# The comparative construction in Sinitic languages: synchronic and diachronic variation.

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# THE COMPARATIVE CONSTRUCTION IN SINITIC LANGUAGES: SYNCHRONIC AND DIACHRONIC VARIATION

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## 6.1 Introduction

Synchronically, to express a comparative of inequality, two comparative construction types predominate in Sinitic languages: Type I *Compare* and Type II *Surpass*. [1] While the Type I *Compare* comparative is synchronically the predominant one in Sinitic languages (see discussion in §6.3 below), the distribution of the Type II *Surpass* comparative is much more widespread than has been previously supposed.

Diachronically, the comparative construction of inequality in Archaic and Pre-Medieval Chinese belongs to Type II *Surpass* in terms of its structure, with the comparative marker being YÚ 于 'to, at'. So too the constructions formed by RÚ 如 'be like' and SÌ 似 'be like', which were subsequently used as comparative markers of inequality in the periods of Early and Late Medieval Chinese.[2] Starting in the Late Medieval period (7th – 13th centuries), we also find a comparative construction belonging to Type I, with BǏ 比 < 'to compare' as the comparative marker. This construction then became the dominant one in Northern Chinese and finally in Standard Mandarin today, totally replacing all the Type II constructions.

In Southern Sinitic, however, where Type I *Compare* had not yet been adopted, verbs such as GUÒ 過 (过) < 'to cross, to surpass' had time to grammaticalize into comparative markers and to replace the other comparative markers used in these Type II head-marking structures (RÚ 如 and SÌ 似). In this analysis, we argue for the position that this is a language-internal development which would be difficult to attribute to any contact-induced grammaticalization.

### 6.1.1 Background to the issue

This section provides the necessary background material to the specific issue at hand, namely the synchronic distribution of comparative construction types in China and the diachronic developments which may have led to this patterning.

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[1] *Compare* type, because the standard comparative marker of this Type I is BǏ 比 whose original meaning is 'to compare'; *Surpass* type, because the origin of the standard comparative marker used in Type II is a verb, GUÒ過(过), meaning 'to surpass'. In this article, we adopt the classification for the main general types of linguistic comparison as used in Huddleston & Pullum (2002:1100).

[2] Note that here we are referring to the syntactic structure as being a head-marking comparative. As will be explained below, the cognitive schemas of *Location* and *Similarity* are associated diachronically with the Type II *Surpass* structure. To be succint, we shall refer to Type II mainly as the *Surpass* comparative, using this as a cover term for the structure.

As foreshadowed above, two dominant structural types have been identified in Sinitic languages for the comparative of inequality:[3]

(i) *Compare* type – Type I dependent-marking $NP_A$– CM – $NP_B$– VP
(ii) *Surpass* type – Type II head-marking $NP_A$– VERB – CM –$NP_B$
(where CM = comparative marker, $NP_A$ = comparee, $NP_B$ = NP acting as standard)

In Standard Mandarin, the language generally used as the representative for Sinitic, the comparative construction has the form, *Marker – Standard of comparison – Verb*, the ordering which cross-linguistically shows a strong correlation with OV, rather than VO languages (Dryer 1992: 91). In other words, it is disharmonic with VO ordering. Hence, a question relevant for the typology of the whole Sinitic taxon is to identify whether this pattern is in general shared across Chinese languages, or if it is restricted to just certain subgroups.

In fact, we find that in the case of the comparative construction, a large number of Sinitic languages do not use this strategy at all natively, but instead employ a *Surpass* or Type II comparative with the configuration *Verb – Marker – Standard of comparison*, a construction which aligns exceptionlessly with SVO languages in the sample established by Stassen (1985) of 110 languages. This pairing similarly shows a strong correlation in a larger sample used by Dryer (1992: 91-92) of 543 languages, grouped by genera and geographical area.

In terms of geography, the *Compare* comparative is essentially found 'natively' in northern China, while the *Surpass* comparative is found in southwestern and southern China. The areas using this pattern include many Hakka and Yue dialects, and even several subgroups of Mandarin. In these cases, the ordering is in perfect harmony with VO constituency.

After establishing the synchronic distribution of the *Surpass* construction, a diachronic sketch of the development of the comparative construction is presented in order to address the issue of whether the *Surpass* comparative is an internal development within Chinese or is a case of contact-induced grammaticalization on the model of languages from surrounding families. Significant for this study, the relevant linguistic area of Mainland Southeast Asia also uses in the main the Type II *Surpass* strategy.

## 6.2 Comparative constructions: Definition

Comparative constructions involve a grading process and typically contain two NPs representing the 'standard' and the 'comparee', a morphological marker of the comparative and a stative predicate denoting the dimension or quality (Stassen 1985, Heine 1997). The comparative marking may also involve a second, degree marker (Heine 1997) which modifies the adjective (if not adverb), such as either the English suffix *–er* or 'more+ADJ', and similarly, French *plus*+ADJ, as well as *khah*[4] 较 'more' in

[3] Chappell (this volume) and Li Lan (2003) discuss the further types of comparative constructions, distributed across Sinitic languages, which are, however, less common. These are the Topic, Transitive Action, and Polarity types.

many Min dialects of China.[4]

In using one object (A, the standard) as a benchmark against which to judge another (B, the comparee), different kinds of comparative constructions are possible depending on whether they express that an entity A has either (i) more, (ii) less or (iii) an equal degree of the given dimension or quality. The first two belong to the comparative of inequality which is divided in this way into superiority and inferiority subtypes. The third is known as the equative and in English uses the form *as ADJ as B* (Huddleston and Pullum 2002: 1100).

More specifically, the comparative of superiority expresses that an entity A possesses a greater quantity or degree than an entity B along a scale for the given dimension, the latter being coded by its predicate. In English, it has the following structure and conforms to the definition of a *Particle* comparative:

$NP_{A[Comparee]}$ – Stative predicate (ADJ + $DEGR_{-er}$) – Comparative $marker_{than}$ – $NP_{B[Standard]}$

(1) Carla is taller than Nicholas.

In contrast to this, the comparative of inferiority uses the adverb 'less' to express a smaller quantity or degree along a scale or continuum for the given quality or dimension:

$NP_{A[Comparee]}$ – *less* – Stative predicate– Comparative $marker_{than}$ – $NP_{B[Standard]}$

(2) Richard is less tolerant about these matters than Erica.

### 6.2.1 Target construction

We single out the comparative of inequality as our target construction in this analysis of Sinitic comparatives. In general, all Chinese languages possess a comparative of inequality of the superiority subtype, known as the *chàbǐjù* 差比句, in Standard Chinese. By way of contrast to English and other European languages, there is, however, no special construction for the comparative of inferiority, that is, of the 'less than' subtype. Thus, comparative constructions (*bǐjiàojù* 比较句) are divided into just two categories for Sinitic: the comparative of superiority or *chàbǐjù* 差比句 and the equative or *děngbǐjù* 等比句 which will not, however, be treated in this analysis.

### 6.2.2 Elements in a comparative of inequality

Up to five elements can be identified in comparative structures: These are the following, accompanied by the abbreviations we will use for them in this article:[5]

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| CM | = | comparative marker |
| $NP_A$ | = | noun phrase referring to the comparee |

[4] English, like Chinese languages, also allows a verbal predicate in the comparative, in which case, it is the adverb which takes the degree marker: *She runs more quickly/faster than I.*

[5] Other abbreviations used for the grammatical glosses are CL = classifier, eBr = elder brother, MOD = modifier in prenominal attributive phrases, SG = singular, PRT = particle, yBr = younger brother.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| $NP_B$ | = | noun phrase referring to the person or thing acting as the standard or benchmark |
| VP | = | verb phrase filled principally by an adjective or a verb as well as other predicative elements |
| DEGR | = | degree marker |

These elements are exemplified in (3) for a basic comparative clause in Standard Mandarin (*pǔtōnghuà* 普通话) with a stative predicate formed by the adjective *gāo* 'tall'.

(3) Standard Mandarin: $NP_A - CM - NP_B - VP$
小王比小李高。

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Xiǎo Wáng | **bǐ** | Xiǎo Lǐ | gāo[6]. |
| $NP_A$ | **CM** | $NP_B$ | tall |

'Xiao Wang is taller than Xiao Li.'

In comparative constructions, even if the dimension of comparison is predominantly expressed by an adjective, this is not always the case. Hence, in Sinitic languages, the VP may be filled by either a verb or a predicative adjective, the latter being classified by some linguists as a 'quality' or 'stative' verb. Thus, the label VP for 'verb phrase' is intended to include both verbs and adjectives in our syntactic formula for comparatives of inequality. For example, the transitive clause *pà lǎoshǔ* 怕老鼠 'to fear mice' is possible in both Mandarin and Cantonese:

(4) Standard Chinese (Mandarin):
我比你更怕老鼠。

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Wǒ | **bǐ** | nǐ | gèng | pà | lǎoshǔ. |
| 1SG | **CM** | 2SG | DEGR | fear | mice |

'I'm even more afraid of mice than you.'

(5) Cantonese, Yue: Hong Kong (香港粵语)
我怕老鼠多过你。

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ngóh | pa | loúhsyú | dō | **gwo** | néih. |
| 1SG | fear | mice | DEGR | **CM** | 2SG |

'I'm even more afraid of mice than you.'

### 6.2.3 Cross-linguistic research: Strategies and cognitive event schemas for comparatives

Crosslinguistic research on the major comparative strategies or cognitive schemas shows the following main categories and, importantly, that variation is not without certain limits. Stassen (1985, 2005, 2011) proposes six different categories according to structural

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[6] For the transcriptions of examples, we use *pīnyīn* romanization for Standard Mandarin and the Yale system for Hong Kong Cantonese. When quoting examples from published sources, the transcriptions have been faithfully reproduced in either IPA, or in a romanization with widespread currency such as that used for Hmong. See also Note 7.

criteria, while Heine (1997) puts forward eight separate categories which he defines cognitively (see below Table 6.1). For this reason, we have adopted Heine's framework (1997) for the schemas described in this analysis. However, in §3.2 below, we propose the existence of an additional cognitive schema called 'Compare', which represents the most common type in Sinitic, but is not accounted for by those given in Table 6.1 (for which see Table 6.2).

Table 6.1: Comparison of analytic approaches for comparative schemas of inequality

| | Stassen 1985, 2005 | Heine 1997 | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 : | Separative | Source | 'from' |
| 2 : | Allative | Goal | 'to' |
| 3 : | Locative | Location | 'at' |
| 4 : | **Exceed** | **Action** | **'surpass, defeat'** |
| 5 : | Conjoined | Polarity | 'X is A, Y is not A' |
| 6 : | Particle | Sequence | e.g. Germanic 'than' |
| 7: | – | **Similarity** | **'as, like'** |
| 8: | – | Topic | 'X and Y, Y is A' |

The first three types of comparatives in both the approaches of Stassen and Heine involve case-marking or the use of adpositions as morphological markers. These are dependent-marked comparative constructions which use the separative or ablative 'from', the allative 'to' or the locative 'at' strategies. The fourth type involves a transitive structure and verbs with the meaning of 'exceed' or 'surpass'. The fifth type represents a complex sentence structure of the conjoined or coordinate type with polarity semantics. In the sixth type, conjunctions such as 'than' and its equivalent in many European languages, if not other kinds of particles, are used as markers of the comparative (see example 1 above). The seventh type involves the cognitive schema of similarity, while the eighth represents a topicalization strategy.

In the contemporary situation, Sinitic languages make use of at least four of these cognitive schemas: *Transitive Action* (our Type II), *Polarity*, *Topic* and also the *Compare* schema (Type I) to be introduced in §3.2 (for more details, see the article by Chappell, this volume). Archaic Chinese also made use of the *Location* schema, and Medieval Chinese, the *Similarity* schema, both discussed in §4. Before proceeding into the main analysis, we provide an example of the unusual topicalization strategy from the Tiantai dialect 天台, a Wu dialect of southern Zhejiang province (see Zhao Jinming 2002b):

(6) Tiantai,Wu: Zhejiang (浙江天台吴语)
小王是小李高。
XIǍO WÁNG SHÌ XIǍO LǏ GĀO[7].
Xiao Wang be Xiao Li tall
'Xiao Li is taller than Xiao Wang.' (literally: As for Xiao Wang, Xiao Li is taller.)

6.3 Comparative constructions of inequality in Sinitic languages

As mentioned in the introduction, two types of comparative construction predominate synchronically in Sinitic languages. These are the *Compare* type and the *Surpass* type. Type I, *Compare*, is dependent-marked whereas Type II, *Surpass*, is head-marked.

Note that while the lexical source and forms for the comparative markers may vary widely in Sinitic languages, the structures and associated cognitive schemas remain essentially the same.

Table 6.2: Types versus schemas used in the history of the Chinese language for the comparative of inequality

| **Type I: *Compare*** **$NP_A - CM - NP_B - VP$** | **Type II: *Surpass*** **$NP_A - VERB - CM - NP_B$** |
|---|---|
| *Compare* schema (with BǏ 比) | *Locative* schema (with YÚ 于) |
| | *Similarity* schema (with RÚ 如, RUÒ 若, SÌ 似) |
| | *Surpass* schema (with GUÒ 过, SHENG 胜) |

6.3.1 'Compare' as a comparative marker in Sinitic

The Type I comparative in Sinitic languages refers to the *Compare* schema which has the syntactic configuration: $NP_A - CM - NP_B - VP$. As mentioned above, the label 'VP' typically represents an adjective or stative verb that codes the dimension in question for the operation of comparison. Synchronically, this construction is the most common one to be found in Sinitic languages (for details, see the survey in Li Lan 2003).

(7) Type I: *Compare*
$NP_A - CM - NP_B - VP$ Standard Mandarin
他比我高。
$tā_A$ **bǐ** $wǒ_B$ $gāo_{VP.}$
3SG **compared:to** 1SG tall
'S/He is taller than me.'

[7] We use small capitals for the Mandarin *pīnyīn* romanization, here, and wherever the original article does not provide any kind of phonetic transcription.

(8) Standard Mandarin
我去比你去方便。
wǒ$_A$ qù **bǐ** nǐ$_B$ qù fāngbiàn$_{VP}$.
1SG go **CM** 2SG go convenient
'It's more convenient for me to go than you.'

The main marker for the Type I *Compare* comparative is the preposition BǏ 比 which is derived from the verb 'to compare' as used in a serial verb construction. Its use is attested from Early Medieval Chinese, that is, from 3rd – 4th centuries AD. As BǏ 比 'compared to' cannot, strictly speaking, be treated as a *Particle (Sequence)* or a *Similarity* comparative, we have decided to propose a ninth cognitive schema and thereby to adopt the label of '*Compare* comparative'. Specifically, the comparative marker BǏ 比 cannot be functionally equated with particles or conjunctions, such as English *than*, French *que* or German *als*, found in European comparatives, nor does it have the meaning of 'be similar to' in these constructions, contrary to the classification given by Ansaldo (1999), as a *Similarity* comparative.

Furthermore, BǏ 比 cannot be classified as belonging to any of allative, locative or source categories, even though it involves dependent-marking. Finally, it certainly does not mean 'exceed', pace Stassen (1985, 2005, 2011) who erroneously describes Mandarin BǏ 比 as an 'exceed' comparative (see Feature 121 in the World Atlas of Language Structures – WALS), as also does Ultan (1972).

This is the standard situation for Northern Chinese. As earlier stated, in this Type I, with the comparative marker in a preverbal position, the source and forms of the comparative marker may vary widely in different Northern Sinitic languages or dialects. The following examples, with the comparative markers GǍN 赶 'catch up, overtake', and the compound form GÈNG-BǏ 更比 are reproduced from Li Lan (2003: 217):[8]

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[8] Li Lan (2003: 217) also gives examples of Type I from Shandong Jiaoliao Mandarin where the marker is apparently either BǍ 把 (which is the preverbal direct object marker in Standard Chinese), or BÈI 被 (a passive marker). These, however, are most likely cases of Chinese characters being used for their homophone values and not the original source morphemes (the IPA values are not given in the original source).

(a) Daye, Gan: Hubei (湖北大冶贛语)
我把渠长。
WǑ **BǍ** QÚ CHÁNG.
1SG **CM** 3SG tall
'I am taller than him.'

(b) Yishui, Jiaoliao Mandarin: Shandong (沂水，山东中部 胶辽官话)
你被他大。
NǏ **BÈI** TĀ DÀ.
2SG **CM** 3SG old
'You are older than him.' (Qian Zengyi et al 2001:293)

(9) Tongxin, Ningxia: Lanyin Mandarin (宁夏同心兰银官话)
今儿赶昨儿强多了。
JĪNR **GǍN** ZUÓR QIÁNG DUŌ LE.
today **CM** yesterday good$_{<strong}$ DEGR PRT
'Today is much better than yesterday.'

(10) Dafang, Guizhou: Southwestern Mandarin (贵州大方西南官话)
我更比你高。
Wǒ **GÈNG-BǏ** NǏ GĀO.
1SG **CM** 2SG tall
'I'm taller than you.'

Other dependent markers in use are BÌNG 并, GĒN 跟, BŌ 拨, ZHÀO 照, PÁNG 傍 etc. for which the distribution is given in Map 99 on comparative markers in Cao Zhiyun et al (2008, *Grammar* volume), noting that the semantic accuracy of these sources is not guaranteed in many of these cases.

6.3.2 'Surpass' as a comparative marker in Sinitic

The second structural type, Type II, is commonly represented by the *Surpass* schema in Sinitic languages, because the comparative marker has its origin in a verb meaning 'surpass', 'exceed' or 'defeat', 'win' (see § 4.2). This is the type called an 'Action schema' in Heine (1997) due to its transitivity. In fact, the verb GUÒ 過 (过) 'to cross, to surpass' frequently turns out to be the source of the comparative marker for Type II in many dialect groups.

(11) Type II: Surpass
$NP_A$ – VERB – CM – $NP_B$
Hong Kong Cantonese (香港粵语)
佢 高 **過** 我。
Kéuih gōu **gwo** ngóh.
3SG tall **CM** 1SG
'S/He is taller than me.'

(12) Hong Kong Cantonese (香港粵语)
我去方便**過**你去。
ngóh heui fòngbihn **gwo** néih heui.
1SG go convenient **CM** 2SG go
'It's more convenient for me to go than you.'

Comparative markers other than GUÒ can also be found in this Type II *Surpass* construction: KĀ 咖, Ā 啊, QǏ 起, etc. (examples reproduced from Li Lan 2003: 217):

(13) Yiyang dialect, Xiang: Hunan (湖南益阳湘语)
他高**咖**你蛮多。
TĀ GĀO **KĀ** NǏ MǍN DUŌ.
3sg tall **CM** 2SG very much
'He is very much taller than you'.

(14) Fuzhou dialect, Northeastern Min: Fujian (福建福州闽语)
我好**啊**汝。
WǑ HǍO Ā RǓ.
1SG good **CM** 2SG
'I am better than you'.

(15) Jimo, Jiaoliao Mandarin : Shandong (山东即墨胶辽官话)
他高**起**你。
TĀ GĀO **QǏ** NǏ.
3SG tall **CM** 2SG
'He's taller than you'. (Qian Zengyi et al 2001:292)

6.4 Distribution of comparative types in Sinitic languages

For Sinitic languages, we take the following ten subgroups of this branch of the Sino-Tibetan family as a basis for discussion of the distribution of the two main types of comparative strategies: Mandarin or Northern Chinese 北方話, Jin 晉, Xiang 湘, Gan 贛, Hui 徽, Wu 吳, Min 閩, Kejia 客家, Yue 粵 and Pinghua 平話. The most prominent language in the Sinitic taxon is Mandarin or 'Northern Chinese', which incorporates eight dialect subgroups and includes the standard official language known as *pǔtōnghuà* 普通話, literally 'the common language' (see §1 in Chappell, this volume, for more details on classification issues).

6.4.1 Sinitic Type I: *Compare* comparatives, in areal perspective

The Type I *Compare* structure is used almost exclusively as the comparative in 5/8 subgroups of the vast Mandarin supergroup of dialects, including Northern Beifang 北方, Northeastern (Manchuria) 东北, Northwestern Lanyin 兰银, Central Plains Zhongyuan 中原, Southern Jianghuai 江淮 (Li Lan 2003). It is also the only strategy in the northern Jin dialects 晋语 (see also Chen and Li 1996 for data on 63 Mandarin dialects).

Type I *Compare* is not only represented by Mandarin and the Jin dialect groups found all over the North of China from Xinjiang and Gansu in the northwest across to Beijing and up to the northeast in Manchuria, but also in the contiguous central Hui dialects 徽 of Anhui province. This strongly suggests a distinct *Northern strategy* that was early remarked upon by Hashimoto (1976, 1978) and more recently by Ansaldo (2010).

6.4.2 Distribution of Type II: *Surpass* comparatives, in Sinitic

The dominant position of Type I *Compare* notwithstanding, the distribution of the Type

II comparative (*Surpass* schema) is much more widespread than has been previously supposed. In terms of geographical distribution, the southwestern and southern dialect groups of China use it, including particularly the Yue dialects (Cantonese) and the Hakka and Min (or Hokkien) dialects located in Guangdong province. Southwestern Mandarin (parts of Hubei, Sichuan, Guizhou and Yunnan) and Mandarin dialects of Shandong (Jiaoliao, Jilu subgroups) also use the Type II *Surpass* structure. In the central, transitional zone, certain Xiang dialects in Southern Hunan, Gan dialects in Jiangxi and many Wu dialects also make use of Type II *Surpass* alongside Type I *Compare* (see examples in §3.2). The reader is referred to Map 6.1 for the distribution of these two main types of comparatives.

MAP 6.1 GOES ABOUT HERE

Map 6.1: Comparative constructions in Sinitic languages: The two main types

Therefore, we do not agree with Wu Fuxiang (2010) who claims that Type II *Surpass* is very limited in distribution, being mainly located in the provinces of Guangdong, Guangxi and Hainan, and also of course in Hong Kong. In other words, in Wu's view, Type II would be mainly limited to Cantonese and to Southern Sinitic languages and dialects closely in contact with Cantonese, from which they have borrowed this structure. We have seen that this is far from being the case, since Type II *Surpass* is the dominant form far to the north in the non-contiguous area of the Shandong peninsula where approximately two-thirds of the Jiaoliao Mandarin dialects employ it (see Qian Zengyi et al 2001:291). In another peripheral area, isolated dialects in the west of Shaanxi province also make use of *Surpass* (Map 98, *The Comparative*, in Cao Zhiyun et al, 2008, *Grammar* volume).

In terms of source lexical fields, Type II markers vary considerably, including GUÒ 过 'pass', QǏ 起 'rise', QÙ 去 'go', SHÈNG 胜'win, defeat', SÌ 似'similar to'… (See several examples above in §3.2, and, in particular, Zhang Cheng (2004), Zhao Jinming (2002a, 2002b) and Li Lan (2003). Despite the different forms for the comparative marker, all make use of the transitive action cognitive schema, as in the Hakka example below.

(16) Hakka *Surpass* comparative, Bao'an: Guangdong (广东宝安客家话)
□惹隻山高**過**个隻山。

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| nya$^{3}$ | tšak$^{6}$ | san$^{1}$ | kau$^{1}$ | **ko$^{4}$** | kai$^{4}$ | tšak$^{6}$ | (san$^{1}$). |
| this | CL | mountain$_{\mathbf{A}}$ | high | **CM** | that | CL | (mountain$_{\mathbf{B}}$) |

'This mountain is higher than that one.'
(Chappell and Lamarre 2005: 72)

In Southwestern Mandarin (e.g. Lipu 荔浦 and Liuzhou 柳州, both located in the Guangxi Autonomous Region), we find the following examples which, like many Hakka and Cantonese Yue dialects, use the comparative marker GUÒ 過 (过):

(17) Lipu, Southwestern Mandarin: Guangdong (广东荔浦西南官话)
他大**过**我。
TĀ DÀ **GUÒ** WǑ.
3SG$_A$ big **CM** 1SG$_B$
'He is bigger than me.' (Wu Hezhong 1998)

(18) Liuzhou, Southwestern Mandarin: Guangdong (广东柳州西南官话)
坐火车快**过**坐汽车。
ZUÒ HUǑCHĒ KUÀI **GUÒ** ZUÒ QÌCHĒ.
sit train$_A$ fast **CM** sit car$_B$
'It's faster to go by train than by car.' (Li and Huang 1995)

There are further differences to be noted that involve syntactic constraints. Unlike Standard Mandarin and Mandarin dialect groups such as the Southwestern, exemplified just above in (18), in Hong Kong Cantonese, the main verb does not need to be repeated in the case of a comparison of complex, non-identical predicates; for example:

(19) Hong Kong Cantonese (香港粵语)
我食肉多**過**魚。
ngóh sihk yuhk dō **gwo** yú.
1SG eat meat more **CM** fish
'I eat more meat than fish.'

Compare this example with its equivalent in Standard Mandarin, where the main verb needs to be repeated so that the two full clauses in question can undergo comparison:

(20) Standard Mandarin
我吃肉**比**我吃鱼多。
Wǒ chī roù **bǐ** nǐ chī yú duō.
1SG eat meat **CM** 2SG eat fish more
'I eat more meat than you eat fish.'[9]

It is not possible to use the more succinct Cantonese *Surpass* structure:

(21) *我吃肉**比**鱼多。
*Wǒ chī roù **bǐ** yú duō.
1SG eat meat **CM** fish more

[9] Some speakers find this acceptable but not fully natural and preferred the strategy:
我吃的肉**比**你吃的鱼多。
Wǒ chī de roù **bǐ** nǐ chī de yú duō.
1SG eat MOD meat **CM** 2SG eat MOD fish more
''I eat more meat than you eat fish.'

This lack of necessity to repeat the verb is certainly special syntactic feature of Cantonese comparatives (Yue-Hashimoto 1997) but it is not unique to the Yue dialects since it is possible too in the Hui'an dialect of Southern Min, although in a different structural type, the zero-marked comparative (see §5 in W. Chen, this volume).

In spite of the fact that the geographical coverage of Type II *Surpass* comparatives is broader than initially believed on the basis of earlier studies, nearly all the dialect groups other than Mandarin may in fact *additionally* use the Type I *Compare* comparative with BǏ 比. In most cases this is, however, a borrowed form. Quite clearly, the BǏ 比 construction is steadily encroaching on the Type II *Surpass* comparative, particularly in the central transitional zone of China for Xiang, Gan, Hakka and Wu dialects (Li Lan 2003, Cao Zhiyun et al 2008, *Grammar* volume, Maps 98 and 99).

To be more specific, in these areas, we find either the coexistence of two forms (Type 1 and Type II) or cases of hybridization of the two, as in Southern Min and Hakka (see Chappell 2001, this volume; W. Chen, this volume), or even of functional specialization. The latter situation is discussed in Chang Song-hing and Kwok Bit-chee (2005: 232-238) who show, following Yue-Hashimoto (1997), that not all the constructions with GUÒ 過(过) may be replaced by BǏ 比 in Cantonese, and vice-versa.

### 6.4.3 Geographical areas for Type II *Surpass* in the world's languages

To place Sinitic languages in a cross-linguistic perspective, it is not surprising to find that the Type II *Surpass* schema common in Southern Sinitic languages is equally predominant in Southeast Asia. Further afield, Bantu languages as well as Afro-Asiatic languages of sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East make use of this strategy (Stassen 1985, Heine 1997, Ansaldo 1999, 2010).

Some examples of Southeast Asian languages using the Type II *Surpass* comparative schema are Laotian and Thai (Tai-Kadai); Vietnamese and Khmer (Austroasiatic); Hmong (Hmong-Mien) and Burmese (Tibeto-Burman). The following examples from Lao, Khmer and Hmong all use markers that are derived from verbs meaning 'to exceed' or 'to surpass', according to the sources consulted.

(22) Lao (Tai-Kadai)

| qaaj$^{4}$ | khòòj$^{5}$ | suung$^{3}$ | **kuaø** | qaaj$^{4}$ | caw$^{4}$. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| eBr | 1SG.P | tall | **MORE.THAN** | eBr | 2SG.P |

'My brother is taller than your brother.' (Enfield 2007: 249; eBr = elder brother, 2SG.P = second person singular pronoun)

(23) Khmer (Austroasiatic)

| reut | tae | awn | **ciang** | kee:aeng | (tiat). |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| get | | weak | **exceed** | everybody:else | (other) |

'[I] keep getting weaker than all the others.' (Haiman 2011: 190)

(24) White Hmong (Hmong-Mien)

| Tus | noog | no | loj | **dua** | tus | noog | ntawd. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| clf | bird | this | big | **comp**. | clf | bird | that |

'This bird is bigger than that bird.' (Jaisser, Ratliff et al, 1995: 182; clf = classifier)

Similarly to the case for many Southern and Central Sinitic languages, Wu Fuxiang (2013) has noticed that in certain, though not all, Tai-Kadai, Hmong-Mien, Austroasiatic, and even Austronesian languages spoken in China, the two types, I and II, co-exist. He puts forward the hypothesis that the Type I *Compare* comparative structure in these languages has been borrowed from Northern Chinese. Some examples of languages in China where the Type I *Compare* co-exists with Type II *Surpass* are given below:

Pana (Bānà) 巴那语 (Hmong-Mien, Southwestern Hunan)

(25) Type II *Surpass*: $NP_A$– VERB – CM –$NP_B$

| Le$^{24}$ | te$^{31}$ | ljou$^{24}$ | **kua$^{35}$** | le$^{24}$ | tɕi$^{44}$ | u$^{24}$ | tɕo$^{55}$. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| CL | eBr | old | **CM** | CL | yBr | two | year |

'Our elder brother is two years older than our younger brother.'

(26) Type I *Compare*: $NP_A$– CM – $NP_B$– VP

| va$^{22}$ | ʑa$^{44}$ | **pi$^{44}$** | ni$^{22}$ | ʑa$^{44}$ | ŋ̊ũ$^{35}$. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1SG | MOD | **CM** | 3SG | MOD | good |

'Mine is better than his.'

Bolyu (Palyu) 侅语 (Austroasiatic, Guangxi and Yunnan)

(27) Type II *Surpass*: $NP_A$– VERB – CM –$NP_B$

| tɕə$^{2}$ | ɕiu$^{5}$ | ʔɔ$^{5}$tsɔ$^{3}$ | kəŋ$^{5}$ | **ŋa:n$^{2}$** | tɕə$^{2}$ | ʑu$^{1}$ | ta:i$^{5}$. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| time | harvest | cereal | cold | **CM** | time | plant | corn |

'Autumn is colder than spring.'

(28) Type I *Compare*: $NP_A$– CM – $NP_B$– VP

| tɕə$^{2}$ | ɕiu$^{5}$ | ʔɔ$^{5}$tsɔ$^{3}$ | **pi$^{3}$** | tɕə$^{2}$ | ʑu$^{1}$ | ta:i$^{5}$ | kəŋ$^{5}$. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| time | harvest | cereal | **CM** | time | plant | corn | cold |

'Autumn is colder than spring.'

Huìhuī 回辉语 (Chamic, Austronesian, Hainan Island)

(29) Type II *Surpass*: $NP_A$– VERB – CM –$NP_B$

| lu$^{43}$ | kau$^{33}$ | pioŋ$^{32}$ | **la:u$^{32}$** | lu$^{43}$ | ha$^{33}$. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| bowl | 1SG | big | **CM** | bowl | 2SG |

'My bowl is bigger than your bowl.'

(30) Type I *Compare*: $NP_A$– CM – $NP_B$– VP

| kau$^{33}$ | **pi$^{11}$** | ha$^{33}$ | tsat$^{24}$ tso$^{33}$ | kiə$^{33}$ | sun$^{33}$. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1SG | **CM** | 2SG | small | three | inch |

'I am three inches shorter than you.'

(All the examples above are reproduced from Wu (2013); our glossing and translations into English – HC and AP).

Hence, the same language contact phenomenon has indifferently affected both Central and Southern Sinitic languages as well as non-Sinitic languages located in China.

The 'native' Type II *Surpass* comparative is used alongside the borrowed Type I *Compare* comparative. In the next section, we consider the diachrony of comparative constructions in Chinese to demonstrate that, as far as the earliest written records reveal, syntactically speaking, Chinese began as a Type II comparative language.

## 6.5 Historical sketch of the comparative constructions

The comparative construction of inequality found in both Archaic (11th – 3rd c. BC) and Pre-Medieval Chinese (2nd c. BC – 2nd c. AD) clearly belongs to Type II and has the following structure using the comparative marker YÚ 于: $NP_A$– VERB – CM (YÚ 于) –$NP_B$.. Two examples are provided:

(31) Comparative of inequality with Type II structure and *Location* schema as source
季氏富**于**周公。 (论语 : 先进)
Jì shí fù **yú** Zhōu gōng.
Ji family rich **CM** Zhou Duke
'The Ji family was richer than the Duke of Zhou.' (*Analects*, 5th c. BC)

(32) 一少**于**二。 (墨子: 经下 41)
yī shǎo **yú** èr.
one less **CM** two
'One is less than two.' (*Mòzǐ*, 4th c. BC)

This Type II structure is associated with a *Location* schema, as the main use of YÚ 于 is as a locative preposition 'at, to' and originally a verb 'to go', according to Guo Xiliang (1997). This is why we classify it as the Type II – *Location* schema (see also Table 6.2). Significant in providing the preconditions for a later diachronic change, the Type II syntactic structure also codes the comparative construction of equality: however, it involves a different set of comparative markers. These are: RÚ 如, RUÒ 若 or SÌ 似, all meaning 'to be like, to be similar':

(33) Comparative of equality using a Type II structure with *Similarity* verbs
$NP_A$– VERB – CM (RU 如) –$NP_B$
猛如虎很**如**羊贪**如**狼。 (史记 : 项羽本纪)
měng **rú** hǔ
powerful **CM** tiger
hěn **rú** yáng tān rú láng.
ferocious **CM** ram greedy CM wolf
'(Be) as powerful as a tiger, as ferocious as a ram, as greedy as a wolf.' (*Shǐ jì*, 1st c. BC)

(34) 君子之交淡**若**水,

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Jūnzi | zhī | jiāo | dàn | **ruò** | shuǐ |
| gentlemen | MOD | friendship | insipid | **CM** | water |

小人之交甘**若**醴。 (庄子: 山木)

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| xiǎo | rén | zhī | jiāo | gān | **ruò** | lǐ. |
| small | people | MOD | friendship | rich | **CM** | sweet-wine |

'Friendship between gentlemen is as insipid as water, friendship between small-minded people is as rich as sweet wine.' (*Zhuāngzǐ*, 4th c. BC)

As for the modern Type I *Compare* structure, in Late Archaic Chinese (5th - 2nd c. BC) BǏ 比 can only be used as a verb meaning 'to compare' in simple S-V-O sentences, while it does not yet occur in serial verb constructions.

The same form as the one found in (31) (Type II structure and *Location* schema) continues to be used in Medieval Chinese during the Six Dynasties (3rd-6th c.) and Tang periods (7th-10th c.). Peyraube (1989) claims that YÚ 于 'at' remains the most common comparative marker, but that one can also find GUÒ 過(过) < 'surpass' used as a real grammatical morpheme marking the comparative (see also Zhang Cheng 2005):[10]

(35) Type II structure associated with both *Location* and *Surpass* schemas

贫**于**杨子两三倍老**过**荣公六七年。 (白居易诗)

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| pín | **yú** | Yángzi | | liǎng | sān | bèi |
| poor | **CM** | Yangzi | | two | three | times |
| lǎo | **guò** | Róng | gōng | liù | qí | nián. |
| old | **CM** | Rong | Master | six | seven | year |

'Two or three times poorer than Master Yang, six or seven years older than Mr. Rong.' (*Bái Jūyì shī*, 9th c.)

However, what is more interesting is that, beginning in the Late Medieval period (7th – 12th c.), other comparative markers can also be found for expressing the comparative of inequality in the Type II structure: these are RÚ 如 < 'be like' and SÌ 似 also < 'be like', that were in fact earlier used, in Late Archaic Chinese, to express the comparative of equality (or equative construction) (see example 33). In the following example, we find the comparative markers of inequality YÚ于 and SÌ 似 occurring in parallel clauses:

[10] Zhao Jinming (2004a) cites a still earlier example of GUÒ from Archaic Chinese, but the example is controversial.

(36) Type II structure associated with both *Location* and *Similarity* schemas
本寺远**于**日　新诗高**似**云。 (姚合诗)
běn sì yuǎn **yú** rì
this temple far **CM** sun
xīn shī gāo **sì** yún.
new poem high **CM** cloud
'This temple is farther away than the sun, the new poems are higher than the clouds.' (*Yáo Hé shī*, 9th c.)

Hence, we clearly have a Type II structure in the second clause of (36) that uses a *Similarity* rather than a *Location* schema to express the comparative of inequality. Hence, we will call it the 'Type II *Similarity* schema'. This signals an important diachronic change in progress whereby SÌ 似 begins to no longer exclusively code the comparative of equality, as it did earlier in its history. In fact, during two or three centuries (9th – 12th c.), the Type II *Similarity* construction ($NP_A$ – VERB – CM – $NP_B$) with the comparative markers RÚ 如 and SÌ 似 was ambiguous, expressing both a comparative of inequality and a comparative of equality.

In contrast to these two comparative markers, BǏ 比, which was essentially used as a verb 'to compare' in simple sentences in Late Archaic Chinese, began to be used as $V_1$ in '$V_1$ … $V_2$' serial verb constructions under the Six Dynasties period (3rd – 6th c.) before being grammaticalized into a comparative marker probably by the end of the Tang dynasty (ca. 9th -10th c.), according to Ōta (1958), Peyraube (1989), and also Zhang Cheng (2004). Zhang nevertheless noticed that the structure only appeared in Tang poetry and not in the prose texts of the *Dūnhuáng Biànwén* 敦煌变文 (Buddhist Transformation texts) of the same period. This led to the appearance in the Late Tang period (9th-10th c.) of a new comparative structure, belonging to Type I:

(37) Comparative of inequality using Type I structure and the *Compare* schema: $NP_A$ – CM – $NP_B$ – VP, comparative marker = BǏ 比 :
若**比**李三又自胜 … (白居易诗)
ruò **bǐ** Lǐ Sān yòu zì shèng.
if **CM** Li San still myself better
'If I am still better than Li San …' (poem of *Bái Jūyì*, 9th c.)

Starting in the Song-Yuan period (10th-14th c.), another Type I construction ($NP_A$ – $CM_{(RÚ如, SÌ似)}$ – $NP_B$ – VP ) appeared, which used the *Similarity* schema for expressing the comparative of equality, with the comparative markers RÚ 如 and SÌ 似 now found in preverbal position. This development arose probably because Type II ($NP_A$ – VERB – $CM_{(RÚ如, SÌ似)}$ – $NP_B$) had become confusingly ambiguous, expressing both meanings of inequality and equality.

(38) Comparative of equality using Type I structure and *Similarity* schema:
$NP_A$ – CM – $NP_B$ – VP, comparative marker = RÚ 如:
脸**如**红杏鲜妍。 (小孙屠)
liǎn **rú** hóng xìng xiǎn yán.
face **CM** red apricot fresh beautiful
'(Her) face is as fresh and beautiful as a red apricot.'(*Xiǎo Sūn tú*, 14th c.)

During the Yuan dynasty (13th -14th c.), the Type I *Compare* schema and Type II *Similarity* schema for expressing the comparative of inequality nonetheless continued to co-exist, as shown by the following two contemporaneous examples:

(39) Comparative of inequality using Type I *Compare* schema: $NP_A$ – CM – $NP_B$ – VP
(这桥)**比**在前十分好。 (老乞大)
(zhè qiáo) **bǐ** zài qián shífèn hǎo.
(this bridge) **CM** at before very good
'(This bridge) is much better than before.' (*Lǎo Qǐdà*, 14th c.)

(40) Comparative of inequality using Type II *Similarity* schema:
$NP_A$ – VERB – $CM_{(RÚ如, SÌ似)}$ – $NP_B$
这但轻**如**你底。 (任风子)
zhè dàn qīng **rú** nǐ dǐ.
this load light **CM** 2SG MOD
'This load is lighter than yours.' (*Rèn fēngzi*, 14th c.)

It is only at the end of the Yuan dynasty (14th c.) that we see a decrease in the Type II comparatives of inequality using the markers YÚ and RÚ/SÌ (that is, *Location* and *Similarity* schemas, respectively) in favour of Type I with BǏ (*Compare* schema). This diachronic change is reflected in the data displayed in Table 6.3 (adapted from Huang 1992: 221):

Table 6.3: Occurrence of three comparative structures

| Period | Centuries | II : YÚ 于 | II : RÚ/SÌ 如/似 | I : BǏ 比 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Six Dynasties – Tang | 3rd-9th c. | 68.1% | 14.4% | 17.5% |
| Song | 10th-13th c. | 49.1 | 20.7 | 30.2 |
| Jin – Yuan | 13th-14th c. | 3.4 | 61 | 35.6 |
| Ming | 14th-17th c. | 1.5 | 35.1 | 63.4 |
| Qing | 17th-20th c. | 1.3 | 6.3 | 92.4 |

During the 17 centuries represented by the data in Table 6.3, the use of the *Location* schema dwindles to just 1.3%; the two markers of the *Similarity* schema which saw their heyday in the Jin-Yuan periods, decrease to 6.3%, while the *Compare* schema increases to 92.4%.

We still have not discussed the historical development of Type II comparatives with GUÒ 過(过), using the *Surpass* schema, which we have pointed out, is extremely common in Sinitic languages of southern and central China. Nonetheless, only one real

example has been found in a Tang dynasty poem (see (35) above).

Zhang Cheng (2005) agrees with Peyraube (1989) that this example (35) should be considered as a comparative construction which makes use of a Type II *Surpass* schema for a comparison of inequality in its second clause. She also noticed that examples of this type involving the comparative marker GUÒ 過(过) are very rare in both the Tang and later periods. With respect to the period of the Tang dynasty, she found only 13 examples (12 in the Tang poems and only one in the *Dunhuang Bianwen* prose texts). Significantly, all these uses of GUÒ, except for the one example in (35) can be considered as full verbs meaning *chāoguò* 超过 'to surpass, to exceed' or *shèngguò* 勝过 'to win, to defeat'.

She concludes, and we agree with her, that GUÒ is not a morphological marker of the comparative during the Tang period, and that in fact it never grammaticalized from a verb into a comparative morpheme in Medieval or even in Modern Chinese ($13^{th}$ – $18^{th}$ c.). There are simply no examples of GUÒ found in the texts from these periods where GUÒ is used as a real comparative marker.

This is also the viewpoint of Wei Pei-chuan (2007) and Wu Fuxiang (2010), who similarly confirm that the few examples of Type II *Surpass* which could be interpreted as a real comparative construction are found only in the Tang poems, and never in prose texts of the same period.

### 6.6 Hypotheses concerning the *Surpass* schema

We will consider two possible explanations as to the development of *Surpass* comparatives across Southern and Southwestern China in relation to their distribution in Southeast Asia, an area which includes the related Tibeto-Burman languages, as well as those from the unrelated Tai-Kadai (Kra-Dai), Hmong-Mien, Austroasiatic and Austronesian (see §4.3 above). The two hypotheses are the following:

(i) It is an independent language-internal development involving a native process of grammaticalisation

(ii) It is a contact-induced change resulting in diffusion of the *Surpass* schema – a structural feature which helps define the linguistic area of Southeast Asia.

#### 6.6.1 Hypothesis (i)

Suppose we adopt the following hypothesis:

> *There is a direct internal derivation of the* Surpass *model either from Archaic or Medieval Chinese into the modern Sinitic languages.*

There is a problem, however, with this first hypothesis: the *Surpass* Type (Type II) in Southern Sinitic languages with GUÒ as the comparative marker cannot be *directly* internally derived from Medieval Chinese ($3^{rd}$ – $13^{th}$ centuries), and nor, consequently, from Archaic Chinese ($11^{th}$ BC –$3^{rd}$ BC), as the transitive *Surpass* construction is clearly not attested as a model in this period, as concluded in §5, which outlines the historical development of comparatives.

The Type II structure which uses locative prepositions (YÚ于) or *Similarity* verbs

(RÚ 如, SÌ 似) as markers in postverbal position is in fact clearly the more common structure in Medieval Chinese to code the comparative of inequality (as shown in Table 6.3).

6.6.1.1 A proposed scenario for GUÒ

GUÒ 過(过) meaning 'to surpass', or even SHÈNG 胜 'to defeat', would have indeed been – for obvious semantic reasons – very good candidates to replace YÚ于< LOC as the comparative marker of inequality in Type II structures. Moreover, *Surpass* is a model associated with a cognitive schema which is attested in many other language families in the world, external to the linguistic area of East and Southeast Asia (see Heine 1997, Heine and Kuteva 2002: 123 ff.). It did not however have sufficient time to grammaticalize and impose itself upon the *Similarity* comparatives using the markers RÚ 如 and SÌ 似 of Northern Mandarin, since Type I *Compare* (with BǏ 比) had already arisen and was gradually replacing all the variants of Type II.

In contrast to this, in Southern China, where the Type I *Compare* structure had not yet been adopted, GUÒ 過(过) had ample time to grammaticalize into a comparative marker and to replace the other markers used in these Type II *Similarity* comparatives, namely RÚ 如 and SÌ 似.

6.6.2 Hypothesis (ii) on linguistic areas and contact-induced change

The *Surpass* comparative is one of the structural features (and cognitive schemas) which identifies a linguistic area comprising Tai-Kadai, Austroasiatic, Hmong-Mien, Tibeto-Burman and many Sinitic languages (see Ansaldo 2010, Bisang 1992, Enfield 2003, Hashimoto 1976, Matisoff 1991 *inter alia*). This second possible hypothesis would thus appear to be eminently reasonable from the point of view of language contact. If we adopt this explanation, is it possible to demonstrate, however, any such contact-induced change in order to establish the direction of borrowing and diffusion? To be specific, and by taking only the Tai-Kadai languages as one example among the several different language families of Southeast Asia, we would need to decide, on the basis of adequate data and argumentation, whether we have a case of sinicization of the Tai-Kadai languages or of taïcization of the Southern Sinitic languages, as has been suggested by Bennet (1979).

Nothing allows us in fact to decide which is the source of the borrowing and which is the target. It could equally be the case that the Type II *Surpass* schema of the languages of Southeast Asia has been borrowed from Sinitic languages, rather than the reverse. This is moreover the hypothesis which both Ansaldo (2010) and Wu Fuxiang (2010) have put forward. In the absence of any historical documents which go back to the early Medieval period for either Southeast Asian languages or for Sinitic languages in Southern China (including at least Yue, Hakka and Southwestern Mandarin), we remain in complete ignorance. Therefore, given these conditions, would it not be better to simply state that the *Surpass* comparative type is common to different language families of Southeast Asia as well as to Southern and Central Sinitic languages. This fact can then aptly serve as another piece of evidence enabling us to identify a linguistic area, without needing, for the time being, to locate the source, nor the associated direction of contact-induced change for this feature.

*Conclusion*

In our view, until further data is uncovered on Southeast Asian languages, the more conservative hypothesis of an internal development is the only one which can be justified at present. Thus for Sinitic languages, the grammaticalization of *Surpass* class verbs into comparative markers is based on an entirely natural cognitive schema whereby a verb meaning 'surpass' grammaticalizes into a comparative marker of inequality, a process which happens independently and repeatedly in many different languages of the world. As far as the diachronic evidence is concerned, a case for contact-induced grammaticalization cannot be established, along the lines of the powerful model of Heine and Kuteva (2005).

This grammaticalization process (Verb 'to surpass' > Comparative morpheme) occurred in only some Sinitic languages – being those located mostly in southern and central China but also in the Shandong peninsula in the northeast. The word GUÒ 'to surpass' was, in fact, a better-adapted candidate for a comparative morpheme than the *Similarity* verbs RÚ, SÌ, etc. already attested in Medieval Chinese. It also was able to develop in these regions remote from the central area of the empire, where Sinitic languages were not directly in contact with the language of the imperial court, nor consequently with the development of a Type I comparative construction with BǏ (*Compare* schema) that became the standard form in Northern Sinitic, beginning from the Yuan period ($13^{th}$ – $14^{th}$ c.).

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