Modern myths of meaning of “Yuchi” in Yuchean

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It is with a cautious humility that I raise the question of the century old, quasi-established meaning of the term “Yuchi.” Modern consensus has it that this term by which the Tsoyaha people are widely known and sometimes spelled “Euchee,” comes from the Uchean Yu Tci -- meaning “seated at a distance” or “faraway.” This origin theory was posited by Frank Speck in 1909. While it is true that the various words for distant (yonder, far, & faraway) often begin with the phoneme Yu, so do some other terms with quite desperate meanings. An analysis of all the words with this phoneme was undertaken in an attempt to resurrect the root meaning of it.

Several major ideas begin with the phoneme Yu, and many more carry it as a subordinate modifier - morpheme. These include besides “distance:” “house/home,” “squareground,” “ill/sick,” “fly,” “high/up,” “myth/story,” “pipe,” “lie/fool,” “strange/weird,” “tie on,” “exchange” & “long ago.” It is not readily clear that these things share any common concept. It is clear that the meaning of the morpheme Yu is subtle, and a bit obscure. However, I might posit that they all have a measured significance wherein the key idea is “import or significance” as in great, large or special. Yu would then be a root idea, like Go/co meaning man or S’a meaning earth, but herein Yu would flag the largeness or significance. This can be seen in the word stago (far) and yustago (very far). It remains clear from the diverse use of the morpheme Yu that it cannot in all likelihood be readily interpreted as “far,” anymore than “up” or “home” or even “sick.”

Yuchi words for “far” include yukho, hege'fu, hegehe'a (Lit: place-end), stago, yustago, yuhe’a (yonder - Lit: house-end), yuske (yonder). In Yuchean the word chi is one form of the verb “to sit.” A cursory understanding of the language could easily cause one to surmise that Yu-chi might refer to “sitting far off.” However a more thorough knowledge of the broad spectrum of the usage of the morpheme Yu, ought to give pause here. After all we have yuba (high, mountain) yuda (pipe), yude (story), yua’e (squareground), yukwane (tie on), yuhu’lene (exchange), and yuxe (sick) -- all of which that have nothing to do with farness. When you add that the Yuchi elders insist that it is not Yu-chi, but Yudji, and that early records also often record it as “Ugee,” and “Hughee,” this opens up greater doubt still as to the Speck theory of origin for the word “Yuchi.” While several Yuchi speakers gave Speck tacit approval of this theory, Frank Speck did not have access to the most knowledgeable of Yuchi Elders. In light of this argument, Speck’s theory must be viewed with great skepticism, and so far as it has been widely embraced - - it should be viewed as mythology.

While it is still possible that the word is not Yuchean in origin at all, its wide use by the Yuchi, the Cherokee (Yutsi), Muskogean (Yutcu’lke), as well as scholars suggests that it might just be a self-appellation. Yuchi elders insist that it is composed of the morphemes Yu, dji, & ha and Chief Sam Brown, jr. insisted that the meaning was earth-sky people. Certainly the Yuchi words for “high/up” and “fly” could support such a claim, but both dji or chi are hard to cast as references to the earth, and “sky” has a word: hob’o.

Based in the knowledge of the elders, I would argue that Yudji was originally a title. Dji like Yu has several uses, but not as diverse. It is part of the verbs “be” and “go” as well as a past tense indicator. Since I do not believe it is a tense indicator here, I would argue that the interpretation should be something on the order of Yu (significant) dji (being) ha (people), or “people that are significant or important” and that it was originally used as a title. This preserves the sense that Chief Brown was conveying, as well as the most likely interpretations of the individual morphemes (ha is well understood to be used as a plural suffix for “people.”). It is also consistent with the emerging view that the Yuchi played a significant role in the commerce and administration of the protohistoric culture in the Southeast.

There is much less question about the use of Tsoyaha. Tso (Sun or sacred) ya (fire) ha (people) is often used with Yuchi or alone as the self-appellation of our people. It is broadly interpreted as “Children of the Sun,” as we are taught that our original ancestors came down from the Sun, bringing our culture, and becoming priests to the peoples of the Southeast.

We may never know the explicit etymology of the name, “Yuchi,” but a better understanding of the Yuchi language can only give us a better understanding of the people and the culture. It is quite clear that the Yuchean language and the culture are intimately interwoven and evolved together -- unraveling one will reveal the other.
Additional support for *Yu* being a morpheme denoting significance or noteworthiness – & perhaps greatness.

**Yuso** -- Polecot, skunk, wherein so means stink, and *yuso* means “significant stink.”

**Yuti** -- Fool, wherein *tixa* means liar or to lie, and *yuti* means a significant liar.

**Yuxa** -- happy, merry, well, wherein *xa* means future, ball game, and *xa’a* means sunshine (big future).

**Yuxu** -- to shake (rattle), wherein *xuxu* means cricket or cicada from their sound.

It should be noted how much the turtleshell rattles sound like the cicadas during dancing.

**Yudowu** -- town, wherein *downu* means authority, appoint, permission, therefore a town is “significant authority.”

Already noted: **Yuba (yupa)** -- high or mountain, wherein *ba* means climb, so *yuba* means a “significant climb.”

**Yuda** -- pipe, wherein *da* means fire or to light, so *yuda* would be a “significant fire.”

Also note that the clan call is *yudaha* (pipe-people).

Also of note: the derivations of house and squareground: **Yuhe** -- house or home, *yuhe’a* or *yue’a* (big house), and squareground -- *S’a sa he* or *yu ahe* (*yu’a’e*). (*he* -- head, therefore *yuhe* is “significant head??”)

**Yuhepe** -- Boat, as in “house-drinks”

also strange -- *yuhe’a* (bighouse??) or *yuhe!’e*

**Yugo!ta** -- grow (“go upward”)

**Yuxe** -- sick, wherein *xe* means dead or die.

**Yufala** -- Way or path of significance & **Yuxt’a** -- road, trail

**Yufulene** -- Exchange, trade

A further search of words wherein the prefix morpheme *Yu* is used to underscore that the meaning is to call further attention to the import of the succeeding morpheme. These additional terms further confirm the use of *Yu* as a morpheme to flag a significance or noteworthiness. One can easily use the term “great” as a substitute for *Yu* and see the general idea of the morpheme’s use. It should be further noted, as well, that these words all have a high level of significance to the Yuchi and their culture.
The Spirit is Willing, and the Culture is Confirming

The real import to the Spiritual Yuchean Lexicon is while many of these words have meaning and use in other languages — it is a secondary or derived usage, whereas they have primary usage in Yuchean, i.e. they are borrowed from the Yuchean into the other languages. This can be established by the structure of the unique Yuchi language. First it is morpheme agglomerative (more so than German), that is the words are made up of elements (morphemes) that have specific meanings themselves — therefore one can more easily trace the origins of any word as it arises in, or from the Yuchi. Second, Yuchean is a language isolate, which means it is not closely related to any other known language. It also is a very pristine isolate, which raises large questions of how the Yuchi lived intimately (particularly with the Koasati) and engaged in exchange without incorporating neighboring language words into the Yuchean. This is because the Yuchi were exceedingly protective of their language, more so than even the French are of theirs. However, the opposite is not true. When we look at the other neighboring languages, we find that they have borrowed quite a number of words from the Yuchean.

A classic example is the word for translator/interpreter: **Yatiki**. This word, and words derived from it, are widely used throughout the neighboring languages — very likely because the Yuchi were long involved in commerce and trade. In these other languages their is no etymological trace of its evolution, but it clearly is made up of Yuchean morphemes. In Yuchean it is a dimorphic term made up of the morphemes for “fire” (“wood-yellow”) and “hand” (“receiver”). Similar morphemes give rise to the term for “poleboy” (**Yadjiki**) as well. So one can most often establish a known origin for a word in Yuchean. The other words in the Spiritual Lexicon are also dimorphemes and polymorphemes leading to the conclusion that they are original words from the Yuchean. This does not argue against some terms having multiple origins and being used because they have dual meaningfulness — but it does accumulate a very strong argument that the Yuchi language and the Greencorn/moundbuilding priesthood coevolved in time. This strongly supports oral traditions among the Yuchi elders that state the said same.

The import of the Spiritual Yuchean Lexicon also is that these words are as important as words like “land” and “water” (often used by linguists) for finding cross language connections. **Iniha** is a dimorpheme in Yuchi with the meaning of “true ceremony” and “people.” It is used by many Southeastern peoples as a term for priests or religious leaders. It was a term used by the Algonquin (Lenape and Shawnee) for their priests, and the Yuchi were very close to these people, as they were with the Koasati -- often living among them all. So it is not just that these words have meaning in Yuchi, but that they have their roots of origin in Yuchean. So while **Kutani** means priest in several languages, its traceable roots are to be found in the Yuchean where it is a dimorpheme meaning “to make brothers.” While **Shawano** is associated with the Shawnee, its traceable roots are in the Yuchean as a dimorpheme as Chief Sam Brown, Jr. taught us.

Based in this brief analysis of these several key words, one comes to a strong conclusion that the Yuchi were key players in the Moundbuilding/Green Corn Rites, and that the evidence indicates a coevolution of these Rites with the Yuchean language based on its structure and the words’ subsequent spread to neighboring languages. Further etymological analysis will demonstrate that the Yuchi were instrumental in founding this pan-Southeastern culture, as traders and priests in order to maintain peace among the peoples -- as the elders have long maintained. It should also be noted that the culture was far more influential and significant in its range across Eastern North America as to be deemed more than just the original tribal confederacy (predating the Iroquois League and the Creek Confederacy), but understood as the First United States of this Land. For far to long the dimensions and quality of the Moundbuilding culture has been minimized, and portrayed as only a loose affiliation of warring tribes. I believe the evidence supports a new view, uncolored by the dominant cultural jingoism, marginalization and minimization that has been so long told of this culture.

Oral traditions may be suspect, but the confirming power encoded in the Yuchean language is a history unto itself, waiting to be unraveled. I have talked to spiritual leaders from a number of tribes who have been taught by their elders that they Tsoyaha Yuchi were indeed the **Isopogoge**, Children of the Sun.
Spiritual Yuchi Lexicon

The Priests:
Iniha (Algonquin usage) --- Iniha carries the meaning of “people of the true ceremony” in Yuchi.
Micco (Muskogean) --- Nekho means “to open up belief” in Yuchean.
Yoholo (Muskogean) -- Yuhochine means “medicine song” in Yuchean. Yoholo means singer in Creek.
AniKutani (Cherokee) -- Khutane means “to make brothers” in Yuchean. Ani means people in Cherokee. Khutane in Yuchean is a small portal/keyhole, the ogee.
Shawaeno (various) -- Shawaeno means “snake/eagle/moon spirit” in Yuchean and refers to priests in general.
Ispogogee (various) -- Ispogogee means dark-horned giant in Yuchean and is a general reference to the original priests.
Choyaha (Yuchi) --- Tsoyaha (Sun-fire people)
Yatiti (Yuchi) --- Fire cross
Yati (Yuchi) --- Fire
Yatiki (Yuchi) --- Translator/Interpreter (Literally: Fire Receiver)
Yustafawaeno (Yuchi) -- upper spirit
Coweta (white town name) -- Co weta means Hawk-man in Yuchean, a principal symbol and priest.

Echota (white town name) --- Etsoto ta means “sacred tobacco fire” in Yuchean.
Canasauga (white town name) -- Caeno Sauga means eagle-bear.
Tsopathla (Chief in Yuchi) --- Tso pa thla means “great sacred or Sun chief” literally.
Gohanesha (Yuchi) --- Go Ha Ne Xu means “ancestors” -- people that have passed.
Gohantone (Yuchi) -- The deity -- Breathmaster (Lit: person controls breath)
Yuda (Yuchi) -- Yuda means pipe. Yudaha (pipepeople) is the clan call.
EE (Yuchi) --- ii means tobacco/ blood.

Chodasha (Yuchi) -- Tsodasha -- an herb: Life Everlasting or rabbit tobacco (Polycephallium sp.)
Lit: “Sacred fire quick”.
Choshata (Yuchi) --- Tsoxata -- an herb: Prairie willow (Salix humilis).
Fadai (Yuchi) -- Fadai -- an herb: Button Snakeroot (Eryngium yuccifolium).
Dae (Yuchi) -- Dae -- an herb/tree: Red Cedar (Juniperus virginiana).
Choso (Yuchi) --- Tosos -- an herb: Horsemint (Bergamot) (Monarda fistulosa).
Josene (Yuchi) ---- Tsosene -- an herb: Spicebush (Lindera benzoin).
Chochubyoto (Yuchi) --- Tsochubyoto -- an herb Jimsee root or Jimsom weed (Datura stramonium).
Chotho (Yuchi) --- Tsotho -- com --- tsothohitsa (Greencorn).
Eyapenetsee (Yuchi) -- ii ya pe net sii (Greencorn Ceremony) tobacco/blood, orate, smoke/drink.
Yashayawa (Yuchi) -- yaxayaewa means arbor (seating structure on the squareground).
SaeSahe (Yuchi) -- Squareground
Ya tci ki (Yuchi) -- Poleboy (translator -- tree receiver -- tree be/go hand) Yaxdjiki see Yudjiha
Yasee (Yuchi) --- yasi device: switch used by poleboy (lit: tree-pieces)
Khyagohalaka (Yuchi) -- Crane feather
YaDiDa (Yuchi) --- device: Drum
Tha pa ne (Yuchi) -- device: Rattle
Geti ne (Yuchi) -- device: Scratcher
Yas aele si sine (Yuchi) -- device: Walkingstick or staff.
Sot’adax’i chata’a (Yuchi) -- Great Lizard (Dinosaur) a threat
Yuchean as a Tool of Understanding Indigenous Southeastern Culture

The Yuchi language has a number of unusual and interesting features that should interest many besides linguists. First, Yuchean is a language isolate, which means it is unrelated to other known Indian languages. In the case of Yuchean this lack of evolution from or with other languages is rather profound and absolute. A few have suggested very distant Siouian influences, but these remain sketchy and unconvincing to most. Further the language has remained isolated from the many neighboring languages despite very intimate contact with these peoples for many centuries. Most isolates form because the speakers are physically isolated, and evidence does point at the Yuchi spending some time island-hopping the Caribbean. But they have spent much time in intimate contact with other languages as well. This is rather unique among languages, and can only be explained by the staunch Yuchi pride and traditionalism, which has kept the language very pristine. The Yuchi have been more protective of their language than the French are of theirs, actively eshewing foreign words for many centuries. This has left the Yuchean language nearly devoid of any borrowed words or structure.

Because the Yuchi neither taught outsiders to speak Yuchean, nor permitted non-Yuchi words to be incorporated into the Yuchean, it remains among the most pristine languages, and has not change appreciably for many centuries. The opposite is not true, as a number of important terms have been borrowed out of the Yuchean, demonstrating that the Yuchi were at the very heart of the protohistoric culture in the Southeast region in both trade and religious focii.

Second, Yuchean is an agglomerative language (like German) wherein words are assembled by stringing morphemes of meaning together. Thus a word like “dinosaur” is composed of the morphemes for “lizard” (sot'a), “mouth” (dax'i), “red” (chata), “big” (‘a). This makes etymology of words straightforward because in addition to the meaning, the origins of the word are fairly easily traced by these morphemes as well. It also makes the language very adaptive to creating new words such as car (k'as’athecaha -- “thing, run, fast”), “radio” (r’ostanewedine -- “box, talking”) and “telephone” (s.te’wedine -- “wire, iron, on, talking”), eliminating the need to borrow such words into the language. These morphemes might have several orderings within a word, but often start with the most important “noun.” These often become rather noteworthy prefix/suffix morphemes across the language as in the following list. It is this feature that makes it so useful for tracking word genealogies among languages.

Categorical Element Designation by Morphemes
Certain syllabic prefix/suffix terms (Morphemes) are used to set a stage for the word, i.e. a prefix of S’a denotes that the term refers to something pertaining to the earth or land. Go (Co) refers to something pertaining to humans or the human condition. Tso refers to something dedicated to the sun or sacred. A suffix of ha denotes a plural inanimate or group of people. Others morphemes include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Morpheme</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S’a</td>
<td>earth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go (Co)</td>
<td>humans/human condition (Yuchi inclusive only)</td>
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<tr>
<td>tti</td>
<td>stone or metal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tso</td>
<td>Sun or sacred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ya (-x,s)</td>
<td>tree/wood</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ya or Da/Ba</td>
<td>fire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yu</td>
<td>noteworthiness/significance</td>
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<tr>
<td>--Waneo</td>
<td>spirit/dream/shadow</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ha</td>
<td>tribe/clan -- groups of people &amp; Plural inanimate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fa</td>
<td>directional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Da</td>
<td>wind</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tse</td>
<td>water</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ha!</td>
<td>breath</td>
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<tr>
<td>K’</td>
<td>thing or action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xu</td>
<td>fish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wak</td>
<td>interrogative as well as suffix: -le</td>
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<tr>
<td>--’a</td>
<td>big</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--s’i</td>
<td>small</td>
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<tr>
<td>-ne or -ke</td>
<td>place (here)</td>
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