INTRODUCTION

Known to the world as Siam, on 11 May 1949, an official proclamation changed the name of the country to Prathet Thai, or Thailand. The word “Thai” means “free”, and therefore “Thailand” means “Land of the Free”. Thailand is situated in the heart of the Southeast Asia mainland, from North 5°30' to 21° and from East 97°30' to 105°. The country covers an area of 513,115 sq. km., 2,500 km. from north to south and 1,250 km. from east to west, with a coastline of approximately 1,840 km. on the Gulf of Thailand and 865 km. along the Indian Ocean. Thailand shares borders with the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (formerly known as Lao) to the northeast, Myanmar (formerly known as Burma) to the north, northwest and west, Cambodia (formerly known as Kampuchea) to the east and Malaysia to the south.

(Figure i, p. 3)

Thailand, a tropical land of mountains, plateau and alluvial plains, is divided into four natural regions. The North or the Continental Highlands, a southern extension of the great plateau of Tibet and Yunnan in China, is a mountainous region comprising natural forests, ridges, and deep, narrow alluvial valleys. The main city of this region is Chiang Mai. Central Thailand or the basin of the Chao Phraya River, is a lush and fertile valley. It is the richest and most extensive rice-producing area in the country and has often called the “Rice Bowl of Asia.” Bangkok, the capital of Thailand is located in this region. The Northeast or the Korat Plateau, is an arid region characterized by a rolling surface and undulating hills. Harsh climatic conditions often result in floods and droughts in this region. The Southern Peninsula is hilly to mountainous, with thick virgin forests and rich deposits of minerals and ores. This
region is the center for the production of rubber and the cultivation of other tropical crops. Administratively, the country is divided into 76 provinces. Each province is sub-divided into districts, sub-districts and villages.¹

Thailand is an ethnically heterogeneous nation, even though the Thais constitute 85% of the population. Generally "Thai" refers to speakers of Thai (Tai) languages in Thailand or neighboring nations. It refers also to the ethnic Thais who form four major regional groups in Thailand: Central Thai, Northeast Thai, Northern Thai, and Southern Thai. It has been proven that the Thai migrated to Thailand from southern China in the 11th century.² They are closely related to the neighboring Lao, the major ethnic group in Laos. The Central Thai have been the dominant group for several centuries, and this has resulted in the assimilation of other groups into Central Thai society. The ethnic groups of Thailand can be divided into three categories: (1) Thais (2) Other groups including the Chinese and minorities in the south (3) Hill peoples of the north.

The Central Thai comprise about 32% of the population of Thailand. Since the late 1600s, when the dialect of Thai became the standard language, they have been dominant culturally, politically, and economically. Central Thai identity is based on being born in a Central Thai community and speaking the central Thai dialect. Because Central Thai identity is prestigious, Central Thais retain their identity whether they live in the core Central Thai regions of Thailand or elsewhere in the nation. In recent decades, there has been considerable migration of this group to other regions of Thailand. Many Central Thai live in cities, but those who live in rural areas follow a traditional lifestyle based on the principles of Theravada Buddhism. About 85% of Central Thai men are
ordained priests, although only a small minority actually joins the priesthood. Their major occupation is wet rice farming.

Figure 1 The map of Thailand.
The second largest Thai group is the **Northeast Thai**, also known as **Thai Lao** or **Lao Isan**, indicating their similarity to the Lao across the border. Their presence in Thailand is largely the result of shifting political boundaries in the past. In language and some customs, the Northeast Thai are more like the Lao than like the Central Thai. The Northeast Thai constitute about 30% of the population and live mainly in the poor northeast region, where they subsist by growing rice and other crops and raising cattle and water buffalo for sale. For over 100 years, Central Thai administrators reporting to the government in Bangkok have run the northeast region. There is also a sizable Northeast Thai population in the Bangkok region who associates closely with the Central Thai. The Northeast Thai are also Theravada Buddhists, although they also celebrate regional festivals not celebrated by other Thais.

The third Thai-speaking group is the **Northern Thai**. The group numbers about 6.5 million. Although the Northern Thai are often described as being heavily assimilated into Central Thai society, they continue to see themselves as both a distinct group and the major Thai group across much of northern Thailand. In addition, they speak a distinct dialect of Thai, continue to use their own language and script, and view the major northern city of Chiang Mai as their political and cultural center. Through trade relations, they have been influenced by southern Chinese culture over the centuries.

The **Southern Thai** also about 6.5 million in number, are the major Thai group in the rural south, a region that has been considerably influenced by the Malays of neighboring Malaysia. Unlike the rest of rural Thailand, which is composed mainly of small wet-rice farms, the south has been exploited for its rubber trees and tin mines and has become an area of considerable environmental degradation. In addition to working in these industries, the Southern Thai have also been fishers.
Due to the declining economy, many Southern Thai have immigrated to other countries—especially to those in the Middle East—in search of employment. While the majority is Buddhist, ties to Malays have produced a small Muslim minority.

The second group in Thailand comprises a number of small Thai-speaking ethnic minority groups in the north and northeast, most of whom are either assimilated into the larger Thai population or retain ties to co-ethnic groups in Laos, Myanmar, or China. The major Thai minority groups are the Phuthai, Phuan, Saek, Korat Thai, Shan, and Lue. There are a large number of other national minority groups in Thailand. The most significant ethnic minority is of the Chinese, who constitute about 11% of the population and live mainly in cities and towns in the central and southern regions. The Chinese have been in Thailand since the 14th century, first as traders, and then—during the period of French and British colonialism in the region—as intermediaries between Thais and Europeans, especially in the rubber and tin trade. To a large extent the Chinese are assimilated into Thai society. Most are Thai citizens, many have taken Thai names, and speak Thai as well as Chinese languages. The Chinese still play an important role in the economy as traders and storeowners, but they are also involved in a much wider range of occupations. They remain a distinct minority due to a continued use of Chinese languages, membership in trading networks and adherence to their traditional belief systems—Buddhism-Taoism-Confucianism—all-important markers of Chinese identity. In addition to the Chinese, Thailand also has significant numbers of Vietnamese and Khmer people from Cambodia. Vietnamese number about 70,000 and live mainly in the northeast. Almost all came to Thailand as refugees—one group in the mid-19th century fleeing from Vietnamese rulers, others escaping the French, and still others after World War II fleeing the conflict there.
between France and the United States during the Indo-China conflict. Descendants of a Khmer population that had come under Thai control in the 15th century are now assimilated into Thai society.* Another major Asian ethnic minority comprises the **South Asians** who number about 60,000 and come mainly from India with small groups from Bangladesh and Pakistan. The **Indians** are a diverse group of whom **Punjabis** (about 20,000) are the largest. There is also a small number of Muslims. Most South Asians work in the service sector and in retail trade. A sense of group identity is maintained across the Indian population by participating in social and religious functions and by sending the children to Indian-language schools. At the same time, some Indians have made an effort to get assimilated into Thai society through seeking citizenship, taking Thai names, speaking Thai, joining Thai organizations, and most important, through intermarriage with Thais.

The third ethnic group is composed of a number of **Hill Tribes** who live in the northwest extension of Thailand that is bordered by Myanmar on the west and Laos on the east. The mountain slopes are occupied by a variety of these people who have converged on this area from the north, northeast, west and northwest, and now eke out a precarious livelihood there. Many of these groups live near the border, and there are often other communities across the border in Laos and Myanmar, spreading as far north as China.

These hill tribes have been classified into four major groups according to their linguistic roots.3

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* The **Kmer** numbered close to one million in the 1980s, almost all of whom were refugees from the civil war in Cambodia. At the end of the war, in the 1990s, nearly all were sent back.
(a) Tai-Kadai which is sub-divided into two linguistic branches:
   (i) Tai, the speakers of this branch are Shan, Lao, Thai and Black Tai.
   (ii) Kadai, the speakers of this branch are Li, Kelao Laqua and Lati.

(b) Sino-Tibetan which is divided into four linguistic branches:
   (i) Sinitic, the speakers of this branch are Chinese.
   (ii) Tibeto-Burman, the speakers of this branch are Burmese, Naga, Chin, Kachin, Lutzu, Nakhi, Minchia, Lolo, Lisu, Lahu, Akha and Garo.
   (iii) Karen, the speakers of this branch are Karen.
   (iv) Meo-Yao, the speakers of this branch are Meo and Yao.

(c) Austroasiatic which is divided into three linguistic branches:
   (i) Mon-Khmer, the speakers of this branch are Mon, Khmer (Cambodians), Mountain Mon-Khmer (Wa, Palaung, Khmu, Lawa and Bahnar).
   (ii) Viet-Muong, the speakers of this branch are Vietnamese and Muong.
   (iii) Semang-Senoi, the speakers of this branch are Semang (Nigritos) and Senoi.

(d) Malayo-Polynesian which is divided into two linguistic branches:
   (i) Cham, the speakers of this branch are Cham, Mountain Cham (Bih, Churu, Raglai and Jarai).
   (ii) Malay, the speakers of this branch are Moken (Orang Laut), Malays and Jakun (Aboriginal Malays).

Ethnically the hill tribe groups that settled in Thailand have been identified as the Akha, Lahu, Lisu, Hmong, Yao, Karen, Lua, Htin,
Khamu and Mlabree. Among the more important tribes are the Akha, Lahu, Lisaw, Hmong, Yao, and Karen. (Figures ii to vii, p. 9-12)

The history of the migration of the Akha, Lahu and Lisu, which have common linguistic roots in the Tibeto-Burman, a sub-branch of Sino-Tibetan family of languages is rather complex. The Akha and Lahu or Mussur migrated in stages from Yunnan, China into eastern Burma and northern Laos. From about the beginning of the twentieth century they started to migrate slowly into northern Thailand from Burma. A few Lahu entered Thailand from Laos. The Lisu or Lisaw migrated from the headwaters of Salween River in China into northern Burma, and then into Thailand through Kengtung State, Burma. Now only minor segments of these three tribes live in Thailand. Much larger populations of each group still live in China and Burma.

The Hmong or Meo and Yao or Mien, who speak dialects of the Meo-Yao sub-division of the Sino-Tibetan family of languages, migrated from south central China into Laos, and from there across the Mekong River into Thailand. Until the communist take over of Laos in 1975, these two tribal groups, the Hmong outnumbering the Mien, dominated the mountains of northern Laos. Because many of the men fought on the side of the anti-Communist forces they had to flee into Thailand with their families, where they were given temporary asylum in refugee camps along the eastern border. A consequence of that tragic war was possibly the most abnormal migration of tribal people so far known. Many thousands of Hmong and Mien, and a small number of Lahu, have been resettled in the United States and other Western countries, as well.

Where the Karen came from remains shrouded in mystery. They perhaps originated in southwest China or southeast Tibet, but apparently none of them live in Thailand today. The vast majority of Karen is domiciled in Burma. They are by far the most populous tribal group in
Thailand. Little or no evidence of the Chinese association remains in their culture, while centuries of contacts with the Burmese, Mon, Tai as well as the British have left their mark. The Karen remains profoundly different from any lowland or high land group today. All these tribal groups have their distinct cultural patterns and artefacts. (Figure viii, p. 13)

Figure ii An Akha woman. The Akha migrated in stages from Yunnan, China into eastern Burma and northern Laos before migrating into northern Thailand. Linguistically, they belong to the Tibeto-Burman sub-branch of the Sino-Tibetan.
Figure iii A Lahu woman. The Lahu or Mussur also migrated from Yunnan, China into eastern Burma and northern Laos before entering Thailand. They belong to the Tibeto-Burman sub-branch of Sino-Tibetan.

Figure iv A Lisu woman. The Lisu or Lisaw migrated from the headwaters of Salween River in China into northern Burma before migrating Thailand. They belong to the Tibeto-Burman sub-branch of Sino-Tibetan.
Figure v A Hmong woman. The Hmong or Meo who speak dialects of the Meo-Yao sub-division of the Sino-Tibetan family of languages, migrated from south central China into Laos, and from there across the Mekong River into Thailand.

Figure vi A Mien Yao woman. The Yao also migrated from south central China into Laos, before coming into Thailand and speak the dialects of the Meo-Yao.
Figure vii A Karen woman. Where the Karen came from remains shrouded in mystery. They probably originated in southwest China or southeast Tibet. They belong to the Karen sub-branch of Sino-Tibetan family of languages.
Figure viii The main migration routes of the hill tribes into Thailand.
According to the latest hill tribe population data from "Hill Area Community Register in 20 provinces of Thailand 1997" surveyed by Hill Tribe Welfare Division, Public Welfare, the hill tribes occupy an area comprising of 3,746 villages scattered over 20 provinces in the North and Mid-West in Chiang Rai, Chiang Mai, Mae Hongson, Phayao, Phrae, Nan, Lampang, Lampoon, Tak, Phitsanulok, Phetchaboon, Kamphangphet, Sukhothai, Uthaithanee, Supanburi, Petchaburi, Kanchaburi, Prachuabkeereekhant and Northeast of Loei province. The census also put their approximately number at around 775,000.

This work focuses on two of the hill tribes, the Yao and Lisaw, who have strongly retained through the centuries their identity, cultural traits, religion and customs, avoiding a complete assimilation but also demonstrating sufficient flexibility to adapt to their new environments.

The Yao, originating in China, is a Mongoloid people of the Sino-Tibetan family of language, and constitutes an ancient minority that may be as old as the Han Chinese. During the last millenium or so political and economic factors forced the Yao to migrate very slowly from the central part of China (possibly in the Yangtse Kiang area) to southern provinces in Yunnan, Guangxi, Guangdong, Guizhou, Hunan, and Jiangxi. The pace of migration became faster as from there many kept moving even further south periodically into northern Vietnam, northern Laos, and northern Thailand over the last couple of hundred years. The Yao in Thailand migrated from Luang Nam Tha and Muang Sing provinces of Laos about 60 years ago, and are settled in significant numbers in the northern section of the country. The Yao are classified into several main sub-groups. According to Jess G. Pourret, the Yao can be classified as speakers of four main languages:

(a) Mien, a Meo-Yao language of the Sino-Tibetan family.
(b) Meo, a form of Hmong dialect from the Meo-Yao family.
(c) Zhuang/Dong of the Tai-Kadai family.
(d) Mandarin Chinese tinted with southern influences.

In Thailand, where only Mien Yao are found, they are simply called Yao, the word Mien being little known outside the sub-group itself. They are also often merely called highlanders in the vernacular.

The Lisu (Lisaw) are a Mongoloid people of Tibeto-Burman origin. It is probable that they are of Lolo extraction, or at least are closely related to this Tibeto-Burman group. While definite information is not available, the original home of the Lisu may have been to the northwest of Yunnan or in Tibet. From this region, the Tibeto-Burman peoples gradually migrated southward into the Salween Valley, and subsequently into Burma and Thailand. The Lisaw first came into Thailand approximately 80 years ago. This tribal group calls itself "Lisu" (both syllables spoken on a mid-tone), but is called "Lisaw" by the Thai. The name has no known meaning. The Lisu are divided into three general sub-groups:

(a) The White Lisu or Pai (alternate spelling--Pe).
(b) The Flowery Lisu or Hua (alternate spelling--Hwa)
(c) The Black Lisu or He.7

At present most of the Flowery Lisu are to be found in Thailand. A subgroup of the Lisaw can also be found in the Northeast regions of India.

The main purpose of this dissertation is to study the clothing, ornaments and musical instruments of the Mien speaking Yao and the Flowery Lisaw settled in Thailand. For the purposes of comparison, an effort was made to investigate the Lisaw of Northeastern India but because of militancy and uncertain political conditions in the region, it was not possible to visit the area. Since a commonality of concerns and approaches can be sensed in all the tribes belonging primarily to the
Mongoloid race and derived from the Sino-Tibetan linguistic family, it was decided to study very briefly, and taking only samplings of the artefacts the region of Ladakh in which the same racial strain of tribes can be seen to see as to how the traditional norms and forms get mutated in the process of their transplantation into a different socio-cultural context. (Figure ix, p. 16)

Figure ix The Ladakhi women in Ladakh region.
Objectives of the Study

The overall objectives of the study in this essay are:

1. To study the evolution of clothing designs, ornaments and musical instruments of the Yao and the Lisaw hill tribes in Thailand.

2. To study the characteristics of the clothing, ornaments and musical instruments of the Yao and the Lisaw hill tribes in Thailand.

3. To compare the clothing, ornaments and musical instruments of the Yao and the Lisaw hill tribe in Thailand.

4. To see whether any similarities can be discerned between the hill tribe of mountainous region of North Western India, in particular Ladakh region.

Through an ethnographic study of these objects, it is hoped that a clearer understanding of these hill tribes that are fast losing their distinctive identity will emerge. It is also hoped that the documentation of these objects with their historical comparative study would go some distance in helping to preserve these last relics.

Research Methodology

Essentially this study is of a descriptive nature. A careful selection of ethnic groups of both Yao and Lisaw tribes is made. The Yao and the Lisaw are studied intensively in Chiang Rai and Chiang Mai provinces, as these areas have the densest settlement of these two tribes.

A marked reliance has had to be placed on recording oral traditions. It is important to note that only a few older tribespeople survive and the store of legends and supportive evidence is likely to be ir retrievably lost if corrective and curative steps are not taken expeditiously. Briefly, the purpose of this study becomes two fold (a) to study, record and document the major artefacts still in use and practice
and (b) to see how the folk traditions which are still potent, are being rapidly modernised.

**Primary Sources**

1. Visits to several villages of Chiang Rai and Chiang Mai provinces, Thailand, as well as Ladakh, Kinnaur, Shimla, India.
2. Visits to various ethnographic, folk arts and crafts museums both in Thailand and India.
3. Interviews with scholars, tribesmen and ethnographers.
4. Consultation of any written records dealing with the migration of the hill tribe and the subject under investigation.

**Secondary Sources**

A study of literature from texts, researches, studies, and essays.

**Tools Used in the Study**

The following tools are used to marshal the data.

1. Tape recorder and cassettes.
2. Photographic equipment.
3. Computer

In order to collect the material extensive fieldwork was undertaken. The chiefs of these clans were interviewed and the scholars in this field consulted. More than 40 settlements were visited and about 50 members of the tribe interviewed. Old and original artefacts, costumes, ornaments, and musical instruments were examined as far as was possible. These artefacts were then photographed by us.

This dissertation has been divided into six chapters. The first chapter entitled General Background, traces the migratory routes of the Yao and Lisaw tribes, their demographic profile, their customs, conventions and beliefs as also their life styles. The second chapter called
“The Clothing” focuses on their articles of clothing, specifically their materials, designs and patterns. In the next chapter, The Ornaments, the same approach is taken towards the ornaments used by the peoples of these tribes. The fourth chapter called Musical Instruments discusses their musical instruments. In the fifth chapter, entitled “The Clothing, Ornaments and Musical Instruments of the Ladakhis”, an attempt has been made to briefly discuss the demographic profile of the tribes of Ladakh and the articles of clothing, ornaments and musical instruments that they prefer. In the Conclusions, the sixth and the final chapter, a comparison of all these artefacts between those of the Yao and Lisaw in particular and of the Ladakhis in general has been attempted.

Reference and Notes

Documents


5. Sae-wang, Nykuay (60 years) An interview, Ban Phaduar village,


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Figures

1.1

National Identity Board, Office of the Prime Minister. Thailand into the 2000’s; Bangkok, 2000, p. 6.

1.2-1.8