

A comparative study of rural and urban life-style changes on Northern Chin Nationals living in Sanchaung Township, Yangon (After 2000)

Thant Sin Htwe and Lwin Lwin Mon*
Anthropology Department, University of Yangon

Abstract

This paper presents the comparative study of rural and urban life-style changes on Northern Chin Nationals living in Sanchaung Township, Yangon (After 2000). Chin ethnic group in Myanmar mainly lives in Chin State. They also live in the nearby Indian states of Nagaland, Mizoram and Manipur and Assam. In 2000, a research on socio-economic life of Northern Chin Nationals was conducted by Anthropology Department. To do that research, the research group went to Hakha, Phalam and Tedaim cities in Northern Chin State and surrounding villages and explored the daily life-style of Chin nationals. Nowadays, some of Chin Nationals have migrated to Yangon and lived in Sanchaung Township since 1980s. In changing their rural life-style to urban life-style, they faced a lot of challenges and this research explored the changes through their social activities and traditional customs. Moreover, opportunities and risks they take due to their changes and how they try to cope these changes according to their own ways was also studied. The goal of this research is to find out their life-style changes as they move from rural area to urban area, how they struggle to adapt these changes and, to promote the national interest of Myanmar *and also to apply the knowledge to the economic and social advancement*. Expected Impact of the research are: to enlighten the concept that Migrant Northern Chin Ethnic groups have conducted themselves and lived in harmony in their new environment, engaging their social activities and preserving their traditional customs, to inform the way they change their rural life-style to urban life-style, to *deliver* the opportunities and risks due to their changes and to differentiate various social problems come out. Qualitative Research method was used from Political anthropology and Social anthropology points of view. In-depth interviews, Key informant interviews for specific social activities and festivals were conducted, and Participatory learning appraisal methods were used. The research outputs will be used by communities and *the existing research capacity is used* effectively to solve their challenges and development problems.

Key words: challenges, rural life-style, the opportunities and risks, urban life-style

I. Introduction

Myanmar is situated in Southeast Asia and is bounded on the north and northeast by China, on the east and southeast by Laos and Thailand, on the south by the Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal and on the west by Bangladesh and India. It is located between latitudes 09 32 N and 28 31 N and longitudes 92 10 E and 101 11 E. It has over 100 ethnic groups living together under the name- the Union of Myanmar, divided by different geographical boundaries, languages, and dialects. Myanmar is divided into seven states and seven regions. These are further divided into districts, which are subdivided into townships, wards, and villages. Among these seven states, Chin ethnic group; one of the ethnic groups in Myanmar, mainly lives in Chin State. They also live in the nearby Indian states of Nagaland, Mizoram and Manipur and Assam.

Chin State is located in the north- western Myanmar. It covers 36,019 square-kilometres (13,907 sq miles) and Chin State is bordered by Rakhine State in the south, Bangladesh in the south-west, Sagaing and Magway Division in the east, the Indian state of Manipur in the north and the Indian state of Mizoram in the west. It is estimated

* Lwin Lwin Mon, Anthropology Department, University of Yangon

approximately 50, 2517 Chin nationals live in Chin State (Ling-Zaw, 2008). The capital of the state is Hakha. The state is a mountainous region with few transportation links. Chin State is sparsely populated and remains one of the least developed areas of the country. Chin State has the highest poverty rate of 73% as per the released figures from the first official survey.



Figure 1. Chin national flag

In 2000, Anthropology departmental research on socio-economic life of Northern Chin National was conducted. For that research, the research group went to Hakha, Phalam and Tedaim cities in Northern Chin State and surrounding villages and explored the daily life-style of Chin Nationals.

Nowadays, some of Chin Nationals have migrated to Yangon and lived in Sanchaung Township since 1980s. After changing their rural life-style to urban life-style, they faced a lot of challenges. This research explored these changes through their social activities and traditional customs. Moreover, the opportunities and risks they take due to their changes and how they cope these changes according to their own ways was also studied.

In this research, six main factors were studied. These were:

-Historical background of the Northern Chin nationals, Brief history of Northern Chin National living in Sanchaung Township, Yangon, Changing from rural life-style to urban life-style, Life-style Changes, Adaptation to their new environment in their social activities and traditional customs and the opportunities and risks resulting from their changes.

The goal of this research is to find out their life-style changes in urban area and how they try to adapt these changes and, to promote the national interest of Myanmar and also to apply the knowledge to the economic and social advancement.

Expected Impact of the research are: to enlighten the concept that Migrant Northern Chin Ethnic groups have conducted themselves and lived in harmony in their new environment, engaging their social activities and preserving their traditional customs, to inform the way they change their rural life-style to urban life-style, to deliver the opportunities and risks due to their changes and to differentiate various social problems come out.

Qualitative Research method was used from Political anthropology and Social anthropology points of view. In-depth interviews, Key informant interviews were conducted and Participatory learning appraisal methods were used for specific social activities

The research outputs will be used by communities and the existing *research capacity is used?* effectively to solve their challenges and development problems.

II. Findings and Discussions

1. Historical background of the Northern Chin Nationals

In Burma Socialist Programme Party (1968), mentioned 44 distinct groups of Chin national's diversity. But adding later by certain announcement, the Chin State comprises 53 distinct groups. The classification is mainly based on geographical distribution, linguistics and clans (as cited in Kyin Lam Mang, 2009). Moreover, according to the Government-classified ethnic groups in Myanmar and Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, there are 53 Chin ethnic groups.

The official geographical distribution of Chin State is seven townships in Falam District of Northern Chin State- comprising of Cikha, Falam, Hakha, Rihkhawdar, Tiddim, Htantalan and Tonzang Townships while five townships in Mindat District of Southern Chin State- comprising of Kanpetlet, Matupi, Mindat and Paletwa and Rezua Townships. The Plain Chins are living in Rakhine State, Magwe and Bago Division. Based on their dwelling places, however, they used to be mentioned as Tiddim Chins, Falam Chins, Hakha Chins, Mindat Chins, Matupi Chins, Paletwa Chins, Kanpetlet Chins and Myepyant (flat land) Chins rather above mentioned classification (Htaung- Howng, 2011).

Among these Chin ethnic people, they have mainly divided into two parts of the region: they are northern Chin and southern Chin. They are under the title of Chin but they have different dialect and culture in the region. (Saw Eh Htoo, 2014).

In southern part of Chin State, there are more than 10 ethnic groups are living peacefully. Nevertheless, the name of the Township called Paletwa is defined as the place of Khumi people. Among acknowledged population in Paletwa Township, multi- groups including: 1.Khumi 2. Rakhine 3. Mara 4. Kheaung Chy 5. Ahnu 6. Bamar 7. Bengali 8. Lushine 9. Thet 10. Panan 11.Muslim 12. Lemro Chin reside together. Among them, 60% of the Paletwa population (around about 90,000 people) is Khumi ethnic group. Basically Khumi people originally belong to two clans. One is known as Awa Khumi (now known as Mro Chin in Rakhine State) and the other is Aphyia Khumi which is under the studying. Both of the clans once lived on the bank of the Kaladan River (Rakha Pura Annual Magazine, 2011).

Chin ethnic people were the members of the Tibet-Mongolian tribe origin. The Chin probably came to Burma (Myanmar), especially the Chindwin valley in the late 9th or 10th century AD.

Most Chin people moved westward and they probably settled in the present Chin State around about 1300-1400. The Chin people do not have factual records of their history as the Chin practice oral traditions.

The name "Chin" is disputed. During the British era, the British used the compound term 'Chin-Kuki-Mizo' to group the Kukish language speaking people, and the Government of India inherited this. Missionaries chose to employ the term Chin to christen those on the Burmese side and the term Kuki on the Indian side of the border. Chin nationalist leaders in Burma's Chin State popularized the term "Chin" after Burma's independence from Britain.

More recently Chin has been rejected by some for Zomi, though the Zomi are also one small Northern Kukish language speaking group. Some Zomi nationalists now consider that the term Chin would mean subtle Paite domination Chini-Kuki-Zomi identity, which other groups like Hmars, Zou/Zo Hmal, and Koms may not coopt. The term Mizo also can cause confusion, particularly following the emergence of the Zomi National Congress.

There are many tribes among the Chin people, such as Yinduu (Daa), Kaang, Ukpu(chin pon), Zo, Thai, Tedim/Sim (who prefer to call themselves Zomi, as the word "Chin" is not in their own language; *note the resemblance to Mizo of the neighbouring Mizoram state in India*). Major tribes of the Chin include Asho, Chro/Cho, Khumi, Zomi, Laizo, Laimi, Matu, Mara, etc. It would be relevant to mention also that they are related to the Kukis of Nagaland, Manipur and Assam. For want of a more acceptable common name, they are usually called the Chin-Kuki-Mizo people, bringing together the three most common names for them, whether given by outsiders or themselves.

There are also tens of thousands of Chin people in Mizoram State, India, mainly in the area of the Lai Autonomous District Council, formerly part of Chhimtuipui District, and a sizable population also live in Churachandpur district of Manipur, consisting of smaller tribes like the Hmar, Paite, ((Vaiphei People / Vaiphei)) Simte, Zou, Gangte and others. Bawn tribe in Southern Mizoram State and Pakistan are descendants of the Lai tribe. This Chin/Mizo/Zomi/Kuki people are scattered into three countries: Burma (Myanmar), Pakistan, and India. Chin ethnic people speak several Kukish languages; Ethnologue lists 49 languages in this group, of which 20 contain the word "Chin" in their name.

The realization that these are of one and share common dialectical root and customs even though separated by international and state boundaries brought about movements for Unification of the occupied territories and of the people. One of the first movements is the MNF (Mizo National Movement) which ended with the formation of the Mizoram State in India. Another complicated matter among the Chin-mizo-kuki is the acceptance of a common name.

1.1. Early history

The Tibeto-Burman (Tibeto-Myanmar tribe) people entered the Chin Hills in the first millennium AD as part of the wider migration of Tibeto-Burman peoples into the area. Some historians speculate that the **Thaik** or **Thek** people mentioned in the Burmese Chronicles might be the Chins. For much of history, the sparsely populated Chin Hills were ruled by local chiefs. The Political organization in the region before the Taungoo dynasty's conquest in the mid-16th century remains largely conjectural. The first recorded instance of a western kingdom believed to be near the Chin Hills is the **Kingdom of Pateikkaya**, a tributary to the Pagan Kingdom in the 11th and 12th centuries. Some historians (Arthur Phayre, Tun Nyein) put Pateikkaya in eastern Bengal, thus placing the entire Chin Hills under Pagan suzerainty but others, like Harvey, citing stone inscriptions, put it near the eastern Chin Hills. (Burmese Chronicles report the kings of Pateikkaya as Indian though the ethnicity of the subjects is not explicitly cited.)

According to the history, it was also believed that the proto Chins steadily started to move southwards from Tibet starting from 2000 years ago. The most given reasons of ancient peoples' wandering are in search of food, good climate and pasture, or to escape from warfare and pandemic diseases. (Ma Zam San Ciin, 2012).

When they reached central Myanmar, they settled for centuries between Chindwin and Ayeyarwaddy River and along the bank of those two rivers. Probably during the last 500 years, they have started to move again to the western mountain ranges of Myanmar.

1.2. Bayinnaung's Empire

The first confirmed political entity in the region was the Shan State of Kale (Kalay), founded by the Shan people who came to dominate the entire northwestern-to-eastern arc of

