MÈNE : A TAI DIALECT ORIGINALLY SPOKEN IN NGHÈ AN (NGHÈ TINH), VIỆTNAM

Preliminary Linguistic Observations and Historical Implications

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Introduction

For many years now I have been intrigued by the considerable diversity of the Tai dialects spoken in Khammouan province in Laos and in neighboring locations. This interest stems from 1974 when I happened to meet a number of Tai speakers from Khammouan living in a refugee camp at Pak Sap in Vientiane Province. Among the languages found in this camp was a dialect called Mène /men/ originating from Khăm Keut District, in the villages of Tharn Bing and Chom Thong. Of particular interest were several lexical items normally associated with languages of the Northern Branch of the Tai ethnolinguistic family that are found much further north in the provinces of Guizhou and Guangxi in southeastern China. There is another language with Northern Branch affinities spoken in Khammouan, Saek, which Gedney (1989 : 373) has suggested may have split away from the Tai mainstream prior to the period normally associated with Proto-Tai.

After a brief tantalizing contact I was unable to work further on any of these languages and finally, in 1984, what little I knew of the area was included in a paper written for the journal entitled Science of Language published at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, hoping at least to stimulate interest in this little-known and unstudied area, noting in particular that many of the speakers traced their ancestral homeland to Nghè An Province in Vietnam. Then, in March of 1990, in the Na Pho refugee camp in Nakhon Phanom Province, Thailand, I discovered another speaker of the Mène dialect, Mrs. Viengthong Tharnnavong. My work with her has convinced me, while taking into consideration the risks involved in presenting a linguistic description based on evidence from a single speaker, that this language is important enough in the study of comparative Tai to venture making available a preliminary analysis with the hope that in the near future more of the Tai languages from Khammouan and Nghè An will become accessible.

To comprehend something of the linguistic and cultural environment in which she was brought up, a few biographical details will be useful. Born in 1945 in the village of Ban Sop Vieng, near the old LS 28 airstrip at Ban Done, the point where the three provinces of Xieng Khwang, Borikhan and Khammouan intersect, Viengthong was the youngest of five children born to Tou/tuu/ and Khén/Khen/ of the Vy/vi/ lineage. This was a Tai Moey/mëy C1/village in which her parents were the only Mène speakers. They had come from Nghè An when her eldest brother, estimated to be 10 years older than Viengthong, was one month old, that is in 1935 or 1936. She also recalls that they came with two other Mène families who settled at Chom Thong and Ban Done. Mrs. Viengthong’s father, Tou Vy, was formerly a sub-district headman with the title of Quan /kwaan/ <'mandarin'. He adopted the Lao surname of Manivong. In the meantime one of the villages formerly under his jurisdiction had moved nearby to the village of Khang Vieng, next to the Special Guerrilla Unit (SGU) base at Muang Mok, Xieng Khwang Province. These villagers, in need of leadership, asked Quan Tou to move there as a respected elder. Even after they moved, however, Viengthong returned frequently to her birthplace, a journey of two days, in order to pursue her weaving, a lifelong interest which she still maintains.

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In 1968 Viengthong married a Hmong man named Ka Nao Vang, a Sergeant in the SGU who took the Lao name of Inpanh Xagnavong. He was assigned to Groupement Mobile (GM) 25 under the famous Hmong commander Colonel Chong Koua Vue. They had two children together. But shortly thereafter tragedy struck. In the dry season of 1970 North Vietnamese regulars launched a massive attack on Muang Mok. Viengthong and most of the young people were taken Vietnamese regulars launched a massive attack on Muang Mok. Both were killed. The survivors were taken to another base at Nao Yang, a region of Borikhanh province. Then the entire populace followed a fiery resistance leader, former BV commander Yang Kai Vue, who took them to live at a mountain stronghold in the vicinity of Xieng My-Xieng Phou. This position was attacked in 1973 and her husband was killed in that battle. The base was subsequently retaken by government forces and Viengthong continued to live here until the communists gained control of the government in 1975.

Viengthong remarried that year to an ethnic Tai Kang man, Tha Thammavong from the Xieng Khe - Nam Phoi region of Borikhanh province. Then the entire populace followed a fiery resistance leader, former BV 205 battalion commander Vang Kai Vue, who took them to live at a mountain stronghold in the Phou Ma Thao chain. They lived here under intense hardship for three years before deciding to escape to Thailand in 1978.

In addition to her own dialect, Mrs. Viengthong has been exposed to many others, Tai Meuy and Tai Kang among them. The base at Nam Heo contained mostly soldiers' families from many areas, and next to Muang Mok was a refugee village called Ban Tong. At the latter she met speakers of Tai Pao (/paaw4/) and during the course of the present study she was frequently able to provide a Pao form in addition to the Mènê. Tai Pao contains many of the Northern Branch features as well.

Mrs. Viengthong's father, the son of Mr. Lon Thou Vy, was a teacher who grew up in the village of Ban Pao Kam (/paaw4 kam4/ 'golden foam') in the vicinity of Xieng My-Xieng Mènê, apparently located on or near the Cha Haa river. She believes that the two towns are near to one another but not adjacent, deduced from a childhood recollection of overhearing her father describing the location to someone else, so the geography is far from clear. According to a map in Vol. III of the Mission Pavoie (1902) detailing routes in the Song Ca valley, Xieng Mènê and Xiang Mi are located on the "Suong" River, which is referred to as the "Con" on other maps, a tributary of the Song Ca to the north. The mouth of this tributary is located slightly downstream from Con Cuông. In the north this same river passes through Quy Chau, an area which is discussed below. Unfortunately none of the later maps have these place names listed. Con Cuông (she recalls her father mentioning this name as well — he pronounced it /kon kuan/) —is on the Sông Ca river (also known as the Lăm Giang,2 called Nam Neun in Tai). One serious problem with the maps is that so many important towns and rivers have two names and sometimes more, Tai, Vietnamese and in this location even Muang, which leads to considerable confusion. The coordinates for the Cha Haa stream are 19 03 N by 104 35 E. Another name cited by Viengthong was the Phou Louang mountain range, the crest of which marks the boundary between Laos and Vietnam just southwest of Con Cuông.

A few lexical items cited by Robequain (1929) in his monograph on Thanh Hoa Province provide a basis for suggesting that the Mènê or closely related languages may have at one time been located in the district of Thuơ'ng Xuân in that province. He notes the existence of a Tai-speaking population called 'Yo' who are considered by all the others as the original inhabitants and whose language is the most divergent. It is also mentioned that they have a writing system that reads from top to bottom and right to left, exactly like the sample given in Finot (1917) from Qui-châu. He records, for example, "fii" for 'fire' [Mènê /fii4/], and "pay et nhay" for 'to go play' [Mènê /pæat ? ee ɲaay4/]. These 'Yo,' he states, also inhabit the neighboring district of Qui-châu in Nghe An. Phu Qui or Qui-châu is approximately 70 kilometers due north of the Xieng My - Xieng Mènê area so any movement or splitting away would be entirely feasible. It is also worth noting here that speakers of the closely related Tai Pao (paaw4 <baaw A) dialect say they came originally from Phou Teuang /phuə tiaŋ/, which refers to the district of Tuơ'ng-duơ'ng northwest of Con Cuông apparently under the administration of Qui-châu. Dang (1974: 23-4), notes that the old name of Phu Turo'ng Duơ'ng is Muang Pao, and that the section of the Song Ca river between Cu'a Rào and Dơ Lơ'ng is also called the Nam Pao. Phu Tuơ'ng-duơ'ng is the location of yet another unusual form of Tai alphabet shown in Finot's Plate I, labeled simply 'Sông Ca.'

The term 'Yo' has come to be applied to Tai dialects in various regions, linguistically quite distinct from one another but obviously originating from a common ethnonym. One characteristic of the Nyo speakers moved into Kham Keut District of Khammouan, especially the area of Soph Tong and Nam Panh, just northwest of Na Pê. Here within a small radius of 20-30 kilometers are Austroasiatic groups with names like Liha, Phong (/phɔŋ/, Toum and Aoye (/tɒ-yɒe/), still unknown to us, as well as Maleng and Thaveung. There are numerous villages of Saek at Nam Hoy, Na Thone, and Na Kadok and an adjacent So Alang village at Na Pong (both terms, Saek and So, begin with the consonant cluster /thr-/ which has been Laoized to /s/); Nyo at Khammouan, Tha Veng and Phiat Xay; Pouak at Khoua Pen, Na Muang, Na Sao, Na Hang, Na Khe /khe/, Na Liang and Na Chia; Theng (who are said to have their own writing system) at Na Pê and Na Phong; Phou Thay at Xam Tuy, Na Feuang, Na Houa, Na Hao, Na Hat, and Na Salôm (the Austroasiatic Thaveung who live nearby refer to the Phou Thay as 'Vang' /vaŋ/ coinciding with the
Phou Thay myth of Muang Vang as their place of origin); and the Thay Bo /bɔː/ at Na Pet, Na Nang, and Thong Khe /kʰɛʔ/. The distance from the Saek villages in the vicinity of Na Pè to Xieng Mène is approximately 90 kilometers. According to local lore the Saek and the Mène are both associated with goldsmithing and mining. And in correlation with this we note the existence of a gold mine at Qui Chau on a 1893 map done by Lemire provided by Archaimbault (1967) in his study of the history of Xieng Khwang. Mrs. Viengthong recalls that the Cha Haa River is also famous for its gold.

Likewise in the vicinity of Na Pè, Fraisse (1949) notes there is a village of 'Thou Ngɛng' (as if they are Austroasiatic) who build their houses on poles, weave in the house rather than under, where the women lacquer their teeth and smoke pipes, and who celebrate the Annamese Têt, but who speak a Tai language. Some of the forms he cites have obvious Mène cognates:

1. what? a le tê, Mène: /taaa-lêë/ cia³ - tua³/
2. plank tat, Mène: /taat³/ 'split bamboo flooring'
3. cooking pot bien, Mène: /bIan³/ 'pot for steaming rice'

This is not to imply that Saek and Mène are closely similar; they are phonologically very distinct. However, I believe it is most probable that they, along with the Pao and Robequain’s Yo’ (hecarther NyoR) and Du’ o’i, represent a distinct population of Tai speakers who resided south of the Red River. This situation is reminiscent of Nung-an and Cao-Kwangsi and Kweichou. They are said by Robequain (1929) to have been chased out of Thanh Hoa long ago by the Tais (he regarded the Du’o’i as Khas as if they were related to the Ayoy mentioned above), but we later find them described by Fraisse (1949) in Khammouan, living together in the same villages as Saeks in Ban Sang and Kham Hè along Route 12 between Gnommarath and the Mu Gia Pass, one mountain range to the south of the Na Pè area, as if theirs was the first migration south out of Nghè An. The historical plausibility of this suggestion will be discussed later, but it should be clear by this time that characterizations of Saek as "out-of-place" geographically are based on inadequate information.

The Mène Language

Efforts to place Mène in one or the other of the traditional Tai subgroups proves difficult. The vocabulary has obviously been heavily influenced by surrounding Tai languages of the Southwestern P Group and by Lao. This, however, may have taken place relatively recently since Mrs. Viengthong recalls that when her parents were speaking to each other she often did not understand all of what they said. Of the non-Southwestern items found on the list below, a few seem to agree with the Central Branch, such as /tak³/ 'to break' or /lap³/ 'to receive,' but in by far the greater number of cases, Mène aligns itself with the Northern Branch, as in /lik³/ 'child,' /kɛʔ e t³/ 'hurt,' or /hiat²/ 'waist.' What we can say for certain is that Mène possesses a number of forms which do not agree with Southwestern Tai languages such as those in the following list:

TABLE I: NON-SOUTHWESTERN MENE FORMS

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<tr>
<th>MENE:</th>
<th>CENTRAL:</th>
<th>NORTHERN:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>asleep</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>kart 6</td>
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<tr>
<td>SOUTHWESTERN: Lao: dat DS3</td>
<td>SI: dat 2</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>CENTRAL: LM: mjt 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>NORTHERN: Saek: de t, ble t 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>break (a stick, etc.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>tak 6</td>
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<tr>
<td>SOUTHWESTERN: Lao: hak DS1</td>
<td>SI: hak 2</td>
<td>WT: hak 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>CENTRAL: LP: tak 2</td>
<td>LM: tak 3</td>
<td>WN: thak 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NORTHERN: YAY: rak 3</td>
<td>SK: rak 4</td>
<td>WM: rak 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>cane, walking stick</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>tuu 5</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>SOUTHWESTERN: Lao: thaw C4</td>
<td>SI: thaw 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>CENTRAL: LC: tau C4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>child</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>lik 7</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>SOUTHWESTERN: Lao: luuk DL4</td>
<td>SI: luuk 3</td>
<td>WT: lu 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>CENTRAL: LP: lok 5</td>
<td>LM: lok 5</td>
<td>WN: luk 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NORTHERN: YAY: lik 1</td>
<td>SK: lik 6</td>
<td>WM: lik 6</td>
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<tr>
<td>crosswise, disorderly, intersection</td>
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<tr>
<td>kway 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>SOUTHWESTERN: SI: khway 2</td>
<td>WT: xway</td>
<td>SN: khway 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CENTRAL: Tay: khoay (B1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>NORTHERN: Dioi: (piak-) kouai (B1)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dig</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kut 6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOUTHWESTERN: Lao: khut DS1</td>
<td>SI: khut 2</td>
<td>WT: khut 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CENTRAL: LP: hot 5</td>
<td>LM: khot 4</td>
<td>WN: khut 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NORTHERN: YAY: hut/kut 1</td>
<td>SK: khut 6</td>
<td>Dioi: kout 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DS4; hut DS4 < *-t-
PT* x-/t/-gut D

dirty
MÈNE: hèk 7
Sui: pjek 7; Hli: rek 7
dregs in wine
MÈNE: tèk 6 (the full expression is: khii 3 ka? tèk 6)
CENTRAL: LP: dêh 5; LM: nûi 2; LC: dîi 5;
NORTHERN: WM: têk 6

fan
MÈNE: pii 4
SOUTHWESTERN: LAO: vii A4; SI: wii 1; WT: vi 4
CENTRAL: LP: vii 4; LM: vei 4; WN: vii 4; LC: vii 2
NORTHERN: YAY: vi 4; SK: phièi 4; WM: poi 2
PT* v-/b- A

fire
MÈNE: fii 4
SOUTHWESTERN: LAO: fay A4; SI: fay 4; WT: fay 4
CENTRAL: LP: fay 4; LM: fay 4; WN: fay 4; LC: fay 2
NORTHERN: YAY: fi 4; SK: fii 4; WM: fay 2
PT* vay A

hurt
MÈNE: keèt 2
NORTHERN: SK: keet 5
Sui: cit 7
great grandchild
MÈNE: len 4/lin 3
SOUTHWESTERN: LAO: leen A1; SI: leen 5; WT: lin 1
CENTRAL: LP: lin 3; LM: lin 3; WN: lan 3; Nung: len C1
NORTHERN: YAY: leen 1/2; Diao: lan C1
PT* hi- A/C

joint, knuckles
MÈNE: kōc 2
SOUTHWESTERN: LAO: khoè C1; WT: xo C1
CENTRAL: Nung: khoè C1; Tay: khoè C1
NORTHERN: WM: xo B4; Diao: ho B4
PT* x/-t/- C/B

knife
MÈNE: mit 7
SOUTHWESTERN: LAO: miit DL2; SI: miit 3; WT: mit 4
CENTRAL: LM: miit 5; WN: miit 5
NORTHERN: YAY: mit 1; WM: mit 6;
PT* m- D

lock; key
MÈNE: khwaa 3
CENTRAL: LP: laa 3; LM: saa 3; WN: saa 3; LC: laa 3
Viet. khoà
[Note: an identical correspondance involving the same
Central language reflexes is found in the form 'right
(hand),' Mène: khwaa'.]

male; young male
MÈNE: têk 6 'male'
SOUTHWESTERN: LAO: thèk DS1; SI: thùk 2; WT: thèk 2
CENTRAL: LP: thèk 4; LM: têk 3; WN: thèk 6;
LC: têk 2
NORTHERN: YAY: tak 1; SK: thak 6; WM: tak 6
PT* th- D

mosquito net
MÈNE: liip 2 'an empty cover, empty sack'
NORTHERN: WM: riap; Diao: thiep; Po-ai: liip DL1
Hsi-lin: òiap; Ch'ian-chiang: òiip
PT* hr- D

open, to
MÈNE: hoy 1/4, khay 4
SOUTHWESTERN: LAO: khay A1; SI: khay 5; WT: khay 1
CENTRAL: LP: khay 1; LM: khay 1; WN: khay 1; LC: khay 1
NORTHERN: YAY: haay 1; SK: hay; WM: höy A1;
Hsi-lin: haay; Lingyün: haay; Tien-chow: haay
CH: k' ai
PT* vx- A

pangolin
MÈNE: lin 5 (C4)
SOUTHWESTERN: LAO: lin B4; SI: nim 3; WT: lin 5
CENTRAL: LP: lin 5; LM: lin 5; WN: lin 5
NORTHERN: YAY: lin 5; SK: li 6; WM: lin 6 (C4)
PT* l- B/C

pond
MÈNE: sam 4
CENTRAL: LP: thom 1; LM: thom 1; LC: thum 1
NORTHERN: Po-ai: tam A4

put away; hide
MÈNE: kii 3 'put away'; son 3 kii 3 'to hide someone'
CENTRAL: WN: kii 6 'to hide oneself'
NORTHERN: YAY: kii 3/6 'to hide'; SK: kii 3 'put away'

receive
MÈNE: lap 7
SOUTHWESTERN: LAO: hap DS4; SI: rap 4; BT: hap 5
CENTRAL: LP: lap 4; LM: lap 4; WN: oap 4; LC: lap 2
NORTHERN: SK: rap 6

remove, take down
MÈNE: pêt 6
SOUTHWESTERN: LAO: pot DS2; SI: plot 2; WT: pot 2
CENTRAL: LM: pjoèt 3
NORTHERN: SK: pleet 4

set a trap
MÈNE: laaj 3 (hew 5)
SOUTHWESTERN: LAO: haaj C1; WT: haaj 3;
BT: haaj 3
CENTRAL: LP: haaj 3; LM: thaaèt 3; WN: thaaèt 3
set up a bed
MENE: ?aan 4 'sofa, or other expensive furniture';

sharpened stake
MENE: kwaak 2
SOUTHWESTERN: LAO: hwak DL1; SI: hwak 2;
WT: khaa? 2
CENTRAL: LP: kuuk 2; LM: kuuk/ vlak 2; WN: khaa 2
NORTHERN: SK: hwak 6

sing, chant
MENE: kap 6
SOUTHWESTERN: LAO: khip DS1; SI: khip 2;
CENTRAL: Tay: khip/sap (DS1)
NORTHERN: SK: khip 6

sprout, (bamboo, banana)
MENE: naat 4 (n: > naal 4)
CENTRAL: Tien-pao: hraat 2
NORTHERN: YAY: raaiJ 4; SK: naaiJ 4

steep mountain slope
MENE: ta-lij 2
CENTRAL: Nung: li1 'slope'; Tho: li1 'abrupt'
NORTHERN: Po-ai: li1 2;
Sui: khil 1 'slanted.'

sun, day
MENE: mafJee 4
SOUTHWESTERN: LAO: ven A4; SI: wan 1; WT: vin 4
CENTRAL: LP: van 4; LM: van 4; WN: van 4; LC: van 2
NORTHERN: YAY: van 4; SK: hen 4; WM: jon 2

thunder
MENE: phe 5 (faa 5 phe 5)
NORTHERN: YAY: pja 3; SK: phraa 3; WM: plaa 3

touch, hit, cheap
MENE: tik 7
SOUTHWESTERN: LAO: thuuk DL1; SI: thuuk 2; WT: thu 2
CENTRAL: LM: thok 3; LC: thuk 5
NORTHERN: YAY: tik 1; SK: thuuk 6

who, person
MENE: pee 4
SOUTHWESTERN: LAO: phay A1; SI: khray 1; WT: phay 5; BT: faJ 1; SH: phay 1/2; SN: phée 1
CENTRAL: LP: caJ 4; LC: naJ 2
NORTHERN: WM: praJ 2 (A4)

As will be seen, in its segmental phonology Mène is not particularly unusual or conservative. It possesses neither rare consonant clusters nor exotic vocalism. The tone system, however, is completely unique with velar conditioning factors not found elsewhere to my knowledge.

Another interesting development in Mène is the loss of final consonants in several of the most common verbs. (This has also occurred in the word 'to eat' in the Mèy language.) The following is a list of those items identified so far:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE II: LOSS OF FINAL CONSONANTS</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>to be</td>
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<tr>
<td>MENE: pee 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lao: pen A2</td>
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<tr>
<td>to eat</td>
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<tr>
<td>MENE: kii 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lao: kin A2</td>
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<tr>
<td>to do, make</td>
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<tr>
<td>MENE: ?ee 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lao: het DS4</td>
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<tr>
<td>to go</td>
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<td>MENE: paa 1</td>
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<td>Lao: pay A2</td>
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<tr>
<td>to take</td>
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<tr>
<td>MENE: ?aat 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lao: ?aw A3</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Yet another unexplained peculiarity associated with these forms is that they are most frequently produced with a final [-h] which is otherwise not phonemic in the language, although a similar phonation occurs in association with tone 2 discussed below.

Phonology
The Mène system of initial consonants is not unusual. It has the expected series with labio-velar and glottal clusters (and perhaps others although these have not been determined) as can be seen on the chart below. Consonant clusters with second element labials are recorded here as /-w-/ in keeping with convention, although this labial element is quite distinctively [-v-] in most environments.


CHART I: CONSONANT INITIALS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>p</th>
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</tbody>
</table>
The Mène vocalic system seems not to recognize length distinctions except for /a/ and /aa/ and before final stops. The probable phonetic analog of this occurs in the diphthongs, whose first element is always long, which are monophthongized before final glides /-y/ or /-w/. Minimal pairs of contrastive vowel length were not found on other syllable types. Syllables with PT */aː/ (the final portion of which, following Gedney, is analyzed as a high back unrounded glide /-y/) show /-ë/ in Mène as is the case with surrounding languages of the Neua-Phuan-Phou Thay type, as well as Red Tai and Tai Mey, spoken in Houa Phanh, Xieng Khwang, Khammouan, and in the Song Chu and Song Ca valleys in Thanh Hóa and Nghệ An.

CHART II : VOWELS AND DIPTHONGS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>i, [ii]</th>
<th>ï, [ïi]</th>
<th>u, [uu]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>e, [ee]</td>
<td>ø, [øø]</td>
<td>o, [oo]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>æ, [æe]</td>
<td>a, [aa]</td>
<td>ɔ, [ɔɔ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iæ</td>
<td>[iia]</td>
<td>[ua]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examples of vowels: /?iit^e/ 'purple'; /?iit^2 (faay^2)/ 'kind of Cerambycid beetle'; /ket^e/ 'scale (of fish, etc.)'; /kheek^2/ 'hit with knuckle of middle finger'; /ne^t/ 'kind of water turtle'; /ke ε^p/ 'narrow'; /vik^1/ 'repulsive (of hairlip or certain leaf-nosed bats)'; /sìp^2/ 'to join, continue'; /mëk^1/ 'ink'; [no examples of long / ëë/ before final stop have been found yet]; /lak^1/ 'steal'; /laak^2/ 'pull, drag'; /duk^2/ 'Clariad catfish'; /duuk^2/ 'bone'; /?oop^2/ 'to bake'; /?iì^2p/ 'giant silk-worm moth'; /pak^k/ 'bracelet'; /poo^k/ 'to peel'; /viak^2/ 'work'; /liat^2/ 'blood'; /luak^2/ 'scald.'

The Tonal System

1. low rising, usually with an audible creakiness at the lowest pont of the tone, examples: /hoy^1/ 'to open,' /khwaa^3/ 'cucumber,' /vaan^1/ 'axe.'

2. mid-low falling, with whisper on the end of the tone, examples: /hëë^3/ 'dry,' /poo^3/ 'male,' /kë ë^t/ 'to hurt.'

3. mid-high with slight fall or fall-rise, examples: /khwaa^2/ 'lock, key,' /khex^ë/ 'near,' /këë^t/ 'put away.'

4. high level, examples: /pit^ë/ 'fan,' /sam^ë/ 'pond, swamp,' /maa^ë/ 'dog,' /bëë^ë/ 'navel.'

5. high falling, examples: /meë/ 'mouthful, bite,' /kua^2/ 'father's younger sister,' /vaë^t/ 'twist and break.'

6. high-mid rising checked, examples: /kap^t/ 'sing,' /tëk^t/ 'male.'

7. low-mid falling checked, examples: /mit^ë/ 'knife,' /liët^ë/ 'child.'

Perhaps the most curious and perplexing aspect of the Mène language is its tone system. No Tai languages so far recorded have developed in precisely this way. There is a single split in the A column, within the A1 box where tone 1 is conditioned by Proto-Tai voiceless velar aspirate and fricative initials, while all other syllables with A column tones have tone 4. The only other Tai languages known to split the A1 box are Saek and at least two Nung dialects, Bac Va and Lang Vo (see Gedney 1989 : 25ff) but the same conditioning factors do not obtain, although it should be noted in Chart I that all of the Saek forms corresponding to PT* kh- possess Saek first tone whereas the other PT initial voiceless velars show tone 2. Gedney (1989 : 36) shows how words in Saek corresponding to WT x- show a propensity for tone 1, but not in every case. And, Saek words with initials descended from PT* f-, hr-, and h1 also share this propensity. Thus, while the agreement in some of the velar series is probably not coincidental, just why it should be so is not clear.

One possibility for this unusual conditioning of a tone split in the A1 box is suggested by Ohala (1973 : 7) who notes that pull on the larynx by the tongue in "consonants involving a high position for the body of the tongue, i.e. palatals and velars, ought to induce a slightly higher average pitch (as opposed to labials and dentals, which do not involve the body of the tongue in the same way)." He goes on to note, however, that experimental data on the subject has produced mixed results. Perhaps it was the combination of physiologic factors, velar tongue position as well as voicelessness, aspiration, and friction, which led to this peculiar grouping.

Looking at Table IV, it is noteworthy that the only definable set of forms which do not follow the pattern are those which Gedney has reconstructed as *G- or *T, presumably voiced, perhaps palatals (judging from the Chinese contact forms, cf. Chamberlain 1990), part of his new series of initials (Gedney 1979). The PT reconstructions are from Li (1977) and will eventually need to be updated, but they will suffice for our purposes given their obvious velar nature in most cases.
### TABLE III: Sources of Mène 1st Tone

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gloss</th>
<th>Mène</th>
<th>PT*Cₖ</th>
<th>WT</th>
<th>Saek</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>whistle</td>
<td>thiw¹</td>
<td>*ph-;*th-;*khw-</td>
<td>thiw₁</td>
<td>thiw²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ginger</td>
<td>hih⁴</td>
<td>*x-</td>
<td>xiq₁</td>
<td>hih³</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chopping</td>
<td>hia⁴</td>
<td>*x-</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to crow</td>
<td>han¹</td>
<td>*x-</td>
<td>xan₁</td>
<td>hal²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>needle</td>
<td>hem¹</td>
<td>*x-</td>
<td>xim₁</td>
<td>kim¹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>green</td>
<td>hew³</td>
<td>*x-</td>
<td>xₑw₁</td>
<td>heew²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>answer</td>
<td>haan¹</td>
<td>*x-</td>
<td>xaan₁</td>
<td>gaan²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>white</td>
<td>haaw¹</td>
<td>*x-</td>
<td>aaw₁</td>
<td>haaw²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bitter</td>
<td>hom¹</td>
<td>*x-;khom₁</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>tam³</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to open</td>
<td>hoy¹</td>
<td>*x-</td>
<td>khay₁</td>
<td>hay⁴</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>return</td>
<td>hin⁴</td>
<td>*x-</td>
<td>xin₁</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hook</td>
<td>hoo³</td>
<td>*x-</td>
<td>xo₁</td>
<td>hoo²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>things</td>
<td>hoo⁴</td>
<td>*x-</td>
<td>xoo₁</td>
<td>hoo³</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>laugh</td>
<td>hoo¹</td>
<td>*xr-</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>ruaw²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hall</td>
<td>hoo³</td>
<td>*xr-</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spirit</td>
<td>van¹</td>
<td>*xw-</td>
<td>xwan₁</td>
<td>hon³</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>axe</td>
<td>vaan¹</td>
<td>*xw-</td>
<td>xwaan₁</td>
<td>vaan²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>athwart</td>
<td>vaan³</td>
<td>*khw-</td>
<td>xwaan₁</td>
<td>vaan²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tamarind</td>
<td>haam³</td>
<td>*kh-</td>
<td>khaam₁</td>
<td>kaam¹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>needle</td>
<td>hem¹</td>
<td>*kh-</td>
<td>xim₁</td>
<td>kim¹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>arm</td>
<td>he n¹</td>
<td>*kh-</td>
<td>xen₁</td>
<td>keen¹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eggplant</td>
<td>hia¹</td>
<td>*kh-</td>
<td>khé₁</td>
<td>kee³</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>horn</td>
<td>haw¹</td>
<td>*kh-</td>
<td>xaw₁</td>
<td>kaw¹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>leg</td>
<td>haa¹</td>
<td>*kh-</td>
<td>xaa₁</td>
<td>kwa₁</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sell</td>
<td>haay¹</td>
<td>*kh-</td>
<td>xay₁</td>
<td>kwaay¹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bodyhair</td>
<td>hon¹</td>
<td>*kh-</td>
<td>xun₁</td>
<td>pull¹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>log</td>
<td>hon¹</td>
<td>*kh/g-</td>
<td>xon₁</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tallow</td>
<td>khay¹</td>
<td>*kh-</td>
<td>xay₁</td>
<td>khay¹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bridge</td>
<td>khoo¹</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>khoo₁</td>
<td>khaaw⁴</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transport</td>
<td>hon¹</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>khun²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dove</td>
<td>haw¹</td>
<td>*khr-</td>
<td>chaw₁</td>
<td>haw²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ask, beg</td>
<td>hoo³</td>
<td>*khr-</td>
<td>cho₁</td>
<td>thoo²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>imprisonment</td>
<td>saŋ¹</td>
<td>*khl-;*thl-</td>
<td>ch flowing chŋ₁</td>
<td>thraŋ²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sight</td>
<td>sëŋ¹</td>
<td>*khl-;*thl-</td>
<td>chën₁</td>
<td>raŋ²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hard</td>
<td>he n¹</td>
<td>*khl-;khën₁</td>
<td>chëν₁</td>
<td>thriaŋ²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cucumber</td>
<td>khwa₄</td>
<td>*kw- (?)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pheasant</td>
<td>khwa₄</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE IV: Exceptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gloss</th>
<th>Mène</th>
<th>PT*Cₖ</th>
<th>WT</th>
<th>Saek</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>son-in-law</td>
<td>khèy⁴</td>
<td>*kḥ/g-</td>
<td>khèy₁</td>
<td>khooy⁴</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ditch</td>
<td>khum⁴</td>
<td>*kḥ/g-</td>
<td>khum₁</td>
<td>khum⁴</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>right</td>
<td>khwa₄</td>
<td>*kḥ/g-w-</td>
<td>xwa₁</td>
<td>khwa₄</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bitter</td>
<td>khom⁴</td>
<td>*kḥ/g-</td>
<td>khum₁</td>
<td>tam³</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eggplant</td>
<td>khia⁴</td>
<td>*kḥ-</td>
<td>hia¹</td>
<td>kee³</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hard</td>
<td>khe ng¹</td>
<td>*kḥ-</td>
<td>khe ng₁</td>
<td>thriaŋ²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>softshell turtle</td>
<td>faa¹</td>
<td>*f-</td>
<td>faa₁</td>
<td>via³</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fishnet</td>
<td>hee e⁴</td>
<td>*xr-</td>
<td>hee₁</td>
<td>ree²</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The phonetic character of Tone 2 is of considerable interest because of hypotheses concerning the origins of the three PT tones which suggest they were once associated with syllable-final phonation features. Haudricourt (1954) first proposed that PT B tones could be associated with final /-h/. In 1969 I posited a whisper final feature for the B tone, figuring, albeit roughly in those days, that if both arytenoid and ligamental portions of the glottis were closed for final stops, the next closest state would be whisper where the ligamentals are still closed and only the arytenoids are open. (I have no idea whether this sort of reasoning is still phonetically valid or not.) Be that as it may, the ending of the B tone in Mène sounds like whisper and is so pronounced as to partially obscure the final nasal consonants, especially /n/ and /ŋ/. The fact that all B and DL syllables share a single common tone implies that this feature is powerful enough to override pitch contour as the factor of primary distinction. A preliminary spectrographic analysis of this tone undertaken at the phonetics laboratory of Chulalongkorn University with the expertise of Dr. Theraphan Thongkum revealed that approximately the final third of syllables ending in final vowels or nasals show breathiness and eventual voicelessness for this tone. Thus it differs from other so-called breathy tones, such as that found in Hmong where the breathiness occurs throughout the entire voiced portion of the syllable. In languages of the AA family with final /-h/, phonetically either voiceless [h] or voiced [h], a similar spectrographic pattern appears suggesting that Mène B tones retain something of a syllable-final phonation closely associated with /-h/. (A more complete analysis is underway but is not yet complete.) Other Tai dialects lacking B tone splits, such as Lao, do not show the corresponding lack in DL found in Mène, and as a general rule, in Tai languages where the B-DL coalescence is complete, these tones have also been split according to the voicing of the initial consonants. Furthermore, in contrast to other surrounding Tai dialects, Mène does not possess the syllable final creaky voice feature commonly associated with the PT C tone, a characteristic of the Northern Branch languages found in Southern China as pointed out by Gedney (1989 : 212).

The final consonants are like those found in other Tai languages:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>p</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>c</th>
<th>k</th>
<th>?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>m</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>η</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>w</td>
<td>y</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examples: /tap/ 'liver'; /tat/ 'cut'; /tak/ 'draw water'; /pia?/ 'infn. white' [note short diphthong here; this is the only example]; /tam?/ 'to stamp on'; /tan?/ 'plugged'; /taŋ?/ 'set up'; /taw? 'turtle'; /tay?/ 'crawl (of insects).'

Mène in Comparative Linguistic Perspective

I will not attempt to provide a complete analysis of the position of Mène in a comparative and historical frame. I will, however, for convenience, show where Mène stands in relation to several relevant comparative phonological issues and to suggestions made on historical geography and classification by such acknowledged sources on comparative Tai as Li, Gedney, and Haudricourt. Using Li's (1977) reconstructions as a base, supplemented by Gedney's proposals (1989 : 229ff) on a new consonant series, the following tables should suffice to provide a general idea of how Mène relates to other Tai dialects. The tables are by no means exhaustive, focusing on the velar initials, but even these are not complete due to a lack of comparative data accessible to me at the time of this writing, and many more forms will be found in the wordlist which do not correspond to data already analyzed elsewhere.

It will be noted that in the majority of instances for Li's PT* kh- and PT* C- Mène has the same pattern as WT, showing h- as the reflex of *-x- and kh- for *kh- as in the forms shown in tables V, VI and XIII. In Tables VII and XV forms reconstructed by Gedney with initial PT* G and PT* Y the agreement does not hold. For 'sing' on Table VIII Mène shows an unaspirated consonant as if this could be the regular Northern correspondence (though not a Mène one), but Li reports that cognates do not occur in other N languages. Similar instances of Mène k- in the high series occur in 'year, cycle' on Table XIV, and for 'bitter,' 'dig,' and 'joint,' on Table XV. The other forms on Table VIII are irregular. Diller's (1988) argument on 'tamarind' is particularly convincing.

The Mène forms deriving from PY* g- and t- are more regular, showing k- in the majority of instances. There are, however, a number of items where we find kh- and h-, as on tables XXII and XXIII, and in these cases, Mène agrees with Saek wherever the Saek words are available.

Mène correspondences with other dialects under Li's reconstructed velar clusters are more problematical. I have merely listed them here for future reference and analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE V: PT* kh- (1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>arm: PT* kh- A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MENE: he n 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lao: khe e n A1; WT: xe n 1; Si: khaen 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LM: kheen 1; LC: keen 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WM: ken 1; Yay: cen 1; SK: keen 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>body hair, feathers: PT* kh- A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MENE: hon 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lao: khon A1; WT: xun 1; Si: khon 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LM: khon 1; LC: khun 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WM: pun 1; Yay: pun 1; SK: pul 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>horn of animal: PT* kh- A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MENE: haw 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lao: kha w A1; WT: xaw 1; Si: kha w 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yay: kha w 5; SK: kaw 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kill: PT* kh- C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MENE: haa 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lao: khaa C1; WT: xaa 3; Si: khaa 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LM: khaa 3; LC: khaa 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WM: kaa 3; Yay: kaa 3; SK: kaa 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
leg: PT* kh- A
MÈNE: haa 1
Lao: khaa A1; WT: xaa 1; SI: khaa 5
LM: khaa 1; LC: khaa 1
WM: haa 1; Yay: ka 1; SK: kwaa 1

sell: PT* kh- A
MÈNE: haa 1
Lao: khaay A1; WT: xaay 1; SI: khaay 5
LM: khaay 1; LC: khaay 1
WM: haay 1; Yay: kaay 1; SK: kwaa 1

torn, ripped: PT* khaat D
MÈNE: haa 1
Lao: khaat DL1; WT: xaat 2; SI: khaat 2
LM: khaat 2; LC: khaat 5
WM: kaat 6; Yay: haat 2; SK: kaat 6

TABLE VI : PT* kh- (2)

bridge (545) : PT* kh- A
MÈNE: khoo 1
Lao: khua A1; WT: kho 1
SK: khoo 4

hit, flick with finger: PT* kheek 2 'to hit with the middle knuckle (to children')
SI: khek DL1
Dioi: kek; Po-ai: ke k, kwe k

scratch something: PT* khiit 2
MÈNE: khiit 2
Lao: khiit DL1; WT: khiit 2; SI: khiit 2
SK: khiit 6

TABLE VII : PT* kh/g- (3)

eggplant: PT* kh-/g- A
MÈNE: khua, ma-hua 1
Lao: khaa A1; WT: khê 1; SI: khua 5
LM: khi 1
Yay: kia 4; SK: kia 3

hole, pit, ditch: PT* kh- A
MÈNE: khum 4
Lao: khum A1; WT: khum 1; SI: khum 5
LM: khui 1
WM: kum 2; Yay: kum 4; SK: khum 4

ride: PT* khw/gw A
MÈNE: khwaa 4
Lao: khua/khwaa A1; WT: xwaa 1; SI: khwaa 5

son-in-law (519) : PT* kh/g- A
MÈNE: khêy 4
Lao: khêey A1; WT: khêy 1; SI: khêey 5
LM: khuuy 1; LC: khêey 1
WM: kiy 2; Yay: klai 4; SK: khooy 4

TABLE VIII : PT* kh- (4)

murky, turbid: PT* kh- B
MÈNE: hun 2
Lao: khun B1; WT: khun 2; SI: khun 2
LM: khan 2; Yay: khun B1; Tho: khun B1
Po-ai: hun C1 SK: khun 2

sing, chant: PT* kh- D
MÈNE: kap 6
Lao: khip DS1; WT: xap 2; SI: khap 2
Yay: khap, sáp
SK: hap 4

tamarind: PT* kh- A
MÈNE: haam 1
Lao: khaam A1; WT: khaam 1; SI: khaam 5
LM: kaam 1
WM: kaam 1; Yay: kaam 1; SK: kaam 1

TABLE IX : PT* khr-

ask, beg: PT* khr/-thrr- A
MÈNE: hoo 1
Lao: khoo A1; WT: chO 1; SI: khoo 5
LM: hoo 1; LC: khoo 1
SK: thoo 2

centipede: PT* khr- D
MÈNE: khep/hep 6
Lao: khep DS1; WT: xep; SI: khep/khaap 2
SK: ca 6 thrip 4

dove: PT* kh- A
MÈNE: haw 1
Lao: khaw A1; WT: chaw 1; SI: khaw 5
LM: law 1
WM: raw 1; Yay: raw 1; SK: haw 2

eggs: PT* khr- B
MÈNE: say 2
Lao: khaay B1; WT: chay 2; SI: khay 2
LM: kay 2; LC: khay 5
WM: ray; Yay: cay 2

top for spinning: PT* khr- B
MÈNE: h/khaang 2
Lao: khaang B1; WT: chaang 2; SI: khaang 2
LM: laang 2; LC: haang 5
WM: raang 5; Yay: caang 2
vine: PT* khr-
MÈNE: cìa 4 (haw 1)
Lao: khì a1; WT: cè 4; Sl: khrìa 1
LM: Iì 4
SK: thaa 4

TABLE X : PT* khl-
drive, chase: PT* khl- D
MÈNE: hap 2
Lao: khap DSI; WT: chap 2; SI: khap 2
SK: khap 4

fever: PT* khay C
MÈNE: say 3
Lao: khay CI; WT: chay 3; Sl: khap 3
LM: lay 3; LC: hay 3
Yay: cay 3

hard: PT* khl- A
MÈNE: heng 1
Lao: khèng A1; WT: khàng 1; Sl: khàng 5
LM: leeng 1; LC: kheeng 1
WM: kleng 1; SK: thriang 2

imprison: PT* thr/khlang A
MÈNE: sang 1
Lao: khang A1; WT: chang 1; Sl: khàng 5
LM: lang 1
WM: klang; Yay: cang 1; SK: thrang 2

quail: PT* khl- C
MÈNE: sum 3
Lao: khum CI; WT: chum 3; Sl: khum 3
Diou: kioum CI; Po-ai: cum CI

side, ribs: PT* khl- C
MÈNE: saang 3
Lao: khaang CI; WT: chaang 3; Sl: khaang 3
LM: laang 3; LC: haang 3

sift, to: PT* thl/khl- A
MÈNE: sìng 1
Lao: khèj A1; WT: chèn 1; Sl: khìng 5
LM: lèj 1; LC: khjèn 1
SK: rang 2

spider: PT* khl- A
MÈNE: (king) kaaw 4
WT: (cìng 2) chaaw 1
LM: -laaw 1; LC: -khjaaw 1
WM: -khwaa 1; Yay: -caaw 1; SK: -thraaw 2

TABLE XI : PT* khw-
cross, to; twisted: PT* khw- (/gw-?) C
MÈNE: vaay 3
WT: xway 2; Sl: khway 3
Diou: kouai C4

crosswise, disorderly, intersection: PT* khw- B
MÈNE: kway 2
WT: xway B1; Sl: khway 2
Yay: khoay B1
Diou: khouai B1

healthy, to be well: PT* ?
MÈNE: khwè e 2 (used as a greeting)
SK: thre e 5 'slowly, gradually'
Viet. khoe (hoi tone)

lie athwart: PT* khw- A
MÈNE: vaang 1
Lao: khwaang A1; WT: khwaang 1; Sl: khwaang 5
LM: khwaang 1; LC: khwaang 1
Yay: vaang 1; SK: vaang 2

lock, a; key: PT* ?
MÈNE: khwa 3
LM: saa 3; LC: èa 3

sharpened stake: PT* khw- D
MÈNE: kwaak 2
Lao: khwaak DL1; WT: khaa? 2; Sl: khwaak 2
LM: kuuk/vaak 2; LC: kuuk 5
SK: khwaak 6

whistle: PT* ?
MÈNE: thiw 1
Lao: phiw A1; WT: thiw 1; Sl: phiw 5
LP: khiw 2; LM: viiw 1
SK: thiw/phriw/hiw/hiw 2

TABLE XII : Mène kh- k
melon, cucumber: PT* kw- A
MÈNE: khwaa 1 (teng 4 khwaa 1 'an especially ripe melon where seeds are ready to plant' - said to rhyme with khwaa 'right')
SI: kwa 1
LM: kwa 2; LC: kwaa 1

open an umbrella: PT* k/kh-
MÈNE: khaang 3
Lao: kaang A2; SI: kaang
LC: khaang

TABLE XIII : PT* x- (1)
answer a call: PT x- A
MÈNE: haan 1
Lao: khaan A1; WT: xaan 1; Sl: khan 5
WM: haan 1; Yay: haan 1; SK: ngaan 2

cross, to: PT* x- C
MÈNE: haam 3
Lao: kh (w) aam CI; WT: xaam 3; Sl: khaam 3
LM: khaam 3; LC: khaam 3
WM: haam 3; Yay: haam 3; SK: haam 3
dry: PT* x- A/B
   MÈNE: khou 1/bëè 2
   WT: xaỳ 2
   LM: khây 2; LC: khaỳ 5
   WM: hâj; SK: khou 2/hii 6
Viet: khô

enter: PT* xaw C
   MÈNE: haw/khaw 3
   Lao: khaaw C1; WT: xaw 3; SI: khaw 3
   LM: khaw 3; LC: khaw 3
   WM: haw 3; Yay: haw 3; SK: haw 3

ginger: PT* x- A
   MÈNE: hing 1
   Lao: khing A1; WT: xing 1; 51: khing 5
   LM: khing 1; LC: khing 1
   WM: hing 3; Yay: hing 3; 5K: hing 2

go up, ascend, rise: PT* xín C
   MÈNE: hìn 3
   Lao: khìn C1; WT: xín 3; SI: khën 3
   LM: khën 3; LC: khën
   WM: hìn 3; Yay: hëw; 5K: hëw 2

green: PT* x- A
   MÈNE: hëw 1
   Lao: khiaw A1; WT: xe w 1; SI: khiaw 5
   LM: kheew 1; LC: kheew 1
   WM: hëw 1; Yay: hëw 1; SK: hëw 2

hook, sickle: PT* x- A
   MÈNE: hoo 1
   Lao: khoo 1; WT: xO A1; SI: khOO 5
   LM: khoo 1; LC: khoo 1
   WM: hëw 1; Yay: hëw 1; SK: hëw 2

knee: PT* x- B
   MÈNE: (hua 1) haw 2
   Lao: khaw B1; WT: xaw 2; SI: khaw 2
   LM: khaw 2; LC: khaw 5
   WM: hëw; Yay: ho 2; SK: kOO 6

knot, to: PT* x- D
   MÈNE: hoo 2
   Lao: khop D1; WT: khop 2; SI: khaaw 5
   LM: khop 3; LC: khoop 5
   WM: hëw 1; Yay: ho 1; SK: koo 6

open, to: PT* xay 1
   MÈNE: khay 4, hoy 1/4
   Lao: khay A1; WT: khay 1; SI: khay 5
   LM: khay 1; LC: khay 1
   WM: høy A1; Yay: haay 1; SK: hay 2

steel: PT* x- A
   MÈNE: haang 1
   Lao: khaang A1; WT: xang A1
   LC: (kaang B1)
   WM: hang/kang A1

TABLE XIV : PT* x- (2)

TABLE XV : PT* x/τ- (3)

bite: PT* x-/τ- D
   MÈNE: khop 6
   Lao: khop D1; WT: khop 2; SI: khaaw 2
   LM: khop 3; LC: khoop 5
   WM: xap 6; Yay: hap 1; SK: tap 6/khop 4

chicken, half-grown (female in M): PT* x-/τ- B
   MÈNE: không 2
   Lao: khiaw B1; WT: không; SI: khiaw 2
   LM: khiêng 2

dig: PT* x-/τ-/g- D
   MÈNE: kut 6
   Lao: khut D1; WT: khut 2; SI: kut 2
   LM: khot 4; LC: kut 2
   Yay: het/kut 1; SK: khut 6
excrement: PT* x-/-t- C
MÈNE: khii 3
Lao: khii C1; WT: khi 3; Sl: khii 3
LM: khii 3; LC: khii 3
WM: xai 4; Yay: hai 6; SK: tai 6

joint, knuckles: PT* x-/-t- C/B
MÈNE: khoo 2 (B4)
Lao: khoo C1; WT: xoo C1
Tay: kho C1; Nung: kho C1
WM: xoo B4; Dioi: ho B4

rice: PT* x-/-t- C
MÈNE: khaw 3
Lao: khaw C1; WT: khaw 3; Sl: khaw 3
LM: khaw 3; LC: khaw 3
WM: xau 4; Yay: hau 6; SK: taw 6

TABLE XVI: PT* xw-

axe: PT* xwaan A
MÈNE: vaan 1
Lao: khwaan A1; WT: khwaan 1; Sl: khwaan 5
LM: khwaan 1
Yay: vaan 1; SK: vaan 2

lie face down, turn upside down: PT* xw- C
MÈNE: vam 3
Lao: khwam C3; WT: xam 3; Sl: khwam 3
LM: khum 3; LC: khum 3
Yay: ham 3; SK: ngam 3

spirit, whorl in the hair: PT* xwan A
MÈNE: van 1
Lao: khwan A1; WT: xwan/xOn 1; Sl: khwan 5
LM: khwan 1; LC: khwan
Yay: van 1; SK: hOn 2

TABLE XVII: PT* xr-

cover, to, to veil: PT* xr- C/B
MÈNE: hom 3 'to cover or to veil (to cover silkworm tray with cloth)'
Sl: hum 3 (C1)
LC: hum B1
Dioi: thom (B1); Ling-yün: lum (C2)
Sui: kum B1

ear: PT* xr- A
MÈNE: huu 4
Lao: huu A1; WT: hu 1; Sl: huu 5
LM: lou 1; LC: huu 1
WM: ri 2; Yay: ria 4; SK: rua 4

fishnet for casting: PT* xr- A
MÈNE: hee 4
Lao: hee A1; WT: he 1; Sl: hee 5
LM: hee 1; LC: hee 1
Yay: re 1; SK: ree 2

TABLE XVIII: PT* g-

acacia: PT* g- A
MÈNE: kee 4
Lao: khe A4; WT: ke 4; Sl: khœ 1
LM: kee 4
Yay: ke 4

algae (long strands): PT* g- A/B
MÈNE: kay 4
Lao: khe A4; WT: kay A4; Sl: khlay A4 (Palgx.)/takhray
Nung: tau-cay A4/B4
Dioi: pen-kay B4 'aquatic plants'

cangue: PT* g- A
MÈNE: kaa 4
Lao: khaa A4 'stuck' (?) WT: ; Sl:
MENE: a TAI DIALECT

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carry on one end of pole: PT* g- A
MENE: k00n 4
Lao: khOOn A4; SI: khOOn 1
LC: koon A4
carrying pole: PT* g- /t- A
MENE: kan 4
Lao: khaa A4; WT: kan 4; SI: khaa 1
LM: kaan 4; LC: kaan 2
WM: xaan 2; Yay: haa 4; SK: taan 4
choke on something: PT* g- C
MENE: ke e n 5
Lao: khe e n C4; WT: ke n; SI: khæen 4
WM: ke n
clf handle, rod: PT* g- A
MENE: kan 4
Lao: khan A4; WT: kan 4; SI: khan 1
WM: kan 2; Yay: kan 4; SK: khal 4
gently, carefully: PT* g- B
MENE: k0y 5
Lao: khOy B4; WT: kOy 5; SI: khOy 3
LM: kooy 5; LC: kooy 6
hold in the jaws: PT* g- D
MENE: kaap 2
Lao: khaap DL4; WT: kaap 4; SI: khaap 3
Yay: kaap 5; SK: khaap 5
musical instrument, pipes: PT* g- A
MENE: ke e n 4
Lao: khe e n A4; WT: ke n; SI:
Nung: ken A4 'bugle'
narrow: PT* g- D
MENE: hEEp/kEEp 2
Lao: khe e p DL4; WT: xe p 4; SI: khæep 3
LM: keep 5; LC: kap/keep 2
SK: teep 5
sickle: PT* g- A
MENE: kew 2
Lao: khiaw A4; SI: khaaw 1
LC: keew A4; Nung: keo 'scissors'
WM: ke w 'scissors'; Dioi: kiau 'scissors'
stick: PT* g- A
MENE: kaa 4
Lao: khaa A4; WT: kaa 4; SI: khaa 1
LM: kaa 4
Yay: ka 4; SK: khaa 4
stump of tree, hollow (Mene): PT* g- A
MENE: koon 4
Lao: khOOn A4; SI: khOOn A4
WM: kon B1 'stump'
swollen: PT* g- B
MENE: kæe 2
Lao: khay B4; WT: kaï 5; SI:
LM: kaï 5; LC: kaï 5
toad: PT* g- A, g- D
MENE: kan 4 kaak 2
Lao: khan A4 khaak DL4
trade: PT* gaa C
MENE: kaa 5
Lao: khaa C4; WT: kaa 6; SI: khaa 4
LM: haa 6; LC: kaa 4
Yay: ka 6; SK: khaa 6
tripod: PT* g- A
MENE: kiaan 4
Lao: kiaa A4; WT: keng 4; SI: kiaan 1
LM: kiing 4; LC: kiing 2
WM: kiaan 2; Yay: ciang 4; SK: kiaan 4

TABLE XIX: PT* gw-
cast a fishing net: PT* gw- A/B/C
MENE: kwang 2 (B)
WT: kwang 4 (A4); SI: khwaang 4 (C4)
LC: kwaang A2
WM: kwang A2 'to surround'
[Note: this item is included here only because it occurs in Li's rather short list under PT* gw- where he glosses it as 'to turn, whirl around.' But even he admits there are many cross-related forms; Lao, for example, has at least three: /khwaang B4/ 'to throw;' /khwaang C4/ and /khwe eng C4/ 'to whirl, twirl.]
lame (of leg): PT* gw- A
MENE: kwe e 4
WT: kwe e 4
Tho: kwe e A4
Dioi: koue A4; Po-ai: kwe e
search (with hands): PT* gw- C
MENE: kwaa 5
Lao: khwaaw C4

TABLE XX: PT* gr-
bunch of bananas: PT* gr- A (?)
MENE: hia 4
Lao: khia A4; WT: hë 4; SI: khria 1
LM: lii 4
complete, entire: PT* gr- D
MENE: kop 7
Lao: khop DS4; SI: khrop 4
LM: lop 4
SK: khop 6
cover, put over: PT* gr- B
MENE: hom 2
Lao: khooM B4; SI: khrOom 3
Dioi: kium B4; Ch'ien-chieng: kjum B4; Po-ai: cum B1
half, middle: PT* gr- B
MENE: kheng 2
indigo (sky color, dye): PT* gr- A
MÈNE: khaam 4
Lao: khaam A4; WT: caam 4; SI: khraam 1
LM: laam 4; LC: kjaam 4
Yay: saam 4; SK: khaam 4

kitchen: PT* gr-
MÈNE: kua 4
Lao: khua A4; SI: khrua 1
SK: thrua 4

lazy: PT* gr- C
MÈNE: (khii 3) caan 5
Lao: khaan 6; WT: caan 6; SI: khraan 4
LM: laan 6; LC: kjaan 4

lemon grass: PT* gr-
MÈNE: (khing 1) khê 4
Lao: (sing A1) khây A4; WT: (hOm 1) caî 4; SI: (ta 2) khray 4
SK: ca-threê/phréê 4

litter of young: PT* gr- D
MÈNE: hOOk 5
SI: khrOOk 3
LM: look 5; LC: kjoook 2
Yay: kok 5; SK: rOOk 5

moan, to: PT* gr- A
MÈNE: caang 4
Lao: khâang A4; WT: cang 4; SI: khraang 1
LM: laang 4
SK: reeng 1

mortar (for pounding with pestle): PT* gr- D
MÈNE: kok 7
Lao: khâap DS4; WT: kok 4; SI: khrkô 4
LM: lok 4; LC: kjuook 2
Yay: kok 1

snake skin (536): PT* gr- D
MÈNE: caap 2
Lao: khâap DL4; WT: caap 4; SI: khraap 3
LM: laap 5
SK: thraap 5

sticklac (for red dye etc.): PT* gr/dr- B
MÈNE: cang 2
Lao: khan B4; SI: khrâang 3
SK: thrang 5

TABLE XXI: PT* gl-

burned charred: PT* gl- D
MÈNE: k00k 2
WT: cO
Tay: loc
crawl: PT* glaan A
MÈNE: kaan 4
Lao: khaan A4; WT: caan 4; SI: khraan 4
LM: laan 4; LC: kjaan 2
Yay: rian 4; SK: luan 4
grope, feel: PT* gl- A
MÈNE: cam 4
Lao: kham A4; WT: cam 4; SI: khlam 1

lassoo, to: PT* gl-
MÈNE: kOng 5
Lao: khOOng C4; SI: khlOOng 4
LM: loong 6; LC: kjoong 4
WM: khlOng 4; SK: rOong 6

similar but not same: PT* gl- D
MÈNE: khap 6 (DS1)
SI: khlap DS4 khlao C4
Dioi: klap DS4; Po-ai: cap DS4 'just right'
stinkbug: PT* gl- A
MÈNE: keeng 4
Lao: kheeng A4; WT: keeng 4; SI: khraang 1
Nung: kej A4
Dioi: kej A4

 TABLE XXII: Mène voiced series > kh

accustomed to: PT* g- A
MÈNE: khêêy 4
Lao: khêêy A4; BT: khêêy 4; SI: khêêy 1
SK: khêêy 4

argue: PT* (?)
MÈNE: khaaw 5

bent (with legs tucked up): PT* g- C
MÈNE: khuu 5
Lao: khuu DS4; SI: khuu 4
LM: kot 4
SK: khot 6
crooked, bent: PT* g/-d/- D
MÈNE: khot 7
Lao: khot DS4; WT: kot 4; SI: khot 4
LM: kot 4
SK: khot 6

fin of fish: PT* g- A
MÈNE: khii 4
Lao: khii A4
WM: kii; Dioi: ki; Tien-chow: kii; Po-ai: cii
SK: khii 4
gird, tie around waist: PT* t- D
MÈNE: khaat 2
guard, oversee: PT* g- A
MÊNE: khum 4
Lao: khum A4; Sl: khum 1; Lue; kum 4

measure, thumb to forefinger: PT* t- D
MÊNE: khüp 2
Lao: khüp DL4; WT: xip 4; Sl: khüp 3
Yay: hup 3/cip 3; SK: khüp 5

price, value: PT* g- B
MÊNE: (naa) khaa 4
Lao: khaa B4; WT: kaa 5; Sl: khaa 3
LM: kaa 5; WM: kaa 6; Yay: ka 5; SK: khaa 5

TABLE XXIII : Mène voiced series > h
eggplant, very small: PT*
MÊNE: hêng 5
Lao: khe-eng C4
tame, familiar: PT*
MÊNE: hun 5
Lao: khun C4; Sl: khun 4
Yay: kun 6; SK: khun 6

TABLE XXIV : PT* t-
chin, jaw: PT* t- A
MÊNE: kaang 4
Lao: khaang A4; WT: kaang 4; Sl: khaang 1
LM: kaang 4; LC: kaang 2
WM: xang 2; Yay: haang 4; SK: taang 4
dried sweat on skin (527): PT* t-
MÊNE: kay 4
Lao: khii C1 khay A4; Sl: khlay 1
LM: lay 4
WM: xoì 2; Yay: hi 4; SK: tiì 4
edge, border, riverbank: PT* t- A
MÊNE: keèm 4
Lao: kheèm A4; WT: xeèm; Sl: kheèm 1
Dioi: hên; Hsi-lin: heen; Po-ai: heen
expel from mouth, put out of mouth: PT* t- A
MÊNE: kaay 4
Lao: khaay A4; WT: xaay 1; Sl: khaay 5
LM: haay 4;
Yay: haay 4; SK: taay 4
fishy smell: PT* t- A
MÊNE: kaaw 4
Lao: khaaw A4; WT: xaaw 4; Sl: khaaw 1
LM: haaw 4
Yay: haaw 4; SK: taaw 4
gold: PT* t-
MÊNE: kam 4
Lao: kham A4; WT: xam 4; Sl: kham 1
SK: tam 5
hammer, club: PT* t- C
MÊNE: kOOn 5
Lao: khOOn C4; WT: xOn 6; Sl: khOOn 4
LM: hoon 6; LC: koon 4
Yay: hon 6; SK: tOOl 6
itch, to: PT* t- A
MÊNE: kan 4
Lao: khan A4; WT: xan 4; Sl: khan 1
LM: han 4
SK: tal 4
neck, throat: PT* t- A
MÊNE: kOO 4
Lao: khOO A4; WT: xO 4; Sl: khOO 1
LM: hoo 4; LC: koo 4
WM: xoò 2; Yay: hO 4; SK: tOO 4
night: PT* t- A
MÊNE: kên 4
Lao: khênn A4; WT: xìn 4; Sl: khênn 1
LM: hên 4; LC: kên 2
WM: xìn 2; Yay: hênn 4; SK: tênn 4
night, nightfall, dark: PT* tam B
MÊNE: kam 2
Lao: kham B4; WT: xam 5; Sl: kham 3
LM: ham 5; LC: kam 6
WM: xam 6; Yay: ham 5; SK: tam 5
person, human being: PT* g/-t- A
MÊNE: kon 4
Lao: khon A4; WT: kun 4; Sl: khon 1
LM: kên 4; LC: kên 2
WM: xun 2; Yay: hun 4; SK: hun 4
search through, to: PT*
MÊNE: kon 5
Lao: khon C4; Sl: khon 4
Yay: hun 5; SK: khon 3
sharp edge: PT* t- A
MÊNE: kom 4
Lao: khom A4; WT: kam 4; Sl: khom 1
LM: hom 4; LC: kum 2
SK: tam 4
shin, lower leg: PT* t- B
MÊNE: kêng 2
Lao: kheèng B4; WT: xeèng 5; Sl: kheèng 3
LM: keeng 5; LC: keeng 6
WM: xeng 6; Yay: hêng 5; SK: teeng 5
thatch grass: PT* t- A
MÊNE: kaa 4
Lao: khaa A4; WT: xaa 1; Sl: khaa 1
LM: haa 4; LC: kaa 2
WM: xaa 2; Yay: ha 4; SK: taa 4
Finot's Qui-châu Alphabet

Returning now to the Qui-châu (QC) alphabet of Finot (1917), not only is this alphabet represented on the comparative chart of Plate I where variants are provided for five of the consonants as recorded by Maspero and Guignard, but a sample is provided, Figure 2 on page 19, with a transliteration and translation on the following page. On close examination there seems little doubt that the language represented in this sample and by this alphabet is very close to Mêne. A variant of the QC alphabet is given by Robert, called by him 'Tay Jô' (TJ).

Of particular interest to followers of the Ram Khamhaeng Inscription controversy is the existence of two characters which correspond precisely to khoo khaya and khoo khat, both in the fact that the two sounds are distinguished in Mêne, and in their close physical resemblance to the Sukhothai characters. However, unlike Inscription One where Diller (1991) argues convincingly that the point of differentiation between the two is to be found on the right vertical portion, the two Qui-châu graphemes are differentiated by an indentation in the uppermost horizontal portion of the character. (For an in-depth analysis of this graphemic feature see Diller 1991.) Finot, apparently unaware of the relationship between these two Qui-châu characters, assigns khoo khat, pronounced /h/- in this alphabet (as it is in Mêne), to set 43, the other members of which look as if they are residual lâo hip symbols from other dialects. He likewise misses the distinction in his Lai-châu sample and lists that khoo khat as an alternate of another unidentified Lai-châu character, both of which he equates to Thai rō̄ rō̄. Robert's TJ also treats khoo khat as a type of /h/-.

In the QC sample the khoo khat symbol is found only in the word /hoo/ 'family, lineage' which is probably borrowed from Vietnamese and has the C4 tone so this is more than likely a late innovation. There are regrettably no other khoo khat or khoo khay words in the sample. But the fact that this character is used for /h/-, the regular Mêne reflex of WT /x/-, implies that the distinction was originally made in the same way it was made on Inscription One. The word for 'malade' used in the sample is transliterated as "ked," as in Mêne /ke ∊/ 'hurt,' a distinctive, albeit rare, Northern word, perhaps borrowed from Austronesian.

The QC, TJ, and Sông Ca (SC) alphabets display many other fascinating features of interest to the study of Inscription One and Southeast Asian writing systems generally. Unlike neighboring Tai writing systems such as those given by Finot for Lai-châu, Nghia-lo, or Hu'ng-hoa, these two appear to have made high-low consonant class distinctions only for stops and even these appear to have become confused. For example, there are no special symbols for voiceless sonorants. Yet, these alphabets have characters more archaic than others so that the possibility of recent innovation can be ruled out, as can the likelihood that they are derived from Sukhothai or Fak Kham and moved east. Rather, I suspect that due to isolation these alphabets developed independently and that rather than retaining the high-low distinction they abandoned it having had no inclination to mark tones. Since most scholars have now accepted the idea first proposed by Gedney and Mote in 1965 that SW Tai speakers moved generally from east to west across the northern mainland, it seems irrational to insist that they had no writing system until Ram Khamhaeng. Cham alphabets have been around since at least the 4th century and from their earlier locations in the east, it could only have been this type of Indic alphabet Tai speakers came into contact with first, long before they would have experienced the Khmer alphabet located much further southwest. Likewise, there are certain characters in these alphabets which could not be descended from Fak Kham as some scholars would like us to believe: for example the sò sò of Sông Ca or the lò lòw of Qui-châu. In both cases, if we accept the Cham premise, the likely source would more probably be the 8th century Cham character depicted by Damais (1955), and whereas in the latter example Inscription One more closely resembles the 10th century form, in the former, sò sò, it is identical to Qui-châu.

The Cham were known to inhabit Ai (Thanh Hoà) in the 9th century and Maspéro (1916) notes expeditions against them by Vietnamese from Ch'ang (Tru' ong) immediately to the north. These campaigns took place in 989, 1006, 1009, and 1011. Pockets of Cham were also noted living in Nghệ An between the 11th and the 15th centuries (Stein 1947 : 235n). The name Ai was replaced by Thanh Hoà in 1111, and Hoan became Nghệ An in 1036; both name changes were evidently the result of promotions from chú thu to phu: (Maspéro 1916 : 31).

Many more of the characters are too close to Sukhothai or Cham to be lightly tossed aside, but it will involve further study by specialists for the details to be eventually worked out. However, I would like to reiterate that the likely direction of transference for the alphabetic tradition which culminated in Inscription One was from east to west, not the reverse.

In Historical Perspective

Mêne is a language that shows: many but not a complete set of Northern Branch lexical features; a few forms...
typical of the Central Branch languages; and a large amount of Southwestern Branch vocabulary. Its tone system indicates an independent development not influenced by other Tai languages or in other words a linguistic isolation at some earlier period in its history, though it does exhibit some similarity to Saek in its splitting of the A1 box. As we have already seen, the historical development of velar initials agrees with NT in many correspondences such as in tonal aberrancies or in the loss of the velar element in labio-velar clusters. Mèn is thus best characterized as a NT language with significant exposure to SWT languages. However, the determination of what is inherited and what is borrowed from SWT will necessarily have to be postponed until we have more adequate descriptions of other languages from this area and we are able to work with other speakers of Mèn, preferably from Vietnam.

Geographically, Mèn appears to have its closest relatives to the northwest in Phu Tu'ông-du'ông, and to the north in Phu Qui, and the Thu'ông Xuan district of Thanh Hoa Province, all south of the Sông Chu River. Since previous studies have focused almost exclusively on areas north and west of the Red River delta, the question now arises, how did Mèn, Pao, Saek, and the other languages known to us only as ethnonyms, such as 'Yo' and 'Du'o'i,' come to be located in this region?

The question is significant not only for the history of Tai languages, but for the ethnolinguistic dimension of Vietnamese history that is customarily ignored.

Given the fact that Mèn is a NT-type language, one of a number of such languages spoken south of the Red River delta, isolated from what we have come to understand as the Tai mainstream until the intrusion of Red Tai and Mèy into Thanh Hoa (Ai) Province, are NT-type languages like Mèn, Pao, NyoR and Saek to be considered part of NT or as a separated branch (as Gedney argues for Saek)? In either case the diversity involved will necessitate modifying our definition of Tai, in particular of the NT branch, which may have been too narrow, based upon the relative homogeneity of NT languages in Guizhou and Guangxi. It would now seem a point has been reached where, if the genealogic metaphor is to be maintained, geography and history must be addressed.

But before proceeding further I am going to digress for a moment to consider the nature of our evidence and a consequent methodological issue. A democratic premise would insist that, in reconstructing the past, evidence from all disciplines be equally considered and that any errant hierarchic tendencies which might arise would be leveled by the existence of weaknesses in all approaches. For example, the fact that history is subject to the political biases of its recorders might be offset by the fact that for historical linguistics, some of the evidence, languages, may have disappeared altogether. However, these kinds of argument are irrelevant when we consider a more fundamental difference in the nature of evidence from the two disciplines, namely that historical evidence is consciously man-made, while language is the product of an unconscious evolution and therefore natural. Linguistic evidence is by definition of a different order because it underlies all the rest. This statement could, I suppose, be contested by historians and others, perhaps anthropologists or archaeologists, but they would never be able to escape the fact that their historicism exists, is made manifest, only in the codes, phonic and graphic, of language, that is, in the domain of linguistics which here, once again, also at this level, is prior.

There are, of course, distortions or biases built into language by virtue of its being constructed of symbols, but these biases are constant for all language. (The nature of this type of bias has been the focus of some philosophical and linguistic study, as in, for example, the work of C.S. Pierce, Roman Jakobson, and Charles Pyle.) Furthermore, those groups of people who are the subject of historical investigation and discourse are, by unspoken agreement, defined by language, for example, Thai, Vietnamese, Cham, Muong, and so on. To say, for instance, that the early Vietnamese did not speak Vietnamese is disturbing because it implies a questioning of nomenclatural criteria and convention. Yet, that is indeed the dilemma with which we are currently faced. 'Vietnam,' as everyone knows, is a Chinese expression, and 'Muong,' as noted by Condominas (1980), is a Tai word; thus both are ambiguous. What is not ambiguous, however, is that both of the languages currently spoken by people with these ethnonyms, belong to a linguistic grouping nowadays labeled 'Viet-Muong' within the larger 'Vietic' branch of Austroasiatic (AA) (Diffloth p.c.). If we pose the question in linguistic terms, "according to the evidence of comparative linguistics and dialect geography what language was spoken in the Red River delta in the first century A.D.? Or, the Chu valley? Or, what language did the inhabitants of Au-lac speak?", the nomenclatural paradox would be eliminated and a frame would be created into which to place subsequent historical records composed in Chinese or Chu-nom.

In the discussion which follows I will consider the linguistic evidence as primary, to be supplemented by historical records and analyses wherever possible.

Insight into the problems posed by the existence of NT languages south of the Delta may be had if we consider several important characteristics of Tai linguistic distribution.

(1) The primary axis of SWT is east to west, and only secondarily north to south. It is only in the secondary north-south axis that the P-PH initial consonant distinction is to be found. The primary axis of NT is north to south. CT dialect distribution is essentially radial, surrounding the area of greatest diversity," described by Gedney.

(2) The diversity of the eastern Vietnam-Guangxi border area is CT diversity and does not include SWT and NT branches. However, since we may now assume that Saek is not a geographical accident, and when Saek and Mèn are to be added to the NT inventory, the diversity of this group is equal to if not greater than CT. So, we may pose the question, where is the epicenter of NT if not somewhere along the north-south axis between Guizhou and Thanh Hoa?

For AA we note that:

(3) Vietnamese is an AA language with strong Chinese influence, whereas its closest genetic relative and neighbor, Muong, shows little or none of this influence. The area of greatest diversity of Vietnamese dialects is central Vietnam.

(4) The Vietic branch of AA includes Viet-Muong and several other dialects spoken in the Song Ca valley and south.
Thus the dialects of Vietic are distributed along a north-south axis from the Red River to Khammouan and Huế.

Based upon these linguistic circumstances we may propose that:

(5) The ancestors of modern Vietnamese arrived in the Delta relatively recently, during a period of heavy Sinicization, from somewhere to the south; and

(6) Tai languages of the NT branch were at one time spoken on a continuum from Guizhou to Thanh Hóa (Ai) and Nghe An (Yên).

Historical information supports this linguistic distribution well.

(7) Northward relocation of toponyms noted by Taylor (327ff) occurred sometime between the Tang dynasty (618-916 A.D.) and the 14th century when the first ethnic Vietnamese historians began composing in Chu-nom. Taylor also notes that Giao received its heaviest dose of Sinicization during the Tang period, and we may surmise that the AA group cultivated expressly for the purpose of carrying out Chinese interests in Giao were the ancestors of the modern Vietnamese, known to the Tais as Keo (/kɛw/ < Giao). If we envision ancestors of the modern Vietnamese moving northward from Nghe An into Hanoi rather than southward from China, the movement of place names would follow this general pattern. Gérard Difflitho, who has studied the languages of this branch on the Lao side more thoroughly than anyone, has ventured (p.c.) that the homeland may have been somewhere to the south of the Sông Ca.

(8) During this same period, to the north, Tai groups were resisting Chinese and later Sino-Vietnamese invasions leading eventually to migrations of SW Tai to the west. The last of these upheavals took place in the 11th century led by Nùng Tri Cao whose followers were the ancestors of the Western Nung (Nông Chữ'ng) found in the vicinity of Lao Cai, that is, isolated from the other CT dialects. And from this piece of datable information we may note that differences obtaining between Western Nung and the rest of CT represent a time span of approximately 1,000 years, a good indicator of the rate of linguistic change in the Tai family.

(9) Finally, the political-agricultural system of Au-lac as described in Chinese sources resembles very closely that of the Black Tai which remained intact in northwest Vietnam at least until the battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1953. Furthermore, the mythological section of the Black Tai chronicles outlines a movement from Muang Om-Muang Ai, from where the Red and Black rivers join, to Muang Lo (Nghia Lô), and west. The myths of the Tais in Thanh Hóa and Nghe An, interestingly, are more directly related to myths attributed to the Chinese Shang, possibly through retention by Chu (cf. Chamberlain 1989) which suggests the existence of two mythic traditions among the Tais which we might tentatively assign to SWT and NT respectively. What seems clear from all of the evidence so far is that there were Tais in the Delta prior to Austroasiatics. That the Tai system was earlier dominant is supported by a number of cultural-political terms borrowed from Tai into Muong dialects (Condominas 1980). Both the ethnonym and the political system were borrowed from Tai, just as the ethnonym and political system of the Vietnamese originated with the Chinese.

I believe there is an explanation for how the earliest Tais arrived in the Delta, but the arguments are somewhat prolix and the details have been set forth in another paper on the BT creation myth (forthcoming). In brief, evidence obtained by comparing biological taxonomies of Tai languages with zoogeographical data suggests that the common ancestor of PT and Proto-Tai-Kam-Sui must have inhabited the lower Yangtze valley in the early first millennium B.C. (Chamberlain 1977, 1984). This was the location of the Kingdom of Wu, attacked about that time by Chu and considered to have been inhabited by "Yüeh" people who subsequently fled south. (For views on non-Chinese substrata in Wu see Ballard 1985.)

For reasons not yet clear, part of the NT (which I shall dub NT') polulation arrived in the Delta first and were later pushed south, while the other part (NT) remained in the north. According to the biotaxonomic data, both CT and SWT must have been located south of the Tropic of Cancer earlier than NT'.

It should be noted that this view of Tai linguistic distribution does not presume Tai speakers proper were the first to inhabit the Delta. The linguistic identity or identities of earlier predecessors remains problematical. It is within this time depth that archaeological evidence should be compared with linguistic distribution of Kadai and AN families, although this is less easily accomplished because of the greater length of time involved and the paucity of linguistic data available at this time.

According to Chinese sources, the area where the Mène and the Pao now reside in the Sông Ca basin was known in the Tang Dynasty as the province of Đồng-lâm, the interior of which (formerly Sơn Province) bordered on Tranninh (Muang Phouan, Xieng Khwang). We have mentioned Taylor's treatise on early Vietnam where we read (327ff) that the location of this toponym (and others from the same area) which later Vietnamese sources place in the Red River valley, is the birthplace of the hero Phùng Hưng. This hero's story as described in Taylor contains a number of motifs and names which are shared by the Lao epic of Cheuang, the primary source for which was a palm leaf manuscript taken by the Thai army in the 19th century from Ban Ban-Muang Kham in Xieng Khwang Province. From comparison with other extant Thai or Tai literature, the language of this text would seem to approximate that of the 13th or 14th century while the events recorded as well as the cultural motifs appear much older. Some examples of similarities include the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE XXVI</th>
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<tr>
<td>Phùng Hưng and Thao Hung (Cheuang)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

1. The ethnicity of PH is in doubt; he is called a "Lao leader," or "barbarian leader" have considered him to be a
by the various sources (Taylor 333).

2. Taylor (201) notes PH had a brother named Hai with giant-like characteristics and great strength.

3. There are three main characters in the Vietnamese version: PH, Hai, and Đỗ Anh Hàm.

4. After PH's death, Hai is opposed by Bồ Phá Lac, another figure with supernatural strength.

5. Đỗ Anh Hàm raised soldiers and besieged the capital city under General Kao Cheng-p'ing.

6. After his death, PH becomes a spirit and cult figure to whom temples are erected.

Similarly, there is a long passage in the epic poem of Thao Hung describing how he ruled the city of Pakan after the defeat of Thao Kwa with great attention paid to the attributes of a good ruler. Both of these ideal kings bear striking resemblance to Ram Khamheng on Inscription One where surprisingly the term pua is used for 'king' although its meaning is much debated. Gedney (1989: 461) pointed out that the term means 'king' in Black Tai, and 'to heal' in other nearby Tai languages. Its phonological similarity to the Vietnamese form can hardly be coincidence and it is perhaps for this reason that Ram Khamhaeng becomes confused with Ruang (=hung, =hûng, etc.) in tales of Phra Ruang. There is much more to be said regarding this matter too lengthy for inclusion here. I have addressed the problem somewhat in a revised version of the paper on Black Tai chronicles where Cheuang also appears, this time as the son of Khun Lo, but where he likewise travels from place to place, establishing his authority, just like Hu'ng and Hai in the Vietnamese version (Taylor 202).

As a final note, also in relation to Cheuang, the Mène in the Lao epic poem play a prominent role. The term is used as an ethnonym usually placed before the name of a character in the story to designate ethnicity. 'Keo' (Giao) is used in precisely the same way. The term came to mean 'spirit' in the Northern Thai chronicles, frequently in association with Cheuang. It is also found in the word for 'heaven,' /mûang 4 men 4/ in Lao and Thai literature, and by the Mène themselves. Further research will be required to explain these usages.

With enhanced awareness of the ethnolinguistic composition of the Sông Ca valley stemming from linguistic studies, be they Tai or Austroasiatic, there is an excellent opportunity to try to reconcile linguistic and historical material. It is hoped that this introductory glimpse of the Mène language will stimulate further progress in such an endeavor.
1. Since 1975 some toponymic and boundary changes have been made in Laos and Vietnam. In Laos, the district of Kham Keut which was a part of Khammouan Province has been reassigned to the province of Bolikhamsay (formerly Borikhan). The province of Nghê An in Vietnam has been changed to Nghê Tinh.

2. Stein (1947: 235) believes that this term "Lam," apparently pronounced with the long vowel in Vietnamese (?), is cognate with Cham, the ethnolinguistic group. He notes that the same Chinese character is used for the name of the old town of Lam-thanh, in the vicinity of Vinh (i.e. the mouth of the Song Ca), and the word for 'indigo,' which looks to be a Tai contact word, reconstructed in Proto-Tai as *gram (cf. Table XX), where some Central Branch reflexes show initial /-r/ and some Southwestern dialects such as WT have /-t/. (Karlgren has Ancient Chinese: *lam and Archaic Chinese: *glaam. The same character is used for the name of the river. A Tai Pao speaker interviewed in 1974 at Pak Sap said that the Pao came from Muang Lam which he equated with Phu Tu'o'ng (Chamberlain 1984: 70).

3. In his treatment of the various Tai-speaking peoples in this area, Dang also lists the Tii.y Khang, who he claims are from Muang Kham Keut in Khammuon (now Bolikhamsay Province); the Tay Mot from Muang Mot in Thanh Hoa; the Tay Puoc who speak a language similar to Mu'o'i — also found in the Na Pè area; the Tay That or Man That (probably the Tai Theng, also found in Kham Keut); the Tay Mu'o'i; and the Tay Chiêng or Tay Mu'o'ng, also called the Hăng Tông. The latter, who are defined by their settlement in cities with ruling lords, are divided into three groups: (1) the groups at Quy Châu, Quy Ho'p, and Quê Phong; (2) the group at Tu'o'ng Du'o'ng known as the Tay Pao, and (3) the group at Con Cương (for whom no name is provided). Dang regards the Tay Mu'o'ng as the earliest inhabitants who appeared in Nghê An in the 14th or 15th centuries although no source is cited for this statement. He also notes that during the Ming Dynasty a Tai chieftain named Cam Bành resisted the invasion of Lê Lợi at Trà Nam, a city whose remains are to be found near Con Cương. The Tai people of Môn So'n and Lu'C Da still remember this story, having linked it to the story of the founding of the country by Kha Lăm or Kha Lăm Cuoc Cương, whose real name was Lê Lợi. The altar to Kha Lăm is found at Ban Tên Ho'p in Lu'C Da where it is known as the altar of Tôngbong.

Dang mentions that the Tay Pao have a tradition of writing on Latania leaf in a script called "Lai Pao" which differs from the Tay Mu'o'ng writing of Quy Châu, the writing of Con Cương, and also that of the Tay Thanh.

4. The Ayoy are said by some to be a hunting and gathering group who live in the jungle, much as the Mlabri or "Phi Thong Leuang" of Xagnaboury (Laos) and Nan (Thailand).

5. Lao data are primarily from Maha Sila (1960). Black Tai (BT), White Tai (WT), Lei Ping (LP), Lung Ming (LM), Western Nung (WN), Yay and Saek (SK) are from Gedney (1989) and Gedney's fieldnotes. The Sui and Hli forms are from Pranee (2527). Lung Chow (LC), Wu Ming (WM) and the remainder of languages cited come from Li (1977).

6. There is in fact another possibility for the QC taw, that it is equivalent to dao chadaa because it closely resembles the Sukhothai form for this character. I also believe that Cham had this character as well, though I have no Cham materials available to confirm this.

7. Stein also comments (p. 235) that the historical phonology of the ethnynym Cham is the same as that of 'indigo,' citing the ancient and archaic Chinese reconstructions of Karlgren, *lâm and *glaam. Tai dialects show variously khr-, c-, kj-, l-, s- as reflexes of PT* *gr-. Both Mène and Saek show /khaam/.
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