

Let's go and listen to the cock-a-doodle-does at dawn (Werapong Mesathan)

Urbanization is encroaching on rural life and makes the “rural area” smaller and smaller to the point we can see traditional way of life only in television programs or period dramas. But you still hear the cock-a-doodle-does at 4 or 5 am in the morning, with cool breezes outside your windows at Tai Lue Village in Xishuangbanna.

Tai Lue people in Ha City in Xishuangbanna, China, have a very similar language to Thai so if you know the Lanna language (northern Thai language) or Laos (Lanchang) Language, you can communicate with them more easily.

Language can identify where people come from and their background better than dress or customs. It is easy to imitate dress and customs but the mother tongue language always remains with their native speakers. Also, language is still active as long as their native speakers build a strong and large community. That is why, when Thais have a chance to talk with Tai Lue, they always ask themselves “Are we relatives who have separated from each other?”

The Tai Lue house also has a unique appearance which can be widely seen in Xishuangbanna. The house is raised above the ground, different from the normal Chinese house which is built on the ground. They also use stones to support the poles or pillars, which are called “เขื่อนหินหย่อง” or “เขื่อนหินตั้ง” (stone supported house), so they don't have to bury the poles in the ground. This technique also helps protect from termites which can do great damage to wooden structures.

This kind of house was also built in the north and northeastern regions of Thailand, and in Laos, along the banks of the Khong River in the past. However, there are only few houses left. Only in the Tai Lue community can we find this kind of house.

Another unique feature of the Tai Lue house is an approximately 0.5 meter gable apex in the middle of the roof eaves which is called “จ้อฟ้า” or “ช้อฟ้า” (chofa) or “เสาฟ้า” or “เสาฟ้า” (saofa).

The original village or community of the Tai Lue does not have village plan like the housing plan of a city so we can see small roads or rambling paths running through the coconut plantation and pamele trees with their large fruits.

Tai Lue houses are located rather far from each other with fruit orchards serving as boundaries. The Tai Lue plant various kinds of fruit including papaya, banana, sugar cane, jackfruit, mafai and “mamonkhai”.

There is also a small plot of home-grown vegetables: spring onions, sweet basil, Chinese parsley, lemongrass, luffa, pumpkins and string beans. As every house has its own garden, it makes this village look like a “garden village”.

Every evening when you walk near the kitchen, you will hear the lively sound of cooking which means dinner will be ready in a few minutes.

After the sun sets behind the banana plantation, at the same time as the rice is boiled, the village will become dark with only dim or shining light from each house. If it is the period of the waning moon, you will clearly see sparkling and twinkling stars in the night sky. During the period of the waxing moon, the full moon will make all the stars appear to hide in the dark sky. The bright moonlight will display a scene of coconut fronds dancing in the wind.

A night at Tai Lue village in Xishuangbanna will be the night that takes you back to the ancient days of Siam. Sleep early in the evening and wake up at dawn to the sound of roosters until the sun’s rays light up the day.

When was the last time you heard cock-a-doodle-does like this?

RILCA takes you to Xishuangbanna

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