

The Indigenous Character of Tai Yai House

at Tor Pae Village, Mae Ngao, Khun Yuam District,
Maehongson Province, Thailand

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Abstract

This paper is a brief summary of survey report on a preliminary study of the spatial organization in Tai Yai house at Tor Pae Village, Mae Ngao, Khun Yuam, Mae Hong Son Province, Thailand.

The study focuses on indigenous characteristics of Tai Yai house emphasizing the spatial organization of the house in relation to its function, form and material. These factors have been influenced by culture, belief and lifestyle of Tai people. Data was collected in 2003 and the case studies are the present the houses in Tor Pae village.

In general, “wat” is both the social and the religious center of many Tai villages. Surrounded by Tai house, a roof thatched with Teak leaves rested on wooden pillars and beams, interior had wooden floor with fixed room dividers enabling to precisely define the living space into living room, bedroom, kitchen, storage, toilet. The features of the external appearance, such as the construction materials, the steeply pitched roof, wide eaves, the ponds, wooden granary, spice garden and animal shed under the house can be seen in Tai Yai houses in Tor Pae village today.

The Spatial Organization of Tai house comprises of three main factors. They are function, form and material. Each part of the house has been influenced by different factors mainly are: Tai culture (social structure), Tai belief and ritual (festival) and Tai philosophy of life (lifestyle): In conclusion, it can be found that the indigenous characteristics of Tai house are influenced by their culture, ritual and philosophy of life.

Forward

The Shan or Tai-Yai call themselves “Tai Long” which means Tai Luang (Great) and they were later referred to as Tai Yai. Their ethnic group is Tai but their linguistic classification is Tai-Kadai. The Tai Yai had a glorious sovereignty centered at Saen Wee City in the state of Shan. Their Kingdom was called Tai Mao, which consisted of nine city-states. They had a monarchical rule called Chaofa. Later they became a Tai Yai state under the rule of Burma, China and Lanna until the British colonized Burma.

The Tai Yai migrated to Thailand along the borders of Thailand and Burma in order to seek for refuge and trade. Initially they settled in the Mae Hong Son area in the year 2374 (Buddhist Era) and they later moved into others provinces. The Tai Yai people represent the largest ethnic group in Mae Hong Son. Tai Yai can also be found in Laos, China (Yunnan Province), Myanmar and Vietnam.

For the Tai of Mae Hong Son the last twenty years is a time of rapid economic change and increase in the standard of living. More than half of the population is still engaged in the agricultural sector, producing rice, soybean and garlic. Also, Mae Hong Son imports food from Northern Thailand due to the shortage of land and the lack of interest in farming as a livelihood. More and more men and women seek employment in towns, learning skills, working for government departments and in the tourist industry. Mae Hong Son is becoming a very popular tourist destination, and there is presently a boom in the construction industry with new hotels, shops and resorts being built in and around the town. Due to tourism the infrastructure in the province has improved rapidly: there is a new airport, better roads, a new hospital and more school. With possibilities of earning more money, more and more villagers are abandoning farming.

Objective

This paper seeks to answer the question: What are the indigenous characteristics of Tai Yai Architecture in Thailand? by examining the physical conditions of the village and the present condition of Tai houses on “function” “form” and “material”. The spatial organization of their house is analyzed to identify the major factor influencing each space in the house. One of the major factor that shape the spatial organization of Tai Yai house is understood, the indigenous characteristics of their house can be identified.

Method

An initial survey of the physical conditions of Tai Yai house reveals that there is a selection of indigenous dwelling units in the village. Mainly, there are two types of information that need to be analyzed: Firstly the physical conditions of the building are studied using measurement and documentation, photography and mapping. Secondly the ritual of people in the village is documented by interviewing. The area of study is Tor Pae village, Mae Ngao, Khun Yuam district, Mae Hong Son Province, in Northern Thailand.

Reference Frameworks

To reach the conclusion of this study, three frameworks were selected for the analysis and interpretation of information gathered. Those are:

- 1.Contextual framework: for the analysis of the villages at a macro scale.
- 2.Specific framework: for specific and detailed study of the selected cases of the dwellings.
- 3.Analytical framework: for examination of main factors affecting the spatial organization of Tai Yai house and identifying the indigenous characteristics of the houses.

The basic geography of Tor Par Village, Mae Ngao Division, Khun Yuam District, Mae Hong Son Province¹

The villages at a macro scale

Tor Pae village is located in Mae Ngao division, Khun Yuam district. Yuam River is originated from the Eastern mountain of Khun Yuam district. It passes through Mae Sarieng district and later merges with Mei River at Ta Songyang, Tak Province. A land along the riverbank is fertile.



Mae Hong Son Province map
Location and boundary- Mae Hong Son Province

With a linear shape in north-south direction, the area is 350 km in length and 95 km in width. The total area is 13,232 sq.km.

To the north is the Republic of Myanmar

To the south is Tak province

To the west is the Republic of Myanmar

To the east is Chiang Mai province

Ruling boundary

There are 7 Districts, 36 Sub-districts and 301 Villages

The 7 Districts are:

- 1.Mae Hong Son District
- 2.Khun Yuam District
- 3.Pai District
- 4.Mae Sarieng District
- 5.Mae La Noi District
- 6.Sob Mei District
- 7.Pang Ma Pa District



Tor Pae Sub-Division, Mae Ngao Division, Khun Yuam District

Tor Pae Village is located in Mae Ngao Division, Khun Yuam District with a total area of approximately 450 sq.km.

To the north is Khun Yuam Sub-district

To the south is Muang Pon Sub-district and Mae Kee Sub-district

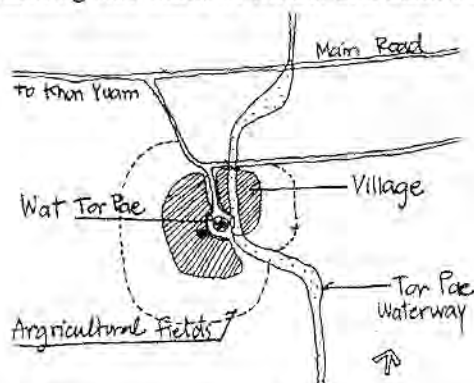
To the west is Mae Kee Sub-district

To the east are Khun Yuam Sub-district and The Republic of Myanmar

Mae Ngao Division consists of 8 villages

- 1.Tor Pae Village
- 2.Hua Ngao Village
- 3.Pra Tu Muang Village
- 4.Huay Ton Noon Village
- 5.Huay Na Village
- 6.Suan Oay Village
- 7.Na Hua Lam Village
- 8.Luang Village

Tor Pae Village consists of 8 small villages (Moo1-8) Upon surveying the physical conditions of Tai houses in these villages, a selection of indigenous dwelling units is found in Moo1 and Moo8. Mostly these houses are in the Tai Yai style with thatch roof made by Teak leaves, the transition space inside the house and a building skin made of timber and bamboo.



The villages on macro scale²

General Information of Tai Yai in the village

Population

The population of the Tai Yai at Tor Pae village is 473 male and 424 female.

Religion

Although the Tai are Therawada Buddhist like the Thai, their rituals and holy texts have been greatly influenced by Burmese Buddhism.

Language

The Tai Yai people have their own Tai language from the ancient time. Their linguistic classification is Tai-Kadai. They have maintained their own culture and traditional literature. Some of them also can communicate by Thai language.

Agriculture

The majority of Tai are farmers who grow rice for their own consumption and a variety of crops to sell at the market. Most of them work in rice fields and grow garlic, peanuts and soybeans as cash crops. The Tai also act as wholesalers of industrial goods through Northwestern Thailand and Eastern Myanmar in exchange for gems, cattle and traditional Tai goods.

Festival

Important annual festivals of the Tai Yai are continually arranged. They are called the "12 months traditions". Examples are "The Buddhist Lent" or "Boon Poi Lern 11" (Worshipping Jong Para) and the most well known festival called "Poi Sang Long" (Novice/Monk Ordination) which is held every March. At this festival they play drums and perform native dances such as "The Bird Dance", "The Lion Dance" and "The Sword Dance" which are common in religious festivals. On April there is a "Songkran" festival similar to that in the Central Thailand. They held all festivals at Tor Pae temple and Pra Tu Muang temple.

Food

Tai people in the village eat rice as their staple food. The preparation of food depends both on the everyday lives of the people and their merit making traditions. Usually, men prepare the food for important festivals.

Dress

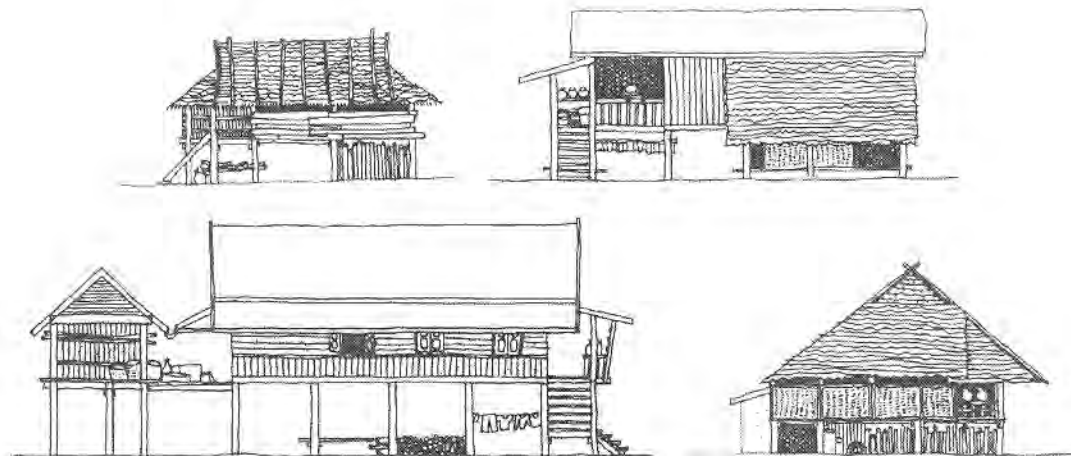
Men wear wide legged trousers and long sleeved shirts with round collars, fastened with fabric buttons down the middle. Women traditionally wear sarongs and embroidered blouses, either short or long sleeved that are fastened across the chest from left to right. Both men and women use hats that are called "Gub Tai"

Characteristic of the village

Tor Pae village is remote from large town and can be reached by the hilly route to reach. Previously contacts were mainly made between the villages. There are attempts to be self-subsistent as much as possible. The indigenous characteristics of the Tai Yai house mostly remain in the village Moo1 and Moo8.

Most Tai Yai standard-sized houses are typically rural type with bedroom. The house is lifted 1.80-2.00 meters above the ground. The wooden post, a has 2.5-3 meter long, a diameter of at least 4 inches and is made from the timber available in the area. Roofing employs bamboo of timber and topped with Teak leaf. (at present it is rare to find such a material). Partition is made of wood or ready-made bamboo planks, which is quite solid. Floors are made of timbers. The interior organization is well defined.

Specific and Detailed study of the selected cases of the dwellings



1. 57 Tor Pae village, Moo 8, Mae Ngao , Khun Yuam district, Mae Hong Son Province
Owner : Neenyae Suwanasang



Front of the house



View from small road



Granary connected to kitchen



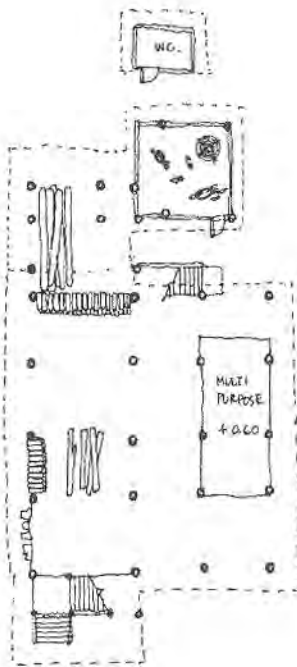
“Tern” as a multi-purpose hall house



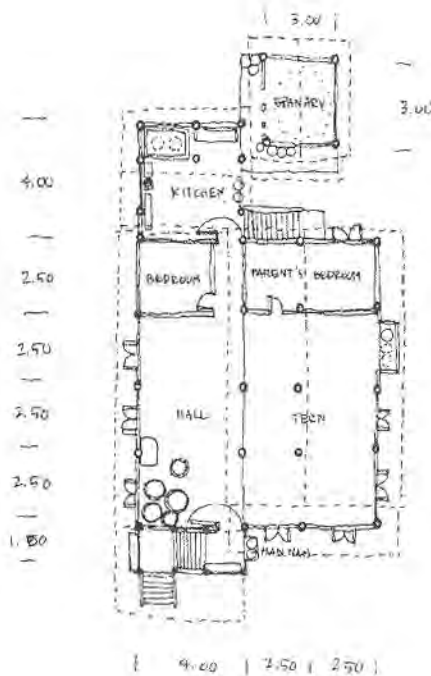
“Tern” and hallway to kitchen



The house was constructed around 50 years ago. It is in a good condition. Most material is made of wood. The roof of Kitchen and Granary were made by Teak leaf. There are eight people living in the house. All of them are farmers who grow rice, soybean and garlic. Under the house is the space for feeding ducks. Usually they go Tor Pae temple for their religious activities.



First Floor Plan of the First House at 57 Tor Pac village, Moo8



Second Floor Plan

2. **71 Tor Pae village, Moo8, Mae Ngao,
Khun Yuam district, Mae Hong Son Province**
Owner : Tongkam Rungsun



Granary



Front of the house



Entrance of the house



Keng Chao Pala



The alcove in kitchen

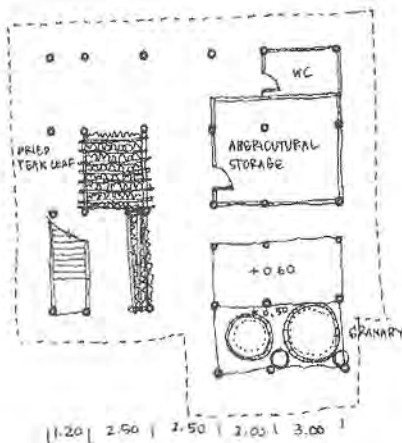


Han Nam

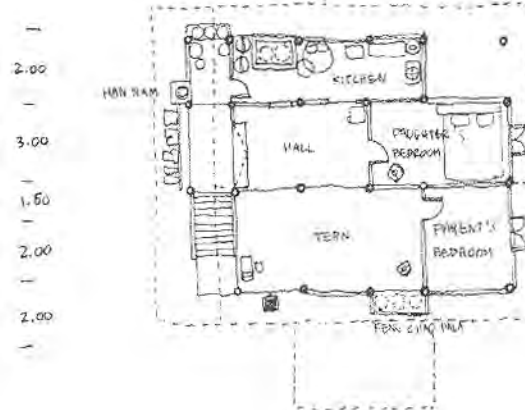


Granary collected rice
for their own construction

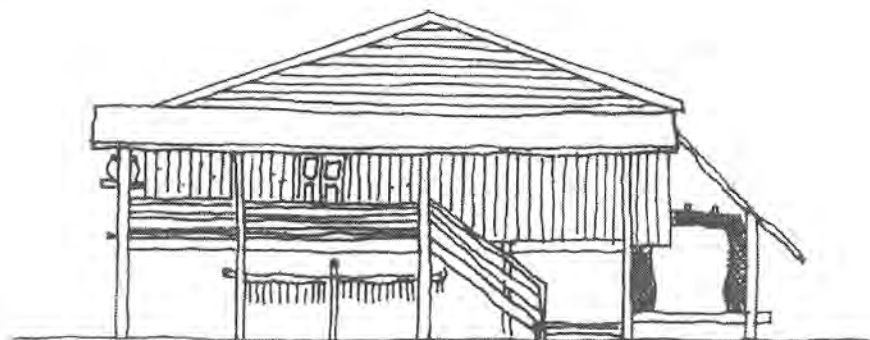
The building was constructed more than 50 years ago and is still in a good condition. Mostly material are wood and Bamboo. The roof of granary was made by Teak leaf. There are five people living in the house. The parents are farmers who grow rice. The daughter and her husband run their own small business. Under the house is a space for drying the Teak leaves. Usually they go Tor Pae temple for their religious activities



First Floor Plan of the Second House
at 71 Tor Pae village, Moo8

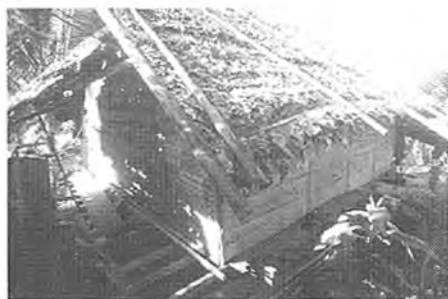


Second Floor Plan



Elevation

3. 90/2 Tor Pae village, Moo8, Mae Ngao,
Khun Yuam district, Mae Hong Son Province
Owner : DENCHAI YEONYONG



Bamboo roof covering
with Teak leaves



Front of the house



Entrance ladder



Roof structure

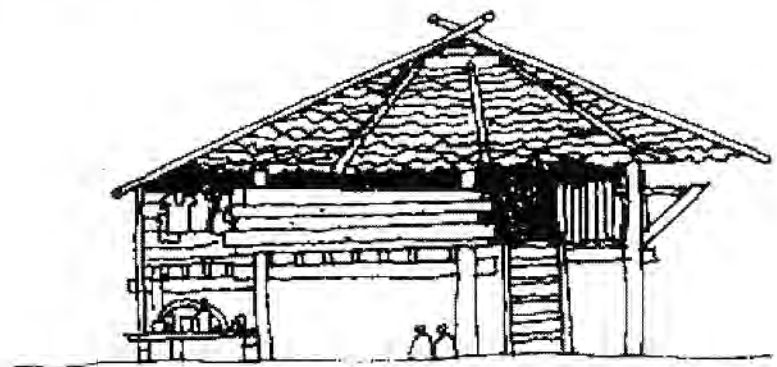


Kitchen

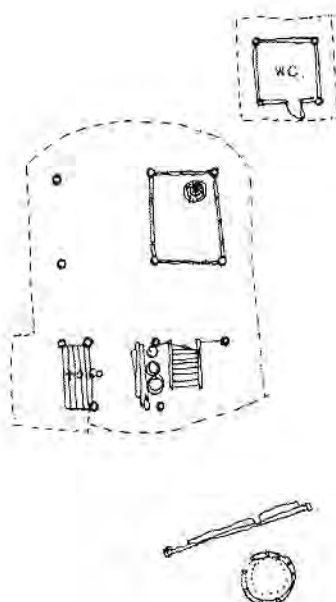


Bedroom

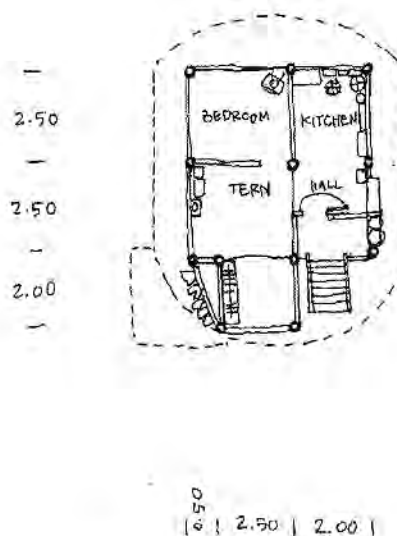
The building was constructed around 15 years ago. It is in a fair condition. The size of the house is a small one. Mostly material are wood and Bamboo. The roof of the house was made by Bamboo structure and topped with Teak leaf. There are three people living in the house. The father is a labor who works at a construction site far away (in Chaing Mai, for example) and the mother is a gardener. They have one son.



Bedroom



First Floor Plan of the Third House
at 90/2 Tor Pae village, Moo8



Second Floor Plan

4. 99 Tor Pae village, Moo1 (near Tor Pae Temple), Mae Ngao, Khun Yuam district, Mae Hong Son Province.

Owner : Kham Niyomvachara



Surrounded by vegetable garden

The houses are cooled down in summer with the breathing through the wall. The father is keen at weaving the Bamboo wall in a very unique pattern.



The entrance gives a welcoming atmosphere by Han Nam and the passage connected to Tern, which is used as a multi-purpose space.



“Tern” as a sleeping space for old parent

The building was constructed more than 40 years ago. It is in a very good condition. Mostly material are wood and Bamboo. The roof of the house was made by Teak leaf. There are five people living in the house. The parents are very old and stay home. The daughter and her husband grow rice, soybean and garlic. The interior space of this house is very interesting with a linkage between the upper floor Tern and the kitchen by an open well and a passageway.



The rice field beside the house

The roof and wall are built using local material and are very unique.
The house was skillfully built with a great sense of aesthetic.



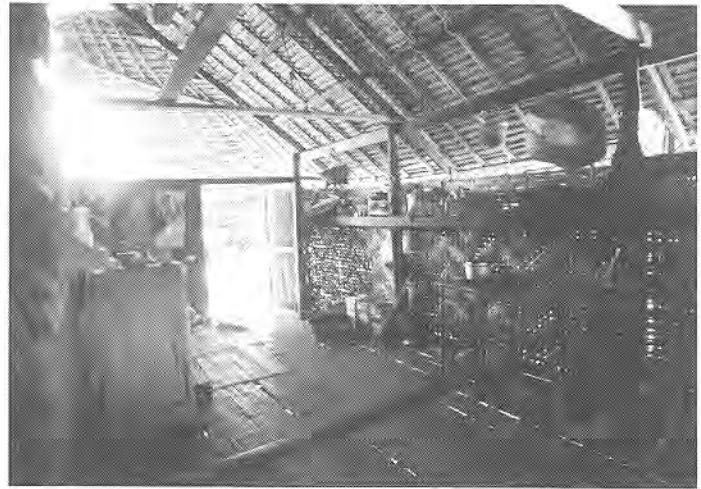
Entrance stair ladder



The opening window



“Keng Chao Pala” cantilevered from the Tern in side the house



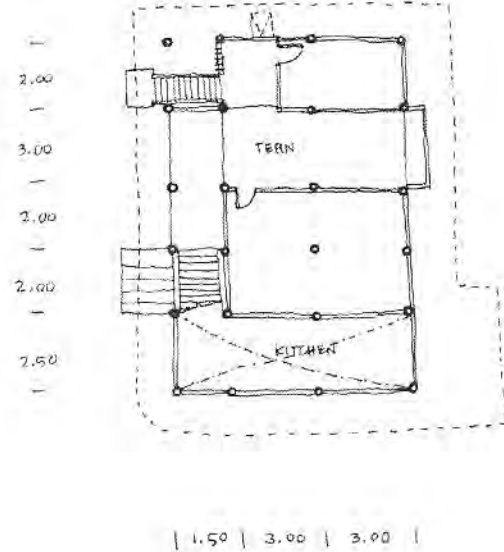
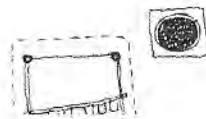
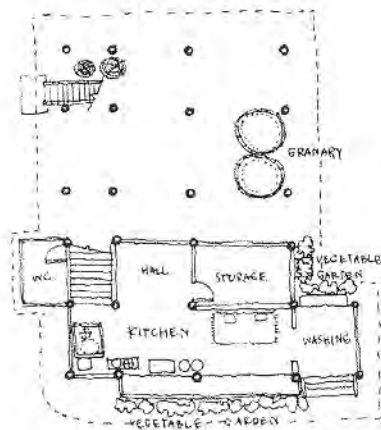
The kitchen is at the ground level with an the open well and a passage which links the Tern and the kitchen together.



Roof's structure is built using bamboo and topped with Teak leaf.

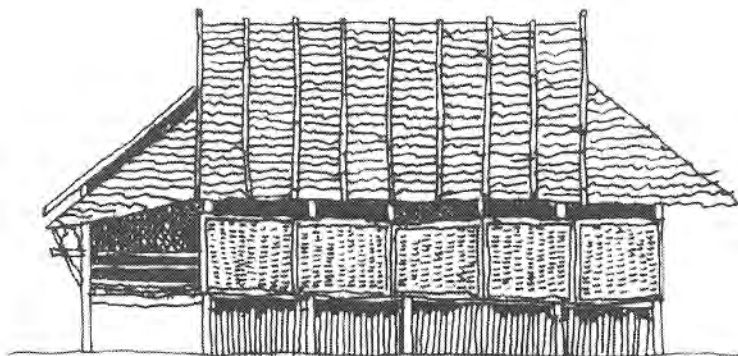


The pond nearby the house



First Floor Plan of the Forth House
at 99 Tor Pae village, Mool

Second Floor Plan



Elevation

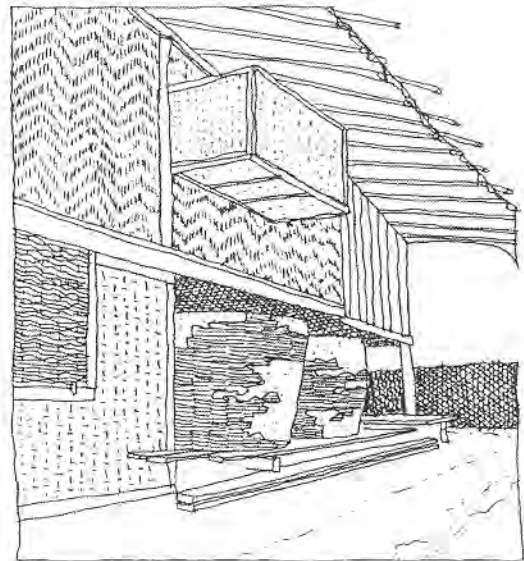


Tor Pae Temple

The major factors affecting the spatial organization of Tai Yai house

1. Function

Tai houses are constructed solely for needed function with humanistic scale. The house reflects the philosophy of life, which is simplicity, humble and respect to nature. Mostly, main functions of the house are defined by the inhabitant's family structure. In general, the Tai people have a single family, thus reflecting in the small size of most houses.

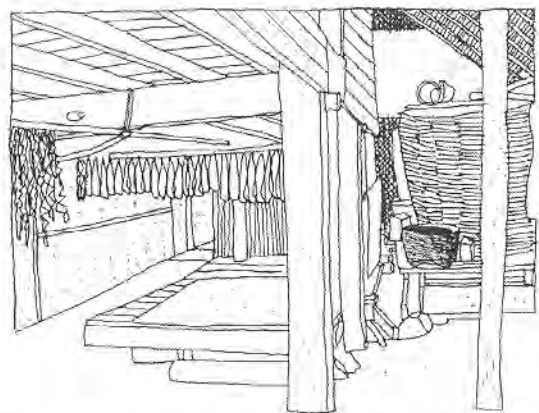


There are special parts of the house created by their religious culture such, as "Keng Chao Pala" which is a secret place dedicating to Buddha and holy spirits.

The bamboo panel with unique pattern.

2. Form and shape

Tai houses can be said to poses a great sense of aesthetic judging from its shape and form. Their houses are boldly expressed with decorations where they felt the importance, especially the form of the roof and the transitional space inside house. The shape of the house is thus dominated by the roof covering with Teak leaves. The house is raised above the ground. The under floor space is used as animal stable and firewood storage. The furniture in each room is placed in direction conforming to their belief in ritual and the super natural. Also their lifestyle make form and shape of the house as the most convenience for them. The forms of the houses are obviously shaped to accommodate their lifestyle.



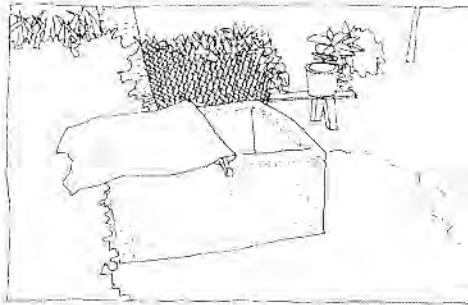
The under floor space used as animal stable and firewood storage.

The cooking utensils are stored on a small shelf or hang on a bamboo wall. The alcove made by wood and solid clay is raised up from the floor.

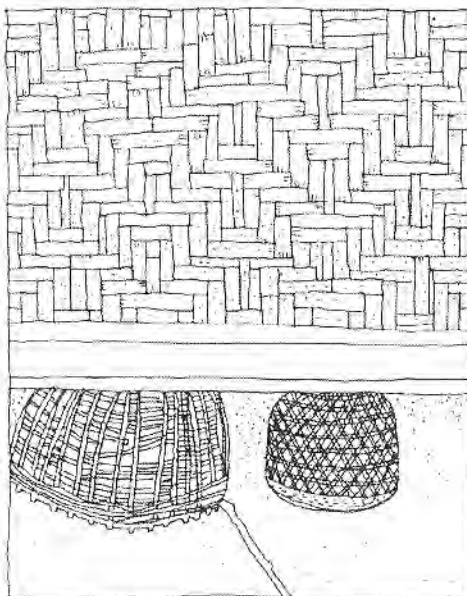


3. Material

Natural material is used as a building skin for both inside and outside. Timber, Bamboo, Teak leaves and wood are flexible skin for the ever-changing climate condition in the valley of Mae Hong Son. The houses are cool in summer with the breathing wall allowing breeze through.



The pond stored water for cooking and cleaning.

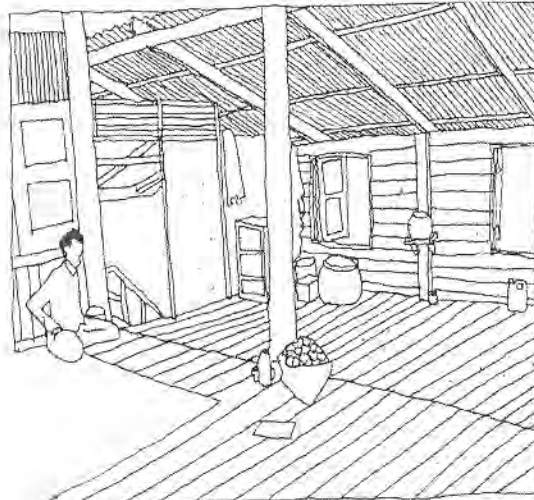


Animal stable

The Tai people are keen at weaving the Bamboo panel with unique patterns. The intentionally minimized voids, the steeply pitched roof covering most part of the partition wall and the thickness of the roof keep the warmth inside the house in winter. The material will be replaced at interval according to its natural life.

The indigenous characteristics of the Tai Yai house at Tor Pae village

Space is clearly divided into two main parts: the outer and the inner space. The first outer verandah covered by a roof in traverse to the house, the granary and toilet. The others, the bedroom, the tern, the kitchen and the inner verandah are under the same roof.³



tern

1. Stair ladder and Dog tying Pole

Stair ladder of the house is normally under the eaves at the left corner. The roof structure is thus supported by pole

2. Tern

The flight of stairs gives access to verandah and then tern. The tern is an interior space where slightly larger than the bedroom. It is a multi-purpose space where the inhabitants may sit and welcome their visitor. For the house with only one bedroom, it may be occupied by the owner's son as his sleeping space at night. There is a shelf of Buddha and holy spirits called "Keng Chao Pala" which is approximately 0.70*2.00meters in sized, projecting out of the house.

3. Han Nam

A Han Nam (water booth) is placed at the verandah next to the stair ladder. A shelf made of wood is hung above the verandah for storing various forms of terra cotta containers.

4. Bedroom

The only one room in the house has a solid partition and is adjoining with Tern through the passages.

5. Passage and Verandah

The passage is enclosed within the bedroom on one side and a panel on the other. This passage leads to kitchen. It can be said that the all rooms in the house are connected by the passages. Verandah appears at the front and the back of the house to connect to a separated granary.

6. Kitchen

There are partitions such as bamboo-craft wall panels, which yields a very good ventilation through the kitchen. The kitchen has a back verandah connected to the granary. The alcoves are placed high above the floor made of wood mixed with solid clay. Cooking utensils are kept on the lower shelf and hung on the wall.

7. Granary

The granary stores rice and crops for consumption and sale at the village market. The roof is topped with Teak leaf. Some houses have their granary at the ground floor. They keep their crops in the big container made of Bamboo weaving and solid clay. The diameter is usually around 1.00-1.50 meters.



⁴The size of the living space and the building style depend upon the socio-economic conditions of the owner. Houses can be classified into 2 types. House with a single roof; usually is a small house with low opened-air ground floor. This type of house is used for temporary living of the newly married family. The whole area are containing with 2 bedroom will cover the kitchen area at the side of the house. The glory Buddha Image is located on the other side of the bedroom. The structural materials of the house are timbers with bamboo-crafted wall panels, with dry leaves roof panels.

The twin houses with a double gable roof, covering the sleeping and the kitchen are as this type of house is usually larger than the house with the single roof. The usual size will be 5 bays with an opened-air ground floor used as the living space and main storage. The opened-air ground floor has a ceiling height of about 2 meters. The houses usually turn gable side to the North-South direction in order to welcome warm sunlight onto the longitudinal side.

Conclusion

The indigenous characteristics of Tai Yai house may be described as having three main factors affecting by the Tai culture, ritual and philosophy of life.

1. Function

The houses are clearly shaped by their functional requirements, which reflect the Tai lifestyle and family structure. Certain parts of the house are shaped by their ritual and culture.

2. Form and Shape

The functions are mainly from their lifestyle and structure of family. The characteristic of the house's form and its spaces inside express simplicity and humbleness. Their ritual, lifestyle responsiveness to climate and the special sense of aesthetic of the local builders are infused into their creation of the space for living.

3. Material

The local natural materials used in construction are reused and recycled by nature. The house as a product of the Tai Yai culture can be considered one of the most environmental sustainable architecture.

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The Interview of

- Mrs.Neenyae Suwanasang
- Mrs.Tongkam Rungsun
- Mr.Denchai Yeonyong
- Mrs.Kham Niyomvachara
- Yos Santasombat: Lak Chang
- Banchob Pantumetha: Kalemhan Tai in Shan state
- Srisak Wanlipodom, Sujit Wongthet:Tai Lue, Tai Yai Tai Siam
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Endnotes

- ¹ The Brief Survey of Tai Yai at Tor Pae Village on 27th December 2002-2nd January 2003.
- ² Ornsiri Panin
- ³ Anuvit Chareonsuphakul (1997)
- ⁴ Ornsiri Panin, The international conference on Tai studies (1998)