

Title: Palatalization and retroflexion in Early Modern Chinese

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From the late Middle Chinese period (1000 - 1300) to the early Modern Chinese period (1300 - 1800), some initial consonants in Mandarin experienced drastic changes, in which velar consonants [k], [k^h], [x], and [n_z] were fronted to alveolo-palatals [t_ç], [t_ç^h], [ç] and palatal-fricative [j]. Then the original [t_ç], [t_ç^h], [ç], and [j] that appeared in earlier-created words (plus part of alveolar consonants [ts], [ts^h], [s]) changed to retroflexes [t_ʂ], [t_ʂ^h], [ʂ], and [ʐ].

Based on the analysis of sound change in some historically related characters, such as

廢 ← 技 ← 支

(kui → t_çu → t_ʂu)

窟 ← 屈 ← 出

(k^hu → t_ç^hu → t_ʂ^hu)

and comparisons of pronunciations in Middle Chinese, Early Modern Chinese, and Standard Chinese, as well as the empirical data recently collected, this paper argues that

- 1) palatalization and retroflexion were two phases of a continual sound change process, like a push chain as described by Lubowicz (2011), rather than two individual events as Wang (1957) suggested;
- 2) palatalization became unconditioned over time, contradictory to the prevailing assumption made by Wang (1957, 1985) and repeated by other phonologists such as Liu (2023) that palatalization could only be triggered by front vowel /i/ or /j/; and
- 3) palatalization and retroflexion in the Chinese language are still in progress, for example,

卡 (k^ha → t_ç^hja); 客 (k^he → t_ç^hje); 更 (kəŋ → t_çŋin),

unlike the claim made by Wang (1957, 1985) and repeated by Liu (2023) that they were completed at the beginning of the nineteenth century “without exception.”

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