

# Kra-Dai and the Proto-History of South China and Vietnam<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The onset of the Zhou dynasty at the end of the second millennium BCE coincides roughly with the establishment of the Chǔ (tshra? / khra C) fiefdom and the emergence of the ethnolinguistic stock known as Kra-Dai (Tai-Kadai). The ancestors of the Kra family proper, situated in the southwestern portion of Chǔ, began to disperse ostensibly as a result of upheavals surrounding the end of Shang, the beginning of Western Zhou, and the gradual rise of Chǔ into a full-fledged kingdom by the 8th century BCE. Beginning with this underlying premise and the stance of comparative and historical linguistics, the present paper provides, in a chronological frame, a hopefully more probable picture of the ethnolinguistic realities of China south of the Yangtze and relevant parts of Southeast Asia, including the geography past and present, of language stocks and families, their classification, time-depth, and the possible relationships between them. The focus is primarily on the Kra-Dai stock of language families up until the end of the Han Dynasty in the 2nd century CE, and secondarily up to the 11th century. Attention is given to what can be deduced or abduced with respect to ethnic identities in pre-Yue Lingnan and Annam, and to other questions such as whether or not Kam-Sui should be included under the rubric of Yue and the position of Muòng in early Vietnam.

## Dedication

This paper is dedicated to the memory of Grant Evans whose final publications, both in *JSS* 102 and posthumously in the present volume, have refocused attention on the broader history of the Tais in Southeast Asia and paved the way for a re-examination of old ideas in the light of new evidence. The resurgence can be said to have begun with Chris Baker's paper in Volume 90 of *JSS* which used linguistic evidence to trace historical movements of Tais from an assumed Urheimat along the Guangxi-Vietnamese border west into Laos, Yunnan, Thailand, Burma and Assam. Following on from the

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<sup>1</sup> I owe a great debt of gratitude to David Holm, who gave generously of his time and knowledge in the preparation of this paper. Without his advice and deep insights into southern Chinese and Zhuang history and prehistory the story told here would have been much the poorer. I would also like to thank Gérard Diffloth, Nathan Badenoch, and Weera Ostapirat, with whom I was fortunate enough to discuss various aspects of linguistic proto-history and their bearing on topics addressed here and to learn from their extensive and profound scholarship.

works of these authors, the present paper attempts to extend the story backwards by using linguistic, historical, prehistorical, proto-historical, and cultural evidence from other families belonging to the Kra-Dai or Tai-Kadai stock, in order to establish a framework into which scenarios such as those proposed by Baker and Evans may fit.

## Introduction

This paper aims to provide a more accurate picture of the linguistic realities of China south of the Yangtze and relevant parts of Southeast Asia, the geography, past and present of language stocks and families, their classification, time-depth, and the possible relationships between them. The focus will be primarily on the Kra-Dai language families, especially the eastern segment, up until the end of the Han Dynasty in the 2nd century CE, and secondarily on the subsequent history until the 12th century CE. I will especially call attention to what can be deduced with respect to pre-Yue Lingnan and Annam, and whether or not Kam-Sui should be included under the rubric of Yue.

The paper also supplements and hopefully clarifies some of the conclusions that I had drawn earlier (especially 1991a, c, d and 1998) in the light of more recent information that has become available from a variety of sources.

Kra-Dai is the name proposed by Weera Ostapirat (2000) composed of two native etyma, Kra and Tai (Dai), the names of representative families within the stock. It replaces Paul Benedict's Tai-Kadai, the second part of which is a coining that combines ethnonymic elements not actually employed by any particular group. It encompasses the related ethnolinguistic families of Kra (Gelao, Laha, Lachi, Paha, Buyang, Pubiao), Hlai (aka Li, Lei, Day), and Kam-Tai (Kam-Sui and Be-Tai).

Stumbling through the dense volumes that have been written on the early history and proto-history of China and Vietnam, the comparative linguist is soon overwhelmed by acute pangs of vexation as disembodied emperors, kings, and local ethnarchs battle their way through time and place shrouded in ethnolinguistic nebulosity. For most writers, where language and ethnicity is concerned, this territory is imagined as a chaotic jumble of diverse peoples so thoroughly undistinguished by Chinese historians as to be impossible to view in a systematic way.

A magnificent exception is the work of Edward Schafer (1967), consummate multi-disciplinarian whose pages teem with linguistic, ethnographic, literary and biological tapestries limited only by availability of sources and his focus on the Tang (or Song in the case of Hainan). Of particular interest is his insistence on providing the reconstructed Middle Chinese phonemicizations for Chinese words so deceptive in their Mandarin Pinyin forms.

Few, however, have followed in his footsteps. We have no equivalent histories of southern China or Vietnam that focus on an earlier time depth, address the subject in a more holistic way, and take advantage of recent advances in the reconstruction of Old Chinese, complementing the earlier work of Karlgren and Pulleyblank, especially Schuessler (2007) and Baxter and Sagart (2014), not to mention advances in archaeology and philology.

More recently, David Holm (2015), who specializes in the decipherment of Zhuang manuscripts composed using Chinese characters, has allowed non-Sinologists a glimpse

into the rich array of studies by Chinese scholars in the fields of archeology, history, human genetics, historical geography, and linguistics, all aimed at uncovering Kra-Dai identities from the often confusing evidence.

Historians and even anthropologists might be forgiven for not following the rather technical methods of historical linguistics, but unfortunately lack of understanding has not discouraged many from making sweeping and often erroneous statements based on nationalistic fervor, faulty assumptions, hearsay, and linguistic lookalikes. Most misunderstandings stem from a failure to correctly identify cognates, that is, morphemes that are descended from a common root form, as opposed to lookalikes.<sup>2</sup> Correct identification of cognates is accomplished by finding other root forms that underwent the same systematic sound changes.

This paper employs the methods of historical linguistics, beginning with linguists working with the spoken languages of people on the ground, converting their speech into written phonemic transcriptions to use as the basis for comparison and reconstruction. Where written evidence is available, written by native speakers in their own languages, regardless of the transcription system, this is of course a primary source of data as well. These analyses may then be compared to other types of information; historical, biological, and cultural. The worldview represented here is therefore different from that of history which relies, in our area, on early written documents in the Chinese language by Chinese historians, mostly from elite segments of society, representing a decidedly top-down view. It also means that histories are compiled according to the availability of documents, and are dependent upon literacy. Peoples without writing systems have no history. But they do have a past, and they do have language. In this sense, historical linguistics has a much broader range of primary sources.

Language takes precedence. Existing as an unconscious process in the human brain, language is not subject to the vicissitudes of political bias found in history, nor to the relative randomness of cultural borrowing of anthropology and archeology. And one should always be aware of the dangers of associating names of archeological “cultures” with living languages and ethnonyms. In Chinese political theory since 1950, Marxist-Stalinist amalgamation and reification of ethnolinguistic groupings into “nationalities” has overly simplified the picture with respect to languages and cultures (cf. Heather Peters 1990:5 ff). This having been said, I have tried wherever possible to link linguistic with historical or archeological evidence under the assumption that agreement from multiple sources provides a more convincing argument.

Of course the meaning of nationalist terms can always be re-defined to mean people who formerly existed within the boundaries of modern-day states; *Pithecanthropus*

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<sup>2</sup> In one recent example from our sphere of concern, the suggestion was made that the *chao* of Nan Chao is an old term originating in this kingdom, borrowed from here into Tai languages, the evidence being that the word occurs only in the Central and Southwest branches, and could not be found in northern Zhuang (Northern Tai Branch), the author having searched a dictionary finding that “*chao* is absent” (Evans 2014). Of course, in fact, the term *is* found in the Northern Branch languages, but with the cognates *θuu* or *suu*, that is, searching only for *chao* doesn’t get one very far. Without understanding the etymological roots of words, such errors may easily occur, leading in this case to an erroneous assumption concerning the evolution of Tai statehood.

*erectus* was Indonesian, Ban Chiang was Thai, or Đông Sơn was Vietnamese. However, with the exception of a few individuals on the ultra-nationalist fringe, the scholarly community does not (or should not) generally accept such statements. Anthropologists, apart from structuralists like Levi-Strauss who was in turn influenced by the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, often assume that because of the random ways in which cultural artifacts may be borrowed or disseminated across ethnic boundaries, that language change operates in analogous ways, and is therefore unreliable.

Comparative and historical linguistics depends upon immutable laws of sound change that are systematic, not random. There are no anthropological or meta-historiographic correlates for these laws, a fact that no doubt accounts for the haphazard ways that linguistic evidence is often utilized.

Finally, it should be mentioned that a good deal of historical, archeological, geographic and genetic information is available only in Chinese language and here I must defer to others more capable than myself to explore and extrapolate. The works of David Holm are excellent precedents.

### The ethnolinguistics of southern China and northern Vietnam

In this paper I propose that the Kra-Dai language family appeared at least as early as the 12th century BCE in the middle Yangtze basin. First of all, though, it is necessary to examine the question of the ethnic composition of this area and which groups may have coexisted with or be ultimately related to Kra-Dai.

I see no convincing evidence of an Austroasiatic presence in southern China or the early territory known as Jiaozhi, except for a slight northward spillover of Palaungic, Pakanic, Pramic<sup>3</sup> and Khmu into southern Yunnan and the Guangxi border areas. The Norman and Mei hypothesis, which postulated an Austroasiatic homeland along the middle Yangtze, has been largely abandoned in most circles, and left unsupported by the majority of Austroasiatic specialists.

Based primarily on their present-day situation—I assume that the ancestors of Miao-Yao (Hmong-Mien) were primarily mountain-dwelling swiddeners. According to Lemoine (1982, 2002), the particular form of Taoist religion found among the Mien (Yao) and Mun (Lantène) indicates a presence in the lower Yangtze basin in the 11th or the 12th century CE. The Mun, although residing along streams in lowland valleys, still practice swidden agriculture rather than paddy (or did so until recently), and were often referred to as lowland Yao, whereas Mien and Hmong traditionally resided near the tops of high mountains. Gordon Downer (1978) notes that Tai-Yao contact forms consist mainly of items specific to the Northern branch of Tai, or to Kam-Sui, not words that can be reconstructed in Proto-Tai, and mostly cultural terms as opposed to basic vocabulary. In other words, contact between the Tai and Yao is relatively recent and confined to geographical areas close to the current locales of the languages, and thus not what we

<sup>3</sup> Pramic is the name introduced by Gérard Diffloth at the 6th Austroasiatic Conference held in Siem Reap in 2015 to resolve a linguistic classification problem in Northern Mon-Khmer. It includes Ksing Mul, Bit, Thai Then, Phong languages of Houa Phen, Pray of Xaygnaboury, and a number of small languages spoken in the tri-border area of Phongsaly, Wen Shan, and Lai Chau.

would expect had the association been older and further north. Likewise, Ostapirat (2014) suggests that correspondences between Chinese and Miao-Yao (MY) are not regular and reflect mostly Middle Chinese borrowings, though Miao-Yao probably had contact with Proto-Min. Even an Old Chinese word for the mythological ‘dog ancestor’ \*koʔ is not found elsewhere in Sino-Tibetan and may originate with Miao-Yao, deriving from an old Yao myth of the ancestor Emperor Pien Kou—a myth which is also found in ancient China and which gave birth to the *Chia Sen Pong* scroll, a kind of official charter found in many Mien villages allowing them to roam freely across southern China and settle in the mountains wherever they may choose, free from taxation.

Sinitic languages, it is generally agreed, are genetically most closely related to Tibeto-Burman and together form the stock known as Sino-Tibetan. Other hypotheses have been proposed that link Chinese to Miao-Yao, Kra-Dai or even to Austronesian, but so far these have not gained wide acceptance.

I suggest that the most important ethnolinguistic stock in the area was Austronesian. There is growing evidence for a Kra-Dai-Austronesian or Austro-Tai connection in southern China (e.g. Ostapirat 2005). The term Austro-Tai refers to the more narrow association of these two stocks alone, excluding Miao-Yao and Japanese which were included in Benedict’s original “Austro-Thai” hypothesis (Ostapirat 2013:1). Kra-Dai and Austronesian appear to be sister stocks, rather than Kra-Dai being a branch of Malayo-Polynesian as has often been assumed (Ostapirat 2013:9). The probable time depth of Proto Austro-Tai, however, places it beyond the scope of this paper.

Some Austronesians on the mainland coast may have coexisted with Be-Tais, and may even have been subject to Tai feudal lords, but the deeper question of Austro-Tai genetic relationships is something separate. Blust (1985) puts the Austronesian homeland in Taiwan, based on the Austronesian branch diversity found there, at a time depth of approximately 5,500 years. Interestingly, this is somewhat earlier than we are assuming for Proto-Kra-Dai, so the period of Austro-Tai unity would have been even earlier. The most recent comprehensive DNA study focusing on Austronesia (Soares et al. 2016) supports the linguistic evidence for a Taiwanese origin of Proto-Austronesian at a time depth of 4,000 years. The time depth is still problematic as most theories about Austronesian are based upon archeology, whereas there are some historical materials to assist in the analysis of Kra-Dai. Furthermore, in Austro-Tai studies, most of the attention has been on the islands, with comparatively little focus on the mainland.

Soares et al. (2016) find a clear genetic linkage between the populations of Guangxi, Guangdong, Hainan, Taiwan and the Philippines with those of Yunnan, northern Thailand and portions of northern Burma. Possibly this represents the Kra-Dai-Austronesian connection though this is not stated explicitly (Austro-Tai or Kra-Dai are surprisingly not even mentioned) and samples from northern Vietnam and Laos are not reported.

The present location of Kra-Dai languages in relation to Austronesian does not support the conventional wisdom that their origin lay along the South China coast, but suggests a west-to-east movement of Austro-Tai peoples, probably following the Red, Pearl, and Yangtze river systems. This would allow for a splitting off of Austronesian, and account for the close relationship of the inland westerly Proto-Kra language to pelagic Austronesian.

Just as a brief example, this relationship can be readily observed in the number systems of the reconstructed forms for Proto-Austronesian (PAN), Proto-Kra (PK) and Proto-Hlai (PH) in the set of cognates below.<sup>4</sup>

	<i>PAN (W)</i>	<i>PK</i>	<i>PH (N)</i>	<i>PH (O)</i>
One	*ica	*tʂəm C	*tehu:ʔ	*cī C
Two	*dusa	*sa A	*hlu: ʔ	*alau C
Three	*télu	*tu A	*tʃhwuʔ	*utu C
Four	*sèpat	*pə A	*tʃha:wʔ	*atəu C
Five	*lima	*r-ma A	*hma:	*ama A
Six	*enem	*x-nəm A	*hnom	*(ə)num A
Seven	*pitu	*t-ru A	*thu:	
Eight	*walu	*m-ru A	*ru:	
Nine	*c/siwa	*s-ɣwa B	*C.βu:ʔ	
Ten	*púluq	*pwlot D	*fu:t	

I will not be pursuing this relationship any further. The table here is only to suggest a plausible answer to the inevitable question: “who was living here before the Proto-Kra-Dais?” To which we may respond, “Austro-Tais.”

Finally, the only other extant groups are those on the Andaman islands, negritos or Austro-Melanesians, such as may be found in peninsular Thailand and Malaysia (Austroasiatic speakers) and others in the Philippines (who now speak Austronesian languages). Andamanese languages are unrelated to any other known group, but their physical type suggests that they were widespread in the distant pre-Austro-Tai past. Holm (2003:162), citing Chang (1959), notes archeological evidence for the existence of negritos in southwest China. Here again they are well beyond the scope of this paper.

The notion that there were myriad ethnic groups living in southern China that have since disappeared needs to be refined. Even if this may have been true of the distant past, say, ten thousand or more years ago, the various peoples found in late Shang and Zhou times belonged to a finite number of ethnolinguistic families, and the majority of them seem to have been Kra-Dai.

David Holm (2015:205ff) speculates, based on the writings of Izikowitz (1962) and Condominas (1990), that the Yue/Tai, as a cultural entity, were probably engaged in a multiethnic feudal endeavor. Apart from Austronesian, however, no traces of other language stocks survive, begging the question whether Austronesians were the only ones thus involved in the east. In the southwestern area of interest, those falling under Tai feudal domination were primarily Austroasiatic groups, who are called “Kha”, that is, Kra < Proto Kra-Dai \*khra C, but only in the Southwestern Tai speaking area. An exception is the Laha, a Kra group. No doubt originally they displayed similar traits such as swidden cultivation and less stratified social organization. In modern times, if multi-ethnic Laos is an indicator, other ethnic families such as Hmong-Mien or

<sup>4</sup> PAN is from Wolff (2010), PK from Ostapirat (2000), PH from Norquest (2007) and Ostapirat (2004).

Tibeto-Burman do not participate in this system. Indeed until recently, the latter have generally remained outside the sphere of government, living in remote areas. The groups mentioned by Condominas (1980; 1990) and Izikowitz (1962) are all Austroasiatic.<sup>5</sup> And of course "Kha" became the general term for Austroasiatic in Southwestern Tai, though the term is not found in Tai languages proper east of the Red River. That is, the word Kha < \*khraa C in Tai languages only occurs where Austroasiatic speakers are found, and elsewhere only in the Kra languages as the autonym. For the Black Tai, where the reflex for \*khr- is s-, the term *Sa* is applied to Khmu and to Laha, but not to Ksing Mul who are called *Puak* (< PT \*b-) [see fn 18 below]. In the extreme southwest corner of Guangxi, Austroasiatic Bolyu and Red Gelao have lived in close proximity for an extended period (Hsiu 2013), and it would be interesting to know the terms by which they refer to each other.

Did the Li (Hlai), the aboriginal inhabitants of eastern portions of Annam and southeast Lingnan, become feudal dependents of the Tai in the same way as did the Laha further west? Did any of the other scattered Kra groups have similar relations with Tais in Annam, Lingnan, and western Yunnan? This seems possible given that the term used for the "diverse" peoples mentioned in many sources, is often "Li-Lao," in rough reconstructed form, *Rei-Krau*, that is, members of the same linguistic stock, but of course culturally highly distinctive and diverse. Indeed the reconstructed form of Jiao in Jiaozhi seems to belong to the same etyma, Old Chinese \*krâu?. As the Yue moved west, they encountered Austroasiatic speakers living in similar ecological niches, and put them into the same category, *Krau* or *Krau*, that is, Lao. (Although much is made of the multiethnic referents of "Lao" or "Liao," in fact any non-Kra-Dai referents such as Tibeto-Burman, are only found far to the west and can be explained as will be discussed later.)

### Kra-Dai and the early history of the Vietnamese

Take, as an opening example, the history of the territory known today as Vietnam, and the language called Vietnamese. The branch of Austroasiatic to which the modern Vietnamese language belongs was once called Việt-Mường, but has for some time now been replaced by Vietic, in which Việt-Mường is one subgroup, because many other related languages were discovered, including Phong<sup>A</sup>, Toum, Liha, Ahoe, Ahlao, Arao, Maleng, Malang, Atel, Atop, Makang, Thémároú, Phong<sup>B</sup>, Kri, Mlengbrou, Cheut, Ruc, SÁCH, Mai and others, all located far to the south in Khamkeut and Khammouane in Laos, and in Quang Binh on the Vietnamese side of the Cordillera (Chamberlain 1998, 2003).

Although this diversity attests to the age of the Vietic branch, the old idea that the branch originated in Jiaozhi can no longer stand. There is no evidence of Vietic, Proto-Việt-Mường or other Austroasiatic speakers living in and around Jiaozhi in the lower Red River basin prior to the 10th or 11th centuries. The Vietnamese language as spoken

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Chamberlain (2012) for a discussion of a Tai-Austroasiatic interaction that is not feudal in nature. It is suggested that this multi-ethnic Tai style polity needs to be more precisely defined as occurring only between certain types of ethnic groups and under certain conditions.

in northern Vietnam, an uneven hybrid in which seventy percent of the vocabulary is Chinese (Phan 2010),<sup>6</sup> is quite homogenous, indicating relatively recent settlement.<sup>7</sup> Although good surveys are lacking, the area of greatest diversity of Vietnamese dialects lies in the North Central and Central regions (Alves and Huong 2007, Alves 2007). To the south of Jiaozhi, away from the coast, Mường speakers range quite far north (see Cuisinier's map), but again do not exhibit a great deal of diversity in the northern locales (cf. Nguyễn 2004). No traces of their language have been recorded in early Chinese records, nor in the languages of the Tai groups who live interspersed with the Mường throughout most if not all of their range.<sup>8</sup>

Taylor (2014) speculates on the linguistic identity of the Lạc people [i.e. Luo Yue], the assumed original inhabitants of the delta, in this way:

What language did they speak? Han immigrants aside, we can plausibly conjecture that much of the lowland population spoke what linguists call Proto-Viet-Muong related to the Mon-Khmer language family that apparently expanded northward from the Ca River plain in modern Nghe An and Ha Tinh Provinces. The geographical connection with other Mon-Khmer languages appears to have been via the Mu Gia Pass from the middle Mekong plain to the Ca River plain. Another plausible conjecture is that the aristocracy that ruled these people, called Lạc in Han texts, came from the mountains north and west of the Red River plain and spoke an ancient language related to modern Khmu, another Mon-Khmer language now spoken in the mountains of northern Vietnam and Laos. On the other hand, the Au conquerors who arrived from the northern mountains with King An Duong might be imagined to have spoken a language related to the Tai-Kadai language family that includes modern Lao and Thai. In any case, it is too early to speak of the Vietnamese language.

Taylor's location of Proto-Vietic accords with current thinking, but his estimate of the time depth is a problem. Proto-Vietic is estimated to be approximately contemporary with Proto-Tai (Diffloth and Chamberlain p.c.), and hence would have been located far to the south. There is also no evidence that the Khmu-related Lạc group (which I refer to as Pramic) was ever found any further east than their present locations in Lai Chau. In fact they must have occupied much of northern Laos, prior to the arrival of the Khmu proper, as their group is split between the Pray (Mal) of Xaygnaboury, the Bit of Louang Namtha, the Thai Then of Louang Prabang, and the rest of the branch in Houa Phanh

<sup>6</sup> This statement does need some qualification as no doubt many of the lexical items of Sinitic origin are cultural or academic, whereas much basic vocabulary, eye, ear, face, arm ...etc. are clearly Austroasiatic. Nevertheless the figure does indicate the very high level of Chinese contact.

<sup>7</sup> The dialectology propaedeutic here, first expounded by Edward Sapir in 1916, is that small areas with greater dialect variation are older than larger less diverse areas and represent the point of dispersal.

<sup>8</sup> As used in this paper, the term Mường refers only to what I tentatively refer to as Mường proper, spoken mostly in Thanh Hoá and points north. It probably includes Nguon, but probably not the Nha Lang or Toum-Liha group or other more distantly related subgroups of Vietic.



(Diffloth and Badenoch p.c.). Some are also found in Phongsaly, adjacent to Yunnan, and Lai Chau. There are also true Khmu (Khmuic) found in Vietnam along the Lao border as far south as Nghệ An.

Taylor then mentions “Tai-Kadai”, rather cursorily, as the language of An Dương, the legendary king who supposedly defeated the Hung kings to gain control of the lower Red River basin. Why this king should be called “Tai-Kadai” and why the Lạc [Luo] must be Proto-Việt-Mường or Khmuic, is not explained.

Churchman points out that,

the ancestors of the people now commonly referred to as Việt (the “Kinh” of Vietnam) were rather late in picking up the term Việt as a group designation for themselves, and they do not appear to have had any name for themselves that was not gleaned from a Chinese literary model. (30)

The main conclusion to be drawn is that the Vietnamese language and ethnicity resulted from the close association between Mường peoples and Chinese colonists in what is now Thanh Hoá and Nghệ An.

The term Mường itself is an exonym, a Tai word meaning (originally) organized settlement or chiefdom (perhaps implying ‘pacified’ or ‘under control’). It was applied to them, not by the Tai, but by the Vietnamese or Sino-Vietnamese colonists, though the dating is uncertain. Had the Vietnamese borrowed the term from Tai at an early time it would have had a different linguistic form since the Northern Branch has cognates such as Yay *puaŋ* A and Sek has *phiaŋ* A. The ethnonym is in fact used in Nghệ An to refer to Tai speakers. The Mường refer to the Tais as *nɛw*, from Nyo or Ou (Âu), but call themselves variants of *mɔl* or *mɔu* (Nguyễn 2004), sometimes written as *Mal*, *Mwal*, or *Mwai* (Cuisinier 1948). The Vietnamese form is *Mọi* (C Tone) (Diffloth p.c.),<sup>9</sup> which was also used to refer to the other Austroasiatic peoples of Vietnam, much as the Han Chinese used the term *Man* to mean all “uncivilized savages,” presumably an expansion of a narrower meaning limited to peoples of the Miao-Yao (Hmong-Mien) family (again based upon certain groups of this family such as the Mun who use *Man* as an autonym).<sup>10</sup> We shall see later that in fact the term *Việt* from Yue/Yueh (Old Chinese \*jwət, wat) referred originally to Be-Tai speakers, that is, people of the state of Yue.

The earliest king of the first Vietnamese state was Lê Hoàn. The family name indicates an ethnic Li person (Hlai, Lei = Vietnamese Lê) ostensibly of an indigenous

<sup>9</sup> Another explanation, admittedly more convoluted, is that the term originated with the Sino-Vietnamese Mi, said to be the clan name of the rulers of the states of Chũ and Yue, that may have been applied to the Kam-Tai groups pejoratively. The main evidence here is that both the Chinese reconstruction (\*mjie B, mie B, me?) [Chinese B = Tai C] and the Vietnamese *Mọi* have the C tone. Schuessler and others have suggested that this word meant ‘bear’ as in KS, Hlai, and Tai, but ‘bear’ always takes the A tone making that interpretation untenable, the graph actually means ‘goat, or bleating of a goat.’ Cf Chamberlain 1991d for further discussion. The Tai language known as Moey or Meuy C tone, very similar both in language and culture to the Red Tai, probably belongs here as well.

<sup>10</sup> Actually *Man*, *Mien*, *Mun*, *Mong*, *Hmong*, *Hmu*, etc. are all cognate forms of this autonym that means simply ‘people’ or ‘clan.’

noble family, a Kra-Dai ethnonym (OC \*rəʔ , rəi) that merged with the Chinese clan name and was used in proper names to designate ethnicity (Schafer 1967). The Sino-Vietnamese *l-* initial indicates it came into the language from Middle Chinese of the Tang period. We need to keep in mind that the early histories of the area were all written in Chinese by Chinese. Use of Chinese characters to write Vietnamese language, called *chữ nôm*, did not begin until the 13th century and was not common until the 15th century.

The conferral of this exonym on the Mường implies that prior to their living in organized settlements, justifying the name, they or their forbears had a different social formation, perhaps as hunter-gatherers or rudimentary swiddeners, living in upland forests, closer to the pattern of the Vietic speakers found further south prior to contact with the Tais.

The old Hlai term for ethnic Chinese was “Moi” (Proto-Hlai \*C-mə:y [Norquest] ) but with the A tone, though what this might mean is difficult to fathom. Most probably they are unrelated.<sup>11</sup>

As for other Austroasiatic branches, the newly classified members of the Pramic branch of Austroasiatic (formerly the Mal-Pram subgroup of Khmuic),<sup>12</sup> including languages like Khang and Ksing Mul, do spill over from Phongsaly into Lai Chau and points east, but the relationship to Vietic is not close. The branch closest to Vietic is Katuic far to the south, sometimes referred to as Vieto-Katuic. (Diffloth 1991, Alves 2005)<sup>13</sup>

More recently, John Phan (2010) argues that most historians of Vietnam have ignored the linguistic situation and concludes that:

Chinese speakers native to Annam (by which I mean the Red, Ca, and Ma River plains) shifted to the local “Proto-Viet–Muong” language around the turn of the first millennium CE... (3)

... it is popular to believe—even just a little—in the “Vietnameseness” of the first millennium polities, even (and often) as far back as the Dongsonian rebellions of the Trung [Zheng] sisters. On the other hand, it is also popular to understand lowland Vietnamese culture as Sinicized and therefore, civilized, as opposed to the primitive cultures of the highlands. These are clearly simple or ugly stereotypes that are logically and historically indefensible, yet they find their way into the most sophisticated works... [The arguments] imply that a recognizable culture for the Vietnamese, like their language, formed during the first few centuries of independent kingship, rather than in a vague and distant, pre-Chinese era. (23)

Phan argues that the language shift that gave birth to Vietnamese arose from contact between what he calls Proto-Việt-Mường and Chinese colonists in the deltas of the Red, Ma, and Ca rivers. But he presents no evidence for the existence of these Việt-Mường

<sup>11</sup> In Thailand, the word *muay AI* is used to describe stereotypically Chinese facial characteristics, though the term is undoubtedly of Swatow origin used by Sino-Thais themselves.

<sup>12</sup> Personal communications, Nathan Badenoch and Gérard Diffloth.

<sup>13</sup> The idea of an AA homeland along the middle Yangtze proposed by Norman and Mei has been largely refuted. (See Sagart 2008)

speakers in the Red River delta prior to this time, since they are known to have originated further south. A more plausible hypothesis would be that the shift occurred among the Chinese in the south (Ma and Ca) first, as I have intimated in previous studies, prior to the time they moved north to defeat Jiaozhi and establish the Vietnamese nation (cf Taylor 1983).

Phan's treatment of the Mường here is rather brief though he devotes more attention to it in his thesis (2013). As in many writings on the Vietnamese past, Kra-Dai is ignored. This omission calls into question his main argument that Mường borrowed directly from Middle Chinese. Rather Mường most probably borrowed from Tai languages rather than from Middle Chinese as more than fifty percent of the forms he cites have Tai cognates (just at first glance). Tai languages are tessellated with Mường throughout the latter's entire range, as can easily be seen on the map provided by Cusinier (1949), whom he derides unnecessarily and thereafter ignores along with her comparative wordlist in *Rites Agraires* (1951). Tai interspersing can also be seen clearly in the map of Robequain (1929). In other lexical domains, Mường is widely acknowledged to have borrowed heavily from Tai (cf. Condominas 1980), and Tai contacts with Chinese obviously occurred much earlier and more consistently than did Mường contacts with Chinese. Thus while I can readily sympathize with Phan's view of prior histories as immersed in an uncritical nationalism, by excluding Kra-Dai from all consideration I fear he is guilty of the very sins he finds so deplorable in others.<sup>14</sup>

### Kra-Dai

Now that we can, with some confidence, set aside Austroasiatic as the stock of original inhabitants in the Red River Delta, and from south China generally, we need to examine what remains. The area that concerns us is China south of the Yangtze, most especially the lands that encompass the modern day provinces of southeast Sichuan, Yunnan, Guizhou, Hunan, Hubei, Gan, Zhejiang, Fujian, Guangxi, Guangdong, Hainan, northern Laos, and northern Vietnam at least as far south as Thanh Hoá and Nghệ An and extending to the Col des Nuages. Prehistorically this would encompass the high Bronze Age cultures of Dian and Đông Sơn.

Now let us overlay onto this territory the distribution of languages classified as belonging to the stock designated as Kra (Ostapirat 2000). The problem has been that many historians and anthropologists have rather loosely bandied about the term "Tai" or "Tai-Kadai" as if it were a homogenous group, without examining either the history of the term itself, the depth and breadth of its subgroupings or the larger stock to which it belongs. When the historical linguistics of the family is mentioned at all, it usually begins with Proto-Tai, and its postulated and much-discussed homeland located along the Guangxi-Vietnamese border (Gedney 1966), that is, the home of the Nung and the Thô on the Vietnamese side and the southern Zhuang languages on the Chinese side,

<sup>14</sup> The variation described by Phan among only three dialects is not really significant. b~v, r~h, for instance are common in the Tai languages adjacent to the locations of his dialects, and certainly not indicative of a very great time-depth.



Figure 1. Approximate locations of the Kra-Dai languages (Wikipedia Commons)

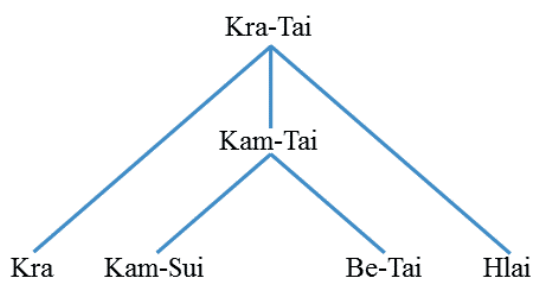
all belonging to the Central branch of the Tai ethnolinguistic family as classified by Li Fang Kuei (1977). This area is linguistically the most diverse and hence deemed to be the oldest. Following the tenets of dialectology Gedney (1967) speculated that the age of Proto-Tai was approximately 1500-2000 years. In personal communications he would often make a rough comparison to the Romance languages in Europe, thus leaning more towards the earlier date.

Recently David Holm (2010) has ventured that much of the diversity in the Central Tai branch can be explained by closer examination of the military and migratory history of each location in the

southern Zhuang area, leaving room not only for additional interpretation and revision of the original hypothesis, but for intriguing new directions for research.<sup>15</sup>

The Kra-Dai stock itself is very diverse, much more so than the Romance languages. It must therefore be quite old, perhaps, as we shall see, dating back to the latter part of the 2nd millennium BCE. As research stands now, the stock is comprised of three main families, Kra, Hlai, and Kam-Tai. The latter is further split into Kam-Sui and Be-Tai.

Geographically Hlai is relatively far away from Kra, but their divergence from Kam-Tai suggests that both languages split away to the south at an early date, and



occupied a contiguous area stretching from southeastern Sichuan to Hainan island, including the territory in between that later became Annam and Lingnan, and predating the Kam-Tai in this area. A number of Kra languages are still found scattered here such as Laha and Lachi, Paha, Buyang, and Pubiao. The earliest dates for this movement are difficult to

calculate, but some idea may be gained by examining the historical background to the dispersal of the three main families of the Kra-Dai stock.

The state of Chǔ appears in the historical record in the 12th century BCE, at the tail end of the Shang dynasty, and lasts through the Zhou dynasty, until its defeat by Qin in 223 BCE.

<sup>15</sup> It can be said that if historians are at fault for lack of precision in their examination of linguistic facts, historical linguists, ostensibly interested in the reconstruction of the past, are often equally at fault for narrow-mindedness leading to lexical deficiency by focusing only on the formal properties of language, providing glosses that are terse in the extreme and providing no context that would allow for at least a modicum of understanding of the daily lives of the speakers providing the information and their histories.

The state was located along the middle Yangtze (the modern provinces of Hubei, Hunan, and parts of Jiangxi and Guizhou). My hypothesis is that the ancestors of the Kra-Dai stock originated here. One of the most striking pieces of evidence is the nearly identical reconstructions for the terms Kra and Chǔ.

For Chǔ 楚 we have the following:

Karlgren No. 88  
 OC \*tʂ'jo  
 MC \*tʂ'jwo: (=Tai C)

Baxter and Sagart (2014)  
 OC \*S-ɾaʔ

Schuessler (2007)  
 OC \*tʂhjwo B (B tone in Chinese = C tone in Kra-Dai)  
 Later Han \*tʂha B  
 Minimal Old Chinese (OMC) \*tʂhra? (= C tone)

And for Kra we have Ostapirat's reconstruction  
 \*kra C. (< Pro-Kra-Dai \*khra C)

Taking the plausible association one step further, Pulleyblank (1983: 413) describes the relationship between Xia (the dynasty/ethnonym) and Zhou which would in fact account for the Chǔ who identified themselves with Xia:

There may have been small Chinese-speaking aristocracies ruling over non-Chinese subject populations; or, given the tradition of an earlier Hsia [Xia] dynasty, which may have been the originator of the writing system, the Shang rulers could have been originally non-Chinese speakers who had adopted the language of their Hsia subjects. The same applies to the Chou [Zhou], who were evidently already using the (Chinese) written language of the Shang before the conquest, and whose descendants later identified themselves as Hsia.

With this in mind, the reconstructed forms for Xia 夏 (and 假) make perfect sense, and we can assume that Kra was the probable autonym of the main ethnic group that came to populate the state of Chǔ, and perhaps earlier. It is important to note that all forms, for Xia, Chǔ, and Kra take the C tone.



Figure 2. Probable locations of Kra and Rei (Hlai) by the early to mid Spring and Autumn Period

Schuessler Xià 夏 OC ɣa<sup>B</sup> (B= Tai C)

LH ga<sup>B</sup>

OMC\*gra?

jiǎ 假 OC ka B

LH ka B

OCM \*krâ?

Baxter and Sagart 夏 Xià \*[ɣ]ʃra?

假 jiǎ \*kʃra? (= C Tone)

The Proto Kra-Dai reconstruction would be something like \*khra C, although caution must be exercised because this would include only PSWT \*khraa C and Proto-Kra.<sup>16</sup> (Chinese B tone class is equivalent to Kra-Dai C). Not only do the tones match, but the alternation between the rounded diphthong and the unrounded vowel in Schuessler's reconstruction of Chǔ is mirrored in the case of Kra as well, even within different branches of Gelao. \*kra C and \*krau C (Ostapirat 2000), the diphthong probably representing a subsequent development from an earlier \*-aa.<sup>17</sup>

The semantic shift from the autonym of the Kra to 'mountain people' or 'enfeoffed people' must have taken place with the arrival of the Yue who came to dominate the original Kra or Krau and Li or Li-Lao inhabitants in Lingnan and Annam. We see as in fn. 17 that Jiao in Jiaozhi seems to derive from Old Chinese \*krâu?. As the Laha were enfeoffed by the Black Tai, so too the Austroasiatic speakers in the Sip Song Chǔ Tai (Khmú and Ksing Mul, and later others to the south and west), all became known as *Kha* in Tai and the word is attested in the Ram Khamheng Inscription of the late 13th century in the north-central region of what is now Thailand.

That this is the origin of the ethnonym "Lao" has been the source of some speculation, despite the tone category being wrong. Schafer (1967:48) suggests that while the term originally applied to the Gelao, by the Tang period it was very widespread and "Lao" was being used to refer to other ethnic groups as well. To the east, however, these all belong to various branches of the same linguistic stock. A similar conclusion is drawn by Von Glahn (1987) and earlier by Pulleyblank (1983). The languages belonging to the Kra family as well as to Kam-Sui indeed are still found in the southern portion of what was once the Chǔ state.

As Pulleyblank (1983:433) suggests,

It may not be going too far to suggest that there was a continuum of Tai-related peoples from the coast of Kwangtung, Kwangsi, and northern Vietnam stretching inland through Kweichow into Yunnan and north into Hunan and southern

<sup>16</sup> So far as I am aware, the only Central Tai cognate is /chaa C1/ from Western Nung (Nung Cheuang) in Lao Cai where it is glossed by Gedney (in Hudak 2008) simply as "mountain people." The initial consonant reflex set kh- ~ x- ~ ch- ~ s- as found in this word, and in others such as 'egg,' 'dove', 'to beg', etc is reconstructed as \*khr-

<sup>17</sup> Ostapirat's \*krau is in fact nearly identical to Schuessler's reconstruction of Jiao in Jiaozhi, i.e. \*krâu?, final glottal stop indicating the C tone.

Szechwan. No doubt they were already somewhat differentiated in culture and language before the coming of the Chinese, having adapted to the different environments in which they had lived.

Clearly related are the Pramic terms for the Khmu: Ksing Mul *klau*, Phong *kəkau*, *təkau*, and the Mun (Hmong-Mien) form *təkaw* (these forms courtesy of Nathan Badenoch), forms that were apparently caught up in what might be referred to as a “Lao” ethnonymic swath descending southwest through eastern Sichuan, Guizhou, Hunan, western Guangxi, eastern Yunnan, the tip of northwestern Vietnam, and Laos. This includes Lue as well, but the term is not applied to the other Tais of northwestern Vietnam. Indeed the Lao themselves have a tradition that their origins are in Meuang Boum on the upper Nam Tè (Black River) well within the swath. To the south Thays of the Houa Phanh came to be called Ai Lao.

To summarize, the identification of Kra with Chǔ and Xia seems well established. The reconstructions are nearly identical, the same tone class, the same vocalic alternation, and the same geographical area.

To take the matter one step further, the Old Chinese forms for Li 李, Baxter’s \*C.rəʔ and Schuessler’s \*rəʔ could belong here as well, as Hlai would also have broken away from Chǔ at an early date as well but to the east, perhaps during the early Spring and Autumn Period. The internally reconstructed autonym for Proto-Hlai \*hləy A (Norquest), is very close to Baxter and Sagart’s and Schuessler’s OC forms for 梨 \*C.r[ə]j and \*rəi respectively, the latter may represent the earlier proto-form when it was more widespread on the mainland. Both Kra and Hlai broke off prior to the introduction of iron as all three groups (Kra, Kam-Tai, and Hlai) have distinct etyma (Ostapirat 2008:631).

The Chǔ homeland is not a new idea. Ballard (1985:165) cites archeologists’ findings that “Wu and Chǔ interacted more with each other than with Chou [Zhou].” He also cites Briggs’ suggestion that Yue and Chǔ were probably Tai, though without further elaboration. Ballard (169) goes on to observe that, “Sinicization of the southern Changjiang (Yangtze) basin was not complete until the Tang dynasty; northern Jiangsu was sinicized by the third century BC, but Zhejiang not until after the third century AD.” There is less information available further west, but no doubt a similar situation existed there. Yan (1983), also cited by Ballard, writes that, “Zhuang-Tong [Kam-Tai] or Miao-Yao had once constituted the substratum of Chǔyu, while the elements of the Han language only instituted [sic] its superstratum.”

More recently, Behr (2006) relates that the many non-Chinese words in ancient Chǔ bronze inscriptions derive from Kra-Dai, not from Austroasiatic or Hmong-Mien who had originally been supposed to reside in the territory designated as the state of Chǔ.<sup>18</sup>

The work of Holm (2015) and other Chinese scholars assumes that Kra-Dai originated in the states of Wu and Yue, and spread to the west and southwest. I find this problematic as it does not easily account for the westerly distribution of Kam-Sui and

<sup>18</sup> Examples cited are from the Warring States period (ca. 5th BCE), including words for ‘one’, ‘white’ and ‘thick.’ A few examples that look as if they may be related to Austroasiatic and Miao-Yao are from edited texts of the mid-Han period and later.

Kra. Based upon this evidence, there is good reason to assume that the ancestors of Kra-Dai originated in the late Shang period in what became the state of Chǔ. On grounds of the considerable diversity within Kra, I suggest that the Kra broke away first, moving south and southwest, perhaps around the beginning of the Chǔ period, well before the introduction of iron. Hlai and Tai followed next, while Kam-Sui shifted only slightly south from their original locations, within the boundaries of the ancient Chǔ state.

Supporting this, Ostapirat (2005) divides Kra-Dai into two main contact groupings, Kra and Kam-Sui on the one side and Hlai and Be-Tai on the other, western and eastern. This seems to agree with the geographical distribution, as well as lexical evidence provided by Zheng and Ouyang (1993), cited by Norquest (2007:15), that the Hlai lexicon shares forty-two items exclusively with Tai, but only thirteen exclusively with Kam-Sui.

Von Glahn (1987) describes Klao peoples moving north from the Guizhou plateau across the Yangtze into Luzhou in southeast Sichuan in the 4th century AD. He notes (24) that records from the 980s state there were 2,415 households of Klao in southern Lu, and that during the Tang they comprised the majority of the native population there. These are perhaps the same people that Zhang (1993) describes as a group of Gelao, the Yiren, calling themselves *gau*, found in southeastern Sichuan, though Tang sources state that they arrived from the north. Von Glahn (1987:21) likewise informs us that: “textual and archeological evidence from the Song shows that Klao society was based on a complex forest economy centered on shifting cultivation.”<sup>19</sup>

It is well known that Chǔ was embroiled in major conflicts during the Spring and Autumn Period (771-476 BCE) and the period of the Warring States (475-223 BCE). With the assistance of Yue, located on the coast to the east around the mouth of the Yangtze, Chǔ overran Wu and later Yue itself, the latter in about 333 BCE, resulting in migrations southward along the coast by local princes and princelings, establishing minor states at Dong Yue (Zhejiang), Min Yue (Fujian) and Nan Yue (Canton), and lesser ones so numerous they became known as the Bai Yue or Hundred Yue (cf. Arousseau 1923). These we take to be the ancestors of the Be-Tai family. Though their languages were absorbed by Chinese on the coast, their substrata are still evident and have lent to southern Chinese dialects many otherwise unexplainable characteristics (see especially Ballard 1985, and Bauer 1987, 1996). Further to the west, where the Chinese presence was less, the Yue languages have survived largely intact.

What happened further inland is less clear. Communication between the two areas was obstructed by rugged mountain ranges. The ancestors of the Kam-Sui family were probably found in the interior, not far from their present locations in Guizhou, Hunan, and northern Guangxi. The language called Lakkia, which is closer to Kam-Sui than to Be-Tai (Solnit 1988) and is spoken today in central eastern Guangxi, may have

<sup>19</sup> Von Glahn also describes the previous inhabitants of the area, the Bo (*puək*) people whom he also associates with the Dian culture. This ethnonym, *puak* if it is the same, became an ethnonym for Ksing-Mul. It is also applied to a subgroup of Bit, *bii puak*, as opposed to another one called *bii laaw* (Badenoch personal communication). In northwestern Vietnam, some Black Tai meuangs had incorporated the Ksing Mul into their fiefdoms, so that the term came to designate that social class, kept separate, however, from the Khmu (*Sa* < \*khraa C), and the Laha (*Sacha* in Black Tai) (Phomsombath 1974). However, the term has likewise been applied to Kra speakers.



originated in northwestern Guangdong (Haudricourt 1966), bordering on Hunan, and together with Biao is the easternmost Kam-Sui language known so far.

### Kra (Krau, Klao, Tlao, Lao)

From the admittedly small amount of historical evidence that is currently available or accessible for territories occupied by the Kra family, it appears that they were originally much more widespread, inhabiting parts of Sichuan, northwest Hunan, and western Guangxi as well as Guizhou. We have conservatively estimated the time depth for Proto-Kra at approximately 3000 BP, indicating a somewhat earlier date for Proto-Kra-Dai especially given the close link between Kra, Chŭ, and Xia.

In her early study of Gelao history, Inez de Beauclair relates that “Lao” occurs first in the Chinese records in the territory of Yeh Lang [Guizhou] in 116 BC, and again under the Han in the area of Hsiang Chŭn [Xiang Jun]. She also concludes that P’o [Bo] (*puak*) and Gelao were closely related groups or even one and the same. This relationship is supported by Edmondson and Yang (2008) in discussing the autonym *Kam*, as often preceded by *laak* (*luuk* ‘child’ in Thai) and note that the autonym in one Lachi dialect spoken along the Sino-Vietnamese border is *li po*, where the first syllable is the Lachi correspondence for ‘child,’ and *po* is said to be the “name of an ancient people.” Perhaps it may correspond to Proto-Tai \*buak, a (potentially pejorative) pluralizing particle. She continues (De Beauclair 1946:365):

The Hsiang Chŭn [Xiang Jun] extended to present Kwangsi. So at this early period, when the Lao first appear under a distinct name as a separate group, in written history, they are represented in Kweichow and Kwangsi. It is generally believed that their original homes were at the Szechwan-Shensi [Shaanxi] border, from where they descended southwards in the 5th century BC.

Although it is often cited as an example of imprecise identification of ethnic groups in Chinese histories, the application of “Lao” to Tibeto-Burman groups in Yunnan and Sichuan may have a logical explanation when the Kra are considered in Shu history, as they appear beginning in the 4th century CE and continue well into the Liang. De Beauclair concludes (1946:367):

Recapitulating the history of the Lao up to the time of the T’ang dynasty it may be said that the Lao appear during the Han Dynasty in Kweichow, Hunan and Kwangsi, and can be found in Szechwan from the time of the Chin Dynasty in great number. They entered from the southeast crowding out the original inhabitants. It is said that they now lived among the Chinese. This close contact must be kept in mind as an important cultural factor. At the time of the Liang Dynasty they seem to be at the height of their power. It may be inserted here, that certain scholars were induced to connect them to the present-day Lolo. This however does not agree with the occurrence of the Lao as far east as Kwangsi and Hunan. Nor is it in conformity with the cultural traits as handed down by the records.

Writing in the early 1940s in Anshun, and with limited resources, these insights by de Beauclair are remarkable and go far towards eliminating much of the ambiguity that surrounds the ethnic identity of the term Lao, especially when we realize that the term was originally applied to the Gelao and Kra, and only later and by association to the Lolo-Burmese groups who had been living in close proximity. The Lao (Kra) seem to have played a much larger role in early pre- and proto-history of southern China than has been previously been acknowledged.

With respect to southern geographic locations of the Kra, Pulleyblank (1983:433) writes:

It is interesting to note that the Lao are mentioned in works of the Southern dynasties far to the southeast in northern Vietnam. In 537 a local rebel named Li Fen . . . , when defeated and pressed by the Chinese governor of Chiao-chou (Hanoi), tried to take refuge in the “valleys (tung 洞) of the Ch’ü-lao 屈撩” but was killed and handed over to his pursuers (Ch’en shu 1:2-3). The unusual disyllabic form Ch’ü-lao [< Gelao] ensures that this is not merely a generalized use of Lao to refer to any kind of southern barbarian.

Weera Ostapirat (2000) classifies the Kra languages into six groups, of which Gelao, Lachi, Laha, and Buyang have subgroups, while Paha and Pubiao (Laqua) are monotypic. The languages are highly diverse and are distributed over an area that includes southeast Sichuan, Guizhou, eastern Yunnan, western Guangxi, and northern Vietnam (Son La, Lào Cai, Hà Giang provinces), indicating a family of great antiquity very widespread in the past. Several of the languages are highly endangered and no doubt survive due to the remoteness of their locations. To this list Edmondson (n.d.) has added the Nung Ven or Anh (*ʔain*) language spoken in Cao Bang Province of Vietnam, belonging to the Buyang group, as well as several others belonging to Gelao. Finally, quite far to the east, Holm (2003:160) notes two villages on the western outskirts of Nanning whose language is referred to as Buyang, indicating a possible abutment with Li (see Churchman quoted below). He also relates that in northwestern Guangxi the local Buyei and Zhuang consider the Buyang to be the original inhabitants and carry out special ceremonies in their honor as spirits of the land and fertility. Holm suggests that the Buyang, as original inhabitants of Guanxi, may have been pushed into the uplands by in-migrating Buyei. I believe we should also consider the possibility that they preferred the upland habitat and subsequently came to be dominated administratively by the Buyei.

Ostapirat’s Kra subgrouping is as follows:

- South-Western Kra
  - Western Kra
    - Gelao* (North, South, Southwest)
    - Lachi* (North, South, Southwest)
  - Southern Kra
    - Laha* (North, South)
- Central-Eastern Kra

Central Kra  
*Paha*  
 Eastern Kra  
*Buyang* (North, South)  
*Pubiao*

Many autonyms of Kra peoples derive from the root form \*khra C, realized in a number of variations and providing a glimpse of the family's linguistic diversity.

Gelao: klau ~ ye ~ ʔlɿu ~ va ~ u (all have C tone)  
 Laha: khlá ~ ha (C)  
 Lachi: hu (C)  
 Paha: ha (has B tone, but several other examples of this C<B irregularity occur)  
 Pubiao: guaa (C) \*note also the *-qua* of Laqua, and *tcha-* of Qabiao

There are no cognate forms known so far from Buyang languages. Note that these are not the only autonyms found in Gelao, but the only ones with consistent cognates. The autonym provided by Edmondson (above) is of potential historical interest as it seems to refer to Buk or Buak. It is not known whether cognates for this name occur elsewhere in Kra.

The level of language diversity within Kra indicates a very early dispersal over a wide area. They are considered the autochthonous peoples in Guizhou (De Beauclaire 1946), and western Guangxi (Holm 2003) and no doubt ranged over much of the western three quarters of northern Vietnam. At some pre-Yue period they must have abutted the Li, and hence, beginning in the Tang, the doublet Li-Lao came to be used in reference to the most uncivilized or unsinicized peoples.

Liang Min and Zhuang Junru (1996) have posited a Buyang component in the Min Yue and Nan Yue groups to the east of the Luo Yue, but this seems much too far east, and a more likely candidate would be Li, especially at this time depth and given the closer affinity between Tai and Li as opposed to Tai and Kra.

An archeologist, Yang Hao (1999) has noted the distinctive features of Nan Yue as opposed to the Eastern Yue, but it seems likely that these were due to influence from the Li rather than the Kra. As mentioned above, there seems to be a general supposition that all Kra-Dai people moved from east to west, due no doubt to the prominence of Bai Yue as a unifying concept, which itself resulted from the Qin and Han invasions, the first official Chinese contact with this part of the south, and the first recorded history of the area. The linguistic evidence though, is more reliable and compelling, and does not tell the same story where Kra is concerned. It would be interesting to examine Yang Hao's work in the light of this linguistic evidence, and the position of the Rei on the mainland.

Finally, linking the two groups Lao and Li (Kra and Rei), Pulleybank continues (1983:433):

As a separate term, Li occurs already at the beginning of the Later Han and is frequent thereafter with reference to the natives of Kwangtung and northern Vietnam (Ruey 1956). Ruey is at pains to distinguish the Li and Lao as separate peoples, though he thinks they were related and shows that they had important cultural traits in common. It may not be going too far to suggest that there was a continuum of Tai-related peoples from the coast of Kwangtung, Kwangsi, and northern Vietnam stretching inland through Kweichow into Yunnan and north into Hunan and southern Szechwan. No doubt they were already somewhat differentiated in culture and language before the coming of the Chinese, having adapted to the different environments in which they had lived.

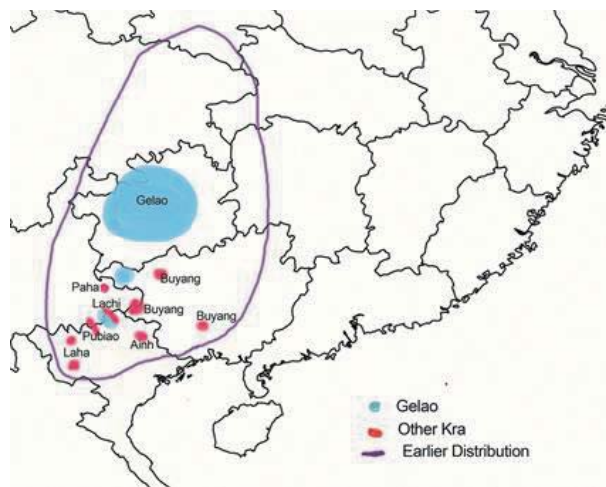


Figure 3. Present-day distribution of Kra languages (in red and blue) and the approximate former territory (northern portions following de Beauclair)

He suggests that *Li* and *Lao* are etymologically connected, as I do below, but with a somewhat different phonological history.

In the Pramic branch, the forms Ksing Mul /hrii/, Odu /raj/ and Kanieng /rii/ in Houa Phan Province are exonyms that refer to Tais (but not to Lao, pace Ferlus, as there are no true Lao speakers in this area). Furthermore, as noted above, the Pramic terms Ksing Mul *klau*, Phong *kəkau*, *təkau* actually refer to Khmu. One possible explanation is that the latter are perceived as closely associated

with Lao, as other Khmu further east were closer to Lue or Yuan, and are called *khmu luuu* and *khmu nuan*.

Badenoch (personal communication) suggests that the Lue /luuu C/ autonym belongs here as well, in spite of the interesting inter-ethnic dynamics which would need to be explained.<sup>20</sup> The tone class of Lue, which is C, fits nicely, indicating it would have to be derived from the Kra/Chü form rather than from the Li/Hlai side. Geographically it makes more sense, for the time being, to assume that the Pramic forms are derived from this same source as well, unroundedness taking precedence over tongue position.

This still does not explain the A tone of Lao /laaw/ which is commonly assumed to be derived from the same source as Gelao. One possibility though, is that forms such as Old Chinese \*krau? ‘Jiaozhi’ lost glottalization, conceivably at a time after they had become separated from other Kra speakers, and developed the A tone rather than C in

<sup>20</sup> Once during a discussion with Lue elders in the district of La in Odomxay province in northern Laos it was explained that when Lue people are looking to establish a new village, they always try to select a location where there are Khmu villages nearby in order to ensure a source of hired labor. Thus the association here between Tai and Khmu is very close, albeit socially asymmetrical.

some locations, that is, \*krauʔ < \*krau A < rau A < lau A.<sup>21</sup> More likely though, the two words simply became confused due to the phonological and semantic similarities.

Schuessler (2007) has the following:

牢 lâu	LH lou	OCM *rû	(in Ai Lao)
[哀 ʔâi]	LH ʔâi	OCM *ʔâi	(in Ai Lao)]
老 lâu B	LH lou B	OCM *rûʔ	(Lau = Tai C)
獠 liau	LH leu	OCM *riâu	(Liao)

As mentioned above, Schuessler remarks that 交 jiǎo \*krâuʔ seems to be cognate, lending further support to the idea that Jiaozhi (Viet. Giao Chi) 交趾 or 交趾 was a Kra-Rei entity.

### Hlai (Li, Rei)

Emerging first in the south, although at what period is unrecorded, the Li appear along the coast of Guangdong west of Canton, and south to Jiuzheng well beyond the Red River Delta. The peninsula that points towards Hainan from Guangdong is named the Li or Lei peninsula, and the indigenous inhabitants of Hainan are also known as Li or Lei. In fact their autonym is Hlai, phonemically /laj/ with a voiceless lateral initial consonant, or /daj/ in some dialects.

Ostapirat (2008:623) writes that:

it is difficult to determine when they migrated to Hainan. Nonetheless, from the fact that the Hlai languages show little of the early Chinese influence that overwhelmed the Tai and Kam-Sui groups as a consequence of the Qin-Han expansion into southern China (ca. 3rd-2nd century BC), we may assume that at least by that time, the Hlai people must have already crossed (or had started to cross) to the island.

Examining the dialect geography of the Hlai languages spread across the southwest and southern portion of Hainan Island, Ostapirat (2008) suggests that the Hlai languages did not enter Hainan via the Lei peninsula but originally crossed the gulf from the mainland south of the Red River delta, rather than via the Lei peninsula as might be assumed given its proximity. This would have been the territory that became the Chinese commandery of Juizhen under the Han. Perhaps, and it might be speculated that the Li were at first dominated by Luo Yue chiefs ('Lạc Lords' à la Taylor) in this area. In either event, the arrival of the Luo, or the Han invasion could have provided the stimulus for some groups of Li to migrate to the island, though equally it may have been a gradual process of exploration.

There can be little doubt that prior to the arrival of the Yue, and later the Chinese,

<sup>21</sup> Pulleyblank (1983:432) notes that: "A third reading of 獠 LMC \*liaw and EMC \*lew is irrelevant; it belongs to an old word meaning "to hunt at night" and has nothing to do with the name of the Kelao, but it is sometimes erroneously found in Western language references to the Lao.

the Li were present on the mainland with a considerable population. Even after this arrival the local population of eastern or coastal Annam must have been primarily Li. Schafer (1969:58) relates that:

In medieval times, the Li were by no means confined to Hainan Island. In the T'ang period they were also well established all along the mainland coast west of Canton and in northern Vietnam - the Annam of T'ang times. Both on the mainland and on the island they troubled the T'ang regime, as when they rebelled in the Hanoi area because of onerous taxes and killed the Chinese protector of Annam. ... Their ethnic name Li was easily converted into a clan or surname by the Chinese invaders, so that prominent men in their communities appear in Chinese texts styled "Li so-and-so." The same was true of other non-Chinese peoples, notably the Huang [Ghwang] of the mainland grottoes. Great luster was shed of this ancient name in the year 980, when the remnants of the T'ang protectorate in Annam, precariously preserved, were finally dissolved, and Li Huan (Viet. Lê Hoàn) declared the independence of the people of Vietnam...

In a paper focused on the "Li-Lao" and "Wuhu" corridor territory in southeastern Guangxi during the post Ma Yuan period in Lingnan and Annam, Churchman (2011:70) writes:

The original meaning of "Li" is obscure... as an ethnonym, it seems to have first been recorded in reference to a group of people living outside the Han Empire near Jiuzhen (now the high country of northern central Vietnam, a great distance from the Pearl River drainage area. During the Six Dynasties the ethnonym was never used for people who lived further east than Canton. Instead it was mainly found in provinces along the Pearl River, between the confluence of the Left Hand [Zuo] and Right Hand [You] Rivers [just west of Nanning] and all the way down to Canton.

Churchman's paper indicates clearly that areas of independent and quasi-independent Li (*Rei*) and Kra survived well into the Sui and Tang and even Song periods. They would eventually have evolved close contacts with Yue and Chinese, to a degree where noble houses appeared in Jiaozhi bearing their clan name née ethnonym, unlike those on Hainan who survived largely intact with only a modicum of Chinese influence until the onset of the Song.

Their ethnonym is not recorded very far north. Apart from Churchman's evidence, we do not know how far west its range might be indicated in old Chinese documents. I would like to venture that that the term "Li-Lao" refers generally to the pre-Yue Kra-Dai speakers who, judging from their current geographical locations, must have been widespread and very diverse, inhabiting the lands of eastern Lingnan and Annam, at least as far south as Jiuzhen. In the pre-Yue period, Li groups were found along the mainland coast from Canton to points far south, including Hainan, while the Kra (Lao) were present in the areas slightly further inland to points quite far west and north.

That Li was a recognized ethnic category in Jiaozhi well into the Tang is well attested. Churchman (2010:31) writes:

the name that indicated locals who were recognizably different from the people or subjects of other parts of the empire was Li. Under the Tang there were households in Jiaozhi classified as “Li households” *lihu* 俚戶 who had special administrative status and only paid half the taxes of ordinary citizens.

The Old Chinese reconstruction of Li or Lei is:

Baxter	*C.rəʔ 李, *C.r[ə][j] 梨
Schuessler	*rəʔ 李 and *rəi 梨

And internally for Proto-Hlai

Norquest	*hləy A
----------	---------

That is to say, apart from the final glide, which would have been a later development, it is not that different from the reconstructed forms for Chǔ and Kra (see above). Though the tone class for the alternate with the final diphthong is A rather than C, the C tone, which is laryngealized throughout the Kra-Dai stock, is commonly represented by a final glottal stop. So it is not difficult to arrive at a scenario where ancestors of the Li (let us call them Rei), like those of the Kra, broke away from the state of Chǔ or even from Yue at an earlier date, perhaps in the Spring and Autumn Period, and moved southeast, settling along the coastal areas of what is now Guangdong and northern Vietnam.

It would be useful to have a clear description of how the two characters were used in the historical documents and at what time periods.



Figure 4. Map of Pearl River Basin: note the locations of the You and the Zuo. Also note the Liu, mentioned below as the early isogloss between Luo and Ou, that is CSW and NT. (Source: Kmusser, 2008 –Wikipedia Commons)

Apart from Churchman's statement just cited, we do not know how far inland the Li may have ranged, but it is plausible to assume that they abutted or overlapped the Kra in many areas such as around Nanning. Their population on the mainland then later merged with Yue arrivals sometime after 333 BCE (or perhaps earlier for Luo Yue) and with Han Chinese. But this cannot have happened very rapidly because we still read of them well into the Tang and Song (see Schafer above). Often they were referred to as Li-Lao, that is to say Rei-Kra, recalling that Lao [*klau C*] is a cognate of Kra.<sup>22</sup>

It is tempting to suggest that Thai or Tai (PT\**day A*) is related to PH\**hləy A*, as one of the cognate forms is *day* in at least one Hlai dialect. Norquest (272) posits a Pre-Hlai form \*[l]əy, but with a caution that: "if these two forms [PH\**hləy* and PT\**day*] are truly cognate, then an original lateral is implied which hardened irregularly to \**d* in Tai." Nevertheless, since his Pre-Hlai reconstruction is actually Proto-Southern-Kra-Dai, consisting only of Proto-Hlai and Proto-Central-Southwestern-Tai, that is, the branch of Tai where *Tai* is often the autonym (not true of the Northern Branch), the suggestion is all the more tantalizing. We would have to explain how the correspondence ended up in Hlai and CSW Tai (Luo Yue), but not in NT (Ou Yue), unless the Hlai borrowed the ethnonym from Rei (Li) on the mainland slightly later, after the two had separated, rather than the two forms being directly descended from a common source. This might explain the phonological irregularity. A degree of uncertainty still surrounds this issue.

Looking at the situation more from an Austroasiatic perspective, Michel Ferlus (2006) proposed a similar though less specific association of:

\**kərii* / *krii* from which are derived Thai, Tai, Li, Hlai, Yi, and,  
\**kəraaw* / *kraaw* which became Lao, Gelao, and Keo

He points out the various ethnonyms of speakers of Vietic languages spoken to the south in Quang Binh and Khammouane (Laos) such as Maleng Kari (*mǎleɛŋ kǎrii*), and claims the terms refer to Vietic speakers who live near to Lao (in fact they do not although they are neighbors of the Sek). The term *mǎleɛŋ* means 'people.' Ferlus also finds the same transference in the Brou autonym *Tri* or *Chary*, a Katuic language spoken in Quang Tri on the Vietnamese side, and in Khammouane and Savannakhet in Laos. Conceivably, Rei speakers on the Chinese coast could have become confused with Vieto-Katuic peoples, who at that period would have had similar forest-based livelihood systems, or even with early Yue, who were said by some sources to have moved as far south as the Col des Nuages (between Hue and Da Nang).

### Agriculture and environment

It is worth clarifying some of the environmental and cultural terms. Terms such as "hill Tai" or "upland Tai" seem to imply that these Tai speakers are living at high elevations. Sometimes they are even called highlanders, a term usually reserved for

<sup>22</sup> Schafer (1967:53): "An early Sung source notes four kinds of Li-Lao speech, not mutually intelligible, in Yung-chou."



Hmong-Mien or Tibeto-Burman groups who practice swidden cultivation high in the mountains. Referring to Tais in this way thus creates confusion. Tais often reside in areas surrounded by mountains, sometimes called “grottoes” or *Dong* (EMC \*down<sup>h</sup> [=Tai B tone]) ‘mountain valley’ or ‘level ground between cliffs and beside a stream’ (Pulleyblack 1983:430), cognate with PT \*doŋ B ‘field’. Until recently, almost all Tai speakers, and most Kam-Sui speakers, so far as I am aware, were lowland wet rice cultivators. In Kam-Tai languages a clear distinction is made between paddy field (PT \*naa A2) and upland swidden field (PT \*ray B). *Dong* indeed became the exonym for Kam-Sui peoples.

Terms specific to wet rice agriculture include ‘rice seedling’, the verb ‘to transplant a seedling,’ ‘a plow, to plow,’ the ‘straw or stubble’ that remains in the fields, the canal or ‘ditch’ for irrigation, the ‘dike or bund’ that separates the paddies, and swamp eels that reside in paddies. All are regular forms reconstructed in Proto-Tai, and most probably in Kam-Tai once the data are complete. Wet rice fields exist both in open plains and in narrow valleys and defiles, using the same techniques. Some swiddening or gardening may be carried out in adjacent upland or sloping areas, but usually for subsidiary crops other than rice. Terracing of paddies on hillsides is a more recent phenomenon. Thus flat plains and valley floors can be assumed to be the original habitat of the Proto-Be-Tais and most probably Kam-Tais as well.<sup>23</sup>

#### Wet Rice Agricultural Terms

Gloss	PT	PKS	Be-Sek	PHlai	PKra
wet field	naa A2	ʔraa5	naa/nia A2	taa 2	(naa A)
dike between paddies	ɣanA2	can ʔ	SK ɣal 4	Cifhə:n	-
irrigation ditch	m̥uaŋ A1	k-njaan	-	-	-
rice seedling	klaa C1	kla 3	SK tlaa 3	[hwiu/viu]	(BY ta laa)
transplant seedlings	ʔdlamA1	ʔdram 1	SK tramA1	[dop/dap]	(dam)
plow	thlay A1	khrai A	SK thay 2	-	-
straw	vaan A2	mpwaan 1	SK viaŋ A?	[ŋwiŋ/ŋiŋ]	(vaaaŋ)ʔ
swamp eel ( <i>Fluta sp.</i> )	(C.)ʔian B	tsjen C	-	diêm (Sav)	-
dry field	ray B2	traai 5	(SK) rii 5	[ʔəŋ]	[za C]

Note: Parentheses indicate borrowings. Brackets indicate non-cognate forms (i.e. separate etyma). SK = Sek. BY = Buyang. Sek data from Gedney (1993). Proto-Kra from Ostapirat (2000). Proto-Hlai from Ostapirat (2008), Matisoff (1988), Norquest (2007). Proto Kam-Sui from Thurgood (1988), Ostapirat (2011). Proto-Tai from Li (1977), Chamberlain (unpublished ms). Sav = Savina’s Hlai (d=j)

Since the cognates for these rice-related terms are mostly lacking or borrowed in Hlai and Kra languages (see table below), we assume that they were originally swidden

<sup>23</sup> Terms specific to swiddening (dry rice or upland farming) are rarely collected by field workers. Terms such as dibble stick, to poke a hole with the stick, to weed the swidden, to burn the swidden, to clean up the area after the burn, to select the location of the new swidden, etc., are rarely if ever found in word lists and dictionaries, even though some such terms exist in Tai languages, and would be interesting to examine historically in Kra and Hlai.

cultivators, as many are today, or were until recently. Hlai seems to have developed its own lexicon, ostensibly after having settled on Hainan and become exposed to wet rice agriculture. Several Hlai groups have resided in the lowlands for some time, and gradually adopted wet rice cultivation, ostensibly under Chinese, Be, or other influence, though the terms adopted by the Hlai are not Chinese. All of the Kam-Tai languages maintain a clear distinction between swidden and wet rice fields.

Ostapirat (2011) notes that the term for ‘plow’ seems not to exist in Proto-Miao-Yao, as might be expected for swidden cultivators. Haudricourt and Strecker (1991) attempt to demonstrate a Proto-Miao-Yao distinction between paddy and upland field, but other terms specific to paddy cultivation are conspicuously absent from their discussion. The earliest use of iron plow shares began in China in the Spring and Autumn and Warring States Periods in the lower Yangtze basin, no doubt among the Kam-Tai people. Evidence suggests that the Old Chinese word for plow may have been a Kam-Tai borrowing from this period (Ostapirat *ibid*).

For political and economic reasons, the swidden-paddy distinction became the indicator of civilization, beginning at least with the Han and no doubt earlier. Indeed the bias has been carried into the present by governments as they attempt to increase production on a national level, despite the fact that it has been amply demonstrated by Dove (e.g.1983), Ducortieux (2006), and others, that when measured as a return on labor, swidden cultivation is the most productive, by one calculation anywhere from 88 to 276 percent higher than paddy (Dove 1983). When measured as a return on land, as governments universally prefer, paddy production in absolute terms is of course higher, but this does not include human labor/time spent in paddy preparation, clearing the land, building dikes, two or more years of waiting before the paddies hold water, transplanting, irrigation systems and upkeep, not to mention the cost of buffalo or other draft animal labor and upkeep, time spent in crafting specialized equipment such as plows and harrows, and taxation. That is to say, the practice of swidden agriculture should be viewed as a preference, not as a measure of cultural evolution as is usually portrayed.

Ostapirat (2008) also examines the cultural issues surrounding terms for ‘iron’ and for ‘crossbow.’ Iron in Kam-Tai languages is an old Chinese contact word dating from the Han period or earlier (Kam-Tai \*hlit < -k), but the form does not appear in Hlai and Kra.<sup>24</sup> As the voiceless lateral initial \*hl- in Old Chinese had changed to \*th- by the time of Middle Chinese, the contact must have been earlier. Furthermore, the variation in the final consonants of this word between Tai \*-k and Kam-Sui \*-t implies that the separation of the two families occurred at about the time of the introduction of iron (or at least iron plow shares) around the 6th century BCE in the state of Chǔ.

Crossbow (PT \*hnaa C) is an areal contact form with roots not only in Chinese but also in Miao-Yao and Austrosiatic, but does not occur in Kra and Hlai. Ostapirat notes that Hlai has another word (Proto-Hlai \*vac), although this actually refers to the

<sup>24</sup> Norquest has Hlai \*hla:k glossed as ‘tin’. If the gloss is correct it would imply the etymon already existed in Proto Kra-Dai (as tin precedes iron and is one of the essential elements in bronze manufacture) and was semantically transferred to ‘iron’ after its introduction subsequent to the splitting off of Hlai. ‘Tin’ is an areal word found in Chinese as well as other groups, with an uncertain etymology.

longbow as the Hlai used only the longbow (Stübel 1937).<sup>25</sup> Ancient Chinese texts state that Hlai aboriginal men were never seen without their bows and their long knives (Schafer 1969). I have seen no similar reports with respect to bows for the Kra groups. It is worth noting that the spectacular illustrations in the Stübel volume provide a glimpse of the Hlai peoples and cultures which, due to their relative isolation, must have remained relatively unchanged for the past two to three millennia.

In previous papers I have presented evidence based upon indigenous histories and Tai zootaxonomies that place the Tais in the lower Yangtze basin. Essentially, organisms with the most extensive north-south ranges have taxa reconstructable in Proto-Tai, whereas organisms found only south of the Tropic of Cancer do not. For example, the softshell turtle *Trionyx sinensis* which ranges widely across China and Southeast Asia has consistent cognates in Kam-Tai languages and even in Hlai where it is applied to sea turtles (Chamberlain 1981).

Tai \*faa (SW faa, N fuua ~ fuuu)  
 Be bi?  
 Sek via  
 KS (Then) fjaa  
 Hlai (Pai-sha) faa

Both species of pythons (*P. reticulatus* and *P. bivittatus*) on the other hand, occur only south of the Tropic. Central Southwestern Tai has correspondences for python (e.g. Lao luam A, Nung num A), but Hlai has a separate unrelated form (PH \*na:p? C), indicating that Hlai split off from Tai or Kam-Tai prior to their move south.

Conspicuous mammals found ranging from Southeast Asia north through southern China as far as the Yangtze or beyond, and which have regular correspondences, include:<sup>26</sup>

<i>Proto-Kam-Tai</i>	<i>Scientific</i>	<i>Proto-Tai</i>	<i>Proto-Kam-Sui</i>
pangolin	Manis	*lin ~ -m B	*lin ~ -m B
Tibetan bear	Ursus	*hmui A	*?mu:i A
otter (1)	Lutranæ	*muan C	*?ja:n C
civet	Viverridae	*hjen A	*hjan A
muntjac	Muntiacus	*faan A (SW+N)	(Mak) va:n A
Porcupine (1)	Hystrix	*hmen C (CSW)	*?mi:n C

<sup>25</sup> This is another of those instances where comparative lexicographers need to be more precise in their fieldwork and in their glosses. Schafer (1969:69) cites 12th century sources that say exactly the same thing, “The Li are skilled with the simple bow, the Yao with the crossbow...” The crossbow pictured in Stübel (Figure 217) is from the Yao or Mun group who came to Hainan at a later period, and are called Miau by Stübel.

<sup>26</sup> For a more complete treatment see Chamberlain (1977) which discusses the taxonomic complexities of combining historical linguistics and ethnozoology but covers only mammals, crocodylians and saurians. A planned revision of this work to be presented as *Kra-Dai Zoology* addresses all primary animal groups.

*Proto-Tai*

rhesus monkey	<i>Macaca mulata</i>	*li:ŋ A
otter (2)	<i>Lutra</i>	*na:k DL
hog badger (likely)	<i>Arctionyx</i>	*hluŋ B
dhole	<i>Cuon /Nyctereutes</i>	*nay A
serow	<i>Capricornis</i>	*ʔya:ŋ C
Porcupine (2)	<i>Atherurus</i>	*hrɔn A

Strictly southern mammals, with ranges limited mostly to areas south of the Tropic, do not have regular correspondences in the various Kra-Dai language families and branches. These include such conspicuous and distinctive animals as gibbon, stump-tailed macaque, pig-tailed macaque, langurs, slow loris, tree shrews, binturong, sun bear, mouse deer (chevrotain), Javan rhinoceros, Sumatran rhinoceros, flying squirrels, and other squirrels. Other fauna (reptiles, amphibians, birds, fish, etc.) show the same pattern, but reliable data are lacking for many languages. Good reptilian examples are the large monitor lizards, *Varanus bengalensis* and *salvator*, which do not have consistent cognates even within Southwestern Tai.

With respect to the coastal origins of the Yue, a number of lexical items specific to the coast support the notion that these areas were peopled originally by Be-Tais. These lexical items are not found in Kam-Sui languages suggesting once again that that family belongs in Ostapirat's Northern (western) portion of Kra-Dai, and that Kam-Sui did not originate on the coast. One such form is the word for 'salt-water crocodile' (*Crocodylus porosus*) usually glossed as 'mythical water creature' in Tai languages that are no longer found along the coast.<sup>27</sup> The size and imposing nature of this reptile, which may grow to a length of eight meters, must have left a lasting impression on the minds of the seafaring Yue, to a degree where the taxon has survived not only in Tai languages but as part of the Tai substrata in the Chinese languages of the southern coast:

Proto-Tai \*ŋaak > ɲuək, ɲuuuk, ɲɤk, ɲuak  
 鱷. OC \*ŋâk, LH \*ŋak (Schuessler) 'salt water crocodile'  
 < Cantonese: ɲok  
 < Amoy: go'k

<sup>27</sup> There is some mystery here as the etymon does not occur in Hlai, although historically this reptile was found along the shores of Hainan as well as nearby along the coasts of Guangxi, Fujian, Guangdong, and Vietnam. Hlai appears to have another taxon, PH \*kəyʔ (Norquest), that is, with the C tone seemingly cognate either with SWT *khee* ~ *kɛɛ* ~ *khia* ~ *hia* 'crocodile (freshwater)' or *hia* ~ *hee* ~ *kia* ~ *chia* ~ *chii* 'water monitor (V. *salvator*)' all of which take the C tone. But semantic confusion between the two is rife. Water monitors are common on Hainan, whereas the crocodile has long been extirpated. In any case all of these forms may relate ultimately to the OC terms for the 'giant salamander' which was found in the basin of the Yangtze, a more northerly animal, OC (?) \*ngieg or \*g'a (Michael Carr personal communication regarding the *Erh-Ya*). It would be reassuring to have both taxa in Hlai, crocodile and *salvator*, for comparison to ensure that the two species have indeed been distinguished in the data. So far this has not been discernable in the available sources.

That the taxon does not occur in Hlai is important as it indicates that Hlai and Tai were separate prior to their arrival on the coast. After separating from Chǔ, Rei probably traveled to the Cantonese coast by inland routes. Along the northern portion of its former range, Fujian and northern Guangdong, the etyma for *porosus* agrees with the Tai languages, but is conspicuously lacking elsewhere. (We do not know if it occurs in Be.) Had Kra-Dai originated on the southeast China coast as many are claiming, this should not be the case. The fact that the term for crocodile in Hlai appears to derive from the OC word for ‘giant salamander,’ an inland non-coastal and more northerly animal, supports this conclusion.

But in another example the word for a turtle, specifically the ‘giant soft shell turtle (*Pelochelys cantorii* Gray)’ is found in the Central Southwestern Tai languages, and is still preserved in Hlai on Hainan glossed as ‘turtle’, or ‘point-nose turtle,’ and in several languages from the northern Philippines as simply ‘turtle.’ No doubt the lack of specificity is due to the data collection. In fact the distribution of the taxon mirrors that of the species which is found in Hainan and in the northern Philippines, as well as along the southern Chinese coast. This turtle is not, however, found on Taiwan, even though cognates occur in Austronesian languages there, glossed either as ‘softshell,’ or ‘river tortoise,’ so either it may have lived there in former times, or the taxon was introduced from the Philippines. Had it come from the mainland one would suppose that the more ubiquitous *\*faa* for the smaller softshell species would have been used. *\*faa* has no apparent cognates in Austronesian. Interestingly, the *Pelochelys* form does not occur in Northern Zhuang or Pu Yi, again, in keeping with its range. This is the largest of the soft shell turtles (family *Trionychidae*) reaching a length of up to 200 cm, so it is not easily ignored. It lives (or lived as it is almost extinct) in large inland rivers such as the Red and the Black and in brackish water along the coast, even sometimes found at sea.

Proto-South-Central Tai *\*top* < BT, WT, TV: (too) top ‘*Pelochelys* or *Rafetus*’  
 < Savina Tay: (tu) tó̄p, <Thô of Backan (EFEO) : (tua) tó̄p

Hlai (Li from Stübel (1937)

Weiss: thöeb ‘turtle’

Geshor: thob ‘turtle’

Proto Hlai (Norquest)*\*thu:p* ‘point-nosed turtle’

(Ostapirat)*\*ʔti:p* ‘soft-shell turtle’

PAN<sup>28</sup> (Wolff) *\*qatipa*, (Blust) *\*qaCipa* ‘river tortoise, softshell turtle’

AN (Philippines, Yap 1973)

Kallaban, Keleyqiq:kateb ‘turtle’,

Ifugao, Rayninan: attob ‘turtle’

<sup>28</sup> Supporting evidence is mainly from Formosan languages except for one in Sumatra.

The distribution of the taxon implies that the Central Southwestern branch of Tai (Luo Yue) was in contact with Rei (Li), but not the northern branch (Ou Yue), and that one or both was in contact with Austronesian in the Philippines. As mentioned *Pelochelys* does not occur on Taiwan though it is (or was) found in the mainland coastal areas of Fujian. Another large softshell turtle, *Rafetus swinhoei*, the Yangtze Giant Softshell, was found in the Red River, especially well-recorded on the Chinese side in southeastern Yunnan, and in the lower Yangtze River along the Jiangsu-Zhejiang border area. Little is known of its former range, but while the taxon in some Tai languages may refer to *Rafetus*, it is not known whether the ranges or habitats of the two species ever overlapped.

The forms for ‘sea eagle’ and/or ‘cormorant’ which became the Central Southwestern Tai word for ‘greater hornbill’ are addressed below in the discussion of Lo (Luo).

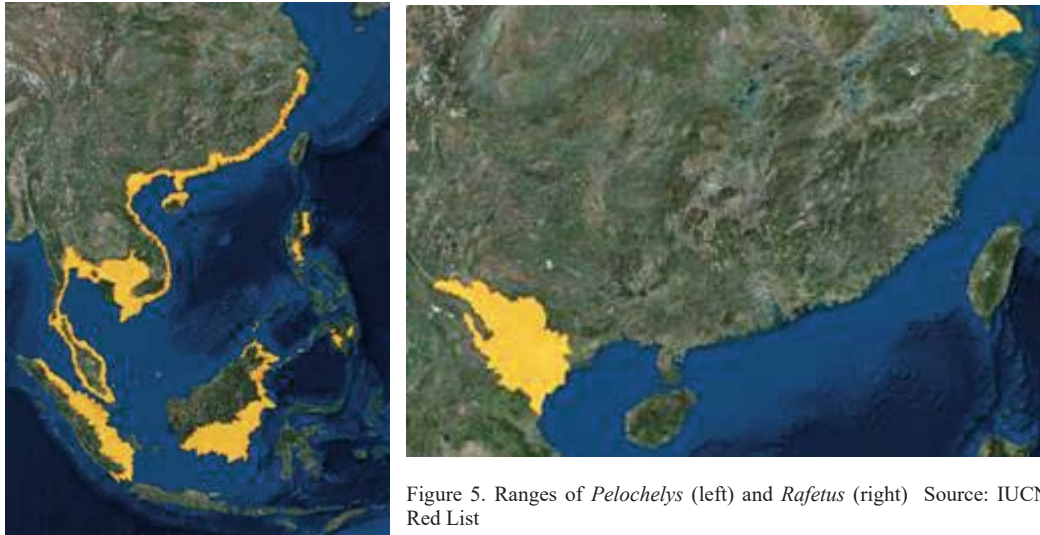


Figure 5. Ranges of *Pelochelys* (left) and *Rafetus* (right) Source: IUCN Red List

### Kam-Sui (Dong, Tong)

Although Proto-Kam-Tai split into two main families around the Spring and Autumn Period (771-476 BCE) in the state of Chǔ, identifying the ancestors of Kam-Sui in history is not as easy as for the coastal Yue. We do not know how far west the Yue state extended, nor therefore the approximate boundary within the territory of Chǔ between Proto-Be-Tai and Proto Kam-Sui prior to the annexation of Yue by Chǔ in 333 BCE. If Inez de Beauclair’s (1946) work is any indication, some muddling of Kam-Sui with Gelao exists in the historical records. Linguistic work has focused on finding cognates for phonological reconstruction (e.g. Thurgood 1988), leaving the lexical material from the Kam-Sui languages either incomplete or insufficiently analyzed. The current locations of Kam-Sui languages extend from eastern Guizhou and southwestern Hunan into northwestern Guangxi, eastern Guangxi and northwestern Guangdong, if we include Lakkia and Biao in the group. The original range may also have included parts of Jiangxi although we know less about this territory. The distribution today is rather sparse, probably indicating a heavy degree of sinicization over most of the former range.

Yang and Edmondson (1997) write that already by the Tang Dynasty the Kam were recognized as a separate group, reconstructed as Kalam or Klam, indicating a much earlier period of unity for the various diverse branches of Sui, Ten, Mak, Mulam (Mulao), Maonan and Ai Cham, not to mention Lakkia and Biao further east in northwestern Guangdong. Yang and Edmondson suggest that the ancient name for Guizhou, which was Qian, < *gjam* (ostensibly) < *galam*, may indicate the source. They do not indicate the precise time period, but most of their sources seem to date from the Tang and Song periods. They state that “early chroniclers” describe a migration following the Warring States period from a vague Chŭ-Yue homeland to northern Guizhou via Jiangxi.

Apart from Lakkia, which Solnit (1988) placed closer to Kam-Sui than to other families, the Biao language(s) of northwest Guangdong remain largely unstudied. Andrew Hsiu (2014) notes that Biao (autonym *koŋ pju*) consists of three mutually unintelligible languages, Shidong, Yonggyu, and Northwestern Biao. I have not seen the study by Liang Min (2002) on the Shidong language. Many forms cited by Hsiu are close to Kam-Sui, but obviously more study is needed.

### Be-Tai (Yue/Viêt < \* *gɿwăt, jwət, wat, wat*)

Appearing first in Chinese records in the 6th century BCE (Aurousseau 1923), the state of Yue was located approximately in the area of present-day Zhejiang, bordered on the north by Wu and on the west by Chŭ. The southern border, if there was one, is not recorded. The term Yue became the ethnomym Viêt of Vietnamese, and Aurousseau believed he was describing the history of the Vietnamese.

For *yuè* 越, the name of the ancient state, reconstructed forms are:

Karlgren	OC * <i>gɿwăt</i>		
Baxter and Sagart	OC *[ <i>ç</i> ]wat		
Schuessler	OC * <i>jwət</i>	LH * <i>wat</i>	OCM * <i>wat</i>

With respect to time-depth, Aurousseau implies that the four main Yue principalities on the coast (Zhejiang, Fujian, Canton (Guangzhou), and Annam/Guangxi), or at least their precursors, were already in existence when the Yue state came to an end. This suggests that, in their movements south following the Qin invasion, the Yue nobility had become familiar with the coastal territory and its local populations and probably already had a presence there, but since the Chinese had not yet arrived, no records exist from this early time period.

These four groups must have been formed already by the end of the Tcheou [Zhou], probably between the end of the 4th and the beginning of the 3rd centuries BC, since the Nan-Yue are already mentioned in Tchouang-tseu and under the Tcheou they are already talking about the Lo-yue. (Aurousseau p. 249)

Holm (2015) has meticulously brought together convincing evidence from a wide variety of Chinese specialists in linguistics, archeology, and mitochondrial DNA to

support the hypothesis that the Yue were indeed Tai. The inclusion of Kam-Sui is less certain. So far there is no clear evidence that the Kam-Sui were ever classified as Yue. Holm provides perhaps the best overview to date on the Yue and their Tai identity. Among the information presented is an interesting feature of the Yue as boatmen and seafarers.

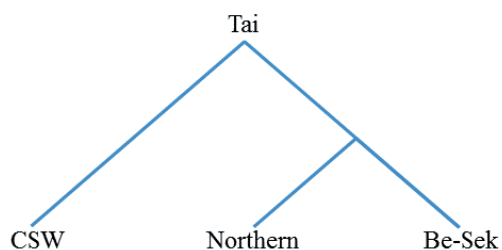
The battles with Chǔ and with other states usually took place on rivers and inland lakes, but the Yue were also given to seafaring, both along the coast and further afield. To this day, Tai communities far inland continue to sing ‘boat songs’ as part of various indigenous ritual practices, and the seas and sea voyages feature in the geography of their spirit world. (Holm 2015:207)

Holm (2015:210) cites the results of Y chromosome testing, carried out and announced by Li Hui in 2002, among peoples thought to be descended from the Bai Yue (hundred Yue). The study identifies one genetically distinct group of descendants who first occupied the Zhejiang-Jiangxi area, and later dispersed away from southeast China into southwest China, Southeast Asia as far west as Assam, following the probable migrations of the Tai speaking peoples. The chromosomal structure of this group is unique and distinct from Han, Hmong-Mien, and Tibeto-Burmans. Apparently Kra peoples were not included, or at least not identified, in the sample.

Describing the well-documented association of the eastern and western Ou (Dong Ou and Xi Ou), Holm concludes that it is:

pertinent to observe that the archaeological evidence and historical records give ample evidence of very close cultural links between the Yue heartland in Zhejiang and the Yue polities in Lingnan, and a well-established sea route affording mobility up and down the coast. In all likelihood, the Lingnan area was one of the destinations for Yue royal clans as they fled southward by sea, out of reach of their powerful enemies to the north, at least for the time being. Once ensconced in their new territories, they would have sought to recreate the ‘valley kingdoms’ they left behind.<sup>29</sup>

Apart from the identification of Yue with Be-Tai, the next most important issue for this family is the position of Sek and Be, and hence the appellation Be-Tai. Both Sek and Be are believed to have broken away from the Tai mainstream prior to the period



of reconstructed Proto-Tai. I suggested putting Be and Sek together to form a pre-Proto-Tai association of Be-Sek, on the grounds that both groups were located on or near the coast, Be on Hainan and adjacent coastal areas west of Canton (Ostapirat 1998), and Sek along with Be, because its namesake the Vietic SÁCH on

<sup>29</sup> Zhong Chong 鐘翀 (2005) of Kyoto University studied isolated Yue valley kingdoms in pre-Qin Zhejiang, noting that their language remains distinct until the present.



the Vietnamese side of the Cordillera near the coast (Chamberlain 1998). That both Sek and Be split from the Tai mainstream is attested by the separate development of the palatal final \*-c which becomes -t in Tai but -k in Sek and -ʔ in Be (Ostapirat 2009:50). The following are some examples:

	<i>Sek</i>	<i>Be</i>	<i>Tai (Siamese)</i>
ant	mək	muʔ	mot
fish scale	tɛk	liʔ	klet
Chinese cabbage	kək	kaʔ	kaat

Lexically, Be and Sek are closest to the Northern branch of Tai, that is the languages referred to as northern Zhuang in Guangxi and the contiguous Bouyei (Pu Yi) in Guizhou. The isogloss between the northern and central branches of Tai is well defined, that is between northern and southern Zhuang, unlike the distinction between the central and southwestern branches which is geographically and phonologically rather amorphous. In fact it would seem logical to set back the time period for what we call Proto-Tai and to redraw the Tai family tree placing the Northern branch together with Be-Sek rather than with Central Southwestern, as shown to the left here.

Gedney (1967) noted that Northern Tai was very homogenous, with northern Zhuang and Bouyei being essentially the same language, whereas the Central languages, just on the other side of the isogloss, were very diverse. He was unable to explain this contrast except for alluding to similar situations of relative lack of change over long periods found in many language families throughout the world. However, the variety exhibited by Be and Sek, taken together with the other Northern branch languages, suggests that this branch was equally diverse but that the area of this diversity, located further east in Guangdong, was swallowed up by Chinese. The Northern branch of Tai was comprised of the languages of the Ou Yue, and more specifically the Xi Ou or Western Ou, who arrived in the south sometime after the Luo (Lo) Yue.

### Ou (Ɖu, Nyo, Âu) and Yi (Yay, Yoy, Ái)

Two groups became especially well-known in Vietnamese history, the Ou and the Lo (Vietnamese Âu and Lạc). Both of these terms appeared originally in the northern Yue areas of Min-Yue (Fujian) and Yue Dong Hai or Dong-Ou (Zhejiang), and apparently referred to subgroups of Yue that were originally perhaps clan or lineage names. The Ou in the north were referred to as the eastern Ou and those in the south as the western Ou. Under the Qin, the inhabitants of the Red River delta were known as Ou-Lo (Âu-Lạc) (Arousseau), though more recently Chinese scholars have maintained the two were never combined (see below).

Ou 𠩺 is reconstructed as:

Karlgren 22 OC \*u, 494 MC \*ʔəu (A)

Schuessler OCM ʔô (A)

Baxter OC q<sup>s</sup>(r)oʔ or q<sup>s</sup>(r)o (A)

Note also: Ou (區), Ou (歐) and Ouyang (歐陽).

Aurousseau calls them Ngeou, and others call them Ngâu, with a nasal initial (possibly intended as a palatal nasal  $\eta$ -). The nasalization is further borne out by the corresponding Mùròng term for Tai which is consistently  $\eta\epsilon w$  throughout all of the dialects (Nguyễn 2004), the diphthong indicating a Middle Chinese period pronunciation. The Nyo themselves have preserved the C1 tone probably captured by the Old Chinese final glottalized form reconstructed by Baxter. Proto-Tai would be  $*\eta\eta\text{C}$  or  $\eta\eta\text{C}$ .

The first mention of the Ou in Chinese, according to Aurousseau, is in the *Houai-nan tseu* (*Huainanzi*) supposedly composed in 135 BCE. This source states that sometime between the years 221 and 214 BCE, the reign of Qin Shi Huang, Chinese troops conquered the Yue country and killed Yi Hiu Song a feudal lord of the Si Ngeou [western Ou], said to designate the people of Tonkin at that time. Earlier, though perhaps less certain, is a text by Sima-Qian in the 1st century BCE, apparently citing an older text dating from the 3rd century BCE, referring to Ngeou-Yue people who stereotypically, “cut the hair, tattoo the body, cross the arms and fasten the clothing on the left.” A later text, the *Yu-ti tche*, attributed to Kou Ye Wang dating from 510-581 CE, states that Jiaozhi was known as the country of the Lo-Yue in the period of Zhou, and under the Qin was called Western Ou (*ibid*). This implies that the term Lo predates Ou in this southern portion of Yue.

Rei (Li) does not appear in any of these nomenclatural combinations, strongly suggesting that Ou and Lo are ethnic designations specific to the Yue, imported by them into the area already inhabited by the pre-Yue Rei and Kra. And of course when Li does occur in combination it is always as Li-Lao (Rei-Kra), the more “primitive” (i.e., earlier) inhabitants.

Also not found are combinations of either Ou or Lo with Yi. One possibility is suggested indirectly by Ferlus (2006) though he associates Yi only with Tibeto-Burman as found in Yunnan and Sichuan, not considering that Yi is also a Tai designation,<sup>30</sup> that is, the Northern branch Tais in Guizhou, *Pu Yi*, the autonym of the group referred to as Nhắng in Vietnam and Laos.<sup>31</sup> In pinyin the name is usually spelled Buyi or Bouyei (realized as  $\eta ji$ ,  $\eta jai$ ,  $\eta joi$ , or  $jai$  in Guizhou dialects all with the C tone) (Guoyan et al 2001), and in the literature generally as Yay (Gedney 1965), Dioi (Esquivel and Williatte 1908), and Giáy in Vietnamese. Ferlus suggests the term has undergone the typical Chinese sound shift of  $l- > j-$ , but this does not work for two reasons, first because the Yi ( $yí$ ) initial consonant is originally preglottalized, and second because the tone class is C whereas the tone for Rei / Li is A.

The peopling of upper Guangxi and eastern Guizhou by the Northern branch must

<sup>30</sup> Actually there are three types of Yi: one has come to be identified with Tibeto-Burman  $yí$  夷 [LH  $*ji$ , OCM  $*l\text{ai}$ ] (as in Ferlus); one is the Kra  $yí$  羿人 referring to peoples along Sichuan-Guizhou border, and; one is the Yi ( $yí$ ) 依 of Pu Yi with the C tone. Schuessler, citing Pulleyblank (1983), notes that  $yí$  夷 has been used since the Spring and Autumn Period to refer to ‘barbarians’ living by the sea, as  $yí$  is the Yue word for ‘sea.’

<sup>31</sup> I am not sure of the origin of the exonym Nhắng. One possibility is that it comes from the county shown as “Yang” on Schafer’s (1967) map of Nam-Viet in the Tang, located in what is now upper Guangxi, possibly the older term for the northern Tais there that are now called Zhuang (a more recent term).

have been somewhat more recent, given the relative homogeneity of the Northern branch dialects, though this generalization may apply more to Guizhou than to Guangxi. In addition, parts of the Ou and Yi had pushed quite far to the south where they became known as the Y<sub>o</sub> (Nyo, Nho) and the Droi (*yuaɣ*), Yooy, or Yuay, both ethnonyms clearly preserving the C tone.

Tai speakers with the autonym Yi [PT \*ʔii, ʔuai, ʔyay (C Tone)] probably moved south earlier, because their name appears further south than Ou (Nyo), that is, on the southern side of the Ak escarpment and southern end of the Nakai Plateau in Khammouane Province, Laos.

Schuessler (2007) notes that the Chinese for Yi 倚 is cognate with 依 which he reconstructs as:

LH \*ʔiai B (=Tai C), OCM \*ʔaiʔ

Their presence in Thanh Hoá, where they are called Droi, (the LH pronunciation), is only a memory, as recounted by Robequain (1929:110):

the Thai of the province [Red Tai] have preserved a memory of long migrations mostly from Dien Bien Phu... They did not occupy the country without violence, for they were harsh in chasing out the Droi: they slaughtered them en masse, ensuring that these savages, very grand and peaceful, would not inhabit the valleys but the slopes of the mountains; one can still see at Muong Xia and Yen Nhan, the earthen ramparts with which they surrounded their villages, and one can still unearth in the rice fields the debris of implements which belonged to them. This eviction and these massacres were relatively recent: not longer than seven or eight generations according to the old people.

The locations mentioned are in a very remote part of the province, near the border with the Laotian province of Houa Phan, district of Xam Tay, a Red Tai speaking area on both sides of the border. It is conceivable that they were an isolated group of Rei-type people as evidenced by that group's presence in Jiuzhen and their upland swidden cultivation. If they were lowland wet rice cultivators, it is hard to envision how they were exterminated by other in-migrating Tais since a more or less symmetrical social interaction with the Yay ethnic group is found in other parts of Vietnam and Laos. □ The ethnonym appears further south as *naay* in Nghê An, *yooy* in Khammouane, Laos (Nakai and Gnommarath), and *yuaɣ* or *yooy* in Sakon Nakhon, Thailand (where they were transported by the Siamese military in the 19th century).

Possibly Ái [C tone], the former name for Thanh Hoá, established in CE 523 (Taylor 1983:133), was named after early Yi inhabitants.

The distribution of the Yi is thus unusual, marked by extreme separation of the Yi in Guizhou from the Droi / Yooy in lower Thanh Hoá, far to the south and beyond. It needs to be borne in mind that the Yay (Giáy, Nháng) found in Vietnam and Laos were relatively recent migrants from Guizhou and thus not part of a continuum (cf. Edmondson 1996).

The Ou likewise moved south where they are known as *Yô* or *Nyô* (*Nho*) starting in Thanh Hoa (Robequain 1929; Robert 1941) and extending further to Nghệ An, Khamkeut and Hinboun (Laos), Nakhon Phanom and Sakon Nakhon (Thailand). As mentioned, in Mường dialects the term for Tai is consistently *ɲew*, indicating that the Kra-Dai group to whom they were first exposed were Nyo, original Northern Tai branch speakers who had expanded south. The consistency of this usage from Nghệ An to the northernmost point of its range near Hanoi implies that the usage came into the Mường language at a time they were relatively unified, before moving north.<sup>32</sup> The diphthong and the tone suggests the term was borrowed from a Middle Chinese (Tang period) source \*ʔəu, (and of course Vietnamese *Âu*),<sup>33</sup> that is, the Chinese colonists on the coast whose main contact had been with Ou who had followed the Yi southwards. The largely independent Chinese colony of *Ái* had presumably organized and militarized the local Vietic peoples (Mường)<sup>34</sup> until by the 10th century they were ready to attack Jiaozhi and establish what was to become the Vietnamese nation (Taylor 1983:266ff).

Linguistically there appear to be at least two main groups of Nyo, those who developed unaspirated stops under the influence of the more numerous Tais, and those who developed aspirated stops from original voiced initials. The former are found only in Nghệ An and Thanh Hoá (author field notes).

The proximity of the Nyo to Chinese colonists or Sino-Vietnamese in the Ma and Ca basins is borne out by their unusual alphabet, lacking the distinction between the initial consonant series found in neighboring Tai alphabets. Written from top to bottom and right to left like Chinese, the alphabet has been painstakingly described by Ferlus (1993) who had access to the original papers of Henri Maspero, the source for the alphabet's details, although its existence had long been known from the works of Guignard (1912), Finot (1917), Robequain (1929), and Robert (1941). More recently a version of the Tai epic of *Cheuang* was published, written in the same Qui Chau script, claiming to be the original language, complete with phonemic transcription and translation in Vietnamese (Nhat and Ky 2005). The lack of a consonant series indicates that the alphabet was devised after the devoicing sound shift that swept over Southeast Asia and southern China, probably sometime around the 12th or the 13th century. The Nyo were thus present in southern Thanh Hoá and Nghệ An prior to that time, at a period when the Mường were more homogenized and prior to their subsequent move northward where they would have encountered only groups calling themselves Tai and not Nyo.

In Khamkeut the name Nyo has been applied to former Vietic speakers, original hunter-gatherers in the Nam Gnouang valley (Grossin 1933, Chamberlain 2014) who typically have no autonym and who began to be called Nyo, perhaps due to a prior

<sup>32</sup> Especially around Lao Cai in Vietnam, and Phongsaly, Oudomxay, and Louang Namtha in Laos.

<sup>33</sup> Out of thirty dialects provided in Nguyễn's survey, only two had other terms; one from Vinh Phú (Thanh Sơn) in the north showed *zaj*<sup>2</sup> which comes from *Giáy*, a term used for the NT language (Yay or Pu Yi) that migrated into Vietnam from Guizhou about two hundred years ago (also called Nhang), and another from Nghệ An (Làng Lỗ) which shows *taj*<sup>2</sup>, that is, Tai.

<sup>34</sup> The tone indicated - *ɲew*<sup>1</sup> or *ɲew*<sup>2</sup> - by Nguyễn corresponds to the A tone in Vietnamese and MC, whereas Tai languages preserve the C tone agreeing with OC \*q<sup>6</sup>(r)o<sup>?</sup> of Baxter and Sagart.

inter-ethnic relationship and to local government insistence. Their former exonym was *Thay Kap Kè* ‘gecko people’ (Chamberlain 2014). Some were also called *puak* (*puʔ, phuʔ*) as in footnote 19 above. Ferlus (1988) maintains that Mène and Pao are “Yo,” although he does not provide any justification for this. However, both Mène and Pao, as well as the *Yò* in the Phu Qui writing sample, display certain Northern Branch features (Chamberlain 1991). The Kap Kè and the Puak until recently resided in small sub-villages attached to Mène and Pao who entered Khamkeut from Nghê An in the late 19th century to escape the marauding of the Ho-Cheuang wars that followed the Tai-Ping rebellion in Guangxi and which affected all of the eastern portion of northern Laos, even reaching Nong Khai in Thailand (Proschan 1996), as well as Thanh Hoá and Nghê An in Vietnam. Thus the Kap Kè and the Puak could have been labeled Nyo by local officials because of this association. There are no ethnic Lao speakers in this district which was governed by an ethnic Phong (Vietic) Chao Meuang well into the 20th century. The Phong were said to be skilled intermediaries between conflicting Tai and Vietnamese systems of governance, in Nghê An as well as Khamkeut (Macey 1906).

	<i>Mène</i>	<i>Sek</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>PT*</i>
asleep	dak	dak	-	*ʔd- DS
break (a stick)	tak DS1	rak	CT thak ~tak	*thr- DS
child	luuk DS2	luuk DS2	SW luuk DL2	*l- D
crosswise	kway B1	khway B1	Dioi kouai B1	*kh- B
dig	kut DS1	khut DS1	Dioi kout DS2- Sui pjek	*x-/yut DS
dirty	hɤk DS2	-	Hlai re:k	-
fan	pii A2	phii A2	CSWT vii A2	*w-/b- A
fire	fii A2	vii A2	CSWT fay A2	*v- A
hurt	keet DL1	keet DL1	Sui cit DL1	-
joint	kɔɔ B1	ɣɔɔ B1	SWT kh-/xɔɔ C1	*x B/C
open	hoy A1	hay A1	SWT khay A1	*x-
pangolin	lin C4	lil C4	CSWT lin B4, Si nim B4	*l- B/C
put away, hide	kuuu C1	kuuu C1	WN kuuu C2	-
take down, remove	pyt DS1	plet DS1	SWT pot~plot	*pl-
shoot, sprout	naaŋ A2	naaŋ A4	Yay raan A4	*nr-/nl- A
mountain slope	təliŋ B1	-	Po-ai liŋ B1 Sui khiŋ, hiŋ	*hl- B
day, sun	məŋee A2	ɲen A2	WM ŋon A2 PAN *wáyɪ	*ŋw- A
thunder	phɛɛ C1	phraa C1	Yay pja C1	*phr- C
who, person	prɤ A1/2		WM prau A2 SWT = A1	*pr-/br-

Note: CT = Central Tai, SW = Southwest, Si = Siamese, WN = Western Nung, WM = Wu Ming

The Nyo of Hinboun and other Mekong-adjacent portions of what is now Borikhamxay Province in Laos as well as on the Thai side in Tha Uthen, Ban Phaeng, and their environs, are decidedly different in language and culture as well as physical appearance. Likewise the Nyo of Sakon Nakhon differ from the other two Nyo groups. Thus in the cases of Yi and Ou south of the Red River delta, the original linguistic identity was lost although the ethnonym has been retained. In the case of Mène and Pao a number of distinctive substrata of Northern branch lexical items have been retained (Chamberlain 1991c). At least one peculiar item, pointed out by Ferlus (1988), was shown by Ostapirat (1998) to occur in the Be substratum of a Chinese dialect spoken on the coast west of Canton.

Mène is a language spoken in a number of villages located on a tributary of the Song Ca in central Nghệ An Province, Vietnam. Some examples of Northern Tai branch substrata are provided here as evidence of the southern penetration of the Ou peoples. Some of the etyma demonstrate shared phonological and lexical features, while a few are relatable only to Sek and/or the other Kra-Dai families of Kam-Sui and Hlai.

### Lo, Luo (Grak, Rak, Lạc)

Lo (Lạc), in Chinese pinyin *luo*, disappeared from the more easterly portions of Annam following the invasion of Ma Yuan that ended in the year 44 CE (Taylor 1983), and thereafter only occur to the west where the ethnonym is preserved among the Tais of Sip Song Chũ Tai as the lineage name of ruling nobility.

Holm (personal communication) observes:

On the Luo Yue: this is the one Bai Yue group on which the earliest Chinese sources are at their most hazy. They provide a pedigree for all of the other Bai Yue royal houses, patrilaterally of course, but do not do so for the Luo Yue. Archaeological sites linked to the Luo Yue in China are concentrated in the southern and western parts of Guangxi—in other words, those areas which are now inhabited by speakers of Southern Zhuang [Central Tai] dialects.

This scenario fits well with Luo (Lo in Tai) becoming a lineage name in Black Tai, and the name of the first ancestor of the Lao, Khun Lo, who evolved into a heavenly spirit. Their location in the Sip Song Chũ Tai lies just to the west of the Luoyue archeological sites in southwestern Guangxi.

Holm continues, calling attention to one chapter of the posthumous work of Meng Wentong (1983:82-88), on ‘Luo Yue Yu Xi Ou’ 駱越與西甌 [The Luo Yue and Western Ou]:

This chapter is devoted mainly to demonstrating that the reliable ancient sources all indicate that the Xi Ou and Luo Yue were two separate groups, rather than a single group called Ou Luo (Âu Lạc). A passage on pp. 85-86 deals specifically with the Luo Yue, and adduces evidence that their location was Jiaozhi 交趾 and Jiuzhen

九真. The location in what later became Jiaozhi is attested for the Luo Yue as early as the Zhou dynasty (11<sup>th</sup> century BCE–221 BCE), though the northern part of present-day Vietnam was not part of the Chinese empire until the Former Han period (206 BCE–24 CE). Jiaozhi and Jiuzhen were commanderies within the Chinese empire from the Han period (206 BCE–220 CE) onwards. While the boundaries of Jiaozhi and Jiuzhen as administrative units changed several times, ancient sources put the Luo Yue in the same general area down to Jin times (317–420 CE).

The Luo Yue domains are also described in early Chinese sources as contiguous with the Qin dynasty commandery of Xiangjun 象郡. [eastern Guangxi and northeastern Vietnam]

Further discussion of early Chinese sources and a summary of the archaeological evidence is found in Meng Wenyong and Yueguo Shigao (2010:329-335). The distribution of Xi Ou and Luo Yue sites in Guangxi and western Guangdong [see Figure 6] is based on this source. The Xi Ou locations in eastern Guangxi and western Guangdong are locations of archaeological sites showing Xi Ou characteristics; these are based on a report by Jiang Tingyu (2005), senior archaeologist attached to the Guangxi provincial museum (Museum of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region). The geographical distributions of these peoples found in old Chinese sources have been shown to have a fairly high degree of correlation with archaeological evidence.

Zheng Xiaolu's work (2007) shows that in the eastern regions of Guangxi and western Guangdong, the major influences on bronze artifact typology came from the Wu and Yue regions in eastern China; this influence began to show itself strongly in the late Spring and Autumn period (770-476 BCE), and continued on into the Warring States period (475-221 BCE).

By contrast, in the central and western parts of Guangxi, no clear signs of Wu and Yue influence on bronze types is found for the Western Zhou and Spring and Autumn periods, and from the late Spring and Autumn and Warring States period only very limited types of decoration and new implements are found that show any Wu-Yue influence, and only in very small numbers (p.175). The bronze culture of this region had its own independent characteristics, beginning in the late Western Zhou period (11<sup>th</sup> century–771 BCE), which it retained well into the late Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods—by contrast with the areas to the east, which came under heavy influence of Wu and Yue (p.180). This Luo Yue bronze culture was different again from that of the Dian kingdom in Yunnan. (David Holm, personal communication)

According to Holm, the approximate boundary between Luo Yue and Xi Ou in Lingnan is the Liu River (see Figure 4), part of the Pearl River system (see Figure 6). It is not precisely the isogloss between Northern and Central branches of Tai as it stands today, but nevertheless is close given the 2,200 year time gap. and the general westward movements of the two Yue groups. No doubt, as he remarks, the Xi Ou, with their superior bureaucratic and military organization, easily overran the Luo Yue, and probably other Kra and Rei groups, as they pushed west to become the northern branch

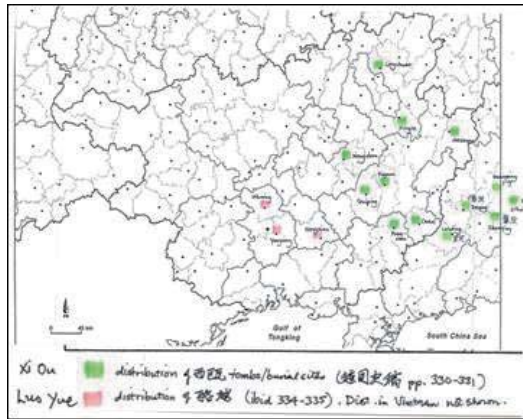


Figure 6. Lingnan. Distribution of Luo Yue (pink) and Xi Ou (green) archaeological sites. The Luo Yue are only those mentioned by Meng Wenying (2010). Courtesy of David Holm.

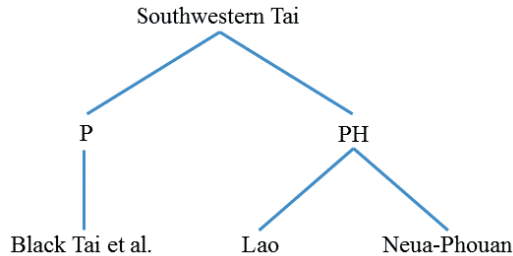
of Tai, and south where Yi and the Ou became Yooy and Nyo respectively. The Luo Yue moved westward, starting from the Liu River, or the Xieng Commandery, which can be taken as the site of the early isogloss.

The early settlers of Xi Ou or Luo Yue must have arrived in an area already populated by Rei (Li) and at this time they both acquired the ethnonym of Tai (PCSW \*day A) and Hlai (PH \*hləy A), assuming they are cognate. This etymon does not occur in the Northern branch. This could also mark the period when the Hlai moved to Hainan from Jiuzhen.

Aurousseau identifies the Lo with a ruling family in Min Yue and Yue Dong Hai, but provides few details.

I am not sure how or when the Lo (*lɔʔA*) lineage name dropped the final consonant.<sup>35</sup> Karlgren's Old Chinese and Middle Chinese reconstructions for 駱. 鷓. 雒 all show forms such as \*glak, kərak, kəlak or klak, clearly the name of the interdicted totemic bird

of the Lo lineage *kok* 'greater hornbill', that agrees with Chinese \*kalak' 駱 'white horse with a black mane,' and 雒 'aquatic bird,' (also 'black horse with a white mane'). These terms are thought to refer to the white-bellied sea eagle common along the south China coast. Perhaps 雒 refers to the cormorant (Chamberlain 1991d; Schuessler 2007), for which the Sino-Vietnamese word is *cọc*.<sup>36</sup>



Schuessler reconstructs simply:

OC lâk LH lak OCM \*râk

But Baxter and Sagart have:

OC [r]ʰak

It is not clear why the initial velar is omitted though Baxter's pharyngeal fricative

<sup>35</sup> One possibility is the propensity of Tai-Thay languages in this area to drop final -k after long -aa-, usually though, it is replaced by a glottal stop.

<sup>36</sup> For a more complete discussion see Chamberlain (1991d). Black Tai lineages are associated with interdicted totemic animals or plants, and in some cases roles in society, such as the *Leuang* lineage who are spirit masters, and frequently are related to ancient families such as the *Kwang* (< Ghwang, Hwang) who interdict tigers (or all wild cats).



off-glide does suggest a retracted element.

In Black Tai, we are faced with the peculiar situation of the lineage name Lo (*lɔɔ A*) and the totemic bird of that lineage, the greater hornbill (*kok*), as cognates descended from the same root but by differing *routes*, (no pun intended).

Subsequent west and southwest migration, must have taken place in waves.

The PH group obviously moved south earlier, resulting in the curious, but undeniable, juxtaposition of Siamese and Neua-Phuan versus Southern Thai-Sukhothai-Lao revealed in the analysis of the tone systems.<sup>37</sup>

Overall then, the picture of movements of Kra-Dai peoples and polities that emerges from the linguistic evidence available so far might look something like Figure 7.

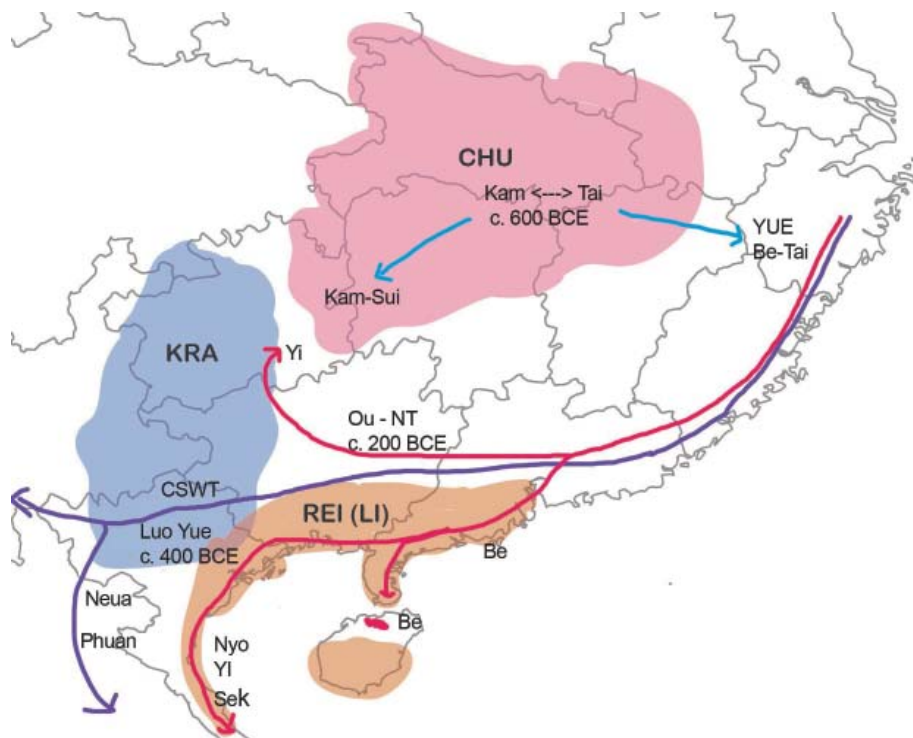


Figure 7. Map showing approximate movements of Kam-Tai and Tai peoples into spaces occupied by Kra and Rei. The dark purple line represents Luo-Yue (CSWT) and the red line Ou-Yue (NT).

<sup>37</sup> P and PH here are just indicative labels and refer to languages where Proto-Tai voiced stops became either (PH) voiceless aspirated or (P) voiceless unaspirated (e.g. as in Thai and Tai). It has nothing to do with the pronunciation of labial fricatives *ph* and *f* etc as misunderstood by Kelly (2013). Kelly makes many mistakes in his paper due to a lack of familiarity with historical Tai linguistics. Most egregious is ignoring tone classes thus negating many of his lookalike etymologies. For example, *bô* (A tone) is unlikely to mean ‘father’ as it has the wrong tone, it should be *bô* with the B tone to correspond with Tai. Likewise my cannot mean ‘mother’ unless it were spelled *m̄ȳ*. On the other hand, *phụ đạo* ‘person+nobleman’ does work as both Tai and Vietnamese have the C tone for both words. The latter are native Tai words and not contact forms with Chinese.

## Tais of the Lao-Viet borderlands from the 10<sup>th</sup> century

The stability of Tai identities in the interior mountain valleys in the face of several hundred years of unsuccessful attempts by Vietnamese governments, beginning with Đại Cồ Việt, to enforce Chinese-style “civilizing” policies, demonstrates the force and extent of their presence. As John Whitmore (2000:12) puts it: “There was to be no cultural respect, ... the new Vietnamese civilization in its cosmic dimensions had to be spread to other peoples.”

The southern Zhuang’s resistance to Chinese and Vietnamese domination since the Sui and Tang periods is quite well known. The same type of conflict was found further west and southwest of the Red River, and in the basins of the Black, the Ma, the Chu and the Ca. Whitmore has carefully documented such interactions during the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries in the former provinces of Phong and Ai, which included the Tais of Sipsong Chu Tai, the Houa Phan, the Ai Lao, the Phouan, and Lao of Louang Prabang. The ethnographic map of Thanh-Hoá in Robequain (1929) is ample evidence, clearly illustrating the position of the Mường squeezed between Tais and Vietnamese. It is also a reminder that, beginning at least as early as the Spring and Autumn period, the territory of Jiaozhi was settled by Kra, Rei (Li), Luo Yue, and Xi Ou who cannot be equated ethnically with the Sinicized-Austrosiatic people we now know as the Vietnamese. In contrast to Guangdong, where sinicization of the Yue was absolute and their languages were no longer spoken, in Vietnam it was the Mường living in and around the Chinese colonial centers at the mouths of the Ca and the Ma whose languages and cultures were affected, giving rise to Sinicized Mal or Mwai (Mường) whom we now call Vietnamese.

These changes did not occur without conflicted attitudes towards sinicization. Whitmore (2000:7) describes the situation admirably:

Through the middle of the [14<sup>th</sup>] century, there was also an ideological shift in the capital, moving away from the attempt at a unified Thien Buddhist belief to one based on the Chinese Confucian Classics and seeking answers in Chinese antiquity. One aspect of the latter was the effort to draw a line between the lowland Vietnamese and other peoples – Chinese, Cham, and Lao. The Vietnamese were not to dress like the people of the north nor were they to speak like their Southeast Asian neighbors. This was a major change from the previous century (1280) when a Tran prince had sat down to eat with the Nguu-hong [Tai of Sip Song Chu Tai] and had thereby maintained peace. By the 1430s, this notion would become more formalized and more extensive, as lowland literati like Nguyen Trai and his colleagues stated the following: “We Vietnamese cannot follow the languages and clothing styles of the Chinese, the Chams, the Lao, the Siamese, or the Cambodians and thereby create chaos among our own customs.”

The various Tai languages and cultures survived intact in the interior, but gradually disappeared elsewhere, though their influence on Mường and Vietnamese agriculture and local administrative terminology remains. In fact, as Phan, cited above, has suggested, we do not really know when the Vietnamese language began to be used, especially in

the north. He in fact estimates 100 or 200 years after the establishment of the new state in the 11th or 12th century.

The presence of the various Yue in Annam led to the eventual naming of the “Viet” -name in the 10th century when *Đại Cồ Việt* was formed. Precisely how this happened is not entirely clear. It can be assumed that the two main waves of Yue moving south from the original state, encountered the ancestors of the Hlai or Li (Rei) when they entered the area around Canton, and came to dominate them politically as far south as Jiuzhen and beyond. The first wave were Luo Yue, known as Lạc in Vietnamese history. They were in turn overrun by a second wave of Ou Yue or Western Ou (Xi Ou in Chinese, Âu in Vietnamese, Nyo in Tai, and Nyeo in Mường). It seems likely that the common people of the time were mostly Li (Rei) and that they were governed by Luo, and later Ou. Local people might have referred to them simply as Yue, and that is the term that ultimately prevailed. The linguistic similarity of Li and Tai would no doubt have led to a wide variety of localized multilingual relationships the depth and breadth of which can no longer be discerned.

### Conclusion

The general sequence of events might have unfolded something like this.

The ethnonym of Kra (PKD \*khra C) can be traced to the reconstructed forms for Xia (*kra?*) and Chǔ (*tshra?*). The onset of the Zhou dynasty at the end of the 2nd millennium BCE coincides roughly with the establishment of the Chǔ fiefdom and the ethnolinguistic stock known as Kra-Dai (Tai-Kadai). The ancestors of the Kra family proper, resident in the southwestern portion of Chǔ, began to disperse southwards, ostensibly as a result of the upheavals surrounding the end of Shang, the beginning of Western Zhou, and the gradual rise of Chǔ into a full-fledged kingdom by the 8th century BCE. Kra peoples eventually occupied the territories that later became Guizhou, Lingnan and Annam. Further to the east, the Li or Rei (*rə?* / *rəi*) also separated and moved south during the Spring and Autumn Period, by an easterly yet inland route, to the areas between Canton and Jiuzhen (Thanh Hoá), as well as to Hainan island.

The groups known as Yue (*jwət*, *wat*), that is to say the Be-Tai, broke away next, in the 6th century BCE, relocating to the east on the coast around the present day province of Zhejiang, conquering the state of Wu (*ɲwâ*, *ɲua*) shortly thereafter. Left behind in Chǔ were the ancestors of the Kam-Sui family, who seem to have remained largely in place, shifting only slightly south, not far from their current locations in Hunan, southeastern Guizhou, and northwestern Guangxi. When Chǔ conquered Yue around 333 BCE, the Yue royal families began to migrate south. First the Luo Yue wave moved into Lingnan and Annam and then westward into northeastern Laos and the Sip Song Chǔ Tai area, followed by the Xi Ou (Western Ou). The Luo Yue became the Central-Southwestern Tai, while the Xi Ou came to form the Northern Branch, including Be and Sek. These Yue and Ou overpowered and no doubt enfeoffed or otherwise absorbed the Rei and Kra in most places. Qin conquered Chǔ in 223 BCE and then Han conquered Qin. Thus began the long Sinitic colonization of southern China and Vietnam.

Jiaozhi (< *krau?* < Lao) would have been Kra-Rei territory. Interestingly, another

name it was known by, Keo, which in Tai, became an exonym referring to Tai speaking peoples, as in the epic poem of Thao Cheuang, was only later applied to the Vietnamese.

An abbreviated timeline linking the linguistic picture to Chinese history follows:

Phase 1 – 1100-800 BCE

Shang [*lhanj*] ends, Zhou [*tiu*] begins, Chǔ [*tscha*] is born  
Kra (Kadai) separates from the Kra-Dai [*khra*] mainstream

Phase 2 – Early Spring and Autumn Period, 771-685 BCE

Political upheavals in Zhou causing capital to relocate  
Li [*rei*] splits off and moves south/southeast

Phase 3 – Chǔ Hegemony – Late Spring and Autumn, 613-453 BCE

King Zhuang expands Chǔ which becomes the most powerful state  
Yue [*jwat*] (Be-Tai) separates from Kam-Sui moves east to the coast, conquers Wu [*ɣwa*]

Phase 4 – Warring States Period, 475-221 BCE

Chǔ annexes Yue, 333 BCE; Qin conquers Chǔ 223 BCE  
Yue royal families begin to move south, forming the Bai Yue  
Luo Yue [*grak jwat*] (Central Southwestern Tai) overruns the lands of the Rei and the Kra in southern Lingnan and Annam  
Xi Ou [*sei ʔəu/jəu*] (Northern Tai) follows and comes to dominate northern Lingnan, including some areas formerly held by Luo Yue in Jiuzhen

Phase 5 – Qin (*dzin*) Dynasty 223-206 BCE; Han (*hans, xans*) Dynasty, 206 BCE – 220 CE

Qin-Han begins colonization of the south, establishing commanderies at Canton, Jiaozhi, and Jiuzhen. Recorded history of the south begins  
Mobile Yue Central Southwestern Tai polities continue to establish chiefdoms, dominating the original Kra and populations in western Annam, and Rei in Jiuzhen  
Ou Yue and Yi [*ʔiai, ʔaiʔ*] Northern Tais push west from Nan Yue  
Be and Sek [*threək*] separate and move west and south from Nan Yue, respectively

I have gone into some detail here on the eastern portion of the Kra-Dai range for two reasons. First, to demonstrate that the most likely earlier inhabitants of the lower Red River basin were Kra-Dai, whether of the Rei or the Kra variety, followed by waves of Yue beginning in the Qin-Han dynasties. But while the Yue-Tai association is acknowledged by most scholars, the pre-Yue roles and geographical locations of the Kra and Rei peoples are usually overlooked.

The second reason is to set the stage for the movement of Tais further west and southwest, beginning approximately in the 10th century, following a series of anti-Chinese uprisings in Lingnan and Annam which began in the Sui and Tang dynasties. The westward Tai (Luo-Yue) expansion was a continuation of the Yue migrations and must have happened quite rapidly given the relative lack of linguistic diversity among the Tai dialects extending from northwestern Vietnam through southern Yunnan, Laos, Thailand, Burma all the way to northeastern India. Considerable attention, historical, anthropological, and linguistic has been focused on this area, much more than on Tai groups to the east and to the north. No doubt this is due to the proximity of the Thai and Lao nations, and the presence of Tai state-like political formations such as found at Meuang Swa, Ayutthaya, Sukhothai, among the Nyouan or Lanna in northern Thailand, the Lue principality of Sip Song Panna, the Shan states in Burma, and the Ahom in Assam, all with Indic-based writing systems and extensive collections of manuscripts, grist for the historian's mill in more recent periods than we have been addressing in the eastern portions of the Kra-Dai speaking world.

### *Abbreviations*

AA	Austroasiatic	NT	Northern Tai
AN	Austronesian	OC	Old Chinese
CSW	Central Southwestern	OCM	Minimal Old Chinese
CSWT	Central Southwestern Tai	PAN	Proto-Austronesian
KD	Kra-Dai	PH	Proto-Hlai
KS	Kam-Sui	PKD	Proto-Kra-Dai
LH	Later Han	PKT	Proto-Kam-Tai
MC	Middle Chinese	PT	Proto-Tai
MY	Miao-Yao (Hmong-Mien)	SWT	Southwestern Tai

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