PHONOLOGICAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AHOM AND TAI NUA AS EVIDENCE ORIGIN OF THE AHOM PEOPLE

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1. Introduction

According to Li (1960) and many other historical linguists, Ahom belongs in the Southwestern branch of the Tai language family. Gait (1994) suggests that Ahom is the language of a group of the Shan peoples who, since 1778 A.D., have migrated into the easternmost part of India bordering on Burma to establish their own kingdom, the Ahom Kingdom. The area is presently known as the Assam State in India. This Shan group originally called themselves "Tai" but later on adopted the name outsiders used to call their group and since have called their group "Ahom."

Since the establishment of the Ahom Kingdom, the status of the Ahom language has changed dramatically. In the earlier times, Ahom was used in all circumstances within the Ahom society. Then, the language was gradually replaced by the Assamese language until 200 years ago when Assamese completely took over Ahom as the daily language of communication. Despite all that, Ahom survived and its status rose to become the sacred language existing to be seen in religious texts and rituals, and in a number of words used to call local plants as well as kitchen utensils. The fact that Ahom has its own writing system allowing a lot of historical records, literature, religious texts, etc., contribute to the survival of the Ahom language (Chatthip 1991).

The most important handwritten manuscript which is known as *Ahom Buranji* or "the history of Ahom" claims that the Ahom people migrated from the Maw Luang Kingdom, their original

homeland.[1] As is stated by Elais (1876), based on the Shan history, the first center of the Maw Luang Kingdom was situated on the plain of the Maw River, presently the area stretching from the North of the Shan State in Myanmar to the Southwest of Yunnan County in China. Both the history of Ahom and the history of Shan lead the Ahom people to believe that the Ahom language somehow originates in the Maw Luang Kingdom. Such hypothesis is even more convincing now that more research has been done specifically on the characteristics of the Ahom and Tai Nua's scripts as well as their writing systems (Ranoo 1987).[2]

According to Harris (1975), the Shan language in the Plain of the Maw River, both in Myanmar and China, is called *the Tai Nua language.* Tai Nua consists of at least three important dialects namely *Tai Loe* with its origin in the city of Chefang, China, *Tai Maw* in the town of Nam Kham, Myanmar, and *Tai Noe* in the Van Poong Tong village of Sipsongbanna, Yunnan. The relationship between the Ahom language and the three dialects of the Tai Nua language is of great importance in three ways. First, if, in fact, the Ahom people migrated from the Maw Luang Kingdom, the four languages should have a fairly close relationship.[3] Second, if the Ahom language is closest to a certain dialect, the area where the dialect is spoken may prove as evidence for the center of the Maw Luang Kingdom in the past.[4] Third, the study of the four languages which leads to an attempt to reconstruct Proto-Tai Nua will contribute greatly to the historical linguistic study of the Tai language family, especially the aspect concerning the status of Ahom; that is, whether Ahom is a language (just like it is widely understood) or merely a dialect of a language. Not only does this paper directly study the history of languages, but it will also help clarify some of the historical linguistic issues.

2. Methods of the Study

As previously stated, this paper is an attempt to study the relationship between four languages, namely Ahom, Tai Noe, Tai Maw and Tai Loe, by means of a comparative method. Thus, I will start from collecting data of the four languages based on Swadesh 200 basic word list to look for sound correspondence sets among those languages.[5] After cognates between the four languages are determined,

I will use the method of lexicostatistics to determine how close Ahom is to each of the three dialects of Tai Nua. Then, I will reconstruct the consonants and vowels of the Proto-language which I term *"Proto-Tai Nua"*

The data of the Ahom language are obtained from *Ahom Lexicon,* edited by B. Barua and N.N. Deodhai Phukan (1964). All the words in the book were recorded in 1932 by a group of graduates who could still remember how each word was pronounced. Since all words were written down in Romanized forms, I take the liberty of transforming them into phonetic forms using IPA.

The data of Tai Noe, Tai Maw, and Tai Loe are taken from the article "A Comparative Word List of Three Tai Nua Dialect" written by Jimmy G. Harris in 1975.

3. Background Information

3.1 Ahom

There are approximately 30,000 real Ahom people descending from Ahom families of the Ahom Kingdom. At present, they can be found in Guwahati and in some areas of Sibsagar in the Assam State of India. However, due to political reasons and a serious attempt to revive the Ahom culture as well as some forms of the Ahom language, many other Assamese speaking people claim themselves to also be the Ahom's descendants. Now that *Ahom* or *Tai-Ahom* nowadays refer to those who are minority people in Assam and speak other dialects of the Tai language family including Phake, Aiton and Khamti, the number of the Ahom seem to increase considerably. According to Diller (1998), the Ahom people number at approximately 8 million.

3.2 Tai Nua

As mentioned in the introduction, Tai Nua refers to one dialect of the Shan language. As far as the Shan language in Myanmar is concerned, not much study has been carried out and, as a result, no real classification of the language has been done linguistically. The only classification of the Shan language of the Shan State in Myanmar that has been studied by Cushing (1914) is purely geographical. Its classification is as follows:

(1) Southern Shan or Standard Shan whose center is in Taunggyi. Southern Shan is used in print and in communication. Generally, Southern Shan or Standard Shan is chosen to be the representative of the Shan language in linguistic studies.

(2) Northern Shan whose center is in Lashio and which includes Tai Nua.

(3) Eastern Shan whose center is in Kengtung is linguistically known as *khün.*

The speakers of Tai Nua are sometimes referred to as "Chinese Shan." They can be found not only in the North of the Shan State in Myanmar but also in China. Sompong (1997) suggests that there are approximately 300,000 Tai Nua in China, but the exact number of the Tai Nua speakers in Myanmar is unknown.

The three dialects of Tai Nua studied in this paper are found in the areas scattered on the plain of the Maw River and nearby. They are as follows:

(1) The first dialect is spoken in the North of Myanmar in the areas from the city of Nam Kham to Mu-Se down to Hsenvi. The speakers of this dialect call their group and their language *Tai Maw* (TM). They accept that they are a group of the Tai Nua.

(2) The second dialect is spoken in the Southwest of China in Chefang, Muang Maw and Muang Wan Ting. The speakers of this dialect call their language *Tai Loe* (TL).

(3) The third dialect is spoken in the Van Poong Tong village of the Sipsongbanna region of Yunnan. The speakers of this dialect call their language *Tai Noe* (TN).[6]

4. Problems of the Classification of the Tai Languages

In Myanmar, Shan dialects are found spoken not only in the Shan State but also in the Kachin State, bordering on North of the Shan State. The speakers of those Shan dialects call their languages Khamti, etc., which happen to be the same languages found spoken in some areas of the Assam State in India. Oral literature as well as handwritten manuscripts suggest that the Phake and the Khamti speakers in Assam migrated from the Kachin State in Myanmar, the area connecting to the North of the Shan State.

Although there has not been any serious linguistic study on dialects of the Shan language in the Kachin State, Grierson (1928) believes that such languages as Khamti and probably Ahom are very close to many languages spoken in Northern Shan, which include Tai Nua. Grierson's observation is significant in that it opens up a new perspective on the status of many Tai languages in those connected areas. Given the proximity of the geographical areas of Tai Nua and Standard Shan, what Grierson thinks is then reasonable. Thus, within the similar proximity of the geographical areas, I do not think it is too farfetched to assume that Ahom also relates to Tai Nua. When more studies on the relationship among Tai Nua, Ahom, and Standard Shan are carried out, the classification of the Tai languages, especially those in the Southwestern branch may need some reshuffle.

After studying many Tai languages elaborately, Li (1960) classifies those languages into groups, as schematized below:

```
                                        ┌─ Siamese
                              ┌─────────┤
                              │         └─ Lao
                    ┌─────────┤
                    │         └─ Black Tai
 ┌ Southwestern ────┤                    ┌─ Lü
 │                  │         ┌──────────┤
 ├ Central          │         │          └─ White Tai
 │                  └─────────┤─ Shan
 └ North                      └─ Ahom
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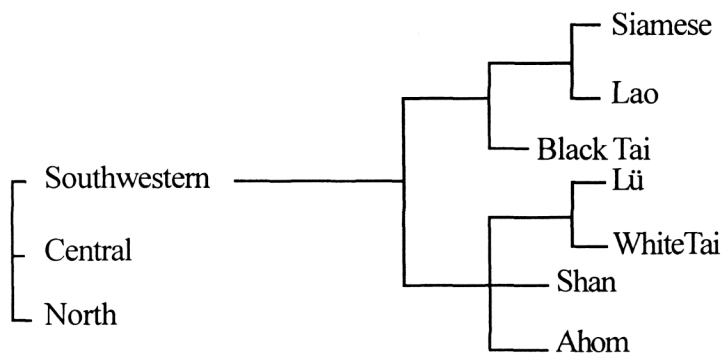
Li's classification reveals that, within the Southwestern branch, Ahom has the closest relationship to Shan. However, it is worth noted that Shan that Li uses to compare is the Standard Shan or a dialect of Southern Shan only. Chamberlain (1972) looks at the classification of the languages in the Southwestern group again. Based on core vocabulary as well as pattern of changes of the stop sounds, he separates the Southwestern group into two subgroups, P and PH. For Chamberlain (1972), Ahom is seen to be close to Shan, Khün, Yuan, Lü, Red Tai, Black Tai, and White Tai. Chamberlain's classification is shown below:

```
                        SWT
              _____/      _____
         P   /                        \   PH
         |                            /\
         |                           /  \
     ┌── White Tai                 Neua      Lao
     ├── Black Tai                  |         |
     ├── Red Tai                  Phuan    Southern Thai
     ├── Lü                         |
     ├── Yuau                     Thai
     ├── Khün
     ├── Shan
     └── Ahom
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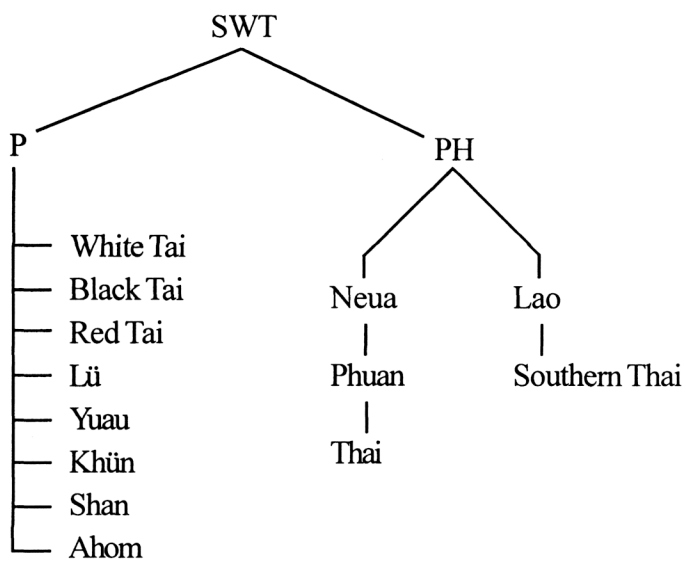
Chamberlain (1975) reconsiders the classification of the Southwestern group one more time. This time, he studies pattern of stop changes together with the splits and mergers of tone, and completely leaves out the study of core vocabulary. He, however, pays attention also to dialects of Tai Nua spoken in China at Chefang, Mong Ka and Tai Maw. His new version of the classification, as given below, makes Ahom closest to Yuan (spoken in Chiang Mai, Thailand) and Shan respectively while keeps Ahom separate from the three dialects of Tai Nua spoken in China.

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                        Proto-Southwestern



              P                              PH



  *A1-23-4    *ABCD 123-4      *BCD123-4        *BCD1-23-4

                  |                |                |
               B=DL             B=DL             B≠DL

                  |                |                |
  Chefang       Black Tai       Thai             Lao
  Tai Maw       Red Tai         Phu Thai         Southern Thai
  Mong ka       White Tai       Neua
                Lü              Phuan
                Shan            etc.
                Yuan
                Ahom
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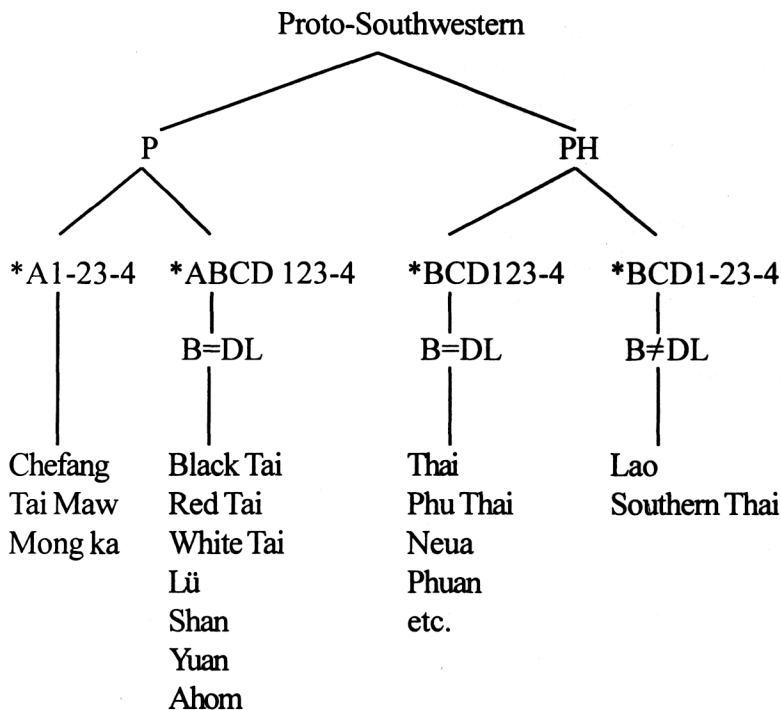
Pranee (1986) criticizes Chamberlain (1975)'s classification of the Southwestern group as insufficient citing that the problems to his analysis root from the fact that Chamberlain ignores the importance of core vocabulary and that phonological analysis can be done in many ways. Like Pranee, I also suspect the classification by Chamberlain (1975). Geographically, Ahom should not have been closer to Yuan than to Shan. Based on the record by the Ahom people themselves that their original homeland is where Tai Nua exists right now, Ahom should have been grouped together with the three dialects of Tai Nua. Therefore, in the next part, I will conduct a preliminary study so as to provide an answer concerning the relationship between Ahom and Tai Nua based on the percentages of shared vocabulary between the four languages.
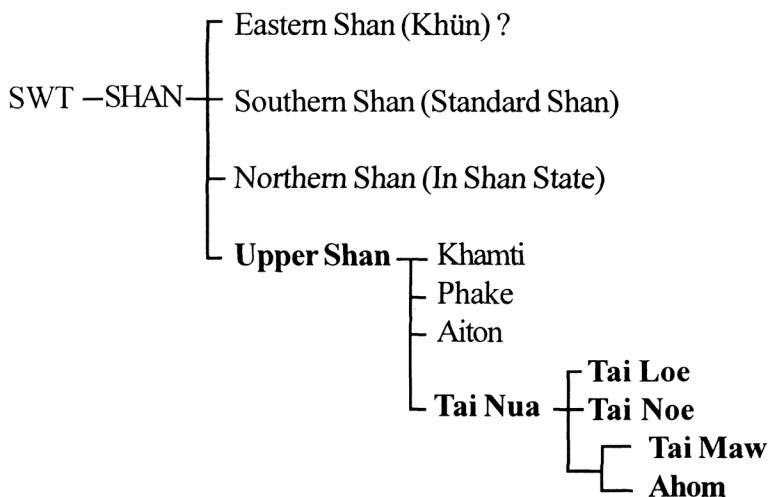
5. Data Analysis

Out of 200 words from the word list provided by Swadesh, I find 155 shared vocabulary words among the four languages. Out of 155 shared vocabulary words, I find that 134 or 86.45% are

cognates. Based on the percentage used to show the relationship between languages, the finding suggests that Ahom holds a very close relationship with all three dialects of Tai Nua at the level of dialect. That is, instead of thinking of Ahom as a separate language, Ahom is merely another dialect of Tai Nua.

Determining cognates from the core vocabulary, I consider only the complete correspondence sets; that is, cognate words for the four languages appear. I cut off the correspondence sets that consist of loanwords or even words with the same forms but different meanings.

After the relationship between Ahom and the three dialects of Tai Nua is confirmed, I will determine the relationship between Ahom and each dialect of Tai Nua by calculating the percentages of cognates shared by Ahom and Tai Loe, Ahom and Tai Maw, and Ahom and Tai Noe respectively. In so doing, I will consider only the pairs of words that share every feature. In 155 corresponcence sets, I find 20 identical pairs of words shared by Ahom and Tai Loe or 12.90%, 27 shared by Ahom and Tai Maw or 17.41% and 22 shared by Ahom and Tai Noe or 14.19%. The findings lead me to conclude that Ahom holds the closest relationship to Tai Maw spoken in the town of Nam Kham, Myanmar. Considering all findings from my study, I maintain that Ahom is a dialect of Tai Nua and propose a new tentative classification of Ahom within the Southwestern branch of the Tai language family as follows:

```
                    ┌─ Eastern Shan (Khün) ?
                    │
SWT ─SHAN──┼─ Southern Shan (Standard Shan)
                    │
                    ├─ Northern Shan (In Shan State)
                    │
                    └─ Upper Shan ─┬─ Khamti
                                         ├─ Phake
                                         ├─ Aiton
                                         │              ┌─ Tai Loe
                                         └─ Tai Nua ─┼─ Tai Noe
                                                            │    ┌─ Tai Maw
                                                            └──┴─ Ahom
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5.1 Set of sound correspondences

From a group of 134 shared cognates of the Ahom language and the three dialects of Tai Nua, I could sort out a group of 28 sound correspondences as follows:

5.1.1 Set of consonant correspondences

	AHOM	TL	TM	TN
1.*p	p-	p-	p-	p-
	-p	-p	-p	-p
2.*t	t-	t-	t-	t-
	-t	-t	-t	-t
	t-	t-	t-	th-
3.*k	k-	k-	k-	k-
	-k	-k	-k	-k
	k-	k-	k-	c-
4.*c	c-	ts-	ts	c-
5.*m	m-	m-	m-	m-
	-m	-m	-m	-m
6.*n	n-	l-	n-	n-
	l-	l-	n-	l-
	-n	-n	-n	-n
7.*ɲ	ɲ-	y-	y-	y-
	-ɲ	-y	-y	-y

	AHOM	TL	TM	TN
8.*ŋ	ŋ-	ŋ-	ŋ-	y-
	-ŋ	-ŋ	-ŋ	-ŋ
	ŋ-	y-	y-	y-
9.*ph	ph-	ph-	f-	f-
10.*th	th-	th-	th-	th-
11.*kh	kh-	x-	kh-	k-
12.*f	ph-	f-	f-	f-
13.*s	ch-	s-	s-	s-
14.*x	kh-	x-	kh-	x-
15.*w	b-	w-	w-	v-
	-	-w	-w	-w
16.*l	l-	l-	l-	l-
17.*r	r-	h-	h-	h-
18.*y	j ~ y	y-	y-	y-
		-y	-y	-y
19.*b	b-	m-	m-	v-
20.*d	d-	l-	l-	l-
	d-	l-	n-	n-
21.*ʔ	ʔ-	ʔ-	ʔ-	ʔ-
22.*h	h-	h-	h-	h-
23.*bl	bl-	m-	m-	l-
24.*pl	pl-	p-	p-	p-
25.*kl	kl-	k-	k-	k-
26.*kw	kw-	k-	k-	k-
27.*phr	phr-	ph-	f-	f-
28.*xr	khr-	x-	kh-	x-

Example of Consonant cognage vocabulary

		AHOM	TL	TM	TN
*p	'brother'	pi	pi[1]	pi[1]	pi[1]
*t	'foot'	tin	tin[1]	tin[1]	tin[1]
*t	'ash'	taw	taw[1]	taw[1]	thaw[1]
*k	'person'	kon	kon[4]	kon[4]	kon[4]
*k	'eat'	kin	kin[1]	kin[1]	cin[1]
*c	'name'	cu	tsɯ[1]	tsɯ[1]	cɯ[1]
*m	'insect'	miŋ	mɛŋ[4]	mɛŋ[4]	mɛŋ[4]

		AHOM	TL	TM	TN
*n	'sit'	naŋ	laŋ^1	naŋ^1	naŋ^1
*n	'one'	leŋ	lɤŋ^1	nɤŋ^1	lɤŋ^1
*ŋ	'snake'	ŋu	ŋu^4	ŋu^4	yu^4
*ŋ	'hear'	ŋin	yin^4	yin^4	yin^4
*-ɲ	'sew'	ɲap	yep^3	yep^3	yep^3
*-ɲ	'mountain'	doiɲ	lɔy^1	lɔy^1	lɔy^1
*ph	'clothing'	pha	phaa^3	faa^3	faa^3
*th	'old person'	thaw	thaw^3	thaw^3	thaw^3
*kh	'right side'	kha	xaa^5	khaa^5	kaa^5
*f	'sky'	pha	faa^3	tɔŋ faa^3	faa^3
*s	'cord'	chai	saay^5	saay^5	saay^5
*x	'horn'	khaw	xaw^5	khaw^5	xaw^5
*w	'sun'	ban	wan^4	wan^4	van^4
*l	'drag'	lak	laak^1	laak^1	laak^1
*r	'stone'	rin	hin^5	hin^5	hin^5
*y	'long'	jaw	yaaw^4	yaaw^4	yaaw^4
	'big'	yau	yaɨ^2	yaɨ^2	yaɨ^2
*b	'leaf'	baw	maɨ^1	maɨ^1	vaɨ^1
*d	'bone'	duk	luk^5	luk^5	luk^5
	'dive'	dam	lam^1	nam^1	nam^1
*ʔ	'take'	ʔaw	ʔaw^1	ʔaw^1	ʔaw^1
*h	'see'	han	han^5	han^5	han^5
*bl	'flower'	blɔk	mɔk^2	mɔk^2	lɔk^2
*pl	'bark'	plek	pɤk^2	pɤk^2	pɤk^2
*kl	'drum'	klɔŋ	kɔŋ^1	kɔŋ^1	kɔŋ^1
*kw	'wide'	kwaŋ	kaaŋ^3	kaaŋ^3	kaaŋ^3
*phr	'who'	phrew	phaɨ^5	faɨ^5	faɨ^5
*xr	'egg'	khrai	xay^2	xay^2	xay^2

5.1.2   Set of vowel correspondences

In the vowel correspondence chart below, it is noticed that all the Proto Vowels still preserve in the three dialects of Tai Nua whereas Ahom has losen the vowel /ɛ/ and /ɤ/ which may cause the changes in Ahom vowels. I found only /*ɯ/ that still preserve without change in Ahom.

		AHOM	TL	TM	TN
1.	*i	i	i	i	i
		e	i	i	i
2.	*e	e	e	e	e
		i	e	e	e
		a	e	e	e
3.	*ɛ	e	ɛ	ɛ	ɛ
		i	ɛ	ɛ	ɛ
4.	*ɯ	ɯ	ɯ	ɯ	ɯ
		u	ɯ	ɯ	ɯ
5.	*ɤ	e	ɤ	ɤ	ɤ
		u	ɤ	ɤ	ɤ
6.	*a	a	a	a	a
		e	a	a	a
7.	*u	u	u	u	u
8.	*o	o	o	o	o
		ɯ,u	o	o	o
		ɔ	o	o	o
9.	*ɔ	ɔ	ɔ	ɔ	ɔ
		a	ɔ	ɔ	ɔ
10.	*u/o	u	o	o	u

Example of Vowel cognate vocabulary

		AHOM	TL	TM	TN
*i	'wing'	pik	pik[2]	pik[2]	pik[2]
	'7'	cit	tset[5]	tset[5]	cet[5]
*e	'mother'	me	me[1]	me[1]	me[1]
	'wife'	mi	me[4]	me[4]	me[4]
	'sew'	ɲap	yep[4]	yep[4]	yep[4]

	AHOM	TL	TM	TN
*ɛ '8'	pet	pɛt²	pɛt²	pɛt²
'insect'	miŋ	mɛŋ⁴	mɛŋ⁴	mɛŋ⁴
*ɯ 'shoot'	jɯ	yɯŋ⁴	yɯŋ⁴	yɯŋ⁴
'hand'	mɯ	mɯ⁴	mɯ⁴	mɯ⁴
*ɤ 'blood'	let	lɤt¹	lɤt¹	lɤt¹
'flesh'	nɯ	nɤ³	nɤ³	nɤ³
*a 'low'	tam	tam²	tam²	tam²
'burn'	phrew	phaw⁵	faw⁵	faw⁵
*u 'know'	rɯ	hu³	hu³	hu³
*o 'person'	kon	kon⁴	kon⁴	kon⁴
'head'	rɯ,ru	ho⁵	ho⁵	ho⁵
'neck'	khɔ	xo⁴	kho⁴	xo⁴
*ɔ '2'	chɔŋ	sɔŋ⁵	sɔŋ⁵	sɔŋ⁵
'together'	cam	tsɔm⁴	tsɔm⁴	cɔm⁴
*u/o 'fall'	lɯm	lom³	lom³	lum³

From our data, I found that apart from a simple vowel, there
also exist the dipthongs in Ahom and the three dialects of Tai Nua
which I reconstructed as *au, *ai and *aɨ. But *aɨ in Ahom has
changed irregularly, so it may be /eɯ/, /aɯ/ or /oɯ/.

5.2 Proto- Tai Nua Inventory

<u>Proto Tai Nua Initials</u>

*b-	d-			
p-	t-	c-	k-	ʔ
ph-	th-		kh-	
m-	n-	ɲ-	ŋ-	
f-	s-		x-	h-
	r-			
	l-			
w-		j-		

Proto Tai Nua Finals

*-p	-t		-k
-m	-n	-ɲ	-ŋ
-w		-j	

Proto Tai Nua Vowels

*i	(ɨ)	ɯ	u
e		ɤ	o
ɛ			ɔ
		a	

dipthongs: *au, *ai and *aɨ

Proto vowel /*ɨ/ only occurs in proto dipthong /*aɨ/.

6. Conclusion and Discussion

This study is an attempt to use a comparative historical linguistics method to analyze the relationship between the languages spoken by the people in the same geographical area.

The analysis of the data showed that:
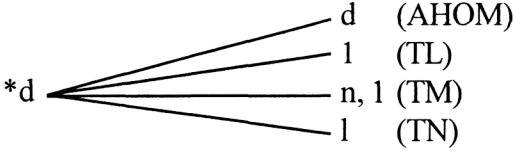
1. Ahom language has a close relationship with all three dialects of the Tai Nua group; Tai Maw, Tai Loe and Tai Noe. From the 200 lexical items, we found that Ahom and these three dialects share 155 core vocabulary words which 134 words are correspondence and cognate sets. The representative percentage of this relationship is about 86.45% which is very high. This number can lead us to conclude, contrary to what has been suggested, that Ahom language should be classified as one dialect of the Tai Nua as Tai Loe, Tai Maw and Tai Noe.

2. The comparison of the 155 cognate sets showed us that Ahom is 17.41% similar to Tai Maw while we found only 12.90% with Tai Loe and 14.19% with Tai Noe. So if we considered Ahom as a dialect of Tai Nua as discussed above, here, we should classify Ahom in the same branch as Tai Maw within Tai Nua group.

The two linguistic analysis above can be used as the new

evidence to support the historical idea about the original homeland of the Ahom which transferred orally from generation to generation in the Ahom society for more than 800 years age and recently we can also find this idea in the ancient Ahom scripts. The idea is that the ancestors of the Ahom people migrated from the Maw Luang Kingdom, situated in the central plain of the Maw River. In that case, the Ahom people should be the same group as the people of Maw Luang Kingdom and they should speak the same language (but may be different accent or with some different specific lexical items of the area). That is why I found (as mentioned in 1 above) that the Ahom language shares 134 of the correspondence sets with the dialects spoken in Maw Luang Kingdom. Apart from that, in the Ahom text, it is not stated exactly that which city in this Kingdom was their homeland. However, in this study, I found that Ahom language is very similar to Tai Maw which is spoken by the people of Muang Nam Kham in Myanmar nowadays. Here, we may conclude that Muong Nam Kham would possibly the origin home of the Ahom. And it is possible to say that, more than 800 years ago, the ancestors of Ahom people of Assam nowadays were the people of Muang Nam Kham. Muang Nam Kham which means 'city of the golden river' has been mentioned in *Pun ku mung,* the book of Ahom original myth, that this city is the homeland of the *Nguek,* mythical animal which is governed by *Khai faa,* Egg of the heaven, who is the descendant of the King originated from heaven and they were ancestors of the Ahom people nowadays. We also found this name in the actually Tai Maw (of Muang Nam Kham) folk songs talking about the orgin of their Muang Nam Kham which was governed by the descendants of *Nguek Khang Lai,* tattooed-chin mythical creature, and *Sua Phuek,* white tiger. Muang Nam Kham mentioned earlier may have been the same as Muang Nam Kham of Tai Maw todays and also may be one of the formerly centers of Maw Luang Kingdom the same as other city as mentioned in the introductory part. And it may be that during the period of Muang Nam Kham as a center of Maw Luang Kingdom, the ancestors of the Ahom people nowadays were the leader of the Kingdom at that time. Anyway to take this conclusion seriously, I think that we need to investigate more and also extend our study to every languages spoken in this area.
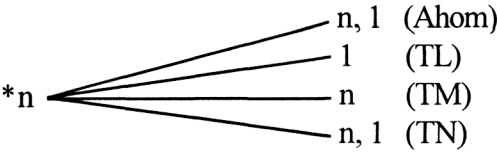
3. The historical reconstruction of Proto Tai Nua as we showed in the second part of this study helped us understand clearly the phonological development of the dialects of Tai Nua and also the Shan group in which Tai Nua is one of its member. For example

    - The phonological system of the Tai Nua or Shan group has no /d/ while we still found this sound in Ahom. It may be concluded that there should be a change of this sound from /*d/>/n/ as in Tai Maw and/or /1/ in Tai Loe. Or it can be two-step changes: /*d/>/n/>/l/ which we need more data to prove.

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                              d     (AHOM)
                              1     (TL)
   *d                         n, 1  (TM)
                              1     (TN)
```

	AHOM	TL	TM	TN
'black'	dam	lam¹	lam¹	lam¹
'dive'	dam	lam¹	nam¹	nam¹
smell'	dum	lom¹	nom¹	-
(9sets)	d	1	1	1
(1set)	d	1	n	n
(1set)	d	1	n	-

    I find that /*n/ becomes /n/, /1/ in Ahom and TM and /1/ in TL but remains unchanged in TM.

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                              n, 1  (Ahom)
                              1     (TL)
   *n                         n     (TM)
                              n, 1  (TN)
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	nam	lam³	nam³	nam³
'water'	nam	lam³	nam³	nam³
'one'	leŋ	lɤŋ¹	nɤŋ¹	lɤŋ¹
'nail'	lip	lep³	nep³	lep³
(6sets)	n	1	n	n
(2sets)	1	1	n	

- Proto-Tai Nua has a liquid cluster (kl,pl,bl) and a bilabial cluster (kw) which sill exist in Ahom but are lost in other three dialects.

-/*r/ is still found in Ahom while it becomes /h/ in other three dialects. /*r/ is still preserved in Ahom in cluster, especially aspirated stop and velar fricative such as /phr/, /xr/ but it is lost in the other three dialects.

The proto-vowels which I have reconstructed show that most of the proto-vowels are preserved in three dialects of Tai Nua whereas Ahom vowels has changed a lot. It is remarkable that /ɛ/ and /ɤ/ does not exist in Ahom for example *ɛ becomes /e/, /i/ and *ɤ becomes /e/, /u/. To explain this situation clearly, I need more investigation.

As my study is limited to the comparison of Ahom language in Assam and the dialects of Tai Nua which spoken in Northern Myanmar and Southwestern China, the result I find is also limited too. However the hypothesis about the status of Ahom language as we present in this paper is very interesting and if I continue and enlarge the scope of my study to other languages in Tai language family spoken in Assam, Kashin State and Shan State in Myanmar such as Phake, Khamti, Aiton and Northern Shan language (include Tai Nua), it is possible that the result of the study will support me about the historical evidence of the origin homeland of the Tai people in Assam. At the moment there are not much researches about these groups. One of them that encourages me is Grierson's (1928). He states that Aiton language in Assam, Phake and Khamti in Assam and Kachin State are similar to Northern Shan language in Shan State. Geographically all these languages are found in the connecting upper land of Assam, Myanmar and Yunnan.

The comparative historical linguistic study of all languages mentioned above such as lexicostatistic study or reconstruction of Proto form of these languages which may be called "Proto-Upper Shan" will give us a new linguistic evidence to the new classification (or new branch) of the Southwestern group in the Tai Language Family.

Notes

[1] According to *Ahom Buranji, Siu Ka Pha,* a Shan prince of the Maw Luang Kingdom, established the Ahom Kingdom in 1778 A.D. He was heir of the Maw Luang Kingdom, but his throne was taken away by *Siu Khan Pha.* After *Siu Khan Pha* ruled the Kingdom, *Siu Ka Pha* decided to call together 9,000 people loyal to him including nobles and soldiers, traveled into the area of the Brahmaputra Valley in India, and established the new Kingdom.

[2] Ranoo Wichasin, an expert on the Ahom language, compared the characteristics of scripts taken from such Inscriptions as Pyu Inscription and Mon Inscription as well as such ancient handwritten manuscripts as Burmese Shan Manuscript, Chinese Shan Manuscript and Ahom Manuscript. She found that the characteristics of the Ahom scripts were similar to those of Shan in China which is still used by the Tai Nua people.

[3] I use the word "languages" here as a general term to refer to Ahom, Tai Noe, Tai Maw, and Tai Loe as separate entities. The term does not say that one entity is closer to another entity and not the rest. Until lexicostatistics method is pursued and the relationship between those four entities is determined, the word "language" is used.

[4] Based on documents on the history of Shan, the Maw Luang Kingdom was originally situated on the Maw or Shweli River, but its capital was changed from place to place, for instance, from Moung Maw to Chefang. However, Moung Kong was known to be the last capital of the Maw Luang Kingdom.

[5] I use Swadesh 200 basic word list rather than his list of 100 words simply because it is the only list available to me.

[6] *Tai Loe* is a local accent of the word *Tai Nua.*

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