ขนมกับการสร้างความเป็นไทใหญ่แม่ฮ่องสอน: มองผ่านขนมอาละหว่า เปงม้ง ส่วยทะมิน Alawha, Beinmont and Shwe Tamin and The Creation of Mae Hong Son Tai Yai – ness

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### บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาการสร้างความเป็นไทใหญ่ในพื้นที่ จังหวัดแม่ฮ่องสอน ผ่านขนม 3 ชนิด ได้แก่ ขนมอาละหว่า เปงม้งและส่วยทะ มิน พบว่าขนมทั้งสามชนิดแต่เดิมไม่ใช่ขนมไทใหญ่ โดยขนมอาละหว่ามีถิ่น กำเนิดในตะวันออกกลาง ขนมเปงม้งและส่วยทะมิน มีถิ่นกำเนิดในพม่า แต่ ด้วยบริบททางประวัติศาสตร์ของจังหวัดแม่ฮ่องสอนทำให้ขนมทั้งสามชนิด เข้า มาเป็นที่นิยมแพร่หลายในชุมชนชาวไทใหญ่ในพื้นที่จังหวัดนี้ ประกอบกับชื่อ รสชาติ รูปลักษณ์ ของขนมที่มีลักษณะโดดเด่นและมีความหมาย จึงเข้าไปเป็น ส่วนหนึ่งของวิถีการรับประทานของชาวไทใหญ่ทั้งในชีวิตประจำวันและ พิธีกรรม นำไปสู่การสร้างและรับรู้ว่าขนมทั้งสามชนิด เป็นขนมของชาวไท ใหญ่แม่ฮ่องสอนสืบเนื่องมาถึงปัจจุบัน

คำสำคัญ: อาละหว่า เปงม้ง ส่วยทะมิน ไทใหญ่แม่ฮ่องสอน

322 มหาวิทยาลัยราชภัฏเชียงใหม่

#### Abstract

This article aims to study the creation of Tai Yai – ness in Mae Hong Son Province through Alawha, Beinmont and Shwe Tamin. It was revealed that these desserts did not originate from Tai Yai. Alawha was from the Middle East while Beinmont and Shwe Tamin were from Burma (known as Myanmar). Due to Mae Hong Son historical context, these three kinds of desserts became popular among Tai Yai people in Mae Hong Son. Also, according to their distinguished names, tastes, and looks, these desserts became a part of Tai Yai daily eating customs and rituals. Consequently, this reflects the creation of Tai Yai – ness, and Alawha, Beinmont and Shwe Tamin are currently known as Tai Yai desserts.

Keywords: Alawha, Beinmont, Shwe Tamin and the creation of Tai Yai – ness

#### Introduction

This article presents findings from a study on the creation of Tai Yai – ness through the three kinds of desserts, including Alawha, Beinmont and Shwe Tamin. The study was conducted to present its history and culture through the study of pertinent documents and the field study, including participant observation and informal interviews with groups of Alawha manufacturers, consumers and other people concerned.

The area of the study was Tai Yai community that settled in the Muang District, Mae Hong Son Province before the nation state. Due to geographical and social conditions, the relationship between Mae Hong Son and other provinces in Burma had been established since the end of Konbaung dynasty until the British colonial rule in Burma. The creation of the nation state caused those Tai Yai people to be under the nationalization process of the Thai state, and to define themselves as Thai people descending from Tai Yai or "local Tai Yai."<sup>1</sup> These

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Tai Yai ethnics who settled in Maehongson Province before the nation state, and Tai Yai who were born in Thailand



factors led those Tai Yai to create Tai Yai – ness based on different historical contexts from those of the Shan State, in which the critical period occurred when there was the political crisis in 1962 (That Sriratanaban, 2010)

Based on the direct observation and data collected, it was found that Alawha, Beinmont and Shwe Tamin are a part of Tai Yai's eating culture in which "food" represents the way of thinking and habits (Busarin Lertchavalitsakul, 2012) With regard to these three kinds of desserts they become the representatives of Tai Yai in Mae Hong Son. Despite the fact that they were originally derived from other cultures, their characteristics were developed until they became unique, and could be manifested through sight, taste, and smell. "Food" then formed various meanings relating to "patterns of social relation," which could be adapted when social interaction among different groups occurred (Busarin Lertchavalitsakul, 2012) Moreover, these desserts were created so that they possessed some special characteristics in order to create differences in eating cultures among different ethnic groups.

#### Dessert culture of Tai Yai society

Tai Yai people have had a dessert culture for a long time. They call such dessert "Khao Moon ( | | | | )," (Chiang Mai Rajabhat University, 2013) such as Khao Moon Khoi, Khao Moon Ghoe. According to traditional Tai Yai way of life, the desserts functioned as an important element in meaningful ceremonies. For example, in a feast of holy spirits, important desserts offered were such as Khao Tom Ho Hok (Khao Tom Hua Ngok) and Khao Moon Khao (Khanom Tom Khao), which symbolize to longevity and prosperity. In Poysanglong Ceremony, the desserts which Sanglongs have to eat for auspiciousness and which are usually included in the reception are Khao Taek Pun (Khao Tok Pan) made with popped rice mixed with brown sugar syrup, and patterned in a circular shape. It

324 มหาวิทยาลัยราชภัภเชียงใหม่ 🔍

signifies purity. Another is Khao Pong Tor (Khanom Khao Pong Tor) made with fried dough mixed with brown sugar syrup. The word "Pong" means cooperation, while "Tor" means advancement and prosperity. Khao Moon Hor that looks like Kanom Tian refers to protection, warmth, or a wedding ceremony which is traditionally held in the afternoon and with no rituals. They also serve "Moon Lod Song"<sup>2</sup> or Khanom Lod Chong, which means an enduring love of a couple. Therefore, desserts are served as a part of the ceremony in case they fulfil it with important meanings.

During the traditional period, Tai Yai people did not put much emphasis on desserts. They were not necessarily included at the end of the meal because they were considered extravagant. However, they were sometimes presented at some special occasions such as celebrations and Buddhist ceremonies in which people prepared them for merit-making and for their families and neighbors. Moreover, most desserts comprise of rice flour, glutinous rice flour, and brown sugar syrup that in the past they had to be homemade, and manufacturing those desserts became complicated and time consuming. Therefore, producing those desserts were a big deal and they were made only during special occasions.

In the Tai Yai community, it was discovered that there were confectioners who produced the desserts called "Jao Khao Moon." This showed that, besides being served at ceremonies, they were made to be sold. They were mostly sold in the morning market by the female merchants, and occasionally they put the rest in baskets and sold them around the community. Most consumers were children, and some parents might buy for them sometimes. According to adults, the desserts were provided as offerings to the monks or during tea (Nam Neng) break. Tai Yai people normally had "Neng" or "Miang" (Yanyong Chiranakhon, 2008), both in the form of "Neng Hang" or dried tea leaves and "Neng Som," pickled tea leaves or Miang, which played an important role in the Tai Yai way

 $<sup>^{\</sup>rm 2}$  Moon Long Song is from Moon Lod Song which refers to Tai Yai's Khanom Lod Chong



of life. Concerning the Tai Yai's greeting; "Tai hoen hue mi khon geu Nhoe hoen hue mi khon neng Phoe te seng hue mee ma," they mean there must be some salt and Miang evermore. According to Tai Yai belief, salt and Miang then symbolize abundance. Others might have "Aom Pu" or chewing betel nuts and "Lhudsilik" or smoking. As these desserts were common after a meal or as a light meal, they therefore do not play a big role in daily Tai Yai eating culture.

# Desserts: A reflection of the relation of Mon, Myanmar and Mae Hong Son provinces

Mae Hong Son province is located in the northwest of Thailand, and connects to Union of Burma measuring approximately 483 kilometres in total length. To the north and west, it connects to the Shan State. To the west, it also connects to the Kayah and Kawthoolei States (Office of Mae Hong Son Cultural Affairs, 2006), and to the east and the south it connects to Chiang Mai and Tak provinces of Thailand. Most of the areas of Mae Hong Son Province are the complex mountain ranges in the Thanon Thongchai ranges. Houses are situated on a plain between valleys with the river Pai and other tributaries flowing through, and afterwards they confluence with Salween river. With those physical features, the connection between Mae Hong Son province and other Burmese states was manageable, and this led to the migration of the population around the borders. With Mae Hong Son location at the end border of Thailand, it was difficult for the government to access it. Moreover, with the insurgency movement of Tai Yai provinces in Shan State around the end of Konbaung Dynasty, and the expansion of commerce and forestry, Tai Yai, Karen, Pa-oh (Tong Shu), and Mon people have migrated there since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. When those communities were crowded, the King Intharawichayanon of Chiang Mai gathered and upgraded them into a city having Mae Hong Son as the center of it in 1874. Phaya Singhanat Racha, the ruler of Khun Yuam province, was appointed as its first 326 มหาวิทยาลัยราชภัภเชียงใหม่ 🎈

ruler, who also was responsible for collecting taxes on teak wood for the King of Chiang Mai. There were at least three factors influencing the foundation of Mae Hong Son province during that time; the expansion of the regional business and teak wood business, and the policy on developing Chiang Mai and Siam borders. Based on the historical development of Mae Hong Son province, its relationship with the provinces in Burmese - Mon cultural areas needed to be mentioned, because its foundation period and that of the British colonial rule in 1885 overlapped (Maung Htin Aung, 2013). Under the British rule, there was a rapid social and commercial growth in Burma. Also, with its advantageous location, Mae Hong Son could connect to Burma easily through various means of transportation. During that time, Mae Hong Son gradually became the consumer of Burmese goods, and there were merchants importing those products directly from Burmese harbor. Most of the goods from Malamaeng were finished goods from factories in Britain, such as clothes, Phasin, Sarong, shoes, antique gold, jewellery, and Buddha images. As a result, when goods trends happened during that time, Mae Hong Son was also influenced and usually followed those "trends." Moreover, there were many Burmese merchants who were traders or involved in the forestry business, who married local Tai Yai people, and later settled in Mae Hong Son. These factors led Burmese culture to influence the creation of Mae Hong Son Tai Yai - ness.

Eating culture is one of the many cultures in which Tai Yai were influenced by Burma, such as Hang Lay and Eupasipian (chicken curry with spices), and many kinds of desserts, such as Jaguyaeng (Sakoo Piak), Thamanae (Sanpannae), Khaoyhaguman. Alawha, Beinmont and Shwe Tamin highlighted in this paper are also Burmese influenced. Pa Manee, the owner of Khanom Mae Manee shop, popular in manufacturing Alawha, Beinmont and Shwe Tamin said that her grandfather was a Burmese who came to Maehogson to work on the forestry business, and got married to her grandmother who was Tai. He specialized in making desserts and the recipe was handed down to her mother named Jor, who later became a confectioner and passed the recipe on to her (Manee Aiumkrasint, Interview, April 18, 2016).

Furthermore, Khun Mae Sirilak said that there was a woman named Pa Laeng selling Alawha and Shwe Tamin near the intersection long ago, and many people called her "Pa Laeng Alawha." She learned how to make Alawha from the Burmese and gradually she created her own recipe.

Mae Thao Mai mentioned that when she was a child, there were Tai – Burmese (Khoe Man) people making and selling Beinmont at Pha Bong village (Sirilak Jeenakham, Interview, April 18, 2016).

As mentioned, these three kinds of desserts were influenced by the Burmese culture, and they were spread and developed together with the economic growth in Mae Hong Son, especially the forestry business which was one of the many factors causing the settling of the Burmese there. With their distinguished characteristics, luscious and flavorful or "Sing" in Tai Yai language, these sweetmeats became increasingly popular not only in Burma, but also in Mae Hong Son. As the city of Mae Hong Son was also ranked as "Kad," the center of economy and trade, it was therefore the center of confectioners manufacturing these kinds of desserts, making them famous among the surrounding communities.

#### Alawha, Beinmont and Shwe Tamin: did not originated from Tai Yai

Tai Yai desserts can vaguely be categorized into two groups; the first group with the sharing features among Tai ethnics, and the other originated from other different ethnic groups. The former includes, for example, Khao Med Gai (Khao Taen or Nang Led) and Khao Moon Hor. The latter involves foods such as Ja Gu Yaeng (Thagu Pyin (Aradmin, 2012) or Saku Pieak) derived from Malaysia via Burma, Kulfee (candy) from India, Kluay Ung No (Kluay Buad Chee – banana in sweetened coconut milk), and Thamanae from Mon. Alawha, Beinmont and Shwe Tamin also originated from other different ethnic groups.

With its long history, Alawha is a famous dessert having different names such as halva, halawa, haluva, aluva, halwa, and alva. It is known that it originated over 3,000 years ago in the Middle East (Martell, 2011). The word "halva" comes from the Arabic word "halwa" which means sweets or candy. However, considering its language origin, it is from Sanskrit which is the ancient language in the group of Indo – European – Iranian – Arayan, and Arab also uses borrowed words from Sanskrit (Random House Webster's Unabridged Dictionary, 2009).

Alawha moved from its origins via the expansion of the trade routes through the regions of Western Asia, Mediterranean Sea, China, and India. Among these regions, there had long been the development of logistics management before Christ. This caused the spread of Alawha across the continents, and various names then were given to it. Currently, Alawha can be found in India, Western and Middle Asia, North Africa, Israel, Balkan Peninsula, and also found among the Jewish in America (Martell, 2011). Though they are diverse in look and taste, they are called with slightly the same names. Alawha are usually made from wheat flour or nut butter, ground sesame, vegetables, cereals, and sugar.

Alawha is famous among Tai Yai ethnics because of the influence of India and Burma. In India, Halva is added with coconut and other ingredients, and with the relationship between the port cities of India and of the Mottama Gulf, it was extended to the port cities in the Ayeyarwady River, such as Pathein city, and was called Halawa (



Though both Swe Tamin (

Alawha, Beinmont and Shwe Tamin are well known among Mon and Burmese, especially in the south of Burma as they came via the trade around its port cities, and some were extended with the settlers there. Pa Saengsa, a Tai Yai from Taunggyi said that in Shan State, Alawha, Beinmont and Shwe Tamin were rarely found, but she had eaten them in Yangon and Malamang. In Malamang, Alawha was very popular and the markets there were full of Alawha merchants (Saengsa, Tai Yai jeweller who merchandises in Taunggyi and Mae Hong Son area, Interview, April 22, 2016). This indicated the popularity of these desserts in that area, in which people had a connection with the Burmese. According to Mae Hong Son's social and geographical contexts, it is necessary to connect it with the south of Burma while Shan State was different. As a result, those desserts were not much popular there.

#### Characteristics of Alawha, Beinmont and Shwe Tamin in Mae Hong Son

As Alawha, Beinmont and Shwe Tamin beame famous in Mae Hong Son, the Tai Yai there pronounce their names differently based on Tai Yai pronounciation; Alawha and Alhawha, Pengmong – Pemung – Pemong, and Suay Tamin, for instance. Besides, they were adapted into Tai Yai's own recipe 330 มหาวิทยาลัยราชภัภเชียงใหม่ 🔍

depending on the local ingredients and Tai Yai preferences. In other words, they are Maehogson's unique recipes.

Alawha comprises of rice flour, coconut milk, sugar, and salt. It is made from rice flour mixed with coconut milk, sugar and salt in slow heat until cooked. Then it is poured into a big round tray, topped with skimmed coconut milk. In order to bake its surface to become brownish and scented, it is closed with a metal lid covered with coconut spathe. When cool, it is cut into small cubes. In addition to the common Alawha, there are Alawha Jung or Alawha Jong made with different ingredients, wheat flour, coconut milk, sugar, milk, butter, and fresh durian or durian paste. The words "Jong" or "Jung" mean wheat flour, which is its main ingredient (Boonlert Wiratanapon, Interview, April 25 2016). It is made from wheat flour mixed with the earlier ingredients and cooked using the same procedures as Alawha. It is commonly served only on special occasions like Buddhist ceremonies because it is expensive, and lots of ingredients such as fresh durian or durian paste are rare in Mae Hong Son. Also, it takes about three hours to mix all the ingredients together, which is a longer time than when mixing Alawha.

Suay Tamin (Shwe Tamin) is made from cooked sticky rice mixed with sugar and coconut milk, poured into a tray, topped with coconut milk and its surface made brownish with the same method as Alawa.

Pengmong (Beinmont) is made from rice flour mixed with coconut milk and sugar. Then it is left until it rises and is mixed in a small pot until cooked and cut into small triangles. This recipe has since been changed because baking powder started being added to those ingredients. It is mixed well under slow heat, poured into the tray when cooked, topped with coconut milk, and baked with coconut spathe to make its surface brownish. When the mixture rises, leave the heat until cool, then cut into small cubes. Pengmong when finished looks like a cake, so it is called Tai Yai dessert cake. In conclusion, these desserts, though differing slightly in taste, share similar ingredients, and cooking procedures; specifically, the making of its surface brownish. This unique feature made them to obtain the so-called name, "Khanom Na Mai," and later they become famous among other groups of people.

### Alawha, Beinmont, Shwe Tamin and "Eating customs" of Tai Yai in Mae Hong Son

Mae Hong Son is the social and economic center of the surrounding communities and its city functions as "Talad" or market where people exchange and trade. Tai Yai houses in its city were designed as "Reuan Pae" or terraced houses especially aiming for merchandising. Furthermore, the morning market there starts in the early morning and closes in the late morning, and many people from the neighboring areas do the business there. In the market there is "Jao Khao Moon" making and selling Alawah, Beinmont and Shwe Tamin. Some sell all kinds of these desserts, others may sell only some of them depending upon available ingredients and the taste of people in different periods of time. If it is Wan Pid (Shaving Day – Wan Gohn), the market women will produce more desserts than usual as more people come to the market to buy things for Buddhist holy days. After the market has closed, those women take the rest of the desserts home and sell them there. The last name of those well-known specialists in dessert making are usually called following the names of the desserts. For example, "Pa Laeng Alawah" refers to Pa Laeng who is known in making Alawah in that area, and "Pa Suay Gee Jao Khao Moon" is Pa Suay Gee who sells various kinds of desserts. Houses or shops selling those desserts are typically known as "Hoen Jao Khao Moon" or Reuan Khai Khanom. This depends on the owners' specialization, for instance, Hoen Jao Alawah, and Hoen Jao Shwe Tamin. It was also discovered that many years ago there were some market 332 มหาวิทยาลัยราชภัภเชียงใหม่

women who walked and sold those desserts around the communities during the late morning and afternoon.

However, the pace of the dessert manufacturing has changed over the time. At the present time, there are fewer market women who sell desserts, but instead, they are sold in "Kad Laeng" or the evening market where the ready meals are usually available. This reflects well how people today live their rushed lives for work and they do not have time to join the morning market. The widely known Jao Alawah also improved their ways of merchandising their desserts, from selling at the markets to selling at homes or shops instead. For example, since the late morning Khun Mae Manee sells her desserts well at home instead of at the market as lots of visitors prefer going there. Consequently, this group of the local desserts is adapted well in accordance with tourism.

Desserts are a significant part of rituals, serving as the food offerings given to the Buddha and monks, and to the angels and spirits, and they are also served for participants in ceremonies. With regard to their unique characteristics, they become notable and are used as offerings in both auspicious and inauspicious ceremonies because of many reasons. Chief among these is that Alawha, Alawha Jong, Beinmont, and Shwe Tamin do not have Tai Yai origins, but they are from the Burmese and had spread throughout Mae Hong Son over the time. Therefore, they had not been promoted as the food offerings in specific ceremonies at first, but they can be used in any ceremonies. As a result, these desserts are popular in both auspicious ceremonies such as Tang Som Tor Lhong, Poy Sang Long, and the inauspicious ones such as funeral ceremony and Han Som Ko Ja. The other reason is that Shwe Tamin has the Burmese meaning of "golden rice" and it is a mixture of sticky rice which symbolize unity. Relating to its special meaning from its name and ingredients which means wealth and unity, it is then commonly used in auspicious ceremonies like house-warming and wedding ceremonies. Another reason is that as Beinmont has quite a different



look, like a cake or fluffy rice flour cake (Khanom Thuay Fu), from and Alawha and Shwe Tamin, its meaning then differs. The look of "Fu" refers to prosperity, it is therefore usual in auspicious ceremonies, and is later adapted into Tai Yai's own dessert or "Tai Yai cake." Therefore, it can be found in Tai Yai birthday feasts to represent Tai Yai – ness. The last reason is that all three kinds of desserts mentioned share some similarities; they have the same cooking procedures, experienced makers are needed, they cannot be produced in large amounts, and some special ingredients for such as "Alawha Jung" like butter, milk and fresh durian are hard to find making it rare in the market and expensive. As a consequence, they are considered special in ceremonies and are given the meaning relating to the social and economic status of those hosts of the ceremonies.

# The presentation of Tai Yai – ness through Alawha, Beinmont, and Shwe Tamin today

Tourism in the north of Thailand has developed since the countries first social and economic development plan (1961 – 1966) (Saratsawadee Ongsakul, 2008). With regard to the Mae Hong Son development strategy, an emphasis was put on special characteristics of the province which include natural and geographical circumstances like Bua Tong field, and traditional and cultural uniqueness of Tai Yai people or Tai and Tai highlanders which are ethnic groups whose identities are preserved well. Also with a trend in cultural tourism since 1987, Mae Hong Son has highlighted the presentation and appearance of Tai Yai through their ways of life, festivals, and cultures along with nature-based tourism. The so-called Tai Yai desserts, Alawha, Beinmont, and Shwe Tamin, have had the role as "Tai Yai Mae Hong Son desserts" through tourism advertisements that promoted them as the desserts that can be tried and found in the morning market, and through this advertisement the market there is also

334 มหาวิทยาลัยราชภัภเชียงใหม่ 🔍

promoted. The well-known Mae Manee shop or Pa Nee Jao Alawha is pinned for the visitors as the landmark filled with Tai Yai desserts.

According to the governmental division, Mae Hong Son Municipality has had the walking street market project since 2002, which later has developed into a cultural street during the high season since 2006 (Pakorn Jeenakham, Director of Mae Hong Son Municipalty Office, Interview, April 22, 2016). Many market women sell their Tai Yai local desserts well there. The Municipality also presents Mae Hong Son's "Tai Yai – ness" through "Poed Moeng Tai," which is a tourism and cultural project that began in 2006 (Mae Hong Son Provincial Administrative Organization, 2015). During the festival, there are booths of Tai Yai desserts, Alawha, Beinmont, and Shwe Tamin which are specially promoted there. Furthermore, with the policy enhancing Thai cuisine to be global or "Thailand: Kitchen of the World," Mae Hong Son has attempted to present Tai Yai foods and that of different ethnic groups, and Alawha, Beinmont, and Shwe Tamin were introduced through cooking demonstrations and contests. According to important governmental and public events held in Mae Hong Son, these three kinds of desserts are provided with a coffee break, and they are considered Tai Yai light meals. Though they are famous and can be gifts, they cannot be kept fresh for a long time. With this limitation, they are then promoted as the desserts needed to be tasted where they originated.

#### Conclusion

Although Alawha, Beinmont, and Shwe Tamin are originated from different countries, with their historical contexts, they eventually become Tai Yai desserts and famous in Mae Hong Son and the nearby communities. Also with the tourism promotion of the government and the trend localism and nostalgia among ethnic people, they lead those ethnics to try to create their identities in



Thailand. Regarding the Tai Yai people in Mae Hong Son, they create their Tai Yai – ness through different methods. These desserts were developed so that they are promoted and accepted as Tai Yai desserts of Mae Hong Son.

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