

Preliminary Analysis of the Phonological History of Melung Tibetan

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Melung Tibetan is spoken in the eastern part of Weixi County, Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Northern Yunnan. This paper aims to provide a sketch of the phonological history of the Melung dialect from the viewpoint of Tibetan dialectology. According to the discussion, it belongs to an independent vernacular group, i.e. the Melung subgroup of the Sems-kyi-nyila dialect group of Khams Tibetan.

Key words: Tibetan dialect, Khams Tibetan, Melung vernacular, dialectal sub-grouping

1. Introduction

Weixi 維西 Lisu Autonomous County is located in the southwestern part of Diqing 迪慶 Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. As its name shows, the county is mainly inhabited by Lisu, but also by Tibetan, Naxi, Han Chinese, and Bai. It is known by local Tibetans that the Tibetan dialects spoken in Weixi can be divided into two subgroups, viz. Budy [Badi 巴迪] and Melung [Tacheng 塔城].¹ Under this multi-ethnic situation, mutual linguistic influence is easily demonstrated and Tibetan is no exception. Melung Tibetan possesses unique characteristics among the Tibetan dialects (Suzuki & Tshering mTshomo 2007).

Among multiple vernaculars of Melung Tibetan, the variety spoken in Baohe 保和 town and Yongchun 永春 village, was spoken by very few Tibetans when the present authors investigated it. We were able to collect only hundreds words and basic sentences because this variety is no longer spoken in everyday life, but we also found interesting data for Tibetan dialectology.

¹ The dialect name “Melung” is based on the oral form of the Written Tibetan name *’ba’-lung* for Weixi, but the transcription of this oral form is based on the Budy dialect /’me: lō/ or /’mbe: lō/. In the Melung dialect, the local name for Weixi is /’ŋi na?/, of obscure origin.

This paper aims to provide a preliminary analysis of the phonological history of the Yongchun variety of Melung Tibetan in comparison with Written Tibetan.²

2. Phonological system

2.1 Tones

The word tone system is adopted, four tonal patterns are distinctive. The first two syllables can carry a distinctive tonal pitch in a polysyllabic word.

type	monosyllable	disyllable
ˉ : high level	S ^[55]	S ^[55] S ^[55]
ˊ : rising	S ^[24/35]	S ^[24] S ^[55]
ˋ : rising-falling	S ^[132]	S ^[24] S ^[53]
ˋˊ : falling	S ^[53]	S ^[55] S ^[53] / S ^[53] S ^[22]

A tonal sign is given before each word.

2.2 Vowels

Each vowel can be articulated as oral or nasalised. Short and long vowels are distinctive.

i	ɨ	ɯ u
e	ɵ ə	o
ɛ		ɔ
a		ɑ

In addition, three *r*-coloured vowels /ɤ/, /ɛ/ and /ɔ/ exist.

Examples on the articulatory position of vowels are given as follows:

/i/	/ˈmi:/ ‘fire’
/e/	/ˈt̪ɕeʔ/ ‘voice’
/ɛ/	/ˈs̪˥ɛ/ ‘gold’
/a/	/ˈk̪˥a/ ‘eagle’

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/ɑ/	/ʎ ^h ɑ:/ ‘snow’
/ɔ/	/ʎtɕʔ/ ‘six’
/o/	/ʎroʔ/ ‘friend’
/u/	/ʎəɾ t ^h u:/ ‘bone’
/ʉ/	/ʎtɕ ^h ʉ/ ‘water’
/ʌ/	/ʎʌ pu/ ‘body’
/ə/	/ʎs ^h əʔ/ ‘louse’
/ɵ/	/ʎŋɵʔ/ ‘breast’

Examples of the lengthening and *r*-coloured distinctions for /ə/ are as follows:

	short	long
normal	/ʎmə tɕi:/ ‘jaw’	/ʎtu jə:/ ‘donkey’
nasalised	/ʎmǎ/ ‘two’	/ʎx ^h ǎ:/ ‘shoe’
<i>r</i> -coloured	/ʎməʔ/ ‘dragon (year)’	—

2.3 Consonants

The consonant inventory is as follows:

plosive	aspirated	p ^h	t ^h	t ^h		k ^h	
	non-aspirated	p	t	t		k	ʔ
	voiced	b	d	d		g	
affricate	aspirated		ts ^h	tɕ ^h	tɕ ^h		
	non-aspirated		ts	tɕ	tɕ		
	voiced		dz	dʒ	dʒ		
fricative	aspirated		s ^h	s ^h	ɕ ^h	x ^h	
	non-aspirated	ʃ	s	ɕ	ɕ	x	h
	voiced		z	ʒ	ʒ	ɣ	ɦ
nasal	voiced	m	n		ɳ	ŋ	
	voiceless	m̥	n̥		ɳ̥	ŋ̥	
liquid	voiced		l	r			
	voiceless		l̥				
semi-vowel	voiced	w			j		

The initial consonant system allows the complex initials consisting of three consonants at most (see §2.4). Examples of simplex initials are given below:

/p ^h /	/p ^h ɑʔ/ ‘pig’
/p/	/pə/ ‘cloud’
/b/	/bə naʔ/ ‘fly’
/t ^h /	/t ^h oʔ/ ‘food’
/t/	/ʔa pa/ ‘robber’
/d/	/ʔtoʔ doʔ/ ‘narrow’
/t ^h /	/t ^h o ʂ ^h əŋ/ ‘pine wood’
/t/	/tu/ ‘mule’
/d/	/tʂu dʒʔ/ ‘sixteen’
/k ^h /	/k ^h a/ ‘mouth’
/k/	/kə/ ‘knife’
/g/	/ko go/ ‘curved’
/ŋ/	/ʔa ŋi/ ‘grand-father’
/ts ^h /	/ts ^h ə/ ‘dog’
/ts/	/tsə taj/ ‘scissors’
/dz/	/dza s ^h a ʔi nã/ ‘in the morning’
/tʂ ^h /	/tʂ ^h u/ ‘water’
/tʂ/	/tʂa/ ‘tea’
/dʒ/	/s ^h e dʒo/ ‘orange’
/tʂ ^h /	/tʂ ^h ɑʔ/ ‘blood’
/tʂ/	/tʂi/ ‘scales’
/dz/	/dzeʔ tʂu/ ‘eighty’
/ʦ/	/ʦtʂi/ ‘step’ (no simple initials)
/s ^h /	/s ^h i/ ‘light’
/s/	/sẽ/ ‘food’
/z/	/za ko/ ‘sock’
/ʂ ^h /	/ʂ ^h eŋ p ^h oŋ/ ‘tree’
/ʂ/	/ʂu lɛ/ ‘morning’
/z/	/zə tʂu/ ‘forty’
/ʧ ^h /	/ʧ ^h eʔ/ ‘half’
/ʧ/	/ʧi la/ ‘cat’
/z/	/zə/ ‘rabbit (year)’
/x ^h /	/x ^h ə/ ‘shoe’
/x/	/ʔa xẽ/ ‘cucumber’
/ɣ/	/ji ɣə/ ‘book’
/h/	/hka/ ‘hair’ (no simple initials)
/fi/	/fiɛ/ ‘cloth’
/m/	/mã/ ‘man’

/ṁ/	/ṁa zẽ:/ ‘dinner’
/n/	/ˈnaw nɛ:/ ‘tomorrow’
/ṇ/	/ṇũʔ/ ‘nasal mucus’
/ṅ/	/ˈṅa:/ ‘fish’
/ṇ̥/	/ṇ̥u ma/ ‘bamboo’
/ŋ/	/ˈŋa/ ‘I’
/ṅ̥/	/ṅ̥go ṅ̥ẽ:/ ‘pillow’
/l/	/ˈlaŋ/ ‘road’
/l̥/	/ṽla/ ‘god’
/r/	/ˈra/ ‘goat’
/w/	/ṽwã ma/ ‘wind’
/j/	/ˈke jœʔ/ ‘all’

2.4 Syllable structure

The most complicated syllable structure can be illustrated as below:

$${}^C C_i G V C C$$

preinitial ^C : preaspiration, prenasal, etc.

main initial C_i : all the consonants.

syllable core V : all the vowels, i.e. short, long, nasalised as well as *r*-coloured ones.

glide G : /w/, /j/ or /r/ only.

final CC : /ʔ/, /ŋ/, /r/, /wʔ/, etc.

3. Phonological history

This section presents a sketch of the phonological history of the Melung dialect through a comparison with the phonological structure of Written Tibetan (WrT).³

3.1 Initial

3.1.1 WrT obstruents

The general diachronic development of obstruents in initial position can be characterised as follows:

³ It is supposed that WrT represents the phonological system of ancient Tibetan. Its phonological value is based on sKal-bzang ʼGyur-med & sKal-bzang dByangs-can (2004:379-390).

- Reflexes of WrT simplex voiceless initials have remained voiceless in Melung.
- Reflexes of WrT simplex voiceless fricative initials have become into aspirated in Melung.
- Reflexes of WrT simplex voiced initials are devoiced in Melung.
- Reflexes of WrT simplex initials which correspond to devoiced sounds are associated with low-toned syllables in Melung.
- Reflexes of WrT complex voiced initials have retained voicing in Melung.

A remarkable innovation on the articulation in the Melung dialect apart from most other Tibetan dialects is that almost WrT alveopalatal obstruents have turned into retroflexes as in:

/ʈʂʰu/ ‘water’ *chu*
 /ʰʈʂaʔ/ ‘iron’ *lcags*
 /ʂʰeŋ pʰoŋ/ ‘tree’ *shing phung*
 /ʰʂa/ ‘four’ *bzhi*

Melung dialect has two occlusive series in the retroflex articulation, i.e. affricates and plosives; there are fewer examples of the latter than the former, and their origin is obscure but may be associated with WrT glide *-r-* as in:

/ʰŋdʒo ma/ ‘mud’ *’dam ba*
 /ʰʈʂə ma/ ‘rice’ *’bras*
 /ʰtu:/ ‘mule’ *drel*
 /ʰtʂʔ/ ‘six’ *drug*⁴

The development of WrT combination with the glide *-y-* is as follows:

- Reflexes of WrT labials with *-y-* turned into alveopalatal fricatives in Melung.
- Reflexes of WrT velars with *-y-* turned into alveopalatal affricates in Melung.

/ʰʧa/ ‘cock’ *bya*
 /ʰʧʰo:ʔ pu/ ‘rich’ *phyug po*
 /ʰʂdʒa/ ‘Han Chinese’ *rgya*
 /ʰʈʧuʔ pu/ ‘peaceful’ *skyid po*

⁴ This word may not be directly associated with WrT *drug* because of its oral form with the high tone.

WrT glide *w* is generally kept as:

/ʃwa/ ‘hat’ *zhwa*
 /^htswa/ ‘grass’ *rtswa*

The entire development of WrT combination with the glide *-r-* is treated separately in §3.3 because of its complexity.

3.1.2 WrT sonorants

The WrT sonorants include four nasals (*m*, *n*, *ny*, *ng*), two liquids (*r*, *l*), and two glides (*w*, *y*). In the Melung dialect, the WrT simplex sonorants were generally kept. WrT complexes generally turned into the same initials as simplexes, with preaspiration in high tone, except for prefixed *s-*, which turned into voiceless consonants as in:

/m̃/ ‘person’ *mi*
 /ṁē:/ ‘medicine’ *sman*
 /ñ pa/ ‘sick person’ *nad pa*
 /^hna pa/ ‘ear’ *rna pa*
 /^hna/ ‘nose’ *sna*

3.2 Rhyme

3.2.1 WrT open syllables

WrT vowel quality in open syllables (including WrT ‘final’) were generally not kept in the Melung dialect except for *a*:

WrT	Melung	
a	/a/	/s ^h a/ ‘earth’ <i>sa</i>
i	/ə/	/ʔ/ ‘mountain’ <i>ri</i>
u	/u/	/tṣ ^h u/ ‘water’ <i>chu</i>
e	/i/	/mi:/ ‘fire’ <i>me</i>
o	/u/	/s ^h u/ ‘tooth’ <i>so</i>

3.2.2 WrT closed syllables with nasals

Almost all the WrT nasal finals caused the nasalisation of the preceding vowel

instead of losing their segmental phonemic status or transformed into velar nasals, as shown in the following examples:

/ʰdɔ̃/ ‘seven’ *bdun*
 /ʰŋũ jø:/ ‘blue’ *sngon po*
 /sẽ:/ ‘food’ *zan*
 /naŋ/ ‘sky’ *gnam*
 /loŋ ma/ ‘river’ *lung ma*
 /ʰt͡sʰoŋ t͡sʰoŋ/ ‘small’ *chung chung*

Concerning the vowel quality, the original articulation of the final caused the sound change of the vowel.⁵ Expected sound correspondences are as follows:

	-ng	-n	-m
a	/aŋ, waŋ/	/ẽ/	/aŋ, aŋ, əŋ/
i	/eŋ, əŋ, uŋ/	/ĩ/	/əŋ/
u	/oŋ/	/ã/	/oŋ/
e	/əŋ/	?	?
o	/oŋ/	/ũ, ẽ/	/oŋ/

As above, WrT finals *ng* and *m* tend to remain as phonemic velar nasals, but several examples, indeed, correspond to the vocalic nasalisation with the omission of the phoneme /ŋ/.

3.2.3 WrT closed syllables with non-nasals

Almost all the WrT plosive finals (*b*, *d*, *g*) transformed into glottal stops as in:

/pʰʌʔ/ ‘Tibetan people’ *bod*
 /ʰdʒeʔ/ ‘eight’ *brgyad*
 /pʰaʔ/ ‘pig’ *phag*
 /ŋiʔ/ ‘eye’ *mig*⁶

The final *b* could remain as the final /w/ as in:

⁵ The effect of the second final *s* is not obvious at present. Because of insufficient data to be analysed, the list below is not perfect.

⁶ This word must originate from Old Tibetan *dmyig*.

/k^həwʔ/ ‘needle’ *khab*

WrT continuant consonants (*s*, *r*, *l*) lost their segmental phonemic status and could cause vowel lengthening.

/s^hɛ:/ ‘gold’ *gser*

/ŋɐ:/ ‘silver’ *ngul*

/tɕu:/ ‘mule’ *drel*

Concerning the vowel quality, the original articulation of the final caused the sound change of the vowel. Expected sound correspondences are as follows:

	-g	-d	-b	-s	-r	-l
a	/aʔ, ɑʔ/	/ɛʔ, eʔ/	/əwʔ/	/ɛ:/	/ɛ:/	/ɛ:/
i	/uʔ, ɔʔ/	/iʔ/	?	/i:/	?	/i:/
u	/ɔʔ, oʔ/	/ʊʔ/	/uʔ/	?	?	/ʊ:/
e	?	/eʔ/	/ʉʔ/	?	/ɛ:/	/u:/
o	/oʔ/	/ʊʔ, ɵʔ/	/ũ/	/ɵ:/	/o:/	/ɵ:/

3.3 Origin of the *r*-coloured vowel

The special feature of the Melung dialect is the innovation of the *r*-coloured vowel, which we previously introduced in Suzuki & Tshering mTshomo (2007).

r-coloured vowels appear as in the following examples:

/ɾpə/ ‘cloud’ *sprin*

/mɔ lowʔ/ ‘thunder’ *’brug* ?

/ʔə/ ‘mountain’ *ri*

/ʔər t^hu:/ ‘bone’ *rus* ?

/b^həŋ/ ‘sugar’ *sbrang*

/f^hɛ:/ ‘cloth’ *ras*

/mɔʔ/ ‘dragon (year)’ *’brug*

According to the above examples, *r*-coloured vowels can be associated with WrT root initial *r* as well as WrT glide *r*, but not with WrT final *r*.

On the other hand, some of the WrT glide *r* have been lost without any compensation or caused the change of root initials into retroflexes as in:

/ˈpaʔ/ ‘cliff’ *brag*
 /ˈbɸa/ ‘snake’ *sbrul*
 /ˈhka/ ‘hair’ *skra*
 /ˈkʰa/ ‘hawk’ *khra*
 /ˈtʂwan jon/ ‘beggar’ *sprang slong*⁷
 /ˈtu:/ ‘mule’ *drel*
 /ˈtɕʔ/ ‘six’ *drug*

According to these examples, the vocalic quality is supposed to influence the formation of *r*-coloured vowels; i.e. the schwa is the most likely source for them. If so, it is a general sound change process in the Melung dialect in which WrT glide *r* lost its phonemic status without any compensation unless the preceding vowel was a schwa. A remaining problem is the existence of /ɔ/ and /ɛ/, as each of them is found in only one example. The former can be analysed as an allomorph corresponding to WrT *’brug*, thus, the form /ˈmɔʔ/ is normal and the vocalic quality in /mɔ/ can be influenced by the vowel of the second syllable. Regarding /ɛ/, this *r*-colour is caused by WrT initial *r*, as opposed to /ɔ/. There are actually only few *r*-coloured examples originating from WrT initial *r*. In other words, this phenomenon is still unobvious.

But there are several examples above which transformed into retroflex initials; in addition, some examples corresponding to the alveopalatal as well as the retention of the glide /r/ are found in:

/ˈtɕʰaʔ/ ‘blood’ *khrag*
 /ˈmbrɸ tswa/ ‘grass of the rice’ *’bru rtswa*

These examples seem exceptional from the viewpoint of the proportion of the sound change type.

4. Position of the Melung dialect among Diqing Tibetan

The sketch of the phonological history above characterises a special aspect of the Melung dialect. In previous studies, this dialect was regarded as a variety belonging to the Southern Route dialect group of Kham Tibetan (sKal-bzang *’Gyur-med* & sKal-bzang dByangs-can 2002:72) or the Diqing dialect group of Kham Tibetan (Zhang 1996).⁸

⁷ This example, as those given in the discussion of §4, can be regarded as a loanword because WrT *l* in the second syllable corresponds to /j/ in the oral form.

⁸ The authors’ opinions regarding the classification of the dialects spoken in the Diqing

However, according to Min (2001:27) and Suzuki (2006), a more detailed classification can be provided for the Diqing Tibetan dialects, though they have not provided any specific linguistic criteria. Thus, the innovations and the retentions in these dialects must be considered. Here we discuss the dialectal position of the Melung dialect among the Diqing Tibetan dialects and more especially rGyalthang, nJol, and Budy.⁹

There are features other than *r*-coloured vowels in Melung dialect which are useful for a judgement of the dialectal position of these Diqing Tibetan dialects. We shall compare these four dialects with respect to such features in the following section:

4.1 Criteria and examples

The discussion of Tibetan dialects spoken in the Diqing Prefecture focuses on the development of the WrT *l* and *y* as well as the features concerning the formation of the affricate series.

WrT *l*

Melung: retention of /l/

rGyalthang: retention of /l/

nJol: palatal approximant /j/ or /l/

Budy: retention of /l/

Examples:

	Melung	rGyalthang	nJol	Budy	WrT
'road'	'lan	'lõ	'jãw	'lã	<i>lam</i>
'hand'	'lõ? kwa	'la? ka	'ja ^h kwa	'lõ kwa	<i>lag pa</i>
'cattle'	ˈlã:	—	ˈlõ	ˈlõ:	<i>glang</i>

Prefecture are not clearly explained. It can be supposed that the Diqing dialect group of Zhang (1996) is included within the southern dialect group in sKal-bzang 'Gyur-med & sKal-bzang dByangs-can (2002).

⁹ These three dialects as well as the Melung dialect can respectively represent variegated kinds of Diqing Tibetan vernaculars. rGyalthang dialect is spoken in Jiantang 建塘 town of Xianggelila 香格里拉 (Shangri-La) County, nJol is spoken in Shengping 升平 town of Deqin 德钦 County, and Budy is spoken in Badi 巴迪 village of Weixi 维西 County. Among them, only the rGyalthang dialect has been studied (Lu 1990, Hongladarom 1996, *Yunnan Shengzhi* 1998, etc.). The author provides a preliminary phonological analysis and a wordlist of rGyalthang and Budy dialects in Suzuki (2007), and in the discussion below all the data of the present authors are used.

WrT y

Melung: retention of /j/

rGyalthang: retention of /j/

nJol: alveopalatal fricative /ɟ/ or /j/

Budy: retention of /j/

Examples:

	Melung	rGyalthang	nJol	Budy	WrT
‘script’	ʼji ye	ʼji dzə	ʼzə ɣə	ʼji gə	<i>yi ge</i>
‘yak’	—	—	ʼzɑ?	ʼja?	<i>g.yag</i>

WrT Py

Melung: alveopalatal fricatives

rGyalthang: alveopalatal fricatives

nJol: alveopalatal fricatives

Budy: alveopalatal fricatives

Examples:

	Melung	rGyalthang	nJol	Budy	WrT
‘cock’	ʼɕa	ʼɕa	ʼɕa	ʼɕa	<i>bya</i>
‘rich’	ʼɕʰoʔ pu	ʼɕʰoʔ bə	ʼɕʰoʔ kɣ	ʰɕoʔ ko	<i>phyug</i>

WrT Ky

Melung: alveopalatal affricates

rGyalthang: alveopalatal affricates or palatal plosives

nJol: alveopalatal affricates except for WrT *sky* corresponding to alveopalatal fricatives

Budy: alveopalatal affricates except for WrT *sky* corresponding to alveopalatal fricatives

Examples:

	Melung	rGyalthang	nJol	Budy	WrT
‘you’	ʼtɕʰəʔ	ʼtɕʰɰ?	ʼtɕʰɰ?	ʼtɕʰɰ?	<i>khyod</i>
‘house’	ʼtɕʰəŋ	ʼtɕʰõ	—	ʼtɕʰõ	<i>khyim</i>
‘happy’	ʰtɕuʔ pu	ʰtɕi:ʔ pə	ʼɕiʔ po	ʼɕiʔ po	<i>skyid po</i>
‘sour’	—	ʰtɕo: nə	ʰtɕɰe pa	ʰtɕɰe pa	<i>skyur po</i>

WrT Pr

Melung: *r*-coloured vowel or omitted vowels without any compensation

rGyalthang: alveopalatal fricatives

nJol: retroflex affricates

Budy: retroflex affricates or plosives

Examples:

	Melung	rGyalthang	nJol	Budy	WrT
‘cliff’	^ˆ paʔ	ʼɕ ^h ɑʔ	^ˆ ʈsaʔ	ʼtɕɑ: ʱgo	<i>brag</i>
‘cloud’	ṽpə	ṽɕĩ	ṽ ^h ʈsẽ	ṽ ^h ʈsej	<i>sprin</i>

WrT Kr

Melung: *r*-coloured vowel or omitted vowels without any compensation

rGyalthang: alveopalatal affricates

nJol: retroflex affricates

Budy: retroflex affricates or plosives

Examples:

	Melung	rGyalthang	nJol	Budy	WrT
‘knife’	ʼkə	—	ʼʈsə tɕõ	^ˆ tə pe	<i>gri</i>
‘hair’	ṽ ^h ka	ṽ ^h tɕa:	ṽ ^h ʈsa: pɣ	ṽ ^h ta	<i>skra</i>

WrT *c/ch/j*

Melung: retroflex affricates

rGyalthang: retroflex affricates

nJol: alveopalatal affricates

Budy: alveopalatal or retroflex affricates

Examples:

	Melung	rGyalthang	nJol	Budy	WrT
‘water’	ṽ ^h ʈu	ṽ ^h ʈu	ṽ ^h tɕu	ṽ ^h tɕu	<i>chu</i>
‘tea’	ʼʈsa	ʼʈsa	ʼtɕa	ʼtɕa	<i>ja</i>

Based on the correspondence of WrT *c/ch/j* above, also the development of WrT *sh/zh* might seem useful to the discussion. However, almost all the dialects spoken in the Diqing Prefecture possess the correspondence to retroflex fricatives for WrT *sh/zh*

with some exceptions. Thus, it is not a feature that can serve to characterise these dialects.

4.2 Discussion

According to the drastic difference of the oral correspondence of WrT *l* and *y*, we can distinguish nJol dialect from the others. The analysis of the development of the affricate series is also important for dialectal subgrouping (Nishida 1987:137-138). In the nJol dialect, the formation of the affricate series, and especially the innovation of the retroflex sounds, is also different. rGyalthang dialect is characterised by the merger of the WrT Py/Pr series and the WrT Ky/Kr series respectively, while WrT *c/ch/j* transformed into retroflexes. Budy dialect possesses the characteristics of both of the nJol and rGyalthang dialects, among which WrT Pr/Kr and a small part of *c/ch/j* transformed into retroflexes.

The Melung dialect, except for its correspondence to WrT glide *r*, is similar to the rGyalthang dialect from the point of view presented above. Consequently, this dialect can be treated as close to the rGyalthang dialect, belonging to the Sems-kyi-nyila dialect group within Diqing Tibetan.¹⁰ In an earlier period, rGyalthang and Melung divided respectively; WrT glide *r* of the former merged into the glide *y* while that of the latter was basically omitted and caused the *r*-coloured vowel. Suzuki & Tshering mTshomo (2007), in a preliminary report on *r*-coloured vowels in the Melung dialect, mention language contact as a possible factor for the curious sound change concerning WrT glide *r*. According to the present study, this dialect could have been influenced by surrounding languages such as Naxi or Bai, which possess *r*-coloured vowels analysed as reflexes of Proto-Tibeto-Burman forms. Therefore, language contact must be considered for the understanding of this curious phonological development in the Melung dialect.

5. Summary and conclusion

The sketch of the phonological evolution of the Melung dialect demonstrates that this little known dialect possesses a typologically particular phonological system; sound changes are summarised as follows:

¹⁰ This classification is based on Suzuki (2006). The Sems-kyi-nyila dialect group corresponds to the Diqing dialect group mentioned in Zhang (1996), because both of them include the rGyalthang dialect.

1. WrT *c/ch/j/sh/zh* basically became retroflexes.
2. WrT glide *r* became a factor of *r*-coloured vowels or was lost without any compensation.
3. Part of WrT final nasals were retained as velar nasals.

Through the analysis of dialectal classification, we classify the Melung dialect as an independent subgroup of the Sems-kyi-nyila dialect group of Kham Tibetan.

The existence of the *r*-coloured vowel is the most remarkable feature of Tibetan dialectology, and this particularity has been found only in the Melung dialect to date. This problematic phonological particularity must be discussed also from the viewpoint of the ethnic history of Weixi because of longtime complex ethnic contacts in this area, which may have influenced the languages of each ethnic group.

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維西藏語分布在雲南省維西傈僳族自治縣保和鎮及與其相鄰的永春鄉，是康巴藏語之一。該地區因長期多數民族混合發展，語言情況也極複雜，本地藏語變成了特殊土話。本文探討維西藏語語音的歷史演變與其類型，認定該藏語在康巴藏語的迪慶香格里拉次方言中占獨立土語小組之地位。

關鍵詞：藏語方言，康巴藏語，維西塔城土話，方言次分類