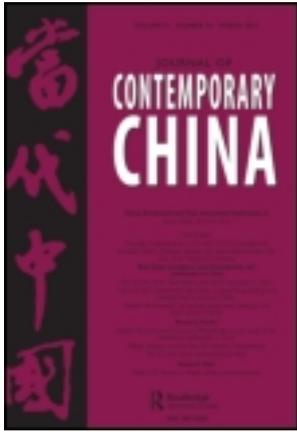


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# Transnational Ties, HIV/AIDS Prevention and State–Minority Relations in Sipsongpanna, Southwest China

ENZE HAN\*

*This paper depicts the transnational ethnic and religious ties between China and Southeast Asia and examines the cultural, political and economic implications for state–minority relations in Southwest China. It documents how transnational ethnic and religious ties facilitate cultural revival among the ethnic Dai people in Southwest China and examines the impact of Buddhist networks on local governance. In particular, it portrays the cooperative relationship between the Chinese state and the Buddhist Sangha on social issues such as HIV/AIDS prevention and care. The paper argues that the Chinese state is more willing to cooperate with transnational ethnic and religious groups when the latter can help improve local governance and generate economic development, under the condition that they do not challenge the state’s ultimate legitimacy and authority.*

## Introduction

In this age of globalization, transnational networks of people, goods and information have received great attention across different academic disciplines.<sup>1</sup> These transnational ties are nonetheless nothing new, and we can say that the movements of people, goods and information across spaces have been ongoing phenomena for centuries. What is new is after a period of time, when the concept of the nation-state has achieved its supremacy in the international system, the old and new transnational ties are increasingly challenging that supremacy. In studies on transnational ethnic politics, growing attention has been paid to how international factors, such as ethnic

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1. For example, James N. Rosenau, *Distant Proximities: Dynamics beyond Globalization* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); Anne-Marie Slaughter, *A New World Order* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); Sidney Tarrow, *The New Transnational Activism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

and religious ties across national borders, have affected political developments within sovereign borders.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, transnational ethnic and religious ties can be ostensibly political and contentious, as they sometimes are a major causal factor in initiating and sustaining domestic inter-ethnic conflict.<sup>3</sup> For example, the Tamil diaspora in North America and Europe has provided significant funding to sustain long-term guerrilla warfare between the Tamil Tigers and the Sri Lankan government.<sup>4</sup> Transnational Islamist and terrorist groups are also destabilizing forces in many Muslim countries and the world as a whole.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, there are also many other transnational ties that are not particularly contentious, in the sense that their activities and aims are not specifically concerned with 'contentious' politics, such as separatist movements or ethnic and religious civil wars. Some are only interested in trade and business, such as the overseas Chinese community and its relationship with mainland China's economic and political change.<sup>6</sup> Others, such as many religious missionary networks, are primarily interested in the transmission of religious doctrines and conversion of non-believers.<sup>7</sup> In some ways, these kinds of transnational ethnic and religious ties are perhaps the most numerous, and by studying them we can gain great insights into aspects of ethnic politics that are often overlooked by studies that focus specifically on contentious politics.

One of the prominent political traits of the People's Republic of China's government is its strident opposition to foreign interference in its domestic affairs, especially with regard to criticism related to policies concerning ethnic minorities or religion, which often draws vehement protest from the Chinese government. This not only applies to the Chinese government's reactions to Western criticism of its human rights record, but particularly to external ethnic organizations that aim to represent and support China's domestic ethnic minorities. The CCP's propaganda war against the Tibetan exile community and the Dalai Lama in particular is extremely harsh,

2. For example, David A. Lake and Donald Rothchild, *The International Spread of Ethnic Conflict: Fear, Diffusion, and Escalation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998); Michael E. Brown, *The International Dimensions of Internal Conflict* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996); Stephen M. Saideman, *The Ties That Divide: Ethnic Politics, Foreign Policy and International Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

3. For example, Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Erin K. Jenne, *Ethnic Bargaining: The Paradox of Minority Empowerment* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007); Pieter Van Houten, 'The role of a minority's reference state in ethnic relations', *Archives europeenes de sociologie [European Journal of Sociology]* 34(2), (1998), pp. 110–146; Charles King and Neil J. Melvin, 'Diaspora politics: ethnic linkages, foreign policy, and security in Eurasia', *International Security* 24(3), (1999), pp. 108–138.

4. Sarah Wayland, 'Ethnonationalist networks and transnational opportunities: the Sri Lanka Tamil diaspora', *Review of International Studies* 30(3), (2004), pp. 405–426.

5. For example, see Frederic Volpi, *Transnational Islam and Regional Security: Cooperation and Diversity between Europe and North Africa* (London: Routledge, 2008); Justin Hastings, *No Man's Land: Globalization, Territory, and Clandestine Groups in Southeast Asia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010).

6. For example, see Alan Smart and Jinn-Yuh Hsu, 'The Chinese diaspora, foreign investment and economic development in China', *The Review of International Affairs* 3(4), (2004), pp. 544–566; Michael Godley, *The Mandarin-Capitalists from Nanyang: Overseas Chinese Enterprise in the Modernisation of China 1893–1911* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

7. Helen Rose Ebaugh and Janet Saltzman Chafetz, *Religion Across Borders: Transnational Immigrant Networks* (Walnut Creek, Lanham, New York and Oxford: Altamir Press, 2002); Afe Adogame and James V. Spickard, *Religion Crossing Boundaries: Transnational Religious and Social Dynamics in Africa and the New African Diaspora* (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2010); Thomas Csordas, *Transnational Transcendence: Essays on Religion and Globalization* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, CA and London: University of California Press, 2009).

with the CCP calling the Dalai Lama ‘a jackal clad in Buddhist monk’s robes’.<sup>8</sup> Or in the aftermath of the ethnic Uighur riot in Xinjiang, the Chinese government accused Rebiya Kadeer and the World Uighur Congress of ‘inciting violence’ and ‘splitting the motherland’.<sup>9</sup> However, if we assumed that the Chinese government takes a uniform reaction to external ethnic and religious involvement within its sovereign borders, then we would be mistaken because the Chinese government’s approach to ethnic and religious affairs in China is, in fact, quite multifaceted. Aside from instances of paranoia and repression, it also shows cooperation and tolerance if it does not feel its legitimacy is threatened or if it sees potential benefits in situations where its domestic minority populations have equally significant external ethnic and religious linkages. This reminds us that the existence of transnational ethnic and religious ties does not necessarily imply a desire to destabilize the Chinese government or challenge China’s territorial integrity. In such a situation, the Chinese government is not likely to be hostile towards such transnational ties.

This paper aims to describe one example of such transnational ethnic and religious ties between China and Southeast Asia and examines the cultural, political and economic implications for state–minority relations in Southwest China. It documents how transnational ethnic and religious ties facilitate cultural revival among the ethnic Dai people in Southwest China and examines the impact of Buddhist networks on local governance. In particular, it portrays the cooperative relationship between the Chinese state and the Buddhist Sangha<sup>10</sup> on social issues such as HIV/AIDS prevention and care. The paper argues that the Chinese state is more willing to cooperate with transnational ethnic and religious groups when the latter can help improve local governance and generate economic development, under the condition that they do not challenge the state’s ultimate legitimacy and authority.

### The case of Sipsongpanna

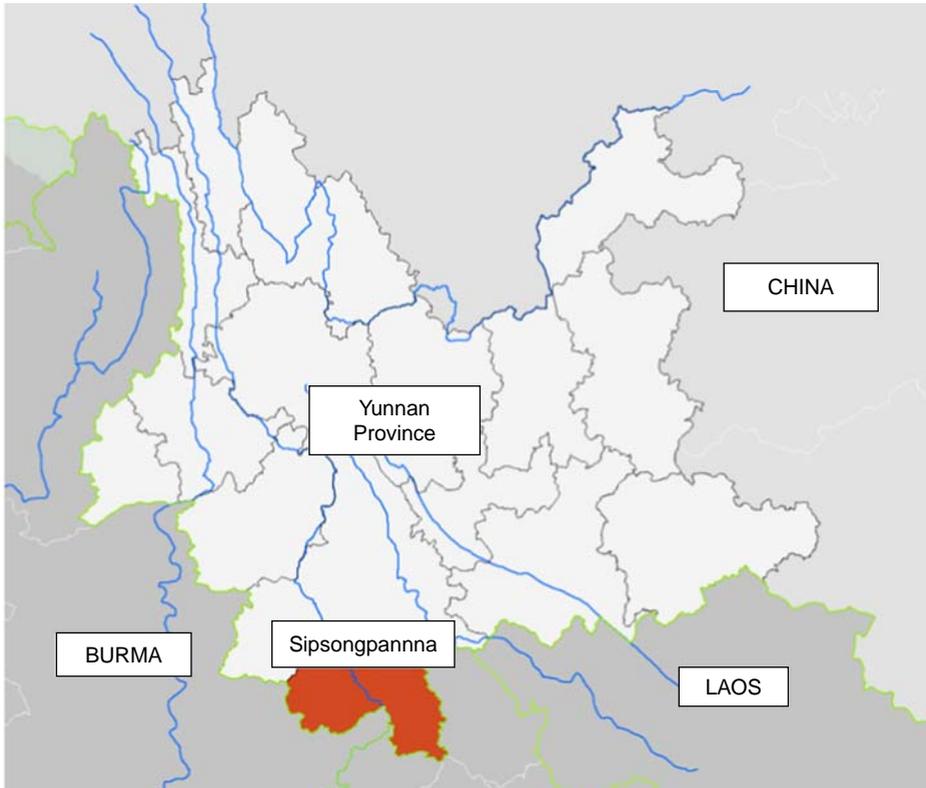
Located at the southwestern corner of the People’s Republic of China, Sipsongpanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture (*Xishuangbanna Daizu Zizhizhou*) is a tip of land with territory size similar to contemporary Israel or Slovenia (see Figure 1). Part of a crescent of border land that connects China with mainland Southeast Asia, Sipsongpanna borders both Burma (Myanmar) and Laos and is not far from the Golden Triangle, an area between Thailand, Burma and Laos that is one of the world’s prime opium production bases. For the past few decades, Sipsongpanna has often been portrayed in the Chinese media and public discourse as an area of exotic culture and colorful minority people, and it is one of the first in China to develop ethnic tourism industry. Due to its geographical and cultural proximity to mainland Southeast Asia, Sipsongpanna has become a popular tourist destination for domestic Chinese tourists to experience a taste of tropical Southeast Asia without the need to go abroad.

Under the surface of a massive influx of Han Chinese tourists into Sipsongpanna, however, there has also been an undercurrent of constant movement of people and

8. Edward Wong, ‘Dalai Lama’s defeat to be holidays in Tibet’, *New York Times*, (19 January 2009).

9. Antoaneta Bezlova, ‘Xinjiang crisis creates ripples abroad’, *Asia Times*, (31 July 2009).

10. Sangha usually refers to a Buddhist monastic community.



**Figure 1.** Map of Sipsongpanna.

goods across the border with Burma, Laos and Thailand. As the titular nationality of the region, the ethnic Dai people share strong linguistic, cultural and religious ties with other Tai-speaking communities in mainland Southeast Asia.<sup>11</sup> The Sipsongpanna Dai Kingdom during pre-modern times was one of the four prominent Tai kingdoms existing in upper mainland Southeast Asia, the other three being Lanna in contemporary Chiang Mai, Thailand; Kengtung, in Burma's Shan state; and Luang Prabang, in Laos.<sup>12</sup> Despite the imposition of modern borders and controls starting in the mid-twentieth century, 'border crossing' has remained relatively easy and frequent for many locals. This is not to say that borders do not have any meaning for the locals, and in fact we can argue that the sense of geopolitical differences is increasingly being internalized and entrenched among the local population. However, national borders in this instance do not pose significant barriers against movement of people and goods. On the contrary, we can argue that it is these official borders that have encouraged or facilitated these movements because of imbalances in economic

11. In this paper, Dai is used to refer to the ethnic group in China. Tai, on the other hand, is used to refer to the transnational Tai/Kadai ethno-linguistic community across mainland Southeast Asia.

12. Charles Patterson Giersch, *Asian Borderlands: The Transformation of Qing China's Yunnan Frontier* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 6.

opportunities or political spaces.<sup>13</sup> The existence of borders and separate sovereignties also means that there are opportunities for people to exit when times are hard and return when things improve. In the case of the Dai, when things got really rough, such as during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), when their traditional culture and Buddhist religion came under severe attack from the Chinese state, many people simply voted with their feet and fled to Burma's Shan state and northern Thailand.<sup>14</sup> In the process, they took with them valuable cultural and religious relics.<sup>15</sup> When many if not all cultural and religious sites and artifacts were smashed by the Red Guards in China, Dai refugees made it possible to protect their culture from total annihilation. After the Cultural Revolution, when Deng Xiaoping started his reform and opening policies, the Dai's cultural revival relied significantly on those people who had fled across the border and preserved their culture.

Support, in the form of manpower and money, was sent in from Burma's Shan state and Thailand to rebuild the Buddhist Sangha in Sipsongpanna. Dai monks, because of their profound training in both Buddhist canon and the Dai language and scripts, were at the forefront of the cultural revival movement.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, Buddhist ties across national borders have provided opportunities for the training of monks and the exchange of people and ideas. These transitional ties have also encouraged Dai Buddhist monks to become socially engaged in Sipsongpanna. Inspired by Buddhist social engagement in mainland Southeast Asia, Dai monks have started taking on more social missions, such as HIV/AIDS prevention and care.

### Transnational ties and cultural revival in Sipsongpanna

The overall Dai population in China, according to the 2000 National Census, is about 1.16 million.<sup>17</sup> Most of the Dai people live on a strip of land along China's Southwestern border area in Yunnan Province. There are also several subgroups of Dai, most of which speak Tai/Kadai languages. For the Dai in Sipsongpanna, they are often referred to as Lue or Dai Lue,<sup>18</sup> and its total population is about 300,000, about one-third of the population of Sipsongpanna. Most Dai practice Theravada Buddhism, which differs from the Mahayana Buddhism practiced by the majority Han Chinese. Thus, religiously and culturally speaking, the Dai are more closely linked with mainland Southeast Asia than with China. However, the political presence of imperial China was felt by the Dai Kingdom in Sipsongpanna early on. Yet, due to Sipsongpanna's distance from China proper, and also because of its

13. Hastings Donnan and Thomas M. Wilson, *Borders: Frontiers of Identity, Nation and State* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 1999), p. 87.

14. The same is also true for many other ethnic minority groups living along China's southwestern border area.

15. Sara Davis, *Song & Silence: Ethnic Revival on China's Southwest Borders* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

16. Sara Davis, 'Premodern flows in postmodern China: globalization and the Sipsongpanna Tais', *Modern China* 29(2), (2003), pp. 196–203.

17. The Chinese national census data are available at: [www.chinadataonline.org](http://www.chinadataonline.org)

18. People generally refer to themselves as Dai, and Lue is often used to differentiate the group from other subgroups of Dai. Also, with the effort the Chinese state invested in creating a single overarching Dai nationality, these days it is increasingly the case for Dai Lue and other subgroups of Dai, such as Dai Nuer of Dehong, to consider themselves as belonging to the single ethnic group. See Thomas A. Borchert, *Educating Monks: Buddhism, Politics and Freedom of Religion on China's Southwest Border*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 2006, p. 12.

rugged terrain and the proliferation of tropical diseases such as malaria, the Chinese imperial court never managed to implement strict direct rule there.<sup>19</sup> In the meantime, the Dai Kingdom also paid tribute to Burma, and thus developed an ambiguous relationship with both of its bigger neighbors, as in the old Dai saying ‘China as father and Burma as mother’ (*haw bien paw man bien mae*).<sup>20</sup>

The real imposition of direct control and effective political incorporation of Sipsongpanna into China’s geopolitical body came after the victory of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in the Chinese Civil War. PLA troops entered Sipsongpanna in 1950, and on 23 January 1953, Sipsongpanna was designated as an autonomous region (later changed to prefecture) for the Dai. The Dai royal family was stripped of its royal title and moved to Kunming, the capital of Yunnan Province, a few hundred kilometers north, so that it would be far away from its power base in Sipsongpanna.<sup>21</sup> Although the CCP’s initial policies in Sipsongpanna were relatively moderate and tolerant, the Cultural Revolution brought a big political and cultural onslaught against the Dai, especially on their institutionalized religion, Theravada Buddhism. Most Buddhist temples and monasteries were ransacked and torn down. Monks and novices were also forcibly defrocked and returned to secular life.<sup>22</sup> During the Cultural Revolution, religious life in Sipsongpanna came to a dramatic halt, and a whole generation of Dai males lost their access to monastery life and religious education.

The Dai’s religious education was traditionally achieved in monasteries. When boys reached the ages of between seven and nine, they would enter the monasteries to become novices, during which time they not only study Buddhist teachings but also Dai scripts and history. This form of education is often called apprentice education.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, monastery education is at the core of Dai cultural transmission. However, because of the Cultural Revolution, many monks either fled to Burma or Thailand or were defrocked and, accordingly, a whole generation of Dai males didn’t have the opportunity to continue this cultural and religious tradition. When the Cultural Revolution ended, and as Dai villagers rushed to restore the rightful position of Theravada Buddhism in their society, they faced the difficulty of not having enough qualified monks to train novices at monasteries. Many villages sent invitations to monasteries in Burma’s Shan state and Thailand for assistance. Many Dai monks who

19. John E. Herman, ‘The cant of conquest: Tusi offices and China’s political incorporation of the southwest frontier’, in Pamela Kyle Crossley, Helen F. Siu and Donald S. Sutton, eds, *Empire at the Margins: Culture, Ethnicity, and Frontier in Early Modern China* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, CA and London: University of California Press, 2006).

20. Giersch, *Asian Borderlands*, p. 36.

21. Shih-Chung Hsieh, *Ethnic–Political Adaptation and Ethnic Change of the Sipsong Panna Dai: An Ethnohistorical Analysis*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington, 1989, p. 182.

22. According to a survey carried out by Hasegawa Kiyoshi, the number of temples in Sipsongpanna in the 1950s was over 500, but in 1981 there were only 145 left. The number of monks in the 1950s was close to 1,000, and in 1981 there were none left. There were more than 5,000 novices in Sipsongpanna in the 1950s, and that number dwindled to a mere 655 in 1981, when Dai villagers were able to send their sons to the monasteries once again. See Kiyoshi Hasegawa, ‘Cultural revival and ethnicity: the case of the Tai Lüe in the Sipsong Panna, Yunnan Province’, in Hayashi Yukio and Yang Guangyuan, eds, *Dynamics of Ethnic Cultures across National Boundaries in Southwestern China and Mainland Southeast Asia: Relations, Societies, and Languages* (Chiang Mai: Ming Muang Printing House, 2000). Also see Susan K. McCarthy, *Communist Multiculturalism: Ethnic Revival in Southwest China* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2009), p. 75.

23. Anne M. Blackburn, *Buddhist Learning and Textual Practice in Eighteenth-Century Lankan Monastic Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

had fled Sipsongpanna came back, as did many foreign monks from areas such as Burma's Shan state and Thailand, to serve as abbots at local monasteries in Sipsongpanna. In 1980, the Sipsongpanna Buddhist Association (*Xishuangbanna fojiao xiehui*) was restored, and it originally welcomed those foreign monks to Sipsongpanna to assist in the restoration of Buddhism.<sup>24</sup>

The current abbot of Wat Pajie (*zongfosi*) is an excellent example of a returning monk from Southeast Asia. Khuba Meung Lom Jom was born in 1960 in Menghai County, Sipsongpanna. When the Cultural Revolution started in 1966, his parents took him and fled to Burma's Shan state. In 1973, he was ordained at a temple in Kengtung, Burma, and later received further religious training in Thailand. In 1985, when he was 25-years-old, his hometown sent him an invitation to become the abbot of a recently rebuilt temple. He thus returned to China and gradually moved up the ranks. Eventually, he became the abbot of Wat Pajie as well as the head of the Buddhist Association. In 2004, he was ordained as Khuba Meung, the highest-ranked monk in Sipsongpanna, which was also the first such ordination to occur since the 1930s. Khuba Meung Lom Jom was later promoted to vice-president of China's National Buddhist Association and took on several other political and honorary positions at both the provincial and national level.<sup>25</sup>

The restoration of Theravada Buddhism in Sipsongpanna also means more and more Dai novices and monks can travel to Burma's Shan state, Thailand or even Sri Lanka to further their religious education. In the past, people could cross into Burma without passports, and the most common route of travel was from Tachilek, Burma and on to Maesai in Thailand, where there is a big Dai community. This form of border crossing is still the most common, and is often built on existing family relations. Because of the easiness of such crossing, it is difficult to gauge exactly how many Dai boys have gone down to Burma and Thailand to study in monasteries there, and as a matter of fact many current senior monks in Sipsongpanna had, at one time, study experiences either in Burma or Thailand.

In 1990, Wat Pajie, the central temple of Sipsongpanna, was rebuilt. The reconstruction of Wat Pajie was accomplished with Chinese state funding and donations from Thailand.<sup>26</sup> Afterwards, the Sipsongpanna Dhamma School (*xishuangbanna foxueyuan*) was established there in 1993 for the purpose of more formal religious training. The Dhamma School has since moved to the newly built Wat Luang Meung Lue outside of Jinghong in 2008. The Dhamma School offers a standard curriculum that includes both religious subjects and other non-religious ones, such as Chinese, mathematics, English and so forth. They recruit novices who have completed six years of primary education and provide three years of middle

24. That attitude gradually changed, and eventually only those who could claim Chinese citizenship could stay indefinitely and become abbots. These days, visiting foreign monks from Burma's Shan state and Thailand have to register with the public security bureau and religious affairs bureau and are permitted to stay for between one and four years. See Thomas A. Borchert, 'Training monks or men: Theravada monastic education, subnationalism and the national Sangha of China', *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 28(2), (2005), p. 256.

25. A biography of Khuba Meung Lom Jom is available at: <http://www.fgzj.org/viewnews-1309>.

26. Hsieh, *Ethnic-Political Adaptation and Ethnic Change of the Sipsong Panna Dai*, p. 242. Also see Roger Casas, 'On the situation of Theravada Buddhism in contemporary Xishuangbanna', in Don McCaskill, Prasit Leepreecha and Kwanchewan Buadaeng, eds, *Challenging the Limits: Indigenous Groups of the Mekong Region* (Chiang Mai: Mekong Press, 2008).

school education plus another three years of technical school training (*zhongzhuan*). After those six years of training, for people who still want to continue their education, there are also opportunities established through government exchange scholarships to study in Burma, Thailand and Sri Lanka. Today, almost half of the graduates go to these three countries for further Buddhist education.<sup>27</sup>

As a result of these transnational linkages and the help that the Sipsongpanna Sangha has received from Southeast Asia, the numbers of temples, monks and novices have generally been restored to their pre-Cultural Revolution levels. It is true that the Chinese government's policy change has played an equally important role, but without the money and people from Southeast Asia, it is almost unimaginable how this cultural and religious revival would have been possible in Sipsongpanna. Now, as the Buddhist Sangha has become more securely reestablished, Dai monks have started to imitate the social engagement of the monks in Thailand.

### Home of the Buddha's Light (*Foguangzhijia*)

Yunnan has one of the highest HIV infection rates of any Chinese province, if not the highest.<sup>28</sup> Due to its proximity to the Golden Triangle area, Yunnan is the main entryway for drug trafficking from Southeast Asia into China, and the HIV epidemic spread first among intravenous drug users, then to sex workers, and then to the larger community. To educate the public and raise awareness about HIV/AIDS is no easy task in China. People often equate HIV/AIDS patients with immoral behavior, and thus hold strong fear and prejudice against them. Oftentimes, people would be shunned as a result of these stigmas, which makes infected people less likely to come out and seek professional medical treatment. In Sipsongpanna, because of its burgeoning tourist industry and the resulting sex industry boom, the HIV/AIDS epidemic has made incursions into rural Dai society. As more and more people, especially the younger generation, have become infected, this has led to great social anxiety and panic. Despite this, it is still taboo to talk about HIV/AIDS. People either did not realize the immediate threat to themselves or felt scared or awkward talking about it.<sup>29</sup> The disease control bureau of the local government found it difficult to carry out its work because of these sensitivities. However, Buddhist monks proved otherwise.

In the late 1990s, some successful stories of Buddhist charity organizations in HIV/AIDS education and prevention in Thailand became known to monks in Sipsongpanna, mainly due to Dai monks' continuing ties to the Buddhist Sangha in Thailand. Specifically, there was an organization in Chiang Mai called Sangha Metta (Compassionate Monks) that provided training and support to a growing body of Thai monks and nuns about HIV/AIDS prevention and awareness education.<sup>30</sup> At the same time, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) spotted this initiative and decided to use the Sangha Metta as a model for its HIV/AIDS campaign

27. Interview at Sipsongpanna Dhamma School.

28. UNESCO's report is available at: <http://www.unescobkk.org/education/hiv aids/projects/hivadb/hiv aids-country-watch/yunnan-prc/>.

29. For a good analysis of prostitution and HIV/AIDS prevention in Xishuangbanna, see Sandra Teresa Hyde, *Eating Spring Rice: The Cultural Politics of Aids in Southwest China* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, CA and London: University of California Press, 2007).

30. For information on the Sangha Metta, see [www.buddhanet.net/sangha-metta/project.html](http://www.buddhanet.net/sangha-metta/project.html).

in the Mekong sub-region, which includes China's Yunnan Province, due to the similar Theravada Buddhist heritage among various ethnic minorities, such as the Dai. Thus, starting in 1997, the UNICEF Yunnan Mekong Sub-region HIV/AIDS Prevention and Care Project started training Dai monks from Sipsongpanna in HIV/AIDS awareness and counseling.<sup>31</sup> In September 1999, several Dai monks from Wat Pajie went to Chiang Mai to attend an HIV/AIDS awareness-raising seminar. The following year, in March 2000, six Thai monks from the Sangha Metta project came to Sipsongpanna and carried out two workshops. The first workshop aimed at adult monks, during which they were trained in certain skills that can be used to teach community members about HIV/AIDS prevention. They also ran a second workshop with novices at the Dhamma School to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS. These workshops and activities carried out by the Thai monks were greatly appreciated by senior monks at Sipsongpanna, and the abbot of the Wat Pajie reportedly 'issued a directive for all monks under his supervision to become actively engaged in HIV/AIDS prevention and care'.<sup>32</sup>

In July 2003, with financial support from UNICEF and institutional support from the Yunnan HIV/AIDS Prevention Office, the Sipsongpanna Religious and Ethnic Affairs Bureau and the Sipsongpanna Buddhist Association started a Buddhist charity called Home of Buddha's Light (HBL) in Sipsongpanna, headquartered at Wat Pajie. UNICEF would provide RMB 150,000 per year over a five-year period to fund the operation of HBL.<sup>33</sup> The Sipsongpanna Buddhist Association would provide monks and staff and coordinate lay people as volunteers for its outreach programs.

The HBL's mission is to use Buddhism's Four Virtues and Five Precepts to educate the public about HIV/AIDS prevention and care.<sup>34</sup> The Four Virtues are benevolence, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity. By promoting these Four Virtues, it aims to reduce the psychological suffering of people living with HIV, and it also hopes to educate the public to develop compassion and understanding for people who are HIV-positive. The HBL also encourages the public to adhere to Buddhism's Five Precepts: refraining from killing; refraining from stealing; refraining from improper sexual behavior; refraining from lying; and refraining from taking intoxicating materials. Among them, the third and fifth precepts are particularly relevant for the HIV/AIDS campaign, as the most common methods of HIV transmission are through unprotected sex and abuse of intravenous drugs: the third precept encourages safe sex and monogamy, while the fifth discourages drug abuse.

With this mission, HBL focuses on education and care. The first component of its education campaign is to raise public awareness about what HIV and AIDS are, how HIV is transmitted, and how to prevent its transmission. Because Buddhist temples play a central role in Dai village life, HBL has organized a series of training sessions for monks and novices at Wat Pajie so that monks and novices can return to their home villages with knowledge and skills about HIV/AIDS prevention. For example,

31. 'Monks teach, practice tolerance for HIV-AIDS victims', *People's Daily* (26 October 2005), available at: [http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200510/26/eng20051026\\_216985.html](http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200510/26/eng20051026_216985.html).

32. The Sanga Metta report is available at: [www.buddhanet.net/sangha-metta/report.html](http://www.buddhanet.net/sangha-metta/report.html).

33. Funding from UNICEF ended in 2008, so these days there are significant financial strains on the operation of the organization. The head of HBL is actively soliciting donations and funding both domestically and internationally. Interview at HBL.

34. Interview at HBL.

in August 2005, HBL organized a seminar for Dai monks under the age of 20 at Wat Pajie. During the seminar, Khuma Meung Lom Jom, the abbot of Wat Pajie, lectured the monks on how to be a good Buddhist and why it is important for young monks to know about HIV/AIDS prevention. During the seminar, a HIV-positive patient also told the monks his personal story about fighting the disease.<sup>35</sup> As knots that connect Dai social and religious life and as educators themselves, Dai monks play a key role in transmitting this knowledge to laypeople.

The other component of HBL's educational work, and the biggest one, is its public outreach campaign. This involves HBL organizing a team comprising Buddhist monks and lay volunteers to go to Dai villages around Sipsongpanna Prefecture. The venues for these campaigns are either village temples or common areas. Usually, HBL coordinates with village heads to organize villagers to attend information sessions. First, they invite monks to give a public sermon about Buddhist teachings. After the sermon, HBL staff show a video about HIV/AIDS and then break villagers up into two groups, one for men and the other for women. In each group, HBL staff and volunteers organize gender-specific demonstrations of how to properly use condoms and prevent HIV transmission during sexual intercourse. They would educate the public about symptoms of HIV infection and how to get tested at the CDC (Center for Disease Control). On many occasions, HBL would also give out free condoms to villagers. Because many Dai villagers have limited knowledge of Chinese, the language of communication used in these communal meetings is usually Dai. HBL has also made educational leaflets in the Dai language and infused them with images of Buddha and Buddhist teachings. Over the years, HBL has gone to more than 50 Dai villages throughout the prefecture, and distributed thousands of leaflets and other educational posters.<sup>36</sup>

HBL also times its outreach campaigns with Buddhist and national holidays and other public events. For example, when there is a temple fair or a Buddhist ceremony, HBL staff members and volunteers will set up a booth to distribute educational leaflets to people. Every year on 1 December—World AIDS Day—HBL sets up an educational booth at Jinghong's city center. In addition, HBL has sponsored a few Dai music concerts, featuring Dai folk and pop musicians, to promote its cause. For example, HBL sponsored a concert by a popular Dai band called Shengtaile (Sounds of Dai Lue), which specifically wrote a song titled 'AIDS is a Human-Eating Devil'.<sup>37</sup>

Other than raising public awareness through its education campaigns, HBL also provides counseling and care for people living with HIV, such as setting up a phone hotline. Every month, it organizes people living with HIV to discuss their psychological and physical problems, and encourages them to develop faith and compassion for life. Through donations, HBL also provides food and medicine to individuals and families who have economic difficulties due to the illness. In 2005, HBL initiated certain small business opportunities for people living with HIV to financially support themselves.<sup>38</sup> Most importantly, HBL organizes Buddhist monks

35. HBL work report.

36. Interview at HBL.

37. See <http://shengtaile.blog.163.com/blog/static/36722240200911191155827/>

38. One of the business initiatives is to arrange HIV sufferers to raise peacocks so that they can sell those peacocks to a commercial company. However, this project did not last very long because raising peacocks requires too much work for HIV sufferers. Interview at HBL.

to provide passage services for people who are dying of AIDS. In a Buddhist society such as the Dai's, these services offer great comfort and reduce physical and psychological suffering. In a testimony by a Dai patient who was dying, he said, 'I thank the Buddha for accompanying me through this most difficult time in my life. With the love and compassion of the monks, I am no longer afraid of death'.<sup>39</sup>

HBL has become a model for ethnic and religious charity organizations devoted to HIV/AIDS in China. In 2005, Buddhist monks from Wat Pajie and HBL staff members went to Beijing and did an interview on the Chinese national CCTV. They were also interviewed in various national newspapers and magazines, such as the *China Youth Daily* and *Nanfengchuang Magazine*.<sup>40</sup> Its model has also been promoted among other Theravada Buddhist communities in southern Yunnan Province. In the meantime, other ethnic and religious NGOs, such as those from Tibetan areas and Muslim areas in Northwest China, have visited Sipsongpanna to learn from HBL's experiences in how to use religion to combat HIV/AIDS.<sup>41</sup> Finally, because of the success of its work, the head of HBL, Mr Ai, won a full scholarship from the International AIDS Society to attend the International AIDS Conference in Vienna in 2010.

### Buddhist monks and local governance

Because of its infusion of Buddhist teaching and the monks' social authority with its campaigns, HBL's work has gradually achieved positive responses among ordinary Dai people.<sup>42</sup> According to a medical study conducted in Sipsongpanna, attitudes toward people living with HIV and AIDS improved significantly when Buddhist monks became involved in HIV/AIDS awareness programs.<sup>43</sup> Through the teachings of Buddhism and HBL's campaign against HIV/AIDS discrimination, the general public has developed more compassion and shown improved awareness and understanding. These efforts certainly can significantly reduce stigmatization of HIV/AIDS and alleviate the psychological trauma of people living with it.<sup>44</sup>

Furthermore, because of Buddhist monks' high status in Dai society, the messages they deliver carry strong authority. According Mr Ai, the head of HBL, 'For Buddhists, the words of monks often carry more authority than those of government officials or the police'.<sup>45</sup> Because of this authority, when monks preach safe sex and refraining from drug use, the community is more likely to heed these messages than official government propaganda. In this case, religious teaching plus 'scientific'

39. International Aids Medicine Academy, *Hope from the Home of Buddha's Light* (19 April 2006), available at: <http://www.aids3591.com/showart.asp?id=324&showpage=1>.

40. Yin Hongwei, 'Home of Buddha's Light', *Nanfengchuang* (16 December 2008), available at: <http://www.nfcmag.com/articles/1299>

41. Interview at HBL.

42. At the beginning, there was some criticism from ordinary Dai people of monks' involvement in the HBL campaigns because many thought it distracted monks from their main duty, which is to study Buddhism in temples.

43. Wu Feng, Zhang Kong-lai and Shan Guang-liang, 'An HIV/AIDS intervention programme with Buddhist aid in Yunnan Province', *Chinese Medical Journal* 123(8), (2010), pp. 1011–1016.

44. This effect probably has to do with Buddhism's specific emphasis on compassion and the comforting impact of religion on believers. See Tomoko Kubotani and David Engstrom, 'The roles of Buddhist temples in the treatment of HIV/AIDS in Thailand', *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* 32(4), (2005), pp. 5–21.

45. Interview.

knowledge about safe sex work hand-in-hand, and prove to be quite effective in the fight against HIV/AIDS in Sipsongpanna.<sup>46</sup>

The HBL's popularity among the Dai people and the success of its campaign against HIV/AIDS also makes the local Chinese government realize the utility of working together with this ostensibly ethnic and religious organization. During some of HBL's outreach campaigns, the local Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau and Health and Disease Control Office both provided institutional support, such as technical staff and transportation. Even without such tangible support, the tacit approval of its operation by the local government is already a sign that the government sees the work of HBL in a positive light. As HBL volunteer Ms Jin told me:

In general, the government has taken the backseat regarding our work on HIV/AIDS prevention. Of course, at the very beginning, when monks from our organization went to villages to preach on these issues, the village heads and other government officials were a bit uncomfortable because they felt that we were trying to do their job and might steal their authority. However, after a while they came to realize that our work was complementary to theirs, and would in fact make their work much easier. So these days, they have no problems with us anymore. In some cases, for example, if a village is to have a big ceremony during holidays, the local government would come to Wat Pajie to ask our organization to go and get involved.<sup>47</sup>

According to an interview given by the Sipsongpanna Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau, originally the government was concerned that religion should not become involved in social activities. They worried about whether monks' involvement in the anti-HIV/AIDS campaign would have a negative effect on the government and the Communist Party, which is after all officially an atheist entity. However, after trials with the HBL, the government realized that the monks could do the same job more effectively than the government and gradually retreated. During my field work in Sipsongpanna, many Dai people told me they were more willing to listen to Buddhist monks than government officials. Therefore, from the government's point of view, instead of working on certain projects while not being appreciated by the local people, it can now delegate some of its work to Buddhist monks, which in return yields better results.

Indeed, the success story of HBL has made the local government in Sipsongpanna increasingly willing to utilize Buddhist monks in improving local governance. For example, the local government actively engaged Buddhist monks in its anti-drug campaigns. In October 2010, more than 100 monks and novices from Sipsongpanna Dhamma School went to visit drug addicts at a rehab facility in Jinghong. There, the monks prayed for those drug addicts and encouraged them to overcome their addictions.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, whenever the Chinese government has a public relations campaign, it will also call on the monks from Wat Pajie to take part in it. The most recent one was asking monks to help promote the new 'Road Traffic Safety Regulation' in rural Sipsongpanna.

46. Buddhism does not have as much of a taboo against condom use as, for example, Catholicism.

47. Interview at HBL.

48. Interview at HBL.

## Minority–state relations in China

So far we have seen a case of how transnational ethnic and religious networks have led to a cultural and religious revival among the Dai in Sipsongpanna. As a result of this revival, contingent upon continual engagement with Buddhist social activists in Southeast Asia, ethnic Dai monks have taken on social missions. Through the activities of organizations such as HBL, Buddhist monks utilize their social authority to improve the social conditions among the Dai, which at the same time improves the Chinese government's local governance on issues such as HIV/AIDS. However, can we thus reach the conclusion that the Chinese government tolerates and actively cooperates with ethnic and religious entities that have extensive transnational linkages? Probably not. Even in the case of the Dai, the Chinese state still keeps a close eye on transnational linkages and finds ways to control and monitor the monks' activities. In HBL's case, the Sipsongpanna Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau managed to prevent the organization from being officially registered as an independent NGO. To this day, HBL is still officially part of the Sipsongpanna Buddhist Association, and all the outside funding and resources it receives must go through the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau.<sup>49</sup> By denying the group independent institutional status and financial capacity, the local government takes a commanding role in preventing any civil activism from getting out of hand or opposing the CCP.

However, there are still substantive differences in the Chinese state's approach toward different types of transnational ethnic and religious ties. As we have seen in the introduction regarding cases involving Tibetans and Uighurs, any transnational linkages these two groups enjoy are constantly treated with suspicion of subversion. International campaigns for a Free Tibet, for example, oftentimes lead to political repression against ethnic Tibetans domestically. The comparisons with the Tibetans and Uighurs do raise several questions however. Why does the Chinese government treat different ethnic minority groups in such different ways? How can we understand the conditions under which the Chinese state is willing to tolerate an ethnic group with strong transnational ethnic and religious links? I think the answer to these questions lies in two sets of factors: political and economic. Generally speaking, the ethnic and religious networks that the Dai enjoy with Southeast Asia are not of a political nature. There are no external organizations explicitly calling for separatism or even political autonomy for Sipsongpanna as there are for Tibet and Xinjiang.<sup>50</sup> In contrast with the Tibetans and Uighurs, the national identity of the Dai as Chinese citizens is not as contested.<sup>51</sup> Thus, politically speaking, the Chinese government is

49. However, the head of HBL is hopeful that with the upcoming leadership changes at the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau, it will get official registration. Interview at HBL.

50. On Tibet, see Melvin C. Goldstein, *The Snow Lion and the Dragon: China, Tibet, and the Dalai Lama* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999); Tsering Shakya, *The Dragon in the Land of Snows: A History of Modern Tibet since 1947* (New York: Penguin Compass, 2000). On Xinjiang, see Gardner Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs: Strangers in Their Own Land* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); James Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

51. This is not to say that all Tibetans or Uighurs do not accept their nationality as Chinese citizens. In fact, the realities of people's identities can be quite complicated. Even in the most controversial Tibetan case, some scholars claim many ethnic Tibetans do see themselves as Chinese citizens. For example, see Charlene Makley, *The Violence of Liberation: Gender and Tibetan Buddhist Revival in Post-Mao China* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007). The same can also be said about the Uighurs. For example, see James A. Millward, 'Introduction: does the 2009 Urumchi violence mark a turning point?', *Central Asian Survey* 28(4), (2010), pp. 347–360.

less wary of any political challenges those transnational ethnic and religious networks could pose to its sovereignty over Sipsongpanna. As a result, the local government is more relaxed and thus less likely to be overly suspicious or repressive of such transnational ties. At the same time, the local government often uses various means to co-opt and control these transitional ties and civil activism so that they cannot challenge the CCP's political authority. Aside from these political reasons, economically speaking, by tolerating these transnational ethnic/religious links and promoting Dai's cultural revival, the Chinese government also reaps handsome economic benefits from the burgeoning ethnic tourism industry in Sipsongpanna.

As mentioned earlier, in pre-modern times Sipsongpanna was one of a few loosely tied Tai kingdoms in Southeast Asia. However, these various Tai domains eventually were carved up and absorbed into the four contemporary nation-states of Thailand, Burma, Laos and China. Thus, for various Tai people there is no independent statehood for themselves, nor are there specific calls for pan-Tai nationalist mobilization. Only in the Burmese Shan state have the ethnic Shan fought for more autonomy from the Burmese state on and off over the past half century.<sup>52</sup> In the Dai's case, despite their relatively recent direct incorporation into China's geo-body, in 1950, after a half century of political and economic integration and national indoctrination, their sense of belonging as Chinese citizens has been relatively established.

In a survey that I conducted among 70 Dai villagers in 2008,<sup>53</sup> when I asked them whether they considered themselves Chinese citizens (*Zhongguo ren*), they unanimously answered yes. I then asked them whether they consider themselves foremost as Chinese citizen or Dai; 42 (60%) people considered themselves Chinese citizens first, while 24 (34%) said Dai, and four people considered the two concepts essentially the same. This overall identification with China also corresponds to the generally favorable view of the ongoing Sinification (*hanhua*) of the Dai (meaning assimilation of the Dai into the majority Han Chinese culture). Although 66 (94%) people interviewed said they mainly speak Dai at home, 69 (98.5%) people considered it necessary for children to learn Han Chinese. When asked directly what they think about the Sinification of Sipsongpanna overall, 48 (69%) respondents considered it a positive phenomena, five (8%) were neutral, and 16 (23%) thought it negative. All in all, it seems that the majority of people interviewed at least do not think of Sinification as negative and threatening (see Table 1 for a summary of responses).

Having said that, we also need to note that this general acceptance of being a Chinese citizen and the overall positive view of Sinification among the Dai do not mean that the Dai reject their own culture and identity. On the contrary, most people interviewed did not feel the two were contradictory—that is, one can learn the Chinese language but that will not make a Dai any less of a Dai. A Dai male interviewed summarizes his opinion on this issue:

52. Shan is the Burmese name for Tai. The Shan state is one of the largest administrative units in Burma and constitutes about a quarter of Burma's land territory. Burma's military junta has been fighting with ethnic rebels ever since the 1962 military coup in Rangoon, including the Shan. See Aung Tun Sai, *History of the Shan State: From its Origins to 1962* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2009); Martin Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).

53. This survey was conducted in two Dai villages in Damenglong, a border town 20 km away from the Sino-Burmese border. Note however, that the sampling procedure of the questionnaire was not rigorous enough to be called scientific, so readers should take the results with a grain of salt.

**Table 1.** Dai and national identity

	Yes	No	No answer or neutral	Total
Do you consider yourself first to be a Chinese citizen or Dai?	42 (Chinese citizen first)	24 (Dai first)	4 (same)	70
Do you speak Dai at home?	66	4	0	70
Do you think it necessary for kids to learn the Han Chinese language?	69	0	1	70
Do you think the Sinification process is good?	48	16	6	70

These days, younger people all can speak the Han Chinese language well, including the Yunnan dialect and Mandarin. But this is not necessarily a bad thing. The younger generation can still speak Dai, and most of them observe Dai cultural traditions both at home and at the temple. By incorporating some Han Chinese culture, it is like a bonus, something we can add on to the Dai tradition, which means people can speak both languages and understand both cultures.

This finding corresponds with those of others who have studied the Dai in Sipsongpanna. According to Thomas Borchert's observation, Dai-lue novice students, 'understand themselves to be citizens of China, and no other nations, despite ties of kinship, language, and cultures to polities of Southeast Asia'.<sup>54</sup> Or as Antonella Diana puts it, '[T]he orientation of Dai ... to the new political and economic context of globalization is informed more by a sense of belonging to the modern Chinese national community than it is by transnational ethnic community'.<sup>55</sup> This acceptance of Chinese citizenship certainly does not mean that the Dai conflate being Dai with being Han Chinese. Rather it means that they see no contradiction being ethnically Dai and politically Chinese. Thus, the efforts made by the Buddhist networks that connect Sipsongpanna with Southeast Asia do not entail challenging China's political sovereignty claim over Sipsongpanna, and no movement has risen to dispute this. Without this challenge, the Chinese state is less likely to feel threatened, and thus less likely to strike against such transnational linkages as they often do with the Tibetans and the Uighurs.

These political reasons aside, the cultural revival brought about by the Dai's transnational ethnic and religious ties has also generated a symbiotic economic relationship between the local Chinese government and the ethnic Dai community in Sipsongpanna. Scholars writing about China's economic development often point to the handsome financial and political rewards a local state can reap by promoting economic development.<sup>56</sup> In a study on the revival of popular religion in rural Northern China, Adam Chau points out how promoting religious revival is similar

54. Thomas Borchert, 'The abbot's new house: thinking about how religion works among Buddhists and ethnic minorities in Southwest China', *Journal of Church and State* 52(1), (2010), p. 136.

55. Antonella Diana, 'Re-configuring belonging in post-socialist Xishuangbanna, China', in Andrew Walker, ed., *Tai Lands and Thailand: Community and State in Southeast Asia* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2009), p. 212.

56. Jean Oi, *Rural China Takes Off: Institutional Foundations of Economic Reform* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999).

to promoting economic development because ‘Temples are like enterprises that generate prosperity for the local economy ... and income for the local state’.<sup>57</sup> The same can be said about the local state’s treatment of the Dai’s transnational connections and their cultural revival in Sipsongpanna.

The Cultural Revolution ended in political and economic disaster in China. When Deng Xiaoping came to power, promoting economic development became the top priority for the Chinese state. Authorities at all levels of government started to search for means to foster such development. Because Sipsongpanna is a landlocked border region, local political elites figured that the best means to foster development was to promote tourism around its ‘colorful’ ethnic minority culture. At a time when ordinary Chinese did not have the opportunity to go abroad, Sipsongpanna was touted as a tropical paradise with an exotic culture and people, and promoted nationally as a tourist destination where the Chinese people could experience Southeast Asia in ‘their own backyard’.<sup>58</sup> As a result of these initiatives, the Sipsongpanna prefectural government started to invest heavily in Dai cultural restoration and promotion. As such, the government tacitly allowed foreign monks and ethnic Dai who had earlier fled Sipsongpanna to come back and help restore the Buddhist Sangha. This is perhaps also the exact reason that Khuba Meung Lom Jom, when he returned from Burma to Sipsongpanna, was gradually bestowed with titles of political authority, and promoted to vice-president of China’s National Buddhist Association. The prefectural government built several Dai ethnic theme parks. In particular, many Buddhist temples were restored so that they could become tourist destinations.<sup>59</sup>

These efforts to promote the local tourist industry have been successful overall, at least economically. Especially during the 1990s, Sipsongpanna was one of the hottest domestic tourist destinations in China. According to government statistics, in 1993 about 1 million domestic tourists visited Sipsongpanna.<sup>60</sup> In 2004, that number increased to 2.7 million.<sup>61</sup> Now, the capital city of Jinghong has a relatively large airport with frequent domestic and international flights, to Thailand, Laos and Burma. According to Susan McCarthy, before the tourist boom, Sipsongpanna ranked in the bottom third of all prefectures and municipal districts in Yunnan Province in terms of tax revenue per capita. However, by 2003, it was among the top three.<sup>62</sup> This boom in ethnic tourism thus greatly beefed up local coffers, offering great incentives for the local government to continue its support of the Buddhist Sangha and tolerate or even

57. Adam Yuet Chau, ‘The politics of legitimation and the revival of popular religion in Shaanbei, North-Central China’, *Modern China* 31(2), (2005), p. 245.

58. In 1981, the Sipsongpanna prefectural government edited a ‘Sipsongpanna Tourist Resource Report’, and submitted it to the State Council. The following year, Sipsongpanna was approved as being one of the first batch of major tourist destinations in China. See Editorial Committee for Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture Gazetteer, *Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture Gazetteer* (Beijing: Xinhua Press, 2002), p. 980.

59. One less desirable side effect of the promotion of ethnic tourism in Sipsongpanna is the commercialization of Dai culture. For example, in some Dai theme parks, there is a daily performance of the Dai New Year celebration for domestic Chinese tourists. On this, see Sara Davis, ‘The Hawaiification of Xishuangbanna: orality, power, and cultural survival in Southwest China’, *The Drama Review: TDR* 45(4), (2001), pp. 25–41; Monica A. Cable, *Ethnicity Lived and (Mis)Represented: Ethnic Tourism among the Dai in Southwest China*, Ph.D. dissertation, Tulane University, 2006.

60. Editorial Committee for Sipsongpanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture Gazetteer, *Sipsongpanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture Gazetteer*, p. 998.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 588.

62. McCarthy, *Communist Multiculturalism*, p. 84.

assist in its ongoing transnational ethnic/religious exchanges with mainland Southeast Asia.

Thus a symbiotic relationship has developed between the Chinese government and the Buddhist Sangha in Sipsongpanna. The local government offers protection and endorsement, while the Dai's cultural and religious revival generates revenue in return. One good example is the 3 November 2007 opening ceremony of Wat Meung Lue Monastery, on the outskirts of Jinghong,<sup>63</sup> attended by Buddhist leaders from all over China and Southeast Asia, as well as dignitaries from the Yunnan and Sipsongpanna governments. The ceremony itself was essentially religious in nature, with Theravada Buddhist monks from Sipsongpanna, Tibetan monks from northern Yunnan and Mahayana Buddhist monks from Kunming chanting and praying. But the ceremony was also very political: Sipsongpanna's prefectural governor and Abbot Khuba Meung Lom Jom both made speeches, one in Mandarin and one in Dai, with translation provided, about the monastery's significance to Sipsongpanna and the Dai people.<sup>64</sup> Particularly notable is the ostensible fusion of business and religion in Wat Luang Meng Lue Monastery. The construction itself was funded as a business investment to make the monastery a popular tourist destination, with a real estate company from northern China acting as the primary investor.<sup>65</sup> Under the deal, the company will be entitled to revenues from the entrance fee for the temple,<sup>66</sup> while Dai monks can stay at the monastery for free so as to 'prove' the authenticity of the place. The arrangement allows the Dai to leverage their religion in order to gain economic benefits and thus fund its revival.<sup>67</sup>

## Conclusion

In Sipsongpanna we have seen a case where transnational ethnic and religious linkages have led to the cultural and religious revival of the Dai. Utilizing the benefits brought about by these linkages, the Buddhist Sangha has gradually reestablished itself, and in the meantime started to engage in social activism. Due to vested economic interests, the Chinese state has also adopted a cooperative stance toward the Dai Buddhist monks and encouraged them to be part of its local governance system. Given the fact that Dai monks and their transnational linkages do not challenge the Chinese state's sovereignty claim over Sipsongpanna, the local government is more tolerant and less likely to use violent means to suppress the social

63. Wat Meung Lue is exactly the same tourist project that Grant Evans mentioned in his article on the cultural transformation of Jinghong. However, it seems that the temple did not turn out to be exactly the 'Disneyland' that Evans predicted. See Grant Evans, 'Transformation of Jinghong, Xishuangbanna, PRC', in Grant Evans, Christopher Hutton and Kuah Khun Eng, eds, *Where China Meets Southeast Asia: Social & Cultural Change in the Border Regions* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000).

64. Video of the ceremony is available at: <http://video.sina.com.cn/ent/s/2007-11-12/18054385.shtml>.

65. Roger Casas, 'Beyond "Fantasyland": religious revival and tourist development in Sipsong Panna', paper presented at *ARNC Workshop 'Human Security and Religious Certainty in Southeast Asia'*, Chiang Mai, Thailand, 2010, p. 8.

66. Gradually all sorts of disputes between the management company and Sipsongpanna Buddhist Association developed regarding how to properly handle affairs at the monastery. Personal interview with Ms Jin from the Sipsongpanna Buddhist Association. The report by Roger Casas is available at: <http://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/newmandala/2010/08/03/wat-luang-sipsongpanna-the-monks-strike-back/>.

67. Hyde, *Eating Spring Rice*, pp. 117–118.

activism of the Dai monks. Thus, in Sipsongpanna's case, the Dai are not implicated in a 'vicious cycle' as the Tibetans or the Uighurs, whose challenges to the Chinese state inevitably bring more state repression.

This brief comparison with the Tibetans and the Uighurs is certainly superficial, but it does allow us to consider that not all ethnic groups are committed to political mobilization in the form of separatism. Many such groups, despite their extensive transnational linkages, are in fact willing to accept being part of a larger political entity. Thus, for scholars who study the relationship between transnational factors and ethnic politics, it is necessary to make a clear distinction between those groups that are committed to self-determination versus the ones that are not. As we have seen in the Dai's case, their transnational linkages do not constitute challenges to the state, and in fact the Chinese state intentionally utilizes these linkages for its own economic and political purposes. Therefore, rather than assuming that all such ethnic groups desire self-determination, it is meaningful to explore why some groups are so, and whether there is any relationship between those transnational factors and the groups' particular commitment to self-determination.

The Dai case also illustrates the multifaceted stance the Chinese state has adopted toward its ethnic minority population. The symbiotic relationship that this paper describes can also be said about most other ethnic minority groups in Southwest China. For scholars who are interested in state–minority relations in China, it is necessary to make clear distinctions and not try to impose the more 'confrontational' model—as in the case of the Tibetans or the Uighurs—on the rest. We should also realize that the same Chinese state can behave quite differently in divergent contexts, and scholars should be more careful not to continue assuming a uniform and monolithic image of the contemporary PRC.