

# New endangered Tibeto-Burman languages of southwestern China: Mondzish, Longjia, Pherbu, and others

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Presented at ICSTLL 46  
Dartmouth University  
Hanover, USA  
August 8, 2013

# Overview

From March – May 2013, I collected word lists of various Tibeto-Burman lects that have had little to no previous documentation. Most have never been mentioned in previous academic literature.

Location: Guizhou and Yunnan provinces, SW China

- **Mondzish** cluster: a divergent Lolo-Burmese group
- **Pherbu** of SE Yunnan: a divergent Bai lect
- **Longjia**: TB affiliation, but no close relatives; Caijia and Bai may be relatives

# 1. Mondzish languages

Data collected from a divergent Lolo-Burmese group of least 6 languages in Wenshan Prefecture, Yunnan:

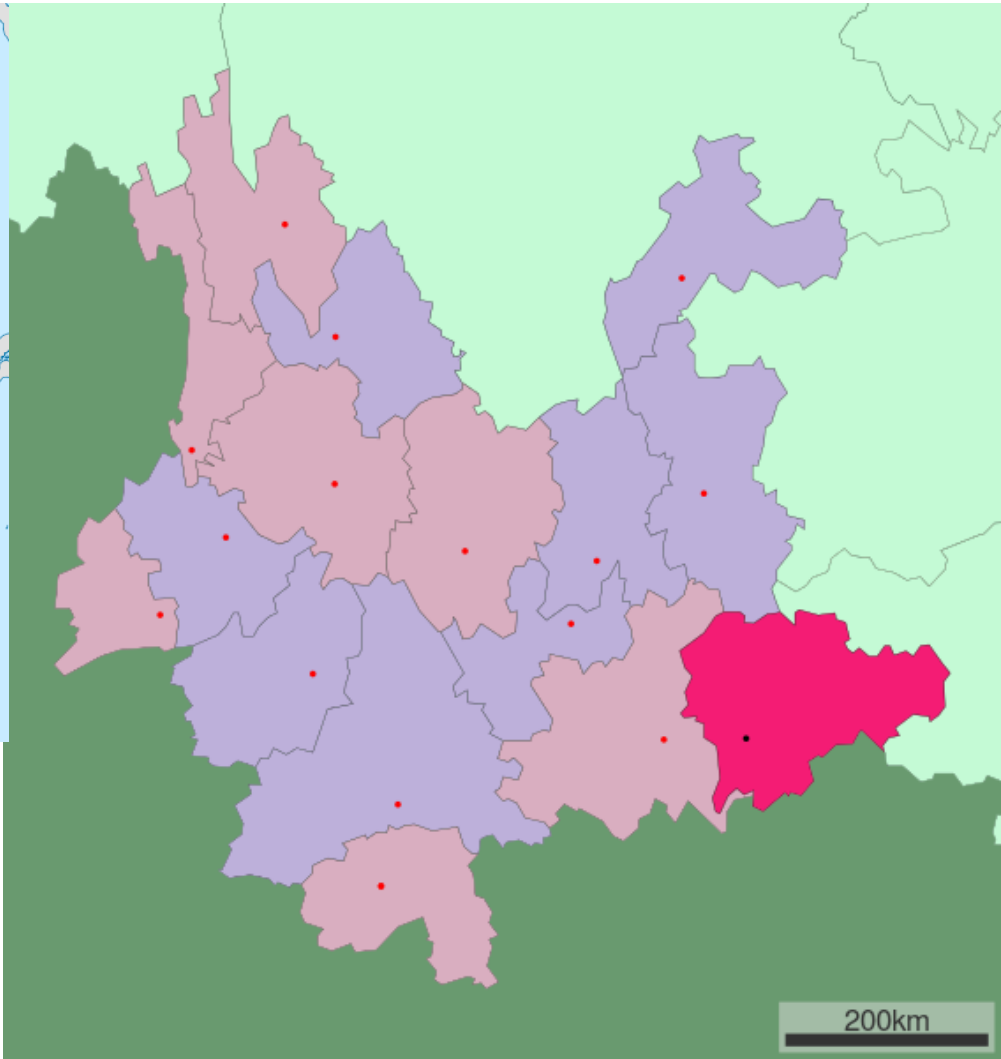
- **Kathu** (ka<sup>33</sup>θu<sup>33</sup>) or **Thou** (θou<sup>33</sup>): ~ 5,000 speakers
  - Nabi 那比, Nanping Township 南屏镇, Guangnan County
- **Muangphe** (muɑŋ<sup>55</sup>phɛ<sup>33</sup>): ~300 speakers
  - Xinfazhai 新发寨, Heizhiguo T. 黑支果乡, Guangnan County
- **Mango** (ma<sup>33</sup>ŋo<sup>11</sup>): < 50 speakers
  - Mumei 木美, Babao Township 八宝镇, Guangnan County
- **Maza** (ma<sup>33</sup>za<sup>53</sup>): < 50 speakers
  - Mengmei 孟梅, Muyang Township 木央乡, Funing County
- **Meang** (mɛɑŋ<sup>53</sup>): ~500 speakers
  - Dala Village 达腊村, Napo County
- **Munji** (mun<sup>53</sup>tei<sup>31</sup>): ~1,000 speakers
  - Yongli Village 永利村, Donggan T. 董干镇, Malipo County

All languages have SOV word order. Also spoken in Vietnam.

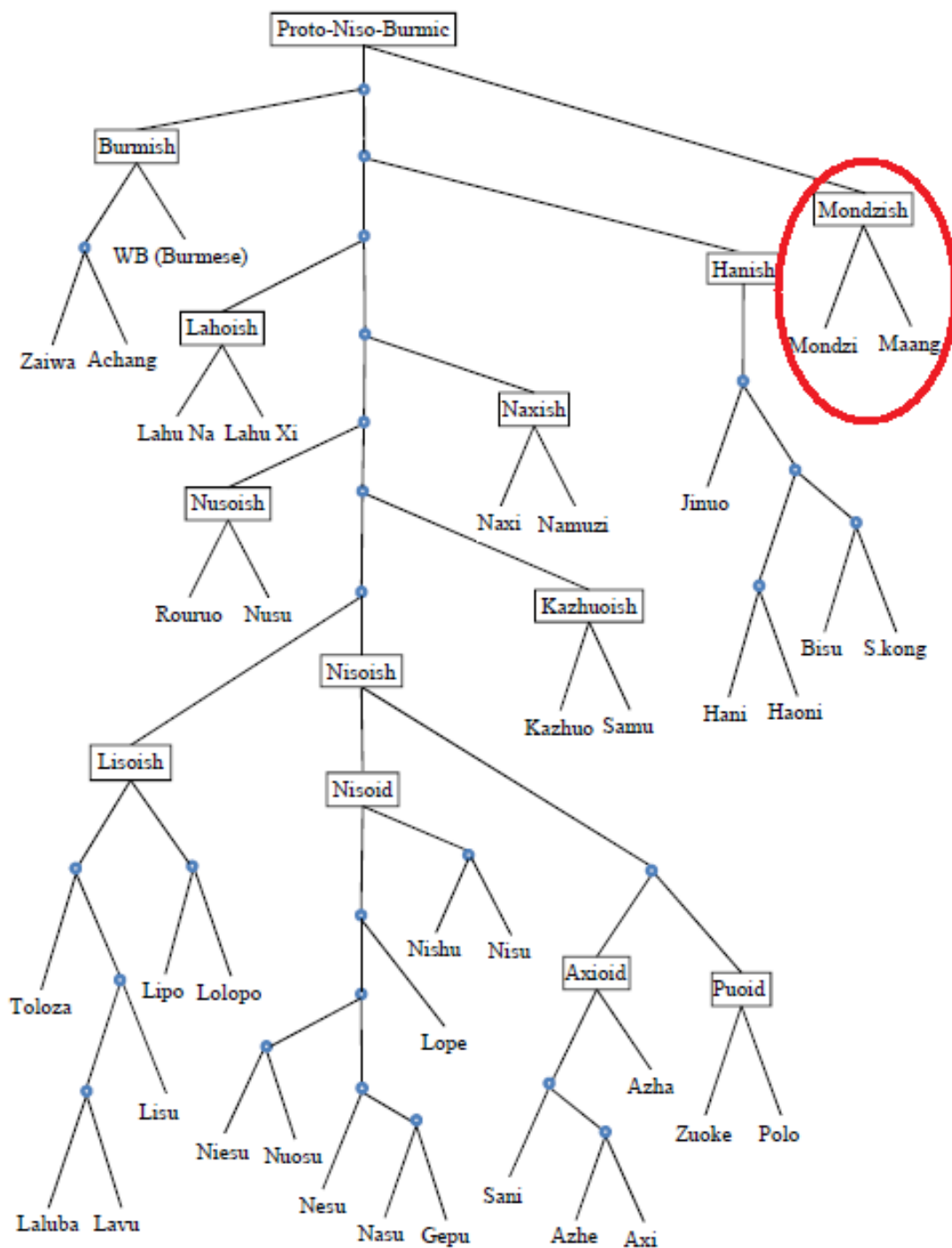
# Location of Wenshan Prefecture



*Top:* Location of Yunnan Province in red



*Right:* Location of Wenshan Prefecture in magenta



# Lolo-Burmese Tree

*Lolo-Burmese  
("Niso-Burmish")  
tree by Ziwo Lama  
(2012)*

*(Mondzish branch  
circled in red)*

# Previous studies of Mondzish

- Wu Zili (1993, 1994): first studies of Kathu and Maang
- Jerold Edmondson (2003): Mantsi of Hà Giang Province, northern Vietnam
- Ziwo Lama (2012): first identified and proposed the Mondzish grouping; only included Mondzi and Maang
- Hsiu (2013): first documentation of Muangphe, Maza, and Mango



Mouth organ (ṇaŋ<sup>33</sup>):  
Meang ethnic group

# Proto-Mondzish innovation: Deaffrication from Proto-Lolo-Burmese

<i>Gloss</i>	<i>Kathu</i>	<i>Muangphe</i>	<i>Mango</i>	<i>Maza</i>	<i>Meang</i>	<i>Munji</i>
human being	<b>θae</b> <sup>55</sup>	<b>saŋ</b> <sup>11</sup>	<b>sak</b> <sup>33</sup>	<b>saŋ</b> <sup>53</sup>	<b>saŋ</b> <sup>11</sup>	<b>sã</b> <sup>53</sup>
medicine	<b>θei</b> <sup>53</sup>	<b>sai</b> <sup>33</sup>	<b>si</b> <sup>33</sup>	<b>sei</b> <sup>33</sup>	<b>sai</b> <sup>33</sup>	<b>sae</b> <sup>33</sup>
salt	tshɛ <sup>33</sup> ʔdei <sup>33</sup>	<b>sɛ</b> <sup>33</sup>	<b>so</b> <sup>33</sup>	<b>sa</b> <sup>33</sup>	ʔde <sup>33</sup>	<b>sɔ</b> <sup>33</sup>
oil	huo <sup>53</sup>	<b>sei</b> <sup>53</sup>	-	<b>sei</b> <sup>55</sup>	ju <sup>11</sup>	<b>si</b> <sup>55</sup>
to eat	<b>ðɔ</b> <sup>53</sup>	<b>zei</b> <sup>33</sup>	<b>zu</b> <sup>33</sup>	<b>zɔ</b> <sup>53</sup>	<b>sa</b> <sup>33</sup>	<b>zɔ</b> <sup>53</sup>

# Kathu lateral clusters: crucial for reconstruction

<i>Gloss</i>	<i>Kathu (Nabi)</i>	<i>Written Burmese</i>	<i>Jinuo (Youle)</i>	<i>Proto-Lolo- Burmese</i>
dog	khli <sup>53</sup>	khwe3	khw <sup>44</sup> jo <sup>44</sup>	*k <sup>w</sup> əy2
ear	ta <sup>33</sup> klɛ <sup>55</sup>	hnaa2khɔŋ3	na <sup>33</sup> kho <sup>44</sup>	*ʔ-na2
white	a <sup>33</sup> <b>phlu</b> <sup>22</sup>	<b>phru2</b>	a <sup>33</sup> <b>phro</b> <sup>44</sup>	* plu1
blue	a <sup>33</sup> <b>plɛ</b> <sup>35</sup>	<b>pra2</b>	a <sup>33</sup> lu <sup>55</sup>	*bra1 (PL)
to fly	a <sup>55</sup> <b>plɛ</b> <sup>33</sup>	pjam2	<b>prɛ42</b>	*byam1
leaf	θei <sup>35</sup> phlo <sup>11</sup>	a1rwak4	a <sup>33</sup> pha <sup>55</sup>	*C/V-pakL
right side	plae <sup>35</sup> pa <sup>33</sup>	ja2	la <sup>33</sup> mɔ <sup>55</sup>	* s-ya1 (PL)



## 2. Pherbu / Minjia 民家 of Qiubei County

- A Bai variety in Badashao Township, 八道哨乡 Qiubei County, Yunnan (autonym: p<sup>h</sup>əɿ<sup>33</sup>bu<sup>55</sup>)
- Mentioned only in government records
- Divergent; SVO word order
  - Some items are only found in the divergent Northern Bai (Bijiang/Luobenzhi) lect, and others with the core Bai lects of the Dali area
  - Others have no cognates with any documented Bai lect (cf. SIL's Bai dialect survey)
  - Primary split from Proto-Bai?
- Geographic location in SE Yunnan is puzzling; result of early migration or displacement from W Yunnan?

# Divergent Pherbu forms

<i>Gloss</i>	<i>Pherbu (Anuo)</i>	<i>Bai (Luobenzhi)</i>	<i>Bai (Heqing)</i>
sun	ŋɛ <sup>33</sup>	ŋi <sup>55</sup>	ji <sup>44</sup> p <sup>hi</sup> 31
fire	fe <sup>33</sup>	fi <sup>33</sup>	x <sup>h</sup> ue <sup>33</sup>
snake	tɕ <sup>h</sup> u <sup>33</sup>	tɕ <sup>h</sup> ɛ̃ <sup>33</sup>	k <sup>h</sup> uo <sup>33</sup>
hair	te <sup>33</sup> me <sup>55</sup>	te <sup>31</sup> me <sup>55</sup>	tu <sup>21</sup> ma <sup>35</sup>
salt	ts <sup>h</sup> ɔ̃ <sup>11</sup>	tsũɛ̃ <sup>55</sup>	pĩ <sup>35</sup>
star	ɕɔ̃ɿ <sup>33</sup>	ɕã <sup>33</sup> tɕi <sup>31</sup>	ɕ <sup>h</sup> ɛ̃ <sup>55</sup> k <sup>h</sup> ɔ̃ <sup>33</sup>
cloud	ji <sup>31</sup>	muĩ <sup>31</sup> kao <sup>42</sup>	vɿ <sup>21</sup>
nose	p <sup>h</sup> ĩ <sup>53</sup>	q <sup>h</sup> ue <sup>55</sup> tu <sup>21</sup>	vɿ <sup>31</sup> tu <sup>21</sup>
ear	jɛ <sup>33</sup> kə <sup>33</sup> pĩ <sup>11</sup>	ʔɛ̃ <sup>44</sup> tɕɿ̃ <sup>31</sup>	ŋi <sup>44</sup> tɔ̃ <sup>42</sup>
to sleep	mi <sup>33</sup>	ŋ <sup>33</sup> ti <sup>31</sup>	ts <sup>h</sup> ɛ̃ <sup>33</sup>
red	xãu <sup>55</sup>	t <sup>h</sup> a <sup>55</sup>	ts <sup>h</sup> ɛ̃ <sup>44</sup>
stone	ts <sup>h</sup> i <sup>33</sup> ka <sup>33</sup> mon <sup>33</sup>	tu <sup>42</sup> q <sup>h</sup> ɛ̃ <sup>55</sup>	tsou <sup>42</sup> k <sup>h</sup> ue <sup>55</sup>
moon	a <sup>33</sup> mun <sup>33</sup> wa <sup>33</sup> lu <sup>11</sup>	ŋo <sup>33</sup> No <sup>31</sup>	mi <sup>35</sup> wã <sup>44</sup>
rain	zy <sup>33</sup>	dzɿ <sup>33</sup>	vɿ <sup>33</sup>

# ‘Millet’ in Pherbu: links further west

- **θie<sup>11</sup>mie<sup>55</sup>tsɿ<sup>33</sup>** ‘millet’ (小米)
- Cognate with forms found only in Arunachal Pradesh, NE India, rather than the rest of China, such as:
  - Aashing (Tani) **tami**
  - Puroik/Sulung (isolate) **tamayi**
  - Memba (Tibetic) **temi**
- This suggests an easterly movement from Arunachal overland to Yunnan.
- George van Driem, Mark Post, and Roger Blench have argued convincingly for the Himalayan/Brahmaputran origin of Sino-Tibetan.



### 3. Longjia 龙家

- Extinct in the 1970's or 1980's, in W Guizhou
- But in 1974, Zhao Qiming 赵启明 (71) transcribed about 20 Longjia words and phrases in Chinese characters, from one of the last remaining speakers in Jiangyizhai Village 讲义寨村, near Anshun City 安顺市, Guizhou.
- Autonym: “Songlibao 松立保”
- Without providing evidence, the *Guizhou Province Ethnic Gazetteer* (2002) claims that Longjia forms an independent TB branch along with Caijia, since it has the following cognacy rates with:
  - **Caijia**: 124 of 800 (15.5%) – *not very close to Caijia*
  - **Yi**: 63 of 800 (7.88%) – *not Lolo-Burmese*
  - **Miao**: 30 of 800 (3.75%) – *not Hmong-Mien*
  - **Gelao**: 28 of 800 (3.5%) – *not Kra-Dai*

A map of Yunnan province, China, illustrating the distribution of various ethnic groups. The map is divided into several regions, each labeled with an ethnic group name. Arrows point from the group names to their respective locations on the map.

- BOREN** (located in the northwest)
- CAIJIA** (located in the west)
- Yi (Nesu, Nipu)** (located in the west, near CAIJIA)
- LONGJIA** (located in the center)
- GELAO** (located in the south)
- BOLYU** (located in the south)
- Han (Sinitic)** (located in the north)
- TUJIA** (located in the northeast)
- Miao (Hmongic)** (located in the east)
- MULAO** (located in the center)
- Buyi (Tai)** (located in the south)

*Upper-case, underlined:*  
autochthonous  
ethnolinguistic groups

# Longjia, compared with Caijia and Bai

<i>Gloss</i>	<i>Longjia</i>	<i>Caijia</i>	<i>Bai</i> ( <i>Bijiang</i> )	<i>PTB</i>
one	pu	ji33	e44, a31	*g-t(y)ik
two	<b>ta (pu)</b>	<b>ta55</b>	kv33	*g-ni-s
three	<b>sa (pu)</b>	<b>sa33</b>	sã55	<b>*g-sum</b>
four	<b>suo (pu)</b>	sɿ31	si44	*b-ləy
five	zau (pu)	<b>yun33</b>	<b>ŋu33</b>	*l-ŋa ~ *b-ŋa
six	ɕi (pu)	<b>fu55</b>	<b>fv44</b>	*d-k-ruk
to eat	wa	zu31	ji55	*dzya

快跑、快跑——(龙家语)着(亨)弄、着弄。

名称：龙家——<sup>松尾保</sup>谢利保。

汉族——舒利保。苗家——

又通保。对门小坡——扎<sup>拗</sup>傲奏。生树子小坡——沙

傲奏。王家河——利别利。

白族款天

白族龙家系部份语言单词(实为龙家语)

吃早饭——娃物(谷)。吃午饭——娃日(云)。吃晚饭——

娃波。吃肉——娃礼。吃菜——娃付。吃耙耙——娃所。

赶场——跑开。犁牛——使奥。加担(草)——<sup>铜</sup>奥。

数日——补。二——打补。三——沙补。四——说补。

五——烧补。六——西补。短语：(汉语)不要舒这

东西给小孩看见——(龙家语)要啊、若罗冬贴(十回)

梯

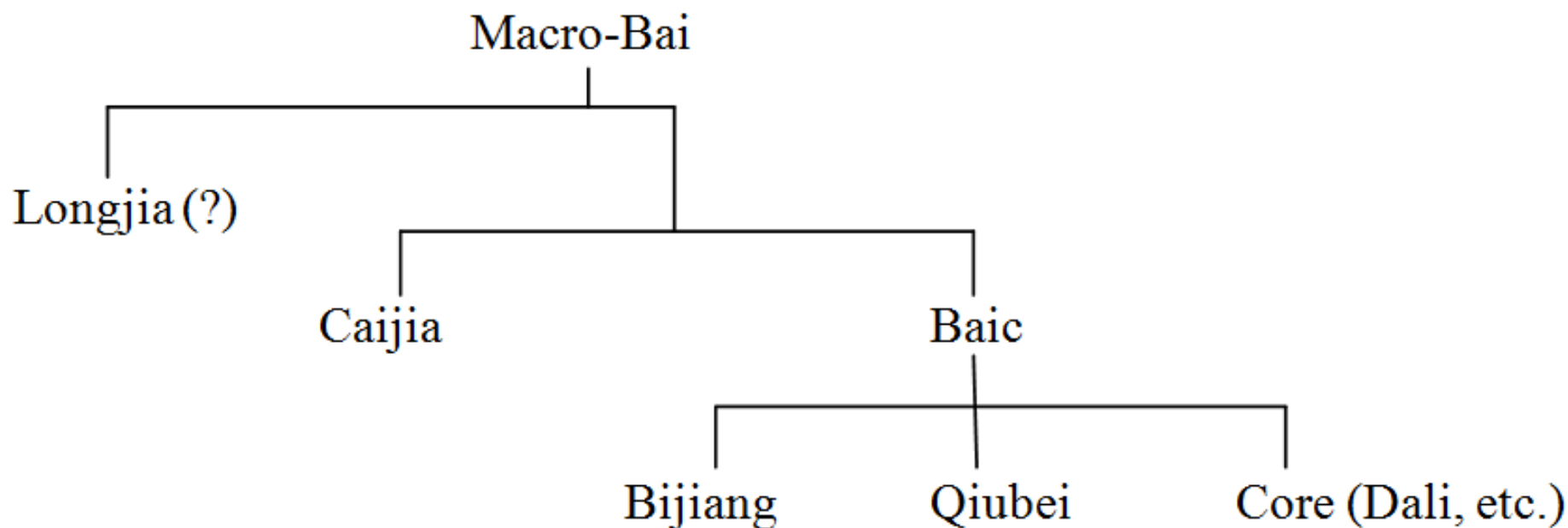


# Nanjinghua 南京话

- A few Nanjinghua 南京话 (autonym now lost) rememberers found in Jianxinhe village 建新河村, Kunzhai Township 昆寨乡, Nayong County, Guizhou Province
- Like the Longjia, the “Nanjing people” are officially classified as Bai.
- Rememberers claim it is very similar to Yi (Nusuphu), but with some divergent lexical items. Thus, there is likely a non-Loloish TB substratum.
- suo<sup>55</sup>mu<sup>33</sup> ‘eat rice’ – This hints at Nanjinghua having an SVO word order, like Bai and Caijia.
  - suo<sup>55</sup> < PTB \*dzya ‘to eat’
  - No obvious look-alikes for ‘eat’: Longjia wa, Caijia zu<sup>31</sup>, Bai ji<sup>55</sup>



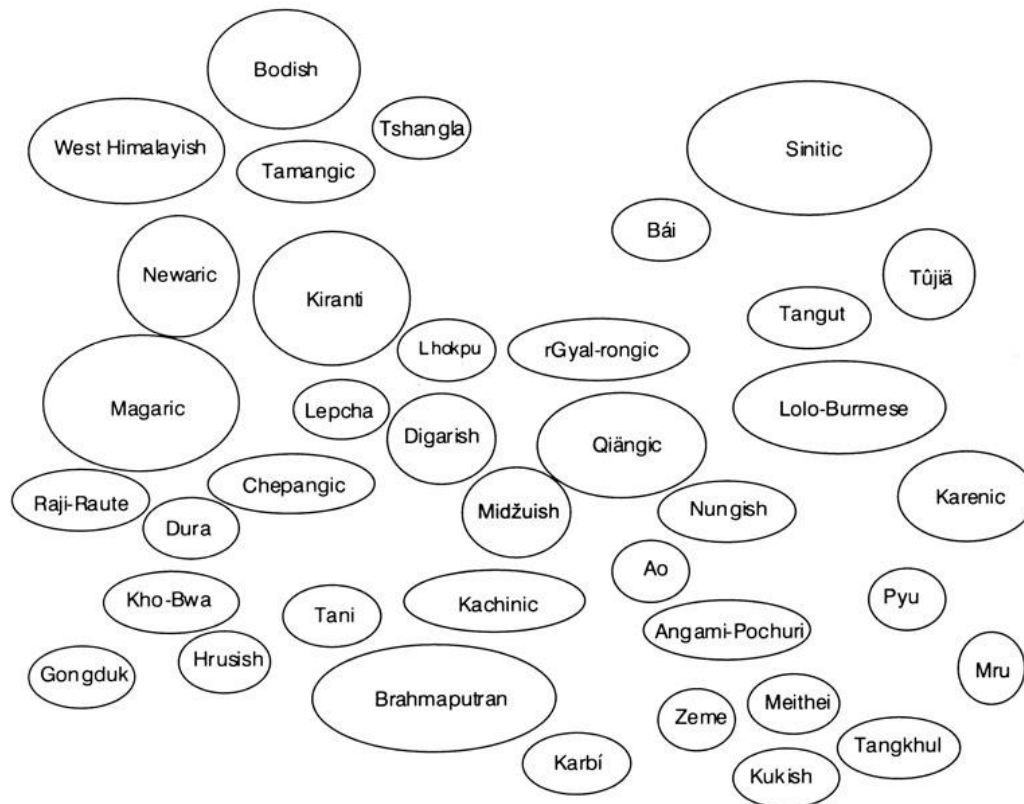
# A Macro-Bai grouping?



- Longjia is too poorly attested to classify with certainty.
- Caijia (recently discovered in Guizhou; ~1,000 speakers) has some lexical similarities with Bai.

# Or, another “fallen leaf”?

- Or, for now, Longjia might be better off as a new leaf in George van Driem’s “Fallen Leaves” model (along with Bai, Lolo-Burmese, Qiangic, etc.).



## 4. Ku, or Bo 𐑖 of Qiubei County

- Autonym is ku<sup>55</sup>, locally known as Bo 𐑖, officially classified as Bai.
- Location: Baintang 白泥塘, Shede Township 舍得彝族乡, Qiubei County, Yunnan Province
- Nisoish (“core Loloish”) language
- However, ku<sup>55</sup> of Wujiashai 五家寨 village (same township) is unintelligible with ku<sup>55</sup> of Baintang 白泥塘. Both claim to be separate ethnic groups.
- The Bo of Qiubei County claim direct ancestry from the Bo 𐑖 of Yibin County 宜宾县, southern Sichuan province, who were famous for their hanging coffins. Some Bo families in Baintang still practice the “hanging coffin” custom.
- Some Kra (e.g., Buyang) and Malayo-Polynesian (e.g., Toraja) speaking communities have historically practiced this custom.

## 5. Others (no fluent speakers left)

- Meuma (mu<sup>55</sup>ma<sup>33</sup> )
  - Found in Xinzhai 新寨, Mada Village 马达村, Daping Township 大坪镇, Malipo County, Yunnan
  - Several semi-fluent elderly speakers found, no fluent speakers
  - Most closely related to Samu, Sanie, and Katso of central Yunnan
- Luoji or Qixingmin 七姓民 (autonym: luo<sup>31</sup>dzi<sup>33</sup> )
  - Found in Shejie Village 蛇街村, Weining County, Guizhou
  - A few semi-fluent elderly speakers, no fluent speakers
  - Informant claims “Luoji” is nearly identical with Yi, but with some noticeable differences ( = non-Loloish substratum?).
  - The Luoji claim their ancestors were not Yi, and spoke a non-Yi language that had gone extinct centuries ago.

# Some implications for prehistory

- The **distribution** of Mondzish in SE Yunnan, Burmish in western Yunnan, and Hanoish in south-central Yunnan suggests that *Lolo-Burmese may have radiated out from central Yunnan a few thousands years ago*.
- **Longjia** and **Caijia**: early TB-speaking agriculturalists that predated the Sinitic, Kra-Dai (Tai-Kadai), and Hmong-Mien expansions in SW China, like Tujia
- The hanging coffins of southern Sichuan were likely built by certain groups of Loloish speakers. Further work is needed to determine whether there are non-Loloish substrata or influences.
- Loloish has absorbed many earlier groups, whose present-day languages sometimes appear to have non-Loloish lexical layers.

# Conclusion

- This 2-month research trip in southern China has turned up many “new” languages hitherto unknown to Western academia: Muangphe, Mango, Maza, Pherbu, Luoji, Meuma, etc.
- Many have very important implications for the prehistory of southern China and SE Asia.
- Many more languages certainly await discovery, if found before they go extinct. Field work is urgent!



*The Munji of Malipo County, Yunnan*

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# Thank you!



(Mural in the Bo 𪗇 village of Bainitang 白泥塘)