The linguistic geography of southern China: language origins and dispersals

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Outline

• Purpose: Provide “Big picture”
• Riverine dispersal theories that I will propose: KD + HM
• Macrophyla: Austro-Tai, Yangtzean
• Linguistic areas that I will propose:
  • (1) Lingnan area
  • (2) Plateau area
Southern China: ~1,000 – 500 B.C.
Homelands

Inferred mostly from present-day geographic distributions, and some Chinese historical records:

- **Henan, Shaanxi**: Sinitic
- **Shandong**: Dongyi (TB? “Etruscan of China”?)
- **Hunan**: Hmong-Mien
- **Jiangxi**: “Para-Hmong-Mien”?
- **Chongqing**: Tujia [TB]
- **Sichuan**: Qiangic [TB]
- **Yunnan**: Bai, Loloish [TB]
- **Guizhou**: “Macro-Bai” (Cai-Long) [TB]
- **Guangdong, Guangxi (＝Yue)**: Kra-Dai
- **Fujian, Zhejiang**: Pre-Austronesian
Spread of Sinitic

- Massive expansion of Chinese empire, culture, language starting around 2,000 B.P. (Qin Dynasty, Han Dynasty)
- Chinese expansion brings about tonogenesis & monosyllabification = creolization processes
- Parallel to expansion of Roman Empire and Latin / Romance languages
- TB, KD, HM, AA had also been expanding prior to 2,000 B.P.; they would have wiped out various isolates.
KD + HM riverine dispersals

- I noticed that present-day distributions of KD and HM branches overlap a lot with drainage basins.

- **KD: Pearl River**
  - **Kra**: Hongshui River
  - **Kam-Sui**: Liu River
  - **Tai**: Yong River
  - Explains why KD spread *west*

- **HM: Xiang River**
  - **Hmongic**: Yuan River
  - **Mienic**: Xiang River
  - Explains why HM spread *southwest*
Kra-Dai riverine dispersal: ~ 3,000 B.P.
Former distribution of Buyang (Kra)

Hmong-Mien riverine dispersal: ~2,500 B.P.
Hmongic: Guizhou, Western Hunan
Mienic: Southern Hunan
Double-crop rice and languages
Single-crop rice and languages
Yangtzean, Austro-Tai
Yangtzean

- Stanley Starosta’s proposal
- KD & HM: agricultural expansions
- Hmong-Mien: Daxi culture
- Para-Hmong-Mien: Jiangxi = perfect geography and conditions for a Hmong-Mien sister family (cf. double-crop rice map)
- Proto-Yangtzean / Pre-Hmong-Mien would have been in Hubei, perhaps Anhui.
- HM & KD are “not quite that diverse”, vs. TB (Blench, van Driem, Starosta).
Austro-Tai

- Paul K. Benedict (1942, 1975); Weera Ostapirat (2005)

- **Austro-Tai**: Majiabang, Hemudu cultures

- **Fujian coast** archaeology (Tianlong Jiao 2007)
  - Fujian to Taiwan migration: 6500-5000 B.P
  - Fujian-Taiwan contact maintained until 3500 B.P.
Austro-Tai

- **Proto-Austro-Tai**: Fisher-foragers along the Fujian coast (Jiao 2007); no rice agriculture yet. Splits to Proto-Kra-Dai and Proto-Austronesian.
- **Proto-Kra-Dai**: Rice agriculturalists in Guangdong (Pearl River Delta), dispersed via rivers.
- **Proto-Austronesian (Formosan)**: Millet agriculture, no wet-rice agriculture (Blench); no outriggers (yet). Multiple migrations from Fujian (cf. Ross’ and Li’s Formosan classifications).
Guizhou: earlier languages

- BOREN
- CAIJIA
  - Yi (Nesu, Nipu)
- LONGJIA
- GELAO
- BOLYU
- MULAO
- Buyi (Tai)
- Han (Sinitic)
- TUJIA
- Miao (Hmongic)
Guizhou before Tai, Sinitic, HM, Loloish

- **Boren**: May be Lachi (Kra branch) (Edmondson & Li 2003)
- **Caijia, Longjia**: unclassified TB languages
- **Gelao, Mulao**: Kra
- **Tujia**: (TB isolate branch)
- **Bolyu**: AA, Mangic / Pakanic branch; migrated from Guizhou to Guangxi in the 1800’s with Gelao (Li 1999)
“Macro-Sinitic” ≠ Bai (Sagart)
“Macro-Bai” (incl. Sinitic)
KD-HM, KD-TB, TB-HM contact

Cai-Long & N. Kra contact

TuJia & Waxiang & Qo Xiong contact

Kam-Sui & Hmu contact
Lolo-Burmese dispersal: overland

Austroasiatic branches: dispersal

Credits:
Paul Sidwell,
Roger Blench
Austroasiatic branches: contact
Linguistic areas

- Qiangic
- Plateau
- Lingnan
- Mon-Khmer
- AN
- Taiwan
Linguistic areas

- SW Mandarin
- Xiang
- Tujiang
- Waxiang
- Loloish
- Hmongic
- Caijia
- Longjia
- PLATEAU AREA
- Kra (N.)
- Kam-Sui
- Kra (S.)
- Pinghua
- Mienic
- Tai
- Yue
- LINGNAN AREA
- Pakanic
- Ong Be
- Hlai
Linguistic areas formed AFTER Hmong-Mien, Kra split up

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Linguistic areas: origins

- Formed between 500 A.D. – 1500 A.D. (around or after split-up of Middle Chinese, but before the Qing Dynasty)
- **Plateau** area primary influences: Tibeto-Burman + Old Sinitic lects in Sichuan and Hunan
- **Lingnan** area primary influences: Tai + Yue Chinese
- **Qiangic**: linguistic area but not coherent subgroup (Chirkova)
Plateau area

- Loss of final stops (-p, -t, -k)
- Tendency for disyllabic and trisyllabic lexical forms (many “dummy” prefixes such as ka-, qa-, ta-, pa-, etc.; PTB *tsa suffix common)
- Simpler tone systems (many with only 4 tones)
- Centered in Guizhou
Lingnan area

• Preservation of final stops (-p, -t, -k)
• Tendency for monosyllabic forms
• More complex tone systems (many with 8 tones or more)
• Centered in Guangxi

• Vietnamese displays both Lingnan and Mon-Khmer features (Red River valley = Lingnan + Mon-Khmer areas).
Mutual influences: families

**TB:**
Unidirectional

**AA-KD-HM triangle**

Map showing the mutual influences of families in different regions.
Mutual influences: AA-KD-HM triangle

- Routes facilitating early contact: coasts of Vietnam and southern China, and rivers.
- **TB → HM**: widespread influence (Ratliff 2010)
- **TB → KD**: heaviest influences in Kra (Ostapirat 2000)
- **AA → HM**: various AA loanwords / cognates in Proto-HM (‘water’, ‘blood’, ‘bone’ etc.), but not in KD or TB or AN (Ratliff 2010)
- **HM → AA**: less likely than AA → HM, but possible
- **AA → KD**: sporadic AA loanwords in Kra
- **KD → AA**: widely attested; cf. Reid (2005) on Austric
Whence the interphyletic similarities?

Possible explanations for East Asian language family similarities.

- (1) They are all related (Starosta’s East Asian macrophyllum)
- (2) They are all borrowings (e.g., Brench’s South Yunnan interaction sphere hypothesis)
- (3) Perhaps compromise of (1) and (2)
Ongoing research

- SE Asian languages database: CRCL Bangkok
- Reconstruction work: Austroasiatic (Paul Sidwell), Kra-Dai (Peter Norquest)
- Flood of new data from China
- New research on genetics, archaeology, etc.
Southern China: ~ 1,000 – 500 B.C.
References

References