

**A SYMBOL OF A PARTICULAR CULTURE: THE  
MEANING OF TEA LEAF IN PALAUNG NATIONAL,  
NAM SAN TOWNSHIP, SHAN STATE (NORTH)**

**PhD DISSERTATION**

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MYANMAR**

**MAY, 2012**

A SYMBOL OF A PARTICULAR CULTURE: THE MEANING  
OF TEA LEAF IN PALAUNG NATIONAL, NAM SAN  
TOWNSHIP, SHAN STATE (NORTH)

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THIS DISSERTATION IS SUBMITTED TO THE BOARD OF  
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FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, I would like to express my thanks to Dr. Mya Mya Khin, Professor & Head, Department of Anthropology, University of Yangon; who guided, advised and assisted me to fulfill this PhD thesis research as Chair person and Co-supervisor and to her keen interest and permission to carry out this research.

Secondly, I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Thidar Htwe Win, Professor & Head, Department of Anthropology, Yadanapon University; who guided, advised and assisted me to fulfill this PhD thesis research as Supervisor and gave precious ideas and advices.

Thirdly, I would like to express my thanks to Sayagyi U Kyaw Han; Professor & Head (Retired), Department of Anthropology, University of Yangon; who guided, advised and assisted me to fulfill this PhD thesis research as External examiner.

Fourthly, I am deeply grateful to Dr. Aye Kyaw; Visiting Lecturer, Department of Anthropology, University of Yangon; who guided, advised and assisted me to fulfill this PhD thesis research as Referee.

Moreover, I am deeply gratitude to Dr. Aung Myat Kyaw Sein; Professor & Head, Department of Phychology, University of Yangon; and Daw Khin Moe Moe Kyu; Lecturer, Department of Anthropology, University of Yangon who guided, advised and assisted me to fulfill this PhD thesis research as Members.

After that, I would like to my special gratitude to Sayamagyi Daw Sein Sein (Retired Director, Higher Education Department, Lower Myanmar) and Sayamagyi Daw Pwa Yin (Retired Professor, Department of English, University of Yangon) for their invaluable guideline, kindness, earnest support and encouragement from start to finish.

In addition, I am deeply gratitude to Sayagyi Dr. Tin Thein; Professor & Head (Retired), Department of Geology, University of Yangon have encouraged me all along during my research work.

And then, I am also deeply gratitude to Sayagyi Dr. Than Tun Sein; Director (Retired), Socio- Medical Research Division, Department of Medical Research (Lower Myanmar), Ministry of Health who devoted a great deal of valuable time for improving this dissertation and encouraing me throughout the preparation of this research work.

After that, I would like to express my thanks to Dr. Tin Maung Chit; Visiting Lecturer, Department of Anthropology, University of Yangon for his valuable guidance and kind advice relating to this research work.

And then, I am also deeply grateful to Dr. Daw Lei Lei Win; Director, Health System Research Division, and Dr. Daw Saw Saw; Research Scientist, Health System Research Division, Department of Medical Research (Lower Myanmar), Ministry of Health for their invaluable guideline and kindness, earnest support and encouragement from start to finish.

Moreover, I would like to express my thanks to all the key informants for their kindness, earnest support, and enthusiastic help during field research. Then, I would like to express my appreciation to all my colleagues and staffs from Department of Anthropology, University of Yangon for their suggestions related to this research.

In addition, I am deeply grateful to my beloved brothers and sisters; for their kindness, unfailing help, financial support, and encouragement from start to finish.

Finally, grateful thanks are also due to Ashin U Pyin Nyar Thi Ri from Zayan Gyi Monastery, heads of the Ta Ang Literature and Culture Committee in Namhsan and Yangon, my niece Miss Hinn Yadar Hlaing, my best friend Miss Myint Myint Kyi, my pupils Mr. Yai Htar, Mr. Tun Lin Oo and his family who helped my field research.

## ABSTRACT

The aim of this research is to elicit the role of tea leaf in Ta Ang (Palaung) **traditional culture** and **subsistence patterns** especially of those who live in Namhsan Township. The study identify the connection between economic life of Ta Ang (Palaung) and tea leaf, describe the meaning of value on tea leaf in Ta Ang (Palaung), and illustrate the cultural symbol of tea leaf for Ta Ang (Palaung).

This study is done from the symbolic anthropological point of view. The Palaungs call themselves in their own language as “**Ta Ang**”. Tea production is the main source of income for Ta Ang national. The **tea leaf** is considered to be a **metaphor** of Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals at present. **The King Alaung Sithu** who was one of the famous kings in Myanmar, gave the seeds (tea) to Ta Ang (Palaung). Then they started to cultivate the tea as their main crop and after that, their life has been mainly related to the **tea plantation**. Because of the giving the tea seeds by King Alaung Sithu, they held the festival in memory of King Alaung Sithu annually. Tea leaf is not staple food for Ta Ang (Palaung) but it is important one. There is quite difference between the perception of tea leaf in other people and the Ta Ang (Palaung). They love tea plant and they satisfy their lives living with tea plantation business. Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals are born, grow up, and die under the tea plant. They consider Laphet as their benefactor. There are two festivals concerning Laphet (tea leaf) in Ta Ang: Community (bHk) Kathein pwe and Lwai Sai pagoda festival. By studying these festivals, find out their perception of Tea Leaf in their live. The symbolic importance of tea leaf has been deeply embedded in the Ta Ang’s traditional belief and daily life: tea leaf as their soul, tea leaf as their benefactor, and tea leaf as self.

**Key words :** Symbolic Anthropology, traditional culture, Palaung, Ta Ang, King Alaung Sithu, tea plant, subsistence patterns, Laphet (tea leaf), perception, symbol, belief, value, metaphor, benefactor

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# CHAPTER (1)

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Purpose of the study

All human behaviors and civilizations are perpetuated only by the use of symbols. According to White, a symbol is a thing the value or meaning of which is bestowed upon it by those who use it (White, 1972). The major focus of symbolic anthropology is studying the way in which people understand and interpret their surroundings as well as the actions of their society. In addition, it studies the symbols and process for example, myth, and rituals. Traditionally symbolic anthropology has focused on religion, cosmology, ritual activity, and food habit. Food plays a dynamic role in the way people think of themselves and others. Food tells not only how people live but also how they think of themselves in relation to others. A people's cuisine, or a particular food, often marks the boundary between the collective self and the other (Parry, 1985).

This research is the study of Ta Ang (Palaung) culture through the interpretation of the meaning of the symbols, values, and beliefs of his society. It tries to discover how such symbols help people produce meaning for them and how such symbols motivate their social life. Mainly, this study examines how people use the metaphor of food in conceptualizing themselves in relation to other peoples. As a people, the Ta Ang (Palaung) have repeatedly reconceptualized themselves as they encountered different other nationals by using Tea Leaf as a metaphor for themselves. Tea is the agricultural product of the leaves, leaf buds, and internodes of the *Camellia sinensis* plant, prepared and cured by various methods. After water, tea is the most widely consumed beverage in the world. It has a cooling, slightly bitter, astringent flavor, which many enjoy. Tea plant, *Camellia sinensis*, is an evergreen plant that grows mainly in tropical and sub-tropical climates.

Two pronunciations, "tea" and "cha" have made their way into other languages around the world. The word "tea" comes from a Chinese ideogram pronounced "cha" in Cantonese and "tay" in the dialect of Amoy. This term was used in ancient times to describe the first flush harvest of tea. As "cha", the word travelled to Japan, India, Persia, and Russia, but the English "tea" was derived from the "tay", which was brought by Dutch to Europe by way of Java. In the known references to tea

in English during the years 1650-59, the word appears in its earlier form of “tee” but was pronounced “tay”. It was first spelled “tea” in 1660 but was pronounced “tay” until the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century. In Palaung language tea is pronounced “myan” (မိၵ်း), it means crop, and in Shan language tea is pronounced “name”(နိၵ်း), it also means crop. So the same two meanings show the seed which comes from the crop. In Myanmar language tea is pronounced “lephet” (လဖေၵ်း), it means single hand. In Ta Ang (Palaung) language “hlar” (လှာ) means leaf and in Myanmar language “phet” (ဖေၵ်း) also means leaf.

Tea was used as medicine previously and the taxes were levied on tea when it was used as beverages in seventh Century Years (Khant Kyaw, 2008). Today tea is the most popular drink in the world in terms of consumption. Most tea consumed outside East Asia is produced on large plantations in India or Sri Lanka, and is destined to be sold to large businesses. India is the world’s largest tea-drinking nation although the per capita consumption of tea remains a modest 750 grams per person every year. Turkey, with 2.5 kg of tea consumed per person per year is the world’s greatest per capita consumer (FAO, January 2010). In 2003, world tea production was 3.21 million tons annually. In 2008, world tea production reached over 4.37 million tons. The largest producers of tea are China, India, Kenya, Sri Lanka, and Turkey.

Tea Leaf was first introduced to Myanmar society in the Bagan era (Bar Thar Pyan Sar Pay Athin, vol.12, 1976). Tea Leaf is an essential item in Myanmar traditional culture. It is used both dried and pickled, which is included in all kinds of traditional celebrations. In ancient times, at courts of law a case may be peacefully decided by eating Tea Leaf between the parties. In the religious affairs, spiritual worship is not complete without Tea Leaf. In traditional Myanmar marriages, a symbolic packet of Tea Leaf may be used as an invitation card (Bar Thar Pyan Sar Pay Athin, vol.12, 1976). So also a marriage may be consummated by eating “a sprig of Tea Leaf and a quid of pan, a daughter is given and accept a son”, in rural areas where simple farmers work on the land (Khant Kyaw, 2008). Thakhin Kodaw Mhaing had written, “Drinking plain tea brings you charm and success”. Myanmar like tea both dried and pickled. In Myanmar there used to be at least one member of the family who likes to have a cup of plain tea as soon as he or she gets up from bed. The first duty of the housewife when she gets up is usually to boil water and prepare a pot of tea, not only for the grandfather, grandmother, father or husband, but for herself and her children. Guests,

near and far, whoever comes for a visit is offered a cup of plain tea. It has become customary for everyone in the Shan State to give tea as gifts to visitors either in dried leaves or in pickled one.

The saying “If you want to eat good pickled tea (Laphet), climb the Palaung mountains slowly” has been known to all of Myanmar. The chief crop of cultivation among the Ta Ang (Palaung) is tea. Most of the Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals from Namhsan township economy are based on tea plantation. It is the largest tea production area in Myanmar. The surroundings of Namhsan are hillsides on which enormous amounts of tea are cultivated. It is 80 percent of the tea-cultivated area of the whole country (The Myanma Alin, Newspapers, 6.3.2009). So, Namhsan is chosen as field area.

## **1.2 Research questions**

The main problems or the questions of this research are (1) How is the connection between Tea Leaf and Ta Ang (Palaung)? (2) How do they value Tea Leaf in their lives? (3) How do they mean Tea Leaf? (4) Why is Tea Leaf important in their lives? (5) Is the Tea Leaf cultural symbol for them?

## **1.3 Objectives of the study**

The general objective of this research is to elicit the role of tea leaf in Ta Ang (Palaung) traditional culture and subsistence patterns especially of those who live in Namhsan Township.

The specific objectives of the study are

- (1) to identify the connection between economic life of Ta Ang (Palaung) and tea leaf
- (2) to describe the meaning of value on tea leaf in Ta Ang (Palaung)
- (3) to illustrate the cultural symbol of tea leaf for Ta Ang (Palaung).

The results of the research are hoped to give beneficial ways for the other related fields. Essentially, it is also hoped to increase more researchers on such topic such as cultural symbol of other ethnic groups. Moreover, this research will contribute knowledge for mutual understandings among diverse people in Myanmar.

#### 1.4 Composition of the study

There are altogether eight chapters in this thesis. Chapter (1) is the Introduction of the research, Chapter (2) is symbolic approach to culture; in this chapter, the problems in symbolic approach will be discussed. It will briefly review previous studies then the main purpose of this chapter will be analysis of the relevant questions to find the Palaung's culture. Chapter (3) is the Research Methodology; which will describe the study design, study site, research methods, limitation, and the setting of the research area.

Chapter (4) is the Historical background of Ta Ang (Palaung); in this chapter, migration of Ta Ang (Palaung) will be described then the various descriptions in the meaning of "Palaung and Ta Ang", background of the study site, the linkage between tea leaf and Ta Ang (Palaung) in the past and tea production in the World will be explained. The main purpose of this chapter is to find out the connection between Tea Leaf and Ta Ang (Palaung).

For this chapter literature survey and key informant interviewing were done. Especially key informant interviews were done with seven persons: six heads of the Ta Ang Literature and Culture Committee in Namhsan and Yangon, and a 73-year-old man from Namhsan. The heads of the Ta Ang Literature and Culture Committee gave confirmed data and a 73-year-old man gave oral history of Ta Ang (Palaung). From literature survey, many historical records and stories about the Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals and tea plant were discovered.

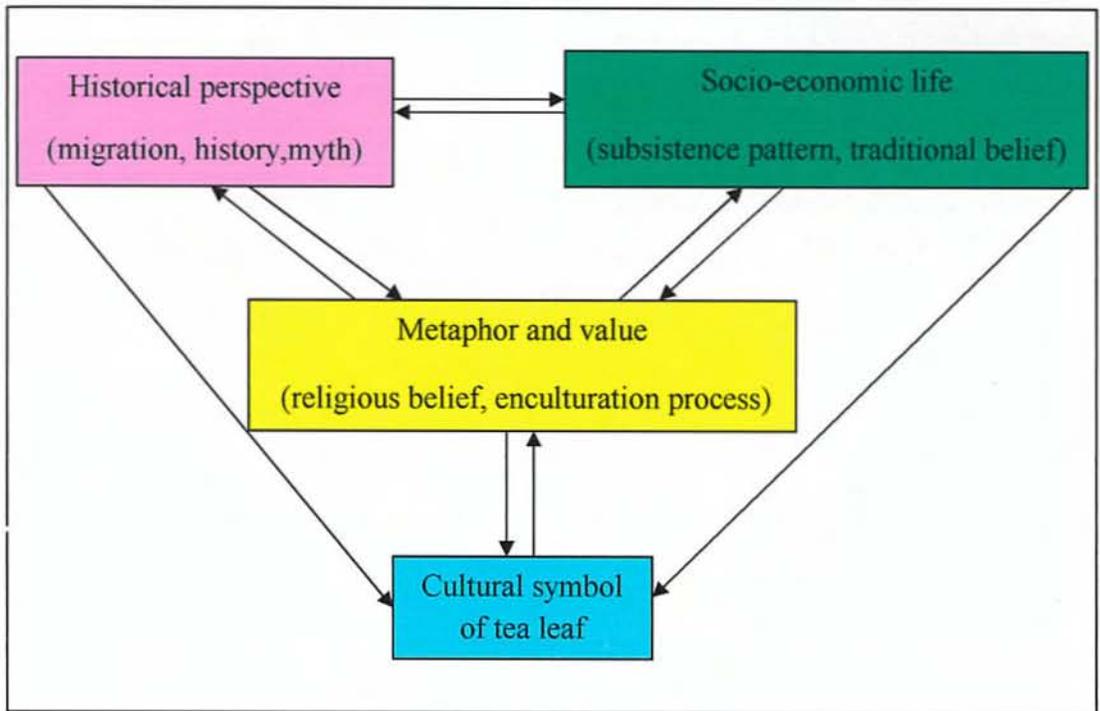
Chapter (5) is the economic aspect of tea leaf; in this chapter Myanmar tea plantation today will be described, and then Ta Ang (Palaung) tea and tea plantation today, seasonal names for the tea leaf and routine work for tea plantation, tea cultivation methods, production and distribution and other economic activities will be explained from economic aspect. The main purpose of this chapter is to find out the role of Tea Leaf in their subsistence patterns and government policies of Tea plantation.

In Chapter (6), Symbolic Importance of Tea Leaf is considered as a metaphor of Palaung. In this chapter the perception of tea leaf in Ta Ang (Palaung) will be discussed, and then tea leaf in festivals, tea leaf in daily life (including case study), the tea leaf in social relation and the tea leaf in the Flag will be described. This chapter will find out their perception of Tea Leaf in their live by studying myths, stories and legends besides, case study will be described concerned with social class, ceremonies, rituals and daily routine. The main purpose of this chapter is to find out how tea leaf

has become related to Ta Ang (Palaung) historically and to highlight how Tea Leaf plays vital role in their lives.

Chapter (7) is the discussion. In this chapter all findings are to discuss about the Ta Ang's (Palaung) particular tea culture based on symbolic anthropology. Chapter (8) is conclusion and recommendation. In conclusion, there will be discussion on the connection of Tea Leaf and the Ta Ang's (Palaung) culture and the position of tea leaf in Ta Ang's (Palaung) culture.

### 1.5 Conceptual Framework of the study



**Chart 1. Conceptual Framework of the study**

The above chart shows the major elements of the framework. How the tea leaf is connected with Ta Ang (Palaung) is found out in history. Besides, the tea leaf is considered to be a metaphor of Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals at present. From this consideration, it can point out the historical connection between the tea leaf and Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals as tradition. This traditional connection continuously exists by way of religious beliefs and economic activities, which are held at present. Moreover, by sharing the knowledge of the tea leaf in enculturation process and other rituals, the tea leaf, a metaphor of Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals emphasizes the interweaving of all the symbolic aspects of Ta Ang (Palaung) traditional culture to form a single, unified whole.

## CHAPTER (2)

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Anthropological approach to culture

Anthropology is the study of all aspects of human life and culture. It examines such topics as how people live, what they think, what they produce, and how they interact with their environments. Anthropologists try to understand the full range of human diversity as well as what all people share in common. Basing on their own concept and background, their approaches to culture differed. The following portray some approaches to culture.

##### 2.1.1 Evolutionary Approach to culture

During the late 1800s, many anthropologists approach culture from evolutionary point of view. They promoted their own models of social and biological evolution. Their writings portrayed people of European descent as biologically and culturally superior to all other peoples. The most influential anthropological presentation of this viewpoint appeared in *Ancient Society*, published in 1877 by American anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan. According to Morgan, human societies had evolved to civilization through earlier conditions, or stages, which he called Savagery and Barbarism. He believed that under Savagery and Barbarism people owned property communally, as groups. Civilizations and political states, he said, developed together with the private ownership of property. Like Morgan, Sir Edward Tylor, a founder of British anthropology, also promoted the theories of cultural evolution in the late 1800s. Tylor attempted to describe the development of particular kinds of customs and beliefs found across many cultures. For example, he proposed a sequence of stages for the evolution of religion—from animism (the belief in spirits), through polytheism (the belief in many gods), to monotheism (the belief in one god). In 1871 Tylor also wrote a still widely quoted definition of culture, describing it as “that complex whole that includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of a society.” This definition formed the basis for the modern anthropological concept of culture. (Encyclopaedia Britannica. 2012)

### **2.1.2 Historical approach to culture**

The more particularistic and historical approach was spread to the United States at the end of the 19th century by the German-trained scholar Franz Boas. Skeptical of evolutionist generalizations, Boas advocated instead a “diffusionist” approach. He contended that cultural traits first must be explained in terms of specific cultural contexts rather than by broad reference to general evolutionary trend. Rather than graduating through a fixed series of intellectual, moral, and technological stages, societies or cultures changed unpredictably, as a consequence of migration and borrowing. (Encyclopaedia Britannica. 2012)

### **2.1.3 The configurational approach to culture**

The Boasian resistance to generalizations of classic evolutionism had two consequences: an emphasis on culture change at a specific level of analysis and a priority on studying the patterns or configurations of local cultural beliefs and values. Pattern and configuration became key concepts for explaining the relation of culture traits to each other and the study of local patterning of cultural traits and changes over time. Benedict's popular presentation, *Patterns of Culture* (1934), though espousing a cultural psychology, is an example, as is the austere and massive *Configurations of Culture Growth* (1944) by another of Boas's students, A.L. Kroeber. This emphasis on the study of internal patterns and configurations of particular cultures as these are expressed in language led in two directions: to “cultural relativism” and to the study of “culture contact,” or “acculturation. (Encyclopaedia Britannica. 2012)

### **2.1.4 Functional approach to culture**

Functionalists based their approach on doing fieldwork on their theories. They lived for long periods with the people they studied, carefully recording even very small details about a people's culture and social life. The resulting ethnographies portrayed all aspects of culture and social life as interdependent parts of a complex model. Malinowski assumed that all cultural traits serve the needs of individuals in a society. The function of the cultural traits is its ability to satisfy some basic or derived need of the members of the group (Malinowski, 1957). In other words, culture exists to meet the basic biological and psychological needs of the individual. A typical functionalist study analyzed how cultural institutions kept a society in working order. For example, many studies examined rites of passage, such as

initiation ceremonies. Through a series of such ceremonies, groups of children of the same age would be initiated into new roles and take on new responsibilities as they grew into adults. According to functionalists, any unique characteristics of the rites of passage of a particular society had to do with how initiation ceremonies worked in the function of that society (Malinowski, 1957).

### **2.1.5 Structural Approach to culture**

In the 1950s, French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss developed an anthropological theory and analytic method known as structuralism. Lévi-Strauss proposed that many common cultural patterns—such as those found in myth, ritual, and language—are rooted in basic structures of the mind. He wrote, for instance, about the universal tendency of the human mind to sort things into sets of opposing concepts, such as day and night, black and white, or male and female. Lévi-Strauss believed such basic conceptual patterns became elaborated through culture. His structuralism views culture as symbolic expression of the human mind (Encyclopaedia Britannica. 2012).

### **2.1.6 Neoevolutionary approach to culture**

Neoevolutionary anthropological thought emerged in the 1940s. American anthropologists such as Julian Steward, Roy Rappaport, and Marvin Harris began to study how culture and social institutions relate to a people's technology, economy, and natural environment. All of these factors together define a people's *patterns of subsistence*—how they feed, clothe, shelter, and otherwise provide for themselves. White hypothesized that cultures became more advanced as they became more efficient at harnessing energy and that technology and social organization were both influential in instigating such efficiencies. Steward discussed evolutionary change in terms of what he called “levels of sociocultural integration” and “multilineal evolution,” terms he used to distinguish neoevolution from earlier, unilineal theories of cultural evolution. Economic and ecological approaches to understanding culture and societies are known as *cultural materialism* or *cultural ecology*. Harris, for instance, analyzed the religious practice in India of regarding cows as sacred. He suggested that this religious practice developed as a cultural response to the value of cows as work animals for farming and other essential tasks and as a source of dung, which is dried as fuel (Harris, 1995).

### **2.1.7 Symbolic approach to culture**

Symbolic Anthropology emerged in the 1960s and is still influenced on the study of culture. Symbolic Anthropology is the study of culture through the interpretation of the meaning of the symbols, values, and beliefs of a society. It tries to discover how such symbols help people produce meaning for them. The major focus of symbolic anthropology is studying the ways in which people understand and interpret their surroundings as well as the actions and utterances of the other members of their society. Symbolic anthropology studies symbols and the processes (such as myth and ritual) by which humans assign meanings to these symbols in order to address fundamental questions about human social life.

### **2.2 Review on the previous studies**

A key theorist who represents this approach is Clifford Geertz. Geertz focused much more on the ways in which symbols operate within culture, as how individuals "see, feel, and think about the world". He believed that an analysis of culture should "not be an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning". Culture is expressed by the external symbols that a society uses rather than being locked inside people's heads. He defined culture as "a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and their attitudes toward life".

In "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight", ethnographer Clifford Geertz documents his observations and conclusions about the role of Balinese cockfighting in their society based on his fieldwork. Most of the story is actually an interpretation and summary of what cockfighting is in the bigger context of Balinese society. What the cockfight says it says in a vocabulary of sentiment—the thrill of risk, the despair of loss, the pleasure of triumph. Yet what it says is not merely that risk is exciting, loss depressing, or triumph gratifying, banal tautologies of affect, but that it is of these emotions, thus example, that society is built and individuals put together. Attending cockfights and participating in them is, for the Balinese, a kind of sentimental education. What he learns there is what his culture's ethos and his private sensibility (or, anyway, certain aspects of them) look like when spelled out externally in a collective text; that the two are near enough alike to be articulated in the symbolic

of single such text; and-the disquieting part-that the text in which this revelation is accomplished consists of a chicken hacking another mindlessly to bits.

The implications of interpretation are exemplified in Geertz's analysis of a funeral in Java, a case of social discourse in which shifting political divisions and their symbolic expressions affected core rituals and emotions surrounding death (1973). The funeral held in Modjokuto, a small town in eastern Central Java. Geertz first outlines critique of functionalism, focusing on its inability to deal with social change, and then sketches the distinction between culture and social system, "the former as an ordered system of meaning and of symbols, in terms of which social interaction takes place; and to see the latter as the pattern of social interaction itself"(1973: 144). Geertz describes the emotional chaos that ensued, tracing its roots to a central ambiguity: Religious symbols had become political symbols and vice versa, which combined sacred, profane, and created "an incongruity between the cultural framework of meaning and the patterning of social interaction" (1973: 169).

Mary Douglas is a symbolic anthropologist who examines how people give meanings to their reality and how this reality is expressed by their cultural symbols. She has believed that humans actively create meanings in their social lives in order to maintain their society. By analyzing these meanings, Douglas attempted to find universal patterns of symbolism. Douglas shows that symbols or anything in society has unspoken assumptions. More importantly, these assumptions say something about how a group understands reality. Her book "Purity and Danger" (Douglas, 1966) traces the words and meaning of dirt in different contexts. She attempts to clarify the differences between the sacred, the clean, and the unclean in different societies and times. Through a complex and sophisticated reading of ritual, religion, and lifestyle, she challenges Western ideas of pollution making clear how the context and social history is essential. Douglas's perspective is a view of culture that searches "for expectations about human agency," an analytical stance that listens for the active voice rather than passive one. In her works, Douglas has examined a wide range of cultural media- foods and goods, prohibitions and purifications- to listen to the way "people make statements about their life." Besides, she argued that the laws were about symbolic boundary-maintenance.

Victor Turner is one of the symbolic anthropologists. Turner mainly studied rituals in non-western societies and looked at the roles of the symbols in specific social situations. He believed that people in a particular society have their own

symbolic system to make sense of their lives. He analyzed rituals and demonstrated the symbolic meanings that derived from social contexts. Turner defined ritual as “prescribed formal behavior for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in mystical beings and powers.” Likewise, a symbol is the smallest unit of ritual, which retains the specific properties of ritual behavior; it is a “storage unit” filled with a vast amount of information (Turner, 1968). Symbols can be objects, activities, words, relationships, events, gestures, or spatial unit (Turner, 1967). Ritual, religious beliefs and symbols are in Turner’s perspective essentially related. He expressed this well in another definition: Ritual is “a stereotyped sequence of activities involving gestures, words, and objects, performed in a sequestered place, and designed to influence preternatural entities or forces on behalf of the actors’ goals and interests” (Turner, 1977). Rituals are storehouses of meaningful symbols by which information is revealed and regarded as authoritative, as dealing with the crucial values of the community (Turner, 1968). Not only do symbols reveal crucial social and religious values; they are also (precisely because of their reference to supernatural) transformative for human attitudes and behavior. The handling of symbols in ritual exposes their powers to act upon and change the persons involved in ritual performance. In sum, Turner’s definition of ritual refers to ritual performances involving manipulation of symbols that refer to religious beliefs.

Turner considered symbols as mechanisms for the maintenance of societies. He argued that social solidarity needs to be continually reinforced and ritual symbols play important roles by keeping social orders. He concluded that the following three kinds of information are all legitimate for symbolic analysis: observed data, informant’s interpretations, and anthropologist’s analysis. Turner was much more interested in investigating whether symbols actually functioned within the social process the way symbolic anthropologists believed they did.

Turner's approach to symbols was very different from that of Geertz. Turner was not interested in symbols as vehicles of "culture" as Geertz was but instead investigated symbols as "operators in the social process" believing that "the symbolic expression of shared meanings, not the attraction of material interests, lie at the center of human relationships". Symbols "instigate social action" and exert "determinable influences inclining persons and groups to action". Turner felt that these "operators," by their arrangement and context, produce "social transformations" which tie the

people in a society to the society's norms, resolve conflict, and aid in changing the status of the actors. (Ortner, Sherry B, 1984)

Raymond Scupin viewed the symbol and sign in his book "Cultural Anthropology; A Global Perspective"; Symbols are arbitrary units of meaning, in contrast to signs, which are directly associated with concrete physical items or activities. Many non-human animals can learn signs. For example, a dog can learn to associate the ringing of a bell (a physical activity) with drinking water. Hence, both humans and other animals can learn signs and apply them to different sorts of activities or to concrete items. A symbol's meaning is not always obvious. However, many symbols are powerful and often unconscious stimuli of behaviors or emotional states. For example, the designs and colors of the flags of different countries represent symbolic associations with abstract ideas and concepts. In some flags, the color red may refer to blood, whereas in others it may symbolize revolution. In many countries, the desecration of the national flag, itself a symbol, is considered a crime. When the symbols associated with particular abstract ideas and concepts that are related to the national destiny of a society are violated, powerful emotions may be aroused. (Raymond Scupin, 2000)

Abraham Rosman and Paula G. Rubel describe the analysis of symbols deals with the meanings of things in a culture; the meanings of words, the meanings of actions, and the meanings of objects. The connection between the symbol and its meaning may differ from culture to culture, as words do from language to language. Symbols are manifested in behavior as well as in ideas. People's actions are guided by symbols and their meanings. Symbols serve to motivate such actions. Further, people's behavior itself has symbolic meaning to those who observe it. He continued to mention, "*Metaphor*, a kind of symbol, is an important analytical concept used by anthropologists in the study of symbolic systems. A metaphor is an idea that people use to stand for another set of ideas. The meaning of the metaphor is the recognition of the connection between the metaphor itself and the "something else" it represents. (Abraham Rosman and Paula G. Rubel, 1995)

Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, Vilas Research Professor of Anthropology at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. She has worked on Japanese culture from the perspective of historical and symbolic anthropology. In her book, "Rice as Self" examines how people use the metaphor of a principle food in conceptualizing themselves in relation to other peoples (Ohnuki-Tierney, 1993). To explore it she

chose, as an example, rice for the Japanese. As a people, the Japanese have repeatedly reconceptualized themselves as they encountered different others-Chinese and Westerners- by using rice as a metaphor for themselves. Ohnuki-Tierney centers her inquiry into the relationship among food, identity, society, and culture on the question of what rice as spirit in rejuvenating rituals, rice as currency, and rice as the difference between self and others. Ohnuki-Tierney breaks ground by combining historical and symbolic approaches in an anthropological study, which is well research and organized. Its weaknesses include poorly selected comparative studies and an eclectic use of theory and scholarship.

Many scholars view cultural symbols with material, ritual, behavior, and language in a particular culture. This research views Ta Ang's (Palaung) particular cultural symbol by using tea leaf.

## **CHAPTER (3)**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Study Design**

This study considers Symbolic Anthropology. Library research, document analysis and field study are conducted. In field study, data are collected by using Participant Observation, Key Informant Interview, In-depth Interview, Informal Interview, Life History, and Focus Group Discussion. Taking photographs and recording with video were performed for special activities.

#### **3.2 Applied Theory**

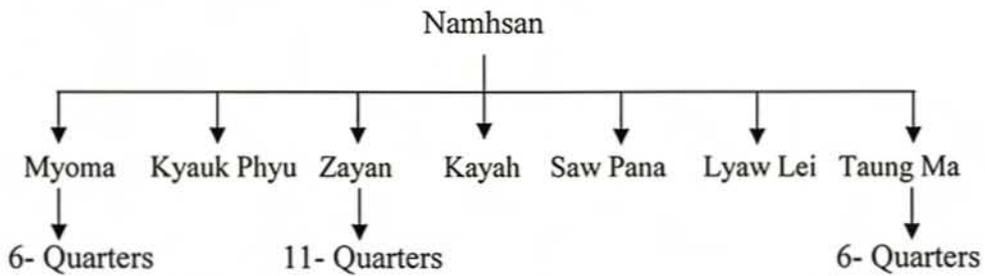
Applied theory for the research is Symbolic Anthropology, the study of culture through the interpretation of the meaning of the symbols, values, and beliefs of a society. Human behaviors are symbolic behaviors. All culture depends upon the symbols and those can also be maintained and transmitted by symbols. To understand the human behavior it is needed to study the symbols of the society.

#### **3.3 Study Site**

Study site is in Namhsan Township, Shan State (North). Namhsan Township lies between latitudes 23° 11.4'N and 23° 30.38'N, and longitudes 97° 23.50' E and 97° 50.40'E. geographically, this township at an elevation of 5332 feet is thick-forested with a great many mountains and steep ranges. Namhsan Township gets a yearly average rainfall of 70-plus inches, with the lowest temperature of 32° F and the highest temperature of 90° F. Its area is 557.58 sq miles, to be surrounded by Hsipaw Township in the east, Mong Mit Township in the west, Kyauk-me Township in the south, and Namtu Township and Man Ton Township in the north. It is 188 miles from Mandalay, 76 miles from Kyaukme and 49 miles from Hsipaw. It is 5332 feet above sea level. Namhsan Township is made up of seven village tracts consisting of 32 villages. The seven village tracts are:

- (1) Myoma village tract
- (2) Kyauk Phyu village tract
- (3) Zayan village tract
- (4) Kayah village tract

- (5) Saw Pana village tract
- (6) Lyaw Lei village tract
- (7) Taung Ma village tract



The research is basically done in Myoma village tract, Zayan Gyi village tract and Taung Ma village tract. The population density of Myoma village is 2818, Zayan Gyi village is 1759, and Taung Ma village is 1363. The majority of the populations are Buddhist. Myoma village is the center of the Namhsan town and most of the tea factories and broker's sales centre are there. Moreover, Zayan Gyi village is the largest tea producing area and Zayan Laphet (the product of Zayan Gyi village) is the most favorite in Myanmar. Taung Ma village is situated near Lwai Sai Mountain, where there is sacred tea tree, which is the precious tree for Ta Ang (Palaung). Without the explanations of these villages, it cannot be given vivid description of Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals. So these three village tracts are chosen as field area.

### 3.4 Research Method

"Methods" are *ways of studying* people from an anthropological perspective. There are the various approaches anthropologists take to learn about a given people or culture. They include such general things as "participant observation" (a key method of study in cultural anthropology), as well as including more specific things such as survey research, archival research, and more.

**Ethnography** is a detailed description of a particular culture primarily based on fieldwork. It is a combination of social participation and personal observation within the community being studied, as well as interviews and discussions with individual members of a group; the ethnographic method is commonly referred to as participant observation. Ethnography provides information used to make systematic comparisons among cultures all across the world. Known as ethnology, such cross-cultural research allows anthropologist to make theories that help explain why certain

important differences or similarities occur among groups. They must observe carefully to gain an overview without placing too much emphasis on one part at the expense of another.

The methodology of Symbolic Anthropology focuses on the collection of data- especially data reflecting the point of view of the members of the society studied- on history, economy, ritual, myth, and values and interpret the meanings of the symbolic concepts and metaphors from the point of view of Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals. For the field research, data are to be collected, analyzed, and prepared by using ethnographic research and statistic data. Research tools are library survey, informal interview, in-depth interviews, participant observation, and focus group discussion. To get the rapport with natives and to grasp the native perspectives on “Tea Leaf” in their life, the researcher stayed there for one month for each field research, so there are all together 4 months in the study site for four field research trips. Through **participant observation** in tea plantation and making three kinds of tea, leisure activities, their ceremonies, ritual, and the daily routine of their lives, the researcher broadened the knowledge of their culture today.

To carry out participant observations, two types of household were chosen; the first is that household engaged in tea plantation and production of pickled tea leaves and green tea, while the second household is engaged in the same plus production of black tea also. The major points common to both types are; the household members must be the Ta Ang (Palaung), ownership of a tea plantation of 5 acres plus, and the employment at least of five outside workers. The homestead chosen for the first type belongs to Myoma village tract, which owns eight acres of tea plantation and hires five outside workers. The choice was appropriate even more because Myoma village tract is a producer of good quality tea leaves and has many broker’s sales centre.

For the second type of household, a homestead at Zayan Gyi village, with 12 acres of tea plantation and 10 outside workers, was chosen. It was done so because Zayan Gyi products - pickled tea leaves, green tea and black tea - are of good quality and popular and picking tea leaves as well as production processes of three kinds of tea can be studied in convenience.

On the first trip, the researcher stayed at the only guesthouse of Namhsan, and met responsible personnel such as chairman, vice-chairman, and secretary of Ta Ang (Palaung) Literature and Culture Committee, collecting all available data for the research. On the second field research, falling in economically important Shwephi

season of the year, the researcher stayed 15 days at a chosen house with family members in Myoma village tract and studied their seasonal activities of livelihood. On the third trip, the researcher stayed at a house in Zayan Gyi village for 15 days. On that occasion, went to observe the Lwai Sai Pagoda festival with the family members and during a 7-day stay at the Pagoda's nunnery rest house and studied the pagoda festival from start to finish. On the fourth field trip, stayed at the same house in Zayan Gyi village, it was November, the time of Mani Sithu veneration ceremony, which studied for the research.

For the key informant interview, key informants were chosen according to their knowledge. Five key informants each from three village tracts were chosen, thus: a man and a woman age 65-plus and once engaged in tea industry, to tell about its historical background. A married man and a married woman, aged under-65, to tell about present-day tea industry in detail; and one migrant worker to Namhsan of 3-year experience in tea leaf picking. Besides, six heads of the Ta Ang Literature and Culture Committee in Namhsan and Yangon were also interviewed. Therefore, there were altogether 21 key informants.

To grasp the experiences of the native people on their social relation, status and role needs closer friendship with them and **in-depth interviews** may bring the personal feelings and perception of their culture. For **in-depth interviews**, eight persons were chosen from each village tract, so there were altogether 32 interviewees thus: two Ta Ang (Palaung) national owning a tea factory to give detailed information on tea industry; two 65-year-old in life-long tea business to give information on King Alaung Sithu and review of the tea plant. In addition, an unmarried youth and girl aged under-20 to give views on King Alaung Sithu and the tea plant; and two married middle-aged (20-50 years) were interviewed. Moreover, some Buddhist monks, nuns, and Board of Trustees members who could tell of the original tea plant and the worship of King Alaung Sithu and the manager of the Township Agriculture Service with knowledge of governmental policy and support were interviewed separately. The Managers of the three biggest tea factories, one is belongs to Ministry of Defense and the other two are private, in Namhsan were also interviewed separately.

Informal interviews were conducted with Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals on their way to tea plantations to pick tea leaves, while they were kneading pickled tea leaves, after their lunch break, or while they were at rest after dinner. Others interviewed were tea factory workers, carriers of tea leaves to the factory, those with least

ownership of tea plantation and those owning 5-plus acres of tea plantation, and personnel of tea brokers' sales centers in Yangon and Mandalay. Moreover, nuns, pagoda trustees, and visitors to the tea-related Celebration were interviewed.

Life history is used for detailed information on personal experience of one's life. For life history, a suitable person each is chosen from villages of the research area. That person must be a Ta Ang (Palaung) national, aged 50-plus, married (household head) and engaged in tea business for generations.

**Focus group discussion (FGD)** will be useful to confirm the data got from the individuals and also to guess and interpret the behaviors, facial expression, and speech in order to grasp the role and status of the member of the society. Focus group discussion at first intended for two times at each village tract but was actually made once, for a total of three. Because the local nationals were at their busiest during most of field trips, so it was difficult to collect necessary people who, moreover, had little time to respond to research questions put to them. Again, three types of grouping were made: a group of married males aged 65-plus and possessing 5-plus acres of tea plantation; suchlike group of females only; and another group of married males, aged 45 and under, and possessing 3-plus acres of tea plantation. The FGD focused the perception of tea leaf in Ta Ang (Palaung).

A direct trip from Yangon to the area under study is impossible. To serve as note taker and take photographic records, this research had to acquire the services of my niece, a graduate in computer Science, and a friend, an Anthropology graduate. Prior to the trip, this group held two meetings to discuss research matters and dos and don'ts. Two local pupils of the researcher were given instructions to serve as note takers before FGDs were held. They are graduates who had learnt Basic Anthropology in their First Year at University.

### **3.5 Duration**

This study was being conducted from 2008 to 2012. To get empirical findings, field research was conducted altogether for 4 months in four years. Moreover, the study tour was fortunate enough to have covered the Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals' Shwephi season, Lwai Sai Pagoda Festival, and Procession in honor of Mani Sithu as well as all three seasons of summer, the rainy season and the cold season. April, September, and November are important and pleasant months for Ta Ang (Palaung) in

Namhsan area. In April there is Shwe Phi Chain (ရွှေဖိချိန်), harvest season especially the time to pick the superior quality tea. In November there is Kahtain (ကထိန်), offering of robes to the members of the Buddhist Order for a special purpose and making devotional offering to the Alaung Sithu Min (King Alaung Sithu AD 1113-1167), who gave the seeds (tea) to the Ta Ang (Palaung). In addition, in September there is Lawi Sai Pagoda festival. There is a sacred tea tree, which is given by King Alaung Sithu. Much data concerning social interaction, personal feeling, status, and roles in society are compiled during these periods. The whole research is carried out under the direct guidance of supervisor throughout these four years.

The researcher essentially did data confirmation in field during November 2011. In March, April and May 2012 would be the results writing and submitting of it. The detailed time frame chart for this study is presented in Appendix 2.

### **3.6 Ethical Considerations**

The basic principles of ethics were adhered to in the study as far as is concerned. In observation, discussions and interviews, the autonomy of participants and confidentiality of the information were ensured and their traditional values and principles were respected and adhered to. Besides, researcher needed to protect informant's physical, social, and psychological welfare and to honor dignity and privacy. To get well documents, using tape recorder, taking photos, and video were done with the permission of the people. Besides, the ethical clearance from the informants' consents was got.

### **3.7 Strength and Limitation**

The advantages of this research are: enthusiastic help given by the nationals in the locality in selection of informants; the nationals in the locality are able to speak Myanmar language very well; information and facts given by those with a wide knowledge of the nationals' background history; availability of interpreters in regard of Ta Ang (Palaung) language. Besides, in FGDs two young graduate Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals, who were taught anthropology as a minor subject, served as note taker; facilitation of transport by motorbike riders to take us to out-of-the way tea plantations and historical sites of Ta Ang (Palaung) origin.

Although only three FGDs were carried out the interviews in the study area were successfully conducted with responsible personnel of Ta Ang (Palaung) Literature and Culture Committee and pagoda trustees, with local tea cultivators and workers at their plantations and factories, and with far and near visitors coming to the pagoda festival. Another significant advantage was the successful participant observation staying sometime together with the Ta Ang (Palaung) families who met the research requirements.

Any undertaking of research has advantages and disadvantages, and it is true for this research. Firstly the disadvantages are: the distant location of the study area, difficult communication, scarcity of reference books specifically dealing with Ta Ang (Palaung) culture and traditions, and FGD was carried out three times only instead of six times originally planned.

Namhsan does not lie by the side of Yangon-Mandalay-Lashio highway, so there is no direct bus route between Yangon and that town. All field trips from Yangon to Namhsan had to use motor road. On the first trip we had a change of bus at Hsipaw; so did on the second trip at Mandalay; so did on the third trip at Kyauk-me; and so did on the fourth trip at Lashio. The highway from Yangon up to Hsipaw and the motor coaches plying it are in good condition, but most of Hsipaw –Namhsan, Kyauk-me –Namhsan, Lashio –Namhsan roads are dirt roads or macadamized ones. Cars plying those routes are small ones like jeep, Hilux, etc. and the driver's assistant often has to get off and check the road ahead. Sometimes in the rainy season landslides occur on Hsipaw –Namhsan, Kyauk-me –Namhsan, Lashio –Namhsan roads and travelers have to spend two or three days on route, it is learnt. However, the study tour had not met with that misfortune. Because of the faraway location of Namhsan and difficult transportation, the study tour visited the study area four times only, each in a year for a total period of four years.

There are three books only dealing specifically with Ta Ang (Palaung) traditions and customs, namely: *Maedoh Palaung* by U Min Naing; *The Course of Ta Ang (Palaung) History* compiled by Myanmar Naingngan Ta Ang (Palaung) Literature and Culture Central Committee; and *Religion and Culture of the Ta Ang (Palaung) Nationals in Namhsan Area* by Ashin Thu Zarta.

## CHAPTER (4)

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF TA ANG (PALAUNG) NATIONALS

This chapter mainly gives a presentation of how Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals migrated into Myanmar, the background history of Namhsan under research, how the linkage between the tea leaf and Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals developed, and an account of tea commodity of significance in Ta Ang (Palaung) history. Also presented in addition are Ta Ang (Palaung) terms, meanings, and the list of major tea growing countries of the world.

#### 4.1 Migration of Ta Ang (Palaung)

In olden days, in the mountain ranges regions as well as in the plains there were no literature records on the history of non-literate people. Most records are carried on by word of mouth, by the oral tradition. Among them are also folk tales, which were created to give general knowledge to teach good behavior, to be able to think and to make people happy. Because of the creative thinking of ancient people, there are many folk tales in man's civilization. The Palaung people also have traditional beliefs or folklore concerned with their origin.

Encyclopedia Myanmarica says Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals belong to speakers of a branch of Austro-Asiatic family of languages, and are of same lineage as Yanglan, Yin, Wa, La, and Lawa. (Bar Thar Pyan Sar Pay Athin, 1976, Vol. 6)

In their folklore, it was said that in the past the Palaung nationals wandered about all over Asia where food and water were available. Then they gathered in Mongolia to the north of China. From there they moved to South China and in about 1000 B.C, at Tarli region they founded Kaw Thi kingdom. Under the Palaung king, the kingdom of Kaw Thi was prosperous. Then, because the economy was developed and there was no war, the population gradually increased. Agriculture was the main economic activity and they lived in peace and happiness. The people said, "The king is as powerful as the Sun and as peaceful and calm as the Moon" ("Namhsan, Ashin Thu Zarta, 2005)

Near that kingdom, there was a beautiful and pleasant lake inhabited by a she-dragon. Every three years, the she-dragon comes upon the land and plays with water. The young Palaung women admired the beautiful she-dragon and imitated her features in their dressing. They dressed in red, black, green, and yellow suits to be as

beautiful as the female dragon. The Palaung women thought that their beautiful clothes and look (fashion) were as beautiful as the she-dragon. They also began to believe that they were born of the “Sun-king and dragon-mother” (Min Naing, 1962).

Anthropologists believe that the Myanmar nationals are descended from the Mongoloid that came down into Myanmar in three main groups, which are divided by basing on language. They are Mon-Khmer group, Tibeto-Myanmar group and the Thai-Chinese group. Among those three groups, the Mon-Khmer group came in earliest and in that group Mon, Wa, Palaung (Ta Ang), Ying-net, Riyan and Danaw national were included. From the language point of view Palaungs (Ta Ang) also belong to Mon-Khmer group which is in the Austro-Asia group (Pe Mg Tin).

The Palaungs live mostly in the Northern Shan State, Kyauk-me, Hsipaw, Namhsan, Taung-ping, Namtu, Kut-kai, Nam Khan and Momeik. They have even spread to the south (Singhanetra-Renard, 2004). The place where Palaungs have settled most are marked as “Taung Paing” (တောင်ပိုင်) region and they are Namhsan area, Hsipaw area, Panlon (Namtu Bawdwin mine area) and Maing-ngaut area. Taung-paing area is 938 square miles.

Taung-paing region is on the northern Shan State Mountains 5000- 6500 feet above sea level. Layers of mountain ranges surround it. The Shans call it “Lwai Lon”, the term "Lwai" means mountain and "Lon" means big or high, so it means very High Mountain. The Shan also call the Palaungs “Taing Lwai” or “Kum Lwai”, the term "Taing" means Shan, "Kum" means man, "Lwai" means mountain. Therefore "Taing Lwai" means Shan from the mountain and "Kum Lwai" means people from the mountains.

## 4.2 Background of the study site

**Table 1. Racial and Ethnic Groups Residing in Namhsan Township**

No	Nationality	Population			Percentage
		Male	Female	Total	
1	Ta Ang (Palaung)	24101	26031	50132	88 %
2	Shan	803	861	1664	2.92 %
3	Others	670	739	1409	2.47 %
4	Chinese	442	432	874	1.63 %
5	Lisu	385	417	802	1.4 %
6	Bamar	323	333	656	1.15 %
7	Lishaw	195	225	420	0.73 %
8	Kachin	195	215	410	0.71 %
9	Kokant	156	171	327	0.57 %
10	Nepalese	34	42	76	0.13 %
11	Mone-wun (Chinese)	21	28	49	0.08 %
12	Indian	21	30	51	0.08 %
13	Kayin	12	13	25	0.04 %
14	Rakhine	14	10	24	0.04 %
15	Bangladeshi	7	12	19	0.03 %
16	Pakistani	7	8	15	0.02 %
17	Chin	3	4	7	0.01 %
18	Mon	4	1	5	0.008 %
	Total	27393	29572	56965	100 %

According to above-mentioned Namhsan Township Population table, 88 percent of the population is found to be Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals. Data were generated from Township General Administration Department, Namhsan; Basic facts on the township (27-12-2010).

**Table 2. Population by Religion in Namhsan Township**

No	Religion	Population	Percentage
1	Buddhism	56045	98.38 %
2	Christianity	745	1.30 %
3	Hindu	53	0.09 %
4	Muslim	132	0.23 %
	Total	56965	100 %

According to the table 2, nearly 99 percent of the township population are Buddhists. Besides, local monks said that the majority of them are tea growers. Data were obtained from Township General Administration Department, Namhsan; Basic facts on the township (27-12-2010)

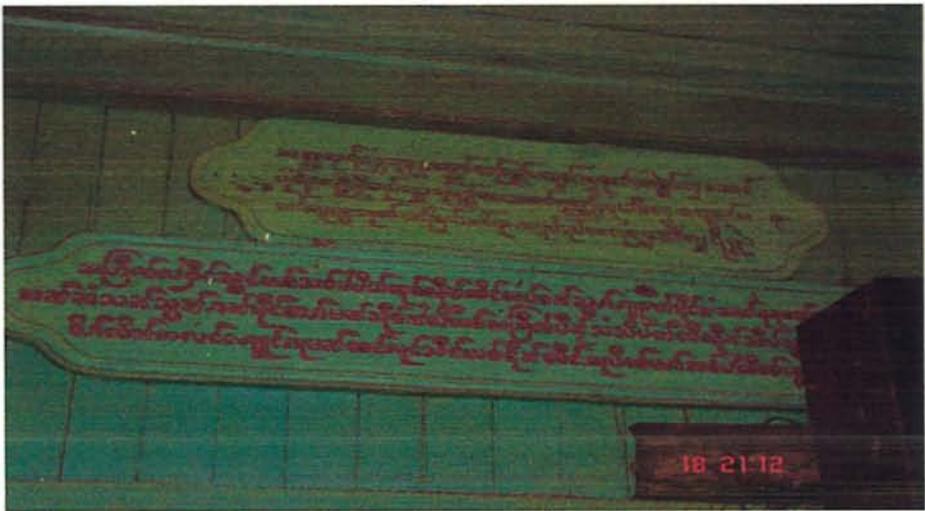
Namhsan Township, Kyauk-me District where most of the Palaung nationals live is 55758 square miles in area. It is the headquarter of the Taung-paing Sawbwa and his "Haw" (the name of building like a palace) is built there. The town of Namhsan is built on a crooked mountaintop, approached by two miles of crooked road, winding uphill from east to west like a huge dragon crawling up the mountain. (See Figure 1)



**Figure 1. Scenes of Namhsan**

Namhsan town was founded in King Mindon's reign, on the 14<sup>th</sup> waning day of Nat Taw (ninth Myanmar calendar), 1227 (The record of Namhsan Myo-ma

Central Monastery, see figure 2) On that day, when the stakes were driven down to start building the new town, there was a terrible earthquake. The water of the streams, lakes, and walls trembled. Namhsan is not a Ta Ang (Palaung) term. They named the town “Namhsan” in Shan language, which means “Nant” is water; “San” is tremble meaning trembling-water town. In Ta Ang (Palaung) language, the Ta Ang (Palaung) call it “Ohn Ye” i.e “Ohn” is water, “Ye” is tremble. Therefore, the meaning is the same: trembling-water town. According to the record of Namhsan Central Monastery, the definition is “the road feels slushy or shaky due to wetness lying underneath”. That road has been paved over a depression full of landfill, which lies to the east of present-day Hawgone (former Shan chief’s manor).



**Figure 2. The record of Namhsan Myo-ma Central Monastery**

Namhsan town is surrounded by nine famous mountains. They are: on the south-east is Lwai Saing mountain, in the east is Man Lwae mountain, in the south-west is Kyauk Phyu mountain, to the south of Kyauk Phyu mountain is Taung Thon Sae mountain, in the north-west is Kaung Mhu Sae (Patamyar Kon Pagoda hill), in the north is Kha Laung mountain, in the north-east Taung Kyaw mountain, in the west is Myaw Pa Young Pagoda mountain, and in the south is Maha Muni Pagoda mountain.

Although many nationals live in Namhsan area such as Palaung, Chinese and Li-shaw, eighty eight percent of them are Ta Ang (Palaungs). They have also spread to the southern and eastern parts of the Shan State. Ninety percent of Ta Angs (Palaung) live in Namhsan and Man Tone areas in Kyauk-me district. In Hsipaw and

Kyauk-me , about forty percent are Ta Angs (Palaung). In Kut Khing, Nam Khan and Musai district, forty-five percent of the people are Ta Angs (Palaung).

In Southern Shan State, Ta Angs (Palaung) can be found in Kalaw, Aung Bun, Yat Sauk , Pindaya, Maing Shu, Maing Kaing, Le Char, Kye Thee, Maing Pun, Kum Heing, spreading to Eastern Shan States. Moreover, in Mandalay Division, find a lot of them are found in Mogok area. There are a million of Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals in Myanmar. (Ta Ang annual magazine, 2004)

For communication, Namhsan is accessible by motor road only. The roads are narrow and dirt roads or macadamized ones. Besides, in the rainy season the roads were covered with mud (See Figure 3). Two types of bus service between Namhsan-Mandalay are by Hilux bus and coach; the same for Namhsan-Lashio route; but Hilux bus service only for Namhsna-Kyaukme route.

**4.3 Other economic activities**

Other economic activities include foodstuff, textiles and garments, electrical products and construction materials, marketing in personal goods, and restaurants. Industries and business of the town, as shown in Basic facts on Namhsan 2010, Township General Administration Department, is as follows; (Township General Administration Department, Namhsan; Basic facts on the township (27-12-2010)

**Table 3. Industries and business of the town**

No	Industry/ Business	Quantity
1	Private fuel oil sales shops	2
2	Transportation services	4
3	Computer and services	4
4	Video show rooms	20
5	Guest House	1



**Figure 3. Muddy roads**

#### **4.4 The various descriptions in the meaning of "Palaung and Ta Ang"**

The Chinese people called the Palaungs "Ponlon" (ပုံလုံ) affectionately. The term "Pon" means human being and the term "Lon" means dragon, so the term "Ponlon" means dragon man or dragon race. Believed to have migrated into Myanmar from China together with the Mons, Palaungs are said to be called Palaung, a corruption from "Paung-laung", the name found in Mon records. (Min Naing, 1962)

According to a Palaung's own historical record, the word Palaung came up during the Bagan Era (A.D 845-50) and that as such it is a Myanmar vocabulary. When the Tagaung people rebelled against the king, the pants-wearing mountain people came to the palace and asked if the king had known of the rebellion. The rebellion is called "Balaung Balle" (ဗလောင်းဗလဲ) in mountain peoples' language which means "inconsistency" or "disunity". After the mountain people informed the king about rebellion or Balaung Balle, the king was able to arrange to put down the rebellion. Then the King was so pleased with the mountain people and felt he could get help from these honest people. So, to remember them he called them "Balaung" (ဗလောင်း) people. It has become "Palaung" in the course of time. (Min Naing, 1962)

In Shwe Yin Myaw Pagoda (ရွှေယင်မွှော်ဘုရား) and Shin Phyu Shin Hla Pagoda (ရှင်ဖြူရှင်လှဘုရား) historical records, when King Alaung Sithu toured his Kingdom and arrived in Nyaung Shwe region, he had a palace built near Lake while staying at there. Unfortunately, a forest fire burnt the royal raft. Even though the raft guard had responsibility, he was not able to prevent the fire. The king Alaung Sithu named the

raft guard “Phaung Laung” (ဖောင်လောင်); it means, "Burning the raft". Therefore, from then they were called “Phaung Laung” and as time passed, it became “Palaung”. (Min Naing, 1962)

Another version according to the Li-nat-ta Lexical Treatise (လိဏတုဝိသုဒ္ဓိ), it was decreed by the King Alaung Sithu for people who got burnt up to the thighs in forest fires while they were asleep in the woods. The expression he used was "Paung Laung" (ပေါင်လောင်); it means burnt thighs, and from thence derived the present term "Palaung". (Min Naing, 1962)

There are two reasons for the Palaung nationals to call themselves “Ta Ang”. They call themselves “Ta Ang” nationals because when they were living on the Mongol highland region they had to depend on a lake for their livelihood of agriculture. Therefore, in Chinese language Palaung national is called "Tar Ang". As time passed, it has become "Ta Ang". “Ta” means in or at and “Ang” means lake so "Ta Ang" means people who live at the lake. Responsible personnel of Ta Ang (Palaung) Literature and Culture Committee said it is wrong to call them “lake dwellers” because the Palaung language word for lake is “Elon” only. Again, in real Palaung language “Taya Ang” meaning “people living on a steep mountain”, which years later became “Ta Ang” (Myanmar Naingngan Ta Ang (Palaung) Literature and Culture Central Committee, 2008).

In former times, other nationals called the Palaungs as Shwe Palaung and Ngwe Palaung in a familiar manner. It is because the Palaungs who live in the inner mountains wear gold ornaments and the Palaungs in the outer mountains wear silver ornaments. In Myanmar Language, Shwe means gold and Ngwe means silver. The terms Shwe Palaung, Ngwe Palaung is used as friendly terms with each other among the nationals. However, for the Palaung nationals the terms seem to be differentiation among them causing disunion. So on 29<sup>th</sup> February, 1996 it was registered with the Ministry of the Interior, Myanmar, Registration No. 1793 that the term “Ta Ang” should be used to call all Palaung people, to promote unity and solidarity and preserve the term “Ta Ang”. (Myanmar Naingngan Ta Ang (Palaung) Literature and Culture Central Committee, 2008)

From the above studies, it can be said that the name Palaung is derived from neighboring people and the name Ta Ang is their original and now it is official. Besides, it can be understood that Ta Ang preceded the name of Palaung and they

prefer the name Ta Ang to the name Palaung. Moreover “King Alaung Sithu” is called “Mani Sithu” by their native Language, therefore, this research will be used both of the term properly.

The name “Shwe-phi Moe-lut” tea is famous all over Myanmar. It is a direct translation into Myanmar from Ta Ang (Palaung) language. It is misunderstood as tea picked before the rains in Myanmar. The real meaning in Ta Ang (Palaung) is red-stemmed leaf buds of the tea plant, growing from the full moon day of Tabaung to the water Festival’s time, is called Shwephi Oo, or superior quality tea. Harvested beginning March, of summer, the tea leaves are called Shwephi Moe Lut Laphet. Shwephi Oo, or Shwephi rain free green tea, has many qualities, namely: brightness; smallness; white stripes called “silver-white threads” on stems; feeling of sharp ends when a fistful of the green tea is grasped; more weighty than other kinds of green tea. Besides, flavor of sourness, it has stringency, sweetness and pleasant odor; detoxicating to the drinker; refreshing; contributory to clarity of thought; good circulation of blood and internal gases; and correcting of urinary problems.

The Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals usually offer some amount of Shwephi Oo (or) Shwephi Rain-free Laphet green tea to monasteries first, before consuming it themselves or making it. Therefore, Shwephi Oo green tea is sometimes called “Phongyi Thauk” (Monk’s Beverage) by the local Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals.

## **4.5 The linkage between tea leaf and Palaung (Ta Ang) in the past**

### **4.5.1 Migration of tea**

Tea is the agricultural product of the leaves, leaf buds, and internodes of the *Camellia sinensis* plant, prepared and cured by various methods. After water, tea is the most widely consumed beverage in the world. It has a cooling, slightly bitter, astringent flavor, which many enjoy. Tea plant, *Camellia sinensis*, is an evergreen plant that grows mainly in tropical and sub-tropical climates. (See Figure-4)



**Figure 4. Tea Leaf**

According to the records of Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations (January, 2010), tea originated in Southeast Asia, specifically around the intersection of latitude 29° N and longitude 98°E, the point of confluence of the lands of northeast India, north Myanmar, southwest China and Tibet. The plant was introduced to more than 52 countries, from this “centre of origin”. Various types of intermediate hybrids and spontaneous polyploids all appear to demonstrate a single place of origin for *Camellia sinensis*- the area including the northern part of Myanmar Yunan and Sichuan provinces of China. (<file:///F:\Tea-Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia>)

In the study of the tea plants in South East Asia by the tea scholar Mr. Milson (1997), it is said that he had found wild, tame, and naturally grown tea plants in Northern Myanmar. Besides, Sayar U Khant Kyaw, who is a traditional healer, stated that "there is historical evidence that the tea scholar Te Iedin has named those teas as *Camellia Arrawadiensis*" in his book “Gambiya magic leaves” (Khant Kyaw, 2008).

Tea plants are native to East and South Asia and probably originated around the point of confluence of the lands of northeast India, north Myanmar, southwest China, and Tibet. Although tales exist in regard to the beginnings of tea being used as a beverage, no one is sure of its exact origins. The usage of tea as a beverage was first recorded in China, with the earliest records of tea consumption dating back to the 10th century B.C.

The Chinese have consumed tea for thousands of years. Tea plants were found in China since 5000 years ago (or) in about 3000 B.C., Tea was grown and processed only in China from the year B.C 2700 to A.D 1610. People of the Han Dynasty used tea as medicine. China is considered to have the earliest records of tea consumption. The origin of the use of tea as a beverage though lost in antiquity is rich in legend. There is a Chinese mythical fable about the origin of tea. It places the introduction of tea as a beverage in the reign of the mythical emperor Shen Nung, about 2737 B.C. Shen Nung, the legendary Emperor of China and inventor of agriculture and Chinese medicine, was drinking a bowl of just boiled water sometime around 2737 B.C when a few leaves were blown from a nearby tree into his water, changing the color. The emperor took a sip of the brew and was pleasantly surprised by its flavor and restorative properties. A variant of the legend tells that the emperor tested the medical properties of various herbs on him, some of them poisonous and found tea to work as an antidote. (Encyclopedia Britannica, Volume-21, 1968)

In another popular legend, many years ago there was a Buddhist man in China who was devoted to religion seriously. He vowed to meditate for nine years continuously without sleep and he suddenly fell asleep after three years during the meditation. When he woke up, he blamed himself for being weakened and as a punishment he cut off his eyelids and threw them away and the eye lids took roots at where they fell and there grew up a small plant. Moreover, some of the Chinese nationals traditionally used to say that they were the first ever grown tea plants on earth. Tea was used as medicine previously and the taxes were levied on tea when it was used as beverages in 7th Century Year in China (Khant Kyaw, 2008).

In A.D 1610, a Dutch merchant began to bring tea from China to Europe. Since then the tea packing industry began to reach England. In 1823, when Indian citizen Major R Bruce found wild tea plant in Himalayas, he believed that tea plants could be grown in India. Therefore, he ordered tea seeds from China and planted them in Government Botanical Garden in Calcutta successfully, and began to grow in Assam (Arthan) State.

According to above-mentioned account, it can be known that the tea originated in Asia and it has been becoming one of the international beverages. No one can claim that the tea plant originally grew at those places. The earliest record on tea consumption dates back to circa 10<sup>th</sup> century B.C in China. By 200 B.C, tea drinking was already widespread in China of *Ching Dynasty*. During the *Tang Dynasty*, the

habit of drinking tea spread from China to Korea and Japan. Tea firstly reached Europe via the colonialist Portuguese who went on expeditions in the East. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, tea use had spread to various parts of the world including the Western countries. Thus, the habit of tea drinking handed down from generation to generation together with its legends has now become a tea culture of significance. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/tea>)

#### **4.5.2 Tea production in the World**

India, the world's largest producer of tea (mostly black tea) supplied about one-third of the total in the mid-1960s and leads the world in tea exports. After World War II, more than 60 percent of India's tea exports were shipped to the United Kingdom (Encyclopedia Britannica, Volume-21, 1968). In 1834, the Assam (Arthan) Tea Company was established in India. It was the first firm which grew the tea plants on industrial scale in the world. In 1937, the Assam (Arthan) tea Company was able to produce dried tea leaves. In 1937 -40 Sri Lanka began to grow tea plants as a British Colony. In 1920, Kenya began to grow tea plants and was able to export tea leaves in 1963. At present there are 45 countries producing tea leaves with 2.5 million hectares of land under cultivation. They are producing (about) 3000 million kilograms of tea leaves annually.

Today tea is the most popular drink in the world in terms of consumption. Most tea consumed outside East Asia is produced on large plantations in India or Sri Lanka, and is destined to be sold to large businesses. India is the world's largest tea-drinking nation although the per capita consumption of tea remains a modest 750 grams per person every year. Turkey, with 2.5 kg of tea consumed per person per year is the world's greatest per capita consumer. (FAO, January 2010)

In 2003, world tea production was 3.21 million tones annually. In 2008, world tea production reached over 4.37 million tones. The largest producers of tea are China, India, Kenya, Sri Lanka, and Turkey. The following table shows the amount of tea production (in tons) by leading countries in recent years. Turkey is world's second largest tea producer after China. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations as of January 2010 generated data.

**Table 4. Percentage of total tea production by country from 2006 to 2008**

No.	Country	2006	2007	2008	Percentage (2008)
1	China	1,047,345	1,183,002	1,257,384	27%
2	India	928,000	949,220	805,180	17%
3	Kenya	310,580	369,600	345,800	7%
4	Sri Lanka	310,800	305,220	318,470	7%
5	Turkey	201,866	206,160	1,100,257	23%
6	Vietnam	151,000	164,000	174,900	4%
7	Indonesia	146,858	150,224	150,851	3%
8	Japan	91,800	94,100	94,100	2%
9	Argentina	72,129	76,000	76,000	2%
10	Iran	59,180	60,000	60,000	1%
11	Bangladesh	58,000	58,000	59,000	1%
12	Malawi	45,009	46,000	46,000	1%
13	Uganda	34,334	44,923	42,808	1%
14	Other countries	189,551	193,782	205,211	4%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>3,646,452</b>	<b>3,887,308</b>	<b>4,735,961</b>	<b>100%</b>

\* in Colum 3, 4, 5 shows tea production in tons

#### 4.5.3 Status of expanded tea growing in Myanmar

Asian countries such as India, Sri Lanka and Indonesia grow tea on a commercial basis and export it. As the tea plant thrives well at an elevation of about 3000 feet Chin and Shan States have suitable natural surroundings for it. State leaders have set down guidelines for expansion of tea growing, namely: For Thandaung, Kayin State to widely grow tea plants through setting up of Zones; to have so large an acreage of expanded tea plantation in Chin State that it becomes fit to be named “Laphet State”; and to carry out necessary motivation in a balanced manner accompanied by free systematic distribution of tea seed. All these are a national program under a 30-year plan with six short-term (5-year) ones (Agricultural Education Division). State-sponsored workshops on improved tea production took

place May 2009 in Yangon participated by Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation personnel, and tea experts.

Statistics for 2010 of United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization show that Asia is the biggest producer of tea. Countries commercially planting it are India, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, China, Malaysia, Indonesia, Japan, Taiwan, Vietnam, South Korea, as well as Kenya in Africa. Townships with commercial tea plantations in Myanmar are Namhsan, Kyauk-me, Mong Mit, Mantong, Namtu, Mong Ngawt, Namhkan, Laukkaing, Kunlong and Tang Yan in Shan State (North); Pinlaung, Pindaya, Kalaw and Mong Hsu in Shan State (South); and Mogok in Mandalay Region. Since 2000, tea plantation has been greatly increased in the Chin State townships of Hakha, Falam and Mindat in accordance with State leaders' directive and the slogan: Chin State must become the Laphet State (Tea State).

#### **4.5.4 History of tea in Palaung**

When did Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals begin to grow tea plants? In the study of the mythical fables of Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals relating to tea plantation to know the answers for this question, the views of the Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals on the tea has been revealed. Like Chinese, the Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals also have a mythical fable (relating to tea plants). There are several legends telling how tea was introduced to Myanmar and how the Palaung came to become involved in cultivation.

King Alaung Sithu (A.D 1113-1167) in Bagan used to go on tour. He arrived at Malayu Island on his tour. (Pho Kyar, 1939) There stayed four deity ogres namely Inghali Deva (အင်္ဂလိဒေဝ), Devayekkha (ဒေဝယက္ခ), Zeya Thattrue (ဧယျသံကြည်) and Bernu Deikpa (ဘာဏုဒိပ္ပ). One day the four deity ogres caught a Brahminy duck (ဟင်္သာငှက်). As the crop of the bird was swelling and when they searched in the crop, they found some kind of seeds. The seeds were not ordinary ones but they were a kind of deity seeds called "Nilavisa" (နီလဗိဇ) which means magic seeds.

Then the deity ogres offered the seeds to King Alaung Sithu who was there on his tour. The king accepted the seeds and returned to Myanmar. One day when the king went on his tour with an intention to plant the seeds offered by the four deity ogre brothers in a suitable place and to propagate religion on his royal barge, he arrived at Lwai Sai where the Palaung (Ta Ang) nationals lived in about 468 Myanmar era. (Khant Kyaw, Sayar, 2008).

When the king gave seeds to Palaung (Ta Ang) Chief, Ta Ngon as a reward for cultivation at the present site, Ta Ngon received the seeds in his left single hand sitting down on one knee. When the seeds were planted, they grew up and as their new leaves were qualified with scent and flavor, they were first offered to the king. When the king had some of the leaves as they had sweet scent, and found out that they were very good in favor but also found that he was especially unable to sleep as in the nights before. Then he stated that these leaves not only have good scent and flavor but also could cure drowsiness.

As the Palaung (Ta Ang) Chief Ta Maung Ngon received the seeds offered by King Alaung Sithu with his single hand, it was known as "Let-ta Phet" (လက်တစ်ဖက်) plants, which means single hand and it changed into "Lephet" (လက်ဖက်) (U Narginda, U, 2005). This was the origin of coincidence of Palaung (Ta Ang) nationals and the Lephet or tea leaves. Since then cultivation of tea plants became the traditional trade of Palaung (Ta Ang) nationals.

The tea plant, which grew from the seeds given by King Alaung Sithu, is standing on Lwai Sai Mountain till the present day, and regarded as exalted plant. A statue of King Alaung Sithu in a magnificent tiled roofed building was built and honored until now. Festivals for the Buddha worship and to honor King Alaung Sithu were held annually on the full moon day to Taw Tha Lin (6th Myanmar month/September). In the festival, one thousand sand pagodas, one thousand bamboo vases, one thousand candles, one thousand flowers, one thousand food offerings, one thousand banners and flags, one thousand paper decorations tied up to bent bamboo strip, one thousand pennants, one thousand umbrellas and one thousand footed to bowls for food offerings and celebrated annually without fail in Taw Tha Lin. In Ta Ang (Palaung) traditional beliefs, King Alaung Sithu is regarded as their lifesaver, revered and respected. (Detail of the festival will be shown in chapter 6.)

U Ponnya (1812-1867), a famous Myanmar poet in his book "U Ponnya Myittaza", stated that tea was planted for the King Dut-ta-baung, so the introducing of tea to Myanmar was about 2,000 years ago (Ponnya, U, 1954). In this version, the seeds were first given to the Palaung while they were still living in what is now northern China.

Therefore, it can be assumed that tea is deeply rooted in Ta Ang (Palaung) history. The Ta Angs (Palaung) have been consistent growers of tea since King

Manisithu gave them its seed and urged the cultivation of tea. Then tea seemingly has taken a significant role in their socio-economic life. To understand the cultural aspect of Ta Ang (Palaung) feeling about tea, it is also needed to focus on the economic aspect of tea. In continuation, the tea's role in the economy of Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals is presented.

## CHAPTER (5)

### ECONOMIC ASPECT OF TEA LEAF

Ta Ang (Palaung) people are traditionally tea cultivators. The majority of Ta Ang (Palaung) people who cultivate tea live in Namhsan, Mantong, Namtu, Namkham, Kutkai, Kyauk-me and Hsipaw in Northern Shan State. Agriculture is the basic economy of Namhsan Township. Tea cultivation is the main livelihood among other cultivations and tea production is the main source of income for the Ta Ang (Palaung) people who live in Namhsan Township.

To have a look at the tea business of Namhsan-native Ta Angs (Palaung), its ethnic groups, populations, and religions are presented first. Current tea plantation of the township, methods and techniques of tea growing, the three major products of tea, symbolic activities in tea production, and problems and difficulties just encountered by tea products are mainly presented. Moreover, tea terms seasonally used by the locals, distribution network of the commodity, other businesses, and present tea cultivation in Myanmar are presented.

#### 5.1 The tea leaf in economy

**Table 5. Basis Demographics of Namhsan Township**

	House	Family	Population	Tea cultivators (Family)
Town	681	892	5729	801
Rural	7743	8935	51236	8299
Total	8424	9827	56965	9100 (92.6%)

According to above-mentioned Basic Demographics Table, there are 92.6 percent of the tea grower families in the Namhsan Township. Data were generating from Township General Administration Department, Namhsan; Basic facts on the township (27-12-2010).

## 5.2 Tea and tea plantation today

The Namhsan Township's major economic activity is agriculture-based and the growing of tea leaf is predominant among all crops. Under present circumstances the records of Myanmar Agriculture Enterprise and Irrigation Department, 2010 show that Northern Shan State with its excellent production technique has the most acreage under the tea plant (Laphet) and the best production and marketing of it. The production of tea leaf is so good that Namhsan in Kyauk-me District is often known as the "tea leaf capital of Myanmar". Out of the total tea plantation area of 99,717 acres in the 8-township Kyauk-me District the Namhsan Township boasts 49,336 acres, the best township wise producer in Shan State, according to Survey and Land Records Department, Kyauk-me District 2010-2011 figures.

Tea leaf growing is the major traditional livelihood of Ta Ang (Palaungs) residing in Kyauk-me Township. According to Township Agriculture Manager, Namhsan with its many 5000 feet-6000 feet mountain ranges, numerous steep slopes, and particularly highlands at least 5000 feet high makes for the best condition for tea leaf growing. As to weather, Namhsan Township enjoys an annual rainfall of 70 inches on average, from June to October. Its highest temperature is 90° ferenhigh (April) and lowest temperature is 32° ferenhigh (December). It also has a lot of springs, whose water is of pH 7.1, according to the Township Agriculture Department, Namhsan's soil is especially good for growing tea leaf in that it has little calcium, but gem-bearing, red natural earths.

Most local farmers claim that Ta Ang (Palaung) of Namhsan set a high value by growing tea leaf, and take pride in an occupation connected with tea. Their superstition is such that other crops rather than tea leaf wouldn't prove successful, as King Alaung Sithu himself had prophesied the occupation of growing tea leaf for the Ta Ang (Palaung). For example, if orange is grown, the fruit would be too sour and small-sized, the Ta Ang (Palaung) believes. A few locals claim that too deep a superstition as such has a bias against other crops rather than the tea leaf.

The minority of locals grow mustard, cabbage, and cauliflower for home consumption in the household garden. It is no commercial work, as Ta Angs (Palaung) consider sale of those vegetables below their status. Therefore those highland produce like mustard, cabbage and cauliflower come to the markets of other towns from Hsipaw, Kyauk-me, Panlon village and nearby ones. Moreover, paddy growing is made possible only through terrace farming, and the harvest is not enough

for local self-sufficiency (See Figure -5). Nowadays, the crops like potato, garlic, and onion show signs of promise.



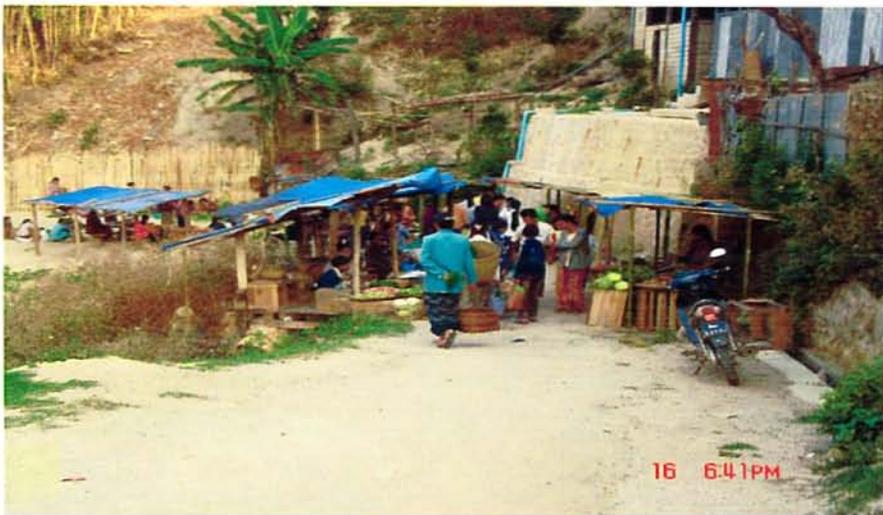
**Figure 5. Terrace farming**

The resident Ta Angs (Palaung) of Namhsan Township claim they have never been engaged in livestock breeding on a commercial scale until now. What they raise are a few chickens, ducks, and pigs. Their hesitancy to make commercial work of livestock breeding is perhaps due to their religious beliefs. Very few people domesticate cows for flesh and milk, and those people are not Ta Ang (Palaung), but they are Indian. Therefore chickens, ducks, pigs and eggs are being imported from Kyauk-me, Hsipaw and Lashio for home consumption of Namhsan.

The 5<sup>th</sup> day market is common all over Shan State, but it is not true for Namhsan. There is no bazaar operated by Township Development Committee either. Basic foodstuff like rice, edible oil, prawn paste, dried fish, potato, onion, or beans mainly come from the plains. Since long ago, there have been pedestrian vegetable sellers shouldering their goods in baskets. These sellers, some permanent and some occasional, come from nearby villages. Nowadays sellers of fish, meat, and vegetables are seen every morning operating in a lane or two off the main road, native people called “morning market” (See Figure 6, 7). In addition, there are daily sellers riding motorbikes who commute from Kyauk-me and Hsipaw to Namhsan.



**Figure 6. The seller from the Namhsan**



**Figure 7. The morning market**

Topographically Namhsan mostly lies along mountain slopes, allowing a wide road with lanes branching off it. That road, 10 feet wide, is barely spacious for two motor vehicles to pass each other. The buildings on both side of the main road are shop houses selling garments, personal and electrical goods, foodstuffs, etc joined by some teashops and restaurants (See Figure- 8). For its commerce, Namhsan has road transport only while those roads are in less than desirable condition. Therefore, its main single product or symbolic product, the tea leaf, is being exported elsewhere.

However, since 2009 the regional roads are being improved by five private companies, which also receive some State support.



**Figure 8. Shops houses along the main road**

The tea plant growers say the topographical feature of Namhsan is all slopes; therefore, only labor force, rather than draught cattle or machinery, has to be used from clearing land up to final manufactured goods like pickled tea leaves, green tea and black tea. At the Shwephi (superior quality tea) season, all households go out to pluck tea leaves, especially the sprouts, by hand. In addition, human labor rather than draught cattle is used in clearing gardens or working the land. It is best to start processing the tea leaf within 12 hours after it has been picked. Daily work of necessity cannot be postponed, so this calls for manual labor.

From ancient times to date tea leaf growers from villages far from Namhsan have been bringing their produce to that town, where most factories stand, with the use of draught animals like bullocks and mules. (See figure- 9). Nowadays some growers use motor trailers. In the evening at Namhsan can be seen processions of mules and motor trailers loaded with fresh-picked tea leaves. On their return home, the tea leaf growers take foodstuffs and consumer goods like rice, edible oil, salt, chilies, onion, soap and garments which they have bought in town.



**Figure 9. Carrying tea leaf to the factory**

### **5.3 Seasonal names for the tea leaf and routine work for tea plantation**

At Namhsan area, there are seasonal names in use for the tea leaf. It will be “Shwephi-Oo” if the tea leaf is picked 3<sup>rd</sup> week of March to 2<sup>nd</sup> week of April. “Shwephi” if it is picked 3<sup>rd</sup> week of April to end-April; “Shwephi-la” if it is picked 1<sup>st</sup> week of May to 2<sup>nd</sup> week of the same. “Khakan-Oo” if it is picked 4<sup>th</sup> week of May to 2<sup>nd</sup> week of June; “Khakan” if it is picked 3<sup>rd</sup> week of June to end-August; “Khahawt” if it is picked 1<sup>st</sup> week of September to 2<sup>nd</sup> week of October; and “Khanaing” if it is picked 3<sup>rd</sup> week of October to 2<sup>nd</sup> week of November. The period from 2<sup>nd</sup> week of November to 2<sup>nd</sup> week of March is not the time for picking the tea leaf.

At Shwephi season when new tea leaves grow in abundance the plantation owners yearly send for migrant workers to pick them from other regions. In this season, some 10,000 migrant workers from Central Myanmar areas like Pakokku, Pale, Monywa, Ayadaw, Myingyan, Taungtha and Meiktila used to come to Namhsan Township. Migrant workers coming for Shwephi season (starting 3<sup>rd</sup> week of March) only will receive half the transfer expenses from the tea plantation owner. If such a worker commits to pick tea leaves from Shwephi season to Khakan season in August, he will be given the full transfer expenses by the plantation owner, who needs the labor of 4-5 workers, sometimes up to 10 workers, for one Shwephi-Oo season picking of tea leaves, totally weighing 1000 viss.

As 2010-2011 rates go, the round-trip travel cost of a migrant worker is around 30,000 kyat. Picking rate of tea leaves is kyat 250-300 per viss. At Shwephi

season, a worker can pick 100-150 viss of tea leaves and more than 100 viss at Khakan season. Some workers laboring for two seasons can earn up to kyat 100,000. For example, at Shwephi season 2010, some girl workers from Myingyan Township said that they had worked for two seasons every year for five consecutive years, and were able take home every year a net income of 50,000-60,000 kyat after paying for food and other expenses. It is most arduous work in Shwephi season as the growth of tea leaves is at its peak. Climbing up and down the mountain slopes to pick tea leaves is simply tiring work, in which boys can labor longer than girls.

The majority of local Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals say the ownership of tea plants or plantation is usually reckoned in terms of yield or number of hills with tea plants. For example, a grower would say, “My plantation produces 1000 viss of fresh tea leaves per year”, or “My plantations covers two hills”. Formerly he would even have referred to the percussion lock firearm, “*Tu-mee*” in local term, in such a speech, like, “When a percussion lock firearm is fired from this side of my plantation the shot will not reach the edge of the plantation on the other side”. Most growers do not use acreage or hard and fast markers for fences. Looking to streams, waterfalls, boulders, or large trees, they just would say, “I own stretch from this stream side up to the big rock lying over there”. Only a few use an exact number of acres in surveying their tea plantation. Topographical conditions of different hills mean different numbers of tea plants, which can go into an acre. Roughly, an acre can accommodate 250-600 tea plants.

Township Agriculture Manager as well as most local tea growers said that both traditional cultivation method and modern cultivation method are in use on the tea plantation. However, most of Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals residing in Namhsan use the traditional cultivation method in their plantations.

## **5.4 Tea cultivation methods**

### **5.4.1 Traditional cultivation method**

According to local tea growers, the traditional cultivation method goes as follows. Firstly, in summer the land is cleared of trees and brush which are to be burnt down. In the rainy season, the Taungya (hillside cultivation) paddy is grown there. It is harvested in the cold season, which also is the time for the tea plant to bear seeds. To get seedlings, two fistfuls of tea seeds are put in each hole dug in the ground. Some try to grow seedlings on the damp slopes by the side of streams. Then a

congestion of tea plants arises from each hole, to reach a height of three feet with a stem girth of half an inch in three years. In early monsoon, the seedlings are pulled out, while the taproot and its lesser roots are trimmed with a knife. They are then transferred to the holes dug in the plantation, not in rows or proper groups. (See Figure 10)

The tea plant thrives well in a cold climate, especially on breezy mountain slopes or sides suffering a little fog. But new plants need to be covered against fog. Weeds are to be cleared and the earth among the plants must be turned up once or twice a year, using the chopping hoe or plough. This action makes for the active growth of new tea leaves.

Disadvantages of traditional cultivation method in tea plantation are: the plantation is vulnerable to damages caused by cattle; no fertilizers are used; no pruning of tea plants; and the tea plantation is left unattended except for bi-annual weeding and turning of earth. Moreover, young tea plants have a survival rate of 50 percent while the dead plants are never substituted with new plants. Therefore, maintenance costs remain low but the yields per acre as well as income are low also. As dictated by the geography of Namhsan area, the chances for occupations other than tea plantations are few so every family only struggles to expand their tea plantation every year. Therefore, climate change and deforestation occur and the tea production decline.

For these reasons scientific development of new tea plantations, reform of old tea plantations, and finding new quality varieties of tea seeds are needed for Namhsan township. Namhsan products, black tea, pickled tea leaves and green tea, being free of the use of fertilizers and insecticides, are deemed “Organic Tea” and in demand abroad. But the export of it is small for their low production. Therefore, increasing tea-leaf production and the per-acre yield can be achieved through systematic planting of seedling, proper pruning of the tea plant, and better harvesting of tea leaves. When small-scale machines in tea production are substituted with modern equipments black tea and green tea worthy of international market could be produced. Then personal income of the tea-leaf grower will increase, while more foreign exchange is earned for state coffers.



**Figure 10. Traditional tea plantation**

#### **5.4.2 Modern cultivation method**

A program for productivity in tea plantation of Namhsan began in 1992, according to Township Agriculture Manager. It has three parts: mending old tea plantations, scientific development of new tea plantations, and the use of high-quality seeds for better production.

Mending an old tea plantation goes thus: In the monsoon, major pruning is carried out in regard of old and useless plants, leaving 6-inch stubs aboveground. To keep off fungus and moss, these stubs are rubbed with gunny-bag pieces or rough cloth. Using “A” frame, contour lines are drawn up to accommodate tea plants of equal height; along those lines new tea plants are grown as prescribed, leaving old plants alone, cut grass and brush resulting from weeding are heaped along the contour lines yearly so that soil erosion and loss of fertilizers are prevented. (See Figure 11) The advantages of proper, systematic tea plantation are: Facility in weeding out and plant pruning, less tiring work in harvesting, less time needed, and more efficiency in harvesting, i.e. more viss of tea leaves are gathered in less time.



**Figure 11. Modern tea plantation**

According to work on tea leaf productivity in Namhsan Township 2009-2010, courses on modern tea plantation methods began in 1992 under the leadership of Myanmar Agriculture Enterprise, Namhsan Township. After finishing those courses, the government personnel went out to village tracts to teach tea growers in taking care of plantations and pruning methods, at the same time distributing educational pamphlets. In 1995, a 45-member group of tea growers and government personnel from Namhsan, led by State Agriculture Manager, went to Sinlam village in Pyin Oo Lwin Township, Mandalay Region to observe and study Chinese tea plantation method and how to produce Kokang style green tea.

In 2006, Shan-, Ta Ang (Palaung)- and Myanmar- language CDs, produced under the supervision of Kyauk-me District authorities and Myanmar Agriculture Enterprise personnel of the same, were distributed to all township in Kyauk-me District, showing how to make better seedlings and create a tea plantation on modern lines. Moreover, a group of 23 tea growers and government personnel from Namhsan Township was on study tour to Kyauk-me Township that already had tea plantations built up on modern lines. Advantages of the trip and the educational CDs: tea growers in Namhsan Township began to build up modern tea plantations. Here specific pruning of tea plant had begun since 1992, and so 70 percent of tea growers are now engaged in major pruning method. In addition, new tea plants on modern lines are being gradually substituted in old decadent plantations.

Moreover, tea growers on modern lines are still few in number for reasons such as high per-acre cost of tea plantation created through contour lines; insecure inputs in the use of modern tea seedling plots; pruning not measuring up to requirements; unseasonal pruning leading to weak plants with few new branches; and total harvesting of young tea leaves leading to weakened young plants and lowering of tea quality and production.

The majority of tea growers at Zayangyi and Taung Ma villages in Namhsan Township are said to have claimed that formerly, the Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals were traditionally and intensely afraid to cut or prune their tea plants. For example, an elderly Ta Ang (Palaung) man of Nammawa Ward, Namhsan, aged 56 and engaged in tea-related businesses said that when he was once about to prune his tea plants his wife in tears cried, “You had better kill me instead of cutting the tea branches”.

Nowadays proper pruning of tea bushes as advised by Myanmar Agriculture Service has proved popular because it gradually improves the harvest and per acre yield of tea leaves. According to the planning statistics of Myanmar Agriculture Service, Namhsan Township 2010-2011, the township’ tea plantation acreage and the per-acre yield are as follows:

**Table 6. The Township’ tea plantation acreage and the per-acre yield**

No.	Year	Acreage grown	Acreage harvested	Per-acre Yield	Total viss
1	2001-2002	47994	47913	196.3	9405322
2	2002-2003	48136	48105	200	9621000
3	2003-2004	48276	48105	216	10390680
4	2004-2005	48421	48367	250	12891750
5	2005-2006	48571	48367	255	12333585
6	2006-2007	48651	48421	256.39	12414660
7	2007-2008	48771	48421	257.36	12461628
8	2008-2009	48971	48571	260.36	12462658
9	2009-2010	49171	48571	260.30	12643031
10	2010-2011	49336	48667	260.74	12689920

According to the above-mentioned Table on Namhsan Township, its tea plantation acreage is found to be increasing by an average 145 acres every year. (The planning statistics of Township Agriculture Service Department, Namhsan, 2010-2011)

## **5.5 Production and distribution of tea**

### **5.5.1 Production**

According to the field research, most of the people's tea production system in Namhsan Township is cottage industry, a small-scale industry operated in the residential unit. So, it is almost attached to the residential building. To develop these industries in Namhsan Township largely it depends on the tea production and market. Myanmar economic system was transformed to the market-oriented economy from the state centralized economic system since 1998. Therefore, the whole economy restricted giving priority to private sector in accordance with the market-oriented economy.

Tea plays a strong role in the culture and daily life of Myanmar people. Here in Myanmar it is customarily to serve traditional green tea and pickled tea, a unique Myanmar tea available only in Myanmar, in Royal ceremonies during the periods of Myanmar Kings and until now in major social ceremonies. Black tea consumption also has increased significantly nowadays. Myanmar produces three kinds of tea: black tea, green tea, and pickled tea leaves. Green tea is produced at any area with tea plantations, but black tea and pickled tea leaves are not produced at every area with tea plantations. In Namhsan Township, all three kinds of tea are produced and marketed. As to the mode of production, most of tea goods producers of Namhsan use traditional, self-manageable method at home i.e. run a cottage industry. Finished goods are sold to the trading centers or the brokers' sales centers. Only tea planters who have difficulties hiring laborers or work sites, and recipients of advance money sell their tea leaves direct to tea factories and brokers. Black tea, which is made using machinery, is produced in tea factories large and small.

**Table 7. Factories producing black tea, green tea, and pickled tea leaves**

No	Particular	Quantity	Remarks
1	Tatmadaw black tea factory	1	Belong to Ministry of Defense
2	Private black tea factory	73	
3	Private pickled tea leaves factory	27	
4	Advance roasting/ drying factory	2	
	Total	103	Unregistered cottage industries excluded

Data generated from Township General Administration Department, Namhsan; Basic facts on the township (27-12-2010).

A history of “Tatmadaw Black Tea Factory” reveals that in 1939, Myanmar under British rule had the first black tea factory built at Namhsan by British Bombay Burma Company. They also built another black tea factory for the Sawbwa’s son, a Shan chief of former time, Kyamaing Sao Hkun Aung at Kunhe village, near Namhsan. There were no other black tea producers besides the two. Tea as a sweetened beverage was not consumed yet by Myanmar, so black tea produced at Namhsan was exported to England.

Today tea is a favorite beverage in Myanmar, which has increased black tea production and established several factories to produce it. On 29-3-1965 the black tea factory of British Bombay Burma Company, came under Foodstuff Corporation, to be run under the management of the state Supervisory Committee. On 3-4-1979, it became an additional factory of Black Tea Factory, Mandalay under Ministry of Industry 1. From 20-10-1991 to date, it has belonged to and has been running under the Directorate of Supply and Transport, Ministry of Defense.

Firstly, it is need to gather fresh tea leaves and remove the moisture (See Figure 12, 13). There are three major stages in the production of black tea, namely: Rolling, Fermentation, and Drying. All these stages are carried out with machines imported from the England. At that time the locals, yet without the benefit of machines, used the traditional pounder and furnace-heated steel plate for drying the

tea leaves. Later domestic industrialists began to build local made black tea factories in imitation of the British-owned factory. As a result, the quality of black tea gradually improved. Now that latest foreign-made machines are being used in Myanmar's tea industry the domestically produced black tea would hopefully be able to penetrate international markets. Today Namhsan Township boasts two brands of black tea produced with the use of modern machinery. They are "Nagapyan" of Thuriya Win Company at Loi Khan village and "Palaung Hteikhta" of Palaung Hteikhta Company at Namhsan (See Figure 14).

Black tea producers in the world are India, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, China, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Kenya and the best kinds of black tea are produced by India, Sri Lanka and Kenya. Vietnam and China have begun to penetrate international markets. Mainly reliant on domestic consumption, Myanmar's tea industry has yet to do likewise.



**Figure 12. Traditional way of fresh tea leaves gathering style**



**Figure 13. Advance way of fresh tea leaves gathering style**



**Figure 14. Advance roasting/ drying factories**

The best and most plentiful green tea is produced in China, and high quality green tea also comes from Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. Today, in Myanmar, green tea is produced traditionally as well as using Chinese-style fresh-roasted-and-dried method. Traditional green tea has already taken a firm hold in Myanmar. Chinese-style green tea, more costly than traditional green tea, has yet to attract the Myanmar's liking. Production techniques need to be improved for Myanmar green tea to sell on international markets. Nowadays Namhsan-produced green teas are of three kinds, namely, traditional green tea, fresh-roasted-and-dried green tea, and fermented green tea.

Production of traditional green tea goes: fresh-picked young tea leaves are treated to 2 minute steaming and are kneaded or rolled by hand on a crude mat spread on a table, then being spread on mats, is dried in sunshine (See Figure 15). Tea leaf handlers from Zyangyi village claim that hand kneading is important in production of pickled tea leaves and green tea. The key is the force exerted by the hand; too much force leads to the fresh tea leaves being crushed completely, and too little force will leave the tea leaf as it is, not rolled and unattractive. With few stages, traditional green tea production is best suited to minor cottage industry. Nowadays hand kneading is being replaced by machines, and by rollers too. Thus, productivity has increased. Traditional green tea comes from Namhsan, Kyauk-me, Namtu, Mantong, Namkhan and Pinlaung, and sells well domestically.



**Figure 15. Tea leaves dried in sunshine**

Fresh-roasted-and-dried green tea is obtained through Chinese method and use of Chinese-made machines, but local tea leaves are used. There are varieties with different prices, colors, shapes, and flavors. This type of production needs fresh and clean young leaves, advanced machines and many fold stages, which altogether is attracting a few domestic producers only. This is also true for Namhsan Township. What is being sold here are “Nagapyan” and “Palaung Hteikhta” brands.

To produce fermented green tea, those pickled tea leaves failing to measure up to market requirements on account of remaining soft thanks to airing, remnants of water, etc are used (See Figure 16). Those pickled tea leaves are dried in sunshine. In the monsoon, the tea leaves appear in profusion but it is not easy work drying them in

sunshine. Thus the tea leaves kept in fermentation are left in sunshine to dry in the cold season when picking of tea leaves is suspended. The green tea made in this way, when tried as plain tea with boiling water, tastes like pickled tea leaves. Its color is greenish yellow. It is refreshing to drink this green tea, and is much appreciated by physical workers laboring in the sun. It is much in demand domestically. Formerly of lowest prices, this kind of green tea demands a good price now.



**Figure 16. Making fermented green tea**

Production and consumption of pickled tea leaves is peculiar only to Myanmar and no other country in the world. It is an essential delicacy given to a visitor at the Myanmar home, or part of a variety of foods entertained at a donation or other auspicious ceremonies. Myanmarans eat pickled tea leaves prepared one way or other—strong on sourness, saltiness, hot taste, or rich taste. It is a Myanmar traditional food of strong standing. Since ancient times pickled tea leaves has been produced and marketed by Namhsan natives Ta Ang (Palaung) and nowadays its production has been started in Mogok Township, Mandalay Region and in Pindaya Township of Shan State (South). According to the Paper on Tea Growing, Production and Marketing of Black Tea, Green Tea and Pickled Tea Leaves in Namhsan, Kyauk-me District, Shan State (North) dated 21-5-2009, more than 95 percent of the whole country's needs are being fulfilled by Namhsan Township. (Myanmar Agriculture Service, Kyauk-me District, 21-5-2009)

To produce pickled tea leaves, fresh young tea leaves are first treated by steam for about two minutes, and then it is kneaded and rolled on a crude mat lying atop a

table, manually or with the use of machines (See Figure 17). Afterwards large plastic bags, packed tight with those steamed tea leaves, are carefully tied up to be airtight. Those bags with steamed tea leaves are placed in round bamboo baskets above ground or underground, in pits 5 feet wide and 11 feet deep for the latter (See Figure 18). The bags of tea leaves have heavy rocks or iron blocks on top whose pressure make the water still remaining in them seep out. Such a pit can accommodate up to 3000 viss of tea leaves, it is learnt. After two months of curing, the tea leaves are removed, sifted and classified. Plastic bags, packed tight with pickled tea leaves according to their classification, are put Pinang bags by way of packing. Pickled tea leaves, when packed into plastic bag, are usually pounded from above with wooden pestles so as not to have remnants of water in pickled tea leaves. Remnants of water, if any, will make pickled tea leaves moldy and soft. Each bag is enough to receive up to 56 viss of pickled tea leaves.



**Figure 17.** Tea leaves kneaded and rolled on a crude mat lying atop a table



**Figure 18.** Pickle tea pits

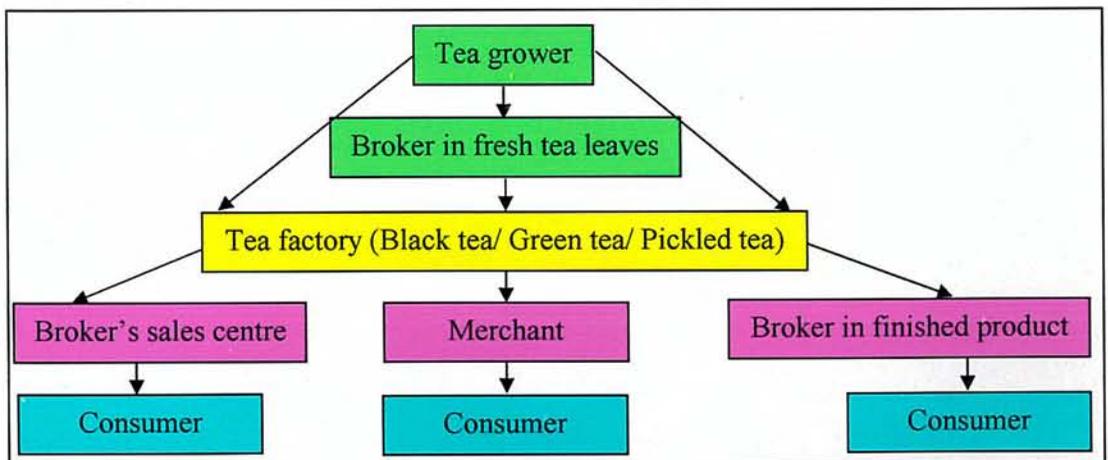
According to most brokers' sales centers in Kyauk-me, the pickled tea leaves produced at Zayangyi area in Namhsan Township is the best among others produced in the country. That pickled tea never turns black and unattractive, but remains yellow in color without the benefit of any coloring agent, and thus demands a high price. Unlike other kinds, when Zayangyi pickled tea leaves is tasted for testing it is found to be a little bitter but turns sweet as a little water is drunk soon after. On the present pickled tea market, the kinds called "Zero Shal" and "Auk Sa" are the most popular and the best sellers. "Auk Sa" pickled tea leaves is, in fact, of lowest quality as it has the most broken leaves. But it is acceptable to all classes of people. In May 2011, according to pickled tea sale centers at Theingyi Bazaar (Yangon), "Auk Sa" pickled tea leaves was sold at about 800 kyat per viss, and "Zero Shal" kind (also known as "Letkauk") was sold at about kyat 3500-4000 per viss.

**5.5.2 Distribution**

Regarding the tea growers in Namhsan Township, their tea markets are Yangon Region, Mandalay Region, and Irrawaddy Region. The distribution system of the tea is from the tea cultivator to factory, then to the broker, then to the trader and then to the consumer.

The tea leaf-connected industries at Namhsan are running tea leaf brokers' sales centers; transportation of fresh tea leaves, black tea, green tea and pickled tea leaves; tea shop; and the occupation of tea products broker.

The commodity flow pattern goes: tea growers are sold fresh tea leaves to the broker or direct to the factories. Moreover, most of the brokers go out to far villages to buy fresh tea leaves and they sold those leaves to the factories. The factories are sold their products to the brokers' sales centre, merchants, and consumers.



**Chart 2. Distribution network of the commodity**

## 5.6 Symbolic activities in tea plantation and making three kinds of tea

The Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals inhabiting Namhsan town hold traditional customs in connection with their tea leaf economy. They are found to be practicing those customs to date.

The Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals aged 65 and above, in Namhsan Township recalled thus: In former times, on the day when a would-be tea cultivator started preparing his plantation he made offerings in honor of king “Alaung Sithu” and guardian “nat” (spirits) of the forests and mountains. With offering of steamed glutinous rice, pickled tea, and dried tobacco leaf. He prayed for a successful tea plantation, to be followed by a big harvest. Specifically he prayed: Now that I am about to start growing of tea plants, the life-blood of Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals, may I have the help of King Alaung Sithu, good weather, and plentiful harvest. Only after the prayer was finished did a plot of land get to be cleared up to be developed into a tea plantation. All family members participated in this ceremony.

According to Ta Ang (Palaung) tea cultivators, aged 45 and under, in Namhsan Township the above-mentioned ritual is still followed on the first day of ground clearing. Only a few members of the family are able to participate nowadays. The reason is that most children are away at other towns and villages for schooling or for job. Moreover, some parents claim that their children are interested in exploring the outside world rather than working the tea plantation or in working in other industries.

In Namhsan Township, tea plantations mostly lie far from the owner’s home. Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals by custom speak of a distance in terms of the time needed for walking to a place rather than miles. For example, they will say, “My tea plantation is about 20 minutes (or one hour) by foot”. According to the field research, even the “nearest” plantation takes about 40 minutes by foot. (The distance in miles is to be reckoned with the assumption that a person can cover three miles in an hour.)

The tea cultivators start leaving for their plantations at dawn as tea’s flavor and essential taste is at its best in the morning, before the sunshine is not strong yet, and tea leaves also need to be handled as necessary before the day is over. Very early in the morning it may still be dark, so torches were used in former times and electric torches are used nowadays. Before leaving for plantations, most growers on every morning offer food, flowers and drinking water to the Buddha at the altar, and same offering to King Alaung Sithu is also made, which are accompanied by a prayer for

their safe hiking to work, plentiful harvest, and good price for tea leaves. The elders usually admonish their youths not to use foul and disadvantageous language on the way. Moreover, having arrived at their plantations, the tea growers recite phrases in honor of King Alaung Sithu and the tea plant.

If young children are taken along to work, they are warned not to aimlessly pluck tea leaves and branches; this also holds true for migrant workers at the plantation. Other instructions for their children and migrant workers are: To pick a sprout or two of the tea plant at a time; not to harm the plant; not to step on it; not to use the branches as firewood; and to avoid any behavior smacking of disrespect for their symbolic tea plant.

Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals take care not to step on tea leaves while processing them to be turned into pickled tea, black tea or plain tea. Girls are strictly told to handle tea leaves only after their long hair has been properly tied up. Their first batch of any tea product (pickled tea, black tea, or plain tea) a small amount each is firstly offered at the household altar, in honor of King Alaung Sithu, guardian nat (spirit) of the village and to the village monastery also.

Most of the Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals in Namhsan Township say that they have been assigned the work of growing tea for their livelihood by King Alaung Sithu and enjoying the protection of his spirit to have a good business. Therefore, they are given to paying obeisance to him saying a prayer for betterment of their economic, health and social affairs. A certain Ta Ang (Palaung) woman, aged 65 and engaged in tea industry at Namhsan, says that she disseminates “metta” (loving-kindness) to King Alaung Sithu at her worshipping ritual every morning. In addition, King Alaung Sithu is invoked to help her in any emergency.

### **5.7 Tea problems in today**

Laphet is another name for fermented or pickled tea. This is a popular Myanmar tea. It is a unique type of tea that is regarded as a Myanmar delicacy. A special occasion in Myanmar will never be complete without serving Laphet. It is a national tradition of the Myanmar people even today. Among tea products, especially pickled tea had been a food of the royal household, consumption of which has had a long tradition in Myanmar. Sometimes it is referred to as “prestigious pickled tea”. Since ancient times the consumption of tea products in Myanmar has taken the forms of pickled tea salad, plain tea and tea sweetened with milk. Almost every household

consumes pickled tea leaves added with fried garlic, fried sesame, fried groundnut, and other fried beans and green tea also (See Figure-19). In the monarchial period, when the two arguing parties want to settle a dispute, they eat pickled tea leaves in front of the arbitrator, which means bury the hatchet and be friends again.

Nowadays the teashop is inevitable all across the country. Teashops are a form of relaxation here in Myanmar. Tea has long been everyday beverage of all social classes and is an inseparable part of life here in Myanmar. Myanmar's tea products market has been extensive since centuries ago. At present Myanmar tea products are winning the foreigners' liking in some countries and enjoying a growing penetration in the international market.



**Figure 19. Pickled tea salad**

Pickled tea consumption has been growing, and some unscrupulous persons have begun producing artificial types of pickled tea in imitation of genuine ones. Hence, “coloring chemical problem” has broken out, according to local businesspersons in pickled tea industry. The Food and Drug Administration of Department of Health, Ministry of Health declared that a coloring agent called Auramine “O” has been found in some brands of pickled tea being sold on the market. Normally it is used in dyeing of textiles like cotton, silk and wool and of leather products. Consumption of pickled tea colored with Auramine “O” won’t do harm immediately, but in the long run it could help develop gene disorder, cancer and delayed body growth in the consumer.

The Myanma Alin and Kyemon dailies (Myanmar newspapers), dated 12-3-2009 give 43 brands of pickled tea in which yellow dye Auramine “O” has been detected. It is not permitted to be used in foodstuffs. The news caused a big confusion among consumers as well as sellers and tea cultivators. Pickled tea consumers drastically reduced their eating habits for fear of being poisoned, while demand followed by supply dived. Thus, 92.6 percent of the Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals who live in Namhsan mainly depending on tea cultivation for their livelihoods are now faced with many difficulties.

When tea prices dived because of lower demand due to news of coloring additives found in pickled tea, growers most hurt are those with a few acres of plantation. During the tea leaf picking season from third week of March to mid November they have regular work to do, earning regular income. But, when that work is suspended from mid November to March they do not have regular income so they have to draw advance money or foodstuffs like rice and edible oil from tea-leaf brokers. When tea leaf prices fall they cannot service their debts enough, and become net debtors. Keeping promises is paramount in the Ta Ang (Palaung) character; whatever debt must be paid up soon enough. If necessary, their tea plantation is sold to obtain cash, turning its owner into a plantation worker or general worker. The monetary problem of daily-wage earners or piece-work laborers is not just as serious. But, being jobless, they have to do earth digging and quarrying. Some migrate to other regions for work.

Low demand means falling prices for tea leaves. Some Ta Ang (Palaung) owners of tea plantations in Namhsan Township said that the wage for picking a viss of tea leaves has become more than the price of a viss of tea leaves on the market. So, they cannot use the services of tea leaf pickers. Therefore, they are carrying on self-manageable basis, relying on Shwe Phi season only with the labor of family members and leaving the tea leaves alone in other seasons. Local cultivators claim it is more advantageous to them that way. But the tea sprouts remaining long unharvested could make for its lower growth in the next Shwe Phi season, which can, however, be remedied by vigorous pruning of the tea plants, it is learnt. Yet most tea cultivators let the plant be as it is because they are very reluctant to cut off the tea plant’s branches. Some tea cultivators claim that those who have drawn advance money from traders, brokerage houses, factories and tea entrepreneurs have begun selling their plantations.

Most tea growers say that dyes and coloring agents are unknown to them, as they have all along been making their tea products using traditional methods. After 1987, much pickled tea leaves had to remain in pits 3-4 years because the pickled tea market had broken down. But on its recovery after those years the pickled tea leaves was found to have naturally turned yellow. This yellow product has since proved popular, and much in demand for years later. It is said that some tea growers were forced to use the coloring chemical in pickled tea because the buyers' demand could not be met; in fact, the traders and brokers had introduced the use of that chemical and technique to them from the plains. The pickled tea still coming from Namhsan Township is of natural yellow color, and free of any chemical.

Nowadays, the problems of tea products are being solved by way of holding workshops like Workshop on Development of Tea Plantation and Production Lashio 2009 under State sponsorship, taking action against artificially colored tea products on the market, seizing and destroying such products, and public education as to side effects in consumption of impure tea products. The native people who faced with the tea problems, are being solved these problems by stopped plucking their tea plantation, reduced their daily expenditure.

## **CHAPTER (6)**

### **SYMBOLIC IMPORTANCE OF TEA LEAF**

This chapter tries to find to know the link between Tea Leaf and the Ta Angs (Palaung), and the role of Tea Leaf in Ta Ang (Palaung) traditional culture and customs. It would give a greater understanding and deeper insight of the Ta Ang (Palaung), one of the Myanmar national races.

#### **6.1 Tea leaf as a metaphor of self**

The major objective of this chapter is to find out the perception of tea leaf in Ta Ang (Palaung) life. How do they accept tea leave in their real life? Why don't they abandon tea leaf? Those questions are key points in here.

Firstly, the word "metaphor" is explained. Metaphor is a way of describing something. People often use metaphors in their daily speech. It may refer to himself or to another person or thing, for example, they may speak of a very pretty girl as "as pretty as an angel", a fat person is "as fat as a panda". Besides, events or happenings may be spoken of as a heavy rainfall may be described as "pouring rain as if it were thrown down with buckets", having to wait a long time for someone may be spoken as "I've been lookingout for you so long that my neck has become a long-necked shrine vase", in English "giraffe-necked". People use metaphors when speaking about things, animals, and events. Among the Ta Ang (Palaung) people, they cannot illustrate their life without tea leaf. Tea leaf is not staple food for them but it is important one. How important it is and the tie between tea leaf and their life are shown in this chapter.

##### **6.1.1 The Perception of Tea leaf in Ta Ang (Palaung)**

To explore the perception of tea leaf in Ta Ang (Palaung) life, people of various classes, various age, living in Yangon were asked about the knowledge of tea leaf. After observing their answers, it was found that although people are familiar with Laphet (tea leaf) as a food, most of the people do not know that the planters of Laphet (tea leaf) are Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals and what Shwe-phi Moe Lut Laphet and Zayan exactly are. As soon as one says Laphet (tea leaf), people think, it is an eatable from the Shan States. It is because they do not know distinctly the difference

between Shan and Ta Ang (Palaung). That is why when Ta Ang (Palaung) people meet others, they usually introduce themselves as if they were born together with Laphet (tea leaf), e.g. *“We are the Laphet (tea leaf) growing Ta Ang (Palaung)”* and *“A true Ta Ang (Palaung) knows thoroughly about Laphet (tea leaf)”*.

Among the people eating Laphet (tea leaf) many do not know exactly who plants it. However, the Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals who plant and produce it know everything about Laphet (tea leaf). There is quite difference between the perception of tea leaf in other people and the Ta Ang (Palaung). If we know the difference, we may be able to understand and appreciate the meaning of tea leaf in Ta Ang (Palaung). The following are what the Ta Ang (Palaung) people, who live in Namhsan Township, say about their perception on tea leaf.

The majority of people aged over 40 years people said that a Ta Ang (Palaung) national is born, grows up and dies under the tea-plant. They also call the Laphet leaf (tea leaf) as gold leaf, silver leaf. When they want to cut or prune an old Laphet plant (tea plant) to change an old plant to become young i.e. for young shoots to come out. They ask the plant not to think that they are doing wrong. They promise to give in charity when it yields new leaves. Sometimes when a plant becomes old, an ignorant worker pulls the plant roughly and hurts the plant. Just as it hurts when somebody touches your flesh, the tea plant must also feel the pain. Therefore, they ask the permission of the old plant before they cut it. It is a very joyous time when they are plucking Shwe-phi tea leaves. They have to pluck it with many people. Everyone in the house have to join in. There are also workers who come from other places. Ta Ang (Palaung) has to associate and handle the tea plant as a plant with “life”. It is blameless to throw away a plate of rice. So many animals will pick it up and eat it. However, they cannot throw away even one shoot of Laphet (tea leaf). Besides, they said, “Planting Laphet (tea leaf) makes them happy. It is blameless livelihood free from evil”. The tea plant is the Ta Ang (Palaung) people’s life, it is their heart; they also love it.

They feel so happy plucking tea leaf. The tea plant and the tea plantation is their life. It is their traditional livelihood from the time of their ancestors. It has sustained them all their lives. They love tea plant and they satisfy their lives living with tea plantation business. They think they cannot live without the smell of tea. They consider Laphet (tea leaf) as their benefactor. In this region only Laphet (tea leaf) flourishes. Therefore, Laphet (tea leaf) is their life savior, their benefactor. They

are rich if they plant many tea plants. It is a family business where everybody has to pitch in. There is no choice, rich or poor, if they have a tea-plantation; they have to pluck tea leaves.

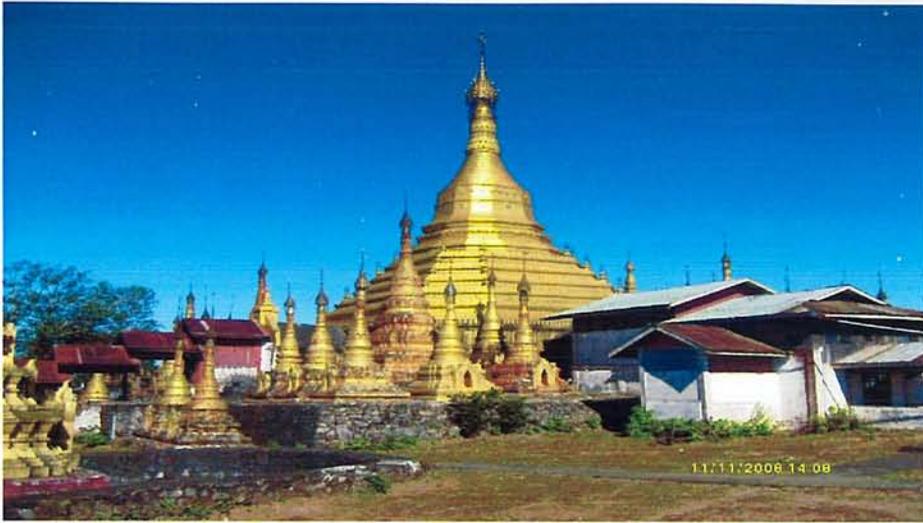
People aged under 40 said that even educated people still believe the tea plant as a plant to be with “life” and so worried of someone cutting off the tea-plant. They have plucked Laphet (tea leaf) since they were young, and plucking Shwe-phi is during the school holidays, so they managed to pluck Laphet (tea leaf) and now even as they are government servants, if the office holiday coincides with Shwe-phi plucking time, they go back to Namhsan for Shwe-phi plucking. They went along into the tea-plantation since they were young. At first, they did not know how to pluck. However, by 7-8 year-old they are experts and father gives 50 or 100 kyat to them as pocket money if they can pluck one viss of fresh tea leaves. The elderly people are so afraid that the young people would break the branches. Today by plucking one viss of tea leaves they earn 500 kyat. They save this money for their school expenses.

The above descriptions show that the Ta Ang (Palaung) people are familiar with tea-planting. They also grew up with the Laphet (tea leaf) business from young. It also shows that they value the tea plant as their own life. They are also happy in their job of plucking tea leaf. Although growing the tea plant is their economic business, the Ta Ang (Palaung) reveres the tea plant as their life savior, treating it as having life like a human being. Picking tea leaves is a job that they enjoy and many Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals make it a point to come home especially at Shwe-phi tea picking time. It is mentioned in the previous chapter that Laphet (tea leaf) has grown along with Ta Ang (Palaung) people’s history.

## **6.2 Tea leaf in Festivals**

The Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals living in Namhsan region celebrate the seasonal traditional festivals. They are Lwai Sai (Padamya Mountain) pagoda festival, Community Kathein pwe, Shin-pyu ceremony, Soon-dawgyi offering ceremony, Maha-doat Mya Thabeik ceremony , Waso flowers offering festival, Water festival, Tabaung pagoda festival and Tabo-dwe bonfire festival are also held. From among these festivals, two festivals are concerned with Laphet (tea leaf). They are Lwai Sai (Padamya Mountain) pagoda festival, one of the grandest festivals in Namhsan region and Community (ခံ့) Kathein pwe. These two festivals reveal a great deal of Ta Ang

(Palaung) national's traditional culture and beliefs. How is the role of tea leaf in these festivals will enlighten the perception of tea leaf in Palaung.



**Figure 20. Lwai Sai Pagoda**

### **6.2.1 History of Lwai Sai (Padamya Mountain) pagoda**

Lwai Sai (Ruby Mountain) is in northern Shan State, 11 miles to the east of Namhsan town and it is the second highest peak in this region. It is 6010 feet high, a 45 minutes motorcycle ride from Namhsan. It takes 4 hours by foot along the car road. Lwai Sai (Ruby Mountain) pagoda is an ancient historical and powerful pagoda (See Figure 20). In Shan language, “Lwai” means mountain and “Sai” means ruby, so Lwai Sai means “Ruby Mountain”. It is the region where the Buddha-to-be wandered about in his lifetime as Peacock king. In the book “Lwai Sai (Padamya Taung) Taung Daw Thamaing” (the history of Lwai Sai, 2005) written by U Nagainda of Namhsan Monastery, Mandalay, he wrote that the remains of the Peacock king were in the rock cave hillock to the south of Lwai Sai Mountain. In the Sasana era (year based on the Buddhist era and reckoned from the time Lord Buddha attained nirvana in 544 BC) 255 king Thiri Dhamathawka, King of Paltalipoat came to Myanmar and consecrated 84000 pagodas all over Myanmar, the middle Zedi (pagoda) on Lwai Sai Mountain was one of them.

The Peacock King made a vow before he died. He said “May my flesh and bones remain without decay for a long time. On the foundation of my body may the Sasana thrive in this region in the future. After many ages, when he becomes the

Gawtama Buddha, he gave a sermon on his past life as Peacock king. In the future when he is no more king Thiri Dha-ma-thawka will enshrine my bone relic in a Zedi (pagoda) in this region and where the Zedi (pagoda) exists, the Sasana (teaching or dispensation of the Buddha) will flourish.

King Thiri Dha-ma-thawka blocked both the entrance and exit to the rock cave that was the residence of the Peacock king. He blocked the entrance with a block of stone and the exit which was on the peak of the mountain, he consecrated a rock Zedi (pagoda) enshrining the bone relic of the Peacock king. King Thiri Dha-ma-thawka took this precaution so that Sasana will last 500 years and be safe from the destruction of unbelievers. After many years, that rock Zedi (pagoda) disappeared, being covered by the forest growth of creepers. King Alaung Sithu, called Mani Sithu by their native language, of Pauk-kan (Pagan) kingdom toured the country, and in Myanmar era 486 arrived at Lwai Sai (Padamyar Mountain) in Namhsan town in Tazaungmon (8<sup>th</sup> month of Myanmar calendar, November). They searched for the Zedi (pagoda) and the Peacock king's cave.

Mani Sithu (King Alaung Sithu) asked the Ta Ang (Palaung) people living in the neighboring villages to help him find the Zedi (pagoda). Finally, it was found covered with creepers and bushes. In Myanmar era 512, Mani Sithu (King Alaung Sithu) renovated and consecrated the Zedi (pagoda) to a height of 7 cubits. When King Thiri Dha-ma-thawka consecrated the Zedi (pagoda) it was only 3 cubits high. Afterwards Mani Sithu (King Alaung Sithu) in gratitude gave to the Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals "Nila-biza" (magic seeds) to plant for their livelihood.

According to "oral history", in addition to the gift of the "Nat seed/ magic seed", the king also left a minister as caretaker of the pagoda. As time passed, the minister learnt the Ta Ang (Palaung) language, and became wearied of staying alone on the mountain. Therefore, he muttered in Ta Ang (Palaung) language "Aw-kalu-yaw", it means I have made a mistake. A Ta Ang (Palaung) chief "Ta Maung Ngun" on hearing it and gave his daughter in marriage to the lonely minister. Besides, for the later generations of Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals, to know and never forget Mani Sithu (King Alaung Sithu), in the Myanmar era 519 the minister and Ta Maung Ngun made carved images of King Mani Sithu giving the seeds, of the leader Ta Maung Ngun accepting receiving the seeds and King Mani Sithu the minister-pagoda caretaker for the people to pay homage.

The plants from those first seeds (See Figure 21) have been carefully preserved and near those plants, a commemorative Haw-nan (the name of building like a palace) has been built to Mani Sithu and people pay homage to it. They had a commemoration festival every three years on the full moon day of Taw Thalín, September. Nowadays under the auspices of the abbot monk Budda Gawdi-nya (1967 to 1997), they have celebrated every year on the full moon day of Taw Thalín, the Lwai Sai Mountain Pagoda Festival and the commemoration of Mani Sithu, which is also called “Kyeezu Sut Pwe” (Thanks giving festival), for 20 years now.



**Figure 21. Tea plants from the first seeds**

### **6.2.2 Lwai Sai (Padamyar Mountain) pagoda festival and symbolic life savior Mani Sithu**

The monks who live in Lwai Sai said this festival is a festival to honor the Buddha. And a festival of expressing gratitude to King Mani Sithu and the Tea-tree. However, the Lwai Sai pagoda has existed long before King Mani Sithu and the Tea-tree. They continue to say that the Pagoda festival is celebrated by the abbot in consultation with the Pagoda trustees.

The Lwai Sai (Padamyar Mountain) pagoda festival is celebrated for 3 days. The actual day for adoration of Mani Sithu and the tea plant is the full moon day of Taw Thalín (September). So it is started two days ahead from the 13<sup>th</sup> waxing moon of Taw Thalín (September). The pagoda festival, it is celebrated under the guidance of the Sangha (monk) who reside in Lwai Sai, the nuns and the pagoda trustees, who live

in the villages at the foot hill of the mountain. They have meeting before the festival to discuss and divide the responsibilities for ceremony. The abbot of the monastery and the pagoda trustees cast lots for market stall to sell only during the festival. The rent is kyat 500-3000 a day depending on size. The money is collected systematically and used as donation for multi renovation of the pagoda.

In 2010, the festival was celebrated for three days from September 21-23, Myanmar era 1372, Taw Thalin waxing moon 13<sup>th</sup> -15<sup>th</sup> full moon day. In this year not only the sellers from neighboring villages but also merchants from Namhsan, Kyauk-me, Lashio, Muse, Mandalay came and there were over 100 stalls. The things they sold were foodstuffs, utility goods, clothing and toys, which come from China. The majority of the stalls were food stalls like Shan noodles, Chinese fried noodles, rice shops, and teashops. The goods sold are soaps, toothpaste, fruits vegetables of special interest are the traditional utility goods of the region and some of the traditional foods of the region such as pickled pork and fish in small shops.

Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals from all over the country come to the pagoda festival. Besides business people who are involved in Laphet (tea leaf) trade from Yangon and Mandalay also come. The PaO' nationals, who plant tea in South Shan States, also come from Taunggyi, Pindaya and Kalaw. Pilgrims from near and far come by car or motorbike; on foot, singly or in groups, staying for a day a sleeping a few nights at the villages at the foot of the mountain, or at the monastery or nun's Zayats (house for nun). The pilgrims bring things for alms giving and some bring their own stores of food with them.

The pilgrims arrived from far and near, first pay obeisance to the Lwai Sai pagoda, the Sangha (monk) and the nuns dwelling in the mountain monastery and Zayats (house for nun). Then they go straight to the Mani Sithu Haw-nan (manor) and the original Tea-tree (See Figure 22) to pay their homage. Some of these pilgrims were interviewed to know their heartfelt feelings on arriving at the sacred shrine and tree.

Most of the old people said that this festival is Ta Ang's (Palaung's) traditional belief. Furthermore, this is the biggest festival in Namhsan region and they are very happy at that time and all the hard work of the year is eased off by this festival. They said that they believe deeply in Tea-tree and King Mani Sithu for their future (relating to economy, social, and health). Besides, if they pray in front of the Tea-tree, the Laphet (tea leaf) will be plenty and get good price in next year. Some of

the people who live in Namhsan Township said that they used to come and seriously pay obeisance to the Tea-tree and King Mani Sithu in the whole year, such as Shwe-phi picking time and whenever they visit the Sayadaw (abbot). They also said that tea leaf and King Mani Sithu is their life saviour, if the king did not give the seeds, they would be in trouble.



**Figure 22. The Mani Sithu Haw-nan and the Tea-tree**

A few old people said that King Mani Sithu is always looking after the Ta Ang (Palaung) people and they get a better yield of Laphet (tea leaf), good prices and good weather because of him. They also said that by visiting to the festival, they could meet their old friends and relatives who live in far away and they can discuss about religion or social or business affairs.

The tea merchants who come from Yangon, Mandalay, Lashio, Muse and Kyauk-me said that they try to come to this festival every year to pay obeisance to the Tea-tree and King Mani Sithu. Besides they said that if they cannot come to the festival, they send some money to offer to the Lwai Sai Pagoda, the monastery, Tea-tree and King Mani Sithu.

Most of the young people said that at first, they came along with their parents and they did not truly believe in Tea-tree and King Mani Sithu, it was just fun for them. They said that now they felt happy to watch a variety of traditional and modern song and dance and musical stage show at night during the festival. Besides, they can meet with their life partners and new friends. Some people said that this festival is the

most popular around this region and they feel happy for visiting all pagodas nearby and sacred historical sites. A few young people said that they came from a far village (near Mogok Township) on foot and it took 2 days and they also said that they are so tired and their feet hurt but when they arrived at the Lwai Sai, they feel happy and relief. Finally, they said that it is a very hard journey but they enjoyed it and they will come next year.

Some of the young people said that they have never been here before and they come now on behalf of their parent, to pay homage to the Tea-tree and King Mani Sithu. Besides, they said that their parents used to tell them about the tree and the King Mani Sithu when they were young. Tea tree and King Mani Sithu are the Ta Ang's (Palaung) benefactors, they have an image of him on their house shrine, and they pay obeisance every night.

Some shop owners who come and sell only during the festival (including non tea planters and people who come from other township) said that they pray and offer a Sand-Zedi (Stupa of sand formed round a wicker-framework) and incense sticks in front of the Tea-tree, to give them good sales and get back the credits/debts quickly.

From the information provided by the interviewees one can realize how much effort is needed to come to the pagoda, how deeply the Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals believe in the King Mani Sithu and the Tea-tree. Most of the old people said that this festival is Ta Ang's (Palaung's) traditional belief. Furthermore, this is the biggest festival in Namhsan region and they are very happy at that time and all the hard work of the year is eased off by this festival. They said that they believe deeply in Tea-tree and King Mani Sithu for their future. Besides, if they pray in front of the Tea-tree, the Laphet (tea leaf) will be plenty and get good price in next year. Some of the people who live in Namhsan Township said that they used to come and seriously pay obeisance to the Tea-tree and King Mani Sithu in the whole year, such as; Shwe-phi picking time and whenever they visit the Sayadaw (abbot). They also said that tea leaf and King Mani Sithu is their life savior, if the king did not give the seeds they would be in trouble.

Old generation can tell the history of pagoda, King Mani Sithu and the first seeds of the tea leaf very well. Young generation does not know detail of the history but they have worked their parent's traditional tea plantation since they were young. By doing tea plantation young generation valued tea leaf and King Mani Sithu. From

the standpoint of anthropology, it is called symbolic enculturation .i.e. entering into a culture.

In day time young people wander round the pagoda in groups, at that time old people staying and speaking under the shade of tree or in pagoda Tazaungs (sideways from pagoda). Lwai Sai pagoda festival is one of the most famous and joyful festivals of the Ta Ang (Palaung) and is family set in their economy and lives.

The monks and the nuns, living on the mountains also had to prepare for the pilgrims who will be their guests. They try to make the guests as comfortable and happy as possible as weather is very cold, so they bring out the blankets they have stored and put them in the sun. They filled the water pots for drinking, cooking, and collected firewood and charcoal for fuel. The young people of Taung-ma village came to help the monks and nuns to clean up the whole Lwai Sai mountain area a week before the festival.

The abbot said that they were so busy during the festival days because there were many guests, they participated in nearly all the activities of the festival, and it was not easy to manage. Besides, this festival is very important for the Ta Ang (Palaung) people. Moreover, he said that they accepted the donation from the pilgrims and used those donation for multi renovation of the pagodas overall mountain, King Mani Sithu Haw-nan and the Tea-tree.

The nuns who live in Lwai Sai Mountain said that many guests come from different places and every year all the Zayats (nunnery rest house) are full and only the place they sleep is left. They feel happy to have so many guests and those guests try to tidy up the Zayat (nunnery rest house) as much as they can when they leave. The whole mountain is quiet when the entire guests leave after the festival.

One of the nuns said that she has nearly 100 numbers of blankets, she get up at night and give blankets to those who need it and those having only a light blanket, and they are all used up. She continues to say that some guests are relatives and friends but the majorities are just pilgrims, after watching the shows and roaming around, when they feel sleepy, they just find an empty place and squeeze in. Only people who come from far away reserve a place to stay before hand. They also eat off whatever they can find in the kitchen. Some of the nuns said that there are many guests in their Zayat so they were afraid they would not have enough water, but we feel happy looking forward to the festival; we feel grateful to the pilgrims for coming in spite of the hardships.

### 6.2.3 The process of the festival

On the thirteenth waxing moon of Taw-thalin (September, The 6<sup>th</sup> month of the Myanmar year), the monks receive the donation for the 1000 Sand-Zedis of King Mani Sithu and Tea tree at the Dhamayon (Community hall for religious purposes). They also receive the things the pilgrims bring for alms giving. The nuns collect the donations for all round renovation of the Lwai Sai pagoda, prepare the Aron-soon (the first meal of Buddhist monks taken as daybreak) offering of fruits and flowers for the Pagoda, and receive things for the alms giving.

On that day they open King Mani Sithu's Haw-nan (manor / shrine of King Mani Sithu) to do the cleaning and offer flowers. They also clear the site of the Tea-tree grown from the original seeds given by King Mani Sithu, stand a white umbrella over it, and fence it with bamboo. In another public Zayat (wayside public rest house/ rest house built on sacred premises), the pagoda trustees make 1,000 Sand-Zedi.

The pilgrims to the pagoda pay obeisance to King Mani Sithu at the Haw-nan and the original Tea-tree. They also visit all the pagodas and sacred historical sites on the mountain such as the Peacock king's cave and Kyauk-shin (living stone), Kyauk Thittar (rock box), Phayar Nga Su (five pagodas), and Kaba Aye pagoda. They also buy souvenirs for presents and household goods from the pagoda festival market stalls. From 7 pm to 2 am, the pilgrims are entertained with Taung-ma Village youth band. It is a variety of traditional and modern song and dance musical show stage by the young men and women of the region.

In the daytime, they perform all the preparations for the celebration. To making 1000 of Sand-Zedis, need 1000 small bamboo baskets. Each household living in Taung-ma village, Tat-min-thar village, Taung-me village, Height-tan village, Zai-tone-hwon village and Phaya-gyi village have to contribute five small bamboo woven baskets. Each village is given one basket as sample to get the uniform size. They can get the bamboo from the forest nearby and must be delivered 3 days before the festival on the 10<sup>th</sup> waxing moon of Taw-tha-lin without fail. Man-maing village of Taung-ma village tract is responsible for the sand. They must bring the sand from Nant-kyone stream, 2 or 3 days before the festival. It must be from that stream, as it is closest to Lwai Sai and the sand is clean and white. Now they need 1000 pennants for which they must cut the bamboo from the forests at the foothills of the mountain. The paper for the pennants must be bought from the 11<sup>th</sup> waxing moon and to have

uniform size, they have to be done in one place. The pilgrims are welcome to help if they wish to in any work.

First of all 5 o'clock early in the morning, the nun and the pilgrims from far and near line up along the pagoda passage holding trays of sunrise meal, to offer to the Buddha. Then the abbot, monks, and the pagoda trustees file in and take their places. All pay obeisance together and do the offering of the "Soon" (food offered to the Buddha or monks). After wards, the abbot gave the five precepts and shared the merits of the good deeds to all beings. Then the congregation went round to all the pagodas on the mountain to offer "Soon", when they finished, the monks and the nuns were served their breakfast at their respective halls.

The second day of the festival is the most populous day. More pilgrims come from Namhsan and the neighboring village than the faraway pilgrims soon after offering the sunrise meal, the pilgrims swarm down the festival market stalls to eat their fill of snacks and local foods. The sellers also depend on this second day as the busiest day of the festival.

The men lead by the Pagoda trustees, try to finish making the 1000 Sand-Zedis from the morning. The women lead by the nuns, try to make ready the 1000 oil lamps, 1000 incense sticks. They make bundles of 10 candles each and 10 incense sticks. Then they have to make a beautiful arrangement of fruits and flowers to be offered. The group to cook and prepare 1000 plates of rice has to make banana leaf five angled plates. In the evening, they have clean the rice to keep ready for cooking before dawn. But at night they could enjoy the variety stage show.

These festive co-operative activities helped to encourage cohesion and unity among them and the Ta Ang (Palaung) people. Although it was strenuous labor to prepare 1000 trays of "soon", they managed it with joy. Actually, it is not an easy job to prepare 1000 trays and finish in time for the ceremony. However, they accomplished this enormous task, humming songs and joking good-naturedly among them.

From early dawn, the pagoda trustees group is busy putting down the 1000 Sand-Zedis (See Figure 23), 1000 banana plates of rice (soon) (See Figure 24), 1000 candles, and 1000 incense sticks round the Tea-tree. Then they have to prepare a place for the monks to sit. The pilgrims have to get up early and cook food in their lodgings or go down to the stall to eat breakfast. They pack up their baggage and clean up their

surrounding so that they can return home straight after the last ceremony. Then they go to the King Mani Sithu Haw-nan and the Tea-tree to pay obeisance.



**Figure 23. A Sand-Zedi**



**Figure 24. 1000 banana plates of rice (soon)**

When the local and faraway pilgrims reach the Tea-tree and the king Mani Sithu Haw-nan, they make offerings of whatever they have brought, candles, incense sticks, Shwe-phi tea and their own plantation produce like paddy and fruits and pray earnestly (See Figure 25). The meaning of their pray they said are;

*“May we be your children who live by the tea plant, given by King Mani Sithu, have more than enough. May our trade prosper; May we eat fully and richly; May we be able to give fully and generously; May we be able to give charity and fulfill the perfections (Paramis); May we be able to buy and sell; May we be able to give when asked or begged; May the King Mani Sithu be healthy and share equally of our merits”.*

They also said that they not only visited and prayed at the Haw-nan and Tea-tree at the Lwai Sai, but they also do the same ritual of inviting King Mani Sithu to their house and offering food, drinking water, flower and sharing merits. Then they would send him back to the Haw-nan. They do it after offering “Soon” (rice), water, and flowers to the Buddha everyday.



**Figure 25. Pilgrims who come from the faraway pay homage to the tea tree**

After the pilgrims from far and near have paid their obeisance to King Mani Sithu and the Tea-tree, they spread their mats near it and wait of the ceremony. Then the pagoda trustees light the bundles of candles and incense sticks. The pilgrims also light the candles and incense sticks they brought near the Tea-tree. One pagoda trustee talked about the great gratitude. They owe to King Mani Sithu, and talked in praise of him. The main points of the pagoda trustee’s talk are:

He spoke that King Mani Sithu is the benefactor of the Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals. The King had given them “Paday Tharpin” (a natural “plant of plenty”), for their livelihood from the time of their ancestors until today. He is our life saviour who

has given us the gold and silver tea leaves. We could afford to do great charitable works when the tea leaf prices are good. As King Mani Sithu had prophesied, the tea plant had brought great wealth and well-being to the Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals. As a gesture of paying the debt of gratitude, he shared the merits of the almsgivings done that day.

At 9 o'clock when everything was ready, the pagoda trustees brought the abbot and the other monks to the Tea-tree. The president of the trustees acted as master of ceremony and read the agenda. Then led by the monks everyday paid obeisance to the Buddha, and offered the 1000 Sand-Zedis, 1000 lights, 1000 incense and 1000 trays of "soon". Then the abbot administers the five precepts to the congregation, and gives a sermon on the benefits of knowing gratitude and the evils of ingratitude. (See Figure 26)

When the sermon was ended, the monks recited the Parei (Sutta to words off evil or harm). Then they called upon King Mani Sithu and all the living beings and lifeless to share the merits of the good deeds done that day. As soon as the ceremony was over and the monks have left, the pilgrims too dispersed quickly. Some men ask for Sand-Zedi to take home and place it near their house shrine of King Mani Sithu. As the pilgrims, one group after another leave for home, the sellers also sell at reduced price before packing for home. Just as they value the Tea-plant, they honor the King Mani Sithu as their life savior, who gave the Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals, the tea plant seeds. In the Ta Ang (Palaung) national's religious beliefs, King Manisithu plays a very important role as he is adored like a Buddha. Although they said that they offer to the Buddha, they celebrate and offer in front of Mani Sithu Haw Nan and the tea tree.



**Figure 26. Celebrate and offer in front of Mani Sithu Haw Nan and the tea tree**

The shrines to King Mani Sithu are seen in the Zedi (pagoda) compounds of Namhsan town (See Figure 27). The shrines contain an image of King Mani Sithu in a seated position on a throne with one hand giving the Tea seeds. In front of the shrine, on either sides were seated the ministers of state and in the middle is the image of Ta Ang (Palaung) national, on his knees, “Ta Maung Ngun” receiving the tea seeds with one hand. The sizes of the images are different, depending on the place. In the pagodas, the images are cast in concrete or carved in crystal.



**Figure 27. Mani Sithu image and shrine at the pagoda**

In the house shrines of the Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals, they place the images of King Mani Sithu and “Ta Maung Ngun” on the left or right hand side of the Buddha image (See Figure 28). The images are carved out of the trunk of old tea plants cut from their or other people’s plantation. They choose the best part of the trunk. Just as they offer “Soon”, water, flowers daily to the Buddha, they do the same to the image of King Mani Sithu. The Ta Ang (Palaung) always makes a first offering of Laphet, dried tea-leaves (sweet and bitter) to the Buddha with their first harvest of the year. They also offer them to the image of King Mani Sithu. Most of the Ta Ang (Palaung) people who live in Namhsan Township, doing all verities of business in Laphet, said that it is true that King Mani Sithu is their rice bowl benefactor, they owe gratitude for all things, so they place him on the altar and give reverence as to God, even the children know it.



**Figure 28. Mani Sithu image at the house shrines**

Some of the Ta Ang (Palaung) families, who have settled in Yangon, doing Laphet business, said that although they have settled in Yangon, educated and they are doing business in tea both dried and wet, they still revere King Mani Sithu and reverently keep his image in their home altar. Moreover, they believe that he is their benefactor, who is looking after their family tea-business.

#### **6.2.4 Mani Sithu Symbolic Veneration Ceremony and Community Kathein Pwe**

Kathein Pwe means offering of the robes to the monks for a special purpose, between the first waning day of Thidin-gyut (7<sup>th</sup> month of the Myanmar calendar) and full-moon day of Tasaung-mon (8<sup>th</sup> month of the Myanmar calendar). Every year, in the month of November, Tazaungmon (the 8<sup>th</sup> month of the Myanmar calendar), the 5 villages of Palaung, namely Pan Sa-mein village, Kaya-lan village, Ho-chaung village, Zayan-gyi Ywama village and Zayan (north) village combine to celebrate the Kathein Pwe. In this ceremony, the procession with carrying portable image of King Mani Sithu and veneration to him are emphasized.

The Shrine of King Mani Sithu is on the Padamya hill in Zayan-gyi Ywama village. Each village can take in turn the images from the Haw-nan to their village. To have it paraded round the village for veneration every five years. In the past, people have to come to the original Haw-nan (manor) on Padamya hill, but times have become better, the image can make the journey to the respective village to receive the veneration of the whole village as it is paraded. It has been done for 7 years now, for

the first 2 years, the King Mani Sithu image was the original image carved from the stem of an old tea plant. Today the image was cast in brass and registered

#### **6.2.5 The procession carrying portable symbolic image of King Manisithu**

On the 13<sup>th</sup> waxing moon of Tazaung-mon (the 8<sup>th</sup> month of the Myanmar calendar), November, the elders of the chosen village, accompanied by the village musical troupe go happily to the shrine on the Padamya hill. They bring back the King Mani Sithu's image together with his court of ministers with ceremony. They are stayed in the village monastery for the night and the villagers come to pay obeisance. The next day on 14<sup>th</sup> waxing moon, the image is paraded with ceremony in a procession, starting from the village right into Namhsan town.

On that day, the procession was led by the president of the pagoda trustees, dressed in traditional white clothes, who carrying a potable Buddha image with both hands. Behind him in a line were the monks and the nuns. Behind them were two young men, dressed in traditional black national uniforms carry the triangular gong on their shoulders and beating it regularly. Following them, two young men carry the banner with the word "75<sup>th</sup> time Maha-bon Kathein Pwe and Mani Sithu Puzaw Pwe". (See Figure 29)



**Figure 29. The Kathein festival and Mani Sithu Puzaw Pwe**

Behind the procession and banner carriers on foot, is an open-roof car. In the front of the car sits the "Ta-pa-lain", Sharman. In the back of the car are four pagoda

trustees carrying the King Mani Sithu image and his court of ministers. The car is decorated with flowers and sheltered by one white and two gold umbrellas. Following the car are young men and women wearing traditional clothes and carrying things to donate (See Figure 30). They are grouped according to the villages and in-between each village followed the musical troupe and dancers.



**Figure 30. Women wearing traditional clothes and carrying things to donate**

The procession goes round, and town and people come and put donations in the silver bowls of the pagoda trustees. When they rested for a while at monastery, they placed the King Mani Sithu image on the right-hand side of the Buddha image. The pagoda trustees offered the “Kathein robes” and others offerings that the people carried, rice-soon and curry to the monks and rice-soon, snacks made of glutinous rice, fruits, sweet tea, plain tea, Laphet with fried lentils, dry tea leaf and other vegetarian eatables to the King Mani Sithu image (See Figure 31). Many villagers come to offer things and pay obeisance and pray for their well-being. The following descriptions are what the devotees said:

This festival is celebrated at the end of Laphet picking season. It is in commemoration of Laphet and King Mani Sithu. They are honoring their benefactor to mark Laphet as their benefactor too. The Palaungs do not pick tea anymore in this month. It is drying time. This festival wishes good-bye to the tea plant for a while. May they have plentiful Shwe-phi next year. They pray they may get good prices.

They pray that the gift of Laphet from King Mani Sithu will always be free from destruction, and the present year's harvest will fetch a good price. They are able to celebrate it together with the Kathein because the country is peaceful, so everybody can see it and worship it.



**Figure 31. The image of King Mani Sithu resides in the monastery**

The image of King Mani Sithu resides in the monastery for one more night and the next day the pagoda trustees accompanied by the musical troupe return them to the Padamyar Hill pagoda precinct's shrine. The community Kathein Pwe to the Buddha and Mani Sithu Puzaw Pwe are celebrated to the Buddha and give in charity to the Sangha (monk). It is also celebrated to show the gratitude. Besides, it is also a cultural festival where the young Ta Ang (Palaung) national youths and girls can meet in a social environment suited to their traditional culture. Thus to the Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals, "Mani Sithu Puzaw Pwe and the Kathein" are of religious, economic and social importance. Besides, it shows how Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals adore King Mani Sithu, as their live savior.

### **6.3 Tea leaf in daily life**

In this topic (finding) the daily routine and social relationship in the family and community, and the perception of tea in their mind is going to be explained. Laphet is not the staple food of the Ta Ang (Palaung) people as rice. They do not eat

it everyday. But they drink plain tea everyday. They also carry out activities concerning Laphet (tea leaf) everyday. Growing tea is a family business where everybody in the family has to pitch in. The young child is taken into the tea-plantation everyday by the parents. Therefore, the Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals are familiar with Laphet from young. The time for harvesting tea leaf is from March to October. Tea-picking season ends by the full-moon time of Tazaungmon (November).

The time of Shwe-phi Laphet picking is the busiest time and highest income for the Ta Ang (Palaung). From the beginning of the tea leaf picking time to the time of packing into bags, in the process of picking Laphet (tea leaf), it needs a team of 10 to 15 people. First are the tea leaf pickers, next those who classify them and last those who pack or press them into the bags. The number of workers depends on the size of the plantation and its yield of tea leaves. The majority of the Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals living in Namhsan region are involved in tea-plantation business. When the tea leaf picking time especially in Shwe-phi picking season, the product is more than the local natives could handle. So labor has to be recruited from other regions. People from central Myanmar, such as Shwebo, Monywa, Pakokku, Myingyan, Meikhtila, and Taungtha districts come to work on daily wage or contract terms.

Among the Ta Ang (Palaung) families living in Namhsan region, there can be find both Nuclear family as well as Extended family types. From ancient times, when the Ta Ang (Palaung) woman marries, she lives in the husband's house practicing the custom of "patrilocal residence"; a residence pattern in which a married couple lives in the locality associated with the husband's father's relatives. Nowadays, there is no definite rule to live which side, the newly married couple shall go, but often make arrangements on the bases of convenience. In a family, the father is the head of the family nevertheless, both husband and wife have to respect each other.

The Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals usually eat three meals a day. The Ta Ang (Palaung) housewife, whose livelihood is planting tea, has to get up from bed at 4:30 AM to cook the meals for the family. Most of them steam the rice. They go to the plantation only after breakfast. The housewife does the "Soon" offering to the Buddha and the King Mani Sithu. Then typically, at 5:30-6:00 AM the family has their breakfast together. Then packing the rice for the afternoon meal at the plantation, they leave the house for work on the plantation. (See Figure 32) Especially during the Shwe-phi season they leave early in the morning, sometimes even with fire-torches. They eat their lunch at 12:00-1:00 PM. They return home only after 6:00 PM or only

at sunset. They eat their evening meal only after they have processed the tea-leaves they have plucked for the day. The Ta Ang's (Palaung) daily menu is mostly vegetables like bamboo shoots, pickled bamboo shoots and celery and tofu. They do not eat meat or fish everyday. (See Figure 33)



**Figure 32. Working at the plantation**



**Figure 33. Breakfast for the family**

In the whole years, they pick tea leaves from March, April (which is Shwe-phi time) to November, for nearly nine months. From December to February, they are busy, by processing the tea-leaves they have to steam it to make Laphet. They have to gather firewood to steam the Laphet and weed the tea plants.

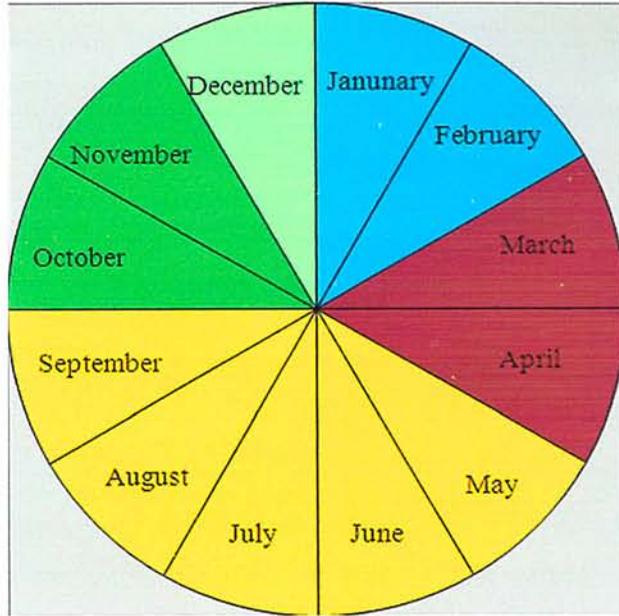
The young Ta Angs (Palaung) have to work on their family plantation. They have to pick the leaves from one farm to another, especially during Shwe-phi time; they cannot see even their friends from their own village. If the plantation is far, they get home very late and the weather is very cold. Therefore, they cannot bathe after a whole day's work. But they can have a happy swim in the plantation stream during rest-time in the afternoons. At night when all work is done, they can relax by watching Television or Video. After passing the tenth standard (matriculation), most of the youth cannot go the universities, because their labor contribution to the family livelihood is essential. Therefore, they can continue their education only by attending the Distance Education. The parent's business is dependent on Laphet, so they are happy when the plantation produces plenty and the prices are good, when they come of age, they too will continue their livelihood with the tea-plantation like their parents.

Some young people feel that their traditional livelihood of growing tea is hard work. There is very little spare time. Day in day out their lives is spent in the plantation. Sometimes they are so busy that even forget the passing away of time. Their everyday life is spent with Laphet business, so that they are out of-touch with the outside world. They have no time to search for or learn general knowledge. They want the world they live in to develop and be up-to-date. They feel frustrated and want to leave their native town to go and work in the big towns and acquire general knowledge.

Nevertheless, the older generation feels that tea-plantation business is their traditional livelihood from their time of their ancestors. To stay the whole day among the tea-plants is a blameless life. Time passes so quickly that one even forgets it. They believe that the more you can pick the more you will thrive. Breathing the tea-leaf scent laden air lengthens their lives. The Ta Angs (Palaung) respect and revere the tea-plant. They never stamp on even a tea-tree twig. They would pick up the small branch, put it on their head, murmuring "Paya" (Buddha), "Paya" (Buddha), and gently throw it away where man will not tread it. When a person becomes too old to do work on the farm they remain at home but still help around in the house. They mined the children, move around the Laphet (tea leaf) that is put out in the sun to dry. Take them in at night, boil water, and cook the rice and curry.

Most of the laborers who came to pick tea in March/ April come from the hot-weather regions of Myanmar. They come to work in the Shan States, which is cool

weather. They escape from the heat and earn good money. The main reason is money. The Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals have an annual work schedule according to the calendar months. The following chart shows the seasonal routing of the Ta Ang (Palaung) who lives in Namhsan Township (See Chart 4). Besides it can be see that the Ta Ang (Palaung) works together with tea leaf in the whole years.



**Chart 3. Seasonal routing**

- |           |   |   |
|-----------|---|---|
| January   | - | weeding tea plant and gathering firewood                |
| February  | - | weeding tea plant and gathering firewood                |
| March     | - | picking Shwe-phi Laphet (tea leaf) and making sweet tea |
| April     | - | picking Shwe-phi Laphet (tea leaf) and making sweet tea |
| May       | - | picking and making Laphet (pickle tea)                  |
| June      | - | picking and making Laphet (pickle tea)                  |
| July      | - | picking and making Laphet (pickle tea)                  |
| August    | - | picking and making Laphet (pickle tea)                  |
| September | - | picking and making Laphet (pickle tea)                  |
| October   | - | picking and sunning tea leaf to dry                     |
| November  | - | picking and sunning tea leaf to dry                     |
| December  | - | sunning tea leaf to dry                                 |

### 6.3.1 The tea leaf in social relation

Being happy highland dwellers, the Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals are honest and peace-loving. They are affectionate and friendly, yet not too shy or grave-locking. They conduct themselves in a friendly manner, whether among themselves or with other people. They are courageous and appreciative of labor force. Ta Ang (Palaung) males and females tend to make great exertion in their work. Being cultivators, they are not greedy, and become easily contented. They especially abide by traditions and customs.

A symbol, belonging to a subject or culture, sometime exists imperceptibly in social relation. Ordinarily these symbols are not easy to detect as native people go about their daily routine of work and living. The social relation of Ta Ang (Palaung) national needs to be studied to identify the symbols existing in Ta Ang (Palaung) culture. Ta Ang (Palaung) national earns their livelihood mainly through tea cultivation so the tea-leaf plays a great role in their social relation.

The tea-leaf products are used by Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals on all occasions auspicious or not. Since long, long ago the pickled tea packet has accompanied an invitation to a ceremony. In case of an auspicious event, the pickled tea packet is tied with two pieces of string, and with a piece of string in case of an inauspicious event. “Two” pieces of string means an even number, which is expected to bring accessions that are more auspicious. When a tea packet is tied with single piece of string, that odd number is expected to bring no more of inauspicious events, the Ta Ang (Palaung) believe.

In the Ta Ang (Palaung) ritual of a couple’s engagement, a matchmaker known in Ta Ang language as “Fuz” (ဖုဆ်) leads. Bringing some dried tobacco leaves for betel quid and some green tea on a tray with a stand, he leads a procession to go to bride’s home, on reaching which he bows three times and tries to seek the approval of the bride’s side by making an auspicious verse-like speech. After which he left that tray with stand containing dried tobacco leaves and green tea as testimony at the bride’s parents.

As part of wedding ceremony, the bridegroom and fellow bachelors under the leadership of “Fuz” go to the bride’s home, on reaching, which “Fuz” bows three times, and request of the elders concerned the bridegroom’s meeting with the bride. Fuz and friends cannot enter the bridegroom’s home without permission. After the

bridegroom has met with his bride, the Fuz, bowing three times with the some dried tobacco leaves and green tea on the tray with stand before him, arks for the girl in marriage on behalf of the bridegroom by saying a verse-like speech.

At that time, he has a basket called “Karu” in Ta Ang (Palaung) language before him, an offertory for elders on the bride’s side, into which he places a Kyat 1000 currency note the amount may depend on the circumstances of the favor-seekers together with dried tobacco leaves and green tea. Wedding presents from both sides of the couple’s parents may include jewelries; pits filled with picked tea still being processed and even tea plantations for the couple’s livelihood.

Thus, tea products are found in connection with social events auspicious or not. Particularly in auspicious events, their role covers from beginning to end of the event.

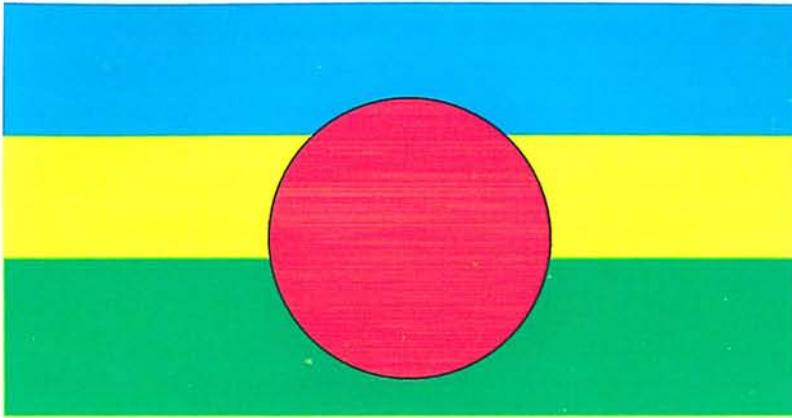
### **6.3.2 The symbolic tea leaf in the Flag**

A flag is usually a piece of multi colored cloth, which is a sign or symbol representative of an aim, cause, or an occasion. Its meaning is a thing fluttering in the air. National or state flag is an important symbol for the country. There are many other flags or banners to show off their root causes like the royalty, a university, an army, a doctrinal organization, or a signal. The colours and designs of national flags are usually not arbitrarily selected but rather stem from the history, culture, or religion of the particular country. Many flags can be traced to a common origin, and such “flag families” are often linked both by common traditions and by geography. (Encyclopaedia Britannica Ultimate Reference Suite. Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica.)

The Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals have their own flag. The flag representative of all Ta Ang (Palaung) is explained in detail on Union of Myanmar, Ta Ang (Palaung) Literature and Culture committee’s The Course of Ta Ang (Palaung) History, published 2008, page.47. Thus, as to its size and patterns: Three horizontal strips of cloth each 1 feet wide, colored blue, yellow and green respectively; overall size is 5feet x 3feet, with a round, red sum with diameter of 1.25 feet at the centre.

As for the flag’s colours, the blue colour, representative of the cosmos and the sky, stands for honesty, integrity, and disciplined unity. The yellow colour represents the Buddha’s Teaching; the green colour stands for land of tea cultivation, the major

resource of economic activity for the ethnic people. The round and red sun means courage, fraternity and the light of literature. (See Figure 34)



**Figure 34. Sample of the Ta Ang (Palaung) National Flag**

### **6.3.3 Tea leaf in saying**

The Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals of both sexes depend on tea growing as traditional occupation and mainly drink green tea. Soon after rising from bed, they go to tea plantations on mountainsides, each with lunch in a packet, to pick tea leaves till the evening. A well-known saying goes: To have good pickled tea leaves, have the Ta Ang (Palaung) climb the mountains fast (Thinkha, 1966). But a different version held by some others has it thus: To have good pickled tea leaves, have the Ta Ang (Palaung) climb the mountains slowly. The tea plant by nature gets better in quality the higher the land it grows on. Thus, the tea pickers have to climb multiple ranges to get to their good quality tea plantations. If they hurried up on their trip they would soon be too tired to reach there so going slow and steady is key for obtaining good-quality tea leaves, it is said.

Some local Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals claim that the original proverb, “Have Palaungs climbing up the mountains if you would like to finally enjoy good quality pickled tea leaves.” Whatever the case, you are invited to the mountains, home of Palaungs, to enjoy good quality pickled tea leaves. Some other Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals say the correct proverb is, “Have Palaungs not climbing slowly on the mountains if you want to enjoy good quality pickled tea leaves,” which means, as the best tea sprouts grow more profusely on mountain-tops, Palaungs must climb fast to

reach there, so as to pick them before they become quite mature. Whatever the differences in meaning, the saying remains current among the nationalities residing in Myanmar.

#### **6.3.4 Life History**

In Anthropology the life history, or personal narrative of one's life, has long been recognized as an important vehicle for learning about how culture is experienced and created by individuals. Life histories have a special significance in our technological, fast-paced, complex world. As we have become more isolated from one another, the life history offers a means of putting us back in touch with others, recognizing the intimacy results from listening to and telling stories (Elyssa Dillon and Laurin Becker, 2006).

The goal of life history is to understand the variation in such life history strategies and experience. This knowledge can be used to construct models to predict particular social life, belief, perception. The key to life history theory is that there are limited resources available, and focusing on only a few life history characteristics is necessary.

##### **6.3.4.1 Case Study I**

Mr. A, a 68-year-old Ta Ang (Palaung) national, is a major tea entrepreneur with his businesses spread in Namhsan and Yangon. He was born in Man Sup village, Namhsan Township. His parents are Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals who worked tea plantations. Since his youth, he has been familiar with tea business because he grew up picking tea leaves for his parents. In adulthood, he continued his parents' original occupation of tea growing and is now a producer as well as seller of pickled tea leaves, green tea and black tea. Besides he own ten tea plantation gardens. He is selling tea products, retail, or wholesale, via his brokers' sales centers opened at Theingyi bazaar and Bayint Naung brokers' center in Yangon.

In his childhood, he helped on his parents' tea plantation, picking tea leaves. Thus helping in generation-old family business, he has to learn how to produce the three major kinds of tea as well as how to market them. On coming of age, he got married to Ar-yan village native Miss. A, a Ta Ang (Palaung) national, and started on self-manageable basis his own manifold business of growing tea and producing pickled tea leaves, green tea and black tea. He has six children.

In 1999, he opened a tea brokers' sales centre, mainly marketing "Palaung Lay Green Tea", at Theingyi Bazaar in Yangon. Another center opened in 2011 at Bayint Naung brokers' center. His one son and three daughters are now running these shops but he mainly lives in Namhsan.

He views tea business as blameless and expresses his belief in happiness, not becoming too ambitious in business. Based at Namhsan with two elder sons, Mr. A's responsibilities for the family are: getting hired farmhands for the family's tea plantations; giving out advance money to tea planters; supervising family-owned tea factories and work sites. Besides, forwarding his produce and finished products like pickled tea leaves, green tea and black tea delivered by those who has drawn advance money to Yangon.

Mr. A said that he loves mountains and likes living there because big cities cannot provide enough fresh air for him to breathe in. He feels like falling ill when he is away from Namhsan with its tea-smelling air, and happy dwelling there due to its calm and quiet, he says. However, he has made his children live in big cities like Yangon so that they might get a new outlook and knowledge. Though Mr. A makes important economic and social decisions for the family, his children are sent to live in Yangon so that they would be able to win new markets and improve their traditional business to keep abreast with the time.

Besides his deep economic insight, Mr. A is given to working for the perpetuation in neighborhood religious and social activities. As a businessperson in tea goods, he regards the tea plant and Mani Sithu as very precious objects, saying the tea plant is like a giver of life to him, his family, and all Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals. The Ta Ang (Palaung) can hardly exit here without the tea plant, but they got to settle down here thanks to Mani Sithu's direction on how to create a livelihood out of tea plant; and those nationals constantly say prayers and disseminate loving-kindness to their benefactors, Mr. A says. On 10-11-2011, the full moon day of Tazaungmon, he had the Alaung Sithu image conveyed respectfully to his house for worship.

The Mani Sithu Image kept at Padamya Pagoda in Zayangyi area is mostly used for special worship after conveying it village, which lasts 1 to 3 day depending on what the village can afford. In 2011, it was conveyed for two days' stay at Mr. A's house for worship. Conveying the Mani Sithu Image to one's home for worship, rather than going to a public place to do so, reveals the family's deeper desire to pay respects to it. This mainly is the objective of special home worship of Mani Sithu

Image. Especially Mr. A said that he conveyed at considerable expense as principal donor the Mani Sithu image to his house for worship because he, highly regarding the initiator of tea-growing livelihood, wanted others to have the same view, and new-generation's youths to know of and maintain the traditional customs. A Ta Ang (Palaung) house usually has its own Mani Sithu image for family worship; but it is considered more meritorious and beneficial conveying and worshipping an outside Mani Sithu image at home, accompanied by visitors and festivities.

A Ta Ang (Palaung) family may worship the Mani Sithu image on the household altar every day but cannot convey the one kept at Padamya Pagoda every year because yearly conveyance of that image is allowed by turns and limited to one year for each village. All rural households in Zyangyi area do not hold individual worshipping ceremony of Mani Sithu Image at each house but usually make it a communal affair. Mr. A was the first individual who was allowed to convey and worship the Mani Sithu image at home; formerly no other principal donor had been allowed to do likewise. In 2011, Mr. A, from the first time, principal donor was allowed to convey the Padamya (ruby) Pagoda's Mani Sithu Image to his house for worship thanks to the kind permission of village elders. The date chosen for that celebration was 14<sup>th</sup> waxing moon of Tazaungmon, 1373 Myanmar era, as it is the usual day for yearly parading worship of Mani Sithu Image and communal Kathina robe-offering ceremony in Zayangyi area, Namhsan Township.

The offertories are monk's robes, alms-cash, and the Padaytharpin (tree-shaped stand where various articles of offering are hung). The invited monks are offered monk's robes, alms-cash, alms-meal, and delicacies. All villagers from near and far are invited and they play host to visitors, who are then treated to a meal with delicious, well-cooked curries.

The successful businesspersons in tea industry, tea plantation owners, tea merchants in regard of pickled tea leaves, green tea and black tea, usually play host, as a private, principal donor, to the conveyance and worship of the Mani Sithu Image. In addition, they pray for more economic success and good health, as if they do at a pagoda. Specifically, their prayers are: For Mani Sithu (King Alaung Sithu) to reach a good destination; for themselves to be endowed with seven properties of the virtuous such as giving alms, morality, knowledge, generosity, wisdom, and being ashamed to do evil and being afraid to do evil for their offering of alms, robes, alms-cash, and feasting the audience and especially for Mani Sithu (King Alaung Sithu) and

forefathers to reach a good destination on their death. But the main theme of any prayer is to get to realization of Nibbana as a result of all good deeds done at Mani Sithu worship celebration.

As the venue for special worship at home, a grand pavilion was set up on spacious grounds in front of donor's house and it was decorated with flowers and colourful paper to accommodate Mani Sithu Image. Before being conveyed there, the Mani Sithu Image was cleaned with traditional shampoo and scented water, like the Buddha image is cleaned sometimes.

Many people from neighboring villages and invited guests came to this devotional offering ceremony, and offered popcorn, pickled tea leaves, green tea, black tea, and cash donations. At the same time, they prayed for prosperity in their tea-related businesses as well as for realization of Nibbana and well-being of their families.

If a family from Zayangyi wants to hold, a home worshipping ceremony of Mani Sithu Image, which is kept at Padamyia Pagoda, it has to ask for a permission of Zayangyi Monastery's abbot, responsible personnel, and board of trustees' members.

In 1373 Myanmar era, Zyangyi dwellers, the principal donor included, made a celebration of communal Kathina robe-offering plus parading warship of Mani Sithu Image. On the first day afternoon, after lunch before the set date monks, nuns, principal donor (Mr. A, Mrs. A & family), invited locals, board of trustees' members, and some people from other villages, conveyed that image. On the morning of celebration day communal Kathina robe offering and parading worship of Mani Sithu Image was held. Later the audience was entertained to a meal at the donor's house, accompanied by chicken curry, fish curry, and thin soup of yam stalks.

On the second day, the Mani Sithu remained available all day long for worship by family members and others. The Sangha (monks) were offered the morning alms-meal, visitors were entertained to lunch, and recitation of religious texts followed afterwards. In the evening, boys and girls, each in their own group, held a debating contest on subjects like love, a maiden's beauty, etc. For example, boys would argue that the maidens of this village were ugly and poor, while those of the other village were beautiful and rich and worthy of their love. The girls also would argue that they could not like the boys of this village because they were lazy and poor, etc. The debate was done all in fun. A similar debate went on among adult males and females, on subjects like the donation ceremony, history of Manisithu, the donating family, etc.

Those debates were now and then interspersed with singing and group dances, activities lasted all night long (See Figure 35).



**Figure 35. The debating contest**

On the third day morning, after the charitable Manisithu procession had gone around the locality that image was conveyed back to its lodge, where after alms-meal was offered to the Sangha and then lunch to the lay congregation.

Curries prepared for the three days of celebration were those of chicken, fish, dried fish, pork, beans, thin vermicelli soup, fried yam stalks and dried fish (traditional dish), and curry of pickled bamboo shoots (traditional dish). According to the donor the total cost was 80 to 100 lakh of kyat at November 2011 prices. Such a ceremony often costs so much that only rich people can afford it.

On the third day evening, the successful completion of the donation was held. Firstly, the family **ou:zi** (open-ended drum with a long body) was tuned (See Figure 36). The Ta Ang (Palaung) custom dictates that “a family **ou:zi**” be kept at each village. That open-ended long drum is known as the village’s family **ou:zi**. When an invited cultural group of another village comes with their family **ou:zi** the host welcomes them at his door with a tray-with-stand containing green tea, rice, popcorn and flowers. Afterwards local volunteers group was given cash donation, accompanied by some singing and dancing to make the event’s end.



**Figure 36. Family ou:zi**

Mr. A was happy at the event's success and expressed his joy for having been conscious of gratitude and his ability to maintain traditional customs. The celebratory honoring of Mani Sithu at home is so costly on event that only the rich can afford it. However, that celebration of Mani Sithu can be undertaken as and when a donor desires it. But in Zayangyi area the event is usually held when Lephath-thee (tea seed) has become mature enough to turn into seedling upon being planted.

### **Case Study II**

A 52-year-oldmTa Ang (Palaung) national, Mr. B, lives in Myoma village, Namhsan Township and is engaged in tea industry such as tea plantation, and production of pickled tea leaves and green tea. He has a son and three daughters. He is conservative and reticent, but honest and hospitable. He is not a big-time entrepreneur, but careful and exact in his work and dealings. His wife is also an honest Ta Ang (Palaung) national. The couple is industrious in their occupation. Soon after rising from bed, Mr. B prepares to go to his tea plantations while his wife prepares breakfast for her family. Having had their meal, Mr. B and children used to go for their tea plantations carrying necessary implements.

Mr. B admitted his appreciation of the tea plant since youth thanks to parents' admonition and the practical benefit he has enjoyed. Therefore, he has been teaching his children now and then the benefits due to the tea plant and Mani Sithu (King

Alaung Sithu). Mr. B said that he and siblings have had basic education and no higher education because his parents were poor and regional development was only at earliest stages. Mr. B learned how to pick the tea leaf, take care of the tea plant, and pay respect to Mani Sithu since his youth when he regularly accompanied his parents to the tea plantations to help out.

Mr. B explained how his family has prospered and his children have been given higher education through a single livelihood of tea cultivation and production of pickled tea. All his children are graduates now. His motto is: "Practice honestly and aim high", and reaches his decision through simple consideration of the matter.

His emphasis is on pickled tea, out of the three major kinds of tea products. But he produces green tea for home consumption, making gifts, or donation to monasteries. Pickled tea has to be produced at most suitable places only. Pickled tea coming from Zayangyi, Hochaung and Kayalan villages are good quality so that its color, smell, and flavor remain constant: it does not blacken when exposed to air and its flavor stays the same.

Mr. B does not have a brand name for his pickled tea, but his buyer at Yangon, Mandalay, Namhsan, and Kyauk-me use their own brand names. He cultivates tea plantation and produces pickled tea the traditional way, without resort to any machinery. The traditional cultivation leads to low yield of tea leaves but farming costs are less. He does not want to adopt the modern method of tea cultivation because it needs a lot of investment in time and money, as well as the pruning of old tea plants. In two or three years he might use the modern method of cultivation a little, he said.

For working together in unity, Mr. B and siblings got their own shares of tea plantation upon coming of age and starting their own families as their parents' livelihood was an economic success. Mr. B and siblings in their youth invoked the blessing of the tea plant and Mani Sithu before tea cultivation started. Mr. B does the same too in his adulthood so that his planting of seedlings, Shwephi season harvest, and family's economic circumstances might go well. As taught by his parents, Mr. B still offers same portion of the first batch of Shwephi Oo, pickled tea and green tea to the monastery.

Very reluctant to cut off tea branches, Mr. B will respectfully ask for holy permission to prune a tea plant when he is forced to do so. On the altar at Mr. B's home is a Mani Sithu image, sculpted out of the best part of an old tea plant. Like the

Buddha image, that Mani Sithu image is daily offered food, drinking water, and flowers. Every year Mr. B, or one of his family members, goes to Lwai Sai Pagoda festival to worship the tea plant and Mani Sithu image kept there. Then he usually brings home a Sand Zedi from that festival to pay homage to at home. After one or two weeks, when flower from the Sand Zedi are dried he gently throw it away where it will not be trodden by man. The Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals yearly visit the Lwai Sai Pagoda not because the tea plant and Mani Sithu image there are considered more powerful than their household Mani Sithu image but the pagoda's Mani Sithu image is believed to have been sculpted out of the original tea plant Mani Sithu had bestowed. Moreover, their pilgrimage to Lwai Sai Padoga is an expression of gratitude owed to the tea plant and Mani Sithu.

#### **6.3.4.3 Case Study III**

Mr. C, a 69-year-old Ta Ang (Palaung) national residing at Taungma village at the foot of Lwai Sai Mountain, has tea cultivation and production of green tea as his business. He has been a widow for nine years and has three sons: the first son is married and works as a car and motorcycle mechanic, second son helps parents' livelihood, and third son is a graduate in government service.

Mr. C claims that a tea-related livelihood is most appropriate in their region, and the best sign of Lwai Sai Mountain probably is the wafting smell of tea leaves all across the forested hillsides. In the past, when schools for the vacation Mr. C usually took his sons to the tea plantations and taught them how to weed out, pick tea leaves, knead pickled tea, and how to dry it.

Mr. C said, "I have created a beautiful life for my sons through the single business of tea plantation and tea production. At that time income from a Shwephi season harvest satisfied the household needs for the whole year." Today he has a son only, out of three, who is interested in the traditional occupation of tea cultivation. When Shwephi season comes tea plants have to be left alone for lack of workers. It is not cost effective to Mr. C to hire outside workers to pick tea leaves. It would be heartbreaking to him to sell off his tea plantations so he left others pick his tea leaves for free if they wish to.

Mr. C now depends on middle son's labor, as he is too old even to weed out the plantations. Since 2008-2009 of tea crises, the prices have been on the decline and tea cultivators in trouble. Therefore, Mr. C climbs the Lwai Sai Mountain now and

then to worship the tea plant and Mani Sithu image kept at Shan chief's manor. In the past too when work was light and the weather was sunny he made such visit to clean and pay homage to those objects of worship.

At present Mr. C's two other sons are no more interested or helpful in his tea occupation. However, Mr. C vows not to discard tea cultivation however worse it gets, but give his tea plantations to all his sons on his passing away as inheritance. Mr. C is unhappy that his sons do not value tea business as he does. Mr. C is told by his youngest son in government service want to cultivate tea with modern techniques but he is enabling to do so because enough workers cannot be hired at reasonable cost.

Mr. C claims he will be happy doing what he likes as long as he can picking tea leaves, kneading pickled tea, drying tea, and weeding out the plantations. He said it would be a prosperous year to Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals when they were kept busy in Shwephi season.

A study of the life stories showed that Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals are consistent entrepreneurs in tea industry, given to keeping their traditions and customs. Besides, it can be seen that their perception, feeling, and value on tea are almost same.

## CHAPTER (7)

### DISCUSSION

This research is the tracing of Ta Ang (Palaung) culture from the metaphor of tea leaf. This chapter discusses the relationship among findings and the anthropological theoretical points of view.

#### 7.1 Tea leaf and concept of tradition

This research tries to find out what are symbolic in Ta Ang (Palaung) culture especially who live in Namhsan Township. The tea leaf is found to have been Cultural Symbol of the Ta Ang (Palaung) since ancient times. They love to dwell on highlands with mountains and ranges. As described in Chapter 4, they seemingly have settled down there for their inclination to live in peace and quiet. By Tylor's definition (1973), culture is "acquired by man as a member of society." This definition shows that culture is learned rather than inherited biologically. Besides, it implies that culture is social; it is shared rather than property of the individual. The people of Ta Ang (Palaung) acquire culture by learning or enculturation as the members of Ta Ang (Palaung) society. They accept the tea leaf as their traditional one because historically there have been concrete connection between tea leaf and their past.

A study on the historical background of the Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals shows that they entered Myanmar along with the Mon, Wa, and Yin-net indigenous nationals. The Ta Angs are well known as Palaung to other nationals in Myanmar. Many scholars stated that tea plant originated at the northern part of Myanmar, but there were no exact historical records. According to a famous Myanmar poet, U Ponnya (1812-1867), in his book "U Ponnya Myittaza" stated that the tea plant was introduced to that area about 2,000 years ago. In that version, the seeds were first given to the Ta Ang (Palaung) while they were still living in what is now northern China. This mention is earlier than Ta Ang's (Palaung) history. It is stated that King Alaung Sithu gave the seeds (tea) to Ta Ang (Palaung) since over 854 years ago (Bagan era). Since then cultivation of tea plants became the traditional trade of Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals. Besides, Ta Ang traditionally has believed that King Alaung Sithu is their life savior and they revere and respect to King Alaung Sithu. Whether or not these legends have any basis in fact, tea has played a significant role in Palaung

culture for centuries as a staple beverage, a curative, and a status symbol. It is obvious that there is a connection between the Ta Ang (Palaung) and tea cultivation and King Manisithu traditionally.

## **7.2 Diversity of meaning in tea leaf**

Tradition is passed down from generation to generation. It is clear that tradition was originated in the past. Lenkeit said “When particular choices are made consistently within a society, regardless of the reasons for those choices, we speak of them as tradition” (Roberta Edwards Lenkeit, 2001). In this statement, reasons for the choices as tradition are omitted. Actually, being tradition show a connection between the past and present. In other words, at least connection with the past is one of the reasons for being tradition. In Ta Ang (Palaung) culture, tea leaf traditionally exists. This tradition of tea leaf connects the past event and present.

Tea leaf, Tea plant, Tea plantation are deeply rooted in the heart of Ta Ang (Palaung) as described in chapter 5. Ta Ang (Palaung) call tea leaf as gold leaf, silver leaf and they have a lot of precious memories concerned with tea leaf. Since their childhood they have enjoyed tea plantation. Tea plantation is done by a lot of people. Everybody in the house has to join and the people from other places come and join. Therefore, tea makes social relationship among the people and creates happiness. Here, tradition was originated in the past but still have social function at present. In other words, tradition has also functions in the society at present.

Moreover, from the religious point of view, King Mani Sithu’s (King Alaung Sithu) gift of the tea-seeds had made the Ta Ang (Palaung) people worship the Symbolic Tea tree. It is an important Ta Ang (Palaung) belief. There is no historical record when exactly they made images of King Mani Sithu, to worship him as their benefactor. It is probably about the time when King Mani Sithu renovated Lwai Sai pagoda. If we calculate with Myanmar era 1373, it may be assumed that this practice of worshipping symbolic King Mani Sithu’s image is 854 years old. The traditional Myanmar eatable “Laphet” is revered by the Ta Ang (Palaung) as their life. That is, the Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals adore King Mani Sithu as their life saviour because he gave them the tea-seeds to grow the tea plant as their livelihood for life. Ta Ang (Palaung) valued on tea leaf is very different from other people who eat tea leaf. In other words, it can be said that tea leaf has religious functions in Ta Ang (Palaung) society.

The colours and designs of national flags are usually not arbitrarily selected but rather stem from the history, culture, or religion of the particular country. The green colour in the Ta Ang's (Palaung) national flag stands for land of tea cultivation, the major resource of economic activity for the Ta Ang (Palaung) people. According to Raymond Scupin, 2000; "the designs and colors of the flags of different countries represent symbolic associations with abstract ideas and concepts", the Ta Ang's (Palaung) national flag shows that they have the potential for expressing deep-felt symbolic emotion in tea.

### **7.3 Tea leaf in particular culture**

Nowadays most of the people of Myanmar used tea in different kinds in various ceremonies. Tea is one of the major commodities being used by each and every home of Myanmar either tea or pickled tea. In ancient times, when an invitation in regard of adoration ceremony, religious sermonizing event, or auspicious occasion was extended it was usually accompanied by packets of pickled tea leaves and green tea as gifts. That custom stands to date in some rural areas. Such an extension of invitation has different names dependent on the area concerned, such as "laphet htoke kam" (laphet means pickled tea leaves, htoke means packet, kam means give), "laphet htoke hmya" (laphet means pickled tea leaves, htoke means packet, hmya means shared), "laphet htoke ngha" (laphet means pickled tea leaves, htoke means packet, kam means shared), or "laphet htoke wai" (laphet means pickled tea leaves, htoke means packet, kam means shared). Pickled tea is an important snack in Myanmar culture; pickled tea leaves and green tea are usual items of entertainment for guests. Pickled tea is not only traditional food of entertainment but also a symbolic food eaten by litigants upon settlement of their lawsuit at a court of law in the past. In local communities also, pickled tea leaves cannot seemingly be done away with at events of religious worship or propitiation of Nat-spirits.

Tea is not only a major product but also plays a strong role in the culture and daily life of Ta Ang (Palaung) people from Namhsan Township. Green tea is an essential beverage for Ta Ang (Palaung) culture. If the one who comes to the Ta Ang's (Palaung) house, firstly they used to feed green tea. Locals' belief that other crops apart from the tea plant cannot be successfully grown in their region might have been caused by too deep a superstition, the climate, or the wrong cultivation techniques. Therefore, instead of singly relying on tea cultivation the nationalities

Should for their development grow other plants as multiple crops, asking for know-how and help from agriculture experts. Only then can the tea growers' monetary problems be lessened in the event of fallen tea prices, low yield, and unexpected event like the coloring chemical problem. Moreover, the locals will be able to survive for long as before, growing their favorite symbolic tea plant. In addition, instead of leaving the tea leaf unharvested in times of low prices it should be tried as an ingredient in other personal products, thus amounting to making full use of the whole tea plant.

Leslie A. White said that a symbol is a thing the value or meaning of which is bestowed upon it by those whose use it (1944). According to Leslie A. White, tea is one of the eatable things for other people but for the Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals tea is a symbol. A study of Namhsan-resident Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals from Symbolic Anthropology perspective shows that the tea leaf is key to their social life, and firmly established in their life historically, culturally, and economically.

A culture consists of the socially acquired ways a particular society's members think and feel. Cultures maintain continuity by means of the process of enculturation. In studying cultural differences, one must guard against the habit of mind called ethnocentrism, which arises from a failure to appreciate the far-reaching effects of enculturation on human life. Enculturation, however, cannot explain how and why culture changes. This research found that, Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals who live in Namhsan Township transmit their tea culture to the future generation by holding festivals connected with tea and King Mani Sithu, doing tea cultivation, making three kinds of tea. It may be said that although the life style of tea cultivation and depend upon tea does not change; the young generation's attitude toward tea gradually changes. These changes are only natural, and it can be predicted that the Ta Ang (Palaung) will gradually lose their value upon tea in next few years.

According to Turner (1967), tea serves as mechanisms for the maintenance of Ta Anng (Palaung) society. The deeper the study of the connection between tea leaf and the Ta Ang (Palaung) the more it becomes evident that it has most significance in their lives. To the Ta Ang (Palaung), the tea leaf is not only the crop of their livelihood but also a material related to their culture. The Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals mean only those resident in Namhsan Township, and not elsewhere. This study of tea leaf would offer ethnographic and historical information. Besides, it includes research

on highly complex subjects, such as the Ta Ang (Palaung) imperial system in a historical perspective.

Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney's book says the Japanese have used rice for their "ethnic" or "cultural" survival (1993). The writer showed the people of Japan how the important role of rice in the lives of the Japanese, in their traditional customs, beliefs and practices. Similarly, it could be said of Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals that they have used tea for their "ethnic" or "cultural" survival. However, the difference between the two is while the Japanese use consumption of rice as cultural symbol the Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals use tea cultivation as their ethnic identity. Engaged for centuries in tea cultivation, the Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals have adopted their tea plantations as ancestors' heritage, their home, family, and life. They have developed a religious adoration for the tea plant.

Geertz focused much more on the ways in which symbols operate within culture, as how individuals "see, feel, and think about the world" (1973). Human beings can describe their thoughts and behavior from their own point of view. It is known to all people that tea is a food item, but they will not be aware of its role in symbolic process for an ethnic group or a culture. To other ethnic groups, tea may be a food item, but to the Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals it is their refuge for **survival** or stand as their **subsistence pattern**. They value tea leaf as their blood, flesh and life.

Overview of this research shows the tea plant for Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals and Mani Sithu have evidently existed together for long in their **history and religious beliefs**. Moreover, the tea plant still plays an important role of **enculturation** as the Ta Ang's (Palaung) livelihood and object of adoration like the Buddha. The tea cultivation is probably the universal occupation of Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals. Their livelihood is so steeped in tea cultivation that they could almost be called tea-planting Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals. In other words, tea cultivation has enhanced the unity of Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals largely. Laphet (tea) creates stability and unity in Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals.

The Lwai Sai Pagoda Festival can be called a meeting point of tea-growing Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals because Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals in Namhsan Township as well as in other townships visit it. Moreover, the flag is representative of all Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals. So couldn't it be considered that the tea is preserving the Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals' culture?

In Chapter 5, economic sector, tea is described as major traditional livelihood. In Chapter 6, on religious and social sectors tea is reflected in the expressions: tea plant as a plant with “life”; tea is their life savior. Therefore, couldn't tea be considered as constituting value in Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals' culture?

Finally, the tea culture of Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals could be deemed a culture with peculiarities all its own. Their particular culture requires that they grow the tea plant for their survival as well as their symbolic spiritual belief. An analysis of the connection between the tea plant and Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals would show that the life of Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals, if without tea cultivation, would have taken a different course and created a different life for them today. All Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals of Namhsan Township have kept until now their virtual worship of the tea plant and Mani Sithu. This tradition, with peculiarities of its own, could be referred to as the Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals' particular culture.

## CHAPTER (8)

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 8.1 Conclusion

Laphet (pickle tea leaf) eatable plays an important role in Myanmar social community. The old and young, rich or poor without distinction, eat it. It is an essential item of entertainment on all occasions of joy and sorrow and religious beliefs. Although people are eating Laphet only a few people know exactly who grow it. In doing research, it is found that people do not know clearly the difference between the Shan and the Ta Ang (Palaung) people. Therefore, when Ta Ang (Palaung) meets other people they identify themselves as “Laphet growers, Ta Ang (Palaung)” or “a genuine Ta Ang (Palaung) must know Laphet thoroughly”. There are several myths for the name of Palaung. Sometimes, the names Shwe Palaung and Ngwe Palaung make different sense among them. Therefore, they use the name themselves as "Ta Ang" to avoid misunderstanding among the nationals.

Tea growing originated in the region since Manisithu (King Alaung Sithu) gave the Ta Ang (Palaung) to do it for livelihood. The Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals residing in Namhsan Township seem to have chosen tea cultivation as their economic activity to adapt to their environment. Tea cultivation has good commercial value if the tea plant is well taken care of. The topography of Namhsan means agricultural land is the only resource it has. The traditional belief in their spiritual life says that the tea plant has been prophesied to be grown as their occupation. Therefore, the Ta Ang (Palaung) residing in Namhsan Township are found to be engaged in tea plant cultivation, marketing tea products and other economic activities connected with the tea leaf as their main livelihood.

Nowadays tea acreage in Namhsan Township is found to be growing by 100-plus acres a year. The government is urging those tea growers to take up, rather than expanding tea plantations, modern methods by way of systematic pruning and rearrangement of the existing plantations. However, most Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals still follow their traditional method of expansion of acreage. Constant yearly expansion of tea plantations could lead to deforestation and climate change.

Field studies have revealed that expansion of tea plantations goes on because the families of tea growers are becoming larger. Moreover, the traditional method

requires less cost and care of the tea plant. Nowadays the tea cultivation has been expanded to other regions as well. Therefore, the Namhsan-produced tea leaf, already well-known for its quality, may well be improved quality and yield-wise through the use of quality seeds and systematic plantation.

The Lwai Sai Pagoda festival is not only the greatest pagoda festival in Namhsan region but also the most important event for every one doing business in Laphet (tea). Not only festival but the notion of “belief,” too, was originally linked to economics. When one views the whole panorama of the pagoda festival in detail, one sees people of all ages, young and old, rich and poor, each with his own thoughts. There are people whose life are Laphet (tea) and do all kinds of business with Laphet (tea). It is their life. There are young people who come because they personally believe in it. Some come with friends just for a joyful jaunt and others purely for an economic financial livelihood. Although they come with various aims but all far and near pilgrims paid reverent obeisance to Lwai Sai Pagoda, King Mani Sithu symbolic shrine and the original Tea tree. The pilgrims from far and near buy mostly clothing and steel utensils for their families. Furthermore, the young people wander round in groups and get to know each other from other villages. The older people staying in the Zayats, pagoda Tazaungs, under the shade of trees talk about business, religious, social and health affairs and get to know each other. Besides, the findings show that the monks and nuns who are dwelling on the Lwai Sai Mountain treat the pilgrims kindly. Though they were monks and nuns, they respect the beliefs of the lay people and help them fulfill their wishes.

The Lwai Sai Pagoda festival is the meeting place of long-lost friends and relatives, of young men and young maids. It is the event to preserve their national's religion and traditional culture and customs. That is why the Lwai Sai Pagoda festival is an important place for Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals' economy, social and religion. Besides, it shows the perception of Ta Ang (Palaung) on tea leaf and how tea leaf and King Mani Sithu have important role in their lives. The Kathein in Buddhism is the offering of yellow robes to the members of the Buddhist Order for a special purpose and it is very auspicious time. For Ta Ang (Palaung) people they show their attitude on tea leaf and King Mani Sithu by celebrating Kathein and King Mani Sithu procession and veneration ceremony. These two festivals reveal a great deal of Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals' traditional culture and beliefs on tea leaf.

The Manisithu (King Alaung Sithu) celebration by way of a large procession going around the whole town is meant to have all nationals of the whole region, young or old, remembering the gratitude owed to Manisithu (King Alaung Sithu). Besides, to finish the 1000 Sand-Zedis, 1000 plates of rice (Soon) ,1000 candles and 1000 incense sticks in time and to convey in procession the Symbolic King Mani Sithu's image around the town need unity. Therefore, we can say that these two festivals build the unity of the Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals.

As a diligent national, the Ta Angs (Palaung) are as busy as bees the whole year round. Their daily routine begins with the cocks crowing at about 4:00 or 4:30 o'clock early in the morning. Although ironic in one sense, the Ta Ang (Palaung) chose tea leaf and tea garden as metaphors for themselves when tea plantation was originally introduced by the King Alaung Sithu. The symbolic importance of tea leaf has been deeply embedded in the Ta Ang's traditional belief and daily life: tea leaf as their soul, tea leaf as their benefactor, and tea leaf as self.

The elderly people do not say exactly the time when they go to the plantation during tea leaf picking season. They only said, "Twilight" or dawn when it may still be dark. They return home quite late and almost dark when they can barely see the plant. From dawn to dusk, they spend their time on the plantation regardless of the passing of time. Sometimes when the plantation is far from town, they have a small house to rest in the plantation, although they have a house in town. Even in their house compound, they grow tea-plants more than other eatable plants. They are happy in their work and they can make friends with their neighbors in work and discuss their output and prices. Their livelihood of tea-planting is beneficial not only to the local people, but also provides work for the people of other regions where work is scarce.

Shwe-phi picking time is the busiest time for the Ta Ang (Palaung). The rest of the time is normal routine work-picking tea leaf, preserving it, sunning it to dry, making sweet tea, weeding and gathering firewood. That is why the Ta Ang's (Palaung) daily life cannot be separated from symbolic Laphet (tea leaf) but kept busy the whole year round.

Life history given in Chapter 6 shows a prominent Ta Ang (Palaung) men's symbolic belief and taking refuge in the tea leaf and Mani Sithu (King Alaung Sithu) , and their consciousness of gratitude owed to them. Moreover, it shows their wealth and the depth of his religious faith. Besides, the Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals adore King Mani Sithu as their life savior. In other words, it can be said that tea leaf has

religious functions in Ta Ang (Palaung) society. Ta Ang (Palaung) valued on the leaf is very different from other people who consume tea leaf.

A study of the traditions, customs and daily activities of the Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals residing in Namhsan Township are found to contain cultural symbols, which could also be objects of their use sometimes. Tea, especially green tea and pickle tea leave salad is stand as social food, religious food in Myanmar's culture. For the Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals tea and King Mani Sithu is their benefactor and they owe gratitude for all things. They treat tea plant as a living thing.

Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals virtually worship Mani Sithu as their benefactor. The benefits coming from plantation of King Mani Sithu -given tea seed leads to the appearance of tea industry as Ta Angs' (Palaung) major economic activity. Therefore, Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals are found to be paying respects to not only King Mani Sithu but also the tea plant, which is inanimate. These facts should lead to a conclusion that Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals are always conscious of gratitude owed to others. More than that, they repay the debt of gratitude by holding the yearly worshipping ceremony of their benefactors. Finally, it can be concluded that tea leaf plays religious and socio economic roles which are two sides of the same coin.

## **8.2 Recommendations**

In this research, the following are recommended:

- To help local people to apply modern way of systematic growing of tea seedlings, pruning of the branches.
- To support for development of small-scale industry of tea production through substitution of present-day machines with modern ones, which may increased individual income of tea cultivators, and more foreign exchange will be earned as national income. Besides, more job opportunities for the local people will arise.
- To maintain and record traditions, rituals, history of Ta Ang's (Palaung) particular tea culture systematically.
- To help solve tea problems in the future and secure tea cultivators' rightful privileges, a tea cultivators association should be organized systematically.
- Further similar research should be done in regards to explore cultural symbol of other ethnic groups.

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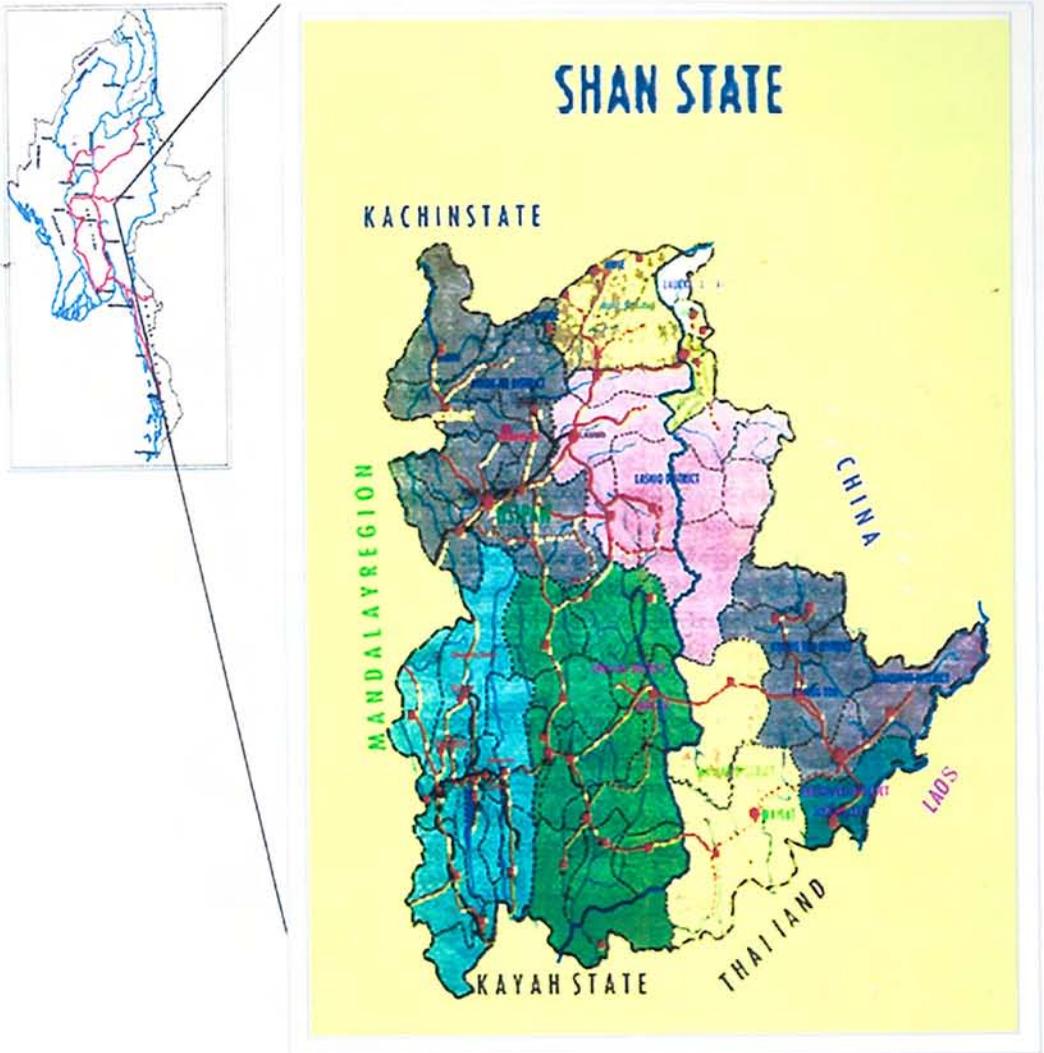
## APPENDIX-1

Map of Myanmar



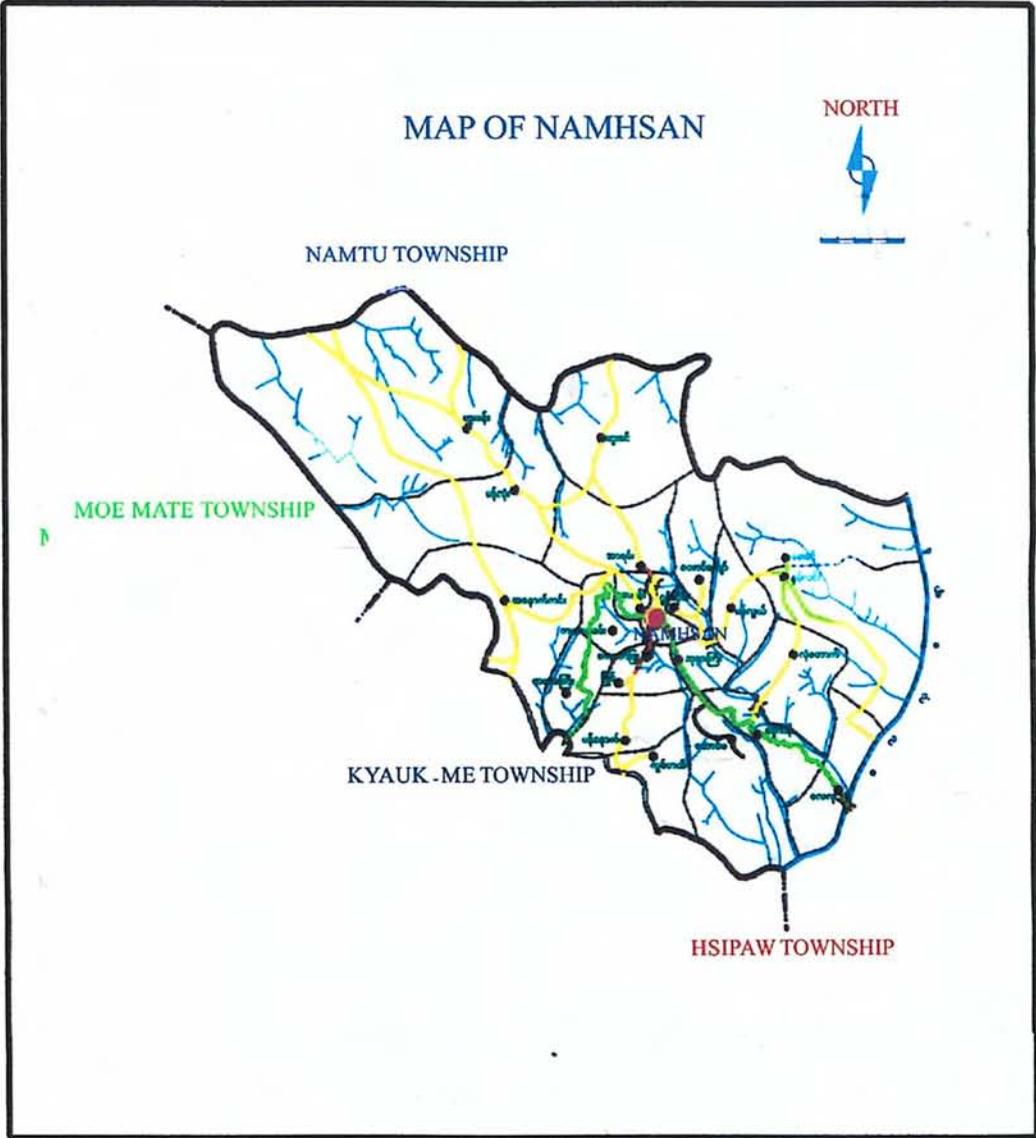
## APPENDIX-2

### Map of Shan State



# APPENDIX-3

## Map of Namhsan Township





UNIVERSITY OF YANGON  
DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY  
External Examiner's Report on the PhD Dissertation

Dated- Yangon, 4, May, 2012

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

**Ref: Yee Yee Cho's PhD thesis**

**Thesis Title- A Symbol of a Particular Culture: The Meaning of Tea Leaf in Palaung National, Nam San Township, Shan State (North)**

Yee Yee Cho's systematic research on "The meaning of tea leaf in Ta Ang (Palaung) nationals" and its results are satisfactory.

Her dissertation on tea leaf plantation in Nam San Township, Shan State (North), along with her findings, is interesting from the point of view of symbolic anthropology, and will be very much useful for working to achieve further progress and development in tea business sector.

Moreover, to handle problems such as damage caused by dyeing tea products as well as to take steps to expand the symbolic tea business nation-wide, the dissertation has advised by her that a national association of tea leaf cultivators be formed with the aim of penetrating international market.

I therefore consider that this dissertation is eligible for the Doctorate degree of Philosophy in Anthropology.



U Kyaw Han  
Professor & Head (Retired)  
Department of Anthropology  
University of Yangon

**UNIVERSITY OF YANGON**  
**DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY**  
**Referee's Report on the PhD Dissertation**

Dated Yangon, 4, May, 2012

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

**Ref: Yee Yee Cho's PhD thesis**

**Thesis Title- A Symbol of a Particular Culture: The Meaning of Tea Leaf in  
Palaung National, Namhsan Township, Shan State (North)**

Yee Yee Cho conducted her Ph D research with the title "A Symbol of a Particular Culture: The Meaning of Tea Leaf in Palaung National, Namhsan Township, Shan State (North)".

She described the economic aspect as well as the symbolic importance of tea leaf completely. She also described the detailed history of the linkage between tea leaf and Ta Ang (Palaung). She made valuable recommendation depending on her findings. Her answers to defend the questions of the members of the board of examiners were also satisfactory.

Therefore, I would like to recommend that her degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology be awarded to her.

  
Dr. Aye Kyaw

MBBS, Dip Med Sc GP (Family Medicine)  
DA Psychology, DAE, MPA  
Certificate of HIV Medicine (Bangkok IS)