

# **Linguistic and Historical Explanation of the Names for the Buyi, a Group of Tai People in Southwest China**

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An ethnic name is one of the important ways an ethnic group, or one of its subgroups, differs from other ethnic groups or subgroups. Its creation and development is in step with the history of the ethnic group to which it refers. The meaning of the names of each group vary because of the differences in social development background and cultural environments. This paper gives a tentative explanation of the names of the Buyis, especially those which appeared in the Han Chinese historical books, such as, “Yue (越)”, “Pu (濮)”, “Lao (僚)”, “Yi (夷)” and “Zhong (仲)”.

## **I. Buyi and Its Names**

Buyi is a minority group in southern China, mainly distributed in the south, the southwest and the central part of Guizhou province of the country. Additionally, there are a small number of them living scattered in some parts of Sichuan and Yunnan provinces, and the mountain areas of Northern Vietnam. According to the statistical figures given in 1990, the Buyis have a population of more than 2,540,000, and more than 95% are living in Guizhou province of China. Genealogically, the Buyis are one of the many Tai groups in south China and Southeast Asia. Its language belongs to the north branch of the Tai language group in the Tai-Kadai language family. Linguists from China are used to calling it the Zhuangdai

branch of the Zhuangdong language group in the Sino-Tibetan language family. It is very close to the northern dialect of Zhuang, which is nearby. It also has a close relationship with such groups as Zhuang, Dong(Kam), Shui, and Maonan in both geographical location and historical origin.

“Buyi”, has been the registered name of the group since 1953. It is the transliteration of “pu<sup>4</sup> ?jai<sup>4</sup>”, which is a name the Buyis call themselves. Because of the difference of local accent, “pu<sup>4</sup> ?jai<sup>4</sup>” has several variants, as shown below:

1, pu <sup>4</sup> ?jai <sup>4</sup>	2, pu <sup>4</sup> dzai <sup>4</sup>
3, pu <sup>4</sup> dzoi <sup>4</sup>	4, pəu <sup>4</sup> ?oi <sup>4</sup>
5, pu <sup>4</sup> jai <sup>3</sup>	6, pu <sup>4</sup> ?ji <sup>4</sup>
7, pu <sup>4</sup> ?jui <sup>4</sup>	8, pu <sup>4</sup> dži <sup>4</sup>
9, pu <sup>4</sup> ?ie <sup>4</sup>	

All these names are very close to the registered name “Buyi” phonetically. Moreover, the Buyis in Northern Vietnam also have similar names such as “Buyi”, “Yay” and “Giay”, all of which are the names the Buyis in Vietnam call themselves.

“pu<sup>4</sup> ?jai<sup>4</sup>” is a noun, which consists of a prefix “pu<sup>4</sup>” and the main part “?jai<sup>4</sup>”. In this construction, “pu<sup>4</sup>” means “people, person”, while “?jai<sup>4</sup>” together with its variants have no specific meaning in Buyi language at all. In Wangmo (southwest of Guizhou), the word “?jai<sup>4</sup>” appears in a four-syllable word “?jai<sup>4</sup> kun<sup>1</sup> ?jai<sup>4</sup> tan<sup>3</sup>” which means “skimp and save, live frugally”. But we do not have sufficient evidence to prove the internal relationship between these two.

Besides “pu<sup>4</sup> ?jai<sup>4</sup>” and its variants, there are still some other names given to the Buyis. In the ancient Han Chinese historical books, the Buyis were once mentioned as “Yue”, “Luoyue”, “Xi’ou”, “Pu”, “Yi”, “Lao”, “Yipu”, “Yilso”. Since the Yuan Dynasty (13th century), especially in the local chronicles of Ming, Qing Dynasties and the Republic of China (from 14th century to 1949), such names

as “Zhongjia”, “Zhongmiao”, “Zhongjiamiao”, “Qingzhong”, “Shuijia”, “Shuihu”, “Shuizu”, “Yizu”, “Yijia”, “Yibian”, “Bendi” (the native), “Tujia”, “Tubian”, and “Sharen” were used to refer to the Buyis. Some of these names show the origin of the Buyis as an ethnic group, others are related to habits of living and model of production of Buyi people. For example, the Buyis like to live at the bottom of the mountains, beside a stream or river, and have been engaged in agriculture, mainly planting paddy rice since the ancient times. So they got the names: “Shuizu”, “Shuijia”, and “Shuihu”, all of which have something to do with water or paddy rice planting. Moreover, the Buyis are regarded as the native people of Guizhou, excluding the Buyis who immigrated to Yunan, Sichuan and Northern Vietnam a few hundred years ago. So the Han Chinese called them “Bendi”, “Tujia” and “Tubian”, all mean “natives”.

The Buyi, have special names for those living in different areas, having different accents and different dressing styles. For example, in the areas around Xingbei Town of Zhenfeng in southwestern Guizhou province, those who live near the city of Zhenfeng and southwards to Ceheng county are called “ $pu^4 ?ja: \eta^{1,}$ ”. Those who live in the upper reach of the North Basin River are called “ $pu^4 na^6,$ ” and another name “ $pu^4 no \eta^{2,}$ ” is given to those living on the north bank of the North Basin River. Over the area of Luodian and Wangmo, people living near the towns are called “ $pu^4 cu^{1,}$ ”, while those who live in the rural mountain areas are called “ $pu^4 luo^6,$ ”. Moreover, there are still some other names such as “ $pu^4 ?ba: n^4,$ ”, “ $pu^4 ja: u^4,$ ”, “ $pu^4 zu \eta^{2,}$ ”, and “ $pu^4 t\zeta am^5,$ ” given to those dressing themselves differently and speaking with a different accent. As for the Buyis, no matter what names they are given, they still regard “ $pu^4 ?jai^4$ ” as their ethnic name.

## II. Linguistic and Historical Explanation

### of the Names for the Buyis

With regard to the origin of the Buyis, there are several historical theories. But all these will not be addressed in this paper. Here, we will analyze only the relationship between the modern name the Buyis call themselves and such names as “Yue”, “Pu”, “Lao”, “Yi” and “Zhong” which appeared in the ancient Han Chinese historical books, or were widely used among the folks last few centuries.

#### 1) “?jai<sup>4</sup>” and “Yue”

“Yue” was the general name for a number of loosely related ethnic groups which inhabited broad areas of south China long time ago. These groups lived on the southeast coast of China in approximately 2000 B.C, more than 4000 years ago. The era beginning in the “Spring and Autumn Period” to the final days of the “Warring States Ages” was the heyday of development for some of the groups. Two local countries, “Wu” and “Yue”, were founded and once tried to seize control of the empire on the Central Plains of China. Due to their numerous branches, the “Yue” were once referred to as “Baiyue” (hundred Yue) in the ancient Han Chinese historical books. In the areas where the Buyi people live today, there once lived two branches of the “Yue” named “Luoyue” and “Xi’ou”. Modern Buyi people are said to have descended from these two groups. The Buyis originated from the ancient Yue, assimilated cultures from other groups, then gradually developed and have formed the Buyis of today. This viewpoint is widely accepted by historical scholars.

“Yue”, the name of ancient Yue peoples, is similar to “?jai<sup>4</sup>”, the present-day phonetic name of the Buyis. These two syllables seem to be pronounced the same; however, there are some important differences. According to the studies of the

famous cultural-linguist, Prof. Zhang Gongjin, "Yue" was pronounced as [y'wat] in ancient Chinese, (before the 3rd century). The correspondence between [y'wat] and "tai"<sup>2</sup> is very clear. "Tai"<sup>2</sup> is the name of the Dai people, which is another ethnic group that originated from the ancient "Yue". He had given some evidence to prove his viewpoints. The Dais have the same historical origin as the Buyis. Their name "tai"<sup>2</sup> is pronounced similarly to "?jai"<sup>4</sup>, and "?jai"<sup>4</sup> seems closer to "Yue". If "tai"<sup>2</sup> has some relationship with "Yue", then so does "?jai"<sup>4</sup>. That means "Yue" may be the transliteration of "?jai"<sup>4</sup> in the ancient Han Chinese historical books.

Few historians have talked about the meaning of "?jai"<sup>4</sup>. In the past, several different ideas about the meaning of "Yue" existed. Some scholars studied the inscription of "Yue" on ancient bronze objects and thought the meaning should be "ax". Some thought it should be "plough" or "ploughshare", and still others thought it should be a kind of stone ax which could be bounded with a handle. Other scholars examined the inscription from a linguistic perspective and affirmed that "Yue" means "people". (All viewpoints above are cited from "the History of Baiyue Groups" written by Chen Guoqiang and so on). As seen above, "?jai"<sup>4</sup> has no other meanings, except the name of the Buyis. According to the phonetic relationship between "tai"<sup>2</sup>, "?jai"<sup>4</sup> and "Yue", we think, "Yue", "?jai"<sup>4</sup>, "tai"<sup>2</sup>, and perhaps some other names of Tai groups meant "plough" or "ploughshare" originally. Modern Tai languages pronounce "plough" as follow:

Zhuang (the north dialect)	ɕai <sup>1</sup>
Zhuang (the south dialect)	thai <sup>1</sup>
Buyi	sai <sup>1</sup> /tɕai <sup>1</sup> /ɕai <sup>1</sup>
Dai (Xishuangbanna dialect)	thai <sup>1</sup>
Dai (Dehong dialect)	thai <sup>1</sup>
Dong	khəi <sup>1</sup>

Molao	khɣai <sup>1</sup>
Shui	toi <sup>1</sup>
Maonan	kwai <sup>1</sup>
Li (Tongzha)	tei <sup>6</sup>
Li (Baoting)	lai <sup>2</sup>

The phonetic forms of "plough" in the Kam-Tai group are very similar to that of the ethnic names (at least the name from some areas) except the Kam-Shui branch. The only difference is the tone, odd number for "plough" (except Li language), but even numbers for the ethnic names. see as below:

Zhuang (northwest of Guangxi)	?jai <sup>4</sup> ----- cai <sup>1</sup>
Buyi	?jai <sup>4</sup> ----- sai <sup>1</sup> /tcai <sup>1</sup> /cai <sup>1</sup>
Dai	tai <sup>2</sup> ----- thai <sup>1</sup>
Li (Tongzha)	tai <sup>1</sup> ----- tei <sup>6</sup>
Li (Baoting)	tai <sup>1</sup> ----- lai <sup>2</sup>

Most linguists think that the tones in the Tai languages were developed later. Without including an in-depth consideration of the creation of the tones, it is possible to estimate that "Yue" and the ethnic names were the same syllable before the tone split. That is, the ancient pronunciation of "Yue" meant "plough", and the creation of the tones led to the variation of the phonetic forms of "plough" and the ethnic names.

Besides "?jai<sup>4</sup>", "dzai<sup>4</sup>" or "dzo<sup>4</sup>i" are also names of the Buyis in some areas. The consonant [dz] is voiced, and corresponds to [tɕ], which is a voiceless consonant in the word of "plough [tcai<sup>1</sup>]". This correspondence is said to be due to the tone split. Therefore, we think that "dzai<sup>4</sup>" or "dzo<sup>4</sup>i" might be earliest name of the Buyis, from which ?jai<sup>4</sup> or ?joi<sup>4</sup> were developed. Furthermore, "Yue" [ɣiwat], the name for the ancestors of the Buyis call themselves, was the original form of them all.

The Buyis, or more extensively the Tai groups, have been engaged in agricultural production since ancient times. It is possible that they were the inventors of the farm tool "plough". It was an important tool in agriculture, and the "Yue" people were characterized by using it. So it is natural the people named the group with this kind of tool to differ from other group.

## (2) "Pu" and "Pu (濮)"

"Pu" was an ethnic group which inhabited in the broad area between the middle and the southwestern part of China during the 5th to 1st centuries B.C. The Han Chinese historical books recorded them as "Baipu" (hundred Pu), for they had complicated internal relations and wide-ranged distribution. Within the field of ethnic history, there are many theories about the relations between the "Pu" and the "Yue". One important theory is that the "Pu" and the "Yue" had a very close relationship, they were names referring to the same ethnic group in different historical periods or in different areas. But in the historical books, sometimes, they were mentioned as "Pu Yue".

According to the studies of Chinese ancient phonologists, "Pu" was pronounced as "puk" in the middle ancient Han Chinese language. As seen from the phonetic construction, this syllable may correspond to the syllable in the name the Buyis presently call themselves "pu". However, we don't have enough evidence to assert that "Pu (濮)" is the same as "pu" in the word "pu<sup>4</sup>?jai<sup>4</sup>".

In Buyi language, "pu" means "people, person". Most of the time, it is a noun prefix referring to the category and characteristics of "people or person". In the language of some areas, it can be used independently as a noun. For example, "guan<sup>2</sup> lian<sup>2</sup> pan<sup>2</sup> pu<sup>4</sup> ma<sup>1</sup> ōa<sup>1</sup> muŋ<sup>2</sup>" (yesterday-have-people-come-look for-you) "Someone came to look for you yesterday." The word "pu" can also be used as a classifier. It refers to the number of the "person" together with a numeral.

This usage is a part of the development of noun prefix. If “Pu (濮)” and “pu<sup>4</sup>” have some relationship in meaning, or “Pu” is “pu<sup>4</sup>” in the word “pu<sup>4</sup>?jai<sup>4</sup>” as some scholars have said, then “Pu (濮)” should contain the meaning “people, person” in the ancient Buyi language. But it seems that one can not differentiate between groups of people by only giving each of them the name “people”. A proper noun should be added according to the word formation of Tai language, which refers to the category and characteristics of the term “people”. But most of the time, “Pu (濮)” appeared independently in the historical books. Although such constructions as “Pu Yue” and “Pu Lao” occasionally appeared, it is still hard to say whether they are compound phrases or a word with its modifier. In addition, “Pu” did not refer to the Buyis only. Rather, it referred to many other groups in these areas, as recorded by the Han Chinese historical books. Therefore “Pu (濮)” must have some other origin as the ethnic name of the Buyis. We cannot simply equate “Pu (濮)” and “pu<sup>4</sup>” in the word “pu<sup>4</sup>?jai<sup>4</sup>”

(3) “ $\delta au^2 / lau^2$ ” and “Lao (僚)”

“Lao” is the general name for a large number of ethnic groups widely distributed in southwestern China and Indochinese peninsula from the early Han Dynasty to the Tang Dynasty. This group assimilated all kinds of culture, which included that of the ancestors of the Buyis. As the difference of geographical location and times, such different names as “Lao (僚)”, “Li (俚)”, “Lao (佬)”, “Lin (伶)” were recorded respectively in the Han Chinese historical books.

Some scholars engaging in the study of Buyi history usually relate “Lao (僚)” to the pronoun “ $\delta au^2 / lau^2$  (we)” in the Buyi language, as they are similar in pronunciation. In some areas, the Buyis sometimes use “pu<sup>4</sup> $\delta au^2 / lau^2$ ” or “kai<sup>5</sup> $\delta au^2 / lau^2$ ” meaning “our people, our nation” as the names they call themselves. “Kayou (卡尤)”, a name, that once appeared in the historical books, is the



transliteration of “ka<sup>3</sup> jiu<sup>2</sup> (our people)” in the third vernacular of Buyi language (in the west of Guizhou province). This is a name indicating strong group identity, usually used among members from the same group. However they still call themselves “pu<sup>4</sup> ?jai<sup>4</sup>” when communicating with other groups. “Lao (僚)” refers not only to the Buyis, but also to a large number of peoples. It is not the transliteration of “pu<sup>4</sup> ɔau<sup>2</sup> /lau<sup>2</sup>”. This can be supported by the phonetic forms of the pronoun “we, us” in all Tai languages, as shown below:

Zhuang (the northern dialect)	tou <sup>1</sup> /ɔau <sup>2</sup>
Zhuang (the southern dialect)	hun <sup>1</sup> lau <sup>2</sup> /lau <sup>2</sup>
Buyi	tu <sup>1</sup> /ɔau <sup>2</sup> /lau <sup>2</sup>
Dai (Xishuangbanna dialect)	tu <sup>1</sup> /hau <sup>2</sup>
Dai (Dehong dialect)	hau <sup>2</sup>
Dong	tiu <sup>1</sup> /ta:u <sup>1</sup>
Molao	niu <sup>2</sup> /hya:u <sup>1</sup>
Shui	ndiu <sup>1</sup> /nda:u <sup>1</sup>
Maonan	ndiu <sup>1</sup> /nda:u <sup>1</sup>
Li (Tongzha)	fau <sup>1</sup> /sau <sup>4</sup>
Li (Baoting)	fa <sup>1</sup> /ga <sup>1</sup>
Lao	hau <sup>2</sup>
Thai	rau <sup>2</sup>
Gelao	ti <sup>55</sup> to <sup>31</sup>

The material presented above shows that the phonetic forms of “we, us” in all Tai languages are quite different from that of “Lao (僚)” except the southern dialect of Zhuang. But now, only a small number of Zhuang people call themselves “pu<sup>4</sup> lau<sup>2</sup>”. Therefore, the name “pu<sup>4</sup> ɔau<sup>2</sup> /lau<sup>2</sup>” or “kai<sup>5</sup> ɔau<sup>2</sup> /lau<sup>2</sup>”, which people from some Buyi areas call themselves, has no relation to “Lao (僚)”. As an

ethnic name, "k lau"<sup>55</sup>, which is a name the Gelaos in Anshun of Guizhou province call themselves today, may have something to do with "Lao (僚)"

As for the origin of "Lao (僚)", we think it has something to do with the ethnic name of the "Laos" today, or perhaps, with "Lao (牢)" in the ancient word "Ai-Lao (哀牢)".

The northern part of Laos was once within the area that the "Baiyue (hundred Yue)" groups inhabited. The "Lao (僚)" , similar to "Lao (僚)" phonetically, refers to the people the majority group in Laos today. The Lao people think that the ancient "Ai-Lao people" were the ancestors.

"Ai-Lao (哀牢)" refers to an ethnic group in South China who were called "the southwestern Yi" during the Han Dynasty. Only a little has been recorded about them in the Han Chinese historical books. Records of South China's Local Countries - Nanzhong History (Hua Yang Guo Zhi - Nanzhong Zhi) said, Ai-Lao "was about three thousand li (=0.5 kilometer) from the east to the west, four thousand and six hundred li from the south to the north". It covered the areas between the southern part of the Yunnan province in China, northern Laos and the northeastern part of Burma. People there "all had their noses and earlobes pierced, . . . and a dragon tattooed on their bodies." "They wore a sleeveless long dress". All of these customs were similar to that of the "Yue" people. According to the record of The Eastern Han Documents - History of Ai-Lao Among the Southwestern Yi (Houhan Shu - Xinan Yi Ai-Lao Zhuan): "In Ai-Lao, there was once a woman named Sayi, who lived in the Lao mountains. One day, when she was fishing in the river, she had a very special sensation as she touched a sunken log, and for that she was pregnant. Ten baby boys were born after ten months. A long time after that, the sunken log turned into a dragon, came out of the water and said to Sayi, 'You once conceived my children, now, where are they?' Nine of the sons ran away when they saw the dragon, except the youngest one. He sat with his back to the

dragon, and the dragon licked him. The mother (Sayi) spoke a strange language, and called 'back' 'tciu', and pronounced 'sit' as 'loŋ'. She named the youngest son 'tciulon'. When the sons grew up, they all chose their youngest brother to be their king, as he had been licked by their father (the dragon) and was artful (clever)."

Similar stories are wide spread among Thai and Lao people. The Thai (the north-eastern part) and the Lao languages belong to the central branch of Tai language group. The word for "young girl" is "sa.u<sup>1</sup>", close to "sa" in the word of "Sayi"; pronounce "sit" as "naŋ<sup>5</sup>", similar to "loŋ". This similarity demonstrates that the Ai-Lao language is very close to Lao. So, the ethnic name "Lao" may have originated from "Lao (牢)" in the word "Ai-Lao 哀牢".

#### (4) Explanation of "Yi (夷)"

"Yi (夷)" is pronounced as "ji<sup>24</sup>". Some scholars relate it to "?jai<sup>4</sup>" or "?ji<sup>4</sup>", as it was once used as the name of the Buyis. They thought that "Yi (夷)" is "?jai<sup>4</sup>" or "?ji<sup>4</sup>". In fact, this is a misunderstanding.

"Yi (夷)" had been used as an ethnic name since the Han Dynasty. At that time, minority ethnic groups in southwestern China were generally called "Xinan Yi (the southwestern Yi)" in the Records of History (written by Sima Qian). The Southwestern Yi were divided into two different groups. One of which was the Xi Yi (the Western Yi), the peoples "all belonged to the Di group", "all plaited their hair". Another kind was the Nan Yi (the Southern Yi). The peoples "all coiled up their hair on their head." "Coiling up the hair" was characteristic of the "Yue". Zi Zhi Tong Jian (a Han Chinese historical book written in the Song Dynasty) recorded. "The Southern Yi referred to Zhangke, Jianwei; the Western Yi referred to Yuexi and Liangzhou." Zhangke and Jianwei were administrative areas within Guizhou in the Han Dynasty. It shows that the Southern Yi referred to the minority groups in Guizhou, and the ancestors of the Buyis were among them. "Yi" was

also mentioned as “Yi Lao” or “Yi Pu” in many Han Chinese historical books, which might be constructed according to the word formation of Tai languages. In these constructions, “Yi” might be the general name, whereas “Lao” and “Pu” were the proper nouns which referred to the specific ethnic groups, including the ancestors of the Buyis.

It was not long ago that “Yi” was used to refer the Buyis only. In the historical books or among the Han Chinese living nearby, the Buyis were called “Yijia”, “Yizu”, “Yibian”, etc. According to the character construction, it is obviously a name given to the Buyis by other groups. “Yi” is the same square Chinese character as in the construction of “Yi Lao”, “Yi Pu” and “Nan Yi”. It is not the transliteration of the “?jai<sup>4</sup>” or “?ji<sup>4</sup>” in the construction of “pu<sup>4</sup>?jai<sup>4</sup>”.

#### (5) Explanation of “Zhong (仲)”

“Zhong (仲)”, also written as “Zhong (𡵓)”, was recorded in the historical books as “Zhongjia (仲家)”. It was first seen in the “Yuan History - Geographical Annals”, where it said that “Zhongjia Man from such places as Xiqu”. In the documents of the Ming and the Qing dynasties, names such as “Zhongmiao (仲苗)”, “Zhongman (仲蛮)”, “Qingzhong (青仲)”, or “Zhongjia (仲家)” were recorded. It seemed that “Zhongjia (仲家)” referred not only to the Buyis, according to the distributive areas. Some other people who inhabited in parts of Yunnan and Guangxi were also mentioned as “Zhongjia (仲家)”. So it might refer to some of the Zhuang people at that time.

There are several viewpoints about the origin of “Zhongjia (仲家)”, and two of them are widely known. One said that the word “Zhongjia (仲家)” came from the so-called “Zhongjiazhi (重甲子)”. According to the legend, the Buyis came from Jiangxi. In the early days of the Ming Dynasty (about 14th century), there was a rebellion in Guizhou, and the ancestors of the Buyis were sent to put it

down. As they wore heavy armor when they arrived in Guizhou, people called them "Zhongjiabin (soldiers with heavy armor)". Later, people mistook it as "Zhongjiazi (仲家子)" or "Zhongjia (仲家)". This viewpoint was also recorded in *Anshun Fu Zhi* (a local Chronicle in Guizhou province). The Buyis "were said to be dispatched here wearing heavy armor, and so were called 'Zhongjia (仲家)'".

There is no denying the fact that many cultural factors from ethnic groups nearby and the foreign land had been assimilated into Buyi culture. At the end of the Yuan Dynasty and the beginning of the Ming Dynasty, it was true that a large number of people immigrated from Jiangxi. It was possible that some of them moved into the Buyi area and were assimilated by the Buyis. But they were only a small part of the Buyi people, not the majority. Secondly, the so-called "heavy armored soldiers" moving into Guizhou was said to be an event in the early days of the Ming Dynasty (about 14th century), but the name "Zhongjia (仲家)" appeared in the Yuan Dynasty (13th century). Finally, in the ancient army, only the chief general and some super officials wore armor, all the regular soldiers usually dressed simply. So it is unbelievable that people mistook "Zhongjia (重甲 heavy armour)" as "Zhongjia (仲家)"

The second viewpoint about the origin of "Zhongjia (仲家)" is that the Buyis have been engaging in agricultural production since ancient times, and were famous for paddy rice planting. So people called them "Zhongren (种人)" or "Zhongjia (种家, meaning 'people who plant')". Since "仲" is a homophone of "种", people later called "仲" instead.

This viewpoint is still unbelievable. First, the history of paddy rice planting by Buyi people can be traced back several thousand years, but the name "Zhongjia (种家)" appeared less than 1,000 years ago. Second, most of the minority groups in south China have been engaged in paddy rice planting, but why would the name "Zhongjia (种家)" refer to the Buyis only? We think that the origin of the name

“Zhongjia ( 仲家 ) should be related with the history of both the Zhuang ( 壮 ) and the Buyi groups.

Most of the historians believe that the Buyis and the Zhuangs have the same ethnic origin, and this can be supported by the similarity of the Buyi language and the northern dialect of the Zhuang language. Zhuang people in some counties of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous District also call themselves “pu<sup>4</sup> ?jai<sup>4</sup>”. Today, Zhuang people in the middle and the western part of Guangxi call themselves “pu<sup>4</sup> tɕuŋ<sup>6</sup>” or “pu<sup>4</sup> ɕuŋ<sup>6</sup>”. The proper nouns “tɕuŋ<sup>6</sup>” or “ɕuŋ<sup>6</sup>” are similar to “Zhong ( 仲 )” phonetically. According to the studies of some scholars, “仲” was once written as “𡗗 (the Han transliteration of ‘tɕuŋ<sup>6</sup>’)” in some Han Chinese historical books.

The Zhuangs and the Buyis live in an adjoining area, so it is natural that people moved from one place to another within the areas of this two groups. Some scholars suggested that the Buyis came from the south. This suggestion was based on the record that (Zhongjia ) “came into Guizhou from Yongguan following Mayin (a Han general) during the Five Dynasties (from 907 A.D. to 960 A.D.)”. According to textual research, Yongguan was in the central part of Guangxi where the capital city — Nanning is situated. It is one of the areas inhabited mainly by Zhuang people today, and it also was a Zhuang area during the Five Dynasties according to historical studies. Of course, it is unbelievable that the Buyis were formed by those who “came from Yongguan following Mayin”, but we can at least see that a large population from the Guangxi Zhuang area once migrated into Guizhou Buyi territory. Those who moved into Guizhou might have called themselves “pu<sup>4</sup> tɕuŋ<sup>6</sup>” or “pu<sup>4</sup> ɕuŋ<sup>6</sup>”. The historian from the local government and the Han people living nearby took the proper noun “tɕuŋ<sup>6</sup>” or “ɕuŋ<sup>6</sup>” and made an ethnic name “Zhongjia ( 仲家 )” or “Zhongmiao ( 仲苗 )”, in accordance with common Chinese word order. It would have been a typical Han Chinese name

given to the Buyis, and therefore was widely used among the Han Chinese living nearby until the initial days of the People's Republic of China. Most Buyis don't have names, such as "pu<sup>4</sup> tɕuŋ<sup>6</sup>", "pu<sup>4</sup> ɕuŋ<sup>6</sup>" or other similar names. In fact they don't realize that Buyi people in some areas call themselves thus, due to the lack of communication between the different areas. They received the names as "Zhongjia (仲家)", "Zhongmiao (仲苗)" positively, and told all kinds of legends about them. They misinterpreted the words by taking them too literally. In some areas, the Buyis even thought the names had some sense of discrimination and humiliation.

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