

PREFIX T- IN OLD CHINESE

Laurent Sagart
Centre de Recherches Linguistiques sur l'Asie Orientale
Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales
(URA 1025 du CNRS)
Paris, France

Chinese forms will be cited according to the formula:

modern standard Chinese [character] *Old Chinese > Middle Chinese 'gloss'

Example: *tun*₁ 涸 *^at-khur > thwon 'to vomit'

Modern Standard Chinese: pin-yin transcription

Old Chinese (OC): ca. 500 BCE, reconstruction follows Baxter (1992) with emendations in Sagart (1993 and forthcoming)

Middle Chinese (MC): ca. 580 CE. Forms are given in Baxter's notation (Baxter 1992)

1. why reconstruct a prefix t- ?

1.1.1 phonetic series contacts involving *t(h)- and initials other than alveolar stops

*tun*₁ 涸 *^at-khur > thwon 'to vomit' (phonetic is *jun*₁ 君 *^bkur > kjun)

1.1.2 interchange between characters apparently showing MC reflexes of OC initial *t(h)- and characters with MC initials reflecting other OC initials

*wei*₂ 惟 唯 t-wi[j] ~ tə-wi[j] > ywij 'to be' [the OC copula], often written epigraphically by *zhui*₁ 隹 *^btu[j] > tsywj 'dove' (this is also an instance of phonetic series contact)

1.1.3 word-family contacts between words showing MC reflexes of OC *t(h)- and words with MC initials reflecting other OC initials

*dan*₁ 湛 *^at-lim > tom 'sunk in, steeped in' (sc. pleasure): *yin*₂ 淫 *^blim > yim 'to soak; excess; licentious'

*zhi*₄ 躓 *^btr-lit-s > trjijH 'to stumble' : *die*₁ 跌 *^alit > det 'to stumble'

*zhi*₄ 寔? *^bt-lit-s > tejH 'stem of a fruit' : *die*₂ 颯 *^alit > det 'stem' (of a gourd)

*he*₂ 合 *^agip > hop 'to join, unite; to answer': *da*₂ 答 *^at-gip > top¹ 'to respond, answer' (this is also an instance of phonetic series contact)

¹ Or possibly *^at-lip > top, as there is some evidence that *he*₂ 𠄎 includes a root lip (*^ag-lip > hop)

1.1.4 double readings

*zhe*₂ 熱 *^bt-nip > tsyip and *^anip > nep, both readings: ‘immobile’

*zhe*₂ 輒 *^at-nep > tep ‘immobile’ and *^bnrep > nrjep ‘legs sticking together, unable to walk’

*pou*₄ 𠵼 *^at-phu > thuw and *^aphu-s > phuwH, both readings: ‘to spit’

*zhou*₁ 鬻 *^bt-luk > tsyuwk ‘gruel’ and *^bluk > yuwk ‘to nourish’

*gan*₁ 飡 *^bt-kan > tsyen and *^bkan > kjon ‘gruel’

2. The functions of *t-

2.1 in verbs

2.1.1 intransitives

stative verbs

*zhi*₄ 質 *^bt-lit > tsyit ‘real, solid, good faith’ (compare *shi*₂ 實 *^bm-lit > zyt ‘solid’);

*di*₄ 的 *^at-lewk > tek ‘bright, brilliant’ and *zhuo*₂ 灼 *^bt-lewk > tsyak ‘burn; brilliant; illuminate; brightly’ (with root root *lewk ‘bright, brilliant’, as in *zhuo*₂ 濯 *^alrewk > dræwk ‘brilliant, fine’, *yao*₄ 瀑 *^blewk-s > yewH ‘shine, brightness’)

*zhuang*₄ 戇 *^atr-ŋoŋ-s > traewngH and *^ahŋoŋ-s > xuwngH (two readings, both:) ‘stupid’ (root initial ŋ- is indicated by modern dialects: Hakka, Min);

*dan*₁ 湛 *^at-lim > tom ‘sunk in, steeped in’ (sc. pleasure, cf. section 1)

*zhe*₂ 熱 *^bt-nip > tsyip ‘immobile’; *zhe*₂ 輒 *^at-nep > tep ‘immobile’ (cf. section 1)

*zhe*₂ 懾 *^bt-nep > tsyep ‘despondent, to fear’ (n- indicated by phonetic series)

color terms

chi 赤 *^bt-hlak > tsyhek ‘red’ (lateral root initial indicated by phonetic series contact)

*chu*₄ 絀 *^btr-kut > trwit ‘deep red’ (velar root initial cf. *chu*₁ 出 below)

actions or functions of the body

*hui*₄ 喙 *^bt-hloj-s > tsyhwejH² ‘to pant’ (*Shi Jing*, Ode 237). root initial hl- indicated by phonetic series.

*tun*₁ 涸 *^at-khur > thwon ‘to vomit’ (cf. section 1)

*pou*₄ 𠵼 *^at-phu > thuw ‘to spit’ (cf. section 1)

other intransitives

*zhan*₃ 輾 *^btr-nan? > trjenX ‘to roll over’. Root initial n- indicated by phonetic series and word-family connection

*zhi*₄ 躓 *^btr-lit-s > trjijH ‘to stumble’ (cf. above, section 1)

*chu*₁ 出 *^bt-khut > tsyhwit ‘to go out’ (velar root initial indicated by phonetic series contact and word-family connection)

*wei*₂ 惟唯 *^bt-wij ~ *^btə-wij > ywij ‘to be’ [the copula] (cf. above, section 1)

² Another reading is *^bq-hloj-s > xjwejH (same meaning).

2.1.2 residue

- *du*₄ 斃 *^at-lak-s > tuH ‘to destroy’

Shi Jing: Da Ya, Ode 258 *Yun Han*, 2nd stanza (Karlgren’s translation):

*Hou*₄ *Ji*₄ *bu*₄ *ke*₄ 后稷不克 ‘Lord Millet is powerless’
*Shang*₄ *Di*₄ *bu*₄ *lin*₂ 上帝不臨 And God on High does not favour us
*hao*₄ *du*₄ *xia*₄ *tu*₃ 耗斃下土 He wastes and **destroys** the earth below’

- *da*₂ 答 *^at-gip > top ‘to respond’ is characterized as a transitive verb by Schuessler (1987: 107)
- In Early Zhou texts *zhuo*₂ 酌 *^bt-lewk ‘to pour with a ladle’ sometimes occurs as a one-argument intransitive ‘to be served drinks’ (Ode 223) and in other instances with a second argument, which designates the vessel or body of liquid (such as a pool) *out of which* liquid is being ladled (*Shi Jing*, Ode 3; Ode 251), or the person *to whom* liquid is ladled (Ode 250). In one case (Ode 220) Karlgren gives a transitive translation:

酌彼康爵

*zhuo*₂ *bi*₃ *kang*₁ *jue*₂

pour with ladle-that-rest-cup
they fill that cup of rest

The meaning is obscure.

2.2 in nouns

2.2.1 mass nouns

*zhou*₁ 鬻 (and 粥) *^bt-luk > tsyuwk ‘gruel’ (lateral root initial indicated by second reading and word-family connection)

*gan*₁ 𪛗 *^bt-kan > tsyen ‘gruel’ (velar root initial indicated by phonetic series and second reading)

*zhi*₄ 質 *^bt-lit-s > tsyijH ‘good faith; substance’

*dan*₃ 膽 *^at-lam? > tamX ‘gall’

*chen*₃ 潘 *^t-hljim? > tsyhimX ‘a liquid’

2.2.2 count nouns

*zhi*₄ 寔 ?*^at-lit-s > tejH ‘stem of a fruit’ (cf. section 1 above)

*zhou*₃ 肘 *^btr-ku? > trjuwX ‘elbow’ (to account for the graphic similarity of the early graph for this word with *jiu*₃ 九 *^bku? > kjuwX ‘nine’)

2.2.3 kin terms

*zhong*₁ 公 [1189a] *^bt-koŋ > tsyowng ‘husband’s elder brother or father’ (compare *gong*₁ 公 [1173a] *^akoŋ > kuwng ‘father; prince’).

Two referential kinship terms in the modern Minnan dialect (Xiamen): *ta*₃₃-*kuã*₄₄ ‘husband’s father’ (*kuã*₄₄ = *guan*₁ 官 ‘official, mandarin’) and *ta*₃₃-*ke*₄₄ ‘husband’s mother’, have prefix *ta*₃₃. Tung (1993) argued that prefix *ta*- goes back to a Yue 越 substratum in Minnan.

2.3 Unclear if noun or verb *duo*₃ 髻 [11j] *^at-lojʔ > twaX (pron. acc. to *Jing Dian Shi Wen*) ‘cutting of the hair of a young child three months of age before presentation to the father’ (*Li Ji, Nei Ze* 20). Again GSR 11 is a lateral series and a prefix *t- is needed to explain the occurrence of initial t- in it. The word-base is perhaps *duo*₄ 墮 [11e] *^alojʔ > dwaX ‘to fall’.

*zhi*₄ 錐 *^bt-rit > trit ‘harvesting knife’ (though the word may originally have meant ‘to harvest’, as proposed by Karlgren)

References

- Baxter, W. H. III (1992) *A Handbook of Old Chinese phonology*. Trends in Linguistics Studies and Monographs 64. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter. 922 pages.
- Maspero, H. (1930) Préfixes et dérivation en chinois archaïque. *Mémoires de la Société de Linguistique de Paris* No. 23, cinquième fascicule, 313-27.
- Sagart, L. (1993) New views on Old Chinese phonology. *Diachronica* vol. X, NO.2: 237-260.
- Schuessler, A. (1987) *A dictionary of early Zhou Chinese*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press. 876 p.
- Tung, Chung-szu 董忠司 (1993) *Gudai Dong-Nan-Ya yige yuyan jiaorong de henji* (古代東南亞一個語言交融的痕跡) [Traces of an instance of language mixture in early south-east Asia]. Paper presented at the 2nd International Conference on Chinese linguistics, Paris, June 23-25, 1993.

sagart@ehess.fr