

**THE PREHISTORY OF THE DAIC  
(TAI-KADAI) SPEAKING PEOPLES  
AND THE AUSTRONESIAN  
CONNECTION**

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# Daic (=Tai-Kadai) languages

- ❖ The Daic or Tai-Kadai languages cover a substantial region of East and SE Asia.
- ❖ They are also known as Kam-Tai & Zhuang-Dong in Chinese sources
- ❖ Thai, their best-known representative, dominates Thailand, but these languages are generally considered to originate in South China, where they are most diverse.
- ❖ Despite their importance, little is known about their prehistory, homeland and the causes of their expansion; proposed archaeological correlations deal only with the most recent phases.

# Haudricourt (1953 p. 123)

‘The Tai languages situated west of the Red River such as Siamese, Shan, Lao, White Tai, Black Tai are very similar to one another; on the contrary on the eastern side of that river we find the languages which are more or less aberrant: Dioi, Caolan, Mak, Sui, or languages which are distant cousins such as Kelao, Tulao, Lati, Laqua. It seems that the Tai languages may have originated in the south of China and may not have spread across the Red River before the 10th century A.D.10’

# Daic languages



F' cke"

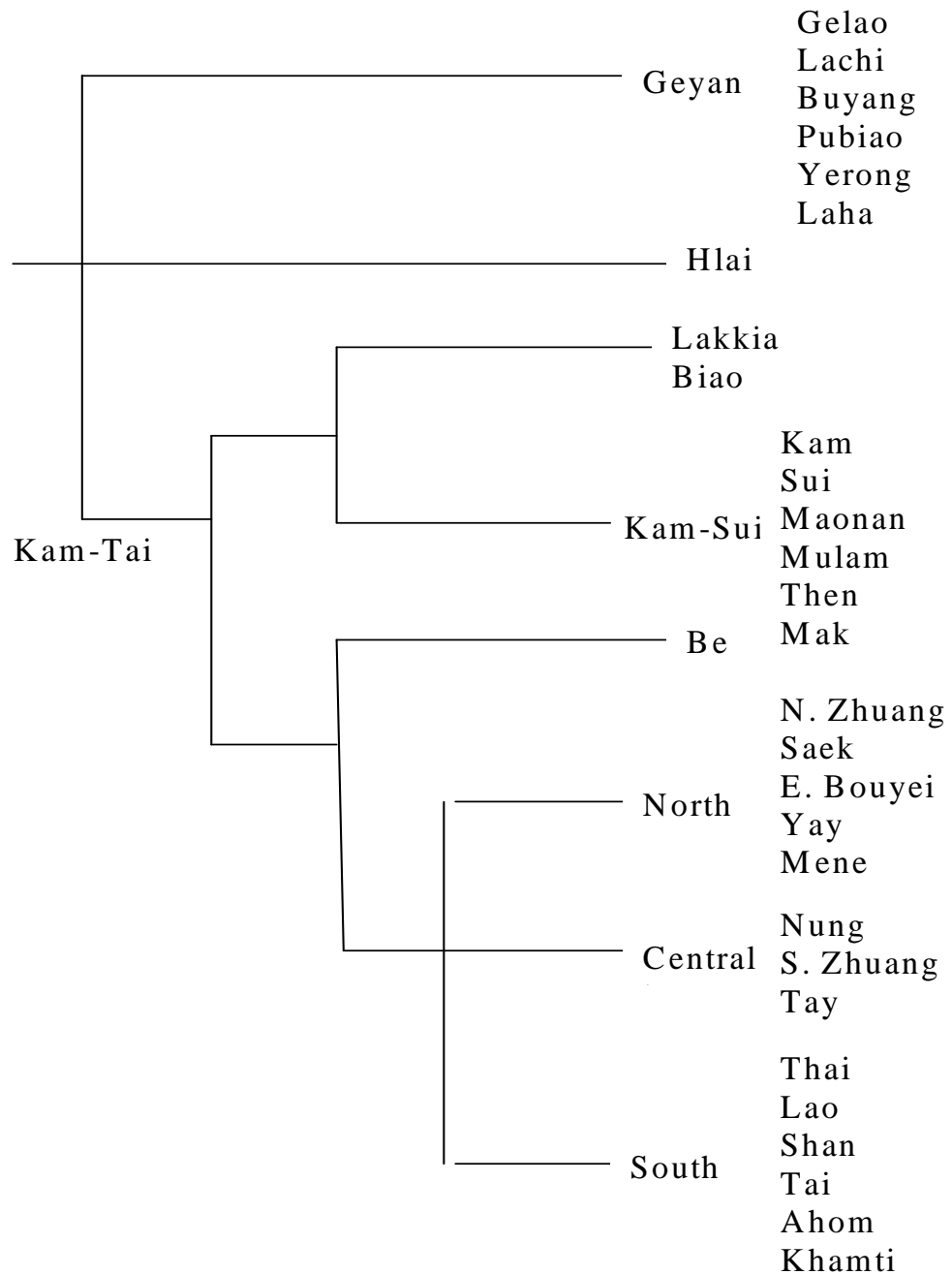
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Proto-Daic  
= Kra-Dai



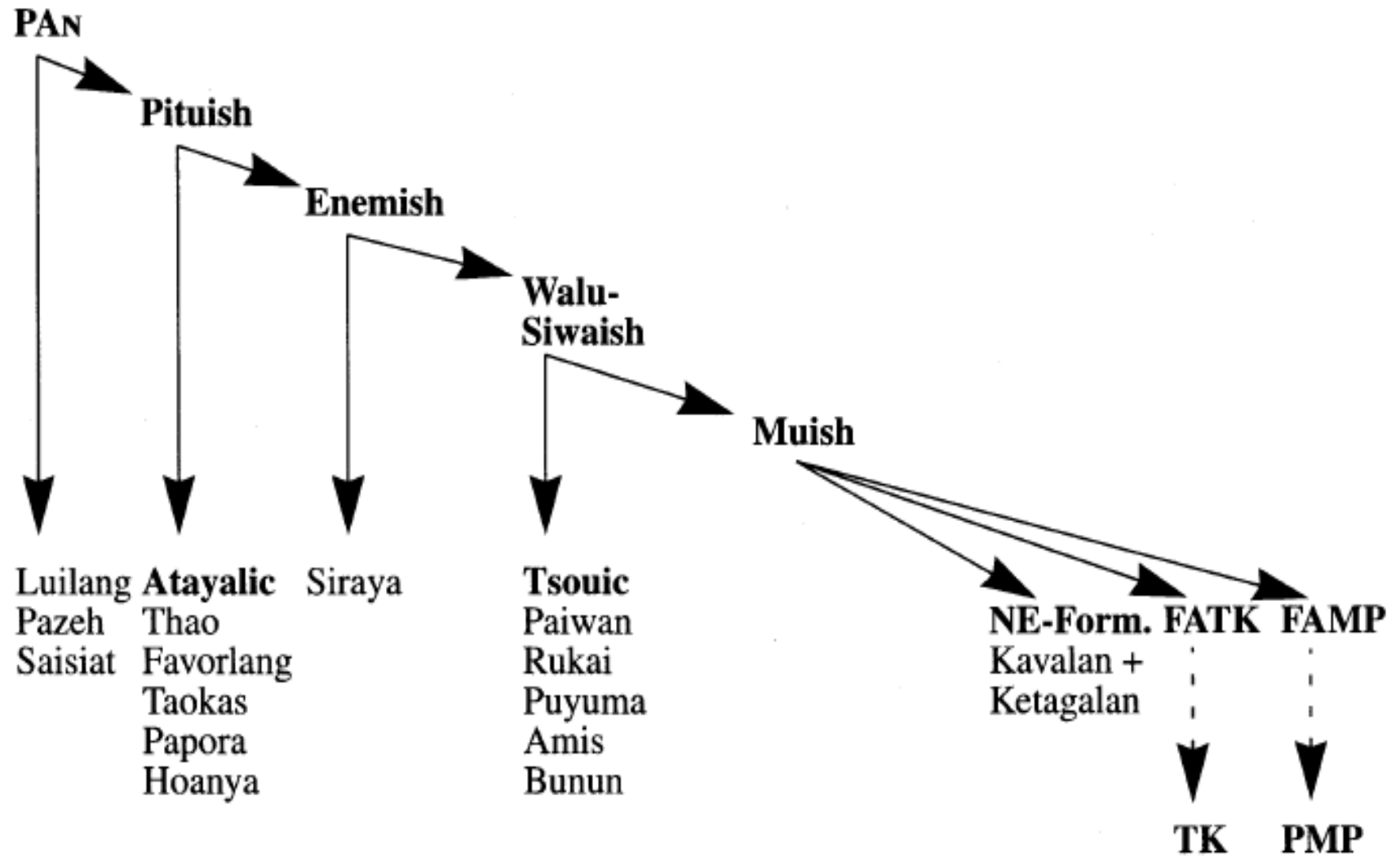
# Daic (=Tai-Kadai) languages

- ❖ All the language phyla of East Asia have been argued as connected with one another at different times. Early 'Indo-Chinese' hypotheses linked Daic with Chinese, or later, Sino-Tibetan (Van Driem 2005).
- ❖ Influential for a long period was 'Austro-Thai' first advanced by Benedict (1942, 1975), which broadly claimed Austronesian and Daic were related.
- ❖ A problem for many authors was that Daic and Austronesian surface morphologies appear to be very different; Daic is highly tonal with very short words, Austronesian is non-tonal and tends to have CVCV stems plus affixes.
- ❖ Hence the tendency was to treat it as isolated or to link it with Sino-Tibetan, which appears much more similar in terms of morphology. Thurgood (1994) argues that the relationship with Austronesian is simply that of loanwords.

# Daic (=Tai-Kadai) languages

- ❖ Ostapirat (2005) has made a much more convincing argument for a genetic relationship between Daic and Austronesian based on regular sound-correspondences.
- ❖ Ostapirat does not advance a hypothesis as to the place of Daic within Austronesian, as his paper links 'proto-Kra-Dai' with the Austronesian reconstructions of Dempwolff and Blust.
- ❖ Sagart (2004), following this line of argument, places Daic on a level corresponding to Malayo-Polynesian as branch of 'Muish', part of his proposed phylogeny of Formosan Austronesian.
- ❖ Evidence Sagart cites from Buyang, a mainland Daic language, shows that typical Austronesian morphology was conserved *after* the arrival of speakers back on the mainland and that the reduced forms now typical of most Daic languages are a later development.

# Sagart's phylogeny (2004)





# Sagart's evidence from Buyang (2004)

	BUYANG	PAN	MP
'die'	ma <sup>0</sup> tɛ <sup>54</sup>	maCay	matay
'eye'	ma <sup>0</sup> ta <sup>54</sup>	maCa	mata
'bird'	ma <sup>0</sup> nuk <sup>11</sup>	qayam	manuk
'8'	ma <sup>0</sup> ðu <sup>312</sup>	_____	walu
'head'	qa <sup>0</sup> ðu <sup>11</sup>	quluh	quluh
'louse'	qa <sup>0</sup> tu <sup>54</sup>	kuCu	kutu
'fart'	qa <sup>0</sup> tut <sup>54</sup>	qetut	
'raw'	qa <sup>0</sup> ?dip <sup>54</sup>	qudip	
'bear (n.)'	ta <sup>0</sup> me <sup>312</sup>	Cumay	
'cover (v.)'	ta <sup>0</sup> qup <sup>11</sup>		WMP ta(ŋ)kup

# AUSTRONESIANS



# WHERE AUSTRONESIAN IS SPOKEN TODAY



# What happened and when?

- ❖ If all this is so, then the ancestors of Daic speakers would have branched off from Formosan at the same period as the first Austronesian speakers were heading towards the northern Philippines, i.e. about 4000 BP.
- ❖ Daic languages were presumably formerly spoken in Guangdong and have now been assimilated by Sinitic.
- ❖ Who would they have encountered on the mainland? It is difficult to say, as any of the non-Sinitic populations of China might have been present as well as speakers of entirely lost language phyla.
- ❖ At present, their easternmost populations are in Guangxi as well as their most significant diversity.
- ❖ However, the Tai branch underwent rapid expansion, probably some 2000 years ago

# Is there an archaeological signature?

- ❖ Broadly speaking no. No archaeological culture has been identified which would correspond to the Daic expansion in its earliest phases (irrespective of the connection with Austronesian)
- ❖ What other types of evidence might be available? A combination of ethnographic, archaeological and textual
- ❖ There are early Chinese texts referring to the minorities of South China
- ❖ Archaeological finds can confirm practices such as dental mutilation
- ❖ Ethnographically, practices such as teeth-blackening, still occur
- ❖ Common material culture, such as musical instruments may also be indicative

# Daic (=Tai-Kadai) languages

- ❖ However, for this type of evidence to be useful it has to be common to Taiwan and not simply regional; if is common among many groups then it may simply be diffused and thus not indicative
- ❖ Many common features of South China are also shared with island SE Asia as part of the Austronesian heritage, and are thus interesting but not useful for this argument

# Textual references

- ❖ Yue (越) was a general name for a complex of loosely related ethnic groups which inhabited broad areas of southern China.
- ❖ The Yue are often referred to as *Bai yue* (Hundred Yue)
- ❖ According to *Records of The Late Han Dynasty - a History of the Southern Aborigines*, "The two prefectures, Zhuya and Dan'er were on the island, about one thousand li east to, 500 li (about 250km.) from south to north. The headman of the aborigines living there thought it was noble to make their ears long, so the people there all bored holes in their earlobes, and pulled them down close to their shoulders.... and called it *Dan'er*."

# Textual references

- ❖ Sima Qian (Records of the Grand Historian (史記)) The ancestors of the Dai in Yunnan were the Dian Yue (滇越).
- ❖ Fan Chuo (*A Survey of the Aborigines*) (Tang Dynasty), they are referred to as 'Black Teeth' and as 'Face-Tattooed'.

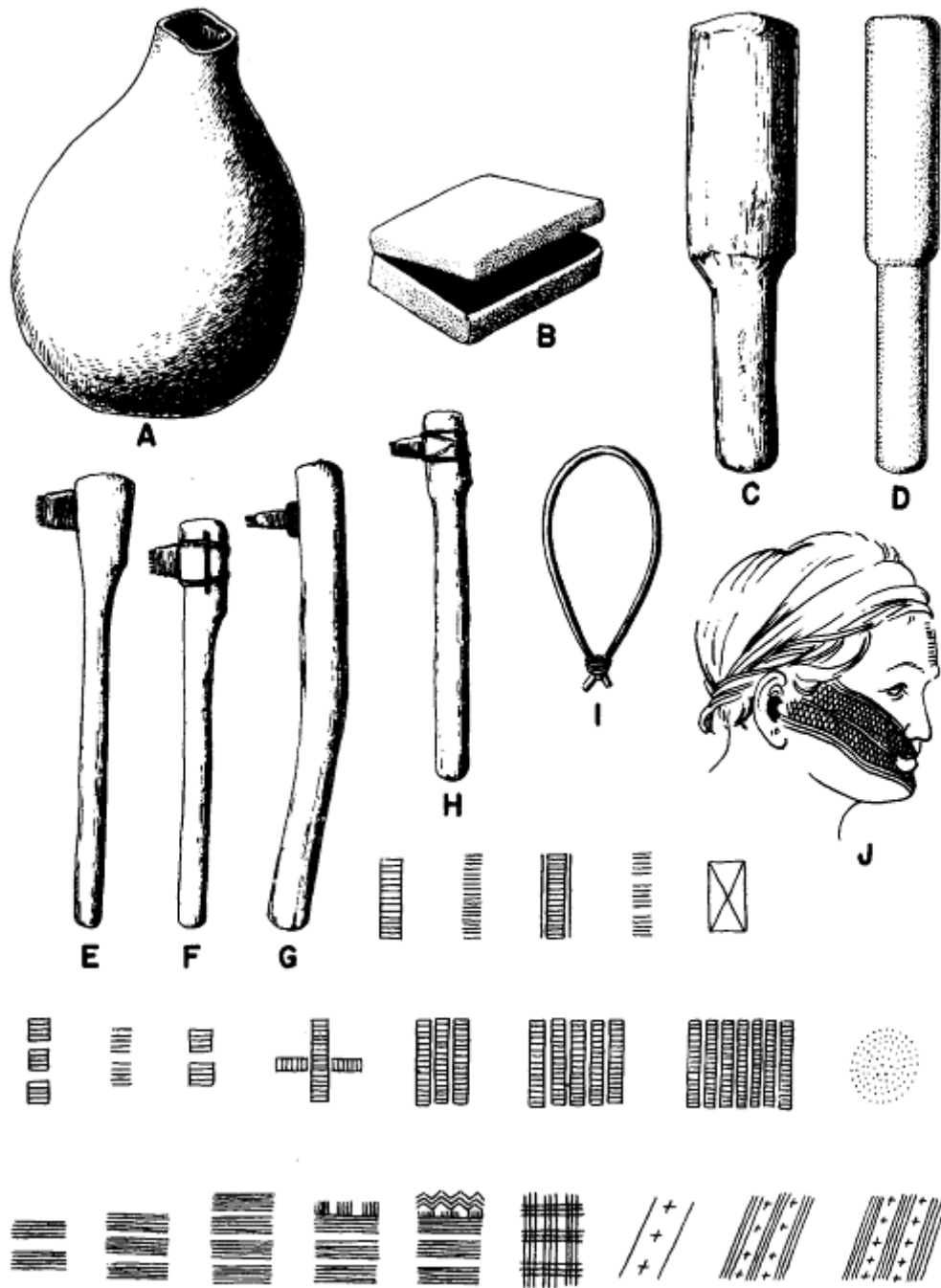


# Tattooing

- ❖ Tattooing on the face is common with most Taiwanese groups
- ❖ Under Japanese occupation there was a violent and ultra-cruel campaign to eliminate it, hence it is hardly seen today
- ❖ It is noted as a feature of the Yue in early Chinese descriptions and is still practised among groups like the Gelao and Dulong today as well as being represented in early terracottas

# Tattooing in Taiwan

Atayal tattooing equipment and designs



# Face-tattooing in Yunnan

Clearly this still excites prurient interest among the Han today



Dulong woman in 1994

# Face-tattooing



Terracotta head,  
excavated in  
Yunnan  
representing face-  
tattooing

# Dental evulsion

- ❖ Dental evulsion/ablation is the taking out of the teeth, most notably the two front teeth but often others as well
- ❖ It is not in use generally in island SE Asia but is common on Taiwan (and incidentally associated with the millet harvest in some groups) as well ethnographically and archaeologically in South China (and some sites in North China)
- ❖ It is illustrated in Chinese 'ethnographic' albums of the 'savage' tribes of Yunnan

# Dental evulsion on Taiwan



Tsou people  
photographed in  
the 1930s

# Dental evulsion in South China



Skulls from South China  
showing dental evulsion

Present-day Tai-speaker  
showing dental evulsion



# Dental evulsion in Yunnan

The picture, from a late-eighteenth century album, shows pre-marital tooth extraction among the Qilao (a Gelao subgroup)





# Dental evulsion in Thai archaeological sites

- ❖ Dental evulsion is also recorded in archaeological sites in Thailand, for example at Kok Phanom Di at around 1750 BC.
- ❖ If this is a signature of early Daic expansion then the Daic peoples of Yunnan must have expanded southwards and their diversity subsequently levelled by the expansion of Thai

# Teeth blackening

- Teeth-blackening is distinct from betel-chewing and uses the plant *Paederia scandens* to colour the teeth
- Chen (1968) 'Tooth-blackening was also common among the Paiwan and Ami' [of Taiwan]
- Tooth blackening is common among various Yunnan minorities and is referred to in Chinese historical sources

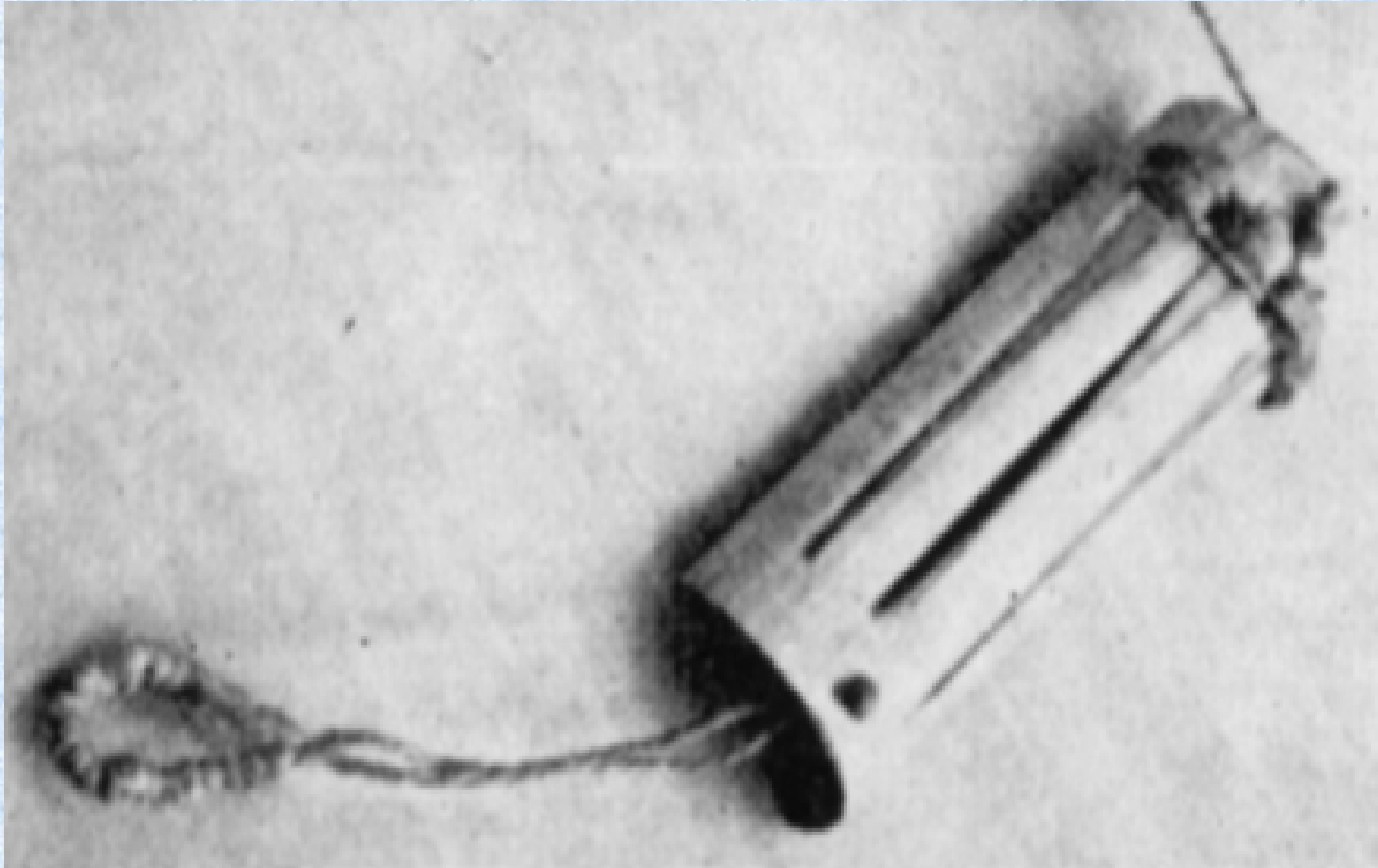
# *Paederia scandens*



# Multi-tongue Jews' harp

- ❑ The Formosan peoples developed some unusual types with multiple tongues, which made possible various types of speech-imitation.
- ❑ In particular it is also widespread in South China, where these same multi-tongue Jews' harps are found. Presumably the multi-tongue Jews' harp was first developed in south China and spread across the straits to Taiwan.
- ❑ However, these instruments were then simplified after the Austronesians left Taiwan since only single-tongue Jews' harps are known thenceforth.

# Atayal four-tongue Jews' harp



Yunnan  
multi-  
tongue  
jews'  
harp



# Snakes intertwined

- Snake cults are deeply embedded in Taiwanese indigenous culture
- A particularly widespread image is of two snakes intertwined
- Snake cults survive among such groups as the Zhuang in South China. This is not evidence in itself, as snake cults are widespread
- However, the typical representation of two snakes (or more commonly dragons) is characteristic of this area and closely resembles the Taiwanese imagery

# Two snakes intertwined

Intertwined snakes in  
Taiwanese imagery



Intertwined  
dragons in  
South China





# Proposed pathways of Daic expansion



# Conclusions

- The linguistic evidence for a genetic affiliation of Austronesian with Daic seems convincing
- But the historical and cultural evidence remains scrappy and difficult to interpret
- This paper contains some suggestions for lines of evidence to pursue, not fully worked out arguments
- In particular, the absence of a archaeological signature needs to be addressed.

# Thanks

To Laurent Sagart for  
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