

Preparatory Research on Cultural and Social Characteristics of Kokang People who live in Myanmar and Thailand

- (1) Traditional Culture and Arts of Today's Myanmar -

- (2) Life Conditions of Kokang and Yun-nan Chinese People in the Villages of Northern Thailand -

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Place of fieldwork: China, Myanmar, Thailand

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Life Conditions

● Research backgrounds

(1) Yangon city, as a former capital city of Myanmar (the present capital is Naypyitaw), is still the political, economic and cultural as well as information transmission center of the country. The city has the biggest university library in the country (Universities Central Library which has a fine collection of materials regarding Myanmar's traditional culture), University of Yangon, Shwedagon Pagoda and the surrounding handicraft as well as many other places where traditional culture and art can be seen. Therefore, in order to know about the present situation and researches conducted on traditional culture and art of modern Myanmar, it is important to have a search in handicraft markets located in the city and on the related research materials collected in the city's libraries.

(2) People who are living in the villages that are located in the highlands of Northern Thailand are of great ethnic and cultural diversity, because the area is located near the borders of Northern Thailand, Myanmar Shan State and Yun-nan Province of China. Regardless of different ethnic categories, there is a large amount of people (especially Kokang and the related Yun-nan Chinese people from Myanmar or China) emigrated from Myanmar Shan State to these villages of Thailand territory. The characteristics of Kokang people and their cultural contact with surrounding ethnic minority groups have not yet been summarized in detail in present researches. Thus, in order to conduct the applicant's doctoral research on characteristics of life and culture of Kokang and the related Yun-nan Chinese people who live in Myanmar, it is important to know Kokang immigrants' present life conditions and their Thailand immigration histories. It will also be helpful to build a friendly relationship and an appropriate social network with them.

● Research purposes and aims

(1) The research aimed to collect traditional paintings, sculpture (wooden or stone-made), traditional music or drama, etc. To know and experience the traditional culture and art in modern Myanmar society is significant for understanding the representations of Myanmar's Theravada Buddhist culture, and in the future it can also be served as a preliminary research on comparative analysis of relationship between majority culture of Myanmar

country and local culture of Kokang people in Shan State. This applies to other ethnic groups' culture in Myanmar as well. In addition, they can be utilized for comparative analysis on relationship between traditional art/culture of Southeast Asian countries and those of China. Meanwhile, in the process of survey, applicant's Burmese language ability is hopefully to be promoted.

(2) Concerned with the research topic on life conditions of Kokang and Yun-nan Chinese people who lives in the villages of Northern Thailand, the research aimed to conduct participatory observation as well as to have interviews with local experts and informants on related topics. The purpose of this research is to prepare for the fieldwork which will be conducted by the applicant in Kokang district in the future.

● Results and achievements by fieldwork

(1) Apart from having collected CD data and videos for traditional music and drama in nowadays' Myanmar society, as well as books on traditional culture that were written or edited by experts on Myanmar culture (in the language of either Burmese or English), the applicant have also taken a large amount of pictures on traditional Myanmar architectural constructions, handicrafts, toys, paintings and sculptures, jewelries, clothes and souvenirs (Please see pictures 1.1 – 1.8).



Picture 1.1 Architecture in Yangon



Picture 1.2 Traditional clothes shop



Picture 1.3 Traditional puppets



Picture 1.4 Traditional Handicrafts



Picture 1.5 Ethnic souvenirs



Picture 1.6 Wooden sculptures



Picture 1.7 Shell-made handicrafts



Picture 1.8 Jewelry-made painting

Under the introduction of the applicant's friends in Yangon, especially a friend from University of Foreign Languages Yangon, the applicant got the opportunities of visiting Bogyoke Aung San Market (the largest market in the city), Shwedagon Pagoda (the largest Pagoda of the country), Yangon China Town and the temples and night markets over the place, Yangon Univeristy, Universities Central Library and University of Foreign Languages Yangon (Please see pictures 8-13).



Picture 1.9 Gate of University of Yangon



Picture 1.10 Gate of University of Foreign Languages Yangon



Picture 1.11 Myanmar-Chinese Library



Picture 1.12 A Chinese Buddhist Temple in Yangon



Picture 1.13 Night-street and market in Yangon city

In addition, the applicant had several interviews with local informants and experts on present situations of preservation and researching on traditional Myanmar art, especially painting and sculpture. Finally, from the daily conversations with local people in Yangon, the applicant also practiced and improved language ability of speaking Burmese.

(2) The applicant visited several villages in Northern Thailand, including Ban Yang, Ban Mai Nong Bua, Ban Huai Namkhun, Ban Tham Ngob, Doi Angkhang, Bian Luang. During participatory observation and interviews with local experts and informants, the applicant found out that there are many Kokang people as well as a lot of Yun-nan Chinese, Lahu, Lisu, Akha and Tai people living in these villages (Please see pictures 2.1-2.8). Therefore, these villages are of high ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity. At a larger scale, Kokang people and Yun-nan Chinese people shared the experience of first emigrating from Yun-nan Province of China to urban areas or villages in Upper Myanmar (e.g Shan State), and then to villages or cities of Northern Thailand provinces (e.g. Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Mae Hong Son, etc.). Briefly, the life-style of Kokang family can be characterized as parents working in local village farmlands, with older children working or accepting higher education in urban areas outside the village (e.g. Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai in Thailand, Kao-hsiung or Taipei city in Taiwan) and younger children studying in local elementary schools. However, at the whole village range, life-condition of Kokang people levels lower compared with other local families who emigrated into the village earlier and who have the origins of military experience.



Picture 2.1 Chinese-style house in village Ban Huai Namkhun



Picture 2.2 Interview scene with local resident in village Ban Huai Namkhun



Picture 2.3 Shops in Doi Angkhang



Picture 2.4 Yun-nan dishes in village Ban Yang



Picture 2.5 Gate of hotel in village Ban Tham Ngob



Picture 2.6 Restaurant in village Ban Mai Nong Bua



Picture 2.7 Landscape of village Bian Luang



Picture 2.8 Chinese middle school in village Bian Luang

● Implications and impacts on future research

(1) According to local experts in Yangon who occupies at a Myanmar-Chinese library, researches on the characteristics of Myanmar sculpture art, as an example of traditional Myanmar art, have not yet been summarized in detail, because only a few domestic researchers are conducting research on the field. To know more about the traditional culture, it would be better to visit cities of ancient architectures and sculptures as well as paintings, such as Mandalay and Bago (formerly Pegu). Also, the collected materials and researches done by European experts during the British colonial times on related topic would hopefully be found out among the collections of the National Archives in London, the United Kingdom. On the other hand, in order to get a brief research review on modern times' traditional culture of Myanmar, it seems only possible to be found out in domestic libraries of Myanmar.

(2) For one thing, through several interviews with local informants, the applicant learned that, for local village residents, it is of a great importance to improve the conditions of elementary education in these villages. Local school showed strongly desire of getting assistance on their educational resource which includes volunteer teachers, textbooks and other school facilities. For another, there are several Northern Thailand villages in which many Kokang people have settled down. Thus, in order to obtain a more comprehensive understanding on local situations of these Kokang people, the applicant would like to enter into these villages at the second time for months from March, 2014. The applicant will work as a volunteer teacher in these elementary schools because this will be helpful for the establishment of trustworthy relationships between Kokang people there caused by a long-term friendly mutual contact with the region.