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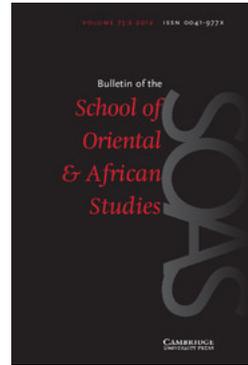
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TIBETAN SO AND CHINESE YA ‘TOOTH’

By WALTER SIMON

THERE would seem little to commend the establishment of an etymological equation between Tibetan *so* ‘tooth’ and Chinese *ya* 牙 of the same meaning, even after substituting for the northern pronunciation *ya* of the latter word the Cantonese pronunciation *nga*, which is identical with Karlgren’s reconstruction of the ‘ancient’ Chinese sound, and almost identical with his reconstruction of the ‘archaic’ sound value as *ngã*.¹

In fact, the obvious relationship between the Tibetan and Chinese words for ‘I’, *ña* and (Ancient and Archaic) *ngã* 我 should prove a very strong deterrent against any further attempt to consider an etymological relationship between the two words for ‘tooth’. So I refrained many years ago from suggesting in print an archaic **sngwa* which occurred to me as a possibility, when taking into account at the same time Burmese ဝ့ဝ်: *swāi* (modern ‘*Ōwa*:’).

However, two important suggestions concerning the reconstruction of archaic Chinese initial clusters consisting of a sibilant followed by a guttural would seem to make the proposed equation less hazardous.

The first suggestion, viz. that of an initial cluster *zng-*, was made by Professor Li Fang-kuei. In his article ‘Some old Chinese loan words in the Tai languages’² he directs attention to Tai words for the Chinese cyclical sign *wuu* 午 (Karlgren, loc. cit., p. 142, No. 60 a-e: ancient *nguo*, archaic *ngo*), like Ahom *shi-nga*, Lü *sa-ya*, and Dìoi *sa*, and writes as follows: ‘Here forms *shi-nga*, *sa-ya* and *sa*, all point back not to a simple guttural nasal but to a compound initial somewhat like *zŋ-* (not *sŋ-* which would give us a different set of tones according to tone rules in Tai)’.⁴

The second suggestion comes from Dr. Paul Serruys. It is included in his important thesis on the *Fangyan* 方言⁵ which is as yet unpublished. In the section devoted to the reconstruction of Archaic Chinese, he writes (typescript copy, p. 224) as follows: ‘Medial *-i-* could be a remnant of consonants other than *-l-*, e.g. *-ŷ-*. In the group 呂: 莒, *k̄io* < *klo*, and *l̄io* < *gl̄io* ~ *l̄yo*, the possibility *kl-* ~ *lk-*, *gl-* ~ *ly-*, as a development from an earlier *L* where *kl-* ~ *lk-*, *lg-* ~ *gl-* are phonologically irrelevant realizations, accounts for medial *-i-* in both cases as a vocalization of the second consonant of the cluster. In the formula *k̄lio*: *gl̄io* or *klo*: *gl̄io*, the *-i-* is not accounted for in the groups where it appears in some words and not in others. Thus *ŷiəp* 荔, *xiəp*, *xiəp* 齊, *lije*, *liei* 荔; *láp*, *láp* 摺 from archaic *g’lap*, *xlám*, *xláp*, *l̄yieb* > *lyje*, *lyeb*

¹ B. Karlgren, *Grammata Serica*, Stockholm, 1940, p. 134, No. 37 a-b.

² Karlgren, loc. cit., p. 125, No. 2 a-g.

³ *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, VIII, 1944-5, 333-42.

⁴ loc. cit., 339. See now also N. C. Bodman, *A linguistic study of the Shih Ming*, Cambridge, Mass., 1954, 61, who avails himself of this suggestion.

⁵ *Prolegomena to the study of the Chinese dialects of Han time according to FANG YEN*, by Paul L.-M. Serruys, C.I.C.M., University of California, Berkeley, 1955.

> -d > -i, gləp. Also: 令 *liěn*, 儜 *liěng*, 憐 *lien*, 冷 *lmg*, 齡 *g'ǐěn* from *lýěn*, *lýěng*, *glǎng*, *g'lěn(g)*?

In a note (No. 143) to this paragraph Dr. Serruys explains that 'the symbol -*ŷ*- indicates a velar fricative with a tendency towards palatalization' but he leaves open the possibility that it was hardly distinct from -*ɣ*-. If one takes into account the fact that the transition from *ɣ* to *i* in *final* position was proposed long ago,¹ one may wonder how far the assumption of a *palatalized* velar fricative is in fact necessary. But Dr. Serruys' main assumption is, without a doubt, of paramount importance.² Not only will it throw new light on phonetic series which have long been established. It will also allow the inclusion of words in phonetic series from which it has hitherto seemed reasonable to exclude them in spite of Sheu Shenn 許慎's statement to the contrary.

The phonetic series 牙 is a case in point. Nobody has so far objected to Karlgren keeping as two separate phonetic series *ngâ* 牙 'tooth' and *ziâ* 邪 'place name' (*Grammata Serica*, Nos. 37 and 47, and before *Analytic dictionary of Chinese and Sino-Japanese*, Paris, 1923, Nos. 208 and 226) since Sheu Shenn's explanation of *ya* being phonetic³ did not seem to deserve credence. In the light of Professor F. K. Li's and Dr. Serruys' investigations Sheu Shenn's analysis would now appear to have been correct. *ziâ* < *zyâ* (or, in the meaning of 'depraved', *dziâ* < *dzyâ*) may well be combined in the same phonetic series with **sngâ* (> *zngâ*?) or an even earlier **sngwâ* (> *zngwâ*?). His analysis can now be further substantiated by the proposed etymological relationship between the Tibetan and Chinese words for 'tooth'.

¹ See *Mitt. Sem. Or. Sprachen*, xxx, Abt. I, 1927, p. 152.

² Dr. Serruys also suggests a *u*-vocalization of *ɣ*.

³ *Shuowen jieetzyh*, J. 6 *shiah*, Radical No. 229: 从邑牙聲.