

## Sub-project A03

# Organization of Historical Knowledge in Tai Lü Manuscripts: The Paratextual Sphere of a Recently Revived Manuscript Culture

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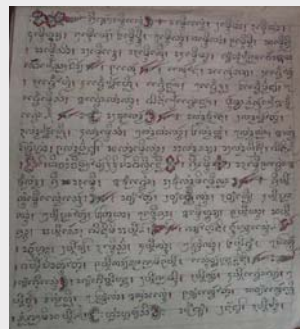
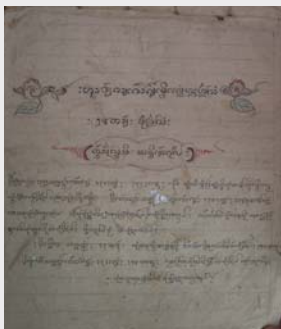
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### Description of the Project

In the autonomous Tai Lü prefecture of Sipsòng Panna (Yunnan, China) the indigenous manuscript culture suffered during the Chinese Cultural Revolution when the bulk of manuscripts was deliberately destroyed. Since the early 1980s local scholars began collecting extant manuscripts, copying and recopying them. Moreover, manuscripts were imported from adjacent Tai speaking areas in eastern Burma and northern Laos. Their further spread, facilitated by local networks of scribes and collectors, contributed to the resurgence and appropriation of historical knowledge through the medium of manuscript. On the other hand, in Müang Sing (Laos), where the political and social upheavals of the late 1970s did not result in similar discontinuities, one can observe an increased production of manuscripts since the 1990s as well. Based on two corpora of mulberry paper manuscripts (papsa) containing historiographical texts – with 56 manuscripts from Yunnan and 30 from Laos many of which are multiple-text manuscripts – it shall be systematically studied how the organisation of historical knowledge is reflected in the paratexts, such as colophons, prefaces, and postscripts as well as in headings and other visual elements structuring the text.

### Objectives

A close examination of the paratexts shall reveal how the scribes organised knowledge when producing their manuscripts and which criteria they applied. The analysis shall also address the question of whether certain texts were copied directly from older extant manuscripts or from printed material or are based on oral traditions. Furthermore, the networks of authors, scribes, sponsors and collectors of manuscripts need to be identified better understand the social function of manuscripts in the still ongoing process of ethno-cultural revival.



The first two folios of a mulberry-paper manuscript dated 6 November 2001, a local Chronicle of Moeng Laem, Yunnan (privat collection). The first folio bears the title and a short foreword, the second folio shows a number of ornamental elements in colour ink structuring the text.



Folio 74 of a mulberry-paper manuscript containing a colophon followed by a postscript. It is the oldest extant version of the Chiang Khaeng Chronicle (Wat Ta Pao, Muang Sing) dated 20 March 1905.



Settlement areas of the Tai in Yunnan

A significant portion of the recently produced manuscripts possess chapter and section headings, registers as well as ornamental symbols providing a text-internal structuring of knowledge. However, these sorts of paratexts are apparently “modern” innovations which are largely absent in older manuscripts. Therefore, it is of special interest whether and to which extent these paratextual elements evolved from older patterns or were influenced by modern print media.

### Tai Lü Manuscript Culture

The Tai Lü speaking area in the upper Mekong valley is part of the Dhamma script cultural domain. The earliest evidence of the Dhamma script, probably a derivative of the ancient Mon alphabet of Hariphunchai, is from the year 1376. Until the sixteenth century this script became the main media of written communication in Lan Na (present-day Northern Thailand) and spread from there to the eastern Shan region, Sipsòng Panna, and finally to Laos. Though a complete survey and documentation of extant Tai Lü manuscripts has yet to be done, their total number can be estimated at slightly over 10,000 of which a large amount are kept in monastic libraries while many others are parts of private collections. Whereas Northern Thai and Lao manuscripts are mostly written on palm-leaf, Tai Lü manuscripts, notably those pertaining to secular texts, use mulberry paper as the main writing support.