

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I became very much interested with the lives of our Yinn cousins, and for that matter all our ethnic cousins too, when I was posted to the small town of Namsan, in the southern Shan State. So I decided to record their daily lifestyles as well as their beliefs and customs and to publish a book in English for others to see the simple people of our land and their hospitality. I must say I am very much indebted to U Sonny Nyein and U Hpone Thant who advised me to publish my photos and also explain their ways of life in English so that other people in other lands would come to know about our Golden Land.

For this I would like to thank my Yinn friends who had helped me in every way that I had demanded of them on my photoshoots, U Sonny Nyein for his endeavours to create a very nice book and to U Hpone Thant for the excellent translation plus many others who had made this book possible.

Thank You!  
**Kyaw Kyaw Win** (Swaitawyeik)



The Striped Yinn

## The Yinn: Still Proud In Their Culture

The Yinns are one of the many ethnic groups that live in Myanmar. Most of the Yinn tribes are found around Namsan Township in Southern Shan State. At the latest census there were only around a couple of thousands of these people but however small they may be the Yinn people still proudly treasure and preserve their customs and traditions.

There is however a divergent view among scholars on their origins. Some scholars say they are related to the Shans in ethnicity while Prof. Luce and others hold that they are of Tibeto-Burman stock and together with the Palaung tribes migrated into the present territory which later became Myanmar. But the Yinn folklore says that they came down from what was Chinese territory led by 5 of their elders together with the Shans when that Sino-Thai group moved into new territories. Later they choose to stay at the present locations while the Shans moved into other areas.

The Yinns also regard themselves as descendants of King Kyansittha of Bagan dynasty and easily identify themselves as blood brothers of the Myanmar people. The Yinns have their own language to communicate with each other but no literature. But the Yinns had preserved their own distinctive culture. They are self-reliant and proud of their own customs and traditions.

The Yinns have 2 distinctive groups: the Black and the Striped Yinns. Actually these differentiations are based on the clothes the females wear. The Black Yinns clothes are black but the Striped Yinns wear clothes of red and white or black strips.

These dresses are woven on back looms at home mainly by the women folks. The distinctive feature of both men and women are that they blacken their teeth by chewing on some jungle vines or betel. Another unique feature is that they decorate their teeth with gold crowns capped on their teeth. The Black Yinns, however, call themselves in their own language as "Yan Aei" while the Shans call them "Yann Lann".

As it is usual for all our mountain folks the Yinns are also very hospitable. The Striped Yinns are always ready with a tankard of rice wine for any visitor fortunate enough to visit their villages but the Black Yinns are more likely to offer a cup of green tea. However, the Yinns are also wont to give a sip of the rice wine to newborn babies, more for medicinal

purposes than for other reasons. But the grownups would not refuse a tipple anytime of the day regardless of age.

They would go to the nearby stream to bath and when they bath the women would go topless into the water. Actually they just wash their hands and legs never the whole body. The strange thing is that almost all Yinn people cannot tell their ages.

The Yinns always site their villages on top of mountains and away from water. They think living near water is not good for their health. For potable water they depend on the water from the nearby water sources. They would fetch the water in dried gourds pitchers and pour it into a hole dug in the ground, wait for the sediment to settle and use the water for drinking and domestic purposes.

### Livelihood

The Yinn people are agriculturists and had adapted well to their own environment.. They plant paddy, groundnuts, sesame and other cash crops on terraced fields on the mountainside. Mostly they would plant soya beans. They also have small orchards where pineapple or ginger etc are grown. The family plots are mostly worked by family members. The villagers help each other in the field work so outside help is hired only if they cannot cope. Traditionally only natural and organic fertilizers such as cow dung are used. And fishes are abundant in the creeks and streams that flow nearby or they go out hunting the wildlife in the forest for meat. Most of the agricultural produce is brought to Namsan, the nearest town, to be sold and exchanged with other provisions they need at home. Even in the raining season the Yinns would visit the town to supply the town folks with wild mushrooms and truffles that they had gathered in the wild. Occasionally a lucky Yinn hunter would bring in to the market a hunk of venison or meat from his successful hunt.

Ownership of land accrues to anybody who had cleared the land for his own use. But the Yinns practise shifting agriculture, moving away to find another more fertile place after 2-3 seasons.

All fieldwork is shared between family members and sometimes friends would also assist. When the paddy are ripe the Yinns worship and request the guardian spirit, "phi mar" in their language, to assist them in gathering a good harvest. They put water in a dried gourd, plugged it with a stopper and then place it at 4 strategic places of their plots. The first place is where they started clearing the land for cultivation, scattered the first seedlings, where they started ploughing and then continue at other remaining three places. All this must be finished in a day.



Yinn ladies with goods to sell at the market.



The fowls are for sale at the market. But curiously the shoulder bags have holes into which the feet of the fowls are put in to prevent them running off. Very ingenious.



Going to fetch drinking water. Come along, boys.



Anybody intrested to buy bamboo shoots. A Yinn lady brings bamboo shoots for sale at the market.