

Pre-Classical Archaisms in Contemporary Written Chinese? Longue-durée vs. Drift in the History of Chinese Grammar

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Contemporary Written Chinese [CWC] (*xiàndài shūmiànyǔ* 現代書面語, for useful discussions see, e.g., Hú Mínyáng 1957, Chéng Guānlín 1990, Rosner 1992, Féng Shènglì 2003, 2006; Sūn Déjīn 2005, 2010, 2012, Diào Yǎnbīn 2017) tolerates a great number of petrified phrases and syntactic constructions from Classical Chinese, most of them only mildly productive – if at all – and often strictly bound to particular registers (*yǔtǐ* 語體). Against this background, it is surprising that some pre-classical Chinese constructions not only have survived into CWC, but are used productively or even playfully, if not necessarily with great frequency.

My presentation will look at three constructions sometimes characterised as inherited from Archaic (pre-Classical) Chinese in the literature, i.e.

- (1) Mandarin [唯~惟 O 是 V] focalization (cf. Liú Jǐngnóng 1994, Sūn Déjīn 2012)
- (2) [direct-indirect] object patterns in Southern Chinese double object constructions and Mandarin rhetorical “object inversion” (Shí Dìngxǔ et al. 2003, 2010; Diào Yǎnbīn 2012, Zhào Yīfán 2013, Eifring, in progress:11)
- (3) [noun → adjective] conversion (Diào Yǎnbīn 1994, Zhāng Wéngúo 2005, Shào Jìngmǐn 2008, Lù Jiā & Mèng Guó 2012) or “word-class flexibility”

Apart from providing a sketch of the pragmatic settings, in which these constructions occur in Contemporary Written Chinese, I will discuss whether they are to be analyzed as retentions from Early Chinese, in how far they may be influenced by substrate influences, dialect mixture or metatypy (Ross 1999, 2006), or whether they are profitably analyzed as instantiations of drift (cf. Hodge 1970, Vennemann 1975). If time permits, I will also comment on how such constructions have been used in recent appeals for “the revival of writing in Literary Chinese” (*wényán fùxīng* 文言復興, e.g. Bì Gēng 2003.a,b, Wèi Míng 2006; Xiāo Yǐngchāo 2007 etc.) and appropriated into the current “great revival of the Chinese nation” (*Zhōnghuá mínzú wěidà fùxīng* 中華民族偉大復興 discourse of the Xí Jìnpíng 習近平 era.