MAPPING THE STAR LORE OF MIZORAM
A CULTURAL ASTRONOMICAL STUDY

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Mizoram, a small state nestled in the northeastern region of India, sandwiched between Myanmar and Bangladesh, is home to a vibrant population of just over one million. Known as Mizos, these people represent a collection of ethnic groups bound together by a shared cultural and linguistic heritage. They trace their origins to a wave of Mongolian migration into Eastern India centuries ago, with a period of settlement in western Myanmar before they arrived in Mizoram around the 17th century. This study seeks to illuminate the Mizo understanding of celestial objects, aiming to uncover narratives and myths that mirror those found in other cultures, thereby tracing the potential origins of these beliefs.

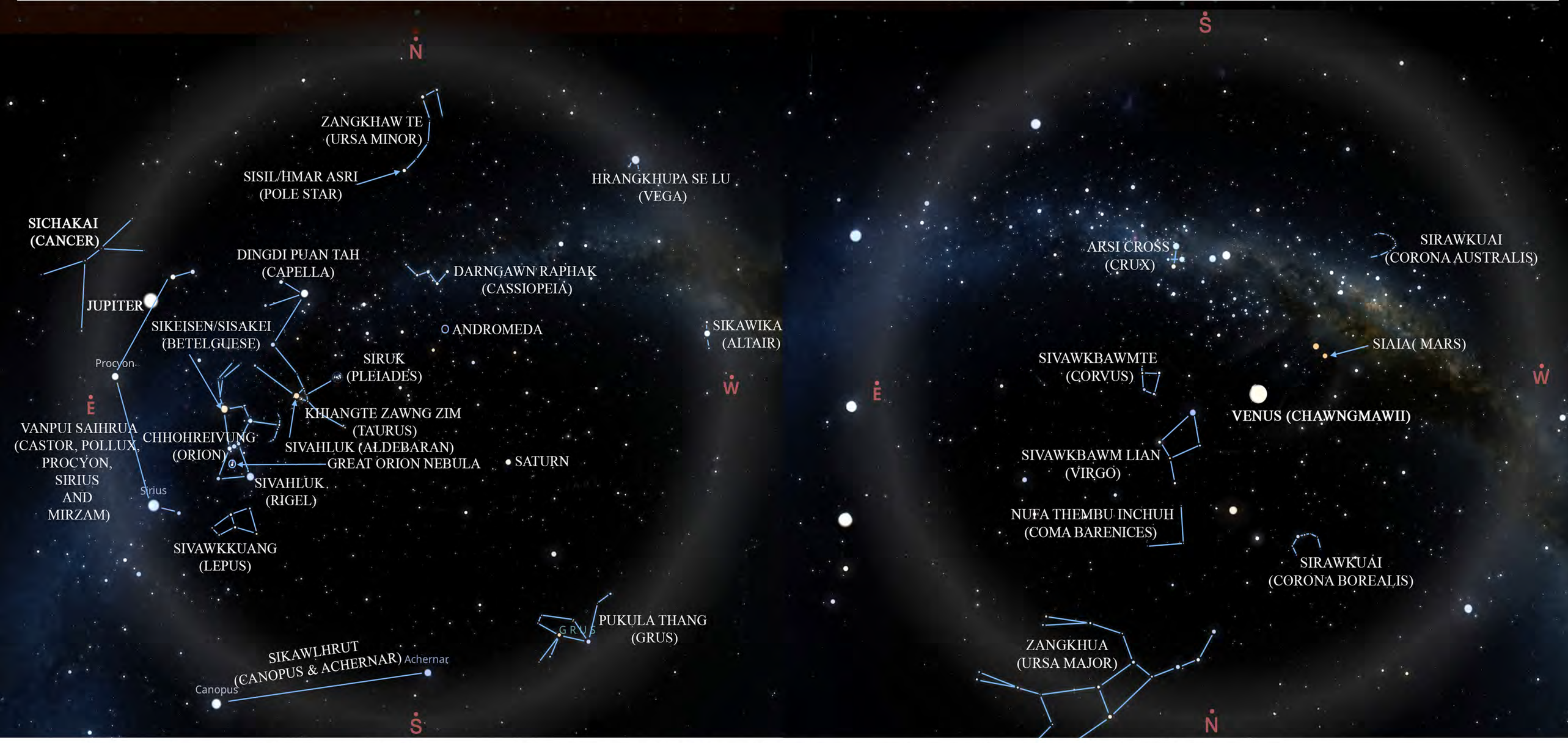


Figure 1. The constellation map of Mizos as visible from the sky above Aizawl, the capital city of Mizoram in November

The following is a list of known constellations, stars, and planets, along with their associated starlore and stories according to the Mizos.

1. Siruk (Pleiades): This cluster originates from a Mizo legend in which six potters, buried alive while digging for clay, ascended to become stars. The name comes from 'Si' (star) and 'ruk' (six), together meaning "six stars."

2. Khiangte zawng zim (Taurus): This constellation commemorates a jungle hunt led by a chief, during which seven warriors, a hunting dog, and a pursued monkey mysteriously vanished when sudden darkness engulfed the forest.

3. Chhohhreivung (Orion): This constellation tells the story of a hunter who, after forgetting his flint, was killed by a tiger. Enraged villagers hunted the beast, only for both the hunters and the tiger to mysteriously perish and be transformed into the stars of Orion.

* Betelgeuse ("Sisakei") represents the fierce tiger.
* Orion's Belt ("Simeitalh") symbolizes the three stones of a fire pit.
* The surrounding stars ("Sisakei zim") represent the hunters encircling the tiger.

4. Sivahluk (Rigel): This star represents the flight of a bird called Vahluk.

5. Vanpui Saihrua (Castor, Pollux, Procyon, Sirius, and Mirzam): These stars form the shape of a bow or catapult in the sky. 'Vanpui' means sky, and 'Saihrua' means bow.

6. Sichakai (Cancer): The name "Crab Star" comes from its resemblance to a crab ('Si' for star, 'Chakai' for crab). The starlore states that the crab was so fierce that even Vanpui Saihrua could not drive it out, resulting in its permanent place in the night sky.

7. Hrangkhupa se lu (Vega): This star represents the horn of an Indian bison owned by a man named Hrangkhupa.

8. Hrangkhupa se dar / Dingdi puan tah (Capella): This star represents the shoulder of Hrangkhupa's Indian bison. An alternative version identifies it with the act of handloom weaving.

9. Sikawikap (Altair): This star represents a game played by Mizo male youths, where the hard seed of a creeper bean is used as both a target and a projectile.

10. Pukula thang (Grus): This constellation represents a deer trapped in a snare made from wood bent into a bow shape. 'Thang' means trap in Mizo.

11. Sikawlhrut (Canopus & Achernar): These two stars rise and set along the horizon in winter, hence the name 'Si' (star) and 'kawlhrut' (along the horizon).

12. Sivawkbawmte (Corvus): This constellation resembles a bamboo basket used for transporting piglets. 'Si' means star, 'vawk' means pig, and 'bawmte' means bamboo basket.

13. Sivawkbawm lian (Virgo): This constellation has the same depiction as Corvus but is a larger version.

14.Sirawkuai (Corona Australis & Corona Borealis)- It represents the immense weight of the towering bamboo, causing its leafy crown to elegantly curl downward in a gentle arc. 'Si' is for star, 'rawkuai' is the curling of a bamboo tree.

15.Zangkhua (Ursa Major)- Zangkhua is the spirit of a man named Kawlawia, who was killed by enemy headhunters.

16.Zangkhaw te (Ursa Minor)- It is named similarly to Ursa Major, where 'te' is for small.

17.Sisil (Pole Star) - In Mizo folklore, the North Star is called 'Sisil', a name derived because the Pole Star is motionless. After all, it is too exhausted to move from muscle soreness, known as 'sil' in the Mizo language.

18.Arsi cross (Crux)- It is named so as it represents a cross.

19.Nufa thembu inchuh (Coma Barenices)- The name literally translates to a mother and daughter arguing over who uses the loom. 'Nufa' is mother and daughter, 'thembu' is the loom, and 'inchuh' is the argument of who gets it first.

20.Darngawn raphak (Cassiopeia) - It represents a four-sided bamboo tray(raphak) commonly used in northern Mizoram, especially in the tvillage of Darngawn.

21.Sivawkkuang (Lepus) - It represents a four-cornered pigsty. In Mizo, 'Si' means star and 'vawkkuang' means pigsty.

22.Hrangchhuana & Chawngmawii (Venus-Saturn/Jupiter) - This is the love story of a young warrior, Hrangchhuana, and a woman named Chawngmawii, who were from rival villages. Hrangchhuana would often sneak into Chawngmawii's village to meet her until they were discovered and killed by her villagers. Mizo elders believe the planet Venus is Chawngmawii, immortalized in the sky. Furthermore, depending on its seasonal appearance, Hrangchhuana is represented by one of two planets: either Saturn or Jupiter.

23.Siaia (Mars)- The story of Siaia is that he was also another suitor of Venus (Chawngmawii). So whenever Hrangchhuana was not around, he would try to court Chawngmawii.

24. Sun (Ni) and Moon (Thla)- The Sun is known as 'Ni' and Moon as 'Thla'.

25. Thlasik kawng (Milky way)- It is simply known as the "winter road" in Mizo, as it is only clearly visible during winter. 'Thlasik' means winter and 'kawng' means road.

26. Great Orion Nebula - Mizo elders recognised that the Orion Nebula was not a normal star, as its appearance was similar to a miniature Milky Way.