

Sorting Through Competing Reconstructions of Old Chinese

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ICSTLL-39 Pre-Conference Workshop on “The Current State of ST/TB Reconstruction”

Sept. 14, 2006

I. Some General Thoughts (PowerPoint Presentation)

II. Illustrative Examples

1. A single purported “word family” and some reconstructions in various systems

Word	GSR#	Mand. < MC	BK 1957	WHB 1992	GHC 2000	LS 1999	ZZSF 2003	WB 2005	Etymology (WB 2005)
理 'regulate, mark'	978d	<i>lǐ</i> < <i>liX</i>	* <i>liǰəŋ</i>	* <i>C-rji?</i>	--	--	* <i>ruw?</i>	* <i>rə?</i>	cognate to WT <i>bri-ba</i> 'draw, design'
吏 'clerk, official'	975g	<i>lì</i> < <i>liH</i>	* <i>liǰəŋ</i>	--	* <i>rjəŋs</i>	* <i>ri?-s</i>	* <i>ruws</i>	* <i>rə?-s</i>	*-s-suffixed deverbal from 理
使 'employ, send'	975n	<i>shǐ</i> < <i>sriX</i>	* <i>slǰəŋ</i>	* <i>srji?</i>	* <i>s-rjəŋx</i>	* <i>s-ri?</i>	* <i>sruw?</i>	* <i>s-rə?</i>	*-s-prefixed denominative from 吏
史 'scribe'	975a	<i>shǐ</i> < <i>sriX</i>	* <i>slǰəŋ</i>	* <i>srji?</i>	--	--	* <i>sruw?</i>	* <i>s-rə?</i>	*-s-prefixed deverbal from 理
紀 'to record'	953i	<i>jì</i> < <i>kix</i>	* <i>kǰəŋ</i>	* <i>k(r)ji?</i>	--	--	* <i>kuw?</i>	* <i>k-rə?</i>	*-k-prefixed derivative of 理
記 'to remember'	953j	<i>jì</i> < <i>kiH</i>	* <i>kǰəŋ</i>		--	--	* <i>kuws</i>	* <i>k-rə(?)</i> -s	*-s-suffixed derivation of 記
事 'to serve for'	971a	<i>shì</i> < <i>dzriH</i>	* <i>dz'jəŋ</i>	* <i>fsrji?(s)</i>	* <i>rdzjəŋs</i>	* <i>Ns-ri(?)</i> -s	* <i>zruws/?</i>	* <i>m-s-rə(?)</i> -s	*-m-prefixed volitional of *-s-prefixed 吏 ¹
仕 'to be a clerk, serve as'	970d	<i>shì</i> < <i>dzrix</i>	* <i>dz'jəŋ</i>	* <i>fsrji?</i>		--	* <i>zruw?</i>	* <i>N-s-rə?</i>	*-N-prefixed untransitivizing of 使

¹But note Gong's direct comparison to WT *rdzas*, WB *ca*.

Note that Sagart and Behr explicitly represent morpheme boundaries with hyphens.

Key to references is on the next page.

- GSR = BK 1957 = Karlgren, Bernhard. 1957. “Grammata Serica recensa”, *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 29:1-332.
- WHB 1992 = Baxter, William H. 1992. *A handbook of Old Chinese phonology*. (Trends in linguistics: Studies and monographs, 64.) Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- GHC 2000 = Gong, Hwang-chenng. 2000. “Cóng Hàn-Zàngyǔ de bǐjiào kàn Shàngǔ Hànyǔ de cítóu wèntí 從漢藏語的比較看上古漢語的詞頭問題 [The problem of Old Chinese prefixes from the perspective of Sino-Tibetan comparison]”. *Language and Linguistics* 1.2:39-62. Reprinted in *Collected Papers on Sino-Tibetan Linguistics*. (Language and Linguistics Monograph Series, C2-2.) Taipei: Institute of Linguistics (Preparatory Office), Academia Sinica. Pp. 161-182.
- LS 1999 = Sagart, Laurent. 1999. *The roots of Old Chinese*. Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins
- ZZSF 2003 = Zhèng-Zhāng Shàngfāng. 2003. *Shàngǔ Yīnxì 上古音系 [Old Chinese Phonology]* Shanghai: Jiàoyù Chūbǎnshè.
- WB 2005 = Behr, Wolfgang. 2005. “Language change in premodern China: Notes on its perception and impact on the idea of a ‘constant way’”. In: A. Mittag and H. Schmidt-Glitzner, eds. *Ideology and historical criticism*. Wolfenbüttel. Pp. 13-51.

2. An example of how different the reconstruction of a single lexical item can be:

叔 *shū* < MC *syuwk* ‘third of four brothers’ (GSR 1031b)

Baxter 1992: OC **stjiwk*

Sagart 1999: OC **^bs-tuk* (possibly derived from 督 *dū* < *dowk* < **^atuk* ‘middle’)

Zheng-Zhang 2003: OC **hljuwG¹*

Without going into all the details, we can note:

a) The vowel is not definitively determined by Middle Chinese or textual evidence; the choice between **iw* (= Zheng-Zhang’s **ju*) and **u* is made by Sagart based on word family connections.

b) MC initial palatal *sy-* can derive from **hl-* or **st-*. Again, the decision is based on word families.

3. An example bearing on ST comparison and PST reconstruction:

血 *xiě/xuě* < MC *xwet* ‘blood’ (GSR 410a-c)

Baxter 1992: OC **hwit*

Sagart 1999: OC **^ahmik*

Zheng-Zhang 2003: OC **qhwiiG* (although on p. 81 he suggests **qhwliig*)

Matisoff 2003:201,230 (HPB): PTB **s-hwyəy* ‘blood’ cf. Karlgren 1957: #4410a-c 血 **xiwet* < PST **s-hwyəy-t*. Sagart argues that PTB **s-hwyəy* represents a later Chinese borrowing.

¹ In this system, *hl-* is a cluster of pre-initial **h* and initial **l-*, distinct from aspirated simple initial **lh-*. See Zheng-Zhang 2003:46-47.