

A hypothesis of the influences of pre-initial consonants upon the development of
rhymes from Old Chinese to Middle Chinese
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Karlgren, the founder of modern Chinese historical phonology, pointed out at the opening of his famous article, "Word Families in Chinese," that, "one of the great goals of Chinese historical phonetics is to prepare the ground for comparative Sinitic linguistics." As it has turned out, the study of historical Chinese phonology has definitely stimulated the progress of comparative Sino-Tibetan linguistics, while on the other hand, comparative study has also contributed greatly to the study of Old Chinese phonology. It goes without saying that the reconstruction of Old Chinese should be based on the internal evidence within Chinese, however, it must also be noted that when the internal evidence allows different interpretations, comparative evidence can often shed light on the solutions to problems.

This paper deals with an additional instance of the clues that comparative study can provide, but which remain undiscovered if one is confined to Chinese materials alone. The paper discusses influences of Old Chinese pre-initial consonants upon rhyme splitting in Middle Chinese. In the reconstruction of Old Chinese, different proposals have been offered to account for rhyme splits from a single Old Chinese rhyme group into divergent Middle Chinese rhymes, especially in the development of third division rhymes. For some third division rhymes, Li Fang-kuei (1971) proposed the reconstruction of a vocalic medial *-i-, while Baxter (1992), Zheng-zhang Shang-fang (2003), and others have suggested the reconstruction of a medial *-r-. This paper confirms the validity of both reconstructions, and in addition suggests a third possibility, which better accounts for certain cases. These cases are best explained by the reconstruction of a pre-initial consonant *C-. The justification of this reconstruction and the scope of the occurrences of this sound will be discussed; in connection with these different solutions, the problem of certainty and uncertainty in our knowledge of Old Chinese phonology will be addressed.