

## On The Etymology of Middle Korean *psar* ‘rice’

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### Abstract:

This article proposes an etymology of Middle Korean *psar* ‘rice’ that so far had no etymology. I suggest that Late Old Korean *psar* and Middle Korean *psar* ‘rice’ represent a loan from pre-proto-Japanese \*wasar (> proto-Japanese \*wasay > Old Japanese *wase* ~ *wasa-*) ‘early rice’ and this loan provides linguistic and philological evidence for this etymology.

**Keywords:** Middle Korean, Late Old Korean, Old Japanese, pre-proto-Japanese, proto-Japanese, rice, reconstruction

**Özet:** Bu makale bugüne kadar etimolojisi hiç yapılmayan Orta Korecede *psar* ‘pirinç’ kelimesine etimoloji önerir. Ben, son dönem Eski Korece *psar* ve Orta Korece *psar* ‘pirinç’ın Ana Japonca öncesi \*wasar (> Ana Japonca \*wasay > Eski Japonca *wase* ~ *wasa-*) ‘erken olgunlaşan bir pirinç türü’ dan bir ödünçleme olduğunu gösterdiğini iddia ediyorum ve bu durum, bu etimoloji için dilbilimsel ve filolojik kanıt sağlar.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** Orta Korece, Geç Eski Korece, Eski Japonca, İlk Japonca, Ana Japonca, pirinç, yeniden kurma

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The goal of this small contribution is to provide an etymology for MK *psar* H (·쌀)<sup>1</sup> ‘rice (as grain)’, which so far had no etymology. This would be a good way to honor my friend and colleague Uwe Bläsing on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday, as finding etymologies for obscure words and solving etymological puzzles has always been one of hallmarks of his varied scholarly activities.

Historically rice gathered from paddies had a limited distribution in Korea, being grown only in the center and south of the Korean peninsula, as the northern part was a millet-producing territory, because it was too cold for rice. This is an important point, to which I will return below.

The earliest attestation of the word in question is LOK 菩薩 ‘rice’ (Kyeyrim #183). The word is written as disyllabic in Chinese transcription (菩 LMC *phuǎ*, EM *phu*’, 薩 LMC *sar*, EM *sǎ*),<sup>2</sup> but we should not be rush to interpret this as disyllabic LOK \**pusar* for two reasons: a) in spite of the fact that Late Old Korean might have had initial consonantal clusters like Middle Korean, Chinese had no way to render them as such in twelfth century AD, because there were none in Chinese of that time, so any word with an initial consonantal cluster must have been written with two transcriptional characters, where the first one just stood for the first consonant in an initial cluster; b) the fact that the first character includes high vowel is alarming at least, as it most likely indicates that this character was chosen deliberately to show that there was no vowel in the Korean form, because high vowels are normally used in East Asian scripts to show the absence of the vowel when there is no other way to indicate it. The reader will see the further etymological confirmation for this

<sup>1</sup> MdK *ssal* (쌀) ‘rice (as grain)’.

<sup>2</sup> Chronologically the Chinese dialect of Sūn Mù (孫穆), the author of the *Kyeylim yusa* is closer to Early Mandarin than to Late Middle Chinese, but it phonetically it is much closer to Late Middle Chinese as it preserves a number of Middle Chinese archaisms, not found in Early Mandarin, such as, for example the preservation of final LMC *-r* < EMC *-t*. LMC and EM reconstructions are cited according to Pulleyblank (1991) with some modifications.

statement. Thus, LOK \*p(u)sar is only of a limited value, and we should start looking at the Middle Korean data written in the *hankul* alphabet.

MK *psar* H (·쌀) has a HIGH pitch, which is the most frequent accentual pattern for Middle Korean nominal roots, but in this case we have an initial consonantal cluster, which can only be secondary, resulting from a vowel reduction \*pVs- > ps-. In this case the first syllable, lost in Middle Korean must have had a LOW pitch, which would confirm to the most frequent accentual pattern LH for Korean disyllabic nouns.

There is no shortage of the attestations of MK *psar* H (·□) ‘rice’ in the texts of the fifteenth century, e.g.:

그짓·씩·리·쌀가·져·나·○나·늘

kù cis stár-í psár kacy-é ná-wó-nà-n-ár

that house daughter-NOM rice bring-CONV exit(CONV)-come-PAST-ATTR-ACC

when the daughter of that house brought out rice [to him] (Sekpo 6.14a)

흔:날·쌀·을:좌·샤

hλn :nath psár-ár :cwa-sy-á

one grain rice-ACC eat(HON)-HON-CONV

[he] ate one grain of rice [every day], and... (Kok 62)

金금바리:예:흰 쌀ㄹㄹ기다.마

kùm pàri-:yey :hoy-n psár kλtλk-ì tàm-á

gold bowl-LOC be.white-ATTR rice full-ADV fill-CONV

[she] filled the golden bowl up with white rice, and... (Welin 8.90b)

The territory of the wet rice agriculture in Korea roughly coincides with the territory where once the continental Japonic languages were spoken: the center and the south of the peninsula. The speakers of proto-Korean were not agriculturalists, but mounted warriors who roamed into the Korean peninsula from the north out of Inner Asia. Rice was not at the time their staple food. Meanwhile, the speakers of the continental Japonic

languages, who were subjugated by Korean nomads were rice agriculturalists, so it is in Japonic where we should look for the etymology of MK *psar* H ‘rice’.

Such an etymology indeed exists: WOJ *wase* ~ *was-* ‘early rice’: *was-pô* ‘early rice ears’, *was-ipî* ‘rice cooked from early rice’, and *was-ki* ‘rice wine made from early rice’. The earliest two phonographic attestations (one for *wase* and another for the compound form *was-*) are only in Western Old Japanese. There are other attestations in Western Old Japanese as well, but unfortunately they are all logographic. There are no attestations in Eastern Old Japanese. Examples:

和佐々酒九升

was-saKĪ<sup>3</sup> KIU MASU

early.rice-rice.wine nine masu<sup>4</sup>

five liters of sake [made] of early rice (KMJ 11)

尔保杼里能可豆思加和世乎尔倍須登毛曾能可奈之伎乎刀尔多弓米也母

nipo-<sup>n</sup>-dōri-nō Ka<sup>n</sup>dusika wase-wo nipë s-u tōmō sōnō kanasi-kî-wo tō-ni  
tate-m-ë ya mō

grebe-DV(ATTR)-bird-COMP Ka<sup>n</sup>dusika **early.rice** food.offering do-FIN  
CONJ that beloved-ATTR-ACC outside-LOC make.stand-TENT-EV IP  
EP

Even though [I] make the food offering of **early rice** from Ka<sup>n</sup>dusika (that is like a grebe)<sup>5</sup>, would [I] let that beloved [of mine] stand outside [the house]?! [– Certainly not!] (MYS 14.3386)<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The most frequent form for ‘rice wine’ in WOJ is *sakë*, but there are other cases when *Kë* alternates with *KĪ*: e.g., ‘*matu<sup>n</sup>gë* ~ *matu<sup>n</sup>gĪ* eyelashes’.

<sup>4</sup> Measure of volume equal 0.59 liter.

<sup>5</sup> *Nipo-N-tōri-nō* is a permanent epithet (*J makura-kotoba*) to Ka<sup>n</sup>dusika.

<sup>6</sup> This poem is in Western Old Japanese and has no Eastern Old Japanese features in spite of the fact that it is found among eastern A<sup>n</sup>duma poems (東歌, book fourteen of the *Man’yōshū*).

呷孀等尔行相乃速稻乎苻時成来下芽子花咲

WOTÖMĚ<sup>7</sup>-RA-ni YUK-Î-AP-Î-nö WASE-wo KAR-U TÖKÎ-NI NAR-I-  
N-I-KÊR-Asi-mo PA<sup>9</sup>GĪ-NÖ PANA SAK-U

maiden-PLUR-DAT go-INF-meet-NML-GEN **early.rice**-ACC reap-  
ATTR time DV-INF become-INF-PERF-INF-RETR-SUP-EXCL  
bush.clover-GEN flower bloom-FIN

It looks like it has become time to reap **early rice** [that grows near] the meeting place with maidens! The flowers of bush clovers are blooming (MYS 19.2117)

We can reconstruct PJ \*wasay LH ‘early rice’ on the basis of WOJ *wase* ~ *wasa-* and MJ *wase* LH (.ワセ) in spite of the fact that the word is not attested in the Ryūkyūan languages. This lack of attestation is clearly due to the difference in agricultural seasons between mainland Japanese islands and the Ryūkyūan islands: J *wase* is early rice collected in the fall, and it simply does not exist in Ryūkyūs.

Phonologically the comparison is impeccable not only on segmental, but also on suprasegmental level. As Murayama demonstrated, in Korean loans in Japanese, Middle Japanese and Middle Korean pitches match (at least for the register), thus MJ H = MK H, and MJ L = MK L (1988: 21-23). In this case the accentual reconstruction LH is, of course, for proto-Korean \*pasar, not for MK *psar* H. The correspondence of WOJ *w-* to MK *p-* also clearly indicates the direction of borrowing from Japonic to Koreanic, because Japonic has both initial \*w- and \*p-, while Koreanic has only \*p-. It is the same correspondence as found in WOJ *wata* ‘sea’ and MK *pàtáh*, *pàrà’r* ‘id.’<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Capital letters denote the logographic spelling.

<sup>8</sup> In a previous publication I believed that Japonic word is borrowed from Korean due to the limited distribution of *wata* in Japonic: it is attested only in Western Old Japanese (Vovin 2010: 111). But it was justly pointed to me by John Whitman that the borrowing can only be the other way around due to the correspondence of initial consonants, as it makes no sense for Western Old

Therefore, one can reconstruct PK \*pasAR or \*pasar LH, and establish that the syncopated vowel in the first syllable of MK *psar* H was *a*. This brings us back to the earlier discussion of LOK \*pusar (菩薩) ‘rice’. Most likely LMC *phiuǎ sar* (菩薩) just reflects inability of the Chinese script to transcribe initial consonantal clusters as mentioned above. But there is also another possibility. It *may be* that the first-syllable vowel *u* in LOK \*pusar is result of labialization of *a* > *u* after bilabial consonant *p*. Unfortunately, our current knowledge of Old Korean is too limited to draw any definite conclusions and to give preference to the first or the second explanation.

In conclusion, I must say that this etymology has far more reaching consequences for the reconstruction of pre-proto-Japonic than for proto-Koreanic. There is one problem that so far I have yet not dealt with. If PK \*pasar is a loan from PJ \*wasay, one has to explain how proto-Koreanic has got its final \*-r from PJ \*-y. If the proto-Koreanic form was indeed borrowed from PJ \*wasay, we would expect Middle Korean form to be \*psAY, not *psar*. And the form *psay* does not contradict the rules of Middle Korean phonotactics, cf. MK *psay*-L ‘to wrap’. It is well known fact that no variety of Japonic has primary syllable-final consonants, although some Japonic languages have developed secondary syllable-final consonants due to apocope, e.g., cf. Psara (Miyako) *par* ‘needle’ vs. WOJ *pari* ‘id.’ For the insular proto-Japonic we can reconstruct word-final \*-y, which is clearly consonantal, because it is for the most part deleted in compounds before another consonant in Old Japanese (no consonantal clusters are allowed), as in *wase* < \*wasay ~ *wasa-*, and word-final \*-m, mostly on the basis of its reflex as the accent class 2.5 (LF), also supported by loans from Korean (cf. OJ *asa* LF ‘morning’ ~ MK *acham* LH ‘id.’, WOJ *turu* LF ‘crane’ ~ MK *twurwum-i* HHL<sup>9</sup> ‘id.’ (Polivanov

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Japanese to borrow Korean initial *p-* as *w-*, when there is WOJ *p-* as well (p.c., February 2013).

<sup>9</sup> Nam gives the accentuation of this word as HLH (1997: 439), and LCT as HHH (1964: 238), while Hankul hakho provides both HHL and HHH (1999: 5004). Nam’s HLH is definitely a mistake, and the earliest attestation in *Welin* 66a is

1968), (Vovin 2008: 144-45)), and morphophonological alternations between nouns and derived verbs, such as WOJ *wosa* LF ‘elder’ ~ *wosam-ë-* ‘to rule’ and WOJ *tö<sup>ŋ</sup>ga* ‘blame’ ~ *tö<sup>ŋ</sup>gam-ë-* ‘to blame’ (Vovin 2008: 146). But the situation for the peninsular Japonic appears to be different: along with secondary syllable-final consonants resulting from apocope (cf. WOJ *mîra* ‘garlic’ ~ pseudo-Koguryö \**mel* (買尸), WOJ *tani* ‘valley’ ~ pseudo-Koguryö *tan* (旦)) it seems that there are also some primary syllable-final consonants that are preserved in peninsular Japonic fragments: cf. WOJ *puka* ‘deep’ ~ pseudo-Koguryö *potse* < \**pokse* (伐斯) ‘id.’, WOJ *kuma* ‘bear’ ~ pseudo-Koguryö *koŋmok* (功木) ‘id.’, WOJ *kî* ‘fortress’ ~ pseudo-Koguryö *xot* (忽) ‘id.’, OJ *nana* ‘seven’ ~ pseudo-Koguryö *nanin* (難隱) ‘id.’). This leads us to the only possible conclusion: PK \**pasar* ‘rice’ was borrowed from a pre-proto-Japonic or peninsular Japonic form \**wasar*. In any case, pre-proto-Japonic appears to have word-final \*\**-r* in addition to proto-Japonic \**-m* and \**-y*. Proto-Japonic \**-y* probably had multiple origins, not only from pre-proto-Japonic \*\**-r*, but also from other consonants, although only future research might be able to give an answer to this problem.

### Abbreviations

ACC	Accusative
ADV	Adverbializer
ATTR	Attributive
COMP	Comparative
CONJ	Conjunction
CONV	Converb
DAT	Dative
DV	Defective verb

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HHL. Much later *Hunmong* 9a or 16a (leaf numbering is not the same in two different woodblock print lines) gives HHH. The first edition of *Twusi enhay* (1481 AD), where the word is also attested, is not available to me now. In any case, this accentuation violates the pattern of early Korean loanwords in Japanese, where at least the register must coincide.

EM	Early Mandarin
EOJ	Eastern Old Japanese
EP	Emphatic particle
EV	Evidential
EXCL	Exclamative
F	Falling pitch
FIN	Final
GEN	Genitive
H	High pitch
HON	Honorific
INF	Infinitive (a type of converb in Japanese)
IP	Interrogative particle
J	Japanese
L	Low pitch
LMC	Late Middle Chinese
LOC	Locative
LOK	Late Old Korean
MJ	Middle Japanese
MK	Middle Korean
NML	Nominalizer
NOM	Nominative
OJ	Old Japanese (both EOJ and WOJ)
PERF	Perfective
PJ	proto-Japonic
PK	proto-Koreanic
PLUR	Plural
RETR	Retrospective
SUP	Suppositional
TENT	Tentative
WOJ	Western Old Japanese

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 Kok Welin chen kang ci kok (月印千江之曲), 1449 AD  
 Kyeyrim Kyeyrim yusa Korye pangen (鷄林類事高麗方言), 1103 AD  
 Sekpo Sekpo sangcel (釋譜詳節), 1447 AD  
 Welin Welin sekpo (月印釋譜), 1459 AD

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