

A Brief Account of my Research Work

[with an appended bibliography]

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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