

Lotus Robe in Kyaing Khan Village Innlay Lake, Shan State (South): An Anthropological Perspective

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Abstract

Generally, robe is regarded as a Buddhist disciplinary item of significance. It is a piece of clothing for arhats and the Buddha's disciples and it will be used as long as the Buddha's Teachings (*Sasana*) exist. The study area is *Kyaing Khan* Village, Innlay Lake, Nyaung Shwe Township, Shan State (South). In this study, descriptive study design was used. This study was conducted with qualitative research method including Key Informant Interviews (KII), Direct Observation (DO), Indirect Observation (IO), Individual In-depth Interviews (IDI), Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and Participant Observation (PO). The aim of this study is to explore the social values on robe made from lotus fiber. In order to achieve the aim, the specific objectives are adopted: they are to present the historical background of robe made from lotus fiber, and the techniques they use in making lotus robe; to elicit how they transmit the techniques of making lotus robe to the next generation; and to explore social value on lotus robe. *Innthar* nationals produce lotus-fiber-woven robes by using natural resources available in Innlay region. The *Innthar* nationals are proud of weaving lotus robe because they are spiritually delighted when offering it as a monastic requisite to the monks. It is found out that the *Innthar* nationals at Kyaing Khan are proud of how they earn their living while trying to hand over the traditional customs of heritage to the next generation.

Key words: Religion, Social value, Robe, Lotus fiber

Introduction

As Myanmar opens its economic doors and shares its cultural and traditional treasures with the world, lotus weaving stands out as a unique industry that was unnoticed. Myanmar people are also proud of their own culture and tradition, and place a high value on lotus-weaving industry. In fact, every national needs to set a real value on his culture not to lose value and identity especially in this globalized world. In this aspect, the term 'value' is defined by the scholars in different ways.

Values are the standards by which members of a society define what is good or bad, holy or unholy, beautiful or ugly. They are assumptions that are widely shared within the society. Values are a central aspect of the nonmaterial culture of a society and are important because they influence the behavior of the members of a society (Raymond, Sccupin: 1998).

All the major world religions were born during times of rapid cultural transformations. Buddhism and Hinduism arose in the Ganges Valley of northern India during an epoch of deforestation, population increase, and state formation. Judaism arose during the prolonged migrations of the ancient Israelites. Christianity arose in conjunction with attempts to break the yoke of Roman imperialism. Islam arose during the transition from a life of pastoral nomadism to that of trade and empires in Arabia and North Africa. Protestants split from Catholicism as feudalism gave way to capitalism (Harris: 1995).

Most of the people in Myanmar believe in Buddhism, and their deep devotion is apparent in the thousands of pagodas, temples, stupas and monasteries. Even a village, whether it may be small or big, tries to set up its own monastery in which a monk resides. The villagers always make various kinds of offerings to the monk, the Pagodas, and the Buddha Images, which, they think, are valuable to them. Among them, robe from lotus fibre is regarded as the sacred and noblest item on account of its rarity, high expense, durability and high artistic skills.

Since offering robe can gain great merits, the Buddhists are eager to offer it to the monks, mostly in religious festivals. In this case, nine types of robe were allowed for monks to

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wear by the Buddha. They are: (1) bedspread (2) towel (3) *Parikkharacolo* (ပုဆိုးပုဆိုးပုဆိုး) (pieces of cloth to be used for this and that) (4) *Nisidana* (မုဆိုးခင်း) monk's rug to sit on (5) robe used when a monk is suffering from sores (6) rain-proof robe (7) monk's lower garment (8) monk's upper robe and (9) double-layered robe (Encyclopedia Myanmarnica Vol.13). Of these, the first six are no longer used (YaweiHtun: 1947). The last three are called *Tivivara* (တိဗိဘရာ); the three robes are currently being used by the Buddhist monks (Encyclopadia Myanmarnica Vol.13).

According to the Buddha's rule, the monks are to make their robe from discarded cloth found in rubbish heaps or on cemetery ground. After washing the cloth that was boiled with leaves, roots and flowers, the cloth would turn to some shade of dark orange. Hence it was named "saffron robe", *Vikappana* in Pali. Monks today wear robes made of cloths donated or purchased, but in Southeast Asia the cloth is still dyed with colour and fragrance.

Theravada monks of Southeast Asia wear robes thought to be very similar to the robes worn by the Buddha and his disciples. The robes worn by Theravada monks are thought to be unchanged from the original robes of 25 centuries ago. Monks in China wear the *Kashaya* over their sleeved robes on ceremonial occasions. The rice paddy pattern is preserved in the Chinese *Kashaya*, although an abbot's *Kashaya* might be made of ornate, brocaded cloth.

Myanmar has for long been home to the Buddha's *Sasana*, and the robe has remained an important monastic requisite. Robe is called "Thingan" in Myamnar. This is "*Shin*" (ဆိန်), meaning "monk" or "elder". Here it stands for monk. "*Kan*" (ကန်) meaning textile is derived from Mon language (e.g., loom; textile weaved on the handloom.). Therefore "*Thingan*" is the robe worn by monks (Yawai Htun: 1976).

In Myanmar, *Tazaungmon* is virtually the month of offering robe. In ancient time various kinds of robe were usually donated to the Buddha and monks, namely: *Kathina* (ကဏ္ဍိက) robe, *Mathoe* (မာထွေ) robe (robe weaved to completion overnight for offering it to the Buddha in the morning), *Panthaku* (ပဏ္ဍိက) robe which is stitched together as such with discarded pieces of cloth picked up from rubbish heaps, after washing and dyeing them (Shin Thiri, 1997). Unlike other national groups, the *Innthar* produce the monk's robe made from lotus fiber. Production of "lotus" robe has gone commercial, being maintained as a traditional occupation handed down by the forefathers. This paper focuses on the production of lotus fiber robe at Kyaing Khan Village, Inn-Ya Village Tract in Innlay Lake, Nyaung Shwe Township, Southern Shan State.

Justification

In Myanmar, the *Innthar*, an ethnic group residing around Innlay Lake, are peculiar in that the houses in their village stand above the lake surface. The *Innthar* have adapted dwelling places to suit the natural environment, having managed to create occupations themselves, based on skills in various workplaces. Thus they have created a striking culture of their own. The economy of the *Innthar* nationals includes farming on the lake surface or on the land nearby, gardening, livestock breeding, and fishing. Moreover, they are engaged in such handicrafts as weaving on loom, lotus fiber making loom, making silverware etc. In making lotus robes, first of all lotus plants of natural growth are harvested and fibers are produced out of them. Then fibers are weaved into cloth on a loom. Finally this cloth is sewn in line with certain rules of the Buddha and it becomes lotus robe. Making lotus-cloth robe is a traditional handicraft of the *Innthar* nationals and it becomes a business enterprise. This paper highlights social value of making lotus robes.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this paper is to explore social values on robe made from lotus fiber. In order to achieve the aim, the following specific objectives are adopted.

They are:

- ❖ to examine how lotus fiber robe came into existence,
- ❖ to find out how they make lotus fibre robe and how they hand over the techniques to the next generation, and
- ❖ to explore how they put social value on making lotus fibre robe.

Research Methodology

Study design

Field research was conducted by using descriptive study design.

Study area

Kyaing Khan Village, Inn Yar Village Tract, Nyaung Shwe Township, Southern Shan State was selected as the study area. There are fourteen villages in Inn Yar Village Tract including Kyaing Khan Village. Besides farming, the *Innthar* nationals at Kyaing Khan Village are engaged in the occupation of weaving lotus-fiber cloth and making lotus fibre robe. That special weaving stands as a commercial activity as well as a sustained traditional craft which is a kind of inheritance from their forefathers. The focus of the study is to explore social value on lotus fiber robe made in Kyaing Khan Village, Innlay Lake, Nyaung Shwe Township, Shan State (South).

Study Population

The study population is 35 respondents from Kyaing Khan Village in Inn Yar Village Tract; especially the employers and employees from lotus-fiber robe weaving industry were interviewed.

Study Period

This study was conducted during 2013-2014.

Data Collection methods

Qualitative method was used in data collection. In terms of data collection techniques, Key Informant Interview (KII), Individual In-depth Interviews (IDI), Direct Observation (DO), Indirect Observation (IDO), Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and Participant Observation (PO) were used.

Key Informant Interview (KII)

For Key Informant Interview (KII), six elderly people who are well-informed in lotus-robe weaving were interviewed. In the interview, they were asked how they got lotus fiber, how they wove it into lotus cloth, and how they sewed it to get lotus robe. And then they were questioned why they valued lotus robe rather than other products, and what the customs and taboos in manufacturing robe from lotus fibre they followed.

Individual In-depth Interview (IDI)

In Individual In-depth Interviews (IDI), the respondents were mainly loom-employers. From this interview, it is found that why they valued lotus fiber robe, how they produced it starting from raw material up to finished product and how it was sold on the market.

Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

For Focus Group Discussion (FGD), both male and female workers were chosen. Four groups of seven participants, altogether twenty-eight, were interviewed in group. The topic was related to various stages in making robe from lotus fibers, wages for loom workers which can make both ends including schooling expenses for their children.

The behaviors of local community and their attitudes toward lotus robe industry were explained in this study with reference to the primary data. In-depth interview with the local inhabitants, observation done by taking note, photographs and putting them on records and library research were included in primary data collection stage.

Findings

Geographical Background

Myanmar has two famous lakes, namely Inndawgyi and Innlay; the former is larger than the latter. The Innlay, the second largest lake, is a better place for people to do business. This lake, which is 2900 feet above sea level, is situated in Nyaung Shwe Township in the Southern Shan State. The area of Innlay Lake is now 63 square miles and the *Innthar* nationals are most of its inhabitants. Most of the people living in groups on the hilly region are *Pa-O, Shan, Dhanu* and *Taungyoe*, but these people live together in the surrounding areas of the Innlay Lake.

Historical Background of the Lotus Fiber Woven Robe

According to the Buddhist doctrine, the lotus robe emerged a long time ago. When the world came into existence, five buds appeared on a lotus plant and each contained a complete set of Thingan Pareikaya (prescribed items in use for the Buddhist monks). So it was prophesied that five Buddhas would appear in this world and would show the Path to Liberation. Then the age-old Thuddawartha Brahmas brought all the five buds to the place where "Ariyas" holy persons lived and offered the sweet-scented lotus robes to them. As only four robes have been so far offered, there is still one robe outstanding. That was said to be the origin of the lotus robe.

Kyaing Khan Villager's Lotus Robe and its History

According to her close relative, Daw Sar Oo (a) Daw Kyar Oo, a 50-year-old woman skilled in handicraft residing at *Kyaing Khan A Shay* village, *Inn Yar* Village Tract, Nyaung Shwe Township about 90 years ago, was the pioneer weaver of lotus fiber fabric. At that time the famous *Shwe-Oo-Daung Taung Sayadaw* was dwelling at *Shwe-Oo-Daung* Mountain which is situated in the northwest of the Innlay Lake. Having successfully produced the first robe made from lotus fiber, Daw Kyar Oo offered the first lotus robe to *Sayadaw*. Later, Daw Kyar Oo earned her living by making monk's robe from lotus fiber, but it almost went extinct after her death. U Htun Kyi and Daw Ohn Yi family, the relatives of Daw Kyar Oo living in *Kyaing Khan* Village, continued this lotus robe weaving, but they also tried to introduce new techniques by maintaining the original form and pattern. Thus their industry has been turned into a producer's cooperative society limited. Such kind of lotus robe is annually offered to the Buddha Image of Phaung Daw Oo Pagoda. Nowadays, tourists and the local people visit there to find out how they produce lotus robe and buy it. The *Innthar* nationals regard this industry as a cultural heritage.

Type of Lotus Plant

Lotus plant is of two varieties: namely large *Kyar Padommar* and small *Kyar Padommar*. The former's stem has spike on it up to half its length only, while the latter has spike all over. The lotus plants are found abundantly at the *Innlay Lake*. The running water in *Innlay Lake* (locally called 'yeshin') is good for the growth of lotus plant; and so its fibers are in fine texture. The lotus plants are also obtained from its surrounding lakes such as the *Mong Nai (Loilem) Lake* in the eastern part of Shan State, the *Phaungtaw Lake* and the *Sanka Inn (Lake)* of Kayah State. In the *Mong Nai (Loilem) Lake*, only large *Kyar Padomma* is found. The plants can be harvested for six months in a year there, being 5 ticals of fiber for a day's work, or a viss for a month's work. The lotus species at the *Mong Nai* (Shan State) and *Phaungtaw Lakes* (Kayah State) are different.

How to Gather Lotus Stems

Gathering lotus stems begins in early *Nayon* (June) and ends in late *Pyatho* (January). It is not done in *Tabodwe* (February) because it is too cold to pluck lotus stems. The workers do other occupations in the remaining months of the year. The lotus plants are differentiated between *Kyar Yekhin* and *Kyar Pin Htaung*. The former is a plant with its leaves, being close to one another on the water. The latter has a stem half of which stands upright above the water. It is found that more lotus fibers are obtained from *Kyar Yekhin* than *Kyar Pin Htaung*.

Kyar Yekhin is to be plucked in October during the rainy season. The lotus plants in deep water have long stems and they will go shorter in shallow water. In *Waso* (July), the lotus in deep water will grow longer, that is, 6-7 feet. In the middle of the rainy season, lotus plants could grow up to 8-9 feet long. Therefore, more lotus collectors are found in rainy season than the other seasons.



Photo 1. 'Kyar Yekhin' lotus



Photo 2. 'Kyar Pin Htaung' lotus

Lotus stem collectors are the *Innthar* nationals from the villages named *Kyaing Khan North*, *Kyaing Khan East*, *Kyartaw*, *Linn Kin* and *Yee Oo*. Most of them are from *Kyartaw* and *Linn Kin* villages, *Innlay*. Some lotus plants can be found at the *Nyaung Shwe Lake*, *Bo Nay Win Htun Farm*, *Inn Oo Village*, and *Sanka Pond*.

Workers from tomato plantation pluck lotus stems after finishing their work. Some people who do not own a garden are also lotus collectors. When lotus-plucking season is over, some workers go fishing or earn their living by working on others' farms (fee for manual labour or *ahkha*). At a thick plot of lotus plants, a worker could bring 15 bundles in a day. A plot with less plants would yield only 7-8 bundles. A bundle consists of 180-200 plants.



Photo 3: Carrying lotus stems in the teak boat



Photo 4. Lotus stems being soaked in water

Gloves are used lest the hands be pricked by the thorns. Fibres are not to be drawn immediately after the stem is plucked. The plucked stems are soaked in water for two nights, explained by the veteran workers from *Linn Kin Village*.

After soaking in water for two nights, the stems are washed with a piece of linen (cloth used for fishing net) until all the thorns from the stems are rubbed off.



Photo 5: Washing lotus stems with a piece of fishing net



Photo 6: Putting lotus stems in the open air to be dry

The step is needed in order not to hurt the fingers while extracting the fibers. The brushed stems are re-bundled and the water is allowed to seep off, but for a while. The lotus stems must not be put vertically after being washed. Moreover, they are not to be soaked in water for more than two nights; if not, they may putrefy. The fibers must be extracted from the stems within 10 days after being reaped.

Plucking lotus stems covers the needs of the families' income rather than other occupations. They earn 2,000 kyats per day. Unlike other occupations, the workers can fix their working hours and take break time. Lotus gathering is less tiring than other works but brings a good income for the family.

Production of Lotus Fiber

In the old days, drawing lotus fibers is done only by single women, that is, the women who tend to draw fiber must be singles. Before drawing, a woman must firstly clean herself and take the five Buddhist precepts. It is believed that if this vow is broken, the lotus stem, that she is pulling out the fiber, will be brittle and easily broken. However, it is found that married women also pull out lotus fibres nowadays. Normally, the woman does not pull out the fiber during her period.



Photo 7. Drawing lotus fibers



Photo 8. Handling 3-4 lotus stems

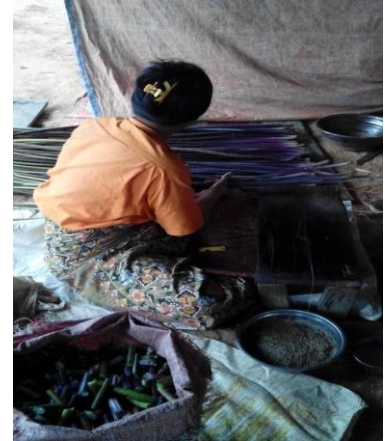


Photo 9. Handling 5-6 lotus stems

Drawing lotus fibers needs great patience and probably it is not suitable for young women. However, they work together with the senior, who are over 30s; and they are just apprentices.

A woman can usually draw 3 ticals of lotus fibres per day. This work is deceptively simple. To have fine thread (*Chigyaw* in Myanmar) or not-so-smooth thread (*Chigyan* in Myanmar) depends on the skill of the drawer. She has to handle 3 thick stems or 4 thin stems to get the fine fiber (*Chigyaw*). It takes a long time for drawing in order to get fine fibre. Fabric made from fine, long fibers is smooth, and weavers like it very much.

In drawing fibers, a well-made wooden desk is used, and the lotus stems are placed on the left whereas a big deep bowl on the right. It is hard to break the stem with hand, so a small knife is used to make a little small cut around the stem before breaking it off. These stems are pulled apart to get fiber.

The fibers lying on the desk are to be brushed by the right hand to produce thread-like fibers and pulled down into the bowl one by one in layers. This makes threads easy to be placed into roll. Each rolled-up fibre is put in sunshine to become dry. Otherwise they may become mildewed fibres. The whole process needs to be done at a stretch. The dried threads are then stirred.

The lotus fiber drawer (woman) has to do housekeeping as well. Mostly the husband gathers stems and the wife draws fibers. This occupation meets the living expenses of the family rather than other occupations.



Photo 10. The bowl full of lotus fibers



Photo 11. Making a slight cut around the stem before breaking



Photo 12. Skein of lotus fibres

Production of Lotus Fiber Robe

The main occupation of the *Innthar* nationals in *Kyaing Khan* Village is 'weaving lotus robes'. This study mainly focuses on economic point of view. Moreover, it also highlights education status and health status of those people.

To produce lotus-fiber-woven robe is not an easy task. It demands both hard work and a large sum of money. A man can uproot hundreds of lotus plants per day, which is worth 3000 kyats (about \$ 3). A minority of the lotus collectors clean up the plants only to sell the stems. A lotus stem was sold for 1.50 kyats in the year of 2012; a hard-working worker earns 4500 kyats (\$ 4.5) in a day (2014). But most of the workers gather and cut lotus fibres themselves to sell. It takes three days to draw fiber from a boatload of lotus stems and they get 3 ticals from it; and at one night they get two ticals from about 1000 stems. Therefore a boatload of stems could produce about 15 ticals of fibre. The workers like selling lotus fibres more than selling stems since they get more money.

The payment for workers varies: daily wage and the amount of work they have done (in terms of bolt). The daily wage is kyat 1000 (2013), the same amount of money for a bolt of fiber. The bolt measures 20 cubits by 4 cubits. A skilled worker can produce 3bolts of fibers in a day.

There are 14 stages to complete a set of lotus fibre woven robe. The buyer prefers a robe made in the time of Myanmar New Year. Mostly the lotus fibre woven robe is offered at *Kathina* ceremony and *Waso* Robe-offering ceremony. Therefore lotus fibre woven robes are ordered directly from the loom owner, usually in the beginning of a year. In short, he knows how many robes are to be produced in the year, and when they will be completed.

It is found that a set of lotus robe would use up 2-2.5 visses of lotus fiber, or 3 visses at the maximum. A tical of lotus fiber was to be bought at kyat 3000 in 2013. A set of lotus fibre woven robe uses up 3 vises of fiber at a cost of kyat 900,000 and the weaving takes 1½ months.

A set of lotus-fiber-woven robe is sold for 1,500,000 kyats in retail market and 1,300,000 -1,400,000 kyats in wholesale. Buyers may visit shops named *Zawlika*, *Khit San Yin* and *Aung Theikdi* to buy the robe. Each shop usually has 2-3 sets only for sale because of high price. There were 80 sets of robe at the maximum and 60-70 sets at the minimum for sale in a

year. The best-selling months are *Waso* (the fourth month calendar) and *Tanzaungmon* (the eighth month in Myanmar calendar) when the monk's robe is the major item of offering.

The *Innthar* nationals of *Kyaing Khan* Village in Inn Yar Village Tract are proud of weaving lotus robe which is intended for requisite of monks as they believe it is a meritorious deed. The process of manufacturing of lotus-fiber-woven robe, using the labour of both man and woman, shows unity between the family members. However it covers living expenses, health, and education of the children.

Education

There is a Basic Education Primary School (BEPS) in *Kyaing Khan* Village. After completion of primary school education, a few go to Basic Education High school at Inn-Yar Village for further education at Middle School and High School. The two villages are closely situated. Thus, they can go to school from home. Most children do not complete High School education, and drop out to join their parents' businesses or floating garden work. Since the parents are from hand to mouth, they cannot provide facilities for education. Thus it was found that the economy and education of the *Innthar* nationals in *Kyaing Khan* are interrelated.

The number of students (*Innthar* nationals of the *Kyaing Khan* Village) in 2013-2014 is shown as follows.

Primary school students	78
Middle school students	29
High school students	26
Graduates	27

Health

It is found that *Kyaing Khan* Villagers in Innlay region lack medical knowledge. When a family member becomes ill, they use traditional remedies or make offering to traditional spirits. Some consult with astrologers. A sick child is believed to have his spirit possessed by the ghosts. Thus, a shaman or an astrologer is consulted about the way of propitiating an angry god. Moreover some villagers, when they became ill or injured, would buy some western drug or traditional drug.

In *Kyaing Khan* Village, there was no western medical doctor, health assistant, nurse or mid-wife employed by government. In an emergency case, they have to send the patient to the dispensary at Inn-Ya Village. When the case is serious, the patient has to be taken to the hospital at *Nanpan*. It is difficult to go there because they go by boat. Most of *Kyaing Khan* villagers are from hand to mouth; it is hard for them to get such a boat even in an emergency case. Only the rich, however, can go to clinics or hospitals in a nearby town for consultation or treatment.

Kyaing Khan Villagers in Inn-Ya Village Tract earn a fair amount of money from the lotus fiber woven robe production. Therefore health care in this area is lower than expected.

Social value regarded as heritage

The first weaver of robe made from lotus fiber was Daw Sar Oo (Daw Kyar Oo) of *Kyaing Khan* Village. After her death, wearing robe was continued by U Htun Yi and wife Daw Ohn Kyi of the same village. Gradually it became a growing industry, and, workers had to be hired as daily-wage worker, piece-worker, or apprentice. A daily-wage worker earns kyat 1000 a day (2013), and a piece-worker kyat 1000 per bolt. The apprentices are considered as the ones who are learning how to weave; they get snacks and gifts on the days of religious significance. The elderly make efforts to maintain the weaving of robe from lotus fiber as a

traditional handicraft. The loom owners passed the techniques to the new generation workers to keep the cultural heritage. Nowadays, the lotus-fiber-woven robe industry has become popular. At the meantime, annual shows and seminars are held and the processes of making lotus robe are explained to tourists through demonstrations. Therefore, the lotus fiber woven robe is regarded as a cultural heritage of *Kyaing Khan* Villagers in Inn-Ya Village Tract.

Social Value Related to Religion

The Buddha-to-be is said to have gone forth for a recluse's life, wearing a fragrant lotus-fiber-woven robe. Thus the *Innthar* nationals regularly make the offering of such a robe to the Buddha Image. Later, this practice became one of their cultural traditions. Thus, the lotus motif is found at pagoda, such as cup-shaped lotus flower, blooming lotus flower, as religious symbols.

The Buddhists in Myanmar adore and highly appreciate the robe woven from lotus fiber. It usually is offered to the famous Buddha Images, famous abbots who are strict followers of the Vinayas. Most of the donors at *Kyaing Khan* Village assert that they share their deeds with delightful satisfaction for the same reason that the cost of robe is very high. Moreover, monks who receive the lotus fiber woven robe offer it to the Buddha as it was an item used by the Buddha in his lifetime.

Most donors at *Kyaing Khan* Village narrate that a lotus-fiber-woven robe at home is offered as *Waso* Robe or *Kathina* Robe. The robe, which longs 7 inches each side, is a sample. Small-size lotus fiber woven robe is cheaper than a real robe used by monks. It cost 3500 kyats for a piece (2013).



Photo 13. Small-size lotus fiber woven robe

The size of the lotus fibre woven robe offered to senior monks is the same as that of other robes in current use. The lotus fibre woven robe cost 1,500,000 kyats (2013). Most locals donate a small-size lotus fibre woven robe to the Buddha but a few rich villagers donate a proper lotus fiber woven robe to the abbot they venerate.

Most donors at *Kyaing Khan* Village reveal their belief yearly by offering the lotus fibre woven robe to the Buddha and senior monks, that is, they believe that it could bring prosperity and good health. If lotus fibre woven robe was not available, they would offer silk robe embroidered with lotus motifs instead. Therefore, the offering of lotus fibre woven robe is highly regarded by the *Innthar* nationals.

Offering of a robe woven from lotus fiber fulfills one's desires. Outstanding qualities of a lotus fibre woven robe are a fragrant lotus smell, being cool in summer, and warm in winter when a monk wears it.

Clothing and utensils are not made of lotus products. Since the robe is a religious item, the weaver has to abide by the five moral precepts at work and the woman involved in its production must not work during menstrual period.

Social Value Related to Social Activities

The robe woven from lotus fiber gives spiritual delight to the *Innthar* nationals when offering it as a monastic requisite to the monks. A set of robe woven from lotus fibres cost 100 times more than an ordinary one. The rich usually buy a complete set of such robe and offer it to the monks by themselves. Then there would be a community-donated set of robes, offered by family and relatives, neighbours, or the group. Sometimes a family would set down a sum of money as "capital" which then is complemented by available contributions coming from various workers. Such a form of offering reveals the *Innthars'* generosity and their strong appreciation of lotus fibre woven robe as a religious offering.

The *Innthar* nationals of *Kyaing Khan Village, Inn-Ya Village Tract, Innlay Lake* usually offer the lotus-fiber-woven robe to senior monks, strictly keeping to *Vinaya* rules, or abbots. But the majority of *Innthar* nationals make it a communal affair, based on local community or kinship, by collecting money they can afford. The robe is usually carried to the monastery by the donor himself or herself. The village elders carry the robe to the monastery because they are the heads of the community.

The lotus-fiber-woven robe is taken to the monastery in a procession accompanied by a local troupe playing musical instruments like long drum, short drum and gong. When it reaches the monastic compound, the robe is not taken directly onto the monastery; the bearers circle the monastic compound up to three rounds. This activity shows their devotion to the Buddha and the three rounds represent *The Three Gems* of 'the Buddha', 'the Dhamma', and 'the Sangha'.

A noteworthy fact is that only males handle the lotus-fiber-woven robe to offer because it is a sacred material while men are superior in power and rank to women.

Conclusion

The *Innthar* nationals produce lotus fibre woven robes by using natural plants from Innlay region. Production of lotus fibre woven robe is a major economic industry for *Kyaing Khan Village of Inn-Ya Village Tract*. There are fourteen stages in production of a lotus fibre woven robe and the first stage is to pluck lotus stems out of lotus plants. From the skilled workers, the new generations learn the techniques for weaving lotus robe and traditional beliefs including dos and don'ts. By choosing the auspicious days, the workers have to abide by five moral precepts so as to facilitate everything in workplace. One of the taboos for women is to avoid this adorable work during menstrual period. The woven fabric has to be dyed with the use of natural produce like tubers, barks and leaves.

The lotus fibre woven robe is usually offered to noble monks by the rich, and by the middle class and the hand-to-mouth families on community basis, clansmen or otherwise. Here, communal donation shows the unity of social organizations.

Kyaing Khan Village's economy is mainly divided into floating garden farming and production of lotus fibre woven robes. Those who do not own floating gardens go for daily wages or any job. Plucking lotus stems and drawing lotus fibres are seasonal work for the adult males, and they go fishing when the season is over. The women weave on the loom all the year round, some work for wages by the bolt.

The study of *Kyaing Khan* Villagers' economic activities is accompanied with tradition, culture and customs. Their income is just enough to make both ends meet. Dropping out of school to help in parents' economy leads to a less number of the educated in this area. These two factors also pave the way for poor health care. It is found out that the *Innthar* nationals at *Kyaing Khan* Village adapt to their environment for their living while trying to hand over the traditional customs to the next generations.

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