
GIS Mapping and Analysis of Tai Linguistic and Settlement Patterns in Southern China

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Abstract

By integrating linguistic information and physical geographic features in a GIS environment, this paper maps the spatial variation of terms connected with wet-rice farming of Tai minority groups in southern China and shows that the primary candidate of origin for proto-Tai is in the region of Guangxi-Guizhou, not Yunnan or the middle Yangtze River region as others have proposed. In addition, Tai speaking people (Zhuang and Bouyei) settle at low elevations along rivers where they can practice irrigated rice farming, in contrast to the Yi, members of the Sino-Tibetan language family, who are found at higher elevations. The patterns of different ethnolinguistic groups exploiting different ecological niches are likely true for all of Asia. GIS technology has great potential to help explain such patterns and understand population movements and distributions.
