

THE KAM-SUI-MAK AND NORTHERN TAI LANGUAGES

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I. INTRODUCTION

The hypothesis that a genetic relationship exists between the Kam-Sui-Mak languages of southern China and the Tai languages was first advanced by Li 1948b:

The Kam-Sui group has a close relationship to the Tai group, but it does not belong to the Tai group in a narrow sense. It has the same origin with the Tai group, but they split before the Ancient Tai group evolved into the modern languages.

In subsequent articles (1948a, 1951, 1965) Li continued to suggest that there was evidence of systematic sound correspondences, particularly with respect to consonant initials and tones, to support the view that the Kam-Sui-Mak languages were related to the Tai languages, yet were sufficiently different to comprise a distinct language group.

Other scholars have suggested a Kam-Sui-Mak and Tai relationship, such as Haudricourt 1959 and Nishida 1954, 1955. However, the supporting evidence for this hypothesis of relationship was incomplete because comparative studies included data only from the languages of Mak, T'en, and Sui, but not from Kam. Now that Chinese materials on Kam and related languages have been made available (Chinese Academy of Sciences 1959a, 1959b; Liang 1965; Pei 1963; Wei 1965), the comparative relationships can be more completely described.

II. DATA

Sets of cognates from fifteen Kam-Sui-Mak and Tai languages and dialects were compiled for this study.

The Kam data are from the Kam-Chinese dictionary (Chinese Academy of Sciences 1959b) with additions from Liang 1965 and Pei 1963. The

dictionary forms are based on the Kam (called T'ung in Chinese) dialect spoken in the Jung-Chiang area of Kweichow province. The Liang forms are from the Che-Chiang Commune in the same area, while Pei apparently includes forms from several dialects.

The Sui data come primarily from Li 1948a,1949,1951,1965 and include forms from dialects of Li-Ngam, Jung-Chiang, and Pyo, in southern Kweichow province. The Nishida 1954,1955 and Rai 1955 citations for Sui appear to be based on Li's data.

The Mak data are from Li 1948b,1965. Additional forms from Rai 1955 appear to belong to a similar dialect and exhibit similar tonal structure. The forms for T'en (called Yang-Huang in Chinese) come from Li 1965, 1966a,1967,1968. Both Mak and T'en are found in Kweichow province.

Languages representing the Northern branch of Tai are Saek, Po-Ai, Wu-Ming, and Yay. The Saek forms show evidence of early consonant clusters. This language is described by Gedney 1970 and Haudricourt 1963.

The Po-Ai data are from Li 1944,1957,1965 and represent dialects spoken in Kwangsi and Kwei-chow. Data for Wu-Ming, also spoken in those provinces, are from Li 1947b,1956.

The Yay data represent a dialects of extreme northern North Vietnam. Gedney 1965 has shown this language to be identical with the Glay language cited by Haudricourt 1960, and to be related to, but not identical with, the Dloi language of the Esquirol-Williate dictionary published in 1908.

Languages representing Central Tai are Lung-Chow (Li 1965) and Lung-Ming (Gedney field notes). Both languages are spoken in southwestern Kwangsi.

Representing Southwestern Tai are Siamese and White Tai. Siamese forms are common knowledge. The White Tai data are from Gedney field notes and from Gedney 1964.

The results presented in this paper are based on over 375 distinct lexical items with cognate forms in all or most of the languages mentioned.

III. FRAMEWORK

It may be useful to review briefly the situation in the Tai languages with respect to the correlation of tones and initial consonants which is the basis of much of the comparative/historical study of Sino-Tibetan languages. It is generally assumed that the parent Tai language had a system of three distinctive tones (here termed A, B and C) on open syllables, and no tone, or a neutral tone (here called D), on checked

syllables. After the major break from the parent language, each daughter language underwent tonal splits conditioned by phonetic features of the initial consonants. In checked syllables there appears to have been an additional conditioning factor of vowel length.

A primary phonetic feature of initial consonants which appears to have influenced tonal development is that of voicing. That is, if the three tonal categories A, B and C are bisected along a voiced *v.* voiceless distinction, a maximal six-way tonal system would result, as in Wu-Ming, Lung-Chow, and White Tai in the table of tonal correspondences given below.

	A	B	C	D short	D long
<i>Voiceless</i>					
Kam	1,2	7,8,9	4,5	1,2,3,4	4
Sui (Li-Ngam)	1	5	3	5	5
Sui (Jung-Chiang)	1	5	3	5	5
Sui (Pyo)	1	5	3	5	5
Mak	1,6	5	3	5	3
T'en	1,5	3	2,6	5	6
Saek	1,2	6	3	4	3
Po-Ai	1,6	5	3	2,3	5
Wu-Ming	1	5	3	5	5
Yay	1	2	3,6	3	2
Lung-Chow	1	5	3	5	5
Lung-Ming	1,4	2	3	3	2
Siamese	1,5	2	3	2	2
White Tai	1	2	3	2	2
<i>Voiced</i>					
Kam	3	9	6	3,6	6
Sui (Li-Ngam)	2	6	4	4	4
Sui (Jung-Chiang)	2	6	4	4	4
Sui (Pyo)	2	6	4	2	2
Mak	2	6	4	2	2
T'en	5	4	2	2	2
Saek	4	5	6	6	5
Po-Ai	2	6	4	3	6
Wu-Ming	2	6	4	6	6
Yay	4	5	6	1	5

continued overleaf

	A	B	C	D short	D long
<i>Voiced (cont.)</i>					
Lung-Chow	2	6	4	2	2
Lung-Ming	4	5	6	4	5
Siamese	1	3	4	4	3
White Tai	4	5	6	4	4

(The numbers indicate tonal contours described in the Appendix.)

Additional phonetic characteristics, such as friction and glottalisation, have also been posited as conditioning factors in the tonal development of Tai languages, and account for the multiple correspondences within the voiceless series. For example, in tonal category A, Siamese has tone 5 in words reflecting original friction initials, and tone 1 elsewhere. A checklist for determining tones in Tai dialects is found in Gedney 1973.

IV. KAM-SUI-MAK AND NORTHERN TAI

Li 1957 suggested general characteristics of Northern Tai to distinguish that group from the Central and Southwestern branches. Some of these characteristics are discussed here with special reference to the role of Saek in the Northern Tai classification, and to the relationship of Kam-Sui-Mak to Northern Tai.

1. INITIAL CONSONANTS

One of the characteristics of Northern Tai mentioned by Li was the lack of distinction in the modern languages between original aspirated and unaspirated initial consonants. Using Po-Ai and Wu-Ming examples Li showed that Northern Tai languages have only unaspirated consonants, "although Po-Ai begins to reintroduce aspirated consonants through the influence of Chinese" (Li 1957:316).

An examination of the data shows that Saek preserves the original aspirated-unaspirated distinction, while the situation is less clear in the Kam-Sui-Mak languages.

In both Tai and Kam-Sui-Mak, original unaspirated consonants are reflected by modern unaspirated consonants. Examples of Proto-Tai *k- are