

# A NOTE ON THE BRANCHES OF MON-KHMER

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A recent study of selected Mon-Khmer languages from a lexico-statistical point of view<sup>1</sup> tends to indicate 9 main branches of Mon-Khmer, with approximately equal linguistic distance between all of them. There is a slight possibility of a northern vs. southern dichotomy, but it seems rather unlikely. Interpreted speculatively from the viewpoint of human geography, this could point to a mass dispersal from some central Mon-Khmer homeland some time during the 2nd millenium B.C.,<sup>2</sup> possibly as the result of some major catastrophe.

The divisions of Mon-Khmer as indicated by the above study are:

- A. Pearic - Pear, Chong, Samre, Angrak (?), Saoch (?)
- B. Khmer
- C. Bahnaric:
  - North Bahnaric - Bahnar, Rengao, Sedang, Halăng, Jeh, Monom, Kayong, Hrê, Cua, Takua, Todrah
  - West Bahnaric - Loven, Nyaheun, Oi, Laveh, Brao (?), Sok, Sapuan, Cheng, Suq (?)
  - South Bahnaric - Stieng, Central Mnong, Southern Mnong, Eastern Mnong, Koho, Chrau
- D. Katuic - Katu, Kantu, Phuang, Brū, Pacóh, Ta'oih, Ngeq, Kataang, Kuy, Lor, Leun, Ir, Tong, Souei, So, Alak, Kasseng (?)
- E. Khmuic - Khmu', Mal, Mrabri, Yumbri, Khao, Tayhat, Puóc, Lamet (?)
- F. Monic - Mon, Niakuol
- G. Palaung, Wa, Riang-lang, Danaw, Lawa, Kawa, Khamed (?), Mang (?)
- H. Khasi
- I. Việt-Mường - Vietnamese, Mường, Mày, Arem, Tày Pong

As for the genetic affiliation of Vietnamese, the figures in the above study put Vietnamese well within Austroasiatic but slightly apart from Mon-Khmer. But Mường falls solidly within Mon-Khmer, and Mày, Arem, and Tày Pong appear to support the Mường evidence, so that Việt-Mường would appear to be a brance of Mon-Khmer, with Vietnamese being slightly divergent because of heavy outside (mainly Chinese) influence.

Within Bahnaric the West Bahnaric division is not yet solidly established, but there are indications pointing in that direction. Gregerson and Smith<sup>3</sup> have recently ques-

tioned the assignment of Bahnar to North Bahnaric because of its lack of register contrast, suggesting that it be classed with South Bahnaric. But the lexicostatistical and geographical features strongly suggest North Bahnaric. Smith<sup>4</sup> is also proposing an Eastern North Bahnaric subdivision within North Bahnaric, comprising Cua and Kótua.

## FOOTNOTES

1. David Thomas and Robert K. Headley, Jr., "More on Mon-Khmer Subgroupings", appearing in *Lingua* Vol.25, 1970.
2. According to Gleason's glottochronological chart (*Workbook in Descriptive Linguistics*, 1965, p.88) the calculated time lapse for 30% cognateness is about 2800 years, and for 20% about 3800 years. So with cognate values between Mon-Khmer branches falling generally between 20% and 30%, a date somewhere between 800 B.C. and 1800 B.C. would be indicated for the grand splitting up of the family.
3. See Kenneth Gregerson and Kenneth Smith, "The Development of Register in T'odrah", in this volume.
4. Kenneth D. Smith, "Eastern North Bahnaric: Cua and K'otua", in this volume.

