Tibeto-Burman vs. Sino-Tibetan

George van Driem

The initial stage of my work on Tibeto-Burman languages two decades ago took place under the aegis of Werner Winter's research programme in Nepal. It is therefore fitting that I write a short note here addressing the history and current state of the art in Tibeto-Burman linguistics. This tale, which I have not told before, briefly introduces the German scholar who first recognised the Tibeto-Burman language family and the Scot who first formulated the Indo-Chinese or Sino-Tibetan conception of language relationships, and briefly traces the further development of their legacies in the history of thought.

Inklings of a Tibeto-Burman language family were gleaned in the 18th century, when Western scholars observed that Tibetan was genetically related to Burmese. However, the precise contours of the Tibeto-Burman language family were first defined in Paris in 1823 by the German scholar Julius Heinrich von Klaproth, the same man who first coined the term 'Indogermanisch'. In his *Asia Polyglotta*, Klaproth defined Tibeto-Burman as the language family which comprised Burmese, Tibetan and Chinese and all languages which could be demonstrated to be genetically related to these three. He explicitly excluded Thai (i. e. Daic) as well as Vietnamese and Mon (i. e. Austroasiatic) because the comparison of lexical roots in the core vocabulary indicated that these languages were representatives of other distinct language phyla.

Julius Heinrich Klaproth was born on the 11th of October 1783 in Berlin and died on the 28th of August 1835 in Paris. As a young man he travelled to China in the years 1805–1806 and again in 1806–1807. He was widely read and mastered a good number of Oriental tongues. He edited the *Asiatisches Magazin* in Weimar, became a foreign associate of the Société Asiatique after its founding in 1821 in Paris. In his *Asia Polyglotta,* Klaproth included a biographical sketch of the Buddha entitled 'Leben des Budd'a nach mongolische [sic] Nachricht', which appeared in French translation in the *Journal Asiatique* in 1824. Yet first and foremost, Klaproth was a linguist. He was the first to observe that the root for 'birch', a phytonym which Sanskrit shares with other Indo-European languages, was important to an understanding of the population prehistory of the Subcontinent:

> Il est digne de remarquer que le *bouleau* s'appelle en sanscrit भूर्ज *bhourtchtcha,* et que ce mot dérive de la même racine que l'allemand *birke,* l'anglais *birch* et le russe берeза (bereza), tandis que les noms des autres arbres de l'Inde ne se retrouvent pas dans les langues indo-germaniques de l'Europe. La raison en est, vraisemblablement, que les nations indo-germaniques venaient du nord, quand elles entrèrent dans l'Inde, où elles apportèrent la langue qui a servi de base au sanscrit, et qui a repoussé de la presqu'ile [sic], les idiomes de la même origine que le malabar et le télinga, que ces nations, dis-je, ne trouvèrent pas dans leur nouvelle patrie les arbres qu'elles avaient connu [sic] dans l'ancienne, à l'exception du bouleau, qui croît sur le versant méridional de l'*Himâlaya.* (1830: 112–113)

This idea which was later seized upon by the Swiss linguist Adolphe Pictet, who coined the term 'linguistic palaeontology' in his 1859 study *Les origines indo-européennes ou les Aryas primitifs: essai de paléontologie linguistique*.

As far as I have been able to trace, Klaproth was also the first to state clearly that the Formosan languages were members of the Austronesian family, genetically related to Malay and Malagasy (1823: 380). Klaproth carefully scrutinised the lexical and grammatical data available at the time, and, following the precedents set by Nicolaes Witsen (1692) and Phillip von Strahlenberg (1730), he was the first to be able to present an informed and comprehensive polyphyletic view of Asian languages and language families. In order to reconcile this polyphyletic view with his religious beliefs, he devised a table of correpondence between Hindu and Biblical chronology, dated 'die grosse Ausbreitung des Indo-Germanischen Völkerstammes' to a prehistoric period 'vielleicht schon vor der Noah'ischen Fluth' (1823: 43), and likewise interpreted most of the great language diversity which he observed in Eurasia as the débris of antediluvian dispersals, thus greatly antedating the confusion of tongues ensuing upon the collapse of the Tower of Babel. Klaproth identified and distinguished 23 main Asian linguistic stocks, which he knew did not yet represent an exhaustive inventory. Yet he argued for a smaller number of phyla because he recognised the genetic affinity between certain of these stocks and the distinct nature of others (1823a, 1823b, 1831). For example, he recognised that the Turkic, Mongolic and Tungusic languages collectively formed a family of related languages, although, unlike Philipp von Siebold, Klaproth still considered Korean and Japanese to be distinct Asian phyla. Similarly, he treated the language stocks of northeastern Eurasia each as a distinct phylum, e. g. Yukaghir, Koryak, Kamchadal, and the languages of the 'Polar-Amerikaner in Asien'.

Klaproth was also the first to identify a family of languages comprising Chinese, the Burmese language of 'Awa', the language of the 'Tübeter' and related tongues, but specifically excluding languages such as Siamese, the Vietnamese language of Annam, the 'Moan' language of the 'Peguer', and so forth. Later German proponents of the Tibeto-Burman theory had precocious intuitions about Chinese historical grammar. Scholars such as Carl Richard Lepsius (1861) and Wilhelm Grube (1881) mooted reflexes of Tibeto-Burman historical morphology in Chinese. Lepsius even recognised that the tones of Chinese had arisen from the loss of older syllable-final segments and the loss of distinctions between older syllable-initial segments. Modern scholarship has today returned to this original Tibeto-Burman language family.

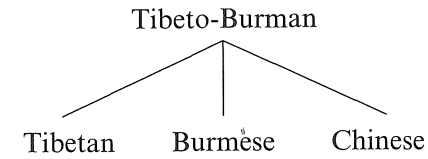

Diagram 1. One of the language families identified by Klaproth in his polyphyletic view of Asian linguistic stocks (1823)

Yet Klaproth's view of a polyglot Asian continent as the home to many distinct language phyla was not universally well-received. In January 1825, in a letter to Baron Paul Schilling von Canstadt, for instance, August Wilhelm von Schlegel described his distaste for the polyphyletic view of Asia presented by Klaproth (Körner 1930, I: 631), whereas Schlegel evidently found John Leyden's undifferentiated 'Indo-Chinese' view of Asian languages to be more palatable (1832: 21). To scholars in Europe, the two most important language families were what was known in the 19th century variously as Indo-European, Indo-Germanic or Aryan, and the Semitic family, later known as Hamito-Semitic and most recently as Afroasiatic. It did not come naturally to everyone to view the many distinct linguistic stocks of Asia as language families on an equal footing with Indo-European and Afroasiatic.

Personalities also played a role, and even the even-keeled Wilhelm von Humboldt made reference to the 'Ätzigkeit' of the brilliant Klaproth (Walravens 1999a). Moreover, between 1826 and 1829, the Société Asiatique

in Paris was torn by the feuding between the group comprising Klaproth, Abel Rémusat, Eugène Burnouf and Julius von Mohl and the 'fleuristes' or 'philologues-poètes', led by the acrimonious Silvestre de Sacy. The lines of animosities drawn in this conflict emanated far beyond Paris. Indeed, the professional perceptions of many a scholar of Oriental languages were shaped by the constellation of likes and dislikes which existed between the linguists of the day as much as they were by substantive arguments, and arguably this is to some extent still the case in Tibeto-Burman linguistics today. However, in the 19th century personality conflicts also had the effect of exacerbating unstated but deeply rooted Eurocentric preconceptions.

1. Indo-Chinese or Sino-Tibetan

One sally against Klaproth's polyphyletic view of Asian languages was Friedrich Max Müller's Turanian theory, a putative language family encompassing each and every language of the Old World other than the 'Semitic' or Afroasiatic and 'Arian' or Indo-European languages. Since I have told this tale elsewhere (2001), suffice it to say that the Turanian view was highly influential in the British Isles and throughout the British Empire, and that the theory continued to influence scholars after Müller's death in 1900, even though he had himself abandoned the theory in his lifetime.

Another more enduring challenge to the differentiated view of Asian linguistic stocks was originally named 'Indo-Chinese'. Indo-Chinese has a more chequered history than Turanian and still continues to lead a life of its own under the guise of 'Sino-Tibetan'. This view of languages originated with the Scottish physician and poet John Leyden.[1]

Leyden was born on the 8th of September 1775 at Denholm on the banks of the Teviot in Teviotdale in Scotland. When he failed to receive a church appointment in 1802, he completed a medical degree at St. Andrews after six months of additional study, building upon his previous medical studies. Then an influential friend of the family arranged a writership for him in India. So, in preparation he studied Oriental languages for several months in London. Leyden reached Madras on the 19th of August 1803, where he took up the post of assistant surgeon and took charge of Madras General Hospital. He travelled extensively in southern India, and in September 1805 sailed from Quilon (Kollam) for Penang. He returned to India in 1806 to settle in Calcutta. During his peregrinations he studied and tried his hand at all the languages he met on the way. In a letter to Lt. Col. Richardson, Leyden bemoaned the fact that, whereas quite a number of Frenchmen and Dutchmen in the East were conversant in Thai, he seemed to be the only Briton[2] to have attempted to gain some familiarity with the language:

> I had an opportunity of studying Siamese but could not help feeling indignant that their [sic] should not be a single Britain [sic] acquainted with that language. Indeed my Dear Colonel I cannot think such facts honourable to the British nation. (1806c: 34)

On the 2nd of January 1807, Leyden submitted his *Plan for the Investigation of the Language, literature, History and Antiquities of the* Indo-Chinese *Nations* to Sir George Hilaro Barlow, the Governor General of India, but withdrew his application on the 17th of the same month. The reasons for the withdrawal of Leyden's proposal are unknown, whether personal or connected to the worsening situation in war-torn Europe and the European colonial possessions in Asia. He also wrote a *Plan for the Investigation of the Language, Literature, History and Antiquities of the Dekkan,* a *Plan for the Investigation of the Language, Literature and History of the Indo-Persic Nations,* and a note *On the Comparative Utility of the Dekkani, Indo-Persic and Indo-Chinese Languages and the Work Most Necessary for Facilitating their Acquisition*. Each of these manuscripts exists in two different drafts which are preserved at the British Library.

Leyden's work on 'Indo-Persic' lacked the profundity and erudition of the great Sanskrit scholar Henry Thomas Colebrooke (1765–1837), but his work on 'Indo-Chinese' was published in *Asiatick Researches* in 1808. Moreover, after the submission of his plans Leyden was elected a member of the Asiatic Society and became professor of Hindustani at Calcutta College. Subsequently, he was also appointed judge of the 24 *parganās* of Calcutta. In early 1809, he became commissioner of the Court of Requests in Calcutta, and in late 1810 was appointed assay master of the Mint at Calcutta.

Because of his talent as a polyglot, he was asked in 1811 to accompany the Governor General of British India, Lord Minto, to Java as a Malay interpreter during the British campaign to seize the Dutch East Indies. In 1806, the Dutch Republic had been occupied by Napoleon, who had put his brother Louis on the throne of what then became the Kingdom of Holland, and on the 9th of July 1810 the Netherlands were annexed by France. The British fleet and 10,000 troops entered the harbour of Batavia on the 4th of August 1811, and John Leyden was also on board. Yet

Leyden died just a few weeks after landfall, less than a fortnight before his 36th birthday. The circumstances of Leyden's death are recounted in the *Dictionary of National Biography* in the following words:

> When the expedition halted for some days at Malacca, Leyden journeyed inland, scrutinising 'original Malays' and visiting sulphurous hot wells. Java was reached on 4 Aug., and as there was no opposition at Batavia a leisurely possession was effected. Leyden's literary zeal took him into an unventilated native library; fever supervened, and he died at Cornelis, after three days' illness, 28 Aug. 1811[3]. (Lee 1893: 216)

On the 18th of September, three weeks after Leyden's death, the Governor General, Jan Willem Janssens, signed the capitulation at Toentang which unconditionally surrendered the Dutch East Indies to Britain. So for five years the Dutch colonies in the Orient passed into the hands of the East India Company. On behalf of Company, Thomas Stamford Bingley Raffles acted as custodian of the Dutch East Indies in the capacity of Lieutenant Governor until the 10th of March 1816, after which he was succeeded by John Fendall. After the defeat of Napoleon, the British handed back the Dutch East Indies in a gentlemanly fashion, and on the 19th of August 1816 baron Godert Alexander Gerard Philip van der Capellen took over as Governor General on behalf of King Willem I of the Netherlands.

Leyden's 'Indo-Chinese' encompassed Mon, which he called 'the *Moan* or language of Pegu', Balinese, Malay, Burmese, 'the Tai or *Siamese*' and 'the Law, or language of Laos', and Vietnamese or 'the *Anam* language of Cochin Chinese'. These 'Indo-Chinese' languages of the Asian continent shared a more immediate genetic affinity with Chinese in Leyden's conception, but Indo-Chinese also explicitly included 'the inhabitants of the Eastern isles who are not immeadiately [sic] derived from the Chinese nations' (1806b: 1). In fact, Indo-Chinese encompassed all the languages spoken by 'the inhabitants of the regions which lie between India and China, and the greater part of the islanders in the eastern sea', which although 'dissimilar', according to Leyden, 'exhibit the same mixed origin' (1806a: 1).

After Leyden's death, the Indo-Chinese idea began to lead a life of its own. In 1837, the American missionary and linguist Nathan Brown used the term 'Indo-Chinese' to designate all the languages of eastern Eurasia. The fact that Brown's Indo-Chinese even included Korean and Japanese illustrates the appeal and dogged longevity of undifferentiated views in the face of more informed opinions. Engelbert Kæmpfer, the physician attached to the Dutch mission at the imperial court at Edo, had already

pointed out in 1729 that Japanese was genetically unrelated to Chinese and had suggested that the Turkic languages might be the closest linguistic relatives of Japanese. In 1832, Philipp Franz Balthazar von Siebold had concluded on the basis of comparative linguistic data that the Japanese language was related to the Altaic or 'Tatar' languages and that within this family Japanese showed the greatest genetic affinity with Manchu.

Later versions of Indo-Chinese excluded Japanese and Korean, and the Austroasiatic languages were recognised as constituting a separate language family by the American Baptist missionary Francis Mason in 1854, when he saw evidence for a specific genetic relationship between the Mon-Khmer language Mon and the Munda language Kol. This newly recognised language family was known as Mon-Khmer-Kolarian for over half a century until Wilhelm Schmidt renamed it Austroasiatic in 1906. After Austroasiatic had been removed from Indo-Chinese, German scholars such as Emile Forchhammer (1882) and Ernst Kuhn (1889) continued to refer to what was left of the pseudophylum by the name 'indochinesisch', and in general the same practice was generally observed in the Anglo-Saxon literature. However, a few British scholars used the term 'Indo-Chinese' in precisely the opposite sense, to designate the very Austroasiatic or 'Mon-Khmer-Kolarian' genetic family of languages which had been extracted from the expansive pseudophlyum, e. g. Sir Richard Temple (1903).

After the removal of Altaic, Austronesian and Austroasiatic languages, Indo-Chinese had been whittled down to the original Tibeto-Burman plus Daic. However, in the confused Indo-Chinese conception the putative language family consisted of a 'Tibeto-Burman' branch (i. e. the original Tibeto-Burman minus Sinitic) and a 'Sino-Daic' branch, e. g. August Conrady (1896), Franz Nikolaus Finck (1909). There was residual uncertainty about the genetic affinity of Vietnamese, particularly in the French scholarly community. André-Georges Haudricourt settled the question once and for all in 1954, and Vietnamese has been universally recognised as Austroasiatic ever since.

Indo-Chinese was renamed 'sino-tibétain' by Jean Przyluski in 1924, and the name entered the English language in 1931 as 'Sino-Tibetan' when Przyluski and the British scholar Gordon Hannington Luce wrote an etymological note on the 'Sino-Tibetan' root for the numeral 'hundred'. A defining feature of the Indo-Chinese or Sino-Tibetan theory, very much at variance with Klaproth's original Tibeto-Burman theory, was that Chinese was not seen as a part of Tibeto-Burman, whilst Daic was seen as the closest relative of Chinese. In the United States, Alfred Kroeber and Robert Shafer adopted the new term 'Sino-Tibetan' for Indo-Chinese.

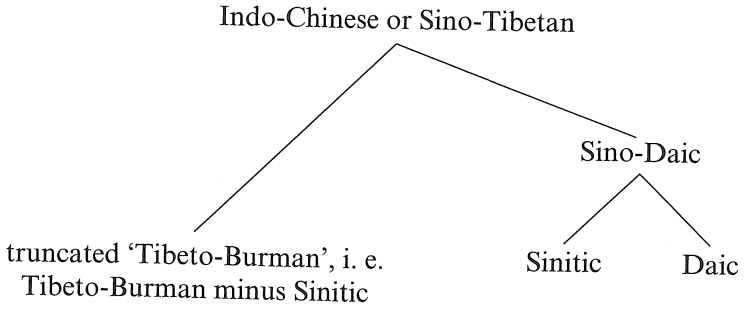

Diagram 2. The Indo-Chinese or Sino-Tibetan theory: Daic has been excluded since the Second World War

Chinese scholars similarly adopted the term *Hàn-Zàng* 'Sino-Tibetan', the contours of which are still the same as that of Conrady's 'Indo-Chinese' and Przyluski's antiquated 'Sino-Tibetan'.

Robert Shafer soon realised that Daic did not belong in the Indo-Chinese or Sino-Tibetan family and in 1938 'prepared a list of words showing the lack of precise phonetic and semantic correspondence' between Daic and other Indo-Chinese languages. Armed with this list, Shafer travelled to France before the outbreak of the Second World War 'to convince Maspero that Daic was not Sino-Tibetan' (1955: 97–98). Instead, Henri Maspero managed to convince Shafer to retain Daic within Sino-Tibetan.

When Paul Benedict moved to Berkeley in 1938 to join Kroeber's Sino-Tibetan Philology project, he likewise exchanged the name Indo-Chinese for 'Sino-Tibetan'. Over a century after Klaproth had already identified Daic as a linguistic stock distinct from Tibeto-Burman (inc. Chinese), Benedict too in 1942 ousted Daic from 'Sino-Tibetan', but he remained more resolute about this measure than Shafer. The removal of Sinitic from the 'Sino-Daic' branch of 'Sino-Tibetan' resulted in a tree model characterised by the retention of the heuristic artefact that Chinese was a separate trunk of the language family. In fact, this was the sole remaining feature which defined Sino-Tibetan as a putative language family and distinguished it from the Tibeto-Burman theory. For a brief spate in the 1970s, Sino-Tibetan even consisted of a Chinese branch and a Tibeto-Karen construct, which in turn was divided into a Karen branch and an even more mutilated 'Tibeto-Burman' (Benedict 1972, 1976).

The tacit but always untested assumption of Sino-Tibetanists has been that all 'Tibeto-Burman' languages share unitary developments not found in Chinese and Karen. Great significance has been ascribed to superficial

criteria such as word order. Though Karen was later put back into truncated 'Tibeto-Burman', adherents of Sino-Tibetan have continued to assume the existence of as yet undemonstrated common innovations shared by all Tibeto-Burman languages other than Sinitic. In 1968, Jim Matisoff adopted the Sino-Tibetan hypothesis from his mentor Paul Benedict and has ever since been propagating this paradigm at Berkeley, where, appropriately, street merchants on Telegraph Avenue sell T-shirts sporting the text 'Subvert the Dominant Paradigm'.

2. Tibeto-Burman replaces Sino-Tibetan

The history of science is the story of scholars living comfortably for years, and sometimes for centuries, with a paradigm or theoretical model which a new generation discovers to be false. Such a paradigm shift occurred in the 1990s when the Indo-Chinese or Sino-Tibetan paradigm was replaced by the original Tibeto-Burman theory of Julius von Klaproth. Three developments converged to yield insights heralding a return to the Tibeto-Burman language family, i. e. (1) a better understanding of Old Chinese, (2) improved insights into the genetic position of Sinitic and an appreciation of its Tibeto-Burman character, and (3) the exhaustive identification of all the Tibeto-Burman subgroups.

The first development involved the production of better reconstructions of Old Chinese. Major advances in the historical phonology of Chinese were accompanied by new insights into Chinese historical morphology. In sequel to his earlier work, Edwin George Pulleyblank completed major new contributions to Chinese historical phonology (1991, forthcoming) as well as a new grammar of Classical Chinese, which superseded the seminal works of Georg von der Gabelentz (1881) and Dobson (1959, 1960). Moreover, a major new synthesis of Old Chinese historical phonology was presented by William Baxter (1992, 1995a, 1995b), which expanded on earlier work by Bernhard Karlgren, Sergej Evgen'evič Jaxontov, Edwin Pulleyblank and Sergej Anatol'evič Starostin. New contributions appeared by Starostin on Old Chinese (1995a, 1995b). Novel insights into Old Chinese morphological processes were presented both by Sagart (1994), by Baxter and Sagart (1998) and by Pulleyblank (1999, 2000). The growing consensus which emerged was characterised by the convergence of the competing reconstructions of Old Chinese.

New insights regarding the genetic position of Chinese seemed to vindicate certain earlier views. By the 1990s the Tibeto-Burman character of

Sinitic had been amply demonstrated, and no uniquely shared innovations had been adduced which could define Tibeto-Burman as a separate coherent taxon that would exclude Chinese and be coordinate with Proto-Sinitic. The new face of Old Chinese was of a language decidedly more Tibeto-Burman in countenance and more closely allied with certain groups like Bodic and Kiranti. In fact, Old Chinese was seen to be less eccentric from the mainstream Tibeto-Burman point of view than, say, Gongduk or Toto. Moreover, isoglosses possibly representing lexical innovations as well as uniquely shared morphological innovations in Brahmaputran may indicate that a more primary bifurcation in the language family is between subgroups such as Brahmaputran and the rest of the Tibeto-Burman family including Sinitic.

Possible uniquely shared lexical isoglosses between Sinitic and Bodic were adduced by Walter Simon (1929), Robert Shafer (1955, 1974), Nicholas Bodman (1980) and myself (van Driem 1997) which could even support the identification of a Sino-Bodic subgroup within Tibeto-Burman. Moreover, Laurent Sagart reconstructed an Old Chinese 'voicing prefix' *<N-> (1994: 279–281). This reconstruction was adopted by William Baxter (Baxter and Sagart 1998: 45), replacing Baxter's earlier *<ɦ-> (1992). Sergej Anatol'evič Starostin has maintained that this prefix is best reflected in Kiranti, Bodish, Sinitic and West Himalayish. If this is correct, the shared morphological element may likewise bolster the case for Sino-Bodic. However, if the feature is a shared retention rather than a shared innovation, then the distribution of the phenomenon is merely suggestive.

The third development which has heralded a return to the original Tibeto-Burman theory is the exhaustive charting of Tibeto-Burman subgroups. Only recently have all the languages and language groups of the Tibeto-Burman language family been identified with the discovery in Bhutan in the 1990s of the last hitherto unreported Tibeto-Burman languages, viz. Black Mountain and Gongduk. In addition to the identification of all basic subgroups, new members of already recognised subgroups have been discovered and rediscovered in Tibet, southwestern China, northeastern India and Nepal. Recently in Tibet at Ba-gsum or Brag-gsum in northern rKong-po, the French scholar Nicolas Tournadre identified an East Bodish language which had previously been erroneously classified as a Tibetan dialect. Instead, Tournadre believes that this tongue is ultimately related to Dzala and the other East Bodish languages of Bhutan. Similarly, Barām or 'Bhráhmú', a Tibeto-Burman language reported by Brian Houghton Hodgson in the mid 19th century, but thought since to have gone extinct, was rediscovered in Gorkhā district in central Nepal in the 1990s.

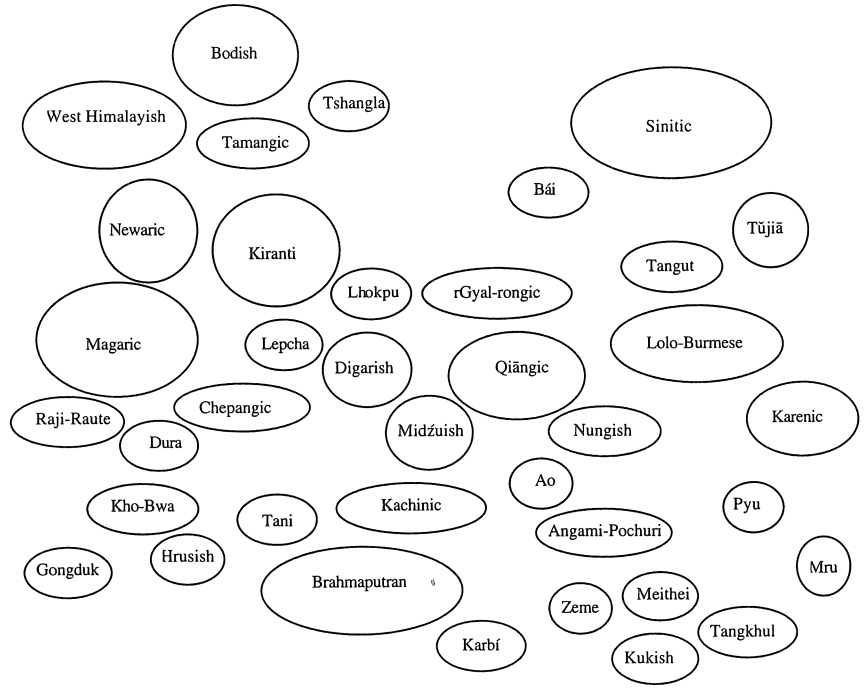

Diagram 3. This patch of leaves on the forest floor has fallen from a single tree, which we know as Tibeto-Burman. We cannot see the branches of the tree, but we are beginning to see the shadows they cast between the leaves on the forest floor. This schematic geographical representation provides an informed but agnostic picture of Tibeto-Burman subgroups. The extended version of the Brahmaputran hypothesis includes Kachinic, but for the sake of argument this diagram depicts the short variant of Brahmaputran, viz. excluding Kachinic. Kachinic comprises the Sak languages and the Jinghpaw dialects. Likewise, Tangut is separately depicted, although Tangut is likely to be part of Qiāngic. Digarish is Northern Mishmi, and Midźuish is Southern Mishmi, i. e. the Kaman cluster. Bái is listed as a distinct group, whereas it may form a constituent of Sinitic, albeit one heavily influenced by Lolo-Burmese. Tǔjiā is a heavily sinicised Tibeto-Burman language of indeterminate phylogenetic propinquity spoken by about three million people in an area which straddles the provinces of Sìchuān, Húběi, Húnán and Guìzhōu. Jackson Sun has suggested to me that Guìqióng may represent a separate subgroup in its own right, independent of Qiāngic and thus constituting a 39th leaf which has fallen to the mossy forest floor from the Tibeto-Burman tree. The Sino-Bodic hypothesis encompasses at least the groups called Sinitic, Kiranti, Bodish, West Himalayish, rGyal-rongic, Tamangic, Tshangla and Lhokpu and possibly Lepcha. Other hypotheses, such as the inclusion of Chepang and perhaps Dura and Raji-Raute within Magaric, are discussed in my handbook (van Driem 2001).

The basic outline of the Tibeto-Burman family is shown in Diagram 3. The model does not have the shape of a family tree, but this is not to say that a *Stammbaum* model is inappropriate. Rather, it is a fitting metaphor for the current state of our knowledge. The various empirically indefensible family trees have been replaced by a patch of leaves on the forest floor which have fallen from the same tree. Not only is the branching pattern of the tree not within view, the constituent language subgroups of the family have only been finally exhaustively identified within the past decade. We cannot lift our heads to look at the tree because we cannot look directly into the past, but in a careful study of the leaves strewn on the forest floor we may be able to discern the shadows of the branches of the tree. At present, we do not know the higher-order branching, but we have every reason to believe that these branches are there. This more candid but at the same time more comprehensive view of the language family confronts scholars with the immediate need to search for and identify the evidence which could support empirically defensible higher-order subgroups within Tibeto-Burman, analogous to Italo-Celtic and Balto-Slavic in the Indo-European language family. The patch of fallen leaves on the forest floor provides a working framework of greater utility than a false tree, such as the empirically unsupported Sino-Tibetan model. The metaphor of the patch of leaves on the forest floor leaves us unencumbered by the false doctrines of the Indo-Chinese paradigm, heuristic artefacts which have survived chiefly as nothing more than truths by assertion. The burden of proof now lies squarely on the shoulders of the Sino-Tibetanists who propagate truncated 'Tibeto-Burman' as a valid taxon to adduce evidence for their taxonomical constructs.

Finally, I should like to present and rescue from possible oblivion a Russian variation on the Tibeto-Burman theme. Although Jaxontov used the label 'Sino-Tibetan macrophylum', his taxonomy, based on lexicostatistics, is basically a Russian variation on the Tibeto-Burman theory, not a version of the Indo-Chinese or Sino-Tibetan model. Diagram 4 reproduces the taxonomy of the Tibeto-Burman language family as proposed by Sergej Evgen'evič Jaxontov in his 1996 keynote address at the opening of the 29th International Conference on Sino-Tibetan [sic] Languages and Linguistics at Noordwijkerhout. Although the Himalayan Languages Project in Leiden organised the conference, and I had personally invited Jaxontov to be the keynote speaker, I had in the intervening years somehow forgotten about his lexicostatistical taxonomy until my friend Laurent Sagart drew it to my attention again in Paris earlier this year. In fact, I do not suscribe to Jaxontov's model of Tibeto-Burman phylogeny, nor do

Aka (Hruso)
Sulung (Puroit)
Tǔjiā
Sinitic subphylum
Tibeto-Burman subphylum
    Tibeto-Burman stock
        Tibetan substock
        Burman substock
            Lolo-Burmese family
                Burmese-Maru branch
                Yí (Lolo) branch
                Nàxī (Moso) branch, Nàxī, Nàmùyì, Shǐxīng
                Ěrsū (Tosu)
            rGyal-rong
            Guìqióng
            Mùyǎ
            Tangut-Ěrgōng family
        Nung substock
        Qiāng substock
        Magar substock
    North Assam stock
        Tani or 'Abor Miri' substock
        Digaro-Idu substock
    Miju
    Naga-Kuki stock
    Mikir
    Mru
    Róng (Lepcha)
    Newar
    Karen
East Himalayan subphylum
West Himalayan subphylum
Bodo-Kachin subphylum
    Bodo substock
    Kachin-Konyak substock
        Jinghpaw
        Sak or 'Luish'
        Konyak
            Northeast branch
            Southwest branch
            Chairel

Diagram 4. Taxonomy of the Tibeto-Burman language family or phylum according to Sergej Evgen'evič Jaxontov, based on lexicostatistics, whereby indentation indicates lower-order subgroup status

I share his convictions regarding the utility of lexicostatistics. However, Jaxontov has so often turned out to be correct and ahead of his time that I have reproduced his entire schema here both for the sake of argument as well as to preserve it for the ready reference of future generations of scholars. It would come as no surprise if one or more of Jaxontov's insights and hunches were once again to be vindicated by subsequent scholarship and future research findings. I have regularised some of the nomenclature and corrected one or two typographical errors, but I have retained Jaxontov's eclectic use of the terms 'subphylum', 'stock', 'substock', 'family', and 'branch'.

The model presented in Diagram 3 is arguably the least biased and most agnostic approach to the Tibeto-Burman family. Yet Diagram 4 embodies a number of testable hunches and hypotheses by an eminent scholar which merit careful consideration. The inclusion of this schema here will make it possible to use and evaluate the hypotheses of Jaxontov's lexicostatistical taxonomy in the light of future research findings.

Notes

1. Collections of Leyden's poetry have been published posthumously by Morton (1819) and Seshadri (1912).
2. Francis Buchanan had included short word lists of Khamti, Shan and Thai in his comparative vocabulary of languages of the Burmese empire (1798).
3. Another source upon which I drew previously (2001: 337) specified the place and date of Leyden's death as Molenvliet on the 29th of August 1811. However, Molenvliet and Meester Cornelis lie on opposite sides of the once affluent neighbourhood of Weltevreden, and it seems improbable that Leyden would have died twice and at two different locations in Batavia.

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