



Literacy Efforts in Lutuv

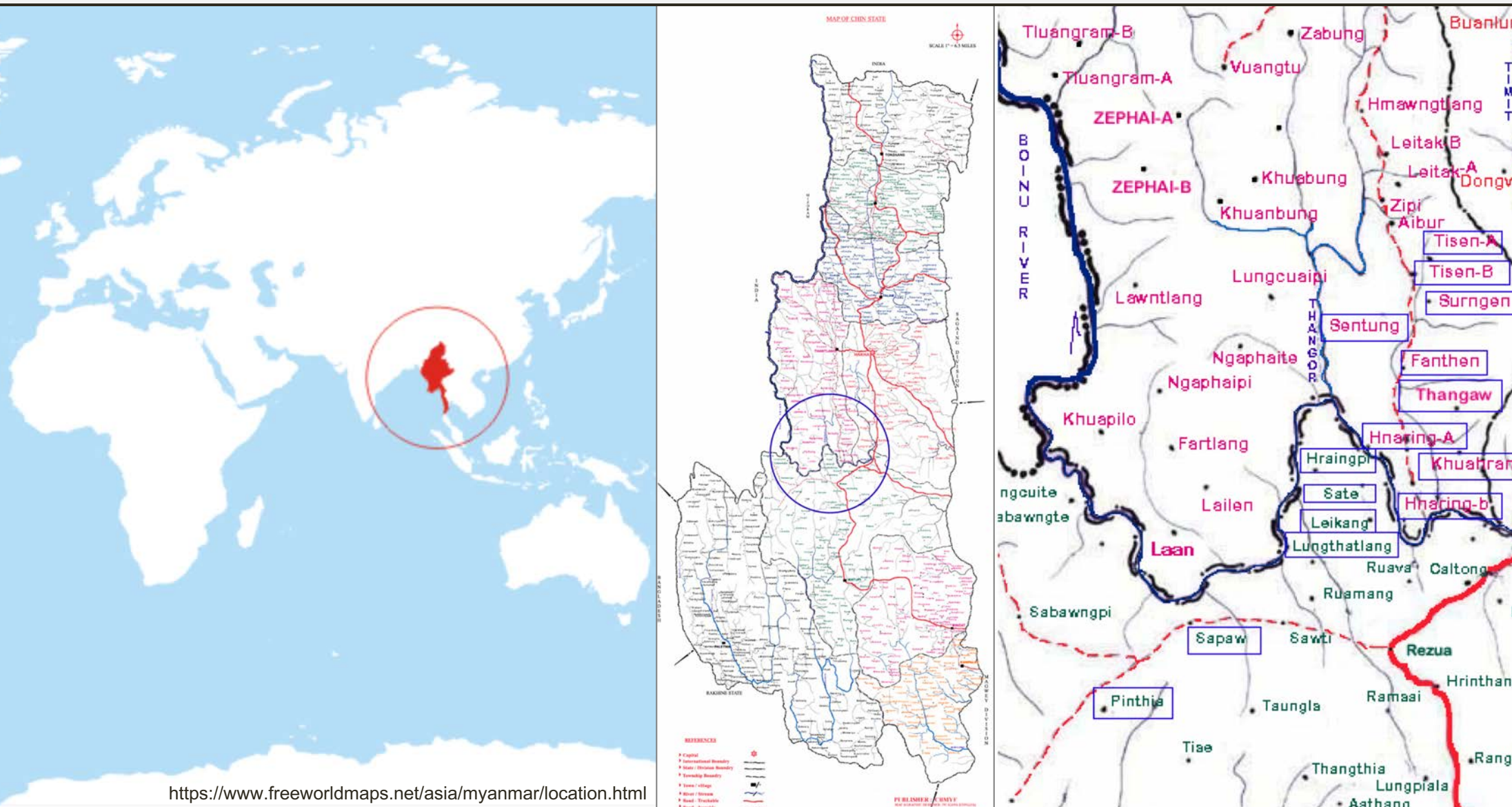
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Background

- Lutuv: Kuki-Chin language from Tibeto-Burman language family [1, 2]
- Spoken by the Lutuv people in Chin State, Myanmar
 - >18,000 speakers world-wide (community estimate as of 2019) [3]
 - In Chin State & in refugee communities in Australia, New Zealand, U.S. [3]



**Lutuv people come from ~19 villages; some aren't shown on map.

Lutuv in Chin State and Beyond

- Chin State: remote, mountainous.
- Electricity and internet largely unavailable.
- Clean water not available in all Lutuv villages.

- Mostly agricultural; main crops corn and rice, also vegetables, spices, fruits. [4]
- Crops mainly for family use, not to trade or sell.
- Largely Christian (>85%) [1]



Hnaring (right), home village of the first author, was granted city status by the gov't in 2017 [5]

Many people have left Chin State. The community estimates ~2000 Lutuv refugees living in the U.S., ~600 in Indianapolis.
As the younger generation picks up new languages (e.g. English), community leaders worry that they may forget their language, identity, and culture.
A Lutuv writing system exists but is not widely used. This project focused on creating children's books to promote use of Lutuv.

Language Maintenance and Summer 2019 Work

LUTUV ORTHOGRAPHY AND LITERACY

- A council of Lutuv leaders approved an official orthography (writing system) in 1972 [6], but it still isn't widely used.
- The community wants to promote wider use of the orthography, but until this summer only two Lutuv books existed: the Bible, and a hymnal.

CHILDREN'S BOOKS AS A MEANS TO PROMOTE LITERACY AND LANGUAGE USAGE

- Providing content that is of interest to children**
 - Youngsters are the biggest concern as they are exposed to non-Lutuv languages regularly.
 - There is a deep sense that *the children are our future*. Fostering love for Lutuv culture, identity, and language will allow us to maintain our heritage for future generations.
- Good learning material for everyone**
 - The writing system is unfamiliar to most people—including adults! They want to learn the writing system, too.
 - Because children's books generally contain shorter, simpler sentences, they make good learning material for those just starting to develop familiarity with the orthography.

BOOKS



- We began with 4 beginner-level books.
- Chose books/topics that were culturally appropriate, 2 with a religious theme and 2 for early learners.

CHALLENGES

- Some words or sentences cannot be translated directly.
 - Ex.: *Alu Lipa*, "They are not the same", was originally titled *Opposites*. Lutuv does not have a word for *opposite*.
 - Other words we do not have: *pink, dolphins, cactus*
- A Lutuv dictionary does not yet exist, and there are no others resources to consult when struggling with words or phrasing.
- Spelling is not yet conventionalized, so it is not always clear how to spell things and advisors may have different opinions.

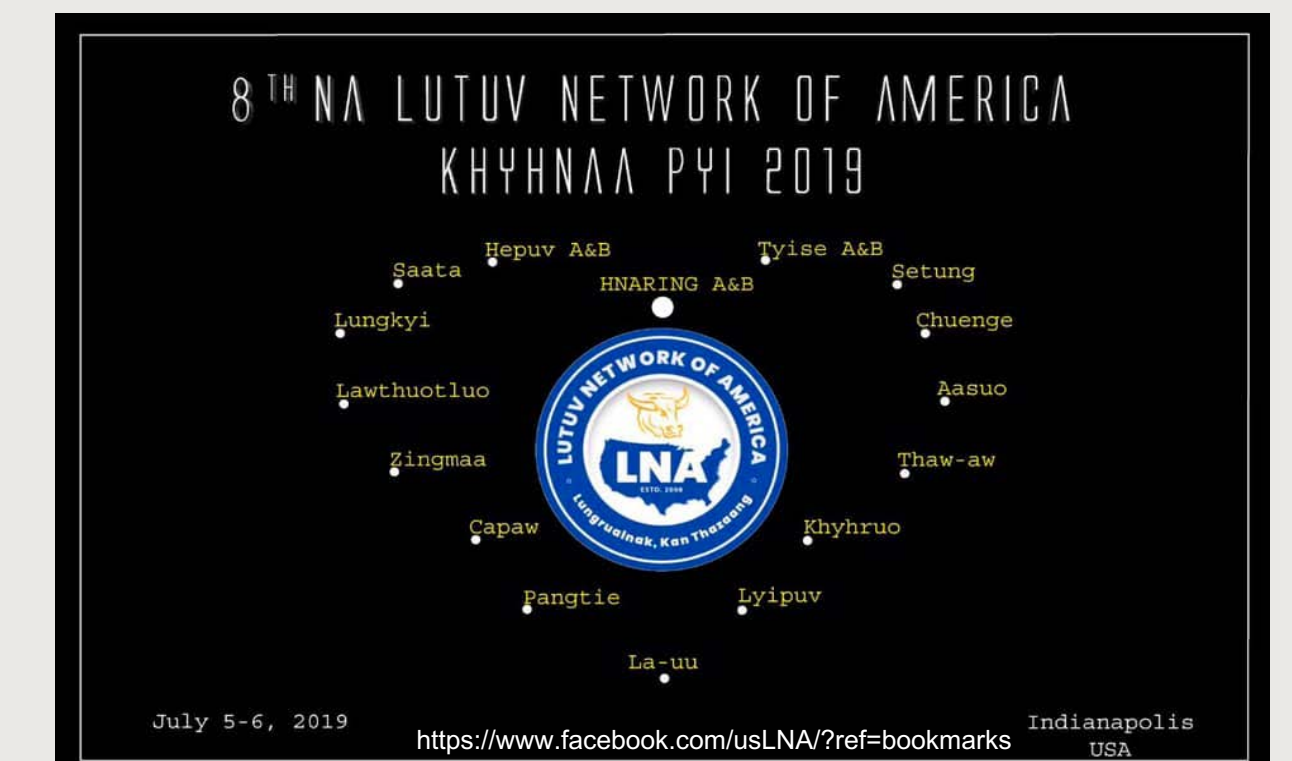
METHODS

- Bloom [7] is a book translation and publication program from SIL International.
- Open source, but can only be used on PCs (not Macintosh compatible).
- Purpose: to promote literacy for minority languages, and to empower communities to create books (relatively) quickly and easily
- Designed for people without training in book writing and publication.
- Provides templates for thousands of books on many topics (ex: 231 books about animals) and for all levels, as well as blank templates for making your own books.



DISTRIBUTION

- Khynaakie is a cultural gathering held every two years (July 2019)
- All Lutuv people in the U.S gather
- Includes traditional dance performances, literacy contest, sports tournaments, beauty contests.
- Mission:** allow Lutuv youngsters to reconnect with their culture and people.
- We targeted this event for book distribution.
- Result: (national) distribution of 500 books
 - 125 copies of each book



Discussion



- Both children & adults showed interest in the books and took copies.
- The kids especially loved the pictures and the colorful illustrations on some books. The design (a thin booklet with simple sentences) attracted their attention.
- The Lutuv community leaders, specifically Lutuv Network of America board members, were impressed with the products and were very supportive of these and future efforts.

Future Directions

- Since handing out books in July, conversation with the Lutuv Network of America board as well as community leaders and members about what they would like to see as the next steps.
 - More books
 - A more rigorous proof-reading system
 - Conventions for spelling, location of word-breaks, etc., are still being decided.
 - Books for different levels of readers; books with more text in them.
- Fostering connections with other people and groups who are working through similar issues.
- Creating new domains for using Lutuv.
 - See my first attempt at a blog at suihnempar9.wixsite.com

References

[1] Eberhard, David M., Gary F. Simons, and Charles D. Fennig (eds.). (2019). *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*. Twenty-second edition. Dallas, Texas: SIL International. Online version: <http://www.ethnologue.com.proxy.iu.edu>. [2] Van Bik, K. (2009). *Proto-Kuki-Chin: A Reconstructed Ancestor of the Kuki Chin Languages*. STEDT Monograph Series, Vol. 8. Berkeley: STEDT. [3] Revolvly, LLC. "Lautu" on Revolvly.com." *Revolvly*, www.revolvly.com/page/Lautu. [4] Scarlis, Christine. "Chin Cultural Profile." *EthnoMed*, 2 June 2010, ethnomed.org/culture/chin/chin-cultural-profile. [5] Elvis, Salai. "Hnaring Khua Myo Pekmi Hunnak Ah Sia 7 Le Vok 3 Leng An Thah." *The Chinland Post*, 7 Feb. 2018, thechinlandpost.info/hnaring-khua-myo-pekmi-hunnak-ah-sia-7-le-vok-3-leng-an-thah/. [6] Paa Liy, Lekhaa. (2013). *Lutuv Caa Thabaw (The History of Lautu Literature)*. <http://lutuvruophahing.blogspot.com/2013/08/lutuv-caa-tuetuv-revfr-bareights-french.html> [7] Bloom [Computer Software]. (2019). Retrieved from <https://bloomlibrary.org/landing>.

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