

A comparison of reconstructed Austronesian, Old Chinese and Austro-Thai

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Sagart 1993 is a valuable addition to the study of linguistic relationships in Asia.¹ He has compared Blust's and Dempwolff's reconstructions of Austronesian and Li Fang-kuei's reconstruction of Old Chinese (OC) to establish what he feels is a genetic relationship between these reconstructed languages.

The reconstructions of Blust (1980, 1983-84, 1985, 1988, and 1989) involve the following phonemes at the Proto-Austronesian (PAN) level, or "Level One" (ca. 5000 BC) [Blust 1980:13]:

Blust's PAN consonants²

	<i>Labial</i>	<i>D/A</i>	<i>Retroflex</i>	<i>Palatal</i>	<i>Velar</i>	<i>Post-velar</i>	<i>Laryngeal</i>
<i>Stops</i>	p b	t d	T D	[gʷ]	k g	q	ʔ
<i>Affricates</i>		C		c z			
<i>Fricatives</i>		s S Z		(s)			h
<i>Nasals</i>	m	n	N	ñ	ng		
<i>Liquids</i>		L l r (R)			R		
<i>Semi-vowels</i>	w			y			

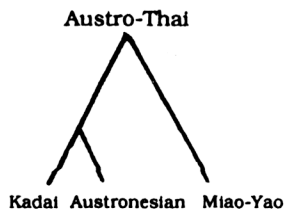
(The voiceless stops and affricates are unaspirated. The phoneme *s may have been a voiceless palatal sibilant; *L was probably a voiceless alveolar lateral; *r was an alveolar tap; and *R was probably an alveolar or uvular trill [Blust 1990b:233-34].)

Blust's PAN vowels³

i u iw uy
 e
 a ay aw

(The symbol e is an orthographic substitute for schwa.)

Benedict (1975:135) postulates the following genetic relationship between Kadai and Austronesian and Miao-Yao:



The system of phonemes reconstructed for Austro-Thai by Benedict (1975:155,178) is:

Austro-Thai consonants

	<i>Labial</i>	<i>Dental</i>	<i>Palatal</i>	<i>Velar</i>	<i>Post-velar</i>	<i>Laryngeal</i>
<i>Stops</i>	p b mp mb	t d nt nd		k g ngk ngg	q G Nq NG	[ʔ]
<i>Affricates</i>		ts dz nts ndz	č j			
<i>Fricatives</i>		s z ns nz	[š] [ž] [ňš] [ňž]	[x] ɣ		h
<i>Nasals</i>	m	n	ň	ng	N	
<i>Liquids</i>		l r		ɽ	[R]	
<i>Semi-vowels</i>	w		y ňy			

(The nasal/oral units, mp, etc. are a "special type of cluster." Doubtful reconstructions are in brackets [].)

Austro-Thai vowels

i		u
e	ə	o
	a	

In addition to the radically different systems of phonemes for PAN and Austro-Thai, Benedict (1975:174-5) also reconstructs initial and medial consonant clusters while Blust and Dempwolff allow only medial clusters:

Austro-Thai consonant clusters

		r	-l	-ɹ
<i>Labials:</i>	p	pr	pl	pɹ
	b	br	bl	
	m		ml	
<i>Dentals:</i>	t	tr	tl	tɹ
	d	dr	dl	
<i>Velars:</i>	k	kr	kl	kɹ
	g	gr	gl	
	x		[xl]	
<i>Post-velars:</i>	q	qr		qɹ

For Old Chinese (ca. 800-500 B.C.), Sagart (1993:3-4) uses the system of Li (1971, 1976):

Old Chinese consonants (Li 1975:1143-4)

	<i>Labial</i>	<i>Alveolar</i>	<i>Velar</i>	<i>Labio-velar</i>	<i>Laryngeal</i>	<i>Labio-laryngeal</i>
<i>Stops</i>	p ph b	t th d	k kh g	kw kwh gw	?	?w
<i>Affricates</i>		ts tsh dz				
<i>Fricatives</i>		s			h	hw
<i>Nasals</i>	m	n	ng	ngw		
<i>Liquids</i>		l r				
<i>Semivowels</i>		j				

Old Chinese vowels (Li 1975:1143-4)

i	u	iə	ua
ə			
a		ia	