

Description of the series

SINITIC LANGUAGES OF CHINA: TYPOLOGICAL DESCRIPTIONS

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Sinitic languages of China: Typological descriptions is a new series specializing in the description of the grammar of Sinitic languages, ‘Sinitic’ being the technical term for the very large number of languages that come under the general name of ‘Chinese’ in the West. As such, it includes well-known examples such as Cantonese 广东话, Hokkien 闽南话, Shanghainese 上海话 and Hakka 客家话, lesser-known ones such as Hunanese Xiang 湘语 or the Jin languages of Shanxi 晋语, without overlooking the national language known as *Pǔtōnghuà* 普通话 in China – or Standard Mandarin in the West. Even Mandarin comes in many non-standard forms including Sichuanese in the southwest and the unusual varieties spoken in Gansu in northwestern China or in the Central Plains area, to name but a small handful.

The primary goal of this series is to promote scientific knowledge of Chinese languages and their typological characteristics through the publication of high calibre linguistic research, based on empirical fieldwork, close analysis of the data and solid theoretical interpretations. The grammatical descriptions, written in a functionalist framework, will be illustrated by linguistic examples presented in a ‘value-added’ four-line format that includes romanization, glossing, the idiomatic English translation, and also the Chinese characters to cater to historical and comparative interests as well as our sinophone readers.

The specific objective is to reveal the great structural diversity found in Sinitic languages and to dispel many recurrent linguistic myths 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 Chinese languages, up until now, has been predominantly written in (Standard Written) Chinese.

Impetus behind the series:

The large-scale research project, *The hybrid syntactic typology of Sinitic languages* (SINOTYPE), provides the impetus behind this series. It benefitted from funding in the form of an Advanced Grant awarded by the European Research Council (ERC) for the period 2009 – 2013.

The SINOTYPE team comprised seven researchers: the principal investigator (and editor of this new series), Hilary Chappell, five postdoctoral fellows and one doctoral student, in addition to two technical staff. Each team member chose an unknown Sinitic language on which to carry out intensive fieldwork and linguistic analysis during the 4 ½ years of the project, according to the following choices:

THE HYBRID SYNTACTIC TYPOLOGY OF SINITIC LANGUAGES: TEAM MEMBERS

Principal Investigator (PI):

1. Hilary CHAPPELL 曹茜蕾 (PhD, Australian National University; EHESS, Paris);
Xianghua, an unclassified Sinitic language of Hunan province

Postdoctoral Fellows:

2. Weirong CHEN 陈伟蓉 (PhD, University of Hong Kong; University of International Business & Economics, Beijing)
Hui'an language of Southern Min, Fujian
3. Yujie CHEN 陈玉洁 (PhD, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing; Zhejiang University, Hangzhou)
Shangshui language of Central Plains Mandarin, Henan
4. Hilario DE SOUSA 苏沙 (PhD, University of Sydney; Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics)
Nanning Southern Pinghua, Guangxi
5. XuPing LI 李旭平 (PhD, Bar Ilan University, Tel Aviv; Zhejiang University, Hangzhou)
Yichun language of Gan, Jiangxi
6. WANG Jian 王健 (PhD, Peking University; Changshu Institute of Technology & Shanghai Jiao Tong University)
Shangzhuang language of Jixi Hui, Anhui

Doctoral student

7. Sing Sing NGAI 倪星星 (MPhil, Cambridge University; EHESS, Paris)
Shaowu language of Northwestern Min, Fujian

During the entire period of the project, over thirty field trips were in fact made to China to carry out intensive investigations *in situ* of the languages targeted for description. Consequently, each researcher has spent up to a total of one year in the field in order to undertake a comprehensive analysis of a little-known Sinitic language with the goal of writing a comprehensive reference grammar, written in a functional, typological perspective.

Thanks to generous logistic support from the host institute, the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS), spacious premises for the exclusive use of the SINOTYPE research centre were found in inner-city Paris for the entire period of the project.

Significance of the SINOTYPE project

Standard Mandarin, or *Pǔtōnghuà* 普通话, has generally been the main, if not, only point of reference for Sinitic languages in typological studies in the West, while until recently it persisted as the primary object of analysis in Chinese linguistics in general. Therefore, the overall aim of the SINOTYPE project was to carry out the first large scale investigation into the linguistic typology of Sinitic or Chinese languages, broadening its horizons beyond Standard Mandarin to consider a set of major parameters in the grammatical make-up of this major branch of Sino-Tibetan.

As outlined above, each team member has been responsible for the description of the grammar of one language, based on extensive fieldwork in China. The scope of the project thus involved pan-Sinitic research not previously carried out in any depth in either China or the West. Over 50 publications have so far resulted from this research project, including the edited volume, *Diversity in Sinitic languages* (OUP, 2015).

Opening up this *terra incognita* in the form of this special series of grammars with De Gruyter Mouton, which concentrates on the lesser-known Sinitic languages of China, is hoped to reveal crucial new insights into the typological profile of Sinitic languages and should

substantially aid in providing a more fine-grained classification of this branch of Sino-Tibetan.

This new series is expected to increase linguistic interest in the Sinitic languages of China and dispel a large number of myths surrounding the use of the label ‘Chinese’, a term which continues to convey the rather erroneous view of a monolithic language, comprised of dozens of related dialects showing a high degree of similarity and uniformity in their grammar. This notion is reinforced in its turn by the persistent and superficial classification of ‘Chinese’ as an example *par excellence* of an isolating language that possesses little morphology.

One type of counterexample from our early findings shows that, quite to the contrary, the process of fusion and its outcome in portmanteau morphemes abounds in Chinese languages, while the use of tone sandhi and rhyme allophony to indicate grammatical features such as aspect, nominalization, morphological definiteness and plurality exists to a far greater degree than has ever been supposed.

Since, as already observed, most of the linguistic literature on Chinese concerns the standard language, Mandarin, the knowledge that is steadily being made available on Sinitic languages to the wider linguistics community is certain to change immeasurably, if not irrevocably, the profile of what is known about this vast language group in the years to come.

H.M. Chappell
Paris, 2017
