

Indigenous Historiography and Pre-Modern Imagined Community:

A preliminary study of *Kwam To Muong* and Tai Dam spatial consciousness of pre-modern polity¹

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Tai Dam had long established tradition of historiography recorded in Tai Dam script. While Tai Dam historical records have been researched a great extent by Vietnamese-Tai Dam scholars, surprisingly, they are limited known to scholars outside Vietnam. The present paper attempts to point out the significance of Tai Dam historical documents. As Tai Dam historiography is not influenced by Thai-Tai Buddhism-related historiography,² it should then be treated in a distinctive vein. Tai Dam historical records reveal the relationships between Tai principalities, their neighboring ethnic groups and polities. A distinguished characteristic of Tai Dam historical records is their literacy traditions. Unlike modern standard literacy, the Tai Dam practiced textual genres of historical records interactively with oral traditions and ritual performances. As a result, in addition to inquiring historical events, I propose that Tai Dam historical records were a crucial means for the pre-modern Tai Dam to identify its political space. The historiographic textual contents and practices demonstrate a pre-modern means for identifying proto-imagined community, namely, a relatively large area of political space represented in recorded documents disseminated amongst the population. In order to concretely discuss these issues, *ກວມຕົມງ* (Kwam To Muong, referred as KTM hereafter) shall be the primary source for discussion.

The present paper is drawn from a reading of three versions of KTM, namely (1) Muong La version translated and published in Dang Nghiem Van (1977:19-198), (2) a version in Tai Dam script from Muong Muoi, Son La province, Vietnam, and (3) a version in Lao Song script from Lao Song, Phetchaburi province, Thailand. The first version allegedly descends from an official version of the previous Muong La principality. The original KTM of Muong La recorded in Tai Dam alphabet is, however, not yet available to this study. The other two versions are unpublished documents privately collected by a Vietnamese scholar. The Lao Song version is herein used in a limited scope. Believably, the version from Muong Muoi is an unofficial version disseminated amongst the Tai Dam commoners. Importantly, this unofficial version records the date it was re-copied, which are 1965 and 1967. In addition, I shall draw information collected from other Tai Dam texts and my field research during March 2002-March 2005.

***Kwam To Muong* as Tai Dam historiography**

The title "Kwam To Muong" comprises of three words, *kwam*, *to* and *muong*. *Kwam* has many meanings in Tai Dam. It may be translated as "language, story, text, ethics." In this context, *kwam* means "text and story." *To* is a verb meaning "telling story, discussing relevant issues." And *muong* is a unit of Tai Dam political organization; it usually refers to a principality normally as large as a district in contemporary

¹ This draft is prepared only for discussion in the conference. Please do not cite without permission by the author.

² Tai-Thai historiography extensively reviewed by David Wyatt (1976).

Vietnamese nation-state. Thereby, KTM may be literally translated as "the book telling stories of a principality" or simply "stories of a principality".³

Even though there were only 9 Tai Dam principalities in pre-modern northwestern Vietnam, more than 9 versions of Tai Dam KTM were found. This is due to the fact that there are both "official versions" and "unofficial versions". The official version is in principle supposed to be compiled by *hmo muong*, a principality's ritual practitioner chair; whereas, the unofficial version is re-copied from the official one. In this extent, in comparison to other types of Tai Dam historical texts, KTM is probably the most popular historical genre disseminated in pre-modern Tai Dam community.

Despite of its extremely significance, KTM is rarely researched and re-examined. Early in 1960, Cam Trong and Cam Quynh publishes the first translation of KTM into Vietnamese (Cam Trong va Cam Quynh 1960). Later in 1977, Cam Trong translates and compares 30 versions of KTM collected in the volume edited by Dang Nghiem Van (1977). Consequently, it is not exaggerated to note that Cam Trong himself is the only scholar who extensively researches and appropriates KTM, especially in his notable volume on Tai Dam history and culture entitled *Người Thái ở Tây Bắc Việt Nam* [the Thai in northwestern Vietnam] (1978).⁴ Regretfully, neither the translated publications nor the study of Tai Dam history provide the original Tai Dam script. James Chamberlain (1992) provides a linguistic transliteration and translation of KTM into English. However, in this short article, he merely presents the mythic section, containing lesser than 5% of the entire text. Sumitr Phitiphat (2545) recently publishes a version of KTM, but again merely a short part of the text transliterated into Siamese Thai are published. Two more versions of KTM are presented to the public in Tai Dam script by the Tai Studies Center (1986) and the Center for Southeast Asian, Northern Illinois University (<http://www.seasite.niu.edu/tai/TaiDam/>). These are the only two versions I have researched so far that present the text in Tai Dam script; nonetheless, neither of which provides any translation, transliteration, and scholarly investigation.

Tai Dam tradition of historiography is prosperous, and KTM is thus merely a single type within the diverse genres of Tai Dam historiography. However, with regard to its distinctive characteristics, KTM may facilitate the best for historical researches on the pre-modern Tai Dam. Tai Dam scholars divide their historiography into different genres as follow: *Kwam To Muong*, *Kwam Tay Pu Seok* (stories exploring the march of great ancestors), *Kwam Faeng Muong* (chronology and genealogy of the great chiefs), the short record of historical events, and the brief genealogy of the chiefs attached to the principality's customary law (Cam Trong 1978:402-475; Cam Cuong 1993). Despite every genre documents chronology, genealogy, and events periodically, each one appears to attribute distinct characteristic.

For instance, in terms of literary form, KTM is composed in prose with *khong khai* (rhymed proverbs) occasionally put in, whereas *Kwam Faeng Muong* and *Kwam Tay Pu Seok* are poems consisting of around 2000 sentences. Of the five genres, the short record and the brief genealogy written in prose are simply short documents. These different types of documents appear to be composed in different convention of written

³ As a Siamese scholar, I have been attempting to convert Tai Dam word ລົມ into Siamese Thai and yet encountered difficulties in doing so. Temporary, I suggest that ໂສສ້າ can be used for referring to ລົມ in Tai Dam. Its pronunciation is similar to the Tai Dam pronunciation, and the Siamese word could mean "to discuss" (Yukti 2548).

⁴ The Vietnamese government recently awards this volume the National Prize in 200?. The book is recently available in French.

language. For example, even though it was composed in Tai Dam alphabet, Kwam Faeng Muong appears to contain plenty of Vietnamese vocabularies transliterated into Tai Dam. However, Vietnamese appears in Kwam Tay Pu Seok and Kwam To Muong in a far lesser extent. In this extent, Kwam Faeng Muong may be compiled during the period when the Tai Dam established closer relationships with the Vietnamese, whereas the other two genres were composed in the earlier period. However, as one read through the text, one would learn that Vietnamese vocabularies gradually appear in the later pages of KTM. Most distinguished of all, whereas Kwam Tay Pu Seok and Kwam Faeng Muong have fewer versions, many versions of KTM were composed by many principalities to represent the principalities' historical point of view.⁵

Dating Kwam To Muong

Prior to investigating contents of KTM, a critical issue to be inquired is the date on which KTM was compiled. Given the fact that most of the versions of KTM never records the date, then, how old is KTM? Is there evidence to prove that KTM was written in the same period as the events recorded in the text occurred? Is it more accurate to conclude that KTM was compiled lately in the 19th or even the 20th century simply for legitimizing the chiefs' throne during the French colonial period?

Cam Trong argues that, despite one may invent or re-write stories of the past in the way one desires, one can never capable to remember the genealogy of his/her ancestors descending for longer than 30 generations in the similar way as KTM does. Normally, he remarks, one would be able to remember their ancestor names for no more than 5-6 generations. He concludes, the only possible way to do it is, then, to keep and pass down the ancestor names with script.⁶ Moreover, Cam Trong finds, a Vietnamese source acknowledges that the Tai had had script since the 11th century (Cam Trong 1978---). Accordingly, to him, KTM was perhaps even been firstly recorded in the 11th century.

However, this conclusion is arguable. Studies on history of Tai-Thai scripts have long agreed that Tai Dam script is a derivative version of Sukhothai script (the 13th-15th century) and partly Lanna-Fakkham script (the 16th-20th century); and it most probably arrived to the Tai Dam around the 16th century (Finot 1917, Coedes 2507, Ferlus 1988, Penth 1986, Hartmann 1985). Consequently, apart from the Vietnamese source cited by Cam Trong, there remains lack of evidence to support that during the 11th-13th century the Tai Dam had used other kind of writing system. However, despite Cam Trong's dating of KTM prompts additional researches, it suggests that KTM descends from no later than the 19th century. The following discussion may be a starting point towards the inquiry of KTM's dating, as the date of KTM has not been extensively examined.

The Lao Song version collected from Phetchaburi implies that KTM is most probably older than 150 years to 200 years, due to the fact that the war captives taken from the Tai principalities in northwestern Vietnam to Siam began in the late 18th century and continued to the late 19th century. It is significant that wordings, contents,

⁵ In addition to Kwam To Muong, Kwam Tay Pu Seok, and Kwam Faeng Muong, which are obviously aimed to document historical event, there are other texts recording historical events. For instance, *xiu* (san song), a chant written in prose form preserved for funeral rite. *San song* documents the place names listed as the route leading the dead spirit eastward to original Tai Dam town, Muong Lo, before continuing to the sky. It is interesting to find that the place names presented in *san song* are parallel to the path that Lang Chuong took his troop marching westward. A detailed presentation of this result of inter-textual corresponding is regrettably beyond this present paper.

⁶ Drawn from my conversation with Professor Cam Trong in May 2005.

and literary style recorded in KTM of Lao Song version is similar to KTM found in Vietnam, despite the forms of Lao Song alphabet slightly differ. Thereby, if one is familiar with KTM from Vietnam, one would be able to read KTM from Phetchaburi with only a few difficulties. In this extent, it is most probably that the Lao Song version is derived from the former version disseminated in northwestern Vietnam before the Tai Dam moved to Siam.

Evidence reveals from an opening section of KTM. It depicts the era when the earth returned to become solid. Vietnam version of KTM writes:

ନିର୍ମଳନିର୍ମଳ୍ୟ ନିର୍ମଳପିତ୍ତର୍ଦେଶ ନିର୍ମଳନିର୍ମଳୋନ ନିର୍ମଳନିର୍ମଳୀନ ନ
ନିର୍ମଳନିର୍ମଳୀନ ନିର୍ମଳନିର୍ମଳୀନ⁷

Form to become the earth and grass. Form to become the sky like the shape of mushroom. Form to become seven balls of soil. Form to become tripod stones. Form to become nine rivers and the place where the Black River and the Red River intersect.

The message appears in Lao Song version as follow:

ନିର୍ମଳନ ନିର୍ମଳିନ ନିର୍ମଳପିତ୍ତର୍ଦେଶ ନିର୍ମଳନିର୍ମଳ୍ୟ ନିର୍ମଳନିର୍ମଳୀନ ନିର୍ମଳନିର୍ମଳୀନ
ନିର୍ମଳନିର୍ମଳୀନ ନିର୍ମଳନିର୍ମଳୀନ⁸

Form to become the earth. Form to become grass. Form to become the sky like the shape of mushroom. Form to become seven balls of *mounts*. *Form to become hole of stream*. Form to become tripod stones. Form to become nine rivers. *Form to become* the place where the Black River and the Red River intersect, [including] *Ou River, Mekong River*.

Apparently, there is very little dissimilarity between the two texts. The different spelling of the word "grass" does not change the meaning of the text. It may represent a slightly distinction of pronunciation, due to the dialect of spoken language.

Additionally, it is common that the latest event documented in each version is most probably the latest date when the text was compiled. In this fashion, the last event mentioned in the text may imply the date of the original version of the text in hand. For example, the latest event recorded in the Muong Muoi version collected from Vietnam is the event during the revolution period in the 1950's and 1960's. Consequently, the date of this version is the 1960's, as it is noted at the end of the text. In the similar vein, the latest event recorded in the official version of Muong La is the French colonial period; thereby, the latest date this version is composed is most probably the late 19th century. More interestingly, the latest event in which the Lao Song version records is the story of Hoang Cong Chat, a peasantry uprising movement based in Dien Bien Phu and

⁷ "ko pen din pen ya, ko pen fa to thuong het, ko pen hin chet kon, ko pen hin sam sao, nam kao kwoe, pa tae, tao".

⁸ "ko pen din pen za, ko pen fa to thuong het, ko pen din chet pu, ko pen hu nam bo, ko pen hin sam sao, ko pen nam kao kwoe, ko pen pa tae, tao, ou, khong." The Lao Song texts presented in this paper are transliterated from the original Phechaburi Lao Song script into Vietnamese Tai Dam script. An extensive study of Lao Song script is provided by Wisarut Suwanwiwek (2524).

controlling a large area of Tai Dam settlement in the 18th century. It is then believable that KTM may have been compiled, at least, as early as the 18th century.

With regard to the use of languages, moreover, it implies that KTM is gradually added and re-copied in many different periods. For example, the phrase 越南民族抗戰 (tap quoc tap nuoc [to fight with the country]) containing two Vietnamese words, *quốc* and *nước*, appears in the period of the late 19th century, but not earlier. This corresponds to what Cam Trong frequently informs me with his regret that he previously owned an official version of Muong Muoi's KTM that contains at least 50 handwriting of the principality's ritual expert. The text was burnt down by fire as a result of the United States' air attack at Son La province in late 1960's. Allegedly, as the literati chairman of each principality is in charge of compiling KTM, such Muong Muoi version of KTM is perhaps descended from earlier than the 16th century.

The fact that strongly indicates the age when KTM arose is the purpose to compile KTM. It obviously demonstrates from the text that KTM was compiled for acclaiming the principality's political legitimacy. Consequently, KTM may firstly appeared as early as the period when Tai Dam principalities established their stronghold in the region. In this extent, Vietnamese and Chinese sources acknowledge the present of the Tai in northwestern Vietnam since even earlier than the 8th century (Whitmore 2000). The establishment of the Tai has continuously been mentioned in the Vietnamese documents in the 11th century (Phan Huu Dat va Lam Ba Nam 2001). Correspondingly, Cam Trong notes, in the 11th century the Vietnamese source refers to the Tai Dam as *Ngư Hầu* (the king cobra) the name of a legendary Tai Dam chief (Cam Trong 1978--). Ramkhamhaeng Inscription, allegedly composed in the 13th (or the 18th?) century, of Siam mentions Sukhothai polity's relationships with a polity located as far as Ou River and Mekong River.⁹ While scholars, especially Jit Phumisak (2548--), previously suggest that the Ou-Mekong polity mentioned in the inscription is most probably the ancient Tai polity established in the area of Vientiane, Lao and Chiang Rai, northern Thailand. However, the inscription perhaps refers to the Tai Dam of Ou River and upper Mekong. Subsequently, in the 15th century, Le Dynasty of the Vietnamese continuously established relationships with the Tai, despite warfare between the two polities occasionally occurred (Phan Huu Dat ibid.).

Consequently, it is most probably that KTM is compiled much earlier than the 20th century. However, it may not be possible to conclude that the text is firstly composed as early as the 11th century as Cam Trong suggests. According to the previous discussion, I propose a hypothesis that the date of KTM might fall between the 15th-16th century. This date corresponds with "the golden age of the Tai Dam" the period when the Tai Dam becomes strongly established in Son La province, as I shall present later.

Origin myth

KTM of various versions divides into 3 sections. The first section, the shortest, sometimes taken away from the translation version, is the message inviting the audience of KTM to listen to the text. Note that KTM was traditionally preserved for funeral ceremony and would merely be read in front of the dead person. This issue will be discussed extensively later. The second section is Tai Dam origin myth. Depending on versions, it normally contains no longer than 5% of the entire KTM text. The last

⁹ I am aware of the Ramkhamhaeng Inscription controversies debating whether the inscription was forged in the 13th century or as late as the 18th century.

section, the biggest, is the chronology of principalities. It records stories of both KTM's principality and other major related principalities. While the first section relates KTM with Tai Dam extensive tradition of textual practices, the second section exhibits literary relationship between the Tai Dam and the Lao. The last section is, on the one hand, a type of historical documents. On the other hand, it is a kind of indigenous historiography maintaining pre-modern Tai Dam imagined community formation. I shall discuss the origin myth in present section. The chronology and the textual practices of KTM shall be continued.

The entire origin myth recorded in Muong Muoi version from Vietnam begins with:¹⁰

ñ ,ñ ññ ,ññ ññ - ñ ,ññ ññ ñ

Form to become the earth and grass. Form to become the sky like

ñññ ,ñññ - ñ ,ññ ññ ,ñññ ñññ -

the shape of mushroom. Form to become 7 balls of soil.

ñ ,ññ ññ ñññ ,ñññ - ñ ,ññ ññ

Form to become tripod stone. Form to become

ñññ ññññ - ñññ ññññ ññññ ññññ ññññ

nine rivers, [and the place where] Black River and Red River intersect. At that time,

As previously mentioned, this part is considered as the key to unlock KTM. It is, allegedly, restrictively preserved for KTM genre. In principle, consequently, any KTM shall begin with this "key." In terms of content, apparently, the text depicts how the earth is formed at its very beginning. Interestingly, the nine rivers and *Pa Tae-Tao* or the place where Black River and Red River intersect is where Tai Dam world began. According to Tai Dam scholars, this place is interpreted as Tai Dam original place when they firstly established their polity in the region. This interpretation corresponds to the location where the ancient populations of Red River Delta established their polities (Taylor 1983:1-9). The Tai Dam then remembered that they had established close relationships with other ethnic groups in the Red River region since the ancient age. Note that, the Lao Song version, as presented earlier, includes Ou River and Mekong as Tai Dam original land. Accordingly, in the Tai Dam's view, the area covering the western rim of Red River Delta, Mekong and as northward as Ou River had been inhabited by the Tai Dam for centuries.

ñññ ññññ ññññ ,ññññ ññññ ññññ

Thaen (the god) then ordered 7 masters, *Che Kon*, coming down to establish

ñññ ññññ ññññ - ññññ ññññ ññññ - ññññ ññññ

¹⁰ Tai Dam text presented here preserves the punctuation, spelling, the order of words, and symbols in the similar way it is presented in the original text. The text is written by pen in purple on A4 sized school notebook. The version under consideration has 123 pages. One page contains about 10-13 lines. Professor Cam Trong explained the meaning of the text to me in early 2004. Any incorrect translation is definitely my responsibility. As the space is limited, the present paper cannot provide the transliteration of the text.

the earth. There was everything. There was every kind of animals,

every specie. Thaen then ordered the 7 masters coming to establish the earth

to became *ban* (village) and *muong* (town). At that time, the masters' children

ရွှေ သုတေသန ရွှေ သုတေသန နောက် ပါမ်း ပါမ်း သိမ်း

made nets having iron and bronze chain. [They] ate raw meat.

9716 گھن یہ گھن یہ گھن گھن 9716 گھن

Thrown to the water [the nets] ate *khae* (a kind of catfish), ate *pok* (a kind of fish). Thrown

សូម ពី គិត ពី និង គិត និង - គិត សូម និង ពី

on earth [the nets] ate deer, ate *fan* (a kind of deer). Thrown to the village [the nets] ate

vn at- m125 165 9 1m 9 16 166 126

people's kids. At that time, every animal, every specie on

3. $\lim_{x \rightarrow 0} \frac{\sin x}{x}$ is 1.

earth knew to speak. Every otter knew to say. Every

From 1971 from 2 to 51.

owl every *jam* (a kind of animal) knew to talk

so, every tan (a kind of animal) knew to tan.

Every pig every dog knew to speak At that time the sky

After the natural environment is solidified, according to this version, the god sent a specie of human being to live on earth. They are presented as the primitive who, even though invented tools, ate raw food. It was the era when animals and human being are communicable. Note that the translated and published version of Muong La provides more elaborated details of this era (Dang Nghiem Van 1977:---). Interestingly, the longer version presents this original era in the same way as the Tai Dam depict their *lien pan* (the noble place of ancestor's country in the sky) wherein *ເລີຍເມືອງເລີຍທອງນາງ ສົ່ງເມືອງເຫັນນິມ*¹¹ (whenever rice and fishes run out, they will automatically arrive) (Dang Nghiem Van 1977:--).

- မြတ်သူမြတ်

At that time, the sky

၁၆၆၆ ခု ၁၇၈၈ - ၁၇၉၅ ၁၆၆၆ ခု ၁၇၈၈ -

became desert in very red. The sun then shined heavily.

97. תְּמִימָה וְכִירָה וְעַמְּקָם וְלִבְנָה וְלִכְאָה

Cows, buffaloes died with hunger for grass. Merchants died

ନିବ୍ରାନ୍ତିରେ କିମ୍ବା କିମ୍ବା... \sqrt{q} ଅତିକାରୀ ହେବାରେ

¹¹ khao met khao ha ma, pa met pa ha tao.

If one is familiar with Buddhist influenced Thai-Tai historiography, one cannot help but see the parallel between this text and the *Agganya Sutra*. Although they do not entirely similar, both texts present (1) the previous interactions between the earth and the sky; (2) the origin of the human derived from the sky; and (3) the division of the sky and the earth at the end. Instead of eating the undeniably flagrant earth soil, KTM, however, depicts the return of human being on earth from inside the gourds. The Muong La version illustrates better details of, for instance, how some species came out of the gourds, what clans of people came from the gourds, and the gourds contained all kinds of necessary Tai Dam religious texts (Dang Nham Van 1997:---). The text continues:

- ຖານ ນັ້ນ ແກ້ວ ສະ ທີ່ ທີ່

At that time, Thaen then ordered masters-

ຫົວ ຂະບົງ ຫົວ ຕົກ ສອງ ສົມ ພົມ ລົງ ນອນ

chief Suang and chief Ngan to bring the gourds down to

ມູນ ມູນ ອົາ ນັ້ນ ພົມ - ສະ ທີ່ ທີ່

Muong Om, Muong Ai outside the sky.

ຫົວ ຕົກ ດີ ຕົກ ພົມ ສອງ ສົມ ພົມ ລົງ ນອນ

Chief Ngan, who is the son, brought the gourds down to

ມູນ ພົມ ນັ້ນ ພົມ - ສະ ພົມ ພົມ ພົມ

Muong Lo outside the sky. [He] then had a son named master-

ຫົວ ພົມ --->

chief Lo

ຖານ ນັ້ນ ... ທີ່ ຫົວ ຕົກ ສະ ສົມ ນັ້ນ ດີນ

At that time, master-chief Ngan then established the land of

ມູນ ພົມ - ທີ່ ຫົວ ຕົກ ສະ ສົມ ພົມ ສົມ

Muong Lo. Master-chief Ngan then distributed the gourds

ສົມ ພົມ ພົມ - ສົມ ພົມ ພົມ ພົມ ດີນ ສົມ ພົມ -

to everywhere. [He] sent [the gourds] to everywhere on earth.

ຖານ ນັ້ນ ສອງ ສົມ ພົມ ພົມ ພົມ ພົມ

At that time, [he] brought to *Muong Bo Tae* 6 fruits of the

ສົມ ພົມ - ພົມ ພົມ ພົມ ພົມ ພົມ

gourds [and] 6 bronze pillars supporting the sky. [He] brought to *Muong Zone*

ສົມ ພົມ ພົມ - ພົມ ພົມ ພົມ ພົມ ພົມ

and *Muong Lao*, *Muong Koi* and *Muong Lo*, *Muong Zo* 2 fruits of

ສົມ ພົມ ພົມ - ພົມ ພົມ ພົມ

the gourds [and] 2 bronze pillars supporting the sky.

So far as I research, KTM of Muong Muoi unofficial version does not mention from where chief Suang and chief Ngan descend; nor do other versions. It is possible

that both masters came directly from the sky, instead of the gourds, given the reason that they were depicted as ones that brought the gourds to distribute region-wide. In this extent, as chief Ngan gave birth to chief Lo, the first Tai Dam chief and the name of Tai Dam ruling clan, it apparently presents the ruling clan as the only single clan descending directly from the sky. At the end, the text writes:

ງາມ ນັກ ພົມ ທົວ ໂດຍ ກະ ອີ ພົມ ພົມ ທົວ

At that time, master-chief Ngan then ordered master-chief

ໄ ກົນ ມະ ຄະ - ກະ ອີ ພົມ ນັກ ມະ

Lo to eat (rule) Muong Lo. [He] appointed master-chief *Luong*

ລູ້າ ພົມ - ພົມ ທົວ ຄະ ລູ້າ ທົວ -

to be *hmo* (the chair of the literati) [and] master-chief Lo to be *tao* (the chief of the principality).

ງາມ ນັກ ພົມ ທົວ ໂດຍ ກະ ກະ ກະ

At that time, master-chief Ngan then returned

ໄ ກົນ ມະ ກົນ ມະ ໂດຍ ມະ ອົາ ມະ ມີ -

back to rule Muong Om, Muong Ai as earlier.

Chief Suang and Chief Ngan did four important tasks. First, they distributed the gourds to different countries. Second, they gave birth to Tai Dam original chief, *Tao Lo*. Third, they established Tai Dam original town, Muong Lo, presently named Văn Chấn, Yên Bái province, a northwestern province located about 150 km from Hanoi. Note that Muong Lo locates close to where Black River and Red River intersect. Four, they appointed the original two political titles of Tai Dam, *hmo* and *tao*, the chairman of literary businesses and the chairman of political businesses to *Khun Luong* and *Tao Lo* respectively. Similar to *tao*, *hmo* became the position, in theory, preserved for Luong clan.

It is interesting that many legends and wordings presented in KTM resemble to those used in Phongsawadan Lan Chang (Lan Chang chronicle, referred as PLC hereafter) (*Phongsawadan Nua* 2499:399-400), as follow:¹²

- The key to open KTM, ກົນ ກົນ ກົນ ພົມ (ko phen din phen ya), is also presented in the opening page of PLC origin myth. However, as it is recorded in Siamese script it becomes ກົນເປັນດິນເປັນຫຼັ້າ (ko pen din pen ya). It is most probably that the Siamese version wrongly transliterates the word "ko"; consequently, "ko-to form" which I believe is supposed to present in PLC original version becomes "ko-and then, also" in Siamese Thai.
- The conflict relationships between Thaen or the sky and humans or the earth is presented in both KTM and PLC.
- After the great flood, both sources present the re-emergent of present day human on earth as the specie from the origin gourd.
- Humans came out of the gourds belong to different sub-groups. KTM mentions the clans named *Lo*, *Luong*, *Quang*, *Tong*, *Deo* (Dang Nghiem

¹² Unfortunately, the present paper cannot access to PLC that recorded in Lao script. The version used herein is presented in Siamese Thai.

Van 1977:--). PLC refers to *Tai Lom*, *Tai Li*, *Tai Long*, *Tai Lo*, *Tai Quang* (PLC: 391).

- Both texts present that, formerly humans encountered difficulties to rule themselves. Later, the noble was sent from the sky to rule commoners. The commoners were then socially organized and began to economically produce. The noble is referred as *Khun Bulom* in PLC and they are *Tung Hoang*, *Tao Suang*, *Tao Ngan* in KTM.
- Khu Bulom established the first organized society at *Ban Na-no-oi-nu* located, according to PLC, in *Muong Thaen*, believed to be the same place as *Muong Thaeng* (pronounced Mường Thanh in Vietnamese and referred as Điện Biên Phủ in Vietnamese literature). Tao Suang and Tao Ngan in KTM established the first organized society at Muong Lo, located near the place where Black River and Red River intersect. Note that, currently, the legend and the name of *Ban Na noi oi nu* still appear at Điện Biên Phủ.
- Both Khun Bulom and Tao Suang (or Tao Ngan, depending on versions of KTM) had a son named "Lo".
- Khun Lo of PLC ruled *Chawa*, the ancient name of Luang Phrabang. Tao Lo of KTM ruled Muong Lo.

Consequently, it implies that the origin myth recorded in both texts originates from a similar version. Either did the Tai Dam borrow it from the Lao or vice versa does not necessarily discourage its significance. However, it is most probably that both the Tai Dam and the Lao drew it from the "universal history", the story which was well known and highly respected throughout the region at that period.¹³ Stories of *Thaen*, the *gourd*, and *chief Lo* might have been treated by the Tai speaking populations, including other ethnic groups, in the region in the similar way as the present of Buddha and his footprints are treated by the Buddhist-influenced Tai historiography.¹⁴ Moreover, it is apparent that, as the two refer to different locations of their original polity, the authors from different ethnic backgrounds then appropriated the universal history to claim legitimacy of establishing distinctive political spaces, Muong Thaen and Muong Lo. These hypotheses certainly prompt additional research.

Chronology

After the mythic age, KTM continues with a "historic age," documenting chronology of principalities, especially the principality that recorded the text. Stories presented in this section of the text are diverse, periodically expansive, and thick. The historic section of KTM can be divided into three periods, including the great worrier era, *ban-muong* era, the revolution era. The longest part of Tai Dam chronicle is the second period, *ban-muong* era whereas the revolution era is shortly documented by the unofficial version of Muong Muoi. This present paper shall focus only on the great worrier era and *ban-muong* era.

ຫົວໜ້າຫົວໜ້າ (The great worrier era)

¹³ This is in the similar vein as David Wyatt refers to the Buddhist-influenced Tai historiography.

¹⁴ In fact, it is most probably that this kind of myth is treated as the "universal history" by not merely the Tai, but also other ethnic groups in the region. See Frank Prochan (2001).

This period is recorded in the text in the form of legend about a great king, ລົງຈູ້ງ (Lang Chuong). Lang Chuong is the seventh son of chief Lo, the first Tai Dam chief. While other sons of chief Lo received the sharing and distribution to rule small towns around Muong Lo principality, Lang Chuong did not receive any place to rule, as KTM of Muong Muoi writes:¹⁵

At that time, master-chief Lo then gave *ban, muong* to [his] sons; [he] distributed *muong* to the noble's sons. [...] And yet, there was master Lang Chuong who was the youngest brother, the latest one. But the place [for him] to earn a living, to eat (to rule) was not found.

Lang Chuong and his troop then marched westwards to seek a suitable town. The text of different versions writes his route similarly, although some versions provide more elaborated details. According to Muong Muoi version, for instance, the route started from Muong Chien (Quynh Nhai distric, Son La), Muong Chai (Son La), Nam Tae (Black River), Muong Bu (Son La), Muong La (Son La town), Muong Muoi (Thuan Chau district, Son La), Muong Kwai (Tuan Giao district, Dien Bien Phu), Muong Fang (Muong Phang district, Dien Bien Phu), Muong Thaeng (Dien Bien Phu city).

At towns located by the Black River, Muong La and Muong Muoi, Lang Chuong confronted with the *xi* (Sa), a derogative term the Tai Dam refers to smaller ethnic groups, like Kadai speaking peoples and ethnic Khamu. The Sa ruled the towns before Lang Chuong arrived. Lang Chuong's troop found difficulties defeating the Sa; yet eventually, his troop murdered the Sa's chiefs of many towns. Instead of conquering the Sa, he left those towns. On the contrary, at the places where the chiefs surrendered, unsurprisingly, they were the Tai. And then they were allowed to rule their towns like before. Ethno-linguistically speaking, the geography of Lang Chuong Marching corresponds to what James Chamberlain (1995:3-7) and Keith Taylor (1978:1-9) note that, at the very beginning of Vietnam history, ethnic Tai migrated westwards to occupy the area where previously inhibited by indigenous Mon-Khmer speaking and Kadai speaking peoples.¹⁶

Lang Chuong finally arrived at Dien Bien Phu and settled there to build his town. Muong Muoi text writes:

Muong Theang was widespread with rice fields on two sides. This nice town suited the master's thousands and thousands soldiers. Chief Lang Chuong then arrived at Muong Thaeng. Muong Thaeng was round like a *dong* (a flat basket). It was curvy like buffalo horns. As it was a big town, he then built. As it was a wide town, he then ate (ruled).

¹⁵ As the space is limit, I can only present the translated version by attempting to preserve the written style and wordings.

¹⁶ The stories of the great worrier era also recorded in a royal ritual of the principalities, particularly the great principalities like Muong Muoi. A principality's rite de passage performed once in 2-3 years had a serious dramatic scene of Tai and Sa fighting. The Tai brought a giant drum to the town. The Sa, performed by ethnic Sa, was seen as the owner of the town. The Sa then chased the Tai away. Finally both Tai and Sa reconciled. The ritual is apparently a reconstruction of the ethnic relations of the ancient time.

Lang Chuong becomes known to the Tai Dam as a great worrier. It is presented in a more elaborated version in *Kwam Tay Pu Seok*. Although the characteristic of Lang Chuong stories is more likely a type of legend, stories of Lang Chuong can be treated as a representation of Tai Dam society in the age of not yet settled society. It implies in the stories that during this period the Tai Dam was in the age of stabilizing its political organization, the process of political consolidation. In this extent, Lang Chuong is a symbolic worrier representing Tai Dam worriers of this era. In this age, consequently, swards, troops, the marching of soldiers, military organization were more likely to play important roles than *ban-muong* system, the systematic political organization, was.

ຫົວໜ້າລົມ່າ (Ban-muong era)

This era covers the biggest size of the text. It documents chronicle of the principalities and genealogy of the chiefs. KTM does not describe the details of the principality's organization. In Ta Kam Regime (the 14th generation of Lo clan), for example, the text writes:

[*Ta Kam*] then distributed muong to his sons; [he] gave muong to the noble's sons. Chief *Ta Ngan* ate (ruled) *Muong Lam*. *Sa To Fid* became *pan*. *Ai Pon* was *kwan tang*. Old *Hai Hua* was *ho luang*. *Ta Dek* went to eat (rule) *Muong La*. *Fee Ya Ngan* was *pan*. *Kwan Huon* was *ho luang*. *Ta Hin* went to eat *Muong E*. *Chi Ya Hon* was *pan*. *Yo YaDieo* was *ho luang*. *Ta Dam* went to eat *Muong Hua*. *Kam Nam Nan* was *pan*. *Fa Uong* was *ho luang*, at that time.

The nobles, supposedly descending from Lo clan, were appointed as the chief of a *muong*. In Ta Kam Regime, *Ta Ngan* (line 2-3), *Ta Dek* (line 5), *Ta Hin* (line 6), and *Ta Dam* (line 8) were *Ta Kam*'s sons. They were then sent to rule *ມູນຄູ້ມູນ* (*muong no muong*), the peripheral towns, located around *ມູນກູ້ມູນ* (*muong kuang muong*), the central town. *Pan* (line 3), *kwan tang* (line 4), and *ho luang* (line 4) were the highest titles preserved for members of *ທ້າວກ້າວໜ້າລົມ່າ* (*thao kae hang muong*, the elderly committee). They assisted the chief of each town, including the central town, to rule *ລົມ່າ* (*song*) and *ລົມ່າ* (*long*), divisions of a town. The numbers of song that a muong had were varied, depending on the size of the muong. Thereby, in terms of the titles appointed, some muong had only *pan* and *ho luang* to rule two song, whereas the bigger muong had *pan*, *ho luang*, and *kwan tang* to assist the chief. Note that smaller organization was *ban*, a village, comprising of about 20 *ໜ້າ* (houses) or fewer. What makes one confuses is that, this entire organization--a principality comprising of the central muong, the peripheral muong(s), divisions of muong, and ban(s)--is referred as *ລົມ່າ* (*muong*) or *ຈັກລົມ່າ* (*chau muong*). This type of organization prompts Cam Trong to term it Ban-Muong system (Cam Trong 1978; Ngo Duc Thinh va Cam Trong 1999).¹⁷

¹⁷ See his extensive study of Ban-Muong system in Cam Trong (1978) and Ngo Duc Thinh va Cam Trong (2005). Accord to Cam Trong, Ban-Muong organization is originally Tai culture. However, others, like Jacques Lemoine (1987), argue that *nai-sip*, *hoi*, *pan* system derives from Mongolian or ancient Chinese.

However, not merely chau muong, but KTM also depicts broader relationships between different chau muong(s). Moreover, KTM records relationships between the Tai polity and other powerful polities. The crucial relationships relevant to the understanding of Tai Dam pre-modern political space are *ຍໍາມີ ມີຫັກ* (*lung-ta ying-sao*, marriage relation), *ຂໍ້ຈົວໃຈ* (*suoi-han*, patron-client), and *ມີລັກ* (*to-son*, warfare).

In terms of family system, the Tai Dam is patrilineal and patrilocal. The majority of KTM then documents the genealogy of the chief's father's side. Instead of writing the family tree, however, KTM periodically records male family members of the chief. For instance:

At that time, chief Ta Ngan arranged ban-muong. [He] gave birth to Tao On, Fa Yu, Ngua Chu Lun, Mun Ham, Kam Ban, Xuang Kam, Tao Zae, Kam Hak. Chief Ta Ngan has nine sons.

Thereafter, the text continues to record the relevant events occurring in Ta Ngan regime (the 15th generation of Lo clan). Until the next regime, the text then lists the name of the chief's sons again, and it then follows with stories of events occurring in each regime. By collecting all of the names listed, then, one can reconstruct *ນັມນາອໂທລວດ* (*nam naeo theo luot*, genealogy) of Tai Dam chiefs, the *Lo* clan. Consequently, for instance, the family tree of a principality arranged from the names listed reveals that up to the 20th century the genealogy of a major Tai Dam principality--Muong Muak--comprises of longer than 34 generations (Cam Trong and Masao 2003).

Interestingly, the genealogy of the major Tai Dam principalities, Muong Muoi, Muong La, Muong Muak, and Muong Lo, exhibits a common characteristic. It records that the chiefs of each principality are all descended from Lang Chuong (3rd generation from chief Lo), Nhu Hau (the 13th generation from chief Lo), and Ta Ngan (the 15th generation from chief Lo). Afterward, each principality developed its separated branch, or rather mini dynasty, of Lo clan. There rose *ວິນ້າ* (Bac Cam) of Muong Muoi, *ເກົອນ* (Cam Ngoc) of Muong La and Muong Lo, and *ເກົມ* (Cam) of Muong Muak. These family names of each branch had not presented earlier in KTM text.

More importantly, KTM records that, in the 16th and 19th generations the chiefs descended from Muong Muoi became the rulers of Muong La and Muong Muak respectively. And it took 10 more generations for the Muong Muoi descended chiefs to become ruler of Muong Lo, the original town located on the easternmost of Tai Dam territory. In this fashion, consequently, KTM traces the genealogy of the chiefs at eastern Tai Dam principalities, Muong Muoi, Muong La, Muong Muak, and Muong Lo, as the descend of Lang Chuong, the great worrier who is the son of the heavenly bestowed chief, chief Lo. In other words, KTM of each eastern principality acknowledges the political legitimacy by referring itself to Lang Choung of Muong Thaeng.

Remarkably, Cam Trong's argument parallel to Li Tana's remarks on non-Chinese but Southeast Asian-styled political organization, such as *kin muong* system documented in KTM (Li Tana 1998).

In practice, however, the Tai Dam acknowledges both mother's cognate (ງມີ, *lung ta*) and father's cognate (ຢືນ, *ying sao*).¹⁸ KTM of Muong Muoi mentions lung ta-ying sao relationships at the beginning of Ta Ngan regime as follow:

At that time, there was not yet an elephant under the royal [stilted] house; there was not yet a woman next to the chief. [...] [Ta Kam] then sent *khun Hu* and *kwan Hai* to propose affectionate and ban-muong relations (ນິ້ວຊາວມນິ້ວຊາວມ ໂມບໍ່ - ຂາວມ ສົມ ຂາວມ ຂັງ, *kai kwam hak kwam paeng kwam ban kwam muong*) to chief *Paed Sam Kaeng So Moi Ka* of Muong Lai. [The chief of Muong Lai] did not deny and sent lady Saen Muong to marry [chief Ta Ngan].

At that period, Muong Lai was the most powerful principality residing nearby. Ta Ngan was going to become the chief of Muong Muoi principality, and it is then necessary for Muong Muoi to establish relationships with Muong Lai. Ta Ngan's marriage is then as mentioned in the text "both love affaires and political affaires" (*kwam hak kwam paeng kwam ban kwam muong*).

However, for the Tai Dam, marriage is a process of reciprocal relationships between lung ta and ying sao. Lung ta is considered the great donor, the one who gives life to ying sao. For the commoners, lung ta gives its "females," including most importantly daughters, female live stocks, and kitchen fireplace tripod to ying sao. But for the nobles, the primary relationship between lung ta and ying sao is to facilitate principality's political maintenance, particularly during the time of political turmoil, as KTM records:

Fong Chaeng ruled Muong Muoi. The *Sa* (various small ethnic groups-translator) was afraid [of him], and all of them fled to the *Keo* (Vietnamese-translator) and the Lao. There remained those who held the soil to wait, carried the grass to stay. Fong Chang did wrong to women. [...] Lady Kam Xoi then brought Mang Keo to rely on Tien Kon at Muong Teok. Lady Kam Soi then went to meet with [Vietnamese] king Buong Thai. The king gave her the royal flag. Chief Mang Keo then returned to [chief] Kam Ban of Muong Lai. [Kam Ban] then sent a troop along [with Mang Keo]. At that time, chief Mang Keo sent message to Tien Kon at Muong Teok to request troops to facilitate him re-cultivating *ban* and renovating *muong*. At that time, Saeng Do Van Ngia and Tiem Ieu offered with enthusiasm to help. [Mang Keo] then arrested Phong Chaeng and killed [Phong Chaeng].

Lady Kam Soi is Wang Muong (the 23rd generation of Lo clan)'s wife, and she is Mang Keo's mother. After Wang Muong died, there was political crisis in Muong Muoi, namely Wang Muong's brothers and members of the elderly committee competed to rule Muong Muoi. The crisis caused people in Muong Muoi, including Kam Soi and her son, Mang Keo, to escape the town. Kam Soi and Mang Keo went to rely on Tien

¹⁸ Note that a woman married to her husband becomes a member of her husband's side. She, similar to her husband, her father/mother(s)-in-law and her brothers/sisters-in-law, becomes *ying sao* of her father, mother(s), brothers, and single sisters.

Kon, Kam Soi's father, lung ta. Tien Kon was the chief of Muong Teok. Kam Soi then went to request help from the Vietnamese king. Finally, with the support of the Vietnamese king, Muong Lai, and Muong Teok, Kam Soi and her son returned to rule Muong Muoi.

Tai Dam marriage relationships are, on the other hand, a type of patron-client relationships. There are numerous regimes that the neighbor chiefs' daughters were given to the chiefs of a powerful principality to establish political network between the two principalities. Back to Lang Chuong Regime (the 3rd generation of Lo clan), for example, Tao Chian gave his daughter to Lang Chuong in exchange for Lang Chuong's protection.

[Lang Chuong] arrived at Muong Chian, the chief of Muong Chian was so afraid of him. [The chief] then gave a royal woman to chief Lang Chuong. The chief [Lang Chuong] then established lung ta relation [with Muong Chian] nicely.

Not only did Tai Dam principalities establish patron-client relationships between themselves, but also they had sought to establish this type of political networks with the more powerful polities, particularly the Lao and the Vietnamese. KTM reveals that it is necessary for the Tai Dam principality's chiefs to receive acknowledgement, supports, and protections from the powerful polities to rule the principality. The story of Kam Soi and her son mentioned previously already points out this issue very well. In order to return to rule Muong Muoi, Kam Soi requested supports from the Vietnamese king for political legitimacy.

Nonetheless, the Tai Dam did not rely only on the Vietnamese dynasties. The text records that the Tai Dam relied on the Lao dynasties at Luang Phrabang in the earlier period and gradually the Vietnamese dynasties later. In earlier period, for instance, Ngu Hau (the 13th generation of Lo clan), brought his troop to the area closer to the Vietnamese polity. Thereby, the Vietnamese dynasty did not trust Ngu Hau and sent armed forces to chase away Ngu Hau. Ngu Hau finally escaped to stay in Laos. In Laos, Ngu Hau served a great extent to the Lao dynasty.

At that time, *Muong Fon* and *Muong Kwa Chao Tau* did not pay tributes. King *Fong Kam* then ordered *mun Pun* and *mun Luang* to lead the army to defeat them. But they could not win. [They] came back to meet with Fong Kam. [Fong Kam] then established chief *Ngu Hau* to lead a troop. [Ngu Hau] went to Tad Nam Chiang Lu. They were afraid. They became soft in front of swords and spears. They then brought goods and treasures to bow and give [to Ngu Hau]. [They] brought money to give [him] 30 *bia*, 30 male buffaloes, 30 female buffaloes, 30 horses, 12 baskets of silver, two pairs of crystal sward. [They] came to bow and salute Ngu Hau. Ngu Hau then returned and brought the goods and treasures to give to king Fong Kam. [Fong Kam] were very pleased. Subsequently, in the next year, *Muong Mad* and *Muong Pa* became agitated. They did not send grass for elephants. They did not bind the grass for maintaining roofs. They did not repair the damaged house floor. King Fong Kam then sent *mun Ko* and *mun Paen* to lead a troop to combat. [They] did not win. King Fong Kam then asked chief Ngu Hau led the troop. [Ngu Hau] chased them away and won. [Ngu Hau] arrested lady *Khing Nat* and lady *Chuang Kam*--they are mother and daughter. [He] got elephants, but did not ride. [He] got shirts, but did not wear. [He] got ladies and wives, but did not sleep with. Ngu Hau then returned. The brave elephants [he] brought were given. The ladies [he]

arrested were given. King Fong Kam were then very pleased. At that time, king Fong Kam then gave lady King Nat to become chief Ngu Hau's wife. Lady Chuang Kam became his stepdaughter.

The regime that exhibits the best management of relationships between the Tai Dam and the powerful polities is Ta Ngan Regime. Ta Ngan served both kings very well, and he himself was well respected by the Tai chiefs. He helped the king of Luang Phrabang to pacify agitation that the Lao king could not solve. When the Lao king gave him an elephant, instead of keeping it, Ta Ngan sent the elephant to the Vietnamese king. Ta Ngan was consequently trusted by both kings; he was thereby recorded as the chief who is *ພູເຄົງທີ່ໄດ້ເຫັນພູລາວ* (*pua Keo ha pua Lao hak*, trusted by both Vietnamese kings and Lao kings). Both kings eventually granted Ta Ngan to rule the most expanded country that a Tai Dam principality had ever ruled. KTM records:

[Vietnamese king] then gave him ban-muong covering any place that built house on stilted. It reached the place where Black River and Red River intersect, including Nam Zoi, Choi Pu, Song Nat, Tat Tae. It covered from Noi Nang and northern Ly Saeng to Nam Tao, the Red River, Chiang Dan, Chiang Luang, Chu Yee, Chee Fung, So-La, Yae Tong, the origin of Black River, the origin of Ma River, the origin of Ou River, and Pu Nang. Chief Ta Ngan received all of those places annexed to the country of Muong Muoi.

Consequently, in addition to such extensive land, KTM of Muong Muoi records a long list of principalities from which Ta Ngan collected tributes. To many Tai Dam scholars, then, Ta Ngan Regime is a golden age of Tai Dam history.

In terms of political relations, apparently, warfare regularly occurred throughout Tai Dam history. After the great worrier era, however, KTM does not depict the Tai Dam as the land seekers. And wars were then presented as a means to establish and stabilize political networks and patron-client relationships as previously discussed. Wars then normally occurred without destroying the established ban-muong organization. However, once for a while, ban-muong was fiercely destroyed by the wars. For example, KTM reflects in one part of the period when the Chinese bandits troop, the Yellow Flags and the Black Flags, as follow:

After *Muong Lo* was taken over, *Zip Tai* (the leader of the Yellow Flag bandit-translator) led the troop to take over *Muong Chian* and called on *Cam Ngoc Yeu* (the chief of *Muong La*-translator) to surrender. *Bun Yeu* (*Cam Ngoc Yeu*-translator) were informed ahead of time. He ordered his soldiers and a general to be prepared at *Sam Sip* mount, which is the border of *Muong Chian* and *Muong La*. The soldiers received *Bun Yeu*'s order and built stone bunkers at every strategic point to block *Zip Tai*.

Troops from two sides fought fiercely. Tai soldiers lose and withdrew to report *Bun Yeu*. *Bun Yeu* led his entire troop to defend *Zip Tai*'s troop at *Muong Bu*. He met with the Vietnamese king's troop sent to support him. A Vietnamese general led the troops comprising of the Tai and the Vietnamese to cross the Black River. After passing *It Ong*, they confronted with the Chinese troop and attacked them fearlessly. The Chinese bullets hit the Vietnamese general. He fell from the horse and died. *Bun Yeu*'s horse also got fired. *Bun Yeu* left the horse and fled. Vietnamese and Tai soldiers ran away. All of them withdrew from

Muong La. Bun Yeu ordered everyone to run into jungles and hide in caves or mountains.

Bun Yeu went to meet with the Vietnamese king. The Chinese hired someone to murder Bun Yeu. Phia Ly brought Bun Hoan (Bun Yeu's son-translator) to Chiang Ko in Laos. Muong La was left to the Chinese to rule. The Chinese abused and raped women either old or young. They massacred people brutally and stole money, cloth. Commoners were desperate: their destiny was similar to fishes caught in the net (Dang Nghiem Van 1977:152).

In conclusion, rather than representing Tai Dam society simply as simple, isolated, static, and self-subsistence society, KTM depicts complexities, dynamics, extensive regional relationships of pre-modern Tai Dam. It is shown from KTM that, in order to maintain its political space, not merely the inclusively organized ban-muong system, the Tai Dam had long established relationships with the Lao and the Vietnamese extensively. Moreover, after it established the political center at Muong Thaeng, the Tai Dam's political center then moved to Muong Muoi, about 200 km east of Muong Thaeng and gradually established relationships with the eastern Tai principalities, such as Muong Teok, and the Vietnamese dynasties. In this account, instead of continuously migrating from Red River delta westwards, it reveals from KTM that the Tai Dam expanded its political power eastwards. The Tai Dam then identifies its political space with the principalities covering the area between Muong Thaeng (on the west) and Muong Lo (on the east).¹⁹

Textual practices

Traditionally, *ወሮንግ (hmo muong, the literati chairman)* was the only person who compiled and held KTM, and normally the text was not accessible to the public including the principality's chief himself. Although the text should in theory be kept afar from the public, commoners who were literate and *ወሮንሪ (hmo ban, ordinary ritual experts)* may copy and keep the text for using in commoners' funeral rite. Consequently, despite of its restrictive characteristic, stories recorded in KTM are disseminated throughout Tai Dam larger community by means of ritual practice. The ritual context of KTM is revealed in the front pages of the text. It reads as follow:

You held a royal hat down to live on earth until age. You carried the wand down to live on earth until now. You stayed for many years and lived good life for many harvesting seasons. You became an elder chief on earth for 100,000 lives. The wood died; you then go up to the upper world. It is the end of human life; you then go up to the sky. You love the sky more than the human world. You love the upper world more than the lower world. You then held the hat to run to the sky and rode the horse to run to the upper world. You were human for 100,000 lives, and those lives then finished. Finish on time. Die like a tree. The long spear reaches its end, so does the wand. The elder ends, so does the youth. The jungle ends; it then reaches the forest. The others finish; it is then our turn. Your oldest child shall get blue eyes mourned. [He] shall open eyes to wait [for you]. [He] shall borrow [your] seat. [He] shall tell stories of the principality to you, shall he? Remember it; memorize it. Remember the time of soil and grass.

¹⁹ And the territory reaches Muong Lai on the north and Nam Ma on the south.

Memorize the age of sky [and] and the age of human, please. The oldest child tells; then, please don't neglect. The orphan tells; then, don't forget. Keep it in mind and impress it into your "neck" (heart-translator), please.²⁰

Contrary to the modern use of historiography, it is revealed from this excerpt that KTM is the kind of historiography that the pre-modern Tai Dam preserved for specific context. Documentary sources note that KTM was read only in the funeral ceremony (Tai Studies Center 1986:65; Ngo Duc Thinh va Cam Trong 1999:839). Accordingly, a native Tai Dam ethnographer documents that, "*Late at night, ສາວຸນນ (khuoi kok, "oldest son-in-law") will bring Kwam To Muong to read.*²¹ *This is to remind the dead person that in the sorrow time s/he ought not neglect her/his root and the time when s/he was alive (ibid.)*" In practice, if khuoi kok cannot read the text, either because he is not literate enough or he cannot read Tai Dam script, *ສາວຸຈັ (khuoi chau, a literate stand-in)*, will read it for khuoi kok to repeat (ibid.) And despite the text is ideally transmitted to the dead person, while reading the text, the dead person's wife or husband, sons, daughter-in-laws, brothers, and close relatives of the dead shall person then listen to the reading. The text is then aimed to both the dead and the living persons.

Consequently, KTM textual practice strengthens the kinship relations between *lung ta* and *ying sao*. As mentioned earlier, it is crucial for the son-in-law to serve as *khuoi kok* in his father or mother-in-law's funeral. A major task of the son-in-law is to read KTM text in front of the coffin. In funeral gathering, then, not merely is the relationship of the dead person's cognate, *lung ta*, re-strengthened, but also the relationship between *lung ta* and *ying sao*, the dead person's in-law's cognate. By means of reading KTM, this rite of passage becomes a reunion of the dead and the alive as well as the cognate and the marriage related relatives.²²

In addition, amongst the noble clans, Lo clan and its branches, the succeeding chief shall listen to KTM in the funeral; and it is then the time to learn from the past how the previous chiefs ruled the principality. Amongst the commoners, however, the text tells stories of one's principality as a part of the larger context of Tai Dam history and territory. For both nobles and commoners, the text then presents to the Tai Dam the larger political space. This textual practice in the funeral ritual context consequently facilitates a great extent the formation of the Tai Dam imagined political space.

In other contexts, I propose a framework to understand Tai Dam indigenous literacy (Yukti forthcoming; 2548). I found that Tai Dam literacy is the interplay of literary and oral traditions. In the larger context of Tai Dam literary tradition, KTM is a kind of texts written in prose preserved for writing and reading without tune. On the contrary, Tai Dam poetical texts, including lyrical texts and ritual chants, are written in poetic form with the length of commonly 1500 - 2000 sentences. The poetical texts are

²⁰ So far I research, the only published version of KTM that presents this message is the translated version of Cam Quynh and Cam Trong (1960). In addition, note that this excerpt is followed with the origin myth as previously discussed.

²¹ Khuoi kok is a ritual title assigned for a male from the in-law's cognate. Even though it is called "son-in-law", in practice anyone from the in-law's side can hold this title.

²² In addition to KTM, khuoi kok is also assigned to lead the dead spirit to the grave in the upper world. For this task, another text entitled *ສັນນຸ້ມ (san song)* is read. *San song* presents the route leading the dead spirit to Muong Lo, where a path to the sky located. The son-in-law shall read the name places listed in the text as well as accompany the dead spirit to the sky. The son-in-law, however, immediately returns home after the dead spirit arrives at the departure point of the path to the sky.

more popular amongst the commoners than texts written in prose like KTM. Although poetical texts are recorded in Tai Dam script, it is commonly found that they are for memorizing, re-citing, and singing. In this extent, the texts in prose are practiced in literacy traditions, whereas the poetical texts are practiced in oral traditions. More interestingly, for the Tai Dam, the texts written in prose form are re-writeable, re-correctable, and gradually added. But the texts composed in verse form last longer because they are commonly not re-written, but memorized. In this account, then, memorizing in Tai Dam literary tradition seems to last longer than texts for reading. And perhaps, the Tai Dam suggests that memory is more durable than writing is. Tai Dam literary and oral traditions are thereby intimately intertwined. As a result, the interplay of literary and oral traditions is the crucial means for the formation of the pre-modern Tai Dam imagined community

Concluding remarks: Tai Dam indigenous historiography and proto-imagined community

The major characteristics of KTM are threefold: origin myth of the gourd, local chronology, and textual practices. It is distinguished that, even though Tai script is used for recording the text, KTM reflects less, if any, of Buddhist-influenced tradition. Rather than taking part in the Buddhist Tai historiography, KTM relates to a distinctive trace of Tai traditional historiography. On the one hand, due to the story of Thaen, the gourd and chief Lo, it implies the oral traditions disseminating amongst the ancient Tai and other ethnic groups settling in Mekong and Black River basins. On the other hand, its tradition of literacy, the religious functions of KTM textual practices, prompts additional research on the indigenous Tai-Thai historiography and the indigenous Tai literacy at large.

Similar to other Tai historiography, however, KTM records chronology of the Tai. KTM documents, for instance, the ancient age of the Tai Dam's migration, traces of ethnic groups that are indigenous in Mekong and Black River basins, and most importantly Tai Dam political traditions reflecting the distinctive characteristics of Tai Dam socio-political process and formation. Distinguished of all, due to the fact that KTM was locally compiled, it provides a profound account from the local point of views. In this extent, documents in KTM shall contribute to the historical accounts of this region tremendously. Given the fact that numerous volumes of Kwam To Muong, including other Tai Dam historical texts, remain restricted to public access, more profound and extensive researches on those copies shall contribute to a better understanding of the process and formation of Tai politics and society.

As for the general Tai speaking societies, Charles Keyes observes that pre-modern literacy played a significant role in the formation of the traditional literate Tai polities (Keys 1996). According to Keyes, given the fact that a system of Tai orthography had been used to record texts commonly distributed in a certain region, such a literate Tai region formed an extensive sharing of what Benedict Anderson terms “imagined community” (Anderson 1992). However, Keyes suggests the term “proto-imagined community.”

KTM provides a concrete representation of how pre-modern Tai Dam spatially viewed its polity. According to KTM, Tai Dam political space began at Muong Lo. It expanded westward to Muogng Thaeng. Finally, the Tai Dam returned to influence the eastern principalities, Muong Muoi, Muong La and Muong Muak. Prior to the revolutionary period, the spatial consciousness of the Tai Dam was repeatedly transmitted solemnly in funeral ceremony. As a result, rather than emerging out of the

print-capitalism argued by Benedict Anderson, KTM represents the proto-imagined Tai Dam community formulated in the religious textual practices.

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