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**REVIEW OF ZHANG JICHUAN 张济川 2009 藏语词  
族研究 ZANGYU CIZU YANJIU (A STUDY ON  
WORD FAMILIES IN TIBETAN), BEIJING:  
SHEHUI KEXUE WENXIAN CHUBANSHE.**

**Guillaume Jacques**

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Unlike Classical Indo-European languages like Greek and Sanskrit, whose morphology is well understood in spite of their intricate complexity, the morphology of Sino-Tibetan languages is still poorly studied, even for a major literary language such as Tibetan. This sad state of affair is due in part to the fact that the languages whose historical phonology is best studied, Chinese and Lolo-Burmese, have poorly preserved proto-Sino-Tibetan morphology.<sup>2</sup>

The book under review is the first systematic attempt at an exhaustive analysis of Tibetan derivational and flexional morphology. Building on previous work, in particular Li's (1933) seminal article on Tibetan historical phonology and Coblin's (1976) work on verbs, Zhang Jichuan provides a detailed survey of Tibetan morphology.

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<sup>1</sup> This review has been written during my stay at the Research Centre for Linguistic Typology, LaTrobe University, Melbourne. I wish to thank Randy LaPolla for his invitation.

<sup>2</sup> Using Chinese or Lolo-Burmese to reconstruct proto-Sino-Tibetan morphology is an exercise comparable to reconstructing Indo-European morphology based on Haitian Creole.

The author is particularly well placed to write such a book. He is not only an able linguist, well known for his descriptive work on Tshangla (Zhang 1986) and for his study of Baima Tibetan historical phonology (Zhang 1997), but he also speaks Lhasa Tibetan beautifully. Unlike many other mainland Chinese scholars of his generation, is also fluent in English and familiar with western Tibetology.

The book is divided into three main chapters. The first chapter (word families, 词族, pp. 3-187) includes a list of all the word families that Zhang Jichuan could find in the known lexicon of Classical Tibetan. The second chapter (morphology 形态, pp. 189-158) presents a general account of derivational and flexional morphology, including affixes, consonant and vowel alternation. The third chapter (phonology 声韵, pp. 159-360) discusses both the reconstruction of proto-Tibetan phonology and various phonetic changes from Old Tibetan to modern Tibetan languages.

## 1. WORD FAMILIES

This chapter, which constitutes the bulk of the book (more than half of the page numbers), includes a clearly structured classification of the entire Tibetan lexicon. Related verbs roots and their derived nouns are classified according to their root initial consonant. With a little practice, it is easy for someone familiar with Classical Tibetan to locate a particular word in this index of roots.

Here is the example of a typical entry (p.132). I keep here Zhang's transcription, where homorganic prenasalization is transliterated as *v-* (see Hill 2005a on the Tibetan letter in question, sometimes incorrectly called *va-chung*); the English glosses are slightly adapted, not direct translations of Zhang's Chinese glosses:

- (1) *vbye-bye* 'to be opened' 分开

*vbyed, phye, dbye, phyes* 'to open, to separate' 使分开、打开

*vbyer, byer* ‘to disperse’ 逃散、蔓延

*vbyes* ‘separated’ 分清

*byes* ‘place far from home’ 异乡、远方

*dbyes* ‘breath, size’ 间隔、宽度

*dbyen* ‘dissentation’ 离间

*phyed* ‘half’ 一分为二、分开

*g.yen* ‘dissentation’ 离间

*g.ya.shing* ‘bolt (door)’ 门闩

*ʔa.shing* ‘bolt (door)’ 门闩、插销

Some of these examples are illustrated by sentences and compounds; compounds, however, do not appear by themselves in the main subentries. No detailed comment is provided in this section to explain the alternations and affixes observed here; explanations only appear in the chapters on morphology and phonology.

The entry starts with a pair of intransitive / transitive verbs. In this particular case, the intransitive verb is the anticausative of the transitive verb, derived by voicing the initial consonant of the root. The transitive verb *vbye*, past *phye* itself presents voicing alternation.

Most of the nouns are derived from the voiced stems. *bye-s* ‘place far from home’, *d-bye-s* ‘breath, size’ and *d-bye-n* ‘dissentation’ appear with different prefixes and suffixes. *-s* and *-n* are well-known nominalization suffixes, discussed by Zhang pp. 251-4. The prefix *d-* however is not accounted for in the book. It is most likely to be related the nominalizations prefixes *ku-* or *tu-* of Rgyalrong languages (see

Jacques 2010a): Tibetan preinitials *d-* and *g-*, as Li (1933) has shown, are in complementary distribution and therefore *d-bye-n* points either to proto-Tibetan *\*t-byen* or *\*k-byen* (preinitials are conventionally represented as voiced stops in Tibetan orthography, but there is no voicing contrast in this position, so that we reconstruct them as unvoiced stops). The spelling *g.yen* represents a dialectal variant of *dbyen*, as *g.y-* and *dby-* merge as *j-* with high tone in various Tibetan languages from Lhasa to Cone county in Gansu.

The noun *phyed* ‘half’ is derived from the unvoiced stem with the nominalizing *-d* suffix, also studied by Zhang (p. 252).

It is unclear whether the words *vbyer* ‘to disperse’ and *g.ya* ‘bolt’ which Zhang included in this word-family are really related. There is no known verbal *-r* suffix, so that any etymological relationship between *vbyer* and *vbyed* would be difficult to account for. Note however the intriguing Cone Tibetan form *ndzer*<sup>2</sup>, past *ɕ<sup>h</sup>er*<sup>1</sup> for the verb ‘to open’ (see Jacques ms.), a paradigm that points to proto-Cone present *\*vbyer*, past *\*phyer*, which presents similarities with both that of *vbyed* and that of *vbyer*.

This example shows how much information can be gained by analyzing each of the word families proposed by Zhang. As seen above, some of Zhang’s comparisons are not entirely convincing. Other doubtful examples include for instance p.8 *mkhal* ‘kidney’ with *khal* ‘charge (on an animal)’, p.24 *deb* ‘book’, *sdeb* ‘to put together’ (*deb* is an abbreviation of *deb.ther*, a noun ultimately of Greek origin, while *sdeb* is a genuine Tibetan verb), p.100. *smyan.ga* ‘marriage’, *nye* ‘near’, *gnyen* ‘kin’ (*gnyen* is indeed related to *nye*, but *smyan.ga* is unrelated, it is rather potentially cognate with Chinese 婚 *\*hm<sup>5</sup>ən*; Chinese *\*ə* regularly corresponds to Tibetan /a/). These minor issues have however no impact on the overall value of Zhang’s book: on the contrary, it is fortunate that Zhang tried to gather as many words as possible in his word families, leaving it to the reader to accept or not his etymologies. Criticizing an etymology is always easier than proposing a new one.

In some cases, Zhang's word families miss obvious cognates. For instance, p.16 in the word family of *bdag* 'to belong to' (*bdag.po* 'possessor') he does not cite *bdog* 'to be there, to belong to' (*bdog.po* 'possessions'); in the entry of *vdzin*, *zung* 'to seize' p.76 he does not mention the derived noun *gzungs* \*k-dzuŋ-s 'dhāraṇī',<sup>3</sup> an important example because it proves that the nominalization by a combination of \*k- and \*-s was still productive when Buddhist terminology was introduced in Tibet; note that the verb *vdzin* regularly translates Sanskrit √dhṛ-, the root from which dhāraṇī- is derived, as in *grags.vdzin.ma* = Yaśodharā (Mahāvvyutpatti #1070, Ishihama and Fukuda 1989).

## 2. MORPHOLOGY

The chapter on morphology (the shortest of the three) includes a list of attested alternations and affixes. For each affix, an extensive (though not entirely exhaustive) list of examples is given. These lists are of great value for the study of ancient non-productive Tibetan morphology. Although most of the affixes presented in Zhang's book have been discussed in previous work, existing grammars of classical Tibetan typically only cite a handful of examples for each formative.

Zhang also presents a survey of Tibetan verb conjugation, which follows Li (1933) and Coblin (1976) but does not provide reconstructions of paradigms in proto-Tibetan by internal reconstruction as Coblin did. In this section, it is unfortunate that the paradigms discussed by Zhang are taken from dictionaries, not from Old Tibetan texts. The recent articles by Hahn (1999) and Hill (2005b) have brought to light two types of conjugation that differ considerably between Old- and Classical Tibetan: the lh-stems (such as *klog* 'to read', CT past *bklags*, OT past *blags* or *phlags*, imperative *lhogs*) and the r-stems (*vbri* 'write', OT present *vdri*, past *bris*, imperative *ris*, see also Jacques 2010b on this topic).

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<sup>3</sup> The sound change \*dz > z in Tibetan word initially and after g- and b- is regular, see Coblin (1976).

### **3. PHONOLOGY**

This chapter mainly discusses the historical phonology of Tibetan from Old Tibetan (as represented by the classical orthography) to various modern Tibetan languages. It also discusses proto-Tibetan internal reconstruction based on the work of Li and Coblin as well as various articles by Simon (for instance Simon 1974).

This section contains a wealth of valuable data and ideas, even if some recent references are inevitably missing. For instance, in the discussion on the initials *v-* and *w-*, no mention is made of the recent work by Coblin (2002, 2006) and Hill (2006; see also Hill 2009, an article which Zhang could not have taken into account in his work anyway since his book was published the same year).

### **4. CONCLUSION**

Zhang Jichuan's book is an invaluable reference that will become indispensable for any further research on Tibetan morphology. Along with Hill's (2010) recent dictionary of verbs, it marks the end of the traditional approach to the study of Tibetan morphology based on dictionaries. This book constitutes the blueprints on the basis of which a full etymological dictionary of Tibetan and Bodic languages can be built on the model of Rix et al. (2001).

Now that traditional dictionaries have been thoroughly analyzed, further work on Tibetan historical morphology will have to concentrate on three topics. First, detailed descriptions of individual dialects, on the model of Bielmeier (1985) and Sun (2003). Second, careful studies of Tibetan grammar based on Old Tibetan texts such as Hill (2005b). Third, comparison with other Sino-Tibetan languages.

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