

Title	The Cultural Ecological Perspectives of the household in Gangaw Region
All Authors	Nyunt Nyunt Win
Publication Type	Local Publication
Publisher (Journal name, issue no., page no etc.)	University of Yangon Research Journal 2011, Vol.3, No.1
Abstract	<p>The aim of this paper is to identify the cultural ecological interrelationship within and among the households in Gangaw Township. The settlement pattern, household unit and household decision making are studied in this paper. Myanmar nationals and Chin nationals live in Gangaw region. In their settlement patterns, their houses are built of bamboo and with wooden posts and plank floors. These get the walls from their natural environment. Traditionally, the nationals in Gangaw region are engaged in farming. Transportation in Gangaw region has now improved, and the development of the area has advanced, making the local people run convenient stores, own ten-wheel trucks and excavators, etc, get contracts for road and bridge construction and take part in the extraction of oil as per the environmental situation of the locality. As a result, the economic management in the household becomes more complicated. However, traditional economic management is still very much the same.</p>
Keywords	ecological interrelationship, natural environment, development, economic management
Citation	
Issue Date	2011

**The Cultural Ecological Perspectives of the household
in Gangaw Region
Nyunt Nyunt Win***

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to identify the cultural ecological interrelationship within and among the households in Gangaw Township. The settlement pattern, household unit and household decision making are studied in this paper. Myanmar nationals and Chin nationals live in Gangaw region. In their settlement patterns, their houses are built of bamboo and with wooden posts and plank floors. These get the walls from their natural environment. Traditionally, the nationals in Gangaw region are engaged in farming. Transportation in Gangaw region has now improved, and the development of the area has advanced, making the local people run convenient stores, own ten-wheel trucks and excavators, etc, get contracts for road and bridge construction and take part in the extraction of oil as per the environmental situation of the locality. As a result, the economic management in the household becomes more complicated. However, traditional economic management is still very much the same.

Key words: ecological interrelationship, natural environment, development, economic management

1. Introduction

The households are a problem for anthropologists for a number of reasons, historical, sociological and intellectual. World systems theorists have recently focused on the household as the crucial social unit where pooling of different forms of income from household and on household production reproduces labour. Recent marxist and feminist literature gives a great deal of attention to the division of labour within the household, and to the ways that power and production roles change during proletarianization (Moran, 1998).

Therefore, the cultural ecological perspectives of the household in Gangaw region will be discussed and data triangulation method will be used to validate the data. Gangaw Township is situated in North West most region of Magwe District. It is started to form as Gangaw District in 1996. It is situated 214.27 meters above sea level and the Myithar river flows from South to North in that region. In ancient times, the four Yaw townships were Saw, Yaw, Laungshay and Tilin; but the present four Yaw Townships are identified as Kalay, Gangaw, Tilin and Saw. Still the townships formerly included in Gangaw District were Gangaw, Tilin and Saw (Gangaw District Gazetteer, 2003).

In olden days, it was difficult to travel in this region because of the surrounding Pontaung and Ponnyataung ranges. Today, the rural development activities such as building roads and bridges, constructing the dams are being carried out. There are a lot of environmental changes. Therefore, simple random sampling

method was used to describe the cultural ecological perspectives of the household in Gangaw Region. The objectives of the study are:

- To identify the cultural ecological interrelationship within and among the households in Gangaw Region.
- To elicit the livelihood of the local people in that area.

2. Literature Review

The households are a problem for anthropologists for a number of reasons, historical, sociological and intellectual. Our most glaring failure is the comparative study of household budgets, including the follow up resources and decisions about how to allocate and consume those (Moran, 1998).

A number of authors have focused attention on the structural problems that households face in combining subsistence production with market- oriented farming or wage labour. World systems theorists have recently focused on the household as the crucial social unit where pooling of different forms of income from household and on household production reproduces labour. Recent marxist and feminist literature gives a great deal of attention to the division of labour within the household, and to the ways that power and production roles change during proletarianization. Yet others have looked at the changing economic basis of power and inequality in the household (Moran, 1998).

As Laslett (1984) and Sahlins (1972) point out, there is no society in which households are totally isolated and self-sufficient. Households are always connected to each other, and penetrated by other affiliations through age, kinship, gender and class.

We need to see the household as social relations and practices that integrate a number of functions and activities, distributing the products of labour, and allocating work and resources. A focus on integrative activities, on the ways that things are shared, and the ways decisions are made, is logically inseparable from the issue of household boundaries.

The inner workings of the household have not been completely ignored by ecological and economic anthropologists. Attention has been paid to the ways that the labor of the household member is managed and apportioned to various tasks, the ways that property and wealth are managed and transmitted between household members,

the ways that food is apportioned among members for consumption, and the ways that rights to the use of household resources are divided between members (McMillan, 1986).

In particular, the daily livelihood activities and interactions that are the habits of the household is determined in the family by power and resources within ecosystems relating to study capabilities on plants, creatures and their relating ecology.

Economic change leads to alterations in boundaries, in the economic bargains and balances between household members, in the allocation of labour and resources to different funds, and in the economic roles taken by different funds, and in the economic roles taken by different people. By adding this kind of analysis to existing studies of household decision making, households are seen to do much more than passively adapt to changing environments.

One part of the problem is that money, labour, and food are not equivalent within the household economy (Wilk 1989, Maher 1981). As the cultural definitions of costs and benefits change, the balances and bargains that underlie the household economy are also changing. Monetary values have certainly penetrated some households more quickly and deeply than others. A crucial event is often seen when sons who still live in the household take wage-earning jobs. Parents must then decide how to treat those earnings, and reach some accommodations with the son about them. But even among the households where some members earn wages, there is a good deal of variation in how wages, income from crops sales, and subsistence production are pooled and managed.

Ecology also offers tools for describing discrete systems and the ways they interrelate, without obscuring the dynamic and changeable nature of those relationships. A common method is formal modeling, using a variety of graphic and statistical methods to simplify and represent the systems under study (Moran, 1982).

3. Materials and Methods

The study aimed to describe factors on household ecology among people who live in Gangaw Township. (5) Study villages were selected to study in Gangaw Township. There are Shaushe, Zahaw, TaungKhayan (South), MyukeKhayan (North) and Kyaw villages. In this region, the majority of Myanmar National is Bama and the second largest is Chin.

Qualitative research methods are used in this study. The emphasis is put on the use of ethnographic interviewing methods. In this study, four different types of research methods were included to enable data triangulation, with findings from ethnographic study compared and contrasted with findings from in-depth interviews (IDIS), key informant interviews (KIIS) and data from document review. (IDIS) were conducted with 12 informants who were housewives, the fathers who were the heads of the family; 10 (KIIS) were conducted with village elders. Three of the village elders were also included in the in depth- interviews. 12 informants selected for in-depth interviews were representative of different expenditure of household, using material constraints and the rule of inheritance. 10 (KIIS) for household unit and household decision making were carried out. Simple random sampling method was used to describe the cultural ecological perspectives of the household in Gangaw Region. All interviews were conducted in Myanmar (mother tongue).

4. Findings: Settlement pattern

Myanmar nationals and Chin nationals live in Gangaw Region together. In their settlement patterns, their houses are built with bamboo and wooden posts and planks for floors and walls which are available in their natural environment. Most of the houses in the villages are raised above the ground, tall houses to a height of five or six feet. Under their houses, they raise cattle; keep almost all drawing carts and ploughs (plate-1, 2). Villagers domesticate fowls, ducks and pigs.

Teak is not accustomed to being used in building houses in the region as cattle and pigs dispose dung and urine under the houses, and in this case teak is not salt-resistant. "ironwood" (*Xylia xylocarpa (Roxb) Toub*) Pyinkado is traditionally prohibited for use in building houses because when building 'natnan' (house for spirits) of 'Ahmayyin natnan', ironwood is usually been utilized as posts of 'natnan'. Moreover, "ironwood" is very hard to nail, which is one reason for not using it. Generally, Ingin (*Shorea siamensis (Kurz) Miq*) which is salt-resistant is used to build houses.

There are a living room, bed rooms and a kitchen in front of the house which is separately built. They use firewood for cooking (plate -3). In olden days, there used to be the doors and windows without the panes on them. At present, in some villages and towns, houses and buildings built with bricks are quite common. Bricks are being manufactured even in the locality. Not only windowpanes are installed but

also ornamental tiles are utilized in building houses nowadays. In Gangaw town area, standardized housings and office buildings make up the modernized and developed social living style of the townspeople. Some household families run home convenient stores even at their houses. It is observed as the creation of job for the family to earn extra income.

Though traditional farming takes place in Gangaw region, modernized cultivation methods utilizing tractors, winnowers, combined harvesters, and threshers, etc., are being used in MyukeKhayan (North) area. Similarly, the households along the Kyaw village main road run convenient stores due to better transportation and communication, existence of natural oil extraction sites, building dams and extension of railroads, forming the local area as an economic centre.

Accordingly, the price of a piece of land (35ft x 60ft) along the village main road of Kyaw village is estimated to be about 100 lakhs, but the ones that are not on the main road are only 15-20 lakhs. Since the village has developed into an economic centre, it is observed that there has grown a little gap in the strata of society. Nevertheless, the local economic management of the households is just the same.

The Household unit

The household of Gangaw region consists of a married man and woman with their children. The basic family consists of relatives who are from both sides of the family, two mature opposite sex who live in a union recognized by other members of their society, and their children.

When the households of the olden days of Myanmar nationals of Gangaw Township were studied, male offspring left his family at marriage and went to live with his wife's family. Nowadays, a married couple can choose to live either with the boy's parents or the girl's parents for as long as three years according to their economic exploitation. The couple then establishes an independent household.

A local resident of Zahaw village said, "When I was 11 years old, my parents built a new house for me to live when I get married. But I didn't move to this new house after having got married. I have lived with my parents-in-law. Moreover, I spent my life cooperating with my parents' business and I also did my own business. There was no body to help my parents in their business as I was the only child. My wife also helps her parents' business and we have gradually saved some money. We lived with my parents-in-law for about ten years until we got three children. They

sent our children to school and we only needed to give them some money for their snacks. Only when we could stand on our own feet, we moved to our own house and tried to lead a separate life".

Originally Chin Nationals practised Patrilineal kinship system. That is, they counted as relatives only the kin from paternal side. At that time, the male offspring at marriage continued to reside in the family dwelling and added their wives and children to the group. Female offspring correspondingly left the paternal residence at marriage and went to live with their husband's family.

But now, Chin nationals living in Gangaw region regard both sides of the family as relatives. They can choose to reside either with paternal side or maternal side according to their economic exploitation. Though they live with their parent's family, the married couples own his or her business privately.

Now, though father is said to be the authority in family affairs, mother can also express her desires. The father also is now obliged to take advice from his wife. Not only the mother but also her sons and daughters now can give advice to their father on family affairs. So though it is said that he is the authority, practically he has to share his authority with other members of the family.

The father , who is the head of the household, has to carry out the work in order to earn money for his family, neglecting his own benefits, to make his sons and daughters happy and contented, and to be able to live in full swing. The mother also solves the problems doing her own duties as well. The sons and daughters carry out household affairs and have to work to earn a living in accordance with their own interest and enthusiasm. Nevertheless, father, mother, sons and daughters are coordinating and collaborating with each other to make ends meet. To settle the financial problems of the household, the closest relatives from paternal side or maternal side used to take the responsibility.

Household Decision Making

Traditionally, the nationals in Gangaw region engaged in farming. Transportation in Gangaw region has now improved, leading the local people to run convenient stores, to own ten-wheel trucks and excavators, etc to get contracts for road and bridge construction and to take part in the extraction of oil as per the environmental situation of the locality. As a result, economic management in the

household becomes more complicated. However, traditional economic management is very much the same.

Households set their production targets in relation to other households, below their optimum capacity. The mechanical solidarity of the household encompasses a simple gender-based division of labour that is linked to low work intensity. Men contribute to household fund of capital and permanent goods of value, while women do not. Women put more into the household maintenance fund than their husbands.

One part of the problem is that money, labour, and food are not equivalent within the household economy. Money becomes more important in the household. It provides an uncontrolled and objective standard of value that undercuts existing concepts of equivalence.

Some households are taking advantage of new economic opportunities. Peasants in that area grow crops using agrochemicals expanding their cash crop production. They set up small retail shops and buy trucks for hauling freight. Income earning methods of the households are thus slightly different from each other, and their decision-making on income distribution is not similar in each household as well. Some households save money, but some do not. Some households are able to invest their cash income in new economic enterprises. It appeared to be the way they managed their household economics. Households pooled their labour and money and channeled it into productive investments. So, normative value of how household members should behave is the same in this Gangaw region.

Though the husband is the head of the household, such critical affairs as social, economic and daughters and sons related are consulted with the wife before decision-making is reached. Thus, household decisions are seen as inherently bifocal succession. They are simultaneously concerned with their ostensible object, and with maintaining or changing the household itself. Decision-making is thus reached in order to maintain marriage.

Households maintain a series of different funds for a particular purpose. They imply their properties in order of hierarchy. The most basic fund is filled; the overflow goes to the next, and so on, leaving discretionary funds for the last. Moreover, when the crop is in, the small profit fund is used to buy gold and repair their house.

With regard to inheritance, both sons and daughters have the same right. Moreover, for Myanmar nationals, the property used to pass by inheritance to the

youngest daughter and for Chin nationals to the youngest son. The rich parents carry out the process while they are still alive. If the inheritance distribution process has not yet been conducted until the parents are dead, the elder uncles and aunts in the kin used to take the responsibility of the inheritance passing process instead. Grownup sons and daughters in the family have different economic points of view. Cooperation and collaboration among others is also observed in the households.

Figure .1 shows a working-class Myanmar household in Gangaw region. The husband doesn't split his income, but gives all his income to his wife as central fund. He takes some money for his own personal discretionary fund. Part of his discretionary income goes for personal items like beer, tobacco and betel quid and another part goes for periodic household expenses like large bills, furniture or social costs. The wife controls a single central fund which includes most agricultural products, cash from selling crops, and the cash income earned by all members, including children. But decision-making about expenditures from the central fund in these households is often negotiated between husband and wife. They manage to define it as major expenses, housekeeping money and investment. The wife's wage also goes into the central fund and she takes some overflow to pay the costs of substituting services like child care. Children's wages go to the mother, who puts some in the central fund, and returns some as allowance.

Households generally used to saving money. The money thus saved is usually used to buy necessary pieces of land for farming, cattle, gold, etc., so as to serve as 'bride price' (ဖလားခကြေး) on occasion that the sons have grown up and got married.

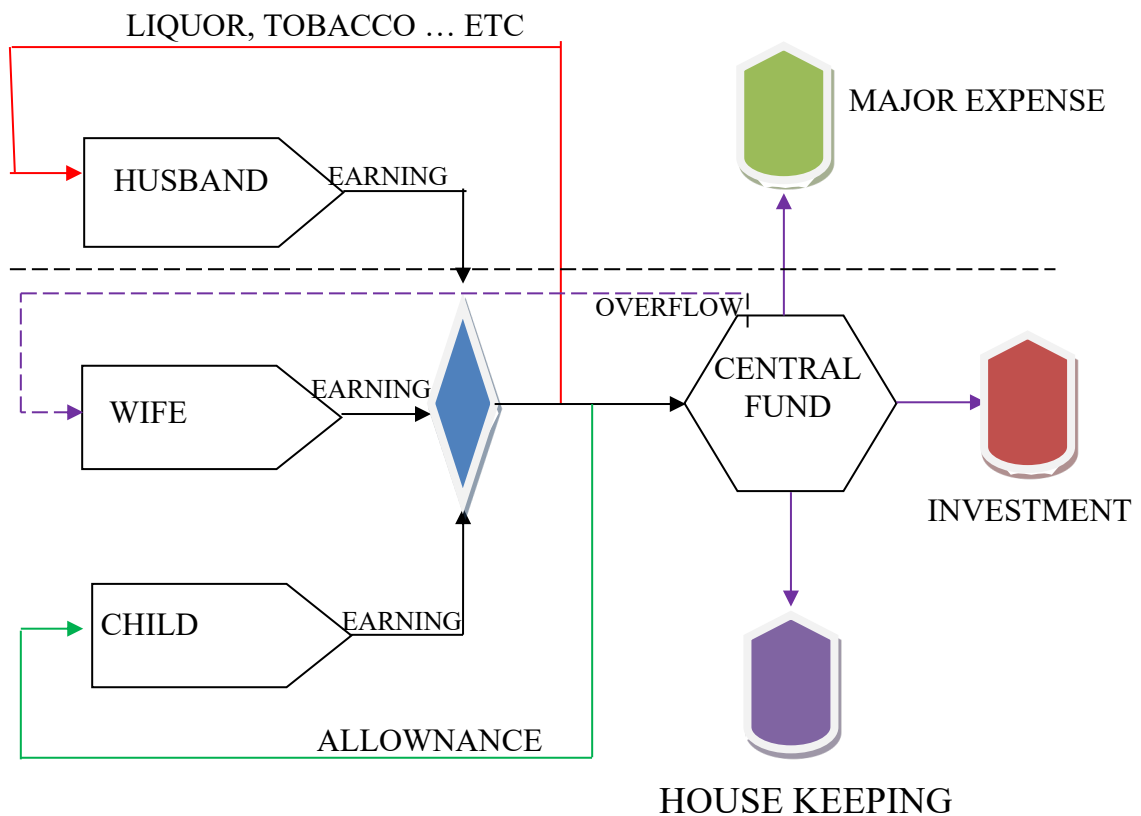


Figure.1: A model of funds in a household of Gangaw Township under the management of housewife.

5. Discussion

In Gangaw region, both Myanmar nationals and Chin nationals used to live in unison and their settlement patterns are just the same. Traditionally they used to build houses, with tall posts, raised above the ground. Under their houses they raise cattle, pigs, ducks and fowls that can still be seen even today, hindering the availability and flow of fresh air and clean environment in the vicinity of the house. In building houses, no windowpanes were attached to the doors and windows. So far to date, we can still see some houses with doors and windows without windowpanes in some villages in the region. The nationals are so good in character that the gates and doors are not necessary to be installed. Furthermore, they are so honest and kind-hearted to help each other in times of crisis and need.

The traditional custom of Chin nationals who live in that region was originally 'patrilineal descent system', practising patrilocal residence system. But having taken up residence in Gangaw region, they happen to accept as the relatives' member from

both paternal side and maternal side. The “bilocal residence system,” the system that allows husband and wife to reside where economic condition is favourable, is practised. However, the system that the youngest son inherits the ‘house’ is still being activated. Moreover, Chin nationals and Myanmar living in Gangaw region have the right of getting married with each other, and the families practise Myanmar (Yaw Region) traditional customs.

When decisions on household affairs are to be made, the father (head of the household) never makes the decision alone; instead, he always consults his wife and children. The mother usually takes the responsibility for the management of the household income.

In the Asho-Chin patrilineal joint families, making decisions to pay for the expenses from the family ‘central fund’ seems to be autocratic. The wife and children ask for their own expenses from the central fund only in times of crisis (Nyunt Nyunt Win, Ma, 1994-96). In the 17th century rural Japan, all household members had rights to the use of houses, tools, and land, but only collaterals of the male household head had the right to be heard in management decisions, and only some patrilineal descendants of the head rights of ownership extending into the future through inheritance, this model carry clear implications for studies of decision making, ranking and authority (Moran, Emilio 1998). Though the households in Gangaw region allocate central fund and distribute among others, it is not autocratic at all. The households in the area practise the extended family system and the wife has to manage the family expenditure. However, the actual expenses of the household are controlled and agreed upon by husband and wife together.

At the present time, economic extensions have taken place in the region due to improved transportation and communication, increased yield in farm products because of building dams and the emergence of local oil extraction sites. Nevertheless, father as well as grown-up children have to submit all their income earnings to mother. It is therefore obvious that the traditional custom is still being practiced. The observation here is that the household pattern has been based on the ethical code of conduct rather than the interest of individual family members: parents, sons and daughters, and sisters and brothers.

6. Conclusion

In striving for the convenience of basic human needs of the household, the traditional houses should be built using posts of sawn timber in place of log posts. Besides, alternative fuel energy should be utilized instead of firewood; fuel-saving mud stove utilization practice should also be encouraged as well; and tree plantations should also be conducted systematically so that the trees and forests in the vicinity will not be degraded.

In line with the development of the locality, household income happens to increase and thus economic management becomes complicated. Increase in per capita income and household income may assist the development of the locality. Nevertheless, it is required for the youths to pay respect to the elders in the society, and it is also important to work together, participating in planning and decision-making processes.

The Chin nationals who reside in the region have changed their cultural attitudes and manners and adapted Myanmar (Yaw Region) traditional customs accordingly. The study thus attempted to emphasize on the household structural problems, their personalities, change of pattern in the production system and kinship phenomena to understand the socioeconomic atmosphere of the region.

Acknowledgements

The researcher would like to heartily acknowledge Sayamagyi Dr Mya Mya Khin, Professor of the Anthropology Department, Yangon University and all the teachers of Anthropology Department, Yangon University. And again, the researcher would like to acknowledge the help of the following persons who have rendered very possible support;

- The chair persons of Peace and Development Council, Magwe division, Gangaw Township;
- Village Peace and Development Council and the villagers who have answered my questions in collecting the data for this paper.

References

- Laslett, Peter (1984). The Family as a Knot of Individual Interests. In Households: Comparative and Historical Studies of the Domestic Group. Edited by R. Netting, R. Wilk and E. Arnould, pp.353-382 Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Maher, V. (1981). Work, consumption and Authority within the Household: A Moroccan Case. In of international Perspective. Edited by K. Young, C. Wolkowitz and R. McCullagh, pp.69-87. London: CSE Books .

McMillan, Della. (1986). Distribution of Resources and Products in Mossi Households. In food in Sub-Saharan Africa. Edited by A. Hanson and D.McMillan. Boulder. Lynne Rienner.

Moran, Emilio (1998). The Ecosystem Approach in Anthropology, The University of Michigan press, United State of America.

Moran, Emilio (1982): Human Adaptability: An Introduction to Ecological Anthropology. Boulder: Westview Press.

Sahlins,M (1972). Stone Age Economic. Aldine: Chicago.

Wilk, Richard (1989): Houses as Consumer Good: The Kekchi of Belize. In the Political Economy of Consumption. Edited by Ben Orlive and Herry Rutz . Latham, MD: University press of America.

ခရိုင်ပြန်တမ်းပြုစုရေးကော်မတီ (၂၀၀၃) Gangaw District Gazetteer, ဂန့်ဂေါခရိုင် အထွေထွေအုပ်ချုပ်ရေးဦးစီးဌာန၊ ဂန့်ဂေါမြို့။

ညွန့်ညွန့်ဝင်း၊မ၊(၁၉၉၄-၉၆) ပဲခူးတိုင်း၊ပန်းတောင်းမြို့နယ် ပတ်ဝန်းကျင် ကျေးရွာများရှိ အရှိ(မြေပြန့်)ချင်းတိုင်းရင်းသားတို့၏လူမှုရေးဖွဲ့စည်းပုံ။ မဟာဝိဇ္ဇာကျမ်း၊ ရန်ကုန်တက္ကသိုလ်။



Plate- 1: Cattle Under The House



Plate-2: Cattle Under The House



Plate-3: Firewood for Cooking