

Re: Fun with the Origin of Chinese spoken languages

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On Mon, 25 Oct 2004 17:39:32 -0700, Jacques Guy
<jguy@alphalink.com.au> wrote:

>He's just learnt the meaning of *wang2ba dan4*. "Terrapin" is
>a North American species of turtles (*wang2ba*)--the word is
>believed to have been borrowed from Algonquian (a native
>language spoken in Virginia and thereabouts).

Reminds me of The ECONOMIST article on the early efforts that led to the adoption of the Beijing dialect as the common national language of China. I have that article filed somewhere.

This was just after the 1949 Revolution and there was a national congress on a national language. The Shanghai clique of course wanted their dialect as the national language. Somewhere during the conference break the senior Shanghai delegate used the word "wang something" in reference to a rickshaw he wanted to hire. However, to the Peking delegate who overheard him, it sounded like Turtle, a word that has the power of calling one a whore. The Peking delegate was enraged and chased the Shanghai guy out of the hall. The Shanghai guy never returned to the conference and the Beijing dialect won by default.

Thus when you (SJ mainly) non Chinese guys talk with such authority about Chinese as it was spoken more than 2000 years ago you have totally no credibility. Even modern Chinese of different dialects can badly misunderstand one another.