

# **Political and Economic Management Model in Ethnic Minority Areas of the PRC: A Case Study of Jinghong (Chiang Roong), Xishuangbanna\***

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## **Abstract**

This research aimed (1) to study the development of the Dai (ethnic minority group) in Xishuangbanna and their minority status under the socialist regime; (2) to study the local administration form of Xishuangbannan Dai autonomous prefecture; and (3) to study the current socio-economic development of Jinghong city. This study employed qualitative methods and documentary research, in-depth interviews and observation.

The research found that the Dai, one of ethnic minority groups in the PRC, live along the southwest border of Yunnan province. The Dai in Xishuangbanna, the so-called “Tai Lue” have their own language, culture, tradition and identities, which are the same as peoples in the mainland Southeast Asia. Historically, Xishuangbanna used to be an independent state in the form of a loose confederation under the influence of China and Burma. The expansion of imperialism led to the decline of the Xishuangbannan traditional state and the “Banna/Panna” system. After the establishment of the PRC in 1949, Xishuangbanna came under the socialism regime. The PRC’s policy towards ethnic minority groups has brought about the model of autonomous areas in the PRC. As a result, the Dai autonomous prefecture was set up in 23 January 1953. In regard to local administration, the Dai have rights to self-regulation (69 items) and also authority in economic management. However, Xishuangbanna’s socio-economic development plans must follow the national strategic plans as well as the needs of the area. Under the PRC’s regional strategy, Jinghong city has become the gateway to the Greater Mekong Subregion and ASEAN community. Following the 12<sup>th</sup> National Five Year Plan (2011-2015), Jinghong local government aims to improve people’s quality of life by promoting tourism development and plans to become an international ecological city.

## **Introduction**

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“Jinghong” or “Chiang Roong” is a county-level city and the seat of Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture in Yunnan province. It was also the historic capital of Dai/Tai Kingdom of Sipsongpanna. The area shares a border with Luang Namtha and Phongsaly provinces of Lao PDR and the Shan State of Myanmar. The Mekong river (Lancang Jiang) flows pass the center of the city. It is located a shipping port from the Chinese border links with countries in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS). At present, R3A route passing Xishuangpanna plays an important role as a land link between China and the mainland Southeast Asia. As a result, Jinghong has become a major city in China’s southwestern border development strategy in GMS North-South Economic Corridor linking Kunming and Singapore.

In China’s political system, the political and economic management model in ethnic minority areas of China is derived from policy implementation of China’s Ethnic minority. In case of Chinag Roong/Jinghong, there has been not only the importance of self-governing aspect, but also the socialism with Chinese characteristic. In addition, it brings about the insights of PRC’s bordering area development.

### **Theoretical Framework**

To create theoretical framework, the researcher reviews the theoretical concepts as follows

- PRC policy of ethnic minorities
- Concepts relating to self-governing of ethnicity in China
- Strategic implementation of bordering areas
- Dai/Tai studies in Xishuangbanna context

### **Research Methodology**

In using a qualitative methodology, the researcher conducted documentary research, in-depth interviews and observation.

This study was drawn on primary and secondary sources.

- Primary sources are comprised of information from in-depth interview, White paper on regional autonomy for ethnic minorities, China’s 12th Five-Year Plan (2011-2015), Jinghong Yearbooks and related government official documentaries.

- Secondary source include academic works written in Thai, Chinese and English

## **Research Findings**

1. The Dai ethnicity is one of 55 ethnic minorities in the PRC. They live along the southwestern border of Yunnan province. The Dai in Xishuangbanna, the so-called “Tai Lue” have their own language, culture, tradition and identities, which are the same as peoples in the mainland Southeast Asia, particularly in the northern part of Thailand. In addition, socio-cultural relations between Lanna Thai and Xishuangbanna have been traced back for centuries. Xishuangbanna maintained its strategic position as an essential route for trading between Yunnan and Lanna Thai.

As the capital city of Xishuangbanna, Jinghong was founded as Chiang Hung (Cheli), by Tai king Phaya Joeng in 1180. Because this principality had twelve administrative zones for which each was called “Banna/Panna,” the whole land was then called Sipsongpanna /Xishuangpanna. (‘Sipsong’ in Thai language means twelve.) Historically, it was an independent state in the form of a loose confederation. Each zone which was called “Banna/Panna” had its independent political, social and economic infrastructures, but they were loosely organized under the rule of “Saenwifa” inherited from Phaya Joeng, and there recognition from both China and Burma. This was a unique type of traditional state of Sipsongpanna /Xishuangpanna.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the disintegration of Sipsongpanna’s traditional states resulted from the competition on traded and political interference of the British and French powers in the southwest region of China. After the British occupied “Chiang Tung,” the traditional relations between Chiang Roong and Chiang Tung subsided. The border demarcation between the British colony and China’s Qing dynasty government in 1894 caused Sipsongpanna /Xishuangpanna become part of China. Also, under Sino-French demarcation in 1895, the French colonized one of twelve zones. Later, it became part of Laos.

After the establishment of the People Republic of China in 1949, the Dai ethnic group of Xishuangbanna was under the socialism regime. The PRC’s policy towards ethnic minority groups brought about the model of autonomous areas in the PRC. This ethnic policy was instituted to introduce a balance between integration and co-existence of ethnic

minorities with the Chinese Han. It allows the setting up of ethnic autonomous areas of regions (provinces), prefectures and counties if one or more minorities live there in concentrated communities. As a result, the Dai autonomous prefecture (in Yunnan Province) was established on January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1953. During the Cultural Revolution period (1966-1976), there were radical changes in socio-cultural structure in the ethnic areas. After that, when PRC's economic reform and open door policy were adopted in 1980s, the rights to self-government of the ethnic minorities were restored. Today, there are opportunities for economic development in the areas and the way to preserve identities of ethnicity.

2. The establishment of the People's Republic of China and the rule of the Chinese Communist Party eradicated the feudal system of Sipsongpanna/Xishuangbanna. PRC also changed the Panna/Banna political structure. With the establishment of Dai Autonomous Prefecture in Yunnan province, Jinghong became a major city in which the local government agencies of Xishuangpanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture have been located. On December 22, 1993, Jinghong has been upgraded to be a county-level city during the Tai New Year/Songkarn (a pouring water festival) 12 - 15 April 1994, the event celebrated the upgrading of the city.

In regard to administration, the local governments of the ethnic minorities in China receive a certain level of autonomy from the central government. Consequently, the autonomous areas enjoy more administrative power than other forms of local governments in general. In accordance with the PRC Constitution and the Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law, Dai Autonomous Prefecture self-regulation (69 items) was officially promulgated by the People's Congress of Xishuangbanna on August 30th, 2007 and effective on September 1st, 2007. According to self-regulation law (Article 15), the prefecture government of Xishuangbanna has executive power and sends reports to Xishuangbanna People's Congress and the Yunnan Province. The governor of Dai autonomous prefecture and the Head of Jinghong city are the ethnic Dai. In addition, the local government bodies should have ethnic Dai government officials, together with other ethnic minorities. Nevertheless, the Chinese Communist Party leaders of Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture and Jinghong city usually are the Chinese Han.

3. Jinghong city's socio-economic development plans follow the national strategic plans as well as the needs of the area. This research analyzed Jinghong's development plans relating to self-sufficient economy and tourism developments. According to the 12<sup>th</sup> National

Five Year Plan (2011-2015), Jinghong development emphasizes on balancing between urbanization and preservation of natural resources and ethnic identities. This research also examined the policy statement addressed on January 18<sup>th</sup>, 2011 by Chinese Communist Party chief of Jinghong city.

According to the policy statements by Chen Xuegang, the party chief of Jinghong city addressed on January 18<sup>th</sup>, 2011, the development of Jinghong is related to Deng Xiaoping theory and the Three Representatives as well as scientific development. It is expected that GDP should reach 13% growth in 2015 and the revenue of local government grows by 18% yearly. People in rural and urban areas should have an increase of 13% per capita income. To implement the 12<sup>th</sup> National Five Year Plan, Jinghong city will continue:

- Following the development plans and pushing forward every aspect of developments during 2011-2015
- Strengthening economy and promoting at least five state enterprises to be listed in stock market in 2020
- Building Jinghong city as an international eco-tourism destination.
- Improving people quality of life in all aspects.
- Improving infrastructures; irrigation engineering, transports, trains, airport, port and service delivery
- Promoting environmental development
- Promoting national integrity and border security
- Promoting human resource development
- Developing Jinghong city to be a bridgehead in the North-South Economic Corridor linking Kunming and Bangkok and to be cultural center and transportation hub in Southeast Asia

It is also viewed that economic reform and the open door policy have brought prosperity to the Jinghong city quickly. In addition, Yunnan province policies to promote green economy and culture have positively impacted on Jinghong city and provided opportunity for rapid development. Under the PRC's regional strategy, Jinghong has become the gateway to the Greater Mekong Subregion and ASEAN community. Following the 12<sup>th</sup> National Five Year Plan (2011-2015), Jjinghong local government aims to improve people's quality of life by promoting tourism development and plans to become an international ecological city

## **Recommendation**

1. The PRC ethnic minority policy is viewed as a symbolic policy. In fact, business investment in Xishuangbanna mostly comes from the government sector and the Chinese Han. Cultural tourism policy should provide opportunities for Dai ethnic minority to acquire financial resource and their ways to preserve Dai identities such as language, attire, customs, arts, religion, traditionally medical care, etc. Instead of assimilating Dai ethnic group to be Chinese, the PRC government could benefit from similarity of Dai people in connecting to that of people in the mainland Southeast Asia culturally. At the same time, Thailand should seek opportunity to link with China via Xishuangbanna and Jinghong city.

2. The establishment of “twin cities” between Jinghong and other historic towns in the Greater Mekong Subregion will enhance people to people diplomacy. It will create the transactional community causing peaceful stability for the subregion. In this process, local government should play an active role in mutual cooperation, for instance, formal visits and staff exchanges. Significantly, they should be well planned and brought to practice continually.

3. The development and existence of the Dai/Tai people under the rule of the People's Republic of China is a challenging issue in terms of accumulating body of knowledge to the field of "Dai/Tai studies" on a global academic community. From a perspective of Chinese politics studies, political and economic management model in ethnic minority areas of the PRC: a case study of Jinghong, Xishuangbanna is part of examining the PRC political system. At the same time, current views about “Dai/Tai studies” are useful to better understand the changing of Jinghong in Xishuangbanna.

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