

Some Comments on Benedict's
"Miao-Yao Enigma: the Na-e Language"

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1. Preface

Up to now we have thought that the Hmong-Mien (Miao-Yao) family comprised three branches:

- Hmongic (Miao and Bunu Yao)
- Ho Nte (She)
- Mienic (Yao proper)

Now Benedict has presented evidence for a possible fourth branch: Na-e.

Benedict's remarks have inspired me to review the current classification schemes for Hmong-Mien. I would like to propose the following system of subgrouping:

I. Hmongic

- A. Eastern Guizhou (Purnell's "Eastern")
- B. West Hunan (Purnell's "Northern")
- C. Sichuan-Guizhou-Yunnan (Purnell's "Central" and "Western")
 - 1. Sichuan-Guizhou-Yunnan (Purnell's "West A")
 - 2. Northeast Yunnan
 - 3. Guiyang
 - 4. Huishui
 - 5. Mashan
 - 6. Luobo River
 - 7. Eastern
 - 8. Pu Nu (Tung Nu)
 - 9. Nu Nu
 - 10. Pu No
 - 11. Nao Klao
 - 12. Nu Mhou

D. Unclassified: nine major groups.

- II. Pa Hng (including Na-e)
- III. Hm Nai
- IV. Kiong Nai
- V. Yu Nuo
- VI. Ho Nte
- VII. Mienic
 - A. Mien-Kim
 - 1. Mien (Iu Mien)
 - 2. Mun (Kim Mun)

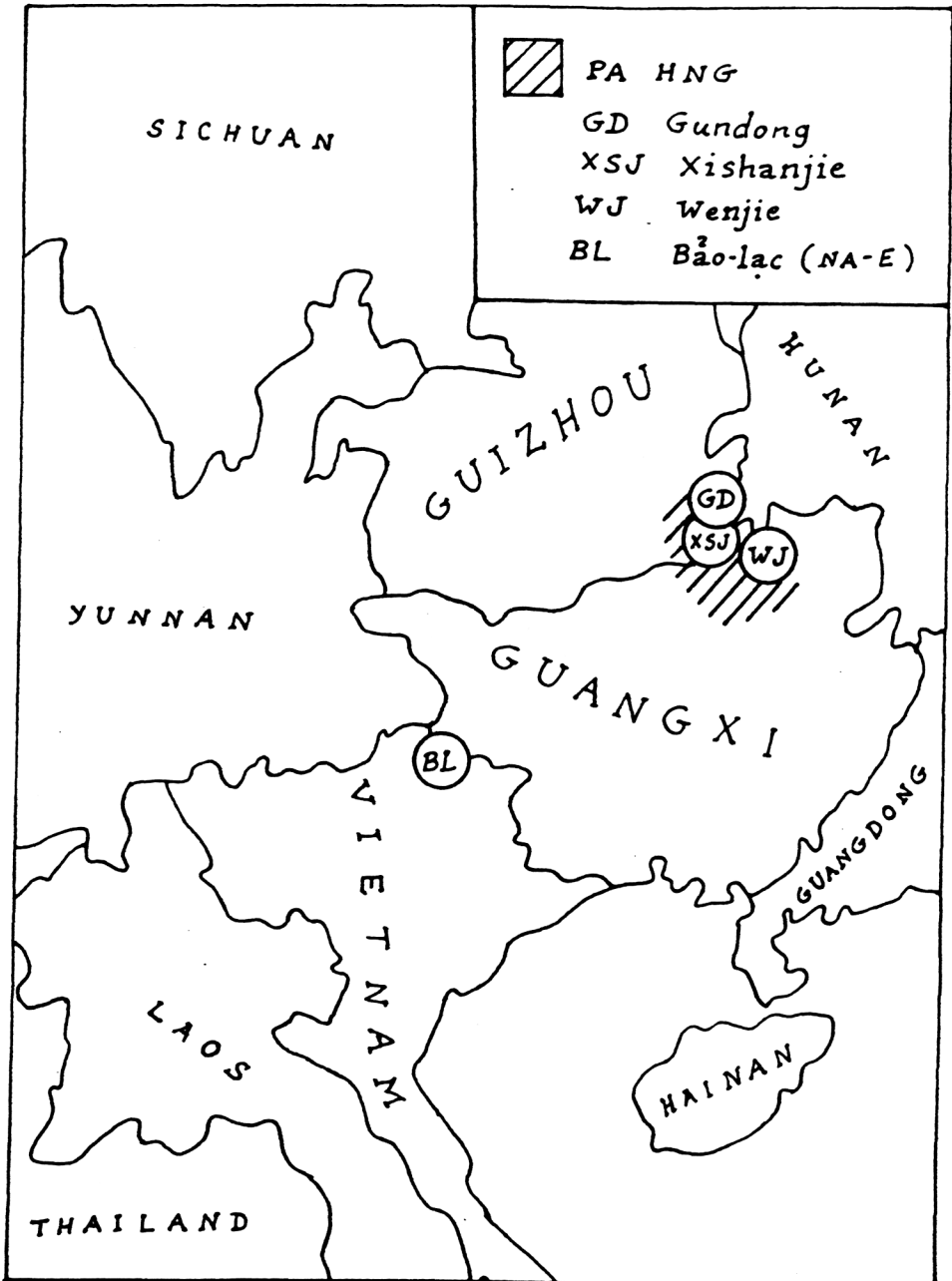
- VII. Mienic, continued.
 A. Mien-Kim, continued.
 3. Biao Mon
 B. Biao-Chao
 1. Biao Min
 2. Chao Kong Meng
 C. Dzao Min

This schema is taken directly from recent Chinese and Soviet publications except that I have split up the Punic (Bunu Yao) subdivision of Hmongic. On the one hand, I have put Pu Nu (Tung Nu), Nu Nu, Pu No, Nao Klao, and Nu Mhou into the Sichuan-Guizhou-Yunnan branch of Hmongic, a possibility which has already been considered by such people as Kun Chang, Wang Fushi, and Martha Ratliff. On the other hand, I have provisionally elevated Pa Hng, Hm Nai, Klong Nai, and Yu Nuo to the status of independent branches of Hmong-Mien, carrying one step further the suggestion made by Mao, Meng, and Zheng (1982:117) that these languages "have almost reached the status of separate yu", that is separate major subdivisions of a language family.

Na-e turns out to be simply a southern outlier of the Pa Hng group: see the map. This was first pointed out by Haudricourt (1954:564/1972:197; 1971:38, 43). See also Benedict (1975:xxi). In addition to Bonifacy's article, we have the following sources for Pa Hng:

1. Mao, Meng, and Zheng (1982:118, 121-123): dialect of Wenjie, Sanjiang County, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region.
2. Institute for the Study of Minority Languages (1959), cited in Moskalev (1978:15). Locality not specified, but appears to be the same dialect as that described by Mao, Meng, and Zheng, or one very close to it.
3. Chang (1947, 1953, 1972, 1976): dialect of Xishanjie, near Yongcong, in the southeastern corner of Guizhou Province. In the literature this dialect is variously known as "Yung-ts'ung", "Hsi-shan-chieh", or "Tahua Yao".
4. Chen (1984:17, dialect #13): dialect of Gundong, Liping County, Guizhou Province.

Benedict has expressed fears that Na-e may have died out since the early recording by Bonifacy. But we have reason to hope that the language may still be spoken. Nguyen (1985:2) cites a recent publication by the Institute of Ethnology in Hanoi which lists a Hmong-Mien language called Pathen. I think this must be the same name as Bonifacy's "Pa-ten", that is, Na-e. We will need to go through Vietnamese linguistic journals such as Ngôn-ngữ and Dân-tộc-học to see



whether more material on Na-e has become available.

Pa Hng splits into two groups, Northern and Southern, which differ in the development of certain initials and finals:

Northern: Xishanjie, Gundong

Southern: Wenjie, Institute wordlist, Na-e

In this paper I will outline very briefly some of the evidence for Haudricourt's assignment of Na-e to the Pa Hng group and I will outline very briefly some additional evidence for Benedict's proposal that Na-e -- or, rather, the Pa Hng group -- separated from Hmongic at an early date.

2. Transcription

All forms in this paper are written in IPA, except for Na-e, for which I retain Bonifacy's transcription. Note the following equivalents:

Bonifacy	IPA
t'	[t̚]
ɕ	[tʃ]
h	[ŋ]
y	[j]
ɣ	[ɣ]

Bonifacy transcribes four tones in Na-e:

- 1: level. Occurs in all historical tone categories and appears to represent cases where Bonifacy simply failed to hear the tone.
- 2: descending, like Vietnamese huyền (low falling). Historically A2, B1, B2, C2, and D2, probably representing several different tones which Bonifacy failed to distinguish.
- 3: acute, like Vietnamese sắc (high rising). Historically C1 and D1.
- 4: interrogative, like Vietnamese hỏi (low rising). Historically A1.

3. Evidence that Na-e belongs to the Pa Hng group

Characteristics shared by Na-e and Pa Hng include the following:

(1) *r becomes yod, e.g. Na-e yò l 'stone'; Xishanjie [jõ 33] 'dragon'.

(2) Velar and uvular initials merge into a single series, realized phonetically as uvular in Wenjie and the Institute wordlist and as velar in the other dialects. For