

1. Description

1.1 Name(s) of society, language, and language family: Society: Kachin. Language: Jingpho (alternate names: Chingp'o, Chingpaw, Jinghpaw, Kachin) Language family: Sino-Tibetan

1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com): kac

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude): "Kachin are located primarily in the Kachin State of Myanmar (Burma) and parts of the northern Shan State, southwestern Yunnan in China, and northeasternmost India (Assam and Arunachal Pradesh), between 23° and 28° N and 96° and 99° E. The Maru Dangbau are found mainly along the Myanmar-China border in this range" [1]

"In the far north there are peaks as high as 5,000 meters but the Kachin settlements and swiddens normally range between 1,200 and 1,900 meters" [1]

1.4 Brief history:

"There was an expansion of Kachin settlement toward the east and south from late in the eighteenth century, in which the Kachin followed the growth of the Chinese overland caravan trade, especially with the rise and spread of commercial opium growing. This led to a flowering of the Gumlao political system, owing to the injection into Kachin politics of new sources of wealth from involvement in the trade and from the levying of tribute on the caravans. It also led to more confrontation of Kachin with Shan, and to instances of Kachin taking over minor Shan valley principalities" [4: 4]

"During the British imperium in Burma and India most of Kachinland was under the Frontier Administration" [4: 4]

"The Kachin State has been a constituent of the Union of Burma (now Myanmar) since that country regained independence in 1948, and the President-elect on the eve of the socialist military coup of 1962 was a Kachin chief, the Sama Duwa Sinwa Nawng. Since the coup, however, the Kachin have been a major element in the multiethnic insurgency against the Myanmar government throughout the mountains of the Myanmar-China-Thailand border region, which has led to the extension of Kachin communities into northern Thailand. In 1953 a Jingpo Autonomous Region was established in southwestern Yunnan in China; the Peoples' Republic of China has proved a magnet and refuge for some of the insurgent leaders from Myanmar" [4: 4]

1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors:

"Most of the ethnography comes from the work of American Protestant and European Catholic missionaries, who started work in the Bhamo area in the late nineteenth century... [most] comes from the records and diaries of British colonial officers and associated traders" [4: 4]

1.6 Ecology (natural environment): "Snow is always found on the highest northern peaks, and the upper elevations are subject to coldseason frosts. There are more

than 50 days of frost a year at higher elevations. Rainfall occurs mainly in the monsoon season (between June and October) and is between 190 and 254 centimeters on average. Temperatures are substantially lower on the high eastern slopes over the China border and in the northern Shan State. The forest cover is mixed evergreen/deciduous broadleaf monsoon forest, with subtropical forest at lower elevations, including teak" [1]

1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density:

Population total all countries: 940,060. --- 900,000 in Myanmar, 40,000 in China, and 60 in the United States [2] There may be a few thousand in India [4]

Average population density is uneven, with higher density in the intermediate zone along the north-south part of the Myanmar-China border due to trade routes there [4] the population of 300,000 persons are described as 'thinly scattered' over an area of 50,000 square miles" [3]

"Overall, many villages had twenty houses or fewer, with more than five persons each, on average." [4: 5]

"Traditional Kachin villages usually had far fewer than 100 households; the larger villages existed for defense, but the requirements of swidden agriculture led to segmentation of villages" [4: 5]

2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):

- rice

- maize, sesame, buckwheat, millet, tobacco, and pumpkin in the Eastern zone which is colder and has less rain

- vegetables and fruits [4: 6]

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:

- fish [4: 6]

- "Meat, provided mainly by pigs and cattle, is not served often, and in most cases is eaten as the sequel to a religious sacrifice" [6: 118]

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?:

- Fishing with traps and poison [4: 6]

- "Hunting with traps, snares, deadfalls, pellet bows, and guns is especially common in the agriculturally slack cold season" [4: 6]

- rifles are important to adult males, but are used as status symbols rather than specifically for hunting [6: 117]

2.4 Food storage:

Livestock were usually kept outside under a home's overhang [4: 5]

"The left (up-slope) side consists of sleeping apartments; the right side is left open for cooking, storage, and entertainment" [4: 5] It is not specified if this is storage for food or other items, however. Huge storage capacity may not be necessary, as there is little crop surplus [5: 14]

2.5 Sexual division of production:

“Men clear and burn the swiddens, hunt, go on raids, and assume most political and religious roles. Women have full responsibility for weeding, harvesting, transporting, and threshing; both men and women cook and brew from the crops, marketing any surplus. Women fetch water and firewood; they prepare raw cotton for weaving their own clothing and make their husbands' (largely Shan-style) clothes from commercial cloth.” [4: 7]

2.6 Land tenure:

“Forest lands in a tract are village property and there is no private property in swidden land. Chiefs or the joint rulers of a Gumlao community have the sole right to allow people to live in a village and the sole right to dispose of land to those wishing to use it, but may not refuse any resident household use of swidden lands. Deciding when and where to shift swidden sites and assigning swidden plots are the prerogative of the chief and the elders. Irrigated lands can be inherited and sold to a fellow villager, but never to an outsider; this right follows the rule that a cultivator may not be dispossessed from a plot while it is in use.” [4: 7]

2.7 Ceramics:

“No pottery making is reported, though earthenware pots are common” [4: 6]

“Much cooking is done in bamboo tubes or in folded banana leaves. Even rice beer is fermented in large bamboo tubes. Banana leaves serve as plates and bamboo sections as cups. In most of the homes, however, there are one or more iron pots. These are used for cooking some foods and for distilling whiskey from the rice beer.” [5:19]

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

Not found

2.9 Food taboos:

“there is an aversion to eating cats, dogs, horses, monkeys, sheep, and goats” [4: 6]

2.10 Canoes/watercraft?

Not found

3. Anthropometry

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):

Not found

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):

Not found

4. Life History, mating, marriage

4.1 Age at menarche (f):

Not found

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):

Not found

4.3 Completed family size (m and f):

Each household typically has more than five people [4]

The Kachin in China: "Family size in Dazhai has been maintained at about five persons for many years, although there are a few large families of as many as twelve. Generally, as income increases and life gets easier, most Jingpo families want to have more children in spite of the government's family planning propaganda." [6: 107] In 1984, the Kachin living in China were restricted to having three children by the government, being fined for each excess child [6: 107]

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):

Not found, but it appears that many Kachin families have many children, so spacing may be quite close together.

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):

Not stated, but it is preferential for a family's daughters to be married off in age order from eldest to youngest [6: 100]

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:

No percentage is stated, but divorce is mentioned so it does occur. It does not seem to be very frequent, however. [4: 8]

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:

Percentage not stated, but described as not common, but it is allowed. Such a situation may occur if there is an obligation of a man to take on his brother's widow as a wife [4: 9]

4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?:

"Bride-price is paid by the groom's father and the latter's lineage mates and may involve lengthy negotiations with payments extending over many years; there may also be a year or two of bride-service. The bride's family provides her with a dowry and helps defray the wedding costs" [4: 9]

4.9 Inheritance patterns:

" Usually the youngest son (uma) inherits his father's house and office, if any, while much of the movable property may go, in the father's lifetime, as dowry to his daughters and as marriage settlements on the older sons... A childless man's estate reverts to his brothers or lineage mates and their heirs" [4: 10]

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:

Not found

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:

Not found

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):

“The aristocratic clans are, in order of precedence, Marip, Lahtaw, Lahpai, N'Hkum, and Maran. The clans are divided into major lineages and these into lesser segments and local lineage groups, and it is especially to the last that exogamy strictly applies, although all the clans are exogamous in theory” [4: 8]

“Exogamy is more theoretical than strict, and it is quite possible to marry even a somewhat distant consanguine” [4: 9] “The first has a single rule: one may not take wives from the same lineages to which one gives wives; the reversal of an alliance is a major offense against the whole social order.” [4: 9]

4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these “other fathers” recognized?

Not directly stated.

4.14 What is the belief of the mother's role in procreation exactly? (e.g., “receptacle in which fetus grows”)

These sort of mechanics are not stated in the literature. Yet, it is clear that the female is very important in carrying and raising children.

4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)?

Not found

4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape

Not found

4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin)

One should marry a woman from a wife-giver lineage [4: 9]

Cross-cousin marriage was preferred prior to 1949 when it became less common [6: 98]

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?

Premarital sexual relations are permitted and individuals do not appear to be chastised for this [4: 9]

4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring

Not specifically, but if a bastard child results from a premarital sexual affair, money is given to the female by the male or his family [4: 9]

4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?

Not stated

4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females

Not found

4.22 Evidence for couvades

No evidence found

4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older)

Not found

4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?

Not found

4.24 Joking relationships?

Not found

4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations

Descent is agnatic, ie is traceable through males, [4: 8]

“In Jinghpaw proper, the wife acquires no membership in her husband's clan and lineage, but in Gauri she acquires it to some extent, and this difference corresponds to differences in the ease of divorce and in the recovery of marriage payments in such cases” [4: 8]

4.26 Incest avoidance rules

“In lineage exogamy, persons with the same lineage name (or household name, according to Leach) are thought to have common ancestors and, thus, to be brothers and sisters; therefore they cannot marry each other. The first thing that a young man and woman should ascertain when they meet is whether or not they share the same lineage name. If so, no matter how far apart their families are, they become “brother and sister.” Even a marriage between two families of the same surname from different Jingpo branches is unacceptable” [6: 99]

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?

Yes, it is held at the bridegroom's home. Several animal sacrifices are made and a hen is released to symbolize the wife entering her new home as she crosses a wood plank bridge. Her mother-in-law greets her by putting a coral necklace (manaozhu) around her neck [6: 189]

4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name?

Not found

4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?)

Exogamy is preferred, but within or outside is not directly stated.

4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)?

“Parents try to arrange marriages to ally with other lineages, but negotiations are turned over to go-betweenes” [4: 9]

4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:

Not in particular, so long as the marriage is of two people from different lineages who are thought to not be related.

Warfare/homicide

4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:

Not found

4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:

“Suppressed upon the extension of British rule, Kachin warfare was mainly guerilla action, raiding, and ambush, with sporadic instances of cannibalism and head-hunting reported.” [4: 13]

4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing:

Not stated, but it appears out-group killing has been more common than in-group killing historically as Kachin had many conflicts with the British and Chinese.

4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations):

Only mentioned in terms of former conflict with the British and Chinese. Also current trade mainly with Chinese, Shan and Burmese.

4.18 Cannibalism?

sporadic instances of cannibalism and headhunting were reported under British rule [4: 13]

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

“Overall, many villages had twenty houses or fewer, with more than five persons each, on average.” [4: 5]

“Traditional Kachin villages usually had far fewer than 100 households; the larger villages existed for defense, but the requirements of swidden agriculture led to segmentation of villages” [4: 5]

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):

“for the most part [Kachin] are shifting cultivators inhabiting dense monsoon rain forest.” [3:4]

5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes):

“the political organisation of the area has been very unstable. Small autonomous political units have often tended to aggregate into larger systems; large-scale feudal hierarchies have fragmented into smaller units... should clearly be thought of as part of a larger total system in flux” [3:8]

“Kachin communities oscillate between two polar types— gumlao ‘democracy’ on the one hand, Shan ‘autocracy’ on the other. The majority of actual Kachin communities are neither gumlao nor Shan in type, they are organised according to a system described in this book as gumsa, which is, in effect, a kind of compromise between gumlao and Shan ideals.” [3: 8]

5.4 Post marital residence:

“Ideally, residence is virilocal, but uxoriocal marriage is not notably uncommon” [4: 10]

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):

Not found

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):

Not stated

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:

Not found

5.8 Village and house organization:

“The rest of the Kachin lived and continue to live in individual household dwellings. Water supply was a critical factor in village size and placement, but villages that were high up for defense purposes were often distant from their water supply. Most villages were entered through a sacred grove marked by posts serving to elicit prosperity from the gods, and by shrines to the spirit of the earth, where community sacrifices were held” [4: 5] Villages were typically on steep mountain terraces. [4: 5]

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens’ houses):

“In some pioneer Gumlao settlements there were real longhouses, composite structures with separately owned individual household apartments along a corridor. Again, livestock were kept separately. These longhouses symbolized the cooperative nature of the Gumlao political order.” [4: 5]

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?

“There are no beds in the western sense of the term. Instead, the Kachins sleep on home woven mats, material from the jungle. There are no items of furniture which must be bought.” [5: 19]

5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc:

There is a clan system, with 5 aristocratic clans as well as clans and lineages of commoners. A man is expected to marry from outside of his lineage (called lineage exogamy)[4: 10]

5.12 Trade:

“Trade is mainly with Shan and Chinese (and Burmese) for salt, metalware, and the prestigious heirloom wares exhibited by aristocratic lineages. Kachins attend the markets held every five days in Shan towns, where they sell small amounts of garden and forest produce. The extent of Kachin involvement in opium growing and trading is in dispute, but the poppy was commonly cultivated in the area, though perhaps mainly by non-Jinghpaw. Trade with the Chinese caravans that came through the region carrying, among other things, opium, was a major source of wealth for the settlements of the intermediate zone; chiefs extracted considerable revenue from traders in their domains” [4: 7]

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?

“Even at the end of all this, however, the ritual status of the youngest son chief and his descendants is deemed to be higher than that of the eldest son chief and his descendants. Moreover it is the youngest son chief who ‘stays put’ on the originally chiefly domain while the eldest son chief has to go off and be a chief somewhere else.” [3:130] This is indicative not only of division of power within a family, but also hints that there are divisions in society between chiefs or royal families and commoners.

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6.0 Time allocation to RCR:

Religious sacrifices are described as ‘frequent’ in the village Wang studied. There are many household level rituals and several community level rituals per year [6].

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):

“There are mediums and diviners; a medium works by trance and is inexplicably chosen for his or her calling, while divination is a learned skill. These are basically private practitioners. There are also priests (dumsa) who officiate at sacrificial rites, and the rather scarce jaiwa , or bards, who preserve and recite genealogies and associated myths at great Merit Feasts (manau) in which chiefs and other high aristocrats proclaim and validate the ancestral sources of their authority. These are all learned offices, never hereditary” Women can only be mediums. [4: 13]

6.2 Stimulants:

opium smoking, drinking rice beer, chewing of betel and tobacco [4: 6]

6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal):

Seasonal: “The chief has the ritual duty of declaring sabbaths from all work at the time of rites held for recurrent or exceptional communal times of crisis such as plagues or junctures in the agricultural cycle (e.g., just before the first sowing the chief and his priests make offerings to the spirit of the earth, which is followed by a four-day sabbath)” [4:13]

“There are two communal nat offerings a year: one in March and one in September (the exact timing is determined by the lunar calendar). Connected with sowing and harvesting, these are the biggest sacrifices and festivals for the whole village, and reflect the care taken to secure the goodwill of village and home guardians.” [6: 181]

6.4 Other rituals:

“There are many more individual household nat offerings than routine communal offerings” [6: 185]

“the sinmali (stream spirit) offering in May. This is a relatively popular ritual, the date of which is determined by the day when the transplanting of the rice seedlings is finished” [6: 186]

“the new-rice-eating festival in October. This very popular ritual offers just-harvested rice to the sky nat and the ancestral nat” [6: 186]

“the rice-soul-calling-back ritual in November. This ritual is important to the people, for it is directly linked to their staple food and it is performed by most families.” [6:186]

6.5 Myths (Creation):

“Their chief is Shadip who is regarded as a ‘reincarnation’ of Chyanun-Woishun, the bisexual progenitor-progenetrix of everything.” [3: 175]

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):

Women frequently weave blankets [4]

6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

There are three types of religious practitioners called mediums, diviners, and priests. Men can hold any of these positions while women can only be mediums – one who works “by trance and is inexplicably chosen for his or her calling” [4: 13]. The other two roles require learned skill.

6.8 Missionary effect:

“By 1990 most, if not all, Kachin communities are Christian, and the social rift between Catholic and Protestant communities sometimes is quite deep. “ [4: 12]

6.9 RCR revival:

“Recent years have also seen some Government-sponsored Buddhist-missionary activity among Kachins in Myanmar.” [4: 12]

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:

“One cause of death is said to be that the cord that the Creator holds, thus sustaining the soul, is eventually gnawed away by spirits. Spirits can also entice the soul from the body, and death ensues if the soul cannot be found and enticed back home.

Ultimately myth has it that death came to Kachin mankind because human beings originally had to attend ceremonies of the sky-spirit people, and, as dama, had to contribute costly gifts. This cost so much that Sut Wa Madu, the ancestor who founded the sut manau (Feast of Merit, a major ritual connection between the two worlds), decided to hold a mock funeral, thus enticing the sky people to attend and bring gifts. The female sun spirit (Jan nat, one of the Sky Nats) felt that this compromised the asymmetrical relations between mayu and dama, and she decreed that if there were to be human funerals, then men would have to suffer death—not so much as a punishment as in order to restore the net balance of the relationship with a quitclaim payment of men's souls.” [4: 14]

“burial is a week after death; this interval is used to try to ensure the separation of the spirit of the deceased from the world of the living, a task aided by a priest, who makes offerings to the ghost and asks it to go away... Then the priest recalls the soul from its temporary limbo and tells it the route to the land of the dead. If thereafter divination shows that the spirit has not gone, it will be installed in the household altar, which had been temporarily removed from the house at the time of the death and is now reinstalled.” [4: 14]

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?

Not found

6.12 Is there teknonymy?

Not found

6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.)

Kachin religion includes major deities who are remote ancestors to all Kachin [4]

“These Sky Nat (mu nat —the word “nat” means a spirit Lord) are ultimately children of the androgynous Creator (Woishun-Chyanun), whose “reincarnation” is Shadip, the chief of the earth nats (ga nat), the highest class of spirit. The youngest sky nat (senior by ultimogeniture) is the Madai Nat, who can be approached only by chiefs, whose ultimate ancestor was his eldest brother and dama, [Ningawn-wa, who forged the earth. A direct daughter of Madai Nat was the wife of the first Kachin aristocrat. Below all these in rank are the masha nat, the ancestor nats of lineages” [4: 13]. Additionally there are minor spirits which are household guardians or the spirits of immediate ancestors [4: 13]

7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint:

Not Found

7.2 Piercings:

Not found

7.3 Haircut:

Not found

7.4 Scarification:

Not found

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.):

“All women wear a manaozhu, a necklace strung with red coral beads from Burma.”

[6: 117]

“gold teeth remain a mark of beauty, and some boys and girls still like to have one or two of them.” [6: 118]

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:

“The most prized outfit of a Jingpo woman is a cape with silver disks and tassels, a handwoven woolen tubular skirt with beautiful ornamental designs, a pair of thick, heavy silver bracelets, and several manaozhu. This attire is worn only for holidays, weddings, grand rituals, and big ceremonies. It can cost as much as 1,000 yuan to assemble, which means that very few women can afford it.” [6: 117]

7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

. “Most adult men wear Han Chinese-style black or dark blue tunics and trousers, and plastic sandals.” “The women like to wear short, black velour jackets with long, thin sleeves, and tubular skirts made either of cotton or of wool cloth that they have woven. Black, dark blue, or cotton print clothes are worn daily” [6:116-117]

Females use cosmetics obtained in local shops [6: 117].

7.8 Missionary effect:

This is not specifically stated to be an effect of missionaries, but it is likely that increased globalization had led to a change from traditional dress to more casual dress influenced by other cultures, particularly from Han Chinese style [6]. This may be especially true in younger generations. “Young people dress more brightly. They like to wear a PLA soldier’s cap and uniform, white or light-colored shirts, pants or blue jeans, and rubber sneakers.” “Since the 1980s, the young people of Dazhai have become more modern in their dress. The normal dress for boys is white shirt, blue jeans, and polished black shoes; for girls, it is a colorful Jingpo or Dai skirt combined with a vivid nylon or polyester shirt overlaid with a jacket or sweater. A few rich and modish girls replace their bracelets with watches, and wear nylon stockings and high-heeled shoes” [6: 118]

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

A few men still wear turbans and long gowns, but most wear more casual tunics, trousers, and sandals. Accessories like shoulder bags and swords are of Jingpo ethnic origin though. [6: 117] Gold teeth are still somewhat common for beauty.

8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system:

“real/classificatory siblings are distinguished by age relative to the speaker.” [4: 8]

8.2 Sororate, levirate:

“obligation to take on the widow of a real or classificatory brother” indicates that such a system is present in the Kachin [4: 9]

8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.):

“Kinship terminology is bifurcatemerging, with Omaha-type cousin terminology” [4: 8]

Traditionally cross-cousin marriage was more common but declined after the 1949 revolution [6: 98]

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

“Kachins make use of concepts concerning the supernatural for practical (technical) as well as ritual ends. The illnesses of men and the diseases of crops and animals are alike attributed to the malicious attack of supernatural beings” [3: 175]

Numbered references

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