

Tai-Kadai and Miao-Yao Migration

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Tai-Kadai and Miao-Yao migrations have almost always been partial (in the sense of leaving some people behind) and unidirectional (not returning to the point of departure). Oppression, warfare, and harsh economic conditions have been their triggers. Confronted with other empire-building nations, such as China, Burma and Vietnam, no Tai-Kadai or Miao-Yao people group except for the Thai and Lao people succeeded in building sovereign nation states themselves.

1 General Migration Typology

In an ecological sense, migration implies the mass movement of numerous members of a species to a different environment. It is triggered as an adaptive behavior by a spatiotemporal variation of resources.¹ Movements of individuals or small groups do not count as migration, as they do not represent mass phenomena. Migratory species include human groups, animal species, and even plant species whose movement is scrutinized under the term 'seed dispersal'. In this introductory section, we identify different types (§ 1.1) and triggers of migration (§ 1.2) by illustrating them with examples derived from ethnic groups in China.

1.1 Types

Migration might affect a group of people completely (A), partially (B) or differentially (C), and might encompass a unidirectional (D) or cyclical movement (E).

A Complete Migration

Complete migration involves the movement of every member of an ethnic group to a different terrain. No ethnic group has been observed to have moved into or out of China in its entirety because for each migratory phenomenon, there has been a left-behind remnant of people. Yet, we might quote the Dungan people as an example of quasi-complete migration. In the 1850s, about four million Dungan people, who were Hui Muslims and descendants of Arabic and Persian immigrants, populated Shaanxi and Gansu provinces. In the wake of the Dungan Revolt (1862–1877), which started as inter-ethnic strife between Hui and Han people² and ended as a

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1 Dingle and Drake 2007, 113.

2 Lipman 1998, 120.

dramatic reduction of population with 3.98 million Dungan killed or deported by Qing imperial forces,³ a small number of perhaps 20,000 Dungan people emigrated to the Soviet Union. It was in the Soviet Union that they came to be called Dungan, a Turkic exonym adopted by Western travelers.⁴ Today, about 175,000 descendants of these Dungan migrants populate Kyrgyzstan (77,000), Kazakhstan (74,000), Russia (3,000), and other territories. The Dungan people still speak the Gansu sub-dialect of Mandarin Chinese, with Russian and Turkic as superstrate languages.⁵

B Partial Migration

The majority of the migration phenomena occurring in China involve the partial displacement of populations. Among the multiple examples of partial migration into or out of China, we can mention the Utsul or Huihui 回辉 people on Hainan Island, signifying a partial migration pattern. They are the descendants of Cham refugees who fled the Indochinese peninsula after the decisive defeat of the Champa kingdom by the Vietnamese kingdom in 1471. The Cham people were trading and seafaring Austronesians who arrived in Vietnam before 500 BC and founded a kingdom in 192 AD. Islam was introduced in Champa in 850 AD and became an official religion in 1676 when a Champa king converted to Islam.⁶ The Champa kingdom lasted for 1600 years before its final annexion by the kingdom of Vietnam in 1832.⁷ The Cham people who fled to Hainan Island in 1471 partly belonged to the ruling class and were allowed by the Ming emperor to settle down in Sanya.⁸ There are currently 8,500 Cham descendants on Hainan Island who adopted the name Utsul. They were integrated into the Hui nationality by the Chinese government in the 1950s.

C Differential Migration

Differential migration happens when two social classes, two age cohorts, two genders, or two otherwise defined social groups exhibit contrasting patterns of migration. China witnessed age-based differential migration in the wake of Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms in the 1980s. The reform of labor and household registration rules allowed people to move freely for work, dismantling the previous requirement to work at their birthplace. This triggered a remarkable increase in internal

3 Kim 2004; Li 1978; Lu 2003.

4 Gladney 1991.

5 Gladney 1991, 33.

6 Manguin and Nicholl 1985, 10.

7 Andaya 2008.

8 Nhung 2006, 104.

migration from poor rural areas to richer coastal areas. However, only young people left the countryside, and elderly people stayed behind. Research estimates indicate a surge in the number of migrants to 100 million in the 1990s and to 200 million in the 2000s.⁹

D Unidirectional Migration

Many instances of migration in Chinese history have been unique events where people move from A to B location without returning to their point of departure. During the Ming-Qing turnover in the 1640s, for example, many Hokkien (Southern Min) people settled on the Malaysian Peninsula, which is constituted by Southern Thailand, Northern Malaysia, and Singapore. It has been observed that the Fujian emigrants of Zhangzhou resettled on the northern part of the Malay peninsula, that is, in Southern Thailand and Singapore, while those of Xiamen and Quanzhou landed in Malaysia, on the southern part of the peninsula.¹⁰ Hokkien people exhibited seamless integration into Thai and Malay society, playing an important role in regional social life.

E Cyclical Migration

Ethnic groups engage in cyclical migration, which reflects a seasonal movement pattern, entailing regular back-and-forth journeys between two areas. Conventionally, Mongolian tribes were recognized for practicing nomadic pastoralism although a majority of them have embraced sedentary pastoralism in the 21st century. In the first half of the 20th century, an average Mongolian family transported between 80 and 120 sheep and goats in the meantime summer and winter camps. A representative case study conducted by Rita Merkle in Ejin County, Inner Mongolia, reported the typical mean distance between the two camps to be about 15 kilometers.¹¹ During the summer, most families underwent migration three to four times between temporal grazing areas located at a distance of 4 to 5 km. The nomads lived in tents or *gers* (*yurts*), which can be assembled and disassembled in 1 to 2 hours.

1.2 Triggers

People migrate to other places in search of protection from oppression (A) and to seek better economic conditions (B) or climatic conditions (C).

⁹ Zhou 2013, 25.

¹⁰ Miles 2020, 32.

¹¹ Merkle 2013.

A Protection from Oppression

The main driver of migration is the threat of oppression or extinction. Tang dynasty China was partly a safe haven for adherents of Zoroastrianism (祆教). When the Sasanian or Middle Persian Empire (224–651) ended with the Islamic conquest of Iran and when its last Zoroastrian king, Yazdegerd III (624–651) was killed, his son Peroz escaped to China together with a group of loyal subjects, where he served as Tang general.¹²

Another example from the 20th century sheds light on the 25,000 Jews who migrated from Europe to Shanghai to escape Nazi oppression. While other Western nations refused entry to the ships of Jewish refugees, Japanese-occupied Shanghai offered asylum to the Jews. Jewish refugees arrived in Shanghai between 1935 and 1941. However, between 1941 and 1945, the diplomatic pressure from Nazi Germany on the Japanese occupants led to the settlement of the refugees in a Ghetto, which was later known as the Shanghai Ghetto.¹³

B Food and Economy

The search for food, or more generally, a pursuit of better economic conditions, is another important driver of migration. In 1668, during the reign of the Kangxi Emperor, the Qing government decreed a prohibition of non-Manchu people, in particular Han people, to enter Manchuria (Liaoning, Jilin, Heilongjiang), but the rule was openly violated. In the mid-19th century, the Manchu government reversed its policy and allowed Han settlers, in particular those from the famine-stricken areas of Shandong, Heibei, and Shanxi, to migrate to Manchuria. The Han became the majority in Manchuria, and the influx of Han farmers contributed to the rapid decline and finally the death of the Manchu language.¹⁴

C Climate

Human beings also migrate in order to find a warmer climate. The search for better climate conditions often combines with other triggers, such as the search for food. However, examples of migratory events exclusively due to climate settings are unknown in China. Yet, there exists a general correlation between population density and proximity to the equator, a variable that serves as a proxy measure for mild climate. Areas closer to the equator are likely to be more densely populated. In China too, ethnic diversity and population are greatest in the south, and population density gradually decreases towards the north.

¹² Bonner 2020, 338f.

¹³ Heppner 1993.

¹⁴ Richards 2003, 141.

2 Tai-Kadai Migration

The Tai-Kadai family consists of more than 96 languages spoken by 100 million people in China, Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, and Vietnam (see Fig. 1). While most scholars agree that the original homeland of all Tai-Kadai groups is Southwest China, there is considerably less consensus on the exact history of Tai migration into Southeast Asia. We present an overview of this controversy (§2.1) before reporting on two more recent emigration waves into Vietnam, the Nung (Zhuang) in the 17th century and the Kam (Dong) in the 19th century (§2.2).



Fig 1 The Tai-Kadai Languages

2.1 Ancient Tai-Kadai Migration

Tai-Kadai people are believed to originate from some of the ancient Baiyue 百越 people, who lived in South China more than 2,500 years ago. The term Baiyue, or Hundred Yue, appeared for the first time in 239 BC in Lü Buwei's annals,¹⁵ probably to capture the extreme variable application of Yue in those days among all kinds of non-Han tribes.¹⁶ Starting as a person name, the term Yue (first as 戊, then as 越 or 粵) was used in compound names since the 8th century BC, in terms such as Yangyue 扬越 (area of Zhejiang province) or Minyue 闽越 (area of Fujian province). The *Hanshu* 汉书 (*Book of Han*), which was finalized in 111 AD,¹⁷ mentions

- the Luoyue 雒越 who were the likely ancestors of the Northern Zhuang 壮, the Buyi 布依,¹⁸ and the Li/Lai (Hlai) 黎 people,
- the Dianyue 滇越 who were the ancestors of the Tai people of Yunnan province,
- the Ouyue 瓯越 who were the likely ancestors of the Southern Zhuang and the Vietnamese Nung.

The term Yue 越 ceased to be used, once the Chinese gained more knowledge about the ethnic groups in the South, roughly in the 2nd century AD.¹⁹ It was at that time that they preferred using other designations.²⁰ Different theories debate the exact time of migration of the Tai people to Yunnan, Thailand, Myanmar, and Laos.²¹ In 1909, military historian Henry Davies proposed that after the defeat of the Dali Kingdom 大理国 (937–1253)²² by the Mongols in 1253, there was a massive migration of Tai people into Southeast Asia; this theory hinges on the assumption that the Dali Kingdom and the earlier Nanzhao Kingdom 南诏国²³ were established

15 Knoblock and Riegel 2000, 510.

16 Meacham 1996.

17 Brindley 2003, 13.

18 The Buyi were also called Zhongjia, written as 仲家 or as 种家.

19 The term Yue is used today with another meaning. In linguistic terminology, it denotes the group of Chinese dialects which are spoken in Guangdong and Guangxi provinces and to which Cantonese belongs.

20 Baker 2002, 4.

21 Gerner 2019b.

22 Duan Siping 段思平 established the Dali Kingdom in 937. This kingdom was ruled by a dynasty of 22 kings before being subjugated by Mongolian armies in 1253. See Mote 2003, 710; Zhao 2002.

23 In 738, Pi Luoge 皮罗阁 unified six ethnic tribes into a new kingdom called Nanzhao 南诏. With the support of Chinese emperor Tang Xuanzong 唐玄宗 (712–756), Pi Luoge established the capital in Taihe 太和. Today, Taihe is a village of Dali City in Yunnan Province. Successors of Pi Luoge turned against the Chinese and won two battles with

and ruled by Tai people. The Tai people, who would have spearheaded resistance against the Mongols, had most to fear and therefore fled to Southeast Asia.

In 1923, missionary-scholar William Clifton Dodd (1857–1919) forwarded a refined hypothesis which claimed that the Mongolian conquest of 1253 was the last and not the first in a series of events that triggered Tai migration into Southeast Asia.²⁴

The connection of the Tai people with the Nanzhao Kingdom was disproved by several scholars²⁵ who argued that in both kingdoms the ordinary people were Bai²⁶ and the ruling elite Yi.²⁷ The Tai people did not have a sufficiently significant role to justify fear of a Mongolian invasion. Using evidence from Chinese manuscripts of different dynasties, these historians further claimed the existence of a Tai Kingdom in today's borders since at least the Western Han dynasty (206 BC–AD 9).

Spurred by discoveries of archaeological sites such as Ban Chiang, Thai scholar Suchit Wongthet suggested a prehistoric presence of Tai people in Thailand.²⁸ Upon inspection of the Rock Paintings of Hua Mountain 花山²⁹ in Guangxi Province, Wongthet modified his theory in 1994 and speculated that Guangxi, the homeland of the Zhuang people, might be the historic origin of the Tai people.³⁰ Chinese historians, including Chen Lüfan 陈吕范, proposed a similar theory according to which the Tai people originated from the ancient Luoyue 雒越 people and started migrating into Southeast Asia more than 2000 years ago.³¹

armies of the Tang dynasty. By 829, the Nanzhao Kingdom expanded into Sichuan, all of Yunnan, Thailand, and Laos. Yet, after reaching its peak in 850, the Nanzhao Kingdom went into steady decline. See Mote 2003, 710; Zhao 2002.

24 Dodd 1923.

25 See Backus 1981; Mote 1964; Terwiel 1978; Chen and Du 1989; Winai 1991.

26 Linguists classified the Bai 白 language either as a Chinese creole language mixed with different Tibeto-Burman languages or as an offshoot of the Proto-Sinitic language that had extended contact with Tibeto-Burman languages. The Bai people are known to be the only ethnic group of Buddhist faith in the area. Anthropologists have used this fact to connect the Bai people to the Nanzhao and Dali polities, which were Buddhist kingdoms.

27 The Yi 彝 are now a nationality in the People's Republic of China whose members speak Tibeto-Burman languages and not Tai languages.

28 Wongthet 1986.

29 The Rock Paintings of Hua Mountain (*Huashan yanbihua* 花山岩壁画) are believed to represent paintings of the ancient Luoyue people, the ancestors of the Zhuang people, and to date back at least to the period between 400 BC and AD 400. The main painting is located in Ningming 宁明 County close to the Ming River 明江 in Guangxi Province.

30 The Guangxi-Guizhou area is also proposed as the origin of proto-Tai by scholars who examined the spatial variation of terms connected with wet-rice farming.

31 Chen 1990.

Besides geopolitical events and archaeological evidence, linguistic data are crucial for understanding migration patterns. When people migrate, their speech gradually diverges from the speech of those who did not move. Researchers can infer migration patterns by explaining speeches that are genetically related but geographically distant. Over the past sixty years, various attempts have been made to reconstruct the family tree (Stammbaum) of all Tai-Kadai languages, starting with William Gedney for Proto-Tai (excluding Kam-Sui and Kra languages), Paul Benedict for Tai-Kadai (excluding Kra languages) and later advancements with the works of James R. Chamberlain and Weera Ostapirat (see Fig. 2).³²

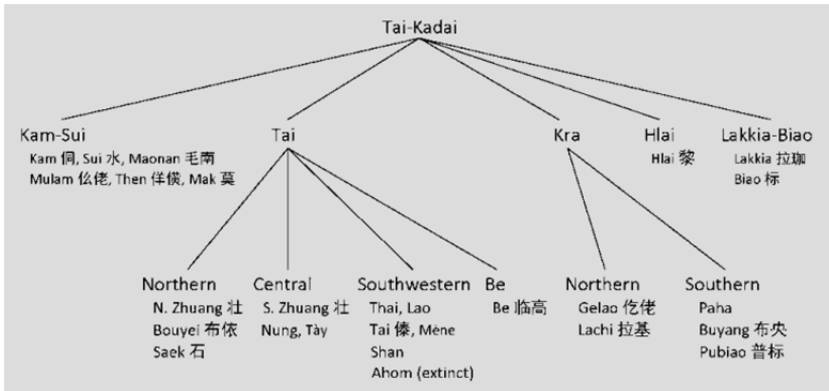


Fig 2 The Stammbaum of the Tai-Kadai family

Using the Comparative Method,³³ Chamberlain connected the split of intermediate proto-languages to political events.³⁴ Proto-Tai, to begin with, separated from other Kadai languages around 330 BC with the southward movement of the Han military below the Yangzi River, disrupting the polities of that area and pushing Proto-Tai speakers to the southwest into the lower parts of Guizhou, Guangxi, and Yunnan. The ancestral languages of Northern-Tai, Central-Tai, and Southwestern-Tai started to separate before the 1st century AD, when Tai groups moved away from Guangxi along a long northwestern trajectory stretching into Southern Yunnan, Myanmar, and Assam.³⁵ As settlers, the Tai people became part of the Nanzhao,

32 Gedney 1964; Benedict 1975; Chamberlain 1997; Chamberlain 2016; Ostapirat 2000.

33 The Comparative Method is a technical algorithm for reconstructing the sounds and words of the ancestor language of a group of genetically related languages.

34 Chamberlain 1998, 4f; Chamberlain 2016.

35 Diller 2000, 4-5.

Dali and Byu kingdoms,³⁶ though without any dominant roles. After Tai people were established along this line, they gradually migrated southward into Thailand, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam over a long period of time, and their migration was propelled by economic incentives and trade opportunities. The distribution of distinctive pottery, such as three-legged jars and bean pots, proves the established trade routes.³⁷ Occasional military pressure from Han frontier pacification campaigns also pushed Tai groups into Southeast Asia (see Fig. 3).³⁸

Using Chinese loanwords of different time layers, Pittayawat Pittayaporn argued that the first major wave of migration into modern-day Thailand was initiated in the 8th century.³⁹ The previously accepted assumption traces migration into Thailand at least 800 years earlier. A second stream may have started in the 8th century AD, when Tai people in Southern Yunnan were struck between the Tang/Song military and Viet groups moving northward. This double pressure forced the Tai people to rebel or to flee. One escape route was the move in a half-circle out of Yunnan/Guangxi into the valleys of the Red and Black rivers in Northern Vietnam. Cẩm Trọng identifies the modern-day Black Tai, White Tai, and Red Tai of this region as the descendants of these migrants.⁴⁰ A famous Tai rebellion took place under the leadership of Nong Zhigao 侬智高 during the 1040s. The eventual defeat of the rebels by Song troops propelled migration into Vietnam.⁴¹ A third wave occurred along the Lancang/Mekong river due to the Nanzhao-Dali turnover in the 10th century and possibly even the Mongol conquest of Yunnan in the 13th century. The legends of the Nüa Tai, Lü Tai, and Khün Tai, who are scattered along the Lancang/Mekong river, report relatively recent movements.⁴² Gordon Luce provided further evidence based on a Mongol report in the 1260s mentioning over 200,000 people at Yunnan's southern border who were about to move southward.⁴³ A fourth move of Tai people came from Western Yunnan into the Muang Mao kingdom, an ethnic Tai state, which was established during 568–1604 and later morphed into the Shan State of Myanmar. Many new Tai migrants from Yunnan arrived in the Muang Mao kingdom during the 11th–14th centuries.⁴⁴

36 The Byu or Piao kingdom 驃国 was a kingdom in Myanmar during 180 BC–1050 AD.

37 Meacham 1983.

38 Taylor 1983, 239–249.

39 Pittayaporn 2014, 47.

40 Cam 1998, 20f.

41 Barlow 1987.

42 Baker 2002, 8.

43 Luce 1958, 147.

44 Sao 1965; Zhou and Ke 1990.

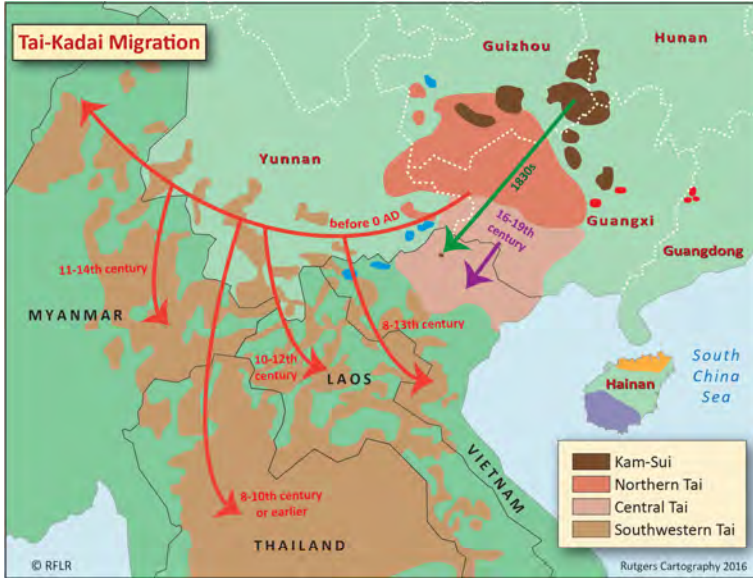


Fig 3 Tai migration

2.2 Pre-Modern Tai-Kadai Migration

Two more recent waves of Tai migration occurred between the 16th and 19th centuries, including the move of Southern Zhuang or Nong into Northern Vietnam and the displacement of the Kam people from Guizhou to Northern Vietnam.

A Nung

“Nung” is the name given by the Vietnamese government to various Central Tai languages spoken in the North of the country, while its variant “Nong” serves as the autonym for Southern Zhuang people in China. Most Nung are the descendants of Zhuang migrants into Vietnam during the 16th and 18th centuries, while some Nung descend from even earlier waves of migrants. Before, after and especially during the Ming/Qing turnover of 1644, a steady influx of Southern Zhuang came across the Sino-Vietnamese border. A convergence of ethnic strife, famines, disasters and bad governance heralded the end of the Ming dynasty. The epicenter of the prolonged struggle between Ming loyalists and Qing warlords was located in Guangxi, where the army general Wu Sangui 吴三桂, a Ming defector who switched over to the Qing, eliminated the last pockets of Ming resistance. The strategic importance of Guangxi brought large amounts of Han soldiers to the Zhuang area. The resulting sinicization and, perhaps more importantly, the general level of violence and disorder pushed many Zhuang people out of China into neighboring

Northern Vietnam where they quickly integrated with the ethnically almost identical Nung communities.⁴⁵

Migration of Nong into Vietnam continued at a lower scale during the entire Qing period, particularly when dynastic transition was complete. Another peak of Zhuang migration was reached in the 19th century in the aftermath of the Taiping uprising against the Qing Government. The Taiping movement was led by the Hakka rebel leader Hong Xiuquan 洪秀全 (1814–1864), a native from Guangdong province.⁴⁶ Hakka people were denied recognition by the majority of Chinese Yue residents in Guangdong, despite being ethnically Chinese. The denied recognition, which is reflected in the Cantonese exonym *Hakka*, ‘guest people’, spurred Hakka intellectuals in the 19th century to justify their Chinese origin.⁴⁷ It is this negated identity that might explain why the Hakka people were receptive for Taiping’s message of transcendence.⁴⁸ In the 1840s, before the start of the military phase, the Taiping movement expanded into Guangxi and made many adherents among the Zhuang people. Its transcendence equally appealed to them. At some point, about 25% of all Taiping followers in Guangxi were Zhuangs. During the rule of rebel leader Hong Xiuquan in Nanjing (1853–1864), Taiping adherents in Guangxi formed militia groups and fought the Qing institutions there. After the defeat of the rebels in Nanjing, Qing loyalists also subdued the insurrectionists in Guangxi. Amidst great social disorder, numerous Zhuang people escaped across the border into Northern Vietnam.⁴⁹ Increased migration took place over several years, leading

45 Barlow 1989; Barlow 2005, chap. 15-16.

46 As a young man, Hong Xiuquan planned to pursue a career in the civil service, but after he had failed the provincial examinations on four occasions, he had visions of a fatherly and of a brotherly figure. After a Christian missionary provided him with summaries of the Bible, he interpreted the fatherly figure as God the Father, the brotherly figure as Jesus Christ, and proclaimed himself the younger brother of Jesus Christ. During the 1840s, he received further instructions by Christian missionaries and adopted the Chinese Bible translation of the missionaries Medhurst, Gützlaff, and Bridgman as the doctrinal base of his emerging organization of believers. In 1851, Hong Xiuquan gathered 30,000 followers and tensions with the Manchu government arose. He rebelled when the government troops tried to disperse his followers. Hong defeated the government troops, occupied Nanjing in 1853, and established Taiping tianguo 太平天国, the “Heavenly Kingdom”, a kind of theocracy. His rule was terminated in 1864 when government forces overcame the rebel’s defense lines, and Hong Xiuquan was killed in 1864. See Spence 1996; Gerner 2019a, 56.

47 Norman 1988, 222.

48 Kuhn 1977, 365.

49 Barlow 2005, chap. 17.

to a strong presence of Nung in Vietnam. According to the national census of 2019, about 1,083,298 people are ethnic Nung.⁵⁰

B Kam

The national census of 2020 reports the presence of about 3.5 million Dong people in Guizhou, Guangxi and Hunan province.⁵¹ The Dong people whose autonym is *Kam* form one among the 56 nationalities in China. During the 1830s, a group of people from several villages in Guizhou decided to migrate southwards and managed to settle in Tuyên Quang province in Northern Vietnam. The reasons of this small-scale migration are unknown. In 1995, linguist Jerold Edmondson together with two members of the Center of Human Sciences in Hanoi visited the descendants of these migrants.⁵² Due to a long process of acculturation and intermarriage with Kinh (Vietnamese) and Dao (Yao) people, only 35 people were reported to have a Kam identity. The fact that these Kam had different Chinese family names (such as Shi 石 and Wu 吴) may point to an original migratory event that involved several villages, as Kam villages are often populated by members of a clan with the same family name. Among the 35 Kam in Vietnam, only one family was capable of speaking the Kam language, while the other descendants adopted Vietnamese as their native language.

3 Miao-Yao Migration

The Miao-Yao 苗瑶 or Hmong-Mien languages are spoken by 14.2 million people primarily in nine provinces of Southwest China and across the border in neighboring Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand. More than 90% of the Miao-Yao population dwell in China (see Fig. 4).

The Miao-Yao people are less populous and migrated less extensively than the Tai-Kadai groups. Chinese scholars, particularly Wang Fushi 王辅世, performed extensive research on Miao-Yao languages within China,⁵³ Wang and his colleagues established a tri-partite division of the Miao languages (Western, Central and Eastern) and then established a linkage between Miao-Yao languages and the Sino-Tibetan family, but other scholars decided that the reconstruction prompting this linkage was based on loanword cognates. Consequently, most linguists classify the Miao-Yao languages as an independent language family with its own Stammbaum

50 See Vietnam General Statistics Office 2019.

51 See National Bureau of Statistics of China 2020.

52 Edmondson et al. 1996.

53 Wang 1979; Wang and Mao 1995.

where each terminal node represents a cluster of related though unintelligible languages,⁵⁴ as depicted in Figure 5.

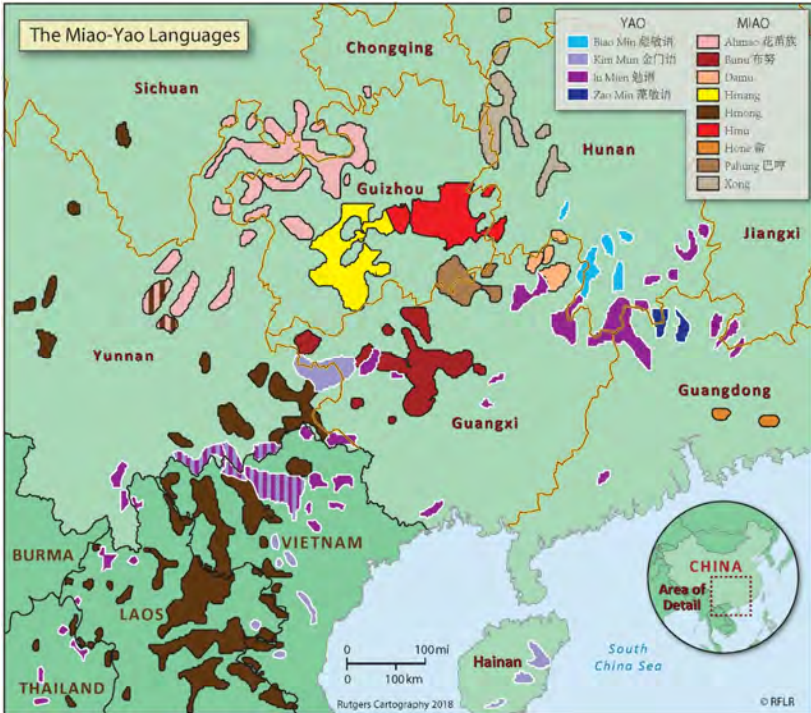


Fig. 4 The Miao-Yao Languages



Fig. 5 The Stammbaum of the Miao-Yao family

54 Gerner 2019b, 62; Ratliff 2010.

As per Han Chinese records, “Miao 苗” is the name used for non-Chinese groups living in the Yangtze basin south of the Han areas during the Qin dynasty (221–206 BC),⁵⁵ although this might have included many groups that were not ancestors of modern-day Miao-Yao people.⁵⁶ Native legends of the Miao people point toward an ancient migration from a “cold land in the north”,⁵⁷ yet no consensus has been reached on the exact location of that homeland. Yang Kou reviewed a list of proposed homelands including places like Mongolia and Mesopotamia, but all lack substantial evidence.⁵⁸ As Miao-Yao languages have not borrowed vocabulary from languages outside of China, most scholars see no linguistic evidence for a place of origin other than China.⁵⁹ Consequently, the Proto-Miao-Yao language might have originated in Northern or Central China.

Miao-Yao people’s traditional orations mention their migration in two large-scale movements, indicating their arrival in the southern area of the Yangtze river, as early as 500 BC. Some myths mention an ancient indigenous script lost by the ancestors of the Miao in the process of forced migration. Remnants of this pictographic writing are said to be preserved in the sophisticated embroidery patterns of clothes and costumes.⁶⁰ Deviant versions of the myth suggest that the ancient script was eaten by the Miao, which resulted in inner qualities such as the ability to memorize the traditional songs. Some versions of this myth raise the expectation that the lost script will be resuscitated in the future. Samuel Pollard’s (1864–1915) missionary script of 1917 (in which the New Testament was translated) could capitalize on this expectation as the Ahmao people in Western Guizhou viewed it as fulfilling the function of the ancient writing.⁶¹

The steady influx of the Han population over the past two millennia triggered southward movement of the Miao and Yao tribes into the lower parts of modern-day Hunan, Guizhou, Sichuan, and Yunnan provinces and eventually into Vietnam and Laos. This displacement occurred since at least the Tang Dynasty (618–907) and was more like a slow, gradual trickle-down movement than a temporary mass migration.

55 Chinese intellectual Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929) suggested that Miao may be a variant pronunciation of Man 蠻 and be used as a shortcut for another equivalent designation, Nanman 南蠻, which literally means „Southern tribes“ (info from Ulrich Theobald).

56 Gerner 2019b, 62.

57 Savina 1924.

58 Yang 2010.

59 Sagart 1995, 341.

60 Enwall 1994.

61 Enwall 1994; Gerner 2022, 47.

The second wave of large-scale migration occurred during the 18th and 19th centuries due to political turbulence and ethnic uprisings. The Miao mounted three rebellions in South and Southeast Guizhou against the Manchu government, all of which resulted in defeat, flight, and migration. Robert Jenks relates the Miao people's motivation to revolt to three types of grievances: the alienation of ancestral land by Han merchants, excessive government taxation, and maladministration on the part of officials.⁶² The First Miao Rebellion (1735–1738) took place when the Manchu government replaced the Tusi system of semi-autonomous indigenous chieftains with regular Manchu officials. The uprising, which covered the area of Guizhou's modern-day Qiannan and Qiongnan prefectures, was bloodily repressed, and about 18,000 Miao warriors were killed.⁶³ The Second Miao Rebellion (1795–1806), a prelude to the third rebellion, happened in Hunan and Southeast Guizhou due to disputes with Han immigrants over arable land. When the indigenous population was forced out of the best cultivatable lands, they rebelled, and fought with Han farmers.⁶⁴ Manchu soldiers finally quelled the rebellion after eleven years of conflict and set up walls and watchtowers to separate the Miao and Han territories.⁶⁵ The Third Miao Rebellion (1854–1873) engulfed a wide area in Guizhou and was fought with great vehemence. Propelled by the Taiping uprising in Guangxi, other ethnic groups such as the Buyi and Yao joined the Miao insurrection. There are rumors that some leaders of this rebellion had direct connections with the Taiping Rebellion of Hong Xiuquan in Nanjing, but the fact that the Miao rebellion outlasted the Taiping movement by nine years rather points to independent causes. The outcome was disastrous, with estimates suggesting the loss of the lives of almost five million people and the depopulation of vast areas.⁶⁶

These three rebellions also triggered a mass exodus of defeated Miao and Yao people to flee and to move out of China into other Southeast Asian countries, like Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, and Myanmar, where they established pockets of new communities (see Fig. 6).

62 Jenks 1994.

63 Wiens 1967, 191.

64 Jenks 1994, 20; Diamond 1995.

65 Elleman 2001, 7.

66 Jenks 1994, 165.

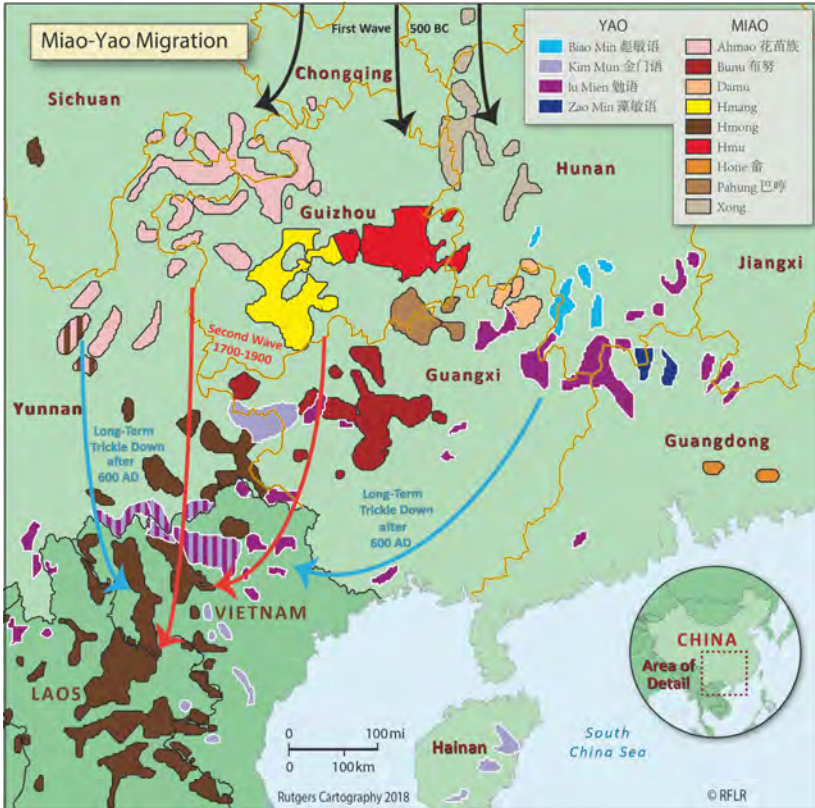


Fig 6 Miao-Yao Migration

4 Conclusion

The migration of Tai-Kadai and Miao-Yao has been a continuous occurrence since ancient times, with Chinese expansion as the main underlying trigger. This migration exhibits stark contrast to the Barbarian invasion of the Roman Empire between 375 and 568.⁶⁷ While the Barbarians overcame the empire in Europe, East Asia demonstrated the opposite trend, wherein the empire overcame the Barbarians. Most Tai-Kadai and all Miao-Yao groups experienced minority status in whatever territory or country they moved to. They are now integrated to various degrees in the societies of East and Southeast Asia, although many of their languages have become endangered as a result of their minority status (except for Thai and Lao).

⁶⁷ Halsall 2008.

List of Figures

- 1 “The Tai-Kadai Languages”
Cf. www.rflr.org/site/assets/files/135831/tk_languages_final.0x800.png.
- 2 “The Stammbaum of the Tai-Kadai family”
Cf. www.rflr.org/site/assets/files/135831/image002.800x0.jpg.
- 3 “Tai migration”
Cf. Fig. 1, with information added by the author.
- 4 “The Miao-Yao Languages”
Cf. www.rflr.org/site/assets/files/292594/image2.800x0.jpg.
- 5 “The Stammbaum of the Miao-Yao family”
Cf. www.rflr.org/site/assets/files/292594/image1.800x0.jpeg.
- 6 “Miao-Yao Migration”
Cf. Fig. 4, with information added by the author.

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