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*Qu Yongxian*

Chinese Academy of Social Sciences

## DAI EPICS UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF DUALISTIC RELIGION

**Abstract.** This paper is a result of the Projects for Young Scholars Fund by Chinese Academy of Social Sciences from 2017–2019. It is both based on the field data and epic text analysis. Fieldworks were carried out mainly in Dehong and Xishuangbanna, two major Dai inhabited areas; through interviews with villagers and follow-up ceremonies to obtain effective information and folk tales, it is found that there are similar narratives spread in different Dai regions, and the content of these narratives reflect the different attitudes towards Buddhism and the primitive religions. Meanwhile, during the three years of study, the author transcribed, translated and annotated two creation epics; one is *Pengshangluo*, an oral version of *Batamaga Pengshangluo* performed by two Zhang Ha (Dai singer) in the ceremony; and the other one is *Chuangshiji*, published in Dehong Dai language. There are some differences between two epics in length, content, structure, way of narration and context of inheritance.

Dai people claim to have hundreds of epics, and most of them are related to Theravada Buddhism. They usually perform these epics in some religious activities, either oral narration by epic singers or hand-held repetition of the text by the chief of Buddhist believers. The author carried out the research from the internal perspective; and through the fieldworks and detailed text analysis, this paper aims to understand the formation, development and inheritance of Dai epics in the context of dualistic belief.

This paper has a certain structure of discussion. It firstly introduces the dualistic religion of Dai ethnic group; Theravada Buddhism, which came from Thailand, Laos, or Burma, has influenced Dai literature broadly. At the same time, Dai people adhere to the primitive religion, which is deeply rooted in the native culture. This paper then analyzes the epics in details, by contrasting the narratives and structures of several epics, including the creation epics *Batamaga Pengshangluo* and *Chuangshiji*, and the unique Aluang epics. At last, this paper explores the relationship between religious tradition and Dai epics.

Based on the analysis above, it can be found that Dai ancestors translated Buddhist stories into poetries in Dai script based on their rhythm; meanwhile, they incorporated locale narratives, and compiled them into manuscripts imitating the sutras, which are called “Beiye Jing” (palm-leaf manuscripts) in Chinese, and are called “Lik” or “Tham” in Dai language. They are kinds of Dai-style sutras, which contain the Dai epics, and are the symbol of the Dai culture. Except for the Buddhist narratives, many myths, folk tales, legends, and other knowledge are also recorded in these sutras. As the result, Dai epics are characteristic of duality: on the one hand, they contain the native narrations that reflect the ancestor worship and animism belief of Dai ethnic group; on the other hand, they carry the Buddhist stories and reflect Buddhist thought. As the Dai epics have the inextricable connection with Theravada Buddhism, in the future work, the author will continue to focus on the Dai epics and make some comparative studies on them with the epics of Southeast Asia and India.

**Keywords:** Dai epic; Creation epic; Oral tradition; Theravada Buddhism; Dai ethnic group; Epic performance; Epic singer; Palm-leaf manuscript; Primitive religion; Aluang epic.

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*Цюй Юнсянь*

## Эпосы Дай под влиянием дуалистических религий

**Аннотация.** Эта статья является результатом исследования, поддержанного Фондом проектов молодых ученых Китайской академии социальных наук за 2017–2019 гг. В исследовании использованы по-

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QU YONGXIAN – Doctor, Associate Researcher, Institute of Ethnic Literature, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), Beijing, China.

E-mail: quyongxian@126.com

ЦЮЙ ЮНСЯНЬ – доктор, младший научный сотрудник, Институт этнической литературы Китайской академии социальных наук (CASS), Пекин, Китай.

E-mail: quyongxian@126.com

левые материалы и данные, полученные при анализе эпического текста. Полевые работы проводились в основном в двух основных населенных пунктах Дай – в Дэхун и Сишунбаньна. В ходе интервью с сельскими жителями, наблюдения церемоний для получения эффективной информации и народных сказок выяснилось, что схожие нарративы распространяются в разных регионах Дай, и содержание этих повествований отражает различное отношение к буддизму и примитивным религиям. За три года обучения автор переписал, перевел и аннотировал два эпических произведения: один из них – «Пэншанлуо», устная версия «Батамага Пэншанлуо» в исполнении двух певцов Дай на церемонии; а другой – «Чуангшиджи», изданный на языке дехонгдай. Есть некоторые различия между двумя эпосами по объему, содержанию, структуре, способу повествования и передачи.

Дайцы утверждают, что у них есть сотни эпосов, и большинство из них связаны с буддизмом Тхеравады. Обычно они исполняют эти эпосы в неких религиозных мероприятиях: либо эпические певцы исполняют устно, либо глава верующих буддизма переписывает текст. Автор провел исследование, находясь внутри среды бытования эпоса. Благодаря полевым исследованиям и подробному текстологическому анализу, эта статья освещает вопросы формирования, развития и наследования эпоса Дай в контексте дуалистической веры.

Статья имеет определенную структуру изложения. Во-первых, рассматривается дуалистическая религия этнической группы Дай: буддизм Тхеравады, пришедший из Таиланда, Лаоса или Бирмы, оказал большое влияние на литературу Дай; в то же время люди Дай придерживаются примитивной религии, глубоко укоренившейся в местной культуре. Затем эпосы детально анализируются, сопоставляются характеры повествования и структуры нескольких эпосов, включая эпические произведения «Батамага Пэншанлуо», «Чуангшиджи» и уникальные эпосы Алуанга. И наконец, исследуется взаимосвязь религиозной традиции и эпоса Дай.

Проведенный анализ установил, что предки Дай переводили буддийские рассказы в стиховую форму письмом Дай, исходя из своего ритма. Между тем, они включили местные повествования и скомпоновали их в рукописи, имитирующие сутры, которые называются на китайском языке «Бэйе Цзин» (рукописи из пальмовых листьев), на языке Дай – «Лик» или «Тхам». Это разновидности сутр в стиле Дай, которые содержат эпосы Дай и являются символом дайской культуры. Помимо буддийских повествований, в этих сутрах также записано множество мифов, народных сказок, легенд и других знаний. Таким образом, эпосы Дай характеризуются двойственностью: с одной стороны, они содержат местные повествования, отражающие поклонение предкам и верования в анимизм этнической группы Дай; с другой стороны, они несут буддийские истории и отражают буддийскую мысль. Поскольку эпосы Дай имеют неразрывную связь с буддизмом Тхеравады, в дальнейшем автор намерен продолжить изучение эпосов Дай и проводить их сравнительные исследования с эпосами Юго-Восточной Азии и Индии.

*Ключевые слова:* эпос Дай; эпосы о сотворении; устная традиция; буддизм Тхеравады; этническая группа Дай; исполнение эпоса; эпический сказитель; рукопись на пальмовом листе; первобытная религия; Алуангский эпос.

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## Introduction

Dai is one of the 56 minorities in China, mainly living in Yunnan Province. They can be distinguished as three main groups from the linguistic perspective, namely Xishuangbanna Dai dialect group (mainly live in Southern Yunnan), Dehong Dai dialect group (mainly in Northwest Yunnan), and Hong-Jin Dai dialect group (living along the Honghe River, Yuanjiang River, and in Jinping County). The first two groups both believe in Theravada Buddhism, while the primitive religion is always the underlying belief. However, the Hong-Jin Dai dialect group is uninfluenced by Theravada Buddhism, they principally keep only the primitive religion.

Therefore, there is dualistic religion in Dai society, primitive religion and Theravada Buddhism. "The faith of Dai ethnic group is mainly composed of two different belief systems of Buddhism and Animism. In Dai language, the rites 'Dan' (almsgiving) and 'Long' (ancestral worshiping) have been done respectively for Buddha and ancestral gods" [1, p. 102]. In the process of accepting Theravada Buddhism, cultural clashes are the inevitable results, also some compromised with each other, and at last they serve Dai society in an integrated way. "In Dai history, Theravada Buddhism and the primitive religion have coexisted at least 700 years" [2, p. 79]. Dai epics are the results of the fusion of Dai traditional culture and Buddhist culture, the content of these epics, in turn, reflect the dualistic religion.

In order to understand the relationships between Dai epics and the dualistic beliefs, two methods are adopted in this study, namely field study and text analysis. On one hand, the field study is a practical approach to collect effective information from the villagers, which is very necessary to understand the present situation of Dai epics, the tradition of Dai's dualistic belief, and the context of epic performance; on the other hand, by analyzing the text, we can understand the pattern and characteristics of Dai epics, analyze the plots and characters, all of them reflect the beliefs of Dai people.

Many senior scholars, such as Wang Song, Wang Guoxiang, Zhu Depu, Dao Chenghua, Hu Yuefang etc., have pointed out that Dai people practice a kind of dualistic belief. For example, the Buddhism and primitive religion of Dai people can be understood through the works of Dao Chenghua, *The History of Dai Culture* and *The Study on the Life Ritual of Dai Ethnic Group in Dehong Prefecture*. Some fine scholars, such as Zhang Gongjin, Li Zixian, Gao Dengzhi, Zheng Xiaoyun, Li Jiang, etc., have acknowledged that the Dai epics were greatly influenced by the Theravada Buddhism; they also discussed the creation and innovation of Dai people based on the inheritance of Buddhist literature. For example, Zhang Gongjin wrote *Dai Culture*, *Dai Culture Research* and *Dai Nationality in China*, all of which focus on Dai folk ballads, epics, and other narrative poetries. However, they are less likely to associate dualistic belief with Dai epics; in addition, most of them tend to study popular titles such as *Langga Xihe*, *Zhao Shutun*, etc., but relatively few focus on the creation epics and Aluang epics.

The following paragraphs will firstly introduce the two religions tradition in Dai society, and then analyze in detail the epics influenced by these dual religions, focusing on the Creation epics, as well as the unique Aluang epics, which mainly derived from Buddhist stories. Through the detailed analysis, this paper aims to understand the formation, development and inheritance of the Dai epics in the context of dualistic belief.

### 1. The Primitive Religion Rooted in Dai Society

The primitive religion of Dai ethnic group is mainly embodied in two aspects: ancestor worship and animism. Ancestor worship is mainly manifested in “Sheman” [sə<sup>31</sup>man<sup>31</sup>] (village gods) and “Shemeng” [sə<sup>31</sup>məŋ<sup>55</sup>] (district gods). When the man/ woman who founded the village died, his/her souls were honored as “Sheman”, and their direct descendants were the priests. In the same way, the tribal heroes are probably honored as the “Shemeng” after their deaths. Shangmudi [saŋ<sup>35</sup>mu<sup>31</sup>ti<sup>55</sup>], for example, recorded in the creation epic *Batamaga Pengshangluo*, is the most famous tribal hero in Dai history. As for animism, Dai people believe that all things in nature have their souls or spirits, such as ox spirit, tree spirit, mountain spirit, etc. Among them, the worship of the rice spirit is the most common. There are mythologies about the grain origin written down in the creation epics, the story about the competition between “Ya Huanhao” [ja<sup>33</sup>xən<sup>35</sup>xau<sup>31</sup>] (rice goddess) or “Bu Huanhao” [pu<sup>11</sup>xən<sup>35</sup>xau<sup>31</sup>] (rice gods) and Buddha was also recorded down in manuscript and spreads broadly.

The worship of ancestors is doubtlessly the strongest part of Dai's primitive religion. In Dai villages, the most important community activities associated with the primitive religion are the “Ling Sheman” [leŋ<sup>53</sup>sə<sup>31</sup>man<sup>31</sup>] (offering sacrifice to the village gods) and the “Ling Zhaiman” [leŋ<sup>53</sup>tsai<sup>33</sup>man<sup>31</sup>] (offering sacrifice to the village cornerstone). The former is highly exclusive and Buddhist monks cannot participate in any activities. All male villagers, led by priests, gather and offer sacrifices to the “Sheman” and ask for blessing with peace and prosperity. At that time, the priests would narrate the legend of their ancestors and trace the history of village. It is a special occasion to differ the “insider” from the “outsider”.

The latter is more inclusive, monks can come to chant and pray for the village with other Buddhist believers when other men go to the holy mountain to accomplish other tasks. It is a phenomenon of the coexistence of two beliefs in Dai society. Specifically, Dai people consider the village as a form of life, which has heart, head, and foots; so that the village would be weak and sick as well as human. As the result, people believe that it is necessary to sacrifice the cornerstone every year to recover its vitality. Both the primitive religion side and the Theravada Buddhism side work in cooperation during the ceremony “Ling Zaiman”. As a Dai-study scholar, Zhang Gongjin once pointed out that, “The procedure of sacrifice to the cornerstone is similar to that of the ancestor gods...the difference between them is that monks can participate in the activities about the cornerstone, chanting for blessing the peace and prosperity of the village. It reflects the infiltration of Buddhism into primitive religion, as well as the tolerance of primitive religion to Buddhism” [3, p. 80].

Dai people always need to keep the primitive religion, for one thing, it is a way to identify the village members, and people get a sense of belonging by participating in this activity. For another thing, it is also a way to unite “insider” members and distinguish the “outsiders”. As “it is a kind of spiritual activity and manual labor to sacrifice to ancestor gods, with which lofty and mysterious appeal, aim to unite all villagers together... therefore, it is the spiritual core to unify villager by the sacrifice of gods, and it is also a means to coordinate interpersonal relations. The cohesion of all members from one community is completed by the worship of ancestor gods” [3, p. 82].

## 2. Dai People Accept Theravada Buddhism

According to Chinese historians, Theravada Buddhism was gradually introduced into Dai regions during the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries [4, p. 390]. After several times of infiltration, it became more and more popular and finally embedded in Dai areas. Nowadays, we can find thousands of temples and pagodas in Dai villages. Dai people also formed the custom of “Dan” [tan<sup>55</sup>], which means to offer something to a temple as a way to pray for peace and happiness. Dai people usually spend three months each year practicing their beliefs, by that time they gather in the hall of the temple, perform the formulary procedures, kowtowing Buddha and monks, chanting, listening to preaching, and so on. Almost these believers are over 50 years old and most of them are female.

Most Dai festivals are related to Buddhism, such as the Water-Splashing Festival (Songkran Festival), Boi Danta (worship pagoda activity), and other kinds of “Boi” [poi<sup>55</sup>] (community celebrations). All of them are opportunities for Buddhists to express their beliefs; people aim to obtain merit by worshipping Buddha and almsgiving during these activities. “Theravada Buddhism advocates self-liberation and self-salvation, and mainly focuses on giving or doing good works to achieve Nirvana, that is reaching the ideal beyond the joys and sorrows of the life and death realm. ‘Boi’ is an important form of Dai Buddhist practice, and has a significant impact on Dai culture” [5, p. 219].

It was incompatible with the primitive religion at the beginning of Buddhism’s introduction, and some stories reflect this period of struggle. For example, the tale about the competition between Phaya Man and Pha Zhao, which was recorded in manuscript: a long time ago, a monk arrived in Meng Baranasi (it is said that the kingdom is located in Xishuangbanna), people called him Pha Zhao. He recited sutras all day long and detested all folk songs. One singer, who was called Phaya Man, said to Pha Zhao: “You chant, I sing, then we will see Dai people prefer your chanting or my songs”. Phaya Man’s song was so amazing that innumerable birds fell around him to listen, and all villagers adored him so much, they couldn’t help surrounding him trying to see his face. He was so shy that he covered the face with a fan; so all the singers “Zhang Ha” [tsaŋ<sup>33</sup>xap<sup>55</sup>] (epic singer in Dai language) coverer their faces with fans as they sing today. Phaya Man won the game as the result. Pha Zhao had to acknowledge the Zhang Ha culture of Dai people, but he maliciously decreed that the singer could only sing folk songs every year after the Buddhist Summer Settlement Festival; furthermore, he persuaded people not to learn singing with Phaya Man, and he even sent out the wicked curse: “all singers will be punished, they have to sing laboriously day and night throughout their lives” [6, p. 87]. Nowadays, it is commonplace for Zhang Ha to sing all night; they usually perform all night after dinner until three or four o’clock in the early morning.

The name Pha Zhao actually refers to Buddha, and Phaya Man means the chief of one village, in ancient times the chief was usually a priest. It’s not hard to surmise that “Pha Zhao” represents the Theravada Buddhism side, and the “Phaya Man” is the primitive religion side. As the ruling class adopted Theravada Buddhism as its main religion, the epic singer Zhang Ha, who originally served the ruling constitution, became a propaganda tool for Theravada Buddhism.

Theravada Buddhism has then compromised with the primitive religion during its spreading, and then gradually became popular in Dai community. “Theravada Buddhism has strongly broken in and occupied almost all areas of Dai culture, however, the primitive religion has tenaciously retained in the corn field of Dai culture. This kind of dualistic religion embodies Dai culture more characteristics” [3, p. 84]. The primitive religion and Theravada Buddhism seem to live in harmony with each other, and they both play important roles in the development of Dai literature.

## 3. The Dualistic Religion in Dai Culture

Based on the field works, it is easy to find that there is dualistic religion in Dai communities. On the surface, Theravada Buddhism displays more powerful than the primitive religion in Xishuangbanna



Prefecture, while in Dehong, the its influence is slightly weaker, where we can find everywhere the shrines of ancestor gods, the kitchen gods, and so on, which are rarely seen in Xishuangbanna. It is common to find that the priest and monk appear in the same place and worship for the same goal. "Dai villagers gather in Buddhist temples during the praying season, they worship not only the Buddha but also other gods, who do not belong to the Theravada Buddhism originally; nowadays, they appear in temples, and enjoy the offerings in a dignified manner" [7, p. 27].

It is widely known that Theravada Buddhism has been always flexible while spreading in a new culture. For its survival in Dai society, Buddhism has come to terms with the primitive religion, no longer interfering with people's worship of the native gods. Some folk tales reflect the compromises, and one of them is "Bu Huanhao Ran Away". The following version was narrated by Yue Pinli, an 80-year's villager from Yingjiang County, Dehong Prefecture, in October 2015: a long time ago, both Buddha and Bu Huanhao enjoyed the new rice offerings together. One day, people celebrated the harvest festival as usual, they committed the fresh rice to Buddha firstly, and secondly to Bu Huanhao, who blessed the crop throughout the year and deserved the first reward, he was so angry that he ran away to the Dark World, taking all rice spirits away with him. As the result, people suffered famine because they couldn't plant rice in the world anymore. More and more people went to the temple and complained a lot, looking for Bu Huanhao back. Buddha decided to bring Bu Huanhao home and found him at the end of the Dark World. However, Bu Huanhao refused and gave him some rice seeds. When Buddha was on the way home, he heard the sound of river, he was so thirsty that he opened his cassock on the ground to wrap the rice seeds, and then he went to drink some water. When Buddha came back and found the rice seeds had already flown away; some hid in the grass, some flew into the woods, and some drilled into the river. That is why nowadays people raise rice seedlings in the paddy field, with weeds always growing among them; people need to cook rice with water and burn the woods for heating rice. Dai people believe that they will get strength only if eating the rice with its spirit in this way. Except for this version, almost all other Dai groups share kinds of rice myths. "Although no two texts have the same content, they share the same thinking in terms of plot, theme, and main content, that is, they all emphasize the benefits of rice to mankind" [8, p. 16]. These narratives reflect a fact that Theravada Buddhism has acknowledged the first status of the rice gods.

After a long history of competition, Theravada Buddhism has taken root in Dai society. At the same time, the primitive religion lost its dominant role, became relatively weaker, although Dai people adhere to ancestor worship and animism. As the result, Dai people have been practicing a kind of dualistic religion for hundreds of years.

Based on the Dai tradition and Theravada Buddhism, Dai people created a special Palm-leaf Culture. "Theravada Buddhism adapted to Dai culture and formed a complete set of Buddhist cultural system, which was more in line with the characteristics of Dai culture at that time, thus integrating Theravada Buddhism with Dai culture" [9, p. 314]. Nowadays, there are two camps of deities in Dai culture; one camp contains ancestor gods and other spirits of animism, and another camp covers Buddha and other foreign deities, who probably came from Indian and Southeast Asia. Most of the deities and their narratives were recorded and preserved in palm-leaf scriptures.

#### **4. The Creation Epics Influenced by the Dualistic Religion**

The history of competition and compromise between the two religions is also the process of cultural integration between Buddhism and Dai traditional culture. To translate Buddhist sutras, Dai people created their writing system based on the Brahmi scripts. As a result, a large number of Buddhist scriptures have been translated into Dai epics, narrated by singers, as so to enlighten the public; meanwhile, some Dai oral tradition such as myth, folk tales, ballads, have been recorded and absorbed into manuscripts, usually written in cotton-paper transcripts, even though they reflect the primitive religion fundamentally.

In the context of Dualistic religion, Dai people have created many epics. "Buddhism brought a large number of Indian stories and other motifs into Dai culture so that Dai literature has been affected by Buddhism for a long time; through selection, absorption, and restructuring, Dai people had created a prosperous world of epics based on the original tradition – there was a peak of Dai literature, and that was the prosperity period of Dai epics" [3, p. 69]. Among them, the creation epics are typical examples.

There are two Dai creation epics published so far, one is *Batamaga Pengshangluo* [10], a Chinese translation, published in 1989. The title in Dai words is ၵၵၵၵၵ ၵၵၵၵၵၵၵၵၵ [pa<sup>55</sup>tha<sup>55</sup>ma<sup>33</sup>kap<sup>55</sup>phum<sup>51</sup>saŋ<sup>13</sup>lok<sup>51</sup>], ၵၵၵၵၵ means “the first time” and ၵၵၵၵၵၵၵၵၵ means “gods created the world”. This epic is mainly circulated in the Xishuangbanna Dai dialect groups. Nowadays, there are still many manuscripts mainly kept in temples; meanwhile the singers Zhang Ha usually perform it orally in traditional ceremonies. For instance, when people celebrate a new house, worship the Zhaiman (village cornerstone), celebrate the Water-Sprinkling Festival, and so on. The second creation epic is *Chuangshiji* [11], which mainly spreads in Dehong Dai dialect groups, the Dai language text was published in 2012. The title *Chuangshiji* means Genesis, is the paraphrase of Dai words “ၵၵၵ ၵၵၵၵ ၵၵၵၵ ၵၵၵၵ” [taŋ<sup>31</sup>te<sup>11</sup>kam<sup>11</sup>pha<sup>11</sup>]. There are also manuscripts kept in temples or treasured by collectors; there is no singer performing epic poems in Dehong today.

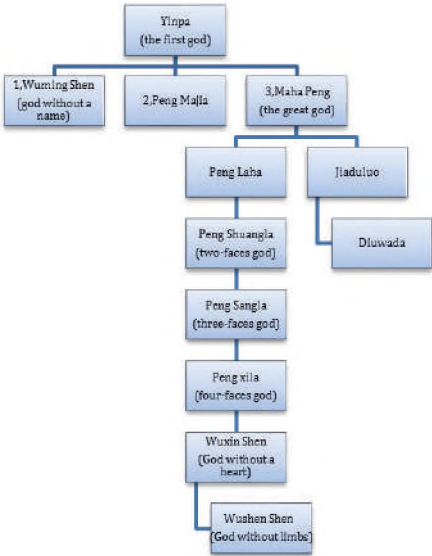
4.1 The Creation Epic *Batamaga Pengshangluo*

*Batamaga Pengshangluo* has more or less 13,000 lines. There are fourteen chapters that cover the origins of the world, the human beings, the animals and plants, the Dai customs, the astronomical calendar, and so on. The details are as follow:

In the original chaotic universe, the clouds and wind rolled into a big ball, and the first giant god Yinpa was born there. After one hundred thousand years later, he created a huge phoenix with the dirt on his body so that he could soar through the universe. Underneath, there was the ancient sea and an ancient god fish living there. After another one hundred thousand years later, Yinpa kneaded the dirt on his body into a ball and threw it on the sea. The dirt-ball grew gradually as the Earth, and Yinpa named it Luo Zongbu. To make the Earth stable, Yinpa created a huge elephant Yuelangwan, and inserted a column into its back; the column then separated the sky and the earth. The sky was like a canopy, the earth was like a fruit, and the column was like tree trunk, which supported the sky and the earth. Then Yinpa divided the land into four parts as east, south, west, and north. One hundred thousand years later, he made three mountains out of dirt and put them on the elephant’s back, making them the highest stone peaks in the universe, named it Ban Lugang. Yinpa’s nails fell off and became the edge of sky and earth; his sweat drips into lakes and seas, and then branched out into countless rivers. Yinpa then created other gods out of his dirt, and they imitated him to make more offspring out of their own dirt, forming a series of gods and goddesses, such as Maha Peng, Peng Laha, Jiaduluo, Peng Xila, Diuwada, Phaya Ying, etc. Judging from the pronunciation of their names, they are probably foreign deities introduced with Theravada Buddhism. Dai people rarely worship them in real life. These deities can be seen in the diagram 1:

Diagram 1

The foreign deities introduced with Buddhism



There are four stages in the origin of human described in *Batamaga Pengshangluo*. The first generation of human was the offspring of two guarders in god's orchard. Diuwada, a bad god, transformed himself into a green snake, and lured them to eat the "immortal mango". Then they became man and woman, married, and gave birth to a pair of siblings. The brother Guliman and the sister Gulima left in search of food and were separated for a long time. Their parents made thirty couples of mud-men and mud-women, to search for Guliman and Gulima. At last, the brother and sister met again and married as the other thirty couples did. As the first generations were descended from gods so that they would never die, and they could continue their lives by shedding skins like a snake. However, the population growth has caused a lot of chaos and filth; the god Diuwada (green snake) cheated them again to eat the "disease fruit", which would lead to death from then on. Finally, the god Yinpa decided to clean the Earth, and made a big fire destroying the first generation of humans.

The second generation of human is also descended from gods. The Earth was burned by the big fire, and the smell of the charred earth wafted into the heaven, and eight gods could not resist the temptation to fly down to eat it. After eating the fragrant earth, they lost their power and never flew back. Then four of them became women and married another four men. Their descendants are the second generation of humans. They lived in Zongbu (Jambudvipa) and ate the earth every day, made the land thinner and thinner. The god Yinpa was angry again and wiped them out with the disease-rain.

Bu Sanggaxi and Ya Sanggasai, the husband and wife gods made the third generation of humans. Assigned by the god Yinpa, they flew down and mended the broken world. After that, they cut open the gourd they brought from heaven and spread the seeds of all things hidden in it all over the earth. Then they returned to heaven and found the "human fruit", ground it like a jam to make a pair of children; the brother was named Noa and sister Salipeng. When they grew up they got married and bred human offspring. However, among these offspring, someone appeared ugly with vertical-eyes, thick-skinned, someone was incest between father and daughter, which caused the outrage of the god. Finally, Yinpa destroyed the third generation human by the big floods.

The fourth and the last generation of humans are the siblings of the brother and sister, who survived the floods by hiding in a huge gourd. To keep the human race going, the god Yinpa selected a pair of babies hidden in the gourd. They floated in the floods for ten thousand years and finally reached the foot of Mount Tianzhu (similar to Mount Sumru). The floods were dried up by the hurricane and the land has recovered when the gourd was mature and the baby boy and girl came out, whose name were Wanna and Yuexiang. Later, they got married after proving it was the will of God, by the ways of "flying thread into needle" and "rolling the stone mill". Because they came out of the gourd, so the offspring were called "gourd-human".

As described above, the world went through three disasters, namely the fire, the floods, and the wind, and then the world was mend and recovered. Yinpa was the first-generation creation god, and the couple-gods Sanggaxi and SangGasai were the second-generation creation gods. The gods created all things, or they brought the seeds kept in the gourd. For example, the god granted human rice seeds, and they were large at the beginning, then encountered a strong wind during flying down to the earth, and was blown into small particles and fell to the ground. Sparrows and mice eaten these rice seeds, and then pulled out excrement. As the result, wild rice grew nearby the river and was eventually discovered by humans. Therefore, when people grow rice and store grain nowadays, sparrows and mice that claim to have brought the seeds always steal them.

The first nine chapters of *Patamaga Pengshangluo* are mainly myths, with many references from Buddhism, such as the series of deities, and the destruction of the world by three catastrophes; meanwhile the last five chapters are mostly legends and folk tales about the activities and production of Dai society, mainly focused on Sangmudi, a tribal leader who led the people to settle down, divided the land for rice growing, created the bamboo house, taught people to raise livestock, invent pottery and other tools, and so on. He was a typical hero in Dai history.

#### 4.2 The creation epic *Chuangshiji*

Another Dai creation epic, *Chuangshiji*, mainly spreads in Dehong Dai dialect area, has a more or less similar structure to the *Batamaga Pengshangluo*. The editor divided the epic into six chapters, and the first five chapters are about the origins of the world, human beings and all other species; the sixth chapter contains eighteen sections, mainly cover the contents on social production, cultural customs

and local history of Dai Epic. According to the epic, the story about the creation and destruction of the world, the origins of human and all things, were all recorded in Buddhist scriptures, stored in the Seven Sutra Depository, which were destroyed by a big fire; so that the whole epic is narrated in the name of Buddha, whom is considered a prophet and a wise man. The details are as follows:

At the beginning of the primordial times, the first five gods were born out of the huge clouds, and they created the world together. Then the world went through three disasters, namely fire, floods, and wind. As the world was destroyed, the ancestor gods came down to repair the world, which is called “Sang Guofa La Guolin” [saŋ<sup>35</sup>ko<sup>11</sup>fa<sup>53</sup>la<sup>53</sup>ko<sup>11</sup>lin<sup>33</sup>] in Dai language, spreading widely among the people. Later, a giant was sent down to plow the land to be flat; but he was halfway done, leaving the rest became mountains and gullies. The land, at last was divided into nineteen continents, with countless rivers crisscrossing the land.

There are also four stages of human origins narrated in *Chuangshiji*. The first generation human was the descendant of gods who came out of the saint eggs; the second generation came out of the gourd-egg, which was born by a saint cow; the third generation was the offspring of eight gods who lost their power and were left on the land after eating the scorched earth. The last generation was the descendant of one couple of brother and sister, who survived by hiding in gourd during the floods. To keep the world flourishing, the gods created everything that human need, including kinds of minerals, animals, plants, grains, and so on. Of these myths, the most famous is “Fangun Die Nandao” [faŋ<sup>55</sup>kon<sup>55</sup>te<sup>11</sup>nam<sup>53</sup>tau<sup>31</sup>] in Dai language; it means humanity was born in the gourd.

The last chapter mainly narrates the legends of Dai ancestors, describing the development from group marriage to monogamy, from the cave living to village settlement, from hunter-gatherer to farming, and so on. Among them, paddy production and pottery technology are described emphatically. Ancient Dai accumulated knowledge gradually in productive activity. For example, they learned to preserve fire, summarized and created the lunar calendar, elected the representatives to be “Zhaoman” [tsau<sup>31</sup>man<sup>31</sup>] (chief of village) and “Zhaomeng” [tsau<sup>31</sup>məŋ<sup>55</sup>] (chief of the district) to manage the public affairs, and so on. Because of population growth, wars ensued, people fought for lands and other resources. Later on, Buddhism was introduced and Dai people were converted to Buddhism. A set of religious culture rules is formed so that everyone complied with and finally achieved social stability.

#### 4.3 The Duality of Creation Epics

These two creation epics were formed under the background of dualistic religion, Dai's Primitive belief and Theravada Buddhism, and so that the contents of the creation epics reflect a kind of duality.

On the one hand, due to the influence of Theravada Buddhism, there are foreign gods and related narratives in the epics. For example, there is the story of “King Suddhodana” (Buddha's father) in *Chuangshiji*, called טלס סוסס טלס טלס [suk<sup>53</sup>tho<sup>11</sup>ta<sup>11</sup>la<sup>53</sup>] in Dai language; he was depicted as a highly respected king, under whose rule the people lived in peace and contentment. Besides, there are many exotic motifs. For instance, in *Batamaga Pengshangluo*, the green snake lured two guarders to eat the mangoes, and then they became man and woman and married to reproduce the human being. This narrative is so similar to the story of *Adam and Eve* in the Bible. It seems that Dai people was influenced by Christian neighboring peoples. Also, there are plenty of Buddhist words and knowledge in the text, except for the foreign gods Maha Peng (the great god), Peng Xila (four-faces god) etc., the spatial unit טלס טלס טלס [ju<sup>53</sup>tsa<sup>11</sup>la<sup>11</sup>], probably derived from the Sanskrit word Yojana; In *Batamaga Pengshangluo*, the land was divided into four parts, Purvavideha in the east, Aparagodaniya in the west, Uttarakuru in the north, and Jambudvīpa in the south: these spatial divisions are influenced by Buddhism.

On the other hand, the creation epics reflect ancestor worship and animism. First of all, it was the ancestral gods who were responsible for repairing the world after it was destroyed. Whether “Bu Sangaxi Ya Sanggasai” in *Batamaga Pengshangluo* or “Sangguofa Laguolin” in *Chuangshiji*, they are Dai's “Bu-Ya”, namely grandfather and grandmother. Secondly, according to these narratives of human origin, the last generation humans were usually descendants of the couples of brother and sister who had Dai names, rather than those foreign deities. Thirdly, the heroes who led humans to settle down, grow rice, build houses, and invent other tools were often tribal chiefs.

The above stories and legends have been widely spread among Dai areas before Theravada



Buddhism arrived here. Hundreds of narrative poetries are related to the primitive religion. For example, the legend of “Shangmudi” was incorporated into *Batamaga Pengshangluo*. Many animal friends helped him in the process of creating the bamboo house; each animal contributes something of itself. The myth “Jiulong Wang” [4, p. 115] (Jiulong king) was also incorporated into *Chuangshiji*; nine evil dragons endanger the world, and Jiulong’s father went to kill the dragons and was killed, and then the other eight brothers went revenge also failed one by one. Jiulong, the youngest one, he swore to kill the dragons. An old fairy man gave him nine precious stones, and he melted them into nine magic arrows, and then he finally killed the nine evil dragons. This ancient myth widely spreads, and reflects the snake totem of Dai people, who have been a rice-growing ethnic group for thousands of years. Besides, the motifs about rice in the epics reflect Dai people’s strong belief in the grain gods Bu Huanhao or Ya Huanhao. The motifs about gourd reflect Dai people’s totem worship of fertility because there are many seeds inside. There are many other examples, which cannot be described in detail here. In a word, the Dai creation epics contain both Buddhist knowledge and local narratives, respectively reflecting Buddhism and primitive religion.

### 5. Dai People Created Diverse of Epics

Theravada Buddhism brought plenty of material to Dai culture; Dai people could understand the outside world through Buddhist scripture, in particular, Indian, and Southeast Asia culture. It triggered the prosperity of Dai literature, and the topics of Dai epics have been broadened.

First of all, some ancient myths were recorded and adapted in the form of poetry; for example, *Nan Wonong* [4, p. 104–105], means the daughter of a saint caw. A woman got pregnant after eating a pineapple dropped by a cow; when her daughter grew up, she goes to forest to look for her cow father and finally got the rice seeds. Another similar example is *Luoying Zhang* [4, p. 101–102] means the daughter of a saint elephant. Both of them reflect the totem worship of Dai people. In short, with the use of writing system, the ancient Dai people could not only record oral traditions into written ones, and they can created more epics based on the native narratives and the material of foreign culture. Therefore, the Dai epics are very rich and diverse in content; “There are works that continue to reflect the primitive religious consciousness, such as *Xiupi Xiugun* (a ghost and a man make friends); there are works extolling Buddhism, such as *Pazhao Daolo* (the tours of Buddha); and there are recreations based on Indian epics, such as *Langa Xihe* (the twelve-heads devil king), which derived from *Ramayana*” [12, p. 11]. Besides, there are also works extracted from the secular world, especially those tragic epics that emerged after the 17th century. For example, *Obing Sangluo* (a tragic lovers story between Obing and Sangluo), *Yehanzuo Maonongyang* (a tragic lovers story between Yehanzuo and Maonongyang), *Wanna Pali* (a tragic lovers story between Wanna and Pali), and so on. “These tragic poems inherited the original ancient ballads, they have the characteristics of folk songs, that is, keep the simple language, with a strong public intonation. At the same time, people were inspired by the Buddhist sutras and imitated the compilation mode of the sutras. Therefore, these epics usually have a complete narrative structure, create characters with strong personalities, and also expresses people’s aspirations” [13, p. 35].

There is no exactly a word referring to epic in Dai language; Dai people generally use the word “Lik” [lik<sup>53</sup>] or “Tham” [tham<sup>55</sup>] to refer to all palm-leaf scriptures. There are some differences between the two words: “Tham” refers to the absolute Buddhist scriptures, which contain a lot of Balinese vocabularies, that the common people cannot understand, and usually in prose form; while “Lik” generally refers to all rhythmic form manuscripts, interpreted in Dai language. Here are two examples; one from *Batamaga Pengshangluo* and the other from *Chuangshiji*, and the underlined words are the rhymes:

Example 1:<sup>1</sup>

᠖ᠠᠨᠩᠭᠦ ᠨᠠᠭ ᠰᠠᠨ ᠲᠠᠨᠨᠢ ᠲᠠᠨᠨᠢ ᠲᠠᠨᠨᠢ ᠲᠠᠨᠨᠢ ᠲᠠᠨᠨᠢ ᠲᠠᠨᠨᠢ  
ta:n<sup>33</sup>ko:<sup>11</sup>sai<sup>55</sup>tin<sup>55</sup>tau<sup>13</sup>phoŋ<sup>51</sup>lum<sup>51</sup>ʔa:<sup>51</sup>ka:t<sup>35</sup>

God Yinpa soared in the wind,

<sup>1</sup> This is an episode of *Batamaga Pengshangluo* performed by two Zhang Ha (singer), female singer is Yu Wangjiao and the male singer is Ai La, they sung in Manmedai Village, Mengzhe County, Xishuangbanna Prefecture, October 2, 2014. Recorded and translated by the author.

၁၅၅ ငှက် ပိဋ် ဌာန တေတေ ငွေတေ  
 ʔan<sup>55</sup>ni<sup>33</sup>pin<sup>55</sup>tsa:<sup>33</sup>həŋ<sup>13</sup>pu<sup>51</sup>kau<sup>11</sup>  
 In the ancient times,

ဘွဉ် ဘ ဂဏဃ ခဏ တေ ပိဋ် တာ ငှက် ဌာန တေ ဂွေ ဂွေ  
 ʔin<sup>55</sup>pha<sup>33</sup>jep<sup>33</sup>tsau<sup>13</sup>ko:<sup>35</sup>pin<sup>55</sup>ta:<sup>55</sup>nin<sup>51</sup>həŋ<sup>11</sup>mai<sup>55</sup>xam<sup>51</sup>faŋ<sup>51</sup>thi:<sup>35</sup>  
 This is how the Yinpa god was born, please listen to my song.

တေတေ ဂဏဃ ငှက် မွဉ် မွဉ် ဂဏဃ ပိဋ် တေ မွဉ် မွဉ် ၆ တေတေ  
 taŋ<sup>13</sup>te:<sup>35</sup>nan<sup>11</sup>mu<sup>51</sup>ma:k<sup>33</sup>sen<sup>55</sup>pi:<sup>55</sup>ki:<sup>13</sup>mi:<sup>51</sup>ma:<sup>51</sup>hok<sup>35</sup>mu<sup>51</sup>  
 A hundred thousand and sixty thousand years passed away.

Example 2 [11, p. 65]:

အဂဏ ဗဏ အဖ ဝဏ တေတေ အဂဏ ဂဏ တေတေ  
 မဏ ဝဏ မဏ တေတေ အဂဏ အဏ တေတေ  
 la:<sup>55</sup>sa:<sup>55</sup>la:<sup>55</sup>tsam<sup>55</sup>tau<sup>31</sup>xoŋ<sup>55</sup>ka:<sup>55</sup>ta:<sup>55</sup>mu<sup>55</sup>lin<sup>33</sup>  
 man<sup>55</sup>tsam<sup>55</sup>ju<sup>11</sup>tau<sup>31</sup>ko<sup>11</sup>laŋ<sup>35</sup>lin<sup>33</sup>həŋ<sup>55</sup>məŋ<sup>55</sup>  
 The goddess flew to the Earth, she tried to mend the land;

ဗဏ ဝဏ တေတေ အဖ ဝဏ ပဏ ပဏ  
 ဗဏ ဝဏ ဗဏ တေတေ အဂဏ အဏ တေတေ  
 pai<sup>33</sup>tsot<sup>11</sup>ha:<sup>55</sup>la:<sup>55</sup>fa<sup>55</sup>po<sup>55</sup>sut<sup>35</sup>  
 son<sup>35</sup>pai<sup>33</sup>son<sup>35</sup>ma<sup>55</sup>het<sup>11</sup>laŋ<sup>35</sup>xut<sup>35</sup>tsa:<sup>55</sup>m<sup>11</sup>ku<sup>33</sup>  
 She mended every corner of the Earth, back and forth, no corners left;

ဝဏ တေတေ ဝဏ တေတေ အဂဏ အဏ အဏ  
 မဏ တေတေ ဝဏ တေတေ ပဏ ပဏ မဏ  
 tsəŋ<sup>11</sup>tak<sup>35</sup>tsat<sup>35</sup>me<sup>55</sup>hau<sup>31</sup>tseu<sup>55</sup>li<sup>33</sup>laŋ<sup>11</sup>tsau<sup>33</sup>  
 jaŋ<sup>33</sup>hau<sup>31</sup>tsa:<sup>55</sup>ha:<sup>55</sup>pəŋ<sup>33</sup>phun<sup>35</sup>ja:<sup>11</sup>mən<sup>35</sup>ʔən<sup>33</sup>  
 She repaired the Earth until she was satisfied, restore its original state without damage;

အဂဏ ဝဏ အဖ ဝဏ ပဏ ပဏ အဂဏ အဏ  
 အဂဏ ပဏ အဏ အဏ ပဏ ပဏ အဂဏ အဏ  
 lai<sup>35</sup>tsam<sup>55</sup>tsəŋ<sup>11</sup>va<sup>33</sup>sa:<sup>55</sup>ko<sup>11</sup>fa<sup>55</sup>la:<sup>55</sup>ko<sup>11</sup>lin<sup>33</sup>pa:<sup>33</sup>sum<sup>55</sup>  
 ko<sup>11</sup>pen<sup>33</sup>laŋ<sup>35</sup>lin<sup>33</sup>sa:<sup>11</sup>məŋ<sup>55</sup>kon<sup>55</sup>fa<sup>55</sup>kaŋ<sup>31</sup>te<sup>55</sup>ja:<sup>55</sup>  
 This is the saying Shangguofa Laguolin, they created a home for human.

From the poems above, we can see the basic form of Dai poetry rhythm as following, and this form of rhythm is called “၁၅၅” [xap<sup>55</sup>] in Dai language. It’s called “waist and foot rhyme” in Chinese, which means that the word at the end of the first line rhymes, and there is a word at the waist of the second line rhymes with it, and so on. This rhythm pattern can be seen as following:

- Line1 : OOOOOOA
- Line2 : OOOAOOB
- Line3 : OOOBOOC
- Line4 : OOOOOD

Furthermore, most of the “lik” (epic manuscripts) have a similar structure. First of all, the texts usually begin with “As I heard, the Buddha was saying ...” and then begin to narrate stories; Secondly, the content of the stories basically revolves around the Buddhist doctrine. The protagonists in the stories (either people or animals) are basically related to Buddha; Thirdly, there are always some lines to praise Buddha at the end of the stories, and through these stories, Buddha’s authority are shown to the public; Fourthly, There is usually no exact record of the date and author of Dai epics. For one thing, these works are regarded as the wisdom of the Buddha and are naturally not marked with

individual names; besides, when a singer or an intellectual creates a song or a narrative text for the event organizer, their works can be copied by others as they have been paid. Nowadays, these “Tham” and “Lik” are mainly kept in temples, and are part of cultural heritage. All the members of community can borrow them to recite, perform, and transcribe for new copies. Generally speaking, these “Tham” and “Lik” copies, which have been presented to Buddhist temples, cannot be resold.

All these scriptures not only contain Buddhism thoughts but also contain traditional knowledge of Dai ethnic group. In the process of the cultures melting, Dai folk singer Zhang Ha and sutras chanter Bo Zhan play an important promotional role, and all of them are inextricably linked to Buddhism. Buddhist temples have cultivated a large number of Dai monks, who understand the traditional culture, after they left temples and returned to secular life, they became Dai intellectuals, who can not only transcribe and recite Buddhist sutras, but also understand traditional knowledge well. Some of them become singer, transcriber, and poet; they have been recorded down much of oral tradition, and kept creating epics until today. Some of them become chanter, the leader of Buddhist believers, conducting daily ceremonies and reciting scriptures for the public. Therefore, during the process of cultural integration, for one thing Theravada Buddhism has been widely promoted, for another thing the Dai traditional culture has been inherited well through the palm-leaf scriptures, especially kinds of Dai epic have got the opportunity to flourish.

All in all, it is a process of two-way interaction. On the one hand, Dai's ancestors transformed the Buddhist scriptures into Dai poetries; on the other hand, they composed native narratives into the palm-leaf scriptures, namely the “Tham” and “Lik” in Dai language. Dai epics appeared unprecedented prosperity; “There are 84,000 Buddhist sutras written in Dai language, and a large number of them are from Dai myths, legends, epics, and stories, which have been restructured and processed into the scriptures” [4, p. 70].

Most Dai epics have been inherited in the living form. In particular, the creation epics are usually circulated in the form of independent section, and different section is performed in a different context. For example, “Bu Sangxaxi Ya Sanggasai” is the main section of chapter six in *Batamag Pengshangluo*, and it is usually performed at the wedding ceremony; “Sangmudi” is one section of chapter thirteen, and it is mainly narrated in the celebration for new house; while the “Ho Zhang” is the twelfth chapter and is usually performed in Water-Sprinkling Festival. Besides, many other epics can be recited at Buddhist activities, especially those related to Buddhist stories, which are called “Lik Aluang”, a special epic of Dai ethnic group.

## 6. The Special Aluang Epics

Dai people claim to have 550 Aluang epics, more or less 150 of them have been collected now, and dozens of them have been published. The Dai word “Aluang” [a<sup>33</sup>lɔŋ<sup>55</sup>] means hero in general; Aluang always gets prompt aid from fairy old men or magic animal during their romantic adventure. Actually, most of Aluang epics are related to Jātaka, and many Aluangs are the incarnations of Buddha.

The epic *Hai Gahan Haluo* [4, p. 408] (the five eggs of saint crows) introduces the origin of Aluang: a long time ago, in the ancient forest Guogongguose, there was a crow's nest in a big banyan tree, and in the nest were five glittering eggs, like precious stones. One day, when the dark clouds were rolling, the lightning hit the tree. These five eggs were blown off and scattered to different places. The first egg fell to the chicken kingdom and was hatched by a hen, and there was the first Buddha, who was named Zhua Gashan; the second egg fell to the buffalo kingdom, hatched by a cow, and there was the second Buddha, who was named Gu Lagong; the third egg fell into the dragon kingdom and was hatched by a dragon. There was the third Buddha, who was named Ga Saba; the fourth egg fell to the elephant kingdom, drifting to a river, and a mother elephant picked it up and took it home. There was the fourth Buddha named Guodama (Siddhattha Gautama). According to the text, it is said that Guodama has to reincarnate for 550 generations as flowers, trees, birds, animals, and all classes of people before he become Buddha. These incarnations of Guodama are all Aluangs, and the experiences and adventures of the various incarnations are Aluang stories, circulating both as oral tradition and written tradition (Aluang epics).

Based on the Jātaka and the Dai folk tales, Dai people have been creating lots of Aluang epics, which can be classified into three types: “the Buddha's type, the mythological type, and the heroic type” [4, p. 407]. The scholar on Dai literature Wang Guoxiang once claimed that most Dai epics, such

as *Songpamin Gasina*, *Zhao Shutun* (Prince Shutun), *Qianban Lianhua* (thousand-petals lotus), *Sike Mianguihua* (four Burmese osmanthus tree), and *Qitou Qiwei Xiang* (elephant with seven heads and seven tails), are derived respectively from these scriptures *Sompamin Sutra*, *Shutun Sutra*, *Thousand Petals Sutra*, *Four Eaves and Portuguese Sutra*, and *Alikta Sutra* [15, p. 113].

*Weixiandala* is a representative of the Buddha's type, which is derived from the 547th story of the *Bunsen Sutra*, *Prince Vishontra*. It is about the prince Weixiandala who followed Buddha and gradually practiced through lots of almsgiving, to free himself from samsara and reach the highest state of Nirvana. Another example is *Aluang Nihan* [4, p. 416], means golden antelope Aluang, which is very popular among Dai people, tells such a story: a long time ago, five hundred antelopes were living in a wonderful forest; the chief male and female antelopes were a loving couple. One day, the female antelope accidentally fell into a trap set by a hunter, and she was so thirsty that she asked the male antelope to bring some water for her. Unluckily, the male antelope fell into another trap on the way to the river. She thought she had been abandoned by her husband, she was so sad and angry that she swore: "all males in the world are heartless. If I were born a human next life, I would kill all the men in the world!" She was reborn as a princess in the Lajiazuo Kingdom at last, and the male antelope was also born as a boy (Aluang) in a poor family. When the princess was 16 years old, she recalled memory about the past and her curse; then she took a knife and went out with full of grudge, and she killed whomever male she met. Aluang also recalled his memory, so he went to a temple and painted their previous story on the wall. He explained that the male antelope had never run away, but he failed to return to her. She forgave everyone after understanding that she had not been abandoned. As a result, she immediately put down the knife and knelt confessing to Buddha that she would never kill anyone or anything again. It is clear that this Aluang epic has Buddhist ideas of reincarnation and karma; Dai people keen to copy this scripture, believing it could drive out hate or remove misunderstandings.

The *Bai Bengke Aluang* [4, p. 418–419] (White Calm Aluang) is a representative of the mythological type. It's about: one princess gave birth to a baby clam, which was regarded as an omen of disaster, and then was abandoned on a bamboo raft. The raft drifted along a river to the demon kingdom, and a woman rescued the baby clam. A few days later, the clam cracked and a handsome boy was born. He was raised well by the demon mother, and he learned some magic techniques there. When he grew up and finally found out that he was a mankind, not the same as demon, then he decided to say farewell to his demon mother, and find his own mother. He came to Meng Zhanba (a Dai kingdom) and happened to meet the king selecting a son-in-law by cap throwing, and he was chosen. He defeated his enemies with magic power and successfully became the new king. At last, he went back to his hometown and found his birth parents.

In this epic, Aluang experienced different identities: clam, orphan, hero, new king, and the son. Just like many other Aluang stories, their status often shift from animal to human, from the poor to the rich, from the common man to the noble, and so on. These Aluang have many similarities, most of them are same with the 31 functional items of the magic stories. For example, they are born as freak, they make the adventure to the demon kingdom, they have magic power, and they win the wars and marry a princess at last. There are many similar epics, such as *the Frog Aluang*, *the Four-legged Snake Aluang*, *the White Tiger Aluang*, and so on. Most of them are fairy tales, widely spreading in Dai society. All the Aluangs can overcome their opponents with Palaxi's help, who refers to the ascetic monk, standing for Buddhism.

There is also much heroic type of Aluang epics; for instance, *the Aluang Gongxiang* (the Aluang with a bow), which is influenced by *Ramayana*, *the Aluang Sangda* (three-eyes Aluang), *the Aluang Xiangmeng* (the Aluang as the jewel of the nation), etc. These epics are closely related to the ancient battles for resources such as women, slaves, lands, and other private property.

All of Aluang epics reflect the dualistic religion of Dai people. First of all, the Aluang epics of the Buddha's type have the purpose of propagating Buddhism, they embody a lot of Buddhist ideas, such as Karma, Samsara, Nirvana, and so on. Secondly, although many Aluang epics derived from Buddhist scriptures, they have also absorbed native narratives, most of which share the traditional thoughts of Dai ethnic group. For example, these epics encourage people to against the evil forces, to pay attention to this life but future life, and to pursue true love and happiness courageously, and so on. The animals in the stories, such as parakeet, clam, golden crab, snake, and ox, are all deified animals from ancient



mythology and embody the totem worship of Dai people. The plots of epics, such as antiphonal singing love song, riverside trysts, three challenges for wedding with princess, and so on, are all reflections of secular life in Dai society, some of them are contrary to the Buddhist doctrine. Some stories had already been spread in the folk before the introduction of Theravada Buddhism. Although there was some propaganda of Buddhism at the beginning or at the end, which is to conform to the textual pattern of the palm-leaf scriptures, these narratives still retain the characteristics of folk stories.

Thirdly, during the Aluang's growth and adventure, Palaxi or Hun Xijia would help him. Palaxi is a Buddhist monk who usually practices in the forest, and he has a strong ability to summon wind and rain and understands well of the world. Meanwhile, Hun Xijia is considered one of the creation gods in Dehong Dai area, and is similar to the Jade Emperor in Han mythology. Whenever Aluang is in trouble, one of them would immediately appear to help him out of danger. Besides, Mong Pipai, means the demon world, which is a common motif in Aluang epics, is often the place where one Aluang grows up, studies, and secures support; actually it refers to the place where the original religion ruled. While Aluang is the reincarnation of Buddha, the Buddhist hero, the "Pipai" [phi<sup>35</sup>phai<sup>55</sup>] (demon) is a Buddhist derogatory term for those who still practice the primitive religion, and so that Pipai is a representative of the primitive religion. "This episode maybe convey that the Buddha grow up in the demon's place, was helped by the demon, and should love each other rather than fight with each other" [4, p. 420]. Aluang is protected both by the figures representing Buddhism and the deities representing the primitive religion, why? This is a manifestation of cultural integration, of the harmony between Theravada Buddhism and the primitive religion; it is also the reflection of the dualistic belief in Dai epics.

### Conclusion

To sum up, Dai people have been practiced a kind of dualistic religion, the primitive religion and Theravada Buddhism; both of them play significant roles in Dai culture. Theravada Buddhism is relatively the dominant one nowadays, there are a large number of Buddhist scriptures kept well in temples. Besides, generations of Dai monks have been reciting and transcribing the scriptures, propagating the Dharma of Buddha. On the contrary, the primitive religion is the recessive one, relying mainly on traditional customs and some sacrificial occasions, and the related narratives has been handed down generation by generation on oral tradition. Nevertheless the comprehensive influence of Theravada Buddhism for hundreds of years, Dai people still cling to the primitive religion as the bottom of their faith.

The religious tradition is of great importance to Dai epics, especially on content and performance. On the one hand, some oral traditions have been absorbed and transcribed into hundreds of "Tham" or "Lik", namely Dai's palm-leaf scriptures. On the other hand, Buddhism sutras have also been localized. Generations of well-educated Dai monks and intellectuals have done this job, adapting and reorganizing Buddhist stories into poetries according to the Dai's rhythm. Furthermore, in the process of literary creation, singers or poets will make bold innovations in the plot of characters and the ending of the story according to the moral concept, psychological quality and literary tradition of Dai ethnic group.

All in all, Theravada Buddhism had injected new blood into Dai culture and brought about the vigorous development of Dai epics, including the creation epics, Aluang epics, tragedy epics, and so on. Literature is the echo of the secular world; Dai people practice the primitive religion and Theravada Buddhism in their society, and thus create the unique Dai epics, which reflect the tradition of dualistic religion in turn.

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