

Religious Networks of Tai Buddhists across the China-Myanmar Border¹

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INTRODUCTION

This paper will explore the relationship between the local Buddhist practices of Tăi people who cross the border between China and Myanmar and the religious policy of the two countries, in which these movements are situated.² I shall explore the question of how the monks and *holu*, experts in Buddhist rituals, migrate from Myanmar to revive their local religious practices after the Cultural Revolution in China. The next question is how local people recognize the Buddhist practices which originated from Myanmar. By answering these questions, I will explore the practices of the border area between China and Myanmar, and disclose an aspect of Myanmar Buddhism which is invisible from the viewpoint of national religious institutions.

My research field, Dehong Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan Province, China, is located on the China-Myanmar border (see Figure 1). One of the main groups in this area is the Tăi people. Han Chinese calls them Dai, and the Burmese call them Shan. The Tăi people typically live in the basin valley areas, called *məŋ* in the Tăi language. The area where I conducted my research is called Məŋ Mau. After the end of the nineteenth century, the Qing dynasty and British colonial rulers started the process of boundary demarcation. As a result, Məŋ Mau was divided, finding itself located in two countries, China and Myanmar. Nowadays, the Chinese side of Məŋ Mau is part of Ruili city, while the Myanmar side forms the Muse and Nanhkan districts.

Most of the Tăi people follow Theravāda Buddhism. Theravāda Buddhists mainly live in mainland Southeast Asia and share a relatively homogeneous Pali canon. But the practice of precepts and the manner of rituals are a little different. Groups sharing the same practices have developed into sects.

Historically, among lay Buddhists it was the kings—being the greatest donors and benefactors—who protected Buddhism. However, some kings also drove out monks who

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were regarded as heretics. These practices legitimized the Buddhist kings. Previous studies point out that the Sangha was institutionalized in each country during nation building, the objective of which was the standardization of Buddhist practices (Ishii 1986(1975); Tambiah 1976, p. 240).

Although their number is much smaller, they are found in Dehong and Xishuangbanna of Yunnan as well. The way in which Buddhism spread into Dehong and Xishuangbanna is different. In the case of Xishuangbanna, Theravāda Buddhism entered via northern Thailand from the end of the second half of the fifteenth century to the first half of the sixteenth century (Liew-Herres et al. 2012, p. 48). Because of this historical process, we find characteristics of northern Thai Buddhism in Xishuangbanna as well.

In the case of Dehong, there are four major sects, *orkəŋ* (Burmese: *gaing*). The Pɔitsəŋ, Tsoti, and Tole sects came from Myanmar between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries and the Yon sect came from northern Thailand in the fifteenth century (Jiang 1983, p. 345; Yan 1986, pp.457-458; Liu 1990, p. 425; Liu 1993, pp. 87-90; Zhang 1992, pp.116-123; Zhang 1993, p. 75). As three of the four sects entered Dehong via Myanmar, the practices in Dehong show strong influences from Burmese and Shan Buddhism. While the Pɔitsəŋ and Yon sects are relatively loose in keeping precepts, the Tole sect is stricter and the Tsoti sect is the strictest of all.

The Pɔitsəŋ and Tsoti sects were originally based in the centre of Myanmar, but they moved to the region around Dehong after the Burmese kings judged them as being heterodox (Yan 1986, pp. 457-458). On the other hand, the traditional lords of each basin in Dehong, *tsău fa*, did not exclude any specific sect but rather protected each sect (Hasegawa 2009, p.147). This situation allowed various sects to develop their own practices.

In the case of Myanmar, the Sangha organization was established in 1980 by the government. Due to the Sangha organization recognizing only nine sects, the local sects in Məŋ Mau were not recognized as official sects and absorbed into them. This policy was aimed at institutionalising innumerable local sects of Buddhism.

In the case of China, the institution of *tsău fa* was abolished after the founding of the People's Republic of China, and the Buddhist Association of Dehong started to manage Buddhism in 1957. However, only a year later, the Great Leap Forward (1958-60) began and the Buddhist Association stopped functioning. During the period of the Cultural Revolution

(1966-76), Buddhist practices in Dehong were suppressed because of the less tolerant Chinese religious policy. After the Cultural Revolution, the freedom of religious belief was recovered. Now the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission and the Buddhist Association manage Buddhism under the guidance of the Communist Party.

The study of Theravāda Buddhist societies started in the 1960s. However, except for Thailand, it was very difficult to conduct research in Theravāda Buddhist societies during the Cold War period, and our understanding was limited to a small sample of the region. With the opening of societies around the region and increased access to the field in recent years, some scholars started working in the border areas and focused on the migration of monks across the border(see Hayashi 2009).

In the process of religious revival after the Cultural Revolution, the Buddhist practices in Xishuangbanna were restored due to the relationship with the Sangha in northern Thailand (Hasegawa 1995, p. 68; Davis 2003, p. 99).

In the case of Dehong, previous studies (Zhang 1992, pp.22-24; Hasegawa 2009, pp.152-155) pointed out that the monks from Shan State in Myanmar have played an important role in the recovery of Buddhism after the Cultural Revolution. However, they did not refer to the specific networks of local sects which cross the national boundary. Furthermore, they did not pay attention to the migration of *holu* who play important roles in Buddhism in Dehong.

In this paper, I introduce this new movement using data gathered by the author during more than a year of fieldwork in villages around Ruili city. The main research was conducted from 2006 to 2007 in TLvillage, with some preliminary trips in 2005 and supplementary work from 2009 to 2011 in 118 temples and pagodas of Ruili city.³

FEATURES OF BUDDHIST PRACTICES IN DEHONG

Low Number of Monks and Novices

The local religious practices in Dehong have many things in common with Buddhist practices in Southeast Asia, as they share the same Pali canon. However, the practice of Dehong differs from other Theravāda Buddhist societies in the small number of monks and novices(see Table 1).This is in contrast to their increasing number in Xishuangbanna, where

Buddhists also experienced the Cultural Revolution's impacts on their religion. Even when compared with Cambodia, where Buddhist monks were murdered by the Pol Pot regime, the number of monks and novices in Dehong is much lower.

Although all the villages in Dehong have a temple as in the rest of Southeast Asia, most of the temples are uninhabited. According to this author's field survey in 2009, of the 118 religious buildings in Ruili—112 temples, three pagodas, and three footprints of Buddha—twenty-nine (25 percent) were inhabited by monks, novices, or women lay practitioners and eighty-nine (75 percent) were uninhabited. These figures raise the question of why the number of monks and novices is so much lower in Dehong than in other Theravāda Buddhist societies. To answer this question we must look at men who are ordained as well as the villagers who accept them.

A local historian, Mr. G, (sixty-eight years old) who was familiar with the cultures of both Ruili and Xishuangbanna explained that the number of monks and novices in Xishuangbanna increased again after the Cultural Revolution because “they [people in Xishuangbanna] have the idea that every boy should become a novice. However, this idea didn't exist in Dehong, even before the Cultural Revolution.”⁴ Previous studies state that it is believed in Xishuangbanna that boys should become novices in order to be considered adults (ZhongyangDangxiaoMinzuZongjiaoLilunshi 1999, pp. 453-454). From this evidence, we see that to become a novice is a kind of rite of passage in Xishuangbanna, as in other Buddhist societies. In the central part of Myanmar, for example, it is normal for parents to have their sons ordained as novices so that they acquire an understanding of moral standards in addition to making merit. Parents also make merit from having their sons ordained as novices. But almost all novices disrobe after a certain designated period.

In Dehong, however, one hardly hears of parents having their sons ordained in order to gain merit for the child or themselves. By no means does this signal that Buddhists of Dehong are not enthusiastic about making merit. For example, people actively maintain the cleanliness of temples even if there are no monks. They also participate enthusiastically in Buddhist rituals in order to accumulate merit. However, their idea is that they should think twice before making their sons ordain. If the sons wish, they may be ordained. Once they are ordained, it is generally considered that they should not take the decision to disrobe lightly.

Thus, the basic thinking in Dehong regarding ordination is different from that in Thailand and the central part of Myanmar.

When I interviewed an elderly villager, Mr. J, (seventy-five years old, male) in TL village, he explained to me, “Many villagers hoped to invite a monk before the Cultural Revolution, but the young generation born during or after the Cultural Revolution prefer not to invite monks.”⁵ This indicates that before the Great Leap Forward, TL village had practices similar to those of other Theravāda Buddhist societies in that it needed monks and novices. The point of difference is that few boys in TL village became novices even before the Cultural Revolution. Therefore, TL villagers had to invite an abbot from another temple of the same sect if the abbot was absent. However, the interruption of the practice for around twenty years took away TL villagers’ enthusiasm to invite abbots. Therefore, without resident monks, Buddhist rituals are performed by virtue of the direct relationship between the lay community and their Buddhist scriptures, Buddha images, and Pagodas.

The Role of Holu

In particular, *holu*, lay experts in reciting Buddhist scriptures, play important roles as mediators in this relationship. *Holu* are basically specialists in the recitation of Buddhist texts, with their main function being to represent the lay community in their merit-making activities. *Ho* means ‘leader’, and *lu* means ‘donation’. In Ruili every temple has one *holu*, and all of them are men. In 2009, the *holu* of TL village lived in another village but came to TL village when rituals were held. Eighty-six percent of *holu* in Ruili were from other villages.

When there is a ritual, *holu* lead the villagers in reciting the five or eight precepts to the Buddha statue in the temple. In the case of a wedding ceremony, housewarming ceremony, funeral, or incident of misfortune, *holu* recite in front of the shelf of Buddhist texts (*señtala*) in each house. In the afternoon on the days of important ceremonies—such as the Water Festival, the festival to donate *kathina* robes (*poikan thin*), and the special holy days (*van sin*) during the rainy season retreat (*va*)—*holu* recite the Buddhist texts (*tala*) for laypeople. The content of *tala* recited by the *holu* consists of stories of the Buddha’s past lives (*tsat to*), precepts that should be upheld by Buddhists, and the proper ways of making offerings. These are recited first in short Pali verses, followed by Tāi translation delivered in storytelling style, so as to make the content easily accessible to followers. People acquire an understanding of the Dhamma (*dānma*) and also gain merit from listening to these recitations. When there are

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no rituals, *holu* copy the *talaas* requested by villagers. After *holu* recite the *tala* in the temple, the villagers keep the actual texts in the *seṅtala*. Most *holu* are farmers, but some of them have another job, for example, such as typing invitation letters in Tăi.

MIGRATION FROM MYANMAR TO CHINA

Migration of Monks

The Buddhist rituals are performed mainly by *holu* in ninety-nine temples (84 per cent) of the 118 temples, but nineteen villagers (16 per cent) have felt the need for monks and novices in the villages. Why do the villagers invite them? The reasons for doing so are not the same.

In the case of MA village, when there are funerals or rituals for building new houses, it is better for the villagers to invite a monk to their own temple than to invite one from other temples. In LP village, when many villagers and domestic animals died consecutively in the village, the villagers were very afraid of the evil spirits, *phi hai*, and invited a monk from Myanmar. In the case of VM village, when they built a new temple, the villagers thought that they had better invite the monks to keep the temple clean.

After these villagers reach the decision to invite a monk, they go to a temple on the Myanmar side of the border, usually a temple of the same sect (*kəŋ*), and invite a monk to come and take up the abbotship. The advantage of staying in the temple on the Chinese side is that the monks can collect more donations than on the Myanmar side. Some monks hope to study Chinese because they regard it as a major language.

It is common practice that the monks are invited from Myanmar. According to my 2009 research, of the 116 monks and novices in Ruili, nineteen (16 percent) were from China and ninety-seven (84 percent) were from Myanmar, especially Shan State.

After they become novices mostly in their native villages, they go to the central area of Myanmar, for example, Yangon or Mandalay, to study the doctrine of Buddhism and take the examination of Buddhism held by the Myanmar government (see Figure 2). This trend became popular after the road connection was improved in Shan State after the 1970s.

This is a sample case of Ven. V, the abbot of TS temple (see Figure 3). He was born in LM village, Mansi district, Kachin State in 1972.⁶ When he was seven years old (1979), he became a novice in MV village, Kachin State. He became a monk in MV village when he was twenty years old, and subsequently stayed in Yangon for three years, Mandalay for two years and then went back to MV temple in Kachin State. In 1999, he moved to TS village on the Chinese side of the border.

The trigger for the TS villagers to invite him was the construction of a new temple in 1994. The villagers thought that it was appropriate to invite an abbot to manage the new temple. They tried to invite a monk of the neighboring temple to serve as the abbot but the proposal was rejected by the monk because the temple belongs to a different sect, the Pòitsəŋ sect. So, the villagers went to MV temple in Kachin State, which belongs to the same sect. The monks and novices of Pòitsəŋ sect move to the central area of Myanmar to receive Burmese education in Buddhism, but they cross the border and move to the temple on the Chinese side according to the network of local sects.

The other circumstances under which the monks move from the Myanmar to the Chinese side occur when they are invited by monks to whom they are known or when invited by laypeople. Figure 4 shows the case of Ven. S, the abbot of HS temple.⁷ He was born in MT village, Thibaw district, Shan State in 1957. When he was nine years old (1966), he became a novice and stayed in the temple of his native village for four years. He then moved to another temple in Thibaw city (1970). When he was fifteen years old (1972), he moved to the Burmese temple in Monywa. Subsequently, he stayed in Monywa for eight years, Mandalay for eight years and passed the middle class of Pali examinations held by the Myanmar government. When he was thirty-seven years old (1994), he met the abbot of HS temple by chance in Mandalay. This was because many Burmese merchants in Ruili come to HS temple to make donations. Even though the previous abbot was not proficient in Burmese, he requested Ven. S to move to HS temple. After the previous abbot passed away, he became an abbot of HS temple.

Migration of *Holu*

Next, how are *holu* recruited after the period of Cultural Revolution? I describe some case studies from TL village.

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The previous *holu* of TL village, Mr. J (seventy-five years old, male), recalled:

Before the Great Leap Forward, more people in the village became *holu* than now, because more people had the knowledge of reciting Buddhist texts compared to now. If there was not a suitable person to become a *holu* in the village, the villagers invited someone from another village.⁸

Even if a man has been a novice or monk, he cannot become a *holu* if he does not have a good voice for reciting Buddhist texts.

After the Cultural Revolution, Mr. J became a *holu* in TL village. The following is his personal story, focusing on his career as a ritual practitioner. Mr. J was born in TL village in 1932. When he was seven years old, he became a novice in the temple of TL village. When he was seventeen years old, he disrobed and got married in TL village. After the Cultural Revolution, TL temple was rebuilt in 1984. At the time, Mr. J was fifty-two years old. As he had had experience of being a novice and his recitation voice was good, the villagers let him become a *holu*. He quit the practice in 1995 because his eyesight had deteriorated.

The *holu* of TL village from 1995 to 2011 was Mr. S.⁹ In 1967 he was born in LX village of Muse District, Shan State. When he was twenty-one years old, he became the *holu* of LX village at the suggestion of the villagers because he had been a temple boy, *kappi*, and had basic knowledge of Buddhist texts. However, he did not know how to recite *tala*. He listened to the recitations of other *holu* and learned from them. In 1990 he was invited to KL village, on the Chinese side, as the previous *holu* had retired. In 1992 he married a woman who lived in KL village and took Chinese nationality. In 1995, however, he quit being the *holu* of KL village because his relationship with the villagers had soured. At that time, the TL villagers invited him to be a *holu* because Mr. J had retired.

The situation in TL village is a common one in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution. My research in 2009 shows that out of 112 *holu* in Ruili city, eighty (71 per cent) *holu* are natives from the Myanmar side of the border. Only thirty-two (29 per cent) of the *holu* are from the Chinese side. Older people who have the experience or were ordained before the Cultural Revolution were not able to continue as *holu* because of their advanced age. Most of the young men replacing this older generation have become monks or novices in Myanmar, and then moved to the Chinese side as *holu*. Especially after the 1990s, local economic development has taken off on the Chinese side, but on the Myanmar side conflict has

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continued and economic levels are low. Therefore, the number of *holu* who hope to move to the Chinese side is increasing.

The Networks of Local Sects

The third *holu* of TL village is Mr. T (see Figure 5).¹⁰ He was born in a village of Kutkaing district, Shan State in 1993. When he was thirteen years old, he was inducted by the Kachin Independent Army (KIA). He escaped from the KIA soon after and became a novice when he was fourteen years old, as the KIA did not induct novices in the temples. The temple he was ordained at was the main temple of the Tsoti sect in Mohnyin (Tăi: MəŋYaŋ), Kachin State. After staying at the temple for two years, he disrobed and moved to Ruili in Dehong because his brother lived there as a *holu*. Soon after he moved to Ruili, the senior *holu* of Tsoti sect introduced him to the TL villagers and he became a *holu* in the village.

The temple of TL village belongs to the Tole sect. Nevertheless, the reason that TL villagers invited the *holu* of Tsoti sect is that the skill of reciting the texts by *holu* who have been ordained at the temple of the Tsoti sect is highly valued by the people of Məŋ Mau. If they are not a member of the Tsoti sect, many *holu* in Məŋ Mau have attended the classes for the Tăi verse of Buddhism which is held every year. All teachers of these classes have been ordained in a Tsoti temple. As this case shows, the network of the Tsoti sect is important for the practice of *holu*.

Zhang (1992, pp. 149-152) describes the features of the Tsoti sect as follows. Firstly, monks and novices are led by one abbot and live together in one temple. Their temple of residence is not fixed; they move to other temples after a certain period of time. The most senior monk of the Tsoti sect at the time of the 2009 research lived in Mohnyin. In fact, the temple of the Tsoti sect in Dehong had not had a resident monk since 1915, when the most senior monk moved to Shan State. Secondly, monks and novices are required to obey the precepts very strictly. For example, they are not allowed to ride in cars but have to walk when they go out. Not only monks and novices, but laypeople as well are requested to obey the precepts. For example, followers are not allowed to raise livestock, and they cannot eat meat if they have witnessed the slaughter of the animals. Furthermore, laypeople are prohibited from drinking alcohol.

According to this author's field surveys, villagers still adhered to these practices, except that some now raised livestock. There was no Tsoti monk in Dehong, but followers made donations to Mohnyin three times per year—during the Water Festival (*p̄is̄nlām*), the beginning of the rainy season retreat (*x̄uva*), and the end of the rainy season retreat (*ɔkva*). Donations from Dehong were collected at the Tsoti temple in Muse, and representatives took them to Mohnyin. When the ordination ceremony is held in the central temple of Mohnyin every three years, many villagers attend and some boys become novices as well.

A different feature from the case of the monks is that they do not take an examination of Buddhism held by the Myanmar government because their practices follow Tāi tradition. They are educated in the ways of reciting and creating the Tāi verse of Buddhism (*lāṅka*).

As I have explained above, these sects in Dehong, Tsoti, P̄its̄ŋ, Tole and Yon are not recognized by the Sangha organization in Myanmar which was established in 1980. It is also said that all the sects in Dehong were united after 1982 in China. Despite the institutionalisation of Buddhist sects in the two countries, local networks of the sects continue and play important roles for the practices of local Buddhists. The monks and novices move to the central area of Myanmar to take examinations, but on the other hand, they move to temples and cross the border according to the network of local sects.

CHANGE AND CONTINUITY OF BUDDHIST PRACTICES

As I have described above, the monks and *holu* who migrated from Myanmar are indispensable to the practice of local Buddhism in Ruili. As a result, the religious practices of Myanmar are brought over to the Chinese side. How do local people view these practices? This is elaborated upon using TL village as a case study.

Practices of the Monks

The TL villagers did not invite a monk to take up position as an abbot. However, when they need to, they go to Ven. S from HS village. For example, the villagers invite him when they hope to exorcise evil spirits by reciting texts of protection (*paliit*) and other chants like *kāmpavaas* as part of the rituals of the whole village. Or when they are faced with

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difficulties in everyday life, or are not in good health and cannot be treated in the hospital, they go to HS temple and meet Ven. S. He is well known for his skills in fortunetelling and treating diseases caused by evil spirits in the body.

As I have described, Ven. S had the opportunity to go to Mandalay to study the doctrine of Buddhism. However, he learned the methodology of fortunetelling and treating diseases from the specialists among laypeople and monks when he was in Mandalay and Thibaw. Ven. S brought these new practices with him when he crossed over to China.

When he is invited to exorcise evil spirits through rituals, he also preaches to the villagers. But he has never been invited to TL village just to preach. This is in contrast to the case in Myanmar. The laypeople in Myanmar often invite monks to listen to the Dhamma talk, which is based particularly on Abhidhamma. Furthermore, the laypeople in Myanmar invite the monk specialists of Vipassanā meditation which is regarded as an important practice and has become popular in recent years. Ven. S is experienced in promoting the education of Abhidhamma and practising Vipassanā in the central area of Myanmar. However, the laypeople on the Chinese side do not demand the practices that are usually recognized as being orthodox in Myanmar. Rather the villagers request monks to perform the rituals that are important for their own everyday lives.

The Sangha organization in Myanmar regards the practices of fortunetelling and treating diseases something that monks should not be involved in. When I asked the Ven S. why in such a situation he practiced fortunetelling and the exorcism of evil spirits, he answered, “these practices are needed for socialising with the laypeople.” This explanation suggests that the monks also adjust their practices depending on the preferences of the villagers.

Another factor affecting this phenomenon is the difference of policy between the two countries. As I have described above, after the Sangha institutions were established in Myanmar, the standardization of Buddhist practices has been the aim and the monks are not allowed to practice fortunetelling or treat disease. In Dehong, while the Chinese government manages temples and monks, it does not try to manage the details of actual Buddhist practice. These political circumstances allow the monks to develop the practices depending on the demand of local people, a practice which is prohibited on the Myanmar side.

Practices of Holu

So, how did the villagers perceive the practice of *holu* who immigrated from Myanmar? To answer this question, I will focus on the change and continuity of practices concerning Buddhist texts.

Firstly, the Tăi phrases recited in rituals have been changed to the Shan style. The phrases recited in the Pali language are basically the same in every Theravāda Buddhist society, but the phrases in the local language are different in each area. Shan phrases were standardized in 1993 at the Shan monks' conference in Muse. New *holu* such as Mr. S learned the standardized forms. Mr. S brought them to TL village when he became *holu* in 1995. Moreover, the script of *tala* also changed from the old Dehong script to the Shan script because Mr. S was used to transcribing and reciting the Shan script.

On the other hand, the way in which Buddhist texts were recited did not change. When Mr. S became *holu* of TL village, he recited Buddhist texts using the intonations of the Tsoti sect (*seṅkalonpen*, *seṅpeuton*, and *see phi la*). Later he learned the intonation of traditional Məṅ Mau style (*seṅThuṅ Mau*) from previous *holu* and uses this for his recitations.

Why did the script of *tala* change, while the way of reciting did not? To analyze these phenomena, we must understand the practices in which they occur. For the villagers, *tala* is not something to read but something to listen to. Moreover, most of the villagers cannot read the Shan script themselves, but they believe that if there is a *tala* in the *seṅtala* of each house, the household will be safe and sound.

On the other hand, why did Mr. S have to change his way of reciting? When asked about his reasons, he replied, “TL villagers were not used to these *seṅkalonpen* and requested me to recite using *seṅThuṅ Mau*.” Listening to the recitation of *tala* by *holu* is an important practice in making merit for TL villagers. The Buddhism of TL villagers is woven into the story and recited melodiously by *holu*. Except for Mr. J, only three men have had the experience of being novices in TL village. They know the Shan scripts and how to recite them, but they cannot become *holu* because their voices are not good enough. This implies that the voice for reciting Buddhist texts is very important for the practices in Dehong, and new styles from across the border are not easily accepted.

CONCLUSION

After the Cultural Revolution, the monks and *holu* immigrated from the Myanmar side of the border because there were few specialists on the Chinese side for the particular way they practise Buddhism. Furthermore, because local economic development occurred at a faster rate on the Chinese side after the 1990s, monks and *holu* also hoped to move there. The Chinese side is a good place for the monks to collect donations and study Chinese, and the *holu* can improve their economic standing as well.

When they move to the Chinese side, local networks of the sects take on an important role. These local sects had officially disappeared, so much so that the Myanmar and Chinese governments have started to regulate and control these sects by constructing the Sangha organization in Myanmar or a Buddhist association in China. Nevertheless the local networks of Buddhism, which cross the border between China and Myanmar, still exist and play a significant role for the local practice of Buddhism.

The migration of monks and *holu* from Myanmar brought the dynamics of the practice to the Chinese side. The local villagers recognize the ability of the monks and *holu* from Myanmar, but they do not feel the need to adopt all matters of orthodox knowledge or doctrine authorised by the Sangha in Myanmar. Instead they are led by their need for services in the practice of fortunetelling or exorcising evil spirits, in which these monks are knowledgeable and skilled. *Holu* are recognised for their ability in reciting the texts of Buddhism, but they must adjust their intonation of reciting texts in accordance with the preferences of the local villagers. This means that local people accept the Buddhist practices from Myanmar partially, but they keep their on-the-ground practices intact to a significant degree.

This case suggests the following. As some previous studies pointed out, the institutionalization of Theravāda Buddhism has progressed even in the border area between China and Myanmar. On the other hand, we must pay attention to the interaction between political power and the practice of local people to understand the religious dynamics of border areas.

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¹ The transliteration method is by Meng (2007).

² Some of the description of Tǎi people's practice overlaps with my paper (Kojima 2012), but the points of discussion in this paper are different.

³ The name of the villages, for example TL, MA, LP and VM villages are pseudonyms.

⁴ Interview in Ruili city. Interviewed by Takahiro Kojima, Ruili city, China, 4 February 2006.

⁵ Interview in Ruili city. Interviewed by Takahiro Kojima, Ruilicity, China, 27 January 2007.

⁶ Interview in Ruili city. Interviewed by Takahiro Kojima, Ruilicity, China, 18 November 2006.

⁷ Interview in Ruilicity. Interviewed by Takahiro Kojima, Ruilicity, China, 19 March 2005.

⁸ Interview in Ruilicity. Interviewed by Takahiro Kojima, Ruilicity, China, 27 January 2007.

⁹ Interview in Ruili city. Interviewed by Takahiro Kojima, Ruili city, China, 25 March 2005.

¹⁰ Interview in Ruilicity. Interviewed by Takahiro Kojima, Ruili city, China, 10 August 2011.