

Houses and religious buildings in the vicinity of Maung Chiang Rung

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A lack of flat terrain, lots of rain and high relative humidity, are the normal geographical and climatic conditions in Sipsongpanna, where the Tai-Lue live. Only 50% of the terrain in the overall area is flat, (Tida Saraya 1989:43), and this flat ground is located between the hills and slopes of the region. Tai-Lue settlements are of two main types: those on flat terrain at the bottom of a valley, and those, on sloping terrain. The picturesque scene of the stepped rice fields can easily be seen from the latter.

As with other agricultural societies, the physical location of the settlement depends on the availability of water resources. This applies to both the Linear village alongside water ways and to settlements located on sloping terrain (to take advantage of water run-off from the mountain-side).

Maung Chiang Rung, Sipsongpanna is popular and well known. However, the most impressive examples of 'cultural ecology' are not found in Maung Chiang Rung itself, but in places close by such as; Maung Hai, Maung Hum, Ban Tin, Maung Chiang Lan, etc. The case studies in this paper focus on houses and religious buildings in the villages of Maung Hai and Maung Hum respectively, the first of which is located on flat terrain and the other, on sloping terrain.

The village and it's Environment

The normal sized Tai-Lue village in Sipsongpanna comprises about 40-50 houses (Ornsiri Panin 1996:50). Every village has the same elements: village gates, houses, a public square, a village temple, a public water-well, and the spirit house. The clustering of these elements seems to be very tight and the village itself is surrounded by agricultural fields. The size of each house is usually about 600-1000 sq.m. The traditional fences there are quite similar to those found surrounding Tai-Yuan houses in Northern Thailand. The typical components of the homes themselves are: the main house itself, a rice storage area, an animal shed, a vegetable garden, a fruit garden, a court-yard, and a spirit-house.

Within the main grouping of 40-50 houses, subdivision into smaller groups of houses is common. Subgroups of 3-5 houses - with a central courtyard - can easily be seen. The village symbol of origin is located within the village public

courtyard. This public courtyard is used as a multi-purpose area by the villagers. Besides this multi-purpose public courtyard, other important public elements are: the village water-well, the spirit house, and the temple.

The temples

Almost eighty percent (Zhu Liangwen 1992:36) of Tai-Lue villages in Sipsongpanna have their own village temple. The other twenty percent tend to use the temple of a neighbouring village. The village temple (or religious quarter) plays a central role in Tai-Lue life, because the Tai-Lue strongly believe that good spirits (or Buddha Spirit) reside in the temple - and that only their family spirits will live in their individual houses. So, the temple is the only place for giving offerings to Buddha. There are lots of religious ceremonies at the temple throughout the year.

The village temple (usually located on the highest section of land within the village), is easily visible from a distance and is also easily approachable from every house in the village.

Normally, the religious quarter of a village will consist of: Viharn, Ubosoth, monks' living quarters, a temple water-well, a pagoda (but not always), and a central court-yard, which is a very important space for the staging of out-door religious ceremonies. The landscape element that helps define the identity of the Tai-Lue religious quarter is the garden surrounding the temple.

The three case studies of religious quarters (which can help us identify the cultural presence of the Tai-Lue in Sipsongpanna) in this paper deal with the following locations: Wat Ban-Tin, Ban Chiang-Lan; Wat-Chiang-Jeng, Maung-Hai; and Wat Saun-Mon, Maung-Hum.

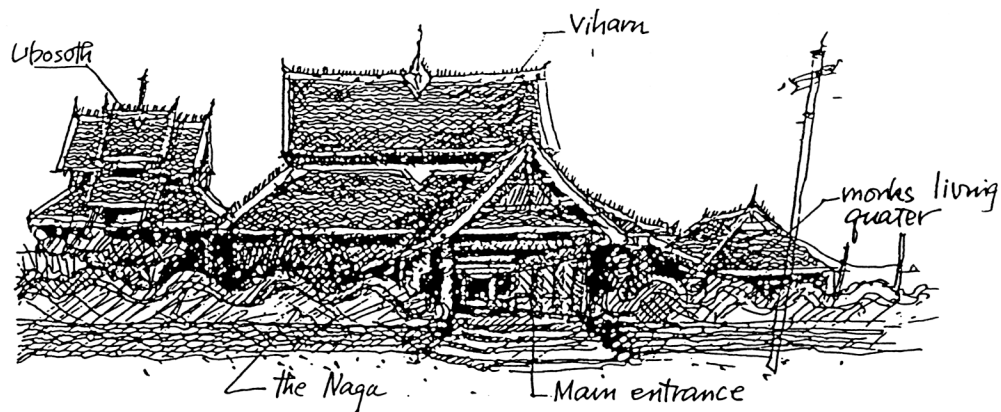
Wat Ban-Tin, Ban-Chiang-Lan

At present, Wat-Ban-Tin is the most important Buddhist Religious Quarter in Sipsongpanna (Ornsiri Panin 1990:43). It is the centre for religious ceremonies and as such is the focus of a joint development project on the part of the Buddhist Association of China and The Buddhist Association of Yunnan.

Wat-Ban-Tin can be easily approached from the main road of Ban-Chiang-Lan. The covered walkway main entrance is connected to the continuous Naga wall, which leads to the longitudinal elevation of the Viharn, facing East-West. The Buddha Image in the Viharn faces East. The small Ubosoth is located to the East,

near the tiny spirit house in the South. The monks' living quarters are located to the West - close to the site's boundary. The outdoor open courtyard is to the West of the entrance walk-way.

With this simple rectangular plan, the architectural appearance of the Viharn is both simple and humble - with a high pitch gabled roof connecting to the surrounding hip-overhanging roof and adding to the double lean-to overhanging roof on the East and West sides. The decorative elements seem very simple but they are neat and possess many aesthetic qualities. Similar to the Viharn, is the small and simple rectangular plan of the Ubosoth - with its double layered, decorated pitch roof and terra cotta roofing materials. The monks' living quarters are of an L-Shape plan with an L-shape hip-gable roof.



Wat-Ban-Tin - Maung Hai

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