

Bianca Son (Mai Mang Khan Cing) Address to Chin in Norway, Frankfurt, and Denmark, July 2006

Because many of us cannot live in our beloved homeland and are forced to live abroad, I have outlined several issues I believe are important for you:

1. Maintaining your tradition and language
2. Understanding your host country
3. Understand “Women’s Rights”
4. Becoming empowered
5. Understand what is happening to Chin women in Chinland!

Maintaining tradition—It is a *Choice*

First it is very important to maintain your traditional culture. Keeping your culture is your choice. In America, a land of immigrants, we have Chinatown and Little Italy. We do not have Polishville or Malaysia town. The Chinese and the Italians simply decided to maintain their tradition. There is no apparent reason other than national pride in their culture and tradition. They are proud of who they are and where they come from. Hence, they maintained their tradition even while living in other—host countries. The Polish and the Malaysians did not maintain their own culture and merged with their host countries. The reasons may be numerous, nonetheless, it is up to you to keep your culture—it is your *choice*.

Culture and language are not “historical” or “stagnant”. Culture and language are alive. They have to be nurtured and cared for—otherwise they will slowly disappear.

Every Day Life

I have visited Chin all over the world and have attended traditional ceremonies such as weddings, funerals and Chin National Day. On these occasions, you were very traditional. But I am not talking about ceremonies; I am talking about every day life. When you wake in the morning, you must speak in your mother tongue when greeting your children. When they come home at night, you must serve them rice. And at night when you put them to bed, recite a Chin poem or sing Chin songs to them.

As your children get older, encourage them to interact with other Chin. They can also have Chin pen pals that are living in other western countries. Encourage them to participate in the keeping of our culture and language by writing poems and songs to be published on the net. This way, they are following in the footsteps of our older generations.

Again, it is 100% your choice. **You are the master of your destiny and the destinies of your children.**

Children Will Resist

Your children, as they grow up in Norway or other countries, may not want to spend their free time writing poems or having Chin pen pals. As the second generation grows older, we can see that many of them are becoming more and more western and actually do not want to speak in

Chin or practice Chin Customs. You must force them. Eventually, they will follow you and realize the importance of tradition.

Aimless People without Identities

If you do not do this, your children will be suffering adults. They will be aimless and without a true or real identity. I can give you some examples of this. When I moved to Germany, I decided to enroll in a Korean language course—I wanted to make German friends. But when I got there, it was full of Koreans. I was shocked.

I learned that many Koreans came to Germany in the 1960s to work in the factories. They had children in Germany and did work hard to maintain their language and tradition. Their kids, as they got older, had no real culture or identity. They did not feel “German” nor understood what it meant to be Korean. So, all these kids were in Korean class to figure out their identity. It was awful. I had lived in Korea for five years. Every free minute, the students would be around me, “Tell me about Korea, how are the people...?” It was sad. They are aimless!

My Case

Do not make the same mistake. My parents made the mistake too. As you know, my father is Chin, my mother is German. I was born in Germany but grew up in America. When I was a child, they did not teach me Chin. In America they stopped speaking German to me. So, when I turned 30, I realized I have no identity. I went to Asia to search for my roots. I realized I am not 100% Asian. Then I moved to Germany to see if I can find my identity there. I have not. I believe I could have felt 100% Chin had I learned the language and practiced the culture. I am still trying to be Chin!

Best of Both Cultures

When missionaries came to the Chin Hills, they brought us Christianity. They taught us many things. We can also learn from Westerners. Keeping your tradition and language does not mean that you should reject your host country’s culture. Adopting some cultural aspects of your host country does not mean you are rejecting the Chin way. It means that you are taking the best of both cultures. My father liked the way Westerners emphasized taking care of their health, for example. He also appreciated the emphasis on travelling around the world. This can only help you!

Making Good Relationships with Westerners

By adopting some Western ways, your hosts will feel warm and happy toward you. How do you feel when a westerner wears a traditional Chin dress? You feel good, you feel honored. Therefore, do the same, buy a traditional Norwegian or Danish sweater and wear it proudly around town. They will appreciate you.

Encourage your children to make friends with Westerners. In Denmark, one Chin girl invited her Danish friend. The Danish girl wore Chin scarves and told me she loves the ways of the Chin. She even spoke a bit of Chin! This way, both of them feel connected to each other without sacrificing their own identities.

Respect begets respect—Do not Violate Western Rules

Try to understand their traditions and their rules. Respect them by not violating them. When I was in America, some Chin killed a goat in the house. This is against the law in the Western world. You must try to understand why. It is not clean and results in disease. In the Chin Hills it is always warm and you slaughter the animals outside. It is all right there, but not here. So, when a special event takes place, buy the meat at the supermarket and simply tell your children about how it is done in the Chin Hills and then later explain to your kids that one day they can participate in the ritual when we can all return to Chinland.

People Are Watching You

Also remember that people are watching you. I mentioned, try to understand your host country. For example, westerners think that anything to do with the body is private. That is, when in public, do not pick your nose or play with your feet. Also, do not remark to Westerners about their weight, “why are you fat?” Or “How old are you?” Such behaviors and comments are considered extremely rude. How do you feel if I walk into your house wearing my shoes? How do you feel if I greet you with a hug instead of a handshake? You feel bad. That is how they feel if you violate their customs. So learn and educate yourself and do your best to fit in with them.

Women’s Rights—Westernization?

Some believe that the issue of women’s rights is a means of westernization. That is wrong. In the western world, women are still struggling for equal rights. American women earn only 70% of what men earn. Politicians and business leaders as well as decision-makers are still predominately male.

The Road toward Equality Is Paved

It is not westernization it is development. It is true that the women’s movement is further ahead in the west. Western women have paved the road for us. We need to take advantage of that—learn from them. So educate yourselves, realize your value. Take advantage of being able to study or to start your own business. Education does not mean getting five degrees, it means reading some books and talking to people about relevant issues.

Do Not Blame Men

Do not blame men. Do not fight with them. We need men--we love men. They are our brothers, our sons and our fathers. We should communicate with them and unite with them. When we fight, it is natural for them to fight back. Instead explain to them that we do not want to be men, we just want them to recognize our values as equal persons. You cannot change others by complaining, you can only change others by first changing yourselves!

The Importance of Women

Now, I would like to address the men. As I said, we love you and we do not want to fight with you. Instead we want you to understand the importance of valuing women. Women are 51% of the population. They can contribute to your family and to your community. They can also help the Chin grow in the world stage. It all starts with you!

When I was a child, I had no idea that there was discrimination against women. My father loved my sister and me completely. When I grew up I realized some people in the world believe women are less intelligent or capable than men, I was shocked.

The Importance of Men/Fathers

The lesson is that you must love your daughters 100% by respecting her as a female and by teaching her that she has value. If she grows up with this knowledge, she will be fierce and capable. She will also respect men and have the courage to work and unite with men. We only fight with those we believe are trying to hurt us.

Many successful women of today have close relationships with their fathers. Research on female achievers shows that fathers who mentor their daughters contribute greatly to her life's accomplishments. The message is clear and simple, if your daughter is to succeed in the demanding world, it is imperative she feels the respect and involvement of her father. Some examples of daughters with close relationships to their fathers are: Hillary Clinton, who might become the first female president in America; The mother of pop music, Madonna was raised by her father; and of course, Aung San Suu Kyi was very close to her father.

What is a "Successful Woman"?

It is important for me to state here that I am not saying all your daughters should grow up to be businesswomen or politicians. Being a successful woman also means being a good mother. My father always told me, "my mother was the one that pushed me to become a scholar". A successful woman will raise both your boys and girls to be strong and to know their value. So, it is a win-win situation once again.

Start with Your Own Families

So, how can you achieve equality in your marriages then? You must work together as a couple. Decide on a division of labor. Many of our leaders have women who are strong and who support the family, even financially. In my case, my husband hates to get his hands dirty, so I take responsibility for the garden and the car. He cannot change the oil, but I can. I cooked for my son for 23 years—I retired! Now my husband cooks every day. It is his hobby. Afterward, it is my job to clean the kitchen. Once in a while when I cook, he will clean up. We decided this when we got married. You must do the same thing within your marriages.

Now I would like to change focus and talk a bit about the WLC's work on publishing Crimes Against Women. As you know, rape is being used against Chin women in Chinland. To support Cheery Zahau's work, I would like to explain the following:

Rape Is Not A "Women's Issue"

Now I would like to address women's rights. Cheery Zahau speaks about Rape in Chinland. Rape is not a sexual crime; it is a crime of violence and a means of power. It is a means of Psychological Warfare! It is the way the SPDC demeans the Chin. It has to do with our rights as Chin!

Rape as a Strategy of War

Rape is an assault on both the individual and her family and community. As well as an attempt to dominate, humiliate, and control behavior. Rape as psychological warfare can also be intended to disable an enemy by destroying the bonds of family and society. For example, the rape of women and girls in front of family members has been frequently reported in Chin State. The terrorism of rape sometimes forces entire communities into flight, further disintegrating community safeguards against rape. Chin women as a result of rape or in fear of rape will often flee, destroying the community.

Rape used as Ethnic Cleansing

In situations of ethnic conflict, rape can be both a military strategy and a nationalistic policy. As an expression of ethnic group hatred, rape of "enemy" women can be explicitly ordered or simply condoned by military authorities.

In the former Yugoslavia, refugees described how public raping of women by military forces was used systematically to force families to flee their villages, achieving the goal of "ethnic cleansing."

In Burma, it has been reported that entire village populations fled into Bangladesh after Rohingya women were raped by the Burmese military.

In Chin State, Burmese soldiers are rewarded for fostering children with Chin women.

Rape is a War Crime

Chinland and Burma are not officially engaged in warfare, therefore, it is difficult to call for UN tribunals. Also, it is difficult to document incidences of rape due to the poor infrastructure and the social stigma attached to rape.

Rape is not reported because of the profound emotional pain and stigma attached to it, fear for the safety of family left behind and lack of ordinary support systems leave women without recourse. Rape perpetrators are seldom, if ever, brought to justice.

Rape destroys the lives of women, of families, of communities and whole ethnic groups!

It is not "their" issue nor is it an issue to be dealt with by the politicians, it is all our concern for they are our people. If we do not fight for the Chin, who will??? The world is not in support of us. We have been in conflict with the regime for over 50 years. If we do not fight this war, we will all lose. So, although we are living abroad, there is always something that can be done. Meet with your community and brainstorm some ideas. All ideas start small. I implore you. Without you, the Chin have no chance...as a people and as a culture!