The Trans-Himalayan phylum and its implications for population prehistory

George van Driem

Universität Bern, Switzerland
Email: vandriem@isw.unibe.ch
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Abstract: The world′s second most populous language family straddles the Himalayas along the northern and southern flanks. The Trans-Himalayan language phylum has been known by various names since it was first recognized in 1823, such as Tibeto-Burman, Sino-Himalayan, Indo-Chinese, Sino-Tibetan and Sino-Kiranti. Each label presumes a different model of phylogenetic relationship. It is high time that empirically unsupported models be discarded. The structure of the language family as a whole is presented with special reference to Sinitic. The Trans-Himalayan model is amenable to accommodating new historical linguistic insights and can better inform other disciplines about ethnolinguistic prehistory than the competing language family models.

泛喜马拉雅语系揭示的人群史前史

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伯尔尼大学，瑞士

摘要：世界第二大语系从北到南跨越了喜马拉雅山。自从 1823 年首次确认，泛喜马拉雅语系被世人所知，并有了各种名称：藏缅语系、汉-喜马拉雅语系、印度-中国语系、汉藏语系、汉-基兰特语系。每一种名称其实都提出了不同的谱系关系模式。现在是时候抛弃那些主观经验主义的模式了。特别以汉语族为参照，整个语系的结构可以呈现。相比其它语系模式，泛喜马拉雅语系更符合历史语言学的新成果，也可以为其它领域提供更好的信息。

Tibeto-Burman identified in 1823 by Julius von Klaproth

Julius von Klaproth was born in Berlin in 1783 as the son of Martin Heinrich von Klaproth, the discoverer of the elements titanium, uranium and zirconium. Julius von Klaproth mastered Mandarin, Manchu, Uighur, Sanskrit, Mongolian, Turkish, Arabic, Persian and other languages, and published his Asiatisches Magazin in Weimar in 1802 and 1803, and consequently received an appointment as adjunct at the St. Petersburg Academy. In 1805-1806, Klapoth travelled overland to China as a member of Count Golovin's embassy and, in 1806-1807, Klapoth conducted linguistic research in the Caucasus

for the Academy. He moved to Berlin in 1812, and to Paris in 1815. In 1816, Klaproth was appointed professor in Paris, financed by Friedrich Wilhelm III, king of Prussia. In 1821, Klaproth became one of the founding members of the Société Asiatique. Klaproth identified the Formosan languages as Austronesian based on Dutch colonial sources. For the language family today known as Indo-European, Klaproth first coined the neutral geographical term 'Indo-Germanisch', inspired by the idea that the southeastern-most language of the family, Sinhalese on Ceylon, was Indic, and that the northwestern-most language of the family, Icelandic on Iceland, was Germanic.

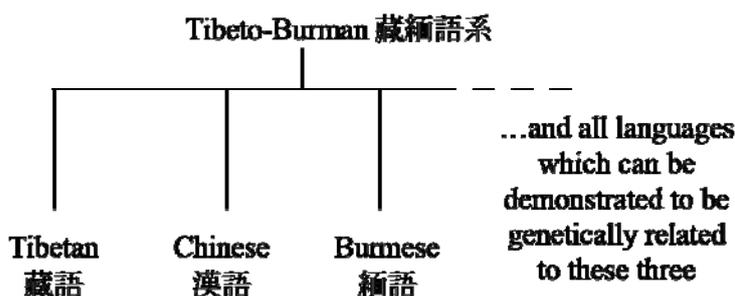In 1823, in his Asia Polyglotta, Klaproth

Fig.1. The Trans-Himalayan phylum identified by Julius von Klaproth in his polyphyletic view of Asian linguistic stocks[1]. He explicitly excluded languages today known to be Kradai or Daic (e.g. Thai, Lao, Shan), Austroasiatic (e.g. Mon, Vietnamese, Nicobarese, Khmer) and Altaic (e.g. Japanese, Korean, Mongolic, Turkic)

proposed the first polyphyletic view of Asian linguistic stocks (Fig.1)[1], at variance with Leyden's all-encompassing Indo-Chinese and Müller's Turanian theory. Klaproth recognized that Tibetan, Burmese and Chinese belonged to a single language phylum. He excluded Vietnamese, Thai, Mon, Khmer, Nicobarese and Japanese as belonging to different phyla. His arguments were based on shared roots in the inherited lexicon vs. borrowed vocabulary. The term Tibeto-Burman gained currency for the language family recognized by Klaproth. The term gained currency in English and was widely used by scholars in the British Isles, such as Robert Cust, Charles Forbes and Bernard Houghton [2-4].

Mandarin represented not an original, but a derived state

In 1860, Carl Richard Lepsius proposed that Chinese tones had arisen from the merger of initials and the loss of finals based on correspondences between Chinese and Tibetan[5]. He argued that entire syllables had been lost in Chinese and that Chinese ideograms once represented words which may often have contained more than just the root syllables whose reflexes survive in the modern pronunciations. This view contrasted with the opinion propagated by many linguists that Chinese had remained typologically unchanged and 'without inflection, without agglutination' for millennia, e.g. Chalmers[6]. The view

promulgated by Lepsius later inspired the work of the Swedish scholar Klas Bernhard Johannes Karlgren 高本漢 who undertook the first reconstruction of Old Chinese in accordance with the principles of the comparative method.

Old fault lines: Tibeto-Burman vs. Indo-Chinese

In Paris, Julius von Klaproth and Jean Jacques Huot stressed the distinction between linguistic affinity and biological ancestry, but not everybody was listening. Grammatical typology inspired language typologists such as Heymann Steinthal, Ernest Renan and Arthur de Gobineau to rank Chinese and Thai together on the lowest rung of the evolutionary ladder of language development based on their 'monosyllabicity' and lack of inflection. According to these scholars, Chinese and Thai were related and were not close to the morphologically more complex 'Tibeto-Burman' languages. Chinese and Siamese mediated a rudimentary, less evolved way of thinking. This view is epitomized by Ernest Renan:

'la langue chinoise, avec sa structure inorganique et incomplète, n'est-elle pas l'image de la sècheresse d'esprit et de cœur qui caractérise la race chinoise? …Suffisante pour les besoins de la vie, pour la technique des arts manuels, pour une littérature légère de petit aloi, pour une philosophie qui n'est que

l'expression souvent fine, mais jamais élevée, du bon sens pratique, la langue chinoise excluait toute philosophie, toute science, toute religion, dans le sens où nous entendons ces mots'.

Is the Chinese language, with its incomplete and inorganic structure, not the very image of the aridity of spirit and heart which characterizes the Chinese race? …sufficient for the needs of life, for manual skills, for an unsophisticated literature, for a philosophy that is nothing more that the expression, often delicate but never elevated, of what is merely just common sense, the Chinese language excludes all philosophy, all science, all religion, in the sense in which we understand these words.

Such reasoning was vehemently opposed by the followers of Wilhelm von Humboldt, such as August Friedrich Pott and Max Müller, who argued that the relationship between language structure and thought was not so simple and that biological ancestry was independent of language.

Struggling within a besieged Indo-Chinese paradigm

John Leyden's fantastic Indo-Chinese theory posited that all the languages of eastern Asia and 'of the regions which lie between India and China, and the greater part of the islanders in the eastern sea… exhibit the same mixed origin'. This grandiose idea was not the most informed theory of linguistic relationship, even when it was first introduced in 1806. Meanwhile, Frederick de Houtman had already recognized the Austronesian family [7], to which Julius von Klaproth would later add the Formosan languages [8]. Phillip Johann von Strahlenberg recognized the contours of the Altaic family [9], to which Philipp Franz Balthazar von Siebold later added Japanese [10], and George William Aston included Korean[11].Francis Mason recognized Austroasiatic as a separate 'Mon-Khmer-

Kolarian' family[12]. Therefore, Indo-Chinese was under siege.

Scholars struggling within the Indo-Chinese paradigm were gradually compelled to accept that Austronesian, Altaic and finally also Austroasiatic represented distinct language phyla. In Munich, Ernst Kuhn narrowed Indo-Chinese down to 'die Sprachen von Tibet[13,14], Barma, Siam und China', i.e. the languages of Tibet, Burma, Siam and China. Therefore, the chinoisierie of racial linguistic typology gave rise to an Indo-Chinese theory of relationship which opposed the 'Tibeto-Burman' languages to the structurally simpler Sinitic and Kradai languages. However, the truncated 'Tibeto-Burman' of the Indo-Chinese model was not at all the same thing as Julius von Klaproth's original Tibeto-Burman which included Sinitic but excluded Kradai. By contrast, the Indo-Chinese model relegated Sinitic and Kradai together to a separate branch.

In 1856, Wilhelm Schott warned against the use of the term 'Indo-Chinese'. He foresaw that those who used the label would continue to think in terms of the erroneous phylogenetic model which the name designated. Yet many German scholars adopted the false Indo-Chinese model and divided the family into an eastern branch, 'Siamesisch-Chinesisch', and a western branch, 'Tibeto-Barmanisch', e.g. Georg von der Gabelentz[15], Émile Forchhammer[16], Ernst Kuhn[13,14], August Conrady[17], Berthold Laufer[18], Kurt Wulff[19].

In 1924, the French orientalist Jean Przyluski coined sino-tibétain as the French term for Indo-Chinese in the English and German sense. This French term entered English in 1931 when Pryzluski and Gordon Hannington Luce co-authored an article on the root for the numeral hundred in 'Sino-Tibetan' in the Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies. The new term did not catch on

at once, but in the aftermath of the Great Depression, the American president Franklin Roosevelt instituted the employment scheme called the Works Progress Administration. Through WPA, the famous Berkeley anthropologist Alfred Kroeber managed to raise funding for his 'Sino-Tibetan Philology Project'.

Robert Shafer effectively ran the project for Kroeber, but saw two things fundamentally wrong with 'Sino-Tibetan'. Shafer proposed (1) to remove Kradai or Daic from the family, and (2) to put Sinitic on par with other divisions in the family. The two operations would effectively have resulted in a return to Julius von Klaproth's original Tibeto-Burman model. In 1938, Shafer traveled to Paris to convince the French sinologist Henri Maspero. Instead, Maspero insisted that Shafer retain Daic within Sino-Tibetan. Later Maspero died at Buchenwald in 1945, a month before the camp was liberated by American troops.

Paul Benedict came to Berkeley to join Kroeber's project. At first, Benedict continued to use the term 'Indo-Chinese', but in time he adopted Alfred Kroeber's new label 'Sino-Tibetan'.

By 1942, Benedict had also adopted Shafer's original view about Kradai or Daic. Ironically, Benedict ultimately ended up taking the credit for ousting Kradai from 'Sino-Tibetan'. Jim Matisoff inherited this false family tree from his mentor Paul Benedict in the 1960s. Ironically, the Sino-Tibetan model which held sway in America was accepted by Chinese scholars and even adopted as orthodoxy, translating the American name as 漢藏語系 Hàn-Zàng yǔxì. The racial linguistic underpinnings for the separate status accorded to Sinitic were based solely on how gross typology had perplexed some 19th-century scholars into believing that Chinese and Thai represented an inferior developmental and structural stage on the ladder of language evolution.

Nicholas Bodman adduced historical linguistic evidence and undertook to challenge the Sino-Tibetan model and instead proposed the term 'Sino-Himalayan' for the family [20,21]. Sergei Starostin also challenged the model and proposed the name 'Sino-Kiranti' [22].

Old fault lines: Historical Linguistics vs. Language Typology

Trubetzkoy identified the Balkan Sprachbund in which Albanian, Bulgarian and Macedonian[23], Rumanian, modern Greek and, to a limited extent, Serbian and Croatian share structural features which they neither inherited nor share with their closest linguistic relatives. Velten identified the 'linguistic area' of British Columbia, Oregon and Washington within which the Salish and the genetically unrelated Sahaptin languages share typological features[24]. Since Haudricourt[25], the areal nature has been recognized of the trend toward tonogenesis in Hmong-Mien, Daic, Austroasiatic and Tibeto-Burman languages of East and Southeast Asia. Emeneau identified the Indian subcontinent as a linguistic area on the basis of numerous phonetic and typological structural features shared across genetic boundaries [26,27].

Despite its Platonic essentialist premises and its general semantic imprecision, the World Atlas of Linguistic Structures vividly illustrates the non-random geographical distribution of both phonetic and gross structural features [28]. Today the work of Matisoff's student Randy LaPolla ignores all this literature and attempts to redeem the Indo-Chinese bifurcation of the family into Sinitic and non-Sinitic on the basis of a handful of syntactic typological features. This is no longer racial typology, but it is not historical linguistics either, and it has no phylogenetic relevance. It is salubrious to keep

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in mind that some people with strong opinions about the internal phylogeny of the language family are not historical linguists.

Scholars who used the label 'Sino-Tibetan' in the past and who use the term in the present, whether intentionally or unwittingly, continue to use the term 'Tibeto-Burman', not in its original meaning, but in the 'Indo-Chinese' sense of all non-Sinitic languages ostensibly constituting a valid subgroup within the family. Historically, Indo-Chinese or Sino-Tibetan has always represented the less informed view. The term Sino-Tibetan denotes a specific phylogenetic model which is empirically unsupported by even a single sound law or lexical innovation that could demonstrate that all non-Sinitic languages form a coherent subgroup. In short, there is no such thing as a Sino-Tibetan language family.

Establishing the internal phylogeny of the language family

Most languages of the Tibeto-Burman family are still undescribed or only scantily documented, but that fact does not excuse scholars who presume to hold opinions about the gross phylogeny of the language family from studying all the languages that have already been documented, nor will it suffice to define all non-Sinitic languages negatively in terms of their not having Sinitic features. Epistemologically, the default model remains Julius von Klaproth's 1823 theory.

The 1823 Parisian agnostic default model is becoming increasingly accepted today, as it once was in the more well-informed scholarly circles in Europe by virtue of the fact that it is the scientifically neutral and empirically best supported model. The burden of proof is on those who advocate special theories, such as Sino-Tibetan, which presumes a phylogenetic granfalloon 'Tibeto-Burman', encompassing all non-Sinitic languages and for which no historical linguistic evidence has ever been

adduced, or Sino-Austronesian, which presumes a genetic relationship between Austronesian and what Sagart continues to call 'Sino-Tibetan'. Notably, the Parisian scholar Sagart came around to accepting the 1823 Parisian view of a genetic relationship between Chinese, Tibetan and Burmese only in 1994.

In his Austronesian handbook, Blust writes: 'The Sino-Austronesian hypothesis is the product of an idée fixe'[29]. Most historical linguists tend to dismiss or ignore Sino-Austronesian. Sagart's internal phylogeny of Formosan languages is also rejected by Blust, Winter and Teng & Ross [29-31]. The kindest review of Sagart's theory in print is my review of the Sino-Austronesian hypothesis [32]. If not just attributable to chance, the purported correspondences could be a residue of early contact between Austronesian and the Sinitic or Sino-Bodic branch of Tibeto-Burman during the Lóngshān interaction sphere along the eastern seaboard during the fourth and third millennia BC.

The challenge of the Fallen Leaves model

The Fallen Leaves model developed in the 1990s is no definitive phylogeny by definition. Although agnostic about higher-order subgrouping, the model does not deny that there is a family tree whose structure must be ascertained by historical linguistic methods. The continuing identification of subgroups presents a challenge to the current generation and to future generations of historical linguists to reconstruct the internal phylogeny of Tibeto-Burman on the basis of reliable data and regular sound laws, and not to accept false family trees that we inherit from our mentors or find in the literature without the support of conventional historical comparative evidence.

Some linguistic subgroups such as Gongduk and Black Mountain Mönpa were only discovered and identified as recently as the 1990s. There are probably more subgroups

Fig.2. The 2011 version of the Fallen Leaves model representing Trans-Himalayan linguistic subgroups.

than shown in the Fig. 2. New subgrouping hypotheses have been advanced, and the Fallen Leaves model, set forth in 2001, continues to undergo tweaking, presenting an ever clearer view.

Incorporated into the 2011 diagram are the rGyal-rongic subgroup, proposed and validated by Sun [33,34], and Siangic, for which evidence has been presented by Post and Blench[35]. Black Mountain Mönpa was likewise identified as a distinct subgroup. Subgroups yet to be incorporated into future diagrams include Ersuish, for which evidence has been presented by Yu [36], and a Naish subgroup has been proposed [37].

An old higher-order subgrouping hypothesis is Sino-Bodic. Julius von Klaproth observed that Tibetan and Chinese appeared to be more closely related to each other than either were to Burmese [1]. Walter Simon and R.A.D. Forrest adduced lexical evidence which suggested a closer relationship between Chinese and Tibetan within the family [38-42].

Robert Shafer repeatedly stated that the linguistic evidence indicated that Sinitic was just one of many divisions in the family and that a closer genetic affinity obtained between Sinitic and Bodic than between any other two major 'divisions' [43-47]. Nicholas Bodman adduced evidence indicating a closer relationship between Sinitic and Bodic and proposed the term 'Sino-Himalayan' for the family [20,21]. I proposed the name 'Sino-Bodic' and adduced lexical evidence [48]. Matisoff protested [49], but most of the Sino-Bodic evidence still stands[32]. Meanwhile, there is no evidence for the truncated 'Tibeto-Burman' of the Sino-Tibetanists in the form of innovations shared by all non-Sinitic languages. Matisoff publicly softened his stance vis-à-vis Klaproth's original Tibeto-Burman theory in 2009, and possible new evidence for Sino-Bodic keeps trickling in, e.g. Nathan Hill, Zhèngzhāng Shàngfāng [50,51].

The term 'Trans-Himalayan' is a neutral

geographical term for the family proposed in 2004, by analogy to 'Afro-Asiatic'. Afro-Asiatic, a term coined in 1914, has replaced the term Hamito-Semitic for similar reasons, i.e. Hamitic was shown not to be a valid subgroup. Trans-Himalayan is the superior label because it designates an agnostic approach with respect to the internal phylogeny of the linguistic phylum, which is amenable to new inputs. By contrast, the term 'Sino-Tibetan' designates a false family tree model, and the term 'Tibeto-Burman' is used in the literature in two different meanings, one by scholars following Julius von Klaproth's polyphyletic framework and another by the Sino-Tibetanists.

A layered view of ethnolinguistic prehistory

Linguistic research findings from within the Trans-Himalayan paradigm can inform a chronologically layered view of ethnolinguistic prehistory. Not only do historical linguistics, archaeology and genetics present three distinct and independent windows on the past. Even on a logarithmically distorted time scale the time depth accessible to historical linguistics can be seen to be far shallower than the prehistorical depth accessible to the other disciplines. This discrepancy in time depth emboldens us to speculate that beyond the linguistically reconstructible past there must have been an early eastward and northward spread into East Asia, probably including the linguistic ancestors of modern Tibeto-Burman language communities. Then there must have been a number of discrete expansions in different directions at different times in the past.

1. A post-glacial northward wave of peopling at a time depth beyond what is generally held to be linguistically reconstructible by historical linguists.

2. A northeasterly spread of ancient Tibeto-Burmans to the putative early locus of Sino-Bodic.

3. An incremental spread of various ancient Tibeto-Burman groups throughout the Himalayas, where there is both linguistic and genetic evidence of pre-Tibeto-Burman populations.

4. A southward spread of Sino-Bodic, suggested by archaeology, genes and language, bringing Sino-Bodic groups, including Sinitic, into contact with the ancient Hmong-Mien, the early Austroasiatics, the Austronesians and a number of other Tibeto-Burman groups.

5. A Bodic spread across the Tibetan plateau spilling over into the Himalayas, as evinced by the distribution of Bodish, East Bodish, Tamangic, West Himalayish and several other groups.

Following these tentatively reconstructed prehistoric stages of peopling, there were the historically attested ethnolinguistic dispersals:

6. The historically documented Hàn spread, clearly evinced in linguistics and genetics, probably assimilating non-Tibeto-Burman as well as other Tibeto-Burman groups.

7. The historically documented spread of Bodish (i.e. Tibetic) across the Tibetan plateau.

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Siberien und grossen Tatarey in sich begreiffet, in einer Historisch-Geographischen Beschreibung der alten und neueren Zeiten, und vielen andern unbekannten Nachrichten vorgestellet, nebst einer noch niemahls and Licht gegebenen Tabula Polyglotta von zwei und dreyßiglei Arten Tatarischer Völcker Sprachen und einem Kalmuckischen Vocabulario. Stockholm: In Verlegung des Autoris.

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