

# ***A Second Discussion of the Genetic Classification of the Kam-Tai Languages: A Reply to Benedict***

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Which family do the Kam-Tai languages (Benedict's Kadai languages) belong to? In an earlier paper (Luo 1983) presented at the Fifteenth Annual International Conference on Sino-Tibetan Languages and Linguistics, I presented a view which contrasts with that of Benedict. In 1984, in a paper entitled "Identification of the Cognates Between Chinese and Dai" presented to the Linguistic Society of Beijing, I restated this viewpoint. This paper presents the points of contrast between my position and that of Benedict.<sup>1</sup>

## **Problems of Basic Word Stock**

Benedict and I agree that part of the word stock of the modern Kadai languages relates to the Indonesian [IN] and Austro-Tai [AT] languages, while another part of the word stock relates to the Sino-Tibetan [ST] languages. Benedict, however, labels only those words that are related to Indonesian as "basic," whereas all those words that are related to Sino-Tibetan he regards as "cultural borrowings," which were either borrowed from Chinese or which Chinese borrowed from Austro-Tai. From this, Benedict concludes that the Kam-Tai languages have a genetic link not with the Sino-Tibetan languages, but with the Indonesian stock.

Our concept of basic vocabulary is the same as that of Benedict. That is, the basic vocabulary is composed of the "nuclear" elements in a language. But, we disagree considerably on the specifics and on the extent of the basic word stock. The basic word stock is the most stable part of the lexicon, containing all the root words as its core and representing the most important things and activities, such as words for natural phenomena: mountain, water, wind, rain, fire, sun, moon, land; important animals and plants: ox (cow), horse, pig, chicken, bird, fish, tree, grass, flower, and others; parts of the body: head, chest, mouth, eye, lungs, hand, arm, foot, leg; important kinship terms: father, mother, son, daughter, and so forth; basic actions: eat, speak, see, fly, come, and so forth; basic adjectives: big,

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small, white, and others; pronouns and adverbs: I, you, he, she, and so forth; and the cardinal numbers.

The Kam-Tai [KT] and the Sino-Tibetan languages share many of the above basic words, which are not “cultural” words at all but rather are core vocabulary including words such as: wind, bird, crow, horse, ox, ride, lungs, meat, liverwort (苔), red (赤), salty (鹹), and so on. Even among the thirty pairs of correspondences which Benedict proposed as “real nuclear lexical elements” in his paper “Thai, Kadai and Indonesian: A New Alignment in Southeastern Asia” (1942), thirteen of these sets can be shown to be Sino-Tibetan [ST] through comparisons with Tibeto-Burman [TB], Miao-Yao [MY] languages, and Chinese words in ancient books.

'moon' KT \**blüan* IN \**bulan*

Ch. 月敦他昆切 \**thən*/ \**thuən*<sup>2</sup> 'moonlight'<sup>3</sup>

(cf. Lei Pian <<类篇>>)

'water' KT \**nam* IN \**danum*

Ch. 沱 乃泰切 \**hnjəm*/ \**ɣjəm* 'turbid, water without waves'<sup>4</sup>

(cf. Shuo Wen <<说文>>, Guahg Yun <<廣韻>>)

'fire' KT \**vai* IN \**apuy*

Ch. 火毀 許偉切 \**xwjad*/ \**xjwei* 'fire' Amoy *hue*<sup>3</sup>, *he*<sup>3</sup>

(cf. Shuo Wen <<说文>>)

'bird' KT \**nok* IN \**manuk* 'chicken, bird'

Ch. 鳥 \**tjagw*/ \**tieu*- \**nieu* Hakka (Chang Ding) *tiau*<sup>3</sup>

Barish (TB) \**dau*, Karen \**tho*

M. *neu*<sup>6</sup>, *noŋ*<sup>6</sup> Y. *no*<sup>8</sup>

'head' KT \**hrua* IN \**ulu*'~*hulu*

T. *u*<sup>2</sup> 53 (polite expression, term of respect)

M. *fhu*<sup>3</sup>, *hu*<sup>3</sup>

'lungs' KT \**pot* IN \**pu*'*uh* 'heart'

Ch. 肺 \**phjad*/ \**phjwäi*

M. *ŋtɕu*<sup>7</sup>, *mpy*<sup>5</sup>, *mplu*<sup>5</sup>

'grandfather' KT \**pu* IN \**ə*(*m*)*pi*

Ch. 父 \**bjwo*/ \**bju* 'father'

<sup>2</sup> The reconstruction of the pronunciation of Chinese characters is based on Li Fang-kuei. The form in front of the slanted line is Archaic Chinese, while the form following the slanted line is Ancient Chinese.

<sup>3</sup> Cited in Zhang Yuansheng and Wang Wei (1980).

<sup>4</sup> Cited in Zhang Yuansheng and Wang Wei (1980).

T. *phu-bo* Garo *bu* Lushei *pu* Kachin *phu* 'brother'

'black' KT \*ʔdām IN \*i(n)təm  
Ch. 黑甚 (于檻切) \*jram/\*jam 'dark black'<sup>5</sup>  
(cf. Shuo Wen <<说文>>)

'blind' KT \*ʔbot IN \*buta'  
Ch. 父見 (莫結切) \*mit/\*miet 'cannot see' Amoy *biaiʔ*, *biʔ*

'die' KT \*tai IN \*matay~patay  
Ch. 歹台 (徒亥切) \*dəd/\*dâi 'danger'<sup>6</sup>  
(cf. Shuo Wen <<说文>>)

'eat' KT \*kin IN \*ka'-\*ka'ən-\*ka'i  
Ch. 𪔐 (九件切) \*kjan/\*kjən 'eat'  
(cf. Buo Ya <<博雅>>)

'this' KT \*ni IN \*ini  
Hakka (Chang Ding) *nɿʔ*, *tɿʔ* Min *ɬɿʔ*  
T. *ti* Pumi *di*, *uti* M. *ŋɿʔ* Y. *na:ɿʔ*

'I' KT \*ku (term of respect) IN \*aku  
Ch. 𪔐 \*kwag/\*kuo (kings use this term)

In addition to the above, we found numerous basic Kadai words with ST but not Indonesian cognates, which are not discussed in the glossary of Benedict's *Austro-Thai: Language and Culture* (1975).

### Parts of the body and excrement

'leg' KT Thai *kha*<sup>1</sup>, Dai *xa*<sup>1</sup>, Zhuang *ka*<sup>1</sup>, Kam-Sui *pa*<sup>1</sup>,  
Maonan *pja*<sup>1</sup>, Gelao *qua*, Li *ha*<sup>1</sup>  
Ch. 𪔐 (骨交) \*khragw/\*khau 'a part of shin near the foot'  
(cf. Ci Hai <<辞海>>) Min *kha*<sup>1</sup>  
T. *khri* 'seat' Nasi *khui*, Asi *khi*, Sani *tshə*  
M. (Bunu) *lau*<sup>1</sup>, Y. *tsau*<sup>5</sup>

'excrement' KT Thai, Dai *khɿ*<sup>3</sup>, Dai *xɿ*<sup>3</sup>, Zhuang *haɿ*<sup>4</sup>, Kam *ɛ*<sup>4</sup>,  
Mulao *ɕɛ*<sup>3</sup>, Gelao *qo*, Sui *qe*<sup>4</sup>, Lakkia *kwɛɿ*<sup>4</sup>, Li *ha:ɿ*<sup>3</sup>  
Ch. 屎 (式視切) \*sthjid/\*ʃɿʔ excrement'

<sup>5</sup> Cited in Zhang Yuansheng and Wang Wei (1980).

<sup>6</sup> Cited in Zhang Yuansheng and Wang Wei (1980).

- T. *skyag-pa*, Kanauri *khō <kli*, B. *khye*, Jingpho *khji*,  
 Bai *si*, Asi *thi*, Lisu *khi*, Jino *khui*  
 M. *qa*<sup>5</sup>, Y. *sa*<sup>3</sup>

## Natural phenomena, animals, and plants

- 'fog' KT Thai, Dai *mək*<sup>7</sup>, Zhuang *mək*<sup>7</sup>, Gelao *mpu*, Kam  
*mun*<sup>2</sup>, Sui *mon*<sup>1</sup>, Maonan *mu:n*<sup>1</sup>  
 Ch. 雾 (莫浮切) \**mjəgw*/\**mjəu* 'fog' Amoy *bəŋ*<sup>2</sup>, *bə*<sup>2</sup>,  
 (cf. Er Ya <<尔雅>>)  
 T. *smugs-pa*, B. *muik* 'dark' Lepcha *muk* 'heavy fog',  
 Bai *muukō* Lushei *mu:k* 'dark'

- 'pig' KT Thai, Dai *mu*<sup>1</sup> Zhuang *mou*<sup>1</sup>, Kam *ŋu*<sup>5</sup>, Gelao  
*mpa*, Li *pau*<sup>4</sup>  
 Ch. 猪巴 \**prag*/\**pa* 'big pig, female pig'  
 T. *phag*, Mikir *phak*, Chiang *pa*, Nasi *bo*, B. *wak*,  
 Dulung *wa*<sup>2</sup>, Lushei *vok*  
 M. *mpa*<sup>5</sup>, *pa*<sup>5</sup>

- 'tree/wood' KT Thai, Dai, Maonan, Mulao, Sui *ma*<sup>4</sup>, Kam *mə*<sup>4</sup>, Zhuang  
*fai*<sup>4</sup>, Buyi *va*<sup>4</sup>, Gelao *tai*, Lakkia *tse*<sup>5</sup>, Li *tshai*<sup>1</sup>  
 Ch. 木 (房未切) \**bjəd*/\**bjwěi* 'wood'  
 (cf. Shuo Wen <<说文>>)

## Basic actions

- 'fly' KT Thai, Dai, Zhuang, Buyi *bin*<sup>1</sup>, Kam *pən*<sup>3</sup>, Sui *vjən*<sup>3</sup>,  
 Maonan *vin*<sup>3</sup>, Mulao *fən*<sup>3</sup>, Lakkia *pon*<sup>5</sup>, Li *ben*<sup>1</sup>  
 Ch. 羽分 \**pjən*/\**phjuən* 'the appearance of flying'  
 (cf. Guang Yin <<廣韻>>)  
 Written Tibetan *fiṇur*, Spoken Tibetan *phir*, W. Burmese  
*pyan*, Spoken Burmese *pjā*, W. Bailang *pyam*, Lahu *po*,  
 Jino *pɛ*, Nasi *mbi*, Lisu *be*, Hani *bjə*, Yi *vo*, Bai *fɿ*

- 'separate' KT Thai, Dai *pha*<sup>5</sup>  
 Ch. 石皮 \**phuar*/\**phuā*  
 B. *prà*, Kachin *bra* 'scatter', Kanauri *bra* 'branch'  
 M. *pha*<sup>5</sup>, Y. *phr*<sup>5</sup>

- 'change' KT Thai *plen*<sup>5</sup>, Dai *pen*<sup>5</sup>, Zhuang, Buyi, Lakkia *pɪ:n*<sup>5</sup>,  
 Kam *pjin*<sup>5</sup>, Sui, Mulao *pjen*<sup>5</sup>, Maonan *pjən*<sup>5</sup>  
 Ch. 变 \**pjian*/\**pjiän* 'change'

## General nature

- 'old'    KT    Thai, Dai, Zhuang, Buyi *kau<sup>5</sup>*, Kam *a:u<sup>5</sup>*, Sui *qa:u<sup>5</sup>*,  
                  Maonan, Lakkia *ka:u<sup>5</sup>*, Mulao *ko<sup>5</sup>*, Gelao *qa*  
Ch. 𠬞 *\*gǝgw/ \*gǝu* 'old'  
T.    ro 'dead body', B. *rau*, Lushei *rou* 'withered'  
M.    *qo<sup>5</sup>*, Y. *ku<sup>5</sup>*
- 'white'    KT    Thai, Li *kha:u<sup>1</sup>*, Dai *xa:u<sup>1</sup>*, Zhuang *ha:u<sup>1</sup>*, Buyi *ya:u<sup>1</sup>*  
                  Ch. 𠬞 *\*gagw/ \*ɣəu* 'white'

## The Relation Between Race and Language

On the basis of physique, culture, and history, as well as the traces of some proto-Malay language in Kam-Tai, it is possible that the ancestors of Kam-Tai speakers belonged to a race of Malay speakers who spoke a proto-Malay language. But over a very long period of history, it is not uncommon for one language to be fused onto another, or for one ethnic group to change languages. Before the stabilizing influence of agriculture, people migrated frequently, so the development of language and the development of culture often followed separate paths. After the New Stone Age, mankind was more settled, although population increases, natural disasters, and human calamities still produced some migration which, in turn, still produced some mixing of languages and cultures. One example is provided by the She nationality, who abandoned their own language (a Miao-Yao dialect still spoken by a few of the She people) in favor of the Hakka dialect of Chinese. Another example is provided by the Man who, except for a few people, have abandoned their own language for Chinese. In general, among the people in question, there probably remain some traces of the original language; however, by no means do we group the Chinese dialect spoken by the Man nationality with the Manchu-Tungus branch of Altaic languages on the basis of its remaining Manchu elements. Similarly, by no means do we group the Hakka dialect of Chinese spoken by the She nationality with the She section of Miao-Yao on the basis of its remaining Miao-Yao elements. The Kam-Tai situation is very similar to these cases except that the Kam-Tai language switching took place long, long ago when the ancestors of the modern Kam-Tai speakers either fused their language with Sino-Tibetan under the influence of a Sino-Tibetan people or changed languages outright. This new dialect of Sino-Tibetan then developed into the modern Kam-Tai languages. Apparently, Kam-Tai developed from proto-Sino-Tibetan rather than proto-Malay, not just lexically but also phonologically and grammatically, as well, for the following reasons:

- 1) A lot of old basic words are shared by Kam-Tai and Sino-Tibetan.

- 2) Kam-Tai is typologically monosyllabic like Chinese, with the main phonological trends similar to those of Chinese.
- 3) The Kam-Tai tonal system corresponds to that of Chinese.
- 4) Both Kam-Tai and Chinese share some cognate grammatical elements; that is, they share forms that are functionally and phonologically similar. In addition, both languages share the well-known four-syllable "elaborate expressions."
- 5) Except for a few cardinal numbers, the numerals are of Chinese origin.

On all five points mentioned above, Kam-Tai is quite distinct from the Malay language and has to be classified as Sino-Tibetan. In this regard, Kam-Tai is no different from other languages, having lots of Chinese loanwords, just as Korean, Japanese, and Vietnamese do.

### **Explaining the Kam-Tai, Indonesian, and Sino-Tibetan Correspondences**

It is Benedict's contribution that he found correspondences between Kam-Tai and Indonesian, which led us to examine the evolution of Kam-Tai from a broader perspective. From the above discussion, however, we see that correspondences also exist between Kam-Tai, Indonesian, and Sino-Tibetan. How, then, are we to interpret these findings?

Benedict regards the correspondences between Kam-Tai and Indonesian as cognates resulting from a common Austro-Tai origin. As a result, Benedict is forced to postulate that those words with Sino-Tibetan correspondences represent "cultural words" borrowed from Austro-Tai into Sino-Tibetan. In those cases where corresponding forms are found in Kam-Tai, Indonesian, and Chinese, but the Kam-Tai forms look closer to the Chinese than to the Indonesian forms, Benedict is forced to suggest a theory of "back-borrowing" where words such as "gold" and "salt" were first borrowed by Chinese from Austro-Tai, and then, after becoming "naturalized" in Chinese, were exported back into Kam-Tai (Benedict 1967: 78). Benedict also assumes an Austro-Tai-X language; that is, a language other than the ancestral Austro-Tai itself, not ancestral to Thai or any of the present-day mainland Austro-Tai languages. This language had already simplified the initial cluster \*gr- to \*g-, as shown by the Chinese borrowings for "mortar" and "salt" (p. 118). The above, of course, is all conjectural and hardly convincing.

We agree that borrowings exist and that the process has not been a one-way affair. Certainly, Chinese has borrowed lots of words from other languages. Other nationalities also have borrowed words from Chinese.

However, to answer the question of which words were borrowed by which languages, it is necessary to base any concrete analysis on history.

The successes of archaeology and of physical anthropology have contributed to our ability to classify these languages. According to archaeological findings, four main cultures existed in mainland China in the New Stone Age. The two cultures relevant to the questions raised in this paper are the Yiang Shao and the Da Wen Kou.<sup>7</sup> The Yiang Shao culture extended all over Shānxi, Shānxi, Henan, Hebei, Eastern Gansu, and Western Hubei. The physical features of the inhabitants resembled those of inhabitants of eastern Asia and of Mongolian speakers of southern Asia. In this period, agriculture was rather well developed. Under Yiang Shao influence, the Xia culture, which had earlier absorbed not only the old Dong Yi clan's Longshan culture but also some other local cultures such as the Bronze Culture in Henan, reached new heights. The other relevant culture is the Da Wen Kou on the lower reaches of the Yellow River, Shandong, northern Jiangsu, Anhui, eastern Henan, and the Peninsula of Liaodong. There is some controversy about their physical features. Some scholars feel that they resemble the Polynesians, while others feel that the resemblance between the Da Wen Kou and Yiang Shao inhabitants was stronger than the resemblance between Da Wen Kou and modern Polynesians. The early Da Wen Kou culture was strongly influenced by the Yiang Shao. The Da Wen Kou actually might have been the historical Dong Yi clan, which had not fused with the Xia clan that migrated gradually to the southwest of China. These people later formed the Kam-Tai nationalities.

Hence, there are two possible explanations for the correspondences between Kam-Tai, Indonesian, and Sino-Tibetan:

- 1) Some words were Sino-Tibetan. The Kam-Tai forms were derived from Sino-Tibetan, while the Indonesian forms were borrowed before their ancestors migrated.
- 2) It is possible that several words of proto-Malay remain in modern Indonesian and that some of these words were borrowed into Sino-Tibetan from proto-Malay or borrowed into Kam-Tai by the ancestors of the modern Kam-Tai speakers.

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<sup>7</sup> Xing Gongwan, "A Tentative Analysis of Sino-Tibetan Languages and Their Nationalities in Prehistoric Times," *Yuyan Yanjiu* 2 (1984).

## A Note on Transcriptions

All of the Indonesian words and forms of Proto-Kam-Tai in my paper are cited in Dr. Benedict's works. The symbol " ' " is a glottal stop. The symbol "q" is a uvular stop. The reconstruction of pronunciation of Chinese characters is based on Li Fang-kuei's works. The symbols of vowels â, ǎ, ǣ are different from phonetic values (that is, they are not tone marks). The symbol ǣ is a front vowel with tongue position more towards the back than [a], almost near the central vowel. The symbol â is a back vowel near [ɒ]. The symbol ǝ is a front vowel with tongue position farther back than [e]. The symbol ɜ is a central vowel with tongue position farther back than [ə].

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*Part II: Phonology*

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