November 19

We left Chiang Mai in the morning having rented a car (Caribian) from Beer car rental. It was the only full size (4 seats) available, but was not as good a vehicle. We drove to Mae Taeng first passing through the market at Mae Ma Lai. Our first stop was the Amphoe office and we asked to see the Kaset Tambon for Mae Taeng and Wiang Haeng. None were around, but someone there told us to call back and set an appointment. They have a staff meeting every Monday morning and so Monday afternoons are a good time to catch them in the amphoe office. Then we continued on to Chiang Dao and stopped for lunch there. After lunch we drove up to Wiang Haeng. It’s probably about 85 km from Chiang Dao to Wiang Haeng and it took us over two hours. There’s construction along the road around where it turns North. But in general a good road.

Wiang Haeng – We arrived in Wiang Haeng around 4pm and went to the amphoe office and found the Kaset Tambon there. He was very helpful and showed us many records of both Wiang Haeng and Piang Luang Tambons. He lent us two books of land use data - Wiang Haeng, 2538 (1995) and Piang Luang, 2535 (1992). He also showed us a large printout of household level data for every village in the amphoe that they are required to collect and send to the Ministry of Agriculture (Provincial) every year. He says that this is available for the entire country and they keep it at the province and in Bangkok. We came back the next day and wrote down the totals for the Wiang Haeng villages (about 21 total). We need to look into getting access to this data from the Province. After finishing there we drove to Piang Luang through a brief rain shower. The fields around Wiang Haeng are mostly irrigated rice and vegetable crops. The Kaset tambon said that few people migrate to Chiang Mai because there is plenty of food here. He also said that there has been little change in land use and area over the past ten years.

Piang Luang – You pass a checkpoint at the entrance to the village. The population information we had from the village survey data was around 1,000 people in 1996. The army personnel at the gate said there are about 10,000 with over half of those as “refugees”. The health centre data we saw on the way out of the village the next day said 4,269 for the village of Piang Luang and another 300 or so in small neighboring villages. The 4,000 figure seemed the most accurate according to the homes etc. that we saw. We were very surprised by the place in general – very prosperous. There were many new and very nice homes along with a Toyota truck dealership, motorcycles etc. We saw almost no very poor looking people. There were lots of children at what seemed like very large schools that we passed. We drove to the guesthouse which is very near the border and got rooms there (250Bt). Then we drove toward the border and saw the gates but didn’t approach. The fields there were rice and then lots of lynchee growing on the low slopes. Then we drove around to the other side of town and saw the Chinese section with another
large school and temple overlooking a reservoir. We drove up the hill by the reservoir to another temple on the top and had a wonderful view of the entire area. On that very hill we saw fruit trees (papaya, lynchée) with corn planted around the young trees. Other slopes also had small lynchée trees and other field crops. It looked like old swidden fields were gradually being converted to orchards.

After dark we drove to a restaurant in town near the car dealership. It appeared to be one of the only restaurants. But we had a very nice meal there. We also met a couple of the teachers in the village. They were a married couple and one taught at the elementary school and the other in the high school. They were from the central region and had only been in Piang Luang about 3 months. They invited us to a celebration they were going to because it was the Tai Yai New Year that very day. There are Chinese, Tai Yai, Dai, Lisu and “Burmese” in the town. They each have different Phu Yais. I thought the Thai Yai were the same as Tai Dam or Tai Daeng in Laos, but people since have said that they are a different group that come mostly from Burma. The teachers first picked up another teacher (single woman graduate from CMU) and then they took us to the Chinese school. Most of the children in town spend all day at Thai school and then walk over to the Chinese school to continue studying Chinese language (and some English) there until 9pm. We saw young elementary school children up to high school age children in the classrooms. After that we drove to the border and climbed a little hill to the celebration area for the Tai Yai new year. They had games and some people were selling things. There was also a stage, but mostly all we saw were awards being given to local officials. We walked through a circular temple as well. It was very dark and there were tons of stars.

We also spent time talking with the teachers about the area and learned many things. Voices lower when they told about the problems they have with the kids in school. Many are like orphans because their parents either don’t live in the village because of travel etc. or are even in jail. So often very young children live with young teenagers. The teachers say that the children cry when asked about their parents. One of the teachers asked me why we were studying agriculture in an area where agriculture doesn’t matter to the economy. She then asked if I understood what the economy was based on there (without actually saying it) and I said that I understood. Trade with Burma is the base of the economy – and most of it I’m sure is illegal trade in problem goods.

Migration – The migration story there is an interesting and complicated one. First, people do go to Chiang Mai and other urban areas. Cheap Burmese labor is available for the fields and also to work in homes as maids etc. Household help earns about 3,000-5,000 Bt. Per month and agricultural labor works for about 60 Bt. A day. Burmese can leave the village with special permission from the amphoe, and can have 7 days away (it used to be just three days). The Chinese on the other hand seem to have more freedom – most have citizenship cards. When they migrate to Bangkok (or Taiwan) they get much higher paying jobs based on their language skills and other connections. It costs 80 Bt. Per month for families to send their children to the Chinese school. And the school also receives funding and other support from Taiwan. There is now a bus into Chiang Mai daily and it takes just 4 hours. People have been travelling to CM for over 20 years but it
used to take two days. The new paved road was just completed last year so now the
buses run regularly and cost 70Bt. Per trip (one way).

Village History and Land Use – After breakfast we broke into two groups and went to try
and talk to some older people to get some information about changes over the past 30
years. Tuang and I found a goldmine when we walked into a chinese shop just up from
the restaurant. At first, we spoke with the male shop owner who was a little reticent and
had a thick chinese accent. But then his wife came home from the market. Her Thai was
very good and she was very friendly and talkative. She was born in Piang Luang and
could relate changes over the past thirty years (her husband had only come from China 20
years ago).