

Letters  
from Shan  
State

By

The Students of the  
School for Shan State  
Nationalities Youth  
~ Seventh Training ~



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The Students of  
the School for Shan  
State Nationalities  
Youth

~ Seventh Training ~

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This book is dedicated to all those who have sacrificed their lives for the democracy movement in Burma, and all those inside and outside Burma who support the freedom of the people.

We would like to give special thanks to our donors, the board members of SSSNY, our School Director Nang Charm Tong, and all the teachers and staff.



*Illustration by Hsai Lern*

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# Introduction

This publication was inspired by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's 1998 book "Letters from Burma," which detailed everyday life inside the isolated Southeast Asian nation. Daw Suu deftly combined stories of everything from the seemingly mundane (fixing a leaky roof), to the joyous (the popular Water Festival), to the tragic (the plight of political prisoners) in order to give the reader a full sense of life in Burma. Moved when reading short passages from the book on Daw Suu's birthday earlier this year, SSSNY students began work on writing their own experiences as citizens of Shan State.

Their stories, after three edits, various conferences, and much discussion, now appear here in "Letters from Shan State." The wide range of topics and emotions covered in their essays speaks to the complexity of life in Burma. Stories of horror, grief, and death are coupled with stories of celebration and blissful moments. In this juxtaposition, readers may get a sense of the lack of flow or rhythm to life in Burma; that at any moment a child's playtime or a cheerful marketplace can turn into a battlefield. Through this collection of stories, readers



see the suffering, but also the indomitable spirit of the people of Shan State; their will and successful effort to maintain some sense of normalcy and native culture despite the chaos that surrounds and at times engulfs them.

Perhaps the readers may also see that they are not so very different from the students; that like all people, these students enjoy favorite foods, festivals, and visits to new places. They remember fondly a beautiful day, a big dinner, a family gathering. At times, like all of us, they suffer and struggle to go on. As people from Shan State, from Burma, from Asia, from the world, let us find in these texts not just individual and unique stories of great importance but also the threads of shared human experience, and therefore, a shared responsibility to support the freedom of the people in Shan State and Burma.

Thank you for supporting SSSNY through the purchase of this book. Please enjoy and share the stories of these students from Shan State.

Amanda Czarnecki  
Teacher, SSSNY  
October, 2007

## The Sound of the Gun Made Me Lose My Family

I am sitting beside the road and waiting for  
mom to bring me home  
I have been waiting here for a long time  
Other moms are coming to pick up their  
children  
And they go back home with happiness but for  
me it is so sad  
And I feel lonely at this time when I see  
them all smiling  
For me it is so helpless.  
The time passed so fast and no one is coming  
to get me  
What had happened to them when the sound of  
the gun was so loud  
Mom where are you now? Why you don't come  
take me home?  
Right now I am so scared and I cannot feel  
the warmth of my mom

When the wartime is like this, where is the  
place I can stay  
For safety and fun?  
I still am waiting here and hope one day I  
can go to my home  
The war makes me lose my home  
The war makes me lose my love  
And the SPDC makes me lose my way

I hope the war ends in our country  
I hope for freedom for our land

I hope our people live free from fear  
I hope our people will live with their  
families until they get old  
I hope the SPDC will love our people and I  
hope they will give rights to us  
And I hope to go home and I am hungry for  
freedom

- I want to go home I want to see my family I  
want to live on my land

By Kawn Wan, from SSSNY and the Orphan  
School, Loi Tai Leng

## Who Killed Burma?

Who provides us with the most kindness in our life? Different people have different ideas about it. For me, the answer is our parents. They always fulfill whatever we need. No one is more kind than our parents. The Burmese military always calls themselves the parents of the country. Are they kind and do they love people? Let us see what they do for our country.

The military took power from the civil government in 1962. It has ruled for four decades and has had a sordid history. During the 1960s Ne Win, the military head man, set up the Revolutionary Council (RC) and ruled the country. He put the civil government, including many Shan leaders and a lot of politicians, in jail without reason. Then during the 1970s, there was tension regarding popularly respected diplomat U Thant's funeral. Students wanted to bury U Thant's body at a shrine for important people, and the military did not want to do that. Hundreds of students were killed over this issue. Additionally, thousands of students were arrested and severely tortured, and the

Student Union at Rangoon University was destroyed by the military during that time.

The military also set up the Burmese Socialist Program Party, which promoted economic socialism. Because of this isolationist policy Burma faced an economic crisis. In 1988, people could not tolerate the situation any longer and the 88 Pro-Democracy Uprising flourished around the country. The military government killed thousands of unarmed people, students and politicians. It was an infamous event in Asia, but the international community did not notice how much the people in Burma were in trouble. After the uprising, the military took power again and set up the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) and ruled the country. During this time SLORC promised to hold elections and to transfer power very soon. After that, the military would return to the base and would not be involved in politics.

The general election was held in 1990 and the National League for Democracy (NLD) won over 80% of the seats in parliament. But the military government refused to accept the results of the election and delayed the transfer of power. In 1993, the military

held the National Convention (NC) to create a new constitution for Burma without any dialogue with the opposition. Most people agreed that was the only way for SPDC to stay in power longer and longer. They tried to convince people to support the National Convention. The military lied to the neighboring countries and the international community that they were making real political development. When the opposition groups tried to have dialogue and discuss the political situation, the military government always refused to talk to them. They often used the violence to defeat the opposition groups. For instance, they tried to assassinate Aung San Suu Kyi in 2003. Let me explain a little bit about that event.

As soon as Aung San Suu Kyi was released from house arrest in 2001, she traveled and met with her party's members and many ethnic groups around the country. Since then, the SPDC kept their eyes on her every step and they were not satisfied with her success. So, they led their cruel people (some said they had prisoners pretend to be monks) to assassinate her when she returned from her upper Burma visit north of Segaing, Mandalay Division. Fortunately, she escaped,

but she did have injuries. There has been no investigation by the SPDC until now.

In 2005, Shan State leaders organized Shan State representatives to discuss politics and the military's National Convention. Dozens of them were arrested and sentenced to long jail terms. Some leaders died in jail because of torture by the military's men.

Still, other cease-fire groups wanted to discuss politics peacefully and they made a cease-fire agreement with the military. At the agreement, SLORC said "You can wait and discuss your political ideas in the National Convention, and you can keep your arms and make development in your own areas." Because of that agreement, many ethnic groups made cease-fire agreements. However in reality, the cease-fire groups never have a chance to discuss politics, and the military tries to restrict them more and more.

On the other hand, the political parties such as NLD and the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD) also tried to make dialogue with the SPDC but it never happened. The parties' leaders were arrested and put in house arrest like Aung San Suu Kyi (leader of NLD). Some were

sentenced to a long jail term like Hkun Htun Oo (leader of SNLD). They were arrested without any good reason and without a fair trial. So what is left for the people and for the country?

Future! What is future for one country? Most people say it is young people. Yes, I also agree with this idea. Without educated young people, it will be very difficult for one country to develop. So let's see how much the military government develops education. According to the GDP, the military government just spends about 2% for education and healthcare. So is it enough for the country which has a population of 60 million? Without any shame, they have claimed that they develop the country. They support the country only a little bit and spend most of the money for arms materials. People have to build the schools by themselves and hire the teachers by themselves. How about the teachers? The situation for them is very difficult. They do that work because they have nothing else to do. It is very difficult to be an educated person. Even in the universities there are so many rules and restrictions for the students. There is not enough



transportation, supporting materials, buildings and teachers, etc. The result is that the quality of education goes down and down. In the current situation, the education system has no standards.

However, the military sends their relatives to the countries which have strong educational programs such as the West and Europe. This is so their relatives can be well-educated people and can continue to control the country in the next generation. How tricky the SPDC military is!

All of the above evidence shows us that the military never wants to accept democracy. Therefore I dare say that the military destroyed our country, making it goes from the richest country to the poorest country. They are the murderers of our country. They destroyed the past, killed the present and made the future ugly.

By Zawm Merng

## SPDC Volcanoes

1996, in our Shan State, was a year of hell for our people because the SPDC volcanoes flowed into Shan State. The trees and the plants were killed by SPDC. Not only the forests, but also our people, our place and many of the buildings were destroyed by SPDC. The rivers were not calm and not clean. Many animals were at risk and were trying to survive. The ethnic nationalities in our Shan State lost their own land, homes, and wealth.

The local people had to move near the volcanoes because they had nowhere to go and no knowledge of the danger. They thought if they moved near the volcanoes they would be safe. SPDC wanted the villagers to stay close in order to control them; that is why the volcanoes had crept up. They used their power and forced the people to move near them. At this time when the people were moving near the volcanoes, rather than being happy, they were in hell. They had to obey SPDC and could not refuse them; their life was very difficult.

The local people tried to use the water to kill the fire but they could not do it.

When the water was close to killing the fire, the SPDC volcanoes prevented them from putting it out. They used their fire to kill anyone even talking about water. The local people couldn't do anything to bring our people freedom from the volcanoes.

Until now, the SPDC volcanoes have stood over our people. From 1996 to 2007, the monks can't always stay in their temples in Shan State. The old people have to work hard because the young people are forced to be porters or soldiers for SPDC. The children can't be educated - the volcanoes burn their schools.

At this time, many children became orphans. Their parents were killed and some were separated from their parents. Even the birds couldn't stay together - the volcanoes forced everything apart. Did the world know that the volcanoes had erupted; did they know many local people had felt the red tears on their faces? When would they pass this gloomy time?

In 1996 if we looked at another country, they could eat delicious rice and they could stay in their homes, they could stay with the love of their parents and they could get warm clothes from their parents.

But at this time, our children had to eat  
rice with tears, they never saw their  
parents, and in the winter they didn't have  
clothes to keep them warm.

By Kawn Wan, from SSSNY and the Orphan's  
School in  
Loi Tai Leng

## Escape from the Cage

Once upon a time there was one bird. It was a female bird and the bird was pregnant. She found some grass to make her nest. The raining season was coming. She had to prepare for the birth of her child. She went to make her nest on a big tree. She made the nest very skillfully. The next day she gave birth.

She didn't think the weather was very bad, even though it was raining hard. Then the big monsoon blew the nest away. At that time the egg had already become a little bird and the mother had gone to find fruit for her chick. When she came back to look after her baby, her baby had disappeared. She went to find her baby, but she didn't see it anywhere. The mother called, "saiv saiv." This means, "where is my baby?" All babies had disappeared in the big monsoon. She didn't see her baby anywhere. She was feeling very upset. Luckily for the mother, she had a strong heart and could fly away to continue her life.

The next day she went to find a safe place, because it was still raining season. Then, one man saw the bird and trapped her.

He put this bird in the cage. The bird had to stay in the cage all the time. She couldn't go anywhere. They gave some fruit to the bird everyday, but all she wanted was her freedom. The bird hopes for someone to come quickly and give freedom to her. What do you think will happen to this bird?

By Cherry Blossom

## The Life of a Bus

When I suddenly woke up it was 7am and I noticed that I got up very late. It was extremely cold and outside it was still foggy. I ran to the bathroom in a hurry and after that I changed into my school uniform. Then I ran to the kitchen where my aunt was preparing breakfast. When she saw me she muttered something under her breath. But, she did ask me to have breakfast and prepared lunch for me to eat at school. I ate the rice quickly and took my lunch pack. Then I left my house and ran to the bus station.

It was Monday. My school was No. 2 High School in Taunggyi, Shan State, Burma. The school was quite far and I had to take a bus every day. Many people were waiting for a bus when I reached the bus station. Most of them seemed to be workers. They wore Thanakha on their smiling faces. Thanakha is one kind of traditional lotion or make-up that has a very nice smell and is from the bark of the Thanakha tree. Their faces were full of energy. Also, there were many students, teachers, civil servants, etc,

waiting for a bus. I liked these mornings very much. They gave me more energy.

After about 10 minutes, an old bus stopped at the bus station. I hurried onto the bus, and already the bus was extremely full. I only had room for my two feet. I could not move anywhere. Also the people were very noisy; they were speaking, children were crying, and some were gossiping. People were pulling and pushing each other. One of my hands held a lunch pack and another held the bus post. The smell on the bus was very terrible, like a mouse that had been dead for 3 days. When I looked through the window, many people were walking and there were a lot of beggars by the road. It was a normal view for me and the other people.

There were monks, students, teacher, workers, and several other types of people on the bus. The bus stopped at every station. At the fifth station it reached a station near my school. I had to push and also pull people to be able to get out of the bus. I felt more comfortable after I got out of. I ran quickly to the school. I had only 3 minutes before class started. When I



reached the gate, it was closed. The teacher came and asked me why I was late. I told her some lie and apologized to her. So, she let me in and I ran to my class. The class had already started when I reached the classroom. I demanded that my teacher let me in. Then I was punished and had to stand and sit 50 times in front of the class. After that, I could sit at my table. I was still shy and tired; my body was shaking. These things were normal for me because I often got to school very late.

The class was over at 4pm and I had to hurry again. If I could not take a bus quickly, I would have to wait until 5 or 6 o'clock to get to my home. In the evening, the people were returning from their work and taking a bus to their home. Everybody always had to struggle for a place on the bus. Luckily, I got on. It was the same scene, a bus full of bad smells and many people. On the bus, people often lost their money to pick pockets.

We can also see some respectful people on the bus. When a monk, old person, pregnant woman or sick person came on the bus, some people who were sitting would stand

and give a place for them. However, some people were very selfish with their seat. Some people were quiet and some were talking to each other. Some had sad faces and some were happy. Some were sleepy and some seemed very excited. The bus was a big world for me even though it was a small and old bus. When the bus stopped at my bus station, I left these faces and got off of the bus. When I reached home, it was already past 5pm. The morning and next day I had to face these things again.

This was my daily life and also the daily life of people in Burma. Sometimes we enjoy this life, and sometimes we are very tired. Sometimes we complain about our difficult life and sometimes we can be happy. Even now, though I am far from these events and this life I still remember them and miss them very much; the bad smell, the smell of Thanakha, the innocent faces, hungry faces, guilty faces, selfish faces, and the views from the window of the bus.....

By Zan Noi

## **Life in Keng Tung Township**

Eastern Shan State has one big area that looks like a triangle. The triangle is formed by three roads that come together from China, Thailand and Burma. In this area, there is also a place that is similar to a big pond. The bottom of the pond has clean water. In the water, there are many golden fishes.

Here there is a small river called Nam Khurn. The river is very strange so people come to visit it. Not every one believed what they saw in the river. The river flows up! It is not the same as other rivers in the world. Normally the river would be flowing downward. It is a very strange sight; if we look at the river closely, it looks like it is flowing down. If we look from afar, it looks like it's flowing up.

That area has a good environment and large mountains around the township, and has a good economy. This township is very famous for both business and culture. Many people

live in the township. They are kind and help each other. In the township there are 18 nationalities. The people in the township are able to get many kinds of things and it is easy to go from one place to another place.

In town, there are many ancient famous sites, such as the 12 city gates that are built in the East, the West, the South, and the North townships. In addition, there is one famous pagoda called Zawm Kham, which means "golden pagoda." West of town and in the East there are hot springs.

Every year there are 3 days that are very important for the people. They are the beginning of Buddhist lent, the end of Buddhist lent, and the New Year. At that time young men and women go to the temples and pray to the gods. They also go to the temples of their grandfathers and grandmothers and ask for forgiveness for their sins. People offer food there for the gods. When I was young, my mother took me to the temple and taught me how to worship. At that time I was very happy and I remember this every time I go to the temple.

Keng Tung township is the place where I was born. I like it because it is a peaceful place. I hope one day I will go to live in Keng Tung again.

By Hseng Zawm

### Khao Buk and Khao Ya Ku

There are many kinds of food in Shan State and in every country in the world. We also could call these "traditional foods" because some countries have their own food that is not the same as other countries. In Shan State there are traditional foods like Khao Buk and Khao Ya Ku. When you read their names, you may be confused, but I will explain what they are.

At first I will tell you meaning of "khao"; khao means "rice". So, now that you know the meaning of Khao, I think you can guess what they make these dishes from. However, I think you will also want the details. I will explain the dish Khao Buk first.

Khao Buk is made from sticky rice. When we begin to make it, we steam sticky rice in water for about twelve hours, or six hours before we start to pound the rice. Mostly, we steam it before we go to sleep at night so it will be ready to pound in the morning. We will cook it in a big jar. When we cook, we usually use firewood, not gas, because when we use firewood it will give us a delicious taste and is cheaper than gas. When the rice is edible, it will be very hot

and we will not let it cool. Then we will begin to pound. When we pound the first time, we have to use some honey to apply around the mortar and then we will put the rice in later. We use honey because we want to get a delicious taste and also stop from "rice decorating" around the mortar's mouth. When we pound the rice, we usually turn it as well. As we turn the rice, we constantly add in a little more honey. We will pound for half an hour. After we finish, we will put a banana leaf on a tray, decorate it with honey, and put the pounded rice on it. After that, Khao Buk is ready to eat.

We usually make this dish on Shan New Year. When we have Shan New year, all people will make Khao Buk and this kind of food is like a symbol for this festival; it is the main food for this activity and is unable to be cut out of Shan New Year.

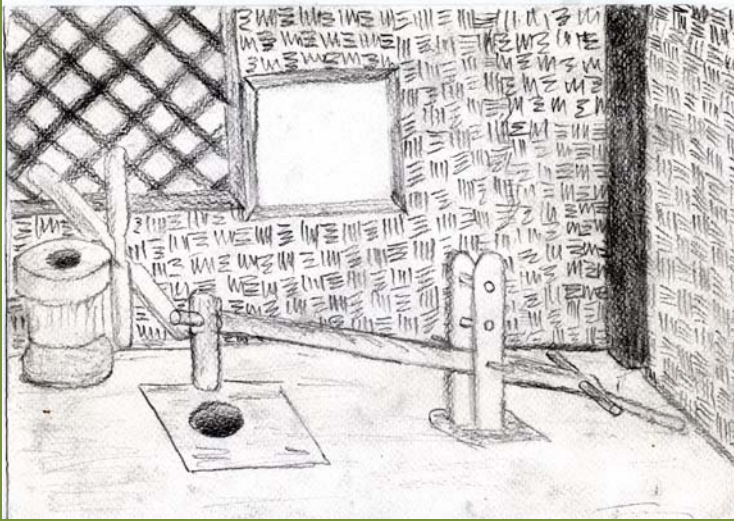
Now that you know about Khao Buk, you may also want to know about Khao Ya Ku. Khao Ya Ku is also made from sticky rice, but we will not pound it and we will have more ingredients. The preparations are similar to Khao Buk, but things will become different after the rice is ready to eat. We will put rice into a big pot and we will mix it with

brown sugar. The brown sugar comes from sugar cane. Then we will stir it until the rice and sugar are balanced. Then we add the most important ingredient that we cannot forget; it is a bean and it gives the dish a good taste. When we have finished, we put all the rice on a tray. We will use a banana leaf to line the tray and apply some oil to it too. We add the oil to make the banana leaf less sticky. When we are finished, we will offer this food first to the temples, and then we will eat it later. The day that we offer to the temple is the third full moon day. This full moon day is the day that Buddha had spoken three articles to the monks. So, this food is important on the special day of the Buddha.

The recipes I have shared in this book are for just a few kinds of food. Now you will know how we like to do our foods in accordance with our tradition and culture.

By Xiao Noom





Pounding the rice

*Illustration by Xiao Noom*

## The Obsession with "Ma-Don-Dang"

Can you imagine why this is such an obsession for me? Do you know what kind of thing this is? This is one of the most popular toys of Shan children. The children will not want to take a rest anymore when they are playing with "ma-don-dang." And, this is also one element of Shan culture. Would you like to guess what it looks like and the meaning of "ma-don-dang"? Let's go ahead and find out.

"Ma-Don-Dang" means one kind of horse. It looks like a pair of shoes attached to two poles of bamboo. We call it "ma-don-dang" even though it does not look like a horse because we ride it as a horse. When we ride it, we often run and compete with each other to see who will run faster, so it is called "ma-don-dang."

When we make "ma-don-dang" we need two poles of bamboo about two or three meters long. It has to be about two inches wide. The size depends on who will ride "ma-don-dang." A bigger child will ride a bigger and taller one; a smaller child will ride a smaller and shorter one. The two poles have

small branches on the joints at the bottom, about one foot up from the ground. We also need two pieces of bamboo about six or seven inches long, which have a drilled hole at the end of the edges. They are put on the small branches of the poles. Those branches were kept when we cut down the new bamboo. Now it becomes like a pair of shoes attached on the poles. It is ready to be used and ridden. "Ma-Don-Dang" can be tall or short, small or big.

The children play with it usually in the afternoon and evening. They make a race among their groups, and they ride "ma-don-dang" to attack and catch each other. This also makes them stay in a group and run faster than other groups. But, sometimes they do not win because other children make a taller "ma-don-dang" than them and are more skillful at riding it. Every child must have it. If they do not have one, they will annoy their parents to make one for them. They are also jealous of each other's "ma-don-dang." However, this is a very peaceful and a very blissful time for them.

In my childhood days, "ma-don-dang" was my life. I do not know why. I think because when I had it, I also had many children come

and ask to be my friend. When I played with "ma-don-dang," I did not care about anything except it.

Once, I was playing with my friend while riding it. Suddenly, "Kaboom!" - a terrible sound was heard from near our village. "COME HERE!" was called from the north and at the same time "GET OUT!!" from the west. My friends and I were continuing to ride "ma-don-dang." "KABOOM!!!" This time it was louder. We laughed at each other because we thought it was the sound from the monastery when they hit the drum. "KABOOM...!. KABOOM...!" This time it was a fierce sound that made the ground tremble. However for us as children, we did not care about anything except playing with our "ma-don-dang." All of the sudden, the bullets crashed through the bamboo like a rain of hail.

As usual, the villages were mostly covered by the bamboo forests in Shan State. There was more speaking. The noises spread through the village. The bullets were still flying over my head. Rapidly, someone grabbed my hands and took me into a trench. It was my father. I was very frightened. I got a quick thought in my head, "Where are my

friends?" Fortunately, they were sitting behind me. I was also thinking, "where is my ma-don-dang?" Without thinking, I got up to go out of the trench. My father held me tightly with anger. "Where are you going?" he asked with a mighty voice. "I am going to take my ma-don-dang." I replied as though nothing had happened. "Are you crazy?! You are going to be killed doing such bullshit!" he roared like a hungry tiger. I was silent. Everyone was silent. The happy evening had turned into a bloody evening. The village had nearly turned into a graveyard. Many people were innocently killed between the war of SPDC's soldiers and the Shan rebellion. After this happened, every time we played in the evening we felt unconfident. We had to be careful about what was going to occur around us.

For Shan children from the villages, they know having a ma-don-dang is like having a car, or having a piece of paradise because they really enjoy it. Having money is as not important as having a ma-don-dang for them. This is one of the only things that they can enjoy. Meanwhile, they also have to realize that they are not secure anymore.

By Xiao Aun

## "Poy Sang Long" Festival

In Shan State, there are many festivals all year, like Shan New Year in December, the Water Festival in May, the beginning of the Buddhist lent in July, the end of the Buddhist lent in October, and the Balloon Fire Festival.

In April, after harvesting we have a famous festival called "Poy Sang Long" in Shan language. "Poy" means festival or party and "Sang Long" means when the children are ordained to become a novice in Buddhist culture. "Poy Sang Long" therefore is when the children are ordained to become a novice and have a party in one place. People in the village who have a son aged about 9-13 years old have to take part in the ceremony. The head villageman collects the children and then they make a "Poy Sang Long." I was one of them.

When I was 9 years old, I became a "Sang Long." One day before sunrise, at early dawn, many people in the temple bring their son to take a shower in holy water to get a holy life. Then, they shave his hair to look like the novice of "Sang Long." They put make up on boys' faces, give them jewelry

to wear, and put a crown on their "Sang Long" head. At the time, they look like a prince. All of their clothes are like the clothes of a prince.

After that, all of the "Sang Longs" had to recite five precepts in front of the abbots and monks in the temple. In addition, we had to go around the ceremony and show the "Sang Long" dance to the Thayer (spirit) and angels. During that time, the "Sang Long" was carried on the shoulders of their relatives. I was a "Sang Long" for seven days.

In the ceremony area there are stages, traditional dances, and many games. This time is very happy for me because people took care of me and I could get everything that I wanted. People came and enjoyed the ceremony. After seven days, I became a novice.

In Shan culture they believe that if they take their son to become a "Sang Long" they will get happiness and merit. This time is the time for Shan people to have fun. This time is the beautiful time that I will never forget in my life.

By Keng Hserng

## The Taunggyi Hot Air Balloon Festival

This festival happens during the pleasant month of November in the winter season. There is not a cloud in the sky at this time, it is almost always clear. The festival happens in Taunggyi, Southern Shan State. The sounds of the traditional kettle-drum are heard all over the town. When this sound is heard, every person there feels emotion and happiness. They know that they will see so many beautiful hot air balloons in the festival.

The festival is held around the Sular Muni pagoda. It sits in the town part of southern Taunggyi. The Hot Air Balloons event is the most famous event of the Taunggyi Tazaungdaing festival. It is also one of the most well known festivals in Myanmar. So many nationalities come and visit the festival.

The balloon festival has a competition. The competition is divided into three categories; Daytime, Nya Mee Gyi and Seinnaban. The Daytime portion is released during the day and the balloons are made in the shape of an elephant, pig, cow, duck,



bird, etc. This portion is for the amateur level.

Both of the Seinnaban and Nya Mee Gyi portions are released at night. Seinnaban means "Diamond earrings which emphasize beauty." Nya Myee Gyi means "the great night light." These are for the professional level. If we want to compete in these competitions, we have to prepare more than two weeks before the festival. Not only the local populace, but also people from other towns and villages come to participate in the balloon competitions.

All balloons are made with traditional hand-made paper. The balloon height is between 20 to 28 feet. The wick weights at least 10 to 15 viss (1 kilo = .62 viss). A maximum of 30 viss of gun-powder is used. The balloons are made with so many beautiful designs.

The festival is held for about 7 days. The full moon day is the most crowded of the whole 7 days because this day is the most important day and we can see "Kahtein Padethapin" (meaning "the tree of plentiful items") parade in the centre of town. Many people wait beside the town road to see Padethapin until it comes around. It is

carried by people and cars. There are many group who circle around it and the group of kettle-drummers follows the groups. They start to march from the outskirts of town and go through to the centre of town and donate to the Buddhist temple, or monastery.

On the full moon night, the weather is extremely cold. Although the weather is so cold, people from Taunggyi and around Myanmar, as well as many foreign tourists, come to the festival. This night is the most crowded and nicest night. The moon shines pleasantly for them. Every person comes and waits to see the release of the hot air balloons. There are several places where the hot air balloons are released. There is also a row of stalls at the festival, a stage show, and other events that create happy times in the festival. If you are alone, you will disappear into a crowd of people.

They prepare to release their balloons. At that time, many people look at them with interest. When they finish with the preparations, they start to release them and the balloons went up slowly. The balloons float up, with many dangling fire works and multicolored lights with fire crackers spreading out from the main balloon. At this

time, people feel excitement, surprise, satisfaction and happiness. They see beautiful things come from the balloon. Then, the balloons disappear gradually into the night sky. After that, the next group in the balloon competition releases their balloons. The balloon competitions are released group by group and go on the whole night. We look at the competition until it is completed.

After seven days, there is the prize presentation ceremony. This is the celebration of all the winners' successes and achievements at the hot air balloon competitions. The prize has two kinds for amateur and professional levels. This day is a very joyous occasion for them and for us.

So, the Taunggyi hot-air balloon competition is the most popular event and the main attraction in Myanmar during the winter. If you visit the Taunggyi hot-air balloon festival, you will have a chance to see beauty and experience enjoyment. I invite you all to come and join this festival.

By Khun Po

## Tai Sar Mei Shan

I want to write about our traditional food Tai Sar Mei Shan. It is a noodle dish. My father taught me



how to make it. To make it we need yellow bean tofu, pork skin, garlic, chilies, pork intestines, peanuts and sauce that is made from rice and mustard.

First, we have to boil the noodles. For the pork intestines, we have to boil them with sauce. Then we will roast the pork skin and peanuts. We also have to chop the chilies and garlic. Finally, we put it all together and make a salad out of it. We eat it especially when we go to worship our ancestors in April before the Water Festival. When we go to worship we bring not only Tai Sar noodles, but we also need chicken, fish, rice, green tea, alcohol, three layers of pork meal, and some food that was their favorite. We also have to burn money for them because we believe they need it to spend it in next life. We do this once a year.

Most of the meal is medium cooked, and it is so delicious. This noodle dish is a very special food for us because when we eat it on that day we go to worship our ancestors. All of our relatives come and we have a meal together.

By A Sam

## Hunters in Shan State

When we talk about hunters, we always talk about gatherers as well. In ancient times, people only hunted and gathered their food. Of course, they did not unite as a society but they stayed in small groups. All these primitive people stayed within the natural environment and got their needs by hunting and gathering.

People still keep hunting and gathering until today. Yet the way they hunt and the weapons that they use are different from the ancient times. In Shan State, people who live in the villages are almost all hunters and gatherers.

There are two different ways of hunting that the Shan people use today. One is that only one or two people hunt. This kind of hunter does not have a goal for the kind of animals they will hunt. They will kill any kind of animals they see.

Another way is that eight to ten people hunt together as a group, and we call this "group hunting." These hunters have a goal to hunt only big animals like deer or goats. You will be very interested in what weapons they use in hunting. You might ask "What

other weapons except guns?" Well, the answer is "dogs." Of course dogs are only small animals but they are very useful in many ways.

Group hunting always has two or three leaders who know a lot about the forest and who separate the members in order to spread out in different directions. This idea does not mean that they hunt individually. They hunt in a circle, shouting and chasing after the prey and coming close to each other. During this time, the dogs are very helpful. When the prey goes out of the hunters' sight, the dogs show the way the prey has gone. They bark and chase after the prey and make it difficult for the prey to run.

In group hunting, all hunters have a gun. We call the person who shoots the prey Zoa Ho, which means "Headmaster." Anyone in the group can be Zoa Ho. When the prey is dead, they cut off its head and give it to Zoa Ho first. Then they distribute the rest to everyone equally.

Hunters in Shan State are sometime not safe. When they hunt deeper and deeper in the jungle, there is a forest devil that makes the other hunters look like prey and so when they shoot the prey, it turns into human

lying on the ground bleeding. Because of this devil, they kill their own group members. Sometimes, the devil will also turn the prey into the hunter's wife, who then calls out to the husband and disappears.

I am going to tell you more about the devil from stories that I have heard from the villagers who know about the devil. There was a hunter who hunted in a deep forest, and he did not see any prey until it was nearly getting dark. As he started to get out of the jungle, he saw his son calling out to him from far away and then disappear. He was curious why his son did not come close to him. He then quickly ran after his son, but he did not see him until he reached the village. As he entered the house he saw his wife and his son were having dinner. He asked his son why his son went and called him. His son said that he did not go in the forest, but he did not believe his son. The next day he hunted, he saw his wife calling him and then she disappeared. He came home and asked his wife about this and she also said that she did not go in the forest. He then realized that something unusual was going on. The next time he hunted, he saw his wife calling out to him again. He did



not believe that it was reality. He quickly shot it and he saw a deer lying dead, so he knew that it was the forest devil that turned into his wife. It is not as bad if the devil turns the animals into a person, but if it turns person into the animals, they will kill each other.

Hunters in Shan State also know when it is a good or lucky time for them to hunt. Culturally, they believe that the prey goes out during the Water Festival. So a lot of hunters are hunting on this day and they are almost always successful.

Even though sometimes they do not catch anything, and even though they face the forest devil, they still love and practice the old traditional way of hunting until today. This is how people in Shan State who live close to the environment get their food from nature.

By Hsai Lern

## Hungry for Peace

Look at the sky, the stars are shining. The clouds are clean and bright. The stream is flowing. The breeze is making the flowers, plants, and the trees dance. The birds are singing. But the fields are empty. They are missing something.

In the village, the paddy fields are full with the rice, but we get no profit and benefit from these at all. The farmers try to grow the rice for their future. They spend their money growing rice and they hope that one day they will get a benefit from their rice. They try very hard and look after their field even though they are poor.

When the rice is beautiful and ripe the farmers are very happy and they have hope for their future. But at this time, the wind is blowing and it destroys all of their rice and their hope is gone. This is also like the situation in the Burma. The winds are like the SPDC and the farmers are like the local people, and the rice is like the women in our country.

When the sun is rising, the villagers are getting up and going to their work in the

farm. At this time, the village is very peaceful. But, when the SPDC is coming, the village is like hell. They control the villagers and they commit atrocities against our people. Some have to relocate because of the SPDC. Not only are the green mountains and the fields controlled by them, but also our culture and languages. They burn the villages and they rape the women in the village. They arrest people without reason and kill many villagers.

They force the village to grow castor oil, and the SPDC forces the adult men to be porters or soldiers. Those that are porters are beaten. Also in the village, when the villagers are going to the farm, they beat them, accuse them of being spies of the SSA (Shan State Army) and say they are going to give rice to the SSA.

For the women the captain calls them to their camp and rapes them. Sometime the SPDC goes to visit a house and rapes a woman there. Many women suffer in the golden land. So, many people hope and think about what day, what year, what time they can escape and who will lead them to a brighter life and show them their rights. They had a

heavenly land in Shan State, and the time away has been long. Now, even though we have our heaven, we cannot return to these places.

The wind that blows through the paddy makes rice growing unsuccessful. But the wind did not know it harmed the paddy. But, the SPDC knows and they continue what they are doing anyway. So many people are like the paddy and they can do nothing about the wind.

Now the songs of our culture have gone and instead of these songs, the cries of our people have taken their place. We are very hungry for peace.

By Ying Ying Hsainammo

**The Life of a Villager on the Thai-Burma  
border in  
Loi Kaw Wan**

Because of the difficult situation in Burma, I came to live in Loi Kaw Wan. I want all of you to know how it is hard to live there.

Many people migrate or move from Burma because the SPDC abuses them, tortures them, and kills many people. Many ethnic groups have to move to the Thai-Burma border because the SPDC soldiers burned their houses and killed many people. The SPDC takes villagers, clothes, food, and arms.

Women who are taken have to cook for SPDC. Their lives are like slaves. Some of them will be raped until they die. Even children have to cook for the SPDC. Many people suffer like this and they don't want to stay in Burma anymore, so they have to move to the Thai-Burma border, sometimes to the Loi Kaw Wan refugee camp.

Loi Ka Wan refugee camp is near the SSA (Shan State Army), so the SSA has to take care of them. This refugee camp has many ethnic groups and different cultures traditions, and religions too. Some of the

ethnicities that live there are Lahu, Akha, Shan, and Palaung. Even though they are from different backgrounds, or come from different areas, they all help in the village.

The villagers have to stay inside the camp. Food is provided by an NGO or other organization. The food usually is not enough because there are so many people who move from everywhere. This year the number of people is increasing more than previous years and the population is going up. The people usually do not have to buy food because most people don't have any work. Sometimes, people try to go to work in Thailand but the Thai soldiers do not allow them to come inside Thailand. So, this situation is very difficult for the villagers.

This year more children have come from other areas like Meng Yorn, Meng Sard, and Meng Thone. Also, there were more births this year. So, the school doesn't have enough teachers or money to help these children. Some of the children don't have parents. They have to depend on the teachers for help and must eat with the teachers.

For the clinic or hospital, they only have basic medicine to take care of patients and give treatments to them. There are many

people and also many diseases, like malaria, diarrhea, pneumonia, asthma, and HIV/AIDS. It is difficult to give health education to the people because they don't have prior education and they don't know how to protect themselves. There are many health issues in this village camp because they don't have any idea how to take care of themselves. Additionally, there are not enough medics.

I would like to help our people and our community so I choose to live in this village and study to become a doctor. I also teach the students and I would like to share my knowledge with our people and exchange information with them.

Loi Ka Wan refugee camp needs some help from you and anyone else who wants to help them to improve or develop health education, and education for children. So, we hope to see you and welcome you to visit this refugee camp. I hope this refugee camp has more development in the coming years. We in the community will try hard to do what we can do.

By Mo Hseng



*Illustration by Kham Hseng*



## A Little Vendor Girl

There is a small town in Southern Shan State. Most of the people in this town were farmers. They worked hard in the raining season and in the hot and dry seasons; they could sell their extra food and get money. When they had money, you would see the market was full of farmers. Some of them bought clothes, make-up, clocks - things that they needed every day, and some machines for their farms. If the farmers had money, most of the sellers in the market also got a lot of money, including a small vendor girl.

She was also one seller in this market. She started her job last year. She sold clothes and got a lot of money at that time. Almost all of her clothes were gone. Therefore, she had to buy more clothes and make new designs for her little shop. She did not have anyone to help her in her job. All of her family had passed away. She had to stand on her own feet. At that time, she was 20. She believed in herself and worked hard. She did not think at all about government and politics. She just knew about her business; what she had to do and how to make new things to earn more money.

Sometimes she was in trouble with the cost between selling and buying. Sometimes she sold her clothes at a low cost and when she bought new clothes, she had to pay more than her selling price.

This is because of the conflict in the country. When she faced trouble like this, her mind changed at once. She wanted to know how they started this conflict and who "they" were. She tried to find the sources. When she knew this situation, it hurt her mind. The situation that she learned about was one about the military, of the government abusing the ethnic people and abusing the rights of all people.

When she changed her mind, she could see different kinds of people. When she was in her business, she saw that the levels of people were not the same. The rich person got richer and richer. The poor got poorer and poorer. Some rich people gave bribes to the government and did illegal jobs that earned more money. They took the place of many other businesses. This situation hurt poor people. They began to have no jobs, no money and hunger.

This little vendor girl, she wanted to escape the bad government and wanted to solve

this situation. She also said that most of the people who lived in the town did not know what kind of situation they were in. Therefore, she decided to leave her town. She decided to become a teacher at the border where they do not live under the military rules. Now, she tries to teach her children to be good and important people to rule the country. By doing things like this, she hopes that in the future, all of the people will escape this bad dream. Now her life has changed from that of a vendor to one of a political person.

By an SSSNY Student

## About My Mother

I think, in my life, a very important person is my mother. To other people their mothers are also important. My mother is important because my mother gave birth to me and she always loves me. She gives food, clothes, education and everything to me.

My mother's name is Na Hpu vey. She is 54 years old. Now she lives in Thailand in Wian Pa Pao City. She is tall and has brown skin. She has 4 children. She loves her children and the children also love their mother. But, when I was little the living situation changed and we didn't stay together. First, my father passed away when I was a young girl. Then, my family's income wasn't very good and it was very difficult to stay together. Since we were farmers we had to pay very high taxes and we didn't have enough for food. So, my mother had to find money to support her children.

She had many jobs and tried to work hard for our family. She did housework, and sometimes she went outside the house to make money for our family. It was difficult; when my mother lived in Burma, she couldn't go anywhere so it was hard to find a job. She was a farmer and raised domestic animals such

as pigs, chickens, cows and buffalo, and she grew vegetables. She shared the vegetables and helped others. She didn't have much academic knowledge, but she was happy with her life.

Now she lives in the city in Thailand. My mother can't read and write English or Burmese, but now she can move a little more easily and stay with many people anyway. She can do everything; she has access to better jobs. My mother teaches me jobs, how to believe in religion, how to cook, how to do housework and how to study for my education. She shows the right way to me. So, my mother supports me until now. I can't fully explain my mother's kindness - it is invaluable for me. God bless my mother.

By an SSSNY Student

## Flowing Christmas Day

In my culture, there are many kinds of holidays such as the New Crop Celebration, Happy New Year and Christmas Day. Even though I have celebrated Christmas Day every year, it is never old in my mind. I cannot forget my early years with my parents, friends and neighbors when we celebrated Christmas together on the 25<sup>th</sup> of December, even though I have been separated from them. I would like to tell you about how we celebrate Christmas Day in my village in Eastern Shan State.

Most of our people are farmers and we are from the hillside. The villagers farm all year round but they finish their harvest time before December. In particular, we are all excited to reach the month of December. At the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> of December, we start cleaning our house and also we buy ornaments such as a Christmas bell and Christmas trees to keep in the house. Every family goes to the city and buys new clothing for every child, including clothes for them to celebrate on Christmas Day.

We decorate the church with different kinds of beautiful flowers that bloom in the

village and trees in order to celebrate on Christmas Day. From the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup>, every youth comes to church and we practiced Christmas songs. After practicing our song, we start choir singing near the village on the 18<sup>th</sup> of December until the 23<sup>rd</sup>. At that time, the weather is very cool and everybody shakes with cold while singing songs. It seemed that the weather allowed the people to feel the perfect Christmas in the coldest season.

Then, on the 18<sup>th</sup> of December, we start walking at 6:00 in the evening and cross through the forest and valleys to reach another village in order to sing a song. One year, the sky was pure dark on that night but the stars were giving off as much light as they could. We were so happy and forgot to be tired. On the street, we talked about our feelings about Christmas Day. When we reached another village, they warmly welcomed us. Then, we started singing a song at every house until midnight. Sometimes, if the village was large, we had to sing songs all night without sleeping. But, all of the youth did not have a desire to sleep because happiness was in everyone's mind when they

were singing. Usually, we finished singing songs on the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of December.

Moreover, on the morning of the 24<sup>th</sup> day, we go to the church and decorate again. In the evening at 6:00pm, everyone comes to the church and we start to play several games and activities around the church. One year, it was very wonderful; the sky was very bright and we saw the lights from the sky throughout the area. The air was full of Christmas songs and people's laughing. For this reason, everyone's mind was blissful at that time. We could not say in words how blissful we were.

After playing several games and activities, we start praise and worship at 12:00 at night. At 12:00, we say "Merry Christmas" at the same time and we shake hands with each other. Then, the pastor preaches about the word of God and how Jesus Christ was incarnated and born on the Earth for all the people who had sin on Christmas Day. When the preaching is finished, we start to eat rice soup cooked with chicken. After that, we talk with each other and wait until the morning of the 25<sup>th</sup> of December. This day is very important for us because we believe that Jesus Christ was born on this



day in order to come and save people who are full of sin.

We take a rest for a while and then everyone comes to the church at 8:00 in the morning. We praise and worship from 8:00 to 12:00 on Christmas Day. After that, we celebrate Christmas Day with many activities and traditional games all day long.

All in all, the world is developing and changing quickly, but for these hill people, they are not interested in changing their environment and their lifestyle. All they want is for their culture to exist from generation to generation, and to celebrate the Holy Christmas day until the end of the world.

By Rebecca

## Water festival in Keng Tung, Eastern Shan State

Keng Tung is the capital of eastern Shan State. There are many ethnic groups in Keng Tung. The central area of the city has a lake and big pagoda. We call the lake "Norng Tung" and the pagoda is called "Zawn Kham." Norng Tung is a little far from Zawn Kham. But, where we live in Norng Tung, we can see Zawn Kham, too. Keng Tung is surrounded by the mountains, like a pan - this means the city sits between the mountains. The Water festival there starts in April and goes from the 13 to 16. Many people get excited because this custom is very different than those of other countries.

In Keng Tung on April 13, they hang a big drum and make a statue in the center of the city. They begin the drum hanging on April 13 at noon and keep it up until April 14 at noon. During this period of time they have to hit the drum until they send the drum to the river. The person who hits the drum wears a red suit. They cannot stop hitting the drum until they are tired, and when that happens they have someone who is ready to change with them. At night, they have many

people in the drumming area. They wash the big drum and statue because they believe that if they wash the drum, they will be healthy or in their next life they will be beautiful or handsome. When we go to wash the drum, we use clean water or holy water. So, in our next life we will be beautiful or handsome or lucky. This belief comes from the old people.

On April 14, many people go to send the drum to the river. The river is called "Nam Khern." At noon, many people come to stay at the place that hangs the drum. If it is time to go, many people follow the drum and statue, and they have a man dressed like a prince to ride the horse to follow them too. The drum and statue are carried by the chosen people. Many people go with them; some go by foot, or ride motorbikes and cars. At the river, people have a big frog figure that is made from sand, and recite Buddhist scriptures. When the drum and statue arrive at the river, they have to leave the statue at the river but the drum has to be taken back. After they leave the statue, the people responsible for the drum have to bring the big drum back the same way while the

person in the red suit hits the drum. If they don't send the drum this way, and do these customs one time every year, many people believe something will happen to our city. So, every year we have to do the ceremony like this, because there is this belief.

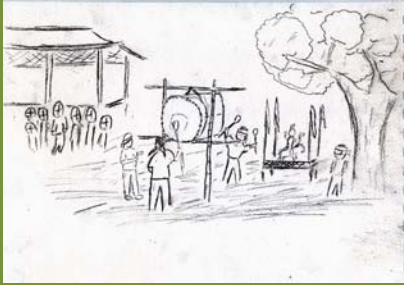
On this day some families make a traditional cake covered with leaves. Then, we share our cake with our neighbors, relatives, or guests. Most people make this cake during the Water Festival because this is also for the New Year. They donate some to the monastery too.

On April 15 in the afternoon, children, adults, old people and monks go to a river and take as much sand as they can to the monastery. Every Buddhist would do this. My parent said if we can take a lot of sand it is good luck. Some people have a car so they take as much sand in their car as they can to donate to the monastery. People believe if we donate the water and sand, this can make us lucky or rich in our next life. On this day, some families go to the cemetery to make an offering to the deceased, such as cleaning the tomb, offering something, or

changing the vases and flowers in the cemetery. On April 16 the old people, and some women who have husbands or children go to the monastery. They usually go for the whole day, but some stay only a half-day and then go back to their house.

After the water festival many people go to visit the countryside. They go to offer at the pagoda and spend the whole day visiting there. Even when the water festival finishes, in the countryside they still play water with people who come to visit the pagodas. On this day, we are wet the whole day. At that time in the city it is quiet and there are not many people in the city, because many people travel and some visit the countryside. People also joke to each other that they are one year older than before. Everyone has a wonderful time during the water festival.

By  
Lieng Lern



*Illustrations by Lieng Lern*

## My Town

Long, blue mountains circle around Shan State and the trees there are green. Some people live in the hills but many people live in the plains. When we climb the mountains we pass many small villages. They are home to the Palaung ethnic group. Also there are waterfalls. Oh! I am very excited; this waterfall is so beautiful and peaceful. The Palaung ethnic group uses this waterfall. It is very helpful for them in many ways.

In the winter, the snow covers all of the forest. There it is very cold. But on the mountain it is high; the land there can get sunlight earlier than on the plain. On the plain, we can't see sunlight until 1 PM because of fog. When winter has arrived in December, the pink flowers blossom on the trees in the forest. The flower's name is Cherry. In our language we call it "Mawk Kawn."

Our town is not too big. Many ethnic groups live in our town, such as Kachin, Palaung, Chinese, Burman and Indian. Most of the people are Tai, or Shan. Outside the town there is also the Irrawaddy River, which has many uses. Many people depend on this

river. They get food from the river, and they also use the water for agriculture. For transportation around town we use cars, motorbikes, and bicycles.

In our town we have a big market. Many people sell goods in the market. The goods are clothes, vegetables and other items. Many people in the town and also from the hills come and sell things. A variety of goods are available on that day.

Our town has a historical monument of Chao Sher Purg, a mythical white tiger. The statue of Chao Sher Purg is in the center of town. Also in the center is a temple that during colonialism the British came and burnt. But the temple is now very peaceful. We also have many parks. Many Chinese people come and visit our town.

Most of the people are Buddhist and many ethnic people are Christian. We have a hospital that the English built during colonialism, and we also have increased the number of primary schools, and high schools. But we don't have a university. After we pass high school, we have to attend a university in another town. In the summer, we attend Shan school in our town, and we have a Chinese school that opens every month.



We have many holidays that we celebrate every month. The most crowded festival is in September because this month is the end of the Buddhist lent. This festival is a part of our culture that we have practiced for many generations. At this time, there are old grandfathers, grandmothers, young boys and young girls who go to pay respect at the temple. We usually go on foot but sometime we go by car. All of the grandfathers and grandmothers go to the temple first. Young boys and young girls wait a few minutes and then come to the temple. We *wai* (pay respect to) the Buddha and the monks at the same time. After that we eat a snack, and then we go to other villages to pay respect. We pay respect for three days. Even though there will be many young people who have weddings, in our culture in the three months of the Buddhist lent we don't have any weddings. This is the old cultural belief that we have practiced for many generations.

We have many things to show you and share about our town, and you are welcome to visit. This is our peaceful and beautiful Nam Kham town.

By Harm Khurh

## Thamanae Festival

Thamanae is one of the most famous Burmese traditional foods. It is a kind of sticky rice cake. It is made with sticky rice and it includes peanuts, sesame, ginger salad, and coconut. We make this thamanae in Tabodwe in the third month of Burmese year.

Tabodwe is the time at the end of winter and the beginning of summer. On the full moon day of this month we have a fire festival. Here we offer the fire to the Buddha to keep him warm. We believe that we offer the fire to the Buddha and the weather will change to become hot, and this is the beginning of hot season. On the full moon day or full moon eve, everywhere in Burma the people in the village will find a time to make Thamanae. After making Thamanae they will make an offering to the Buddha on the full moon day and also make an offering to the old people to show that the young people pay respect to them. It is the custom of the people in Burma.

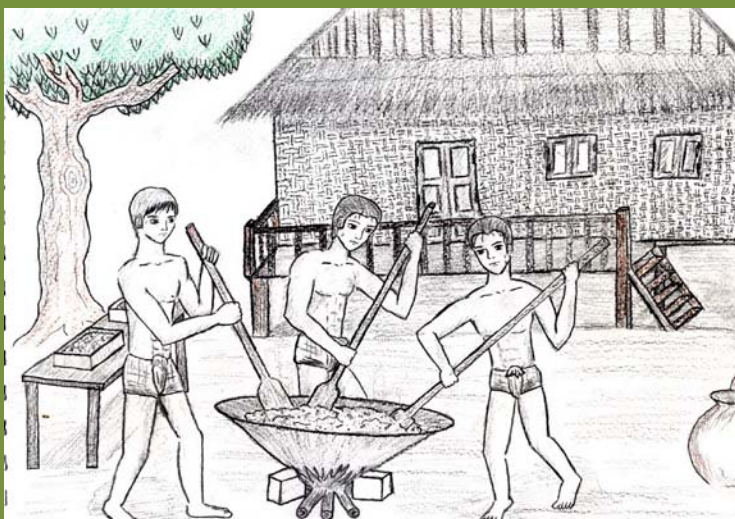
The way of making Thamanae is also interesting. Making Thamanae is hard work because they make it all at once, using about

10 kilos of rice. So, it is always the strong young men who make the Thamanae. The first step for making Thamanae is we have to wash the sticky rice and soak it in the water for one night. We need some garlic, onion and ginger. The onion and garlic will be sliced and then we will chop the ginger. Then we need a big pan to combine the ingredients. We put the oil into the pan and put the onion, garlic, and the ginger in. After that, we put in the rice and cook it with some water. Then, three strong men use a paddle and turn it up and down and use the paddle to press it to be sticky until it is well done. Then we have to turn the fire off and use the banana leaves to cover it and keep it for a moment. Then we put it on the fire again and we have to put peanuts, sesame and coconut in it. For the coconut, we have to slice it and fry it first before we put it into the rice. After that Thamanae is ready to eat.

In this period while some are making Thamanae, others will sing songs or perform dramas for them. This is a happy time for the young people to cooperate. After Thamanae is ready, they will share with every

house and offer it to the Buddha on the full moon day.

By Lieng Khurh



*Illustration by Lieng Khurh*

## A White Market into Red

My village name is Mong Yaw, located in Lashio Division, Northern Shan State, Burma. In our village, we are separated into four small parts; East, West, North, and South. Our village is the main one and we have many small villages around us. Most of them live on the mountain and do agriculture for their livelihood. Therefore, our village was more civilized than them.

The main market was also situated at our village and every fifth day was a market day. The villagers around us came and sold their crops. From the money they got, they would buy all their needs to last until the next market day. They just could save a very small amount of money. They were very happy buying and selling their crops. They even sang traditional songs while they relaxed. Therefore, it was like a kind of festival.

One market day was very terrible; however, the people did not know in advance what would happen. They just bought and sold their goods as usual. The market was very crowded and noisy, but it was a happy noise. Some sold their crops and talked to their friends. Some were eating their favorite

foods. Some were relaxed because they worked late into the night and had not had a rest yet. Some were singing their traditional songs. As always, they seemed very happy on this market day.

Unfortunately, about fifty SPDC soldiers suddenly surrounded the market and all of the people were very shocked and tried to escape. The market became very noisy and seemed more crowded than before. It was a terrible noise: people were shouting, crying, running, some were beaten until they were nearly dead and there was blood everywhere. However, some could escape. They left everything and ran as fast as they could. Then, the soldiers gave the order to have the men stay and that all women could be set free. They beat the remaining villagers and collected all the things they wanted. They beat people nearly to death if the villagers tried to run. The villagers always tried to break free because they already knew that the SPDC soldiers were very cruel and inhumane. However, they never got a chance. The reason they caught the villagers on this day was to make them Army porters. An Army porter is someone who is forced to carry the Army's food, clothes and guns without any payment or

adequate food to eat - sometimes they have no food to eat. They tied them together and separated them into groups. It made the soldiers able to control them easily. Finally, they left the market with the captured villagers and no one was left in the market place.

The market was like a heaven created by the innocent villagers' happy activities such as singing, selling their crops, eating their favorite food and buying their needs. These things were thrown away by the SPDC soldiers. Therefore, the white and pure market changed to the red of the villagers' blood, and the market that was once crowded and noisy was silenced.

By an SSSNY Student

## Novice's Life

I was born in 1985. I started to be a novice monk at the age of 8. I was a novice monk for over one year. In the Temple, we had different rules compared to when I wasn't a novice monk. I was both a novice at the Temple, and a novice at the house or forest.

When I entered the Temple, I had two reasons for becoming a monk. One was that I wanted to study, and the other was to avoid being a soldier. In my family, there are five of us; my mother, older brother, grandfather and grandmother. My father died when I was two years old. My grandfather loved me more than my older brother, and my grandmother loved my older brother more than me so we often had problems.

Additionally, in 1990- 1995 the Mong Tai Army (MTA) was so strong, they gave us the rule that for one family "if you have more than one son you have to send your son to us." They also said all people in Shan State must become a soldier at the age of 18 except females and monks. They made a rule that one family could not have more than two sons at home. I hated the Mong Tai Army and I was so afraid to be a soldier. I knew that



if I was a soldier I risked death all the time because a soldier must obey orders and may be placed on the frontline. I often told my mother that I wanted to study but my mother told me, "We were poor. We could not pay the money and also it is so far to go to school in the city."

Then, one day an official paper was sent to my family. It said that, "one male from your family must come to join our Army as we know that your family has more than two males." My mother read it and she was silent, and then suddenly she cried. I asked her why but she said nothing to me. At that time I was 8 years old. My grandfather brought me to the soldier camp and showed me to them. One major told my grandfather, "He is too young - wait for ten years until he is old enough to be a soldier and then send him to us again." Meanwhile, my mother cried and screamed at home; "He is too young! How can he be a soldier?" She cried all day. When my grandfather and I came back home, my mother smiled and she looked happy again. When we all sat together my mother suddenly thought of a new idea. " Oh! I should send my son to the Temple - this is the best way." So, I

was a novice monk for over one year from 1994-1995.

In the Temple there were so many rules for the monks and for the novice monks to follow. When I was a novice monk I always was hungry because when I lived with my family I ate three times a day, but as a novice monk I ate only two times a day. There was never enough food when I ate. In the morning, we ate at half past 5. Then we would worship for over one hour. At 8 AM we started our class, and studied until half past 10. In the afternoon, some of the novices on duty or the cooks had to find vegetables until after 4 pm. When they came back, some of them had to collect firewood and some had to collect water. After they collected the vegetables and firewood, they then prepared for the next morning.

One morning, one young novice tried to teach me something I did not understand. He gave me three strikes on my back with a long stick and it hurt so much. I could not sleep well that night. I was so afraid and I did not want to study any more. I wanted to leave the Temple; I thought every night about escaping. Not only for this reason, but also because some older novice monks hit me and

knocked me on my head whenever I played with my toys. Some of them jumped over my head whenever I sat down. I couldn't complain - if I complained they hurt me. When I had some money I kept it in my pillow, but they would take it whenever I visited my family. Finally, in 1995 I left the Temple.

From 1995-1996, the Mong Tai Army surrendered to the SPDC. Villages in Southern Shan State were relocated and villagers were tortured, captured and forced to be porters. Some of them were killed. My family and I had to hide from SPDC soldiers, so we went into the deep mountains for 5 months. At this time I was still a novice but I lived with my family. This was difficult because I still thought about my rules that I had to keep as a novice, even though I longer lived in the Temple.

In the forest we did not have enough food. We ate bamboo shoots and anything else that we could eat. One day, other families like us came and saw us and we all decided to go to the city. While we were traveling it was very hard. We could not walk during the day - we had to walk at night. It took three days to arrive in the city. In the city we had no area to build our house and it was so

difficult for us to find a place to live. My mom borrowed money from her friend and she sent me to Thailand so I could avoid becoming a soldier, and so I could study. I lived in Thailand for over 6 years. At that time I could neither read nor write. I started learning Thai language. As it was not my mother tongue, it was very difficult for me.

We did not know we were victims of human right abuses, so when I finally realized that I was so sad and angry. When I lived in Thailand I felt I had no future as I had no Thai document and also I did not have any rights that Thai people had. They always said I was illegal and they treated me worse than an animal. I had no choices, and I felt very isolated. No one wanted to talk to me as I could not speak Thai language well.

One day, I saw the news about SSA-S (Shan State Army-South) fighting with SPDC around the Thai-Shan border. I was excited and I decided to go to Loi Tai Leng, a camp on the border, to be a soldier. When I arrived, I asked to become a soldier. They said, "You are still young - you cannot be a soldier. To be a soldier you must be 18 years old." So, they put me in school first.

At that time I did not know their rules, and I thought I could be a soldier. So at first I did not want to study, but later I saw the value of education so it made me want to study more and more. I started at fifth grade and I finished post-nine. I applied to SSSNY and luckily I was selected, so now I feel I have hope. If I return to the community, I will share the knowledge that I have been given at the SSSNY Training.

By Tun Yee

## On My Holiday

A beautiful bird is flying through our house and comes back to a tree near my house. The birds are singing very sweetly. I wake up and I am listening to the bird's song. After that I get up and open the window, then look out. The sunlight is coming out from between the mountains. The sunlight is very bright and makes me more awake. I look at my table clock; it is 7:00 AM. It is not late for me because today is my holiday. I take a shower for about 10 minutes and I have some breakfast with my family. At 7:30 AM, I am sitting in front of my house and waiting for my friend. Then my friend comes to my house.

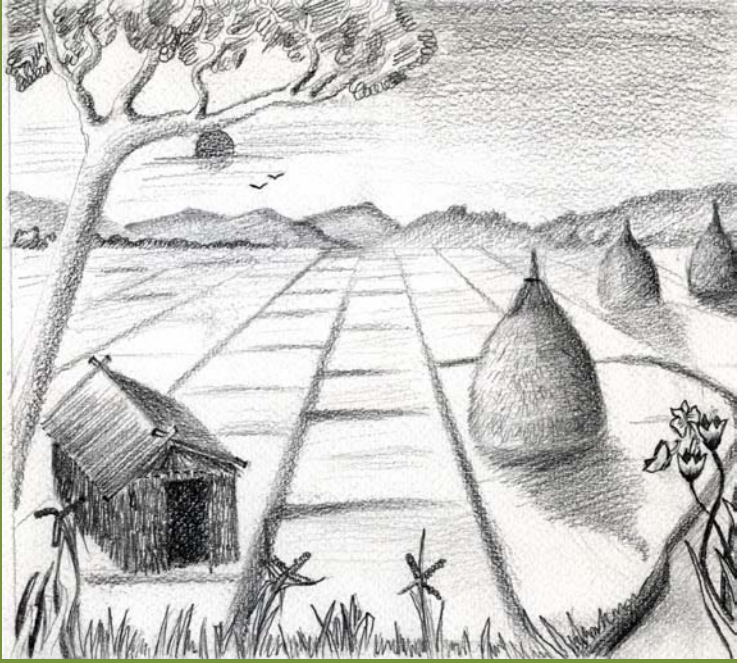
Today in our village we have a race in the farms, so we will go to look at the race. In the race they will see who can plant the rice crops the fastest. This time is very peaceful and very beautiful. The rice crops are green and the water is full in the paddy.

In the race, they make two groups; group one is men, group two is women. The race starts at 9:00AM. The women's race is very fast and serious. The men's race is very good looking because they are having fun and planting very slowly. The race finishes

at 11:00AM. Then the headman of the village gives the prize to the winners. We have lunch with our villagers in a farm hut.

In the afternoon we go to visit the mountains. Inside the forest there are many tall trees, and we find dry firewood there, so we take some firewood and carry it home. On the way, we collect some vegetables beside the street. We stop near a stream and drink water. The water is very cold and makes us tired. At this time, the twilight is very beautiful and the sun is slowly coming down between the mountains. When we arrive home, it is very dark. I take a shower and I have dinner. Today I'm very tired and I go to sleep early.

By Lao Perng



*Illustration by Hsai Lern*



## **New Crop Ceremony**

The new crop ceremony is one of the most important ceremonies for Lahu people. It is also part of our culture. It is essential for all Lahu to celebrate this ceremony. In October, all of the Lahu people will help each other to bring some of their crops to church. Also, many friends will join our new crop ceremony.

At 12 o'clock, all people will have lunch together happily. At lunch, there are many kinds of curry. One important curry is the curry that we make with pork, chili, and onion. The most important ingredient is the bark of the Burmese Gway Ti tree. Then we pack these ingredients with a banana leaf and grill it. The curry is very delicious. Also we put out vegetables and we eat these together with the curry. The curry is essential for our new crop ceremony.

During the ceremony the parents will buy new shirts for their children. In the evening after dinner there is a concert for all adults and children. They will come together to sing a song. When we finish the concert, all friends play some fun games in a

circle around a fire. Everyone is very happy with the ceremony and enjoys it until it ends at 12 o'clock.

By an SSSNY Student

## Traditional Paste (Nam Phit Phoo)

There is a Shan delicious traditional paste; in Shan, we call it "Nam Phit Phoo." This paste is very popular among Shan people. Even if you have only tasted it once, it is sure that you will want to continue to taste it and have it repeatedly. When I first tried it, I did not want to stop eating the paste. I just wanted to eat it continuously until it was finished, but my mother told me not to eat too much. Moreover, my mother told me that she would teach me how to make it the next time and how to do it myself anytime I wanted to have it.

This is the way we make "Nam Phit Phoo." First, we will take everything we need - soya beans, peanuts, fish, tomatoes, green chilies, garlic, salt, seasoning powder, and a mortar and pestle. Then we will have to prepare some leaves to eat with the paste like cauliflower, cabbage, green grass, cucumber, bamboo shoot, aubergin and so on. It depends on you as to which leaves you would like to eat it with. Then we will roast the fish and soya beans, groundnuts, garlic, tomatoes, and chilies, and let them cool to be able to pound them. You pound the peanuts and soya beans; next, you put

them together and drain them. After that, you put some chillies in it, and then put in a pinch of salt, and seasoning powder. Secondly, pour a little bit of water in it and mix it all together. After that, you can have a taste: if your paste needs something, you can put in what you need. Pour your paste into a bowl and prepare.

Finally, you take your bowl and take the vegetables that you have sorted out, and eat them with the paste. At this time, it is very delicious and you will also sweat because the paste is very hot. Although it is hot, you will not want to move your hand from the paste bowl. The paste bowl has an influence over you. You cannot avoid it anymore. You cannot forget the taste of the paste when you hear its name: "Nam Phit Phoo".

By Galaxy

## Hill Land

I was 3 years old; we lived in a small village in the hill lands. At that time, my father was one of the Kachin Leaders of the Independence Army. My father usually lived in the forest, far away from the village. The SPDC soldiers were always coming to our village; they destroyed whatever they wanted, just the same as now.

When they arrived at our village my father had to run away to the forest. Some made a big hole in the ground to hide in during fights with the SPDC. After the SPDC went back, everything was broken down. We were very hungry in the forest because we did not have time to take food and we could not carry a lot of bags. SPDC soldiers came once or twice a month.

Our village was very far away from city, so we didn't have a clinic, teachers or a regular school. We had a small school which my father built for the village, but not enough teachers. My mother and her friend taught the students. At that time, I was so young I was still on the back of my mother. My mother said students would wait

in front of the school for their teachers to come. When she saw her student's faces, my mom cried. Some children had no parents; they came with no food for lunch, so my mom had to bring food for them.

One day, the SPDC soldiers came again and the villagers ran away. But, at this time my mother and our family could not run, because I was ill and my sister was sick too. It was just my mom and her little daughters left behind. Then soldiers came to our house and they beat my Mom, and asked about my father: "Where does he live???" And then they burned our house and village. Finally, they did not see my father, and they did not have an answer for where he was. Therefore, they said a terrible and cruel word to my mom. They threatened my mom, saying "We are going to rape your daughter, and kill you, if you don't tell us where your husband is." They wanted to find my father, to kill him. But, God always took care of us and the village. They did not kill my mom or harm us. After that, it was very difficult to survive day to day because of the war's impact on our village. Everyone had lost their house, farm, food and animals.

"Therefore, I hate the military government." My mother said that when I was young until now. At that time, I did not know language very well but my mother said that about SPDC, even though then I did not understand. I'm not the only one - we all have a cause to hate the Burmese military. That is one of my stories.

By Jenny



*Photo by Jenny*

## **Bleeding Behind a Small House**

After Ne Win's military took over power in 1962 until now (2007), our Shan people face difficulty in their lives in living on their own land. Hundreds of thousands of people have suffered in Southern Shan State - some of them were killed by SPDC; some disappeared in situations that the military has covered up. Nowadays when we think about this, we are very sad. We have known that human rights are very important to people all over the world, but in Shan State, we still have many human right violations. When I was young I had experiences with human rights violations, and even now I still hear about these abuses. When I asked "why do these things happen?" no one could tell me until now.

My experience that I still remember is; in 1996, I saw dead people! There were 25 men and 15 women that had been killed by SPDC. At that time, I was very scared of the situation which had happened in the jungle of Tem Vong Mong Nai. My relatives were killed there and my father disappeared during this situation, and until now no one tells me if he is still alive or



not. Before this fighting, my father was forced to carry bombs for SPDC soldiers.

After my father disappeared, I went to find food with my mother in the forest in Far Zong Mong Nai. That morning I was still cooking and I was blowing the fire. Then I heard a sharp noise from the two tents next to our tent. I know this is the noise of shouting guns. At that time my Mum jumped up into our tent, took the beef then jumped down. She pulled my hand, and my younger brother and my older sister took one shirt and we ran away, ran down in the valley. I still remember my Mum said to us "tonight we have to sleep here my sons and my daughter and please be quiet, don't make any noise." After one day, the lid of my cooking pot was still in my hand. But I didn't know why I took it with me. My Mum said to me "You are very stupid; throw it away," and I threw it in the bush.

After three days, we returned to our tent and saw that our carts were burned and our food, rice and our pigs and cows are gone too. I still remember, my Mum cried and hugged me and my brother and sister. After that, we moved to another place. We lived in this new place 15 days and then the same

problem happened again. Unfortunately, my Mum was sick and my sister took my Mum to the city for a cure, but she was not fine and she had to stay far away from all of us.

During the moon in 1997, maybe January, my sister took me and my younger brother to go to the city " Kho Lum." We lived in the city for 15-20 days because we had no food, and my loving sister had to go and find food in the same places that my mother and my father got food. This time we took our younger brother to go and live with the monks at the temple at Kho Lum. I still remember that my brother said to me "please bring more and more food from the jungle because we have to live together forever, even if we have no parents." These words are still in my mind until today; I never forgot them.

After that, we have to go far away from my brother for food. We went to the jungle called "Thak Led" near Far Zong village. Therefore, we built a new tent with our neighbors in this area. There were about 10 houses in that area. I remember my tent faced the South and was made with bamboo. Behind our tent there was a small tower that we had to keep some rice needed to feed the cows and buffalo.

One month later, I left my loving sister again to find food because we needed more food to live in the city for a long time. Our food was not enough to sustain our lives in the city for a long time, so I had to go another place to find it. Unfortunately, not so long after I smiled and say goodbye to her (her name was Nang Suon or Nang Ying), I heard guns' noises at our camp. Therefore, I stopped walking and waited for about five hours. After five hours, I ran back quickly and hid myself outside the camp for a few hours. I saw burning houses and I was very anxious. I was breathing hard and I looked through my half-burning tent and saw too much blood around the tower behind my house. I went there and saw my loving sister not breathing and sleeping in her blood from her body, so I started to cry. Then I stopped breathing for a while and cried again until it was dark. I walked with too much fear to return to the city Kho Lum.

I met my brother in the temple, he had no hair, and he smiled at me, welcomed me. Then he asked me, "Why didn't our sister come with you? Where is she, and do you have food now?" I could not answer him, so I was very sad and my tears were dropping again. I

cannot answer his questions until now. I am very sorry to him because I still lie to him. I left him in 1997 or 1998 - at that time he was young and I could not say anything to him. When I left him, I made a second lie to him, and did not tell him where I was going.

Fortunately, in 2007 at SSSNY I met him at the opening ceremony for school. I was very happy that day, and I am very proud of the SSSNY staff and teachers for calling him so we could meet each other again. I am also very thankful to our school, which helps me to see my brother.

I cannot forget all of these situations. The thing that stays in my heart all the time is the bleeding of my sister behind the small house. I think this history is very bad in my life and a dark secret that has no light to show me. This history makes me know that the people who live in Burma without rights are treated less than animals. It makes me feel like there is a rope hanging around my neck all the time.

By Sai Lieng

## Refugee

People who are refugees are sad. Everyday they aren't happy. Their tears fall onto the ground all the time. They never have freedom in their life. They have to stay in the forest and mosquitoes bite them. They don't have a house. If the rain falls, they will be wet. They don't have food to eat. They are hungry. The children cry because the children are very hungry and they can't forget the hunger. Their parents go to find fruits and vegetables for their children. They don't make noise because they are afraid the soldiers will come and kill them. They don't have clothes to change into when they are wet. Even if they want to sleep, they can't because they have to sleep on the ground without a bed. They don't have a blanket. They are cold.

The refugees hope other people will come and help them. Every day, all the time, they hope to escape this life.

By Kham Hseng

## Visit to the Royal Garden

A few months ago, the SSSNY students, staff and cooks went to visit the Royal Garden. This Garden is very big and very interesting for me. It has lots of flowers, different temples and buildings. A lot of Thai people and different ethnic groups came to visit. We all enjoyed visiting the garden.

At the Garden, the people made firecrackers of many styles. At that time, I was very surprised and happy to see that. Then they started to dance with their traditional dress and I saw that was very different from our culture. I was very excited and proud of myself, because in my life, I never dreamed to see something like this. After that, all of the students took photos with each other and we were so glad.

In the evening we had dinner. We opened our rice boxes and ate together near the lake. We enjoyed our dinner. At that time, the sky was a little dark and I missed my family and my country so much, because there I have never been to a festival like this. Everything was different from our

country. A little later, my friends came and talked to me and I forgot about my thoughts. Then, we went around the garden from one part to another part and we saw different types of flowers and took photos. Soon we went to see a Thai traditional theater show. This was also strange for me and interesting to see.

On the bus ride home, our friends talked about their visit and how happy they were. At 10 PM we arrived at the school and we were all tired. After I took a shower, I took a rest.

When I visited the Royal Garden, I got a lot of information and saw many different kinds of flowers. This made me very happy. Then I thought I was a lucky girl to attend SSSNY. This opportunity is important in improving my life. In conclusion, I want to advise and encourage everyone who has never visited the garden, to go and be able to see how beautiful it is.

By Ah Pai

## Green Tea

Summer is ending. The season to pluck the tea leaves is coming. The villagers are preparing their materials for plucking the tea leaves. They are very busy with weaving baskets to put the tea leaves in, and mats for drying the steamed tea leaves. They make all their materials to be ready before the Water Festival.

After the Water Festival, the villagers start to pluck the tea leaves. Plucking at this time is the best time to get "best tea" or, as we call in our language, "Shwefy." We divide the tea depending on the time of plucking. If plucking after April or May we call these "the first leaves," and leaves from June to October are called "the middle leaves." Then we have special ways to make tea. First, we steam the tea leaves that we have plucked with boiled water for five minutes. Instead of putting them into the water, we steam them. If we boil it, its original sweet taste will be lost. So, by steaming it, you not only get a good taste but also get a good smell. Secondly, we mix the steamed tea leaves together to become



soft. Third, we spread the steamed tea leaves on the mat until the next morning. Then in the morning we dry it under the sun. In the evening we collect the dry tea leaves and sort them out to be two kinds of teas. They are called "best tea" and "good tea." People are happy to make it even though the ways to make it are difficult. In addition, the traders are happy to trade tea, because its cost is not very expensive and it is famous. It also plays an important role in our society. People believe that drinking tea can not only reduce the diseases like cancer, but also create friendship. For example, we welcome our guests with this tea. We drink it and chat with each other.

Thus, we keep drinking tea as a way of creating friendship and as a way of keeping our custom.

By an SSSNY Student



*Photo by an SSSNY Student*

## **Manau Dance Festival**

The Manau dance is very famous and important tradition for Kachin people. The Manau dance is usually performed on a special or auspicious day. There are many kinds of Manau dances, such as Sut Manau, Padang Manau, and Ding Shawng Manau.

Sut Manau is usually danced when there is economic prosperity. Padang Manau is danced when there is victory in war and before going to the war in order to organize and get power and energy, and to conquer in the war. It is also danced when a king or leader dies, or when we start to build a village or town. Ding Shawn Manau is danced when there is a new house, building or palace.

In the Manau dance, there are thousands of people that can participate and dance at the same time, so the people are known as enthusiastic dancers. A Manau dance festival lasts at least a week and has 3 or 4 days of dance. People dance in the Manu Park. The Manau Park is a round flat area and in the center of the Park there is a large Manau pillar.

For the Manau pillar there are 6 strength pillars and 4 cross pillars. On

these pillars there are many drawn symbols and patterns of our Kachin culture. People dance around this pillar led by 4 leaders in 2 groups. The main two leaders are at the front of the line and people are flowing behind them. So, the two leaders are very important for this dance. If they are wrong the dance can be destroyed because a lot of people are dancing and all of these people follow them. We believe a mistake can cause the leader to die. So, they must not be wrong when they are dancing.

Near the Manau pillar there is an instrumental group and a singing group. There is a long and large drum, and a lot of gongs that provide the main rhythm for the dance. Beside the pillar there is long tower for special singing. People dance wearing many types of colorful and beautiful clothes, and dance 1 or 2 times a day. Men use a long sword while dancing. Women use a handkerchief and fan. In this dance, many people come from far away to join the dancing festival with the crowd.

The Manau festival is owned by a family, and that family is usually the Du Wa (the leader of the Kachin people). In the

past, the festival owner has to give food to the people who come to this dance.

By dancing in this Manau Festival, people are more organized, get strong power, and are united. In this time, many relatives meet and are happy. So, today Manau festivals are often danced where Kachin people live. In Asam, India, Yunan, China and Burma, there are large Manau Parks. By dancing in Manau Festival we get grace from God. This is what the Kachin believe about the Manau Festival.

By Doi Awng

## My Holiday Trip

At the end of March, our family and my uncles were making gun powder for hunting in the jungle. Before we went, we were discussing wild animals and how to protect ourselves from them. In April, we went to the jungle and before we arrived in the jungle we crossed a small village.

When we passed through this village, the headman welcomed us when we arrived at his house. At that time, our trip coincided with the water festival of Shan State. So, at his house his wife was cooking for us and the headman put some alcohol on our table for us to drink. And then when his wife was finished cooking, we all ate together and the headman put some alcohol in our glass to drink.

After this meal, we all walked into the jungle. When we arrived there some people were cooking dinner; some people were making a camp to stay in and some people were looking for dry branches to make a cooking fire. After setting up, we started hunting in the jungle. My uncles arrived at camp first with a rooster. Other people came back empty-handed. Before we went to sleep we

drank tea and talked about what happened when we were hunting.

The next morning after our meal we all climbed up the mountain. Only my father stayed in the valley to make a fire. He made a fire in the bush and at that time we had already taken position to shoot animals coming out from the bush. Then, the fire became very strong. Suddenly, a black thing came out in front of me. I was very excited - my hands were shaking, and I shot it. Then, I climbed down to follow the thing and as soon as I arrived there it was already dead with lots of blood on its skin. At that time I saw very clearly that the black thing was a pig. Then we put its meat on the fire to dry, and we drank tea and talked.

After three days, we were all bored of staying in the jungle. Fortunately at this time the headman came and met us. Our camp and his village were only 2 miles apart, so they knew where we stayed. He invited us to come to his home to celebrate the water festival and we agreed to go to his house. We went to his home, drank a lot of alcohol, and danced with beautiful girls. It was their tradition. After the water festival we went back to the jungle. We didn't get any

more animals; we got only the pig. Finally,  
we went back to the city.

By an SSSNY Student



## One Amazing Couple in Shan State

45 years ago, there was a boy and a young girl. The boy's name was Sai Luu and the young girl's name was Nang Nyo. Sai Luu lived in Hsipaw, which is one of the ancient towns of the Shan Prince. This town is very nice and has plenty of vegetables, fruits and natural resources. It has one of the most famous pagodas in Hsipaw named "Baw Kyo Pagoda." This pagoda is situated in the west of Hsipaw, seven miles from town. Sai Luu left Hsipaw to pursue a degree and graduated with a Geology major at Mandalay College-University in 1957.

Nang Nyo lived in a village about two hundred miles from Hsipaw. She was a country person who had never been to school or traveled, but she was also a very beautiful young girl. Her father was the headman of the village and her family had property with cows, buffaloes, paddy fields and a plot of farmland.

In 1959, Sai Luu joined the revolution with his friends because Ne Win's government wanted to destroy the Shan Kings. The situation in Shan State was unstable. Some princes were arrested by Ne Win's government.

Sai Luu joined with Sao Noi's Noom Suk Harn or "Young Brave Warriors" at the Shan -Thai border. Sai Luu was brave and bright, and he became an important leader in his association.

In 1961, he came to the village where Nang Nyo lived. He first saw Nang Nyo when she went to the monastery during the Lighting Candle Festival Ceremony in this village. She was only sixteen years old. Sai Luu didn't forget the thought in his mind; "What a beautiful young girl in this village." He was not handsome, but he was intelligent and brave. At that time he was single and twenty-six years old. He fell in love with Nang Nyo and he wanted to marry her. This was an unrequited love affair for him. Nang Nyo didn't like him and she had had a handsome boyfriend in her village for about two years. So, she hated Sai Luu and she didn't want to see him any more. This was a loveless situation for her.

After finishing the Lighting Candle festival, which lasted about 5 days, Sai Luu went to Nang Nyo's house everyday. When he stayed at this village he investigated Nang Nyo's life and who her relatives were. At that time most of the villagers practiced a

traditional culture. When they were harvesting their crops they wanted to get some volunteers to help. So, Sai Luu had a good chance to help her and get close to her to pursue a romantic relationship, so his unrequited love could be won. Sai Luu went to her house regularly every evening. Nang Nyo didn't like him and didn't want to see him anymore in her life. She didn't speak a word to Sai Luu at that time.

The village didn't have a well or reservoir like the town, it had only one stream for a water source. The villagers had to rely on this small stream and use this water for their daily lives. Every morning and evening, the villagers had to carry water for cooking food. Nang Nyo had a problem with bringing the water from the stream to her home because Sai Luu would wait for her there. He had decided to wait at the stream until Nang Nyo would come to collect water for her family to use. She also could not take a shower at the stream for about two months because Sai Luu always waited for her in the evening at the stream. In the morning she had to get up one and half hours earlier than the normal time. In the village, every lady and boy must get up at 4:30 AM every

day. That is the traditional habit for the villagers. But Nang Nyo had to get up at 3:00 AM for about two months in order to bring the water from the stream to her house. She hated Sai Luu so much. Her handsome boyfriend knew about how Sai Luu had fallen in love with Nang Nyo and he was very upset because he didn't have power like Sai Luu. He was only a normal country boy who had never been to school, and he had only his love for Nang Nyo. When Sai Luu would come to Nang Nyo's house, her boyfriend didn't dare to come to his girlfriend's house. He was afraid of his girlfriend's father, who was greedy and wanted to be a powerful man in the village.

Her parents liked Sai Luu so much and wanted him to be their son-in-law because Sai Luu was a man of power and had a mature mind, knowledge and kindness. Sai Luu asked her parents to marry her, and to be with her forever without anxiety in his life. Finally, Nang Nyo had to accept him to be her husband. She had to accept him without anger because women can't disobey their parents in the Shan traditional culture of this village. They married at the monastery with her relatives and family.

When her boyfriend knew about the wedding of Nang Nyo, the boy was very sad and cried. He couldn't eat any food for two weeks and he got seriously sick for five days. He also had a broken heart and he hated women and he didn't want to marry another woman because he still loved Nang Nyo. He wanted to be a bachelor. But, when he was 43 years old, he married a very beautiful young lady. When Nang Nyo heard that about her former boyfriend from the village she sent him a wedding gift and gave him a letter because Nang Nyo really loved this boyfriend so much.

Nang Nyo told him she had two sons and five daughters. Unfortunately, Sai Luu died in a weapons accident and his family didn't get to see his funeral. When he died, his youngest daughter was only two months old. This was a most unhappy situation for his family, but he did die while living his life for his people. So "amazing love is unequal in beauty, education, and lifestyle; it is justice only for the man who wants to love that woman freely!"

By Leun Hseng Fah

## Akhar Traditional Wedding

Most people in the world, whether they are tall or short, Buddhist or Christian, will have to find a suitable husband or wife at the proper time. Just like the old people say, "If it's time to be ripe, it has to be ripe." But in different countries, different people have different ways to make a couple for marriage. Here I want to share our Akhar, one of the ethnic groups in Burma, traditions of finding a lover and marriage.

Although a man and woman may both agree to get married, they cannot marry yet. First, the parents of the man have to discuss the marriage with the parents of the woman. If both parents agree with each other, they will choose a good day to marry.

There is a wedding at both sides of the family. First, there is a wedding at the woman's house. Then, there is a wedding at the man's house. While they are getting married at the woman's house, the man has to pay two ancient coins to the mother of the woman. That is the cost for the milk that the mother breast-fed the bride when she was a baby. (The old people explain it like that.) The weddings at the man's house and

at the woman's house are similar but when the wedding is in the woman's house, she will call her siblings and friends, and when the wedding is in the man's house he will call his siblings and friends.

In Akhar culture the bride has to go live at the groom's house after the wedding. Most times the groom will not go live at the bride's house. If the groom goes to live at the bride's house, other people will say he is like a woman, because almost all Akhar women have to go live at the groom's house. Always in Akhar culture we will see the bride go to live at the groom's house.

However, I am so proud that we have our own culture and we can keep this tradition until now. The wedding day is a very important day in every person's life. If he or she chooses the wrong person, they will have many problems. So, everyone should consider this to be an important day in one's life. Then they will be happy for many years.

By Ahker-were yer

## **Like Fish Traveling in a Bottle**

The lives of many children began at the Thai and Shan (Burma) border. The area was controlled by the MTA army from 1991 - 1996. MTA was a large resistance army led by Khun Sa. Many children grew up in that army. At that time, some of them were forced to be child soldiers in the army. Some of them were soldiers' children. I am one of the soldiers' sons. Their lives there were difficult in terms of food, health care, and education, even though there were a few hospitals, schools, and some food sources that were supported by the army. There were three preliminary schools in that area. The children who attended these schools could not continue their education when they finished these schools. Even though their lives were difficult there, when teachers asked the students, "What are you going to be in the future?" most of them answered the same; "soldier" "teacher" "nurse" "doctor" "sailor" and "pilot." They still had hopes and dreams, even though they have no plan to achieve them.



In 1996, when the MTA army surrendered, many of the children there were faced with a very difficult situation. The schools closed and there was not any government school for them to continue their education. Luckily for some children, their families had a on the Thai side of the border. There was a Shan school inside Thailand, which allowed them to attend. But many of them did not have this opportunity. Like me - my father did not have a house on the Thai side so I couldn't attend that school.

Even though the school was open for some of them, after they finished 6<sup>th</sup> standard at that school, they couldn't continue their education. They had to go to Chiang Mai and start work as a migrant worker. The number of Shan children who were uneducated grew. The saddest situation was that many former child soldiers couldn't remember their homes or parents, so many of them couldn't go back home. Also, the soldiers' children had a similar situation. Even though they had parents, there were many problems in the family. Poverty was a strong pressure on the family. The other big problem for some of them was that there were some family members who became disabled in the war. These people

were soldiers, like my father. Some of them had been injured in war, so they could not work. The children had to solve this problem by working in the city in Thailand. The children didn't have Thai identity cards, so they had to work overtime and they got a low salary. They had no choice because their families were waiting for their salary. They also could not go back into Burma because they did not have Burma identity cards either. The children had no one to rely on except themselves. Both former child soldiers and soldiers' children are still suffering today.

Some very, very bad situations happened at that time. The Mafia, who came from China to do business in that area, picked up some of the former child soldiers. Some of them became drug carriers. So, some of them continue their lives in Thai jails. Their lives are trapped in this cycle again and again.

Who built this situation for them? Now, most of them cannot get out of this bad situation yet. Their lives are like that of a fish swimming in a bottle. They are still suffering on the Thai-Burma border. When will they have chance to get out of the

bottle? When will their story be told to the world?

By Sai Pi, SSSNY student and Refugee at Kung  
Kyaw Camp

## **The Life of a Worker Family**

The sun was rising from the east and many men and women were standing in front of the labor office with their lunch box. Around 6:00 A.M the lorry car comes and takes all the people to the "Mai Yu." Who are they and what are these people's lives like?

Mai Yu is one of the Burma-China border trade and commerce areas. There, the labor officer checks their labor card. Some drink tea and eat "Samu Za" (like a snack) for their breakfast. After that they start to work. Their work is to change cosmetics from truck to truck to be checked by the officer. They have to work eight to ten hours a day and they get 1500 and 2000 kyat a day.

Then, they have to do overtime every day and they don't get any extra money. Sometimes they get some fruit or fish from the labor officer. The officers are taking these things from the trucks - there is no need to ask any person about them, they can take them anytime they want. There are no laws for the officer. In the evening the workers take some fruit or fish or other supplies from the officer and come back home

at different times. Sometimes they come very late.

Most of the workers are homeless. They have to borrow a room and stay at another person's house. Some families live in a 10 x 10 foot room. The cost of this room is 8000 kyat a month, and they have to pay other fees for electricity and water. The electric fee is 1.5 Yuan per unit and water is 200 Kyat per unit. They also can live in a bamboo house. In the raining season their lives are very difficult; the roads are full of mud and it is very difficult to go from one place to another.

Most of the workers like alcohol because they are working very hard and they want to give up on their lives. When they come back from their work, most of them stay at the alcohol shop or tea shop. Their salary is not enough to support their families, so their children cannot go to school. Their children cannot get an education, so their lives are already broken.

Most of their futures are hopeless and dark. Where is a peaceful and happy place for these worker families? This is the current situation in the border area of Shan State.

By Sai Sam, Northern Shan State

## Politics in Burma and Aung San Suu Kyi

"Please help!" We (people in Burma) have no way to continue our life. The country's economy is broken down. People in the country are suffering in many ways. Education is down, and there is lots of corruption within our country. Many poor people have it even worse. Yet another bad thing is that the military groups are keeping Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest.

What is happening now in Burma is that not only students in Rangoon, but also people in the entire country are facing difficulties in their financial situation, especially when they are in high school and in University. Most of the students are from poor families and their parents have to work hard every day to raise their children. There is no government spending on school and University. Students have to pay the full fees of the school. For one student when she or he is in high school, e.g. Ten Standard, it costs at least 300,000 Kyats a year. It is not a small amount of money. A general worker earns only about 400,000 Kyats a year. So, life is very hard to live in Burma.

I think to lift up people's life in Burma there would have to be many changes, such as social and political change. For the political system, the ruling system must be changed. There is a lot of corruption in economic policy. The military government is abusing the economy by giving bribes. For example, Chinese people are giving bribes to the Burmese soldiers and logging in Kachin State illegally. These practices are harmful to the future of Burma.

To make our future life beautiful, Aung San Suu Kyi is the one who will strongly fight for freedom and democracy, but now she is under house arrest. She was under house arrest for over a decade between 1988 up to the present time. The military regime is extending her house arrest year by year. This is so sad. She loves all people in Burma. She does not just make speeches but she tries to have conversations with the public. People in Burma, even ethnic people, believe in her and love her.

For the future Democratic Country of the Union of Burma, all people in the country, including ethnic people, have to cooperate and ask the government to release Aung San Suu Kyi, Hkun Tun Oo, and all

political prisoners immediately. On the other hand, the countries and networks such as the USA, EU, Russia, China and India and ASEAN that have influence on Burma should give pressure to release and negotiate with Aung San Suu Kyi.

By Noom Khurh



*Illustration by Lao Perng*



## School in My Dream

SSSNY is a place you and I learn together  
Like flowers and bees on the tree  
Here we can learn and talk about everything  
In the morning when the sun rises in the east  
The teachers start coming; one teacher, two,  
three, four  
They bring fruit and good skills  
We will always remember these things  
We meet and live together like one big family  
We do not come from the same place  
But we take responsibility and we learn  
From morning to evening we eat together  
We never discriminate between nationalities  
We also love each other and we are unified  
We will work hard in the future  
Those who did not have the opportunity to  
attend school in our country  
This is our school  
We will be strong for our nation  
We will win and get democracy from the SPDC  
We are in solidarity and we are united  
We never left our country, we never abandoned  
our country and  
We are here to become stronger so when we  
come back to our country we can rebuild it  
Here we are learning how to love and make  
peace  
We are not learning how to hate each other  
like the military regime  
We will bring love and peace to our people in  
Burma  
We are learning about the past history  
We won't repeat the same mistakes from  
history  
One day we will see freedom in our land  
When that day comes  
We will know what we should and should not do  
Here we don't have to be afraid or waste our  
life  
And our eyes are not blind or dark anymore

School here is like a door opening for us to  
see the light  
Education is our light  
We feel the kindness from the staff at the  
school  
We want to thank our funders for their  
donations  
We are thinking about our teachers and our  
staff and lovely students  
When we meet again keep these flowers alive  
in your heart  
This was SSSNY; a lovely school

By Kawn Wan, from SSSNY and the Orphan  
School, Loi Tai Leng



# About the School

The School for Shan State Nationalities Youth (SSSNY) was founded in 2001 by a group of youth from Shan State, including award-winning activist and one of TIME Magazine's 2005 Asia's Heroes, Nang Charm Tong. Unlike the other displaced ethnic nationalities who have access to established refugee camps, refugees from Shan State are at a disadvantage when trying to access training and educational facilities. SSSNY offers an in-depth Social Justice Education program for displaced Shan State youth to provide them with the basic skills and education necessary to take an active role in the struggle for human rights and democracy in Burma.

SSSNY aims to:

- Develop knowledge, technical skills, and self-confidence of Shan State Youth
- Promote involvement in the movement for social change by producing graduates from the school that are actively working with various Shan State democratic community organizations, carrying out activities such as documentation of human rights violations, providing education

and raising awareness to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS

- Broaden perspectives of Shan State Youth through programs that promote the empowerment and freedom of others in the community

For more information about SSSNY, please visit our website at [www.sssny.org](http://www.sssny.org)

“I am sitting beside the road and  
waiting for mom to bring me home ...  
I have been waiting here for a long time  
Other moms are coming to pick up their  
children  
And they go back home with happiness but for  
me it is so sad  
And I feel lonely at this time when I see  
them all smiling  
For me it is so helpless.  
The time passed so fast and no one is coming  
to get me  
What had happened to them when the sound of  
the gun was so loud  
Mom where are you now? Why you don't come  
take me home?  
Right now I am so scared and I cannot  
feel the warmth of my mom...”

“One year, it was very wonderful; the  
sky was very bright and we saw the lights  
from the sky throughout the area. The air  
was full of Christmas songs and people's  
laughing. For this reason, everyone's mind  
was blissful at that time. We could not  
say in words how blissful we were...”

Somewhere in between terror and bliss lies the truth about Burma. "Letters from Shan State" offers a glimpse into daily life in the largest state in Burma. Written by 36 youth from renowned activist Nang Charm Tong's School for Shan State Nationalities Youth, these stories describe the horrors from which the students have escaped, and the beauty they so strongly desire to return to.

All proceeds from the sale of this book go towards the academic programs at the School  
for Shan State Nationalities Youth