

Taiwanese Cantillation Prosody and the Standard Tradition of Regulated Verse

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1 November, 2014
Stanford University

Basic issue

Tradition that Southern dialects are better for representing the sound of traditional poetry of the “Táng sound” (*tángyīn* 唐音) style.

Known problems with the claim

Taking the common Taiwanese *wéndú* 文讀 as an example, there are some sixteen initials heard, whereas medieval phonology requires no fewer than 35 and as many as 41. Taiwanese does not always distinguish historically distinct initials.

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There are also various places where medieval categories are simply mixed up in Taiwanese — one medieval initial coming out different ways in Taiwanese — mostly among voiced initials.

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Initial	字	Medieval phonology	Taiwanese
並母	湓	{ben-1}	phûn
	抱	{bauQ-1}	phāu
	浮	{bou-3b}	hû
	服	{buk-3b}	hók
	被	{biQ-3bx}	pī
	病	{beingH-3a}	pēng

Examples of Taiwanese wéndú failing to represent a medieval initial in a single form:

Initial	字	Medieval phonology	Taiwanese
明母	每	{ meiQ-1a }	muí ⁿ
	買	{ meiQ-2a }	mái ⁿ
	蟆	{ ma-2 }	mâ ⁿ
	馬	{ maQ-2 }	má ⁿ
	眉	{ mi-3cx }	bî
	未	{ miH-3a }	bī
	無	{ muo-3c }	bû
	暮	{ muoH-1 }	bō

Examples of Taiwanese wéndú failing to represent a medieval initial in a single form:

Initial	字	Medieval phonology	Taiwanese
定母	笛	{ deik-4 }	ték
	弟	{ deiQ-4 }	tē
	停	{ deing-4 }	thēng
	頭	{ dou-1 }	thiû
	茶	{ dra-2 }	chhâ
	宅	{ dreik-2a }	thék
	纏	{ dran-3b }	tiân
	沉	{ drem-3 }	tîm

Examples of Taiwanese wéndú failing to represent a medieval initial in a single form:

Initial	字	Medieval phonology	Taiwanese
來母	羅	{le-1}	lô
	老	{lauQ-1}	nó ⁿ
日母	人	{nyen-3b}	lîn
	耳	{nyiQ-3d}	ní ⁿ

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Today I am reporting instead on the prosodic behavior observed in Taiwanese “cantillation” of Táng-era literature. This is long-term work in progress — I put it aside in the Fall of 2001, frustrated with technical problems, but have taken it up again this summer, now that my programming skills can be put to service here.

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- Chinese traditional *yínsòng* 吟誦 is highly ornamented.
- Intrinsic syllable-tones are elaborated into melody; the principle bears a likeness to the embellishment of written characters into *shūfǎ* 書法 (‘calligraphy’).

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The “Pípá xíng” 琵琶行 of Bái Jūyì.

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Sung by Hsü I-t‘ing 許禕廷 in a setting transmitted by Hóng Zénán 洪澤南.

潯陽江頭夜送客

sîm-iông-kang-thiû iā-sòng-khek

Seeing off a guest by night
at Sîmiông River's edge —

♩ = 84



sîm - iông kang - thiû iā - sòng - khék
潯 陽 江 頭 夜 送 客

楓葉荻花秋瑟瑟

hong-iáp tèk-hoa chhiu sek-sek

‘Seksek’ in the autumn air
went sweetgum leaves,
went silver-grass blossoms —

5

hong - iáp — tèk hoa — chhiu sek - sek —

楓 葉 荻 花 秋 瑟 瑟

主人下馬客在船

chú-lîn hā-máⁿ khek chāi-sôan

The host dismounted;
at boatside was the guest —

9

chú - lîn _____ hā - máⁿ khek chāi - sôan _____
主 人 下 馬 客 在 船

舉酒欲飲無管弦

kú-chiú iòk-ím bù-kóan-hiân

They raised their wine to drink;
no flutes or strings there were —

13

kú - chiú iòk ím bù - kóan - hiân
舉 酒 欲 飲 無 管 弦

醉不成歡慘將別

chui put-sêng-hoan chhám chiong-piàt

Drunk, but not to the point of happiness —
miserable at parting —

17



chui put - sêng - hoan chhám_ chiong - piàt_

醉 不 成 歡 慘 將 別

別時茫茫江浸月

piát-sî bông-bông kang chìm-gòat

Vast it seemed, at parting —
river drenched moon —

21

The musical notation is written on a single staff with a treble clef. It begins with a 3/4 time signature, followed by a 6/8 time signature, then a 2/4 time signature, and ends with a 3/4 time signature. The melody consists of several notes, some with slurs and ties, indicating a continuous flow. The lyrics are written below the staff, aligned with the notes.

piát - sî bông - bông kang chìm - gòat
別 時 茫 茫 江 浸 月

忽聞水上琵琶聲

hut-bûn suí-siōng pî-pâ-seng

Suddenly was heard
the sound of a lute on the waters —

25

hut - būn suí - siōng pî - pâ - seng

忽 聞 水 上 琵 琶 聲

主人忘歸客不發

chú-lîn bông-kui khek put-hoat

The host forgot about going back;
the guest did not set off —

29

chú - lîn bông - kui khek put - hoat
主 人 忘 歸 客 不 發

Segmentals

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What about rhyming?

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Just as in Mandarin.

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別	piat	
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發	hoat	
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家在蝦蟆陵下住	chū	秋月春風等閒度	tū
十三學得琵琶成	sêng	弟走從軍阿姨死	sú
名屬教坊第一部	pū	暮去朝來顏色故	kù
曲罷曾教善才服	hòk	門前冷落車馬稀	hi
妝成每被秋娘妒	tù	老大嫁作商人婦	hū
五陵年少爭纏頭	thiû	商人重利輕別離	lí
一曲紅綃不知數	sù	前月浮梁買茶去	khù
鈿頭雲篦擊節碎	sui		
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*數 sò' => sù

度 tō' => tū

故 kò' => kù

Tone in rhyming

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Yángqù tone (-ū)

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When did people start doing that?

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Probably by Bái Jūyì's own time!

When did people start doing that?

住	部	妒	數	污	度	故	婦	去
chū	pū	tù	sù	ù	tū	kù	hū	khù
去聲		去聲	去聲	去聲	去聲	去聲		去聲

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Bái himself rhymes two *shǎngshēng* words into a *qùshēng* rhyming block — both are examples of words that have moved between tone categories as a result of the tone split that gave us -ù and -ū.

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This shows us that the *kind of* tone-split we see in Taiwanese was already present in Bái's language — like modern poets, he rhymed in an accent whose tones were different from the way he spoke.

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Tonal prosody

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Tonal prosody (♩ = 1.0)

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1.0	1.4	0.9	1.1	1.0	0.9	1.7

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Syllables in different tones are also not the same duration.

Average duration by tone (♪ = 1.0)

Average duration by tone (♩ = 1.0)

<i>tone</i>	<i>avg. duration</i>
○	1.3
●	1.0

Average duration by tone (♩ = 1.0)

<i>tone</i>	<i>avg. duration</i>
○	1.3
<i>yīnpíng</i>	1.2
<i>yángpíng</i>	1.3
●	1.0
<i>yīnshǎng</i>	1.0
<i>yīnqù</i>	1.0
<i>yángqù</i>	1.0
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Distinct tendency to prolong *píng* syllables overall, and particularly the *yángpíng*.

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<i>tone</i>	<i>avg. duration</i>
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<i>yīnpíng</i>	1.2
<i>yángpíng</i>	1.3
●	1.0
<i>yīnshǎng</i>	1.0
<i>yīnqù</i>	1.0
<i>yángqù</i>	1.0
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How does that relate to the relative length of different positions?

Average duration by place and tone (♩ = 1.0)

Average duration by place and tone (♩ = 1.0)

place:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
○	1.0	1.7	1.0	1.4	1.0	1.0	1.8
●	1.0	0.9	0.9	0.8	0.9	0.8	1.6

Average duration by place and tone (♩ = 1.0)

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Final syllable, regardless of tone, tends to be prolonged.

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Final syllable tends to be prolonged.

Caesura-positions 2 & 4 are longer in *píng* tones.

Inner (positions 2-6) *zè* tones are all slightly shorter on average.

Average duration by place and tone (♩ = 1.0)

place:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
○	1.0	1.7	1.0	1.4	1.0	1.0	1.8
<i>yīnpíng</i>	1.0	1.6	1.0	1.2	1.0	1.1	1.9
<i>yángpíng</i>	1.1	1.7	1.0	1.6	1.0	0.9	1.8
●	1.0	0.9	0.9	0.8	0.9	0.8	1.6
<i>yīnshǎng</i>	1.0	1.3	0.9	0.8	1.0	0.9	1.5
<i>yīnqù</i>	1.0	0.6	0.9	0.6	0.9	0.9	1.6
<i>yángqù</i>	1.0	0.8	0.8	0.8	1.1	0.8	1.8
<i>yīnrù</i>	1.0	0.6	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8	1.7
<i>yánggrù</i>	1.2	0.8	0.9	0.8	0.8	0.7	1.5

Average duration by place and tone (♩ = 1.0)

place:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
○	1.0	1.7	1.0	1.4	1.0	1.0	1.8
<i>yīnpíng</i>	1.0	1.6	1.0	1.2	1.0	1.1	1.9
<i>yángpíng</i>	1.1	1.7	1.0	1.6	1.0	0.9	1.8
●	1.0	0.9	0.9	0.8	0.9	0.8	1.6
<i>yīnshǎng</i>	1.0	1.3	0.9	0.8	1.0	0.9	1.5
<i>yīnqù</i>	1.0	0.6	0.9	0.6	0.9	0.9	1.6
<i>yángqù</i>	1.0	0.8	0.8	0.8	1.1	0.8	1.8
<i>yīnrù</i>	1.0	0.6	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8	1.7
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Average duration by place and tone (♩ = 1.0)

place:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
○	1.0	1.7	1.0	1.4	1.0	1.0	1.8
<i>yīnpíng</i>	1.0	1.6	1.0	1.2	1.0	1.1	1.9
<i>yángpíng</i>	1.1	1.7	1.0	1.6	1.0	0.9	1.8
●	1.0	0.9	0.9	0.8	0.9	0.8	1.6
<i>yīnshǎng</i>	1.0	1.3	0.9	0.8	1.0	0.9	1.5
<i>yīnqù</i>	1.0	0.6	0.9	0.6	0.9	0.9	1.6
<i>yángqù</i>	1.0	0.8	0.8	0.8	1.1	0.8	1.8
<i>yīnrù</i>	1.0	0.6	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8	1.7
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These generalizations hold for most individual tones

Average duration by place and tone (♩ = 1.0)

place:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
○	1.0	1.7	1.0	1.4	1.0	1.0	1.8
<i>yīnpíng</i>	1.0	1.6	1.0	1.2	1.0	1.1	1.9
<i>yángpíng</i>	1.1	1.7	1.0	1.6	1.0	0.9	1.8
●	1.0	0.9	0.9	0.8	0.9	0.8	1.6
<i>yīnshǎng</i>	1.0	1.3	0.9	0.8	1.0	0.9	1.5
<i>yīnqù</i>	1.0	0.6	0.9	0.6	0.9	0.9	1.6
<i>yángqù</i>	1.0	0.8	0.8	0.8	1.1	0.8	1.8
<i>yīnrù</i>	1.0	0.6	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8	1.7
<i>yánggrù</i>	1.2	0.8	0.9	0.8	0.8	0.7	1.5

These generalizations hold for most individual tones, though position-4 *yīnpíng* looks doubtful here. (More data needed.)

Average duration by place and tone (♩ = 1.0)

place:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
○	1.0	1.7	1.0	1.4	1.0	1.0	1.8
<i>yīnpíng</i>	1.0	1.6	1.0	1.2	1.0	1.1	1.9
<i>yángpíng</i>	1.1	1.7	1.0	1.6	1.0	0.9	1.8
●	1.0	0.9	0.9	0.8	0.9	0.8	1.6
<i>yīnshǎng</i>	1.0	1.3	0.9	0.8	1.0	0.9	1.5
<i>yīnqù</i>	1.0	0.6	0.9	0.6	0.9	0.9	1.6
<i>yángqù</i>	1.0	0.8	0.8	0.8	1.1	0.8	1.8
<i>yīnrù</i>	1.0	0.6	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8	1.7
<i>yánggrù</i>	1.2	0.8	0.9	0.8	0.8	0.7	1.5

Some prolongation in position-2 *yīnshǎng*, too.

Average duration by place and tone (♩ = 1.0)

place:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
○	1.0	1.7	1.0	1.4	1.0	1.0	1.8
<i>yīnpíng</i>	1.0	1.6	1.0	1.2	1.0	1.1	1.9
<i>yángpíng</i>	1.1	1.7	1.0	1.6	1.0	0.9	1.8
●	1.0	0.9	0.9	0.8	0.9	0.8	1.6
<i>yīnshǎng</i>	1.0	1.3	0.9	0.8	1.0	0.9	1.5
<i>yīnqù</i>	1.0	0.6	0.9	0.6	0.9	0.9	1.6
<i>yángqù</i>	1.0	0.8	0.8	0.8	1.1	0.8	1.8
<i>yīnrù</i>	1.0	0.6	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8	1.7
<i>yánggrù</i>	1.2	0.8	0.9	0.8	0.8	0.7	1.5

Some prolongation in position-2 *yīnshǎng*, too.

Are all cases of prolongation basically the same?

Average duration by place and tone (♩ = 1.0)

place:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
○	1.0	1.7	1.0	1.4	1.0	1.0	1.8
<i>yīnpíng</i>	1.0	1.6	1.0	1.2	1.0	1.1	1.9
<i>yángpíng</i>	1.1	1.7	1.0	1.6	1.0	0.9	1.8
●	1.0	0.9	0.9	0.8	0.9	0.8	1.6
<i>yīnshǎng</i>	1.0	1.3	0.9	0.8	1.0	0.9	1.5
<i>yīnqù</i>	1.0	0.6	0.9	0.6	0.9	0.9	1.6
<i>yángqù</i>	1.0	0.8	0.8	0.8	1.1	0.8	1.8
<i>yīnrù</i>	1.0	0.6	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8	1.7
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Some prolongation in position-2 *yīnshǎng*, too.

Are all cases of prolongation basically the same? (no)

Percentages of melismatic and non-melismatic syllables

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<i>tone</i>	<i>melismatic</i>		<i>non-melismatic</i>
	<i>fall</i>	<i>rise</i>	
<i>yīnpíng</i>	26.4	1.4	
<i>yángpíng</i>	5.1	52.6	
<i>yīnshǎng</i>	44.7	6.6	
<i>yīnqù</i>	30.4	0.0	
<i>yángqù</i>	25.8	0.0	
<i>yīnrù</i>	43.8	1.4	
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Yángpíng has strongest tendency to melisma.

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<i>tone</i>	<i>melismatic</i>		<i>non-melismatic</i>
	<i>fall</i>	<i>rise</i>	
<i>yīnpíng</i>	26.4	1.4	72.2
<i>yángpíng</i>	5.1	52.6	42.3
<i>yīnshǎng</i>	44.7	6.6	48.7
<i>yīnqù</i>	30.4	0.0	69.6
<i>yángqù</i>	25.8	0.0	74.2
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Yángpíng has strongest tendency to melisma.

Other tones, if melismatic, normally fall; *yángpíng* rises.

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Are *yīnshǎng* and *yīnrù* melisma significant? (More data needed.)

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- *Yángpíng* tends to be melismatic and has a distinctive rising contour, unlike the other tones, which tend to fall in melisma.
- Other matters, requiring further data and historicity unknown:
 - Line-feet tend to be quite prolonged, regardless of tone.
 - Initial syllable is not shortened in *zè*-tones.
 - *Shǎngshēng* in position 2 appears somewhat prolonged.

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Broadly speaking, the Taiwanese cantillation tradition pays attention to traditional large tonal categories and their ornamentation, and to the integrity of traditional rhyming groups, without being true to the phonetics on which finer-grained prosodic rules rested.

Tonal ornamentation is the primary expression of prosody, and is imposed even on compositions entirely outside of regulated praxis.

Workflow

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- Export to “extensible markup language for music” format (MusicXML).
- Analyze with scripting language (Python 3).

End