

# Social Change and Ethnic Identity of LAHU in China

—Ethnic Tourism, “Gourd Festival” and their identity—

3<sup>rd</sup> year student

KAIKAKU Field School

Research Area : People’s Republic of China

HORIE Mio

Key words : ethnic minority, culture, Tourism, identity

## Background and objectives of my research

After the Cultural Revolution, exotic ethnic culture became more visible. All ethnic minorities need to have “culture kit”, for example ethnic costume, ethnic music, dance, festival etc. Lahu, my research people, live across China and Southeast Asian border. After Communist party Lahu in Yunnan identified one of ethnic minorities in China. They are relatively invisible nationality because of the absence of remarkable “culture”, so from 1992 the Lancang Lahu autonomous county made new festival called “Gourd Festival (葫蘆節)”, based on Lahu’s folklore that Lahu was born from Gourd. I’m interested in the dynamism of ethnic identity in such drastic social change, so on the April 2009 I research the Gourd Festival, first time held at Yunnan Nationalities Museum in Kunming, the capital of Yunnan Province. Museum filled gourd motif, men played gourd pipe (traditional Lahu instrument), so many Lahu wore ethnic costume with silver adornment shaped gourd (it’s new phenomenon), and they sang many songs about gourd. After the festival I followed the dancers went to their village, it appeared that so many people have guitars gave from county. There are big factor that Lahu elites want to make *Lahu’s gourd culture* more and more famous. But on the other hand, the economic gap expanded, it seems to depends on whether they carry the *Lahu’s gourd culture* or not.

In Nepal Field-School, I learned National Park conflict at Chitwan that the original inhabitants are prohibited to enter the Park by army. This is also the problem



Lahu women make a road to Museum



Lahu singer sing a song of Gourd pipe

of tourism, and in discussion one answer for their better life is that they join the tourism and gain profit. But we have to ask what is the profit and who are the “original inhabitants”. In Lahu case the inhabitants deeply participate the tourism, but it bring economic inequality in village. In comparison of Nepal tourism, I learn the importance of concern about the influence of tourism more carefully.



Elephant ride in Chitwan National Park



Children do a washing at the liver beside National Park