CHAPTER THREE

SHÜPFOMEI FEASTS AND FESTIVALS:

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Introduction

Shüpfomei expresses his fear and joy; makes invocation and gives thanks that express his deep inner longing to touch the infinite. Shüpfomei expresses them by observing the different gennas, taboos and the different rituals. In the same way he expresses his joys and thanksgiving through external celebration of feasts and festivals. With such an inner search namely, to reach the infinite, Shüpfomei celebrate their feast and festivals. It is the celebration of life where religious experience adds its meaning. Thus, religious experience is expressed in performance of rites and ritual. The religious colouring can be seen in the following, (a) Invocation to God – for fertility of life, crops, averting of sickness and natural calamities. (b) Thanking God – for the good harvest, health, from sickness and from natural calamities. (c) Recalling the dear departed souls, forefathers, parents, children, brothers and sisters. (d) Transmission and imparting the cultural heritage – to the young generation. ¹

¹. According to the general understanding of Shüpfomei is that every celebration of feasts and festivals are accompanied with the performance of rites and rituals. The celebration of their feast and festivals are also seen from the observance of gennas, taboos and the conventional rules of their forefathers.
<table>
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| **Jhum cultivation (field)**  
  *Pfole do* |
| ![Jhum cultivation](image) |

| **Terrace cultivation (field)**  
  *Moko / Dothu do* |
| ![Terrace cultivation](image) |
Shüpfomei tribe is an agrarian tribe; cultivation of paddy, maize, millet, potatoes, tomato, cabbage and vegetables are the main crops. Therefore young and old have to work in the field. According to survey conducted by Mao Integrated Development Association (MIDA) a Non-governmental Organization (NGO) more than half of Shüpfomei life's span is spent in agricultural economy. 2

Shüpfomei agricultural fields are classified into two (a) Terrace field (odzū do), (b) Jhum field (pfole do). 3 While terrace field is sub-divided into wet paddy field (moko do) which has a perennial water source and all through the year water is abundant. The other is dry paddy field (dothu do) where seasonal cultivation is done. On such dry paddy fields, cultivation is done during summer months starting from May, June, July, August, etc. while the remaining months are dry. Agriculture and cultivation work is not separated for the rich or the poor only, but manual labour is shared by all. Everyone has to work in the field and earn his or her living.

1. Mao Integrated Development Association (MIDA) during their Annual General Body Meeting, 1998. "Paper presented by Economic Committee an Approach Paper". MIDA is a Non-governmental organization (NGO) registered in 1991, with the aim – a equitable and sustainable development of the backward tribal people. It had created public opinion in the field of social awareness and today the organization is movement towards the grass root masses.
2. Terrace field is considered as the invention of Shüpfomei forefathers in their method of cultivation. Jhum (slash and burn) or shifting method of cultivation is taken as the cycle method without disturbing the biodiversity of ecology, environment and allow nature to retain its fertility.
There is an old saying, “Shüpforme from birth to death have to carry basket”, so much so he/she is called ‘basket carrier’. Thus, from the beginning of the year he / she starts carrying basket on his/her head, firstly – bringing home dry fire wood, carrying dry cow dung to the field, carrying potatoes for planting. Secondly, the harvest potato is carried home or to the market for sale, followed by harvest of maize, carrying of firewood, harvesting of paddy etc.  

Thus, Shüpforme whole life is an agricultural life of carrying his or her basket with the head. We shall see that Shüpforme feast and festivals are agrarian in nature and we can call it as agricultural feast and festivals.

3. Shüpforme concept of feasts and festivals

3.1. Agricultural celebrations

Shüpforme celebrates distinctive feasts and these feasts revolve around agriculture. The reason is that Shüpforme directly or indirectly depends on agriculture. With the inauguration of feast marks the beginning or end of sowing, planting of seeds, marks the propitiation and invoking god and deities for good harvest, it is thanksgiving to God for the good harvest and abundance of wealth. Thus, the feasts and festivals bring the spiritual aspect as well as the belief system in the people.

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4. Narrated by Sanuo Ashuli (73) from Punanamei village. The author had interviewed him on the 14th May, 1991 on a particular point regarding Shüpforme ‘agriculture, feast and festivals’. He also mentioned that Shüpforme celebration of feast and festivals begins with invocation to God (Oramei), full of rite and rituals which are precise and meticulous. According to him Shüpforme feast and festivals with its merriment, is equally important with the offering of rite and rituals to gods.

5. The entire economy and transaction of Shüpforme population is depended on agricultural products and her business also deals on agricultural goods. With the pressure on the land, few persons, those who are close to the National Highway No. 39, and living in towns have ventured into business economy. It is a minority and very insignificant.
Consequently such festivals is accompanied with joyful celebration of eating and drinking, singing and dancing of traditional tunes, it is also a time of playing indigenous instruments and games. Generally, such a celebration is understood as God's blessing, protection and asking God to continue the blessing. Such a celebration of feast and festivals are not mere days of rest and merriment, but occasion where traditional culture is revived, renewed and regaining strength from the agricultural fatigue. These are the days of cultural education for the young people where the old impart traditional skills like folklore, folktales, dances, yells, to the coming generation.

The celebrations have an educative value bringing out the traditional ceremonial dresses and colourful costumes which are put on in order to remember the gone by days. Today, many of the old people comment and express their painful feeling saying that present celebration of agrarian feasts and festivals are no longer in that spirit. They say that Shüpfomei tribe is celebrating the agrarian feast in name only i.e. external celebration and skin deep, not knowing the meaning of the feast. It is because there is a sudden change from the old concept of feast and festivals with modern outlook of life.

3.1.1. Indigenous games

Shüpfomei agricultural feasts and festivals are followed with the playing of indigenous games and musical instruments. Such indigenous musical instruments and games have a deep significance and relevance to the tribe. According to the season indigenous musical instruments and games are played. It brings both external and internal relaxation and soothing effect to the physical and mental atmosphere. In the following
pages we shall analyze some of the indigenous games played during the feasts and festivals -

(a) Osii kaka ka - Playing of wooden dice games (male game)
(b) Kaka ka - Playing of wild bean games (female game)
(c) Jithe kada - Flying of sticks (male game)
(d) Lerü kaphi - Throwing of wild stem javelins (male game)
(e) Chiuta koppfi - Pulling of stick (male game)
(f) Ostu koshu - Hitting the target (male game)
(g) Ostu thovu - Shot put (male game)
(h) Ori kepe - Tug – of – war (male game)⁶

3.1.2. Indigenous musical instruments

Shüpfomei indigenous musical instruments can be classified as follows:

(a) Lobvi - One string guitar
(b) Philai - The sound is produced by tapping with fingers
(c) Khetsi - Blowing and tapping with fingers
(d) Sokai khebu - Blowing of buffalos’s horn
(e) Makhi khebu - Blowing of dry wild reed ⁷

Indigenous musical instruments are being played to encourage, showing one’s vigour and accompanying the love songs. It bring healing effect in the people’s mind when played in season and situation.

⁶ Cf. N. Saleo, Imemei Kohrü Ko (Mao Naga Life) pp. 88-89
⁷ Cf. Ibid.,
3.2. Classification of feasts and festivals

3.2.1. Yearly feasts

Shüpfomei festivals are celebrated in a particular lunar month, and the festivals can be divided broadly into yearly festivals and occasional festivals. The yearly festivals are celebrated within the lunar month every year. With the sighting of the moon, the village headman announces the yearly festivals. Without questioning the weather, situation and climate such feasts are celebrated. The four yearly feasts celebrated by Shüpfomei tribe are –

3.2.1.1. Chūthuni – harvest feast / feast of the dawn / New year feast
3.2.1.2. Saleni – feast after transplantation
3.2.1.3. Chūjüni – feast before cultivation
3.2.1.4. Onuni – feast before harvest

Each of the feasts mentioned above has it meaning and correspondingly there is a lot of merriment. The feast ushers a beginning of a season and it inaugurates or close the season. In the following pages we shall discuss the above mentioned yearly feasts and festivals in detail.
3.2.2. Occasional feasts

Every event in a man's life is an occasion where he thanks God for the blessing he receives. He shows such blessing by erecting or giving special drink and meal to the whole village. It is also an occasion where he wants to transmit certain cultural elements for the benefit of future generations. Therefore, occasional feast and festivals depend on each other and both intermingle together to make a memorable event or events in the life of a person. Occasional festivals are feasts celebrated in according to the convenience of the people, situation and the weather. Some of such occasional feasts and festivals are –

3.2.2.1. Feast of merit - Zhoso mozü
3.2.2.2. Pulling of village gate / memorial stone – Koro / Otsu kosüt
3.2.2.3. Family genna - Ohelei mani
3.2.2.4. Village genna - Inulei mani

9. Sometime a person may take the occasion feast as of the localized feast i.e. village genna to fit into his celebration, like feast of merit. The same person may request the king to have the particular celebration festivals coincide with the village feast.

3.3. Harvest feast - *Chūthuni*

We begin with the yearly feast celebration called *Chūthuni*. The harvest feast – *Chūthuni* inaugurate Shūpfomei yearly festival and at the same time, the new year. Shūpfomei feast is a community celebration. Community aspect is seen in all acts of every day like - manual labour, in groups working in rotation in different person's fields, at the time of building house the whole village give a helping hand without expecting anything in return.

During the erection of village gate or memorial stone the whole village contribute freely their goods apart from the wages, clearing the village road or village pond, etc. Chūthuni feast is seen as one of such community celebration, which brings bond of unity, brotherhood and the spirit of patriotism. Every person longs for this particular feast and there are many reasons why people long to celebrate this particular feast. One of the main reasons is because of the joyous atmosphere where people have plenty to eat and drink. The festive mood is seen even in the climate and since harvest, there is relaxation in every aspect of the human person.

3.3.1. What is Chūthuni?

*Chūthuni* is a feast celebrated every year after the harvest, and it is called harvest feast, because this feast comes after the harvest. It gives the occasion to thank God for the good harvest provided to the community and thereby a physical, moral, spiritual and
mental relaxation after the tedious hard work in planting, weeding, cutting paddy
threshing, carrying and storing it up in the barns (obe). “Chūthuni” literally means “feast
of the dawn”. It is also the new year for Shüpomei tribe and the first month of the lunar
calendar. “Chūthu” in low tonal pronunciation would mean “day” and “Chūthu” in a high
intonation would means “morning” and “ni” would mean “feast”. Therefore, “Chūthuni”
is the “feast of the dawn”. It is considered to be the biggest feast and the best feast. One
of the many reasons why Chūthuni is considered the biggest feast and festival is grand is
because of the pleasant climate, availability of abundance of food and drink and the
relaxed mood of the people. The external preparation as well as the internal disposition
create the atmosphere for the people. The whole tribe and every village community often
long for the day, with external and internal preparation.

Chūthuni connotes spiritual aspects because the month begins with physical
preparation, because there is a general feeling that at the beginning of year they must
begin the year with a clean heart. Young and old thus, start the year with the spirit of
eagerness. 11 Generally it is the parent who blesses their children on the eve of the new –
year as the old customs. With the coming of Christianity and education, such practice is
toned down to a low level. Still many parents do continue to bless their children on the
ev of the new-year.

11 Kaisi Lohru, A.I. (Red) Interviewed on the 12/12/1991. According to him, “Chūthuni” feast has both
physical and spiritual blessing at the beginning of the year. On physical aspect he says, “people keep
themselves externally clean by taking bath, cleaning of their weapons and surroundings”. On spiritual
aspect he says, they invoke god and their forefathers to support them and guide them. Thus, morally they
will celebrate the feast and keep the new-year in the grace of god. He further says that “Chūthuni” brings a
lot of God’s blessing for the year, because the lunar month of Shüpomei begins with “Chūthuni”
correspond to the month of January for Shüpomei and in other words is the new-year.
3.3.1.1. Physical and spiritual preparation

Chüthuni the first month of the lunar calendar begins with pomp and gaiety. The month begins with physical and spiritual preparation. It being the new-year every Säpfome tribe and person make a very intense inner preparation both external (physical, clothings, weapons etc.) and internal (abstains from sexual intercourse, making offerings and sacrifices to the spirits). The village headman looking at the waxing and waning of the moon and counting the days will officially announce to the village the previous night a new-year genna from the official pinnacle (mani kasha bu) and also at very early dawn. Generally, the whole village and the tribe do know and count the days and the month for this feast. The village headman (movuwo) consulting with the previous month and sighting the moon announces the new -year – Chüthuni.

The new-year begins with “phre mani” – observing new year day. On the eve of the new – year, it is the duty of parents to bless their children and wishing them long life and prosperity. The village headman on the eve of the new-year announces to the village to observe the new-year day as a sacred day. On this day every male big or small, young or old will get up early in the morning and go to the village pond and have a ritual wash of head, leg, hands and some even have a bath. This is a symbolic external purification and washing away of the yearly sins and asks God to bless the coming year from evil spirits and harm. After washing of the physical body, people often take some water in the hands and sprinkle it on their cloths shouting that everything is clean. They will also
bring their weapons like guns, arrows, bows, spear and dip in the water to show that everything is clean and purified. When everything is finished, the whole village sits down for discussion and many village rules and regulations for the coming year and also award sanctions on those who break the village laws. Many fathers carry water containers to their home to wash their kids those who could not come to the pond for the early morning bath. After the discourse, the whole community moves slowly towards home with a traditional yell.

There are three official traditional yells, which are used only for special occasions, namely “Emehu”, “Movuhu” and “Pasühu” and each of them is very dear to the people and people often listen with much care and respect. When such traditional yells are not properly done, there is a superstitious belief that life and animal die in large number.

3.3.1.2. Divination of omen - osa kopfū

Soon after the washing is done two elders who are well experienced in the divination of omen will call few young pairs usually six in number. After choosing the

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12. The fathers whose children are small and unable to come for bath carry with them pond water in yam leaves or in any other containers. The significance behind such carrying of water and washing their child is cleaning them from evil spirits, sickness and asking god’s blessing.
13. “Emehu” is the traditional yell, accompanied with four voices and is a combination of strength, valour and energetic. On hearing “Emehu” in olden days they get encouragement to continue their warfare.
14. “Movuhu” is also a traditional yell, accompanied in four voices in uniformity. The difference between “Emehu and Pasühu” is that in “Movuhu” there is patriotism and supportive spirit is seen in the yell.
15. “Pasühu” is the three traditional yell, which is accompanied with four voices and sentimental. It creates a lot of love and determination in the people. Thus, in all these traditional yell there is sacredness put into and while yelling we have yell with respect and whenever such yells are not properly done elders often scolds the community and told to do well.
boys they will be separated and to proceed to a secluded place where nobody can find out. It is because the whole divination is done in secret and it is a sacred activity. As the selected group walks away from the public, they will go to a bamboo groove and choose a bamboo shoot by throwing a stone at it. The stone which hits the particular bamboo shoot is cut and split into two halves. It is further split by taking only the outer cover for the use of ceremonial ritual while the rest are cut into pieces and the rest is hid properly lest some other people may use for some other purpose and defile. The two outer barks are taken with much care and used for the divination of omen.

Divination of omen is one of the oldest method of consulting and asking God for wealth, health, life span, crops, animals, weather and climate of the year. Shüpfomei tribe also does the divination of omen on such occasion. There are many other occasions where divination of omen is done. Other occasions are done in every important event of their life.

Here the group sits down and two names are called out from the selected boys – Kaikho or Kaihrï, etc. These two boys will wear the shawl around their waist facing each other and standing apart from each other would pull the split bamboo strings tied to their waist. When everything is done, one of the elders will say a short prayer imploring God to bless the year and shower his grace for the year. By the time he finishes, he also utters the words of omen for the year with regard to agriculture, life span, etc. Inevitably the split bamboo would came and beat each other and if it beats each other it is considered as a good sign and if it does not it is considered as a bad omen. If the split bamboo does not
beat each other, the whole village has to observe another day "phre mani" – another new year day to rectify the omen. The selection of young boys is to be done with much care. These persons should be chaste, upright and must be good boys in the eyes of the villagers. Such boys should not visit the woman’s dormitory the previous night or have any sexual intercourse. It is considered a memorable day for any young man to get such opportunities in life.  

3.4. Chüthuni feast preparation

3.4.1. Announcement of rice beer preparation - Zhepe

The preparation of Chüthuni feast starts on the 18th of the current month, when the headman announces “Zhepe” – to the village about rice beer preparation for the feast. It is done by the village headman on the 17th evening giving prior information on the previous night and 18th early morning he announces again reminding the village people. The preparation of rice beer is specially announced, because the whole celebration of the feast consists in eating and drinking. Rice beer is the chief diet of the people. A good amount of rice beer is prepared every year during such a celebration. Once it is announced, it is left to the individual families to start the preparation lest, they be late for the celebration with their rice beer not being ready and that would means shame.

16 On such special occasion young boys who are selected are the most fortunate. The author himself participated in the divination of omen in the village. He went through all the necessary formula and it was the first and last of such event.
3.4.1.1. The making of rice beer

The rice beer making is time consuming, laborious and tedious to women folk. There are various kind of rice beers; some are mild while others are strong depending on the alcoholic percentage. The most common method of making rice beer is from paddy which is pounded into rice. Then, it is soaked in the water for more than three hours and after that it is strained in a basket. The soaked rice is made into flour and with boiled water it is made to watery flour and kept overnight. The following morning yeast powder is spread over the watery flour. As it ferments foam formation takes place. Then it is poured into the barrel or drums with the required amount of water added, and within two days it is ready to serve. The taste and the alcoholic percentage depends on the amount of water one adds it. The undissolved grains often settle down at the bottom, which is further used for making rice beer by cooking again or sometimes people eat them straight away. The ordinary yeast is made from paddy alone. The amount required for the year is taken out and soaked in water for three to four days.

After which it is taken out and put in the basket covered with banana leaves or on any other leaves. As it sprouts out inside the basket, it is taken out again and dried in the sun and little by little yeast is pound and put into the powdered rice flour for the preparation of the rice beer. There are various types of yeast which the villagers used for making rice beer of different types and quality. Generally people used the common rice
beer because other drink preparations are time consuming and much more labour is involved.\textsuperscript{17}

3.4.1.2. Advent – Nisha

The 25\textsuperscript{th} day of the month is called “Nisha” which means advent. It is on this day that the prepared rice beer is inaugurated and tasted. In the evening the whole family sits down together and bake Naga bread (\textit{lore}). This bread is baked without yeast and baked on a flat stone and when sufficiently baked it is mixed with sesame seeds “otsü” to give a better taste. Then the neighbours sit down together around the bonfire and inaugurate the \textit{Chüthuni} festival with the tasting of each other rice beer.

3.4.1.3. Main feast day -Nijü

The following day on 26\textsuperscript{th} of the month, which is “Nijü” – is the most important day of the feast. On this day, animals are slaughtered, divided and shared among families and neighbours. A very special ritual is performed called “orakhe kho” – that is serving of meal to the gods which is done in the evening. The rite is performed by the head of the family, who takes some cooked meat in a plantain leaf and in a plantain leaf cup filled with rice beer and then offer it to the gods. It is a sign of thanksgiving for the bountiful harvest and a gratitude to the ancestors for the support and inviting them to partake the

\textsuperscript{17} It is the common diet and daily affair for the village woman in the household. Rice beer is the chief diet and it is served to everyone instead of tea or coffee. With the coming of Christianity there is a lot of restriction. Externally the Church put restriction but in reality it is the same and since no alternative was provided today young generations have taken to drugs in place of rice beer.
good harvest of the year. After that the whole offering is placed near the corner of the house.

In the afternoon youths in groups go to each family and collect, say two/three mugs of rice beer, and firewood from each family for the evening social gathering. At the same time small boys will also collect Naga bread (lore) which was baked on the previous night, besides Salt and chilly from each family is brought for the common celebration. All the collections are put together in a common place. At sunset a huge bonfire is lit and the whole men folk without distinction assemble together for the party. Here the rice beer is served, Naga bread, salt, chilly, etc. is shared and distributed to all. According to one's own capacity the drinks are served. Traditional folksongs, folk dances and folktales are retold to the young generation. The great oral tradition, namely, the traditional yell is practiced and perfected through repetition. The different yells are taught and corrected during such occasion. As the stock of rice beer comes to an end, the whole community walks around the bonfire and with the traditional yell and the bonfire is put off with legs. This very night is the trial of strength between the married and the unmarried in competition - namely catching of birds the following day.

3.4.1.4. Catching of bird competition – ruho koho

On the 27th is called “Oshu kope” – the visit and sending off relatives, friends. On this day friends and relatives from different villages come and pay courtesy visits and exchange prepared food and rice beer. It is symbolically a token of good health and
cheer. It is also a family get together for the married daughters who might have being married to other villages, and then come to pay visit to their parents, brothers and sisters. This brings family bond, cement family ties and solidarity is brought back. The elder brother usually give a special gift to their married sisters called “sonū,” a stripe of meat and rice beer as they return to their mother-in-law’s house. Some rich families also prepare “toda” – a kind of tiffin for their sisters to be carried to their homes. It signifies brotherly love for their sisters who are married. It also recalls the family bond and often married sisters remember their parents, and their childhood life.

On the 27th early morning, the whole village celebrates the bird chasing competition (ruho koho) in the open jungle. On this day, the in-laws are also invited for the interesting competition of chasing and catching birds. Early morning every male young and old, married or unmarried gather together in a selected jungle with a yell, and the whole group rush to chase in order to catch birds. The catching of birds is done only with hands without using any weapons or implements such as guns, bow and arrow, spear or catapult, etc. The one who catches the first bird is considered to be the luckiest and most fortunate of the year. It is also believed that a person who catches a particular kind of bird called “Lisi tuo” on that day will be considered as equal to killing of a reindeer. The good omen is that the person is honoured and respected during this wild game. Thus, every man takes an active participation in such a competition. The whole competition takes almost three hours, and after the competition of chasing and catching of birds, the whole group is supposed to assemble in an agreed common place.
Here every one dresse himself with traditional customs - “tosü mani”, decorate themselves with headgear, spears, guns, creeping grass, flowers, and above all with the different trophies which are caught during the competition and solemnly with a sacred traditional yell move homewards. The birds are torn into pieces shared and hung on the plant, branches and the sacred traditional yell is either “Pasü hu” 18 – revered traditional folk yell used during solemn occasion, or “Eme hu” 19 – is the most loved traditional folk yell for Shüpfomei tribe. Thus, during such occasions the above yells are officially intoned and slowly arranging the whole group into four rows will move to the village.

On reaching the village a bamboo is erected and on it all the birds caught in the competition of the year is hung. Before closing the ceremony, the whole community has to go through the village at least twice in circle. Finally and on reaching the centre of the village or a common place, the whole community gives a faster tempo to the traditional yell and with a few more rounds finally drop down the whole yell to a stop. In the mean time, many young men will jump and twist to show their muscle, strength and valour. During such an occasion musketeer guns are fired all along the journey. The deep meaning and significance behind this external competition is to show physical fitness. It is here where every male person tries to prove himself worthy of the society and the village. Thus, we native persons are invited to participate in such activities of the village.

18. Ref. Footnote on page. 164
19. Ref. Ibid.,
20. It is the gesture of the family members to invite their sons and daughters who are working outside the village to participate in the village activities. Thus, many government servants do take holiday for the village celebration to show that they belong to the village.
The rest days such as 28th, 29th and 30th is called “Onizho” meaning celebrating the festival. On these days people eat and drink, sing and dance, tell stories and recall their forefathers, yet today, a new trend is seen in the organizing of such competition and modern games have become a common feature for the last three days.

3.4.1.5. Climbing the hill – pfoki kapra

The villages like SongSong (Chakre Chovu), Kalinamei (Kahremei) continue into this day to climb a particular fixed hill. It is called “Pfoki kapra”. All male members with their colourful traditional customs, together with guns, spears etc. and young girls in their traditional attire with their royal staff 21 “sheko sii”, and their bamboo basket slowly climb up the hill. Traditional yell and busting of musketeers is the common scene of the day. Like the chasing and catching of bird competition, they also invite their in-laws to participate in the climbing of the hill. There are seven spots and before reaching each spot, the whole group has to drop and stop the previous traditional yell. And with the next move they have to start new yell till they reached next of the seven spots.

21. Royal staff – Sheko sii, is an iron staff approximately 3’ with pointed end. Every woman during her marriage day she has to carry with her as she goes to her husband’s house. The carrying of the royal staff on the marriage symbolically stands for honour, respect and the external show that she is coming from a rich family. The first royal staff is said to have been brought to Shippomei area by the Tangkhuls (Phumei) another Naga tribe. The Tangkhuls use to sell to the village going around and asking to buy from them. Thus, royal staff became the standard and accepted goods to be used during feast and festivals.
On reaching the peak, games like long jump (ozhe kazhe), high jump (osii kotu) for the man and woman are conducted. There will be traditional dance called “de kocho” — it is jumping and dancing, showing of stamina and their skill, which is only for woman folk. One of the strict observance of this particular occasion is the home coming before sun set. It is believed that if the climbers come back after sun set, the result, or the consequence would be heavy death toll of person and animal will occur in the village for that year. Therefore, before sun set, the whole group has to return home. 22 There is also a special ritual that every young man has to load some ceremonial dry firewood of one or two pieces to their sisters as a sign of their love towards them. The firewood has to be brought to the morung, i.e. the girl’s dormitory (lochü bulei) for the evening bonfire. And with the climbing and return from the hill, the whole festival of Chūthuni feast comes to a close.

3.5. Shüpfomei cultivation feast - Saleni

3.5.1. Meaning of Saleni

“Saleni” — is a sacred feast of the Shüpfomei which is celebrated in the month of July month (Sale khro), according to the lunar calendar. It is celebrated after the completion of paddy transplantation and after heavy tedious manual work in the open paddy field. For Shüpfomei tribe, every three years a new month is added to the present month, and it is called Sale kahei (double July). The lunar calendar has 29 days and to

22. According to the old saying of the elders, certain villages stopped climbing the hill as a part of the celebration because the village failed to observe the forefather’s sayings and broke the law. As a consequence heavy death toll took place on the particular village. To avert such more happenings the villages stopped climbing the hills.
adjust to the Gregorian calendar one month i.e. 29 days are added to the corresponding month.

The feast of Saleni is adjusted with the double July on that particular year. This particular feast is also called "Kapeni" – cultivation feast and generally everyone looks forward to this particular feast. There is an old saying that even nature, takes part in this particular celebration. 23 Natures participates in the sacred feast when a particular flower called “salei pa” blooms during this season and as the flower blooms farmers can predict that the feast is coming near. And there is also a particular insect with a shrill sound resounding the whole area reminding of the approach of the feast, which is called “salei vo” – saleni pig. The shrilling sound of that particular insect is same as of the pig. “Sale” - means feast of the month of “Sale” – July month of the lunar calendar, and “ni” - means feast. Thus, it means feast of the July month.

Shüpomei calls it as a sacred feast because the whole celebration of this feast is full of rites and rituals. The meticulous observation of the sacred rites and rituals gives a sense of sanctification and a feeling that they have done their duty in paying worship and offering of sacrifices to god. And at the same time, failure to observe the rites and rituals bring the opposite effect and result would be the fear that the evil spirits will haunt them.

23. According to S. Ashuli (73) explains the season in a poetical form, he says nature plays her part to celebrate with the people. Tape record interview on 14th May, 1995
3.5.1.1. Feast of rites and rituals

The performers observe the sacredness of the feast and the ceremonies it contains, become perfect only when it is performed. Each performer is supposed to observe with precision and with deep sense of holiness and faith. Every step and action in performing has a ritual significance and the idea is the communication to the holy, the ultimate which Shüpfomei called “Oramei” – God. 24 The effect passes from the external action to the internal experience of the performer and the receiver. It is the sacrament and thus action will have a cause and effect, resulting in the blessing, prosperity, good health and increase of livestock, etc. While the opposite result is the negative which is epidemics, natural calamities, misfortune, earthquake and accidental fire in the village. The whole celebration last for five full days like that of Chüthuni feast. The only difference between these two feasts is the face of the performer. The external joyful experience is missing during the celebration of “Saleni” feast 25 while a joyful atmosphere prevail during “Chüthuni” feast.26

24. Ref. 4.2.1. etymology of the term “Oramei”.
25. Sacredness of Saleni contains in rites and rituals and not in the external celebration.
26. Joyful and merriment is the external experience and not in the rites and rituals.
3.5.1.2. Ceremonial procedure of the feast

The feast of Saleni commence on the 18th of July month – (Sale khro), and it is called “Zhepe” that is announcement for the preparation of rice beer. The village headman (movuwo) will announce the villages and remind them of the coming feast and the celebration. But the real feast starts on the 28th of July with the inauguration of “Macha kozii” – sacred meal or sacred picnic by children of below 7 years of age. 27 It is the manifestation day for every male child to the society and the feast continues by extending till the 3rd of next month of August (Rolei khro), adjusting with the sighting of new moon.

In the following pages we shall see how the “Saleni” feast has become institutionalized and ritualistic for Shüpfomei tribe. The forefathers looked at this particular feast from two aspects, firstly, from religious and spiritual aspect, secondly from physical range, i.e. to regain their physical strength after tedious manual labour, agricultural work. But today’s generation looked at “Saleni” feast with different eye, where the above mentioned aspects are missing.

27. “Macha kozii” – sacred meal, there is no equivalent term in English expression. It is the manifestation of a child that he has reached the stage of puberty.
3.5.2. Purification and sanctification - *Lidzū kocho*

3.5.2.1. Drawing of spring water

On this day all those persons who had celebrated “Zhoso mozū” – feast of merit, will observe the drawing of water from the village early dawn and it is known as “Khudziū” – drawing of water. The whole procedure is special and the following things are needed to draw water.

(a) Two yam (*biro hu*) leaves which are plucked from the garden and are put together.

(b) Two scented buds called “Kholo izū” are plucked and squeezed into the yam leaves.

(c) The performer has to carry his spear and a shield that is decorated with feathers of cock and he goes to the village spring pond.

(d) He has to carry with him a few paddy grains and also a few grains of rice to the pond.

On reaching the pond he will drop the few paddy grains first into the pond, saying “molū jithu to” – meaning ‘from gift of the soil we have received’ and then dropping the a few more grains of rice, saying “male fu to” – ‘may we have plenty’. And with this he will draw water inside the yam (*biro hu*) leaves and take home.

3.5.2.2. Blessing with water

On bringing home, the water in the yam leaves is opened up, he then sprinkles and washes all his children rubbing all the joints of the body saying with the following prayers. There is no formal or written code while offering the prayers, instead it is the
prayer of the heart, thanking, asking and imploring God for life, health and wealth. The following rituals are as follows:

(a) Touching the right leg ankle – may you be blessed with wealth in your life.
(b) Touching the left leg ankle – may all your work be fruitful.
(c) Touching the left knee – may your speech be faithful.
(d) Touching the right knee – with the rising of sun and moon may you be blessed.
(e) Touching the right arm – may the rain and water be yours.
(f) Touching the left arm – may you be free from evil spirits.
(g) Touching the right elbow - may peace reign in your way.
(h) Touching the left elbow – may you be master of forest and mountain.
(i) Pouring the remaining water on him – may all what you dig may put forth fruits in abundance. And with traditional yell the blessing comes to an end. 28

Thus, after such meticulous performance of rites and rituals, Shüpfomei forefathers expresses their joy and satisfaction through the last traditional yell. This traditional yell is the summit of their feast. The meaning of this yell is the expression of victory over the evil spirits. Finally, the sacred meal (macha koto) is done during this feast, it is also an expression of mental and physical happiness. We have already dwelt with this particular topic (reference 2.4.).

28 Cf. Fr. William Nepuni, Ememei Zhi ye Chåna (Mao culture and tradition) P. 8. The performance of the ritualistic ceremony takes time and often people do it with pride and a sense of happiness. Externally it looks tedious and consuming yet it is not so because of the religious aspect of it.
3.5.2.3. Sacred meal - *Macha kozü*

The joy and happiness knows no bound when the parents present their son to the village and to the community. Often it is called the manifestation day for the boy child. Every male child has to undergo the sacred ritual known as “*Macha kozü*” – sacred meal, which is a joyous expression given to his friends and peer groups. It is called giving sacred meal “*Macha kozü*”. (cf. 2.4.)

3.5.3. The celebration of *Saleni*

3.5.3.1. Second day - *Nijü*

The second day that is 29th of July month (*Sale khro*) is called “*Nijü*” – meaning the main feast day. On this day also people perform the ritual called “*Lidziü*”-sanctification. Some animals like pigs, dogs and others except bulls are slaughtered for the feast on this day, but bulls are not killed on this particular day. In the evening “*ora khe kho*” – placing of food and drink to God is done, imploring God’s blessing and protection from pestilence, disease and from natural calamities. The head of the family takes some cooked rice, meat and some rice beer in a plantain leaves (*ole*) and offers them to God. There is a general belief that God accepts the gift offered by eating and drinking. There is also a notion that such gifts offered are often eaten by house rats and people generally accept that the ancestors come by night and take them away. 29 There might be different beliefs but Shüpfomei offer rice and rice beer to gods (spirits, ancestral spirits, etc.)

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29. The belief is that human spirit takes the form of domestic animals and insects. It participates in human activities. Thus, living beings request the support, guidance and help of their ancestors.
3.5.3.2. Third day - Oshu kope

The third day of the feast is called “oshu kope” – meaning sending off the visitors. On this day, married daughters from other village would come and pay courtesy visit to their parents. They exchange “odu” - prepared food and drink, while the elder brother presents a slice of pork called “sonii” – a strip of slice pork to all their married sisters.

3.5.3.3. Fourth day - Ale lepa

The fourth day is called “ale lepa” – second day of sanctification. It is done by sighting the new moon; the reason is because this day comes on the second or third day of the next month i.e. August (Rolei kdro). If “ale lepa” comes on the second day of August month (Rolei kdro), then July month will have only 30 days. And if “ale lepa” comes on the third day of August month (Rolei kdro), then July month will have only 29 days. The last day of Saleni is called “ale lejë” – means the main day for purification and sanctification.

All the men-folk will take an early bath from the village spring pond and before taking bath each man will bind his legs with thatch grass, then snap it while washing down with water. Prayers are being said to God to disentangle him from all sickness, misfortunes and evil deeds. Before leaving the spring pond he will fetch some water (khudzë kocho) in a yam leaf with a pair of scented leaves (kholo hu) and takes home. On
reaching home he dabs all the joints of his body with the water asking God to glorify him like the sun and moon and give him victory over the enemy. And with the calling of spirits the feast comes to an end. (ref: 2.4.2.)

The other two feasts are “Chüjüni” and “Onuni”. “Chüjüni” – is advent celebration for paddy plantation. The purpose of the celebration of this feast is to prepare oneself physically for the coming heavy work in the field. The feast is commemorated on the 27th June (Pfozü khro) and it is celebrated for only one day. On this day cowherds are given a sumptuous meal with rice beer and meat for the service in looking after the cattle. With the celebration of this feast will start the paddy transplantation.

The next feast which Shüpfomei celebrate is Onuni – advent celebration for harvest. It falls on the 28th September (Onu khro) of the lunar calendar. Like the feast of Chüjüni it is also celebrated only one day. The feast commences the harvest of first fruits of the labour. The harvest of millet, maize, etc. is done during this season.

3.6. Feast of merit - Zhoso mozü

3.6.1. Why feast of merit?

One of the deep desire of every married couple in their life time is to perform the status ceremony which is called “Zhoso Mozü” – feast of merit, followed by the

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“Zhoso” – is the host, the one who distributes from the surplus of his wealth to the village as a sign to show his riches. “Zhoso mozü” – is the feast of merit, who climb the status of honour by giving his wealth and riches. “Zhoso sa” – is the special shawl with three woven cloths are stitched together and worn by those who celebrated the feast of merit.
TABLE 15

Shüpfomei traditional house

Traditional village gate
(Koro chükhu)
TABLE 16

Shűpfomei paddy barns (Otho be)

Mani kasha hu
The place on which Pudunamei (Pfosemei) Headman (Movuwo) announces the genna (mani) to different villages.
TABLE 17

Shüpfomei rice beer barrel
(Osü pipa)

Traditional monolith stones
erection of monolith stone. They work very hard, earn and collect, and as a sign to show the wealth, they offer and share generously their goods to the whole village and attain the heights in status. They also erect memorial monuments to propagate their name and their memory to the future generations and descendants.

They also wear a special kind of shawl called “Zhoso sa” after giving such feast to the village. When such a person wears this shawl he is respected, honoured and given a place in the society. His words are taken seriously in public meetings. Such a celebration takes a lot of their time and the preparation has to be done meticulously and at different stages.

3.6.1.1. Purpose of merit feast

The material riches of a person is calculated from the external goods, such as the number of cattle, paddy fields, sons, firewood land, amount of paddy, etc one owns. Rich people often share their wealth with the village by giving such merit feasts and gain their status from the public. Very rarely a person does the feast of merit twice, and thrice cannot be imagined. People who could afford twice are considered very great and honourable. Generally in a man’s life time, certain persons even perform twice such feasts of merit.
3.6.2. Preparatory phase

3.6.2.1. First phase

The person who is going to perform the feast of merit (Zhoso mozüi) has to give prior information to the whole village during the month of September (Onu khiro). He will kill two bulls and a pig, prepare rice beer and serve wine for the whole village and the meat is distributed as "chovü kovüi" to each of the household. A special gift is given to the village headman namely the right leg of the bull while the right fore limb is given to the local chief. He will call a few elders inside the house and serve them with rice beer. But before they could drink the rice beer, they will pour out few drops to the ground to pay respect and gratitude to their ancestors and with one great yell they will inaugurate the feast of merit as the first announcement. Only after the inauguration from inside the house wine will be served to all those who are outside the house. They will also accord three traditional yells to the house owner and drink to their hearts' content and later the community will slowly return to their own houses. 31 As the community depart from the official drinking ceremony, the host and master of ceremony sit down together and plan out for the remaining days which is much more taxing and calls for minute preparation. The owner often calls his family and close relatives and sort out the different methods and ways into the searching of stone, ropes, animals, materials, wine, preparation, etc. The amount of animal slaughtered during the whole process of the feast of merit is counted and through that people generally admire the wealth of such persons.

31. Cf. K Sani, Customs and Traditions of Mao Naga (In Mao Dialect), P. 29
3.6.2.2. Sexual abstaining

If the following year, where the March month (*Orolopra khro*) is to be for the erection of the memorial stone, then in the current year on the 25th day of the month of November (*Belu khro*), the family will collect crab (*ovo*) from the field and cook it in a new pot. And after cooking, they then pinch it out a small piece separately. In a new plate they will place plantain leaf and eat the crab. After eating the crab the husband and wife will abstain from sexual intercourse and they will enter the stage of abstinence. 32

The success and purity of the celebration and erection of the memorial stone will depend much on their meticulous observations of the rules and regulations of the ceremony. Thus, the psychological satisfaction of sacred or profane comes within the person’s judgement in such observations. 33

3.6.2.3. Second phase

With the dawn of the new-year, he will announce to the whole village that he would be performing the merit feast. As a confirmation of his decision he would once

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1. According to the traditional belief it is the most testing of a man’s stamina, the ability to restrain himself from the physical performance. From the day of eating the crab meal till the erection of the memorial stone, the couple has to restrain their union.

2. In olden days, external behaviour of a person is judged. The success and failure of the erection and pulling of memorial stone depends on his enduring strength to abstain from the norms, rules and regulations laid down by the forefathers. Thus, the performer is very careful and meticulous in his performance in the rites.
again announced to the whole village, like the previous occasion. With the second announcement, the whole village will work for him – such as ploughing his fields, harrowing, transplanting of paddy, weeding and harvesting of his field. The whole village will cut firewood for him and even carry it to the owner’s house. At this stage, the owner will be looking out for a memorial stone which will be used for the said purpose. \(^{34}\) By now the owner has already made up his mind to erect the memorial stone. The second announcement is the sure sign of his mind.

3.6.2.4. Hiring of barrels - *litei*

On the 25\(^{th}\) day of January as the day comes near he will hire rice beer barrels (*litei*) \(^{35}\) and basket container (*chopho*) from the villages and neighbours. The owner has to kill a young bull and pay the hiring interest in advance to the owners. If there be any extra meat he will distribute to other villages as a gift to substitute for modern invitation card. It was the customary invitation ‘card’ of the olden days.

\(^{34}\) Selected persons are sent to search for the Memorial stone. And only the best and durable stones are selected for the purpose. It is a tedious search, because all stones cannot be used for the memorial stone. The selected stone may be desired and liked by those who are sent to select it but they have to dream dreams (omu ome) to see the omen. If the omen is bad, they have to abandon it and search for an other.

\(^{35}\) Ref. (Photo of rice beer Barrels, each of such barrels can contain more than 200 litres of rice beer. In the olden days, before the coming of such present containers wooden barrels are used for farming rice beer for any celebration. Even individual families use the wooden barrels but in much smaller in size and it is customary especially those who perform feast of merit to hire the wooden barrels for those who had already done feast of merit.
3.6.2.5. Final preparation

On the 13th of March (*Orolopra khro*) the rice for making rice beer is pound into flour and boiled water is poured into it and stirred well. It being a very good amount, the whole village men folk do the work of pounding, boiling of water and mixing the flour, while the womenfolk carry water for boiling. After cooling down the whole mixture is kept for the night. The family will observe this day as a genna – abstaining from work and to see that the rice beer preparation is done properly.

On the 14th will be the putting of yeast and pouring into the barrels. On the 15th a pig or more (according to the population and household in the village) will be killed and a stripe of meat i.e. two sliced, tied together on a bamboo string and then the meat is distributed (*chovü kovü*) to each household. 36 It is customary to show that the host who is performing the feast of merit as a sign of invitation to each family in the village. While on the 17th bulls, buffaloes are killed and given as a gift to the whole village and all neighbouring villages (*chovü kovü*). Buffaloes and bulls head are not used for meat distribution but kept as souvenir in the house. The real day for the feast of merit (*Ozho koso*) falls on the 18th March (*Orolopra khro*). On this day in the early morning one pig and cow is killed and the host will feed and serve rice beer to the village. The feeding of the whole village is done to show his wealth and it continues till the pulling of the memorial stone and erection of the stone. The performing of the feast of merit is

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36 Every household without any exception is distributed with a stripe of meat. According to Shuípromei custom each household thought out and mentioned by the owner and the meat is given.
considered as the greatest event, and the host will make sure that every thing is done according to plan.

3.6.3. Pulling of memorial stone

3.6.3.1. Selection of stone

The selection of stone is the hardest in the celebration procedure. The owner does not choose and select any stone, but prior to his selection he makes sacrifices and prayers. He abstains from any sexual contacts with his wife. He searches the height and breadth, sees whether the stone has any defects, marks and flaw. Once he is satisfied and chosen he talks to the stone as though it is a living object, "ni azü oke oku sole do" – 'you will be my friend'. He then pours rice beer on the stone and puts a scented plant (kholo) on the stone and goes home. That night he goes to see his dream (omu ome anole) to find out the omen. If the dream is bad he will reject the stone and search for a new one, but if the dream is good he will start intensive preparation in order to pull the stone. Some time even during the dream the stone itself will reveal its name and sex. Such example "Asu" – meaning 'double name' and the pair in most cases consists of male and female.

In such cases the owner has to pull both the stones. It is said that such persons are very lucky and often give double feast of merit and erect two stones one for himself and

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[^37]: According to Shüpomei culture, every event is important and such event has to be consulted with dream to see the omen. It is through dream God speaks to the person and gives direction.
another for his wife. 38 Erection of two memorial stones is common and for rich people it is their desire to erect one for his memory and the other for his wife.

3.6.3.2. Selection of rope

The selection of particular jungle creeping rope is a must and very important for pulling the memorial stone. The persons who are selected for this particular job goes to the forest in search for a particular jungle creeper called “richu”. Two to three months before the real occasion and make the preparation. The host (Zhosowo) will ask the king and fix the day and date with him for the pulling of the stone. The month of March (Orolopra khro) is the general month for such occasion and it may have been observed from the climatic point of view also prevailing sunny weather and people are more or less free from other heavy work. On the 8th of March (khrokha chacha ni), the special creeper rope called “richu ri” which is an important rope for the pulling memorial stone ceremony is cut and gathered in a particular place. This particular rope has a symbolical meaning and it is tied in the middle of the sledge. It should not have any defects or broken buds, etc. There are other two ropes beside the “richu ri” and these three ropes which are tied to the sledge is symbolically related to and reflects the special shawl “chosro sa” which is worn only by Zhosomei – performer of the feast of merit. 39

1. K. Lohru (69) is the author’s father, and his father had narrated this event to him. His father had told this particular stone when asked about during the meeting, that his father had erected two monolith stones at “Kepeho” – it is ½ km from the present Punanamei village. And both the memorial stones are erected close to each other - one for his father and the other for his mother. He says, his father was told in the dream regarding the stone and his father pulled both the stones.
2. Ref. (3.6.) (3.6.1.)
This particular shawl is stitched together by three woven cloths and is worn beginning from the day of pulling the stone. The person who wears this shawl is honoured and respected in the society. And according to the traditional customs only those who has performed the feast of merit can only wear such shawl and nobody else is supposed to wear them.

3.6.3.3. Preparation of the sledge

The sledge on which the stone is to be pulled is prepared on “tobu mani” – a genna observed for laying of stone on the sledge. While other preparation such as the tying of the special creeper rope to the sledge is done. The next three days are called “lopra mani” – meaning ‘days set apart for the pulling of stone’. With the convenience of the people and agreement with the village headman, the monolith can be pulled. It is said that pulling of memorial stone takes many days and olden people spent a lot of their working days in ceremonial pulling of such massive stones.
3.6.4. Actual day of pulling the memorial stone

3.6.4.1. Sacrificial rite over the stone

On the actual day of pulling the stone, the host (zhosowo) will wear the special shawl “Zhoso sa” make a sacrifice and prayer in the morning and together with the village male folk move to the spot where the sledge is ready. The whole male folk adorned with such costumes like head gear (lalei) two colourful sashes (nahra) across their chest, a loin cloth (noto) around the waist, with leggings (phi dara) on their legs, ear lobs (kobvo) with decorated hornbill feathers, will solemnly assemble near the stone.

Women folk with traditional attire for the occasion also join behind the procession carrying rice beer and other eatable goods like salted dried beans, salt, etc. to give moral a boost but they must not come near the spot. On reaching the spot the host moves slowly to the stone and by now the yells stop to a pin drop silence. The three ropes that are spread out cannot be touched or walked across by any one. If it is done it is a bad omen and every one is told not to walk across nor touched it before the sacrificial rite is done.
3.6.4.2. Offering of the unblemished cock

Once the whole community gathers around the stone, the host “zhosowo” will bring the unblemished cock with him and with its leg scratch the stone and talk to the stone by saying ‘be agile like a cock and reach the destination safe and sound’. He then throws the cock in the air and as it comes down the whole community will chase and tear it into pieces and with its blood the stone is smeared. Once again the host blesses the stone and rubs it saying, ‘be agile and reach the destination fast and safe’.

Some of young boys will fling two sticks each from behind the stone towards the three ropes that are spread. As they fling the sticks the whole group will yell “woo...woo...” It signifies that the flying of the sticks let the stone also move forward. On finishing of the flinging of the sticks, the young boys from the right side by touching the stone will run across the whole length of the rope and finally climb on the top of the stone. As soon as the boys reach on the top of the stone, there will be six elders standing on the top of the stone that will direct and guide the stone and the rope.

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1 Unblemished cock – Oho hodzu mokro, is the offering and sacrifice of spotless cock to God. The meaning and purpose is asking God to reach the stone in it desired place. It is also meant taking away the short coming and failure of the people. The sacrifice is symbolically done for the whole people.
The persons who stands on the sledge with unison voice will cry to the group, "Ho...le...lo, ho...le...ko" at this cry the whole community will also respond to the yell and pull the sledge saying, "ko...ho...wo". There will be three persons infront of the sledge guiding the three ropes from any entanglement. It is the most dangerous job and a very risky one, because in the process of pulling by hundreds, they may be pushed or fall into the twisted ropes. Usually persons who are brave, physically agile and mentally fit will do the job. And such persons are given a basket of salt on reaching home for their bravery. There are others who put cut pieces of wood beneath the sledge so that the sledge might not be worn out while being dragged on the rough ground, besides it also helps to move faster the sledge.

3.6.4.3. The traditional yell  41

There are two main directors on the top of the sledge and yell to the group. The first director will yell "Ho...le...lo" and the second director will soon follow with the cry "Ho...le...ko" and at this the whole community will also respond with the same yell "Ko...ho...zo" and at this sound they will pull the sledge. It is the timing that matters in the forward movement of the sledge and not the individual strength. Sometime pulling of such a stone goes even for days due to accident, long route and difficult terrain etc. But on reaching close to the village, the main directors will change the yell "He... ho" and the group will also repeat the same.

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1 Traditional yell is the expression of joy, encouragement, support, cooperation, solidarity of Shüpformeie —clathers. There are different yells used at different times and occasions.
On reaching the spot or destination the ropes are rolled up from the right to the left. Then, the owner gives a great party to the whole village with meat and drink. A special salt called “kashū mati” is packed and given to the person who guides and directs the ropes. Two pieces of meat each are given to the whole village as a token and wages for their service.

3.6.5. Erection of the memorial stone

The memorial stone is erected on a location according to the wishes of the owner and it is done during the month of May (Khrana khro). Even on the day of erection of memorial stone, the host (Zhoso pfona) has to spend and make elaborate preparation. A bull is killed and its blood is taken and smeared on the stone. The residue of the rice beer (ozhe kho) is also taken and rubbed on the stone. Paddy grains are sown near the stone.

3.6.5.1. The sacrificial cock - oho ra koso

The sacrificial cock is done in order to see the omen. If the cock dies with its right leg crossed over the left leg, then believe that it is a good omen. The feathers of the cock is thrown all along the route to the located place of the stone. The best feather of the cock is taken and planted near the stone with scented plant (kholo). Once the stone is erected all elders in two groups come together near the stone and with traditional yell give the official blessing, one of the group will yell “Ho...ho...ho” and the other group will yell “Oh...oh...oh”.
3.6.5.2. Solemn blessing

One of the elders will lead the prayer –

(a) “Atamei omei ko kho ye oto ko khowe” – we ask for people and food, and the whole elders community will answer “ae” – yes.

(b) “Atamei chomu kapeo tamei” – we are dreamers race, and the whole elders community will answer “ae oh” - yes.

(c) “Atamei chobi so amotsiwo tamei” –we are the race who strengthen and supports, and the elders community answer “oh” – yes.

(d) “Ota ta nghoe zhūlo kashū evūbvū tikoipo” – as we cultivate let it produce in plenty and the whole elders community will answer “oh” – yes.

(e) “Otho telo omo (omosū kru) kru tikoipo” – let us bear fruits like (omosū) a kind of wild fruit bearing plant, and elders community will answer “ove”- yes.

(f) “Hithini hieh, netto puni onghi, nesho puni onghie” – in future we like to get more, and the whole elders community will answer “ove” – yes.  

3.6.5.3. Significance of the feast of merit

The feast of merit is very significant and symbolic. It is at such an occasion that many past enemies become friends and reconciliation take place. On such an occasion many young and old prepare themselves physically and mentally to show their physique

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1 Cf. Kalirũ Sani, Customs and traditions of Mao Naga (in Mao dialect). P. 35. This particular solemn blessing is done to instill fear and discipline in the village especially to those who break the village laws.
to the village. It is also a spiritual exercise where many young and old prepare their moral
behaviour and promise to live upright lives. It bring self-control and helps the others on
such occasion. Today when we look at the whole feast of merit, we can say that such a
feast is to prove oneself the ascendant as “I am better and powerful than you”. In olden
days the show of one’s wealth and riches is the amount of paddy fields, cattle, land, and
house he possesses.

3.7. Bachelor and spinster dormitory system

3.7.1. What is Morung?

3.7.1.1. Bachelor and spinster dormitories

As the children reach certain age, they don’t sleep in the parent’s house. They
often form a peer group and start sleeping in a dormitory. It is called bachelor dormitory
or morung and in Shüpfo mei language it is called “Khrucho kozi”. And as girls once they
reached puberty age they also stay in girl’s dormitory known as “Locho kozi”.

It is both the boys and girls in the village and there are many such peer groups
where they have the dormitories. Therefore, such dormitories are known “morung”
system. The early age group for boys often starts from 7 – 8 years, while most of the
peer group often begins 13 – 15 of age. Girls also start from the early age and continue to
stay together.
Morung for both boys and girls serves as a guard house, recreation club and centre of education, art, discipline and have its own importance for ceremonial purposes.

According to modern concept of education, the morung system organized by Shüpfomei forefathers were considered as the best. It contained all the ingredients of modern understanding of education. The morung system can be taken as best form of schooling even in the modern concept because here human behaviour is taught and learn.

There are neither prescribed curriculum nor method of teaching. It is nothing more than the basic principle of life, human relationships, good manners and etiquette. Young men and women are taught the folksongs, folktales, community work and co-operation especially to live upright and virtuous life. The real background as to why bachelor dormitory existed was that these young men might become responsible citizens of the village and society. In such dormitory they learn all kinds of skill of crafts, carving, basket making, mat making, different traditional yells, etc. There is an old saying that until young boys and girls stay with their peer groups they never learn what is life. Only when they began to live with their peer groups they become refined and responsible in life.

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41. Cf. Joseph S. Thong, Head-Hunters culture (Historic culture of Nagas) P. 88. (There are different opinions regarding the morung system. According to one school of thought, it is looked as the outdated method of education, it can be applied only in small community or village. While another school of thought expresses that with modern form of education it is impossible to practice the morung system. Here there is no practicality aspect of the morung system but a real concept of education. Shüpfomei forefathers had their own understanding of human development and the morung system gave them the old concept of social, moral, spiritual values.
42. K. Lohru, A.I. (Reid). Interview on the 12/12/1991. According to him morung system was the acceptable method approved by the society. It not only brought human growth and social development, but also a sense of belonging and self worth. For the Shüpfomei forefather morung was only system that they could think of at that time and which was binding for the whole society and village.
3.7.1.2. Moral inputs of dormitory system

The value imparted to young people in the morung becomes very beneficial to the village. In the olden days when there is epidemic in the village, the people feared to go out even at night, but young bachelors roam and do traditional yell in the village who often bring consolation and encouragement to frightened families. During the village war (oso orru) these young men guard the village from enemies day and night. When there is urgent and necessary work, they will be the first to help out.

3.7.2. Bachelor dormitory – Khrucho kozü

The boys start sleeping in the bachelor dormitory on the first day of the month when the village observe genna “Phehrū mani” – a day of sanctification and purification of self. While the girls don’t have any fixed day to start sleeping in the spinster’s dormitory. Morung is a very sacred place for the boys and no woman is allowed to sit or sleep on the bed of the boys. The owner of the house is often considered to be upright, and virtuous a person to train these young men for both physical, mental, moral and spiritual growth. It is considered as the formal educational institute for Shüpfomei tribe as they did not have what we now do in educational schools and colleges. The teacher or instructor is any of the family men and women in whose house the dormitory is constructed. The family accepts these boys and girls as their own children and shower with much care and concern. In return these young man and woman call the owner of the house as their father and mother and work for them during their stay in the morung.
3.7.3. Spinster’s dormitory – *lochii kozü*

A girl after the evening meal goes to the dormitory where she spends a lot of her time among the peer groups. Here she learns to live a sincere life and hard work. She often brings her cotton yearn and spinning tools and work with their group. Her friends help her unfinished works. Here she learns how to weave shawls, cultivate the habit of hard work, helping others, learn music, folk dance, singing of folksongs, folktales and sharing ideas with different persons and thus, she learns how to live with life. There are lots of merriment and enjoyment where young men and women shared their joys and moment of love. In summer time young boys bring maize, cucumber, fruits from jungle, gardens and share in the girl’s dormitory. They also make common rice beer and share together. During such celebrations girls sit on one side with their leader, likewise boys also sits on the opposite and have singing competitions, and through such songs, they woo each other for their life partner. We shall mention some of such types of songs:

3.7.4. Types of love songs

There are various types of songs for wooing partners, but we shall mention only two so as to understand such love songs. These songs are folksongs with deep meaning and message and to understand the meaning one has to understand the context. Today many of such verses are no longer in use because of the difficult meaning and non-understanding of the tune.
3.7.4.1. Love song – Odolo

A love song is often sung by lovers to each other and in order to attract another. It expresses the undying love for the other and the singer has to sing in such a way to attract the other and after singing a verse, it is the other group that has to respond. An example of such a love song is as follows;

*Omei thopfū hehi vu butie*  
All of us have come together

*Mei thopfū sū vu adžū lotie*  
All of us have gathered together

*Kobu thopfū ole no leshūe*  
All gathered here deep is the love

*Kobu thopfū ole no leshūe*  
All gathered here deep is the love

*Sūto moli Shūpfomei sū*  
Let Shūpfomei be

*Sūto moli Shūpfomei sū*  
Let Shūpfomei be

*Shūpfomei sū kozū lei butie*  
Shūpfomei is still in the dark

*Shūpfomei sū kozū lei butie*  
Shūpfomei is still in the dark

*Adei duno kozū lei butie?*  
Why is Shūpfomei still in the dark?

*Adei duno kava lei prahra?*  
Why Shūpfomei can’t come to light?

*Shūpfomei neto pfoto no sote*  
Shūpfomei boys and girls don’t try

*Komo vano kozū lei butie*  
Why they still stay in the dark

*Shūpfomei neto pfoto no sote*  
Shūpfomei boys and girls try hard

*Loli kava lei prale*  
Then, they will walk in the light

*Lari modulo meo sote solo*  
Students try hard
Larü modo ala tho lo
Students stand up

Pfatomei no ezhô yi marie
Boys are like the right arm

Netomei no ena yi chakhæ
Girls are compared to the left arm

Pfatomei no sote solo li
If boys try hard

Netomei së ala tho lo le
Girls will also be able to stand

Kozü tino adei marie?
Darkness is compared with whom?

Kozü tino adei chakha?
Darkness is what it looked like?

Kozü tino nopfu yi marie
Darkness is like womenfolk

Kozü tino lapfo yi chakhæ
Darkness is like menfolk

Khrulo kali kocho leino
When you are in the prime of life

Sote so ovo sole she
Let us work hard

Shüpfomei së kozü lei bu hrae
Shüpfomei will not stay in the dark

Bulo kohro so ala tho leshe
Let us try not to stay in the dark

Ovo so kotho thi së
Once we start our work

Mei kata ko akheiwo ti sho
Let no one stop doing it.\(^{45}\)

\(^{45}\) Cf. Fr. William Nepuni, Ememei zhi ye chûna (Mao culture and tradition). P. 48
Such love songs are sung and cherished even today in social gatherings. It brings a lot of encouragement among the young lovers. There are many more songs which are sung and used during social festivals. Today the singer or the group often adapts or changes the verses to suit the situation and occasion.

3.7.4.2. Agricultural song

This particular song is sung during transplantation season. Such songs are sung by the group and by attractive lovers to steal the show.

She lotamei ti odzü pa shue jü
She lotamei ti ole shü shue jü
Odzüpa shue jü oleshü shue jü
She dzüpa moli hibvüo vulemo
She dzüpa moli hibvüo vulemo
Dzüpa duno vue leshü duno vue
She propa ti pa obvü bulei
She leiko vono vu ru zho zhoe
She pa zhüwo bue
She chuša zhü bu lemoè
She propa ti paoli are tiwe
She elo kali ekhru yi mokru le  

Come all you farmers are so lovable
All you farmers are so charming
So likable and charming
Without love we couldn’t have come
Without love we couldn’t come
Because of love we have come
When flower buds open
Honey bee comes to suck the nectar
Though it look very pretty
It is not going to stay forever
Once the flower blooms it fades
As young girls, meet young boys
She ekhru kali elo yi mokru le  
As young boys, meet young girls  

Mokru moli kohru mu moe  
If we don’t meet life is not worth  

She nopfu tele mei kata te hrae  
Married women cannot go where others go  

She lapfo tele mei kovu vu hra  
Married men cannot go where others go  

She siodu sino khusu azhule  
Because of these let us unite  

She siodu sino lero azhule  
Because of these let us join  

Khusu azhule lero azhule  
Let us unite and join together  

She hibvuo bue kathi mei kose  
Even if we remain, we are only mortals  

She hibvuo bue kathi mei kose  
Even if we remain, we are only mortals  

Hibvuo bue kathi mei kose Shupfomei  
Shupfomei mortals we are.46  

3.7.4.3. Composed songs

Modern composed songs are recorded in cassettes and many of them have been shown on video films. The composed songs are mostly translated from the modern expression of love and it creates a deep sense of love, departure and separation of human longing of for love. It brings young and old to recall and relive their youthful days.
Mangailo kohro ekhruwo
Niyi mocho moli lohro tie
Lekashü kasa kosomei pajü koso bue
Ahei, lekashü hino omei kakrū yi bvūmoe
Mangai lo kohro sü ale li bue
Hey! Mopfino adapra
Opropa khru no pawo kobu chū
Osūngho madei vano
Kotu, no kotu! tuto! Ara kowochü
Koprho kolo khru ti mocho leshūë
Lekashü Khrañū, Khrana khro
Osūngho li ongha so prawe
Ekhra, elomei le sūso korū pie
Osū torū phino omei koho fū khru no
Aso pfo leshū chū kophrowe

Unforgettable friend
Cannot live without thinking of you
There are many lovable friends
But our love is special
Can’t forget you in my life
As the year passes by
As the flower blooms
In the spring season
As the cuckoo coos
Let us recall those moments
Recalling spring season
Everything is green
Recalling youthful days
Under the shady bushes
Talking about “Love” ⁴⁷

Conclusion

Social celebration brings solidarity and harmonious blending to a person’s wellbeing psychologically and physically. Shüpfomei social and cultural feast and festivals are in same line, namely physical strength is again regained and from their

¹⁷ The first composed audio cassette released in 1984. Composed and sung by Pudunamei pop group. The author got permission from the concerned persons and given a free translation.
psychological fatigue they feel in the course of their individual lives. The feast and festivals brings solidarity in a sense that family relationship is linked up with the offering and presentation of gifts during the celebrations. Thus, married daughters are invited to their parents' house and give a symbolic gifts of sliced pork and a gourd of rice beer to be given to her mother-in-laws and father-in-laws. Such gestures bring family ties and lasting bond of union.

Social celebration has social impact and significance to the village. This is true of those affected by modern busy lives and especially those living in cities and towns also. They also show concern for such celebrations that bring social unity. Christmas and New-year are given a new outlook with the coming together to the village. In the same way coming for the social celebration especially ChAthuni or Saleni bring that sense of the belonging. The social feasts and festivals have deep impact on the society and tribe. Every social celebration brings the deep aspiration of human longing and human expression to meet the ultimate.