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The Tarons In The Changing World

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Abstract

The Tarons national is found mostly in *Karong* village, *Naung Mon* township, *Putao* division, in the northernmost edge of Myanmar. It belongs to the Rawang tribal group and they are strangely short in height. There are only five genuine Taron in Myanmar. The others have intermarried with other tribes like the Htalu tribe because they practise patrilineal kinship system. These mix Taron people are of ordinary height. They have high rate of infant mortality but life expectancy increase considerably is they survived. Their main occupation is *Taungya* farming, hunting, and honey collection. The Tarons are expect hunters because they hunt for all around the seasons. They work only to provide for the family. They do not sow, hunt or keep things for commercial purpose. To the Tarons their life is complete if their family is well-provided.

1. Introduction

The Taron national ethnic groups live in *Naung Mon* Township, *Putao* Division, in *Kachin* State which is in the northernmost edge of the Union of Myanmar. On the north and east of *Naung Mon* Township is the people's Republic of China and to the west, it shares a border with India. In the south, there is a car road from *Putao* to *Machanbaw* and *Suprabaun*. It is surrounded by snow-capped mountains and deep river valleys. The high mountain ranges are covered with ever-green forest with valuable and rare flowers. It is a region of natural beauty. It is the habitat of many rare and world-known animals like the Tarkin, Bluesheep, Red coral, Muskdeer and the red panda. The natives believe that it also has many strength-giving herbs and roots. There is also an insect called "*Shepati*" which they believe of having health value. People living around *Naung Mon* township are mostly *Rawang* and *Lisu*, *Jangphaw* and a few Tibetans. These people belong to the Tibeto-Myanmar group and lived in the plateaus of Central Asia and moved south along the river valleys of *Yangse* and the *Hohango* in Western China. Slowly they have reached Myanmar and became tribes of the places they settled in.

The Taron national belongs to Rawang tribal group and originally came from the region of Taron river valley in the China. They came along the *Hta-La* stream and settled in the present place *Arundam* (*Karoung*) region. *Karaung* village is on the eastern bank of *Adumlawun* stream and inhabited by Htalu, Taron and a few Tibetans. *Karoung* village is 55 miles distant from *Pannamdim* town if you go along the *Maykha* river valley. *Karoung* is a Taron word for "village". By looking at the village name, it shows that in the past the Tarons must have power. Later as the population increases the Htalu tribes became more powerful and named it *Arundam*. They came to be known as Taron tribes because they lived in the upper reaches of the Taron river valley. It means people who live in the upper part of the river and use the *Rawang* language. Besides the short height Tarons, we also can see Tarons of ordinary height in that area. Now the Tarons living in Myanmar are usually of ordinary height and only a few are dwarfs.

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2. Aims and Objective

The Union of Myanmar is inhabited by various national ethnic groups, the *Kachins*, the *Kayas*, the *Kayins*, the *Bamas*, the *Mons*, *Rachines*, the *Shans*. Today, we are building a modern developed and progressive nation. It is the most important requisite that the national ethnic group in Myanmar must be united to gain this goal. Each national group must learn to understand and respect the traditions, customs and habits of the other national ethnic groups. So the Anthropology department staffs have decided to make field trips to these national groups with the following five objectives.

- To strengthen the national spirit of the Union of Myanmar by bringing out the cultural traditions and customs of the national groups.
- To receive and preserve in time the almost extinct cultural traditions, and by suitable modernization to develop the social and economic conditions of the people.
- To solve the problems arising out of the social, economic and political situations and relationships.
- To include in the schools syllabus, and teach the school children about the cultural traditions and customs of these national groups that have been reached.
- To prove to all nationals inhabiting in the Union of Myanmar are descended from the Mongoloid race (yellow).

3. The Research Journey Period

The Yangon University Anthropology Research Team started their journey on 7.3.2003. We left Yangon for Myitkyina by air and slept the night in Myitkyina. On 8.3.03 we left Myitkyina for Putao by air and stayed in Putao from 8.3.03 to 15.3.03. Here we made enquires about the journey forward, collected data concerning the research and made preparations for the research project. On 16.3.03 we left Putao by car for *Htawsdum*. From there, we crossed the Maylikha river by a small boat to *Salumdum* village. Our journey on foot started from this village. We crossed *Namhti* mountain and rested the night at *Namhti* camp. On 17.3.03 we continued on foot from *Namhti* mountain climbing 6,000 ft high *Babulon* mountain and reached *Maza* camp to *Naung Mon* reaching there at mid-day and rested for the night there. The hiking journey from *Putao* to *Naung Mon* was (46) miles. We experienced both the joy of the beauty of the environment and suffered the hardships of the journey. On the 19.3.03, we had to search for food (rice) for the journey, medicines ropes and porters.

We came to realize that on this journey we would have to depend on our own feet, bear hardships and have courage to achieve success. It gave us confidence and spiritual strength. This Taron ethnic group research gave us many experiences for self-reliance. Pannandin town is 43 miles from Naung Mon. To the west of Pannandin from 55 miles along the Maykha river is Karoung village where the Taron tribe settles in, it is on the eastern bank of Adunglaung stream. *Dazundum*, *Tasuhtu*, *Karoung*, *Tahundum* villages are covered with snow when they have snow showers. On the journey, from Pannandin to Karoung, we crossed eleven bridges; two with steel ropes and wooden floor, eight with steel ropes and Bamboo floor and one with cane ropes and bamboo floor. We managed to cross over mountain ranges, deep ravines and rivers. It took all our physical and moral strength to overcome these hardships. We had to continue sometimes cleaning the trail of bushes and branches by

ourselves Besides the hiking up is most disheartening full of sand-flies, leeches and insects. Although we met the deadly mountain cobra and viper three times on our way, we came away unscathed from these dangers. On our return journey, from Naung Mon to Putao, we traveled by car, from Machanbaw. The car road from Naung Mon to Putao is 76 miles distance and can be used only in the dry season. The research journey lasted 38 days.

Observation and Findings on the Journey

Although the main research concentrated on the culture; tradition and customs of the Taron national. We had the opportunity to meet other nationals living in their villages throughout the journey. They were Rawang national, Htalu national, Taron-Rawang national and Taron-Htalu half-caste national. The aged Tarons were able to give us much knowledge of their traditions and customs. Besides we met the Tibetan tribes in *Htawadum* village and we were able to observe them.

Family Organization

The Taron family organization is Extended Family system. It is made up of the old grandfather and old grandmother of paternal line and the sons based families. When the eldest son marries, he still lives with his parents by bringing his wife home. When the second son marries, he also lives with his parents. Only when the second son gets married or when the eldest son's family has go the first son or when thy proper enough to have separate living, the eldest son's family can move to another place. Although the sons live together with their parents, their livelihood is separate from the family. When the girls of the family marry, they have to go away with their husbands and live with the parents-in-law. Likewise, when sons get married, they take their wives to their houses, in accordance with their custom of the **patrilocality residence**.¹

The father as the head of the house has the greatest authority. He manages the household with justice, so that all the members of the family fear, love and revere him.

Although the father is supposed to be the final authority in everything concerning the family, the mother has the right to give her view in the family affairs. So the father often consults the mother and the sons and daughters. In reality the father does not asset his authority alone. But the family can only give suggestions and the final authority still rests on the father. When the father dies, the eldest son inherits the authority, until he sets up a separate household. Then the second son assumes the responsibility. In the event of having no sons, the mother take up the responsibility, helped by her husband's brothers. So they live as Patrilineal Extended family type.

In the past, a Taron could have three to five legally married wives. Once there was a village headman called *Ah-Thon-Laung-Phon*, who was a famous hunter and brave fighter. He had five wives. Although they all live together under one roof, each wife is given a room and a fire place for herself. So a man with two wives will have a two rooms house, the man with five wives will have a five rooms house. Taron community of former days had the custom of Polygynous Family. Each family has a separate business of their own. But in building or repairing a house all the families have to help which show their unity in this living together system.

The first wife has the greatest authority and she has the right to reprimand al the other children. The youngest wife is the one he takes out to ceremonies or to the public place. The Taron family has to struggle very hard fro their daily needs, so that they have very little time for leisure. As soon as day breaks, they have to get up early and cook breakfast. It is millet or

corn or yams. They drink plain tea or drink some fermented drink they have made. Then the whole family have to go and work in their *Taung-ya*. Even the ten-year-old children have to work in their *Taung-ya*. The younger children also accompany the elders who either carried them or walked alone. Sometimes they may leave at the *Taung-ya* after the morning's hard labour. When they are not working in the *Taung-ya*, they do not cook the afternoon meal. Instead they eat the vegetable like cucumber, yams, cassava, and fruits for nourishment.

They have to work very hard in the *Taung-ya* till dark. So they usually eat their evening meal too in the *Taung-ya*. When they have any meat got by hunting, they eat it by grilling it on a fire. The dried meat is usually eaten boiled with a lot of chilies and salt. After the evening meal, the Tarons usually sit around the fire and talk while they work. The women cool food for the pigs and men prepare the bow for the next day's hunt. They make the strings from the bow. They seldom visit other houses in this free time because they are too tired after a day's labour for their daily food. They must fall sound asleep for the night.

Kinship System

In observing the Kinship System of the Taron people living in Karoung village, we see two kinds of Kinship. They are kinship by blood and kinship by marriage. In kinship by blood, the kinship is traced by following the kin only from the paternal side. It is **patrilineal descent**¹. The kinship is not traced through the mother's clan. So **matrilineal descent**² is absolutely not found. They practise Unilineal kinship system. When a woman marries, she has to live with her husband's family and her children become her husband's clan. Tarons are the descendants to the Rawang which can be divided into five sub-tribes as follows:

Malang

Matwang

Lungmin

Tangsar

Daru

Darus can be sub-divided into seven sub-groups. They are:

Ahkupai

Anmpai

Ze-wang

Rani

Dashu Wang

Hta-Lu

Taron

Taron can be divided into two clans. They are:

Sandum and

Luamdan

Two clans of Taron group lived in the Taron river basin of China on the rock mountain of "*Lon-pin-la-kha*". The *Sandum* clan lived on the peak of the (Arundam) where Hta-Lu-tribes live. We learnt from hundred years old Hta-Lu national *U Dazan Abai Sin*, who lived in

Gawaing village that the first persons to arrive were *Takasun* and *Ah-thon-laung-phone*. Now there are only five genuine Tarons in Karoung village, four Luamdum clan are brothers and sisters. They were originally eight of them and four had died.

No.	Name	Age	Height	Remarks
1	Luamdum Nan-hsein	60	4 feet 3 inches	1 st daughter (alive)
2	-	-	-	1 st son (dead)
3	-	-	-	2 nd daughter (dead)
4	Luamdum Dee	-	-	2 nd son (dead)
5	Luamdum Sin	-	-	3 rd son (dead)
6	Luamdum Mar-hta	50	4 feet 3 inches	3 rd daughter (alive)
7	Luamdum Darwi	45	4 feet 5 inches	4 th son (alive)
8	Luamdum Nwin	43	4 feet 2 inches	4 th daughter (alive)

The first daughter *Lundum Nan-hsein* has a little daughter *Chan-yein-nin* but who the father is not mentioned. The little girl is now (13 years old) and by looking at her name, the father must be a Hta-Lu national. The names of the first son and the second daughter were unknown since they died young. They could not tell the ages of the second and third sons, *Luamdum Dee* and *Luandum Sin*. The third daughter *Luandum Mar-hta* is a spinster, assumed to be retarded. The fourth son *Luamdum Darwi*, married a Hta-Lu woman (*Chan-ye-e-du-na*) and had a son who died at the age of two months. She also died about two years ago having fallen from the mountain into the ravine while gathering honey. She was (32) years old at the time of her death. The fourth daughter *Luamdum Nwin* also is a spinster. The Taron nationals practice the patrilineal system, so only the sons can inherit the clan name. The Taron men learn the names of their male also is a spinster. The Taron nationals practice the patrilineal system, so only the sons can inherit the clan name. The taron men learn the names of their male ancestors orally (by rote) to remember their lineage. (Luamdum Darwi's lineage chart is attached).

Luamdum Htein-bar and *Luamdum Phu-saul* both married Hta-Lu women and the children become half-caste Taron and Hta-Lu. *Luamdum Du-ye-e-shun*, the son of the first wife was to be married. To keep the tribal blood pure they had to find a wife from the same tribe. So the lesser wife went to the Taron valley and brought back the bride. Her name was *Dazondan Nan-sar* of *Dazondon* clan. The four pure Tarons in Myanmar today are the children of Luamdum Du-ye-e-shun and *Dazondan Nan-sar*, *Sondum Son-wan* (100 years old) is of *Sodum* clan, and the only surviving pure Taron today. (*Sondum Son-wan's* lineage chart is enclosed.)

Marriage

The relatives of the bride and the bridegroom are quite friendly towards each other. There are a few prohibitions concerning marriage. They must not marry a man or a woman of the same clan. For example a Luamdum male cannot marry a Luamdum female and a Sondum

male cannot marry a Sondum female. But a sondum man can marry a luamdum woman and a luamdum man cannot marry a sondum woman. That is why the Taron tribes do not have **endogamy**¹ but practice the **exogamy**² system of marriage.

The daughters of the brothers can marry the sons of the sisters. It is cross cousin marriage. In Taron language, it is called *mayousan*³. But on the other hand a brother's son cannot marry a sister's daughter. In Taron language, it is known as *phan-htan*¹. Besides any son or daughter of elder brother cannot marry any son or daughter of young brother. Likewise no son or daughter of elder sister can marry any son or daughter of younger sister. It is Parallel cousin marriage and prohibited. (The chart of marriage system is attached).

Naming ceremony

The Taron national like the other Rawang tribes have the naming ceremony of their children. They list the boys and girls separately according to age and give their names.

Boy/ girl serial order list according to age

	Boy	Girl
First	Phone	Nin
Second	Dee	Nyin
Third	Khin	Chan
Fourth	Sin	Nwin
Fifth	Min	Sanin
Sixth	Phee	Tangan
Seventh	Yone	-

To the above age serial order name is prefixed the clan name, e.g., the name "Luamdum Sin" means he is the forth son and belongs to Luamdum clan. Besides the above custom of naming a child, they also have the custom of naming a child according to the dreams of the father or the mother. Sometimes, they may consult shaman for a suitable name according to fortune telling. Whatever other name the child may be given the name given according to age is usually accepted.

Education

Karoung village has one primary school with KG pupils and 10 first standard pupils. Because of difficulty in getting a teacher, the school's assistant clerk is teaching the children. The building is leaning to one side a about to fall to pieces. There are no desks for the pupils and no office furniture. There are twelve middle school Taron pupils who go and attend school in Putao. We see that the Tarons are paying attention to educating their children. They need to help of the authorities concerned to see that these Taron nationals receive higher education, be trained to take responsibility and return to their native region for development of their tribe.

Health

The most prevalent diseases are Malaria ^{and} worms. They also suffer from loose bowels, intestinal diseases and goitre. In a family there at least six to seven children and at most ten to twelve children and the oldest children look after the younger ones. There is no

midwife to deliver the child. The mother has to deliver her own child. They are in great need of health education. So infant mortality is high but if they survive, they live to a ripe old age. They also have to work till old age. We met the oldest Taron aged woman, Sondum Son-wan, who is 100 years old.

Taron nationals die more from accidents than from sickness. They fall down from the mountains or into the ravines of the Maykha river valley. They gather the fruit and roots of medicinal plants for use as domestic medicine. *Magit* bulbs and honey are used as strength giving tonics. The *shepati* (a plant like insect) is mixed with honey to take as health-giving tonics. Although they have a lot of traditional medicines they prefer using modern medicine which is hard to get. So they have to use their own traditional medicine. Their domestic use medicines are *Khantauk* roots, Mountain goat oil *etc.*

The Taron nationals have a good body structure. They have a light skin and strong body. They have very little facial hair, like the moustache and sideburns. They are strong and sturdy people. It is known that Luamdum Dawi could carry the weight like the other nationals, although he is being a dwarf. They could carry such burden easily difficult stones and cliffs of the ravines.

Economy

The chief economic occupation is *Taung* farming, hunting and bee-keeping. They grow wheat, corn, varieties of millet, sweet peas, and *Nampangui*. They can grow only enough for their family. They usually eat popped corn, wheat, *U Laing*, *Thon Sat*. When relatives and visitors come they entertain with popped corn, *U Laing* and *Lecha Cork* which is tea with milk and salt. Scarcity of arable land, extreme climate and lack of technical knowledge, it is difficult to get self sufficiency even for the family. When they are free from farm work, the men climb the ice covered mountains to hunt as snares. When the ice melts, they dig for medicinal roots like *Khantauk* roots and search for *Shipati* insects. The Tarons are experts huntsmen because they go hunting for months on-end. Then they take the animal skins and animal products, medicinal roots and bulbs like *Khantauk* root and *Magit* Bulbs, *Shipati*, cane baskets and bamboo containers along the *Nanilakha* mountain valley trail to the little village "*Gyehtan*" and exchange them with what they need. They bring back dyes, salt, knives, funnel to blow the fire, socks and matches. It does not matter whether their goods are valuable or not. The important thing to get what they needed. So the barter system still exists in these regions. Today they do not have to pound the wheat for flour and in the mortar pounders they have small water-powered mills. They also supplement their food by milling for hire. The charge is two condensed mill tins of flour for milling one big square tin of wheat. *Karoung* village is lit by hydroelectricity. So there is a potential of using hydroelectricity for other development purposes.

Beliefs and Perception of the World

The Taron's life is poor and full of hardships. They have to work the whole day on the *Taungya* and hunt in the forest and the mountains to get just enough food to fill their stomachs and enough to cover their bodies. The most important thing for them in their life is to have sufficient food and survive the dangers of living in the forests and the mountains. They believe in the *Nat* (Spirit) and depend on the *Nat* to provide for their need in the past. But now with the arrival of Christian missionaries, their beliefs have changed. They have been converted to Christianity for three generations already.

Christianity is firmly established among the Taron tribes. But there are still people who believe in signs and omens. For the Taron tribes region has become their refuge for security of their life and the fulfillment of their wishes. In other words, they feel psychologically safe and strengthened and socially, it is very practical base. Instead of having to struggle daily for their lives, the church has become the center of their lives for meeting and communicating with each other. While doing religious chores, they could results and discuss their social problems and solve them. Belief in a religion has made the present life and the hereafter of a Taron more meaningful. He has come to know the difference between good and evil and their effects. To the Tarons, whose pride is only in being a "great hunter" has come the knowledge of the difference between a "good man" and a "bad man". Such thoughts are born in the Taron mind only through religious beliefs. In the Christian church, there are two stairways, one for men and the other for women. They also sit separately. So we see social grouping based on sex among the Taron tribes. They could also discuss their life's experiences, business and social situations here.

The role of the religious leader has become very important now. They have confidence in him and depend on him. It is also the right place to educate them. So the Taron people's development in life will greatly rest on the wide knowledge and fine qualities of the religious leader.

The Taron people do not believe that it is a burden to have many children. To be wealthy also is something not extraordinary to them. The most important thing for them is simple sufficiency for the family. None of them farm, hunt, keep bees to become rich. They are contented and life is complete if they have enough to eat and clothe themselves.

In the past, the Tarons's social life was very backward. Their small structure made it difficult for them to choose a life partner. It had made them down hearted and developed an inferiority complex among other nationals. But now international research scholars' interest in them have made them become famous. Not only the true Taron but even the half-caste- Htalutaron is proud to belong to the Taron tribe. In the past to have sufficient food for the family had been their primary need. Today they are conscious of their identity as a Taron people and that it is important to preserve their own cultural traditions.

4. Conclusion

Concerning the short height of the Tarons in Myanmar, a Hta-Lu elder said that the early Tarons were of normal height. Then they began to grow shorter with each generation. Besides the Taron tribes now living in the Taron river basin are of normal height some tall and some short. Luamdum Dawi's father Luamdum Du-yee-shan was a man of normal build. But this mother Dazondan Nan-Sar was less than four feet tall. It was told by the elders that when she was brought from the Taron river valley in China to Myanmar, she was carried in basket (palaing). (So it is believed that the Tarons in Myanmar are short people due to a family gene. The Tarons who have married Hta-Lu tribes in Myanmar are of normal build, so not all Taron are dwarfs.

The Taron tribes populations is small because of the environment in which they had to live. They had to bear extremes of the weather and natural disasters. They had to work very hard for their daily food and shelter. Deficiency in basic food led to malnutrition and disease. They also lack knowledge of agriculture and animal husbandry and the customary prohibitions regarding marriage such as "Mayousan" and "Phan-htan" which have made them mix with other Ethnic groups.

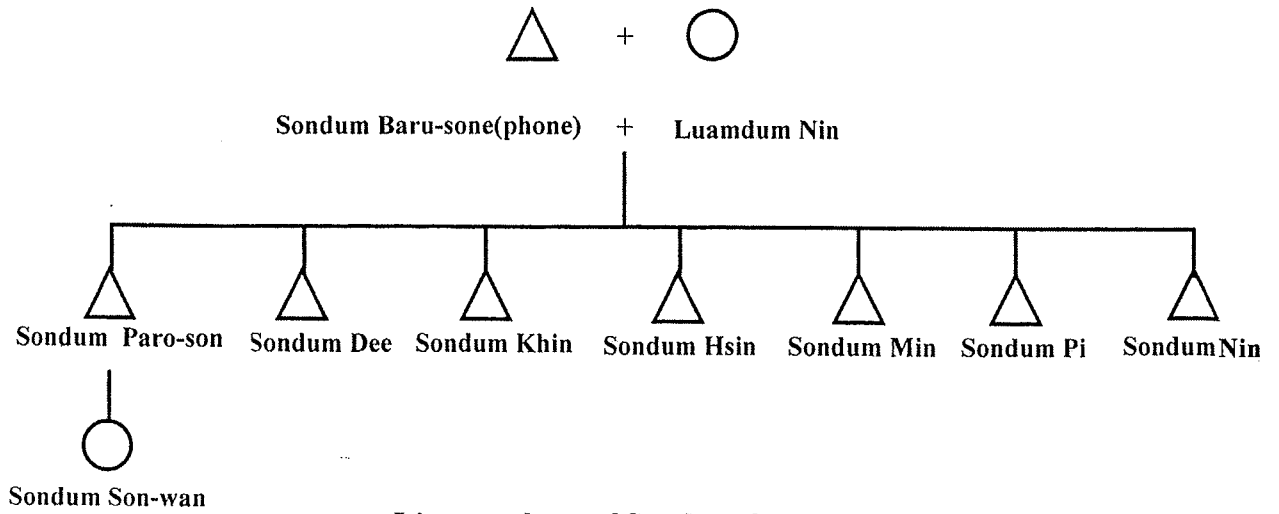
In Karong village there are thirty families with a population of 179 people. Because of patrilineal descent system, although most of them are half-caste only four families are considered not Tarons. For example when a Taron man marries a Htalu woman, his descendants become Htalu tribe. Likewise, when a Taron man marries a Htalu woman, his descendants. So there are 13 families with the population of 84 people who claim to be Taron tribe. So as long as there are sons who will inherit the Taron tribe as theirs there is no chance of the tribe dying out.

Many people see the Taron tribes as a dying out small group of dwarfs with only five genuine Tarons surviving now. This view is quite different from the point of view of the researchers, anthropologists and the Tarons. It also depends on how "genuine or not genuine" is defined. Many consider them not true Taron if they are not dwarfs. This phenomena is only in Myanmar because Tarons in their native region are normal. If we should consider this question, there are few people in the world who can claim that he is blooded. Even if he claims to be descended from one tribe only we can see that his body structure has changed and so also his mind. If the Taron-Htalu half caste Tarons continues to adopt Taron clan, his tribe will continued to survive for many generations. But of the 13 families of Taron-Htalu marriage who have taken Taron tribal group only one family is married according to their system. It is the boy Sondum married the girl Luamdum. (The Taron nationals still do not realize that they need to preserve their national groups by not marrying into other national group like the Htalu and Rawang national groups. Otherwise, they run the risk of the Taron national group dying out and lose their indentify.

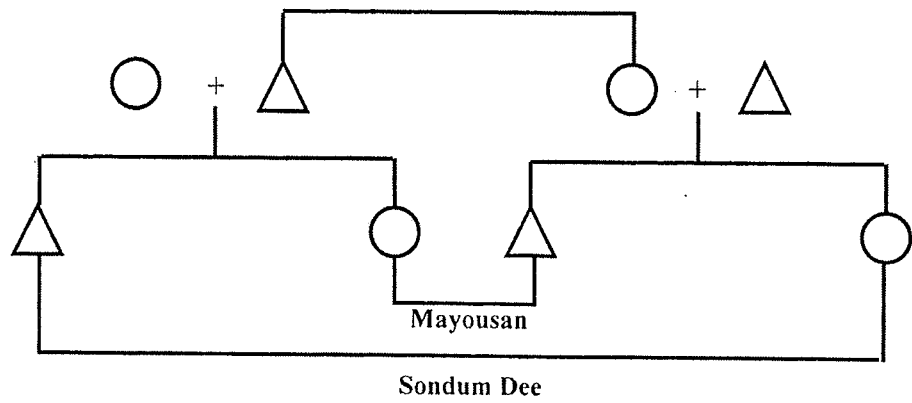
Acknowledgement

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Appendix I : Lineage Chart and Marriage System



Lineage chart of Sondum Son-wan



Taron's marriage system

Appendix III : The Taron



The Taron standing in front of and in between the members of research team from Yangon University



The Taron, U Darwi, in the traditional dress



The Taron family and researchers

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