

Ancestral Beliefs and Spatial Organization of Tai Dam Houses⁵⁰

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Abstract

Tai Dam, or Black Tai, or Lao Song originated in Sip Song Chu Tai, northwestern part of Vietnam. They were seized to Thailand as war prisoners during Thonburi and Rattanakosin periods. This paper aims to compare ancestral beliefs and spatial organization of Tai Dam houses in northwest Vietnam and at Ban Mae Prachan Village, Petchaburi Province, Thailand. Tai Dams at Ban Mae Prachan become Buddhists but still practice animism, supernaturalism, and ancestor veneration. Their villages and houses have some similarities and differences from those in northwest Vietnam due to changes of physical, social, and socio-cultural contexts. Besides a village shrine and a graveyard, Ban Mae Prachan also included a Buddhist monastery. Tai Dams at Ban Mae Prachan dwelled as a nuclear family, houses of married sons were constructed surrounding that of their parents. Whereas Tai Dams in northwest Vietnam traditionally lived in a long house as an extended family with the eldest son of the patrilineal family was the leader of the household and to hold ancestor worship once a year. Traditional Tai Dam houses in these two areas had two staircases and entrances, one to the front and the other to the rear. In northwest Vietnam, one to the front, or *gwaan*, was reserved for men of the family and male guests and that to the rear, or *chan*, was for women and female guests. While at Ban Mae Prachan, one to the *gwaan* was for guests and the other to the *chan* was kept for family members. In later period, houses at Ban Mae Prachan had only a single staircase either outside or inside a house and a bedroom known as a room for ancestor spirits where the ancestor and the first erected pillars were kept.

Keywords: Tai Dam; Black Tai; Lao Song; Lao Song Dam; houses, Ban Mae Prachan, Petchaburi; ancestral beliefs; spatial organization

Tai Dam refers to Black Tai, Lao Song Dam, and Lao Song. The term *dam* [black] was taken from the color of their women's traditional cloth. "Black Tai" and "White Tai" were probably used to refer to these branches of the Tai race in the nineteenth century by the French. Their original home was Sip Song Chu Tai [the twelve cantons of the Tais] to the west of the Red River (Dang River) in the northwest Vietnam since the twelfth century. *Chu* likely came from the Vietnamese term *chau* referring to district or canton; Sip Song Chu Tai likely had more than twelve cantons, or towns, such as sixteen (Sawangpanyangkoon, 1991, p. 36).

⁵⁰ This paper is based on Inpuntung, Vira; Kasemsook, Apiradee; Panin, Tonkao; & Chaturawong, Chotima. (2006). *Black Thai: a comparative study on living environment between the Black Tais in Thailand and in Vietnam*. Bangkok; and Chaturawong, Chotima. (1997). *Black Tai houses: a case study in Petchaburi province, Thailand*. (Master's thesis). Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand. The former was supported by The Thailand Research Fund (TRF) from 2003-2006 under the research series of TRF Senior Research Scholar, Professor Onsiri Panin.

Each ruled independently and some were relatives. These cantons were a settlement of the Black and White Tais. Tai Dams migrated to the northwest Vietnam after the White Tai (Tai Khao) and later had more power and replaced them at Mueang Lai by the end of the twelfth to the beginning of the thirteenth century. Before Tai Dam and Tai Khao moved into the area, northwest Vietnam was a settlement of Kha or Khamu, an indigenous inhabitation of mainland Southeast Asia whose language belongs to Austro-Asiatic family. Khamu later were forced to higher ground and became slaves of the Tais (Phornphen, 1989, p. 9).

Sip Song Chu Tai was surrounded by three major powers, namely Laos to the west, Vietnam to the south, and China to the north. When wars occurred among these kingdoms, people in this area migrated and were taken to the south, west, and north. Sip Song Chu Tai became under the protection of Luang Phrabang when Laos or Lanchang was divided into Luang Phrabang and Vientiane. However, in the Thonburi and Rattanakosin periods of Siam (eighteenth to nineteenth centuries), Siam gained power over Lanchang and Sip Song Chu Tai; however, Sip Song Chu Tai was allowed to rule themselves as an autonomous division.

Tai Dam in northwest Vietnam has been considered as one of the most primitive Tai since their religious beliefs based on animism, supernaturalism, and ancestor veneration without influence of Hinduism and Buddhism from India. Furthermore, their kinship system has been patrilineality which position of Tai Dam men is far superior to that of their women. They reflected in Tai Dam village layouts and spatial organization of their houses which provided examples of an ancient Tai civilization prior adoption of Buddhism and Hinduism.

Tai Dam Villages and Spatial Organization of Houses in Northwest Vietnam

In northwest Vietnam, Tai Dam villages have not had any Buddhist monasteries as it was in other Tai villages in Laos, Thailand, and Myanmar. Instead, every Tai Dam village had a shrine of *phi ban*, or a village god, who was their ancestor and a village guardian to ensure peace and prosperity. Not far from a village, there was a graveyard to bury the earthen jar of the ash after the death cremation.

Houses of Tai Dam have been built on piles on which the upper floor was living areas and the ground floor was used for sheltering animals, storing wood, working space, and pounding rice. They have been rectangular houses which usually contained extended family of ten to twenty family members (Schrock, Gosier, Marton, McKenzie, & Murfin, 1972, p. 52). Length of a house has often been auspicious odd numbers, such as three, five, seven, and nine bays; bay refers to space between two columns. In the past, they were nine and eleven bays long; however, in present they are seven to nine bays (Vallibhotama, 1991, p. 29; Budsara, 1979, p. 24). The living areas on the upper floor have been divided into three parts, namely the front covered verandah, the living space, and the rear covered verandah and an open balcony.

The front covered verandah was called *gwaan* where men sat to weave baskets, to make and repair weapons or just sat, smoked, and drank with his visitors (Schrock et al., 1972, p. 58). The rear covered verandah was called *chan* and the open balcony was known as *chandad*. They were considered space for women. The open balcony was used for washing purpose, hanging out the washing, and spreading out foodstuffs to dry in the sun, for example, gains and chili. At dusk or on overcast days, women would use it for spinning and sewing as it provided them better light.

The living space was a basic open floor plan and combined all functions within one room, namely, ancestral, sleeping, reception, eating, and cooking areas (See Figure 1). According to the horizontal axis line of a house, the living space can be divided into two parts, the upper and lower parts which the former was considered more important than the latter. The upper part consisted of ancestral and sleeping areas

while the lower part contained reception, eating, and cooking areas. The old style houses had no windows, the room was dimly lit by the light falling through the open doors or slipping through the cracks in the bamboo walls and gaps in the floor or by lamps and the fire at night. The ancestral area is around the ancestor pillar, the first pillar next to the front covered verandah, in the direction where heads of family members pointed toward when sleeping at night. It is a pillar where patrilineal ancestors dwell (see Plate 1).

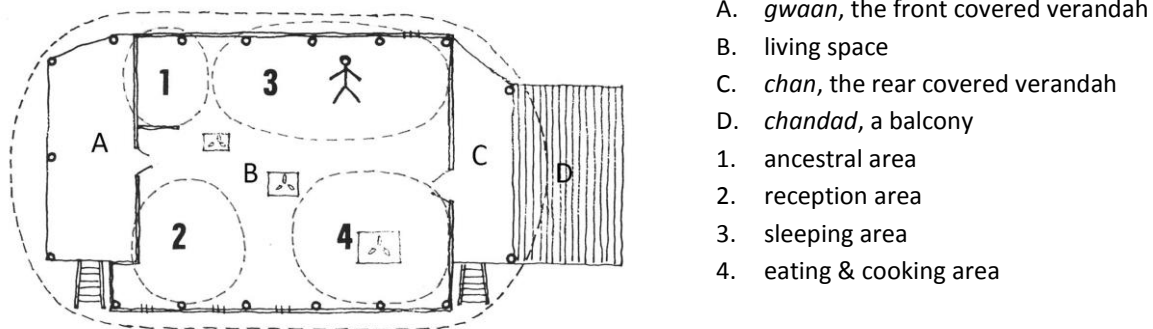


Figure 1: Spatial organization of a traditional Tai Dam house in Vietnam

The ancestral area has been reserved for ancestor worship which performed annual ceremony and periodically offered every five days for noble (*Phu thao*) and ten days for commoner (*phu noi*) families. Tai Dam society was divided into hierarchy of rulers or nobles (*phu thao*), priests (*mo*), commoners (*phu noi*), and slaves (*that*) who were Khamu or mixed Khamu. Priests were categorized as commoners. The ancestral area has often been protected by a low partition and prohibited other family members and women to enter, except wife of the house owner. The ancestor pillar was also a place where symbols of *khwan hua* of family members have been kept. *Khwan* refers to an invisible spirit that lives within each person. If this invisible spirit leaves the body and does not come back, it will cause sickness. There are many invisible spirits (*khwan*), such as thirty or eighty residing in several parts of the body. The most important one is *khwan hua* (the invisible spirit of the head) which dwells on one's head. Once one dies, these invisible spirits will divided into three groups for different destinations, namely, *khwan kok* [the invisible spirit of the body], *khwan hua* [the invisible spirit of the head], and *khwan plai* [shadow]. The first group will return to *mueang fa* [heaven town] where their ancestors and *Thaen*⁵¹, the supreme god, reside. Whereas the second and the third will reside at the ancestor pillar of the eldest son's house and a graveyard of a village, respectively (Pitiphat, 1980, p. 32, 1991, p. 47; Hickey, 1958, p. 149; Van, 1990, pp. 70-71).

⁵¹ According to Sumitr Pitiphat, there were many Thaens, namely Thaen Luang (the chief Thaen), Thaen Pua Ka La Vi, Thaen Chad, Thaen Naen, Thaen Boon, Thaen Kor, Thaen Sing, Thaen Sad, Thaen Hung Khao. See Pitiphat, Sumitr. (1980). The religion and beliefs of the Black Tai, and a note on the study of cultural origins. *JSS* 68.1 (January), 29-38.



Plate 1: An ancestral area and the ancestor pillar at a Tai Dam house in Vietnam. This house also includes a plough handle, an important instrument to plant rice, representing older relatives



Plate 2: Symbols of kwan hua at a current Tai Dam house in Vietnam

A symbol of *khwan hua* was made when every Tai Dam child was born and destroyed when one died. There were differences between male and female symbols, the former included a small fan, a crossbow, and a small bag or a small bamboo basket in a tube shape placing a small red cloth, silver, and gold for luck fortune. While the latter consisted of a small basket and a fan (Trong, interview, December 19, 2004) (see Plate 2). *Khwan hua* of family members are protected by their patrilineal ancestors at the ancestor pillar. At present northwest Vietnam, an ancestral area of some Tai Dam houses is located on the mezzanine to avoid contacting with outsiders and women. Underneath the mezzanine can be used as a storage area (Inpuntung, Kasemsook, Panin, & Chaturawong, 2006, p. 138). It has been considered necessary for outsiders or other family members to ask for permission from the patrilineal ancestors before entering the living space which consisted of the ancestor pillar. Otherwise, it would cause sickness or misfortune to the family members of the house.

Opposite the ancestral area was the reception area. It was a place to receive guests and for guest to sleep. The sleeping areas were situated next to the ancestral area. At night, sleeping mats of each family have been unrolled and laid in a parallel row, each with a black-colored mosquito net draped over it. As there were several nuclear families lived in a single house, a sleeping area for each family was within a bay and each might have its own individual fire-place. However, most houses had one central fire-place that all household members used for cooking (Schrock et al., 1972, p. 46). There were often separated fire-places for men and women. The fire-place near *gwaan* was reserved for men to boil water for tea and to warm themselves in winter whereas the one near *chan* was reserved for women to cook (Vallibhotama & Wongted, 1991, p. 30). The cooking and eating areas were at the rear of the living space, near *chan*, or the rear verandah.

Tai Dam had a system to arrange a sleeping sequence of household members based on patrilineal kinship with the eldest son as the head of a family household. The first bay of sleeping areas close to the ancestral area was reserved for grandparents or parents or the eldest son's family which only man was allowed to sleep next to the ancestral area. Following bays were sleeping areas of the second, third, fourth, and so on sons' family.

The fire-place where women cooked associated with the first pillar, although its position varied in different localities (Van, 1990, p. 76). The first pillar refers to the column firstly erected when a house was built. The

first erected pillar and a fire-place related to women and prosperity. In Petchaburi, Thailand, the first pillar of a Tai Dam house was erected by an older or younger brother of the house owner's wife. Furthermore, objects which were considered sacred were also hung at the first pillar, such as a tortoise shell and *taleo* (a symbol made from bamboo band weaving in a shape of a star) for protection against evil spirits (see Plates 3-4). It also included grass which was intended to be food of a tortoise as well as rice plant and cotton with desire for fertility (Trong, interview, December 19, 2004). According to an old Tai Dam myth, a tortoise taught Tai Dams a prayer to please *Thaen*, the supreme god, and to build a house on piles roofed with a tortoise shell-shaped circular gable. Tai Dams were very grateful to the tortoise and thereafter hung a tortoise shell at the first pillar and had a house roof in a form of the tortoise shell. (Dang Nghiem Van 1990) stated that a *linga* or *yoni* made of wood was also hung at the first pillar with wishes for a large family. All these things were tied together with bamboo band representing gold and silver strings, a symbol of prosperity and wealth pp. 76, 81-82).



*Plates 3-4: The first erected pillar at present Tai Dam houses in Vietnam. It hangs a tortoise shell and probably a taleo symbol at the top of the pillar (left) while the other one hangs a wooden tortoise and is covered with a case on its head (right).
Source: Inpungtung et al., 2006, p. 141.*

Tai Dam houses in northwest Vietnam have often had two external staircases, one to the front reserved for men of the family and male guests and the other to the rear for women and female guests. It probably aimed to protect adultery as a house lived several generations of family members. Houses were constructed with bamboo and wood and roofed with thatching in a shape of tortoise shell-shaped circular gable. A round gable was also considered as the primitive roof type of people in Southeast Asia, such as an ancient house with a round gable excavated at Ban Khao, Kanchanaburi Province, Thailand, dated around 1800-1300 BCE, Neolithic period. This kind of roof was likewise found in Yangshao culture (dated from around 5000 to 3000 BCE) along the Yellow River, and in Lungshan period (late Neolithic culture) of China (Henriksen, 1982). Houses of noble Tai Dams were characterized by crosses at both ends of the rooftop (Schrock et al., 1972, p. 46).

Cam Trong, a Tai Dam scholar, provided examples of architectural floor plans of small to large Tai Dam

houses in northwest Vietnam, for example, small to medium sized houses of Lo Wan Pan, Tue Hla, and Lueang Wan Ing; and a long house of Tong Wan Phang (Sawangpanyangkoon, 1996).

House of Lo Wan Pan was the most basic one as it was for a single family. The house had one staircase at the *chan* and three bays long of the living space with a single fire-place at the center (see Figure 2).

- A: ancestral area
- A': ancestor pillar
- B: sleeping area
- C: reception area
- D: fire-place
- E: gwaan
- F: *chan*
- G: chandad
- H: windows
- I: doors
- J: staircase
- H: window

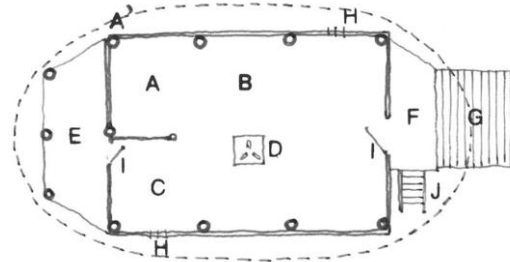


Figure 2: Upper floor plan of Lo Wan Pan's house
 Redrawn from Sawangpanyangkoon, 1996.

House of Tue Hla lived four nuclear families, namely grandparents, parents (house owner), the eldest son's family, and a daughter and son-in-law. It was an old tradition that so called son-in-law stayed at bride parents' house to assist their agricultural works for some time during volunteering period. The living space had five bays long which the upper part were arranged from the front to the rear in a sequence of an ancestral area and sleeping areas of grandparents, parents, the eldest son's family, and a daughter and son-in-law, respectively (See Figure 3). There were two staircases and two fire-places, one to the front reserved for men and male guests and the other to the rear for women and female guest. The fire-place to the rear was for women to cook.

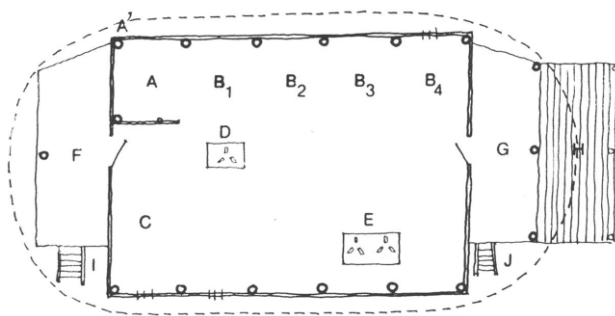


Figure 3: Upper floor plan of Tue Hla's house
 Redrawn from Sawangpanyangkoon, 1996.

- A: ancestral area
- A': ancestor pillar
- B1: room for grandparents
- B2: room for parents
- B3: room for the eldest son's family
- B4: room for daughter and son-in-law
- C: reception area
- D: fire-place for men
- E: fire-place for women
- F: *gwaan*
- G: *chan*
- H: *chandad*
- I: staircase for men
- J: staircase for women

House of Lueang Wan Ing lived five nuclear families, namely parents, the eldest son's family, the second son's family, the eldest son of the eldest son's family, and the youngest daughter and son-in-law. Although the living space was five bays long parallel to that of Tue Hla's house, arrangement of the sleeping areas rather differed from that of the former. The sleeping area of the youngest daughter and son-in-law was located on the opposite side, or the lower part, of that of her family members since after the volunteering period, the daughter and son-in-law would move to his family's house (see Figure 4). House of Lueng Wan Ing had two staircases, one to the front for men and male guests and the other to the rear for women and female guests. There were three fire-places inside a house, one close to the front was reserved for guests (men), another in the middle and the other close to the *chan* were for the family household.

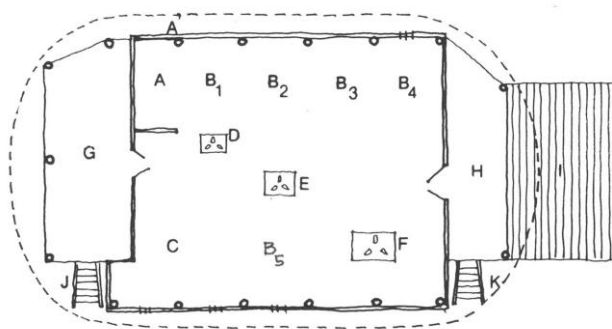
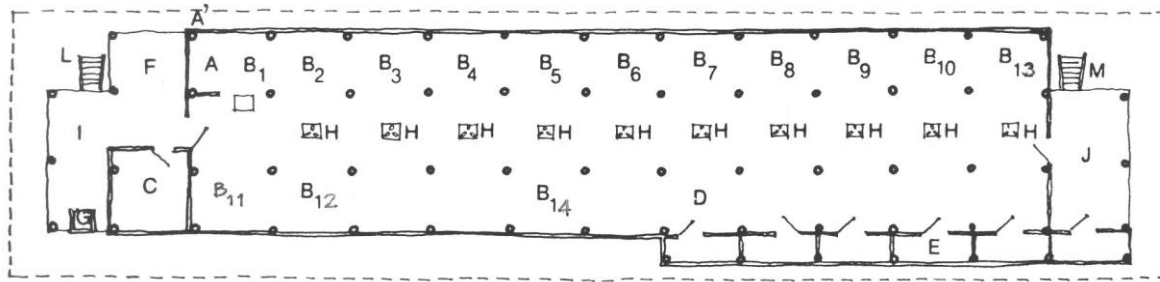


Figure 4: Upper floor plan of Lueang Wan Ing's house
 Redrawn from Sawangpanyangkoon, 1996.

- A: ancestral area
- A': ancestor pillar
- B1: room for parents
- B2: room for the eldest son's family
- B3: room for the second son's family
- B4: room for the eldest son of the eldest son's family
- B5: room for the youngest daughter and son-in-law
- C: reception area
- D: fire-place for men
- E, F: fire-places for family household
- G: *gwaan*
- H: *chan*
- I: *chandad*
- J: staircase for men
- K: staircase for women

House of Tong Wan Phang, surveyed in 1967, was a long house, ten meters wide and sixty meters long. Long houses were previously common in La - Son La district before revolution period in Vietnam. House of Tong Wan Phang had eleven bays long of the living space and lived three-generation household or eleven nuclear families, each slept within a bay and arranged as this following sequence; parents (younger brother lineal as the eldest brother passed away), the eldest son's family (eldest brother lineal), the second son's family (eldest brother lineal), the third son's family (eldest brother lineal), the eldest son of a younger brother's family (younger brother lineal), the second son of a younger brother's family (younger brother lineal), the eldest son of the eldest son's family (eldest brother lineal), the second son of the eldest son's family (eldest brother lineal), the eldest son's family (adopted child), the eldest son of the eldest son of a younger brother's family (younger brother lineal), and grandson of the eldest son's family (eldest brother lineal) (see Figure 5). Moreover, the house lived the youngest daughter of a younger brother's family and other single female members, namely a youngest daughter (eldest brother lineal) and a teenage granddaughter. They slept on the opposite side, or at the lower part, of the living space as they were expected to move out after agricultural volunteering period or getting married. The house had ten fire-places for each family and consisted of two external staircases, at the front verandah or *gwaan* for men and male guests and at the rear verandah or *chan* for women and female guests.



- | | |
|---|------------------------------------|
| A: ancestral area | C: sleeping area for male guests |
| A': ancestor pillar | D: sleeping area for female guests |
| B1: room for parents (younger brother lineal) – parents of B5, B6 | E: storage |
| B2: room for the eldest son's family (eldest brother lineal) | F: cultivated tool storage |
| B3: room for the second son's family (eldest brother lineal) | G: toilet for guests |
| B4: room for the third son's family (eldest brother lineal) | H: fire-place for each family |
| B5: room for the eldest son of a younger brother's family (younger brother lineal) – son of B1 | I: <i>gwaan</i> |
| B6: room for the second son of a younger brother's family (younger brother lineal) – son of B1 | J: <i>chan</i> |
| B7: room for the eldest son of the eldest son's family (eldest brother lineal) – son of B2 | L: staircase for men |
| B8: room for the second son of the eldest son's family (eldest brother lineal) – son of B2 | M: staircase for women |
| B9: room for the eldest son's family (adopted child) | |
| B10: room for the eldest son of the eldest son of a younger brother's family (younger brother lineal) – son of B5 | |
| B11: room for a youngest daughter (eldest brother lineal) | |
| B12: room for the youngest daughter of a younger brother's family – daughter of B1 | |
| B13: room for grandson of the eldest son's family (eldest brother lineal) – son of B7 | |
| B14: room for a teenage granddaughter | |

Figure 5: Upper floor plan of Tong Wan Phang's house
 Redrawn from Sawangpanyangkoon, 1996.

Tai Dams at Ban Mae Prachan Village, Petchaburi Province, Thailand

Ban Mae Prachan Village is located next to Mae Prachan River at Wang Khrai Sub-district, Thayang District, Petchaburi Province. Tai Dams were firstly taken as war prisoners from northwest Vietnam to Siam during Thonburi period (1768-1782) and later in the reigns of King Rama I (1782-1809), King Rama III (1824-1851), and King Rama V (1868-1910). Tai Dams at Ban Mae Prachan Village was chosen as a case study since the village contained a traditional Tai Dam house which was still alive and likely the last living one in Thailand. These Tai Dams were the group who came in the reign of King Rama III (1824-1851) and firstly settled at Ban Tha Laem Village, Khao Laem District which is not far from the seashore. Preferring mountainous area, they asked and received permission to settle at Ban Wang Tako Village. Thereafter, during the reign of King Rama IV (1851-1868), some Tai Dams at Ban Wang Tako decided to move to a new place at the current Ban Mae Prachan Village where it was more plentiful and located next to river (Chaturawong, 1997, p. 88). Tai Dams in Thailand have had mixed culture between that of their ancestors in Vietnam and the new one of the central Thais. In Thailand, they have been known as Lao Song Dam or Lao Song, the Thais understood that Tai Dams were Lao since they and Lao people were taken to Siam or Thailand in parallel periods. Siam needed numerous workers to build up the country during Thonburi and Rattanakosin periods after Ayutthaya was sacked by the Burmese in 1767. The terms "song" means dress or came from

“suang” meaning pants, and *“dam”* refers to black color (Suli, 1976: 9-10). The first settlement of Tai Dams at Ban Mae Prachan followed their traditional pattern in Vietnam which houses were grouped as clusters according to families and surrounded by rice-fields. It had no Buddhist monastery instead, contained a village shrine, a small house built on piles, and a graveyard to the west of the village. Around 1978, the village extended to the west with another village shrine and a graveyard. In 1996, Ban Mae Prachan was divided into three small hamlets (Moo 9, 1, and 6), each had its own village shrine. One of the two graveyards became a school and a village Buddhist monastery (see Figure 6). In 1993, an ordination hall at the monastery was constructed with brick in a central Thai style (Chaturawong, 1997, pp. 89-92). Since the first settlement in the nineteenth century to 1968, Tai Dams at Ban Mae Prachan were a closed and isolated community and married among Tai Dams whose communities scattering in several villages in Petchaburi and other provinces in central Thailand. Once every year in April when they were free from agricultural works, it was a tradition in Lan Khuang Festival that Tai Dam men from one village traveled to other Tai Dam villages to play music and to dance at courtyards of house clusters. A Tai Dam village had many courtyards for threshing rice named after a female leader during the Lan Khuang Festival (Suli, 1976, pp. 163-164). This festival provided an opportunity for young Tai Dam men to meet with young Tai Dam women, then to fall in love, and later to get married. However, after 1981, Tai Dam women had more freedom to marry Thai and Chinese men; in 1996, ninety percent of population at Ban Mae Prachan was Tai Dams and ten percent was Thai and Chinese (Chaturawong, 1997, p. 91).

Tai Dams at Ban Mae Prachan currently practice not only ancestor veneration, animism, and supernaturalism but also Buddhism. In 1997, the village consisted village shrines, a graveyard, and a Buddhist monastery. Tai Dam houses at Ban Mae Prachan were similar to as well as differed from those in Vietnam due to shifting from one physical, social, and socio-cultural context in Vietnam to the other in Thailand. Tai Dam houses at Ban Mae Prachan can be divided into four types according to their building materials and construction periods, namely traditional Tai Dam house, developed traditional Tai Dam house built around 1937-1952, Influence of local Thai house dated around 1957-1967, and Influence of central Thai house. The former three style houses were built on piles while the latter were often constructed in two storeys. The traditional and developed traditional Tai Dam houses were built with natural wood, bamboo, and reed and thatched with blady grass. Influence of local houses were constructed with sawed timber and roofed with clay tiles whereas the influence of central Thai houses were often erected with brick on the ground floor and cut timber on the upper floor (Chaturawong, 1997, pp. 107-108). Although differing in material used, forms, and space arrangement; these four style houses still included the ancestor pillar associated with the patrilineal clan and the first erected pillar related to women and fertility.

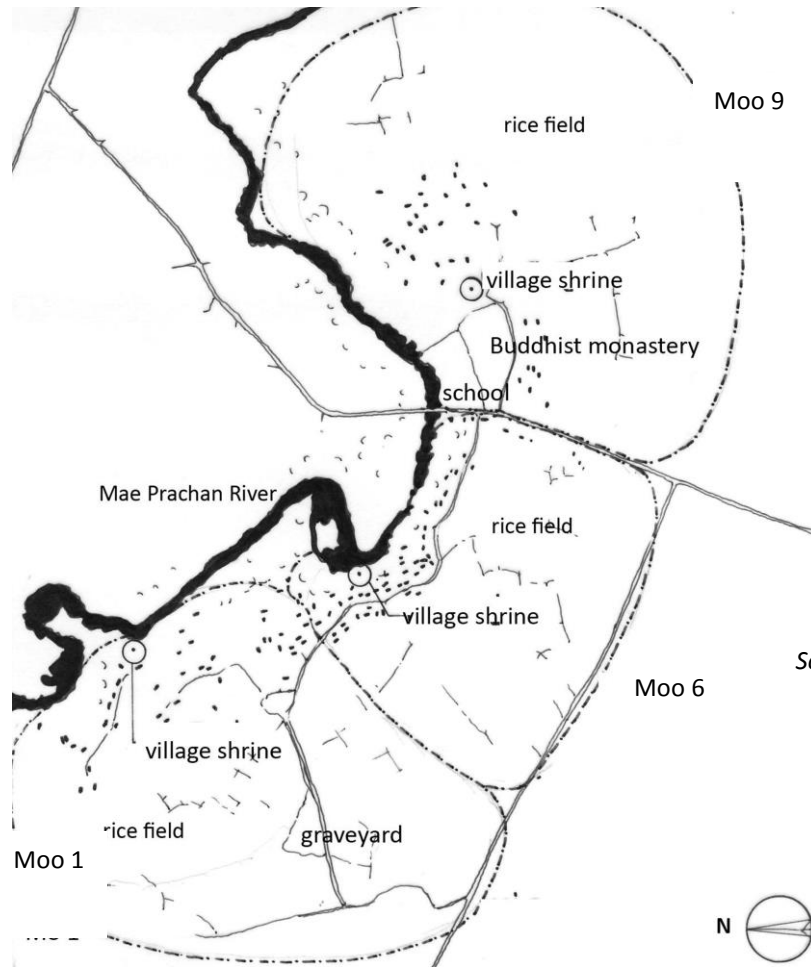


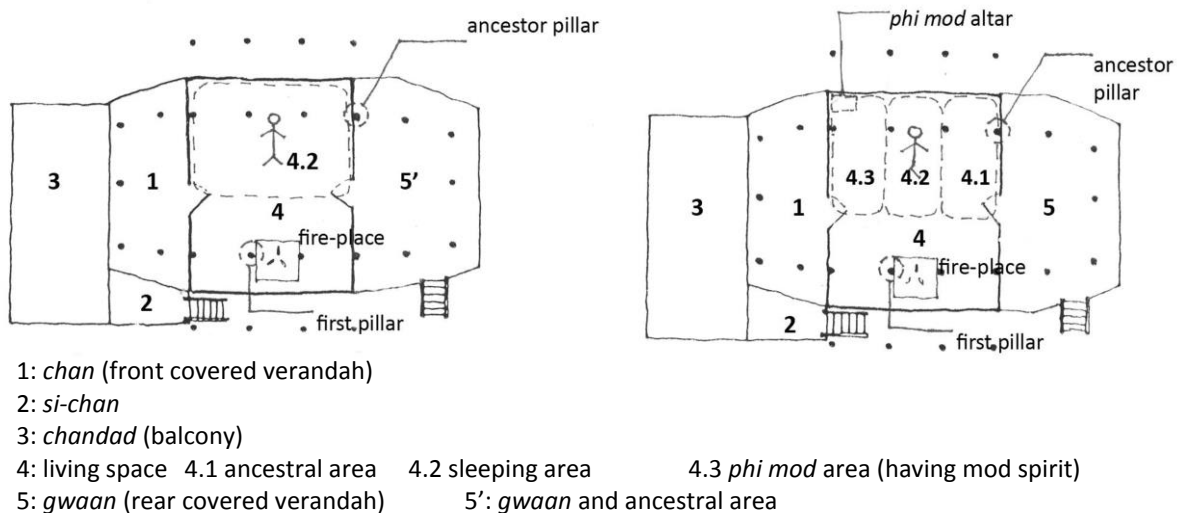
Figure 6: A village layout of Ban Mae Prachan in 1997
Source: Chaturawong, 1997, p. 100.

Spatial Organization of Tai Dam Houses at Ban Mae Prachan Village

Traditional Tai Dam houses at Ban Mae Prachan were built on piles with natural materials and had a tortoise shell circular gable parallel to those in Vietnam. Furthermore, houses in these two areas had neither window nor partition and were built in a basic open floor plan. Their upper floor plan was divided into *gwaan*, *chan*, and the living space with a fire-place for cooking and warming. They also had two external staircases, one to the front and the other to the rear. However, traditional style houses at Ban Mae Prachan differed from those in Vietnam in size, staircase users, and spatial organization of the living space. Tai Dam houses at Ban Mae Prachan were smaller than those in Vietnam as they were usually built three bays long and lived a nuclear family. Two staircases of commoner (*phu noi*) houses at Ban Mae Prachan were no longer separated between men and women instead, one reserved for family members at the *chan* and the other saved for outsiders or other family members at the *gwaan*. Probably because Tai Dam communities were situated among those of the Thais or outsiders. In order to protect their ancestral area and the ancestor pillar from the outsiders, the reception area was placed at the *gwaan*, outside the living space of a house. The covered verandah of *chan* became the front while that of the *gwaan* was the rear and a reception area. It was also the sleeping area of a son-in-law during volunteering period. The location of the ancestral area differed between houses of noble families (*phu thao*) and commoner families (*phu noi*). In Petchaburi, *phu thao* refers to Lo Kham family and *phu noi* were families (*sing*) of Ru, Wi, Ka, Kwang, Rueang, Lo Noi [small Lo], Lang, and Tong (Pitiphat, 1978, p. 57). However, in Vietnam, Lo Kham

[Golden Lo], Lo, Lo Back [Silver Lo], and Kwang Kham [Golden Kwang] families were considered as nobles (*phu thao*), leaders, while the rest were commoners (*phu noi*), inferior. Noble families were considered privileged as they were rulers in Sip Song Chu Tai; however, they were not necessary to be leaders in Thailand. Furthermore, Tai Dam myths claimed that Lo Kham family was created by Thaen, the supreme god, to be a leader of Tai Dams and the only one who was not emerged from a bottle gourd. Whereas Kwang, Luang, and others were emerged from a bottle gourd as the first, second, and so on. Some myths added that Lo family was an assistant of Lo Kham family.

The ancestral area of a noble house was larger than that of a commoner house and situated at the *gwaan* where the ancestor pillar was placed (see Figure 7). While that of commoner houses, the ancestral area and ancestor pillar were located inside the living space (see Figure 8). Their difference was the position of the wall dividing *gwaan* and the living space. At *phu thao* houses, this wall was placed behind the ancestor pillar and made it situated at the *gwaan*, while at commoner houses, the wall covered the pillar which made it located inside the living space. Because the annual feast to the ancestors of nobles needed large space as they had larger offers with buffalo sacrifice whereas those of commoners were smaller with pig sacrifice. Furthermore, ancestors of the commoners were more frightening to outsiders than those of the nobles (Pitipat, Ondam, & Thammaphimuk, 1978, pp. 22, 79). Therefore the staircase at the *chan* of a noble house was used by both family members and outsiders. Their reception area could be held inside the living space. *Gwaan* where the ancestral area of the noble was placed could be a sleeping area of a son-in-law during volunteering period but not allow for a sleeping area of outsiders and women. Before entering to the *gwaan* of noble families, other family members and outsiders needed to ask permission from the ancestor spirits. However, during annual feast period of *phu thao*, other family members and outsiders were absolutely prohibited to enter the *gwaan*. The ancestor pillar normally kept symbols of the *khwan hua* of household members and a name list of the patrilineal ancestors.



Figures 7-8: Upper floor plan of traditional Tai Dam houses at Ban Mae Prachan, *phu thao* house (left) and *phu noi* house (right)

Source: Chaturawong, 1997, pp. 110-111.

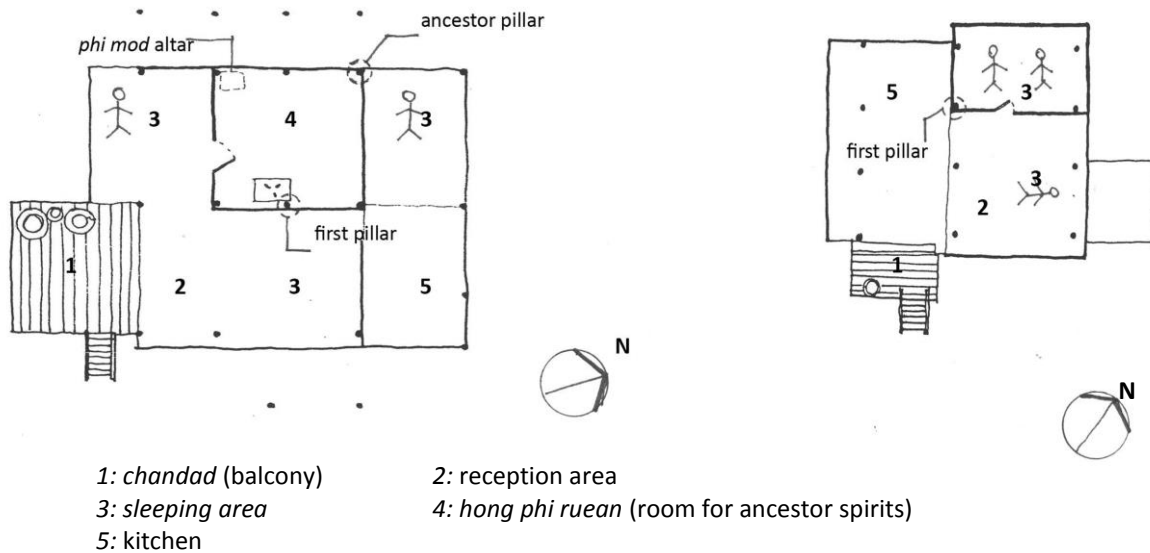
The living space of a commoner house (*phu noi*) consisted of ancestral, sleeping, eating, and cooking areas. If a house owner had lineal ancestors as *mod* (sorcerer), the living space would also contain *phi mod* (sorcerer spirit) area where *phi mod* altar was placed. *Phi mod* altar was normally placed at the bay next to the *chan* in the living space at the direction of ones' head when sleeping. *Phi mod* area was not allowed to sleep; thus in this case, sleeping area of this house with three bays long was left only at the middle bay. *Mod* was a person who could cure sickness and exorcise bad luck through performing a ritual. *Mod* could be male and female but he or she must have father or mother or relatives as *mod* and was chosen to be *mod* by a mod spirit (Pitiphat, 1980, p. 33). Every *phu noi* (commoner) house must have a *phi mod* altar, although they neither have lineal ancestors as *mod* nor contain a *phi mod* area. Since during an annual ceremony and feast for the ancestors, *phi mod* has also to be informed (Chaturawong, 1997, p. 111). Cooking area was around the fire-place inside the living space. The fire-place was located at the lower part of the living space between the two columns of the middle bay (see Plate 5). One of these columns was the first erected pillar which its head was covered with a case made of bamboo or rattan. The case aims to prevent the naga who lives under the earth pushing against the pillar (Chaturawong, 1997, p. 251). The pillar also hung a wooden tortoise or a tortoise shell and dried corn and chili for protection against evil spirits and with the wish for fertility, respectively (see Plate 6).



Plates 5-6: A fire-place at a traditional Tai Dam house at Ban Mae Prachan in 1997 (left) and its first erected pillar which the head was covered with a case and hung a wooden tortoise (right). Source: Chaturawong, 1997, p. 127.

Houses were changed to have a single external staircase at the *chan*, or the front covered verandah, in the developed traditional Tai Dam houses built around 1937-1952. The ancestor and first erected pillars became located inside a bedroom enclosed with bamboo walls (see Figures 9-10). Therefore house owners were no longer worried about outsiders to disturb their ancestors which could lead to sickness of family members. The bedroom which was one bay wide and one or two bays long was considered the most private one and reserved for parents, small children, and teenage daughters. Although a house, for instance, that of Nang Bao, still had a fire-place within this bedroom, it was no longer used. The house had separated cooking area to the rear. The first erected pillar at Nang Bao's house was situated next to the

fire-place. Its head was covered with a case made of rattan and hung a wooden tortoise as well as dried corn and chili (see Plate 7). The house of Nang Bao also had the *mod* spirit as her mother was a female *mod*. The *phi mod* altar was located inside the bedroom at the different bay of the ancestor pillar (see Plate 8). It was a rare case that son-in-law, or husband of Nang Bao, resided at his parent-in-law's house for the whole life since they did not have any sons. Son-in-law could build a small shrine for his ancestors outside parent-in-law house but was not allowed to sleep next to the ancestral area of his wife's ancestors as well as in the *phi mod* area inside the bedroom. After his parent-in-law passed away, the bedroom became vacant (see Figure 9). Another case is that of Nang At, the house did not have the ancestor pillar since she built a new house after her husband passed away. The bedroom was a sleeping area of a daughter and granddaughter and located only the first erected pillar (Chaturawong, 1997, p. 48) (see Figure 10).

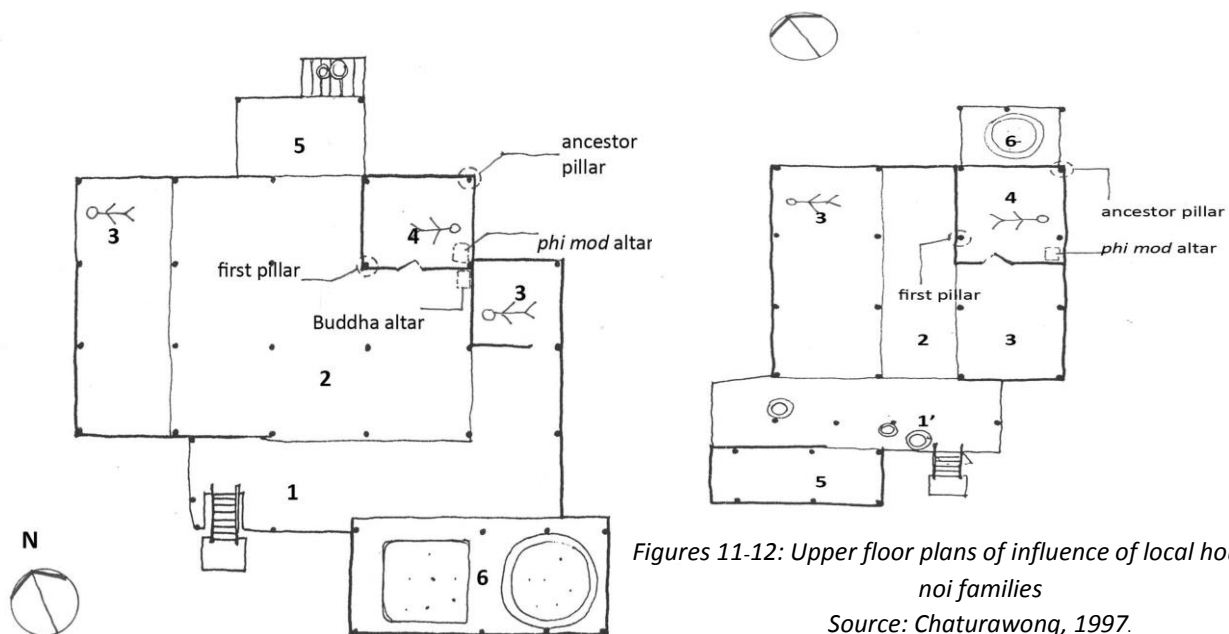


Figures 9-10: Upper floor plans of Nang Bao's house (left) and of Nang At's house (right) in 1997
 Source: Chaturawong, 1997.



Plates 7-8: The first pillar hung a wooden tortoise and was covered with a case on its head (up) and a *phi mod* altar (right) at Nang Bao's house.
 Source: Chaturawong, 1997, p. 155.

Influence of local houses (dated around 1957-1967) at Ban Mae Prachan shared similarities with local Thai houses in Petchaburi. This house type had gable or hip roofs and one external staircase at the *chan* corresponding to those of local people in Petchaburi. The living space on the upper floor of *phu noi* (commoner families) consisted of a bedroom called *hong phi ruean* [room of the ancestor spirits] and a kitchen as well as combined reception, living, sleeping, and storing areas. A kitchen and a bedroom were enclosed with walls separating from other areas. The bedroom with an ancestral area was one bay wide and one or two bays long and reserved for parents, small children, and teenage daughter. It contained both the ancestor and the first erected pillars (see Figures 11-12). While ancestral area and the ancestor pillar of *phu thao* (noble families) was located in the *gwaan* which became a storage area to the rear of the house. The bedroom of *phu thao* thus included only the first erected pillar (see Figure 13). Other sleeping areas scattered in several places of the living space and usually for sons, male relatives, and guests. As it was not enclosed with walls, other sleeping areas were cooler than the bedroom of parents. Direction of one's head when sleeping fixed toward the ancestor pillar only inside the bedroom or *hong phi ruean*. The first erected pillar inside *hong phi ruean* hung a basket made of bamboo parallel to the case covering the column head; however, the basket was sometimes not put on the column. It likewise included a simply wooden tortoise and dried corn and chili. Because of several house extensions, an upper floor plan of some houses became connected with that of a rice barn (see Figure 11). Normally a rice barn was considered superior to a house as it was where *phi kalom khao* (rice barn spirit) dwells. *Kalom* refers to a large basket storing rice grain which was made of bamboo and reed and plastered with mixed soil, buffalo dung, and paddy husk. A traditional rice barn was built separately from a house with higher floor at the direction of one's head when sleeping in the *hong phi ruean* and far enough that a house would not cast a shadow over a rice barn (Chaturawong, 1997, p. 251).



Figures 11-12: Upper floor plans of influence of local houses, *phu noi* families
 Source: Chaturawong, 1997.

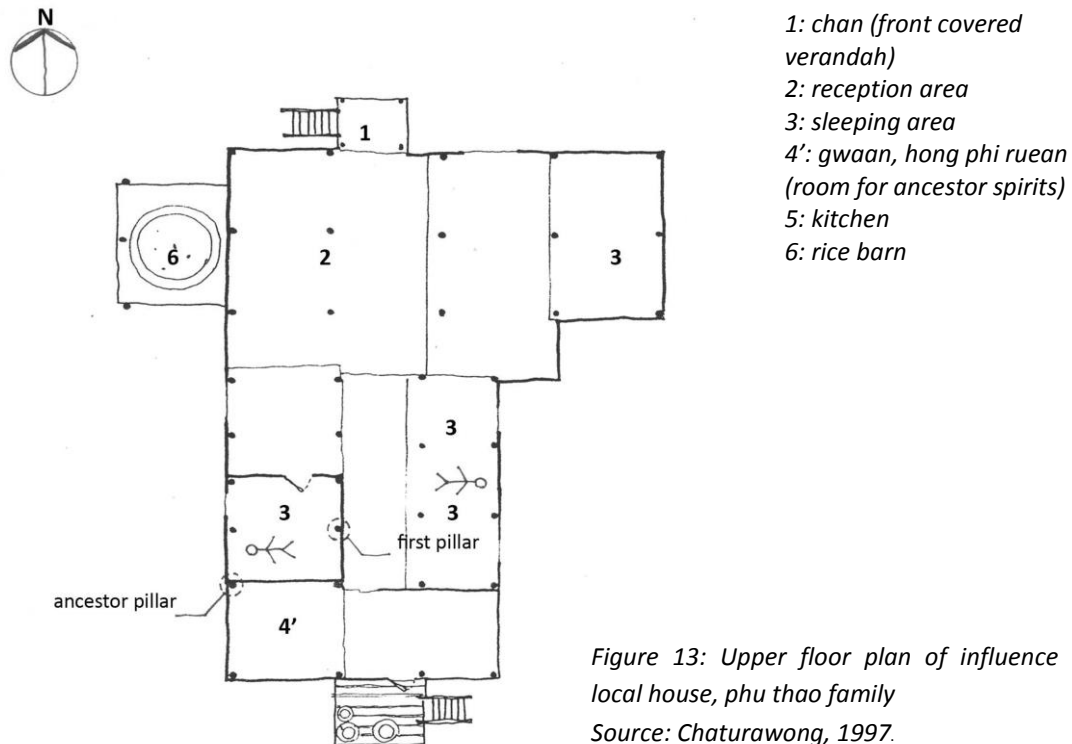
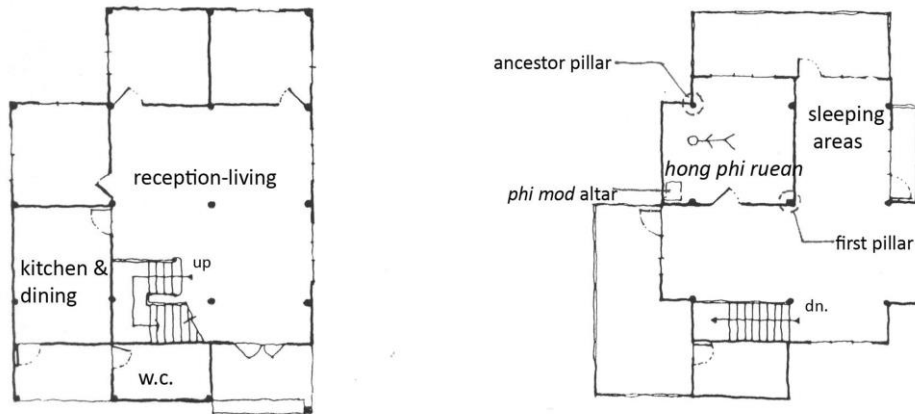
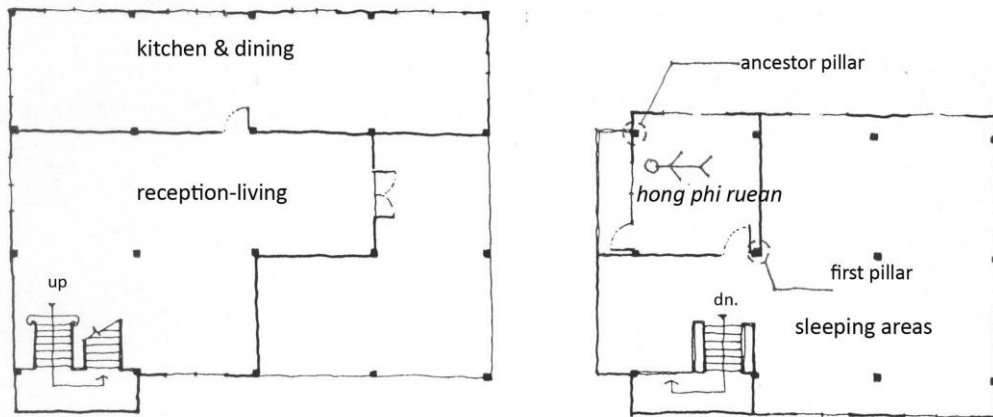


Figure 13: Upper floor plan of influence of local house, phu thao family
 Source: Chaturawong, 1997.

Influence of the central Thai houses had two storeys which the ground floor was reception and living areas as well as included a bathroom, a kitchen-dining, and an internal staircase to the upper floor (see Figures 14, 16). The upper floor consisted of sleeping areas and a bedroom called *hong phi ruean* [room of the ancestor spirits]. *Hong phi ruean* was a sleeping place of parents and teenage daughters as well as an ancestral area for weekly offering and annual ceremony. It was one bay wide and long where the ancestor and the first erected pillars were placed. The former was situated at the direction of one's head when sleeping while the latter was oblique the former at the direction of one's feet (see Figures 15, 17). The first erected pillar hung a basket made of bamboo parallel to the case, a simply wooden tortoise, and dried corn and chili as well as was stuck with a red inscribed cloth influenced from the central Thais. It had no difference between *hong phi ruean* of *phu thao* [noble] and *phu noi* [commoner] families except that of the *phu thao* did not have a *phi mod* altar (Chaturawong, 1997, pp. 207-208).



Figures 14-15: Ground (left) and upper floor plans (right), influence of central Thai house, phu noi family
 Source: Chaturawong, 1997, p. 207.



Figures 16-17: Ground (left) and upper floor plans (right), influence of central Thai house, phu thao family
 Source: Chaturawong, 1997, p. 208.

Tai Dam or Black Tai is known as Lao Song Dam and Lao Song in Thailand. They moved from northwest Vietnam to Petchaburi Province, Thailand during the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries. As their religious beliefs were not mixed Hinduism and Buddhism, they were considered as one of the most primitive Tai. Their religious beliefs reflected in their village layout and spatial organization of houses. Tai Dam houses at Ban Mae Prachan Village were chosen as case studies since the village contained a traditional Tai Dam house which was still alive. Tai Dam village layouts in Vietnam and at Ban Mae Prachan had a village shrine as a guardian, and a graveyard; however, one of the two graveyards at Ban Mae Prachan later became a school and a Buddhist monastery influenced from the Thais. Tai Dam houses at Ban Mae Prachan could be classified into four types, namely, traditional and developed traditional Tai Dam styles and influenced of local and central Thai styles. Although Tai Dams received influence from the Thai, their houses still included an ancestor and the first erected pillars according to their religious beliefs. Traditional Tai Dam houses at Ban Mae Prachan followed the design of old Tai Dam houses in Vietnam. They were built on piles with natural materials and roofed with a tortoise-shell circular gable. The living space was located on the upper floor and had neither partitions nor windows. The open floor plan of the living space combined an ancestral, reception, sleeping, eating, and cooking areas. The ancestral area was around the ancestor pillar,

where the patrilineal ancestors dwelled and was located in the direction of one's head when sleeping. Whereas the first erected pillar was on the opposite side to the direction of one's feet and associated with women and fertility. The houses had two external staircases to the front and to the rear. However, a traditional Tai Dam house at Ban Mae Prachan was smaller than that in Vietnam and their two staircase at commoner houses were no longer separated between men and women instead, one for family members and the other for outsiders or other family members. Houses could be classified into those of noble (phu thao) and commoner (phu noi) families where an ancestral area of the former was placed at the rear covered verandah (gwaan) and that of the latter was in the living space. Gwaan became a reception area of a commoner house. The developed traditional and influence of local style houses had a single external staircase and the ancestor and first erected pillars located inside a bedroom for parents, small children, and teenager daughters. A bedroom of the noble house included only the first pillar as the ancestor pillar was situated at the rear covered verandah which became a storage place. Influence of central Thai style houses were often built in two storeys with brick on the ground floor and cut wood on the second floor. It had a single internal staircase to the second floor where sleeping areas and a bedroom or a room of the ancestor spirits were placed. There were no differences between houses of nobles and commoners. Village layout and spatial organization of Tai Dam houses at Ban Mae Prachan, Petchaburi reflected their adaptation to new environment and society in Thailand where their traditional beliefs were still practiced and a new religion of Buddhism started to approach.

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