

Pre-Buddhist Practices Among The Tai-Khamti Of Arunachal Pradesh: Continuity, Transformation, And Religious Syncretism

Miss Nang Pinni Mein

Department Of Anthropology, Rajiv Gandhi University, Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh, India

Abstract:

The Tai-Khamti of Arunachal Pradesh, a small yet significant ethnic group, have preserved a rich tapestry of pre-Buddhist practices deeply rooted in their cultural heritage. These practices, intertwined with animism, ancestor worship, and nature reverence, offer a window into the community's spiritual life before the advent of Theravada Buddhism among them. This study explores the continuity and transformation of these ancient rituals, highlighting their role in shaping the social and religious identity of the Tai-Khamti. Through oral traditions, rituals and festivals, the community maintains a connection to their pre-Buddhist past, demonstrating resilience in preserving their indigenous belief systems amidst external influences. This study aims to contribute to the understanding of how indigenous practices coexist and evolve within the broader framework of modern religious identities.

Keywords: *Indigenous belief system, Theravada Buddhism, Tradition and transformation*

Date of Submission: 09-04-2026

Date of Acceptance: 19-04-2026

I. Introduction:

The Tai-Khamti are recognised as one of the 26 major scheduled tribes of the state of Arunachal Pradesh. They migrated from *Moung Khampti Loung* (located in Shan state of present Myanmar) during the latter half of the eighteenth century. The name Khamti means a 'land of gold' where the name is a combination of two words - the meaning of the word '*kham*' means gold and '*ti*' means place. They affix the name Tai to themselves denoting that they belong to the Tai race. The Tai-Khamti language belong to the Tai speech family of the Siamese-Chinese family which forms a branch of the Indo-Chinese family. There are three main speech families of the Siamese-Chinese family- the Tai, Karen and Chinese. Under the Tai speech group there are the languages of the Siamese, Lu, Lao, and Khun of the trans-salween Shan states, Shans of Burma and Yunan and finally the Ahom and Khamti language fall (Gogoi, 1971). The Tai people's present habitat extends from Assam in the West to Hainan and Kwangsi in the East and from the interior of Yunnan in the north to the southern- most extremity of Thailand in the South (Gogoi, 1971). The groups of Tai people who inhabit the state of Arunachal Pradesh are Tai-Khamti, Phakiyal, Turung, Khamyang, Aiton. The Tai-Khamti territory falls in the Namsai district, bounded by Lohit to the North, Changlang to the east, Assam to the South and Dibang to the West. They occupy the low-lying plain regions drained by the Tengapani and Noa Dihing rivers. Lathao village is one of the biggest villages of the Tai-Khamti in Namsai District and it has a uniform Buddhist population. It is a relatively well to do village with 163 permanently residing households. Agriculture is the mainstay of the village economy where both permanent wet and dry cultivation is practiced. Cultivation of their *na* (rice fields) is by far the most important activity of the villagers. This is supplemented by the cultivation of cash crops such as mustard, taro, potatoes and, more recently, tea.

The Tai-Khamtis, a distinct ethnic group residing primarily in the northeastern regions of India and parts of Myanmar, are known for their rich cultural heritage and intricate spiritual practices. Predominantly followers of Theravada Buddhism, the Tai-Khamti have seamlessly integrated Buddhist teachings with their traditional beliefs and rituals, reflecting a unique syncretism that characterizes their religious and cultural landscape.

Theravada Buddhism among the Tai-Khamtis: Theravada Buddhism, the oldest form of Buddhism, emphasizes adherence to the Pali Canon and the monastic community's role in preserving the teachings of the Buddha. For the Tai-Khamtis, Theravada Buddhism represents a significant spiritual framework that guides their moral conduct, religious observances, and community life. Despite their strong affiliation with Theravada Buddhism, the Tai-Khamtis have not completely abandoned their pre-Buddhist traditions, which continue to play a vital role in their cultural and spiritual practices.

Pre-Buddhist Practices

Prior to the adoption of Buddhism, the Tai-Khamtis practiced a form of animism deeply rooted in South-East Asian traditions. Their pre-Buddhist belief system revolved around the worship of a pantheon of spirits and deities, known as *phis*, which were believed to influence various aspects of life and nature. These spirits were revered for their power over fertility, protection, and prosperity, and rituals were conducted to appease and honor them. The Tai-Khamtis held these spirits in high regard, performing elaborate ceremonies to ensure their favor and avert misfortune.

Syncretism and Ritual Continuity

The arrival of Theravada Buddhism did not result in the complete abandonment of these pre-Buddhist practices. Instead, the Tai-Khamtis have skillfully woven elements of their indigenous spiritual traditions into their Buddhist practices, creating a syncretic religious experience. This fusion is evident in various rituals and ceremonies that continue to honor traditional deities alongside Buddhist teachings. For instance, rituals such as *Phang-Suo-Moung*, *Phi-Nam-Huan*, and *Hong-Khwan* reflect a blend of ancient animistic beliefs with Buddhist influence, illustrating how traditional practices have adapted to coexist with new religious ideologies.

Modern Context and Evolution

In contemporary times, the Tai-Khamtis have witnessed significant changes in their ritual practices due to modernization, including advancements in education and technology. Despite these transformations, their commitment to Theravada Buddhism remains steadfast. The persistence of pre-Buddhist rituals among some segments of the community, though largely modified, highlights the resilience of their cultural identity. This ongoing synthesis of pre-Buddhist and Buddhist practices demonstrates the Tai-Khamtis' ability to maintain their historical traditions while embracing new religious paradigms.

In summary, the Tai-Khamtis' religious and cultural practices offer a compelling example of how indigenous beliefs can coexist with and enrich external religious influences. The interplay between Theravada Buddhism and pre-Buddhist animistic practices within the Tai-Khamti community reveals a dynamic and evolving tradition that bridges ancient heritage with contemporary spirituality.

II. Objectives Of The Study

The primary objective of this study is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the pre-Buddhist traditional practices of the Tai-Khamtis, a significant ethnic group from Namsai district, Arunachal Pradesh, India. This research seeks to delve into the historical and cultural significance of these ancient practices, exploring how they have been integrated into the daily lives of the Tai-Khamti people over time.

Additionally, the study aims to assess the extent to which these pre-Buddhist traditions have been influenced by neighbouring tribes, particularly in terms of cultural exchange and adaptation. Through this exploration, the paper intends to shed light on the cultural continuity and transformation within the Tai-Khamti community, highlighting the ways in which their pre-Buddhist practices have been preserved, adapted, or modified in response to external influences.

III. Methodology

This study employs a comprehensive methodological approach, integrating descriptive, historical, and analytical techniques to thoroughly explore the pre-Buddhist practices of the Tai-Khamti tribe. The research is grounded in both primary and secondary data sources, ensuring a robust and well-rounded analysis. The study is conducted among the Tai-Khamti tribe of Namsai District of Arunachal Pradesh. The primary data were meticulously gathered through extensive fieldwork of one year, which involved conducting in-depth personal interviews with key-informants, including village monks, priests, elders, and other knowledgeable members of the Tai-Khamti community who holds the knowledge of these practices. These interviews provided valuable insights into the tribe's customs, rituals, and beliefs, offering a firsthand account of the pre-Buddhist practices that have been passed down through generations. Additionally, personal observations and experiences during the field study further enriched the data, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of the cultural practices under investigation.

To complement the primary data, a wide range of secondary sources were consulted. This included a thorough review of existing literature such as books, academic journals, research articles, census reports, and government gazetteers. These secondary sources provided the necessary historical context and supported the qualitative analysis of the primary data. By cross-referencing the information obtained from these published materials with the field data, the study ensures the accuracy and reliability of its findings. There is no doubt that the Tai-Khamti are devout Theravada Buddhists and pass their lives by sincerely following and observing the principles of Buddhism. But it has also been observed that besides following Buddhism, they also simultaneously practise some forms of pre-Buddhist traditional norms and practices in their daily lives. They observe the

principles of Buddhism simultaneously with their indigenous faiths and beliefs in such a way that inspite of occurring clash with each other, this amalgamation provided a new and peculiar phenomenon which ultimately beautified and decorated their whole religious structure. They have, indeed, successfully amalgamated their traditional traits and practices with Buddhism.

IV. Discussion

In real sense, the Tai-Khamti are polytheists who believe and worship different Gods, evil spirits (*Phra*), Demons (*Phi*) and the spirits of their ancestors (*Phi-Nam*). About the practice of Buddhism by the Tai-Khamti, once T.T. Cooper has observed, "In religion they (Tai-Khamti) appear to be strict followers of Burmese Buddhism, but excepting the priests, their religion is little more than polytheism, under a thin veil of Buddhist pantheism, the beauty of Gautama's teachings being utterly unknown amongst them while many of their customs are altogether opposed to Buddhism..."⁵⁴. T. Cooper's might have stood correct if their beliefs and religious performances were not changed or modified. Today, a vast changes and modifications could be seen in their religious beliefs and practices due to the sharp influence of Buddhism in their lives. Thus, it will be incorrect to believe that their traditional practices and beliefs have overshadowed Buddhism, but, on the other hand, Buddhism has, indeed over shadowed all their traditional faiths and practices. As for instance, the nature of performing '*Me-Nam Me Phi*', a traditional ritual of Tai-Khamti to get the blessings from their ancestors which was popularly observed in the past, has changed completely today. During the worship, sacrifices were given of Buffalo, cow, pig and also use of wine did take place. But, today this kind of worship which involves sacrifices are abandoned totally for the sake of Buddhism. Likewise, several traditional practices and ceremonies are modified or abandoned by them in order to suit the same with the basic principles of Buddhism. Now a days, in their festival and ceremonies, involvement of wine is unheard of or unimaginable. Preparation of the fermented rice beer in the houses of the Tai-Khamti is regarded as religious taboo today. The Tai-Khamti still perform the ceremony of '*Me-Nam Me Phi*' with slight modifications in which they offer only cooked rice, flowers etc., to their ancestors without any sacrifices. These Buddhists of the Theravada School regard it better to avoid the sacrificial parts of their traditional ceremonies for the sake of their religion.

While performing their traditional ceremonies, the Tai-Khamti never involve the Bhikkhus (*Chao Mun*) into their ceremonies. *Chao Mo*, the traditional priest, perform such rituals in presence of the villagers. The traditional magical chants of the Tai-Khamti which are mostly of pre-Buddhists age, are available in the form of manuscripts. These manuscripts are not kept in the Monastery. They are kept by the village magical doctors called as *Chao Mo* or *Mo Ya Tai*. The magical chants are mostly found to be in Tai language. The Tai-Khamti even worship the manuscripts of magical chants. They perform these traditional ceremonies outside the campus of the monastery.

Some of the notable traditional pre-Buddhist ceremonies which the Tai-Khamti perform regularly, side by side with the Buddhist rituals are explained below

Hong khwon ritual

The Tai-Khamti regard it as a spirit calling ceremony. Literally, in Tai-Khamti *Hong* means to bring back and *Khwon* means spirit or soul. The *Hong Khwon* ritual is performed to pray the *Lengdon* who is believed to be the lord of heaven who grants long life and prosperity to the king and the country besides being practised at the individual level. The Tai-Khamti believe that the body and mind of a human being are governed by the *Khwon*. Whenever the *Khwon* disappears, the human body gets attacked by diseases. It generally happens when an individual is tortured seriously or he falls into the water and also on the land from a higher altitude. Thus, to call back the lost *Khwon*, the *Hong Khwon* ritual is performed. According to them the Tai-nation or the country is attacked by the enemies, in such situation, they used to perform the ceremony of *Hong Khwon*.

During the *Hong Khwon* ritual at the individual level, the worshipper chants the following words:

"This is an old procedure which we are going to chant them again. This had been followed by *Pu Ching Pha*. This is necessary for all old and young. The soul *Khwon* of our brother/sister has been lost. He/she is becoming weak. We are trying to bring back his/her lost soul. The cooking pot (*Hai Khao*), fish, rice, water, bow and arrow, spade and all necessary things are kept here. Even the fishing trap (*Khyek*) is kept. Kindly take all these things and search the lost soul. Please travel as much distance as you can. If you are successful in bringing back the lost soul, the child/man/woman would live longer and would be free from diseases for the whole life"

In case, a man or a woman who have suddenly fallen sick after a deep shock or got scared, the Tai-Khamti think that good soul of the person is being taken out by some spirit and evil spirit occupy the former place. According to their traditional belief, the body and mind of a human being is governed by the *Khwon* which are stored in the human body and when the quantity of *Khwon* is lost or decreased, the human body is attacked by diseases. Similarly, when a person is terrified or he falls in water or falls from any high place, then the volume or quality of *Khwon* is lost. The body and mind become inactive. In such situation, *Hong Khwon* ritual is performed. When a person falls in serious illness, the Tai-Khamti think that good soul of the person is being taken out by

some spirit and evil spirit occupy the former place. Therefore, in case of serious illness, they conduct worship by keeping sword, gun and egg near the sick person and some elderly members read from the *Punthi* (sacred book) and therapeutic ritual is performed.

The Tai-Khamti believe that a *Khwon* is an element of vitality, vigour and strength of a person. The ceremony to bring back the *Khwon* is called *son khwon* which is normally arranged in dusk. They believe that a *Khwon* may flee into deep water and so the *Khwon* is floated with fishing implement called *Khyek*. To lift *Khwon*, as an omen of good luck, they look for a lizard or a fish. All the material lifted with help of *Khyek* are wrapped in a cloth and placed in front of the ancestral pole of respective house which is called *Sao- phi-nam* and the therapeutic ceremony is performed. Like an individual human being, they believe that the country also has its *Khwon*. Sometimes, the *Khwon* of the country also needs orientation. When the country is attacked or facing abnormal situation, a ceremony called *Hong khwon moungh khwon* is performed to provoke the God to augment the power of *Khwon* for the country. Sometimes, royalty used to recognize *Khwon* with royal grandeur after battle they fought, with a view to get release from sin, they committed by killing men in the battle or to win in the battle by strengthening *Khwon*. This ritual is performed with royal grandeur, all the household articles like bows, arrows, knives, daos (machete), spades, battle axe, swords, spears etc. are enamelled and fruits, sweets, foods are offered to the ancestral spirit. The basic difference between the *Son Khwon* and *Hong Khwon* is that *Hong Khwon* is basically aggressive in nature, the ritual specialist is in command and orders the tools and weapons to bring back the *Khwon*, on the other hand *Son Khwon* is characterized by pleading and cajoling. The two therapeutic rituals *Son Khwon* and *Hong Khwon* demonstrate how a stray element of vitality can be induced to return to the human body. The Tai-Khamti have great respect for nature and wherever they found any power or beauty, they entreat mercy from the object and invested them with supernatural character. They believe that the supernatural power direct and control human life. They believe in extra sensory super powers and to them material objects are as animated as themselves and an invisible spirit presides in themselves, and in other objects and beings. That's why, they propitiate or conciliate these super natural powers, which they believe, direct and control human life. So, for reconciliation the super natural powers they worship them in forms of spirits or phis. According to their needs and requirements they worship various types of spirit like spirit of paddy field *Phi-Na*, the spirit of forest *Phi-Thoun*, the spirit of water *Phi-Nam*, the spirit of hill *Phi-Noi*, the spirit of country *Phi-Moungh*, the spirit of house *Phi-Huan*, the spirit of the village *Phi-Maan* etc. They pay great reverence to the spirit of their village. The existence of a special hut dedicated to the spirit *Phi-Maan* is a common feature of a traditional Tai-Khamti village. A small monument is constructed in the name of the *Phi-Maan* at the entrance of the village. This symbolic monument or hut is known as *Ho-Phi*. They have their own village God locally called *Kaliabapu*. The sacred place is located at the end of the residential huts in the north-east of the village. Twice in every year, the villagers worship this deity. The family members just offer the foodstuff to the deity. The villagers have constructed one small shelter for this deity. The villagers consider this deity as very powerful. In Tai-Khamti society, the spirits are propitiated according to occasional demands, for instance when a person returning from the forest falls ill, it is believed that the forest spirit is offended. So, *Phi-Thoun* is propitiated by offering flowers and candle near the forest.

Pang-chi-mung ritual

This ritual is performed by the Tai-Khamti whenever their village is faced with certain calamities and misfortunes. Such calamities are generally characterised by the failure of crops due to scanty rainfall or the spread of epidemics in the village. This ritual is performed at the village as well as household levels. According to their belief, such calamities or misfortunes occur only due to the curse of the Supernatural beings. In such circumstances, they find the pleasing of the supernatural being inevitable and unavoidable. In such ritual, besides men, participation of only unmarried women is permitted. Such ritual is particularly performed under a big tree nearby their paddy fields by constructing a temporary hut. In the remote past, the Tai-Khamti used to sacrifice animals during the ritual. But today animal sacrifices are totally banned due to the influence of Buddhism. Though no sacrifice is performed today, yet met of deer, duck, pig, chicken etc. are offered to the deity. It is believed as necessary to mention here that pictures of various kinds of animals are found hanging at the place of worship. During the prayer, they pray for the wellbeing of the whole village in the form of good harvest and also to avoid themselves from such horrendous epidemics. This ritual is generally held for two or three days. The cooking and distributing works of the ritual is wholly performed by the unmarried women. Literally, *Pang-Chi-Mung* means the spirit of Manabhum Hills which is popularly call by the peoples as *Dangoria*.

Me-nam-me-phi ritual

As stated above, the ancient mode of observation of *Me Nam Me Phi* ritual by the Tai-Khamti is modified or changed. But they did not disown the ritual completely. Only the sacrificial section is disowned. The main characteristics feature of this ritual is the paying of homage and reverence to their ancestors' spirit at the community level. Now a days, it is observed that the ritual is performed at individual household levels. Thus, the

inclination towards the household level from the community level in the observance of this ritual is the major modification. The Tai-Khamti believe that their ancestors spirit resides in the main post of their houses which they call *Chao Lai*. During this ritual, they offer cooked rice, flowers, water etc., to their ancestors at the foot of the main post. The family members of the house pray for peaceful, happy and prosperous life. Some sections of them are also found to perform the ritual outside their house at the *Kongmu* (a pagoda shaped structure constructed in the eastern direction). They offer flower, rice etc., at the *Kongmu* which they call *Khoutangsom*. It is also known as *Kongmu Phihan*.

Phi-nam- huan (pai nahong pai chan) ritual

The Tai-Khamti believe in the family and clan spirit. They usually propitiate the spirit of the deceased parents or grandparents known as *Phi-Huan*. They also propitiated the spirit of their founder clan called *Phi-Nam-Huan* or *Phi Nahong Pai Chan*. They have a great reverence to the spirit of their ancestors. It is believed that the ancestors desire propitiation with offerings from their living progenies and dissatisfied ancestors may cause sufferings to the family members. According to their traditional believes, the spirit of their ancestors resides in the north-eastern corner pole called, *Chao Lai* and the south-eastern corner pole called, *Sao Nam* of their house. The female spirit (very furious, as they believe) resides in the north-eastern pole while the male spirit resides in the south-eastern corner pole in their respective houses. Therefore, these two poles (*sao-phi-nams*) are considered auspicious and the adjoining places of the poles are always kept neat and clean. As a mark of respect, they offer cooked food, puffed rice, flowers and pour water in every meritorious works of their family. Dirty clothes, vests, mops, brooms, cooking materials, fishing implements etc. are always keep away from these two poles. In every meritorious function of the family, the spirits of ancestors are worshipped among them. During the festive occasions, the worship of *Phi-Nam-Huan* is a mandatory work. Normally, the worship of the *Phi-Nam-Huan* is performed before noon preferably before breakfast. To worship the spirit, two small pyramids (about two feet high) made out of sand known as *Kongmu* are made beside the two poles (*sao-nams*). A *Kongmu* is a circular conical shaped heap of sand tapering to a point which is decorated with *Tankhon*, *caaku* and flowers. The *Tankhon* is a special small flag made of thin bamboo stick, end of which is bent over and held into place with a thin thread that carries a piece of white paper cut out in a distinctive pattern possibly to recognize a shape of a human body. The *Tankhon* is coupled with another stick called *caaku* which carries a small paper flag as well as a numbers of paper shreds which have been attached to the top. The head of the family lit candle, incense sticks in front of the *Kongmu* and offered cooked foods, fruits, sweets, puffed rice, flowers and water to the spirit and prays for the well beings of the family. At the end of the offerings, water libation is held. In the pristine, the Tai-Khamti kill their domestic animals in order to honour the house spirits, *Phi-Huan*. The flesh of the sacrificed animals was cooked and eaten by all family members. Offerings are normally accompanied by appropriate chanted verses which are aimed to arouse joyful and devout contemplation for spiritual progress. It is said the conventionally ascribed stereological benefits of the offering flowers for health and beauty, water is a means to a cool mind, peaceful and free from worry, food assures adequate nourishment, the lighted candles are a means to enlightenment and glory. The worship of the *Kongmu* of *sao phi nam* of the northeastern corner is followed by the *Kongmu* of the southeastern corner. In general, the worship of the *Phi-Nam-Huan* is held during the harvesting season. The Tai-Khamti never use their new seasoned rice (harvest-feast) prior to the offering of their respective *Phi-Nam-Huan* and Buddhist monks.

V. Conclusion

There are many traditional practices of *Phis* and God and Goddesses prevalent among the Tai-Khamti. The study of their rituals and practices reveal that their religion (Theravada) has absorbed some traits of pre-Buddhistic South-East Asian culture which they have brought with them at the time of their migration. According to their traditional believe the spirits are benevolent as well as malevolent in nature. It is to be noted that the Buddhist monks of the village are not associated with the practices of such rituals and the rituals are not held within the campus of the monastery. In some rituals, women are not allowed to participate. The priest of the village called *Pathek* or *Chao Mo* is the chief executive of the *Phi* worships. The Tai-Khamti had a sacrificial tradition and that these customs have all been discontinued. Each village abandoned its large-scale communal sacrifice at its own time. We are told that the sacrificial tradition among the Tai-Khamti of Namsai lasted till third decade of nineteen century. The study reflects the influence of neighbouring Hindu society in some of their rituals like *Kantu-nang*, *Tong-kani-pan* and *Painang-Sulasati* etc. The offerings of grinded raw rice powder, gram, porridge in the *Kantu-nang* rituals and use of opium and hemp in the *Tong-kani-pan* rituals clearly indicate the influence of neighbouring Hindu society. The influence of some Hindu customs is evinced in their traditional performing art i.e. in *Pya-Pung* (drama staging). Thus, due to influence of neighbouring Hindu community a synchronization of cult took place. At present, the sacrifices of livestock and use of rice beer which constituted the key ingredients in some of their phi worships in the past are not in vogue. With the spread of modern education, development of science and technology, some drastic changes have been noticed in the traditional way of

observing traditional practices among the Tai-Khamti. Although they practice many pre-Buddhistic rituals in their society, they are still staunch followers of the Theravada form of Buddhism. They do not consider that such beliefs and practices are affecting in their way to follow the basic tenets of Theravada form of Buddhism. It is to be noted that pre-Buddhistic practices are restricted to a section of the tribe; neither the monks nor the chief and elite section of the society practice such rituals. The study reveals the fact that most of their rituals travelled across the boundary at the time of their migration to the present settlement and forms an intrinsic part of their life and culture. The study is significant to provide a glimpse of cultural heritage of South-East Asia which is very important in the present-day context specially to locate north-east India in the wake of India's policy of "Act East"

References:

- [1]. Das, N.K. (2009). Identity Politics, Cultural Pluralism And The State In South Asia: An Anthropological Reappraisal. In Das, N.K And V.R. Rao (Eds.). Identity, Cultural Pluralism And State - Southasia In Perspective. (Pp. 420-439). Delhi:Mac Millan Publishers India Ltd
- [2]. Frazer, J.G. (1932). Magic, Art And Evolution Of Kings. London: Macmillan & Co. Limited.
- [3]. Gogoi, L. (1971). The Tai Khamptis Of North East India. New Delhi: Omsons Publications.
- [4]. Gombrich, F.R. (1998). Theravada Buddhism - A Social History From Ancient Benares To Modern Colombo. New York: Routledge And Kegan Paul Ltd.
- [5]. Kamstra, J.H. (1967). Encounter Or Syncretism: The Initial Growth Of Japanese Buddhism. Lincoln: Anybook Ltd.
- [6]. Kondinya, Monastic Buddhism Among The Tai-Khamtis Of Arunachal Pradesh, National Publishing House, Delhi, 1986, 15
- [7]. Singh KS. (Ed), People Of India, Arunachal Pradesh, Anthropological Survey Of India, Calcutta. 1995; XIV:183.
- [8]. Tambiah S, Buddhism J. And The Spirit Cults In Northeast Thailand, Cambridge
- [9]. Tripathy B, Dutta S. Religious History Of Arunachal Pradesh, Gyan Publishing House, Delhi, 2008, 241