MÈNE : A TAI DIALECT ORIGINALLY SPOKEN IN NGHÊ AN (NGHÊ TINH), VIÊTNAM

Preliminary Linguistic Observations and Historical Implications

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Introduction

For many years now I have been intrigued by the considerable diversity of the Tai dialects spoken in Khammouan province in Laos and in neighboring locations. This interest stems from 1974 when I happened to meet a number of Tai speakers from Khammouan living in a refugee camp at Pak Sap in Vientiane Province. Among the languages found in this camp was a dialect called Mène /men⁴/ originating from Kham Keut District, in the villages of Tham Bing and Chom Thong. Of particular interest were several lexical items normally associated with languages of the Northern Branch of the Tai ethnolinguistic family that are found much further north in the provinces of Guizhou and Guangxi in southeastern China. There is another language with Northern Branch affinities spoken in Khammouan, Saek, which Gedney (1989 : 373) has suggested may have split away from the Tai mainstream prior to the period normally associated with Proto-Tai.

After a brief tantalizing contact I was unable to work further on any of these languages and finally, in 1984, what little I knew of the area was included in a paper written for the journal entitled *Science of Language* published at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, hoping at least to stimulate interest in this little-known and unstudied area, noting in particular that many of the speakers traced their ancestral homeland to Nghê An Province in Vietnam. Then, in March of 1990, in the Na Pho refugee camp in Nakhon Phanom Province, Thailand, I discovered another speaker of the Mène dialect, Mrs. Viengthong Thammavong. My work with her has convinced me, while taking into consideration the risks involved in presenting a linguistic description based on evidence from a single speaker, that this language is important

enough in the study of comparative Tai to venture making available a preliminary analysis with the hope that in the near future more of the Tai languages from Khammouan and Nghê An will become accessible.[1]

To comprehend something of the linguistic and cultural environment in which she was brought up, a few biographical details will be useful. Born in 1945 in the village of Ban Sop Vieng, near the old LS 28 airstrip at Ban Done, the point where the three provinces of Xieng Khwang, Borikhan and Khammouan intersect, Viengthong was the youngest of five children born to Tou/tuu³/and Khén/Khen⁴/ of the Vy/vii⁴/ lineage. This was a Tai Moey/mëy C1/village in which her parents were the only Mène speakers. They had come from Nghê An when her eldest brother, estimated to be 10 years older than Viengthong, was one month old, that is in 1935 or 1936. She also recalls that they came with two other Mène families who settled at Chom Thong and Ban Done. Mrs. Viengthong's father, Tou Vy, was formerly a sub-district headman with the title of Quan (/kwaan/ <'mandarin'). He adopted the Lao surname of Manivong. In the meantime one of the villages formerly under his jurisdiction had moved nearby to the village of Khang Vieng, next to the Special Guerrilla Unit (SGU) base at Muang Mok, Xieng Khwang Province. These villagers, in need of leadership, asked Quan Tou to move there as a respected elder. Even after they moved, however, Viengthong returned frequently to her birthplace, a journey of two days, in order to pursue her weaving, a lifelong interest which she still maintains.

In 1968 Viengthong married a Hmong man named Ka Nao Vang, a Sergeant in the SGU who took the Lao name of Inpanh Xagnavong. He was assigned to Groupement Mobile (GM) 25 under the famous Hmong commander Colonel Chong Koua Vue. They had two children together. But shortly thereafter tragedy struck. In the dry season of 1970 North Vietnamese regulars launched a massive attack on Muang Mok. Viengthong and most of the young people were taken into the nearby jungle while her parents, Tou and Khén, stayed behind to watch the house. In the ensuing heavy artillery fire both were killed. The survivors were taken to another base at Nam Heo. This position was attacked in 1973 and her husband was killed in that battle. The base was subsequently retaken by government forces and Viengthong continued to live here until the communists gained control of the government in 1975.

Viengthong remarried that year to an ethnic Tai Kang man, Tha Thammavong from the Xieng Khe - Nam Phoi region of Borikhanh province. Then the entire populace followed a fiery resistance leader, former BV 205 battalion commander Vang Kai Vue, who took them to live at a mountain stronghold in the Phou Ma Thao chain. They lived here under intense hardship for three years before deciding to escape to Thailand in 1978.

In addition to her own dialect, Mrs. Viengthong has been exposed to many others, Tai Meuy and Tai Kang among them. The base at Nam Heo contained mostly soldiers' families from many areas, and next to Muang Mok was a refugee village called Ban Tong. At the latter she met speakers of Tai Pao (/paaw A4/) and during the course of the present study she was frequently able to provide a Pao form in addition to the Mène. Tai Pao contains many of the Northern Branch features as well.

Mrs. Viengthong's father, the son of Mr. Pon Thou Vy/pon 3 thuu 2/and Mrs. Lian/lian⁴/, came from the village of Ban Pao Kam (/paaw⁴ kam⁴/ 'golden foam') in the vicinity of Xieng My-Xieng Mène, apparently located on or near the Cha Haa river. She believes that the two towns are nearby to one another but not adjacent, deduced from a childhood recollection of overhearing her father describing the location to someone else, so the geography is far from clear. According to a map in Vol. III of the *Mission Pavie (1902)* detailing routes in the Song Ca valley, Xieng Mène and Xieng Mi are located on the "Suong" River, which is refered to as the "Con" on other maps, a tributary of the Song Ca to the north. The mouth of this tributary is located slightly downstream from Con Cûong. In the north this same river passes through Quy Chau, an area which is discussed below. Unfortunately none of the later maps have these place names listed. Con Cûong (she recalls her father mentioning this name as well — he pronounced it /kɔn kuaŋ/) —is on the Sông Ca river (also known as the Lâm Giang,² called Nam Neun in Tai). One serious problem with the maps is that so many important towns and rivers have two names and sometimes more, Tai, Vietnamese and in this location even Muang, which leads to considerable confusion. The coordinates for the Cha Haa stream are 19 03 N by 104 35 E. Another name cited by

Viengthong was the Phou Louang mountain range, the crest of which marks the boundary between Laos and Vietnam just southwest of Con Cuông.

A few lexical items cited by Robequain (1929) in his monograph on Thanh Hoá Province provide a basis for suggesting that the Mène or closely related languages may have at one time been located in the district of Thu'ò' ng Xuân in that province. He notes the existence of a Tai-speaking population called 'Yo' who are considered by all the others as the original inhabitants and whose language is the most divergent. It is also mentioned that they have a writing system that reads from top to bottom and right to left, exactly like the sample given in Finot (1917) from Qui-châu. He records, for example, "fii" for 'fire' [Mène /fii⁴/], and "pay et nhay" for 'to go play' [Mène /paa⁴ ? ee⁴ ñaay⁴/]. These 'Yo,' he states, also inhabit the neighboring district of Qui-châu in Nhgê An. Phu Qui or Qui-châu is approximately 70 kilometers due north of the Xieng My - Xieng Mène area so any movement or splitting away would be entirely feasible. It is also worth noting here that speakers of the closely related Tai Pao (paaw⁴ <*baaw A) dialect say they came originally from Phou Teuang /phuu tïaŋ/, which refers to the district of Tu'o'ng-du'o'ng northwest of Con Cuông apparently under the administration of Qui-châu. Dang (1974 : 23-4), notes that the old name of Phu Tu'o'ng Du'o'ng is Muang Pao, and that the section of the Song Ca river between Cu' a Rào and Dô Lu'o'ng is also called the Nam Pao. Phu Tu'o'ng-du'o'ng is the location of yet another unusual form of Tai alphabet shown in Finot's Plate I, labeled simply 'Sông Ca.'

The term 'Yo' has come to be applied to Tai dialects in various regions, linguistically quite distinct from one another but obviously originating from a common ethnonym. One characteristic of the Nyo spoken in Tha Uthen in Nakhon Phanom, Thailand which is preserved in at least one Mène dialect cited in Chamberlain (1984), that of Tham Bing, is the word/tëë/ 'which, what,' in the phrase /paa tëë haa/ 'what are you going to do?' (Mrs. Viengthong however, looks upon this as a Pao form.) But since this word is not found in other Tai dialects it does demonstrate a link between Pao, Mène, and Nyo ('Yo').

Looking to the south, we find that many of the Mène speakers moved into Kham Keut District of Khammouan, especially the area of Sop Tong and Nam Panh, just northwest of Na Pè. Here within a single small radius of 20-30 kilometers are Austroasiatic groups with names like *Liha*, *Phong* (/phɔɔŋ/), *Toum* and *Ayoy* (/?a-yɔy/), still unknown to us, as well as *Maleng* and *Thaveung*. There are numerous villages of *Saek* at Nam Hoy, Na Thone, and Na Kadôk and an adjacent *So Alang* village at Na Pong (both terms, Saek and So, begin with the consonant cluster /thr-/ which has been Laoized to /s/); *Nyo* at Khammouan, Tha Vèng and Phiat Xay; *Pouak* at Khoua Pèn, Na Muang, Na Sao, Na Hang, Na Khe /khee/, Na Liang and Na Chia; *Theng* (who are said to have their own writing system) at Na Pè and Na Phong; *Phou Thay* at Xam Teuy, Na Feuang, Na Houa, Na Hao, Na Hat, and Na Salôm (the Austroasiatic Thaveung who live nearby refer to the Phou Thay as 'Vang' /vaŋ/ coinciding with the

Phou Thay myth of Muang Vang as their place of origin); and the *Thay Bo* /bɔɔ/ at Na Pet, Na Nang, and Thong Khe /khɛ?/. The distance from the Saek villages in the vicinity of Na Pè to Xieng Mène is approximately 90 kilometers. According to local lore the Saek and the Mène are both associated with goldsmithing and mining. And in correlation with this we note the existence of a gold mine at Qui Chau on a 1893 map done by Lemire provided by Archaimbault (1967) in his study of the history of Xieng Khwang. Mrs. Viengthong recalls that the Cha Haa River is also famous for its gold.

Likewise in the vicinity of Na Pè, Fraisse (1949) notes there is a village of "Phou Theng" (as if they are Austroasiatic) who build their houses on poles, weave in the house rather than under, where the women lacquer their teeth and smoke pipes, and who celebrate the Annamese Têt, but who speak a Tai language. Some of the forms he cites have obvious Mène cognates:

1. what ? *a le tié*, Mène: /?aa-lëë⁵ cia⁵ - tua⁵/
2. plank *tat*, Mène: /taat²/' split bamboo flooring'
3. cooking pot *bien*, Mène: /biaŋ³/ 'pot for steaming rice'

This is not to imply that Saek and Mène are closely similar; they are phonologically very distinct. However, I believe it is most probable that they, along with the Pao and Robequain's 'Yo' (hearafter NyoR) and 'Du' o' i,' represent a distinct population of Tai speakers who resided south of the Red River. This situation is reminiscent of Nung-an and Cao-lan described by Haudricourt (1961) but there appears to be little direct relationship between Mène and these languages, which, in any case, seem to have arrived in their present locations rather late. Du'o'i, an ethnonym that is preserved in Khammouan, Laos and Sakon Nakhon, Thailand (also pronounced /yooy/ or /yuay/), is cognate with Yay (Dioi) (also known as Nhang) or Yi, I, Jui, etc., a Northern Branch ethnonym from the vicinity of Lao Kay in northern Vietnam, Kwangsi and Kweichou. They are said by Robequain (1929) to have been chased out of Thanh Hoá long ago by the Tais (he reguarded the Du'o'i as Khas as if they were related to the Ayoy mentioned above), but we later find them described by Fraisse (1949) in Khammouan, living together in the same villages as Saeks in Ban Sang and Kham Hè along Route 12 between Gnommarath and the Mu Gia Pass, one mountain range to the south of the Na Pè area, as if theirs was the first migration south out of Nghê An.⁴ The historical plausibility of this suggestion will be discussed later, but it should be clear by this time that characterizations of Saek as "out-of-place" geographically are based on inadequate information.

The Mène Language

Efforts to place Mène in one or the other of the traditional Tai subgroups proves difficult. The vocabulary has obviously been heavily influenced by surrounding Tai languages of the Southwestern P Group and by Lao. This, however, may have taken place relatively recently since Mrs. Viengthong recalls that when her parents were speaking to

each other she often did not understand all of what they said. Of the non-Southwestern items found on the list below, a few seem to agree with the Central Branch, such as /tak¹/ 'to break' or /lap¹/ 'to receive,' but in by far the greater number of cases, Mène aligns itself with the Northern Branch, as in /lïk¹/ 'child,' /kɛɛt²/ 'hurt,' or /hïat²/ 'waist.' What we can say for certain is that Mène possesses a number of forms which do not agree with Southwestern Tai languages such as those in the following list:

TABLE I : NON-SOUTHWESTERN MÈNE FORMS

asleep
    MÈNE: dak 6 (nɔn 4 dak 6)
    CENTRAL: LP: dak 2; LM: nak 2; LC: noon 2 dak 5
    NORTHERN: YAY: dak 3; SK: dak 4
    PT* ?d- D

bend, reshape
    MÈNE: bet 6
    SOUTHWESTERN: Lao: dat DS3; SI: dat 2
    CENTRAL: LM: mjat 3
    NORTHERN: Saek: dɛt, blɛt 4

break (a stick, etc.)
    MÈNE: tak 6
    SOUTHWESTERN: LAO: hak DS1; SI: hak 2; WT: hak 2
    CENTRAL: LP: tak 2; LM: tak 3; WN: thak 6; LC: tak 5
    NORTHERN: YAY: rak 3; SK: rak 4; WM: rak 5
    PT* thrak D

cane, walking stick
    MÈNE: tuu 5 (kɔn 5 tuu 5)
    SOUTHWESTERN: LAO: thaw C4; SI: thaw 5
    CENTRAL: LC: tau C4
    PT* d- C

child
    MÈNE: lïk 7
    SOUTHWESTERN: LAO: luuk DL4; SI: luuk 3; WT: lu 4
    CENTRAL: LP: lok 5; LM: lok 5; WN: luk 5; LC: luk 2
    NORTHERN: YAY: lïk 1; SK: lïk 6, WM: lïk 6
    PT* 1- D

crosswise, disorderly, intersection
    MÈNE: kway 2;
    SOUTHWESTERN: SI: khway 2; WT: xway; SN: khway 2
    CENTRAL: Tay: khoay (B1)
    NORTHERN: Dioi: (piak-) kouai (B1)
    PT* khway B

dig
    MÈNE: kut 6
    SOUTHWESTERN: LAO: khut DS1; SI: khut 2; WT: khut 2;
    CENTRAL: LP: hot 5; LM: khot 4; WN: khut 6; LC: kut 2
    NORTHERN: YAY: hut/kut 1; SK: khut 6; Dioi: kout

DS4; hut DS4 < *τ-
PT* x-/τ-/gut D

dirty

MÈNE: hëk 7
Sui: pjek 7; Hli: re:k 7

dregs in wine

MÈNE: të? 6 (the full expression is: khii 3 ka? të? 6)
CENTRAL: LP: dëë 5; LM: nïï 2; LC: dïï 5;
NORTHERN: WM: ?di; Yungshun: bli

fan

MÈNE: pii 4
SOUTHWESTERN: LAO: vii A4; SI: wii 1; WT: vi 4
CENTRAL: LP: vii 4; LM: vei 4; WN: vii 4; LC: vii 2
NORTHERN: YAY: vi 2; SK: phii 4; WM: poi 2
PT* v-/b- A

fire

MÈNE: fii 4
SOUTHWESTERN: LAO: fay A4; SI: fay 4; WT: fay 4
CENTRAL: LP: fay 4; LM: fay 4; WN: fay 4; LC: fay 2
NORTHERN: YAY: fi 4; SK: vii 4; WM: foi 2
PT* vay A

hurt

MÈNE: k∈∈t 2
NORTHERN: SK: keet 5
Sui: cit 7

great grandchild

MÈNE: len 4/lin 3
SOUTHWESTERN: LAO: leen A1; SI: leen 5; WT: lin 1
CENTRAL: LP: lin 3; LM: lin 3; WN: lan 3; Nung: lên C1
NORTHERN: SK: leen 1/2; Dioi: lan C1
PT* hl- A/C

joint, knuckles

MÈNE: kɔɔ 2
SOUTHWESTERN: LAO: khɔɔ C1; WT: xɔ C1
CENTRAL: Nung: kho C1; Tay: kho C1
NORTHERN: WM: xö B4; Dioi: ho B4
PT* x/τ- C/B

knife

MÈNE: mit 7
SOUTHWESTERN: LAO: miit DL2; SI: miit 3; WT: mit 4
CENTRAL: LM: miit 5; WN: mit 5
NORTHERN: YAY: mit 1; WM: mit 6;
PT* m- D

lock; key

MÈNE: khwaa 3
CENTRAL: LP: laa 3; LM: saa 3; WN: saa 3; LC: laa 3
Viet. khóa
[Note: an identical correspondance involving the same
Central language reflexes is found in the form 'right
(hand),' Mène: khwaa¹.]

male; young male

MÈNE: tëk 6 'male'
SOUTHWESTERN: LAO: thëk DS1; SI: thïk 2; WT: thëk 2
CENTRAL: LP: thëk 4; LM: tëk 3; WN: thëk 6; LC: tëk 2
NORTHERN: YAY: tak 1; SK: thak 6; WM: tak 6
PT* th- D

mosquito net

MÈNE: liip 2 'an empty cover, empty sack'
NORTHERN: WM: riap; Dioi: thiep; Po-ai: liip DL1;
Hsi-lin: ðiap; Ch'ian-chiang: τiip
PT* hr- D

open, to

MÈNE: hoy 1/4, khay 4
SOUTHWESTERN: LAO: khay A1; SI: khay 5; WT: khay 1
CENTRAL: LP: khay 1; LM: khay 1; WN: khay 1; LC: khay 1
NORTHERN: YAY: haay 1; SK: hay; WM: höy A1;
Hsi-lin: haay; Lingyün: haay; T'ien-chow: haay
CH: k' ai
PT* x- A

pangolin

MÈNE: lin 5 (C4)
SOUTHWESTERN: LAO: lin B4; SI: nim 3; WT: lin 5
CENTRAL: LP: lin 5; LM: lin 5; WN: lin 5
NORTHERN: YAY: lin 5; SK: lil 6; WM: lin 6 (C4)
PT* l- B/C

pond

MÈNE: sam 4
CENTRAL: LP: thom 1; LM: thom 1; LC: thum 1
NORTHERN: Po-ai: tam A4

put away; hide

MÈNE: kïï 3 'put away'; sɔn 3 kïï 3 'to hide someone'
CENTRAL: WN: kïï 6 'to hide oneself'
NORTHERN: YAY: kï 3/6 'to hide'; SK: kïï 3 'put away'

receive

MÈNE: lap 7
SOUTHWESTERN: LAO: hap DS4; SI: rap 4; BT: hap 5
CENTRAL: LP: lap 4; LM: lap 4; WN: ɕap 4; LC: lap 2
NORTHERN: SK: rap 6

remove, take down

MÈNE: pët 6
SOUTHWESTERN: LAO: pot DS2; SI: plot 2; WT: pot 2
CENTRAL: LM: pjot 3
NORTHERN: SK: pl∈t 4

set a trap

MÈNE: laaŋ 3 (h∈w 5)
SOUTHWESTERN: LAO: haaŋ C1; WT: haaŋ 3; BT: haaŋ 3
CENTRAL: LP: haaŋ 3; LM: thaaŋ 3; WN: thaaŋ 3

set up a bed
MÈNE: ?aan 4 'sofa, or other expensive furniture';
CENTRAL: LP: ?aan 2; LM: ?aan 4;

sharpened stake
MÈNE: kwaak 2
SOUTHWESTERN: LAO: khwaak DL1; SI: khwaak 2;
WT: khaa? 2
CENTRAL: LP: kuuk 2; LM: kuuk/vaak 2; WN:
khaak 2
NORTHERN: SK: khwaak 6

sing, chant
MÈNE: kap 6
SOUTHWESTERN: LAO: khap DS1; SI: khap 2; WT:
xap 2
CENTRAL: Tay: khap/sâp (DS1)
NORTHERN: SK: hap 4
PT* kh- D

sprout, (bamboo, banana)
MÈNE: naaŋ 4 (nɔɔ 4 naaŋ 4)
CENTRAL: WN: δaaŋ 4; T'ien-pao: hraaŋ (A4)
NORTHERN: YAY: raaŋ 4; SK: naaŋ 4; WM: raaŋ 2; Pu-
i (#11, 12) : naaŋ (A4)
PT* nl/r- A

steep mountain slope
MÈNE: ta-liŋ 2
CENTRAL: Nung: liŋ pan 'slope'; Tho: liŋ 'abrupt'
NORTHERN: Po-ai: liŋ 2;
Sui: khiŋ, hiŋ 'slanted.'
PT* hl- B

sun, day
MÈNE: măŋee 4
SOUTHWESTERN: LAO: ven A4; SI: wan 1; WT:
vin 4
CENTRAL: LP: van 4; LM: van 4; WN: van 4; LC:
van 2
NORTHERN: YAY: van 4; SK: ñɛn 4; WM: ŋon 2
PT* ŋw- A

thunder
MÈNE: pheɛ 3 (faa 5 pheɛ 3)
NORTHERN: YAY: pja 3; SK: phraa 3; WM: plaa 3
PT* phraa C

touch, hit, cheap
MÈNE: tĭk 7
SOUTHWESTERN: LAO: thïïk DL1; SI: thuuk 2; WT:
thu? 2
CENTRAL: LM: thok 3; LC: thuk 5
NORTHERN: YAY: tĭk 1; SK: thĭk 6

who, person
MÈNE: pëë 4
SOUTHWESTERN: LAO: phaÿ A1; SI: khray 1; WT:
phaÿ 5; BT: faÿ 1; SH: phaÿ 1/2; SN: phëë 1
CENTRAL: LP: caÿ 4; LC: naÿ 2
NORTHERN: WM: praÿ 2 (A4)

As will be seen, in its segmental phonology Mène is not particularly unusual or conservative. It possesses neither rare consonant clusters nor exotic vocalism. The tone system, however, is completely unique with velar conditioning factors not found elsewhere to my knowledge.

Another interesting development in Mène is the loss of final consonants in several of the most common verbs. (This has also occurred in the word 'to eat' in the Mëy language.) The following is a list of those items identified so far:

TABLE II: LOSS OF FINAL CONSONANTS

	Mène:	Lao:
to be	pee⁴	pen A2
to eat	kii⁴	kin A2
to do, make	?ee⁴	het DS4
to go	paa⁴	pay A2
to take	?aa⁴	?aw A3

Yet another unexplained peculiarity associated with these forms is that they are most frequently produced with a final [-h] which is otherwise not phonemic in the language, although a similar phonation occurs in association with tone 2 discussed below.

Phonology

The Mène system of initial consonants is not unusual. It has the expected series with labio-velar and glottal clusters (and perhaps others although these have not been determined) as can be seen on the chart below. Consonant clusters with second element labials are recorded here as /-w-/ in keeping with convention, although this labial element is quite distinctively [-v-] in most environments.

Examples of initials: /puu³/ 'blunt, dull '; /tak⁶/ 'break'; /cok¹/ 'mortar'; /keɛt²/ 'hurt'; /kwɛɛ²/ 'medicinal bark'; /pham⁴/ 'chop, mince'; /thook²/ 'jail'; /khuang²/ 'rope bridge'; /khwɛɛ²/ 'healthy (greeting)'; /hɔɔ⁴/ 'sharpen'; / hwaa⁴/ 'stir'; /bëë⁴/ 'leaf'; /daa⁴/ 'prepare'; /?ïap²/ 'to pickle'; /?waan⁴/ 'to shout'; /mïaŋ⁵/ 'crazy'; /naaŋ⁴/ 'shoot, sprout'; /ñuu⁴/ 'broom'; /ŋii²/ '2nd month'; /-ŋwaa⁴/ 'yesterday'; / fuŋ⁴/ 'to mend nets'; /sïa⁴/ 'left over'; /swaaŋ²/ 'to become sober'; /vaaŋ¹/ 'athwart'; / yɛŋ²/ 'saddle'; /lëë¹/ 'to talk in sleep.'

CHART I : CONSONANT INITIALS

| p	t	c	k	
			kw	
ph	th		kh	h
			khw	hw
b	d			?
				?w
m	n	ñ	ŋ	
			ŋw	
f	s			
	sw			
v		y		
	l			

The Mène vocalic system seems not to recognize length distinctions except for /a/ and /aa/ and before final stops. The probable phonetic analog of this occurs in the dipthongs, whose first element is always long, which are monopthongized before final glides /-y/ and /-w/. Minimal pairs of contrastive vowel length were not found on other syllable types. Syllables with PT /*aï/ (the final portion of which, following Gedney, is analyzed as a high back unrounded glide /-ÿ/) show /ëë/ in Mène as is the case with surrounding languages of the Neua-Phuan-Phou Thay type, as well as Red Tai and Tai Mëy, spoken in Houa Phanh, Xieng Khwang, Khammouan, and in the Song Chu and Song Ca valleys in Thanh Hoá and Nghê An.

CHART II : VOWELS AND DIPTHONGS

i, {ii}	ï, {ïï}	u, {uu}
e, {ee}	ë, {ëë}	o, {oo}
ε, {εε}	a, aa	ɔ, {ɔɔ}
{ia}	{ïa}	{ua}

Examples of vowels: /ʔit⁶/ 'purple'; /ʔiit² (faay³)/ 'kind of Cerambycid beetle'; /ket⁶/ 'scale (of fish, etc.)'; /kheek²/ 'hit with knuckle of middle finger'; /nεt⁶/ 'kind of water turtle'; /kεεp²/ 'narrow'; /vĭk¹/ 'repulsive (of hairlip or certain leaf-nosed bats)'; /sïïp²/ 'to join, continue'.; /mëk¹/ 'ink'; [no examples of long /ëë/ before final stop have been found yet]; /lak¹/ 'steal'; /laak²/ 'pull, drag'; /duk⁶/ 'Clariad catfish'; /duuk²/ 'bone'; /ʔop²/ 'to bake'; /(bëë³) ʔoop²/ 'giant silkworm moth'; /pɔk⁶/ 'bracelet'; /pɔɔk²/ 'to peel'; /viak²/ 'work'; /lïat²/ 'blood'; /luak²/ 'scald.'

The Tonal System

TAY MÈNE TONES
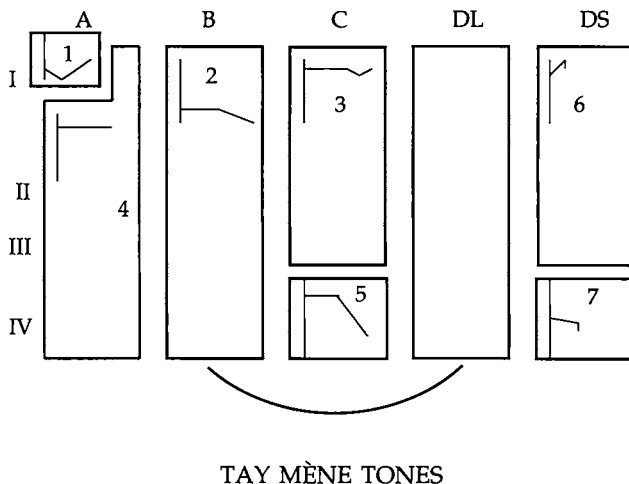
1. low rising, usually with an audible creakiness at the lowest pont of the tone, examples: /hoy¹/ 'to open,' /khwaa¹/ 'cucumber,' /vaan¹/ 'axe.'

2. mid-low falling, with whisper on the end of the tone, examples: /hëë²/ 'dry,' /pɔɔ²/ 'male,' /kεεt²/ 'to hurt.'

3. mid-high with slight fall or fall-rise, examples: /khwaa³/ 'lock, key,' /khëë³/ 'near,' /kïï³/ 'put away.'

4. high level, examples: /pii⁴/ 'fan,' /sam⁴/ 'pond, swamp,' /maa⁴/ 'dog,' /bii⁴/ 'navel.'

5. high falling, examples: /mεŋ⁵/ 'mouthful, bite,' /kua⁵/ 'father's younger sister,' /van⁵/ 'twist and break.'

6. mid-high rising checked, examples: /kap⁶/ 'sing,' /tëk⁶/ 'male.'

7. mid-low falling checked, examples: /mit¹/ 'knife,' /lïk¹/ 'child.'

Perhaps the most curious and perplexing aspect of the Mène language is its tone system. No Tai languages so far recorded have developed in precisely this way. There is a single split in the A column, within the A1 box where tone 1 is conditioned by Proto-Tai voiceless velar aspirate and fricative initials, while all other syllables with A column tones have tone 4. The only other Tai languages known to split the A1 box are Saek and at least two Nung dialects, Bac Va and Lang Vo (see Gedney 1989 : 25ff) but the same conditioning factors do not obtain, although it should be noted in Chart I that all of the Saek forms corresponding to PT* kh- possess Saek first tone whereas the other PT initial voiceless velars show tone 2. Gedney (1989 : 36) shows how words in Saek corresponding to WT x- show a propensity for tone 1, but not in every case. And, Saek words with initials descended from PT* f-, hr-, and hl also share this propensity. Thus, while the agreement in some of the velar series is probably not coincidental, just why it should be so is not clear.

One possibility for this unusual conditioning of a tone split in the A1 box is suggested by Ohala (1973 : 7) who notes that pull on the larynx by the tongue in "consonants involving a high position for the body of the tongue, i.e. palatals and velars, ought to induce a slightly higher average pitch (as opposed to labials and dentals, which do not involve the body of the tongue in the same way)." He goes on to note, however, that experimental data on the subject has produced mixed results. Perhaps it was the combination of physiologic factors, velar tongue position as well as voicelessness, aspiration, and friction, which led to this peculiar grouping.

Looking at Table IV, it is noteworthy that the only definable set of forms which do not follow the pattern are those which Gedney has reconstructed as *G- or *ϒ, presumably voiced, perhaps palatals (judging from the chinese contact forms, cf. Chamberlain 1990), part of his new series of initials (Gedney 1979). The PT reconstructions are from Li (1977) and will eventually need to be updated, but they will suffice for our purposes given their obvious velar nature in most cases.

TABLE III :
Sources of Mène 1st Tone

Gloss :	Mène :	PT*C_i	WT :	Saek :
whistle	thiw¹	*ph-; *th-; *khw-	thiw A1	thiw² phriw² hiw² hiiw²
ginger	hiŋ¹	*x-	xiŋ A1	hiiŋ²
chopping block	hiaŋ¹	*x-	—	—
to crow	han¹	*x-	xan A1	hal²
needle	hem¹	*x-	xim A1	kim¹
green	hew¹	*x-	xɛw A1	heew²
answer	haan¹	*x-	xaan A1	ŋaan²
white	haaw¹	*x-	æaaw A1	haaw²
bitter	hom¹ kom¹ khom⁴	*x-; *ʈ-	khom A1	ʈam⁴
to open	hoy¹ hoy⁴ khay⁴	*x-	khay A1	hay⁴
return	hïn¹ kïn⁴	*x-?	xïn A1	—
hook	hɔɔ¹	*x-	xɔ A1	hɔɔ²
things	hoŋ¹	*x-	xɔŋ A1	hɔɔŋ²
laugh	hoo¹	*xr-	—	ruaw²
hall	hɔɔ¹	*xr-	—	—
spirit	van¹	*xw-?	xwan A1 xɔn A1	hɔn²
axe	vaan¹	*xw-	xwaan A1	vaan²
athwart	vaaŋ¹	*khw-	xwaaŋ A1	vaaŋ²
tamarind	haam¹	*kh-	khaam A1	kaam¹
needle	hem¹	*kh-	xim A1	kim¹
arm	hɛn¹	*kh-	xɛn A1	keen¹
eggplant	hïa¹ khïa⁴	*kh- *G-	khë A1	kee³
horn	haw¹	*kh-	xaw A1	kaw¹
leg	haa¹	*kh-	xaa A1	kwaa¹
sell	haay¹	*kh-	xaay A1	kwaay¹
bodyhair	hon¹	*kh-	xun A1	pul¹
log	khɔn¹	*kh/g-	xɔn A1	—
tallow	khay¹	*kh-	xay A1	khay¹
bridge	khoo¹	?	khoo A1	khaw⁴
transport	hon¹	?	—	khun²
dove	haw¹	*khr-	chaw A1	haw²
ask, beg	hɔɔ¹	*khr-	chɔ A1	thrɔɔ²
imprison	saŋ¹	*khl-; *thl-	chaŋ A1	thraŋ²
sift	sëŋ¹ sëŋ⁴	*khl-; *thl-	chëŋ A1	raŋ²
hard	hɛŋ¹ khɛŋ⁴	*khl-	khɛŋ A1	thriaŋ²
cucumber	khwaa¹	*kw- (?)	—	—
pheasant	khwaa¹	—	—	—

Gloss :	Mène :	PT*C_i	WT :	Saek :
kind of rat	hwii¹	—	—	—
Agamid lizard	-căkhɛɛ¹	—	—	—
spin cotton	khen¹	?	khin A1	—
kind of fishtrap	haa¹	—	—	—
breathe (lst word)	haa¹	—	—	—
untamed	hɛɛ¹	—	—	—
parade, guard	hɛɛ¹	—	—	—
brick	hɔɔ¹	—	—	—

TABLE IV :
Exceptions

Gloss :	Mène :	PT*C_i	WT :	Saek :
son-in-law	khëy⁴	*kh/g- *G-	khëy A1	khooy⁴
ditch	khum⁴	*kh/g- *G-	khum A1	khum⁴
right	khwaa⁴	*khw/gw- *Gw-	xwaa A1	khwaa⁴
bitter	khom⁴	*kh/g- *ɣ-	khum A1	ʈam⁴
eggplant	khïa⁴ hïa¹	*kh- *G-	khë¹	kee³
hard	khɛŋ⁴ hɛŋ¹	*khl-	khɛŋ A1	thriaŋ²
sift	sëŋ⁴ sëŋ¹	*khl- *thl-	chëŋ A1	raŋ²
to open	khay⁴ hoy⁴ hoy¹	*x-	khay A1	hay²
softshell turtle	faa¹	*f-	faa A1	via³
fishnet	hɛɛ⁴	*xr-	hɛ A1	ree²

The phonetic character of Tone 2 is of considerable interest because of hypotheses concerning the origins of the three PT tones which suggest they were once associated with syllable-final phonation features. Haudricourt (1954) first proposed that PT B tones could be associated with final /-h/. In 1969 I posited a whisper final feature for the B tone, figuring, albeit roughly in those days, that if both arytenoid and ligamental portions of the glottis were closed for final stops, the next closest state would be whisper where the ligamentals are still closed and only the arytenoids are open. (I have no idea whether this sort of reasoning is still phonetically valid or not.) Be that as it may, the ending of the B tone in Mène sounds like whisper and is so pronounced as to partially obscure the final nasal consonants, especially /n/ and /ŋ/. The fact that all B and DL syllables share a single common tone implies that this feature is powerful enough to override pitch contour as the factor of primary distinction. A preliminary spectrographic analysis of this tone undertaken at the phonetics laboratory of Chulalongkorn University with the expertise of Dr. Theraphan Thongkum revealed that approximately the final third of syllables ending in final vowels or nasals show breathiness and eventual voicelessness for this tone. Thus it differs from other so-called breathy tones, such as that found in Hmong where the breathiness occurs throughout the entire voiced portion of the syllable. In languages of the AA family with final /-h/, phonetically either voiceless [h] or voiced [ɦ], a similar spectrographic pattern appears suggesting that Mène B tones retain something of a syllable-final phonation closely associated with /-h/. (A more complete analysis is underway but is not yet complete.) Other Tai dialects lacking B tone splits, such as Lao, do not show the corresponding lack in DL found in Mène, and as a general rule, in Tai languages where the B-DL coalescence is complete, these tones have also been split according to the voicing of the initial consonants. Furthermore, in contrast to other surrounding Tai dialects, Mène does not possess the syllable final creaky voice feature commonly associated with the PT C tone, a characteristic of the Northern Branch languages found in Southern China as pointed out by Gedney (1989 : 212).

The final consonants are like those found in other Tai languages :

p	t	c	k	?
m	n		ŋ	
w		y		

Examples : /tap⁶/ 'liver'; /tat⁶/ 'cut'; /tak⁶/ 'draw water'; /pïa?⁶/ 'intsf. white' [note short dipthong here; this is the only example]; /tam²/ 'to stamp on'; /tan²/ 'plugged'; /taŋ³/ 'set up'; /taw²/ 'turtle'; /tay²/ 'crawl (of insects).'

Mène in Comparative Linguistic Perspective

I will not attempt to provide a complete anaylsis of the position of Mène in a comparative and historical frame. I will, however, for convenience, show where Mène stands in

relation to several relevant comparative phonological issues and to suggestions made on historical geography and classification by such acknowledged sources on comparative Tai as Li, Gedney, and Haudricourt. Using Li 's (1977) reconstructions as a base, supplemented by Gedney's proposals (1989 : 229ff) on a new consonant series, the following tables should suffice to provide a general idea of how Mène relates to other Tai dialects. The tables are by no means exhaustive, focusing on the velar initials, but even these are not complete due to a lack of comparative data accessible to me at the time of this writing, and many more forms will be found in the wordlist which do not correspond to data already analyzed elsewhere.

It will be noted that in the majority of instances for Li 's PT* kh- and PT* x-, Mène has the same pattern as WT, showing h- as the reflex of x- and kh- for kh- as in the forms shown in tables V, VI and XIII. In Tables VII and XV forms reconstructed by Gedney with initial PT* G and PT* Ɣ the agreement does not hold. For 'sing' on Table VIII Mène shows an unaspirated consonant as if this could be the regular Northern correspondence (though not a Mène one), but Li reports that cognates do not occur in other N languages. Similar instances of Mène k- in the high series occur in 'year, cycle' on Table XIV, and for 'bitter,' 'dig,' and 'joint,' on Table XV. The other forms on Table VIII are irregular. Diller's (1988) argument on 'tamarind' is particularly convincing.

The Mène forms deriving from PY* g- and τ- are more regular, showing k- in the majority of instances. There are, however, a number of items where we find kh- and h-, as on tables XXII and XXIII, and in these cases, Mène agrees with Saek wherever the Saek wherever the Saek words are available.

Mène correspondences with other dialects under Li's reconstructed velar clusters are more problematical. I have merely listed them here for future reference and analysis.

TABLE V : PT* kh- (1)

arm: PT* kh- A
    MÈNE: hєn 1
    Lao: khєєn A1; WT: xєn 1; SI: khææn 5
    LM: kheen 1; LC: kheen 1
    WM: ken 1; Yay: cen 1; SK: keen 1

body hair, feathers: PT* kh- A
    MÈNE: hon 1
    Lao: khon A1; WT: xun 1; SI: khon 5
    LM: khon 1; LC: khun 1
    WM: pun 1; Yay: pun 1; SK: pul 1

horn of animal: PT* kh- A
    MÈNE: haw 1
    Lao: khaw A1; WT: xaw 1; SI: khaw 5
    Yay: khaw 5; SK: kaw 1

kill: PT* kh- C
    MÈNE: haa 3
    Lao: khaa C1; WT: xaa 3; SI: khaa 3
    LM: khaa 3; LC: khaa 3
    WM: kaa 3; Yay: kaa 3; SK: kaa 3

leg: PT* kh- A
    MÈNE: haa 1
    Lao: khaa A1; WT: xaa 1; SI: khaa 5
    LM: khaa 1; LC: khaa 1
    WM: haa 1; Yay: ka 1; SK: kwaa 1

sell: PT* kh- A
    MÈNE: haay 1
    Lao: khaay A1; WT: xaay 1; SI: khaay 5
    LM: khaay 1; LC: khaay 1
    WM: haay 1; Yay: kaay 1; SK: kwaay 1

torn, ripped: PT* khaat D
    MÈNE: haat 2
    Lao: khaat DL1; WT: xaat 2; SI: khaat 2
    LM: khaat 2; LC: khaat 5
    WM: kaat 6; Yay: haat 2; SK: kaat 6

TABLE VI : PT* kh- (2)

bridge (545) : PT* kh- A
    MÈNE: khoo 1/4
    Lao: khua A1; WT: kho 1
    SK: khau 4

hit, flick with finger: PT* kh- D
    MÈNE: kheek 2 'to hit with the middle knuckle (to children)'
    SI: khek DL1
    Dioi: kek; Po-ai: kεk, kwεk

scratch something: PT* kh- D
    MÈNE: khiit 2
    Lao: khiit DL1; WT: khit 2; SI: khiit 2
    SK: khiit 6

TABLE VII : PT* kh/g- (3)

eggplant: PT* kh-/g- A
    MÈNE: khïa, ma-hïa 1
    Lao: khïa A1; WT: khë 1; SI: khïa 5
    LM: khïï 1
    Yay: kïa 4; SK: kee 3

hole, pit, ditch: PT* kh- A
    MÈNE: khum 4
    Lao: khum A1; WT: khum 1; SI: khum 5
    LM: khum 1; LC: khum 1
    WM: kum 2; Yay: kum 4; SK: khum 4

ride: PT* kh-/g- B
    MÈNE: khwii 2
    Lao: khii B1; WT: khi/khwi 2; SI: khii 2
    LM: khwei 2; LC: khwii 5
    WM: kïy 5; Yay: kïay 5; SK: khooy 5

right: PT* khw/gw A
    MÈNE: khwaa 4
    Lao: khua/khwaa A1; WT: xwaa 1; SI: khwaa 5
    LM: saa 1; LC: £aa 1
    WM: kwaa 2; Yay: kwa 4; SK: khwaa 4

son-in-law (519) : PT* kh/g- A
    MÈNE: khëy 4
    Lao: khëëy A1; WT: khëy 1; SI: khëëy 5
    LM: khuuy 1; LC: khëëy 1
    WM: kïy 2; Yay: kïay 4; SK: khooy 4

TABLE VIII : PT* kh- (4)

murky, turbid: PT* kh- B
    MÈNE: hun 2
    Lao: khun B1; WT: khun 2; SI: khun 2
    LM: khon 2; Tay: khun B1; Tho: khun B1
    Po-ai: hun C1 SK: khun 2

sing, chant: PT* kh- D
    MÈNE: kap 6
    Lao: khap DS1; WT: xap 2; SI: khap 2
    Tay: khap, sâp
    SK: hap 4

tamarind: PT* kh- A
    MÈNE: haam 1
    Lao: khaam A1; WT: khaam 1; SI: khaam 5
    LM: kaam 1
    WM: kaam 1; Yay: kaam 1; SK: kaam 1

TABLE IX : PT* khr-

ask, beg: PT* khr-/thr- A
    MÈNE: hOO 1
    Lao: khOO A1; WT: chO 1; SI: khOO 5
    LM: hoo 1; LC: khoo 1
    SK: thrOO 2

centipede: PT* khr- D
    MÈNE: khep/hep 6
    Lao: khep DS1; WT: xep; SI: khep/khaap 2
    SK: ca 6 thrip 4

dove: PT* khr- A
    MÈNE: haw 1
    Lao: khaw A1; WT: chaw 1; SI: khaw 5
    LM: law 1
    WM: raw 1; Yay: raw 1; SK: haw 2

egg: PT* khr- B
    MÈNE: say 2
    Lao: khay B1; WT: chay 2; SI: khay 2
    LM: kay 2; LC: khjay 5
    WM: ray; Yay: cay 2

top for spinning: PT* khr- B
    MÈNE: h/khaang 2
    Lao: khaang B1; WT: chaang 2; SI: khaang 2
    LM: laang 2; LC: haang 5
    WM: raang 5; Yay: caang 2

vine: PT* khr-
    MÈNE: cïa 4 (haw 1)
    Lao: khïa A1; WT: cë 4; SI: khrïa 1
    LM: lïï 4
    SK: thaa 4

TABLE X : PT* khl-

drive, chase: PT* khl- D
    MÈNE: hap 2
    Lao: khap DS1; WT: chap 2; SI: khap 2
    SK: khap 4

fever: PT* khlay C
    MÈNE: say 3
    Lao: khay C1; WT: chay 3; SI: khap 3
    LM: lay 3; LC: hay 3
    Yay: cay 3

hard: PT* khl- A
    MÈNE: hɛng 1
    Lao: khɛɛng A1; WT: khɛng 1; SI: khæng 5
    LM: leeng 1; LC: kheeng 1
    WM: kleng 1; SK: thriang 2

imprison: PT* thr/khlang A
    MÈNE: sang 1
    Lao: khang A1; WT: chang 1; SI: khang 5
    LM: lang 1
    WM: klang; Yay: cang 1; SK: thrang 2

quail: PT* khl- C
    MÈNE: sum 3
    Lao: khum C1; WT: chum 3; SI: khum 3
    Dioi: kioum C1; Po-ai: cum C1

side, ribs: PT* khl- C
    MÈNE: saang 3
    Lao: khaang C1; WT: chaang 3; SI: khaang 3
    LM: laang 3; LC: haang 3

sift, to: PT* thl/khl- A
    MÈNE: sëng 1
    Lao: khëŋ A1; WT: chëŋ 1; SI: khïng 5
    LM: lëŋ 1; LC: khjëŋ 1
    SK: rang 2

spider: PT* khl- A
    MÈNE: (king) kaaw 4
    WT: (cing 2) chaaw 1
    LM: -laaw 1; LC: -khjaaw 1
    WM: -klwaaw 1; Yay: -caaw 1; SK: -thraaw 2

TABLE XI : PT* khw-

cross, to; twisted: PT* khw- (/gw-?) C
    MÈNE: vaay 3
    WT: xway 2; SI: khway 3
    Dioi: kouai C4

crosswise, disorderly, intersection: PT* khw- B
    MÈNE: kway 2
    WT: xway B1; SI: khway 2
    Tay: khoay B1
    Dioi: kouai B1

healthy, to be well: PT* ?
    MÈNE: khwɛɛ 2 (used as a greeting)
    SK: thrɛɛ 5 'slowly, gradually'
    Viet. khoe (hoi tone)

lie athwart: PT* khw- A
    MÈNE: vaang 1
    Lao: khwaang A1; WT: khwaang 1; SI: khwaang 5
    LM: khwaang 1; LC: khwaang 1
    Yay: vaang 1; SK: vaang 2

lock, a; key: PT* ?
    MÈNE: khwaa 3
    LM: saa 3; LC: £aa 3

sharpened stake: PT* khw- D
    MÈNE: kwaak 2
    Lao: khwaak DL1; WT: khaa? 2; SI: khwaak 2
    LM: kuuk/vaak 2; LC: kuuk 5
    SK: khwaak 6

whistle: PT* ?
    MÈNE: thiw 1
    Lao: phiw A1; WT: thiw 1; SI: phiw 5
    LP: khwiiw 2; LM: viiw 1
    SK: thiw/phriw/hiw/hiiw 2

TABLE XII : Mène kh- k

melon, cucumber: PT* kw- A
    MÈNE: khwaa 1 (teng 4 khwaa 1 'an especially ripe
    melon where seeds are ready to plant' - said to rhyme
    with khwaa 'right')
    SI: kwaa 1
    LM: kwaa 2; LC: kwaa 1

open an umbrella: PT* k/kh-
    MÈNE: khaang 3
    Lao: kaang A2; SI: kaang
    LC: khaang

TABLE XIII : PT* x- (1)

answer a call: PT* x- A
    MÈNE: haan 1
    Lao: khaan A1; WT: xaan 1; SI: khaan 5
    WM: haan 1; Yay: haan 1; SK: ngaan 2

cross, to: PT* x- C
    MÈNE: haam 3
    Lao: kh (w) aam C1; WT: xaam 3; SI: khaam 3
    LM: khaam 3; LC: khaam 3
    WM: haam 3; Yay: haam 3; SK: haam 3

dry: PT* x- A/B
    MÈNE: khoo 1/hëë 2
    WT: xaÿ 2
    LM: khaÿ 2; LC: khaÿ 5
    WM: haÿ; SK: khoo 2/hïi 6
    Viet: khô

enter: PT* xaw C
    MÈNE: haw/khaw 3
    Lao: khaw C1; WT: xaw 3; SI: khaw 3
    LM: khaw 3; LC: khaw 3
    WM: haw 3; Yay: haw 3; SK: haw 3

ginger: PT* x- A
    MÈNE: hing 1
    Lao: khing A1; WT: xing 1; SI: khing 5
    LM: khing 1; LC: khing 1
    Yay: khing 5; SK: hïing 2

go up, ascend, rise: PT* xïn C
    MÈNE: hïn 3
    Lao: khïn C1; WT: xïn 3; SI: khïn 3
    LM: khën 3; LC: khën
    WM: hïn 3; Yay: hïn 3; SK: hïn 3

green: PT* x- A
    MÈNE: hew 1
    Lao: khiaw A1; WT: x∈w 1; SI: khiaw 5
    LM: kheew 1; LC: kheew 1
    WM: hew 1; Yay: hew 1; SK: heew 2

hook, sickle: PT* x- A
    MÈNE: hOO 1
    Lao: khOO 1; WT: xO A1; SI: khOO 5
    LM: khoo 1
    SK: hOO 2

knee: PT* x- B
    MÈNE: (hua 1) haw 2
    Lao: khaw B1; WT: xaw 2; SI: khaw 2
    LM: khaw 2; LC: khaw 5
    WM: hφ 5; Yay: ho 2; SK: kOO 6

knot, to: PT* x- D
    MÈNE: hOOt 2
    WT: xOt DL1
    LC: khoot

open, to: PT* xay 1
    MÈNE: khay 4, hoy 1/4
    Lao: khay A1; WT: khay 1; SI: khay 5
    LM: khay 1; LC: khay 1
    WM: höy A1; Yay: haay 1; SK: hay 2

steel: PT* x- A
    MÈNE: haang 1
    Lao: khaang A1; WT: xang A1
    LC: (kaang B1)
    WM: hang/kang A1

teeth, tooth, fang: PT* x- C
    MÈNE: h∈w 3

    Lao: kh∈∈w C1; WT: x∈w 3; SI: khiaw 3
    LM: kheew 3; LC: kheew 3
    Yay: hew 3

white: PT* x- A
    MÈNE: haaw 1
    Lao: khaaw A1; WT: xaaw 1; SI: khaaw 5
    LM: khaaw 1; LC: khaaw 1
    WM: haaw 1; Yay: haaw 1; SK: haaw 2

TABLE XIV : PT* x- (2)

guest: PT* x- D
    MÈNE: kh∈∈k 2
    Lao: kh∈∈k DL1; WT: kh∈? 2; SI: kh∈∈k 2
    LM: kheek 2; LC: kheek 5
    WM: hek 3; Yay: hek 2; SK: heek 6

press down, oppress, force: PT* x- B
    MÈNE: hom/kom 2
    Lao: khom B1; WT: khum B1; SI: khom 2

pull, draw: PT* x- A
    MÈNE: khen 1
    Lao: khen A1; WT: khin; SI: khen 5

scrape, to: PT* x- D
    MÈNE: cok 6
    Lao: khuut DL1; WT: xut 2; SI: khuut 2
    SK: khuut 6/hut 4

year, annual cycle: PT* x- D
    MÈNE: kuap 2
    Lao: khuap DL1; WT: khOp; SI: khuap 2
    LC: khuup

TABLE XV : PT* x/τ- (3)

bite: PT* x-/τ- D
    MÈNE: khop 6
    Lao: khop DS1; WT: khop 2; SI: khop 2
    LM: khop 3; LC: khoop 5
    WM: xap 6; Yay: hap 1; SK: τap 6/khop 4

bitter: PT* x-/τ- A
    MÈNE: kom/hom 1, khom 4
    Lao: khom A1; WT: khum 1: SI: khom 5
    LM: khom 1; LC: khum 1
    WM: xam 4; Yay: ham 4; SK: τam 4

chicken, half-grown (female in M) : PT* x-/τ- B
    MÈNE: khïang 2
    Lao: khïang B1; WT: khëng; SI: khïang 2
    LM: khëëng 2

dig: PT* x-/τ-/g- D
    MÈNE: kut 6
    Lao: khut DS1; WT: khut 2; SI: khut 2
    LM: khot 4; LC: kut 2
    Yay: hut/kut 1; SK: khut 6

excrement: PT* x-/τ- C
    MÈNE: khii 3
    Lao: khii C1; WT: khi 3; SI: khii 3
    LM: khii 3; LC: khii 3
    WM: xai 4; Yay: hai 6; SK: τai 6

joint, knuckles: PT* x-/τ- C/B
    MÈNE: kOO 2 (B4)
    Lao: khOO C1; WT: xO C1
    Tay: kho C1; Nung: kho C1
    WM: xö B4; Dioi: ho B4

rice: PT* x-/τ- C
    MÈNE: khaw 3
    Lao: khaw C1; WT: khaw 3; SI: khaw 3
    LM: khaw 3; LC: khaw 3
    WM: xau 4; Yay: hau 6; SK: τaw 6

TABLE XVI : PT* xw-

axe: PT* xwaan A
    MÈNE: vaan 1
    Lao: khwaan A1; WT: khwaan 1; SI: khwaan 5
    LM: khwaan 1
    Yay: vaan 1; SK: vaan 2

lie face down, turn upside down: PT* xw- C
    MÈNE: vam 3
    Lao: khwam C3; WT: xam 3; SI: khwam 3
    LM: khom 3; LC: khum 3
    Yay: ham 3; SK: ngam 3

spirit, whorl in the hair: PT* xwan A
    MÈNE: van 1
    Lao: khwan A1; WT: xwan/xOn 1; SI: khwan 5
    LM: khwan 1; LC: khwan
    Yay: van 1; SK: hOn 2

TABLE XVII : PT* xr-

cover, to, to veil: PT* xr- C/B
    MÈNE: hom 3 'to cover or to veil (to cover silkworm
    tray with cloth)'
    SI: hum 3 (C1)
    LC: hum B1
    Dioi: thom (B1); Ling-yün: lum (C2)
    Sui: kum B1

ear: PT* xr- A
    MÈNE: huu 4
    Lao: huu A1; WT: hu 1; SI: huu 5
    LM: lou 1; LC: huu 1
    WM: rï 2; Yay: rïa 4; SK: rua 4

fishnet for casting: PT* xr- A
    MÈNE: he∈ 4
    Lao: he∈ A1; WT: h∈ 1; SI: hææ 5
    LM: hee 1; LC: hee 1
    Yay: re 1; SK: ree 2

hail: PT* xr- D
    MÈNE: hep 6
    Lao: hep DS1; WT: het 2; SI: hep 2
    LM: hat 3; LC: hat 5
    Yay: rip 3

hall, large building: PT* xr- A
    MÈNE: hOO 1 'building larger than a house'
    Lao: hOO A1; SI: hOO A1
    Nung: ho; Tho: khɔ

impetigo, the itch: PT* xr- D
    MÈNE: hit 6
    Lao: hit DS1; WT: hit 2; SI: hit 2
    LM: lit 3;
    SK: hit 4

laugh: PT* xr- A
    MÈNE: hoo 1
    Lao: hua A1; SI: hua 5 (rO? 4)
    LM: luu 1; LC: huu 1
    WM: riaw 1; Yay: riaw 1; SK: ruaw 2

seek: PT* xraa A
    MÈNE: haa 1
    Lao: haa A1; WT: haa 1; SI: haa 5
    LM: laa 1; LC: haa 1
    WM: raa 2; Yay: ra 1; SK: raa 2

storm, heavy rain: PT* xraa B
    MÈNE: haa 2
    Lao: haa B2; WT: haa 2; SI: haa 2
    LM: laa 2; LC: haa 5
    WM: raa 5; Yay: ra 2; SK: raa 6

stream: PT* xr- C
    MÈNE: hoy 3
    Lao: huay C1; WT: hoy 3; SI: huay 3
    LM: luuy 3; LC: vuuy/huuy 3
    WM: ruy 3; Yay: vi 3; SK: rii 3

TABLE XVIII : PT* g-

acacia: PT* g- A
    MÈNE: k∈∈ 4
    Lao: kh∈∈ A4; WT: k∈ 4; SI: khææ 1
    LM: kee 4
    Yay: ke 4

algae (long strands): PT* g- A/B
    MÈNE: kay 4
    Lao: khay A4; WT: kay A4; SI: khlay A4 (Palgx.)/
    takhray
    Nung: tau-cay A4/B4
    Dioi: pen-kay B4 'aquatic plants'

cangue: PT* g- A
    MÈNE: kaa 4
    Lao: khaa A4 'stuck' (?); WT: ; SI:

carry on one end of pole: PT* g- A
    MÈNE: kOOn 4
    Lao: khOOn A4; SI: khOOn 1
    LC: koon A4

carrying pole: PT* g-/τ- A
    MÈNE: kan 4
    Lao: khaan A4; WT: kaan 4; SI: khaan 1
    LM: kaan 4; LC: kaan 2
    WM: xaan 2; Yay: haan 4; SK: τaan 4

choke on something: PT* g- C
    MÈNE: kε∈n 5
    Lao: khε∈n C4; WT: kε n; SI: khææn 4
    WM: kε n

clf handle, rod: PT* g- A
    MÈNE: kan 4
    Lao: khan A4; WT: kan 4; SI: khan 1
    WM: kan 2; Yay: kan 4; SK: khal 4

gently, carefully: PT* g- B
    MÈNE: kOy 5
    Lao: khOOy B4; WT: kOy 5; SI: khOy 3
    LM: kooy 5; LC: kooy 6

hold in the jaws: PT* g- D
    MÈNE: kaap 2
    Lao: khaap DL4; WT: kaap 4; SI: khaap 3
    Yay: kaap 5; SK: khaap 5

musical instrument, pipes: PT* g- A
    MÈNE: kε∈n 4
    Lao: khε∈n A4; WT: kε n; SI:
    Nung: ken A4 'bugle'

narrow: PT* g- D
    MÈNE: hEEp/kEEp 2
    Lao: khε∈p DL4; WT: xε p 4; SI: khææp 3
    LM: keep 5; LC: kap/keep 2
    SK: τeep 5

sickle: PT* g- A
    MÈNE: kew 2
    Lao: khiaw A4; SI: khiaw 1
    LC: keew A4; Nung: keo 'scissors'
    WM: kε w 'scissors'; Dioi: kiao 'scissors'

stuck: PT* g- A
    MÈNE: kaa 4
    Lao: khaa A4; WT: kaa 4; SI: khaa 1
    LM: kaa 4
    Yay: ka 4; SK: khaa 4

stump of tree, hollow (Mène): PT* g- A
    MÈNE: koon 4
    Lao: khOOn A4; SI: khOOn A4
    WM: kon B1 'stump'

swollen: PT* g- B
    MÈNE: këë 2
    Lao: khay B4; WT: kaÿ 5; SI:
    LM: kaÿ 5; LC: kaÿ 5

toad: PT* g- A, g- D
    MÈNEE: kan 4 kaak 2
    Lao: khan A4 khaak DL4

trade: PT* gaa C
    MÈNE: kaa 5
    Lao: khaa C4; WT: kaa 6; SI: khaa 4
    LM: haa 6; LC: kaa 4
    Yay: ka 6; SK: khaa 6

tripod: PT* g- A
    MÈNE: kiang 4
    Lao: khiang A4; WT: keng 4; SI: khiang 1
    LM: kiing 4; LC: kiing 2
    WM: kiang 2; Yay: ciang 4; SK: khiang 4

TABLE XIX : PT* gw-

cast a fishing net: PT* gw- A/B/C
    MÈNE: kwaang 2 (B)
    WT: kwang 4 (A4); SI: khwaang 4 (C4)
    LC: kwaang A2
    WM: kwang A2 'to surround'
    [Note: this item is included here only because it oc-
    curs in Li's rather short list under PT* gw- where he
    glosses it as 'to turn, whirl around.' But even he ad-
    mits there are many cross-related forms; Lao, for ex-
    ample, has at least three: /khwaang B4/ 'to throw;' /
    khwaang C4/ and /khwε∈ng C4/ 'to whirl, twirl.']

lame (of leg): PT* gw- A
    MÈNE: kwε∈ 4
    WT: kwε 4
    Tho: kwε∈ A4
    Dioi: koue A4; Po-ai: kwε∈

search (with hands): PT* gw- C
    MÈNE: kwaa 5
    Lao: khwaa C4

TABLE XX : PT* gr-

bunch of bananas: PT* gr- A (?)
    MÈNE: hïa 4
    Lao: khïa A4; WT: hë 4; SI: khrïa 1
    LM: lïï 4

complete, entire: PT* gr- D
    MÈNE: kop 7
    Lao: khop DS4; SI: khrop 4
    LM: lop 4
    SK: khop 6

cover, put over: PT* gr- B
    MÈNE: hom 2
    Lao: khOOm B4; SI: khrOOm 3
    Dioi: kioum B4; Ch'ien-chieng: kjum B4; Po-ai: cum B1

half, middle: PT* gr- B
    MÈNE: khëng 2

WT: ciŋ B4; SI: khrïŋ B4
Lao: khïng B4;
WM: klaŋ B4; SK: thrïng 5/kheng 5

indigo (sky color, dye): PT* gr- A
    MÈNE: khaam 4
    Lao: khaam A4; WT: caam 4; SI: khraam 1
    LM: laam 4; LC: kjaam/laam 2
    Yay: saam 4; SK: khaam 4

kitchen: PT* gr-
    MÈNE: kua 4
    Lao: khua A4; SI: khrua 1
    SK: thrua 4

lazy: PT* gr- C
    MÈNE: (khii 3) caan 5
    Lao: khaan 6; WT: caan 6; SI: khraan 4
    LM: laan 6; LC: kjaan 4

lemon grass: PT* gr-
    MÈNE: (khing 1) khëë 4
    Lao: (sing A1) khaÿ A4; WT: (hOm 1) caÿ 4; SI: (ta 2) khray 4
    SK: ca-thrëë/phrëë 4

litter of young: PT* gr- D
    MÈNE: hOOk 5
    SI: khrOOk 3
    LM: look 5; LC: kjook 2
    Yay: cok 5; SK: rOOk 5

moan, to: PT* gr- A
    MÈNE: caang 4
    Lao: khaang A4; WT: cang 4; SI: khraang 1
    LM: laang 4
    SK: reeng 1

mortar (for pounding with pestle): PT* gr- D
    MÈNE: cok 7
    Lao: khok DS4; WT: cok 4; SI: khrok 4
    LM: lok 4; LC: kjuk 2
    Yay: cok 1

snake skin (536): PT* gr- D
    MÈNE: caap 2
    Lao: khaap DL4; WT: caap 4; SI: khraap 3
    LM: laap 5
    SK: thraap 5

sticklac (for red dye etc.): PT* gr/dr- B
    MÈNE: cang 2
    Lao: khang B4; SI: khrang 3
    SK: thrang 5

things, possessions, aparatus: PT* gr-/dr- B
    MÈNE: khïang 2
    Lao: khïang B4; WT: cëng 5; SI: khrïang 3
    LM: liïng 5
    SK: thrïang 5

TABLE XXI : PT* gl-

burned charred: PT* gl- D
    MÈNE: kOOk 2
    WT: cO
    Tay: loc

crawl: PT* glaan A
    MÈNE: kaan 4
    Lao: khaan A4; WT: caan 4; SI: khaan 1
    LM: laan 4; LC: kjaan 2
    Yay: rian 4; SK: luan 4

grope, feel: PT* gl- A
    MÈNE: cam 4
    Lao: kham A4; WT: cam 4; SI: khlam 1

lassoo, to: PT* gl-
    MÈNE: kOng 5
    Lao: khOOng C4; SI: khlOOng 4
    LM: loong 6; LC: kjoong 4
    WM: klɸng 4; SK: τOOng 6

similar but not same: PT* gl- D
    MÈNE: khap 6 (DS1)
    SI: khlap DS4 khlaay C4
    Dioi: kiap DS4; Po-ai: cap DS4 'just right'

stinkbug: PT* gl- A
    MÈNE: kɛng 4
    Lao: khɛɛng A4; WT: kɛng 4; SI: khrææng 1
    Nung: keŋ A4
    Dioi: keŋ A4

TABLE XXII : Mène voiced series > kh

accustomed to: PT* g- A
    MÈNE: khëy 4
    Lao: khëëy A4; BT: khëy 4; SI: khëëy 1
    SK: khëëy 4

argue: PT* (?)
    MÈNE: khaaw 5

bent (with legs tucked up): PT* g- C
    MÈNE: khuu 5
    Lao: khuu C4; SI: khuu 4
    WM: kau A2

crooked, bent: PT* g-/k- D
    MÈNE: khot 7
    Lao: khot DS4; WT: kot 4; SI: khot 4
    LM: kot 4
    SK: khot 6

fin of fish: PT* g- A
    MÈNE: khii 4
    Lao: khii A4
    WM: koi; Dioi: ki; T'ien-chow: kii; Po-ai: cii
    SK: khii 4

gird, tie around waist: PT* τ- D
    MÈNE: khaat 2

Lao: khaat DL4; WT: xat; SI: khaat 3
Dioi: heueut; Po-ai: hïit

guard, oversee: PT* g- A
МÈNE: khum 4
Lao: khum A4; SI: khum 1; Lue; kum 4

measure, thumb to forefinger: PT* τ- D
МÈNE: khïip 2
Lao: khïip DL4; WT: xïp 4; SI: khïip 3
Yay: hup 3/cip 3; SK: khïip 5

price, value: PT* g- B
МÈNE: (naa) khaa 4
Lao: khaa B4; WT: kaa 5; SI: khaa 3
LM: kaa 5;
WM: kaa 6; Yay: ka 5; SK: khaa 5

TABLE XXIII : Mène voiced series > h

eggplant, very small: PT*
МÈNE: hεng 5
Lao: khεεng C4

tame, familiar: PT*
МÈNE: hun 5
Lao: khun C4; SI: khun 4
Yay: kun 6; SK: khun 6

TABLE XXIV : PT* τ-

chin, jaw: PT* τ- A
МÈNE: kaang 4
Lao: khaang A4; WT: kaang 4; SI: khaang 1
LM: kaang 4; LC: kaang 2
WM: xaang 2; Yay: haang 4; SK: τaang 4

dried sweat on skin (527): PT* τ-
МÈNE: kay 4
Lao: khii C1 khay A4; SI: khlay 1
LM: lay 4
WM: xoi 2; Yay: hi 4; SK: τii 4

edge, border, riverbank: PT* τ- A
МÈNE: kεm 4
Lao: khεεm A4; WT: xεm; SI: khææm 1
Dioi: hen; Hsi-lin: heen; Po-ai: heen

expel from mouth, put out of mouth: PT* τ- A
МÈNE: kaay 4
Lao: khaay A4; WT: xaay 1; SI: khaay 5
LM: haay 4;
Yay: haay 4; SK: τaay 4

fishy smell: PT* τ- A
МÈNE: kaaw 4
Lao: khaaw A4; WT: xaaw 4; SI: khaaw 1
LM: haaw 4
Yay: haaw 4; SK: τaaw 4

gold: PT* τ-
МÈNE: kam 4
Lao: kham A4; WT: xam 4; SI: kham 1
SK: τam 5

hammer, club: PT* τ- C
МÈNE: kOOn 5
Lao: khOOn C4; WT: xOn 6; SI: khOOn 4
LM: hoon 6; LC: koon 4
Yay: hon 6; SK: τOOl 6

itch, to: PT* τ- A
МÈNE: kan 4
Lao: khan A4; WT: xan; SI: khan 1
LM: han 4
SK: τal 4

neck, throat: PT* τ- A
МÈNE: kOO 4
Lao: khOO A4; WT: xO 4; SI: khOO 1
LM: hoo 4; LC: koo 4
WM: xφ 2; Yay: hO 4; SK: τOO 4

night: PT* τ- A
МÈNE: kïn 4
Lao: khïïn A4; WT: xïn 4; SI: khïïn 1
LM: hën 4; LC: kën 2
WM: xïn 2; Yay: hïn 4; SK: τïn 4

night, nightfall, dark: PT* τam B
МÈNE: kam 2
Lao: kham B4; WT: xam 5; SI: kham 3
LM: ham 5; LC: kam 6
WM: xam 6; Yay: ham 5; SK: τam 5

person, human being: PT* g-/τ- A
МÈNE: kon 4
Lao: khon A4; WT: kun 4; SI: khon 1
LM: kën 4; LC: kën 2
WM: xun 2; Yay: hun 4; SK: hun 4

search through, to: PT*
МÈNE: kon 5
Lao: khon C4; SI: khon 4
Yay: hun 5; SK: khon 3

sharp edge: PT* τ- A
МÈNE: kom 4
Lao: khom A4; WT: kam 4; SI: khom 1
LM: hom 4; LC: kum 2
SK: τam 4

shin, lower leg: PT* τ- B
МÈNE: kεng 2
Lao: khεεng B4; WT: xεng 5; SI: khεng 3
LM: keeng 5; LC: keeng 6
WM: xeng 6; Yay: heng 5; SK: τeeng 5

thatch grass: PT* τ- A
МÈNE: kaa 4
Lao: khaa A4; WT: xaa 1; SI: khaa 1
LM: haa 4; LC: kaa 2
WM: xaa 2; Yay: ha 4; SK: τaa 4

TABLE XXV : PT* tw-

smoke: PT* tw- A
    MÈNE: kwan 4
    Lao: khwan/khuan A4; WT: xwan/xOn 4; SI: khwan 1
    LM: van 4; LC: van 2
    WM: xOn 2; Yay: khwan 1; SK: tOn 4

water buffalo: PT* tw- A
    MÈNE: kwaay 4
    Lao: khwaay A4; WT: xwaay 4; SI: khwaay 1
    LM: vaay 4; LC: vaay 2
    WM: xwaay 2; Yay: khwaay 1; SK: vaay 4

word, language: PT* tw- A
    MÈNE: kwaam 4
    Lao: khwaam A4; WT: xaam 4; SI: khwaam 1
    LC: vaam 4

Finot's Qui-châu Alphabet

Returning now to the Qui-châu (QC) alphabet of Finot (1917), not only is this alphabet represented on the comparative chart of Plate I where variants are provided for five of the consonants as recorded by Maspéro and Guignard, but a sample is provided, Figure 2 on page 19, with a transliteration and translation on the following page. On close examination there seems little doubt that the language represented in this sample and by this alphabet is very close to Mène. A variant of the QC alphabet is given by Robert, called by him 'Tay Jò' (TJ).

Of particular interest to followers of the Ram Khamhaeng Inscription controversy is the existence of two characters which correspond precisely to *khɔɔ khaay* and *khɔɔ khuat*, both in the fact that the two sounds are distinguished in Mène, and in their close physical resemblance to the Sukhothai characters. However, unlike Inscription One where Diller (1991) argues convincingly that the point of differentiation between the two is to be found on the right vertical portion, the two Qui-châu graphemes are differentiated by an indentation in the uppermost horizontal portion of the character. (For an in-depth anaylsis of this graphemic feature see Diller 1991.) Finot, apparently unaware of the relationship between there two Qui-châu characters, assigns *khɔɔ khuat*, pronounced /h-/ in this alphabet (as it is in Mène), to set 43, the other members of which look as if they are residual *hɔɔ hiip* symbols from other dialects. He likewise misses the distinction in his Lai-châu sample and lists that *khɔɔ khuat* as an alternate of another unidentified Lai-châu character, both of which he equates to Thai *rɔɔ riɑ*. Robert's TJ also treats *khɔɔ khuat* as a type of /h-/.

In the QC sample the *khɔɔ khuat* symbol is found only in the word /hɔɔ/ 'family, lineage' which is probably borrowed from Vietnamese and has the C4 tone so this is more than likely a late innovation. There are regrettably no other *khɔɔ khuat* or *khɔɔ khay* words in the sample. But the fact that this character is used for /h-/, the regular Mène reflex of WT /x-/, implies that the distinction was originally made in the

same way it was made on Inscription One. The word for 'malade' used in the sample is transliterated as "ked," as in Mène /kɛ ∈ t²/ 'hurt,' a distinctive, albeit rare, Northern word, perhaps borrowed from Austronesian.

The QC, TJ, and Sông Ca (SC) alphabets display many other fascinating features of interest to the study of Inscription One and Southeast Asian writing systems generally. Unlike neighboring Tai writing systems such as those given by Finot for Lai-châu, Nghia-lo, or Hu'ng-hoa, these two appear to have made high-low consonant class distinctions only for stops and even these appear to have become confused. For example, there are no special symbols for voiceless sonorants. Yet, these alphabets have characters more archaic than others so that the possibility of recent innovation can be ruled out, as can the likelihood that they are derived from Sukhothai or Fak Kham and moved east. Rather, I suspect that due to isolation these alphabets developed independently and that rather than retaining the high-low distinction they abandoned it having had no inclination to mark tones. Since most scholars have now accepted the idea first proposed by Gedney and Mote in 1965 that SW Tai speakers moved generally from east to west across the northern mainland, it seems irrational to insist that they had no writing system until Ram Khamhaeng. Cham alphabets have been around since at least the 4th century and from their earlier locations in the east, it could only have been this type of Indic alphabet Tai speakers came into contact with first, long before they would have experienced the Khmer alphabet located much further southwest. Likewise, there are certain characters in these alphabets which could not be descended from Fak Kham as some scholars would like us to believe: for example the *sɔɔ sïa* of Sông Ca or the *tɔɔ tàw* of Qui-châu. In both cases, if we accept the Cham premise, the likely source would more probably be the 8th century Cham character depicted by Damais (1955), and whereas in the latter example Inscription One more closely resembles the 10th century form, in the former, *sɔɔ sïa*, it is identical to Qui-châu.

The Cham were known to inhabit Ai (Thanh Hoá) in the 9th century and Maspéro (1916) notes expeditions against them by Vietnamese from Ch'ang (Tru'o'ng) immediately to the north. These campaigns took place in 989, 1006, 1009, and 1011. Pockets of Cham were also noted living in Nghê An between the 11th and the 15th centuries (Stein 1947 : 235n). The name Ai was replaced by Thanh Hoá in 1111, and Hoan became Nghê An in 1036; both name changes were evidently the result of promotions from *châu* to *phu:* (Maspéro 1916 : 31).

Many more of the characters are too close to Sukhothai or Cham to be lightly tossed aside, but it will involve further study by specialists for the details to be eventually worked out. However, I would like to reiterate that the likely direction of transference for the alphabetic tradition which culminated in Inscription One was from east to west, not the reverse.

In Historical Perspective

Mène is a language that shows: many but not a complete set of Northern Branch lexical features; a few forms

typical of the Central Branch languages; and a large amount of Southwestern Branch vocabulary. Its tone system indicates an independent development not influenced by other Tai languages or in other words a linguistic isolation at some earlier period in its history, though it does exhibit some similarity to Saek in its splitting of the A1 box. As we have already seen, the historical development of velar initials agrees with NT in many correspondences such as in tonal aberrancies or in the loss of the velar element in labio-velar clusters. Mène is thus best characterized as a NT language with significant exposure to SWT languages. However, the determination of what is inherited and what is borrowed from SWT will necessarily have to be postponed until we have more adequate descriptions of other languages from this area and we are able to work with other speakers of Mène, preferably from Vietnam. Geographically, Mène appears to have its closest relatives to the northwest in Phu Tu'o'ng-du'o'ng, and to the north in Phu Qui, and the Thu'o'ng Xuân district of Thanh Hoá Province, all south of the Sông Chu River. Since previous studies have focused almost exclusively on areas north and west of the Red River delta, the question now arises, how did Mène, Pao, Saek, and the other languages known to us only as ethnonyms, such as 'Yo' and 'Du'o'i,' come to be located in this region? The question is significant not only for the history of Tai languages, but for the ethnolinguistic dimension of Vietnamese history that is customarily ignored.

Given the fact that Mène is a NT-type language, one of a number of such languages spoken south of the Red River delta, isolated from what we have come to understand as the Tai mainstream until the intrusion of Red Tai and Mëy into Thanh Hoá (Ai) Province, are NT-type languages like Mène, Pao, NyoR and Saek to be considered part of NT or as a separated branch (as Gedney argues for Saek)? In either case the diversity involved will necessitate modifying our definition of Tai, in particular of the NT branch, which may have been too narrow, based upon the relative homogeneity of NT languages in Guizhou and Guangxi. It would now seem a point has been reached where, if the genealogic metaphor is to be maintained, geography and history must be addressed.

But before proceeding further I am going to digress for a moment to consider the nature of our evidence and a consequent methodological issue. A democratic premise would insist that, in reconstructing the past, evidence from all disciplines be equally considered and that any errant hierarchic tendencies which might arise would be leveled by the existence of weaknesses in all approaches. For example, the fact that history is subject to the political biases of its recorders might be offset by the fact that for historical linguistics, some of the evidence, languages, may have disappeared altogether. However, these kinds of argument are irrelevant when we consider a more fundamental difference in the nature of evidence from the two disciplines, namely that historical evidence is consciously man-made, while language is the product of an unconscious evolution and therefore natural. Linguistic evidence is by definition of a different order because it underlies all the rest. This statement could, I suppose, be contested by historians and others, perhaps anthropologists

or archaeologists, but they would never be able to escape the fact that their historicism exists, is made manifest, only in the codes, phonic and graphic, of language, that is, in the domain of linguistics which here, once again, also at this level, is prior. There are, of course, distortions or biases built into language by virtue of its being constructed of symbols, but these biases are constant for all language. (The nature of this type of bias has been the focus of some philosophical and linguistic study, as in, for example, the work of C.S. Pierce, Roman Jakobson, and Charles Pyle.) Furthermore, those groups of people who are the subject of historical investigation and discourse are, by unspoken agreement, defined by language, for example, Thai, Vietnamese, Cham, Muong, and so on. To say, for instance, that the early Vietnamese did not speak Vietnamese is disturbing because it implies a questioning of nomenclatural criteria and convention. Yet, that is indeed the dilemma with which we are currently faced. 'Vietnam,' as everyone knows, is a Chinese expression, and 'Muong,' as noted by Condominas (1980), is a Tai word; thus both are ambiguous. What is not ambiguous, however, is that both of the languages currently spoken by people with these ethnonyms, belong to a linguistic grouping nowadays labeled 'Viet-Muong' within the larger 'Vietic' branch of Austroasiatic (AA) (Diffloth p.c.). If we pose the question in linguistic terms, "according to the evidence of comparative linguistics and dialect geography what language was spoken in the Red River delta in the first century A.D.? Or, the Chu valley? Or, what language did the inhabitants of Au-lac speak?", the nomenclatural paradox would be eliminated and a frame would be created into which to place subsequent historical records composed in Chinese or Chu-nom.

In the discussion which follows I will consider the linguistic evidence as primary, to be supplemented by historical records and analyses wherever possible.

Insight into the problems posed by the existence of NT languages south of the Delta may be had if we consider several important characteristics of Tai linguistic distribution.

(1) The primary axis of SWT is east to west, and only secondarily north to south. It is only in the secondary north-south axis that the P-PH initial consonant distinction is to be found. The primary axis of NT is north to south. CT dialect distribution is essentially radial, surrounding the "area of greatest diversity," described by Gedney.

(2) The diversity of the eastern Vietnam-Guangxi border area is CT diversity and does not include SWT and NT branches. However, since we may now assume that Saek is not a geographical accident, and when Saek and Mène are to be added to the NT inventory, the diversity of this group is equal to if not greater than CT. So, we may pose the question, where is the epicenter of NT if not somewhere along the north-south axis between Guizhou and Thanh Hoá?

For AA we note that:

(3) Vietnamese is an AA language with strong Chinese influence, whereas its closest genetic relative and neighbor, Muong, shows little or none of this influence. The area of greatest diversity of Vietnamese dialects is central Vietnam.

(4) The Vietic branch of AA includes Viet-Muong and several other dialects spoken in the Song Ca valley and south.

Thus the dialects of Vietic are distributed along a north-south axis from the Red River to Khammouan and Hué.

Based upon these linguistic circumstances we may propose that:

(5) The ancestors of modern Vietnamese arrived in the Delta relatively recently, during a period of heavy Sinicization, from somewhere to the south; and

(6) Tai languages of the NT branch were at one time spoken on a continuum from Guizhou to Thanh Hoá (Ai) and Nghê An (Yên).

Historical information supports this linguistic distribution well.

(7) Northward relocation of toponyms noted by Taylor (327ff) occurred sometime between the Tang dynasty (618-906 A.D.) and the 14th century when the first ethnic Vietnamese historians began composing in Chu-nom. Taylor also notes that Giao received its heaviest dose of Sinicization during the Tang period, and we may surmise that the AA group cultivated expressly for the purpose of carrying out Chinese interests in Giao were the ancestors of the modern Vietnamese, known to the Tais as Keo (/kεw/ < Giao). If we envision ancestors of the modern Vietnamese moving northward from Nghê An into Hanoi rather than southward from China, the movement of place names would follow this general pattern. Gérard Diffloth, who has studied the languages of this branch on the Lao side more thoroughly than anyone, has ventured (p.c.) that the homeland may have been somewhere to the south of the Sông Ca.

(8) During this same period, to the north, Tai groups were resisting Chinese and later Sino-Vietnamese invasions leading eventually to migrations of SW Tai to the west. The last of these upheavals took place in the 11th century led by Nung Tri Cao whose followers were the ancestors of the Western Nung (Nông Chu'o'ng) found in the vicinity of Lao Cai, that is, isolated from the other CT dialects. And from this piece of datable information we may note that differences obtaining between Western Nung and the rest of CT represent a time span of approximately 1,000 years, a good indicator of the rate of linguistic change in the Tai family.

(9) Finally, the political-agricultural system of Au-lac as described in Chinese sources resembles very closely that of the Black Tai which remained intact in northwest Vietnam at least until the battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1953. Furthermore, the mythological section of the Black Tai chronicles outlines a movement from Muang Om-Muang Ai, from where the Red and Black rivers join, to Muang Lo (Nghia Lô), and west. The myths of the Tais in Thanh Hoá and Nghê An, interestingly, are more directly related to myths attributed to the Chinese Shang, possibly through retention by Chu (cf. Chamberlain 1989) which suggests the existence of two mythic traditions among the Tais which we might tentatively assign to SWT and NT respectively. What seems clear from all of the evidence so far is that there were Tais in the Delta prior to Austroasiatics. That the Tai system was earlier dominant is supported by a number of cultural-political terms borrowed from Tai into Muong dialects (Condominas 1980). Both the ethnonym and the political system were borrowed from Tai, just as the ethnonym and political system of the Vietnamese originated with the Chinese.

I believe there is an explanation for how the earliest Tais arrived in the Delta, but the arguments are somewhat prolix and the details have been set forth in another paper on the BT creation myth (forthcoming). In brief, evidence obtained by comparing biological taxonomies of Tai languages with zoogeographical data suggests that the common ancestor of PT and Proto-Tai-Kam-Sui must have inhabited the lower Yangtze valley in the early first millenium B.C. (Chamberlain 1977, 1984). This was the location of the Kingdom of Wu, attacked about that time by Chu and considered to have been inhabited by "Yüeh" people who subsequently fled south. (For views on non-Chinese substrata in Wu see Ballard 1985.)

For reasons not yet clear, part of the NT (which I shall dub NT_1) poulation arrived in the Delta first and were later pushed south, while the other part (NT_2) remained in the north. According to the biotaxonomic data, both CT and SWT must have been located south of the Tropic of Cancer earlier than NT_2.

It should be noted that this view of Tai linguistic distribution does not presume Tai speakers proper were the first to inhabit the Delta. The linguistic identity or identities of earlier predecessors remains problematical. It is within this time depth that archaeological evidence should be compared with linguistic distribution of Kadai and AN families, although this is less easily accomplished because of the greater length of time involved and the paucity of linguistic data available at this time.

According to Chinese sources, the area where the Mène and the Pao now reside in the Sông Ca basin was known in the Tang Dynasty as the province of Dòòng-lâm, the interior of which (formerly Sòn Province) bordered on Tranninh (Muang Phouan, Xieng Khwang). We have mentioned Taylor's treatise on early Vietnam where we read (327ff) that the location of this toponym (and others from the same area) which later Vietnamese sources place in the Red River valley, is the birthplace of the hero Phùng Hùng. This hero's story as described in Taylor contains a number of motifs and names which are shared by the Lao epic of Cheuang, the primary source for which was a palm leaf manuscript taken by the Thai army in the 19th century from Ban Ban-Muang Kham in Xieng Khwang Province. From comparison with other extant Thai or Tai literature, the language of this text would seem to approximate that of the 13th or 14th century while the events recorded as well as the cultural motifs appear much older. Some examples of similarities include the following:

TABLE XXVI
Phùng Hùng and Thao Hung (Cheuang)

1. The ethnicity of PH is in doubt; he is called a "Lao leader," or "barbarian leader"	1. Cheuang's ethnicity is likewise a problem. Some have considered him to be a

by the various sources (Taylor 333).

Kha or Austroasiatic figure and his story is also told by the Khmu.

2. Taylor (201) notes PH had a brother named Hai with giant-like characteristics and great strength.

2. One of the three Cheuang figures in Khmu tales is Ai Chet Hai, likewise a giant of great strength. This also has become a Lao story in verse.

3. There are three main characters in the Vietnamese version: PH, Hai, and Dô Anh Hàn.

3. The are three Cheuangs for the Khmu as well: Cheuang, Ai Chet Hai and Ai Ñii Kraan (Smalley 1965).

4. After PH's death, Hai is opposed by Bô Phá Lac, another figure with supernatural strength.

4. Thao Hung is killed by Khun Lo (=Lac) in the form of a Then or heavenly spirit.

5. Dô Anh Hàn raised soldiers and besieged the capital city under General Kao Cheng-p'ing.

5. Thao Hung raises an army and besieges the city of Muang Pakan under Thao Kwa, a Vietnamese.

6. After his death, PH becomes a spirit and cult figure to whom temples are erected.

6. After his death, Thao Hung or Cheuang leads an army of spirits to heaven, which he conquers. Cheuang becomes an ancestral spirit for both Lao and Khmu.

Taylor (204ff) goes on to note that PH came to be regarded as the ideal leader, a benevolent king close to the people, what in Vietnamese would be called *vua* as opposed to the Sino-Vietnamese *vương*, a more remote or distant king.

Similarly, there is a long passage in the epic poem of Thao Hung describing how he ruled the city of Pakan after the defeat of Thao Kwa with great attention paid to the attributes of a good ruler. Both of these ideal kings bear striking resemblance to Ram Khamheng on Inscription One where surprisingly the term *pua* is used for 'king' although its meaning is much debated. Gedney (1989 : 461) pointed out that the term means 'king' in Black Tai, and 'to heal' in other nearby Tai languages. Its phonological similarity to the Vietnamese form can hardly be coincidence and it is perhaps for this reason that Ram Khamhaeng becomes confused with Ruang (=hung, =hung, etc.) in tales of Phra Ruang. There is much more to be said regarding this matter too lengthy for inclusion here. I have addressed the problem somewhat in a revised version of the paper on Black Tai chronicles where Cheuang also appears, this time as the son of Khun Lo, but where he likewise travels from place to place, establishing his authority, just like Hu'ng and Hai in the Vietnamese version (Taylor 202).

As a final note, also in relation to Cheuang, the Mène in the Lao epic poem play a prominent role. The term is used as an ethnonym usually placed before the name of a character in the story to designate ethnicity. 'Keo' (Giao) is used in precisely the same way. The term came to mean 'spirit' in the Northern Thai chronicles, frequently in association with Cheuang. It is also found in the word for 'heaven,' /mïang 4 men 4/ in Lao and Thai literature, and by the Mène themselves. Further research will be required to explain these usages.

With enhanced awareness of the ethnolinguistic composition of the Sông Ca valley stemming from linguistic studies, be they Tai or Austroasiatic, there is an excellent opportunity to try to reconcile linguistic and historical material. It is hoped that this introductory glimpse of the Mène language will stimulate further progress in such an endeavor.

ENDNOTES

1. Since 1975 some toponymic and boundary changes have been made in Laos and Vietnam. In Laos, the district of Kham Keut which was a part of Khammouàn Province has been reassigned to the province of Borikhamxay (formerly Borikhan). The province of Nghê An in Vietnam has been changed to Nghê Tinh.

2. Stein (1947 : 235) believes that this term "Lam," apparently pronounced with the long vowel in Vietnamese (?), is cognate with Cham, the ethnolinguistic group. He notes that the same Chinese character is used for the name of the old town of Lam-thanh, in the vicinity of Vinh (i.e. the mouth of the Sông Ca), and the word for 'indigo,' which looks to be a Tai contact word, reconstructed in Proto-Tai as *graam (cf. Table XX), where some Central Branch reflexes show initial /-/ and some Southwestern dialects such as WT have /c-/. (Karlgren has Ancient Chinese: *lâm and Archaic Chinese: *glâm. The same character is used for the name of the river. A Tai Pao speaker interviewed in 1974 at Pak Sap said that the Pao came from Muang Lam which he equated with Phu Tu'o'ng (Chamberlain 1984 : 70).

3. In his treatment of the various Tai-speaking peoples in this area, Dang also lists the Tày Khăng, who he claims are from Muang Khăng in Laos (he does not say where this is but I have noted [1984] their presence in Muang Kham Keut in Kham-mouan [now Bolikhamxay] Province); the Tày Mot from Muang Mot in Thanh Hoá; the Tày Puôc who speak a language similar to Mu'ò'i —also found in the Na Pè area; the Tày Thanh or Man Thanh (probably the Tai Theng, also found in Kham Keut); the Tày Mu'ò'i; and the Tày Chiêng or Tày Mu'o'ng, also called the Hàng Tông. The latter, who are defined by their settlement in cities with ruling lords, are divided into three groups: (1) the groups at Qùy Châu, Q ùy Ho'p, and Qúê Phong; (2) the group at Tu'o'ng Du'o'ng known as the Tày Pao, and (3) the group at Con Cûong (for whom no name is provided). Dang regards the Tày Mu'o'ng as the earliest inhabitants who appeared in Nghê An in the 14th or 15th centuries although no source is cited for this statement. He also notes that during the Ming Dynasty a Tai chieftain named Câm Bành resisted the invasion of Lê Lo'i at Trà Nam, a city whose remains are to be found near Con Cûong. The Tai people of Môn So'n and Lu'c Da still remember this story, having linked it to the story of the founding of the country by Kha Lam or Kha Lam Cúôc Công, whose real name was Lê Lo'i. The altar to Kha Lam is found at Ban Tân Ho'p in Lu'c Da where it is known as the altar of Toòng.

Dang mentions that the Tày Pao have a tradition of writing on Latania leaf in a script called "Lai Pao" which differs from the Tày Mu'o'ng writing of Quy Châu, the writing of Con Cuông, and also that of the Tày Thanh.

4. The Ayoy are said by some to be a hunting and gathering group who live in the jungle, much as the Mlabri or "Phi Thong Leuang" of Xagnaboury (Laos) and Nan (Thailand).

5. Lao data are primarily from Maha Sila (1960). Black Tai (BT), White Tai (WT), Lei Ping (LP), Lung Ming (LM), Western Nung (WN), Yay and Saek (SK) are from Gedney (1989) and Gedney's fieldnotes. The Sui and Hli forms are from Pranee (2527). Lung Chow (LC), Wu Ming (WM) and the remainder of languages cited come from Li (1977).

6. There is in fact another possibility for the QC tɔɔ tàw, that it is equivalent to dɔɔ chadaa because it closely resembles the Sukhothai form for this character. I also believe that Cham had this character as well, though I have no Cham materials available to confirm this.

7. Stein also comments (p. 235) that the historical phonology of the ethnonym Cham is the same as that of 'indigo,' citing the ancient and archaic Chinese reconstructions of Karlgren, *lâm and *glâm. Tai dialects show variously khr-, c-, kj-, l-, s- as reflexes of PT* gr-. Both Mène and Saek show /khaam/.

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