Answer key to exercise on xiéshēngzì 1

1. In reconstructing Old Chinese rimes and initials, xiéshēngzì諧聲字 are very useful in two aspects. How are xiéshēngzì used to study the initials and rimes of Old Chinese?

Characters that share the same phonetic component should have been pronounced very similarly in Old Chinese in the following two senses:

1. Their initials should share a single place of articulation, e.g. [k] and [g], but not [t] and [k]
2. Their rimes should be in the same class.

[Note that there is no necessary connection in terms of tones. ]

1. The following characters are xiéshēngzì: 工gōng, 空kōng, 江jiāng. The character 工 is also the shared phonetic component. Can you analyze the initials and rimes of these three characters in terms of the xiéshēngzì principles, i.e. what phonological connection should they have in Old Chinese and whether this relation still holds in Modern Standard Chinese pronunciation?

In terms of the xiéshēngzì principles mentioned above, in Old Chinese they should have had similar initials in terms of their place of articulation, and they should have had the same rime.

The pronunciations in Modern Standard Chinese are gōng, kōng and jiāng respectively. Clearly they do not all have the same rime any more. In terms of the initials, the pinyin g, k and the pinyin j do not share a single place of articulation (g and k are velar, j is palatal).