

**“WE DID NOT DRINK AS STUPIDLY AS TODAY’S YOUNG
PEOPLE”: A COMMUNITY STUDY ON ALCOHOL DRINKING
AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AMONG KHMUS ETHNIC
MINORITY, CHINA**



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AMONG KHMUS ETHNIC COMMUNITY, CHINA

LI ZHE 5137898 SHHS/M

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THESIS ADVISORY COMMITTEE: ASSOC. PROF. SAUWAKON
RATANAWIJITRASIN, PH.D., ASSOC. PROF. LUECHAI SRINGERNYUANG,
PH.D., ASSIST. PROF. OPART PANYA, PH.D.

ABSTRACT

Heavy drinking among ethnic minorities is well known by scientists in China. Medical scientists have identified alcoholism and alcohol dependence as a psychosocial problem, whereas alcohol drinking is also a social and cultural phenomenon from a social scientists’ point of view. This research attempted to explore and understand the Khmus’ traditional alcohol drinking culture, and explain how, and to what extent, their drinking culture and behavior has been affected by community development. The researcher stayed in a Khmus community and conducted an ethnographic study using different methods, such as participant observation, informal conversations, and both semi-structured and life history interviews.

The Khmus explained that their long existing drinking norms and values are a way of sharing and showing respect. However, modern elements have become infused and are challenging their traditional norms and values. Today, they drink to cope with the stress brought about by resource competition, development policies, loan repayments, and alienation, while concurrently enjoying the excitement brought on by modern civilization. Alcohol drinking is no longer only a cultural practice, but is accompanied by enjoyment, and building new social relationships and structures to replace collapsing traditional social structures. Also, women and youth now participate in the drinking bouts, as part of the emergence of profound changes brought about by development in their society to show gender equality and modernity. These new behaviors have been associated with health problems caused by excessive drinking of alcohol.

The changes of the ecology, community and family structure, as well as economic and development policies are the roots of the collapse of Khmus’ social structure. To some extent, alcohol drinking is a way to help them build a new social structure to replace parts of their fading traditions. Thus, development might produce unintended consequences. Development policies for ethnic minorities like Khmus should not only find ways to address the issue of excessive drinking and its associated health problems, but also help hill tribe people to rebuild a replaceable community structure, in order to improve the physical and cultural health of these people.

KEY WORDS: ALCOHOL DRINKING/ SOCIAL CHANGE / ETHNOGRAPHY /
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