

The Austroasiatic Vocabulary for Rice: Its Origin and Expansion

In Southeast Asia, would it be peninsular and insular, the various names for rice form systems of at least three significant terms : (1) "rice (in general)" / "unhusked rice", (2) "husked rice", (3) "cooked rice", from which two fundamental terms can be retained : "raw rice (general, not transformed)" and "elaborate rice (peeled, ready to be cooked)". The word "cooked rice" generally means "food". The languages of the Austroasiatic family (Munda and Mon-Khmer) present a wide variety of systems and it is difficult to propose a unique reconstruction at the Proto Austroasiatic level. That could be explained by the proper history of the domestication of rice.

Before being domesticated, about 10,000 years ago, wild rice was gathered and consumed by populations of collectors. Each language must have had a specific word to name the plant. When rice cultivation propagated from Centre China, collectors becoming farmers could either borrow the word "rice" from the donor population, or preserve the word of their own language. This last case can explain the diversity of rice naming systems.

When rice cultivation extended towards areas where the wild plant did not exist, the word "rice" of the donor language was propagated with the cultivation of the plant. It is the case of the Proto Austroasiatic root ***C.rac** "rice (in general)", represented in Old Chinese by ***^bm.rats** and in Proto Austronesian ***beRas** "husked rice". Its expansion can be traced the southeastwards (Malay-Indonesian *beras*) and westwards (Vedic *vrihi* < pre-Indo-Aryan **vrijhi*) and to Western Europe (Latin *oryza*).

With the help of Mon-Khmer comparatism, it will shown that the root ***C.rac** originally meant anything else than "the cereal collected by tearing off the grains along the stem with the hand".

Historical linguistics