

## ALTAIC AND CHINESE

Loanwords from Chinese are certainly well known in quite a number of Altaic languages, starting with Korean and Japanese that have huge Chinese layers in their vocabulary, and ending with Turkic that can be shown to have borrowed several important lexemes from Chinese already on the Proto-Turkic level. This is of course due to China's great political and cultural influence in historical times.

However, not all Chinese-Altaic lexical matches can be explained by borrowings from Chinese. Now that we possess much better knowledge of Chinese and Sino-Tibetan historical phonology and Sino-Tibetan subclassification<sup>1</sup>, it has become possible to identify inherited Sino-Tibetan vocabulary in Chinese and separate it from a large layer of words having no Sino-Tibetan etymology. We also have much more information about adjacent language families, such as Altaic, Austro-Asiatic and Austronesian.

In this paper I shall not discuss lexical contacts between Chinese (Sino-Tibetan) and its Southern neighbours. But I want to draw attention to a large group of lexical matches between Chinese and Altaic that are characterized by the following features:

1. The Old Chinese words are usually attested starting with Early Zhou at the earliest (only a few of them are attested later than 6th century B. C.).
2. For none of these words any Sino-Tibetan parallels have been proposed.
3. On the Altaic side, the words are particularly well represented in the Eastern area (Korean, Japanese and Tungus-Manchu).

---

<sup>1</sup> Due basically to the works: [Benedict 1972; Shafer 1966–1974; DEZC; Baxter 1992; Старостин 1989; Peiros, Starostin 1996].

Cf. the following cases<sup>2</sup>:

OC 爪 *crū?* ‘claw’ : Alt. \**čjūru* (~ -a) ‘to scratch, claw’ > Kor. \**čūr* ‘file’; Jap. \**dir-ŋa-* ‘scratch, claw’; TM \**žurū-* ‘scratch, draw’.

OC 李 *rhə?* ‘plum’ : Alt. \**èrì* ‘plum, fruit’ > Kor. \**irim* ‘clematis berries, akebi seed’; Jap. \**itàpi* ‘Japanese fig’; Turk. \**erük* ‘plum, apricot’; Mong. \**üril* ‘plum’.

OC 兔 *thā(k)s* ‘rabbit, hare’ : Alt. \**tògsu* ‘hare’ > Kor. \**thóski* ‘hare’; Mong. \**togsi-* ‘run away jumping’; TM \**tuksa-* ‘run; hare’.

OC 姑 *kā* ‘father’s sister, aunt, mother-in-law’ : Alt. \**ěk’à* ‘elder sister, mother’ > Kor. \**kjə-* ‘woman’; Jap. \**kaka* ‘mother’; Turk. \**eke* ‘elder sister’; Mong. \**eke* ‘mother’; TM \**eKe* ‘woman; elder sister’.

OC 芥 *krēts* ‘mustard’ [LZ] : Alt. \**kabro(-čV)* ‘a k. of ferment’ > Kor. \**kòr-’áci* ‘wine fungus’; Jap. \**kara-* ‘bitter’, \**karasi* ‘mustard’; Turk. \**Kor-* ‘ferment; bitter’; Mong. \**kowr* ‘poison’.

OC 客 *khṛāk* ‘guest’ : Alt. \**kàra(-kV)* (~ *k’*) ‘opposite, enemy’ > Jap. \**kàtā-ki* ‘enemy’; Turk. \**Kar-* ‘opposite’, \**Karak* ‘bandit’; Mong. \**kar-* ‘foreign, alien’.

OC 盆 *bhān* ‘tub’ : Alt. \**pòjńV* (~ *p’*) ‘vessel; boat’ > Kor. \**pái* ‘boat’; Jap. \**púná-i* ‘boat, vessel’; Mong. \**haji-* ‘ship’.

OC 軌 *kru?* ‘wheel-axle ends’ : Alt. \**kjúru* ‘(wheeled) vehicle’ > Jap. \**kúrúma* ‘vehicle’; Mong. \**kür-diin* ‘wheel’.

OC 凍 *tōŋs* ‘to freeze up’ [LZ] : Alt. \**tunja* ‘cold, frost’ > Jap. \**tumeta-* ‘cold’; Turk. \**doŋ* ‘cold, freeze’; Mong. \**dayara-* ‘freeze’; TM \**doŋota* ‘cold, frost, freeze’<sup>3</sup>.

OC 祖 *čā?* ‘deceased grandfather, ancestor’ : Alt. \**áčV* ‘elder relative, ancestor’ > Kor. \**áčā-* ‘aunt, uncle’; Turk. \**áčaj / \*ěčej* ‘elder relative’.

OC 貢 *kōŋ-s* (< \**kōm-s?*) ‘tribute, present’ : Alt. \**k’òm* ‘offering, respect’ > Kor. \**kōmá* ‘respect’; Jap. \**kuma* ‘offering to gods’; Turk. \**Kom-* ‘inheritance, legacy’.

OC 梅 *mā* ‘Japanese apricot, plum’ : Alt. \**jumu* ‘a k. of fruit or berry’ > Jap. \**úmái* ‘plum’; OT *imiti* ‘hawthorn’; TM \**uma-hta* ‘brier, cornel’.

OC 粒 *rəp* ‘cereals, grain as food’ : Alt. \**àrp’á* ‘barley, millet’ > Jap. \**àpá* ‘millet’; Turk. \**arpa* ‘barley’; Mong. \**arbaj* ‘barley’; Manchu *arfa* ‘barley’.

<sup>2</sup> The Old Chinese forms are given according to the reconstruction in [Старостин 1989]; the Proto-Altaic as well as Korean, Japanese, Turkic and Tungus-Manchu forms are quoted from [EDAL]. While dealing with each individual entry we omit much of the etymological discussion, referring the reader to the corresponding sections in [EDAL].

<sup>3</sup> Jap. *tumeta-* is attributed in [EDAL] to Proto-Altaic \**tumu* ‘cold, snot’; phonetically, however, it is ambiguous and may well reflect Proto-Altaic \**tunja* (cf. especially Tungus-Manchu \**doŋota* with similar suffixation).

OC 麥 *mrāk* ‘wheat, barley’ : Alt. \**m̃iurgu* ‘wheat’ > Kor. \**mír̃h* ‘wheat’; Jap. \**mùnkí* ‘wheat, barley’; TM \**murgi* ‘barley’.

OC 惑 *wāk* ‘to deceive, err’ : Alt. \**uk’è* ‘stupid’ > OJ *wokwo* ‘stupid’; Mong. \*(*h*)*üki* ‘stupid’; Manchu *uxu-ken* ‘stupid’.

OC 棣 *lhāj-s* ‘wild plum’ : Alt. \**ójle* (~ *-i*) ‘small fruit’ > Kor. \**òijás* ‘plum’; Mong. \**ölir* ‘wild apple’; TM \**ulīn-(kta)* ‘wild apple’.

OC 琴 *ghām* ‘a musical instrument with 7 strings’ : Alt. \**kúma* > Kor. \**kàmínkó* ‘a Korean harp of 7 strings’; Turk. \**Komuř* ‘musical instrument’; TM \**kumu-n* ‘music’.

OC 罩 *trāk<sup>w</sup>-s* ‘basket for covering and thus catching fish’ : Alt. \**t’óbru(-kV)* ‘net’ > Kor. \**tărăčhí* ‘basket’; Jap. \**túr-* ‘fishing’; Turk. \**tor* ‘net’; Mong. \**towr* ‘net’; TM \**turku-* ‘to get caught (in a trap, net)’.

OC 農 *nūñ* ‘agriculture; peasant, farmer’ : Alt. \**niànŋu* / \**ñiànŋu* ‘field’ > Kor. \**nón* ‘rice field’; Jap. \**nūa* ‘field’; Turk. \*(*i*)*añır* ‘stubble-field’; Mong. \**nuntug* ‘grazing place’; TM \**ñuñi* / \**ñoñi* ‘place of hunting’.

OC 過 *k<sup>w</sup>āj-s* ‘to pass, pass over’ : Alt. \**kèju* id. > Jap. \**kúaja-*; Chuv. *kaj-* ‘go away’; TM \**kěj-*.

OC 賓 *pin* ‘visitor, guest’ : Alt. \**p’iŋŋi* ‘other, foreign’ > Jap. \**pina* ‘province, barbarians’; Turk. \**öñi* ‘other’; TM \**punŋe* ‘other, someone else’s’.

OC 劍 *kam-s* ‘sword’ : Alt. \**k’emá* ‘sharp, sharp tool’ > Jap. \**kámá* ‘sickle’; TM \**xemer* ‘sharp’.

OC 敵 *dhēk* ‘enemy; enmity’ : Alt. \**dàgì* ‘enemy’ > Kor. \**tōi* ‘barbarian’; Jap. \*(*d*)*ikù-sà* ‘war, warrior’; Turk. \**jagi* ‘enemy, war’; Mong. \**dajin* ‘war’; TM \**dagu-r* ‘friend’.

OC 稷 *cək* ‘non-glutinous variety of broom-corn millet’ : Alt. \**žjúgi* ‘millet’ > Kor. \**čòh* ‘millet’; Turk. \**jügür-* ‘millet’; TM \**žija-* / \**žije-* (~ *-g-*) ‘millet’.

OC 縣 *g<sup>w</sup>ēn-s* ‘district’ [LZ] : Alt. \**kiúne* ‘people, country’ > Jap. \**kúni* ‘country’; Turk. \**Kün* ‘people’; Mong. \**kiyün* ‘person’; TM \**kün-* ‘clan (name)’.

OC 轂 *k(l)ōk* ‘nave of wheel’ : Alt. \**kòlbèkV* ‘wheel hub’ > Jap. \**kàsiki* ‘wheel hub’; Turk. \**Kol-luk* ‘arrow hub’; Mong. \**kolkibči* ‘hub’; Ewk. *kulbukā* ‘hub’.

OC 鵲 *shiak* ‘magpie’ : Alt. \**sako-sako* id. > Jap. \**kàsàsáki*; Turk. \**sagisgan*; Mong. \**siyažigaj*; TM \**saksa(ki)*.

OC 麒麟 *g(h)ə-r(h)ən* ‘unicorn’ (cf. also 麋 *krun* ‘waterdeer’) : Alt. \**gúri(-nV)* ‘deer, game’ > Kor. \**kòrání* ‘deer, elk’; Mong. \**görüye-* ‘antelope, game’; TM (?) \**gurna-* ‘ermine; squirrel’.

OC 茼蒿 *bhə-ləʔ* ‘plantain’ : Alt. \**b̃iola* > Kor. \**pùrò* ‘salad, Lactuca’; Jap. \**bàrà(m)pi* ‘fern’; Turk. \**balgín* ‘viburnum’; Mong. \**bal-* ‘heracleum, angelica’; TM \**boloka* ‘spiraea’.

OC 旃 *b(h)āt-s* ‘streamer’ : Alt. \**pǎdà* ‘flag, standard’ > Jap. \**pátà* ‘flag, banner’; Turk. \**bAd-rak* ‘banner, flag’; Mong. \**bad-* ‘flag, standard’.

OC 豸 *η(h)ān-s* ‘wild dog’ : Alt. \**ηǐndó* ‘dog’ > Jap. \**inú*; Turk. \**it* / \**it*; TM \**ηinda-*.

OC 筥 *kra?* ‘round basket’ : Alt. \**k’ùre* ‘basket’ > Kor. \**kóri*; Jap. \**kuà*; Turk. \**Küri-*; TM \**xurid-* ‘vessel for berries’.

OC 葢 *d(h)əm?* ‘berry (of mulberry tree)’ : Alt. \**čamu* (~ *tj-*) ‘a k. of tree, mulberry’ > Jap. \**tum(u)i* ‘mulberry’; Mong. \**dom* ‘lime-tree’; TM \**žamu* ‘brier’<sup>4</sup>.

OC 緄 *kūn?* ‘cord, string’ : Alt. \**k’ùní* > Kor. \**kính* ‘string, tassel’; Jap. \**kinú* ‘silk, cloth’; Turk. \**köjñe-lek* ‘shirt’; Mong. \**kejeñ* ‘edge of cloth’.

OC 楸 *ghwat* ‘horse-bit’ [Han] : Alt. \**kádù* ‘bridle’ > Kor. \**kùr’ói*; Jap. \**kútúwá*; Mong. \**kada-*; TM \**kadala* / \**kadara*.

OC 獮 *snhar?* ‘autumnal hunt’ : Alt. \**sönu* ‘dog hunt’ > Kor. \**sànhǎñ* ‘hunting’; Jap. \**sùnà-tər-* ‘to fish’ (< \*‘hunt’); Turk. \**sonar* ‘dog hunting’; TM \**suna* ‘dog rope’.

OC 馘 *kʷrāk* ‘cut-off ears of slain enemies, ear-tokens’ : Alt. \**k’ùjlu(-kV)* ‘ear’ > Kor. \**kúí* ‘ear’; Jap. \**kí-k-* ‘hear’; Turk. \**Kul-kak* ‘ear’; Mong. \**kulki* ‘ear-wax; middle ear’; TM \**xül-* ‘to sound’.

OC 劓 *η(h)rets* ‘to cut off the nose’ : Alt. \**ηǐàkča* ‘nose’ > Kor. \**nǎčh* ‘face’; Mong. \**nagčar-kai* ‘back of nose’; TM \**ηiaksa* ‘nose’.

OC 襟 *krəm* ‘overlap of a robe’ : Alt. \**kúro(mV)* > Kor. \**korom* ‘clothes string, lace’; Jap. \**kárámó* ‘clothes’; Turk. \**Kur* ‘belt’; Mong. \**kormaj* ‘lap, skirt’; TM \**kurumV* ‘a k. of upper clothes’.

On the whole, the most plausible solution seems to be to suggest a layer of early Altaic loanwords in Old Chinese, suggesting rather early lexical contacts. not later than 2d millennium B.C. We should note that at least some of them (including Japanese matches) had been known before, but usually treated as early Chinese borrowings in Japanese (e. g. OJ *karasi* ‘mustard’, *ume* ‘plum’, *mugji* ‘wheat’, *kuni* ‘country’, *koromo* ‘clothes’ — see, for instance, [Miller 1972: 203, 235]): a more detailed etymological analysis now allows to revert the direction of borrowing.

The presented analysis can have a number of important implications for untangling the extremely difficult prehistoric situation in China and East Asia.

<sup>4</sup> Only the reconstruction \**čamu* is given in [EDAL]; however, \**tiamu* is not excluded given the absence of the Korean reflex, crucial in this case.