

Development of Lisu Literature and Culture in Kachin State, Myanmar

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Abstract

The tribe of Lisu has been living in Myanmar since ancient times. They entered Myanmar from the eastern part of Tibet. To express the background history of the tribe, they passed through the snow covered mountains of the northern part of Myanmar and settled down in Khaw-bu-de and Khaung-Lan-phu region in the 9th century A.D. Some of the tribe also descended to Kokang through the River Thanlwin from Yarhar region in the year 1300 A.D. This Lisu tribe is descended from Lolo tribe. They appeared long before the invention of writing. Although they have different dialects, there are not many differences among Lisu people. Concerning Lisu Literature, there are two kinds such as Roman Letter based and Myanmar Letter based. Because of Lisu Literature, the customs of Lisu have improved a lot. Therefore Culture has been developing gradually since the invention of writing. There are music and dances during the Lisu New Year festival. There are differences in rituals and traditions according to the regions. One of the Lisu tribe's ceremonies is house - warming ceremony. The names of their popular dances are Che-ngo-che dance and Shar-pe-ta dance. Lisu Literature and ritual associations have been established since the year 1900 in Putao and other regions. Lisu people's union spirit, responsibility and accountability and their attitude have been recorded in history.

Keywords : Tribe, literature, culture

Introduction

The tribe of Lisu is one of the tribes who have been living in the Union of Myanmar. The meaning of Lisu is stated in the research paper. Historical evidence shows that Lisu tribe has been existing since the 9th century A.D. The author has referred to the book that described the descendants of tribes compiled by the famous historian Dr Than Tun. He expressed the background history of Lisu tribe with their rituals and customs in his book. The author obtained the facts about Lisu tribe interviewing the Lisu people who are the natives of Putao and collecting books and records about them. Lisu tribe Literature and cultural troupe joined the Yangon University Cultural Association and performed at Yangon University Diamond Jubilee Hall on 11th February 2013 to hail the Union Day, the performance at Science Fair to entertain the Vicepresident Dr.Sai Mauk Kham in Arts Assembly Hall in 2014, the performance at the English Language skills competitions to entertain the President U Thein Sein in Myanmar Convention Centre, Nay Pyi Taw in 2014, showed the development of their traditional dances. Survey of the tribe has been done since the year 2010 up to now. The author's efforts resulted in success. By interviewing Lisu elderly people as well as young people of Putao township, the author has come to know that other tribe in the Union of Myanmar ought to learn about Lisu tribe. Because very few people learn about them. Lisu Literature and culture has rarely been expressed in bodies. Although they used to be unknown among the tribes of Myanmar, they have begun to emerge out of the past. They are trying to be the best of their abilities for the good of the Union of Myanmar.

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The tribe of Lisu has been living in Myanmar since ancient times. They entered Myanmar from the eastern part of Tibet. To express the background history of the tribe, they passed through the snow covered mountains of the northern part of Myanmar and settled down in Khawbude and Khaunglamphus regions in the 9th century A.D. Some of the tribe spread to Myitkyina, Bamaw

and Sadon in Kachin State from Phiyamar region. Some of the tribe

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went down the River Thanlwin up to the Shan Hills. Some of them who went down the River Mekong got to Thailand. Some of the tribe descended to Charkaw region, Khaunglanphu township in Kachin State via Lardarkaw path, Mekiko path and Larwada path from China in the 9th century A.D. Then they settled down in Naungmon, Putao, Machanbaw, Swanparabwan, Myitkyina and Tanaing townships. Some also migrated to khanti township in Sagaing Region. Some of the tribe also descended to Myanmar via Chibyakaw path, Marshi path, Taukarhauk path, etc. from China. Some of the tribe also descended to Kokang through the River Thanlwin from Yarhar region in the year 1300A.D. This Lisu tribe is descended from Lolo tribe. Lisu tribe and Lahu tribe are included in Lolo group. Hill people of Lolo tribe live in hilly regions of Yuunang Province and they are not recognized as Chinese people. Actually Lisu is of Myanmar-lolo tribe. The population of Lisu is estimated in national census of Myanmar. Myanmar –Lolo also comes from Tibet Myanmar family. The tribe Lisu can stand as a native of Myanmar. The background history of Lisu has been observed from evidences, folk-tales and history handed down by word of mouth and interview with the Lisu elders. Besides, the researcher referred to translated versions and Myanmar encyclopaedia. Lisu tribe has scattered in different regions such as Putao and Bamaw in Kachin State, and Loilin in Shan State. They appeared long before the invention of writing. Although they have different dialects, there are not many differences among Lisu people.

In Lisu language, there are three different sub languages such as (a) original Lisu language (b) Lisunaw language and Lisu lamei language. However, most of the original Lisu language is mostly used. Concerning Lisu literature, there are two kinds such as Roman Letter based and Myanmar Letter based. Because of Lisu literature, the customs of Lisu have improved a lot. We can see that the ideas, thoughts and culture have been developing gradually since the invention of writing. There are music and dance during the Lisu new year festival. There are differences in rituals and traditions according to the regions. However recognized language and culture of Lisu can be observed in Putao Township, Kachin State.

Putao Lisu people and Yuunang Province Lisu people weave their cloth on their looms themselves. The raw materials for their cloth are hemp fibres. They grow hemp for their can use. Every woman can weave cloth on looms. Putao Lisu women wear long dresses in blue, green and black colours. Awhite long dress with black and white stripes is very beautiful. It is worn when Lisu women go to ceremonies. One of the Lisu tribe's ceremonies is house-warming ceremony. When they have constructed a house, all the invited guests who are drinking khaungye have to dance and jump about the floor in order to know whether the floor is well-built or not. The name of their popular dances are Che-ngo-che dance and Shar-pe-ta dance. The shar-pe-ta dance is the kind of dual dances which is danced by both man and woman drinking Khaungye together touching each other's cheeks. They drink Kaungye with relish till it spills out onto the floor from the bamboo vessel. Lisu literature and ritual associations have been established since the year 1900 in Putao and other regions. Lisu people's union spirit, responsibility and accountability and their attitude have been recorded in history.

Migration of Lisu tribe to Myanmar

According to the folk-tales and oral history, Lisu tribe used to live in Wa-ba which is upper Mekong river and No-mi region which is upper Thanlwin river. There was an increase in population of Lisu tribe so they descended to Cha-go-lo which is the upper part of Ahakyan creek Nyi-ta-di, passing through La-wa-da and Ma-gu-gyi mountain ranges. Later, migratory Lisu tribe came into Myanmar one after another and they spread to Putao region.

The settlers such as U Nasi, U Ziti and U Leme Noshi entered Myanmar respectively from Chi-la-mi, the upper Thanlwin river through Chi-bya-kaw pass, Mar-shi-kaw pass, and Hot-ta-hot pass. They spread to Panwa, Sadon, Pargyaung and Myitkyina.

The settlers entered downstream the Thanlwin river and reached Htein-chyone region from where they diverged in Tapein river and Shweli river. Then they got to Seinlone Hilly region, Bamaw District and scattered in different directions. Some settled down in Kokang, Shan State and Mogok, Mandalay region. Actually, indigenous races in Myanmar are direct descendants of Mongol origins. There were three groups such as Mon-Khmar group, Tibet-Myanmar group and Thai-Chinese group who entered Myanmar. Among the three groups, Tibet-Myanmar group descended downstream Mekong river and Thanlwin river. Then they also diverged into three groups again, such as Chin, Kachin group, Bamar and ancient Bamar group and Lolo hunters group, Chin-Kachin group wound about snow covered mountain and finally got to Putao via Assan. Bamar and Ancient Bamar group entered downstream Maykha river. Lolo hunter group entered group downstream Thanlwin and settled down in Putao, Myitkyina and Bamaw Districts.

Dispersal of Lisu tribe

Lisu tribe was descended from Mu-Ku-dee called Mongolia Heights. According to the anthropologists and historians, they are descendants of Lolomoso group which is also a member of Tibeto – Burman. Their original location was Normu which is the upper part of Thanlwin river. They migrated to various parts of Myanmar in three groups, one group settled down in Sawlaw region in A.D 900. Another group resided permanently in Cheephwe region in A.D 850. The third group got established in Shan state in A.D 1200. Some of them migrated to Vietnam, Laos, Thailand and India.

Likewise some of the tribe spread to Myitkyina, Bamaw and Sadon in Kachin State from Phyamar region, Some of the tribe went down the River Mekong and got to Thailand. Some of the tribe descended to Charkaw region, Khaung –Lan-Phu township in Kachin State via Lardarkaw pass, Mekiko pass and larwada pass from China in the 9th Century A.D. Then they settled down in Naungmon, Putao, Machanbaw, Swanparabwan, Myitkyina and Tanaing townships. Some also migrated to Khanti township in Sagaing Region. Some of the tribe also descended to Myanmar via Chibyakaw pass, Marshi pass, Taukarhauk pass, etc from China. Some of the tribe also descended to Kokang through the River Thanlwin from Yarhar region in the year 1300 A.D. This Lisu tribe is descended from Lolo tribe, Lisu tribe and Lahu tribe are included in Lolo group. Hill people of Lolo tribe live in hilly regions of Yunnan Province and they are not recognized as Chinese people. Actually Lisu is of Myanmar Lolo tribe. The population of Lisu is estimated in national census of Myanmar. Myanmar - Lolo also comes from Tibet-Myanmar family. The tribe Lisu can stand as native of Myanmar. The background history of Lisu has been observed from evidences, folk-tales and oral history and interview with the Lisu elders. Besides, the researcher referred to translated versions and Myanmar encyclopaedia. Lisu tribe has scattered in different regions such as Putao and Bamaw in Kachin State and Loilin in

Shan State. They appeared long before the invention of writing. Although they have different dialects, there are not many differences among Lisu people.

Lisu Language

Lisu people enjoy living in rural areas. They know jungle tracks well. They symbolize their farmland cutting a notch with a chopper on the trees' stems. When they see the beehives, they mark them erecting bamboo poles or clearing around the place.

Since writing had not been invented at that time, incidents could not be recorded. Signing was used instead of writing. Signing is a symbolic system in which signed symbols represent words. For invitation letters and bonds, they made a notch with a knife on planks. In ancient times, if two villages were at war, they declared war sending each other chilli, feather and wood charcoal which were put in a bamboo quiver.

Lisu people have their own language. Although there are different species of Lisu, their spoken language does not have several dialects. There are three different sub languages such as (a) original Lisu Language (b) Lisunaw Language and Lisu Lamei Language. However, most of the original Lisu language is mostly used.

Nowadays, Lisu Language has been invented. It was invented by the British Mission Mr.J.O Fraiser and Kayin national U Ba Thaw based on Roman letters. U Zimbar, U Gu-ah-wu, Li Zaw-Ka-na-Lu, U Khaw-bu and U Ngwar-tar contributed to the invention of Lisu Language. Lisu Language is now used for education, social affairs, business and religion.

There are forty alphabets in Lisu Language based on Roman Letters. They are as follows:

B P d D T T G K K J C D
Z F F M N L S R R V V H
G G W X Y A A E E I O U
B D L U

Lisu Literature

Literature is essential for a people. Lisu letter had been invented based on Chinese Language three hundred years ago. Later, Lisu letter was invented based on Thai Language, English Language, Kachin Language, Roman Language and Myanmar Language. The most invented by J.O.Fraiser and Sayagyi U Ba Thaw in 1918. It is easy to use. The first book writtern in Lisu Language was known as M-I-MI OO. It was published at Moulmeur China. Its recognized number was GBcPONO 421 SECR-9(6) 15-7-1922 under the British rule in Myanmar. Lisu literature became world acknowledged in 1923.

Therefore culture has been developing gradually since the invention of writing. There are music and dance during the Lisu new year festival. There are differences in ritual and traditions according to the regions. However recognized language and culture of Lisu can be observed in Putao Township, Kachin.

Lisu's Music and Dances

Music and dancing are an important part of Lisu tribe culture. The Lisu do around dance and people of all ages, male and female partake in the dance. The tempo is always slow and haunting, with a repetitive melody but different words with each refrain telling a story with the story line continuous and spontaneous from one group to another. It is a very creative process which can continue on into the wee hours of the night. There are many other celebration with

each religion having their special days and also weddings, births birthdays, thanks giving, house blessing, house warming and funerals, when they go hunting, herding, planting, harvesting, and even in resolving conflicts. According to the Lisu sayings, one can't live without songs, just like one can't live without salt.

Lisu Music

There are mainly three types of Lisu music:

1. Folk singing
2. Dance music
3. Instrument music

Folk singing has three major forms. Mugwa is the type of songs that tell epic stories. They are sung during holidays, often along wine drinking. The lead singers of Mugwa are elderly men and the crowd follows in a chorus. The content of Mugwa is mainly around tribal histories, marriage and burial customs, work traditions, etc. Traditionally, when singing any Mugwa, a story of how monkey created the world was always added as a prelude. Mugwas from different regions have different name because of their content. In one of the tribes, when there is a conflict in the village, both parties involved would sing Beimo Mugwa back and forth in front of the judge who sings his opinion to the crowd. It is the only singing form known to remain in the world used for such purpose. **Baishi**, or **Baishibai**, or **Mountain Songs** is another form of folk singing. The literal translation is "free to say, free to sing". Singers of Baishibai often form a line and dance to the rhythm while putting their arms on the shoulders of each other. It is sung around holidays, family gatherings, or just when doing everyday chores, Baishibai often happen out-of-door and improvisation ally. There is a lead singer and the crowd is split into two or three parts harmony. Throat vibrato is used frequently and is quite characteristic in Baishibai. Youyi or **Love Songs** is typically sung as dialogues between a man and a woman or a group of men and women forming a two parts harmony when they are out working in the field. Common themes include courtship, love, working, daily happenings, etc. Dance music is a big part of Lisu music. Around traditional holidays or special events, people gather around the fireplace in the house or out in the open field, form a circle, sing and dance in various forms. Among them, Qian-er is a form of group dance popular around holidays in the Fugong area.

Lisu Musical Instruments

Lisu musical instruments feature picture of rare and unusual musical instruments of the hill tribes in northern Kachin State in puta-o, Myanmar with briefs on their history, culture an the role of music in their live.

There are traditional instruments, Flute, Chiben, bamboo mouth harp, etc. accompanied the dance with or without singings. Music instruments used by the Lisu people include wind instruments like the Five-pipe Free Reed Sheng, Bamboo Flute, Four-Hole Vertical Flute, Bamboo Mouth Harp or Kouxian; stringed instruments.

Art: Lisu Musical Instruments

The musical instruments in each tribe tell about the feelings, beauty and varied wisdom of the village instead of putting it into words. The beautiful sound of each musical instrument, weaving through the evening remains today and will continue to the next generation, as long as the new generation is taught and is interested.

The bottle gourd organ

Usually, this is the favorite instrument of Lisu men. This is a wind instrument which they will play at ceremonies in the community culture court or when they travel to play in other villages; they also use the bottle gourd organ to contact each other, to others know they are thinking of them- a very good reason why this is the favorite and continues to be learnt from generation to generation.

Therefore, one of the Lisu tribe's ceremonies is house warming ceremony. When they have constructed a house, all the invited guests who are drinking Khaung-ye have to dance and jump about the floor in order to know whether the floor is well-built or not. The names of their popular dances are Che-ngo-che dance and Shar-pe-ta dance.

The shar-pe-ta dance is the kind of dual dance which is danced by both man and woman drinking khaung-ye together touching each other's cheeks. They drink Khaung-ye with relish till it spills out onto the floor from the bamboo vessel. And then Lisu literature and ritual associations have been established since the year 1900 in Puto and other regions. Lisu people's Union spirit, responsibility and accountability and their attitude have been recorded in history.

The authorities who are concerned with Lisu literature and Culture Committee have been implementing the development of their language and culture. Two hundred thousand copies of books written in Lisu Language for kindergarten, first standard and second standard school children have been distributed and taught. The curricula and syllabi are compiled by members of five committees for religion. Staff of Myitkyina University also helped them a lot. School children in sixty five villages among seventy five villages are learning Lisu language at present. There are approximately two hundred Lisu words are similar to Myanmar words.

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Present Executive Committee Members of Myitkyina

President - U Ah Hsi (Kachin State Regional Minister)

Vice-President - U Lah Mya Wu

Secretary - U Hsa Ki (jeweller)

Present Executive Committee Members of Yangon

President - Khwah Ah Gah

Vice President - Joe Lay Hwah

Secretary - James Khwa Ra Shah

Results and Discussion

It is known that the tribe of Lisu has been living in Chakaw region, Khaung-Lan-Phutownship, Kachin State since the 9th century A.D. Such conclusion is drawn by historical evidences and field research. From Chakaw, they migrated to Naungmon, Putao, Machanbaw, Swamparabwan, Myitkyina and Chibwe. During the field research, the author met and interviewed some natives who settled down permanently. Facts mentioned in the book "life of Lisu tribe" by writer Myat Toe, are the same as what I know. I learn some more facts about them during my research. I come to know their present life and future prospect and inventive mind. There are local militia units in their region and it shows that they would like to safeguard our independence and sovereignty. It is delightful to see the enthusiasms of local militia units.

Concerning religion, they profess Christianity, Buddhism and others. The population of Christians are more than that of Buddhists owing to the attempts of Christian missionaries. The author also interviewed regional pastors.

With regard to clothes and ornaments, they differ regionally. They wear their national colourful costumes in order not to break the tradition. Lisu tribe language and literature have been developing gradually. Although they have dialects, there is a common Lisu language. Seventy percent of Lisu language is commonly used by every Lisu.

Nowadays even ASEAN countries are interested in Lisu culture. In the cruise around ASEAN countries in the year 2014, youths of Myanmar entertained the youth from ASEAN countries with Lisu traditional songs and dances. Such dances and songs were rehearsed in Yangon University Fine Arts and Performing Arts Association centre. It was known that youths of ASEAN countries appreciated Lisu performance. To represent the Union of Myanmar, Lisu cultural group also paid a goodwill visit to Vietnam for cultural exchange.

Although there are not many Lisu educated persons a few Lisu youths are attending some universities learning higher education. It shows signs of improvement in education.

Since Lisu people are natives of Myanmar who settle down mostly in northern part of Myanmar should be encouraged in their literature and culture by other natives in the country. It takes all sorts of natives to make a union. Other races should meet and exchange culture with Lisu people so that they know tradition of Lisu more. It will be of great help for e-tourism.

Conclusion

It is known that the tribe of Lisu has been living in Chakaw region, Khaung-Lan-Phu township, Kachin State since the 9th century A.D. Such conclusion is drawn by historical evidences and field research. From Chakaw, they migrated to Naungmon, Putao, Machanbaw, Swamparabwan, Myitkyina and Chibwe. During the field research, the author met and interviewed some natives who settled down permanently. Facts mentioned in the book "life of Lisu tribe" by writer Myat Toe, are the same as what I know. I learn some more facts about them during my research. I come to know their present life and future prospect and inventive mind. There are local militia units in their region and it shows that they would like to safeguard our independence and sovereignty. It is delightful to see the enthusiasm of local militia units.

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There is also a new finding. It is said that Lisu tribe used to live in the caves of a mountain in the far northern part of Myanmar. Pictograms can be observed on the walls of the caves. Such pictograms are estimated to have been written during the Neolithic age. Hence, It can be inferred that they are the ancient indigenous people of Myanmar.

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