

## Abstract

The main purpose of this study are twofold. The first is to collect substantial record of Kwa Tang, a ritual performed exclusively by the Yao, which had never been presented before in full details. Second, this study also aims to present an analysis of its significance in the context of Yao's economic, social and political changes.

Yao is an ethnic group widely found in the southern part of China, Northern Lao and some northern provinces of Thailand. Traditionally, the patterns of their beliefs and rituals concentrate on animism and ancestor worship. Nevertheless, the long history of social and cultural contact with China brought in many Chinese ideological and cultural effects. In Thailand by the end of the Nineteen century the Yao have started to move in, particularly into the provinces of Chaing-rai and Nan. Though recently they have been put under close contact with the Thais, many aspects of their daily life and ritual remain unchanged. The Kwa Tang ritual is one of such aspects. In many parts of this region home to the Yao people, such ritual had declined in its significance. Beside being very expensive and time consuming ritual, the number of qualified priests has decreased. Against such background, this study shows that the Kwa Tang ritual has become more and more popular in recent years among the Yao of Huai Mae Sai (a village in Chaing Rai Province).

In term of economy, through government agencies and other NGO groups, the village of Huai Mae sai has Changed from its traditonal Yao economic system into a more capitalist mode of production. Their social structure has also been affected by the more complex economic differentiation, thus become more heterogenious. The once influencial clan and kinship networks in the political organization of Yao community have given way to a more systematic political setting organized by the centralized Thai administration outside the Yao community. This changes are the main factors contribute to the popularity of the Kwa Tang ritual, according to this study

Kwa Tang, in terms of its symbolic representations and ritual display, is closely related to the Tao rituals in chinese culture. In the Yao social context, Kwa Tang represents one of the most powerful social machanisms which organizes the socio-economic hierarchy of the male population; using the traditional chinese capitalistic social structure as its prototype. To a certain extent, we may suggest that the degree of socio-economic changes within the Yao community and the popularity of the Kwa Tang ritual are directly co-related, In other word, within a traditional Yao socio-economic setting the significance of Kwa Tang would be minimum. Whereas in a more capitalistic socio-economic environment Kwa Tang and its ritual significance would be maximum.

This study illustrates not only the role of Kwa Tang in the Yao society but also help to understand its cultural mechanism, in terms of changes and adaptations. Compare with their kingroups in China and Laos, the Yao of Huai Mae Sai have experienced a unique and different pattern of social and economic changes.