The preface by the series editor

This impressive volume by Shanshan Lü 吕珊珊 represents the first major descriptive grammar of the endangered language, Caijia. Prior to this publication, only two or three sketches of Caijia phonology and lexicon were at hand, these being published in Chinese language journals. They already pointed to the fact that Caijia is an intriguingly conservative and archaic language. As Volume 8 in the series on *Sinitic languages of China*, the grammar illuminates the innumerable special features of this little-known language, spoken by a few small communities high up in the terraced mountains of Guizhou province in southwestern China.

Shanshan Lü became a member of my ERC SINOTYPE team from 2010-2013, and played an active role in this research project focusing on the typology of the languages of China and on diachronic change. In 2011, after successfully obtaining her Master’s degree in Sciences du langage at the Université-Lumière in Lyon, she qualified to take up her doctoral studies at one of the grands établissements of France, the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS Graduate School in Social Sciences) in Paris, gaining her PhD diploma in 2020.

The comprehensive description which she has undertaken has great significance not only for the typology of Sino-Tibetan and Southeast Asian languages in general, but also for determining the precise linguistic affiliation of Caijia within this family. Caijia is claimed to represent one of the first splits from the ancestral tree of Sino-Tibetan. The very topical issue of language contact also comes into play in her research, given that Caijia has been in close contact with the neighbouring Tibeto-Burman language, Yi.

For the research on Caijia, Dr. Lü carried out five extensive fieldwork trips to Guizhou province in China between 2012 and 2018, each of two months’ duration, mainly working in the county seat of Hezhang 赫章 with funding from both the EHESS and the Centre de recherches linguistiques sur l’Asie orientale (CRLAO, Research Centre for East Asian Languages) in Paris. Her data include not only elicited material but also traditional stories, ballads and narratives about different customs and festivals, important for the preservation of Caijia culture. These include healing rituals and descriptions of traditional immunization methods for which the expertise of the Caijia became renowned in Guizhou and which serve as an important aspect of the intangible heritage of China’s rich and diverse culture.

In 2020, Dr Lü took up the position of research professor in the newly established Institute of Corpus Studies and Applications at the Shanghai International Studies University 上海外国语大学 where she continues to work on both Caijia and Naxi, a Tibeto-Burman language.

*Sinitic languages of China: Typological descriptions* is a book series specializing in the description of the grammar of Sinitic languages, ‘Sinitic’ being
the technical term for the Chinese branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family. As such, it includes the national language of China, Pūtōnghuà 普通话, known as Standard Chinese or Mandarin in English, other well-known languages outside China such as Cantonese 广东话, Hokkien or Southern Min 闽南话, Shanghainese 上海话 and Hakka 客家话, as well as the lesser-known languages, including Hunanese Xiang 湘语, the Jin languages 晋语 of Shanxi, and Pinghua 平话 of Guangxi. Even Mandarin comes in many non-standardized forms including the Sichuanese variety of Southwestern Mandarin 西南官话 spoken in Chengdu, the Southern Jiang-Huai Mandarin 江淮官话 of Nanjing, the Central Plains Mandarin 中原官话 of Xi’an, not to overlook the typologically unusual varieties spoken in Gansu and Qinghai in northwestern China, such as Tangwang 唐汪话, Gangou 甘沟话 and Linxia 临夏话 which are case-marking languages with verb-final word order.

The primary goal of this series is to promote scientific knowledge of Sinitic languages and their typological characteristics through the publication of high calibre linguistic research, based on empirical fieldwork, detailed analysis of the data and solid, theoretical interpretations. The grammatical descriptions, written in a functionalist and descriptive framework, are illustrated by linguistic examples presented in a ‘value-added’ four-line format that includes romanization, glossing, the idiomatic English and Chinese translations, the latter useful for our sinophone readers.

The specific objective is to reveal the great structural diversity found in Sinitic languages and to dispel many recurrent clichés about Chinese. The authors involved in this series are all highly trained fieldwork linguists with a background in both typology and Chinese linguistics.

The series thus aims to reach an international readership for the first time, given that most literature available on Sinitic languages other than Mandarin, up until now, has been mainly written in the medium of Standard Written Chinese.

The large-scale research project, The hybrid syntactic typology of Sinitic languages (Sinotype), provided the initial impetus behind this series. Sinotype benefitted from funding in the form of an Advanced Grant (No. 230388) awarded by the European Research Council (ERC) for the period 2009 – 2013. The host institute, the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS), graciously provided managerial support and accounting resources, not to mention spacious premises for the Sinotype research centre in inner-city Paris, at 2, rue Küss in the 13th arrondissement, for the entire period of the project. We take this opportunity to express our many thanks to both the ERC and the EHESS.
The other volumes planned for this series are:

Volume 2:  *A grammar of Nanning Pinghua*, by Hilário de Sousa

Volume 4:  *A grammar of Central Plains Mandarin*, by Yujie Chen


Volume 7:  *A grammar of Waxiang, a Sinitic language of northwestern Hunan*, by Hilary Chappell

H.M. Chappell
Series Editor
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