Austro-Tai revisited

Weera Ostapirat
Mahidol University

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1. Topics:

- Austro-Tai hypothesis defined
- Austro-Tai and relevant hypotheses: Sino-Tai and Sino-Tibetan-Austronesian (STAN)
- A basic vocabulary test-list for Austro-Tai, Sino-Tai, and STAN
- Kra-Dai *a: and *ɤ: and implications on KD/AN relationship
- Some remarks on Kra-Dai (KD) and Austronesian (AN) correspondences for penultimate syllables.

2. Austro-Tai defined

Austro-Tai (AT) in this talk refers to a language family to which Kra-Dai (KD) and Austronesian (AN) belong, as sister languages.

I would like to define this clearly at the beginning because the KD/AN connection as proposed by Benedict (1942, 1975, 1990) has always been part of the grander schemes that include more language groups such as Austroasiatic, Miao-Yao, and Japanese.

3. Austro-Tai, Sino-Tai, and Sino-Tibetan-Austronesian

The issue of further connection of KD/AN to AA (thus 'Austric') or MY (and Japanese) is beyond the scope of this presentation. I will however address two hypotheses that are incompatible with Austro-Tai in some ways. These are Sino-Tai and Sino-Tibetan-Austronesian.

In brief, Austro-Tai and Sino-Tai are conflicting hypotheses. Scholars who support Sino-Tai believe in the genetic relationship between Tai and Chinese which, together with Tibeto-Burman (TB), form the grand Sino-Tibetan family.

(This grand 'Sino-Tibetan' scheme, which may be traced back to Conrady (1896), is not necessarily a current view of Sino-Tibetanists, many of whom do not believe in Sino-Tai and consider Chinese as simply one of the several major branches. See also van Driem 2005).

On the other hand, AT and STAN are incompatible in a different way. STAN endorses the genetic relationship of KD and AN, but demotes KD into an AN subgroup, thus nullifies the AT configuration.

(The macro-family similar to STAN is earlier envisioned by Wulff (1942), who believes that Tai, Chinese, and Austronesian are all related. The STAN hypothesis, however, makes it clear about the family hierarchy. TB and Chinese make up the ST family, which is then related to AN. In this scheme, Kra-Dai is regarded as a branch of Austronesian).

4. Questions

The following questions are thus what we seek to answer:

•Are Tai (Kra-Dai) and Chinese genetically related?
•Are Sino-Tibetan and Austronesian genetically related?
•Is Kra-Dai an Austronesian subgroup?

5. A basic vocabulary test-list

A test-list of 24 basic vocabulary items is offered here for a quick look at the nature of relationship between Sino-Tibetan, Austronesian, and Kra-Dai languages.

This shortlist of 24 items includes words that appear in both Holman et al's 40-wordlist and Yakhontov's list of 35 basic words. Holman et al (2008) select the 40 basic words from Swadesh's 100-wordlist based on ranked stability. The test-list lexical items, except three (two, die, full), also belong to the Leipzig-Jakarta 100-wordlist (Tadmor et al 2010).

	TB	OC	AN	KD
1. Blood	s-hwyəy	hwit/k	daRaq	pɣla:c
2. Bone	rus	kut	CuqelaN	Kudɣ:k
3. Ear	r-na	njə?	Caliŋa	qɣrɣ:
4. Eye	mik/myak	m(r)juk	maCa	maTa:
5. Hand	g-lak	hju?	(qa)lima	(C)imɣ:
6. Nose	s-na(:r)	bjit(s)	ŋjuŋ≳ijuŋ	(?)idaŋ
7. Tongue	m/s-lay	Ljat	Sema	(C)əma:
8. Tooth	s-wa	K/thjə?	nipen	lipan
9. Dog	kwəy	kwhi/en	asu	Kama:
10. Fish	ŋya	ngja	Sikan	bala:
11. Horn	krəw	krok	(quRuŋ)	paqu:
12. Louse	srik	srjit/k	kuCu	KuTu:
13. Fire	mey	hmoj?	Sapuy	(C)apuj
14. Stone	r-luŋ	djAk	batu	KaTi:l
15. Sun	nəy	njit/k	qalejaw	Kada:w 'star'
16. Water	ti(y)/twəy	h(l)juj?	daNum	(C)aNam
17. I	ŋa, ŋay	nga, ngaj?	aku	aku:
18. Thou	naŋ	nja?, njəj?	iSu, Simu	isu:, amɣ:
19. One	it	?jit/k	isa/esa	itsɣ:
20. Two	g-ni-s	njəjs	duSa	sa:
21. Die	səy	sjəj?	ma-aCay	maTa:j
22. Name	r-miŋ	mjeng	ŋajan	(C)ada:n
23. Full	b/pliŋ	(l)jeng	penuq	pəti:k
24. New	sar	sjin(g)	baqeRuh	(C)ama:l

Table 1: A basic vocabulary test-list

[The Tibeto-Burman (TB) and Old-Chinese (OC) forms are from Baxter (1995) and the
AN forms are from Blust (1999), with some adjustments according to his on-line
Austronesian Comparative Dictionary (ACD).]

From the Table, we find the related forms falling into two divisions--
between TB and OC on the one hand and between AN and KD on the other.

This confirms the Sino-Tibetan unity and supports the Austro-Tai (KD + AN) hypothesis. Negative results are found for Sino-Tai and STAN hypotheses.

Apart from 'horn', for which Sagart (2005) considers the AN and OC forms to be related, only two words from the test-list are included among the 61 roots proposed as evidence for STAN ('bone' AN *kukut instead of *CuqelaN and 'water' OC *[B]t-hlɨm? 'liquid, juice' instead of *h(l)juj? 'water').

	AN	OC
Bone	kukut	[A]kut
Water	daNum	[B]t-hlɨm? 'liquid, juice'

AN otherwise does not share any forms with Sino-Tibetan in the basic word test-list.

6. KD: a sister or a daughter language group to AN?

The question concerning the hierarchical relationship between KD and AN is of a different nature. The shared KD/AN forms support the genetic relationship of KD/AN but do not directly negate the possibility that KD is a daughter language of AN.

A piece of evidence from the vowel correspondence of KD *a: and *ɤ: to AN *a is presented here to suggest that KD and AN are co-ordinatedly related.

First, I will present the evidence of KD *a: and *ɤ:. The representative dialects are Siamese, Heitu, and Lingao for Tai, Hlai, and Be languages respectively.

	Tai	Hlai	Be	
eye	taː	tshaː	da	*aː
dog	maː	maː	ma	
leg, thigh	khaː	haː	va	
pestle	saːk	tshaːk	hak	
carry on pole	haːp	tshaːp	hap	
hand	mɯː	məɯ	mo	*ɤː
navel	dɯː	rəɯ	do	
child	luːk	dɯːk	lək	
night	khɯːn	---	xən	
forget	lɯːm	dɯːm	---	

Table 2: KD *aː and *ɤː

Notes:
• For 'child', see Po-ai /lɯk/ < Proto-Tai *lɤːk. Siamese, and the Southern Tai dialects, have developed PT *ɤː > uː before a velar ending.
• In Hlai and Be, the variant reflexes occur in an open syllable: KD *ɤː > /əɯ/ in Hlai and *ɤː > /oː/ in Be.

Table 3 shows examples of the correspondences KD *aː and *ɤː to AN *a. For a simplified picture, I will use Hlai forms as KD representatives in the comparisons. Other languages are referred to when Hlai forms are lacking. (Si = Siamese, Wm = Wuming).

	AN	Hlai (Ht)	Hlai (Bd)	
eye	maCa	tshaː	tshaː	*aː
leg, thigh	paqa	haː	haː	
five	lima	maː	paː	
sun, star	qalejaw	raːu	raːu	
boat	aluja	raː	vaː	
shrimp	qudaŋ	raːŋ	vaːŋ	
plant	mula	raː	gwaː	

child	aNak	dɯː?	ɬɯːk	*ɤː
borrow	Sezam	jɯːm (Si)	---	
one	isa	tshəɯ	tshəɯ	
hand	(qa)lima	məɯ	məɯ	
navel	puja	rəɯ	vəɯ	
chaff	qepah	voː (Be)	---	
bear, n.	Cumay	mui	mɯi (Wm)	

Table 3: KD *aː/*ɤː and AN *a

As long as such correspondences KD *aː and *ɤː to AN *a cannot be explained away as innovations on the KD side, it is simplest to assume that they indicate early Austro-Tai distinctions preserved in KD but lost in AN. This implies that KD is a separate sister language rather than an AN daughter language group.

7. Some remarks on KD and AN sound correspondences

I have earlier discussed in some details the sound correspondences between KD and AN (Ostapirat 2005). In this short presentation, I would like to focus on the less stable part of the disyllabic forms, that is, to show how we may reconstruct early penultimate vowels and consonants from pieces of evidence. In some cases, we can arrive at the full disyllabic forms for Proto-Kra-Dai, which in turn help justify our KD/AN comparisons.

Table 4 illustrates the examples of KD penultimate vowel *u corresponding to AN *u. In the Table, we can see that KD penultimate vowel *u has the rounding effect on the initial development of the Baoding dialect of Hlai. The changes are recurrent and consistent.

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	KD	Ht	Bd	AN
eight	*-aɭ-	ruː	gou	*walu
head	*-uɭ-	rau	gwou	*qulu
to plant	*-uɭ-	---	gwaː	*mula
star, sun	*-ad-	raːu	raːu	*qalejaw
boat	*-ud-	raː	vaː	*aluja
shrimp	*-ud-	raːŋ	vaːŋ	*qudaŋ
raw	*-ud-	riːp	viːp	*qudip
eye	*-aT-	tshaː	tshaː	*maCa
head louse	*-uT-	tshou	fou	*kuCu

Table 4: KD penultimate vowel *u

While Hlai preserves excellent traces of KD penultimate vowel(s), it is hardly useful for the reconstruction of the penultimate syllable onsets. In Table 5, I show corroborating evidence from the Mulam (Ml) language of the Kam-Sui branch, where the onsets are better preserved. This, together with Hlai evidences of penultimate vowels, may lead to the reconstruction of the full KD disyllabic forms. (Dw = Dawu dialect of Mulam).

	KD	Ml	AN
to plant	*muɭ-	mɣaː	*mula
eye	*maT-	mɣaː (Dw)	*maCa
head louse	*KuT-	khɣoː	*kuCu
head	*Kuɭ-	kɣoː	*qulu
fart	*Kət-	khɣət	*qetut
sour	*Kəts-	khɣəm	*qa(n)sem
chaff	*Kə(m)p-	kwaː	*qepah

Table 5: Mulam reflexes of early KD onsets

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The languages of the Kra branch also show reflexes that are useful for the reconstruction of KD penultimate onsets. (Table 6). As we may note, the KD penultimate vowels are neutralized into /a/ (phonetically [ɐ] or [ə]). Again, together with Hlai evidence on penultimate vowels, we may sometimes arrive at fully reconstructed disyllabic KD forms. (By = Buyang (E-Cun dialect), Lj = Langjia Buyang, Tm = Ta Mit Laha)

	KD	By	AN
leg	*paq-	pa ʔaː	*paqa
bear, n.	*Tum-	ta mɛː (Lj)	*Cumay
head louse	*KuT-	ʔa tuː	*kuCu
shoulder	*Kab-	ʔa ʔbaː	*qabaRa
raw	*Kud-	ʔa ʔdip	*qudip
nine	*siw-	sa waː (Tm)	*Siwa
eye	*maT-	ma taː	*maCa
bird	*maN-	ma nuk (Lj)	*manuk

Table 6: Kra reflexes of early KD onsets

Table 7 provides a quick look at etyma reconstructible with KD penultimate vowel *i and evidence for this in the Kam-Sui languages.

	AN	Kam	Sui
tongue	*Sema	maː	maː
hand	*(qa)lima	mjaː	mjaː
fire	*Sapuj	pui	wiː
tooth	*nipen	pjan	wjan

Table 7: KD penultimate vowel *i

8. Conclusion

• The Austro-Tai stock, as the ancestor of Kra-Dai and Austronesian families, is a viable hypothesis. It is supported by a sizable number of shared basic vocabulary items, which are justified by regular sound correspondences.

• Some phonological correspondences indicate that KD and AN are sister languages.

• The genetic relationships between Chinese and Tai (Sino-Tai hypothesis) and between Sino-Tibetan and Austronesian (STAN hypothesis) are not well supported by the basic vocabulary test-list.

• The proposal that KD is an AN subgroup, which is based mainly on numeral evidence (Sagart 2004), can be debated on its own right (i.e. part of the AN subgrouping issue) even if Sino-Tibetan/Austronesian connection is unfavored.

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