

## History that slithers: kra-dai and the pythonidae

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Abstrak

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This paper brings together a number of disciplines in order to demonstrate how historical, anthropological, ecological, zoogeographical, ethnobiological, and linguistic evidence relating to the physical distribution and linguistic representations of pythons in northern Southeast Asia and southern China can be brought to bear

on Kra Dai prehistory and intrafamilial as well as interethnic relationships. The normal and most recognized word for python is confined to the Tai family proper, and even then there are some qualifications. Two species of python are found in much of the Tai linguistic area south of the Sino Vietnamese border, but only one,

the Burmese python, occurs in Guangxi, Guangdong, and Hainan. Some Central Tai dialects have acquired another name that seems to be Austroasiatic in origin, and yet no AA languages are found in those areas. It is suggested that these dialects received the word via Kra to the west. On the eastern side, yet another surprising correspondence is noted between Lung Ming in southern Guangxi and

Hlai on Hainan. Sek, located far to the south, which usually preserves archaic forms of Be Tai, has no words for python that correspond to those in the rest of the family. Close examination of the linguistics of this particular member of the Southeast Asian mega fauna reveals a pattern of interaction between the families of the Kra Dai stock, Austroasiatic, and southern Chinese that mirrors the phylogenetic tree.