**Ancient Chinese Sentence Final Particle ěr爾**

Sentence particles belong to those linguistic phenomena that distinguish both Classical and Modern Chinese from the languages of Europe and a majority of other language families. They have accordingly been perceived as a special “domestic” linguistic feature by Western and Chinese philologists and linguists alike (cf. Mǎ [1898] 2000: 323). The study of particles was traditionally an important part of the broader interest of Chinese scholars in so-called “empty words” (*xūzì* 虛字) and it represented practically the only discipline that could be subsumed under the label of grammar in pre-modern China. One would thus expect that this domain has been systematically explored and described from different perspectives, and also, that the functions of these particles have been clarified in highest detail. But surprisingly, this does not seem to be the case. There have admittedly been published a plenty of Chinese articles dealing with the usage of a particular particle in the language in general or, more frequently, in a certain transmitted text (see Sūn 2003), and the topic has been relatively popular in the West as well.[[1]](%22%20%5Cl%20%22x_x__ftn1) We do have at our disposal various dictionaries of functional words (see Zádrapa 2014, s. v. Classical Chinese, Dictionaries of Function Words and Monographs on Function Words), continuing the pre-modern tradition (see e.g. Pú 1987: 457–459 or Hé 1995: 279), and sentence particles are addressed in a way in each of the many textbooks of Classical Chinese (see Zádrapa 2014, s. v. Textbooks). Quite naturally, they feature in the few comprehensive grammars of the language, such as Gabelentz 1881, Dobson 1959, Pulleyblank 1995, Gassmann and Behr 2013, Zhōu 1959–1962, Hé and Yáng 2001. Lately, there have appeared highly welcome studies on function words in excavated texts (most notably the monographs by Zhōu Shǒujìn [2005], Wèi Déshèng [2000] or Zhāng Yùjīn [2011]). However, what we practically miss, maybe apart from the attempt by Dobson (1974) generally deemed unsuccessful, is a full-fledged monograph on sentence particles in Classical Chinese that would provide us with a consistent, unified and theoretically up-to-date account of the entire system. Instead of that, we have been exposed to an incredibly confusing polyphony of mutually irreconcilable explanations, both those in reference books and those *ad hoc* ones in commentaries, sometimes entagled in often quite idiosyncratic theories. At the same time, very little of this all rests on a contemporary linguistic theory (but cf. Caboara 2013, and, to an extent, some recent studies, such as Liú 2007, Hé 2013, or Cáo 2010). Largely for these reasons, irrespective of their omnipresence and importance, sentence particles tend to be mostly ignored in translations into Western languages, at least those whose meaning is relatively subtle and cannot be easily and straightforwardly translated into the given language, and which are translated into Modern Chinese very differently if at all. This can be seen, after all, from the examples below. It is therefore crucially important to focus on sentence particles over and over again, exploring them on the background of new knowledge in such fields as reconstructed phonology, morphology and palaeography, supported by the findings resulting from the analysis of excavated texts, but also trying to relate the Chinese data to general theories of language (especially typology).