

Old Chinese: some new evidence

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In *Old Chinese: a new reconstruction* (2014), Sagart and I describe a linguistic reconstruction as a set of hypotheses about a language that cannot be observed directly. These hypotheses are based on past observations, but crucially, they make predictions about observations that have not yet been made. Thus the hypotheses of a reconstruction are open to falsification if their predictions about further observations turn out to be false. If further observations are consistent with the predictions of our hypotheses, this does not prove that the hypotheses are true, but it does give us confidence that we are on the right track.

In this paper I will discuss several cases where we have found evidence that was not available to us when our book was written, and discuss whether they support the Old Chinese reconstruction system we proposed. In some cases, we find that new evidence suggests that we should revise the reconstructions of particular words; but there are also cases where the new evidence is consistent with the predictions of our hypotheses, and thus gives us further confidence in them.

References

Baxter, William H., and Laurent Sagart. 2014. *Old Chinese: a new reconstruction*. New York: Oxford University Press.