



Scheme for “Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage and Diverse Cultural Traditions
of India”

Form for National Inventory Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage of India

A. Name of the State

- Manipur

B. Name of the Element/Cultural Tradition (in English)

- Rice Beer Culture (The arts of brewing, associated crafts and its cultural significance)

B.1. Name of the element in the language and script of the community

Concerned, if applicable

C. Name of the communities, groups or, if applicable, individuals concerned (Identify clearly either of these concerned with the practice of the said element/cultural tradition)

- Tangkhul community in general but practiced by some individuals and concentrated in some villages.

D. Geographical location and range of the element/cultural tradition (Please write about the other states in which the said element/tradition is present)

- Rice beer is found among the tribal of the northeast and other Indian tribes.

E. Identification and definition of the element/cultural tradition of the India

(Write “Yes” in one or more boxes to identify the domain(s) of intangible cultural heritage manifested by the element. If you tick ‘others’, specify the domain(s) in brackets.)

- i. (Yes) oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage
- ii. () performing arts
- iii. (Yes) social practices, rituals and festive events
- iv. () knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe
- v. (Yes) traditional craftsmanship
- vi. other(s) ()

F. Provide a brief summary description of the element that can introduce it to readers who have never seen or experienced it

- Rice beer, among the Tangkhul community of Northeast, is an alcoholic beverage that is made from fermentation of a particular type of rice called *makrei* in local language, whereas the yeast is prepared from ordinary rice grains. It was a common drink favoured by colonial administrators, but after the conversion to Christianity (Baptist), Christians forsook the drink. It is still brewed in a cheaper quality for commercial purpose, which inevitably led to the lost of the traditional arts. What is interesting besides production and consumption is the culture that accompanied it – crafts associated with it and its significance in rituals and festivals, which in fact is the focus of the project. Gourd making, along with it production of traditional musical instrument called *tingteila*, and wickered baskets are crafts closely related to it. Besides, its significance in rituals and festivals was paramount; the disappearance of rice beer culture simply explains the disappearance of traditional culture and alienation to customs and traditions.

- G. Who are the bearers and practitioners of the element/Cultural Traditions? Are there any specific roles or categories of persons with special responsibilities for the practice and transmission of it? If yes, who are they and what are their responsibilities?
- Aged people who were converted to Christianity in their maturity are knowledgeable with the arts and its culture. Since Catholic denomination is more tolerant towards rice beer, some Catholics still practice it.
- H. How are the knowledge and skills related to the element transmitted today?
- With today's knowledge and skills of production and preservation, rice beer could be produced in a larger scale without compromising to the quality, standardised fermentation process, and increase shelf life. It could be a substitute to the more harmful imported or locally brewed alcohols. Besides, it could be a local attract for tourism.
- I. What social functions and cultural meanings do the element/cultural tradition have today for its community?
- The community's attitude towards rice beer is not homogeneous. Dominant culture shaped by Baptist and nationalist ideology looks upon it as an evil practice. Whereas Catholics who constituted less than ten per cent of the population tend to be more tolerant. However, keeping it at arm's length is generally considered as a moral duty.
- J. Is there any part of the element that is not compatible with existing international human rights instruments or with the requirement of mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals, or with sustainable development? I.e. describe any aspect of the element/cultural tradition that may be unacceptable to Law of the country or may be in opposition to practicing community's harmony with others.
- In so far as alcoholic beverages are not equally acceptable, some communities may find it unacceptable and its culture incompatible.
- K. Your Project's contribution to ensuring visibility, awareness and encouraging dialogue related to the element/cultural tradition
- My project is an attempt to encourage people to have a dialogue with the past culture, so that the community may have a more unbiased view towards the

traditional customs, which includes the despised customs like headhunting and rice beer, and less scorned but more or less discarded traditions such as folksongs, and folksongs. The project may also create awareness among the people of its nutritional values too.

L. Information about the safeguarding measures that may protect or promote the element/cultural tradition

- In Japan, the government established sake-brewing research institute in 1904, introduced enamel-coated steel tanks to replace wooden barrel, and organise such events as sake-tasting competition like wine-tasting events in the west.

a. (Write “Yes” in one or more boxes to identify the safeguarding measures that have been and are currently being taken by the communities, groups or individuals concerned)

- i. () transmission, particularly through formal and non-formal education
- ii. (Yes) identification, documentation, research
- iii. (Yes) preservation, protection
- iv. (Yes) promotion, enhancement
- v. (Yes) revitalization

b. Write about the measures taken at local, state and national level by the Authorities to safeguard the element/cultural tradition?

- NA

M. Write about the threats, if any, to the element/cultural tradition related to its practice, visibility and future longevity. Give facts and relevant reasons based on the current scenario.

- Its disappearance is mainly because of the introduction of Christianity (Baptist), influx of foreign liquors, and commercialization unaccompanied by better techniques of production and preservation.

N. Safeguarding measures proposed

- The crucial part of protection and promotion of this culture must include sensitization and creation of platform to help people into a dialogue. I suppose the important step is to encourage people objectively look at the culture (untainted by religious or political considerations, which is always difficult). Research and documentation of the culture need to be undertaken in a wider scale. Such measures may be taken: Identification of rice beer from other alcoholic drinks such as spirit, a locally brewed called *ashaba*; promotion of such drinks by the state and local government which are culturally significant; instituting research institute to invent better techniques of production and preservation; cultural promotion through organizing such events as rice beer tasting and handicraft competition.

O. Community Participation

- Participation of the brewers and artisans in recreating the arts and local people in festival and recreating rituals

P. Concerned community organization(s) or representative(s)

- NA

Q. Give information of any Inventory, database or data creation centre

(local/state/national) that you may be aware of or of any office, agency, organisation or body involved in the maintenance of the said inventory etc.

- NA

R. Principal published references or documentation available on the element/cultural tradition

Books:

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Species Associated With 'Hamei' - A Traditional Starter Used For Rice Wine Production in Manipur, India." *International Journal of Food Microbiology* 124 (2008):115–125.

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Project Title: Rice Beer Culture in the Traditional Tangkhul Community of the Northeast

Introduction: Towards the second half of nineteenth century when the missionaries began to propagate the “light of Christianity” in the hills of Northeast India, the fabric of the tribal life was never to remain the same. It was not so much the introduction of a new worldview that brought such drastic changes, but the apparently innocuous prohibition of such social practices as singing, dancing, and imposition of dress code. Such practices affect the everyday life of the people. Identifying rice beer as the key to the social, cultural and religious life of many Northeast tribal communities, the missionaries made consumption of rice beer as the cardinal sin. The renunciation of rice beer has a domino effect: with its abandonment the traditional culture soon crumbles.

Among the Tangkhuls the sense of sin attached with rice beer adamantly persisted and the arts of brewing traditional rice beer is now confined to a handful of elderly citizens who steadfastly hold on to their traditional religion. This ultimately leads to the loss of techniques and it also affects conservation of rice germplasm. As expected many rituals and festivals lost their significance and they slowly disappeared if not recast. What was perhaps not foreseen or intended was the corollary death of traditional craftsmanship associated with the culture of rice beer. If the art of brewing the beer is a dying art, so are the corollary activities.

Objectives of the Research:

1. To document the arts of brewing varieties of traditional rice beer such as *zamshei*, *zamshonra*, *zamshim*, *vaithei*, *hongra*, *chor*, *chakhan*, and *pasho*. These are primarily categorized on the basis of rice varieties, variations in the process of brewery and differences in the ingredients of yeasts. And different villages used to specialize in different brand of beer.
2. To document the disappearing associated handicraft. Rice beer was served in a variety of containers corresponding to the occasions made of calabash gourd. Besides, gourd was used for utensils, decorations and in making stringed instrument called *Tingteila*, which is

the traditional musical instrument of the community. Gourds were therefore widely cultivated even though they grow in wild. Gourd artifacts are rarely seen these days if they still exist at all. Another craft that met the same fate is the art of making containers. *Vaichum* is a kind of wickered basket used to brew rice beer; *ngankha* and *khoram* are made of bamboo, the former to store and the latter to serve the beverage; *tongti* and *changrei* are straws/ pipes made of broomstick grass; and *pong* is made of wood to brew huge quantity of the beverage. The craft is on the brink of extinction.

3. Activities and consumption of Rice beer are intimately related to rituals and festivals. With the disappearance of rice beer culture they also died off. However, a festival called “*Khamorkhui*” celebrated by Chingjaroi village still upholds the intimate relationship between rice beer and festivals. It is the only festival in which rice beer plays an important role. Holding on to the traditional culture, the village alone retains the true colour of traditional celebration of festivals.

Implementation of the Project: The project intends to document through audio-video media various activities such as methods and processes of brewing, celebration of “*Khamorkhui*”, crafting of gourd containers and baskets, discussions and interviews. Documentation and data collection would cover the villages where traditional practices have a strong presence. By performing the rituals and festival of “*Khamorkhui*” participants would be encouraged to recreate the traditional culture.

Time Frame of the Project:

1. February and March – Literary Review
2. April and May – Preliminary Survey
3. July and August – Collection of Primary Data
4. September to February – Experiment and Validation
5. March and April – Report Writing
6. May – Submission of Final Report

Specific Areas Coverage: The project intends to cover some villages of the Tangkhul community in Manipur, particularly such villages as Chingjaroi, Paoyi and Longpi. These are the villages once called “Luhuppas” in the far north of the state. The significance of covering these villages lies in the fact that traditional culture is most strongly retained in these villages.

Conclusion: The project is expected to preserve and propagate the dying traditional arts and crafts and promote a sense of appreciation for the traditional culture. It will be a record, a document of the terms (language) related to the culture. It may encourage artisans to put their skills to productive use. Participants in recreating rituals and festivals would have a better understanding of the past traditions and practices and thereby learn to appreciate the much-deprecated traditional culture.

List of Pictures (with a brief description):

1. A double-layered container called *vaichum* to brew rice beer made of bamboo.
2. Another type of brewing container made of clay.
3. A traditional brewing container called *maranchu* carved out of tree's trunk used only on important occasions and festivals.
4. The leaf of this tree when mashed has an adhesive property. (The mashed leaves mixed with cow-dung are painted on the first layer of basket, over which is woven another layer of basket. The double layered basket maintains room temperature while brewing.)
5. The mashed leaves of the adhesive tree (to be used here to mend the *maranchu*)
6. Raw material of the yeast called *khawo*.
7. The powdered rice mixed with water called *tatangru*.
8. A woman about to pour *tatangru* in a brewing container.
9. A woman mixing the yeast into *tatangru*.
10. Gourd mugs traditionally used to carry rice beer.
11. A gourd mug standing on a traditional bowl (also used as platter) as a decoration.
12. *Tingteila*, a musical instrument, made of gourd which is disappearing because of the scarcity of gourd and decline of folksongs.
13. A folksinger with his *tingteila*.

Signature: Yumi Kapi

Name & Designation: YUMIRIN KAPI

Name of Institution (If applicable):

Address:

Final Report on the Project “Rice Beer Culture in the Traditional Tangkhul Community of the Northeast” Sanctioned under the Scheme for Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) & Diverse Cultural Traditions of India

Introduction

Towards the second half of nineteenth century when the missionaries began to propagate the “light of Christianity” in the hills of Northeast India, the fabric of the tribal life was never to remain the same. It was not so much the introduction of a new worldview that brought such drastic changes, but the apparently innocuous prohibition of such social practices as singing, dancing, and imposition of dress code. Such practices affect the everyday life of the people. Identifying rice beer as the key to the social, cultural and religious life of many Northeast tribal communities, the missionaries made consumption of rice beer as the cardinal sin. The renunciation of rice beer has a domino effect: with its abandonment the traditional culture soon crumbles.

Among the Tangkhuls the sense of sin attached with rice beer adamantly persisted and the arts of brewing traditional rice beer is now confined to a handful of elderly citizens who steadfastly hold on to their traditional religion. This ultimately leads to the loss of techniques and it also affects conservation of rice germplasm. As expected many rituals and festivals lost their significance and they slowly disappeared if not recast. What was perhaps not foreseen or intended was the corollary death of traditional craftsmanship associated with the culture of rice beer. If the art of brewing the beer is a dying art, so are the corollary activities.

Background

On the centrality of rice beer in the everyday life of the Nagas, Furer-Haimendorf observed in the context of the Angami Nagas: “Without rice-beer, the life of the Angami is little more than an evil dream. He drinks water as seldom as he can” (12-13). The same can be said of the Tangkhuls. Rice beer substituted water and food. It was served to guests and friends, used in rituals, divinations, and festivals. In fact, libation would be meaningless without it. William Pettigrew, the first Christian missionary in Manipur, who established a mission center at Ukhrul in 1896, identified consumption of rice beer as an important deterrent towards conversion as well as remaining a Christian. In one of his mission reports, as early as in 1901, he wrote: “The one great drawback is drink. I believe the work here will be more to the mind of the Master if we keep to total abstinence” (14).

When in 1908 Pettigrew decided to put his foot down by prohibiting the converts from consumption of rice beer and participation in any customs and traditions that involved “offering of sacrifices to evil spirits” (21). All but five out of thirty-three converts abandoned the missionary and reverted back to their “heathen” ways. Furer-Haimendorf wrote, “Drinkers of rice-beer, the mission teaches, will burn in hell fire for ever, and the Naga, dazzled by the prestige of the white man, believes, and eschews with reluctance his cherished national drink” (57).

The perpetuating influence of the missionaries’ proscription and the extent of internalization may be gauged from the unrelenting drives against consumption of alcohol in the teachings of the church, and the policing activities of various civil organizations. In many villages, some organizations arrogated to themselves the right to prevent the import of alcoholic products from time to time.

Tangkhul Nagas

The Tangkhul is one of the major tribes of the generically named Nagas. They inhabit the northeastern hills of the Manipur state and part of the Somra tract in Myanmar. According to 2011 census, the total population of Ukhrul district, where Tangkhuls concentrated, is 183,998. There are more than 10,000 Tangkhuls in Myanmar. The earliest available demographic information of the tribe is found in E. W. Dun’s *Gazetteer of Manipur*. According to Dun, the 1881 census put the total population of the Tangkhuls at 32,952, whereas George Watt put the figure in about 20,000 (365).

Tangkhul is a name given by the Meiteis. It was first mentioned in the Court Chronicle called *Cheitharol Kumbaba* in CE 1404. Colonial administrators spelt the name in different ways: M. McCulloch called them “Tangkool”; R. Brown referred to them as “Tonkhul” and Johnstone spelt it as “Tankhool.” In colonial literature, Tangkhuls were always differentiated from what the Meiteis called Luhuppas. “Lupa Luhup,” which may be referred to Luhuppas, is mentioned in *Cheitharol Kumbaba* in CE 1574. McCulloch, the political agent of Manipur, located the Luhuppas in the north and the Tangkhuls in the south of the region.

Specific Areas Coverage

The project covers some villages of the Tangkhul community in Manipur, particularly such villages as Chingjaroi, Longpi and Peh. These are the villages once called “Luhuppas” in the far north of the state. The significance of covering these villages lies in the fact that

traditional culture is most strongly retained in these villages. Chingjaroi borders the state of Nagaland and the Senapati district of Manipur. It is situated in the northernmost part of Manipur. Fig. 1 is a view of a part of the village that Ursula Bower took in 1939. The second picture is a distant view of the village from Peh.



Fig. 1¹



Fig. 2

A festival called “*Khamorkhui*” celebrated by Chingjaroi village still upholds the intimate relationship between rice beer and festivals. It is the only festival in which rice beer plays an important role. Holding on to the traditional culture, the village retains the true colour of traditional celebration of festivals. Another village in which the tradition of rice beer

¹ <http://himalaya.socanth.cam.ac.uk/collections/naga/record/r62290/gallery/0.html>

consumption plays significant role is the seed-sowing festival called Luirá Phanit of Longpi village. The presence of a large Catholic community in the village is the primary reason behind the persistence of the culture. Among the Christian denomination, the Roman Catholic permitted the use of rice beer as distinguished from the Baptist, and Seven Day Adventist who strictly forbade alcoholic drink of any form.

Another mentionable festival is Chingai's Shar Phanit. Although the festival has been Christianized particularly by stripping off the role of rice beer in the rituals, which have been replaced by Christian rituals, the festival retains certain traditional practices. What is particularly significant about the festival is that all the traditional festival, except Luirá, have been abandoned after Christianity acquired hegemonic position among the Tangkhuls.

Peh village (Fig. 3) is selected as an area of focus firstly because of its proximity to both the villages and secondly because many of informants came from the village. As part of the project, an elderly person of the village prepared a few types of rice beer.



Fig. 3

Methods

Study on the local knowledge of the production of *khór*, the alcoholic beverage of the Tangkhuls, and its cultural significances was undertaken between 2014 and 2015 among the among the Tangkhuls (particularly Chingjaroi, Longpi and Peh village) in Ukhrul district in the state of Manipur. In order to understand how the indigenous knowledge of the Tangkhul Naga is learned, shared, and transmitted within the community, the study employed what is called the Situated Learning Theory (SLT). This theory provides the framework for an in-

depth exploration of knowledge acquisition process within a certain community that considers the socio-cultural context of the learners. SLT considers learning to be a fundamentally social phenomenon, which occurs through everyday interactions. We also adopted participatory approach and ethnographical method of observation. The participatory method included interviews, group discussions and ethnographic method consists mainly of personal observations of the researcher. For interviews and discussions, both men and women of different educational background and social status were selected. The knowledge of preparing *khawo* (starter cakes), fermentation of *chor* (alcoholic beverage), cultural significances and crafts associated with rice beer production of the Tangkhul society were noted and recorded. We also attended Khamorkhui festival of the Chingjaroi village and interviewed both men and women of the methods of preparing *chor*, and *tam* and their cultural importance to the village as exemplified in the festival. We prepare various types of rice beer with the help of an elderly expert in Peh and Longpi village. Besides, we interviewed and held group discussions with the knowledgeable persons of the villages.

Rice Beer and Tangible Culture

Rice beer was served in a variety of containers corresponding to the occasions made of calabash gourd. Besides, gourd was used for utensils, decorations and in making stringed instrument called *Tingteila*, which is the traditional musical instrument of the community. Gourds were therefore widely cultivated even though they grow in wild. Gourd artifacts are rarely seen these days if they still exist at all. Another craft that met the same fate is the art of making containers. *Vaichum* is a kind of wickered basket used to brew rice beer; *ngankha* and *choram* are made of bamboo, the former to store and the latter to serve the beverage; *tongti* and *changrei* are straws/ pipes made of broomstick grass; and *pong* is made of wood to brew huge quantity of the beverage. The craft is on the brink of extinction.

Unsurprisingly, colonial account of gourd craft is scanty. What interested the colonial ethnographers and administrators were warfare, belief system, and festivals of the Nagas and not their material culture. Besides, missionaries pursued to stamp out traditions and customs that were found to act against conversion and practices of Christianity. In a rare photography (Fig. 4) taken by Ursula Bower in 1939, a man is pictured holding an earthen jug. A wooden platter and a gourd are placed on the ground. The *mise-en-scene* of the snap-shot is interesting. As the dog sitting behind him faces the camera, the man squatting perhaps on the edge of his front yard looks absent-mindedly into the distance holding not the gourd but a jug. Most probably, the man was a Christian posing for Bower's camera.

Jonathan Kapai, one of my informants, commented that the gourd could have been his personal one. A non-Christian in a traditional setting could have held on his gourd, because they were a kind of a personal identity marker. Gourds were moulded to desired shapes by conditioning them to soaking, drying and heating and some form of designs were woven upon them usually with thin splits of wicker.



Fig. 4²

The most common gourd is shown in Fig. 2 with a neck that enables a better grip. The Gourd with an elongated neck in Fig. 3 is a decorative piece. Standing on a wooden platter, it is now displayed in a Naga living room, an impoverished reminder of the lost traditional arts. Another common mug is made of bamboo. Bower captured a Tangkhul Naga of Chingjaroi village drinking rice beer from a bamboo mug called *khoram* (Fig. 4). Longpi village is perhaps the only village where the tradition of drinking rice beer with bamboo mugs is still practice especially during the traditional festival called Luirá Phanit. In Fig. 8, an old woman in the contemporary setting is captured seeping beer from a bamboo mug with a platter of *hoksa* (pork) placed on her laps. *Hoksa* is a favourite Tangkhul dish cooked with lots of chilli powder especially by the northern Tangkhuls. The red colour of *hoksa* in the woman's platter is suggestive of the amount of chilli powder used in the cooking.

² <http://himalaya.socanth.cam.ac.uk/collections/naga/record/r62367/gallery/0.html>



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

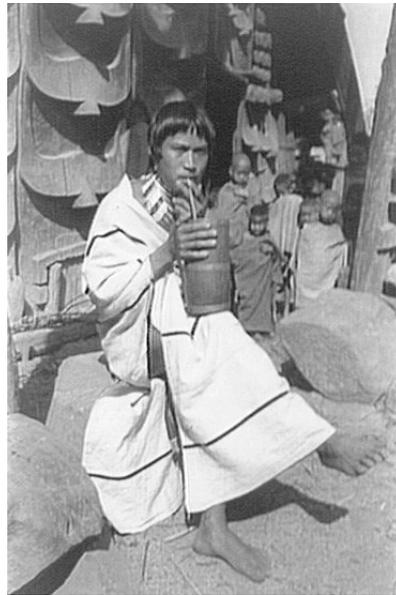


Fig. 7³



Fig. 8⁴

³ <http://himalaya.socanth.cam.ac.uk/collections/naga/record/r62295/gallery/0.html>

⁴ <http://kanglaonline.com/2017/01/tangkhul-culture-vamkashok-still-alive-at-longpi-village/>

My informants generally believe that the harmful effects of chilli powder is lessened firstly by cooking the meat for more than two hours and secondly by the digestive properties and curative power of rice beer. Unfortunately, whereas the tradition of rice beer consumption has long been abandoned, the dietary habit and food culture remain almost the same. Many agreed that it has a deleterious impact on the health of the people. Basumatary et al. found that *jou*, a homebrewed rice beer of the Boro tribe of Assam, shows “the presence of useful components which might have beneficial for health as well as tremendous therapeutic potential in curing various ailments” (102). In another study, Deep Jyoti Bhuyan et al. concluded that their analyses “indicate that the rice beer produced in North East India is nutritionally rich and have high therapeutic values. The presence of antiradical activity and other earlier evidences also suggest the possible medicinal properties of this traditional drink” (147).

In short, in the traditional Tangkhul society, rice beer was a balancing food item. When it was removed from the equation without supplemented by appropriate source of nutrition, the general health weakened.

The disappearance of gourd as a container is basically a result of modernization. Metallic utensils slowly replaced gourd as a container. However, conversion to Christianity has been particularly deleterious. Besides Nagas' “craving for a foreign style of living,” as Furer-Haimendorf remarked, missionaries' injunction to forsake traditional ways of life hastened the disappearance of not only knowledge system but the material culture too. Even in nineteen thirties, when majority of the Tangkhuls were non-Christians, converts had started to lap up Western materials and using foreign goods had become a matter of pride. In the Bower's photograph taken in 1939 (Fig. 9)⁵, a bottle and a flask are foregrounded and one of the men proudly displays his leather bag.



⁵ <http://himalaya.socanth.cam.ac.uk/collections/naga/record/r62309.html>

Fig. 9

Folksongs and folkdance were also taught as a heathen ways of life. Therefore, Christians were prohibited from indulging in the acts. Western hymn songs replaced folksongs. As early as in 1907, Pettigrew had translated Western hymns into Tangkhul and published in a book form called *Jesuwui La* (Fig. 10).

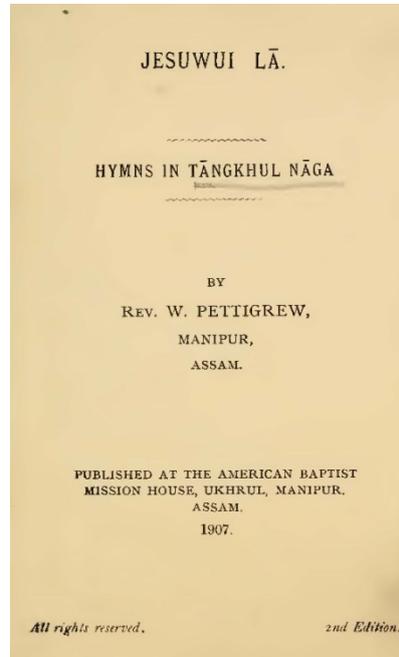


Fig. 10

Coupled with the constraint on folksong, the eclipse of gourd craft eventually put an end with the traditional musical instrument called *tingteila* (Fig 11 and 12). The former rendered *tingteila* redundant and the scarcity of gourd folded up the production of the instrument, because the body of *tingteila* is made of gourd. Some elderly persons are holding on to the instrument as their legacy for the younger generations.



Fig. 11



Fig. 12

Besides gourd artifacts, various containers connected with the arts of brewing rice beer include *vaichum*, *ngankha*, and *pong*. *Vaichum* (Fig. 13) is a double-layered container used to brew rice beer. The first layer or the inner one is usually made of bamboo. The outer cover of a certain kind of bamboo is peeled out and made into thin strips. They are then soaked in water for about a day, dried in the sun and kept over a hearth for about a week. These strips are interlaced to make the inner layer. Over which is painted a mixture of mashed leaves of a tree called *lihong* (Fig. 14) and cow-dung. It is then left in the sun to dry. After which another layer is woven over. The edges are then braided with wicker. The double layered basket maintains room temperature while brewing. *Ngankha* is a small container made of bamboo and it was used to store rice beer. *Maranchu* or *pong* (Fig. 15) is a huge wooden brewing container carved out of tree's trunk. It is used only on important occasions and festivals particularly when huge quantity of the beverage is required. *Tongti* and *changrei* are straws/ pipes made of broomstick grass. Needless to say these various crafts are on the brink of extinction.



Fig. 13



Fig. 14



Fig. 15

As an important objective of the project, we have tried to record not only the technical knowledge of the arts of brewing and perception of its cultural significance, we have taken special interest in noting the terms and meanings associated with rice beer culture. Many of the terms recorded in the project are unknown to young people.

Rice Beer and Intangible Culture

It is easy to see the connections of rice beer and material culture. In other words, the effects of the discontinuation of rice beer consumption on its related craftsmanship seems more perceptible than its implications on the ideational realm. Nonetheless, the shunning of the tradition has important bearings on the changes in attitude and outlook. Ringkahao Rongui, former Principal of Ukhrul Higher Secondary School, while welcoming the renunciation of liquor consumption, remarked that by demanding complete abstention on a tradition that was central to the traditional ways of life, “a seed of inferiority complex was sown into the minds of the people.” A. S. John Apeng, editor of the journal called *Legacy*, elaborated by arguing how replacement of rice beer with tea and sugar instilled a sense of dependency upon the colonial masters and the missionaries.

The renunciation of rice beer production and consumption hastened the decline not only of its allied crafts but also of folksong and folkdance performances; the cumulative effects of the disappearance of what I call “rice beer culture,” in turn, hastened the process of alienation from the traditional social set-up and inadequacy of it.

Concatenation of many factors went into the process of alienation from tradition and a sense of inferiority complex. Rice beer culture is not the only factor, but an important one. It would seem a surprise to the present generation that liquor was a part of everyday life in the traditional society, because it has been made a kind of cardinal sin. That somehow explains the

zealousness in which restriction on liquor economy is carried out by various civil organisations like Tangkhul Shanao Long (TSL), Tangkhul Katam Long (TKS), village units and above all the underground organisations. The effort to curb liquor consumption has been carried out with a kind of religious ardour, not surprisingly because, religion, as it is practiced among the Tangkhuls, is particularly averse to alcohol.

In a way, conversion to Christianity obviated the necessity of it in rituals, ceremonies, and festivals. Rituals, festivals, and propitiations were incomplete without rice beer. No wonder, with the renunciation of rice beer important components of what made the traditional Tangkhul culture whole gradually wither out. The only traditional festival that is still practice rather perfunctorily is the seed sowing festival called Luirā Phanit.

Rice Beer and Festivals

What is particularly significant about the Luirā Phanit festival of Longpi village of the northern Tangkhul is the way in which rice beer still figure in the texture of the festival. Many drop in on the festival at Longpi just to get the taste of rice beer. Dr. Jubilee Shangrei pointed out that the reason why rice beer consumption is still practiced in Longpi is because of a large presence of Catholics in the village. Catholic mission, unlike the Baptist missionaries that arrived much earlier, did not set down the relinquishment of rice beer consumption as a necessary condition of conversion to Christianity.

It is traditional to celebrate Luirā Phanit for 12 days; although that tradition is hardly followed these days. The first four days are the times to collect *meila* (roots and stems of pine tree used as torch or to start fire), firewood, and clean the areas around the habitation area by setting fire. The smoke so produced signals the neighbouring villages of the approaching festival. On the fourth day, animals to be consumed in the festival are slaughtered. On the same day, married daughters (or sisters if the father is dead) called *yorla* are given meat called *yorla sapher*. The fifth day is *kaphani* (the day when strangers are forbidden from entering the village). On this day, the village *awunga* (headman) plants the first seeds of the year by following the ritual called *mamachi-theimachi khamashao*. On the sixth day, the festivity begins in full swing. This is the day when *shingnai* (people outside one's kinship) and poor people are offered rice beer and food. For the next four days, kin and friends invite each other for feast. Till tenth day, various types of competition are held. On the 11th and 12th days, village market is opened when people from different villages participate as sellers and buyers.

In the contemporary society, Luiru is no longer celebrated with such extravagance and the rituals have almost disappeared. Longpi Luiru comes closest to the traditional ways of celebration. Longpi village celebrates Luiru for five days. 27 February has been fixed as the day of *sathat* (when animals to be consumed in the festival are killed). Towards the evening, married women receive *yorla sapher* from their fathers or brothers. Being a patrilineal and exogamous society, marriage is strictly outside one's clan and after marriage a woman goes to live in her husband's house (patrilocal residence) and assumes his clan name. The traditional Tangkhul society ensured continuing relationship of women to their parents' family through many practices. This custom of giving away meat to one's daughters or sisters is an important one. However, it is not one-sided. The daughters or sisters are obligated. The rule of reciprocity demands that they should return the gift in some form of exchange. Therefore, when their fathers or brothers host Feast of Merit (Maran), construct house, or when they die, the women (*yorla*) are obligated to bring at least a pot of rice beer.

On this day, the village ponds and wells are cleaned and so are the village entrance. The practice is anachronistic, because traditionally cleaning of ponds takes place after the festival of Chumphu when the newly harvested food are consumed for the first time. On this day, ponds are cleaned so that the food may be cooked with the fresh and clean water. However, since Chumphu is not observed anymore the necessity of cleaning village entrance and ponds and wells calls for some changes.

On the second day, the village observe the tradition of *vamshok* (which in the traditional day was usually observed on the sixth day) when each family take out their food and eat not inside the house but in the front yard. The idea is that any passerby may be invited to partake with the family. After *vamshok*, everybody comes out of the house and walk the whole village by performing what is called *khamahon*. *Khamahon* is sung as a prelude or epilogue to folksong performance. It is performed usually in three voices.

Luiru is one of the few festivals of the whole village. Chumphu, for instance, is observed by each household and women are the primary performer; Yarra is a celebration of each age-set; and Thisham primarily concerns the families of the dead. Therefore, the village

Khamorkhui (also called Khamangkhui) is the festival in which rice beer figures in a grander scale. Whereas Luiru is a festival common to Tangkhul tribe, Khamorkhui is celebrated only by the Chingjaroi village. The term "khamor" refers to a type of unleavened bread and "khui" means festival. "Khamor" is a thin bread round in shape of "a little bigger than the back of a hand." The bread used to be made in the festival. Though it is no longer prepared or consumed, the name remains. The festival is also called Khamangkhui, "khamang" meaning

“age-old” and “khui” meaning festival. Therefore, it means “age-old festival.” Interestingly, a neighbouring tribe called Poumei call the festival Douni, which meaning “age-old festival.”

Whatever the veracity of the name is, Khamorkhui is one of the few festivals in which traditional ways of life are reflected. It is celebrated for five days. On the first day, as it is common of Tangkhul festival, animals are slaughtered for consumption during the festival. The first two days are observed by the village a whole when various competitions are held among the village localities called *tang*. The village is divided into three *tang* – *atungtang*, *alungtang* and *azingtang*. Each *tang* is organized into three groups consisting of householders, youth and children. Each group takes part in the competition, which includes folksong, folkdance, and a traditional game called *saotheila*. *Saotheila* is competed among girls and the game is usually conducted on a space called “alukhung” (Fig. 16).

Fig. 16

That *saotheila* is performed at *Alukhung* seems contradictory, because *Alukhung* is a public space where village elders and council deliberate on issues concerning the village. However, it also serves as a gossip space. Literally, it means “heap of stones.” This space exemplifies the meeting of opposites or contradictions in the conceptualizations of the traditional society.

On the first day, the village observes the ritual of the invocation for good harvest of year, the ritual that is primary to Luiru has been incorporated to the festival of Khamorkhui. On this day, married women receive meat called “yorla sakho saphei” from their fathers or brothers.

On the third day, each *tang* (locality) observes the Thanshok Khami (Pioneering Day). Each *tang* selects a host for the day. The members of the *tang* work for the host for at least a day and groups of household contribute (usually consisting of four households) a pot of unfermented rice beer. In Fig. 17, the pots containing unfermented rice beer are being collected

in the house of the host. As the woman in the right put starter into the pots, the man keeps the record of who have brought the pots. All the pots are to be emptied into a *maranchu* (Fig. 18)



Fig. 17



Fig. 18



Fig. 19



Fig. 20

After thoroughly cleaning the *maranchu* and planting the planks on the two ends with natural adhesive (Fig. 19); they are meant to absorb excessive foam formation, the *maranchu*, having dragged to the side of the house, is securely fixed, and the pots are emptied into it. The *maranchu* is covered and left for about five days to ferment.

The host feast the tang by offering food (rice and meat). In his honour a monolith used to be erected, although this custom is no longer strictly followed. This is the only day in which rice beer is consumed at the community level; otherwise, rice beer exchange is essentially a private affair shared between family members, friends, and hosts and guests. Drawing from the same source, *maranchu*, and feasted by the same host, the festival affirms communal bonding.

On the penultimate day of the festival, the youths of each *tang* go in search of foods. Young men usually go hunting; some trap birds, others go for fishing. Some girls accompany the boys for fishing and others gather wild fruits and vegetables. And on the last day, each *tang* feast together at the front yard of the pioneer (host).

Another mentionable festival that keeps close to the traditional ways of observation is Shar Phanit celebrated by Chingai village. Although rice beer no longer features as an important aspect of the festival, some traditional practices are still kept intact. Unsurprisingly, there are only a few followers of Roman Catholic in the village. The festival, celebrated in April, is a rain-making ceremony. This is interesting because rain-making ceremonies are almost absent among the northern Tangkhuls. On the contrary, Luiru famous among the Tangkhuls, are observed in a lackadaisical manner among the eastern and southern Tangkhuls where rain-making festival was the most important festival in the areas. Chingai is the only village in the northern Tangkhuls that gives importance to the rain-making festival.

Traditional Knowledge of Rice Beer

The substrate of the traditional Tangkhul rice beer is the grain of a particular type of rice called *makrei*. Its husk is blackish in colour and it has a sticky property. The starter cake (Fig. 21) of *khori*, *zamshei* and *vaithei* is made from the sprouted rice grains. An ordinary rice grains are soaked in water and left to germinated for about five days. The sprouted grains (Fig. 22) are then left to dry in the sun and kept in a basket (Fig. 23) above a fire place (Fig. 24). Having properly dried, which takes about 4-5 days, the sprouted grains are grounded into powder (Fig. 21).



Fig. 21



Fig. 22



Fig. 23

The preparation of *khawo* (catalyst) involves various steps and takes many days. On the pretext that it is a light work, it is prepared by women. Potency of rice beer is said to depend largely on the catalyst. And it is believed that some women's hands are more potent than others. In other words, some women's *khawo* produce stronger *khor*.

Fig. 24

The difference between *khor*, *zamshei* and *vaithei* (on the one hand) and *tam* or *zam* and *pasho* (on the other) lies in the difference of starter cake. Whereas the former type use *khawo* as starter cake, the latter use a certain root. In the pre-colonial days, the root catalyst came from Kabo in Myanmar. In those days, traders from Kabo brought iron, the catalyst and medicine to trade for pottery, cotton, salt, and spices. After the imposition of hill house tax of Rs. 3 in 1892 and the tightening of administrative control over the hills, the trade shifted to the Manipur valley. The root catalyst of *tam* was replaced by the yeast found in the Imphal market prepared mostly by the people known to the Tangkhuls as the Andros. Whereas *khor*, *zamshei* and *vaithei* are fermented in a container called *vaichum* and *maranchu*, *tam* and *pasho* are fermented in a clay pot (Fig. 25).



Fig. 25

Zamshei-vaithei are known to be the best quality rice beer served to special guests and drunk on special occasion. The fermentation process produces a thick, rich creamy foam that brims over the container. It tastes sweet in this stage. When the rice beer is “ripe”, the foam subsides and the colour turns from white to deep green. The rice beer scooped out of the ripe stage is called *zamshei-vaithei*. Water is then poured into the container and left for few hours for proper blending; this is called *khor*.

Production

The traditional Tangkhul rice beer, generally called *khore* though it is also used to refer to a specific type, is prepared from a cooked rice grain called *makrei* as substrate along with a starter cake called *khawo* or ordinary yeast available in the market in the case of *tam*. *Makrei* grains are cleaned by winnow out chaffs and then dried in the sun till the grains produce a cracking sound when bitten. The grains are then pounded and husks are winnowed out.

The grains are cooked lightly and then emptied into a winnowing fan so as to allow the grains to cool. Meanwhile the milky water is collected in a bowl as it is sieved out of the winnowing fan. After which the partially cooked grains are emptied into a container called *vaichum* along with the collected milky water and thoroughly stirred. The stage is called *tatangru* (Fig. 26).



Fig. 26

Khawo (catalyst) is then added and properly mixed. In the case of preparing a huge feast, *khawo* is mixed in the pots and poured into *maranchu* where it is properly stirred. The *vaichum* or *maranchu* is closed tightly and kept for about 5 – 10 days according to season. Fermentation process includes vigorous foaming and the “ripened” stage is when the foams disappear. That is a yardstick of judging the properly prepared rice beer.

Tam is prepared long with husks and a different kind of catalyst is used to produce it. The cooked rice while cooling is thoroughly mixed with husks and catalyst traditional powdered root imported from Myanmar or yeast of an ordinary market. And then the mixture is transferred into a clay pot wherein is poured the milky water. The ingredients are thoroughly stirred and the mouth of the container is tightly closed.

Conclusion

Rice beer culture was integral to the traditional ways of life, because rice beer production and its consumption pervaded the everyday life of the people. It was central to rituals, festivals, everyday life. Besides, it produces related practices like crafts and folklore performances. The central question that the project asks and enquires is what happens to a society when one of its core traditions disappears. Since practices must disappear to be replaced new ones, it is pertinent to ask if changes are constitutive of the culture or externally caused. We find that the prohibition of rice beer production and consumption is largely responsible for the destruction of related crafts, performances of folktale, folksong and folkdance. That is to say, the dissolution of rice beer culture adversely affected not only the tangible culture but also the intangible culture of the Tangkhuls.

The project also leads to a conclusion that the dissolution of rice beer culture also indirectly leads to the culture of dependency and inculcation of inferiority complex.

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List of Pictures (with a brief description):

Fig. 1. A view of Chingjaroi village. Photograph taken by Bower in 1939.

Fig. 2. Chingjaroi village as viewed from Peh village.

Fig. 3. A partial view of Peh village.

Fig. 4. A man from Chingjaroi village posing for Bower in 1939 likely in front of his house.

Fig. 5. Two gourd container used to carry *khor* or water called *khoram* in Tangkhul.

Fig. 6. A decorative *khoram* in a modern setting.

Fig. 7. A man from Chingjaroi village sipping *khor* from a bamboo container.

Fig. 8. An old woman from Longpi village seeping rice beer.

Fig. 9. Three Christians of Chingjaroi village taken by Bower in 1939.

Fig. 10. Cover of *Jesuwui La* written by William Pettigrew.

Fig. 11. A photograph of *tingteila*, a traditional Tangkhul musical instrument.

Fig. 12. An elderly person from Talla village performing on his *tingteila*.

Fig. 13. *Vaichum* in which traditional rice beer is brewed. A double-layered container to brew rice beer made of bamboo.

Fig. 14. Local adhesive used in the cleaning of *maranchu*.

Fig. 15. *Maranchu* where rice beer is brewed in large quantities.

Fig. 16. *Alunkhung*, a space of political debates and gossips in Chingjaroi village.

Fig. 17. Chingjaroi women preparing rice beer for Khamorkhui festival.

Fig. 18. Members of Azingtang cleaning *maranchu* or *pong*.

Fig. 19. Local adhesive.

Fig. 20. *Maranchu* being dragged to the side of host's house.

Fig. 21. Catalyst for *vaithei*, and *khor* locally called *khawo*.

Fig. 22. Sprouted grains for the preparation of catalyst.

Fig. 23. Rice grains in a special basket for the preparation of *khawo*.

Fig. 24. Sprouted rice grains being dried over a hearth for the preparation of *khawo*.

Fig. 25. Another type of brewing container made of clay.

Fig. 26. *Tatangru* being stirred.