

**UNIVERSITY OF YANGON  
DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY**

**ETHNOGRAPHIC TEXTILE ART EXPRESSING  
SYMBOLIC CULTURE OF ASHO-CHIN NATIONALS**

**KYIN LAM MANG  
M.Res. –Anth-2 (2008-2009)  
MASTER OF RESEARCH (ANTHROPOLOGY)**

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**Research Thesis submitted to the  
Department of Anthropology  
for the Degree of Master of Research**

**Submitted by**

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(2008-2009)**

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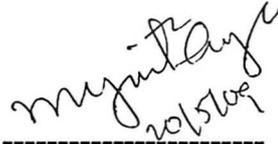
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**ETHNOGRAPHIC TEXTILE ART EXPRESSING  
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## Abstract

The main purpose of this research is to study on fantastic **ethnographic textile art** which belong to **Asho-Chin nationals** based on **symbolic anthropological perspectives**. **Asho-Chin** comprises of six distinct groups (*Chinpong, Khamau, Kounsho, Lauktu, Laytu and Sunghtu*). The majority of them are dwelling apart from Chin State. Today, though they are locally living in Rakhine State, Magwe Division, and Bago Division, linguistically and culturally, they belong to Chin national.

The textiles of **Asho-Chin** are artistic and aesthetic in terms of weaving. But today the tradition of weaving and wearing is gradually diminishing. For this reason, the major objectives have been set for this research as follows:

- To identify the **symbolic meaning** of the motifs woven on the variety of their textiles through the relevant cultural background among the sub-groups.
- To verify the diversification of each group through studying the similarities and differences of the structure and pattern of the textiles from one sub-group to another.
- To study and make a document how the textile play an important role in their daily lives through **symbolic cultural approach**.
- To be a comprehensive study, **ethnographic textile art** of **Laytu sub-group** will be highlighted explicitly and the rest of sub-groups' textiles will be in general.

**Key words: ethnographic textile art, symbol, meaning, symbolic anthropological perspectives, symbolic cultural approach, Asho-Chin.**

## Introduction

The Asho-Chins were believed that dispersed from central Myanmar to the region now called Southern Chin State and kept spreading out along the west mountain ranges during the second millennium C.E. Eventually, they had occupied around the tributaries of Lemro River, Dalet Chaung and Mone Chaung and some had settled in the Rakhine Yoma and Bago Yoma for about five centuries ago. They are geographically grouped as Plains Chin (၈၉၉၉၉၉,၅၅၉:). It means Chin living in the plain region.

The main purpose of this research is to study on fantastic ethnographic textile art which belong to Asho-Chin nationals, particularly Laytu sub-group, based on symbolic cultural perspectives. The textiles of Asho-Chin are artistic and aesthetic in terms of weaving. But today, in the plains of the Northern Rakhine State, and Magwe Division their traditional costumes have not been used daily. Only a few people in the remote area of the Southern Chin State, Rakhine Yoma and Bago Yoma, still used their traditional way of clothing everyday.

Some people wear on special occasion as a ceremonial dress while some do not have even any single traditional dress of their own. It might be vanishing one day. Accordingly, it needs to be studied and recorded how the textiles play an important role in the ways of life of the Asho-Chin nationals. Certain matters which will need further research are discussed in the 'Conclusion and Recommendation'.

### Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of this research are:

(i) To find out where and when Asho-Chin got the technical know-how of weaving to create such an excellent designs and patterns of textiles.

(ii) To elicit the meanings of the motifs woven on the Asho-Chin textiles. All the meaning of the different motifs on the textiles of each sub-group will be described as a symbolic culture of the Asho-Chins, especially, how the motifs and patterns represent the symbolic meaning of the textiles and how can identify them through their textiles.

(iii) To understand how the textiles play an important role in their daily life of the past, present and future. Textiles can also represent social role of the wearer and the different ways of use of the textiles suggest the symbolic culture in their daily life. It could be discovered the relationship among the sub-groups through similarities and differences of their textiles. So, this research has attempted to illustrate the symbolic

meaning of the different style of the textiles of each sub-group based on relevant cultural reality.

(iv) The final one is to find the solution to above issues and to widely educate to the young generations how they should sustain the weaving technique and using traditional ways of textiles in order to conserve their culture and get income generation as well.

This research is prepared to present in five chapters.

In Chapter I, the existing Literature document on Asho-Chin textiles are discussed and analysed on them. Then, the research method and research area are described.

In Chapter II, the historical background of the Chins and Asho-Chins in general, identification and distribution of the Chins are presented.

In Chapter III, the origin of textiles, the routes of textiles and the technology of weaving of Chin and Asho-Chin textile art based on historical evidences are explained.

In Chapter IV, their settlements and the general description and significant symbolism of the textiles belong to six distinct Asho-Chin groups.

In Chapter V, Discussion on the ethnographic textile art of Laytu sub-group of Asho-Chin through cultural anthropological perspective, especially by symbolic approach is illustrated.

# Chapter I

## Literature Review

### 1.1. Existing Literature document on Asho-Chin textiles

Regardless of the literature prior to the independence of Myanmar, introduction to certain Asho-Chin textiles firstly appeared in literature may be probably in the book entitled "ပြည်ထောင်စုမြန်မာနိုင်ငံ၊ တိုင်းရင်းသားယဉ်ကျေးမှုဓလေ့ထုံးစံများ (ချင်း)" [*Union of Myanmar, Culture and Customs of National Races (Chin)*] published by Burma Socialist Programme Party in 1968. This book mainly focuses on culture and custom of the all Chin nationals. It covers only a few descriptions on Chinpong and Laytu textiles.<sup>1</sup>

The second literature document was one article contributed by Deborah Lindsay Garner and Jay Bommer in the *Textile Museum Journal* (1999-2000; vol. 38-39). It is only a few lines and photographs about Laytu and Sunghtu textiles. The article had just opened the window to the world textiles enthusiasts for a glance on Asho-Chin textiles.

In the same year, certain descriptions and photographs of Asho, Laytu, Sunghtu, Lauktu and Chinbon appeared in the book entitled "Textiles of the Hill Tribes of Burma" (1999) by Michael C. Howard.

In 2001, a multi-authored book entitled, "ချင်းလူမျိုးများ၏ သမိုင်းဖြစ်စဉ်နှင့် ရိုးရာယဉ်ကျေးမှု ဓလေ့ထုံးစံများအကျဉ်း" [Historical background of Chin national and a brief account on their culture and customs] was published by Committee for Chin History Development, Yangon. This book's interest is more on historical background, culture and customs and less on description of textiles. It covers only one paragraph on Asho-Chin textiles composed of 16 lines, without covering all members of Asho-Chin textiles.

A few documents again on Asho-Chin textiles and photographs belong to Laytu and Lauktu were mentioned in the article of "Documenting Chin Textiles" contributed by John Barker in the multi-authored book entitled "Textiles from Burma" in 2003.

A monograph on '*Chin Textiles from Myanmar, India and Bangladesh*' entitled "Mantles of Merit" came out in 2005 by David W. and Barbara G. Fraser was the best literature document illustrated about Asho textiles in one chapter. This is so far the most comprehensive one on Chin textiles ever. The devotion of the authors' capacity, time and strength are very impressive and appreciative. The book mainly focuses on the structure of textiles or the technique of weaving through employing a lot of technical term, and the way of use of textiles as well. This book broadly made the world known

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၁။ မဆလပါတီဌာနချုပ်၊ ပြည်ထောင်စုမြန်မာနိုင်ငံ၊ တိုင်းရင်းသားယဉ်ကျေးမှုဓလေ့ထုံးစံများ (ချင်း) စာ၊ ၄၀၂-၄၀၄

on Chin textiles and the Chin textiles also gain a room in the world of textiles because of this book.

Michael C. Howard reviewed and modified on his first book, "Textiles of the Hill Tribes of Burma" (1999) and published again a more complete one, "Textiles of the Highland Peoples of Burma" in 2005. This book covered again only a few illustrations on Asho-Chin textiles.

All books and articles mentioned above had tried their best to be well done. Some are perfect and agreeable but some remain inadequate and inaccurate on Asho peoples and their textiles. The literature on Asho-Chin or their textiles is comparatively limited. The literatures prior to the independence of Myanmar had less interest on the textiles of any hill peoples and merely documented in superficial.

Symbolic and interpretive anthropology view culture as a symbolic system. Prominent symbolic anthropologists are Clifford Geertz, David Schneider, Victor Turner, Mary Douglas, Terence Turner and Nancy Munn.

Clifford Geertz was an American anthropologist who developed the concept of the symbolic nature of culture and interpretive anthropology. His new idea was popularised in anthropology and had widespread use across a number of disciplines. In his book "*The Interpretation of Culture (1973)*" explains about his approach to culture is based on the metaphor of culture as text and anthropological inquiry as the interpretation on text.<sup>2</sup> (Moore 1997: P.238)

Victor Turner was one of the most creative thinkers in British-American social anthropology. Jerry D. Moore wrote a book on "Visions of Culture" in 1997. He wrote, A symbolic approach to culture inevitably leads to a concern with meanings: if culture is symbolic, then it follows that it is used to create and convey meanings since that is the purpose of symbols. If meanings are the end products of culture, then understanding culture requires understanding the meanings of its creators and users. And if that is true, then culture is unknowable to the etic observer, since the meanings are only obtainable from the emic insider's point of view. (Moore 1997: P. 211)<sup>2</sup>

Turner (1974:55) considers cultural symbols, including ritual symbols, "as originating in and sustaining processes involving temporal changes in social relations, and not as timeless entities..... ." Symbols have some basic properties in common.

(Moore 1997: P.233)<sup>2</sup>

In fact, a symbol is something that represents something else, either by association or by resemblance. It can be a material object or a written sign used to represent something

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2. J. D. Moore: *Visions of Culture* (1997) P. 238, P.211, P.233,

invisible. By using some implements, clothing for instance, a given ethnic group could be identified who they are and how and when they use those textiles.

Textile plays an important role in every element of culture. Accordingly, certain cultural elements can be studied through textiles expressing symbolic meaning of their culture. This research has been attempted to reveal symbolic expression of the textile art of all sub-groups of the Asho-Chins and ethnographic textile art of Laytu sub-group in explicit through symbolic and interpretive anthropological perspectives.

## **1.2. Research Methods**

Ethnographic study, direct observation, indirect observation, key informant interview, taking photographs, record the video and voice, questionnaire and book research methods were used to accomplish this research. Functionalism was used for certain functions refer to the symbol of affection, prosperity and victory.

To find out where and when Asho-Chin got the technical know-how of weaving to create such an excellent designs and patterns of textiles, book research, direct observation and indirect observation methods were used.

To elicit the meanings of the motifs woven on the Asho-Chin textiles, key informant interviews, taking photographs, record the video, questionnaire were applied.

To understand how the textiles play an important role in their daily life of the past, present and future ethnographic fieldwork was employed.

## **1.3. Geographical Description of the Research Area**

Padaung, Ann, Minbya, Myebon, Setoktaya townships are chosen for this research area because the six distinct sub-groups of Asho-Chin nationals currently inhabited in those area. Every sub-group's locality and textiles will be studied first through literature evidences and interviewed some prominent native peoples inhabited in Yangon in order to reveal the symbolic meaning of their textiles.

However, this research will focus ethnographic textile art on Laytu sub-group, a member of the six distinct Asho-Chin nationals those who mainly live in Mrauk Oo and Minbya townships, Rakhine State. Of those two townships, Minbya is chosen for this field research. The primary reason why to be selected the sub-group of Laytu is their textiles are the most significant one; in style, size and weaving technique by which expressing symbolic culture of them. The next reason why for the location, Minbya township is the majority of the Laytu sub-group live there.

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### **Location of Minbya Township**

Minbya is located on the west bank of Ramaung River, which diverted from Lemyo River, in the north-east of Sittwe, the capital city of Rakhine State. It takes five hours by boat from Sittwe to Minbya. Minbya Township is bordered with Ann Township in the east, Pauktaw Township in the west, Myebon Township in the south, Kanpetlet Township of Chin State in the north, Setoktaya Township of Magwe Division in the north-east.

### **Physical Feature of Minbya Township**

Minbya Township is located in the coastal region of Rakhine State and generally wide extended plain. Almost all the villages in Minbya Township are situated by the bank of the rivers and streams. So, the transportation and trading is very convenient. Some Laytu people trek There are Lemyo River and a number of smaller rivers that flow toward the Bay of Bengal. Since Minbya region is low land of the Rakhine Yoma mountain ranges and the landscape is mostly plain and the mountains can be seen in the north and east of the town. Southern area of the region is full of paddy fields and northern and eastern region paddy fields end at the foot-hills.

### **Population of Laytu Sub-group**

Today, the Laytu Chins who are living in 15 villages of Minbya township, Rakhine State are classified by geographical distribution where they are inhabited in; Kungtu (i.e. hill dwellers), Laymyo river Laytu, Phonthar Chaung Laytu, Panmyaunggyi Chaung Laytu, Kanni (village tract) Laytu, Yaw Chaung Laytu. In addition, there are some 5 villages in Myebon townships. The total population of Laytu Chin is estimated some 20,000.

### **Sample Site and Size**

Kyunnyo, the suburbs of Minbyamyio (where diversity of Laytu sub-group inhabited), Phethapyin and Chaungnet villages (where the Kanni Laytus are living in), in the south-east of Minbya and Setiyan village (Phonthar Laytu area), in the north-east of Minbya were chosen to do field research. The reason why to choose those four places for field research was, some textile artists and old facial tattooed women were still remaining there.

Key informants of two women of facial tattooed and textile artists in Kyunnyo,

one in Phethapyin, two in Chaungnet and three in Setiyan villages were interviewed about tattoo and hand woven textile art. Additionally, voice and video recording, interviews with questionnaires and direct and indirect observations were done in every place with four to six persons respectively. In Yangon, some key informants of Asho-Chin peoples were interviewed.

## **Conclusion**

One of the jobs of this research is to make sound certain existing literature evidences on Asho-Chin textiles. Basically studying on symbolic meaning of textiles, this research has tried to reveal the diversification of Asho sub-groups by their textile art. The analysis between field result and existing literature documents are mentioned in the final chapter of Conclusion and Recommendation.

The preset research methods had been effectively employed. Pretest of data collection was carried out with some Asho-Chin elders who are living in Yangon. All members from six distinct Asho-Chins can be interviewed in Yangon area. The research was started in August 2008 and ended in March 2009. It includes literature review, pretest in Yangon and personal interviews in Yangon and empirical field work.

## Chapter II

### Historical Background of Chin and Asho-Chin Nationals

#### 2.1. Historical background of Chin Nationals

In old days, although the Chins were non-literal, the elders were able to recite all the names of their ancestors (i.e. genealogy of each clan and lineage) and the territory where they moved over and settled down. Every sub-group of Chin tribes and clans had songs and poems on several events and incidences in their ways of life. Those genealogy, territory, songs and poems were maintained and transmitted through generation by generation.

In present day, most of the Chin sub-groups have their own literature based on Roman alphabet so that the reciting documents mentioned earlier have been safely preserved by means of hard copy and soft copy as well.

Those records suggest full account of Chin peoples. Certain evidences stated that some groups of the proto-Chin were assumed originally occupied along the Chindwin river, in the valley between the Chindwin and Irrawaddy river while another groups around the Popa and Bagan during the first millennium C.E. No other evidence of origin of the Chins could be traced beyond then by themselves.

One theory believed by some scholars and historians was peoples known as today Southeast Asian who are living on the hills or in the plains had emigrated from the region of China. An alternative theory states that those peoples may firstly migrate southwards from Tibet, crossing the Himalaya and down the streams and rivers and occupied the territories respectively until reaching the sea. Earlier migrations often took place in search of food, good pasture and fertile lands. In addition, because of the strong weather in the north they had to keep moving southern wards year after year.

In the second millennium, the Chins started to move to the western mountain ranges (အနောက်တောင်ရိုးမ). The first settlers in the northern Chin moved from upper Myanmar pushed south the late comers to northern and western Rakhine State. Alternative route was started from the Bagan and Popa area. Those groups moved to the southern Chin area too. From there, one group spread over the Rakhine State, Magwe and Bago Division. They were supposed to be forefather of Asho-Chins.

Today one fourth of Rakhine State population may probably be different clans of Chin nationals. Harvey (1925) mentioned that the Chins had already served as levies

under King Alaungphaya in 18th century.<sup>3</sup> It suggests the long history of relation and association of Chin nationals with ancient Burmans (i.e. Bamar or Myanmar today).

The term 'Chin' is firstly addressed by ancient Burmans since centuries ago. During since British administration, the term 'Chin' became official name for Chin natioanals. But Chin nationals are called themselves 'Zo', 'Lai', 'Cho', 'Konshou' and 'Asho'. The common meaning of those terms is peoples who live on the higher cold region of the mountains. Middle part hill-dwellers are called 'Lai' and lower part, warm region 'Sim'. The first name suggests that their living on the mountains and the latter terms represent for those who occupied in the middle part and the lower part of the hills.

In the late 1960s, each monograph on different national races in Myanmar was published by Burma Socialist Programme Party. Those books were referred as an official guide book on the account of national races in Myanmar. As mentioned in the earlier chapter the book on Chin culture and custom "ပြည်ထောင်စုမြန်မာနိုင်ငံ၊ တိုင်းရင်းသားယဉ်ကျေးမှု ဓလေ့ထုံးစံများ (ချင်း)" published in 1968 was one of them. This book in fact, mentioned 44 distinct groups of Chin nationals diversity.<sup>1</sup> But adding later by certain announcement, the state stated the Chin comprise of 53 distinct groups. The classification is mainly based on geographical distribution, linguistics and clans.

The official geographical distribution of Chin State is seven townships in Falam District of Nothern Chin State - comprising of Cikha,\* Falam, Hakha, Rihkhawdar,\* Tedim, Thantlang and Tonzang townships while five townships in Mindat District of Southern Chin State - comprising of Kanpetlet, Matupi, Mindat and Paletwa and Rezua\* townships. The Plains Chins are living in Rakhine State, Magwe and Bago Divisions). (\*Newly upgraded to township level in 2002)

**Linguistics of Chin Nationals**

Chin people speak over 40 related but distinct languages of Kuki-Chin, a section of Kuki-Naga or Kukish, a sub-group of the Baric division of the Tibeto-Burman language, and a sub-family of the Sino-Tibetan language family of languages. (See table 1)

In Northern Chin, raids and warfare were so common since they first occupied on the hills during second millennium C.E. So some clans and lineages spread over every where for the reason of be slaved, or be prisoners of war, or be refuge under the powerful tribes. Some tribal leaders adopted them into their lineage or clan but some had to remain in their old lineage name. As a result, certain lineages who at one time distributed to everywhere now speak different languages though they belong to a

၁။ မဆလပါတီဌာနချုပ်၊ ပြည်ထောင်စုမြန်မာနိုင်ငံ၊ တိုင်းရင်းသားယဉ်ကျေးမှုဓလေ့ထုံးစံများ (ချင်း) စာ၊ ၂၁-၂၄

biologically same clan or lineage. In the Northern Chins, though the language differs from group to group, speaking in the town is common language among all district groups.

## 2.2. Historical background of the Asho-Chin Nationals

Referring to Hutchinson 1906, Fraser (2005) described that Plains Chin or Asho-Chins were divided into six different cultural groups. Those were Chinpong (Chinbon or Utbu - to the British), Khamau (or Saibaung or Zingbong), Kounsho, Lauktu, Laitu (Laytu or Laytoo - to the earlier books) and Sumtu (Sunghtu- to the earlier books).<sup>4</sup> This research will be done on those six different cultural groups of Asho-Chins nationals based on above classification.

When interviewed, every group claimed that they migrated from central Myanmar first and moved over the area now Southern Chin, along the Mone Chaung and Aye Chaung. They occupied Phokhaung Taung. Every sub-group had the same background history of living together in Phokhaung Taung.

From there, they gradually moved down the small stream and river and dispersed over along the Rakhine State, Magwe division and Bago division. Certain Asho sub-groups reached and inhabited in a small section of northern Yangon and Irrawaddy Division and Naypyitaw Division (Formerly Mandalay Division).

### Language

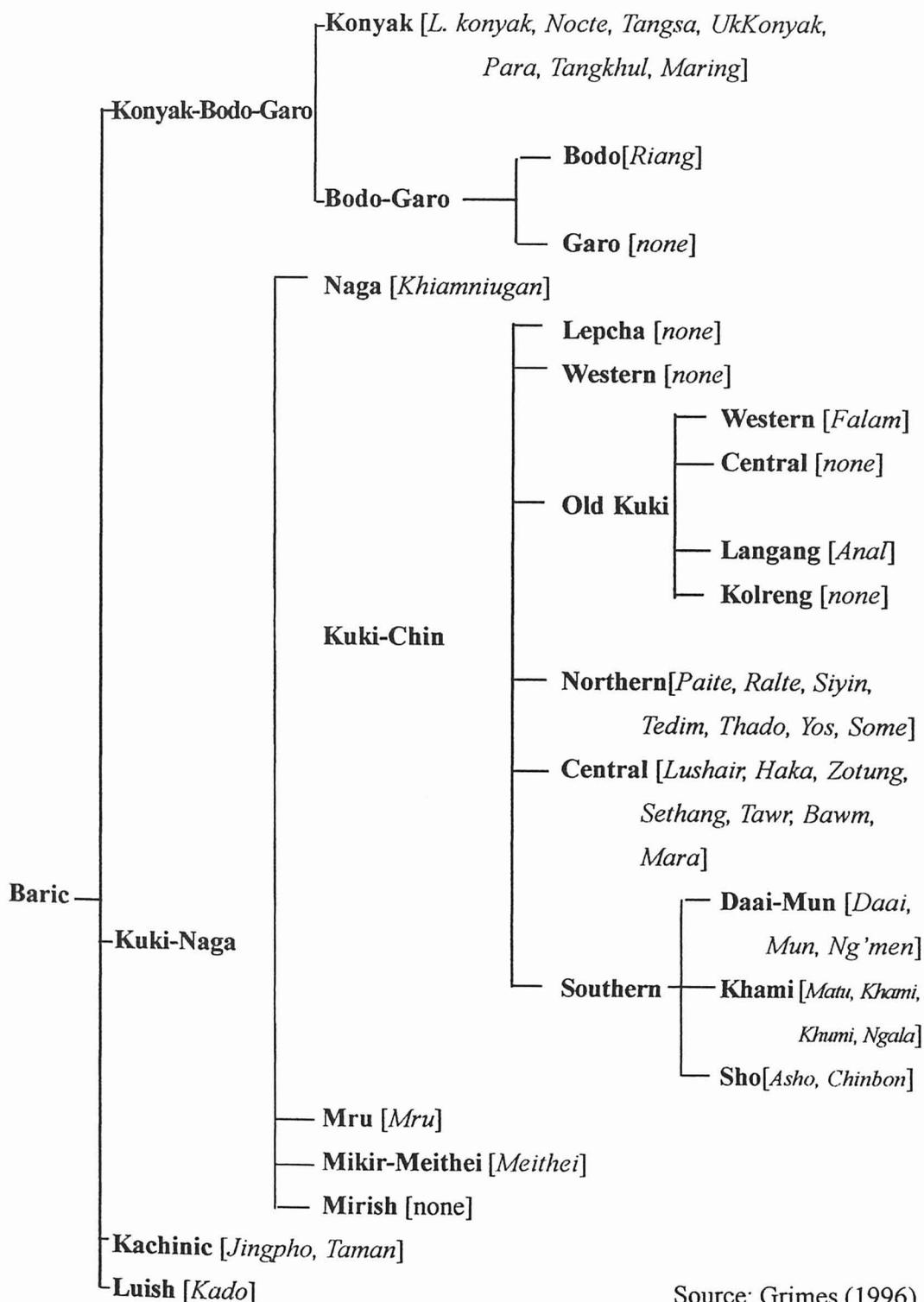
Linguistically, those six groups are closely related to each other. They can communicate each other by using their own languages. Chinpong and Laytu are geographically neighbouring groups. All Chinpong understand Laytu dialect but not all Laytu understand Chinpong's. Again, Laytu are neighbouring with Lauktu in the east and Sunghtu in the south. All Laytu can communicate well with Lauktu rather than Sunghtu. Khamau and Kounsho use very similar dialect.

So, linguistically, they could be classified Chinpong, Laytu, Lauktu and Sunghtu are one group and Khamau and Kounsho are another group. Anyway, if they live together, they all can communicate each other by using their own dialect respectively. It suggests that linguistically they belong to a group. Grimes (1996) also grouped Chinbon and Asho under umbrella of 'Sho'. (See table 1). This researcher discovered that Chinpong can be broken down into Chinpong, Laytu, Lauktu and Sunghtu sub-groups while Asho

4. Fraser, David and Barbara Fraser. (2005) *Mantles of Merit. Chin Textiles from Myanmar, India and Bangladesh*. (P. 209)

Table 1. Baric Languages spoken groups<sup>6</sup>

Group    Branch    Sub-branch    Group    Sub-group



Source: Grimes (1996)

6. Howard: *Highland Peoples of Burma*. Vol1, 2005. P.15

into Khamau and Kounsho based on similarities and differences of symbolic textiles functioned as material culture. Further linguistic survey may be needed to verify this hypothesis.

However, Laytu, Lauktu and Sunghtu sub-groups are not well known by the outsiders. Even only a few Chin know them as a sub-group of Chin nationals.

When interviewed, Khamau and Kounsho did not agree the term, '*Khamau*.' This is the term called by other sub-groups and they claimed they are only Asho. The name '*Kounsho*' represents hill dwellers. Kounsho means Asho peoples who are still living on the hill. They share similar language and culture though they have a bit different design of textiles. It may possibly be the name depends on the locality. This idea could be considered and compared with peoples who live in upper Myanmar are called '*Anyathar*'.

**Table 2. Comparison of some words of Asho-Chin sub-groups with Burmese**

Burmese	Laytu ( <i>Laitu</i> )	Sunghtu ( <i>Sumtu</i> )	Lauktu ( <i>Ekkai</i> )	Chinpong ( <i>Uppu</i> )	Khamau/ Kounsho
ချင်း	hieu	hieu	hieu	hieu	a shieu
အဖေ	paw	a po	a po	a po	a po
အမေ	nu	a nu	a nu	a nu	a nu
ထမင်း	buh	buh	buh	buh	buh
ရေ	tui	tui	tui	tui	tui
ခွေး	ui	ui	ui	ui	ui
ကြက်	aa	aa	aa	aa	aa
ဝက်	wouk	wouk	oak	woak	oak
ရှာ	shaw	shaw	shaw	shaw	shaw
လမ်း	lam	lam	lam	lam	lam
အိမ်	im	im	im	im	im

## Conclusion

Firstly, this research has tried to reveal the historical background of Chin and Asho-Chin nationals through literatures and personal interviews. In order to verify or classify the grouping of Asho and Chinpong (See table 1) will need further research through diversity of linguistics of Sho.

## Chapter III

### Origin of Textiles and Ethnographic Textile Art of the Asho-Chins

#### 3.1. Origin of Hand woven Textile Art

The primary purpose of clothing of the earliest mankind is to protect from shamefulness and weather. Depend on the climate and the season of their locality, prehistoric man might first use leaves, fur or hide for clothing. The clothing materials would have being upgraded from animal fibres and hides to tree bark fibres (hemp and flax), cotton and silk and wool.

It kept getting evolved era by era and textiles became a part of culture and played an important role in a progressive community. The improvement in clothing materials and technology from hand to machine refer to the level of civilization of the people who wear them. Hand woven sophisticated textiles suggest a symbolism of economy, aesthetic and artistic value in a given culture.

The production of sophisticated hand woven textiles within the Indian subcontinent has prehistoric origins. The earliest textile findings were made at Mohenjodaro, an archaeological site of the Indus River. Spindles were found there and it could be probably used to wind weft threads when working at a wooden loom; the presence of bronze needles at the site suggests that this was Bronze-Age civilization. From this evidence we may define that some ancient Indians were two to three millennium advance of the European world in the preparation and use of cotton and mordanted dyestuffs.<sup>6</sup>

From earliest trading records, it is clear that European, Asian and Indian and Levantine civilizations looked to India for her textiles. Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Persians and Chinese traded precious metal and silks for the fine and colourful cottons of the sub-continent.<sup>6</sup>

After invasion of India in 327 BC by the Alexander the Great, this early period that textile and other trading networks soon radiated from the ports of western and eastern India. Goods flowed to and from the peninsula of India both overland and by coastal sea routes, and from India to Ceylon and Burma (now Myanmar) by way of the ports of Orissa and Bengal. Trade with China was established through the eastern route traversing Assam and Burma (now Myanmar).

Myanmar geographically lies between two highly civilised nations of India and

<sup>6</sup> Gillow, J.G, and Nicholas Barnard; *Traditional Indian Textiles*. P. 7-8

China. The first inhabitant proto-Burmans' culture was mixed up with the late settlers from India and China. In a course of time, it bears a diversity of national races formed up of today Myanmar.

In 1-3 century AD, a large member of the Cakya dynastic clan from India migrated into Myanmar and occupied in Tagaung, upper Myanmar. Certain prominent historians of Myanmar believed that Myanmar peoples begin from Tagaung. Anyway, there is no doubt that they would bring along hand woven textile industry.

When studying Chin textiles, the similarities of some motifs are likely adopted from Indian textiles. Some geometric patterns of paintings and embroideries of Indian textiles and Chin textiles are exactly identical. This is just only a clue to find a solution. This research does not trace back them in details. It is needed to be done further research through the methodology of anthropological history.

## **The Art**

According to the Random House Dictionary, art means the quality, production, expression, or realm, according to aesthetic principles, of what is beautiful, or of more than ordinary significance. Traditionally the term art was used to refer to any skill or mastery in literature, music, performance, and handicraft. Any art work will give you a significant feeling of satisfaction or emotion when you enjoy it. However some art work does not give such a feeling to everyone without having background knowledge of it. However, art of weaving or textile art categorised in handicraft has symbolic meaning and it can give artistic and aesthetic sense to anyone.

## **Textile Art**

The word textile is from Latin *'texere'* which means "to weave", "to braid" or "to construct". The simple textile art is felting, in which animal fibers are matted together using heat and moisture. Most of the textile art begin with twisting or spinning and plying fibers to make yarn. The yarn is then knotted, lopped, braided or woven to make flexible fabric or cloth, and cloth can be used to make clothing and soft furnishings.

## **Ethnographic Textile Art**

In this research, ethnographic textile art of the Asho-Chins include the techniques of hand-spinning cotton yarn, dyeing with vegetable dye, weaving by body loom, embellishing or decorating with beads, buttons and cowrie shells, colours and patterns,

embroidery and sewing technique - every work falls under the category of textile arts. This research regards ethnographic textile weavers as ethnographic textile artists and their products as ethnographic textile art.

### **3.2. Origin of Ethnographic Textiles Art of the Asho-Chins**

#### **Asho-Chin Technical Know-how of Weaving**

Every sub-group of Chin probably obtains their textile art from Indian and proto-Burman. Certain Indian textile motifs were definitely adopted by neighbouring other groups and in a course of time they reached to the hill-dwellers; Mizo, Naga and Kathe of northeast India. The ancient Chin nationals had a long history of trading and relationship with Naga, Mizo and Kathe from India and adjacent lowlanders Burman and Shan.

The progenitors of the Chins must have knowledge of the weaving technology before they had segregated into many sub-groups and migrated to everywhere today. The similarities of the motifs of the textiles suggest their relationship in the past and the differences suggest their later diversification and forming up of a distinct culture.

When interviewed, Laytu elderly textile artists explained that the motifs on their textiles were adopted from the patterns of baskets and bamboo matting woven walls of the bamboo houses. Detail descriptions are discussed in the next Chapter V. It could be figured out before they had known the technical know-how of textile weaving, women textile artists got the basic idea from men's bamboo matting work of basket and the house they were living in.

#### **Basic Category of the Asho-Chin Textiles**

Among the sub-groups of the Asho-Chin nationals, tunics for both sexes may probably be the commonest textiles though the weaving techniques and motifs, the sizes and the colours are not identical from group to group. The tunics are used daily and play a significant symbol by which they can be identified who they are.

The second important textile must be the blankets and shawl which are essential for their cultural activity. The basic structure of blanket, warp stripes composition of black, red, indigo blue and grey colours are very common in every group. This blanket suggests that the diversity of the Asho-Chins were one group at one time. Even among the other Northern and Southern Chin groups this kind of blanket could be seen. Creation of the blankets may be earlier than tunics. They were likely to be daily use before tunics for multipurpose. As a cultural symbol, the blankets play an important role in every sub-

group of the Asho-Chins. Discussions are mentioned in the next sections.

The third classification of the textiles of the Asho-Chins would be the variety of headdress used by both sexes. In the ancient time, the degree of importance of the headdress for men and women were equal. Men had long hair and they had to knot their hair with the headdress. Today, Asho-Chin men have no long hair and the headdress is used for just wrap round the head. Both man and woman headdress now are usually used like a hat to protect from sun light. They also play as an adornment. The headdresses have an important role in the wedding ceremony as exchange of gifts.

The final ones would be man's loin cloth and woman's skirt. The loincloth has no motifs, a long piece of cloth (6 feet long and 6 inches wide) and plain black or white. It is no longer used today.

### **The Layout designs of the Asho-Chin Textiles**

The layout designs of Asho-Chin textiles especially blouses (or tunic) are similar in general. It means the tunics are first woven in one piece and cut into two pieces. Those two pieces of cloth are folded and joined along four seams to transform a tunic. Two openings for arms and one for head have to leave when stitching so that the tunic appears like a sleeveless blouse. The textile artist has to be skillful in weaving in order to be symmetrical of the motifs on both pieces of cloth. Every sub-group has their own style and layout designs of textiles. Among them, the tunics of Chinpong and Lauktu are very resembling.

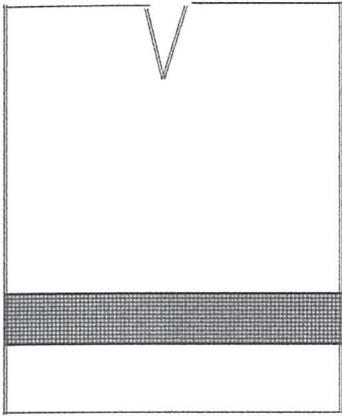
Though structural compositions of the detail geometric motifs are different from group to group, the yellow, pink or red geometric supplementary weft motifs are common in all groups. In some groups, those patterns are on the chest and some on the lower portion near the bottom line of the tunic. By contrast, in some groups the supplementary weft patterns are woven on the top and some on the bottom of the tunic. Those patterns are the most distinguish portions in their textiles and they suggest the symbol of the group. (See Photo 1)

### **The Process of Making a Textile**

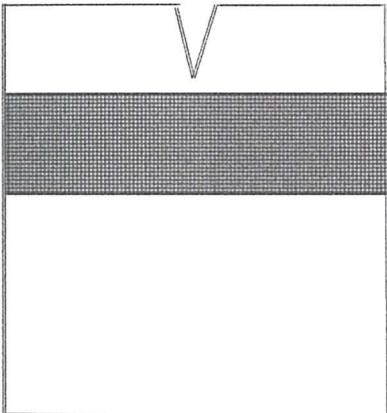
Almost all the textiles of Asho-Chins were made of homespun cotton and silk while employing natural dyes of indigo and some other reddish colour got from different

**Photo 1. The layout Designs of Asho-Chin textiles**  
(mainly highlighted on woman tunic and skirt)

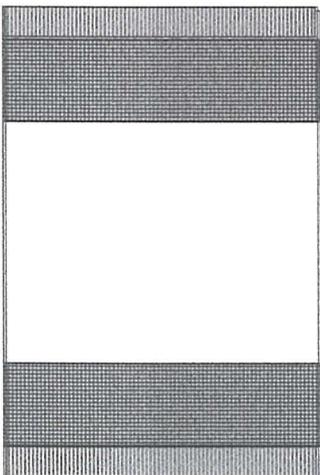
**Chinpong woman tunic**  
(l = 119 cm, w = 100 cm)



**Khamau woman tunic**  
(l = 95 cm, w = 90 cm)

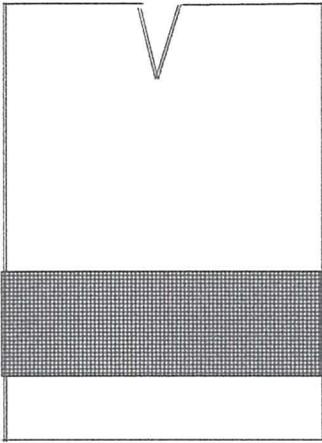


**Kounsho woman skirt or shawl**  
(l = 137 cm, w = 70 cm)

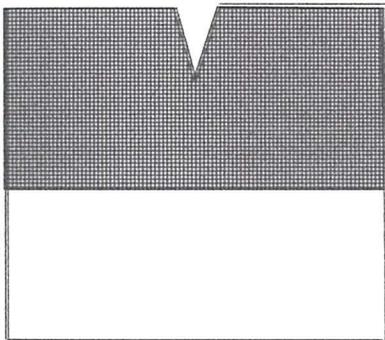


l = length, w = width

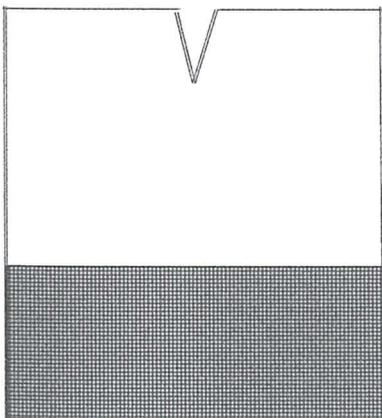
**Lauktu woman tunic**  
(l = 127 cm, w = 75 cm)



**Laytu woman tunic**  
(l = 50 cm, w = 50 cm)



**Sunghtu woman tunic**  
(l = 87 cm, w = 90 cm)



**l = length, w = width**

leaves, flowers and barks. At one time, the Asho-Chins used to make clothing by themselves not for commercial scales. In order to get a cloth by their own, they had to grow cotton plants, collect the cotton, spin into thread, dye and weave by themselves. On some Asho-Chin textiles embroidery and embellishment could be seen. All those processes were mostly done by mothers for herself and also for her husband and daughters. Daughters also have to help mother and learn the know-how of all process of textile works.

It takes at least a month to be woven a textile without motif ones. Women are responsible to work in the farm, in the kitchen and to take care of her infant. She has to weave only a short spare time in a day. In spinning and warping (preparation for weaving) daughters and can help their mother.

### **The Role of the Textiles**

As mentioned earlier, there are altogether six different cultural groups in the Asho-Chins. Every group has different design and pattern of textiles. Certain designs and patterns are close but some are very different. Some textiles were kept and handed down through generation by generation as a heirlooms.

Textiles are key factor in the person's social status in the society. In those way, ethnographic textiles of the Asho-Chins also indicate the status of administrative power, wealth, culture and role of the religious leader. The relevant accounts are discussed more in the next chapters.

Textiles have significance beyond their subsistence functions. They are used as from simple wearing to decorative or symbolic functions. Textiles are the basic symbolism through which most adult gain their social identity participate in society and make their contribution to its well-being. In certain cultural elements such as wedding, social and religious feast, and funeral rites, the consistent symbolic textiles must be dressed up during the feast and rite.

Every society, literate or none, has a specific set of ideas and customs, and a certain set of items and arts, which make them, distinguish from the others. Likewise, textile art of every Asho-Chin sub-group also suggests the unique symbol of each group and diversify from other neighbouring tribes.

### **Current Situation of Textiles**

Today, to make clothing in the ways of past time is waste of labour, money and time. Everyone has to buy the clothes from the market. So many alternative fabrics or ready made clothing could be available at the market from very cheap to very expensive in price. People have to merely decide to buy on their affordability or on their requirement. It is natural that culture is always changed. No matter how they love their culture, once the modern culture no more allow to sustain the old ones. It has necessarily to change or modify. As a result, weaving and wearing of the traditional textiles are gradually vanishing.

In the modern world, communication, transportation and media industries are getting bigger and easier to be used so that culture, habit and custom are transmitted one culture to another through various mode of interrelation. Accordingly, jean and T-shirt culture widely spread throughout even among the Myanmar town and country dwellers. The traditional ways of wearing could be only seen on a special occasions of wedding, religious feast and National Day. Even in the traditional textile today, the materials, ways of weaving and style of wearing are being varied and classic sensation is hardly to be seen.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, the origin of the hand woven textiles and origin of ethnographic textile art of the Asho-Chins have been firstly discussed. Additionally, the category, layout designs, technical similarities and differences among the inter-groups and general role of the textiles of the Asho-Chins are expressed. The basic structure of blanket, warp stripes composition of black, red and grey colours are very common in every group. Those blankets suggest they are one group at one time.

In every sub-group, old women know the technique of traditional way of weaving. And also only the old men can tell the complete account of their historical background. Unless the research is done now, it is critical to be disappeared the symbolic culture of ethnographic textile art of the Asho-Chin nationals.

## Chapter IV

### General Description of Asho-Chin Textiles Art

Firstly, in this chapter, general account on their settlements and textiles of all six distinct groups of Asho-Chin are alphabetically described. Secondly, the significance of the symbolic expression of their textiles are discussed. This research was done based on existing literatural classification on Asho-Chin sub-groups. Some new findings and differences from the literature are discussed in the chapter of Conclution and Recommendation.

#### 4.1. Chinpong (or Uppu)

##### Settlement

They first started their migration from the central Myanmar during last 5 centuries. The majority of Chinpong (Chinbon or Utbu - to the British) live in Kanpetlet township, Chin State. They are called 'Uppu' by themselves and 'shiptu' by other sub-groups of Asho-Chin. It means peoples who live in the upper region of the river or peoples come from the east. Kyin Dwe village is the largest locality of Chinpong sub-group and they kept moving over and living along the Mone Chaung.

In 1979, Setoktaya township local authority issued a "*Documentary History of Setoktaya Township*" (မကွေးတိုင်း၊ စေတုတ္ထရာမြို့၊ မြို့နယ်ဖြစ်စဉ်မှတ်တမ်း) and the book mentioned that among 120 villages in the township, 90s are Chin villages. Based on the linguistics, textiles and traditional custom, the book classified Chin peoples in Setoktaya into 4 distinct groups: <sup>7</sup>

1. Mayin Chin and Lonpaw Chin,
2. Chinpong Chin,
3. Taungthu Chin and
4. Minkyah Chin.

A further explicit linguistic survey will be needed how to classify those Chin groups. This research only focused on their textiles and has just grouped them as Chinpong. According to the book mentioned above, some villages there, can only speak Burmese and their language, customs and textiles are gradually vanishing. A further ethnographic study should be done in Setoktaya Township.

According to the book, only one Chinpong village lies in Setoktaya Township.

၇။ မကွေးတိုင်း၊ စေတုတ္ထရာမြို့၊ မြို့နယ်ဖြစ်စဉ်မှတ်တမ်း (၁၉၇၉) စာ (၄၅-၆၀)

Some Chinpong are living in Laungshwe and Saw Twonship, Magwe Division. The total population today of the Chinpongs is estimated 50,000. Because of wide distribution, linguistics, textiles and customs had varied among them. Even some can not communicate each other and Burmese is common language for them. In the present day, the some Chinpongs who are living in Magwe Division are gradually abandoning their identity and culture.

In the earlier literatures, though Chinpong are culturally classified under Asho, the linguists' classification is more acceptable. Linguistically, Asho and Chinpong are grouped under the Sho. (See table 1)

### **Textiles**

Man uses headband, longyi and woman use different headband, free-size long tunic and belt. The background colour is indigo blue and the patterns are reddish silk. They use a long blanket in multi purposes - for night blanket, body wrapper or longyi in day time and finally use as a funeral shroud. In fact, they own the variety of textiles made of silk than other groups. (See photo 3)

### **Significant Symbolic Textiles**

Chinpong women tunics are woven of comparatively fine handspun cotton of indigo dyed. All of Men's longyi and blankets the whole things are woven of silk employing natural coloured red and indigo blue. Using of the fine handspun cotton and silk for the whole textile is a significant symbol that suggesting their wealth and how much they value on their textiles.

The woman headband is also unique one. The weaving technique is different from others. Lauktu women share the headband of Chinpong. The native people claimed that existing literature's document mistakenly mentioned Minkyah Chin textiles as Chinpong textiles. This research would use both name because of uncertainty.

**Photo 2. Chinpong (or Minkyah Chin) woman tunic and headband**



#### **4.2. Khamau (or Zingbong)**

##### **Settlement**

Khamau live near the foot of the Rakhine Yoma in the west of Pyay, Padaung, Padan townships and Myehte, Thayet, Taungdwingyi in Magwe Division, Taunggok, Thandwe, Kyaukphyu and Ann townships in Rakhine State, and some in Bago Yoma. When interviewed, they did not accept to be classified under the name of Khamau. Even some people do not know the term, '*Khamau*'. It is only called by the outsiders especially other sub-groups. They only accept the term, '*Asho*' comprising of various lineage groups but there is no other sub-groups under the Asho. No matter how they spread over every where in the country they share only single language and culture.

##### **Textiles**

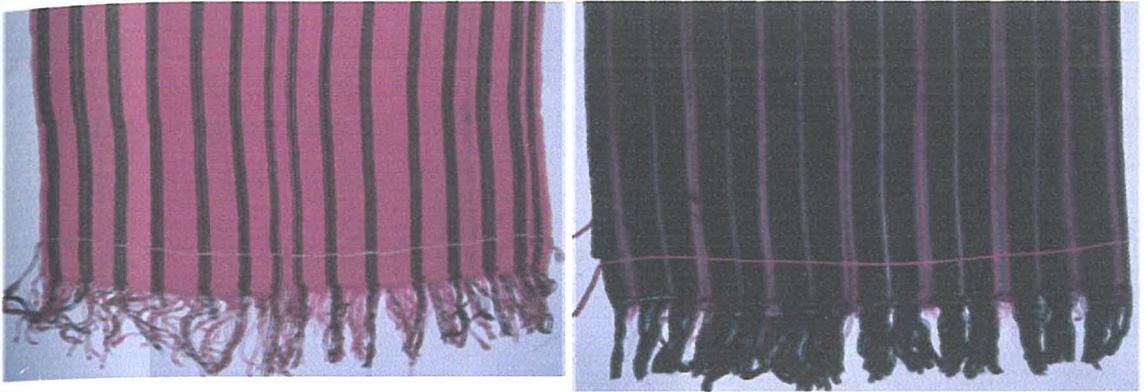
Both man and woman wear different headbands and different design of square-size tunics called '*phyung*'. They use plain black or indigo blue or pink colour background and motifs are yellowish silk. The colours of the tunic depend on the available natural dyes in the area. So, the background colour and the patterns vary from region to region.

##### **Significant Symbolic Textiles**

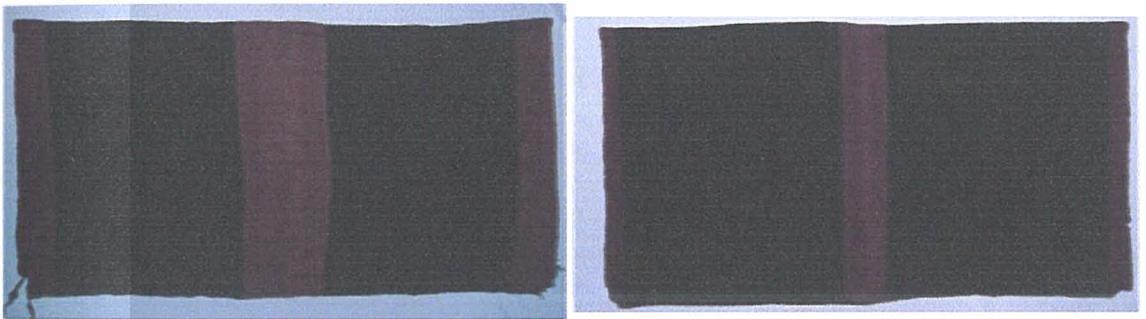
The most significance of the Khamau textiles are geometric designs of patterns plus iconography, resist dyeing and tapestry are different from other sub-groups of the

**PHOTO 3. VARIETY OF CHINPONG (or) MINKYAH CHIN TEXTILES**

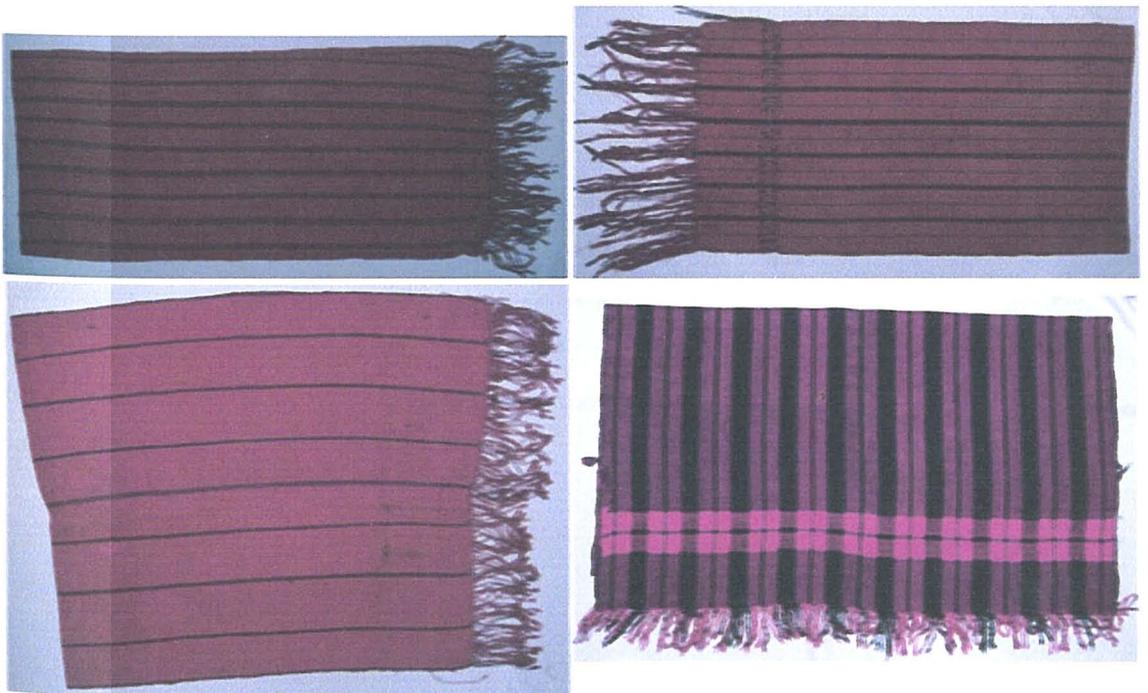
**CHINPONG BLANKETS**



**CHINPONG WOMAN AND MAN LONGYIS**



**MINKYAH CHIN (or) MAYIN CHIN SHAWLS**



Asho-Chins. The common iconography of the Khamau tunic are human figures dancing hand in hand—a symbolism of unity and waving a flag by riding horse is a symbol of victory of the heroes. Additionally, birds figure represent peace and harmony. Moreover, Because of its embroidery and resist dyeing of the Khamau tunic is strikingly impressive among the Asho-Chin textiles. Variety of their textiles are shown in photo 5.

**Photo 4. Khamau Woman tunic and Man tunic**



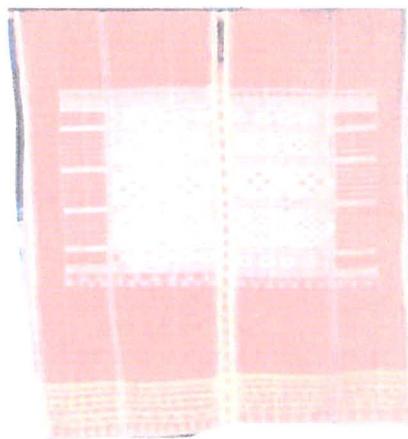
### **4.3. Kounsho**

#### **Settlement**

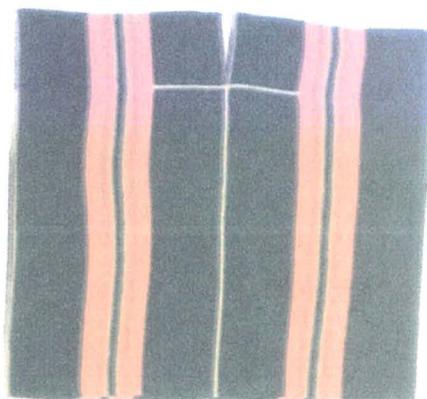
This sub-group is a complicated one. The term Kounsho is usually used by Khamau and Laytu. It represents the hill dwellers of their relatives. It means they were probably living together in the same place at one time and some families moved over to the lowland. The emigrants called the rest of their group on the hill as '*Kounsho*'. Although the earlier books categorised Khamau and Kounsho into two different sub-groups, the native people claimed that they are same group who shared one culture in the past. It will be needed further research. This research would not do explicit study on the Asho-Chins' diversification. This is very interesting for those who are willing to do ethnographic study on the Asho-Chins. The majority of Kounsho peoples now live in Nga Phe, Mindon and Minbu townships.

PHOTO 5 VARIETY OF KHAMAU TEXTILES

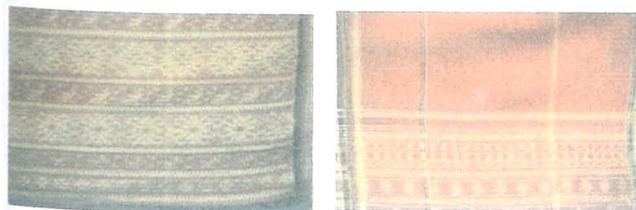
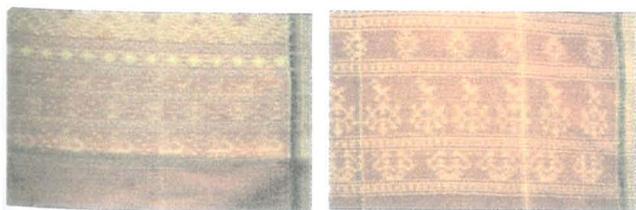
WOMAN TUNICS



MAN TUNICS



ICONOGRAPHY ON THE TUNICS (ചിത്രങ്ങൾ)



MAN LOINCLOTH



## Textiles

The textiles are extremely large, square and free-size tunic. Some tunics are plain pink colour and some backgrounds are indigo blue and two pinky silk panels can be seen symmetrically.

## Significant Symbolic Textiles

The tunic of Kounsho is the most simple among the Asho-Chin nationals. There is oval shape embroidery on the chest. But they have another textile of woman's open skirt, decorating on the both ends and the series of small flower motifs are embroidered between the both decorated woven patterns. Some variety of their textiles are illustrated in photo 7.

**Photo 6. Kounsho woman tunic and man tunic**



## 4.4. Lauktu (or Ek kai)

### Settlement

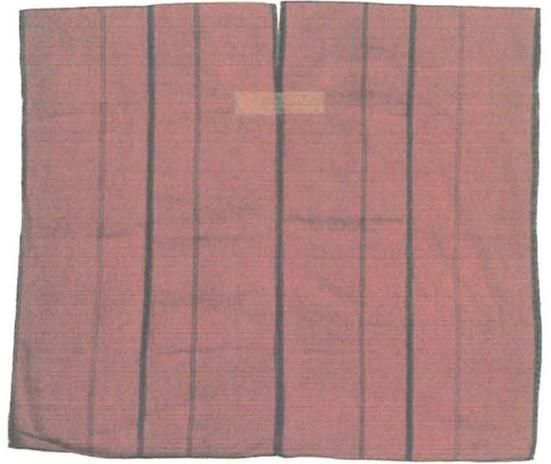
They live along the Dalet creek in Ann Township, Rakhine State. Dalet creek is called '*Lauk*' in their term and the meaning of Lauktu is people who live along the Lauk(or Dalet) creek. They are also called '*Ekkai*' by themselves. Those who inhabited at lower part of the Dalet creek have yellow skin and the Rakhines called them '*Kayin Chin*'. It becomes familiar with them and now the young generations of Lauktu often

FIGURE 7. VARIETY OF KOUNSHO TEXTILES

WOMAN TUNIC (MINDON)



WOMAN (NGAPHE)



MAN TUNIC (NGAPHE)



WOMAN HEADRESS OR SHAWL



say they belong to Kayin Chin. But in fact, they have no relationship to Kayin nationals.

### **Textiles**

The textiles of Lauktu: headband and tunic are very similar to Chinpong's. Man wears headband and tunic. The basic colour is indigo blue and the motifs are reddish silk. They accepted they were a sub-group of Chinpong. They have a few variety of textiles. (See photo 9)

### **Significant Symbolic Textiles**

Lauktu woman tunic and headband are supposed to be definitely adopted from Chinpong. Their territory lies between Chinpong and Khamau area. Looking from the region where they are inhabited in, Chinpong are in the north and northeast and Khamau are in the east and southeast. By all means, they share the woman tunic from Chinpong and man tunic from Khamau. The size of the woman's tunic is similar to Chinpong's over 100 cm long and 70-80 cm wide. But the size of the man tunic is altered, not like Khamau's square size. The length is always over 100 cm and the width is 70-90 cum. The man and woman headdress of the Chinpong and Lauktu are identical. Their ancestors may be siblings.

**Photo 8. Lauktu woman tunic and headband**

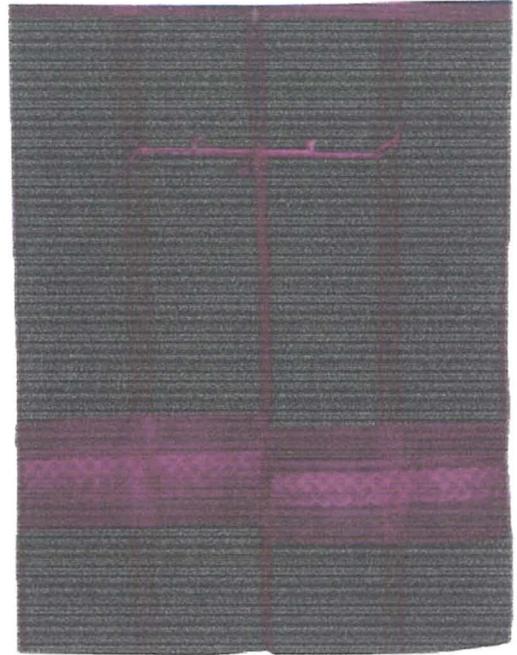


PHOTO 9. VARIETY OF LAUKTU TEXTILES

WOMAN TUNIC



WOMAN TUNIC



MAN TUNIC



#### 4.5. Laytu (or Laitu, or Doaitu)

##### Settlement

Laytu subgroup live in along the Lemyo River and its tributaries in Mrauk u township and Than Chaung, Wet Chaung, Phonthar Chaung, Panmyaunggyi Chaung, Chaung net and Yaw Chaung in Minbya township, in Rakhine State.

##### Textiles

Man and woman wear similar design and pattern of short tunic. Man tunic is bigger in size. However, men wear the tunics when only *Nat*(supernatural beings) sacrifice feast. Man has small piece of headband and beaded-web design headband. Man also uses a small loincloth. Woman wears a beautiful tunic and open plain indigo skirt covered by a hip cover textile in the back and a simple textile in the front of the skirt. The basic colour is indigo blue and the patterns are reddish silk. Reddish beads and cowrie shells are attached on the tunic. Laytu also claim they lived together in the past with Chinpong. Some of the Laytu groups are still living on the hill neighbouring to Chinpong. Linguistically, they are closely related.

The significant symbolism of the Laytu textiles will be described in the next Chapter V under the title of Ethnographic textile art of Laytu Sub-group.

#### 4.6. Sunghtu (or Sumtu)

##### Settlement

Sunghtu a sub-group in Myebon township, Ann township and Yanbye island are called *sumtu* by themselves and other sub-group of Chinpong and Asho. Myanmar and Rakhine called them Sunghtu and it was recognised and used as an official name of them. The term '*Sumtu*' means peoples who live in the farthest region near the sea.

##### Textiles

Man and woman wear different design and pattern of free-size long tunics and headbands. Man has loincloth. The design of tunic is a bit different from Myebon and Ann townships. The background color is indigo blue and the motifs are made of reddish silk. The basic motifs of the textiles are shared with Chinpong, Laytu and Lauktu. The composition and some new creation make different from the others.

### Significant Symbolic Textiles

The general layout design of the Sunghtu woman tunic can be seen as the upper part of the Laytu tunic goes undermost. The whole dimension is 80-90 cm in length and about 70 cm. The length is always longer than the width. Compare to the tunics of Khamau and Kounsho their tunic is medium size. A few of glass beads embellishments and cowrie shells are also found in the Sunghtu tunics. But it is comparatively less than Laytu tunic. In some tunics human figure iconography are also found. It could also be shared with Khamau.

The Sunghtu man tunic is a very sophisticate one, of full patterns in front and back. This is the most striking and superb textile among the Asho-Chin nationals.

**Photo 10. Sunghtu woman tunic and man tunic**



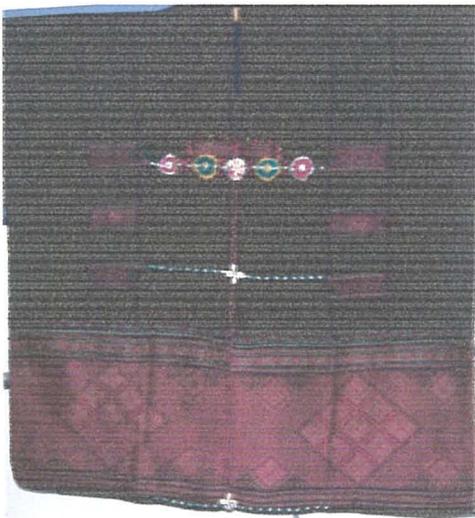
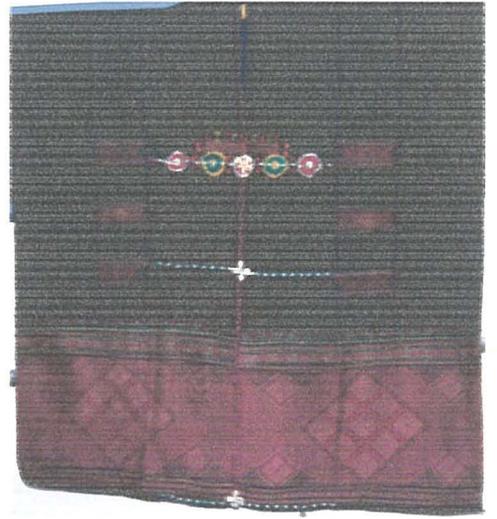
### Conclusion

The general descriptions of the ethnographic textile art of the six distinct groups of the Asho-Chinis have been here completed. The category and significant symbolic meaning were mentioned.

Almost all the Asho-Chin textiles are technically warp-faced and warp stripes are prominent. The main colour of the warp fabrics are black, indigo blue and red. The yellow, green and white colours are rarely seen in some groups. The light brown colour (*'pin ni yang'* in Burmese) comes naturally from the raw cotton. The compositions of those colours vary from one group to another. Almost all the informants said the colours

PHOTO 11. VARIETY OF SUNGHTU TEXTILES

WOMEN TEXTILES



MAN LOINCLOTH



have not so sound interpretation. But they love the red and indigo blue colour very much. The first creation colour seemed to be black and brown getting from a kind of tree bark. Later, they discovered the red from some fruits and flowers, the blue from the indigo plants and the yellow from the turmeric. They are employed on availability in their environment. The blankets of all sub-groups have very close compositions of colours.

Other weaving technique of tapestry, embroidery and embellishment created by the textiles artists make them different from the others. The dimensions of the textiles also vary from group to group.

All the above similarities and differences of the symbolic textiles define them who they are, how much they love the textiles and what extent the textile artists are skillful. The technical similarities and differences can also suggest the relationship among the sub-groups of the Asho-Chin nationals. This research kept doing ethnographic textile art through explicit study on the Laytu sub-group to be complement of this research.

## Chapter V

### Ethnographic Textile Art of Laytu Sub-group of Asho-Chin

This research has been attempted to illustrate the ethnographic textile art expressing symbolic culture of every sub-group of Asho-Chin National. However, this research was unable to be done explicit study on every sub-group. Laytu, a sub-group from six distinct groups, has been highlighted as a sample for this research. In order to perceive on the ethnographic textile art of the Laytu, through symbolic anthropological perspective, certain relevant cultural elements are discussed in this chapter.

#### 5.1. Migration of Laytu sub-group

When interviewed, the elders were able to recall their farthest migration route through the stories told by their forefathers. All the sub-groups mentioned about living at the Phokhaung Taung and Than Chaung (*Shin Chaung*). Prior to that time, the Asho ancestors supposed to be migrated together with other Chin groups from the north and east of geographical territory of Myanmar today and settled in the central Myanmar.

Initially, their common ancestors were believed to live there together and gradually dispersed to the western mountain ranges and eventually reached to the fertile low land of Rakhine State and Magwe Division by dividing into distinct groups. According to the verbal genealogical record, it could be figured out they had already been in Rakhine region for more or less 300 - 500 years.

It is certain that all the diversity of Chin tribes in the present were living together in one place and must share a single language during a course of time - prehistoric period for Chin peoples. Tedim tribes who dwelt in the far north of Chin State called themselves 'Zo' and Falam and Hakha 'Lai' - the central part of the Chin State is likely to be relation about Laytu (*Laitu* by themselves, meaning who inhabited in the middle part). So do the terms Sim - who live in the warmer and lower region in Northern Chin and Sunghtu (*Sumtu* a sub-group of Asho-Chin, who live in far south, near sea) may have relation.

#### Identification

They accept to be a sub-group of Chin nationals. Although they agree to be a sub-group of Chinpong, do not agree to be grouped under Asho subgroup. They also

have some common stories with Chinpong and they claimed living together at one time with Chinpong. Some of the Laytus are still living on the hill neighbouring to Chinpong. The term 'Chin' in their tongue is 'hieu'. Linguistically, they are closely related.

The original name of the Laytus is 'Doaitu'. Peoples who are remaining on the hill are still called *Doaitu or Kungtu* (i.e., *hill dwellers*) as well. A big group of Doaitu who had migrated to southern low land are called *Laitu* (i.e., *middle region dwellers*). The emigrant Laytu group called their relatives, remaining on the hills and now living along the *Than Chaung Creek*, 'Kungtu' or their original name, *Doaitu*. The term *Kungtu* and *Kounsho* have the same representation of hill-dwellers. It is only the variation of the pronunciation by different groups and different locality.

Those names are accepted by themselves and so do the rest of the sub-groups. So these three different names suggest their past and present relation among them. The different nomenclature based on region only refers to relocation of a certain peoples who were one group at one time. The term Laytu is addressed by Rakhine and Burmese. So, it became an official name of the group.

The majority speak very frankly and kindly. They always warmly welcome the guests of friends, relatives or strangers. The way of their thinking is always liberal. They are honest, friendly and generous.

### **Physical Appearance**

The physical appearance of the Laytus is not so different from their fellows of typical Burmese or Rakhine. Outward features of those typical Aso, Burmese and Rakhine are closely resembled. Examination by letting them speak no words will be hard for the outsiders to identify or differentiate what national they belong to. Although they speak Rakhine language since childhood, the way of their speaking is a bit different from native Rakhine.

No distinctive biological traits are found to represent the whole Aso-Chin nationals. They own black and straight hair, black eye and light brown skin. Exceptionally a few has yellow skin. Epicanthic or Mongolian fold of the eye is present in some. The average height of the men is 5 feet 4 inches and the women 5 feet 2 inches. But unusually taller than those height were seen. In general build both males and females are slim. No broad and stocky are found.

One significant appearance of old ladies is facial tattoos. Every elder over 50 has tattoos on their faces. It is illustrated in detail in the sub-title of 5.3 Tattooing. Man

has no tattoo on any part of his body.

## 5.2. Textiles of Laytu

In all societies in the past and present, peoples have been decorating or adorning their bodies with variety of textiles, ornaments and cosmetic depend on various occasions. In every simpler society in the past, textiles and ornaments played as symbolic material culture. It is believed that only the level of the technology and materials can be varied but the past idea and degree of the artistic and aesthetic value of the textiles and ornaments may not be less than the present ones.

The most distinguished symbols for Laytu identity are women's facial tattoos and embellishment of glass beads and cowrie shells on the intricate weaving of their tunics. Without those two significances, Laytu Chin would not have been revealed over the surface of the world of textiles. They had not been documented for years and even one literature had predicted them as a vanishing tribe of Myanmar.

Weaving is only women's skillful area and owning such a distinguished ornament could be considered as an object of pride. On the other hand, women's skillfulness in textile arts suggest the symbol of prosperity in the patriarchic community-that is man's obligations and activities in the economy could support the family sufficiently beyond basic biological needs in their life.

### Woman Tunic

The textiles of Laytu are significantly smaller and shorter to compare with the tunics of the rest of the Asho-Chin nationals. The general layout of the tunic is resembled to the Hakha, a Northern Chin group. The dimension is approximately 50 cm long and 40 cm wide in nearly square shape. Man and woman wear similar design and pattern of short tunic.

The background colour of the tunic is indigo blue or black and the patterns are reddish silk. Reddish glass beads and cowrie shells or buttons are embellished on the tunic. The variation of the motifs on the top half could be seen through the skillfulness of the textile artist.

The jobs done on the bottom half are also sophisticated ones. This portion can tell a lot of symbolic expressions. After finishing the weaving, the cloth is cut and joined the seams to transform a tunic. Before embellishing red glass beads and cowrie shells, the bottom half portion is still plain. The fifty percent of the plain's center portion is

symmetrically divided by two bands composed of variety of woven motifs and the division bands leave the center part of the bottom half square shape. This square shape plain sections both front and back are embellished by red glass beads. The remaining plain section between side seams and the bands are embellished with corie shells and red glass beads.

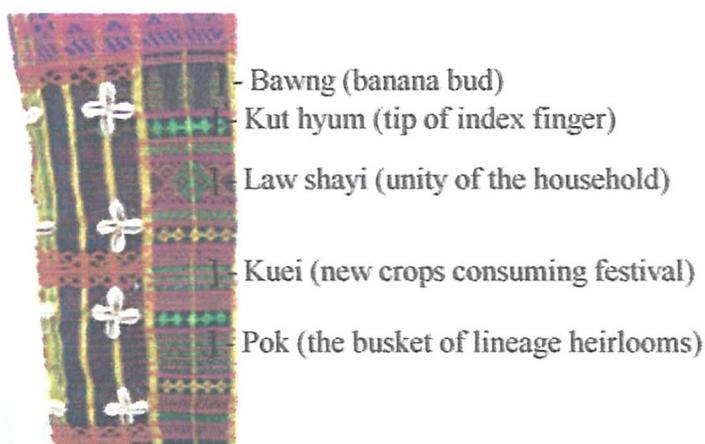
**Photo 15. Two different types of Laytu women tunic**



### **Interpretations of the motifs**

There are only four major motifs on the bottom half. The up most 3 figures on the bottom half are called (*Bawng*), representing the banana buds. It is interesting that why the banana buds play an important role in their ways of life. Doing in-depth interview give the answer that the banana bud is one of their favourite curries naturally grown in the forest. No matter how they got insufficient crop because of bad weather, they can survive eating the banana buds. The second important motif is a symbol of an extended family unit surrounding by grand parents, grand children, uncles and aunts. The third motif interprets that new crop festival held for sufficient yield of crops and the fourth one is the symbol of the basket in which save their family and lineage heirloom. The rest of the other motifs are also essential but alternate from one after another such as symbols of teeth of the dogs, chicken legs, eyes of the birds, tips of the fingers and patterns adopted from Rakhine. (See zoom up Photo 16a, for the four major motifs)

**Photo 16. Interpretation of motifs on Laytu woman tunic**



Altogether 96 cowrie shells embellished on the bottom-half are representing that wishing to be healthy and strong enough like the cowrie shells and having long life. It may have connection of amulet to be avoided from 96 kinds of diseases (၉၆ ဝါးရောဂါ) in Myanmar culture.

The red glass beads are just ornaments for looking beauty. The weaving has been sophisticated plus the embellishment of the red glass beads is more marvelous job. The workmanship of the whole tunic is stunning. It is natural that every woman love beauty and admiration by someone else. They are prestige for appraising on their workmanship by every one.

### **Woman Hip Cover**

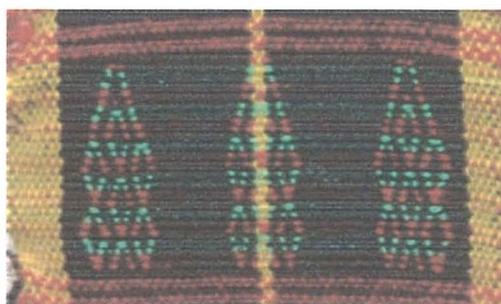
That short blouse (tunic) goes together with a short open plain indigo skirt and the back of the skirt is covered by a hip-cover textile called '*hun dap*'. Another hanging panel of any cloth getting from the market covers the front of the skirt. Those three pieces of textiles are secured by a metal belt. (See Photo 18 for interpretation of the motifs on the Laytu woman hip cover).

**Photo 17. Laytu woman hip cover**



PHOTO 16 a. INTEERPRETATIONS OF MOTIFS ON LAYTU WOMAN TUNIC

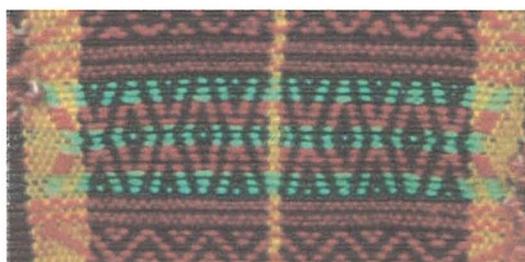
(ZOOM UP)



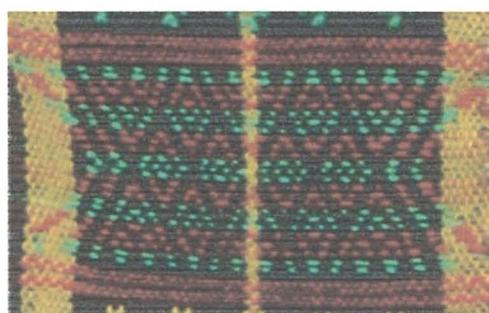
BAWNG



LAW SHAYI



KUEI



POK

PHOTO 18. INTERPRETATIONS OF MOTIFS ON LAYTU WOMAN HIP COVER



] PAMSIHSI (the seed of pumpkin)

] KUEI (new crops consuming festival)

]LAW SAHYI (unity of the household)

]KUEI (new crops consuming festival)

] PAMSIHSI (the seed of pumpkin)

] SHAK UUM (dried gourd container  
fro traditional wine)

## Man Tunic

The man's tunic is a bit longer and wider than woman's one. However, man wear tunic only in a special occasion like wedding ceremony and supernatural beings sacrificial rites. Man has small piece of headband and beaded-web design headband. Man also use a small loincloth earlier days and replaced with longyi or blanket later.

**Photo 19. Laytu man tunic**



## Blankets

In their culture, 3 different blankets namely; '*hiauh keng*', '*hiauh pum nia*' and '*hiauh ham buai*' or '*hiauh pum vai*' play an important role (See Photo 21). They suggest the distinct symbolic meaning of their culture. Every household must have at least two kinds of blankets, '*hiauh keng*' and '*hiauh pum nia*' for their any ritual and for dowry. The important role of the blankets are explained in the next sub-headings of relevant cultural elements.

## Study on the Symbolism of the Laytu Tunics

Laytu tunics have structurally two different portions. The top half portion is woven with intricate dense patterns composed of three openings for the neck and two arms. The patterns on the top half of the tunics are adopted from the patterns on the bamboo woven wall. So the name of the tunic represent house-like cloth (*khlang im*; *khlang*=dress, *im*= house). It means as if living in a house, wearing such a dress is safe from weather, comfortable and prestige. The variety of pattern composition can be found on the top half depends upon the skillfulness and creativity of the textile artists. Weaving the top half portion is the most exciting job for them. One textile artist elder recalled that when she was young, they used to compete to create more intricate and beautiful motifs and compositions among her peer group for fun.

Sometimes men can also give the good advice to create a new pattern. Because doing the bamboo matting wall and basketry is their area and they can also create significant designs. Once one was able to create new patterns were produced, the peer textile artists came and saw her weaving and admired her achievement. In the mean while, the textile artist always feels as if bearing a lovely own child. She is very proud of her new creation and the rest of the textile artists adopted the new weaving technique from her.

### 5.3. Tattooing

Facial tattooing of the women in all Asho sub-group was tradition for the puberty of the girl. The Laytu peoples regard the woman facial tattoo as a coming of age. Every girl at the age of 11 or 13 must be tattooed, only in the odd ages. At the age of nine, the girls are not coming of age yet and the skin is still too young to be tattooed and at the age of 15 and over, the skin is no more suitable to be tattooed. Only after tattooing, the girls are eligible to get marry and they received adult textiles from their mothers.

Tattoo was practiced in much of the Asia, from Himalayas to Indochina, from Hainan Island to Pacific Island, from China to Japan. Historically, tattoo was practised in Burma by a number of national races. Burmese and Shan peoples both practised tattoo but not on their faces but on the legs, arms and several parts of the body.

Northern Chins do not practice any tattoos like southern Chins. The practice of facial tattooing of the southern Chin women had a long history. There was a folklore that the elders used to tell their children and grandchildren was - since living together with Burmans at the central Myanmar, old Myanmar kings used to raid and capture the young women to get marriage. Since then the women began to tattoo their faces in order to make themselves look unattractive but later they saw themselves more attractive with facial tattoos.

So, they had practiced it for centuries and they accept that the facial tattoo is more beautiful than plain face. On the other hand, facial tattoos can be defined permanent cosmetic for them.

A child from birth to full growth wears only plain white cloth made from hand-spun cotton and simple plain weave. They have to wear the symbolic textiles mentioned above after tattooing their faces when they are coming of age.

The patterns across the Asho-Chin sub-groups vary from one group to another. It became a symbol of the group. Now the young generations abandoned the facial tattooing

custom according to the restriction of the government. The youngest women who have facial tattoos at present days are over 30-40 year-old. It suggests that they had terminated tattooing faces since 1970-80.

Although the tattoo masters are men in the rest of sub-groups, women in Laytu sub-group. This profession could not be succeeded by family line. A person who has special genius in painting is fit for tattoo master. Sometimes, in a region, only one woman has to perform this job.

### **Symbolism of the Tattoo Patterns**

The whole face is full of tattoo designs. The curve lines on the forehead are symbols of comb centered by a symbol of ring. The symbol on the nose is banana bud like on the textile of tunic. The fence of the *nat pwe* (sacrificial rite for superficial beings) is drawn on the eyelids. Both side of the cheek are decorated by the symbol of the tail-feather of the cock.

### **5.4. Economy**

The economy of the majority of the Laytu sub-group is fundamentally to fulfill the basic biological needs of a household. Since they practise extended family system, the primary social structure is a household including grandparents, parents, siblings and sometimes son's family and uncles and aunts. The usual economy of Laytu peoples are agriculture, animal husbandry, hunting, fishing and trading. The household economy is run by husband and assisted by wife. Only the husband is successful in the economy, the wife can produce more textiles.

All of their wealth has a great relation with the above economy. Their wealth means the number of buffalos and textiles they own. But among the textiles, the blankets called '*hiauh pum nia*' and '*hiauh ham buai*' have a background history. Those blankets represent the symbol of triumph in agriculture or hunting and building houses. Sometimes they receive those blankets for dowry while they are wife taker and have to transfer again to the daughter's husband family when they are wife giver.

### **Agriculture**

Prior to 19th century, they lived on the hills and practiced slash-and-burn (swidden) agriculture. They grow dry rice, vegetables and cotton to make textiles. Only human power was the main source of energy. By early 19th century they started to move

to the adjacent low land. But they are still practicing slash-and-burn cultivation for long time. Today total settlement in valleys became more common and their livelihood varied from one household to another.

They abandoned slash and burn agriculture and grow wet rice instead. They still have to grow vegetables and cotton in the low land. The main technology for wet rice agriculture inherited from the Neolithic days is still widely applicable in the most remote area. The iron ploughshare attached to the stock of the plough is harnessed to draught animals and a man would control the stock of the plough while ploughing.

The basic unit of land measure is 100 bamboos (ဝါးတစ်ရာ). 125 bamboos is equal to 1 acre. 100 bamboos paddy field normally yields 150-200 basket (တောင်း). Growing sesame and various beans is also a good income generation for some region. One basket is equal to 52 cups (condensed milk container = နို့ဆီခွက်) while 4 baskets are equal to 1 sack and it costs 1200-1500 kyats. The basket made from split rattans in the past are now replaced by the locally made of tin container equal to the one basket capacity.

### **Other Plants and Vegetables**

Apart from the wet paddy field, they grow some winter season crops on the sandbank resulting from silting after monsoon. Sesame, ground nut, garlic, onion and variety of beans are winter crops which give them great income. They also grow indigo plant for dyeing cotton yarns to be made textiles.

Additionally, another source of their income is from selling bananas. Banana buds are one of their side dish too. Banana plants are naturally growing in the forest and they used to get banana and its buds to eat. Banana is semi-long term plants and no need to take care. Sometimes normal crop yield is down they try to survive by eating banana buds. Anyway, every Laytu likes eating banana buds in general. So, now they grow banana plants, sell the banana for income generation and buds to eat.

They also grow sugar cane for considerable income. The vegetables are also grown for self consumption and the surplus can be sold to the towns.

### **Animal Husbandry**

The indigenous chicken, pigs, dogs and goats are common domestic animals for Laytu peoples. Every household must breed at least one or more domestic animals of them for any sacrificial rites. Those domestic animals are freely wandering in the village

and neighbouring pastures. Only during the rice growing season, they kept them in the shelters nearby home.

There is variation in the numbers of animals owned. Some who owns a plenty of rice field have a pair of buffaloes for draught. No cow is raised for milking. However some used to breed buffaloes for the payment of bride price, exchanging with blankets from the family of bride or sacrificial offerings where still practising animism. The highest sacrificial animal is white buffalo usually bought from the Rakhines.

### **Hunting**

Killing a big wild animal in hunting, a blanket called '*hiauh pum nia*' is woven by the hunter's wife and the hunter wears the blanket during the triumph feast is held. Hunting is now rare because of restriction of holding guns permission by the government. The another reason for terminating the hunting is that the numbers of game are getting less and less because of crowded population and extended farm lands. But some hunters can still catch games by trapping. Different kind of traps are used depend on the type of prey. When crops get ripe, they catch more barking deer, wild boar and even sambur. Wild elephants are still wandering on the Rakhine mountain ranges and they are totally prohibited to kill. Sometimes they may invade the destroy paddy fields.

### **Forest Products**

People who do not have any land and animals have to work searching forest products. This is not only the husband work. Sometimes the whole family goes along with the husband and they spend all of their time in the forest and on the river. The major forest products of Laytu people are bamboo and firewood from the jungle. They have to go up the river and creek for weeks. Today, most of the Laytu got money from the merchants of the town in advance for bamboo and firewood. They go up the river the whole year round, back and forth, by chopping down the bamboos and the branches of the trees for firewood. They have to build bamboo-raft composed of over 50 000 - 80000 pieces of bamboos and rafting down the river. The price of the 100 pieces of bamboo is 3000-5000 kyats and 100 pieces of firewood is 250-300 kyats.

In the lower region where near the sea, Kanni Laytu have nipa palm (*dhani*) plantations. They make '*dhani*' thatch roofs and sell to the towns often as far as Sittwe. The price of the 100 stitched '*dhani*' palm leaf flaps is 1500-2000 kyats.

A certain fraction of their income is used to buy cotton and silk. Their wives

have to weave textiles when they are free from their work especially in summer time.

### **Trade and Wage Earning**

In the past, they had trading relation with Rakhine and Myanmar civilization. They got silk yarn from Myanmar traders and Rakhine traders as well.

Today, some Laytus are doing trading. They sell some of their surplus product of rice, sesame and beans and buy again cotton yarns and chemical dyes.

But some relocated villages because of the insurgency last 30 years ago have no land to grow and they had to work as carpenter or hard labour for daily wages in the town. They usually earn 1500-2000 kyats per day.

### **Handicraft**

Those who are skillful in any handicraft can live on their products. The blacksmiths, wood craftsman are not permanent profession in Laytu but who have special genius for such handicraft can earn extra income on one's individual request.

Some go up the rivers, chop down the bamboo and make bamboo mat. Currently, the prices of a bamboo mat 10 feet x 5 feet is 1000-1300 kyats.

The Yaw Chaung Laytus still practice weaving and wearing their traditional ways of textiles. The area where they live in was formerly remote area, but now the road to Yangon from Sittwe pass through their region and they can earn money from selling their textiles. Weaving textiles is sometimes a good income generation in summer for a good weavers. Experience makes each textile artist able to create subtle variations that reflected her own artistic personality.

### **5.5 Housing Pattern**

Today, the houses at the plains in Rakhine State are not so different from Rakhine houses. All the housing materials are bamboo products, tree trunk or bamboo posts, bamboo matting wall, bamboo slat plank, '*dhani*' thatch roof. The houses are built in one story but the posts must usually be high enough for a man can stand on the ground under the floor. The richer families build wooden houses in every village. The wooden house posts are higher than the bamboo posted houses.

In both houses, the ground is used as a living room in the summer and the high post protect from the flood in rainy season. The weaving looms are usually placed on the ground level. Two posts are joined with a wooden or bamboo bar and it is used as

warp beam for the loom. They got leisure time after harvesting in the winter and earlier summer. This is the time to begin weaving textiles. If the weaving looms are placed inside the house, any wooden or bamboo frame of the window is used as a warp beam.

The kitchen is essentially separated or extended room from the main house for fire protection. The majority of houses usually have no doors but some have for the security reason. A bamboo matting wall or a big blanket partition divides the rooms; one for parents' master bed room and the rest one is common bed room at night and living room at day time. Their treasure of textiles are kept in the big baskets with the lids and placed in the parents' room.

They have no definite fence for every house. Some families who raise fowls and goats have fences for their domestic animals. Some indigo plants for textile dyeing are grown in the garden back of the house.

### **The Highest Social Status Symbolised by Building Bamboo-Bulk up House**

The highest social status is defined by building a bamboo-bulk up house called '*Yawpok imm*' (ဝါးစည်အိမ်). The bamboo-bulk up house means a number of bamboos were bulk up and secured by split rattans and erected as a house posts. The dimension of the house is about 20ft x 20ft, with 12 posts.

The reason for building of the '*Yawpok imm*' is in order to reveal the symbol of prosperity. Originally, they are already rich enough to live in a wooden house while the majority of the normal villagers live in dhani thatch roofs. At the moment of building the wooden house, he held a big dedication. But building the '*Yawpok imm*' is more prestigious rather than building wooden house in which they are permanently living right now. After building the '*Yawpok imm*' they live in that new house for only one year and the '*Yawpok imm*' has to be dismantled again.

Fundamentally, '*Yawpok imm*' builders come from a lineage that higher social stratification. Every generation has responsible to build those houses to maintain their social status. So, they have to prepare for about ten years to build such a '*Yawpok imm*'. The building procedure starts from chopping down the bamboo, collecting the cane, splitting the wood, and erecting the posts. Every step of the procedure is associated with rituals including animal sacrifice.

The first procedure to start the building of '*Yawpok imm*' started with chopping down the bamboos followed by chopping down the rattan and wood, associated with animal sacrificial rite such as pigs and goats. The highest sacrificial rite has to be held

when splitting the log woods symmetrically half by half. The wood is only used for the post plates.

When started preparing to build the *'Yawpok imm'* house, a significant blanket *'hiauh pum vai'* or *'hiauh ham buai'* has to be started weaving simultaneously by the house-wife. The end of the building and weaving must be done at the same time. The preparation period would take time. But the actual constructing the house; from the erecting the post to roofing must be finished in one day in order to show their unity. The measurement of the blanket depends on the mithun (ခွာ:နော့ကံ) they would kill in the first day of the house dedication. The blanket must be big enough to cover the dead body of the mithun. The number of the blanket to be woven also depends on the number of the mithun. Every mithun has to be covered with a blanket. If the number of mithun is two, two blankets must also be woven.

After the first day of house dedication, the owner has to wear the blanket in prideful. This is a symbol of prestige. On the other hand wearing the blanket express he came to the throne of prosperity. His counterparts also bring their blankets for the symbolism of their prestige. They also bring pigs and altogether in such a house dedication over 30 heads of pigs are usually killed and the dedication lasts for 7 days.

Today, some ordinary peoples who can afford to build such a house but they can not get the social status like the usual family.

## 5.6. Marriage System

The textiles play an important role in the marriage system of Laytu sub-group. Again, marriage system and kinship system has interrelation. So, before discussing about the marriage system, kinship system of Laytu will be described first.

The Laytu Chins practice patrilineal kinship system. The children in each generation belong to the kin group of their fathers. Every Laytu can recite their genealogical chain from five to over ten generations of their ancestors. The kinship system includes people related both by descent and marriage.

The social structure of kinship in Laytu is based on lineage. The primary social structure is family and beyond the immediate family is lineage. The lineage elder is authoritative upon his kin members. This lineage structure could be defined as a basic political unit.

## **Courtship**

Customarily, the Laytus practise prefixed marriageable partners through kinship consistency. The youths are not free to fall in love each other. But the customary law tolerates the young men and women to choose their spouse. Accordingly, they practice two different modes of marriage; free search by courtship and definiteness by kinship.

The Laytu girls must compulsorily have facial tattoos on their coming of age and receive textiles woven in advance for them by their mothers. Likewise, when the boys reach puberty age, usually 12 to 14, they have to go to the dormitory, a separate building only for young men. They have to stay there at night time.

The dormitory is managed by one of the eldest youths. He acts as a leader among them. Every evening, he has to make an arrangement for the boys to visit the girls alternatively. The youth can visit neighbouring villages vice versa. The leader has to manage for the guest youth. The youth leader has to always wear a headband to be easily distinguished by the strangers.

Premarital sex is not strictly prohibited by the customarily law. But practice of the premarital sex is rare. When visiting to the girls, boys must help the girls spinning of the cotton or preparation of weaving. A boy has to go alone or sometimes with friends depends on their relationship. If they have already been fallen in love each other, the girl usually weaves the textiles for the boy. Only the lovers can meet every night. If a girl is a good reputation of beauty and hospitality every young man wants to visit her and the youth have to be there alternately one group after another in a single evening. Normally, every visit takes only one to two hours until midnight.

## **Traditional Education**

The dormitory is not only the place for merely sleeping for the young boys to practice courtship but also the education center for learning social obligation from the elder youths. The elder boys passed on their experience to the new comers of contemporaries from the way of wearing textiles in the special occasion to the way of maintaining the textiles, from the way of building house to hunting wild animals, and from the way of wooing a girl to maintaining the unity in their community. Courtship and achievement in love affair make them mental maturity. This is also the place where building self confidence for the young boys. After living a course of period in dormitory, they become brave even to face the enemies in the battle field or wild animals in the forests. They are eager to obtain the triumph symbol of textiles

The Laytu young women are brought up under guardian of the parents and boys by the guidance of their elder brothers and fellows in the dormitory where they start to learn their traditional education and customary laws. For the girls, traditional education is taught by their mothers; spinning the cotton yarns, weaving textiles, child care, farm work and house work.

### **Formal Education**

Today, though the formal education is widely practised across the country, the majority of the Laytu youth end their education in the primary level. The reason they give most is the middle school are far from their place and they have to work for the family subsistence. The number of graduate youth would not be more than 10 persons. They still practice early marriage rather than going to school.

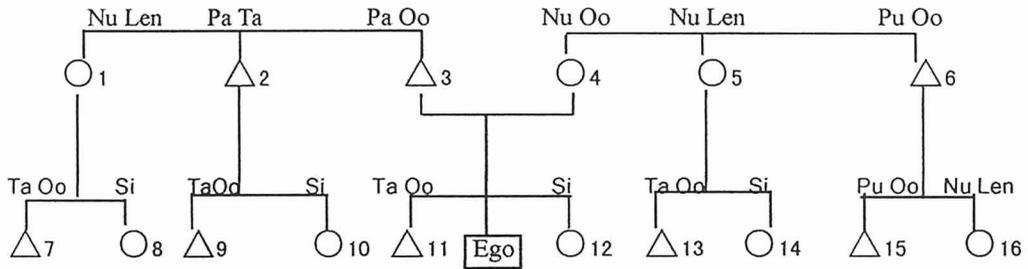
They are bright and intelligent. If they go to the higher level of school it is sure that they will be successful. But only a few youths of Laytu and Lauktu go to school and get higher degree. More Chinpong, Sunghtu, Khamau and Kounsho young people have awareness of the importance of the education.

### **Marriage circle and blanket cycle**

According to the marriageable category, cross-cousin marriage is ideal model of marriage mode. The parents make engagements between two families since the children were childhood. They practise patrilineage in kinship system and exogamy in marriage system. Accordingly, cross-cousin marriage is customarily exogamous.

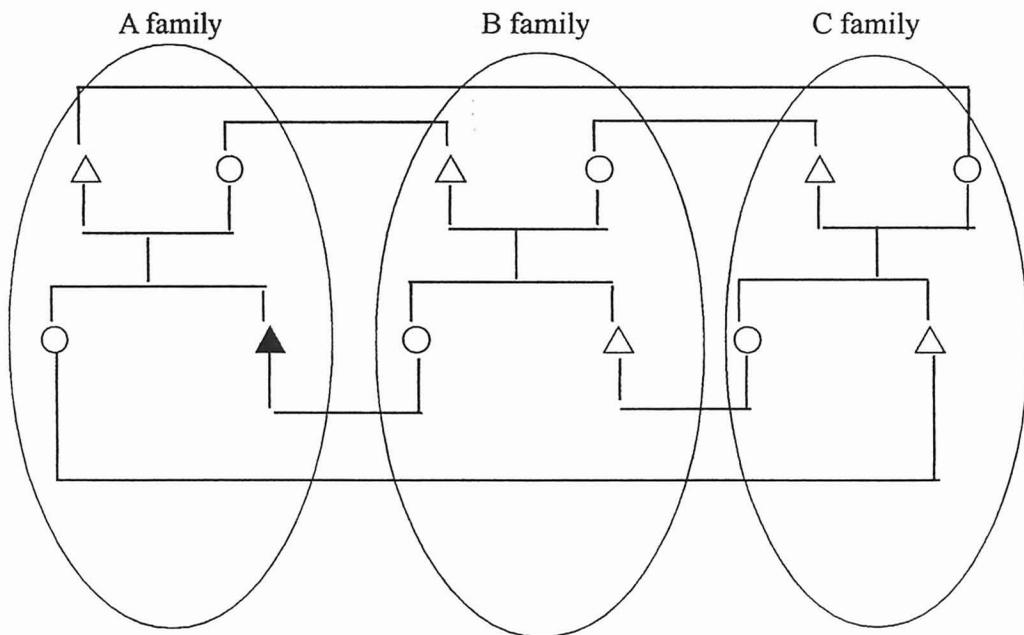
For instance, (See table 3) Ego from 'A family' must get married his mother's brother's daughter of 'B family' while Ego's sister will marry with her father's sister's son from 'C family'. The wife from 'B family' and the husband from 'C family' must be siblings and their children will follow cross-cousin marriage. Likewise, they set up a marriage circle of at least among three families. According to this marriage rule of Laytu, a customary law is activated. This is what ego's parents became inferior status and his parents-in-law are superior in social status. Simultaneously, each family is superior over one family and inferior to another in the marriage circle. The inferior status family has to present blankets to the superior status family in every event, from engagement ceremony to death ceremony. Every prominent feast, they have to exchange spear or gong from the superior status family and blankets from the inferior status family. In those ways, the blankets go around cycle among the marriage circle.

**Table 2. The Laytu Kinship Terminology System**



- △ = male
- = female
- ┌──┐ = Sibling
- └──┘ = marriage

**Table 3. The Illustration of Laytu Marriage Cycle**



### **Marriage by Engagement**

Ego's parents have to visit with a rice wine pot when their potential daughter-in-law is about to bear. If the born child is a girl they held a small ceremony as an engagement for their son and handed a gong and a spear for a pre-marriage payment of bride price. The parents of the daughter give back them any textile (blanket or shawl) and necklace for showing agreement. That is why here the textiles are essential for the structure of the community and for a function of the customary law. On the other hand such an exchange of gifts suggests the symbol of the marriage system of the Laytu sub-group.

### **Patrilocal and Monogamy**

The time to get marriage is set by the age seniority of the siblings. But the definite age - good to marry is not fixed. It depends on the male's career and success. After marriage, they have to live with male's family patrilocally and try to build a new house in two to three years and move there in neolocal.

Fundamentally, Laytu are monogamous. But Polygamy is not strictly forbidden. Marriage means maintaining the genealogy in a culture especially who practise patrilineage kinship system. So, in case of bearing no son, the husband is allowed to get marry a second or third wife until at least a son's born. If a wife wants to divorce or does any fault, her husband has no responsibility to return the dowry blankets. In some case, even the first wife makes arrangement for her husband's new wife. But some Laytu men who want to have a lot of children can get marry wives more than one simultaneously.

### **Wedding Ceremony**

Wedding ceremony is usually held in the open season. After harvesting and new crops consuming festival, they are free from the daily routine work. The arrangement is led by male family. The first day of marriage started with exchanging the bride price and the dowry. The boy's family brings gongs, spears, sword to the girl's house. They first drink the traditional grain wine (ခေါင်ရည်).

After receiving the payment of bride price, the girl's parents give the boy's parents some blankets in return as dowry. In Laytu custom, the bride price and the dowry must be in balance reciprocate. Accordingly, the numbers of blankets given to the boy's parents from the girl's parents depend on the number of buffalos they would kill on the wedding reception. One buffalo is equal to two blankets in the past. In the present day, they calculate for the equal value of exchanging of the bride price and dowry and payment

are replaced with money tentatively.

The first day of wedding reception is held in the female's house and male family took their newly daughter-in-law home. The next day, a greater reception was held in the male's house. Killing animals, drinking rice wine and dancing and singing conducted by the chief shaman and his followers. During the chief shaman say praying in front of the newly-wed couples, both sides of fathers have to wear headdress as a symbol for blessing.

## **5.7. Child Care**

### **Maternity**

The pregnant woman has to work her daily routine farm and house work until giving birth to her child. Maternity cloth is bigger size of usual tunic without embellishment of beads and cowrie shells. Sometimes pregnant women wear the longyi more upward.

Both sides of parents get together on the due date to be born child and the pregnant woman's parents have to bring along some shawls to wrap around the baby. This type of shawl is specially woven with loosely spinning cotton yarns so that soft enough for the baby. They are waiting by preparing a rice wine and sacrificing a chicken. Then, they look the lower jaw of the Chicken and predict for the future life for the infant. If the chicken jaw is too wide, it is not good omen and only the narrow angle of the chicken jaw predicts the future life of the born child will be successful. Her mother and local birth attendant enter the maternity room and take care for giving birth to the baby. Husband is allowed to enter maternity room for any assistance in Laytu sub-group, but in some groups not. When born the baby, the umbilical cord was cut a thin bamboo strip rather than iron knife. The new born infant and mother have to be care taken by her mother.

### **Naming Practice**

The new born child is immediately given a name by his or her father. They believe that otherwise, the supernatural beings can catch the child's soul and the child may get sick or even die. Naming festival is done after one week of birthday. The baby's mother's mother brings a shawl or blanket of '*hiau h keng*' to carry the baby.

### **Baby Sitting**

Since the ways of life of the Laytus are still simple, every family has at least 3-5

children. In breast feeding period, mother carries along with her baby by wrapped around with a simple baby carrying blanket, '*hiauh keng*'. In this position the baby can be moved her back or front. When breast feeding the baby is moved to her front and while working house work returned to her back securing in the blanket. This blanket is not important for the festival or for any occasion. But the function of this blanket is superb though it's simple in structure. Without this blanket, mother can do nothing of her housework. It has no patterns, often plain or two colour stripes; white and brown or red black and red.

After the breast-feeding period, the baby has to be care taken by older sisters in descending order. Not by older brothers. The baby is carrying along on the back of he or her sister by round wrapped by baby carrier blanket. In the village, every same age of young girls has to be care takers of their younger children. They may be wandering around the village or place the baby on the ground and play underneath the trees. The babies are much more rapidly developing in standing, walking and speaking. Sometimes babies are taken care by the grandmothers and neighbours when the elder sisters have other assignments by their parents.

## 5.8. Festivals

Unlike the Northern Chin groups, they have no record of war history between inter-groups and neighbouring tribes and slavery practice. So, they have no war victory related festival. They have a significant festival of wedding ceremony, the new crop consuming festival, 100 baskets grains yield festival, killing a big wild animal festival such as tiger, bear and even elephant in the past, and new bamboo-bulk up house (*Yawpok imm'* = ဝါးစည်အိမ်) dedication. Funeral ceremony is usually held like a festival. In every victory festival the blankets play an important role. Symbolic textiles are woven; for 100 baskets grains yield festival a blanket of '*hiauh keng*', for killing a big wild animal '*hiauh pum nia*' and for the house '*yawpok imm'* '*hiauh pum vai*'. (See Photo 21)

### New Crops Consuming Festival

The new crop consuming festival is usually held in five days after harvesting. This festival may be the biggest one that all villagers participate in the festival. There is no host and guest. Mostly it occurs in October around the full moon day of *thadinkyut* in Myanmar calendar in the past when they practice shifting cultivation. Now the harvesting time is November and December. After that, the new crop consuming festival is held.

When harvesting is finished the shaman is invited to come to the farm for praying.

He brings along the textile of woman's head dress called *lukhu* (See Photo 14). This headdress is only used for harvesting time and wedding ceremony. The last crops are piled on the ground covered by the head dress. Then the shaman starts to pray for thanks giving and ask for a good yield of crops in the next season like present year, if it is good this year. If not, he prays for the apologizing to the earth owner and sky owner and rain owner that the next year yield would not be like this year.

Here again, in harvesting ceremony is being held the harvested crops were covered with the headdress and the shaman pray for thanks giving and ask good crop yield in the next season like present year. So the headdress plays an important role for their symbol of this festival.

### **Funeral Ceremony**

When a person dies, the dead body is first cleaned with water and laid on the bamboo mat. Then, the textiles he or she likes best when she was alive were put on and the dead body is covered by a blanket called '*hiauh pum nia*'. This is the most important blanket to cover the dead body. That's why every household must necessarily own at least one. Those who can afford have two or more. For a couple they share the blanket half by half which is about 15 feet long. Those who die first use the half and the rest of half is kept for the spouse still alive.

They are holding parting ritual - man for 5 days and woman for 3 days is compulsory. In order to reveal their love and prosperity, his or her lineage members have to bring their textiles or any cotton yarn and piling on the corpse or hanging over the corpse. This performance also refers a symbol of the unity and prosperity among the lineage they belong to and showing their affection on the deceased person. No other lineage members are necessarily to do so.

The rich as mentioned earlier who can build wooden house or bamboo bulk-up house have to hold funeral rite every day prior to cremation. The host is responsible to kill the animals and to serve the guests with traditional grain wine (*zu*). Relatives come from afar have to stay overnight. All the guests have to dance while playing musical instruments; drums, gongs and cymbals.

The eve of the cremation expelling the devil ritual is done on the courtyard in front of the house at midnight. The reason to carry out this rite is to drive out the devil from the village which cause the host dead. When the music group starts playing, a man has to dance wearing like a devil. The dancer is particularly professional. They are

needed to pay certain amount of money for the ritual depends on the host's wealth. The dancer's body is wrapped around with a certain '*hiauh keng*' (See Photo 21) blankets and the face is covered by a wooden mask look like devil.

As soon as this ritual gets started, some two or three young men go around every house and collected a fistful of rice with basket. To avoid the dancer exhausted, each of the young man has to set out different direction and take cares different section of the village respectively. When they return they throw out the rice to the devil dancer. While doing so by the young men the shaman prays to eradicate the devil of disease which cause the person die. The audiences continue to drink rice wine and dance the whole night. Finally, when the devil dancer pretends to fall down and die, the ritual is over.

### **Cremation**

In the next morning when the sun rises, people carry the dead body to the place outside of the village where prepared for the cremation. Under the bamboo mat 7 split thin bamboo stripes for man and 6 for woman are placed so that the dead body can be easily transported to the cremation site. They use no wooden coffin. The split bamboos are loosely woven to be long and big enough to cover the dead body. It almost looks like a mesh cover. Traditionally, the cremation takes place 4th day after death. A number of firewood is piled systematically lined and crossed level by level; 6 level for woman and 7 level for man. The dead body is put on top of the pile of firewood with the textiles and set fire. When cremation is over, the ashes are collected within terracotta. No specific pottery is made for the urn, ordinary water pottery or traditional rice wine pottery can also be used for it.

The whole villagers have to participate in the ritual from the beginning to the end. When the urn is brought back to home, it was placed in the small urn house; like a '*nat*' shrine (နတ်တံခွန်); four poles, roofing, flooring but without wall, built nearby house. The urn is covered by a terracotta lid and decorates with the deceased person's dress. The urn is kept there for a month or a year and sent to the mountain where the urns are used to be placed. Their forefathers used to live in the north at one time and migrated to the south and they still maintain the custom of sending back the urns to the north in present day. The night before the day of sending back of the urn they celebrate departing feast.

## 5.9. Religious Beliefs

Although some Laytus have now converted to Buddhist and Christian, a few are still practising animism in remote area. Accordingly, in a region at least a shaman is essential for every ritual and festival from birth to death. All the ritual conducted by the shaman is always associated with textiles.

They believe in non-human origin of supernatural beings such as gods and spirits who governed the earth, forest and mountain, fields and crops, sea water, air and rain. The next less belief is set on the human origin supernatural beings of ghosts and ancestral spirits. For the latter ones every adult family member can do any offering and worship by themselves. But for a big case needed to take place animal sacrificing, only the shaman can conduct the rites such as, curing the sick, growing and harvesting, house dedication and funeral ceremony.

Shaman had to wear the tunic similar to the women's one and '*hiauh pum nia*' (See Photo 21) a special blanket during the whole ritual. Being a shaman is not a family line succession. But the sons of shaman are also able to take part of apprentice. Those who would like to be a shaman can learn from the great shaman. Those novices have not to attend every ritual. Only the major feasts the shaman performs with his followers.

### Health and Curing System

In Laytu Chin community, there is a shaman who care takes the people's health. The shaman could diagnose all the pains, infections and diseases caused by devil spirits. It needs to be extracted the bad spirit. If it is not serious case, starts with killing a chicken and diagnose by looking the lower jaw of the chicken. Prediction of fortune or misfortune by chicken lower jaw is common in Laytu's every event.

The chicken blood is mixed with alcohol and the sick must drink it. In some cases, the sick suffered from malaria are iron deficiency and after drinking chicken blood, he or she recovers in two days and the shaman is more recognised by his people. If it does not work, dog, goat, pig and buffalo are needed in ascending order. Sometimes, the sick may recover soon because of their strong belief.

Whenever sacrificial animal is killed the blanket '*hiauh keng*' is used to cover the dead body of the animal while the shaman is saying the prayer. In this way, the textile plays an important role to cure the sick.

### 5.10. Heirloom and Inheritance

In Laytu culture, heirlooms are preserved by the lineage elders and handed down from generation to generation. The most important heirlooms of the lineage include a gong, a spear, a necklace, two bronze bowls and one bronze spoon. Among the lineages, a person who wants to celebrate any festival have to take and use in the festival and keep until one takes from him to have a celebration or return them to the lineage elder.

An affluent person in Laytu community is defined by the number of buffaloes, blankets and variety of gongs he owns. Those properties are customarily essential for the bride price and dowry. As mentioned earlier sub-heading of marriage, male family have to give buffaloes, gongs and spears to the wife giver family as a bride price. In return, they will receive some textiles particularly blankets '*hiauh keng*' (See Photo 21) as a dowry. The families who have a lot of sons and daughters must get ready for bride price and dowry for their children. Textiles are inheritance handed to their children by parents in every family. The family inheritance is usually complete set of textiles for their children given by parents when they got marriage. Bride price and dowry go to the parents and textiles for their own

The most important inheritances are all those properties plus house and farms owned by the parents. All those properties are inherited by the heir of the family. In Laytu custom, the eldest son and youngest son are eligible. But not strongly defined the biggest or the youngest one. It depends on the situation of the parents' wealth and economic situation of their son's. One of them can get all or both can be shared in a certain proportions through compromise of three party conferences presiding by father.

### Conclusion

Among the six distinct groups of Asho-Chin nationals, the ethnographic textile art of the Laytu sub-group has been illustrated through symbolic cultural perspective. It covers their culture from migration to the modern day. The functions and roles of their textiles have been discussed in every relevant cultural element.

## Conclusion and Recommendation

This research has been done under the title of '*Ethnographic Textile Art Expressing the Symbolic Culture of Asho-Chin Nationals*'. As mentioned in the 'Introduction' - aims and objectives to reveal the root of the textile art of Asho-Chin sub-groups, the process of making a textiles, the meaning of the motifs and functions of the textiles, the technical similarities and differences of the textiles among the six distinct groups of the Asho-Chin nationals have been explored. A specific academic research will be needed in order to trace back the origin and being widespread of textile art among the Chin including Asho-Chin sub-groups.

The research findings are mentioned chapter by chapter. The Chapter I has expressed that certain existing literature evidences on Asho-Chin textiles. Basically studying on symbolic meanings and functions of the textile art, this research has been done to reveal the diversification of Asho-Chin sub-groups and their textiles.

The preset research methods had been effectively employed. Pretest of data collection was carried out with some Asho-Chin elders who are living in Yangon. The research was started in August 2008 and ended in March 2009. It includes literature review, pretest in Yangon and personal interviews in Yangon and empirical field work.

Firstly, this research has tried to reveal the historical background of Chin and Asho-Chin nationals through literatures and personal interviews in Chapter II. In order to verify or classify the grouping of Asho and Chinpong (See table 1) will need further research through diversity of linguistics of '*Sho*'.

The original of hand woven textile art and general account on ethnographic textile were expressed in detail in Chapter III. From the original of hand woven textile to Layout designs, processes, role of the textiles were discussed. Almost all the Asho-Chin textiles are technically warp-faced and warp stripes are prominent. The main colour of the warp fabrics are black, indigo blue and red. The yellow, green and white colours are rarely seen in some groups. The light brown colour ('*pin ni yaung*' in Burmese) comes naturally from the raw cotton. The compositions of those colours vary from one group to another.

Other weaving technique of tapestry, embroidery and embellishment created by the textiles artists make them different from the others. The dimensions of the textiles also vary from group to group.

All the above similarities and differences of the symbolic textiles define them

who they are, how much they love the textiles and what extent the textile artists are skillful. The technical similarities and differences can also suggest the relationship among the sub-groups of the Asho-Chin nationals.

In Chapter IV, the general descriptions of the ethnographic textile art of the six distinct groups of the Asho-Chins were illustrated according to the existing literature. The category and significant symbolic meaning were mentioned. Additionally, the variety of textiles in each group was illustrated.

This research has discovered that some existing literature did misinterpretation on category of the Asho-Chin sub-groups and their textiles, mainly on Chinpong, Khamau and Kounsho. The existing literature mentioned Chinpong as a single sub-group. When interviewed, Chinpong and his other relatives were discovered; Mayin or Lonepaw, Minkyah and Thaugthu. The Minkyah woman tunic was mistakenly named as Chinpong. This research has been done merely based on textiles art and devoted to accomplish its aims and objectives. However further explicit linguistic survey will be needed to verify the group's name and their textiles.

This research kept doing ethnographic textile art through explicit study on relevant cultural elements the Laytu sub-group. The textiles play an important role in certain elements of their culture. The only one to be prestigious for the Asho-Chin women is their textiles. It will be needed a period of time to resume the practical skills of handloom. Asho-Chin textiles, in particular, textiles of Laytu sub-group have unique and sophisticated in terms of weaving technique. It takes time to be skillful. So the young generations find little interest to learn handloom technique. However, textile is perishable and native peoples could not conserve their original textiles for over 100 years. They are now starting to lose the textiles and technical know-how as well.

Accordingly, consultation to the peoples of textile artists that how to take over the challenges of modern technology, maintain the handspun cotton spinning, vegetable dyes, hand-woven technology and traditional ways of culture were done by the researcher. On the other hand, guidelines were given them how to get income generation by their traditional way of weaving technology so that their ways of life would be get more developed than earlier through maintaining their culture.

### The list of informants

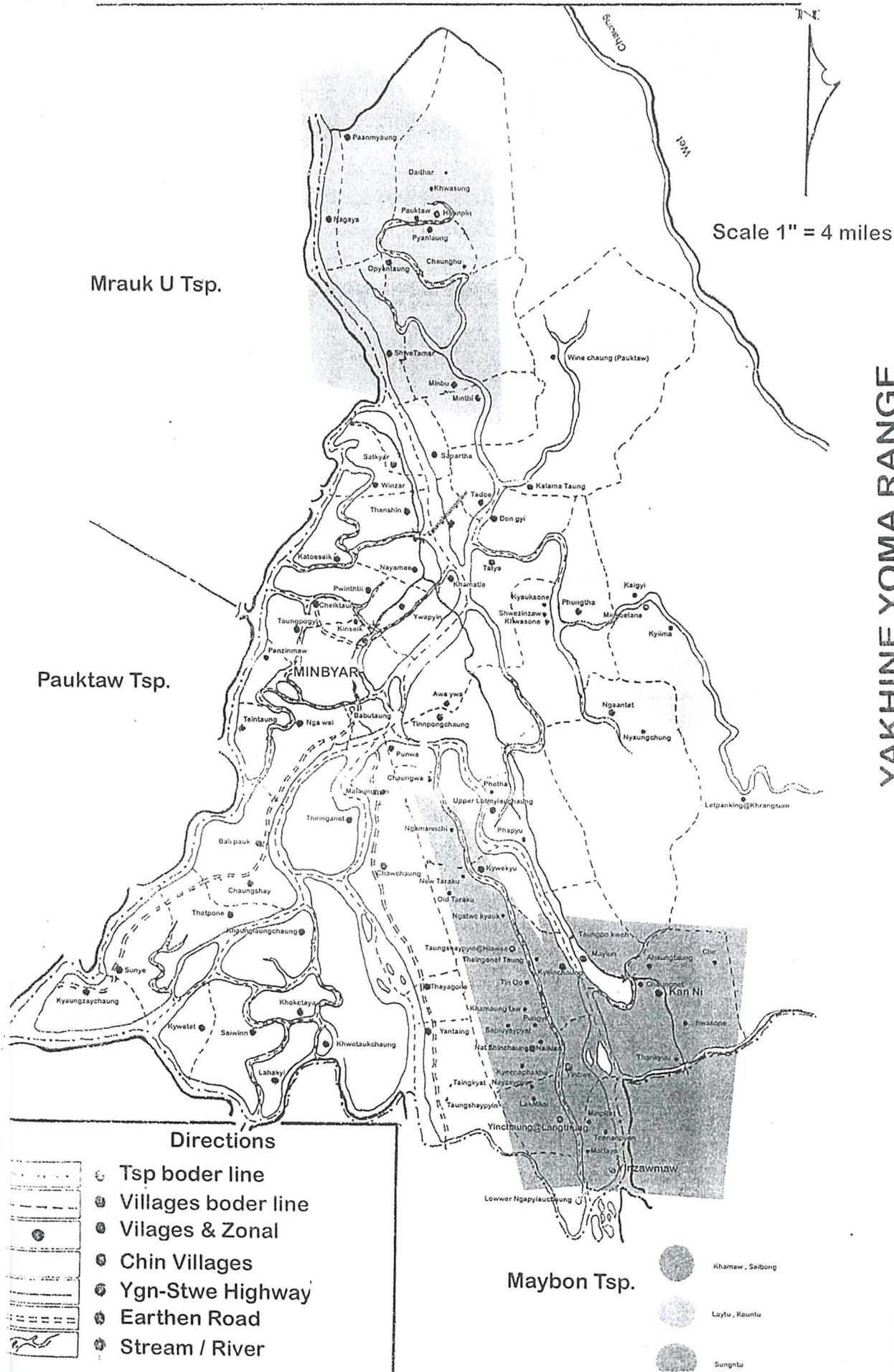
1.	Rev. Aung Saw	77	Reverend (Asho-Chin Baptist Church)	Insein
2.	Salai Tun Hlaing	74	Chin State Education Officer (Rtd)	Insein
3.	U San Tun	73	BEHS, Headmaster (Rtd) (Sunghtu)	Minbya
4.	Daw Koih Poeng	62	Textiles artist (Kyunnyo, Laytu)	Minbya
5.	U Myint Swe	46	Farmer (Kungtu or Doaitu)	Minbya
6.	U Hla Maung	42	Christian Pastor (Chinpong, Laytu area)	Minbya
7.	U Phwe Mana	40	Christian Pastor (Yaw Chaung area)	Minbya
8.	U Than Maung,	29	Student (Lauktu area)	Minbya
9.	Daw Wang Un	80	Textile artist (Phonthar Laytu)	Setiyan vlg.
10.	Daw Shing Ke	72	Textile artist (Phonthar Laytu)	Setiyan vlg.
11.	U Liea Tsung	45	Farmer (Phonthar Laytu)	Setiyan vlg.
12.	Daw Sein Thong	32	Textile artist (Phonthar Laytu)	Setiyan vlg.
13.	Daw Bok Dai	54	Textile artist (Kanni Laytu)	Phethapyin
14.	Daw Bok Phong	78	Textile artist (Kanni Laytu)	Chaungnet
15.	U Maunglai	82	Shaman (Sunghtu)	Zinyawmaw
16.	Daw Mayma	70	Textile artist (Sunghtu)	Zinyawmaw
17.	U Thaukkya	53	Village headman (Sunghtu)	Zinyawmaw
18.	Daw Malan	80	Textile artist (Sunghtu)	Natshing
19.	U Thein Maung	35	Baptist pastor (Kounsho)	Ngaphe
20.	U Thein Tun Oo	51	Textile dealer (Chinpong)	Setoktaya
21.	U Ngame She	73	Lineage leader (Khamau or Saibong)	Thahtegone
22.	U Maung yin	60	Village headman (Khamau or Saibong)	Thahtegone
23.	U Mana Hleih	35	Christian Pastor	Lemyo area
24.	U Daniela	30	Textile dealer	Lemyo area

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 1968            Union of Myanmar: Sarpay Beithman.  
                   - ပြည်ထောင်စုမြန်မာနိုင်ငံ တိုင်းရင်းသားယဉ်ကျေးမှုရိုးရာဓလေ့ထုံးစံများ (ချင်း)
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 1979



# MAP 2. MINBYA TOWNSHIP



Scale 1" = 4 miles

Mrauk U Tsp.

Pauktaw Tsp.

YAKHINE YOMA RANGE

Maybon Tsp.

### Directions

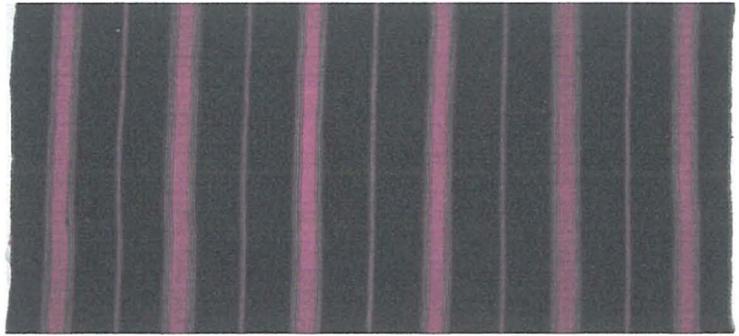
- Tsp border line
- Villages border line
- Villages & Zonal
- Chin Villages
- Ygn-Stwe Highway
- Earthen Road
- Stream / River

- Khamaw, Saibong
- Laytu, Keuntu
- Sungntu

PHOTO 12. SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES OF THE ASHO-CHINS' BLANKETS

CHINPONG BLANKET

(l = 235 cm, w = 121 cm)



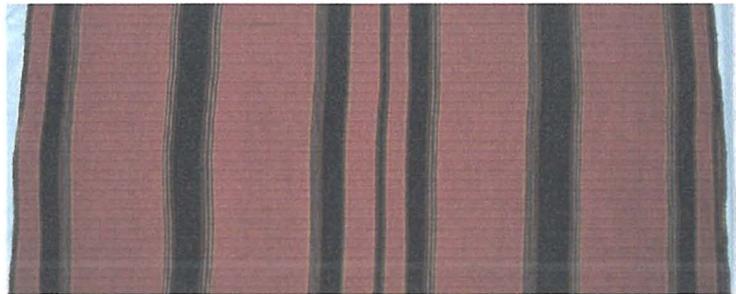
KHAMAU BLANKET

(l = 220 cm, w = 110 cm)



KOUNSHO BLANKET

(l = 356 cm, w = 123 cm)



LAUKTU BLANKET

(l = 360, w = 130 cm)



LAYTU BLANKET

(l = 418 cm, w = 110 cm)



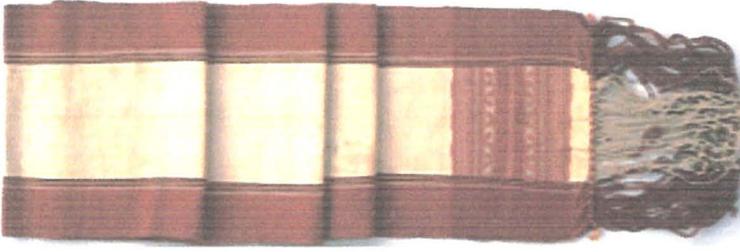
SUNGHITU BLANKET

(l = 356 cm, w = 123 cm)

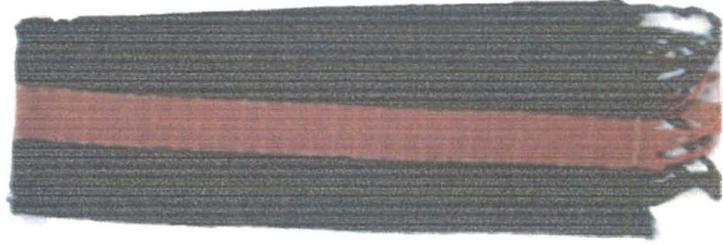


PHOTO. 13. ASHO-CHIN MEN HEADDRESSES

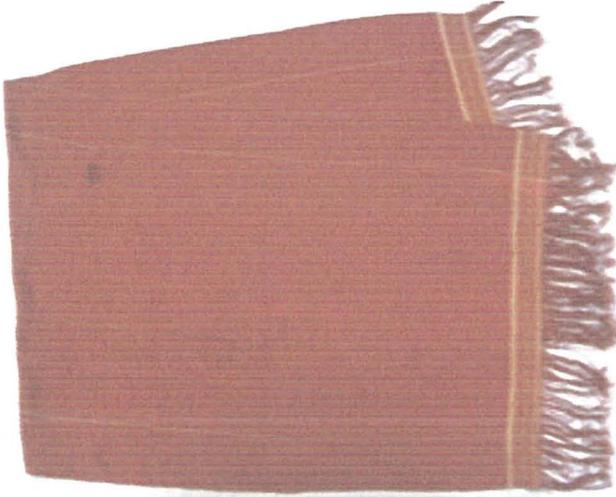
CHINPONG



KHAMAU



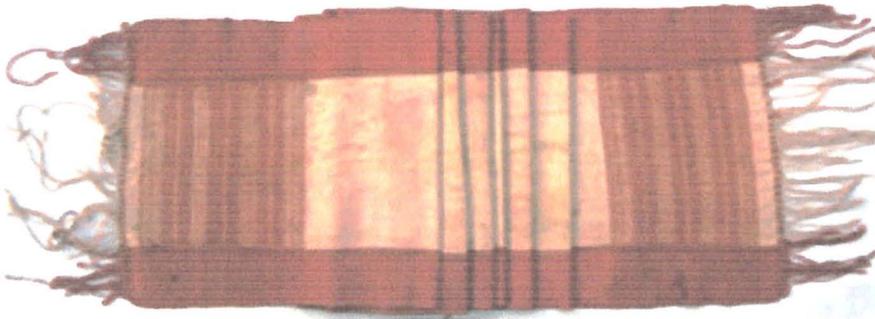
KOUNSHO



LAYTU



LAUKTU

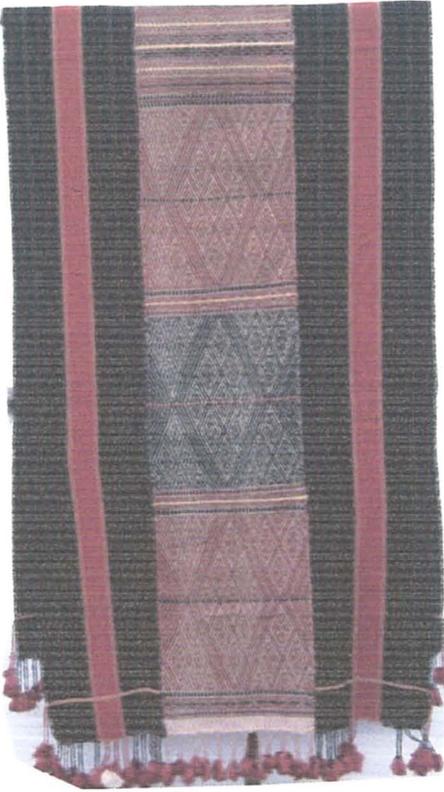


SUNGHTU



PHOTO 14. ASHO-CHIN WOMEN HEADDRESSES

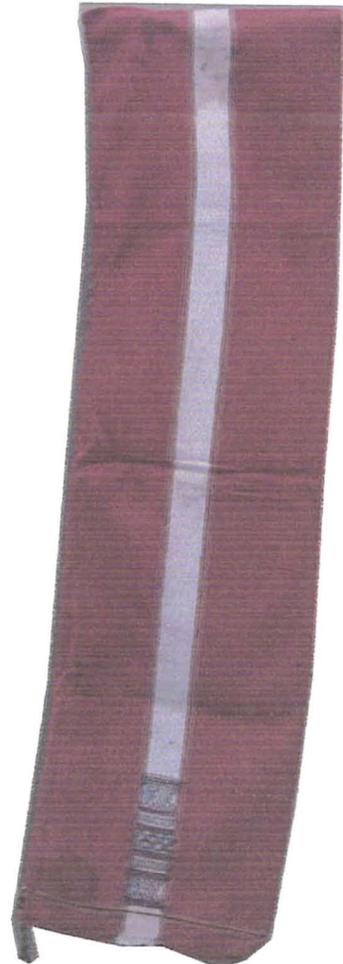
CHINPONG



KOUNSHO



LAYTU (*Lakhu*)



LAUKTU



PHOTO 20. COMPARISON OF LAYTU TUNIC TOP HALF PATTERNS

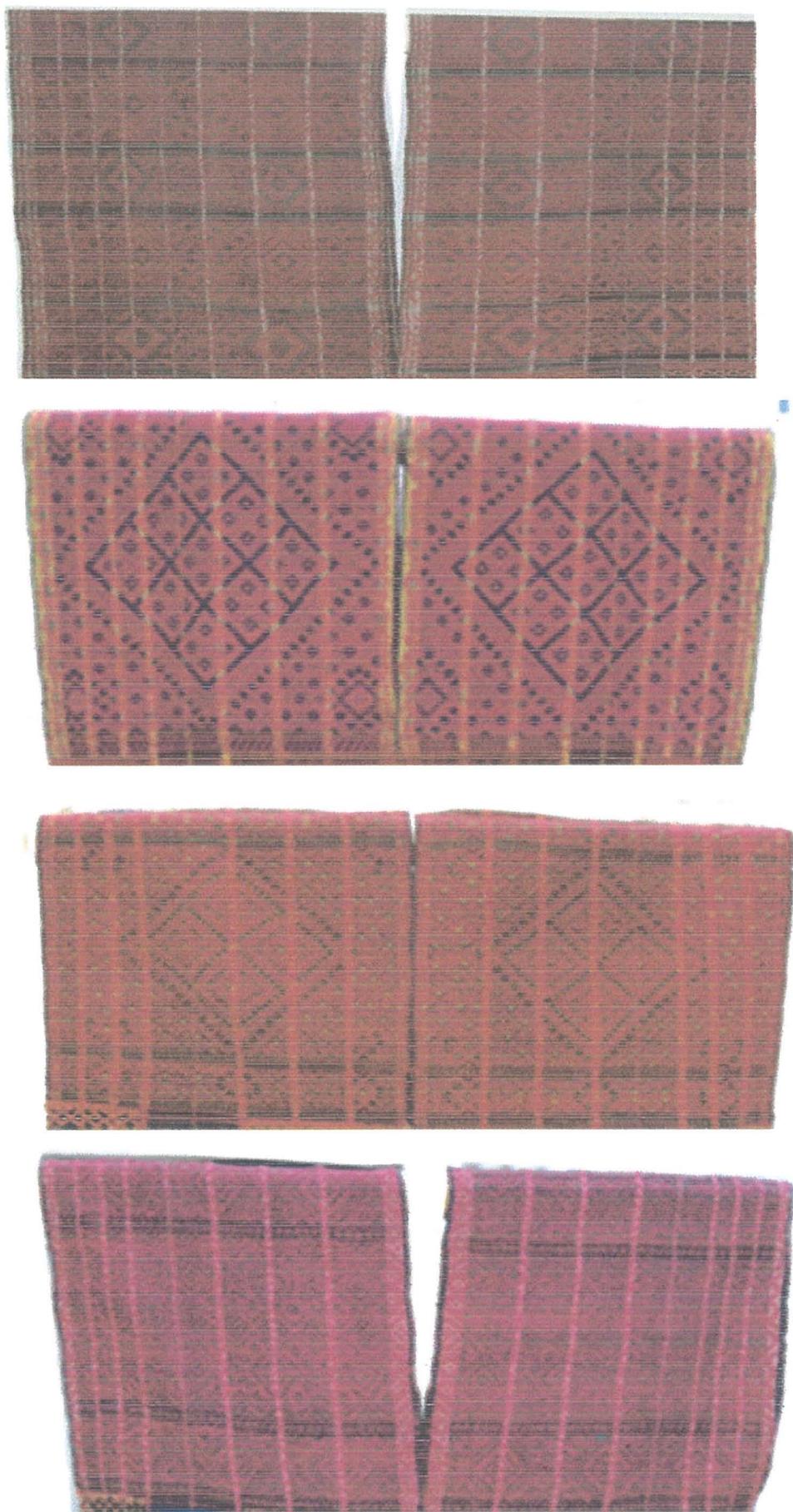
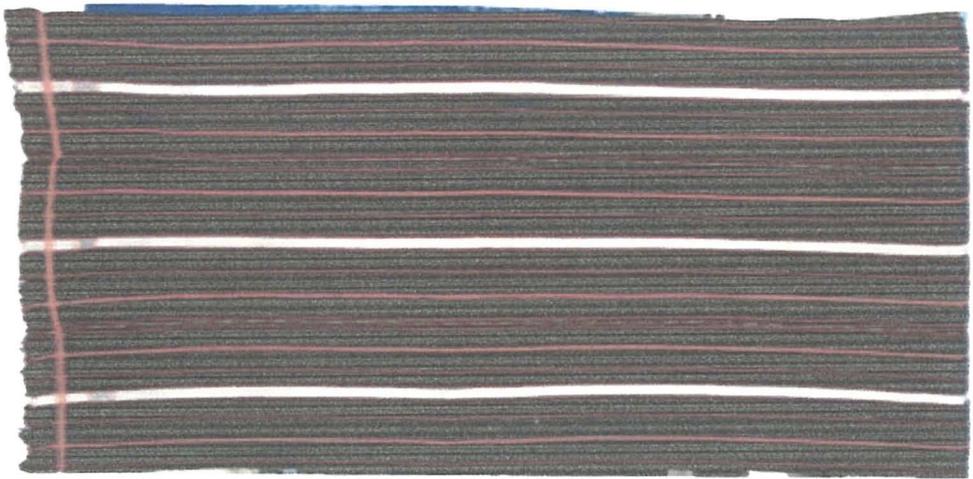


PHOTO 21. VARIETY OF LAYTU BLANKETS

HIAUH HAM BUAI OR HIAUH PUM VAI



HIAUH PUM NIA



HIAUH KENG

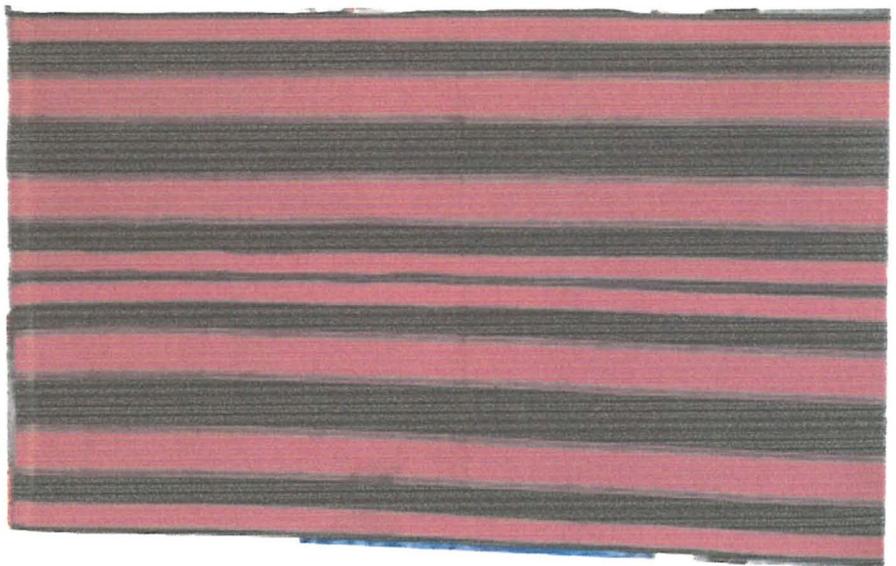


PHOTO 22. VARIETY OF LAYTU TEXTILES

WOMEN TUNICS



WOMEN HIP COVERS

