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Change of Rural Society and Local Agro-ecological Knowledge in Myanmar

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PREFACE

In May 2001, the SEAMEO Regional Centre for History and Tradition and the Center for Southeast Asian Studies of Kyoto University came together to launch a research project, "Historical Development of Rural Societies and Villagers' Livelihood in Myanmar." The aim of the project was to study the changes that had been going on in Myanmar at the village level from the earlier opening up of Myanmar under the colonial order to the more recent developments as Myanmar shifted from being a centrally planned economy to one which was market-oriented.

Since the project was designed as a microcosmic village study, much attention was paid to the selection of an appropriate project site. After a preliminary survey of potential sites, Gwa township in southern Rakhine State was finally selected.

For much of the pre-colonial period, Gwa was an out-of-the-way, obscure area, much removed from the developments in Rakhine State which were centred in Mrauk-oo, the capital, in the north, and in the subsidiary centre of Thandwe in central Rakhine State which provided the main point of overland access to the central valley of the Ayeyarwady. It was mainly during the colonial period that a Gwa began to develop, with a migration into the area from the north via the Ayeyarwady delta which featured largely in the British colonial programme of developing commercial rice cultivation and the export of rice to underwrite British colonial administrative expenses.

Gwa entered into a second period of development when, with the change towards a market-oriented economy when, together with the development of major communication and transportation facilities providing access, the fishing industry of the Rakhine coast was encouraged in the effort to produce marine export products for an international market.

The research project conducted at Gwa from May 2001 to March 2003 was a multi-disciplinary project which attempted to study the change in rural society and villagers' livelihood from a variety of view points. For this multi-disciplinary study, the SEAMEO Regional Centre for History and Tradition was able to draw upon the rich scholarly resources available at several Myanmar academic institutions: the Universities' Historical Research Centre, the University of Yangon and the Institute of Economics.

The conduct of the research project was marked by a close camaraderie among the participating scholars as they exchanged theoretical insights, research methodologies, views and experiences across cultures and disciplines to enrich each other's work. The project also benefited from the welcome and cooperation extended to it by local authorities and the local community.

The results of the research project were presented and discussed by the participating scholars in a two-day workshop, "Change of Rural Society and Local Agro-Ecological Knowledge in Myanmar," held in the SEAMEO Regional Centre for History and Knowledge in Yangon, 16-17 March 2004, and they are now made available to a wider audience in this publication.

Tun Aung Chain
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Historical Development of Local Administration and Community Leadership

Myint Thein

Introduction

This paper is based upon fieldwork on local administration and community leadership in the rural area of Gwa township, Rakhine State. The villagers of Ywathitkone, the village where I conducted my research, have a long tradition of local administration. Through interviews and participant observation, I critically examined the relations between village headman and villagers. I studied not only the specific administration, but the background and root causes of socio-economic problems which relate to local administration. I also visited the township-level government offices to get the basic information relevant to the understanding of the general conditions of the township. Historical knowledge cannot be definitive or absolute, since deeper insights always await perception in the light of additional evidence. Relativity is particularly characteristic in the field of study. So I tried to collect the oral history of the village. I also tried to examine the contradiction between the local administrative system and the village community. In contrast to the local administration I will attempt to present the village administration and the role of community leadership.

My study is presented in four parts: the first part provides a brief background of the study area; the second part describes the local administrative system at township and village levels; the third part studies the changes of in community leadership; the last part examines the relationship between the villagers and the local administrative authority.

I. Study Area

1. Location

Rakhine State is geographically situated in the western part of the Union of Myanmar. There are five districts (Buthidaung, Maungdaw, Sittway, Kyaukphyu and Thandwe) and 17 townships. (Hla Tun Aung: 2003, 671). Gwa township, situated in the southernmost part of Rakhine State between latitudes $17^{\circ} 15' N$ and $18^{\circ} 8' N$ and longitudes $94^{\circ} 25' E$ and $94^{\circ} 54' E$, belongs, together with Thandwe and Taqunggok, to Thandwe district. It is bordered on the west by the Bay of Bengal, on the north by Thandwe township, on the east by Laymyethna township and on the south by Thabaung township.

Gwa township is oval in shape, a little broader in the north and narrowing towards the south. Its broadest width, east and west between the Bay of Bengal and the Rakhine Yoma, is 25 miles; its north to south length is 63 miles, and its total area is 885.11 sq miles. Because of the Rakhine Yoma, Gwa township is thickly forested with the coastal plain generally only 5 miles wide. Kyaintali, Sathwa, Kinpong, Rahaingutuo, Kyaukchaung and Gwa creeks flow through the township into the sea. Within 15 miles of their mouths the water is saline, beyond that it is fresh. (GA 2003: 5). Gwa town was formerly known as Gwa Ywa (village) and since it is an island at the junction of two creeks, Gwa and Rahaingutuo, it was also known as Gwa Island.

Changing Traditional Cropping Systems in Rural Rakhine State

Meaning of "Traditional" in Rural Development Study

Ando Kazuo

I. What is "Traditional"?

In March 2001, the modern variety of irrigated rice cultivation was observed only very limitedly even along the side of the national road from Gwa to Thandwe. The green crops were Matpei (Black gram) a variety newly promoted by the Agricultural Extension Office. Usually, the rice stubble-fields spread to a large extent. As shown in Table 1 the crop acreage of Gwa Township, especially the rice production, depends on the wet season's rain-fed field. The villagers also depend on their own manual labor force. In the study village, the agricultural tools drawn by cows or buffalos are shown in Photo 1~5. These are locally hand-made from wood and bamboo excepting the iron parts, e.g. ploughshare. The agricultural landscape, crop statistics (Table 1) and the agricultural tools allow visitors to judge the cropping systems of this locality as "traditional" with the connotation of "no change" or "static", even "undeveloped as against modernization". The farmers in Gwa Township, seem to be obedient followers of traditional agricultural tools and the system of rice cultivation. Outsiders, like urban dwellers and even including the author of this article, usually tend to have such an idea. Why does this happen? Probably, outsiders dwelling in urban areas are much familiar with the rapid change surrounding them and unconsciously believe that the good return of rapid economic growth is realized by "development by modernization". Their mind is filled with such key words as rapid, new, economic etc. However, is it true that farmers have not changed their agricultural tools and crops? The author would like to advance a negative hypothesis: Certainly the farmers have changed their tools and crops in order to meet their own requirements and not the requirements of outsiders. The present study reveals important clues in this regard. The Da Lein Tone and Setton have been well associated with the development of the Ayeyarwaddy region for several decades and the finding is that the Te or plough has even changed its shape within last 50 years. Also, the villagers cultivate modern varieties of rice under rain-fed conditions. However, these changes are easily overlooked because these have become natural or harmonious in the life of the villagers and village landscape and accordingly the outsiders misunderstand these "new things" as "traditional" or "un-changed". The Nipa palm locally called as Dani (shown in Photo 6) seems to be natural but all of them are cultivated along the creeks. The Nipa palms too have been adopted into the village landscape. The meaning of "Traditional" appears to the author like the Nipa palm in the village landscape. When the mode and speed of "Change" in the rural livelihood is in accord with the villagers' subjective wish and pace to change themselves, the "Change" appears as "Traditional" to outsiders. Incidentally, the meaning of "Traditional" in ritual studies etc. seems to be "Unchanged" or "Authority". However, in rural development studies conducted for supporting the rural people, "Traditional" is for outsiders to learn the "things" which have given the rural people sustainability of livelihood in their history. We must learn the principle identified by "Traditional" and, on this basis, we can create the "new things"

Fish Resources and Fishery Systems in Rakhine State

OHNISHI Nobuhiro

Abstract

The fish resources of Gwa township were investigated in 2001-2003. A total of 155 species (51 families) were recorded from the market, fishermen, and fish traders. Gwa has a coastal area, a mangrove area, rivers and paddy fields. Thus, the diverse geographical configuration provides richness in fish species.

There are some fishery villages in Gwa, with Nga konenyo as one of the major products are shipped in the salted form or the salted dry form. The large-scale fishery enterprises provide employment opportunities and encourage internal migration of the people. Although large-scale fishery flourishes in Gwa, small fish dealers also sell minor fishes in the daily market. The richness of species provides opportunity for both large-scale fishery and small-scale fishery. Although some areas (ex. mangrove area) are not suitable for large-scale fishery the richness of species is high and these areas are good fishery grounds for small-scale fishery. Both large-scale and small-scale fishery depend on the richness of species in the area and provide employment opportunities for the people.

Introduction

The conservation of biodiversity is one of the important subjects in the world. Many conservation programs and researches are being conducted highlighting the present situation. This subject is also very important in the case of Myanmar, because Myanmar is famous for its richness in biodiversity. The richness of species is fundamental as resources for people and a variety of fishes are used for food resources in the coastal area. However, the use of biodiversity is not well understood. In general social systems always interact with resource use patterns. For example, there is much social cooperation in fishing, the processing of fish after landing, marketing and so on. Therefore, I try to clarify (1) the use of a variety of fish resources in a coastal region of Myanmar and (2) the relationship between socio-economic traits and the use of these fish resources.

Study Site and Study Methods:

This study was conducted in Gwa township, Rakhine State, Myanmar. Gwa is situated in the southern part of Rakhine State and faces the Bay of Bengal. The Gwa river runs into Gwa Bay. Mangrove forest occurs in brackish water areas. Thus, various water environment occur such as the marine area, the brackish water area and the fresh water area.

Field research was conducted from 25 November to 5 December 2001, 7-14 March 2002, 8-17 July 2003, and 18-20 December 2003. Interviews of fish sellers, fishermen and their



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