

# Khangchiu: the youth dormitory of Liangmai Naga



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## Abstract

This paper is an attempt to highlight the significance of youth dormitory system of the Liangmai Naga of Manipur. This traditional institution played a vital role in imparting value education and maintaining the social fabric among the pre-literate Liangmai community. In the past, it serves as the cultural center, where young boys and girls are molded to become responsible adult members of the community. However, this highly developed institution of the Liangmai Naga has now disintegrated. Change in religious belief and the advent of modern education has been attributed for the decline of *khangchiu*. The paper reflexively analyzes the origin and decline of this traditional institution as well as the roles and functions it played in the traditional Liangmai society. The main objective of the paper is to document the systematic operation of the youth dormitory system so as to bring better understanding of this traditional institution to the younger generations.

**Keywords** Liangmai Naga · Khangchiu · Youth Dormitory · Manipur · Ethnography

## Introduction

The cultural practice of youth dormitory system is one of the common features among several tribal communities around the globe, including the various tribes of India. It is a well-organized cultural and traditional institution. The earliest accounts of this institution among the Indian hill-tribes include works by Butler (1847), Peal (1883, 1892, 1893), Dalton (1872), Sherring (1905–1907), Pant

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(1935), Furer-Haimendorf (1938, 1950), Elwin (1947, 1948) and so on. These works highlighted the dormitory system practiced by various tribes in the North-eastern India, Central India and Southern India and other parts of the world. It brought to light the common cultural element between distinct cultural, racial and linguistic groups. This system was widely practiced by tribal communities of the Northeast India like the Nagas, the Kukis, the Mizos and the like. Similarly, it was found to be quite common in Central Indian states among the tribes like Juangs, Oraons, Murias, Gonds, etc. It was also reported to be practiced by people in “the hill-tracts of Travancore and some regions in Mysore, the Wynad and the Nilgiri Mountains” (Furer-Haimendorf 1950). Considering this institution as “barracks for the unmarried”, Peal stated that such social custom among different races makes it “doubly noteworthy, first as evidence of former racial affinity; second, as an important factor in social evolution generally” (1892). Writing on the Naga tribes of Manipur, Hodson noted regarding the youth dormitory that “it would seem to be rather symptomatic of a definite level of culture than distinctive of any special ethnic group or groups” (1911). The existence of this cultural parallel notwithstanding great distance separating the different ethnic tribal population marks a similar sphere of social structure.

Ever since the earliest accounts of “the Muria’s Ghotul”, “Naga’s great bachelors halls” and “the Oraon’s youth dormitories”, scholars of various disciplines have shown great interest to this traditional system. However, the dormitory systems of many of the tribe are not well-documented and they are in a dilapidated condition. In many communities this system has disintegrated and ceases to exist. With the advent of modern education, shift in religious belief and other modern development, this cultural practice has become irrelevant. The dormitory system of the Liangmai has not been properly documented and it has today lost all practical importance in everyday life. In such a context, an attempt is made in this paper to describe the youth dormitory institution of the Liangmai Naga.

The term *morung* is commonly used in the literature to refer to the Nagas’ youth dormitory. But each Naga tribe has different terms for this “*morung*”. The Ao Nagas called it *ariju*, the Sumi Nagas *apuki*, the Konyak Nagas *ban*, the Angami Nagas *kichuki*, the Rongmei Nagas *khangchuu*, the Lotha Nagas *champo* and so on. Other tribal groups in northeastern states of India like the Bhotia called it *rangbang*, the Mizos called it *zawlbruk*, the Maras called it *laipho*, the Tiwas called it *chamadi*, etc. In the central India region, the Munda and Ho group called this institution as *gitiara*, the Oraons call it *jonkerpa* or *dhumkuria*, the Bhuiyans call it as *dhangar basa*, the Gonds and Murias call it as *ghotul* and the Juangs called it as *darbar*, *mandaghar* or *majang*. In southern India the Kunikars have a bachelor’s hall known as *kottil*, which also serve the purpose of accommodating visitors or guests.

The male youth dormitory of the Liangmai Naga is known as *khangchuu*. It is a multi-functional institution. Besides housing the male youths, who formed the work force and defense system of the village, it also serves as a center for learning various art and crafts, oral literatures and other cultural activities. *Khangchuu* played a very important role in the Liangmai socio-economic-political and cultural context. There is a separate female youth dormitory known as *liuchuu*, which is usually paired with a *khangchuu*. In this paper the term *khangchuu* is used as an umbrella term to refer

to both. However, when referring to specific dormitory, the specific male and female dormitory terms are used interchangeably.

## Data and methodology

The primary data for this study were collected by the author during a field trip to Tharon village, Manipur in September–November, 2016.<sup>1</sup> A male informant named Phenlakbou Marenmai, 67, provided the data. It is supplemented by telephonic interviews conducted with two more male informants,<sup>2</sup> one from Tharon village and the other from Chiang village. Liangmai villages in Manipur no longer practice the dormitory system. However, all my informants had the opportunity to experience the functioning of *khangchiu* in their respective villages when they were younger. Data were collected through personal conversation and interview. They were asked a series of questions in regard to origin, admission, function and so on about the youth dormitory. Few available corpuses on Liangmai dormitory system are also referred to as secondary source of information.

## Results and discussions

### Locating the Liangmai

Liangmai is one of the Naga tribes of Manipur and Nagaland. In Manipur, they are largely concentrated in the district of Tamenglong followed by the adjoining districts of Senapati and Kangpokpi. In Nagaland, they are found in Peren district. In fact, their habitat is a continuous belt extending from the hills in the north of Tamenglong to the hill ranges in south Peren and further to the adjoining valley of Kangpokpi in the east. Tamenglong is located in the western part of Manipur between 24.59 degrees North longitude and 93.30 degrees East latitude with an area of 4391 sq kms.

There are approximately 100 Liangmai villages, most of which falls in the state of Manipur. Many of these villages are a segment of an original mother village and just a handful of them crosses one hundred households. The total Liangmai population according to the census of India 2011 is 49,811. The Liangmai people were previously known by an incorrect ethnonym, and till recent the name “Kacha Naga” was used to refer to Liangmai, along with the Zeme, in Manipur. This misnomer, however, was officially rectified with the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order

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<sup>2</sup> Kaikhamang Daimai, 73, a retired government employee, originally from Thalon village, presently living in Imphal, Manipur. He has authored several articles and books on Liangmai community. Nampibou Marenmai, 55, a government employee, currently working and living at New Delhi. He is originally from Chiang village. He has written several articles on Liangmai.

(Amendment) Act, 2011. The Act officially recognized Liangmai as a separate and distinct tribe in Manipur. In Nagaland, the term “Zeliang” is used to refer to Liangmai along with Zeme. Their language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman language group. In the classification of the Tibeto-Burman languages by Bradley (1997), Liangmai was placed under the Zeliangrong group, which falls under the Southern Naga of the Kuki-Chin-Naga. Recently, Burling (2003) grouped Liangmai under the Zeme group, which was again referred to as Western Naga in Post and Burling (2017). They have no script of their own and they use modified Roman Script for writing.

### Origin of Khangchiu

Fürer-Haimendorf (1938) claimed that “men’s house” system of the hill tribes of Assam is a very ancient institution and it appears most probable that it belongs to the oldest cultural stratum of the Naga Hills. However, in some Naga tribes like the Angami and Sema, the *morungs* are small and insignificant (Hutton 1921a, b). The accounts given by my informants, on the other hand, suggested that the *khangchiu* of Liangmai Naga is a very old and well-developed system. Though it lacks a separate and elaborate structure like some of the Naga tribes, the system is well-defined. Its origin, however, is not known by the people. Traditionally, people consider it inappropriate for boys and girls to sleep under their parental roof once they attained the age of seven or eight. They believed that if children stay with their parents for longer period, they do not develop sense of responsibility and are dependent on parents. A child sleeping in their parental house after attaining the age of seven or eight is regarded as something undignified. Parents also encourage their children to be with their friends and peers. A common advice or warning parents gave while encouraging their children to join their friends is *nakamai sai sui tang lak de* “you won’t be able to keep up with your friends (if you continue to stay at home)”. It implies that staying at home for longer period will lessen a child’s ability.

The Liangmai culture recognizes puberty as an important stage of development. This is the period children start learning to contribute to the family and community or village. Even before formally joining their *khangchiu*, boys and girls leave their parental house as early as the age of seven or eight and starts forming groups and stays together learning art and craft, and learning how to contribute to the welfare of the village. The groups also sleep together at a particular house. Such a group of boys is called *chungkhangna*, while the girls’ group is called *chungkina*. Liangmai villages like Makhen called this organization as *khangtuaki*. This organization is some sort of junior dormitory and form a transition stage before joining the *khangchiu* and *liuchiu*. Boys and girls stay with their *chungkhangna* and *chungkina* till the age of thirteen or fourteen and will ultimately go to their designated *khangchiu* and *liuchiu*. *Chungkhangna* and *chungkina* has no affiliation to any *khangchiu* or *liuchiu*. Boys in same *chungkhangna* may go to different *khangchiu* when they reach the right age. However, this practice is not universal among the Liangmais. My informant from Chiang village points out that such practice is not

known in his village. Boys and girls straightaway join their *khangchiu* and *liuchiu* at around the age of eight or nine in his village.

There are several views presented regarding the origin of youth dormitory system. Scholars like Peal (1893) and Hodson (1911) opine that the youth dormitory is possibly a survival of the communal houses, which were the first stage in the development of homes. Youth dormitory was instituted to save children from witnessing physical intimacy of their parents and from being an embarrassment to their parents (Elwin 1947) or designed to prevent incest (Shakespeare in Hodson 1911) are some common interpretations. Considering the Liangmai *khangchiu*, interpretations such as youth dormitories are instituted to prevent witnessing primal scene and to prevent incest seem inapplicable. There are three main reasons; firstly, the Liangmai traditionally built houses with multiple rooms. The grown-up children and parents sleep separately and have their own privacy. Secondly, Liangmai does not build separate house as *khangchiu* but is attached to one family in the village, known as *aziki*. This *aziki* conduct its family business without difficulty despite the presence of *khangchiu*. Thirdly, the Liangmais strictly follow the tradition of exogamy and something like incest is unthinkable and unheard of in the community. However, it is likely that the prevailing Naga culture of frequent raids, feuds and head-hunting in olden days induced the necessity for the people to prepare their children, especially the male, as semi-soldier for community protection early on. They must have set up the dormitory system to provide training to young male and make them war-ready. The role and function of Liangmai *khangchiu* corresponds with the first group of dormitories defined by Elwin (1947). The primary concern of the parents when their grown-up child sleeps with them under same roof is he or she will not be able to keep up with his or her peers. The youth dormitory system among Liangmai seems to have originated as an establishment to groom boys and girls to become an able-bodied adult citizen. It is an institution that imparts skills and knowledge.

### Structure and location

In most Naga communities that practice the dormitory system, the dormitory or the *morung* is usually the largest and most ornate structure in the village (Mills 1926 & 1937; Furer-Haimendorf 1938). It typically stands “over-looking one of the main approaches of the village” (Furer-Haimendorf 1938), a strategically advantageous position to defend the village. But unlike some Naga tribes such as the Konyak, Ao, Lotha, and Rengma, the Liangmai Naga do not have separate house built as *khangchiu*. It is but attached to one of the houses in the village. A person who is wealthy usually volunteered to host a *khangchiu*. At other times the elders of the village would hold a meeting and choose a person who is wealthy, honorable and prominent in the village to host one. The family which hosts a *khangchiu* is called *aziki* (or *kaziki* in some village). One important reason for choosing a wealthy person to host one is that in times of emergency, the host would have no problem in providing

food and *zaw*<sup>3</sup> to the *khangchiu* members. In case of any eventuality the *khangchiu* members would eat from host's house and rush off to their duty. The number of *khangchiu* in Liangmai villages may vary. In villages like Tharon and Chiang, the villages which my informants belong to, there are four *khangchiu* respectively.<sup>4</sup> For each *khangchiu* there is an equivalent *liuchiu*, a female dormitory. If there are four *khangchiu* in a village, there will also be four *liuchiu*.<sup>5</sup> Such pairing of *khangchiu* and *liuchiu* is imperative in the lifestyle of the village both for practical and social purpose. "Such pairing may not be mandatory but a necessity" reckons one of my informants. He further added that "in the functionary of a village, *khangchiu* played an important role as work force, defense force and other duties, and this institution needs support from *liuchiu*. The assistance of *liuchiu* is required for the smooth functioning of *khangchiu*".

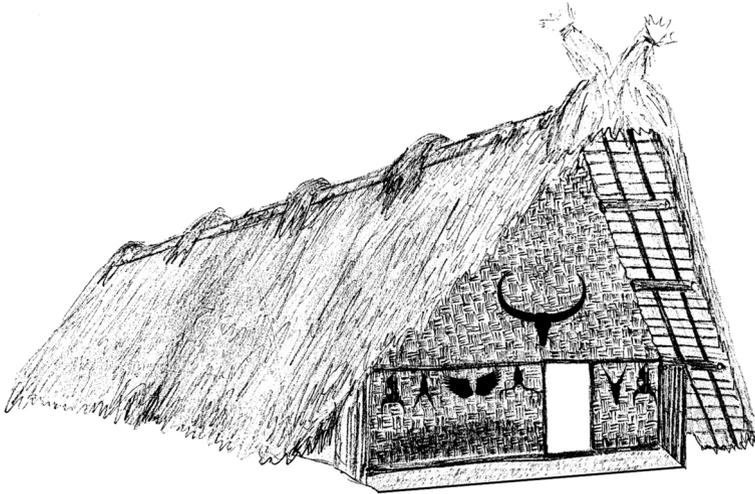
A person who volunteered or was chosen to host a *khangchiu* would build a house larger than the ordinary housing structures (also see Daimai 2018; Maisuangdibou 2022). Such a house has two parts. The first part is called *akhangki* which literally means bachelor's room. This *akhangki* is built to accommodate forty to fifty or even more, depending on the size and population of the village. The second part of the house consisted of normal housing rooms like kitchen, bedroom of the host's family. *Akhangki*, which is lodged at the front portion of the house constitutes almost half the size of the entire building. Sleeping platforms are raised in all corners of *akhangki*. In the middle is a hearth called *mang* or *kamang* where a big fire is burned for lighting purpose as well as to keep the occupants warm. People to these days use a metaphorical expression *khangchiu mang kum da* which means "like a *khangchiu* hearth", when one sees a big blazing fire in a hearth. This hearth is surrounded by *bamchuan*, a long bench, placed for sitting purpose. Next to *akhangki* is *kabum*, the cooking and dining area of the host family. Adjacent to *kabum* is bedroom, store-room, etc. of the host family. Based on the description given by my informants, Figs. 1, 2 and 3 is the reproduction of the structure of *aziki*, a traditional Liangmai house which host a *khangchiu*.

Depending on the village, the names of *khangchiu* also differ. It is usually named according to the location a *khangchiu* is placed. In some Liangmai villages, *chawang*, the king or the chief, has his own *khangchiu* and *liuchiu*, which forms a royal regiment. The term *khangna* is used to refer to the members of male dormitory and *kina*, the members of female dormitory. So, for instance, the king's *khangchiu* will be called *chawang khangna* and *chawang kina* respectively.

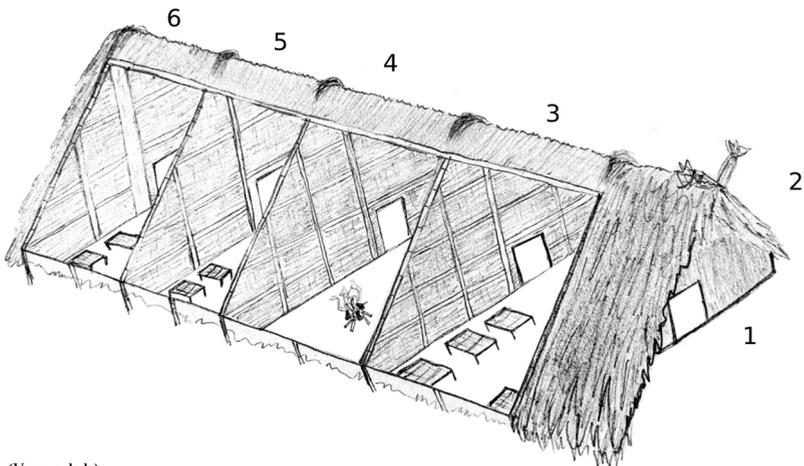
<sup>3</sup> Rice beer. It was a very important commodity in Liangmai culture and tradition. It was used for all ceremonial purposes as well as for daily consumption. It was not highly intoxicating.

<sup>4</sup> Maisuangdibou (2022) mentioned four *khangchiu* and three *liuchiu* in Chiang village. But my Chiang informant named four *liuchiu*.

<sup>5</sup> The names of four *khangchiu* and *liuchiu* in Tharon village are: (a) *ari khangna (khangchiu)/ari kina (liuchiu)*, (b) *ahang khangna/ahang kina*, (c) *tuanning khangna/tuanning kina* and (d) *tubuan khangna/tubuan kina*. Similarly, Chiang village have four *khangchiu/liuchiu*. They are: (a) *taoluang khangna/taoluang kina*, (b) *thaorun khangna/thaorun kina* (c) *chawang khangna/chawang kina* and (d) *tureng khangna/tureng kina*.



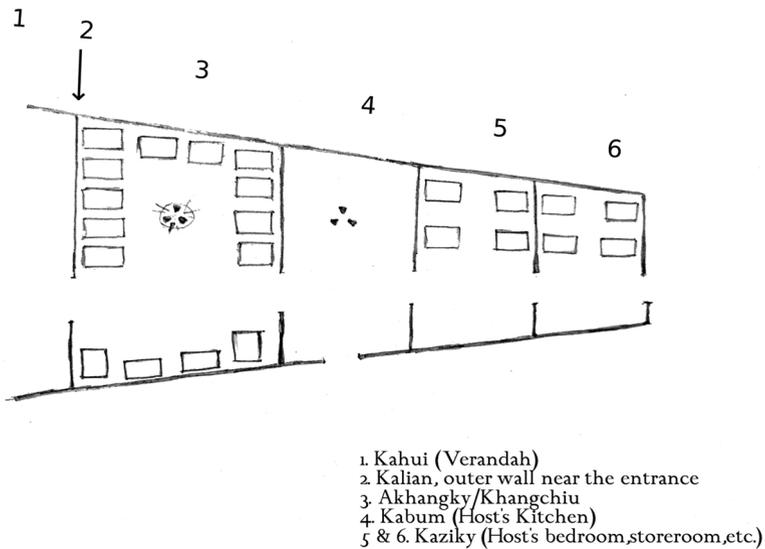
**Fig. 1** Aziki, house that host *khangchuu*



1. Kahui (Verandah)
2. Kalian, outer wall near the entrance
3. Akhangky/Khangchuu
4. Kabum (Host's Kitchen)
- 5 & 6. Kaziky (Host's bedroom, storeroom, etc.)

**Fig. 2** Aziki, Cutaway View

It was a common practice among the Nagas to preserve the skulls of game meat. The Liangmai follows the same practice. The outer wall near the entrance of a *khangchuu* is adorned with skulls of different animals, claws and plumage of birds its members have killed. This wall is called *kalian*. The adorned *kalian* is the pride of a *khangchuu*. The log beams and wooden planks are also “decorated with carvings of



**Fig. 3** Aziki, Top view

images of birds, animals, and human beings” (Maisuangdibou 2022: 166). Near the entrance and *kalian* there is an open gallery or porch with a roof over it. This porch, known as *kahui*, serves as a verandah as well as a space to workout. A bull’s skull is hung from railing of the roof which is as high as 20–25 feet, and this differentiate an *aziki* from other common housing in the village.<sup>6</sup> The empty space in front of the house known as *kama* is used for traditional games and sports like high jump, long jump, shot put, and other activities like dancing. It is also a common practice of a Liangmai Naga village to conduct annual strength show to see who is the strongest and fittest in the village. In such competition, each *khangchiu* compete against each other to earn or win the coveted first prize. In Liangmai culture there is no prize given to the winner, rather the victor offered bull or pig and feed the villagers. It is the name of being “the strongest” that matters to them.

Rivalry between different *khangchiu* is a common feature; nevertheless, it is a healthy one. It is limited to outperforming the opposing *khangchiu* in games and sports, in capturing the ceremonial cow or doing good deeds for the village. Daimai wrote “there is a keen competition between the *Khangchius* for the welfare of the village. Whenever a *Khangchiu* receives accolades for its performance, it throws a feast or gifts a *mithun* (*Bos Frontalis*) to the village” (Daimai 1995: 476).

<sup>6</sup> The normal housing structure is called *chungki*. It is said to be much smaller than *aziki*.

## Admission into a *Khangchiu*

Membership to a *khangchiu* is decided on the day a child is born. When a child is born, the midwife claimed the child for a certain *khangchiu*, usually the one where she has emotional attachment. She, then informs that *khangchiu* “a child is born and I had claimed it to be a member of your *khangchiu*; take a *teibung* (food pack) to the family”. Subsequently, the members of the *khangchiu* go to the family where the child is born with rice and portion of meat and claim him as one member of them. In some cases, when the news of a new born baby in the village is heard, the gender of the baby is enquired. After learning the gender of the baby, members of different *khangchiu* rush to that house to claim membership to their *khangchiu*. They come bearing gifts like hen, portion of meat or at the least an egg. Merely claiming membership without gift is not valid. It is the gift that seals the deal. Whoever comes with a gift and claims first will have the new member. So, a person becomes a member of a *khangchiu* on the day he/she was born.

Membership of a *khangchiu* is for a lifetime. Up to the day he dies, he remains the member of the *khangchiu* who came with *teibung* on the day he was born. Each member also dearly cares for their respective *khangchiu* throughout their life. “Change of membership is not known,” said my informants. Disassociation or excommunication of a member must have been rare as my informants put it. They have not heard of such cases nor knew about it. The boys normally join their *khangchiu* at the age of thirteen or fourteen. In villages where *chungkhangna* is not practiced they joined as early as the age of eight or nine. One of my informants joined his *khangchiu* around that age as the system of *chungkhangna* is not practiced in his village. A person continues to sleep in his *khangchiu* even after his marriage. “I remember my father going to his *khangchiu* to sleep when I was a small boy” recalls one of my informants. There is no set age to stop one from sleeping in *khangchiu*. However, as new members come the married members vacate their places to accommodate younger members. They remained as member of their respective *khangchiu* even after they stopped sleeping in it. On demise of a member, it is the responsibility and duty of other members to dig his grave and make other necessary arrangements for his funeral. The members also carry out a proper send-off to female member of the paired *liuchiu* who is to be married off in the tradition of *aliumi mibo*<sup>7</sup> the most respected form of marriage in Liangmai culture.

Liangmai *khangchiu* is a multi-clan institution. There is no stringent rule like this and that family or this and that clan should be in a particular *khangchiu*. For instance, a father and son or brothers may be members of different *khangchiu*. There are, however, cases where father and son or brothers belong to same *khangchiu* as well. Each person will be a member of the *khangchiu* which claimed him first on the day he was born. This way the dormitory system checks groupism or clannism. It helps in maintaining the balance between different kin and clan in the village.

<sup>7</sup> Daimai (2018) mentioned it as *n-changmi*. People equate this form of marriage to the present Christian Holy Marriage.

## Rites-de-passage

When a boy has reached the right age, his *khangchui* members come to his house and inform the family that the time has come for him to join the *khangchui*. On the day the parents give the boy *akhang pirim*, “a man’s haircut”, take a jar of rice beer and see him off to his *khangchui*. They entrust the boy to the *khangchui* saying “from this day teach him and take care of him”. There is also another rite called *akhang nii thui Khaibo* meaning “wearing of man’s pant (traditional kilt)”. This ritual is done by one of the elders of the *khangchui*. While wearing the kilt, the elder chants “Hey, ata..(pajan dinja) tu I niu akhangnee thui Khai gude, pakhangchui chak kiuja maiphen mairenjiu lunglo, tathiu-chari machun sujiu machun doubilo, charuang wangjiu wang gengjiu lung khai-bilo...” (Daimai 2018): 46), *maisai sui tang za, makhap-marap za lung so lo*.<sup>8</sup> This can be translated as “Hey, I dressed my ward (saying the boy’s name) as man. As he joins his *khangchui* let him be equal to his peers, when he goes out to war let him be successful, let him have good name in the gathering of multitude, may he be able to keep up with others and let him live vigilantly”. Then the rice beer brought by the new member’s family is drunk by *khangbonmai*, elders who have ceased to sleep in *khangchui*, and bless the kid.

Similarly, for a girl, before she joins her *liuchui*, she was given a *thamdan* “a woman’s haircut” and accorded a ritual called *patakombombo* meaning “covering of her bosom”. These rituals signify that she has already become a woman. Boys and girls transitioned from a junior dormitory to a youth dormitory after these rituals.

Girls usually do not visit the male dormitory. On the other hand, boys frequently visit female dormitory to socialize and possibly to establish a relationship. The female members of the affiliated *liuchui* are sometimes invited to the *khangchui* when certain discussion is needed in regard to hosting of feast or to organize a festival.

## Role of the members

Roles and responsibilities of *khangchui* members are based on age grade classification. There are a set of unwritten rules that the members follow religiously. The youngest members are obliged to sweep and clean the *khangchui* and its surroundings. They also collect firewood to be used in the dormitory. It is also the duty of these young boys to look after the *khangchui* during daytime when its older members are away in the field or engaged with some other outdoor works. They have to keep things in order. They also serve as an errand boy for older members. For instance, they may be sent to get food packs, rice beer or other items from older member’s house. Being obedient to older members is a requisite quality for younger members. They can be punished in case of disobedience. Parents cannot object such disciplinary actions in *khangchui*.

<sup>8</sup> This part was added by the author (Daimai 2018) during the interview.

The older members, constituted by youths in their prime, look after the affairs of the village. These youths formed the most important group in the functioning of the dormitory. It is their responsibility to maintain good roads and bridges for the villagers. They repair village gate, walls and fences. They help the poor and needy with food items and free labor when necessary. They also help each other out in daily affairs. Special attention is given to the condition of water source of the village. They make it sure that the villagers always have clean drinking water. Maintaining the village wall is another duty of the bachelors. They made stone walls and fences of wood and bamboo. They are the village manpower and defense mechanism. They make necessary decisions for the betterment of *khangchuu* and the village in general. More detail on the role and function of this group is provided in the following section.

*Khangting*, the commander of the *khangchuu*, is the oldest member who resides or sleeps in the dormitory. He commands absolute authority. It is told that whenever he arrives in *khangchuu* other members rise to their feet in act of respect and offer their seat to him. No member can disobey his order. It is his role to maintain rules and discipline in *khangchuu*. He also occupies the most strategic location in the sleeping area, which usually is at the edge. This space cannot be occupied by any other member nor can it be given even to a guest. He protects it at all cost. My primary informant narrates about an incident involving his *khangting* and armed members of Naga National Council (NNC). One day some Naga army came to the village and went to his *khangchuu*. On arriving, the commander of the army ordered the members and *khangting* present in the dormitory at that time, "Get up and go to your houses. We are occupying your *khangchuu* tonight". The *khangting* replied "I will not vacate my space. As per my village tradition I have to sleep here. I cannot abandon my *khangchuu*". They tried to drag him out by force but the old man stood his ground. Finally, they let him off saying "he is very determined". This way the men followed their tradition and make sure they perform their duty without fail.

The role of *khangting* also extends to the counting of dates and seasons. People follow the lunar cycle to keep track of time. Besides him, *chawang* "king" and *singku* "priest" also keep their count of dates. These three will come together to see whether their count is in align with each other for any event or festival in the village. If there is disparity, mistake is rectified after consulting each other.

*Khangbonmais* are the members who have ceased sleeping in *khangchuu*. However, they hold certain power in decision making by virtue of being the member of the *khangchuu*. *Khangchuu* cannot perform any activity which is not approved by *khangbonmai*. For instance, if a *khangchuu* wanted to host a festival for the village, the members go to *khangbonmai* with a pot of rice beer to get their permission. It is also their duty to formally welcome new members into their *khangchuu*.

Despite the age grade hierarchy in distribution of roles and duties of the members "an egalitarian spirit was a feature of the community life of the Liangmai which owed much to the youth dormitory itself where all members – rich and poor, old and young, strong and weak – were treated equally" (Daimai and Ranjan 2015). The members of youth dormitories often assist in various communal endeavors. The welfare of the village and the villagers are looked after by the members of youth dormitories. They also helped in providing firewood, drinking water and sometimes food

items to the needy, especially the poor and the widowed. When a person wanted to build a *chakiuki*, a traditional grand house, he goes to the *apai/pai*, the village council, with a pot of rice beer and seeks its permission. When the permission is granted and it is declared that such a person is to construct a grand house, all able-bodied villagers extended their help, including members of different *khangchiu*. In such event, work distribution is given to each *khangchiu* and they try to perform better than the other. On completion of the work, a bull or pig is offered by the owner of the house for a feast. In case a bull is offered, the competition to capture the animal becomes an important and exciting event in itself. Whoever captures the bull first is highly praised and in turn it brings laurels to the *khangchiu* he belongs to. Such achievement is much coveted by the people.

### Function of *khangchiu*

One of the most important functions of *khangchiu* is providing security to the village. The youths who are in their prime, take it upon themselves to guard the village. The mode of guarding is different from the present-day military system where soldiers are posted in designated position or location. The youths rather stay awake in their respective *khangchiu* to be aware of their surroundings and be prepared to spring to action in case of any untoward incident. When evening falls and the night has set in, the younger members gather and stay awake till midnight keeping close attention to sounds, sites and events in the village. Sometimes they patrol the village singing songs and assuring the villagers that they are in good hands. After midnight the older members rose and take over the watch. There is no set routine but the members follow this system with understanding. This act of guarding the village is called *akhebo* or *kaluang pangbo*.

Emphasizing on the importance of *akhebo* or *kaluang pangbo*, Phenlakhbou, my primary informant recalls “those were the days of daos and spears (meaning frequent raids and wars) and as a youth of the village, providing security to the villagers, especially women and children, was the utmost goal. Married men can also guard but the bachelors consider it as their main responsibility when it comes to guarding the village”. He also sang some folksongs usually sung by youths while being on guard. The first song they would sing while on guard goes like this:

*kiumayang kiso zuang khang*  
*malo pou*  
*dekam nelo dinso dulo*  
*malo pou*  
*aram mai guan zuanne*

Free translation:

From *Kiumayang* house I come, comrade  
 Don't tell me of your whereabouts, comrade  
 I come to look after the welfare of my villagers.

“There are many songs related to village guarding which reflect the mood of the youth on guard. They take their duty very seriously” he added and sang another song which manifested the sacrificial attitude of the *khangchiu* members.

*karikhe kaleng tao kabam kumme*  
*liuna mai, ping du lo*  
*akhe mun so kamai sai rasai*  
*akuan rom buiye*  
*kamai sai rasai*  
*i aben dan lu buiye*

Free translation:

Like a hawk, I am guarding (the village)  
Young maiden, do not fear  
If anyone dies in my watch  
I can cut my ear  
If anyone dies  
I will cut my hand.

These songs show how dedicated the youth members of the dormitory are in doing their duty. They are willing to lay down their lives for their *khangchiu* and their village. The spirit of selflessness and sacrifice was the order of the day. The main objective of *khangchiu* is to let the villagers carry on their daily affairs without any fear.

In return, the villagers also put their full trust on the *khangchiu* youths for their safety. Their trust on the one who guards is reflected in the following song.

*thiao bichiu rikhepou*  
*kamai kai ruang ga khepou*  
*kaapai za khepou*  
*azan khepou raowe*  
*kaliuraowang kolo*

Free translation:

You heard a sound and called on the one who guards  
Among the multitude you know the one who guards  
You stumble and shout out to the one who guards  
I don't want my name to be 'the one who guards'  
Called me the selfless one instead.

In the event of inter village feud or raid; the warriors set out to the mission from *khangchiu*. Enemy's head is brought to *khangchiu*. So, in a way it serves as a “semi-military barracks”.

A person gravely injured in raids or other events is brought to his *khangchuu* rather than his house. The other members attend to him. “My grandfather was shot (by accident)” recalls Nampibou, “and he was taken to his *khangchuu*. He has wife and children to care for him but his peers claimed he should be brought to the *khangchuu* and they will attend to him. He later succumbed to his injury”. Even sick members are brought to their respective *khangchuu* to be attended to by his fellow members. It serves as an infirmary.

Members of *khangchuu* may stop sleeping in their youth dormitory after getting married. However, during the time of *Chaga Ngee*, which is a purification festival of Liangmai Naga, all members, young and old go to their respective dormitories. From the first day of *chaga*, after *chami malapbo*, a fire-making ritual, they stay in their *khangchuu*. *Chaga ngee* usually lasted for five to seven days, and during this period it is a taboo for men to sleep with their wives and to eat food cooked by women folks. This signifies purification of their bodies. In Liangmai culture, physical intimacy with opposite sex is considered impure. So, in times of war, men will not go to war from their homes. They believed that if a man goes to war from his house, he might be injured or even killed because he is impure. In this way *khangchuu* signifies purity and serves as a purification center.

Another important purpose of *khangchuu* is to transmit basic knowledge of art and craft. One learned how to make things of daily use, namely *kakhaa*, *kaluang*, *tamthuu*, *mariu*, etc. all traditional basket of different shape and size made of cane and bamboo. Learning such a craft begins as early as when one was in *chungkhangna*, but such skills are enhanced while at *khangchuu*. A man who does not know how to make *kakhaa-kaluang* for his sister is considered *miu*, meaning “wanting” or “imperfect”. Such a person is considered inferior, lacking quality to be called a man. Such art and craft were taught to young man in *khangchuu* so that one becomes a competent citizen and contribute to the community. Similarly, girls learned their crafts like weaving, stitching while at *liuchuu*. The youth dormitories serve the purpose of basic training institute.

*Khangchuu* is an institution that inculcates discipline to its members. Young people were taught never to be disrespectful to elders. There was a popular metaphorical expression while referring to a wayward, indiscipline person, *khangchuu chak khai mak za de* which means “(he) didn’t sleep in *khangchuu*”. It implies that the person lacks knowledge and discipline taught in a *khangchuu* as he did not sleep there. Counter expression like *khangchuu chak khai bo na si len taro* “he who attended/sleep in *khangchuu*” is used to refer to a well-mannered and discipline person, implying he was taught well in *khangchuu*. Another quality inculcated in *khangchuu* is selflessness and being helpful to others. People try their best to do good and earned good names. Doing good things and earning praises from others was one of the main motivations for younger people.

The older members, after doing their daily work in field, come to *khangchuu* to sleep and teach the younger members. Besides teaching art and craft, they narrate folk tales and sing folk songs which the younger members pick up and pass on to the next generation. In a way this dormitory operates like an educational institution.

## Fund of Khangchiu

*Khangchiu* mostly raised its fund by working on fields of wealthy persons. They are paid in the form of grains and livestock for their labor. Grains and cereals are saved up while livestock are reared. Some *khangchiu* have more properties or fund than the others. *Khangchiu* funds are usually used for the welfare of the villagers. For instance, when a *khangchiu* have surplus of funds, it sponsors a village festival. The festival commonly sponsored by a *khangchiu* is *matui ngee* or *matuibo*. *Matuibo* is celebrated with dance, food and drinks and the host *khangchiu* will feed the whole village for two to three days. Before the celebration, an invitation is given to other dormitories in the village, villagers and to nearby villages. In Liangmai culture, giving out invitation is called *taran zanbo*. For *taran* (invitation), chilli powder is used. Dried chillies will be pounded into fine powder and one *tien* (equivalent to one spoonful) each is wrapped neatly in banana leaf and distributed.

When a *khangchiu* hunted a big game, small portions of the game meat are distributed to the elders of the village. It usually killed another domesticated animal like cattle or pig to be added to the game meat and feed the villagers as well. The *khangchiu* used its own livestock for this purpose. Otherwise, they raised the fund by working for the person from whom the additional animal was taken or any other wealthier person in the village and pay forward for the price of the animal.

Things needed in *khangchiu* like firewood, water, etc. are gathered by its members. They don't depend nor burdened the host family for such stuffs. Only in a sudden unforeseen crisis they depended on the host family.

## Decline of Khangchiu system

Some conservatives are of the view that Christian missionaries are to be blamed for the disintegration of the *khangchiu* system. Christianity penetrated to the core of the Liangmai social institutions and *khangchiu* suffered the maximum damage. Once converted, Christians are expelled from their villages and are not allowed to participate in village activities. On top of that the missionaries forbid the new converts to continue in their old ways. When more people converted to Christianity, the traditional village life was left impaired, including the youth dormitory system.

Religious factor alone is not responsible for the annihilation of the dormitory system. The introduction of modern education plays a major role in changing the lifestyle of the tribal like Liangmai. When education was first introduced in the Liangmai region, people were resistant to it thinking it will make them lazy. But gradually they succumbed to the modern education system. It replaced the traditional institution which was the youth dormitory. When charged for destroying the youth dormitory system, the Christian missionaries would deny stating the fact that *khangchiu* has decayed even in non-Christian villages and they would claim that modern education is responsible for it (Kabui 2016). After initial resistance, people realized the importance of education and everyone wants to send their children to school. The educated generation started neglecting their traditional practices. They lost interest

in learning or did not get time to learn traditional art and craft. My informants also mentioned that they missed most of *khangchiu* life because they had to leave the village to study.

There is a change in the attitude of the younger generation towards their traditional customs and practices. Traditional songs associated with their cultural activities are no longer sung. Traditional dance of various forms is no longer practice. The lifestyle of the villagers itself has changed with shift in religion, formal education and other modern development. One of my informants opines that traditional practices like the *khangchiu* system are no longer relevant or possible in the modern era. "One cannot focus solely in eating and drinking alone in the present time" he said.

From the religious point of view, as majority of Liangmai has converted to Christianity, they could no longer practice the old ways of life. Rituals, chants, sacrifices and other activities associated with old belief system had to be abolished. Practically, it is no longer possible for the villagers to live in their villages as one kingdom in present time. Modern technology and entertainment have replaced the art and craft, story-telling and other practices. Many have shifted from agrarian lifestyle to other professions. Therefore, the way of living associated with agriculture is no longer relevant to many.

From the moral point of view, some practices that were accepted and even celebrated in earlier days are no longer applicable in present times. For instance, earlier having multiple sexual partners and taking enemies head are considered as achievements. But these acts are no longer accepted; they are considered as crime in the present time. Taking revenge was regarded as show of worthiness in the past but now it is not so.

After conversion to Christianity, introduction of formal education and other modern development, people have discarded and neglected the practice of *khangchiu* institution. A majority of present generation no longer knows about it. Only a few elders remember this system. It has been more than five decades since this practice is discontinued. Membership to this institution has stopped in the current generation. All these factors contributed to the decline of youth dormitory system among Liangmai people. Presently, no dormitory system is found among the Liangmai Naga in Manipur. The system has been totally annihilated.

## Conclusion

The *khangchiu* system of the Liangmai Naga found a natural affinity with the *morung* of other Naga tribes. It was a well-developed system where their traditional live centered until its degradation in the latter half of the twentieth century. The socialization process had changed considerably. The old way of learning art and craft for livelihood has now been replaced by modern education and finding salaried job. The *khangchiu* system is talked about as symbol of the past. Even among the older generation, there are only a few remaining who had witnessed the *khangchiu* and remember how it operates. Modernity, in the form of formal education, electoral politics and rise of educated middle class has brought about new intra-community differences. The gap between educated and uneducated, the rich and poor has

uprooted the old egalitarian nature of the people. Electoral politics not only creates groupism but has also brought a divide even within a clan and family.

However, traces of *khangchiu*'s role can be found in the functioning of village students' unions, youth clubs and Church youth departments. These organizations mainly operate to uplift the community and it resonates the role *khangchiu* played in the past. Efforts are being made by a few community members to revive and preserve their dwindling cultural heritages such as folk songs, folk tales, folk dances, etc. Yet, reviving traditional practices like the *khangchiu* system is practically unattainable.

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**Availability of data and materials** I have elicited the data through oral interviews and documented it in a manuscript. I possess the manuscript data as well as the video files of the interview/narration.

## Declarations

**Ethics approval and consent to participate** My informants were well-informed about the purpose of the research and utilization of the same data being collected and they willingly participated in this research process. They are actually happy to share their knowledge to younger generation.

**Consent for publication** When I informed the informants of the possibility of publication using the data, they gave their consent orally for it.

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## Comments

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