

Reflections on the Study of Post-Medieval Chinese Historical Phonology

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This paper begins by noting some recent developments in the study of Míng and Qīng Guānhuà phonology and the ways in which these have influenced and changed the author's thinking. These points then lead to reflections on the entire field of post-medieval Chinese phonology. Realizations about the probable nature of pre-modern koines are linked with the problems of interpreting traditional textual sources. Interactions between koines and regional speech forms are considered, with a view to how comparative and historical dialectology might mesh with the emerging field of Chinese koine studies. Finally, ways in which new work of this type might contribute to research on even earlier periods are briefly outlined.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to review certain recent developments in the study of Chinese phonology of the Míng 明 and Qīng 清 periods and to suggest ways that realizations about Guānhuà 官話, the standard koine of this time, may influence future studies of the entire post-medieval era.

2. The “rediscovery” of Guānhuà

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the phonological system of Guānhuà, the standard koine of Qīng times, was very similar to and clearly based upon the sound system of Pekingese, the dialect of the national capital. In subsequent periods the name of this koine has changed to Guóyǔ 國語 and Pǔtōnghuà 普通話, but the basic phonological

structure of the language has remained essentially the same. For someone living in 1900 the connection between Guānhuà and Pekingese would have seemed both obvious and reasonable. For, except for the seventy-year interval between 1356 and 1421, the capital had been in its current location since 1276, when the Yuán 元 imperial seat, Dàdū 大都, was officially founded. And, given the conventional wisdom that standard pronunciations tend to derive from the languages of cultural and political centers, it was reasonable and intuitively satisfying to suppose that the national koine of China had been phonologically Pekingese-based since the thirteenth century. This assumption was strictly speaking an historical hypothesis, but it was an hypothesis which went basically unchallenged, for which reason it underwent two further developments. First, it expanded into the belief that standard Guānhuà was not merely phonologically based upon, but was in fact for the most part completely identifiable with, Pekingese. In other words, it was generally and conventionally assumed that throughout its history Guānhuà **was** Pekingese, in the sense that the two were for the most part identical not only in phonology but also in lexicon and syntax. Minor differences were conceded, of course, but the general identity was considered established. The second development was that in scholarly circles the conventional impression hardened into orthodoxy. In the mid-1960's, when the present writer was introduced to the field of Chinese historical linguistics, no alternative view of the history of Guānhuà was discussed or even intimated.

This situation changed significantly during the 1980's. Lǐ Xīnkú 李新魁 (1980), as part of a general theory about the phonological foundations of Chinese koinés through time, contravened the traditional view by asserting that from the early Míng through late Qīng periods the sound system of Guānhuà was associated with the speech of the upper Central Plains or Zhōngzhōu 中州 area, centered in the Yellow River watershed around Luòyáng 洛陽. Somewhat later, Endo Mitsuki (1984) noted that the early Míng capital had been located in Nanking and suggested that the language of this area had remained standard in the fifteenth century after removal of the political center to Peking. In the following year Lǚ Guóyáo 魯國堯 (1985), after having read a Chinese translation of the diaries of Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), noted that in the late

Ming period the standard koine was specifically denoted in this source by the term “Quonhoa” (= Guānhuà) and that Ricci and his confrères, without having expressly said so, appeared to associate this language with the speech of Nanking. Much earlier Luó Chángpéi 羅常培 (1930) had pointed out that the orthography in certain of Ricci’s romanized Chinese essays appeared to be identical with that used in the famous *Xīrú ěrmùzī* 西儒耳目資 of Nicolas Trigault (1577-1628). Luó assumed that the underlying language of these materials was Pekingese, because Peking was the national capital during the period and the Ricci essays had been written in that city. Later, Lù Zhìwéi 陸志韋 (1947) countered with the theory that Trigault’s system must represent a Shānxī 山西 dialect, because his book had been completed in that province. In response to these claims, Lǚ asserted that, if Guānhuà was indeed a Nankingese-based koine, then the works of both Ricci and Trigault must reflect a Jiāng-Huái 江淮-like phonology rather than a northern one. In 1986 Paul F. M. Yang delivered a paper at Academia Sinica in which he introduced to sinological linguists a Portuguese-Chinese dictionary manuscript attributed to Ricci and/or Michele Ruggieri (1543-1607).¹ The paper, which was published three years later (Yang 1989), compared the form of Chinese represented in the dictionary with those found in Ricci’s essays and the *Xīrú ěrmùzī* and showed that it was in fact an aberrant, regional variety of essentially the same language. He argued strongly in favor of Lǚ’s stance regarding the Nankingese base of the koine. Finally, in 1992 Zhāng Wèidōng 張衛東, in a study of the *Xīrú ěrmùzī* orthographic system, adopted essentially the same position as Lǚ and Yang.

In his discussion of the late Ming Guānhuà tonal system, Yang (1989:208, 219-21) mentioned a slightly later missionary work dealing with Guānhuà of early Qīng times. This was the *Arte de la Lengua Mandarina* of Francisco Varo (1627-1687), completed in 1682 and published in Canton in 1703. During the 1990’s this little-known work and its author became the focus of increasing interest. A detailed study of Varo’s life revealed that he

¹ This text was in fact already fairly well known to historians and specialists in China mission studies, especially in Italy. See, for example, D’Elia (1938, 1942-49).

had written, in addition to his grammar, a large Spanish-Guānhuà dictionary and also a fragmentary Portuguese-Guānhuà lexicon (Azmayesh-Fard 1996). Close study of these works showed that the language described by Varo was in fact essentially the same as that recorded by Ricci and Trigault (Coblin 1997, Coblin and Levi 2000). Furthermore, in his grammar Varo remarks that in order to enunciate Mandarin words well “...one must understand the way in which such words are pronounced by the Chinese. Not just any Chinese, but only those who have the natural gift of speaking the Mandarin language well, such as those natives of the Province of Nân kīng, and of other provinces where the Mandarin tongue is spoken well” (Coblin and Levi 2000:23). And in the preface to his Portuguese-Chinese lexicon he points out (p.2) that the spellings he gives for his Chinese entries “conform to what is spoken in the province of Nân kīng.” Here, then, is the conclusive link between the language recorded by the late Míng/early Qīng missionaries and the speech of Nanking, or at least of the Jiāng-Huái dialect area where Nanking is located. Varo’s remarks thus confirm beyond doubt the general hypothesis of Lǚ Guóyáo, Paul Yang, etc.

Having clarified the identity and phonological structure of this “missionary Guānhuà,” it then became possible to trace its history downward through later textual sources. The same language, slightly evolved, was also recorded by Joseph Prémare (1666-1736) in his *Notitia Linguae Sinicae* (1730) and finally, in the early nineteenth century, in the great *Dictionary of the Chinese Language* (1815-22) of Robert Morrison (1782-1834), as well as in slightly later sources such as the *English and Chinese Vocabulary in the Court Dialect* (1844) of S. Wells Williams. At this point it was also possible to show how this form of Guānhuà ceased to exist as a national koine. For British accounts, written by Chinese language specialists connected with the British diplomatic and consular services in the 1850’s and 60’s, indicate that at approximately this point the phonological base of the national koine shifted to the sound system of the Pekingese dialect (Coblin 1997:290-91), a situation which remains current today. On the other hand, preliminary probes of the lexical and grammatical material in the Míng/Qīng Guānhuà material, and parallel comparison of this with standard Mandarin grammars and dictionaries of

the nineteenth century sinologists on the one hand and the grammar and word-stock of modern Mandarin on the other, yield a different picture in the areas of syntax and lexicon. For it would seem that, while there has been some adoption from northern Mandarin dialects of high-frequency grammatical functors and lexical items, the bulk of the older Guānhuà koine lexicon and syntactic structure was retained in the late nineteenth century standard language and remains in place today (Coblin Ms.1). Thus, strictly speaking, the traditional term Guānhuà covers two different koines. For most of the history of its use, it referred to the Jiāng-Huái-like lingua franca recorded by successive generations of foreign missionaries, from Ricci down to Morrison and Williams. During the final years of the Qīng period, it specifically denoted the new, phonologically Pekingese-based koine. It is this language which is directly ancestral to the Guóyǔ and Pǔtōnghuà of today.

3. The historical antecedents of Guānhuà

The term “Guānhuà” itself appears to be no older than the early to mid sixteenth century, for the earliest occurrences of it, collected by Lǚ (1985 [1993]:295), all appear to date from this period. Stages of the koine which predate these attestations can be considered Guānhuà in substance though not, strictly speaking, in name. What can be said of the phonology of this “pre-Guānhuà” stage? In fact, a great deal. For we are fortunate in having extensive Korean orthographic records of Chinese from the mid fifteenth to early sixteenth centuries. These consist of five corpora of orthographic forms, deriving from two individuals, Sin Sukchu 申叔舟 (1417-1475) and Ch'we Sejin 崔世珍 (1478?-1543):²

The Standard Readings (正音) of Sin Sukchu as found in 1) the *Hongmu chōng'un yōkhun* 洪武正韻譯訓, (completed in 1455), and 2) the *Sasōng t'onggo* 四聲通考 (completed ca. 1450), a lost work whose

² The following information is taken from Kim (1991:Chaps.1 and 3).

spellings are preserved in the *Sasông t'onghae* 四聲通解 (completed 1517) of Ch'we Sejin.

The Popular Readings (俗音) of Sin, as preserved in the *Yôkhun* and the *T'onghae*.

The Left Readings (左音) in the *Pônyôk No Gôltae* 翻譯老乞大 and the *Pônyôk Pak T'ongsa* 翻譯朴通事 of Ch'we Sejin. The Left Readings in these works are believed to derive from Sin Sukchu.

The Current Popular Readings (今俗音) recorded by Ch'we in the *T'onghae*.

The Right Readings (右音) given by Ch'we in the two *Pônyôk* collections.

These materials have of course been intensively studied in Korea for some time. Most of this research has been published in Korean and is therefore, sadly, inaccessible to me. Three extensive works in languages I can read are Kang (1985), Kim (1989), and Kim (1991). Of these three, the third gives broader coverage, since it is intended to encompass all five of the corpora listed above. It is therefore this work, in which the material is quite conveniently arranged, which has served as the source for my data on the Korean orthographic forms. In addition to working with the data themselves, it is necessary to determine when and how they were elicited and what types of language they represent. This too is an area which has been fairly widely discussed. The historical source material, derived from Korean historical records, is actually written in literary Chinese. Though a number different interpretations of it exist, the most penetrating and convincing, in my opinion, is that of Yüchi Zhiping 尉遲治平 (1990), which I follow here.

In order to determine possible historical filiation, each body of material must be compared with the Guānhuà corpora of Ricci, Trigault, Varo, etc. An initial study of this type indicates that the closest ties are with the Standard Readings of Sin Sukchu (Coblin Ms.2). In fact, it can be argued that this form of pronunciation is directly ancestral to the Guānhuà system (Coblin Ms.3).³ But, in tracing this development it is also necessary

³ The Standard Reading material is generally thought to comprise a set of literary readings for homophone groups in the *Hóngwǔ zhèngyùn* 洪武正韻 (Kim

to consider how it may have been influenced by possible relationships and interactions with the Jiāng-Huái dialects of the Nanking area. This, in our view, should be done by first undertaking historical studies of these dialects themselves (Coblin Ms.4). The results of such studies, when incorporated into a general comparison of the Standard Readings and the sound system of late Míng Guānhuà, suggest that the former underwent convergence with the Jiāng-Huái dialects at certain points but never really became identical with any particular one of them.⁴ For the Standard Reading system definitely possesses features which are not typical of the Jiāng-Huái group as a whole (Coblin Ms.1, 3).

Careful reading of early descriptions tends to confirm this conclusion. For example, Varo's association of his Mandarin phonology with Nankingese was not absolute and unequivocal. We should recall his counsel that Guānhuà be learned from "natives of the Province of Nān kīng, and of **other provinces where the Mandarin tongue is spoken well**" [emphasis added]. We find a similar view in Morrison's accounts. On the one hand he says in his dictionary (1815:xviii), "The pronunciation in this work, is rather what the Chinese call the Nanking dialect, than the Peking." But elsewhere he remarks (ibid., p.x): "What is called the Mandarin Dialect, or 官話 Kwan hwa, is spoken generally in 江南 Keangnan **and** 河南 Ho-nan Provinces...[emphasis added]," implying that something other than complete identity with Nankingese was involved here. A linguistic interrelationship of just this type has in fact been envisaged by Jiǎng Shàoyú 蔣紹愚 (1994:125), who suggests that the phonology of the Guānhuà koine need not be viewed as the sound system of one particular dialect but may instead have been more broadly rooted in a larger speech area. This view of the Guānhuà system, as eclectic and

1991:Chapter 3). Yùchí (1990:18) argues that it was probably elicited during detailed discussions of the *Hóngwǔ zhèngyùn* which Sin conducted with one Ní Qiān 倪謙, a Míng official who visited Korea in 1450. He further observes that Ní was a native of Hángzhōu 杭州 who spent his government career primarily at the southern court in Nanking.

⁴ A similar conclusion was reached by Chou (1989:279-80), who examined comparatively the sound classes inherent in the *Hóngwǔ zhèngyùn* and the phonological system of modern Nankingese.

composite, appears to accord both with comparative analysis of the internal structure of the system and with the early European assessments of it.

Examination of Sin Sukchu's Standard Readings shows that they share a number of features with the 'Phags-pa Chinese spelling system. This orthography, which was developed during the 1260's at the behest of the Mongol emperor Qubilai (known in China as Yuán Shìzǔ 元世祖) and submitted to the throne in 1269, has been much studied and discussed.⁵ The sound system inherent in it is often compared with that of the *Zhōngyuán yīnyùn* 中原音韻 (published 1324). The two systems are different in certain fundamental ways, and there are varying opinions on why this is so. One of these, which is probably prevalent today, is that, where the 'Phags-pa system differs significantly from that of the *Zhōngyuán yīnyùn*, its peculiarities are artificial and in many cases consciously archaizing, under the influence of traditional sources such as rime tables. An alternate view is that the 'Phags-pa system is a realistic orthography and represents a sound system different from that found in the *Zhōngyuán yīnyùn*. A possible new approach to the 'Phags-pa material is to compare it not only with the *Zhōngyuán yīnyùn* but also with the Korean orthographic corpora and those of the Míng/Qīng period Western missionaries. An initial attempt of this type has suggested that most of the special features in the 'Phags-pa system have analogues in the Korean and Guānhuà material and must therefore be taken seriously as reasonably accurate representations of some contemporary type (or conflation of types) of standard Chinese pronunciation (Coblin 1999). My own hypothesis is that it represents the speech of the Chinese members of Qubilai's entourage during the 1250's and 60's and that it may therefore be directly descended from standard systems which were current in Jīn 金 and late Southern Sòng 宋 times. With these points in mind, it has then seemed worthwhile to consider the hypothesis that the type of sound system represented in the 'Phags-pa spellings was directly ancestral to Sin's Standard Reading system. Testing of this has revealed that, while the two systems are in fact strikingly similar, Sin's system contains distinctions

⁵ For extensive bibliographical listings and surveys, cf. Nakano (1971) and T. F. Cheng (1985).

which are neither present in the 'Phags-pa spelling nor predictable on the basis of it (Ms.5). The tentative conclusion is that the Sin and 'Phags-pa systems represent different but probably closely related Central Plains standard pronunciation types. They could at some point have been “sister” koine varieties, the Sin type derived from the lower plains and the Yangtze watershed, while the 'Phags-pa type came from the upper plains and perhaps incorporated features from other areas as well. It was also observed that the sound system inherent in the *Zhōngyuán yīnyùn* appears to be more similar to that found in Ch'we Sejin's Right Readings, which Yùchí believes may have reflected a regional pronunciation of the Liáodōng area in the sixteenth century. It would seem worthwhile to explore this matter further in the future.

4. Some general implications of Guānhuà history

Let us now summarize our conclusions regarding the history of Guānhuà, some of which are fairly well established while others are admittedly more conjectural. The phonological system of the koine may have come into prominence in the Yangtze watershed during the fourteenth century, at the time when Zhū Yuánzhāng 朱元璋 (1328-1398) consolidated his power there and founded the Míng dynasty. It resembled in certain ways the earlier 'Phags-pa system but cannot have been derived from that system. It was rather different from the phonological framework reflected in the *Zhōngyuán yīnyùn*, which many feel represents a form of standard pronunciation of the Yuán period. The move of the political capital to Peking in 1421 had no fundamental effect on the koine's phonology. During the lapse of the dynasty, there were of course a number of evolutionary developments, and there may have been some adoption of features found in the Jiāng-Huái dialects of the Nanking area. At no time, however, does there appear to have been complete convergence with Nankingese or any other dialect. The koine phonology, as represented in our alphabetic sources at least, remained in this respect “dialectally abstract.” This is not to say that it was in any sense “unnatural” but rather that it combined various current phonological features in ways that were

probably not found in any single dialect of the time. The advent of the Qīng dynasty in 1644 brought no detectable change in the koine phonology. However, by the eighteenth century the way it was pronounced in Peking had begun to be influenced by the local dialect of that area; and by ca. 1850 there was a complete shift to an essentially Pekingese phonological base. This shift may not have been accompanied by a similarly dramatic change in lexicon and syntax. In these areas, the bulk of the material received from the earlier koine may have survived intact. But, by the latter part of the nineteenth century, the language we have denoted as Míng/Qīng Guānhuà appears have been effectively defunct as a national koine.

The history of Míng/Qīng Guānhuà is interesting in its own right, but it also has broader significance. For, as the last koine of the traditional period, and the only such language for which we have extensive, alphabetically attested evidence regarding phonology, lexicon, and syntax, it serves as a model on which we can base hypotheses about the nature and development of pre-modern Chinese standard languages in general. In fact, on the basis of it we can already make a number of preliminary observations, of which those dealing with phonology are of particular concern here.

To begin, as Jiǎng (1994) has noted, the phonology of a traditional Chinese koine need not have been identical with the sound system of particular spoken dialect. And in fact, evidence suggests that local dialects as such were often not the normal media of polite conversation among the educated in traditional China (Lǚ 1985 [1993]:298). Instead a koine phonology was more often an amalgam of phonological features. This assertion is in no sense a radical departure from known linguistic reality. For example, Guóyǔ, the form of modern standard and ostensibly Pekingese-based Mandarin spoken in the city of Taipei, has characteristics which are reminiscent of Yangtze watershed Mandarin (such as failure to distinguish retroflex and dental sibilant initials and the final nasals /n/ and /ŋ/ after the vowel /i/), as well as certain Min and Hakka-like features (Kubler 1981, R. Cheng 1985). Further afield, the regional standard pronunciation in the city of Lexington, Kentucky today is not phonologically identical with that of the local dialect of the area. Instead, it

is a composite system which uniquely combines local sound patterns with features adopted from standard American English as spoken on television, in films, etc. Our information on Guānhuà phonology suggests that traditional Chinese koinés may have had similarly eclectic phonological characteristics. This situation may in fact not be unusual anywhere in the world, but what is of interest to us here is that it is reliably attested in pre-modern China.

Secondly, and as a corollary to the preceding point, while koine phonologies may not have been identical with those of particular dialects, they were inextricably bound up with such dialectal sound systems, for it was ultimately from those systems that they derived the substantive material from which they were constituted. It is as if the koinés floated on the surface of the vast body of spoken vernaculars, deriving substance from them while concurrently contributing to them in the form of loanwords, literary readings, etc. The manner in which the two language types interacted could be complex, subtle, and perhaps idiosyncratic. The history of language in China may thus in fact have been to a certain extent an interplay between koinés and regional vernaculars, a process which might prove difficult to trace using conventional methods of historical reconstruction.

Thirdly, we note the very important point that major political and/or governmental changes did not necessarily have significant effects on the sound systems of koinés; or, at least, such effects could literally take centuries to manifest themselves. Thus, while the founding of the Míng dynasty may indeed have resulted in the emergence of a new standard, the shift of capital to Peking seventy-odd years later had no effect at all on the phonology of the new koine. And two and a quarter centuries after that the founding of a new dynasty, the Qīng, by an entirely different ruling group, was equally ineffectual in modifying the basic system. It was only in the mid-1800's, 430 years after the original departure of the political center from the Jiāng-Huái area, that the shift of phonological base to the speech type of northern capital was completed.

Fourthly, and as a corollary of the preceding point, the location at which a particular historical document was composed cannot be taken as a necessary indication of the type of language represented in that document.

Thus, early investigators mistook the transcriptions of Ricci as representative of Pekingese because Ricci resided in Peking, the national capital, when he wrote them; and the work of Trigault was alleged to be a record of Shānxī speech because he was there when his *Xīrú ěrmùzī* was completed. The fact that a koine was known and used in a particular place is no indication that it derived from that place.

Finally, we observe that filiation between koines of successive eras is by no means necessarily direct. For example, it is clear that the Standard Reading system of Sin Sukchu cannot have been derived from that implicit in the *Zhōngyuán yīnyùn*. Whatever they both were, they represent different linguistic strains. Likewise, the sound system of modern standard Mandarin cannot be descended from that of standard Mandarin of 1700, the *Lengua Mandarina* of Varo and his confrères. There is no direct filiation between the two. We could, if we wished, set up equations of correspondence between all these systems, and we could even represent these correspondences linearly as if they were part of a monolithic historical development. But to claim historicity for such a sequence would distort and misrepresent the true history of standard language in China.

5. The study of post-medieval Chinese phonology

The field of post-medieval Chinese historical phonology is in fact a sub-area within traditional phonological studies as a whole. As such it has heretofore been closely associated with textual sources such as rime books, phonological tables, etc. A number of received views of and approaches to these materials have been fairly standard in the field. For example, it has often been assumed that particular texts represent the native dialects of those who composed them. Or, alternatively, where the presence of standard or koine pronunciations were assumed from the outset, it was taken for granted that these koines were essentially identical with the dialects spoken in the pertinent political centers during the periods in question. And, finally, the languages thought to underlie the texts were assumed to be successive stages in the unitary development of “standard Chinese,” culminating in the sound system of modern standard Mandarin.

Though the material in the written sources was most often not in forms which were readily interpretable phonologically, it was deemed feasible to restore earlier pronunciation types by projecting modern Mandarin forms directly backward and plotting them onto the systematic patterns observed in the textual data. This technique, following the practice of Bernhard Karlgren, has always been referred to as “phonological reconstruction.” In fact, however, it does not really resemble the methods of comparative or internal reconstruction practiced in the field of historical linguistics as whole. On the contrary, it probably has more in common with the sort of interpretive techniques used to study the pronunciation of such ancient, alphabetically recorded languages as Latin and Greek,⁶ the difference being that the sound categories in those languages, along with their approximate phonetic shapes, are already inherent in the written forms, whereas in Chinese one must first deduce the categories for oneself and then interpret them phonologically without the aid of alphabetic representations.

On the basis of our review of Guānhuà history, it is possible to reassess a number of the traditional stances in the field.

First of all, we may suspect that traditional phonological texts seldom, if ever, were intended as descriptions of particular dialects as such. As Kun Chang (1979:243) has observed, “The synchronic description of a single dialect is a practice of modern linguistics. [In pre-modern times] no one felt it necessary to faithfully and exhaustively describe any one living dialect.” Traditional texts were, on the contrary, probably most often connected with koine pronunciations of successive eras. And, as we have seen in the preceding section, one cannot assume a priori that such koinés were ever identical with particular dialects. They seem rather to have been phonologically eclectic in that they had a proclivity to develop composite phonological systems.

This tendency to eclecticism has been enhanced by the fact, also pointed out by Chang (*op. cit.*), that phonological texts in traditional times seem to have been primarily concerned with reading pronunciations of characters in literary contexts rather than with the sound systems of actual

⁶ As, for example, in such works as Allen (1965) and (1968).

speech. For this reason they were often not subject to unequivocal synchronic constraints but could on the contrary archaize by including readings from previous sources whenever these were felt to be authoritative or prestigious. The phonetically abstract nature of the Chinese script may have made this sort of “diachronic eclecticism” easier than it might otherwise have been, since the reader would not necessarily have been confronted by written forms which were patently unnatural or unpronounceable from a synchronic standpoint.

To these complications we must then add our observation that koines of successive eras cannot be assumed to have evolved in direct progression, the earlier ones feeding directly into successive ones, period by period, in a systematic, linear filiation. Instead, there could be and sometimes was wholesale and even fairly abrupt replacement of earlier sound systems by newer ones, which themselves could be constituted from elements of diverse dialectal origin. Factors of this type pose serious practical and theoretical problems for the traditional reconstructive approaches and methodologies, especially where these take for granted a direct, linear process of sound change from period to period.

6. Thoughts on the future of the field

Our reflections on the history and nature of Guānhuà, have called into question a number of basic assumptions about the study of post-medieval Chinese phonology. However, this need not engender pessimism about the future. On the contrary, recent realizations, and the reassessments they will stimulate, will almost certainly strengthen the field. Let us now see how and why this is so.

6.1 The importance of alphabetic sources

The field of post-medieval phonological studies has been signally blessed with a wealth of records in alphabetic form. For the mid-thirteenth century we have a nearly complete syllabic inventory in the 'Phags-pa orthography. Beginning in the fifteenth century we have Korean

orthographic records of several different types of standard or regional-standard Chinese. From 150 years later, beginning in the final decades of the Míng period, we have written records in the Latin alphabet, extending down to and through the nineteenth century where they intersect modern recordings. And finally, from the early to mid-Qīng period we have Manchu orthographic sources for standard Chinese. In my opinion, this material is no less valuable than alphabetic recordings of the older European languages. Indeed, because the Chinese orthographies in question were often developed with great care and precision for the expressed purpose of accurately representing Chinese pronunciation to students of the language, they may ultimately prove to be more useful than comparable sources in the West. This is not to say that they are simple or easy to deal with. They must still be interpreted, just as texts in Latin, Greek, Middle High German, Middle French, etc. are interpreted phonologically. But they are nonetheless priceless records of earlier stages of Chinese, which deserve to assume a central place in the study of post-medieval historical phonology. The problem is that these materials are currently not readily available to the field at large. Instead, they remain the bailiwick of a small number of specialists and are scattered in sources which are sometimes obscure and difficult of access. What is immediately needed is a set of comprehensive handbooks in which the data are conventionally transcribed and can be found easily and quickly, without the need to know the original scripts. Kim Kwangjo's dissertation (1991) is an example of how such a compendium might be structured, with the exception that it lacks indexes to its data tables. At the next level, we need comparative handbooks in which material from each of the alphabetic sources is juxtaposed in single entries. For example, if one wanted to examine the orthographic forms for the words "hand" and "head", one might find useful an arrangement of the following type, taken from a database which comprises some of the pre-modern orthographic data mentioned here:

shǒu 手 QYS śjəu:

O. 'Phags-pa: Ménggǔ ziyùn shiw (上) [śiw]

A. Early Míng: Sin Sukchu SR śiw (上); PR ---; LR ---

B. Late Míng

General: Ricci xèu [ʃeu] ; Trigault xièu, xèu [ʃieu ~ ʃeu]

Southern: Port-Chinese Dict scieü [ʃeu] ; Dialogues scieu` [ʃeu]

C. Early Qīng: Varo xèu [ʃeu] ; Prémare cheou` [ʃeu]

D. Mid-Qīng: Morrison shòw [ʃʌu] ; Williams shau³ [ʃəu]E. Late Qīng Nanking: Kühnert shó [ʃəu] ; Hemeling shou³ [ʃəu]

tóu 頭 QYS dǎu

O. 'Phags-pa: MGZY t^{hiw} (平) [dǎw]

A. EMing: Sin Sukchu SR dǎw (平) ; PR --- ; LR ---

B. LMing

General: Ricci --- ; Trigault 'têu [t'eu]

Southern: Port-Chin Dict teū [t'eu] ; Dialogues teū [t'eu]

C. EQing: Varo t'êu [t'eu] ; Prémare t'êdu [t'eu]

D. MQing: Morrison t'ow [t'ʌu] ; Williams t'au² [t'əu]E. LQing Nanking: Kühnert t'ô [t'əu] ; Hemeling t'ou² [t'əu]

In these examples, a conventional “*Qièyùn* 切韻 system” transcription has been given for convenience of reference to the traditional analytical framework. Orthographic forms are then cited from materials beginning with the 'Phags-pa data and ending with nineteenth century sources. Phonetic interpretations have been added in square brackets. Others might interpret the material differently, but what is important at the present stage is that the original orthographic material be made readily accessible to everyone working in the field. For these data can put us in direct contact with koine pronunciations of earlier periods in a way that hypothetical “reconstructions” of the traditional type cannot.

6.2 The importance of modern dialect data and the comparative method

We have observed that the history of Chinese phonology has generally involved close interaction between koines and dialects. If this is so then it suggests that in studying phonology we must take account of the history of the regional vernaculars themselves. In the absence of pre-

modern written records, we must do this by employing the comparative method. The utilization of this method in Chinese dialectology has aroused some controversy in recent years. Efforts to apply it to Chinese dialects have often involved what might be called “deep” comparison, i.e. the comparative study of large and hence exceedingly old dialect families, such as Wú, Mǐn, Hakka, etc. Difficulties have arisen in the process, and these have given rise to doubts about the efficacy of the method as a whole, insofar as it is applicable to Chinese as a language group.⁷ Here again, in the specific area of post-medieval Chinese phonology we are in fact rather lucky. For in this field any comparisons we undertake will by definition be of a more “shallow” type, in that we will restrict our scrutiny to smaller groups of closely related dialects. The effectiveness of comparative reconstruction at this time depth is well documented, a good case in point being Bloomfield’s Proto-Central Algonquian (Bloomfield 1925, 1970:440-488). If one wants to study the relationship between late Míng Guānhuà and the languages of the Nanking area, there is a great deal of material available for a reconstruction of what might be called “Proto-Central Jiāng-Huái.” Such an endeavor, resulting in a proto-language probably no more than five or six centuries old, is not difficult to carry out and can shed light on the interactions between the alphabetically attested koine and the vernaculars of the area where it was based (Coblin Ms.4). Efforts of this type can and should be made across the broad dialectal landscape, wherever the data are adequate to support them. For example, if one wants to consider the relationship between the *Zhōngyuán yīnyùn* and the Luòyáng dialect of earlier times, one should begin not by simply comparing the text with one or more modern dialects but rather by working out a comparative proto-North Central Plains reconstruction, to see what sort of general system emerges. This may then be compared with written records of various kinds, including the *Zhōngyuán yīnyùn*. To apply the comparative method effectively in the field of post-medieval phonology, we need to set our sights low and proceed cautiously and incrementally, working in detail with recent linguistic stages.

⁷ On time-depth as a limit on the efficacy of the comparative method in phonological reconstruction, cf. Durie and Ross (1996:10-11).

6.3 The role of written Chinese records

I have recently been accused of holding the view that “traditional Chinese linguistic scholarship as represented by rhyme dictionaries and rhyme tables is worthless.”⁸ Let us consider this surmise for a moment. At the outset, it seems unlikely that any reasonable person would consider written records from the past to be “worthless.” But in fairness to the writer in question, this line is probably motivated by a rather different concern. For what he really fears, surely, is that one might consider worthless the broad corpus of modern attempts (such as his own) to interpret traditional Chinese linguistic sources. Let me then allay these apprehensions. My view is that modern studies of traditional texts have elucidated many aspects of traditional Chinese scholarship and accordingly provide a useful basis from which future work in the field can be carried forward. The question is, how should this be done?

It seems to me that with the advent of the new century the time is ripe to reassess the traditional Chinese scholastic corpus and its modern interpretations in the light of newly emerging ideas on the history of the Chinese language family as a whole. How this is to be accomplished is something which the new generation of sinological linguists will determine. My suggestion, as outlined above, is that orthographic sources be moved to the fore and taken together with comparative reconstruction as a basis for reexamination of the traditional sources. In closing, I should like to briefly illustrate how this might be done.

One of the most widely studied texts in the field of post-medieval phonology is the *Zhōngyuán yīnyùn*. There has been considerable discussion of the dialectal basis or bases for the system inherent in its homophone groups. And there have been at least half a dozen major attempts to restore actual early sound values for that system. How, then, are we to proceed in the twenty-first century? Discard the earlier attempts and then make more such attempts? Hopefully not. Let us instead develop new approaches to the text itself, building wherever we can on the efforts

⁸ So Pulleyblank (1998:201). Significantly, no statement of mine is cited in support of this. It remains more ululation than allegation.

of our predecessors, but at the same time incorporating new views of the material and developing new methodologies for dealing with it. The purpose of the *Zhōngyuán yīnyùn* was to show educated readers from various parts of China which syllables could be put in riming position in the *qǔ* 曲 literary form (Yáng 1981:1-6, Ji 1999:19). And its goal was clearly to arrange the riming syllables in lists which would be easily accessible to the largest number of readers. The “accessing framework” adopted by the author, Zhōu Déqīng 周德清, was phonological in conception. It is therefore incontestable that there inheres in the structural arrangement of the text information about whatever sound system or, more likely, systems the largest number of readers would have brought to the text when trying to use it, wherever they happened to be from. Sadly, however, it may never be possible for us to uniquely determine on the basis of this arrangement itself precisely what the sound system of Zhōu Déqīng’s own speech or the speech of any particular one of his readers was. Nor can we extract from the text itself the actual sound values of any such system. This is not because the work is flawed or “worthless.” It is rather because it was never intended to help people of our time learn how language varieties of that time were actually pronounced. In fact, it was not even intended to convey such information to people of **that** time. For they would have needed no such information. Its purpose, which seems to have been well served (Yáng 1981:1), was to give lists of rimeable syllables for the *qǔ*. All of this notwithstanding, it is equally certain that we today, knowing what we do about the text, can use it to learn more about pronunciation types of Zhōu Déqīng’s time. Let us consider several simple examples.

In the *Zhōngyuán yīnyùn*, after the large body of homophone lists, there is a further section dealing with mispronunciations, some of which were of dialectal origin (*zhū fāngyǔ zhī bìng* 諸方語之病). The following are three of these:⁹

⁹ The examples occur in the second volume (unpaginated) of the *Něān* 訥庵 edition, as edited by Lù Zhiwéi and Yáng Nàisī 楊耐思, Peking: Zhonghua, 1978.

1. 倉有窗 “The [pronunciation of the] graph *cāng* has [an erroneous application to] *chuāng*.”

cāng 倉 QYS tshāng

- O. 'Phags-pa: MGZY tshang (平) [ts'ɑŋ]
- A. EMing: Sin Sukchu SR ts'ɑŋ (平); PR ---; LR ---
- B. LMing
 - General: Ricci ---; Trigault 'çām [ts'ɑŋ]
 - Southern: Port-Chin Dict za' [ts'ɑŋ]; Dialogues ---
- C. EQing: Varo çhāng' [ts'ɑŋ]; Prémare ts'ang [ts'ɑŋ]
- D. MQing: Morrison tsang [ts'ɑŋ]; Williams ts'áng¹ [ts'ɑŋ]

chuāng 窗 QYS tshāng

- O. 'Phags-pa: MGZY chwang (平) [tʂ'uaŋ]
- A. EMing: Sin Sukchu SR tʂ'uaŋ (平); PR tʂ'uaŋ; LR ---
- B. LMing
 - General: Ricci ---; Trigault c'hoām, c'huām [tʂ'uaŋ]
 - Southern: Port-Chin Dict zan [ts'an]; Dialogues ---
- C. EQing: Varo choāng' (Voc.) [tʂ'uaŋ]; Prémare t'chouāng, ts'ang [tʂ'uaŋ ~ ts'ɑŋ]
- D. MQing: Morrison chwang [tʂ'uaŋ]; Williams chw'áng [tʂ'uaŋ]

These two words are kept apart in the pronunciations indicated by the 'Phags-pa and Sin Sukchu orthographic forms, though they are rather close in Sin's system. However, in Prémare's record *chuāng* 窗 had a variant pronunciation which was identical with his reading of *cāng* 倉. Though we do not know exactly how Zhōu Déqīng read these graphs, we may suspect that in his time there existed some fairly current speech form which resembled that on which Prémare's variant spelling was later based. And it is of course possible that that form of Chinese actually read the graphs in Prémare's way. In any case, what Zhōu's note tells us is that in his view this homophony between the two was non-standard, a situation which seems to be confirmed by both the 'Phags-pa and Standard Reading corpora.

2. 巾有驚 “The [pronunciation of the] graph *jīn* has [an erroneous application to] *jīng*.”

jīn 巾 QYS *kjen*³

- O. Phags-pa: MGZY *gin* (平) [kin]
 A. EMing: Sin Sukchu SR *kin* (平); PR ---; LR ---
 B. LMing
 General: Ricci ---; Trigault *kīn* [kin]
 Southern: Port-Chin Dict *chin* [kin]; Dialogues ---
 C. EQing: Varo *kīn* [kin] (Voc.); Prémare ---
 D. MQing: Morrison *kīn* [kin]; Williams *kin*¹ [kɨn]
 E. LQing Nanking: Kühnert *gīng* [ciŋ]; Hemeling *chin/ching*¹ [cin ~ ciŋ]
 F. ModNanking: Jiangsu Sheng [tɕiŋ^{31陰平}]; Nanking Dict ---
 G. JHuai: JR [tɕiŋ^{31陰平}]; YZ [tɕiŋ^{31陰平}]; GY [tɕiŋ^{44陰平}]; HF [tɕiŋ^{陰平}];
 Proto-Central Jiāng-Huái *kiN^{陰平}

jīng 驚 QYS *kjəŋ*

- O. Phags-pa: MGZY *ging* (平) [kiŋ]
 A. EMing: Sin Sukchu SR *kiŋ* (平); PR ---; LR ---
 B. LMing
 General: Ricci ---; Trigault *kīm* [kiŋ]
 Southern: Port-Chin Dict *chijn* [kin]; Dialogues ---
 C. EQing: Varo *kīng* [kiŋ] (Voc.); Prémare *kīng* [kiŋ]
 D. MQing: Morrison *kīng* [kiŋ]; Williams *king*¹ [kɨŋ]
 E. LQing Nanking: Kühnert *gīng* [ciŋ]; Hemeling *chin/ching*¹ [cin ~ ciŋ]
 F. ModNanking: Jiangsu Sheng [tɕiŋ^{31陰平}]; Nanking Dict [tɕiŋ³¹]
 G. JHuai: JR [tɕiŋ^{31陰平}]; YZ [tɕiŋ^{31陰平}]; GY [tɕiŋ^{44陰平}]; HF [tɕiŋ^{陰平}];
 PCJH *kiN^{陰平}

In the koine pronunciations preserved in our alphabetic sources, these two graphs are generally kept strictly apart. However, in the form of Guānhuà preserved in the Portuguese-Chinese Dictionary manuscript they were homophones, both pronounced [kin]. Furthermore, comparative study of the central Jiāng-Huái dialects¹⁰ suggests that this same homophony

¹⁰ For which forms are given in lines F and G of the examples.

existed in Proto-Central Jiāng-Huái, the ancestral form of these dialects, even though we are unable to determine what the exact phonetic shape of the final nasal consonant (*-N) was in the two problematic syllables (Coblin Ms.4). It is interesting that the equivalence considered non-standard by Zhōu is found in both the regional system of the Portuguese-Chinese Dictionary and the Proto-Central Jiāng-Huái system but not in the standard koine spellings of successive periods.

3. 馬有麼 “The [pronunciation of the] graph *mǎ* has [an erroneous application to] *mǒ*.”

mǎ 馬 QYS ma:

- O. 'Phags-pa: MGZY --- ; (Suppl. ma (上) [ma])
- A. EMing: Sin Sukchu SR ma (上) ; PR --- ; LR ---
- B. LMing
 - General: Ricci mà [ma] ; Trigault mà [ma]
 - Southern: Port-Chin Dict ma [ma] ; Dialogues ---
- C. EQing: Varo mà [ma] ; Prémare mà [ma]
- D. MQing: Morrison mà [ma] ; Williams má⁴ [ma]

me 麼 QYS muâ

- O. 'Phags-pa: MGZY mwo (上) [mwɔ]
- A. EMing: Sin Sukchu SR mwɔ (上) ; PR ma (平) ; LR ma (平)
- B. LMing
 - General: Ricci --- ; Trigault mô [mɔ]
 - Southern: Port-Chin Dict --- ; Dialogues mo, mo` [mɔ]
- C. EQing: Varo mò, mà [mɔ ~ ma] ; Prémare mò, mô [mɔ]
- D. MQing: Morrison mō [mɔ] ; Williams mó² [mɔ]

Here we see that in the 'Phags-pa and Standard Reading forms the syllable represented by 麼 was read with a rounded vowel. But in the Popular and Left readings of Sin the vowel was unrounded, and this same form was also known to Varo. It is not unlikely that this is the pronunciation which Zhōu Déqīng considered to be erroneous. It is intriguing that Sin Sukchu heard this “erroneous” pronunciation in spoken

contexts (rather than in the reading pronunciation) of his time and that there was some competition between the two in Varo's time as well.

In these examples we have not attempted to restore the actual pronunciation of Zhōu Déqīng or even speculate about what the dialectal basis of the *Zhōngyuán yīnyùn* may have been. But it has been interesting and informative to compare what Zhōu says with the information we have found in our orthographic sources. Even if we are never able to “reconstruct the *Zhōngyuán yīnyùn* language” (assuming that such a thing actually existed in the first place), the text is an invaluable historical source for the study of koines of the post-medieval period.

7. Conclusions

In this paper we have reflected on recent insights into the nature of pre-modern Guānhuà and the importance these may have for the study of the entire field of post-medieval Chinese phonology. In this connection we have suggested for the future 1) that traditional assumptions about the nature of Chinese koines (i.e. geographical and dialectal affiliations, filiation from period to period, etc.) must be reconsidered and, where necessary, reformulated; 2) that orthographically recorded material should be given a more prominent place in the data corpus and should be used as a basis for the reassessment of traditional, non-orthographic textual sources; and 3) that the comparative and historical study of modern dialects, resulting in phonological reconstructions of proto-forms, should be reconciled with the study of written sources in order to elucidate the mutual influence between koines and regional vernaculars of successive eras. In closing, we may move briefly beyond the venue of post-medieval phonology to the larger field of historical phonology as a whole. For this field, the suggestions made under point 1) above seem to be directly applicable, while those under 2) appear to have less relevance. The question of whether and how the measures suggested under 3) may be applied to the medieval and earlier periods is one which future generations of sinological linguists must confront and resolve.

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對中古以後語音史的一些思考

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明清官話語音史的研究近幾十年來有了相當可觀的進步。本篇討論這些新發現如何能夠幫助我們重新研究和了解中古以後的語音大田野。結論是：1) 中國近代共通語並非某時某地的方言。其語音系統卻是拿各地方音為基礎的一種新穎建築。2) 研究此種獨特的語音系統需要拿歷代拼音文字記載為主要研究對象，而傳統韻書應該算是次要的參考資料。3) 必須大量地使用方言比較法來重建古代方言音系，然後再來與各代共通語音系作對照和比擬。