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REVIEWER'S REPORT

Manuscript No.: IJAR-55667

Title: Sacred Norms and Social Control in Customary Institutions among the Maos of Manipur

Recommendation:

Accept as it is
Accept after minor revision.....Yes.....
Accept after major revision
Do not accept (*Reasons below*)

Rating	Excel.	Good	Fair	Poor
Originality	√			
Techn. Quality	√			
Clarity	√			
Significance	√			

Reviewer Name: Dr. Jyotika Singh

Reviewers report: This manuscript provides a compelling ethnographic analysis of Mao Naga customary institutions, effectively integrating legal pluralism and Durkheimian theory to reveal their role as adaptive moral sovereignties in a plural legal landscape. Strengths include its thematic synthesis of secondary sources and insightful discussion of sacred rituals as mechanisms of social control. However, reliance on secondary data limits depth on contemporary changes, and a more critical engagement with ethical issues like gender norms would enhance rigor. Overall, it merits publication with minor revisions for broader anthropological impact.

Reasons for minor changes: The minor revisions are recommended to strengthen the manuscript's empirical robustness and analytical depth. Clarifying the selection and triangulation of secondary sources will address potential biases and enhance methodological transparency; while expanding on contemporary adaptations through brief case studies could better illustrate the dynamic interplay with modernity. Additionally, incorporating a more critical discussion of ethical issues, such as gender inequalities and punitive norms, will align the analysis with contemporary anthropological standards and human rights perspectives, ensuring a more balanced and impactful contribution. Finally, standardizing references to APA 7th edition will improve scholarly precision and readability.

Detailed Reviewer's Report

REVIEWER'S REPORT**Introduction**

This manuscript offers a comprehensive ethnographic and theoretical exploration of customary institutions among the Mao Naga (Ememei) community in Manipur, India. It examines how sacred norms, kinship structures, rituals, and governance mechanisms maintain social order, emphasizing their adaptive interplay with Christianity, state law, and modernity. Drawing on legal pluralism, Durkheimian sociology, and anthropological theories of kinship and ritual, the paper argues that Mao customary law is a dynamic, morally charged system rather than a static relic. The analysis integrates descriptive accounts of family, clan, marriage, guardianship, rituals, and dispute resolution, positioning these institutions as sites of moral sovereignty in a plural legal landscape. Overall, the paper is well-structured, with clear sections on theory, methodology, and findings, making it accessible to readers in anthropology, sociology, and legal studies.

Objectives

The primary objective is to analyze Mao Naga customary institutions as an integrated regime of social control and moral authority, demonstrating their role in regulating everyday life while negotiating contemporary influences like Christianity and state law. Secondary objectives include situating these institutions within interdisciplinary frameworks (e.g., legal pluralism, Durkheim's sacred, and kinship theories) and highlighting their adaptive, non-static nature. The paper aims to address gaps in systematic studies of Mao customs, using qualitative interpretation to reveal how sacred rituals and kinship networks sustain ethical order. It also seeks to contribute to broader debates on legal pluralism in postcolonial contexts, showing how customary norms coexist with modern governance.

Results

The paper delivers robust results through thematic analysis of ethnographic material, revealing key insights into Mao social organization. It effectively demonstrates how family and clan structures form the moral foundation, balancing hierarchy with reciprocity and care. Marriage and conjugality are portrayed as alliances reinforcing clan ties and cosmological balance, with detailed accounts of rituals, prohibitions, and divorce norms. Guardianship, adoption, and maintenance highlight collective care obligations, while rituals (e.g., genna and Okhro echa) and kingship illustrate performative justice and moral regulation. The findings underscore the sacralized nature of social control, where fear of divine punishment complements communal accountability, and customary law adapts to pluralism without losing legitimacy. Theoretically, the integration of Durkheim, Turner, and Foucault provides nuanced interpretations, such as viewing rituals as self-regulating mechanisms. Empirically, the paper synthesizes secondary sources (e.g., Daniel, Nepuni) into coherent clusters, offering a framework for understanding Mao institutions as living moral sovereignties.

Limitations

While the manuscript is ambitious, several limitations warrant attention. First, its heavy reliance on secondary ethnographic sources (e.g., compiled accounts from Makhel and Makhan villages) introduces potential interpretive biases, as the authors do not conduct primary fieldwork. This secondary nature limits claims to exhaust Mao diversity or contemporary changes, as noted in the methodology section, and may overlook intra-community variations or recent shifts due to migration and globalization. Second, the theoretical framework, though interdisciplinary, occasionally feels uneven; for instance, legal pluralism is well-applied, but Foucault's concepts are invoked somewhat superficially without deep

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engagement with his critiques of power. Third, the paper could better address ethical tensions, such as harsh sanctions for offenses like suicide or rape, which are presented descriptively but not critically interrogated in light of human rights standards. Finally, the conclusion calls for future fieldwork, but the manuscript itself does not fully bridge the gap between historical ethnography and current realities, potentially underplaying conflicts with state law or Christianity.

Strengths

The paper's strengths lie in its theoretical depth and synthetic approach. It skillfully weaves legal pluralism with Durkheimian and anthropological perspectives, offering a fresh lens on customary law as adaptive moral order rather than "tradition." The thematic organization of ethnographic data is methodical, transforming scattered accounts into an integrated analysis that highlights relational authority and sacred legitimacy. The discussion of rituals as mechanisms of social control is particularly insightful, illustrating how genna and Okhro echa blend fear, reconciliation, and cosmology. The writing is clear and humanistic, avoiding legalistic jargon while emphasizing lived practices. Additionally, the paper contributes meaningfully to postcolonial anthropology by showing how Mao institutions negotiate modernity, providing a model for studying similar communities. Its call for future research is forward-looking, positioning it as a foundational text.

Conclusion

In summary, this manuscript is a valuable contribution to the anthropology of customary law and social control, offering a nuanced portrayal of Mao Naga institutions as dynamic moral systems. It successfully challenges static views of "tribal tradition" and enriches debates on legal pluralism, making it suitable for publication in a journal like Journal of Legal Pluralism or Anthropological Quarterly. The results are compelling, and the strengths outweigh the limitations, though minor revisions would enhance its impact.

Final Thoughts

I recommend acceptance with revisions. Specifically, the authors should clarify how secondary sources were selected and triangulated to mitigate biases, and expand on contemporary adaptations (e.g., via brief case studies or interviews if available). A deeper critical discussion of ethical issues, such as gender inequalities or punitive norms, would strengthen the analysis. Finally, ensure APA 7th edition consistency in references (e.g., some entries lack full details). With these changes, the paper could serve as an exemplary study in the field. Overall rating: Accept with minor revisions.