



'This is lo' – photographs from Tamlu, Nagaland, 1902

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I acquired a family archive of colonial documents and photos taken in the first years of the 20th century, the majority relating to the Naga Hills. The most substantial and interesting of these is a diary, enhanced by images, which covers tours made by Connie Shakespear while accompanying her husband, the commandant of the Naga Hills Military Police based in Kohima. To determine what could be made of her record, in December 2019 I went to some of the villages she had visited to provide background for a potential publication of the diary. Whilst my visit was an informal exercise and not made for anthropological purposes it did provide experience of a kind reflected in academic texts linking photography with anthropology and history (Morton: *The Anthropology of Photography*). By showing photographs to people living there today I hoped to gauge their level of interest and to ask for comment and my presentation of these images in the village of Tamlu is one focus of this essay. A second focus is to show how Connie's text and photographs from Tamlu reflect her interest in the village and her engagement with the people, an important element in deciding to publish the diary. The third aspect of the essay addresses the villagers' attitude to the camera and the business of being photographed, also relevant to assessing Connie's relationship with them. My visits to Tamlu and other villages made it clear to me that the diary and photographs belong in the public domain.

Key words: Colonial photography, cultural heritage, ownership of photographs

In presenting my archive to people in Tamlu I did not see myself as returning or repatriating images to the community – the images I took with me were to help me gather comment and information. In retrospect I had not thought enough about how they would be received – it was to be a learning experience.

On arrival in Tamlu I was introduced to Kontock, not a village elder but a teacher, born and brought up in the village, able to converse in English and with a knowledge of village history, traditions and custom, a direct descendant of one of the two founders of the village. He knew everyone in the village of course. Appointed as my guide he listened carefully as I explained why I was there and then he looked through my album of Victorian images in their modern transparent leaves.



Picture 1: Kontock, Tamlu, December 2019



Picture 2: 'Moimang, Io, Daupan, Tablungias'

He said he would take me to a man with knowledge, the pastor. An older man, whose grandfather had been a *dobasha*¹, the pastor showed me his battered copy of a Hutton publication and went on to speak about the British rather than my archive photos and the people in them. Likewise a descendant of the first British *chowkidar* in Tamlu whom we saw next spoke interestingly and at length about the experience of his ancestor, but not about the photographs. Later that first evening neighbours came to see the photos they had heard about. They were interested but once again not forthcoming with comment.

Connie's diary gives the names of some villagers who feature in portraits and one aim of my visit to Tamlu was to look for descendants and people who might know of them. Next day on our walkabout we were invited into a house for a small lunch. Whilst Kontock and I were sat eating, one Chingkam came in and asked me my business. After a brief reply I gave him the album to leaf through then sat down again, only to hear shortly afterwards: '*Moimang. I think this is my great grandfather. His name was Meimung*'. '*This man Moimang was dobasha (interpreter)*', I told him. '*That's right. My great grandfather was dobasha*'.

Chingkam was of course amazed to suddenly see his ancestor right there in front of him, dressed up in this portrait (Picture 2) of four important men of the village in 1900. I got out the giveaway photos, found the two portraits of Meimung and handed them over. This was a moment – finally I had found a relative and was able to experience and share with Chingkam the 'joy and excitement' of finding an image of an ancestor, just as Aird did with the aboriginal people he was working with (Aird, 2003). Unlike the photographs of Aboriginal people of whom Aird writes, Meimung, Chingkam's ancestor, was seemingly proud and delighted to be photographed.

Chingkam wanted a photo of me so we made a second portrait session – with his phone camera. Later in the afternoon he came to find me and handed over a present in return – a finely woven red scarf with thin white stripes and shells sewn in a pattern at either end. Later, on my second evening there, I heard there were two families in the village with the name Daupan, another of the four luminaries photographed in 1900. Unfortunately I had no time to meet them.

The British, known as Khonhent, had their fort and dak bungalow on top of a hill referred to now as Kalatchung, but of them nothing remains apart from metal bars and plates, sheets of corrugated iron and stories. Kalatchung is now endowed with a church and it is up here where the Angh of Tamlu lives today. Pictures 3 and 4 show the Kalatchung area in 1900 and again in 2019.

After our meeting with Chingkam, Kontock suggested we show the photographs to the Angh of Tamlu. We walked up to his house and there we met Longvang, the Konyak Angh, the King of the village for both Phom and Konyak. '*Tamlu is a model village*' Kontock told me '*with its two tribes living together*'. A Konyak, the Angh is accepted by the Phom as the final arbiter of any decision if it is needed. He was sat on a chair in his yard preparing food. Kontock showed him the album. After a while he became absorbed by the photos, as was his wife and two neighbouring ladies she had called in. He went through the album (Picture 5) five or six times but made no specific comment.

Next we were invited to join a group of men building a house. They took a great interest in Connie's photographs (Picture 6) and I was asked to video W. Yentai making a short speech which went: 'Our culture from Tamlu, if anybody comes to our party, so luckily you have come today. God bless you also, it is our culture, thank you' and with that he handed over two more meals which we took away with us.

Quite apart from the personal connections the community were clearly interested in the older culture depicted through these ad hoc presentations made in less than two days. The arrival of the photographs in the village was a complete surprise for all so this process was far from that of the repatriation of photographs to a community as was the case in Vanuatu (Gaismar and Herle, 2012). My visit did not generate the stories and discussion which arose when the Layard archive was taken back and presented to the elders of the island. In hindsight my informal approach was never going to achieve much in the way of obtaining the Naga voice in relation to this archive. Hidden from the village for over a century these images in the album had an effect, but for a fuller appreciation of community reaction a more structured approach would be needed. Before leaving, Kontock asked me to transfer to him the digital images I had with me and I was

1. interpreter



Picture 3: 'Tamlu stockade from parade'



Picture 4: The Kalatchung area in 2019



Picture 5: The Angh, his wife and neighbours looking at Connie's photographs of Tamlu, 2019

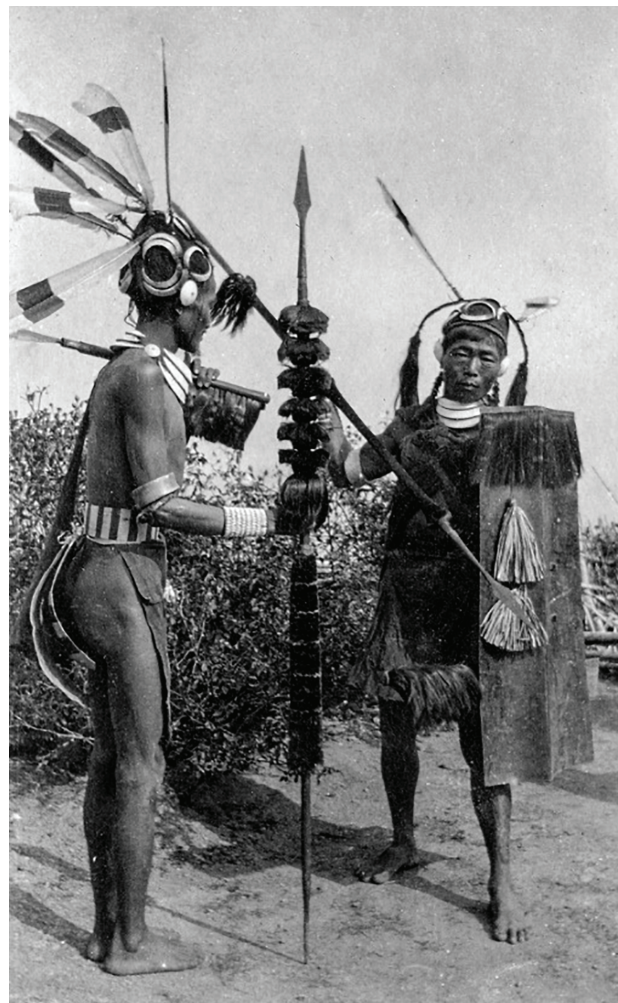


Picture 6: The housebuilding party with the photographs

able to do this later on Whatsapp. It remained for all the diary photos in the archive to be put online and made available to the present generation of those communities which feature in the diary.

Turning to Connie and the archive photographs, it's clear these were taken for a family album, to be kept for posterity as a personal record of an unforgettable experience. Whilst a colonial figure she was no ethnographer or administrator collecting illustrations for documentary purposes, to be used for classification, control or surveillance (Morton). Her photography precedes and does not belong to the style of photography of the later well-known ethnographer / administrators like Hodson, Hutton and Mills after 1910 (Stockhausen, 2014), nor does her diary compare with the wealth of information, ideas and thinking about the Nagas found in these works. However the text and photographs provide a tale of 'interaction' between the photographer and the photographed and indicate her interest and social engagement with certain individuals in the indigenous communities. Indeed the process of taking photographs of these leading figures in the village played an active role in the development of their personal relations as happened with Layard and his native assistants (Herle 2012).

On 18 February 1902, the day Connie took the portrait of the four 'warriors' pictured above, she writes: 'Our party of "warriors" duly turned up to be photo'd and were very amusing. Having stood for their pictures they presently came up to me, Moimang posturing and posing with his spear, demanding opium (all good humouredly and in fun) or if I could not give the opium, some money to buy it, and then they would dance for me. So I promised them the latter and the two M. and Io began their dance with funny little shouts, ferocious gestures, and spearings of imaginary foes' (Shakespear 2021). This negotiation with Meimung bears out Geismar's observation that 'photographic practice is always negotiated between photographer and photographer' (Geismar and Herle 2012). The two of them feature in Picture 7 below:



Picture 7: 'Moimang (left) and Io/Ayo, Lengta Nagas, Tamlu'

Picture 8 below of Wang from Tamlu can only be described as a portrait. Connie refers to him as 'Wang' the 'mistri'. On their arrival he presented them with two fish he'd just caught in the River Dikku. From her Diary again: 'Then home with Io escorting us, to find Moimang (Dobasha) and "Wang" already there, the latter, nice man, refusing to be paid for his fish which he said was a present, and all 3 made happy with a cheroot and tot of rum apiece'.



Picture 8: 'Wuang a Lengta Naga of Tamlu'

Her diary demonstrates an enthusiastic interest in village history, dress and clothing, material artefacts and housing, occasionally reflected in captions. The longest of these accompanies the burial tree in Tamlu, on which she also elaborates in her diary: 'Skulls & children's bodies in the burial tree. Bodies are first smoke dried & afterwards the head is wrenched off & placed in an earthen pot or basket & laid at the foot of tree while the body is wrapped round with leaves of the 'tokapat' pahu & hung up in the fire'. More typical though is the simple caption accompanying the photograph of Daupan (Picture 9), one of the four 'warriors':



Picture 9: 'Daupan and his heads'

In this photograph the subject's expression, the cast of eye, might indicate the relationship Daupan has with the colonial photographer. Do the downcast eyes mean anything, given that his expression in the 'four warriors' photograph above is very different?

This brings us to the last focus of this essay, how the subjects engaged with the camera and the process of their being photographed. A reference in her diary would suggest the subjects might have had some awareness of photography: 'The D.babu² of the place was there, keenly interested in the photographing and anxious for his own picture to be taken. Poor fellow, he is evidently pursuing art under great difficulties with a cardboard box as camera with a little lens stuck in one side'.

It is interesting how Meimung, Io, Wang, the 'four warriors' and Impi (below) present themselves. These men were leading figures in the village, they were not silent and they were clearly not worried someone was about to 'rob them of some part of their being' (Sontag 1979). They appear un-shy, unafraid, and enjoyed the occasion, a return journey to their cultural past, and they wanted to show off, dressing for the camera willingly and looking directly at it. This might have been a negotiated exchange but it was not contested.

Connie's diary covering these photographs makes this clear: 'All are to come tomorrow morning in finest attire to have their portraits taken. (Io, however having evidently a great love of finery came up the last thing at night as we were retiring to rest, to show himself off, already dressed in all his finery and war

2. Dak babu or Mail clerk

paint, very pleased and talkative, and had to be gently but firmly dismissed, with a cheroot to qualify the dismissal and an explanation that tomorrow was the time when his presence would be wanted!)

These portraits and the relationship between photographer and photographed was a strong factor in deciding to publish this colonial diary, in particular her relationship with Io. In her diary Connie writes: 'On our way back we fell in with Io, who begged us to come to his house and see his wife. What a character the man is! he presently took my hand, holding and pressing it, and so conducted me to his house with much state and courtesy. A neat, tidy little house, and Impi looking very well, fat and beaming - he evidently takes great care of her'. And it is Connie's portrait of the 'character' Io with his lady, taken outside one of the village morungs, that speaks to me most clearly.



Picture 10: 'Io/Ayo and Impi'

On leaving the village it was Io who saw her off: 'Seeing it was likely to be a long business I decided to ride on and so farewell had to be said to Io. It was quite touching. He explained how, having his photo I should go into many countries but could always look at this and say "this is Io" - he expressed his regret in many quaint little ways, and then finally laying one hand on my shoulder, and the other on my chest, with this sort of embrace he turned away, and we went our several ways'.

Before I met Chingkam I had not thought about the ownership of these photographs. Is it the photographer or the subject to whom the photograph belongs? Perhaps there's no resolution to the question but it's clear to me now that her personal photographs should be in the public domain, like the diary, and be available to everyone who might have an interest in them.

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