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***Hhamaq tul* and *Milsanlquvqsant lol*:  
An Anthropological Comparative Study on “Collective Avoidance  
Ritual” among Hani-Akha People in China, Laos and Thailand**

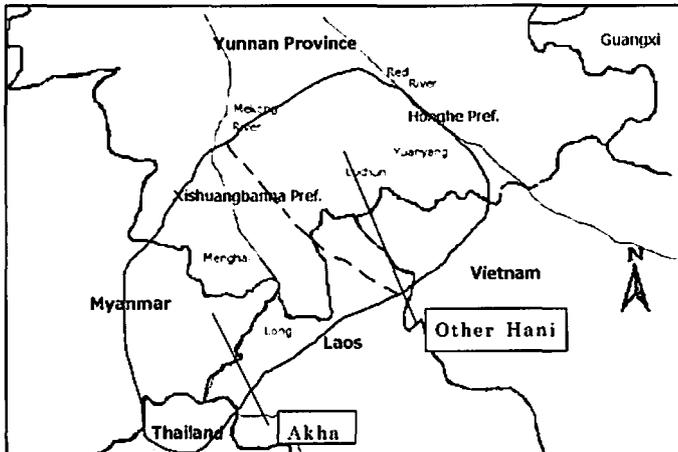
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**Abstract**

*Hhamaq tul* is one of the annual rituals held by Hani people in Honghe Pref. Yunnan province. *Milsanlquvqsant lol* is similar ritual held by Akha people in Myanmar, Laos and Thailand. It used to be held by Akha people in Xishuangbanna, P.R.C. I compare with these rituals and examine previous studies. I draw a conclusion that both of them are “collective avoidance ritual” of their ancestor’s wisdom for survival.

keywords: Hani, Akha, ritual, Yunnan, Laos, Thailand



Map 1 Distribution of Hani and Akha

Table 1 Population of Hani-Akha(2014) estimated by Inamura

|               | Akha Population<br>Estimated | Hani Population<br>Estimated |
|---------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| China(P.R.C.) | 285,000                      | *1,409,000                   |
| Myanmar       | 400,000                      | 0                            |
| Thailand      | 60,000                       | 0                            |
| Laos          | 108,000                      | 900                          |
| Vietnam       | 0                            | 24,000                       |
| Total         | 853,000                      | 1,433,900                    |

\*This population includes Hani group and other dialect group which P.R.C government identified as official Hani nationality(ethnic group). This population excluded Akha. I discussed many census about each population in my dissertation(Inamura 2015a:29-33).

The orthography of Hani-Akha words written in this article is known as "New Hani Script"(it is not latest) in China[see Lewis and Bai 1996].

## I Introduction

It is impossible to understand a ritual or cultural elements without getting grasp of co-variations of them. This point of view will declare some kind of thought of comparative methodology. Folklore studies tend to pick up common traits and try to guess "authentic traits", "true culture" by the study of historical conjecture or comparative linguistics. These attempts are rather obstacle of understanding cultural elements themselves. It will be not understandable until the cultural elements are put in the context of historical change and co-variations.

Hani is a name of the official ethnic groups in Peoples Republic of China. This P.R.C. ethnic category include many sub-groups, but Hani group and Akha group are relatively large. Hani is known as a cultivator of terraced paddy fields, which was nominated for World Heritage in 2013. Some Hani is also official ethnic group in Vietnam. Akha is one of the famous hill tribes, scattered through Northern Thailand, Laos and Myanmar[see Table1,Map1]. Each of them looks different appearances and modes of production. But they share a common ancestors, which passed from father

to children over fifty generations. I tried to plot their genealogies as 100 examples in map. We can accurately trace their ancestor's migration over 500 years[see Inamura 2012].

*Hhaqma tul* ritual is quite important for Hani people, and also it shows the crucial point of discussing about Southeast Asian pre-modern states. This is important for the dynamic political model in the epoch-making study by E. Leach(1954), also for the discussion of Asian despotism (K.A.Wittfogel) influenced the notion of Asiatic mode of production by K. Marx.

*Hhaqma tul* is generally known as a village community ritual, which is held approximately in February (each village has their own auspicious day) . It is one of the biggest festivals among Hani people.

## II A Review of Studies on *Hhaqma tul* and *Milsanlquvqsant lol*

I can safely say that the most studies of *Hhaqma tul* are limited in P.R.C. This ritual is corresponded with the sequence of *Milsanlquvqsant lol* ritual and *Laoqkaq dol* ritual among Akha in Thailand and Laos. The studies referred to *Milsanlquvqsant lol* by European and American scholars are not few. The Japanese scholars' studies on *hhaqma tul* are so superficial and ethno-centric, which are related with the issue of origin of Japanese or evolutionist approach of Asian Culture. I can ignore these articles by Japanese scholars [see Inamura 2003a]. Thus I would like to focus attention on the studies of *Hhaqma tul* in P.R.C. and the studies of *Milsanlquvqsant lol* in Europe and America.

In 1950s the topics of ethnology in P.R.C. are concentrated on ethnic identification. So the studies on *hhaqma tul* used to be considered as one of the distinctive cultural traits. Firstly You Zhong 尤中 translated *hhaqma*

*tul* into “dragon festival” (祭龙) in Chinese. Then the potlatch type feast at *hhaqma tul*, of which tables are lined side by side like a dragon, had been called “long dragon feast” (长龙宴) in Chinese. After that several Hani scholars insist that *hhaqma tul* is not related with dragon worship [Jiumi 1993:20-21, Weize 1995:31, Nuohan 1990:19]. But at least in Cheli 车里 village, Luchun 绿春, *Hhelaog* (king of dragon) is worshiped at *hhaqma tul* beside *beiqyaoq* (Hani dragon: which is disliked) [Li Kezhong 1998:76]. Anyway *hhaqma tul* should be analyzed as *hhaqma tul* itself. After that remarkable works had been published, mainly based on religion study by Hani scholars [Li Kezhong 1998, Weize 1995].

In Thailand *Milsantquvqsant lol* has been analyzed in the context of Southeast Asian pre-modern polity [see Plate1]. Deborah Tooker showed that these rituals reproduced as replicating village founding. This aspect is coincident with Li Kezhong’s 李克忠 analysis on *hhaqma tul*. There is three levels, building a house; *Zaolkuldi-e*, village founding; *Laoqkaq dol*, worship for “a country owner”; *Milsantquvqsant lol* [Tooker 1988:320]. *Milsantquvqsant* (The “Offering to Lords of Land and Water), Kammerer noted these lords are identified as *yaolsant*, which label is the Akha equivalent of Shan term *saohpa* (“prince” or “lord”) [Kammerer 1986:280]. Lewis noted “It is certainly borrowed from the Shans. Akha all recognize this. They even tell me that it used to be they just joined the Shans in this offering, and contributed money and liquor as their share in it.” [Lewis 1969-70:256]. Alting von Geusau noted “The only occasion on which the *zyuqma* takes off his turban, folds his hands, and bows his head in the direction of the four winds (all of which actions seem in violation of *zant* !) occurs when prayers are offered to the Lords of the Earth. The prayers are in either Shan or Thai, and clearly acknowledge Thai political

power over territory"[von Geusau 1988:250-251]. This ritual is also known in Menghai, Xishuangbanna as *Milsanlquvqsanl lol*[Hani social and historical Survey:136] or *Gaqsanl lol* which I heard. Masao Higa heard about it as worship of Muang deity(principality deity) at Menghai in Xishuangbanna in the past[Higa(et al.)2006:78-79]. Also Akha scholar Mentu 门图 mentioned about it as hunting offering for mountain deity in Xiding 西定. Xishuangbanna[Mentu 2002:46]. However this ritual is hardly not held among Akha in Xishuangbanna, China after 1960s. Tooker(1988,1990,1996) applied Tambiah's notion of "galactic polity", which is Tambiah noted as "Such a political edifice was not so much a bureaucratized centralized imperial monarchy as a kind of galaxy-type structure with lesser political fission or incorporation" [Tambiah 1976:70]. This point of view is developed on the base of Leach's dynamic political model between Shan and Kachin (Jinpo). But Akha lacked cross-cousin marriage system among Kachin (such as Mayu-dama), it is difficult to examine mechanical pendulum model between authoritarian monarchy and equalitarian community. This contradictive dichotomy of ideology had not been solved in their society or mythology, and clearly existed as Hani polity before 1950s. Also it is quite important to examine Tambiah's model in non-Buddhism area.

### III *Hhamaq tul* :A ritual between lineage ritual and community ritual.

*Hhaqma* also means the special forest at the upper side of village, which is village community share or some lineages own. *Hhaq* means "power", *ma* as a suffix means "mother", "origin" or "source". So *hhaqma* can be translated into "The Source of Power". Li Kezhong translated it *jingsheng* 精神 (this Chinese word can be translated, "spirit", "will", "soul", "mind", "mentality", "motive", etc.).This modern word is unsuitable and too vague

and abstract. If *hhaqma* indicates “The Source of Power”, it reminds us totemism of Durkheimian notion. However the notion of totemism after Levi-Strauss shows that psychological or evolutionist explanation is rejected. The interpretation by Levi-Strauss is that totemism is the issue of cognitive category in *la pensée sauvage*. I heard that members of some lineage can not become *Molpil*, some can become politician in Yuanyang. These category remind me of the nexus with their folk category *Zyuq* (approximately politics), *Hal* (approximately military or skill), *Pil* (approximately magic or priest).

*Hhaqma tul* is commonly considered as a community offering for community spirit [e.g. Li Kezhong 1998]. But Yang Liujin 杨六金 and I found two puvma albol (holy trees) in a village, Hajiao village in Ranren 然仁, Leyu 乐育 township, Honghe 红河 County [Yang & Inamura 1997]. Similarly there used to be three holy trees in a village, Yuanyang 元阳 County, where the village I spent nine months for my fieldwork. They said each tree belong to Bai 白, Ma 马 and Li 李 lineages (surnamed clans). In this village *hhaqma tul* is held on a same day. But every lineage killed their own pig and offered to each own tree and held a feast under their own tree [see Plate2]. After the offering each member of the lineage visited the tables of other lineages and ate a food and drank liquor. They made a good friendship each other in a same day. In Quanfuzhuang, 全福庄 Yuanyang county, there used to be two trees, but now they have one tree (The other was struck by lightning). By these evidences *hhaqma tul* could not be simply analyzed as a community ritual. In Ezha 俄扎, Yuanyang county, a big pig was killed in one village. But pork was equally divided and distributed to each lineage by weighing it on scales. On the contrary, in Akha village meat is equally distributed to each household at such a

ritual. It is because Akha people ideologically tend to deny the existence of lineage as a faction at least at ritual in spite of existing lineages[see Plate3].

It is clearly inappropriate to understand these distributions as a cultural survival of "primitive democracy" [Li Kezhong1998:271-297]. Ritual itself has a function to connect the present with mythological ancient time. This aspect is the illusion by old-fashioned anthropology by Morganism and Fraser' s notion of "cultural survival". The expressions of equality at ritual mean neither past equalitarian society nor present equality. Social scientist should analyze these peculiar communication at ritual in the context of social intercourse and examine historical records without simply believing it.

#### IV Lords and *Hhaqma tul*

There was a Tusi System 土司制度<sup>1</sup> before 1950 in Yunnan[Inamura 2015b,plate5],Li Kezhong did not mention about the nexus of lords and *hhaqma tul* in historical documents. Weize offered this point of view but did not show concrete examples [Weize 1995:115]. The insight of the author of "*Hani brief history*" is however extreme left one, showed the evidence.

"Holy tree is human being's protective deity. Some families have their own holy trees. Village community has also common holy tree."

"*Milgu*[religious headman of village] in these area is only the conductor of dragon ceremony [*hhaqma tul*] and does not have another political power. A few *Byuqma* [priest] make their living by superstitious activities. They are

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<sup>1</sup> Lords(Tusi 土司) were tribal leaders recognized as imperial officials by the Yuan,Ming and Qing-era Chinese governments. The arrangement known as native chieftain system 土司制度,part of which lasted until 1950 in Honghe Area.

patronized priests, wholly recite the genealogy of the lord. And they say lord is sky god, if lord is absent, then no rice are harvested and cock never crows [which means that tomorrow never comes]. They deceive people by these words. Some lords labeled these natural worship as a symbol of class. For example, Situo Lord's "offering to mountain god" [*hhaqma* or *Milsant*] is changed into offering to his subordinates. The harvest ceremony which used to be held in *Milgu's* field, was changed into Lord's field. Religio-superstitious activity is ruler's ideological instruments." [*Hani Brief History*:110 The sentences in parenthesis are Inamura's notes.]

"In the Nageng Lord's Area, Every village has own forest. These are prohibited to cut trees, especially 'village deity tree'. If it come out that someone cut them, he or she will be severely punished by customary law. Thus these forest was perfectly protected by these severe punishment. This is the wisdom of the ethnic group who lives in the remote area. [*Yuanyang historical documents* vol.1:57]

Before 1950s, Lord of Land and Water *Milsantquvqsant* or Lord of land *Milsaol* used to be not only supernatural existence but also Lord itself in some area. Thus I guess that mountain deity which Mentu mentioned is Tai Lord of Menghai principality. *Milsant* (owner of land) used to be a Tai Lord. So they used to pray to Tai Lord for permitting to hunt animals. However there is no Lord and animals are too scarce for hunting anymore.

## V Collective memory and *Hhaqma tul*

Superficially *Hhaqma tul* represents unity. However the text of ritual *Hhaqniq apyuq colpol pol* (by Zhu Xiaohe 朱小和 *Byumoq*) shows that *hhaqma tul* has some function of re-organizing splintery village or lineage.

*Niq la Hhaqma olzaq.* In February *Hhaqma aol* [same as *Hhaqma tul*]  
*Hhavqpaq qiq mol seivq.* Killing a big male pig  
*Huteil lei col loq,* A man at the front  
*Züldal heeq nei qiq sseiqa nga.* Taking a finger-size thick and large meat  
*Nolho lei col,* A man at the back  
*Alpavq heeq nei qiq dev nga.* Taking leaf-size thin and little meat  
*Qiq yol maq dil niq yol jol.* One family cannot divide into two  
*Qiq pu maq dil niq pu civ.* One village cannot divide into two  
*Colmoq aqpyuq laqhol bol e neema cal,* Old man is impatient to divide family.  
*Süildev aqhhol loq pusiivq qiq e teiq al.*

New village head is busy to keep a unity of a village.

[*Haniq Apyuq Colpolpol*: :31-32 written in Yuanyang dialect, recited by a famous priest Zhu Xiaohe, published in 1986 at Yunnan nationality publisher, English translation from Hani words by Inamura]

Hani have quite good memory, remembering history of lineage and village community. *Hhaqma tul* ideology represents egalitarianism and unity of a community. However they can not forget their own lineage history. Thus when Lord's power became strong, special ritual appeared overwhelming egalitarianism.

## VI Conclusion : *Hhamaq tul and Milsanlquvqsant lol* as "collective avoidance ritual"

Sipsongpanna Tai kingdom was a colleague of Muang(principalities) before 1949. In 1953 P.R.C. government named Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture. On the other hand, Basin of Honghe(Red River) was occupied by many lineage type tribes. Most powerful tribe was Nisu people and its lineages, which is called *Haqhhol* by Hani people and

officially included Yi ethnic group now. Han Chinese expanded to Yunnan by Mongolian invasion in 13 century[see FitzGerald 1972]. Du Wenxiu Muslim Rebellion (1856-1874) crucially made Han Chinese expand to the south. Mongolian Army, Han Chinese, Qing Army, Du Wenxiu (杜文秀) Muslim Rebellion, British Army, French Army, Japanese Army, Nationalist Party, Communist Party and indigenous Lords (Tusi 土司) [see Inamura 2015b]. Most Hani people used to be under the control of *Haqhol* polity like Nalou Lord. Akha was ruled by Tai polity[Figure1].

Both *Hhamaq tul* and *Milsanlquvqsanl lol* are not an ideological plot by a ruler. I do not say each Hani-Akha individual think so, but it is accumulated folk-wisdom or folk-lore by ancestors for survival over long time warfare. These ritual look obedience to Tai or Nisu ruler. But Hani-Akha ancestors learned that counterfelt obedience avoid crisis. Their funeral song, which is pure ancestor's words and never seen borrowed words, always invoke on deceased that do not go high(great), do not go low(miserable), choose middle way [Inamura 2003b, see also von Geusau 1983].

James Scott(2009) enlightened these hill tribes cultures as "the art of Not being governed". They are neither primitive nor nomadic. They are just reluctant exiles from mountain to mountain at modern warfare times. In Hani-Akha case, I can agree with Scott's point of view. *Hhamaq tul* and *Milsanlquvqsanl lol* visibly show feigned allegiance for rulers. But actually ritual is also practice of preparation for escape. It reminds me of the notion of "avoidance practice" by Erving Goffman[Goffman 1982(1967): 16]. But Goffman mention this notion as face-to-face relationship. So I will call them "collective avoidance ritual".

*Miqsaol albol*(holy tree) was systematically destroyed as superstition in

the Cultural Revolution by communists in 1950s-1960s[Hu&Tang 1993]. In 2014 September, I showed a picture of *Miqsaol albol* of Laos to an old man(70 years old) at Nannuo Mountain in Xishuangbanna. He grinningly answered it is *milsaol albol*, it was that he had seen until childhood. His son (45 years old) has never seen it before. He was born after the Cultural Revolution.

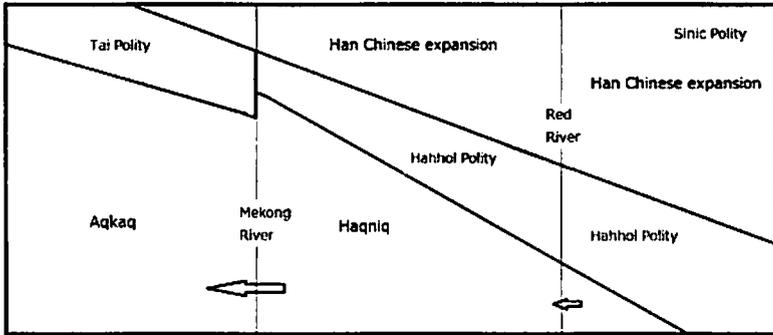


Figure1 Migration of Hani and Akha in their Oral History



Plate1 *Milsanlquvqsanl* in Chiangrai, Thailand



Plate2 *Hhaqma albol* of Village Community: Yuanyang Ezha (left)  
*Hhaqma albol* of Bai Lineage Yuanyang (right)



Plate3 Providing meat for each household (left) Chiangrai  
Providing meat for each lineage (right) Yuanyang

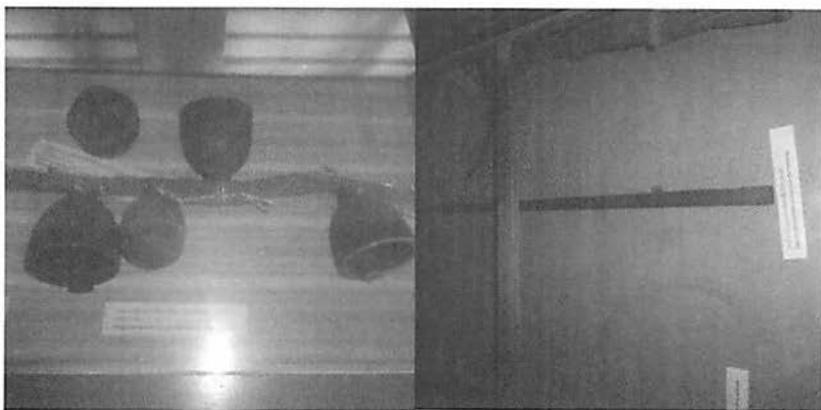


Plate4 *Miqsaol albol*(holy tree)  
( Long district, Luangnamtha, Laos 2014)

### Muang Sing Museum in Laos: Tai Lord



This museum is recreation of Tai Lue Lord's mansion  
Portrait of Cao Fa Sili Nō(Lord of Muang Sing, Laos 1855-1905 reigned)



Elephant bells as symbol of Lord

Lord's gun

**Nalou Lord in Jianshui, ruler of Honghe and Yuanyang :*Haqhol* Lord**



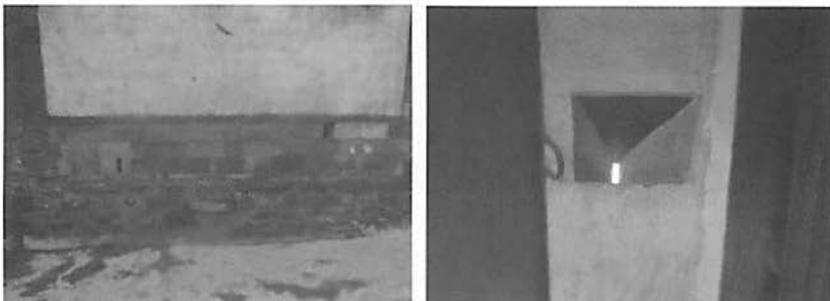
The Office building of Nalou Yongle Lord, which built in Qing-era. Huixin village, Potou county, Jianshui Pref. 纳楼土司署 建水县坡头乡回新村



Tower gate and screen wall



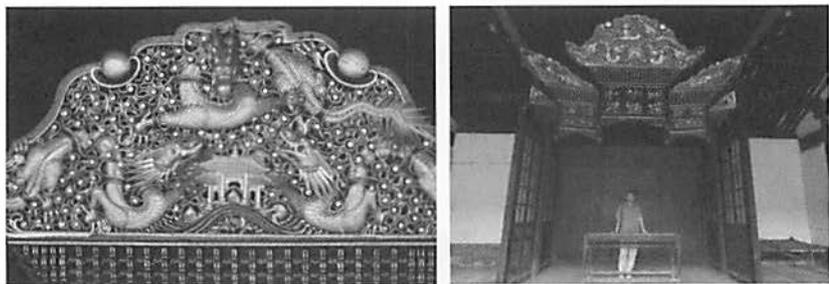
Nalou Office located at steep mountain ridge



Crenels



Main room and side room



Nalou main room Dragon decoration(with four claws)



Portrait of Nalou Yongle last Lord, Pu Guotai 普国泰 (1883-1950)

## Zongwa Office (Wazhe Lord)in Yuanyang:Haqhol Lord



Horse caravan in 2014



Zongwa Office which Wazhe Lord owned.

Photo(right):Pu Guoliang 普国梁 (1921-1997) who was last Wazhe Lord, and used to be communist leader.



Zongwa Lord's house:  
His descendants still live in and use



Jade cup presented by the emperor in Tang-era  
Stool(beneath a kettle)  
presented by the emperor in Qing-era

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Note: This article is originally prepared for the 4th International Conference on Hani-Akha Culture, which was held in Honghe, Yunnan Province, China in December 2002. I added some data from Inamura(2015a), Inamura&Murakami(2014).