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Proceedings of the Tenth Seminar of the International
Association for Tibetan Studies (PIATS 2003), edited by
Christopher I. Beckwith**

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Medieval Tibeto-Burman Languages II: Proceedings of the Tenth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies (PIATS 2003). Edited by Christopher I. Beckwith. Volume 10/1 of the Brill Tibetan Studies Library, edited by Henk Blezer, Alex McKay and Charles Ramble. Leiden/Boston: Brill (2006). 200 pp.

The title of the volume might create an expectation that an attempt is made at extensive coverage of medieval Tibeto-Burman languages. In fact, unlike *The Sino-Tibetan Languages* (Thurgood and LaPolla 2003), *Medieval Tibeto-Burman Languages II* is not an encyclopedic volume, but a collection of research papers, which follows up on the previous volume in the series, *Medieval Tibeto-Burman Languages* (Brill, 2002, likewise edited by C. Beckwith).

The editor's Preface (5 pages) provides a presentation of all the chapters, which compensates in part for the absence of abstracts for individual articles. In terms of practical matters, an index for the entire volume would have been a welcome addition for the reader's orientation.

The volume contains an introduction by the editor, Christopher Beckwith, and eight articles by the participants at the second Medieval Tibeto-Burman Languages Symposium:

Christian Bauer, Kazue Iwasa, Guillaume Jacques, Vadim Kasevich, Rudolf Yanson, and Bettina Zeisler. Only two of the participants (Wolfgang Behr and Abel Zadoks) did not contribute a chapter.

Each author's contribution will be reviewed in turn.

Christopher Beckwith: C. Beckwith's papers are entitled "Towards a Tibeto-Burman Theory" (introductory paper, 38 pp.), "The Sonority Sequencing Principle and Old Tibetan Syllable Margins" (a discussion of Old Tibetan syllable structure, 11 pp.), and "Old Tibetan and the Dialects and Periodization of Old Chinese" (a discussion of the history and relationship of Tibetan and Chinese, starting out from an analysis of 'black' and semantically related words, 22 pp.). Beckwith exposes a criticism of the notion of *Sino-Tibetan*, questioning the existence of Sino-Tibetan and Tibeto-Burman as language families. If these classifications are still in common use, this is because, "To quote Baudelaire, 'an atmosphere of fear envelops the field'" (p. 4). The author proposes various alternative hypotheses on Tibeto-Burman languages and their relationship to neighbouring languages in the course of their history, including hypotheses on "a significant connection between Proto-Chinese and Proto-Indo-European" (p. 32) and on "a loan influence of Proto-Indo-European or Common Indo-European on 'Proto-Sino-Tibetan' at around 4000 B.P." (p. 33). Given the extremely broad scope of the author's reflections in "Towards a Tibeto-Burman Theory" and "Old Tibetan and the Dialects and Periodization of Old Chinese", which encompass both diachronic and synchronic questions, it is not reasonable to expect an equally thorough coverage of all the issues addressed. Limiting the review to my area of expertise, I must

point out that Beckwith's discussion of the notion of lexical tone overlooks important findings reported in the literature on the intonation of the tone systems of Asia. Beckwith questions the notion of phonemic tone, on the grounds that the phonetic realisation of tone in discourse is very variable; his conclusion is that "obviously the textbook definition of tones, or of the phoneme, cannot be correct" (p. 6). In view of the author's insistence on the importance of "*actual connected speech*" (p. 10; emphasis his), it may be relevant to point out some results of phonetic studies of tones in connected speech. Tonal coarticulation and allotonic variation are known to be strong in Southeast Asian languages; this has been investigated experimentally by several studies, among which those of Han and Kim 1974, Brunelle 2003, Michaud and Vu-Ngoc 2004 for Vietnamese, Xu Yi 1997 for Mandarin Chinese. This contextual variability, already noted by Chao Yuen-ren 1933 and Pike 1948:29, does not actually detract from the lexical, phonemic status of these tones; no more than, say, the frequent voicing of unvoiced stops in connected speech in French detracts from the phonemic status, in this language, of the voicing contrast (between /p, t, k, f, s, ʃ/ on the one hand, /b, d, g, v, z, ʒ/ on the other). A useful notion for handling the phenomena touched upon by Beckwith is *stress*, used in several models of Chinese prosody (in particular Chao Yuen-ren 1933, Hoa 1980, Chen 2000); in the model proposed by Shih Chilin 2000 (for the purpose of speech synthesis), these phenomena are treated in terms of a *strength coefficient* associated to each syllable.

Such shortcomings are perhaps inevitable given the very broad scope of Beckwith's papers.

Christian Bauer: Christian Bauer's contribution (4 pages plus references) is entitled "Reflections on early Mon-Burmese grammar". The author, a specialist of Mon, outlines an ambitious research programme, pointing out that the contact between Burmese and Mon involved more complex interactions than was assumed by Yanson 1994. Bauer emphasises the fact that exploiting the written tradition to obtain evidence on the evolution of phonological systems requires great philological cautiousness: he suggests that the investigation into the mutual influence of Burmese and Mon in the course of their history should rely on an in-depth *text typology*. Yanson's contribution, in the same volume, brings out a similar concern: stone inscriptions, or inscriptions on brass bells, are formal texts, made by learned monks or supervised by them, and are very likely to use a conservative spelling; they offer important evidence, but do not allow for straightforward conclusions as to the actual pronunciation at the time of writing (p. 117).

Bettina Zeisler: the paper entitled "The Tibetan understanding of *Karman*: Some problems of Tibetan case marking" (44 pp.) sets out a reflection on 'case marking' in Tibetan. The author proposes to adopt the point of view of a native Tibetan speaker to look at the issue of the reinterpretation of Sanskrit grammatical categories by Tibetan scholars. Her approach does not consist in adopting from the outset labels such as *accusative* and *ergative* to describe the 'case' systems of Sanskrit and Old Tibetan: these typological categories actually cover a wealth of different systems, and they could blind the linguist to the fine detail of the language under investigation. B. Zeisler proposes a detailed investigation into the Sanskrit categories (an analysis hailed by the editor as "a

model of careful scholarship on Tibetan grammatical studies”: p. viii), which sheds new light on the seemingly erroneous equivalences chosen by Tibetan grammarians. The author also adduces detailed evidence from other Tibeto-Burman languages, allowing her to propose generalisations such as: “In contrast to the agreement patterns, which appear to be applied quite consistently, Tibeto-Burman case marking is rather flexible or even unpredictable, as it is governed by pragmatic rather than syntactic or semantic criteria” (p. 87).

Rudolf A. Yanson: Yanson’s article, “Notes on the evolution of the Burmese phonological system” (18 pp.), addresses issues in the dating of evolutions that took place from Old Burmese to Modern Burmese. In particular, Yanson examines the phonetic change from /k/ to /tʃ/ in Burmese: this change is not directly reflected in the orthography, but the appearance of a spelling with a medial glide is interpreted by the author as an indication that the initial had changed to /tʃi/: “... we can assume that as soon as we come across the spellings *ky* or *k^hy* in the inscriptions in places where in Old Burmese we had just *k* or *k^h* followed by *i*, the conclusion can be drawn that the process of evolution of complex palatalized velar initials into simple palatals had been completed (...)” (p. 107). This allows him to propose a datation for the change from /k/ to /tʃ/: it would have been completed by the end of the fifteenth century.

Concerning rhymes, the author argues that the time of the merging of the finals /k/ and /c/, and /ŋ/ and /ɲ/, is around the middle of the eighteenth century, at the same time when /p/ and /t/, and /m/ and /n/, merged; and that the system of

closed rhymes acquired its present phonetic shape before the middle of the eighteenth century (p. 119).

This article illustrates the fact that the evidence offered by the written language is sometimes very indirect, due to conservative orthographic practices.

Guillaume Jacques: In a volume dedicated to the memory of Ksenia Kepping, it is fitting that one of the contributions should bear on the Tangut language. The linguist's use of medieval Tibeto-Burman materials rests on a set of hypotheses, which are by now very solid for some languages (in particular, for the Burman and Tibetan scripts at the time of their creation) but much less for others. In particular, there is a considerable gap to bridge between the system of Tangut initials and rhymes reflected in the Tangut lexicographic tradition (which follows the Chinese principle of *fanqie* 反切, as explained briefly on pp. 121-122) and the actual phonetic value of these categories. Guillaume Jacques bases himself

- for Tangut: on the reconstruction proposed by Gong Hwang-cherng, and on a knowledge of the Russian sources
- for rGyalrong, a modern language likely to be related to Tangut: on his own fieldwork.

These allow Guillaume Jacques to propose a substantial “Essai de comparaison des rimes du tangoute et du rGyalrong” (32 pp.). The paper is in French; it is not very likely that interested readers will understand this language (required languages for Tangut scholars being essentially Russian and Chinese), but the specialist without a command of French will nonetheless be able to appreciate the

information contained in the tables which constitute the core of the paper. This chapter represents a significant step towards a better understanding of the relationships between the two languages compared.

Kazue Iwasa: Kazue Iwasa presents “*Mamuteyi*, Lolo manuscript no. 6 (2) in the library of the Ecole Française d’Extrême-Orient, Paris” (17 pp.). The paper consists of a general presentation of Yi (a.k.a. Lolo) manuscripts, a presentation of the *Mamuteyi* manuscript, and some preliminary reflections on the syntax of the text. The conclusion outlines a promising research programme: an analysis of the written Yi language in light of a comparison with the modern Yi language.

Vadim B. Kasevich: The paper entitled “The Category of Causative in Tibeto-Burman Languages and the Iconicity Principle” proposes a syntactic/semantic analysis of causatives, and a reflection on grammatical iconicity. Readers expecting a discussion of medieval Tibeto-Burman data may be somewhat disappointed: the chapter, which starts out from English and Russian, briefly touches upon one single Tibeto-Burman language (Eastern Sgaw Karen), which provides two of the ten examples discussed in the paper. The bibliography is deliberately short: “The literature on causatives in different languages is really abundant, but I will take the liberty of reducing the bibliographic references to the minimum” (p. 171); the authors quoted are William Croft, Michael Tomasello, Sun Hongkai, Anna Wierzbicka and Ludwig Wittgenstein. The author’s conclusion is that it is doubtful “whether the Iconicity Principle, at least if applied to the category of causative in Tibeto-Burman languages and, more

generally, Sino-Tibetan languages, is as valid an explanatory tool as it is believed by many to be”.

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