

Old Chinese “west”: *sn^hər

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This article aims to reconstruct the word “west” in Old Chinese phonology. In previous studies, since there was no sufficient evidence besides Chinese dialects, phonetic compounds, and phonetic loans, most scholars reconstructed its onset as *s-. One of the oldest dictionaries, *Shuōwén jiězì* 說文解字, includes two other written forms of 西 xī “west,” 𠂔 (Gǔwén 古文) and 𠂔 (Zhòuwén 籀文). This paper re-examines the reconstruction of the word 西 xī “west” and investigates the word 訊 xùn “to interrogate” seen in excavated documents. According to the *Shuōwén*, 訊 xùn also had another written form (𠂔 訊), which has the old form of 西 xī (𠂔). In other words, 西 xī and 訊 xùn must have had *Xiéshēng* connections (諧聲關係) at the time. Based on the resources from excavated documents such as oracle bone inscriptions and bronze scripts, 訊 xùn credibly has the character 人 rén as the phonetic element. This implies that 訊 xùn should have had the onset *sn- at the time; hence, it is concluded that the word “west” also had the onset *sn^h- in Old Chinese as well.

Keywords: Old Chinese phonology, excavated documents, phonetic loan, preinitial *s-