

Recenzje / Reviews

Shanshan Lü 2022. *A Reference Grammar of Caijia. An Unclassified Language of Guizhou*. Sinitic Languages of China – Typological Descriptions Volume 8. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter Mouton. Pp. xxviii, 600.

With the appearance on our shelves and desks of the grammar bibliographically described above, we have at our disposal not only a description of another language so far undescribed or “**under-described**” but also yet another first-hand source testifying to how much China’s linguistic reality differs from the petrified, ideologically motivated and stubbornly maintained, official dogma of “fifty six nationalities” (Chinese + 55 ‘national minorities’) with fifty four-five¹ languages, each (save one (Chinese) or two (with Hui added)) in use within strictly determined autonomous administrative borders.

It happens to be the third book on this writer’s shelf in the “Sinitic” series mentioned above, after the grammars of Southern Min of Hui’an County (Chen 2020) and of a hybrid Sinitic language spoken in Shaowu City/County (Ngai 2021), both in Fujian Province.

¹ The exact figure depends on details – how and what one counts. On the one hand, e.g. Yugu(rs) are interestingly diversified linguistically, with four different groups each using as native one of four very different tongues: one *Mongolic* Shira or Eastern Yugu, one *Turkic* Saryg or Western Yugu, and of the remaining two groups one is Chinese- and the other Tibetan-speaking. On the other hand, the most widely dispersed Islamic Hui (the second-largest (over 10,000,000 strong) officially recognized minority; non-religious Hui communities, not to speak of individuals, also exist) with no separate and common among (and for all of) them language, usually speak the ethnolect(s) of the region they inhabit. At times, certain completely Sinicized “nationalities”, or such that have abandoned their ancestors’ tongue(s), tend to be classified, just like the Hui, as “having no language of their own” (here we have e.g. She and especially Manchu with minuscule or no population of speakers of their grandmas’ tongues). Besides, the list includes, as one nationality, also highly diversified indigenous Austronesian-language population of Taiwan referred to in PRC as *Gaoshan* ‘highlanders’ (even though not all of them are living in the highlands) with over ten different languages still in use (at least 26 known, officially 16 nationally recognized, 3 locally recognized, the remaining moribund or extinct – recorded and unrecorded; 12 recorded in Asai and Ogawa 1935, 24 recorded in Ogawa 2006).



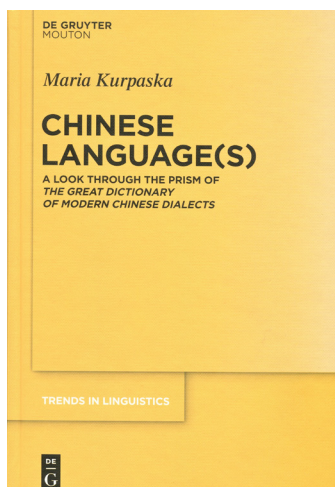
What triggered his attention and interest in the volume presented here was, apart from concern for small, endangered, newly discovered, newly described tongues, its subtitle, and particularly the attribute <unclassified> in it: the decision to accept Lü's grammar for publication in the <Sinitic> series itself is at least "a sort of" classification, all the more so that both adjectives – <unclassified> and <Sinitic> prominently featured on both the (very attractive !) cover of the book and on its opposite title pages ([II] and [III]).

Actually, the term *Sinitic* is also relatively new in the discipline. In the classical Voegelin & Voegelin 1977, one finds it only in the "Index" (p. 66) directing to ("see") *Sino-Tibetan* (307–308) where it is identified with the first component of the term *Sino-Tibetan* ("Traditionally, 'Sinitic' was supposed to have three major constituents (*Chinese*, *Kam-Tai*, and *Miao-Yao*) [...]. Note that no further reference is made to 'Sinitic'", 307). What would today require the label <Sinitic> is what the Voegelins (114–116) called simply <Chinese> defined as "an assemblage of several separate languages intertwined in an endless network of dialects" (114), with eight groupings (Yue, Hakka, Xiang, Gan, Mandarin, Wu, Northern and Southern Min, 115–116, – all still not long ago treated as "dialects of Chinese", at best as Chinese dialect clusters). Meiers 1979: 128–132 classification is basically the same ("Der chinesische Zweig" as a basic subdivision of "Sinotibetische Sprachen und Tai Sprachen", with the same further grouping, both – and many others – in fact following Yuan 1960). Ramsey saw a potential (but also a problem) in the collective glottonym <Sinitic> but used it only twice in his 1987 (: 230, 290) book.

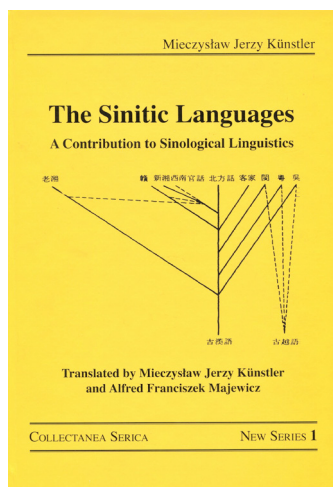
Kurpaska (2010), who was among the first to analyze the material offered by a series of 42 dictionaries of local dialects arranged according to the same pattern and compiled under the supervision of Li Rong and published between 1995–1998 (two of them in 2003), and later integrated into the monumental "great dictionary of modern Chinese dialects" (Li 2002²) with the aim to retrieve an authentic up to date documented picture of the linguistic situation of China, entitled the result of her research reservedly and diplomatically <Chinese Language(s)>. Künstler 2019 has the term <Sinitic> in its title but it actually is in part its author's own English adaptation of the Polish original released in 2000, and in part its posthumous translation – the original title was 'Chinese languages'.

The glottonym <Caijia> is as well rather a newcomer in compendia listing languages of the world: it can hardly be found in those routinely checked (cf. e.g. Majewicz 2022: 168, 170–173, 178–181) whenever this writer decides to introduce newly published unique language data of potential interest to a wider audience of "general" linguists. This writer was pleasantly satisfied to find it in Asher & Moseley 2007 (: 378 index, redirection to "*Chinese (Sinitic)*, Caijia", 379; reference to pp. 159, 161, and 200 (map 45, "Chinese, Old South-Western, Caijia [item] 17" (a tiny darker green dot on light green background just on the left edge of the map on p. 201, 9,3 cm. from the bottom edge).

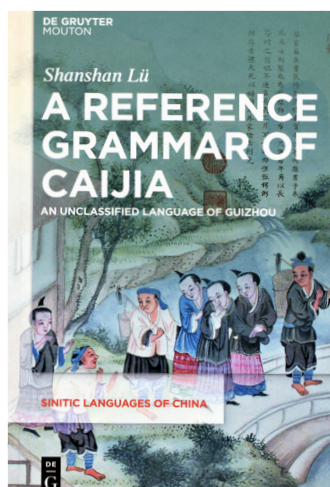
² The dictionary publication date is December 2002; Li Rong (born 1920) passed away on December 31 of the same year. He was a linguist renowned not only in China, in 1982–1985 served as director of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Institute of Linguistics.



Kurpaska 2010



Küstler 2019



Lü 2022

From Chinese language(s) to Sinitic languages to Sinitic language grammars

The Chinese exoethnonym for the language native speakers used in literature is 蔡家人 *càijiārén* or 蔡人 *càirén* while the people's endoethnonym is *meŋ²¹ ni³³ ~ meŋ³¹ ni³³* [menɿ niɿ]; the glottonyms are, respectively 蔡家话 *càijiāhuà* and *meŋ²¹ ni³³ ɲoŋ³³*. The population, seemingly astonishingly overestimated in Asher-Mosely 2007: 161 (the *number of speakers* is put at “100,000” – a misprint ?), according to the book under discussion here is “numbering at 18,000” (p. 1) and classified in literature as one of “unrecognized~unclassified~other” ethic groups (pigeonhole <归类未定> *guīlèi wèidìng* ‘classification not decided’).

The very first sentence of the book (save the front matter) under scrutiny characterizes the Caijia language not only as “under-described” but also “critically endangered [...] spoken by about 1,000 people in Bijie 毕节 Prefecture in the northwest of Guizhou 贵州[省] Province in southwestern China” (1, reference to LTBEIB). The book is provided with an imposing “Bibliography” (575–591), yet Lü notes (3) that “there is very little literature to be found on Caijia”. She indicates only two *Minzu Yuwen* papers: Bo’s 2004 14-page “outline” description (*gaikuang*) and Hu’s 2013 7-page text on Caijia pronouns, one 12-page festschrift contribution on lexicon (Zhuangchang’s 2013), and a 1982 unpublished manuscript compiled by local “Language Team of Bureau of Ethnic Identification in Bijie” (referred to as LTBEIB in the “Bibliography” (584)). The manuscript aside, it makes but 33 pages of print³.

³ The situation may have improved since the author wrote these constations – cf. Hsiu 2018 (10 pp.) or Yu 2018 (7 pp.) just at this reviewer’s hand (only they add pages to the total of 50, a 51.5% increase !). One cannot overlook articles focusing on other matters but including considerable data on and from Caijia (like Hölzl 2021) or... Lu 2020 (even if its access is temporarily restricted), and as many as her own five papers listed (584) in the *Grammar* under concern. Besides, surprising activity can be observed in the Web, cf. e.g. *Zhihu* (知乎), a social

The Caijia's past goes back to the BC era (“[...] descendants of the State of Cai 蔡國 (11th–447 BC) and were more widely distributed than nowadays in the Ming and Qing Dynasties”, 1). Lü quotes (1–3) records dated 1461 mentioning them, and 1736–1795 and 1848 describing their customs, rituals clothes; besides, she lists six other relevant Qing Dynasty sources dated 1736–1848, observing that the “Caijia were often denoted as the *Caijia Miao* 蔡家苗 ‘Hmong of Caijia’ in these documents, but in fact their customs are very different from the Hmong” (2, cf. also the cover illustration and the comment on it in the “Preface”, p. XI). Possibly, however, *miao* did not function in those contexts as ethnonym (although, again, it could: the Miao~Hmong (actually, there are many variants of the ethnonym used by various – and numerous – Miao groups) were their neighbors and the chroniclers hardly were “ethnographers”)⁴.

The attributive *unclassified* in the subtitle of the book is related also to the place of Caijia in the genealogical classification of languages. Basing on the historical records mentioned, Lü concluded that “Caijia has always been spoken in a multi-linguistic area” and this can be the source of the problem. Lü expresses it (3) bluntly: “The genetic affiliation of Caijia remains unclear”. It was considered a dialect of Chinese, a separate Sinitic language, a dialect of the Bai language(s), an ethnolect independent of but related to Bai, an ethnolect (dialect or language) related to other “uncategorized~unrecognized languages”: *Waxiang Chinese* (瓦乡话~瓦鄉話 *wǎxiānghuà*) of northwestern part of Hunan Province, *Luren~Lu* (卢人语~盧人語 *lúrényǔ*, “newly extinct” – some sixty~seventy years ago), and *Longjia* (龙家语~龍家語 *lóngjiāyǔ*, also extinct but more recently than Luren) – these *-lects* are believed to be “very archaic” results of the earliest offspring of the Old Chinese trunk (“the first split”, cf. Sagart 2011⁵), one of (up to six⁶) “Greater Bai” (~Macro-Bai~Bai) subdivision of Sino-Tibetan, a local subdialect (close to a local subdialect) of Southwestern Mandarin, “Sino-Tibetan, possibly Sinitic” (Hölzl 2021: 13).

Lü discusses, or rather briefly mentions, such varying results and proposals emerging from research (both field and office desk) to decide that “identifying the classification of Caijia is not the aim of [her] grammar” (4). The decision seems optimal: (1) firm statement is premature at this phase of research, (2) every ethnolect (and, actually, every object or matter) can be analyzed and described in detail irrespective of its classification.

question-and-answer website), or haphazardly (this writer is neither fan of, nor expert in surfing the internet) found discussions of the type characteristic of the medium like e.g. 蔡家人是一个怎样的族群? ‘what kind of ethnic group the Caijia are’ popularizing data concerning their origin and history, customs, their ethnonyms in various surrounding minority group tongues (!), also their language (sound inventory, tones, lexicon, typological features – word order, analyticity, even useful bibliodata – astonishing!).

⁴ In 2013, Caijia was presented as “recently discovered in Guizhou; ~1,000 speakers” (Hsiu slide 17), but the word *rediscovered* seems more suitable.

⁵ In Lü’s words: “Sagart [...] suggests that Caijia constitutes an early split from Old Chinese along with [...] Waxiang” (4).

⁶ The remaining being three Baic tongues – Northern Bai, and Central and Southern Bai, and three <Ta-Li> tongues – Caijia, and Longjia-Luren as Longjia and Luren (thus in Glottolog documentation archives; cf. also Hölzl 2021: 17 for terms <Ta-Li> and <Cai-Long> and Hsiu 2013, slide 17 for the Macro-Bai grouping tree).

Here, we conclude this matter with the following quotation from Bradley 2007: 159: “In addition to these [seven⁷] major clusters, there are three smaller residual groups in the south-west, Waxiang, Pinghua and Caijia, who speak distinct varieties of Chinese that are strongly influenced by other surrounding types of Chinese but they probably represent residual Chinese populations that preceded the spread of Mandarin and other varieties into these areas”. The “Sinitic languages” in Bradley (p. 161) have been classified into four “groups” (the principal unit in the table): <Mandarin> (with four subclasses), <Central> (with three subclasses – Xiang, Gan, and Wu (each with further subdivisions – 2, 2, and 6, respectively), <Southern> (with three subcategories: Yue, Min – with 5 subdivisions, and Hakka), and – the most interesting for us here – <Old South-western>, with three *-lects* listed: Waxiang, Pinghua, and Caijia⁸.

Apart from the “unclassifiedness” discussed above, other eye-catching features of Lü’s *Grammar* have been the attractively exposed (subchapter “1.4 Basic features”, 6–12) typological particularities of the ethnolect described. Advertized explicitly (numbered) are four of them but this author prefers to indicate a few of them regardless of Lü’s selection (for which this writer has no objections whatsoever) rather in accordance with his own capricious and *ad hoc* preferences, like “[...] Caijia possesses **many common features with** the languages of different families, including **Mon-Khmer, Tai-Kadai, Hmong-Mien, Sinitic, and Tibeto-Burman**” (10, **bold** afm), “compared with Sinitic languages, Caijia is *isolating to a higher degree*” (7, *cursive* afm), “most of the words in Caijia are monosyllabic and affixation is limited, while noun-forming suffixes are widely observed in Sinitic languages”, yet “fusion words can be observed” (*ib.*) “Caijia [...] basically an SVO language” with “two other word orders [...] observed” and (7), “pronoun dropping” whenever the context allows (9), “object marking constructions” (*ib.*), linguistic diversity in Caijia surroundings and linguistic diversity of Caijia itself despite the small population of speakers and relatively small Caijia-speaking area. Typological approach is felt present throughout the volume.

The core of the book (1–558), preceded by 28 front matter pages, is organized into 16 “chapters”, the first being “Introduction”, and the sixteenth – “Conclusion”; for this writer, it looks like a confusion of genres, in the case of “Chapter 1 Introduction”

⁷ *i.e.*, Mandarin, Wu, Gan, Xiang, Min, Yue, Hakka.

⁸ Svantesson 1991 has been devoted to “the written language situation of China’s minority peoples” (:70) but it includes three appendices, one of them (app. 2) listing “Ethnic groups and languages in China” (82–85); the list successfully served for years as the most accurate and complete source of information available for general linguists. The same can be also said about App. 3 (86–87) providing “Genetic classification of the languages of China” – there, one finds the category <Sinitic> with three languages – “Bai, Chinese, Wutun” and the category <(Unclassified)> with one language only (Tangwang; on Wutun see Sandman 2016, on Tangwang – Xu 2017, 2014). Lü herself provides “a list of Sinitic languages” (pp. 12–13) with “Standard Mandarin” (*putonghua*) and “ten branches of contemporary Chinese dialects” (following the 1987 “Australian” *Language Atlas of China* (Hongkong: Longman)), one of the branches being “Mandarin 官话 *guanhua*”, the only one subclassified into eight subgroups, one of them in turn – “Southwestern” – marked in bold “as the major Sinitic language spoken in the Caijia area”.

reinforced by the insertion of a redundant and totally functionless list of chapter titles from the – praiseworthy – table of “Contents” (XIII–XXI), belonging to still another genre in academic book editorship. In this writer’s opinion, the primary role of introduction, well harmonized with other interrelated components of the book infrastructure like table of contents, index (indices), references and cross-references, source documentation, bibliography, notes, abbreviation lists, etc., is to serve as a guidance tool to optimize the *user-friendliness* of the publication offered – one cannot expect someone reading an academic book of substantial volume from desk to desk whenever one wants to check a detail of current or sudden interest. *Conclusion* is also rather an infrastructure instrument than a <chapter>. The book concludes with two analyzed and translated texts (“The man and the tiger” 559–567, and “The zombie wife” 568–573)⁹, the bibliography mentioned above, and an index (593–600). The latter, together with the “Contents” mentioned above, do back up each one the others.

The “Introduction” (1–13), from which certain fragments have been quoted or referred to above, places Caijia – the people and the tongue – in words and literally on the map, more precisely on three tiny maps¹⁰ localizing (1) Guizhou Province (贵州省) on the map of China, (2) Bijie Prefecture¹¹ on the map of Guizhou, and (3) Hezhang and Weining Counties (resp., 赫章县 Hèzhāngxiàn and, to the west, 威宁县 Wēiníngxiàn). The third map points to six Caijia-speaking locations (three in Weining and three in Hezhang) and simultaneously three Caijia language varieties: *Weining* (four locations, three on the territory of Weining County, one just on the Bijie side of the borderline between the two counties), *Songlin*, and *Xingfa* (both in southeastern part of Hezhang County). Xingfa is of particular importance here as “the data presented in [Lü’s *Grammar*] were collected in Xingfa Township 兴发乡 [Xīngfāxiāng...] between 2012–2015 during nine months of fieldwork in total” (4–5). At first sight the maps looked transparent and useful but turned out to be of little or no help in attempts to use them in confrontation with linguistic (and also other) atlases and maps of China available to this writer (too small, too ambiguous, too few details, too little explanation, at the least; still, better such one than none).

In the same subchapter (“Data and methodology”, 4–6) Lü very briefly characterized the collected material, explained the languages of communication with her informants and introduced three of them by name, age, languages spoken, and some other bio-background – two (male and his generation younger daughter-in-law) from a Xingfa village and one from Songlin Township (松林镇 Sōnglínzhèn): “despite the short distance between Xingfa and Songlin, [the Songlin informant] speaks a different variety of Caijia than

⁹ In the entire volume, “data are presented in a four-line format with both English and Standard Mandarin [simplified characters] translations” (6).

¹⁰ Treated as one – and only – map in the book, captioned <Map 1.1: Xingfa Caijia>.

¹¹ In November 2011 Bijie Prefecture (毕节地区 Bìjié dìqū) administratively became “prefecture-level city” Bijie (毕节市 Bìjiéshì), so the map shows rather Bijie City jurisdiction area.

the” Xingfa couple. Two more Weining variety data informants have also been named but the data “will not be presented in [Lü’s] work” (6)¹².

Chapters that follow have also been conditioned by the typological features of the language. Chapter 2 provides a description of Caijia “**Sound system**”¹³ (14–44) in terms of “**Onsets**” (14–33; 33 onset consonants), “**Rimes**” (33–36)¹⁴, and “**Tones**” (36–44; five tones, instead of four in previous literature, “suggested”). Chapter 3 discusses “Noun phrases” (45–103; here “Demonstratives” (46–49), “Nouns” (40–59), “Pronouns” (59–76, of interest here personal **honorifics** for 2nd and 3rd person singular), “Numerals” (77–78), “**Classifiers and measure words**” (78–92)¹⁵; “Place words, localizers¹⁶, and time words”, “headless noun phrases” (100–103). The next chapter, naturally, is about “Verb phrases” (104–182): “Similar to Standard Chinese [...], Caijia adjectives function just like verbs [...] Though [they] do share many common features with canonical verbs, they also possess distinctive features” (105) – hence both have been treated under the “Verbs” (104–151) label; other subchapters are on “Adverbs” (151–160), “**Verbal classifiers**”¹⁷ (160–171), “Prepositions”¹⁸ (171–181). Further chapters: 5 “Ditransitive constructions” (three “major” types and two “minor” types, 183–199); 6 “Analytic causative constructions” (three types, 200–218); 7 “Passive constructions” (two types, 219–242); 8 “Differential **object**” **marking** constructions (“also known as [...] ‘disposal constructions’ [...]”, three types, 243–262); 9 “Constructions of comparison” (263–301); 10 “Aspect system” (11 aspects¹⁹, 302–353); 11. “Modal system” (354–414); 12 “Negation” (415–426); 13 “Interrogatives” (427–458); 14 “Relative clauses” (459–480); 15 “Clause linking: Complementation, coordination and adverbial subordination” (481–555), and 16 overall “Conclusion” (556–558).

¹² Generally, Lü’s “Introduction” could be (and was) expected to be more extensive and more informative on the Caijia area and communities after the author’s nine months of staying there and direct contact with the people – few potential users of the book had or will have a chance to pay a visit there; recently, this writer enjoyed the pleasure of assessing and recommending to colleagues linguists and ethnologists De Gruyter Mouton’s grammars of Xong in which the 11-page “Introduction” was followed by 48 pages of very elucidative “Background”, and of Papapana in which similarly organized such introductory material on 67 pages was additionally richly illustrated with maps, charts, and photos (speakers of the language described stop being anonymous for the user of the book). Not a bad pattern to apply.

¹³ The “chapter [...] will not explore [Caijia] phonological system in depth” (14).

¹⁴ “33 rimes observed”, of them 30 “formed with vowels or nasal codas”, 3 “are syllabic consonants [...] not] identified” in past research; 11 monophthongs (33–34) and nine diphthongs (34–35), ten rimes for nasal codas (35–36).

¹⁵ Both terms practically imply the same and have in literature been used alternatively to **count uncountables**; in languages with no categorial number distinction simply all is uncountable and requires a unit (like *cup*, *spoon*, *kilogram*, *liter*, *gallon*, *bottle*, *piece of*, etc.). Lü argues that “Classifiers are [...] not a universal category, but every language possesses measure words [...] similar to classifiers” and shows that in Caijia “several features of measure words can distinguish them from classifiers” (91) – hardly convincingly, still *entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem*.

¹⁶ “... indicate a relative spatial relation between two entities. The[ir] function [...] is to turn ordinary nouns into place words ...” (94).

¹⁷ „As a category, [they] are *not commonly referenced in general linguistic literature*” (160, *cursive afm*).

¹⁸ “all of which are derived from verbs but clearly behave differently” (182).

¹⁹ “As is typical of Sinitic languages, Caijia is also an aspect prominent language” (352).

From the latter we quote the following: “**Caijia** is a **dying language**. The present grammar is not only the **first global description** of its grammatical system, but also a **documentation**, which we hope can be considered as the major contribution of this research work” which “provides reliable linguistic data not only for further areal typological studies on East and Southeast Asian languages, but also provides **valuable insight into the diversity of the languages** of the area” (558, **bold** afm). Precisely – nothing to add (cf. the beginning of the present text).

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²⁰ *Bijié mínzú shìbié bàngōngshì yǔyánzǔ*.

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²¹ Interpreted also as Zheng Zhongshangfang or Zheng Zhang Shangfang.