Trans-Himalayan *g- and *sr-

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1. Trans-Himalayan *g- versus *j-. Axel Schuessler (2015: 590) argues, in his review of Baxter & Sagart’s Old Chinese: a new reconstruction (2014), that where Baxter & Sagart reconstruct *g- the following examples suggest Old Chinese *j-.

Chi. 羊 yang < *gaŋ ‘sheep’ (03-39a), Tib. ལྷ་ཀར་ g.yaṅ-dkar, Japhug Rgy. qazō < *(qa-)jaŋ, Zbu Rgy. k-ix?

Chi. 䖉 zjang < *sgaŋ (03-39n) ‘auspicious’, Tib. ལྷ་ g.yaṅ

Chi. 産 yangX < *gaŋ? (03-39r) ‘itch’, Tib. ལྷ་ g.yaṅ, Japhug Rgy. ṛṣa < *(r)ja

In a reply to Schuessler’s review, Baxter & Sagart instead propose that Tib. g.y- is a regular reflex of *g- and, by implication, that their proposal is superior by virtue of taking account of the velar initial in the relevant Tibetan words. ¹

1a. There is a counterexample, in which Tib. g.y- corresponds to a Chinese velar rather than a Chinese uvular.

Chi. 軍 kun < *[k]ʷə (34-13a) ‘army’, Tib. ལྷ་ g.yul ‘army, battle’

In another counterexample Tib. g.y- corresponds to Chi. *m-qʷ- or *gʷ- in Baxter & Sagart’s reconstruction.

Chi. 右 hjuwH < *m-qʷə-s ~ *m-qʷəʔ, hjuwX < *[g]ʷəʔ (04-17i) ‘right hand’, Tib. ལྷ་ g.yas < *gyas ‘right’, Bur. ṛṣa yā

1b. The correspondence of Tib. g.y- to Chi. *gʷ- (or *m-qʷ- > *gʷ-) may not at first sight appear exceptional to Tib. g.y- : Chi. *g-. But, if we read further in their reply, it turns out that in their defence of *gʷ- as the origin of Middle Chinese ḫj-, as opposed to Schuessler’s *w-, they propose Tib. g- (not g.y-) : Chi. *gʷ-.

¹ Jacques (2013: 295 note 6) two years earlier offered the same proposal as Schuessler. As a fourth example in favour of *j- Schuessler (2015: 590) also points to Chi. 羊 yang < *gaŋ (03-39h) ‘vast’, Tib. ལྷ་ g.yis-po. Baxter & Sagart instead suggest that the Chinese cognate of Tib. ལྷ་ g.yis-po is “a Chinese root beginning in a glottal stop, not a uvular: *ʔaŋ ‘broad, full, ample, swollen’, which includes ḫan and yāŋ 汎” (2017: 573). They do not offer reconstructions for these words, but presumably intend ལྷ་ angH < *ʔaŋ (03-20i) ‘fill to overflow’ and 汎 jang < *ʔaŋ (03-20g) ‘great, expansive’.

2 Baxter & Sagart preface their statement of this correspondence with the caveat “[r]egardless of what g.y- may have stood for phonetically” (2017: 571), implying unawareness of the relevant literature. See Hill 2012.
Chi. 于 hju < *gʷ(ʔ)r(a) (01-23a) 'go', Tib. མཁ མཁ མཁ < * hgʷra (Lauffer's law) < * hcʷra
Chi. 丈 hju < *[g]ʷ(ʔ)as (01-23o) 'taro', Tib. མཁ མཁ མཁ < * gʷra (Lauffer's law) < * gʷra
'potentilla anserina', WBur. གIFA གIFA = *Qʷa 'elephant foot yam'
Chi. 亠 hwan < *[g]ʷar (25-12a) 'turn around', Tib. མཁ མཁ མཁ མཁ < * sgʷar (Lauffer's law)
< * soʷar 'round', WBur. གIFA གIFA: wahn < *Qʷanän

Additional cognates also support this same correspondence.

Chi. 樺 hwaeH < *[g]ʷras (01-27-) 'birch', Tib. མཁ མཁ མཁ < * gʷra (Lauffer's law) < * gʷra
'birch bark'
Chi. 友 hjuwx < *[g]ʷaʔ (04-17e) 'friend', Tib. མཁ མཁ མཁ མཁ < * gʷrags (Lauffer's law)
< * gʷrags 'friend'
Chi. 胃 hjiwiiH < *[g]ʷa[t]s (31-05a) 'stomach', Tib. མཁ མཁ མཁ < * gʷrad (Lauffer's law)
< * gʷrad
Chi. 逝 hjwij < *[g]ʷa[j] (28-05d) 'go against', Tib. མཁ མཁ མཁ < * gʷral (Lauffer's law)
< * gʷral 'part, deviate'
Chi. 羽 hjuX < *[g]ʷ(ʔ)r(a) (01-24a) 'feather', Tib. མཁ མཁ མཁ < * sgʷra (Lauffer's law) < * sgʷra
1c. Baxter and Sagart offer their own two counterexamples to Tib. g.y.: Chi. * g-, in which
Tibetan instead has g-. They offer no reason for the divergent Tibetan outcomes g- and g.y.-
Chi. 廿 yinH < *[g]ʷa[n]-s (GSR???) 'small of the back', Tib. མཁ མཁ མཁ < * gʷalpa
Chi. 媺 zjaenH < *s.gar (03-39-) 'to pass, go beyond', Tib. མཁ མཁ མཁ < * gʷral 'to step, pass or climb
over'

I am able to offer a further cognate in support of the same correspondence.

Chi. 治 heap < *[g]ʷr(a)ʔ (37-01m) 'accord with', Tib. མཁ མཁ མཁ < * hgrub < * hgrup 'accomplish,
achieve'

1d. Overall, the evidence points against Schuessler's *w-, but the evidence against his *j- is
weaker; the outcomes Tib. g- versus g.y.- are not predicted by Baxter & Sagart's Old Chinese.

2. Development of Trans-Himalayan *sr-.

We reconstruct 三 三 "three" as *s.rum based in part on phonetic rón积极 in the old alternative graph 三 三. Schuessler sees no trace of a rhotic in TB "three" and concludes that we must be wrong about OC. What needs to be explained is the absence of *r in TB. Handel (2002: 13) proposed that PST *sr- evolved to PTB *s- preceding nonfront vowels, for instance in shā 沙 *sːraj “sand”: WT sa “earth”; compare the
front-vowel word shī 水 *sːrik “louse”: Lushai [Mizo] hrik, Japhug rGyalrong zruy
(Jacques 2015). “Three” is an additional example of the TB *sr- > s- change. (Baxter
Handel offers an explanation for the correspondence of *sr- in Chinese to Tib. s- (or š-) seen in the following examples, namely that Chinese maintains inherited *sr-, which Tibetan (and all languages of the family except Chinese) simplify to s- before vowels other than inherited *-e- and *-i- (2009: 201-209).³

3 I omit a few of Handel's weaker cognate proposals. Their weaknesses are discussed in my forthcoming book.

Chi. srit < *sri[k] (29-35a) 'louse', Tib. sig

Chi. sreat < *srat (21-29d) 'kill', Tib. vsad (pres. gsum, Bur. sat < *sat, Lashi šatH

Chi. sam < *srum (38-30a) 'three', Tib. gsum, Bur. sumh < *sumh, Lashi somH

Chi. srae < *s'raj (18-15a) 'sand', Tib. sa 'earth', Bur. sai 'sand'

Chi. sreat < *srat (21-29d) 'kill', Tib. vsad (pres. gsum, Bur. sat < *sat, Lashi šatH

Chi. srae < *s'raj (18-15a) 'sand', Tib. sa 'earth', Bur. sai 'sand'

Chi. srit < *sri[k] (29-35a) 'louse', Tib. sig

Chi. sraeng < *s.reŋ (09-25g) 'son-in-law', Tib. sring-mo 'sister of a man'

Chi. sreanX < *s'rar (34-46a) 'produce', Tib. srel 'rear, bring up'

Chi. sraewk < *s'rok (11-21o) 'suck, inhale, WBur. sok < *šuk 'drink', Lashi šukH

To these one can further offer the following comparisons:

Chi. sam < *srum (38-30a) 'three', Tib. gsum, Bur. sumh < *sumh, Lashi somH

Chi. that < *t'at (21-24i) 'otter', Tib. sram, Bur. phyam, Lashi šam

The five examples 'kill', 'sand', 'three', 'son-in-law', and 'produce' conform to the pattern Handel describes. He acknowledges that 'louse' contradicts his hypothesis, finding it best to “attribute the variation in Tibetan to an unknown cause” (2009: 209) and criticizing Benedict (1972: 108 n. 304) for setting up *śr- and *sr- on the sole basis of the two outcomes *śr- > š- and *sr- > sr- in Tibetan. The same criticism applies to Jacques' reconstructions of Tib. š- < *sr- versus sr- < *sər- to explain the same two examples (2015: 217). The different reconstructed initials *sr- versus *s.r- in Baxter & Sagart's system implies an explanation similar to Jacques'. For 'otter' Handel resolves the obstacle of sr- in Tibetan appearing before -a- by reconstructing *s'ram 'otter' rather than *sram; for him there is “no apparent cognate in Chinese” (2009: 202 note 20). This *sr- versus *s-...
r- notational slight of hand, exactly akin to the tack of Benedict that Handel rejects, has no descriptive or explanatory power.

2c. Jacques rejects Handel’s explanation of the development of *sr-. First, he objects to the comparison of Chinese ㄦ sreanX < *s-ŋræ? (34-46a) ‘produce’ to Tib. རྒྱ སྲྱེ ‘rear, bring up’ (2015: 216 note 2 on p. 221), but in so doing puts undue weight on Baxter & Sagart’s reconstruction. Handel reconstructs *s’ræn? (2009: 200, 204) and Schuessler *s’ran? / *s’ræn? (2009: 291). Second, Jacques points out that Japhug Rgyalrong maintains medial -r- in at least one cognate where Chinese has the vowel *ə.4

Ch. 参 syim < *srəm (38-29a) ‘rhizome’, Japhug Rgy. ṭr-ṛram ‘root’5

This example suggests that Handel’s proposal may not be correct. Jacques (2015: 219-220) offers three explanations for the attested correspondences: (1). Languages other than Chinese share a change *sr- to s-, conditioned be a following inherited *-a- and possibly also *-o-. (2). Chinese innovates medial *-r- through infixation (cf. Baxter & Sagart 2014: 57-58). (3). Current reconstructions of Old Chinese include too many instances of medial *-r-. Jacques remains agnostic among these three possibilities.

2d. Considering Tibetan correspondences of those Chinese words that have an unexpected medial *-r- permits further contemplation of Jacques’ third option. In most cases Tibetan exhibits a complex onset with a སུན་འཇིག sion-hjug or འགྲོ་ཅན mgo-can consonant, i.e. s-, d-, l-, or g-. The overall pattern of unexpected Chinese *-r- corresponding to Tibetan complex onsets entitles one to speculate that Chinese had some ‘pre-initial’ in these words that conditioned the same effects in Middle Chinese as Old Chinese *-r-. Because it is unlikely that specifically *r- was the ‘pre-initial’ in all of these words, it is more suitable to reconstruct *R- as a convention to mean ‘an indeterminate initial of a complex onset which bears the same effects as *-r-’. Particularly based on the comparison of Tibetan གསོད་ gsod ‘kill’ with Chinese 殺 sreæt < *sræt (21-29d), Pulleyblank posits *ks- as an origin of Middle Chinese 生 sr- (1965: 206-207). Gong similarly proposes *rsat as the origin of Chinese 殺 sreæt < *sræt (21-29d) (2002[2001]: 171).

Ch. 殺 khaewk < *[kʰ]ræk < *R[kʰ]ræ (10-03a) ‘hollow shell, hollow’, Tib. བོད་ skog ‘shell, peel’

Ch. 銀 ngin < *ŋra[n] < *Rŋra[n] (33-01k) ‘silver’, Tib. ༨༨ ཁྲུལ dṇul


Ch. 虎 xuX < *qʰraʔ ‘iger’ < *Rqʰraʔ (01-18b), Tib. བོད་ stag

4 Jacques (2015) also proposes Chi. 色 srik < *srak (05-31a) ‘color, sex, shame’ cognate to Japhug Rgy. ṭr-sraʔ ‘shame’, but has more recently decided that the semantics are not sufficiently compelling (per litteras 27 January 2018).

5 Jacques (2017) further proposes Tib. གྲོམ gšam ‘base, underpart’ as a cognate.
2e. There are two comparisons, in which the Tibetan cognates have a simplex onset; these are apparent counterexamples to Pulleyblank's conjecture.

Chi. *pra < *Rpa (01-51g) 'skin', Tib. *lpags
Chi. *srat < *Rsat (21-29d) 'kill', Tib. āsad (pres. āgsod)
Chi. *srum < *Rsum (38-30a) 'three', Tib. āgsum

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In the first of these apparent exceptions, the Japhug Rgyalrong cognate zrɯɣ 'louse' confirms the Chinese onset *sr- is original. One may suggest that Tibetan underwent a change *sr->ś- conditioned by the vowel -i-. Because the change *sr->ś- preceded Dempsey's law *-eŋ > -iŋ), Tib. śiṅ mo *sr-in-mo 'sister of a man' avoided the former change (cf. Chi. *sreṅ < *s.r-ŋ [09-25g] 'son-in-law'). I have no explanation for the correspondence seen in 'sand'.

3. Burmish sibilant correspondences. I am unable to dispel this miasma and limit myself to presenting the evidence organized according to the proto-Burmish outcome.

3a. *s-:
Bur. *sak 'breath', Lashi sɔʔH, Chi. *sik (05-29a)
Bur. *sak 'tree', Lashi sɔkH, Chi. *sik (29-33n)
Bur. *saŋh 'liver', Lashi səŋH, Chi. *sin (32-33a)
Bur. *saŋh 'liver', Lashi səŋH, Chi. *sin (32-33a)

3b. *ʃ-:
Bur. *ʃak 'life', Lashi *ʃakH, Tib. sroq

3c. *ʃ-:
WBur. *ʃak 'drink', Lashi *ʃukH, Chi. *ʃewk < *ʃrok (11-21o) 'suck, inhale'

3d. *ɬ-:

3e. For three words it is not currently possible to unambiguously determine the proto-Burmish initial as Lashi cognates are unavailable, and other languages (e.g. Atsi) do not maintain
pre-glottalized sibilants.

Bur. က် sai < *sai 'sand', Atsi se¹, Tib. ང་ sa 'earth', Chi. 沙 srae < *sˤraj (18-15a) 'sand'

Bur. ཤོ sīḥ 'separate', Atsi sai³¹ 'differ' (?), Tib. བཞིན gsil 'break down'

Bur. འོ sa 'titivate', Atsi sai⁵⁵ 'redo, repair', Tib. སྭུན gsar 'new', Chi. 鮮 sjen < *ser (23-21a) 'fresh'

3f. Jacques proposes Burmese rh- < *ʔr- as the cognate of Chinese *sr- (2015), offering the following example.

Chi. 生 sraeng < *N.sreŋ (09-25a) 'live, alive', Bur. က်ဥ် rhaŋ 'alive'

This cognate may be valid, but its vowel correspondence is irregular.

3g. In two sibilant correspondence sets no Burmese cognate is available.

Tib. སྲིན་མོ sriṅ-mo < *srei-mo 'sister of a man', Chi. 甥 sraeng < *s.reŋ (09-25g) 'sister's child'

Tib. རིམ་ sams (pres. རིམ་ sams) < *səm 'think', Chi. 心 sim < *səm (38-31a) 'heart'

References


Handel, Zev (2002). ‘Rethinking the medials of Old Chinese: Where are the r’s?’ Cahiers de Linguistique – Asie Orientale 31.1: 3–32.


