Pan-Asiatic. Typology and Diachrony.

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It is perhaps best to approach the subject (see title) naively, simply by asking questions such as: Is it possible to imagine a map of all of Asia n hundred years ago by husbanding internal reconstruction, areal linguistics, typology, and imagination? By imagining such a map and by allowing for dynamics -- currents with the power to move one way or another, i.e., for languages to influence each other and change -- one could set up the equivalent of archaeology in linguistics. Of course, there are problems with the time depth: some areas lend themselves to reconstruction more easily than others (because of written records, perspicacity, our experience with other languages, older scholarship) and the emerging map would not necessarily reflect one and the same stage of reconstruction for all areas. Nevertheless, the attempt alone should be a worthwhile exercise and teach us to sharpen our tools. A few typical questions will now be presented.

Is aspiration a prime (a given, about which it is futile to ask further questions) or can it be assumed to have arisen, perhaps from some segmental

configuration (such as initial consonant clusters)? It has been thought for some time that at least some instances of the aspirated/unaspirated opposition in Chinese come from an element, perhaps *s, which was a morpheme and which, when adjacent to an unaspirated stop, eventually caused aspiration of that stop. That does not explain the great majority of aspirated stops in Sinitic. Are they all reconstructible? Do they correspond in the various Chinese languages? S. R. Ramsey (p.c.) has suggested that the aspirated stops in Korean developed from clusters. The large number of Chinese loans with the aspiration correlation must have served as a model or at least as a statistical support. Can such a scenario be envisaged for other languages? What about this correlation in Southeast Asia?

In South Asia (India) it is the aspiration of voiced stops which is considered a prime, for reasons having to do with the reconstruction of Indo-European, and the aspirated voiceless stops are discounted as secondary. This anomaly (aspirating voiced stops) has given rise to the competing glottalic theory which, in its turn, prompts the question whether glottalization is a prime. In Northwest North America it is, but is it in Asia?

One prejudice (perhaps of European reconstructionists, because of their own languages) is

the assumption that distinctive voice itself (t : d) is a prime. It need not necessarily be. In certain parts of continental Asia voice can be associated with the weakening of unaspirated stops (medially or when unstressed). Initial distinctively voiced stops seem to occur more toward the North (Mongolian) and West of Asia (Indic, Iranian, Semitic). The extreme East and North of Asia (Korean, Japanese, Ainu, Chukotian, Gilyak) seem to have had no voice distinction originally. Is voicing truly the distinction among stops or is this idea a Eurocentric prejudice? If it is not voicing, what is? Glottalization? Aspiration? Do these ever replace each other historically? In what order? Do some continents prefer some dichotomies over others? Africa and Europe seem fond of voicing and the Americas of glottalization. Can we deduce anything about prehistory from this?

Is it reasonable to expect that one can look for historical or areal implications in other sub-systems (nasals, fricatives) among the consonants? In other words, does the presence of, say, a hissing affricate such as c in a system predict the presence of an s? Is the glottal fricative h a prime, i.e., can we expect to find it at random in consonant systems, or is it implicationally bound up with certain features (aspiration of stops, the presence of an s or š in the

system, or perhaps even with the absence of a labial voiceless fricative)?

Among the nasals, Asia is certainly more hospitable to the velar nasal ŋ than the other continents, especially in initial position. Can this fact be connected with anything else, again, historically or areally? A personal prejudice of this writer is the notion that in the domain of the non-labial and non-velar nasals, either n or the palatal ñ will be dominant, i.e., it will be preferred lexically or grammatically. In Gilyak (Amur region), ñ seems to be statistically more frequent in roots and n in affixes. Is the inverse ever the case? Certainly ñ is more audible, i.e., has a higher functional value. Does this fact have anything to do with what is being discussed here?

There seem to be points on the map of Asia where a k : q distinction (q is post-velar, often called uvular) is favored: Arabic in the West, Chukchi and Eskimo in the North, some Tibeto-Burman languages in the Southeast. Elsewhere, the distinction is weak or absent. What do we deduce from this?

Among vowel systems, the choice is between triangular ones (with five vowels as in Malayalam or Japanese, i e a o u, or with three vowels, as in Arabic, i a u) or rectangular ones (with nine vowels as