

The Sino-Tibetan Existential *s-ri

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In his recent paper on deictics (Benedict 1983), the author overlooked a key Chinese 'this/that' that occurs as a loan use (in Shijing) of 實 398a [ś-1]iět/dź'iět 'solid; [fill solid:] fill, stop up; full; [solid product:] fruit; riches; enrich', the (palatalized) *s- prefix alloform of 粟 403a (loan use) liět/liět 'solid, compact; dense; full and rich (sc. ears of grain)'. As already indicated (Benedict 1979, which cites only 398a; see Benedict -forthcoming for the initial reconstruction, revised from the schema in Benedict 1976), the PST root here is *(s-)ra(-s), with regular *r > -l-, *-s > -t and *a > -iě- before dental final (see the Conspectus); cf. WT sra(-n) 'hard, solid', sran-ma ~ srad-ma 'peas, beans'; also sras 'child' (resp.) = 'fruit (of the womb)'; Tamang rara roro ('high B' tonal series) 'fruit', from *hra^B < *s-ra^B; Lushai ra? < *ras 'fruit; bear fruit'; Pa-o (Karen) séng rá ('high B' series) 'child', from *hra^B < *s-ra^B; for the semantics, cf. Proto-Karen (generally) *sa^B < za^B 'fruit; offspring'; PTB *za 'child'.

The Chinese (Archaic/Middle) -iět rime, however, is also the reflex for PST *-is and *-it, as shown in the Conspectus, hence [ś-1]iět 'this/that' can be compared directly with PTB *(s-)ri(-t) (No. 264 in the Conspectus); cf. Lepcha ri 'to dwell with, dwell together, abide with'; WB hri 'to be (in some place)', from *s-ri; WR srid-pa 'existence; state of being, life; things existing, the world; also a single being'. For the complex intermingling of copula/existential and deictic, see Benedict 1983:77 and 79ff.; Chinese has the doublet 是 866a śgiěg/zię: 'this; this is, is' 斯 869a (loan use)

s-giég/siē 'this'.

It would seem, on the surface, that the final -t of [ṣ-ḷ]iēt reflects PST suffixed *-t, although not in the nominalizing role seen in WT srid-pa. WB has 'creaky tone' here, however, a reflex of prefix *s- (Thurgood 1976), with the initial aspiration (unvoicing) seen in verbal as opposed to nominal forms (cf. mañ 'to be named' ~ hmañ 'to name', paralleling Jingpho myīng ~ śamyīng, from PTB *(r-)ming^A ~ *s-ming^A). It appears (Benedict 1983bis) that Chinese final -t is a parallel reflex of the same *s- prefix in roots with high-front vowel (final -k in roots with back and low vowels), hence [ṣ-ḷ]iēt and WB hri' may be morph-for-morph cognates.

The author (1976) has suggested a relationship of PTB *(s-)ri(-t) with 屍 597i xliar/t'iei 'body', via a PST-level doublet *s-rə-y, as well as with 身 386a ś[ḷ]iēn/śiēn 'body, person' (< 'being'), which impresses as a likelier comparison, from PST-level *sri-n, with typical Chinese palatalization. The same paper also compares WT srin-po (fem. srin-mo) 'demons' with 神 385j [ṣ-ḷ]iēn/dz'īēn (reconstructed as in Benedict -forthcoming) 'spirit; divine, supernatural', with the final -n visualized as a 'collective' plural (Conspetus), the basic *s-ri root being represented by WT sri 'a species of devil or demon, a vampire'; Lushai hrî (< *sri^B < *s-ri^B) 'the spirit supposed to cause sickness'; also (now added) Chepang ri? (< *ri^B) 'spirit' (see Benedict 1983bis for the accent); 离 23a xlia/t'ie 'a mountain demon', from *sri^A, with regular *B > *A shift after prefixed *s-(Conspetus: fn. 494).

Matisoff (1983) has placed all these forms in one large allofamic family ('beings') and the author initially went along with this. In addition to ri 'dwell' (above), however, Lepcha also has ri 'the influence of evil spirit; used also for a burning or tingling pain', semantically typing in with Lushai hrî 'spirit of sickness'. Lepcha regularly has medial -y- as a reflex for prefixed *s- (Conspetus: 35) but lacks the form *ryi, a possible antecedent of /ri/, hence one cannot exclude an underlying *s-ri for one or both of these Lepcha cognates; for the latter, an early loan from WT sri 'demon' is possible but seems unlikely. This Lepcha evidence, ambiguous though it may be, at least makes possible an alternative view of PTB *s-ri^B 'spirit (of illness)' as a distinct root. Against this view stands the fact that Matisoff has been able to find an apparent parallel in another member of the 'extended' allofamic family: Jingpho rai 'to be, exist', et al.; Tangkhul rai 'unclean spirit'; Boro

ráy 'devil'. Another Matisoff addition to this large conglomeration will hardly do, however; WF sril ~ srin-bu 'worm (esp. silkworm), insect, vermin', with /sril/ representing the earlier form (Conspetus: fn.53), from PTB *(s-)ril; cf. Jingpho kágyin-rin 'earthworm' (cf. kákyin 'worm'), showing regular -n for final *-l.

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