

The Ao Traditional Village Government: The Process of Succession: A Case Study

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Abstract

The study of the Naga traditional self-governing institution is essential because the system is still practised in almost all Naga villages. In the Naga society and culture study, the village identity occupies the most important position. The Ao villages are very distinct in their administration, which is based on a well-knit clan system and a well-established self-governing institution - the '*Putu Menden*'. This paper inscribes the basics of the organisation of Village Administration and its structure at Chungliyimti, the qualifications of Tatar Member, the tenure system, the size and the cycles of the *Putu Menden*. An attractive traditional meat sharing practice is included in *Putu Menden*'s succession process. Interestingly, the process of succession has practical variations among the various Ao villages with time and practice; hence, a case study on the process of succession of a few villages is presented. This could open up, for researchers, important sources of knowledge about the traditional power structure, meat sharing and its organisation. In the successive study, case studies of more villages could be included.

Key Words: Naga Culture, Ao *Putu Menden*, qualifications, tenure, size, structure, Chungliyimti, Cycle of *Putu Menden*, succession Process, selection of representatives, Meat sharing. Case studies, Villages

Introduction

In the study of the Naga society and culture, the village identity occupies the most important position in respect of every tribe...the Naga villages are more homogeneous, self-sustaining and independent. They are very distinct in Village administration, distribution of clans, socio cultural network and practices (Jamir and Lanunungsang, 2005, 37). The family of race called the 'Nagas' popularly came into use only after the event of the British to this land. Until then, each tribe was distinct in its culture and practices and was better known by their tribe name as Aos, Semas, Angamis,

Konyaks, etc. Traditionally Nagas lived in villages and each village has a government that is sovereign and independent, internally supreme and externally free from outside control (Temjensosang 2013, 1-2). Agriculture is indispensable to livelihood of the people and their traditional self-government is linked with its activities.

The Naga villages are the most permanent social and political unit for all practical purposes. Naga villages have different forms of government, according to their tribe, as we can see from the classifications of J.H. Hutton and Verrier Elwin which are considered as more appropriate. J.H.

Hutton mentioned four types of polity: (1) Sumi and Chang, (2) Konyak, (3) Ao and Tangkhul, (4) Angami, Rengma, Lotha and apparently Sangtam (Pochury)- Pochury now recognized as a Naga tribe on 21st April 1991) (Mills J.P, 1980). According to Verrier Elwin, the Sumi and Chang practiced hereditary chief ship; the Konyak had a very powerful Anghs (Chiefs); the Aos are governed by bodies of elders; and the Angami, Lotha, Rengma and others were extremely democratic (Nagaland 1961, 6-7). But the general administrations of the villages of all the tribe are quite similar, based on tradition.

It is significant to study the working of the Naga traditional governing institutions due to the fact that the system is still practiced. Similar viewpoint is stated by others as, in the North-East, one finds two simultaneous democratic institutions at work, a modern democratic system vis-à-vis a traditional system among the Hill tribes (Hazarika, 2006). Despite the fact that modern system of governance has been ushered in since Nagaland State got Statehood on 1st December 1963, yet age-old traditional practices and values prevail (Amer 2015, 38).

The Ao villages are very distinct in its administration based on a well- knit clan system. A well- established Ao village administration is a mini state, a unique democratic republic. In the past, the Ao system of government was a miniature state having a republican form of government with a well- established *Putu Menden* by the chosen representatives of various clans (Jamir and Lanunungsang, 2005, 38). This system of government is called *Putu Menden*. 'Putu' refers to thirty years-a person's prime period of life. 'Menden' refers to Seat; therefore, *Putu Menden* means the selected group of people who rule the village for 30 years. *Putu Menden*, during their

term is said to have owned the sky above, (the sun and the moon) the land, water and air under the jurisdiction. The members of the *Putu Menden* are also known as *Tatar* which means entitlement. On a similar line a Scholar writes, the *Tatars* or the chosen leaders exercise their supreme power collectively in the village administration. This system of administration originated at *Chungliyimti* and continues to be the core power structure of the Ao villages (Tatongkala 2014, 61). Thus, the *Putu Menden* enjoys legislative, executive and judicial powers. The new village administration can therefore make new rules and annul old ones.

This paper looks at the organisation of Ao traditional governance system at *Chungliyimti*, the qualifications to be a *Tatar* Member, tenure system, the size and the cycles of the *Putu Menden*. The traditional Meat sharing practice is also introduced in the case study of traditional succession process of this unique administration.

The Organisation of *Putu Menden* at *Chungliyimti*

Chungliyimti is very important in the study of Ao culture; this is the first village they have established after emerging from *Longtrok* (six stones) they were *Pongener-Tongpok*, *Longkumer-Longpok* and *Jamir-Longchakrep* (Adams, P.F, 1940). Later on, as the population increased, a number of sub-clans were formed from each of these three clans and in the long run these sub-clans became major clans and started forming more sub clan from them (Jamir, Kibangwar 2016, 7). According to oral tradition, it is told that during the time of *Chungliyimti*, wars, disputes and death were unknown. People lived a simple and peaceful life but after a certain period, animals came into being, making such a life impossible. In addition, the growth of population was inevitable and increasing

household not only needed an administration, it also gave rise to political consciousness. Thus, people felt the need of an administration and control so they selected a group of people to protect and administer the village, and subsequently, organised the *Chungliyimti Sholang Menden* (Meat sharing) the first organization of village governance system based on meat sharing and allocation of authority and privileges according to the share of meat. This village governance system has come to be known as *Putu Menden*. They selected people from age group of above thirty and the group was named as *Medemsanger Pusu* because people see them as 'pur kulemsor nubo medem (age group, equal in stature, agility and boldness). Some, assert that the Tatars are selected from seven *zūnga* in an age group of 21 years which they coin it as *Shomeka nung asortem*. They selected the various categories of *Tatars* representing the clans as rulers and the eldest from amongst the *Tatars* of *Tongpok* ancestry was given the *Ung*.

The Tatars are given the supreme authority to govern the village. They make the law, execute and interpret it. The *Ung* is given the ceremonial head of the village administration (similar to the position of Indian President). He acts as a priest and a *Kimen* (Assembly House). The new *Putu Menden* sit at his house as the *Unger Salang* and decide rules and regulations and meat sharing. There is *Ung Tonglu* (Deputy *Ung*) who helps the *Ung* in the exercise of his power and acts as *Ung* in his absence.

The *Putu* killed a perfect bull, perfect from horn to toe and *Sholen shopang latet* (meat-sharing) is completed. Their forefathers advise them to lead and administer peacefully and secure the village and its people. To set up the Village government according to the will of God they approached and took the guidance of *Ongangla*. (*Tsapongpi*,

Tsüngremkumer is a person who can communicate with God).

The rapid growth of population was inevitable and increase of household. It also made agriculture land insufficient, started shortage of food, water and even firewood. Thus, the people of *Chungliyimti* decided to move for a better settlement. They went across a suspension cane bridge they built (*Arr Apu*) across Dikhu River (Tsula), and settled at *Aonglenden* - the present Ungma Village. Later, they shifted to the nearby hill known as *Koridang* from there they reverted back to Ungma. But it is told, during settlement at *Koridang* many of them migrated in search of better settlements and formed many of the Ao villages.

Qualifications to be a Tatar member of Putu Menden

The following qualifications are laid down for a *Tatar* Member of the *Putu Menden* without much variation among the Ao villages.

To be eligible for the Tatar seat of the *Putu Menden*, a representative has to be:

1. at the age of 30 or above, should be a bona-fide and chosen member of a clan;
2. physically fit person with good moral character;
3. a legitimately married person;
4. a very rich person among the clan members;
5. a person who can sacrifice his life for the village;
6. a pioneer of the Village;
7. not a thief, robber or a murderer.

Tenure

Originally, the term of a *Putu Menden* is thirty (30) years. However, due to time and practice, there are variations from village to village. Ungma, Longkhum, Chuchuyimpang and Mopungchuket *Putu Menden* rule for 30 years.

Longsa *Putu Menden* rules for 20 years. In many other villages, there is practice of rule for 5 or 6 years, but they are re-chosen even more than once, provided the *Tatar* is found suitable or his clan group proposes his name to represent them again. This system is more common in smaller villages. In this way, some clan members may continue to hold its membership more than his tenure-ship if his clan numbers are fewer. In the system, a team of *Tatars* retires in its own time and a new team comes to power in turn. Evolvement of this new administrative system was one of the significant achievements in the early period of civilization beginning from *Chungliyimti*.

The size of *Putu Menden*

The size of *Putu Menden* varies from village to village depending on the size of population and the number of clans. Ungma village *Putu Menden* at present is very large consisting of about 310 members. It is to be noted that Ungma village selects six categories of *Tatars* from a clan from respective *Menden*. Longsa and Mopungchuket village *Putu Menden* are also considerably large, they select only four categories of *Tatars*. However, in smaller villages there are about 15 to 12 members according to size of the population in their village.

The cycle of *Putu Menden*

1. ***Medemsanger Putu***: This is the first *Putu Menden*; the selected rulers in this *Putu* were from same age group, equal in physical stature, agility, boldness and strength, hence 'Medem' means equal thus they were equal people. They desired to rule without retiring, however, they were compelled to hand over their power to the next generation, after 30 years rule, they became old. They handed over the *Putu Menden* to the next generation.

2. ***Mejensanger Putu***: The *Tatars* of this generation were vigorous and wise. Their motto was 'Be the ruler', without becoming old. They thought they can rule forever hence this group of rulers were named as *Mejensanger Putu* meaning never becoming old.

3. ***Mopungsanger Putu***: *Mopung* (meaning wind) thus the generation of wind people which denotes the group is quick, can entangle and are uncatchable like the wind. Therefore, they called this *putu* as *Mopungsanger Putu*.

4. ***Kosasanger Putu***: *Kosa* (meaning broken- the generation of broken people who die young). In fact, in this generation, people died during their prime time. It was told, they were forced to fight with wild animals, during this new generation, the practice of tiger hunt by the community was also common.

5. ***Riyongsanger Putu***: *Riyong* (proclamation of war), the generation of people who proclaim the war. While at *Chungliyimti*, it was a time of war with many foes of neighbouring villages; such as *Lisuru*, *Anar*, and *Oronger* etc. This situation took place after the reign of *Kosasanger*. Immediately after the entry of the new *Putu*, war broke out. Thus, this generation was called *Riyongsanger Putu*. During this generation, more headhunting practices were at hand and they were real fighters and war heroes.

J. P. Mills stated that the *Chongli* recognize a cycle of five generations, which are named as follows: *Mechensangr* (those who do not run away), *Mopungsangr* (wind people), *Koshasangr* (broken people, i.e., men of this generation die young), *Riyongsangr* (many people), *Metemsangr* (equal people). The meanings given are warlike the traditional ones and very likely fictitious. Dr.

Clark translates the names as follows: truthful generation, bad generation, swaggering generation, generation, and united generation. Each generation of councillors takes the name of the cycle coming after that of its predecessors, till *Medemsanger* is reached, when a fresh start is made at *Mejensanger*. As the length of a generation varies locally, all villages are not in the same generation at the same time (Mills 2003, 181-182). The *Medemsanger Putu* is the first set up of *Putu Menden* at Chungliyimti. Thus, the process of succession of *Putu Menden* rotates starting from *Medemsanger Putu* till *Riyongsanger Putu* and the cycle start again.

Creation of new *Menden/Menden Sabang*:

There are two ways of creating the *Menden/Menden Sabang* in the village; one is the formation of a new *menden* by force-breaking away without approval, whereas the other is the creation of a new *Menden* with due permission by the *Putu Menden*. Since the Clan is the basis of selection of *Putu Tatar* and in some villages, there are only primary clans that are very large in number of households- they are divided into two or more *Menden/Menden Sabang* (seats) division of a big clan into two or more seats is to increase the representation (Similar to delimitation of constituencies). For instance, the *Pongen* clan of a *Menden* can be divided into two or more seats (*Menden Sabang*) so as to enable them to double the representatives. Hence, the different categories of Tatars are selected from the newly created *Menden/Menden Sabang*. Similar Seat creation is practised in most of the Ao Villages.

The Succession or Taking Over of *Putu Menden*

Peterson J. has believed it is disturbing that the mechanisms for the transferral of power

remain disconcertingly vague and ambiguous. Effective leadership depends on having the right personalities in-charge and this is never an easy task (Peterson 2001, 580). Contrary to the assertion, succession process of the Ao *Putu Menden* is well organised according to the age-old tradition which is standardized in every details. The Ao villages are very distinct and independent of each other and thus, reconcile on trivial practical differences in application such as the process of succession of village administration. In the same vein, Along Longkumer asserts that Nagas being rooted in the tradition of consensus building and selecting the most capable, communities have continued their age-old tradition of selecting leaders and representatives to govern them. This is in contrast to modern day democracy of having elections where money and muscle power along with party politics prevails to a large extent...our forefathers were already practicing a pure form of democracy within their respective village republic (Longkumer 2018, 4).¹ *Putu Atsungtep* (Succession) is not only meant for transfer of power from one *Putu Menden* to another but it is also meant for change of a generation which is replaced by another (Ao, Tajen 1980, 126).

Every *Putu Menden* has to retire on the completion of its thirty years term and a new team of representatives will take their seat which is known as *Mendentsüing* (succession or takeover).

As one asserts, sometimes before the end of its full term for thirty years, a *Putu Menden*, for reasons, goes out of office generally two years before the end of existing *Putu*. The existing *Tazüingpurs* inform *Lanu Mapang* (senior most for the next *putu*) of the next *Putu Zünga* so that *Lanu Mapang* will get sufficient time to be prepare for change of *Tatar Putu Menden* (Ibid, 1980, 126). As J.P. Mills, (1926) claims, the most striking feature of the *Chongli* system is that

at the end of every generation, all the councillors of a *khel* vacate office and a new body takes their place. Every *Chongli* village has a standardized generation of many years, usually between twenty-five and thirty. When the time comes to vacate office there is almost always a violent quarrel. The office holders, reluctant to relinquish their power and shares of meat, argue that their time is not up yet, while the younger generations are eager to take their place. It must have often happened in the past that the old men were able to put up a stout fight and prolong their period of office, or that the young men have been able to oust their elders before their time was up, for might is often right in Naga life (Mills 2003, 182). It is to be noted that with the event of modernity the outlook of the people has changed. *Tatars* of the retiring *Putu* and the new representatives rather exercise mutual understanding and the process of succession is done with appreciation, praise and good advice.

Case study

I include here a case study of the succession process of a few Ao villages I frequently visit, which is in a way not complete, as we all know that ours is an oral tradition and even the resource person cannot remember the whole rich traditions at one go. With this little primary data, we try to understand their variations in practice after being customized in their village republics for many years. We found variations in nomenclatures, *Putu* cycles, names and categories of rulers, the tenure system, size of the *Putu* and specifically, differences in meat sharing. It can be an opening for the youngsters to research further and suggest a possible uniformity on the succession process among different villages. More villages could be included in the successive study.

Longsa Village

In Longsa Village², succession occurs

after the completion of twenty (20) years.³ The traditional village government is known as *Pusu Menden* (will use the general term *Putu Menden*). The present cycle is *Mejensanger Pusu*. They took over in the year 2020. The size of the *Putu Menden* is 67 Tatars. The category of rulers according to their position are:

1. *Lenyong/Samen*
2. *Shopi 1*
3. *Shopi 2*
4. *Shoshanglak*

Ung is, by tradition, selected from amongst the Tatars of the *Pongen* clan, who function as *Kimen*' (Assembly house) and titular head of the Village. The *Putu Menden* sit at *Ung*'s place and makes rules and resolutions, meat-sharing and all-important matters of the Village.

Aola is selected from among the *Tatars* of the *Jamir* Clan. He is also known as *Nashijongba* (one who spears the bull /to kill the bull). He is the head of the *Onger Salang* (traditional self-governing government) and exercises the highest authority in the Village.

There are seven *Menden Sabang* in the Village with three primary Clans, namely *Pongener*, *Longkumer* and *Jamir*; and each *Menden Sabang* selects the four categories of Tatars from each of the three clans. The condition for creating a new *Menden Sabang* is about 80 Households. One year before the succession, during the 19th year of ruling *Putu*, all the *Menden Sabang* clans select their representatives for the new *Putu Menden*, which is to start with the succession process.

The following is the sequence of events for the succession strictly based on tradition.

Firstly, during the *Tsüngremmong* festival, the new *Putu* representatives have to do *Sholi*

(buying of meat). It is said that *Lenyong/Samen* has to buy a share of 500 pieces of meat, *Shopi-1* 300 pieces of meat, *Shopi-2* 200 pieces of meat and *Shoshanglak* with 100 pieces of meat; the number of pieces of meat varies according to the clan members or the size of the *Menden Sabang*. The select Tatar to be *Ung* has to buy extra 100 pieces of meat. The allotted pieces of meat are put in a Naga basket with plantain leaves and covered by *Shoküptsü Pomet* (big rounded meat) which is cut to cover the basket of meat. They take it to the jungle, and all the clan members must be present. Only the retiring *Tatar* members are not allowed. In the jungle, they organize speeches by the new *Tatars* known as *Nülaksü* (a traditional form of a powerful speech where every sentence is pronounced along with a spear being thrust on the soil). They speak of sequences of their culture and traditions right from the *Chungliyimti* and about the village histories. They then feast on the meat that is bought by the new putu representatives and come back to the village singing war and glorious songs. After reaching the Village, they march throughout the village, singing traditional songs. During the night, they have *Kimak* (a surprise visit by a large group of people). *Kimak* is sometimes invited. It means all the clan members visit the house of their representative for the new *Putu Menden*. Normally, during these visits, the visitors sing traditional victory songs related to the house owner's clan and in return, expect to be offered *Shotok* (a well-prepared meat about five pieces stitched in bamboo stick) along with *mechemtsü* (first juice of rice beer) which is specially prepared for the occasion. The retiring *Tatars* also gather at a place nearby and sing traditional songs soothing and praising each other for their past glories. Secondly, the selected representatives of all clans (*Menden Sabang*) for the new *Putu Menden* have to give *Shoshi* (returning of meat) to the retiring

representatives of their clan as the retiring *Tatar* have given a bull while assuming the seat of *Tatar*. Thus, the practice of returning a big bull to the retiring *Tatar* is completed.

Thirdly, the same year after the harvest, to complete the succession/takeover, all different clans of the *Menden Sabang* collectively give a big bull to the new *Putu Menden*. This bull should be perfect from horn to toe, which is a tradition. This is the first and very important meat sharing by the new *Putu Menden Tatars*, known as *salangshotok* (Putu Tatar meat sharing). This is done at the *Putu Salang /Onger Salang* (the meat cutting platform) of the *Putu Menden*. There is an evident tradition of killing and sharing this bull's meat. In Longsa village, The *Lenyong* of the *Jamir* clan is given the title of *Nashijongba Aola*. He is the only person to spear the bull. So, he will kill the bull with his spear and then put the *sangshe* (a jungle thorny bush) on the bull's body and cut it with a sharp dao, as he proclaims:

Oh, bless our Putu with warriors,

Give us victory against the enemy from east to west,

Let there be no diseases and epidemics

Let there be no fire in the Village

Please give us a good harvest and prosperity.

This traditional cutting of *sangshe* with proclamation is called *Sadaklep* (cutting with challenge and prediction). Then, they distribute the meat parts of the animal strictly according to the customary meat-sharing system. The head is for the *Ung* of the *Pongen* clan; *Longkümer* has to pull out the fat in the stomach, and *Jamir* takes a slice of liver along with the gall bladder, also known as *Azümedem*. After taking due share of meat by

the *Lenyong* and *Shopi-1* of respective clans at the *Onger Salang*, the remaining meat is divided equally among the *Menden Sabang*, where the *Shopi-2* and the *Sosanglak* are given their share of meat. Again, all members of the Village will give another bull and a pig to the new *Putu Menden*. This is called *Tsükdongmen* (Paddy tax) first syllable 'Tsük' means 'paddy' and 'dongmen' means tax collection. Hence, the two animals are given to the *Putu Menden* by the citizens as tax.

In the olden days, the selected representatives for the new *Putu Menden* should give the *Kitem* (River fish wrapped in plantain leaves). Interestingly, they use this system to appreciate the old *Putu Tatar* for his achievements during their term. From the forefathers' days, river fish was treated as a special dish for the rich and the rulers. It is one of the specialities to be given as a gift. The procedure of *kitem* is that the new representative to be next *Tatar* should visit the senior's house and praise them for their successful term and take their blessing.

In all this sequence of succession process there is traditionally accustomed abstinence system for the representatives of both the new *putu* and retiring *putu*, this is treated as inviolable and essential for the new *Putu* to accomplish in their term.

Ungma Village

In the present study I am covering only the succession process of Ungma *Yimpang*⁴ which I am more familiar with, but the process may be very similar in the case of *Yimlang* of Ungma. In Ungma Village, the succession takes place after the completion of thirty (30) years; their traditional village administration is known as *Pusu Menden* (will use the general term *Putu Menden*). The present cycle is *Kosasanger Pusu*, which took over

in the year 2014. The size of their *Putu Menden* is comparatively very large, consisting of 220 Tatars. The categories of rulers according to their position are:

- 1) *Tazüing*
- 2) *Tekong*
- 3) *Lasho*
- 4) *Wasang*
- 5) *Tarjung*
- 6) *Jameja*

Ung is by tradition, selected from amongst the *Tatars* of the *Tongpok* ancestry, from amongst the *Tatars* viz., *Tekong*, *Lasho* or *Wasang*. He functions as Assembly House as the new *Pusu Menden* sits at his place and makes rules and regulations, meat sharing (*Shojung-shoben latet*), and also during annual payment collection (*Saru-moluk*) and count.

Ung süngdong (Deputy *Ung*), who is selected from the *Longpok* ancestry. The *süngdong* helps the *Ung* in exercise of his duties and acts as *Ung* in his absence.

Ojen Ungpo (similar to *Aola*) is selected from among the *Tatars* of the *Longjakrep* ancestry. He is given the privilege to head the village administration and exercises the highest traditional authority.

Tzüdongmen are selected from the three ancestries known as *Songteptrok* (six members each from three clans) most of them are equally capable but could not be accommodated in the *Tatars*.

There are Five *Menden* in the Village, represented by three primary Clans of *Tongpok*, *Longpok* and *Longjakrep* ancestry and each *Menden* selects the six categories of Tatars

from each clan. The five *Menden* are unique and independent as regard to succession, organization and sharing of meat. The share of meat one gets signifies his position, power and privileges. The tradition practiced during *Chungliyimti*, *Aonglenden* and *Koridang* is conspicuous by its presence and order.

The following are the sequence of events for the succession.

The selected representatives of all clans for the new *Putu Menden* have to give *Shoshi* (returning of meat) to the retiring representatives of their clan who had given a bull while assuming the seat of *Tatar*. This means returning a bull to the retiring *Tatar*.

The selected representatives for the new *Putu Menden* should give the *Kitang* (supporting gesture). Interestingly, they use this system to appreciate the old *Putu Tatar* for his achievements during their term. The procedure of *kitang* is that, the new representative to be next *Tatar* should visit the senior's house, praise their successful representation, and take blessing from them.

Then, the *Atsüngtep* (succession) takes place at the *Mendentsüng Salang – 'Shojungshoben latetdak'* (the Village meat sharing platform). In all this succession process, there is traditionally accustomed abstinence system for the representatives of both the new *putu* and retiring *putu Tatars*, this is treated as inviolable and essential for the new *putu* to accomplish in their term.

Mopungchuket Village

In Mopungchuket⁵ the traditional village administration is known as *Putu Menden*. Succession takes place after the completion of 30 years. The present Cycle is *Medemsanger Putu*

Menden; they took over in 2018. There are 22 Tatars at present and six clans, namely; *Ozükum*, *Jamir*, *Longkumer*, *Lemtur*, *Aier* and *Ochi*. The categories of rulers according to their position are;

- 1) *Tazünpur*
- 2) *Senyim*
- 3) *Shi Mulong*
- 4) *Wangchang*

Ung is by tradition, selected from amongst the *Tatars* of *Ozükum* clan. He functions as Assembly House for the *Putu Menden*. The new *putu* sits at his place and makes rules and regulations and do the *Shitsüng –shikolak latet* (traditional meat sharing).

Ung Tonglong (Deputy *Ung*) is also selected from the *Ozükum* clan. He helps the *Ung* in exercise of his duties and acts as *Ung* in his absence. There are 2 *Ungs*, one each selected from two *Mepu*, (*Khel*) and the eldest *Ung* is given the *tambutu* (Leadership).

The process of taking and handing over the *Putu Menden* is generally done after the harvest is completed or specifically during the month of October. The first thing to start before the succession of new representatives selected for the next *Putu Menden* have to do *Kishi Kilaba* (ask for approval) from the retiring *Putu Menden*.

Secondly, the selected *Tatars* altogether give one perfect bull to the retiring *Putu Tatars* during the *Ainlenapidang* (on the day of cleaning the paths connecting the neighbouring villages). Thirdly, they nominate an *Ung* from the *Ozükum* clan; Fourthly, they select a *Tazünpur* each from amongst the clans who are well versed in customs and traditions, and fifthly, they select Eight (8) *Senyim*, *Ung*, *Ung Tonglong*, *Shi Mulong*, *Wangchang* respectively.

Then only the succession starts; firstly, the two eldest *Tazüingpur* will give one bull each.

Secondly, two *Tazüingpur* will give one bull. Thirdly, four *Senyim*, *Unger*, and *wangchang* altogether, seven of them will give one bull. Thus, a total of seven bulls are sacrificed to approve the succession. The bull must be *Apetasüing maket* (perfect from horn to toe) which also must be an *Anüdok Nashi* (a Bull from the east) or maybe it means that the bull must be an agile one.

From *Chungliyimti*, forefathers, on the day of ritual at the pond *Tsüsen Tsübo* (First pond), the meat share of the clan and the Tatars, *Yimlishi or Shitsüing-shikolak latet* (Meat sharing) have been accomplished; the head is given to the *Remsong*, *Pongen* and *Ozüikum*, the *Shi-Molung* (Chest portion) to the *Jamir* clan, *Wangchang* (neck portion) is given to *Longkumer* clan.

The same year, as part of the succession process, they will go to *Alisü mang* (A place) after the completion of *Saru mener* (after the tax collection). On that day, eight *Tazüingpur Tatars* will prepare meat for the whole entourage, which will be carried in the traditional basket. Work distribution will be strictly according to tradition. Those selected *Tatars* for the new *Putu* will settle towards the east side, and the retiring *Tatars* of the *Putu* and youngsters will sit towards the west. On the day of *Alisü mang*, no visitors or no one from outside the village are allowed. It is forbidden with *anembong* (abstinence). In the olden days, trespasser have to pay with their head.

They clear the jungle; construct fresh pathways and demarcate it with *Shimakatsü* (bamboo sticks) and then start *anembong* a traditional abstinence for seven (7) days. During these seven days period, no one even the villagers are not allowed to set foot at the *Alisü mang*. *Alisü mang* can be seen clearly from many Ao Ranges: *Ongpangkong*, *Langpangkong* and *Changkikong*. Villages of these Ranges can easily see and confirm the taken over by the new *Putu*. After seven days of abstinence, the *Unger* and the *Shi mulong* will walk first and remove the bamboo sticks (*shimakatsü*); only then can the village community walk. That is how ‘*Alisü mang*’ is especially connected to the age-old traditional succession process of the *Putu Menden* of Mopungchuket Village.

Conclusion

The Ao system of Village Administration first originated at *Chungliyimti* and continues to hold till today. In almost all the Ao villages, two administrative setups can be seen- the traditional one, formed by *Tatars* of the *Putu Menden*, whereas, the modern system is called Village Council, which is organised as per the Nagaland Village Council Act, the members of this system include the *Tatars* and the G.B.s of the Village. But in actual practice, the core functions and policies of any importance are initiated in the traditional *Putu Menden* called *Salang*. Even though it is an oral tradition, they practice it with minute details. One rational practice that continues till today is Ao

villages have not succumbed to the State political masters in the selection of new *Tatars* and the succession process – but rather committed to the age-old practices. The pure democratic convention of succession must be thoroughly studied and preserved as a source of knowledge because key traditional activities are linked with the succession process. This will help future researchers in terms of information and consistency in the succession process.

Endnotes:

¹Along Longkumer, in the Sunday Post, Special supplement (October 28, 2018). writes about the Succession of an Ao Village.

² Interview & Approval: Kazutemtjen Tatar, Aochuba Tatar, L Bendangwati Tatar and Longsa Onger Salang (Longsa 2019 & 2023)

³Longsa Village earlier practiced thirty (30) years of rule, but during *Kosasanger Putu* (during 20 years of its *Putu*) struggled in vain in a raid, so they gave the leadership of the raid to *Züngalepzük* (Age group for the next *putu*) with a promise to handover the rule if they are victorious in the raid. That day the *züngalepzük* was victorious in the raid and thus, they took the rule. From that *putu* onwards succession takes place by the end of twenty years.

⁴Interview with Imtidongba Tatar, Lipokzulu Tatar, Imkum Tatar, Tebutedi. Imolemba Jamir & Tebutedi. Longrikaba Lkr (Ungma 2022 &2023)

⁵Material from Akumjungba Lkr and final approval by Medemsanger Putu Menden (Mopungchuket 2023)

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