PREFIX T- IN OLD CHINESE[1]

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Abstract: alternations of various types (in the phonetic series; in the script; in the word-families) force us to recognize a prefix t- in Old Chinese. Prominent among words prefixed with t- are intransitive verbs of different kinds (stative verbs; verbs expressing actions or functions of the body) and mass nouns. Examples and counterexamples are discussed.

Keywords: Old Chinese, morphology, phonology, lexicon, prefix.

1. WHY RECONSTRUCT A PREFIX T- ?

*1.1 phonetic series contacts involving *t(h)- and initials other than alveolar stops*

tun_1 涒 *[a]t-khur > thwon 'to vomit' (phonetic is *jun_1* 君 *[b]kur > kjun)

*1.2 interchange between characters apparently showing MC reflexes of OC initial *t(h)- and characters with MC initials reflecting other OC initials*

wei_2 惟 唯 t-wi[j] ~ tə-wi[j] > ywij 'to be' [the OC copula], often written epigraphically by $zhui_1$ 隹 *[b]tu[j] > tsywij 'dove' (this is also an instance of phonetic series contact)

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[1] Chinese forms will be cited according to the formula:
modern standard Chinese [character] *Old Chinese > Middle Chinese 'gloss'.
Example: *tun_1* 涒 *[a]t-khur > thwon 'to vomit'.
Modern Standard Chinese forms are cited in *pin-yin* transcription. Old Chinese (OC): ca. 500 BCE, reconstruction follows Baxter (1992) with emendations in Sagart (1993 and forthcoming).
Middle Chinese (MC, ca. 580 CE): forms are given in Baxter's 'typable' notation (Baxter 1992).

1.3 word-family contacts between words showing MC reflexes of OC *t(h)- and words with MC initials reflecting other OC initials

dan_1 湛 *^{a}t-lim > tom 'sunk in, steeped in' (sc. pleasure): yin_2 淫 *^{b}lim > yim 'to soak; excess; licentious'

zhi_4 躓 *^{b}tr-lit-s > trjijH 'to stumble' : die_1 跌 *^{a}lit > det 'to stumble'

zhi_4 蔕?*^{b}t-lit-s > tejH 'stem of a fruit' : die_2 眣 *^{a}lit > det 'stem' (of a gourd)

he_2 合 *^{a}gip > hop 'to join, unite; to answer': da_2 答 *^{a}t-gip > top^2 'to respond, answer' (this is also an instance of phonetic series contact)

1.4 double readings

zhe_2 慹 *^{b}t-nip > tsyip and *^{a}nip > nep, both readings: 'immobile'

zhe_2 輒 *^{a}t-nep > tep 'immobile' and *^{b}nrep > nrjep 'legs sticking together, unable to walk'

$zhou_1$ 鬻 *^{b}t-luk > tsyuwk 'gruel' and *^{b}luk > yuwk 'to nourish'

gan_1 飦 *^{b}t-kan > tsyen and *^{b}kan > kjon 'gruel'

2. THE FUNCTIONS OF *T-

2.1 in verbs

intransitives

-stative verbs

zhi_4 質 *^{b}t-lit > tsyit 'real, solid, good faith' (compare shi_2 實 *^{b}m-lit > zyit 'solid');

di_4 的 *^{a}t-lewk > tek 'bright, brilliant' and $zhuo_2$ 灼 *^{b}t-lewk > tsyak 'burn; brilliant; illuminate; brightly' (with root root *lewk 'bright, brilliant', as in $zhuo_2$ 濯 *^{a}lrewk > dræwk 'brilliant, fine', yao_4 曜 *^{b}lewk-s > yewH 'shine, brightness')

$zhuang_4$ 戅 *^{a}tr-ŋoŋ-s >traewngH and *^{a}hŋoŋ-s >xuwngH (two readings, both:) 'stupid' (root initial ŋ- is indicated by modern dialects: Hakka, Min);
dan_1 湛 *^{a}t-lim > tom 'sunk in, steeped in' (sc. pleasure, cf. section 1)
zhe_2 慹 *^{b}t-nip > tsyip 'immobile'; zhe_2 輒 *^{a}t-nep > tep 'immobile' (cf. section 1)
zhe_2 懾 *^{b}t-nep > tsyep 'despondent, to fear' (n- indicated by phonetic series)

-color terms

chi 赤 *^{b}t-hlak > tsyhek 'red' (lateral root initial indicated by phonetic series contact)

chu_4 絀 *^{b}tr-kut > trwit 'deep red' (velar root initial cf. chu_1 出 below)

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^{2} Or possibly *^{a}t-lip > top, as there is some evidence that he_2 合 includes a root lip (*^{a}g-lip > hop)

-actions or functions of the body

hui₄ 喙 *$*^b$t-hloj-s > tsyhwejH[3] 'to pant' (*Shi Jing*, Ode 237). root initial hl- is indicated by the phonetic series.

tun₁ 涒 *$*^a$t-khur > thwon 'to vomit' (cf. section 1)

-other intransitives

zhan₃ 輾 *$*^b$tr-nan? > trjenX 'to *roll over*'. Root *initial n-* indicated by phonetic series and word-family connection

zhi₄ 躓 *$*^b$tr-lit-s > trjijH 'to stumble' (cf. above, section 1)

chu₁ 出 *$*^b$t-khut > tsyhwit 'to go out' (velar root initial indicated by phonetic series contact and word-family connection)

wei₂ 惟唯 *$*^b$t-wij ~ *$*^b$tə-wij > ywij 'to be' (cf. above, section 1)

residue

du₄ 斁 *$*^a$t-lak-s > tuH 'to destroy'

Shi Jing: Da Ya, Ode 258 *Yun Han*, 2nd stanza (Karlgren's translation):

Hou₄ Ji₄ bu₄ ke₄	后稷不克	'Lord Millet is powerless
Shang₄ Di₄ bu₄ lin₂	上帝不臨	And God on High does not favour us
hao₄ du₄ xia₄ tu₃	耗斁下土	He wastes and **destroys** the earth below'

da₂ 答 *$*^a$t-gip > top 'to respond' is characterized as a transitive verb by Schuessler (1987: 107)

In Early Zhou texts *zhuo₂* 酌 *$*^b$t-lewk 'to pour with a ladle' sometimes occurs as a one-argument intransitive 'to be served drinks' (Ode 223) and in other instances with a second argument, which designates the vessel or body of liquid (such as a pool) *out of which* liquid is being ladled (*Shi Jing*, Ode 3; Ode 251), or the person *to whom* liquid is ladled (Ode 250). In one case (Ode 220) Karlgren gives a transitive translation:

酌彼康爵

zhuo₂ bi₃ kang₁ jue₂

pour with ladle-that-rest-cup

they fill that cup of rest

The meaning is obscure.

2.2 *in nouns*

mass nouns

zhou₁ 鬻 (and 粥) *$*^b$t-luk > tsyuwk 'gruel' (lateral root initial indicated by second reading and word-family connection)

gan₁ 飦 *$*^b$t-kan > tsyen 'gruel' (velar root initial indicated by phonetic series and second reading)

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[3] Another reading is *$*^b$q-hloj-s > xjwejH (same meaning).

zhi₄ 質 *$*^b$t-lit > tsyit 'good faith; substance'
dan₃ 膽 *$*^a$t-lamʔ > tamX 'gall'
chen₃ 瀋 *$*^b$t-hlimʔ > tsyhimX 'a liquid'

count nouns

zhi₄ 㦲 ?*$*^a$t-lit-s > tejH 'stem of a fruit' (cf. section 1 above)
zhou₃ 肘 *$*^b$tr-kuʔ > trjuwX 'elbow' (to account for the graphic similarity
of the early graph for this word with *jiu₃* 九 *$*^b$kuʔ > kjuwX 'nine')

kin terms

zhong₁ 妐 [1189a] *$*^b$t-koŋ > tsyowng 'husband's elder brother or father'
(compare *gong₁* 公 [1173a] *$*^a$koŋ > kuwng 'father; prince').

Two referential kinship terms in the modern Minnan dialect (Xiamen):
ta₃₃-kuã₄₄ 'husband's father' (*kuã₄₄* = *guan₁* 官 'official, mandarin') and *ta₃₃-ke₄₄*
'husband's mother', have prefix *ta₃₃*. Tung (1993) argued that prefix *ta-* goes back
to a Yue 越 substratum in Minnan.

2.3 Unclear if noun or verb

duo₃ 鬌 [11j] *$*^a$t-lojʔ > twaX (pron. acc. to *Jing Dian Shi Wen*) 'cutting of
the hair of a young child three months of age before presentation to the father' (*Li
Ji, Nei Ze 20*). Again GSR 11 is a lateral series and a prefix *t- is needed to
explain the occurrence of initial t- in it. The word-base is perhaps *duo₄* 墮 [11e]
*$*^a$lojʔ > dwaX 'to fall'.

zhi₄ 銍 *$*^b$t-rit > trit 'harvesting knife' (though the word may originally
have meant 'to harvest', as proposed by Karlgren)

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