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REVIEWS

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wenhu@amu.edu.pl**Mieczysław Jerzy Künstler. 2019. *The Sinitic Languages: A Contribution to Sinological Linguistics*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 322**

Two years ago, when I first entered Adam Mickiewicz University library, I saw a book named *Języki chińskie*. I was so intrigued by this book and eager to know what a Polish Sinologist wrote about Chinese languages. Unfortunately, my Polish is not good enough to read it and there was no translated version at the time. Therefore, when later the English translation of *The Sinitic Languages: A Contribution to Sinological Linguistics* was published, I was so glad to read it. Generally speaking, this book is very interesting, providing a diachronic and synchronic view of the Chinese languages, both for beginners with very little knowledge of Chinese languages and for Sinologists interested in Chinese linguistics.

The book is arranged in such a way that in the first two chapters the reader can get basic information about Chinese languages and writing. This is especially helpful for those who have less advanced knowledge of Chinese languages. In the first chapter the author stresses the fact that even though Chinese languages are characterized as monosyllabic, tonal and positional, monosyllabicity and tonality were not characteristic of archaic Chinese morphology. The writer argues that monosyllabicity is the result of language evolution, whereas tonality is a result of the phonetic developments, and it is regional and changeable. These are the fundamental tenets of the book; in later chapters, the writer will discuss the phonetic and morphologic development in various periods of history. Analysing the issue of positionality, the author also mentions the genetic links between Chinese and other languages of the Far East and South-East Asia. It is claimed that many factors, including the substratum and the superstratum, influence the changes of word order, therefore the latter are not considered suitable to analyse the kinship of languages, though genetic links are important for phonetic reconstruction. To prove this hypothesis, the writer discusses Bernhard Karlgren and Weldon South Coblin's research into reconstruction, and the links between Chinese and Tibetan, as well as between

Chinese and Thai, are given as examples to support the hypothesis. The whole chapter is very meticulously written, and the writer's way of combining genetic and areal interpretation in phonetic reconstruction (which is also the research methodology in the whole book) is creative and convincing.

Chapter Two is entitled *Writing and Languages*, but it is not focused on the Chinese written script. The writer explains to the readers the characteristics of Chinese scripts, and the genetic links between Chinese and other languages. The words created in the Zhou Dynasty contained two parts: one indicating the semantic field, and the other – the pronunciation, which is typical of Chinese characters. However, the part indicating pronunciation was not developed in a systematic way, so the old pronunciation is unknown now and the Chinese characters did not evolve towards phonetic notation. Even though in later periods Chinese linguistics created two methods, *duruo* and *fanqie*, to mark pronunciation, in modern times *zhuyin zimu* and *pinyin* were introduced to that purpose, and since 1950s simplified characters were used, all of these factors do not make Chinese languages phonetic. Besides words created in ancient Chinese, there are also loanwords and phonetic borrowings from other languages: Japanese words written in Chinese characters will be read by Chinese people according to the Chinese pronunciation, and the words will be borrowed into Chinese; foreign words without Chinese written script are written in Chinese according to their phonetic value. Loanwords and phonetic borrowings enrich the Chinese lexicon, while at the same time Chinese also influences other languages and Chinese language varieties. The whole analysis is very fruitful; the only place I consider as deficiency is that all the Chinese characters are shown in *pinyin*, which is why readers cannot see the actual Chinese characters. Of course they can refer to the Appendix to check, but I think it is less convenient. To be honest, even though I am a native Chinese and have been learning *pinyin* from the age of six, sometimes I still have to think for a while to figure out which word the writer is discussing, because in Chinese several words can be shown in the same *pinyin*, but they have a totally different meaning.

Chapters three to ten discuss Chinese languages from Shang-Yin (1600 BC) to the present. Among them, chapters three and four present Pre-Archaic Chinese (or, as the author suggests, Proto-Chinese) and Archaic Chinese, from which period the inscriptions are found on oracle and bronze. The syntax of these two periods is carefully analysed, which I consider a definite strength of the volume. These two chapters provide the readers with historical evidence and basic methods to measure the word order changes. The sentence structure in Pre-Archaic Chinese is Subject-Object-Predicate, changing into Subject-Predicate-Object in Archaic Chinese, only to gradually return later to Subject-Object-Predicate. The author argues that even today the Chinese sentence structure is still, slowly but constantly, changing. In the following six chapters, syntax is not the main topic of analyses any more, and morphology, phonology and phonetics are discussed in detail. With the phonetic reconstruction of Archaic Chinese in Chapter Four, the readers can trace the phonetic changes diachronically. It is not an easy task to reconstruct pronunciation in different historical periods on the basis of limited documentation, so what the writer accomplishes is truly praiseworthy. In his reconstruction of pronunciation, the author makes use of the influence of dialects – this research method can also provide

helpful hints for the phonetic research of dialects. For researchers with interest in Chinese syntax and phonology, these eight chapters will be a useful source for their study; for beginners, these eight chapters contain many generic terms and might be a little hard to read and understand, but they definitely equip the novice with some knowledge about the Chinese languages.

Chapters eleven to thirteen are about Chinese dialects. The readers can learn about dialect groups and their genetic relationships from Chapter Eleven. This chapter is the fundamental part of the three, and it offers suggestions for further reading. Chapter Twelve, entitled *Mandarin Languages*, introduces the subgroups of Mandarin languages and the phonetic differences between them. For people who have little knowledge of Mandarin languages, this chapter is a valuable source of information. Chapter Thirteen presents the Wu, Xiang, Gan, Hakka, Yue and Min languages. However, only a few pages have been devoted to each dialect, so the writer mainly focuses on the phonetic aspect. It is a pity that the syntax and morphology of these dialects have not been equally carefully analysed. Chapter Thirteen has connection with previous chapters: from chapter three to ten the writer widely exemplifies his narration with words and sentences from Chinese dialects to support his phonetic research, but the phonetic knowledge of dialects is not provided there. For readers who are not familiar with Chinese dialects, what is discussed in Chapter Thirteen can aid them in understanding the previous analysis.

The book provides a comprehensive study of Chinese languages, and the readers can not only broaden their knowledge of them but also of the Chinese culture and history. It is a good choice for anyone who is interested in Chinese languages and who wants to do some research into them. After reading this book, I really want to express my respect for the very knowledgeable author, who visibly used to have a great passion about Chinese languages and was able to channel it into research; his knowledge for Chinese languages at the time of various dynasties is impressive. Most Chinese people would not know as much as him; and he is very rigorous in his method, all the points made in the book are carefully expounded and the explanations are very detailed. I really hope that more of the late Prof. Künstler's scholarly output can be made accessible to the Anglo-phone reader by translation into English.