

Pa-hng development and diversity

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1. **Introduction.** The Pa-hng 巴𐄂 or Red Yao 紅仡 have traditionally been classified as belonging to the Hmongic Branch of Hmongic-Mienic, Bunu type, cf. Meng et al 1982.¹ However, Paul K. Benedict (1975:xxi, 1986) and Strecker (1987a, 1987b)—in light of its special features—have contemplated assigning Pa-hng to a separate branch of Hmong-Mien (Miao-Yao) along side Hmongic, Mienic, Ho Nte (She), and others. Strecker (1987b), however, reports that some Chinese linguistics regard this reclassification as hasty and seem more inclined to persevere in a tripartite division of Proto-Hmong-Mien. A second issue raised by Strecker (1987a, 1987b) was to divide Pa-hng into Northern and Southern forms. The Southern form would be represented by the Pa-hng of Guangxi Sanjiang Wenjie (cf. Mao et al) and perhaps also by the outlier Na-e of Vietnam (Bonifacy 1905), whereas Guizhou Gundong would be characteristic of the Northern type. The modest aim of this paper is not to broach the question of the ultimate placement of Pa-hng in the larger Stammbaum of Hmong-Mien from the top down, but instead to consider the pattern of microcosmic change from location to location as an aid to understanding where sound changes began and what areas they reached last. My result will require a more subtle differentiation than a dichotomous separation into Northern and Southern Pa-hng in which the dominant physical landmark of the area, the Rongjiang River namely, seems to have played a major role. Simultaneously I wish to present a corpus of data gathered at about ten locations that might be of further use in the solution to the questions of the history and development of the Hmong-Mien language group.

The Pa-hng live mostly in the NE corner of Guangxi-Zhuang Autonomous Region in Rongshui, Sanjiang, and Longsheng Counties and in adjoining areas of Guizhou Province at Liping, Congjiang, and Rongjiang Counties on both banks of the Rongjiang River. According to Mao et al (1982), the Pa-hng

throughout China numbered 10,375 in the late seventies. Outside of China there is an outlier group of about 2,000 Pa-hng living in Vietnam according to 1982 figures, where they call themselves

巴天 Batian or Baxing, and where they are referred to as the Lai Miao 'Immigrant Miao' or Hua Miao 'Flowery Miao' by the local people (Fan Honggui et al 1986). They say they migrated to Vietnam 200-300 years ago, coming over the sea. They live in three areas of Vietnam: (1) Zhanhua County Linfu Township and Anshan County Zhongshan Township; (2) includes Hexian Province Zhanhua County Youchan, Beiguang, and Hongguang Townships; (3) in Beiguang County on the right bank of the Jing River there are three Townships: Xinzheng, Xinli, and Yanping Townships, according to the Chinese translation of the Vietnamese original. They lived mixed with the Yao, Tai, and Sui peoples, raising two major crops: wet paddy rice (both glutinous and long-grain) and corn. Bonifacy (1905) recorded a few lexical items of their language to constitute the first contact by foreign scholars. Haudricourt (1954, 1971) has pointed out that this group is identical to the Pa-hng.²

The Pa-hng language data in larger amounts is found in Chang Kun (1947:96 and *passim*), who personally gathered vocabulary on Congjiang Xishan Dahua Pa-hng in 1941. Chinese specialists in Hmongic languages, notably Professors Wang Fushi and Chen Qiguang of Central Institute of Nationalities, have included some data in a number of their papers. The most extensive study has been performed on Guizhou Liping Gundong Pa-hng by Zhang et al (1985).

In the winter and early spring of 1990 Professor Yang Quan of the Central Institute of Nationalities and I were able to collect a body of vocabulary from about ten locations in Sanjiang and Rongshui Counties. In Sanjiang County these people are found in three settlement areas: Tongle 同樂,³ Laobao 老

巴⁴ and Gaoji Gongjiang 高基弓江.⁵ We were fortunate enough to obtain language help for Laobao and Tongle. The inaccessibility of Pa-hng villages made an onsite visit impossible, as the Pa-hng live in the most mountainous, most isolated, least fertile areas of Sanjiang County off of any public roads. They also plant only one crop of rice per year. These circumstances result in the Pa-hng being among the most impoverished of the minorities peoples of Sanjiang. Indeed, it seems to be a characteristic feature of the Pa-hng to crave isolation and hence it

is also their fate to endure a more austere existence than some of their brethren. Li (1985) likewise documents the Pa-hng's lamentable resistance to organized education and the Han language. This sad state of affairs is especially true among females, not a single one of which in Guizhou Province ever having finished elementary school, and not a single Pa-hng ever having graduated from college.

In early January 1990 we arrived in Guangxi Sanjiang Kam Autonomous County to work principally on Kam. A survey of the languages spoken in Sanjiang revealed that the Pa-hng also inhabited this area and thus a brief session of data elicitation was arranged. Our first interviewee was Mr. Pan Shengwen, a Yao Mjen village leader and official from Tongle Jindai Village 近代, who grew up speaking both Yao Mjen and Pa-hng. Shortly thereafter, we were able to conduct a more extensive session with Mr. Wan Rensheng of Laobao Bianlang 邊浪. In a second session Mr. Wan brought along two additional speakers from this very remote village, Mr. Wan Yuqing and Mr. Tang Xiangcai. We were able to make comprehensive audio, computer, and airflow recordings of the sounds of these speakers and document about 500 vocabulary items.

Our travels to Rongshui County to the south of Sanjiang in late February 1990 also were rewarded with even more opportunities to study Pa-hng. In this endeavor we were aided by Chairman Pu (first name unfortunately unknown), a Pa-hng and member of the Minority Affairs Committee of Rongshui County. He informed us that there was a special school in Rongshui County Seat to try to break through the cycle of entrenched illiteracy among the Pa-hng. The next day he brought over seven students from the school, each from a different area of the county and all native speakers of Pa-hng. Because each of the seven speakers was to repeat the same elicited item, we were more limited in the total number of vocabulary we could gather. We elected to have all the speakers produce the list of minimal contrasts found in Chen Jin 1988.

2. Tones. There are seven or eight contrastive tones in Pa-hng. Historically speaking, the proto-tones A, C and D have each divided, while the original B tone did not split in the Pa-hng of Guangxi, resulting in seven tonal contrasts. The tone value and the number of tone categories are quite uniform in all the speakers we examined. We have provided composite pitch

plots of these seven tones for Mr. Wan Rensheng in Figures 1 and 2.⁶

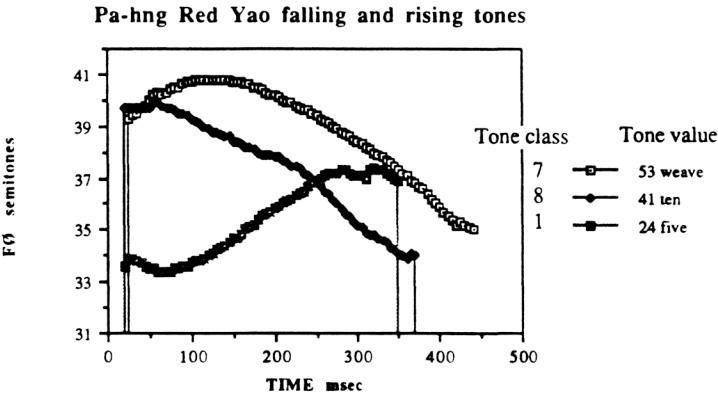


Figure 1: Pa-hng contour tone trajectories

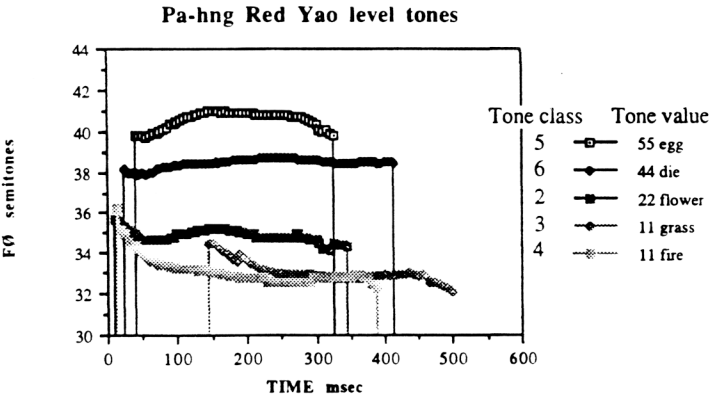


Figure 2: Pa-hng level tone trajectories