Socio-cultural factors of Falam in Chin State, Myanmar

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Abstract

Chin State is situated in the Western sector of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, the 13,907 square miles Chin State is home to Chins. In Myanmar, they predominantly inhabit Chin State, which is located in the Northwest of the country, the bordering Bangladesh to the west and India to the north. The Chin State is divided into two divisions. Northern and Southern During the British Colonial period, the Chin State was under. A Socio-economic study of Falam Township was carried out in 2014. A structured questionnaire was used to collect information. A northern sample of 30 households in 6 villages was selected. A house to house visit was made by 2 interviewers. There are many collections of the historical and socio-cultural evidences of the villages. Out of these villages, the name of the village, Parthe, is explained briefly in this paper.

Introduction

These facts and figures were obtained from the survey of the field trip to Falam, Chin State, Chin Hills, Upper Chintwin. We will glance briefly at the western side of Myanmar, where the hills are occupied by different kinds of Chins. Chin Hills as a whole, the true Chin Hills are the mountainous ones between the Myitha River and the Assam border.

South of this region the Chin Boks, Chin Bone, Yindu and other Chin of the Pakokku Hill Tracts, and the Cane, bellied Chins (m’gan) of the unadministered Country liner live between Pakokku and Rakhine State, Still further South, at least to Thayet and Pyay are yet other Chins who are more or less Burmanised.

The Chins as a whole are classified as
(i) Northern (Chin Hills Proper)
(ii) Central (Pakokku Hill Tracts) and
(iii) Southern (Minbu, Thayet, Pyay, etc.)

Chin Hills Proper are again divided for administration purposes into Northern, central and Southern or, if preferred, into Siyin –Thaukkate (Sokte), Tashon and Haka. The Northern Hills (Tiddim) are inhabited by the Thado, Yo, Siyin, Sokte, or Thaukkate and Kamhaung tribes. The central (Falam) by Tashon, Lomban, Laiso, Kwangli, Wheingo and Yahow who are Lai, and, Southern (Haka) by Hsemtong, Zhotung, Lawhtu, Wantu, and by Haka, Yokwa, Ktang Klang, Bwal and Kwaterlontong. The last five are also lai, though the Haka (a group of about ten
villages—including the parent village) claim to be the only true lai.

The Pakokku Hill tracts, of which Kanpetlet is the administrative centre, are divided into a number of great Chin Bok Valleys or Chaungs. These are called the East Maw, West Maw, Hnaw, Yaw, Maung, and Kyauksit Chaungs. Further south, round Kanpetlet, are the Salin Paukadu-Piedaw Chaungs inhabited by yintu. Other minor Chin races along the border are the Matu yopa and Mgan. The last are better known to us at “Cane-bellied Chin’’ from their peculiar dresses which consist only of cane hoops round the stomach. Along the foot of these Chin Hills on the Myanmar side, are curious people called Toungtha and yawthas or “Children of the yaw” District.

The Yawthas are possibly of Shan Origin, but are now indistinguishable from Burman except for their patois. The Taunthas are probably a hybrid race of Chin origin, though now largely Burmanised. The women still retain a curious national costume. Yindus, but do not now inter-marry with Chins. They are Buddhists, and are believed to have lived at one time on the slopes of Mt. Popa. The second great branch of the migration, and the one we are here concerned with, turned south and overran Myanmar in three main streams Chin, Kachin, Bamar and Lolo. The Chin stream, taking the line of the Chindwin distributed itself along the mountains down the whole length of Myanmar on its western side. A generation ago the kuki Chins left the Chin Hills, settled in Myanmar and since 1877 have re-entered Myanmar again in the Somara Hill Tracts at a point considerably to the north of their original settlement.

The early history of Myanmar is the story of immigration of the races now occupying it. To observe the Chin tribes, it is known that, three species diverged from Tibet-Myanmar family and they came down into Tibet, Assam and Myanmar. Assam-Myanmar species is comprised of six groups. They are:

(i) Nga-ga group
(ii) Kuki-chin group
(iv) Thet group
(v) Kachin group
(vi) Myanmar group and
(vii) Lolo group

Koki-Chin group spreads in different directions over a wide area such as Somara Hills, Chin Hills and Thandwe. They settle down in forty four localities. Northern Chins such as Thadaw, Siyin, Kamhaung and Yoe settle down in northern part of Chindwin river. Central Chins such as Le and Lushay or Whelanga settle down in Tiddim, Falam, Haka and Kanpetlet.

Southern Chins such as Kyaw, Ahnu, Kaungro live in Rakhine State. Thaung Chin which is included in Southern Chin and to live in Pakokku, Hteein, Saw and Gangaw township. They weave the famous “Yaw” longyis. She and Uhami; who live in Thayet and Minbu districts are also Southern Chins. Language-affinities have been discovered which, as our knowledge advances, link various people into definite groups. From such evidence only, and by examining the present distribution of the races, it is possible to reconstruct the story of these extraordinary migrations. These facts and figures were obtained from the survey of the field trip to Falam, Chin State in Myanmar.
The Professor of History Dr. Khin Saw Nwe and the Professor and Head of Anthropology Dr. Mya Mya Khin jointly conducted a survey of Falam and its neighbouring villages with the permission of Yangon University Asia Research Centre. A Socio-economic study of Falam Township was carried out. A structured questionnaire was used to collect information. A northern sample of 30 households in Six villages selected. A house to house visit was made by two interviewed. There are many collections of the historical and social-cultural evidences of the villages. Out of these villages, the name of the village, Parthe, is explained briefly in this paper.

Chins of Falam

Chin villages-Falam is comparatively well populated. Among Chin Villages Lomban, near Falam, is a pretty large village, and may be taken as typical of the rest. On the opposite slopes across the valley huge settlements of 400 houses are seen covering great areas of mountain side. In a Chin village each tenement is fenced in, leaving a maze of little public paths between the fences. The houses are thatched. The usual trophies hang in the porch. The interior is dark, the roof being hung with corn-cobs, and the floor piled with gourds. These are the chief items of diet. The floor is usually boarded, which gives a superficial appearance of cleanliness.

Chin languages

The variety of language and dialects in the Chin Hills is bewildering. The language of one village is hardly intelligible to people living a few miles away.

Before the British colonial period incessant and bitter feuds intensified these differences. The several language may, however, be placed very roughly under two group –Northern and Central-Southern. The language in each group are basically the same, though mutually unintelligible. However, under British rule, the speech of the most important tribes has assumed a certain currency, so that kamhow is generally understood in the North, Laizo in the Centre, and Lai in the South. Of these, Laizo and lai are – Sufficiently alike for Falams and Hakas to understand each other with difficulty. The curse of Babel has indeed fallen upon these people. Chins in Government service usually communicate with each other either in Bamar or Hindustani more often the latter. Most of the Siyins and Urdu well.

Nowadays, Chin villagers as well as city people can speak Myanmar language well. Christian missions, pastors and village headmen are implementing social welfare, economy, education and health programmes in Chin villages. The government, local non-governmental organizations, international non-governmental organizations and United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) provide assistance on agriculture, water supply, social security, economy, education and health care service in Chin Hills.

The six villages which were visited for the survey are Ionpi, Many kheny, Zar Linen, Laizo, Lomban Parthe and Cizaymul. We obtained the facts and figures by interviewing and surveying the local
people of Chin villages. Why Parthe village is mentioned in the research paper is that it is similar to other villages and ancient, it is also related to traditional culture of Chins. Chin language Parthe is meant by flower.

**The Emergence of Chin Special Division**

The Chin Hills were the autonomous region, governed by the regional Chiefs before the British had occupied the whole of Myanmar. After the British occupation, they had searched the route to connect India and Myanmar by land and found the Chin Hills. The Chins had resisted against the British imperialists when the British paved the road to connect India and Myanmar at the Chin Hill. The British imperialists had also occupied the whole of the Chin Hills due to the disparity of arms between the Chins and the British.

The British administered the Chin Hills in accordance with the Chin Hills Regulation Act 1896, until the end of their rule in Myanmar. For administrative purpose the Chin Hills was roughly divided in three parts;

1. **Chin Hills Region**
2. **Pakokku Hill Regions**
3. **Northern Rakhine Hill Regions**

Northern Chin Hill was divided into three subdivisions, Tidim, Falam and Haka. Assistant superintendent was appointed in each sub-division and they were ruled directly by superintendent with headquarters at Falam. Formerly the Pakokku Hill Tracts was placed under Pakokku districts and formed Kanpetlet subdivision was brought within the Chin Hills Proper in 1930. In the same year the former hill tracts of Rakhine (Matupi sub-division) was incorporated into the Chin Hills. Paletwa was placed under Rakhine division throughout the colonial period and included in the Chin Hills after the independence of Myanmar. In other words the Chin Hills was separately administered under the British rule.

The Kachin Hill Tract Regulation and the Chin Hills Regulation formed the basis of British rule in the Kachin and the Chin Hills. In general, the administration system of Kachin and Chin Hills were the same with local chieftain governing their people under the supervision of Superintendents or Assistant Superintendents. The key to the British system of indirect rule in the Kachin and Chin Hills were the chief or headman, and his authority and Jurisdiction was defined in the regulations.

The Chin Hills contained three subdivisions and was administered by a superintendent who was an officer of the Myanmar commission. The officer in charge of the Chin Hills was a superintendent whose headquarters were at Falam and who was assisted by four Assistant Superintendents stationed at Falam, Tiddim and Hakhar. The British Government gave the full authority to the Deputy Commissioner for the administration of Chin Hills. For this reason the British Government gave him the authority concerning the appointment and dismissal of headman.

The Deputy Commissioner, Political Officer, Superintendents as head of the administration had certain duties, the collection of revenues, maintenance of peace and order and
administration of justice. The British recruited soldiers from all its colonies during the First World War. A number of men from the Chin Hills were sent for the labor corps to France. After the war the Government intended to replace the Kanpetlet Chins by men from the Northern Chins gradually. Politically, the Chin people were alert not only to the need for improvement in the fields of education, health and medicine, agriculture, economic development and communications, but also to gain their rights and freedom after the First World War.

The strong feeling of bitterness to against the government increased in the mind of Chins. At that time Vum Thu Maung started to form the Chin National Organization. It was based on the G.C.B.A movement that emerged at Myanmar Proper in 1920 and Dobama Asiayone in 1930. By the support of Thakin in Pakokku, the Union of Chin National established the Chin Hills Buddhist Missionary Association, the Chin Hills Myanmar Language Proliferation Association in 1933. The headquarters of Dobamar Asiayone in the Southern Chin Hills was established at Mindat and the Chairman was Vum Thu Maung or Thakin Aung Maung.

The main object was to make self determination and to fight against the capitalism. Thakin Aung Maung organized people to stop giving tax to the government. The first general meeting of Chin Hills Union Organization was held successfully at Ware village on 29 September 1932. The meeting decided to work together for the successful implementation in education, health, economy and social affairs. They also made a painful decision to drive out the imperialists as soon as possible in cooperation with Myanmar.

The members of Chin Hills Union Organization refused to take part in the public service and the discussions were in deadlock. Finally, the Government declared Chin Hills Union Organization as an illegal organization. The Chins were very angry with the one sided act of the Government. As a result, demonstrations against the Government took place in various parts of Kanpetlet. After the declaration of Chin Hills Union Organization as an illegal organization, the Government arrested many Chin Political Leaders. The 36 members of circle chairman declared their resignations from the public service in defiance of the detention of Chin Political Leaders. Demonstrations against the Government also took place in many parts of the area. They said that they would no longer pay tax and would not also service as their coolies. They also stopped their ties with the ruling government.

The main task of Chin Region administration was levy tax. So, as soon as a region had been placed under the administration the system of levying tax was adopted and exercised. Just like the Kachin Hill region, the task of collecting tax was supervised by the Chin Hill region government officials. In the region of the Chin Hills, the Deputy Commissioner was the revenue officer. The subdivisional officer received the levies collected by his subordinate, and headman and presented them to the Deputy Commissioner.

After the gaining of independence by Myanmar and during the regime of the capitalist parliamentary democracy period, Kanpetlet region, Rakine mountainous region (Pletwa), Northern Haka, Matupi and Mindat regions were amalgamated and formed into Chin Special Division, Southern District to administer the Chin Hills. Also the former Tiddim,
Falam and Haka regions of the Chin Mountainous Regions were amalgamated and formed to govern as the Northern District of Chin Special Division. Before and after the convening of Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL) preliminary preparation conference, General Aung San had invited the Chin National Leaders to his residence and discussed and gave suggestions on the administration, social and economic affairs.

U Vum Thu Maung, U Za Rik, U Ngul Tung and U Thawng Cin Thang had attended the meeting and took part in the discussion. General Aung San had suggested that the Chins had participated in the struggle for national independence by sacrificing their lives and the Chins should stay as the Chin Special Division without staying separately as the state in order to be convenient in the rehabilitation and development work. They could propose any kind of administrative pattern that they had desired in drafting the constitution and gave them two days for consideration. The Chin representatives also discussed and unanimously decided to stay in the Union of Myanmar as the Chin Special Division rather than staying as the separate state. That was why the Chin Hill was formed as the Chin Special Division with two districts and six townships governed by the sub-district officer.

After the independence, the Chin State had become the Chin Special Division in accordance with the 1947 state constitution and introduced the parliamentary democracy period. At that time, the administration was divided as the central administration and provincial administration in the central administration, Chin Affairs Council formed with the elected members of parliament. The council was consisted of fourteen members including the Chin Affairs Minister. The duration of the council was four years. The persons who had served as the commissioners in Chin Special Division were U Thein Maung, U Tuang Mung, U Thawng Cin Thang, U Kim Si, U S.za Hau, U Win Tin, U Sein, UNain Lain and U Ni Uk. There were sub-district officers and township officers under the Deputy Commissioners. Townships were governed by Myoma councils. In the villages, the village councils were formed and the Thugyi or village Headman acted as the Chairman of village council. The adjacent villages were formed as the circles and were governed by the circle councils and implemented the prevalence of law and order, development, security, fire prevention, administration, economic, social and judicial matters.

The significance of the administration of Chin Special Division was that it was divided into central administration and provincial administration and the members of parliaments from the central administrative council were selected by convening the elections. Chin Affairs Minister was the member of the Union Cabinet and sat his office at Yangon. The district administrative persons were gazette officers appointed by the Union Government and they had possessed the administrative and Judicial Powers.

The first Chin National Conference could be held at Falam. The conference was attended by the members of the Government of Union of Myanmar, the representatives of the national races from the various States and Divisions and the Chin Nationals. The conference was attended by 5,000 Chin
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Nations from Kanpetlet, Paletwa, Haka, Falam and Tiddim. The Chin National Conference had unanimously approved and promulgated the proposals for the abolition of the feudal system. Thakin Vum Thu Maung and the Chin patriots, who started the political movements against the British imperialist government, had been arrested on 20 February 1939 and sent to jail. That was one of the historical landmarks of the Chin’s resistance against the imperialist. Consequently 20 February was marked as the Chin National Day to honour the victory of the Chin’s resistance movements against the imperialists and feudalism and the celebrations are held every year on Chin National Day.

In the Chin Hill, the old system of circle Headman administration had been abolished and the Circle Councils were formed and administered. During the rule of the Revolutionary Council Government from 1962 to 1973, the name of Chin Special Division was not changed. Chin Special Division was promulgated as the Chin State according to Chapter (3), Article (30) b of the constitution of the Socialist Republic of the Union of Myanmar 1974 that had been approved and promulgated by the National Referendum held unanimously from 15 to 31 December 1973. Consequently the old name of Chin Special Division was ceased to exist and the new name of Chin State had occurred in accordance with the new constitution.

**The survey of Falam Township in Chin State**

Nowadays, Chin villagers as well as Falam city people can speak Myanmar Language very well. Christian missions, pastors and village headmen are implementing social welfare, economy, education and health programmes in villages. The government, local non-governmental organizations, international non-governmental organizations, and United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization provide assistance on agriculture, water supply, social welfare, economy, education and health and Chin Hills. Successful attempts can be seen now.

Concerning the economy of the villages, there are rice barns in some villages. Concerning the agriculture, necessary aids have been given to gardening, cultivation, mobile farms and permanent farms. Cabbages, apples, chayotes, oranges, corns, tomatoes and grapes are cultivated in the region and sent to other regions. Cotton weaving, weaving thatch for roofing, making traditional handicrafts of bamboo and rattan can be seen in Chin Hills. The government as well as other organizations lend loans for the development of agriculture in Chin State. Houses in Chin Hills are chalet built of pine wood. We can see that corrugated iron sheets are used for roofing instead of using thatch. Chalets having long legs can be seen on the mountain slopes. Construction of chalets has improved a lot. In the restaurants, corn and beef which is known as sar-bu-tee and other meals which are cooked with corn are available for three hundred kyats per dish. Aung-lauk pea is also their favourite one.

The stone crosses with names and dates of death on them can be observed on the slopes of the mountains beside the motorway to commemorate the late people. Motorways are being broadened in the whole state so that road communication is gradually improving. In the highway buses, videos which speak Mizo language can be watched. Traditional songs have been converted to modern ones. On the way to Falam, barking deer, wild boars and monkeys
inhabit in the jungle. Onion and garlic are grown three times a year in northern Chin State. Yam tuber is widely grown in southern Chin State. Myauk-ngo fruits are exported to India.

Falam used to be the headquarters of the Chin Special Divisional Commissioner. There is the Independence Pagoda at the entrance of the city. There are department of traditional medicine, Public Health Foundation, non-governmental Organization, Religious associations, Myanmar Post and Telecommunication office, courts, office of auditor-general, churches, a general hospital, Basic Education Schools and religious school in Falam.

In observation of the six villages very close to Falam, the author would like to describe Parthe village. It is said that it is a one thousand and fourteen years old ancient village. Parthe village is located in Lonbum village to the east, Lathee and Lomzam villages to the west. The area of it is four square miles and there are four hundred and ninety villagers in ninety households. In summer, there are some courses such as cake baking courses and sewing courses in the village. The young villagers go to Falam for their education. There are not enough midwives in the village. There are also social services such as women’s association, and charities.

The villagers help each other in constructing houses. Some relatives of Parthe villagers live in Manipur and India. The transportation is very difficult. In this paper, It will deal with way of life, especially of the Northern Chin people as briefly. But nowadays, As promotions were made in transport and communication of Chin States, travels become easy and smooth. When the ways of life in Northern Chin Society. The tribal groups in Myanmar. Thinking and belief were so primitive and it was slowed to develop their society. Like other tribal ethnic people, the chin people have their beautiful culture and way of life. Since ancient times, there have been differences in their history, level of socio-economic development, custom, belief, and religion.

Therefore, the custom, culture, beliefs and language of the different races differ according to their geographical location, climate, and communications. Nowadays we are living a trend of 21st century world. Along with the changing the world. Unfortunately, some tribal languages, cultures, customs and literature have been lost. On the other hand, it is impossible to practice or follow all of the old or ancient traditions in this knowledge age as extremely. However, we have to keep and develop our beautiful cultural resources may keep us something good for the betterment of our future community. The basic economic needs of the Northern Chins depend on agriculture. A structured questionnaire was used to collect information, 6 villages Selected, Lon pi, Mang Kheng, Zar Linen, Lai zo, Lon yang, Parthe, Cizaymul. There are many collections of the historical and Socio-cultural factors of the villages. Out of these villages, the name of the village, Parthe means beautiful flower.

Parthe village, one of the oldest villages in Falam township. The basic economic needs of the Northern chins depend on agriculture. Parthe village, the basic crops are rice, maize, millet and some vegetables. They raise pigs, chicken, dogs, and mythuns as domestic animals. They use them especially in sacrifice and traditional feasts according to their belief in
Tradition and Customs of northern Chin

Every national races residing in the union of Myanmar has their own traditions and culture. As the chin people are comprised of many tribes, there are also many traditions as well as festivals and dances. But in the present day, it is found that all the festivals cannot be held with the exception of some of them. However, on the significant days of the chins, the festivals are held as the gesture to reveal their culture. It is found that the religion and the traditional cultures of the whole chin region are very similar to those of the Tibeto-Burman group basically that migrated into Myanmar at the earliest times. Only in the later period, there were different kinds of religion in chin state due to the penetration of religions, traditions and cultures from abroad in the successive periods. It is found that the traditions practiced by the chin people in the social ceremonies such as offering and worshiping to the spirits and sacrifices are not so different from other Tibeto-Burman tribes. Sacrifice to their recognized spirits is conducted traditionally and the festivals are held whenever necessary.

The festivals can be divided into three categories such as, economy, social and religion. The festivals concerning with the economy are held with the participation of the entire village. Also in the social festival it can be divided as the festival for happiness and sorrow. Seed sowing festival, harvest festival and traditional festival or eating the first crop and the worshipping festival to the guardian of the farmlands are concerned with the economy. In the religious festival with the exception of the common spirit worshipping festival of the whole village, other worshiping festivals are concerned only with the tribes and are held at any time according to their traditions and customs. The social festivals are the private and are celebrated occasionally.

The Significant festivals are as follows;
1. Kwang Sai pwai
2. Khuo Do pwai
3. Slaying of a tiger
4. Law Ma Annet pwai
5. Kyat Kyar Kok pwai
6. Kyat Ma Phyu pwai
7. Tan Ain pwai
8. Crop high yield festival
9. House warming festival
10. Victory over the Animal
11. Victory over the Enemy

**Khua-Do or New Year festival**

Khua Do or New Year festival is held in October after the harvest of the grains grown in the rainy season. The word “Khua Do” is a compound word made up of “Khua” which means village or villagers and “Do” means celebration or entertainment. In other words “Do” refers to the opposition or fighting the enemy. The form of the festival varies from one tribe to another but the ideology and the material objects used in the festival are common throughout all Khua Do in Tidim, Khum Tom in Hkaha. Phan-Ai in Falam varies among spirits believers. Christianity and Phauk chin Hauk believers. However, khua Do can be divided into two categories. Special Khua Do also known as “Do Mei” lasts four days but it is held every other ten years. The second one is called “Do Mo” or formal Khua Do, lasting three days. During this New Year festival, the chins go to the grave yard in order to pray for the souls or spirits of the deceased ones. In this festival seeking bee hive or wasps nest in the forest also plays a profound part. All the youths in the village leave for the forest to seek bee hive.

It is believed that if someone dies the wasps would protect the body from insects and worm. The nests of the wasps are broken up and the larvae are taken out and examined very carefully to see what they foretell about the future. If larvae are all healthy and strong, people will be healthy the next year. If the number of larvae in the nets are many, there will be good harvest and plenty the next year. To summarise the reasons for the celebration of “Khua Do” festival are as follow:
(i) To entertain the souls of our departed ancestors whom we invited to the festival
(ii) To drive away all the evil spirits
(iii) To know about the next year through asking the spirit mediums.

**Conclusion**

Every national races residing in the union of Myanmar has their own traditions and cultures. The Chin people are comprised of many tribes, there are also traditions as well as festivals and dances. In the present day, the festivals can be divided into three categories such as, economy, social work and religion. A gentle handshake is a common greeting in Chin Culture. In Chin Language, there are about forty to forty-five dialects of the chin culture. Myanmar embraces all the national races. According to the census of 2014 the population of Myanmar is (54.4) million with the Bamar, the majority races making up about 70%. Falam township in later period becomes as development township in Myanmar. Actually, the Falam township also near the township of Tamu, Bordering with India. Therefore as it was possible to transport and sell the products of Falam township to mainland, the native’s economy was developed.

The basic economic needs of the Northern Chins depend on agriculture. Transportation is very difficult in this region, Nowadays, City Development Committee is constructing to the
infrastructure. In preserving the traditions and customs in accordance with the policy of the preserving culture, the traditions and customs that are beneficial should be preserved and those which are not appropriate with the time should be forgotten gradually. The youths and the elder persons have already understood this fact. When researchers from foreign countries are interested in Chin traditions and culture, they can come and do research work and it will be of great help for e-tourism in Myanmar.
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