3. Syllable Structure

The canonical shape of the Taishun syllable can be described as follows:

$$\text{TONE}$$

$$\$ \quad (C) \quad (V) \quad V \quad (V) \quad \left(\left\{ \begin{array}{c} \text{?} \\ \text{ng} \end{array} \right\} \right) \quad \$$$

The shortest syllable consists of a vowel only. Tripthongs can occur only in open syllables. In closed syllables, only single vowels and dipthongs occur. Thus, the longest syllables can have the following shapes: CVV?, CVVNG, CVVV.

There are also two syllabic nasals in the language: $ m $ and $ ng $.

4. Tone System

4.1. Tones of Isolation Syllables

The phonetic values of isolation syllables are given below in terms of Middle Chinese (ca. 600 A.D.) tone categories.[5] The underlined tones are extremely short. All Tone IV syllables end in glottal stop.

	I PING (平)	II SHANG (上)	III QU (去)	IV RU (入)
A YIN (陰)	35	55	21	5 (4)
B YANG (陽)	33	31	31	5

Below, the Taishun (TS) isolation tones are compared with the four dialects described in Norman (1977–1978) and noted in Section 1 above.

		TS	FD	ZY	FA	NT
1.	IA	35	55	43	43	33
2.	IB	33	21	11	11	11
3.	IIA	55	52	41	41	41
4.	IIB	31		lacking		
5.	IIIA	21	24	35	35	35
6.	IIIB	31	12	13	13	41
7.	IVA	5-(4)	5	54	54	33
8.	IVB	5	24	21	21	5

Taishun syllables occurring in isolation Tone IIIA (phonetically low falling and rather short) are characterized by considerable glottic tension in the final. This glottic tension approaches, but does not quite reach, a final glottal stop. That a glottal stop is not present is evident in that the

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[5]I make use of Middle Chinese tone categories as a reference point for Taishun tone categories and in arranging some modern Taishun segmental reflexes in Appendix I. There is no doubt that Middle Chinese is an inadequate historical reference point for modern Min. However, until a more complete reconstruction of Proto-Northeastern Min and Proto-Min emerges, I have sometimes had to rely on Middle Chinese distinctions with the knowledge that Min specialists can reinterpret the data presented here in terms of their ongoing research on earlier stages of Min.

informant can prolong the final just a bit. In this exaggerated pronuncia-
tion a glottal stop does not materialize but rather the informant reaches
the bottom of tone scale and simply runs out of tonal space.

Syllables occurring in this tone as the first syllable in two syllable
compounds lose the glottic constriction but the constriction remains in
such compounds when the Tone IIIA syllable is in second position.

Norman (1978) has noted that reflexes of Tone IIB have largely merged
with Tone IIIB in Fuding, Zheyang, and Fuan. This merger also holds for
Ningde but the distinction, according to Norman, is preserved in tone
sandhi. This merger also holds for Taishun and no distinction is preserved
in tone sandhi.

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[6]A lower pitched short tone, 4, does occur in some cases in the second syllable of two
syllable compounds as revealed in the tone sandhi chart in Section 8 below. However, this
tone value, in these contexts, is not restricted to the finals noted just above in the text.

5. The Initial System

The initial system is outlined below. The symbols given in brackets reflect a rather narrow phonetic transcription and the unbracketed symbols, which are used in the transcription throughout this study, present a quasi-phonemic analysis.

	Labials	Alveolars	Alveolar sibilants	Prepalatal sibilants	Velars	Glottals
Unasp. stops	p	t	ts [ts]	ts [tɕ]	k	
Asp. stops	p'	t'	ts' [ts']	ts' [tc']	k'	
Sonorants	m	n/l			ng [ŋ]	
Fricatives	h [ɸ]		s [θ]	h [ɕ]		h [h]

The following observations are necessary to give a fuller explanation of the initial system.

(1) In a phonemic analysis, [ɸ], [ɕ] and h [h] could be considered allophones of one phoneme since they do not contrast. The distribution is as follows:

> [ɸ] occurs before: -u, -ua, -uai, -ui, ue, -ung, -uang, -uong
> [h] occurs before: -i, -e, -a, -o, -ie, -eu, -ai, -au, -uo, -ang, -eng, -ing, -ong and -yng
> [ɕ] occurs before: -y, -yeng, -iong

As a general rule, it would be possible to state that h is realized as [ɸ] before u except for one example in the data: [huo 33] 'peace'. The initial [ɕ] cannot be considered an allophone of s because of contrasts such as:

> 書 'book' sy 35   versus   虚 'empty' ɕy 35

In considering the initials [ɸ], [ɕ], and [h] it would seem that no simple rule using distinctive features or vowel qualities can be formulated. Yet, the distribution is clearly non-contrastive with regard to finals. In the transcription all three sounds are represented with the symbol h as the chart above indicates.

(2) The initials [tɕ] and [tɕ'] are in complimentary distribution with [ts] and [ts'] respectively. The former occur only before i and y

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uang [uAŋ], uong [uɔŋ]
aʔ [Aʔ], oʔ [ɔʔ], eʔ [ɛʔ], əʔ, yʔ, uʔ, iʔ
iaʔ [iAʔ], ioʔ [iɔʔ], ieʔ [iɛʔ]
uaʔ [uAʔ], uoʔ [uɔʔ], yeʔ [yəʔ]

The following observations serve to provide a more detailed description of some of these finals:

(1) With e [ei̯], ue [uei̯], eng [ei̯ŋ], and ieng [iei̯ŋ], the i̠ off-glide is very slight, but nevertheless perceptible.
(2) The off-glide u [ʊ̆] in i̠u, e̠u and i̠au is so low that it approaches but does not quite reach an [o].
(3) The front rounded y̠ of y̠e [yə], and yeʔ [yəʔ] is most noticeable after the prepalatal sibilant initials; in other cases it approximates a front rounded vowel with an i̠ quality.
(4) The symbol combination o̠e [ö>] in oeng is meant to describe an almost central rounded vowel, a sound approximating a rounded schwa.

THE TAISHUN PHONOLOGICAL SYSTEM:
A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF A
NORTHEASTERN MIN DIALECT

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