

Early Chinese Loanwords in Tai and Vietnamese and Evidence of the Loss of Old Chinese Coda Clusters with Stops plus *s

Abstract: The goal of this presentation is to explore the chronology of Early Chinese loanwords (ECLs) in Vietnamese and Tai languages by considering the timing of the loss of Old Chinese (OC) coda clusters (e.g., *ks, *ts, *ps, and *ʔs, as per OC reconstructions of Li (1971), Zhengzhang (2003), Schuessler (2009), and Baxter and Sagart (2015)) before tonogenesis and emergence of the qusheng tone category. It has been posited that such clusters were still present in the 1st millennium BCE (Rabinovitch 2021). However, details of the timing of the loss are harder to determine.

For this study, I have assembled three dozen probable ECLs reconstructed in Proto-Tai and found in modern Vietnamese. These OC words had the noted coda clusters and later developed qusheng tones in Middle Chinese (MC). The ECLs show evidence of a few periods of borrowing.

1. **ECLs from BCE-era OC** in Tai with voiceless stops but not fricatives (e.g., Proto-Tai *hmuakD ‘hat’ (Li 1977) < Chinese 帽 ‘hat’ mao4, OC *m^suk-s)
2. **ECLs from early-CE-era OC** in Tai and Vietnamese without stop codas but with tones indicating borrowing from Late OC (or possible Early MC) (e.g., Proto-Tai *kawB ‘old’ (Pittayaporn 2009) and Vietnamese *cũ* ‘old’ (vs Sino-Vietnamese *cũu*) < Chinese 舊 ‘old’ jiù, OC *N-k^wəʔ-s)
3. **ECLs from mid-CE-era MC** in Vietnamese with level tones indicating borrowing from Early MC after tonogenesis in Chinese but before tonogenesis in Vietic, so they lack contour (e.g., Vietnamese *ngan* ‘goose’ vs Sino-Vietnamese *nhạn* < Chinese 雁 yàn ‘kind of wild goose’, OC *C.ŋ^srar-s)

In some cases, ECLs in Tai borrowed in the first stage were also borrowed later in Vietic (e.g., Vietnamese *mũ* ‘hat’ (vs Sino-Vietnamese *mạo*) from Chinese 帽 ‘hat’ mao4, OC *m^suk-s). For example, OC *m^suk-s ‘hat’ was likely borrowed in Tai in the 1st millennium BCE when OC retained the *ks coda, while in Vietic, it may have been borrowed during the Eastern Han Dynasty when there are documented Chinese communities in the first or second century CE, when OC may have lost the *k and retained only *s (or *h at that time).

Neither Proto-Tai nor Vietic have been reconstructed with coda clusters, so the ECLs in both Tai and Vietic would have only simplex codas. Thus, hypothetically, Tai borrowed these ECLs with voiceless stops, while Vietic borrowed them with fricatives. However, the locus of Tai was farther north in modern-day southern China, and Tai experienced earlier contact with OC, while Vietic was spoken farther south in the Red River Delta region, and its language contact with OC came later. That supports the chronology of borrowing first in Tai when the voiceless stops in the OC clusters were retained and borrowing later in Vietic after loss of voiceless stops but retention of fricative codas. In my talk, I will present the lexical data, discuss the chronological analyses, and consider ethnohistorical linguistic implications of the ECLs.