
From Similarities to Differences:

Vernacular Houses of the Dais in Sipsongpanna and Tai-Lue in Northern Thailand

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Abstract

The Study of similarity and differentiation of the vernacular houses of the Dai in Sipsongpanna and Tai-Lue in Northern Thailand, are seeking for the answers of : **the physical conditions of the village** in relation to cultural ecology, the **physical conditions of houses on “space” “form” and “surface” and the hidden dimensions of believes in concerning with spatial organization.** The cases study are in between, the vernacular houses in Maung Chiang-Rung, Maung-Hum in Sipsongpanna and Tawangpa, Nan Province, Chiengkum, Payao Province in Northern Thailand. From macro to micro scale of study, the survey started from the village plan in relation to its cultural ecology, to houses lay out, and further to the spatial organization of houses plans in concerning with their believes. In the village context, the village plan and elements are totally similar but differentiated in the village scale, which the Dai villages are almost double size of the Tai-Lue in Thailand. In houses context, the basic space for living and spatial organization are quite similar. Those are the timber houses built on stilts, with main approach from the covered front-stairs to the covered terrace in continuing to the main hall and bedroom respectively. The kitchen can be classified into 2 types, separate kitchen in adjoining to the open terrace and combine kitchen within the main hall. It doesn't matter with any house scale, similar spatial organizations are found. With similar house plan, there is the differentiation in house form, especially roof form. The steep hip-gable roof are quite popular in Sipsongpanna, while the Tai-Lue in Thailand played with the charming lower roof angle which were influenced from site location and climatology. If “space” “form” and “surface” can be the mean of architectural interpretation, from this study we found similarity in “space” and “surface” but differentiated in “form” especially roof form, which mean that, there are similarity in their way of living in concerning with cultural ecology : “space” can be interpreted as “living” and “surface” referred to local building materials which were used as building envelope, but differentiated in “form” in concerning with building site and climatology. In conclusion, it can be found that, **“The differentiation of house form in concerning with their site and climatology cannot interfere the cultural roots of the Tai Ethnic in any location.”**

Foreward

The Dai or Tai-Lue ; one of the most impressive Tai Ethnic Group, which is popularly known in Sipsongpanna, Yunnan, and also gradually penetrated in to Northern Thailand, and Laos. In Northern Thailand, the Tai-Lue have settled themselves and formed their Community in various places, such as Chiangmai, Chiangrai, Lampoon, Lompang, Prae, Nan and Payao. All of them still retain their traditional life style and living in concerning with their physical environment and culture.¹ Their warm hospitality welcome to the new comer in combination with the folk wisdom in relation to their living, religious and believes have impressed every one. Considering the above, it is felt that a comparative study ought to be undertaken in order to establish the similarities and differences between the major group of the Dai is Sipsongpanna and the Tai-Lue in Northern Thailand for future references.

Objective

The objective of this research is therefore to study the physical conditions of the village in relation to cultural ecology, the physical conditions of houses on “space” “form” and “surface” and the hidden dimensions of believes in concerning with spatial organization. This implies that comparative studies must be made to identify the similarities and differences together with seeking at the factors involved, for the purpose of ascertaining the relationship between those groups.

Method

In concerning with the architectural research dealing with the physical conditions of community settlements and dwelling units, it require to carry on studying local social and cultural influences as well, it was necessary to study documents, maps, photographs and make measured drawings of the building selected for case studies. The area study were Maung Hum and Maung Chiang Rung in Sipsongpanna, China, Tawangpa District in Nan Province and Chiangkam District in Payao Province in Northern Thailand.

¹ Tida saraya : 1989.p.43.

Reference Frameworks

For reaching to all inquiries of this research, three frameworks were selected for the analysis and interpretation of information gathered. Those are:

- 1.Contextual framework: for the analysis of the villages on macro scale.
- 2.Specific framework: for specific and detailed study of the selected cases.
- 3.Comparative framework: for Looking at Similarities and differences, changes and evolutions, and factors involved to those changes.

Similarities

1. The Village Plan

The village context and village plan in associated the village elements are totally similar. Every village contains similar elements: village gates, various clusters of houses, public square, temple, public and private water-well and spirit houses. Clustering of those elements seem to be very tight and surrounded with agricultural fields.²

With the group of 40-50 houses³ Sub division of the smaller group within the village are popular. The containing of 3-5 houses with central courtyard can be easily found. Village ancestral symbol is located in the public courtyard (Kuang-ban), the temple, spirit house and public water-well are also the important village elements.

2. Houses

- House plan

The physical Condition of houses is the timber houses built on stilts. The lower floor with compact earth are used as the multi-purposes space for living, timber storage, weaving area, agricultural tools storage, rice storage and sometimes can also be used as the animals shed. The main stairs under the overhanging roof lead to the upper floor main-entrance. The upper floor space are divided into two parts, the private enclosed area for family sleeping space and the open continuous space for multi-purposes. Those purposes are: the central-fire place which can be also used as cooking space, the living place, rice storage, and also sleeping place for

²Zhe Liangwen : 1992. p.36.

³Ornsiri Panin : 1996. P.50.

guests. Usually, with Tai-Lue very warm hospitality, the central hall and the continuous open area are always be welcome to the visitors. Only the enclosed sleeping area, where the ancestral shelves are located is the only restricted area for visitors.

Besides the houses, the rice storage or granary is also one of the most important element for Tai-Lue lives. Some of them use the small area of the central hall as their rice storage. Some kept their big bamboo rice bowl at the lower floor. But lots of them have their separate granary besides their house. The granary is also the timber building built on stilts. The lower part can be used as timber storage and animal shed. Many houses have the connected open terrace between the kitchen and granary. This opened terrace can also be used as the kitchen clean-up area.

- Building materials

Timber and bamboo are the main building materials of Tai-Lue houses. In the ancient time, the binding construction systems of bamboo were very popular.

At present, lacks of bamboo construction are built. With self-evolution, houses were gradually changed to be timber construction.

The main structural system is posts and lintels with timber materials for main structure, floor and roof structure.

Differences

- Houses form

The influence of microclimatology effected to the house form and appearance of both Dai houses in Sipsonypanna and Tai-Lue houses in Northern Thailand.

In Sipsonypanna, because of very long period of rainfall. The house has to be very well protection. So the appearance of large and long overhanging roofs are the identities of houses in Sipsonypanna. Observing from outside it seems as if every house has only very large and very high pitch with low overhanging roofs. No walls can be seen from the elevation, lack of open terrace. While the roof form of the Tai-Lue houses in Northern Thailand use the high pitch gable and hip-gable roof with lower angle than in Sipsonypanna. Sun terrace is also

the important element, which connected to the shading open space of the main hall

The appearance of the Dai houses in Sipsonypanna seem to be more elegant and massive while the Tai-Lue houses in Northern Thailand looked more feminine and humble with separate masses.

Conclusion

With similar house plan, there is the differentiation in house form especially roof form. The steep hip-gable roof are quite popular in Sipsonypanna, while the Tai-Lue in Northern Thailand played the charming lower roof angle which were influenced from site location and climatology.

If "space" "form" and "surface" can be the mean of architectural interpretation, from this, study we found Similarities in "space" and "surface" but differentiation in "form", which mean that, **there are similarities in their way of living in concerning with cultural ecology** : "space" can be interpreted as "Living" which effected on house plan and "surface" referred to local materials which were used as building envelope, but **differentiation in "form" in concerning with building site and climatology.**

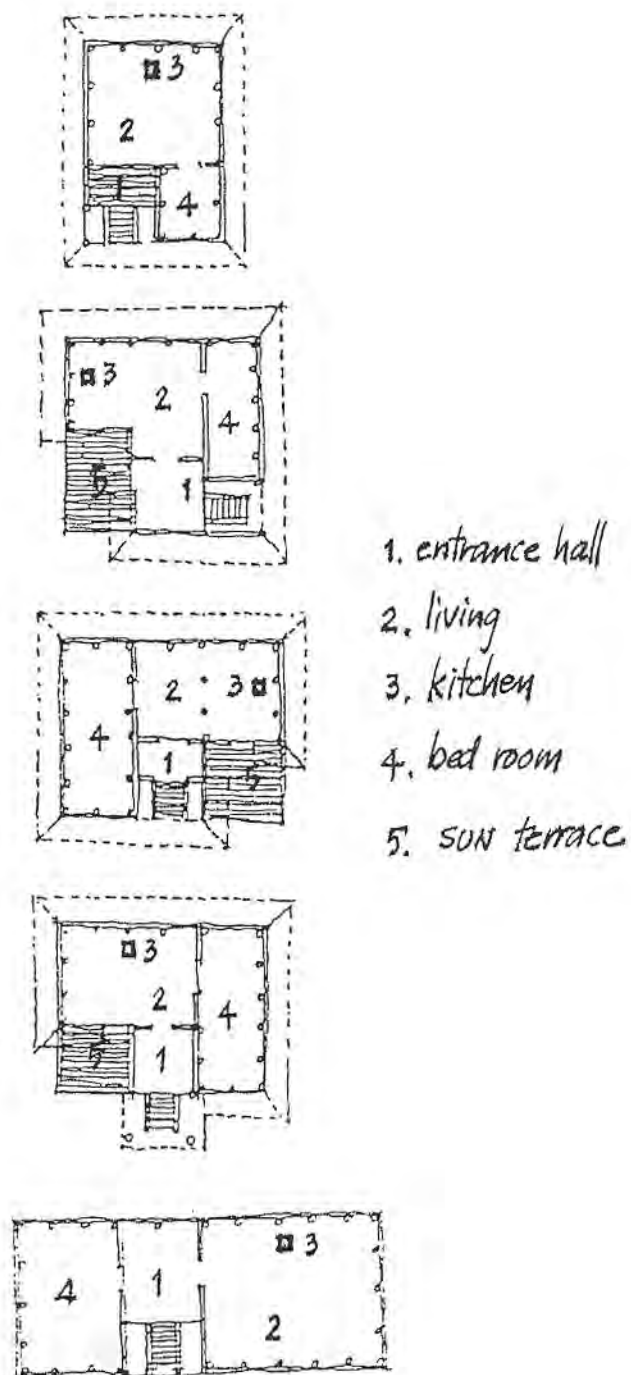
In conclusion, it can be found that, **the differentiation of house form in concerning with their site and climatology cannot interfere the cultural roots of the Tai Ethnic Groups in any location.**



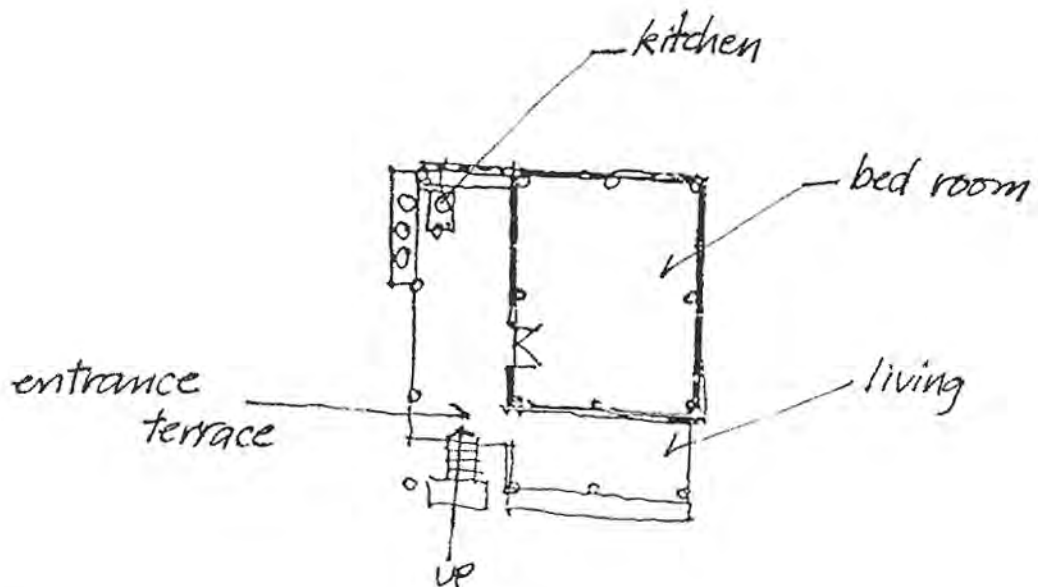
Figure 1
Village atmosphere : Nan Province.



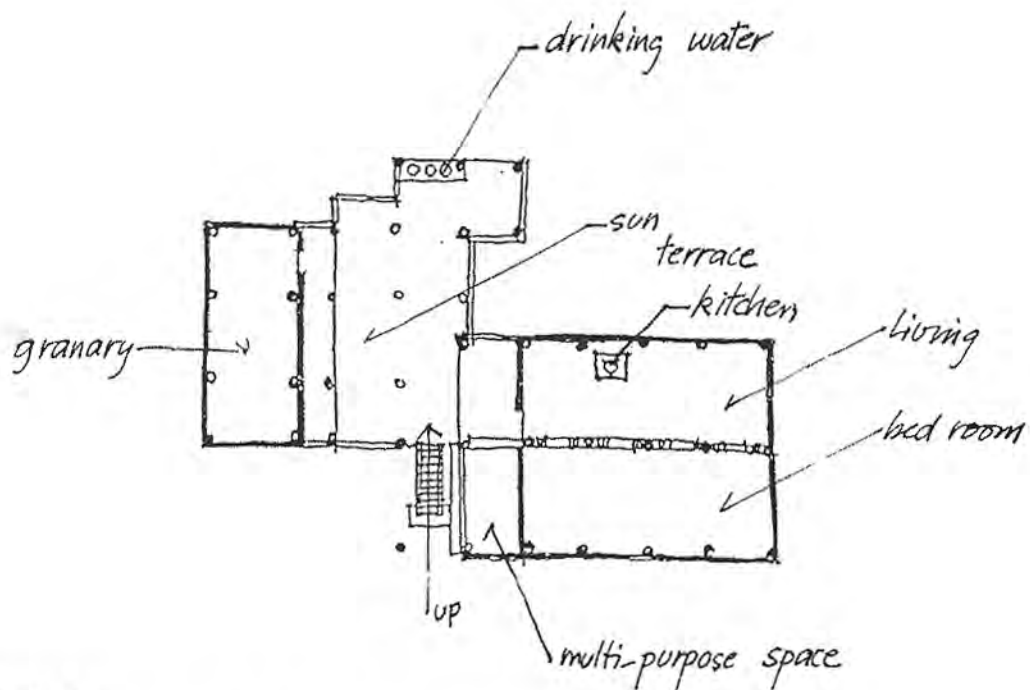
Figure 9
Village atmosphere : Sipsongpanna.

**Figure 3**

- Selected house plans of the Dai houses in Sipsongpanna.

**Figure 4**

House plan of Tai-Lue in Tawangpa District, Nan Province, Thailand.
(ORNSIRI PANIN : 1995, P.60)

**Figure 5**

House plan of Tai-Lue in Chiangkum, District Payao Province, Thailand
(ORNSIRI PANIN : 2000, P.22)

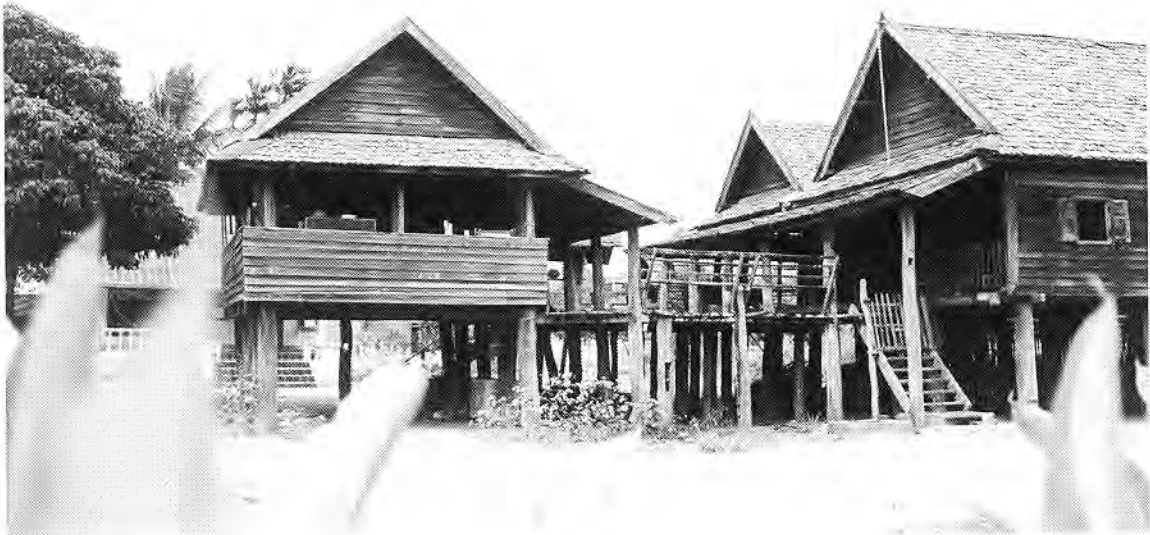


Figure 6
Overall form of Tai-lue house in Chiengkam, Payao Province.



Figure 7
Overall form of Dai house in Sipsongpanna.



Figure 8

Multi-purpose area of Tai-lue house in Chiengkam, Payao Province.



Figure 9

Multi-purpose area of Dai house in Sipsongpanna.



Figure 10

Semi-open cooking space of Tai-lue house in Chiengkam, Payao Province.



Figure 11

Cooking space of Dai house in Sipsongpanna.



Figure 12

Ground floor of Tai-lue house in Chiengkam, Payao Province.



Figure 13

Ground floor of Dai house in Sipsongpanna.



Figure 14
Ground floor timber storage of Tai-lue house in Chiengkam, Payao Province.



Figure 15
Ground floor timber storage of Dai house in Sipsnogpanna.



Figure 16
Tai-lue Chiangkam granary.



Figure 17
Dai in Sipsongpanna granary.



Figure 18
Tai-lue house Chiengkam roof form.



Figure 19
Roof form of Dai house in Sipsongpanna.

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