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*Re-examining the genetic position of Jingpho:
can the Sal hypothesis be reconciled with the Jingpho/Nungish/Luish grouping?*

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ABSTRACT

Some sort of special relationship among Jingpho, Northern Naga (= Konyak) and Bodo-Garo has been posited ever since the *Linguistic Survey of India* (1903-28) lumped them together as “Bodo-Naga-Kachin”. This closeness, whether due to genetic or contact factors, was noted in the *Conspectus* (Benedict 1972:6-7), and the idea was developed in most convincing detail by Burling (1983), who dubbed these groups collectively as the *Sal* languages (from a characteristic root for “sun” that may be reconstructed with that approximate pronunciation).

At the same time, we at STEDT (see Matisoff 2003:5) have been assuming a Jingpho/Nungish/Luish grouping, without this ever having been demonstrated explicitly. A huge problem has been the lack of adequate lexical data on the Luish languages, several of which have gone extinct before they could be properly studied. Now, however, two recent studies of Luish languages (Huziwara 2008, Sangdong 2012) have greatly enriched our knowledge. Much more material is now available on the Nungish side as well (e.g. LaPolla 2001, Sun Hongkai 2005). It might now be possible to take a stab at reconstructing both Proto-Luish and Proto-Nungish. As for Jingpho, it is fortunately one of the best documented TB languages.

In any event, the complexity of the issues surrounding Jingpho’s genetic position demonstrates Benedict’s wisdom in placing Jingpho right in the middle of his unorthodox anti-Stammbaum (*ibid.*).