

Künstler, Mieczysław Jerzy (2019), *The Sinitic Languages. A Contribution to Sinological Linguistics*, Collectanea Serica, New Series, vol. 1, Sankt Augustin: Institut Monumenta Serica, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, Bibliography, Index, Transl. Mieczysław Jerzy Künstler and Alfred Franciszek Majewicz, 330 pages, 137,25 €, ISBN 978-0-367-18620-3 (HB), ISBN 978-0-429-19723-9 (eBook)

For a comprehensive treatment of the diachronic and synchronic aspects of Sinitic languages, this is a most unusual work. It is unconventional in many respects, not least being the author's determination to exclude Chinese characters in his book. The only Sinographs that do appear are in the "Index with Glossary" (pp. 291–322), compiled by Barbara Hoster, Dirk Kuhlmann, and Elke Spielmanns-Rome. Künstler's decision not to include Chinese characters in his text was intended to emphasize his conception of Sinitic languages as fundamentally oral in nature. His reasons for omitting Chinese characters in his book are succinct and powerful:

I decided not to use Chinese characters in this book – not out of some strange editorial economy, but in order to show that language and writing are really two different things, that writing is only a code used to record a language, but is – so to say – external to the language itself (p. 11).

Künstler has many other pertinent things to say in defense of his omission of Chinese characters. They have to do with such matters as misleading people into believing that the only differences among the many Sinitic languages and topolects (*fāngyán* 方言, commonly mistranslated at "dialects"), a belief "so deep-seated among Chinese that no dictionary gives the pronunciation of the quoted dialectal words", a complaint that Künstler repeats several times in the book.

In this regard, Künstler states a fundamental difference between Chinese and Western linguistics: "For Chinese linguists a word is a unity of sense and its written form, whereas for Western linguists [...] a word is a unity of sense and its phonetic shape", a formulation that he attributes to Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) and Antoine Meillet (1866–1936). It follows that, "for a Chinese speaker the written form is inseparable from the sense, while for us the phonetic shape is inseparable from the sense."

Another deficiency of the characters for linguistic notation that Künstler points out is that there are many morphemes in the Sinitic languages and topolects apart from Modern Standard Mandarin (MSM), which he calls Modern Standard Chinese (MSC), for which there are no *hanzi*.

These are profound and brilliant statements. Would that all students and scholars of Chinese languages (and here I include non-Sinitic languages as well as Sinitic languages) would take them to heart. In this, I applaud

Künstler, since all writing systems are secondary, while spoken language is primary.

I also respect the author's repeated references to "Modern Sinitic languages" in the plural. In other words, he does not see "Chinese" language as a multiplicity of "dialects" of a single, monolithic tongue, but rather as a number of full-fledged languages belonging to what he calls "the Sinitic linguistic family". I find this viewpoint to be highly refreshing and fundamentally correct in contrast to the usual overemphasis on written Chinese as the object of linguistic inquiry. Indeed, the very title of his book in English, *The Sinitic Languages*, constitutes a significant contribution to the conceptualization of the object of linguistic analysis, particularly in light of the fact that the original title of the book in Polish, published in the year 2000, was *Języki chińskie*. Thus the evolution of Künstler's own thinking about the taxonomy of the languages of China underwent further progress from the time when he first delivered the lectures, under the rubric "Selected Problems of Sinological Linguistics" at the Chair of Sinology in Warsaw University in the early 1990s, on which this volume was ultimately grounded.

However, as Künstler himself recognizes, there are serious divergencies between his lectures of the 1990s and the book in Polish of 2000 in which they were incorporated on the one hand, and the present English version on the other hand. The main factor that precipitated the development in Künstler's thinking about the Sinitic language family was his acquisition of the 42 volumes of the *Xiandai Hanyu fangyan da cidian* (Great Dictionary of Modern Sinitic Topolects, 2002) as well as other topolect dictionaries that came into his possession around then. After that time, Künstler immersed himself deeply in the study of the Sinitic topolects, which led him to make a number of important discoveries about the nature of the Sinitic language family in its temporal and geographical dimensions. This continued while he labored over the translation of the original Polish lectures until his death in 2007.

Another unique facet of Künstler's treatment of the Sinitic language family is his view that many characteristics of Modern Sinitic languages, especially their morphological and lexical features, cannot be explained by or derived from Old Sinitic (what he calls Archaic Chinese, often synonymous with Old Chinese), but are innovations in the modern languages. This he demonstrates with detailed examples, especially in the second half of the book (from chapter 7 on). This is one of Künstler's major contributions in breaking down the conventional understanding of monolithic "Chinese".

Künstler is not an iconoclast simply for the sake of being different. Rather, in carrying out his researches on the distinctiveness of Modern Sinitic languages, he takes into account their genetic and areal associations as well as the phenomenon of languages in contact, which shows that he is quite aware of their relatedness within a certain critical framework.

Künstler's comprehension of genetic relationships among languages is both skeptical and sensible, leading him, for example, to doubt the close kinship of Sinitic and Tibetan from the latter part of the Zhou onward, when Sinitic (i.e., Han) became a "mixed language" with roots in both Shang and Zhou languages, for neither of which we know its identity for certain.

The weakest part of Künstler's book by far is his treatment of Middle Vernacular Sinitic (MVS), despite the fact that is a crucial moment in the transition from the millennial dominance of Literary Sinitic (LS)/Classical Chinese (CC) to the rise of the written vernacular and the emergence of identifiable languages and topolects within Sinitic. Künstler calls this stage in the development of Sinitic Middle Chinese or Ancient Chinese, and he is mostly interested in the sounds of the language, not its grammar, vocabulary, or morphology, which is the focus of most researchers on MVS nowadays. For MVS, Künstler relies almost exclusively on the work of the Russian scholars Isabella Samoylovna Gurevich and Irina Tigranovna Zograf, whom he criticizes, and the German scholar, Thomas Zimmer, whom he praises. Although it is clear that Künstler's exposure to the findings of Thomas Zimmer came late in the formation of the original (2000) Polish edition of his book and so he was unable to take full advantage of Zimmer's findings, Künstler is to be commended for having recognized the critical importance of this stage in the development of Sinitic.

All the more, apart from Gurevich, Zograf, and Zimmer, it would seem that Künstler was not in a position to avail himself of the current scholarship on MVS at that time. Consequently, aside from mentioning Zimmer's book<sup>1</sup> briefly on pp. 151, 157–160, he is able to do no more than offer a cursory "Addendum" (pp. 271–275) in which he surveys the vital research of Zimmer. What he does not recognize is that the foundation of Zimmer's presentation relied heavily on the investigations of Victor H. Mair. Indeed, Zimmer's bibliography lists the five essential items by Mair for the study of MVS from among scores of publications on this subject by the same author.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Zimmer, *Baihua. Zum Problem der Verschriftung gesprochener Sprache in Chinesischen. Dargestellt anhand morphologischer Merkmale in den bianwen aus Dunhuang*. Monumenta Serica Monograph Series, 40 (Nettetal: Steyler Verlag, 1999). Reviewed by Victor H. Mair in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 120.2 (2000), 306–308.

<sup>2</sup> Victor H. Mair, "Lay Students and the Making of Written Vernacular Narrative: An Inventory of Tun-huang Manuscripts", *Chinoperl Papers*, 10 (1981), 5–96. Victor H. Mair, *Tun-huang Popular Narratives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). Victor H. Mair, *Painting and Performance: Chinese Picture Recitation and Its Indian Genesis* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988). Victor H. Mair, *T'ang Transformation Texts: A Study of the Buddhist Contribution to the Rise of Vernacular Fiction and Drama in China* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Council on East Asian Studies, 1989). Victor H. Mair, "Script and Word in Medieval Vernacular Sinitic", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 112.2 (1992), 269–278. A review article of *The Poetry of Han-shan*, by Robert G. Henricks (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990).

Not one of them is to be found in Künstler's book. Because of his lack of familiarity with these this body of scholarship, Künstler commits many errors and infelicities with regard to MVS, of which the following are several typical examples repeated at various places throughout the book:

“Jiangmo bianwen” should be “Xiángmó biànwén 降魔變文” (“Transformation Text on the Subjugation of Demons”) – p. 157

“Ba xiang bian” (“Eight Aspects of Transformation”) should be “Bā xiāng biàn 八相變” (“Transformation on Eight Aspects [of the Tathāgata, i.e., Thus-come / gone]”) – p. 292a and passim

*bianwen* 變文 (“altered text”) should be “transformation text” – p. 135

*jingjiang jingwen* should be parsed as *jīng jiǎngjīngwén* 經講經文 (“sutra lecture text on the XX sutra”) – p. 157

The most inadequate aspect of *The Sinitic Languages* (henceforth *SL*) is its philology that is the author's reading and understanding of the texts that are cited in it. In that sense, I would say that Künstler is more of a linguist than a sinologist.

Another lack of *SL* is that there is very little coverage of the enormous contributions of Indian language science (particularly in phonology) brought to China along with Buddhism.

Aside from the positive features of *SL* that I have already mentioned, we must also give Künstler credit for emphasizing the importance of substrates in the evolution of languages, for providing an excellent introduction to the technical business of historical reconstructions as exemplified by Bernhard Karlgren (1889–1978) and others, utilizing the research of Gerty Kallgren (1916–2011, a student of Karlgren) to outline the main characteristics of Song period colloquial, paying attention to such supra-segmental features as intonation and stress (overlooked by many other scholars), and so forth.

Although *SL* is a serious work of scholarship, Künstler's writing is marked by a disarming frankness that I find quite attractive. In one place, he says that Karlgren's book on the history of the Chinese writing system is better than his own of 1970, though he elsewhere disagrees with Karlgren on this or that point. Describing his experiences in China, he tells this anecdote (p. 170) which is so revealing about himself and about the state of language studies in modern China:

Shortly before my return to Poland, another prominent linguist, Professor Gao Mingkai (1912–1965), presented me with [...] a small nephrite bowl bearing an elaborate inscription. Handing it over to me, Professor Gao (with whom I always conversed in French, as he did not know the northern variety of Chinese, while I did not understand him at all because of my lacking knowledge of Min idioms) said that he was giving it to me because

he did not understand the meaning of the inscription and did not even know in what direction it should be read: from left to right or from right to left. The bowl remains on my desk till today and the inscription puzzle remains unsolved. This is only one example of the measure and degree of Classical Chinese's artificiality at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

I personally would love to see that bowl some day and ponder the mystery of the inscription on it.

Overall, Künstler's *SL* is an innovative, thought-provoking survey of the history and nature of the Sinitic language family from the earliest times to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is a worthy successor to the achievements of the distinguished Polish sinologists Janusz Chmielewski (1916–1998) and Witold Jabłoński (1901–1957), both of whom were Künstler's teachers. We are fortunate that the author himself undertook the translation of the first half of the book and that Alfred Franciszek Majewicz completed the translation with the able assistance of many students and colleagues. Now that it is available in English, I hope that sinologists and linguists outside of Poland will take advantage of this opportunity to become acquainted with a new way of looking at the Sinitic language family, one not burdened by misconceptions about the relationship between speech and script, between languages and topolects.

Victor H. Mair

ZHOU, Minglang (2019), *Language Ideology and Order in Rising China*, Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 306 Seiten, Hardcover, 83,19 €, ISBN 978-981-13-3482-5

Der rasante politische und wirtschaftliche Aufstieg Chinas auf der internationalen Bühne und eine Neuausrichtung in der Sprachpolitik seit den frühen 1980er Jahren bilden den Rahmen dieser Studie des chinesisch-US-amerikanischen Linguisten ZHOU Minglang (University of Maryland). Die Neuausrichtung in der Sprachpolitik manifestiert sich in der Verabschiedung des Allgemeinen Sprach- und Schriftgesetzes der Volksrepublik China (中华人民共和国国家通用语言文字法), das im Jahr 2000 verabschiedet wurde und am 1. Januar 2001 in Kraft trat. Hierin sieht der Autor eine Abkehr von der stalinistischen Sprachpolitik hin zu einem inklusiven sprachideologischen Modell, das auf eine Dominanz der Standardsprache Putonghua und gleichzeitig komplementärer Integration von Standard, Sprachen der ethnischen Minderheiten und regionalen Varietäten (方言 *fangyan*) abzielt.