

The language corridor: New evidence from Vietnam

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1. Introduction

It is widely accepted that many Tai and Kadai groups currently settled in SE Asia once lived in southern China.¹ Historians East and West, modern and ancient have reported this movement. Indeed, as Terrien de Lacouperie (1887:14) said:

The majority of the population of Indo-China is made up of ethnical elements which were formerly settled in China proper. The ethnology of the peninsula cannot be understood separately from the Chinese formation, and the intricacies of one help pretty often to make intelligible the complication of the other.

Moreover, it is generally believed that this movement has primarily taken a southern and western directional vector. But, by simply announcing this statement I have done little to enlighten the extraordinarily complex issue of the ethnic, topographic, and geographic givens that have helped to condition and shape the interaction, intersettlement, and interfusion of Han and non-Han groups in peopling of the territory south of the Yangtze River.

In this paper I will attempt to demonstrate how linguistic analysis might be employed to examine these issues. However let me say that my aims here are modest. I will strive for no comprehensive account of the migrations into SE Asia, but instead I will look at one geographic area, namely the Vietnam-China Borderlands. I would note though that this particular area I feel is one of the most informative, because the borderlands area is a place where one can find a profusion of small linguistic groups displaced from their homelands often by great distances. In some cases these small groups may be found no where else. In short I contend the Borderlands area resembles a freeze-frame, stopping the action of an epic motion picture of travelers encamped at various locations on their journeys when the tighter

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border controls of modern times abruptly broke upon them. Moreover, by using the linguistic lens to view this still life we are able to determine in many cases where these travelers have come from and where they are going, for in regard to movements of peoples in the last 250-400 years there is very much a *beaten path syndrome* in the sense described by Morrison in his *Functions and dynamics of migration*, 1977. That is why Li Jinfang and I in 1996 suggested that there exists a *language corridor*, a special pathway leading from Guizhou and northern Guangxi Province into northern Vietnam.

How may we describe this pathway? It is a general route of travel out of harm's way that runs a course along the Guizhou-Guangxi border westward into Yunnan Province. From there it turns south and terminates in Vietnam in Hà Giang, Lào Cai, and Lai Châu Province and in Laos in Phongsaly Province. In this paper I will explore reason for the language corridor and speak about some of the Kadai groups that have taken that corridor.

In the following I will be considering the linguistic situation of four immigrant groups in Vietnam and their forbearers in China, the Kam of Vietnam or *Đông*, the Sui of Vietnam or *Thủy*, the Bouyei immigrants to Vietnam (the *Giáy*), and the Red and White Gelao of Vietnam or *Cơ Lao*. As I will outline below, the Kam, Sui, and Gelao appear to be the last vestiges of free migration with perhaps some push from the harsh economic setting of their former homeland in China. The Giáy, by contrast, appear to have partaken in a mass migration phenomenon so that today they have a population in Vietnam of about 40,000.

2. Viet Kam, a dying language

Kam is a Kam-Sui language in the Kadai Branch whose speakers are primarily found in Guizhou Province, China. They are thought to have come to Vietnam in small numbers about 150 years ago and are found today in only one village, Đồng Mộc, of Tuyên Quang Province. It has been general unknown to non-Vietnamese scholars until recently that Kam is spoken outside of China and few if any purely linguistic publications exist on the Kam of Vietnam. However, brief ethnographic notes and a short word list are found in Nguyễn Khắc Tụng (1975:306-316) and there is a brief description of the cultural practices of the Kam in *Các dân tộc ít người ở Việt Nam (các tỉnh phía bắc)* (1975:287-290).

There are today not more than a very few who can still speak this language. Local authorities helped us to find what we believe to be the best speaker of Kam in Vietnam, Mr. Thạch Kim Đồng or in Chinese Shi Jindong. Mr. Đồng learned the language from his mother, the now 96 year old Ngô Thị Thang, who had also taught him much about Kam culture and history. He has reported to us that in his village

there are about 35 people who would claim to be Kam. Among them, though, only the family of the matriarch Ngô Thị Thang can still speak the language and Mr. Đồng is said to speak the best, now that his mother has grown deaf in her old age.

2.1 Viet Kam tones

Kam is one of the languages of Asia that has carried the process of tone splitting to an extensive degree. Mr. Đồng speaks a kind of Kam that has not split its tones as fully as most kinds. It is the usual assumption that the Kam-Sui languages, like the Tai languages in general, had five proto tones, now conventionally designed A, B, C, DL, and DS, cf. Li 1965, 1977. From the five tones then arose ten by a sound change known as *tone bipartition*, as it has been called in Haudricourt 1961. It was usually the case that forms with original voiced consonant initials developed low tones, whereas those with original voiceless consonant initials developed high tones, cf. Liang Min 1984, Wang 1984, and Edmondson and Yang 1988. We can represent these changes as in:

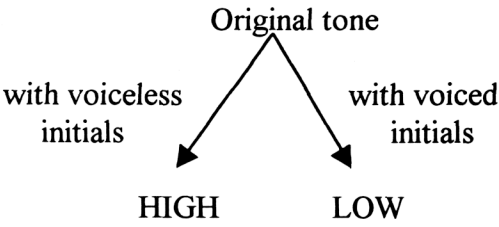


Figure 1. Tonal bipartition into HIGH and LOW reflexes

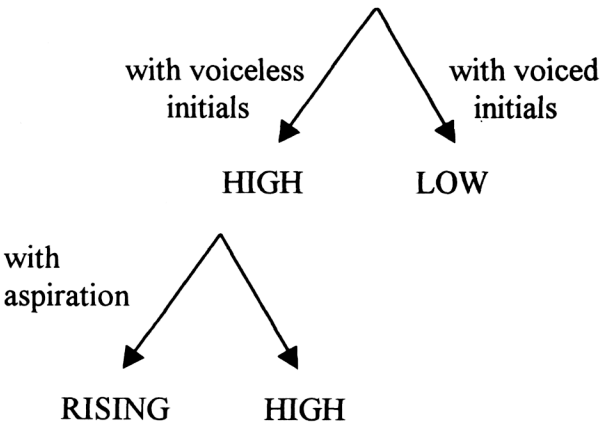


Figure 2. Tripartition into HIGH, LOW, RISING tones

Kam, however, belongs to a select group of area languages that have undergone tripartition through a second historically distinct tonal bipartition. Whenever the original consonant initials possessed aspiration (voiceless friction, as it is called by Gedney 1972), rising tones were the result. The process is illustrated in Figure 2.

The above scenario eventually led to nine tones in open syllables and six in closed syllables.² The tripartition of tones is attested in four of the six generally recognized varieties of Kam with bipartition in the other two, the latter being found in extreme southeast Guizhou at Liping Shuikou (designated area 5 in the unpublished but comprehensive dialectological report *Dongyu Diaocha Baogao* 1957) and in Rongshui County of Guangxi Province, area 6, on the very southern edge of Kam speaking territory.

We found that Viet Kam clearly reflects at least six tones, which would constitute bipartition. However to complicate the picture, some tendencies were also observed possibly reflecting additional developing tones in Mr. Đồng’s speech. Specifically, those vocabulary items with aspirated stop or voiceless friction initials typically had a higher onset than vocabulary with plain voiceless stop initials. While this effect may be only phonetic and not a contrastive feature of the language, it may reflect “work in progress” of a familiar tonal sort in this linguistic area, i.e. emerging tripartition.

The organization of Viet Kam tones as developments from proto categories may be represented as in Figure 3:³

A	B	C	DL	DS
1 [44]	5 [53]	3 [24]	9 [34]	7 [55]
2 [212]	6 [33]	4 [52]	10 [31]	8 [32]

Figure 3. Viet Kam tone categories

We have constructed plots of representative forms with these tones from our tape recordings.⁴

²We note that the DL tones mirror the pitch trajectories of the C tones and DS tones mirror the trajectory of the A tones.

³We follow here the Gedney tradition for representing proto tone categories A, B, C, DL (ong), and DS(hort) even though it results in some tone number reorderings, nor for Viet Kam are the four term vertical categories well suited, rather a simple two term system (reflecting original voiced vs. original voiceless initials) suffices.

Viet Kam Tone A

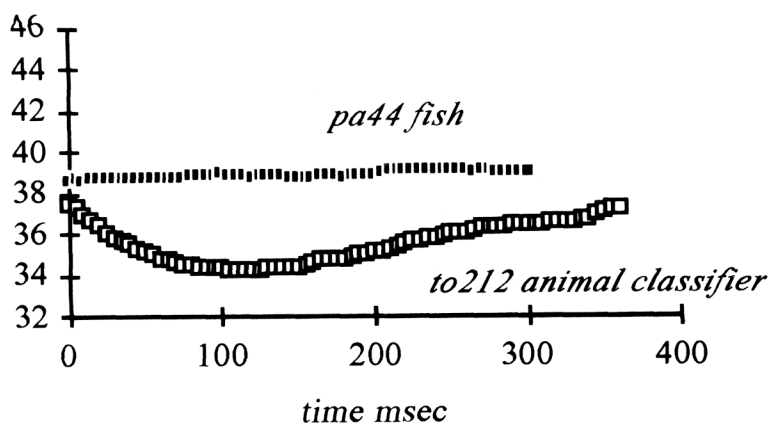


Figure 4. Viet Kam Tone A (> tone 1 and tone 2) illustrated in *pa*¹ 'fish' and *to*² 'animal classifier'

Viet Kam Tone B

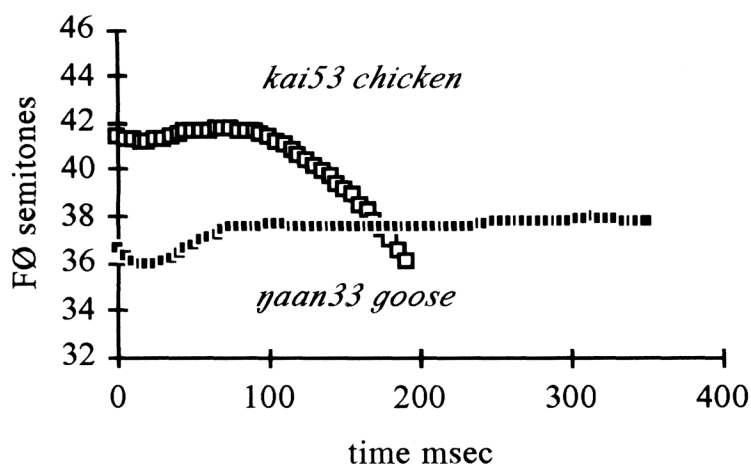


Figure 5. Viet Kam Tone B (> tone 5 and tone 6) illustrated in *kai*⁵ 'chicken' and *naan*⁶ 'goose'

⁴To make these plots we used both direct recording into the computer and tape recordings, which were later played back into the computer. The signal in each case was digitized by means of the CECIL speech analysis system. It consists of a hardware A-D/D-A box and software for a small DOS computer. At a later time three or more pitch plots were composited by means of some software we have developed, which computes the mean values from several repetitions of a syllable.

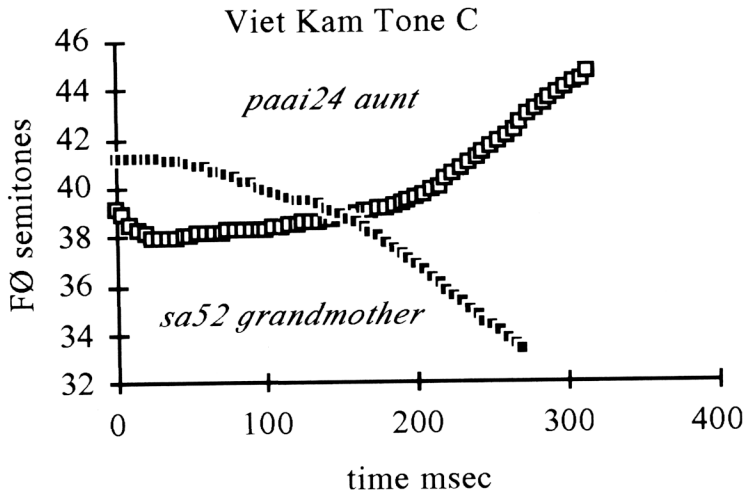


Figure 6. Viet Kam Tone C (> tone 3 and tone 4) illustrated in *paai*³ 'aunt' and *sa*⁴ 'grandmother'

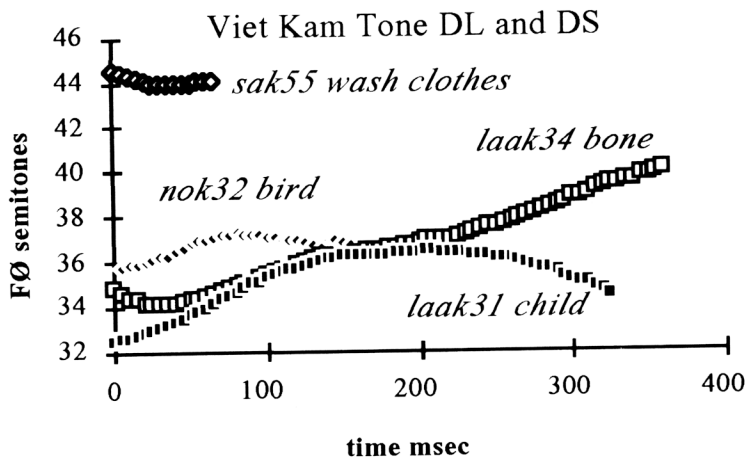


Figure 7. Viet Kam tone DS (> tone 7 and tone 8) illustrated in *sak*⁷ 'wash clothes' and *nok*⁸ 'bird' as well as tone DL (> tone 9 and tone 10) illustrated in *laak*⁹ 'bone' and *laak*¹⁰ 'child'

The six tone system of open syllables in Viet Kam above compares favorably with the varieties of Kam found in China at Congjiang Guandong, Liping Pingtu, Liping Shuikou, and Congjiang Guandong, cf. Yang (1988:29-30). Viet Kam as well as its counterpart varieties in Kam of Area 5 above has only six tones in open

syllables at the same time preserving a richer set of initial consonant than at virtually all other locations.

2.2 Initials in Kam

Viet Kam initials

p	t	t̚	k	q	ʔ
ph	th	t̚h	kh		
	s	ɸ	h		
v					
		j, l			
hw		hj, hl			
m	n	ɱ	ŋ		
hm	hn	hɱ			
pj	pw		kw		
phj			khw		
mj					
		lj			

Initials at Liping Shuikou

p	t	t̚	k	q	ʔ
ph	th	t̚h	kh	qh	
	s	ɸ	h		
			ɣ		
w		j, l			
hw		hj, hl			
m	n	ɱ	ŋ		
hm	hn	hɱ	hŋ		
pj	pw		kw		
phj			khw		
mj			ŋw		
hmj			hŋw		
	tj	lj			
		lhj			
	thj	nj			

It is worth noting that the transcriptions *hm*, *hn*, *hl* etc. do not represent /m̥, n̥, l̥/ but rather a cluster in which the *h* onset is timed to precede the sonorant. The sonorants may retain at least some of their original voicing. Thus, *hl* might, in finer transcription, be [ɦl].

2.3 Vocabulary

Kam, as a speech form in Vietnam, is today restricted to only a very few individuals and is not being passed on to their children. It is, therefore, a matter of some urgency that we preserve copious examples of the language now for future generations. Clearly, we are not many years away from losing all live speech evidence on this historic Kam migration into the Vietnam-China borderlands. Even so, we were impressed that languages don't disappear easily and that a speaker, such as Mr. Đồng had acquired the lexical richness and phonological complexity of his first language despite growing up in a community possessed of few conversational partners in Kam. In this regard, one expects to see some contraction as a result of the small speech population, especially in the area of vocabulary. Indeed, we found such to be the case. Certain vocabulary items found among the Kam of China, for example, are no longer present. For instance, Mr. Đồng uses only the phrase *Nyenc Gaeml* [nɛn² kɛm¹] 'Kam people' and does not employ the equally common expression used in China, *Lagx Nyenc Gaeml* [laak¹⁰ nɛn² kɛm¹] 'Kam people'. On the other hand, he has the archaic word *pui*² for 'cotton' as well as the more modern Han borrowing *mjiŋ*². We did not, however, find the older form *maan*³ for 'village' (cf. Sui *?baan*³) only *ɕaai*⁴.

2.4 Locating the original settlement area of the Viet Kam

In order to locate the possible original home area of the Viet Kam, we tabulated a body of Viet Kam forms as to whether they were identical with parallel items in 22 Kam villages at different locations in China. We ranked these identities of form for all items we checked with the result that some villages overlapped very little and others a great deal. The sites numbered 1-22 in below reflect the degree of similarity. The sites 6 and 9-22 show little similarity to Viet Kam, whereas sites 4, 5, 7, and especially 8 show a very high degree of identical shared forms. We can, therefore, suggest that at this stage of our survey the *Urheimat* of the Viet Kam was perhaps Liping Shuikou of Guizhou Province, China or at least a speech community very much like it.

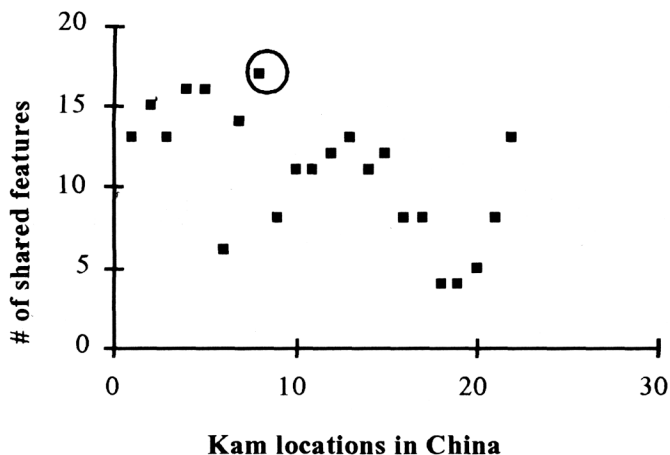


Figure 8. Shared forms in 22 Kam locations

3. The Viet Sui

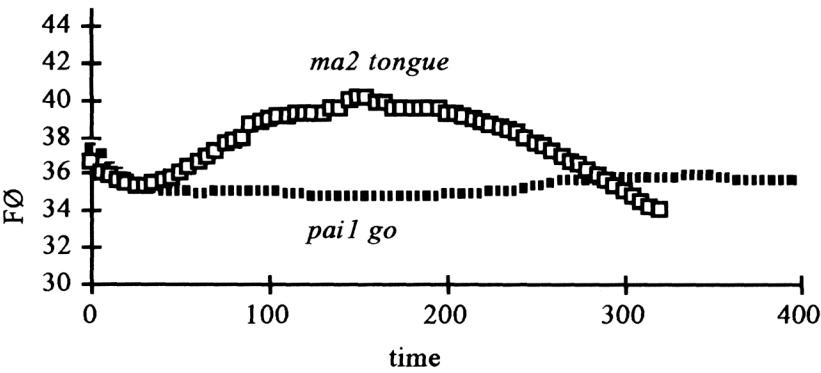
The Sui or Thủy nationality of Vietnam is one of the smallest. According to the census of 1978 there were only 55 Sui speakers in 1982. The population today numbers about 120. They are all located in Hồng Quang Village of Chiêm Hoa District. It is located about 62 km to the NW of Chiêm Hoa city near the border with Hà Giang Province. According to the old people eight families moved to Vietnam; the time of settlement is unknown. Because of disease and starvation many families—Yang and Fan—have died out. Today there are only eight families—Meng (5), Li (2), and Pan (1). The Sui there live with the Pa Then or Pa-hng and the Tày. In October 1995 we were fortunate enough to be able to work with Mr. Lý Văn Ming, 46, of this community, who provided us with a 600 word vocabulary and information about the current state of the Sui language in Vietnam.

Sui is one of the two main components of the Kam-Sui language branch. The Kam-Sui languages are spoken—aside from Kam and Sui in Vietnam—in Guizhou, Hunan, and Guangxi Province in China, cf. Edmondson and Solnit (1988) for further details. The Kam-Sui languages are known for the complexity of their initials (Sui) and their tones (Kam). The original work on this group was done by Li Fang Kuei (1948, 1949, 1966).

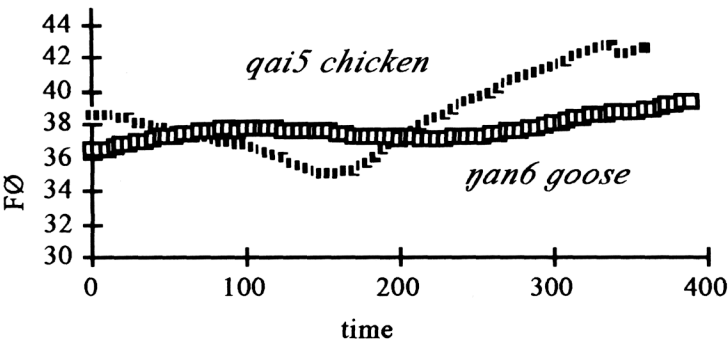
3.1 Sui tones

Sui has six tones on open syllables and four tones in closed syllables. These can be illustrated by the items:

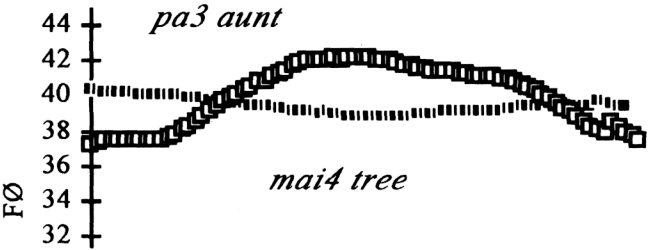
Viet Sui Tone A



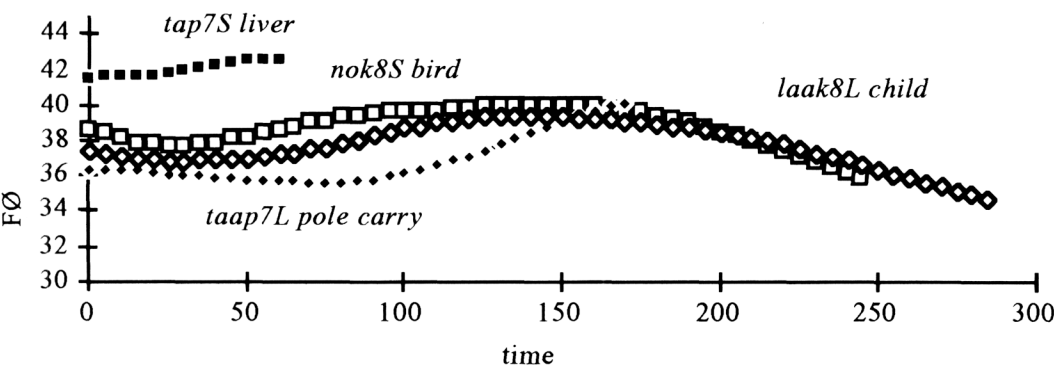
Viet Sui Tone B



Viet Sui Tone C



Viet Sui Tones DL and DS



These values are quite typical of Mr. Ly’s speech and of Sui in general. In locations in China the Sui tones values are: A1 = 24, 11, 12; A2 = 31, 31, 31; B1 = 35, 35, 35; B2 = 55, 23, 44. In the dead tones: DS1 = 55, 55, 55; DS2 = 35, 35, 35; DL1 = 43, 31, 32; DL2 = 43, 31, 31. A comparison with the tone values of Sui at two locations in China shows that Hồng Quang Sui tones are for all intents and purposes identical to the Sui tones of Guizhou Province as are portrayed in Yao et al 1955.

Viet Sui Tones:	1 = 12; 2 = 42; 3 =33; 4 = 53; 5 = 35; and 6 = 44
Sandu Sandong:	1 = 13; 2 = 31; 3 = 33; 4 = 53; 5 = 35; and 6 = 55
Dushan Yang'an	1 = 13; 2 = 31; 3 = 33; 4 = 53; 5 = 35; and 6 = 24/55

3.2 Locating the original settlement area of the Viet Sui

Even superficial comparison of Viet Sui and Sui forms from China yields near perfect overlap, with the following differences on the part of Viet Sui (V) as compared with Sandong Sui (S):

Viet Sui	Sandong		
hj or fj	ɕ	as in	laak ⁸ hja ³ vs. laak ⁸ ɕa ³ ‘bride’ hjon ¹ tin ¹ vs. ɕon ¹ tin ¹ ‘heel’ hjom ¹ vs. ɕum ¹ ‘heart’ fjan ¹ vs. ɕaan ¹ ‘garden’
l	ɛ	as in	li ⁴ vs. ɛe ¹ ‘saliva’
NG	ɛ	as in	NGaan ¹ vs. ɛaan ¹ ‘chin’
ŋg or ʔg	ʔɣ	as in	ʔge ¹ or ŋge ¹ vs. ʔye ¹ ‘husband’ but note ʔya ¹ ‘paddy field’ in both V and S.
o or ɔ	ə	as in	qom ⁴ ʔna ³ vs. kəm ⁴ ʔna ³ ‘thunder’
u	o	as in	mun ¹ vs. mon ¹ ‘fog’ puŋ ⁴ vs. poŋ ⁴ ‘pond’ mun ⁶ vs. mon ⁶ ‘monkey’
i	e	as in	ŋjin ² vs. ŋjen ² ‘mouth’
e	a	after palatalized initials as in	ʔbjek ⁷ vs. ʔbjak ⁷ ‘girl’ lam ¹ ljek ⁸ vs. ljak ⁸ ‘banana’

About 70 examples of vocabulary from these places were compared with the Viet Sui data for initials and rimes, as reported in the *Shuiyu Diaocha Baogao* 1956. The following chart gives the results of that comparison.

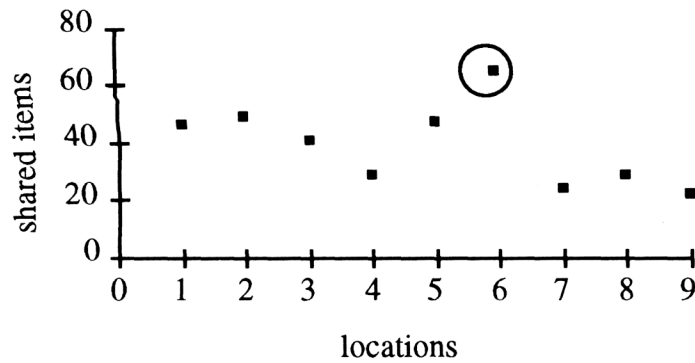


Figure 9. Shared sounds of Viet Sui and nine Guizhou locations

4. Giáy

Let us now turn to the Giáy, one of Vietnam's 54 official nationalities. According to the 1989 census there are about 40,000 Giáy living in Vietnam. Most of them are found in territory very close to the Vietnam-China border. Information in *Các dân tộc ít người ở Việt Nam (các tỉnh phía bắc)* (1978:234) states that the Giáy live in the districts of Bát Xát, Mường Khương, and Bảo Yên of Lào Cai Province. They call themselves Tu Di from the Guanhua pronunciation Tu Dì(n) of the name of their original homeland in Duyun, [tu⁵⁵ yn⁵²] in Standard Chinese and [tu³³ in²¹] in Guanhua or SW Mandarin. According to household records they arrived in Maguan in Wenshan Prefecture and in Honghe Prefecture about 200 years ago, cf. Chu 1975. Chu points out that the group (formerly) called Bồ Y and the Tu Di are not directly related. They came from separate locations in Guizhou Province in China and at different times. The Tu Di once lived in Duyun; whereas the Bồ Y are from Wangmo much further to the west. The history of Bồ Y settlement in Vietnam is more complex still. Smaller subgroups of the Bồ Y call themselves Pu Na or Pu Thín 'people of the paddy field.'

The Giáy also live in the districts of Yên Minh and Đồng Văn of Hà Giang Province, in the districts of Mường Te and Phong Thổ of Lai Châu Province, and in the districts of Bảo Lạc of Cao Bằng Province. The Giáy are all relatively new immigrants from China. According to some reports there are also Giáy just across the border in Yunnan Province in China at Maguan and at Hekou. The Giáy are not originally from the nearby areas in China, but instead they are believed to be scions of the 2.5 million strong Bouyei, who just like the Kam, Sui, and Gelao are found in distant Guizhou Province. From the data found in Giáy household registries a number of Bouyei left Guizhou and traveled overland to southern Yunnan and northern Vietnam about 160 years ago, cf. Edmondson and Li 1996.

Linguistic information about the Giáy is easier to obtain than many other groups principally because of the work of Wm. J. Gedney. In 1991 Hudak published *William J. Gedney's the Yay language*, a 500 page glossary from a Mr. Nung To Phang from Mường Hum to the west of Lào Cai City in Bát Xát district. The speech reported in the present study is very similar to that investigated by Gedney. At least some of the cardinal features of Mr. Nung's Giáy were in evidence in the Lào Cai Giáy speaker we interviewed, e.g. identity of initials in *hun*² 'person' and *hun*¹ 'rain'.

Our informant was a young student at the University of Culture in Hanoi, Vietnam studying for a position in the publishing industry. He was a Giáy (Bouyei) speaker from Lào Cai Province who came from a location 70 km east of Lào Cai City and lived within one km of the border with China. He reported that his family had many relatives still living in China near Hekou in Yunnan Province.

4.1 Viet Giáy tones

The three proto-tones have today reversed their values so that an original high tone is now low and vice versa, a phenomenon called *tonal flip flop*. The mechanism for such change is disputed. The A tones in Giáy have the values 33 and 35. The B tones have the values 21 and 42. The C tones have the values 23 and 34. In the dead tone syllables, DL and DS (closed syllable with long vowel, DL, and closed syllable with short vowel, DS) there are three distinct pitch tracks. The values of original low tones in DL and DS have merged to 23, whereas the high DL is 41 and the high DS is 33.

The tone splitting pattern is just as Gedney found it in his study, in which the old preglottalized initial series three forms in C tone go with the low set and not with the high as tone 34 below:⁵

	A	B	C	DL	DS
1			23		
2	33	21		41	33
3					
4	35	42	34	23	

Viet Giáy Tone A

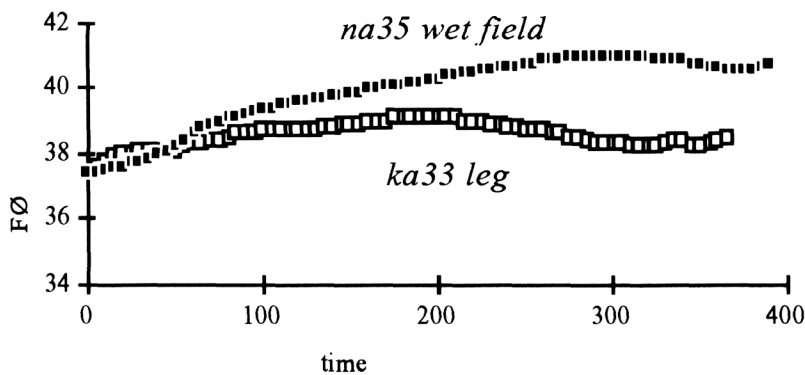


Figure 10. Viet Giáy tone A (> tone 1 and 2) illustrated in *ka*¹ ‘leg’ and *na*² ‘wet field’

⁵The 1, 2, 3 and 4 refer to consonant classes in the proto-language, as set out in Gedney (1972). The class 1 included aspirated stops, voiceless sonorants, and fricative; the class 2 referred to plain stops; class 3 to “preglottalized” voiced stops; and the class 4 to original voiced stops.

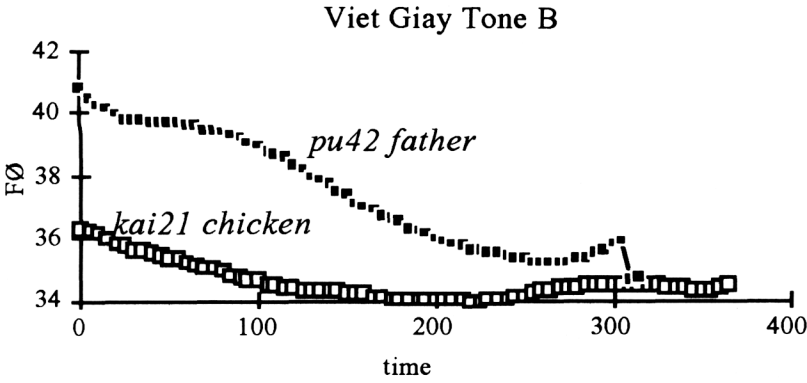


Figure 11. Viet Giáy tone B (> tone 5 and 6) illustrated in *kai*⁵ ‘chicken’ and *pu*⁶ ‘father’

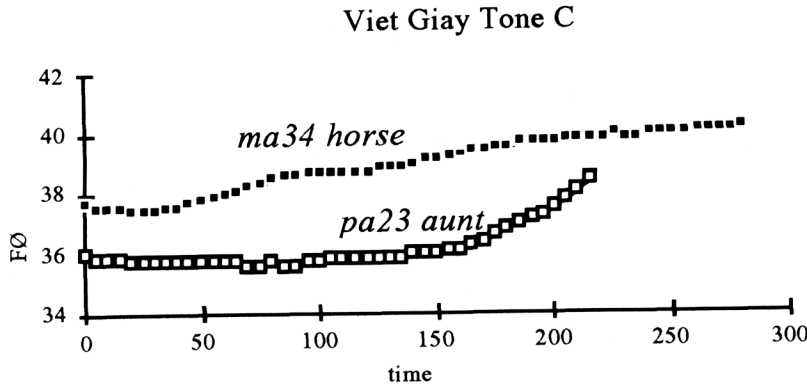


Figure 12. Viet Giáy tone C (> tone 3 and 4) illustrated in *pa*³ ‘aunt’ and *ma*⁴ ‘horse’

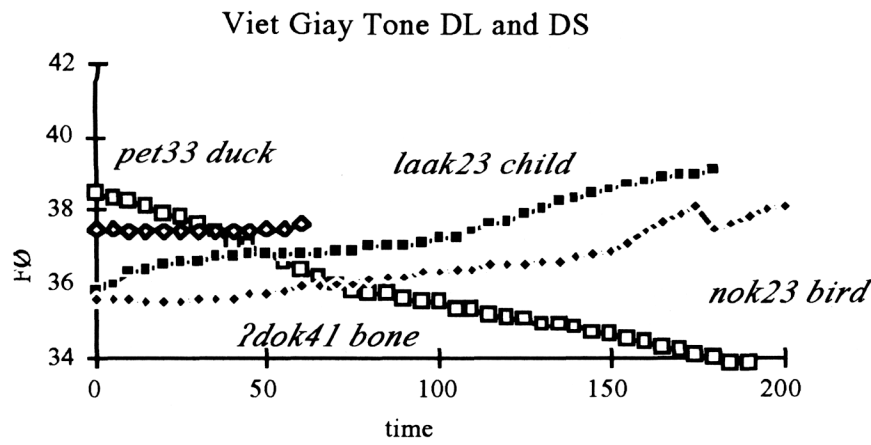


Figure 13. Viet Giáy tone D (> tone 7S, tone 7L, tone 8S, and tone 8L) illustrated in *pet*^{7S} ‘duck’ and *?dok*^{7L} ‘bone’, *nok*^{8S} ‘bird’, and *laak*^{8L} ‘child’

4.2 Viet Giáy initials

Viet Giáy initials are virtually identical to those in Hudak with a few differences worthy of mention. Notably, Gedney's /r-/ corresponds to /ð-/ in Giáy, e.g. *rí⁶ ~ ðí⁶* 'dry field'; *rin¹ ~ ðin¹* 'rock'. The interdental fricative /ð/ appears to come from proto-initials involving *r* or *consonant* + *r*, e.g. **thraap^{DL}* 'carry on the ends of a pole' becomes *ðaap⁹*. The voiceless interdental fricative /θ/ comes from **s* or **z*. The alveolar sibilant /s/ is the product of original **tʃ* or **dʒ*. As for /f, v/, Viet Giáy has undergone a reversal from the state of the proto language; thus original **f* has become Viet Giáy /v/ and original **v* has become Viet Giáy /f/. As has been reported by Donna Snyder 1995, these features are typical of Bouyei in other places. The glottal fricative /h/ in Viet Giáy comes from velar continuants **h*, **x*, **ɣ*. Note as well that in Gedney's speaker the initial *j*- is pronounced as [z]. Gedney suggests (xxiii) that this phenomenon is a probable result of a Vietnamese education with a "Vietnamese-like teaching pronunciation which disappears in normal speech." The [z] pronunciation of our speaker didn't disappear in normal speech and *z* is conspicuous in some locations in the southwestern area of Bouyei speech in Guizhou Province. Thus, we are disinclined toward dismissing /z-/ as a product of language-contact and suspect instead that /z-/ is a mutated historical inheritance.

4.3 Locating the original settlement area of the Viet Giáy

According to their own accounts the Giáy people of Vietnam came from Guizhou Province about 150 years ago, place unknown. In probing this question we compared our data on Giáy with information on the more than 40 locations in the *Buyi Diaocha Baogao* 1958. In this work there is an assemblage of shibboleth tests of phonology and lexicon that carve out subgroups among the Bouyei of Guizhou. We selected about 25 of these tests and compared them to the Viet Giáy data. We found that the Chinese locations designed 1-7 showed the greatest number of shared elements with Viet Giáy.

Measure of similarity of BDB locations and VN Giay

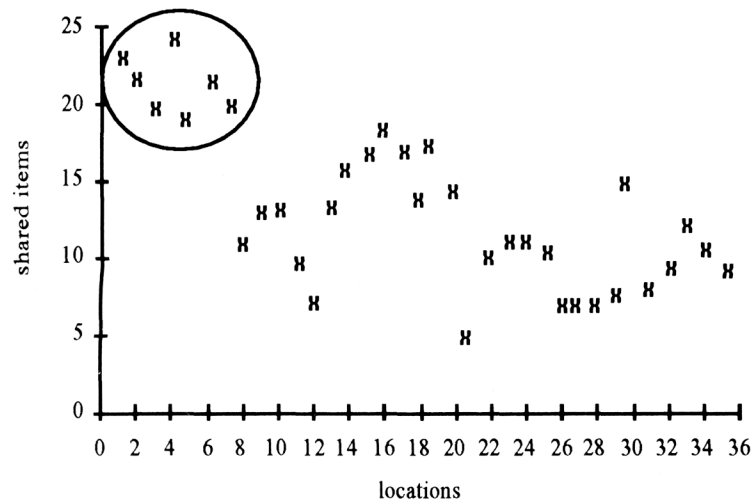


Figure 14. Comparison of the shared sounds and words of Giáy and 36 Guizhou locations in the *Buyi Diaocha Baogao*

We conclude that the Giáy we studied immigrated from extreme SW Guizhou Province at one of locations 1-8 studies in the *Buyi Diaocha Baogao*.

5. Red and White Gelao

There are three kinds of Gelao found in Vietnam, Red Gelao, White Gelao, and Green Gelao The Gelao people are principally found in Hà Giang Province in the two districts of Đồng Văn and Hoàng Su Phì. All three forms of this mutually unintelligible language are highly endangered. The Gelao population in Vietnam totals 1,500. In China the population may total as much as 50,000, but only a small fraction of these can still speak the Gelao language. The tendency toward language shift is strongly in evidence in Vietnam as well. For, although the Red Gelao have the largest population, it has only a very small number of speakers. This language is spoken today in only two villages, Na Khê and Bạch Đích of Yên Minh District; the two groups regularly intermarry. The Red Gelao of other places in Hà Giang Province, Cán Tí in Quản Ba and Túng Sán in Hoàng Su Phì have already given up their language and speak Hmong, Tày, or Vietnamese. They call themselves [va⁵⁵ ntɣ⁴¹].

The White Gelao possesses a larger number of speakers. The White Gelao are found in Đồng Văn District at Phố Là Village and Sính Lũng Village; they call themselves [tɛ³⁵ ʔlur³¹].

5.1 Some data

Our informant for Red Gelao lives in Na Khê village and is 37 years of age, but already did not know many of the names of insects and other objects commonly found in his environment. He reported that everyone in his villages speaks Hmong and also Guanhua (Chinese). He himself does not speak Vietnamese well. In our sessions we relied on Hmong and Guanhua to communicate with him.

Red Gelao has four tones with values 41, 44, 15, and 35. The tones can be exhibited with the words: *qu*⁴⁴ ‘chicken’, *khe*¹⁵ ‘year’, *ɲi*³⁵ ‘horse’, and *noŋ*⁴¹ ‘silver’.

White Gelao also possesses four tones with the values 55, 33, 35, and 53. I have not presented tone plots here, since Gelao tones in general present no problem to perceive even though reconstructing their sources in the Gelao parent language is by no means trivial.

Gloss	Red Gelao	White Gelao
‘one’	tɕɿ ⁴⁴	tɕi ⁵³
‘two’	se ³³	sæ ³¹
‘three’	twa ⁴⁴	tau ⁵⁵
‘four’	pu ⁴⁴	pu ⁵⁵
‘five’	maŋ ⁴⁴	mæ ³⁵
‘six’	soŋ ⁴⁴	tɕho ³¹
‘seven’	te ⁴⁴	hi ⁵⁵
‘eight’	wu ³⁵	qu ⁵⁵
‘nine’	tshe ⁵¹	qu ³⁵
‘ten’	la ⁵¹ kwe ⁴⁴	tshu ³³

5.2 Locating the original settlement area of the Red and White Gelao

Red Gelao belongs to the rarest of Gelao types. According to Zhang Jimin’s 1993 study *Gelaoyu yanjiu*, Red Gelao belongs to the second vernacular type of North-Central Gelao. Red Gelao in China is also found in the same area as Green Gelao in Zunyi Prefecture at Renhuai County. There are said to be only two villages in China where Red Gelao is still spoken in Guizhou Province at Baqu Banliwan, where they call themselves [pu⁵⁵ mu⁴⁴ hen⁵⁵] and Pingliu Village, where they use the autonym [pu⁵⁵ ha⁵⁵ kei⁵³]. Comparing Banliwan vs. Na Khê we find: ‘door’ *ma*⁴⁴ *ɕi*⁵⁵ vs. *ma*¹³ *ɕi*⁴⁴, ‘bowl’ *lan*⁴¹ *lau*⁴¹ vs. *la*⁴¹ *lau*⁴⁴, ‘dog’ *tɕuŋ*⁴¹ vs. *xəŋ*⁴⁴. Zhang (p. 297-298) gives some samples of the vocabulary at these locations, which we use to confirm that Na Khê Red Gelao is closely related to the Red Gelao forms in Zunyi Prefecture.

White Gelao speakers are found at Liugu Niupi in Shuicheng County of Guizhou Province, at Moji Longlin County, Guangxi, at Laozhai and Yueliangwan in Malipo County in Yunnan Province and in Vietnam at Đồng Văn in Hà Giang. Comparison of data shows the similarities:

Gloss	Liugu Niupi	Moji Longlin	Laozhai	Đồng Văn
Gelao	to ³¹ ʔlo ⁵⁵	tə ⁰ ʔlu ⁵⁵	to ²¹ ʔlu ³³	te ³⁵ ʔlu ³¹
‘ladder’	qa ³³ le ³¹	lə ⁰ ʔle ³¹	ntsai ⁴⁴ ʔi ⁴⁴	ntsai ⁴⁴ ʔi ⁴⁴
‘bone’	qa ³³ de ¹³	qə ⁰ nde ³⁵	nto ⁴⁴ ndai ³¹	ndu ³¹ qa ³³ nde ³¹
‘intestine’	qa ³³ ɕe ³³	qə ⁰ se ⁵³	tɕa ⁴⁴ ɕi ⁴⁴	tɕa ⁴⁴ si ⁴⁴
‘bracelet’	lan ³¹ gan ³¹	lə ⁰ gan ³¹	nti ³¹ ŋkon ⁴⁴	nti ³¹ gon ³⁵
‘bird’	ma ³³ no ¹³	mə ⁰ no ³⁵	ʔla ⁵³ m ³¹	la ³³ la ³¹ ne ³¹
‘white’	qau ³¹ a ³⁵	pə ⁰ ʔau ¹³	qə ³³ ta ⁵³	pe ³¹ ʔau ³¹

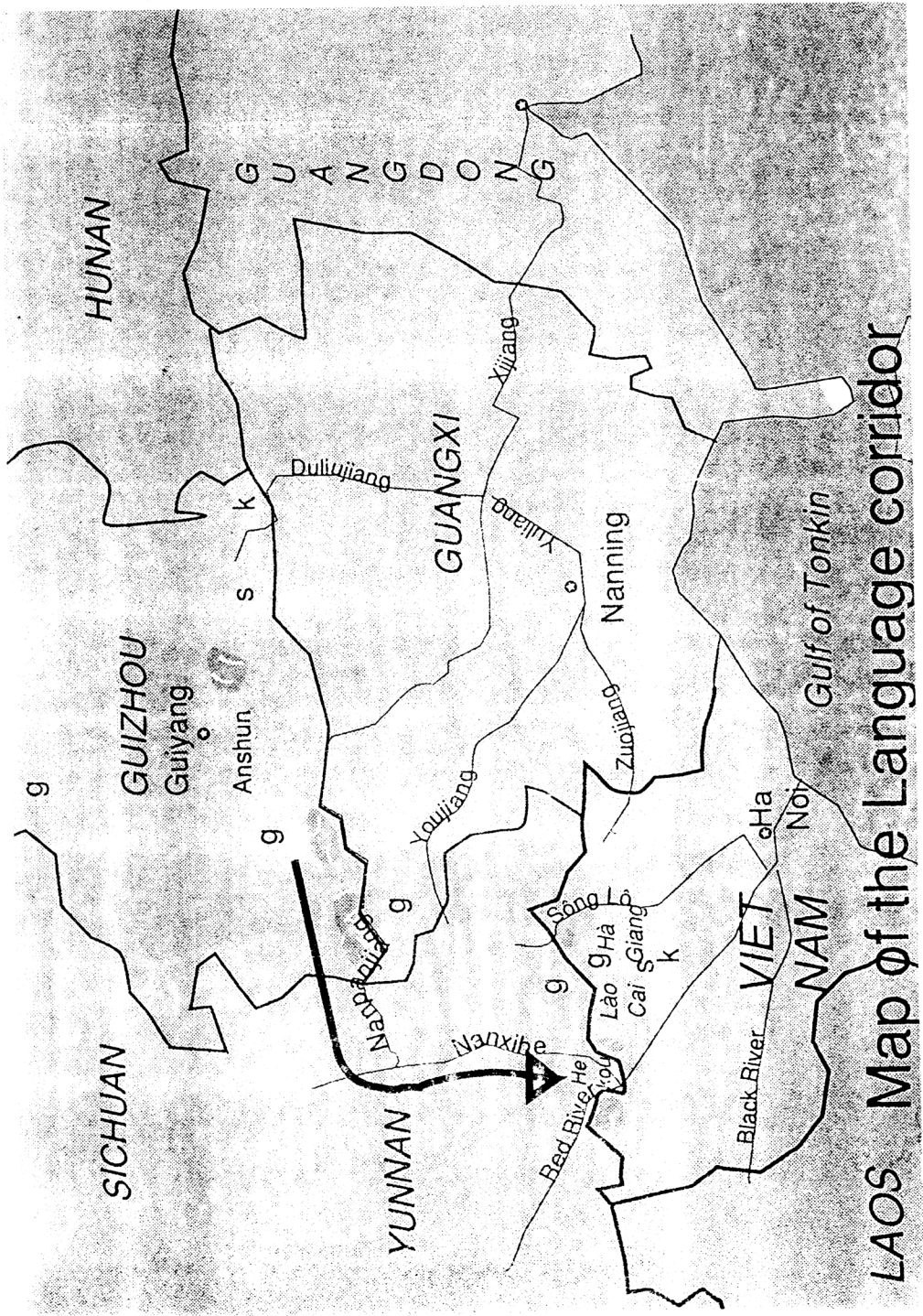
6. Conclusion

We have considered the Kam, Sui, Bouyei, and Gelao and their current distributions. Three of these represent migrations of small groups that left locations in Guizhou to find new homes in Vietnam so that today their settlement areas are concentrated. Because their numbers were never large, we can assume that their migration to Vietnam was *free migration or primitive migration*. The Bouyei (Giáy) in Vietnam by contrast have been reported to have come from Anlong, Duyun, Zhenning, Wangmo, and Libo Counties, widely separated areas of southern Guizhou Province. Moreover, there is a population today of 40,000. These groups appear to have arrived in Vietnam at differing times ranging from 250-100 years ago. Therefore, we assume that mass migration was involved in the case of the Bouyei. The current situation of these immigrants to Vietnam also tell us that we are dealing very much with the Beaten Path Syndrome, in which people have tended to follow an old and familiar path in their exodus. Or to say it using the words of the Chinese writer Lu Xun, *Lu shi ren zou chu lai de* ‘a road is nothing more than the rut made by people walking.’ Knowledge of that corridor must have been widespread from travelers and traders coming to and fro; people must have trusted to it the lives of their children and their future economic well-being. Travel on foot for such a distance was obviously a dangerous business and therefore we must conclude that there were adequate causes for people to want to leave. But for those wishing to exit from Guizhou and northern Guangxi there were not many choices as is in clear evidence from the richly diverse linguistic pockets of their descendants from groups who once lived far away but who were left stranded on the Language Corridor.

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Map of the language corridor



LAOS Map of the Language corridor

