

## Poi Sanglong/Poi Khamsang : The Study of Rite of Passage in Tai man's life in Tai Yai Community of Ban Pangmoo Village, Maehongson, Thailand and Tai Aiton Community of Banlung Mantai , Karbi Anglong District, Assam, India.

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**Abstract:** Poi is the word in Tai which means festival, celebration and religious ceremony. This paper studies on Poi Sanglong of Tai Yai of Ban Pangmoo, Maehongson, Thailand and Poi Khamsang of Tai Aiton of Banlung, Poi Sanglong and Poi Khamsang is the Buddhist ceremony and life cycle ceremony among the Tai boys (the age from 7 to 21 years old) who are ordained and become as novice monks. Participant observation and in-depth interview are the method of this study. Both of Tai groups reside in different country and settle down far from each other but Poi Sanglong and Poi Khamsang have been practicing in both communities. These two Poes share same meaning and function; firstly Sanglong and Khamsang are used to call novice monk and have same cultural root, secondly Poi Sanglong and Poi Khamsang share the same pattern of socialization, and lastly these Poes reflect Tai ethnic identity through the process of the ritual. Tai Yai at BanPangmoo, Maehongson, Thailand migrated from Mawkmai, Mong Nai and Lankher Shan state to Thailand in the nineteenth century as well as Tai Aiton at Banlung Mantai, Karbi Anglong district, Assam, India migrated from Chindwin Valley, Kachin state to India because of the war. Thus, both of the Tai groups maintain their own ethnic identity through culture and practices. Poi Sanglong and Poi Khamsang are one of the important rituals in one Tai man's life as rite of the passage. Moreover, Poi Sanglong or Poi Khamsang is the celebration of the ethnic identity among the Tais.

**Keywords:** Tai, Tai Yai, Tai Aiton, Poi, Ethnic Identity, Buddhist Studies

### 1. Introduction

The term 'religion' comes from Latin word 'religare' which means 'to bind'. Edward B. Tylor explains that religion is the belief in supernatural beings. Emile Durkheim says that religion is the combination of beliefs and practices. Sacred space and profane space, is the space for understanding the social solidarity. Clifford Geertz also gives a meaning to religion saying that religion is all the symbolic which gives all the meaning of everything. Religion is related to faith. It can explain about life and truth. For Geertz, religion can bring about the feelings and the understanding which controls behaviour. (Namtham, 2005: 1-2) Then, religion is the set of beliefs, practices and institutionalized system. The main elements of religion comprise of the beliefs, symbolic system, ritual, practisers, heirs and members. So, ritual and festival is a kind of practice manifesting what people believe.

It can be said as life cycle ritual for a Tai man. Tai's life is attached with Buddhism for his or her whole life. As a Tai baby, he or she has to go to the temple since he/she is in mother's womb. Tai boys are to be socialized by family and society in such a way that they have to purify themselves and gain another status when they turn into 7-15 years and 21 years old. At the same time, a Tai girl has to learn how to be a good woman and housewife. Poi Sanglong or Poi khamsang is a kind of ritual which reflects a prescribed passage to coming of age and achieving adulthood for Tai boys.

Tai's life is attached with Buddhism and agricultural life. There are a lot of rituals and ceremonies in one Tai's lifetime which can be divided into three ceremonies; 1. Buddhist ceremony 2. Cultivating ceremony 3. Life cycle ceremony. Poi Sanglong is Buddhist ceremony and life cycle ceremony and Poi Sangken is buddhist ceremony and cultivating ceremony.

The word 'Poi' is derived from Pali word which means tradition. 'Poi' is used among Tai people (who use South-Western Tai Language) to refer festival, celebration and religious ceremony. In Tai societies, there is a plenty of 'Poi' which can be divided into different occasions of Tais's lives such as rites of passage or rites of transition, healing rites, fertility rites, calendrical rites and festive rites or rites for social auspiciousness. These kinds of 'Poi' attaches to Tais from womb to tomb. Moreover, Tai's tradition is bound to Tais. Both of the Tai Aitons and Tai Yai share the same cultural practices in *Poi*.

In this paper, the researchers study on two Tai communities; Tai Yais in Ban Pangmoo village, Maehongson, Thailand and Tai Aitons in Banlung Mantai village, Karbi Anglong District, Assam, India.

## **Who are the Tai Yais?**

In Shan State the word Tai Laung uses to call Tai people in Shan state, Burma. In Thailand, most of people know Tai Luang as Tai Yai. The history of Tai Yai migration from Mong Mao kingdom has been told among Tai Yais. Nowadays, Tai Laungs or Tai Yais live in many countries such as Shan state in Burma, Southern China, Northeast India, Laos and Thailand. Basically, Tais people once they settled down and built the village, they would call the village as “*Maan*” or “*Ban*” then follow with their name of the village such as Ban Pangmoo. Tai people tend to have a house nearby the river and the mountain because their lives attach to agricultural life and seasonal plants. So, Maehongson is the good spot for Tai people.

During 1830s Tai Yai people used to travel across the border without the boundary of nation-state. They chose to practice cultivation for their livelihood in Maehongson. After the harvesting they would go back to Shan state.

Interestingly, Pangmoo village was founded in 1831. The record was written by the Thai central government. That *Chow Keaw Meung Ma* came to this place with the mission of catching wild elephant. At the same time, he had to observe this location. The prince named ‘*Chow Keawmungma*’ was found in the historical records. During 1856, this prince asked Tai Yai people who are scattered throughout the area to settle down in Pangmoo village. Then it got extended to Maehongson town.

The name of Ban Pangmoo comes from the story of pigs in the time of 1831 when *Choaw Keaw Mungma* visited here and found that so many pigs used to come and eat Salt-Lick here. ‘Ban’ means village and ‘Pang’ comes with a slightly difference from ‘Pong’ which means Salt-Lick. And ‘Moo’ is ‘pig’. The interesting story goes like this that *Choaw Keawmungma* saw the pigs when he was hunting for elephants and suddenly realized that this area suits for building a community. Hence, the story has been told from generation to generation that Pang Moo village is the first village of Maehongson where the Tai people stay for so long in this land. Therefore, the sense of belongingness comes later on to the heart of Tai Yais.

## **Who are the Tai Aitons?**

Banlung Mantai village is established in the late of nineteenth century and there is no exact record of the first settlement of the village. As the oral history said, “Banlung was very big village during the year of 1920-1940”. Tai Aitons from Banlung had to migrate from Banlung to Namsai in Arunachal Pradesh, Banhin, Ahomoni and Ban Sai, Balipartha because of the density of people. Nowadays, Tai Aitons from Banlung still have many relatives in those places.

Edward Gait mentioned that Tai Aitons came to Assam in the eighteenth century in 1791. Jaya Buragohain (1998) wrote that Tai Aiton village in Bargaon established in 1835. There are 8 villages of Tai Aiton in Assam; 1. Banlung Mantai or Bargaon 2. Ban Hin or Ahomani 3. Ban Sa or Balipathar 4. Chakihola 5. Kalioni 6. Barhola 7. Dubarani 8. Tengani and one village in Arunachal Pradesh, is called Jonapather.

Tai Aiton village in Assam settle down in the middle of Dhansiri valley. The migration of Tai Aitons were told in *Lik Khu Mung* (written accounts) that Aitons migrated from upper Chindwin valley in Burma when Alungpaya made war with many tribes for his conquer. The original homeland that mentioned in *Lik Khu Mung* was *Mong Hi Mong Ham* and then they migrated to *Mung Kwang* and migrated to Assam or *Mung Nun*. The name of Tai Aiton is from two words, Tai as they called themselves and Aiton comes from 2 words in Tai; Ai means the first, Ton or Don or Doi means higher place so the meaning of Aiton is ‘Superior’.

In Banlung Mantai village or Bargaon, this village is located on Golaghat-Saoupathar road. Banlung in Tai refers to two words; Ban means village and Lung means big, from the name of the village, Banlung used to be a very big village. Mantai means people who speak Tai language. The environment in the village is similar with Chindwin valley as it is in tropical rainfall zone. Banlung Mantai has residential area and farming area which is not too far from each other. They live by riverside. The land at the river side is abundant for planting vegetable and wet-rice cultivation.

## **2. Research Objectives**

This paper aims to understand Tai ritual especially in Poi Sanglong or Poi Khamsang in two Tai communities in two different countries and secondly to describe the function of the ritual that reflects socialization and continuity of ethnic identity.

## **3. Research Methodology**

### **3.1 Research Method**

This research uses participant observation and interviewing.

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### 3.2 Key Informants

The area of this study was to study Poi Sanglong and Poi Khamsang rituals in two Tai communities, Tai Aiton community of Ban Lung Mantai, Karbi Anglong district, Assam, India and Tai Yai Community of Ban Pangmoo, Maehongson, Thailand. Interviewing is conducted for understanding all the details of the ritual from the boys who attained the ritual, Tai elderly people and local historians along with participant observation.

### 4. Research Results

#### Poi Sanglong Of Tai Yai Of Ban Pangmoo Community, Maehogson, Thailand.

Poi Sanglong is a kind of ritual. 'Poi' means festival and 'Sanglong' means young boys who want to become novice for a short period of time (10-15 days). Poi Sanglong is counted as the greatest making merit among the Tais. Because It is a life cycle ritual for a Tai Yai man which means this ritual is the making a good man process as the Buddhist successor. A life of a Tai Yai is attached with Buddhism for his or her whole life. As a Tai Yai baby, he or she has to go to the temple since he/she is in mother's womb. Tai Yai boys are to be socialized by family and society in such a way that they have to purify themselves and gain another status when they turn into 7-15 years and 21 years old. At the same time, a Tai Yai girl has to learn how to be a good woman and housewife. Poi Sanglong is a kind of ritual which reflects a prescribed passage to coming of age and achieving adulthood for Tai Yai boys.

Poi Sanglong is not only found in Tai communities in Thailand but also is Shan State, Southern China and Assam India. In Thailand, Poi Sanglong is also known as "Buat Lukkeaw" (Buat is to ordain or *Pabbajja* in Pali-Sanskrit and *Lukkeaw* means a crystal) which means the boy who is ordained; later on he will become as pure as a crystal. In Shan State, Poi or Poy Sanglong is one of the biggest festivals same as Poi Sang Jan (in Tai Laung, *Thingyan* in Burmese) or Poi Songkran or Poi Sangken in Tai Aiton community (Water festival).

#### The Ritual and the Process.

'Poi Sanglong' or 'Poi Lern Si' is observed in March and April every year. The big Tai Yai festival is called 'Poi Sanglong'. The festival is the celebration of young boys who are ordained as novices. Their parents and Psuedo parent confer to tonsure upon boys. And then the boys have to change their dress along with wearing crowns like a prince. Then, the procession would be held to announce that all the boys would turn themselves to be monks soon. After the ritual, being monks, the boys have to learn Buddhist religious philosophy and Tai Yai cultural norms. Poi Sanglong is usually held once a year in Maehongson (the field area). April seems to be a joyful month for Tai Yai or Tai Yai people. During summer season, Tai Yais harvest their rice and others crops and before the festival this harvesting comes to an end. Hence, it is the time to take some rest after working hard in the last one year back. In this sense, the festival becomes a kind of recreation activity besides being a means of social-solidarity.

#### Mythology on Poi Sanglong

The Tai word 'Lern Si' is used to refer the month of March and April, and Poi Sanglong, which is the biggest festival among Tai Yai, is celebrated during this time. The word 'Poi' means festival, 'Sang' or 'Choa Sang' is called novice. And 'Long' or 'Ar-long' is related to Buddhist myth about the Buddha when he was a prince. Later, he had decided to become a monk without any hesitation, this story becomes the origin myth (Buddha myth) about Poi Sanglong. One such story has been written by Su Nunta of Ban Kun-or, Jogmae city in Myanmar. 'Arnon Tatong Pan' or 'the question of Arnon'<sup>1</sup> (อาหนันตาทองปาน การทูลถามของพระอาหนันท์) becomes relevant here. Back to 200 years ago, the story tells us about the question of 'Sanglong', the Arnon monk to Buddha.

*Once Arnon monk asks the Buddha that if people brings their own sonsto join this ritual what would happen to them. Buddha says that their parents will be in heaven for 8 eternities. If they don't have any son, they can be 'Por Kham or Mae Kham'<sup>2</sup> and they will be in heaven for 4 eternities. Moreover, the story talks about the story of the king, and the rich people holding Poi Sanglong. The story goes this way. An ugly as well as poor boy wants to become the Sanglong, but all the rich people deny him. He is an ugly son of a widow woman. Unfortunately, they didn't have enough money to have the arrangement of the ritual. But that poor boy had merits. He made God Indra feellike helping withmercy. So, Indra took care of him until he became more beautiful with all gems and gold-tinted clothes. And, thus, he could become aSanglong finally.*

For Tai Yai people, a boy is more important than a girl. But, it is does not mean that women are always dominated by men. When the boys have to be Sanglong, the girls also become an important part of the ritual, as they have to learn all the woman's works. At least, for Tai Yai people, the equality is maintained like this. Both the sex has their own role to play.

The festival Poi Sanglong has to be arranged in such a way with a Sanglong procession that others, who do not belong to Tai Laung community, must feel what this community believes in. Tai Yais celebrate their own identity through this festival by dressing and practicing their own ritual. Hence, this festival has many symbols and many processes. The researcher collected all the data by visiting the field during 25<sup>th</sup> March-5<sup>th</sup> April 2017 when the festival was celebrated. It can be noted that, before discussing about the festival or the procession, some instruments and associated stuffs are required which has an immense importance. They consist of:

1. Drum '*Klong Gonyao*'. It is a long drum. A different from Klong Gonyao is called '*Klong Mong Seung*'.
2. '*Ko Long*'. This is a Sanglong's dress. A Sanglong must wear *Ko Long* which is different from day to day dress of a boy.
3. Sanglong's essentials like '*Go-jor*' (carpet, โกวจ้อ) and '*Tan Nam Tao*' (Water-Jug, ถังน้ำเต้า), utensils.
4. '*Tee Kham*' is a golden umbrella. Every Sanglong uses one each umbrella in the time of procession.
5. '*Koloor*' the associated stuffs for monks and the temple.

The temple arrangements are as follows

5.1 '*Oob Choa Para*' (อุบเจ้าพารา) comprising of flower, incense, candle, coconut, medicines, cigarette, betel nut etc. Tai Yais would put all of these items into the basket. This basket is called '*Oob*'. Here '*Choa Para*' means the Buddha.

5.2 '*Ton Patae Sa*' (ต้นปะเต้สา). The word comes from a Burmese word. It is called 'the tree' in Buddhist myth. It is made of bamboo, colourful paper is used especially of silver and golden ones, colourful thread, and a decoration with cushion, mattress, mosquito nets, trousers, shirt, hair, flute, medicines, notebook, pencil, pen, soap, bowl, etc. And the people or Sanglong's relatives will donate these to the temple and pray that in next life they should be rich persons.

5.3 '*Ton Kojong*' (ต้นโคจ้อง). It is made for the temple. '*Ton Ko Jong*' is made of bamboo and banana leaves. It is decorated with a pot, a pan, a dish, bowls, spoons, forks which are covered again with colourful threads.

5.4 '*Pok Kao Tak*' (ปลอกข้าวแตก) is made of bamboo and puffed rice with colourful paper.

6. '*Ten Ngeun Ten Kham*' (เทียนเงิน เทียนคำ). It is the candle and incense-sticks.

'*Mog Ngeun Mog Kham*' (พุ่มเงินพุ่มคำ). It is made of silver colored paper and also golden ones. And '*Gun Tong Pan Tong*' (Jar with the flower and leaves, ถังตอง ปานตอง). It is made of flower and leaves.

7. '*Mo Nam Tao*' consists of 9 kinds of leaves and seasonal flowers. All These leaves signify good luck. They are used to freshen up.

8. '*Ko Loo*' (โคหลู) or the 'Big bowl' contains with rice, dry fish, pickled fish, fish sauce, onion, garlic, and salt for temple.

9. '*Ton ngeun*' (ต้นเงิน) is the money for the temple. Parent of Sanglong or relatives donated these beautifully decorated money to the temple.

10. '*Plik Ka La*' (ปลิกกะหล้า) contains yellow robes (*Sanggan*, ส่างگان), mattresses, pillows, blankets, soaps, toothpastes, toothbrushes, dishes, spoons and slippers etc which are mainly for the Sanglongs

### 3.3 The process of Poi Sanglong Celebration (4 days celebration from 4-7 April 2017)

#### 3.3.1 Preparation and meeting

At the beginning of Poi Sanglong, all rich people will arrange their children to be 'Sanglong'. After that, the meeting will be held to announce that how many Sanglongs would participate in that particular year. And the main persons would be called '*Ta ka Long*' or '*Chao Poi Long*' who will pay for everything, because they would be the richest people having and charismatic effect in the community. After the meeting, the news would spread person to person. If some want their children to become 'Sanglong' but having not enough money, can join as '*Choa Pab Poi*' (shared host). In the past, they didn't fix the rate for these poor people, but nowadays the rate is fixed by the main host.

There is a sub-meeting as well when the host calls '*Choa Pab Poi*' to discuss about

- The date and the management
- The amount of Sanglong
- The place
- The guest
- The temple

- Preparation
- The regulations in Poi Sanglong
- The meeting of 'TapaeSanglong'

'TapaeSanglong' is the one who has to take care of the Sanglong. A Sanglong should have at least 3 to 5 TapaeSanglongs or, sometimes more people than that. They have to take care of the Sanglong's stuffs, and offer rides on their shoulders. Moreover, they have to carry all the stuffs like carpets, pillow, Jar, Betel Nut etc. When they have a meeting, they would meet each other and have the rehearsal with some dances with the Sanglong by giving the Sanglong some riding on their shoulder. All the drummers would also practice.

- The elderly people meeting - The host has to ask for some suggestion from the 'Ju Kohn Tao' (จู้โชนเต่า)

After the meeting, Tai Yai people have to promote this festival, which is called 'Tok Ten, TokHorNeng', because, in the past, there was no invitation card. It happened only by person to person. When they go to promote they would carry invitation gift made of tea leaves and water to head of the village, and then, the head would announce the news to the villager. 'Tok Ten' is a custom that talks of young man and woman carrying sets of candles and incense sticks for the promotion of the festival. It is a trick to make them know each other. And 'Tok ten' is usually done because people want to spread the news far and wide.

### 3.3.2 Preparation for the place

All the relatives of the Sanglong would come and prepare the place for the Sanglong.

1. The Sanglong's house which is called 'Keng-Sanglong', would be built as the temporary house for the Sanglong. It is one metre above the ground for staying, sleeping and also praying.

Along with this, 'Soom Man Tab' is built for the guests. For the Sanglong's eating, a ritual is called 'HongKhwanSanglong' is prepared. In case of the guests, a 'Soommue' is then built.

2. Temple

Inside the temple premise, a 'Soom Man Tab' would be built for all the guests. Bamboo is the main material used, and 'Bai Plung' provides the roof. Nowadays, some places use steel and tents instead of bamboo. This is done for the preparation of the feast as well.

3. Preparation for Sanglong's and food

For the procession of the Sanglongs, many things have to be prepared. For example, 'Ton Ko Jong', 'PokKhoaTak', 'MokNguen', 'Mok Kham' etc. are needed (which is mentioned earlier). It is, because everything has to be ready with the Tai Yai's arts and crafts and paper decoration. Here, 'KhoaTak Pun' and 'Khoa Pong' are the main sweets, it made of puff rice and sugar cane. It takes around ten days to make puffed rice. 'Khoa Moon Hor' is another sweet which has to be prepared one day before the festival.

All these preparations are to be done at least one day before the festival, and all the children and their parents along with 'Tapae Sanglong' have to come to the temple for having the Sanglongs' hairs shaved by the monks with the help of the Sanglongs' relatives.

In the past, Sanglongs had to stay in the temple before the festival started for 3-7 days. Monks would have taught them how to pray and behave if they chose to become monks. Until the shaving day, Sanglongs would play 'Hide and Seek' games and TapaeSanglong were to find them out. But nowadays, this kind of game is extincted.

### 3.4 Transformation of Sanglong in Poi Sanglong festival

The festival was held in Panglor temple in Maehongson town. There were 12 Sanglongs and 3 Janglongs. Poi Sanglong festival was celebrated in April, 1-3, 2017. Before Poi Sanglong, the festival simply started with the shaving ceremony. On 31, March, 2016 at Wat Panglor, Maehongson the ritual had been started with the sound of Tai Yai music instruments. 15 Sanglongs were sitting on the chair and their Por Kham and Mae Kham would stand behind them. After tonsure ritual, Sanglong would clean themselves with water and perfume and wear white dress. Then, they would ride on TapaeSanglong's shoulder because their feet should not touch the ground. At night, they would stay in 'KengSanglong' or the temporary house for Sanglong.



Figure 1 Tonsure ritual

#### Day 1 – ‘Wan Hak’

In the first day morning, the Sanglong’s parents and TapaeSanglongs along with the hosts would take the Sanglong for taking bath with Son Poy water and perfume. After that, the Sanglong has to dress up with the prince’s dress and be ready to go to temple. The researcher interviewed Sanglongs about their feeling before they become Sanglong.

*“I come from Ban Pangmoo. Today I feel a little bit excited because I have seen this festival many times. So, I accomplished my family’s wish as well as my dream to become a ‘Sanglong’ today”* the name of the boy is JJ, Kittibhum Chaiyon, 11 years, studying in class 5. (personal interviewed on 5<sup>th</sup>, April, 2017)

At the same time, an important ritual starts. Pang Choa Mung is the name of this ritual. 2-3 people with a horse would go to worship the ancestor spirit and invite the spirit to possess the horse. After that the horse would walk to the temple. Tai Yais believe that the ancestor spirit will look after all the festival and have it accomplished without any barriers.



Figure 2 Pang Chao Mung ritual

Sanglongs would reach temple, they would sit in front of all the monks. They would pray ‘*Panchasilla*’ and make ‘*Kun tor*’ or ask for forgiveness from the monks. After that, Sanglongs have to ride on their TapaeSanglong’s shoulders. Their feet should not touch the earth. The TapaeSanglongs would dance even if they would be carrying the Sanglong on their shoulders. The drummers and all the musicians would love to show their own dancing skills too. While they would be enjoying, the Sanglong’s parent and their relatives too can join the carrying of theSanglong on their shoulders. Some of them would scatter puffed rice and flower to the Sanglongs. Crackers are fired to announce that this festival has begun. Tai Yais believe that the sound of crackers can protect all the evils as well. After the dancing, the Sanglongs would go to worship ancestor spirits at the ancestor shrine. The Sanglong procession starts from the temple to the shrine along with the musicians and their relatives.

The head of TapaeSanglong would pray to the ancestor spirit and ask them to look after the Sanglong and the festival. After that the Sanglongs would go to the main host’s house and have lunch.



Figure 3 Tapae Sanglong is carrying Sanglong

In the afternoon, the Sanglongs would visit their relative's houses and get all the blessings from them. Tai Yais believe that if any of the Sanglongs comes and visits their household, it would fetch good luck to them later on. The Sanglong's relatives would treat them well with juices, food and money. Elderly people in their family would bless and tie white thread on their wrist. After that the Sanglongs would pray with the reciting of Pali hymns for them. At night, the main host would arrange a dinner and a Tai Yai's concert and cinemas for the Sanglongs and their guests.

It can be mentioned here that besides, Tai Yai people join this festival, Tais from Shan state also would love to join. Sanglong's family who has relatives in Myanmar would invite their relatives to come to Maehongson and join as a guest. Some family of Thailand want to maintain Tai Yai culture, and that is why they pay more to the musicians of Shan State, Myanmar to showcase the traditional culture and invite the musician and TapaeSanglong to come and perform their best.

Day 2- '*Wan Kham Keak*' - Ko loo Procession, Sanglong visiting houses, Hong Kwan, Kham Kaek

Around 9 o'clock in the morning, the Sanglong's procession would start with the walking from the temple to the main town. The procession has its own hierarchical arrangement, starting from '*Jeejay*', '*Oubchao Para*', the horse, '*Ton Taepae Sa*', '*Ton Ko Jong*', '*PokKhoatak*', '*Tien Nguen*', '*Tien Kham*', '*Ton Nguen*', '*Ton Kham*', '*Gun Tong*', '*Pan Tong*', '*Mo Nam Tao*', '*Ton Nguen*', '*Ko Loo*', '*Plik Ka La*', '*Sang Gan*', Mattress and pillows, Sang Longs, all the musicians and their instruments, then the others stuffs along with people.

Today's Tai Yais would love to wear their own traditional dress while carrying all the Sanglong's stuffs. The procession would walk around the town inviting others to share the merit. People in the town would love to prepare water and juices for all the people in the procession.

'*Hong Kwan Sang Long*' would be arranged in the evening at the temple. The Sanglong's parents would prepare twelve food items for them. '*Ja-reh*' would pray Tai Yais hymns for them in Tai language.



Figure 4 Jareh and "Hong Kwan Sang Long

At night, people would come and visit Sanglongs's houses if they get the invitation. If they are the guest, they will give some money and put it inside the envelope. The guests would have dinner after talking to Sanglong's parent. After the dinner, Sanglong would bless the guest with Buddhist hymns.

Day 3- '*Wan Kham Sang*'

On this day, 'Jang Long' and 'Sang Long' would gain new status. The ritual for Jang Long starts in the early morning at 4-5 am. They walk clockwise round the main Vihara for 3 rounds by riding TapaeSanglong's shoulder. Then, they have to come and sit in front of monks and ask for permission to become monks in Pali words. On this very day, 'Ja-reh' would read Tai Yai ascription (*Tom Lik*) and pray for Sanglongs and Janglongs. After that, the monks would change their white dress (which they wore already inside 'Ko Long' dress) into the yellow robe. Then all the novices have to learn Buddhist Philosophy and Tai Yai language and culture.



Figure 5 Sanglong is changing the

On this day, so many Television Channels would come and take a long interviewing shot. Entire festive environment has been documented by the media houses. Poi Sanglong is supported by Tourism Authority of Thailand along with the local people and organization.

### **3.5 Poi Khamsang in Tai-Aiton of Ban Lung Mantai Village, Assam**

In Tai Aiton of Banlung Mantai, Tai people here don't use the same word for calling this festival but similar as Poi Sanglong, here this festival is also arranged as "*Poi Khamsang*" (young boy who is from 10-20 years old) and Kham-Khey (for a man who wants to become a Buddhist monk or Bhiksu). Poi in Tai Aiton refers to ceremony or festival and "Khamsang" means a boy or man who wants to attend in Buddhist ordination ceremony (*Pabbaja*). Tai Aiton community gives the importance to the son as son can become a monk to through the ordination as it is the greatest making merit among Tai's belief.

Poi Khamsang in Tai Aiton village is a ceremony where young boys (Sanglong) of the village are ordained for novice. Poi Khamsang in Tai Aiton would be held individually and it is not fixed in every year because it depends on each family's convenience and the schedule of the boy. The story of Poi Kham Sang is related to Buddha life as well as Tai Yai people.

The story of Buddha has been told to recall 'Lord Buddha' when he was a prince "*Siddhartha Gotama*". Later on he decided to leave his palace to search for the truth of life until he found the middle path for enlightenment. Tai Aitons believe that the ordination is the greatest making merit in one's life and if a son in one family becomes ChoaSang, the parent and his relative would feel so proud. The age of Khamsang should be from 5-19 years old and ChoaKe's age should be above 20. In this

In BanLung mantai village, temple is located in the heart of the village. Chao Ke or monk also once used to be Khamsang. The latest Poi Khamsang in Banlung Mantai village was celebrated in 19-21 March 2006, all khamsangs were ordained as Sramanera (a novice monk).

### **3.6 The preparation**

There are three days of arrangement same as Tai Yais but it is different. The first day, the boys would wear prince dress but not in fully dress up and walk around entire village on foot in the late morning after that they would get invited for lunch. Tonight *Khamsang* would stay at "*Song Lang*".





Figure 6 Song Lang

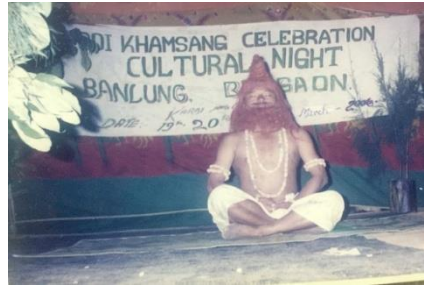


Figure 7 a part of the performance to tell a story of Lord Buddha in Banlung Mantai village , March 2006

On the second day, *KhamSangs* have to pray Pancha Sila or in Tai Aiton “*Kamsil ThomTra*” (the five precepts) and again wear royal dress but today many people would love to carry them to walk around the village on their shoulders in the morning and *Khamsangs* would have lunch in any houses that invite them. In the evening, *Khamsangs* would change their prince dress into white shirt and Tung. (Wrapped skirt for men, it can be in any colors) And Tonsure ritual would do it by the evening too.



Figure 8 KhamSang parade Day 2

Lastly on third day, today *Khamsangs* would ride on the Chariots (*Jeaw* in Tai Aiton language) that was carried by men and in the evening they would get offered the robe to wear from senior monks. Later on, they will stay in the monastery as long as they want.



Figure 9 KhamSang parade on Day 3



Figure 10 from Khamsangs to become novice

“*Por Ling*” and “*Mae Ling*” (father and mother who raise *ChoaSangs*) are the main sponsor, he or she can be anyone who wants to make merit in this celebration. Each KhamSang may have to spend at least rupee 100,000 for overall celebration.

After they become a novice monk, the elder monk would teach him all the Buddhist rules or Vinaya Pitika, Dharma, Tai tradition, Buddhist literature, Pali etc. After 2006, there is no Poi Khamsang celebration in the village because all the children in the village are engaged with all school works and tuitions and most of Tai boys don't want to stay inside the monastery as it is a solitude life.

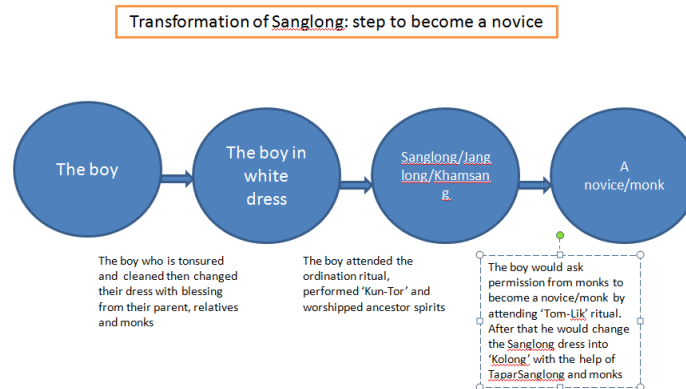
## 6. Analysis And Conclusion

### 6.1 Poi Sanglong Celebration Of Tai Yais And Tai Aiton Identity

The process of Poi Sanglong or Poi Khamsang is full of symbolic act of cultural reproduction, cultural orientation<sup>3</sup> and revival of Tai Yai identity. Poi Sanglong is related to Buddhist ceremony and by looking critically at the festival Sanglongs refer to unknown boys who have decided to become a part of the society through the procedure of ordination. In term of symbolic act, the tonsure and the belief of untouchable the earth reflects the idea of purity. According to Buddhist belief says that hair shows sensuality and ego. Hence, hair needs to be cut off for forsaking sin. The boys would have to be tonsured. In the sense of dirt, tonsure is related to sex pollution and to eliminate ego. It is possible to think of Mary Douglas (1984) who mentions that “what goes for sex pollution also goes for bodily pollution” At this moment Sanglongs would feel like their bodies and minds were cleaned. Then, they have been bathed with perfume and water. After taking bath, they should be in the white dress (white which signifies the purity or peace) before wearing the prince's dress. *Sanglongs* or *Chao Sangs* should not let their feet touch the earth reflects that they are not like an ordinary people. So, this kind of hygiene ritual signifies the preparation stage before the most sacred part of the ritual. Interestingly, *TapaeSanglongs* or *PorLing MaeLing* seem to be special person who can carry the prince on their shoulders and for *PorLing MaeLing* are the sponsor who

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support ChoaSang in economic and their personal life from before the celebration until they become ChoaSang. So, it is not only Sanglongs or khamsang who gain new status but also *TapaeSanglongs* and *PorLing MaeLing* who become like their pseudo-parent. Lastly, they would wear the yellow robe to gain new status as novice/monk.



The festival makes the Sanglongs see things in a completely new way that they are not an ordinary boy/man through the ritual. Becoming novice or monk in Buddhism reflects that they could make merit for their family. Beyond that becoming as Sanglong in Tai Yai society is extremely high prestigious status. Due to Buddhist belief, man should attend ordination ceremony to inherit the religion once in his life for making a great merit. The way that Sanglong parade is walking around the town reflects that this festival needs all the people to see and all the music in the parade is also inviting all people to come and celebrate together no matter what they are Tai or not. What is undeniable about inheritance is that Sanglongs/Janglongs/KhamSang have to inherit Tai culture as well as Buddhism for the next generation. They keep performing this ritual from generation to generation. Hence, this is a kind of cultural reproduction in the sense of inheritance.

Socially, Poi Sanglong expresses cultural orientation. The process of Poi Sanglong and Poi KhamSang create many spaces for example, space of interaction and space of self as a Tai boy. Cultural orientation has been conducted within the family first. When the member of the family has decided to send their boy to become Sanglong/KhamSang, the family has to tell the story about Buddha life and the story of their own male relatives who used to attend Poi Sanglong /Poi KhamSang in the past. The boys would feel like Poi Sanglong/Poi KhamSang festival is a part of their childhood life. On the other hand, the girl would learn how to prepare an artificial flower for the festival along with helping the family in the preparation process. Thus, the festival represents that Tai boys and girls have to concern about the gender roles. In Tai Yai community, the photographs were taken in Poi Sanglong festival every year. Each of Tai family would decorate the wall with Sanglongs pictures who are the member of the family. Those photographs have some function for status representation. According to the budget of Poi Sanglong is around 50,000 baht to 150,000 baht. For each KhamSang in Tai Aiton community has to spend at least rupee 100,000. Moreover, for the preparation needs help from all relatives and the villagers.

Poi Sanglong or Poi khamsang helps Tai Yais or Tai Aitons to recollect the good old days in the past by telling Poi story. Hence, Poi Sanglong or Poi Khamsang marks the identity formation. People are inspired by the photographs and the oral tradition. The researcher has noticed during doing the fieldwork that the story of Poi Sanglong or Poi Khamsang is a kind of prestigious story. Focusing heavily on the preparation of this ritual creates many space of celebration of identity. Firstly, the meetings (The meeting of *ChoaPab Poi*, the meeting of *TapaeSanglong* and the meeting of elderly people) create the space of reaffirmation of identity. The meeting starts with many discussions. The main issue would be the objectives of performing Poi Sanglong or Poi Khamsang festival. All the objectives point out about that this festival has benefit to Buddhism and both of the Tais culture. Moreover, when the mass-media helps Tai Yai people to promote the festival. Poi Sanglong or Poi Khamsang has become one of the must-visit festivals in the northern part of Thailand and Poi Khamsang in Tai Aiton community also invites many Tai groups in North East India to join. Moreover, Poi Sanglong was registered as Thailand's intangible heritage in 2018. Hence, Tai Yai people feel proud of their own culture. Certainly, the festival promotes a sense of togetherness and represents their identity.

An important point is that *Sanglong* or *Chao Sang* as the medium between the profane space and sacred space who can bring the merit to people in his community. Also, Sanglong is the Tai Yai representative. And Chao Sang or KhamSang is the Tai Aiton representative. Interestingly, the meeting of elderly people expresses the hierarchical society in both communities. The elderly people would talk of the right way to perform this festival and reaffirm that all the process is never changed. Along with that they would explain all the meaning of the ritual. Moreover, the festival creates the space for social interaction. For example, when *Chao Pap Pois* or *Por Ling Mae Ling*, the hosts may come from different community to the meeting, the meeting would help them to know each other than

before. Similarly, *Sanglong/Chao Sang* group would stay in the temple for 10-15 days. Emotionally, it expresses that *Sanglongs/Chao Sangs* would have the feeling of attachment among each other, attachment to community and attachment to family. Being as *Sanglongs/Chao Sangs*, they are weaving Tai identity by themselves unknowingly. Especially in their generation, the boys (who used to be *Sanglongs/Chao Sang*) would become friend for whole life and never forgot who they are. Along with this, the festival also creates the bonding between the community members, religious tolerance, Tai identity consciousness

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