

Prolegomena to Integrating Paleographic Data and the Reconstruction of Old Chinese Phonology

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Scholars have agreed generally that paleographical data, especially those recently excavated bamboo and silk manuscripts of the Warring States and early empires (4th to 2nd century BCE), contemporaneous with the *Book of Poetry* (Shijing) and other early Chinese classics, should be incorporated, as a set of newly available materials, into the reconstruction of Old Chinese. However, there is no consensus as how, why, and what to do. What is the linguistic nature of these excavated manuscripts? What is the relationship between these paleographical data and the transmitted texts (especially the *Book of Poetry*, the rhyme system of which is the foundation of the Old Chinese phonology)? What is the relationship between spoken languages and written texts in early China? Were there regional dialectic expressions in the written records? Questions as such have not been systematically explored. In this paper I propose to discuss these basic issues in the integrating paleographic data and the reconstruction of Old Chinese phonology. At the same time I also will reflect on the nature of the Old Chinese reconstruction, and the benefit and limitation of the data, the methods, and the results in Old Chinese reconstructions. I will propose that the Old Chinese reconstruction should incorporate long-term macro-reconstructions (the *Book of Poetry* rhyme system plus the Middle Chinese categories) with relative short-term micro-reconstructions that excavated manuscripts could help to build. The multiple versions of the same texts among the excavated manuscripts, such as the *Book of Poetry*, the *Book of Changes*, and the *Laozi*, could be used to help us see these subtle changes and evolution in the Old Chinese phonology.