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*Proceedings of the Tenth Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society* (1984), pp. 338-349

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The 'Rung' Languages:  
A Major New Tibeto-Burman Subgroup<sup>1</sup>

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**0. Introduction.** The purpose of this paper is to argue for the existence of a major new Tibeto-Burman subgroup on par with the six major subgroups mentioned below. Although the evidence presented below is speculative rather than definitive, it does establish the 'plausibility' of a 'Rung' subgroup. The evidence organizes itself into two independently-supported but mutually consistent sub-grouping schemas: the schema produced by a careful collation of various 'suggestions' in the literature as well as the schema established on the basis of an interlocking network of shared innovations. Nonetheless, gaps exist in the data and its interpretation.

**1.0 The current subgrouping.** A dependable classification schema is central to any broadly-based historical work, since correct determination of which systems or parts of systems are retentions from the common proto-system and which are more recent innovations rests crucially on accurate knowledge of the subgrouping. However, Tibeto-Burman subgrouping is in its infancy; not only does the composition of lower-level units still pose numerous questions, but the composition of higher-level units remains almost completely open. Thus, while major subgroups such as Bodish, Kiranti, Mirish, Burmese-Lolo, Kuki-Naga, and Bodo-Garo are well-established,<sup>2</sup> it is far from well-understood how they relate in turn to one another.

Within the subgrouping literature, the languages to be placed in Rung are particularly varied in their representation in the literature. For instance, Benedict (1972:5-8) suggests that Dzorgai [=? Qiang], Lepcha, and Magari are 'perhaps' in Tibetan-Kanauri [=Bodish-Himalayish], Digaro [=Taraung] and Kaman [=Miju] are 'perhaps' in Abor-Miri-Dafla [=Mirish], and Nungish is 'perhaps' connected to Burmese-Lolo [=Burmish], and Kadu-Andro-Sengmai [=Luish] are 'perhaps' connected with Jinghpaw. In short, Benedict classifies albeit speculatively the languages of the proposed Rung subgroup into at least three of his six major sections. However, it should be noted that elsewhere in the same body of text, Benedict notes Bodo-Garo and Jinghpaw affinities (pp. 6-7; cf. also Burling 1983), Lepcha and Jinghpaw affinities, and Bahing-Vayu affinities for Magari; further, throughout the relevant section, Benedict makes the tentative nature of his speculations quite clear. Shafer (1966-7, 1974) establishes Gyarung as a separate branch within his Bodish Section, while he leaves Dzorgai [=?Qiang], Digaro [=Taraung], and Miju [=Kaman] as in the Bodic Division but otherwise unclassified; within his Burmic Division, he put Lepcha in his Northern Naga branch of his

Kukish section, classified Jinghpaw, Nungish, and Luish as parallel independent sections, and placed Tangut in the Burmese-Lolo section. In short, Shafer classifies these languages into six separate lower-level sections and two separate higher-level divisions. Within his Tibetic, Egerod (1974) classifies Gyarung as Bodish, Digaro and Miju as 'Other Tibetic', and Magari as 'perhaps' as Kirantish; within his Burmic, he classifies Ch'iang as Burmese-Lolo but with the comment that it stands (798) "in a not clearly defined relationship to Lolo", Jinghpaw as a separate branch of Burmese-Lolo, and Lepcha as Northern Naga but with the comment that it (ibid.) "has Baric and Himalayish affinities". In short, Egerod classifies these languages into five or six different subgroups within his two supergroups, but he like Benedict makes the tentative nature of the classifications abundantly clear. In addition, he specifically notes the Jinghpaw affinities not only of the Luish languages [Andro, Sengmai, Kadu, Sak, and perhaps Chairel] and of the Nungish languages [including Rawang and Trung]. Throughout all of the above, the lack of consensus and the tentative nature of the proposed classifications testify to the speculative nature of the conclusions.

**2.0 Lower level groupings.** Nonetheless, the situation is not as chaotic as it initially appears. In large part, the proposed Rung supergroup is composed of a number of smaller subgroupings many of which are well-established and relatively uncontroversial at least at the lower levels:

The **Nungish languages** include Trung (Sun 1979, 1982) and Rawang (Morse 1965, Barnard 1934). To this group, Taraung [=Digaro] has been added.

The **Gyarung languages** are explicitly grouped together throughout the literature cf. Chang and Chang (1975), Nagano (1983, 1979ab). This group includes Iosu, an eighteenth-century Chinese-Gyarung bilingual text apparently related to the modern Suo-mo dialect of Gyarung (Nishida 1973 in Chang and Chang 1975: 393), as well as Wolfenden's (1936) Kham-to.

The **Qiang languages**, including the two dialects of Qiang found in Sun (1981b)<sup>3</sup> have long been recognized as a group cf. e.g. Wen (1941), Chang (1967).

**3.0 Intermediate level groupings.** In turn, suggestions of close subgrouping affiliations between these established groups also exist in the literature:

**Nungish, Luish, and Jinghpaw.** A collation of the standard subgroupings strongly suggests such a subgrouping. Shafer (1966-7, 1974) classified Jinghpaw, Nungish, and Luish as parallel independent sections within his Burmic Division. Egerod (1974) went further, specifically noting a special connection between Jinghpaw and the Nungish languages [including Rawang and Trung] and between Jinghpaw and the Luish languages [Andro, Sengmai, Kadu, Sak, and perhaps Chairel]. Benedict (1972:5-8) suggests that Kadu, Andro, and Sengmai [=Luish] are 'perhaps' connected with Jinghpaw.<sup>4</sup> In fact, suggestions that the Nungish (and the

**Luish languages** (Bernot 1966) are connected to the **Jinghpaw languages** are scattered throughout the literature. For instance, Sun (1979:303, fn. 2) explicitly connects Trung [Nungish] and Jinghpaw noting that they share basic vocabulary and grammar.

**Gyarung and Qiang.** The inclusion of Gyarung and Qiang [=Qiang, Primi, Kaman [=Miju]] in an 'Tibetanoid' grouping is found explicitly in Qu (1983);<sup>5</sup> in fact, the assumption that Gyarung and Qiang are genetically close is implicit in much of the work coming from the mainland of China.

**Gyarung and Qiang: direction marking.** Throughout these languages a system is found providing a "morphosyntactic indication of deictic orientation of a verb" (DeLancey 1983:101), something immediately recognizable as an example of the 'directive' system described in detail by Wolfenden in his classic Outlines of Tibeto-Burman Linguistic Morphology (1929). Gyarung and Qiang share one such highly marked system (DeLancey 1983: 106-7, fn. 8): "Qiang and rGyarong have elaborate demonstrative and directive systems incorporating geographical categories such as 'upstream', 'downstream', 'toward the mountains', 'toward the river.'" Cf. Chart 3.0 below:

	Gyarung		Pumi [=Primi]	Qiang [=Mami]
'straight up'	to	to	tx	tx
'straight down'	na	na	nx	a
'upstream'	ko	ko	---	nyu
'downstream'	di	nx	---	sx
'toward mountain'	ro	ro	khx	kux
'toward the river'	ri	rx	xE	thiu
'toward center'	dx	dx	dx	dx
'away from center'	tha	thE	t'x	tha

Chart 3.0: Directive systems in Gyarung and Qiang languages.  
[Gyarung, Primi, Qiang: Sun 1981a:39]

Not only are the categories similar, but in many instances the specific morphemes are obviously cognate.

**Gyarung-Qiang and Tangut.** Also suggested in the literature but without much hard evidence is a connection between either Gyarung or Qiang and Tangut. As early as 1936, Wolfenden speculated that Gyarung might be a "moderately near surviving relative of Si-hia [=Tangut]" (1936:168). Similarly, DeLancey (1983:101) noted that Qiang is also "long reputed to be a likely close cousin, both linguistically and ethnically, to Tangut [=Hsi-hsia, Si-hia]". Quite obviously, these alternative couplings are the result not of conflicting opinions but rather of the

closeness of the Gyarung and Qiang language groups. However, convincing hard evidence for a Gyarung-Qiang connection with Tangut is lacking.

#### 4.0 Higher level subgroupings.

**Gyarung and Nungish.** The Gyarung affiliations were expanded in another direction by Chang and Chang (1975), when they first accepted Wolfenden's coupling of Gyarung and Kham and then went a step further by providing evidence in support of their suggestion that Gyarung and Trung were closely connected. Quite obviously, this implies more than just a close affiliation between Trung and the Gyarung languages; indeed, the addition of Trung was tantamount to connecting the Gyarung languages and the Nungish languages.

**The assimilation rule for the first person singular.** Chang and Chang (1975:398) noted the assimilation rule for the first person singular among the features shared by Gyarung and Trung [=Nungish]. In Gyarung, the first person singular adds **-ng** to open syllables, while stop-final syllables replace the final stop by the homorganic nasal (Qu 1983); in Trung, the first person singular adds **-ng** to open syllables [*\*nga* 'I'], while stop-final syllables replace the final stop by the homorganic nasal followed by a glottal stop (Sun 1979:296; 1982:84-5).

**Gyarung, Trung [=Nungish], and Kham: the preverbal yes/no interrogative marker < PTB \*ma 'not'.** For subgrouping Gyarung, Kham, and Trung together, one of the strongest pieces of evidence is a unique preverbal interrogative *\*mx-* (DeLancey 1978b:4; Watters 1973:104ff; Sun 1982: 105-6), which they all share. The presence of a *\*mx-* yes/no interrogative marker represents a shared innovation, and the presence of a *\*mx-* general interrogative marker represents a shared 'secondary' innovation. However, equally significant is the fact that the Rung languages have innovated this *\*mx-* interrogative particle in an otherwise totally unprecedented preverbal position. It is exceedingly unlikely that all this is the result of 'independent but parallel development'.

While Simon (1942) noted that the **-m** of the Classical Tibetan interrogative marker **ham** was ultimately to be derived from the negative marker PTB/PST *\*ma* / *\*mi* 'NEGATIVE', it remained for DeLancey (1978ab; cf. also Thurgood 1983a) to lay out the path that the derivation must have taken. Thus, while the *\*ma* 'NEGATIVE' is found abundantly attested throughout Sino-Tibetan and unquestionably reconstructs to the earliest stages of the language family, the *\*ma* interrogative marker is an innovation, whose origins are to be found in the syntax and semantics of disjunctive questions. Such disjunctive questions e.g., A not-A questions are the rule rather than the exception in Tibeto-Burman and were the source of the widespread *\*ma* interrogative markers. In those cases where everything in the not-A tag but the negative was dropped, the negative was left in sentence-final position; this sentence-final negative was then reinterpreted as a yes/no-question interrogative marker. Then, in at least some cases, this

\*ma yes/no interrogative marker was secondarily generalized from use with just yes/no questions to use with all questions.

**5.0 Other possible connections.** Other remarks in the literature also suggest expansion one or more of the above groups in one direction or another. As a minor point, Chang and Chang mention the possible addition of Lepcha [=Rong] to their Gyarung-Trung complex. Sun (1979:303, fn. 2) suggests connecting the **Xi-fan** [=Hsi-fan, Si-fan; =Hsi-fan: Horpa, Manyak [=Menia], Muli; Horpa in Migot 1957:557-60; Hodgson, B.H. Sifan and Horsok...JASB 22.1853:117-51; [=Xi-fa'n]] languages to Trung and then this complex to his 'Tibetanoid' (i.e., Gyarung, Qiang, and Kaman) languages. Qu (1983) also suggests the inclusion of Gyarung, Kaman [=Miju], Primi, and Qiang in an 'Tibetanoid' grouping.

Other potential linguistic relationships are implied by the overall membership of the larger subgrouping. Kham (Watters 1973), a language which evidence presented below shows to be part of the Gyarung-Nungish complex, has 'affinities' (presumably genetic) to Magar (Shepherd and Shepherd 1973).

#### 6.0 Systems reconstructable back at least to proto-Rung.

**6.1 Agreement systems.** The agreement system has not yet been reconstructed, but even a rudimentary examination makes it clear that the bulk of the system was inherited even at the proto-Rung stage (cf. Fig. 6.1). In Figure 6.1 below, the systems of Gyarung (a Rung language), proto-Gyarung (as reconstructed by Qu 1983), and Thulung (a Kiranti language) are compared. Just from this data,<sup>6</sup> it appears that all the first person forms except for the Thulung first person exclusive marker -ku date from a common origin; further, such an origin dates back at least to a point where proto-Gyarung and proto-Kiranti were one. The second person forms, however, based on this and other data, show Gyarung innovation in the second person prefix tx- and in the second person singular transitive stem suffix -u; the prefixal tx- in particular is a characteristic of certain Gyarung languages and is presently the only major evidence suggesting the inclusion of Chepang in within Gyarung. The plural forms -ny/\*-ny/and -ni are cognate, as are the -tsh' of the Gyarung dual and the -ci of the Thulung dual.<sup>7</sup> The third person forms here, as in much of Tibeto-Burman, are so varied as to be of little help; however, if Chepang is Gyarung, the lack of either a \*kx- reflex or a \*wx- must be accounted for.

**6.2 Causative formation.** The oldest layers of Tibeto-Burman causative formation historically are a derivative of the concatenation of subordinated motion verbs with main verbs found in the proto-Tibeto-Burman directive system; more recent layers have developed out the syntax and semantics of other types of verb concatenations. The Rung languages are notable in this respect for their strikingly faithful retention of large chunks of the original directive system as well as for their retention of of the transitive/causative portion of that directive system.

Within the Rung languages, a variety of distinct causative

constructions exist. However, certain of these are clearly common to the subgroup as a whole, while others may be restricted to just a subgroup of Rung. What is of interest here is the parts that go back to at least a common proto-Tibetan/proto-Rung if not proto-Sino-Tibetan stage.

	Gyarung (Zhuo-ke-ji) (Qu 1983)		proto-Gyarung (Qu 1983)		Thulung (Allen 1975)	
	IV	TV	IV	TV	IV	TV
1S	-ng	-ng <sup>8</sup>	-ng	-u	-ngu	-u
1PI		-i		-i		-i
1PE		-i		-i		-ku
1DI		-tsh'		-tsh'		-ci
1DE		-tsh'		-tsh'		-cuku
2S	tx- -n	tx- -u	tx- -n	tx- -u		-na
2P		tx- -ny		tx- -ny		-ni
2D		tx- -ntsh'		tx- -ntsh'		-ci
3S	---	-u <sup>9</sup>	kx-	wx-	---	
3P	kx-	wx-	kx-	wx-		-mi
3D	kx-	wx-	kx-	wx-		-ci

Figure 6.1: Agreement systems.

Notes: Phonetic symbols: <x> indicates a shwa, <ny> indicates palatal nasal. IV indicates a form added to intransitive verb stems, and TV indicates a form added to a transitive verb stem. The first person forms -ng/ \*-ng/ and -ngu are immediately recognizable as relics of proto-Sino-Tibetan \*nga 'I'

**Gyarung, Trung, Kham, and Jinghpaw: prefixal and suffixal -s.**

**Gyarong causatives.** The most frequent marker of the causative in Gyarong is -sA-, which becomes -se- before unrounded front vowels and -su- before rounded low-back vowels. In addition to marking causativization, -sA- also serves to mark transitivization (Nagano 1983). A much more rare use of -sA- is found in its co-occurrence with certain adjectivals. A clearly related form -syA- is used to establish the patient as a stated or unstated beneficiary. All these prefixal uses have in common that they mark movement in the direction of an action, result, or goal; that they are etymologically connected and that they ultimately derive from an earlier 'directive' system cannot be doubted. In suffixal position, the morpheme -s occurs, which indexes what Nagano (1983:100) terms 'perfect'; this, I suspect, has the same ultimate

etymology as the prefixal s-causative.

**Trung causatives.** Transitivity differences are marked in a number of distinct ways in Trung (Sun 1982:101-3). The most common marker appears to be the prefix tw 21 / sw 21 ; tw 21 occurs before s- and c- initialled forms, while sw 21 occurs elsewhere; this morphophonemic alternation is strikingly similar to the sha/ja alternation of the Jinghpaw causative marker described below. However, no obviously related suffixal particle has been found.

**Kham causatives.** The Kham prefixal causative is fairly accurately characterized by Wolfenden's description of the original PTB \*s- (sec. 42, para. 2):

It is probably that originally -s- was a directive indicating simply either (a) general direction into the condition or state named by the verb root itself, or (b) (as its fullest extension in an object direction) action to, towards, for, etc., an indirect object. As a later development (c) the so-called transitive or causative verbs in -s- arose.

Within the Kham use of the s- prefix, one can still see the intensifying, directionalizing, transitivizing, and causativizing continuum. In addition, Kham has a number of suffixal -s elements that are relatable to the prefixal s-.

**Jinghpaw causatives.** The Jinghpaw prefixal mechanism is sha, which before a verb beginning with a voiceless fricative or a voiceless aspirated stop becomes ja (Maran and Clifton 1976). The parallel with Trung above is striking and compelling. In addition, Jinghpaw has a suffixal mechanism--the addition of the verb shangun, part of which Maran and Clifton suggest is relatable to the prefixal sha.

**Tibetan causatives.** Still preserved in the orthography of Written Tibetan are both s- prefixes indicating transitive/causative meanings and -s suffixes indicating the perfective. Once these are viewed in conjunction with the proto-Rung features described above, it is clear that both the prefixal and the suffixal s must be reconstructed to a considerable time depth. In addition, the range and scope of their distribution in Rung should give us a way to reconstruct their original form and function.

**7.0 Conclusion.** An immediate appeal of this subgrouping is that it would provide a solution to the question of the genetic affiliation of a number of languages; however, a more valuable result in the long run may be in the syntactic reconstruction which should follow the realization that these languages group together. As one consequence of a partial reconstruction of the syntax of this group, it is possible to reconstruct the older verbal pronominalization system in a little more detail and to a little greater depth. However, a potentially far more valuable product of this subgroup lies in its retention of most of the

component parts of the once fully-productive Tibeto-Burman system of direction marking and causative marking (Wolfenden 1929), which has been largely reduced to fossilized remnants elsewhere in the family (cf. the prefixes of Written Tibetan). In particular, the prefixal and suffixal components when analyzed together make it obvious, as Wolfenden contended, that the more recent causative-marking systems had their ultimate origin in direction-marking systems; further, the suffixal components found both in Gyarung, Kham, and Jinghpaw of Rung and the suffixal *-s* marking the perfective in Written Tibetan look to have their origins as part of the same original directive system. These contentions, of course, remain to be proved.<sup>10</sup>

#### Footnotes

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- 1 I shall be astonished if all my errors should prove minor and grateful to readers for their corrections. This material is based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation under Grant No. BNS-8203882.
  - 2 These six subgroups are those of Benedict 1972 minus Jinghpaw, which is not treated here as a separate subgroup.
  - 3 Lu (1980:58) places Primi [=Pumi; 'white men'] with the Qiang languages, but whether it is closer to Qiang or to Gyarung is not yet clear. The name itself suggests the possibility that the Primi [=Pumi] are the descendants of the long-sought Pyu of Burma.
  - 4 However, it should be noted that elsewhere in the same body of text, Benedict also speculates on Jinghpaw and Bodo-Garo affinities (pp. 6-7; cf. Burling 1983) as well as suggesting that Nungish is 'perhaps' connected with Burmese-Lolo.
  - 5 The inclusion of Kaman [=Miju] in this complex still needs to be proven.
  - 6 A much broader range of data than that in Figure 6.1 supports this analysis (cf. Bauman 1974, 1975; DeLancey 1980, 1981; Thurgood 1983a).
  - 7 Despite the apparent phonetic similarity of the various second person nasal initialed suffixes, it is unclear whether they are one and the same piece. The *-n-* of the Gyarung dual *-ntsh'* may simply be the remnant of the *\*-ni* plural marker followed by the dual marker. At least typologically, a dual from an older plural plus a dual would not be unexpected. Alternately, it could be argued that this *-n-* is simply a relic of the proto-Tibeto-Burman (PTB) pronoun *\*nang* 'you'. It is also possible that a third alternative exists. Thus, the status of the remaining second person elements is not apparent--at least not to me.
  - 8 The intransitive verb (IV) form appears to have been generalized to the transitive verbs (IV), but in the western dialects e.g., Danba the the *-u* of the proto-system is still found with the

- transitive verbs (Qu 1983).
- 9 A comparison with the eastern dialects shows this -u to be an extension of the second person -u (Qu 1983:37-8).
- 10 It is particularly imperative that the lexical evidence in Benedict (1972) and Burling (1983) linking Jinghpaw to Bodo-Garo and Konyak be dealt with.

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