Preface

This Outline of Classical Chinese Grammar has grown out of notes prepared over the years for teaching Classical Chinese to undergraduates at the University of Cambridge and the University of British Columbia, as well as at summer schools in Bloomington, Indiana, Columbus, Ohio, and Minneapolis, Minnesota, in the 1960s. When I began the study of this language at the end of the Second World War, there were very few textbooks or other learning aids available. There was, in fact, still a widespread belief that Chinese, especially the classical language, had no grammar and that the only way to learn it was by a kind of osmosis. By reading texts with a teacher, preferably a native speaker of a modern spoken form of the language, one was supposed to absorb a facility at guessing at the meanings of passages by piecing together the meanings of successive words as provided in a dictionary.

There had, of course, been pioneering works by western sinologists in the nineteenth century, particularly noteworthy being Georg von der Gabelentz, *Chinesische Grammatik* (1881), but these were held in little regard. Rather more heed was paid to the contributions of Bernhard Karlgren, whose work had first put the study of Middle and Old Chinese pronunciation on a scientific basis and who had also made many insightful observations on the grammar of the classical language. There were others, like my old teacher, Walter Simon, at the School of Oriental and African Studies, or George Kennedy at Yale and Harold Shadick at Cornell, who were trying to apply modern linguistic theory to Classical Chinese. Nevertheless, it would be true to say that there was nothing approaching a coherent analysis of the syntax of the language available. I felt this lack even more acutely when, all too soon, I found myself in the position of having to teach the language myself. Along with other contemporaries, like William Dobson and Angus Graham, I found myself pushed into doing research in this area. After publishing two or three papers on grammatical questions, I concentrated my publication more on historical phonology but I continued to think about questions of syntax and to prepare teaching notes for my students. The Outline that I offer here is the end result of this process.

The world has, of course, changed greatly in the half century since I began to study Chinese, not least in linguistic theory, which has been revolutionized by the theories of Noam Chomsky and his followers. While this has inspired much recent work on Modern Chinese grammar, it has, unfortunately, had comparatively little impact so far on the study of the classical language. We are still at the stage of struggling to work out the
basic patterns of Classical Chinese syntax. Perhaps some students will be inspired by the unsolved problems that they find in this book to apply new theoretical tools and bring the grammar of Classical Chinese into the linguistic mainstream instead of being in a rather esoteric backwater. Meanwhile, I am encouraged by the reactions of those who have seen and used earlier versions both at the University of British Columbia and elsewhere to think that students and teachers will continue to find it a useful introduction to the language.

It is impossible in a short work of this kind to argue fully for all the positions taken, let alone discuss the views of other scholars who agree or differ from them. I have endeavoured in the endnotes to acknowledge major contributions of my predecessors and contemporaries but I am only too aware that the references I have made are far from complete in this regard. I can only hope that my colleagues will forgive me, bearing in mind my primarily pedagogical aim.

In preparing this work for publication I have been greatly assisted by a generous grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. The grant was provided for a Concise Dictionary of Classical Chinese, of which the Outline of Classical Chinese Grammar was to serve as an introduction. In the end it has seemed better to publish the Outline separately. The Dictionary exists in the form of a preliminary draft on computer but will still require much work before it is in publishable form.

Among those whom the grant has enabled me to employ, Dr. Gary Arbuckle must be specially mentioned for his help in preparing the computerized text of this book. I should also like to thank Mr. Jingtao Sun and the copy editor of the UBC Press who have proofread the text with great care and caught many errors. Errors that remain are of course my own responsibility.

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