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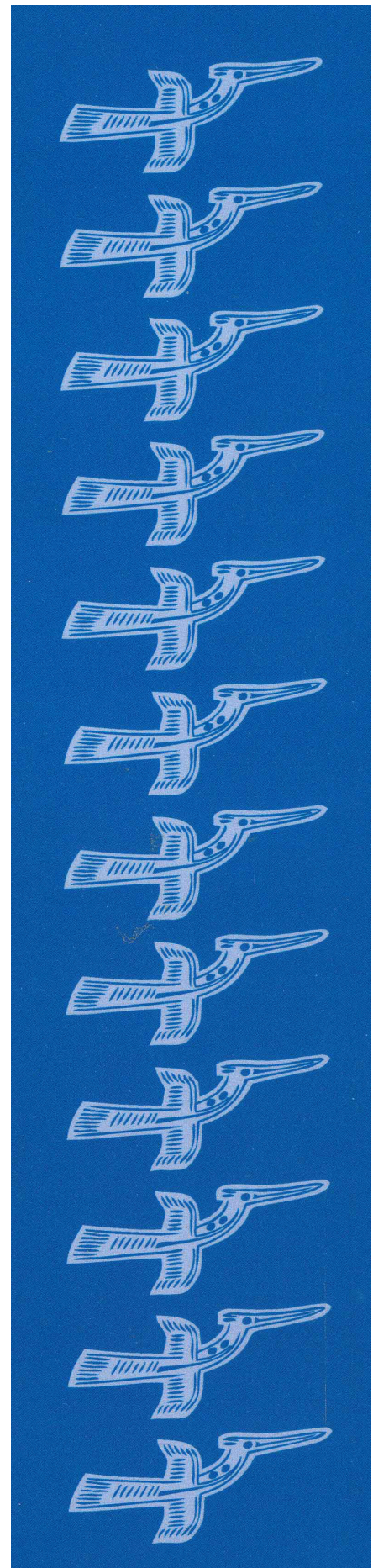
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Linguistic evidence of the trans-peninsular trade route from North Vietnam to the Gulf of Thailand (3rd-8th centuries)*

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Abstract

By the period of 3rd-8th centuries, an ancient land trade route linked North Vietnam to the Gulf of Thailand. The circulation of traders and travelers along this route has left cultural and linguistic influences of Ancient China as well as Ancient Vietnam (under Chinese rule) through the Khmer area. (1) Some Chinese words, few but highly significant, were borrowed into Khmer, and later passed in Thai, (2) The names of animals of the duodenary cycle in Ancient Vietnamese were borrowed by the Khmer and are still used today, and (3) The syllabic contrast /Tense ~ Lax/ of Middle Chinese was transferred, with various effects, in Vietic, and thence in Katuic and Pearic. This study is yet another example of the fruitfulness of interdisciplinary cooperation in the social science fields, here between linguistics and history.

Keywords: phonetic history, borrowing, language contact

ISO 639 Language codes: cmn, cog, khm, tha, pcb

1. Introduction

Ancient Chinese texts that tell us about the period from the 3rd to the 8th century led to suppose the existence of a land route joining the Chinese protectorate of Chiao-chih (*Giao Chi*, Northern Vietnam) to the Gulf of Thailand, a route which avoided the dangers of the maritime route. During this period, China paid special attention, particularly in the 7th and 8th centuries, to a region located in the North-East of today's Thailand, corresponding to the Land Chen-la in ancient Cambodian history. It seems that there has been in this region a kind of dependency of the Chinese Empire. This situation suddenly ceased with the reunification of the Khmer lands by Jayavarman II who was enthroned universal sovereign in 802 CE. However, research has revealed some traces of ancient linguistic and cultural influences of Chinese in the languages of the region, such as Khmer and Thai.

We will first provide details about some loans of vocabulary from Middle Chinese to Khmer and Thai. Then we will explain how the Khmer cycle of twelve animals has been borrowed from ancient Vietnamese. Finally, we will develop the crucial problem of transfer of the syllabic contrast /Tense ~ Lax/ from Middle Chinese to the languages of the Vietic, (East-)Katuic and Pearic groups.

An historical overview will complete this study.

Abbreviations:

OC: Old Chinese; OC(B): Baxter 1992; OC(B-S): Old Chinese according to the Baxter-Sagart system (2011); OC(F): Old Chinese reconstructed by Ferlus (occasionally); MC: Middle Chinese (Baxter); EMC: Early Middle Chinese (Pulleyblank definition). Karlgren series are designated by 'K.' followed by the serial number in *Grammata Serica Recensa*.

MK: Mon-Khmer; PMK: Proto Mon-Khmer; AA: Austroasiatic; VM: Viet-Muong (or Vietic); PVM: Proto Viet-Muong (or Proto Vietic).

T: Tense (voice, syllable); L: Lax (voice, syllable); /T ~ L/: /Tense vs Lax/ contrast.

For the phonetics history of Chinese language, the trickiest part of the demonstration, I used the works of Karlgren *Grammata Serica Recensa* (1957), Pulleyblank *Lexicon of Reconstructed Pronunciation...* (1991), Baxter *A Handbook of Old Chinese Phonology* (1992), and sometimes Baxter-Sagart *Old Chinese Reconstruction, Version 1.00* (2011).

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2. The loanwords from Old/Middle Chinese

The phonetic developments of the Chinese language since the beginning of our era (mono-syllabization, lenition of medial **-r-**, registrogenesis, tonogenesis, loss of final plosives) have obscured the correspondences between Chinese borrowings in Khmer and the original words in Chinese. Khmer is a language which remained relatively conservative. It is therefore necessary to compare the Chinese borrowings with their reconstructions in OC and MC. Despite great progress in this field, the historical phonetics of Chinese is far from being definitively established. Sometimes I had to bring in my own interpretations, for which I take full responsibility.

Two of the four words considered below, “protect, defend, soldier” (§. 2.3) and “eat, food (for monks)” (§. 2.4), involve the phenomenon of fricativization of medial ***k** within sesqui-syllables. That is C.**k**V(C) > C.**x**V(C), then C.**h**V(C). This shift has had to occur in the last stage of OC. It should be noted that this phenomenon is still a matter of discussion, the process proposed here is different from that of Sagart & Baxter (2009).

2.1 “Country, principality, province, *encircled village”

Chinese *yuè* 越 :: Khmer **c^hvat** *chvā't* ឆ្នាំត្រី :: Thai **caṅwat**^{D1} จังหวัด

Chinese: *yuè* 越 (K.303e) < MC hjwot/EMC wuat < OC(B) wjat/OC(B-S) “cross over, exceed”, interpretable by “cross the enclosure (of the village), the boundaries (of the country)”. A sesqui-syllabic form ***C.wat** must have existed.

Khmer: *chvā't* ឆ្នាំត្រី **c^hvat**; Old Khmer (9th-10th cent.) *chvāt(t)* ***c^hwat** “to circumscribe, delimit”, and *caivāt(t)/caivāt(t)* ***caṅwat** “delimited territory” (Jenner & Pou 1980-81: 343-344). Proto Khmer ***c.wat** and its derivative ***cṅ.wat** (< **c-ṅ-wat**).

Thai: **caṅwat**^{D1} จังหวัด “province, township”.

How to link Chinese *yuè* 越 “cross over, exceed” to Modern Khmer **c^hvat** “to circumscribe, delimit” and Old Khmer ***caṅwat** “delimited territory”? In the *Book of Han* (*hànshū* 漢書/汉书) which covers the period of Earlier Han (206-25 BCE), the character *yuè* 越 was used as a phonogram in expressions naming southern populations: Luòyuè 雒越 (Sino-Vietnamese: *Lạc Việt*), Shānyuè 山越, Dōngyuè 東越/东越, and specially Bǎiyuè 百越. In all these expressions the sinogram *yuè* 越 suggest the meaning of “country, principality”. The Chinese lexicon contains words built on a root ***wat** and likely to participate in a single family of words on a semantic basis involving the idea of circularity, circular boundary. I suppose – that is my hypothesis – that *yuè* 越 ***wat** originally designated a circular defensive protection surrounding the primitive village. Some examples in the same word family:

yuè 越 (K.303e) < OC(B) wjat/OC(F) ***wat** “cross over, exceed”, interpretable by “cross the enclosure of the village”.

wài 外 (K.322a) < OC(B) ng^wats/OC(F) ***ṅ.wat-s** “outside”, interpretable by “out of the enclosure of the village”.

yuè 月 (K.306a) < OC(B) ng^wat/OC(F) ***ṅ.wat** “moon”, by reference to its round shape.

It follows from these considerations that the meaning of ***wat** “enclosure, circular boundary (around the village)” emerged in the Chinese language from a Pan-Asiatic root whose meaning could be “to hunt slingshot, twirl the sling (for launching a bola?)”, then “twirl the battle-axe”, of which *yuè* 戣 (K.303a) “battle-axe” is another derivative. Security generated by the formation of major states has marginalized the use of ***wat** “defensive circular boundary” to the southern areas which preserved socio-political structures at the village level. The semantic relationship between the Chinese and Khmer forms is self-evident.

2.2 “Inspect, examine, guard, police”

Chinese *wèi* 衛 :: Old Khmer *trvac/trvāc* :: Thai **truat**^{D1} ตรวจ

Chinese: wèi 衛 (K.342a) “to guard” < MC hjwejH/EMC wiaj^h < OC(B) wrjats/OC(B-S) *[G]w(r)at-s/OC(F) *Cr.wat-s (C is any consonant).

Old Khmer: *trvac/trvāc* (Jenner & Pou 1980-81: 256) “to inspect, examine, check, verify”; *tamrvac/tamrvāc* “police, guard”. I reconstruct ***truac** and ***tmruac** (< **t-m-ruac**). Modern Khmer forms **truət** and **dəmruət** are re-borrowings from Thai (Uraisi 1984).

Thai: **truət**^{D1} ตรวจ “To inspect, examine” and **tamruət**^{D1} ตำรวจ “policeman”. The etymological palatal final of Khmer is preserved in Thai spelling by *-c* (-จ) while pronounced **-t**. The regular form **truət**^{D1} was corrupted in **kuat**^{D1} กวด through a popular pronunciation and became the current word in Lao, **kuat**^{D1} ກວດ “to test, examine”.

Note: Vietnamese *soát* “to check, inspect” is an ancient Chinese borrowing before the 5th century. The initial *s-* originate in an ancient initial cluster **Cr-** (C is a plosive initial). One can reconstruct OC ***Cr.wat-s** with the change **r.wat-s** (simplification of first syllable) then **wrat-s** by metathesis of **r** (for examples of metathesis in Chinese, see Coblin 1986: 68). These words belong to the same word family as OC ***wat** (*yuè* 越) by the intermediate meaning “keep the fortified village, protect the country”.

2.3 “Protect, defend, soldier”

Chinese hàn 扞 :: (Khmer **tiəhion** ទាហាន) :: Thai **t^haham**^{A1} ทหาร

Chinese: hàn 扞 (K.139q)/捍 (K.139i) “to ward off, protect, guard” < MC han^H/EMC yan^h < OC(B-S) ***m-k^har-s**/OC(F) ***C.kan-s** (C is any consonant). Sino-vietnamese *cán*. The reasons for choosing the final **-r** by Baxter-Sagart are unknown.

Khmer: **tiəhion** *dāhān* ទាហាន, probably borrowed from Thai.

Thai: **t^haha:n**^{A1} *dahār* ทหาร (graph *-r* -ร is hypercorrective) “soldier”. Lao **t^haha:n**^{A1} *dahhān* ທະຫານ.

Note: Chinese hàn 扞 “to ward off, protect, guard” derived from an original base currently represented by *gān* 干 (K.139a) “shield” < MC/EMC kan < OC(B) kan/OC(B-S) ***k^har**. I propose the changes OC(F) ***C.kan** > (*fricativization*) ***C.xan** > ***C.han** from which Thai and Lao modern forms are derived. Reconstruction of a pre-syllable ***C-** is required to explain the feature /tense/, noted by ^{-s} in the Baxter-Sagart system. This pre-syllable is preserved in the first syllable of Thai and Lao forms.

Here, unlike the other examples, OC ***a** is interpreted as a long vowel. The original for *gān* 干 “shield” is attested in Lao by **kan**^{A1} ການ “protect, defend, obstruct, bar”. In dictionaries this word is drowned in the many pages of examples of its namesake **kan**^{A1} (sanskrit *kāra*), a nominalizer term.

2.4 “Eat, food (for monks)”

Chinese zhān 饘 :: Khmer **c^han** អាង :: Thai **c^han**^{A1} ฉันท

Chinese: zhān 饘 “congee, thick gruel” (K148m) < MC tsyen/EMC teian < OC(B-S) ***t-qan**/OC(F) ***c.kan**. Note: a doublet MC tsyenX < OC(B-S) ***t-qan?** is reconstructed by these authors.

Khmer: **c^han** *chān* អាង “to eat, drink (for monks)”, and **cəŋhan** *cānhān* ចុងអាង “food of monks”. Although these words are not attested in Khmer inscriptions, the presence of the infix **-ŋ-** is a good evidence of their existence in Old Khmer.

Thai: **c^han** *chān* ฉันท “to eat (for monks)”, and **cəŋhan** *cānhān* จังหัน “food (for monks)”.

Note: I propose the changes ***c.kan** > (*fricativization*) ***c.xan** > ***c.han** > (*monosyllabization*) **c^han**. A rapprochement is possible with *kan* and *makan*, widespread in the Austronesian languages.

3. The duodecimal cycle of twelve animals in Khmer

Since the remotest antiquity, China has counted time on the basis of the sexagesimal cycle, combining decimal cycle of the ten heavenly stems (*tiāngān* 天干) and duodecimal cycle of the

twelve earthly branches (*dizhi* 地支). In fact, China was the center of dispersion of this system that was originally developed by a population located towards the center of China and speaking a language akin to Austroasiatic (Norman 1985), early absorbed by the Chinese expansion. During Hàn times, the terms of the cycle, that had become opaque for Chinese speakers, have been associated with the names of animals involved. The list is: *RAT*, *BUFFALO* (or *OX*), *TIGER*, *HARE* (or *RABBIT*, or *CAT*), *DRAGON* (originally a crocodile), *SNAKE*, *HORSE*, *GOAT*, *MONKEY*, *ROOSTER*, *DOG*, *PIG*. The Chinese duodecimal cycle is widespread in Asia. It was particularly borrowed by the historical peoples of Southeast Asia, Vietnamese, Khmer and Mon. It is important to follow the evolution of the cycle of twelve animals and its adaptation to receptor languages.

Curiously, the names in the Khmer cycle do not belong to the lexical funds of Khmer. Cœdès (1935) found that ten out of twelve terms of the cycle corresponded to names of animals in Muong, the only Vietic language known at the time outside Vietnamese. The today linguistic knowledge shows that the twelve words, to which *YEAR* must be added, have correspondances in the Vietic languages (Ferlus 2010). In fact, the Chinese names were translated into Vietnamese and transmitted to Ancient Khmer before the Vietnamese abandoned their old nomenclature to adopt the Chinese cycle, today pronounced in Sino-Vietnamese.

Table 1: 1 Names of animals; 2 Khmer (phonetic); 3 Khmer (script); 4 proto Khmer; 5 proto Viet-Muong; 6 *Vietnamese*; 7 examples in Vietic languages (M. Muong; Mk. Maleng Kari; Th. Thavung; R. Ruc; P. Pong; Mb. Maleng brô); 8 Chinese.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Name	Khmer			Viet-Muong / Vietic			Chinese
	modern Kh.		proto Kh.	PVM	Việt	Vietic languages	
Rat	cu:t	ជូត	*juot	*juot	chuo̯t	(M.) cuot ⁸ 'squirrel'	子 zǐ
Ox	c ^h lou	ឆ្កែ	*c.lu:	*c.lu:	trâu	(Mk.) sǎlu: ²	丑 chǒu
Tiger	k ^h a:l	ខាល	*k ^h a:l	*k.ha:l ²	khái	(Th.) kǎha:l ³	寅 yín
Hare	t ^h ah	តោ	*t ^h ah	*t ^h ah	thó	(M.) t ^h o: ⁵	卯 mǎo
Dragon	ro:ŋ	រោង	*m.ro:ŋ	*m.ro:ŋ	rông	(R.) mǎro:ŋ ¹	辰 chén
Snake	mǎsaj	ម្សាញ	*m.saj	*m.səj ²	rǎn	(R.) pǎsɨj ³	巳 sǐ
Horse	mǎmi:	មី	*m.ŋja	*m.ŋə: ²	ngiŋa	(Mk.) mǎŋə: ⁴	午 wǔ
Goat	mǎmɛ:	មែម	*m.bɛ:	*m.ʔɛ: ²	-	(Mk.) ʔɛ: ³	未 wèi
Monkey	vɔ:k	វ៉ក	*vɔ:k	*vɔ:k	-	(P.) vɔ:k ⁸	申 shēn
Rooster	rǎka:	រកា	*r.ka:	*r.ka:	gà	(R.) rǎka: ¹	酉 yǒu
Dog	ca:	ច	*cɔ:	*ʔ.cɔ: ²	chó	(R.) ǎcɔ: ³	戌 xū
Pig	kol	កុវ	*kur	*g/ku:r ²	cúi	(Mb.) kù:r ²	亥 hài
Year	c ^h nam	ឆ្នាំ	*c.nam	*c.nəm	năm	(Mb.) sǎnam ¹	

The term *YEAR* is attested in the Khmer inscriptions of 6th-7th centuries, most of the other terms are only from the 13th. However, the presence of one term among the twelve (+ one) of the cycle is sufficient to assume the use of the full cycle.

The Vietnamese origin of the terms in the Khmer cycle shows that the inhabitants of Chiao-chih (the ancient Vietnam, Chinese protectorate) have played the role of intermediary between the Empire and the areas towards the Gulf of Thailand.

5. Middle Chinese /T ~ L/ contrast, and its transfert to Vietic, (East-)Katuic, and Pearic.

Reminder: The general syllabic type in OldChinese was (Cv)CV(C), i.e. a part of vocabulary was made up of monosyllables CV(C), the other part of sesqui-syllables CvCV(C). The coalescence of initials in sesqui-syllables developed a tenseness /T/, while monosyllables became lax /L/. Thus syllabic contrast between CvCV(C) and CV(C) was coupled with contrast /T ~ L/. The evolution was continued by the monosyllabization and the formation of a syllabic contrast CV(C)/T vs CV(C)/L in MC, associated with modifications of vocalic aperture, vowel lowering in T-syllables and vowel raising in L-syllables. At this stage, MC was a voice type register language (Ferlus 2009). These findings result from the linguistic analysis of the *Qièyùn*, a rime book elaborated in the early 7th century. However it should be noted that these ideas are far from being accepted by specialists in phonetic history of Chinese.

Table 2: Development of voice type register phenomenons in Chinese

Old Chinese	Middle Chinese	Divisions of <i>Qièyùn</i>	<i>transferred to Vietic, Katuic and Pearic</i>
CvCV(C) (tenseness)	CV(C)/T (v. lowering)	I/IV and II	T (ense)
CV(C) (laxness)	CV(C)/L (v. raising)	III	L (ax)

In languages of Vietic, (East-)Katuic and Pearic groups, vowels can be pronounced with a feature of tenseness realized as a glottalization, or changed into tone. Diffloth Gérard (1989) proposed the reconstruction of a proto AA creaky voice to explain this feature. If this theory explains in a satisfactory manner the situation in these three language groups, however it remains inoperative about the reasons for the absence of this feature in numerous other AA languages. Moreover, if we note that these languages are located (or were located) on the ancient road linking the North Vietnam to the Gulf of Thailand, one is led to consider the emergence of this feature of creakiness as the result of the propagation of MC contrast /T ~ L/. This brings us to distinguish two levels of proto languages in these three groups: a first stage, *Early Proto language*, directly derived proto AA, and a second stage, *Late Proto language*, characterized by the intrusion of contrast /T ~ L/.

We will briefly state the effect of the transfer of /T ~ L/ on Vietic, (East-)Katuic and Pearic syllables. For a better understanding of these phenomena, which should not underestimate the difficulty, it is necessary to refer to the reference studies.

5.1 The effects of /T ~ L/ in Vietic (Ferlus 2004)

	Early Proto Vietic	Late Proto Vietic: shift of finals			
	Early Proto Vietic finals	*/-p -t -c -k/	*/-m -n -ɲ -ŋ -r -l -w -j /	*/-ʔ/	*/-s -h/
T	sesqui-syllable CvCVC	-p -t -c -k (not affected)	-m ^ʔ -n ^ʔ ... ^(ʔ) (glottalization)	*-ʔ > # ⁽¹⁾	-s -h (not affected)
L	monosyllable CVC	-p -t -c -k (not affected)	-m -n ... ⁽¹⁾ (not affected)	-ʔ ⁽²⁾	-s -h (not affected)
	<i>tones in vietnamese</i>	sắc-nặng	¹ ngang-huyền ² sắc-nặng	¹ ngang-huyền ² sắc-nặng	hỏi-ngã

The most outstanding fact of Vietic is the creation of open syllables in Late Proto Vietic. This fact created conditions for the formation of the three fundamental tones represented by *ngang-huyền*, *sắc-nặng* and *hỏi-ngã* in Vietnamese. Of note: the feature /T/ is strong enough to cause the loss of final -ʔ, but not enough to affect the voiceless final plosives. The voiced finals were glottalized and have *sắc-nặng* tones in Vietnamese.

5.2 The effects of /T ~ L/ in (East-)Katuic (Diffloth 1989)

	Early Proto Katuic	Late Proto (East-)Katuic: shift of finals			
	Early Proto Katuic finals	*/-p -t -c -k/	*/-m -n -ɲ -ŋ/	*/-r -l -s -h -w -j/	*v
T	sesqui-syllable CvCVC	-mʔ -nʔ -jʔ -ʔ (glottalization)	-mʔ -nʔ -ɲʔ -ŋʔ (glottalization)	-rʔ -lʔ -sʔ -hʔ -wʔ -jʔ (glottalization)	vʔ
L	monosyllable CVC	-p -t -c -k (not affected)	-m -n -ɲ -ŋ (not affected)	-r -l -s -h -w -j (not affected)	v

Contrast /T ~ L/ has affected only some dialects (Katang, Yir/Ong, and here Talan) in the East of Katuic group. Other Katuic languages (Suoy, Kuy/Kuoy, Sô/Bru, ...) were not affected. To simplify, I did not take account of the vocalic length in the development of /T/. The effect of tenseness is more important in Katuic than in Vietic. All finals in the T-series are affected by a glottal feature (also characterised as creakiness), plosives changed into nasals, while in L-series finals remains unchanged (for an overview on Katuic, see Sidwell 2006).

5.3 The effects of /T ~ L/ in Pearic (Ferlus 2011a)

	Early Proto Pearic	Late Proto Pearic: shift of finals				
	Early Proto Pearic finals	*/-p -t -c -k/	*/-m -n -ɲ -ŋ/	*/-r -l -s -w -j/	*/-h/	*v
T	sesqui-syll. CvCVC	-pʔ -tʔ -cʔ -kʔ (glottalization)	-mʔ -nʔ -ɲʔ -ŋʔ (glottalization)	-rʔ -lʔ -sʔ -wʔ -jʔ (glottalization)	-h	vʔ > vʔ
L	monosyllable CVC	-p -t -c -k (not affected)	-m -n -ɲ -ŋ (not affected)	-r -l -s -w -j (not affected)	-h	v

Except for the final **-h**, all the others were glottalized under the effect of the tenseness in the T-series. One can observe the re-creation of syllables ending in **-ʔ**. The Pearic languages are those where the effects of tenseness are generalized the most, but where the finals are the least corrupted.

Today, Pearic dialects are scattered in the Cardamom Mountains, but some centuries ago Pearic was still spoken north of the Great Lake. By the end of the 13rd century, Chou Ta-kuan reported the presence of the *Chuang* (today **co:ŋʔ**, a Pearic language) in the mount Kulen (Martin 1997: 65-71).

6. Historical conclusions

One has highlighted three categories of linguistic facts which suggest traces left by a Chinese presence along this trans-peninsular route.

Of the four words of Chinese origin present in Khmer and Thai, three are highly significant, (1) “country, pricipality”, (2) “to inspect, examine, guard”, and (3) “to protect, defend” then “soldier”. These words are good evidence of Chinese military and administrative presence.

The origin of terms in the Khmer duodecimal cycle shows that Chinese influence may have been conveyed by former Vietnamese incorporated into the Empire, as well as by Chinese themselves.

Finally, an influence more subtle to identify, the syllabic contrast /T ~ L/ highlighted in MC, but that has formed early in the hinge of OC and MC, was transferred to Vietic languages, then (East-)Katuic and Pearic.

Here is an inventory of passages in Chinese historical texts that might indicate a Chinese presence southwest of the Great Cordillera, somewhere north of present-day Cambodia.

During the 3rd-8th centuries, Chinese texts reveal the existence of dependencies of the Chinese Empire located between the Middle Mekong and the north of Cambodia.

The Records of the Three Kingdoms (*sānguózhì* 三國志) tell us that to the 3rd century, a state named T'ang-ming (*táng míng* 堂明), located north of present Cambodia, sent embassies to the emperor of China (Pelliot 1903: 251). This practice indicates a nominal authority of China over this area.

In his *Great Treatise of Geography* (*shí dào zhì* 十道志), 8th century, the author Kia Tan (*Jiā dān* 賈耽), details the land route from the Chinese protectorate of Chiao-chih (*jiāo zhǐ* 交趾; Sino-Vietnamese: *Giao chi*), the today North of Vietnam, and leading to the dependency of Wen-tan (*wén dān* 文單) (Pelliot 1904: 210).

In *The New History of Tang* (*xīntāngshū* 新唐書), it is reported that Chen-la (*zhēn là* 真臘) successor of Fu-nan (*fú nán* 扶南), split into two states, the Land Chen-la and the Water Chen-la by the early 8th century. It is thought that Wen-tan was just one of the names of Land Chen-la, in other words the part of Ancient Cambodia which extended farther north than present day Cambodia.

Tatsuo Hoshino (1986: 31-32), more precisely, considers Wen-tan as the capital of of Po-lou kingdom, another name of Land Chen-la. The documents mentions several embassies from Wen-tan to the imperial court during the 8th century: the first in 717 shortly afterwards the split of Chen-la, then in 753 when a son of the king of Wen-tan accompanied the embassy; also 771, the viceroy of Wen-tan and his wife went to China.

The location of Wen-tan remains a problem to solve. Some ancient authors suggested identifying with Vieng Chan, the today capital of Laos, an idea taken in *The Historical Atlas of China* (1986, 5: 72-73), which shows us the southernly boundaries of the empire at the time of Tang (618-907). The course of the frontier roughly follows the level of the 19th parallel forming a projection to the Mekong valley (*see* map 1). At the site of Vieng Chan, one can read 文單城 (*wén dān chéng*) “City of Wen-tan”. This interpretation is obviously erroneous, firstly Vieng Chan did not yet exist at that time, on the other hand Wen-tan must be reconstructed **mun tan** in MC. In a recent study, I proposed the interpretation by Sanskrit *mūla tāla* “City of palm sugar” (Ferlus 2011b). The best hypothesis seems to be that of Hoshino (1986: 27) who proposed to identify Wen-tan with Muong Fa Daet (Kalasin Province, Thailand).

In 802, Jayavarman II was proclaimed cakravartin (universal sovereign) on Mount Mahendra (Phnom Kulen), after having reunified the Khmer lands. At the beginning of the 9th century, Chinese documents no longer refer to this region. Which brings us to the conclusion that Land Chen-la, capital Wen-tan, must be some kind of Chinese dependency. This finding is of great interest for the history of ancient Cambodia, particularly in the area of today Northeastern Thailand. A territory originally of Mon culture, but whose limits remain to be clarified, fell under Chinese rule, and then was reunified with the Khmer lands by Jayavarman II.

What would be the reason of the existence of these dependencies in an outlying region from China and linked to Chiao-chih (presently Northern Vietnam) by roads cut through geographical obstacles? It is clear that the roads described in the texts were only those controlled by the Chinese, of the great trans-peninsular trade route connecting southernmost China to the Gulf of Thailand, and becoming a sea route toward India by a portage through the Isthmus of Kra. This land route, a priori difficult, was essential to avoid the Cham whose navy controlled the sea route from China to India by the Strait of Malacca. Tatsuo Hoshino (2002) remarkably studied the trans-Mekong route to the Wen-tan, despite various difficulties of locating the places quoted in the Chinese sources.

We will like to call the part of the trans-peninsular trade route located between Chiao-chih and the Gulf of Thailand the « Han Trail » (*see* map 2).

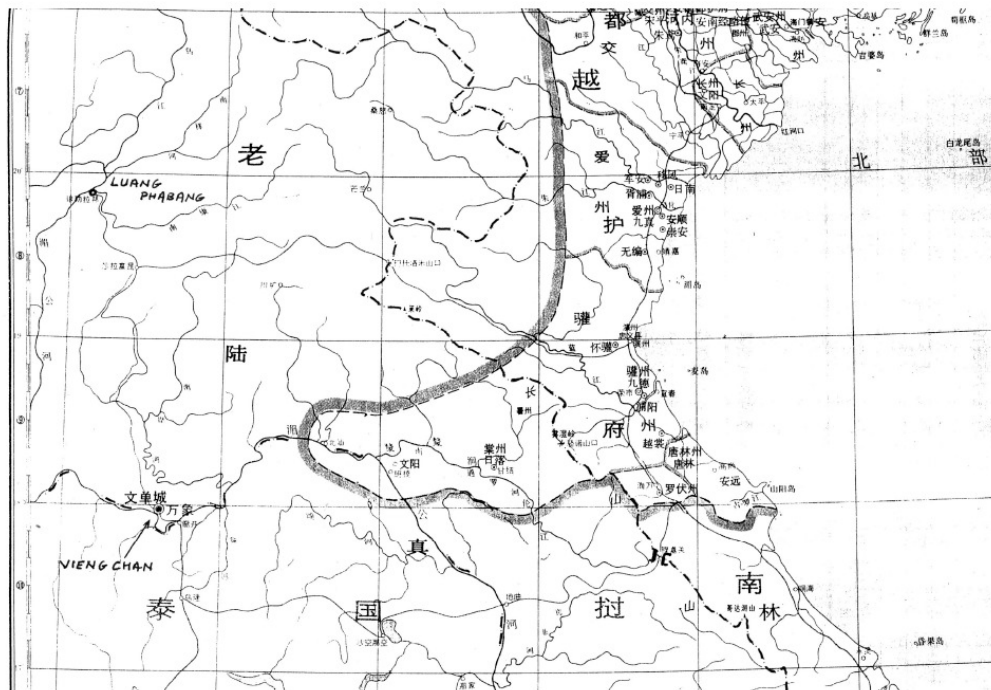


Figure 1: Map showing the location of the supposed Chinese dependency according to the misidentification of Wen-tan with Vieng Chan (*The Historical Atlas of China*, 1986, 5: 72-73).

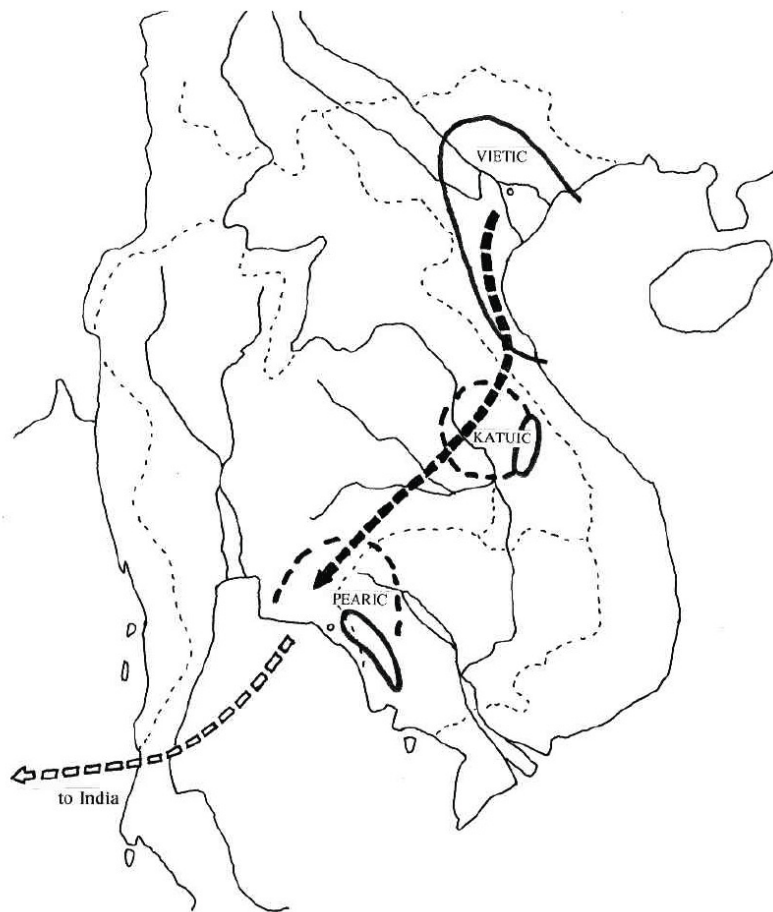


Figure 2: Map showing the trans-peninsular trade route linking the Chiao-chih (North Vietnam) and the Gulf of Thailand, and continuing towards India.

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