

In the organization of the Tai community, the family is the primary social unit. Commonly, it will consist of father, mother, their children, usually the father's sister (if unmarried), and sometimes grandparents. The traditional Tai society is a patriarchal society. Man, the head of the family, makes the decisions in almost every family concern. However, his authority does not hamper the development of individuality or personality in the other members of the household.

(3) **Karn-me sip-hah hoh,**
work-wife, wife's tasks/ fifteen/ item, head, category

karn-phoh sip-hah long.
work-husband, husband's tasks/ fifteen/ matter, what pertains to

(4) **Ying moen faai, tsaai moen nam.**
woman/ be like, compare to/ dam/, man/ be like, compare to/ water

Woman, the wife is also important to the household in many matters. Besides household duties she has to supervise cooking, weaving, looking after children, taking care of the money and valuables, and keeping the accounts of all expenses. In the absence of a father, mother is regarded as head of the home. If there is an older son, however, he may take on all the responsibility but always consults with other family members, such as his mother, wife, brothers, sisters, before making decisions on any important household affairs. At present, these functions and the status of the head of the family continues.

(5) **Kaw- oo au laem- sau.**
cls.person/ father/ take/ bar, long slender/ post

kaw- mae au taep-khah.
cls.person/ mother/ take/ piece of thatch.

(6) **Phoh harm ngau,**
husband/ to carry together/ base (as of tree),

me harm paai.
wife/ to carry together/ the end part

An important fact of Tai culture is that women work side by side with men in the fields and in cottage industries. The husband and the male adults of the family take care of the hard physical labor. The wife cooks, is responsible for the children, and makes and keeps the clothing in good condition.

(7) **Phoh pharn kaw me yarp,**
husband/ destitute/ also, as well as/ wife/ difficult, arduous

tsoy- kan harp tseo mee.
help each other/ carry on the shoulder/ quick/ rich, wealthy

(8) **Phoh yarp kaw me pharn,**
husband/ difficult, arduous/ also, as well as/ wife/ destitute,

tsoy- kan harm tseo mark.
help each other/ to carry together/ quick/ plentiful, rich

Some wives may help the family make a living by setting up grocery corners or food booths. It should also be noted here that even children help their parents work. Young boys and girls do some simple chores like sweeping floors or looking after small children. They are considered to be working hands in the family.

(9) **Thom kwarm paw tsaue ngae,**
listen, obey/ word/ father/ heart/ polite, civilized

thom kwarm mae tsaue yen.
listen, obey/ word/ mother/ heart/ cool, calm

They (the children) are very much polite and gentle. The younger Tai people respect their elders.

The Way of Life Weaving

(10) **[Loen-] see,**
month four, the fourth month/,

sao khuen kee taw laai.
lady/ go up, upwards/ loom/ weave (as cloth)/ design, pattern

The women folk of the Tai are skilled in embroidery and weaving. They have indigenous methods of dying of yarns. The Tais have an unique way of expressing their artistic designs. These artistic designs are reflected in their textiles created by the Tai women on their looms. Additionally, they decorate their houses, bamboo products, and other implements of daily use.

Environment, Technology, and Economy Agriculture and Its Technology Irrigation System Trade

(11) **Het nah haue mee hong,**
do/ rice-field/ let/ have/ canal.

long- kah haue mee poeng.
affair/ trade/ let/ have/ rule, method, tactics

(12) **Het sohn haue mee fun,**
do/ garden/ let/ have/ fertilizer

khaai kun haue sohp warn.
sell/ goods/ let/ mouth/ sweet, (use language that please other people)

-5-

(13) **Het sang het tae-tae,**
do, produce/ what/ do, produce/ exceedingly

kin am pae haue lai khaai.
eat/ not/ be able to/ let/ get/ sell

(14) **Him hoen haue pen kart.**
near/ house/ let/ be/ market

Agriculture plays an important role in the economy of the Tai. They are also famed as good traders, and they are a hard-working and thrifty people.

(15) **Tsoy-kan kin tsang warn,**
help each other/ eat/ so that/ sweet, delicious

tsoy- kan harm tsang mau.
help each other/ to carry together/ so that/ not heavy, light

(16) **Tsoy-kan tsang lai,**
help each other/ so that/ get/,

mai- kan am lee.
hot, vexed/ each other/ not/ good

(17) **Phaue te loh m tsoy- kan pohk,**
who/ will/ fall down/ help each other/ erect/,

phaue te tohk tsoy- kan hop.
who/ will/ fall down/ help each other/ support, cherish

Tai people are reputed as hospitable and ready to render help at one another.

Economic Cooperation

(18) **Het hoen tsoy khah,**
build/ house/ help/ thatch/,

het nah tsoy som.
cultivate/ rice field/ help/ transplant, set plant

They help each other in their work, such as construction of houses, farming, and other related works.

(19) **Kai karn warn nah-hoen hoeng,**
exert oneself/ work, affair/ village/ family/ distinguished, splendid

kai karn moeng nah-hoen khuen.
exert oneself/ work, affair/ country/ family/ go up, make progress

The household is the basic social unit of the Tai village community. Usually co-operative village activities centered round the family household rather than individuals.

Status of Men and Women

Age-grade Structure and Activities

(20) **Thau num khao sarm parn tset saen.**
old/ young/ middle-age/ three/ division of time/ seven/ kind, rank

Among the Tais, age is a prominent factor in the determination of an individual's position in society. The formation of groups on the basis of age, age-grading, is a means of organizing the Tai without recourse to kinship or descent. Age classification plays a significant role in Tai society. It strongly determines an individual's position to which rights and obligations are affiliated.

Seven Age-grade (Tset-saen)

All the Tais are classified and organized on the basis of age into seven categories or age-grades (tset-saen). Each age grade (saen) divided into a range of 6 years. They are ranked by terms which distinguish them as of the following:

- The first, Saen **luk-on-lek** or luk-on-ae (0-6, Very young child) [entering age grade],
- The second, Saen **luk-on** (7-12, Child) [young state],
- The third, Saen **luk-on-hart** or num-haai (13-18, Teenage) [beginning to participate in joint leadership]
- The fourth, Saen **kohn-num** or mao-sao (19-24, 25-30, Youth) [taking part in leadership of youth affairs],
- The fifth, Saen **kohn-khao** (31-36, 37-42, Middle-age) [taking part in leadership] and
- The next to last, Saen **kohn-lohng** (43-48, 49-54, Adult) [village leader] comprise two ranges each.
- The last, Saen **kohn-thau** (54 +, Elder) [connoisseur, ritual performer, village supervisor] comprise a range each.

Each of these age grades is assigned activities which are relevant to their world outlook. The activities are meant to emphasize rights and obligations required by the members of each grade.

Three age sets (Sarm-parn) Male and Female Relations

The four last groups of age grades (the fourth, the fifth, the sixth, and the seventh age group) are laboring people. They are classified and organized on the basis of labor into three age sets (sarm-parn). Sarm-parn are ranked by terms which distinguish them as of the following.

- Parn **mao-sao** (the youths, the young people in the period of adolescence),
- Parn **paw-hoen mae-hoen** (the married persons, the period of household life) and
- Parn **kohn-thau** (the period of old age, seniority or senior citizen).

The members of an age set are those who were initiated into age grade at the same time. Male and female age sets are

paired and support one another in feasting and ceremonies activities. They not only foster strong feelings of loyalty and mutual support but also form a body of social and economic functions.

Chaichuen K. Yodtai
15-May-2001