

**A NEW SINO-TIBETAN ROOT \*d-yu-k  
BELONG/TRUST/DEPEND/ACCEPT/TAKE AND  
A NOTE OF CAUTION TO MEGALORECONSTRUCTIONISTS**

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*This article is affectionately dedicated to Dr R.K. Sprigg, whose solid scholarship and subtle phonetic acumen are matched by an exquisite, quintessentially British sense of humor.*

**1. YHWH Loquitor**

The more we learn, the more we realise how little we know. Several hundred Tibeto-Burman [TB] and Sino-Tibetan [ST] etymologies have already been proposed in print, and scores of others remain buried for the moment in notebooks and on odd slips of paper. Yet this is but the tip of the iceberg, and one has the feeling that only a small fraction of the interconnections among the reconstructible TB and ST roots have so far been discovered. This is still, thank God, a field where one can come up with a brand-new etymon some sunny afternoon - a field which one can TRUST, on which one can DEPEND, and to which it is fun to BELONG!

There is a Lahu verb *cû*, which I first encountered in a Christian village in contexts like *yěšû? thà? cû? ve* 'place one's trust in Jesus; accept Jesus (as one's savior)' [*thà?* (P<sub>n</sub>)<sup>1</sup> 'object marker'], but which turned out to have a broader range of meaning: 'prefer; adopt as one's own; accept; put one's trust in; have recourse to; depend upon' (Matisoff, to appear).

The word occurs in collocations like the following:

*í-kâ? cû ve* (OV) 'take to the water (as a swimmer or fish)'

*mû-ho cû ve* (OV) 'take to the air (as a bird or plane)'

*šû thà? cû ve* (OV) 'depend on others' [*šû* (Pron) 'remote 3rd person; others, they']

*ca cû kî* (Ndeverb) 'a refuge; something/someone to be depended on' [*kî* 'locative nominaliser']

*nê te thô mâ na qo nâ?-chî=yè thà? ġa cû ve yò* 'If the spirits don't listen even when you pray to them, then you've got to try [= have recourse to] the hospital'.

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The high-falling tone [˥] of *cû* reflects Proto-Lolo-Burmese [PLB] Tone \*2, and the voiceless unaspirated initial points to a PLB \*voiced prototype, perhaps an affricate \*j (= \*dʒ) or a dental affricate \*dz.

The Akha [Southern Loloish] cognate *djù* [low tone] ‘listen to, adhere to’ (Hansson, in prep.) confirms the PLB tone (\*2) and the \*voicedness of the PLB initial. This sense is missing from Lewis 1968, though he does give a form *jù* [low tone] glossed ‘to become weak (used of humans getting weak, also of inanimate objects such as a rope sagging)’ (145). This can now be seen to be cognate with a homophonous Lahu form, *cû*, that I had previously considered to be a distinct lexeme, meaning ‘loose, slack; not taut, not stretched tight’. The notion of ADHERENCE or TRUSTING or BELONGING is very close to the idea of DE-PEND-ENCY, literally ‘hanging down from’ - passive pendulosity, as it were. At any rate, it is safe to set the root up provisionally as Proto-Loloish [PL] \*ju<sup>2</sup> or \*dzu<sup>2</sup>. So far we cannot narrow it down any more than that, since Akha is notorious for dental/palatal vacillation in sibilants and affricates, and Lahu has no phonemic distinction between the two series at all. (Later we shall entertain some persuasive allofamic evidence to reconstruct the initial a bit differently, with a prefix.)

Jingpho has a sure cognate to this PLB etymon, which allows us to set it up firmly for Proto-Tibeto-Burman [PTB]: *chyù* ‘to depend, rely upon; to cling to or cleave to’ (Hanson 1906:90), *mæchyù* ‘to cling to, depend upon, to hug (the shore); [the deer] clings to/depends upon [the brook]; reliable, trustworthy, and thus a figurative name for a rock or a *nat* prophet’ (408). Note that ‘chy-’ in Hanson’s transcription is simply a voiceless unaspirated affricate [tʃ].<sup>2</sup>

As a first approximation, therefore, we may set up the etymon as PTB \*m-džu (= \*m-ju) or \*m-dzu. A Chinese cognate quickly presents itself, in Karlgren’s (1957) *Grammata Serica Recensa* (GSR) Series 1224, namely 屬 [now simplified to 属] #1224s, reconstructed as Old Chinese [OC] \*d̥iuk / Middle Chinese [MC] \*ʒiwok (Mandarin *shǔ*), glossed ‘be joined to, attached to’ (*Shi Jing*); ‘belong to, be of the category of’ (*Shu Jing*). This character has a variant reading with \*voiceless unaspirated initial, OC \*t̥iuk / MC \*t̥iwok (Mandarin *zhǔ*) glossed ‘attach, connect; apply; touch devotedly; entrust to, give a charge to, order; draw upon oneself (as enmity); collect, etc’.<sup>3</sup>

Phonologically the Chinese/TB fit is excellent as far as the initial goes. A Proto-Sino-Tibetan [PST] \*dy- cluster will do very nicely. It even seems well within the realm of possibility that the dental element was reinterpreted as a prefix at a more recent time depth, so that the form at some point in the history of Lolo-Burmese was analysed as \*d-yu. This would then allow us to establish an allofamic connection between our PLB etymon \*d-yu (Tone \*2) and another group of forms reflecting PLB \*yu (Tone \*1), i.e. derived from an unprefixed variant with the palatal semivowel functioning as the root-initial. These words are widely attested in LB with the meaning ‘take, receive, accept’:

Written Burmese [WB] *yu*, Lahu *yù*, Lisu (Fraser) *ru* (tone ‘4’), Bisu *yú* (high tone), Akha *yú* (high tone), Mpi *ju* (tone ‘5’).<sup>4</sup>

Semantically, the association between TRUST/DEPEND and ACCEPT/ATTACH ONESELF TO WHAT IS OFFERED/TAKE seems plausible enough (cf. the gloss ‘collect’ for 屬 in Karlgren #1224s).<sup>5</sup>

The variation in voicing indicated by the multiple Chinese readings for #1224s seems to reflect an old simplex/causative alternation:

BE ATTACHED TO	⊗	ATTACH (oneself, something) TO
PST *m-dyu-k		PST **s-dyu-k > *tyu-k.

The \*m- prefix, characteristic of stative or durative (i.e. non-causative, non-directionalised) verbs in TB (Wolfenden:26-30), is directly attested in the Jingpho form *mæchyù*, above.<sup>6</sup>

One problem remains. The TB forms all reflect an open syllable, while the putative Chinese cognate ends in \*-k (as dramatically reflected in the Sino-Japanese reading *zoku*). Yet it should not strain our credulity too much to suppose that the final velar is 'suffixal'. Suffixed -k (as well as -t and -n) is frequently invoked in these situations, even by some of our more reputable Sino-Tibetanists - though the morphological function of such a velar element, if indeed it ever had any, remains shrouded in obscurity. Striking examples from Benedict's (1972) *Sino-Tibetan: a Conspectus* [STC] include the equation of PTB \*dza (better, \*dža) 'eat' with Chinese 食 \*dʰiək/\*dʒiək [GSR #921a-c].<sup>7</sup>

It is worth noting that the Lahu verb *yù* 'take' has recently extended its range of meaning as an auxiliary verb. As a 'pre-head versatile verb,' (Matisoff 1973:211 ff, and especially note 76, pp. 556-7) occurring before a main verb, it has had the sense of 'take something and V with it,' or causatively, 'take something and cause it to V', as in:

*tʂʰ* 'emerge' [< PLB \*ʔtwak] / *yù tʂʰ* 'take something out'  
*ʂi* 'die' [< PLB \*siy<sup>1</sup>] / *yù ʂi* 'kill someone'

Recently, however, *yù* has come into use as a *post-head* versatile verb, with the meaning 'V so that the action has a thorough or permanent effect; V so that it TAKES,' e.g.

*na* 'listen' [< PLB \*ʔna<sup>1</sup>] / *na yù* 'listen carefully; listen up, heed advice'  
*hê* 'study' [< Tai; cf. Siamese *rian*] / *hê yù* 'study hard, absorb one's lessons'  
*lo* 'wait' [< Tai; cf. Siamese *rɔ̃*] / *lo yù* 'wait patiently, keep on waiting'.

It seems clear that this usage represents a contamination from the Thai auxiliary verb *jùu* - a word which incidentally reflects the interesting Proto-Tai [PTai] initial \*ʔj- (glottalised palatal semivowel) (Li Fang-Kuei 1977:182, 184). As a main verb, *jùu* means 'dwell, be in a place'. As an auxiliary verb, it indicates progressive or durative action (e.g. *khɔj jùu* 'keep on waiting'), much like its counterparts in other languages (e.g. Mandarin *zài* 在, Vietnamese //*ở*//, Lahu *chê*).

It seems to me at least possible that the phonological resemblance between our OC word \*dyu-k 'BELONG TO A CATEGORY' and the PTai etymon \*ʔjuu 'BE IN A PLACE/BELONG SOMEWHERE' is not fortuitous, and bespeaks an early Sino-Thai contact word.<sup>8</sup> If that is the case, this extension of the range of Lahu *yù* under Tai influence is not exactly a 'contamination,' but rather a reactivation of a previous network of associations that was already 'in the family'.

At the very least, the etymon \*m-dyu-k ⊗ \*s-dyu-k BELONG/RELY/DEPEND/BE JOINED TO/CLING TO seems well established for the PST level. Our suggested PLB metanalytic allofam \*yu [< \*d-yu < \*dyu] TAKE/ACCEPT is slightly more speculative, but, I feel, quite DEPENDABLE - and in fact worthy of being CLUNG TO until generally ACCEPTED.

## 2. *Advocatus diaboli loquitur*

The first part of this paper was serious. I would now like to demonstrate the danger of ‘megalocomparison’ by pointing out the uncanny similarity of our new PST root \*d-yu-k BELONG/BE JOINED TO/CLING TO to the well-known Proto-Indo-European [PIE] etymon \*yeu(g)- (i.e. \*yeu- ≠ \*yeug-) JOIN. (The allofam with final velar, \*yeug-, is called ‘augmented’ by Indo-Europeanists, which is neither more nor less explanatory than calling the final velar in our Chinese cognate ‘suffixal’.) This Indo-European root underlies a large number of English words, including of course ‘yoke’, ‘conjugal’, ‘join’, ‘junction’, ‘yoga’, and ‘zeugma’.<sup>9</sup> It is no doubt a ‘regular correspondence’ to have the PST \*d- prefix correspond to PIE \*zero, and the consonants and vowels also ‘fit perfectly’:

Proto-Serindo-European	PIE	PST
*d	-	*d-
*y	*y	*y
*ew	*eu	*u
*G	*g	*k

It is fun to let our minds range (wander?) far and wide from one language family to another. But megalocomparison is an uncertain business at best, and can degenerate at any time into a mere playing with symbols. Accidental resemblances can be dolled up to look highly plausible on paper. A healthy skepticism and a sense of humor are prerequisites in this game. More than one far-flung etymology that has been proposed in recent years will turn out to have no more validity than the PST/PIE ‘etymology just proposed. There is nothing wrong with that. Problems arise only when one’s speculations begin to take on the aura of absolute truth in one’s own mind.

## NOTES

- 1 Parts of speech are abbreviated as in Matisoff 1973/82. In particular, N<sub>deverb</sub> = deverbal noun, O = object, P<sub>n</sub> = nominal particle, V = verb.
- 2 The tone of Jingpho *chyu* is given as 'low' in the MS of Maran's revision of Hanson's dictionary, and I have it as 'low' in my own field notes, but it is given as high in Dai Qingxia *et al.* (1983:96). All sources (including Dai:444) agree that the derivative *mčhyù* is low tone. Dai's Chinese gloss for both forms is 依靠 'depend on'.
- 3 In modern Mandarin *shǔ* has a range of meanings like the following: (1) category, genus; (2) be under, be subordinate to; (3) belong to; (4) family members, dependents; (5) be born in the year of (one of the twelve calendrical animals) (Wu:636). For the meaning ENJOIN/ORDER/URGE, a character 囑 [not in series 1224] with the mouth-radical is now used. For the connection between JOIN and ORDER, cf. English *enjoin*, ult. < Latin *injungere* 'join to; impose'.
- 4 See Bradley (1979b:350-1, set #606). This etymon is not restricted to Lolo-Burmese, as claimed in STC (209, 220), but is also found in Angami Naga *zu* 'take, pluck'.
- 5 Cf. the English expression 'TAKE TO the air' (i.e. 'entrust oneself to the air', Lahu *mû-ho cû ve*).
- 6 Incidentally, it is likely that another voiceless-initialled member of Series 1224 is relatable to this word family, viz. #1224u 鋸 'shaft of an ax' \*t<sub>1</sub>juk/\*t<sub>1</sub>wok (Mandarin *zhú*), with the semantic link provided by the notion of ATTACHMENT (Note: Mandarin *zhú* is a 'reading pronunciation; see Chou (1979:155, #4238)).
- 7 This eminently suffixable root is also assigned a Chinese allofam with a nasal suffix, 餐 \*ts'an < \*tsa-n [GSR #154c]. On the TB side, both a -t and an -n are attested, as in Jingpho *šât* 'food; rice' ≈ *šá* (high tone) 'eat' < PTB \*dža-t [but the Jingpho simple fricative (rather than affricate) is unexplained in STC]; or in Written Tibetan *zan* 'food' < \*(d)za-n and Jingpho *šan* 'flesh, deer, meat' (Matisoff 1978:27). STC fails to recognise the allofamic relationship between its sets #66 'EAT' and #181 'MEAT/ANIMAL'.
- 8 BELONG is a highly abstract notion, as indicated by the fact that the English word 'belong' has become grammaticalised as a genitive marker in Pidgin (e.g. *lava-lava bilong tuan* 'my lord's loincloth').
- 9 For a detailed (and serious) treatment of this Indo-European etymon as it actually was borrowed into many TB languages of NE India and the Himalayas, see Matisoff 1982.

