

The Cun language, by Ouyang Jueya. Shanghai Far East Publishers. 1998.

by Weera Ostapirat

The Cun language is spoken on Hainan island and is closely related to, or is a member of, the Hlai language group of Kra-Dai stock (= Tai-Kadai). The early concise descriptions of the language (Fu 1983, Ouyang and Fu 1988) noted a number of interesting linguistic features so this more complete study is welcome. Ouyang's book now supplies us with the most comprehensive survey of Cun, including a list of 2,330 vocabulary items, which are especially useful for the comparative and historical studies of Hlai and related languages. The author of the book, Ouyang Jueya, is also a co-author of the monumental study of Hlai dialects *Liyu Diaocha Baogao* (Survey of the Hlai languages) published in 1983.

The first chapter of the book introduces readers to the ethnological and sociological background of the Cun people and their language. The Cun people call themselves /ŋa:u¹ fən¹/ 'village people' and call their language /tshən¹ fən¹/ 'village language'. Approximately 45,000 Cun speakers are reported to live among the majority Chinese in Dongfang county; a large amount of Chinese is used in current Cun speech.

The phonological features of Cun are described in Chapter 2. The Cun initial consonant inventory lacks the voiceless unaspirated stops /p-/ and /t-/ but has a full set of aspirated stops and affricates /ph th tsh kh/. Cun also has an affricate /tθ-/, which is unique among Hlai dialects.

The sound corresponds to s- (> t- in some dialects) and to ʈ- in other dialects.

	Cun	Xifang	Baoding
thread, v.	tʰɔk ²	sɔk ⁷	tokʈ
wash	tʰak ²	so:k ⁷	to:k ⁷
blood	tʰɔt ²	ʈo:t ⁷	ʈa:tʈ
tongue	tʰin ³	ʈiŋ ³	ʈi:n ³

Cun appears to lack the ending -*au*. For the rimes -*au* and -*eu* in other Hlai dialects, the Cun reflexes are -ɔ and -ou, respectively.

	Cun	Baoding
short (height)	thɔ ³	thau ³
dry	khɔ ⁵	khau ²
leaf	bou ¹	beu ¹
hand	mou ¹	meu ¹

The rimes transcribed as -a(i), -ɔ(i), and -o(i) deserve a comment. The parenthesized ending (i) in these rimes is weak and usually elided in word-final position; it emerges in compounds when it is followed by another morpheme. The rimes -a(i) and -ɔ(i) are marked in early transcriptions (Fu 1983) with long vowels, i.e. -a:(i) and ɔ:(i), and typically correspond to -a:i and -o:i in such Hlai dialects as Baoding. These are not to be confused with Cun -ai and -ɔi, where the ending -i is always stable.

	Cun	Baoding
excrement	ha(i) ³	ha:i ³
far	lai ¹	lai ¹
many	tθo(i) ¹	to:i ¹
hot, ripe	foi ¹	fui ¹

In words with labial initials, Cun rime -o(i) corresponds to -ei in other dialects.

	Cun	Baoding
fire	fo(i) ¹	fei ¹
walk	fo(i) ¹	fei ¹
this	nei ³	nei ²
lean, adj.	lei	lei

Since this (i) may be discerned only when it precedes another morpheme, it can be easily missed in transcriptions when the words occur in isolation or at word-final position. For instance, the word 'fire' is transcribed as /fo¹/ in the Appendix (p.193) but as /fo(i)¹/ in the rime description section (p.21). Early transcriptions of the word in Ouyang and Fu 1988 as well as the expected sound correspondences confirm the latter form. Otherwise the Cun rime -o is not typically found in native words. Thus, some caution is thus needed in such cases when using the lexical list.

Cun has five tones, labelled with the numbers 1 to 5. The pitch values of these tones are as follows:

Tone 1	Tone 2	Tone 3	Tone 4	Tone 5
35; 55	33	42	13	21

All tones may occur with smooth or checked syllables. (In checked syllables, the pitch value of Tone 1 is [55]). In native words, however, only Tone 2 and Tone 4 typically occur with checked syllables. These tones reflect the Proto-Hlai tonal categories and correspond systematically to the tones of other Hlai dialects as follows:

Tones	Cun	Yuanmen	Baoding	
*A1	khai ¹	khai ¹	khai ¹	chicken
*A2	veŋ ⁴	vian ⁴	ve:ŋ ¹	master
*B1	khɔ ⁵	khau ⁵	khau ²	dry
*B2	vɔ ⁵	va ²	va ²	shoulder
*C1	thɔ ³	thau ³	thau ³	short (height)
*C2	la(i) ⁴	ruai ⁶	ra:i ³	intestine
*D1	phək ²	phia? ⁷	phe:k ⁷	high
*D2	viat ⁴	vat ⁸	vat	bow, n.

Basic descriptions of word classes, morphology, and syntax are presented in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4. An interesting morpheme ki⁵ is reported to prefix to a number of lexical items, namely, body parts, animals, and plants. Cun has borrowed numeral forms from Chinese and presently keeps the native forms (corresponding to the basic Hlai roots) only for numerals from one to six. The heavy influence of Chinese has also extended to syntax. In some cases, Cun uses both native and Chi-