

SQUIBS AND ETYMOLOGIES

Vietnamese /s/ and /x/: the chũ nôm evidence

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As first established by Maspero (1912), Vn. initial s- (Hanoi /s/, Saigon /s/) is the reflex for PMK clusters of stop + r/l type, e.g. Vn. sông 'river'; Bahnar kroŋ, Cham (loan) krauŋ, Mon krəŋ, P-Waic *kloŋ~*kroŋ. Most of the closely related Muong languages have cluster reflexes of various kinds but Khen, on which Thompson (1976) based his PVM reconstructions, has simply x- here. Thompson reconstructed *kh- for an intermediate Vn./Khen level but this will hardly do since five of the forms involved (see Maspero, cit. supra and Huffman 1977 for the MK cognates) are written in the native chũ nôm ('southern script') with initial l- (in MC) phonetic elements: sau 'behind, after' 婁 liu; sáu 'six' 老六 lâu (cf. 1055a); sâu 'deep' 深 liu (cf. 123a); sông 'river' 河 liuŋ (cf. 1193a); sống 'live' 生 lun (cf. 1180a) (chũ nôm from Génibrel); cf. also sao (=saaw^A/) 'star' 星 lâu, an apparent early loan from Kadai (AT): Saek traaw¹ < P-Tai *ʔdraaw^A (see Benedict 1975: Glossary under SUN/STAR/SKY). Another pair of Vn. forms in this group (Khen x-) but without known MK correspondences are written similarly: sàng 'coffin' 椁 liəŋ (cf. 898a); sang 'go across' 郎 lân (735r). All in all, some 50 Vn. forms with initial s- are written in this fashion in the chũ nôm, attested for the 8th century A.D. but generally of much later date, employing both newly created characters (e.g. 老六) and standard (often rare) characters used as phonetic elements (e.g. 深); see the excellent review by Nguyễn (1979).

One can hardly set up an earlier *kr- or *kl- in view of the chũ nôm l- (rather than *ki- or the like) but *xl- or *hl- seems likely, yielding Khen x-, with support from a pair of early loans from Chinses, where initials of this type are not unknown (P-Min has *sl->*hl-): sáp 'wax' 蜡 lâp (cf. 637a); sen 'lotus' 蓮 liän (213d) (but contra Downer [1973] sú'c, Khen xək 'strength, force' probably belongs not with 力 liək, id. (928a) but rather with 念 t'iek (921g), as written, since both have the additional glosses 'prepare, put in order' and 'to order'); cf. also sang 'bark of a tree which the poor chew with betel', written 郎 lân (735r), and Laha hlə:ŋ 'betel', from a complex AT etymon (see Benedict 1975: Glossary under ARECA).

Other Vn. forms in the same group (Khen x-) are written with chũ nôm, presumably of later origin, that reflect the shift to s-. These include sām 'thunder' (cf. 620c), with MK comparisons (Maspero); cf. also sa 'fall' and sóc 'squirrel' (Maspero), sua 'to bark' (Huffman), all with MK cognates. The single outside comparison in this group also points to an earlier *hl-: sát 铁 'iron' (金 402a), Khen xək; P-Tai *hle:k (PVM, like Burmese, has -ac < *-ik ~ *-ek). It should be noted, however, that Khen also has x- for Vietnamese s- in Sino-Vietnamese loans such as số (123r), Khen xo 'number' (cf. Boro kh- < *s-).

Rather surprisingly, the *chũ nôm* also point to an earlier */l/ or */r/ in four Vn. forms with initial x- (Hanoi and Saigon s-). PMK initial *s- regularly yielded Vn. t-, as pointed out by Maspero: *tóc* 'hair'; cf. Mon, Stieng *sok*; Khmer *săk*; P-Semai **sok*, with Vn. x- corresponding rather to a palatal stop elsewhere in MK: Vn. *xu-ơng* 'bone', Khen *s+əŋ* ~ *siəŋ* (PVM **c'+əŋ*); Khmer *cʔəŋ*; Khmu *cʔaaŋ*, P-Semai **jʔaaŋ*. It is highly significant that one of the four forms involved appears to be the Vn. cognate of PAA *(ca)cak (partial reduplication) 'tear/torn': Kherwari (Munda group) **cacak*: Mon *cak* (Benedict 1975: 476), viz. *xạc* 'torn' 落 *lâk* (~ *xác*, without l- in wr.), pointing to an earlier (pre-Vn. level) infixated form such as **c/r/ak*, with x- for *c- in the (secondary) consonant cluster (cf. 'bone', above). It also seems significant that a second form in this group is connected with a puzzling set discussed by Thompson (p. 1146): *xông* 'to lower' 降 *luŋ* (cf. 1180); cf. *xuông* 'to descend', (no l- in wr.); Khen has both *xuəŋ* 'lower' and *t'uəŋ* 'descend', the latter suggestive of an earlier cluster with */t/ or */c/; these forms are possibly related to P-Tai **loŋ*^A (N. Tai **rɔŋ*^A) 'descend'; **looŋ*^C 'descend (float down) a stream'. No comparisons have been uncovered for the remaining two forms in this group: *xốp* 'soft, tender' 軟 *liáp* (637d); *xốp* 'fall upon (attack)' 擊 *liáp* (+637d).

¹ Abbreviations: AA Austroasiatic; AT Austro-Thai; MC Middle Chinese; MK Mon-Khmer; P Proto-; Vn. Vietnamese; VM Viet-Muong.

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