

# **The Gelao languages:** *Preliminary classification and state of the art*

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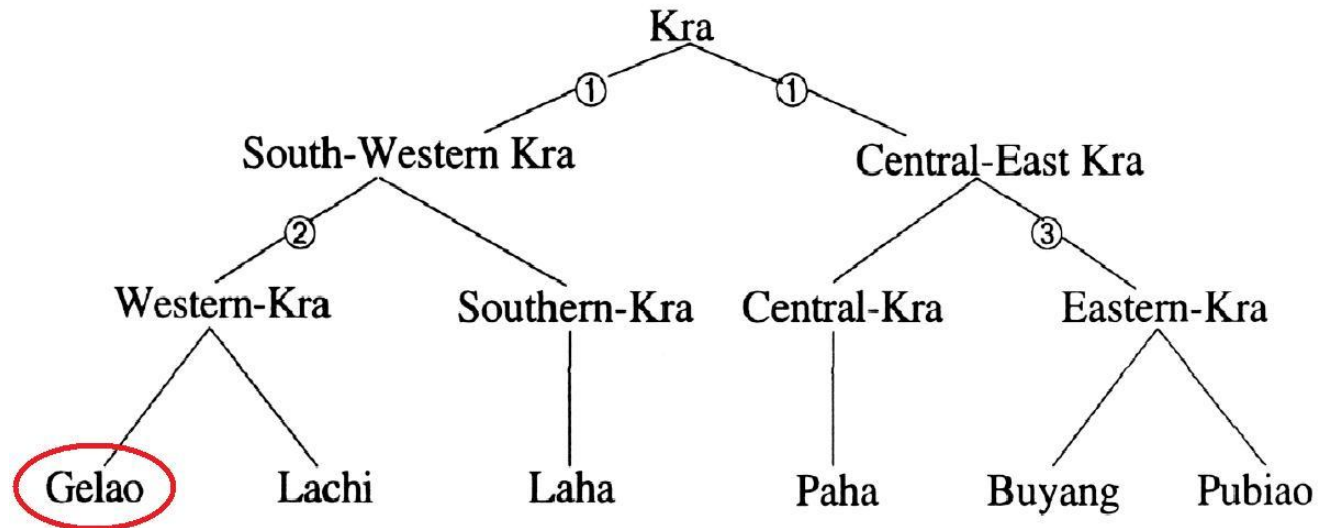
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# Gelao's position in Kra-Dai

Kra-Dai (*Tai-Kadai*): primary branches

- Tai
- Hlai
- Ong Be
- Kam-Sui
- **Kra**



Source: Ostapirat (2000)

# Goals of this talk

- Give a demographic **overview** of a little-known, but very important, language group
- Put together linguistics, anthropology, and history (mostly in Chinese) to get the “**big picture**”
- Propose a new preliminary internal **classification** of Gelao that takes recent data (post-2000) into account
- Explore some of Gelao’s **interactions** with neighboring languages
- Explain why Gelao is in **urgent need of more scholarly attention**

# Why Gelao?

- Why Gelao deserves much more attention in Kra-Dai studies:
  1. *Phylogenetic position*: Divergent within KD
  2. *Internal diversity*: Many distinct varieties, most likely around **10 languages** (mutually unintelligible lects)
  3. *Historical importance*: Major ethnic group in Chinese historical sources; known as Geliao 仡僚, etc.
  4. *Large present-day ethnic presence*: Ethnic population of 500,000; speaker population: < 6,000.
  5. *Language endangerment*: All Gelao varieties (except Central Gelao and Judu Gelao) are **moribund with < 50 speakers left**; fieldwork is extremely urgent.

# Internal diversity

- **Gelao** is by far the most internally diverse group of Kra languages.
- Remaining 3 Kra groups: relatively little internal variation
  - **Buyang** cluster (6 langs.): *Paha, Ecun, Langjia, Rongtun, Qabiao, En (Nung Ven)*
  - **Lachi** cluster: *Flowery, Chinese, Pocket, Red, Long-Haired, Black, White* groups
  - **Laha** cluster (2 langs.): *Wet Laha, Dry Laha*

# Origins

- Gelao homeland: **west-central Guizhou** province, SW China
- Guangxi, Yunnan, and Vietnam populations: recent arrivals during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) due to civil unrest
- *Early Gelao* dispersal: upstream migration along the **Beipan River 北盘江 watershed**
- Dispersal of the *Buyang* (also Kra speakers): upstream along the **Nanpan River 南盘江 watershed**; evidence from toponyms with the prefix *Yang-* 央 (Li Jinfang 1999).

# Likely dispersal routes of Kra-Dai in the Pearl River watershed



Adapted from <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Zhujiangrivermap.png>

# Gelao agriculture and material culture

- Pioneering wet / paddy agriculturalists who opened up fields
- Recognized as the “first farmers” by local neighboring groups (Li Jinfang 2006)
- Hanging coffins (also among the Buyang)
- Dental ablation (tooth removal)



*Gelao dental ablation  
(Nicholas Tapp 2003)*



# Guizhou province: Recent incursions vs. Autochthonous populations

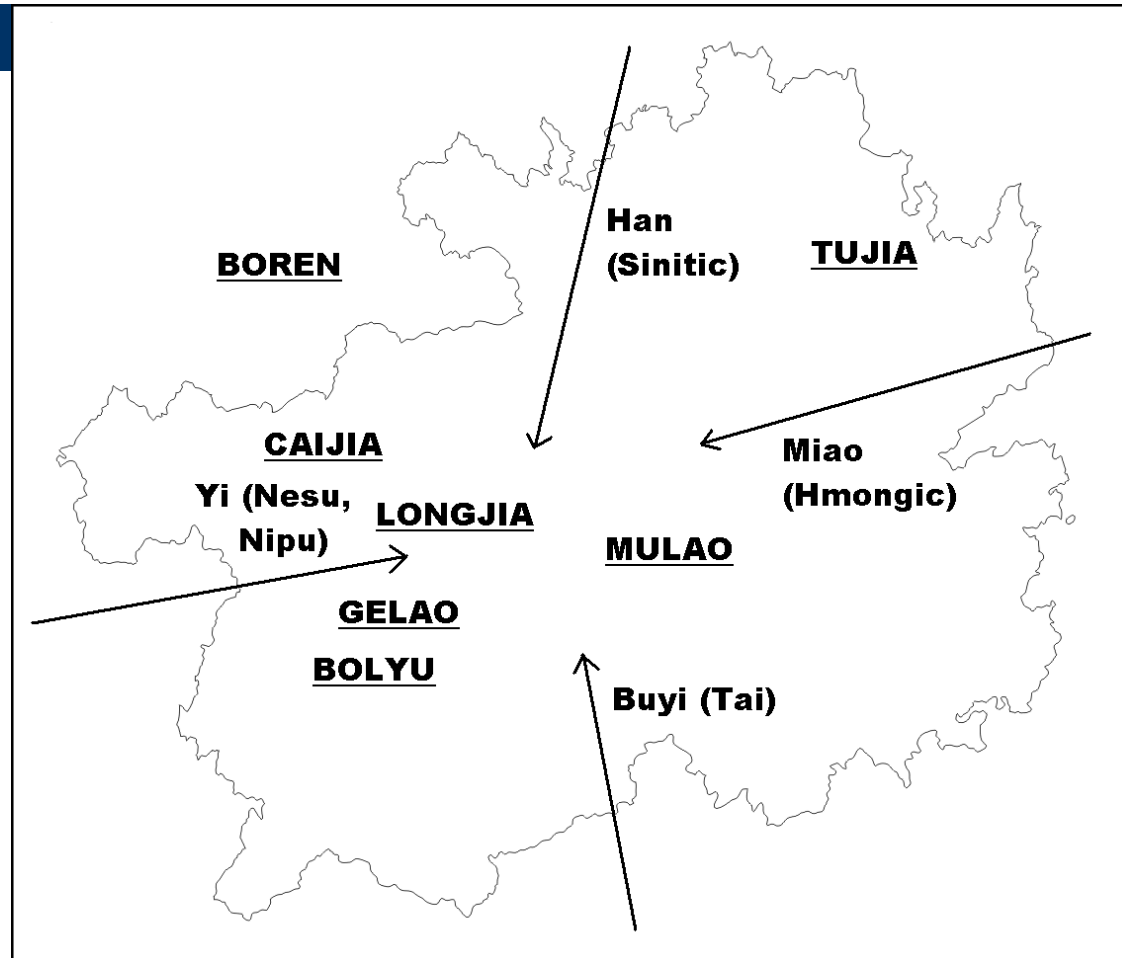
## Recent arrivals

(< 1,000 B.P.):

- *South:* Buyi (Tai)
- *West:* Yi (Loloish)
- *East:* Miao (Hmongic)
- *North:* Han (Sinitic)

Native (> 1,000 B.P.):

- Gelao (Kra-Dai)
- Bolyu (Austroasiatic)
- Longjia, Caijia (TB)
- Tujia (TB); Boren?



Map created by author

# Proposed classification

Preliminary classification proposed, based on **similarities / lexical isoglosses** tentatively identified in a Gelao vocabulary database (available upon request).

- 1. **White Gelao** has 2 branches: (1) “Core” (Judu, Moji, and Wantao), and (2) China-Vietnam border group
- 2. **Central Gelao** has 2 branches: (1) *Hakei* and (2) *Qau*, following Yumay Shen (2003). Each have little internal variation.
- 3. **Red Gelao** has at least 5 branches (most diverse): *Hongfeng*, *Bigong*, *Houizitian*, *Mulao*, and *Vandu*; China-Vietnam border (“Vandu”) variety is divergent

# Proposed classification: Red Gelao

## Red

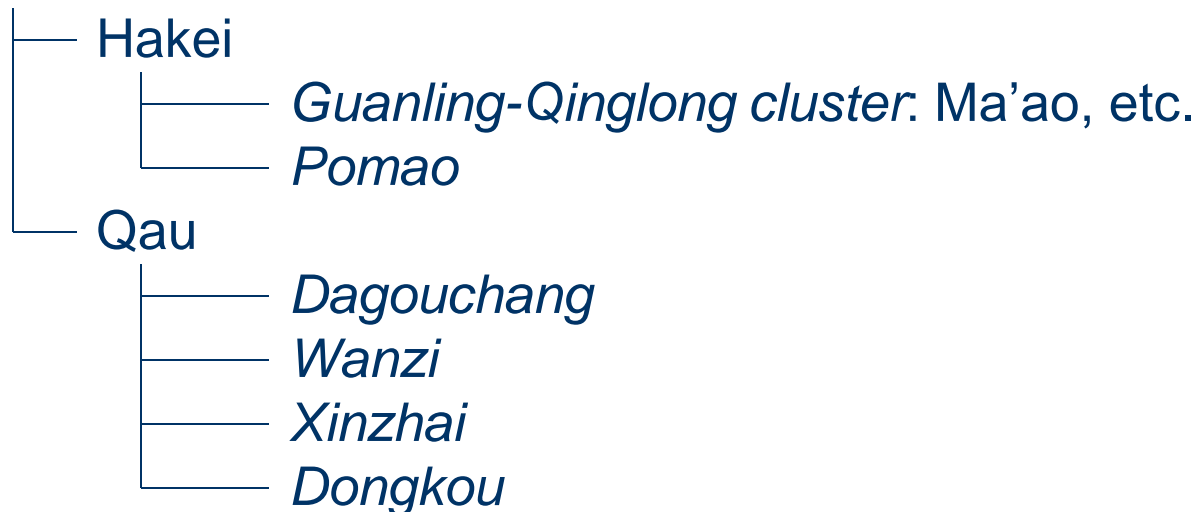


# Proposed classification: White Gelao & Central Gelao

## White



## Central



# Gelao database, 100 words

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O
1		<i>Proto-Kra</i>	<i>Hongfeng</i>	<i>Bigong</i>	<i>Houzitian</i>	<i>Mulao</i>	<i>Vandu</i>	<i>Judu</i>	<i>Moji</i>	<i>Wantao</i>	<i>Yueliangwan</i>	<i>Zhenfeng</i>	<i>Sanchong</i>	<i>Dagouchang</i>	<i>Wanzi</i>
59	flower	*hŋa C	ŋəu43	ŋou55	xə44 teŋ31 ŋəu44	ŋo33	(xə55 xo55) xua55	hu35 ʔo31	hua53	hwa55	la33 bi55 bi55	kəu35 huŋ42	kəw33 hn53	ŋkau55 u55	ŋkau55
60	fruit	*C-mak D	lan31	lɛ31 və31	teŋ31 mi35	vai53	ntoŋ55 ntoŋ55	ma35	ma31 ma24	ma35	ma31	taŋ31 taŋ31	ntaŋ31	mei31	mei31
61	stone	*p-ra A, *ʔuŋ A	ʔa43 ʔui55 wo31	qəw55 zəw33	lan31 wo44	qo53 ɣ24, ə55	qo35 la55 ɣi55	vu31 ŋ31	po31 oŋ31	bo35 uŋ31	qəu33 vu55 (Fy)	paŋ35 ŋ35	poŋ35	hrau31	əw33
62	water	*ʔuŋ C	ŋ55	i55	uŋ44	uŋ33	aŋ35	ŋ33	oŋ53	ʔuŋ55	m55	ŋ42	ʔm53	əw55	əw55
63	salt	*ŋo A	ŋəu31	no33	ŋəu44	ŋə31	ŋəŋ55	qə0 ŋiu31	kə31 ŋiu31	kə0 ŋiu31	ŋiu55	si42 ŋə42	ŋu31	ŋteəw33	ŋteəw44
64	moon	*m-djan A, *(C-)tjan A	ma43 lai31 ʔau13	(ma55) lo31 hua13	me13 zi44	kə33 va31	mo35 to55 sə31	ʔuŋ31 dʒi31	oŋ53 dʒi31		zi55	ta31	ntə31	mo21 tsu33	tsu33
65	month		lai31	ləw31		fə31		pu31 dʒi31	bə31 dʒi31		zi55		ntə31	thu33	thu44
66	sun	*(l-)wan A	ma43 yua43	ləw31 ləw13	ʔdo31	kə33 zə31	ma35 lua55	la35 ʔlu31	la24 lu31	la35 lu35	du35 vu33			mo21 lei33	klei33
67	day	*(h)wen A	han43 diuŋ31	vai33	han31 toŋ44	ve31	la55 ŋi35	wuŋ31	zi31 hoŋ31	ji31 wuŋ31	vu35 duŋ35	fe35	ze35	sen33	sen44
68	year	*m-(p)ɣin A	ɡuai31	vlei31	ŋkuei31	tsə24	kui31	plei31	pləi31	plei31	plə55	pi35	pzz35	plei33	plei33
69	sky		ʔlau13 yui31	və31	a44 yui31	li24 fə31	u55 vu55	lwei31 lwei31	vəi31 vəi31	wei31 wei31	du35 zu55	to13 ji31		ʔuei55	vlei44
70	star	*d-luŋ A	lei55 lau31	lɛ31 lɔ33	te44 zəu44	tso53 zə31	ma35 ndu55	duŋ31 dai33	duŋ31 dai53	ʔdai55	duŋ35 dai33	tsə35	tʃə35	lei31 tsu33	lei31 tsu33
71	cloud		hu55	qa55 vaw13 (xəw13)		ve53	aŋ55 ua31	qə0 pu35	zəu31	tou31	mi31 sai55	tu31 lu31	m53 ŋə33	ten55 pa55	ten44 pau44
72	rain	*jəl A	min31	mi(e)31	mei31	me31	mi55	man31	man31	man31	man35	maw31	mən31	mei33	mei44 zəu44
73	wind	*gwjen A	ɣuan31	vai31	xəu35	fəi33	a55 xəw31	vu31 juŋ31	bəi31 juŋ31	ba33 juŋ31	fai31	ve31	ve	ven55	ven44
74	fire	*pui A	hye43	piə33	fe44	va31	a55 pi55	pi31, pji31	pi31	pi31	pi55	pai35	paj35	pai33	pai33

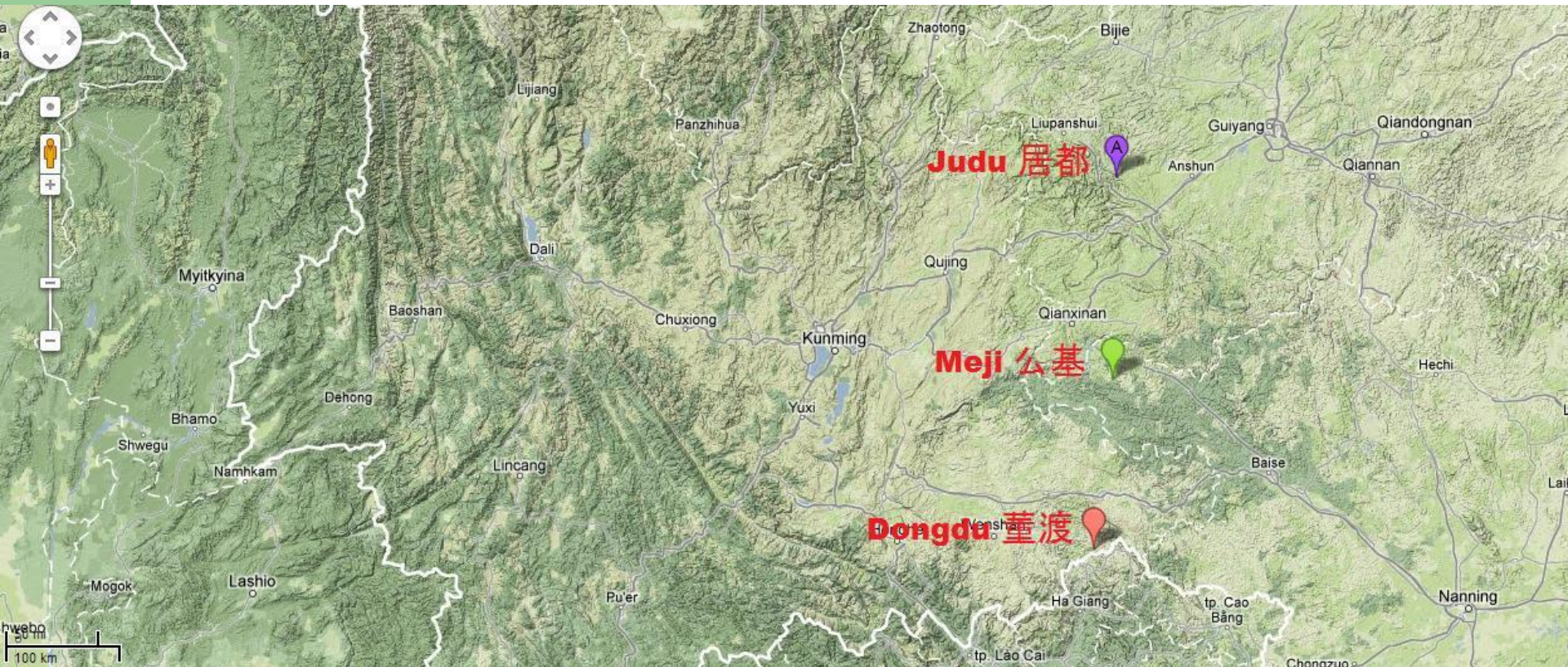
# Most spoken varieties (least endangered)

Total speakers of all Gelao languages: no more than 6,000 people (Zhou Guoyan 2004)

- **Judu** (Core White Gelao): more than 1,000; village cluster with the most Gelao speakers in China
- **Hakei** (Central Gelao; in Guizhou): 2,000 scattered across SW Guizhou
- **Hakei** (Central Gelao; in Sanchong, Guangxi): 300 in Sanchong village
- **Qau** (Central Gelao): 1,000 scattered across central Guizhou



# White Gelao locations





# Central Gelao locations





# Red Gelao: most endangered

*Red Gelao locations I visited in western Guizhou and SE Yunnan from July to August 2012:*

- **Hongfeng** 红丰村, Pudi Township 普底乡, Guizhou
  - about **15** fluent speakers
  - lateral retroflexes discovered; e.g., *ma*<sup>43</sup>/*o*<sup>13</sup> ‘bird’
- **Shajing** Township 沙井乡, Guizhou
  - **one (1)** speaker (age 80+); Hongfeng variety
- **Langdai** Township 郎岱镇, Guizhou
  - **one (1)** speaker (age 88); last speaker of Houzitian variety
- **Tiechang** Township 铁厂乡, Yunnan
  - **one (1)** semi-speaker of *ua*<sup>35</sup>*nte*<sup>31</sup>; 50 speakers in Vietnam

# Red Gelao locations





# Last surviving speaker of Houzitian Red Gelao: Guo Yunxiu 郭云秀 (88)



# Research priority: Red Gelao

- Red Gelao, compared to Central Gelao and White Gelao, is:
  - *Most internally diverse*: at least 5 mutually unintelligible varieties
  - *Most endangered*: all varieties have fewer than 50 speakers
- Crucial for reconstruction:  
Except for the China-Vietnam border variety (“Vandu”), all Red Gelao varieties (along with Paha) are the only Kra languages to have retained **Proto-Kra retroflex distinctions**, which appear as **spirants** in Red Gelao varieties.

# Red Gelao: Proto-Kra retroflex distinctions preserved

- Proto-Kra \*m-ɬa A ‘eye’ >
  - Hongfeng *pa43 ɕiu43*
  - Bigong *zəw33 zəw55*
  - Houzitian *tə44 su44*
  - Mulao *li33 zo31*
- Proto-Kra retroflex and stop series merge to a single stop series in most synchronic Kra languages.
- cf. Proto-Austronesian \*maC<sub>a</sub>; (*ma*) *ta* in most other Kra languages

# Gelao influences: Tibeto-Burman

- Yi (Loloish) loanwords occur in Gelao (Li Jinfang 2006), but are “sporadic.” Little/no Kra loanwords in Yi.
  - **Yi > Gelao power structure:** Yi chieftains ruled over the Gelao several hundred years ago, after military incursions into Guizhou (Zhou Guoyan 2004)
- Open rimes and disyllabic forms in Gelao – also in the nearby TB branches *Lolo-Burmese* and *Tujia*
- Kra languages have final and sometimes **circumfixed negation** (e.g., Bigong Gelao ma<sup>31</sup> ... ɔ<sup>33</sup>)
  - Typical of Tujia and Naga languages such as Mongsen Ao; rare in South China.

# Gelao negation < Tibeto-Burman

- Gelao (Wanzi) (Zhang 1993)

*su*<sup>33</sup>*ta*<sup>33</sup>      *vu*<sup>13</sup>      ***a*<sup>33</sup>**

we                  go                  **NEG**

‘We are not going.’

- Tujia (Northern) (*Tujiayu Jianzhi*:73)

*kai*<sup>35</sup>                  *gi*<sup>55</sup>*kua*<sup>55</sup>                  *tiã*<sup>21</sup>                  ***ta*<sup>35</sup>**

this                  watermelon                  sweet                  **NEG**

‘This watermelon is not sweet.’

- Interestingly, also Mongsen Ao (Coupe 2007)

# Gelao influences: Austroasiatic

- **Bolyu** (an isolated AA language with 1,000 speakers in W. Guangxi today) has some *Gelao loanwords*; they are neighbors with the Gelao.
- Examples: Bolyu *tshe1* ‘person’ (ultimately from Loloish), *ʔi3* ‘he/she’; both not present in Bugar.
- Chinese historical records indicate that ethnic Bolyu (Lai 徕) had lived in west-central Guizhou – the Gelao homeland/nucleus
- However, the opposite (AA to Gelao) is much rarer.



# Sporadic AA loans in Gelao: ‘nose’

- Yueliangwan White Gelao *bu35 mai31* ‘nose’ (AA form not found in any other Kra language)
- Proto-Kra ‘nose’: *\*teŋ C* and *\*hŋət D*
- Compare Bagan *pə55 mā̃31* ‘nose’ < PMK (Shorto) *\*mu(u)h* ~ *\*muus* ‘nose’
- But, borrowings are by far from Gelao to Austroasiatic, not vice versa. Hence, the following power structure in W. Guizhou:  
**Yi (TB) > Gelao (KD) > Bolyu (AA)**

# Conclusion

- The Gelao migrated upstream to W. Guizhou to become one of the first agriculturalists there. 3 primary branches survive today: Central, White, Red
- Once widespread and important; now highly marginalized and endangered culture
- Should deserve more scholarly attention: diverse, historically important; archaic features such as Proto-Kra retroflexes
- Fieldwork is urgent, especially for Red Gelao: many varieties at the brink of extinction. Many varieties described in Zhang Jimin (1993) are now extinct.

# Special thanks

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- Sharon Rose
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- Peter Norquest
- All informants in the field, and their friends and families

# Gelao data sources

- Red Gelao
  - Hongfeng: Zhou Guoyan (2004), He Yancheng (2008)
  - Bigong: Li Jinfang (2006)
  - Houzitian: My own recordings (2012)
  - Vietnam Red Gelao: Jerold Edmondson recordings (1997)
- White Gelao
  - Judu: Zhou (2004), Li Jinfang (2006)
  - Moji: Guangxi Minority Languages (2008)
  - Wantao: Li Jinfang (2006)
  - Yueliangwan; Fengyan: Li Jinfang (2006)
- Green Gelao (Hakei)
  - Pomao: Zhou Guoyan (1999)
  - Sanchong: Shen Yumay (2003), Guangxi Minority Languages (2008)
- Qau
  - Wanzi: He Jiashan (1983)
  - Dagouchang: Li Jinfang (2006)

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