
The appearance of this fine book on the Jiongnai language, a Hmongic (Miao) language of the Hmong-Mien (Miao-Yao) language family, is most welcome. Spoken by only about 1,000 people1 in scattered small hill villages in the eastern part of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region (Jinxiu Yao Autonomous District), Jiongnai qualifies as an endangered language. It is also quite conservative phonologically, and thus important for historical studies. This is the first full-length study of the language, and both the wealth of information and the detailed comparative-historical analysis presented by the authors will be of enduring value.

“Jiongnai” is a sinicization of [kjɔŋ33 nai33] in the Lónghuá dialect, and means ‘mountain people’. The language is also referred to as “Huālán Yáo” or ‘blue-flowered Yao’. It is represented by two dialects in this book: Longhua (the same dialect used to represent Jiongnai in the 1995 comparative study by Wang and Mao) and Liúhàng. They are different in important respects (see chapter 4); and it seems that Longhua preserves more of the ancient initial consonant clusters which makes this language so important for reconstruction. For example, certain prenasalized velar initials with medial glides in Longhua regularly correspond to degraded fricative and glide initials in other Hmongic languages (see p. 113), and provide the “missing

1. The count of 822 speakers in Mao, Meng and Zheng 1982 (p. 8) was based on an earlier census.
link” between the Chinese source of these very old loanwords and proto-Hmong-Mien:

**stone**

Old Chinese² *C-rjats > Man. *li 磬 ‘whetstone’
proto-Hmong-Mien *ŋk-rau A (Jiongnai /ŋkja 1/)

**forest**

Old Chinese *C-rjim > Man. *lín 林
proto-Hmong-Mien *ŋk-ram B (Jiongnai /ŋkjan 3/)

**dragon**

Old Chinese *C-rjong > Man. *lóng 龍
proto-Hmong-Mien *ŋg-ron A (Jiongnai /ŋkjan 2/)

The structure of the book will be familiar to readers of this series: after an introductory chapter, there follow chapters on phonology (pp. 1-19), word-formation and Chinese borrowings (pp. 20-39), and syntax (pp. 40-83). Then after a brief chapter comparing the phonology, lexicon, and syntax of the two above-mentioned dialects (pp. 84-93), the authors present a valuable set of comparisons between Jiongnai and other languages of the Hmong-Mien family in the longest chapter of the book (pp. 94-253). They address in turn similarities and differences between Jiongnai and Miao (Hmongic) languages; Jiongnai, Bunu and She (Ho Ne); Jiongnai, Pañng, and Younuo; and Jiongnai and Yao (Mienic) languages. In the concluding section of this chapter, the authors identify Jiongnai as a Miao language (although ethnically Yao), one more closely related to She (Ho Ne)—itself also a Miao language—than any other. The book concludes with

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² The OC reconstructions are by Baxter (1992); the HM reconstructions are mine.
a glossary of words given in both Jiongnai dialects, and a sample text
of a tale about twin brothers.

Vol. 64: Trends in Linguistics Studies and Monographs. Berlin/
New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

*Mao Zongwu, Meng Chaoji and Zheng Zongze. 1982. Yáozú Yūyán
Jiānzhì [A sketch of the languages of the Yao people]. Beijing:
Minzu Chubanshe [Central Nationalities Press].

reconstruction of proto-Miao-Yao pronunciation]. Beijing:
Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe [China Social Sciences
Press].

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