Answer key to exercise on xiéshēngzì 2

*Xiéshēngzì* refers to a type of Chinese characters that has a phonetic component and a semantic component.

* A series of *xiéshēngzì* that shares the same phonetic component should be in the same rime class in Old Chinese.
* A series of *xiéshēngzì* that shares the same phonetic component should have a single place of articulation for their initials in Old Chinese.

Study the following xiéshēngzì series. Identify the common component and sort the characters into two groups:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 同tóng |  | 功gōng |  |
| 江jiāng |  | 筒tǒng |  |
|  | 銅tóng | 紅hóng | 洞dòng |
| 桐tóng | 扛káng |  | 缸gāng |

1. Please list the two groups

Group 1: 同桐銅筒洞

Group 2: 江扛功紅缸

1. What is the common phonetic component for each group?

Group 1同

Group 2工

1. Do they all still rhyme according to their modern pronunciation?

All of the characters in Group 1 still rhyme. The characters in Group 2 belong to either ong or ang, so they do not all rhyme in modern pronunciation.

1. What initials are there in each group?

Group 1: d t

Group 2: j k g h

1. Do they still share the same place of articulation? What place of articulation is it?

Group 1: yes, all are alveolar

Group 2: no. k/g/h share the same place of articulation, i.e. velar. But j is palatal.

1. If the characters do not share the same place of articulation, can you guess what the original place of articulation and even the original initials could have been?

In group 2, g/k/h and j are different. Theoretically speaking, there are three possibilities. First the original initial could have been alveolar. Second, the original initial could have been palatal. Third the original initial could have been some other sound that shares some similarities to both g/k/h and j.

But if we consider the first possibility, then we have a possible sound change from g/k/h to j. This is actually an instance of a common sound change process called palatalization. Therefore it does seem as of now that the original initial could have been a velar for Group 2. The initial j could have been a “g” or a “k”, among other possibilities.