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A Study of the Palaung Origin and Orthography

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Abstract

In the base of any written records left behind, it is extremely difficult to give an authentic account of the Palaung. The Palaungs did not form a homogeneous people with a single culture in the period of our study. They were split up into a very large number of sub-tribes each with a varied customs and dialects. Hence, a comparatively study of ethnic tribes may in this paper an attempt on the early home of the Palaung is made on the accounts.

Key Words: Early Home, Migration Route, Language Study

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to present in general outline a short summary of the main trends and developments on Palaung's migration routes and languages in general with special reference to Mon-Khmer, with a few evaluative comments. The arrangement of group in the detailed scheme of classification is based on general linguistic analysis of the population of the estimated areas has been effected and figures are included in this work. Only the more significant bibliographical information gave here.

Materials and Methods

The study is mainly based on contemporary documents primary books written by the British Administrators scholars who wrote their experiences on the Palaungs and also other contemporary scholars who deal with the history of the Southeast Asia in general and China in particular. These contemporary writings are our main source material. The oral traditions, legends and myths as available also give us some clue. The map of migration route reflects its appearance. Based on statistic methods were computed. Then, a generalization was made by using deductive and inductive approaches.

Results and Discussions

The Palaung who live in Myanmar and its environs are mostly Myanmar. Although they speak the same language, Palaung, their speech is different in

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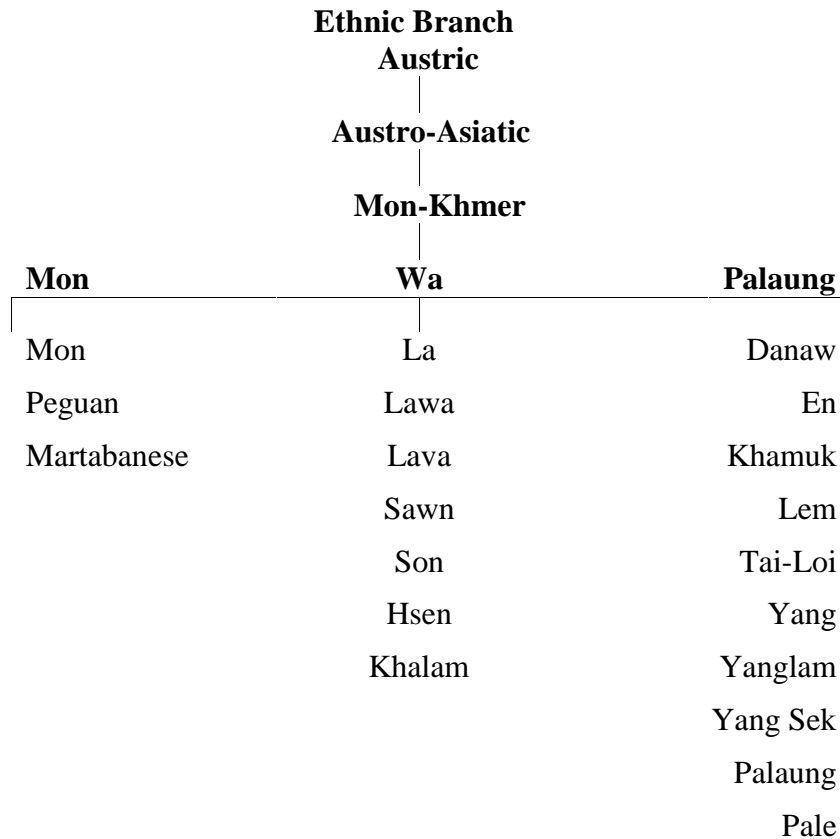
some aspects from standard Myanmar language-the official and common language. The dialect of Palaung which is different in pronunciation and vocabulary from standard Palaung language can be found in Myanmar. The best endeavors are used in writing the paper. I hope it will contribute something to Palaung language and Myanmar social relationship.

Early Home

Palaung is one of the Mon-khmer ethnic groups. In order to delineate an ancient history of a Palaung a wider scope of study is necessary. From this point of view, a brief survey of their early accounts needs to be examined. For this exercise, as one factor, the ethnology is the first to be investigated. Scholar classified the whole human race into three broad races. Out of the three migratory waves of racial groups that entered Myanmar from the north, namely the Mon-khmer, the Tibeto-Burmans and the Thai-Chinese. The Mon-khmer was the earliest group that reached Myanmar (Enriquez, 1933).

Mon-khmer is used to designate one of the hypothetical major racial stocks of mankind and is applied widely to all peoples of Asia and other parts of the world whose racial characteristics are found similar with those of the Mon-khmer stock. Hence, the Palaung belongs to the Mon-khmer race because they are said to have fulfilled all the morphological characteristic of the Mon-khmer as summarized by bowels (Enriquez, 1933). All this points are to the original habits of the Mon-khmer race.

Ethnic evidence is also to be taken into accounts as another factor. Scholars have sub-divided Astro-Asiatic family into sub-groups and sub-sub groups are as follows: (Grantham, 1923, See Map-II).



Source: Grantham, 1923

In these various divisions the Palaungs are groups as Mon-khmer family. One can assume that it might have been existence in 600BC. (Wathann Oo, 2004). The home of these people is not known but some where between Yunan and Myanmar is believed to be their earliest known home. Historian suggested the original home from which they descended differently. Enriquez historian thought that the original home might have located near the Yunan, south of the Nan Chao Shans, and probably entered Myanmar down the valley of the Shweli (Enriquez, 1933). When the Chinese speaking people from the north move to south ward the Mon-khmer speaker left their place and move father south, and southwest. Some scholar firmly asserted that the “earliest known home of the Mon-khmer speaking people was somewhere between Yunan and Myanmar”. At the same time, scholars hold different views on the original habitat of the human race and most of them think that man made his first appearance in

China: Burkitt said that the later Stone Age people (Neolithic Period) made their movements from China to Central Asia and thence to Europe. It is, therefore, speculated that China is not only the home of the human race but also the home of the tribal peoples who were scattering in the southern provinces.

According to the census report, 1911 showed that the Mon-khmer invasion was the first great historic eruption from central Asia into the Indo-Chinese peninsula. Its main line of advance was South down the Mekong valley into Cambodia and Siam whence by a literal westward movement, it reached Myanmar and spread thinly over it. Subsequently, it was forced back upon itself by later Myanmar invasion, and Mon-khmer groups are found now in isolated pockets all down the South East frontiers of Myanmar (Morgan Webb, 1912, See Map-I).

When the Palaungs entered and spread out in Myanmar had been written differently. The era about the Palaung entering into Myanmar had been presented by various historians. The western historian Enriquez has his imaginative suggestion of how the Palaung arrived in Myanmar. According to his suggestion, the wave of Tibeto-Burman races moving down the Irrawaddy valley drove the scattered Mon-khmers south till they consolidated in force round Prome, and there began the age-long conflict which deluged the country in blood up to recent times. The Tibeto-Burman tribes, as we have seen, consolidated at Pagan in the 9th century. Pegu was a Mon capital from 573 to 781 A.D; but at the time of Anawratta's famous raid in 1057, the Mon government was at Thaton (Enriquez, 1933). The most ancient settlement town was Thaton.

Moreover, it is said that there were more of the Mon-khmer linguistic descendants farther west's. These include what is now the Mons in lower Myanmar. So they all belonged to the Mon-khmer racial groups, that the Ta-ans (Palaung) race together with the Wa and the Mon racial group entered Myanmar from the Tibetan Plateau, move down to lower Myanmar to such places as the mouth of the river Irrawaddy (Enriquez, 1933; Lowis, 1949). Sittaung and Thanlwin (Lowis, 1949) and settled in towns and villages from which they again moved up country and spread mostly in Shan State.

The western scholar thought that it might be the first of the Mon-khmer tribes to occupy our attention are the western most of them, the Palaungs whose home is the Shan states proper and the state of Momeik.

There are a certain number of Palaungs in the Southern Shan States and to the east of the Thanlwin, but the tribes is most strongly represented in the Northern Shan States, and notably in the state of Tawngpeng, which may be looked upon as the tribal head quarters, (Lowis, 1949) Kyaukme, Hsipaw and Momeik were the areas in the Northern Shan State, and other areas in the South where the Ta-ans inhabited (Enriquez, 1933). Moreover it is learnt that some went as far as China to settle there. This was how the Palaung settled step by step in various regions. In those regions the Palaung had to get along with the native, who were already there before the Palaung arrived, but sometimes problems did come out among them. Palaungs were those people who had to get along especially with the Shan first and then with the Myanmar.

Appearance of Palaung in Myanmar Historical Perspective

When Palaung people were appeared is not known exactly. The mention of Palaung village (Paung-laung Ywa) is often found in Bagan inscriptions (Luce and Pe Maung Tin, 1933, photo no. 185/13). There is another inscription dated in the year c. 1198, the Palaung who dwelling in mountain range are termed as Palaung (Nyein Maung, 1972). The term Palaung has various meanings. The term Palaun derived from the Pyu race. "Pyu" to "Palau" and thence to "Palaung" (Min Naing, 1962). Another expression showed that the "Palaung tau toe" and Yaw exist, and thus the Palaun could be presumed as descended from the racial stock (Min Naing, 1962).

In one of the historical records of the Palaung (Ta-an), the terminology was regarded as a Myanmar origin that existed in the Tagaung period. According to it, when arose the rebellions in the country, trousers-clad highlander crowded into the king's court and simply confronted the Tagaung monarch to warm of the state of the affairs. Their direct quotes were, your Majesty's kingdom is in Chaos (balaung bale in Myanmar phonetic version) (Min Naing, 1962).

The Tagaung king was said to be very pleased with these people that concern for the country's affairs, and especially the term they used for expressing it. The king realized that they were a reliable race and

recognized them by the name “balaung” from which it was said the term “Palaung” derived (Min Naing, 1962).

According to the Shwe-yin Hymaw annals, the Royal Barge in the middle of the Inlay lake in Shan State caught fire from the forest fires while king Alaungsithu was in residence. He told the palace guards, phaun laun (the barge catching fire- in Myanmar), and from that expression derived “Palaung”, it was said (U Thuyira and U Ottama, 1994).

Another version according to the li-natta lexical Treatise, it was the decree by king Alaungsithu for people who got burnt up to the thighs in forest fires while they were asleep in the woods. The expression he used was “paun laung” (burnt thighs in Myanmar), and from thence derived the present term “Palaung” (Min Naing, 1962).

The Palaung history had it that the prince of the son lord and the dragon princess of the sea lord were united in marriage and generations proliferated out of the wed lock were known in Palaung as the “Ra-an” race, meaning residents of high mountains and slopes. From “ra-an” the literary term “Ta-an” derived (Min Naing, 1962).

In Chinese the Palaungs were known as “pone-lone”. “Pone” refers to ancestry, and “Lone” refers to dragon. As historical references varied, so were the dialects and intonations among the Ta-ans according to the locations of settlements (Min Naing, 1962).

Language

In very ancient times, many different peoples have passed through Myanmar, Mainly from North to South. Their language, Austro-Asiatic, is related more or less distantly to other languages reaching from Madagascar to Easter Island and from Central India to New Zeland. They came to this region in different periods in various waves from different directions. Grierson deals with those tribes from the linguistic point of view. (Grierson)

The Austric-family has two main sub divisions. The first is called Austro Nesian or languages of the Southern Islands. The second sub-family is called Austro-Asiatic or the languages of the Southern Mainland of Asia. The Austro Nesian or languages of the first group are spoken in the Malay Peninsula and in the southern islands as far as Newzeland.

The Austro-Asiatic, languages of the second sub-division extend from India to China Sea coast. More narrowly, they comprise the Mons of Burma and Thailand, Khmer of Cambodia, Khasi of Assam. (Choudhury) and they have connection with the old Munda languages of Central India. Professor G.H Luce considered that Austric-speaking peoples inhabited the whole of South East Asia during the first millennium B.C. He also remarked in one of his lectures that out of the Austric family, the Mons and Khmer have the two oldest civilizations. There are many jungle tribes in the Malay Peninsula, Indo-China and Central India who to this day use a series of numerals up to seven which are substantially identical with old Mon numerals (Naing Pan Hla, 1958). Linguistically they are akin to the Khmers (Le May, 1956).

Prior to the 19th century, the Ta-ans or Palaung did not have a written language, and they studied the Shan language instead. The Palaung language of which very little indeed is known would appear to be monosyllabic and is even more guttural and indistinct than Lisaw (Dawson). They have no written language of their own, but have adopted the literature of the Shans (Interview with U Kyaw Htu, 2 October 2004).

Myanmar as the language of the home, has made but little progress amongst the Shans of the Shan States. Conversely about 23 thousand persons who are not Shan by race have returned Shan as their language as shown in marginal statement. According to the 1921 census reports are as follows: (Grantham, 1923).

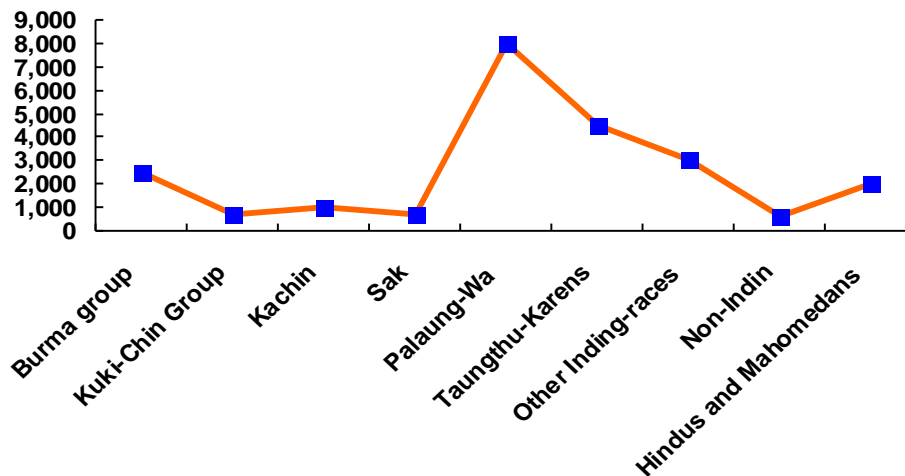


Table-1. Persons Other than Shans who Speak Shan Languages

Source: Grantham, 1921

I think that no one had seriously studied the language of the Palaungs. They had never given our government trouble. It is possible to conduct all necessary business in Shan all the men knowing more or less of that language.

The arrangement of the table itself is adapted rather to provincial conditions. According to the 1911 census reports show that the Palaung's nearest connections in the Shan States are as follows: (Grantham, 1923)

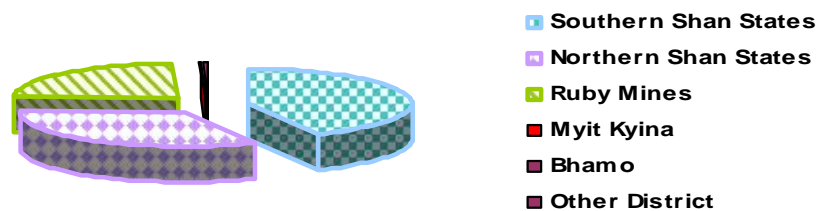


Table-2. Palaung-Wa Language and Group

Source: Morgan, 1912, See Map-III

The Palaung are great wanderers and small settlements are scattered over all parts of the Shan States on the higher ranges.

They always profess to have come from Tawngpeng and shout any connection with the Wa tribes. The Was are among the wildest and the Palaungs among the mildest of the hill folk of the states, there can be no doubt as to the two tribes possessing a common origin (Lowis, 1949). Distribution of total population by languages concluded (Grantham, 1923).

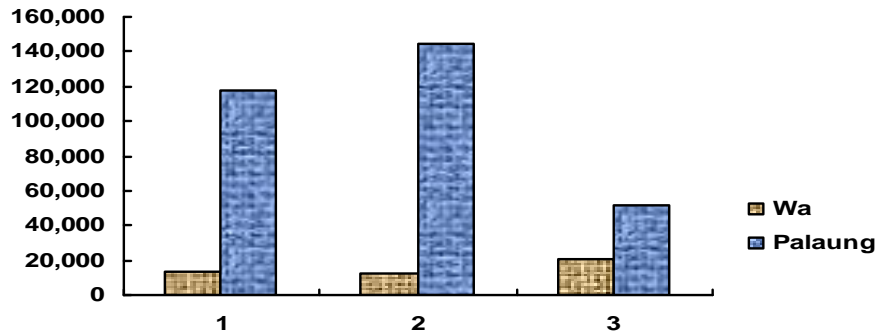


Table-3. Palaung-wa Groups (Total Number of Speaker)

Source: Grantham, 1921

The arrangement of group in the detailed scheme of classification is based on general linguistic considerations. A linguistic analysis of the population of the estimated areas has been affected and the figures are included in this table. The Palaung's nearest connections in the Shan States, however, are not the Was, but the Yins, Yangs or Rings of Mongsit, Mongnai and Laihka (Lowis, 1949). The Wa of Kengtung on the other hand claims to have been the original inhabitants of all the country down to Chengmai. This is significant in connection with the Rumai tradition that their ancestors came from Thatton (George Scott, 493). The connection between the Palaung and Wa language is very closed. Apart from other facts, linguistic of the also point, Yunnan as an original home of the tribal including Palaung because the Wa whose languages are scattered populations in Yunan as an original home of the tribals including Palaung because the Wa whose languages are scattered populations in Yunan.

A specimen of dialects given below shows linguistic affinity between the Palaung and the Wa (George Scott, 626).

English	Wa	Palaung
One	Te	Hle
Two	Ra ()	E
Three	Lai (oi)	oe
Four	Pôn	Hpôn
Five	Pon	Hpon
Six	Hpawng (Fan)	Hpan
Seven	Laiya (Lia)	Taw
Eight	S'te (sn 'te)	Ta
Nine	S'te (sn 'ti)	Tim
Ten	Kao	Ko
Eleven	Hsip-it	Ko-ra-hle
Twelve	Hsip-hsawng	Ko-ra-

Source: GUBSS, Part I, Vol: I, 626

Linguists have been trying to classify languages to indicate genetic relationship. If a considerable proportion of the words and the grammatical forms of two languages are reasonably similar, similar enough to indicate that the resemblances cannot be due to mere accident, these similar words and forms must go back to a common source, and if this source is not borrowing by one language from another, the two tongues are related by descent from a common ancestor. The spoken language of the Palaung belongs to the Indo-Chinese language group. The languages of the Myanmar, Shan and Yun are also mixed with the written language of the Palaungs (Myanmar Socialist Party, 1967). Therefore it is difficult to find the origin of the Palaung history from linguistic point of view.

The Wa language in China belongs to the wabeng language branch, Men-Cambodian language group of the South-Asian language family. Most words in the South-Asian language family are based on monosyllabic roots and in some respects such as their measure words expressing the natural units of things they are similar to those in the Sino-Tibetan-Burma language group. The wa people belong to the Mongoloid race (South-Asian group) (Studies on the Minority Nationalities of Northeast India, 1992).

A reference to the comparative vocabularies proves conclusively to the arm-chair students that wa and Palaung are very closely allied languages, not much farther apart than the various dialects of the Chingpaw, or the Chin. But the Rumai will not have it and reject attempted proofs with contumely (George Scott).

The Palaung speak various dialects of a common language Palaung, which is quite unlike that of any of the other groups here considered (Leach).

English	Palaung (or) Rumai (Shan State)	Rumai (Mantôn neighbourhood)	Palaung (or) Rumai (Nam Hsan)
Tall	Ja, dza	Dza	In-gya
Little	Jem, det	Det	Bre
Very Small	-	-	De dayat
Big	Dang	-	Dhan
Tight	Hkyi-a (ch)	Hkyi-a (ch)	Awp
Wide	Ka-wa	Wa-h	Wa
Close	Dat	Dat	Dat
Painful	Hsan	Hsan	Su
Pleasant	Tha-ya (Burmese)	-	Hye-myan- nyo-hyaw
Red	Rawn	Reng	Un-ko
Yellow	Tan	Teng	Un-ting

Green	I-nyo	Nyen	Un-ye`
Blue	La	Nyen-ra-bai	Ny`-Swam
Black	I-wang	Wang	I-y ū m
White	I-lui	Lue	Bain
Hand	Tai	K -ba-tai	Ti
Foot	Jan	K -ba-jeng or seng	-
Nose	Kadongmu	Kawng-mu	Gawng-mu
Eye	Ngai	Ngai	Ngy`e
Mouth	Mwe	Mwe	M ū t

Source: GUBSS, Part I, Vol: I, 630

Many of the dialects have never been studied and classified and many of the names returned in the hill areas are village names rather than tribal names (George Scott). (In this way the different Palaung clans and even the different groups of the same clan, separated from one another, and having no link in a written language, developed different dialects.

Mon and Palaung-wa groups deal with bilingualism. Only certain indigenous languages are taken into account, all other languages being ignored. Persons speaking two or more subsidiary languages in the same class or subsidiary languages in two or more classes have been counted once for each class.

The population of the estimated area of Myanmar in the Thaton, Amherst, Northern and Southern Shan States, amounting to 7831 (Males 4050, Females 3331) has been omitted from this table because statistics for language are not available. An estimate of the number of speakers of Mon and Palaung-Wa groups in the unenumerated parts of Thaton, Amherst, Northern and Southern Shan States is given in bilingualism of the Wa-Palaung. At the last census the language ordinarily used in the home was entered in the enumeration schedule, at this census the mother tongue was

entered (Bennison, 1933). According to the 1931 census reports are as follows:

District	Mother-tongue	Mon-khmer	
		Males	Females
Thaton	languages of the Burma Group	148	132
	languages of the Karen Group	16	1
	languages of the Tai (Shan) Group	8	
	languages of the Mon-khmer Group		
Amherst	languages of the Burma Group	1401	889
	languages of the Karen Group	1817	1722
	languages of the Tai (Shan) Group	13	
	languages of the Mon-khmer Group		
N.Shan States	languages of the Burma Group	12	2
	Other Tibeto-Burmese Languages	90	21
	languages of the Karen Group		
	languages of the Tai (Shan) Group	289	287
S.Shan States	languages of the Burma Group	1	1
	Other Tibeto-Burmese Languages		3
	languages of the Karen Group	22	232
	languages of the Tai (Shan) Group	235	41
	languages of the Mon-khmer Group		
		4050	3331

Source: Bennison, 1931

The system of classification is given in bilingualism of the table and is the same as that used at the 1931 census. The indigenous languages have been formed into groups, branches, sub-families and families; they include groups Mon to Wa and Palaung. For the sake of convenience all Chinese language has been included among the indigenous languages.

In the year 1912, an American lady by the name Miss Maclean attempted at inventing the Ta-an written form based on the Roman alphabets while trying to spread Christianity among the Ta-ans. Her efforts came to no avail as the “Language she invented was not practicable enough for use in writing, reading, and could not represent the exact sounds in Ta-an (Min Naing, 1962). As the Ta-ans are natives of Myanmar, and Buddhist by faith, they would prefer their language and literature to be akin to Myanmar (Interview with U Myo Thant Htun, 29 August 2004). One Ta-an nation by the name U Paw San, a resident of Tayangyi villages, Nangsam Township, formulated a dialect for the Ta-ans speakers. He invited all, clergy and laity alike, for the presentation of his Ta-an dialect at the Haw of the Southern Nangsam Sawbwa in 1954. It was unanimously accepted as it conformed to the linguistic features of the Ta-an dialect both in spoken and written. The Sawbwa gave his approval in 1955 and U Paw San was awarded a gold medal by the Sawbwa for his achievement in 1956.

At the set of the invention, the Ta-an written language had 24 consonants, and 12 vowels. Pali and numerals were the same as that of Myanmar. The 24 consonants are (Min Naing, 1962)

***u?c?*?i?p?q?Z?n?O?w?x?'?e?y?z?A?b?r?, ?
&?v?0?o?t***

Later the 24 consonants were found to be inadequate and a supplementary was made. The Ta-ans added one more consonant to the existing 33 Myanmar consonants (Min Naing, 1962) making it a 34 consonant set. They added the number of vowels became 11. The finalized 34 consonants are

***u?c?*?C?i?p?q?Z?ps?n?O?#?X?!?;?P?w?x?'
?"?e?y?z?A?b? r?, ?&?v?0?o?[?V?t***

The 11 vowels are as follows:

tm? tđ/tk? at/tJ? atm? tdkU?tdk?
tsdU? tdk;? tmfU

We can study the Myanmar phonetic and Palaung phonetic connection. (Interview with U Thu-kha, 24 January 2005)

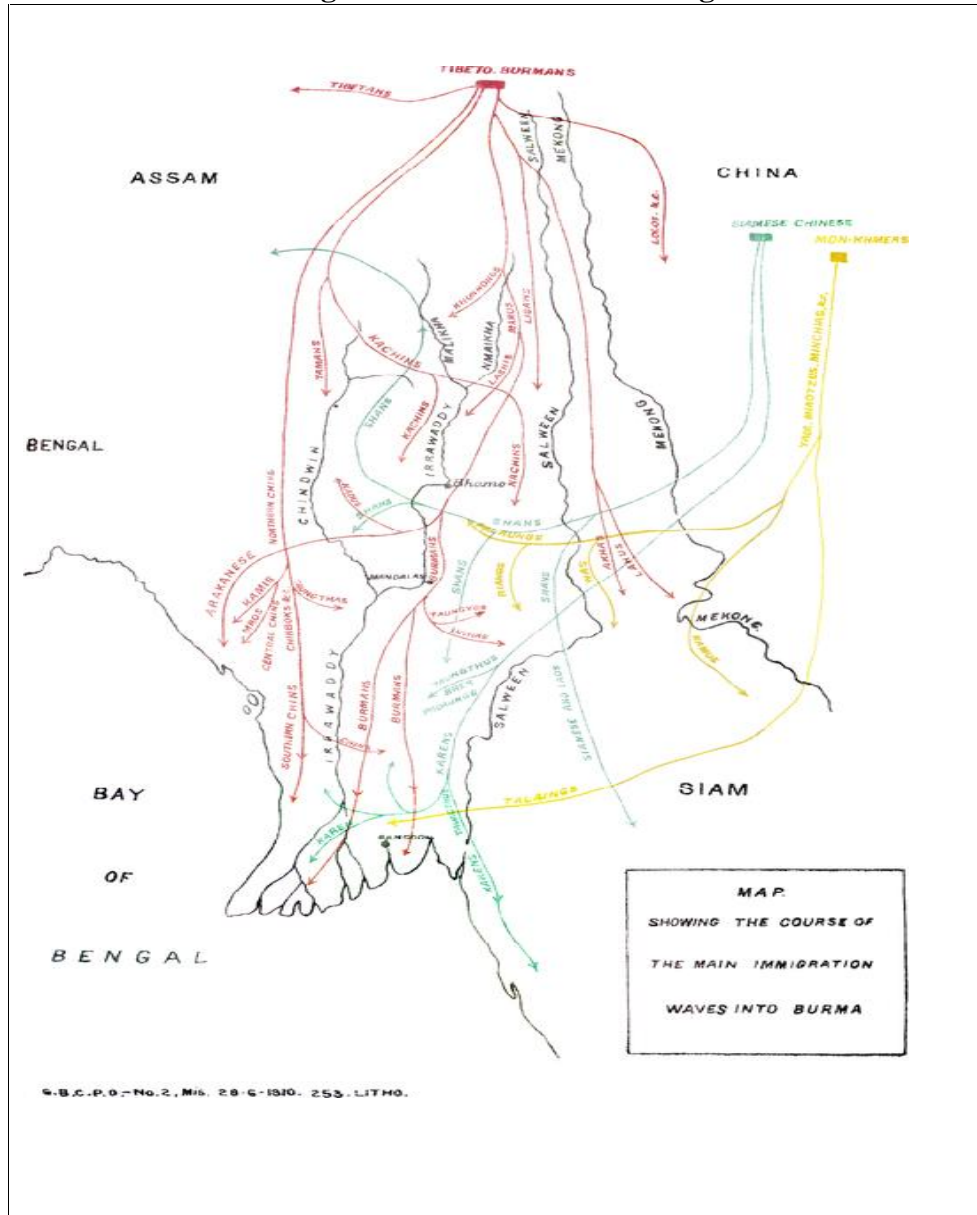
<i>jrefrm</i>	<i>yavmifta&;tom;</i>	<i>yavmiftoHxGuf</i>
em&D	em&D	em&D
pmtkyf	yHyf	Ayfh
zdeyf	csKyfwyf	cl;wif(ef)
wl	rxnf	rm'dkif
aq;vdyf	qdkyfoavmnf	pD;vdcf
cJwH	uHrful	veful;vefY
azmi fwđef	azgifwdif	ueful;rif(cf)
za,mif;wdkif	awef	awef
rD;jcpf	rD&fuD&f	zm;&m;
aoewf	qemwf	wedwf
vifuGif;	csif;	csdKifh
wl&d,m	wl&D,m	wl&d,m
armif;	armif	aumifhrđk(cf)
acgif;avmif;	wvdif	[D;

This supplement amendment for the Ta-an written language was approved by the state in 1972 (Min Naing, 1962).

Conclusion

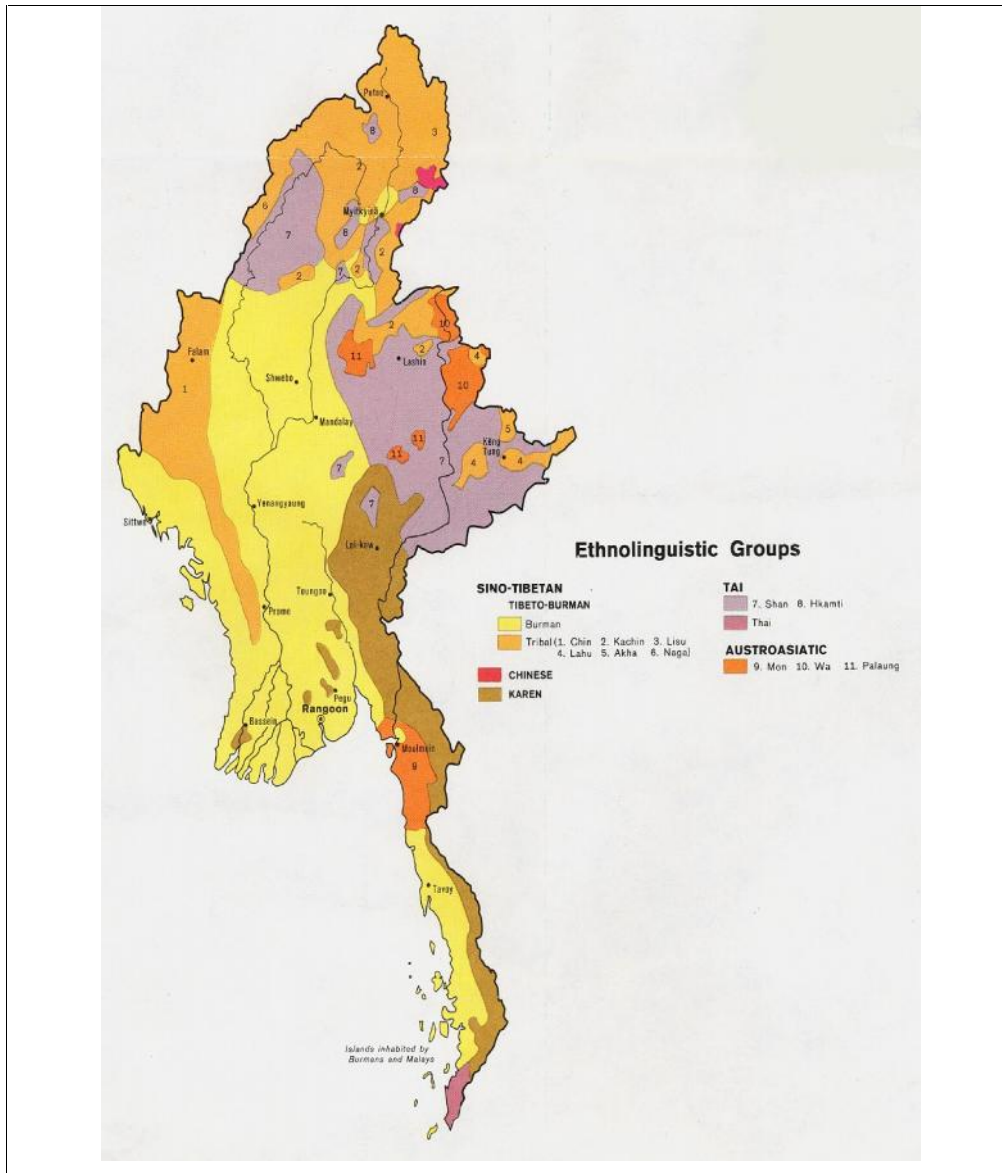
In a word, in the cause of wars, famines, population growth and migration, there had been definitely a great deal of change of tribal or ethnic or even linguistic identity. It may be considered that their own language or dialect and in fact divided into several distinct and intermarrying clan. Another factor showed that the war and slave system among the tribes resulting to the absorption of people from one group to the other forgoing the identity. The ongoing process of absorption continued during the advent of the British rule with received further fillip when the converted Christians ignored the facts of clan and lineage. Many of the traditional makers of the clans such as sacrifices, the position occupied by the corpse at the funeral feast and dialects etc lost their cultural importance and significance. The transformation was fast. Finally, after Palaung unrest the ties of alliance related to descent further loosened due to village regrouping, migration and miscegenation. Nothing beyond a tentative classification however will be possible until the matter has been fully investigated by a proper linguistic survey. The speech of people living in Myanmar and its environs is interesting. The words they used are interesting expressions, which linguistically contribute towards the development and vigor of Myanmar language. These words reflect the everyday life and social relationship of the community in the environs of Myanmar.

Map (I)
Migration Route of the Palaung



[http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The Tribes of Burma/Map](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Tribes_of_Burma/Map)

Map (II)
Ethno linguistic Groups



http://jipvoyages.fr/BIRMANIE_002.htm

Map (III) Settlement Areas



[http://www.joshuaproject.net/people-profile.php? Peo3=14590 & org3=BM](http://www.joshuaproject.net/people-profile.php?Peo3=14590&org3=BM)



[http://www.joshuaproject.net/people-profile.php? Peo3=14178 & org3=BM](http://www.joshuaproject.net/people-profile.php?Peo3=14178&org3=BM)

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Interview

Interview with U Kyaw Htu (Age 43) (2 October 2004), Assistant Lecturer, History Department, Mon-Ywa University

Interview with U Myo Thant Htun (Age 35) (29 August 2004)Tutor, Philosophy Department, Yatanabone University

Interview with U Thu-kha (Age 38) (24 January 2005) Taung (Palaung) Payiyatti Monastery, Eastern Quarter of Ta-khwan Taing, Mandalay