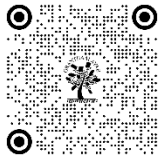


CULTURAL CONTINUITY AND CHANGE: MODERNIZATION AMONG THE RONGMEI TRIBE

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DOI
[10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i1.2024.3414](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i1.2024.3414)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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ABSTRACT

This ethnographic research offers a thorough examination of the metamorphosis undergone by the Rongmei people in Northeast India as they shift from tradition to modernization. It examines the complex dynamics of how modernization has transformed the traditional Rongmei lifestyle. This research, using a detailed anthropological approach, elucidates the intricate relationship between tradition and modernization in Rongmei society, providing significant insights on cultural preservation and socio-economic change in indigenous groups. This research provides an in-depth analysis of the intricate alterations inside Rongmei society during modernization and religious change.

Keywords: Rongmei, Modernization, Socio-Economic, Preservation, Tradition

1. INTRODUCTION

The Rongmei tribe in Northeast India has historically resided in secluded, mountainous areas and isolated woodlands. Nevertheless, the ubiquitous impact of civilization, propelled by globalization, has profoundly affected their existence. This influence extends beyond the personal sphere, impacting the social, cultural, and religious traditions of the Rongmei community. Within a comparatively short span of time, there was a drastic transformation of the tribal society (Irene, Simte, and Haokip, 2014:49). This article examines the progressive evolution of the Rongmeis from a traditional society to a modernized one, with globalization altering their society, culture, language, traditions, occupations, religion, customs, practices, economy, and politics. The advent of Christian missions during British colonial control significantly transformed this previously static tribal society.

2. DYNAMICS OF MODERNIZATION: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Modernization theory denotes a theoretical framework that gained prominence in the 1950s and 1960s concerning the comprehension of economic, social, and political development difficulties. Modernization theory, which emerged in the 1950s and 1960s, provides significant insights on the economic, social, and political advancement of societies. Rooted in the concepts of “tradition” and “modernity,” modernization theory may be defined as the process by which underdeveloped regions adapt to inputs from established industrial center (Schneider, Schneider, and Hansen, 1972:340). Wilbert Moore’s (1963) perspective emphasizes a complete shift from traditional and pre-modern societies to technologically driven, economically prosperous, and politically stable entities, underlining the role of education and adaptation in this transition. Modernization, therefore, encompasses changes in both economic and cultural aspects of society.

Modernization theory is a paradigm that elucidates the process by which societies experience social, economic, and political transformations, progressing along a shared developmental trajectory from traditional, agrarian, and rural communities to modern, urban, and industrialized ones (Bradshaw, 1987; Escobar, 2011). In essence, all societal advancement commences with rudimentary technology, limited output, and conventional practices. Modernization entails the adoption of new technology, enhancement of economic productivity, and substantial social, cultural, and political modifications to conform to global norms, utilizing contemporary methods and materials. Gangmumei (2008), in his publication “Ethnicity and Social Change,” delineates three phases in the progression of human civilization: the inception of primitive societies and communities, the metamorphosis of these societies into civilizations, and the advancement of industrialized modern societies propelled by the industrial revolution. These stages underscore the ongoing and dynamic essence of modernization, adjusting to altering developmental objectives over time.

Smelser’s theory sees modernization as a multifaceted process involving economic, political, social, and cultural changes progressing through stages from traditional to post-modern, highlighting the importance of economic, political, social, and cultural factors in the modernization process (Smelser, 1963). Conversely, Giddens’ sociological theory views modernization as multi-dimensional, emphasizing economic growth, state expansion, and the rise of individualism, with the “end of tradition” occurring gradually as societies become more interconnected and globalized due to increasing reflexivity, potentially leading to the abandonment of traditional practices and the adoption of new lifestyles, which can yield benefits like enhanced economic productivity, improved education access, and enhanced healthcare (Giddens, 1991:15).

Modernization theory elucidates the shift from traditional to modern societies, emphasizing economic development, industrialization, and intricate social structures as fundamental elements. It posits that societies evolve to become more democratic, egalitarian, and receptive to novel ideas during modernization. This theory is pertinent to the Rongmeis, examining aspects such as rationalization, the eradication of superstitions, economic transformations, Christianization, and democratic engagement, drawing on insights from Neil Smelser’s and Giddens’s theories regarding modernization and the notion of the “end of tradition.”

3. THE RONGMEI IN THEIR INDIGENOUS EPOCH: PRE-COLONIAL NARRATIVES

During the Pre-Colonial Era, the Rongmei people maintained self-sufficiency by engaging in trade, farming, and hunting with adjacent tribes. Their economic activities were significantly influenced by the forest, land, climate, and rivers. Their settlements, which were situated on highlands, were governed by chiefs and Village Councils, which granted them political autonomy. In addition to weaving, pottery, and household industries, their agrarian-based economy was characterized by terrace cultivation and slash-and-burn agriculture. Social class distinctions were minimal, and barter was the primary mode of exchange, with the village serving as the focal point.

During the Pre-Colonial Era, the Rongmei people maintained self-sufficient lifestyles through hunting, agriculture, and commerce with adjacent tribes. Nature significantly influenced their economic operations, depending on the forest, terrain, climate, and rivers. Their elevated villages afforded political autonomy, governed by chiefs and Village Councils. Their agrarian economy encompassed slash-and-burn and terrace cropping, augmented by weaving, ceramics, and domestic industries. Barter served as the principal method of transaction, with negligible social class disparities centered around the hamlet.

Pre-colonial and colonial Northeast India was marked by instability and conflicts among tribes, villages, families, clans, and neighboring tribes. These conflicts often arose from competition over resources, particularly land and water, and differences in cultural practices and beliefs. Rongmei communities frequently suffered due to their lack of unity and the autonomous nature of their villages. As T.C. Hodson noted: "A Kabui, owes no duty to the tribe; he enjoys no rights as a member of the tribe; it affords him no protection against an enemy, for as often as not his worst enemies are those of his own village or tribe" (Hodson, 1911). Different theories of Rongmei migration and settlement in different parts of Northeast India were mentioned in the writing of many scholars (Thaimei, 1995; Marulung, 1996; Gailangam, 2001; Kamei, 2004). The migration history of the Rongmei community, predominantly transmitted through oral traditions, is characterized by a multifaceted narrative encompassing the pursuit of improved socio-economic prospects, emancipation from oppressive conditions, and displacement due to land expropriation by neighboring ethnic groups. These migratory dynamics have collectively contributed to the process of modernization within the Rongmei society, shaping their historical trajectory and cultural evolution.

3.1. COLONIAL INTERVENTIONS AND THEIR EFFECTS ON RONGMEI IDENTITY

The development of Rongmei society, economics, and administration during the Colonial Period was influenced by two primary factors: colonial involvement and the dissemination of Christianity, together with modern education. Colonial engagement in Northeast India began in the early 18th century, resulting in British consolidation of authority and the establishment of provinces such as Assam, Manipur, and Tripura by annexation. This era experienced significant transformations in transportation infrastructure, communication systems, tax reforms, educational advancements, commerce growth, and the establishment of Christianity. The British pursued dual objectives: alleviating tensions between tribes and plains while enhancing trade (Chakraborty, 2004). British encroachment into Rongmei territory interrupted their customary lifestyle. New land tenure systems and income strategies conflicted with established traditions, affecting reliance on trees (Kamei, 2008:169-170). The conventional tribal governance, characterized by hereditary chiefs and village councils, encountered challenges upon the introduction of a new legal system. The British transformed tribal politics by establishing federal links among villages and granting them judicial power to adjudicate disputes in mountainous areas. The practice of headhunting was diminished through punitive actions, and the barter system was progressively supplanted by monetary transactions (Thomas, 2004). Roads linking locations such as Dimapur and Kohima began to develop (Chakraborty, 2004). The British instituted the Inner Line System, nominally to safeguard tribal culture, but primarily motivated by their commercial interests and the necessity to mitigate inter-tribe raids.

The Naga Labour Corps' experience during World War I significantly influenced their political awareness. Montha Kamei Abunglaona and Jadonang of the Rongmei Naga tribe in Manipur participated in the Labour Corps during World War I. The Rongmeis endured taxation (Rs.3 per household), coerced labor, and mandatory contributions throughout British governance. Competent individuals were appointed to administrative positions, acting as cultural intermediates (Kamei, 2021). From 1925 until 1930, the regions occupied by the Rongmei community had recurrent agricultural failures, severely affecting their socio-economic status. Notwithstanding these adversities, colonial officials continued to implement their tax collecting system, including harsh means such as fines, coerced labor as a substitute for taxes, and occasionally incinerating non-compliant villages. The implementation of house tax and limitations on conventional hunting and fishing rights imposed additional hardships on the Rongmeis (Kamei, 2004). The Rongmei Nagas strongly fought the house tax, declining to pay it for four years. Leaders such as Jadonang and Gaidinliu arose to spearhead movements opposing these practices, promoting non-payment of house tax and rejecting British governance to safeguard the rights and interests of tribal tribes in Northeast India. The encroachment of migrant Kukis on their ancestral territory and intertribal disputes intensified economic difficulties, prompting some individuals to transition from agricultural to non-agricultural jobs (Kamei, 2004:146).

3.2. CHRISTIANITY AS A MODERNIZING FORCE

Christianity was introduced to the Rongmei community by missionaries in the 19th century. Kamei Namrijinpou, referred to as Maipak of Bakau village, was the inaugural Kabui to convert in December 1914 under U.M. Fox in Imphal. Namrijinpou launched a vigorous evangelistic campaign, and despite initial opposition, he and his adherents, aided by

Rev. William Pettigrew, effectively disseminated Christianity in Rongmei communities. The establishment of churches and schools in the region resulted in the extensive proliferation of Christianity among the Rongmei people. The transforming influence of Christianity on traditional Rongmei society became especially evident in the decades after India's independence. A notable resurgence in the late 1970s in Tamenglong District resulted in around 80 percent of the Rongmei population adopting to Christianity (Kamei, 2013:31-40). The conversions were influenced by multiple causes, including as external forces, societal dynamics, personal situations, and the apparent compatibility of Christianity with modernization.

The Rongmei people's way of life underwent substantial modifications as a result of the spread of Christianity. Numerous people converted to the religion, giving up headhunting and animism as well as some aspects of their culture, such as living in dorms and making booze. Through the introduction of education and the distribution of missionary publications, Christian missionaries had a significant role in modernizing the Rongmei people and preserving their native tongue. The burgeoning Zeliangrong Christians, influenced by missionaries, questioned the tenets of their old faith, even condemning once-cherished customs (Kabui, 1979:416) (Kamei, 2012). This change caused a rift between Christian adherents and non-Christian people by upending traditional laws and village structures. Village chiefs' status suffered as well since they had less control over religious matters (Hodson, 1911). Education and the spread of Christianity have made people more tolerant, which has an impact on the chief's and his councils' dictatorship. As a result, new political, social, and economic structures emerged.

Monotheism introduced by Christianity conflicted with the Rongmei polytheistic religion, leading to a divergence of beliefs. The introduction of Christianity disrupted the functioning of village institutions and customary laws, leading to a rift between the non-Christian and Christian followers (Longkumar, 2008). The cost associated with traditional sacrifices and offerings became burdensome for common people, driving some to Christianity. However, the reform movements led by figures like Haipou Jadonang and Rani Gaidinliu emerged to counteract the growing influence of Christianity. These movements aimed to preserve traditional practices and resist outside forces. The Zeliangrong Religious Council (ZRC), representing the Zeliangrong people, initiated reforms under the Zeliangrong Rachapriak Phom (ZRP) since 1994. This religious organization focused on revitalizing traditional religious practices, offering a sense of spiritual and cultural identity. The movement also engaged in social and political activism, advocating for the rights of the Rongmei people. However, it faced opposition and criticism, including gender-role adherence and exclusion of women from certain religious practices.

4. ADAPTING TO CHANGE: MODERNIZATION AND THE RONGMEI SOCIAL FABRIC

Tribes are exposed to new concepts, behaviours, and technology that go against their long-standing traditions and beliefs as they grow more assimilated into the general population. As people embrace new ways of thinking and doing that are more in line with mainstream culture, this process frequently results in the destruction of old cultural practices and values.

4.1. PASSAGE OF RITES: BIRTH

Modernization has significantly altered the rites of passage, particularly with birth in the Rongmei group. Conventional delivery methods have evolved due to the increased accessibility of modern medical care, diminishing dependence on traditional birth attendants and enhancing mother and new-born health outcomes. Furthermore, the impact of modernization and Christianity has resulted in the eradication of certain superstitions linked to rites for detecting the gender of the unborn child, aimed at safeguarding against malicious spirits such as 'Rasi-Rarou.' The intricate traditional rites and ceremonies formerly linked to delivery have diminished, supplanted by more straightforward behaviours shaped by Christian beliefs. It has enhanced healthcare, gender roles, and family structures, leading to better delivery practices and a reduction in certain old superstitions and rituals.

4.2. MARRIAGE IN RONGMEI SOCIETY: TRADITION AND TRANSFORMATION

The Rongmei tribe's traditional marriage system has significantly evolved due to industrialization and the influence of Christianity. Historically, marriages were orchestrated by parents and frequently included a bride price, accompanied by diverse customary rituals and ceremonies. Monogamy was the standard, while polygamy was uncommon (Panmei,

2012). The emergence of Christianity has altered marital customs within numerous civilizations. Coerced and arranged marriages have been supplanted by voluntary unions performed in churches, fostering gender equality. Polygamy is diminishing, whereas remarriage, particularly for widows and widowers, is widely acceptable. Conventional practices, such as animal sacrifices, have been supplanted by more straightforward rites, such as the offering of tea. Nonetheless, the financial burden of contemporary weddings might be arduous for individuals with constrained resources. Attitudes toward intra-clan marriages have transformed, exhibiting increased acceptance when spouses are from distinct communities. This transformation illustrates how religious conversion can instigate substantial social changes, enabling young individuals to select their partners autonomously, despite the prevalence of online dating or inter-ethnic and inter-racial marriages, consistent with the contemporary Western marriage paradigm articulated by Giddens (1991:87).

4.3. CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES ON DEATH AND BURIAL PRACTICES

Rongmei death rites integrate spiritual beliefs, viewing death as a natural transition to the afterlife. Rituals, elegiac compositions, interment or cremation, and communal feasts support grieving families, with particular burial sites allocated for distinct sorts of death. Traditional customs encompassed elements such as animal sacrifices and grave offerings, along with a feast for the deceased's family and friends (Brown, 1873:26). However, urbanization and Western cultural influences have significantly impacted these old death and burial customs. Technological advancements have replaced complex ancient ceremonies and rituals with contemporary practices of death and sorrow. Christian relatives gather to sing hymns, pray for the deceased's repose, and offer support to the grieving family, under the direction of the Church's pastors or priests (Ghosh, 1982:232). Moreover, there has been a shift in perspective on the burying of newborns when the mother dies during childbirth. T.C. Hodson historically stated that it was customary to inter them, based on the notion that they were possessed by bad spirits. This action is currently seen as both a crime and a sin, demonstrating the evolution of procedures while maintaining core ideas (Hodson, 1901: 306).

4.4. DYNAMICS OF FAMILY LIFE

Modernization has profoundly transformed the family structure and kinship ties of the Rongmei indigenous tribe. Historically male-dominated, extended families have been affected by evolving societal conventions, transitioning from a patriarchal framework to more varied family structures in the context of modernization. It is posited that Christian missionaries have strengthened the patriarchal structure in Rongmei community by integrating Western patriarchal values (Kakran and Manchanda, 2017). The shift from extended to nuclear families within the Rongmei society is driven by a complex interaction of economic forces, evolving conditions, and desires for contemporary living. This transition has transformed living arrangements and family relations, while endeavours to maintain traditional kinship values continue, frequently integrating aspects of both frameworks. This subtle approach illustrates the interplay of modernity and tradition within the Rongmei society, where adaptation is essential for preserving their rich cultural legacy.

4.5. WOMEN'S PLACE IN CULTURAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXTS

Rongmei women play vital roles in households, contribute to income, engage in crafts, preserve culture through dance and attire, and oversee sacred spaces in religious practices. Christianity has brought significant changes, empowering women to engage in church activities (Gonmei, 2004:111). Compared to other tribes, Rongmei women enjoy more autonomy in partner choice and divorce initiation, although divorce is uncommon (Irene, 2014:17). Education has empowered them, leading to active participation in various domains. Modernization has also spurred awareness of property rights, challenging traditional biases. Despite progress, disparities persist, particularly in rituals, education, and politics, with urban and educated women experiencing more significant change than their rural counterparts.

4.6. DORMITORY AS A SOCIAL HUB

The conventional dormitory system, referred to as Morung, was fundamental to Rongmei social and cultural existence, providing indigenous education and promoting tribal values. T.C. Hodson asserts that dormitories are a remnant of communal housing, representing the initial phase in the evolution of residences when entire villages cohabited (Hodson, 1996:75). Nevertheless, this age-old organization has experienced a decrease in recent years.

Christian missionaries contributed to the discouragement of Morung, advocating for education within families and urging parents to enrol their children in school (Kamei, 2016:34). Urbanization, enhanced career prospects, and the appeal of contemporary education have diminished the significance of Morung, as youth prefer formal education and metropolitan lifestyles (Rao, 1976:136). The transition from conventional occupations and the expansion of the service sector have also led to the downfall of the dormitory system. Kabinai (2021) asserts that "the Thien (dormitory) is a crucial institution for the Rongmei, as its overall function is intricately connected to the cultural, social, moral, economic, and religious aspects of Rongmei society." The modernization, coupled with the advent of Christianity and current education, resulted in the evolution of traditional dormitories among the Rongmei people, with certain vestiges remaining but losing significance in modern society.

4.7. SHIFTS IN INDIGENOUS HOUSING STYLES

Modernization has significantly transformed the traditional home of the Rongmeis, enhancing living circumstances markedly. The incorporation of contemporary facilities such as electricity, plumbing, and heating has improved overall comfort and convenience. Furthermore, contemporary housing standards have resulted in a transition away from housing domestic animals indoors, primarily due to cleanliness considerations. The aesthetic dimensions of dwelling have also progressed. Conventional components such as skulls displayed outside residences have been supplanted by more sanitary and ornamental alternatives like flowers. Construction materials have grown increasingly accessible, with bricks, marble, tiles, and corrugated aluminium sheets favoured for their resilience, particularly in response to climate change. Contemporary residential designs are tailored to accommodate specific family requirements, emphasizing the quantity of rooms, dimensions, ventilation, sunshine access, and sanitary kitchen and bathroom areas. This change, while enhancing living circumstances, might impose financial strain, as not all community members possess the means to build modern residences.

4.8. HERITAGE TOOLS: A GLIMPSE INTO THE PAST

Technological advancement is a crucial catalyst for transformation in society and the economy. The Rongmei community has undergone substantial technical transformation in recent decades. The accessibility of contemporary tools and equipment has resulted in a diminished dependence on conventional implements such as hoes, daos, adzes, bows and arrows, and spears. The decline in demand for traditional tools has resulted in a loss of income for traditional tool-makers. Contemporary tools and equipment exhibit enhanced efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

4.9. HERITAGE IN FABRIC AND ORNAMENTATION

The introduction of Christianity in Northeast India inspired a transformation in tribal attire customs. Historically, numerous indigenous cultures were accustomed to wearing minimal clothing. The Rongmei tribe was likewise affected. Modernization has impacted wearing styles, leading to the combination of traditional garments with contemporary accessories. Men have embraced contemporary attire, comprising trousers, shirts, coats, sweaters, and footwear. Women have adopted modern fashions such as skirts, blouses, coats, scarves, and sweaters, in addition to a range of footwear choices. Traditional ornaments are increasingly rare among the educated, supplanted by gold jewellery including coloured stones, a variety of necklace designs, and hair accessories. For the affluent, even expensive diamonds are included into their jewellery. Western clothes have become increasingly widespread, whereas traditional garb is reserved for significant events such as rites and festivals.

4.10. HERITAGE THROUGH FESTIVALS

Modernism and traditional tribal festivities embody conflicting forces, with modernism denoting advancement and traditional festivals representing heritage. Within the framework of Rongmei culture, modernity has facilitated the preservation and promotion of traditional festivals via contemporary methods, hence enhancing their accessibility to a broader audience. Nevertheless, as individuals embrace new lifestyles, traditional rituals have somewhat waned due to the challenges of modernization, particularly the decline of traditional venues. The impact is reciprocal, as numerous Rongmei festivals integrate contemporary aspects to adjust to evolving circumstances while maintaining their traditional ideals. The amalgamation of modern and traditional culture became evident with the emergence of

Christianity. The State Government of Manipur sponsors state-level festivals such as Gaan-Ngai to exhibit cultural diversity; nonetheless, this has elicited concerns regarding commercialization and the potential degradation of indigenous practices.

4.11. LANGUAGE AS A CULTURAL IDENTITY:

The Rongmei language, a Tibeto-Burman dialect utilized by the Rongmei community, does not possess a distinct script and predominantly depends on oral tradition for the preservation of its culture. Throughout the years, modernization has yielded varied outcomes. Modern technology has positively impacted the documenting and preservation of Rongmei through spoken recordings, written materials, and educational resources, hence enhancing literacy and fluency, especially in tribal languages, English, Manipuri, and Hindi. This has enabled the Rongmeis to preserve their cultural traditions associated with language, including songs and traditional knowledge. Nonetheless, modernity poses a risk to linguistic variety as lesser-known languages and dialects are suppressed through increased interaction with more dominant languages like as English, Manipuri, and Hindi. The reduction of indigenous languages leads to the erosion of cultural practices and knowledge. The Rongmei language, an essential component of cultural identity, is under threat from modernity, since many Rongmeis fail to transmit their oral traditions while adopting contemporary languages.

4.12. FOOD AS A CULTURAL EXPRESSION

Modernization and urbanization have altered Rongmei dietary traditions, supplanting old customs with contemporary, Western-influenced diets. They now prepare oil-infused foods with spices, relish a wider array of fresh produce, and utilize LPG or electric stoves. The acceptance of Christianity has resulted in a decrease in the consumption of rice beer and wine, which were previously integral to their ceremonies and daily existence. Modernization has heightened awareness of the significance of a good and healthful diet, a concept emphasized through education. The implementation of food processing processes and innovative methods for smoking meat and vegetables demonstrates this understanding. Nonetheless, an increasing propensity for processed foods, fast food, and sugary beverages has heightened apprehensions regarding health complications such as obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease.

4.13. HEALTHCARE & TRADITIONAL MEDICINE

Modernization has significantly transformed Rongmei healthcare. Historically, herbal medicines and spiritual practices were predominant; however, modernity has transitioned healthcare towards contemporary methods, influencing dietary, hygienic, and sanitation habits. Contemporary healthcare has garnered trust owing to governmental initiatives such as Primary Health Centers and health programs. Nonetheless, distant locales and limited resources provide obstacles, resulting in some individuals without access. Conventional customs endure in these circumstances. The government currently advocates for indigenous health systems and herbal remedies via the Department of Ayush, acknowledging their significance in conjunction with modern medicine.

4.14. URBANIZATION

Modernization-driven urbanization has transformed Rongmei villages, which earlier lacked infrastructure and communication. Rongmei people have moved to urban areas in northeastern India including Manipur, Assam, and Nagaland for jobs and better lives. Imphal, Guwahati, Dimapur, Silchar, Kohima, and Jorhat have large Rongmei populations. Rongmei communities are also scattered throughout Senapati, Churachandpur, Ukhrul, Imphal East, Imphal West, Bishnupur, Assam, and Nagaland. Imphal has 31 urban and semi-urban Rongmei villages, including Namthanlong (Muchi Khul), Dimdailong, Tharon, Langol Tarung (Tarung), Neikanlong, Guigailong, Lungdaijang, and Majorkhul (Gaichangpou, 2017). The British established Tamenglong as a semi-urban hub in 1919, starting the semi-urbanization process. Weekly markets, commercial centers, educational possibilities, and cultural events were added by this migration. It broke village isolation and promoted social and economic mobility by offering non-farming jobs (Thenbilung, 1988:77-78). Infrastructure and economic growth in Tamenglong have raised living standards. Tamenglong's semi-urban expansion has changed Nungba and Noney's social and economic dynamics. Rongmei lifestyles have changed due to urbanization, reflecting environmental and social changes.

4.15. THE SHIFTING ECONOMY: EFFECTS OF MODERNIZATION

Modernization has substantially altered the traditional economy of the Rongmei people. This transition has caused shifts in livelihoods and income sources. Traditional behaviors such as hunting, gathering, farming, and artisanal crafts have given way to market-oriented economic activities, which is consistent with the broader trend of modernization. The Rongmei economy has traditionally relied on communal lands and neighboring forests for survival, but it is currently transitioning away from surplus-oriented systems, owing to industrialization and shifting economic dynamics.

A fundamental shift in the Rongmei community has been the upgrading of farming operations, which are the foundation of their economic livelihood. Tractors, plows, and harvesters have replaced traditional tools such as hoes and daos (machetes). This transition to modern farming methods has not only enhanced efficiency but also agricultural productivity, resulting in larger crop yields. Another notable development is the shift from community to individual land ownership. In addition to agriculture and farming, Rongmei women are involved in cottage businesses, particularly weaving and dyeing. Weaving proficiency is regarded as a defining characteristic of a bride's qualities, emphasizing its importance in Rongmei women's social contributions. Weaving, therefore, remains a vital vocation for Rongmei women (Beeju, 2014).

Mechanization has drastically altered the traditional economy of the Rongmei people. Adoption of technologies such as pump-sets and shallow tube-wells has enabled numerous crop rotations per year. High-yield crops, chemical fertilizers, and pesticides have changed to a cash-driven agricultural paradigm, increasing output and changing the community's economic structure. Rapid population expansion and infrastructural development have limited land availability, spurring rural-to-urban migration for better job opportunities and higher living conditions. Non-agricultural jobs in rural areas have grown in popularity, including government employment, education, and healthcare services. Education and skill development initiatives have increased options for white-collar workers, changing occupational patterns.

Despite the benefits of economic development, difficulties remain. Access to markets and resources is restricted in some locations, and technical advancement is uneven. Furthermore, the influence of consumerism and globalization has transformed spending habits, with a growing preference for consumer items and greater living standards. One notable effect of modernization has been increased consumption of alcohol, particularly Indian-made foreign liquor. Its increased availability at hotels, restaurants, and other settings has made it a profitable income source for certain people.

5. MODERNIZATION AND ITS ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS

Modernization has significantly influenced the traditional political systems and governance structures of the Rongmei people. These alterations have arisen from multiple sources, including colonial intrusion, the impact of Christianity, the dissemination of English education, and exposure to India's federal democratic system. These alterations have profoundly changed the character of traditional village councils, which are integral to Rongmei governance.

5.1. UNDERSTANDING THE TRADITIONAL VILLAGE GOVERNANCE SYSTEM

In conventional Rongmei villages, governance was managed by the Village Council (Pei), comprising Nampou and clan representatives, reflecting a democratic framework. The Village Chief and Council possessed executive and judicial authority, fostering consensus-driven choices and community harmony. In the 1870s, British administrators recognized the necessity of protecting tribal communities and largely refrained from disrupting traditional government practices due to isolation and financial limitations (Syiemlieh, 1989:142).

Nonetheless, modernization introduced substantial transformations. The autonomous village status of contemporary Rongmei villages was forfeited with the enactment of the Manipur Village Authority Act, 1956. This legislation sought to include the hilly regions of Manipur into conventional governance and established local self-administration along with elections for village officials. The composition of the Pei altered, as did its authority. In certain instances, Village Councils are currently led by Village Chairmen. The District Autonomous Council (DAC) acknowledges the function of village Chiefs in the administration of justice, despite the ongoing existence of traditional village bodies. The village headmen were empowered to implement government regulations and issued court warrants. As a result, the

Chief's position evolved into a more symbolic than executive one (Horam, 1988:75). Conventional methods for resolving disputes in the village have been supplanted by contemporary judicial systems. Previously, Village Councils adjudicated disputes and disagreements within families and the community; however, citizens now seek recourse through the police and judicial system when displeased with the Council's resolutions. Nonetheless, Pei persists as the singular authority responsible for the wellbeing of the entire village, notwithstanding the establishment of contemporary governmental entities under the Constitution of India (Kabinai, 2021:17).

5.2. THE TAMENGLONG AUTONOMOUS DISTRICT COUNCIL ELECTION & TAMENGLONG SMALL TOWN COMMITTEE ELECTION:

The Tamenglong Autonomous District Council (TADC), created under the Manipur Hill Area District Council Act of 1971, has the jurisdiction to legislate on diverse facets of tribal life in the Tamenglong district, including education, healthcare, land, forest management, and development. The TADC consists of 30 elected members tasked with district administration and development, holding elections every five years, supervised by the State Election Commission in compliance with Manipur Government laws. Since March 1988, elections have not occurred, resulting in the Council's dissolution and the transfer of its authority to the Deputy Commissioner of Tamenglong District, assisted by the Chief Executive Officer appointed by the Governor. In 1978, the State Government established Small Town Committee administration, offering an additional democratic channel for Zeliangrong involvement in village governance. This Committee managed many tasks, encompassing health, sanitation, water supply, road maintenance, marketing, and urban development under Local Self Government, operating in accordance with the Municipal Act of Manipur. During Mr. Ph. Khiaklung's tenure in 1987, the Town Committee discontinued its operations, resulting in the State Government's retraction of Small-Town Committee activities in Zeliangrong-inhabited regions in 1988. These trends signify the evolution of political institutions driven by modernization, providing novel ideas and governance methodologies.

5.3. FROM MARGINALIZATION TO REPRESENTATION: RONGMEIS IN THE MANIPUR LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

The incorporation of the Rongmei region into the Indian Union transpired with the adoption of India's Constitution in 1950. This signified a crucial juncture that initiated political transformations and prospects for the Rongmei community. Following the establishment of a federal democratic government, the Rongmei people commenced active political engagement to obtain representation and promote their interests within the larger political arena. This was apparent as candidates from several political parties represented the Rongmei community in the subsequent Manipur State Assembly Elections, underscoring their growing involvement in the political sphere. Throughout the years, numerous Rongmei persons have emerged as political candidates, competing for election offices. Prominent among these representatives were individuals such as D. Athuibou, G. Kabipou Kabui, Pauheu, T.P. Kiulengpou, I.D. Dijuanang, K. Huriyang, Jangamlung Panmei, Gaikhangam, and numerous more. They participated in elections across many constituencies, hence enhancing political participation within the Rongmei community.

5.4. REPRESENTATION IN PARLIAMENT

The election of Meijinlung Kamson in the 8th Lok Sabha elections in 1984 was a notable milestone. Kamson, representing the Indian National Congress party, became the inaugural Rongmei to occupy this position. His successive triumphs in the Lok Sabha elections of 1989, 1991, and 1996 reinforced his authority, and he held the position of Union Minister for Home Affairs from 1984 to 1996. Although no Rongmeis have attained seats in Lok Sabha elections since 1996, political consciousness and cosmopolitanism have progressively increased within the group.

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, industrialization has significantly influenced multiple aspects of Rongmei life. Conventional rituals and practices have diminished due to the emergence of new technology, lifestyles, and ideologies. Agriculture and craftsmanship have been supplanted by contemporary industries and trade, while Christianity, Western education, and

global media have facilitated the evolution of old ideas. Modernization has yielded both possibilities and problems economically and politically, promoting economic growth and political participation while concurrently intensifying inequality and job dislocation. This period has prompted transformations in Rongmei political and social structures, resulting in enhanced gender equality and more involvement of women in the workforce and civic affairs. Christianity indirectly facilitated modernization via education. Conventional matrimonial practices experienced substantial transformations with mutual bride prices and increased autonomy in selecting life partners. Rongmei folks acquired substantial representation in the parliament. Nonetheless, Smelser's linear model of economic development and social change does not entirely pertain to the Rongmeis, since their distinct experiences illustrate varied structural transformations shaped by modernity.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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