

The Historical Phonology of Tibetan, Burmese, and Chinese

The discovery of sound laws by comparing attested languages is the method which has unlocked the history of European languages stretching back thousands of years before the appearance of written records, e.g. Latin *p*- corresponds to English *f*- (*pes*, foot; *primus*, first; *plenus*, full). Although Burmese, Chinese, and Tibetan have long been regarded as related, the systematic exploration of their shared history has never before been attempted. Tracing the history of these three languages using just such sound laws, this book sheds light on the prehistoric language from which they descend. Written for readers with little linguistic knowledge of these languages, but fully explicit and copiously indexed for the specialist, this work will serve as the bedrock for future progress in the study of these languages.

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University of London*



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To John Okell

Noch ist nicht ein einziges Gesetz, vorab kein Lautensprechungs-
gesetz gefunden worden. Und gerade Lautensprechungsgesetze
sind doch die Grundlage jeder Weiterforschung und darum das Ziel,
dem vor allen Dingen zuzustreben ist.

(Conrady 1896: viii)

Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>page xi</i>
<i>Note on Abbreviations and Conventions</i>	<i>xiii</i>
Introduction	1
1 Tibetan	3
1.1 Old Tibetan	5
1.2 Classical Tibetan	7
1.3 The Bodish Languages	7
1.4 Tibetan Diachronic Phonology	8
1.4.1 From Old Tibetan to Proto-Bodish	9
1.4.2 Reprise: From Proto-Bodish to Old Tibetan	21
1.4.3 From Proto-Bodish to Trans-Himalayan	22
1.4.4 Reprise: From Trans-Himalayan to Proto-Bodish	44
1.4.5 Diachronic Mysteries	45
2 Burmese	46
2.1 Old Burmese	46
2.2 Written Burmese	51
2.3 The Burmish Languages	51
2.4 The Loloish Languages	54
2.5 Burmese Diachronic Phonology	54
2.5.1 From Burmese to Proto-Burmish	54
2.5.2 Reprise: Proto-Burmish to Old Burmese	69
2.5.3 From Proto-Burmish to Trans-Himalayan	69
2.5.4 Reprise: Trans-Himalayan to Proto-Burmish	82
2.5.5 Diachronic Mysteries	82
3 Chinese	84
3.1 Old Chinese	85
3.1.1 Middle Chinese	86
3.1.2 Rhymes of the <i>Shījīng</i>	102
	vii

viii	Contents	
	3.1.3 Structure of Chinese Characters	104
	3.1.4 Less Traditional Sources of Data for Reconstructing Old Chinese	107
3.2	Simplex Initials of Old Chinese	113
	3.2.1 Internal Reconstruction of Middle Chinese Initials	113
	3.2.2 Expanding the Old Chinese Initials Using <i>Xiéshēng</i> Evidence	116
3.3	Old Chinese Pre-initials	122
	3.3.1 Reconstructing Tight Pre-initials Using <i>Xiéshēng</i> Evidence	126
	3.3.2 Reconstructing Tight Pre-initials on the Basis of Morphological Speculation	141
	3.3.3 Reconstructing Tight Pre-initials Using Proto-Mǐn	150
	3.3.4 Reconstructing Tight Pre-initials Using Loans into Vietic	155
	3.3.5 Reconstructing Tight Pre-initials Using Loans into Hmong-Mien	162
	3.3.6 Reconstructing Tight Pre-initials Using Loans into Tai-Kadai	163
	3.3.7 Reconstructing Loose Pre-initials	163
	3.3.8 Reconstructing Loose Pre-initials Using Proto-Mǐn	164
	3.3.9 Reconstructing Loose Pre-initials Using <i>Xiéshēng</i> Evidence	166
	3.3.10 Reconstructing Loose Pre-initials Using Loans into Non-Sinitic Languages	169
	3.3.11 Reconstructing Loose Pre-initials on the Basis of Morphological Speculation	172
3.4	Old Chinese Medial *-r-	173
3.5	Old Chinese Vowels	173
	3.5.1 Asymmetries in Type A Rimes with Velar Codas	174
	3.5.2 Origin of Some -w- (合口 <i>Hékǒu</i>) Rimes in Labio-velar Initials	175
	3.5.3 The ‘R-Hypothesis’: Origin of the Vowels -ae- and -ea-	175
	3.5.4 Asymmetries in Type A Rimes with Dental Codas	176
	3.5.5 The ‘Rounded-Vowel’ Hypothesis: Origin of the Remaining -w- (合口 <i>Hékǒu</i>) Rimes	177
	3.5.6 W-Neutralization	178
	3.5.7 ‘A-Raising’, ‘Acute Fronting’, and ‘I-Raising’	179
	3.5.8 Hi > Mid	180
	3.5.9 Asymmetries in Type B Rimes with Dental Codas	181
3.6	Origins of the Tones and Final Clusters	182
	3.6.1 Distribution of Middle Chinese Tones in <i>Xiéshēng</i> Series and the <i>Shījīng</i>	182

Contents	ix
3.6.2 Origin of the Departing Tone	183
3.6.3 Origin of the Rising Tone	186
3.7 Finals of Old Chinese	186
3.7.1 <i>-*aj</i> Monophthongization	187
3.7.2 Final <i>*-r</i>	187
3.8 How to Reconstruct a Word in Old Chinese	188
3.9 From Old Chinese to Trans-Himalayan	194
3.9.1 Merger of Velars and Dentals after <i>-i-</i>	194
3.9.2 Labial Neutralization	195
3.9.3 Inability to Distinguish <i>*-u-</i> and <i>-ə-</i> before Acutes	195
3.9.4 Inability to Recognize <i>-r-</i> in Certain Circumstances	196
3.9.5 Coblin's Conjecture: <i>*Tr-</i> < <i>*rT-</i>	197
3.9.6 Pulleyblank's Conjecture: <i>*Cr-</i> < <i>*RC-</i>	200
3.9.7 Old Chinese <i>*-k</i> < <i>*-k</i> , <i>*-kə</i>	201
3.9.8 Old Chinese <i>*-ʔ</i> < <i>*ʔ</i> , <i>*-q</i>	202
3.9.9 <i>*-j</i> < <i>*-j</i> , <i>*-l</i>	204
3.9.10 <i>*-r</i> < <i>*-r</i> , <i>*-rl</i>	206
3.9.11 The Correspondence of Chinese <i>*-o-</i> to Tibetan <i>-u-</i>	208
3.10 Reprise: Trans-Himalayan to Old Chinese	210
3.11 Diachronic Mysteries	210
4 Trans-Himalayan	211
4.1 Overview of Trans-Himalayan Phonology	211
4.2 Initials of Trans-Himalayan	212
4.2.1 Simplex Resonants	212
4.2.2 Simplex Obstruents	219
4.3 Vowels of Trans-Himalayan	236
4.3.1 The Vowel <i>*-a</i>	236
4.3.2 The Vowel <i>*-e</i>	236
4.3.3 The Vowel <i>*-i</i>	237
4.3.4 The Vowel <i>*-o</i>	238
4.3.5 The Vowel <i>*-u</i>	239
4.3.6 The Vowel <i>*-ə</i>	241
4.3.7 Unexpected Vowel Correspondences	242
4.4 Finals of Trans-Himalayan	244
4.4.1 Final <i>*-ʔ</i>	244
4.4.2 Final <i>*-q</i>	244
4.4.3 Final <i>*-k</i>	245
4.4.4 Final <i>*-ŋ</i>	246
4.4.5 Final <i>*-p</i>	247
4.4.6 Final <i>*-m</i>	247
4.4.7 Final <i>*-t</i>	248

x	Contents	
	4.4.8 Final *-n	248
	4.4.9 Final *-r	249
	4.4.10 Final *-j	250
	4.4.11 Final *-l	251
	4.4.12 Final *-rl	252
	4.4.13 Irregular Finals	254
	4.5 Reprise of Diachronic Mysteries	257
	4.6 Concluding Remarks	257
	<i>Appendix: Complete Lists of Examples</i>	259
	<i>References</i>	291
	<i>Index Verborum</i>	310
	<i>Index Rerum et Nomum</i>	346
	<i>Index Legum</i>	370

Figures

1.1 The Tibetan alphabet	page 6
1.2 Bodish <i>Stammaum</i> (after Shafer 1966: 113)	8
1.3 Bodish <i>Stammaum</i> (after Hill 2010b: 111)	8
1.4 <i>Stammaum</i> of the Bodish family proposed here	8
2.1 The Burmese alphabet	47
2.2 Burmese simplex onsets	47
2.3 Old Burmese consonant clusters	48
2.4 The rimes of Old Burmese	49
2.5 Written Burmese consonant clusters	50
2.6 Rimes of Written Burmese	50
2.7 The Burmish language family	52
3.1a Opening of the <i>Qièyùn</i> from a Dūnhuáng fragment	88
3.1b Transcription and translation of Figure 3.1a	89
3.2 Two homophone groups from the 刊謬補缺切韻 <i>Kānmiù Bǔquē Qièyùn</i> of 706 CE	91
3.3 The <i>fānqiè</i> onset speller chains \check{c}_1 - and \check{c}_2 -, distinguishable in the <i>Qièyùn</i> but not in the rime tables	93
3.4 The <i>fānqiè</i> onset speller chains l_1 - and l_2 -, distinguishable in the <i>Qièyùn</i> but not in the rime tables	94
3.5 The forty-two initials of the <i>Qièyùn</i>	96
3.6 Chart 23 from the <i>Yùnjìng</i>	96
3.7 Chart 23 of the <i>Qīyīnlüè</i>	97
3.8 Co-occurrence of rimes of the four divisions with various types of Middle Chinese initials	98
3.9 Co-occurrence of the rimes of type A and B with various types of Middle Chinese initials	99
3.10 Proto-Mǐn correspondences to Middle Chinese 並 <i>b</i> -	108
3.11 Combining the evidence of Kra-Dai, Vietic, and Mǐn	110
3.12 Old Chinese initials on the basis of Middle Chinese internal reconstruction	114

xii	List of Figures	
3.13	The Middle Chinese complementary distribution of 群 <i>g-</i> and 匣 <i>h-</i>	114
3.14	The development of Old Chinese voiceless resonants in Middle Chinese	118
3.15	The development of Old Chinese simplex uvulars in Middle Chinese	120
3.16	Old Chinese simplex initials	121
3.17	Middle Chinese reflexes of * <i>s-</i>	144
3.18	Middle Chinese division- <i>i/iv</i> syllable types in final <i>-ng</i>	174
3.19	Middle Chinese division- <i>i/iv</i> syllable types in final <i>-ng</i> with the supposition of labio-velar initials	174
3.20	Revised type A syllables with final * <i>-ŋ</i>	176
3.21	Middle Chinese division- <i>i/iv</i> syllable types in final <i>-n</i>	177
3.22	Labio-velar initials (division- <i>i/iv</i> in final <i>-n</i>)	177
3.23	Breaking of rounded vowels (division- <i>i/iv</i> in final <i>-n</i>)	178
3.24	The non-rhyming of 奔 <i>pwon</i> (33–28a) and 門 <i>mwon</i> (33–35a)	179
3.25	W-neutralization (division- <i>i/iv</i> in final <i>-n</i>)	179
3.26	The distribution of Middle Chinese type B rimes before <i>-n</i>	179
3.27	Hi > mid (division- <i>i/iv</i> in final <i>-n</i>)	180
3.28	Six vowels in type B rimes before <i>-n</i>	181
3.29	Six vowels in type A rimes before <i>-n</i>	181
3.30	The Mon–Khmer origins of Vietnamese tones	183
3.31	The 去聲 <i>qùshēng</i> tone transcribing foreign <i>-s</i>	184
3.32	The 去聲 <i>qùshēng</i> tone as Korean <i>-s</i>	185
3.33	Old Chinese origins of Middle Chinese initials	190
4.1	Trans-Himalayan segmental inventory	212

Note on Abbreviations and Conventions

Tibetan is transliterated in the pre-2015 Library of Congress transliteration system with the following changes: ‘*h*’ rather than apostrophe, ‘*c*’ rather than ‘*ç*’, and ‘*j*’ rather than ‘*ǰ*’. Burmese also follows the Library of Congress system, with the exception that ‘*h*’ and ‘*ʔ*’ are used rather than “ and ’. For Chinese I provide the character followed by Baxter’s Middle Chinese (1992), an Old Chinese reconstruction taken from or compatible with the current version of Baxter and Sagart’s system (2014), and the character number in Schuessler (2009). As in Baxter’s own recent work, for Middle Chinese I use ‘*ae*’ and ‘*ea*’ in place of his original ‘*æ*’ and ‘*ɛ*’. I do not, however, follow him in changing ‘*ʔ*’ to ‘+’. When citing sources originally written in the International Phonetic Alphabet I use ‘*s*’ instead of ‘*ʃ*’ and ‘*c*’ instead of ‘*tʃ*’. Otherwise, the following symbols and abbreviations are used:

*	unattested
√	root
Bur.	Burmese
Chi.	Chinese
fut.	future
Kur.	Kurtöp (<i>apud</i> Hyslop 2011)
MChi.	Middle Chinese
Mon.	Mtsho-sna Monpa, Wenlang dialect (<i>apud</i> Lu 1986)
OBur.	Old Burmese
OChi.	Old Chinese
pres.	present
Rgy.	Rgyalrong
Tib.	Tibetan
OTib.	Old Tibetan
WTib.	Written Tibetan
SBur.	Spoken Burmese
WBur.	Written Burmese
VN	Vietnamese (<i>apud</i> Baxter and Sagart 2014)

xiv Note on Abbreviations and Conventions

- Atsi (*apud* Lustig 2010)
 Lashi (*apud* Nishi 1999) I make the following orthographic substitutions
 when citing tones ³³ > Ø, ³¹ > V, ⁵⁵ > H, ⁵³ > X
 Achang (*apud* Nishi 1999) I make the following orthographic substitutions
 when citing tones ⁵⁵ > Ø, ³¹ > H, ³⁵ > X
 Xiandao (*apud* Nishi 1999) I make the following orthographic substitutions
 when citing tones ⁵⁵ > Ø, ³¹ > H, ³³ > X¹

¹ Xiandao also has a 35 tone, which I leave in numeric notation.