

# *ICSTLL-39, Seattle*

Workshop: Sept. 14, 2006

## **The Current State of ST/TB Reconstruction**

Sorting Through Competing  
Reconstructions of Old Chinese

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# *The Shanghai Symposium*

- ✦ When: December 2005
- ✦ What: Current state of OC reconstruction
- ✦ Why: Bring together scholars from different fields and countries
- ✦ Who: Linguists, philologists, archeologists, historians

# *OC: Points of Agreement*

- ✦ Tonogenetic suffixes
- ✦ Ever richer consonant cluster inventory
- ✦ Ever richer morphology (primarily derivational, affixal)
- ✦ Growing importance of word families as data source (vs. textual sources)
- ✦ Cf. Sagart *Roots*, Schuessler *Ety. Dict.*

# *OC: Points of Disagreement*

- ✦ Vowel System: 2, 4, or 6?
- ✦ Types of clusters
- ✦ Broader linguistic affiliations
- ✦ Reconstruction of individual forms
- ✦ The ever-confounding “Type B” or “medial \*-j-” reconstruction problem

# *New OC Reconstructions: Implications for ST Comparison*

- ✦ Old Chinese now looks more “Tibeto-Burman”
- ✦ Easier to identify roots, variants
- ✦ Should provide for more regular sound correspondences

# *Methodological Questions: How long can we avoid them?*

- ✦ What is “Old Chinese” anyway?
- ✦ Is “Old Chinese becomes Middle Chinese” a realistic model?
- ✦ Interpretation of textual evidence: E.g. How to define “phonetic series similarity”, if such a thing exists at all?

# *Methodological Questions: For the Comparativist*

- ✦ Can Old Chinese reconstruction be separated from reliance on textual sources and their limitations?
- ✦ Can study of variation, dialects, comparative method shed light?
- ✦ Is a “simplified OC system” a useful tool?

# *Problems for the non-specialist*

- ✦ The reference work problem
- ✦ The moving target problem
- ✦ But is this situation really any different from reconstructed PIE, PTB, etc.?



# *Major systems in use today*

- ✦ Pulleyblank
- ✦ Li Fang-Kuei / Gong Hwang-chen
- ✦ Baxter / Sagart
- ✦ Pan Wuyun / Zheng-Zhang Shangfang
- ✦ Numerous variations on the above

# *What's the TB comparativist to do?*

- ✦ Pick a system
- ✦ Read up on it, including recent publications
- ✦ Make friends with the brains behind it
- ✦ Maintain correspondence and ask lots of questions

# *Some illustrative examples*

✦ See the handout

# *Bibliography*

✦ See the handout

# *Invitation to comment*

- ✦ Many experts are here today - I'd be grateful for their participation in further discussion

*End*