

The Ethnolinguistic Groups of Myanmar

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ETHNIC CLASSIFICATIONS

Official list of 135 ethnic groups

Ethnologue/ISO 639-3 listing

Atlas of the World's Languages listing

LINGUISTIC GROUPS

Tibeto-Burman	many languages including Myanmar, Chin, Kachin, Kayah and Karen
Mon-Khmer	many languages including Mon
T(h)ai	various languages including Shan
Miao-Yao	Hmong and Mien
Sinitic	Kokang (Yunnanese Chinese) etc.
Austronesian	Salon (autonym Moken/Moklen)
Indo-European	Daingnet, Maramagyi etc.

ETHNIC GROUPS

Historical

Political

Identity and Attitudes

Fusion and Fission

NAMES OR –(O)NYMS

- Autonym group's own name for itself
- Exonym outsiders' name(s) for a group

- Collective Exonym Chin, Karen, Kayah, etc.
 outsiders' name for a collection of similar groups

- Toponym name based on the name of a place

- Neonym new name, replacing a pejorative name
- Paleonym former name

NAMES OF LINGUISTIC GROUPS

Often names used in the linguistic literature for related groups of languages contain former names, sometimes even pejorative exonyms

Loloish: from Lolo, Chinese collective exonym for Ngwi groups

Nungish: Nung toponym, autonym and collective Jinghpaw and Shan exonym for Rawang, Dulong and related languages

CHANGES IN NAMES

Exonyms often become pejorative and may then be replaced

Allonyms – alternative names for the same group in different languages

Deutsch/German/allemand/tedesco/nemets

SOUNDS IN NAMES

Names undergo sound changes within a language AND in other languages, and so gradually diverge, even if they start phonetically similar

The constraints of the sound system of the majority language limit the possible forms of exonyms

[ɹəwɑŋ²¹] ‘Rvwàng’ > ရဝမ်: /ɹəwã⁴²/,

written as if ending in –m (to give the correct vowel sound) and with /42/ tone instead of /21/ tone

BAMAR GROUPS

Ethnic Group	Myanmar name	English name (1)	English name (2)	ISO 639-3
86	ဗမာ	Bamar	Burman	mya
87	ထားဝယ်	Dawei	Tavoyan	tvn
88	မြိတ်	Beik	Merguese	-
89	ယော	Yaw	Yaw	-
96	ရခိုင်	Rakhine	Arakanese	rki
117	တောင်ရိုး	Taungyo	Taungyo	tco
118	ဓနု	Danu	Danu	dnv
126	အင်းသား	Intha	Intha	int

EXONYMS FOR MYANMAR

86 exonyms

မြန်မာ

ဗမာ

Chinese 缅甸 miǎndiàn

Thai

p^hamâa < *bəma:¹

English

Burma ['bɜ:mə]

sporadic *mr > b

Burma Mergui which?

BURMISH GROUPS

Ethnic Group	Myanmar name	English name (1)	English name (2)	ISO 639-3
8	မရူ	Maru	Lhaovo	mxh
9	လရှီ	Lashi	Lashi	lsi
	လချိတ်	Lachit		
10	အဇီး	Atsi	Zaiwa	atb
94	ဖွန်	Hpon	Hpun	hpo
133	မိုင်းသား	Maingtha	Achang	acn

မိုင်းသား or Maingtha is an old toponym, see below
autonyms mainly in column (2) above

Jinghpaw and Chinese –NYMS for Burmish groups

Ethnic Group	Myanmar name	Jinghpaw name	Chinese name	ISO 639-3
8	မရူ	Maru	Langsu/狼速	mxh
9	လရီ	Lashi	Leqi/勒期	lsi
10	အဇီး (ဇီး)	Atsi	Zaiwa/栽瓦	atb
133	မိုင်းသား	Ngochang	Achang/阿昌	acn

There is a further related group in China, Bola/波啦

WHAT IS KACHIN?

All these groups other than the Hpon and some Achang form part of the Kachin culture complex

Maru, Lashi, Atsi and Bola are all classified as part of the Jingpo nationality in China

The majority of Jingpo in China are Zaiwa, with smaller numbers of Jinghpaw, Maru, Lashi and a few Bola

Due to an error, Chintao/Xiandao has been classified as a separate language; in fact these people live in two villages that moved from the Husa valley and speak the Husa dialect of Achang, but are classified as members of the Jingpo nationality

ACHANG LANGUAGES

The 2010 census population of Achang in China is 39,555;
not all of these can speak any kind of Achang language

In particular, almost no Achang outside Dehong Prefecture
can speak Achang, and many younger Achang in Lianghe and
Luxi counties also do not speak Achang

Achang location	autonym	population	
Husa (Longchuan)/龙川	ɲa ²¹ tʂ ^h aŋ ²¹	13,483	acn-1
Lianghe/梁河	ɲɑ ²¹ tʂ ^h aŋ ²¹	12,369	acn-2
Luxi/潞西	ɲaʔ ⁵⁵ tʂ ^h aŋ ⁵⁵	2,524	acn-3
elsewhere in China		11,179	
Kachin State	ɲoʔ ²¹ tʂ ^h aŋ ⁵⁵	35,000?	acn-4

ACHANG

Achang largest single concentration:

Husa valley, Longchuan County, Dehong Prefecture, China

Hotha ‘Shan’ in British literature, Buddhist

[məŋ sa] in Tai Mao (local Shan variety, ‘Dehong Dai’)

မုံငံးဆး in Burmese from Shan; Burmese /s/ > /θ/ c.1800

Husa Achang go to Myanmar

as Buddhist priests, as blacksmiths in many Shan villages

Ngoqchangh in Myanmar

distinct from all three main Achang varieties in China

part of Kachin culture complex

close marriage links to Lashi

Romanization since 1992, revised 2004

NGWI (LOLOISH) GROUPS

Ethnic Group	Myanmar name	English name (1)	English name (2)	ISO 639-3
12	လီဆူး	Lisu	Lisu	lis
105	ကွီ	Kwi	Yellow Lahu	lhi
106	ပျင်	Pyin/Pyen	Bisu	bzi/pyy
113	ကော်	Kaw	Akha	ahk
125	လားဟူ	Lahu	Lahu	lhu
			Laomian	lwm
			Akeu	aeu
			Nusu	nuf

NGWI ALLONYMS

12 Lisu

old Chinese name Yě rén/野人 (‘wild people’), also used in Jinghpaw and formerly in Myanmar လောင်ရင် and India ‘Yobin’

old Shan name [lisɔɔ], also seen in former Myanmar လီရှော

105/125 Lahu

old Chinese name Luohei, also in Lisu

old Shan name [musəə], also Burmese မူးဆိုး

113 Akha

Thai/Shan name [iikɔɔ], Chinese neonym Aini

In China a part of Hani nationality

PHONETIC FILTERS IN -NYMS

Lahu /e/ /o/ are phonetically quite high, and similar to /i/ /u/ but distinct

Outsiders usually hear Lahu /e/ /o/ as /i/ /u/

Exonyms attempting to represent [la⁵³ ho¹¹]
usually use /u/, as does the orthography

Burmese, Chinese, Thai, English, Viet, Lao

ORTHOGRAPHERS AND NAMES

The Lahu autonym has been written La^v hu_ for over 80 years

Literate Lahu Christians now often pronounce this as [la⁵³ hu¹¹]

LAHU ORTHOGRAPHIES AND CONTROVERSY (1)

Lahu tones were originally represented with postscript diacritics from the 1920s

In 1950 a new Baptist missionary changed the representation of two tones

/33/ was marked with a colon (:.) until then, but after that unmarked

/11/ was unmarked until then, but after that marked with a postscript underline

LAHU ORTHOGRAPHIES AND CONTROVERSY (2)

The new Lahu *pinyin* orthography developed in China in 1958 did not distinguish two vowels and two tones

	Baptist	<i>pinyin</i>
/u/	ui	eu
/ɤ/	eu	eu
/21/	- _v	-l
/11/	unmarked to 1950 _ after 1950	-l

Actually these two vowels are only marginally distinct in Lahu words, but the contrast is reinforced by many Shan loans; and the two tones are merged in some dialects

LAHU ORTHOGRAPHIES AND CONTROVERSY (3)

After criticism from Lahu (and from foreign linguists), a reformed Lahu pinyin was introduced in 1987, with a distinction:

/u/ written as eu

/21/ written as -l

/ɣ/ written as eo

/11/ written as -f

Hence the modern Chinese *pinyin* form Ladhof
versus 1958 to 1887 Ladhoh

YELLOW LAHU

105 Lahu Shi

autonym [la⁵⁵ ho¹¹ ɕi³³], Shan/Lue name Kwi

Part of Lahu nationality in China

Listed as separate Kwi ethnic group in Laos and Myanmar

Numerous subdialects

One identical subdialect with different names

Laho Shi Banlan	Myanmar (E Shan State), Thailand
Laho Shi Nakeo	China (Xishuangbanna Prefecture)
Lahu Ahpubele	Laos, USA (California)

MULTIPLE ORTHOGRAPHIES

125 (Black) Lahu has three Romanization orthographies
Baptist and Catholic (1930s)
pinyin Chinese (1950s)

105 (Yellow) Lahu has one main orthography (1980s)
previously used Black Lahu orthography

Black Lahu vigorously reject the need for a Yellow Lahu orthography

LUMPING VERSUS SPLITTING

Laomian is included in the Lahu nationality in China
Most Laomian also speak Lahu

Akeu is included in the Akha ethnic group in Thailand,
Laos and Myanmar, and in the Hani nationality in China
Nearly all Akeu also speak Akha

Bisu/Pyen is included in the Lawaa ethnic group in
Thailand

Nusu is included in the Nu ethnic group in China

BISU, PYEN OR LAOPIN?

106 PYEN ၵၢ် (pyy) AND BISU (bzi)

One language, out of contact for ~150 years

2 villages in Myanmar, Pyen ethnic group

(Yaw Tan and Nam Theun, Möng Yong, Eastern Shan State, 615 people)

1 village in China, unclassified ethnic group

(Laopinzhai, Menghai County, 240 people)

3 villages in Thailand, part of Lawaa ethnic group

(Doi Chomphu, Doi Pui Kham, Phadaeng,
Chiang Rai/Phayao Provinces, 585 people)

Thai-based orthography in Thailand

Lahu-based orthography in Myanmar

KACHIN STATE ETHNIC GROUPS

Ethnic Group	Myanmar name	English name (1)	English name (2)	ISO 639-3
1	ကချင်	Kachin	Jinghpaw	kxk
3	ဒလောင်	Dalaung	(variety of Jinghpaw)	
4	ဂျိန်းဖော	Jinghpaw	(autonym of Jinghpaw)	
5	ဂေါရီ	Gauri	(dialect of Jinghpaw)	
6	ခရူ	Hkahku	(dialect of Jinghpaw)	
7	ဒူလန်း	Duleng	(variety of Jinghpaw)	
8, 10, 11:	Maru, Lashi, Atsi		12: Lisu	
2	တရိုမ်း	Trone	Taraon	mhu
9	ရဝမ်း	Rawang		raw
-		Kham Tibetan		khg

'TRONE' AND RAWANG

2 Trone: Digaru Mishmi or Taraon in India, Darang Deng in China, autonym [taɹuaŋ], Burmese also တရောင်

9 Rawang: old Shan/Kachin exonym Nung

Four language clusters, three **literary languages**

- 1 (China) **Dulong**/Trung/Drung (N and S) and Nung
(Myanmar) Ganøng subgroup: Dvru and Jørwang
- 2 (China) Anong, (Myanmar) **Anung**
- 3 (Myanmar) Rawang subgroup: **Mvtwang** and Tangsar
- 4 (Myanmar) Lungmi/Longmi subgroup: various subtypes

Three ISO 639-3 codes: raw (Rawang), nun (Anung/Anong) and duu (Dulong) for the three literary languages

NUNGISH GROUPS IN CHINA

and other groups linked with them

Two nationalities in China: Dulong/独龙 and Nu/怒

Dulong live mainly in Dulongjiang Township of Gongshan County (2010 census 6,930) and speak Dulong

Nu (2010 census 37,523) live in other areas of Nujiang Prefecture and speak four distinct languages

Nung (no ISO code) Bingzhongluo Township, Gongshan County

Nusu (nuf) Pihe Township, southern Fugong County;
most Nusu in China are bilingual in Lisu

Anong (nun) central Fugong County and in Myanmar;
however nearly all Anong in China now speak only Lisu

Zaozuo (zal) southwestern Lanping County

A few Nusu also live near Pihe in Kachin State, Myanmar

Nusu and Zaozou are related to Ngwi (12, 105, 106, 113, 125 etc.)

TOPONYM > AUTONYM > EXONYM

Potamonym – name derived from the name of a river

/nuŋ/ ethnic group living on upper Salween in Bingzhongluo

Nu/怒 river in China, Nu/怒 nationality in China

Jinghpaw/Shan exonym for Rawang etc. Nung

Lisu exonym for Rawang etc. **NO.** /no⁵⁵/

Thanlwin river in Myanmar

Salawin river in Thailand: pre-1800 Burmese pronunciation

Salween river in English: pre-1800 Burmese pronunciation

CHIN AND KUKI

Over 50 ethnic groups listed for Chin State and Rakhine State, Myanmar

Large number of related languages spoken by the same groups and different groups in India and Bangladesh

Same group often under different names in different countries, as well as paleo- and neonyms

Kuki: pejorative Indian exonym

Chin: old Myanmar exonym

KUKI-CHIN NAGA IN MYANMAR

Ethnic Group	Myanmar name	English name (1)	English name (2)	ISO 639-3
59	သဒို	Thado	Thadou	tcz
		Anal		anm
63	နာဂ	Naga	(exonym from India)	
64	တန်ခွန်	Tangkhul		ntx
		subgroups: Akyauung Ari (ngy), Koki (nxk), Maring (nng)		
	မကူရီ	Makuri		jmn
		subgroups: Makuri, Lungphuri, Saingphulei		
	ပါရာ	Para		pzn

NORTHERN NAGA IN MYANMAR

Ethnic Group	Myanmar name	English name (1)	English name (2)	ISO 639-3
	ဆယ်ညူငန်	Khiamnyungan		kix
	ကော်ညပ်	Konyak		nbe
		subgroups: Kyan-Karyaw (ngq), Lao (nlq)		
	လိုင်နောင်	Lainong	Leinong	lzn
		subgroups: Ponyo-Gongwang (npg), (Makyam (umn)?)		
	တန်ရှန်း	Tangshang	Tangsa/Tase/	nst/
		many subgroups: Haimi, Moshang, Rangpan, etc.		
			Nocte	njb
			Wancho	np

LUISH, SAK, THET

Ethnic Group	Myanmar name	English name (1)	English name (2)	ISO 639-3
102	သက်	Thet	Chak, Sak	ckh
91	ကဒူး	Kadu		zkd
92	ဂနန်း	Ganan	Kanan	zkn
65		Malin Taman		(not listed) tcl

KADU AND THET

Autonym [atsaʔ]

ဆန်

Sak

Rakhine [θaʔ⁵⁵] Thak,

Myanmar [θɛʔ⁵⁵] Thet

Exonyms

Lu, Lui – former Manipuri term,

Luish – linguistic grouping

BURMESE PRONUNCIATION

ဝ	ဆ	ဇ	ဆ	
tʃ	tʃʰ	dʒ	s	1112, 16 th c.
ts	tsʰ	dz	s	18 th c.
ts	tsʰ	dz	θ	early 19 th c.
s	sʰ	z	θ	mid-19 th c.
s	s	z	tθ	early 21 st c.

NORTHERN KAREN

Ethnic Group	Myanmar name	English name (1)	English name (2)	ISO 639-3
14	ဇယိမ်:	Zayein		kxk
-		Lahta		kvt
15	ကယန်း(ပဒောင်)	Kayan	Padaung	pdu
20	ယင်းတလဲ	Yintale		kvy
21	ယင်းဘော်	Yinbaw	Ka-nga	kvu

CENTRAL KAREN (1)

Ethnic Group	Myanmar name	English name (1)	English name (2)	ISO 639-3
13	ကယား	Kayah	Western Kayah	kyu
		Kayah Li	Eastern Kayah	eky
			Northern Kayah	-
17	ဂေဘား	Geba		kvq
29	ဘွဲ	Bwe	Central	bwe

Kayah also formerly known as Karenni or Kayinni ‘red Karen’

CENTRAL KAREN (2)

Ethnic Group	Myanmar name	English name (1)	English name (2)	ISO 639-3
16	ကဲခို	Gekho		ghk
-		Geker		-
18	ကယော/ဘရဲ	Kayaw/Bre/Brek		kvl
19	မနုမနော	Manumanaw	Manu/ Manaw	kxf
24	ပလေကီး	Palaychi		-
31	မိုးပွါး	Mopwa	Dermuha	-

SOUTHERN KAREN

Ethnic Group	Myanmar name	English name (1)	English name (2)	ISO 639-3
26	စကော	Sgaw		ksu
(22	ကရင်	Kayin	Karen exonym)	
(23	ကရင်ဖြူ	Kayinbyu	white Karen)	
30	မော်နေပွါး	Monnepwa	Hkahku	
28	ပကူး	Paku		jkp
27	တလှေပွါး	Talaypwa	??	??

PERIPHERAL KAREN

Ethnic Group	Myanmar name	English name (1)	English name (2)	ISO 639-3
32	ရှု၊ ပိုး	Shu	Pwo/Pho	pwo/kjp
(25	မွန်ကရင်	Mon Kayin)	(Thailand Pwo groups	kjt/pww)
128	ပအိုဝ်း တောင်သူ	Pa'O/ Taungthu	Black Karen	blk
see also Mon-Khmer groups called ယင်း/Yang > Yin				
122	ယင်းနက်	Yinnet	'black Yang'	
121	ယင်းကျား	Yinkia	'striped Yang'	

KAREN EXONYMS

Thai	[karian]	(Karen) – usually Pwo
N Thai	[ya:ŋ]	(Karen) – usually Sgaw
Shan	[ya:ŋ]	(Karen) – usually C/N
English	[kə'ɪɛn]	probably borrowed via Arakanese after 1825
Autonym	[p ^h lon]	(Pwo Karen) ‘people’

OTHER LINGUISTIC FAMILIES

Great complexity among Mon-Khmer languages, representing various branches of Mon-Khmer: Monic and Northern including Waic, Palaungic and Angkuic

Considerable diversity among languages and varieties of Shan/Tai languages

PROBLEMS IN ETHNIC CLASSIFICATION

Multiple listing of some groups under autonym and exonym(s)

Use of paleonyms and collective exonyms

Lumping of distinct languages

Splitting of related dialects

Missing groups – not listed or included within some other group

CONCLUSION

MORE WORK NEEDED

Survey and Documentation

Especially for Tibeto-Burman and
Mon-Khmer languages

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION ESSENTIAL

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Identity and self-esteem of ethnic groups requires correct understanding of their social, historical and linguistic connections

Good linguistic information can also lead to better educational and social outcomes for minority ethnic groups

THE WAY FORWARD

More co-operation

More training of minority ethnic group members for linguistic work

More effort to provide appropriate education recognising the linguistic needs of minority ethnic groups

Clear recognition by the whole nation of the value and richness of its ethnolinguistic diversity

THANK YOU VERY MUCH!

Publications, references and this
powerpoint may be found on
[academia.edu](https://www.academia.edu)

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