

The Kachin.

The Kachin live astride the borders of Burma, China, and India.¹ They have been a well-known case in the literature of anthropology regarding historical transformation of their marriage and political systems. Kachin in China were politically, economically, and culturally controlled by Chinese owing to their intermediary position in the caravan-trade among China, Tibet, and Southeast Asia, and to their disassociate relations with the states or kingdoms in Southeast Asia largely in times of wars. From the late eighteenth century, major Chinese caravan-trade routes passed through the Kachin Hills. The trade, largely attributed to the rise of kingdoms in Yunnan such as Nanzhao and Dali (6th – 13th century AD), had shaped ethnic configurations of the region since then.

Various theoretical models of political and sociocultural transformation based on the Kachin case have been generalized for understanding the politics between low-land polities and up-land chieftaincy in mainland Southeast Asia. Currently, the Kachin case is intensely discussed by scholars with a Southeast Asian perspective, who consider ethnic groups in Yunnan (including Kachin, Wa, Dai and so on) a politico-economic and socio-cultural intersection between China and mainland Southeast Asia playing the role of middlemen. Kachin have been playing such a role among Chinese, Dai, Burmese and many others in the China-Burma border areas for centuries, making most of Kachin individuals multilingual speakers.

From 2003 to 2011, I conducted 32 months of fieldwork, mostly in Sama village and its four neighboring villages in Tongbiguan Village Tract, Yingjiang County, Yunnan Province. These villages have been inter-connected by marriage for hundreds of years. There are about 500 adults total, with over 90% ethnic Kachin. Sama is a Kachin cultural center in China. One of the two greatest specialists of animal sacrifice in Tongbiguan Village Tract lives there. Before 1953 when the Chinese Communists took the Kachin Hills, Sama was the headquarters of the most powerful Kachin chief in China (the *Nhkum³³ Du³³ Wa³³*)² who controlled most areas of today's Yingjiang and Longchuan Counties. Currently, the Jianbian Administrative Office (the local lowest governmental office) is located in Sama. It controls Sama and its four neighboring villages. In 2014, I

¹ Traditionally, the term “Kachin” is used in English and French to refer to people who call themselves Jinghpaw across the borders of China, Burma and India, and currently the term, used as a multi-ethnic category by the Jinghpaw elites, involves a number of other ethnic groups (such as Lisu in China). The word Kachin is the transliteration of the Kachin term Gachye (the spelling is Ga-Khyen) meaning “red land,” referring to the Kachin origin place in their genesis legends. The term Jinghpaw is written in the Chinese Pinyin orthography as Jīngpō, and is pronounced in the Kachin dialect in India as Singhpo. In China, they are known as one of the nation's 55 officially identified ethnic minorities (mínzú). Both the term Kachin and Jīngpō include the same six branches of the people, while in China it also includes ethnic Lisu that live together with Jīngpō and in Burma it includes Hka Hku branch. The biggest branch of Kachin is also called Jinghpaw. The language of the Jinghpaw is used as the ritual language, and their political system is treated as a model, for all the other branches. In this article, I focus on the Jinghpaw branch in China, most of whom live in Tongbiguan and Kachang Townships, Yunnan Province. When I say Kachin, I refer to the Jinghpaw branch unless otherwise specified. All personal names used in the article are pseudonyms.

² The Kachin Orthography used in this work is consistent with the standard Kachin, namely, *nhkum³³ ga³¹* (Kachin spoken in the political domain of the *Nhkum³³* chief, in today's Tongbiguan Village Tract, Yingjiang County; *ga³¹* means “language”). Four tones of Kachin are marked by 33 (mid-level); 31 (low falling); 55 (high-level); 51 (high falling).

also conducted intensive interviews with 60 villagers (including eight religious specialists, three government officials, and people who are fluent in Chinese and Kachin and those who speak only Kachin, male:female = 2:1, Christians:non-Christians = 1:2).

Most interviews were conducted when I stayed with people in their fields, focusing on natural objects and phenomena I could see and think of during the fieldwork. I asked about names of, and daily expressions regarding, the objects and phenomena in the Kachin language, whether and how people use the objects or deal with the phenomena in their daily life, and what will they do if the objects or phenomena do not appear as expected. Based on preliminary analysis of interview data, I conducted dozens of semi-structured interviews with religious specialists and oral history tellers, relating the objects/phenomena I observed to their belief and cosmologies. I asked about rituals for tackling with problems caused by people's inconsistency with their environment, how and why they specify time and space for conducting the rituals. During the years of fieldwork, I have attended most of the rituals mentioned in our conversations, and in the interviews I also focused on details I observed in rituals relating them to other details concerning the Kachin genesis stories and daily life. In particular, I also conducted a few semi-structured interviews with officials in charge of local development projects in the local County government and asked about the impact of the projects on the local environment.