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Following the Marrow: two parallel Sino-Tibetan etymologies[1]

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1.0 Introduction

In his provocative paper "Chinese and Austronesian are genetically related" (1990), the French linguist Laurent Sagart claims that no regular correspondences have been established between Chinese and Tibeto-Burman (TB), whereas unlimited numbers of cognates, showing "regular" correspondences can be established between Austronesian (AN) and Chinese, as long as one chops off the initial syllable of the AN root.

There's nothing wrong with this syllable-lopping *per se*. Benedict's "Austro-Tai" megalo-grouping, whereby Tai and Hmong-Mien are related to AN, rests on similar hypotheses: the dissyllabic PAT etyma suffered loss of their initial syllables in Tai-Kadai (with its "tai-ambic" stress pattern: the two best examples being EYE and DIE) and loss of their final syllables in Hmong-Mien (with its "myochaic" [i.e. Miao-Yao trochaic] stress).[2]

One can certainly not exclude a very early contact relationship between AN and Chinese, especially since the AN homeland is now thought to have been somewhere in coastal SE China, perhaps Fukien, opposite the island of Taiwan.

However, there are many objections to Sagart's reconstructive approach:

a Sagart's criteria for phonological correspondence are lax, so that it is easy to find lookalikes in the huge AN and Chinese lexica.

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[1] This paper has been presented at the Fourth Spring Workshop on Theory and Method in Linguistic Reconstruction, University of Pittsburgh (March 27-29, 1992), and at the Second Annual Meeting of the Southeast Asian Linguistics Society (SEALS), Arizona State University, Tempe (May 13-16, 1992). I intend this as the beginning of a larger study of the "regularity" of Chinese/Tibeto-Burman sound correspondences.

[2] See Benedict 1975; Solnit 1992.

b. His criteria for semantic correspondence are also extremely tolerant, and often a prioristic (i.e. not based on demonstrable patterns of semantic association in AN or Chinese).

c. Sagart's search for cognates is proceeding by Chinese rhyme group, with no notion of starting with core vocabulary.

d. Sagart vastly underestimates the number of reliable Chinese/TB cognates already discovered. Many of these are not at all obvious, and can be established only on the basis of subtle comparative work.

While the sound correspondences between Chinese and TB do not always appear exquisitely regular, there are reasons:

(a) Reconstruction systems for Old Chinese (OC) are in flux, with many competing theories. How to establish regular correspondences if it's not clear what you're supposed to be corresponding to?

(b) We are not dealing with monolithic invariant etyma, but with word-families, as in Indo-European.[3] Loans and backloans between Chinese and TB are also a factor.

(c) The period of presumed Chinese/TB unity was a long time ago, perhaps 6000 years B.P.

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[3] As a random example, consider all the variants which must be posited for a simple IE etymon like *wed- 'water; wet', in order to account for all its descendants that have made their way into English, either through inheritance or borrowing (< *Watkins 1985, p. 73*):

1. *wod-ṓr [suffixed o-grade]
   > PGmc *watar > OE wæter > *water*
2. *wēd-o- [suffixed lengthened grade]
   > PGmc *wēd- > OE wǣt, wēt > *wet*
3. *wod- [o-grade]
   > PGmc *wat-skan > OE wæscan, wacsan > *wash*
4. *we-n-d- [nasalized form]
   > PGmc *wintruz 'wet season' > OE winter > *winter*
5. *ud-ór [suffixed zero-grade]
   > Greek hudōr 'water' > *HYDRO-* (including *clepsydra, dropsy*)
6. *u-n-d-ā [suffixed nasalized zero-grade]
   > Latin unda 'wave' > *undulate, inundate, abound, redundant, surround*
7. *ud-ro-, *ud-rā [suffixed zero-grade]
   'water animal', in PGmc *otraz > OE otor > *otter*
8. *ud-skio [suffixed zero-grade]
   Scot. and Ir. Gaelic uisge 'water' > *uisquebaugh, whiskey*
9. *wod-ā- [suffixed o-grade]
   Russ. voda 'water', with -ka 'diminutive' > *vodka*

And in fact it IS possible to find phonologically parallel cognates between PTB and Old Chinese. In this paper I offer two such, for both of which I claim responsibility. One of them appeared in print as early as Matisoff 1978 (MARROW); the other (FOLLOW) was mentioned in passing in Matisoff 1985 (set #45), but is given here in greatly elaborated form.

Both of these etyma involve the same graphological phonetic series in Chinese, #11 in Karlgren's *Grammata Serica Recensa* [GSR]. In general, all characters in the same series are assumed to have identical or very similar rhymes,[4] regardless of the details of the system of OC reconstruction one espouses.

The two Chinese lexemes in question appear consecutively in GSR #11:

11g	OC *dzwɪa	MC zwiȩ̂	Mandarin suí
	'follow' (*Shu Jing*); 'conform to' (*Shi Jing*); 'foot' (*Yi Jing*)		
11h	OC *swɪa	MC swiȩ̂	Mandarin suǐ
	'marrow'		

All etyma in this labialized (so-called hé-kǒu) series are reconstructed with one of two OC rhymes *-wâ or *-wɪa, presumably felt to be close enough to be written with the same phonetic. Subsequent development of the two was different: *-wâ > MC -uâ > Mand. -(u̯)o, while *-wɪa > MC -ɪȩ̂ > Mand. -uɪ [wei].

So these two etyma are as closely matched in rhyme as can be—both reconstructed with the same sub-rhyme of the same phonetic series.

2.0 FOLLOW

2.1 FOLLOW in Kamarupan (TB of Northeast India)

"STC" (Benedict 1972:51) sets up in passing a root *ywi 'follow', as one of two examples of PTB initial *yw- (along with *ywar 'sell'), but claims that this root is restricted to "Kuki-Naga", offering only two supporting forms (Lushai zui, Siyin yui), both from the Chin group. The rhyme *-wi is of non-canonical shape for the STC's system of PTB [see

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[4] Often the same etymon is graphically repartitioned into more than one homophonously read character: cf. PROPERTY / LUMBER / TALENT, etc. (Matisoff 1988).

below 4.0], so that we must assume the intention was to set it up only for "Proto-Kuki-Naga" (= Proto-Kuki-Chin-Naga).

Indeed, whether or not we take PKN and PKCN to merely be synonyms, the Naga branch of Kamarupan has many likely additional reflexes of this etymon, gleanable from Marrison 1967, Appendix I(a), p. 100:[5]

We may distinguish three groups of forms, all glossed as 'follow':

(a) those with a labial spirant or semivowel initial
/similar to the STC's reconstruction *ywi/

Konyak **wo**i-lak

Sangtam i-**v**ü

Sema athiu-**v**u

Mao **f**ü

*(b) those reflecting a nasal prefix: *m-ywi (or better, *m-yuy)*
/with secondary frication of the y to z or dz/

Chokri	**mü-zv**i
Angami (Khonoma dial.)	a-sa-**me-dz**i
Angami (Kohima dial.)	sie-**me-dz**i-lie

/These forms from the Angami group show what looks like a nasal prefix; the Chokri vowel symbolized as "ü" is very likely an unstressed shwa-like thing; Angami characteristically gives its unstressed prefixes a slight *e*-color vocalization, e.g. the causative prefix *pe-*./

The impressionistically transcribed monosyllabic Phom form mü is difficult to interpret; it looks the same as the first syllable of the Chokri form, where we interpreted it as a prefix; perhaps it is to be analyzed as the reflex of the entire prototype *m-ywi. (In TB, m- frequently tends to swallow up a following -u, e.g. the Lahu phonemic syllable /mu/ is really a syllabic labiodental nasal affricate [Matisoff 1973:3-4].

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[5] Marrison is the first to admit the low quality of the phonetic transcription of the forms from these languages; yet they are often good enough to make cognate relationships fairly obvious. In some compounds it is not clear where the syllable boundary should be, and I am making educated guesses. Syllables deemed to be cognate are in boldface.