

Languages of the Ethnic Corridor in Western Sichuan¹

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In recent years, scholars in China devoted to the ethnohistory, ethnology, and minority language studies of southwestern China have often used the term "*Ethnic Corridor*" to refer to the strip of territory extending from southern Gansu and eastern Qinghai down through western Sichuan and southeastern Tibet to western Yunnan and the northern Burmese and Indian frontiers.

Characterized geographically by lofty and steep north-to-south oriented mountain chains and a multitude of huge rivers (including the Min, Dadu, Yalong, Jinsha, Lancang, and Nu), this area has historically had a complex ethnic makeup. For over a century, Chinese and foreign scholars in ethnology, history, and linguistics have written about the intricate ethnic and linguistic situations in the Corridor. To this day, the area still presents many unsolved puzzles. Professor Fei Xiaotong gave the following analyses:

"This corridor, a borderland of Sino-Tibetan and Yi-Tibetan contact, has been an arena of political tug-of-war. This is also the area in history where the so-called Qiang, Di, and Rong ethnic groups lived and thrived and where many local governments of varying power and duration have appeared. At present, this corridor is inhabited by the Chinese in the east and the Tibetans in the west ... there seem to be, nevertheless, some substrate languages that survived the overwhelming influence of either *lingua franca* ... in this corridor are

¹ **Translator's note:** This is a translation of one of the most important recent articles by Sun Hongkai: "Chuanxi Minzu Zoulang Diqiu de Yuyan". It originally appeared in the anthology *Xinan Minzu Yanjiu* (*Studies of the Ethnic Groups of Southwestern China*) Chengdu: Sichuan People's Press, 1983, pp. 429-454. I amalgamate Sun Hongkai's original notes with my supplementary ones into a single sequence; the latter are distinguished from the former by carrying a TN mark, short for *translator's note*. For new language names, I use Pinyin renditions of the Chinese names given by the author without the tone marks (except to avoid potential confusion, e.g. footnote 2). In the Chinese original, the last two note numbers (13 and 14) in the text have no corresponding entries in the endnotes. Cordial thanks are due to Randy J. LaPolla for meticulously proofreading earlier versions of this translation and providing helpful suggestions for improvements.

to be found many living historical relics; this area should be fertile ground for exploration by historians as well as linguists." (Fel, 1980:158)

Within the past few years, the present writer has carried on extensive fieldwork in western Sichuan, one of the core areas of the Corridor, and has come to a preliminary understanding of the linguistic situation of the area: the number and distribution of the various languages, the sociolinguistic contexts of their use, and their basic characteristics.

The inhabitants of this area are found to speak, aside from the now well-known Tibetan, Yi, Qiang, Primi, and rGyarong languages, many "historical relic languages" previously little understood by the outside world. Speakers of these languages, besides using their respective vernaculars at home and in their villages, can converse also in Chinese, Tibetan, or Yi, when so required by communicative need and discourse situation.

This article aims to give a brief synopsis of the distribution, extent of use, and basic characteristics of these languages, as well as their general affiliations with the surrounding minority languages.

1. Sketches of the corridor languages

1.1 ÈRSŪ 尔苏 (including Tosu 多苏 and Lisū 栗苏²)

The Ersu language is spoken mainly in Ganluo, Yuexi, Mianning, and Mull counties of the Liangshan Autonomous Prefecture of the Yi Nationality, and Shimian and Hanyuan counties of the Ganzi Autonomous Prefecture of the Tibetan Nationality. The speakers number about twenty thousand.³ Ersu speakers at different localities have different autonyms: those living at Ganluo, Yuexi, and Hanyuan call themselves "Ersu", "Buerzi" or "Ersubuerzi"; those living at eastern Mianning call themselves "Duoxu (Tosu)"; those living at Shimian use "Lusu", and those living at Mull, Jiulong, and western Mianning "Lisu". These different autonyms are dialectal variants of the same word, originally meaning "white people".

The Ersu language exhibits considerable internal diversification: different dialects are almost mutually unintelligible. In matters of basic vocabulary and syntactic structures, however, they are still quite similar. There are three main dialects: the eastern or Ersu dialect spoken by about 13,000 self-termed Ersus or Lusus, the central or Tosu dialect spoken by

² To be distinguished from the Yipho (Lolo-Burmese) language Lisū 栗蘇.

³ The population figures given in this article are approximate statistics arrived at by adding up rough population numbers gathered at each locality before 1980.

about 3,000 self-termed Tosus, and the western or Lisu dialect spoken by about 4,000 self-termed Lisus. We made a detailed investigation of the central dialect spoken around Mianning, Sichuan, and after double-checking our data with those contained in Nishida Tatsuo's *Tazoku Yakugo Kenkyū* (*Study of a Chinese-Tosu Vocabulary*),⁴ we found that this vocabulary records an earlier form of the same Tosu dialect of the Mianning area. The pronunciation of most basic items of that vocabulary are still consistent with that of the living Tosu speech, even though a number of the words in the *Vocabulary* have disappeared from modern spoken Tosu.

Outside of the villages and communities where their own vernacular is used, the Ersu people also speak Chinese, Yi, and (around Jiulong) Tibetan. In places like Shimian, Hanyuan, and Mianning, the use of Ersu is already becoming restricted. At certain localities near highways or cities, middle-aged people and young adults are losing their command of the language. In the following I give a brief account of the main characteristics of Ersu, based on a variety spoken at Zeluo Commune, Ganluo County, Liangshan Autonomous Prefecture of the Yi Nationality.

1.1.1 Phonology

There are 42 single-consonant initials in the following series: bilabial, labiodental, dental, alveolar⁵, apicodomal, alveopalatal, prepalatal, velar, and glottal. In some Ersu dialects, uvular stops and spirants are found as well. There are 32 initial consonant clusters; 21 of them are two-place clusters composed of a basic initial plus a post-initial (a spirant), and the remaining five are three-place clusters. Vowels do not contrast in length or vowel tensivity⁶, but a few retroflexed vowels are found. Rising diphthongs abound; falling ones, which are very few, occur infrequently. There are no consonantal codas. A few nasalized vowels occur in the native vocabulary; Chinese loanwords with nasal codas are rendered as nasalized vowels with

⁴ TN: This work is based on a Chinese-Tosu vocabulary, which is part of the *Xifan Yiyu* (*Sino-Xifan Bilingual Vocabularies*) compiled during the Qing Dynasty under imperial decree.

⁵ TN: These points of articulation refer to phonetic realizations rather than phonemic contrasts. As a matter of fact, the bilabial and labiodental series are presumably always in complementary distribution in any of the languages reported in this article. I tentatively use "dental" and "alveolar" to translate Sun's "shejian qian" (front-apex) and "shejian zhong" (mid-apex). These places of articulation are most probably also always in complementary distribution in any of these languages. It is doubtful that the practice of many mainland Chinese scholars to mechanically assign dental/alveolar spirants and affricates to the "front-apex" category and dental/alveolar stops, nasals, and liquids to the "mid-apex" category is always empirically founded.

⁶ TN: Mainland Chinese linguists have been using this term to refer to laryngealization. For phonetic details, see Maddieson and Ladefoged 1985.

the nasal endings dropped. Even though two tonemes, one high and one low, can be established, few words are distinguished by pitch alone.

1.1.2 *Lexicon*

The Ersu lexicon is richly diversified; word-formation rules are very productive. The sericulture formerly practiced by the Ersu people leaves the language heavily endowed with technical terms related to silkworm farming. The lexicon also contains a number of early and some recent (technical) loanwords from Chinese; a few Yi borrowings connected with general livelihood, and some Tibetan ones dealing with religion are also found. Loanwords, however, do not constitute a large percentage of the lexicon; those from Chinese count less than 10%, and those from either Yi or Tibetan less than 2%. The major word-formation device is compounding; some nouns, verbs, and adjectives are formed by prefixation or suffixation. Four-syllable elaborate expressions⁷ abound.

1.1.3 *Grammar*

In Ersu, word order, particles, and morphology are all indispensable grammatical coding devices. Nominal plurality is conveyed by suffixation. Expressions of orientation are characteristically rich: besides those universal to all languages, there are others which denote the orientation relative to the position of mountains and riverflow, each of which is further distinguished along an axis of proximity: general reference, proximal, mediate, and distal. This system of orientation (or path) terms plays a role even in the naming of a new-born baby according to the mother's age at the time of childbirth. The system of classifiers is also highly developed. In a numeral phrase with a classifier, the word order is *head noun-numeral-classifier*. Personal pronouns are case-inflected by means of ablaut, yielding agentive, genitive, and patient case forms. Reduced forms of the personal pronouns are prefixed to kinterms to mark the category of possession.⁸ Pronouns can be reduplicated; when reduplicated, personal pronouns become reflexive, and interrogative pronouns become plural. Verbs

⁷ **TN:** The existence of such tetrasyllabic expressions is an important Southeast Asian areal feature. [See Matisoff (in prep.)]

⁸ **TN:** This refers to the head-marking device where the possessed noun head (usually restricted to inalienable ones) is marked to agree in person (sometimes also in number) with the modifying possessor, i.e. of the schematic formula:

Noun₁ ^HNoun₂ + ^MPronominal Affix (Nichols 1986:59)

This category of possession is reported in some other Corridor languages not treated in this article, e.g. rGyarong and the Nunglish languages Trung and Anong. See Sun 1984, 1988.

conjugate by prefixation and/or suffixation according to tense,⁹ mood, voice, and the special category of orientation. Existential verbs are finely differentiated (see 2.3.7). A considerable portion of common adjectives appear in reduplicated forms. There are quite a few grammatical particles, expressing such relations as genitive, patient, instrumental, locative, comparative, and ablative. Also characteristic is the existence of the "definite" particles.¹⁰ The basic word order of the Ersu sentence is SOV. Modifying nouns and pronouns appear before, and attributive adjectives and numeral phrases after, the nominal heads.

1.1.4 Writing

The Ersu people generally use Chinese in writing, though some individuals involved in education learn the Yi script. Before Liberation, a few people, the so-called Sufa'ers, learned to read Tibetan, and some of them keep Tibetan sutras even today. Their knowledge of Tibetan, however, is limited to reading, and even this knowledge is utilized only in connection with religious activities. One clan of the Ersu people, the Shabas, have used a pictographic writing system known as Zhalama writing (Liu et al. 1981). Over ten documents recorded in this form of writing are extant, on subjects as varied as history, religion, astrology, almanac-making, medicine, and language. Some of these handwritten documents, which are extremely valuable for the study of ethnohistory, ethnology, minority languages, ethnoreligion, and the origin of writing, have regrettably been lost.

1.2 NAMÜYI 纳木义

The Namuyi language is chiefly spoken in Mianning, Mull, Xichang, and Yanyuan counties of the Liangshan Autonomous Prefecture of the Yi Nationality, and in Jiulong County of the Ganzi Autonomous Prefecture of the Tibetan Nationality, Sichuan. There are about 5,000 speakers. The Namuyi people around Jiulong and Mull called themselves "Naimuzi", whereas those around Mianning and Xichang call themselves "Namuyi". These different forms are dialectal variants of the same autonomy.

⁹ TN: Sino-Tibetan languages as a rule do not have true tense systems. What Sun means by *ʒh1* (i.e. "tense") is most likely *relative tense*, which is associated more with aspectual systems (cf. what Smith 1983 calls Situation-Aspect).

¹⁰ TN: My translation of the so-called *dīngzhī* particles as "definite" is tentative. Judging from the descriptions given in the *Jīanzhī* series (e.g., Sun 1981), their uses are quite complicated. They behave sometimes like emphasis markers, and sometimes like complementizers. More work is needed in this area before we can be clear about the various pragmatic functions of these particles.

The Namuyi dialects differ mainly in phonology. The varieties spoken around Mianning and Yanyuan have few consonant clusters, whereas those spoken around Jiulong and Muli have more.

Speakers of Namuyi use the language as their chief means of verbal communication at home and in their villages, outside of which they use Chinese or Yi.

In what follows we give an account of the basic characteristics of Namuyi, based on the variety spoken at Luopuo Commune, Second District, Muli Autonomous County of the Tibetan Nationality, Liangshan Autonomous Prefecture of the Yi Nationality, Sichuan.

1.2.1 *Phonology*

There are 40 single-consonant initials in nine series: bilabial, labiodental, dental, alveolar, apicodomal, prepalatal, velar, uvular, and glottal. Stops and affricates generally contrast in voicing and aspiration. 24 initial clusters exist: a homorganic nasal preinitial can precede both voiced and voiceless aspirated stops and affricates; a voiced or voiceless aspirated bilabial stop can take a dental or retroflexed spirant postinitial. A few three-place clusters also occur. The system of monophthongs is complicated: in native vocabulary, retroflexed and nasalized vowels are found; some vowels even distinguish phonemic tensivity. There are no triphthongs or falling diphthongs, or consonantal codas. Four tonemes serve important distinctive functions.

1.2.2 *Lexicon*

Monosyllabic words constitute the majority of the core lexicon. New words are formed chiefly through affixation and compounding of existing lexical elements. Loanwords come chiefly from Chinese, mostly technical terms borrowed after Liberation, and Tibetan, mostly religious but also some livelihood (e.g. dairy) terms. A few Yi loanwords are also found.

1.2.3 *Grammar*

In matters of morphology and syntax, Namuyi resembles Ersu. Grammatical information is coded mainly by word order and the use of particles. Morphological alternation is also employed, but to a lesser extent. Nominal plurality is expressed through suffixation. There is a rich system of classifiers; word order and other syntactic traits of the nominal-classifier construction are the same as in Ersu. For dual and plural first person pronouns, there is a contrast between inclusive versus exclusive forms.

Tense/aspect is conveyed by affixation and tonal modification on the verb stem, while voice, mood, and orientation are expressed by suffixation. Existential verbs are finely differentiated. The copula is omissible. There is a special set of prefixes for adjectives; many common adjective stems appear in reduplicated forms. Many grammatical particles are used, coding genitive, patient, instrumental, locative, comparative, and ablative relations. The typical sentential word order is SOV. Modifying nouns and pronouns appear before, and attributive adjectives and numeral phrases after, the nominal heads.

1.3 SHĪXĪNG 史兴

The Shixing language is distributed mainly along the Shuiluo River and its downstream tributary, the Chongtian River, in the First District of the Muli Autonomous County of the Tibetan nationality, Liangshan Autonomous Prefecture of the Yi nationality, Sichuan. Its speakers, who number about 2,000, use the autonym "Shixing", while the Primi call them "Xumi". They live in mixed communities with Naxi, Yi, and Primi. It is their belief that their vernacular is a "mixture of Tibetan and Naxi". This is definitely false, as our investigation shows that Shixing is a distinct Tibeto-Burman language. Their impression stems from the presence of Tibetan, Yi, and Naxi lexical elements in Shixing, due to the influences of Tibetan Buddhism and Dongba shamanism.¹¹

Besides using this language at home and in their villages, Shixing speakers adopt Chinese and Primi in interacting with the outside world. The Shixing language is quite uniform internally; no dialect variation has been noted.

In the following we give a brief account of the main characteristics of the Shixing language spoken at the Shuiluo Commune.

1.3.1 Phonology

Among the Corridor languages, Shixing has the most elaborate system of single-consonant initials, with more than 50 of them. They are pronounced at ten places of articulation: bilabial, labiodental, dental, alveolar, alveodental, alveopalatal, prepalatal, velar, uvular, and glottal. Stops, affricates, nasals, and laterals all contrast in voicing. The structure of consonant clusters is relatively straightforward; only one type exists, namely: homorganic nasal preinitials before voiceless or voiced stop or affricate initials. The system of monophthongs is also quite complex. There

¹¹ TN: A form of animistic religion of the Naxi people.

are retroflexed and (in a few words only) laryngealized vowels, although contrasts of tensity are not found. The velar nasal coda is often realized as nasalization of the front nuclear vowels. There are no stop codas. Diphthongs are generally of the rising variety, only a few falling ones occur. A system of four tonemes exists, and is important for lexical differentiation.

1.3.2 *Lexicon*

Shixing has a richly diversified lexicon. The Shixing people have traditionally been rice-cultivators; the Shixing lexicon is hence quite different from neighboring languages in this semantic field. A number of Tibetan, Primi, and Naxi loanwords are found in other semantic areas, owing to contact with these languages. The major word-formation device is compounding; words formed through affixation are rare.

1.3.3 *Grammar*

Grammatical information is chiefly coded by word order and the use of particles; only a few grammatical categories involve morphological alternations. Nominal plurality is expressed by suffixation. There is a rich system of classifiers; classifiers appear after numerals. Some case forms of personal pronouns are derived by ablaut. Dual and plural first person pronouns have inclusive and exclusive forms. Tense/aspect, mood, and orientation are expressed by suffixation; voice, however, also involves such additional morphological devices as consonant alternations and reduplication of the verb stem. Existential verbs are finely differentiated. In general, the copula cannot be omitted. Common adjectives often occur in reduplicated forms; adjectives that occur in sentential subject and object slots usually need further suffixation. Grammatical particles abound, expressing genitive, patient, instrumental, locative, comparative, ablative, and other relations. The typical sentential word order is SOV. Modifying nouns and pronouns occur before, and attributive adjectives and numeral phrases after, the nominal heads.

1.4 MINYAK (Miyao/Muya) 木雅

The Minyak language has attracted much attention both inside and outside of China because many scholars of renown have suspected the language to be closely related to Xixia (Tangut) (Stein 1951, Wang 1944); some have gone so far as to completely equate the two. Yet, earnest and in-depth investigation of Minyak was not undertaken until 1980.

Minyak is spoken in Kangding and Jiulong counties of the Ganzi Autonomous Prefecture of the Tibetan Nationality, and in Shimian and other counties of the Ya'an District, Sichuan, by about 15,000 people. Those living at Shimian and the Wanba and Hongba areas of Jiulong call themselves "Minyak"; of those living at Kangding and the Tanggu area of Jiulong, most call themselves "Buoba", a few others call themselves "Minyak". There are two dialects of Minyak: the eastern dialect spoken around Shimian and the Wanba and Hongba areas of Jiulong, and the western dialect spoken around Kangding and the Tanggu area of Jiulong. The western dialect is subject to heavier influences from Tibetan, while the eastern dialect is more influenced by Chinese. Except for the few people engaged in religious activities who speak a bit of faltering Tibetan, eastern dialect Minyaks in general do not know Tibetan. They use Minyak as their principal home, village, and local language; cadres and people who leave the villages often adopt Chinese to communicate with outsiders. Some of them can even speak Chinese quite fluently. On the other hand, most speakers of the western dialect can speak the local (Kham) Tibetan dialect; very few, however, are conversant in Chinese.

The following is an account of the Minyak language based on the variety used at the Liuba Commune, Shade District, Kangding County, of the Ganzi Autonomous Prefecture of the Tibetan Nationality.

1.4.1 *Phonology*

There are 42 single-consonant initials in nine series: bilabial, labiodental, dental, alveolar, apicodomal, prepalatal, velar, uvular, and glottal. All stops and affricates contrast in voicing and aspiration. Uvular phonemes are characteristically prominent, occurring frequently in the lexicon. All of the few (seven) consonant cluster initials belong to one single type: voiced stops and affricates prefixed by homorganic nasal preinitials. More than 20 monophthongal rhymes exist; laryngealized vowels, though contrastive, show limited distribution and low frequency of occurrence. Nasalized vowels are found mainly in Chinese and Tibetan loanwords. There are many rising diphthongs with front rounded and unrounded as well as back unrounded onglides, but no falling diphthongs or triphthongs. No consonantal codas exist. There is a system of four tonemes which is important for lexical differentiation.

1.4.2 *Lexicon*

The Minyak lexicon is also richly diversified. The Minyak people live mainly on animal husbandry and, to a lesser extent, agriculture. This

accounts for the existence of a set of native vocabulary items dealing with farming and animal-herding, which are distinct from their equivalents in Tibetan. On the other hand, the number of Tibetan loanwords is substantial: all the religious and most of the political and cultural terms are borrowed from Tibetan. There are, however, more Chinese loanwords than Tibetan ones in the Eastern dialect. The major word-formation device is compounding; affixation is also exploited. Four-syllable elaborate expressions abound.

1.4.3 *Grammar*

In Minyak, word order, grammatical particles, and inflection are all important grammatical coding devices. Suffixation yields plural and diminutive forms of nominals. Classifiers are used extensively; cardinal numerals lower than 10 generally do not occur without classifiers. The numeral appears in front of the classifier in a numeral phrase. Ablaut produced the three case forms of personal pronouns: agentive, patient, and genitive. Dual and plural personal pronouns are further differentiated into inclusive and exclusive forms. Pronouns can be reduplicated; reduplication makes personal pronouns reflexive and interrogative pronouns plural. The verbal categories of person, number, tense, voice, and orientation are expressed by stem-modification and affixation. Existential verbs are finely differentiated. The copula is generally omissible. Most common adjectives appear in reduplicated forms; negation words in general cannot occur before adjectives used as predicates. Adjectives do not occur in sentential subject or object slots without carrying special formatives. Grammatical particles convey genitive, agentive, patient, instrumental, locative, comparative, and ablative relations. The typical sentential word order is SOV. Modifying nouns and pronouns occur before, and attributive adjectives and numeral phrases after, nominal heads.

The structure of Minyak, in sum, is very similar to that of Xixia. Their vocabularies also share a significant number of cognates. However, our impression, after some preliminary comparisons were conducted, is that although Minyak shares more cognates with Qiangic than either Loloish or Tibetan, it shares no more cognates with Xixia than with any other member of the Qiangic branch. In other words, it is still too early to equate Minyak with Xixia; and further, from the point of view of linguistics, it is simply unfounded to pinpoint the modern Minyaks as direct descendants of the historical Xixia people who migrated south after the downfall of the Tangut Empire.

1.5 GUIQIÓNG 贵琼

In the main, speakers of the Guiqiong language are distributed along the terraces of the Dadu River, Yutong District, Kangding County, of the Ganzi Autonomous Prefecture of the Tibetan Nationality, Sichuan. In northern Luding County and northwestern Tianquan County, Ya'an District of the same autonomous prefecture, a small number of these people can also be found. All in all, they number about 7,000. The name "Guiqiong" is the Chinese rendering of their autonym.

Guiqiong as a distinct language was discovered long ago. As early as April 1930, when a group of investigators on a survey project (in preparation for the establishment of the erstwhile Xikang province) were passing through Yutong, one of them made this comment: "The language and customs of Yutong, one of the eight districts of Kangding, are distinct from those of either the Chinese or the Khams Tibetans. The people here are actually a unique ethnic group" (Dong 1930).

Speakers of Guiqiong live in small communities interspersed among larger Chinese communities. They use Chinese outside of their own villages. The Guiqiong language they speak is under heavy influence from Chinese, containing many Chinese loanwords. Guiqiong is internally quite uniform; no dialect differences exist.

We give below a brief account of the main characteristics of Guiqiong based on the speech of Maiben Commune, Yutong District, of the Kangding County.

1.5.1 Phonology

The nine places of articulation for the single-consonant initials are: bilabial, labiodental, dental, alveolar, apicodomal, alveopalatal, prepalatal, velar, and uvular. Stops and affricates contrast in voicing and aspiration. The pronunciation of the uvulars and the alveopalatals is undergoing change. In the speech of old and middle-aged people, they are kept as distinct phonemes, but in the speech of the younger generations, the uvulars have merged with the velars, and most instances of the alveopalatals have merged with the dentals, others with the apicodomals. As regards the 20 consonant clusters, only one type is found: voiceless, voiced, and voiceless aspirated stops and affricates preceded by homorganic nasals. There are more than 20 monophthongs. Nasalized vowels occur frequently in native vocabulary. Many rising diphthongs with front unrounded, front rounded, or back rounded onglides occur, but there are no falling diphthongs or triphthongs, nor are there any consonant codas. A system of four tonemes exists, and is

important for lexical differentiation. Phonological alternations, especially vocalic assimilation, are quite common.

1.5.2 *Lexicon*

Monosyllabic words constitute the major core of the lexicon. Compounding is the chief device by means of which the lexicon is enlarged; word-formation by affixation is not productive. Loanwords from Tibetan and particularly Chinese provide another source for lexical enrichment.

1.5.3 *Grammar*

The main syntactic coding devices in Guiqiong are word order and the use of particles; limited morphological alternation is also employed. Plural and diminutive forms of nouns are derived by adding suffixes. Classifiers are used extensively; cardinal numerals below ten normally do not occur without classifiers. In a numeral phrase, the numeral appears before the classifier. Personal pronouns differentiate singular, dual, plural, and collective numbers, the latter three having in addition distinct inclusive and exclusive forms. Case inflection of these pronouns is realized by vocalic and tonal alternation. The verbal categories tense/aspect, mood, voice, and orientation are expressed by affixation on the verb stem. In the speech of old people, traces of two other verbal categories, person and number, can still be found. Existential verbs are finely differentiated. The copula is generally omissible. A rather special characteristic of adjectives in this language is that, when used as a sentential predicate, the adjective stem can be reduplicated and affixed (some stems are simply affixed together with a linking syllable) to convey intensification of the quality or state it denotes. There is a rich set of grammatical particles expressing genitive, patient, instrumental, locative, comparative, and ablative functions. A special set of "definite" particles is also found. The basic sentential word order is SOV. Modifiers, including nouns and pronouns, appear uniformly after their heads.

1.6 ÈRGŌNG 尔龚

The Ergong language is spoken mainly in Danba, Daofu, Luhuo, and Xinlong Counties of the Ganzi Autonomous Prefecture of the Tibetan Nationality, and at some localities around the Guanyinqiao area of Jinchuan

County of the Aba Autonomous Prefecture of the Tibetan Nationality.¹² Speakers total about 35,000. Some scholars in China used to consider the language to be similar to rGyarong. In a paper entitled "The social history of the rGyarong people", Ma Changshou says that this language is distinct from Tibetan, and gives it the name Ergong, which I adopt here (Ma 1944).¹³ Li Shaoming also mentions the language in an important paper (Li, 1980).¹⁴ Our preliminary investigation shows that Ergong is a separate Tibeto-Burman language distinct from rGyarong and even more so from Tibetan. Speakers of Ergong call themselves "bøpa", their customs and religious beliefs are basically the same as the Tibetans. Ergong is the chief means of communication among themselves; cadres and those who often travel outside of the Ergong communities speak Chinese and Tibetan as well.

The Ergong language at various localities varies to some extent in phonology, lexicon, and grammar. At present, it is difficult to propose dialectal groupings, since extensive surveys of all Ergong-speaking communities have not yet been undertaken.

The following brief account of the Ergong language is based on the variety spoken at Dasang District of Danba County.

1.6.1 Phonology

The 44 single-consonant initials of Ergong are articulated in the following nine series: bilabial, labiodental, dental, alveolar, apicaldomal, prepalatal, velar, uvular, and glottal. Aspiration is contrastive for voiceless spirants. There is a complicated system of consonant clusters; 191 different clusters are counted in a core vocabulary of about 2,000 words, out of which four structural patterns emerge: (1) root initial preceded by a nasal, spirant, liquid (lateral/rhotic), or glide; (2) root initial followed by a spirant or liquid; (3) two nasals or spirants forming a cluster; and (4) root initial both preceded and followed by another consonant. The first three

¹² Ergong speakers can also be found at the Muerzong District, Markam County, of the Aba Autonomous Prefecture of the Tibetan Nationality (personal communication from Liu Huiqiang, Institute of Ethnological Studies of Sichuan Province).

¹³ TN: Actually, the passage alluded to in Ma's paper says that what Ergong, which he romanizes as "Rguan" (without clarifying where this name comes from), is distinct from rGyarong. He also says that another name of Ergong is "Daofu yu", or the language of Daofu. This reminds us of the "Stau" language of Wang 1970, and the "*dialecte de Taofu*" in Migot 1957, both actually referring to none other than Ergong. In addition, Ma claims that Ergong or Stau is the language of the historic Hor people. This is in accord with Hodgson 1874 and Shafer 1954, who call the same language "Horpa", i.e. "the language of the Hor".

¹⁴ Li Shaoming says in this article that the inhabitants of the Geshiza and Bawangsi areas of Danba County speak the "Rgu" language, also commonly known as the "Daofu" language. Li claims that this language is similar to the Gelin language (TN: a local dialect of rGyarong?), with a mingling of some Hor elements.

patterns account for 167 two-place clusters, whereas the last pattern accounts for 24 three-place clusters. The system of rhymes is also rich. Among monophthongs, there exists a separate set of (infrequently used) retroflexed vowels. There are falling diphthongs and rising diphthongs; triphthongs occur in native words as well, but are less common. There are nasal and lateral, but no stop or spirant, codas. Tone is not found to be phonemic, but there are salient and noticeable (though still redundant) pitch contours associated with individual words.

1.6.2 *Lexicon*

Monosyllabic words dominate the core lexicon. Affixation and compounding are the major word-formation devices. Words borrowed from Chinese and Tibetan further enrich the lexicon. In general, religious terms are borrowed from Tibetan and technical ones from Chinese; Chinese and Tibetan loanwords dealing with everyday life are also found.

1.6.3 *Grammar*

Word order, particles, and morphological alternation are all important devices for coding grammatical information. Particles added after nominals produce the corresponding plural and diminutive forms. Nouns denoting orientation or direction abound; they are used much as in Qiang and rGyarong. There is a rich system of classifiers; the numeral precedes the classifier in the numeral phrase. Personal pronouns distinguish singular, dual, and plural numbers, the various case forms of which are produced by ablaut. The verbal categories of person, number, tense, mood, voice, and orientation are expressed by stem-modification, affixation, and reduplication. Existential verbs are finely differentiated. There are two copulas, used respectively in affirmative and negative sentences; both conjugate according to person. Many of the common adjectives appear in reduplicated forms; adjectives must take a special definite particle to occur in sentential subject or object slots. Many grammatical particles exist, expressing genitive, agentive, patient, instrumental, locative, comparative, and ablative relations. A set of definite particles is also put to extensive use. The typical sentential word order is SOV; modifying nouns and pronouns precede, while attributive adjectives and numeral phrases follow, their nominal heads.

1.7 ZHÁBĀ 札巴¹⁵

The Zhaba language is spoken mainly in Yajiang, Daofu, Litang, and Xinlong Counties of the Ganzi Autonomous Prefecture of the Tibetan Nationality by about 15,000 speakers. The Zhaba people, allegedly the earliest inhabitants of this area,¹⁶ call themselves "Buozi", while "Zhaba" is an exonym from Tibetan. Their language is now recognized as a Tibeto-Burman language distinct from Tibetan, Minyak, and Ergong. They speak Zhaba as their chief home and village language, and use Tibetan or Chinese outside of their communities.

There are two major dialects of Zhaba: the western dialect spoken in Xinlong, Litang, and western Yajiang, and the eastern dialect spoken in Daofu and northern Yajiang.

There follows a brief account of the language as spoken at Tuanjie Commune of Yajiang County.

1.7.1 Phonology

The 42 single-consonant initials are articulated at nine positions: bilabial, labiodental, dental, alveolar, apical, alveolar, prepalatal, velar, uvular, and glottal. Stops and affricates contrast in voicing and aspiration while nasals also display a contrast in voicing. Two patterns of consonant clusters occur: voiced stops and affricates preceded by homorganic nasals, and bilabial stops followed by spirant post-initials. The system of monophthongal rhymes is complex; altogether, the plain and nasalized vowels number over 20, the latter type occurring in native words as well as loanwords. Most diphthongs belong to the rising variety with front rounded, front unrounded, and back rounded onglides. Falling diphthongs and triphthongs are rare in

¹⁵ The recording and collating of the Zhaba material was undertaken chiefly by Lu Shaozun. TN: According to Huang 1987:19, Zhábā (a language recorded by Lu) is mutually intelligible with Quèyǔ 却域语, another Qiangic Corridor language not mentioned in this article, which is spoken in Xinlong, Yajiang, Litang Counties of the Ganzi Autonomous Prefecture. Huang, on the other hand, mentions another distinct Corridor language: Zhábà 札坝语, spoken in the Zhábà District of Daofu and Zhamat District of Yajiang, which is different from both Quèyǔ and Lu's Zhábā.

¹⁶ Shangguan Jianbi of the Xinan Minzu College claims, on the basis of Tibetan documentary evidence, that "the Zhaba (in Tibetan 'dra-pa) people in Yajiang and Daofu must be the earliest inhabitants of the Muyagang area. They speak the Zhaba language (in Tibetan 'dra s'kad), which is very different from the surrounding Tibetan and Minyak languages. The upper-class intellectuals can speak the Tibetan koiné and use Tibetan in writing (Shangguan 1981)."

native vocabulary. No consonantal codas exist. There are four tonemes with important functions in lexical differentiation.

1.7.2 *Lexicon*

Monosyllabic words dominate the Zhaba core vocabulary. Compounding and to a lesser extent, affixation are the main methods of word-formation. There are a number of Tibetan and Chinese loanwords, their scope and distribution being similar to the situation in Ergong.

1.7.3 *Grammar*

Word order, particles, and morphological alternation are all important coding devices in Zhaba. The plural and diminutive forms of nominals are derived by adding suffixes. There is a rich system of classifiers. Numerals less than 10 do not occur without classifiers; in a numeral phrase, the numeral precedes the classifier. Personal pronouns distinguish singular, dual, plural, as well as collective numbers; the latter three have distinct inclusive and exclusive forms. Personal pronouns are further differentiated according to case. The verbal categories of person, number, tense, mood, voice, and orientation are expressed by stem modification and affixation. Existential verbs are finely differentiated. There are two copulas, one of which usually co-occurs with first person subjects, and the other with second or third person subjects. Copulas are in general obligatory. Most adjectives appear in reduplicated forms. Adjectives used as predicates are similar in morphological behavior to ordinary verbs. There are many grammatical particles, expressing genitive, agentive, patient, locative, instrumental, comparative, and ablative relations. The typical sentential word order is SOV; modifying nouns and pronouns precede, and attributive adjectives and numeral phrases follow, their nominal heads.

2. **Genetic affiliations of the languages**

The previous section shows that some of these Corridor languages are distributed in Tibetan, Chinese, or Yi-speaking areas, while others are situated in areas where speakers of Primi, Naxi, Yi, and Tibetan intermingle. Why, then, do we consider them to be anything other than dialects of Tibetan, Yi, or some other better known languages? In the process of our inquiry, we recorded for each language (and some dialects of certain languages) about 2,000 common words and 500 to 600 sentences. On the basis of this corpus, we made a preliminary analysis of their phonemic

systems, word-formation rules, and grammars. After a comparison with Tibetan, Yi, Qiang, Primi, and rGyarong was made, we discovered that all of the seven languages are more closely related to Qiang, Primi, and rGyarong than to either Tibetan or Yi. As a result, we have reached the conclusion that the seven new Corridor languages, together with Qiang, Primi, and rGyarong, should constitute a separate Qiangic branch within Tibeto-Burman, distinct from the Tibetan, Loloish, and Jingpho branches. Let us now briefly discuss the results of our comparisons.¹⁷

2.1 *Phonological comparisons*

2.1.1 *Initials*

The number of single-consonant initials in the Qiangic languages normally exceeds 40; some individual languages, however, may have fewer such initials. The rGyarong language spoken at Suomo, for instance, has only 35. These initials commonly comprise nine to ten places of articulation. Two factors account for the complexity of segmental initials in these languages: (1) Many of them distinguish four sets of affricates: dental, apicodomal, alveopalatal, and (pre)palatal.¹⁸ Such a contrast is seldom reported in the other branches of Tibeto-Burman. Tibetan dialects, for example, normally have only three sets of affricates: dental, apicodomal, and (pre)palatal. Loloish languages, as well as Tibetan, generally have three, while certain languages have only two. Jingpho and Burmese have even fewer affricates. (2) Most of the seven languages have phonemic uvular stops and spirants. Uvulars are absent in the Suomo dialect of rGyarong, but in some other dialects uvulars are contrastive. There are no uvulars in any dialect of Tibetan;¹⁹ the traditional Tibetan script, moreover, preserves no traces of uvular consonants at all. Loloish languages, except for individual cases like Lahu or the Bijläng dialect of Bai, have no uvular consonants either. The development of cluster initials in Qiangic is unbalanced: one language may have as many as 190, while another may have only six. The patterning of clusters is quite characteristic; both root initials with pre-initials and those with post-initials are found, and quite a few languages have 3-place clusters as well. In addition to the plain voiced ones, voiceless

¹⁷ TN: See also Sun Hongkai 1986:58-61.

¹⁸ TN: Besides Ersu, Shixing, and Guizhong, other Qiangic languages that have been reported elsewhere to manifest such an elaborate system of affricates are Qiang and Primi.

¹⁹ TN: This is certainly not true. Phonemic uvulars are found in many Western and Amdo Tibetan dialects. I have discovered no less than five contrastive uvulars in a variety of Amdo Tibetan spoken at Ndzorge Shæmc, Sichuan (Sun 1986). See also Sun and Wang 1987 and Wu 1982 on uvulars in other varieties of Amdo Tibetan, and Rangan 1975, 1979 on uvulars in the Western Tibetan dialects.

aspirated or unaspirated stops and affricates can also be preceded by homorganic nasal pre-initials. For example, in the western dialect of Minyak only voiced stops and affricates can take homorganic nasal pre-initials, whereas in the eastern dialect voiceless aspirated initials can do so as well. On these two counts (i.e. patterning of clusters and distribution of the nasal pre-initial), the Qiangic branch is very different from Loloish. Most Loloish languages allow only voiced stops and affricates to take the nasal pre-initial, while only in rare instances (e.g. Jino, with five such clusters) can we find clusters composed of root initials followed by post-initials. The development of cluster initials among Tibetan dialects is also unbalanced. The distribution of the nasal pre-initial in the Khams dialects resembles Loloish. While most Amdo dialects only have clusters composed of root initials plus pre-initials, individual varieties spoken in eastern Qinghai and northwestern Sichuan preserve more cluster initials, comparable to those found in Qiangic.

2.1.2 Rhymes

The system of rhymes in each of these languages is also complex. The following aspects will be compared: (1) *Monophthongs*: There is usually a rich system of around 20 monophthongs. Most languages, except rGyarong and Ergong, contrast oral and nasalized vowels, the latter often occurring in native as well as borrowed vocabulary. Quite a few languages also have retroflexed vowels. Dialects of individual languages may distinguish vowel length. Furthermore, most Qiangic languages contrast a front /a/ and a back /ɑ/ or /ɤ/. A few languages make a distinction in tensity. Among the traits mentioned above, the presence of nasalized and retroflexed vowels seems more typical of this branch of Tibeto-Burman, different from both Tibetan and Loloish. Vowel tensity appears to be due to Loloish influence, because it is found only in Namuyi and Minyak, both spoken in the neighborhood of the Yi-speaking territory, and because the distinction is infrequently used and unstable. (2) *Diphthongs*: the diphthongal rhymes of the Qiangic languages are quite characteristic. Most of them have a set of about 10 (Primi has as many as 38) rising diphthongs with high front rounded, unrounded, and high back rounded onglides. A few languages also have falling diphthongs with front unrounded and back rounded offglides. Loloish and Tibetan, on the other hand, have fewer vowel clusters. Some Loloish languages, such as Bai, Lisu, and Naxi, have rising diphthongs, but none of them involve front rounded onglides.²⁰ Some Tibetan dialects have many vowel clusters, but these are all true vowel sequences arising from vocalized codas or

²⁰The membership of Bai in the Loloish group is highly controversial. [Ed.]

contracted suffixes,²¹ rather than ordinary gliding diphthongs. (3) *Consonantal codas*: It is a general characteristic of the Qiangic languages to be devoid of consonantal codas. Languages like rGyarong, Ergong, and Northern Qiang, however, do have a multitude of such codas. A comparison with Written Tibetan reveals that most of the consonantal codas of rGyarong and Qiang occur in loanwords from Tibetan; as for the consonantal codas found in native vocabulary, some are in agreement with those in Tibetan, others are disparate. Many consonantal codas in Northern Qiang are secondarily derived as a result of word formation processes.²² As regards Ergong, only nasal and lateral codas exist, chiefly in Tibetan loanwords. All other Qiangic languages have almost no consonantal codas at all; some languages have nasal codas in a marginal sense, since these are in free variation with vowel nasalization. We can therefore conclude that of the Tibeto-Burman languages of China, Tibetan and Jingpho are more conservative with reference to consonantal codas, while Loloish languages have dropped practically all of theirs, usually leaving compensatory tensing in the originally checked syllables. As for the Qiangic languages, they seem to occupy an intermediate stage between Tibetan and Jingpho on the one hand and Loloish on the other, losing most but not all consonantal codas.

2.2 *Lexical comparisons*

Aside from pointing out general lexical similarities and differences between the languages compared, our lexical comparisons are intended mainly to reveal the ratio of cognates to non-cognates. As a result of preliminary comparisons based on a selected 1500-word core vocabulary from each of the languages concerned, we arrive at the following ratios: 17% to 31% among Qiangic languages, about 15% between Qiangic and Yi, and about 13% between Qiangic and Tibetan. The tables below, with respectively Guiqiong, Minyak, and Ersu as source languages, exemplify our comparisons:

²¹ TN: This is a translation of the term *zhenxing fuyuanyin* ("genuine vowel cluster"), i.e. vowel sequences with an equal degree of stress or sonority in contradistinction to *jiaxing fuyuanyin* ("pseudo vowel cluster"), i.e. gliding diphthongs.

²²See Benedict 1983. [Ed.]

Table 1.

SOURCE LANGUAGE	LANGUAGES COMPARED	COGNATES	NONCOGNATES
	Qiang	25.1%	74.9%
	Primi	27%	73%
	Ergong	21.5%	78.5%
Guiqiong	Minyak	21.8%	78.2%
	Ersu	24%	76%
	Namuyi	28%	72%
	Shixing	19.4%	80.6%
	Tibetan	13.3%	86.7%
	Yi	14.1%	85.9%

Table 2.

SOURCE LANGUAGE	LANGUAGES COMPARED	COGNATES	NONCOGNATES
	Qiang	24.9%	75.1%
	Primi	25.7%	74.3%
	Ergong	18.1%	81.9%
	Ersu	20.5%	79.5%
Minyak	rGyarong	17.9%	82.1%
	Namuyi	22.7%	77.3%
	Shixing	23%	77%
	Tibetan	15.4%	84.6%
	Yi	14.1%	85.9%

Table 3.

SOURCE LANGUAGE	LANGUAGES COMPARED	COGNATES	NONCOGNATES
	Qiang	26.1%	73.9%
	Primi	27.8%	72.2%
	Ergong	20.1%	79.9%
	rGyarong	17.5%	82.5%
Ersu	Namuyi	31%	69%
	Shixing	21.3%	78.7%
	Zhaba	21%	79%
	Tibetan	11.9%	88.1%
	Yi	16.6%	83.4%

The preceding three tables are sufficient to reveal the great lexical differences between the Qiangic languages and both Tibetan and Yi. A non-cognacy ratio of 85% surpasses by far the internal lexical differences between Tibetan dialects. Our colleagues in Tibetan dialectology believe that lexical differences "are an important criterion in subgrouping the Tibetan dialects. The non-cognacy ratio between the three dialects is about 30%; the more closely related Dbus-Gtsang and Khams dialects, however, have a non-cognacy ratio of only about 20%. The non-cognacy ratio between subdialects in any Tibetan dialect is usually 6-7%, seldom exceeding 10% (Desha, 19xy²³:150). On the other hand, even the most widely differentiated dialects of Yi have a mutual non-cognacy ratio of only around 40-50%. This means, from the lexical point of view, that the seven languages in question cannot be mere Tibetan or Yi dialects. Furthermore, comparison between these languages and Qiang, Primi, and rGyarong shows that they share a higher mutual cognacy ratio and hence closer genetic affiliations.

2.3 Grammatical comparisons

Some of the important grammatical characteristics common to the Qiangic languages are not found in either Tibetan or Yi, and vice versa. Not

²³ Reference is missing in the original. [Ed.]

only do the Qiangic languages share certain special grammatical categories, but the morphemes manifesting these categories have quite obvious sound correspondences throughout.

Therefore, in order to reach cogent conclusions on linguistic affiliations, it is necessary to systematically consider grammatical compatibility as well as phonological resemblances and lexical cognacy rates. In the following we discuss some salient grammatical traits prevalent in Qiangic languages but absent in Tibetan and Yi.

2.3.1 *Plural and diminutive forms of nouns*

All Qiangic languages have plural noun forms derived by adding a suffix or a particle to a noun stem; some languages have dual forms as well. Similar morphological devices also produce diminutive forms. The diminutive particles of the various languages are obvious cognates with straightforward sound correspondences. Tibetan and Yi generally do not use plural and diminutive morphology to the same extent, and even in the Loloish languages that do, the particles added are not cognate with the corresponding forms in Qiangic.

2.3.2 *Classifiers*

The classifiers in the Qiangic languages have the following three important features: (1) their multitude and great subcategorizability (2) their close bond with the numeral (Numerals lower than ten in many Qiangic languages must appear in conjunction with classifiers) and (3) their characteristic ordering (*noun-numeral-classifier*) in the numeral phrase. On the other hand, the use of classifiers in Tibetan and Jingpho is very different. In the first place, classifiers occur only rarely in either language; numerals can directly modify the nominal head. Moreover, word order in the numeral phrase in Tibetan and Jingpho is *noun-classifier-numeral*. As regards the uses of classifiers, Qiangic languages resemble Yi, but the resemblance is not complete because in the latter language classifiers can occur as noun head specifiers without accompanying numerals.

2.3.3 *Case forms of personal pronouns*

In most Qiangic languages personal pronouns have distinct case forms, usually the following three: nominative, patient, and genitive. The various case forms are derived chiefly by means of ablaut or consonantal stem-alternation. The genitive forms of personal pronouns in Tibetan, Jingpho, and Yi are also distinct from the nominative; in Tibetan and Jingpho they are derived by ablaut²⁴ and in Yi by tonal alternation. There are no distinct patient case forms for Tibetan, Jingpho, or Yi personal pronouns, however.²⁵

2.3.4 *Tense/aspect and person/number inflection*

All Qiangic languages conjugate for tense/aspect, and many also for person/number. These categories are usually expressed by affixation, and in many languages ablauting and tonal alternation of the verb stem are also employed. Although the functions and realizations of these categories differ from one language to another, closer inspection reveals not only their common origins but indicate clearly the probable paths of their historical development. Modern Tibetan verbs no longer productively conjugate for tense/aspect; the three tenses of the Classical Tibetan verb (present, past, and future) are similar in function to the Qiangic tenses, but the forms of their realizations do not seem to be cognate at all. Loloish languages in general do not conjugate for these morphosyntactic categories. Jingpho verbs, on the other hand, do have person/number inflection; however, their forms, functions, and origin are all distinct from Qiangic.

2.3.5 *Category of orientation*

All Qiangic languages manifest the verbal category of orientation by adding various prefixes to the verb stem. In Sun 1981, I described the basic features of this category in Qiang and compared these with similar phenomena in Primi and rGyarong. The past two years of fieldwork in western Sichuan have brought the discovery that this same category exists in all of the languages in the area except Chinese, Tibetan, and the Loloish languages. The functions of this category are the same everywhere, even though the number of orientation prefixes may vary according to the specific

²⁴ **TN:** This is true only of most modern Tibetan dialects, and only when the pronouns end in a vowel. In Classical Tibetan and modern western Tibetan dialects (e.g. Ladakhi) the genitive forms of personal pronouns are derived by suffixation (-i, -yi, -kyi, or -gyi in Classical Tibetan and -i in Ladakhi).

²⁵ **TN:** Distinct dative-goal case forms do exist for pronouns in modern Tibetan, which in the Amdo dialects are produced by ablaut (vowel-lowering in Ndzorge Shæme, see Sun 1986: 85-7).

language. Furthermore, orientation prefixes with similar functions in different languages show obvious sound correspondences. This category may involve not only literal geographical orientations but grammaticalized tense/aspect and modal distinctions as well. Hence, it plays a very important role in the overall grammatical system and stands out as one of the most prominent characteristics of the Qiangic branch, in contrast with both Tibetan and Loloish.

2.3.6 *Causative and reciprocal forms*

Verbs in all of the Qiangic languages mark causative and reciprocal morphology. The formation of causative verb forms in Qiangic is complicated; some languages, similar to Yi, use voicing and aspiration alternations of the initials, while others are like Tibetan in using prefixation.²⁶ The formation of reciprocals by reduplicating the verb stem in Qiangic is, however, unique. Verbs seldom undergo reduplication in Tibetan; those reduplicated verbs that do occur do not have any reciprocal meaning. Reduplication is a productive morphological process in Yi and Jingpho, but what is conveyed is interrogative mood in the case of Yi and weakened/frequentative aspect in the case of Jingpho.

2.3.7 *Differentiation of existential verbs*

All Qiangic languages except rGyarong have a set of existential verbs which are differentiated on the basis of the nature of the objective entities (people, things, or phenomena) whose existence is predicated.²⁷ These various verbs in each language show apparent sound correspondences with their equivalents across Qiangic, indicating their common provenance. This feature is absent in Tibetan, Jingpho, and Yi.

2.3.8 *Forms and uses of adjectives*

²⁶ **TN:** In Tibetan, causative verb formation by means of prefixation (e.g. Classical Tibetan *gul-ba* 'move' --> *sgul* 'cause to move') is not productive even in the conservative classical language. In the modern dialects, a verb is causativized by adding both a causative suffix and a causative auxiliary verb; e.g. Ndzorge Shæme /*thoŋ*/ 'drink'-->/*thoŋ-ŋen ndzæg*/ 'cause to drink'.

²⁷ **TN:** In Northern Qiang (Mawo dialect, data from my own field notes), for example, there are as many as five distinct existential verbs with strict rules governing their distribution: (1) *zi*, used with animate objects, (2) *wa*, used with stationary objects, (3) *la*, used with objects in containers, (4) *xtfi*, used with objects on or beneath something else, and (5) *hu*, used with inanimate objects possessed by a modifying human noun or pronoun.

One of the remarkable features of adjectives in Qiangic is the predominance of reduplicated stems. Many (over 70% in some languages) common adjectives appear only in disyllabic reduplicated forms. Predicative adjectives in Qiangic are similar to verbs in being able to take verbal affixes. This is different from Tibetan, where adjectives inflect for the category of degree (i.e. positive, comparative, superlative), and predicate adjectives must occur with existential verbs or copulas. Adjectives in Yi also behave differently from those in the Qiangic languages: adjective reduplication in Yi, like verb reduplication, produces interrogative sentences.

2.3.9 Grammatical particles

All Qiangic languages have many grammatical particles, usually expressing the following seven functions: genitive, agentive, patient, instrumental, locative, comparative, and ablative. In addition, quite a few of these languages have "definite" particles. Particles of similar meanings across the Qiangic languages are often cognates. Grammatical particles are somewhat less abundant in Tibetan and Jingpho; even though Loloish has a little more, there are usually no discernible sound correspondences between these and their Qiangic counterparts.

The phonological, lexical, and grammatical characteristics unique to the Qiangic languages discussed above, coupled with the absence of many characteristically Tibetan and Loloish features, corroborate our claim that these languages form a separate branch within Tibeto-Burman.

3. Tentative conclusions

3.1 I have presented a brief sketch of each of the seven newly discovered Corridor languages and their relationship to Qiang, rGyarong, Yi, Tibetan, and Jingpho. I have also given evidence that they should form, along with Qiang proper and rGyarong, a distinct Qiangic branch.

The Qiangic languages, occupying a geographically medial ground between Bodic and Loloish, have, all considered, a closer resemblance to Loloish. There is, however, considerable internal divergence within Qiangic. Take consonant clusters for example. One language (Ergong) has almost 200, another (Minyak) only a few, while in certain dialects (e.g. the Tosu dialect of Ersu), there are none at all. We believe, therefore, that in assessing the genetic affiliations of these languages, one must not press any single factor. Differences between closely related languages may reflect the various routes individual languages have taken in their historical evolution. Instead, the linguist should look into the mechanisms and conditions for the

various changes and find out the connections between these differences and other features of the languages in question. In the process of our areal linguistic comparisons, we have made the interesting discovery that the characteristics of these languages have much to do with their geographical distribution: those that are situated in the vicinity of Amdo Tibetan have more consonant clusters (as in Amdo Tibetan), which occur not just in Tibetan loanwords; likewise, those that are distributed near Yi-speaking territory (where tense vowels are found) have developed tense vowels even in native words, some of which are not cognate with the corresponding Yi forms. This phenomenon reminds us of the following remark made by Mantaro Hashimoto:²⁸

It is true that human languages have an aspect of structural development like a genealogical tree; that is why we aim at establishing the genealogical or genetic relationship among human languages. On the other hand, however, we know that human languages also have an aspect of wave-like diffusional development. There is no question whatsoever about the existence of this aspect. In order to apply some unified analysis to these two mutually conflicting aspects and to make it a new starting point for our study, we propose the concept of pastoral vs. agrarian types in linguistic development.

It is true that the search for the protolanguage should be a focal concern in our efforts to genetically classify languages. We must not lose sight, however, of the influences which genetically related languages (sometimes distantly related or totally unrelated languages as well) situated in the same territory exert on each other. Such influences may be responsible for importing not only lexical material, but also morphological and syntactic categories and patterns. Aside from lexical cognacy, then, linguistic classification must take into account similarities between language groups that arise secondarily as a result of wave-like diffusion.

3.2 Language is one of the most important and durable characteristics of an ethnic group. The multilinguistic situation in western Sichuan is the

²⁸ TN: There was supposed to be a note (note 13) here in the original article but, for some reason, it is not to be found in the endnotes. I had the fortune to meet the late Prof. Hashimoto himself in Taipei when he was there attending the Second International Conference on Sinology sponsored by the Academia Sinica on December 29-31, 1986, and he kindly offered me not only his own translation of this passage but also information on the source of the quotation: *Yuyan Dili Leixingxue (Areal-Typological Linguistics)*; Chinese translation of the Japanese original. Beijing: Peking University Press (1983), p. 29.

result of long periods of separation and individual development, creating distinct languages out of a once uniform language spoken by closely related tribal groups. Although some of these tribes inhabiting the Corridor, subjected constantly to wars, migrations, and mutual interminglings throughout history, gradually lost their identities and became assimilated to larger ethnic groups, their languages have persisted in spite of the turmoil. Now, 30 years after Liberation, speakers of rGyarong, Ergong, Zhaba, Minyak, and Shixing are definitely identified, with their consent, as ethnic Tibetans on the grounds that despite the linguistic differences, they are practically identical with the Tibetans in terms of customs, habits, and psychology. Their diverse languages do not stand in the way of their becoming a homogeneous nationality. Many instances of a single ethnic group speaking more than one language can be found both inside and outside of China.²⁹ As for those who speak Ersu, Guiqiong, and Namuyi, they used to be called, pejoratively, "Xifan" (western barbarians); after Liberation, some have claimed to be Tibetans, others have chosen to be considered a separate "Fanzu (Fan tribe)", still others have been grouped with the Chinese.

After the downfall of the Gang of Four, some of these people have voiced the desire to the local government to have their ethnic identity reinvestigated. A linguistic investigation is, nevertheless, not the same as an ethnic-identity investigation. A distinct language by itself does not qualify its speakers as a distinct ethnic group. We believe, therefore, that for such an investigation to produce scientific and accurate conclusions, it has to incorporate considerations of social history, economic life, customs and habits, as well as the volution of the people involved.

3.3 Throughout history, multiple ethnic groups with multiple languages have led an intermingled existence in this passageway territory. The Ethnic Corridor is then a perfect laboratory for sociolinguistic studies. In this area of multilinguistic contact, the minority inhabitants are generally conversant in at least two languages. The Ersu people at Ganluo, for instance, are often *jokingly referred to as being "three-tongued"*, since many of them are proficient in Chinese and Yi as well as Ersu. At the same time, we can discern through analyzing the structures of the extant Corridor languages both traces of diachronic linguistic convergence and excellent instances of resistance to convergence. All of these are of tremendous help to our understanding of the great complexity of ethnic relations in history. They also help broaden our vision and enrich our linguistic knowledge, so that we

²⁹ TN: The standard Tibeto-Burman example is the ethnic Kachins, speaking four languages: Zaiwa, Lechi, and Maru (Burmic), and the distantly related Jingpho language. Another example is provided by the Nu (=Nung, Rawang) people, who speak (at least) four different languages: Trung, Anong (both Nungish), Zauzou, and Nusu (both Lolo-Burmese).

may work out better solutions to existing problems in the cultural and educational development of the minority nationalities.

3.4 It has been our conviction that language is a mirror of society; changes in society are reflected in its language. A revelation of the social implications reflected in diachronic changes in language systems should provide us with a key to solving some complicated historical mysteries. For example, historical documents since the Han and Jin Dynasties record more than 20 names of Qiang tribes in this area, among which some are clearly reported to have lived in tower-like dwellings called "qionglong", or "chao", which can still be found scattered throughout the Qiangic-speaking territory. The words for "qionglong" in Qiangic languages, to our surprise, are strikingly similar and show remarkably neat sound correspondences; what is more, the Chinese word "qionglong" itself is evidently a phonetic adaptation of the same word in an ancient Qiangic language (Sun Hongkai 1986, 1989). This proves, first of all, that since as early as the Han and the Jin Dynasties the Chinese have been in close contact with ethnic minorities in this area and some loanwords from their languages have entered Chinese, and, second, that all of the ancient tribes that had dwelled in "qionglong" are related to the present-day speakers of the Qiangic languages. Similar examples abound.

3.5 The investigation of the Ethnic Corridor languages lays down a solid foundation for detailed research into the various *Xīfān Yìyǔ* 西番译语 (*Sino-Xifan Bilingual Vocabularies*). In the past, we could recognize only two out of the nine languages recorded in the *Sino-Xifan Vocabularies*, part of the *Hua-Yi Yiyu* (*Sino-Xenic Bilingual Vocabularies*) collected in the Qing Dynasty: Tibetan and rGyarong. Now, after all these years of fieldwork and comparative research, we have successfully identified all of the missing languages.

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