

A Brief Account of my Research Work

[with an appended bibliography]

SUN HONGKAI

Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing

Translated by James A. Matisoff

I graduated from Peking University in 1954. [1] On university fieldtrips I had had the chance to record various Chinese dialects, as well as material on the Kam-Sui (= Dong-Shui) languages. After graduation I was assigned to the Linguistic Research Section of the Chinese Academy of Sciences. In 1955 I accompanied Professor Wang Fushi and other scholars on a research trip to study the Miao dialects of Guizhou, Yunnan, and Guangxi. For nearly a year we recorded the "Chuan-Qian-Dian" Miao dialect [2], as well as the dialect of E. Guizhou (= Qiandong), which gave me a thorough understanding of the relationship between the initials and tonal categories of Miao and the Zhuang-Dong (= Kam-Tai) languages. This was a good initiation for me into the problems of undertaking large-scale field research.

In 1956 the Chinese Academy of Sciences organized Language Research Teams, and drafted plans for a general survey of the minority languages of China. Before the research teams went forth, a program of specialized training was provided for the staff of more than 500 people who were to participate in the survey. I had the job of instructor in one of these training groups, and lectured on phonetic theory and linguistic field methodology for a period of four months.

Right after the training groups finished their studies, I joined the Seventh Minority Language Research Team and went off to Sichuan to participate in a general survey of the Qiang language.

The Qiang people live in several counties in the northwest part of Sichuan Province. In the summer of 1956 we began a "main-point survey" of the Qiang language, concentrating on the key dialectal areas, and by the spring of 1957 we produced a research outline that we thought suitable for use in our investigations of Qiang. In the Southwest Institute of

Nationalities, a staff of more than 10 people were trained to do research on Qiang. During the second half of 1957, we carried out a comprehensive survey of the Qiang language, recording material from more than 30 points in all. At each point we recorded more than 3000 commonly used words, about 500 example sentences to illustrate the grammar, and a certain amount of oral-literary material. For each dialect we figured out the phonological system. After the survey was concluded in the winter of 1957, from 1958 to the spring of 1960 I led a small group which carried out a point-by-point checking and supplementation of the data recorded during the survey of 1957. During this time I was constantly going around to the various villages and stockaded settlements where over 100,000 Qiang people live. I learned to use the Qiang language as a means of communication, and established deep bonds of friendship with the Qiang people.

Among the personnel in our research team there was a certain young woman from Sichuan called Liu Guangkun, who had just graduated from the Southwest Institute of Nationalities with a specialty in Tibetan language and literature. In the course of our common research on Qiang, sharing weal and woe, we struck up a deep friendship, and in the winter of 1958, during a break in our fieldwork, we were married. She has been a powerful help to me in my research work ever since.

I also carried out research on Qiang dialects, and wrote *Qiang-yu fangyan yanjiu* (Research on Qiang dialects) [unpublished], as well as the first version of *Qiang-yu jianzhi* (Outline Grammar of the Qiang Language) [final version published 1981], and other works. I put forward the idea that the Qiang language is to be divided into two dialect groups, a Northern and a Southern. The 5 Northern dialects are Luhua, Mawo, Cimulin, Weigu, and Yadu; the 5 Southern dialects include Daqishan, Tauping, Longxi, Mianchi, and Heihu.

In the summer of 1960 I went to the western part of Yunnan to work on the Dulong and Nu languages, going as far as into the Dulong and Nu river valleys on the Burmese border. After studying the Dulong dialects and local patois for close to a year, I acquired a basic understanding of the special features of the Dulong and Nu languages. From 1961 to 1962, in order to be able to offer a scientific opinion on the problem of the genetic classification of Qiang, Dulong, and Nu, I organized a small group of researchers to compare these languages with Tibetan, Yi, Jingpho, Burmese, and several other Tibeto-Burman languages (more than 10 in all). At the end of 1962 I wrote a report where I suggested that Qiang, Jyarong, and Pumi (=Primi) constituted a separate language branch by themselves, that

Dulong belonged in the Jingpho family, and that Nusu (= Nu) was to be included in the Yi group of languages. My analysis of the languages and dialects of the Qiang branch of Tibeto-Burman were first published in *Zhongguo Yuwen* #12 (1962), in my article "Qiang-yu gaikuang" (Outline of the Qiang language). During this period I once again penetrated into the Qiang-speaking area, and carried out some data-collection and checking of material for publication in the "Outline Grammar" (Jianzhi) series. In 1963 I completed the work for the revised version of my *Qiang-yu Jianzhi* (Outline Grammar of the Qiang Language).

At this time I was promoted to the rank of Assistant Research Fellow. From 1964 to 1965 I once again went to Yunnan, this time with Professor Lu Shaozun, in order to do a rather thorough study of the Primi language. We figured out the phonological and grammatical systems of the language, and laid the groundwork for the compilation of the *Outline Grammar of Primi*. After the completion of the work on Primi, I went back to the Nu and Dulong river-valleys, where I once again did a comparatively thorough investigation of the languages used by the Nu and Dulong people. This time the research was oriented toward preparing the *Outline Grammars* of Dulong and Nu, so I collected a fairly rich body of material.

During the 10 years of upheaval, my professional work basically came to a halt. At this time I had the opportunity of consulting materials in the Xi-xia language, as well as a corpus of Xi-fan/Chinese bilingual texts, and I managed to accumulate some data on these two literary languages.

In 1976 I participated in a research team of the Chinese Academy of Sciences to investigate the minority languages of Tibet, leading a small group to study on-the-spot the Menba (= Monpa), Loba (= Lhopa) and Deng languages of Southeastern Tibet. We recorded two dialects spoken by the Menba people - Cuona Menba and Canglo (Motuo) Menba. Three Loba dialects were recorded - Bo-ga-er Loba, Sulong Loba, and Yidu Loba. Finally, we studied two dialects spoken by the Deng people -- Darang (= Taraon) and Geman (= Kaman). In 1977 a portion of this material was compiled, and in 1980 the preliminary results of our research were published in our jointly authored book, *Menba, Loba, Deng-ren de Yuyan* (The Languages of the Menba, Loba, and Deng Peoples).

In 1978-79 I twice accepted invitations from the Sichuan Minorities Committee to undertake a "differentiating appraisal" [3] of the Baima people, a group that lives in the Pingwu region of Sichuan Province and the Wudu area of Gansu Province, from a multi-faceted point of view -- ethnographic, historical, linguistic, etc. I recorded quite comprehensively

the Baima language of that area, and collected popular oral literary materials. For comparative purposes I also recorded data from the neighboring Tibetan dialects, in order to demonstrate that the Baima people speak an independent language of their own (though one that is comparatively close to Tibetan).

In 1980 I received a promotion to the rank of Associate Research Fellow.

During the 5-year period from 1978 to 1982, I set aside a fixed period of time each year to go to Southern Gansu, Western Sichuan, and Western Yunnan, carrying out linguistic research in that historic corridor for the migration of peoples. Besides Jyarong and Primi, I discovered 7 new languages belonging to the Qiang branch, namely Muya, Shixing, Ersu, Namuyi, Guiqiong, Ergong, and Zhaba. In 1985, professors at the Central Institute for Minority Nationalities also discovered a new language in this region, the Queyu language. I have written simple accounts of this group of languages in two articles, "Sichuan minzu zoulang diqu de yuyan" ("The languages of the People's Migration Corridor of Sichuan") and "Liu jiang liu yu de minzu yuyan ji qi xishu fenlei" ("The languages of the peoples of the Six River Valley region and their genetic classification"), publishing separate reports on them in Sichuan and Yunnan, respectively.

During this period of time, on the one hand I compiled and published the *Outline grammar of Qiang* and the *Outline Grammar of Dulong*, and on the other hand I began to turn my attention to carrying out general research on the languages of the whole Tibeto-Burman family. The scope of my research essentially involves the two areas of phonology and grammar. In Tibeto-Burman phonology, I have worked on such specialized topics as the evolution of consonant clusters, splits and mergers of simple consonants, vowel length contrasts, plain/lax vs. constricted/tense vowels, nasalized vowels, final consonants, tones, weakened/destressed syllables, etc. Besides writing "An exploration of the sources of several phonological developments in Tibeto-Burman" and "A study of consonant clusters in the Tibeto-Burman languages," I also organized a compilation of research papers by more than 20 specialists and scholars on the Tibeto-Burman languages spoken within the borders of China, in a book to be called *Zhongguo Zangmianyu* (Tibeto-Burman Languages of China). In the Introduction which I wrote for this collection, I discuss in detail several important principles and tendencies in Tibeto-Burman historical phonology. (This book was already completed by the autumn of 1984. In the summer of 1985 it was sent off to the publisher, and it will soon be available in print.) As far as grammar is concerned, I have investigated

the categories of directionality, person, and reciprocity in the verb systems of several Tibeto-Burman languages, as well as the category of personal possession in nouns, and the characteristics of the various types of classifier systems that have evolved in the family. I have also worked on the genetic classification of the Tibeto-Burman languages spoken within China, etc. On all these subjects I have completed articles, most of which have already been published.

In the summer of 1984 I began to take over the collation of the materials on the Nu language, and again made a trip to Southwest Yunnan in order to do a more thorough and complete study of the languages and dialects spoken by the Nu people of the Nujiang (= Salween) and Lancang (= Mekong) river valleys. The main result this time was the collection of supplementary material on dialects of Nusu, as well as on two other languages used by the Nu people, Rouruo (= Zauzou) and Anong. After recording these in some detail I returned to Beijing and finished writing the *Outline Grammar of the Language(s) of the Nu People (Nusu dialect)*, as well as general introductions to Rauruo. and Anong. I confirmed the independent linguistic status of these latter languages, and expressed my preliminary opinion on their proper genetic classification within Tibeto-Burman. I believe that Anong is rather close to Dulong, belonging in the Jingpho subgroup of TB; while Rouruo and Nusu, since they are fairly close to the Yi languages, probably belong in the Yiish (= Loloish) subgroup of TB. [4,5]

In the spring of 1986 I was promoted to Senior Research Fellow, and was appointed to a professorship at Peking University. In the summer of that year I had the opportunity to revisit the Tibetan area of Sichuan, and carried out a study of the Amdo dialect of Tibetan. No one had ever investigated the Amdo dialect of A-ba-zhou (Sichuan) before, and some new discoveries concerning the phonological evolution of Tibetan were made. For the first time a contrast between velars and uvulars was discovered in an Amdo dialect. The Amdo words pronounced with uvular stops also have uvulars in several other Tibeto-Burman languages, so this phenomenon deserves a more thorough investigation. I also pointed out some problems that this dialect raises for the reconstruction of Proto-Tibetan that are worth a more detailed exploration.

During recent years, thanks to the help of many foreign specialists and professors, especially Tatsuo Nishida, Paul K. Benedict, James A. Matisoff, Nicholas C. Bodman, Robbins Burling, Graham Thurgood, Scott DeLancey, David Bradley, Boyd Michailovsky, Martine Mazaudon, Yasuhiko Nagano, etc., I have managed to collect a certain amount of material on

Tibeto-Burman languages spoken outside of China. This has caused me to broaden my horizons, and has provided me with the means of undertaking a study that will eventually encompass the entire Tibeto-Burman family. I am extremely grateful to all these scholars for their help and support. I am currently teaching an introductory course in Tibeto-Burman at Peking University. At the same time, in a course I am giving at my research institute on the minority languages of China, I intend to make the maximum possible use of the results already achieved by foreign scholars working in the field of historical/comparative Tibeto-Burman, and to avail myself of the material they have collected on TB languages spoken outside of China. By so doing I hope to raise the level of Tibeto-Burman studies in China, and to bring to bear whatever little strength I have in order to promote research into the Tibeto-Burman family.

[1] The Chinese MS of this memoir was hand-delivered to me by Dr. Chen Kang at the 2nd International Loloish Conference in Lund, Sweden (November, 1986). My thanks to Randy LaPolla for checking over and correcting the translation. [JAM]

[2] Dialect spoken in the area where the three provinces of Sichuan, Guizhou, and Yunnan meet.

[3] "Jinxing shibie jianding": a study to determine whether the group should be recognized as an official minority nationality.

[4] In his "Six River Valley" article (1983g), Dr. Sun had placed Nu in a special branch of the Burmish group.

[5] At the 2nd Loloish Conference (Lund, Nov. 1987), it was decided to try to introduce the term "Yi-pho" as the new name for the Yi or Loloish family.

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF SUN HONGKAI

1957. "Word formation." (Translation) Scientific Publishing Co. 33 pages.

1962. "A sketch of the Qiang language." *Zhongguo Yuwen* 12, pp. 561-71.

1979. "A sketch of the Dulong language." *Minzu Yuwen* (4), pp. 292-303.

1980a. (with Lu Shaozun, Zhang Jichuan, and Ouyang Jueya) *The Languages of the Menba, Loba, and Deng Peoples*. Social Science Publishing Co., Beijing. 389 pp.

- 1980b. "The Di people of historical records and the Baima people of Sichuan and Gansu." *Minzu Yanjiu* (3), pp. 33-43.
- 1980c. "The language of the Baima people." In *Papers Concerning the Problem of the Affiliations of the Baima Tibetans*, pp. 15- 25. Publication of the Sichuan Institute of Minority Nationalities.
- 1981a. *Outline Grammar of the Qiang Language*. People's Publishing Co., Beijing. 220 pp.
- 1981b. "On the origins of the word *qionglong* (watchtower)." *Minzu Yanjiu* (1), p. 80.
- 1981c. "The category of directionality in the Qiang verb." *Minzu Yuwen* (1), 34-42.
- 1982a. *Outline Grammar of the Dulong Language*. People's Publishing Co., Beijing. 248 pp.
- 1982b. "Preliminary investigation of the problem of the affiliation of the Qiang family." In *Research Papers on Minority Languages and Linguistics*, Qinghai People's Publishing Co., Xining, pp. 189-224.
- 1982c. "The *sha-ba* picture writing of the Ersu". *Minzu Yuwen* (6) 44-48.
- 1982d. "A secret language of the Deng people". In *Language Beautiful*, No. 1 (July), Kunming, Yunnan.
- 1982e. "A brief introduction to the Ersu (Tosu) language." *Yuyan Yanjiu* (2), 241-64.
- 1983a. "The category of person in the verb systems of the Tibeto-Burman languages of China." *Minzu Yuwen* (2), pp. 17-29.
- 1983b. "On the origins of certain phonological changes in Tibeto-Burman." *Zhongguo Yuyan Xuebao* (1), pp. 269-298. Commercial Press, Beijing.
- 1983c. "Concerning research on the Ersu language and the Ersu writing system." *Minzu Yanjiu Dongtai* (Trends in Minority Research) (2), pp. 19-20.

- 1983d. "The languages of the 'Corridor of Nationalities' region of Western Sichuan." In *Research on the Peoples of the Southwest*, No. 1, pp. 429-54. Sichuan People's Publishing Co., Chengdu.
- 1983e. "An approach to the phenomenon of bilingualism in China." *Minzu Yanjiu* (6), 68-76.
- 1983f. "Outline of the Idu Loba language." *Minzu Yuwen* (6), 63-79.
- 1983g. "The languages of the peoples of the Six River Valley region and their genetic classification, including the languages of the upper reaches of the Jialing River and the Yalu Zangbu river valley." *Minzu Xuebao* (3), pp. 98-273. Yunnan People's Publishing Co., Kunming.
- 1984a. "The noun-category of personal possession in the Tibeto-Burman languages of China." In *Journal of the Central Institute of Minority Nationalities* (1), 78-84.
- 1984b. "The languages of China." In *Language Beautiful*, No. 3 (January), Kunming, Yunnan.
- 1984c. "A brief introduction to the peoples and languages of the Six River Valley region." in *Trends in Research on the Minorities of the Southwest*, #11, pp. 27-42.
- 1984d. "The category of reciprocal action in the Tibeto-Burman verb." *Minzu Yuwen* (4), pp. 8-16.
- 1984e. "Concerning the state of research into the Tibeto-Burman languages of China." *Minzu Yanjiu Dongtai* (Trends in Minority Research) (4), pp. 16-23.
- 1984f. "An investigation of consonant clusters in Tibeto-Burman languages." Paper submitted to the 17th International Conference on Sino-Tibetan Languages and Linguistics. 19 pp.
- 1985a. "Characteristics of Tibeto-Burman consonant clusters and their patterns of historical evolution." *Zhongguo Yuwen* (6), pp. 433-42.
- 1985b. "Sketch of the Rouruo language of the Nu people." *Minzu Yuwen* (4), pp. 63-78.
- 1985c. "The basic characteristics of the Dulong language and a sketch of its dialects and patois (tuyu)." In *Investigation into the Social History of*

the Dulong People (II), pp. 155-77. Yunnan People's Publishing Co., Kunming.

- 1986a. "An approach to the Qionglong culture and the languages of the Qiang family." *Minzu Yanjiu* (2), pp. 53-61.
- 1986b. "The current situation with respect to the implementation of language planning in China." Paper presented at the International Conference on Language Planning, Ottawa, Canada, May 25-29.
- 1986c. "Some remarks on the languages spoken by the Nu and the Dulong nationalities." *Minzu Yanjiu Dongtai* (Trends in Minority Research) (1), pp. 13-17.
- 1986d. "Notes on Tibeto-Burman consonant clusters." (English translation of 1984f) *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area* (LTBA) 9.1, pp. 1-21.
- 1986e. (with Liu Lu) *Outline Grammar of the Language of the Nu People (Nusu dialect)*. 177 pp. People's Publishing Co., Beijing.

* * *

The following works are in press or in preparation as of December, 1986:

- (a) *The Tibeto-Burman Languages of China (Introduction, Phonology, Lexicon)*. People's Publishing Co., Beijing.
- (b) "A comparative study of the use of classifiers in Tibeto-Burman languages, with a discussion of the stages of classifier development." To appear in *Zhongguo Yuyan Xuebao*.
- (c) "Toward a genetic classification of the Tibeto-Burman languages spoken in China." To appear in a Festschrift to be presented to Professor Tatsuo NISHIDA on his 60th birthday.
- (d) Sketches of the following 13 languages are to appear in a volume entitled *Zhongguo Xiandai Shaoshu Minzu Yuyan* (The Languages of the Contemporary Minority Nationalities of China):
 - [1] Anong [2] Baima [3] Darang Deng [4] Dulong
 - [5] Ergong [6] Ersu [7] Geman Deng [8] Guiqiong
 - [9] Idu Loba [10] Nusu [11] Qiang [12] Rouruo
 - [13] Shixing.