

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# The Evolutional Development of Nouns in Middle Chinese Grammar

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## ABSTRACT

Middle Chinese witnessed the existence of a large number of new grammatical constituents, some of which had already been developed in the mid and late Old Chinese language before thriving in middle ancient times. Among these, the syntactic functions of nouns in Middle Chinese were in the process of evolutional development. The paper aims to investigate the nature of noun evolution by analyzing the exemplified data. It is found that nouns in Middle Chinese grammar mainly serve as subjects, objects, and attributes, though their direct link with predicates became less frequent due to the extensive usage of the copula of *shì* 是 (be). The development of nouns mainly consisted of prefixes and suffixes, such as the prefix *ā* 阿, which emerged with its crucial evolutional features.

## KEYWORDS

Middle Chinese, grammatical constituents, evolutional development, nouns

## ARTICLE INFORMATION

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## 1. Introduction

Nouns in Middle Chinese undergo evolutional development, which can be seen from the syntactic functions of nouns, as nouns in Old Chinese mainly served as subjects, objects, and attributes, though their direct link with predicates became less frequent due to the extensive usage of the copula of *shì* 是 (be). The development of nouns mainly consisted of prefixes and suffixes. The suffix of *zi* 子 appeared in the Pre-Qin period, while the prefixes of *ā* 阿 appeared in the Han Dynasty. They were more widely used in the middle of ancient times. Meanwhile, the prefix of *ā* 阿 is the foundation of the new suffixes, such as *ér* 兒 and *tóu* 頭 emerged after the Six Dynasties.

## 2 The evolutional development of noun grammatical constituents

Grammatical constituents of nouns can be seen from the noun prefix of *ā* 阿 first appeared in the Western Han Dynasty. For instance, it was written in *Shiji-Bian Que Cang Gong Liezhuan* 史記·扁鵲倉公列傳 (Records of Historian-Biographies of Bian Que and Cang Gong) that *Gù Jibei Wang amu ziyán zuré ér mèn* 故濟北王阿母自言足熱而懣. (That is why the wet nurse of the deceased Emperor of Jibei complaint of feverish feet and irritable mood.) *Zhèngyì* 正義 (The Exact Implications of Records of the Historian) by Zhāng Shǒujié 張守節 (Zhang Shoujie) quoted from *Fú Qián* 服虔 (Fu Qian) that *Rǔmǔ yě* 乳母也. (Its meaning is wet nurse.) The childhood name of Empress Chen, the wife of Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty was *Ājiāo* 阿嬌 (Ah-Jiao, a sweet and charming girl), which refers to beautiful young ladies in later ages. The prefix of *ā* 阿 was extensively utilized after the Eastern Han Dynasty. For example, the childhood name of Cáo Cāo 曹操 (Cao Cao) was *Āmán* 阿瞞 (Ah-Man, the one deceiving others) and that of Liú Shàn 刘禅 (Liu Shan) was *Ādǒu* 阿斗 (Ah-Dou, a weak-minded person). In volume 32 of *Rizhi Lu* 日知錄 (Notes on the Daily Accumulation of Knowledge) by Gù Yánwǔ 顧炎武 (Gu Yanwu), it is written that *Lìshì hàn Yáokēng Bēi yīn yún*: 'Qíjiān sìshí rén, jiē zì qímíng ér xìyǐ Ā zì, rú Liú Xīng Āxìng, Pān Jīng Ājīng zhìlèi...Chéngyáng Língtái Bēi yīn yǒu zhǔlì Zhōngdōng Ādōng. 《隸釋》漢《穀阮碑》陰雲: '其間四十人, 皆字其名而繫以阿字, 如劉興阿興, 潘京阿京之類...成陽《靈臺碑》陰有主吏仲東阿東. (On the back of the Stone Tablet from the Pit in Yao of the Han Dynasty in *Explaining Li-Style Calligraphy*, it reads that among them there are forty people with *Ā* 阿

(Ah) in their style names, such as *Ah-Xing* of Liu Xing and *Ah-Jing* of Pan Jing, etc....On the back of the *Stone Tablet from Lingtai* in Chengyang, carved the style name of Zhongdong as *Ah-Dong*, one subordinate of a county official.) The noun prefix of *ā*阿 (Ah) might be derived from *yī*伊 (Yee) of the Old Chinese language. In *Zhēngyuè*正月 (The First Lunar Month) of *Xiǎoyǎ*小雅 (Minor Odes) in *Shī*詩 (Book of Poetry), it is written that *yǒuhuáng Shàngdì, yī shuǐyún zēng?* 有皇上帝, 伊誰云憎? (The God has the saying. Does anyone speak out hatred?) In *Kuǐbiàn*頽弁 (Leather Caps) of *Xiǎoyǎ*小雅 (Minor Odes), it reads that *yǒukuǐ zhě biàn, shíwéi yíhé?* 有頽者弁, 實維伊何? (Who are those dressed in leather caps?) *Yī*伊 (Yee) in those cases can be taken as a prefix as well. *Yī*伊 (Yee) and *ā*阿 (Ah) both belong to the initial group *yǐng*影 (Ying), though they are in different categories. Furthermore, their rhyme groups like *zhī*脂 (Zhi) and *gē*歌 (Ge) are respectively utilized but belong to the same group. In this sense, they are quite close to each other in terms of group division. The widespread usage of the prefix *ā*阿 (Ah) after the Wei and the Jin Dynasties may be due to sutra translation. Lots of Sanskrit words beginning with *a-* were translated into *ā*阿 (Ah) in Chinese, such as *Āluóhàn*阿羅漢 (Arhat, a person released from all worries with abstinence and finally became a saint of Theravada Buddhism), *Āmítuófó*阿彌陀佛 (Amitābha, Buddha of Longevity), *Āshéllí*阿闍梨 (Acārya, a saint or an eminent monk), *Āxiūluó*阿修羅 (Asura, not a heavenly god), *Ābídìyù*阿鼻地獄 (Avīci, the hell of infinite pain) and so on. With a much wider scope of usage in Mandarin Chinese, the prefix of *ā*阿 (Ah) is often utilized in the following contexts.

### 3 Concrete context of the prefix of ā阿 (Ah)

One context is in front of one character selected from a name, a style name, a childhood name or a childhood style name, showing intimacy by adding *ā*阿 (Ah). Examples are as follows.

(1) [Lǚ Sù fǔ Méngbèi yuē: “Wúwèi dàdì dānyǒu wǔluè ěr, zhiyú jīnzhě, xuéshí yīngbó, feifù wúxià Āméng!” [魯肅拊蒙背曰: “吾謂大弟但有武略耳, 至於今者, 學識英博, 非復吳下阿蒙!” (Lu Su patted the back of Lv Meng and said, “I used to say that you only had military knowledge, but nowadays you have profound knowledge and much knowledgeable as well, no longer the one of Ah-Meng of Wu in the south of the Yangtze River.”) [Quoted from *Jiāngbiǎo Zhuàn*江表傳 (The Biography of Sun Quan in the South of the Yangtze River) in *Lǚ Méng Zhuàn* 呂蒙傳 (The Biography of Lv Meng) of *Wú Shū* 吳書 (Book of Kingdom Wu) in *Sānguó Zhì* 三國志 (Records of Three Kingdoms) annotated by Pèi Sōngzhī裴鬆之 (Pei Songzhi)]

(2) *Suǐyǒu wǔ nán'ér, zǒngbú hào zhībǐ. Āshū yǐ èrbā, lànduò gù wúpí. Āxuān xíng zhixué, ér bú'ài wénshù.* 雖有五男兒, 總不好紙筆。阿舒已二八, 懶惰故無匹。阿宣行志學, 而不愛文術。 (Although I have five sons, none of them are interested in learning and acquiring knowledge. Ah-Shu is sixteen years old. No one can exceed him in laziness and ignorance. Ah-Xuan is nearly fifteen years old and does not like gaining knowledge at all.) [From the poem entitled *Zézi*責子 (Criticism to My Sons) by Táo Qián陶潛 (Tao Qian) of the Jin (晉) Dynasty]

(3) Zhōng Shìjì mù Wáng Ānfēng: “Āróng liǎoliǎo jiě rényì.” 鐘士季目王安豐: “阿戎了解人意。” (Zhong Shiji looked at Wang Anpeng and made comments that Ah-Rong clearly knows what people are thinking and taking.) [From *Shǎngyù*賞譽 (Appreciation) of *Shìshuō Xīnyǔ*世說新語 (A New Account of Tales in the World) by Liú Yìqìng劉義慶 of the Southern Song Dynasty]

(4) Huángōng yǔ jiābīn: “Āyuán yǒudé yǒuyán ...” 桓公語嘉賓: “阿源有德有言...” (Duke Huan told the guest that Ah-Yuan is virtuous and eloquent...)

(5) Xiè Tàifù yǔ Zhēncháng: “Ālíng yú cǐshì gùyù tài lì.” 謝太傅語真長: “阿齡於此事故欲太厲。” (Grand Preceptor Xie told Zhenchang that Ah-Ling seemed to be too serious with this matter.)

In the above mentioned example (1), *Āméng*阿蒙 (Ah-Meng) refers to *Lǚ Méng*呂蒙 (Lv Meng) from the Wu Country in the south of the Yangtze River during the Three Kingdoms Dynasty. In the above mentioned example (2), both *Shū*舒 (Shu) and *Xuān*宣 (Xuan) were sons of Táo Qián陶潛 (Tao Qian). In the example (3) mentioned above, *Āróng*阿戎 (Ah-Rong) refers to *Wáng Róng*王戎 (Wang Rong). In the example (4) mentioned above, *Āyuán*阿源 (Ah-Yuan) is the style name of *Yīn Hào*殷浩 (Yin Hao). In the example (5) mentioned above, *Ālíng*阿齡 (Ah-Ling) refers to *Wáng Húzhī*王胡之 (Wang Huzhi), whose style name is *Xiūlíng*脩齡 (Xiuling).

In addition, the following are examples that *ā*阿 (Ah-) is utilized before the surname of a female.

(1) Chénjùn Yuán Zhēn zài Yùzhōu sòng jìnnǚ Āxuē, Āguō, Āmǎ sānrén yǔ Huán Xuānwǔ. 陳郡袁真在豫州送妓女阿薛, 阿郭, 阿馬三人與桓宣武。 (Yuan Zhen from Chen County once sent Huan Xuanwu three prostitutes, namely Ah-Xue, Ah-Guo and A-Ma.) [From *Yōumíng Lù*幽明錄 (Stories from the Nether World) by Liú Yìqìng劉義慶 (Liu Yiqing) of the Southern Song Dynasty]

(2) [Wéi ]Yīng zǎozú, qíqī Liángshì, bú zhìsàng érjià ...Yīng wén Liángshì jià, báirì láiguī, chéngmǎ jiāng shùrén zhiyú tíngqián, hūyuē: “Āliáng, qīng wàngwǒ yě?” [韋]英早卒, 其妻梁氏, 不治喪而嫁...英聞梁氏嫁, 白日來歸, 乘馬將數人至於庭前, 呼曰: “阿梁, 卿忘我也?” (Wei Ying died at young age. His wife, Ms. Liang, remarried without conducting a funeral for him...On hearing this, Ying returned during daytime on a horse and gathered people in the courtyard, shouting “Ah-Liang, how come you forget me?”) [From volume 4 of *Luòyáng Qiélán Jì*洛陽伽藍記(Buddhist Temples in Luoyang) by Yáng Xuànzhī楊銜之(Yang Xuanzhi) in the Northern Wei Dynasty]

(3) Zhì Gāozōng yùlì Tàizōng cáirén Āwǔ wéihòu, Chǔ Suiliáng, Hǎo Chùjùn děng sǐzhēng bùkě. 至高宗欲立太宗才人阿武為后, 褚遂良, 郝處俊等死爭不可。(Emperor Gaozong intended to appoint Ah-Wu, concubine of Emperor Taizong, as the Empress. High officials such as Chu Suiliang, Hao Chujun and his followers risked their lives to advise him against it.) [From volume 10 of *Wénjiàn Hòulù*聞見後錄(Memoirs) by Shào Bó邵博(Shao Bo) of the Song Dynasty] Another version of “Āwǔ阿武(Ah-Wu)” is “Wǔshì武氏(Ms. Wu)”, referring to Wǔ Zétiān武則天 (Wu Zetian).

From the Six Dynasties to the Tang and Song Dynasties, ā阿(Ah-) was utilized in front of the position of a female's surname, which has already been discussed by predecessors. In volume 10 of *Yúnlù Mǎnchāo*雲麓漫鈔(Sketches at the Cloud Foot) by Zhào Yànwei 趙彥衛(Zhao Yanwei) of the Song Dynasty, it reads that “Tángrén hào wǔhòu wéi Āwǔ Pó. Fùrén wúmíng, dìyǐ xìng jiā āzì, jīnzhī guānfǔ fùrén gòngzhuàng, jiēyún Āwáng Āzhāng, gàishì chéngxí zhī jiùyún. 唐人號武後為阿武婆。婦人無名, 第以姓加阿字, 今之官府婦人供狀, 皆雲阿王阿張, 蓋是承襲之舊雲。” (People of the Tang Dynasty called Empress Wu Lady Ah-Wu, as females did not have names at that time, but an “Ah-” was added in front of her surname. In today's official female confessions, there are Ah-Wang, Ah-Zhang, etc., which are derived from the old expression and/or usage.) According to Qián Dàxīn 錢大昕(Qian Daxin), “Liúcháó [fùnlǚ] duōyǐ ā xìng, rú *Jīnshū* zhōng, jīnshì zhōngxīng, rǔmǔ Āsū yǒu bǎo Yuándì zhīgōng, cìhào Bǎoshèngjūn. *Jiù Tángshū*, Zhōu Pán chǒng àiqiè Dùshì, shàngsòng jīn chāiniè èrshí méi, shǒuchì yuē: ‘Xiǎng Zhōugōng Ādù.’ *Nánqí Shū* Suí Dúgūhòu wèi Yún Zhāoxùn wéi Āyún, Táng Xiāoshūfēi wèi Wǔhòu wéi Āwǔ, Wéihòu jiàngwéi shùrén chēng Āwéi, Liú Cóngjiàn qī Péishì chēng Āpéi, Wú Xiāng qǔ Yán Yuè nǚ, qímǔ Jiāoshì, chēng Āyán, Ājiāo. *Tángshū-Ānlè Gōngzhǔ Zhuàn*: ‘Āwǔzǐ shàngwéi tiānzǐ.’ Hóng Jǐngbó yún: ‘Jīn lúxiàng zhīfù yǐ ā qiè qíxìng.’ *Zé Nǎnsòng yóurán*, jīnzé gōngsī jùwú cǐyǔ yǐ. 六朝[婦女]多以阿繫姓, 如《晉書》中, 晉室中興, 乳母阿蘇有保元帝之功, 賜號保聖君。《舊唐書》, 周盤寵愛妾杜氏, 上送金釵鐏二十枚, 手敕曰: ‘餉周公阿杜。’《南齊書》隨獨孤后謂雲昭訓為阿雲, 唐蕭淑妃謂武后為阿武, 韋后降為庶人稱阿韋, 劉從諫妻裴氏稱阿裴, 吳湘娶顏悅女, 其母焦氏, 稱阿顏, 阿焦。《唐書·安樂公主傳》: ‘阿武子尚為天子。’洪景伯云: ‘今閭巷之婦以阿繫其姓。’則南宋猶然, 今則公私俱無此語矣。” (In the Six Dynasties, “Ah-” is used before most surnames of [females]. For instance, in *The Book of the Jin Dynasty*, it reads that during the resurgence of the Jin Dynasty, wet nurse Ah-Su was granted the title of Emperor Protector for her credit of protecting Emperor Yuan. In *The Old Book of the Tang Dynasty*, it reads that Zhou Pan loved his concubine Ms. Du, giving her twenty gold hairpins with a written imperial order, “To Mr. Zhou's beloved Ah-Du.” According to *The Book of the Qi Dynasty of the Southern Dynasties*, Empress Dugu of the Sui Dynasty called Yun Zhaoxun Ah-Yun; the imperial concubine Xiaoshu of the Tang Dynasty called Empress Wu Ah-Wu; Empress Wei was called Ah-Wei after being demoted as a commoner; Ms. Pei, Liu Congjian's wife, was called Ah-Pei; Wu Xiang married the daughter of Yan Yue, whose mother was Ms. Jiao, so they were called Ah-Yan and Ah-Jiao respectively. In *The Biography of Princess Anle of The Book of the Tang Dynasty*, it is written that “Ah-Wuzi remained to be emperor.” According to Hong Jingbo, “Nowadays, Ah- is attached to the surname of a female for common people.” Such usage became popular in the Southern Song Dynasties. However, the expression does not appear in either official documents or private letters today.”

#### 4 Other exemplified context of the prefix of ā阿 (Ah)

The other context forms numerous disyllabic words by placing ā阿 (ah-) before monosyllabic relatives or family names. Examples are as follows:

(1) Jīnyuè qīrì shī ādiē, niàncǐ kùdú kě tòngshāng 今月七日失阿爹, 念此酷毒可痛傷。(On the seventh day of this month, I lost my father and was overwhelmed by such terrible pain.) [From the poem entitled *Shifù Língdīng*失父零丁(Lonesomeness of Losing Father) by Dài Liáng 戴良(Dai Liang) of the Eastern Han Dynasty]

(2) [Xiè Huǐnǚ] bèi fā túxiǎn yǔhuì juéyuē: “Āfù, dàzhàngfū dāng héngshì zhànchǎng, nàihé lángjí dūshì?” (謝晦女)被發徒跣與晦訣曰: “阿父, 大丈夫當橫屍戰場, 奈何狼藉都市?” (Xie Hui's daughter bid farewell to him, her hair tousled and her feet bared, saying that “Father, a true man should lose his life in the battlefield. How come should he bear such insults in the street?”) [From *Xiè Huì Zhuàn*謝晦傳(The Biography of Xie Hui) of *Nánshǐ*南史(The History of the Southern Dynasty)]

(3) Yèqī xiānxià, fū qízi, huímà Yè yuē: “Jūn búwéi bǎisui āgū, bùgǎn tiānzǐ ēnyù, shēnsǐ gù bùzú sāizui, nàihé wǎngshā zǐsūn.” 曄妻先下, 撫其子, 回罵曄曰: “君不為百歲阿家, 不感天子恩遇, 身死固不足塞罪, 奈何枉殺子孫!” (Fan Ye's wife first patted her son and then retorted, “You never consider your one hundred-year-old mother. Nor are you grateful to the Emperor for his appreciation.

Even your death would not make up for those sins, but why should you implicate and kill your decedents?") [From *Fàn Yè Zhuàn* 范曄傳(The Biography of Fan Ye) of *Sòng Shū* 宋書(The Book of the Song Dynasty)]

(4) Zhōuchū yǒu tóngyáo yuē: "Báiyáng shùtóu jīnjī míng, zhīyǒu ājiù wú wàishēng ." 周初有童謠曰: "白楊樹頭金雞鳴, 只有阿舅無外甥." (There used to be a nursery rhyme, which goes that "A golden rooster is crowing on top of the poplar branch. There is only an uncle, while there is no nephew.") [From volume I of *Wǔxíng Zhì* 五行志(Records of Five Elements) in *Suí Shū* 隋書(The Book of the Sui Dynasty)]

(5) Jǔyán wèi àmèi, zuòjì hé bùliáng! 舉言謂阿妹, 作計何不量! (He asked his younger sister, "Why didn't you think twice before making the decision.") [From *Gǔshī Wèi Jiāo Zhōngqīng Qī Zuò* 古詩為焦仲卿妻作 (A Poem for Jiao Zhongqing's Wife)]

(6) Āmǔ wèi ānǚ, rǔkě qù yìngzhī. 阿母謂阿女, 汝可去應之. (The mother told the daughter that "You may go and accept the marriage proposal.")

In the above-mentioned example (1) and (2), both *ādīe* 阿爹 and *āfù* 阿父 refer to father. In the example (3) mentioned above, *ājiā* 阿家 addresses the mother of the husband. In the example (4) mentioned above, *ājiù* 阿舅 means uncle, that is, brother of one's mother or wife. For instance, in *Kùrěn* 酷忍(Cruelty) of *Dàtáng Xīnyǔ* 大唐新語 (New Anecdotes of the Tang Dynasty), it reads that "Tàizōng [wèi Zhāngsūn Wújì] yuē: 'Zhènyì yì rúcǐ, bùnéng xiāngwéi, ājiù wú hòuhuǐ yě. 太宗[謂長孫無忌]曰: '朕意亦如此, 不能相違, 阿舅無後悔也.'" (Emperor Taizong told Zhangsun Wuji that, "I have made up my mind that nobody can make a change of it. The uncle will not feel regretful.") In the example (5) mentioned above, *āmèi* 阿妹 refers to younger sister, while in the above example (6), *āmǔ* 阿母 stands for mother, and *ānǚ* 阿女 means daughter.

Occasionally, *ā* 阿 is put in front of disyllabic words. See the following examples.

(1) Wénzōng Huángdì céng zhīshī yǐ shì Zhèng Qín, Qín zòuyuē: "Qiě qǐliú shènglǜ yú wànjǐ, tiānxià yǎngwàng." Wénzōng búyuē. Qín chū, fù yǐshì Lǐ Zōngmín, tànfú bù yǐ, jìyù yí bāi, shòu'ér chūzhī. Shàng xiào wèizhī yuē: "Wùlìng shìlái āfùzǐ jiànzhī." 文宗皇帝曾制詩以示鄭覃, 覃奏曰: "且乞留聖慮于萬幾, 天下仰望." 文宗不悅. 覃出, 復以示李宗閔, 歎伏不已, 一句一拜, 受而出之. 上笑謂之曰: "勿令適來阿父子見之." (Emperor Wenzong used to show Zheng Qin a poem he composed, but the latter commented that, "I beg you to care more about government affairs to win respects of the whole society." Wenzong felt unhappy after hearing this. When Qin went out, Wenzong showed the poem to Li Zongmin, who gasped in admiration, kowtowing every time while reading one sentence of the poem. When he accepted the poem and went out, the Emperor laughed and made a joke on him and said, "Never let the pedantic person visit me again." [From volume II of *Táng Yǔlín* 唐語林(Stories of the Tang Dynasty) by Wáng Dǎng 王讜 (Wang Dang) of the Song Dynasty]

(2) Huībō ěrshí tíngyù, dàliáo qǔqián wèizú. Āgūpó jiànzuò tiānzǐ, pàng rén bú dé chángchù. 回波爾時廷玉, 打獠取錢未足. 阿姑婆見作天子, 傍人不得根觸. (Huibo (a person's name) was called Tingyu at that time; who made a hunting and did not make enough money. On the condition that his aunt became the Emperor, nobody is allowed to approach him.) [From *Huībō Cí* 回波詞 (Huibo Peams) by Yáng Tíngyù 楊廷玉 (Yang Tingyu) of the Tang Dynasty]

(3) Wángmǔ quānchéng xiǎo nǚzǐ, lǎojūn húnshì āhái'ér. 王母全成小女子, 老君渾是阿孩兒. (Queen Mother of the West transformed herself into a little girl, while the Supreme Venerable Lord was transformed into a little boy.) [From *Fóshuō Guān Mílè Púsà Shàngshēng Dōulùtiān Jīng Jiǎng Jīngwén* 佛說觀彌勒菩薩上生兜率天經講經文 (Lectures of Buddhist Sutra on Watching Maitreya Went to Tusita Heaven) in *Dūnhuáng Biànwén Jí* 敦煌變文集 (Collections of Narrative Literatures in Dunhuang)]

(4) Shùnzi ...shàngbào āyēniáng: "Jǐngzhōng shuǐmǎn qiánjìn, qiǎnwǒ chū zhē, yǔ fàn pán shízhě, búshì āniáng néngdé?" 舜子...上報阿耶孃: "井中水滿錢盡, 遣我出着, 與飯盤食者, 不是阿孃能德?" (Shunzi...told his parents that "The well is filled with water and all the money has been dug out. Shouldn't it be the power of a mother who helps me out of the well and offers me a plate of dish?") [From *Shùnzi Biàn* 舜子變 (The Tales of Shunzi)].

(5) Shǐhuán, xiānshēng yuē: "Bàorǔ āběnláng, bùjiù jīguī, wùyōu yě." 使還, 先生曰: "報汝阿本郎, 不久即歸, 勿憂也." (When the messenger was about to leave, Mr. Tian said, "Tell your master that they will be found soon and it is unnecessary to feel worried.") [From volume IV of *YīnHuà Lù* 因話錄 (Note-Style Stories) by Zhào Lín 趙璘 (Zhao Lin) of the Tany Dynasty]

## 5 Conclusions

The paper is to examine the noun evolution by exemplifying *ā* 阿 in Middle Chinese. In the above-mentioned example (1), *āfùzǐ* 阿父子 refers to a pedantic person. In the above-mentioned example (2), *āgūpó* 阿姑婆 is a paternal aunt, which was how Yang Tingyu, the county magistrate of Jiāxīng 嘉興 (Jiaxing), addressed Wu Zetian. Example (3) mentioned above, *āhái'ér* 阿孩兒 stands for a little

boy. While in the example (4) mentioned above, *āyēniáng* 阿耶孃 is equal to *yēniáng* 耶孃 (father and mother). In the above-mentioned example (5), *āběnláng* 阿本郎 refers to a maser, and a male master used to be called *láng* 郎 in Middle Ancient China. It can be seen that the noun prefix of *ā* (Ah) underwent an evolutonal process, widely used during the Six Dynasties and the Tang Dynasty, and was gradually abandoned in northern dialects after the Song and the Yuan Dynasties. However, it has always been maintained in southern dialects such as Wu and Yue dialects in China. Expressions such as *lánpí āwǔ* 藍皮阿五 (blue-skinned Ah-Wu) and *hóng yǎnjīng āyì* 紅眼睛阿義 (red-eyed Ah-Yi) in the stories written by Lǚ Xùn 魯迅 (Lu Xun) vividly depict the features of modern Wu dialect.

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