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Nan-Chao and the Birth of Sukhothai: Problems of the Twentieth-Century Thai Perception of the Past

Winai Pongsripian

1. It is generally known among sinologists that Nan-chao was once a powerful kingdom (653-902). Indeed, it was a force T'ang China (618-906) had to contend with. This state wielded its authority over much of present-day Yunnan and parts of mainland Southeast Asia.

However, it is most intriguing to note that although historians have culled a lot of information from Chinese records concerning almost all aspects of Nan-chao there is still a debate among Thai and Chinese scholars on whether the people of this kingdom were actually Tai. Despite claims by modern historical research in the West, as well as in China, that Nan-chao could by no means be considered a Tai state, conservative Thai scholars have always come out to defend the theory that Nan-chao was a state founded by a Tai dynasty.

Until recently that Nan-chao theory was sacrosanct in Thai textbooks, and Thais over the age of 30 were taught in their school days that Nan-chao was no less than a national pride. Following the

*This represents a slightly-improved version of my paper of the same title presented at the Fourth International Conference on Thai Studies, Kunming, the People's Republic of China, 11-13 May 1990. I wish to express my thanks and gratitude to Professor Dr. Khien Theeravit and the Ford Foundation for their support which enabled me to attend the Conference.
establishment of Sino-Thai diplomatic relations in 1975, the subject of Nan-chao was brought to the fore again by Chinese historians, notably Chen Lufan and his colleagues. Their works were translated into Thai and published in various Thai journals, including the widely read Sinlapawatthanatham, until 1989. Expressly, the Chinese historians wanted to repudiate the assumptions held and propagated by those Western imperialists and consequently, to remove a source of ill feelings between the two nations.

2. Published works by Chen Lufan and the current line of research on the Nan-chao problem with conclusions unfavourable to the Nan-chao = Tai equation have not failed to invite criticisms from conservative Thai historians. Former Thai Prime Minister M.R. Kukrit Pramoj has on occasions expressed his displeasure at the suggestion that Nan-chao was not a Tai kingdom.¹ In 1987 the Thai-Chinese Friendship Association published a book entitled History of the Tai Peoples Prior to the Sukhothai Period in which protagonists of the Nan-chao = Tai identification reassert their conviction. That the Nan-chao problem remains an important issue in the history of Sino-Thai relationship is manifest in the presentation of the Nan-chao debate and its far-reaching consequences upon the Chinese community in Thailand as a leading feature in the Far Eastern Economic Review (18 Feb. 1988) in the following year. The Nan-chao problem hence has become a political as well as psychological issue. It was against this background that the Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, and the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, the Academy of Social Sciences (Yunnan), in 1988, agreed to undertake a joint research project: Nan-chao and the Birth of Sukhothai. The purpose is to clarify and reassess, in a judicious way, the various issues relating to the Nan-chao problem. The approach was interdisciplinary in character, though the emphasis was placed on history and historiography. The study involved two observation tours, one in the Tali region in April 1988 and the other in northern Thailand and the Sukhothai region in January 1989.

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¹ See, for example, M.R.Kukrit's special lecture on "The Thai-Chinese Cultural Assimilation" in Winai Pongsripian, ed. Sinlapa Watthanatham Thai-Chin Suksa, (Nakhon Pathom: Silapakorn University, 1989): 19
3. With the full report on the project now being under preparation, it is not the purpose of the present paper to deal with all major aspects of the Nan-chao problem. Nor is it the objective of the writer to discuss the plausibility of the Nan-chao = Tai or Nan-chao = Yi/Luo-Luo equations; much is to be said about that subject by Chinese historians attending this conference. This paper aims instead to treat of two important issues deemed crucial to the proper understanding of the Nan-chao problem, namely, the evolution of the Nan-chao historiography in twentieth-century Thailand and how the Nan-chao theory was adopted in official Thai historiography, and the discussion about the origin of the kingdom of Sukhothai as revealed by the epigraphic content of Inscription II, the so-called Wat Si Chum inscription.

4. In dealing with these two issues, one must take into consideration the following three assumptions upon which popular Thai perception of the past is based.

(1) The early ancestor of the Tai race had first migrated from the Altai Mt. in northwestern China and subsequently, as a result of Chinese political pressure, they were forced at different stages in history to move farther south, until a branch of the Tai ancestors succeeded in founding the state of Nan-chao in Yunnan in the first half of the seventh century.

(2) The Tai constituted the ruling class of Nan-chao. They possessed such a glorious military prowess that they could not only extend their sway far and wide, but also resist T'ang China's aggressions throughout the 600-year existence of their state. The assertion that Nan-chao was a Tai Kingdom had been based on a comparative study of certain 'Nan-chao' words found in Chinese records and words common to Tai ethnic groups, especially the words Chao, meaning prince, lord, and krasuang, department.

(3) Following the fall of Nan-chao in 1253 as a result of Mongol expansion, the Tai were further pushed south into mainland Southeast Asia where they again began to found settlements which later were to become the various states in the north of present-day Thailand. Of all these newly founded states, Sukhothai seems to have been elevated by popular writers as Nan-chao's successor state.
It is worth noting that modern Chinese historians involved in the study of ancient Thai history have concentrated on giving a *coup de grace* to these three popularly-held assumptions. Their argument against the Nan-chao theory, no matter whether it sounds convincing enough, is that early protagonists of the Nan-chao theory were less than critical in their use of contemporary Chinese sources. In fact, the Nan-chao = Tai identification was almost universally accepted at least until the early 1970s as evident in books written by prominent scholars. It was also accepted by Chinese historians until Chiang Ying-liang and Ma Ch’ang-shou did a complete about-turn in the early 1960.

II

5. In Thailand, the history of Nan-chao historiography represented the changing Thai perception of the past in the first half of the twentieth century. As a matter of fact, the popularization of the Nan-chao theory coincided with the period in which nationalistic fervour was in full swing during the 1930s. If the Nan-chao = Tai identification was a myth created in the West, it served to boost the Thai morale following the traumatic years Thailand had experienced towards the end of the nineteenth century. In talking about how the Nan-chao theory evolved and how it was incorporated into modern Thai historiography, one needs to broach the subject of the influence of the West upon Thai historical writings.

6. It is interesting to note here that King Chulalongkorn himself recognised the dearth of historical evidence relevant to the origin of the Tai nation, apart from the unreliable *Phongsawadan Muang Nua*, which indicated that the Siamese nation seemed to have emerged into the scene some 1239 years ago with the founding of Muang Sawankhalok and

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Muang Sukhothai. What amounted to the first national history of Siam, the Phongsawadan Sayam, was written by Prince-Monk Wachirayan in 1898/9. Its writer did not seek to look beyond Siamese territory to trace the origin of the Tai race here substituted by the term Sayam although he was evidently influenced by Western-style historical writing.

It is safe to say that in this transitional period Siamese intellectuals were well aware of the shortcomings of the indigenous sources, e.g. tamnan and phraratchaphongsawadan, but they were not only unable to resist their appeal but also made no serious attempt to find alternative sources. However, in his Tamnan Prathet Thai, Prince-Monk Wachirayan later tried to establish a sketch of Thai history from the sources then available to him. Basing his interpretation on the Tamnan Singhanati, he believed that Chiang Saen and the River Kok area was the cradle of Thai civilization. From there, the ancestors of the Thai migrated south to occupy the heartland of Siam.

7. It was in the mid-1880s and early 1890s that European scholars, Terrien de Lacouperie and E.H. Parker evolved a grand theory of the Tai race. Terrien de Lacouperie, in his Cradle of the Shan Race, was the first Western historian to associate the Tai with the Ai-lao legend and the Nan-chao kingdom in southwestern China. He proposed that the Tai homeland was to be found in China, just south of the Yang-tse Kiang. In 1887 de Lacouperie hypothesized in his book entitled The Western Origin of the Early Chinese Civilization that the Tai were the original inhabitants of China. He supported his theory by another work, Les Langues de la Chine avant les Chinois, in which he conducted a comparative study of Chinese and Tai cognates.

Terrien de Lacouperie’s conclusion was that Chinese civilization was not only not so ancient as one might be led to believe, but also it had

4. Chulalongkorn, King of Thailand, "Song Wichan Ruang Phraratcha Phongsawadan" (cremation volume for the funeral of M.R.Marut Thewakun, 14 June 1989): 1
had strong Tai elements. His theory concerning the Tai race made an enormous impact on French and British Orientalists towards the end of the nineteenth century, but it was E.H. Parker, British Consul at Kweichou, who first made a study of the Shan histories in connection with Chinese historical records. He enthusiastically published his amazing results in two articles in the *China Review* in 1891 and 1892/3, which apparently confirmed de Lacouperie's theory. Both historians believed that the Ai-lao of the Chinese records were the ancestors of the Tai/Lao. Since the Nan-chao ruling class claimed the Ai-lao as their ancestors, it would not be unreasonable to suppose that they were also Tai. The implication of the works by de Lacouperie and Parker is that at least the historical background of the Tai dates back to the Former Han times (220 B.C. – A.D. 8).

8. E.H. Parker had every reason to be enthusiastic about his exposition of the unknown Tai past. He remarked in 1892 that back in the mid-1880s, when he visited Bangkok, "Siamese of high rank were totally ignorant of the history of the Shan (Nancho) Empire". However, the impetus to the widening of the Thai perception of the past had both political and intellectual incentives. Western imperialism finally precipitated the creation of Siam as a nation state, and the traditional Tamnan and phongsawadan histories had to give way to a Western-style national historiography with a wider perspective and a continuous narrative. For the first time, the Prince-Monk Wachirayan is said to have expressed his concern for the lack of effort amongst Siamese scholars in compiling a standard textbook on the history of Siam. Right at the end of the nineteenth century, Phraya Prachakitkorachak (Chaem Bunnak) complied the Phongsawadan Lao Chiang, *“History of the Lao Chiang/Tai Yuan Principalities”*, which was serialized in the Wachirayan magazine in 1899. An innovation in the PLC was the compiler's inclusion of an

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7. E.H. Parker, "The Early Laos and China" *China Review*, 19, 2 (1891) : 67-106; "The Old Thai or Shan Empire of Western Yunnan", *China Review*, 20, 6 (1892/3): 337-47
9. Wachirayan, op. cit. : 20
introductory chapter entitled *An Explanation Regarding the Tai Race*, in which he showed that he was familiar with the works of European authorities such as Terrien de Lacouperie, Max Muller, and Sir Arthur Phayre. In 1906, a year before his untimely death, Pharaya Prachakit updated his work, and published it as the *Phongsawadan Yonok, History of the Tai Yuan*, the most impressive synthesis of indigenous sources, unmatched by his contemporaries. Indeed, he was the first Thai historian to introduce the subject of the Thai outside Siam.

9. But it was in the 1910s that the grand theory of the successive Tai migrations as propounded by de Lacouperie and the great Tai kingdom of Nan-chao as depicted by Parker began to be included in the national history of Siam. Prince Narathip’s *Phongsawadan Thai Yai, History of the Great Thai*, which was published in 1912, marked a turning-point in the transition of modern Thai historiography in the sense that its writer was much inspired by Western Orientalists. Referring to Parker’s works, Prince Narathip writes:

> In comparing Mandarin Chinese words with Thai words, one recognizes that in every 1,000 Chinese words 325 are Tai-derived. Besides, the structure and syntax of the Chinese language are the same as those of the Thai language.\(^{10}\)

> In writing a long introduction to the *Royal Autograph Recension of the Chronicle of Ayutthaya*, in 1913, Prince Damrong says that the Tai language should stand for Thai-ness, and taking that into account, he states that

> the birth-place of the Tai (speaking peoples) was to be found in present-day southern China stretching from the Yang-tse River across Szechuan and Yunnan to Laos. All these lands used to form Thai territory.\(^{11}\)

\(^{10}\) Prince Narathip Praphanphong, *Phongsawadan Thai Yai*, (Bangkok: Khurusapha, 1962) : 58

\(^{11}\) Prince Damrong, “Phraniphon khamnam”, *Phraratcha Phongsawadan Chabap Phraratcha Hatthalekha*, I, (Bangkok: Khlang Witthaya, 1973) : 35-6
Prince Damrong explains in his commentary to the RA that Tai migrations were caused by two important factors, population growth and Chinese political pressure. *As a result of population growth*, argues Prince Damrong, *the Tai had to migrate for the first time in the first century B.C. to the southwest and south.* Further gradual migrations were to take place thanks to China's subsequent territorial expansion.

It should be noted that the *Father of Thai History* designates Yunnan as the *Former Tai Country* or *muang thai doem*. He relates how the Tai kingdom of Nan-chao came into existence and gives a sketch of its history up till its fall in 1253. It is indicated that at the time when Nan-chao was beginning to decline the Thai settlers in the central plain of Siam had already made themselves masters of the region. At this particular point, Prince Damrong did not imply that the ascendancy of Sukhothai was in any way connected with the fall of Nan-chao.

10. The publication, in the 1920s, of three important works by W.C.Dodd, W.A.R.Wood, and Prince Damrong were to pave the way for the rise of Thai nationlistic historiography, which was to be in vogue in the 1930 and 1940s. Dodd's collected papers, *The Tai Race: Elder Brother of the Chinese*, were published in 1923. As a book containing much linguistic data and the writer's relation of the Tai ethnic groups in southern China, it lends credence to Terrien de Lacouperie's grand theory concerning Tai migrations. It was translated into Thai by Luang Niphetnitisan (Huatli Hutakowit) in c. 1935 and published many times until recently. Chulalongkorn University during the rectorship of Field Marshall Phibunsongkhram also sponsored its publication in 1939.

More influential than *The Tai Race* was Wood's *A History of Siam*, which was published in 1924. As the first English standard textbook on Thai history, Wood's work was considered authoritative and has been quoted by many. Wood begins by saying that the history of the Tai peoples could be traced back to 585 B.C. when the Tai still constituted the majority of those whom ancient Chinese histories refer to as the

12. Ibid. : 59
“Barbarians” occupying territory south of the Yangtze. He observes that even in the early twentieth century the population in Yunnan remained Tai rather than Chinese, and pure Tai communities could be found only a few hundred miles from Canton.13

In assuming Nan-chao to be a Tai kingdom Wood did not confine himself to the philological connection of the word chao only, but he cites also the other common characteristics of Nan-chao and Old Siam. These were 1) the central administration of Nan-chao which comprised the shwang, the units, more or less, corresponding to the Siamese Krasuang; 2) the military organization which arranged for the rank and file to be similarly controlled in the units of 10, 100, 1000, and 10,000; and 3) the fact that the system of land distribution in Nan-chao was based on the same principle as that of the Siamese sakdina system.14 It is important to note that Wood should be held responsible for the suggestion that the fall of Nan-chao before Kublai Khan’s troops compelled the Tai to migrate in large numbers into the Sukhothai kingdom during the reign of Si Intharathit.15

Prince Damring, in his Chulalongkorn University lecture in 1924, linked the collapse of Nan-chao to the rise of the Tai states in northern Thailand, especially Sukhothai, in this way.

In 1253, having founded the Yuan dynasty in China, Kublai Khan ordered the pacification of the Former Tai Country, As a result of Mongol aggression, the Tai were forced to leave their original homeland and migrate south in great numbers. The Tai, who had already settled in Lanna and the towns adjacent to Sukhothai, thus acquired so much strength that they wished to free themselves from Khmer control. This led to armed resistance. Two Tai leaders, Pho Khun Bang Klang Thao and Pho Khun Si Intarathit, both former vassals

14. Ibid. : 37
15. Ibid. : 52
of the Khmer, joined forces to attack Sukhothai, a Khmer outpost, and conquered it in about 1257. Pho Khun Bang Klang Thao was enthroned, and with the new honorific title, Si Intharathit, he ruled as the first Tai king of Siam.16

11. Khun Wichitmutra (Sa-nga Kanchanakphan)'s Lak Thai marked the beginning of Thai nationalistic historiography. Having been awarded a prize by the Royal Institute in 1927, it has been reprinted at least ten times, which makes it one of the most popular Thai books ever. Khun Wichit's contribution to the Nan-chao historiography concerned his wild speculation that the Tai ancestors had had their original homeland in the region of the Altai Mt. Although this myth is based on groundless assumptions it was once enshrined in school textbooks and in popular belief.

12. The Coup d'Etat of 1939 ushered in a new period in the history of Thailand, which coincided with the temporary decline of the monarchy. Luang Wichitwathakan, a close associate of Field Marshal Phibun, was to dominate the Thai intellectual world with his numerous writings. He was particularly prolific in producing books on history and quasi-historical plays and novels. The quasi-historical play, Nan-chao, was written in 1933. It was often performed to impart nationalistic values to the public. Psychologically, Western-inspired nationalistic historiography served to revive self-confidence and rekindle national spirit which had been put to the test during the Paknam Incident of 1893 and its aftermath. It would not be wrong to say that Thai intellectuals competed with one another in the study of the distant Thai past, especially the problems connected with the origins and dispersal of the Tai. The following works are relevant to the topic of our discussion.

1935 Phraya Anuman Rajadhon’s Thai-Chin, (The Tai and the Chinese)
1935 Praphasiri (Phraya Kosakornwichan)'s Wikhoh Ruang Muang Thai Doem (An Analytical Study of the Former Tai Country)
1936 Luang Wichit’s Sayam and Suwannaphum (Siam and the Land of Gold)
1937 Phra Borihanthepthani’s *Phongsawadan Chat Thai (History of the Thai Nation)*

1940 Phraya Anuman’s *Ruang Khong Chat Thai (An Account of the Tai Race)*

Of all these Thai writers, Phraya Anuman seems to have left the most indelible impression by means of his detailed linguistic references that Nan-chao was definitely a Tai kingdom. Although he notes that to try to get some historical facts from the Thai sources such as the legend of Khun Borom is like trying to "extract blood from a crab," he believes that the Tai had been the major inhabitants in Southern China. Linguistic evidence, he argues, points to the fact that Hakkas and Cantonese are not pure Chinese, but Tai. This assumption convinced Phraya Anuman and his contemporaries that many current Chinese terms and historical names could be reconstructed to represent their original Tai names. Thus, names of the kings of Nan-chao were rendered into Thai. Phraya Anuman himself thinks that *kiulung* in the legend of the Ai-lao means *khao-luang* (Big Mountain) and Pi-Lo-Ko, the unifier of Nan-chao, must have been Khun Borom, the famous legendary figure in Tai cosmogonic tales.

Discussions about the origin of the Tai race got so carried away in the *Bangkok Times* that Prince Damrong said he should like to leave this subject to younger generations. Mention should also be made of two other publications: Luang Wichit’s *Ngan Khonkhwa Ruang Chon Chat Thai (Research on the History of the Tai Nation)* which was originally written in 1956 for official use in the Department of Central Intelligence, and the Thai version of Emille Rocher’s *Histoire des Princes du Yunnan et Leur Relations avec la Chine* which was included in 1970 as instalment 77 of the prestigious *Prachum Phongsawadan*. The latter work was published incidentally at the time when the Nan-chao theory was beginning to be demolished by modern histo-linguistic research.


III

12. It is tempting for an historian to conclude, as did Prince Damrong and W.A.R.Wood some seventy years ago, from circumstantial evidence that the rise of Sukhothai was due in part to the fall of Tali in 1253, which sent waves of Tai migrants to the south. The two events – the fall of ‘Nan-chao’ and the founding of the Phra Ruang dynasty in about 1257 – took place in such a sequence that it would not be illogical to think of their possible connection.

Our Chinese colleagues at the Academy of Social Sciences would argue rightly that the demise of the ‘true’ Nan-chao kingdom in 902 would make it sound absurd to link the collapse of Nan-chao to the rise of Sukhothai in the mid-thirteenth century. But that is beside the point. The original ruling family may have been deposed and replaced by the Tuan family, but the state still existed more or less in the guise of Nan-chao. The important issue that has satisfactorily been solved is the fact that the Tuan clique was not Sinicized Tai, but Pai. In his research on the Nan-chao problem, Chen Lufan points out that the Mongol dynasty reinstated the last Tuan ruler, who had accepted Yuan overlordship. He also argues that according to Chinese records, no pacification campaign was launched against the Tai immediately after the Mongol seizure of Tali.¹⁹ It is unlikely that the Tai were forced to move south in large-scale migrations.

13. Much of what we know about the origin of Sukhothai has come from George Coedès’ interpretation of Inscription II.²⁰ According to Coedès’ reconstruction, the Siamese first made their appearance in Southeast Asian epigraphy in the eleventh century. In the twelfth century, they may have settled in great numbers in the upper Menam basin under Khmer yoke. In the early thirteenth century, two Tai princes, Bang Klang Thao of Muang Bang Yang and Pha Muang of

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¹⁹. Chen Lufan, “Exploring the Historical Remains of the Ancient City of Sukhothai: More on Whether Kublai Khan’s Conquest of the Dali Kingdom Gave Rise to the Mass Migrations of the Thai People to the South” : 6
²⁰. George Coedès, “Les origines de la dynastie de Sukhothai”, JA (1920) : 233-4
Muang Rat, a dependent king with the title of Kamrateng An conferred by the sovereign of Angkor, succeeded in dislodging the Khmer governor from Sukhothai. Pha Muang enthroned his friend there and in turn conferred on Bang Klang Thao his own Khmer title of Kamrateng An Sri Indrapatindraditya. Coedes dates the coronation of Si Intharathit around 1220.  

14. Students of Thai history should be informed that up to the present moment 53 inscriptions concerning the history of Sukhothai have been discovered. Of all these, only Inscription II, the so-called Wat Si Chum inscription, gives an account of the early history of Sukhothai past, but, unfortunately, the role of the founder of the Phra Ruang dynasty has been based on the defective deciphering of the much defaced WSC. Attempt was made in 1980/1 by a group of Thai epigraphists and experts on Sukhothai history to improve and check the deciphering of this important inscription. With the availability of the new text, it is possible for one to try to look at the early phase of Sukhothai history anew.

On 21 December 1989 a Sukhothai-Ayutthaya study group was formed for the purpose of monthly discussions. At my request, Dr. Prasert na Nagara and M.R. Supawat Kasemsri, the other two members of the group, agreed to go through the text of WSC carefully line by line. I have benefited a great deal from their unrivalled experience, and I wish here to express my gratitude to them for their kind help. They are not, however, responsible for whatever mistakes I may possibly make here. What follows are points of interest.

(1) It is mentioned that the Mahathera Rajachulamani was born in Saluang Songkhaew (I/8), where his father, Phraya Khamhaeng Phra Ram (I/64), may have been ruling as dependent king. Khamhaeng Phra Ram was obviously a son of Phraya Si Nao Nam Thum.

22. See report on “Kan Sammana Silacharuk Sukhothai Lak Thi 2 (Wat Si Chum)” Sinlapakorn, 26, 6 (Jan 1983) : 81-119
(2) Si Nao Nam Thum is said to have been reigning in two cities, Sukhothai and Sisatchanalai. (I/9) He caused the Great Thupa of Sukhothai to be built. (I/10).

(3) ...was lord of Chaliang (I/12)

(4) Muang Tai submitted to Nam Thum. (I/12) M.R. Supawat concurs with me that this could be the Mon town of Tai Thong, mentioned in the Palatine Law and the 2/K. 125 Fragment of the Chronicle of Ayutthaya.

(5) Nam Thum’s overlordship was recognized as far as...to the east; Khun Lun (ta), Khun Da, Khun Dan to the south; Chot Wiang Lek to the southwest; Laphun,...to the west; Chiang Saen, Phayao,[m] Lao to the northwest;...to the north. (I/13-15)

(6) Nam Thum was engaged in an elephant duel with I Daeng Phuloeng. (I/17) He was ceded both the towns of Haeng (Tak) and Sukhothai. (I/19)

(7) Nam Thum’s son, Phraya Pha Muang was lord of Muang Rat and Muang Lum. (I/21)

(8) Formerly, Pho Khun Bang Klang Hao went north to the Muang Bang Yang to organize troops.... (I/22)

(9) Bang Klang Hao took Sisatchanalai (and Sukhothai). (I/23)

(10) Sisatchanalai-Sukhothai fought against Khom Sabat Khlon Lamphong. (I/25)

(11) Bang Klang Hao and K.S.K.L. fought against each other. The former sent his men to inform Pha Muang. (I/28)

(12) Pha Muang came to charge K.S.K.L. and forced the latter to retreat. Pha Muang entered Sukhothai and expressed his wish to give the town back to his friend. Bang Klang Hao did not proceed to enter the town, for he felt embarrassed towards his royal friend. Hence, Pha Muang withdrew all his troops and Bang Klang Hao decided to enter. (I/29-31)

(13) Pha Muang, therefore, officiated at Bang Klang Hao’s coronation, in which he transferred the town of Sukhothai to his friend together with his own title, Sri Indrapatindraditya, previously bestowed on him by the sovereign of Angkor. (I/31-33).

What emerges from the above-outlined information is interesting. The political developments of the Sukhothai area before the times of
Ramkhamhaeng were somewhat obscure, but they probably involved the expansion of Tai city-states loosely connected by marriage alliances. We may conclude that the Tai had gained a foothold in the Sukhothai-Sisatchanalai region even before the end of the twelfth century. Khmer-influenced adjuncts and architecture at Wat Phra Phai Luang and Sisatchanalai date back to the Bayon style of the reign of Jayavarman VII (1180-c.1220). According to the Prah Khan stèle, Jayavarman VII gave away Khmer princesses in marriage to potentially powerful lords. As Pha Muang had received a Khmer title, a sword of state, and the hand of a Khmer princess, he was probably a nominal vassal of Jayavarman VII in the early thirteenth century. The actual status of his father, Nam Thum, is not clear. He is depicted by the writer of WSC as though he had been head of a confederacy of Tai petty states, many of which were mere settlements under a Khun.

15. As regards the relationship between the Nam Thum and Phra Ruang dynasties, one is now led to believe that the Nam Thum family had been in a more secure position with its control of important towns. The emergence of the Phra Ruang dynasty was evidently a humbler event. In Inscription No. 45, the two immediate ancestors of Si Intharathit invoked in an oath between Nan and Sukhothai are Pu Khun Chit and Pu Khun Chot. Their Khun title indicates their inferior status to that of Pho Khun Si Nao Nam Thum. WSC implies that Bang Klang Hao played a subordinate role vis-a-vis Pha Muang. The fact that Pha Muang crowned Bang Klang Hao king of Sukhothai and transferred his Khmer title to him suggests, in my opinion, Bang Klang Hao’s tacit recognition of his friend’s political patronage. In our discussions, Dr. Prasert disagreed, saying that both Tai chiefs were equal, owing to their Pho Khun status and friendship tie.

16. There are some other assumptions about the early history of Sukhothai that call for reconsideration.

First, it is often claimed that the expulsion of KSKL from Sukhothai and the coronation of Si Intharathit represented the liberation of the Tai from Khmer yoke. We believe that if item 6 listed above contains elements of truth, one can venture to say that Nam Thum was the first Tai chief on record to have successfully wrested control over
Sukhothai and Rahaeng (Tak). I Daeng Phuloeng, former lord of those two places, was likely to be Mon, as his I Daeng title suggests. The KSKL incident apparently took place at the time when Sisatchanalai and Sukhothai was under Tai rule. Under Bang Klang Hao, the two cities were temporarily lost to KSKL, probably a local Khmerized chief from the Suphanburi area who wished to extend his authority into the upper Menam basin.

KSKL’s proper name ‘Lamphong’ (ลัมพอง) reminds one of the officer named in the Ayutthayan Law of Military Hierarchy as “พลัง”, the first syllable of which is recognizably a misrendering of “พระ”. One can also see its possible connection with “ลัมพ์” (Lumpha-ngu), the name given in one version of the sangitiyavaṇaṇa to an early Ayutthaya king, popularly known as Barommaracha II or Khunluang Pho Ngua, formerly Prince of Suphanburi. If the name Lamphong, with all its variants, was in one way or another associated with the Suphanburi region, then one can say that the traditional rivalry between the royal houses of the North and South had existed since the early days of Sukhothai.

Second, the rise of the Phra Ruang dynasty is shrouded in mystery. Little is known about its origin. As a result of previous misreading of the text of WSC, Bang Klang Hao was often thought to be chief of Muang Bang Yang. He, in fact, as item 8 shows, went north to Muang Bang Yang. Both WSC and the Ramkhamhaeng inscription, Si Intharathit is not remembered as a great military strategist; in RK, he was rescued by his warrior son, Ramkhamhaeng when Sukhothai was attacked by the Khun of Chot.

Epigraphic evidence from ESC and RK suggests that the situation in the upper Menam basin up to the reign of Si Intharathit was politically fluid and characterized by the local rivalries amongst Mon, Tai, and Khmer chiefs jostling for power. Ramkhamhaeng, great as he is described in traditional sources, may have been the first Tai king ever to impose a degree of central authority on the whole region.

An important piece of information, often overlooked, is to be found in the Chindamani Where it is stated: “In C.S. 645 (A.D. 1283),
a goat year, Phraya Ruang Chao, having taken over the city of Sisatchanalai, invented the Tai script".\textsuperscript{23} If one accepts this as an historical fact, then Ramkhamhaeng may have become in that year the sovereign of a unified kingdom with Sukhothai as the capital city. It is again tempting to speculate that Ramkhamhaeng's invention of the Tai script may have been inspired by a new sense of Tai political and cultural unity. According to RK, various Tai ethnic groups came to submit and seek his protection. (IV/2-4) The obscure \textit{Muang Tai La Fa}... in the list suggests a Yunnan connection, but it could possibly mean the Shan States. These gradual local migrations occurred in the latter half of the thirteenth century, and they had nothing at all to do with the fall of Tali.

IV

17. The Nan-chao theory is not without its critics. Paul Pelliot, in 1904, expresses his doubt about the Nan-chao = Tai identification in his famous \textit{Deux itinéraires de Chine in Inde}, taking both Terrien de Lacouperie and E.H. Parker to task for their uncritical use of Chinese records.\textsuperscript{24} He points out that the Nan-chao patronymic linkage, in which the last syllable of a person's name is preserved as the first syllable of his son/sons' names, is a common characteristic of the Tibeto-Burman speaking peoples.\textsuperscript{25} This is a custom not known to have been observed by the Tai. However, Dr.Prasert na Nagara notes that at Sukhothai there seems to have been a patronymic pattern in which a king of Sukhothai could take after his grandfather's name.\textsuperscript{26}

Apartment from pelliot, G.H. Luce who once believed that Nanchao was a Tai state, writes in one of his later works:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{23} Department of Fine Arts, \textit{Chindamani}, (Bangkok: Bannakhan, 1971): 140
\item \textsuperscript{24} Paul Pelliot, "Deux itinéraires de Chine en Inde", \textit{BEFEO}, 1904 : 154
\item \textsuperscript{25} Ibid. : 166
\item \textsuperscript{26} Prasert na Nagara, \textit{Prawattisat Sukhothai Chak Charuk}, (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University, 1988) : 11
\end{itemize}
Who were the people of Nan-chao in the seventh to ninth century A.D.? Misled partly by medieval Chinese sources which call them Man, Southern barbarians,... and suggest their connection with the Ai-lao of the Han dynasty, partly also by such wide-spread words as Lao, and meng, I plead quility to having long regarded them as basically Dai.27

Objection to the Nan-chao theory was further raised in the 1960s by Michael Blackmore (1960 and 1967)28 Frederick Mote and Hiram Woodward Jr. (1964 and 1965).29 In 1975 J.R. Chamberlain produced a linguistic reconstruction of the Tai languages which contradicts both the grand theory of Tai migrations and the Nan-chao theory.30 The two most recent historical researches on Nan-chao, Charles Backus' The Nan-Chao Kingdom and T'ang China's Southwestern Frontier (1981) and Shen Jing Fang's L'identification aux thais du Royaume de Nan Zhao: une theories remise en cause (1987), also refute the proposal that Nan-chao was a Tai kingdom.

18. In Thailand, the reaction against the Nan-chao = Tai antagonists is shown in Prince Dhani Nivat's paper, Thai Migrations (1967), and the

27. G.H. Luce, Phases of Pre-Pagan Burma, (London: Oxford University press, 1985) : 100
28. Michael Blachmore "The Rise of Nan-chao in Yunnan", JSEAH, 1 (1960); "The Ethological Problems Connected with Nan-chao" in Historical, Archaeological, and linguistic studies on Southern China and the Hong Kong Region, (Hong Kong, 1967)
late Khachorn Sukhaphanit’s two articles published in 1971. Prof. Khachorn argues that de Lacouperie’s hypothesis should be accepted because it is confirmed by anthropological data given in Wolfgang Eberhard’s *A History of China*. He thinks that the mysterious *Thien* Kingdom mentioned in Ssu-ma Chien’s *Shih Chi* was the same as Muang Thaen of the Nithan Khun Borom because both names mean *Heaven*.

19. In concluding this paper I think it appropriate to mention a few things about our April 1988 observation tour of the Nan-chao archaeological sites. A series of discussions with local Chinese historians gave us the opportunity to inquire about many unsolved issues and to form a better understanding of the various aspects of Nan-chao culture. Our fieldwork in the Weishan area, which also involved interviews with the local Luo-Luo/Yi people, confirms that Nan-chao words as recorded in Fan Cho’s *Man Shu* are not Tai, but they are related to the current Luo-luo language. In our opinion, Nan-chao, with its Tibetan-influenced Buddhist background, has left no cultural traces, especially in the field of arts and architecture, that can be said to bear much resemblance to those of Theravadin Sukhothai.

As regards other related problems, we are not as yet entirely convinced that Ai-lao was not a Tai kingdom. The rejection of the Nan-chao = Tai identification does not exclude the possibility of Ai-lao being a Tai state. This is because, according to Chinese records, the Nan-chao rulers *claimed* the Ai-lao as their ancestors. There are instances in history in which the glorious past of one nation was unknowingly incorporated into the early history of another nation. The Nan-chao problem has provided us with a classic example. Concerning the Thien = Thaen identification, we accept the explanation that the name of this kingdom is Tien, not *T'ien* which means *Heaven*.

The popular Thai view of ancient Tai history concerning Tai migrations and Nan-chao will probably live on for a long time, because once a national myth is popularized it dies hard.