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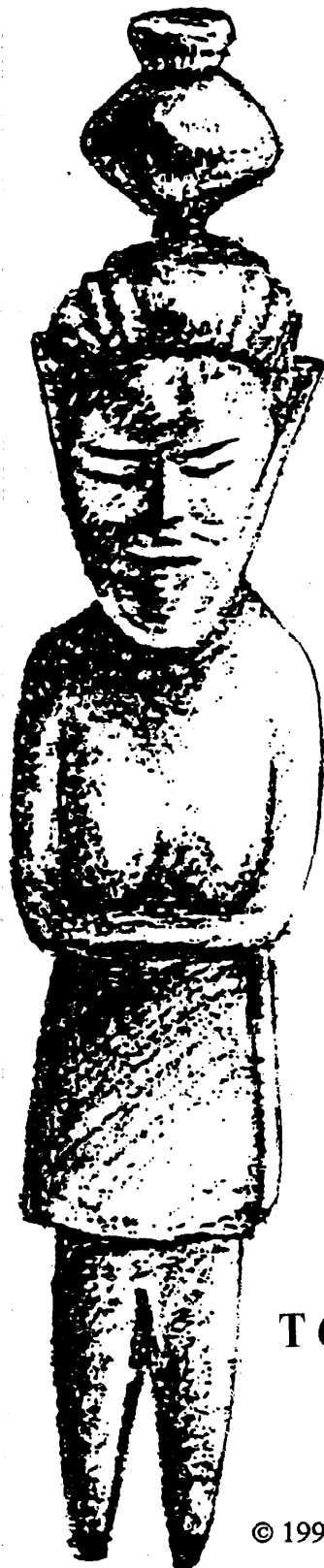
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Four Austric Theories  
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Wilhelm Schmidt is the father of Austric, a theory which posits a language family consisting of Austroasiatic and Austronesian. Frans Kuiper was perhaps the first scholar after Schmidt to adduce a good number of possible Austric correspondences, some of which show stunning semantic and formal correspondence (1948). In the *Mother Tongue* of October 1999, I wrote that Frans Kuiper's comparison of Malay prefixes with a hypothetical Austric source language for the early loans in the *R̥gveda* would be a fanciful exercise unless the correctness of the Austric theory was presumed. I should, of course, have written that Kuiper's comparison was meaningful because he presumed the correctness of the Austric theory. Moreover, Kuiper was the first to address the question of identifying possible Austroasiatic prefixes in the unidentified loan layer in the *R̥gveda*. The hypothesis formulated by Kuiper was that the early loan layer exhibited elements which could be identified as ancient Austroasiatic prefixes, only relicts of which could be found in Munda but many of which were still found intact in Malay.

Wilhelm Schmidt's Austric was a macrofamily, which was later even to include Japanese as a predominantly Austric 'Mischsprache' consisting of an 'austrasiatische' and an 'ural-altaische' layer (1906, 1930). There are also other versions of the Austric theory. The oldest alternative version is nearly as old as Schmidt's Austric. What were seen as correspondences between Siamese, Chinese, Burmese, Tibetan and Malay led both August Conrady (1916, 1922) and Karl Wulff (1934) to espouse the hypothesis of a genetic relationship between Indo-Chinese and Wilhelm Schmidt's Austric, whereby Indo-Chinese consisted of Daic plus Tibeto-Burman. In those days, Chinese was seen as closely related to Siamese, rather than as a constituent branch of Tibeto-Burman (cf. van Driem 1997, 1999a). I call this theory mega-Austric. It proposes a superfamily consisting of Austroasiatic, Austronesian, Daic and Tibeto-Burman. There exists yet another version of Austric to which I gave the name 'Greater Austric' several years ago (1998). This hypothetical construct comprises Austroasiatic, Austronesian, Daic and Hmong-Mien and is therefore more comprehensive than Schmidt's Austric, yet not quite as inclusive as Conrady's mega-Austric. Greater Austric unites the Austric and Austro-Tai theories. Robert Blust entertained a version of the Greater Austric hypothesis when he proposed that Austroasiatic might represent one trunk of 'the Austric superfamily' with Austro-Tai (i.e. Daic plus Austronesian) making up the other trunk. (1996).

La Vaughn Hayes is a proponent of Schmidt's Austric, but does not reject the possibility of a genetic relationship of Austric with Daic and Hmong-Mien. Though not much evidence has accrued for either Greater Austric or mega-Austric since August Conrady and Karl Wulff had a look at it, Hayes claims that for Austric proper there is 'massive evidence of a shared core vocabulary, only a small part of which' he adduced in his first article (1992: 174). In his

and in his most recent article he even sets up a sound law involving regular correspondences between Austroasiatic and Austronesian for reflexes of the reconstructed Austric sibilants \*s and \*z, which he argues constitutes 'irrefutable proof' for the reality of Austric. This is evidence which deserves to be taken seriously, especially in view of the great time depth which is usually assumed for Austric. It is to be hoped for that young scholars will pick up the gauntlet which Hayes has cast down, and that new initiatives will be undertaken to describe the many hitherto undescribed Austroasiatic languages in rigorous detail.

Kuiper felt that 'the relatively small number of words which Austronesian has in common with Austroasiatic is not, accordingly, sufficient proof in itself to assume that both branches have sprung from one parent language' (1948: 380), and Kuiper therefore looked for additional evidence in the form of morphological correspondences between Malay and Munda. Wilhelm Schmidt first presented morphological evidence for his Austric hypothesis in 1906, much of which was drawn from Nicobarese, and Lawry Reid has continued this tradition (1994). I discussed several problems with the four proposed morphological parallels which constitute all the evidence in my essay on the Austroasiatic Indus Theory in the last *Mother Tongue*. The purported resemblances lose much of their force when the facts are viewed in fuller comparative context. It is sobering to recall that the existence of purported reflexes in Old Japanese of the Malayo-Polynesian infix \*-<um-> had already been adduced early in the 20th century as evidence for what is now called the Austro-Japanese theory, or the 'Nippon-Malayo-Polynesian' language family as it was first called by Dirk van Hinloopen Labberton, the professor of Dutch in Tokyo who originally proposed the theory in 1924.

Before most of Hayes' work had been published, Gérard Diffloth had examined the scanty lexical evidence for Austric thus far that can bear up to scrutiny, and established that the lexical evidence was on the whole negative. Yet there seems to be sufficient evidence, both material and circumstantial, to take the theory seriously, whether Schmidt's Austric (i.e. Austroasiatic and Austronesian), Blust's Greater Austric (Austroasiatic, Austronesian, Daic and possibly Hmong-Mien) and Conrady's mega-Austric (i.e. Austroasiatic, Austronesian, Tibeto-Burman, Daic and presumably also Hmong-Mien). The lexical and morphological evidence for Austric may also make sense, and perhaps even more so, if a fourth and totally novel variation on the Austric theme is assumed. This new, fourth version of the Austric theory was proposed by Frederik Kortlandt and is a radical departure from the conventional view that Austroasiatic shows too much internal diversity to have formed at a time depth more shallow than three millennia. This version of the Austric theory entails that Austroasiatic is a branch of Malayo-Polynesian, which makes the time depth of Austroasiatic shallower than that of Malayo-Polynesian and much shallower therefore than that of Austronesian as a whole. This fourth version of Austric makes sense if it is presumed that the intrusive proto-Austroasiatic branch of Austronesian was subjected to rapid interference through shift and bilingualism after migrating to the Southeast Asian mainland in much the same way as ancient Austronesian languages were when they were transplanted to New Guinea. The interference and intense contact situations presumed for Austroasiatic are precisely what would be expected if an intrusive seafaring populace were to settle the already populated Southeast Asian mainland. As

a result, Austroasiatic would show great internal diversity and appear an order of magnitude older than, say, the Oceanic languages of the Pacific, the spread of which represents the opposite situation of pioneers colonizing virgin, previously uninhabited islands rather than intrusive groups having to assimilate a heterogeneous collection of resident mainland populations.

Stanley Starosta showed that prefixing as a morphological process began in western Formosa, whence it spread via the northeast to the southwest of the island, and thence via the Philippines to become a full-fledged system in Malayo-Polynesian. Kortlandt's hypothesis that Austroasiatic is an offshoot of ancient Malayo-Polynesian therefore makes sense of the morphological correspondences adduced by Lawry Reid (1994). This morphological evidence falls into place when viewed in light of the relative chronology, elucidated in Starosta's work, of the development and grammaticalization of affixal processes in Austronesian. Kortlandt's Austric also makes sense of the lexical correspondences between Munda and Malay adduced by Frans Kuiper, which involve many items with strikingly specific formal and semantic correspondence, e.g. Santal *gavić*, Mundari *gāui*, Kharia *gouj* 'beckon with the hand' vs. Malay *gamit* 'touch slightly with the finger in order to give a hint or draw attention' (1948: 377). Kortlandt's version of Austric would explain why Kuiper was able to adduce correspondences at this level, whereas the result of Diffloth's lexical comparison was largely negative, as it was based on the assumption that Austroasiatic and Austronesian were coordinate nodes. In other words, the hypothesis that Austroasiatic is an ancient offshoot of Malayo-Polynesian and not a coordinate node with Austronesian makes sense of the lexical correspondences which are in evidence between Malayo-Polynesian and Austroasiatic in contrast to the relative paucity of lexical correspondences between Austroasiatic and Austronesian.

Kortlandt's Austric also presumes a far more likely ancient prehistoric migration than Schmidt's Austric because it involves a maritime migration to the Southeast Asian mainland from insular Southeast Asia, whereas Schmidt's Austric theory necessitates a migration overland from a putative *Urheimat* to both Formosa, the recognized Austronesian homeland, and to the area surrounding the Bay of Bengal, the Austroasiatic centre of gravity. On the other hand, the Southeast Asian mainland is an obvious and probable destination for a seafaring race such as the Austronesians, who managed to colonize such out-of-the-way and improbable destinations as Madagascar, Easter Island and Hawai'i. Roger Blench has proposed that archaeological evidence which could be interpreted to support the hypothesis that Austroasiatic is a branch of Austronesian would be the connexion between the Lapita ware of Formosa, the Philippines and eastern Indonesia and the red slipped ware tradition of mainland Southeast Asia. This interpretation fits chronologically because the connexion is quite late, dating from between the middle and the end of the second millennium BC. The Malayo-Polynesians had fanned out from their Formosan homeland long before then, and mainland Southeast Asia was most certainly already inhabited by other, non-Austronesian peoples, for the neolithic assemblages in Thailand and Vietnam are about a millennium older than those of Indonesia. The appearance of red slipping on the Southeast Asian mainland at this time is compatible with the hypothesis of an intrusive Austronesian population ancestral to Austroasiatic because the red slipped ware found in Thailand, Vietnam and Malaya is associated with cord marked pottery

styles which do not occur in insular Southeast Asia, and there is little resemblance between the earliest pottery of Thailand and Vietnam and that of the Philippines and Indonesia.

Another tell-tale sign of a linguistic intrusion is the manifest racial difference between Munda speakers on one hand and the Nicobarese, the Khasi and the speakers of Mon-Khmer languages on the other hand. This physical difference could be accounted for by assuming that the Munda are the descendants of a pre-Austroasiatic group which learnt Austroasiatic. Kortlandt's version of Austroasiatic as an offshoot of Austronesian is compatible with Robert von Heine-Geldern's theory of an Austric homeland in mainland Southeast Asia, though there is a difference of time depth. Kortlandt's theory supposes a time depth of just over three millennia and can be tentatively identified with the intrusive appearance of red slipped ware in Thailand and Vietnam, whereas Wilhelm Schmidt's Austric consisting of Austroasiatic and Austronesian as two coordinate nodes would have to be of far greater antiquity and has therefore been identified with the mesolithic Hòabìnhian technocomplex. If we assume Kortlandt's scenario, the arrival of various Tibeto-Burman groups in northwestern India from Sìchuān may have been the disruptive force which drove the linguistic ancestors of the Munda further west deeper into India, whereas the arrival of the Pyu in the Irrawaddy basin is what split up Mon-Khmer. These competing theories and scenarios are discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two of my forthcoming handbook on the greater Himalayan region, entitled *Languages of the Himalayas*. The linguistic evidence holds primacy above the archaeological evidence because obviously only language can provide incontrovertible evidence of a linguistic intrusion and the spread of a language family. The resolution of the Austric problem is pivotal to our understanding of Asian prehistory. Yet at this point the epistemological basis for Austric is still meagre as far as language families go, let alone for Greater Austric or mega-Austric. For this reason, the comparative investigations conducted by La Vaughn Hayes are of great value in this much neglected field. The most urgent task before us, however, is the detailed documentation of the many hitherto undescribed or only partially described Austroasiatic languages, most of which are currently endangered with extinction.

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