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# A case study of dialect contact of early Mandarin

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## Abstract

Four descendants of Ming dynasty Nanjing Mandarin, namely, Tianjin, Yunnan, Tunpu and Jun, differ in the preservation of the phonological features in their common ancestral language. This paper discusses and compares the features of Nanjing Mandarin as preserved in these four dialects and considers the linguistic, social, psychological and geographical factors that influenced the divergent paths. The common features and individual differences resulting from the preservation or discard of features in the ancestral language are directly connected with the presence or absence of these factors.

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## 1. Introduction

Change in the languages of early Mandarin-speaking migrants in different regions is a topic worthy of attention in language contact study. This paper studies four migrant languages descending from Nanjing Mandarin during the Ming Dynasty, namely, the dialects spoken in Tianjin, Yunnan, Tunpu and Jun. The four dialects are in different geographic locations. Tianjin, the port city near Beijing, is a Northern Mandarin dialect, both Yunnan and Tunpu are Southwest Mandarin dialects, and Jun—spoken in the tropical island of Hainan—is a Mandarin isolate surrounded by Cantonese and Hainan Southern Min. These four dialects differ tremendously with their surrounding dialects,<sup>1</sup> and are closely linked to their ancestral language. Based on data obtained from fieldwork and documentation in rhyme books and rhyme tables from the Ming and Qing dynasties, as well as historical archives and local chronicles, this paper claims that the four dialects are direct descendants of Ming-era Nanjing Mandarin, and via synchronic and diachronic comparisons, analyzes the traces left behind and the changes the four dialects have undergone from the Ming dynasty to the present day.

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<sup>1</sup> The four garrison dialects differ from their respective surrounding dialects in phonological structure. Tianjin differs from neighboring Beijing and Hebei dialects in tonal inventory, tone sandhi, and dental sibilant initials. Yunnan differs from Southwest Mandarin in its retroflex consonant initials and nasalization pattern. For Tunpu dialect in Guizhou, the evolution of the entering tones is different from neighboring Southwest Mandarin. The Jun dialect of Yacheng, Hainan, is completely different from the surrounding Cantonese and Southern Min dialects.

## 2. Four dialects as direct descendants of Nanjing Mandarin

Nanjing was the capital of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) for half a century before the court moved to Beijing. To consolidate the empire and strengthen the armed forces, Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang, the founding emperor of the Ming, implemented a garrison system all over the country. The garrisons ranged in size from about 1000 officers and soldiers to more than 5000. It was mandatory for all the military officers and soldiers to leave their hometowns and settle down in the garrisons in which they served. The position was hereditary. The state would offer them land to farm with the requirement that their families stay with the army. Locals generally did not serve in the garrisons., which resulted in a unique long-distance migration in the early Ming Dynasty (Cao, 1997:7–8).

The historical origin of the four dialects—Tianjin, Yunnan, Tunpu and Jun—has previously been discussed by Author (2013a,b) and Author and Chen (2017). As documented in both scholarly literature on migration and population history as well as in local chronicles and documents, the city of Tianjin was founded by military officers and soldiers as *Tianjin Wei* (天津卫, Tianjin Garrison). Yunnan Mandarin was brought to Yunnan by hundreds of thousands of military officers and soldiers. The ancestors of Tunpu are very likely to have been the officers and soldiers as well as their families stationed in *Pingba Wei* (平坝卫, Pingba Garrison), and the ancestors of the native speakers of Jun were also soldiers stationed with their families in *Yazhou Defense Garrison* (崖州防御所). Statistical analysis of native places of officers and soldiers during the early Ming shows that 45% of them were from *Nanzhili* (南直隶), that is, the Nanjing Capital District in the broad sense, including present day Anhui and Jiangsu provinces, and less than 10% of the officers and soldiers were from other places. We thus infer that the majority of the military migrants were from the area around Nanjing and spoke the Mandarin dialect of the region. Based on this inference we are able to determine that the four dialects under study are the direct descendants of Nanjing Mandarin in the Ming Dynasty.

The Nanjing Capital District of the Ming Dynasty covers today's Anhui, Jiangsu and Shanghai. Assumptions on the language spoken in the Nanjing Capital District and Nanjing Mandarin are summarized as follows (Author, 2014, 2016):

1. Jianghuai Mandarin and Zhongyuan Mandarin coexist in the District. Jianghuai refers to the lower reaches of the Yangtze, including Nanjing, and Zhongyuan refers to the area that includes northern Anhui and northern Jiangsu.
2. *Xiru Ermuzi* 西儒耳目资 (Trigault, 1626) is the source of the basic phonological system of Nanjing Mandarin during the Ming Dynasty. It is based on the Nanjing dialect which belonged to the Jianghuai family, but also on a fusion of both Jianghuai and Zhongyuan Mandarin.
3. Nanjing Mandarin in the Ming does not necessarily refer to the dialect spoken in the town of Nanjing. It was a hybrid of both Jianghuai and Zhongyuan families.

One reason for Nanjing Mandarin's hybridity lies in the lack of any precise standard of spoken language. Generally, the dialect of a certain cultural or political center is considered the standard. However, despite this deep-rooted concept of standard pronunciation, the literati of the day failed to reach any consensus in this respect. The so-called *Zhongyuan Yayin* 'Refined Speech of Zhongyuan' records the language spoken on formal occasions like academy and court proceedings during the Yuan and Ming dynasties. Linguistically it was also heterogeneous and colored by personal accents, like modern day Mandarin. As Jianghuai and Zhongyuan Mandarin share few differences and speakers have no difficulty in communication, it is therefore natural to group Zhongyuan Mandarin and Jianghuai Mandarin together under the collective banner of Nanjing Mandarin.

## 3. Phonological comparisons

### 3.1. Phonetic forms of Zhī, Zhuāng and Zhāng

Sun (2010) claims that the phonetic forms of the three initials, represented as Zhī 知, Zhuāng 庄 and Zhāng 章 in historical rhyme books and in Chinese historical linguistics literature,<sup>2</sup> as documented in *Xiru Ermuzi* (Trigault, 1626) are similar to those found in Jianghuai Mandarin and reflect the basic phonetic realizations of the three initials in Ming Nanjing Mandarin. The phonetic realization of the Zhī-Zhuāng-Zhāng initials is an important parameter in classifying Chinese dialects, and is an indispensable phonetic feature in the examination of the ancestral language of a certain

<sup>2</sup> In Chinese historical phonology, initials and rhymes are represented by characters. These characters may have different pronunciations in modern dialects. In comparative work it is more convenient to use these characters, rather than phonetic symbols, to represent the relevant initials or rhymes.

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