

**Figure 1.3** At the time of the research Lohit District<sup>10</sup> (i.e. present Namsai District) was the most important Khumi population centre in India. The 2001 census highlighted that 12,000 of them inhabit the area, which they dominate in number (Government of India 2001). This place is also where the first Khumi colony

to reach India in the mid-eighteenth century was allowed to settle along the Taptirani River near present Namtal locality (figure 1.3). Khanti is defined as *Hinayana Buddhism* (small vehicle) also known as *Theravada Buddhism*. Buddhism implies a set of rules of conduct and the precept (*sila*) the laypeople can acquire merit through offerings. Giving an offering is considered as a meritorious act. Among the Khanti the offering of an ivory statue is, for example, a way for merit-making. From the beginning of their settlement in India, the Khanti rapidly built monasteries and temples to practice their Buddhist faith. Each Khanti village possesses its own *stupa* (monastery). Until Indian independence in 1947, and the building

of schools in each village, young Khamsi used to retreat to the monastery and learn how to read and write Pali language. Indeed, when the British set

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Box L2

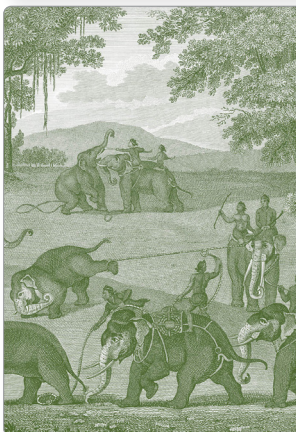
Since 2006, the Khantais have been celebrating the Shan New Year *Poi Poi* Ma during the months of November or December. This event is held annually in different parts of Khantai inhabited areas. During my stays, I could see that many means were deployed for the reconstruction of numerous village temples and monasteries, as it is the case in Naxos, Chongchikun and Wargho. The highlight of this identity movement dates back to 2010, when I was able to attend the inauguration of the five most important religious places in Khantai land: Kongme Khant, the golden pagoda, located on a small hill along the Tengyue River. The construction of such an imposing place of worship could be interpreted as a willingness to materially and concretely mark the footprint of Thanaud Buddhist, but also as a way to distinguish themselves from other populations inhabiting the area.

up their colonial enterprise to distinguish between the various tribes and populations of Upper Assam, Budhithien gave the Khamti a distinctive mark as compared with other populations in the area. As quoted from the 1891 Census Report: "The Khamtis are Budhith, as far more civilized than most of other Shan tribes in the province [of Assam], they have their own priests, and these, as well as a large proportion of the laity are literate" (Census Report, quoted in Goswami 1973: 453). Concerning the Khamti and Budhithian, Cooper writes: "In speech of the Khamtis a little is to be discerned in their intonation, for there is about the second tone which characterizes the idea of wildness and want of culture, very far from being a necessary property of the Khamtis, far from some of their social laws even civilized nations might take a lesson" (Cooper 1895: 143).

Since this particular research undertaken on the Khanti or their religious focuses on Buddhiism (see among others Kordtjens 1996), very few truly mention the spirit cult (Boers 2008). Again, more recently, Nethaling (2009) stated that Theravada Buddhiism was the only Khanti religion (Sriponso 2009). This appears to be all the more surprising as we know that among the Tai, Buddhiism is often associated with other belief and practices, like spirit worshipping. Nowadays, it even seems that the adherence to the Buddhist faith is a way to promote a Shan Buddhiist identity, distinct from all the neighbouring populations (see box 12). More recently, Khanti earned the right to be renamed as 'Tai Khanti' in the Scheduled Tribes<sup>1</sup> where they were initially noted as 'Khampis'. This shows further will to get closer to their Tai and Shan identities.

16. As we will see in this volume, in addition to providing them recognition and legitimacy, this status brought them some advantages during the development and growth of the timber industry (see chapter 7 from the forest to the factory: the timber industry).

## INTRODUCTION



## Mela shikar

A perilous venture

### Capturing elephant in Northeast India

[illegible]

1. During interviews conducted in the Chongfeng Administrative Circle, several experienced poachers told me they had already captured elephants in the manner called *lai cheng* in Tai. This was confirmed by Shubhakar in his book *Smuggling Mules* (2004). These captures were then mainly conducted on behalf of the Kuomintang (*gong*) and he said to the British during the colonial period. Since the capture was forbidden, this method is not used. Indeed, it is impossible to build a ladder large enough without anyone noticing it.



**Figure 4.7**  
Suzana sitting on  
Kassi for the first  
time. (Photo: Naohe)

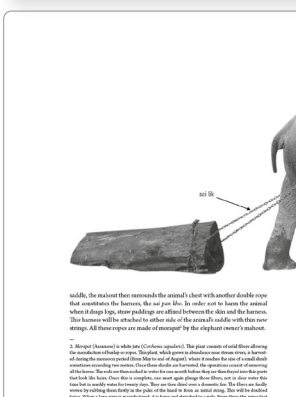
The writings of James Howard Williams<sup>10</sup> on the treatment of newly captured elephants in logging camps in Myanmar during the first half of the nineteenth century are particularly interesting. He describes how, once an elephant had been tamed by a human presence at its site. Until his fathers mahout can sit on his back, the animal is restrained using ropes made of cooled buffalo skin in order to avoid injury. Such procedures differ slightly from those observed among the Khamsi. J. H. Williams explains that in Myanmar where the animal is tamed between two trees, his future mahout is first linked to a meter above his head with a raffia rope. The animal is then secured by a second rope that is attached to the trunk. The mahout then releases the rope and let the mahout down carefully until he reaches the elephant's neck. According to Williams, this process generally took about a dozen days before the animal accepted his mahout, being startled by a mahout (Williams 1891).

In French Indochina, William Best also mentioned the way tainters avoided the elephant's weight by pulling on a rope eight or ten meters above the animal by placing a certain amount of weight on the animal's back, and depending on its reaction would add more. The total charge could weigh as much as 200 kilograms. Once the animal was willing to support that weight on his back, they started

Coming back to the Khmeris situation, it must be noted that the elephant's behavior is not always violent. During the first step of group violence in many respects. When I questioned them, it was difficult for my interviewees to justify coercive methods used in this first step, as well as what preceded it: the starvation of the animals. They answered that it should last for about a short time as possible, generally 10 days, and that they should not be too violent. The first step is the most delicate and the most delicate, but the trainer experiences. On that point, it must be said that Khmeris recognize a good elephant trainer if he manages to complete this step in less than ten days. It remains his own responsibility to ensure that this period be as short as possible.

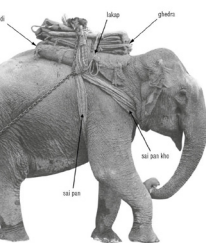
During the second step, the animals are put in a cage for a few days. This period since it involves the suffering and mistreatment of animals. Within this short period, he has to gain the trust of the animal and forge links and bonds with him and the process will be more severe if the animal does not accept and submit to human orders. The most delicate elephant only needs a few days to be tamed. The trainer must be able to control the animal and the animal requires that the animal accept the treatment meted out to him and understand the human intentions towards him. The elephant must learn to trust the human and not interpret their intentions or attitude as aggressive. According

18. In colonial Myanmar, Colonel James Howard Williams, nicknamed 'Bill the Elephant', was engaged in the 1920s as an assistant manager in Bhamo and worked for the Dundee Burma Trading Corporation, which employed nearly 2,000 elephants. J. H. Williams was also an officer of the British Army in charge of transport. He left several records including the epicureous Bill [elephant] (1951).



3. Marquis (Acanthaceae) is white (pale) (Confusee *apud*!). This plant consists of stiff fibres allowing the macrocarpa to develop as ropes. This plant, which grows in abundance near stream rivers, is harvested during the recession period (from May to end of August) when it reaches the size of a small child sometimes exceeding two metres. Once these fibres are harvested, the operations consist of removing all the leaves. The ends are then stacked to water the one month before they are then folded into three parts that look like hair. Once this is complete, one must again glunge these fibres, not in their whole size but in smaller sizes for twenty days. They are then dried over a charcoal fire. The fibres are finally woven by rolling them tightly in the palms of the hand to form an initial string. This will be described

TABLE 4. *continued*

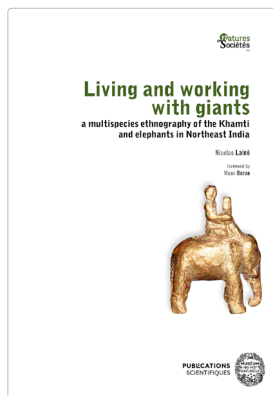


**Figure 8.1**  
Ropes and equipment for dragging logs (Laine 2012).

Once the saddle and harness are attached, the mahout adjusts chains, the so-called *chakras*. On each side of the animal, chains are attached to the *chakras* at saddle height, and extend from the rear of the animal. Two small wooden wheels are inserted at the centre of each node of the entwined rope so that the saddle remains in equilibrium when the animal pulls back. When legs are ready to be dragged or pulled, two new chains are rolled and hung by hooks. When the mahout sits on the saddle, he transmits gentle commands with his feet using the *chakras*. This is a kind of stirrup in which he places his feet behind the elephant's neck. The *chakra* is used for the mahout's safety. Placing his feet inside the collars, they are not likely to slip when the elephant falls forward (see figure 8.1).

as used for working elephants will be made. It should be noted that the strings do not all have the same thicknesses, the outer three being somewhat thicker than the inner ones.

WORLD CLIMATE DATA CENTER ON TAIWAN CONDITIONS 1



# Living and working with giants

a multispecies ethnography of the Khamti  
and elephants in Northeast india

Nicolas Lainé

## THE BOOK

This book proposes a multispecies ethnography of human–elephant working relationships in Northeast India, in the local context of the Khamti population. Based on an extended research fieldwork, it analyses not only people’s action but also animal involvement in establishing and maintaining trusting relationships at the workplace. Thanks to Nicolas Lainé rich descriptions, the reader can follow the capture of a juvenile forest elephant, and understand its transformation into a village elephant as a reciprocal process. Both cognitive capacities and corporeal capabilities of humans and elephants are taken into consideration, as well as their mutual influences and the representations that arise from the specific contexts of interspecies communication and collaboration. The adopted multidisciplinary approach allows thinking the human–animal working unit in terms of cooperative interaction, and even intersubjective engagement —opening to reflexions on the mutually beneficial modalities of existence of humans and animals in a shared environment.

## THE AUTHOR

Nicolas Lainé holds a PhD in Ethnology from Paris West University (2014). He is currently a postdoctoral research fellow at the Institut de Recherche pour le Développement (IRD/UMR Paloc) and a postdoctoral research associate at the Research Institute of Contemporary Southeast Asia (IRASEC) in Bangkok. He is also a member of the International Multidisciplinary Thematic Network "Biodiversity, Health, and Societies in Southeast Asia", supported by CNRS-InEE (National Institute of Ecology and Environment, France), and serves as an expert member of the IUCN SSC Asian Elephant Specialist Group. His research focuses on human-animal relations in Asia, the links between health and biocultural diversity, and the decolonization of science.

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