unable to manage multi-ethnic paddy rice-based lowland polities by themselves? They clearly failed in the case of Luang Namtha and Mäng Khön. Clans and lineages swiftly united to form temporary confederations under charismatic upland leaders, but easily splintered on their demise. Are upland social structures inherently incapable of supporting even small multi-ethnic basin polities? These are just a few of the questions left unanswered in this special issue, but it is hoped that they may serve as starting points for further research.

Upland polity building counteracted the power of dynastic states and lowland Tay polities. Kataoka argues that turbulent changes in the uplands after the eighteenth century gave rise to a new ideology for the articulation of ethnic consciousness among the Lahu, namely the ideology of a stateless people; the notion of statelessness arose in response to their incorporation into the Chinese state. He cites contact with Han migrants, and the tightening of administrative control by the Qing as it attempted to demarcate its borders with British and French colonial powers, as factors that stimulated a surge in Lahu aspirations for a state of their own. Viewed from this perspective, Kataoka concludes that the notion of statelessness as manifested in messianic movements constituted an ideology of convenience rather than an expression of true Lahu ambitions.

The papers by Kataoka, Daniels, and Badenoch and Tomita represent an effort to grapple with the multifaceted hill experience of polity building that is reflected in the complexity of actual Tai-non Tai relations, and compel us to engage in new ways of looking at their intricacy.

*Periodic Markets*

Periodic markets have functioned as one of the most common interfaces between upland and lowland peoples in the past as well as present. They boast a long history, for Chinese officials verified their existence among the Tai west of the Salween River as early as 1303–4. The *Yunnan Zhilue* 雲南志略 (An Account of Yunnan) by Li Jing 李京 reported: “Trade gatherings are held every five days; women hold markets in the morning and men hold markets during the day” (Fang 1998, Vol. 3, 129). Some markets facilitated the exchange of upland and lowland produce, while others specialized in the sale of upland commodities for long-distance trade. Despite this early record and the fact that money circulated here from early times, surprisingly little analysis has been done of these markets.

On the basis of extensive fieldwork in Jinping County, Yunnan, Nishitani and Badenoch substantiate that periodic markets are located at points where the conveyance of local produce down mountains intersects with places convenient for the horizontal transportation of manufactured goods along valley floors. They identify the market’s primary role as providing villagers from surrounding areas with a venue to sell their produce in order to obtain cash to purchase basic daily necessities, and confirm that there were uplander-uplander as well as uplander-lowlander exchanges. They emphasize links between the upland sphere of socio-economic interactions and the lowland spheres. They also point out that the foundation of periodic markets presupposes the existence of a market network and the participation of traveling traders, and in some cases specialist brokers with connections to outside markets. This in itself is not a surprising finding, but the authors’ conclusion that periodic markets while serving as sites for economic transactions also contribute to the creation of a sense of identity and reinforce awareness of ethnic uniqueness is certainly novel. The originality lies in its potent implication that trade, and by extension contact with the outside world, does not erode the differences between lowland and upland ethnicity, or even intra-upland ethnicity for that matter. Rather than becoming a great leveler, or unifier of ethnic groups, trade at periodic markets creates diversity, and as such it underpins the gap between lowland and upland and even reinforces differences between individual upland ethnic groups. Nishitani and Badenoch conclude that such marketplaces, which are “based on decentralized interactions between diverse actors,” may “suggest the existence of local strategies for negotiating increasingly complex currents of regulation and liberalization.”

*Theravāda Buddhism*

Theravāda Buddhism served as an interface, especially among Mon-Khmer speakers such as the Lua, Wa, Ta’aang, and Bulang. These upland communities adopted Buddhism from

the Tai, but we have little data about the chronology of its introduction. The best-known literary evidence appears in *The Padaeng Chronicle*, which describes the area east of the Salween River; this source records upland peoples coming down to Kengtung to study Buddhism during the mid-fifteenth century (Mangrai 1981, 122). There can be no doubt that upland peoples have a long association with lowland Buddhism.

The paper by Kojima and Badenoch analyzes the role of Buddhism in the networks of interaction between upland Ta'aang and lowland Tai (Shan) west of the Salween River. In this area the Tai practice Burmese-style Buddhism, though the now largely defunct Yon (Thai/Lao: Yuan) sect from Lanna was popular in the past. Kojima and Badenoch document how Ta'aang monks from upland villages in northern Myanmar serve as monks in Tai village temples in the Mäng Maaw (Ruili) basin, Dehong, in Chinese territory, which suffer from a chronic shortage of ordained clergy. This sort of exchange is facilitated by the cultural proximity of the Ta'aang and the Tai; the monks of both ethnic groups share a language and script, and Badenoch and Kojima note that belonging to the same sect expedites interaction as well.

Traditionally low levels of ordination have led to a heavy reliance on lay ritual specialists in the exchange of offerings and merit in Dehong. Kojima and Badenoch identify such lay ritual specialists as an important mechanism for interaction between Ta'aang and Tai people due to their high mobility. They demonstrate that by providing services to lowland Buddhist communities in the Mäng Maaw basin, upland Ta'aang practitioners have fashioned networks that “bridge the rural-urban divide and cross international boundaries.” Here the Tai do not dominate the upland-lowland relationship. Kojima and Badenoch argue that the motivation for Ta'aang embracement of Tai culture derives from a symbiotic relationship, one in which the Ta'aang actually “contribute to the continuity of Tai Buddhism,” and is not an “inevitable outcome of unequal power relations.” While not denying the existence of differences in social position, they stress mutual benefit as a driving force in the upland-lowland relationship.

### *Multilingual Oral and Written Skills*

Scott claims that upland peoples deliberately choose not to adopt literacy as a strategy to facilitate their interactions with lowland text-based states. He reasons that the oral tradition suited the needs of mobile upland societies much better than the written one, and that possessing writing constituted a disadvantage (Scott 2009, 226–237). This assertion has little foundation in fact. For a start, the Yao/Mien have been long renowned for their extensive use of Chinese texts in secular and religious rituals, and some have even maintained Chinese literary skills until recent years. Badenoch and Tomita contest Scott's notion of literacy as a liability for upland peoples on the basis of evidence from

Luang Namtha. They demonstrate how the Lanten and the Mun clearly utilized their proficiency in oral and written Chinese to great advantage in negotiating with lowland regimes, and argue that multilingualism can enhance the position of upland peoples in their interactions with lowland states.

Language and script functioned as an interface in the practicalities of upland-lowland associations. Upland peoples often knew an assortment of languages and scripts. Lanten, Sida, and Bit used Chinese (Yunnanese) amongst themselves and Lue with lowlanders as lingua franca respectively in Luang Namtha. Daniels points out that it was their proficiency in the Tai language and script that enabled the Ta'aang to serve as officials in the Mǎng Khǒn polity. There can be little doubt that language and script have enormous instrumental value as "social capital" for upland peoples when dealing with lowland polities as suggested by Badenoch and Tomita.

What role did individual upland peoples perform in the making of history in northern continental Southeast Asia? They may not have been star actors in the theater of national histories, but they did play cameo roles during some periods. As many of these papers attest, their involvement in the foundation and functioning of lowland Tai regimes was much deeper than scholars have previously thought. Though they did not construct large polities that evolved into modern states after the demise of colonialism, some of them did contribute to the foundation and administration of pre-modern Tay polities. Upland peoples maintained networks that stretched far beyond the confines of their own villages, and strategically engaged with other ethnic groups in the uplands as well as in the lowlands. Past scholarship has identified forest product trade and labor supply as contributions to lowland economies, but Kojima and Badenoch demonstrate that upland assistance extended to the realm of Buddhism and ritual practice as well. Though historical reality may reveal similar trends in upland strategies, it does not indicate blanket uniformity but rather compels us to consider the singularity and multiplicity of forms that their strategies might take.

### *Yunnanese Migrants and Their Regimes*

Historical evidence demonstrates that while engagements with state authority led some upland groups to participate in lowland state administration, at the same time they stimulated others to aspire for autonomy by constructing their own polities or regimes. Registers of these political organizations have yet to be drawn up, but they may number more than we imagine. Charismatic leaders generated short-lived organizations, while some Ta'aang, Lahu, and Han (Yunnanese or Haw) leaders set up longer-lasting regimes distinct from those of the Tai. Though not fully treated in this set of papers, I should like to briefly discuss upland Yunnanese regimes because they have been one of the actors



in the theater of history since the nineteenth century. The major group of Han Chinese in upper continental Southeast Asia came from Yunnan. The Yunnanese, generally known as Haw, included non-Muslim Chinese (Han) and Muslim Chinese. In the past, scholars have emphasized their role as merchants, especially as controlling trade networks, securing access to markets, procuring important products (Hill 1998; Forbes and Henley 1997), and being the bearers of technological change (Daniels 1996, 411–446; 2000; Nishikawa 2011); but here I propose the notion of them as creators of their own political organizations.

Upland regimes controlled by single-surname Yunnanese groups, for instance the Yang 楊姓 family of Kokang (Maliba 麻栗壩) and the Zhang 張姓 family of Löy Mō (Chinese: Laimo 萊萊山) located in the mountains on the west bank of the Salween, emerged during the eighteenth century, if not earlier (Shi 2010, 189). In recent times, they turned out such figures as Jimmy and Olive Yang (of Kokang) and the drug lord and Shan (Tai) separatist military leader Khunsa (Zhang family member, Chinese name Zhang Qifu 張啓富), to mention just a few. The Chinese Muslim (Panthay) settlement at Panglong (Chinese: Bannong 班弄/Banglong 邦籠) in the Wa states, founded in 1875, two years after the fall of Du Wenxiu's Dali Sultanate, expanded control over the surrounding Wa people after the arrival of the British during the 1890s and "established themselves as the direct military and commercial overlords" of a large tract of land lying between British-ruled Burma and Yunnan after the Wa-Panthay War of 1926–27; they engaged in long-distance caravan trade with Indochina, southern Burma, and China until the Japanese invasion. It was the wealth of the Panglong Chinese Muslims, mostly derived from the opium trade, that enabled them to equip themselves with modern arms and to exercise authority in the Wa states (Forbes and Henley 1997, 132). These upland regimes emerged as organizations independent of Chinese state power, and in the case of the Chinese Muslims their move to Panglong was motivated by the need to escape from oppression by the Qing in the first place.

People from tiny upland Yunnanese regimes have played substantial, if sometimes notorious, roles in the post-1950 history of minority peoples in northern Burma by deploying trading and militia networks to serve their own political and economic interests. They have been deeply involved in the drug trade and ethnic insurgency movements in parts of upper continental Southeast Asia, where the authority of remote central governments has remained weak, but their influence has been disproportionately large in comparison to the size of their organizations.<sup>5)</sup>

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5) The most comprehensive and detailed account of the main Han people involved in the drug trade and ethnic insurgency movements in the region during the second half of the twentieth century can be found in Lintner (1999).

Little in-depth research has been done on upland Yunnanese regimes, and indeed the term “regime” is used only tentatively. Nevertheless, available evidence allows us to attempt some basic conceptualization. First, these regimes were headed by influential Yunnanese families or individuals whose dominance derived from economic activities such as trade; they were not founded on a lord-vassal relationship as in Tai societies. Second, Yunnanese leaders forged close relations with outside political powers, which bolstered their authority and enabled them to maintain some measure of semi-independence. Their villages and regimes had military organizations and possessed the ability to field fighting men. Daniels’s paper presents the case of an upland Yunnanese (Han) village providing mercenaries for lowland Tai for 40 years.

Recognition by outside political powers and trade constituted common features of upland Yunnanese regimes. The Yunnanese of Kokang maintained a measure of autonomy by cooperating with the Tai polity of Sēn<sup>5</sup> wii<sup>1</sup>, (Burmese Theinni; Chinese Mubang 木邦) in the precolonial era, the British during the colonial period, and the Burmese government after 1947. Legitimization from outside stands prominent in the case of the Yunnanese family surnamed Fu 傅, who administered the hill-dwelling Haw, Phunoy, Akha, Yao, and Miao ethnic groups in Phongsaly, Laos, from the nineteenth century until the 1950s. The authority of this family derived from official appointments made by Lao royalty; successive monarchs issued family heads with Phanyā titles. The titles of the last three appointees were Phanyā Somphū (Fu Zhaoqing 傅兆清 [d. 1933]), Phanyā Sai (Fu Yuanlin 傅元林), and Phanyā Chāfū (Fu Yuanzhang 傅元璋 [1911–88]). The economic foundation of the Fu family regime essentially rested on trade with the upland peoples under their administration as well as adjacent Yunnan (Daniels 2009, 75–82, 90–106). Yunnanese regimes seem to have striven to create environments that facilitated their commercial and technological activities, probably out of the realization that without power they would not be able to protect and advance their economic interests. In this sense, their regimes aspired to ideals different from those of the Lahu, as described in Kataoka’s paper.

Lowland and upland societies in northern continental Southeast Asia have assimilated large numbers of Han immigrants since the sixteenth century, if not earlier. A Chinese source of 1584 stated:

There are several 10,000 people from Fujian, Guangdong, Jiangxi, and Sichuan who engage in trade and crafts at the Great Ming Market (*Da Ming Jie* 大明街) outside the city of Katha. A further 10,000 have been captured by the Three and Six Pacification Commissioners (*sanxuan liuwei* 三宣六慰). (Anonymous, *juan* 14, 60a)

Surprisingly large numbers of Han resided at the Great Ming Market located outside

Katha, a major trading point on the Ayeyarwaddy River, while equally enormous numbers of Han artisans and craftsmen were in the service of the rulers of Tai polities in continental Southeast Asia (*sanxuan liuwei* 三宣六慰).<sup>6)</sup> Tai rulers incorporated captive Han with skills beneficial to them into the labor service systems of their polities. Tai rulers procured the bearers of Chinese skills and technology by military force and coercion and settled them within their polities. Han artisans supplied Tai aristocrats with vital skills and technologies necessary for the formation and maintenance of their polities (Daniels 2000, 82–88). Most of these early migrants did not form long-lasting Han communities but were absorbed into lowland Tai society, their descendants retaining few traces of their ethnic heritage.

Prior to the eighteenth century the Han population of Yunnan was relatively small, so there were few incentives for the Yunnanese to migrate *en masse*. Indeed, empirical evidence for the existence of upland Yunnanese regimes emanates mainly from the post-eighteenth century period. Such regimes emerged with the sudden burgeoning in numbers of Yunnanese and other Han settling in the uplands, which in turn resulted from contemporary population explosion in China. Yunnanese societies in the uplands provided an alternative to absorption into lowland society, which seems to have been the norm during earlier periods. Trade was evidently a mainstay of these regimes and even semi-independent villages in the upland tracts of Tai polities, yet many Yunnanese cultivated hill land, sometimes practicing swidden agriculture. Nevertheless, Yunnanese societies seem to have been too fluid and unstable to permit the formation of polities and remained small in comparison with Tai polities.

The recent rise in the political and economic power of the People's Republic of China reminds us of the importance of the Chinese state for Yunnanese and other Han communities in contiguous continental Southeast Asia. Since the 1990s, the ever-growing influence of China has invigorated many Han in the uplands there to utilize their cultural affiliation as well as their linguistic and literary skills to advance their own economic interests; proficiency in Mandarin brings opportunities to work in Taiwan or to engage in business with China. A Han Chinese heritage has now become a distinct advantage to upland Han people in northern Burma, Thailand, and Laos. This hints that Han absorption into lowland society may be connected to the association of the Chinese state with

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6) The term *sanxuan liuwei* 三宣六慰 refers to the three *xuanfusi* 宣撫司 of Nandian 南甸 (Mäng<sup>2</sup> Ti<sup>2</sup>), Gan'ai 干崖 (Mäng<sup>2</sup> Naa<sup>2</sup>), and Longchuan 隴川 (Mäng<sup>2</sup> Wan<sup>2</sup>) and the six *xuanweisi* 宣慰司 of Mengyang 孟養, Mubang 木邦 (Sën<sup>5</sup> wii<sup>1</sup>), Miandian 緬甸 (Tounggoo Dynasty Burma), Cheli 車里 (Sipsong Panna), Babai 八百 (Lan Na), and Laowo 老撾 (Lan Sang). The titles *xuanfusi* and *xuanweisi* are usually both rendered into English as Pacification Commissions, and in this instance they refer to the polities in the Tay Cultural Area.

northern continental Southeast Asia at different times over history. In the past, Han immigrants found it expedient to integrate with lowland Tai and Burmese societies when Chinese dynastic power weakened and imperial interest in northern continental Southeast Asia waned. But full integration was not necessary, and it proved easier for them to maintain their own semi-independent regimes when the Chinese state deepened its involvement in the area.

Many aspects of upland polity-building endeavors remain unexplained. Since Leach, scholars have occasionally invoked the notion of Tai/Shan polities as models for polity-building activities by upland groups such as the Kachin, Palaung, and Karen, and Lieberman has classified their political organizations as “proto-statelets” (Lieberman 2003, 208–209). Nonetheless, as Kataoka points out in his paper, our lack of a framework for understanding upland concepts of state, kingship, and power severely constricts the potency of our analytical powers. It remains unclear exactly what type of autonomous societies upland peoples aspired to create, so it is still too early to conclude whether they were simply imitating Tai models or striving to establish something different.

It is with topics of this sort that the following papers attempt to grapple. They provide some firm and generalized conclusions grounded in empirical evidence and herald, I hope, the beginning of a new age of consensus around the importance of the upland peoples in the making of history in northern continental Southeast Asia.

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