

The Gelao languages: *Preliminary classification and state of the art*

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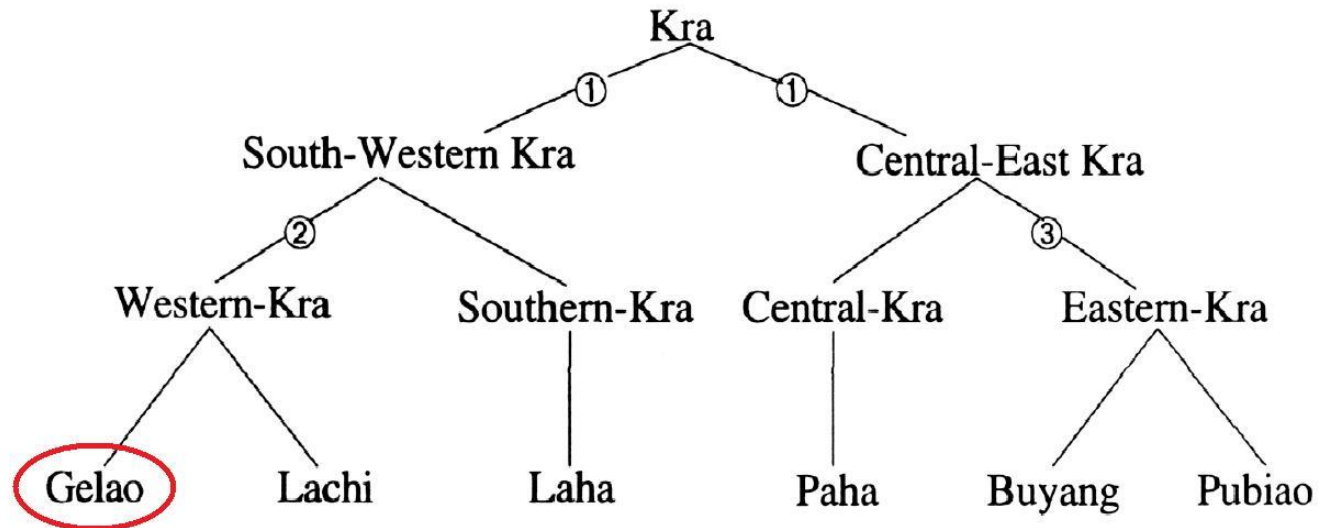
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Classification: position in Kra-Dai

Kra-Dai (*Tai-Kadai*): primary branches

- Tai
- Hlai
- Ong Be
- Kam-Sui
- **Kra**



Source: Ostapirat (2000)

Origins

- Homeland: **west-central Guizhou** province
- Guangxi, Yunnan, and Vietnam populations are relatively recent arrivals: through migrations during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) due to civil unrest
- The **Proto-Gelao** dispersed through western Guizhou by following the Beipan River 北盘江 and its tributaries.
- The related **Buyang** dispersed through the borderlands of SW Guizhou and NW Guangxi by spreading through the Nanpan River 南盘江 watershed; evidence from toponyms with the prefix *Yang-* 央-.

Possible dispersal routes of Kra-Dai branches in the Pearl River watershed



Adapted from <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Zhujiangrivermap.png>

Guizhou: Recent incursions vs. Autochthonous populations

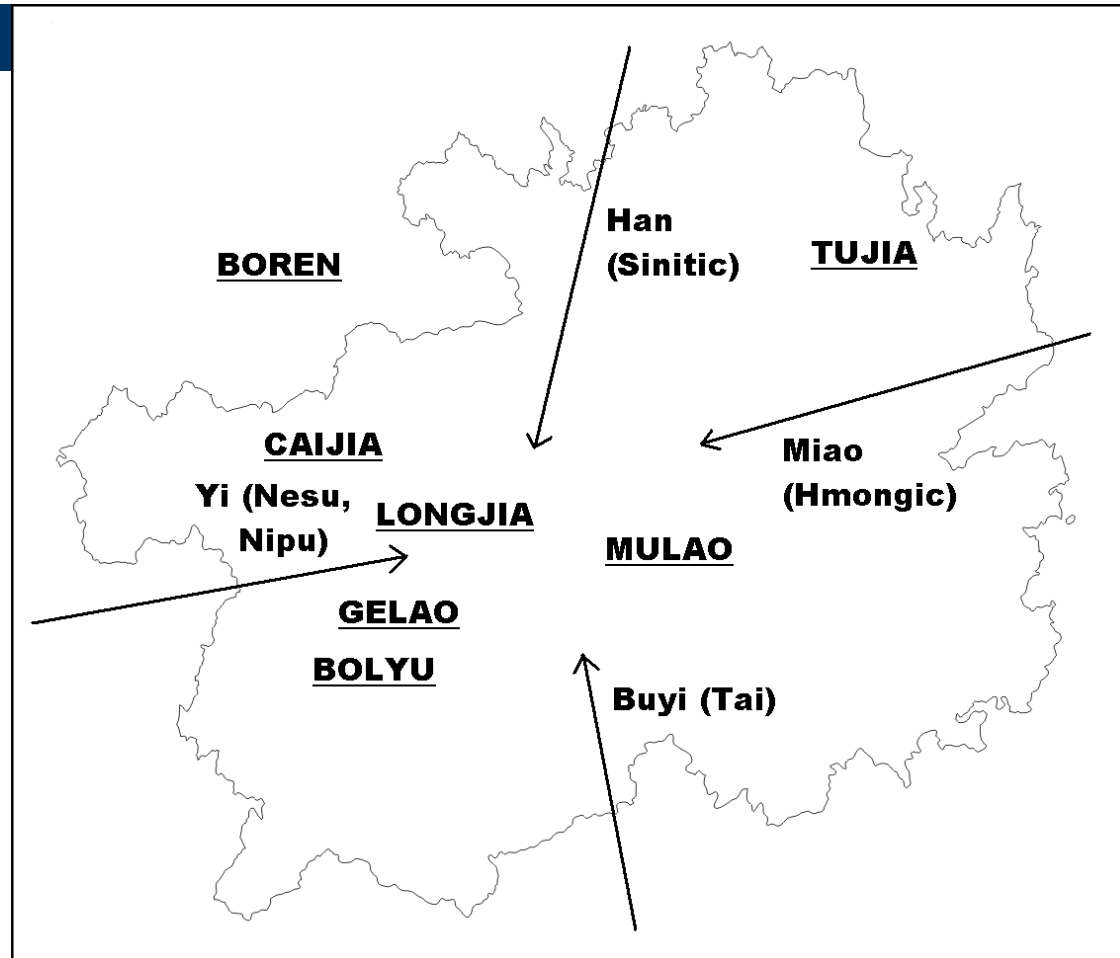
Recent arrivals

(< 1,000 B.P.):

- *South:* Buyi (Tai)
- *West:* Yi (Loloish)
- *East:* Miao (Hmongic)
- *North:* Han (Sinitic)

Native (> 1,000 B.P.):

- Gelao (Kra-Dai)
- Bolyu (Austroasiatic)
- Longjia, Caijia (TB)
- Tujia (TB); Boren?



Map created by author

Gelao culture and customs

- Wet / paddy agriculturalists who opened up the fields; later switched to dry farming as they became marginalized by incoming groups
- Hanging coffins (also among the Buyang)
- Dental ablation



*Gelao dental ablation
(Nicholas Tapp 2003)*

Why Gelao deserves more attention: Internal diversity

- **Gelao** is by far the most internally diverse group of Kra languages. (cf. Kra data in the *Austronesian Basic Vocabulary Database*)

The remaining 3 Kra groups are very tightly knit (relatively little internal variation).

- **Buyang** cluster (6 lgs.): Paha, Ecun, Langjia, Rongtun, Qabiao, En (Nung Ven)
- **Lachi** cluster: Flowery, Chinese, Pocket, Red, Long-Haired, Black, White groups
- **Laha** cluster (2 lgs.): Wet Laha, Dry Laha

Most critically endangered varieties

Red Gelao

- **Hongfeng** 红丰: about 15 fluent speakers; 30 including semi-speakers; a few speakers in nearby Shajing Township 沙井乡
- **Bigong** 比贡: a few elderly speakers left
- **Vandu** (Border Red Gelao): fewer than 50 in Ha Giang, Vietnam; < 5 semi-speakers just across the border in China
- **Houzitian** 猴子田: 1 speaker left in Langdai Township 郎岱镇, Liuzhi Special District, Guizhou: 88-year-old Guo Yunxiu 郭云秀

Other Gelao

- **Moji** 么基 (White Gelao): about 5 fluent speakers

Many varieties recorded by Zhang Jimin (1993) are now extinct.

Most widely spoken varieties

Total speakers of all Gelao languages: no more than 6,000 people (Zhou Guoyan 2004)

- **Judu** (White Gelao): more than 1,000; village with the most Gelao speakers in China
- **Hakei** (Guizhou): 2,000 in Guanling, Zhenning, Qinglong countries of Guizhou
- **Hakei** (Sanchong, Guangxi): 300
- **Qau**: 1,000 in Pingba, Anshun, Puding countries of Guizhou

Proposed classification

- I have proposed a preliminary classification based on **lexical isoglosses** identified in a Gelao vocabulary database that I have compiled (available upon request). I have also entered word lists of dozens of Gelao varieties into the publicly accessible *Austronesian Basic Vocabulary Database*, which now has comprehensive coverage of Kra-Dai lects.
- Inclusion of **Hakei** and **Qau** in Central Gelao follows Yumay Shen (2003). Hakei and Qau each display little internal variation.
- **White Gelao** is remarkably coherent, with the China-Vietnam border varieties forming a divergent group.

Red Gelao

- Red Gelao is the **most internally diverse** (at least 5 mutually unintelligible varieties) of all Gelao groups, as well as the **most endangered**.
- **Crucial for reconstruction:** Except for the China-Vietnam border variety (“Vandu”), all Red Gelao varieties (along with Paha) are the **only Kra languages to have retained Proto-Kra retroflex distinctions**, which appear as spirants in Red Gelao varieties.
- ‘Eye’: Proto-Kra *m-**ʈ**a A > Hongfeng *pa*₄₃ *ɕiu*₄₃, Bigong *zəw*₃₃ *zəw*₅₅, Houzitian *tə*₄₄ *su*₄₄, Mulao *li*₃₃ *zo*₃₁; cf. Proto-Austronesian *ma**C**a; (*ma*) *ta* in most other Kra languages

Gelao database, 100 words

| | A | B | C | D | E | F | G | H | I | J | K | L | M | N | O |
|----|--------|---------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|---------------|-------------------|---------------|-------------|-----------------------|---------------------|-------------------|-----------------|-------------------|--------------|
| 1 | | <i>Proto-Kra</i> | <i>Hongfeng</i> | <i>Bigong</i> | <i>Houzitian</i> | <i>Mulao</i> | <i>Vandu</i> | <i>Judu</i> | <i>Moji</i> | <i>Wantao</i> | <i>Yueliangwan</i> | <i>Zhenfeng</i> | <i>Sanchong</i> | <i>Dagouchang</i> | <i>Wanzi</i> |
| 59 | flower | *hŋa C | ŋəu43 | ŋou55 | xə44 teŋ31 ŋəu44 | ŋo33 | (xə55 xo55) xua55 | hu35 ʔo31 | hua53 | hwa55 | la33 bi55 bi55 | kəu35 huŋ42 | kəw33 hn53 | ŋkau55 u55 | ŋkau55 |
| 60 | fruit | *C-mak D | lan31 | le31 va31 | teŋ31 mi35 | vai53 | ntoŋ55 ntoŋ55 | ma35 | ma31 ma24 | ma35 | ma31 | taŋ31 taŋ31 | ntaŋ31 | mei31 | mei31 |
| 61 | stone | *p-ra A, *ʔuŋ A | ʔa43 ʔui55 wo31 | qaw55 zəw33 | lan31 wo44 | qo53 y24, ə55 | qo35 la55 y55 | vu31 ŋ31 | po31 oŋ31 | bo35 uŋ31 | qəu33 vu55 (Fy) | paŋ35 ŋ35 | poŋ35 | hrau31 | əw33 |
| 62 | water | *ʔuŋ C | ŋ55 | i55 | uŋ44 | uŋ33 | aŋ35 | ŋ33 | oŋ53 | ʔuŋ55 | m55 | ŋ42 | ʔm53 | əw55 | əw55 |
| 63 | salt | *ŋo A | ŋəu31 | no33 | ŋəu44 | ŋə31 | ŋəŋ55 | qə0 ŋiu31 | ka31 ŋiu31 | ka0 ŋiu31 | ŋiu55 | si42 ŋə42 | ŋu31 | ŋteaw33 | ŋteaw44 |
| 64 | moon | *m-djan A, *(C-)tjan A | ma43 lai31 ʔau13 | (ma55) lo31 hua13 | me13 zi44 | kə33 va31 | mo35 to55 sə31 | ʔuŋ31 dʒi31 | oŋ53 dʒi31 | | zi55 | ta31 | nta31 | mo21 tsu33 | tsu33 |
| 65 | month | | lai31 | ləw31 | | fə31 | | pu31 dʒi31 | bə31 dʒi31 | | zi55 | | nta31 | thu33 | thu44 |
| 66 | sun | *(l-)wan A | ma43 yua43 | ləw31 ləw13 | ʔdo31 | kə33 zə31 | ma35 lua55 | la35 ʔlu31 | la24 lu31 | la35 lu35 | du35 vu33 | | | mo21 lei33 | klei33 |
| 67 | day | *(h)wen A | haŋ43 diuŋ31 | vai33 | haŋ31 toŋ44 | ve31 | la55 ŋi35 | wuŋ31 | zi31 hoŋ31 | ji31 wuŋ31 | vu35 duŋ35 | fe35 | ze35 | sen33 | sen44 |
| 68 | year | *m-(p)yiŋ A | guae131 | vlei31 | ŋkuei31 | tsə24 | kui31 | plei31 | plai31 | plei31 | plə55 | pi35 | pzz35 | plei33 | plei33 |
| 69 | sky | | ʔlau13 yui31 | va31 | a44 yui31 | li24 fə31 | u55 vu55 | lwei31 lwei31 | vai31 vai31 | wei31 wei31 ʔduŋ31 | du35 zu55 | to13 ji31 | | ʔuei55 | vlei44 |
| 70 | star | *d-luŋ A | lei55 lau31 | la31 b33 | te44 zau44 | tso53 zə31 | ma35 ndu55 | duŋ31 dai33 | duŋ31 dai53 | ʔdai55 | duŋ35 dai33 | tsa35 | tʃa35 | lei31 tsu33 | lei31 tsu33 |
| 71 | cloud | | hu55 | qa55 vaw13 (xəw13) | | ve53 | aŋ55 ua31 | qə0 pu35 | zun31 | tou31 | mi31 sai55 tai31 | tu31 lu31 pu33 | m53 na33 | ten55 pa55 | ten44 pau44 |
| 72 | rain | *jəl A | min31 | mi(e)31 | mei31 | me31 | mi55 | man31 | man31 | man31 | man35 | maw31 | man31 | mei33 | mei44 zau44 |
| 73 | wind | *gwjen A | yuan31 | vai31 | xəu35 | fəi33 | a55 xəw31 | vu31 juŋ31 | bəi31 juŋ31 | ba33 juŋ31 | fai31 | ve31 | ve | ven55 | ven44 |
| 74 | fire | *pui A | hye43 | pia33 | fe44 | va31 | a55 pi55 | pi31, pji31 | pi31 | pi31 | pi55 | pai35 | paj35 | pai33 | pai33 |

Proposed classification: Red Gelao

Red

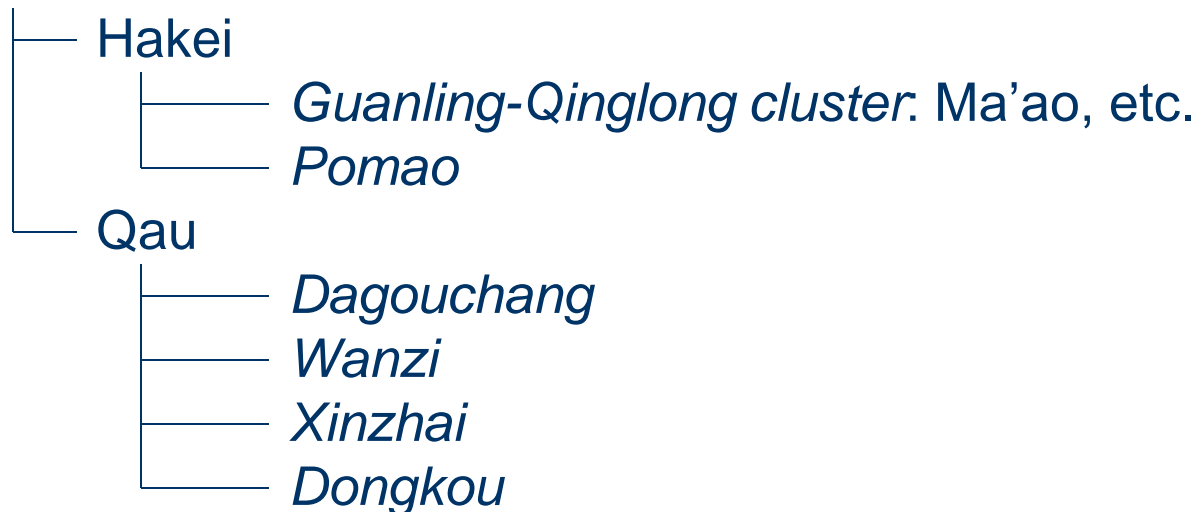


Proposed classification: White Gelao & Central Gelao

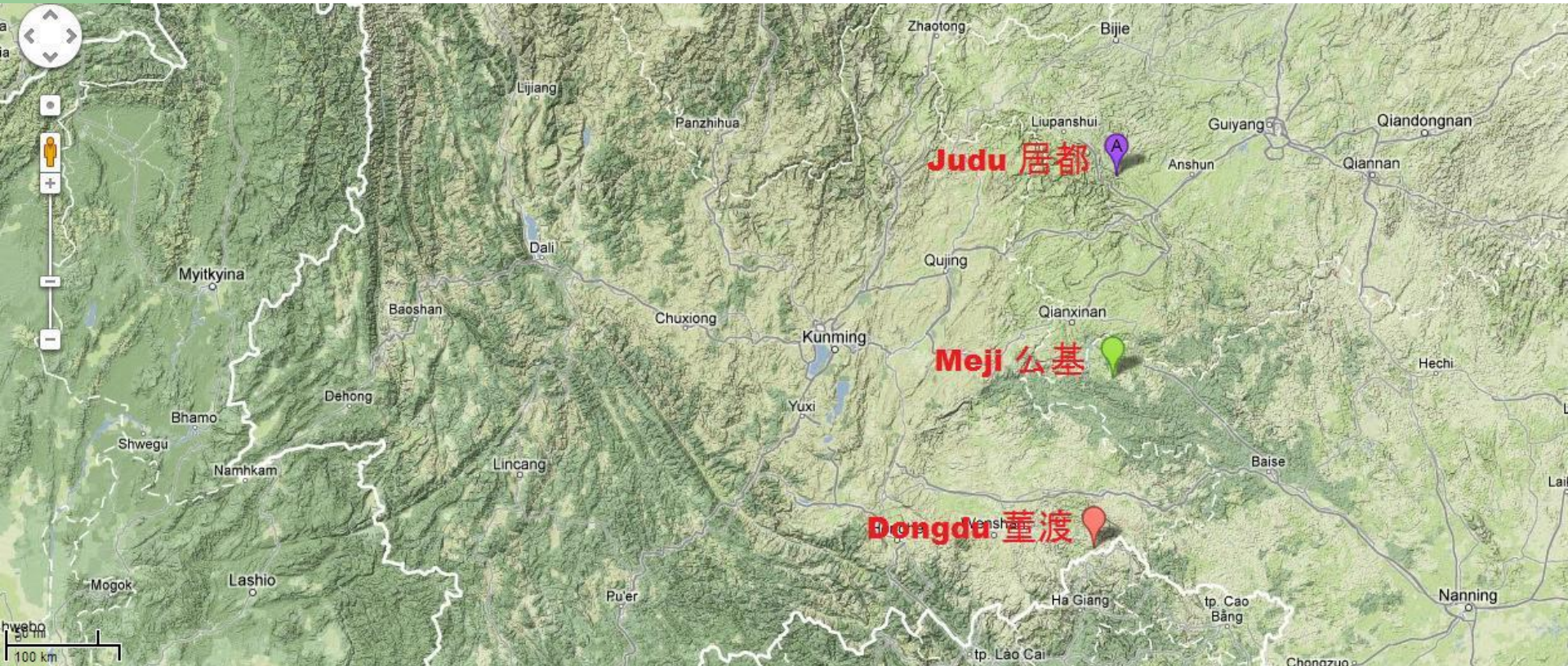
White



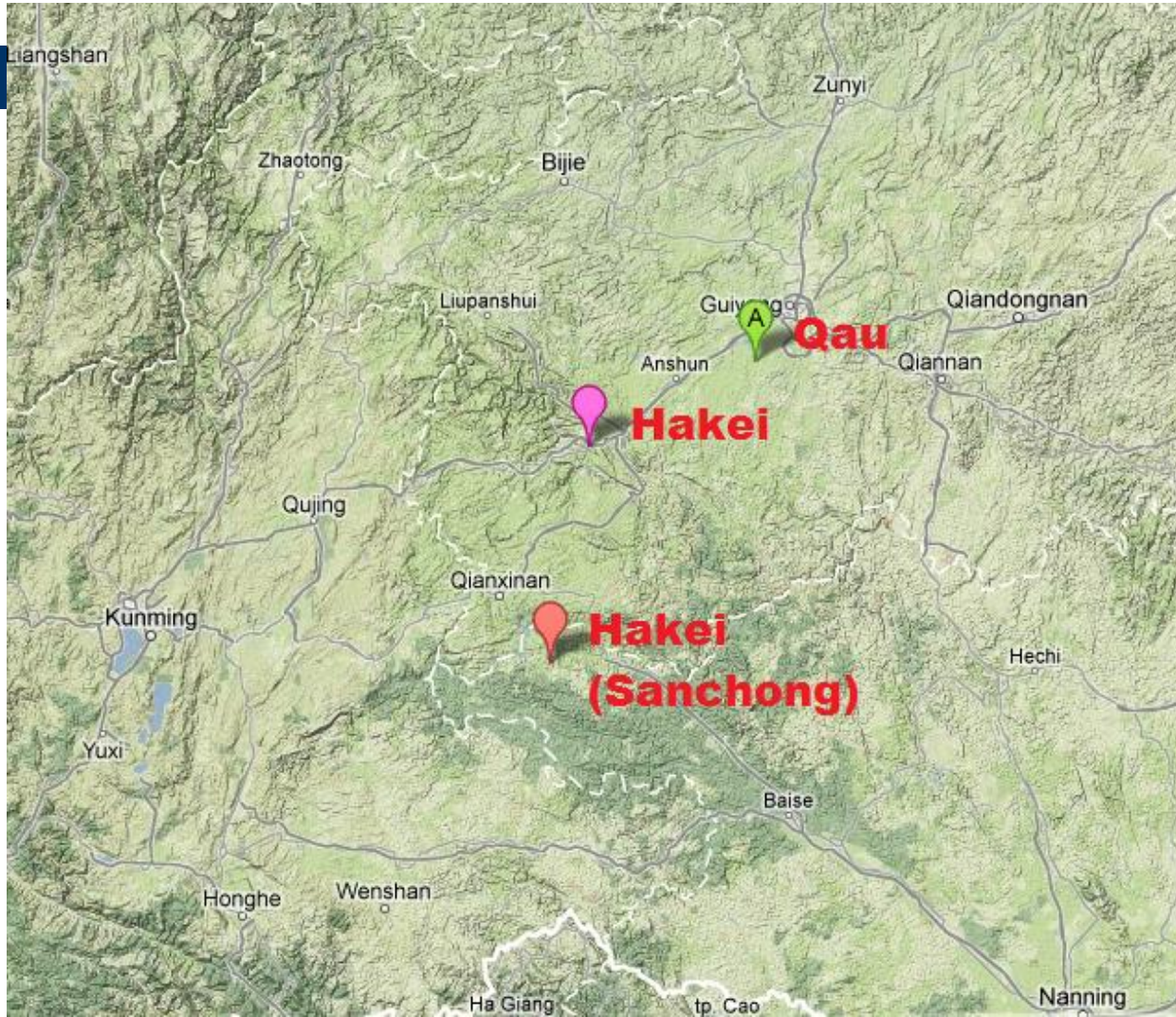
Central



White Gelao locations



Central Gelao locations



Red Gelao locations



July - August 2012 fieldwork

I recorded various Red Gelao varieties in western Guizhou and SE Yunnan from July to August 2012.

- Hongfeng 红丰村, Pudi Township 普底乡, Guizhou: lateral retroflexes discovered; dozens of previously undocumented forms and a few songs recorded
- Shajing Township 沙井乡, Guizhou: I could find only **one** elderly speaker of the Hongfeng variety, Li Tingju 李庭举 (80) of Qingyan village 青岩村
- Langdai Township 郎岱镇, Guizhou: only **one** 88-year-old speaker of the Houzitian variety
- Tiechang Township 铁厂乡, Yunnan: only **one** semi-speaker of Red Gelao

Houzitian Red Gelao

- Basic vocabulary is different enough to be mutually unintelligible with all other Red Gelao varieties.
- Guo was born in Houzitian 猴子田, Qingkou Township 箐口乡, but moved to Luomadong 罗马洞 (18th cluster 十八组), Qinglong village 青龙村, Langdai township 郎岱镇 after marrying; Guo is now widowed.
- Due to her limited hearing and poor enunciation, I was able to record only about 100 vocabulary items from her. Nevertheless, she claimed to still be completely fluent in Houzitian Red Gelao, despite having no conversational partners for many years.

Last surviving speaker of Houzitian Red Gelao: Guo Yunxiu 郭云秀 (88)



“Vandu” (Vietnam Red Gelao)

- 1 semi-speaker (rememberer) of Red Gelao in Tianba 田坝, Dongdu village 董渡村, Tiechang township 铁厂乡, Malipo County 麻栗坡县, Yunnan, China
- Autonym: *ua³⁵ndeɪ³¹*, instead of *va³⁵ntw³¹* as recorded by Jerold Edmondson Na Khê
- The *ua³⁵ndeɪ³¹* language more similar to *va³⁵ntw³¹* than to *u³³wei⁵⁵*, discovered in 2003 by Li Jinfang in Fanpo 翻坡, Yangwan township 杨万乡, Malipo County.
- The informant and her family say that she was born in “Moudan 某丹”, which is most likely the village of Mậu Long, located just to the north of Na Khê in Yên Minh District, Vietnam. She moved to Tianba at age 17, after she married an ethnic White Gelao who speaks only Southwestern Mandarin.

Red Gelao speaker Wang Qiongying 王琼英 (47) of Tianba 田坝 with her White Gelao husband



Gelao influences: Tibeto-Burman

- Li Jinfang has observed some Yi (Loloish) loanwords in Gelao, but has observed them to be “sporadic.” There are no observed Kra forms in Loloish languages so far.
- This is because the Yi came to Guizhou within the past several hundred years, and Yi chieftains ruled over the native Gelao.
- Like Lolo-Burmese, Bai, and Tujia, Gelao has open rimes and disyllabic forms.
- Kra languages have final and sometimes circumfixed negation (e.g., Bigong Gelao ma³¹ ... ɔ³³), like Tujia and some Naga languages such as Mongsen Ao. This is rare in southern China.

Gelao negation < Tibeto-Burman

- Gelao (Wanzi) (Zhang 1993)

*su*³³*ta*³³ *vu*¹³ **a**³³

we go **NEG**

‘We are not going.’

- Tujia (Northern) (*Tujiayu Jianzhi*:73)

*kai*³⁵ *ei*⁵⁵*kua*⁵⁵ *tiã*²¹ **ta**³⁵

this watermelon sweet **NEG**

‘This watermelon is not sweet.’

- Interestingly, also Mongsen Ao (Coupe 2007)

Gelao influences: Austroasiatic

- **Bolyu**, an isolated Austroasiatic language now spoken only in Longlin County, Guangxi, has some Gelao loanwords. Chinese historical records indicate that ethnic Bolyu had lived in Puding County, Guizhou, along with Gelao.
- Yueliangwan White Gelao, spoken by the Vietnam border, has an **Austroasiatic loanword**, *bu35 mai31* ‘nose’, cognate with Bugan *pə55 mǎ̃31* and PMK *mu(u)h ~ *muus (not found in any other Kra-Dai variety). Proto-Kra has only *teŋ C and *hŋət D.
- Borrowings are by far from Gelao to Austroasiatic, not vice versa.

Sources

- Red Gelao
 - Hongfeng: Zhou Guoyan (2004), He Yancheng (2008)
 - Bigong: Li Jinfang (2006)
 - Houzitian: My own recordings (2012)
 - Vietnam Red Gelao: Jerold Edmondson recordings (1997)
- White Gelao
 - Judu: Zhou (2004), Li Jinfang (2006)
 - Moji: Guangxi Minority Languages (2008)
 - Wantao: Li Jinfang (2006)
 - Yueliangwan; Fengyan: Li Jinfang (2006)
- Green Gelao (Hakei)
 - Pomao: Zhou Guoyan (1999)
 - Sanchong: Shen Yumay (2003), Guangxi Minority Languages (2008)
- Qau
 - Wanzi: He Jiashan (1983)
 - Dagouchang: Li Jinfang (2006)

Conclusion

- Gelao should be split into at the very least 3 different languages, and most likely around 10 languages.
- Except for Central Gelao and Judu Gelao, all Gelao varieties are moribund with fewer than 50 speakers left; fieldwork is extremely urgent.
- Due to its phylogenetic position, internal diversity, and historical importance, Gelao deserves much more attention in Kra-Dai studies.

Special thanks

- **Eric Johnson & family** for graciously hosting my stay in Wenshan, Yunnan and their incredible hospitality
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- Jamin Pelkey
- Sharon Rose
- Lucien Carroll
- Peter Norquest
- Doug Cooper

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