

CHAPTER 12

THE EFFICACY OF THE P/PH DISTINCTION FOR TAI LANGUAGES

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Introduction

It was my intention from the beginning to remain clear of the controversy surrounding Sukhothai Inscription One since I felt that there was little I could contribute to what had already been said. Those who have become involved, however, have brought me unwillingly into the arena, and I stand accused of leading Michael Vickery astray, as well as others, and of supporting the notion that Inscription One is a fake. Of course, anyone who had bothered to read what I have written would have seen that those early linguistic studies of mine did not involve epigraphical insights, but were concerned with classification and comparative Tai phonology. Moreover, I have always used Inscription One in support of my ideas concerning the origins of the Sukhothai Thais and the historical locations of the Tais generally. In 1972, I used a passage from Inscription One to endorse the hypothesis that the language of Sukhothai was most closely related to that of Luang Prabang.

Now I find myself in a strange predicament. Those who maintain Inscription One is a fake have used my work to support their theory, and this, coupled with a good deal of runaway academic gossip, has evolved into a mistaken belief that I advocated the idea of fakery. Based on this gossip, rather than what I have written, William Gedney saw fit to make me the scapegoat in his Machiavellian pasquinade which accused me of influencing Vickery and others.¹ I am sure this was conceived as a cut-off-the-supplies-at-the-source kind of tactic, but from my perspective it is more akin to kicking-the-dog-instead-of-the-wife,

known in psychological parlance as displacement, a defensive rather than an offensive maneuver.

Furthermore, in a recent paper (1989) responding to Gedney's, Vickery has very elegantly defended my ideas, focusing particularly on Gedney's questionable *figurae causae*. This places me in the awkward position of having been assailed by the defenders of the faith, in the person of my own professor with whom I happen to agree on the matter of Inscription One's legitimacy, only to be vindicated by those with whom I disagree on this particular issue. As a result, I am left with no choice but to write this paper in the form of a rejoinder and append my voice to the dialogue which has taken place thus far.

The essence of the satisfaction with my views by Vickery and the dissatisfaction by Gedney, lies in the dating of the devoicing sound shift which changed the voiced initial stops reconstructed for Proto-Tai */b, d, j, g/ to either /p, t, c, k/ in some dialects, or /ph, th, ch or s, kh/ in others. In two articles, published in 1972 and 1975, I labeled these two groups the P dialects and the PH dialects respectively. The labels were just for convenience, like the P languages and Q languages of Celtic, but the controversy now being raised concerns whether the distinction reflects genetic relationships or is typological. This in turn has bearing on the issue of approximate dating and I would therefore like to address this question here and to clarify my current views. A second issue, not addressed except by innuendo in Gedney's paper, is the relationship of Ayutthaya to Sukhothai which I will take up in the second and third parts of this paper along with a discussion of the linguistic and historical position of Lao.

To my way of thinking, there has been a persistent and ever-widening gap between what is supposed to have happened historically, and what has been reconstructed linguistically. Thus, in my studies I have endeavored to avoid the errors of a too narrowly defined disciplinism. As will be seen in this paper, "maverick" though it may be, my approach takes inspiration from Professor Gedney at almost every step, and that is as it should be. A teacher is inspired by the truths he has uncovered

and passes on not just a bundle of reliquary facts, but the inspiration itself, epiphanies which kindle the flame of learning in the student. This is the process of knowledge, and when it is received it cannot be accepted uncritically. I have received much knowledge and inspiration from Professor Gedney, but I intend for these to remain alive, not kept mounted like hunting trophies on the wall.

1. PH and B

As I look back upon those articles, I naturally see some things I would like to change; for example, I do not now believe that there was a Houa Phan branch of Lao; the Thai Bo, in one instance at least, turned out to be a group of bilingual Austroasiatic So who had adopted a Lao dialect. There probably never was a Neua-Phuan intrusion into an older population as I once suggested. I have yet to meet a Pong or a Phong, of either the Tai or the Kha variety, although I suspect that the term may be preserved in that Phou Thay subgroup called /kapOng / who were perhaps Austroasiatic (AA) speakers originally living in symbiotic relationships with Tais. (Likewise, the ethnonyms of /kataak/ (Phou Thay); /kalëp/(Neua, Nho); /kalOm/ (Lue); etc. may fall into this category.)² My early dating of the sound shift, however, was based upon a variety of factors and influences which I still would hold to be valid. Following Gedney's (1965) proposal of a Proto - Tai (PT) homeland along the eastern Vietnam - Kwangsi border; and taking into account the current locations of the Tai dialects and Tai populations in northern Vietnam; and in keeping with Haudricourt's (1954) suggestion that Vietnamese had already undergone the sound change by the 12th century; the idea of an 8th or 9th century date was hardly a startling proposal. It should also be mentioned here that in 1962 (>1965) Brown had proposed a date of 1000 AD for this sound change. Gedney reviewed this work in 1965 and attacked not the date, but rather Brown's acceptance of the conventional Yunnan homeland for what would have to be labeled Proto-Southwestern Tai, although Brown did not use that term. The Vietnamese assumed power in the 10th century

and the various Tai groups, surrounded by hostile Chinese and Sinicized Vietnamese invaders, had been in a constant state of upheaval and revolt since the early 7th century. These culminated in the revolt of Nung Tri Cao in the 11th century and were undoubtedly the reason for the Tai exodus to the west.³

Also, there are clear linguistic patterns in the geographical distribution of the South-Central Tais and the development of the PT initial stops. There is a contiguous band from Cao Bang through So'n La and Lai Chau in Vietnam, through Phongsaly and Louang Nam Tha provinces in Laos, through Lanna in northern Thailand, through southern Yunnan in China, through the Shan States in Burma, to Assam, where all of the Tai languages have developed unaspirated stops in the voiced series. There is another contiguous area of Houa Phan, Xieng Khwang, Luang Prabang, Xagnaboury, Vientiane, Northeast Thailand, and Central Thailand where the voiced series developed aspirated stops. I have chosen to view this generalization as a non-accidental pattern, not as a coincidence, hypothesizing that the sound change occurred before the various Tais began their migration west. Such a hypothesis is firmly within the confines of acceptable comparative and historical practice, and neither Gedney's animadversions upon my ideas, nor his sanctimonious invocation of the laws of historical phonology can alter this fact.

There is also a third possibility that I did not pursue in 1972 nor in 1975, that one group changed earlier than the other; that is, perhaps those dialects I have labeled the P group changed before the PH group. Since populations were mobile at the same time devoicing would have been occurring, this would allow for the late arrival of the change to Ayutthaya (assuming that is what happened), and it would account for those dialects of Khmu in northern Laos which borrowed words like /b00 - B4/ 'father' from Lao, and other Khmu dialects like Kwen which have borrowed the same item as /p00/ from Lue. (Note that Gedney cites only the former.)

As regards the language of Sukhothai, I suggested that it was most closely related to Luang Prabang and to Southern Thai. According to my reasoning, it could have been either a PH

language or a B language, but not a P language. I still feel, however, that it is highly unlikely that Inscription One, chiseled in stone, represents the first Tai writing system. It could have been a system of conventions like the modern Thai and Lao writing systems today. The stone itself cannot tell us how the stops were pronounced. (This is an example of one of those elementary linguistic principles like the regularity of sound change.)

In the 1972 paper, following the principle that areas of dialect diversity are older than areas of dialect sameness (the very principle which Gedney (1965) in his review of Marvin Brown's *From Ancient Thai to Modern Dialects*, had applied to the region of the eastern Vietnam - Kwangsi border in suggesting a PT homeland (which may prove to be at least a Proto-South-Central homeland), I provided evidence that the location of greatest Southwestern Tai diversity was along the Lao-Vietnamese border. Later, in 1984, I proposed that this diversity was particularly evident in the provinces of Houa Phan, Xieng Khwang, Khammouan, Nghe An, and Thanh Hoá, and that it included the Northern Branch languages as well, such as Saek, already described by Gedney (1970), and remnants of such languages as in the Tai Mène dialect. I also proposed that the terms Yoi and Nho once common in Thanh Hoá and Nghệ An, were actually Northern Branch ethnonyms. (So far as I know, the term Tai/Thay/Day does not appear in history before the Ram Khamhaeng Inscription.)

My primary goal in 1984 and in 1986 was to demonstrate the P/PH diversity in the regions south of the Red River Delta and along the Lao-Viet frontier, and to suggest that the P/PH split occurred here. For example, one of the most interesting and clear cut instances I found was in the Black Tai dialect of Muang Vat (also known as Yên Châu, in earlier times a toponym for what is now part of Nghệ An), in the south of the Sip Song Chou Tai near the northern boundary with Houa Phan. The dialect of Muang Vat is a PH language while all the rest of the Black Tai speak a P dialect. The dialect of Muang Vat is linguistically closer to the dialect of Xieng Kho in Houa Phan,

while the culture is closer to Black Tai. Analogous situations seem to occur with Yoi, Nho and Phou Thay, but not with White Tai, Lue, Kam Meuang, Nüa, or Shan in the west. Since speakers of these latter languages were to be found in their present locations by the 11th and 12th centuries, and since they are all uniformly P languages, they must have undergone the sound shift before they migrated.

Later in 1975, again working from a Gedney idea that the Southwestern (SW) and Central branches of Tai are not really separable, representing, phonologically at least, a continuum, I applied the same system I had used for the SW languages to all of the data available to me for both groups. It worked surprisingly well with the exception of Gedney's Lei Ping dialect (1966), which had, lo and behold, developed aspirated stops in the PT voiced series. This was a conundrum, for the strongest evidence of the devoicing shift was around the Vietnam-Lao border and the regularities were too great to ignore. I was forced to posit an admittedly weak theory that the Lao dialects and Lei Ping were somehow more directly related. The only justification for this, so my way of thinking went at the time, was the case of the Nung dialects which are found mostly in the Cao-Bang - Lang So'n area, but which are represented by an isolated pocket, called the Nung Cheuang (Nông Chu'o'ng) or the Western Nung as Gedney named them, who had relocated to the vicinity of Lao Cai and southeastern Yunnan after the defeat of Nung Tri Cao (Nong Zhi-Gao) by the Chinese General Di at *Yongchou (Nanning) in 1054* (Barlow 1987). Since the Lao of the Nam Ou claimed to be from Muang Boum on the upper Black River (Nam Tè), a relatively short distance from Lao Cai on the Red River, I reasoned that something similar might have happened to separate Lao and Lei Ping. But no supporting evidence has ever surfaced and I am content to dismiss the idea. At the time Gedney wrote to me that he had doubts about the Lei Ping association.

Now it appears to me that the group of Tai languages which later become the PH group, while still retaining the voiced stops, moved west and southwest earlier than the others, perhaps

after having been separated from the mainstream by the rise of the Sino-Vietnamese in the delta. The rest of the South-Central languages underwent the devoicing shift while still relatively unified in the east. Lei Ping, like those dialects of Nung spoken just west and northwest of Cao Bang which seem to have retained the voiced stops (Haudricourt 1960), was somehow isolated and became the exception that proves the rule. This geotemporal frame also fits better the Chinese/Vietnamese 6th to 12th century span suggested by Haudricourt (1954).

In response to those who are constantly inventing new theories to explain the movement of languages, I am compelled to interject at this point that large populations of Southeast Asians did physically pick up and migrate, voluntarily and involuntarily, over vast territories. A good deal of this movement has been recorded in the distant as well as in the recent past. Peoples who are known to have switched languages have done so in relation to a variety of inter-ethnic relationships and varying species of political domination and expediency such as may still be observed today (cf. Condominas 1980). Thus a rapid movement from east to west need not be an obstacle to our thinking about Tai migrations in northern Indochina. One recent example of this are the large populations of Hmong who fled from the Chinese in Kweichow, entered the region of Cao Bang about 1800, and began settling in Xieng Khwang about 1810 (Savina 1924).

There is ample evidence to show that an older Tai population had been divided by the expansion of the Sinicized Austroasiatics in the delta and the various subsequent upheavals associated with this expansion such as the Nan Chao attack in the 9th century. It was, in fact, those languages in the Sam Neua-Thang Hoá region which formed the Neua-Phuan subgroup, including Phou Thay, Nho, and eventually Thai of Ayutthaya, a subject to which I shall return later in this paper.

In 1972 and in subsequent papers, I was fond of quoting a passage from Robequain (1929) which addressed the probable location of the Ai Lao. I had always found this an interesting problem because of the Vietnamese use of the term to refer to

Laos, and because the term Ai, as a place name, occurs in Vietnamese history for what is now the province of Thanh Hoá to the south of the delta,⁴ and in the Black Tai Chronicles Muang Ai is referred to as a location from which the Tai originated before arriving at Muang Lo.

Keith Taylor, in his very detailed, but to a Tai specialist very frustrating, study of early Vietnam, writes (1983: 173):

Ai province lay in the Ma River plain. In 622, Ai was one of eight provinces established in this plain and its hinterland; in 627, these were consolidated into two provinces; and in 636, Ai absorbed the remaining one. Situated in the middle of the protectorate [of Annam], Ai escaped the full impact of the Chinese influence pressing on the Hong [Red] River plain to the north; at the same time, Hoan shielded Ai from the more volatile influences of the frontier [Champa] in the south. This seems to have enabled Ai to be more selective about what it absorbed from external influence and perhaps explains why Ai emerged in the tenth century as the original and most persistent center of the politics of independence

Robequain, apparently following Maspéro, identified Ai Lao with a kingdom which had its center at Xieng Kho, a town in Houa Phan province, situated to the northeast of Sam Neua city, on the Ma river, about 18 kilometers to the east of Muang Et. Muang Et has traditionally been an administrative subdistrict of Xieng Kho /kh00 C4/, implying that Xieng Kho was the more important of the two centers. And although most of the *settlements along the Nam Ma are located at points where its tributaries emerge*, this is not the case with Xieng Kho.⁵

The Nam Ma is considerably larger than the Nam Sam /sam A4/ which is usually taken to be the main river of the province, the river for which the city and the province were named, Muang Sam or Chou Sam in Sam Neua province. And unlike the other rivers which flow from Laos into Vietnam, for example the Nam Mo and the Nam Noen which become the Song Ca, or the Nam Sam which becomes the Song Chu, the Ma has the same name in Laos as it has in Vietnam, implying

habitation by a common ethnolinguistic group. In fact, the Nam Sam or Song Chu is ultimately a tributary of the Ma; the two rivers converge just north of Thanh Hoá city.

Besides the Black Tai (BT) and Red Tai (RT) dialects found within the various subdistricts of Xieng Kho, the Neua dialects themselves exhibit a fairly wide range of tonal differences. This phenomenon is not limited to the district of Xieng Kho, but is true for all of Houa Phan. The diversity, I would estimate, is greater than the diversity for Lao or BT areas of comparable size and topography. Many speakers of dialects from the southern part of the province were uprooted in the 1880s and 1890s and fled south into Khammouan province during the Cheuang Wars. Other Neua populations moved into the region of Vang Vieng (Muang Xong) after the Chinese Ho opium war of 1914.

I infer from this that what I call the Neua-Phuan subgroup of the PH dialects were older and therefore had the opportunity to move across northeastern Thailand to the central region prior to the time that the ethnic Lao settled in the northeast. The Lao movement began with smaller groups in the periods of 1352 - 62, 1428-56, 1572-74, and 1628-32, mostly in the vicinity of Udon and Nongkhai. The largest populating began in the south from Champasak, and spread rapidly along the Nam Mun and the Nam Chi rivers beginning in 1713 (Thirachai 2529).

That many of these Neua-Phuan languages were once Northern Branch languages seems clear from the Khamouan evidence (see for example Chamberlain 1984, 1986, and the ethnonyms already mentioned). I believe that further confirmation would be found if we were able to pursue field studies in Thanh Hoá and Nghê An, Xieng Khwang, Houa Phan, and Khammouan.

Émile Gaspardone, in an article published in 1971, has provided a valuable piece of evidence from an inscription at Ma Nhai (near Cu'a Rao on the Song Ca in Nghê An Province). I cited this inscription in 1984, but I would like to quote it once again for analysis. The French translation by Gaspardone reads as follows:

Sa paternelle Majesté Chu'ong-Nghiêu, Civile et Sage, Sixième Empereur de la dynastie Trân de l'Auguste Viêt, ayant reçu du Ciel le bienveillant Mandat, possède largement tout le pays Central et n'a partout, dehors comme dedans, qui ne se dit sujet et qui ne se soumette; et ce misérable Ai-lao se refuse encore à Sa Conversion. L'année étant â-t-ho'i, au dernier mois d'automne, l'Empereur lui même a conduit ses Six-armées visiter la région de l'Ouest. Le prince héritier du Champa, le Tchen-la, le Sien, les vassaux Qui Câm et Xa Lac, le chef Bôi Bôn et les Thanh-xa récemment ralliés, tous les Mân apportant des produits de leurs terres, à l'envi vinrent l'accueillir. Seul le rebelle Bông, obstiné dans l'erreur et craignant la justice, n'est point venu se présenter. Au dernier mois d'hiver l'Empereur, ayant fait halte au plateau de Cu-dôn, au Mât chau, donna l'ordre à ses officiers et aux troupes barbares d'entrer dans ce pays. Mais le rebelle Bông, le prévenant, s'était enfui et se cachait. L'Empereur fit rentrer l'Armée.

One facet of this text which agrees chronologically as well as geographically, and which is supported by the Black Tai chronicles, is Gaspardone's identification of Bông with Phong, or Souvanna Khamphong, the grandfather of the first king of Lan Xang, Chao Fa Ngoum. His association of Bôn with Phuan is *likewise, I believe, correct. The ethnonyms of Qui, Câm, and Lac [Lo] are still to be found among the Tai groups in Nghê An as well as other areas of Tai-speaking Vietnam and Laos. The term Thanh-xa is still a puzzle.*

Xa is interpreted by Gaspardone as Tai, the hereditary rulers of Môc Chau. In Tai this district is known as Muang Sang and is inhabited primarily by Red Tai speakers. Môc Chau too is adjacent to the district of Xieng Kho, to the west, and is located southwest of Yên Chau (Muang Vat). But Xa /Saa C1/ is also a Tai reflex for Lao /Khaa C1/ 'Austroasiatic.'

With respect to the original problem of the dating of the devoicing sound shift, the inscription as presented by Gaspardone does offer one important insight. In the case of the word Phuan, referring to that group of Tai speakers traditionally

associated with Xieng Khwang, a word beginning with an original voiced series stop, it is transcribed as *Bôn*. Likewise, the name of the “rebel” Phong is transcribed as *Bông*. Both of these words are associated with PH group dialects, Phuan and Lao respectively. However, for the P group Tai lineage of *Câm*, also beginning with a PT voiced stop, cognate with the Lao word /kham A4/ ‘gold,’ Gaspardone uses the unaspirated voiceless stop, indicating very clearly that in 1336 the PH languages had not yet made the shift from voiced to voiceless, while the P group had already undergone the change.⁶

If Gaspardone’s transcriptions of the Chinese characters used for the inscription are accurate, then it makes good sense to assume that the language of Sukhothai in the late 13th century was indeed a B language which had not yet undergone the devoicing shift. Moreover, the efficacy of the P/PH distinction, based on this evidence, is enhanced even further as a meaningful linguistic isogloss and an historical boundary.⁷

The same author (1971: 10, fn 39) mentions another relevant detail concerning a Tai group known to the Vietnamese as the Ngu’u-hông, said to belong to the Ai Lao:

The Ngu’u-hông were crushed then [1337], their chief Xa Phên was decapitated. The tribes converged as did the boundaries, the Hu’ng-hoá of the Da giang, the Black River, lay to the northeast of Thanh-Hoá and Nghê-an, by the mountains of Laos and China. Cf. the *Hu’ng-hoá dia-chi*, ms, initio, and 46: Man, Ai Lao, Sien, Lu’, Xa-li, etc., all Thai under other names. On the emergence of Man ngu’u-hông, see the *CM [Việt sử thông-giám cu’ong-muc] III, 27, 2e an. long-tru’ong-thiên-tu’* of Lí Thánh-tông, 1067, which annexes them excessively. The *CM* locates them at Yên-chau of Hu’ng-hoá, with a language and literature equal to that of the Ai Lao, following the Hu’ng-hoá to Tranninh and to Lao-lung in the *Kiên van tien luc* of Lê Quý-Dôn, IV [sic]. [Chinese characters omitted.]

Yên Chau is the Vietnamese name for Muang Vat, home to that southern dialect of Black Tai already mentioned which

relates most closely to the Neua spoken in Xieng Kho, proposed home to the Ai Lao. Gaspardone's sources furthermore place these Tai at Muang Vat in the year 1067 and following.

The ethnonym of Ngu'u-hông may be preserved in the Red Tai lineage of Ngâu (cf Robert 1941). The Ngu'u-hông may also be that tribe called /ngEw /in the epic poem of Cheuang, a poem which appears to have been copied by a scribe in Ban Ban (Muang Kham) in northern Xieng Khwang province (Muang Phuan) (Mahasila 1943). The passage reads:

biang faay täy siang theet ciin caam k0 Thing phaay
kaang Thing ñaay ñOng fuang ngEw

(In the south [his kingdom] extended to Chen-la and the Cham; in the center it included the Nhai, the Nhung, and the Ngew.)

I was able in 1986 to account for all but one of these ethnonyms as occurring in the vicinity of Nghê An and Thanh Hoá; now it is hopefully complete. Ban Ban or Muang Kham is also the home of a Black Tai population, mostly in the subdistrict of Nhot Keua, who speak like the Tai of Muang Vat. This area is moreover a nexus of other Tai-speaking populations, notably the Thay Et at Ban Na Pa in Muang Kham District, and the Red Tai at Tha Vieng, mixed with Phuan. To the south, Phuan is found at Muang Ngane (at the head of the Xan River), and along the Xan, which seems to be its eastern limit, to Muang Kao where it is found mixed with Nho and Meuay. Muang Kao is in Borikhan Province (now called Borikhamxay by the socialists), about 26 kilometers north of Pak Xan.

Finally, following Madrolle, Gaspardone notes that the change of names of the two rivers which join to form the Song Ca (Lam-giang), perhaps marked an ancient boundary between Annam and Laos. The Nam Mo becomes the Ca or Lam, and the Nam Noen, flowing from Houa Phan, becomes the Hiêu in Vietnamese, before its convergence with the Ca. (Pavie accorded the role of principal branch to the Nam Noen, and this may have been more correct, for the town of Muang Lam, presumably the same toponym as the river, Lam-giang, is located on the Nam

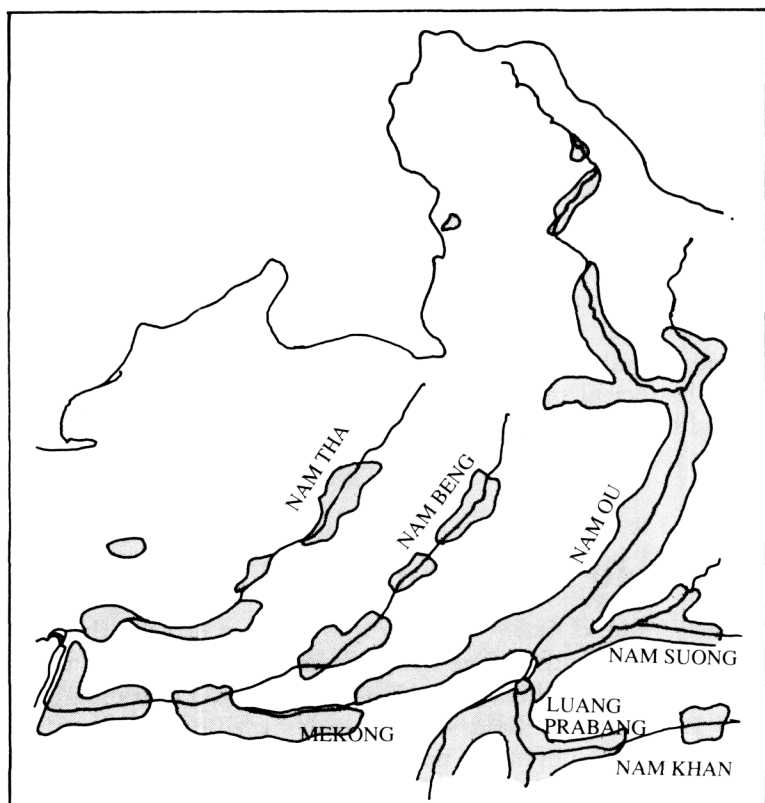
Noen tributary, not on the Song Ca proper.)

Historically, retention of a common name for the Ma, from Sip Song Chou Tai, through *Muang Et* and *Xieng Kho*, and through Thanh Hoá, may imply a common ethnolinguistic inhabitation or dominance in Thanh Hóa, formerly called Ai, which probably included adjacent parts of Houa Phan and Yên Châu.

The task is obviously too enormous to sort out here the ethnolinguistic, toponymic, and Tai dialectal complexity of the Annamese non-coastal states or principalities from the T'ang period onward. But this complexity must be recognized and eventually analyzed if we are to complete the southern half of the Tai historical picture, including answers to the question of the origin of the Sukhothai Thais and their writing systems. Ignoring this region can only result in distorted theories.

2. The Lao Subgroup

Now I would like to turn to the problem of Lao, the other half of the PH group. Map 1 illustrates the distribution of Lao dialects in northern Laos according to the *EFEO ethnolinguistic map of 1949*. Extant field work provides verification for all but a few of the most northerly positions in Phongsaly province, but since all of the other Lao information on the map is in agreement with these field studies, it is reasonable to assume that this map represents the distribution of the true Lao dialects as defined by the characteristic C1 - 234 split on the tone chart. (That is to say, that for syllables spelled with the PT C tone, written with a *may tho* mark in the Thai and Lao (and Sukhothai) writing systems, those spelled with an initial PT voiceless consonant will have a tone contour which is distinct from those spelled with PT voiceless unaspirated consonants, PT pre-glottalized consonants, or PT voiced consonants. For example, the tone on the word for 'face' /Naa²/ will always have a different tone from that on /paa²/ 'aunt,' /baa²/ 'crazy,' or /naa²/ 'mother's younger sibling.')



Map 1 Distribution of Lao

The pattern of distribution on the map is readily discerned as following the courses of the Nam Tha, the Nam Beng, and especially the Nam Ou which leads directly to those upper portions of Phongsaly. All of these rivers flow into the Mekhong. So far, there is no evidence to show that any of the Lao dialects are spoken across the border in the northeastern tip of Lai Chau Province, but it should be noted that those Lao pockets in northern Phongsaly are only a short distance from the valley of the Black River and the towns of Muang Tè and Muang Boum. The latter was brought to my attention by Lao speakers from Nam Bak and Muang Ngoy because according to their local traditions the home of the Lao was originally in Muang Boum (despite the more widely held view taken from the history of Khoun Bourom which relates how the Lao are descended from Muang Theng (Dien Bien Phu). Muang Boum is located in a relatively large flatland near the confluence of the Black and the Boum rivers and appears from the maps to be at the hub of several trade routes from China, from the northwest and the northeast, which continue on to the Nam Ou valley as well as to Lai Chau city.

If density of population is any indication, the main route of Lao migration was along the Nam Ou, through Muang Khoa, Muang Ngoy to Pak Ou, into Luang Prabang, and southward along the Mekhong to Xagnaboury, Pak Lai, and Kène Thao. The Luang Prabang dialect continues south into Loei Province in Thailand, through Dan Sai to Lom Sak. East of Pak Chom District in Loei, the Vientiane dialect begins and continues along the Mekhong with only gradual changes to Champasak.

The Lao spoken from Luang Prabang to Lomsak is characterized by the use of the future particle /ʔi/, as opposed to /si/ in Vientiane and south; /ci/ in Luang Nam Tha Lao, Nam Bak and Muang Ngoy, Neua-Phuan, BT, RT, and WT; /na /in Nho; and /ca /in Thai. Another feature is the tri-directional rising-falling-rising contour on the A1 tone which is found as far as Muang Ngoy.

West of the Nam Ou, the Lao dialects of Nam Bak, Muang Xay, and Luang Nam Tha have tones that more closely resemble Vientiane.

In Chinese the term Lao, sometimes represented as Liao, appears in the historical records (cf. Schafer and Eberhard) in reference to what the Chinese considered very primitive peoples. In China today, the term has been preserved in the ethnonyms of Mulao, a language spoken in northern Kwangsi which belongs to the Kam-Sui family, closely related to Tai, and Kelao/Gelao spoken in western Kweichow, a language of the Kadai family, considered by many to be related to Tai and Kam-Sui. Tai-Kadai has been used by Paul Benedict (1975 and elsewhere) to designate the superstock, or broader grouping of languages to which Kam-Sui and Tai belong.

The Kadai family languages are found widely separated from each other in southern China and northern Vietnam. In addition to Gelao, already mentioned in western Kweichow, there is Lati (Lachi) on the Chinese-Vietnamese border near Ha Giang, Laqua further north, also on the border, Laha in the Sip Song Chou Thai, and Li (Day) in the mountains in the south of Hainan island. The languages are very different from each other so it is assumed they are all that remains of an earlier larger and more numerous ethnolinguistic family which ranged over much of southeastern China and parts of northern Vietnam. It is tempting to suggest that the syllable "Lao," so widely used in the T'ang period, became compressed in some of the Kadai names such as Laha (>*Lao Ha), Laqua (>*Lao Qua), and Lati (>*Lao Ti).

Elsewhere, Haudricourt (1960) notes the ethnonyms of Ts'un Lao and Xan Lao, in the far east around Moncay on the Chinese side of the border. He relates them to the Man Cao Lan, Tai speakers whose culture is otherwise Yao living in the central part of northern Vietnam, and classifies them as a separate group, between his "Thai Proprement Dit" and Chuang.

Lao was also used to refer to the inhabitants of Phúc-lôc (Fu-lu, previously Du'ông Lâm) Province in the 7th century where they were referred to as the "migrating uncivilized Lao" (Taylor 1983: 172). At this time the province was supposed to be located near the Ca river, according to the Chinese sources. But later Vietnamese historians place the province to the northwest of Ai

and Tru'óng (perhaps near So'n La or Yên Chau). (The problem of the discrepancies in location of these place names is, according to Taylor [327ff], irreconcilable.) In addition, the military advisor of the indigenous cult hero Phung-Hu'ng, named Dô Anh Hàn (which looks suspiciously like a Tai name such as "Thao Ai Han"), was called a "Lao" by the Chinese (Taylor 332). I am sure there are many more similar occurrences.

Extant languages retaining the Lao ethnonym are found in all three of the Tai-Kadai families: Kadai, Kam-Sui and Tai. Lao may be the oldest surviving ethnonym for what we might cautiously refer to as *Proto-Tai-Kadai*. Eberhard (1968), in his pioneering folkloristic classification of cultural motifs in South-east China, utilizes the name (which he calls Liao) for a very primitive culture, preceding, or at least considered by him to be more primitive than, the Thai, Pa, and Yao cultures. He even goes so far as to indicate the location of the Liao culture (453) some 60 miles to the south of Ch'ang - an, the center of the Chou Kingdom.

It is reasonable to assume that the Lao side of the PH group, retaining this old ethnonym, inhabited the northerly valley of the Nam Ou and Muang Boum before the P group moved west. The Lao name may in fact preserve an original Kam-Sui or Kadai, or other non-SW identity of a group that resided here for a long time, or which may even have been swept into the area or have been displaced by the Nan Chao army when they attacked Annam in the 9th century. Whatever their origin, it is necessary to account for the existence of the ethnonym as well as for the present status of Lao as belonging to the SW Branch of Tai. Like the Northern Branch groups in Khammouan which shifted to SW dialects while retaining the northern ethnonyms of Nho and Yoi, or like the strange case of the Tai Mène found also in Borikhan province which preserves only some Northern Branch lexical items, Lao may have been a Kadai language which was southwesternized through contact with what was then a dominant Tai population.

3. The Origin of the Sukhothai Thais

With these scenarios in mind, we may begin to look at the problem of Sukhothai. My reasons for suggesting, as I did in 1972, that the Sukhothai arrived via Luang Prabang were at once geographical, linguistic, and historical. Geographically, assuming a general east to west movement of Tais, Luang Prabang is in the logical position due to the watercourses which lead to Sukhothai. These have recently been clarified in the doctoral dissertation of Amphay Doré (1987) who maps the ancient trade routes between the two locations (see Map 2). In addition, Inscription One speaks metaphorically of the Nam Khong and refers to the people of the Ou and the Khong in a statement which accurately depicts the distribution of the Lao. Luang Prabang was at that time the trade route crossroads par excellence of northern Southeast Asia.

The linguistic evidence of the tone systems upon which I have relied correlates with the hypotheses of some historians who allege the existence of Sukhothai Thais in southern Thailand (e.g. Wyatt 1984: 50 ff). The tone systems for Southern Thai and Lao share the propensity for tertiary splitting of the B and C tones, although it is much more pronounced in the southern dialects than in Lao. On the other hand, the tone systems for U Thong and Bangkok correspond perfectly with those of the Neua-Phuan group, and so over the years I have steadfastly maintained that the language of Ayutthaya was not directly descended from that of Sukhothai.

According to Lao and Phuan historical traditions, the two kingdoms of Xieng Dong Xieng Thong or Muang Xwa (Luang Prabang) and Muang Phuan (Xieng Khwang), were always considered as separate but related. The annals of both kingdoms have evolved to account for this circumstance through a mythic sibling relationship of the founders; Khoun Lo for Muang Xwa, and Chet Cheuang for Muang Phuan, both said to be sons of Khoun Bourom. In Black Tai history, however, Lan Cheuang is the last son of Khoun Lo; and in the epic of Cheuang, Khoun Lo is invoked as a god of war to defeat Cheuang. These latter

sources are presumably older, and the myth of Khoun Bourom, one suspects, at least in its extant forms, attempts to rectify an awkward situation and to unify ancient divisions. I believe that the ancient boundaries, which according to Phuan tradition were drawn between the two kingdoms during a meeting of the two brothers, are mirrored linguistically in the Lao-Neua/Phuan subgroups, and likewise in the respective kingdoms of Sukhothai and Ayutthaya.

One additional point I would like to discuss, albeit somewhat impressionistically, is related to the arguments surrounding the divergent political structures of Ayutthaya and Sukhothai. While Inscription One portrays a system of benevolent patriarchy, the Ayutthayan evidence provokes images of a highly ordered and codified (Sakdina) society. And while these conjured visions are quite obviously overgeneralized, and even to some extent amorphous, similar cosmological differences are to be found between the Lao and the Neua-Phuan subgroups. An even greater degree of differentiation obtains between the Lao political system and those of the P group.

In the past, this has been interpreted as Black Tai isolation and hence a more original preservation of an older common Tai administrative and religious order. But I have recently come to believe that this may not have been a Tai system, but a Chinese one. The Black Tai land distribution system, for example, resembles that of the Sui and T'ang dynasty which was imparted to Giao Chau as described by Taylor (1983: 209), and which presumably was adopted with varying degrees of completeness by the divergent Tai speaking groups.

That such political distinctions follow linguistic boundaries should come as no surprise, and although relationships between language and culture have been exhaustively studied, the South-east Asian complex provides ample opportunity for continued examination of the processes by which languages shift ethnicity, particularly in the relationships between Tai and Austroasiatic, already alluded to in this paper, and that between Tai and Yao in the strange cases of Man Cao Lan and Lakkia (see Haudricourt 1960, 1967).

Thus, we find among the P group, Black Tai, White Tai, Red Tai, Lue, Shan, and so on, the most rigid hierarchical social structures, perhaps as a result of more extensive Sinitic contacts. In the Neua-Phuan subgroup, while clearly evident, this rigidity in such groups as the Neua of Houa Phan or the Phou Thay of Savannakhet, is by no means so obviously delineated in comparison to, say, the Black Tai.⁸ And by further contrast, Lao political structures could be characterized as the least resolute, to a point where adherence to absolute codes connotes discord and conflict.

At this point, readers with experience in Thailand will no doubt protest that all Thai/Tai cultures share these latter features, to which I would say, yes, I agree, but only in the underlying sense. I would argue that the Lao, having been the most inland, were therefore historically the least included in the political spheres of India and China. Luang Prabang, at the hub of mainland overland trade routes, must have developed the ability to more readily tolerate foreign influences while at the same time having more freedom to adopt only those more agreeable attributes to which they attached importance. But although axial in its location, its comparative remoteness from the larger coastal centers would render foreign military invasion a less desirable and more costly undertaking. When it did begin to expand its own sphere of influence in the 13th century, culminating in the Kingdom of Lan Xang, its position of power, like the center square in tic-tac-toe, could not be maintained against its more powerful strategically located pelagic neighbors.

Seen in this light, and taken together with all of the arguments presented heretofore, I conclude that the linguistic evidence, while essentially neutral, if combined with the historical position of Laos and the PH character of the Lao language, supports the hypothesis that the Sukhothai Thais arrived from Luang Prabang, and secondarily argues for the authenticity of the Ram Khamhaeng Inscription. The Ma Nhai Inscription not only supports the validity of the P/PH distinction, it implies that Sukhothai was a B language. But there is still no evidence to demonstrate that Inscription One was the first Tai writing

and I will continue to suggest that epigraphers focus their attention to the east and the probable relations between Tai and Cham.⁹

The need for collaboration between Tai specialists and scholars of the ancient history of Vietnam and southern China is pressing. Tai specialists are able to examine indigenous Tai histories, when they are available, but we are confined to a reliance on secondary and tertiary sources for the Chinese and Vietnamese versions of history while attempting, in a thus impoverished way, to construct hypotheses concerning Tai events in Vietnam. From even the very best of these sources, such as Taylor (1983), we are left with an aftertaste of ethnolinguistic obfuscation, while the Tai toponyms covering two-thirds of the map of northern Vietnam, ancient and well-established, stand out conspicuously but are largely ignored.

Hence for students of Tai studies, reading Vietnamese history is like trying to see the silkworm through its cocoon. The old inland provinces cited by Taylor (327 ff) of Phong, So'n, Phúc-lộc, and Diên (Yên), which the Chinese records locate to the south along the Song Ca, have all mysteriously, Taylor notes, been relocated further north by Vietnamese historians. These place names, in at least some instances, follow movements of Tai speaking populations, as in the Black Tai chronicles where the first move is from Muang Ai to Muang Lo (Nghia Lô). All of the places now known by these names which Taylor mentions are inhabited by Tai speakers, yet the local heroes of these regions who rose up against the T'ang, are all portrayed as freedom-fighting Vietnamese.

One quite clear example is the indigenous hero named Phung-Hu'ng, and his brother Phung-Hai. Probably the surname Phung is originally the same word as *Phông*, both cognate with Schafer's (1967) Middle Chinese from the province named P'yong, the same name which is preserved in Laos in various titles, ethnonyms, and toponyms, especially in Houa Phan. There is also the Kingdom of the Pungs (Plunien 1905) and the Pungs which appear in other Tai histories. It is highly likely that the person called Phung-Hu'ng is none other than the hero

of the Lao/Phuan epic of Thao Hung or Cheuang, and that his brother Phung-Hai is the very same as Ai Chet Hai who appears in a Phuan legend as a Gargantua-like figure, the great size and strength of whom is reinforced by the existence of the megalithic jars on the Plaine des Jarres in Xieng Khwang province (Prachit 1971). (The Lao name has assumed a false etymology as "Brother Seven Jars," but in fact, the word /cet/ which may mean 'seven' is also used in front of the names of the early kings of Xieng Khwang (cf Archaimbault 1967), where indeed, Chet Cheuang was the first king). Cheuang is found in the Black Tai chronicles as Pu Lan Cheuang, who, like Phung-hu'ng, goes from place to place establishing rule over new territories which become eventually the Sip Song Chou Tai. (Compare Taylor, p. 202, "Hu'ng and Hai went from village to village, establishing their authority wherever they went.") Hu'ng's military advisor, Dô Anh Han, could be interpreted in Tai as Thao Ai Han; /Haan/, meaning 'brave' or 'strong' in Tai languages, is yet another of the terms attached to Cheuang. Like the Hu'ng of Vietnamese history, Cheuang also became an ancestral spirit of the Tai peoples as well as the Austroasiatics in northern Southeast Asia. Thus, it is appropriate to mention here Ram Khamhaeng's most powerful spirit of the mountain at Sukhothai named Phra Khaphung /Kha²/ phung/, spelled with the initial high class /Kh/ as if it were originally /Khaa²/ 'Austroasiatic.' As I have already alluded, peoples known by the ethnonym of Kha Phong are still found in Sam Neua, Xieng Khwang, Khammouan, and Nghê An provinces in Laos and Vietnam. Some speak a Viet-Muang language and others apparently speak a dialect related to Khmu.

It is understandable then, that from a Tai perspective, the identity of those "Vietnamese" who rebelled against the T'ang is highly suspect, and for the present it can only be concluded that the real rulers against whom the local Tai revolts were aimed would most accurately be referred to as the Sino-Vietnamese. The Tai culture was the only one administratively organized enough to carry out a successful resistance. The Non-Sinicized Vietnamese, or the Muang, whose language is Austroasiatic but whose name and administrative system is Tai (cf Condominas 1980), are a further key to this conclusion.

Taylor's anomaly of toponyms may be explained by taking into account the rise to power of the Sino-Vietnamese in the delta which split the Tais into at least two groups. Some were pushed to the south at first and later worked their way back up the valleys of the Tè (Black) and the Ma to settle in the watersheds created by these rivers. The exposure of the Tais living in Ai and Yèn to the culture of Lin-yi or Champa in adjacent Huan is a fact that can hardly be contested and may have begun as early as the 7th century, long before the existence of Sukhothai in the west.

I have dealt elsewhere with the linguistic diversity of Nghê An and Thanh Hoá (1984, 1986) and a forthcoming paper on the Black Tai Chronicle of Muang Mouay will describe what I believe may have happened ethnolinguistically with the Tais in Vietnam. For purposes of the present paper, I can only reiterate what I have already said, that the implications of the diversity of Tai groups along the Lao-Vietnam border argue not only for a P/PH distinction, but for a Lao/Neua-Phuan distinction which is reflected in the divergent languages of Sukhothai and Ayutthaya. So far I have seen no evidence, either linguistic, literary, or historical, which would contradict this premise.

Notes

- 1 The first draft of the paper dated January 26, 1989 was widely circulated by Gedney. It was presented in final form at the panel on Inscription One at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies held in Washington, D.C. in March 1989. Parts of the first draft referring to me were cited by Dr. Prasert na Nagara at the Siam Society panel discussion on March 4, 1989 and there was no opportunity for response at that time. In keeping with the prevailing imagery of a boxing match, Dr. Prasert generously bestowed upon me the honor of middleweight champ, for which I am grateful.
- 2 The Thay Phong /phOng/ were described to me as speaking a language that is neither Tai nor Khmu. These Phong live in the mountains in the villages of Ban Keng Kok and Ban Nam Tane in the subdistrict of Phong Sathone, in the district of Muang Xone, Sam Neua Province, approximately 22 kilometers south of the famous Phou Pha Thi mountain. They were said to dress similarly to the Yao, wearing turbans and pants with decorative borders. (The information was provided by Mr. Khamthong Bongxay, whose father was the Nai Phong /phong/ of Sathone, killed by the Vietnamese in 1962. Khamthong became the Ta Seng until they were evacuated in 1965). The villagers of Phong Sathone speak a Neua dialect, but are surrounded by Khmu. This informant spoke both languages fluently.

The province of Phong in Annam, described in Taylor (1983: 170) as just west of Giao between the Red and Black Rivers, appears to have been pushed to the northwest, perhaps along with the Tais themselves, and remains not only in the ethnonyms and the administrative systems, but also in the province names of Phongсалы and Phong Thô. The Red Tais of Thanh-Hoa use the administrative term as well (Bourlet 1907).

It should also be noted that the Laha, Kadai speakers, who are found in the vicinity of Chieng Xang in So'n La Province, are known to the Tais there as "Xa Poong" (Dang 1972), /Saa²/ ("Xa") being the Black Tai cognate for Lao /Khaa²/.

- 3 The exploits of Nung Tri Cao, or Nong Zhi-gao in Chinese romanization, against the Vietnamese Dai Co Viet and against the Chinese Song ruling powers in Yung and Jung, or what are today the provinces of Guangxi and Guangdong, in the 11th century, have been admirably researched by Barlow (1987). This rare glimpse of the history of an indigenous hero serves very well as an example of the kind of rebellion that occurred in many parts of mainland Southeast Asia where encroaching Chinese and Sino-Vietnamese were attempting to push out and control local Tai populations. Control was sought both militarily and sometimes more subtly through Sinicization of the local leadership. From the clan names and the geography, as well as from the indigenous histories and literature, it is clear that the leaders of such revolts were ethnically and linguistically Tai or from the closely affiliated linguistic families of Kam-Sui or Kadai.
- 4 Maspéro (1916: 31) records that at the end of the 11th century, Ai was promoted administratively to the rank of "phu of Thanh Hoá," and that the last historical mention of Ai was in 1061. Thanh Hoá appeared first in the year 1111. The Châu of Hoan was replaced in 1036 by Nghê An.
- 5 Boutin (1937: 118) reports that the population of Xieng Kho was more than double that of the population of the provincial capital of Sam Neua. His statistics were as follows:

Sam Neua	9,338
Xieng Kho	22,901
Muang Xone	4,898
Sam Taÿ	6,003
Maung Xoi	4,640
Houa Muang	6,634

The sub-districts of Xieng Kho are: Sop Sane, Muang Et, Nam Na Mène, Muang Seum, Xieng Khoune (mostly Black Tai), and Muang Vane (mixed Black Tai, Red Tai and Neua).

- 6 The Chinese characters used in the inscription for proper names were selected to convey the sound of the word. For the names of Câ, Bôn, and Bông, all the characters represent Chinese words with original voiced stops reconstructed by Karlgren (1923) for his Ancient Chinese, spoken in the 6th century (also known as Middle Chinese). These were reconstructed as /g'i'am (A)/ # 386 'animal especially a bird'; /*b'uân (A)/ # 690 'plate'; /*b'i'wong' (=Tai B)/ # 34 'income, salary,' respectively. These have been devoiced in most Chinese dialects, for example Cantonese which shows /kham/, /phun/ and /fung/. The Sino-Vietnamese forms used by Gaspardone still retain the voicing in Bôn and Bông, but not in Câ, reflecting an earlier devoicing change for the P languages. Other characters could presumably have been used if the initials to be represented were /g/ or /kh/. (I am grateful to Dr. Reinhart Struntz for his help in deciphering the Sino-Vietnamese characters reproduced in Gaspardone's paper.)

The reconstruction for /*b'i'wong'/ is slightly problematical according to Karlgren who notes that some dialects show reflexes as if the initial were originally voiceless. Curiously, this may also be a problem in the Lao manuscripts of Khoun Bourom which refer to Fa Ngoum's grandfather, whom Gaspardone equates with "the rebel Bông," as Souvanna Khamphong, the last syllable being interpreted as /Phong A/ as if the initial were voiceless. In at least one other instance, in *Mahasila* (1967: 23) the second son of Khoun Bourom and Nang Et Kheng is called /khamphu-ang/in some manuscripts and /Saÿ Phong A/ in others, reflecting a variation between /phu-ang/ and /Phong/.

Assuming Gaspardone is correct in his association of Bông with Khamphong, this type of variation might account for the spelling irregularity in Lao. But in addition,

Gaspardone's tone of *huyền* (A) on Bông does not agree with Karlgren's reconstructed *K'ü* (B) tone for this character. Furthermore, Khammanh (1969) cites yet another personage with the same name, from the same period, in Muang Phuan, Phra Chao Khamphong (/Phong/), whose name looks suspiciously like that of Souvanna Khamphong. Obviously, additional analysis is needed before this puzzle is solved.

- 7 There is an area of Nghê An and Thanh-Hoá, extending from a point south of Qui Chau to the north of Yên Tho, where the DOD (1974, 1967) maps show names of mountains all spelled with Bu instead of *Phu* or *Phou*. To the east of this area, the Vietnamese term *Núi* is used, and to the west, the more common Tai word *Phu* is found. The word for mountain in PT is reconstructed as /*bu A/. Another topographical term, 'cliff, escarpment,' PT /*pha A/ is still spelled with the voiceless initial. These two words are even found in combination, e.g. *Bu Pha Bi* (Hill 801) near Thian Giao. All of this area is designated as Tai speaking on Robequain's ethnolinguistic map of Thanh Hoa. This spelling does not occur in any other areas of Vietnam.

If such names were to occur on maps, one would expect to find them in the vicinity of Cao Bằng and certain points to the west (Nguyễn-Bình), northwest (Bao-Lac), and north (Soc-Giang) of that city. This is the area which Gedney (p. 7) notes that Haudricourt referred to (the citation should be 1960) as having preserved voiced stops. The information was taken by Haudricourt from a linguistic survey done by the École Française d'Extrême Orient in 1939. The survey covered 55 Tai speaking areas in northern Vietnam, but unfortunately did not cover the provinces south of the Delta. Haudricourt does not cite the forms themselves; he merely refers to the glosses. Gedney, however, copied the original notebooks in Paris and I in turn copied all of the animal names from Gedney. The only data I have therefore are for the glosses 'owl' and 'person.' (Haudricourt does mention the forms for 'bat' and 'wild boar' as well but I regard these as problematical taxemes which are not

regular in their correspondence across the dialects.) He does not, for some reason, include 'elephant' which also shows voicing in some dialects on the survey. The survey was not carried out by linguists, and much of the recording was impressionistic, done with the assistance of speakers of other Tai dialects and presumably some Vietnamese speakers. Also, in the points in question, there is considerable dialect mixing so it may not provide an entirely accurate picture. That the items for 'person' and 'owl' have voiced initials does seem to be consistent in this area, even though it is not apparent from the toponyms on the maps. Another point on the survey, 207 IX. 5, *Thô of Moncay*, has *cân* for 'person' and *gâu* for 'owl' and thus leaves open the question of accuracy of transcription.

- 8 In Sam Neua, for example, there are at least four terms applied to Muang (District) size administrative units. First there is *chou* /cuu2/, like the Black Tai Chou in 'Sip Song Chou Tai,' used interchangeably with the term *muang* /mïang/ for the town of Sam Neua, Chou Sam or Muang Sam. Muang is also used with the district centers of Muang Xieng Kho, Muang Sam Tay and Muang Xone. Then there is the term *kong* /kOng/ used with the districts of Kong Muang Xoi and Kong Houa Muang. A fourth term, *phong* /phong/ is used with (and perhaps restricted to) Phong Sathone (cf fn 2) which is attached administratively to Muang Xone, and is said to be larger than a sub-district or Ta Seng. The Nai Phong is also referred to as a deputy Chao Muang, for areas not conveniently accessible to the Muang.
- 9 Schafer (74) notes that the Cham were in Ai in the early ninth century and that they were attacked by the Vietnamese from Ch'ang Chou (Tru'o'ng). Maspéro (1916) confirms this noting that in 989 (Việt su' lu'o'c, q.1.19 b) there was an expedition against the Chams who occupied Ai Châu, followed by others in 1006, 1009, and 1011 (28).

In yet another Tai connection, Schafer writes regarding the mythical bronze pillars of Ma Yuan (98), that the

governor of Ai Chou wanted to find them and melt them down to sell the copper. Although he never found them, the local inhabitants "regarded the pillars as divine barriers protecting them from death at the hands of the men of the sea." They complained to the Protector of Annam who ordered the governor to give up his plan. The bronze pillars appear in the Black Tai chronicles as synonyms for the *Mak Tao POUNG* gourds sent out to populate the various known regions of the world.

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