

# ON THE LANGUAGES OF THE JINGPO NATIONALITY\*

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This article discusses certain characteristics of language use among the Jingpo (Kachin) nationality, with a view towards exploring how social factors have influenced language use and development in an ethnic group that uses several languages.

## 1. THE SUBGROUPS OF THE JINGPO NATIONALITY AND THEIR LANGUAGES

The people of the Jingpo nationality resident in China live mainly in Luxi (潞西), Ruili (瑞麗), Longchuan (龍川), and Yinjiang (盈江) counties of the Dehong (德宏) Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture in Yunnan Province. They number about 100,000. The Jingpo nationality can be divided into five subgroups: the Jingpo (景頗), the Zaiwa (載瓦), the Leqi (勒期), the Lang'e (浪峨), and the Bola (波拉). The following is a chart summarizing the names by which each group addresses itself and the other group:

	<i>Jingpo</i>	<i>Zaiwa</i>	<i>Leqi</i>	<i>Lang'e</i>	<i>Bola</i>
<i>Jingpo</i>	tʃin <sup>31</sup> pho <sup>731</sup>	a <sup>31</sup> tsi <sup>55</sup>	lǎ <sup>31</sup> ji <sup>55</sup>	mǎ <sup>31</sup> ʒu <sup>31</sup>	po <sup>31</sup> lo <sup>31</sup>
<i>Zaiwa</i>	si <sup>55</sup> tɿŋ <sup>55</sup>	tsai <sup>31</sup> va <sup>51</sup>	lǎ <sup>31</sup> tʃhi <sup>55</sup>	lǎ <sup>31</sup> ləŋ <sup>51</sup>	pǎ <sup>31</sup> lo <sup>31</sup>
<i>Leqi</i>	phuk <sup>55</sup> vu <sup>51</sup>	tsai <sup>31</sup> vu <sup>51</sup>	lǎ <sup>31</sup> tʃhi <sup>51</sup>	ləŋ <sup>31</sup> vu <sup>51</sup>	pǎ <sup>31</sup> lo <sup>51</sup>
<i>Lang'e</i>	phauk <sup>55</sup> vɔ <sup>31</sup>	tsa <sup>55</sup> vɔ <sup>31</sup>	lǎ <sup>31</sup> tʃhi <sup>55</sup>	lɔ <sup>31</sup> vɔ <sup>31</sup>	pǎ <sup>31</sup> lo <sup>31</sup>
<i>Bola</i>	phauk <sup>31</sup> va <sup>31</sup>	ti <sup>31</sup> va <sup>31</sup>	lǎ <sup>31</sup> tʃhi <sup>35</sup>	lɔ <sup>31</sup> va <sup>31</sup>	pǎ <sup>31</sup> la <sup>55</sup>

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The Jingpo people have a strong sense of national identity. Not only are all members of the nationality aware of the particular subgroup to which they belong, but they are also clear about the subgroup affiliation of everyone they know. To outsiders they refer to themselves as the Jingpo, but among themselves they like to use their subgroup names, considering themselves members of distinct ethnic groups. This division into branches is one of the important characteristics of the Jingpo, and it has played a key role in the history of the nationality.

The members of the various branches live in geographically overlapping regions. The Jingpo and Zaiwa, the most populous subgroups, occupy large areas. The Xishan (西山) district in Luxi county, the Zhanxi (盏西) district in Yinjiang county, and the Dengjia (等戛) area in Ruili county are inhabited by the Jingpo. The Leqi, Lang'e and Bola subgroups have smaller populations, and their communities are generally limited to the size of single villages. Most areas have mixed populations; only a few villages are inhabited entirely by people of a single subgroup. In a multi-subgroup village, usually one subgroup is recognized as the main subgroup. Yinqian (引欠) township in the Santaishan (三台山) district of Luxi county is a typical multi-subgroup township. Every village in this township is inhabited by people from several different subgroups, but within each village one subgroup predominates. For example, the Zaiwa are considered the main group in Bangwa (邦瓦) village, the Lang'e predominate in Yinqian village, the Leqi predominate in Guanglin (广林) village, and the Bola outnumber the others in Kongjia (孔家) village. There are also a few villages containing different groups in relatively equal proportions. In villages inhabited by people from different clans, a single family often includes people of different clans.

The various subgroups within the Jingpo nationality have similar economic systems and modes of production, similar marriage and funeral customs, similar styles of dress, and similar religions. Although the Jingpo subgroups may have developed out of different proto-groups historically, they gradually came to resemble one another through a long period of contact, and developed into a single nationality. The differences among the subgroups are mainly manifested in their languages; each subgroup has its own distinct tongue, and the same line that separates the subgroups separates the languages.

As to the classification of the five languages, it is my opinion that they *belong to two different branches within Tibeto-Burman. The Jingpo language* belongs to the Jingpo branch, while the Zaiwa, Leqi, Lang'e, and Bola languages belong to the Burmish branch. Jingpo is unlike the other four, in that it has many characteristics different from those of the Burmish languages. For example, Jingpo bilabial and velar consonants not only have palatalized forms,

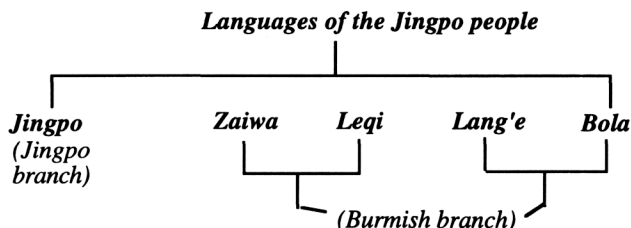
but retroflex forms as well; the majority of simple words are disyllabic and have a reduced first syllable;<sup>1</sup> there are few classifiers, and even these are not required when nouns are counted as individual units; causatives are marked by adding a prefix to the simplex form; there are numerous particles in the verb phrase that express the inflectional categories of mood, person, number, and direction. Morphologically the language is rich, exhibiting morphophonemic alternation, reduplication, and affixation. Even more important, many words in Jingpo are not cognate with words in the other four languages. Also the rules of sound correspondence between cognates in Jingpo and the other languages are quite irregular, and there are only a few examples of each sound correspondence. The following are examples of some non-cognate lexical items:

<i>gloss</i>	<i>Jingpo</i>	<i>Zaiwa</i>	<i>Leqi</i>	<i>Lang'e</i>	<i>Bola</i>
<i>man</i>	mǎ <sup>31</sup> ʃa <sup>31</sup>	pju <sup>51</sup>	pju <sup>31</sup>	pju <sup>31</sup>	pju <sup>55</sup>
<i>nose</i>	lǎ <sup>55</sup> ti <sup>51</sup>	nɔ <sup>51</sup>	ny <sup>33</sup>	nɔ <sup>31</sup>	nǎ <sup>55</sup>
<i>tongue</i>	ʃiŋ <sup>31</sup> let <sup>31</sup>	ʃo <sup>51</sup>	ju <sup>33</sup>	ʃɔ <sup>31</sup>	ʃa <sup>55</sup>
<i>bee</i>	lǎ <sup>31</sup> kat <sup>31</sup>	pjo <sup>31</sup> jan <sup>31</sup>	pju <sup>33</sup>	pjo <sup>35</sup> jɔ <sup>31</sup>	pja <sup>31</sup>
<i>eagle</i>	kǎ <sup>33</sup> la <sup>33</sup>	tsun <sup>51</sup>	tsɔn <sup>51</sup>	tsum <sup>31</sup>	tsɔn <sup>55</sup>
<i>bear</i>	tsap <sup>55</sup>	vam <sup>51</sup>	wɔm <sup>31</sup>	vɛ <sup>31</sup>	vɛ <sup>55</sup>
<i>monkey</i>	wɔi <sup>33</sup>	mju <sup>731</sup>	mjuk <sup>31</sup>	mjauk <sup>31</sup>	mjaui <sup>731</sup>
<i>tree</i>	phun <sup>55</sup>	sik <sup>55</sup>	sək <sup>55</sup>	sək <sup>55</sup>	sak <sup>55</sup>
<i>house</i>	n <sup>55</sup> tǎ <sup>51</sup>	jum <sup>51</sup>	jɔm <sup>33</sup>	jam <sup>31</sup>	jam <sup>55</sup>
<i>needle</i>	sǎ <sup>55</sup> mjit <sup>55</sup>	ap <sup>55</sup>	ŋap <sup>55</sup>	ŋɛ <sup>755</sup>	ŋɛ <sup>755</sup>
<i>one</i>	lǎ <sup>55</sup> ŋai <sup>51</sup>	ʒa <sup>31</sup>	ta <sup>31</sup>	ta <sup>31</sup>	ta <sup>31</sup>
<i>old</i>	tiŋ <sup>31</sup> la <sup>33</sup>	maŋ <sup>31</sup>	ma:ŋ <sup>33</sup>	mɔ <sup>35</sup>	mɔ <sup>31</sup>
<i>deep</i>	suŋ <sup>31</sup>	nik <sup>31</sup>	nɔ:k <sup>31</sup>	nɔ <sup>731</sup>	na <sup>731</sup>
<i>new</i>	n <sup>31</sup> nan <sup>33</sup>	a <sup>31</sup> sik <sup>55</sup>	a <sup>31</sup> sək <sup>55</sup>	sək <sup>55</sup>	sak <sup>55</sup>
<i>many</i>	lo <sup>755</sup>	mjo <sup>31</sup>	mjo <sup>33</sup>	mjo <sup>35</sup>	mja <sup>31</sup>
<i>high</i>	tsɔ <sup>31</sup>	mjan <sup>51</sup>	mjan <sup>33</sup>	mjo <sup>31</sup>	mja <sup>55</sup>
<i>ascend</i>	luŋ <sup>31</sup>	to <sup>731</sup>	to:ɔ <sup>31</sup>	to <sup>731</sup>	ta <sup>731</sup>
<i>cry</i>	khɜap <sup>31</sup>	ŋau <sup>51</sup>	ŋau <sup>31</sup>	ŋuk <sup>31</sup>	ŋau <sup>55</sup>
<i>wear</i>	phun <sup>55</sup>	vut <sup>31</sup>	vut <sup>31</sup>	vɛ <sup>755</sup>	vɛ <sup>755</sup>
<i>sell</i>	tut <sup>31</sup>	uŋ <sup>31</sup>	vɔŋ <sup>55</sup>	auŋ <sup>35</sup>	auŋ <sup>35</sup>

Zaiwa, Leqi, Langsu, and Bola are close to Burmese and Achang, all belonging to the Burmish branch of TB, and all sharing characteristics not found in Jingpo. These languages share many cognates, but monolingual speakers of different languages have difficulty communicating with each other.

<sup>1</sup> I.e., 'sesquisyllabic'. [Ed.]

The main differences involve sound correspondences and the use of different lexical items; there are few grammatical differences. Whether these should be considered “language” or “dialect” differences is not yet clear. As for the relationships between the various languages of the Burmish branch, Zaiwa is closer to Leqi, while Lang’e is closer to Bola, and Zaiwa and Leqi are closer to Achang, while Lang’e and Bola are closer to Burmese. The following table illustrates the genetic relationships of the languages of the Jingpo people:



## 2. CHARACTERISTICS OF LANGUAGE USE WITHIN THE JINGPO NATIONALITY

Two noteworthy aspects of language use by the Jingpo nationality are its *stability* and its *concurrence*. Stability here refers to the fact that people of different subgroups prefer to use their own languages. As a result, a rich body of linguistic materials and literature, such as poems, stories, proverbs, and maxims, have developed separately in each language. Concurrence refers to the fact that besides the language of their own subgroup, many members of the Jingpo nationality can use the languages of two or three other subgroups with facility and without confusing them with their own language. Naturally, the people in mixed communities show higher concurrent language use than those in areas where only one subgroup is represented.

The choice of which language to use when members of two different Jingpo subgroups meet is not arbitrary. Rules involving social setting, generation, age, sex, and occupation govern the choice of language. In the following section, we analyse some important social settings and study the use of various subgroup languages by members of the Jingpo nationality.

### **In the family:**

Many Jingpo families include people from different subgroups. In such families, the language used by each member is stipulated by tradition. The children belong to their father's subgroup, and they use the language of that subgroup. If a father and mother are from different subgroups, the father and children use one language and the mother uses the other. Although husband