MIECZYSŁAW JERZY KÜNSTLER
(Warsaw)

On Pekinese qūliūr—‘curly’ and jūliūr—‘numb’

1. As far as I was able to find it out the Pekinese word qūliūr (1) was first noted by Jin Shoushen (2) in his Beijinghua yuhui (3), published in 1961, and then it was noted by Song Xiaocai (4) and Ma Xinhua (5) in Beijinghua ciyu lishi (6), edited by Suzuki in 1982. The dictionary of Pekinese words and expressions picked up from Lao She’s works—Lao She zuopinzhongde Beijinghua ciyu lishi (7), published recently by Yang Yuixiu (8), does not mention the word, but it means that the writer simply did not use it. Needless to say that the word qūliūr is unknown to the dictionaries of Modern Standard Chinese, Chinese as well as Western (9) including the latest edition of Xiandai Hanyu cidian.

1.1. Jin Shoushen gives the meaning of the Pekinese qūliūr as ‘winding, crooked, curved’ and illustrates it by the following two examples:

a) ni huade zhema quliur guaiwaarnde, zen neng suan ge zhixian (10)—‘you have drawn it so winding and crooked, so how could it be taken as a straight line?’

b) ni zhege toufa, zemno zhida quliur (11)—‘as to your hair, why is it ever curly?’

In this latter sentence quliur has simply the meaning of ‘curly’ but for Song and Ma it has also only the meaning of ‘winding and crooked, crooked and not straight’. Their unique example is:

c) zhe haizi shi tiansheng quliur toufa (12)—this child has natural curly hair.

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1 Numbers in brackets refer to the list of Chinese characters at the end of this paper. The Pinyin romanisation of MSC is used without any modification. Phonetic transcription is used when necessary.

2 To say the truth it is noted in the great four-volume Chinese-Russian Dictionary as a dialectal form pronounced quliur with the meaning of ‘trace, footprint, chain of footprints’. Here this cannot be taken into consideration as we do not know to what dialect it belongs and consequently how it is really pronounced in this dialect (the pronunciation given by the dictionary is quite obviously a simple projection into MSC of the two characters). Moreover the given meaning is rather far from the meaning of the Pekinese quliūr.
This is another prove that the word means first of all 'curly' that is 'winding in semicircles'. As I see it this meaning is basic for the Pekinese qūliur. It is not 'crooked zigzag-like' nor 'meander-like' but just 'semicircle-like' i.e. 'curly'.

1.2. Up to now no etymology of this Pekinese word has been proposed. It seems rather clear that the second character at least is in this case used quite arbitrary. The basic meanings: 'slide, glide, smooth, sneak off, slip away' has no relationship with the meaning of the whole. Thus the second character in qūliur appears only in its phonetic function.

2. Before we propose an etymologic interpretation of the Pekinese qūliur we must say something about another Pekinese word which is phonetically similar. It is the word jūliur (13) noted by J i n. Shoushen who gives the following meanings of it: 1) 'winding', 2) 'to shrink, to stiffen, numb'. The first meaning is illustrated by the following example:

d) she gen shensi da juliur le (14)—'this cord is twisted (entangled')

The second meaning is illustrated by:

c) hao leng tian, ba wo shou dou dong juliur el (15)—'these are very cold days and my hands are numb with frost'.

So far J i n. S o n g and M a have however no jūliur at all, but they have recorded another word, unknown to their predecessor. This is jūluanr (16) having the following two meanings: 1) 'to have finger and toes numb with frost and cannot stretch them', 2) 'crooked and bend, winding'. The first meaning is illustrated by the following example:

f) she tianr zhen leng, shou dou dong juluannr le (17)—'its very cold these days, so hands are numb with frost'.

The second meaning is illustrated by:

g) she haiyi toufa zhen you yisi, tianshengde dai juluannr (18)—'the hair of this child is very fine, it is in a natural way curly'.

Jūluanr (16) appears also in Xiandai Hanyu cidian (9), but only with the meaning of 'frozen stiff, numb with cold' and is qualified as a dialectal expression. The same dictionary gives jīluan which is explained as 1) 'to have muscles shrunk and it is impossible to stretch them out', 2) 'to be a stickler for (form)'. The latter meaning is qualified as literary. The explanations of Xiandai Hanyu cidian concerning jīluan are a little bit disappointing, because the expression is known also as having the meaning of 'cramp, spasm, to writhe'.

It seems really important indeed what B a i. Wanru (19) writes in his Etymological notes on the Beijing dialect—Beijing fangyan benzi kao (20), published in 1979 in Fangyan (21). Under the entry jū (22), written also (23),—which is not used as monosyllable in the dialect of Peking—the author gives the expression (24) which is read either jūliur or jūluanr and has the meaning of 'numb, stiffen'. B a i also indicates that the character jū (22) is in Guangyun (25) explained as 'to have hands and legs cold', whereas in fīyun (26) it is given the meaning of 'legs sprain from cold'.

3. Thus—as we see—in Modern Pekinese we have two words phonetically similar: qūliur and jūliur/jīluanr/jūliur. The first seems to mean mainly 'curly, winding,
crooked', the second meaning first of all 'numb with cold, stiff'. Synchronically it seems quite admissible to say that phonetic resemblance of the two words caused probably an interference of semantic fields and therefore the second word is also used with the meaning of the first, although the inverse does not happen. It is quite possible, however, that the problem is more complicated as synchronic analysis seems to indicate.

Let us point out that the phonetic variants of jūliur in the dialect of Peking are very important to the interpretation of qūliur.

4. Now we must mention two interesting articles published in Zhongguo yuwen (27) in 1978 and 1979. The first of them is the article by Zhāng Qingchang (28) concerning Mongol loan-words in Chinese—Mantān Hanyuzhongde Mengyu jiècì (29), where among others the author proposed a Mongol etymology for the word qūliān (30)—'circle, ring'.

The following year Li Baoduan (31) published his article about the words hulan and qūliān—Guanyu “hulan” he “qūliān” (32). Li rejected Zhāng’s etymology and interpreted qūliān as a bisyllabic form of the word quān (33). The author says that a regular bisyllabisation by means of adding an -l- should give rather [te’yilan] than [te’yliēn], but the syllable [yan] being absent in—as he says—“many regions”—it was replaced by [liēn]. He remarks moreover that even today elderly people in North-East regions use the word [te’yliēn] that is (34) 'little golden rings or circles'.

4.1. The discussion between the two Chinese linguists seems to prove first of all that both of them did not know that the word qūliān (35) was noted already in the third chapter of a work intituled Rongzhai subi (36) written by the famous Souther Song scholar and writer Hong Mai (37) who lived in 1123–1202. Hong Mai says clearly that qūliān (35) is the same as quān (33). If Zhāng Qingchang knew that the word qūliān, which is obviously an earlier form of qūliān (30) is much older than the Mongol rule in China, he would not perhaps seek Mongol explanation for it. If Li Baoduan knew that qūliān exists and was already noted by Hong Mai, he would certainly not speak about the hypothetic [te’yilan] as better than [te’yliēn]. Li Baoduan does not seem however to see any remote causes of such a bisyllabic form as qūliān.

Thus in Pekinese the evolution quān (33) > qūliān (35) > qūliān (30) is quite admissible and it appears parallel to juān > jūluānr > jūliur.

5. The problem however is not as simple as it may appear at first. To admit that quān > qūliān > qūliān and juān > jūluānr > jūliur means that qūliān and jūluān are dimidiated (if we may use P. A. Boo d b e r g’s term) forms of quān juān respectively. In order to be dimidiated, in Archaic Chinese quān and juān would have initial consonant clusters of the type kl-, k’l-, gl-, g’l-. As far as B. K a r l g r e n’s reconstructions are concerned this is not true. The phonetic series juān (38)—'roll, scroll' and all cognate words, including quān (33) have no consonant clusters at all.

6. It is well known that in many cases there is a contradiction between K a r l-
green’s reconstructions based mainly on xiesheng and fanqie evidences on the one hand and dialectal evidences on the other hand. The problem is known at last since Paul Yäng’s *On the reconstruction of Old Chinese based on modern dialect data* (1971). It was recently discussed again by Marjorie K. M. Chan in her *Initial consonant clusters in Old Chinese* (1984). To say it briefly today it is out of question that in many cases dialectal evidence clearly indicate an Old Chinese consonant cluster where the reconstructions do not admit its existence and that dialect data cannot be neglected.

In the case of the phonetic series juán (38) the existence of consonant clusters was already pointed out by N. C. Bodman (see his *Historical linguistics in Current Trends in Linguistics*). Bodman shows that the word kliān—’roll, scroll’ in the Wuming dialect of the Chuang language is evidently borrowed from Chinese and thus something like kwāj/kwājan should be admitted for (38) or (39). Anyway long before him Katherine P. K. Whitsaker (*Characterisation of the Cantonese dialect with special reference to its modified tone, 1952*) postulated initial consonant clusters in this series.

7. To all dialectal evidence indicating consonant clusters in this series we may add some more examples.

a) [kws‘lye] written (40) (it would be thus pronounced kūliān in Pekinese) was noted as having the meaning of ‘circle, ring’ in the dialect of Taiyuan as described by Wang Lida (41) in his *Taiyuan fangyan ciuie jige tedian he rogan xuciye yongfa* (42).

b) [kuo’] (54) lye (53)] written (43) is considered by Zhao Bingxuan (44) in his *Taiyuan fangyanliande fanyu pianci* (45) as bisyllabic form of [te’ye] (53)] (that is MSC and Pek. quān (33)).

c) The same author treats the Taiyuan dialect word [k’uo (55) lye (11)]—’ring, circle’ written (40) as a bisyllabic form of [te’ye (11)] (that is MSC and Pek. quān (33)) and he identifies it with the word qūliān (30) used by Su Jiingchen (46) in his *Gaozu huan xiang* (47).

Similar and evidently cognate words were quite recently noted in the dialect of Fuzhou as described by Liang Yuzhong (48) in his *Fuzhou fangyande “qiejiaoci”* (49):

d) [kwo luon] is considered to be a split form of [kuon] (with regular -n in the place of -n) written (38) and having the meaning of ‘to roll up’.

e) [kua luə] is given as a diminished form of [k’uən] written [33] and meaning ‘to roll’.

8. All these and many other similar examples seem clearly to indicate that the whole series of cognate words have had in AC an initial consonant cluster which was diminished and in this form preserved in many Chinese dialects, Mandarin as well as Southern. Some indications of consonant clusters in this word-family may be seen in such colloquial binoms as gūlu (50)—’a wheel, to turn round, to roll’, especially in connection with such AC words as g’lwar/g’lwx or g’lwan (51)—’turn round as a wheel’ and other doubtless cognate words like liwén (52)—’a wheel’. 

The colloquial gūlu is particularly interesting as it is frequent in various Northern Chinese dialects such as Shanxi [xū́lū́̀̂̂e] or [kwá́lua] written (51) and meaning ‘to turn up, to roll’. Moreover, this word is cognate of Tibetan k’or-lo- ‘circle, disk, wheel’ and perhaps also sku-ru—‘a paddle-wheel’. Thus we have even external evidence for old diminuated forms testifying to the existance of ancient clusters, for diminuated forms occur in Tibetan too.

9. Phonetic difference between the Pekinese unstressed syllables [li̇er⁰] and [li̇or⁰] is minor which makes the evolution quite possible. Thus for both Pekinese words we have:

quan > quluan(r) > qulian(r) > quliur
juan > jualian(r) > julian(r) > juliur

where quan and juan are diminuated and were probably k’i̇wān and k’i̇wān respectively.

The semantic evolution: ‘to roll, bend, curved > cramp, spasm stiffen > numb’ seems quite admissible, especially since the first syllable of the diminuated form was noted with the character (53) which caused additional interference of meaning.

As far as ‘curly’ is concerned its semantic relationship with ‘to roll, bend curved’ and ‘ring, circle, wheel’ seems quite apparent. The fact that the first syllable of the diminuated form was noted with the character qū (54)—‘bent, crooked’ also played some role in the semantic evolution of this word and finally greatly differentiated it from juliur.

List of Chinese Characters

1. 曲溜儿
2. 全受申
3. 北京谚语汇
4. 宋辛才
5. 马欣华
6. 北京话词语例释
7. 范金先作品中的北京话词语例释
8. 杨玉秀
9. 现代汉语词典
10. 你画的这么弯曲的，怎么能算个直线
11. 你这个头发，怎么直打弯曲儿
12. 这孩子是天生曲溜儿头发
13. 拘溜儿
14. 这根绳子打拘溜儿了
15. 好冷天，把我手都冻拘溜儿了
16. 拘挲儿
17. 这天儿真冷，手都冻拘挲儿了
18. 这孩子的头发真有意思，天生的带拘挲儿
19. 自宛如
20. 北京方言本字考
21. 方言
22. 驹
23. 构
24. 钩
25. 广韵
26. 集韵
27. 中国语文
28. 张清常
29. 漫谈汉语中的蒙语借词
30. 曲连
31. 李葆瑞
32. 关于“胡阑”和“曲连”
33. 圈
34. 曲连儿
35. 屈变
36. 容斋随笔
37. 洪迈
38. 卷
39. 捲
40. 密联
41. 主立达
42. 太尉方言词汇的几个特点和若干虚词的用法
43. 骨联
44. 赵兼,dim
45. 太尉方言里的反语联词
46. 雕景臣
47. 高祖足乡
48. 梁玉璋
49. 福州方言的“切脚词”
50. 转轴 or 转转 or 轧转 or 轧转
51. 轧
52. 车
53. 驹
54. 曲