

Remarks on the etymology of *Giao/Jiao* and the homeland of Vietic languages

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The etymological puzzle of *Giao/Jiao*

The etymology of “Giao/Jiao” (in Giao Chỉ/Jiaozhi 交趾) and the related question of the Vietic homeland remain central to the ethno-linguistic prehistory of mainland Southeast Asia. While its Old Chinese proto-form, i.e., **kraw*, seems indisputable, the etymon of this Sinitic proto-form/toponym and the ethno-linguistic prehistory of Northern Vietnam before the arrival of the Chinese (c.200 BCE) in Red River Delta (RRD) remain controversial.



- (1) a. Folk etymology: *Giao/Jiao* ‘cross, intertwined’ < *Giao Chỉ/Jiaozhi* ‘(the land of) intertwined-toe people’ (e.g. Trần Trọng Kim’s (2019:31) remark in his Brief History of Vietnam)
- b. Kra-Dai account: *Giao/Jiao* < MC **kaew* < OC **kraw* < Proto-Kra-Dai **kraw*/**kraw*? ‘person’ (cognate with Proto-Tai **kra*:C ‘slave’) (e.g. Nguyễn V.L. 1993:42, Ferlus 2009:3-4, Chamberlain 2016:46-47)
- c. Austroasiatic account: *Giao/Jiao* < MC **kaew* < OC **kraw* < Proto-AA **traw*? ‘taro Colocasia Esculenta’ (cf. Vietnamese (*khoai*) sọ ‘taro’)



Kra-Dai account of *Giao/Jiao*

- (i). **Giao Chỉ/Jiaozhi** (< OC **kraw* < **kraw*?) was a Kra-Rei territory (on par with *lao*, *gelo*, etc.) (Nguyễn V.L. 1993, Chamberlain 1998, 2016, 2018). Chamberlain claims further that the Đông Sơn culture was originally Tai-speaking.
- (ii). Kra-Dai *kɛ:w*¹ (< MC **kaew*) first became an exonym referring to Tai speaking peoples in the Jiaozhi area and later applied to the Vietnamese.
- (iii). North-Central Vietnamese with the greatest linguistic diversity is the homeland of Vietic and from there did the Viet-Muong people move to the RRD (cf. Nguyễn T.C.’s (1995:321) reading of the Sơn Tinh-Thủy Tinh myth as a reflex of this northward movement).
- (iv). Sinitic loans found in Vietic were thus borrowed indirectly via Tai in the first millennium CE (Chamberlain 2018:158).

AA alternative account

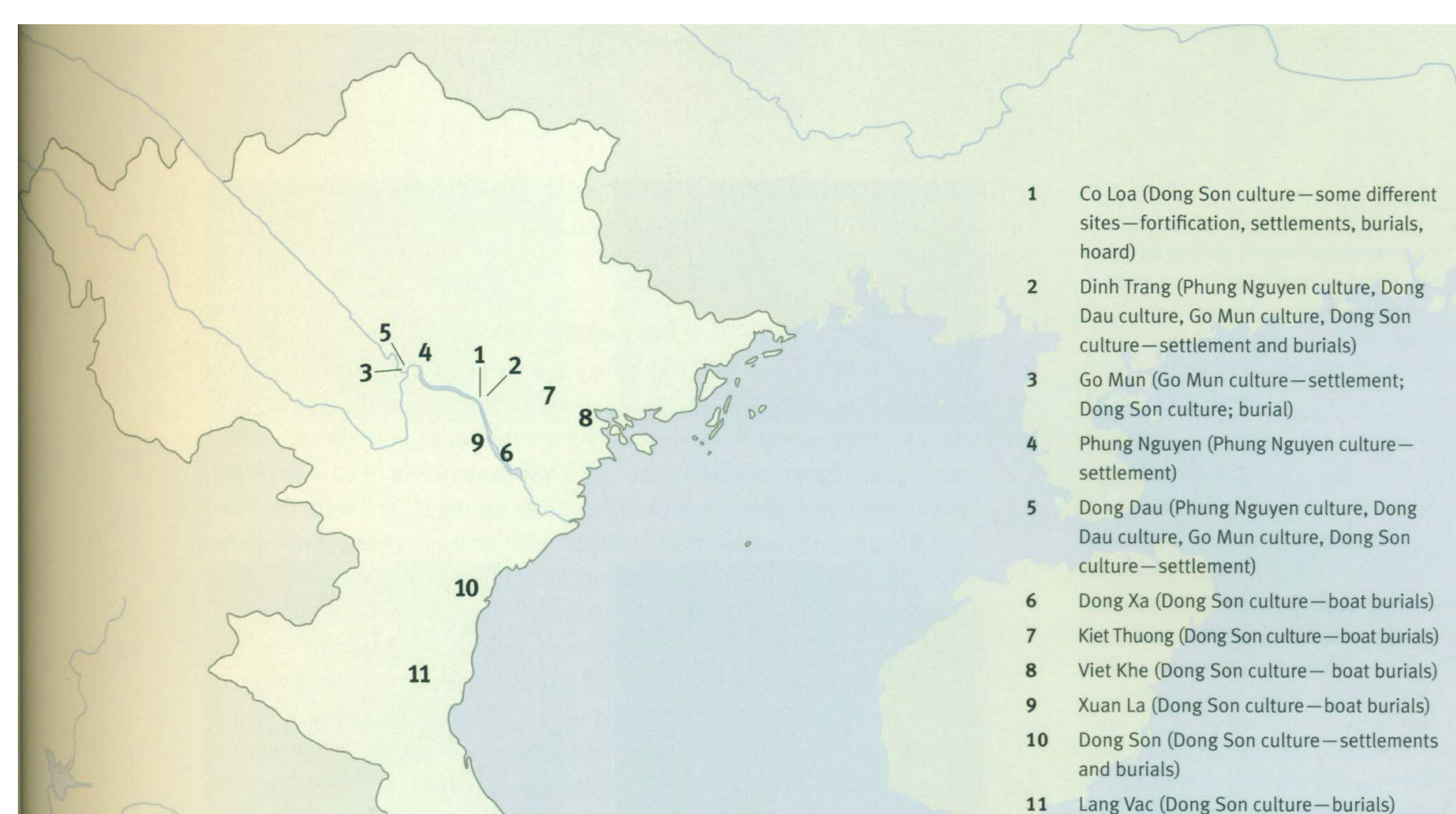


Figure 1: Key archaeological sites in Northern Vietnam (cf. Tingley 2009:25)

- Vietnamese archaeological evidence have shown a continuous development of material cultural styles and technologies: Phùng Nguyên (2000-1500 BCE) > Đông Đậu (1500-1000 BCE) > Gò Mun (c.1100-800 BCE) > Đông Sơn culture (600 BCE-200 CE) (contra Chamberlain’s claim in (i)).
- There is a growing body of evidence from AA scholarship points to the RRD as a viable locus of AA dispersal.
- Alternative account of *Giao/Jiao*: OC **kraw* < Proto-AA **traw*? ‘taro Colocasia Esculenta’, implying Giao Chỉ/Jiaozhi was once an Austroasiatic taro-growing territory (Pain 2020:370-371).

Common ESLs in Tai and Vietic

- Alves (2020:155) finds no salient evidence supporting Chamberlain’s claim #(iv) – See Table 1.
- Lexical and phonological evidence places Tai and Vietic in the Lingnan and RRD region during the Đông Sơn period whose distinct language early contact situation/locations with Sinitic.
- CAVEAT: linguistic data (including etymological info) alone cannot recover the details of location, timing, or population of both Tai and Vietic communities back then.

Table 1: Common early Sinitic loans in Tai and Vietic

Gloss	Chin.	oc	MC	Proto-Tai	ECL	SV	Mường
harrow	pá 耙	*[b] ^h ra	bae	*fue ^A (Li)	bừa	bà	pừa
pincers/tongs	qián 鉗	*C.[g]<r>[e]m	gjem	*gi:m ^A (Pitt.)	kìm	kiềm	(kep)
needle	zhēn 針	*t.[k]əm	tsyim	*qem ^A (Pitt.)	kim	châm	kim
cage; coop	lóng 籠	*k.rɔŋ	luwng	*kruŋ ^A (Li)	lồng	lung	lồng
bag (noun)	dài 袋	*Cə.l ^h ək-s	dojH	*dai ^B (Li)	đầy	đại	(bao)
chopsticks	zhù 箸	*d<r>ak-s	drjoH	*thu ^B (Pitt.)	đũa	trợ	tũa
saw (noun)	jù 鋸	*k(r)a-s	kjoH	*ku ^B (Li)	cưa	cứ	khứa
to embroider	xiù 繡	*[s]iw(k)-s	sjuwH	*se:w ^B (Pitt.)	thêu	tú	thêu
scissors/shears	jiǎo 鉸	*mə-[k] ^h r[a]w?	kaewX	*ke:w ^C (tentative)	kéo	giảo	NA
to dye	rǎn 染	*C.n[a]m?	nyemX	*ɲwu:m ^C (Pitt.)	nhuộm	nhiễm	nhuộm
to cut off, to behead	zhǎn 斬	*[ts]ram?	tsreamX	*tram ^C (Pitt.)	chém	trảm	chém
cooked/ripe	shú 熟	*[d]uk	dzyuwk	*suk ^D (Pitt.)	thuộc	thục	thuộc

New implications

- Both Tai and Vietic had a long presence in the *Giao/Jiao* region before the Chinese arrival.
- Though *Giao/Jiao* may ultimately derive from a Kra-Dai toponym, *Giao Chỉ* isn’t necessarily a solely Kra-Dai polity.
- The locus of early Sinitic-Vietic contact is less likely to be North-Central Vietnam, but presumably be in the RRD (e.g. in and around Cổ Loa). The homeland of Vietic (and subsequently AA’s Urheimat) is thus pending revision.

Selected references

• Alves, M.(2020). The Đông Sơn speech community: Evidence for Vietic. *Crossroads* 19, 138–174. • Chamberlain, J.(1998). The Origin of the Sinitic: Implications for Tai and Vietnamese History. *Journal of the Siam Society* 86:1–2, 27–48. • Chamberlain, J.(2016). Kra-Dai and the Proto-History of South China and Vietnam. *Journal of the Siam Society* 104, 27–77. • Nguyễn, T.C.(1995). *Giáo Trình Lịch Sử Ngữ Âm Tiếng Việt*. Hanoi: NXB Giáo dục. • Nguyễn, V.L.(1993). Tộc Danh Của Một Số Dân Tộc Ở Nam Trung Quốc Và Đông Nam Á. *Văn Đề Tên Gọi Giao Chỉ*. In *Những Vấn Đề Ngôn Ngữ Và Văn Hóa, Hội NNH Việt Nam*, 35–44. • Pain, F. (2020). “Giao Chỉ” (Jiaozhi) as a Diffusion Center of Middle Chinese Diachronic Changes: Syllabic Weight Contrast and Phonologisation of Its Phonetic Correlates. *Tsing Hua Journal of Chinese Studies* 50:3, 355–437.