

Consuming alien goods, digesting foreign culture: Influence of trade and traders in
northwestern Thailand

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Early 1992 in Khun Yuam, a remote town in northwestern Thailand, there were three television channels (all broadcasted from Bangkok), a couple of public telephone booths and several private phones. Video players and facsimile machines were commonly found in individual homes. When I went back in 2001 the TV channels increased to five and the private phones were doubled. There were two new computer shops that provided internet service, whose customers were mainly local students, nurses, and district officials. Townspeople also used mobile hand-phones (two giant satellite dishes were built in the town to provide the service). Has the globalisation come to town? Will its force drive away the beauty and virtue of local culture (as some NGOs are worried)? But outside influence is no alien to the locals. Since the nineteenth century townspeople have seen outside traders, armed with foreign products, coming to the town. Goods were bought, sold and consumed. Traders also brought new languages, information, innovation and new style of consumption. The locals have learnt to live with new things and changes. And they have adapted well. This paper argues that globalisation should not be seen as inevitable mighty Western force upon local societies, but rather the complexity of local cultures responding to globalisation. For more than a hundred years outside influence and innovation have flowed to the town. In the past cross-border trade between Khun Yuam and the Burma's Shan States was common. Not only goods from the Shan States but also their Tai culture were important to Khun Yuam. Buddhist monks and learned men were invited to the town to teach Buddhism and Tai written language and to provide religious services and traditional healing. Skillful carpenters and

masons were hired to repair, renovate or even build a temple. Shan States represented the continuity and survival of Tai culture in Khun Yuam. But things have changed and new influence has replaced the old one. By using modern technology and new economic system, Thai culture has become significantly influential to local communities. This is a result of a successful adaptation of local culture to innovation and globalisation.

Townspeople

Khun Yuam is a small market town located at the northwestern corner of Thailand. To the west, it is adjacent to the Kayah State of Burma (approximately over twenty kilometres to the Burma-Thailand border) and about sixty-seven kilometres south of Mae Hong Son town. Khun Yuam was established in the nineteenth century. The reasons of the settlement are not conclusive. Some scholars indicate that the town was resided by Tai traders who arrived with their caravans, wanting to create a trading network between the Shan States and Thailand's northwestern region.¹ A writer suggests that the growth of this area were associated with logging activity when teak was abundant. New settlements were set up by migrants from the Shan States to work as loggers and later decided to settle in the area.² In contrast, an official version claims that Khun Yuam was settled in the early nineteenth century by Tai people who migrated down south from Mae Hong Son and its nearby village to find new land.³ The town then became part of the Mae Hong Son district, which was under Chiang Mai administration. It is also possible that many people migrated to this area to avoid uneasy situations of fighting and banditry in the Shan States, which were not uncommon in the nineteenth century. It is

¹ Srisakr Vallibhotama and Suchitt Wongthes, *Thajnauj, thajjaj, thajsajaam. Sinlapawadthanatham chababphised* (Lesser Tai, Greater Tai, Siamese Tai. Arts & Culture, Special Issue) (Bangkok: Samnakphim Matichon, 2534 B.E. [1991]) and Ratanaporn Sethakul, "Political, Social, and Economic Changes in the Northern States of Thailand Resulting from the Chiang Mai Treaties of 1874 and 1883" (Ph.D. diss., Northern Illinois University, 1989).

² Bunchuai Sisawat, *Chiangmai lae phaaknya* (Chiang Mai and northern region) (Bangkok: Khlang Witthaya, 2504 B.E. [1961]), p. 672.

said, for example, that the early settlers of Müang Paun, a village some twelve kilometres to the south of Khun Yuam, were war migrants from Burma. According to some local elderly, the Karen, the Pa-O, the Kayah and the Lua, were the autochthonous people of the area.

The current population of the town includes the Tai, Kon Müang, Thai, Karen and Hmong speakers, but I will focus only on three groups whose languages are Tai, Kam Müang and Thai or Central Thai.⁴ All three are categorised in the same language family called “Tai”. “Tai”, as far as I know, often refers: firstly, to a language family, and secondly, to several groups of these speakers. An explanation given by Charles Keyes indicates that

... Tai-speaking people are found throughout mainland Southeast Asia and southern China and include the Shan of Burma and southern China, the Tai Lue of northern Laos and southern China, the Lao of Laos, and various other Tai groups (such as the Tai Dam or Black Tai, Tho, Nung, and Chuang) of northern Vietnam, northern Laos, and southern China. The main Tai-speech groups found today in Thailand are the Siamese or Central Thai, the Lao or Isan (or Northeastern Thai), the Yuan or Kon Muang (or Northern Thai), and the Southern Thai.⁵

“Tai” as used here means a particular group of Tai-speakers. These people, especially in Khun Yuam, refer to themselves as “Tai”,⁶ but elsewhere they are known as the “Shan”. Anthony Diller estimates that there are some three million people who speak various dialects of “Shan”. He also states that the language of “...Southern Shan is traditionally written with a distinctive Burmese-like orthography which distinguishes neither tone nor certain vowel contrasts”.⁷ In the past, Tai was the lingua franca of Khun Yuam. It was employed when people were dealing in trade, in communal ceremonies and everyday life. It was spoken by the

³ Khun Yuam District Office, *Eegkasaanprakaubkaanbanjaajsarub amphoekhunyuam* (Summary report of Khun Yuam District) (Khun Yuam, Mae Hong Son, 2535 B.E. [1992]), p. 2.

⁴ The other two groups are the Karen and the Hmong. The Karen are the major population of the area, but most of them live in upland villages. The Hmong are the smallest group, all of whom recently migrated from Mae Chaem District in Chiang Mai. They mostly reside on high-altitude mountains. However, some Karen and Hmong have moved to settle in the outskirts of the town.

⁵ Charles F. Keyes, *Thailand: Buddhist Kingdom as Modern Nation-State* (Boulder and London: Westview Press, 1987), p. 213.

⁶ They are called “Ngiaw” by the Kon Müang. The term “Ngiaw”, however, is considered offensive by the Tai.

Tai, Karen, Kayah, Pa-O and Lua, although none of the last three groups lives in Khun Yuam at the present time.⁸ Today, many townspeople still speak Tai, but its status as a trading language has declined (see further for discussion).

On the other hand, Anthony Diller notes that “some 20 to 25 million speak Central Thai varieties as a first dialect, and the great majority of Thai nationals in the rest of Thailand are at least partially (passively) bidialectal in Central Thai”. Unlike Shan (or Tai), the Central Thai language contains “...many Mon-Khmer and Indic loans”.⁹ Since Central Thai is used in school, governmental administration and business, the number of its speakers is increasing.

The Kam Müang language includes “Northern Thai varieties spoken in Chiangmai, Chiangrai and nearby areas”. Kam Müang speakers refer to themselves as “Kon Müang”.¹⁰ Anthony Diller states that Kam Müang

...may be used to refer to the urban speech of Chiang Mai as opposed to rural Northern varieties. (Yuan is also used to designate these varieties, but rarely by those who speak them.) A distinctive Lanna [the written language] script, similar to Lue and Khuen scripts, is still in some use and is being locally revived - also referred to as Tua Mu'ang or Tua Tham. In earlier times this variety was referred to by Central Thais and foreigners as (Western) Lao, a usage now obsolete. Approximately 6 million speakers in Thailand.¹¹

⁷ Anthony Diller, “Tai languages: Varieties and subgroup terms”, *Australian National University Thai-Yunnan Project Newsletter*, 25 (1994): 15.

⁸ A similar situation occurred in the Shan States of Burma, where Tai was spoken widely. Leslie Milne writes that in the Shan States in the nineteenth century, “... Nearly all Kachins can speak and understand a good deal of Shan; indeed, the people of the different tribes use Shan as a common language” (Leslie Milne, *Shans at Home* (New York: Paragon Book Reprint Corp., 1970 [1910 original], p. 132). The Palaung of Tawngpeng (see Maurice Collis, *Lords of the Sunset: A Tour in the Shan States* (London: Faber & Faber, 1938), p. 214 and Frank M. Lebar, Gerald C. Hickey and John K. Musgrave, *Ethnic Groups of Mainland Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Human Relations Area Files Press, 1964), p. 122) and several other ethnic groups spoke Tai as well.

⁹ Diller, “Tai languages: Varieties and subgroup terms”, p. 8 and p. 15.

¹⁰ These two terms are pronounced like this by the local Kon Müang in Khun Yuam (that is, with an unaspirated “k”). However, “Kham Muang” or “Mu’ang” and “Khon Muang” are commonly used in the literature. “Kam” means words or languages.

¹¹ Diller, “Tai languages: Varieties and subgroup terms”, pp. 11-12.

Kon Müang is translated by Richard Davis as “the people of the principalities” and they do not “like being called Lao”.¹² The local Tai of Khun Yuam, however, refer to the Kon Müang as *Joon* (Thai - *Yuan*), a term considered offensive by the latter. I must note that Tai and Kam Müang languages are distinct. The local Tai speak Kam Müang (and Tai, of course), but not many Kon Müang are able to speak Tai.

Most of the Tai in Khun Yuam are the descendants of people who migrated from the Shan States of Burma in the first half of the nineteenth century. Some Tai residents, nevertheless, originally came from nearby villages and some from villages in the territory of Müang district of Mae Hong Son. They later married the locals and decided to settle in the town. The Kon Müang, on the other hand, are either the descendants of migrants from Amphoe Mae Chaem,¹³ which is a district next to Khun Yuam, or those who recently moved from other districts of Chiang Mai. The Thai include those who came from provinces of the central and eastern regions of the country. The Thai, mostly males, comprise at least two groups: those who married local women and those who are government officials, including district officers, policemen, doctors and nurses, and schoolteachers.¹⁴ Inter-marriage among Tai, Kam Müang and Central Thai speakers, is common.¹⁵ Almost all of the town residents are either bilingual or multi-lingual.

In its early days, the town established close relations, economically and culturally, with the northern region and the Shan States. Local people regularly traded and travelled across the border. They sometimes searched for wives, craftsmen, learned persons, precious things and valuable goods, in Burma and brought them home. Traders from other towns in the

¹² Richard B. Davis, *Muang Metaphysics: A Study of Northern Thai Myth and Ritual* (Bangkok: Pandora, 1984), p. 23.

¹³ According to the informants, the Kon Müang left Mae Chaem owing to famine and drought in the area. Even if, however, there was no drought, there would never be enough rice to eat because of the soil's poor quality. This has made Mae Chaem, until now, one of the poorest districts in this region.

¹⁴ Apart from some former policemen who married the locals, almost all of the Thai government officials stay in the town for a few years, they will then be transferred to other posts elsewhere.

Chiang Mai area imported products that the locals needed, while local traders carried goods that were locally produced to outside markets. News about the outside world also came with the traders and the plains of the central region seemed to be another country far away. The Shan States and the northern region were the territory local people were familiar with.

Khun Yuam had been, at least until the World War II, active in local trade. Not only were there many traders living in the town, but Tai traders from Burma and Kon Müang traders from several districts in Chiang Mai also came to sell their goods. Many traders were full-time and some were part-time. They travelled on foot. Part-time traders, having no animals, normally carried the goods themselves, but full-time traders used oxen as pack animals. The latter were therefore known as *phaukhaa wuataang* or “oxen caravan traders”.¹⁶ They were better off than part-time traders.

Major exports of Khun Yuam in the past were rice,¹⁷ *thoonaw* (dried, grounded fermented soy bean cakes used in cooking) and a small amount of betel nuts. They were sold in the markets of Mae Hong Son, Mae Sariang, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai and occasionally in the Shan States. On the return trip, local traders bought salt, sesame oil, shrimp paste, dried shrimps, dried fish, tea, fermented tea, tobacco, clothing, paraffin oil, matches, etc., and sold them in Khun Yuam. Outside traders, of Tai, Kon Müang and Pa-O speakers, who transported similar goods, also stopped to trade in the town. Thus, despite its smallness, the town was rather active in trade. Tai and Kam Müang were spoken in the town, but Tai seemed to be

¹⁵ To my knowledge, there are some Tai-Karen couples living in the town.

¹⁶ Sometimes, it is translated as “ox-train traders” or “bullock traders” (see Katherine Ann Bowie, “Peasant Perspectives on the Political Economy of the Northern Thai Kingdom of Chiang Mai in the Nineteenth Century: Implications for the Understanding of Peasant Political Expression” (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1988), Chusit Chuchart, “From peasant to rural trader: The ox-train traders of northern Thailand, 1855-1955”, *Australian National University Thai-Yunnan Project Newsletter*, 7 (1989) and J. George Scott, *Burma and Beyond* (London: Grayson & Grayson, 1932). It must be noted that these oxen were used for goods transportation only and were looked after with great care. They would not have to plough the land or do any other tasks. Animals used in cultivation were usually water buffaloes.

¹⁷ According to some locals, there was often more than enough rice for local consumption. The surplus of rice was sold in nearby villages or Mae Hong Son and, occasionally, as far as in the markets in Mae Rim or Chiang Mai.

used widely by most speakers, traders in particular, who were neither Tai nor Kon Müang. Most traders who came from the Shan States did not speak Kam Müang.

Politically, Khun Yuam in its early days did not draw much attention from the government in Bangkok. Its administration was left in the hand of Chiang Mai rulers, who were under Bangkok suzerainty. It was in the late nineteenth century that Khun Yuam and its surrounding areas became a concern for the Thai government. The region was essential because of its strategic location at the frontier between Thailand and Burma, then occupied by the British. There were always conflicts and fighting between the Tai and the Kayah; both sides wanted to occupy the land, to assemble people for labour, to control the trade routes and so forth. The rulers of Chiang Mai also tried to share control of the area, especially in logging. All this forced the Thai government to reform its administration at the turn of the century.

Yet, disputes continued after the reforms, particularly disputes between the British and the Thai. The latter decided to make more changes, both in administrative and judicial systems. The following decades saw the administration trying to solve its disputes with the Tai who were British subjects.¹⁸ Taxes were reduced and individual land ownership was granted to the locals who were Thai subjects. New settlers were persuaded to move and settled in the areas under Thai control. Not until the 1930s did the situations in Khun Yuam and Mae Hong Son areas become more stable and the Thai administration could feel more at ease.¹⁹

Traders

¹⁸ Many British subjects crossed the border to Khun Yuam to trade and other reasons. Some of them took local women as their wives but only a few settled down. They occasionally got into a dispute with local people and sometimes with the Thai authority.

¹⁹ For the administration reforms in the northern region, see Ratanaporn, "Political, Social, and Economic Changes", p. 255. For the disputes between Thai authority and British subjects, and issues about new settlements and land ownership, see NA, MT.5.16/1 (National Archives, Thailand, Document of the Ministry of Interior Affairs).

In the old days, local traders did not merely trade for their own wealth. They also searched for amusement in their travels, the pleasures of companionship, the delight of new experiences, extra money for merit making and prestige. They were friends with a lot of people, many of whom were of different speech groups. They travelled and knew more about the outside world than other residents. They made contributions to the monasteries more often than ordinary locals. Most of them were literate; a few men who are alive can still read and write both Tai and Thai.

As previously mentioned, in the past many townspeople were full-time traders and others traded occasionally, particularly in the dry season. They not only traded locally, but often travelled to other towns or villages in order to involve more profitable goods. They travelled on foot. Full-time traders (or *phaukhaa wuataang*) usually employed oxen as a means of transportation. The oxen were all young and strong. They were looked after with great care in order to fulfil their only task, that is, to transport goods. Western travellers in the nineteenth century, quoted in Bowie, saw some of the bullocks that were used in trader's caravans and recorded the following information about them:

The head of the animal is covered with a mask made of small cowrie shells, beads, or seeds, with two openings for the eyes, and surmounted by a high tuft of feathers from the tails of a peacock or an Argus pheasant, while an additional supply of bells is hung round the neck and shoulders and also round the hind quarters of the beast, and one tuft of hair is suspended beneath the tail, and another on the left side of the neck ... The object of all these trapping is to protect the caravan from the assaults of evil spirits.²⁰

... These useful animals are controlled by a string through their nostrils, double paniers of cane being slung across their backs. Some have their faces covered with bear and tiger skins, decorated with shells and looking-glasses. A plume of peacock feathers finishes the head-dress. Sweet-toned bells are fixed above the paniers, and wherever one journeys the sounds for the bell are heard for miles. It is said that the bullocks know the tinkling of their own droves, and the keepers in the evening call them into the camps simply by sounding the bells (Bowie 1988:170-171).

²⁰ Hallett (1988) witnessed similar decorations on the bullocks that were going to Kengtung, east of the Shan States. He wrote that "...The leading oxen had masks, embroidered with beads, on their faces, surmounted by peacocks' tails". Some of the caravans travelled with "...over a hundred bullocks" (Hallett 1988:208-209).

The bullocks that led the caravans were even more important than the rest of the animals and were therefore treated specially. The animals were described in this way,

The lead ox was carefully chosen and well taken care of. The lead ox was always the strongest ox in the pack and not afraid of anything. A good lead ox could apparently lead the entire caravan straight through the middle of another caravan without hesitating. The lead carried no load, other than a large caravan bell (*phanglang*) on his back; his function was to set the pace and lead the way (Bowie 1988:170).

Each animal carried weights of between forty and sixty kilograms, but the average was fifty kilograms (Chusit 1982:18 and 1989:5). In contrast, Moerman (1975:158) states that “...Three oxen are reckoned to carry about 100 kilograms”.

Oxen caravan traders were normally wealthier than anyone.²¹ Many of them owned oxen, as many as thirty heads or more.²² A few possessed horses as well. They preferred to build large houses, with particularly large living rooms at the front, to provide a living space for their trading partners or friends. At the back of their houses there were colossal rice stores to keep enough food for their own consumption and guests throughout the year. They generally owned several pieces of land that were either rented by the locals²³ or cultivated by hired hands. In addition, some traders hired local or Karen women to do domestic work.

As stated earlier that rice was the main export of Khun Yuam. Rice was taken by oxen caravan traders to sell in Phaa Baung, Mae Hong Son, Mae Sariang, Mae Rim and Chiang Mai. It was sometimes transported across the Salween River into the Shan States.²⁴ Betel

²¹ Bowie (1988:171) also notes that elsewhere in northern Thailand, “[o]xen caravan traders were generally wealthy, certainly among the better-off in their respective villages”.

²² Chusit documents that some oxen caravan traders might own up to one hundred heads of oxen (Chusit 1982:20 and 1989:5).

²³ The rent was usually paid in rice, not cash.

²⁴ A couple of Tai elders in Tau Phae informed me that they were occasionally hired by a Khun Yuam trader to accompany his caravan, carrying paddy to towns in the Shan States.

nuts²⁵ and *thoonaw* were, at times, also for sale. After the goods were sold, the traders purchased salt, sesame oil, shrimp paste, dried shrimps, dried fish, tea, fermented tea (Tai – *neng*, Kam Müang – *miang*),²⁶ tobacco, paraffin oil, clothing and so forth, and took them back to sell in Khun Yuam. Every now and then, these products were transported to Khun Yuam by outside traders who came from other towns or villages in the northern region,²⁷ or even from the Shan States.

During trading trips, oxen caravan traders hired a few locals to look after their animals, at least one man for every ten bullocks, plus another man to take care of the lead ox. The caravans always started to travel rather early in the morning and stopped about an hour before noon. Chusit (1989) confirms that elsewhere in the northern region oxen caravan traders also “...set out very early in the morning, about 5.30 a.m., and stopped about 10.30 a.m. That is, they travelled about five hours a day and then stopped to prepare their food and allow the oxen to graze”.²⁸ The caravans “...travelled at a speed of about 3 kilometres per hour, though on level ground they might travel somewhat faster” (Chusit 1989:5). They covered a distance of 15-20 kilometres each day (Chusit 1982:18). Traders and their hired men would then spend the rest of the day relaxing, while the animals fed themselves. They often had to sleep in the forest, as Moerman indicates:

...One built a sleeping shelter and, if caught in the rains, the oxen too would be provided with leaf and bamboo coverings much like those now made for carts. The rice was always kept wrapped in leaves to protect it against the hazards of the journey (Moerman 1975:158).

²⁵ Betel nuts were generally taken from Burma to Khun Yuam by Burmese Tai traders. Local traders then purchased the betel nuts and transported them to other markets. A small amount of local betel nuts was sold as well.

²⁶ At home, local Tai normally offered drinks and fermented tea and tobacco to their guests. When the Tai consumed fermented tea, they wrapped a bit of salt with a small mouthful of *neng* leaves and let it dissolve slowly in their mouths. They usually did not chew the leaves.

²⁷ Bowie (1988:169) writes about a *phaukhaa wuataang* from Mae Rim who brought fish to sell in Khun Yuam and made “...substantial gains”.

²⁸ Moerman (1975:158) tells us that the Chiangkham's Lue traders travelled for a similar period of time.

Traders also needed some protection from wild animals, such as tigers,²⁹ bears and snakes as well as from humans. Saang Paang, a former oxen caravan trader, insisted that he and his trading partners were always armed with swords. He was told that many traders were very skillful in the Tai martial art (*laaj*). He also admitted that he always hid his money under the paddy in the bottom of the baskets when he travelled for fear of thieves, though he was never robbed by anyone.³⁰ Another man, an elderly Tai who lives in Tau Phae, four kilometres to the west of Khun Yuam, was a farmer and part-time trader. He used to carry paddy to Chiang Mai once or twice a year. He recalled that when night fell, he and his friends began to make a fire and a lot of noise in order to scare the tigers. He heard that tigers often preyed on oxen in the trading caravans. Worse, as far as he knows, one or two men in his village were attacked and killed by tigers.

All traders were tattooed in order to be protected from supernatural powers, harmful spirits and bad omens. Some of them even learnt the use of incantation spells. As a matter of fact, all this seemed to be practised widely by oxen caravan traders in the northern region. Bowie was informed that in trading caravans

...If anyone carried a gun, it was most likely to be the *naaj hooj* [caravan leader]. The others carried swords. All were protected by tattoos and many carried a protective cloth covered with mantras to protect against evil spirits, tigers, disease, thieves, and other misfortunes. In the words of one villager, “any of the long-distance traders were invulnerable (*kham*); they had to be in order to make it through the forest! They also took dogs along, who barked to alert the traders if there were any problems” (Bowie 1988:169-170).

None of my informants, however, refers to the use of dogs.

²⁹ In the past, there were many tigers roaming the forests around Khun Yuam, Mae Hong Son and Chiang Mai. The names of some places, for example, Mae Ngaw, an area that covered several villages to the west of the town, were related to some characteristic of the tigers. *Ngaw* was the tiger's growling sound.

³⁰ Saang Paang is the brother of Kau Can La's mother (Kau Can La was also a former trader) and their family has been involved in trade for several generations. Saang Paang finished the third grade of primary education from a local school. At one stage, he engaged in the logging industry, working with Saang Jjin, a local wealthy Tai who was a logging contractor. Saang Paang cut teak trees in the Kayah State, west of Khun Yuam, then floated the logs down the river to the saw-mills in Moulmein where he collected his payment. He enjoyed the

Traders did not always have to spend the night on the ground in the forest. When they arrived at the houses of their trading partners, who were also friends, either in a town or a village, they would be sure to enjoy the hospitality of their hosts. Meals and drinks would be served. News was to be exchanged. Traders would do nothing but relax. Their delight and happiness could be described as follows:

The former traders are quite gleeful about the occasional large profits they made, but a more dominant memory is of the fun they had, of the sights along the way, of opportunity for song and riddle. Even in boasting of their success, they talk in this way: "I was a trading man. Whenever I made a trip, however far I went, I would sleep on a mattress every night. I never had to bring a mat or food because wherever I went, there were friends who would put me up. I would put them up when they came through here. A trading man must have a large house because he has many age-mates [*sio*]"'. Adventure, fellowship, popularity, and prominence - as well as profit - rewarded the trader (Moerman 1975:158-159).

Though the satisfactory feeling and happiness described in the above paragraph can be applied to the traders in Khun Yuam, a couple of points need to be clarified. It seems to me that the trader cited by Moerman traded and travelled only short distances; perhaps between villages or small towns, rather than through the forests. He thus neither had to bring any food with him nor sleep in the forests and was able to stay with a friend every night. Some traders, on the other hand, like it or not, always slept in the open air. Saang Paang revealed that when he and his friends arrived in Mae Rim or San Pa Tong or Chiang Mai, they never stayed in a friend's house. Since they had many oxen to feed and nurse, they normally camped in the fields outside the towns while their animals grazed and rested nearby. Their friends or trading partners who lived in the towns would bring them food, drinks, fermented tea or tobacco, as well as chatting and exchanging news to keep them company. Traders who came from Mae Chaem and other places sometimes camped on the outskirts of the towns, so it was a great

opportunity to meet old trading colleagues to revive sweet memories of the past or to make new friends.

Not only did oxen caravan traders make the best out of their trading activities, but part-time traders also gained similar benefits. The old man mentioned above who lives in Tau Phae said that although his group earned little money on each trip, what he really enjoyed was the delights of the travelling, of the fantastic new experiences he gained and of the company of his trading partners and friends. Another former part-time trader and a caravan hired hand named Jaa Cing Ta was a resident of Khun Yuam town.³¹ When he was in his twenties, Jaa Cing Ta walked, together with five or six male friends, to Chiang Mai to sell paddy a couple of times a year. Each of them carried husked rice in two baskets hung from both ends of a bamboo pole laid on their shoulders. After selling all the rice, they would purchase dried fish, salted and sweetened fish and clothing, to sell to the locals in Khun Yuam. Jaa Cing Ta remarked that a Chiang Mai-Khun Yuam return trip usually took thirty to forty-five days, depending on how often the group stopped. He also confirmed that he enjoyed making some extra cash as well as travelling and, most importantly, seeing a great place like Chiang Mai. He sometimes spent several days looking around that city, searching for beautiful garments or ornaments, trying different food, and so forth.

According to Chusit (1989:5), oxen caravan trade “...was extensive till 1960”. However, trading activities have never stopped. New kinds of traders and the so-called “sales representatives” have been coming to the town with a greater variety of goods, such as soft drinks, instant noodles, canned fish, monosodium glutamate, plastic household utensils, electrical appliances, motorcycles, petrol, insecticide and so on. The scale of trade has become larger.

³¹ Much to my regret Jaa Cing Ta died peacefully in his sleep at the end of February 1993, less than a month before I left Khun Yuam. He was a very kind, good-natured old man, with a great sense of humour.

Changes have slowly occurred in Khun Yuam in the past. Since the 1980s the town and its district have been affected by rapid changes. The main highway has been, again, upgraded to facilitate a new business, tourism. Tourists, both Thai and foreigners, armed with cameras, video cameras and Thai currency, have been visiting the area. The townspeople started to learn how to cook Thai food and new eating houses selling Thai food have been opened. The locals speak the Thai language more often than before. A new bus service has linked Khun Yuam and Mae Hong Son directly with Bangkok and the central region. Travelling by air has become rather common as well. Telephone and facsimile machines are now in use. Television is watched regularly by almost everyone. Radios broadcast Thai and Western pop music everyday. Unlike in the past, however, traders in Khun Yuam no longer have to travel as often because of the use of new technology to receive news and trade information and knowledge of the wider community. The town is also changed. For example, there are new houses and shops, new upgraded roads and more public telephone booths. Business is good, and local traders/shop owners are pleased. Some have become richer.

Shan States and their influence

In those days, travelling between Khun Yuam and the Shan States was common. Although the reasons for their trips varied, the townspeople normally went to Burma for trading purposes, especially to search for precious stones and other valuable goods, special kinds of food or of cooking ingredients. Not less often was to find Tai craftsmen and carpenters and bring them to the Thai territory to build temples, stupas, Buddha images or other handicrafts that were related to religion. Occasionally, some local men crossed the border to find their future wives. Some visited their kinsmen or friends. Sometimes when the town could find no able monks to perform rituals, the locals went to the Shan States to invite learned monks to come to Khun Yuam. The monks would help the people in their religious

functions and, often, taught local novices and monks to read and write the Tai scripts. Some of these monks returned to Burma after living in the town for a while but some remained until the last day of their lives.

Traders usually spent a lot of money on religion. They offered food and other necessities to the monks, built a new temple or renovated the old ones and so forth. Traders made merit more often than non-trading locals. Some members of their families even took the Buddhist yellow robes for life. An elderly kinsman of Saang Jiin, for instance, was ordained when he was young and remained in the monastery until he died.³² Most local traders were also educated. Males, in particular, were ordained and learnt the Tai written language at the monasteries. Later when formal education became available (and compulsory), they went to school, either the local one or those in Chiang Mai. In contrast, not until formal education was introduced and the first primary school was established did women begin to be able to read and write. Yet, a number of women spent only one or two years in school. Only those who wanted to be literate taught themselves to read and write Thai, the national language. Formal education and, of course, the Thai language have also brought changes to Khun Yuam.

Today, Tai culture of the Shan States has become less significant in Khun Yuam, but contacts between townspeople and the locals in Burma have not stopped. Until the end of 2000 when the Burmese military government ordered the Burma-Thailand closed, cross-border trade between the Shan States and Khun Yuam had been normal. Although more items of goods were brought into Burma than into Thailand, townspeople in Khun Yuam still

³² Two of Saang Jiin's children, on the other hand, have engaged in education. Thamrong Bunphithak, his elder son, is a former teacher and now the Chief of Khun Yuam Primary Education Office. Siisa-aat Sawae-ngsii, his daughter, is the headmistress of Roongrian Baan Khun Yuam, one of the two primary schools in the town.

Elderly locals recall that Saang Jiin's family owned a colossal teak house with a huge rice store near the *saan caw müang*, the shrine of the tutelary spirit. The house was raised so high from the ground that elephants could walk under the house. In the old days, the family hired many Karen men to work with the elephants and in the forests, as well as Karen women to take care of domestic work. Elders described the house as always busy with people coming and going. Its kitchen had to provide food for both residents and guests day and night. Saan Jiin's family regularly gave contributions to the monks, sponsored local boys in their ordinations and helped in building and renovating the temples.

consumed goods from Burma, for example, dried tea leaves, powdered cattle hides (used for cooking), sesame oil and candles. Buddhist monks in the Shan States are sometimes invited to Khun Yuam to give religious services, but most of them stay only for a short period of time. None of these monks, as far as I know, have remained in the town. Interestingly, for many town residents, elderly people in particular, the monks (and, of course, the religion) in the Shan States are seen as more genuine than the local ones.

Relations among traders

Reciprocity was, of course, practised among the traders, both full-time and part-time. Saang Paang assured me that when traders from other towns arrived in Khun Yuam, they always received a warm welcome and local hospitality. Some of them spent the night at his house, but many preferred to stay at the shelter near the morning market so they could look after their animals that rested in the nearby wasteland. Traders from Mae Rim normally brought fermented tea with them, and those who came from Mae Chaem would trade salt with the locals. Saang Paang would provide them with food and other necessities. He chatted and joked with them, keeping them company until they left the town. Saang Paang sometimes even gave them small gifts.

A lot of the townspeople were (and still are) related to villagers who lived outside the town, especially in the Tai villages of Tau Phae, Müang Paun and Mae Surin (the latter two were each located some twelve kilometres to the south and the north of the town, respectively). It is said that in the old days these people always visited each other or even spent a few days living at the houses of kin during significant religious festivals. Nowadays, as travelling between the villages is more convenient, most relatives usually return home in the evening. Nevertheless, if there is a very special ceremony, many of them may stay for a night or two. After the Buddhist Lent (Tai – *auk waa*, Thai, Kam Müang – *auk phansaa*) and

the traditional Thai New Year Day, the local Tai always visit and exchange gifts with their kinsmen in Khun Yuam town and the three villages. All elderly kin will receive a special greeting on such days. Often, these Tai residents were in the past – some of them still are – trading partners who sometimes travelled together as far as Mae Hong Son and Mae Sariang to sell and buy goods. Some of my informants in Khun Yuam town still recall the pleasure of this trading-travelling and of their partners' hospitality when they stayed at their homes.

Residents of Khun Yuam, moreover, have established some connections, socially and economically, with the locals in Phaa Baung and Huaj Poong,³³ both of which are small markets located between Khun Yuam and Mae Hong Son. Nonetheless, since the advent to Khun Yuam of so-called “direct sale”,³⁴ an English term borrowed by Thai salespeople, the locals of Khun Yuam, Phaa Baung and Huaj Poong now seem to have less contacts with each other. Those who are kinsmen exchange fewer visits. An explanation given by some townspeople is that in the old days, a trip to Phaa Baung or Huaj Poong was frequently for both personal and trading purposes; the two markets at the time provided some goods that Khun Yuam town did not have. While visiting their relatives, Khun Yuam residents would bring some goods with them to sell or exchange with the traders of Phaa Baung or Huaj Poong. Some goods were then bought to sell in Khun Yuam. Today, on the other hand, there is everything one wants in the market of Khun Yuam town. Thus, relatives no longer go to these two towns in order to buy or exchange goods.

Influence from the capital

³³ Although Huaj Poong is now less significant, it was in the past a somewhat important market for local trade. Bowie states that traders often stopped in Huaj Poong for a trading reason. At the time, Huaj Poong “...served as an entrepot for traders who then transported the goods on to Mae Hong Sorn” (Bowie 1988:167).

³⁴ This means that most consumer products can be ordered and transported by the salespeople directly from the companies in Bangkok to these markets.

During the World War II, Khun Yuam-Mae Hong Son area was occupied and used by the Japanese to invade Burma. Roads were built, connected this region with the Shan States. Airfields for military usages were constructed in Mae Hong Son, Khun Yuam and Mae Sariang. After the war, the Thai government decided to pay more attention to this northwestern frontier, partly owing to the communist movements that became increasingly active. The old dirt tracks built by the Japanese were upgraded several times and have now become the main highways connected Mae Hong Son and other towns with Chiang Mai Province. Airfields in Mae Hong Son and Mae Sariang were upgraded for commercial plane's landing, while the airstrip in Khun Yuam was kept for military purpose. The region was (and still is) very important for the strategic defense of the country. Since Khun Yuam is only some twenty kilometres from the Thailand-Burma border, a unit of the Border Patrol Police has been established in the area. In the 1960s a highway was constructed, connecting Mae Hong Son, Khun Yuam and Mae Sariang with Chiang Mai. Later a bus-route service was operated.

A new development, tourism, reached the area in the 1970s. Since then, many Thai tourists have come to the mountaintops surrounding Khun Yuam every winter for holidays. Foreign tourists travel through the town and stop for a rest before heading to hill-tribe villages in Pai District for trekking. Travelers and tourists have become common scene in the town and new shops and eating houses are open to serve the new arrivals. Oxen caravan traders have gone, replaced by itinerant traders and modern-day salesmen.

Central Thai language

The economic growth in Thailand since the mid-1980s has drawn Khun Yuam closer to the capital, both economically and politically.³⁵ Almost all of the goods sold in Khun Yuam's shops today are imported. Sales representatives from the companies in Bangkok transport many manufactured products to the town. They range from smallest objects like needles and thread to ones as large as motorcycles, from watches to television sets, video and stereo players, from kitchen utensils to ready-made garments, from bottled and canned soft drinks to instant noodles to canned fish and from candy to medicines. Most sales representatives come once a month to check whether shop owners want more goods, to introduce new products, to hand in bills, to receive payments, and so on. These newcomers also come with a new language. Almost all of them speak Central Thai and do not understand Tai and Kam Müang.

Individual itinerant traders, on the other hand, occasionally arrive in the town with their utility trucks loaded with goods. They sell garments, bags and backpacks, shoes, rubber boots and flip-flops, household and cooking equipment, musical cassette tapes, picture posters of film stars, small personal items and cosmetics, stationery, etc. Some of them bring seafood from the country's eastern seashore kept in iced metal containers, various kinds of fruit and confectionery that are grown or made and consumed in the central region. Some fruit and sweets are relatively new to many town residents. The introduction of such new products becomes successful; they are sold like hot cakes, despite the rather high prices. All but a few traders travel with their spouses and, sometimes, their children or a close kin. Some itinerant traders are Kon Müang, many are Thai. Thai, therefore, is spoken more frequently than Kam Müang between the locals and traders.

³⁵ The town did not seem to be much affected by the crisis in 1997. When I returned to the town in 2001, there were more shops opened, some of them were operated by outside traders who had just moved in. Two or three shops were expanded; these shop owners told me that business had been good.

A group of Thai speaking itinerant traders will occasionally arrive in Khun Yuam, selling various kinds of goods, including cosmetics, ready-made garments, toys, kitchen utensils and hardware. The group camps on open patch of ground used to land military planes to the east of the town. At night, a screen is put up to show the movies to the townspeople for free – one of the selling strategies aiming at drawing local customers' attention. The movies are all in the Thai language, as foreign films are always dubbed.

The use of Central Thai in Khun Yuam is increasing.³⁶ It is spoken far more widely than just in the schools: in the shops, the morning market, the bank, at the bus station, etc. Town residents find themselves use Central Thai much more often than in the past; only the elderly who have no contact with outsiders do not speak the language. The Central Thai written language is also used in all business-related activities, such as banking transactions, purchase orders, bills and payment, and so on. Neither of the local languages – Tai and Kam Müang – has ever been used as widely as Central Thai. Written Tai has often been utilised for religious ceremonies and traditional medical practices, while hardly any local people still read Kam Müang. Written Thai, on the other hand, is used by a large segment of population, including women and children; unlike the Tai written language in the past, which was employed mainly by educated adult males. Lexical inter-exchange among Tai, Kam Müang and Central Thai is common as well. The number of Central Thai words used in the two local languages, especially in economic activity and political sphere, is increasing. It will be misleading, nevertheless, to assume that local languages are absolutely replaced by Central Thai. Tai and Kam Müang are normally spoken at home and in temples, among close friends, neighbours and colleagues (those who work in the hospital, district office and schools); the two languages clearly indicate intimacy among speakers.

Food

New foods are brought from the central region – not only packaged instant noodles, canned food, canned and bottled soft drinks, candies and packaged snacks, but also other new kinds of food introduced from outside the region. These include Central Thai-style curry (cooked with coconut cream) and hot dishes, Chinese-style noodles, fried rice and fried noodles. These dishes differ from local cuisine, especially Tai food, which is usually cooked with sesame oil and has a rather mild taste. Several eating houses serve Central Thai food for customers, many of whom are local. Even in the feasts associated with religious functions, wedding and funeral ceremonies, Thai dishes are sometimes served and eaten. Central Thai cuisine is no longer the food of the outsiders.

More fresh food is also imported. A local patrol-station owner, for example, is also an agency under contract with a giant agro-industrial company, generally known as “CP”.³⁷ With her husband’s support,³⁸ she started this business several years ago. Her major tasks included taking orders (mainly fresh chicken meat, eggs and fresh pork) from customers (usually local retailing shops and petty traders) in Khun Yuam-Mae Hong Son-Mae Sariang area, sending orders to the company’s branch in Chiang Mai, ensuring that the goods were sent to the customers, and collecting the payment. Such produce was then transported from the farms in Chiang Mai area to the customers. Every morning, however, she and one or two of her employees would bring chicken meat, eggs and other fresh food to sell at the town’s morning market. She did this in order to keep up with her customers and other traders so that she

³⁶ I have discussed this issue in Niti Pawakapan, “Trade and Traders: Local Becomes National”, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 31, 2 (2000): 374-389.

³⁷ The company’s name is Charoen Pokphand Group Co., Ltd. Its head office is located in Bangkok. In recent years, it has become a transnational corporation, investing in several kinds of business, such as agro-industry, fertilisers, seed supply, feed milling, livestock, fisheries, textiles, metals and finance (for background on the company see Hewison 1983:265-269 and 386-387). The corporation expanded rapidly during the economic boom but suffered greatly after the crisis in 1997. According to some sources, however, the corporation’s agro-industry and livestock are well-established and thus have recovered faster than other businesses. It is said that CP is now one of the largest chicken and pork production in the country.

³⁸ Her husband, a Thai from Bangkok, used to be CP’s sales representative.

would not miss any news or information important for her business. In the interview in 2001 she told me that the sales of CP's products in the area was increasing and she was getting more customers and orders. In her view, local people seemed to prefer this imported produce than the local one. There was demand for the chicken meat all year round, but the highest demand was during the rainy season when the locals were busy working in their rice fields.

The consumption of imported seawater fish is also increased. A shop owner in Tau Phae, a large village near Khun Yuam, informed me that one of the best-selling items was seawater fish. The trade, covered all the Mae Hong Son region, was operated mainly by three traders, all of whom lived in the village. The fish – frozen – was transported from Chiang Mai to these three traders. It was then steamed and sent to local traders who made the orders. Like the chicken meat, there was always demand for seawater fish. Nonetheless, according to this informant, local people (at least in her village) seemed to consume more dried and canned fish than seawater fish during the cultivating period. It should also be pointed out that unlike the old days when dried fish was imported from the Shan States, dried fish – and occasionally dried squid – is today produced in Thailand, either in the eastern or southern region.

An interesting development is that production of cooking powder called “hinle” in Mae Hong Son and Chiang Mai. “Hinle” is an oily dish, popular in northern Thailand and the Shan States. Its ingredients, vary between places, mainly consist of fatty pork, sesame oil and several dried and grounded mixed spices. At the present time the powder of such mixed spices, which is contained in tiny paper envelopes (each envelope is enough for one cooking), is manufactured in Mae Hong Son and Chiang Mai. On the envelopes of the cooking powder produced in Chiang Mai, it is written in Thai scripts, describing details of the ingredients, the brand name, the name of the manufacturing company, and so on. The ones that are manufactured in Mae Hong Son, on the other hand, are written in Tai. This is because, I am told, the latter is aimed for local consumption and for export to the Shan States, where a large

number of the population can read Tai. Interestingly, according many town residents, the brand produced in Mae Hong Son is more delicious than the Chiang Mai's one.

Consumer products

Consumer goods, manufactured in the Central region, have been introduced to Khun Yuam town and surrounding villages for many years, but the arrival of such goods became regular since the mid-1980s after the Chiang Mai-Mae Hong Son was upgraded and the sales strategy used by companies in Bangkok happened to be more aggressive. Local consumption of such products, according to some shopkeepers, has increased in past years. Goods, ranging from soap and detergent to packaged snack and canned food, are sold in shops; even in a very small shop in a village.³⁹ Among these products, canned fish – usually in tomato sauce – and packaged noodles are always in high demand and can be sold all year round.

The increasing consumption of consumer goods has changed local consuming habit and attitudes. Soft drinks, canned and bottled, for example, are considered suitable for special occasions or house visitors. In the old days whenever there was a guest, the host would either offer drinking tea, fermented tea leaves (for tasting) or Burmese tobacco (for smoking) to his guest; often all of the three were offered. Such reception was considered proper and honourable to both the guests and the hosts. They were also given to monks when there were religious functions or to ordinary guests in weddings and funerals. In Khun Yuam today there are some changes. Drinking tea and fermented tea leaves are normally offered to elderly guests and monks by the elders. Younger people hardly consume tea leaves. Burmese tobacco is replaced by manufactured cigarettes imported from Bangkok. Soft drinks have gradually

³⁹ This phenomenon is, however, probably not uncommon at all if comparing with other parts of the country. It is reported that in the villages in the Central region at least since early 1960s, local people already consumed “large quantities of modern consumer goods, mostly as gifts to priests and to families celebrating life-cycle events” – see Pfanner, David E. and Ingersoll, Jasper, “Theravada Buddhism and village economic behavior: A Burmese and Thai comparison”, *Journal of Asian Studies* 21, 3 (1962): 357.

become a reception in private homes, especially for special guests; it is more common, of course, to offer drinking water or iced water to guests because of its cheaper cost. Yet in wedding or funerals, soft drinks are always presented and consumed. In addition, according to the shop owner in Tau Phau, energy drinks (in plastic bottles) and canned coffee are among her shop's best selling items. She guessed that her customers who consumed canned coffee (often contained high amount of caffeine) were addictive to caffeine.

Another interesting development is the consumption of the so-called "UHT drinking yoghurt". In past years the consumption of cow milk in Thailand has increased rather rapidly. This is probably due to, partly, the government campaign of milk consumption among children and, partly, the new health and nutrition awareness, especially among urban residents.⁴⁰ The government has tried to encourage pre-school and early-primary-school children throughout the country to drink milk. This has led to the "free-milk" campaign, which is financially supported by the Ministry of Education, to give all the children at schools in the rural area a drink of milk everyday. At the early stage of the campaign in Khun Yuam-Mae Hong Son area, fresh milk contained in plastic bags were given, but the milk became spoiled quickly, not suitable for children who lived in remote villages. Fresh milk was then replaced with the UHT milk because of its no-refrigeration required, life-long quality. The campaign has proved to be a success; today even commercial milk is consumed by young children in the town and a number of villages.

It must be noted, however, that most children prefer flavour-added milk to the ordinary, non-flavoured one. Most of the commercial milk sold in Khun Yuam's shops is thus flavoured milk: strawberry and chocolate. According to a few shopkeepers, the UHT drinking yoghurt is also a favourite among children and some adult females because of its sweet and sour, fruity tastes. This drinking yoghurt is either a mixture of milk, fruit juice and sugar or

⁴⁰ The consumption of milk in the rural area is increasing as well, despite its lower rate than in the urban area.

yoghurt, fruit juice and sucrose, depending on its brand. Yet, the tastes – of course with fruity-flavoured-added – seem to be similar. Like the ordinary UHT milk, the drinking yoghurt usually lasts for several months without refrigeration. There is local demand for UHT milk and drinking yoghurt all year round, not only in Khun Yuam's town but some villages as well.

Dress

The influx of cheap, Western-style, ready-made garments is changing the dressing pattern of the townspeople rather quickly. Teenagers wearing jeans and T-shirts, men and women (in their forties or even fifties) in Western-style trousers, shirts and blouses, can be seen throughout the town. Some married women even prefer jeans when they are outside their homes. And it is not uncommon to see women who earn a salary (nurses, schoolteachers, government officials) wearing skirts on weekdays and even weekends. Only a small number of elderly Tai still wear their traditional dress with turbans on their heads when they are outside the houses. These traditional Tai clothes are brought from the Shan States and have become less available, owing to the small amount of goods from Burma and cheaper clothes from the Central region.

Entertainment

There are now five television channels, broadcasting in Khun Yuam. All programmes are in Central Thai. Owing to the availability of hire purchase service, television sets, radios and stereos, or even video players, have become normal possessions in many households. Watching television is a common leisure, shared by the people of all ages. In addition, many town residents also enjoy watching video films, almost all of which are rental. All foreign movies, mainly produced in Hong Kong and Hollywood, are dubbed into Central Thai. None is in local languages.

Energy

Cooking gas has been used by townspeople for many years. The gas, in small, cylinder-shape metal containers, imported by agencies in Chiang Mai, was manufactured in the Central region. It was then transported via Chiang Mai to the shops in Khun Yuam town. In 1992 the gas was utilised mostly by townspeople, but in 2001 even the inhabitants of nearby villages were using it. The shop owner mentioned above, for instance, stated that more two-third of the households in Tau Phae used gas. It was, however, used only when the occupants were in rush and wanted to cook or heat up their food quickly, especially during the cultivating period when the villagers spent most of their time in the paddy fields. Usually, the villagers would prefer firewood as a source of energy, because of its much cheaper cost. Charcoal, on the other hand, was not used as widely as firewood, mainly by noodles shops. There were three or four villagers who produced charcoal for the shops in the village and Khun Yuam town. It is worth noting that the decisions to utilise such energy sources are perhaps not due to their prices. Clearly, cooking gas is more expensive than any other sources but used by many households. This is because using gas is more convenient and faster. Charcoal produces constant heat, much better than firewood, and less smoke. It is thus preferred by noodles shopkeepers, who need hot water for all day long.

Cash payment and hire purchase

Hire purchase has been introduced to the town some time ago and has become popular. In several shops, goods such as electrical appliances, gas stoves, motorcycles and even pieces of cloth and ready-made garments can be bought on this basis; motorcycles and electrical appliances are the most common purchases. The number of customers relying on hire purchase is increasing; even housewives who previously had no regular income are using

it. A few women have begun to do laundry for the townspeople, usually for those individuals earning a salary, such as government officials, schoolteachers and nurses. Clothes are picked up, washed, dried, ironed and delivered by the women; motorcycles bought on hire purchase for personal reasons are also used for this work. Women who can find more customers decide to buy a washing machine – needless to say, on hire purchase.

This section is to provide some examples of two different methods of payment offered to customers in Khun Yuam town in 1992: cash payment and hire purchase. The price of goods and the amount of profit earned in these two payment methods will also be shown. Tables 1 and 2 compare the prices of garments sold in a shop and those sold by one of the itinerant traders who come from their hometowns in the central region to trade in Khun Yuam periodically. Table 3 shows the prices of some products sold on hire purchase by a shop owner.

The figures below prove that the traders, local and non-local, earned reasonable amounts of profit from their goods, those sold on hire purchase in particular. Since hire purchase has been introduced to the town, many households now possess more electrical appliances or even a motorcycle. They are satisfied because many products have become available to them, although they have to pay a higher price for the goods. Even those who earn a little cash, for instance, laundresses and food hawkers, are now able to own a television set or a motorcycle; the latter has become almost a must for many locals. In addition, since a lot of villagers, Tai and Kon Müang, have begun to make more cash by selling their crops, especially garlic and soy bean, they are also inclined to buy and utilise more consumer goods than previously. Some of these products are bought on hire purchase. Often, on the other hand, a special discount price is offered to customers who pay cash for their goods. I am told that the Hmong, unlike the townspeople and those who have a salary, prefer to pay cash in order to get a discount.

Table 1 Cash payment – a shopkeeper's case

Type of goods	Price bought (baht)	Price sold (baht)	Profit (baht)	Profit (percentage)
A pair of jeans	120	160	40	33.33
A pair of sports trousers	60	80	20	33.33
A skirt	120	160-170	40-50	33.33-41.67
A good-quality winter jacket	750	860	110	14.67

Table 2 Cash payment - itinerant trader's case

Type of goods	Price bought (baht)	Price sold (baht)	Profit (baht)	Profit (percentage)
A pair of jeans	150	210 minimum 250 maximum	60-100	40-66.67
A man's shirt	75	120-140	45-65	60-86.67
A man's shirt	90	130-150	40-60	44.44-66.67
A good-quality winter jacket	450	650-700	200-250	44.44-55.56
A good-quality winter jacket	650	850-900	200-250	30.77-38.46

Although an itinerant trader may make more profit than a shopkeeper. The former has some extra expenses, such as petrol, truck maintenance expenses, vehicle registration fee, camping cost and so on. The only expenditure that seems to be unusually high for a shopkeeper is rent. This is the main reason why many shopkeepers in Khun Yuam try hard to

own a shop. In general, despite the differences in price, both local shopkeepers and itinerant traders often sell the same quality of goods or similar products.

Several itinerant traders remarked that they are doing somewhat well and that their present occupation is more profitable and more desirable than their former one – rice farming. Most itinerant traders are former farmers or people who used to work in rice fields who decided to become traders because of financial problem, illness caused by agricultural chemicals or other reasons. Many of them still own some land in their home towns, but they do not consider it likely that they will take up farming again. In fact, those who have become quite successful have encouraged their siblings or close relatives to join them in trading.

Some shopkeepers complained to the district office and demanded that all itinerant traders be forbidden to camp and sell their goods in the town area. The district office replied that it had no authority to impose such a trading prohibition. Moreover, as the itinerant traders had not done anything illegal, any prohibition against them would be considered discrimination. I presume that the shopkeepers' actions were caused by worry related to pressure of competition from the itinerant traders, and fear that they might lose their customers to these outside traders. Though tensions between the shopkeepers and itinerant traders have not yet eased, not all the former are unhappy. Many goods, especially food, drinks and cigarettes, are purchased and consumed by these outside traders. Locals who sell food and groceries or run small eating houses are delighted.

Table 3 compares the price of certain goods sold for cash or on hire purchase by a shop owner. The period of payment for goods bought on hire purchase varies from three months to thirty-six months depending on the price of the item. Expensive goods, such as motorcycles, have the longest period for payment. A down payment, of course, has to be paid before the goods are taken. Each customer is asked to sign a contract with the shop, agreeing

to make regular payments and so forth. If he or she stops paying, the goods will be confiscated by the shop and no refunds will be given.

The locals who have limited cash prefer buying goods on hire purchase. So far, it has been a successful business. However, those who have a reasonable amount of money like to pay cash because a discount is given to them. Furthermore, some residents, whenever they have occasion to travel to Mae Sariang or Chiang Mai will take the opportunity to shop and purchase goods there, especially electrical appliances, because of the cheaper prices and greater variety of goods sold in these two markets.

Table 3 Hire purchase

Type of goods	Cash price (baht)	Down payment (baht)	Number of monthly instalments	Amount of each instalment (baht)	Total price paid on hire purchase (baht)
Rice cooker	750	150	3	215	795
		150	6	115	840
Electric fan	990	200	3	291	1,073
		200	6	159	1,154
Gas stove	3,668	773	6	555	4,103
		773	12	314	4,541
Washing machine	5,140*	690	12	515	6,870
		690	24	317	8,298
refrigerator	6,240*	990	12	601	8,202
		990	24	370	9,870
Television set	6,380*	790	12	649	8,578
		790	24	399	10,366
Stereo	10,090*	1,600	6	1,744	12,064
		1,600	12	986	13,432
		1,600	18	733	14,794
Yamaha motorcycle	33,000	5,900	12	2,868	40,316
		5,900	24	1,739	47,636
		5,900	36	1,363	54,968
Honda motorcycle	36,500	6,900	12	3,133	44,496
		6,900	24	1,899	52,476
		6,900	36	1,488	60,468

Notes: * These are discount prices, especially offered to customers who pay cash.

Global force and local adaptation

In this paper, I have argued that outside influence is nothing new, even in the remote, northwestern frontier of Thailand, therefore, globalisation should not be seen as a might Western force that will endanger, or even terminate, local cultures. For decades local people in Khun Yuam town have adopted innovation and benefited from these changes. Their culture is transformed as well, adapting itself to the rapidly changing world. As demonstrated above, local way of life and diet are gradually changing. Local people eat more meat and eggs, imported from the Central region; children drink manufactured cow milk; canned and packaged food are consumed by everyone; gas is utilised when cooking needs to be done quickly, particularly during the cultivating period when most residents are busy working in their rice fields. Almost all of these goods are produced in the Central region. A new influence also comes with these products: Central Thai language, which is used widely in activities associated with trade, education and politics. And the number of local people who are literate in Central Thai, including children and women, is increasing quickly.

Yet, it will be misleading to conclude that local culture is in danger, being replaced by outside influence, including the new, mighty economic force and globalisation. The residents of Khun Yuam have been familiar with strangers who arrive with outside products and innovation. In the past they came from the Shan States of Burma, but today from the Central region of Thailand. Local people consume and utilise such innovation introduced to them. They accept the ones that are useful, but abandon those which are not, including the old, local invention and technology. Local culture has, of course, changed. But it survives, adapting well to new things in such a fast changing environment.

The locals consume new manufactured goods, wear modern-style clothes and use Central Thai more frequently. But they have not forgotten their own. Tai and Kam Müang are still spoken at home, in the market and the temples. They are the languages of local people,

indicating their intimate relationships. They are (and were) Buddhists, practising Buddhist beliefs, supporting local monks and celebrating every religious festivals. One of the most meaningful rituals for the locals has been the ordination of local boys before they reach the age of eighteen or nineteen years old. It is so important that any family which has a boy will try, by all means, to hold the ordination for the child. This ritual displays both the faith of local people in religion and social status in the community, as well as brings good deeds to the family.

Despite the delight of new entertainment: television programmes and video films, local people still enjoy their own pleasure. Tai and Kam Müang music and songs are listened by a large number of people. All of the Tai songs sold in Mae Hong Son, as far as I know, are recorded into cassette tapes in Mae Sai, an extremely important trading town in Chiang Rai province. Some singers are Thai citizens of the Tai background and some are Burmese Shans, who occasionally cross the border into Thailand for the recording. Most of these cassette tapes are modern music, but some are traditional Tai songs, sung by older singers. The tapes are sold in Mae Hong Son town; none is found in Khun Yuam. Live Tai music is a local favourite as well. In 1992 there was a funeral of a most respectful, elderly Tai monk, who lived and died in Khun Yuam town. A Tai musical band was hired to play in the funeral from Mae Hong Son. The band, a mixture of Tai and Western musical instruments, mostly played Tai songs and became one of the most attractions of the funeral. All musicians were amateurs, working full-time at the Mae Hong Son municipal office, but had many years of experience in Tai music. According to some local participants, the band was thought to be genuine and authentic Tai. It was a prestige of local Tai music.