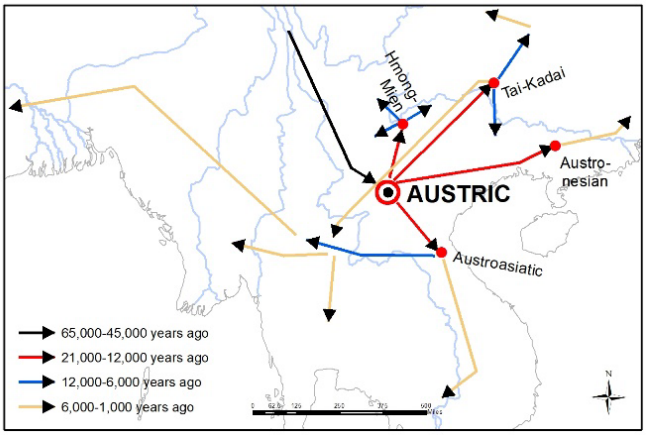
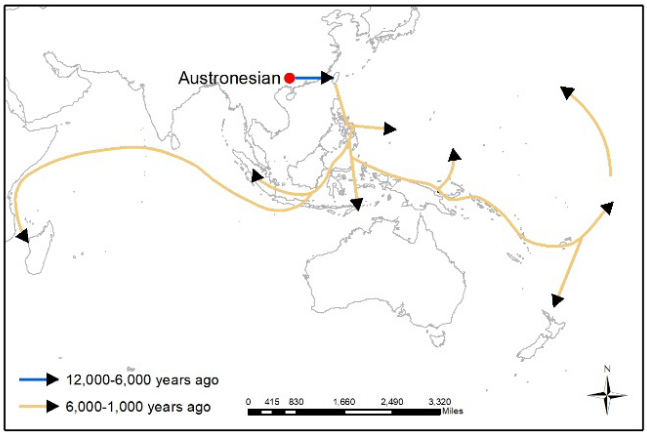
9.Austric

Homeland. The four main subgroups in the Austric phylum are widely recognized: Hmong-Mien, Austronesian, Austroasiatic (Munda and Mon-Khmer (including Vietnamese and Khmer), and Thai-Kadai (including Thai and Laotian). I accept the argument that these four language groups have a common ancestry, formed during the early settlement of Southeast Asia. I have proposed the plain of the Mekong and the Red River Valley in today's Vietnam as a likely spot for the homeland of this ancestral group. That highly productive region was not easily accessible from the west, especially in the Pleistocene era when the subcontinent of Sunda was greatly expanded by the low sea level. I hypothesize, therefore, that after the Trans-Himalayan homeland was established in Yunnan by migrants who ascended the Salween and other rivers, migrants later descended the Mekong River, founding the Austric homeland in the lowlands





The main map focuses on the early differentiation of the Austric phylum into its four main subgroups. The map of the Indian and Pacific Oceans portrays the late Holocene maritime expansion of Austronesian-speaking peoples.

Concise Spreadsheet: top four levels

Austric			
	Austroasiatic		
		Katuic	
		Bahnaric	
		Khmeric	
		Pearic	
		Khmuic	
		Vietic	
		Mangic	
		Monic	
		Aslian	
		Nicobarese	
		Palaungic	
		Khasian	
		Munda	
	Tai-Kadai		
		Northern	

			Kra
			Northeastern
		Southern	
			Hlai
			Be-Tai
	Hmong-Mien		
		Hmongic	
			Bahengic
			Sheic
			West Hmongic
			Xong
			Hmuic
		Mienic	
			Iu Mien
			Biao Mon
			Kim Mun
			Biao Min
			Dzao Min
	Austronesian		
		Formosan (9 languages)	
		Malayo-Polynesian	
			Western Malayo-Polynesian
			Central-Eastern Malayo-Polynesian

Full Spreadsheet: see "9.Austric," listing Austric languages by groups and subgroups.

Pleistocene Changes.

65,000–45,000 years ago.

45,000–21,000 years ago. Migrants may have descended from the Yunnan highlands along the Mekong Valley and, in the lowlands of the Mekong and the Red River Valley, formed the homeland for what became the Austric phylum.

21,000–12,000 years ago. In the late Pleistocene, the Austric group divided into its four constituent groups without any long-distance migrations: they were the ancestors of Miao–Yao, Austronesian, Austroasiatic, and Tai-Kadai.

Holocene Changes.

12,000–6000 years ago. The Mon–Khmer family established agricultural communities in the Mekong Valley. The Austronesian family established agricultural communities in the Pearl River Valley.

6000 years ago–1000 CE. Expansion of each of the four groups. Best known is Austronesian, which spread from the Pearl River Valley of South China to Taiwan and then to all of island Southeast Asia and the Pacific and to Madagascar. Speakers of Munda languages moved westward into India. Also the Nicobar Islands, now off the coast of Myanmar, came to be occupied by speakers of Austroasiatic languages, though they are not far from the Indo-Pacific-speaking Andaman islands.

Commentary and Debates. Paul Benedict made the case for an Austric phylum as ancestral to the four well-known families of Southeast Asian languages. While there is little analysis of Austric as a whole, its four constituent families – Austroasiatic, Tai-Kadai, Hmong-Mien, and Austronesian – are relatively well described.

For Austroasiatic, Paul Sidwell distinguishes 13 groups within the phylum. He argues that an Austroasiatic homeland formed 4000 years ago in the lower Mekong Valley, among

groups that became Katuic, Bahnaric, Khmeric, and Pearic. Yet he tentatively ranks all 13 groups at a single level, arguing that lexicostatistical and other methods cannot yet set them in nested order.

Most linguists working on Austric languages assume that currently known languages have overlaid evidence of earlier language groups. For the case of Austronesian overlay of Indo-Pacific, this conclusion has been verified. But for Austroasiatic, Tai-Kadai and Hmong-Mien, it is work giving more attention to how current language distributions might reflect antecedent languages within the Austric phylum. In parallel analysis, there is need for archaeological work targeting early Holocene and Pleistocene times in Southeast Asia.

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