

Sabah has the most diverse races in Malaysia. The Kadazandusun were the original inhabitants there and is ranked first in the population ratio, followed by the Chinese. Kadazandusun is only one word but consists of more than thirty multi-communities. Almost twenty years ago, in an assembly by the delegates of most native people in Sabah it seems to have been resolved that they designated their ethnic identity as Kadazandusun. The communities who shared the same language and culture but had different dialects were unified. The organization called KDCA (Kadazan-Dusun Cultural Association) is devoting itself to preservation, development, reinforcement and promotion of the multi-ethnic cultures. The association is led by Mr. Pairin Kitingan who is the previous Chief Minister and the current Deputy Chief Minister of Sabah. Mr. Pairin is also the brave leader (Huguan Siou) of Kadazandusun.

They say that the ancestors of Kadazandusun populated around the present monument of Nunuk Ragang building. It is located at the place of about 50 km from Ranau, on the Ranau – Sandakan Highway where two rivers merge. As Nunuk means 'banyan tree' and Ragan means 'red' in Kadazandusun, Nunuk Ragang means 'red banyan tree'.

According to the legend, there stood a giant Nunuk Ragang a long time ago. Their ancestors seem to have bathed in the river and taken in the sun sitting on the branches of the tree in strength. Seen from a distance, it would appear as though the top of the tree looked reddish. The waters of the pool would be also stained red with the sap of the tree and cure their skin diseases of those who washed themselves clean.

They had great prosperity and built a civilization in the region. The place of Nunuk Ragang is the cradle of Kadazandusun and an important landmark from the cultural viewpoint. The civilization of Nunuk Ragang has been handed down to now through oral literature, and tracing their history back more seems to be hard. It seems that their civilization that thrived at Nunuk Ragang dispersed everywhere in Sabah for various reasons and the dispersion brought to form multi-ethnic Kadazandusun communities.

KDCA visits the spot annually to perform a ceremony and a festival because of giving intellectual education to Kadazandusun of the present and the next generation. The primary object is to re-awake and instill the multi-ethnic unique cultural roots, history and tradition in their minds and to lead them to live with pride and dignity as an ethnic group. Huguan Siou is also celebrated at the ceremony.

It was held on 5 July this year and my wife and I attended it as VIPs by favor of Dr. Othman. Dr. Othman and his family who manage Slagon homestay are Kadazandusun and he is a

chairperson of main organizing committee of the event.

In the trunk of the Nunuk Ragang memorial building on the model of a giant fig tree, the ceremony took place with Mr. Pairin (Huguan Siou) sitting on the central throne and the people dressed up in ethnic costume. As I cannot understand their language, it is just my supposition, but some communities seemed to be talking about their histories with melody respectively. The climax of the ceremony was with Mr. Pairin blowing out the candles on a big colorful cake.



The Festival at the Nunuk Ragang Memorial Building Area

After that, the assembly moved toward the outdoor stage and the festival started with speeches by the organizers and went on with the playing of instruments, songs and dancing. Mr. Pairin and Dr. Othman introduced us to the audience as guests from Japan in their speeches. We were impressed with an orchestra playing with the folk bamboo instruments. Tombotuon like Shou (old Japanese instrument) in Gagaku (old Japanese orchestra) and flute called Seruring were very similar in shape, tone and scale to Japanese ones. Not only traditional instruments but also the saxophones were made of bamboo.

After being served rice wine and getting more or less drunk, the participants went on the stage to play folk dance. Mr. and Mrs. Pairin and Othman and even my wife were dancing on

the stage to singing or playing. I limited myself only to seeing dances because I had been troubled with a strained back a few days before. It was clear, cheerful and peaceful festival. There were stands selling foods, folkcrafts, clothes and so on. A quasi-triathlon with young people competing was conducted. The contestants walked on stilts, ran and swam down in a rapid river using a tire as a life buoy and competed for a winning time.

I came away with the feeling that the event of Nunuk Ragang was similar to somewhat of a village festival in Japan.

The students belonging to a college that train teachers in Keningau were also visiting there in a group. They explained to me that they attended the event not as an amusement but as a part of lessons of learning their own ethnic culture.

Kadazandusun are agricultural people and eat rice as their staple food. Therefore, we had rice often during our stay at Slogon. Any cooking by Ms. Lungkiam (Mrs. Othman) tastes good to me. This time we had many exotic vegetables. The salads made of banana flower, ginger flower, sour mango, jackfruit and so on were very nice. The food made of soured raw fish was tasty too. I did not feel any difference on the flavor of the cooking between hers and ours.

We had a lunch party for trying Japanese foods, such as Somen and Soba brought by a Japanese in addition to Kakiage. Mr. and Mrs. Othman and their staffs were eating deliciously Soba and Somen sprinkled grilled laver and Kakiage dipping into Soba sauce. The other day I cooked Okinawa food called Shirishiri made of carrots, tuna cans and eggs. It met a favorable reception. They say Japanese and Kadazandusun are very alike in appearance, but I suppose both people are similar even in taste and music.

A large number of the Kadazandusun profess to be Christians, followed by Muslims. Before the middle of nineteenth century when Christianity was preached animism were prevailing in the community. As the Othmans is a Muslim family, we cannot take pork at Slogon homestay.

They are affected strongly by rice crop, therefore Kaamatan (harvest festival) seems to be the most important festival for them and it takes place all over Sabah in May of every year. It seems to give us an good opportunity for finding various cultures of Kadazandusun. Beauty contests in Kadazandusun take place during the festival. Many activities are being performed on the initiative of KDCA in order to convey their ethnic tradition and pride. Ms. Lungkiam recommended me strongly to join Kaamatan next year.