

中央研究院語言學研究所籌備處會議論文集之二

# 中國境內語言 暨語言學

第五輯 語言中的互動

殷 允 美  
楊 懿 麗 編輯  
詹 惠 珍

中央研究院語言學研究所籌備處  
台灣 台北

中華民國八十八年六月

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## 出版說明

「中國境內語言暨語言學國際研討會」係由中央研究院歷史語言研究所發起，於民國七十九年首度召開，至今共舉辦五屆。其中，第一、二、四屆都由歷史語言研究所主辦，第三屆由清華大學主辦，本屆（第五屆）由政治大學主辦。前四屆主題依序分別為「漢語方言」、「歷史語言學」、「詞法與詞彙」、以及「語言類型」。本屆則以「語言中的互動」為主題。

本屆會議已於民國八十五年十二月二十七日至二十八日舉行。會中宣讀通過初審之論文二十篇，加上專題演講論文與特約討論論文七篇，共計二十七篇。會後扣除作者因故撤回論文與未通過編輯委員會複審者，共餘二十三篇，收錄於本論文集內。集內論文不只兼顧語言形式與語言功能，更涵蓋多方面領域，包括音韻、語法、構詞、語意、語用、社會語言學與心理語言學等等。所探討的語言大多為現代漢語，另有四篇涉及古漢語與南島語句法。內容的編排是將專題演講與特約討論之論文放在前面，隨後再依語法的層次排列會議論文：漢語的音韻，音韻與句法、句法與語意、句法與語用之互動，語法史，台灣南島語句法等。

有關本論文集之出版事宜，雖然前四屆會議的會後論文集均交由中央研究院歷史語言研究所以該所名義出版專輯，由於該所語言組已於八十六年八月另行成立「語言學研究所籌備處」，故本屆（第五屆）論文集即改由新的單位出版，書名為「中國境內語言暨語言學·第五輯·語言中的互動」(Chinese Languages and Linguistics, Volume 5)；一方面可維持原有之序列制度，使各屆論文集得以成一系列，另一方面又可說明出版單位的更易狀況。

本屆會議承中央研究院語言學研究所籌備處（即前歷史語言研究所語言組）、行政院國家科學委員會、教育部、政治大學學術發展基金會、文化建設基金管理委員會、及太平洋文化基金會的協助與贊助，我們在此表示由衷的感謝。此外，對本屆所有的論文宣讀人、審查人與評論人的共襄盛舉，為本屆會議的主題提供了豐富的內容與精闢的見解，帶動熱烈的討論，我們也深致謝意。我們還要感謝政大語言學研究所與英語系的師生，在此次會議籌

備與開會期間的協助，以及政大語言所助教曾惠鈴小姐協助會後論文集之集稿送審事宜，中央研究院語言所陳玉冠小姐負責編輯事務。沒有她們的認真負責與任勞任怨的工作熱忱，本論文集不可能順利圓滿完成。

楊懿麗

于政治大學語言學研究所

88年4月2日

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# Languages and Peoples of China<sup>1</sup>

**William S-Y. Wang<sup>2</sup>**

*City University of Hong Kong*

## Abstract

This paper is a general survey of current knowledge of the languages and peoples of China from a multi-disciplinary perspective. Linguistic evolution depends critically on the landform upon which the peoples live; this landform was largely determined 60 million years ago. The principal axis in China is a north-south division, with early cultures emerging in both regions. "Han" is an ethnic concept which has resulted from millennia of amalgamation of numerous peoples, especially as the northerners expanded southward. The paper concludes with a review of the major hypotheses which have been recently advanced on the ancestry of the Chinese language, as published in Monograph 8 of the *Journal of Chinese Linguistics*.

It is an honor for me to speak to this gathering of friends and colleagues, at this Fifth Conference of the International Symposium on Chinese Languages and Linguistics, on the topic of Languages and Peoples of China. I chose to speak on this topic because I feel that

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1. Paper presented at the Fifth Conference of the International Symposium on Chinese Languages and Linguistics, IsCCL-V, at the National Chengchi University in Taipei. I thank the organizers of IsCCL-V for their gracious hospitality, and Baoya Chen, Leonard Chow, Hsin-I Hsieh, Paul Li, Stanley Starosta, C. Y. Tseng, Ovid Tzeng, and two anonymous reviewers for their comments, and particularly Lisa Husmann for detailed criticisms of an early draft of this paper, which resulted in significant improvements.
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linguistics must never drift too far away from the study of peoples, and that we can build upon a much more solid foundation if we constantly refer to the biological and social contexts in which language functions. My topic falls within a large research area which involves many disciplines concerned with the origins and evolution of peoples. In addition to linguistics, these disciplines include anthropology, archeology, ethnology, genetics, and history.

Interaction among these disciplines has been especially intensive and productive in recent years, as can be exemplified by the publications of the linguist Joseph Greenberg, the geneticist Luca Cavalli-Sforza, the archeologist Colin Renfrew, among many others. This upsurge in inter-disciplinary collaboration has prompted Renfrew to speak of a "grand synthesis" in this research area. Each discipline provides an additional and complementary window through which we can study the origins and evolution of our species. While I will maintain an awareness of the large picture of all of mankind, my remarks here will be largely limited to China.

## 1. The Land and the People

The major features of China's landform were determined some 60 million years ago as the result of a collision between two geotectonic plates. The Indian subcontinent collided into the Asian mainland, raising the towering Himalaya mountains and their associated plateaus, and creating a ladder landform in China which slopes stepwise successively eastward to the Pacific. It is this ladder landform that makes all of China's great rivers flow eastward, the 東流水 that poets have sung about throughout the centuries.<sup>3</sup>

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3. Actually, the Chang Jiang is a special case. Its initial course parallel to those of the Lancang Jiang and Nu Jiang, it would have flowed southward into Southeast Asia, but for a massive blockade in western Yunnan. Here the river ricochets northward in a remarkable hairpin curve, and gradually finds its course eastward. As it winds its way toward the East China Sea, merging with tributaries and replenishing great lakes, it grows into Asia's mightiest river, nourishing the entire width of China. One

Moist air from the Indian Ocean is blocked by these massive mountains, leaving much of western China high and dry. Most of the human activities in the last 10,000 years, that is, since the onset of agriculture, have concentrated in the eastern portions of China, where there is adequate rainfall and where the river valleys make agriculture possible. Cultivable land in China has always been scarce. A recent report estimates it at 9%, a figure that is remarkably close to the traditional farmer's lament: 三山六水一份田.<sup>4</sup>

The combination of mountains and deserts in the west and northwest, and ocean in the east and southeast gave China a high degree of isolation and autonomy. Until transportation became much improved with the domestication of the horse, interaction with other early civilizations, such as those which developed around the Indus Valley and Mesopotamia, was severely limited by these natural barriers.

At present there is a major controversy among scholars of human evolution concerning the origin of modern humans, as we emerged the last 100 or 200 thousand years ago.<sup>5</sup> The dominant view, especially championed by geneticists, holds that all of us are the result of migrations out of Africa. In this view, these emigrants from Africa were successful in their conquest of the world because they had a special advantage.

Many adherents of this view would go on to maintain that this special advantage is language. This is not to say that before the conquests from Africa, people did not have some rudimentary form of

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writer recently put it in these moving words: "Had there been no bend, and had the waters been allowed to flow on, they would have passed inexorably and quite tragically away and out of China ... Had not the limestone massif intervened at Shigu, there would be nothing so unimaginably vast as the river that slices through the nation's heart today. A China without such an immense torrent at its heart is almost impossible to contemplate." Winchester (1996:3)

4. See Prosterman et al. 1996:90. In dividing cultivable land by the population, the ratio turns out to be a mere 0.11 hectares for each person in China whereas the ratio is almost 7 times greater per person in the United States.
5. The controversy revolves around the latest wave of *Homo sapiens*. There is no argument regarding the African genesis of the earlier species in our lineage, the *Homo erectus*, which emigrated well over a million years ago.

verbal communication, since even monkeys have systems of calls. Language here must mean some verbal system that approximates what we have today, in particular, a system that is supported by segmental phonology.<sup>6</sup> The view implies a scenario of monogenesis, in which groups of people in Africa who have invented language were able to replace all other peoples in the world.<sup>7</sup> Ultimately, we ought to be able to trace all languages to an African origin, just as geneticists have done with mitochondrial DNA.

If this scenario is correct, then it is possible that the languages of China have distant relatives situated much closer to Africa. Indeed, the Dene-Caucasian hypothesis recently advocated by some Russian linguists would claim this as a feature of their proposal, quite independently of the work of the geneticists. As we shall see a little later, their claim is that Sino-Tibetan is related not only to languages in the North Caucasus, on the shores of the Caspian Sea, but even to Basque in western Europe.

On the other hand, opposing the out-of-Africa view is one which sees a great deal of regional continuity. Wu Xinzhi 吳新智 of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, for instance, reports that the fossils in China show a continuity of development in their anatomical structures, from modern populations all the way back to Peking Man of 500,000 years ago. Such continuity would not be possible if indeed all the populations that inhabited ancient China were completely wiped out by newcomers out of Africa.

To my mind, complete replacement by emigrants from Africa everywhere in the world is an implausible scenario. It is much likelier that the ratio of genetic mixture of these emigrants with the indigenous populations would vary from region to region. The evidence reported by Wu and his associates seems to suggest that certain anatomical traits found among the modern Chinese can be traced back to a considerable

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6. For a fuller discussion see Wang 1997.

7. For discussion from a different viewpoint, one which supports polygenesis from strictly probabilistic considerations, see Freedman and Wang 1996.

time depth.

## 2. The North/South Division

Regardless of the controversy surrounding the origins of modern humans, it is abundantly clear from the fossil evidence that there is a virtual continuum of hominid activity in China over the past million years; cf. Wu and Poirier (1995:4). The famous fossils of Yuanmou 元謀 in Yunnan (site #58) and of Zhoukoudian 周口店 near Beijing (site #62) belong to an earlier species called *Homo erectus*; presumably they did not have segmental language. On the other hand, the well preserved skull dated to around 200,000 B.P. found near Dali 大荔 in Shaanxi (site #8) shows many modern features. In the words of K. C. Chang 張光直 (1986:53):

The uranium-series date of 200,000 BP places the Dali cranium immediately following the end of Zhoukoudian, and it suggests a convenient temporal threshold for humans to step from erectus to sapiens in this part of the world.

A series of archeological finds made in various regions shed light on the peoples of ancient China. The earliest pottery appears to be found in Zengpiyan 甓皮岩 in Guangxi, ranging in dates from 7000 B.P. to 10,000 B.P. Pottery is always a good indication of a more settled life-style, as opposed to nomadic and pastoral. The earliest evidence of rice cultivation appears to be along the middle segment of the Changjiang, around the same time.

The diachronic picture that emerges from these finds is neatly captured in a series of maps presented by Chang (1986:235). Ancient China during the early days of agriculture was a series of isolated patches of local culture, stretching across the eastern half of the land, from the extreme northeast all the way to Taiwan. By 7000 B.P., the more successful of these cultures have expanded sufficiently to be

almost bordering upon each other. The most dramatic changes took place around 6000 B.P. Whether the changes were triggered by successful agriculture and the consequent population expansion, or by natural events such as floods, we do not know at present. Nonetheless, 6000 B.P. was the period of amalgamation on a grand scale, when the cultures began to exert a strong enough influence on each other to an extent that moved K. C. Chang to describe the result of the amalgamation as the "*initial China*."

The diffusion of cultural artifacts and traditions on such a large scale can only happen if it was demic, that is, they were carried along by waves of migrating peoples. Indeed, this is what I suspect happened in China 6000 years ago, rather than just diffusion of cultural items. There is some preliminary evidence, based on quantitative analyses of basic vocabulary (Wang 1997c), that it was also around then, some 6000 years ago, that the great Sino-Tibetan family of languages began to diverge, resulting in the several hundred languages we find in East Asia and Southeast Asia today.

Although archeologists cannot take us further back than the Shang dynasty,<sup>8</sup> and historians cannot verify a date earlier than 841 B.C., there are many legends in ancient texts which provide valuable clues. While we must interpret legends with a great deal of caution, some of them do suggest an ethnic diversity in China which goes all the way back to its formative period. There is the famous legend of Yandi 炎帝 seeking help from Huangdi 黃帝, and jointly defeating the forces of Jǐulí 九黎, led by Chīyōu 蚩尤. The battle is supposed to have been fought in the home territory of Huangdi, around modern Zhuōxiàn 涿縣 of Hebei, in the heartland of Zhongyuan 中原, where Han culture originated.

It has become customary to refer to the Han peoples as descendants of Yándi and Huangdi, because according to the ancient text Guoyu these two were brothers.<sup>9</sup> The "nine" in Jiuli, being the

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8. There is as yet no consensus on the archeological sites of the Xia dynasty, though opinions are gravitating toward recognizing Erlitou as one of the sites.

9. There is an extended discussion of these early legends and their relation to historical

largest integer written with a single digit, must not be taken literally. It was just a way of indicating that there were numerous tribes involved in the battle. On the other hand, the ethnic term "lí" has come down to the present day. The Li peoples, who call themselves [ hlai ] with an initial unvoiced lateral, are now mostly situated in Hainan. It is by no means certain, however, that they are indeed the descendants of the Jiuli of Chiyou.

Other evidence similarly points to a great deal of ethnic diversity, and supports the fact that there always was a great deal of ethnic diversity, and that the languages and peoples of China trace back to a very complicated web of intermingling roots. A book published in the early Qing dynasty by Gu Ziyu (1624-1680) estimates that there were 10,000 *guo*'s at the beginning of the Xia dynasty, some 3,000 *guo*'s at the beginning of the Shang, and 1,800 *guo*'s at the beginning of the Zhou.<sup>10</sup> When Gu used the term "guó" 國, he was not referring to some well-defined political entity such as those of the contemporary world; most likely the majority of them were tribes of various sizes, degrees of cohesion, and linguistic affinities.

Without questioning the accuracy of Gu's numbers, it is clear that China's heritage is one of great diversity, and that the Hanyu of today is one of numerous contending languages that were spoken on the land. Furthermore, through the several millennia of intensive contact we can be sure that there has been extensive mutual linguistic influence between the Han peoples and their neighbors. It is often extremely difficult to sort out the effects due to contact from those of internal evolution, that is, due to horizontal transmission as opposed to vertical transmission.

The difficulty is due in part to the multitude of undefined ethnic names in the historical literature, and in part to the numerous movements of peoples through the millennia. Frequently, the ethnic designation of a people differs from the name of the language that these

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linguistics in Xu (1991:34), based on the research of Yu (1980).

10. Gu's numbers are quoted in Chang (1983:27).

people speak. The language that the Yaos of Bama speak, for instance, is actually Miao; on the other hand, the language that the Miao people of Hainan speak is actually Yao.<sup>11</sup> Oftentimes, ethnic names will vary across political boundaries; e.g. Hani in Yunnan and Akha in Southeast Asia refer to the same people. Nonetheless, despite these many difficulties, research in this direction will surely shed much light on how the languages of China emerged and evolved.

### 3. The Rise of the Hans

While early Neolithic cultures were distributed over much of China, the peoples that were to eventually unite and dominate the land began their quest in the regions of the Huanghe. In a famous paper published in 1933, 夷夏東西說, Fu Sinian made it clear that during the several millennia B.C.E. most of the socio-political developments in China concentrated along an east-west axis in the Huanghe region. The major contention then was between the Yi and the Shang in the east versus the Xia and the Zhou in the west. So the scenario was one of eastward amalgamation. It was only since the Han dynasty that the Changjiang region developed significantly, and Chinese history began to unfold along a north-south axis on a larger landscape, and the process became one of southward amalgamation.

The primary reason for the success of the people of the Huanghe region is their invention of writing. Literacy gives a society countless advantages in its competition against its neighbors. Indeed, the Chinese words for "culture" and "civilization" are both formed from the character *wen*, which simply meant "writing." Abundant specimens of early writing are available from 3400 years ago, leading some scholars to speculate that the invention must have emerged considerably

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11. See Mao et al. (1982) for further discussion. Some Yao communities speak Lajia, which is a Kam-Tai language, while other Yao communities have replaced their language with Han dialects.



earlier.<sup>12</sup> From the lexicon and the grammar found on these specimens, it is clear that the language of these peoples of the Shang and Zhou dynasties is the direct ancestor of Hanyu.

The term "Han", to refer to an ethnic group, did not become prominent until Liu Bang used it to name the dynasty he founded in 202 B.C.E. Before that, the terms "Hua" and "Xia" were used. In modern Chinese, we find expressions like "hanzi, nanzihan, haohan, laohan" where the word "han" is used simply as a common noun, meaning "man." One wonders if that was perhaps the original meaning of the word, which was extended by other peoples to refer to this ethnic group. It is not at all unusual in early societies to call a group by a word that simply means "people" or "person" in their language.<sup>13</sup>

However the name "Han" evolved, the peoples identified with that first major Chinese dynasty had interacted a long time with other peoples, both before and after the founding of the dynasty. According to tradition, these peoples are named collectively according to the cardinal directions with reference to the Central Plains. The Yí 夷 to the east may have been speakers of Austronesian and Austro-Asiatic languages. The Róng 戎 to the west were probably mostly speakers of Tibeto-Burman. In the north, there were the Dí 狄, formidable pastoralists who swarmed in when the dynasty was weak and vanished into the deserts and mountains at other times. They spoke various languages of the Altaic family, which today includes Turkish<sup>14</sup> at one end and Japanese at the other end, stretching across the middle of Asia like a belt. To the south, the name Mán 蠻 covers the most diverse collection of peoples, speaking languages which are now grouped under

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12. While the speculation is reasonable, there is as yet no undisputed earlier specimen available. To qualify as true writing, the symbols must have a close relation to the spoken language to be able to harness the expressive power of the latter.

13. Some examples from Mao et al. (1982:9) are: the term "Lakkia" refers to a language in the Dong-Shui group - literally, "people.mountain". The Yao peoples call themselves "Mian," which means "people". The term is written variously as 勉, 曼, 門, 敏 due to dialect differences. At the same time, however, we should remember that the river Han Shui had its name centuries before the Han dynasty.

14. Zhengzhang (1990) suspects a relation between the word 狄, which has been reconstructed with a [r] and a final [g] and the word "Turk".