



LINGUISTIC CLUSTERS OF
MAINLAND SOUTHEAST ASIA
A DESCRIPTION OF THE CLUSTERS

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A Description of the Clusters

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Introduction and Background

The purpose of this paper is to describe the 26 linguistic clusters in Mainland Southeast Asia. A linguistic cluster is a grouping of genetically related languages. Although these groupings exhibit differing degrees of social cohesion and common ethnic and cultural traits, these social factors are not a primary consideration in determining the linguistic clusters described in this paper.

Mainland Southeast Asia (MSEA) includes the countries of Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam. Although some linguistic clusters cross borders into other neighboring countries, we will focus on the languages in these five countries. Mainland Southeast Asia forms a region where languages from different families or branches assimilate features that are not related to their genetic stock. Evidence for MSEA as a linguistic area is discussed in Enfield (2005), Goddard (2005), Matisoff (2001), Migliazza (1995), and Thurgood (1999).

For an overview of the language families and a summary of the clusters in each family, see Mann, Smith and Ujlakyova (2009).

Structure of the paper

In this paper we provide a map of each linguistic cluster in MSEA, list the languages in MSEA for each cluster, their population, basic information about the group and its language development status.

The maps of each cluster show where the speakers of languages included in the cluster are the majority population.

The languages listed in each cluster are those which have speakers in MSEA. Language spoken only in China, for example, will not be listed, although they may belong to the same cluster. Countries outside MSEA with languages from a given cluster are given in parenthesis. Population figures cited include all of the speakers in the listed languages. For example, Chin languages are spoken in India, Bangladesh, and Myanmar. Thado Chin is spoken in both India and Myanmar, so it is listed in the MSEA cluster, and the entire population of Thado Chin speakers is included. Population figures of languages spoken only in Bangladesh or India are not included. Population figures were primarily taken from Gordon (2005).

Selected bibliographies are given at the end of each cluster. The clusters are numbered and presented alphabetically by language family. The basic framework of the linguistic clusters is from the Ethnologue (Gordon 2005) unless otherwise noted. While this classification scheme needs to be revised, there tends to be general agreement among linguists about the cluster boundaries described in this paper. Some of the other classification levels in the Ethnologue need to be improved and this is an item on the author's ever growing list of things they hope to do. Beyond the Ethnologue, this paper relies on information obtained through background research involving written sources and interviews of knowledgeable experts for the clusters described. We would particularly like to thank Amber Morris for beginning the research on this project, and each of the individuals who reviewed the cluster descriptions. Although the information for this research is from various sources, the authors accept full responsibility for any errors, omissions, misrepresentations, or distortions.

Overall, the five language families in MSEA¹ can be divided into 26 linguistic clusters. Within these clusters, there are 477 languages, with 285 languages located in Mainland Southeast Asia². Among the languages in MSEA, 145 languages have one or more written forms. This would make it appear as though more than half of the languages in the area have a written form; however, it is important to note that there are a tremendous number of undocumented languages in this region. The authors project that the total number of languages *in the five countries of MSEA* likely exceeds 500 languages, meaning nearly seventy percent of the languages in this region lack a written form. This indicates a tremendous need in Mainland Southeast Asia for language identification, documentation, and development activities.

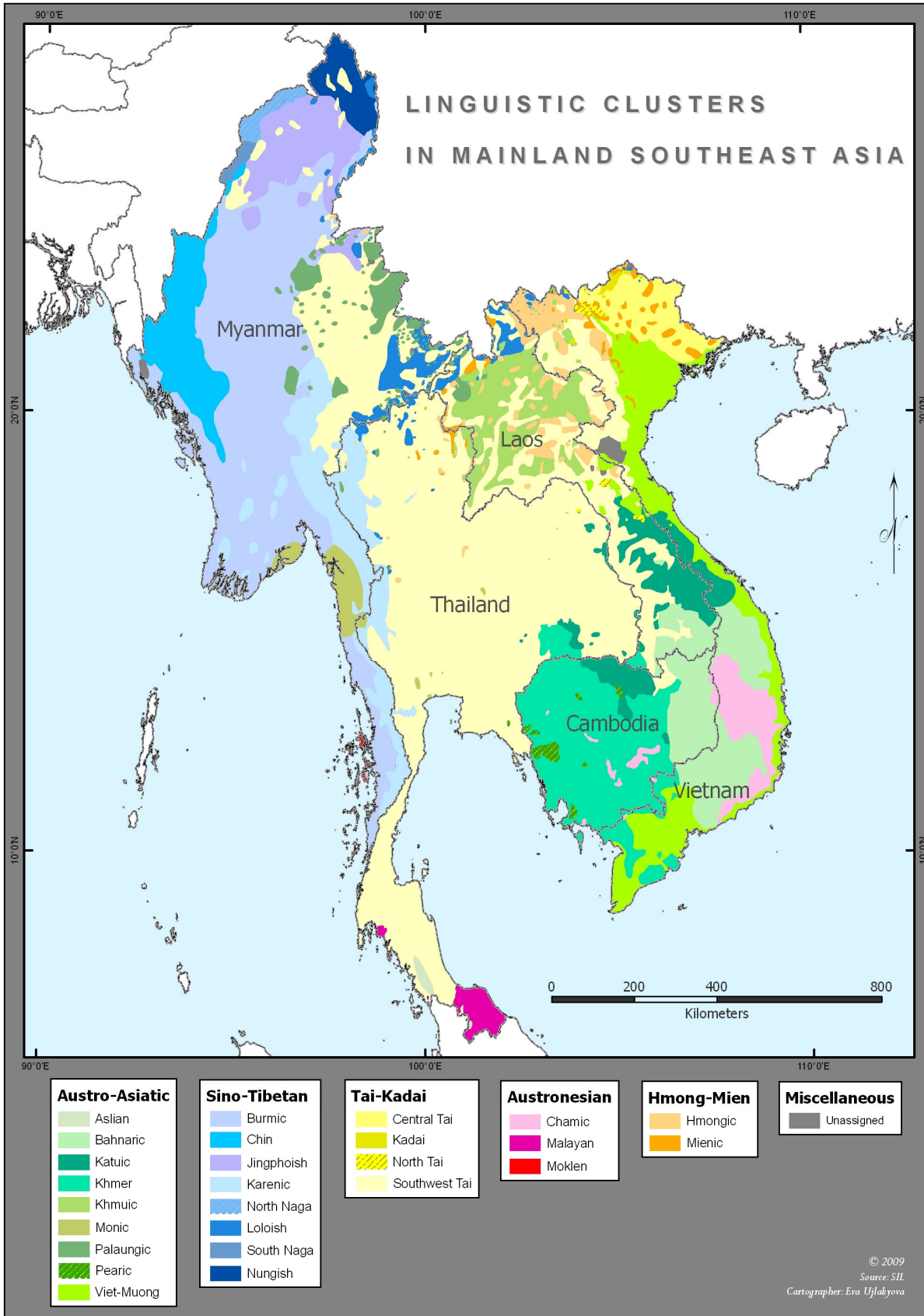
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¹ For a map of the 5 language families in MSEA, and map showing all 26 language clusters in MSEA, see Mann et al. 2009. *Linguistic Clusters of Mainland Southeast Asia: an overview of language families*.

² Unless otherwise noted, these numbers are based on the *Ethnologue* 15th edition, plus various updates we are aware of that will be published in the upcoming edition.

Map of Linguistic Clusters in Mainland Southeast Asia



Aslian Cluster



The first Mon-Khmer group located in MSEA is Aslian. In the Aslian cluster there is only 1 language located in MSEA, the North Aslian language of Tonga, spoken by the Mani people of Southern Thailand.

Demographics

Name	Aslian (from Malay <i>orang asli</i> ‘original peoples’)
Language family	Austroasiatic; Mon-Khmer
Population	300
Languages	18 (1 in MSEA, not written)
Countries	Thailand, (Malaysia)

Aslian Languages in MSEA

Tonga [[tnz](#)] ([Thailand](#))

Discussion

Aslian languages are spoken by the aboriginal inhabitants of peninsular Malaysia and Thailand. The Aslian peoples are thought to be the earliest inhabitants of this area. Most of the Aslian peoples and languages are located in Malaysia. In Thailand, the Aslian tend to live in small nomadic bands and are primarily hunter-gathers. The sociolinguistic and anthropologic situation is complex, with individuals shifting from one band to another and marked differences in speech varieties at the band and even individual level. Tonga has also

been called “Maniq”, though this ethnolinguistic name includes at least 4 languages in Thailand.

Language development

Among the Aslian in Thailand, there is considerable bilingualism in Southern Thai, though literacy rates remain low. Tonga is an unwritten language with 300 speakers that is reported to be endangered. There is no non-print media available in Tonga.

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Bahnaric Cluster

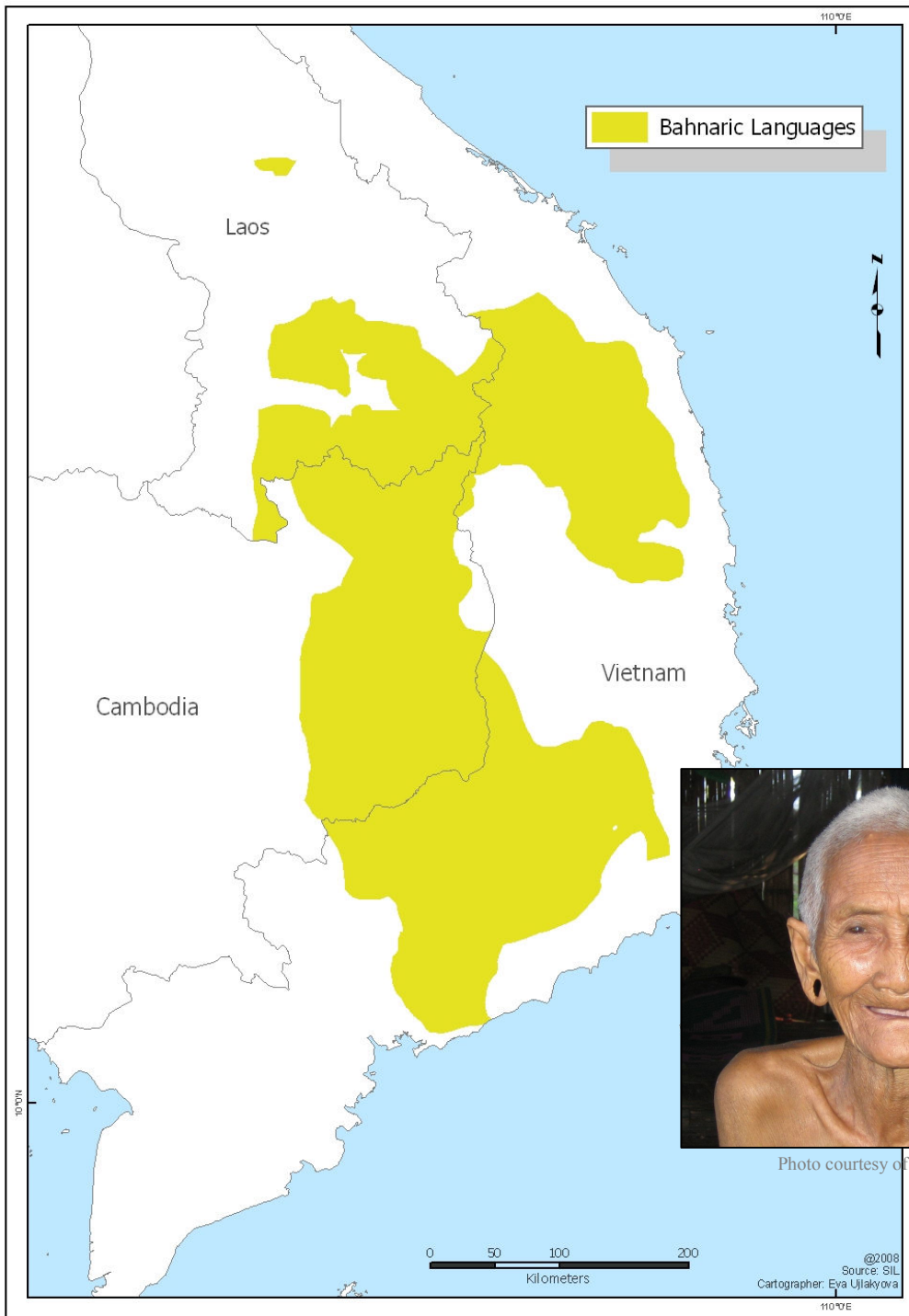


Photo courtesy of Julie Barr

The second Mon-Khmer group located in MSEA is Bahnaric. There are 39 languages in the Bahnaric cluster, all of which are located in Mainland Southeast Asia.

Demographics

Name

Bahnaric - from the largest language group, Bahnar,

	with around 158 thousand speakers.
Language family	Austroasiatic; Mon-Khmer
Population	977,966. Koho, Sedang, Bahnar and Hre have populations over 100,000. No information available for Budeh Stieng.
Languages	39, 20 with written form
Countries	Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia

Bahnaric Languages in MSEA

Alak [alk] (Laos)	Mnong, Eastern [mng] (Vietnam)
Bahnar [bdq] (Vietnam)	Monom [moo] (Vietnam)
Chrau [crw] (Vietnam)	Nyaheun [nev] (Laos)
Cua [cua] (Vietnam)	Oy [oyb] (Laos)
Halang [hal] (Vietnam)	Ra'ong ²
Halang Doan [hld] (Vietnam)	Rengao [ren] (Vietnam)
Hre [hre] (Vietnam)	Sapuan [spu] (Laos)
Jeh [jeh] (Vietnam)	Sedang [sed] (Vietnam)
Jeng [jeg] (Laos)	Sok [skk] (Laos)
Kaco' [xkk] (Cambodia) ³	Sou [sqq] (Laos)
Koho [kpm] (Vietnam)	Stieng, Budeh [stt] (Vietnam)
Katua [kta] (Vietnam)	Stieng, Bulo [sti] (Vietnam)
Kayong [kxy] (Vietnam)	Takua [tkz] (Vietnam)
Khaonh ⁴	Talieng [tdf] (Laos)
Kraol [rka] (Cambodia)	Tampuan [tpu] (Cambodia)
Lave [brb] (Laos) ⁵	The [thx] (Laos)
Laven [lbo] (Laos)	Thmon ²
Maa [cma] (Vietnam)	Todrah [tdr] (Vietnam)
Mel ²	Trieng [stg] (Vietnam)
Mnong, Central [cmo] and Southern [mnn] (Vietnam) ⁶	

Discussion

Bahnaric languages are spoken by hill tribe peoples in south-central Vietnam as well as eastern Cambodia and southern Laos. Some of the larger groups have speakers found in the USA. They are agriculturalists, and their religions are primarily Christianity and traditional religion. Lave is called Brao in Cambodia and Vietnam. The name Chrau means 'mountain dweller'. Talieng is also known as Tariang, which means "headhunters". Kru'ng 2 is different from the Krung (1) dialect of Rade in Vietnam. Kraol of Cambodia is different from the Kraol dialect of Kuy. Tampuan, Kaco and Jarai (an Austronesian language) are exogamous clans together; their intermarriages override ethnic and linguistic boundaries.

Language development

³ Kaco (Kachok) includes Lamam and Roman, which Gordon lists as separate languages, but are clan names within the Kachok (Kaco) group (Barr 2008).

⁴ Khaonh, Mel, Thmon, and Ra'ong are not included in the Gordon, but are separate Bahnaric languages (Barr 2008).

⁵ Lave (Brao) includes Kru'ng 2 and Kravet, which Gordon lists as separate languages, but are dialect of Brao (Gregerson et al. 2008)

⁶ According to Bequette (2008), Central Mnong and Southern Mnong are dialects of the same language, pronounced "Mnong" in Vietnam and "Bunong" or "Panong" in Cambodia.

Bahnar, Chrau, Cua, Halang, Jeh, Rengao, Hre, Sedang, Eastern Mnong, Central and Southern Mnong, Maa, Koho, Chrau, Bulu Stieng, Lave, Laven, Tampuan, Budeh Stieng, and Nyaheun are all written. Laven (also called Jru') has a Lao-based script. Tampuan, Central and Southern Mnong, and Brao have Khmer script. Literacy is quite low in first languages, but rises to 50% to 75% for the second language for the languages of Chrau, Bahnar, Koho, Hre, and Sedang. Among the minority groups in Ratanakiri province (Brao, Tampuan, Jarai, Kaco), bilingualism in one of the other minority languages is common. Bilingualism in the national language appears to be very low, except in Chrau, which is informally used in education, religious services, and oral literature. Chrau speakers have a positive language attitude, but nearly all speak some Vietnamese as second language.

Potential Research Questions

There are many ambiguities in the classification or the status of some of these languages and their dialects. For example,

- A dialect of Halang called Salang in Laos may be a different but related language. What is the status of Salang?
- A dialect of Todrah called Didra may be a different but related language. What is the status of Didra?
- Talieng and Trieng may be the same language. What is their relationship?
- What is the level of intelligibility of Halang Doan with Takua, Kayong, Halang Daksut, or Rengao? (Gordon (2005) says it may be intelligible with one of these)
- Maa is sometimes considered a dialect of Koho. What is the potential for adapted language materials from Koho to be used for Maa?
- What is the place of Ra'ong in the Bahnaric cluster?
- What is the place of Thmon in the Bahnaric cluster?
- What is the level of language vitality of Khaonh and Mel? What is the level of intelligibility between Khaonh and Mel?

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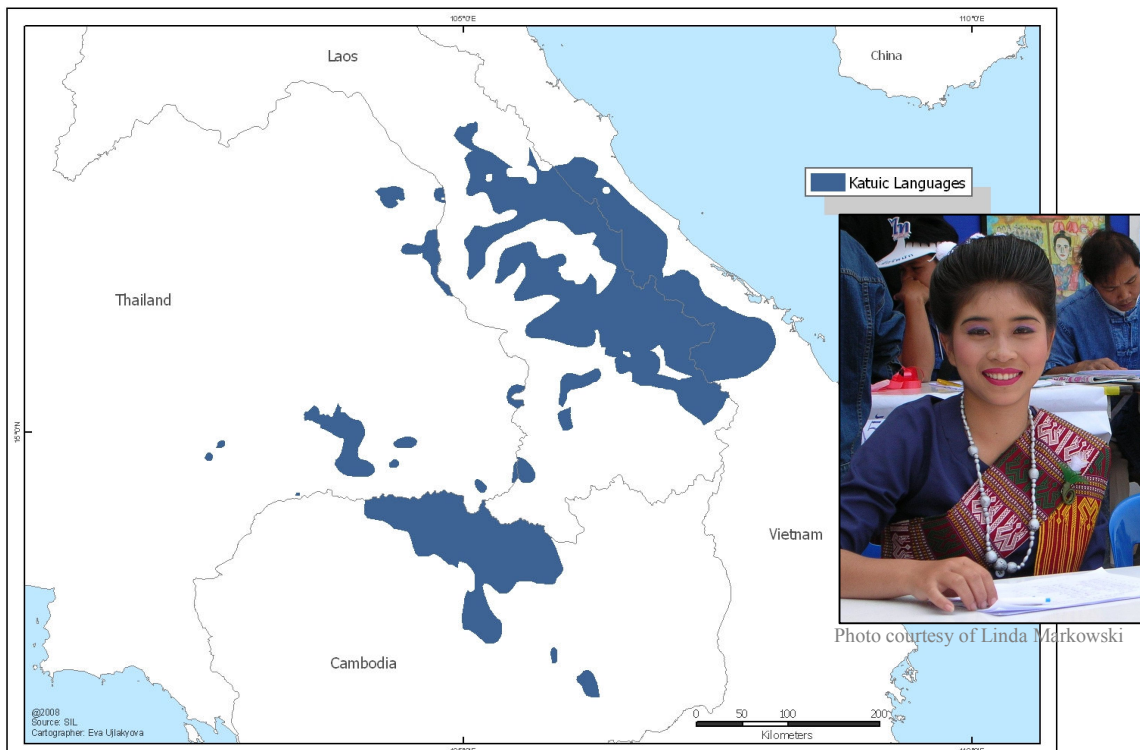
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Katuic Cluster



The third Austro-Asiatic group located in MSEA is the Katuic cluster. In the Katuic cluster there are 20 languages, all of which are located in Mainland Southeast Asia.

Demographics

Names	“Katuic” comes from the Katu language, which had field work being done at the time the cluster was initially identified.
Language family	Austroasiatic; Mon-Khmer; Eastern Mon-Khmer
Population	1,023,688 ⁷ (Eastern Bru, Kataang, Kuy and So all have over 100,000 people)
Languages	20, 11 with written form
Countries	Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand

Katuic Languages in MSEA

Ir	[irr] (Laos)
Kataang	[kgd] (Laos)
Ong	[oog] (Laos)
Ta'oieh, Upper	[tth] (Laos)
Ta'oieh, Lower	[tto] (Laos)
Kasseng	[kgc] (Laos)
Katu, Eastern	[ktv] (Vietnam)
Katu, Western	[kuf] (Laos)
Pacoh	[pac] (Vietnam)
Phuong	[phg] (Vietnam)
Tareng	[tgr] (Laos)
Khlor	[llo] (Laos)
Ngeq	[ngt] (Laos)
Bru, Eastern	[bru] (Laos) ⁸
Bru, Western	[brv] (Thailand)
Bru Khok Sa-at	[XXX] (Thailand) ²
Sô	[sss] (Laos)
Khua	[xhv] (Vietnam)
Kuy	[kdt] (Thailand)
Nyeu	[nyl] (Thailand)

Discussion

Katuic speaking people are generally farmers, and follow or mix animism, Buddhism, and ancestor worship. Some of the larger groups such as Kataang (also known as Bru Khong Chiem), So and Kuy have begun to assimilate into Laos, Thai, or Cambodian culture (Lebar).

Language development

A high percentage of Kuy in Cambodia also speak Khmer. The So of Laos are bilingual, speaking So in their homes and Lao in social settings. The Ngeq are 70% monolingual. Most Katuic speaking people have very low literacy in their own language, and some languages are unwritten. Eastern and Western Bru, Eastern and Western Katu, Kuy, Pacoh, Kataang, Upper Ta'oieh, Ngeq (Nkriang), Nyeu and So are written. Western Katu has a 'Lieq' script. Eastern

⁷In adding the population data, we used Van der Haak's figure of 8000 (1988) for the Nyeu language instead of Gordon's figure of only 200.

⁸Carolyn Miller (2008) notes that Eastern Bru is also known as Bru Tri, Western Bru is also known as Bru Dong Luang. In Thailand, there is also the language Bru Khok Sa-at.

Bru has a Vietnamese-based script. Kuy use different scripts in Cambodia, Laos and Thailand.

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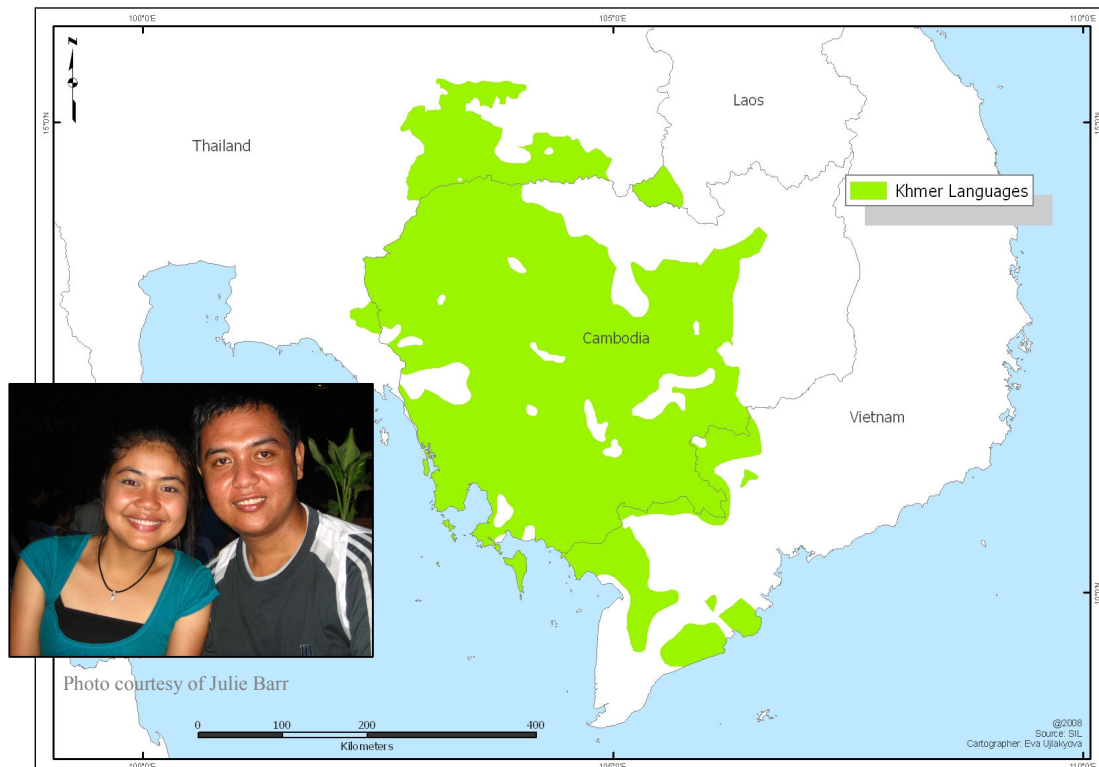
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Khmer Cluster



The fourth Austro-Asiatic group located in MSEA is the Khmer cluster. The Khmer cluster includes 2 languages, Central Khmer and Northern Khmer. Central Khmer is the national language of Cambodia, and can found across borders with Laos, Vietnam, and Thailand, as well as in other countries such as the US, Canada, China, and France.

Demographics

Names	Khmer is the national language of Cambodia.
Language family	Austroasiatic: Mon-Khmer
Population	14,276,639
Languages	2, both written
Countries	Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand

Khmer Languages in MSEA

Khmer, Central	[khm] (Cambodia)
Khmer, Northern	[kxm] (Thailand)

Discussion

Central Khmer is spoken all over Cambodia, and across the borders of neighboring countries. Khmer people follow all walks of life. They are primarily Buddhist. Northern Khmer (sometimes called Khmer Surin) is spoken in Isaan, the Eastern part of Thailand. It is also known as Thai Khmer. The people live on plains or in scrub forest. They are mostly peasants and intensive agriculturalists, though there are of course craftsmen, educators, officials, and other trades. They are Buddhist or Christian.

Language development

Central and Northern Khmer are both written. Central Khmer has 1,000,000 second-language speakers. 35% of the population over 15 cannot read or write Khmer. The Khmer script was derived from a southern Indian alphabet.

Very few people who speak Northern Khmer are monolingual. Northern Khmer is used in towns, though in cities it is being replaced by Isan and Thai. It is informally used in education, media, religious services, commerce. People have a positive language attitude. Nearly all can speak Central Thai, most Isan (a dialect of Northeastern Thai), and some Central Khmer. The literacy rate in Northern Khmer is below 1%, but is higher for the second language (50-75%).

Potential Research Questions

- What is the status of the language called Khmer Khe? Is it another term for Khmer Surin (Northern Khmer), or is it a Katuic language related to Kuy?

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Khmuic Cluster

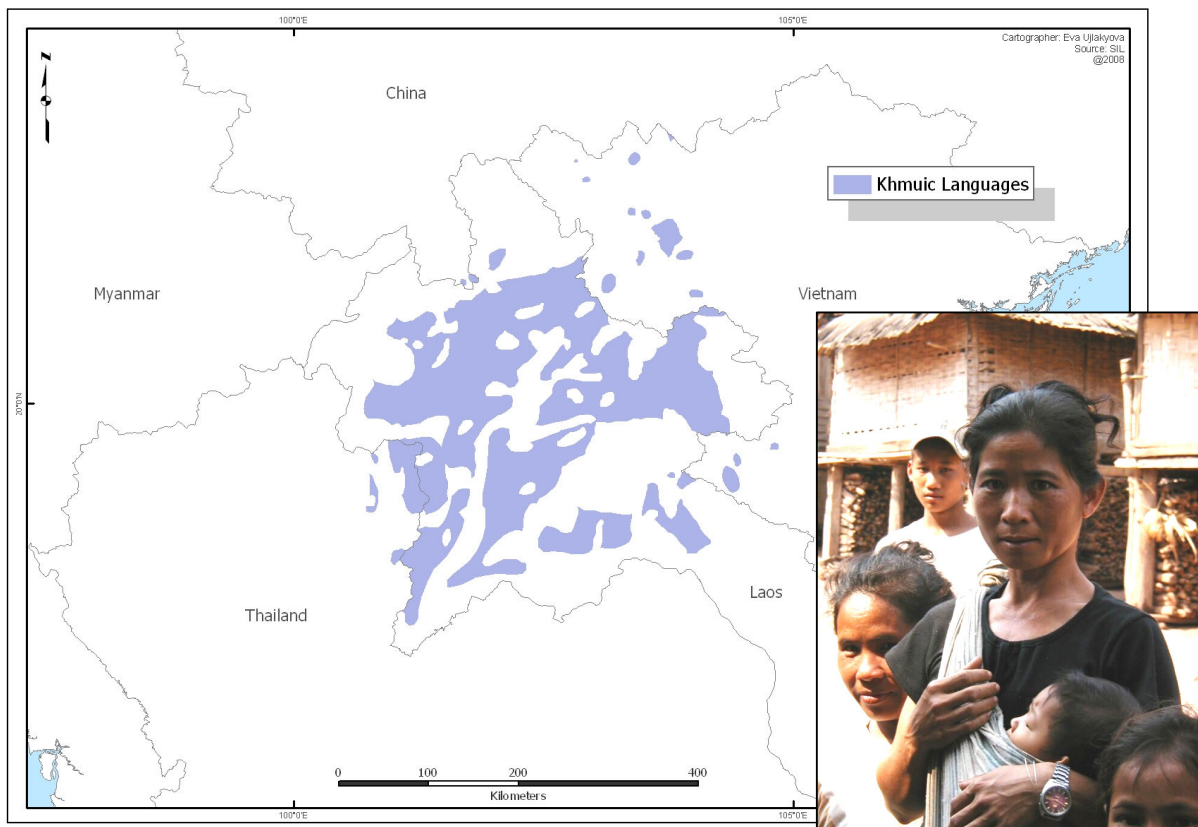


Photo courtesy of Mark Osborne

The fifth Austro-Asiatic group located in MSEA is the Khmuic Cluster. In the Khmuic cluster there are 11 languages⁹, all of which are located in Mainland Southeast Asia. Generally Khmuic languages are very conservative, especially in respect of morphology, where they preserve complicated and apparently ancient initial clusters (Sidwell, 2004).

Demographics

Names	Kmhmu, Kmhmu', Kamu
Language family	Austroasiatic: Mon-Khmer; Northern Mon-Khmer
Population	662,651
Languages	11, 4 with written form
Countries	Vietnam, Laos, Thailand

Khmuic Languages in MSEA

- Bit [[bgk](#)] ([Laos](#))¹⁰
- Khao [[xao](#)] ([Vietnam](#))
- Khuen [[khf](#)] ([Laos](#))
- Khmu [[kjg](#)] ([Laos](#))

⁹ The Gordon (2005) lists 13 languages, but recent data indicate that Lua' [prb] is an alternate name used for both Prai and Mal. (Lua is also an alternate name of Lawa (Palaungic), which is totally unrelated to Prai or Mal.) Pray 3 [pry] is the Ban Wen dialect of Prai, and Phai [pry] is a dialect of Prai as well. Ethnologue updates are forthcoming.

¹⁰ According to the eth, "Phsing (Bit) is regarded as Khmu in China, but is in the Palaungic branch (Svantesson 1990)." Related to Khao in Vietnam.

O'du [tyh] ([Vietnam](#))
Mal [mlf] ([Laos](#))
Prai [prt] ([Thailand](#))
Mlabri [mra] ([Thailand](#))
Kháng [kjm] ([Vietnam](#))
Phong-Kniang [pnx] ([Laos](#))
Puoc [puo] ([Vietnam](#))

Discussion

The Khmu were the indigenous inhabitants of northern Laos. Khmuic languages are spoken by less than 1,000,000 people. Khmuic languages are scattered throughout Laos, and are also spoken in Vietnam, China, France, Myanmar, Thailand, and the USA. Khmuic speakers follow traditional religion, Christianity, and two groups are primarily Buddhist (Puoc and Khuen). They are agriculturalists. Some Mlabri are nomadic hunter-gatherers.

Language development

Khmu, Mal, Pray, and Mlabri all have written forms. Khmu has a Duota script in China and also has some non-written media. Prai speakers also use Mal. Most Prai speakers also speak Northern Thai. Mlabri speak or understand some Hmong and Northern Thai. Khmuic languages have very low literacy rates. The one exception to this seems to be Phong-Kniang speakers, of which, according to Gordon (2005), “many are educated”, though there is no indication of their own language having a written form.

Potential Research Questions

- Phsing (Bit) is regarded as Khmu in China, but Gordon (2005) notes that Svantesson (1990) suggests that it is in the Palaungic branch and is related to Khao in Vietnam. Study should be done to clearly determine the classification of Bit.

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Monic Cluster

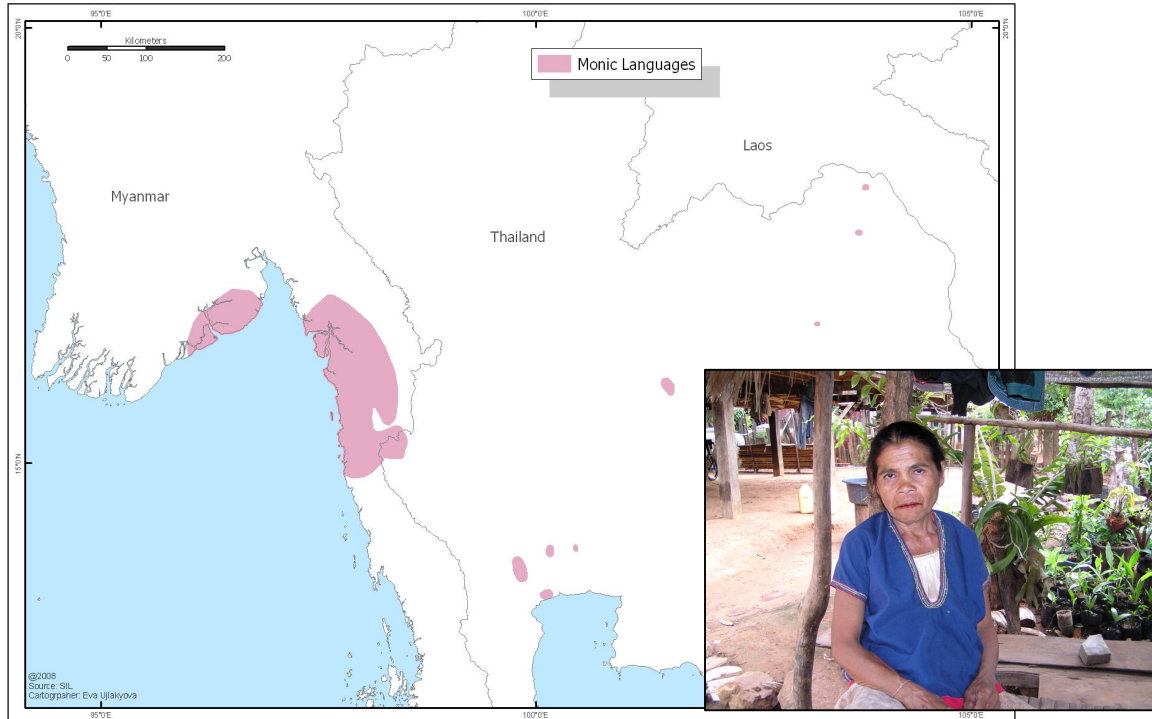


Photo courtesy of Nathan and Carey Statezni

The sixth Austro-Asiatic group located in MSEA is Monic. The Monic cluster includes 2 languages, both of which are located in Mainland Southeast Asia. These languages are Mon and Nyah Kur.

Demographics

Names	“Monic” is taken from the language Mon.
Language family	Austro-Asiatic; Mon-Khmer
Population	945,100
Languages	2, both written
Countries	Myanmar, Thailand

Monic Languages in MSEA

- Mon [[mnw](#)] ([Myanmar](#))
- Nyah Kur [[cbn](#)] ([Thailand](#))

Discussion

Mon is spoken by the Mon (also known as Talaing) people of Myanmar and Thailand. The Nyah Kur live only in Thailand. The Mon and Nyah Kur people are a remnant of an ancient Mon-Khmer Empire. They came from India and established the first great civilization in the region of North Thailand and Northern Burma. They were perhaps the first to use irrigation to

grow rice, and brought Buddhism from India. According to Guillon, the Mons were the only group in present-day Thailand (along with the Cham and Khmer) to have a script until the 13th century (and the 11th century in Burma) (1999). The Nyah Kur language is more closely related to the ancient Mon than to the modern Mon language. The Mon and Nyah Kur are primarily Buddhist and animist. The Nyah Kur are subsistence farmers. Historically they were hunter/gatherers, but with the loss of forest and wildlife, they have had to settle into villages and plant rice and cash crops. Most of the Mon are peasant farmers, although a few are merchants and craftsmen.

Language development

Nyah Kur has a literacy rate below 1% for their own language, but literacy rates in their second language (Thai) of 75% to 100%. Many Mon young people use only Burmese. The Mon in Myanmar can read Burmese and are generally bilingual in Burmese. Mon has an ancient Indic-based script derived from Pali.

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Palaungic Cluster

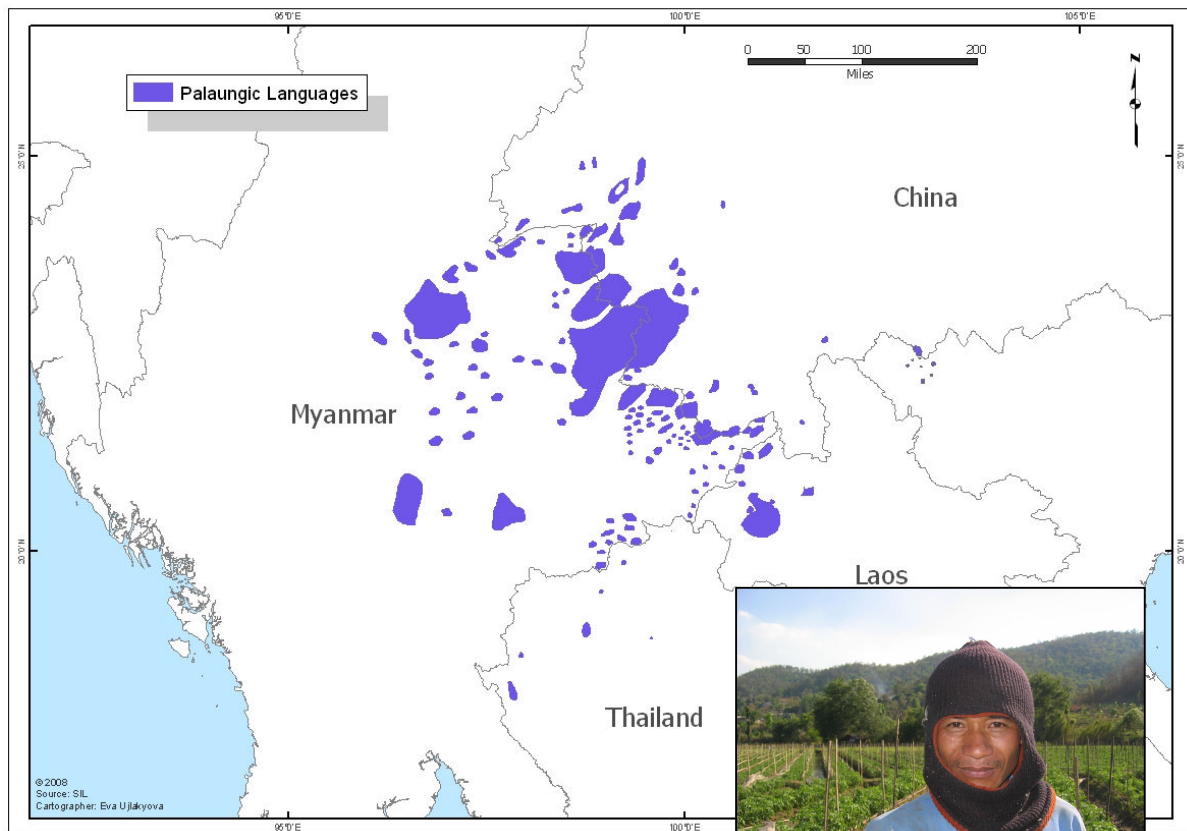


Photo courtesy of Philip Lambrecht

The seventh Austro-Asiatic group located in MSEA is Palaungic. In the Palaungic cluster there are 22 languages¹¹, 19 of which have speakers located in Mainland Southeast Asia.

Demographics

Names	Named for the Palaung.
Language family	Austro-Asiatic: Mon-Khmer
Population	2,158,642. Pale Palaung, Rumai Palaung, and Shwe Palaung > 100,000; Parauk > 500,000; Wa > 800,000.
Languages	22 (19 in MSEA, 9 with written form)
Countries	Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, (China)

Palaungic Languages in MSEA

- Danau [[dnu](#)] ([Myanmar](#))
- Palaung, Pale [[pce](#)] ([Myanmar](#))
- Palaung, Shwe [[pll](#)] ([Myanmar](#))
- Palaung, Rumai [[rbb](#)] ([Myanmar](#))
- Riang [[ril](#)] ([Myanmar](#))
- Yinchia [[yin](#)] ([Myanmar](#))
- Kon Keu [[kkn](#)] ([China](#))
- Mok [[mqt](#)] ([Thailand](#))

¹¹ We suspect that there are a number of other distinct Palaungic languages not reflected in the current literature.

Samtao [stu] (Myanmar)
Tai Loi [tlq] (Myanmar)
Kiorr [xko] (Laos)
Con [cno] (Laos)
Lamet [lbn] (Laos)
Blang [blr] (China)
Lawa, Western [lcp] (China)
Lawa, Eastern [lwl] (Thailand)
Parauk [prk] (Myanmar)
Wa [wbm] (Myanmar)
Mang¹² [zng] (Vietnam)

Discussion

Palaungic speakers are traditionally farmers. They raise rice, grains, and vegetables. Tea is grown as a commercial crop. Those living in the hills, sell dried tea and also trade "pickled tea" and livestock for items such as sugar, kerosene, and canned milk. Most of the Palaung are Buddhists, and some are Christians, but they have also maintained their ethnic animist religion. The Wa appear to have two main groups with different lifestyles, the more southern group being nominally Buddhist and growing wet-rice, and the northern group living in the mountains and follow an ethnic religion with used to include headhunting (Lebar). The Mang live in Northern Vietnam and across the Chinese border. They are agriculturalists and hunters. They are polytheistic.

Language development

Little is known about the status of language development of Palaungic languages. Blang, Eastern and Western Lawa, Pale Palaung, Rumi Palaung, Parauk, Wa, Lamet, and Riang all have written forms. Blang has 2 alphabetic scripts used: 'Totham' in the Xishuangbanna area and 'Tolek' from Dehong to Lincang. Mok is nearly extinct. Few Wa know how to read and write. Wa and Pale Palaung have non-print media as well as a written form.

Potential Research Questions

- Mosely claims there are a few thousand speakers of Danau in three villages, though the language is being influenced and replaced by various Tibeto-Burman languages. Gordon (2005) gives a population figure of 10,000. What is the true population of Danau? What is the status of their language vitality?
- The language Bit, listed in Gordon (2005) as a Khmuic language, has been identified by J-O Svantesson (1990) as Palaungic, and related to Khao in Vietnam. Survey should verify the classification of Bit as Khmuic or Palaungic.

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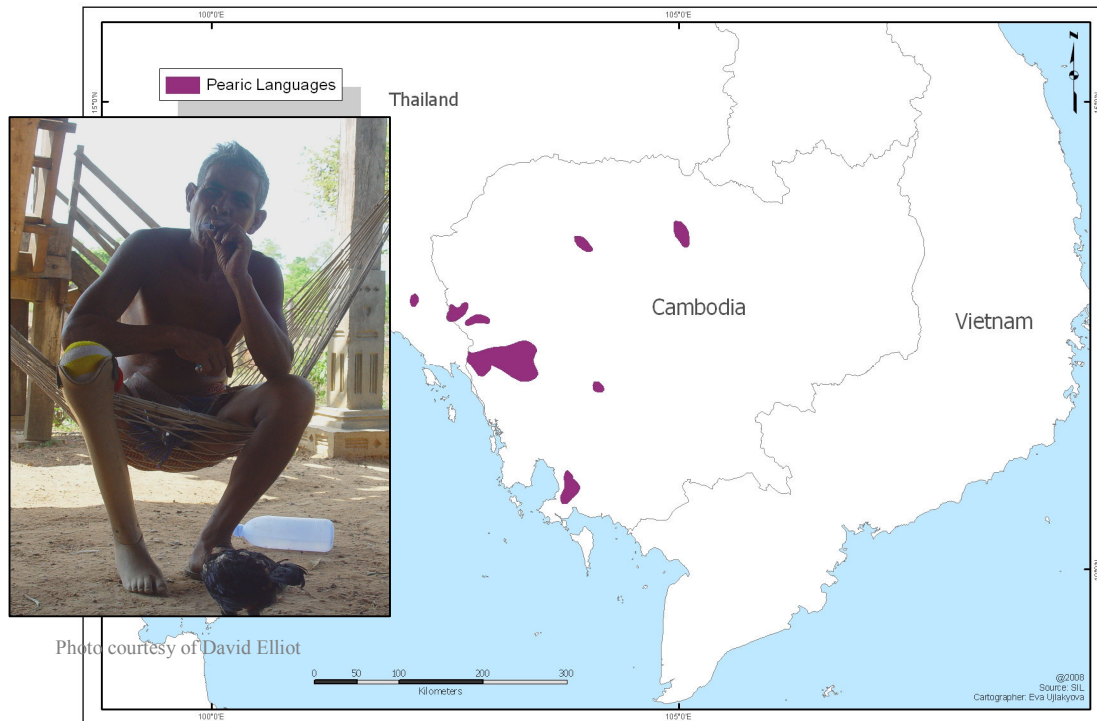
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Pearic Cluster



The eighth Austro-Asiatic group located in MSEA is Pearic. In the Pearic cluster there are 6 languages, all of which are located in Mainland Southeast Asia. “Phonologically the group is remarkable, showing a 4-way register system that combines both breathy and creaky phonation. This 4-way system is similar to the systems found among Vietic languages, except that the creaky phonation is definitely realised as a glottal restriction during the phonation of the vowel, rather than with the final consonant” (Hunter).

Demographics

Names	“Pear” may be a pejorative term meaning “slave” or “caste”.
Language family	Austroasiatic: Mon-Khmer; Eastern Mon-Khmer
Population	9,550
Languages	6, 0 with written form
Countries	Cambodia, Thailand

Pearic Languages in MSEA

- Pear [[pcb](#)] ([Cambodia](#))
- Chong [[cog](#)] ([Cambodia](#))
- Sa'och [[scq](#)] ([Cambodia](#))
- Somray [[smu](#)] ([Cambodia](#))
- Samre [[sxm](#)] ([Cambodia](#))
- Suoy [[syo](#)] ([Cambodia](#))

Discussion

Pearic languages are remnants of aboriginal languages of Cambodia. The Pearic language branch still had many speakers in Angkor city when Chinese traveller and writer Zhou Daguan visited the country seven hundred years ago. Today the Pearic languages are on the verge of extinction due to slavery, pogroms, and assimilation. Only people over the age of 50

or 60 years remember when they were used. The closest related language to Pear found outside Cambodia is Chong, which is spoken in Thailand's Chanthaburi province by some 3,000 speakers, including children (Doling). The Pear cultivate upland rice and a few other crops, and supplement their diet with fishing and hunting. The Sa'och also do a significant amount of fishing and hunting, as well as working for the Khmer (Lebar).

Language development

All of the Pearic languages appear to be endangered and close to extinction. Chong has a locally initiated language revitalization project. Everyone under 30 speaks Thai.

Potential Research Questions

- In Thailand and Laos, Kuy (a Katuic language) is called Soui as well. The only information given about Suoy by Gordon is the population of 200 (Worm and Hattori), the general location of the group (northwest of Phnom Penh) and that the language is related to Sa'och, Somray and Samre. Is there a relationship between Suoy and Kuy?

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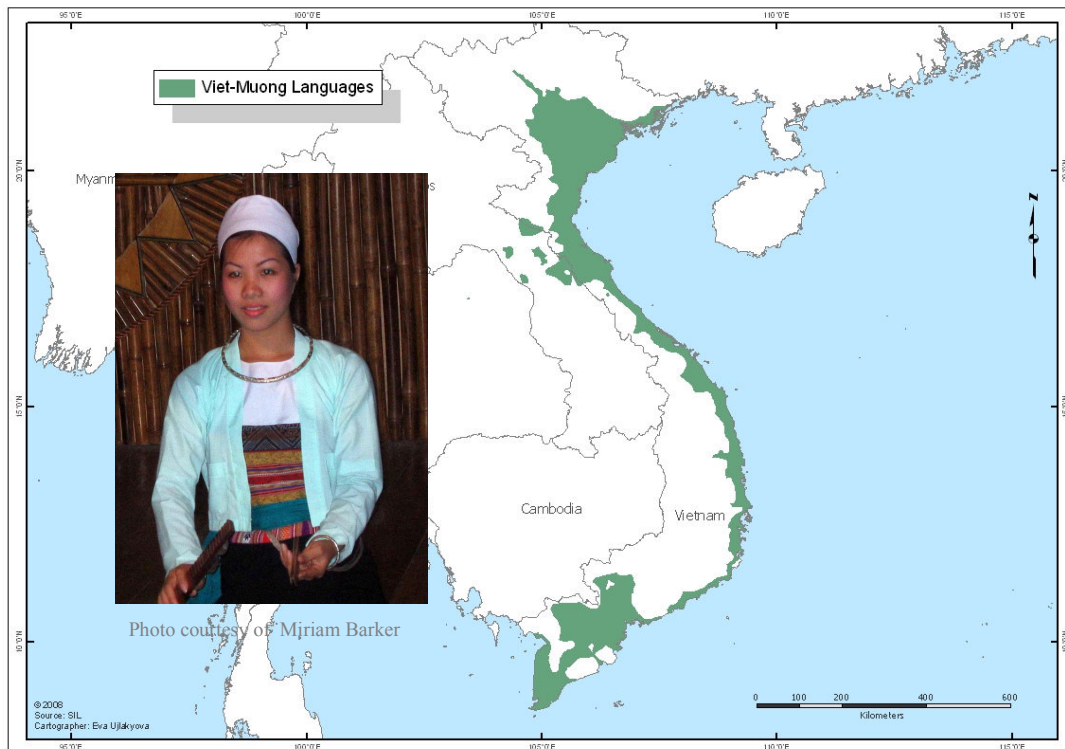
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Viet-Muong Cluster



The ninth Austro-Asiatic group located in MSEA is Viet-Muong. All 10 languages in the Viet-Muong cluster are located in Mainland Southeast Asia.

Demographics

Names	Viet-Muong is taken from the two largest groups, the Vietnamese and the Muong.
Language family	Austroasiatic; Mon-Khmer
Population	69.2 million Vietnamese has 68 million, Muong over 1 million speakers
Languages	10, 2 written
Countries	Vietnam, Laos, Thailand

Viet-Muong Languages in MSEA

- Arem [[aem](#)] ([Vietnam](#))
- Maleng [[pkt](#)] ([Laos](#))
- Chut [[scb](#)] ([Vietnam](#))
- Hung [[hnu](#)] ([Laos](#))
- Tho [[tou](#)] ([Vietnam](#))
- Bo [[bgl](#)] ([Laos](#))
- Muong [[mtq](#)] ([Vietnam](#))
- Nguôn [[nuo](#)] ([Vietnam](#))
- Aheu [[thm](#)] ([Thailand](#))
- Vietnamese [[vie](#)] ([Vietnam](#))

Discussion

Vietnamese speakers call themselves the 'Kinh' people. Chut speakers are part of the Chut official ethnic community in Vietnam, together with Arem, May, and Ruc. Those who speak the Sach or Salang dialects practice upland rice cultivation. Those who speak the Ruc and May dialects are seminomads. Maleng speakers are agriculturalists and practice traditional religion. Viet-Muong speakers (except Vietnamese speakers) tend to live on mountain slopes and follow traditional religion. Vietnamese speakers mix Buddhism with ancestor worship and traditional religion. There are also followers of Cao Dai, Christianity and other religions among the Kinh people.

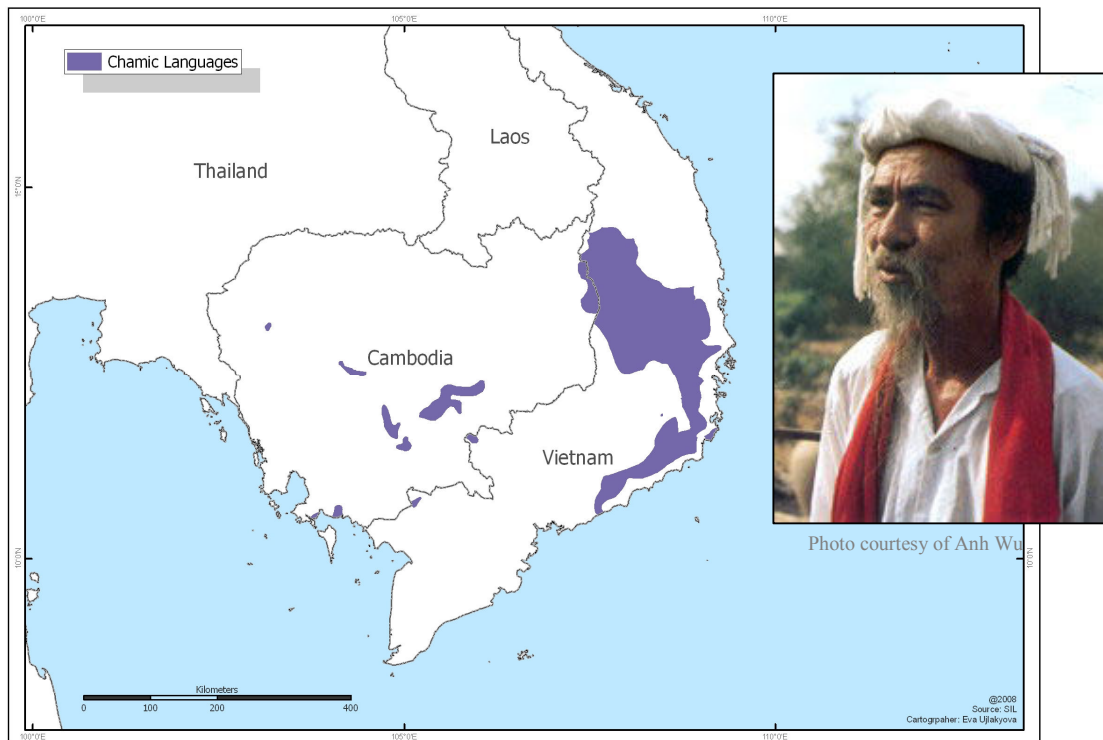
Language development

Arem is nearly extinct, with less than 100 speakers. Vietnamese and Muong are written, and have non-print media. Muong have a literacy rate of 1%-5% in their first language, and 50% to 70% in their second language (Vietnamese). Vietnamese is the national language of Vietnam. They have a romanized script and a literacy rate of 65%.

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Chamic Cluster



The first Austronesian group located in MSEA is Chamic. This is referred to in Gordon as Achinese-Chamic, but because all the languages found in MSEA are in the Chamic branch, this cluster will be referred to Chamic. In the Chamic language cluster there are 11 languages, 9 of which are located in MSEA.

Demographics

Names	The Chamic people are descendents of the ancient Champa kingdom in south/central Vietnam in the 9 th and 10 th centuries.
Language family	Austronesian; Malayic
Population	1,076,230. Rade, and Jarai have populations of more than 200,000. Western Cham has a population of between 400,000-700,000.
Languages	11 (9 in MSEA, 8 with written form)
Countries	Vietnam, Cambodia

Chamic Languages in MSEA

- Cham, Western [cja] (Cambodia)
- Chru [cje] (Vietnam)
- Cham, Eastern [cjm] (Vietnam)
- Roglai, Southern [rgs] (Vietnam)
- Roglai, Cacgia [roc] (Vietnam)
- Roglai, Northern [rog] (Vietnam)
- Haroi [hro] (Vietnam)
- Jarai [jra] (Vietnam)
- Rade [rad] (Vietnam)

Discussion

The Chamic people are remnants of a once powerful kingdom. The majority of Eastern Cham people follow a religious system influenced by Hinduism. A minority follow Muslim-influenced religion. Before Hindu scholars came from South India about the 2nd and 3rd century AD, the Cham people were animists. Western Cham speakers are primarily Sunni Muslim though there are folk Muslim also. The Cham society is matrilineal as daughters carry the family name of their mothers. Wet rice farming is the main agriculture for coastal Chamic peoples. Pottery making and cotton cloth weaving are two other sideline occupations. Haroi, Jarai, and Rade live on mountain slopes and are animists or Christians. The Roglai (also written Ra Glai) believe there is a spiritual world known as "Giang" that includes good and evil forces.

Language development

Chamic languages have Austro-Asiatic influences. Eastern Cham, Western Cham, Chru, Haroi, Jarai, Rade, Northern Roglai and Southern Roglai all have written forms. Chamic languages tend to have low literacy rates in their first language, and higher rates in the national language. Chru, Haroi, Jarai, Rade, Northern Roglai and Southern Roglai have Roman scripts, though Jarai has different scripts used in Vietnam and Cambodia. Chru speakers are reported to also use Vietnamese. Eastern Cham has a Devanagari type of script and although there has been work on a Romanized version, it has not been agreed upon. Most Eastern Cham adults are bilingual in spoken Vietnamese and Cham, but most of them are illiterate in both the Cham script and the Romanization, though the Devanagari type of script is now taught in public schools (Blood, 2008). There are conflicting reports about whether ethnically Chamic people in Thailand still speak Cham or have shifted to Central Thai. Most Western Cham use a Jawi script based on Arabic.

Potential research questions

- What is the relationship between the Jarai in Cambodia and Vietnam? Can they use the same language materials?
- The Chamic languages in Vietnam were surveyed in the 1950s and 1970s using wordlists as the primary assessment instrument. There may be a need to do intelligibility testing between these languages to determine the potential for shared development projects.

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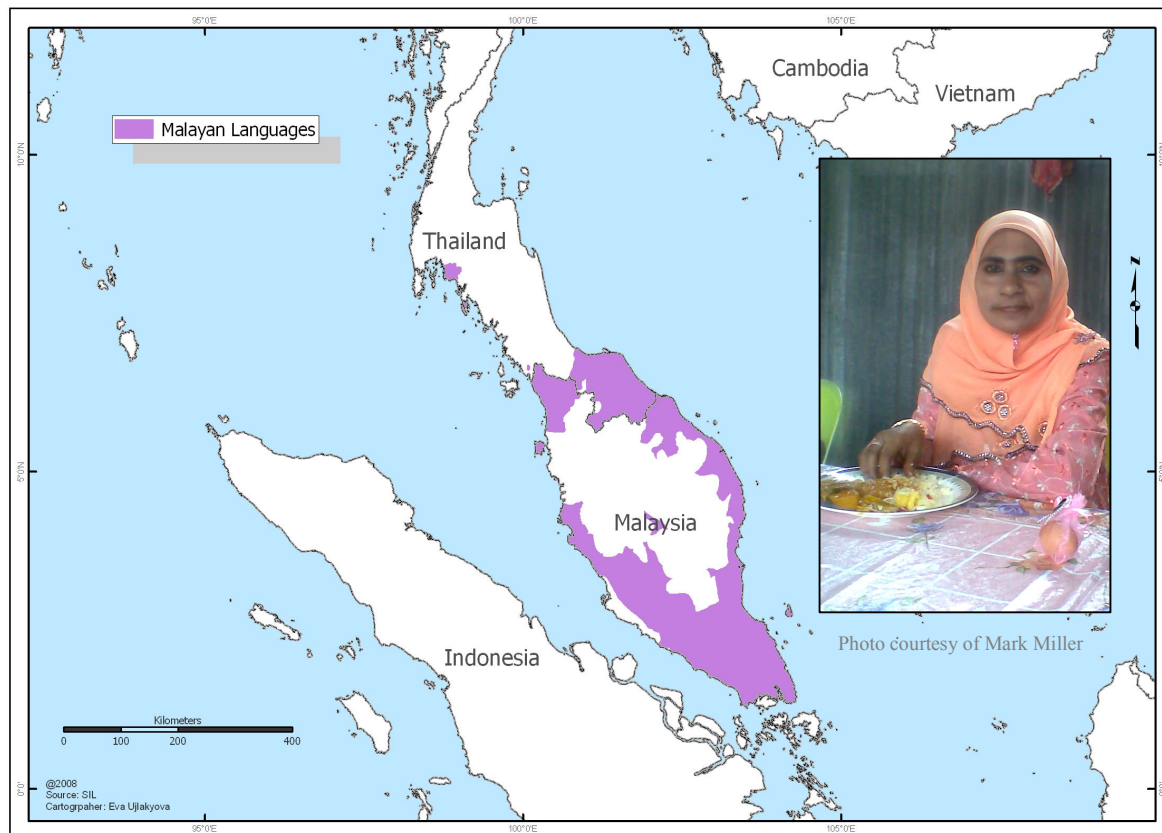
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Malayan Cluster



The second Austronesian group located in MSEA is Malayan¹³. In the Malayan cluster there are four languages located in MSEA. These are Malay, Kedah Malay, Pattani Malay and Urak Lawoi.

Demographics

Names	from “Malay”, the national language of Malaysia.
Language family	Austronesian; Malayo-Polynesian; Malayic
Population	about 3,124,000 in Thailand ¹⁴
Languages	46 (4 in MSEA, 3 with written form)
Countries	Thailand, (Malaysia)

Malayan Languages in MSEA

Malay, Kedah	[<u>meo</u>] (Malaysia (Peninsular))
Malay, Pattani	[<u>mfa</u>] (Thailand)
Malay	[<u>mly</u>] (Malaysia (Peninsular))
Urak Lawoi'	[<u>urk</u>] (Thailand)

Discussion

Malay and Pattani Malay speakers are Muslim or Christian. Urok Lawoi are Aboriginal Malays who speak a unique Malay language. They follow traditional religion, though some

¹³ This map shows only the locations of languages with speakers in MSEA.

¹⁴ This figure does not include Kedah Malay speakers. According to Gordon (2005), in Thailand they live in “a few villages near Satun”, which may indicate a small population.

are Christian. Kedah Malay (also known as Satun Malay) speakers are culturally Malay, but more people in the area speak [Central] Thai than Pattani. They live in tropical forest and are primarily Muslim.

Language development

Malay, Pattani Malay, and Urak Lawoi have written forms. Malay has Roman and Arabic (Jawi) scripts. Satun Malay speakers are mostly bilingual in Southern Thai (Himmelman). Non-print media is available in Malay, Urak Lawoi, and Pattani Malay.

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Moklen Cluster



The third Austronesian group located in MSEA is Moklen. The Moklen cluster includes two languages, both of which are located in Mainland Southeast Asia. These languages are Moken (in Myanmar) and Moklen (in Thailand).

Demographics

Names	Moken means “drowned people” (Philips).
Language family	Austronesian; Malayo-Polynesian; Malayic
Population	8,500
Languages	2, 1 with written form
Countries	Myanmar, Thailand

Moklen Languages in MSEA

Moken	[mwt] (Myanmar)
Moklen	[mkm] (Thailand)

Discussion

The Moken people live primarily on boats, but occasionally settle on islands in the area. They are often called “Sea Gypsies”. They are fishermen and barter marine products for other essentials. Moken and Moklen people follow traditional religion, or Islam.

Language development

Moken is written. Many Burmese Moken have intermarried with local Burmese, Arabs, or Indians. These are often bilingual in Burmese or Malay, and may hold double citizenship. Moklen has a heavy Thai and Mon-Khmer influence. Moken has non-print media materials available.

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Hmongic Cluster

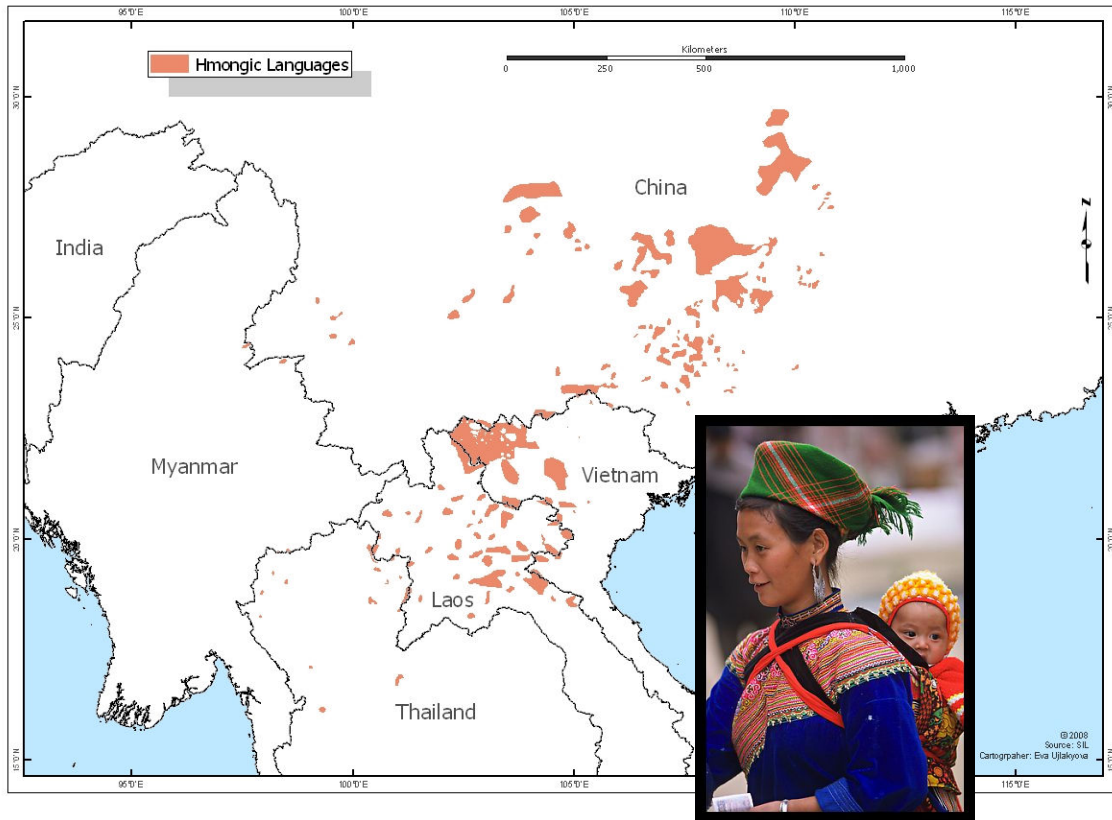


Photo courtesy of Quang Tuan Luong

<http://www.terrageria.com/vietnam/vietnam.bac-ha.html>

The first Hmong-Mien group located in MSEA is Hmongic¹⁵. In the Hmongic cluster there are at least 29 languages¹⁶, 6 of which have speakers located in Mainland Southeast Asia. These languages are Hmong Daw (White Miao), Hmong Njua, Hmong Shua (Sinicized Miao), Hmong Don, Hmong Do and Pa-Hng.

Demographics

Names	Often referred to as the “Miao” group in China, though this does not include the Bunu branch, which is regarded to be ethnically Yao (Mien), even though their language is Hmongic.
Language family	Hmong-Mien; Hmongic
Population	at least 1,698,655 (no information for Hmong Don and Hmong Do)
Languages	29 (6 in MSEA, 2 with written form)
Countries	Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, Myanmar (China)

¹⁵ The Hmongic Languages map here includes only those languages with speakers in MSEA. The majority of the Hmongic languages are spoken in China.

¹⁶ The 16th edition of the Ethnologue will include 34 languages in the Hmong cluster, and we suspect there are many more distinct languages than is reflected in the current literature.

Hmongic Languages in MSEA

- Pa-Hng [pha] (China)
- Hmong Njua [blu] (China)
- Hmong Don [hmf] (Vietnam)
- Hmong Dô [hmv] (Vietnam)
- Hmong Shua [hmz] (Vietnam)
- Hmong Daw [mww] (China,)

Discussion

Hmong people are reported to originate from Siberia. The majority of Hmong people live in China, but there are significant populations in MSEA. Hmong people also live in the United States, Canada, France, Australia, South America and Africa. Lemoine (2005) estimates a total of between 4-5 million Hmong worldwide, though others give estimates of up to 10 million. Hmongic languages in MSEA are spoken by people in North Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand. The people are primarily farmers and gatherers, and are also known for their unique textiles. They often live on high mountains away from other groups. They are primarily animist, though there are some Christians, especially Hmong Daw and Hmong Njua.

Language development

Hmong Daw and Hmong Njua are written using several systems - Romanized, or with letters based on the Thai alphabet or the Vietnamese alphabet. There was also a special “messianic script” developed by a Hmong spiritual leader in Laos for Hmong Daw and Hmong Njua, though it bore no resemblance to the Roman alphabet or other alphabets in use across the region. Both groups have access to non-print media.

Potential Research Questions

- As there is almost no information available about Hmong Don and Hmong Do (including population, etc.) initial surveys should be done.
- The Hmong Shua in Vietnam may speak a dialect similar to the Hmong Shua (Hmongb Sad) in China. “Shua” means “Chinese” in Hmong. Do the Hmong Shua in Vietnam have this name merely because their origins were in China, or does the group use this name because they are closely related to the specific ethnolinguistic group called Hmongb Shuad in China?

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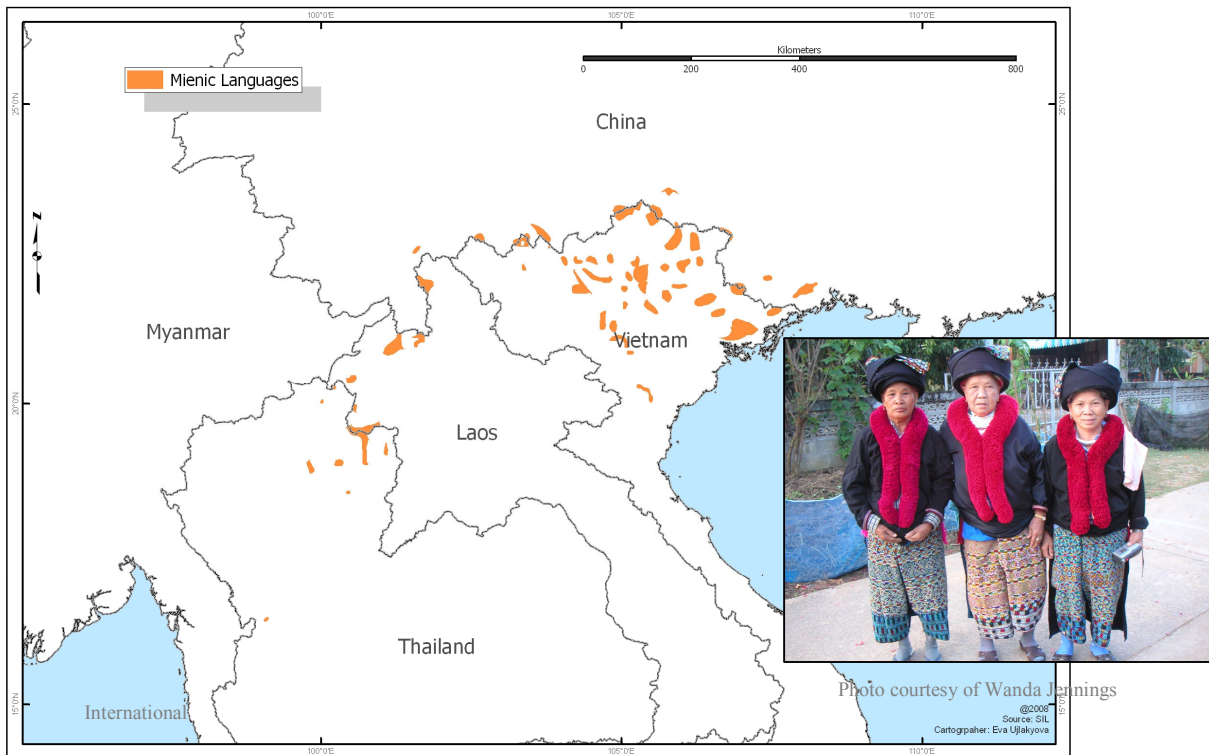
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Mienic Cluster



The second Hmong-Mien group located in MSEA is Mienic. In Mainland Southeast Asia, there are two Mienic languages, Iu Mien and Kim Mun, and they are both in the Mian-Jin branch.

Demographics

Names	Iu Mien and Kim Mun have many alternate names related to “Yao”
Language family	Hmong-Mien
Population	1,193,185
Languages	5 (2 in MSEA, 1 written)
Countries	Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, (China)

Mienic Languages in MSEA

- Iu Mien [[ium](#)] ([China](#))
- Kim Mun [[mji](#)] ([China](#))

Discussion

Iu Mien in Vietnam are found throughout the highland regions of northern Vietnam. All 'Yao' and 'Mien' in Thailand are Iu Mien. They are swidden agriculturalists growing rice. They are also hunters, weavers, and embroiderers. They are Taoist, or follow traditional religion. Kim Mun speakers and Iu Mien speakers are considered part of the Yao nationality in China and Laos, and part of the Dao nationality in Vietnam. They are primarily Taoist.

Language development

Iu Mien is written. Kim Mun has a Romanized orthography, though it is not in use. Iu Mien also has non-print media available. Kim Mun has low bilingualism in Laos. In Vietnam, at least, Kim Mun seems to have several varieties which differ significantly in their phonetics.

Potential Research Questions

- Both Iu Mien and Kim Mun are relatively unresearched. There may be several varieties of each which are unintelligible. Basic survey should be done to determine the varieties of Mienic languages in Laos and Vietnam, and their relationships to each other.

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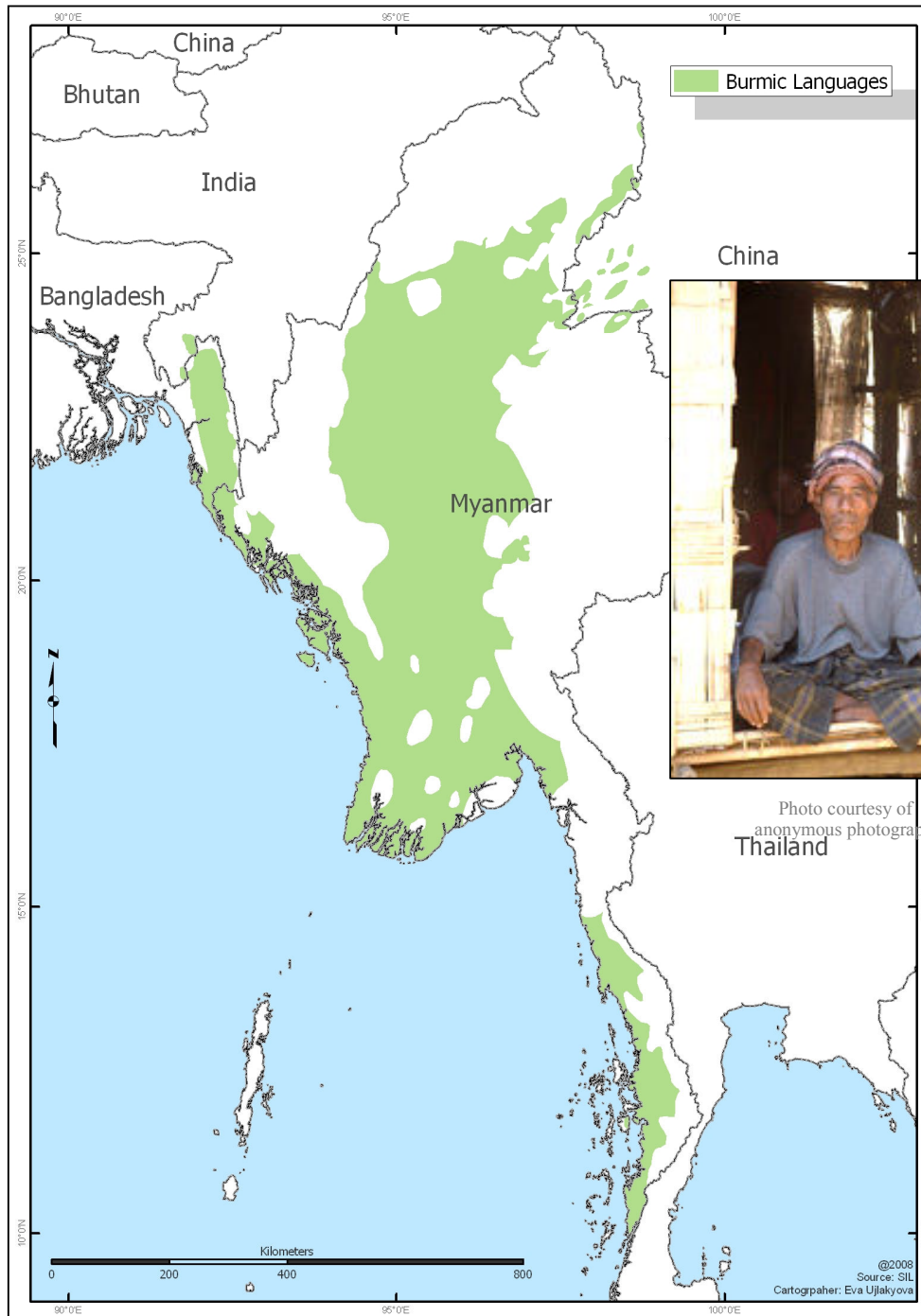
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Burmic Cluster



The first Sino-Tibetan group located in MSEA is Burmic. In the Burmic cluster there are 12 languages located in Mainland Southeast Asia. These are almost all found in Myanmar, though they extend to China, India, and Bangladesh.

Demographics

Name	Burmish, Burmic - from the largest language group, Burmese, the national language of Myanmar, with around 32 million speakers.
Language family	Sino-Tibetan; Tibeto-Burman; Lolo-Burmese
Population	34,992,589
Languages	14 (12 in MSEA, 6 with written form)
Countries	Myanmar (China, Bangladesh, India)

Burmic Languages in MSEA

- Achang [[acn](#)] ([China](#))
- Arakanese [[mhv](#)] ([Myanmar](#))
- Burmese [[mya](#)] ([Myanmar](#))
- Chaungtha [[ccq](#)] ([Myanmar](#))
- Hpon [[hpo](#)] ([Myanmar](#))
- Intha [[int](#)] ([Myanmar](#))
- Lashi [[lsi](#)] ([Myanmar](#))
- Maru [[mhx](#)] ([Myanmar](#))
- Taungyo [[tco](#)] ([Myanmar](#))
- Tavoyan [[tvn](#)] ([Myanmar](#))
- Yangbye [[ybd](#)] ([Myanmar](#))¹⁷
- Zaiwa [[atb](#)] ([China](#))

Discussion

Burmic languages are tonal and SOV. The majority of Burmic speakers are agriculturalists, though some (especially Burmese), are fishermen, craftsmen, and industrialists. Speakers of Burmic languages have many different religions, including Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, Daoism, Christianity, and polytheism. Burmese speakers are primarily Buddhist. Lashi, Zaiwa, and Maru are considered part of the Jingpho ethnicity, and use Jingpho as a language of wider communication in some places. Chaungtha means 'People of the valley', or 'People of the stream', while Intha means "people of the lake". Hpon is almost extinct with only a few hundred speakers. Xiandao may be a dialect of Achang. The people are grouped under the Achang nationality in China. They are not located in MSEA.

Language development

Arakanese, Burmese, Zaiwa, and Lhao Vo (Maru) have non-written media. Achang, Burmese, Lashi, Zaiwa, Maru, and Arakanese (also known as Rakhine) are written, though Arakanese does not have a modern standardized script. Most languages in the Burmic cluster have either no report, or very low reports for literacy, while Burmese has reports of 83% - 90% adult literacy rates. Burmese uses an Indian (Brahmi) script, adapted from Mon. Achang has a Roman script. Achang speakers are mainly adults. The Longchuan dialect is stable, but speakers of other dialects are shifting to Chinese. Maru (Lhao Vo) has a Roman script, but low literacy rates in first language, and up to 50% literacy in their second language of Burmese. In Myanmar many Arakanese are literate in standard written Burmese. Some journals and articles written by Rakhine people use the Burmese script but alter the spelling to reflect Arakanese pronunciation, but there is no standardized Arakanese (Rakhine) script. A Zaiwa Roman script orthography was developed in 1957, based on the speech of Longzhun in the Xishan District of Luxi County. Speakers have a very low literacy rate in their first language (below 1%), but a higher rate in their second language (50% to 75%).

¹⁷ Yangbye is considered by some to be a sub-variety of Arakanese.

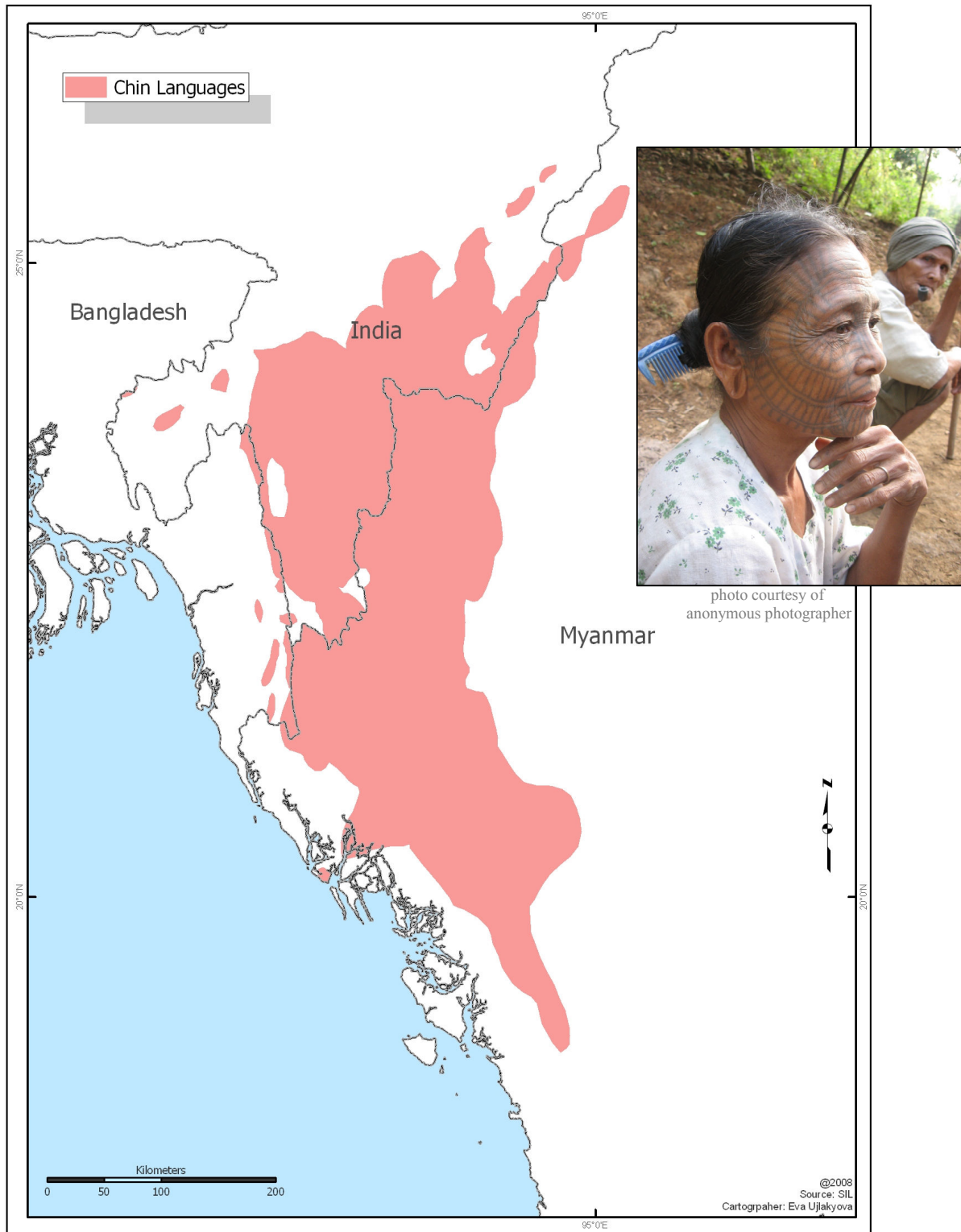
Potential Research Questions:

- Some people call Arakanese a dialect of Burmese (UCLA). Are Arakanese (Rakhine), Intha, and Tovoyan separate languages, or dialects of Burmese? Should consideration be given for the potential for adaptation of existing Burmese materials into these varieties?
- What is the status of Ben Ren and Hknong, two unidentified ethnic groups in the Achang area?

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Chin Cluster



The second Sino-Tibetan group located in MSEA is the Kuki-Chin cluster. We will call this the Chin cluster, since the term “Kuki” is used primarily in India. The Chin cluster traditionally includes Central, Northern, and Southern branches. On the basis of comparative reconstruction, however, Khoi Lam Thang (2001) suggests just two main branches with the

traditional Northern Chin and Southern Chin placed together in one group, and traditional Central Chin languages grouped together with Mara. Very little research has been done in some of these languages, and even the classification of the cluster within Tibeto-Burman is debated by scholars. In the Chin cluster there are about 52 languages, maybe 40 of which have speakers located in Mainland Southeast Asia. Many of these languages have the rather usual feature of having two or three stems for most verbs.

Demographics

Names	Kuki-Chin, also known as Kuki-Lushei, Mizo
Language family	Sino-Tibetan; Tibeto-Burman
Population	at least 3,407,000. Falam Chin, Thado Chin, and Mro Chin >100,000; Tedim Chin > 300,000; Haka Chin > 400,000; Meitei > 1 million.
Languages	about 52 (maybe 40 in MSEA ¹⁸ , 30 with written form)
Countries	Myanmar, India, Bangladesh

Chin Languages in MSEA

- Chin, Anu [XXX] ([Myanmar](#))¹⁹
- Chin, Bawm [[bgr](#)] ([India](#))
- Chin, Haka [[cnh](#)] ([Myanmar](#))
- Chin, Ngawn [[cnw](#)] ([Myanmar](#))
- Chin, Zotung [[czt](#)] ([Myanmar](#))
- Mizo [[lus](#)] ([India](#))
- Pankhu [[pkh](#)] ([Bangladesh](#))
- Chin, Senthang [[sez](#)] ([Myanmar](#))
- Chin, Tawr [[tcp](#)] ([Myanmar](#))
- Anal [[anm](#)] ([India](#))
- Chin, Siyin [[csy](#)] ([Myanmar](#))
- Chin, Tedim [[ctd](#)] ([Myanmar](#))
- Chin, Falam [[flm](#)] ([Myanmar](#))
- Gangte [[gnb](#)] ([India](#))
- Hrangkhoh [[hra](#)] ([Myanmar](#))
- Lamkang [[lmk](#)] ([India](#))
- Chin, Paite [[pck](#)] ([India](#))
- Purum [[pub](#)] ([Myanmar](#))
- Ralte [[ral](#)] ([Myanmar](#))
- Chin, Thado [[tcz](#)] ([India](#))
- Yos [[yos](#)] ([Myanmar](#))
- Zome [[zom](#)] ([Myanmar](#))
- Chin, Mro [[cmr](#)] ([Myanmar](#))²⁰
- Chin, Daai [[dao](#)] ([Myanmar](#))
- Chin, Laitu [XXX] ([Myanmar](#))²¹
- Nga La [[hlt](#)] ([Myanmar](#))²²

¹⁸ We suspect that there are a number of other distinct Chin languages not reflected in the current literature.

¹⁹ Although Anu Chin is not listed in Gordon 2005, it is listed as a minority language by the government of Myanmar.

²⁰ Chin, Khumi Awa, which Gordon lists as a separate language [cka] is another name for Chin, Mro (So-Hartmann 2009).

²¹ Laitu/Laingtu Chin will be included in the 2009 edition of the Ethnologue.

²² Nga La is also known as Matu Chin.

Chin, Khumi [[cnk](#)] ([Myanmar](#))²³
Chin, Mara [[mrh](#)] ([India](#))
Chin, Mūn [[mwq](#)] ([Myanmar](#))
Chin, Khumi Awa [[cka](#)] ([Myanmar](#))
Chin, Bualkhaw [[cbl](#)] ([Myanmar](#))
Chin, Chinbon [[cnb](#)] ([Myanmar](#))
Chin, Asho [[csh](#)] ([Myanmar](#))
Welaung [[weu](#)] ([Myanmar](#))²⁴
Zyphe [[zyp](#)] ([Myanmar](#))

Discussion

Chin languages are spoken primarily in Northeast India and Myanmar. Many of the people are Christian due to missionaries coming to Myanmar (then Burma) during the colonial period. A number of Chin people still practice their traditional animism and the Chinbon and Laitu Chin people are Buddhist. Chin people live in tropical forests and hills, and are primarily agriculturalists. Chin women often tattoo their faces with designs particular to their group, though this practice has declined in recent times. Large numbers of Chin speakers have also moved to the US and other countries. Bawm Chin is a subgroup of the Laizou (Anal). Pankhu is a subgroup of the Mizo. Daai Chin is reported to have 6 main subgroups.

Language development

There is incredibly diverse development in these languages. Some of them have populations well-educated in their own tongue (Meitei, for example), with long history of writing. Some of these languages are so isolated that even the populations of them are unknown. The relationships between the languages themselves are also very complex. Anal, Asho, Bawn, Chinbon, Daai, Falam, Haka, Khumi, Mara, Mūn, Ngawn, Paite, Siyin, Tedim, Thado, Zotung, Gangte, Hrankhol, Lamkang, Meitei, Mizo, Mru, Hmar, Darlong, Bualkhaw, Lemi, Matu, Mro, Zou, and Zyphe all have written forms. Asho Chin, Falam Chin, Haka Chin, Mūn Chin, Paite, Mro Chin and Tedim Chin have non-print media available. Here is some information about specific languages. Laitu Chin has high language vitality. Asho Chin speakers are quite bilingual in Burmese. Though literacy rates are lower for older Lai people, there is a Roman script in India, and Lai is taught in primary schools. Anal speakers also use Meitei, and although they have a Roman script, the literacy rate in Anal is below 1%. Gangte has high literacy rates among young people and lower among older people. Hrankhol extremely low literacy rates. Lamkang people in India can read Meitei, but they have a Roman script, and they cannot read it. They have requested literacy help. Thado Chin is taught in schools in Manipur, but there is no information about the status in Myanmar. The Khumi have a literacy rate in their second language (Burmese?) of 60%. Mara Chin is taught in India in primary schools, but there is no information about the 20,000 Mara Chin speakers who live in Myanmar. In general, although many Chin languages have a script, literacy rates in mother tongues tend to be low in India, and there is almost no information about those who live in Myanmar.

Potential Research Questions

- Several languages have dialects that may be separate languages. Lai/Haka has a dialect called Shonshe that may be a separate language. Khumi Chin has dialects called Khami and Ngala that may be separate languages. Falam Chin has a dialect

²³ So-Hartmann considers Lemi Chin a separate language, and not a dialect of Khumi Chin (2009).

²⁴ Welaung Chin is also known as Rawngtu Chin.

called Chorei that may be a separate language. Daai Chin has a dialect called Matupi Daai that may be a separate language. A sho Chin has dialects called Lemyo, Thayetmo, Minbu, and Khyang that may be separate languages. What is the status of these “dialects”?

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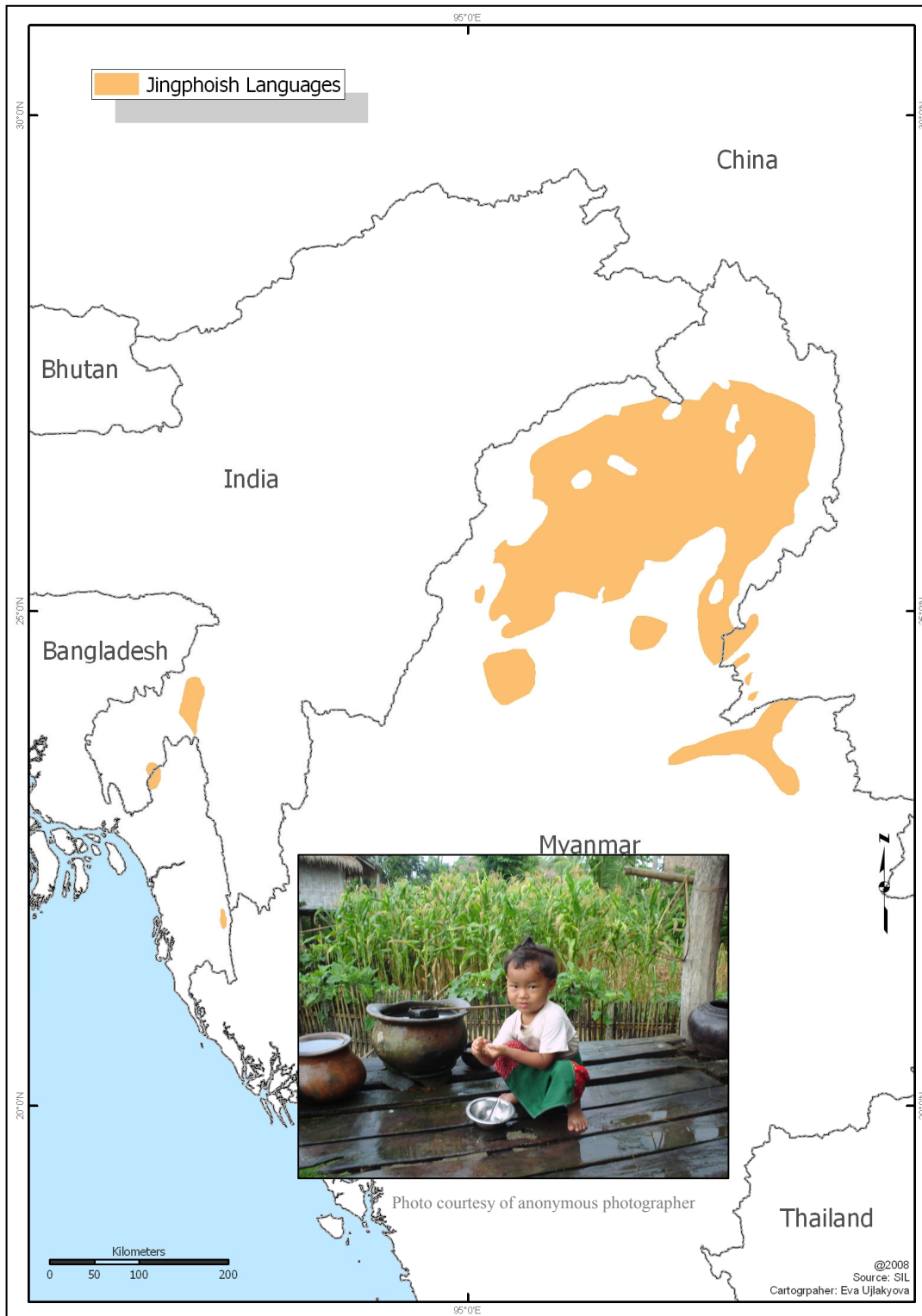
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Jingphoish Cluster



The third Sino-Tibetan cluster located in MSEA is Jingphoish. In the Jingphoish cluster there are at least 4 languages located in Mainland Southeast Asia²⁵. Three of these are listed in Gordon (2005). These languages are Jingpho and Taman in the Jingpho branch, and the Luish language Kadu. Beyond this, we include the language Kanan²⁶.

Demographics

Names	Jingpho-Konyak-Bodo
Language family	Sino-Tibetan: Tibeto-Burman
Population	at least 987,000 (900,000 Jingpho)
Languages	at least 5 (at least 4 in MSEA, 1 with written form)
Countries	Myanmar, (India, Bangladesh, China)

Jingphoish Languages in MSEA

- Jingpho [kac] ([Myanmar](#))
- Taman [tcl] ([Myanmar](#))
- Kadu [kdv] ([Myanmar](#))
- Ganan [XXX] ([Myanmar](#))

Discussion

Speakers of Jingphoish languages are pastoralists and agriculturalists. They are primarily animists. Their dwellings are usually two stories and built out of wood and bamboo. Kadu is different from Katu, a Mon-Khmer language of Vietnam, China, and Laos.

Language development

Jingpho has a written form²⁷. It is a trade language for many other groups. It has a Pinyin alphabet in China. Taman is reported to be extinct. Jingpho and Kadu have high language vitality and non-print media available.

Potential Research Questions

- Gordon (2005) lists the language Chak, which is potentially Jingphoish. What is the classification of Chak?

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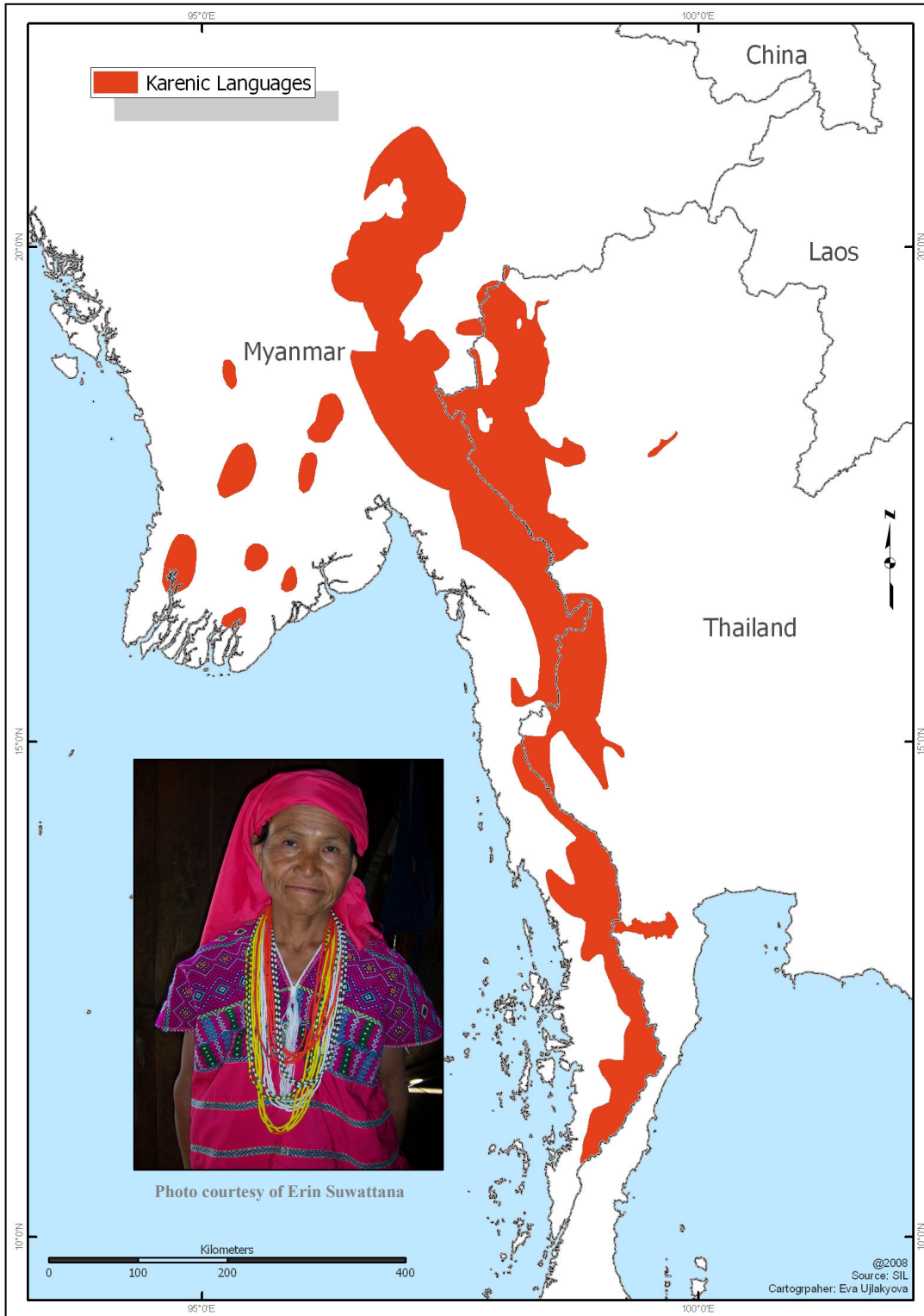
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²⁵ We suspect that there are a number of other distinct Jingphoish languages not reflected in the current literature.

²⁶ Kadu is often called “Kadu-Kanan.” Gordon notes that Kadu, Kanan (Ganaan), Chakpa, and Phayeng may be separate languages. Although there is high lexical similarity between Kadu and Kanan, the strong ethnolinguistic identity of the groups and the low reported intelligibility between the groups suggests that Kadu and Kanan would be better conceived of as separate languages.

²⁷ Kadu has an orthography, but it is not used.

Karenic Cluster



The fourth Sino-Tibetan group located in MSEA is Karenic. The internal structure of the Karenic cluster has not been studied in depth, and scholars disagree in the classification and even the identification of languages in this cluster. In the Karenic cluster there are 20 languages, all of which are located in MSEA, in Thailand or Myanmar. We have added Kayaw²⁸ and West-Central Thailand Pwo Karen³ to this list, for a total of 22 languages.

Demographics

Language family	Sino-Tibetan; Tibeto-Burman
Population	5,048,294
Languages	22, 10 with written form
Countries	Thailand, Myanmar

Karenic Languages in MSEA

- Karen, Pa'o [blk] (Myanmar)
- Karen, Lahta [kvt] (Myanmar)
- Kayan [pdu] (Myanmar)
- Karen, Bwe [bwe] (Myanmar)
- Karen, Geko [ghk] (Myanmar)
- Karen, Geba [kvq] (Myanmar)
- Karen, Brek [kvl] (Myanmar)
- Kayaw [XXX] (Myanmar)¹
- Kayah, Eastern [eky] (Myanmar)
- Karen, Yinbaw [kvu] (Myanmar)
- Karen, Yintale [kvy] (Myanmar)
- Karen, Manumanaw [kxf] (Myanmar)
- Kayah, Western [kyu] (Myanmar)
- Karen, Paku [kpp] (Myanmar)
- Karen, S'gaw [ksw] (Myanmar)
- Wewaw [wea] (Myanmar)
- Karen, Zayein [kxk] (Myanmar)
- Karen, Pwo Eastern [kjp] (Myanmar)
- Karen, Pwo West-Central Thailand [kjp] (Thailand)²⁹
- Karen, Phrae Pwo [kjt] (Thailand)
- Karen, Pwo Western [pwo] (Myanmar)
- Karen, Pwo Northern [pww] (Thailand)

Discussion

The Karen people's ancestors were from Tibet. They are almost unique among the Tibeto-Burman languages in having SVO word order; other than the Karenic languages and Bai, Tibeto-Burman languages feature SOV order. This is likely due to influence from neighboring Mon and Tai languages (Matisoff 1991). Karen people form a large percentage of the population of Burma, and have held office and other important roles in the military units raised in Myanmar under British rule. In Burma the Karen hill tribes have tended to remain animistic, but among those settled in the plains there are many Buddhists and Christians. They are mostly farmers, and many have experienced considerable displacement

²⁸ Kayaw is not in Gordon (2005), but is documented in works such as Manson's *Karenic Language Relationships* (2003).

²⁹ Not in Gordon (2005) as such. West-Central Thailand Pwo Karen is linguistically the same language as Eastern Pwo Karen, but due to the highly distinct socio-economic and political differences in Thailand and Myanmar, these two entries will be treated as languages with different developmental needs here.

in recent years. In Thailand, Karenic peoples are the largest of the minority groups. The Karen in Thailand have enjoyed a more stable existence, living both in the mountains and on the plains. As in Myanmar, some Karen have continued with their animistic beliefs, while other have followed Buddhism and still others have followed Christianity. There have been a number of messianic movements within the Karen.

Language development

Sgaw Karen and Pwo Karen have a long written tradition. Northern Pwo Karen, Western Pwo Karen, Eastern Pwo Karen, Sgaw Karen, Bwe Karen, Geba Karen, Pa’O Karen, Eastern Kayah, Western Kayah and Kayan all have written forms. Kayan and Bwe, Eastern and Western Kayah have extremely low literacy, especially in their first language. Northern Pwo Karen has a Thai-based script. Bilingualism ranges from monolinguals in Northern Pwo Karen to monolinguals in Thai. Some literacy work has been done in Bwe, Geba Karen, and Sgaw Karen. The Eastern Pwo Karen have a plethora of writing systems, including a Mon-based script, called the Monastic script, and a “Christian” script, similar to Burmese, and based on Sgaw Karen. Although they have a script, the literacy of the people is quite low in Karen. The Phrae Pwo Karen use Northern Thai and S’gaw Karen as second languages. There is non-print media available in Pa’o Karen, Western Pwo Karen, S’gaw Karen, Western Kayah, Kayan, Eastern Pwo Karen and Northern Pwo Karen.

Potential Research Questions

- Some reports indicate Paku and a dialect of Paku called Mopwa are separate languages. Is Mopwa actually a separate language?
- Zayein Karen may be an alternate name for Lahta Karen used in the village of Zayein. Are these two varieties actually the same language?
- Wewaw may be an alternate name for S’gaw Karen. Are these two varieties actually the same language?
- Yinbaw Karen is reported to be a variety of Padaung (Geko Karen). What is the relationship between these two varieties?
- Yintale Karen is reported to be a variety of Kayah. What is the relationship between these two varieties?

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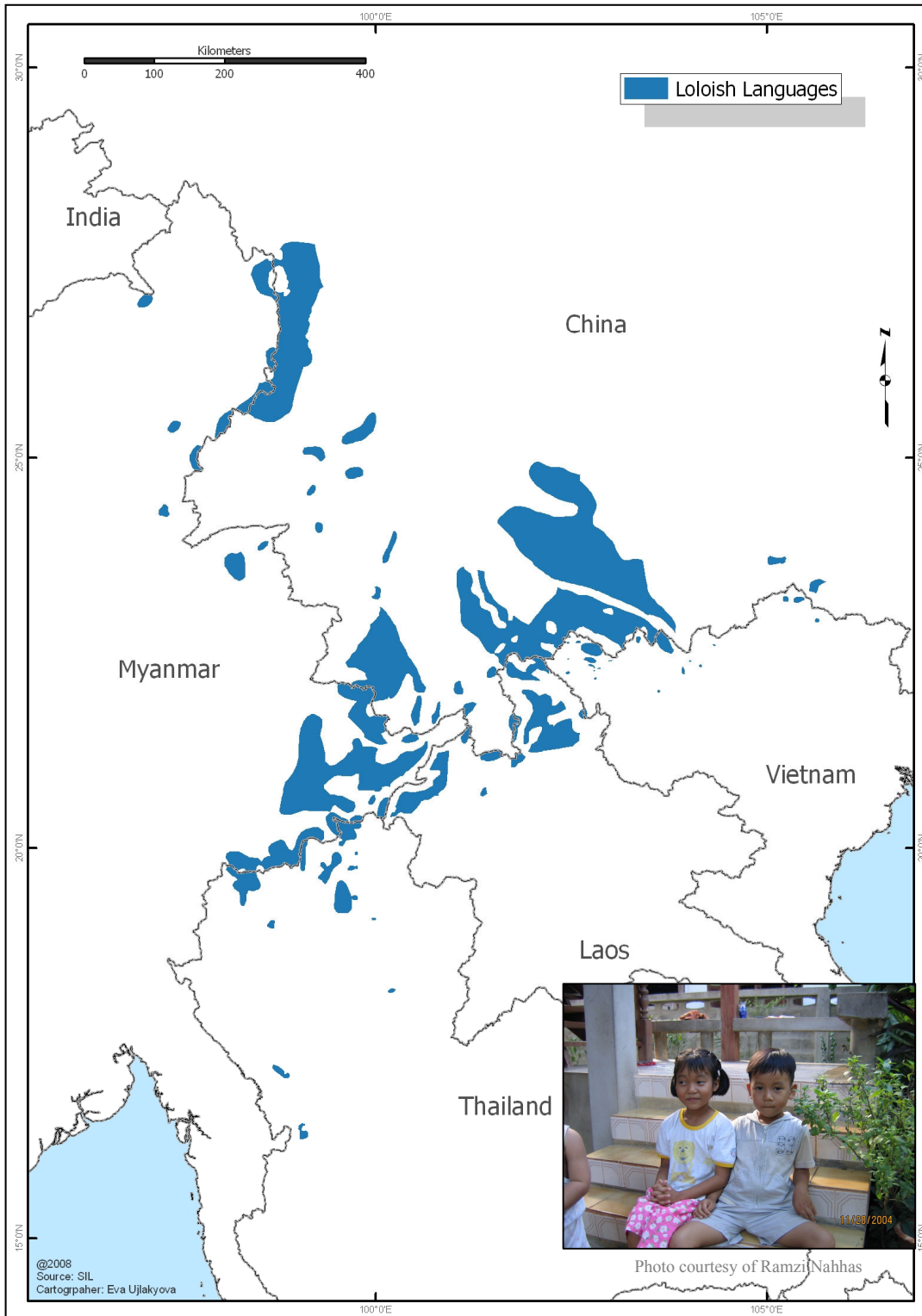
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Loloish Cluster



The fifth Sino-Tibetan group located in MSEA is Loloish. Many of the languages in the Loloish cluster are found primarily in China, but of the 57 languages, there are 20 languages with speakers located in Mainland Southeast Asia³⁰.

Demographics

Names	Called “Yi” in China, or “Ngwi”, derived from a Tibeto-Burman word meaning “silver”. Lolo is considered pejorative (Bradley), though it remains the name of the cluster.
Language family	Sino-Tibetan; Tibeto-Burman; Lolo-Burmese
Population	2,714,047 (Akha, Hani, Lahu and Lisu all have over 400,000 speakers)
Languages	57 (20 in MSEA, 8 with written forms)
Countries	Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, (China)

Loloish Languages in MSEA

Lisu	[lis] (China)
Laghuu	[lgh] (Vietnam)
Mantsi	[nty] (Vietnam)
Kaduo	[ktp] (Laos)
Akha	[ahk] (Myanmar)
Hani	[hni] (China)
Sansu	[sca] (Myanmar)
Sila	[slt] (Laos)
Lahu Shi	[kds] (Laos)
Lahu	[lhu] (China)
Mahei	[mja] (Myanmar)
Phana'	[phq] (Laos)
Bisu	[bii] (China)
Công	[cnc] (Vietnam)
Mpi	[mpz] (Thailand)
Phunoi	[pho] (Laos)
Pyen	[pyy] (Myanmar)
Ugong	[ugo] (Thailand)
Laopang	[lbg] (Myanmar)
Lopi	[lov] (Myanmar)

Discussion

The Loloish people are generally agriculturalists. Some practice animal husbandry or hunt. Their religions include polytheism, traditional religion, Buddhism and Christianity. The larger groups live at low altitude, though other groups often settle on mountain tops or ridges. They tend to have distinct costumes among each language group. According to Matisoff, “Loloish has strictly monosyllabic morphemes, few initial clusters or final consonants, often complex tone-systems, and a penchant for compounding as its chief morphological device.”

³⁰ We suspect that there are a number of other distinct Loloish languages not reflected in the current literature

Language development

Akha, Bisu, Lahu, Lahu Shi, Phunoi, Mantsi, Hani and Lisu all have written forms. Lisu has vigorous language use and strong vitality, though low literacy levels. Speakers of other languages in the area use Lisu for administration, religion, and bilingual education in schools. In Drung and Nu areas, oral and written Lisu are used for Christian activities. Lisu and Lahu are taught at Kumning Institute in China. Lahu also has vigorous language use, and higher literacy rates. Some speakers of other languages use Lahu as second language for commerce. Lahu is taught in primary schools. Akha has low literacy rates, at least in Thailand. Mpi has low language vitality and high bilingualism in Thai (Nahhas 2005). Ugong is no longer a vital language either. All the children speak Thai as first language, and only 80 adults (50's and over) use Ugong at home. Coong is only used in a few domains. It is spoken by about half the children who are ethnically Coong, but there is a mildly supportive language attitude. Mantsi has a Yi script. Hani has a Roman script. Akha, Lahu and Lisu have access to non-print media.

Potential Research Questions

- What is the status/classification of Laopang? Gordon (2005) notes that they are possibly same as Laba, a group of Lahu near Lao-Thai border.
- Is Mahei a dialect of Hani or Akha?
- What is the status of Mantsi? It is called 'Southeast Vernacular' type of Yi. Is it related to what is called Southeastern Yi or Guizhou Yi in China?
- Is Laghuu related to Laopang (Laopa) of Myanmar? (an alternate name for Laghuu is Laopa.) What is the vitality of Laghuu (300 speakers)?
- Gordon (2005) notes that Sansu may not be a separate language from Hani. What is the relationship between these two languages?
- The Phunoi dialects Black Khoany, White Khoany, Mung, Hwethom, Khaskhong may be separate languages. What is their relationship?

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North Naga Cluster

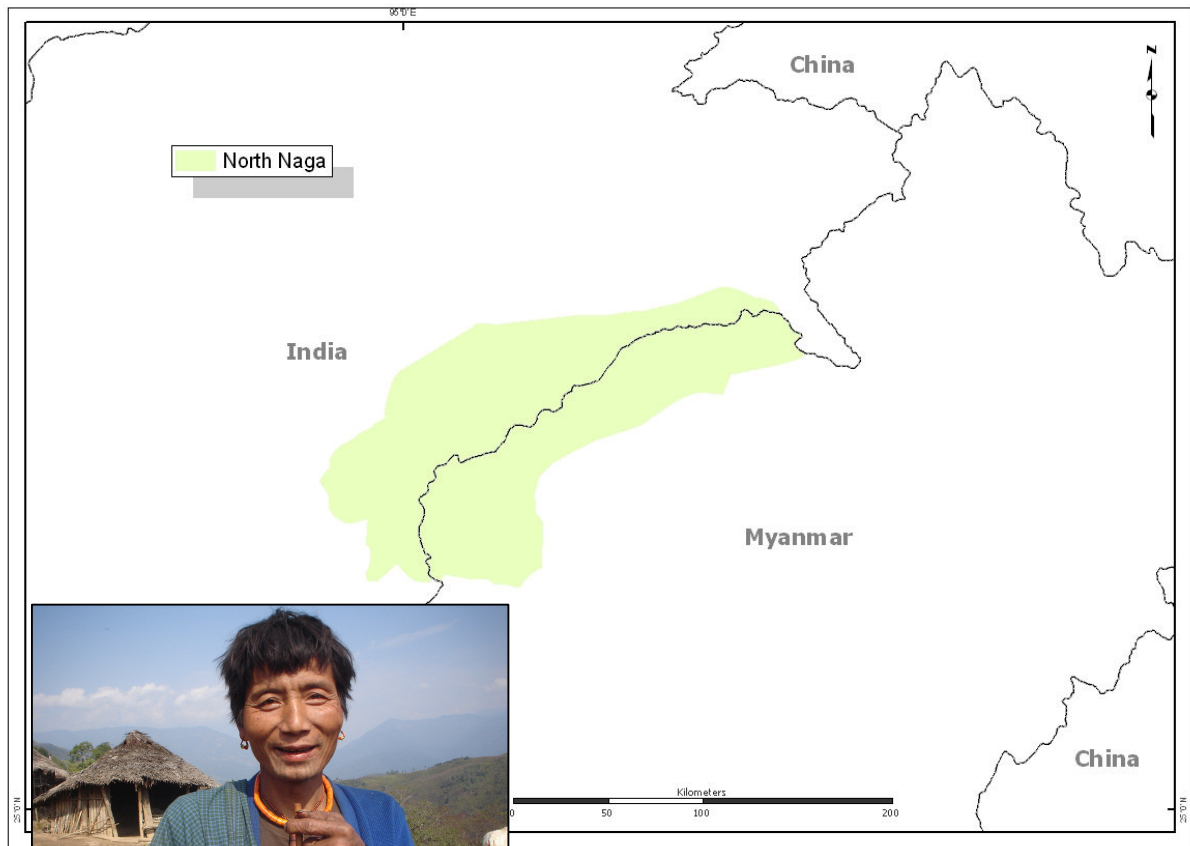


Photo courtesy of anonymous photographer

The sixth Tibeto-Burman cluster located in MSEA is North Naga. In the North Naga cluster (which Gordon terms “Konyak”) there are at least 6 languages located in Mainland Southeast Asia. Beyond the three North Naga languages listed in Gordon (2005) we include the languages Lainong (Leinong) Naga, Makyan (Macham) Naga, Law Naga³¹.

Demographics

Name

Theories of the etymology of the word “Naga” abound. Records exist even as far back as 1228 when the Assamese first came into contact with the Naga. Some claim that “Naga” is a corruption of the Assamese word “Nanga” (pronounced Noga), which means mountaineer. Another explanation of the meaning is that “Naga” means “pierced ear”, na meaning “ear” in Burmese and many Naga languages and ga meaning “pierced”. If the name came from within the people group, the most likely derivation is from “Nok”, which means “people” in some dialects (Thohe Pou 2008).

³¹ Recently, Ethnologue updates for Lainong (Leinong) Naga, Makyan Naga, and Law Naga have been sent in (Epple 2008). We suspect that there are a number of other distinct North Naga languages not reflected in the current literature.

Language family	Sino-Tibetan; Tibeto-Burman; Jingpho-Konyak-Bodo
Population	at least 241,400 ³²
Languages	at least 11 (at least 6 in MSEA, 3 with written form)
Countries	Myanmar (India)

North Naga Languages in MSEA

- Naga, Konyak [nbe] (India)
- Naga, Tase [nst] (Myanmar)
- Lainong (Leinong) Naga [XXX](Myanmar)
- Makyan Naga [XXX] (Myanmar)
- Law Naga [XXX] (Myanmar)
- Naga, Khamniungan [nky] (India)

Discussion

The Naga live in Northeast India and Myanmar. Some scholars believe they emigrated to this area from the Southeast, some believe they came from China, or even Indonesia and Malaysia, though “so far no satisfying explanation has been put forward (Saul 2005).” Present-day Naga peoples are agriculturalists. They produce their own food and clothing, and sell and trade fruit (oranges) and vegetables. The Naga are majority Christian; Buddhism and animism are also practiced in some areas.

From the end of the 19th century until recent times, all of the groups in the large geographical region between the Brahmaputra and Chindwin valleys were called Naga and often claimed that they were one group. Although they occupy a continuous stretch of hill country, these groups are not homogeneous ethnically, culturally, or linguistically. Linguistically, the North Naga languages are more closely related to languages in the Jingphoish cluster than languages in the South Naga cluster.

Language development

Konyak Naga, Naga Tase, Khamniungan Naga all have written forms³³. Lainong Naga, Makyan Naga, Khamniungan Naga, Konyak Naga (Kyan) and Tase Naga all have high language vitality. Naga Tase (also known under the names Tangsa, Tangshang, and Heimi) also has non-print media available, and other Naga Tase groups have literature on the India side. Tase Naga speakers vary by clan (at least 70) in the way they speak; some of these varieties are quite similar and some seem to be quite different.

Potential Research Questions

- Among the North Naga cluster there are huge areas of uncertainty, particularly with Tase Naga. Tase Naga is actually a large group, with approximately 73 sub-varieties living in Myanmar. Some varieties are almost identical and some varieties are quite different. It is expected that with more research, some of these varieties may be identified as unique languages as well. This grouping has many names including Northern Naga, Heimi/Haimi, and Tangshang/Tangsa. Some better known “Tase” varieties include Moshang/ Mawshang/ Mungshe, Mungre/ Morang and Chamchang.
- There is a group of varieties under the names Konyak, Kyan, and Karyaw in the far north of Myanmar near the Indian border. Are Kyan and Karyaw varieties of Konyak Naga, or a separate language(s)?

³² Population figures for Law Naga, Konyak Naga in Myanmar and Khamniungan Naga in Myanmar were not available.

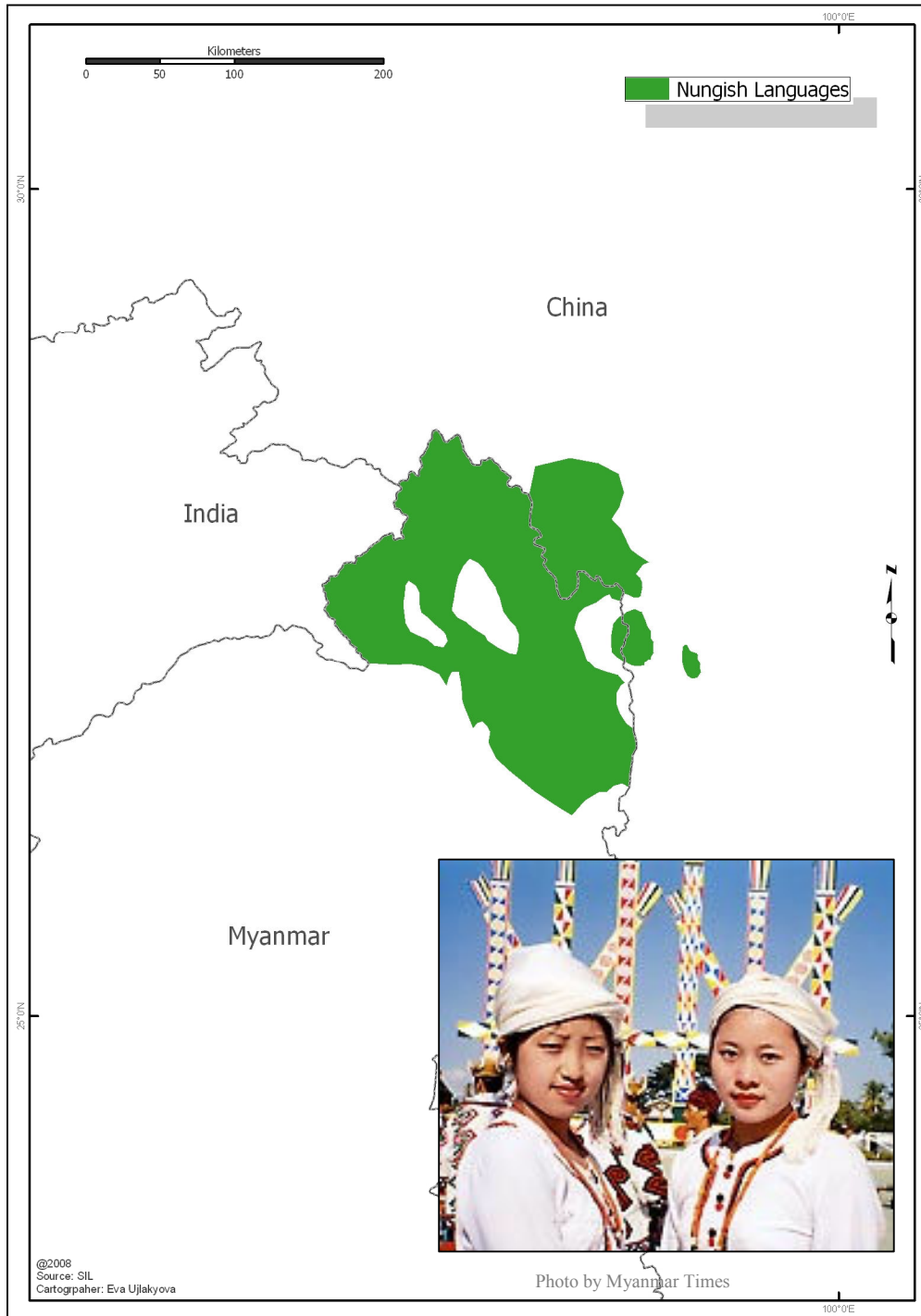
³³ Lainong Naga has an orthography, but it is not used.

- Other varieties that may be distinct languages are Gongwang/Solo and Ponyo, which Bradley (2002) lists as a variety of Khamniungan Naga.

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Nungish Cluster



The seventh Sino-Tibetan group located in MSEA is Nungish. The Nungish group includes 5 languages³⁴, 4 of which are located in MSEA.

³⁴ Although Gordon (2005) lists only 5 languages, we suspect that there are a number of other distinct Nungish languages not reflected in the current literature.

Demographics

Names	Although the cluster is called Nungish, Rawang is the largest group by far.
Language family	Sino-Tibetan; Tibeto-Burman
Population	132,600
Languages	5 (4 in MSEA, 2 with written form)
Countries	Myanmar, (China)

Nungish Languages in MSEA

Lama	[lay] (Myanmar)
Norra	[nrr] (Myanmar)
Nung	[nun] (Myanmar)
Rawang	[raw] (Myanmar)

Discussion

The Rawang are an agriculturally based mountain people. According to Morse, they are stable, peace-loving, and hospitable. They live in the beautiful and isolated regions of northern Burma. Nung-Rawang are short in stature, and are known for their crossbow hunting skills (Myanmars.net). The Nung in Myanmar are different from the Nung (Tai family) of Vietnam, Laos, and China, and from Chinese Nung (Cantonese) of Vietnam. The Nung of Myanmar are agriculturalists. They are Polytheists, Christians, or Buddhists. There is very little information about speakers of Lama and Norra.

Language development

Nung and Rawang are written. Rawang use their language in all domains. Their second language is Burmese, in which they have high literacy rates as well. The Nung have almost no monolinguals in China, though there is no report on bilingualism in Myanmar. They have an indifferent language attitude. According to Gordon (2005), the Nung in Myanmar may be the same as the Nu River Drung in China. They have a lexical similarity of 70% with Rawang. Rawang has non-print media available.

Potential Research Questions

- Lama may be a dialect of Norra. What is the relationship between these two varieties?
- Nung may be the same as the Nu River Drung in China, and therefore able to share written materials with them. Are these varieties simply alternate names of the same language, or are Nung and Nu River Drung separate languages?
- They Rawang have more than 70 dialects, at least 7 of which are not mutually intelligible (Morse). How many of these distinct Rawang “dialects” are actually languages not reflected in the current literature?

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South Naga Cluster

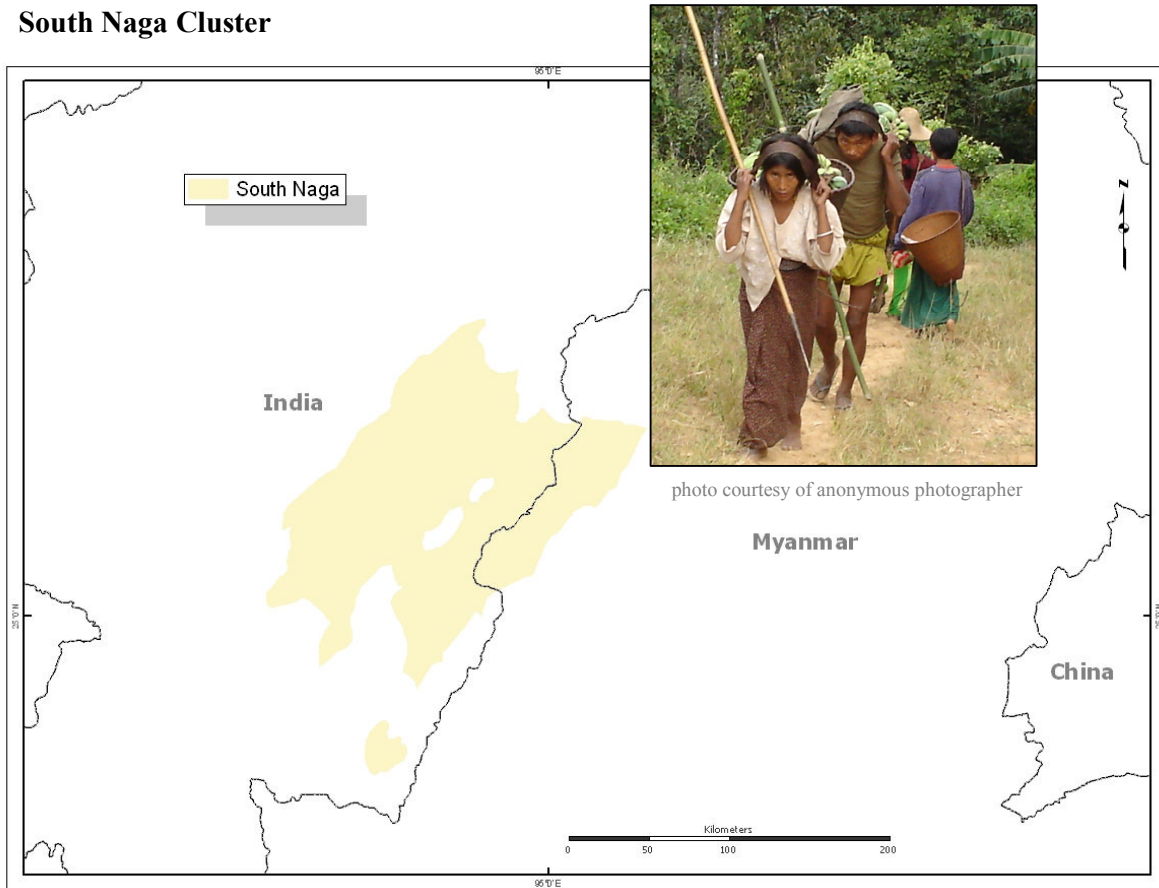


photo courtesy of anonymous photographer

The eighth Sino-Tibetan group located in MSEA is the South Naga cluster. In the South Naga cluster there are 4 languages located in Mainland Southeast Asia. These are Tangkhul Naga, Makuri Naga, Para Naga, and Longphuri Naga³⁵.

Demographics

Name

Theories of the etymology of the word “Naga” abound.
Records exist even as far back as 1228 when the Assamese first

³⁵ According to Gordon (2005), there are only 25 languages in the Naga cluster, all of which are only found in India. However, as demonstrated in Saul (2005) and other sources, there are in fact Naga languages found only in Myanmar. More of these will appear in the next edition of the Ethnologue (Epele, 2008), and we suspect that there are even more distinct Naga languages not reflected in the current literature.

came into contact with the Naga. Some claim that “Naga” is a corruption of the Assamese word “Nanga” (pronounced Noga), which means mountaineer. Another explanation of the meaning is that “Naga” means “pierced ear”, na meaning “ear” in Burmese and many Naga languages and ga meaning “pierced”. If the name came from within the people group, the most likely derivation is from “Nok”, which means “people” in some dialects (Thohe Pou).

Language family	Sino-Tibetan; Tibeto-Burman; Kuki-Chin-Naga
Population	at least 120500 ³⁶ .
Languages	28 (4 in MSEA, 3 with written form)
Countries	Myanmar (India)

Naga Languages in MSEA

- Naga, Tangkhul [[nmf](#)] ([India](#))
- Makuri Naga [XXX] ([Myanmar](#))
- Para Naga [XXX] ([Myanmar](#))
- Longphuri Naga [XXX] ([Myanmar](#))³⁷

Discussion

The Naga live in Northeast India and Myanmar. Some scholars believe they emigrated to this area from the Southeast, some believe they came from China, or even Indonesia and Malaysia, though “so far no satisfying explanation has been put forward (Saul 2005).” Present-day Naga peoples are agriculturalists. They produce their own food and clothing, and sell and trade fruit (oranges) and vegetables. The Naga are majority Christian; Buddhism and animism are also practiced in some areas.

From the end of the 19th century until recent times, all of the groups in the large geographical region between the Brahmaputra and Chindwin valleys were called Naga and often claimed that they were one group. Although they occupy a continuous stretch of hill country, these groups are not homogeneous ethnically, culturally, or linguistically. Linguistically, the South Naga languages are more closely related to languages in the Chin cluster than languages in the North Naga cluster.

The Para Naga are also known as Jejara Naga. Jejara means “the people who love and live a life of peace and tranquility”. The term “Para” is derived from the word “Parasar” which means “new village founders”, and was used to refer to anyone who wandered around and then came and settled down in Myanmar. Para Naga are primarily Christian.

The Makuri can be found living along the Chindwin River in Homalin Township, Layshi Township, southern Lahe Township, and around the foothills of Mount Sarameti. The Longphuri and Para live to south of the Para. Tangkhul speakers live further south on mountain slopes or plains in Layshi Township.

Language development

Makuri Naga, Para Naga, and Tangkhul Naga are written. All these languages have high language vitality and use a Roman script. Tangkhul is taught in primary schools in India. There is no known non-print media in Naga languages.

³⁶ Population estimates for Tangkhul Naga in Myanmar were not available.

³⁷ Longphuri Naga are also called Amimi Naga. Their language has traditionally been classified as a Makuri Naga dialect, but there is evidence that Longphuri is a distinct language from Makuri.

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Central Tai Cluster

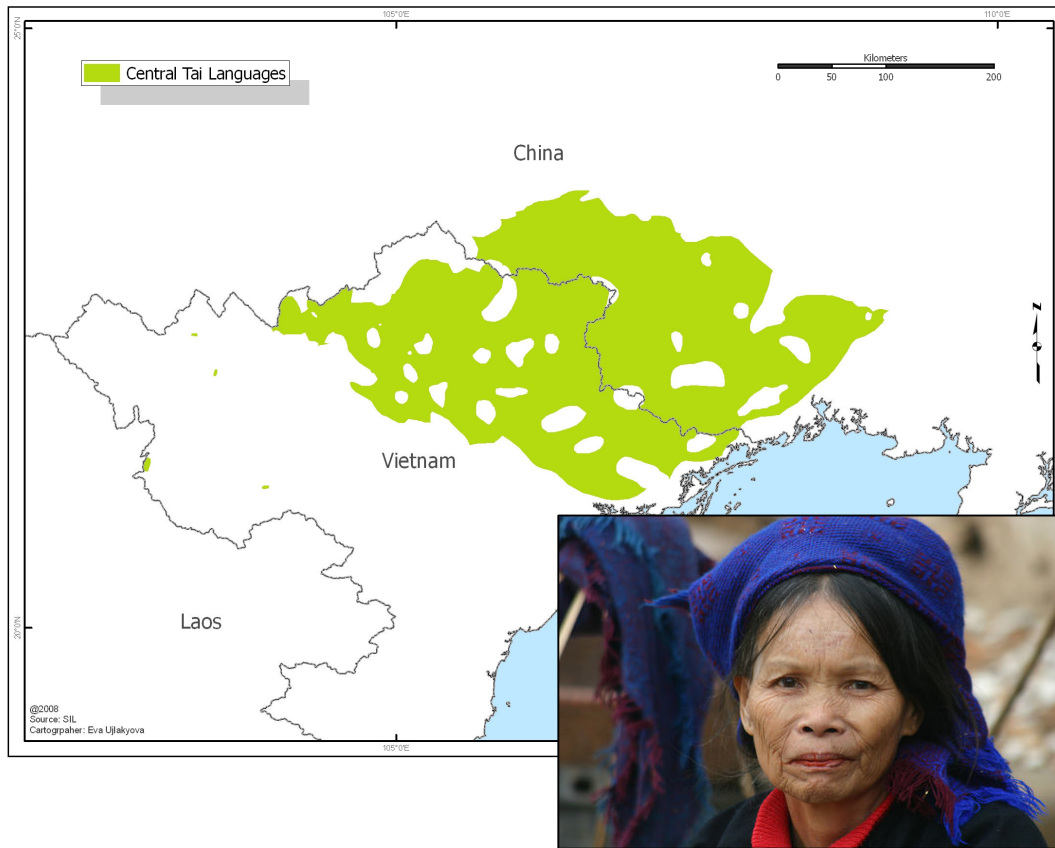


Photo courtesy of Walter Callens
<http://flickr.com/photos/waltercallens/sets/72157594502768376/>

The first Tai-Kadai group located in MSEA is Central Tai. The Central Tai cluster includes 6 languages, 4 of which are found in Vietnam.

Demographics

Names	“Man”, a term used by the Chinese for these peoples, is considered derogatory.
Language family	Tai-Kadai; Kam-Tai; Be-Tai; Tai-Sek; Tai
Population	2,643,926. Tay has almost 1.5 million. Nung has around 900,000.
Languages	6 (4 in MSEA, 2 with written form)
Countries	Vietnam, (China)

Central Tai Languages in MSEA

- Cao Lan [[mlc](#)] ([Vietnam](#))
- Nung [[nut](#)] ([Vietnam](#))
- Ts'un-Lao [[tsl](#)] ([Vietnam](#))
- Tày [[tyz](#)] ([Vietnam](#))

Discussion

San Chay is the name of the people who speak Cao Lan. Some San Chay people speak San Chi (a form of Cantonese) instead of Cao Lan. Speakers are said to have come from China in the 19th century. Their religion is animism, and ancestor worship. The Sanchay are an

agricultural people who grow rice, and fish catching plays an important role in their economic life as well (Vietnam-Culture.com).

The Nung practice agriculture and horticulture. They grow cash crops and fruit trees as well as rice. The Nung worship their ancestors, spirits, saints, Confucius, and Kwan Yin. Nung villages are often built on hillsides, with stilt houses. The Nung are known for their indigo attire (Vietnam People Groups).

The Tày people are agricultural. Tày villages are always built at the foot of a mountain and are often named after a mountain, field, or river. Each village contains about 15-20 households. Ancestor worship is a religious rite of the Tày (Vietnam People Groups).

The Tsun-Lao are primarily rice farmers (dry and wet), although gathering forest products, fishing, hunting, breeding livestock, and making handicrafts are also important activities. Tsun Lao practice Buddhism, and animism. They live in villages alongside rivers or near roads (Holmlund).

Language development

The Tày have a high degree of bilingualism and acculturation in Vietnamese. Tày and Nung are both written, but both have low literacy rates in their own language, and higher rates in Vietnamese (50% to 75%). Both languages are very similar to Southern Zhuang in China.

Potential Research Questions

- There is a report that Cao Lan may be a form of Yue Chinese. How intelligible are these two varieties?
- Strecker (1985) makes a case for Cao Lan, Ts'un-wa and Nung-an as North Tai languages (which he calls "?Yai"), explaining their Central Tai features as areal influence with "Tai-Nung". How do Strecker's "Ts'un-wa" and "Nung-an" and "Tai-Nung" relate to Gordon's "Tsun-Lao" and "Nung"? Do these languages belong to the North Tai or the Central Tai group?

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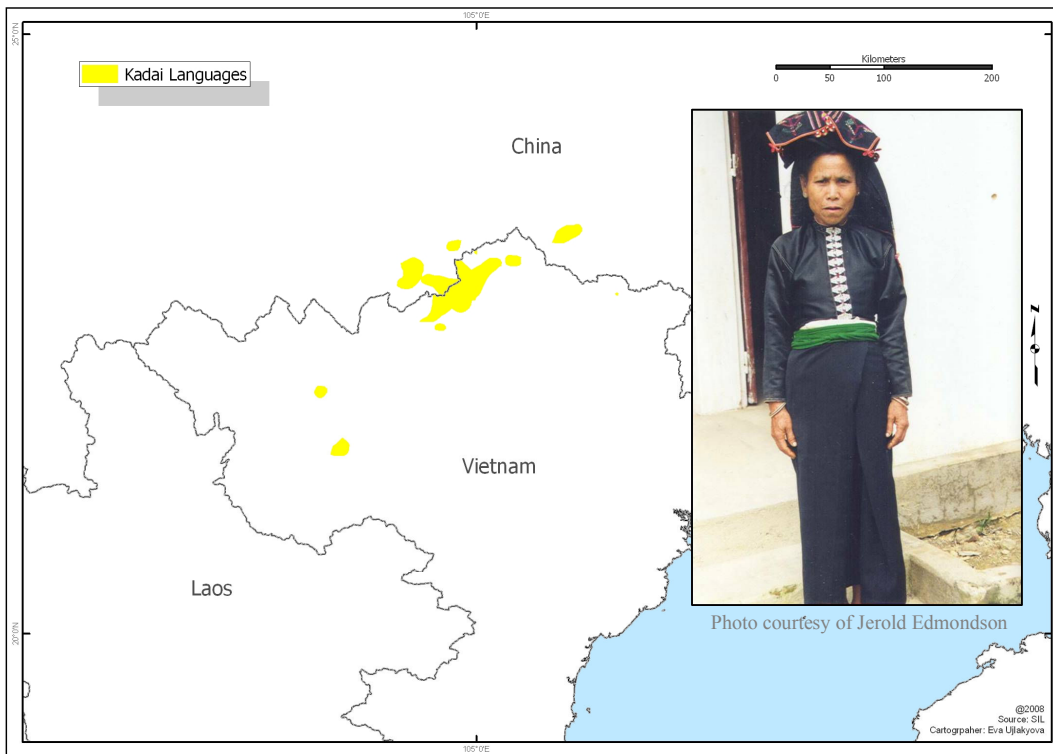
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Kadai Cluster



The second Tai-Kadai group located in MSEA is Kadai. The Kadai cluster includes the Western Kra, Southern Kra, Eastern Kra and Central Kra branches. In the Kadai cluster there are at least 7 languages³⁸, 5 of which are located in Mainland Southeast Asia. These languages are all found in Vietnam.

Demographics

Names	Kadai is also known as Kra.
Language family	Tai-Kadai
Population	17,942
Languages	at least 7 (5 in MSEA, 1 with written form)
Countries	Vietnam, (China)

Kadai Languages in MSEA

- Gelao [giq] (Vietnam)³⁹
- Lachi [lbt] (Vietnam)

³⁸ We follow the organization of Edmondson (2008) instead of Gordon (2005).

³⁹ According to Edmondson (2008), due to settlement in multi-ethnic situations, the Gelao speakers of one village are often unable to understand the Gelao speakers of a nearby village. He notes that Ostapirat gives three branches of Gelao which have significant differences, and may be classified as separate languages.

En [enc] (Vietnam)
Qabiao [laq] (Vietnam)
Laha [lha] (Vietnam)

Discussion

Kadai languages are spoken in China and Vietnam. The people are agriculturalists; they plant wet and dry rice and practice animal husbandry. There are few Christians. They primarily practice traditional religion and polytheism.

Language development

All Kadai (Kra) languages are tonal. Lachi is the only written language. Lachi speakers also speak Zhuang, Miao, and Chinese. There is no non-print media available in these languages. Red Gelao and White Gelao are nearly extinct, with only a few speakers left, and many speakers of Green Gelao (population 300) are shifting to Hmong, Tay, or Chinese. En (also called Nung Ven) has only 200 known speakers. Qabiao, also called Pubiao, has about 300 speakers in China and 300 in Vietnam. In China, nearly 30% of the younger generation speak Qabiao, though generally everyone can also speak some Southwestern Mandarin, Southern Zhuang or Hmong. Laha young people (under 50) seldom speak Laha. They live together with the Thái and Khmu, and they speak Thái and dress like the Tai Dam.

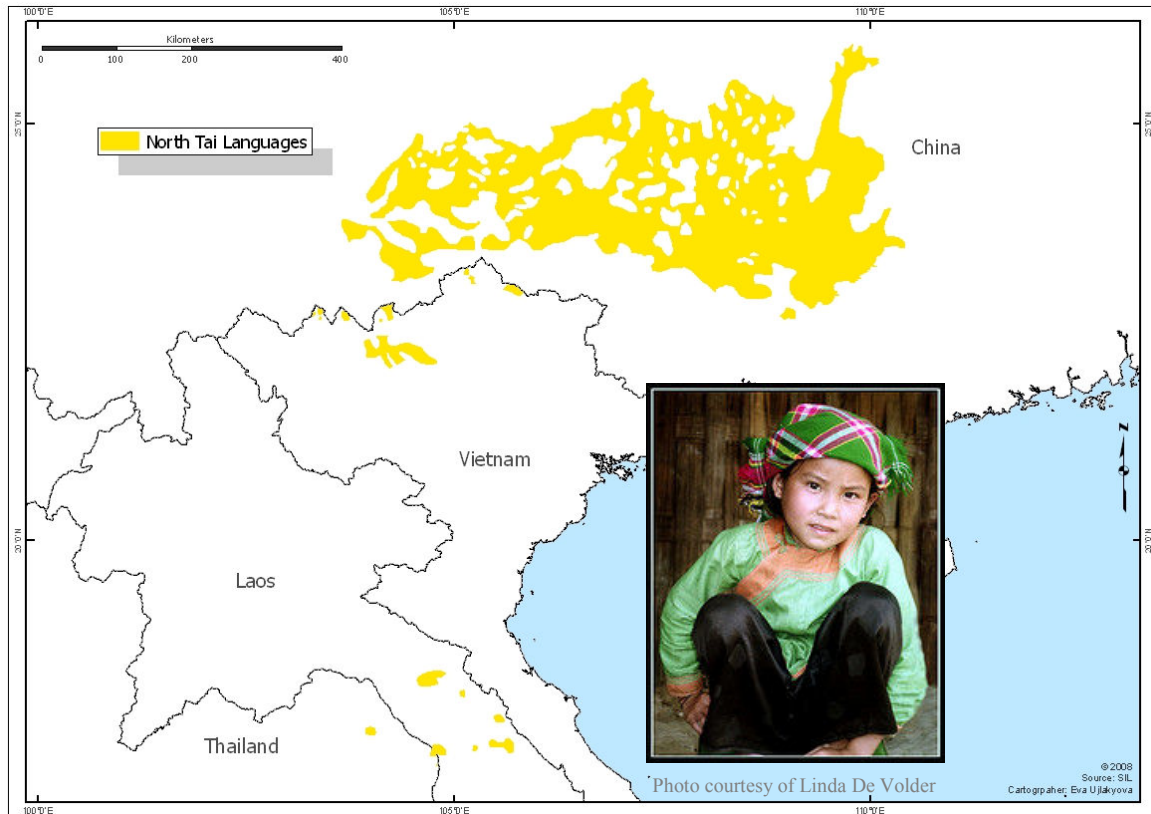
Potential Research Questions

- What is the level of vitality of the languages En and Laha?

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North Tai Cluster



The third Tai-Kadai group located in MSEA is North Tai. The North Tai cluster includes 14 languages⁴⁰, 4 of which have speakers located in MSEA.

Demographics

Names	The Bouyei of China are called Giay or Nhang in Vietnam
Language family	Tai-Kadai; Kam-Tai; Tai
Population	2,087,400
Languages	14 (4 with speakers in MSEA, 1 with written form)
Countries	Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, (China)

North Tai Languages in MSEA

Bouyei	[pcc] (China)
Tai Mène	[tmp] (Laos)
Saek	[skb] (Laos) ⁴¹
Yoy	[yoy] (Thailand)

Discussion

The Bouyei/Giay/Nhang people are primarily farmers and cattle breeders, and also raise horses. Generally, they live on mountain slopes in houses built on stilts. They practice ethnic

⁴⁰ The ethnologue 16th edition splits Northern Zuang into 10 languages, so that the number of languages in North Tai increases from the 4 languages listed in Gordon (2005).

⁴¹ Although Gordon classifies Saek in it's own cluster, Saek belongs to the North Tai linguistic cluster. According to Li (1960), the differences between Saek and the other North Tai languages are due to the language preserving archaic features that the other North Tai languages have lost. Gedney (1970) concurs with this analysis as do Edmondson and Solnit (1997).

religion, though more are being influenced by Buddhism (Chazee). The Tai Mene and Yoy also build houses on stilts and are primarily rice farmers, though they also raise animals. The Tai Mene are pure animists, and the Yoy are Buddhist (Schliesinger). There is some question as to the ethnic origin of the Yoy. The Saek people originally come from Vietnam. Those in Laos have begun to assimilate with the Lao and So people. They follow a traditional religion in Lao. The Saek people in Thailand are primarily Buddhist.

Language development

Bouyei has a Roman script in China, and access to non-print media as well. Yoy speakers also use Northeastern Tai in Thailand, and Lao in Laos. Yoy may be the same as Tai Yo of Khamouan Province of Laos, a Northern Tai language. Tai Mene speak their mother tongue in their homes, but speak Lao with outsiders. According to Schliesinger, the Mene vocabulary has been influenced heavily by outside languages (including Lao). Almost no one speaks the “original” language anymore. Saek speakers also use Lao, though the level of their bilingualism is not known.

Potential Research Questions

- What is the relationship between Yoy and “Tai Yo”. Gordon (2005) notes “there are reports that [Yoy] may be the same as “Tai Yo” of Khamouan Province, a Northern Tai language⁴². What is the relationship between Yoy and Tay Yo (Tay Do)?
- Strecker (1985) makes a case for Cao Lan, Ts’un-wa and Nung-an as North Tai languages (which he calls “?Yai”), explaining their Central Tai features as areal influence with “Tai-Nung”. Are these languages North Tai or Central Tai?

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⁴² Gordon (2005) lists Tay Yo as an alternate name for Tay Do, a Tai language, but not within any linguistic cluster. (“Do” is pronounced “Yo” in Vietnam). Other information about Tay Yo includes http://en.etnopedia.org/wiki/index.php/Tay_Jo about Tay Jo Language in VN: “Within the classification of Tay in Vietnam is a small, distinct language called Tai Jo (or rather Tai Do)? This is probably the same language as Tai Yo spoken in Khamouan Province, Laos. Other distinct languages among the Tay includes the several hundred speakers of Thu Lao, and Padi.”

Chamberlain writes, “Yooy is the tentative linguistic identity of the residents of Ban Khone Kène, but in fact the people of this village appear to be the descendants of Phong men who married Yoy women as described by Fraisse (cited above), and since descent is reckoned through the male line, the people of Khone Kène relate that they came originally from Ban Tong (on the Nam Noy in the NBCA), a Phong village, and that they resided for some time at Ban Malua (the abandoned Ban Maloi on the maps) before moving to Khone Kène, already said by Fraisse to be a Yooy village in 1944.” (Chamberlain 1996)

Finally, Chamberlain presented a paper on Tai Mene during ICSTLL 24 (1991). He says he thinks the “Yo” (an ethnonym he’s heard from a Tai Mene speaker and apparently others) live south of the Red River, and are mentioned by Fraisse (in 1949) as living in Khamouan, in the same village as some Saek speakers “as if theirs was the first migration out of Nghe An”. Schliesinger also gives data on “Tai Yor”, also known as “Yo.”

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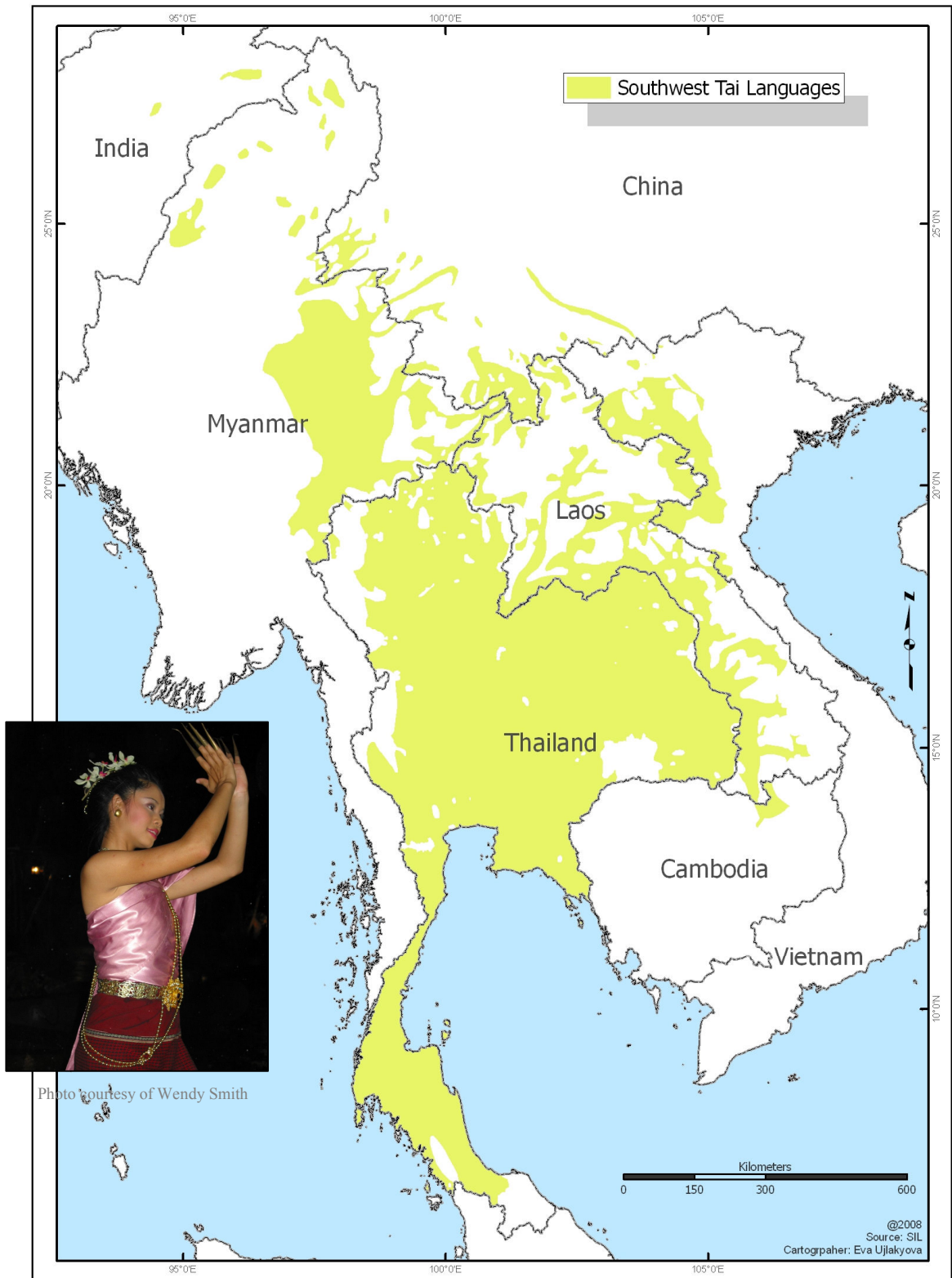
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Southwest Tai Cluster



The fourth Tai-Kadai group located in MSEA is Southwest Tai. In the Southwest Tai cluster there are 32 languages, 26 which are located in Mainland Southeast Asia. The Southwest Tai cluster includes Thai, the national language of Thailand, and Lao, the national language of Laos.

Demographics

Language family	Tai-Kadai; Kam-Tai ; Be-Tai ; Tai-Sek ; Tai ; Southwestern
Population	56,125,665. No information for Tày Tac or Pu Ko. Thai > 20 million (M); Northern Thai > 6M; Southern Thai > 5M; Northeast Thai > 15M; Lao > 3M; Khun over 100,000; Lu > 600,000; Phu Thai about 500,000; Tai Don > 490,000; Phuan > 200,000; Shan > 3M; Tai Daeng > 100,000; Tai Dam > 700,000; Tai Nua > 300,000
Languages	32 (26 in MSEA, 13 with written form)
Countries	Vietnam, Thailand, Laos, China, Myanmar, Cambodia

Southwest Tai Languages in MSEA

Tai Dam	[blt] (Vietnam)
Thai, Northern	[nod] (Thailand)
Phuan	[phu] (Thailand)
Thai Song	[soa] (Thailand)
Thai	[tha] (Thailand)
Tai Hang Tong	[thc] (Vietnam)
Tai Dón	[twh] (Vietnam)
Thu Lao	[tyl] (Vietnam)
Tai Daeng	[tyr] (Vietnam)
Tày Tac	[tyt] (Vietnam)
Lao	[lao] (Laos)
Nyaw	[nyw] (Thailand)
Phu Thai	[pht] (Thailand)
Thai, Northeastern	[tts] (Thailand)
Lü	[khh] (China)
Khamti	[kht] (Myanmar)
Khün	[kkh] (Myanmar)
Shan	[shn] (Myanmar)
Tai Nüa	[tdd] (China)
Thai, Southern	[sou] (Thailand)
Yong	[yno] (Thailand)
Pa Di	[pdi] (China)
Pu Ko	[puk] (Laos)
Tai Long	[thi] (Laos)
Tai Thanh	[tmm] (Vietnam)
Tày Sa Pa	[tys] (Vietnam)

Discussion

Southwestern Tai speakers come from all economic levels and walks of life. The larger groups have both city and rural dwellers, and the smaller groups tend to be found in more traditionally rural settings. Southwest Tai people tend to be Buddhist, though some groups

follow traditional religions. The exception is Southern Thai, as some of the speakers are Muslim.

Language development

Khamti, Lao, Lu, Sahn, Tai Dam, Tai Don, Tai Nua, Thai, Northeastern Thai, Northern Thai, Southern Thai, Phu Thai, and Thai Song all have a written form. Non-print media is available in Lao, Lu, Shan, Thai, Northeastern Thai, and Northern Thai.

Because a few of the Southwest Tai languages are the languages of wider communication in their regions, and for (Central) Thai and Lao, the national languages of the country, the literacy rates and language vitality of these languages tend to be fairly high. The smaller languages with a written script still tend to have low literacy rates in their own tongues, but some have higher rates in their second language. For example, Tai Dam (a “smaller” language of over 700,000) has low literacy rates for their own language, though literacy rates range from 50% -75% in Vietnamese.

Although educated Northern Thai speakers can use Central Thai, they generally use Northern Thai (the language of wider communication in North Thailand) in the home. Rural or uneducated Northern Thai speakers have limited proficiency in Central Thai. Northern Thai has had a Yuan script for a long time, in which are written Buddhist sermons, inscriptions, and the Bible, but few can read it. Thai script has been used for literature in Northern Thai also, although it lacks some necessary contrasts. Northeastern Thai has a Thai script. Muslim Tai ('Thai Malay') speak only Southern Thai, though most Southern Thai speakers read Central Thai.

Phuan has vigorous language use, and the people have a strong sense of identity. “Phuan” is also the name used for Lao speakers in Thailand. The Lao literacy rate is between 30% - 60%. Lao has influenced the speech of some Tai Dón speakers. The Tai Dón have a distinctive writing system and strong ethnic pride, but Tai Dón speakers who have had prolonged contact with Tai Dam have become bilingual in it. Nyaw speakers and Phu Thai speakers also use Northeastern Thai (Isan). Phu Thai speakers have a literacy rate below 1% in their own language, but a rate of 75% to 100% in their “second language”. Lü speakers use Lü in all private domains and by all ages, but Central Thai is used in schools and on the radio, and Northern Thai is the language used in town for trade, employment, and with Northern Thai speakers. Lü speakers understand very little Central Thai. Lü has an old Lü script.

Shan has a script, though Tai Mao (Northern Shan) has its own script. Southern Shan is written with a Burmese-like script which does not distinguish tone or some vowels. Khamti speakers also use Burmese or Jingpho. They have a Lik-Tai script which resembles a Mon script in India. Phake speakers also use Assamese. Tai language is taught to children in village schools, and Phake has a Tai script. Lanna and Khun spoken dialects are considered close by their speakers. Khun has a script close to that of the Lanna. Tai Nua has a Liek script.

Potential Research Questions

- The Korat dialect of Isan (NE Thai) is quite different. Is it a separate language from Isan?
- The language Tai Long may be the same as Mao (Tai-Long, Tai-Mao, Maw, Mau) (Northern Shan) on the Burma-Yunnan border. What is the relationship of Tai Long to Mao?

- What is the lineage of Yong (an unclassified language)?
- Pu Ko only has two villages, Thu Lao has a population of 200 and Tai Sa Pa has a population of 300. What is the vitality of these languages?

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