On the Reconstruction and Development of *-b

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The reconstruction of Archaic Chinese *-b, *-d, and *-g is based on three main types of evidence: (1) rhymes in the Shih Ching, (2) hsieh sheng (phonetic compounds), (3) double readings in Ancient Chinese. However, there are problems in reconstructing *-b: first, it is not attested in the rhyming of the Shih Ching; second, there are only a few cases indicating close contact between *-b and *-p. The former problem can be explained by the fact that hsieh sheng represents an earlier stage than the Shih Ching and the change *-b > *-d took place between these two periods. One purpose of this paper is to account for the latter problem.

Archaic Chinese *-b is rare, as is Proto-Austronesian *-b and Proto-Indo-European *b. Only a dozen reconstructed forms end with PAN *-b (Dempwolff 1934-38), and there are only a few cases of PIE *b in any position. The rare occurrence of *-b is thus a universal feature. Voiced stops are phonetically more complex than their corresponding voiceless stops, and are more susceptible to change than the latter, especially when they occur in the word- or syllable-final position. The reconstruction of *-b is partly based on the overall pattern of relationships in the sound systems. Parallel developments are shown in the different language families in this paper.

The reconstruction of Archaic Chinese *-b is supported with three types of evidence: (1) hsieh sheng, (2) double readings and (3) common etymology. Some supporting evidence is provided by a comparison of similar phenomena in the other languages.