

Title	Changes in the Kinship System of Diaspora Kachin Groups in Myanmar
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7.1 CHANGING ENVIRONMENTS: LANGUAGE AND SOCIETY IN MYANMAR

## Changes in the Kinship System of Diaspora Kachin Groups in Myanmar

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### Abstract

This study looks at kinship terminology and the ethnic identity of Kachin people living at Anisakhan in Pyin Oo Lwin district. The research aims to explore how the kinship system is influenced by social networks and contact with non-Kachin societies. The research focuses on bilingual language use and how it affects the kinship system and kinship terminology. Data collection was done by elicitation and informal conversation to link linguistic and ethnographic factors in the kinship systems as reflected in the kinship terminology. For the field research, data collection methods included the design of ethnographic research, including documented metadata, key informant interviews and in-depth interviews. Triangulation was used to validate the data. The traditional Kachin kinship system is patrilineal. If they have no children, they adopt both boys and girls according to Mayu (mother-in-law) and Dama (son-in-law). After marriage with other ethnic groups, they also practice adoptive marriage. Functional principles help in establishing kinship groups based on relational status with other Kachin. This work is especially relevant to contemporary social relations. The concept of kinship by marriage among Kachin sub-ethnic groups is very important in their social organization, which is based on paternal side and maternal side that form Hpu-nau (brothers' clan), Mayu (mother-in-law), Dama (son-in-law), when getting married regardless of any sub-ethnic groups. Exogamy is typically practiced by all Kachin ethnic groups. Rawang and Lachid (Lashi) in Anisakhan use Jinghpaw as their common language, to which their kinship system adapts, leading to a redefinition of their classification. For example, in this region, there is only one Rawang ethnic household; they do not know their own kinship terms, but use the Jinghpaw system in their practice.

**Keywords:** kinship terminology, kinship, functional principles, ethnicity

## Introduction

Although its exact meanings, even within this discipline are often debated, anthropologists study kinship as a web of social relationships in the lives of most societies. Kinship patterns include affinal relatives related to one's parent by marriage in contrast to the relationships that arise in one's group of origin, which may be called one's descent group.

There are said to be over one hundred ethnic groups in Myanmar. Ethnic groups, including Kachin nationals, live all over Myanmar. All Kachin sub ethnic groups are included in the name "Kachin". In the stone inscription Nunyannuwa of Nyaung Oo Shwesigon inscribed in B.E.804, the ethnic groups in Kachin Hills were stated as Kachrin (ကချင်နင်း). Though there are some records, ideas and statements that Kachin" originated from 'Kachin' the word 'Kachin' is an etic term that is not included in Kachin language. All the Kachin sub-ethnic groups prefer "Jingphaw" than 'Kachin'. Jingphaw thus becomes an identity that cannot be separated from all Kachin ethnic groups.

A large number of Kachins who live in Anisakhan are those who moved in from Moe Meik and Kukkhaing about forty years ago. Jingphaw, Azi (Zai Wa), Maru (Laovo) sub-ethnic groups are also resident in Aung Thu Kha. The language they use every day is Myanmar because most people in their surroundings are Myanmar. They use Kachin language when they speak among family members or sub-ethnic group members. Though there is some difference among the languages of sub-ethnic groups, they understand each other. The common language of all Kachin sub-ethnic groups is Jingphaw that they mostly use to communicate with each other. However, the kinship expressions they use are not in Jingphaw, the common language. They still use their own terms, instead.

Nevertheless, the Kachin ethnic groups practice their kinship system in the community and it is essential in their social network. They practice a patrilineal kinship system for ethnic reproduction such as Mayu (daughter-in-law side), Dama (parents-in-law side), and Hpu nau (brothers' clan), to determine their social identity.

The specific objectives of this paper are

- To explore how the kinship system structures their social network
- To clarify the sense of ethnic identity of Kachin ethnic groups living in Anisakhan
- To explore the language factors in Kachin kinship terminology in Anisakhan

This paper discusses the kinship system and identity of four out of six Kachin sub-ethnic groups living in Phaung daw village and Aung Thu Kha village in Pyin Oo Lwin Township. Aung Thu Kha villagers respected our efforts as university lecturers to learn about their kinship system and helped us with our interviews. During our second visit, we decided to focus on the Jingphaw, Maru (Laovo), Azi and Lisu kinship systems. We found that Jingphaw language was used as their common language though each group use their own language for their kinship terminology as well. We were particularly interested in how marriage with non-Kachin partners involved the categories of Mayu and Dama, and their requirement to find adoptive parents before marriage with non-Kachin.

It is not easy to find out about Kachin kinship systems in Shanywa. So the decision was made not to select Shanywa as the study area. But some kinship patterns were observed from an old Jingphaw

man. Data on kinship terminology was collected again in Aungthukha Village for two days. It was thus decided to select Aungthukha and Phaungdaw Villages as study area.

### Kinship by Marriage

The following description is based on a Jinghpaw wedding. There are no structural reasons why the bride couple's relatives should not be on friendly terms with each other. Categorization is by age, with elders served first, but with no distinction in gender or kin distance. They pay respect to each other, regarding each other as true relatives. The conception of kinship by marriage among Kachin sub-ethnic groups is very important in their social organization and it is a necessity every Kachin national is expected to abide by. In this case, to pay respects to the paternal and maternal side equally permits the structuring of Hpu-nau (brother's clan), Mayu (daughter-in-law), Dama (parent-in-law) relations. Based on this conception, the Kachin sub-ethnic groups build their social life.

Paternal and maternal parallel cousins are Hpu-nau (see Figure 1, Figure 2). Brothers and sisters born from two sisters are the same clan because the two sisters had to marry from the same Mayu and so the maternal parallel cousins belong to the same clan: marriage is therefore not allowed (see Figure 4). They are regarded as own brothers and sisters and endogamy is prohibited.

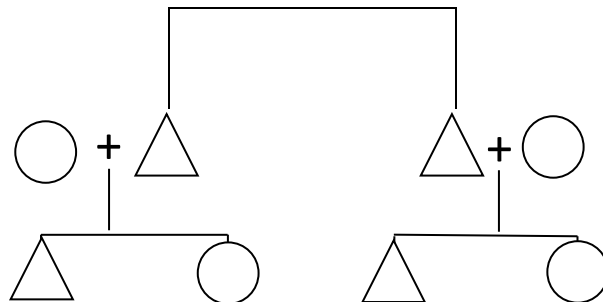


Figure 1: Kinship chats of paternal parallel cousins (or) Hpu-nau

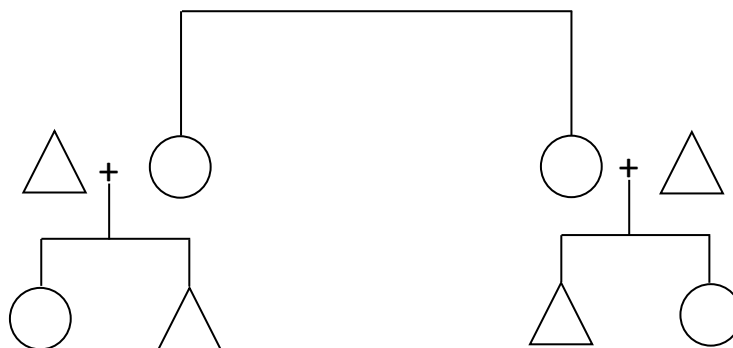
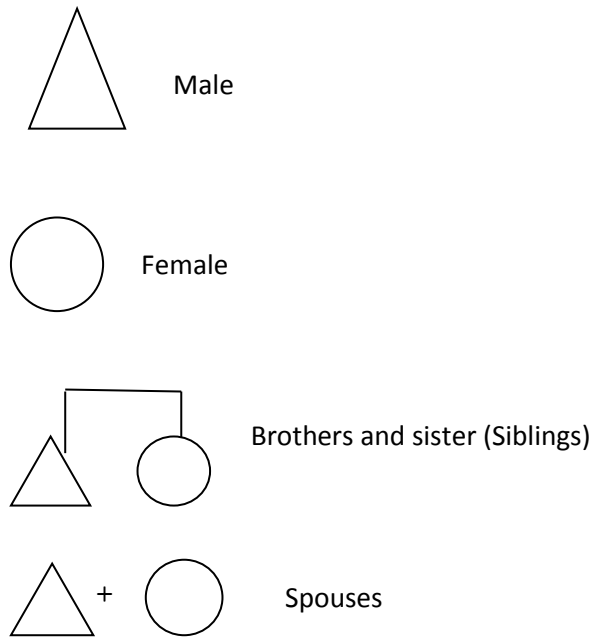


Figure 2: Kinship chats of maternal parallel cousins (or) Hpu-na



Although some cross cousin marriages (sister's son A and brother's daughter B) is prohibited, other cross cousin marriages (sister's daughter D and brother's son C) are allowed. C can marry father's sister's daughter (Figure 3). In cross-cousin marriage between the brother's son and sister's daughter, the bride is called Ganam makin (blood daughter-in-law). However, in addition Lisu ethnic group permits sister's son and brother's daughter marriage system.

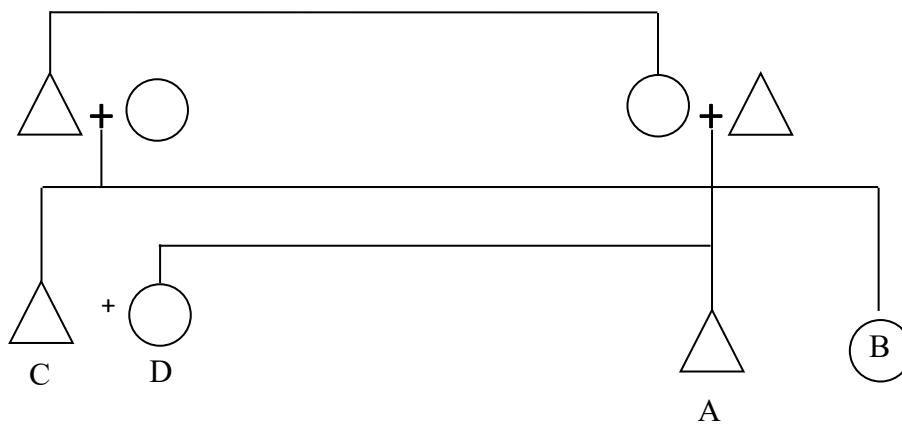


Figure 3: Marriage between sister's daughter and brother's son (C+D); no permission for marriage between sister's son and brother's daughter (A,B)

Therefore, Ego can marry mother's brother's daughter (Figure 3). Ego can marry mother's brother's daughter from the Mayu group (wife-givers, daughter-in-law kinship). Ego from maternal side cannot marry Ego's Dama (wife-taker's) sisters. Ego sisters can marry boys from paternal side, calling it Dama (wife-taker's kindred). Ego boys cannot marry Dama girls (Figure 4).

The reason for the prescription of such marriage systems is the need to practice exogamy, i.e. that Ego boys must not be of the same clan as the Dama (father's sister's husband clan), and Ego boy's sisters must not be from the same clan as the Mayu (maternal side). This is common in strong

patrilineal kinship system. Marriage exogamy is a social identity practiced by all Kachin ethnic groups.

Kachin parents teach their children to know Hpu-Nau, Mayu, Dama and the relationship between their clan and other clans. Thus the children get to know which is Mayu (giver) and which is Dama (receiver) (Figure 4). As soon as anyone meets in Kachin life, they immediately ask for their clan names so as to position themselves appropriately. When they get to know it is the Mayu clan they start calling 'sister-' or 'brother-in-law' and become friendly.

Long ago, Mayu-Dama children were engaged from young, as early as at the age of 10-11. Gifts of sugar, condensed milk and khawpoke would pass from the boy's side before engagement. The beauty of the bride is not important; but the Mayu-Dama kinship link is important, they say. In Mayu-Dama relations, the clan name is important. Beyond the clan name, family names are also taken into consideration. Clan names are for general social relations while family names play a deeper role in marriages between Kachin peoples. The Jinghpaw, Azi, Lisu and Laovo tribes of Kachin use both clan and family names while in the Maru and Lashi tribes, an increased use of the family name has led to exclusive use of family names in both general social relations and marriage as well.

As inter-Kachin marriage relations become more complex from tribe to tribe to family to family, using family names provides a clearer picture of how one is related to the other and through whom.

For example,

Nlaw	dai	hkong
family name	father name	proper noun

A Lashi man's view on the use of family names:

"I think using family names are better than using clan names. No new family names have been given or created for at least 100 years now. Family names are branches of clan names. If only clan names were used in marriage unwanted marriages between closely related individuals of the same clan may occur. But if we use family names as well, we would be able to recognize close and distant relations within the clan, and thus avoid marriage between close relations.

Within the same clan, people with different family names aren't considered as close relations. Those with the same family name are closely related and are, at most, separated by a few generations. That's why two people of the same clan, from totally separate places may marry if they have different family names. But those who have the same family name are never allowed to marry - it's impossible."

In olden days, a widow would be married by the elder brother or younger brother of her dead husband. This is the practice of levirate system. Moreover, the widower is to be married by one of the sisters of the dead wife. This is called Sororate system. The elders used to urge to do so. Besides, once Mayu, Dama has done, further wedding presents don't need to be given again. Though Levirate and Sororate systems were practiced long ago, nowadays, it is no longer a must.

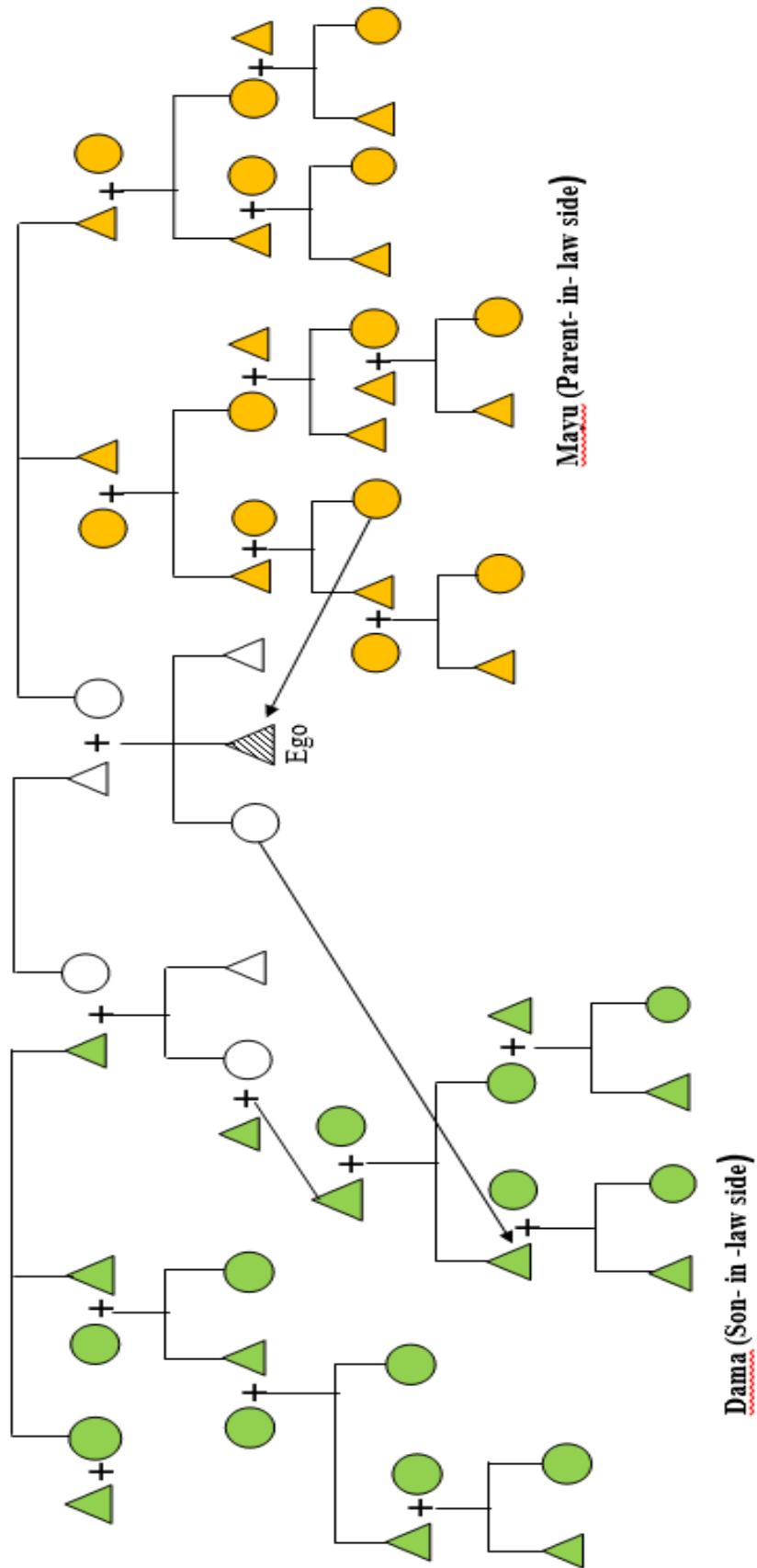


Figure 4: Mayu (Parent-in-law side) Dama (Son-in-law side)

### Kinship by Adoption

Kachin can marry non-Kachin. But outsiders need to be adopted by Mayu-Dama related persons before marriage. This is called marriage by adoption. If the couple elope, they are to be discarded; parents of both sides will in that case not take any responsibility for them. This traditional custom is still practiced by the Kachin without fail.

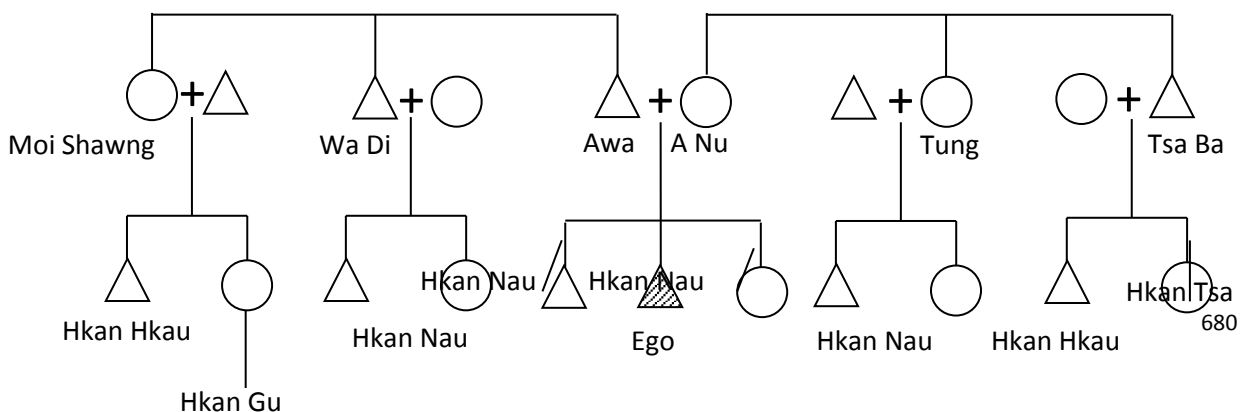
Kachin nationals used to adopt both boys and girls. They especially do such adoption when it involves marrying non-Kachin. The adoption is done by Mayu-Dama. For example, if a Kachin national wants to marry a non-Kachin person, the Mayu or Dama of that Kachin national will have to adopt that non-Kachin girl or boy before marriage. As the sons of a Kachin family are the ones who continue the family line, it is required by non-Kachin men to be adopted into a Kachin clan in order to be married thus ensuring the continuation of the family's Kachin lineage. Sons and daughters of non-Kachin people become the clan of Kachin national. Yet nowadays there is a decrease in the adoption of women into a Kachin groom, as the non-Kachin bride is automatically considered as part of the groom's family's clan. For example, after marriage, the non-Kachin bride of Maran Gam is no longer formerly addressed by her maiden name but as Maran Gam Jan (Mrs. Maran Gam) or a name for senior person (which in this case is Gam, meaning firstborn son) of the groom would be taken into consideration and she would be called the relevant female equivalent in this case, as Maran Gam is obviously first born, (as the word Gam implies) his bride would be called Maran Kaw (Kaw meaning first born daughter).

On such occasion of adoption, four or five elders are invited, offering adopt parents with such things as Kachin longyi or Myanmar taungshay longyi, a pack of rice with various curry, khawpoke, liquor, condensed milk, steamed chicken, beef can (other meat is possible). The adopt father is to give the boy the silver sword, bag; the adopt mother is to give the boy the tumi gun. The adopt parents are to give the girl the traditional costume. The adopted sons and daughters have no right of inheritance. They only have the right for name's sake as clan. Adoption is very scarce because they have their own daughters and sons.

### Kinship Terminology

The kinship terminology considered here concerns that in Jingphaw, Maru (Laovo), Azi (Zaiwa), Lisu ethnic groups who live at Aung Thukha Village and Phaungdaw Village, Pyin Oo Lwin District. Although they use Jingphaw in communicating with each other, they only use their own Kinship terms.

Figure 5: Jingphaw Kinship Terminology





In Jingphaw, the terminology for paternal uncles (father's brothers) is the same as for maternal uncles (of mother's brothers), namely Tsa Ba, without differentiating by age. Mother's elder sisters are referred to using the same term as Tung. Mother's younger sisters are referred to in different terms by age.

Calling father Awa, and calling father's brother Wa Di are just like calling ahpei and ahpeiyi in Myanmar. Moreover, the term for mother is the same as the classificatory term used, namely A Nu (mother is Nu/A Nu/N-Nu) with the addition of a name for senior person such as Bawk, Doi, Lum, or Kai and so on to set them apart according to order of birth. In a sense, it is like calling their mother's sisters Nu bawk (second elder mother), Nu Doi (third elder mother), are also like calling 'Ah maylay', 'Ah maylat' in Myanmar.

Mother's elder and younger brothers have their own separate terms. They are also addressed according to a name for senior person. But as they are holders of their own family name and clan name that is different from the children's own, they are called Tsa (uncle) with the corresponding indicator of a name for senior persons such as Ba, Bawk, Doi and so on. In Ego generation, parallel cousins are called in the same term as Hkan Nau. Father's elder sister, sister's daughter and mother's elder brother, younger brother's daughters are called separately. Moreover, mother's brothers' sons and father's sisters' sons are called by the same term Hkan Hkau (Figure 5).

As per their kinship terminology, parallel cousins are prioritized and called by the same term without differentiating their gender and age. This is mostly seen in the societies that practice patrilineal kinship system.

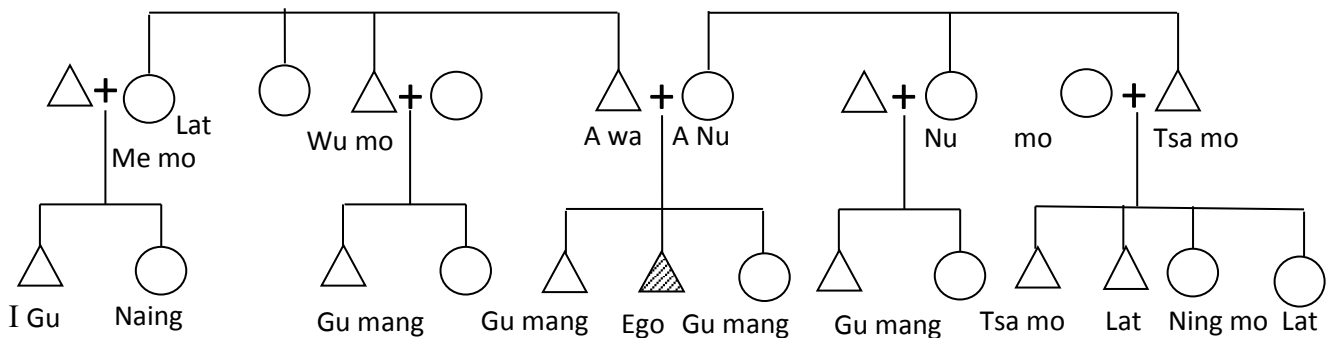


Figure 6: Kinship terminology of Azi (Zai wa) National

In the kinship terminology of Azi (Zai wa) ethnic group, there are terms for father, elder/younger sisters, father's brothers' sons, mother's brothers' daughters. Of them, the eldest are called separately, and the younger ones are called in the same term. For example, the paternal aunt and the maternal uncle, and the children of maternal uncle, mother's uncle's sons and daughters are called in the same term (Figure 6).

Ego's own generation, brothers' sisters and parallel cousins are all consider siblings, without differentiation by gender or age. Cross cousins are distinguished by separate terms (Figure 6). From our point of view, such a system is terribly complex and illogical. The Azi system have strong

patrilineal descent groups. Thus, some of the maternal cross cousins are terminologically merged with the lineage of ego's father.

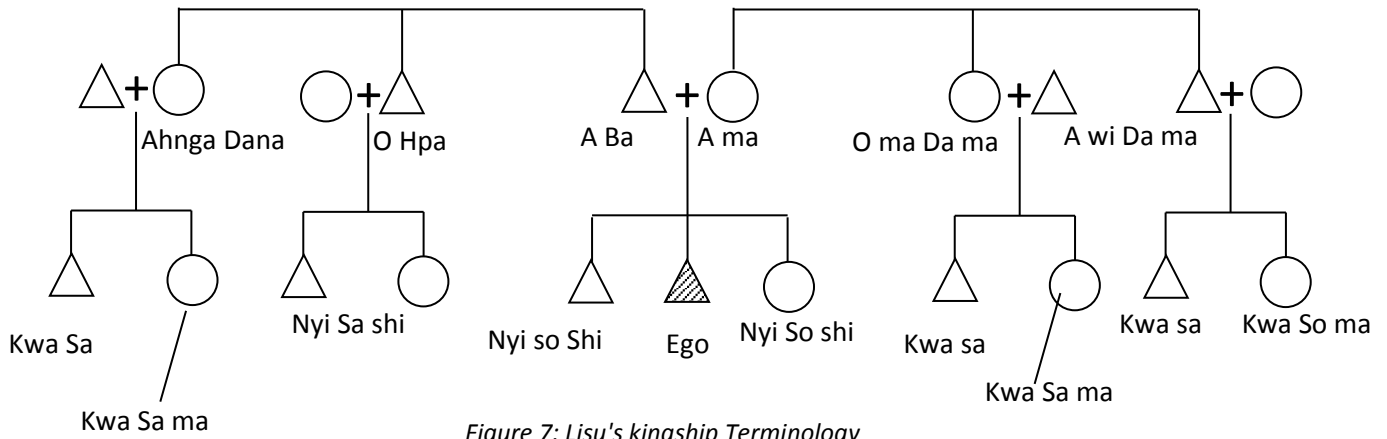


Figure 7: Lisu's kinship Terminology

In Lisu ethnic kinship terminology, a distinction is made between elder brothers and younger brothers of father side for whom different terms apply. Moreover, aunts from paternal side and uncles and aunts from maternal side are separated by age.

In Ego's own generation, maternal parallel cousins, maternal cross cousins and paternal cross cousins are called by the same term, only separated by gender. Besides, paternal parallel cousins are not distinguished from Ego's siblings without differentiating gender being called in the same term as Nyi So Shi (Figure 7).

Father, brothers (younger and smaller ones) are regarded as siblings and are called in the same term as Ego's siblings. These systems can only be found in the societies that practice patrilineal kinship system.

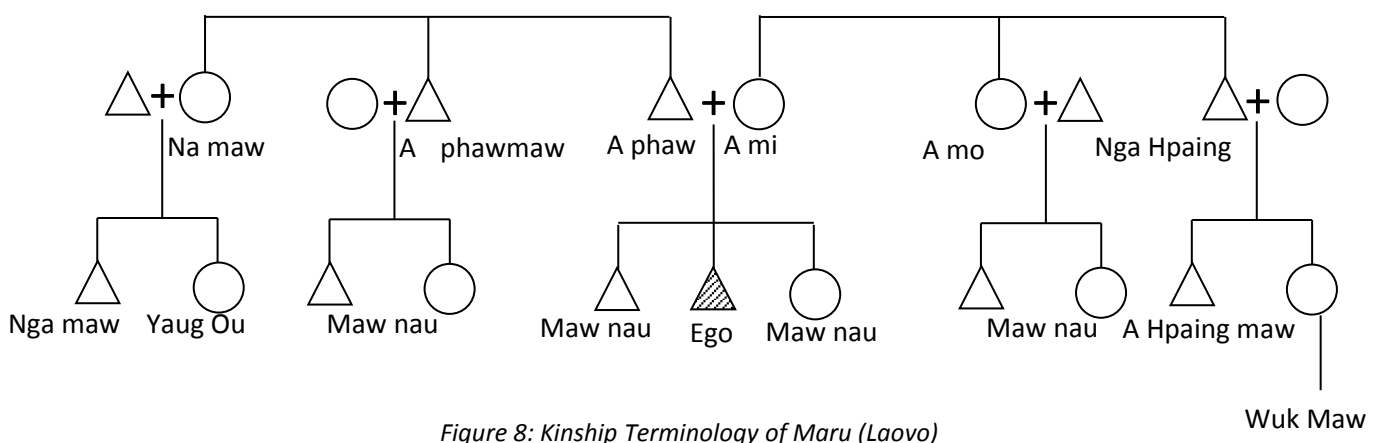


Figure 8: Kinship Terminology of Maru (Laovo)

In Maru kinship terminology, one's father and father's brother are referred to by a single term, but differentiated according to their age, as are one's mother and mother's sister. However, one's father sister and one's mother's brother are referred to by separate terms.

In one's own generation, siblings and parallel cousins are all referred to by the same term as Maw Nau without differentiating according to their gender. They are offspring of people who are classified in the same category as ego's actual mother and father. Cross cousins on both paternal and maternal side are referred to by separate terms according to their gender (Figure 8). Such a method of differentiating is called a bifurcate merging like Omaha system.

Moreover, there are kinship terms that call own brothers and sisters separately by age and by gender. In this region, there is only one Rawang ethnic household, so they themselves do not know their own kinship terms. Likewise, Lacid (Lashi) nationals both use Jingphaw as their common language to express their kinship terms.

## Conclusion

Among Kachin sub-ethnic groups who settled in Anisakhan, paternal parallel cousins are mostly regarded as siblings. Thus, members of the Lisu ethnic group look upon paternal parallel cousins as their siblings regardless of gender for whom they use the same term. The kinship terminology of cross cousins has separate terms, it is observed. The reason is that the Kachin sub-ethnic groups practice patrilineal kinship system not only as a structural formula but also as a functional issue. It is therefore observed that paternal parallel cousins locally known as Hpu-nau are just the same clan, and they are regarded as relatives. Till now, they emphasize social welfare activities of the society, earning a name as social organization. But family names have become important for the Maru and Lashi tribes. This clarifies the increasingly complex inter-clan marriage relations. As the Maru and Lashi are mostly Christians, they have shifted from the more traditional use of clan homes to family names. This has increased the number of legitimate possibilities. A change in the clan concept and how it is applied can also be seen.

The Kachin sub-ethnic groups who settle in Anisakhan are only small groups. Rawang and Lacid (Lashi) ethnic groups are also small groups, and so their kinship terminology has already disappeared. So they use the common language Jingphaw, it is observed. But they are still practicing their kinship system as a common descent identity. The practice of exogamy also provides them with a social identity.

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