—3—

DHARMA AND DEVELOPMENT AMONG THE XISHUANGBANNA DAI

In the spring of 1997, the villagers of Manchunman, in the Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture, celebrated the dedication of the recently rebuilt local Buddhist temple with an elaborate festival. Manchunman is situated on the banks of the Lancang (Mekong) River in Menghan Township, roughly twenty miles southeast of Jinghong, the prefectural capital. The original temple, damaged by time, termites, and Cultural Revolution conflict, had recently been renovated with funds from a variety of sources: the Xishuangbanna Buddhist Association, private citizens, tourist revenues, and prominent politicians from Thailand. The festival to dedicate the rebuilt structure was held in May and took place over several days. The festivities included musical performances, banquets, temple offerings, and the chanting of Buddhist sutras. On one day, villagers and political elites gathered in the temple to make offerings and request blessings from the abbot. Among those present were the mayor of Jinghong, the head of the prefecture, and a representative from the Thai consulate in Kunming. The consul had donated ¥225,800 for the reconstruction effort, while the president of the Thai Senate had given ¥198,888.[1] Also present was Dao Meiying, a former princess, member of the pre-1949 Sipsongpanna royal family, and wife of the retired prefectural head. During the several hours of offerings and sutra chanting, the temple overflowed with celebrants.

Following a noontime banquet, the dignitaries moved to the banks of the Lancang River to watch a rocket festival. Hundreds of spectators who had come for the event, most of them other Dai people from villages across the township, joined the dignitaries. Rocket festivals are held in Tai communities throughout Southeast Asia; the launching of rockets is believed to ensure abundant rains. This particular event entailed competitions among teams of men from villages throughout Menghan. Teams launched rockets in groups of two or three; teams whose rockets flew highest won cash prizes from the visiting dignitaries. The bestowing of prizes was as much a sight as the rocket-launching. After each heat, the winning team chanted and slowly danced its way from the launching platform to the reviewing stand, surrounded the seated dignitaries, and lifted them in their chairs up in the air. The dignitaries—including the consular representative, the mayor, and the prefectural head—were held aloft for several minutes, until each produced thick wads of ¥100 notes as prizes for the winning team.

These events illustrate how, in contemporary China, the party-state has repudiated the anti-religion, anti-tradition bent of Maoist socialism. Despite noteworthy exceptions like Falun Gong, the Chinese leadership tolerates the resurgence of much religious and cultural practice among Chinese minorities and among the Han. Yet what is striking about the events depicted above is that officials not only tolerated them, they participated as central and essential players as well. In the absence of their participation, the Manchunman festivals, though entertaining and important in their own right, would have lacked the significance they possessed.

This kind of state participation is not unusual. In Xishuangbanna, Dai culture and religion are conspicuously promoted by the party-state. Officials see the maintenance and propagation of traditional culture—or some facsimile thereof—as integral to their duties. Cadres pay public homage to traditional institutions by welcoming the Dai New Year at theatrical and musical events, accompanying members of the former royal family to dragon boat races, funding a variety of music, arts, and dance troupes, and participating in ceremonies like the one above. Officials even encourage cross-national Dai-Tai identification and interaction. How is it that the state has become patron and curator of, even participant in, Dai cultural practices? What local or national motives are at work in these public spectacles? Furthermore, how do minority cadres and ordinary Dai people regard state-sanctioned cultural endeavors?

Underpinning official support for Dai culture is the idea that it can serve the developmental goals of the Chinese party-state, nationally as well as in

Xishuangbanna. For officials, Dai culture possesses "instrumental" significance—it is an instrument or tool that can be deployed in the service of various ends. Dai cultural resurgence has been a boon for the tourist industry in Xishuangbanna; tradition and revenues are tightly intertwined. The ostensibly friendly historical relationship between the Chinese empire and Tai kingdoms is played up to attract foreign investment. Cultural and religious ceremonies also serve as conduits through which the party-state asserts its authority and legitimacy. The state makes a great show of its support for Dai cultural distinctiveness, but it expects Dai compliance in return.

Yet this instrumentalist view of culture does not explain the Dai revival as a whole. Officials' role in the revival is more than an effort to buy off the support of minorities, entice tourists, or lure foreign investors. The state has adopted a kind of caretaker relationship toward Dai cultural practice, and the preservation of Dai culture is viewed as an end in itself. Among the Dai, including religious leaders, intellectuals, cultural activists, ordinary people, and officials, participation in the revival springs from a genuine desire to reestablish practices through which Dai identity is expressed and maintained. Such practices also express Tai identity, that is, Dai membership within the broader, cross-national "imagined community" of Tai peoples in Laos, Myanmar, and Thailand.[2]

Yet aspects of the revival also reflect and refract values and ideals related to Chinese national identity and membership. Promotion of and participation in Dai cultural endeavors can be, at times, ways of being Chinese. This becomes apparent when Dai revival is seen in the context of broader societal efforts to rework Chinese identity that occur in light of national imperatives of economic and cultural modernization. Cultural activists and participants, however, do not accept uncritically the way these goals of reworking identity and achieving modernization are defined. Instead, cultural practice is a means through which identities, norms, and membership are negotiated and contested.

CULTURE AND MODERNIZATION IN XISHUANGBANNA

The Dai, who number over 1.3 million, are the third largest minority group in Yunnan. Slightly more than one-quarter of the Yunnan Dai live in the Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture. Another 29 percent reside in Dehong, a Dai and Jingpo autonomous prefecture several hundred miles away in western Yunnan. Dai also reside in the districts of Honghe, Simao, and Lincang, which border or lie between the two autonomous prefectures.

TABLE 3.1 Composition of Xishuangbanna Population, 1956–2005

	1956	*1982*	*2000*	*2005*	*% in 1956*	*% in 2005*
Dai	128,700	225,485	298,004	358,930	50	34
Han	17,905	185,894	289,100	255,294	7	24
Hani	46,514	129,198	169,974	205,501	18	20
Lahu	16,203	33,336	52,530	59,118	6	6
Bulang	19,368	27,664	37,440	46,642	7	4
Yi	6,365	16,495	45,939	52,926	2	5
Jinuo	5,491	12,405	18,786	25,316	2	2
Other	18,099	15,972	81,618	45,873	7	4
Total	258,645	646,449	993,391	1,049,600	100	100

SOURCES: *2006 Yunnan tongji nianjian*, 712–15; *Xishuangbanna guotu jingji kaocha baogao*, 141; *Yunnan sheng 1990 nian renkou pucha ziliao*, 41–52.

In Xishuangbanna, the Dai comprise 34 percent of the population (table 3.1). Though it is a Dai autonomous prefecture, Xishuangbanna is ethnically diverse with forty-four nationalities living within it. The figure is misleading, however, since many of the groups identified, such as Koreans, Tibetans and Uyghurs, are represented by only a handful of individuals and their families who migrated to the prefecture in search of economic opportunity. Long-established minorities include the Hani, Yi, Lahu, Bulang, Jinuo, Yao, and Miao. Xishuangbanna is also home to over four thousand Hui, descendents of Muslims from north-central Yunnan who fled south to escape Qing persecution in the nineteenth century.[3]

The Han are the second largest group in Xishuangbanna. In 2005 there were 255,294 Han living in the prefecture, comprising roughly 24 percent of the population. In 1949 only about five thousand Han resided in the region. Their numbers grew dramatically in the 1950s, when thousands of people from interior provinces settled on rubber plantations created by the State Farm Bureau. During the late 1960s, these farms received an infusion of "sent-down youth" from all over the country. Dai and other minorities also work and live on the farms, but most hail from elsewhere in Yunnan and other provinces. In the reform era, the Han population again surged as economic opportunities drew new waves of settlers from all over China. By 2000, there were nearly as many Han in the prefecture as Dai. In the last several years their numbers have declined, partly due to de-collectivization of some of the state farms (fig. 3.1).

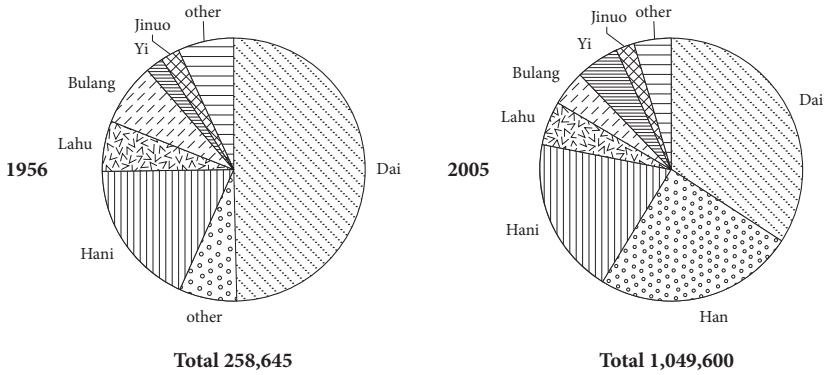

FIG. 3.1 Demographic change in Xishuangbanna, 1956 and 2005

XISHUANGBANNA UNDER REFORM

The policies of the Mao years severely damaged the economy and society of Xishuangbanna. Post-1978 reforms have improved the situation considerably. The Chinese government resurrected its policy of respecting minorities' "special characteristics," or at least those the state believes do not encourage ethnic or religious strife. As a model minority with a reputation for being docile (*wenshun*), the Dai's special characteristics are vigorously promoted. Local and provincial governments showcase Dai art, customs, dance, architecture, textiles, and music. The state funds numerous Dai dance troupes at the prefectural, provincial, and national level; many of these are featured on state-run television programs throughout the year. Jinghong is home to a Nationalities' Culture Park (*minzu wenhua gongyuan*), although the city is something of a nationalities' culture park in its own right. Throughout the prefecture, miniature "Dai culture villages" have been erected next to the actual villages that manage them. In these culture villages, which are attempts to capitalize on Xishuangbanna's tourist boom, young women bathe conspicuously in the Lancang at scheduled times, and the annual water-splashing festival is celebrated daily. Even the Farm Bureau has jumped on board. In an ironic twist on the theme of internal colonialism, several state farm branches have diversified into the tourism and hospitality industries, and some are exporting "Dai flavor" (*Daizu fengwei*) to the more industrialized areas of eastern China.[4]

Much of this cultural promotion has a top-down, state- or business-led character to it, and is driven by economic concerns. Much of it can also be dismissed as ersatz. However, a genuine desire to reinstate traditions and cus-

FIG. 3.2 An active Buddhist temple, Menghai County

toms is also sparking cultural resurgence. The most visible example of this is the renaissance of Theravada Buddhism (fig. 3.2). With few exceptions, Dai are Theravada Buddhists. Buddhism has long been central to Dai life, and it continues to shape what it means to be Dai to a considerable degree.

In 1950, there were 574 active temples in Xishuangbanna, staffed by more than nine hundred full-time monks and more than five thousand young novices. Religion continued to flourish several years after the founding of the PRC, a result of the CCP's decision to respect minorities' cultural practices and work with and through preexisting minority elites. As is the case throughout China, the leftward lurch of the late 1950s severely curtailed religious activities in Xishuangbanna. During the Great Leap, Buddhist statues and other religious objects were melted down for the metal they contained. Temples were turned into meeting halls and granaries, and monks were persecuted as rightists. Policies toward religion relaxed for a few years after the Great Leap, but the Cultural Revolution put an end to this modest revival. At its height all temples in Xishuangbanna had shut and only one elderly abbot remained, the rest having fled over the border or been defrocked.[5]

Following the inauguration of reforms in 1978, Buddhist institutions recovered fairly quickly. In 1981, roughly one-fifth of the temples in Xishuangbanna had been renovated or rebuilt, and twenty-three monks were

TABLE 3.2 The Fall and Rise of Buddhist Institutions in Xishuangbanna, 1950–2005

	1950	*1965*	*1970*	*1981*	*1994*	*2005*
Temples	574	103	51	128	502	563
Monks	6,470	815	1	640	4,927	6,000

SOURCES: Mi Yunguang, "Shangzuobu Fojiao," 121; China Sangha Metta, "2007 Foguang Zhi Jia gongzuo jihua"; *1997 XBNJ*, 212–11.

in residence, teaching more than six hundred novices. By the mid-1990s, Theravada Buddhism had recovered almost to its pre-Great Leap levels (table 3.2). Today, there are 577 temples and over 4,500 monks throughout the prefecture.[6] A number of these monks are returnees from Laos and Myanmar who fled Xishuangbanna during radical Maoist campaigns. Also among their number are younger monks from Laos, the Shan State of Myanmar, and northern Thailand.

Cross-border and regional networks are important to the Buddhist revival. Today, many Dai make pilgrimages to reliquaries, temples, and other religious sites in neighboring countries. Many are devotees of influential Buddhist leaders from these countries and travel long distances to festivals organized in their honor. One of these is Khruba Bunchum, a charismatic Thai monk whose picture is displayed in homes throughout Xishuangbanna. Khruba Bunchum has visited Xishuangbanna on several occasions, and draws thousands of Dai faithful to events in Laos and the Shan State.[7]

The party-state mostly welcomes the Buddhist revival in Xishuangbanna. Yet certain practices, such as the education provided by Buddhist monasteries, vex local officials in their efforts to implement various policies. Traditionally, a large proportion of Dai boys and men would spend a period of time as monks, even if they did not enter the monastery permanently. On the eve of Liberation, one-third of the male population had spent some time in the monastery, at least temporarily.[8] This training served a variety of practical and symbolic purposes. Temples were the only place where Dai men could learn the written Tai language, the script in which religious texts are written. Temple education also included mathematics, literature, and history. Becoming a monk was also an opportunity for merit-making and a rite of passage for Dai males. Today, young novices around the ages of seven to fifteen are a common sight at village temples throughout the prefecture (figs. 3.3, 3.4). Temple education focuses on religious texts, the

FIG. 3.3 Novices studying the Dai script, temple school, Menghai County. Many Dai boys from the ages of about eight through their teens spend several years in the temple as novice monks. During this time they study and practice Buddhism and learn to read and write the Dai language.

FIG. 3.4 Novice monks, Menghai County. The majority of novices return to regular society after a few years in the temple, but some stay on to become monks permanently.

Dai script, and the ideals and philosophy of Theravada Buddhism. Girls and women are still excluded from temple education.

What concerns local officials is that the resurgence of Buddhist education has coincided with a drop in elementary and middle school enrollment rates throughout the prefecture. In Menghai, one of the three counties that comprise the prefecture, official statistics show that the primary school enrollment rate had been as high as 98 percent in 1975, but by 1982 it had dropped to 67 percent.[9] In Xishuangbanna as a whole, overall enrollment rates dropped from about 92 percent in 1975 to 85 percent in 1986.[10]

These figures should be regarded skeptically. The study fails to mention that drop-out rates were extremely high during the Cultural Revolution; not much "educating" was accomplished due to the political turmoil of the period. Moreover, economic reforms were a prime culprit in the decline of enrollment. As is true throughout China, the implementation of the household responsibility system after 1979 created unforeseen side effects. Peasant families, newly reliant on household labor after decades of collectivized farming, pulled their children out of school and put them to work. In Xishuangbanna, however, economic incentives were not the only cause of disruptions in education. Historically, religious education in Xishuangbanna was much more widespread than it was among Dai communities in Dehong, the Dai and Jingpo autonomous prefecture in western Yunnan. In the reform era, the resurgence of religious education has been considerably less extensive in Dehong as well.[11] Yet while the primary school enrollment rate in Dehong initially fell after 1979, by the mid-1980s it was over 96 percent.[12] Moreover, while enrollment and retention rates in Xishuangbanna lagged behind provincial rates throughout the 1990s, among novice monks they were particularly bad. In 1995, 67 percent of novices were in school in Xishuangbanna, compared to 92 percent of all school-aged children in the Dehong prefecture.

Rather than simply crack down on temple schools, officials have sought cooperation from high-ranking monks. A variety of strategies have been tried: special classes for novices in temples; requiring abbots to personally deliver novices to elementary schools each day; and segregating school classes by sex so that novices will not have to attend classes with girls. Officials have accommodated the religious calendar by, for instance, providing novices with tutors during holidays when their presence in temple is required. County branches of the Education Bureau have also penalized or rewarded teachers for attendance rates in their classes. In what appears to be an effort to capitalize on local interest in and respect for Thai Buddhism,

a handful of Thai monks have been brought into the prefecture to teach English at several of the largest temples. This tactic is also aimed at stemming the tide of adolescent monks who leave Xishuangbanna to study in Thailand, Laos, and the Shan State.[13]

Results, however, have been mixed. Many senior monks, who are responsible for the religious education of novices, are unconcerned about whether or not their charges receive a state education. Some are simply indifferent to overall goals of modernization and economic development; they believe that their chief obligation is to the moral and spiritual development of the faithful. As one monk explained, "Whether or not this area develops is of no concern to me. I don't oppose development, but I don't promote it either. My purpose is to help the people live morally, in accordance with Buddhist principles."[14]

This quintessentially Buddhist detachment suggests that certain Dai cultural values do in fact conflict with the state's interest in integration, ethnic unity, and educational modernization. In *Lessons in Being Chinese*, a study of Dai and Naxi education, Mette Hansen notes the drop in school enrollment rates following the re-opening of Buddhist temples in Xishuangbanna and explains:

> The Chinese government and its civilizing envoys have not been able to spread and popularize Chinese education efficiently among the Tai in Sipsong Panna. One important reason is that most Tai fail to see any significant economic or social advantage in spending money on school education. Another reason is that the content and form of state education is in direct opposition to the traditional Tai Buddhist education of monks and to Tai values in general. . . . The few Tai who pass through the school system need to alienate themselves from their cultural heritage (their religion, language, and history, in particular) in order to be successful. . . . For most Tai, Chinese education has little direct bearing on their ethnic identity and cultural practices simply because they do not participate in it.[15]

The rejection of state schooling in favor of temple education thus signifies an assertion of Dai values and identity against those that are specifically Chinese.

The disparities between Xishuangbanna and Dehong, and between ordinary students and novices, suggest that Buddhist temple schools are seen by many Dai people as a viable alternative to a state education, and that traditional Dai values trump modern Chinese ones. However, although Hansen's

interpretation has merit, the opposition of Dai values to Chinese education is overstated. For one thing, Hansen's interviews with female Dai students indicate that many Dai do in fact view a state education as necessary and valuable. Furthermore, this seeming repudiation of state education needs to be put in context. The reopening of temples occurred shortly after the end of the Cultural Revolution, when educational institutions expanded greatly but instruction consisted of little more than "unceasing criticism sessions."[16] Education in Xishuangbanna was in shambles during the more radical periods of the Maoist era, and there were few qualified teachers.[17] Values and cultural identity have no doubt led some Dai families to send their sons to temple rather than state schools, but the appalling condition of state schools needs to be taken into account. Those who choose temple schools are selecting an educational institution that has existed for centuries and that historically has offered real value and utility for Dai people, benefits state schools in the 1960s and 1970s mostly failed to provide.

The drop in school enrollment rates that occurred in the 1980s was not unique to the Dai. As in other Han and minority Chinese communities, the main culprits behind the drop were economic opportunities and constraints and the belief that a state-provided education is not so much opposed to cultural values as it is lacking in application to rural life. A former middle-school English teacher, himself a Dai, described the resistance he got from his rural students. "What's the point of learning English?" one student asked him. "Am I going to speak it to the cattle while plowing the fields?"

UNDERDEVELOPMENT AND THE SCAPEGOAT OF CULTURE

These educational dilemmas demonstrate that, despite its contribution to the economic development of the region, Dai culture has not always been viewed positively by the predominantly Han party-state. Through much of the first decade of reform, Chinese officials and academics were deeply skeptical about the compatibility of Dai values, traits, and customs with modernization and market socialism. Granted, the region was economically underdeveloped: local officials were slow to implement policies aimed at creating a market economy, and Dai households were slow to adopt them. The paddy fields of Xishuangbanna, however, are highly productive, and the climate allows two and even three plantings per year. Moreover, Xishuangbanna has a much more favorable land-to-person ratio than Yunnan as a whole; in theory Dai peasants should have been able to easily

satisfy local rice consumption needs while devoting surplus fields to cash crops. Yet Dai households in the early and mid-1980s continued to devote far more land than necessary to cultivating rice, instead of pursuing a more "rational" and lucrative strategy of diversification.[18]

The so-called backwardness of the Dai economy could be seen in other ways. Although traditionally Dai households raised pigs, the prefecture as a whole was unable to fulfill its annual pork consumption needs in the early 1980s, necessitating the import of over one thousand tons of pork annually. Xishuangbanna also lacked any significant presence of manufacturing and other industry, and heavy industry was practically nonexistent. What industry did exist was limited to mining and the processing of primary products such as tea, sugar, rubber, and fruit. Furthermore, most manufacturing activities were confined to the Han-dominated state farms, which were essentially enclaves with little impact on the surrounding countryside. In the early 1980s, Dai peasant incomes were 73 percent below the provincial average.

How, officials wondered, could this backwardness and this failure to exploit market opportunities be explained? In trying to isolate the causes of backwardness, many officials and researchers blamed the traditional values and practices of the Dai. Buddhism was identified as a key part of the problem; its emphasis on detachment seemed incompatible with the acquisitive striving that drives a market economy. "Rice culture"—a distinctive Dai worldview that elevates rice to sacrosanct status—was also cited as a reason for continued emphasis on subsistence farming at the expense of more profitable ventures. This "rice culture" (*duomi wenhua*) includes not just rice cultivation but, as scholar Tan Leshan argues, "closely linked, mutually reinforcing forms of social life" that underscore the extent to which "people and nature are united."[19] Any transformation of the local economy would thus first require an overhaul of the Dai worldview and the practices that embodied it.

Lacking in this analysis is any consideration of the role of Maoist political and economic policies in maintaining, if not generating, backwardness. For instance, the region's industrial underdevelopment reflects the fact that it was neglected by Maoist industrialization programs. What little industrialization did take place was quasi-colonial in nature, located not in Dai villages or communes but on state farms. The persistence of a subsistence ethic among Dai peasants, along with the particular emphasis on rice cultivation, was likely a response to the food insecurity resulting from successive disastrous policies. During the Great Leap Forward and the "Learn

from Dazhai" campaign, Xishuangbanna peasants were forced on several occasions to pull up entire fields of glutinous rice. Glutinous rice is a staple of the local diet; however, it is a lower-yielding crop than the "normal," longer grained varieties that are the foundation of Chinese agriculture. Dai cultivation of glutinous rice violated the drive to make grain—i.e., the longer grained varieties—the centerpiece of the rural economy. Naturally the destruction of glutinous rice crops exacerbated already dire food shortages in the prefecture. In the early 1980s, these crises would have been fresh in people's minds.

To a great extent, the cultural revival has empowered minorities. The reestablishment of traditional institutions enables them to pursue modes of life and citizenship that challenge limiting stereotypes and official classifications. Yet the post-Mao cultural turn also has the potential to disempower minorities in so far as it encourages a shifting of blame. Minority culture may serve as a convenient scapegoat for policy failures, a catch-all explanation for why China's more peripheral peoples remain underdeveloped. Party-state policies are absolved in the effort to explain the backwardness of minority regions; minority culture is implicated in their stead.

Today, many officials remain skeptical of the compatibility of Dai beliefs and customs with China's overall developmental goals. Even Dai officials express concern that cultural and religious values may inhibit the economic development of Xishuangbanna. Their ambivalence stems in part from certain Chinese conceptions of what it means to be advanced—of what constitutes proper, modern beliefs, and behavior. One official in the Minority Work Department expressed the view that Buddhism, a constituent part of Dai identity, was backward. "Of course I'm Buddhist," he laughed when asked about his beliefs, "I'm Dai! But I'm not very devout, because I am educated. If I had never gone to school I might still be a practicing Buddhist, but because I am educated, I do not believe in such things."[20] Similar views are expressed by Zheng Peng, a vice chairman of the Xishuangbanna Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), member of the pre-1949 Dai royal family, and author of numerous books in Chinese about Xishuangbanna and Dai life. Zheng states that Buddhism had retarded the modernization of the Dai people because it encouraged passive acceptance of the status quo and discouraged worldly striving. Dai people, he explains, were inclined to be satisfied with what they had, and consequently they lacked "struggle spirit."[21] Despite these reservations, most Dai officials support the religious revival, and do so publicly.

REFORM AND ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION

The alleged cultural backwardness of the Dai and Xishuangbanna notwithstanding, the region has experienced a remarkable economic transformation. Today, Xishuangbanna is held up as a model of "minority nationality economics" (*minzu jingji*), an example of what can be achieved when the special characteristics of minorities are harnessed to China's developmental project. The growing presence of investors, business people, and tourists from Shanghai, Thailand, Hong Kong, and beyond underscores how this formerly isolated frontier outpost has been drawn into transnational political and economic linkages.

The location of Jinghong along the banks of the Lancang River, known outside China as the Mekong, is a major factor in its transformation from remote idyll into commercial gateway to Southeast Asia. Over the last decade, trade between China and Southeast Asia has grown considerably.[22] China is one of six participating countries in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) economic cooperation program, initiated in 1992 under the auspices of the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The GMS program aims to facilitate trade and transport among member states, which include Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Thailand. Since the program's launch, over one hundred cooperative projects have been implemented. These are aimed at improving roads, bridges, and ports; removing physical obstacles to Mekong river transport; standardizing customs and immigrations procedures; increasing electrical power generating capacity and transfer; and harmonizing water resource management. Between 1992 and 2005 the ADB approved $1.4 billion in loans and $2.2 billion in co-financing for GMS initiatives.[23] A key focus of the GMS is the development of a north-south corridor that stretches from Kunming through Xishuangbanna all the way to Bangkok.

Xishuangbanna is a prime beneficiary of this activity. The opening of the Lancang River to cargo and passenger traffic has turned the city of Jinghong into an increasingly busy (albeit small) international port. In 1995, Mekong transport between Jinghong and Chiang Saen, in Thailand, was nonexistent. Today, boats ferry goods and passengers the 213 miles (344 km) between these two ports, and two-way trade between Jinghong and Chiang Saen grew from $101 million in 2003 to $162 million in the first nine months of 2005.[24] The volume of commercial freight from Thailand entering China through the port of Jinghong grew tenfold between 1995 and 2003, and a new Jinghong port facility is in the works.[25]

Xishuangbanna's economy has also been transformed by the growth in township and village enterprises (TVEs). From 1985 to 2000, TVE earnings increased 225 times over.[26] During the 1990s, Xishuangbanna outpaced most other prefectures in Yunnan in terms of TVE revenue growth.[27] Much of the growth in the TVE sector results from the expansion of the rubber industry. Xishuangbanna is one of only a couple of places in China where natural latex is cultivated and processed. Historically, rubber cultivation was limited to the state farms. In 1963, with assistance from the farms, some Dai communes began converting fields and forests into rubber stands. This trend accelerated in the 1980s following the implementation of reforms. The area dedicated to "civilian-managed" (*minying*) rubber stands grew from approximately 4,500 hectares in 1981 to over 78,000 hectares in 2005. *Minying* rubber cultivation occurs in thirty of thirty-seven rural townships in Xishuangbanna and involves more than 97,000 households and over 277,000 people, roughly 46 percent of the rural population. In 2004, *minying* rubber production accounted for almost 20 percent of agricultural output value in the prefecture, and taxes from rubber cultivation comprised 13 percent of public finance revenues.[28] Rubber cultivation is labor-intensive; some Dai farmers supplement household labor by hiring workers from the state farms, many of them Han.[29]

Despite problems in these sectors in recent years, overall the local economy has continued to grow. Total gross domestic product in the prefecture grew from ¥1.16 billion in 1990 to ¥7.9 billion in 2005. The benefits of this growth have gone to rural communities as well as more industrialized towns. Whereas rural incomes lagged behind provincial averages throughout much of the 1980s, from the 1990s to the present they have surpassed the Yunnan average. Clearly, the traditional Dai worldview has not stunted economic modernization.[30]

Economic growth has contributed to the expansion of public revenues. In the early 1980s before the start of the tourist boom, Xishuangbanna ranked in the bottom third of all Yunnan prefectures and municipal districts with regard to tax revenues per capita. By the mid-1990s prefectural revenues outpaced the provincial median by a margin of 1.6 to 1, and through 2003 Xishuangbanna ranked third among all prefectures and districts in Yunnan, trailing only Kunming and Yuxi, the two most industrialized regions of the province.[31] However, falling rubber prices and weaknesses in the tourist industry have hurt revenues, and recently the prefecture's revenue ranking has slipped.[32] Xishuangbanna continues to depend on central and provincial subsidies to fund public expenditures.

Perhaps no phenomenon is more responsible for the transformation of Xishuangbanna than tourism, a pillar of the local economy. Canny marketing and packaging of Dai culture along with the tropical, unspoiled reputation of the region have drawn millions of Chinese and foreign tourists to the prefecture.[33] Growth in tourism is particularly important to local officials because it generates foreign exchange. Tourism has also diversified the economy by spurring growth in services such as transportation and hospitality. In other words, tourism has helped modernize the economy by helping it break out of the mono-cultural tendencies of the early 1980s. In 1990 agriculture accounted for 60 percent of all economic output, while services, 26 percent. In 2003, agriculture accounted for 38 percent, while the share of the local economy comprising services had increased to 45 percent. Industrial output has remained steady at around 17 percent of total output.[34]

Xishuangbanna was opened to foreign tourists in 1982; since then tourism has mushroomed into a billion-yuan industry. In the last few years that sector has weakened somewhat. One of the main culprits in this decline is the expansion of tourism in other parts of Yunnan, especially Lijiang and Shangri-la County in the northwest. These have become hot spots for ethnic tourism in Yunnan, and many travelers now bypass Xishuangbanna in favor of these areas. Development itself is a problem: Xishuangbanna has garnered a reputation in recent years as being too modern and overbuilt.[35] Local officials and businesspeople fear that growth is eroding the area's exotic, bucolic charm, the very quality that made growth possible.

The chief of the tourism bureau in Menghai County articulated this concern in a conversation. In a region where one third of all revenues derive from tourism, the position of tourism bureau chief is an important one, even at the county level, and can be a stepping stone to higher prefectural and even provincial political office. During an outing to an ancient Buddhist pagoda, we (the bureau chief, myself, and two township officials) drove past a Dai village comprised of wood-shingled stilt houses along with several boxy, plain, two-storey concrete and white tile structures. These nondescript houses, built in a style common throughout Asia and the developing world, stood in stark contrast to the picturesque wooden stilt homes that account for much of Xishuangbanna's aesthetic appeal. The bureau chief exclaimed,

> Look at that! These people are getting rich and building modern, Han-style houses. Our prefecture has developed very quickly in the last decade, mainly because of tourism. But if everyone builds these expensive modern houses, we

> will lose what is special about Xishuangbanna and about Dai culture, and tourists will no longer want to visit. Then we will lose a big part of our income.[36]

The chief said he would have to hold a meeting with the villagers and speak to them about this dangerous architectural trend.

The bureau chief's calculating attitude toward Dai tradition echoes the idea that culture is an instrument—a resource or tool for political and economic ends. His concern appeared to be the protection of tourist revenues; architecture was only a superficial problem. Shortly after that conversation, we drove toward a cultural tourist site, a "Dai cultural village." On the way there, I asked him how such sites were affecting ordinary Dai people, especially members of the younger generation who typically staff them. Given his prior tirade, and given the Party's oft-stated concern with modernization and "spiritual civilization," I expected to hear a laudatory explanation of how working at tourist sites, and in the tourism industry more generally, brings rural Dai people into contact with Han, other *minzu*, and visitors from abroad. In other words, I expected that the bureau chief would provide further commentary on how participation in an increasingly market-driven society was enhancing Dai connections to the larger Chinese and globalized world.

The bureau chief's answer surprised me. He explained that because of tourism, people from the villages, mainly young women, were learning about their culture, their traditions, and their history as a people, as Dai. In his view, these sites educated young Dai workers about their own, presumably authentic, customs and practices. He also claimed that when they returned home, they brought this new knowledge of Dai culture and tradition to their families and neighbors, who might otherwise have known little about who they, as a people, really are:

> In the past, people did not usually dress up in their traditional nationality clothing. But these young women learn about their *minzu* costume when they work at the tourist sites, and become used to wearing traditional clothes. When they return home, they bring these habits with them, and many more people in their villages learn from them and also begin to wear their traditional costume.[37]

His assessment is oddly reminiscent of modernization theory, albeit in a slightly convoluted way. In his view, Dai participation in the increasingly market-driven tourist economy was helping to "re-traditionalize" the countryside. He appeared to view this as a positive trend. Certainly there were financial benefits to be gained by exploiting Dai exoticism. But

Dai people also benefited by becoming reacquainted with (ostensibly) traditional practices, aesthetics, and arts through their labor in the tourism industry. To this official, culture was both a tool for economic gain and an end in its own right, crucial to self-knowledge and a sense of one's history and people.

Both officials and ordinary Dai people have sought creative solutions to the problems created by economic modernization. One such effort includes the planned relocation of one hundred and eighty Dai households to New Manjinglan Tourism Village. The original Manjinglan was once a tranquil village on the outskirts of Jinghong that attracted foreigners to its Dai-style guesthouses and restaurants. As Jinghong grew, Manjinglan was swallowed up in a frenzy of sprawl and construction. By the mid-1990s, Manjinglan was still known for its restaurants and hotels, but, like the newer karaoke bars and beauty parlors, they were mostly constructed in the concrete, cinderblock, and tile style, and the village had become a noisy urban street. Several years ago, officials decided to recreate Manjinglan by relocating villagers. The city government appropriated dozens of Manjinglan paddy fields about one kilometer south of Jinghong along the Lancang River for the construction of the new "traditional" village.[38]

The idea behind the creation of this new Manjinglan is to establish a living, breathing, authentic Dai village that is at the same time a tourist site. Xishuangbanna is dotted with "Dai culture villages," but these are strictly places of commerce, kitsch façades that bear little resemblance to actual communities. Many sites are open just a few hours a day. Manjinglan is intended to be different. It is to be laid out in the fashion of a traditional Dai village, with houses oriented toward the village center and temple. Residents will live in their houses full time. A number of families will be eligible to receive tourists for meals and accommodation. However, planners have not adhered completely to authentic traditions. Planned for the center of the village is a square constructed specifically for song-and-dance performances, and visitors will be able to experience the normally annual water-splashing festival daily. In the eyes of project supporters, these compromises are a sensible response to the need for both cultural preservation and economic modernization.

Similar approaches have been tried elsewhere in Xishuangbanna. The results of these projects are uneven. This is exemplified by the case of Manting Village. Manting, an administrative village in Menghan Township, comprises five natural villages, including Manchunman, the site of the temple rededication festival described at the beginning of this chapter.

Through outside investment and local participation, Manting was transformed into the Manting Dai Minority Village. It has become a mandatory stop for package tours visiting Xishuangbanna. Whereas before the mid-1990s anyone could freely travel the dusty roads and alleys of Manting, today visitors must buy a ticket at an elaborate gatehouse to gain entry. The former dirt road leading into the village is well paved, and neat hedges line the side of the main road, limiting views of residents' yards. A typical Dai village tends to be somewhat dusty (or muddy) and chaotic, with chickens and pigs roaming freely and farm implements cluttering the underside of stilted houses. In Manting, the shingled roofs of the large, well-built homes slope down to neat hedges, making it look more like a Honolulu suburb than a typical Dai village. In Manchunman, the area in front of the new temple is crowded with vendors selling faux-ethnic trinkets and religious paraphernalia to the dozens of tour groups that visit daily.

Revenues from ticket and trinket sales have benefited the village and freed some residents from the burden of farm work, though most Manting villagers remain farmers. Thus, while Manting is a tourist site, it is also a real village. Yet some visitors are dubious. A group of Taiwanese tourists I talked to at the Manchunman temple said that while they enjoyed their visit, they wanted to see a real Dai village and temple. I explained that the village and temple were in fact authentic, but the Taiwanese were not convinced. "No, they're not—they're fake!" one woman retorted.[39]

THE ROCKET FESTIVAL RECONSIDERED

While much of this marketed cultural production is only packaging, with little existing beneath the surface that visitors see, Dai cultural revival is not undertaken solely for Chinese or foreign tourist consumption. Many commercial endeavors have been made possible by the resuscitation of grass roots cultural practices and institutions. Moreover, not all state-promoted cultural activities are organized for tourist consumption, nor do they all have such an obviously instrumental function or evince such a superficial character. Rather, many events and institutions in which party and government officials play a prominent role are organized by and for ordinary Dai people as well as the Dai elite. Such events can serve as political theater in which relationships, expectations, and identities among Chinese state, minority elite, and ordinary Dai people are expressed, affirmed, and contested.

The type of temple rededication ceremony and rocket festivals described at the beginning of this chapter holds important religious and cultural sig-

nificance for participants and spectators. Such occasions are also opportunities for recreation; in Manchunman, hundreds if not thousands of people came together from all over the township and county to socialize, eat, drink, dance, and otherwise participate in the festivities. Festivals are also venues for officials, especially Dai officials, to demonstrate their commitment to minority autonomy. In doing so they affirm, in symbolic form, Dai political, economic, and social position in a prefecture where historically they dominated, but where Han migrants from the interior are increasing in number. By offering temple donations, requesting sutras for their families, awarding prizes in the rocket competition, and celebrating the renovation of the temple, these officials also affirm Dai distinctiveness and their right to engage in cultural and social endeavors (mostly) unique to them as a people. At the same time, Dai members of the local and provincial party-state apparatus assert their role as mediators between the central state and the Dai people.

Events such as the temple festival are frequent throughout the year in Xishuangbanna, particularly during the Dai New Year. Officials also support a number of long-term, high-profile projects that appear to stimulate the Dai's sense of ethno-cultural identity and unique history. The project for the reconstruction of the imperial palace, for example, is funded by local and provincial government as well as private investors, some of them Thai. The palace will form the focal point of a proposed theme park called "Thailand City."[40] In early 2007, an announcement was posted on the website of the China People's Capital Network regarding investment opportunities in the project, seeking 240 million yuan in capital.[41] In 2005, a real estate development company based in the northeastern province of Liaoning invested 200 million yuan for the construction of the Theravada Buddhism Cultural Center, which opened in October of 2007. The huge complex, located on the outskirts of Jinghong, is formed around the centerpiece of the Mengle Buddhist Temple, now the largest Theravada Buddhist temple in all of China. The complex also serves as the new home of the local branches of the provincial Buddhist Studies Institute and the Buddhist Association, and includes classrooms, offices, and accommodations for several hundred monks. Admission to the center is free for members of the Dai and Bulang minorities, both of which are predominantly Theravada Buddhist; for all other foreign and Chinese visitors the ticket price is one hundred yuan. Ten percent of ticket receipts goes to the Buddhist Studies Institute, while the remaining 90 percent goes to the Liaoning property development firm that constructed and manages the center. Both groundbreaking and opening ceremonies were attended by company

officials, religious and government leaders, and members of the former royal family of Sipsongpanna.[42]

Official support for these kinds of projects makes sense, given the benefits cultural revival has had for the economy. However, the contrast between the state's enthusiasm for the restoration of Dai Buddhist temples and its hostility to many (though not all) other forms of religious practice cannot be so readily understood. For instance, in the year prior to the temple rededication ceremony, Beijing officials conducted a crackdown campaign on God of Wealth shrines in restaurants. Unlike many crackdowns on superstition, the anti–God of Wealth campaign was not motivated by fears of nefarious sectarian activity. Rather, the shrines were decried as backward and unseemly. They were examples of superstition not in keeping with the modern image officials believe Beijing businesses should present.[43]

The government is often more flexible regarding the religious practices of minority nationalities. Decentralization is a major factor affecting the variation in the treatment of traditional religious practices. The redistribution of power to localities means that the state as a whole behaves inconsistently. As Kenneth Dean argues, decisions concerning the acceptability and allowable scope of religious activity are often highly localized and variable.[44] Thus, even in Han areas, local officials as well as entrepreneurs promote practices and institutions that might seem like superstition to Beijing counterparts who oppose God of Wealth shrines. For instance, Graeme Lang, Selina Chan, and Lars Ragvald have detailed the role of local Han officials in promoting shrines to the God of Wealth and other deities at Wong Tai Sin temples in Guangdong.[45] As Lily Tsai shows, officials realize that the institutions in which many such "superstitious" practices are embedded can be effective channels for raising revenue.[46] The Beijing crackdown appears to be an unusual case.

One explanation for state support of Dai culture is that officials view the Dai as irrevocably ethnic, exotic, and other, and in continued need of Han assistance both in modernizing and preserving their uniqueness. As such, official support for and even involvement in Dai cultural practices are emblematic of what Louisa Schein calls "internal orientalism."[47] According to Schein, official valorization of minority cultural traditions reflects a larger, Han-centric project of national identity construction. The concept of internal orientalism may help explain the events described above, since, as Schein argues, state-sponsored minority cultural endeavors produce an exotic, traditional, and typically feminized minority "other" against which a modern, masculine Han subject is dialectically constituted.

Schein's concept of internal orientalism can explain much of what is produced for tourist consumption; the scheduled bathing exhibitions by young Dai women are a prime example. Yet the concept is a poor fit for other institutions and events, including the temple ceremony and rocket festival. One minor problem is the issue of masculinity. Schein argues that minorities are primarily constructed as sensual and feminized exotics. Yet the rocket festival was nothing if not a performance, and contest, of hyper-masculinity, as male villagers competed to see whose rockets would fly highest, straightest, and farthest. This may simply buttress the idea that minorities are sensualized. Then again, the rocket festival is not an exclusively Dai festival; the Bun Bang Fay festival, as it is called, is common throughout Tai communities in Laos and northeastern Thailand.[48] By participating in it, these Dai men were not producing themselves, or being produced, as sensualized minorities; they were producing themselves as Tai.

Furthermore, the whole idea of internal orientalism rests on a dyad, a binary opposition between subject and object, Han and minority. In Schein's formulation it is the construction of the minority as object, as other, that produces the Han self as subject. The gaze of the subject on the cultural production of the othered object serves as the mechanism of subject constitution. Yet one of the noteworthy features of the temple rededication and rocket festivals was the multitude of players, subjects, and even dyads. These dyads included Han and Dai, prefectural and provincial, Chinese and Thai, party and local government, villagers and officials, men and women. They even included a Dai-Chinese–foreigner dyad, at least briefly during the banquet when I and the head of the prefecture shared a cup of *baijiu* in a toast to demonstrate our mutual regard.

Thus it was not always clear who was performing, or who was in the audience. For instance, the chanting of sutras during the temple rededication ceremony can be seen as a kind of performance, carried out by a traditional religious elite whose reconstitution in the last few decades is a result of favorable Chinese minority policies and foreign (e.g., Thai, Lao, Burmese) support. Yet the gift offerings and requests for sutras by Thai and Chinese officials were themselves a performance, one that conceded some degree of legitimacy to the temple abbot and to the Buddhist infrastructure of Xishuangbanna. The audience-performer dyad was equally confused in the rocket festival. The competition was great entertainment for officials and the hundreds of Dai villagers clustered on the banks of the river. The demand for and disbursement of prizes, however, turned things around (and sent them up in the air). Party, state, and consular VIPs became the

performers, captured and held aloft until their displays of cash prizes satisfied their captors, the victors.

While the model of internal orientalism does not quite fit this case, the discrepancies between the government's treatment of Dai religion and its anti-superstition campaigns in other parts of China highlight the centrality of modernization as an ideal and an imperative. That is, the state's seemingly contradictory behavior reflects its overarching goal of modernization. Anti-superstition campaigns are aimed at backward behaviors practiced by Chinese citizens who should be dedicated to the modernization of China's material and spiritual civilization. In this way, clampdowns on superstition echo the anti-religion policies of the Maoist era as well as the campaigns against popular religion of the Republican period.[49] Superstitious practices like God of Wealth veneration do not pose a threat to the state of the sort that Falun Gong and separatist Tibetan activists are believed to pose. Yet they are a feudal and superstitious embarrassment, out of sync with China's modern self-image. In Xishuangbanna, in contrast, religious and other cultural traditions underpin the modernization of the local economy. The markers of economic modernity include such things as a diversified economy, the expansion of manufacturing, and increased revenue extraction; the marketing of Dai culture has served all these ends. Dai minority culture, or some ersatz version of it, is simply one resource among many that further the developmental project.

STATE CULTURAL PROMOTION AND THE DAI RESPONSE

The state uses the mobilization of cultural practice to promote development and enhance its legitimacy among the Dai. Yet it would be simplistic to assume that the effects of valorizing and mobilizing cultural resources are always intended. In fact, by mobilizing cultural resources, the state makes them available to other social and political actors. Regardless of the interests underpinning its actions, in promoting the revival the state sanctions cultural practices and institutions as sites on which identities, goals, and power relations can be asserted and contested. Minority cultural identities do not possess any inherently anti-state, anti-regime tendencies. However, the symbolic and institutional resources that comprise and express these identities can be mobilized for a variety of ends.

Dai people who are recovering and expanding cultural traditions and what they see as an authentic Dai identity want to facilitate genuine Dai cultural expression. These individuals, lay people as well as Buddhist monks,

have created several cultural organizations and programs, and in the late 1990s, they established the Dai Culture Association to serve as a formal mass organization to coordinate their endeavors. They also set up a Dai language printing press so they can publish texts focusing on Dai history, folklore, art, and religion. One result of their efforts is the growth of cross-border music festivals involving Tai groups from Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand.

A number of these cultural activists are wary of state-led or business-led cultural endeavors, which they do not see as either benign or as serving the interests of the Dai people. They deride the packaging of supposed traditions for the purpose of economic development, and criticize officials' promotion of what they see as a sham version of Dai culture produced mainly for Han consumption. Yet their understanding of what counts as authentic is paradoxical, and does not necessarily mean traditional. For instance, the Dai literacy courses for both sexes initiated by local promoters are a clear break from the tradition of male-only temple education.[50] The cultural activists also helped put together Dai pop groups and produced DVDs of their music, which is modeled after contemporary Thai pop. One of the key activists, in describing how this very untraditional music expresses a genuine Dai identity, reveals the paradox of cultural expression:

> Our songs are fairly simple: they are about the countryside, village life, and the home. They seem very ordinary, and are not very different from a lot of "Han" popular music, except that the style is like Thai music. But really, we sing about the home because we want to remind people where they are from. We want to make people remember the land, and protect their land, their home. Of course, when we sing about the land and the countryside, we are singing about Sipsongpanna.[51]

As Sara Davis explains, by "creating a hip, contemporary culture" unique to the Dai, pop music promoters "aimed to build the self-esteem of local youth."[52] Their hope is that Dai people in Xishuangbanna will better understand their cultural heritage as Dai, and as members of a cross-national Tai community.

Projects like the ones just described do not spring from simple nostalgia or a longing to recapture the past. These cultural activists explain their endeavors in terms of not just authenticity, but also of "nationality autonomy" and modernization. The Chinese constitution guarantees minority regions certain rights of autonomy, as well as formal protections of minority religion, language and culture. The state rarely if ever balks at suspending these guarantees in the name of expediency or stability, however. In practice,

autonomy boils down to the fact that, in counties, townships, prefectures, and other regions designated as minority autonomous areas, certain government positions must be filled by members of the designated groups. The head of the prefecture of Xishuangbanna, for example, must be Dai. There is, however, no restriction on Han officials serving as deputy prefectural or county heads, vice mayors, and so on—there may be four or five of these at a given administrative level. Moreover, the Han-dominated Communist Party retains ultimate say over a wide range of government activities. The ambiguities of nationality autonomy notwithstanding, the fact that members of some minorities are articulating claims based on these guarantees suggests that the discourse of autonomy has taken on a life of its own.

Thus, these cultural activists understand their own projects in progressive and political terms and speak of their activities as efforts to put some real bite into the concept of "autonomy." For them, the idea of Xishuangbanna as an "autonomous prefecture" under the leadership of the Dai people requires that Dai culture and religion flourish. "Without culture," one founding member of the preliminary group explained to me, referring to the Theravada Buddhist-infused Dai traditional culture, "the idea of autonomy is a farce, is meaningless."[53] Even more to the point, he argued that "without culture, there is no power" (*meiyou wenhua, meiyou quanli*)—power understood in a specifically political sense of rights and influence. This individual criticized some members of the Dai party-state elite for their support of, in his view, a bastardized, sham version of Dai culture, and their failure to support programs that might have real efficacy, such as a widespread Dai language literacy campaign.

The recognition of a link tying cultural matters to effective governance has led activists to make changes which seem fairly cosmetic, but which they view as crucial to furthering their agenda. In the mid-1990s they lobbied to change official signs in Xishuangbanna Prefecture that use the Dai written language as well as Chinese. Previously the written Dai on these signs was mostly a phonetic rendering of Chinese phrases in the Dai alphabet. As a result of their lobbying efforts, signs were changed to employ actual Dai words, phrases, and grammar.

This perceived link between culture and power also underpins these activists' educational and even pop music endeavors. Sounding like classical modernization theorists, activists express the fear that increased mobility, opportunity, and the diversity of pop culture lure young Dai away from Xishuangbanna, village life, and Theravada Buddhism to the homogenizing, standardizing cities of China—even if by city they are

referring to the commercialized prefectural capital of Jinghong. Granted, these post-Mao changes have given these activists access to the modern pop-cultural milieu of Thailand, from which they derive a great deal of inspiration. They worry that if the practical, everyday features of Dai life are eroded and lose their resonance with the younger generations, then Dai claims of autonomy, even in the limited Chinese sense, is threatened. For this reason, DVDs, concerts, literacy programs, and other projects are pivotal in their struggle to strengthen Dai identity and culture.

Despite the disdain they show for state-led cultural promotion, many of these cultural activists are, ironically enough, party members and state officials. Moreover, close connections with the party-state serve them well. For instance, the deputy mayor of one township described how he used the resources and authority of his office to promote classes in the Dai written language at township schools. This official was responsible for educational affairs in the township, and because of his efforts, several schools were teaching the Dai written language on a regular basis. The Dai pop music festival mentioned above also materialized in great part because of such connections. Organizing something like a music festival in China is complicated, especially when it involves participation by groups from other countries, in this case Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand. Permits must be acquired, forms must be signed and stamped by officials in local and prefectural government, formal invitations must be sent to performers outside the country, lists of participants drawn up and submitted, and visas procured. Without connections to the state, an event such as this one is unlikely to get off the ground. In the case of the Dai music festival, one of its promoters was a township official. Festival organizers decided to hold it in the township where this individual worked. Because of their connections, access to resources, and procedural know-how, the organizers were able to cut through red tape and get the festival approved.

BUDDHIST REVIVAL AND HIV/AIDS PREVENTION

The value of party-state connections is demonstrated by the genesis and development of another fruit of the Dai revival, Home of Buddhist Light (Foguang Zhi Jia). Home of Buddhist Light is an organization of Buddhist monks and laypeople dedicated to preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS. The group operates out of the Central Buddhist Temple (*zongfosi*) in Jinghong (fig. 3.5). It was formally established in 2003, though its founders had been active for a number of years in promoting HIV/AIDS awareness

FIG. 3.5 Offices, classrooms, and living quarters at the Central Buddhist Temple, Jinghong

through the Buddhist infrastructure of Xishuangbanna. AIDS is a growing problem in China, and Yunnan is one of provinces most affected by the crisis. In Yunnan, the Dai minority has been particularly hard-hit. Most Dai infected with the disease, however, reside not in Xishuangbanna but in Dehong, the Dai and Jingpo autonomous prefecture several hundred miles away in western Yunnan. Cases in Dehong are clustered in and around the border town of Ruili, a major transport point for heroin processed in Myanmar. The epidemic was fueled by a spike in prostitution and drug use in the 1980s and 1990s. Xishuangbanna has been far less affected than Dehong: at the end of 2006 there were 557 known cases of HIV and AIDS in Xishuangbanna, less than one-hundredth of a percent of the population.[54] Still, AIDS is a growing problem regionally, and health workers and officials struggle to find effective means of curbing its spread.[55] In recent years the government has mobilized official mass organizations and grassroots civil society groups in the fight against AIDS.[56]

The Home of Buddhist Light organization grew out of a program initiated in the mid-1990s. The group's founders, most of them monks, were inspired by an AIDS awareness program created by Thai monks in the early 1990s, called Sangha Metta. The Dai monks had encountered the program while studying at Buddhist institutions in Thailand. In the late 1990s, representa-

tives of the Thai organization were invited to conduct training sessions in Xishuangbanna. In 2003, Home of Buddhist Light was formally established; it then entered into a partnership with UNICEF.[57] In addition to educating people about AIDS, the group helps people with the disease participate in mainstream society, for instance, by training them to be AIDS educators.

One of the unusual elements of Home of Buddhist Light's approach is that it relies on Buddhist monks to educate people, especially rural villagers, about AIDS prevention. At the Central Buddhist Temple, senior monks give talks every few months on AIDS prevention, which are attended by other monks and lay people alike. Village monks attend training sessions to learn about the disease and how to educate their rural congregations about prevention. During holidays and festivals, monks hand out pamphlets and give sermons on AIDS prevention in addition to their normal duties. Since there are over five hundred temples, six thousand monks, and roughly three hundred thousand Buddhist faithful in the prefecture, the opportunities for AIDS outreach are many.[58]

Buddhist infrastructure and beliefs are central to Home of Buddhist Light's endeavors. In sermons monks discuss the "Five Precepts" of Buddhism, which call on the faithful to abstain from sexual misconduct and intoxicants. Buddhism also encourages compassion and loving-kindness, qualities that may lead to greater acceptance of those living with the disease. One of the founders of the organization is Abbot Long Zhuang, director of the Central Buddhist Temple and the highest-ranking monk in Xishuangbanna.

Government connections were central to the creation of Home of Buddhist Light. Several lay founding members hold positions in local government. Moreover, like other prominent religious leaders in China, Abbot Long is a quasi-political figure. He leads the local Buddhist Association, the Xishuangbanna branch of the Yunnan Buddhist Studies Institute, and has served as a deputy head of the local CPPCC. These are not policy-making bodies, but membership signifies influence and connections to the state. State actions have shaped Home of Buddhist Light in other ways as well. China's trade and diplomatic relationships with Thailand facilitated the transfer of expertise from a religious Thai organization to the monks of Xishuangbanna. Without this favorable political environment, the exchanges that generated the organization might never have occurred. Home of Buddhist Light is not a state-run group, yet its official linkages are clear.

It is difficult to assess whether the organization has helped curtail the AIDS/HIV epidemic. Still, it has improved the lives of many and enhanced

awareness throughout the prefecture. Of the over five hundred people in the prefecture known to be infected with the virus, sixty are currently active in Home of Buddhist Light's programs, some as paid volunteers.[59] By using temples and religious festivals as venues for AIDS prevention education, the organization reaches a great many people, perhaps more than state health workers can. The high status of monks accords authority to their anti-AIDS message that other programs may lack.

There is a direct connection between the resurgence of Theravada Buddhism and AIDS outreach. Because of the loss of religious personnel and knowledge during the Mao years, many young Dai monks sought training in the 1980s and 1990s in Thailand, Laos, and Myanmar. There they encountered the ravages of AIDS; those studying in Thailand also encountered Sangha Metta. Buddhist teachings inform the monks' outreach, and religious values encourage ordinary Dai people to accept their message. The revival of Buddhism made Home of Buddhist Light possible, and in turn, the organization benefits Buddhist institutions and practitioners. By being incorporated into the anti-AIDS effort, they are shown to be effective social resources. The Chinese state also benefits. If Home of Buddhist Light is successful, it will help curb the spread of AIDS, prostitution, and drug use. Far from retarding the modernization of the Dai people, Buddhism is central to their economic and social development.

LOCAL IDENTITY AND STATE AGENDA

The story of the Dai experience under both Maoism and the era of reform highlights the ambiguities of minority identity, Chinese national identity, and citizenship. In contemporary China, groups like the Dai are expected to embrace the state's modernizing agenda. At the same time, they are encouraged, if not expected, to resuscitate the traditions and customs that define them as minority. These expectations are interlinked. As Shih Chih-yu argues, minorities "must first recognize their minority status in order to regard citizenship projects with a positive attitude." Doing so has costs, argues Shih, since Chinese civilizing and citizenship projects "reproduce the distinction between the advanced and the primitive who, once enrolled in the projects, will have no perspective to problematize their minority identities."[60]

In Xishuangbanna, one of the more prominent elements of the state's modernizing agenda is the drive to implement a diversified market economy throughout the region. Underscoring Shih's point, Dai practices and institutions—including the traditional village, the Buddhist temple, and habits of

personal cleanliness (e.g., bathing)—have been hitched to the developmental project. The presentation of the Dai as backward and exotic has facilitated economic modernization, whether measured by diversification, foreign investment, or tax revenues. Yet does this mean that the Dai lack the critical perspective with which to "problematize their minority [identity]"?

The experiences and projects of Dai cultural activists detailed here suggest otherwise. Many Dai do indeed regard the citizenship project of Chinese modernization with, as Shih puts it, a "positive attitude." They agree, in some respects at least, with the state's goal of modernizing Xishuangbanna and the minorities who live there. Yet they simultaneously challenge the stereotype of the Dai as backward and uncivilized. In doing so, they contest Han-centric understandings of modernity and the processes by which it is achieved, posing instead models of modernity informed by Dai culture and religion. Cultural revival has generated efforts to rethink what it means to be Dai, and Chinese. Contrary to Shih's assertion, Dai appropriations and interpretations of Chinese citizenship projects do indeed problematize both minority and national identities.

This does not mean the state is thwarted in its goals. Cultural revival has been mutually beneficial for the Dai and for the Chinese party-state. Interpretations and understandings may at times diverge, but each makes use of the other in ways that generally, though not always, promote each other's agendas. To some extent, this is because the state and the Dai are not always "others"—the state promoting the revival in Xishuangbanna is partially a Dai state. One benefit for the state is that it can present itself as an effective steward of the customs and livelihood of the Dai people, thereby enhancing its legitimacy among the people of Xishuangbanna. At the same time, Dai cultural revival is viewed by many of its promoters and participants as a means for enhancing their own power, their own rights as minorities and Chinese citizens. For them, cultural revival is a necessary complement to minority autonomy. Their endeavors encapsulate a moral judgment concerning the impact and possibilities of development. If modernization is to truly benefit them it must benefit them as the collectivity of the Dai *minzu*.