

Abstract

The Medial Systems of Old Chinese and Proto-Sino-Tibetan

by

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This dissertation examines the reconstruction of medial elements in Old Chinese [OC], the earliest recoverable stage of Chinese, and in Proto-Sino-Tibetan [PST], the ancestor of both Chinese and the Tibeto-Burman [TB] family of languages. In recent decades new contributions have been made by a number of scholars to the reconstruction of OC and of Proto-Tibeto-Burman [PTB]. Through comparison of OC and PTB it is now possible to take advantage of these contributions to further improve our understanding of the phonological systems of both OC and PST.

For the purposes of this study, “medial” is broadly defined as any segment or sequence of segments within a syllable which intervene between the initial consonant and the main vowel. The study is thus concerned primarily with glides **j** and **w** and liquids **r** and **l**. Through a thorough examination of OC and PTB cognates, an attempt is made to resolve some of the questions and controversies involving their reconstruction.

Chapter 1 introduces the scope and nature of the study and lays the methodological groundwork for the analysis.

Chapter 2 presents a detailed review and critique of the medial systems of four major reconstructions of Old Chinese, those of Li Fang-kuei, Edwin G. Pulleyblank, William H. Baxter, and Gong Hwang-cherng.

Chapter 3 reviews the major reconstructions of PTB and PST, outlining the work of Paul K. Benedict, James A. Matisoff, Nicholas Bodman, W. South Coblin, Gong Hwang-cherng, and Ilia Peiros and Sergej A. Starostin.

Chapter 4, the bulk of the study, is an in-depth look at each of the four major medials: **l**, **r**, **w**, and **j**. In each section, the appropriate reconstruction of the medial element is reconsidered based on comparisons between reconstructed OC and PTB forms.

Chapter 5 summarizes the conclusions of the study. A number of new proposals are put forth for revised reconstructions of medials, initial clusters, and vowels in OC. These revisions have important implications for reconstructing the basic syllable structure and phonotactics of OC, and for charting the development of medials from the PST to OC stages.