



CHAPTER

7

Getting to Know Thailand

*“There is and always only One Thai Massage.
Whatever anyone wants to call – is just a name.”*

—Phrakhrū Uppaakarn Phatanakit

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A Brief History of Thailand

The Background of this Unique Country and Her People

The origin of the Thai race has long been a subject of controversy for both Thai and foreign historians alike. Wide-ranging research covering many disciplines including history, linguistics, biology, anthropology, as well as archeology, has been conducted on this complicated issue.

In the early days, researchers proposed that Tai-speaking peoples inhabited vast areas covering the southern part of China, especially Guangdong and Guangxi Provinces, as well as the southern part of Yunnan Province (Sipsong Panna and Turhong). Several Tai ethnic groups have also been identified in northern Vietnam, Laos, the Shan State of Burma, and Assam. They all live in clans and continue to lead their traditional way of life. While some of the Tai ethnic groups specialize in highland agriculture, others thrive on rice growing in the river-valley basins.⁴²

Historians and histo-linguists now tend to believe that the Tai race most probably originated in Guangxi Province in the People's

Republic of China, and that they are ancestors of the Thais in Thailand, the Shan in Burma, and the Lao in Laos. The migration of the Proto-Tai-speaking people from their homeland in Guangxi took place around 250 B.C. and diverged into two separate branches. The larger of the two groups, the Proto South-Central Tai (PSCT) speakers migrated to Bathuk (now in North Vietnam) around 800 A.D. era. Under Vietnamese pressure, they moved in a southwest direction to Sipsong Chuthai between 900 and 1000. The second, smaller group migrated from Bathuk to the juncture between northern Thailand, Laos and Burma, and subsequently into Assam. One branch of the larger group in Sipsong Chuthai continued their migration into Laos and settled in Luang Prabang while the other followed the Ou River into the Nan and Yom river basins in Thailand. All these migrations continued in a gradual process. The Tai settlers in the Yom river basin were to give rise to the flourishing Sukhothai Kingdom and culture. It was King Ramkhamhaeng of Sukhothai who ushered in a period of territorial expansion, and invented the Siamese script in A.D. 1283.⁴²





Migration Mapping of the Ancient Tai^{42, 43}



This map is not to scale and is meant to show migration routes only.