

Samlor - Nang Upiam
**Literature That Reveals the Space and Identity of the
Shan People in Shan State¹**

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Abstract

The story of “*Samlor-Nang Upiam*” [สามลอ-นางอุเปี่ยม] is well known among the Shan ethnic group in Shan State of Myanmar. It appears in many forms and has been continually reproduced. This piece of literature seems to be highly acclaimed among the people reflecting their united attempt and intention to make this literature widespread throughout the Shan State. The purpose of this article is to analyze the meaning, role and existence of this literary work in Shan State, Myanmar. The researcher used a mixed method of research by conducting document research and a field study in five areas, Tachilek [ท่าช้างเหล็ก], Taunggyi [ตองยี], Mueang Kueng [เมืองกึ่ง], Chiang Tong [เชียงทอง] and Muche-Namkham [หมูเจ่น้ำคำ] with five sample groups (religious leaders, village leaders, villagers, artists, owners of bookshops, as well as entertainment media) for a total of 75 in-depth interviews.

¹ This article is part of the author's thesis “Samlor - Nang Upiam and Chao Sudhon - Nang Manohra: The Meaning and Existence in the Social Context of Tai Ethnic Groups”, Ph.D. Program in Mekong and Salween River Basin Studies, Chiang Mai Rajabhat University.

Data was collected through observation and interviews as well. The analysis was based on theories of folklore, sociology and anthropology in order to investigate the meaning of existence in the social context of this literary work. The result showed that besides its value and role as an aesthetic media, stimulating the people's consciousness in terms of ethnic, sacred space and cultural tourism, this literary work, *Samlor-Nang Upiam*, also serves as a tool for social discourse that is reproduced and passed on by the Shan leaders comprising monks, artists and leaders of the Shan State Army, to define their identity or existence and space during rule of the Burmese Military Government.

Introduction

Literature is considered a kind of valuable legacy of mankind because it is a product of the intellect and emotions embedded with splendid content and beautiful language carefully reflected by its author. Thus, literature brings happiness and beauty to all members of the society, be it the creator of the work itself, the readers or users, or the society in general.

A literary work that has noticeably emerged in the social context of the ethnic Shan of Shan State² and that has spread widely among the Shan in the form of oral and written literature, songs, folk performances and mural paintings, is the story of "*Samlor-Nang Upiam*" [สาลอ-นางอุเปี่ยม], a legend about the tragic love of a Shan couple. Some evidence related to this legend was found in a town named Kueng in the central part of Shan State, with both the place and

² Several terms are used in referring to the Shan people. Westerners refer to the *Tai* speaking people in the Shan State as *Shan*. People in Thailand call the Shan in the Shan State as *Tai Yai* [ไทใหญ่]. Shan people in the Shan State and in Thailand call themselves *Tai* [ไต, คนไต], *Tai Luang* [ไทหลวง] or *Tai Long* [ไตโหลง].

some material confirming the origin of the story which is viewed by the people as sacred.

The continual production of the story, its wide dispersal and popularity in various forms among the Shan people in Shan State has implication about space and identity of this group of people which has been under the control of the Burmese government. This implication is clearly revealed.

Literature is a kind of mechanism that causes change in a society through a disclosure process dealing with the creation and production of identity and new meaning, which sometimes results in overlapping, dominance, seizing of meaning, space and identity through the language and the work itself as a product of the social movement of the nation state or those who possess power during a certain period in history who share the same goals and ideology.³

At present, the studies of Shan literature tend to be put in the “frame” of literary study emphasizing the text rather than the social context. Thus, it can be said that the research on Shan folklore/literature in terms of social context needs to be addressed in order to close the gaps.⁴

In this article, the researcher will analyze the story of *Samlor-Nang Upiam*, Shan literature, in its socio-cultural context. The factors creating the social discourse through the use of the story of *Samlor-Nang Upiam* will be emphasized. Overall, this article will attempt to present an analysis of the text in relation to its role in creating social discourse, its meaning and its existence in the social context of the story.

³ Chairat Charoensinolan [ไชยรัตน์ เจริญสินโอฬาร], *Wathakamkanphatthana* [วาทกรรมการพัฒนา] (*Development Discourse*) (Bangkok: Khletthai, 2002) 19-20 (in Thai).

⁴ Siraporn Na Thalang [ศิริพร ณ ถลาง], *Chonchat Tai Nai Nithan* [ชนชาติไทในนิทาน] (*Tai Peoples as Reflected on Tai Folktales and Folk Literature*) (Bangkok: Matichon, Special Issue of Silapawathanatham, 2002) 267 (in Thai).

Literary Text

This article uses the literary text of “*Samlor-Nang Upiam*,” the version of the Mrs. Mia-ing [นางเมื่อยะอิง], published in Shan characters in Taunggyi, Shan State in 1998 and 2005. Originally, the story of “*Samlor- Nang Upiam*” was a folktale that was orally passed on among the Shan in Shan State. The author composed the story based on tales and some books written earlier. It appears that the story was created for two purposes: to give an account of a great love story of a Shan couple and to teach lessons about human behavior through the characters.

Samlor, the leader of oxen caravan trade, met Nang Upiam, a beautiful girl from another town. It was love at first sight and they decided to live together despite his mother’s objections. Thereupon, Upiam was persecuted until she and her son died. Samlor decided to die to be with his wife and son. Samlor’s mother used items of local superstition to separate the lovers’ tombs to prevent them from being together in the next life. The lovers’ souls became two stars that are separated by another star which was actually the article his mother put between them.

An analysis of the content shows that the theme depicts the harm caused by blind love and the pride of the family members which leads to disaster. The story was of a single plot. Analysis of the characters reveals some Dhamma related to controlling oneself and the family in a Buddhist society and the larger society of the world, which requires acceptance and forgiveness of one another instead of pride and prejudice.

First, this story reflects three aspects of the Shan way of life: 1) The economic system which has been life sustaining by means of bartering between towns and communities through caravans of merchants using oxen as transportation for ages; 2) Next is the close knit relationship between families and communities in which the story depicts the role of wives and mothers as the decision makers, as well as depicting the interaction between traveling merchants and the local people in trade and cultural exchanges, as well as in the founding of new families; and 3) The third aspect the story reflects the belief

system, especially beliefs dealing with karma whose result is carried to the next life making people pay heed to their actions.

Creating social discourse through the Story of “*Samlor-Nang Upiam*”

According to history, the Shan lost their territory to the Burmese and fell under Burmese rule due to the violation of the Panglong Treaty made between the Burmese government and the Shan people, as well as other ethnic minority groups in Burma in 1947 after the British left. The Panglong Treaty stipulated that the contract would be effective for 10 years and after that all parties to the contract would be free to become independent from one another. However, the Burmese neglected to follow the agreement and continue to exert their rule over the Shan State and other minorities under its military government.

“The Shan, with their long tradition of ruling by chaofa’s and observation of Buddhism within their unique art and culture to the extent that it formed their identity, love their nation, their heritage and engage in merit making, hard work, bravery with a good heart, cleanliness and an ordinary life conduct. They are also proud of their language as much as their life.”⁵ Therefore, when they had to be under the Burmese rule against their will, the Shan had to try to survive and to maintain the dignity of their race, which also included their art and culture and traditions that have been handed down for generations.

The major mechanism for creating social discourse through the story of “*Samlor-Nang Upiam*” has been by the local leaders of the Shan in Shan State which could be classified into four groups as follows:

⁵ Nanthariya (Lamchiakthet) Sa-iam [นันทรียา (ลำเจียกเทศ) สาเอี่ยม], “Longtai Nai Nangsue Baebrian Shan [สองไตในหนังสือแบบเรียนไทใหญ่],” *Kansueksa Prawatisat Lae Wannakham Khong Klumchatphanthai (Study on the History and Literature of the Ethnic Tai Group)* (Bangkok: Amarin Printing, 2001) 98 (in Thai).

Buddhist Monks

During the first ten years under the Burmese military government which was very strict and harsh on the Shan and other minority groups, a great deal of the Shan art and cultural treasures, such as religious texts, history books as well as several religious activities and customs, were destroyed. Performance of these activities was under the close watch of the Burmese soldiers as they were afraid that these people would unite against the government.

Despite the destruction of the religious texts, Shan monks, who became the people's moral support, continued to preach using whatever they could find around them as examples and reminders for the people to hold on to good deeds and restrain themselves from doing evil. As such "*Samlor-Nang Upiam*" became one of their favorite stories that was retold among them and that was used by monks to refer to when teaching about ethics for household principles among the Shan in various villages and towns throughout the Shan State.

When the military government became less strict on the conducting of their religious activities, a number of monks tried to pass on the value of the folk tale "*Samlor-Nang Upiam*" to the Shan in Shan State employing different tactics given here.

Khruba Bunchum [ครูบานบุญชุม]

He was a Shan monk who strictly applied the Buddhist principles of meditation and compassion. He was revered by all the people in the Upper Mekong region comprised mostly of the Shan.⁶ The monk also believed in the story of Bodhisattava and merit making through pilgrimage. He helped in the construction and renovation of several religious structures. Also, the people believed that they could gain merit by engaging in the same activities he was involved in so they tried to participate in all of the activities initiated by him. His influence helped unite the Shan which resulted in their maintaining

⁶ Paul T. Cohen, "A Buddha Kingdom in The Golden Triangle: Buddhist Revivalism and the Charismatic Monk Kruba Bunchum," *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*. Vol. 11 (Issue & Macquarie University Australia, 2000): 14.

and conserving their art and culture, especially through his hard work and his traveling to all parts of Shan State.⁷

The revered monk also engaged in preserving and disseminating the story of *Samlor-Nang Upiam*. He led in the restoration of Mueang Chiang Tong [เมืองเชียงทอง], which was believed to be the birth place of Samlor, and Pasa Temple [วัดป่าสา] which was said to be the house and land of Samlor. Khruba Bunchum encouraged the people to collect information about the story. He also directed them to repair the mural painting of *Samlor-Nang Upiam* and had a one-pillar castle built for the spirit of Samlor to reside in. Moreover, a museum was built to collect their stories and personal belongings. Shan people from various parts of Shan State visited the place and learned about the significance of Chiang Tong and the “immortal” story of *Samlor-Nang Upiam*.



Figure 1: Khruba Bunchum Tonbun, a revered monk among the Shan of Shan State. He played a great role in promoting Shan art and culture.

Source: Phrakhruba Saengla Thammasasi [พระครูบาแสงหล้า ธรรมสิริ], Abbot of Wat Phrathat Sai Mueang, Thachilek [วัดพระธาตุสายเมือง ท่าขี้เหล็ก].

⁷ Udom Thiraphatthananonthakun [อุดม ธีรพัฒนานนทกุล], “Botbat Khong Phrasong Naithana Phuchueam Khwamsamphan Thangwatthanatham Boriwen Phaknuea Tonbon Khong Thai Kap Ratchan Khong Phama [บทบาทของพระสงฆ์ในฐานะผู้เชื่อมความสัมพันธ์ทางวัฒนธรรมบริเวณภาคเหนือตอนบนของไทยกับรัฐฉานของพม่า] (The Role of Buddhist Monks as Cultural Linkage in the Upper Northern Part of Thailand and Shan State of Burma)” (Liberal Arts), Chiang Mai University, (2002) 54-59 (in Thai).

Another town called Mueang Kueng was considered important in relation to *Samlor-Nang Upiam*. Here, Khruba Bunchum raised the significance of the burial place of *Samlor-Nang Upiam* by constructing a single-pillar castle for their spirit to reside in. He also built a museum to collect objects related to the two people the same as he did in Mueang Chiang Tong. He had the story presented using all forms of media. The abbot and committee members of Wat Phrathat Nang Upiam [วัดพระธาตุนางอุเปียม] were assigned to look after the museum and tell the story to visitors.



Figure 2: Mural painting of “*Samlor-Nang Upiam*” at Wat Nang Upiam, Mueang Kueng, Shan State. This one depicts the scene when the two lovers met and talked to each other on the banks of the river Teng [แม่น้ำเต็ง].

Source: The researcher.

***Bunchao Tasaeng* [บุญเจ้าตาแสง]**

The word *Banchao* is a title given to a monk whose former name was Tasaeng. This monk was a Shan who was born in Mueang Swoo [เมืองสวู่] in the southern part of Shan State. Although he was blind and could not read any of the Tai and Shan literature in the written form of religious texts or tales, he had heard them told by his older relatives

and monks from many temples in his childhood. Those stories inspired him to preach through dramas to impress people with them as he had been in the past.

His preaching by using the stories of *Samlor-Nang Upiam* was considered the best and it brought him a great reputation. His description of various scenes was clear and effective. For example, he gave clear details and the feelings of the people in the story when he described the caravan of the bull and cattle trade. The account of the time when Samlor and Upiam first met each other was splendid. The scene of their departure was also very touching. The lament of the Tonglo bird (Cuckoo-นกกาเหว่า) looking for his father was even more moving. Even the hot exchange of the words between the mother-in-law and Upiam was so moving that it made the audience glad they would never have such a cruel millionaire mother like Samlor's mother.

***Bunchao Sukkham* [บุญเจ้าสุขคำ]**

He is a Shan monk whose birth place was in Mueang Tang Yan [เมืองตางยาน] in the northern part of Shan State. Currently he is the abbot of Doi Tueang Kham Temple [วัดดอยตุงคำ] in the town of Muche-Namkham. He is also one of the revered monks who has travelled to many places in the Shan State. Because of his being keen in photography and documentary filming, he could spread Buddhism and the art and culture through recording and he was able to take Shan people to all parts of Shan State via his recording despite several barriers that prevent them from travelling themselves. In this way, the Shan people were able to identify with the uniqueness of their culture and art in various parts of the cities in the Shan State.

A CD-ROM of "*Samlor-Nang Upiam*" that the revered monk recorded during his journey to Mueang Kueng in 1996 was shown throughout the Shan State and became very popular. His recording that was meant for Buddhist devotees was reproduced and distributed throughout the region. It was perfect and complete in terms of content. It was also a beautiful presentation of the town (Mueang Kueng) in various aspects, particularly the areas believed to be the birth place and the burial site of Upiam. His shots were very artistic

and the narration in his own voice was fascinating to the audience. A lot of Shan people seek the opportunity to obtain the CD-ROM, therefore it has been so often copied and reproduced that it has been distributed widely throughout the Shan State.

Shan Artists

Several Shan artists have taken part in creating the discourse of the story and thus, they have made the story of *Samlor-Nang Upiam* popular throughout the Shan State region.

Poets and printing technology

Originally, the reproduction of local literary works of the Shan was done by copying them on *sa* paper or palm leaves, which took time. During the Burmese rule, a great number of texts of the ethnic groups were destroyed. The Burmese government required that all students in the compulsory education use a Burmese curriculum. This made the younger generation of Shan fail to get skills in the Shan language; and even though the local scholars tried to improve the Shan character system to make it easier to read and write and taught it to the younger generation, they were unable to create and reproduce their text by the old method. There were many barriers to this; for instance, they had to make a living for survival and they had to avoid being watched by the government soldiers.

However, when modern printing technology was introduced to the Shan State, the Burmese government allowed them to publish their literature under the supervision of the organization known as “The Press Security and Registration Division”. Thus, the creators of any kind of literature had to be careful not to be suspected by the committee of any intention to attack the government or express themselves in any form of sarcasm or disrespect. Otherwise, the materials would be confiscated and destroyed with no exception.⁸

⁸ Achariya Saisin [อัจจริยา สายศิลป์], *Suekao Lae Suemai Nai Phama Chak Nangsuephim Suloksaiboe* [สื่อเก่าและสื่อใหม่ในพม่า จากหนังสือพิมพ์สู่โลกไซเบอร์] (*From the Newspaper in the Cyberworld*), 12 May 2010 <<http://www.midnightuniv.org/midnighttext/0009999862.html>> (in Thai).

Nevertheless, some groups of Shan scholars and writers in each town who were keen on literature and wanted to recommend it for entertainment purposes and pass on the beauty of their literature to all Shan in Shan State, tried to create and reproduce some local literary works using the new printing technology. Their effort was considered successful since during the past decade many printing places in such big towns as Taunggyi, Mueang Nai [เมืองน่าย], Mueang Kueng and Saenwi [แสนหวี] have published quite a lot of local literature opening the opportunity for many Shan people to read them.

Singers

Shan people love to sing and dance like other ethnic Tai. There are many well known Shan singers who have entertained their people this way. These artists have taken parts in "*Samlor-Nang Upiam*" in well known song versions and increased its popularity. The most popular singer in Shan State nowadays is Chai Saimao [ชายสายมาว].

Chai Saimao was born in Muche in the northern part of the Shan State. He is a gifted singer and composer. He began playing the guitar and singing Shan songs when he was 15 years old. In 1977, he came to sing in Chiang Rai. The following year he was asked by the Shan State Army to sing the song "likhommai panglong" (Panglong Treaty) composed by a medical doctor named Chai Khamlek [ชายคำเหล็ก]. The song talks about the promise of freedom made by the Shan prince and representatives of the minority groups and the government representative

Chai Saimao travelled around the Shan State singing this song until it became popular and created a high state of enthusiasm among the Shan and cause him to be arrested and imprisoned for 2 years and 17 days. After that, he was forbidden to sing the song and the song was banned. Chai Saimao joined the Shan State Army (SSA) responsible for cultural affairs. He was encouraged by Chao Mahasang [เจ้ามหาสง], his commander, to record the song and disseminate it until it became a hit song in Shan State and it was again banned.⁹

⁹ "Shan Singer," May 10, 2010 <<http://www.Khonkhurtai.com>>.

Thus Chai Saimao is an important person who has made this song become “immortal” among the Shan. The “Panglong Treaty” song has become a symbol of struggle. The imprisonment did not intimidate him. He has continued his career and uses songs to call for justice for his people. History will record his historic actions. He has become a heroic artist and a hero in the hearts of all Shan until today.

Even though the song “Panglong Treaty” is banned and controlled by the Burmese military government, the song about *Samlor-Nang Upiam* (“Khun Samlor Nang Upiam”) sung earlier by Chai Saimao, has appealed to many people. People have been impressed by the story and it has become an “immortal” piece of literature to them and is still popular until now.

Chai Saimao has also composed a song titled “Tonglokham” (Yellow or golden feathered cuckoo) in a CD-ROM Karaoke style which was inspired by the literature of “*Samlor- Nang Upiam*”. The background of the song is the burial place of Upiam and Samlor, as well as the mural painting based on the story found in Nang Upiam Temple. The song has brought him as much fame as the former one.

The two songs, “Khun Samlor-Nang Upiam” and “Tonglokham” that were inspired by the folk literature of “*Samlor-Nang Upiam*,” were followed by many other presentations of the same story, which has maintained and extended its popularity among the Shan in the Shan State.

The field study in all regions of the Shan State confirmed that the song “Khun Samlor-Nang Upiam” by Chai Saimao is one of the top ten hits of Chai Saimao. Moreover, other songs related to this literary work have also been known and well liked in the Shan State. These are “Siang Noktonglo khokhomna [เสียงนกทองลอคคอกหม่นา -The sad sound of cuckoo], sung by two women singers, Moonmueang [มูนเมือง] and Saeng Khamnaueang [แสงคำเมือง]; the song “Yu kok hrai Yu Muea kok hrai Muea [อยู่ก็ไครอยู่ เมื่อก็ไครเมื่อ - I wish to stay and leave at the same time], sung by Chai Daengpang [ชายแดงปาง]; and the song “Wiang Chao Samlor” [เวียงเจ้าสามลอ] sung by Muafong [หมวยฟอง]. All of them are very popular and well known in the Shan State.

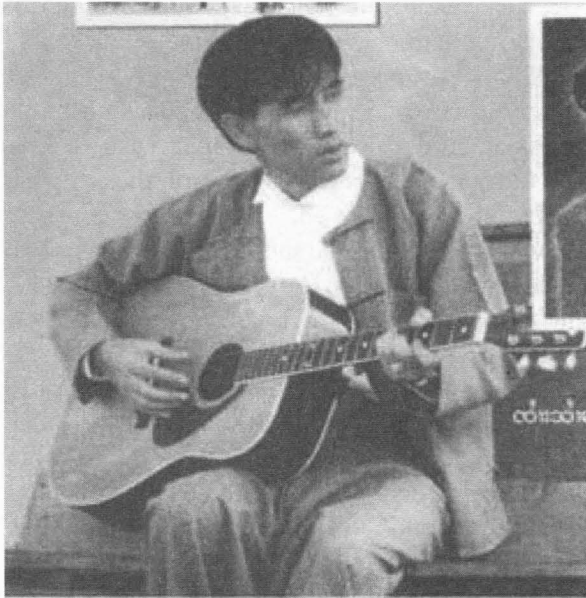


Figure 3: Chai Saimao, the popular singer of Shan, composer of “Panglong Treaty” and “Khun Samlor-Nang Upiam” the “immortal” and nationalistic songs that is played a great role in Shan State.

Source: The researcher.

Leader of the Shan State Army: Chao Yotsuek

The long history of the Shan since their establishment in Mueang Mao [เมืองมว] during the leadership of Chao Suea Khanfa [เจ้าเสือข่านฟ้า] has been full of pride and beauty long admired by all of their people reflected in over ten records of their history; however being under the Burmese rule without the chance to fight back has been considered a painful eradication of their past history. Therefore, a number of Shan rulers and fighters gathered and formed the Shan State Army under the leadership of Chaonoi Sonanta [เจ้าน้อยซอนันต๊ะ].

Khun Sa [ขุนสา], Chao Konchoeng [เจ้ากองเจียง] and Colonel Chao Yotsuek [พันเอกเจ้ายอดศึก], the present leader.¹⁰

Colonel Chao Yotsuek brought his people together to form the Shan State Army in 1996, located on Doi Tailaeng [ดอยไตแลง] around the Thai-Myanmar border near Pang Mapha District [อำเภอปางมะผ้า], Mae Hong Son Province. From 1999 onward, the army has continued to grow rapidly in strength. The organization consists of a Shan village, mainly for those who fled the war in the Shan State, a military camp and strategic outposts. The village is equipped with public facilities and a utilities system, a hydro-power generator, a satellite system that can receive worldwide news 24 hours a day through radio and television. There is also an FM radio station (FM 103.25 Mhz) that broadcasts daily from 1800-2100 hours. These Shan broadcasts can reach as far as the central part of the Shan State, which serves to publicize their role and activities and provides the people information about their culture and useful knowledge and public health messages.¹¹

Chao Yotsuek said that he could not say whether the mission of redeeming his nation will be successful or how long it will take. He also has tried to develop Doi Tailaeng to be the center for the Shan language and culture with the hope of continuing the legacy and cultivating the spirit of nationalism among the Shan youth. He has tried to make them aware that it will be useless if they are able to redeem their land and nation but their culture and their roots have been destroyed. This is the burden the leader has shouldered. He has the will and intention to win back his nation using art and culture.¹²

¹⁰ Pornphimon Trichot [พรพิมล ตริโชติ], *Chon Khlum Noy Kap Ratthaban Phama* [ชนกลุ่มน้อยกับรัฐบาลพม่า] (*Ethnic Minority and the Burmese Government*) (Bangkok: Research Fund Office, 1999) 72-73 (in Thai).

¹¹ Niphatporn Phengkaeo [นิพัทธ์พร เพ็งแก้ว], *Warasan Sarakhadi* [วารสารสารคดี] (*Sarakhadi Journal*), No. 264, May 2007, Year 23 (Bangkok: Wiriya Business Co., Ltd.): 87-88 (in Thai).

¹² Niphatporn 35.

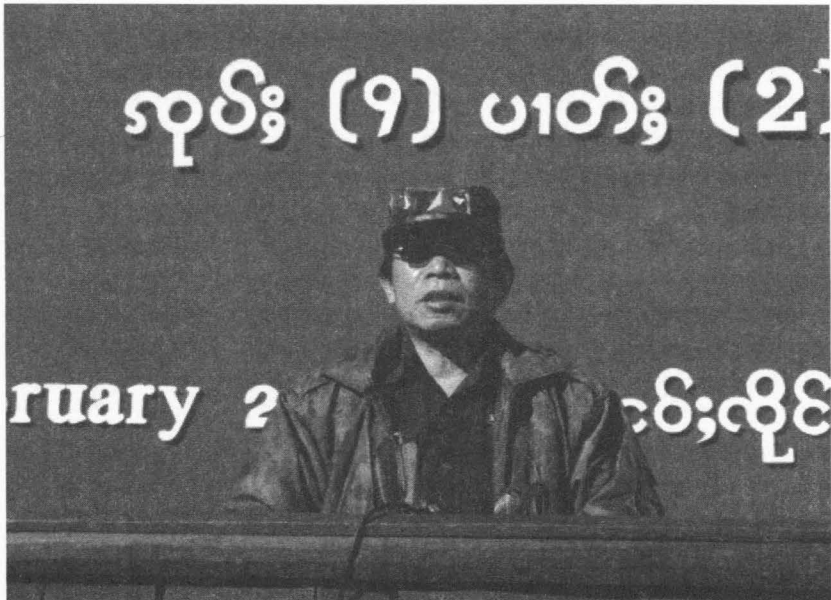


Figure 4: Chao Yotsuek, Leader of the SSA – Shan State Army who employed the policy of fighting with art and culture combined with weapons to win back the land for the Shan.

Source: 15 May 2010 <www.taifreedom.com>.

The policy to redeem the nation via art and culture has been spread and carried out through leaders at all levels from the SSA to the Shan State to ensure that it is implemented vigorously and is included in the educational curricula for Shan students on Doi Tailaeng. The radio broadcasts of the SSA station on the mountain (Doi Tailaeng) at the Thai-Myanmar border, Pang Mapha District, Mae Hong Son, are able to reach to the central part of the Shan State to update the people on the political movement and the policy on culture to their people to instill the love and desire to carry on the

Shan culture regardless of their being under the rule of another group.¹³

The story of *Samlor-Nang Upiam* has been told continually, especially on Valentine's Day, the day they believe the protagonists, Samlor and Upiam, came to meet in the heavens above the Shan State. Thus, in a literary dimension, "*Samlor-Nang Upiam*" has some locations connected to the Shan State. This work of literature is praised as the great love legend of the Shan.¹⁴ At the same time, the song "Khun Samlor-Nang Upiam" by Chai Saimao, who symbolizes the fighting spirit of the Shan ethnic group, has been broadcast via radio wave on Doi Tailaeng. On some ceremonious occasions on Doi Tailaeng and in the Shan State, there is also a Shan dramatic play performance similar to *likey* in Thailand, in which they also like to perform the story of *Samlor-Nang Upiam*. It is one of the five most popular stories to be performed and it is well liked by the Shan.

Thus, every movement and every role of the creators who pass on the literature of *Samlor-Nang Upiam* to the Shan in Shan State is considered a cultural communication designed to enhance nationalism among the Shan through their "immortal" literature to be shared among their people. Therefore, this literary work has taken deep root in the Shan soul of all ages in Shan State.

Meaning and Existence in the Story of "*Samlor - Nang Upiam*"

An analysis of existence in the social context of the story of "*Samlor-Nang Upiam*" reveals that this story played two significant roles in Shan society in Shan State as follows:

¹³ Prawit Wongpeng [ประวิทย์ วงศ์เปง], "Rongrian Khong Khon Phlatthin: Kansangudomkan Chatniyom Nai Rabopkansueksa Khong Rongrian Bonthanthiman Kongkam Lang Kuchat Shan [โรงเรียนของคนพลัดถิ่น: การสร้างอุดมการณ์ชาตินิยมในระบบการศึกษาของโรงเรียนบนฐานที่มั่นคงกำลังคู่ชาติไทใหญ่]" (School for displaced people: Creation of nationalistic ideology in the education system of the school on the base of the Shan State Army)" (Master's Thesis (Liberal Arts), Chiang Mai University, 2008) 110 (in Thai).

¹⁴ "Independence," *Valentine's Day*, 2103, Vol. 26, No. 253, 2009 (Bangkok: Shan Herald Agency for News) : 2.

1. The story of *Samlor-Nang Upiam* can be a medium to foster aesthetics among the Shan and can be used as media for teaching ethical lessons and good relationships among family members. Moreover, the places mentioned in the story and Shan State can be considered sacred places and serve as cultural attractions among the people.

2. The story of *Samlor-Nang Upiam* is a cultural media that raises their sense of identity and nationalism as it signifies their space, identity and linkage of their spirit to the extent of forming unity. As the Shan in Shan State have shared the same history and land as well as social context, they have enjoyed and shared the value of the same literary work and have reproduced it and transformed it into other forms and continually disseminated it among the group of people in the same land with the same intention. Therefore, it can be said that this literary work is a symbol clearly and truly reflecting the unity of the Shan people of Shan State.

Samlor - Nang Upiam: Literature for Life for the Shan People

An attempt to confirm one's space and existence through cultural identity by using an "immortal" literary work of a group of people in the forms of literature, song and dramatic performance is considered a way of creating an imagined community according to Benedict Anderson,¹⁵ who states that the creation of a political community called a "Nation-State" requires a clear physical and imagined space shared by the members of the community.

Things that depict sharing the same imagined space are language and symbols, especially a national language or national print language. This is at the heart of an ideology and politics that builds up national consciousness. Language in the form of poetry and songs has as much significance and even though used and reproduced several times, the poetry or songs still imply the experience of a

¹⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Chumchonchintakam* [ชุมชนจินตกรรม] (*Imagined Communities*), ed. and trans. Chanwit Kasetsiri [ชาญวิทย์ เกษตรศิริ] (Bangkok: Khletthai, 2009) 12 and 78-79 (in Thai).

particular time or period that constitutes the existence or identity of the imagined community that continues to echo.

Although the Burmese government has tried to create images that indicate the space distinctively reflecting the identity of the Military Government through the institute known as The Office of Strategic Studies located in Rangoon and Naypyidaw, the new capital, in order to make the world know about its images as a means to destroy and dissolve the power of the minority or ethnic groups of people making up half of the country's population, by using weapons, the army and a civil war without considering human rights and humanitarian awareness. The central government claims that their efforts are a righteous means because they are attempting to destroy the resistant groups of people and they also have adopted the policy of Burmanization with the Shan who are the second largest group in the country.¹⁶ Regardless of this, the Shan have tried to regain their freedom and their land using force as well as art and culture to bind the Shan in unity.

It is questionable whether using force will be successful or not, and how long it will take. The efforts to struggle to maintain one's race using the special and existing evidence among the Shan ethnic group by means of the literary dimension relating to the story of *Samlor-Nang Upiam* have succeeded due to three factors as follows: 1) the outstanding position of the story that encompasses the values and connection of this group of people; 2) the passing on of the values by the people they love and trust, such as family, monks, artists and policy holders, who aim to redeem their nation by culture in a heart to heart manner; and 3) the cultural media advocating this literary work conforms to the production system and the disseminating method specified by the government.

In such situations the folk story which this research has dealt with has spread widely in the forms of story telling, printed media and songs and has taken deep root in the soul of the all Shan in the Shan

¹⁶ Thitiwut Thuethong [ฐิติวุฒิ ถือทอง], "Kanmueang Attalak Haeng Sahaphap Phama: Korani Chonchat Tai Yai [การเมืองอัตลักษณ์แห่งสหภาพพม่า: กรณีชนชาติไทใหญ่] (Identities, Politics of Myanmar: The Case of the Shan)" (Master's Thesis (Political Science), Thammasat University, 2005) 107 (in Thai).

State. As mentioned above, although the Shan State is under Burmese government control, all the land as imagined by the Shan belongs to them and they are bound together by these media which confirms that their community is sustainable.

The researcher, as a scholar in literary studies, has realized the infinite value of the Shan literature which can appropriately serve the community in its present social context. This literature provides an aesthetic appreciation to the audience while stimulating their ethical and ethnic awareness. These literary works are able to unite their hearts in all circumstances. All in all, this can be considered the holistic value of literature that is created by a group of people and is truly for the benefits of the group.

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