

A Comparison of Buddhist Music and Dance Between Ancient Cambodian and Yunnan Minority Peoples After Reading *The Customs of Cambodia*

Yang Minkang (Music Research Institute, The Central Conservatory of Music, Beijing)

[Summary] Over 700 years ago, *The Customs of Cambodia* was written by Zhou Daguan. It provided a detailed, reliable record and description of the Buddhist culture of Chenla, describing the Buddhist sects, characteristics of temples, Theravada rituals, ritual music activities, and related folklore activities. Compared with the music of some Yunnan ethnic groups that believe in Theravada, such as Dai, Blang, De'ang, etc, they all have some common features. In the vast sea of Chinese historical records, this is another important historical document that records ceremonies and ritual music and dance in detail after the *Pyu Music*.¹ It helps us to understand the ins and outs of Theravada music and dance culture in China today, it also sheds light on the research of Theravada's cultural history in Southeast Asia.

[Keywords] *The Customs of Cambodia*, *Dai Minority*, *Blang Minority*, *Theravada*, *Ritual music*.

[Chinese Library Classification] J607, J608, J609.2

[Document Code] A

[Article ID] 1008—9667 (2009) 03—0027—08

During the Sui and Tang Dynasties, Chenla which was a vassal state of Funan, began to rise. Its original territories included today's northern Cambodia and southern Laos. Around the mid-6th century, A.D, Chenla annexed the eastern border area of Funan and gradually became stronger. In the 7th century, it eventually replaced Funan and became the most powerful Indianized countries in Southeast Asia. During the Song² and Yuan³ dynasties, this country that once belonged to Funan grew stronger. During this period, the official exchanges between the Central Plains imperial court of China and the neighboring countries in Southeast Asia were relatively close. Southeast Asian countries often sent envoys to pay tribute, and many official envoys of the Chinese court were sent to this region. After this, the history, politics, economy, folklore, religion, and other aspects of these countries were recorded more thoroughly in Chinese history than before. For example, the situation of the Chenla Kingdom after the Sui Dynasty⁴ was recorded in more detail in Chinese historical records such as *Lingwai Daida* and *Zhu Fan Zhi* from Song Dynasty and *The Customs of Cambodia* from Yuan Dynasty. Among them, *The Customs of Cambodia* by the envoy of the Yuan Dynasty Zhou Daguan,⁵ was based on

¹ *Pyu Music*, 骠国乐, a poem by Bai Juyi, describes music and dance of the performance from a group from Pyu in Tang Dynasty (A.D. 801). Pyu is the name of ancient Myanmar.

² A.D. 960 - 1279

³ A.D. 1271 - 1368

⁴ A.D. 581 - 619

⁵ According to Profess Duan Lisheng's research, Zhou Daguan was not an envoy but an attaché.

his personal experience from living in Chenla for more than one year. Among many historical works of the same kind from that time, his investigation results are particularly credible. In this article, we provide a comparative analysis of the historical discussion of Theravada Buddhism and related ritual music from this book (*The Customs of Cambodia*), and the music ethnography of the ethnic minorities who practice Theravada in Yunnan today

Section 1: Religious Status and Buddhist Sects

Lingwai Daida by Zhou Qufei of the Song Dynasty, recorded that in the Kingdom of Chenla: "The monk's incantation and magic are very powerful. The monks in yellow robes can have families, and ones in red robes live in temples, and the discipline is strict. Taoists wear grass and leaves as clothes."ⁱ During the Yuan Dynasty, Zhou Daguan described this in more detail in *The Customs of Cambodia*:

*Monks are called 'Zhugu',⁶ Zhugu would shave their heads, wear yellow robes with their right shoulders exposed, with yellow sarongs underneath and bare feet. Temples are allowed to use tiles, there is only one statue inside, which is Gautama Buddha, also known as Bei Lai.⁷ He is dressed in red, made of clay and painted with colors, there is no other statue than this. The Buddha statues in the temples look different, although they are all made of copper, there is no musical instrument decoration such as bells, drums, cymbals, or any flag decoration. The monks would eat fish and meat, but they don't drink alcohol. Local people also use fish and meat to worship the Buddha, the monks have one meal a day which is dedicated by the believers, there is no kitchen in the temples. There are many scriptures to be read, which are all written on palm leaves, they are extremely neat. The characters are black, but they are not written with pen and ink, and I don't know what is used. There are also monks sitting on gold and silver palanquins and using gold and silver umbrellas. If there is a major national event, the king will also consult with famous monks. Nuns do not receive similar treatment.*ⁱⁱ Volume 5

Regarding the popular Buddhist sects in Chenla during the Song and Yuan dynasties, the academia generally believes that Mahayana Buddhism (Northern Buddhism) was dominant at the beginning, and by the time *The Customs of Cambodia* was written, this had mostly shifted to Theravada Buddhism (Hinayana Buddhism). For example, *The Customs of Cambodia* divided Chenla monks into "the ones in yellow robes" and "the ones in red robes", later scholars pointed out that this referred to Hinayana and Mahayana Buddhist monks respectively. I am going to compare the conditions of Buddhist folklore, rituals, and use of music in Chenla that is recorded in *The Customs of Cambodia* with the related situation of Theravada Buddhism in Yunnan nowadays, and we can enumerate many common points between the two. As described in the book, there were "no bells, drums or cymbals" in the Chenla temples, this must be the conclusion drawn by Zhou Daguan based on his observations and the use of such instruments in Mahayana Buddhism in China at that time. The custom of "not using music" in

⁶ From Siamese Chǎo Ku which means monk of Theravada Buddhism. See Lu Junling and Zhou Shaoquan's editor's note: *A Compilation of Information About Cambodia in Ancient Chinese Books*, page 131, Zhonghua Book Company, 1986.

⁷ From Sanskrit Prāh, which means saint. See Lu Junling and Zhou Shaoquan's editor's note: *A Compilation of Information About Cambodia in Ancient Chinese Books*, page 131.

the Chenla temples is consistent with the similar custom that is still maintained in most Theravada regions nowadays. In the current Theravada temples, although the phenomenon of storing "bells, drums and cymbals" can be seen, they are not used for Buddhist ceremonies, but are mainly stored for the villagers, who usually use these instruments in folk activities that are not Buddhist rituals. In addition, according to the book, at that time, in the Kingdom of Chenla "The local custom is that children first go to the temple to study when they are young and return to the world when they grow up. No further details on this custom could not be found."ⁱⁱⁱ This education system is highly consistent with the current education situation of Theravada Buddhism in Yunnan, Myanmar, and Thailand. In contrast, in areas where Northern Buddhism is popular, it is very rare to combine Buddhist education with national education. In addition, from the book, practices such as "Zhugu [monks] would shave their heads, wear yellow robes with their right shoulders exposed", "monks would eat fish and meat" and reciting palm-leaf manuscripts, can also correspond directly with similar practices in Theravada Buddhist temples today.

Section 2: Buddhist Recitations, Festival Ceremonies and Singing and Dancing Activities

From what Zhou Dagan saw and experienced personally in Chenla, we can tell the Buddhism then and there and Theravada Buddhism today both use music and dance frequently in their daily recitation and festival ceremonies. The official and folk rituals often use drums, monks and Buddhist ceremonies are also involved sometimes, they are very closely related to each other.

1. Day to day recitation, Buddhist music and dance

According to the *Book of Sui-Nanban-Chenla Biography*, the Chenla people during the Sui Dynasty period: "Shower every day, cleaned their teeth with poplar sticks,⁸ and read the scriptures. Afterwards they shower again before having a meal, and then clean their teeth with poplar sticks before returning to read the scriptures."^{iv} This reverent sign of repeated cleaning and recitation every day is very similar to the daily practice and chanting of scriptures by the monks of Theravada Buddhism today. In addition, Zhao Rukuo's *Zhu Fan Zhi-Chenla Kingdom*⁹ from the Song Dynasty records: At that time, the King of Chenla "believed in the Buddha devoutly and had more than 300 girls to dance for the Buddha, they were called Anan, which means buddha's servant."^v Some scholars have verified that "Anan" refers to "Ailan" in Zhou Dagan's book (see below).^{vi} According to the two books, from the perspective of the scale and the nature of this type of Buddhist event performed by 300 people, it would be a large-scale religious ritual music and dance held in the royal court every day.

2. Seasonal festival ceremony

⁸ Could be toothbrush or toothpick.

⁹ Zhu Fan Zhi is variously translated as *A Description of Barbarian Nations*, *Records of Foreign People*, or other similar titles.

According to Zhou Qufei's *Lingwai Daida* Volume 10 *Holy Buddha* from the Song Dynasty, Chenla Kingdom has a series of festivals and customs in the first lunar month, involving a belief with strong marine characteristics:

The foreign countries in the south all respect the holy Buddha. According to legend, the holy Buddha was born in the city of Zhanlipo in the Kingdom of Chenla. The holy Buddha was a woman, she had a husband. One time, while she was travelling by the sea, her boat was tossed by the dragon king. She said to the dragon king: "Send me to the shore, I'll give birth to a son this year, and I'll offer him to you." Then the dragon had the god of sea send her boat back to Zhanlipo city ... In the south, people lived in thatched cottages, but the temple of the holy Buddha was very neat, with golden statues, the four halls represent the holy Buddha and her three husbands. There were several generations of witches, they were called nuns.¹⁰ In the temple, there was a lot of drum playing and dancing, there was always enough meat and food. Every year on the 13th day of the first lunar month, a hut would be made in front of the temple, where the grains would be put inside, and the holy statue would be brought out of the temple and people would burn the grains as a sacrifice. On the 14th, the holy Buddha returned to the temple. On the 20th she gave birth to a son, which was a round rock. On the night of the 20th, the people of the whole nation stayed up to wait for the birth of the Buddha's son. On the next day, the people offered treasures, rhino horn and ivory to the Buddha. Her son was put in a boat and sent to the sea to offer to the dragon king.^{vii}

Zhengshuo Timing from Zhou Dagan's *The Customs of Cambodia* recorded the various festivals related to the Buddhist calendar in each year:

The first month of the year in Chenla is October in China, and this month is called Kadek.¹¹ The king would give orders to build a large shed in front of the palace, which could accommodate more than a thousand people, with lanterns and flowers hung on it. More than twenty zhang¹² away from the riverbank on the other side of the river, the workers use connected wood to build high sheds, like the poles for building towers, they can be twenty zhang high. There would be three to six of them every night, and fireworks and firecrackers would be placed on top of the sheds, the fireworks are contributed by the officials of all the cantons and counties. At night, the king would be invited to come out to watch the fireworks and firecrackers, which could be seen from a hundred miles away. The sound of the firecrackers is as loud as cannons, the whole city would be shaking. The king would distribute candles and betel nuts to the officials and their families, which would be very valuable. The king would also invite envoys to watch, and the ceremony would last over half a month.

There would be festivals every month, for example, in April it is Paoqiu,¹³ and in September it is Yalie. On this day of Yalie, the people of the whole country will gather in front of the palace to receive guidance from the Yalie guide. In May, the festival is to welcome the blessed water,¹⁴

¹⁰ The Chinese word is 夷婆 Yi Po, which may refer to the nuns in the holy Buddha temple.

¹¹ Zhou Dagan appears to have made a mistake, as Kadek is December in Cambodian Lunar calendar, January should be Mekseh.

¹² Zhang is a measure word in China, 1 zhang was 316.8 cm in Yuan Dynasty. Here 20 zhang would be around 63 meters.

¹³ This could be Visak Bochea or Meak Bochea.

¹⁴ Likely to be Songkran Festival.

monks from all around the country gather and send water to bathe the king. The king would watch the lively scene of water transportation from the tower. In July people would burn rice, at this time the new rice would just be ripe, and people would burn some outside the south gate to worship the Buddha. Countless people including women in the carts carried by elephants came to watch the burning, but the king would not leave the palace. Ailan Day is in August, which means to dance. The king would order singers and dancers to perform in the palace every day, and there would also be pig fighting and elephant fighting. The king would also invite envoys to watch. The festival would last for ten days.

Holidays in other months will not be detailed here.^{viii}

If we compare events every month and every year in the Chenla calendar with the record of the Dai people from Dehong Prefecture¹⁵ in the Dai language history book *Sheben Mengwan*,^{ix} the following results can be obtained:

Chenla Calendar and Dai Calendar	Chinese Lunar Calendar	Record in <i>The Customs of Cambodia</i>	Record in <i>Sheben Mengwan</i>	Note
January	October	The king would order a large shed to be built in front of the palace ... this can be twenty zhang high (see above paragraph)	New Year, people visit each other and give their best wishes.	The first month of year in both places, both celebrate it.
February	November	Not available	Monks fast in the temples, and believers hold Buddhist fasting events.	
March	December	Not available	Burn white wood, give merit and feast to the ordained elders.	
April	January	Paoqiu	April Festival, people worship and pray to the Buddha's statue.	There is no Buddhist activity in Chenla.
May	February	Welcome the blessed water (see above paragraph)	Bathe the Buddha Festival (Water Festival), there is dragon boat racing in some places, such as Xishuang Banna.	It was custom to bathe the Buddha in both places.

¹⁵ In present day Yunnan Province.

June	March	Not available	Water Banyan trees on the day of full moon.	
July	April	Burn rice (see above paragraph)	People set up a Buddha table, invite monks to their home or village to recite scripture, pray to the god of the village and tribe.	The situation nowadays is different.
August	May	Ailan Festival (see above paragraph)	People all join the celebration, offer robes, money and food to the monks for them to use during the Xia'anju period (raining season).	There is no Buddhist activity in Chenla.
September	June	Yalie Day (see above paragraph)	Xia'anju period begins, people take breakfast and lunch for the monks, give merit to the temples.	There is no Buddhist activity in Chenla.
October	July	Not available	Offer new rice to the Buddha.	The Dai ceremony is the same with the rice burning in Chenla in July.
November	August	Not available	From the 13 th to the 16 th , celebrate the end of Xia'anju period, people light candles to welcome Buddha coming back from heaven.	
December	September	Not available	Ceremony to offer robes to the monks.	

The festivals in Dehong Prefecture listed in the above table are the situation of the Dai calendar in the period of the 7th generation chieftain Duosanzhao (about the middle of the 17th century) in the Longchuan area. This is slightly different from the current situation of the

calendar and festivals in Dai areas today. Now we will compare the basic conditions of ancient Chenla and Dehong shown in the table, see the result below.

- (1) The consistent points: First, the first month of these two places is the October of the lunar calendar; grand celebrations are to be held; second, the Dai Bathing Buddha Festival in the 17th century and Welcome Blessed Water Festival in ancient Chenla are both in May (lunar calendar February), this festival (Buddha Bathing Festival) and the New Year's Day are both the most important religious festivals in the two places. It is worth noting that the Dai calendar now starts with June (April in the Gregorian calendar); according to the current Cambodian calendar, the first month is also between March and April in the Gregorian calendar.¹⁶ Whether this convergence is a coincidence or not requires further study.
- (2) Discrepancies and doubts: First, the new rice festivals of various ethnic minorities in Yunnan today are mostly in July or August in lunar calendar. Cambodia also holds the Rice Burning (New Rice) Festival around July in the lunar calendar, so some scholars believe that Zhou might have confused them with each other;¹⁷ Second, the festivals in April, August, and September of the ancient Chenla calendar are all secular activities, but combined with relevant historical data and cultural background, some of them are still related to Buddhism. For example, the "Ailan" dance performance held in Chenla August, combined with the aforementioned *Zhu Fan Zhi*, can be regarded as a daily large-scale music and dance offering ceremony held in the palace.

According to the above analysis, within the same Theravada (Hinayana) Buddhist cultural circle, there are quite some common features between the 17th century Dai calendar and the 13-14th century ancient Chenla calendar and related festival customs. Today in the Dai calendar as well as the Cambodian calendar, the beginning of the year is March or April in the solar calendar, which seems to indicate that there is a common origin between the two. The presentation and resolution of these issues will eventually provide a basis for us to further recognize the connection of Buddhist music and culture between the two places, and it will help us to find a broader space for investigation and exploration.

3. *The king's guard of honor*

¹⁶ See Zhou Dagan's original work, Xia Nai's proofreading: *The Customs of Cambodia Proofreading*, Zhonghua Book Company, 2006 (second edition). Page 122, note 1: Bo's notes: "But now the first month of Cambodians is Cet month, ... in the third and fourth months of the solar calendar."

¹⁷ See Zhou Dagan's original work, Xia Nai's proofreading: *The Customs of Cambodia Proofreading*, P. 125, note 9: Ge Daisi's re-annotation: "In Cambodia, after the harvest every April, a festival of burning rice (new rice) is held. In mid-July, the farming begins, and another agricultural festival would be held. Zhou Dagan said 'burn new rice in July', did he confuse the festival in April and the one in July?"

According to the record from *The Customs of Cambodia*, when the king of Chenla goes out, his guard of honor would follow as described below:

Every time the king goes out of the palace, the horses and troops would be in the front, and the flags and drums at the back. There would be three to five hundred court ladies in a line, dressed in floral clothes and flower buns, and holding giant candles in their hands, they would light the candles even during the day. There are also some court ladies who hold golden and silver utensils and tools, which are different from the Chinese style, I do not know what they are used for. There are also some other court ladies dressed as soldiers with spears and shields and they are another troop. There are also sheep carts, deer carts, and horse carts, all decorated with gold. The royal family and officials would ride elephants in the front, there are countless red umbrellas seen from a distance. Following behind are the queen and concubines of the king, some of them ride in sedan chairs, some ride elephants or horses, and there are hundreds of golden umbrellas for them. Behind them is the king, standing on the elephant's back, holding a golden sword, and there are golden braces for the elephant's ivories ... Whenever the king goes on a tour, there must be a small golden pagoda and a golden Buddha at the forefront. Those who are watching have to kneel down and worship three times.

The king works in the office twice a day, if the officials and the people wanted to see the king, they would all sit on the ground to wait. When the sound of music can be heard coming closer, the snail horn would be blown outside the office in response. The officials and people are only allowed to raise their heads when the snail horn stops, and the king is now seated.^x

We can see that the frequent use of drums, pagodas, and Buddha statues in the above-mentioned imperial family's parade and affairs brought a strong religious atmosphere and ritual characteristics to such daily activities. They are one of the important factors that constitute the especially strong Buddhist cultural atmosphere of the whole country of ancient Chenla.

Section 3. Life rituals and customs related to Buddhism

The Customs of Cambodia • Maiden specifically recorded the female's coming-of-age and marriage customs of the Chenla people at that time. The full text is as follows:

For the families with daughters, parents would wish the girls, "May you have someone who wants to marry you, may you marry hundreds of husbands in the future." Girls from the rich family from seven to nine years old, and girls from poor families up to eleven years old, must give their virginity to a monk. This is called chen-t'an.

The government would choose one day in April (Chinese lunar calendar) to notify people who have girls and want to chen-t'an to declare to the government. The government will give the family a large candle with a picture carved on it. It is said that when the candle

is lit at night and burned to the place marked on the candle, it is time to chen-t'an. The parents usually choose a monk or Taoist priest for the girl one month, half a month, or ten days in advance. Regardless of the location of the temples and Taoist temples, they are always invited by the believers. The prestigious monks and Taoist priests are all reserved by the rich and officials' families, the poor have no choice. The wealthy family would offer gifts such as alcohol, rice, cloth, betel nuts, silverware, and other things to monks or priests. There are gifts up to 100 loads at most, which are worth two to three hundred taels of silver in China. Sometimes people offer smaller gifts of 30 or 40 loads or at least 10 dans, depending on the financial situation of the family. That is why the poor can only do this when the girl is at the age of eleven, it costs too much to chen-t'an. Some rich families would spend money for girls from poor families to chen-t'an, believing it is a good deed. One monk can only chen-t'an with one girl in a year. If a monk has agreed to chen-t'an with one girl, he is not allowed to accept other families' request.

The family would host a banquet on the night of chen-t'an, and there will be a band playing drums, relatives and neighbors will join the ceremony. They will build a high shed outside the house, on which there are clay figures and beasts, there would be about ten of them, or sometimes only three or four, poor families usually do not have these. These clay statues were all based on stories and legends, and they would be displayed for seven days before being removed. In the evening, people carry the sedan chair and umbrella and play drums to greet the monk.

There are two pavilions connected with colorful cloth, one with the girl sitting in, and one with the monk sitting in. I cannot understand what they are saying. The music of the drums is very loud, and there is no curfew that night. When it was time for chen-t'an, the monk and the girl go inside a room, the monk would remove the girl's hymen with his hand and then put it in wine. The parents and neighbors would put one drop of the wine on their foreheads or drink it to pray for blessings. Some people say that the monks have sex with the girls, and some say that there is no such thing. But the locals would not let the Chinese see it, so I do not know all the details. At dawn, people carry the sedan chair and umbrella and play drums to send the monk back to the temple. After that, parents have to offer cloth and silk to the monk to redeem the girl, otherwise the girl will belong to the monk for the rest of her life and cannot marry anyone else. I saw the ceremony on the night of April 6, 1297.

The girl must sleep with her parents before the chen-t'an, but not afterwards, and the parents would not worry about the girls having sex after chen-t'an. At the time of the wedding, although there would also be betrothal gifts and ritual activities, it is much simpler than chen-t'an. There are many couples who have sex before getting married. This is neither strange nor shameful in terms of local customs. On the night of chen-t'an, sometimes there are more than ten families greeting the monks from one street. People and the monks' palanquins shuttle through the streets, and there is the sound of drum music everywhere.^{xi}

1. The birth ceremony

At the very beginning of the article, it says: *For the families with daughters, parents would wish the girls: "May you have someone who wants to marry you, may you marry hundreds of husbands in the future."* According to the similar customs of the Dai and Blang minority today, this should be regarded as a prayer chanted by the parents and elders in the birth ceremony of the girl, such as prayers of the Dai people: *The child in the arms of the mother / If you are indeed a child given by god / Then grow when you touch the wind / It's a girl who looks like a bee / It's a boy who looks like an elephant...* The purpose of the prayer is the same as the Chenla one, which is to wish the children good luck in the future, but because of the different environmental conditions, the expressions are different.

2. The coming-of-age

Before discussing the relationship between the chen-t'an from *The Customs of Cambodia* and the coming-of-age, I would like to briefly sort out the chen-t'an ceremony procedure:

- 1) In April (Chinese lunar calendar) every year, families who wish to have chen-t'an for the daughters have to report the matter to the government on a certain day.
- 2) The government issues a large candle with a cut mark in the middle to the family. When the candle burns to the mark, the ceremony begins.
- 3) Within one month before the ceremony, the main family chooses a monk, the rich can choose the prestigious monks, while the poor have no choice. According to the rules, each monk can only perform this type of ritual once a year.
- 4) The rich can buy wine, rice, cloth, betel nut, and silverware for the ceremony. They could be worth two or three hundred taels of silver. The poor may not be able to afford this. Sometimes the rich also pay for the poor, which is called "good deeds."
- 5) The rich family would host a banquet on the night of chen-t'an, and there would be drumming music, relatives and neighbors will join the ceremony. They will build a high shed outside the house, on which there are clay figures and beasts, there would be about ten of them, or sometimes only three or four, poor families usually don't have these. These clay statues would be displayed for seven days before being removed.
- 6) In the evening, people carry the sedan chair and umbrella, and play drums to greet the monk. There are two pavilions connected with colorful cloth, one with the girl sitting in, and one with the monk sitting in and chanting. The music of the drums is very loud, but the neighbors would not mind this.
- 7) When the candle burns to where the mark is, this means it is time for chen-t'an, the monk and the girl go inside of a room.
- 8) At dawn, people carry the sedan chair and umbrella and play drums to send the monk back to the temple. After that, parents have to offer cloth and silk to the monk to redeem the girl.

The last paragraph of the *Maiden* cited above specifically summarizes the custom of "coming-of-age". According to this, every woman must live with her parents before the "chen-t'an" ceremony. After that, the woman would move to another room, and she would be allowed to have relationships with other men, their sexual behavior would not be restricted. In fact, this custom of heterosexual interaction is not unique to the ancient Chenla people. It is a common phenomenon in the mountains in southern China and Southeast Asia. For example, in Yunnan ethnic minority areas, many ethnic groups such as Yi, Hani, Jingpo have "public houses" and Li people in Hainan Province also have "long gui". The roles of these buildings in female's adulthood in the traditional culture of these areas are similar to those of Chenla mentioned above. According to the traditional customs of the Li people, girls cannot sleep in the same room with their parents when they are fourteen or fifteen years old. Boys must go up the mountain to chop wood to build a "long gui", while girls' parents build a "long gui" for them. During this period, through "night travel", the "long gui" became a place for young men and women to meet and date, and this kind of interaction was also accepted by the family and society. In Zhanglang, Xiding and other places in Menghai County, Xishuangbanna Prefecture, Yunnan Province, in the Blang ethnic group, after a young man or woman completed the "Yao Guanqi",¹⁸ which is their coming-of-age, the men could go to women's houses and play "Qin" (an instrument), sing "Suo" (love song) and "Yao Guan Ji" (inviting the girl). At this stage, a young woman can see more than 10 men at the same time and cannot refuse the visit of other men until marriage. Once at the age for marriage, the parents can arrange it for them. In addition, in the traditional concept of the Blang people, if someone didn't have a coming-of-age ceremony that person would not be accepted as a member of their village, and he/she would be tantamount to a lost ghost, like a murdered person, he/she could not be buried in the village's cemetery after death. We can tell that in the similar activities of the Blang people, apart from not setting up separate places such as "long gui" and "public houses", which limits the interaction between young men and women (because they are in the sight of their parents), other aspects are like those in ancient Chenla.

It is worth noting that Ming and Qing historians repeatedly used the same content from *The Customs of Cambodia*, but in most cases the paragraph about the period between "chen-t'an" and "marriage" was deleted. This often leads the readers to mistakenly associate chen-t'an directly with the "right of virginity" related to marriage, thus ignoring the "liminal" period that exists between chen-t'an and "marriage" related to adulthood. Of course, compared to the regular coming-of-age ceremonies, "chen-t'an" of the ancient Chenla has its own culture characteristic. We can make a comparison with the related folklore and ritual theories. Regarding the general characteristics of the coming-of-age ceremony, Turner summarized as follows:

- a. The subject of passage ritual is, in the liminal period, structurally, if not physically, "invisible". This "visibility" is often restricted by cultural regulations and classifications.

¹⁸ I think the author made a mistake here, the ceremony is called Bo Ji or Qi Chi, the young people get their teeth dyed black with smoke from burned wood.

- b. Let's take coming-of-age as an example, the neophytes are neither living nor dead from one aspect, and both living and dead from another. Their condition is one of ambiguity and paradox, a confusion of all the customary categories.
- c. The neophytes are sometimes said to "be in another place". They have physical but not social "reality", hence they have to be hidden, since it is a paradox, a scandal, to see what ought not to be there.
- d. A further structurally negative characteristic of transitional beings is that they have nothing. They have no status, property, insignia, secular clothing, rank, kinship position, nothing to demarcate them structurally from their fellows. Their condition is indeed the very prototype of sacred poverty. ^{xii}

According to Turner's definition, the coming-of-age ceremony has obvious characteristics such as invisibility, vagueness, and individuality (non-social). However, it is undeniable that what he describes is mainly the situation of coming-of-age rites in tribal societies and cannot be applied to all types of coming-of-age rites in all societies. For example, compared with the above-mentioned general coming-of-age ritual characteristics, in ancient Chenla, "chen-t'an" as a form of coming-of-age ritual has a specific time – April of the lunar calendar, location – the residents' homes, host – the parents, performers – monks, ritual music – drums, official recognition – declaration and enforcement system (distributing candles), etc. We can see that the characteristics of the coming-of-age ceremony of the tribal society summarized by Turner have been reduced to varying degrees in the "chen-t'an" ceremony of the Chenla people. In the Chenla society, this kind of coming-of-age ceremony is also a kind of public ceremony recognized by society, and because of its relatively fixed time, location, and the enthusiastic group activities ("in an alley sometimes more than ten families are having the celebration"), it becomes a kind of folk customs with certain characteristics of the nature of festivals. It can even be considered that such coming-of-age ritual activities in Chenla society obviously combined the different folk cultural factors of tribal society and feudal society in life rituals and ethnic festivals.

3. Wedding

According to the *Book of Sui* that was published in the 7th century AD, at that time, in Chenla: "Whoever is marrying a wife, would only need to give one set of clothes, and then choose a day to send an intermediary to welcome the wife. The bride and groom would stay at home for 8 days before the wedding, they light the candles all the time at day and night. After getting married, a man would divide property with his parents, and then leave home to live with his wife. If the parents died before their son was married, the son inherited their legacy. If the parents died after their son was married, their legacy goes to the government."^{xiii} It can be seen that the marriage at that time did not focus on the wedding format, but on the actual religion and folklore.

There are two places that discussed weddings in *The Customs of Cambodia • Maiden*. One is at the beginning of the chapter, where it quotes the parents' prayer at the birth ceremony of their daughter, which was: "May you have someone who wants to marry you, may you marry hundreds of husbands in the future." The other is at the end of the chapter: "At the time of the

wedding, although there would also be betrothal gifts and ritual activities, it is much simpler than chen-t'an. There are many couples who have sex before getting married." Although the material that can be analyzed in this record is very brief, if we combine the context with today's historical data of ethnology, a simple analysis can still be made.

Judging from the information displayed in the two related records, the second one mentioned the "marriage" activity, and specifically mentioned two topics: First, the so-called "betrothal gifts" which are the gifts from men to women's family for marriage and engagement. The wedding was described as "much simpler than chen-t'an", and this "simple" is relative to the luxury and grandeur of the "chen-t'an" mentioned above. We can see that at that time, Chenla people paid much more attention to the coming-of-age ceremony than the wedding. Second, regarding the "many people who fornicate first before getting married", this was happening mostly after the "chen-t'an" of the coming-of-age ceremony, when the young men and women were free to choose their spouses during the "liminal" period, and were free to have sex before getting married. The phrase "many people who fornicate first before getting married" also clearly shows that as a scholar from a country that advocates ethics and religion, he did not understand and held contempt for foreign folk customs. In today's words, this is a manifestation of an "outsider" mentality that goes against the core of cultural relativity and ignores the inherent characteristics of the insider's culture.

In the theory of Marxist ethnology and the history of social development, there is a view proposed by the American ethnologist L.H. Morgan and adopted by Marx and Engels, that is, the history of human marriage has experienced the process of consanguine marriage, group marriage, polygamous marriage and monogamous marriage since the primitive state. If analyzed according to this academic line of thinking, the marital status of Chenla people at that time showed the transition from polygamous marriage to monogamous marriage. On the one hand, we can see the clues from the words and metaphors in the chanting for newborn girls. From the analysis of the sentence: "May you have someone who wants to marry you, may you marry hundreds of husbands in the future." parents thought the number of men who associate with women in this society should be "the more the better". Combined with their attitude of "unrestricted and guarded" premarital sexual behavior, it can be considered that this is a long-standing traditional custom. This shows the basic morphological characteristics of "polygamy" or "polyandry" in polygamous marriage,¹⁹ and has a certain similarity with the existing "visiting marriage" of the Mosuo people of the Naxi ethnic group in Yunnan Province. On the other hand, the Chenla people expect women to "marry a lot" and would also hold simple weddings, while the traditional "visiting marriage" of the Mosuo people places value on the "visiting" rather than the "wedding" ceremony. Therefore, the increasingly monogamous settlement forms among the Mosuo people today can be used as a circumstantial evidence that the

¹⁹ The typical manifestation of the dual marriage system is that a couple of spouses maintain a relatively stable cohabitation life for a certain period of time, that is, a man has a master wife among many wives, and a woman has a master husband among many husbands, the main husband and wife separate from the group to a certain extent and live a relatively stable cohabitation life. Customs such as "walking marriage", "wangmenju", and "buluo fujia" remained among some ethnic minorities in southwest China in the last century reflect the historical legacy of the dual marriage system.

marriage of the ancient Chenla people must hold the "betrothal gifts and ritual activities." In addition, the contemporary existing marriage patterns of the Blang people in Yunnan Province, who also speak Mon-Khmer dialect and believe in Theravada Buddhism as the Chenla people, can also be used as another important circumstantial evidence of the links between the two peoples.

When investigating the "dui ge" (couple singing) activity in the Blang Mountain area of Menghai County, Xishuangbanna, a scholar described that: in the past in the passionate stage of dui ge next to the fireplace, if both the boy and girl like each other, the parents of the girl who pretended to sleep on the side also liked the boy, they'd get up and tell them: "It's late at night, you two should sleep together." Then the girl and boy can live together. Afterwards, the young man would inform his parents, and the parents would ask the matchmaker to take a half kilogram of pork, a packet of tea, and a packet of tobacco to the girl's family for matchmaking. The girl's family would accept the gifts, cut the pork into small pieces, wrap them in banana leaves, and distribute them to her clan and her relatives. The above is the first wedding, after which they would live with the wife's family. During the following three years, the husband would work and eat at his parents' house during the day and stay with the wife's family at night. If the wife is pregnant, members of the Jiagun clan and relatives of both sides will send chickens, eggs, salt, and rice to congratulate them before giving birth. After three years, if the couple is in a harmonious relationship, they would need to choose an auspicious date in advance. The husband would prepare five half silver coins, a skirt, a piece of homespun cloth and a fully grown pig. The wife would also prepare a bamboo strip wardrobe, tools, bamboo strip stools, pigs, chickens, etc. This is the second wedding (called "cha" or "gangeding") and begins to enter the stage of living with the husband's family. Before the 1980s, in Blang villages, many men only held the first weddings in their whole lives and lived with their wives, instead of joining their father's clan. There are also some couples who divorced after three years because they could not hold a second wedding.^{xiv}

4. Funeral

The *Book of Liang* written by Yao Silian in the Tang Dynasty records that around the 6th century AD in Funan: "National custom is to shave off their hair and beard during bereavement. There are four ways to bury the dead: for water burials the body is thrown into the river, for cremation the body is burned to ashes, for earth burials the body is buried underground, and for the bird burial the body is abandoned in the wild."^{xv} At the time, the Funan burial customs mentioned in the Chinese historical records were more diverse, but there was no detailed description of the content.

Around the 7th century AD, the Kingdom of Chenla had annexed Funan, and the historical records of funerals are more detailed: "For funerals, the children are not allowed to eat for seven days, and they will cry when they have their hair shaved. Monks, nuns, Taoist priests, and relatives all come together and they play music at the funeral. People usually burn the corpse with fragrant wood, then collect the ashes to put in a gold and silver bottle and send it to the lake or sea. The poor may use ceramics and paint them with colorful paint. There are also some

people that choose to not be burned, and the corpse is sent to the mountain for the wild animals to feed on."^{xvi, xvii} Cremation is a funeral custom advocated by ancient Buddhism, at this time, it became popular in Chenla, and there were fixed roles such as the host, the victim, and the participant (family). There was a very complicated religious ritual process, and music (which should be drum music) during the whole process.

The Customs of Cambodia of the Yuan Dynasty recorded: "The local people do not have a coffin after their death, they only wrap the body with straw mats and cover it with coarse cloth. During the funeral procession, they hold flags, play drums and music, and hold two plates of fried raw rice which they throw on the road. The body would be taken to somewhere quiet outside the city, where the family discard it and leave. If an eagle, a crow or a wild dog comes to eat the corpse, and there is nothing left, this shows that the parents are blessed... Now there are gradually more cremations, often of the descendants of the Chinese... There is also tower burial for the king, but I do not know if it is the king's whole body or just the bones."^{xviii} The funeral customs described in the Chinese historical records at this time were obviously dominated by traditional celestial burials, which were also accompanied by "flags and drum music", while the Buddhist cremation form was described as "gradually more frequent", which continued to increase later. But whether it was introduced with the rise of Indian Buddhism or is a legacy of the "Tang Dynasty" remains unclear.

Section 4. Other customs

It is worth noting that according to Zhao Rukuo's "Zhu Fan Zhi · Chenla" in the Song Dynasty, when Chenla people traded with foreigners, they could use gold and silver to pay for local specialties, as well as barter. Items that could be used for barter include leather drums and porcelain, fake brocades, parasols, alcohol, sugar, etc. We can tell that the goods imported into the area at the time were mainly Chinese goods, and leather drums were also used for cultural exchanges. In the Yuan Dynasty, according to *The Customs of Cambodia*, there were more than 20 kinds of "Tang goods" that could be used for trading. Although there were more types and more refined goods, the leather drum was no longer included. Perhaps at this time, leather drum instruments could already be made by the people of Chenla, and there was no need to "import" them from abroad.^{xix}

Section 5. Conclusions

By analyzing and comparing Zhou Dagan's *The Customs of Cambodia* from the Yuan Dynasty, several conclusions are drawn as follows:

1. The Buddhist culture of Chenla is reliably recorded by Zhou Dagan six or seven hundred years ago, as he described the Buddhist sects, characteristics of temples, Theravada Buddhism rituals, ritual music activities, and related folklore activities in more detail than previous works. From the situation described, monks, drums, music and

ceremonial guards attended all public ceremonies, which is still an important feature of the customs of Theravada Buddhism in China.

2. As the ethnic groups in Yunnan and Southeast Asia do not have the habit of recording their ancient history in writing, many such historical situations are recorded in Chinese through the eyes and words of the Chinese. It can be said that in the vast sea of Chinese historical records, this is another important historical material that records ceremonies and ritual music and dance in detail after the "Pyu Music", which helps us understand the ins and outs of today's Theravada Buddhist music and dance culture in China. It also has very important reference value for the study of the cultural history of Theravada Buddhism in Southeast Asia.
3. Regarding the "chen-t'an" ritual activity in *The Customs of Cambodia*, academic circles have always received mixed reviews. On the one hand, some scholars who take a more serious academic attitude have written a series of academically insightful related treatises. On the other hand, there are also some scholars who view the practice of chen-t'an from a position of cultural superiority and comment based on their own ethics and morality, and even politics, and have a low opinion of the practice. In this regard, my point of view is: a) The author Zhou lived in the place for more than a year. Through more detailed observation and textual research, the process and content of the etiquette are described in detail, it is not a fictional piece. b) Judging from the content of each chapter he wrote, everything has a basis, time and location are explained, from which we can say he was a professional and competent chronicle writer. c) From the government and host's arrangement of a series of activities, from its cumbersome and luxurious ritual process and scenes, it is obvious that in the minds of the Chenla people at that time, this was a relatively important and sacred ritual. d) Regardless of whether it is from the point of view of coming-of-age or of wedding, in the early Buddhist history and contemporary life, there is adequate circumstantial evidence proposed by Buddhist circles and social scientists to indicate the existence of the "chen-t'an" ceremony. It is not a "ridiculous legend" as some people have called it today, and it must not be simply generalized as an "exotic custom". Of course, with such extremely precious first-hand data collected by ancestors who traveled a long way to foreign countries, we should not take an evasive attitude towards it in our academic research today.

References:

ⁱ [Song Dynasty] Zhou Qufei, *Lingwai Daida* [M] Beijing, Zhonghua Book Company, 1999.

ⁱⁱ [Yuan Dynasty] Zhou Daguan, *The Customs of Cambodia* [M] Xia Nai Proofreader, Beijing, Zhonghua Book Company, 1981.

ⁱⁱⁱ [Yuan Dynasty] Zhou Daguan, *The Customs of Cambodia* [M] Volume 5, Xia Nai Proofreader, Beijing, Zhonghua Book Company, 1981.

^{iv} [Tang Dynasty] Wei Zheng, et al, *Nanman • Chenla* [M] *Book of Sui*, volume 82, Beijing, Zhonghua Book Company, 1997.

-
- ^v [Song Dynasty] Zhao Rukuo, Yang Bowen proofread, *The Proofread of Zhu Fan Zhi, book 1, Kingdom of Chenla*, [M], Qianlong carved edition.
- ^{vi} [Song Dynasty] Zhao Rukuo, Yang Bowen proofread, *The Proofread of Zhu Fan Zhi* [M], Beijing, Zhonghua Book Company, 2000:24.
- ^{vii} [Song Dynasty] Zhou Qufei, *Lingwai Daida* [M] volume 10, Beijing, Zhonghua Book Company, 1999.
- ^{viii} [Yuan Dynasty] Zhou Dagan, *The Customs of Cambodia* [M] Volume 13, Xia Nai Proofreader, Beijing, Zhonghua Book Company, 1981.
- ^{ix} Longchuan County Political Consultative Conference Literature and History Group, *Selections of Longchuan County Literature and History Materials*, Series 3 [M]. Mangshi: Dehong Nationalities Publishing House, 1992.
- ^x [Yuan Dynasty] Zhou Dagan, *The Customs of Cambodia* [M] Volume 40, Xia Nai Proofreader, Beijing, Zhonghua Book Company, 1981.
- ^{xi} [Yuan Dynasty] Zhou Dagan, *The Customs of Cambodia* [M] Volume 8, Xia Nai Proofreader, Beijing, Zhonghua Book Company, 1981.
- ^{xii} [UK] Victor W. Turner, *Betwix and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage* [C] translated by Chen Guansheng, *Western Religious Anthropology Essays*, Part 2. Shanghai, Sanlian Bookstore, 1995: 512-530.
- ^{xiii} [Tang Dynasty] Wei Zheng, et al, *Nanman • Chenla* [M] *Book of Sui*, volume 82, Beijing, Zhonghua Book Company, 1997.
- ^{xiv} Yan Sijiu, Yan Enkan et al, *Translated • Survey of Manguo Zhai in Blang Mountain Area, Menghai County* [M] *Social and Historical Survey of Blang Nationality*. Kunming, Yunnan People's Publishing House, 1986, 25-34.
- ^{xv} [Tang Dynasty] Yao Silian, *Hainan, Dongyi, Xibei Zhurong, Funan* [M] *Book of Liang*, Volume 54. Beijing, Zhonghua Book Company, 1997, 204.
- ^{xvi} [Tang Dynasty] Wei Zheng, et al, *Nanman • Chenla* [M] *Book of Sui*, volume 82, Beijing, Zhonghua Book Company, 1997.
- ^{xvii} [Yuan Dynasty] Ma Duanlin, *Siyi Kaojiu, Chenla* [M] *Wenxian Tongkao*, Volume 332. Beijing, Zhonghua Book Company, 1986, 2605.
- ^{xviii} [Yuan Dynasty] Zhou Dagan, *The Customs of Cambodia* [M] Volume 16, Xia Nai Proofreader, Beijing, Zhonghua Book Company, 1981.
- ^{xix} [Yuan Dynasty] Zhou Dagan, *The Customs of Cambodia* [M] Volume 21, Xia Nai Proofreader, Beijing, Zhonghua Book Company, 1981.

(Editor in Charge: Wang Xiaojun)
(Translated from Chinese by Lin Bo)