Does the Williams Cycle apply to Mandarin Chinese?

As long observed, movement's landing site and locality domain correlate: raising-to-subjects (A-mvt.) may cross non-finite-TPs but not finite-CPs, whereas *wh*-movement (Ā-mvt.) may cross finite-CPs. Traditionally, this is explained by the Ban-on-Improper-Movement (Chomsky 1973). Alternatively, this could be hard-wired in the grammar as **Williams Cycle** (**WC**; Williams 1974, 2003, 2013): "movement to SpecXP cannot proceed from SpecYP or across YP, where Y is higher than X in the functional sequence," a view gaining renewed interest (Poole 2022, Bondarenko 2024, Meadows 2024). Recently, Yan & Meadows (2025) (**YM25**) propose that WC applies to Mandarin, which conflicts with Mandarin's allowance of hyperraising-to-subjects (HR) across finite-CPs, a counter-example to WC (Chen 2023, 2025a; Lee & Yip 2024). To resolve this language-internal inconsistency, we reexamine YM25's evidence and argue **against** WC in Mandarin.

YM25 examine ❶ *object-topicalization* and ❷ *VP-Copying* (VC), which may target **TP-external** or **TP-internal** positions. Assuming the functional sequence $C \succ T \succ F \succ Voice \succ V$, where CPs, TPs, and FPs are selected by 'know'-type, 'force'-type, and 'try'-type-verbs, respectively (Huang 2022), YM25 argue for a correlation between landing site and locality domain (1–2): TP-external object-topicalization and VC land in CP and may cross CP; TP-internal object-topicalization lands in TP and may cross TP (but not CP); TP-internal VC lands in FP and may cross FP (but not CP/TP).

Our counter-arguments are two-fold. ❶ TP-external and TP-internal object-topicalization differ not only in their locality domains (Qu 1994; Shyu 1995) (3) but also A/Ā-properties, e.g., external- but not internal-topicalization reconstruct for Principle A (4), which has led Chen (2023, 2025b) to propose that external-topicalization is driven by **pure-Ā-features** [TOP], whereas internal-topicalization is derived by **composite-A/Ā-features** [ϕ+TOP] (*cf.* van Urk 2015; Lohninger et al. 2022). Crucially, the apparent WC effects follow if Mandarin C-heads only host pure-[Ā]-probes (while Voice-heads host composite-[A/Ā]-probes): internal-topicalization via C leads to an improper *A/Ā-after-Ā* chain (5).

❷ Contra YM25's (partial) observation that, unlike external-VC, internal-VC can only cross "FPs" selected by 'try'-type-verbs (6), we argue that (internal-)VC is not constrained by locality but by subject-identity between the moved and in-situ VPs. 'Try'-type-verbs vs. 'force'-type-verbs are effectively subject-control-verbs vs. object-control-verbs, which differ in the **embedded-subject/PRO's (non-)identity with the matrix-subject**. When this difference is neutralized, e.g., via reflexive objects with 'force'-type-verbs, internal-VC becomes possible (7a). Internal-VC may even cross CPs selected by 'know'-type-verbs when embedded- and matrix-subjects are co-referential (7b). We propose that VC moves not a bare VP, but a ***v*P containing a subject-trace**, which must reconstruct for the subject-trace to be bound by the same subject as that in the in-situ VP (*cf.* Huang 1993 on VP-fronting). The contrast in (6–7) follows from different reconstruction possibilities: External-VC as pure-Ā-movement can reconstruct to establish subject-identity (8a). By contrast, internal-VC as composite-A/Ā movement resists reconstruction (4), thus subject-identity must be achieved via co-reference (8b). Otherwise, the subject-trace in the moved *v*P would be problematically bound by a distinct subject (6a–b).

To conclude, the apparent WC effects in Mandarin argued by YM25 are either reducible to distribution of composite-probes, or do not stand due to partial generalization. This is a welcome result given that Mandarin allows HR. The upshot is that WC must be *parameterized* and *cannot* be universal.

(1) Object topicalization

a. [$_{CP}$ **{Obj}** [$_{TP}$ **{*Obj}** ...V_{know} [**$_{CP}$** [$_{TP}$ [$_{FP}$ [$_{VoiceP}$ ...*t*...

b. [$_{CP}$ **{Obj}** [$_{TP}$ **{Obj}** ...V_{force} [**$_{TP}$** [$_{FP}$ [$_{VoiceP}$ ...*t*...

c. [$_{CP}$ **{Obj}** [$_{TP}$ **{Obj}** ...V_{try} [**$_{FP}$** [$_{VoiceP}$ ...*t*...

(2) VP Copying *(generalization to be challenged)*

a. [$_{CP}$ **{VP}** [$_{TP}$ [$_{FP}$ **{*VP}** ...V_{know} [**$_{CP}$** [$_{TP}$ [$_{FP}$ [$_{VoiceP}$ ...<VP>...

b. [$_{CP}$ **{VP}** [$_{TP}$ [$_{FP}$ **{*VP}** ...V_{force} [**$_{TP}$** [$_{FP}$ [$_{VoiceP}$ ...<VP>...

c. [$_{CP}$ **{VP}** [$_{TP}$ [$_{FP}$ **{VP}** ...V_{try} [**$_{FP}$** [$_{VoiceP}$ ...<VP>...

(3) a. **{Zhe-shi$_i$}** meiyou-ren **{*zhe-shi$_i$}** xiangxin/zhidao [$_{CP}$ Lisi hui zuo _$_i$].
this-matter no-person this-matter believe/know Lisi will do
'{This matter}, no one {*this matter}, believes/knows that Lisi will do (it).'

b. **{Zhe-shi$_i$}** meiyou-ren$_j$ **{zhe-shi$_i$}** dasuan/changshi [PRO$_j$ bipo/mingling Lisi$_k$ [PRO$_k$ zuo _$_i$]].
this-matter no-person this-matter plan/try force/order Lisi do
'{This matter}, no one {this matter}, planned/tried to force/order Lisi to do (it).'

(4) **{Ta-ziji$_{i/j}$-de pengyou}** Zhangsan$_i$ **{ta-ziji$_{i/*j}$-de pengyou}** dasuan [PRO$_i$ bipo Lisi$_j$ [PRO$_j$ ma _]].
3SG-self's friend Zhangsan 3SG-self's friend plan force Lisi scold
'{His$_{i/j}$ friend}, Zhangsan$_i$, {his$_{i/*j}$} friend, planned to force Lisi$_j$ to scold (him).'

(5) *[$_{TP}$ [$_{TopP}$ **Obj$_j$**$_{[\phi],[TOP]}$ Top$_{[\phi+TOP]}$ ... [$_{VoiceP}$ ... **t$_j$** ... [$_{CP}$ **t$_j$** C$_{[TOP]}$ ... **t$_j$** (...)]]]]
(✘ A/Ā; ✘ A/Ā; Ā)

(6) a. **{Zuo zhe-shi}** Zhangsan **{*zuo zhe-shi}** xiangxin/zhidao [$_{CP}$ Lisi hui zuo-de hen kuai].
do this-matter Zhangsan do this-matter believe/know Lisi will do-DE DEG fast
'{Doing this matter}, Zhangsan {*doing this matter} believes/knows that Lisi will do fast.'

b. **{Zuo zhe-shi}** Zhangsan **{*zuo zhe-shi}** bipo/mingling Lisi$_j$ [PRO$_j$ zuo-de hen kuai].
do this-matter Zhangsan do this-matter force/order Lisi do-DE DEG fast
'{Doing this matter}, Zhangsan {*doing this matter} forced/order Lisi to do fast.'

c. **{Zuo zhe-shi}** Zhangsan$_j$ **{zuo zhe-shi}** dasuan/changshi [PRO$_j$ zuo-de hen kuai].
do this-matter Zhangsan do this-matter plan/try do-DE DEG fast
'{Doing this matter}, Zhangsan {doing this matter} planned/tried to do fast.'

(7) a. **{Zuo zhe-shi}** Zhangsan$_k$ **{zuo zhe-shi}** bipo/mingling **ta-ziji$_k$** [PRO$_k$ zuo-de hen kuai].
do this-matter Zhangsan do this-matter force/order 3SG-self do-DE DEG fast
'{Doing this matter}, Zhangsan {doing this matter} forced/order himself to do fast.'

b. **{Zuo zhe-shi}** Zhangsan$_k$ **{zuo zhe-shi}** xiangxin/zhidao [$_{CP}$ **ta$_{k/*i}$** hui zuo-de hen kuai].
do this-matter Zhangsan do this-matter believe/know 3SG will do-DE DEG fast
'{Doing this matter}, Zhangsan {doing this matter} believes/knows that he will do fast.'

(8) a. [$_{TopP}$ [**$_{vP}$** *t*$_{k/*i}$ **V$_j$-O**]$_{[\phi+TOP]}$ Top$_{[TOP]}$ [$_{TP}$ Subj$_i$ [$_{VoiceP}$ 'force' REFL$_k$ [$_{TP}$ PRO$_k$ ... **[$_{vP}$ t$_k$ V$_j$** *de*P]...
reconstruction

b. [$_{TP}$ Subj$_{k/*i}$ [$_{TopP}$ [**$_{vP}$** *t*$_{k/*i}$ **V$_j$-O**]$_{[\phi+TOP]}$ Top$_{[\phi+TOP]}$ [$_{VoiceP}$ 'force' REFL$_{k/*i}$ [$_{TP}$ PRO$_k$ ...[**$_{vP}$ t$_k$ V$_j$** *de*P]...

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