

Review of Mao Zongwu and Li Yunbing. 2001. *Jiǒngnàiyǔ Yánjiū* [A study of Jiongnai]. Beijing: Central Nationalities University Press. 322 pp.

The appearance of this fine book on the Jiongnai language, a Hmongic (Miao) language of the Hmong-Mien (Miao-Yao) language family, is most welcome. *Spoken by only about 1,000 people¹ in scattered small hill villages in the eastern part of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region (Jinxiu Yao Autonomous District), Jiongnai qualifies as an endangered language. It is also quite conservative phonologically, and thus important for historical studies. This is the first full-length study of the language, and both the wealth of information and the detailed comparative-historical analysis presented by the authors will be of enduring value.*

“Jiongnai” is a sinicization of [kjoŋ³³ nai³³] in the *Lónghuá* dialect, and means ‘mountain people’. The language is also referred to as “*Huālán Yáo*” or ‘blue-flowered Yao’. It is represented by two dialects in this book: *Longhua* (the same dialect used to represent Jiongnai in the 1995 comparative study by Wang and Mao) and *Liùhàng*. *They are different in important respects (see chapter 4); and it seems that Longhua preserves more of the ancient initial consonant clusters which makes this language so important for reconstruction. For example, certain prenasalized velar initials with medial glides in Longhua regularly correspond to degraded fricative and glide initials in other Hmongic languages (see p. 113), and provide the “missing*

¹. The count of 822 speakers in Mao, Meng and Zheng 1982 (p. 8) was based on an earlier census.

link” between the Chinese source of these very old loanwords and proto-Hmong-Mien:

stone

Old Chinese² *C-rjats > Man. *lì* 砺 ‘whetstone’
 proto-Hmong-Mien **ŋk-rau* A (Jiongnai /*ŋkja* 1/)

forest

Old Chinese *C-rjɨm > Man. *lín* 林
 proto-Hmong-Mien **ŋk-rəm* B (Jiongnai /*ŋkjɔŋ* 3/)

dragon

Old Chinese *C-rjong > Man. *lóng* 龍
 proto-Hmong-Mien **ŋg-rɔŋ* A (Jiongnai /*ŋkjaŋ* 2/)

The structure of the book will be familiar to readers of this series: after an introductory chapter, there follow chapters on phonology (pp. 1-19), word-formation and Chinese borrowings (pp. 20-39), and syntax (pp. 40-83). Then after a brief chapter comparing the phonology, lexicon, and syntax of the two above-mentioned dialects (pp. 84-93), the authors present a valuable set of comparisons between Jiongnai and other languages of the Hmong-Mien family in the longest chapter of the book (pp. 94-253). They address in turn similarities and differences between Jiongnai and Miao (Hmongic) languages; Jiongnai, Bunu and She (Ho Ne); Jiongnai, Pahng, and Younuo; and Jiongnai and Yao (Mienic) languages. In the concluding section of this chapter, the authors identify Jiongnai as a Miao language (although ethnically Yao), one more closely related to She (Ho Ne)—itself also a Miao language—than any other. The book concludes with

2. The OC reconstructions are by Baxter (1992); the HM reconstructions are mine.

a glossary of words given in both Jiongnai dialects, and a sample text of a tale about twin brothers.

Baxter, William H. 1992. *A Handbook of Old Chinese Phonology*. Vol. 64: Trends in Linguistics Studies and Monographs. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

Mao Zongwu, Meng Chaoji and Zheng Zongze. 1982. *Yáozú Yǔyán Jiǎnzhì* [A sketch of the languages of the Yao people]. Beijing: Minzu Chubanshe [Central Nationalities Press].

Wang Fushi and Mao Zongwu. 1995. *Miáoyáoyǔ Gǔyīn Gòunǐ* [The reconstruction of proto-Miao-Yao pronunciation]. Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe [China Social Sciences Press].

Martha Ratliff
Wayne State University