

Abstract

A border village between the northwestern border of Thailand and Shan State of Burma, Piangluang Village is located in Vieng Hang district, Chiang Mai. The majority of population in the village was Tai yai (Shan) military troop's families until Shan Revolution United Army (SURA) allied with Kuomintang (KMT) in 1969 which resulted in a second largest group of population, KMT. The minority is Palong and Lisu who fled from Burma State and sought refuge in the village afterwards, and Thais who recently went into the area mainly for trade.

The study of ethnic identity invention of Tai Yai people at the border village has found that the people apply costumes, language, culture and traditions as an ethnic boundary. At the same time, their identity has challenged and compromised with surrounding ethnic groups particularly Thai and Burma states during the past four decades.

From 1958 to 1996, the area covering Piang Luang Village to the eastern bank of Salween River in Shan State was under Shan Revolution United Army (SURA)'s control, which was later changed its name to Mong Tai Army (MTA). Therefore, the identity invented during the period was meant to directly challenge the power of Burma State. For example, political songs criticising the Burma State, the production of Tai Yai language books which was forbidden in the lands under Burma's control, and the making of flag to raise awareness in resistance. Most importantly, the Tai Yai people rejected Burmese culture such as cutting off the edge of the skirt of their *Likay* costumes to make it different from Burma's.

However, after the announcement of surrender of Mong Tai Army (MTA) in 1996 and the border village in Shan State became under Burma State's control, Tai Yai's identity was less challenging to Burma State. They became more compromise with Thai

State since they had to live in Thailand since any Challenges might affect the Thai – Burmese relationship and cause instability to its people.

In conclusion, under the changing border and inconstant political circumstances, Tai Yai people in Piang Luang Village have to adjust themselves to the changing situations. Therefore, their identity has never been fixed. The ethnic identity invention of Tai Yai people in the village accordingly well reflects the way to conserve their identity under changing situations.