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## **Dormitory in the Life of the Rongmei Naga, India**

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### **Abstract**

The Dormitory is one of the important features of all the Naga villages in ancient days. It is known as Thien among the people of Rongmei Naga. The thien or dormitory is an inseparable socio-cultural institution of the rongmei people. Dormitories are well organized cultural and traditional institutions which is the life-vein of the rongmei tribe as the entire village machinery operates through these institutions till the present day. The Bachelors' dormitory is known as Khangchu and the girl's dormitory is called Luchu. Other important dormitories include the Khangbuan Kai (married men), Banja Kai (Elder's house), Mathenmei Kaibang (Married women's house) and Kengiapui Kaibang (Old women). The dormitory provides the manpower required by the village to organize any public works, religious ceremonies and festivals including dance, music and games. All legislative, executive and judiciary functions of the entire rongmei village are performed through the decision taken by the Peikai or the village Executive Council which is comprised mainly of the members from the Banja and Khangbuan Kai. In this paper I would like to focus on the role played by the Thien or dormitory as an important village institution promoting, sustaining and preserving the indigenous games and sports of the Rongmei till today. However, the introduction of western education and the advent of Christianity led to the gradual decline of Thien or Dormitory system among the people of the Rongmei tribe inhabiting in the north-eastern part of India.

**Key words:** Dormitory, Games, Festivals, Christianity, Indigenous.

### **Introduction**

The Rongmei Naga is a major tribe in the state of Manipur, India. They also reside in two other Northeastern states of Nagaland and Assam. Before the advent of colonial forces the Rongmei were an outstanding tribe in the hills of Manipur, particularly in the field of war-craft, folk music, handicrafts and songs. Among the Naga they are regarded as a peace loving people known for their simplicity, courtesy and spectacular hospitality. The Rongmei have fine attributes such as honesty, cheerfulness and self reliability. Rongmei tribe is recognized as per the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Act, 2011, (No. 2 of 2012) dated 8<sup>th</sup> January, 2012 (The Gazette of India, 2012). It is among the 33 recognized tribes by the Government of Manipur. The bachelors' house is widespread among the hill tribes of South Asia (Smith 1981:124). The dormitories under many forms and innumerable names have existed in a very wide region of the world extending from the Himalayas and the Formosa in the North to Australia and New Zealand in the South. "Taken by themselves, these barracks for the unmarried are sufficiently suggestive; but when we notice that they are but one of many peculiar social customs found surring more or less among all these races, the case is double noteworthy, first as evidence of former racial affinity; second as a n important factor in social evaluation generally" (Peal, 1892: 228). The bachelor's house is widespread among the hill tribes of south Asia (Smith, 1981, 124). In India, the dormitory system is found among a large number of tribes. Like other Naga and Kuki tribes, the Rongmei also has a dormitory system. According to Kamei, "Rongmei society has got a very high moral and discipline pattern of life. They have a separate institution for all the members belonging to this community according to their stage of age, group and sex. There are dormitories in every Rongmei village. The dormitory is known as Thien in Rongmei dialect" (2008: 47). The dormitory has been described as *morung* by the western anthropologists and it has now become a universal word. Ursula Graham Bower opines, 'dormitories are an admirable institution which discipline and educate the young, and unite the householders' (1986). In the Rongmei village in the past, dormitory is a place where unmarried youths used to sleep at night and had social interactions (Makuga, 1994). This dormitory system is considered as the custody of cultural and traditional wealth of the Rongmei society. Gangmumei also mention that, it met the educational needs of the young men, served as the defence of the village and provided the manpower required to organize the public works, religious ceremonies and cultural festivals including dance and music. The youth in the dormitory were trained to cater to those needs of the society (2004). In the dormitory both boys and girls are disciplined which promotes their traditional and cultural values.

### **Materials and Methods**

Narrative analysis has been used for the study and the data has been gathered through primary and secondary sources.

#### *Thien (Dormitory) in the life of the Rongmei Naga*

The Rongmei village is never considered as a complete village without having a dormitory. Thien (Dormitories) are well organized traditional institutions where the entire village operates through it. The bachelor's dormitory is known as Khangchu while the girl's dormitory is called Luchu. Besides these there are two other dormitories known as Gaanchang Kaibang (married men) and Mathenmei

Kaibang (married women). The Khangchu is a three tier system in which there are three different categories namely Gaana (unmarried boys), Gaanpi (married and unmarried men) and Khangbon (middle aged men). The gaana is the junior most of the three tier grades and it consists solely of unmarried young boys. The Gaanpi forms the next grade comprising of two different categories- junior and senior. The junior grade is called Gaanpi Chaphongmei. They are generally unmarried one and represent the senior most of the young boys called 'gaan'. The senior category is known as Gaanpi Kaijipmei and they consists of only married men. The next grade is known as Khangbuan which forms the highest grade in the Khangchu. They are mostly made up of married middle aged men. The Khangbuan are the head of the khangchu system where peace and prosperity of the Khangchu dormitory depends on the ability, efficiency and leadership under their supervision (Kamei, 2018). Girls have a dormitory of their own like that of the Khangchu boys known as Luchu. Unlike the Khangchu, the membership of the girl's dormitory is only for the unmarried girls. They have two leaders known as Tuna Pi (Tuna= girls, Pi= head) who are the senior most from amongst the girls. In addition to this, two married men from the Khangchu are assigned to look after the affairs of the girl's dormitory known as Tunamun Sinmei. The girl's dormitory is divided into three institutions namely, Luchu (unmarried girls), Mathenmei (married women) and Kengjapui (old women). A married woman will no longer be the member of the Luchu but becomes a member of another social group called Mathenmei. They perform social functions during festivals and religious ceremonies and composed the backbone of the rongmei society. The bachelor's dormitory is not a rival or parallel administrative unit of a village, but an institution within the village unit. A Morung (Khangchu) may aptly be called a microcosm of the village and like the village it has its own council" (Horam, 1975:69). They have their own unique functions in the society which sustains and unite the people in the realm of culture and traditional. The Khangchu or boys dormitory is the primary institutions of the Rongmei society where all the boys who attained the age of teenagers becomes the members. It is compulsory for any male members in the Rongmei society to join in Khangchu. In the opinion of T.C. Hodson, dormitories are a survival of communal houses which were the first stage in the development of homes when the whole village lived together (1996:75). The membership of the Khangchu is acquired right from the time of birth. On the very day of the birth of a child, the boys or girls of the dormitory according to the sex advance to the family of the newly born baby and present an egg as a proper request to become member of the particular dormitory when it grows up. A similar dormitory system Luchu also operates for the girl's too. The Khangchu or Luchu is housed at the residence of a rich or prominent elder (Banja) after a consensus from the village Council called Peikai. To offer one's house or a part of it for the dormitory was appreciated by the community members and very much endorsed by large. For them, it is a public spirited act to offer his house as the *Khangchu* (Kamei, 2004). In the dormitory system young boys who are new members were imparted various forms of education by the seniors in the dormitory to be able to evolve themselves as a capable individuals in the society. It plays a vital role in grooming the personality of the youth as social, religious and cultural practices are evolved in these dormitory. In every village there are at least one or more Khangchu depending on the size of the village. "It was instituted to save children from witnessing the primal scene and from being embarrassment from their parents" is the view of Elwin Verrier (1968:124). J. Shakespeare suggests that the bachelors' dormitory was designed to prevent incest (Hodson 1996:75). Kamei opines that there are two probable theories for the origin of the Khangchu; one is that, in ancient times, it was a common affair among the tribal people to raid other tribal groups. This led to inter-tribal feuds endangering the peaceful living of the common people. Inter tribal feuds commonly happened among the tribes for want of supremacy over the other. Therefore killing of an enemy became a lawful deed among them (2013:01). Fighting between the two villages became a common occurrence. It is for this reason that there arises a need for all young men to sleep together in a common place in order to defend the entire village from any enemy. Secondly, when population was small, the entire village used to live together in one big house as an enlarged family because: (a) traditionally, a rongmei village was located on top of the hill and had shortage of flat land enough for the building of houses. They, therefore, accommodated the entire village to live in, and (b) there they lived together for fear of attack from another village and wild animals. Other reason is that of educational purpose whereby in the dormitories all kinds of traditional practices and activities were taught by the seniors known Khangbuan and Banja to its young members called Gaana. According to rongmei belief, the male's dormitory was an adaptation from the hoary past when, men and gods attended the house of the mythical God Tingpurengsonnang who was the patriarch of the dormitory. It is a God's institution adopted by men. The Khangbuan also taught the young members to respect and obey elders, be punctual and dutiful towards their works. The overall function of the Thien or dormitory is the catering to the welfare of the entire village with the support of village Pei (Council).

#### *Functions of the Dormitories*

The most important socio-cultural and political institution of the Rongmei is the Khangchu Thien. The Rongmei are a well knit unit with solidarity and social cohesion firm to their community values. One of the important features in the community life of the Rongmei is the spirit of an egalitarianism which owes much to the system of Thien (dormitory) where all the members big or small, rich and poor, old and young, strong and weak were treated equally. It taught all the members the importance of every individual in the community. The spirit of oneness, companionship, sharing, sense of caring, goodwill, fellowship are learnt, maintained, are practiced in the Thien and was looked upon as an ideal of the Rongmei community. According to Roy, "the training and education that the child received in these institutions can be best described as habituation, imitation or perhaps unconscious conditioning along with the other kind of learning which is conscious and conditioned. With the result that when the children become adult responsible members of the society they react, rationalize, behave and think where a cultural pattern of the group (2010:20). A sense of belonging and togetherness where an individual's self interest was made subordinate to the importance of the community welfare was the governing feature of the Rongmei society. Working together in agricultural fields, participating in the community feast and festivals marks the common sight of the Khangchu members.

#### *Political and Judiciary functions*

Every rongmei village since the ancient days was a republic where the supreme power lies with the villagers who were free to do and exercise all powers within their capacity and within their own jurisdiction. From the beginning the Rongmei village was a well organized

polity where the PEI was the highest traditional body. The members from the Banja Thien or dormitory made up the village executive council or PEI. From time immemorial the Rongmei followed the tradition of classless society with democratic principles and values. Every rongmei village was ruled or governed by the experienced elders who are the members of the Banja Thien usually headed by the Nampou (owner of the village), Namgakpou (administrator), Napmupou (in charge of food) and Tengku (Spiritual head). Gerontocracy form of administration was followed. The rongmei villages were not ruled by the King. Each Thien or dormitory has their own respective duties, distinct roles, functions and responsibilities in the administration of the entire village. All the political decision is finalized by the decision of the Peikai or the village executive council headed by the Nampou or village owner. They exercised all powers and functions of the executive, legislation and judiciary functions of the entire village. The Peimei or members of the village council are given full power to constitute any law as deem fit and convenient to the entire village. Cases arising out of heinous crimes and disputes within and outside the village is tried by the Pei according to the prevailing customary laws of the village. The Banja Thien or dormitory also decides in the matter of village prohibition, ceremonies, sacrifices, festivals, annual distribution of lands for jhum cultivation, village social works like construction and repairing of village roads, ponds and village gates etc. The execution and enforcement of any administrative and judiciary decision is undertaken by the members of the Khangbuan Kai (married men) in accordance and collaboration with the Banja dormitory. The members of the Khangbuan Kai are responsible to enforce and execute the orders of the Peikai in maintaining peace, unity, law and order in the entire village (Makuga, 2007). There is limited role in the administrative and judiciary functions on the part of the Luchu (girls) and Mathenmei Kaibang (married women) dormitories.

#### *Security of the Village*

To guard the whole village from any forces is one of the most important duties of the Khangchu. It was necessary because feuds between villages and war with the other tribes were a common feature in the olden days. This inter village war is known as Shangna Rih. Many factors are responsible for the outbreak of such inter village warfare among the people of the rongmei tribe. Nou Kasoumei or Kidnapping of someone's wife is the main reason for such feuds. Inter clan factions were also responsible too. So khangchu thien or boys dormitory by providing a communal sleeping hall for the boys and other members of the dormitory was necessary to guard the entire village from any unprecedented fighting and feuds. They act not only as a guard house for the defense of the village, but also protect the village in times of accidents, incidents, natural calamities like earthquakes, floods, draught, sickness, epidemic etc. (Makuga, 1994: 23). The village kept sentinels to keep vigil and protect the entire village from any dangers. According to the size of the village and number of the Khangchu young men were deployed during day and nights. They also act as a guard house for the defense of the village and such warriors are known as Riphian or Rephen (Kamei, 2004: 255). This act of defense by the Khangchu is known as Rigaan Dingmei. Girls are not engaged in such activity. The sound of the drum was meant to alarm the villagers from any danger and it is because of the Rigaan Dingmei or guard at night and war times that all the villagers could settle in peace without fear. Thus the role and duties of the Khangchu members is directly related to the welfare and safety of the whole village community and this act is honored by villagers.

#### *Centre for Arts and Craft:*

The Thien or dormitory system provides every rongmei village members to teach and learn skills in the field of handicrafts. They also get training in the art of handicraft like basket making, wooden craft, carpentry, bamboo, cane and other embroidery works (Gonmei, 1980: 15). It is through the Khangchu Thien that all the young members learned art skills and crafts. The khangchu young members were taught the techniques of fighting skills for war, wrestling, games and sports, handicrafts, moral education, religious philosophy and social etiquette by the Khangbuan in Khangchu Kai. Different forms of folk songs, music and dance which is the forte of the Rongmei is kept alive from older generation till the present day through the Khangchu and Luchu dormitory. The art of weaving clothes, spinning and dyeing of clothes is particularly educated to the young Luchu girls by the married women (Meipui). Young boys (gaana) and girls (tuna) were taught community ethics, cooperative attitude, respect for elders, civic duties and responsibilities towards self and the whole community and were trained to become a worthy citizen. The young girls are given informal education training like art of spinning, weaving, dance, music etc.

#### *Centre for Community Services*

The Rongmei are industrious and a community oriented people. All the community service rendered by the Khangchu in times of need was done in honorary rather than wages. Receiving of money or kind from the family for any work carried out by the Khangchu was not encouraged by the people of the tribe. The youths of the dormitory also extends other social services such as constructing footpaths, village pond, cleaning the entire village surroundings, house building of an individual or community, fishing, and hunting, and in the fields at the time of seed sowing and harvesting (Rao, 1976: 137). The Khangchu acts as a centre of cultural activities. The festival and ceremonies of the village or individual are organized by the Khangchu. It renders service for the individual family, household or village council during the time of marriage, death and other social occasion. The Kengiapui (old women) are generally assigned with ritual functions during births, deaths and religious ceremonies (Kamei, 2004: 255). It is through such community services towards the welfare of the village that young khangchu boys developed a sense of discipline, responsibilities and duties towards their fellowmen and the community as a whole. There is a moral obligation of the khangchu boys to ensure that every family in the village was cared whether they be orphans, poor or widows. The young members of the khangchu collected firewood for the weaker families and help the needy in their agricultural works. Therefore khangchu was never a mere place of sleeping or gathering for the young people but it is a charitable centre where values of love, concern towards fellow citizens were taught and cultivated. The girl's dormitory looks after the welfare of the village by contributing voluntary services in the form of collecting firewood, pounding and husking of rice grains and carrying water for the poor and deserted widows during the daytime.

*Centre for promotion of Discipline*

According to Asoso Yonuo, “They learn manners, discipline, art, stories, songs, war tactics, diplomacy, religious and customary rites and ceremonies living in it” (1974:11). Chakhuang is the respect a man gives to someone older to him or her. It is a man’s gallantry when he or she sacrifices their interest and needs for the well being of the weaker ones and elderly. Members of the Khangchu were taught to be chivalrous towards women and kind towards the elderly. The young boys and girls without such discipline are considered coarse and uncultured. Every member of the dormitory is expected to participate in the community work failing which was not tolerated by the seniors and punishment was awarded to the individual or group. Giving extra workload or boycott by the other peers as per the instruction of the seniors was the common punishment for the one who did not follow the rules of the Khangchu. Sometimes as punishment one may be expelled from the dormitory for certain period of time depending on his offences and during which he is not allowed to participate in the socio-cultural activities of the village. There was no payment of fine in cash or kind. Discipline, obedience, integrity, righteousness, respect for elders were the watchword and hallmarks of the Khangchu and Luchu. All the boys and girls, irrespective of the family wealth and status were subject to equal treatment under the authority of the Khangchu and Luchu. The girls are authorized to use their dormitory only at the night (Bower, 1986: 82). The younger boys are instructed by the Gaanpi or seniors to fear the supreme God, love and respect their parents, pay respect to all old men and women, village leaders or authorities (Pei Gaandai), including the host and hostess of the dormitory especially during the customary functions and festivals. It was tradition of the people that the Khangchu boys and Luchu girls to firstly offer or set aside any fresh wine, meat curry or any kind to the oldest men and women during the occasion (Makuga, 2007: 70).

*Duties and Responsibilities of the Khangbuan and Banja dormitory*

Khangbuan means matured manhood and their dormitory is known as the Khangbuan Kai which is another important institution of the Rongmei village. They are the members who are promoted from the Khangchu Kai based on their seniority. Usually the khangbuan kai is housed at the senior most members among them. In issues related to village administration or village level problems they gather at the house of the village council or Peikai for discussion. The institution of Khangbuan is important on account of manifold activities starting with being the head and leader of the Khangchu kai or boys dormitory. The chosen Khangbuan will convene the meetings among the khangchu boys as and when it felt necessary for discussion and necessary actions whichever needs to be performed. They are responsible to train and shape the gaana (young boys) from the Khangchu Kai in shaping them to become a responsible citizen in the village. The maintenance of peace, order and unity in the Khangchu dormitory solely lies on the competency and efficiency of the Khangbuan. They teach the young boys and youths in matters of obedience, politeness towards elders, punctuality, respect towards women and physical hygiene. The Khangbuan is also accountable to impart the gaana (boys) in cutting wood, bamboo works, tiling the ground, cleaning of village roads, agricultural works from sowing to harvesting, community hunting and fishing etc. They act as the educator of their custom and tradition to the young khangchu boys about their past in forms of stories, folk songs, music and dance. They played a vital role in preparing the younger generation for becoming a member of the village council known as Pei. J.P Mills (1980) writes, it is in the morung (khangchu) that the old men tell of the great deed of the past, and the coming generation is taught to carry on the old traditions in the future. The enforcement and execution of all the orders pass by the village council or Pei is heavily dependent upon the active participation of all the Khangbuan members. The Khangbuan are promoted to the next category called Ganchang on the seniority basis. Again they are promoted to the next stage called Banja where they become the member of the village council or PEI and hold offices (Kamei, 2008: 50). Banja are the senior most member of the entire population. They perform all the religious ceremonies of the village. Since time immemorial the banjas have been acting as the highest authority in all the affairs of the village – social, cultural and political. They have the power and authority to take all the decisions in matter related to village legislation and judiciary functions. They constitute the executive member of the village council.

*Khangchu Thien (Dormitory): A centre promoting Games and Sports*

Games and Sports have been part and parcel in a Rongmei traditional village since time immemorial. The Rongmei people also gave an emphasis on games and sports because of its place in their culture, its history and its philosophy to their community. The people are conscious of their past-times and therefore maximum utilization is made out of it. Much of these games have traditional values attached to it. Games and sports is an integral part of their culture and religion. Looking at the structure and functions of Khangchu dormitory one can understand how the Khangchu Thien or dormitory helps in the development and promotion of indigenous sports among the people of the rongmei tribe. The khangchu thien is also a place where young boys are taught about the sporting pasts where ancient heroes are glorified and patronized. The elders or khangbuan carried out the task of integrating the youth and the zeal for sports in the Khangchu Thien itself. The young boys were taught of the way in which their ancestors play or compete and also how they think about the games and what they purported to gain by playing those games and sports. Some of the games and sports played by the rongmei people often carry with them a specific set of social and cultural traditions derived from its ancient roots. Playful nature of the young khangchu boys and luchu girls starts right from their respective dormitory itself. Khangchu promotes both individual and group games in the rongmei village. Group competition is seen with the members of a particular khangchu kai against the members of the other dormitories within the village. One of the most popular games played by the young Luchu dormitory members is the Gaa Towmei or Gaaring Pinmei which is a seed of a creeper generally round in shape. Shaa Ganmei, a traditional game of spinning the top is mostly played among the Khangchu young boys with fierce competition and merry making. For both these games there is no standardize field but rather it was played in any area with smooth ground surface which is usually in front of the Khangchu Kai or Luchu Kai. Majority of the Rongmei games and athletic contest took place in the context of religious festival or occasion and therefore some religious tone cannot be denied. From an anthropological point of view, athletic competition such as Taupwang Phamei and Danjwangmei played among the Khangchu boys during the Gaan Ngai festival can be said to fulfill a societal function within the society by re-emphasizing the distinction between the living and the dead appeasing the restless spirits of

departed individuals by entertaining them. Taupwang Phaimei or traditional game of Shot-Put and Danjwangmei, a traditional game of long jump is played mostly only during the festival of Gaan Ngai festival. It is played only by the Khangchu boys on the inauguration day of the festival towards the evening at the Danshapung or village jumping ground after the procession called Hoi Gammei which is a traditional way of invoking God's presence. No girls are allowed to play in these games. In these games Khangchu boys display their strength and compete amongst themselves to be recognized as the strongest youth in the entire village. No stranger was allowed to win over the Khangchu youth from the host village as it was considered a defeat of the entire village in the hands of a unknown stranger. These games was not just for the show of strength by the Khangchu boys but there is also a religious connotation in these games because these games were played not just for the fun and love of it but rather it is also considered as an act of Daan or an omen for the entire village. The splashing of the soil or mud during the long jump is believed as the distribution of paddy or rice, and so, the more the volume of the soil or mud is splashed it is believed that the year ahead will be a year of prosperity with no starvation. Chatwan Twanmei or High Jump is played by the Khangchu boys usually in front of the Khangchu Kai so as to entertain amongst themselves. This game is not played during the festivals but the khangchu boys are very much fond of this game and it is considered important to keep them physically fit. The Khangbuan (married men) who are the senior members of the Khangchu would encourage the young khangchu boys to take part in games and sports which is played especially during the festivals and occasion as it mirror the solidarity and strength of the entire village. Ancient myth and stories of the legendary heroes or personalities and their achievements in certain games and sports are orally told and echoed in the ears of the young boys by the elders of the Khangchu Kai (Dormitory). This in turn would help the khangchu boys to indulge in athletic activities and sports with a patriotic feeling and admiration towards their indigenous games.

#### *Importance of the Thien (Dormitory) System in the Rongmei village*

The Thien is an important institution for the Rongmei because the overall function of the dormitory is closely interlocked with the cultural, social, moral, economic and religious life of the Rongmei society. It is the cradle of the socio-cultural life of the Rongmei. It is directly or indirectly related to the welfare of the village. According to Pongener the dormitory, "was the leading traditional institution of learning and the foundation of Naga culture. Therefore, it would be naive to believe or say that Nagas received no education prior to their contact with the western missionaries or before the introduction of modern education. Naga societies, though without a formal education system, regarded education as operative at all stages of human life and very much in the interest of the cohesion of village communities" (2011:39). The traditional dormitory is beneficial and relevant for the Rongmei as it provides a kind of education to all its members and youths in particular. The sole link between the past and present among the Rongmei in the absence of writing and documentation is provided by the dormitory system in the forms of teaching folk songs, folk tales and folk dances by the elders and seniors of the Khangchu. This folk tales, folk songs and folk dances contain the whole ethos of their tradition and culture. Oral tradition is kept alive with the practice of dormitory system from time immemorial till the present among the Rongmei people. Dongre observes that, the dormitory, "is a social temple, the centre of village life, from which radiate many types of healthful and creative activity" (2021:11). The khangchu or bachelor's dormitory is considered as a sacred entity by the people of rongmei tribe. It has its own code of conduct where everyone must abide by it. The dormitory among the rongmei people plays an important role during feast and festival, rituals and any ceremonial gathering. The rongmei illage was a well organized polity and the highest traditional body of the village is known as PEI which is the executive council. The PEI is the highest ordeal in the traditional rongmei illage. It continues to exist till today as the sole authority towards the welfare of the entire village despite the introduction of modern political bodies instituted under the Constitution of India. The village is ruled or governed by elders who are the members of the Banja dormitory who plays an important role in the administration and judicial functions of the entire village. One of the most important functions of the Banja Thien is the inevitable role played in the religious domain of the people. Every social, religious rites and sacrifices are performed by the elders from the Banja thien. The khangchu and Luchu Thien among the other dormitory constitute as the most important machinery where folk songs, folk dances and oral stories of the tribe are kept alive till today (Riamei,2013). The young dormitory members are taught by the elders of their respective thien. Folk song is an important integral part of the rongmei society which is regarded as an authoritative medium of communication amongst the people having its own historical and cultural importance. The khangchu and luchu dormitory is the training ground and upholder of the entire traditional fabric which has passed down from one generation to the next. The elder members of the Mathenmei Kaibang (married women) who are promoted to the next social group known as Kengjapui Kaibang who are assigned with ritual functions during births, deaths and religious ceremonies of the village.

#### *Impact of Christianity and Western Education*

The introduction of Christianity has brought about changes in different spheres of the Rongmei society. The existence of Thien (dormitory) in spite of its bonding with the people could not surie when Christianity penetrated in North East India and did invade the very core of the Naga social institution. Christian missionaries can be attributed with the spread of western education among the people of the tribe. The first missionary in Manipur, William Pettigrew landed at Imphal on the 6<sup>th</sup> of January 1894 as a missionary under the Arthington Aborigines Mission. The first Christian association where the rongmei people could first get associated was the teachings of Christianity was the North-West Christian Association which was started in the year 1928 consisting of the Kuki, Hmar, Chiru, Kom, Kharam, Kacha Naga (now Zeme and Liangmei) and Kabui (now Rongmei and Inpui) (Gonmei& Khanglen, 2018). The first convert among the Rongmei was Namrijinang Kamei@ Maipak Kabui a resident of Keishamthong, Imphal. He was baptized by Re. U. M. Fox, a pioneer Christian minister in the year 1915. There is no denying that the Christian missionaries were unsympathetic towards the rongmei culture which had a far reaching ramification in their cultural and traditional values. In the beginning of the Christian conversion difference arose between the converts and non-converts and the missionaries, many, at times played the game of divide and rule where villages were often broken into two different groups and families were broken. During the customary and traditional celebrations there was a great scheme of division between the converts and the non converts as the former were deprived of the opportunity to join in those festivals. In many cases the new converts were

turned or chase away from the village depriving of their inherent rights by their own villagers who are more so the followers of indigenous religion called Pou-Pei Chapriak now known as Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak. The traditional religion is based on Polytheism, worship of many gods and goddesses deities of different kinds and the supreme God etc. The Christian missionaries saw the folk music and songs as associated with sacrifices and spirit worship and perceived as a hindrance to the advancement of the gospel. Traditional costumes and ornaments or instruments were discouraged by the pioneers of Christianity among the people of rongmei. Introduction of western hymns and restrictions made by the pioneering missionaries among the rongmei on singing folk songs and dances in any Christian gatherings resulted in the extreme decreasing use of folk related songs and dances. Today there is great sense of reial among the people whereby traditional costumes and folk songs and dances are incorporated by the Rongmei Christians. The prohibition of the use of folk songs and dances among the people by the early missionaries and converts fostered a negative approach in the minds of the people towards their own culture and religion. With the introduction of western education the elders of the community who are responsible for teaching the young members in the dormitory could not pass on their moral, traditional values and etiquette etc. This has led to the disintegration of the dormitory system to a great extent that it can led to its extinction when traditional values, stories and songs are neglected by the upcoming generations as they thrive along the western education. If the Rongmei people want to learn their culture, tradition and belief system, the one way to do so is to reied the dormitory system and explore their indigenous folk songs, traditional stories which has been neglected for so long. The effort of the people among the rongmei who are still following the indigenous religion (TRC) and the role of Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak Phom (TRCP) are commendable and deserve utmost respect today. The mistake of the early Christian missionaries was that they failed to study properly and appreciate the Rongmei way of life. Today the youths of the rongmei tribe are at the crossroads and dilemma between tradition and modernity where globalization has brought in major changes in their way of life. It is pertinent for the rongmei citizen on the one hand to reach out and be a part of the globalised world having accessed to modern education and development in this highly competitive world, while on the other hand it is highly important to continue with the values upheld by the traditional institutions such as the Khangchu (boys dormitory) and Luchu (girl's dormitory) which aimed at making an individual well grounded and groomed member of the community and country at large. There is a hope that followers of T.R.C (Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak) could play a major role in keeping this traditional dormitory system alive and saving it from its extinction unlike many other tribes of northeast India. Probably the early Christian missionaries were confused regarding the cultural values and the religion of the Rongmei tribe. As such the institution of the Khangchu and Luchu which is the cultural centre of the people is considered and looked upon by the missionaries as a heathen institution which is against the doctrine of Christianity. The Christian missionaries alone were not the lone factor responsible for the decay and disintegration of the Khangchu dormitory, but the introduction of formal education gave a major blow to its existence as the rongmei parents started sending their children to the schools.

### Conclusion

The Thien or dormitory is an inseparable socio-cultural institution of the Rongmei tribe. In a traditional rongmei village there are around five separate Thien or dormitory. Among them the most important are the Khangchu and Luchu which provides a communal sleeping hall for boys, girls and other members of the dormitory. According to Asoso Yunuo, "They learn manners, discipline, art, stories, songs, war tactics, diplomacy, religious and customary rites and ceremonies living in it" (1974:11). It acts as a centre of cultural activities. A person, who becomes a member of the Khangchu Thien, refines his culture, rectifies is manners, changes his attitudes; polishes his code of conduct; develops his conscience; nurtures his thought and action; realizes his duties and responsibilities and later becomes a successful man in the rongmei society. A boy goes to the khangchu dormitory while he is still young where he moulds all that is necessary that a man is required to do as members of other dormitories as he or she progresses in a lifetime. It indicates that this dormitory took the place of the rongmei parents in bringing up in the discipline of the civic society. .K Anand writes, "The morung plays a vital role in preparing younger generation for posts in the village council. The morung is the club, the public school, the military training centre, the hostel for boys and meeting place for village elders. It is as well the centre for social, religious and political activities. In sort, it is the fulcrum of the village democracies" (1967: 89-90). The elders or khangbuan who are overseeing the Khangchu thien also helps the younger members by bringing them into the fold of games and sports whenever and wherever necessary especially during the times of festivals ad occasions. The introduction of Christianity and western education in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century among the rongmei led to a mass conversion into Christianity and sending their children to formal schools which ultimately led to the decay and downfall of the Thien (dormitory) system in all the rongmei villages. The proper functioning of the Thien has been is on decline but one cannot outrightly conclude that this system has been totally gone or died out from the present traditional Rongmei society. It still exists in the functioning of the entire social fabric of the present Rongmei villages.

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