The Nagas
A portrait of an old Konyak Naga woman from Hongphoi village who wears red plastic sticks as ear decoration. They imitate red dyed porcupine needles, which are a sign of her royal clan. Only a few old women still have holes in their ear fossae for fixing the needles (AvS 2009).

This old Konyak Naga headhunter from Hongphoi village still possesses a good number of old ornaments, like a bearskin cap with boar’s tusks and a necklace with tiger teeth. His ear ornaments consist of empty bullet cases, on which a single glass bead is suspended by a thin thread (AvS 2009).

In everyday life, not many Nagas still look like this man from the Konyak village of Zangkham, with his traditional haircut and a fur cap with a feather (AvS 2009).
Hill Peoples of Northeast India

The Nagas

Society, Culture and the Colonial Encounter

Extended New Edition

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with Alan Macfarlane, Sarah Harrison and Anita Herle
and a new introductory chapter by Marion Wettstein and Alban von Stockhausen

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Connecting to the Past

Marion Wettstein and Alban von Stockhausen

Having a strong interest in the Nagas – a group of indigenous peoples settling in the Northeast of India and the Northwest of Myanmar (Burma) – and especially in their material culture, for us and many people the present book represents one of the most important reference works to this day. All the more we felt honoured when we were invited to write an introductory chapter for the new edition. This new edition appears at a time of great change – thus at least is the hope of the Nagas: At the beginning of 2011, all travel restrictions were lifted on Nagaland and Manipur, the two Indian Union states in which the majority of Nagas currently live. It is now possible for foreigners to travel to the region with a normal Indian visa, without having to obtain a restricted area permit, and for Indian citizens without the need of an inner line permit. These special permits, which have for long time hindered tourism, research, and commerce in the region, were a legacy of colonial times. Following Indian Independence, they were maintained on account of the many separatist movements in Northeast India. After a period of civil commotions which at times assumed the dimensions of a civil war, the long-lasting peace process has finally succeeded in calming down the region and has led to its opening.

When this book was first published in 1990, the scenario was still very different. It was practically impossible for foreigners to travel to Nagaland, which means that most of the chapters and images of material culture it contained inevitably referred to historical data stemming largely from colonial times. The portrayal of the Nagas in large parts of this book had from the beginning been conceptualised as a historical account.

In the last two chapters of this book, titled “Naga Nationalism” (chapter 14, p. 151-170) and “Nagaland today” (chapter 15, p. 171-177), we get a glimpse of the conditions of life among the Nagas in the 1980s. During that time the political upheavals had just taken on a new dimension as a result of the split of the separatist freedom fighters into two sub-groups. Reading these chapters one sees the beginning of several developments that have in the meantime intensified; others took a different turn. More than 20 years have passed since then, so our short introductory chapter will offer a concise update based on repeated field research in Nagaland over the last

Eating vessels in the traditional shape are nowadays made from aluminium. However, wooden eating vessels, as shown on p. 342, also continue to be used (AvS 2008).

(Previous page)
This portrait of an old headhunter from the Konyak Naga village of Zangkham shows the Nagas’ innovative approach towards body decoration. Still having wide ear holes, as were common in former times, he wears empty rolled up biscuit packages as ear ornaments (AvS 2009).
eight years. It is not our purpose to give an exhaustive historical account here, but rather to discuss a few topics which from our point of view seem to be of special importance to the Nagas – at least to those living on the Indian side of the border – at present and in the near future.

Political Developments and their Impact on Identity

Already in colonial times some Naga intellectuals organised themselves into the so-called Naga Club, which had demanded a separate Naga nation. Although the British administration had accepted this plea, the Indian Union after its independence in 1947 failed to recognise it and simply integrated the Naga regions into India. A rebel army formed among the Nagas and the separatist movement won large civil support. Under the NNC (Naga National Council) and its legendary leader A.Z. Phizo, a plebiscite was held in 1950 in Kohima – today the capital of Nagaland – that reinforced the Nagas’ claim for independence. Throughout the 1950s, the ‘Naga Army’ and the Indian Army fought bloody battles. In 1963 Nagaland was created as a Union State of India by the Central Government, and in 1975 some representatives of the Nagas signed an agreement, the Shillong Accord, which among other points declared that Nagaland came under the constitution of India. But some rebel leaders disagreed with this accord, including Phizo meanwhile living in exile in London, as well as a new splinter group called the NSCN (National Socialist Council of Nagaland) led by Thuingaleng Muivah. Both groups still had armed forces that continued fighting the Indian Army until the late 1980s. Undoubtedly this fight with the Indian Army led to a strong ethno-political Identity that strengthened identification with the in-group – the (united) Nagas – in contradistinction to the ‘enemy’, which was ‘India’. A more detailed account of the political history up to that point can be found in chapter 14 of this book. We will now pick up the thread at this juncture and follow the political developments since then.

In 1989 the NSCN split into two groups, one still led by Muivah together with Isaak Chisi Swu (NSCN-IM), the other led by S.S. Kappalong, a Burmese Naga (NSCN-K). This split also ran along ‘ethnic’ lines, the IM-faction being largely dominated by the southern-most groups and by the Sema Naga, the K-faction mostly consisting of the Eastern groups and many Burmese Nagas. But the split also cut across family lines: one brother would join the IM-faction, the second the K-faction. Thus, from the late 1980s on four armed forces were present in the Naga region: the Indian Army, the NNC (also called ‘the Federals’), the NSCN-IM, and the NSCN-K.
Soon the fight for independence took a new direction: The Baptist Church played a major role in the peace process. And in 1997 a first ceasefire could be signed between the Indian Government and the NSCN-IM. Similarly a ceasefire was arranged shortly after with the NSCN-K in an agreement which since then has been extended year after year. The underground factions were allocated to special camps outside of which they (theoretically) agreed to remain unarmed. Fights between the Indian Army and the Naga rebel groups practically came to a halt.

Meanwhile the Central Government had changed its strategy towards the Nagas. Not military oppression but administrative embedding was now supposed to convince the Nagas that they are a part of India. The Indian soldiers stationed in Nagaland up to this day belong mainly to the Assam Rifles, and since the late 1990s their slogan painted in large letter on the walls of their camps reads: “Friends of the Hill Peoples”. This motto was initially understood as cynicism among the Nagas, but slowly came to be accepted by the civil society as a genuine offer. However, the war has brought death to practically every Naga family and many political activists will make sure that this is not forgotten, as for instance the freelance journalist Kaka Iralu who wrote a book about the struggles from an emic Naga perspective that is legendary in Nagaland (see Kaka D. Iralu 2000).

At the same time the internal struggle for power and for the legitimate right to represent the Nagas flamed up among the rebel factions. The result was a fratricidal war in the 1990s, and most deaths during these times were reported to be due to in-fighting between the warring rebel factions; shootings between the rivalling groups continue to this day. This meant that the peace process now had to be continued on another front. And once again the Church played an important part in this process of reconciliation that aimed at bringing the fight between the split underground factions to an end. But also many other civil organizations and private initiatives had large influence. One of the most innovative approaches was implemented in 2008 on the occasion of one of the many reconciliation talks in Thailand, where leaders and officials from the factions met on neutral ground, mediated by representatives of the civil organizations. Since these talks led to nothing, it was decided to play some games by way of a distraction. One was a football match between two teams: on the one side the representatives of the civil organizations, on the other members of the different, otherwise opposed factions. The football match was such an emotional success that it was repeated a year later, but this time in Nagaland itself. Each year the event included more and more social activities in which the opposing factions had to cooperate as a team (see Ahmed 2008). Currently the conflict has cooled down. Even though an attempt to
(top) A soldier watching the assembled dancers at the Ahuna festival in Zunheboto, a cultural festival of the Sema Naga (AvS 2008).

(bottom) The US Consul General in Kolkata, Beth A. Payne, posing together with Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio, other officials and a group of Angami Naga singers and dancers on the occasion of the Hornbill Festival at Kisama (AvS 2010).

next page

(top) One of the village guards of the Chang Naga village of Hakchang showing a local publication that commemorates the recent political history of the Nagas. Produced by local political activists, one copy of the book was presented to each village council in the region (AvS 2007).

(bottom) Signs campaigning for job reservations for people from ‘Eastern Nagaland’, especially the region of Mon and Tuensang, are nowadays posted in the run-up to nearly every election. This region is considered ‘backward’ and underprivileged (AvS 2007).
permanently unite the underground factions seems to have failed for the
time being, the strong wish and work for peace has led to considerable
improvements - at least in the more western regions and in urban areas.

All underground factions, however opposed they may be to one another,
still share the same goal and ideology: An independent nation for the Na-
gas. But the acceptance of this ideology no longer receives such wide sup-
port from civil society as it used to. The moderate political forces among
the Nagas which had cooperated with the Indian Central Government
and which formed the Federal Government of Nagaland are running the
state with Indian finances. As described on pp. 172-73, they are organised
in line with the Indian party system. The official Nagaland Government
follows the Central Government’s five-year plans, but apart from that also
tries to invest money into sectors that it regards as promising future indus-
tries, such as ecotourism, music and fashion. Often one can hear people
joking: ‘We Nagas want independence – but the worst thing that could
happen to us is independence.’ Most Nagas are well aware that they are
economically dependent on India and political independence would mean
absolute poverty. However, many still feel that they are ‘not Indians’. They
perceive their political and social identity as Nagas as being ‘different’
from the Indian Nation which they feel they are ‘forced’ to live in. They
look physiognomically different from the rest of the Indians and are often
mistaken for Tibetan refugees or Japanese tourists in ‘mainland’ India.
They speak their own Tibeto-Burman languages and prefer English to Hin-
di as a second language. They don’t dress in Indian style but largely wear
western style outfits, their own traditional clothes, or a mix. And they are
predominately Christian. But the young generation of Nagas, especially
that of the urban centres, has often enjoyed long years of education in one
of the large Indian cities and greatly appreciates the possibilities that this
experience has opened up for them. They are much more positive towards
being a part of India than their parents’ or grandparents’ generation.

An important feature of Naga identity that is still being negotiated lo-
cally is concerned with the question of whether the Nagas are one people,
or whether they are many different ‘tribes’. In many respects one can
observe a strong tribalism in the region: the underground factions are
largely divided along tribal lines. Identification with one’s own group is
very strong – but this does not necessarily mean with a ‘tribe’, but rather
with one’s own village or clan. A lot of political effort is being put into the
notion of Naga unity, and the present book provides a welcome academic
argument in this respect for many Naga political activists. Even though
the wording is very careful, the notion that the Nagas are one people is put
Fighters of the NSCN-K underground faction posing for the lens in Mon region (AvS 2007).
forward clearly (see p. 103). And this notion is one of the most important arguments in the demands for independence (cf. Wettstein in print).

The chapter on Naga Nationalism (chapter 14) makes it very evident that the Christian religion plays a major role among the Nagas. Christianity was always closely linked to the underground factions – but as mentioned also to the peace process. The motto of the NSCN still today reads: “Nagaland for Christ” and Vashum (2000) goes as far as to diagnose a combination of Christian socialism paired with a mix of dictatorship and intra-democracy as the basis of the NSCN’s vision of the Naga nation. The background of the Naga Christian ideology was introduced by Baptist missionaries - mainly of the ‘Southern Baptist Church’ - in the late 19th century, and its early history can be followed on pp. 152 ff. We will take a short look at the religious scene as it presented itself in the last years.

Christian Enthusiasm

Many of the chapters in this book touch on religious aspects of the erstwhile Naga culture. However, head-hunting, feasts of merit with animal sacrifices, and the majority of animist rituals are things of the past. They already were so in the 1980s, as pointed out in chapter 15. But looking at the example of one Angami village and one aspect of the former animist beliefs – the healing practices and the associated notions of spirits – we can nevertheless gather from this chapter that the former belief system has not been totally replaced by Christianity. Rather, a syncretism has occurred and in the second half of the 20th century, when the puritan phase of missionisation was over, a revival of old traditions could be observed. Agricultural festivals were celebrated by everybody, and even in Christian weddings traditional presents were exchanged that were common in the old belief system. Such outward signs of the old traditions can still be found today. Everybody of course celebrates the harvest festivals – in the form of a day-long Christian church event. Baptist authors have formulated suggestions for a Naga way of Christianity in the last few years that tries to include certain aspects of the old belief system. One involves general efforts to integrate animist spirit beliefs and mythology into the Christian narrative and to work out a specific Naga theology (see for example Nuh 2003, O. Alem Ao 1994).

However, this should not hide the fact that a very strict form of Christianity has been deeply instilled into the Nagas. Anyone who is not Christian is nowadays excluded from society. This even manifested physically at a wedding we attended in Viswema village.
(Angami region) in 2005. The last three remaining non-Christians were sitting away from the rest of the wedding party, behind a canvas palling, drinking a little rice beer that had been brewed for them. The Christian party did of course not drink alcohol, except that from time to time a few older men popped in to covertly sip a cup and immediately join the wedding party again. Prohibition is still maintained in Nagaland because of the power of the Church, even though everybody agrees that it does more harm than it prevents alcoholism – and simply makes a few smugglers very rich.

In practice, Naga Christianity is deeply rooted in civil society. The most powerful organizations are the churches and they are the ones that can make things happen, as we have seen in the political peace process. – Or not, as was the case for example with a project for the de-stigmatization of HIV and Aids patients in the Eastern Naga region. In Tuensang town, one of the best known and most respected social workers finally removed his Aids projects from the church context because the Church refused to cooperate in the de-stigmatization strategy. HIV and Aids have become a problem not least due to the missing infrastructure, he reports, because even in the 1990s it may have taken several years before the results of a blood sample returned to the patient.

Church organizations have replaced the former social organizations, such as the morung system – an indigenous ‘school’ institution characterised by boy’s dormitories (see chapter 3 and p. 175-76) –, but in our view it would be much too optimistic to call this a ‘transformation’ in the process of ‘modernization’. The morung system has lost practically all of its functions and in many regions even its physical existence in architectural structures. The only similarity between church organizations and the morung can be seen in their aim of ‘teaching culture’. But the culture that was taught in the morung and the one that is taught through the Church and its organizations are entirely different.

In the theological education, a great emphasis is placed on the mission. The officially proclaimed aim of the Naga Baptist Church is the total Christianisation of Asia by the year 2020. This official policy trickles down even to the village priests, as an interview with a reverend showed: “There are about 22 theological training centres [in Nagaland]. So in each training centre there are about 200 to 300 people training for missionary work. So every year around 120 or 150 graduates are being produced from theological colleges and they are all prepared to go for mission” (Oppitz
Looking like two nearly identical houses of traditional architecture, the one on the right side is the house of the ang (‘king’), the one on the left is the Baptist Church of the Konyak Naga village of Zangkham, and to its left stands the old head tree of the village. They all will have to give way to a new concrete Church building that is planned to be constructed in the near future (AvS 2009).
The Baptist church of the Chakhesang village of Chizami with villagers coming to attend the Sunday Service. Many village churches have a capacity of up to a thousand people and are usually full to the last seat on Sundays (AvS 2007).

A marriage in the Konyak Naga village of Phungkung. The pavilion, which is built of bamboo, is not a traditional structure but is inspired by US American wedding catalogues. The bride and groom are taking pictures together with everyone attending the wedding party, which can number up to several hundred people. This means many hours of posing for the couple (AvS 2007).

(bottom right) Sunday service at the Ao Baptist church in Kohima. In the two larger cities, Dimapur and Kohima, each Naga community has its own church, the Ao Baptist church is one of the largest in Kohima (AvS 2005).
In everyday life pride in the glorious past intermingles with the new Christian identity, as in the case of this small boy from the Konyak Naga village of Longwa, who is simultaneously wearing a headhunter’s necklace and a Christian cross (AvS 2009).

The Catholic cathedral of Kohima was built between 1986 and 1991 with the help of Japanese investors who wanted to donate a landmark in the memory of World War II fights in Kohima. Its shape is inspired by a traditional architectural style that is common for the rich men’s houses and morung s (boy’s dormitories) of many Naga groups (AvS 2005).

The red star has been put as a Christmas decoration on the roof of a house of traditional architecture in the Chakhesang village of Pfutseromi. The projections on the pediment can be found in a number of variations among the southern Naga groups. In former times they could only be put on the roof if the house owner had given feats of merit. The feasts, and especially the animal sacrifices that were part of it, were forbidden by the Baptist missionaries and thus are not performed any more today (AvS 2009).
et al. 2008:295). One of the biggest mission projects is for China, as
the pastor relates. Because the Nagas look so similar to many Chinese
minorities, it is easy for them to enter China and missionise incognito.

Christianity in Nagaland chiefly means Baptist Christianity. However,
a number of other Christian denominations also exist, and Hindus and
Muslims can also be found in very small numbers, mostly among the im-
migrants from other parts of India. The Catholic Church is the biggest mi-
nority religion in Nagaland. It is generally more open towards traditional
symbolism and culture and less restrictive in social matters. The cathedral
of Kohima, for instance, is architecturally based on a structure commonly
used for the morungs of many Naga groups. The diocese of Kohima
proudly reported to us that it has gained new members in the last few
years without putting much effort into missionising. In recent years many
other Christian churches have started to missionise Nagaland. In particu-
lar the charismatic churches are gaining members among younger people,
which brings a certain unrest to families. A young woman explained that
when she expressed herself to her friends – saying that she thought that
the official church was a farce and only produced a lot of brainwashed
people – she realised that she was not alone with her views, which ex-
plains the success of the alternative denominations (see Oppitz 2008:420).

Tradition, Modernity and the Economic Factor

It was the same young woman who said what many young Naga people
feel today about their cultural past: Everybody tells them not to lose
their Naga culture, to connect to the past. But if they ask ‘so what is our
culture, how was our past?’ they will be told a strongly Christianised
story by their parents and grandparents. But the young people, especially
the educated ones, know very well that this is not true. So their solu-
ton is to construct their own youth culture, which is oriented to Western
lifestyle magazines and TV channels. As a result, there is a large gulf
between the values held by urban youth and those of their parents, not
least because many young people – as mentioned – have spent many
years in ‘mainland’ India for their education. Their world views are more
open towards India and other religions, and they have other expecta-
tions about economical success. After receiving their education, most of
them return to Nagaland, where practically no economic options exist.
These are some of the main factors in the current generation’s conflict.

The relation between ‘modernity’ and ‘tradition’, as we read on p. 173,
is largely seen as lying in the distinction between ‘town’ and ‘countryside’.
To some extent this is still true today, as for example with respect
to infrastructure. The roads in urban areas are maintained better than in
A lot of entertainment has been created in the last few years for Naga youth, especially the urban centres. Rock contests and road shows are meant to support the young generation’s musical interests and talents. For several years now the ‘Naga Idol’ contest is a regular event. The winner, here the Ao Naga singer Naro in 2008, receives a considerable financial prize (AvS 2008).

The young urban Naga lifestyle is not oriented towards local tradition. Western magazines and TV channels are the basis for the young people’s dresses and dreams, as can be gathered from these four ladies going for shopping in Ser’s Bazar in Kohima (AvS 2005).
The Hornbill Festival near the Angami Naga village of Kisama is the model for many Naga festivals nowadays. With groups attending from all over Nagaland, it is a staged show that has not only the purpose of attracting foreign tourists. Sponsored by the Government of Nagaland, it is also an important event for creating a feeling of unity, belonging and cultural awareness among the different Naga groups themselves (AvS 2009).
This kind of naïve ethnic painting and miniaturised handicraft for decoration are the main style of new art developed in Nagaland in the last two decades. They are largely sold during cultural festivals. But very recently a new scene of artists has started to reach beyond ‘ethnic art’ (AvS 2005).

Many Konyak Naga villages near the Myanmar border live from selling jewellery and woodcarvings to tourists or to dealers who bring them to the antique market (AvS 2009).

(top left) Also for tourists from ‘mainland’ India the Naga villages have the air of an exotic past. Scenes with people carrying loads in their baskets can still be found in the countryside, and they are a much-sought camera motive (AvS 2009).
Portraits of ‘warriors’ in their festive attire, such as here a Yimchungri Naga, that show nothing but a ‘noble savage’ are easy to take at one of the tourist festivals. They are welcome motives that depict the wild, exotic headhunter for photo albums and coffee table books. But they entirely blend out the background of contemporary everyday life and modernity (AvS 2009).

During the last few years the Government of Nagaland has taken pains to find and support economic perspectives for the younger generations. They have recognised that the perpetuation of many political problems and tensions is strongly linked to the lack of prospects for the youth. Programmes in music, sports, and media are meant to advance youth in fields that really interest them. Another sector for which the Government has high hopes is the clothing industry, especially the field of handloom weaving. Traditionally weaving is a woman’s occupation, but recently men have also started to enter the designing business. The transformation of traditional cloth patterns for garments and home décor is promoted in many Government sponsored fashion shows and handicraft fairs. The fears about the misuse of cultural heritage or copyrights that still persisted a few years ago – that foreign designers would ‘steal’ the Naga patterns and earn a lot of money with them – seems practically to have vanished, and Naga ‘fusion fashion’ is advocated all over India. A third factor in the economic initiative is envisaged along the Myanmar border. Some years ago ‘trade centres’ were designated for the purpose of facilitating the exchange of goods. However, at present not much is traded at these centres, which only exist on paper. One reason for this might be the poverty on the Myanmar side: there are practically no roads to transport goods and there is no money for commercial exchange.

The biggest economical hope is placed on tourism. The tourist infrastructure has been gradually improved in Nagaland over the past years. Many new hotels and tourist villages have been built, practical aspects (such as ATMs) have been improved, and the yearly
Festivals and other cultural programs are today the only occasions on which traditional attire is worn, as for instance the cultural festival of Eastern Nagaland held in Tuensang town in 2007. Such events prevent the unique traditional attire of the Nagas from vanishing. However, a trend towards standardisation is also discernible (AvS 2007).
Hornbill Festival has grown as many side events have come to be included. The Government has tried to channel tourism into a few locations in order to protect the rest of the state. Nevertheless, one is aware that Nagaland is not entirely ready for mass tourism, nor even in fact for increase in individual tourism. With the end of the permit restrictions, tourists will start to travel around the state as they like. But at present they have to realise that the roads are still too bad to bring them to the village they are aiming at in the calculated time, and that most villages have no facilities for tourists to sleep and eat. The Hornbill Festival, which is considered the most important tourist attraction of the year, is a staged event that can only partially satisfy the individual tourist’s hunger for ‘authentic’ Naga culture. Nagaland, like many other ‘exotic’ world regions, is trapped in the classical tourism predicament: foreign visitors want to see Naga culture, but also have a clear idea as to what this should look like. But today ‘authentic’ Naga culture is not the one shown in the largest sections of this book – or in some recently published glossy coffee table books (see for example Stirn and van Ham 2000, 2003). The only possibility to connect to the past which many tourists would love to see is to stage a show that has nothing to do with everyday Naga life today. The same is true of the souvenirs tourists often like to bring back home, such as one of the ‘antique’ bead necklaces, for instance.

Material Culture, Arts and Crafts

Travellers may be happy that they can still find such antique necklaces, maybe with some brass heads showing the number of heads the former owner had hunted. And they may be delighted to hear or personally witness that ‘real’ Naga jewellery is still produced: in the famous Konyak Naga village of Longwa, right on the Myanmar border. Visiting a smith in this village, we were also able to observe the process of lost-wax casting. And we were assured that he produces sixty pieces of ‘antique’ necklaces every month. After polishing the pieces, they are buried in a special mixture of mud, ashes, and oil to make them look ‘authentic’ – just like the strings and beads – for sale at the antique market. For him and his colleagues, the production of ‘antique’ necklaces guarantees their survival and the well-being of the whole village. To manufacture what the buyer wants is not, of course, a new development. Already in colonial times the Nagas produced items that were tailored to the ethno-graphers’ and collectors’ wishes, as can be gathered for example from the many model carvings in museum collections. But the Westerner’s fascination for antiques has also brought the local people to the idea of selling their last remaining heirlooms. Already today the material cul-

The encounter between tradition and modernity in Nagaland can be manifold. This is the grave of the village teacher in the Konyak Naga village of Zangkham. Its structure is that of a traditional grave hung with all the implements and objects that were important for the deceased’s life. Between a traditional men’s shawl and an umbrella for protection, we can also find an alphabet poster which he had used for teaching. Traditional graves are getting less common in Nagaland. One mostly finds Christian graveyards with gravestones (AvS 2009).
In the rural areas many Nagas still wear some of the ornaments from their cultural past mixed with western-style dress. A headhunter's necklace here, a hornbill feather there. This can be seen in the portrait of Limang with his grandchild taken in the Konyak village of Wanching and from the street view of Nampong in Arunachal Pradesh, where some Burmese Nagas had come from the other side of the border for a short visit to a festival on the Indian side (AvS 2007 and 2008).
In rural areas, especially in regions that are not yet well-connected to the road infrastructure, some villages can still be found that are almost entirely built using traditional architecture. Thatch-roofed houses with verandas built on bamboo stilts are for example still common in the Phom Naga village of Yongyah. But in many regions of Nagaland thatch roofs have been forbidden because they easily catch fire (AvS 2008).

In the northern part of Nagaland tea plantations are a welcome source of income, like the one shown here near the Konyak Naga village of Shiong. If the tea produced is not used privately, it is sold to one of the companies in the Assam Plains and mixed with Assam tea (AvS 2009).
(top and bottom) Both wet rice and dry rice are still cultivated as a staple food among the Nagas. Wet rice is usually cultivated in the more southern parts of Nagaland on terraced fields, like this one near the Chakhesang Naga village of Pfutsero. Dry rice is grown on slopes that are prepared by jhuming, or slash and burn cultivation. The fields near the Konyak Naga village of Longzang show the stage after the burning down when only a few tree trunks are still standing. Deforestation and short cultivation cycles that lower the fertility of the ground are a major problem in Nagaland today (AvS 2009).
ture of the Naga past is largely to be found in European museums and private collections. Soon there will be nothing remaining in the Naga region itself. This, of course, is a two-sided matter: if the colonial administrators and later travellers had not collected the items of past Naga material culture, there would be no remaining testimony to it today.

Interestingly, the present book played, and still plays, a major part in the antique market: the best place for buying Naga objects was for a long time not in Nagaland or ‘mainland’ India itself, but in Kathmandu. And in order to sell the pieces, most dealers had a copy of ‘the Jacobs’ on their shelves. They would point to this or that page to prove to the buyer that the necklace in stock was exactly like in the book – and thus ‘authentic’. On one of our recent visits to Nagaland we met a European private collector travelling with this book in hand and showing the pictures to the local people in order to obtain specific objects. His diagnosis was that in ten years at latest, the material culture as seen in this book will be totally lost. As researchers we applied a comparable method: we showed the people pictures of European museum collections – from this book and also from collections at other museums – in order to trigger discussions and comments about the objects and about the ancient culture in general. Often the local people saw material objects from their own past for the first time and were amazed that once upon a time they had made such beautiful things. Frequently we were asked to send a copy of the book, or at least a construction drawing for one or two objects, so that they could restart to produce them. These few anecdotes may illustrate how the editing of an ethnographic museum collection always has manifold impact, not only on the interested researchers and collectors, but also the local people concerned.

Maopha Angh Taiwangsu, a smith of the Konyak Naga village of Longwa, produces a raw cast of a head for a necklace using lost-wax casting. He uses a wooden model for the rough shape of the head onto which he moulds a sheet of black wax. He adds mouth, eyes, decoration and the channels later used for pouring in the metal. After a short bath in water, the wax model is now dipped into a mixture of ashes and water, and more mud, ashes and soil are attached to it to be placed in the middle of a wet mud cask. A small hole is kept where the ‘channels’ of the wax model extend out into the cask. The cask is then dried by keeping it in the fireplace, and the wax of the model melts and flows out of it while the oven for melting the metal is heated up. The alloy for the head – in this case consisting of the jacket of an old flash light and other small metal parts – is melted down in an iron tube. For this step in the process, the smith wears his fur hat and mumbles some words of prayer, as he explains, asking God for success. He casts the melted metal mix into the hole and leaves the cask on the ground for a while. After some minutes it is put into a bucket of water. The mixture of ashes and soil dissolves in the water and is washed away from the metal head (AvS 2007).
(top) This large wood carving is one of the last of its kind. It decorates the central wall of the house of the ang (king) of the Konyak Naga village of Zangkham (AvS 2009).

(bottom) A wide variety of baskets are still produced today and used as they were a hundred years ago. Basketry is one of the few fields of material culture that has hardly changed among the Nagas. The large baskets in the front store room of the houses of the Angami and Chakhesang Naga, here in Pfutseromi village, are filled with rice. This rice, however, is not necessarily meant for eating but is accumulated over many years as a sign of wealth (AvS 2009).
Weaving, being a woman’s craft, is still practiced as ever with a backstrap loom. The material, however, no longer consists of locally grown cotton, but mostly of pre-dyed rayon yarn that is imported from the Assam Plains or Myanmar (Burma). This Sema Naga weaver from Lazami village is weaving a traditional ladies’ shawl, but the same technique is also used to weave skirts and shawls with newly invented patterns (AvS 2009).

Wood carving is still a man’s craft. This Konyak carver in Mon town is making a mithun head for the buyer, who most probably will hang it on the front of his house or in his living room (AvS 2007).

Basketry is also a man’s craft. Besides traditional basketry, which can be found in practically every Naga village, there are also a few talented basket weavers who try out their craft with new shapes and as a free art form (AvS 2004).
It is unnecessary to repeat that much of the material culture as seen in this book has practically vanished from among the Nagas. This, however, is not true of all object categories: agricultural implements such as hoes or baskets, for instance, are still produced and used on a daily base. But in general we can agree that a process already observed in the 1980s has continued: “distinctiveness of pattern and colour, which once identified groups and individuals with great precision, has subsequently been lost” (p. 172). On the other hand, it is wrong to believe that so-called ‘traditional’ cultures never undergo change, even in their material world. Dress, ornament, arts and crafts are always transforming, among the Nagas as well as in all other world regions. Western observers are tempted to judge these changes as a ‘decline’ in culture, or as an unflattering adjustment to an assumed tourist taste. But seen from a local perspective, these changes are a necessary development that every tradition always goes through, a matter of negotiation between the past and the present, and a means of building a bridge between the two.

As regards ‘traditional dress’, the Nagas are particularly innovative. Local taste distinguishes between several categories of ‘traditional’ or ‘ethnic’ dress, and all are regarded as suitable for creative development. Even if some objects – as for example some highly appreciated shawls – will not be altered, many other patterns and symbols are used for the creation of new tribal costumes or uniforms, for home décor, or for stylish fashion. As if the love for body decoration was a remaining heritage from the past, even today the Nagas – especially the women – consider themselves as very fashionable and well dressed. And the recently upco- ming Naga fashion scene with countless beauty pageants, model hunts, and fashion shows proves them right. Also in wood carving and basket weaving – both traditionally men’s crafts – new notions of artistry are developing that go beyond the pure practical aspects (basketry) or the tourist market (wood carving). In the last few years a scene of young artists has established itself in the capital Kohima that is trying to bridge past and present in the fields of music, painting and sculpture and searching for new approaches to the question of what it means to be Naga today.

Literature and Scientific Research

The question of what it means to be Naga, what is actually Naga identity? has also been a main issue in several of the recent academic publications on the Nagas (see for example West 1999, Saul 2005, Oppitz et. al. 2008). Since 2001 the travel restrictions for foreign visitors to Nagaland have gradually been relaxed. This has advanced research by foreigners and small-scale tourism, and it has opened the possibility

Naga designers have only recently started to create fashion for men. The women’s and men’s collections of Angami Naga designer Bambi Kevichusa are known for their elegance and their unobtrusive use of Naga symbolism, like the few cowries placed in this suit shown at ‘the Naga fashion night’ in December 2010 (AvS).
(top) In 2010 the Hornbill Designers Contest at Kohima was held for the first time and fashion designers from all over Northeast India competed. The collection shown here was designed by Ao Naga designer Akala Pongen representing the state of Nagaland in the contest. She is specialised in fusion fashion, applying traditional patterns or cloths to modern, Western style dresses (AvS 2010).

(bottom) Fashion shows with dresses that make extensive use of traditional patterns are part of nearly every local Naga cultural festival, like here at the ahuna festival of the Sema Naga in Zunheboto town. Not that such clothes would be worn in everyday life; they are produced purely for the shows, which in most cases are Government sponsored (AvS 2008).
of cooperation between local scholars and the international scientific community. Europe has seen several exhibitions on the Nagas in the last few years, especially in the German-speaking region (“Naga: Kopfjäger im Schatten des Himalaya” (Naga: Headhunters in the Shadow of the Himalaya) in Frankfurt in 2004 / “Naga: Schmuck und Asche” (Naga: Beads and Ashes) in Zürich 2008, see also Oppitz et. al. 2008 / “Naga: Eine vergessene Bergregion neu entdeckt” (Naga: A Forgotten Mountain Region Rediscovered) in Basel 2008, see also Kunz and Joshi 2008 / “Die Kunst der Naga” (The Art of the Nagas) in Hüttenberg 2008 / “An Image of Nagaland” in London 2008). Twenty years after the pioneering work of the Naga Videodisc project (see Turin and Macfarlane 2008) which is today publicly accessible as the Naga Database (see http://www.alanmacfarlane.com/FILES/nagas.html), new involvement with Naga museum collections has been triggered, especially with the historical photographic sources (see http://www.soas.ac.uk/furer-haimendorf/archive/). A boost in the international book market can be observed as well, with several travel and photographic books about the Nagas (see for example Stirn and van Ham 2000, 2003, Arya and Joshi 2004).

In the past 20 years an indigenous Naga writer’s scene has firmly established itself, with a focus on political literature (see for example Chasie 1999, Kaka D. Iralu 2000, Nuh and Wetshokhrolo 2002), local ethnography, anthropology, linguistics, and oral tradition (see for example Jamir and Lanunungsang 2005, Temsula Ao 2000, Kumar 2005, Lotha 2007), theology (see for example O. Alem Ao 1994, A. B. Ao 2002, Bendangansi and Aier 1997, Nuh 1996, 2001, 2003), and fiction and poetry (see for example Temsula Ao 2006, 2009, Easterine Iralu 2003, 2007). And with a short passage from the epilogue of one of the most recently written novels, ‘Mari’ by Easterine Kire (Iralu) who lives in exile in Norway, we would like to allow our readers to go – into the Naga past:

“Kohima sleeps. A Kohima so different from the Kohima of my youth. It is rare to see it thus. Tranquil in the grip of sleep. I don’t want to go to sleep now. I want to watch this stillness a little longer. It feels as though the past and the present are intermingling at this very minute. But only for a moment. And when I have closed the window, the past will have flown and the present will rush in and take over” (2010:170-71).
A view of Kohima, the capital of Nagaland (AvS 2006).
In the rural regions of Nagaland, hunting is still a quite common practice and part of everyday life. This group of men from the Phom village of Bhumnyu has just returned from a hunting trip and is sharing out the meat between them (AvS 2008).
Building work, whether for traditional or modern construction, is still performed as communal work in many regions. Here, in the Ao Naga village of Chuchuyimlang, the house owner offered free food and drink to everybody who wanted to join in. While working the men sing miiumiu, a traditional repetitive melody with syllables that have no further meaning (AvS 2005).

Local products from all over Nagaland are sold at the market in Kohima. Hornet and bee larvae are considered a precious delicacy (AvS 2009).
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References

AvS: All photographs in this chapter have been taken by Alban von Stockhausen (with the exception of the reconciliation soccer image, which was taken by Kazu Ahmed).


