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CHINESE GRUE: ON THE ORIGINAL MEANING AND EVOLUTION OF QĪNG 青

VICTORIA BOGUSHEVSKAYA

Una delle peculiarità del vocabolario dei colori in lingua cinese è la rappresentazione di diverse parti dello spettro tramite un unico termine – *qīng* 青, che denota non solo la categoria composta verde-azzurro, ma si estende anche verso l'area macro scura dello spazio del colore.

Qīng è uno dei cinque colori canonici in Cina. Sebbene svolga una doppia funzione nella formazione delle parole – in qualità di radicale in cromonimi derivati in wenyān e come morfema in composizione con lessemi dei colori in cinese mandarino standard – non rappresenta uno dei termini di colore basilari nella lingua cinese contemporanea, in quanto esistono termini distinti, psicologicamente salienti, per indicare il verde, l'azzurro e il nero.

Questo articolo si concentra sull'analisi semantica di tutti i significati esistenti del termine *qīng*, determina la sequenza temporale della loro comparsa e avanza ipotesi sui motivi del loro sincretismo.

One of the peculiarities of Chinese colour vocabulary is that the composite *qīng* 青 category not only denotes green-blue continuum, but also extends into the macro-black area of a colour space.

Qīng is one of the five canonical colours in China. Although it has a binary word formation function – as a radical in derived colour lexemes in wenyān and as a morpheme in compounds in Modern Standard Mandarin – it is not a basic colour term in contemporary Chinese, there are separate psychologically salient terms for 'green', 'blue' and 'black'.

The paper aims to provide semantic analysis of all the existing meanings of the polysemantic *qīng*, determines the sequence of their emergence and puts forward a hypothesis about the reasons for their syncretism.

Keywords: colour naming, grue, macro-category, qing, colour categorisation

1. Introduction

Physiologically, a typical healthy human eye is able to distinguish and perceive anywhere between twenty thousand¹ and ten million² colours. However, languages differ greatly in the way in which the gamut of colours is partitioned into lexical categories. For instance, French has no equivalent of the English 'brown'; it needs to be translated either with *brun* or with *marron* or even sometimes with *jaune* – which we usually think of as meaning 'yellow' – depending on the shade it refers to and the range of objects it applies to³. An English speaker would use the word 'blue', while a Russian speaker would split it into two distinct basic colour terms (BCT)⁴, *sinij* (синий) and *goluboj* (голубой) specifying dark and light blue respectively and considering them separate colours. Ndembu, one of the languages of the Congo region, possesses primary

¹ A.V. Luizov, *Cvet i svet* [Colour and light], Energoatomizdat, Leningrad 1989.

² D.B. Judd – G. Wyszecki, *Colour in business, science, and industry*, Wiley, New York 1975³.

³ J. Lyons, *Linguistic semantics: an introduction*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1995, p. 90.

⁴ A basic colour term (BCT) is a colour term denoting one of the most salient colour concepts in a society.

terms only for three colours: white, red and black; terms for other colours are either derivatives or consist of descriptive and metaphorical phrases, as in the case of green, which gets expressed as the ‘water of sweet potato leaves’. Colours which we would distinguish from white, red and black are, in Ndembu, linguistically identified with them. Blue cloth, for example, is described as black cloth, and yellow or orange objects are lumped together as ‘red’⁵. Moreover, in some societies, there is no word corresponding to the English ‘colour’ and they do not contain any abstract colour terms (CT) at all. They might instead use equine CT, as per Shelta, a language spoken by Irish nomadic people⁶, or cattle CT, as the Mursi (Ethiopian transhumant cattle herders) do⁷. In other words, each language, from the point of view of another language, may be arbitrary in classifying colours; what becomes expressed by a single colour word in one language may be characterised by a series of colour words in another.

A BCT may be simple, representing a single hue⁸ or a single fundamental category (e.g. English ‘red’ for RED⁹), or it may be composite, also known as an extended or macro-colour term, representing the union of two or more fundamental categories¹⁰. The phenomenon of composite CTs is explained by peculiarities in the internal structures of relevant languages and by the unique cultural characteristics of the respective societies. However, it is not that ethno-linguistic communities using a macro-colour category cannot visually distinguish between the two or more hues, “they just regard them as two varieties of the same colour, as one merges into the other and the community finds no compelling reason to regard them as fundamentally different”¹¹.

Several types of macro-categories known in languages are denoted by only one BCT: ‘warm-light’ and ‘dark-cool’, as in the case of the Dugum Dani of Indonesian New Guinea¹²; or a separate YELLOW + GREEN category, widely used among languages in the Pacific Northwest¹³; or have no boundary between GREEN and BLUE. The latter macro-category is often called ‘grue’, a modern construct out of the English for ‘green’ and ‘blue’. Macro-categories are often multiply

⁵ V. Turner, *The forest of symbols: Aspects of Ndembu ritual*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY 1967, p. 60.

⁶ T.A. Mikhailova, ‘Krasnyj’ v irlandskom jazyke: ponjatie i sposoby ego vyraženiya [‘Red’ in the Irish language: The concept and means of its expression], “Voprosy jazykoznanija”, 1994, 6, pp. 118-128.

⁷ D. Turton, *There’s no such beast: cattle and colour naming among the Mursi*, “Man”, N.S., 15, 1980, 2, pp. 320-338.

⁸ Hue is the chromatic element to colours such as red, green and blue.

⁹ SMALL CAPITALS hereinafter indicate colour concepts or categories.

¹⁰ The full classification also includes the third type, the so-called derived terms, representing the mixture of two fundamental categories (e.g. English pink for RED + WHITE or brown for BLACK + YELLOW), P. Kay – C.K. McDaniel, *The Linguistic Significance of the Meanings of Basic Colour Terms*, “Language”, 54, 1978, 3, pp. 610-646, p. 633.

¹¹ C.P. Biggam, *The semantics of colour: a historical approach*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2012, pp. 61-62.

¹² B. Berlin – P. Kay, *Basic colour terms: their universality and evolution*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1969, pp. 46-47.

¹³ R.E. MacLaury, *Colour-Category Evolution and Shuswap Yellow-with-Green*, “American Anthropologist”, N.S., 89, 1987, 1, pp. 107-124, p. 107.

focused¹⁴. Focal grue selections have often proved to be bimodal, chosen from both the focal blue and focal green regions, but grue has never been found to be focused in the intermediate blue-green region¹⁵. The grue category exists in some old and modern Semitic languages¹⁶, in Sanskrit¹⁷, in some Austronesian, Apachean, Aztec-Tanoan, Eskimo¹⁸, in Turkic¹⁹, in Celtic²⁰, and even in some dialects of Italian²¹. Its Chinese equivalent is *qīng* 青, which is expressed in the standard combinations *qīng tiān* 青天 [blue sky] and *qīng cǎo* 青草 [green grass].

2. Green

I deploy three different kinds of evidence in favour of the fact that *qīng* primarily stands for GREEN. First, is the etymological analysis of the character *per se*, written in Old Chinese as 青 (HDZD, 4046). Yuē Zhāi explains that the lower part of the character is a drawing of a well-shaft constructed for obtaining a mineral pigment, which is expressed by a dot in the middle, while the upper part represents a plant²². Needham, quoting Kalgren, says that this depicts a plant of some kind, very possibly indigo²³ with its juice being collected in a pan²⁴. Thus, we have the syssemantic-category (Chin. *huìyì* 会意)²⁵ character that expresses the

¹⁴ Focus (focal colour) is the area of a colour which is considered the best and most typical example of that colour.

¹⁵ P. Kay – C.K. McDaniel, *The Linguistic Significance of the Meanings of Basic Colour Terms*, p. 630.

¹⁶ V.V. Naumkin – V.Ya. Porkhomovsky, *Očerki po etnolingvistike Sokotry* [Essays in the ethnolinguistics of Soqotra], Nauka, Moskva 1981, p. 27.

¹⁷ Yu.V. Normanskaya, *Cvetooboznačenija v sanskrite* [Colour names in Sanskrit], in *Naimenovaniya cveta v indoevropskix jazykax: Sistemnyj i istoričeskij analiz*, A.P. Vasilevich ed., KomKniga, Moskva 2007, pp. 40-53, p. 49.

¹⁸ B. Berlin – P. Kay, *Basic colour terms: their universality and evolution*, pp. 74-78.

¹⁹ A.N. Kononov, *Semantika cvetooboznačenij v tjurkskix jazykax* [Semantics of colour names in Turkic], “Tjurkologičeskij sbornik”, 1978, pp. 159-179, p. 172.

²⁰ T.A. Mikhailova, *‘Krasnyj’ v irlandskom jazyke: ponjatje i sposoby ego vyraženiya* [‘Red’ in the Irish language: The concept and means of its expression], p. 118.

²¹ A.M. Kristol, *Colour systems in southern Italy: a case of regression*, “Language”, 56, 1980, 1, pp. 137-145, p. 143.

²² Yuē Zhāi 约斋, *Zi yuán* 字源 [Etymology of Chinese characters], Shànghǎi shūdiàn 1986, p. 121.

²³ As is commonly known, China is the birthplace of sericulture. The earliest excavated silk is a group of ribbons, threads and woven fragments dyed red, dated to 3000 BC, Ye Yun – L.G. Salmon – G.R. Cass, *The ozone fading of traditional Chinese plant dyes*, “Journal of the American Institute for Conservation”, 39, 2000, 2, pp. 245-257. The dominant materials used for textile dyeing were plant dyes. Chinese literary sources state that indigo was one of the oldest dyes, known as early as during the legendary Xià 夏 Dynasty (ca. 21st – ca. 16th cent. BC) and mainly obtained from the indigo plant *Polygonum tinctorium* (Chin. *liǎolán* 蓼藍), Xú Cháohuá 徐朝华, *Xī “qīng” zuòwéi yánsècí de nèihán jí qí yǎnbiàn* 析“青”作为颜色词的内涵及其演变 [Colour lexeme ‘qīng’: analysis of its meaning and evolution], “Nánkāi dàxué xuébào” 南开大学学报, 6, 1988, 19, pp. 33-39, p. 35.

²⁴ J. Needham, *Science and Civilization in China. Vol. 5: Chemistry and chemical technology. Part 2: Spagyric discovery and invention: magisteries of gold and immortality*, with the collaboration of Lu Gwei-djen, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1974, pp. 157-158.

²⁵ Lit. ‘joint meanings’; a type of Chinese characters whose meaning is indicated by the combined meanings of their constituent parts. Also known as ‘associative’. For more on this category, see W. Behr, *Homosomatic*

idea of a pigment (of biological or mineral origin), which has the colour of plants. Yuē Zhāi believes that *qīng* meant *shíqīng* 石青 [stone *qīng*]²⁶, that is, the azurite mineral. Xú Cháohuá hypothesises that *qīng* primarily denotes not just azurite alone, but the aggregate of two minerals: azurite and malachite²⁷.

The second piece of evidence stems from the phonological reconstruction of *qīng* by William Baxter, who points out that *qīng* was once very close to the lexeme *shēng* 生 [live, bear, be born, produce, fresh] phonologically, morphologically, and almost surely etymologically. Moreover, he compares *qīng* with the Tibeto-Burman root **sriŋ* [live, alive, green, raw]²⁸. The fact that the Tibeto-Burman cognate also means ‘green’ in some languages makes it quite plausible that a similar semantic development of English ‘green’ and ‘grass’, and of German *grün* and *gras* from the same Old German root **gro-* [grow] is quite parallel.

The third basis of evidence is of archaeological origin. Chēng Tè-k’un studied a group of fifteen vessels *t’u-lu*, colour-containers assigned to the late Shāng 商 – Western Zhōu 周 period (ca. 1300-771 BC)²⁹. Most of these containers are made of bronze (some of pottery, one jade and three marble). They vary from cuboid to round and triangular in shape. Each of them has three to five tubular receptacles for the pigments and a hole in the centre for a mixing saucer. In five out of these fifteen containers (four made of bronze and one made of pottery), residues of pigment were found in the bottom of the tubes, and these have been identified as white, black, red, green and yellow powders with none of them containing blue pigment. The contents from one of them underwent spectroscopic analysis, and the green substance was identified as a copper compound; a pigment derivable from a number of materials such as malachite³⁰. This fact proves that the Shāng people did know of the existence of a green (but not yet a blue) pigment; furthermore, this also makes *qīng*, originally denoting the aggregate of azurite and malachite, quite plausible as both are basic copper carbonates, the sources of copper. Except for its vibrant green colour, the chemical formula of malachite is similar to that of azurite. Azurite is found in shades of deep, intense blue and is less abundant in nature than malachite. Both minerals frequently occur together, to the extent that the name ‘azur-malachite’ has been used for intimate combinations³¹. Geo-

juxtaposition and the question of syssemantic characters, in *Écriture chinoise, données, usages et représentations*, F. Bottéro – R. Djamouri ed., EHESS, Paris 2006, pp. 4–52 for critique of Boltz’s view, W.G. Boltz, *The origin and early development of the Chinese writing system*, American Oriental Society, New Haven 1994, pp. 147-149.

²⁶ Yuē Zhāi 约斋, *Zi yuán* 字源 [Etymology of Chinese characters], p. 121.

²⁷ Xú Cháohuá 徐朝华, *Xī “qīng” zuòwéi yánsècí de nèihán jí qí yǎnbiàn* 析“青”作为颜色词的内涵及其演变 [Colour lexeme ‘qīng’: analysis of its meaning and evolution], pp. 33-39.

²⁸ W.H.III. Baxter, *A look at the history of Chinese colour terminology*, “Journal of the Chinese Language Teachers Association”, 19, 1983, 2, pp. 1-25, pp. 16-17.

²⁹ The name ‘*t’u-lu*’ (圖廬) was taken from an inscription on one of the containers.

³⁰ Chēng Tè-k’un, *The t’u-lu colour-container of the Shang-Chou Period*, “The Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiques”, 37, 1965, pp. 239-250, p. 244.

³¹ M. O’Donoghue, *Less common species in gems: their sources, descriptions and identification*, in *Gems*, M. O’Donoghue ed., Elsevier, Oxford 2006⁶, pp. 376-470, pp. 387, 426.

logically, azurite is the parent and malachite a weathered form of the original blue deposit³². However, azurite is less stable, and if hydrated or exposed to a moist atmosphere, gradually gets converted to malachite. Coarsely ground azurite produces dark blue, while the finely ground pigment is pale and weak and has a greenish undertone³³.

Archaeological discoveries in the final third of the past century confirmed that the beginning of China's Bronze Age can be traced back to the third millennium BC³⁴. By the Late Shāng era (ca. 1300–1046 BC), the Bronze Age culture was spread widely over northern, central and eastern China. Bronze manufacturing technology requires mining of copper and tin deposits, and malachite was most probably the principal source of copper. Repeatedly reported findings of malachite – the largest single piece weighed 18.8 kg³⁵ – in ancient copper mines at Yīnxū 殷墟, an ancient capital of Shāng, prove that the Shāng people were familiar with natural deposits of this copper ore. Interestingly, the term for bronze in Modern Standard Mandarin (MSM)³⁶ is *qīngtóng* 青銅 [qīng + copper: grue copper].

Both malachite and azurite appear in Old, Middle and Modern Chinese texts under several names in which *qīng* is always a root morpheme:

Malachite:

- *kōngqīng* 空青 = hollow + qīng [nodular grue] in *Ji Ni-zǐ* «計倪子» (4th cent. BC), *Shénnóng běncǎo jīng* «神農本草經» (2nd–1st cent. BC), *Shí Yào Ěryǎ* «石藥爾雅» (806 AD), *Běncǎo gāngmù* «本草綱目» (1596), *Sāncái Túhuì* «三才圖會» (1609);
- *zēngqīng* 曾青 = augment + qīng [laminar grue] in *Ji Ni-zǐ*, *Shénnóng běncǎo jīng*, *Shí Yào Ěryǎ*, *Běncǎo gāngmù*, *Sāncái Túhuì*;
- *lǜqīng* 綠青 = MSM BCT for GREEN + qīng in *Shénnóng běncǎo jīng*, *Shí Yào Ěryǎ*³⁷.

In Modern Chinese, malachite is mostly called *tóng lǜ* 銅綠 [copper + BCT for GREEN] or *shí lǜ* 石綠 [stone + BCT for GREEN], as in *Běncǎo gāngmù* (1596); in MSM the term for malachite is *kǒngquèshí* 孔雀石 [peacock stone].

Azurite:

- *báiqīng* 白青 = MSM BCT for WHITE + qīng [pale grue] in: *Shān Hǎi Jīng* «山海經» (8th–1st cent. BC), *Shénnóng běncǎo jīng*, *Shí Yào Ěryǎ*, *Běncǎo gāngmù*;
- *fūqīng* 膚青 = superficial + qīng in: *Ji Ni-zǐ*, *Míng Yī Bié Lù* «名醫別錄» and *Běncǎo jīngjí zhù* «本草集注» (495 AD);

³² E. Bergslien, *An Introduction to Forensic Geoscience*, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford 2012, p. 302.

³³ *The Grove Encyclopedia of Materials and Techniques in Art*, G.W.R. Ward ed., Oxford University Press, New York 2008, p. 503.

³⁴ M.E. Kravtsova, *Istorija iskusstva Kitaja* [History of Chinese art], Lan', St. Petersburg 2004, p. 95.

³⁵ Xuē Yǎlíng 薛亚玲, *Zhōngguó lìshǐshàng tóng, xī kuàngyè fēnbù de biànciān* 中国历史上铜、锡矿业分布的变迁 [Changes of copper and tin mining industry distribution in Chinese history], "Zhōngguó jīngjìshǐ yánjiū" 中国经济史研究, 2001, 4, pp. 102–106, p. 103.

³⁶ Modern Standard Mandarin refers to contemporary Chinese (from the 20th century onwards); Old Chinese: 11th cent. BC – 1st cent. AD; Modern Chinese: 12th–20th centuries.

³⁷ For more references to Old and Middle Chinese texts, please consult table 95 in J. Needham, *Science and Civilization in China*.

- *biǎnqīng* 扁青 = flat + *qīng* in: *Shénnóng běncǎo jīng, Sāncái Túhuì*.

In Modern Chinese, azurite is often denoted as *shíqīng* 石青 [stone + *qīng*], while the MSM term for it is *lántóngkuàng* 藍銅礦 [BCT for BLUE + copper ore] or *lán kǒngquèshí* 藍孔雀石 [BCT for BLUE + peacock stone] meaning ‘blue malachite’.

Although the green pigment was known in ancient China and the form of the character *qīng* is found in Shāng oracle bone inscriptions (Chin. *jiǎgǔwén* 甲骨文)³⁸, it was never applied as a CT³⁹. As for early bronze inscriptions (Chin. *jīnwén* 金文), the *Hànyǔ Dà Zidiǎn* provides a form of this character (HDZD, 4046) written in the inscription of the lid of *Wú fāng yí* 吳方彝, a ritual vessel dated 898 BC, but *qīng* is used here as a name. Another example we found from early bronze inscriptions is on the *Pú hé* 匍盃 pot, a relatively recently discovered object, assigned to the later period of the reign of King Mu 穆王 (c. 956–918 BC)⁴⁰, where *qīng* is clearly a name and most probably also a toponym⁴¹, and need not have been a CT. In the inscription of the *Shǐ Qiáng pán* 史牆盤, a bronze basin from the King Gong 共王/恭王 (c. 917/15–900 BC) period we read: “*qīng yōu gāo zǔ* 青幽高祖”, where many scholars have read the *qīng* as a loan character for *jìng* 靜 [silent], and translated the phrase as “the silent and secluded ancestors”⁴² and expressed praise⁴³. Wang Tao, instead, suggests that *qīng* 青, used together with *yōu* 幽, is best understood as the extended meaning of the CT ‘dark-green’, referring to the sky or heaven where the ancestors lived⁴⁴.

³⁸ Oracle bone inscriptions from the late Shāng period (ca. 1300-1046 BC) comprise the earliest Chinese collection of graphs indisputably regarded as a fully developed writing system. These divinatory inscriptions were carved primarily on the scapulae of oxen or sheep and on turtle shells, W.G. Boltz, *The origin and early development of the Chinese writing system*, p. 31.

³⁹ Wang Tao, *Colour Terms in Shang oracle bone Inscriptions*, “Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies”, 59, 1996, 1, pp. 63-101, p. 100.

⁴⁰ Li Xuéqín 李学勤, *Lùn Yīngguó mùdì chūtǔ de Pú hé* 论应国墓地出土的匍盃 [On the Pú hé pot, excavated at the Cemetery of Ying State], “Píngdǐngshān shīzhuān xuébào” 平顶山师专学报, 1999, 1, pp. 66-67, p. 66.

⁴¹ Wáng Lóngzhèng 王龙正, *Pú hé míngwén bù shì bǐng zài lùn tiàopín lǐ* 匍盃铭文补释并再论颍聘礼 [Supplementary decipherment of the inscription on the Pu he pot and restudy of Tiaopin etiquette], “Kǎogǔ xuébào” 考古学报, 2007, 4, pp. 405-422, pp. 405-408.

⁴² See, Li Xuéqín 李学勤, *Lùn Shǐ Qiáng pán jí qí yìyì* 论史墙盘及其意义 [The bronze p’an-basin made by the court historian Ch’iang and its significance], “Kǎogǔ xuébào” 考古学报, 1978, 2, pp. 149-158, p. 153; Táng Lán 唐兰, *Lüelùn Xī Zhōu Wēi shǐ jiāzú jiāocáng tóngqǔqún de zhòngyào yìyì* 略论西周微史家族窖藏铜器群的重要意义 [The significance of bronzes found in a cellar of the Wei (an official historian) family of Western Zhou Dynasty], “Wénwù” 文物, 1978, 3, pp. 19-24, p. 22; Pān Fēng 潘峰, *Shǐ qīng’* 释“青” [Let us figure “qīng” out], “Hànzi wénhuà” 汉字文化, 2006, 1, pp. 41-44, p. 43.

⁴³ Qiú Xīguī 裘锡圭, *Shǐ Qiáng pán míng jiěshì* 史墙盘铭解释 [Interpretation of the inscriptions on the Shǐ Qiáng pán basin], “Wénwù” 文物, 1978, 3, pp. 25-32, p. 32.

⁴⁴ Wang Tao, *Colour Terms in Shang oracle bone Inscriptions*, p. 100.

The word occurs only once in the *Shūjīng* «書經» [*Classic of Documents*]⁴⁵, in the *Yǔ gòng* «禹貢» [*Tribute of Yu*] section, which is agreed to be quite late⁴⁶ and probably composed in the 3rd century BC. The application of *qīng* 青 in the *Shījīng* «詩經» [*Book of Odes*]⁴⁷ is fairly complicated. While clearly endowed with the meaning ‘green’ when describing the colour of bamboo and leaves, it seems to have the meaning ‘green or blue’ in four places: applied to a collar (ode 91.1), girdle-gems (91.2), earplugs of an uncertain material, probably silk (98.2) and flies (219.1, 2, 3). However, another meaning is ‘luxuriant’, where commentators say it should be read as *jīng* and also written slightly differently: 菁.

Most probably, the character *qīng* 青 originally represented the word later written as *jīng* 菁⁴⁸. As *qīng* was a cognate of *shēng* 生, its original meaning might be something like ‘flourishing, verdant’. Later on, due to the split of polysemy, *jīng* 菁 became subtle in this meaning (and the graphic form became slightly complicated by adding the ‘grass’ radical on top as an additional semantic element), while *qīng* became a colour term. *Qīng* 青 is so used in odes 55.2 and 233.2; the form *jīng* 菁 is found in odes 119.2 and 176.1–3. Nevertheless, the puzzle over the usage of *jīng* in the *Shījīng* does not clarify the meaning of *qīng* in the above four instances.

As regards the definitions of *qīng* by classical dictionaries, the *Shímíng* «釋名»⁴⁹ glosses it as *shēng* 生 [live, produce, fresh] («釋名 • 釋采帛», quoted from HDZD, 4046), cited earlier. The *Shuōwén jiězì* «說文解字» [*Analytical Dictionary of Characters*]⁵⁰ defines it as a ‘colour of the east’, i.e. in accordance with the five-agent theory⁵¹, and that the whole character expresses the idea of ‘wood generating fire’, where the upper part stands for *mù* 木 [wood], the agent of the east, while the lower part represents *dān* 丹 [cinnabar]⁵², which is naturally red, just like fire, the agent of the south⁵³. Therefore, in addition to being syssemantic, *qīng* also appears to belong to the phonosemantic (Chin. *xíngshēng* 形声)⁵⁴

⁴⁵ *The Classic of Documents* is a collection of speeches made by rulers and important politicians from mythical times to the middle of the Western Zhōu (1046–771 BC) period.

⁴⁶ Dating from at least the late Warring States 戰國 (475–221 BC) period, C.D.K. Yee, *Chinese maps in political culture*, in *The History of Cartography*, Vol. 2, Book 2, *Cartography in the Traditional East and Southeast Asian Societies*, J.B. Harley – D. Woodward ed., University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1994, pp. 71–95, p. 76.

⁴⁷ *The Book of Odes*, the oldest collection of Chinese poetry dating ca. 800–500 BC.

⁴⁸ W.H.III. Baxter, *A look at the history of Chinese colour terminology*, pp. 17–18.

⁴⁹ Lit. *Explaining Names*, a glossary dictionary compiled by Liú Xī 劉熙 at the end of the Eastern Hàn 漢 Dynasty (25–220 AD).

⁵⁰ Lit. *Explaining simple and analysing compound [characters]*, a dictionary of graphic etymology, the predecessor of Chinese dictionaries and encyclopaedias, completed by Xǔ Shèn 許慎 in 100 AD.

⁵¹ The ancient *wú xíng* 五行 theory of ‘five agents’ (five elements) assumed complex and cosmic interrelationships among the five agents (metal, wood, fire, water and earth), the five directions, the five colours, the five seasons, the five internal organs of the body, the five notes on the musical scale, etc.

⁵² The etymology of *dān* 丹 ‘cinnabar’, in turn, usually gets explained as a drawing of a lump of mineral in a crucible or a mineral powder on a stretched filter cloth, J. Needham, *Science and Civilization in China*, p. 157.

⁵³ *Shuōwén* 10, 青部 (*Explaining simple and analysing compound [characters]*), p. 684.

⁵⁴ Lit. ‘form and sound’; this type of character consists of a semantic determiner broadly indicating the meaning of a character (also known as ‘radical’) and a morphological constituent (also known as ‘phonetic’). For a more detailed explanation of the *xíngshēng* category, refer to W. Behr, *Homosomatic juxtaposition and the question of syssemantic characters*, pp. 293–294.

category, where *dān* 丹 is the semantic determiner and *shēng* 生 is the morphological constituent.

3. Blue

When used in the context of sky, *qīng* is interchangeable with *cāng* 苍, another term for GRUE, phonologically very close to *qīng*, with the difference of a main vowel only⁵⁵. Even though the *Shuōwén jiězì* glosses it as the ‘colour of grass’⁵⁶, in twelve cases out of the fifteen instances in the *Shijing*, it serves to describe the sky’s colour; in two of the remaining instances, it is applied to reeds and rushes (ode 129.1) before finally a fly (ode 96.1). *Qīng* and *cāng* are also used interchangeably for describing the colour of the sky in later texts such as the *Liji* «禮記»⁵⁷ and the *Zhuāngzǐ* «莊子»⁵⁸. We may therefore relatively safely assert that *cāng* was a referential synonym of *qīng*, as firstly, the colour of grass was often described as *qīng*, and secondly, although not totally identical in usage, *qīng* and *cāng* were exchangeable in many contexts. I furthermore intend to devote a separate paper to *cāng* and other synonyms of *qīng*.

However, we first see the meaning of ‘blue’ in this lexeme in the following passage from the *Xúnzǐ* «荀子»⁵⁹: “*Qīng qǔ zhī yú lán ér qīng yú lán* 青取之於藍而青於藍” («荀子 • 勸學», quoted from HDZD, 4046). The *Shuōwén jiězì* glosses *lán* 藍 – BCT for BLUE in MSM – as a ‘herb used for dyeing [things] *qīng*’⁶⁰, so the phrase becomes translated as: “*Qīng* is obtained from the indigo plant, but is more *qīng* than the indigo plant”⁶¹.

4. Macro-black

One of the characteristics of the Chinese grue is that it denotes not only cool primaries, but also extends into the macro-black area. The reason for this syncretism is the subjective factor⁶². Liú refers to the *Comments to the Lǐ Qì* 禮器 section of the *Liji* «禮記» by Zhèng Xuán 鄭玄 (a famous scholar in the Eastern Hàn 漢 Dynasty, 25-220 AD) and the further explanation by Kǒng Yǐngdá 孔穎達 (a scholar of the Táng 唐 Dynasty, 618–907 AD). Both comments are devoted to the famous historical incident described in the *Shǐ jì*

⁵⁵ W.H.III. Baxter, *A look at the history of Chinese colour terminology*, p. 10.

⁵⁶ *Shuōwén 2*, 中部 (*Explaining simple and analysing compound [characters]*), p. 124.

⁵⁷ *The Book of Rites*, an encyclopaedia of ritual matters written during the late Warring States 戰國 (475-221 BC) and Western Hàn 漢 (206 BC-8 AD) periods.

⁵⁸ The Daoist book ascribed to Zhuāng Zhōu 莊周 (trad. 369-286 BC).

⁵⁹ The Confucian treatise written by Xún Kuàng 荀况 (trad. 313-238 BC).

⁶⁰ *Shuōwén 2*, 中部 (*Explaining simple and analysing compound [characters]*), p. 72.

⁶¹ Fig. ‘The student becomes better than the teacher’.

⁶² Liú Yúnquán 刘云泉, *Yǔyán de sècǎi měi* 语言的色彩美 [Beauty of language in colours], Ānhuī jiàoyù chūbǎnshè, Héféi 1990.

《史記》[*Historical Records*]⁶³. Qín Èrshì 秦二世⁶⁴ had a chancellor Zhào Gāo 趙高 who one day decided to rebel, but was unsure whether the ministers would follow him in this action. Thus he first set a test: he brought a deer and presented it to Qín Èrshì calling it a horse. Qín Èrshì laughed and said: “You must be wrong to call a deer a horse!”⁶⁵. Then the emperor questioned those around him. Some remained silent, while some, hoping to ingratiate themselves with Zhào Gāo, said it was a horse, and others said it was a deer. “He [Zhào Gāo] also called *qīng* 青 black (*bēi* 黑), and black (*bēi* 黑) yellow (*huáng* 黃), as in the case with a deer and a horse”⁶⁶. The end of the story was that Zhào Gāo secretly arranged for all those who said it was a deer to be brought before the law. Thereafter, the ministers were all afraid of Zhào Gāo and became obedient to him. Hence, the meaning ‘black’ of the CT *qīng* 青 is nothing more than the despotism of Chancellor Zhào Gāo.

The idea of forcing the lexeme *qīng* upon an artificial acquiring of the meaning ‘black’ does not look flawless. The story of a deer called a horse is indeed described in the *Shǐ jì* by Sīmǎ Qiān, but is limited to that⁶⁷. The historian does not say that Zhào Gāo ordered people to call *qīng* ‘black’ and to name ‘black’ as ‘yellow’, so it is unclear why Kǒng Yǐngdǎ refers to Sīmǎ Qiān. But what might cause this mismatch? This most likely stems from the fact that the parable was passed down orally and therefore varied in content. It is generally acknowledged that the creative activities of the Hàn historiographers and commentators inspired the formation of the *quasi*-history. The story of a deer called a horse was told to illustrate the lack of principles and cowardice of the emperor’s retinue⁶⁸. Commentators may feasibly have deployed *qīng* to mean ‘black’ as an additional fact testifying to the tyranny and substitution of notions in order to make the story more persuasive.

The polysemy of *qīng* cannot be considered artificial or, moreover, imposed. Linguistic syncretism of the terms for green, blue and black colours is not only known in Chinese. The same phenomenon exists in the African Shona language, where the term *citema* covers not only most blues and some bluish greens, but also black⁶⁹; in Welsh, there is a CT *glas*, which can refer to blue, but also to certain shades of green and grey⁷⁰. In Old Russian scripts of the 11th-12th centuries, the term for dark-blue *sinij* was also polysemous and in some texts took on the meaning ‘dark’ and even ‘black’, e.g. *sinij kak saža* [as *sinij* as soot]; and *sinec* (from the same root **sin*), a euphemism for the Devil because of his dark appear-

⁶³ A famous universal history of Early China written by Sīmǎ Qiān 司馬遷 (completed ca. 90 BC, during the Western Hàn Dynasty).

⁶⁴ Lit. ‘Second Emperor of the Qín 秦 Dynasty’ (personal name Húhài 胡亥), who reigned from 210 to 207 BC.

⁶⁵ From this incident derived a famous idiom: ‘calling a deer a horse’ (Chin. *zhǐ lù wéi mǎ* 指鹿為馬), meaning ‘to deliberately misrepresent’.

⁶⁶ Liú Yúnquán 刘云泉, *Yǔyán de sècǎi měi* 语言的色彩美 [Beauty of language in colours], p. 39.

⁶⁷ See, for example, R.V. Vyatkin – V.S. Taskin, *Syma Cjan’ – Istoričeskie zapiski (Ši czi)* [Sima Qian – Historical Records (Shi ji)], Vol 2., Vostočnaja literatura, Moskva 2003², pp. 94-95.

⁶⁸ *Ibi*, p. 368.

⁶⁹ H.A. Jr. Gleason, *An Introduction to Descriptive Linguistics*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston Inc., New York 1961, p. 4.

⁷⁰ C.P. Biggam, *The semantics of colour: a historical approach*, pp. 10-11.

ance⁷¹. Already in the late 1880s, Geiger insisted that etymologically many terms for ‘blue’ originally signified ‘green’ and that an even larger proportion signified ‘black’⁷².

As for the explanation of the polysemy of *qīng* by Chinese linguists, they refer to no practical need for its splitting, because “black is au fond present in indigo; on the other hand, black somehow becomes streaked with green or blue”⁷³.

5. *Why is qīng polysemous?*

As we see, the Chinese sources either avoid the etymological problem of the ‘black’ or ‘dark’ meaning of this lexeme, or suggest the only and quite unpersuasive explanation: some kind of despotism of Qín’s chancellor Zhào Gāo. However, the unavoidable question is: why does Sīmǎ Qiān tell the parable about a deer and a horse and does not mention the colour substitute? And even if such a substitution occurred, then why did *qīng* keep the meaning ‘black’, whereas the substitution of *bēi* ‘black’ with ‘yellow’ did not remain? It is quite possible that the meaning of this wordplay – if, of course, it happened at all – was specifically intriguing to accompany the preparation of the revolt led by Zhào Gāo, who was, incidentally, very educated and intelligent, and participated in the script stabilisation movement and the design of the small seal script (Chin. *xiǎozhuàn* 小篆) during the reign of Qín Shǐhuáng 秦始皇⁷⁴. This wordplay most probably served as some code or slogan understandable only by trusted co-conspirators. However, rather than this historical puzzle, what might be the linguistic reasons for the acquiring of the meaning ‘black’ by the lexeme *qīng*? I would propose here the following two explanations:

1. *qīng* 青 was primarily applied to denote DARK/BLACK only in a certain dialect area during the Warring States Period, while the meaning ‘grue’ was a lexical norm of the standard language during that same period. The political unification of the empire in 221 BC under the auspices of the Qín could favour the interference of some dialect meanings into the standard language;
2. the syncretism of *qīng* 青 has an intralinguistic origin. It seems plausible that at a certain stage in the development of the colour lexicon, it signified cool primaries (blue/green/black) with the hyper-meaning ‘dark’. At a later stage, the general meaning split but in some combinations the reflex of the previous unity remained.

It is, however, quite difficult to define the time when this general meaning split happened. Chinese etymological dictionaries in the relevant entries illustrate it either by Kǒng Yǐngdǎ’s comments or by the rare usage by poets for describing the colour of hair and eyes.

⁷¹ See N.B. Baxilina, *Istoriya cvetooboznačenij v russskom jazyke* [History of colour terms in Russian], Nauka, Moskva 1975, pp. 176-178.

⁷² B. Berlin – P. Kay, *Basic colour terms: their universality and evolution*, p. 136.

⁷³ Zhāng Qīngcháng 张清常, *Hànyǔde yánsècí (dàgāng)* 汉语的颜色词 (大纲) [Chinese colour names (syllabus)], “Yǔyán jiàoxué yǔ yánjiū” 语言教学与研究, 1991, 3, pp. 63-80, p. 72.

⁷⁴ Lit. ‘First Emperor of Qín 秦 Dynasty’, the founder of the Qín Dynasty (221-207 BC) who unified China in 221 BC after the long-lasting Warring States Period.

For example, in Li Bái's 李白 (701-762 AD) poem we find *qingsi* 青絲 [black silk]⁷⁵, in Dù Fǔ's 杜甫 (712-770 AD) there is *qingyan* 青眼 [black eyes]⁷⁶, and in Yàn Jidào's 宴幾道 (c. 1030-c. 1106 AD) it says *liǎng bìn qīng* 兩鬢青 [the hair on his temples is black]⁷⁷. The first and third examples are metaphors, whereas the second one derives from the colloquial expression *qingbáiyan* 青白眼 [qīng + white + eye]. This expression is said to have originated with the poet Ruǎn Jí 阮籍 (210-263 AD)⁷⁸, a member of a *coterie* of eccentric intellectuals referred to as the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove (Chin. *Zhúlín Qī Xiàn* 竹林七賢). As the *Jìn shū* «晉書» (*Book of Jin*)⁷⁹ relates, Ruǎn Jí revealed his mood by purposefully making his eyes “white” or “black”⁸⁰, i.e. he would look people whom he liked directly in the eyes, letting them see the pupils of his eyes; however, upon encountering someone who displeased him, he would flash a glance towards the sky, exposing the whites of his eyes to express his displeasure. From *qingbáiyan* 青白眼 [qīng + white + eye] evolved the synonymous *qingyan* 青眼 [qīng + eye], *qinglai* 青睞 [qīng + glance] and *qingmou* 青眸 [qīng + eye pupil], meaning ‘looking straight in someone’s eyes’, and *chuiqing* 垂青 [care + qīng], meaning ‘showing appreciation for someone, looking upon someone with favour’. All these expressions signify ‘approval’, ‘pleasure’, ‘benevolence’, ‘consideration and respect’, whereas *baiyan* 白眼 [white + eye] ‘looking askance (showing the whites of one’s eyes)’ conveys the meanings like ‘contempt’, ‘disdain’, ‘disapproval’ or ‘anger’. According to Zhāng Qīngcháng, “since Ruǎn Jí was neither blue-eyed, nor green-eyed, *qing* in this case clearly signifies black”⁸¹. Instead of being that categorical about the colour of Ruǎn Jí’s eyes, I would rather suggest that *qingyan* 青眼 [qīng eyes] – *baiyan* 白眼 [white eyes] implies the opposite ‘presence – absence of pupils in the centre of the eyes’; yet *qing* should be translated as ‘dark’ (not ‘black’) when it describes the colour of the eyes.

As for the metaphor *qingsi* 青絲 [the black silk], used by Li Bái for the description of hair⁸², it is not accidental. Since the Hàn Dynasty (206 BC–220 AD) the meaning ‘black/dark’ of the lexeme *qing* has been used for the description of blue-black dyed textiles⁸³. This is probably related to the use of azurite, *shiqing* 石青 [stone qīng], the mineral mentioned earlier. The dye extracted from azurite can have different shades, up to the very deep, almost black blue. It seems plausible that the binominal *qingyi* 青衣 (lit. [dark clothing])

⁷⁵ *Tāng Shī Sānbǎi Shōu*, 122 («將進酒»).

⁷⁶ «短歌行», quoted from Xú 1988, 36.

⁷⁷ *Sòng Cí Sānbǎi Shōu*, 54 («生查子»).

⁷⁸ Zhāng Qīngcháng 張清常, *Hànyǔde yánsècí (dàgāng)* 汉语的颜色词 (大纲) [Chinese colour names (syllabus)], p. 70.

⁷⁹ An official historical text covering the history of the Jin 晉 Dynasty from 265 AD to 420 AD (compiled in 648 during the Táng 唐 Dynasty).

⁸⁰ Xú Cháohuá 徐朝华, *Xī “qing” zuòwéi yánsècí de nèihán jí qí yǎnbiàn* 析“青”作为颜色词的内涵及其演变 [Colour lexeme ‘qing’: analysis of its meaning and evolution], p. 36.

⁸¹ Zhāng Qīngcháng 張清常, *Hànyǔde yánsècí (dàgāng)* 汉语的颜色词 (大纲) [Chinese colour names (syllabus)], p. 70.

⁸² Fig. about the silky hair of a beauty.

⁸³ Xú Cháohuá 徐朝华, *Xī “qing” zuòwéi yánsècí de nèihán jí qí yǎnbiàn* 析“青”作为颜色词的内涵及其演变 [Colour lexeme ‘qing’: analysis of its meaning and evolution], p. 39.

is derived from the denotation of azurite. This is also confirmed by the fact that when L.P. Syčëv and V.L. Syčëv describe the clothing of *Hóng Lóu Mèng*'s «紅樓夢» [*Dream of the Red Chamber*]⁸⁴ main character, young nobleman Jiǎ Bǎoyù 賈寶玉, they refer to the Qiánlóng 乾隆 emperor's 1759 edict⁸⁵ which assigned wearing the jacket *guà* (褂) over the robe *páo* (袍) as an essential part of official formal clothing, and the jacket *guà* must be exclusively of the deep blue *shíqīng* 石青 (as an analogy of the mineral's name the fabric was dyed with) colour⁸⁶.

There might be another explanation for the metaphorisation of the binominal *qīngsī* 青絲 [black silk], which is due to its meaning 'hair in youth', where *qīng* means 'young', and in this case we deal with the connotative meaning of this CT. In this respect, it is interesting to see the synonymy of *qīng* – exclusively when it describes the colour of the hair – with *lǜ* 綠, a BCT for GREEN in MSM. In MSM, this meaning remains in the bookish binominals such as *lǜyún* 綠云 [dark/black clouds] (fig. about hair of a beauty) and *lǜbīn* 綠鬢 [black hair on the temples]. Since green is the colour of spring and youth, someone's hair in his/her young years is described symbolically via *qīng* 青 or *lǜ* 綠.

The polysemy of *qīng* also spreads the derived lexemes with *qīng* as a semantic determiner:

- *tiān* = 靑 = 天: [sky in Daoist texts] (HDZD, 4049);
- *sè*: [reddish-blue] (*chíqīng* 赤青, red + *qīng*) (HDZD, 4049);
- *hù*: [pigment similar to azurite] (*shíqīng* 石青) (HDZD, 4049);
- *chēng* = 靑 = 靑: [straight look in someone's eyes] (HDZD, 4047) (cf. mentioned above *qīnglài* 靑睐, *qīngmóu* 靑眸, *qīngyǎn* 靑眼).

6. How to translate expressions containing *qīng*

For Chinese speakers, the polysemy of *qīng* 青 does not create any confusion, as usually they do not question what colour it means in one or another word combination. To foreigners, they recommend memorising the metaphorical expressions containing this lexeme. In this respect, the following hints may be suggested:

1. When it describes objects pigmented by nature, *qīng* 青 indicates GREEN (*qīngwā* 靑蛙 [frog], *qīngtāi* 靑苔 [moss], *qīngjiāo* 靑椒 [green pepper], *dòu qīng* 豆靑 [pea green colour]), except for:
 - a. the colour of the sky and the colour of the skin (because of cold, anger, fear or vascular collapse), where it indicates BLUE:
 - *qīng xiāo* 靑霄 = *qīng míng* 靑冥: [blue sky];

⁸⁴ *Dream of the Red Chamber*, written by Cáo Xuěqín 曹雪芹 (1715-1763), is generally considered the greatest of all Chinese novels.

⁸⁵ They mean a massive work entitled *Huángcháo liqì túshì* «皇朝禮器圖式» *Illustrated Precedents for the Ritual Paraphernalia of the Imperial Court*, which provided a comprehensive, illustrated inventory of all court items, including the strict codes of dress required of court officials.

⁸⁶ L.P. Syčëv – V.L. Syčëv, *Kitajskij kostjum: simbolika, istorija, traktovka v literaturu i iskusstve* [Chinese Costume: Symbolism, History, Interpretation in Literature and Art], Nauka, Moskva 1975, p. 87.

- *qīng tiān* 青天: [blue sky] → [clear sky] (semantic extension) → fig. about justice or upright and honourable official, “who sees things clearly, without any mist or fog”⁸⁷;
 - *qīng yún* 青雲 (qīng + cloud): [clear sky], [high altitude reaching the clouds] (from the Hàn Dynasty onwards) → fig. [great official career or literary rank];
 - *qīngzhǒng* 青肿 (qīng + swell): [bruise];
 - *miànqīng* 面青 (face + qīng): [bluish (unhealthy) complexion], *liǎnsè qì dé fāqīng* 脸色气得发青 [face turned blue with anger].
- b. the colour of plumage and scales (of non-multicoloured species); in these cases it usually refers to DARK/GREY/GREYISH-BLACK:
- *qīngyú* 青魚 (qīng + fish) = *hēihuàn* 黑鲩 (MSM BCT for BLACK + carp): *Mylopharyngodon piceus*, black carp (*Cihǎi*, 3153, 3298);
 - *qīngquè* 青雀 (qīng + sparrow) = *sānghù* 桑扈: *Eophona personata*, Japanese Grosbeak, a finch in colour with a black head (*Cihǎi*, 3153, 1504).
2. When it describes artificially pigmented objects or dyed textiles, *qīng* may refer either to BLUE or to BLACK. The meaning depends on: a) the historical time frame, b) whether the text is written in *báihuà* (白話) or in *wényán* (文言), and c) in combination with which CT is applied:
- a. if the text is written in *wényán*, and *qīng* is used in opposition to *chì* 赤 [red], *hēi* 黑 [black], *huáng* 黄 [yellow], *bái* 白 [white] or other CTs of a different hue, then *qīng* indicates BLUE, whereas if it is accompanied by *lán* 藍 – BCT for BLUE in MSM⁸⁸ – *qīng* usually denotes very dark shades of BLUE, bordering on BLACK;
 - b. if the text is in *báihuà*, prior to the Yuán 元 (1279-1368) – Míng 明 (1368-1644) period, *qīng* always refers to BLUE, whereas, after the Ming Dynasty, it acquires the meaning ‘dark/black’.

Observe the meanings of *qīng* in the following etnoeids⁸⁹:

- *qīngjīn* 青衿: lit. [blue collars], fig. about scholars and intellectuals, from the scholars’ dark-blue dress of classical times (already seen in the *Shījīng*);
- *qīngyī* 青衣: [dark clothes], but with some nuances:
 1. from the end of the Eastern Hàn Dynasty to the Táng Dynasty, it referred to the

⁸⁷ Xú Cháohuá 徐朝华, *Xī “qīng” zuòwéi yánsècí de nèihán jí qí yǎnbiàn* 析“青”作为颜色词的内涵及其演变 [Colour lexeme ‘qīng’: analysis of its meaning and evolution], p. 36.

⁸⁸ Originally denoting the indigo plant, it became the sky and water descriptive CT in Middle Chinese and is a BCT for BLUE in MSM, V. Bogushevskaya, *Semantika cvetonaimenovaniĭ v kitajskom jazyke (universal’noe i nacional’noe)* [The semantics of colour terms in Chinese: universal and regional characteristics], PhD diss., Moscow State University 2008 [unpublished].

⁸⁹ Enoeids are unique *concepts of worldview* manifested in a particular society; they often belong to implicit lacunas. See A.I. Belov, *Cvetovye etnoĭdemy kak ob’ekt etnopsixolingvistiki* [Colour etnoeids as an object of psycholinguistics], in *Ėtnopsixolingvistika*, Ju.A. Sorokin ed., Nauka, Moskva 1988, pp. 49-58.

- robes of servants, which were made of coarse dark blue fabric⁹⁰;
2. from the Ming Dynasty onwards, figurative generic name for someone of humble status, regardless of clothing colour (which, however, was still made of coarse fabric and dyed either blue-black or black)⁹¹;
 3. also known as *hēishān* 黑衫 (MSM BCT for BLACK + robe) [black clothing] in Chinese opera (*Cǐhài*, 3152), and refers to a role type for women, young or middle aged, who have been raised to behave within the social norm. The name of the role comes from a black robe that women in this role often wear when their fortunes have turned for the worse. The characters are empresses and noble women, filial daughters, faithful wives, or lovers in distress⁹². Depending on the social status of the character, a robe is made either of black silk or of coarse black fabric⁹³.

It is interesting to note that the principle of ‘originally containing the pigment *in se*’ versus ‘painted over’ is also reflected in ceramics terminology:

- *qīngcí* 青瓷 (qīng + ceramics): the class of ceramics widely known as *celadon*⁹⁴, but the more accurate term is ‘greenware’ (glazed with a smooth grey-green appearance as a result of the iron within the glaze being fired in a reducing atmosphere)⁹⁵. Some of these ceramics, however, hardly deserve being called green (some are bluish-green, some are greyish-green), but definitely not blue;
- *qīnghuā* 青花 (qīng + flowers): lit. [blue flowers], blue-and-white porcelain (also known as ‘underglaze blue’), the most admired type of Chinese ceramics, fully mastered during the Yuán Dynasty. The decoration was applied in cobalt-blue pigment directly to the ceramic body and then covered with transparent glaze⁹⁶. Cobalt oxide was originally imported from Central or West Asian countries⁹⁷ and acquired the name *huí huí qīng* 回回青 [Mohamettan qīng], i.e. [Muslim blue]. The drawing is free and bold, yet delicate, the blue varying from almost pure ultramarine to a dull, greyish colour with a tendency to clot and turn black where it runs thickest⁹⁸.

⁹⁰ Zhāng Qīngcháng 张清常, *Hànyǔde yánsècí (dàgāng)* 汉语的颜色词 (大纲) [Chinese colour names (syllabus)], p. 71.

⁹¹ Xú Cháohuá 徐朝华, *Xī “qīng” zuòwéi yánsècí de nèihán jí qí yǎnbiàn* 析“青”作为颜色词的内涵及其演变 [Colour lexeme ‘qīng’: analysis of its meaning and evolution], p. 39.

⁹² A.B. Bonds, *Beijing opera costumes: the visual communication of character and culture*, University of Hawai‘i Press, Honolulu 2008.

⁹³ Zhāng Qīngcháng 张清常, *Hànyǔde yánsècí (dàgāng)* 汉语的颜色词 (大纲) [Chinese colour names (syllabus)], p. 71.

⁹⁴ A European term derived from the name of the shepherdess wearing a dress of that colour in the seventeenth-century French novel *L’Astrée* by Honoré D’Urfé and denotes a wide range of high-fired green-glazed wares, S. Vainker, *Ceramics for use*, in *The British Museum Book of Chinese Art*, J. Rawson ed., The British Museum Press, London 2007², pp. 212-255, p. 253.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

⁹⁶ *The British Museum book of Chinese Art*, J. Rawson ed., The British Museum Press, London 2007², pp. 212-255, p. 368.

⁹⁷ J. Needham, *Science and Civilization in China*, p. 157.

⁹⁸ M. Sullivan, *The arts of China*, University of California Press, Berkeley/Los Angeles 2008⁵, p. 225.

7. Conclusion

In contemporary Chinese, *qīng* 青 is not a basic colour term; there are separate, ‘psychologically salient’ terms for GREEN (*lǜ* 綠), BLUE (*lán* 藍) and BLACK (*hēi* 黑). However, *qīng* has not faded away; on the contrary, it still very much remains in use: it forms compound terms with other colour lexemes and also often deployed in its figurative meaning of ‘young’.

Nevertheless, even native speakers are sometimes unable to define what colour *qīng* refers to in some contexts. Chinese linguists acknowledge that dictionaries are not always able to give thorough explanations⁹⁹. To interpret its meaning, one has to rely heavily – and, in fact, exclusively – on when, within which historical time frame, where and under what circumstances this colour term is applied.

⁹⁹ Zhāng Qīngcháng 张清常, *Hànyǔde yánsècí (dàgāng)* 汉语的颜色词 (大纲) [Chinese colour names (syllabus)], pp. 71-72.



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