

SCA-UK Chairman's New Year Message 2105 (2010) Pi Mai Tai

(Venerable Dr. Khammai Dhammasami, DPhil (Oxford) Chairman,
SCA_UK & Research Fellow, Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies,
University of Oxford, UK)



It is a great honor to greet you all **Happy Pi Mai Tai** on behalf of members of the Shan Cultural Association (SCA-UK) and Tai/Shan community in the United Kingdom. We welcome the 2105th *Pi Mai Tai*, Shan New Year, before we welcome 2011 AD. Together with this Pi Mai, we celebrate the long, diverse and rich culture of our

people who are scattered all over four of the five continents.

To welcome Pi Mai this year, we hold an event on Saturday, 27th November 2010, nearly two weeks ahead of the actual New Year date, at Kennedy Lecture Theatre at the Institute of Child Health, University College London, University of London. Our cultural event will include song performance in Tai and other languages led by Nang Kham Leik, singer and daughter of the famous composer Dr. Sai Kham Leik. Our brothers and sisters from the Laotian community in London will also join the performance with a famous song, *Tai Dam Rumpun*. The evening will also feature dances, traditional and modern, by members of our SCA-UK members.

Besides, in accordance with our objective to deepen our cultural knowledge, there will be two lectures on Shan/ Tai culture by

British researchers, Dr. Susan Conway of School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London and Ms. Helen Mears (Curator for World Art, The James Green Centre for World Arts) of Brighton Museum, UK.

On this auspicious day, especially we think of our Tai families spread throughout the world and send our warmest greeting of goodwill, hope and love to all of them: we say **Mai-soong Pi Mai Tai**, first, to the over seven millions of our brothers and sisters in the Shan State and other parts of the Union of Myanmar where they are known to outsiders as Shan; then, to the millions of our people who are largely known as Dai living in the Sipsongpanna (Xishuangbanna) Dai Autonomous Prefecture and Dehong Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture, both in southern China; also, to the eighteen million Dai Zhuang (Bouxcuengh/ꨀꨣꨱꨗꨣ) from the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, also in southern China, who proudly count among them an Olympic gold medalist and businessman Li Ning (1963 -).

We also send our best *Pi Mai* wishes to the one million strong our brothers and sisters who are known as Thai/ Táy in the famous Dien Bien Phu, Hoa Binh, Lai Chau and Son La areas of Vietnam who count among them Nông Đức Mạnh (1941 -), the powerful secretary general of the Vietnamese Communist Party; and to our Tai-Khamti and Tai-Phake siblings in Assam State and Arunachal State in India. Of course, our warmest *Pi Mai* wishes are also extended to our *Pi-nongs* in Thailand, Lao and in the Phailin area of Cambodia.

With this 2105th (2010 AD) *Pi Mai Tai* celebrations, the SCA-UK is celebrating its fifth birthday this year. In terms of its existence, being five is certainly a toddler. We have a long way to go to grow and achieve our goal. It has taken us, for example, five years for the SCA - UK's meager bank account to show a balance of 5, 000 (five thousand Pounds), an amount too small for its ambitious, noble and charitable objectives. It still cannot afford salaried staff; all the office-bearers and volunteers_ many of whom are still university students_ work on a pro bono basis, with the sole aim of

promoting Shan/ Tai culture in the multi-cultural United Kingdom.

However, despite being a toddler, in 2007, when it was only two years old, the association has already co-hosted, with SOAS Centre for Buddhist Studies, University of London, the first Shan Buddhist and culture conference in the West! That academic gathering has since inspired a couple of other scholarly meetings in South and South-east Asia. Moreover, since its inception, the SCA-UK has given its full support to cultural promotion by others, noticeably the *Amazing Thailand* events and similar ventures organized by Thai Festival Organization, TFO.

To mark its fifth celebrations, I am glad to announce here that the SCA-UK is launching an educational project which initially includes four bursaries for university students. Each bursary is awardable to a worthy recipient for a year, worth 25 Pounds a month, and all the bursaries are to begin in 2011. The SCA-UK will collaborate with Tai cultural associations back home to set up a process of bursary award.

On behalf of all the hard working members of the SCA-UK, I

would like to take this opportunity to invite well-minded people, both Tai and non-Tai, to help sustain this bursary project. 25 Pounds may be insignificant to many in the UK, but it covers nearly all the normal expenses of a university student in both Shan State and other parts of the Union of Myanmar. One may help by donating for the whole bursary for a year (180 Pounds) or even for a month (25 Pounds). Donations can be made either as a one-off or through monthly bank standing order (BSO).

Two bursaries are for students studying in universities in Mandalay, Magwe, Pyinmanar and Yangon: (a) one of them is reserved for medical student and is to be named as **Dr. Sao Ba Nyan Medical Student Bursary** in honor of a well known Tai/Shan doctor, composer and leader, Dr. Sao Ba Nyan of Sipaw. He composed Shan national anthem in the early 1940s. (b) The other bursary is for students studying disciplines other than medicine and is to be called **Nang Kham Ku Bursary** in honor of a well known female novelist who lived in the early 19th century in central Shan State. Nang Kham Ku wrote the Tai

classic novel *Khun Sarm Law Nang Oo Pem*.

The other two bursaries are for student reading any subject at universities in Taunggyi, Lashio and Kengtung (Kyaington) in the Shan State, Union of Myanmar. One of them is called **Sao Garng Sor Bursary** in honor of a famous writer and poet who lived in the late 18th and early 19th century. He was the father of the novelist Nang Kham Ku. The other bursary is named after **Sao Amat Luong Merng Nong**, who was once chief minister for Saofa, ruling prince, of Merng Nong in central Shan State. Not unlike U PO Hlaing at the court of King Mindon of Mandalay, the able chief minister, who lived in the late 19th century and early 20th century, was known for his scholarship in Buddhist studies and meditation.

With these bursaries, the SCA-UK is today making known its intention to support education whenever possible. In the near future, possibly after about two years of experiment, if everything goes to the plan, the SCA-UK is intent on expanding the project by establishing a few full scholarships for university students studying in

the Shan State universities as well as in higher education institutions elsewhere in the Union of Myanmar.

While the SCA-UK initial education projects are aimed at the students in Shan State as well as other parts of the Union of Myanmar, our cultural promotion takes place almost exclusively in the United Kingdom. This is because while maintaining the Tai cultural identity we wish to do our best to contribute to the success of multi-cultural society wherever we live. The words of the philosopher-composer Dr. Sai Kham Leik will do very well here to explain the SCA-UK's outward looking approach. He says: "Our *Pi Mai Tai* celebrations are but a start to welcome New Year. From the New Year of the Tai people in early December we enthusiastically go on to join the celebrations of New Year with people from every part of the world on 1st January, from *Pi Mai Tai* to a New Year universally celebrated."

Happy Pi Mai Tai to all!

