

Cornell University

# *Yancai or Jiangcai?*

A Case Study of Word Reinterpretation  
in Middle Chinese Literature

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# Content

- General problem of word interpretation in Middle Chinese literature
- Case study: Reinterpretation of a ghost word *jiangcai*

# General problem in Middle Chinese philology

# General philological problem

In MC literature, words blur due to...

- misinterpretation in lexical semantics  
(caused by diachronic change and dialectal difference)
- miswritten/misread characters

# How to recover?

Blurring words can be recovered by referring to ...

- contexts and conventional expressions
- parallel text (contemporaneous/later, same/other languages)
- alternative interpretations with similar characters/sounds

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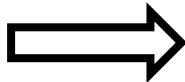
- contexts and conventional expressions
- parallel text (contemporaneous/later, same/other languages)
- alternative interpretations with similar characters/sounds

❖ **Different types of evidence can lead to different results**

Case study


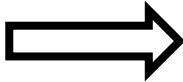
A ghost word in *Yanshi Jiaxun*

# New evidence type, new interpretation


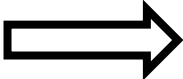
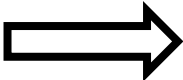
Previous evidence	Result
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• variant characters</li><li>• contemporaneous Chinese materials</li><li>• later Japanese Chinese materials</li></ul>	 Result A



# New evidence type, new interpretation

Previous evidence		Result
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# Case study: *jiangcai* in *Yanshi Jiaxun*

## **Background**

*Yanshi Jiaxun* “Family Instructions for the Yan Clan”

- A book written at around 6-7 CE
- Significant work in Chinese philology and historical linguistics

# Case study: *jiangcai* in *Yanshi Jiaxun*

**Background:** *Yanshi Jiaxun* “Family Instructions for the Yan Clan”

- A book written at around 6-7 CE
- Significant work in Chinese philology and historical linguistics
  - separate chapters focusing on philological and dialectal topics
  - large vocabulary of Middle Chinese colloquialism.

# Case study: *jiangcai* in *Yanshi Jiaxun*

**Problem:** Written form and semantic meaning of *jiangcai*

吳	郡	陸襄，	父	閑	被	刑，	
Wu	county	LuXiang,	father	Xian	suffer	kill,	
襄		終身	布	衣	蔬	飯	
Xiang		lifelong	cloth	clothes	vegetable	food,	
雖	薑菜	有	切割，	皆	不	忍	食；
even	ginger	have	cut,	all	not	bear	eat;
居	家	惟	以	掐	摘	供	廚。
live	home	only	with	pinch	pluck	supply	cooking.

(北齊·顏之推《顏氏家訓·風操第六》)

“Lu, Xiang comes from Wu County. His father Xian is killed, so Xiang lives a simple life with clothes made of cloth and food containing vegetables through out his life. He cannot bear eating ginger which needs to be cut, and all the cooking ingredients are pinched or plucked.”

# You (2017) first questioning the gloss

- There is no need to use disyllabic form for the word ‘ginger’, since the word has always been monosyllabic *jiang* though out Classical Chinese.
- Ginger has nothing special to be separated from other common vegetables.

# Questioning the gloss

**Problem:** Written form and semantic meaning of *jiangcai*

- Correct character: 堦(疆)菜? 薑菜?

# Questioning the gloss

**Problem:** Written form and semantic meaning of *jiangcai*

- Correct character: 壇菜? 薑菜?
- Correct meaning:
  - 壇(疆)菜—‘**field**-vegetable’
  - 薑菜— ‘**ginger**-vegetable’



# Questioning the gloss

**Problem:** Written form and semantic meaning of *jiangcai*

- Correct character: 塶菜? 薑菜? Or...?
- Correct meaning:
  - 塶(疆)菜—‘**field**-vegetable’
  - 薑菜— ‘**ginger**-vegetable’
  - Or...?

# Review: 1<sup>st</sup> work

## PROPOSAL (You 2017)

- Writing forms 疆菜 and 薑菜, both pronounced as *jiangcai*, were confused.
- The word in *Yanshi Jiaxun* should be understood as 疆菜, literally reading 'field-vegetable', instead of 薑菜 as 'ginger-vegetable, ginger'.

You 2017—*jiangcai* is 疆菜 ‘field-vegetable’

## Types of EVIDENCE

- **Variant characters** of 薑 and how it can be confused with 疆:  
‘ginger’ 薑 = 薑 ≈ 疆 = 疆 ‘boundary, field’
- Similar usage of **contemporaneous material** *Fengsu Tongyi* and **gloss from later** philologists
- Similar usage of **later Japanese Chinese material** *Yixinfang*

# Review: 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3rd work

## PROPOSAL (Xu 2020 & Zhao 2020)

- You's interpretation is incorrect.
- 薑菜 is the correct form of *jiangcai*, which should be interpreted as 'ginger'.

Xu 2020—*jiangcai* is 薑菜 ‘ginger-vegetable’

## Types of EVIDENCE

- No **convention** of the *jiang* 疆 ‘boundary’ used as ‘field’, thus no *jiangcai* 疆菜 ‘field-vegetable’ used as ‘vegetable’
- **Productive structure** of ‘hyponym-hypernym’ when naming vegetables
- **Contemporaneous Chinese Buddhist texts** containing the same 薑(菜)

Zhao 2020 — *jiangcai* is 薑菜 ‘ginger-vegetable’

## More types of EVIDENCE

- **Variant characters** of 鹽 and how it can be confused with 薑:



薑 = 塶 ≈ 塶 = 鹽



- **Variant texts** with You's examples containing *yancai* 鹽菜 ‘salted vegetable, pickle’

# MY PROPOSAL

- *jiangcai* is a ghost word caused by misinterpretation.
- The target word should be *yancai* 鹽菜 'salt(ed) vegetable' , a common term for 'pickle' in Middle Chinese.

# EVIDENCE

- Variant forms of Chinese characters
- Variant texts and contextual interpretation
- Parallel Pali and Chinese Buddhist texts
- Conventional expression containing *yancai*



# Variant characters and misreading cause ghost form

- Variant characters of *jiang* 薑 'ginger'



薑=塏

- Variant characters of *yan* 鹽 'salt'



鹽=塏

(Variants attested in **contemporaneous inscription** in Tang dynasty and **later dictionaries** )

# Variant characters and misreading

- Variant characters of *jiang* 薑 'ginger'



薑=塠

- Variant characters of *yan* 鹽 'salt'



鹽=塠

- How they confuse with each other:



=塠≈塠=



# Contextual interpretation:



## Variant in parallel medical texts

- a. 斷                      一切                      薑菜,                      飲食                      米                      麴。  
cut                      all                      ginger-vegetable,                      eat                      rice                      alcohol

“Stop eating all the **gingers**, (only) eat rice and alcohol.”

(日·丹波康賴《醫心方·治服石身體腫方》)

- b. 斷                      一切                      鹽菜,                      飲食                      米                      麵。  
cut                      all                      pickle,                      eat                      rice                      flour

“Stop eating all the **pickles**, (only) eat rice and flour.”

(唐·孫思邈《千金翼方·若从脚肿向上稍进入腹杀人方》)

# Contextual interpretation:



## Variant in parallel Buddhist texts

- a. 淨人 行 草 葉 薑菜/鹽菜 飯 果 時,  
clean-person distribute grass leaf ginger-vegetable/pickle rice fruit time,  
應 教 玄 放。  
should ask hang put

“When clean person distributes grass, leaves, gingers/pickles, rice, and fruit, (monks) should ask them do it in a hanging (contactless) way.”

(《大正藏》，85/702/a)

- b. 若 行 鹽, 果, 菜, 應 語 玄 放。  
if distribute salt fruit vegetable should say hang put

“If (clean person) distributes salt, fruit, and vegetables, (monks) should say: ‘Put it in a hanging (contactless) way.’”

(唐·慧述《四分戒本疏》卷三 CBETA 2023.Q4, T85, no. 2787, p. 610b5-7)

# Parallel Pali Buddhist texts differentiating *jiang(cai)* and *yan(cai)*

- Target character 1 = Pali *iṅgivera* 'ginger'  
Lexical meaning = MC *jiang* 'ginger'



# Chinese *jiang* 薑 – Pali *iṅgivera* ‘ginger’

Target character=Pali *iṅgivera* ‘ginger’

...*Dadhissa me rasam āhara,*                      *loṇassa me rasam āhara,*  
curd-GEN I-DAT taste-ACC take-2sg.IMPR. salt-GEN I-DAT taste-ACC take-2sg.IMPR.  
*siṅgiverassa me rasam āhara,*                      *jīrakassa me rasam āhara...*  
ginger-GEN I-DAT taste-ACC take-2sg.IMPR. cumin-GEN I-DAT taste-ACC take-2sg.IMPR.  
“Bring me the curd’s taste, bring me the salt’s taste, bring me the ginger’s taste, bring me the  
cumin’s taste.”

(Milinda Panha)

王勅厨下人言：“所作美羹，如前取羹中水味來，次取葱味來，次取薑味來，次取鹽豉味來，次取糯味來。”

（《那先比丘經》卷二 CBETA 2023.Q4, T32, no. 1670B, pp. 713c24-714a5）

# Parallel Pali Buddhist texts differentiating *jiang(cai)* and *yan(cai)*

- Target character 1 = Pali *iṅgivera* ‘ginger’

Lexical meaning = MC *jiang* ‘ginger’



- Target character 2 = Pali *biḷaṅga* ‘vinegar; sour gruel’

Lexical meaning ≈ MC *yancai* ‘pickle’



# Chinese *jiang* 薑 – Pali *bilāṅga* ‘vinegar’

Target character =Pali *bilāṅga* ‘vinegar; sour gruel’

<i>Tassa</i>	<i>kho</i>	<i>seṭṭhissa</i>	<i>pana,</i>	<i>bhante,</i>	<i>gahapatissa</i>
that-GEN	indeed	millionaire- GEN	and	Lord--VOC	houcelord-GEN
<i>evarūpo</i>	<i>bhattabhogo</i>	<i>ahosi</i>	<u><i>kaṇājakam</i></u>	<u><i>bhuñjati</i></u>	<u><i>bilāṅga</i></u> <u><i>dutiyam.</i></u>
such-NOM	meal portion-NOM	be-3sg. AOR.	porridge of broken rice-ACC	eat-3sg.PRES.	<b>vinegar</b> second-ACC

“That millionaire and householder’s meal, Lord, is as such. He eats porridge of broken rice with vinegar as side dish.”

(Mahāsaṅgīti)

a. 摩訶男長者如是巨富，作如是食用：食羶碎米、食豆羹、食腐敗薑，著羶布衣、單皮革屣，乘羶敗車，戴樹葉蓋，未曾聞其供養施與沙門、婆羅門，給恤貧苦、行路頓乏、諸乞匄者。

（劉宋·求那跋陀羅譯《雜阿含經》卷四十六 CBETA 2023.Q4, T02, no. 99, p. 337a18-22）



# Chinese *jiang* 薑 – Pali *bilāṅga* ‘vinegar’

Target character = Pali *bilāṅga* ‘vinegar; sour gruel’

<i>Tassa</i>	<i>kho</i>	<i>seṭṭhissa</i>	<i>pana,</i>	<i>bhante,</i>	<i>gahapatissa</i>
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“That millionaire and householder’s meal, Lord, is as such. He eats porridge of broken rice with vinegar as side dish.”

(Mahāsaṅgīti)

b. 彼長者家，金銀珍寶，數千萬億，不可稱量，況複餘財。雖有財富，不能飲食，所可食者，雜糠粗澀。若作羹時，渾煮薑罷，煮已還取，賣為財用。

（別譯《雜阿含經》卷四十六 CBETA 2023.Q4, T02, no. 100, p. 393c19）

# Blurred words in Chinese distinguished in parallel Pali texts!

- Target character 1 = Pali *iṅgivera* ‘ginger’

Lexical meaning = MC *jiang(cai)* ‘ginger (vegetable)’ ⇒ 薑 (菜)



- Target character 2 = Pali *bilāṅga* ‘vinegar; sour gruel’

Lexical meaning ≈ MC *yan(cai)* ‘salt (vegetable)’ ⇒ 盐 (菜)



# Conventional usage and context of *yancai*

- Conventional phrase ‘not even eating pickles’: a common expression used to mourn the death of close ones in MC
- Exact context in *Yanshi Jiaxun*

# Conventional usage and context of *yancai*

Conventional phrase ‘not even eating pickles for mourning

及	母	亡，	景伯	居	喪，	不	食	鹽菜。
till	mother	die,	Jingbo	stay	death,	not	eat	pickle.

“When his mother died, Jingbo mourned (his mother) and **did not eat pickles.**”

（北齊・魏收《魏書》卷四十三）

# Conventional usage and context of *yancai*

## Context in *Yanshi Jiaxun*

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Wu	county	LuXiang,	father	Xian	suffer	kill,	
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Xiang		lifelong	cloth	clothes	vegetable	food,	
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live	home	only	with	pinch	pluck	supply	cooking.
(北齊・顏之推《顏氏家訓·風操第六》)							

“Lu, Xiang comes from Wu County. His father Xian is killed (by cutting instruments), so Xiang lives a simple life with clothes made of cloth and food containing vegetables through out his life. He cannot bear eating pickles which needs to be cut, and all the cooking ingredients are pinched or plucked.”

# Summary

- *jiangcai* is a ghost word which does not exist, not only in *Yanshi Jiaxun*, but also in all contemporaneous Middle Chinese literature.
- The ghost word results from *yancai* 鹽菜 ‘salted vegetable, pickle’, due to misreading of characters and continued misinterpretation of lexical semantics.

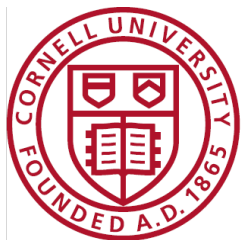
# Take-aways

- Different types of evidence may lead to different interpretations.
- Parallel texts of various languages should be referred to whenever possible.

# References

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Q&A