CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

CLAN-CENTRED COMMUNITY

*Daengl bangh weex maengx, daengl juml weex nyongc.*

*Helping one another generates mutual happiness; being together generates mutual gladness.*

The culture of Xiangye was relatively stable and well-preserved. The close-knit community survived only by interdependence. Old people said that the village had always been inhabited by Kam people. In the 10 years before Liberation one or two Han families moved from elsewhere to live in Xiaozhai and were able to live in harmony with the Kam. They were quickly able to speak Kam and adapt to the local customs so that by the time of Liberation they had assimilated and to all intents and purposes had become Kam themselves. In this way the village always seemed like a pure Kam community.

Old people used to say that in the past, Kam people did not have surnames, only nicknames. They were called by names such as Cai, Jin, Fu, Ping, Xiang and Jian. These names had no meanings and were only the tags by which people were known. When the Han people spoke to or about them, they added the prefix ‘Lao’ to these tags, calling people ‘Lao Cai’, ‘Lao Jin’ and so on. When he was small, the author heard an uncle relate the following story about names.

“Some time ago, officials were sent by government authorities to register household members and their addresses in all the settlements. In Xiangye, there were many people with the name ‘Jia’ and the government officials could not distinguish between them. When it came to paying taxes each Jia was inclined to point to his neighbour. The result was that several Jias ended up paying one portion of grain tax between them. When the main official in charge of collecting tax discovered a grain shortfall he was furious. He called all the Jias together and divided them into Ous, Yangs, Wus and so on, so that every person was given a Han surname in the household register. From that time on, Xiangye people used surnames.”

The above legend may have predated the migration of ancestors to Xiangye. The Ou genealogical chart can be traced back to Tianzhu
At the gravesides during the Sweeping the Graves Festival.