

MIAO AND CHINESE KIN LOGIC

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Dr. Ruey Yih-fu of Taiwan has kindly submitted to me the full kinship terminology collected by him among the Yachio or Han Miao of southern Szechuan, who call themselves Hmong Ntsü.

This system is exceedingly interesting not only for its elaborateness, but because of striking semantic differences of detail from standard Chinese, whereas its basic pattern or fundamental classificatory plan is even more strikingly similar to that of Chinese, in spite of the languages differing radically in their word forms.

The purpose of these paragraphs is to summarize these differences and likenesses.

For Chinese I use mainly Han Yi Fêng's fundamental "The Chinese Kinship System," published in 1937 in the second volume of *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, supplemented by my "Process in the Chinese Kinship System," originally issued in the *American Anthropologist* for 1933, and republished with minor reductions and additions in *The Nature of Culture*, 1952. This is a construal of data assembled by T. S. Chen and J. K. Shryock in the *American Anthropologist* for 1932.

Both systems operate with nuclear terms, which can be used by themselves to denote certain kindred, and with modifiers which are added to the nuclears, and, although often generic in their intrinsic meaning, usually limit the denotation of the compound to specific kindred. I shall compare first the Miao nuclears, then the modifiers, recorded by Dr. Ruey.

COMPARISON OF CHINESE 23 AND MIAO 24 NUCLEAR OR PRIMARY TERMS

Grandparents-Grandchildren—Chinese has only two primaries in this group, for F F and for S S, other designations being formed by modifiers.

Miao has the same two, F F and S S (the latter seemingly expanded in range to include d S), but has two additional terms for F m and m m. (All

terms for males are abbreviated to capitals, for women to lower-case letters.)

Parents-Children—The meanings are the same in the two systems: F, m, S, d.

Siblings—The two systems agree in recognizing sex of the sibling and usually relative age also. Chinese recognizes both categories throughout, and therefore has 4 terms: o·B, y B, o s, y s. Miao involves a third category, sex of speaker or ego, or as I prefer to construe it, whether ego and the sibling are of the same or opposite sex: that is, whether they are parallel or cross siblings. Consistently, carried through, this added consideration would double the number of Chinese terms and result in eight for Miao. But Miao, while always distinguishing parallel from cross sibling (// ~~form~~ X), drops the older-younger (o-y) distinction between cross siblings, so that the total number of terms is six: four parallel, o // B, y // B, o // s, y // s: and two cross, X B, X s (or: ♀'s B, ♂'s s).

Uncles-Aunts—Chinese brings the o-y distinction also into the uncle-aunt field, but expresses the distinction in **primary terms** only between male siblings: F o B, F y B. This results in an asymmetry of primaries: m s alone corresponds to the two parallel male terms, with the two cross relations m B and F s also undifferentiated. (Reference here of course is merely to primary terms, as they are used “nakedly”, unmodified; the o-y differentiation is widely expressed for uncles-aunts in Chinese, but by adding secondary or modifying terms.)

Miao has only two primaries in this area, both for the cross kin m B and F s. The parallel kin are differentiated by modifiers both for their sex and their relative age, so that there are four of them: F o B, F y B, m o s, m y s.

Nephews-Nieces—These are fewer than Uncle-Aunt terms in both systems: two in Chinese, only one in Miao.

Chinese has primaries only for nephews: B S, s S, reflecting the heavier weighting of the male lineage, as in the Grandparent and Uncle classes.

Miao's single primary in this area expresses the Miao preoccupation with parallel over cross relationship. It denotes // Sb Ch. This is “asymmetrical” in that it is without “X” counterpart. It is also one of only two Miao primaries ambiguous as to sex of the relative denoted.

Affinals—Chinese has six nuclear terms for affinals, Miao has seven. Four, or perhaps five, of these have the same meaning as Chinese nuclears; the

remainder select a certain few of the brother-sister-in-law affinals—quite different selections in Chinese and Miao—leaving others to be expressed by compound terms.

The common meanings for primaries are H and w; and d H and S w.

According to Fêng, *yo* denotes w F and is the only Chinese nuclear term covering persons of both sexes, w F and w ^mM. Kroeber gives *yo*, high mountain, as an increment similar in force to our “-in-law” as used by a man for his w F and w m. Miao uses *tai* (and could this be a loan from Chinese *tai*, “mountain peak”?) as a nuclear term primarily for m m, but extends the meaning, still as a unit term, to w m. There is certainly a partial parallel to Chinese here. On the other hand, while *tai*, w m, is uncompounded, it is not strictly nuclear in that sense, the meaning or “m m” being presumably original, and I have therefore not counted it, with the sense of “w m,” among the 24 nuclear Miao terms. It is simple, but it is not a primary term, for “w m.”

The remaining affinal terms are, in Chinese, *sao* for o B w; and, in Miao, two terms used by women for their husbands' brothers, of necessity parallel, namely *lau*, H (//) o B, and *je*, H (//) y B; and finally *ta*, w (//) y s.

The selection of the particular kinds of affinals denoted by nuclear unit terms is quite different in the two languages. Chinese selects one out of four Sb Sp (siblings' spouses); Miao selects three out of four Sp // y Sb; there is no visible reason why the three-fourths or five-eighths of other siblings-in-law should differ in being compounded.

COMPARISON OF MODIFYING TERMS

Eight modifying terms are **always** preposed in Miao. These are the terms for father's mother, for father and mother, for wife, for all three kinds of sisters, and for daughters. With the exception of *tsi*, “father,” these eight first-position terms all denote females.

Metaphorical Modifiers—Three of the Miao modifying terms are metaphorically adjectival: *me* before F s expresses compliment (respect); *mi* before Sp y Sb expresses youth, adolescence; and *mpeu*, meaning “outside”, following any of the six sibling terms, converts these into cousin designations, except for patrilineal parallel cousins: there are from one to four women in the relationship from ego to the cousin, when *mpeu* is postposed. Compare, in Chinese *wai*, “external”, for kinship through females; and, corresponding

to those for whom *mpeu* is not used, Chinese *t'ang*, "hall", added for the children of brothers.

Altogether, Chinese has around a dozen metaphorical terms corresponding to the three in Miao.

Kin Word Modifiers—A second class of modifiers in both languages consists of words that are themselves kin terms. That is, they are nuclear terms when they stand alone, but when in composition with other nuclears, they modify the reference of these. Thus, in Chinese, the three words pronounced *fu* but written with different characters, and denoting, in isolation, respectively "father", "husband or adult male", and "son's wife", also *mu*, "mother", these terms in combination lose those intrinsic significances and denote simply males or females of respectively older, equal, or younger generation. *Nü*, "daughter", and *hsü*, "daughter's husband", have similar secondary functioning.

While in Chinese only about one fourth of primary kin terms additionally have this extended secondary sense, in Miao all twenty-four primary terms are also used as secondaries in combinations! As secondaries, they differ among themselves only in position. Eight of the secondaries must precede, as already stated. Four must follow—m B, F s, gr S, // Sb Ch. The other twelve vary.

It will be seen that while the range of subclasses in the extended or secondary class varies considerably between Chinese and Miao, both subclasses occur in both languages. How far this similarity may be due to specific higher cultural influence from Chinese on Miao, or to similar former or still existing institutions, or to spread of patterns of classificatory logic, remains to be ascertained by Sinologists.

APPENDIX

A Comparative Table of the Miao and the Chinese
Primary Kinship Terms

Grandparents and Grandchildren

Chinese			Miao	
祖 tsu or 祖父 tsu fu	FF		jeu ₁	FF
祖母 tsu mu	Fm		po ₁	Fm
孫 sun	SS		kin	SS

Parents and Children

父 fu	F		tsi ₁	F
母 mu	m		na ₁	m
子 tzü	S		to ₁	S
女 nü	d		nts'ai ₁	d

Siblings

兄 hsiung	oB		ti ₁ (m. s.)	oB	}no ₁ (w. s.) B
弟 ti	yB		ku ₁ (m. s.)	yB	
姊 tzü	os		mu ₁ (m. s.)	s	{ ve ₁ (w. s.) os ntæu ₁ (w. s.) ys
妹 mei	ys				

Uncles and Aunts

伯 po	FoB		—	
叔 shu	FyB		—	
姨 i	ms		—	
舅 chiu	mB		klag ₁	mB
姑 ku	Fs		na ₁	Fs

Nephews and Nieces

姪 chih	BS		ntu ₁	{BS (m. s.) sS (w. s.)
甥 sheng	sS			

Affinals

夫 fu	H		jeu ₁	H
妻 ch'i	w		po ₁	w
壻 hsü	dH		vu ₁	dH
婦 fu	Sw		na ₁	Sw
岳 yo or 岳父 yo fu	wF		—	
岳母 yo mu	wm		tai ₁ or na ₁ tai ₁	wm
嫂 sao	oBw		—	
			lau ₁ (w. s.)	HoB
			je ₁ (w. s.)	HyB
			tu ₁ (m. s.)	wys