PREFIX T- IN OLD CHINESE
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Chinese forms will be cited according to the formula:  
modern standard Chinese [character] *Old Chinese > Middle Chinese ‘gloss’  
Example: tun₁ 涌 *ã-t-khur > thwon ‘to vomit’

Modern Standard Chinese: pin-yin transcription


Middle Chinese (MC): ca. 580 CE. Forms are given in Baxter’s notation (Baxter 1992)

1. why reconstruct a prefix t-?

1.1.1 phonetic series contacts involving *t(h)- and initials other than alveolar stops  
tun₁ 涌 *ã-t-khur > thwon ‘to vomit’ (phonetic is jun₁ 君 *b-kur > kjun)

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

wei₂ 惟 唯 t-wi[j] ~ tə-wi[j] > ywij ‘to be’ [the OC copula], often written epigraphically by zhui₁ 隹 *t[ui]j > tsywj ‘dove’ (this is also an instance of phonetic series contact)

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

dan₁ 湛 *ã-t-lim > tom ‘sunk in, steeped in’ (sc. pleasure): yin₂ 淫 *b-lim > yim ‘to soak; excess; licentious’  
zhì₄ 躯 *b-tr-lit-s > trjɪjH ‘to stumble’: die₁ 跌 *ã-lit > det ‘to stumble’  
zhì₄ 麹 *b-tr-lit-s > tejH ‘stem of a fruit’: die₂ 甦 *ã-lit > det ‘stem’ (of a gourd)  
he₂ 合 *ã-gip > hop ‘to join, unite; to answer’: da₂ 答 *ã-t-gip > top¹ ‘to respond, answer’ (this is also an instance of phonetic series contact)

¹ Or possibly *ã-t-lip > top, as there is some evidence that he₂ 合 includes a root lip (*ã-g-lip > hop)
1.1.4 double readings

zhe2 懾 *b- nip > tsyip and *nim > nep, both readings: ‘immobile’
zhe2 懭 *b- nep > tep ‘immobile’ and *bnep > nrep ‘legs sticking together, unable to walk’
pou4 a *a- phu > thuw and *a- phus > phuwH, both readings: ‘to spit’
zhou4 嘚 *b- luk > tsyuwk ‘gruel’ and *bluk > yuwk ‘to nourish’
gan1 旰 *b- kan > tsyen and *bkan > kjon ‘gruel’

2. The functions of *t-

2.1 in verbs

2.1.1 intranitives

stative verbs

zhi4 質 *b- lit > tsyit ‘real, solid, good faith’ (compare shi2 実 *b- m-lit > zyit ‘solid’);
di4 的 *b- lewk > tek ‘bright, brilliant’ and zhuo2 灼 *b- lewk > tsyak ‘burn; brilliant; illuminate; brightly’ (with root root *lewk ‘bright, brilliant’, as in zhuo2 灼 *b- lewk > dræwk ‘brilliant, fine’, yao4 澲 *b- lewk-s > yewH ‘shine, brightness’)
zhuang4 戇 *b- njon-s > traewngH and *bnjon-s > xuwngH (two readings, both:) ‘stupid’ (root initial nj- is indicated by modern dialects: Hakka, Min);
dan1 湛 *b- lim > tom ‘sunk in, steeped in’ (sc. pleasure, cf. section 1)
zhe2 懺 *b- nip > tsyip ‘immobile’; zhe2 懺 *b- nep > tep ‘immobile’ (cf. section 1)
zhe2 懦 *b- nep > tsyep ‘despondent, to fear’ (n- indicated by phonetic series)

color terms

chi 赤 *b- hlak > tsyhek ‘red’ (lateral root initial indicated by phonetic series contact)
chu1 緣 *btr- kut > trwit ‘deep red’ (velar root initial cf. chu1 出 below)

actions or functions of the body

hui4 嘤 *b- hloj-s > tsyhejH2 ‘to pant’ (Shi Jing, Ode 237). root initial hl- indicated by phonetic series.
tun1 涤 *b- khur > thwon ‘to vomit’ (cf. section 1)
pou4 a *a- phu > thuw ‘to spit’ (cf. section 1)

other intranitives

zhan3 潤 *b- nan-s > trjenX ‘to roll over’. Root initial n- indicated by phonetic series and word-family connection
zh3 潤 *b- lit-s > trjijH ‘to stumble’ (cf. above, section 1)
chu1 出 *b- khut > tsyhwit ‘to go out’ (velar root initial indicated by phonetic series contact and word-family connection)
wei2 惟 唯 *b- wij ~ *b- taj-wij > ywij ‘to be’ [the copula] (cf. above, section 1)

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2 Another reading is *bq-hloj-s > xjwejH (same meaning).
2.1.2 residue

- du4 故 *a-t-lak-s > tuH ‘to destroy’

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

\[\begin{align*}
\text{Hou4 Li4 bu4 ke4} & \quad \text{后稷不克} \quad \text{‘Lord Millet is powerless} \\
\text{Shang4 Di4 bu4 lin2} & \quad \text{上帝不臨} \quad \text{And God on High does not favour us} \\
\text{hao4 du4 xia4 tu3} & \quad \text{耗斁下土} \quad \text{He wastes and destroys the earth below} \\
\end{align*}\]

- 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-lwk ‘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:

\[\text{酌彼康爵} \]
\[\text{zhuo2 bi3 kang1 jue2} \]

pour with ladle-that-rest-cup

they fill that cup of rest

The meaning is obscure.

2.2 in nouns

2.2.1 mass nouns

- zhou1 粥 (and 粥) *b-luk > tsyuwk ‘gruel’ (lateral root initial indicated by second reading and word-family connection)

- gan1 它 *b-t-kan > tsyen ‘gruel’ (velar root initial indicated by phonetic series and second reading)

- zhi4 質 *b-t-lit-s > tsyijH ‘good faith; substance’

- dan3 膽 *b-t-lam? > tamX ‘gall’

- chen3 潛 *t-hljim? > tsyhimX ‘a liquid’

2.2.2 count nouns

- zhi4 質 *b-t-lit-s > tejH ‘stem of a fruit’ (cf. section 1 above)

- zhou3 肘 *b-tr-ku? > trjuwX ‘elbow’ (to account for the graphic similarity of the early graph for this word with jiu3 九 *b-ku? > kjuwX ‘nine’)

2.2.3 kin terms

- zhong1 嫂 [1189a] *b-t-konj > tsyowng ‘husband’s elder brother or father’ (compare gong1 公 [1173a] *konj > kuwng ‘father; prince’).
Two referential kinship terms in the modern Minnan dialect (Xiamen): \textit{ta}$_{33}$-\textit{kua}$_{44}$ ‘husband’s father’ (\textit{kua}$_{44}$ = \textit{guan}$_{1}$ 官 ‘official, mandarin’) and \textit{ta}$_{33}$-\textit{ke}$_{44}$ ‘husband’s mother’, have prefix \textit{ta}$_{33}$. Tung (1993) argued that prefix \textit{ta}- goes back to a Yue 越 substratum in Minnan.

\textbf{2.3 Unclear if noun or verb} \textit{duo}$_{3}$ 鬌 [11j] *\textit{a}-\textit{loj}/twax (pron. acc. to \textit{Jing Dian Shi Wen} ‘cutting of the hair of a young child three months of age before presentation to the father’ (\textit{Li Ji, Nei Ze} 20). Again GSR 11 is a lateral series and a prefix *\textit{t}- is needed to explain the occurrence of initial \textit{t}- in it. The word-base is perhaps \textit{duo}$_{4}$墮 [11e] *\textit{loj} > dwaX ‘to fall’.
\textit{zhi}$_{4}$銍 *\textit{b}-\textit{rit} > trit ‘harvesting knife’ (though the word may originally have meant ‘to harvest’, as proposed by Karlgren)

\textbf{References}


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