A new approach on the modal KE 可, aspect and modality in Archaic Chinese, and the development of deontic readings

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In the presentation, I will discuss the diachronic development of one of the basic modal verbs of Late Archaic Chinese (5th – 2nd c. BCE), the possibility modal *kě* 可 'possible, can'. Constructions with *kě* are the only syntactic means to express the deontic meaning of obligation in Late Archaic Chinese; additionally its complement is subject to particular aspectual constraints. It appears in two variants in Late Archaic Chinese: in the basic variant *kě*, which is also probably historically older, and in the variant *kě yǐ* 可以, involving the applicative head *yǐ* 以. In the first part of the study, I will investigate some of the hypotheses proposed with regard to a verbal morphology in Archaic Chinese (Old Chinese) in the context of modal predication. For this purpose, I will concentrate on the analysis of the morpho-syntactic constraints of the complement of modal *kě* in Early and Late Archaic Chinese; the variant 可以 *kěyǐ* will only be included in the second part of the investigation. The strongest argument in favor of focusing on KE and excluding KE YI from the investigation of the morpho-syntactic features of the complement verb is that the former involves a change in the argument structure, but also in the aspectual structure of the complement verb, whereas the latter does not due to the applicative head YI. The changes in argument and aspectual structure are two features that are supposed to be reflected in the morphology of the verb in Archaic Chinese. The complement of the basic variant KE is passivized or unaccusative as a rule (Pulleyblank 1995: 23, Liu 2000, Meisterernst 2008a), referring to a resultant state projected in the future. The internal argument of the complement verb, the patient or theme, raises out of *v*P and functions as the subject of the modal predicate.

(1) 若民煩，可教訓。　　　(*Guóyǔ* 17, *Chǔyǔ shàng*) (LAC)
　　Ruò mín　fán,　　　kě　jiào shùn
　　If　people exert.oneself, KEG teach instruct
　　If the people exert themselves, they can be taught and instructed.

In the second part of the presentation, I will briefly discuss the employment of KE, KE YI, and other modal verbs of possibility as deontic markers. Deontic readings of modal verbs of possibility have to be triggered by negation or by the reverse polarity of rhetorical questions in LAC as in example (2). I will propose that this trigger allows them to move out of the lexical layer and to function as true deontic markers in the CP/TP layer. Deontic auxiliaries independent of particular syntactic triggers only develop after the Late Archaic period.

(2) 臣違君命者，亦不可不殺也。」　　　(*Guóyǔ, Luyǔ shàng*) (LAC)
　　Chén　wéi　jūn mìng zhě, yì　bù　kě bù　shā yě
　　subject oppose ruler order REL, also NEG KE NEG kill SFP
　　A subject who opposes the order of his ruler must also be killed.