

## **Tonogenesis in Greater Mainland Southeast Asia: Reconciling the Historical Evidence and the Comparative Evidence**

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Within the Greater Mainland Southeast Asian linguistic convergence area (hereafter, GMSEA), languages with lexical tone contrasts predominate. Moreover, the historical process by which innovative tonal contrasts emerge, *tonogenesis*, has been demonstrated to be convergent in the region, with many languages from various language families developing tone in essentially the same way (cf. Matisoff's (2001) *Sinospheric tonbund*). Historical segmental contrasts of onset and coda phonation are carried forward into modern tone languages, only changed phonetically into the tonal contrasts that have replaced them (i.e. transphonologization (Hagège & Haudricourt 1978; Hyman 1976)).

The *traditional interpretation* of GMSEA tonogenesis, first modelled in the foundational work of Haudricourt (1954), is rooted in the GMSEA philological tradition. This model is overtly ordered in terms of chronology, with coda phonation contrasts being transphonologized first and into contour tones. Subsequently, onset phonation contrasts also transphonologize, splitting the tones and doubling the tone inventory into two *pitch registers*, which differ in pitch level. This sequential interpretation explains the emergence over time and the distribution of tonal contrasts in the historical sources and orthographic traditions quite well. It remains the received hypothesis today and is invoked uncritically in all major phonological reconstructions for GMSEA language families (Baxter & Sagart 2014, Ostapirat 2000, Pittayaporn 2009, Ratliff 2010, *inter alia*).

Nevertheless, Haudricourt's model is just one lens through which the historical records can be viewed. This traditional interpretation is in fact seriously challenged by a lack of supporting evidence in modern GMSEA languages. Based on the traditional model, we would expect to find modern tone languages at two stages: a more conservative *Stage 1* with tonal contrasts that are cognate with coda phonation categories only and (2) a more innovative *Stage 2* with tonal contrasts that are cognate with both onset and coda phonation contrasts. In fact, there are no unambiguous cases of a modern GMSEA Stage 1 tone language. However, there are many cases of languages with suprasegmental contrasts that are cognate with onset phonation only, a stage not included in the traditional model. These languages are generally referred to as *register languages* rather than tone languages in the GMSEA tradition, and their evolution (i.e. *registrogenesis*) has been considered separate from that of tone languages, at least historically. This bifurcation in the study of suprasegmental contrast in the region has contributed to the failure to integrate the register languages into the conventional GMSEA tonogenetic model.

In this talk, we will review the nature and origins of the traditional interpretation of conventional GMSEA tonogenesis as sketched out above, discuss how it is unsupported by evidence from modern tone languages and present an alternative model with scope to explain both the historical and the modern evidence. We propose that this kind of tonogenesis most likely begins with gradual phonetic change in the phonetic expression of the historical onset phonation contrasts, producing a contrast that would be called *register* today. Subsequent gradual phonetic change in the direction of tone with intermediate stages of cue redundancy between onset and coda phonation differences and pitch differences ultimately produced tone inventories that we see today.

This study highlights the fact that the interpretation of historical linguistic records is inherently categorical and the details of the progression of phonetic changes that feeds ultimate phonological change must be inferred. This is precisely where the comparative study of unwritten languages should fill in the gaps, confirming our inferences in some cases, but calling them into question in others.

## References

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