

Some Thoughts on a Review by Dr. Hsiao Su-ying

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In *Chinese Studies*, vol. 26, no. 1 (March 2008), pp. 289-296, Dr. Hsiao Su-ying has published a review of my recent book, *A Handbook of 'Phags-pa Chinese* (University of Hawaii Press: Honolulu, 2007). The following are some brief thoughts on that review.

To begin, Dr. Hsiao is to be lauded for the care with which she has read the book. Regrettably, it contains misprints and typographical errors; she has identified and corrected a number of these. For that I am most grateful to her. Some further thoughts on detailed matters are as follows.

In the 'Phags-pa script forms found in the glossary to the text, I have not distinguished between final letter **-n** and the vowel **-i**. This distinction is seldom maintained in the received Chinese 'Phags-pa texts. In practice, when reading the 'Phags-pa script forms, one is guided by the syllabic structure of the forms in deciding which underlying letter is intended. I chose to maintain the epigraphical ambiguity in the script forms, but to resolve it in the attached Roman transliterations. An alternative would have been to introduce a distinction into the script forms, for example by adopting the unambiguously different forms found in the Yuan period inscriptions. I did not choose that

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option in this case. In a different matter, the ‘Phags-pa letters *-w-* and *-e-* are in certain of their realizations so similar as to be easily confused, and the syllabic structure alone often does not allow a choice between the two. One must rely on other means to distinguish them. In this instance, I chose to differentiate them by adopting unambiguously different forms for each throughout the glossary. This decision was the opposite of that taken in the case mentioned immediately above. Unfortunately, Dr. Hsiao does not approve of either decision. That is of course disappointing to me, but such differences of preference are a part of scholarly life.

The glossary to the book is at base a listing of Chinese characters. For convenience of reference to other sources, the ordering of the *Menggu ziyun* 蒙古字韻 was adopted as the basic format of presentation. The glossary itself does not constitute an edition of the *Menggu ziyun* and should not be viewed as such. In a number of cases, when taking characters from the *Menggu ziyun*, editorial emendations suggested by modern students of this text were adopted in the glossary. The relevant sources are mentioned in the introduction of the glossary. Specific sources for each individual change were not identified in the glossary proper, because it was not intended to serve as a critical edition of the *Menggu ziyun*. This has unfortunately led to certain difficulties and misunderstandings. For example, in entry line 214 of the glossary, the character *bei* 北 “north” has been listed, while the corresponding form in the *Menggu ziyun* is actually *bi* 比 “to compare.” Dr. Hsiao has noted that no such emendation occurs in the notes of Jūnast 照那斯圖 and Yang 楊 (1987) and queries at some length my reasons for adopting it. Here I would point to two other sources mentioned in the introduction to the glossary, where this problem is specifically dealt with. The first is by Cheng Tsai-fa 鄭再發 (Cheng 1967: 962-963) and the second is by Ning Jifu 寧忌浮 (Ning 1997: 173). Cheng’s treatment is particularly detailed and revelatory. A reading of his findings leaves little doubt that 比 is a scribal error for 北 here. Interestingly, it would seem that Yang Naisi 楊耐思 himself also subscribes

to this modified reading, for he tacitly adopts it on p. 101 of his book, *Zhongyuan yinyun yinxi* 中原音韻音系 (see especially the footnote to this page). Why he did not include a note on it in Jūnast and Yang (1987) remains a mystery.

It is gratifying that Dr. Hsiao (p. 294) finds interesting my thoughts on the nature of ‘Phags-pa Chinese and its relationship to other forms of the Chinese language. This is a complex question which deserves continued discussion and consideration. We may hope to hear more from her on it in the future.

In closing, I shall take the opportunity to mention one further matter, which is not directly relevant to Dr. Hsiao’s review. In the introduction to the book I argued for the historical linguistic significance of ‘Phags-pa Chinese as an alphabetically recorded form of early Chinese. This has elicited from Professor E. G. Pulleyblank (2007) a rather acerbic reaction, in which he denigrates the importance of alphabetic sources and proposes to substitute his own brand of Neo-Karlgrenian “Qieyunology” as the ultimate key to Chinese phonological history. After the smoke and noise of these expostulations, it is, I feel, encouraging to read the recent thoughts of Professor Zhongwei Shen (Shen 2007) on the value of ‘Phags-pa Chinese as an alphabetic source for the study of Chinese historical phonology. It would seem that those who actually work in ‘Phags-pa studies today remain convinced of the worth of their data and their scholarly endeavors.

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