THE FIRST PERSON PRONOUN IN ARCHAIC CHINESE, WITH A NOTE ON DUPLEX CHARACTERS*

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Tibeto-Burman (TB) *nga (tone *A) 'first person pronoun' and the topic marker (TM) *ga ~ ka play a strange "cat and mouse" game as they romp about the family. The widely represented *nga, from Chepang, Chang (Northern Naga), and Trung (Nungish) on the north(/west) and Tujia (west-central China) on the east to Burmese-Lolo on the south(/east), as our "mouse," is at times firmly in the paws of our TM "cat": Waling (Kiranti) angka < *-nga-ga '1 p. prn.' TB *na(:)ng '2 p. prn' largely escaped this fate, indicating that in TB-land, even as in Washington, the Ego was by far one's favorite topic! In the monosyllabizing TB family, a *nga-ga or *nga-ka is unstable, especially for a pronominal, with the result that in Lepcha and Ahi Lolo our "cat" ate our "mouse": both go < *ga '1 p. prn.', with parallel developments in Qiangic as well as Kuki-Naga. Finally, in Written Tibetan (WT) the -ga ~ -ka TM is directly suffixed, whereas in Written Burmese (WB) it reflects an intervening ergative *-s: WB -ka' < *s-ga, with regular 'creaky voice' [represented as '] < *s-; cf. WT sga, WB ka' 'saddle'.

Chinese has interesting echoes of the TB developments. The earliest recorded language, Archaic Chinese (AC), was that of the kings and priests and, as one might have expected, the Ego played a key role, with the "cat" once more eating the "mouse." The standard AC also paralleled Lepcha and Ahi Lolo in its -a > -o shift, with variable palatalization (-y-) as an added feature, while the language of "the people" was at times reflected in the recordings as well as in modern dialects: Vulgar AC (VAC) maintained the *-a. As regards another key feature of the phonology,[1] both AC and VAC showed variable monadic (*sg-) vs. dyadic (*s-g- > s-) reflexes involving prefixed *s-.

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[1]For phonology, see the writer's "Archaic Chinese initials," in *Wang Li Memorial Volume*, edited by the Chinese Language Society of Hong Kong (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Co., 1987), pp. 25-71 (English volume).

Curiously, Chinese paralleled WB rather than WT in its inclusion of reflexes, here of both types, for ergative ***s**: for standard AC, *GSR* 82a-e 余 **sgyo / ywo** < ***sga** 'I, we'; for VAC, ***s-ga** > **sa**, reflected in Jiahe (Hunan) **sa** '1 p. prn.'; for the phonology, compare the following:

PTB   ***sga ~ s-ga** (see above), *GSR* 82a-e 余 **sgyo / ywo**
        Jiahe **sa** '1 p. prn.'
PTB   ***na** 'female kin' (*STC*: 187), *GSR* 94a-e 女 **nyo / ńywo**
        Can. **na** 'female (of animals)', 'woman / girl'

Our ***nga** "mouse," playing one early dialect against another (VAC was apparently *not* involved here), survived only as a name part in Shijing—and played a role in later AC: *GSR* 58f-i 吾 **ngo / nguo** [< tone *A] 'I, me, my, our'. The version 𤕦 (*GSR* 58i) has what Karlgren calls an "additional" radical, which turns out to be the simplified 82c form 夲 of 82a-e! The source: Zhou III-IV bronze inscription, dated ca. 770-ca. 250 B.C.—hardly something dashed off! Is this to be analyzed as a "duplex character", to be read "**ngo-sgyo**", from **nga-sga**, indicating that the full, underlying disyllabic form survived into a relatively late stage of AC?! The writer has thought this not too unlikely, and this inscription adds some weight to the idea.