



THE THADOU-KUKI PERCEPTION OF DEATH

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RESEARCH ARTICLE



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DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.70096/tssr.260404014>

Abstract

Death is an inseparable part of the human life cycle, and cultures worldwide have their own conceptualisations and understandings of it. The certainty of death aroused fear and anxiety among people of all cultures. As an addressal mechanism to this universal problem, several belief systems, worldviews and funeral practices are accorded as per the community understanding of death. The papers dwell on the Thadou-Kukis' perception of death and how their understanding of death shapes and influences their worldview and socio-cultural practices. The different funeral practices and the role of social and kinship relations in their funeral ceremony. The paper also seeks to comprehend how people perceived death in relation with their natural environment. The ecological role of plants, animals and others in shaping their perception of death as well as usage in the funeral practices.

Keywords: *Death, Ecology, Funeral, Perception, Thadou-Kuki*

Introduction

For long, death has been understood as the absence of a heartbeat and respiration. Society's perception of death varied across cultures, and in all societies, there existed culturally sanctioned treatment and disposal of the body and a prescribed period of mourning (Cohen: n.d.). The certainty of death arose the feeling of fear and anxiety, and in an attempt to cope with it, a number of worldviews, belief in an afterlife and several cultural and funeral practices are centred around people's perceptions of death. Generally, burial or cremation has been the most common way of disposal of the body in most cultures. Communities, who believe in afterlife, often see rites of passage as a means to conquer fear and anxiety caused by death. In other words, death was regarded as the supreme initiation for the beginning of a new spiritual life (Eliade: 1917). When a person dies, the relatives and dear ones of the deceased experience bereavement and mourning. Bereavement is the experience that follows the death of loved ones, and mourning is the culturally accepted norm of the expression of the person feeling following the death of a loved one. (Gire:2002).

Robert Hertz (2004) classified death into three headings, first concerning the deceased body i.e., the provisional period where the deceased body is taken care of as per the deceased status in the society. Secondly, the temporary time period where the deceased soul is believed to stay on earth before reaching its final destination. Lastly, the mourning period, where the deceased relatives are subjected to taking care of the deceased and a whole set of prohibitions, till the entire funeral practice comes to an end. Funeral practices involve rites of separation as well as rites of transition or incorporation. Separation rites include the various cultural procedures by which the deceased body is transported before finally being laid to rest. The purpose of a transition or incorporation rite is to unite all the surviving members of the deceased and sometimes with the deceased, which is usually expressed in the form of a communion feast (Gannep: 1960).

Methodology

The Thadou-Kuki are one of the numerous Kuki-Chin linguistic speaking groups of people inhabiting areas between Naga Hill in the north, down to the Sandoway District of Burma to the south and from the Myittha River in the east to almost the Bay of Bengal to the west (Grierson: 1904). Scholarly discourse on death studies on the Thadou-Kuki mainly presents the general categorisation of death as good and bad death and the various death rituals and types of funeral practices. However, death was central to the worldview and belief system of the people. Their strong belief in the afterlife and notion of good and bad death strongly influence their socio-cultural practices and day-to-day lives. The implication and usage of plants, animals and others in their belief system with regard to death practices and the vital role of the social and kinship relatives in their funeral practices all warrant for a holistic understanding of the people's perception of death. Information gathered through unstructured personal interviews from those acquainted with the Thadou-Kuki way of life, especially with those put in charge of custom and culture in

socio-cultural organisations. Vernacular books written on Thadou-Kuki custom and culture, published for private circulation, colonial ethnographic accounts and scholarly published and unpublished work on the people have been used to fill the existing lacunae on death studies of the Thadou-Kuki.

The People Classification of Death

Death, or '*Tolthi*' in local parlance, was considered to be the permanent separation of the soul from the physical body. They had diverse views on death but primarily categorised death into 'good' and 'bad' death. Natural death of a person after a long and fulfilling life was considered to be a good death or '*Thipha*', whereas those of unnatural death that are considered to be socially disruptive, like those cases of suicide, death away from home, falling from trees, drowning, where the body cannot return home, and alike, were counted as dead death or '*Thise*' (Seale & Gees: 2004). However, beyond this conventional categorisation of death, they have different connotations of death as per their understanding of human life stages. The death of an infant would be referred to as '*Senhut thi*', and the body of such an infant was assumed to be pure and spotless, and was considered a family sacrificial offering to God (Haokip: 2019). The occurrence of the first death within a family, except for those already married off women, was accorded as '*Chalam pai*'. As this marks the beginning of death within a family leading to physical separation from the family members, such death was considered undesirable and was not treated as per the established customary funeral and burial practices. The demise of an individual before attaining maturity or during their growing stage is known as '*Donthi*' or '*Khanthi*', and those without leaving any heir to the family lineage were known as '*Buchupthi*'. The death of a married woman, whose post-marriage feast known as '*Nulam Chopna Satha*' has not been arranged so far, was termed '*Lailamthi*' (Doungel: 2024).

The Thadou-Kuki people believe that in a good death, the deceased soul would have to undergo a journey to the land of the dead, or '*Mithikho*', and burial of the deceased was done as per the customary burial practices within the house courtyard. Burial of the deceased in good death would be followed by the cultural practice of symbolic condolence to the deceased, referred to as '*Salnit*', or '*Umnit*'. On this day, a tree known as '*Thingel*' would be erected as a funeral post on the deceased's grave if the deceased happened to be a man of repute or a wealthy man. Villagers would abstain from their daily jhum work and restrict themselves from travelling in and out of the village, as they believed that doing so would disrupt the agricultural productivity and encounter with ill fate. Instead, they would gather at the deceased's house to console the living members (Haokip: 2023). The soul of the deceased in bad death was considered to be left behind in this world to wander around, unable to reach its final destination. In incident of bad death, it was customary for the first person who found the body to cover it with a shawl referred to as '*Deljang*'. The body in a bad death is deprived of the privilege of customary funeral practices and is buried off outside the village precinct. The reason for this is that if such a death is treated as per the established customary funeral practices instance of such a death was believed to follow suit. In certain cases, the deceased body was marked with charcoal with the belief the deceased soul would transmigrate or reincarnate with such a birthmark (Doungel: 1994). Even amongst cases of bad death, instances where the deceased body could not be recovered, '*Thidai*' was considered the most undesirable form of death by the people (Lhouvum: 2016). Disposal of the deceased body in a bad death would be followed by another symbolic observance of condolence known as '*Sahnit*'. This observance is not only limited to the deceased village but even to the neighbouring village if such an incident was known to them. As seen in the case of '*Salnit*' or '*Umnit*', villagers would restrict themselves from travelling and abstain from doing daily jhum work. All the household utensils were kept in inverted position, and menfolk would abstain from touching guns and sharp objects such as knives, daos, sickles and others. The reason for these lies with the belief that if such symbolic condolence was not observed, other cases of bad death were to follow suit (Doungel: 2023).

Kinship & Death

There exists a close connection between the social and kinship relations with the funeral practices of the people. Kinship is being understood as the state of being related to each other, and kinship relations mainly consist of consanguineal, affinal and social relations. The Thadou-Kukis follow the unilinear principle of patrilinear descent. Much importance was given to the social and kinship ties that a child born out of an illegitimate relationship or an orphan was looked down upon and not even reckoned by the people in the society. The consanguineal relations among the Thadou-Kuki in its broad term are commonly referred to as '*Phung le Chang*', meaning clan or sub-clan, and is better understood with the term '*Upa-Naopa*' in local parlance, where '*Upa*' denotes a senior member of a clan or a family and '*Naopa*' as a junior clan member or younger sibling within a family. The affinal relations are understood with the term '*Tucha-Sunggao*' relatives, where '*Tucha*' would denote the wife receiver or in-law of a person. The wife-giver, i.e., the person himself, would become the '*Sunggao*' relatives to the in-laws. '*Becha*' is another social relation which holds an important position within the family setup of Thadou-Kuki society. '*Becha*' relatives comprise an exogamous or collateral male relative of a person without whom a person is unable to survive (Gangte:1993).

Mortuary practices of the people demand the presence and execution of certain specific tasks by each social and kinship relation of the deceased in the funeral ceremonies. Customarily, it is the duty of the deceased '*Tucha*' relatives to do all the manual laborious work, like digging of the grave, preparation of the scaffolding in which the deceased corpse was supposed to be laid and dressing of the meat for mortuary feast during the entire funeral ceremonies. In the same manner, it is the task of the deceased '*Becha*' relatives to supervise and make all necessary arrangements needed for the rites and for the smooth conduct of the entire funeral ceremony. The customs and traditions of the people demand the presence of the deceased '*Upa*' in funeral rites and ceremonies thereby highlighting the importance of kinship descent and the lineage in which the deceased is being reckoned. Similarly, the presence of '*Sunggao*' relatives of the deceased is equally important, as their presence ascertains the legitimacy of

the deceased from the maternal side. Besides, funeral practices of the people also call for repeated verbal reckoning of the family and clan lineage of the deceased, referred to as '*Minluto*', while performing an act of mourning over the deceased refers to as '*Kitom*'. Where the lineage of the deceased would be cried out starting from the clan and sub-clan till it reached up to the deceased. For example, if the deceased name was Thangkhomang Sithlhou, then the verbal reckoning of lineage would run as "*Tah Chapa, Thadou Chapa, Sithlhou chapa, Ngamsei chapa, Thangkhomang Sithlhou, lamkai tukah a koi man suboi thei ponte*".

Rites & Funerals

Death rituals are the culturally accepted norms of disposal, mourning and treatment of death by the close relatives of the deceased. It is the attitudes, values and ideas and cultural blueprint inherited by an individual as being a member of the society (Cohen: n.d.). The Thadou-Kuki have different funeral practices depending on one's deeds and achievements during their lifetime. This differences in the funeral practices and variations in the ritual practices reflect the existing social hierarchy within the community. In normal funeral ceremony, when an individual passed away, immediately a messenger would be fanned out to inform the relatives and near dear ones of the deceased and was referred to as '*Thijin kou*'. The family '*Becha*' would then place a jar of wine inside the room to be used by the guest attending the funeral. This would be followed by a period of mourning and condolence or '*long-op*', where an old widow woman of the village or the '*Tucha*' wife would have to attend to the deceased body by washing and covering it with a traditional shawl called '*Pondum*'. The hair of the deceased was tied in a manner opposite to the way it was when he or she was alive referred to as '*Thi sampot*'. The priest would then pour a mouthful of wine inside the deceased mouth '*Thi tuipeh*', after which the corpse is laid to rest in a scaffolding placed in a reclining position against the walls with the deceased feet touching the floor. This positioning of the deceased corpse is known as '*Sanglajia Kitung*'. Then the rite of '*Thimit phoh*' is performed in which the deceased eye is kept wide open with the help of bamboo outer splits. As part of the ritual, the funeral party would be divided into two groups, with one group remaining inside the house while the other group positioned outside separated by the main entrance door of the house. Facing the deceased corpse, those inside the house would hit a wooden log to the ground with the rhythmic sound of *Li li li li li li*. While those positioned outside would produce *the ho ho ho ho ho* sound in the same rhythmic manner (Haokip: 2023).

The rite of '*Thimitphoh*' was be followed by an act of lamenting and mourning over the deceased body. Mourning is the culturally accepted expression of pain and grief and acknowledging the reality of loss. It has also acted as a means to develop an enduring connection with the deceased as they embark on the afterlife (Worden: 2009). In the funeral ceremony women would lament by weeping and wailing over the deceased corpse, but menfolk mourn by showing an act of expression of anger known as '*Kitom*', by hitting the doors and pillars of the house with a wooden log, dao and axe. The reason for such lies with the belief of the people that death was caused by an evil spirit that constantly hovers over the deceased body. Depending upon who's performing this mourning act of anger there are '*Changval kitom*', performed by the relatives of the deceased. However, if the deceased happened to be a man of repute, then '*Lholhi kitom*' would be performed whereby strong men of the village would alternately stamp their feet with a long drawing sound of *li li li li li li*. Selection of burial site '*Lhan chan*' would be done by the priest with a propitiation rite using rice beer within the deceased's courtyard. The actual burial would take place after the priest performs the last rite with an invocation referred to as '*Phunsam*'. The priest displaying an act of showing anger would then lead the funeral proceeding by saying, '*Lamnon lamnon Kapu that lamnom Kapa that lamnon*', which means '*make way for those who have taken the deceased lives*' after which the deceased was finally buried off (Tongkhohamm: 2016).

The Thadou-Kuki had different funeral practices for a man of repute within the society and for those who have achieved fame and status in life. Firstly, *Langlapma Kivui*, this unique funeral practice was performed for men of the highest repute of being a good hunter or wealthy man and for those who have performed feats of merit '*Chon*', like that of *Sai-ai* (hunter rite), *Chang-ai* (agriculture rite) and *Gal-ai* (warrior rite) during their lifetime. Here, the deceased is not immediately buried but was laid in unique scaffolding known as '*Langlap*'. The scaffolding was particularly made from *Gopi* bamboo, in a manner where the corpse does not get defile by coming in contact with household utilities and could be moved to and fro between the house and burial ground during the entire funeral ceremony. A mourning period of seven days was observed, in which the corpse was taken in and out of the house once a day as part of the funeral rites. On the seventh day, the rite '*Lhaw Lhil*' was performed where the deceased was carried around within the house seven times. The priest would then lead the funeral procession by constantly spraying wine from his mouth and brandishing a sword over the dead corpse to protect against evil spirits by lifting and lowering the sword before the corpse is finally disposed of. (Gangte: 1993).

Khunsumma Kihei, this funeral practice was for those who could not have completed the feast of merits. Further, it's being stated that for those who desire to performed '*Chon*', one has to arrange a communion feast of mithun (*Bos frontalis*) three times. In order for one to fulfil such an obligation, the deceased relatives may kill a goat to replace mithun so a *Khunsumma Kihei* funeral practice could be performed. Here, the mourning period was observed for three days in which the corpse is laid to sit on a scaffold made of *Gopi* bamboo split and was place at the middle portion of the house known as '*Sanglai*'. A fowl with its legs crossed was then tied to the scaffold that eventually struggled to escape and would be reffere to as '*Ah Lap*'. As the people gathered for the funeral ceremony, they would sing the folk song '*Haophut Lapi*' (Haokip: 2019) and the folk lyrics run as:

People loh in bon luongthing sajang alamme

Josa ahei lem lemme

Khumlhan thongte kalhun leh

Kavan sajang kalamme

Lam tolla kahei lem leme

*Naopa ngenten athat ne
Keiman ngete katha ne
Nengte somsiel kasom siel
Ngente kumpon kadum pon*

Free translations,

As the currents of *Peo & Loh* swept the deer (*Sajo*)
So do the corpse of my son, whom I found dead on my arrival from the field.
My younger brother was killed by the *Ngentes*.
So, did I kill the *Ngentes*

Thus, the wealth and richness of *Ngentes* were mine.

Amidst the song, the deceased was adorned with a shawl termed as '*Delpi*', woven by widows of the villages. All the married male members presence at the funeral would perform an act of showing of anger by stamping their feet rhythmically and striking the pilling and walls of the house with a long drawing sound of ho ho ho ho ho. This act of mourning over losses of their loved ones was referred to as '*Lholhiih*' and it would be followed by the rite known as '*Khunsumma Kihei*'. All male members would carry the deceased corpse by using two bamboo poles with a plank above upon which the deceased body was placed, they then moved slowly sideways towards the burial ground while simultaneously producing the sound ho.ho.. ho..ho... This rite was performed for three time, once in a day in which priest's performed the propitiation act of spraying wine twice a day, i.e., one within the house and another at the burial ground. On the third day the rites of *Khunsumma kihei* would be followed by mourning and showing an act of anger against the loss of their loved ones. In this funeral system selection of the grave site was done by the priest with a propitiation by spraying a mouthful of wine (Gangte: 1993). The propitiation for selecting the burial site runs as

*Noija Noimangpa kadoh le
Chung Pathen kidoh tan eite e
Chung Panthen kadoh leh
Naju Ju lhit llhah nalai ta a chun
Vuitan eiti e*

Free translations

When I asked the lord of the underworld (*Noingmangpa*)
He replied to enquire of the God who dwells above (*Chung Pathen*).
When I asked *Chung Pathen*
He was instructed to bury it at the spot where the drops of wine have fallen.

As per the propitiation, the gravesite was demarcated at the spot where drops of wine have fallen. The priest then initiated the digging of the grave by taking it first, thereby marking the work for digging the grave could begin. The walls of the grave were also torched with fire so as to protect against the possible interference of unseen malevolent spirits over deceased body after it was finally laid to rest.

Burials

Burial of the deceased body would be done within the house courtyard with the deceased facing west direction, as the people somehow associate the journey of life and death with that of the rising and setting of the sun. Demarcation of burial site and the manner in which the grave is being dug and the body taken care of during the funeral ceremonies correlate to the people's perception of death and also define the social status of an individual with the community. Their beliefs in the afterlife and the world of the dead strongly shape their actions and worldview during their lifetime. As mentioned earlier, they have different funeral practices as per the deeds and achievements of the individual, thereby reflecting the existing social hierarchy within the society. They hold a belief that once a grave was dug was never to be left unattended at any point in time during the funeral ceremony, as doing so was considered to be a bad omen. However, if it was to be left unattended due to unavoidable circumstances, then the grave was to be covered neatly with thorny bushes with the belief to hide it from possible interference of the malevolent spirits that may bring forth bad omens or misfortune. Burial of an infant in '*Senhut thi*' was done beneath the hearth portion of the house, away from exposure to sun and rain that may defile the body. Burial sites for the cases of the first death within a family or '*Chamlam pai*', were done below the floor of the house eaves called *Lhongnoi*, where it would not be spotted easily. The body of such a death was buried within the same day or night itself, depending on the hour when the individual passed away.

The Thadou-Kuki have two distinct methods of digging the grave, namely '*Ko-Phei*' and '*Ko-tung*'. The digging of graves in '*Ko-phei*' is much easier compared to '*Ko-tung*'. Here, a grave would be dug vertically till a desirable depth is reached. Once the desirable depth is attained, then the wall of grave would be again dug sideways so as to slide in the deceased body. Digging of graves in '*Ko-tung*' would initially run the same as in *Ko-phei*, i.e., a grave would be dug vertically till it reached a desirable depth. From the desirable depth, another grave would be hollowed out horizontally against the walls of the grave so as to just fit the deceased body. To avoid these painstaking and time-consuming process of digging the grave another more convenient method developed in pace of time and increase in numbers of population. Here, initially a wider grave would be dug and upon reaching a desirable depth another narrower grave just to fit the body would again vertically.

Cases of bad death that occurred outside the village parameters was buried away from the settlement area in a secluded place where it won't be easily spotted. However, if the victim of such an incident was brought home alive and later died eventually. Then the body of such a bad death was buried at the corner of the household, deprived of the customary burial practices (Douleng: 2023).

Post-Burial Practices

Most of the post burial practices are closely associated with afterlife belief of the people. As mentioned earlier the people hold a belief that the deceased have to journey to the land '*Mithikho*'. Besides, they also belief in the existence of heaven or land of bliss '*Peugaal*' or final resting place of the deceased soul. In order to prepared oneself for the journey to the land of the dead and reached the land of bliss, several cultural practices and post burial practices are attributed to it. As part of this belief system, a dog would decapitate by the priest as part of the funeral rituals refers known as '*Uilamjong Thana Themthu*' and later the dog head would be hung on the pole erected above deceased grave. They believed that the dog spirits would accompany the deceased and barks away the evils spirits on his journey to abode of the dead. (Goswami:1985). For those who have achieved fame and status, burial of the deceased would be followed erection of a bamboo pole on the deceased grave. The bamboo pole is split in four parts and a nutgall fruit '*Khongma*' is inserted between the bamboo split. The number of nutgall fruits should tally the number of wild game hunted by the deceased. Another funeral post '*Lhan khom*' would also be erect on the grave where the heads of the killed enemy and those hunted animals' heads along with heads of animals killed during the funeral were hung on the funeral post. An additional V- shape branches of a '*Lhe*' tree would also be erected for those who have a tiger their time. People belief killing of a tiger follows bad omen and the tiger spirits awaits the person killing it. To avoid such omen an image of the sun would be curved at the base and its branches curved like an arrow on both sides of the edges. As it is belief that doing so would confuse the spirits of killed tiger (Gangte:1993). For a smooth passage to afterlife and to show of prestige and status of the deceased. The deceased family would also organise a hunting expedition referred to as '*Lhan sadel*' by requesting experience hunters of village, the heads of the hunted animals would be hung at the deceased funeral post (Lhouvum: 2014).

Mortuary Feast

The rite of transition or incorporation among the Thadou-Kuki can be understood in the form of mortuary feast known as '*Kosa*' (Gennep:1960). Mortuary feast is usually arranged with the idea to reunite all the surviving members of the family and also seen a means for the deceased safe journey to the land of the dead. The head animals killed for mortuary feast was also hung at the mortuary with the belief that their soul will be at the service of the deceased in afterlife. Depending upon who's arranging the mortuary feast there are '*Inneite Kosa*', which is a feast arranged by deceased family in honour of the deceased grave and so as to gratitude to those who have helped in digging the grave during the funeral. Second, '*Deichom Kosa*' or feast arranged by the dear friend or close relatives of the deceased. Third and the most important of all is the mortuary feast arranged by the deceased maternal relatives refer to as '*Pute Kosa*'. The feast is arranged in order to strengthened and show the continue shared relationship between maternal relatives and family members of the deceased, apart from being taken as an expression of grief and love to the deceased. (Lhouvum: 2016).

Corpse Price

The arrangement of mortuary feast in '*Pute Kosa*' would be followed by claimant of corpse price or '*Longman*'. This cultural practice of claimant of the corpse price is referred to as '*Longman Kibet*' or '*Sakengkhai*'. When such customary practice was carried by the deceased maternal relatives it was obligatory on part of the deceased family to offer a mithun termed as '*Selpi Keng*' or '*Sel Goul*' as a corpse price to the deceased maternal kin. If the deceased turn out to be a married woman, then the due bridal price or '*Damlou sel*', set aside at the time of her marriage would be claimed along with the corpse price. It was customary not pay bride price in full at time marriage so as to strengthened the bond and love between the husband with his in-laws. Considering the maternal kins of a particular family is unable to arrange mortuary feast due to their economic constrain. It was mandatory for the maternal kins of a particular family to arranged a mortuary feast for the last deceased *Tute* or nibling, referred to as '*Tutop*'. This customary practices of claimant of corpse price were restricted on those counted as bad death '*Thise*', a couple without any male heir and demise of a child without any sibling.

Ecological Understanding of Death

Human have viewed the world and cosmos as divine creation and every structure of the world impregnated with sacredness. Nature was fraught with religious values and various cosmic heiraphony are associate to plants, animals and others, whereby symbolising and expressing particular structure of the sacrality like that of eternal youth, immortality and wisdom (Eliade: 1917). The people deep attachment to the natural environment is also seen in the way they perceive death during their lifetime and in their funeral practices. They believed that certain plants and animals are considered to be the manifestation of sacred powers with a cosmic manifestation and are central to their socio-religious-economic and cultural life of the people (Chongloi:2008). Mithun or *Bon frontalis* symbolised material prosperity and with an ability conferring prosperity, longevity and panacea. The porcine pig with the ability to drive out defilement, darkness, infertility and cleansing of sin. The fowls regard a keeper of time was attributed with the ability to the foretell what is to happen and bring back the straying soul. Likewise, the *Se* tree mundane

standout be chosen from many others trees symbolise health, outward beauty. The magnificent posture structure of 'Gopi' bamboo would project prosperity, longevity of life, fecundity.

The Thadou-Kuki does not merely perceived animals and hunting of animals as a means for sustenance but a way of expressing one status and position in the society. They belief that acquisition of numerous wild animals such as boar, deer, bear, tiger and others would ensure a smooth passage in their sojourn to the land of the dead and such was also considered to be an accumulation of wealth for afterlife. In their funeral practices, as a preparation for afterlife journey the priest would perform a rite known as 'Ui-Lamjong', in which the priest would be poured a wine on a dog head and decapitated it with an invocation. The reason for performing such rite lies with the belief that the soul spirits of the dog would accompany the deceased by barking away all the evil spirits that may hindered the deceased soul in the journey (Goswami:1985). Further, as expression of showing the deceased status an assurance of wealth and fortune in afterlife, as earlier mentioned the deceased family would organise a hunting expedition consisting of experience hunters of the village, which is referred to as or *Lhan Sadel*. In the same manner, the head of the mithun or pig killed for the mortuary feast would be hung in funeral post and the same would also be used as corpse price in their funeral practices.

The Thadou-Kukis would specifically use only 'Gopi' bamboo species to prepared the scaffolding where the deceased was to be laid during the funeral ceremony. The Same split into four parts would be erected as a funeral post on the graves of those who had performed the feast of merits and attained famed and status during their lifetime, referred to as 'Vakot Kiset'. Between the bamboo split a number of nutgall fruit 'Khongma' would be inserted thereby depicting the number of animals hunted by the deceased. A 'Se' tree would be erected as funeral post as where all the head of animals hunted by the deceased and heads of animals killed in post burial practices like that of 'Lhansa del, mortuary feast 'Kosa', would be hung at the funeral post. For those who had hunted a tiger in their lifetime, a 'Lhe' tree with a carving was erected as an additional funeral post, so as the to fool the soul of the tiger. They belief that bad omen follows killing of a tiger and the soul of the tigers awaits to avenge its hunter even in death.

Discussion

The study finds that several belief system, cultural practices and world view was associated with the people perception of death. Apart from the commonly understood classification of death as good and bad death. They have different connotations of death as per their understanding of human life cycle, with a varied meaning attached to it. The death of an infant was regarded as a family sacrificial offering to God, and those counted as bad death and the first death within the family were viewed as something that was undesirable, and such were deprived of a customary funeral ceremony. Kinship and social relations of the people are deeply entwined with their funeral practices. The established traditions assigned each social and kinship relative of the deceased with a specific task. It is the responsibility of the deceased's *Becha* relatives to look after the entire funeral and post-funeral practices. Similarly, the task of *Tucha* relatives was to do all the manual labour work in these funeral practices. Funeral practices of the people demand the presence of *Upa* and in-laws to show solidarity and express the bond shared with the deceased family. Besides, their presence also ascertains the legitimacy and lineage of the deceased within the community. Different funeral practices and burial sites would be demarcated as per their understanding and identification of death within their cultural framework. Eminent persons within the community and of those who have performed the feast of merits have a separate funeral practice. In most cases, burial of a bad death was done outside the village parameters, and that of an infant and those counted first death were buried beneath the house of the deceased, where they would not be easily spotted. Among the Thadou-Kuki rites of transition or incorporation can be understood with the post-burial cultural practice of mortuary feast and corpse price. Mortuary feasts and corpse prices are arranged to strengthen the shared affinal bond and to show the continued relationship between deceased family and social relatives. Ecological sensibility of the people also gets reflected in the way they perceived death during their lifetime and in their mortuary practices. Animal was used for expressing one's wealth and social status and was also closely associated with the afterlife beliefs of the people. Certain plants and animals are believed to be the manifestation of the divine with sacred power and are extensively used in the mortuary practices. As a result, hunting of animals was not solely for sustenance but was very much entwined with their belief system and perception. To conclude, the people's perception of death greatly influences their belief system and socio-cultural practices. We find a great deal of importance being given to the kinship relations and the ecology where they dwell upon in their funeral practices.

Acknowledgment: No

Author's Contribution: *Lunminthang Lhouvum*: Literature Review, Data Collection, Methodology, Analysis, Drafting, Referencing

Funding: No

Declaration: The author has given consent for the publication.

Competing Interest: No

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