

## The State of Sino-Tibetan

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Thurgood, Graham and Randy J. LaPolla, eds. *The Sino-Tibetan Languages*. Second Edition. London and New York: Routledge, 2017. xxx + 1018 pp. ISBN 978-1-138-78332-4. Price £300.00.

The publication of a second edition of *The Sino-Tibetan Languages*, edited by Graham Thurgood and Randy LaPolla, testifies to sustained interest in this language family. Comparing the first and second editions provides a window onto 14 years of research. The book's girth has grown from 716 to 1010 pages. Newly treated languages include Mongsen Ao, Karbi, Tangsa, Kurtöp, Manange, Stau, Japhug, Wambule Rai, Sangla Kinnauri, Lizu, Yongning Na, Zaiwa, and Tujia. Only Yunnan Bai and Kham fell away to make room for the newcomers.<sup>1</sup>

A positive change to affect linguistics between the publication of the two editions is increasing care and explicitness in the handling of primary data. An inspiring example of this trend is Boyd Michailovsky's article on Hayu. In 2003 his examples were not cited, but here in the second edition a citation follows each example, e.g. Bbs11 following example 1 (p. 687). He explains the abbreviations used and gives a url where the original audio files are available (p. 695).<sup>2</sup> I succeeded in listening to Bbs11. Among the articles new to the second addition, three provide data citations of some kind. In the article on Japhug, Guillaume Jacques provides citations such as 05-khWna, 5 (p. 629) and remarks that the corresponding files are "progressively being made available" (p. 633) on the Pangloss archive. Even without a url or an explanation of the conventions I succeeded in listening to 05-khWna. In the article on Manange, Kristine Hildebrant and Oliver Bond provide citations such as Braga\_M22013006 (p. 522) and give a url for a repository at the University of Virginia (p. 532). Unfortunately, no file with such a name is available at the link given. Thus, I have failed to listen to Braga\_M22013006.<sup>3</sup> In the article on Karbi, Linda Konnerth provides citations such as SiT, HF 058 (p. 307). She does not say where these files are hosted nor give any details of her conventions. I have not succeeded in listening to SiT, HF 058. Thus, only four of the 53 chapters cite original data and for only two can the reader confirm the data cited. It is

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1 Co-editor Thurgood says Kham is included (p. 26), but I do not find it.

2 I located the files at a somewhat different url, namely [http://lacito.vjf.cnrs.fr/pangloss/corpus/list\\_rsc\\_en.php?lg=Hayu](http://lacito.vjf.cnrs.fr/pangloss/corpus/list_rsc_en.php?lg=Hayu) (accessed 9 July 2017).

3 Kristine Hildebrant (per litteras, 9 June 2017) has kindly pointed me to a url for the transcript; the video is also meant to load at the same site, but for me it did not: <http://audio-video.shanti.virginia.edu/video/manange-man-describes-drinking-water-problem> (accessed on 9 June 2017).

disappointing that so many among the authors of newly commissioned articles did not cite their data; this failing is particularly perplexing in the case of those authors who benefited from the generosity of agencies that explicitly require archiving in public repositories. The move toward open data is still in its early days.

The focus of the volume is squarely on modern languages; Tangut and Classical Tibetan are the only premodern tongues treated; the articles on Burmese, Chinese, Meitei, and Newar exclude discussion of their more ancient stages. The ample inclusion of understudied languages is welcome, but the rudimentary state of research at times impinges on the presentation. Thus, Gwendolyn Hyslop distinguishes genitive and ergative cases in Kurtöp although both are marked with *-i*, *-gi*, and *-li* (p. 410). We learn neither how these variants are conditioned nor why it is necessary to divide them into two cases. Anju Saxena's account of the Sangla Kinnauri case system exhibits similar problems, with *-u*, *-o*, *(-)pəŋ*, and *-n(u)* marking the dative and *-u*, *-o* and *-n(u)* marking the genitive (pp. 759-760). She tells us that as dative markers *-u* and *-o* occur "predominantly" after singular nouns ending in consonants and *(-)pəŋ* after those ending in vowels. By implication *-u* and *-o* as genitive markers suffer no such phonological restrictions, but we are not told, nor do we learn how to interpret the option hyphen before *pəŋ*. Some authors represent the languages they study as more poorly researched than they are. Zaiwa is the best described Burmish language, worked on at least by Yabu,<sup>4</sup> Wannemacher,<sup>5</sup> and Lustig.<sup>6</sup> Zhu ignores these authors; he himself penned three of the four items in his bibliography (p. 884). Saxena's bibliography on Kinnauri thoroughly lists the early literature, but omits reference to Takahashi's work on the Pangli dialect.<sup>7</sup>

The space of a short review forbids detailed treatment of the book's 53 chapters. I therefore limit my remaining remarks to the editors' two introductory chapters and the chapter on Classical Tibetan, a language familiar to me. I conclude with a few overall comments.

### 'Sino-Tibetan: genetic and areal subgroups' by Graham Thurgood

Thurgood provides a judicious and mostly up-to-date account of Sino-Tibetan subgrouping. On the place of Chinese he is agnostic; for him 'Tibeto-Burman' is "a convenient way to refer to all languages except Chinese (Sinitic), but

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4 Yabu Shirō 藪 司郎, 『アツィ語基礎語彙集』.

5 Mark W. Wannemacher, *Aspects of Zaiwa Prosody*.

6 Anton Lustig, *A grammar and dictionary of Zaiwa*.

7 Yoshiharu Takahashi, "A descriptive study of Kinnauri (Pangli dialect)", 97-119, "On the deictic patterns in Kinnauri (Pangli dialect)," pp. 341-354, "On the Verbal Affixes in West Himalayan", pp. 21-49, and "On a Middle Voice Suffix in Kinnauri (Pangli dialect)", pp. 157-175

without committing to a subgrouping scheme” (p. 5). However, this agnosticism is not carried over into the book’s organization, which clearly divides the family into Sinitic versus Tibeto-Burman and lavishes Chinese with attention it is otherwise not due. All of Thurgood’s subgroupings require a pinch of salt; in almost no case is scholarship advanced enough to point to uncontroversial shared innovations. Even for Lolo-Burmese, which Thurgood calls “a well-established subgroup with a system of complex, shared innovations, involving initials, tones, and rhymes” (p. 8) he names no innovations, and I am aware of none, despite having read the works he cites. Thurgood does not discuss all subgrouping hypotheses meriting attention. Turin’s proposal that Thangmi and Baram subgroup with Newar (p. 30)<sup>8</sup> and Jacques’ suggestion of a Burmo-Qiangic branch uniting Lolo-Burmese, Qiangic, and Rgyalrongic,<sup>9</sup> are two promising recent ideas not touched upon. Rung is the most controversial proposal Thurgood treats; it is a large subgroup that combines Rgyalrongic and Kiranti among other branches. The Rung hypothesis finds its motivation in LaPolla’s desire to reconstruct an *Ursprache* with isolating morphology. So, to dismiss the testimony of those languages with verb agreement, they all come under one roof. In 2003 both editors accepted Rung, but did not impose the subgroup on the structure of their book. In contrast, in the new edition Thurgood’s discussion of the hypothesis is more measured,<sup>10</sup> but now Rung is oddly enshrined in the table of contents.

Thurgood’s chapter includes some mistakes. He describes the second pronoun \*khyet ‘thou’ as an innovation common to the Tibetan languages (p. 11); in fact the word is plural ‘you’ and never ‘thou’ (*vide infra*). Citing VanBik, Thurgood claims that in Kuki-Chin \*s-, \*sy- > \*th- (p. 23). In fact, \*sy- becomes \*s<sup>h</sup> - in VanBik’s system. Thus, Matisoff’s<sup>11</sup> Tibeto-Burman reconstruction \*sya ‘meat’ becomes Kuki-Chin \*s<sup>h</sup> aa, in turn yielding Daai Chin s<sup>h</sup> a ‘flesh’;<sup>12</sup> compare Tib. *śa*, Lashi *śaH*, etc. Staying with meat, if we accept Post’s suggestion that Gongduk *dij* ‘tree’ descends from \*siŋ (cf. Tib. *śiñ* ‘tree’ and Chi. 薪 \*siŋ ‘firewood’) then it is logical to suppose that Gongduk *tafi* ‘meat’ continues \*sya ‘flesh’ (p. 15).<sup>13</sup>

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8 Mark Turin, *A Grammar of Thangmi*, pp. 25-28.

9 Guillaume Jacques, *Esquisse de phonologie et de morphologie historique du Tangoute*, pp. 305-306. Although not reflected in the book’s table of contents, Thurgood admits that Tangut is “likely close” to Rgyalrong (p. 7), a view that the article on Stau by Jacques et al. (p. 611) also argues for.

10 LaPolla leaves his earlier discussion untouched (p. 49),

11 James A. Matisoff, *Handbook of Proto-Tibeto-Burman*, p. 169.

12 Kenneth VanBik, *Proto-Kuki-Chin*, p. 186

13 One could also propose a connection between Gongduk *um* ‘face’ and Tib. *ḥ um* ‘kiss’ or Chi. 唵 \*ʔum? ‘hold in the mouth’, see Benedict, Paul K. (1972). *Sino-Tibetan: a Conspectus*, p. 36. Unfortunately, I cannot confirm the philological reality of either the Tibetan or Chinese

Thurgood does not take sufficient care to distinguish Tibetan loans from cognates in those languages that enjoy cultural contacts with Tibetan speakers. For example, the realization of Tibetan *s-* as high tone in Dakpa in such words as <sup>H</sup> *MAN*<sup>5.3</sup> (Tib. *sman*) 'medicine' and <sup>H</sup> *NUM*<sup>5.3</sup> (Tib. *snum*) 'oil' (p. 13) is not diagnostic of an East Bodish subgroup unless the possibility can be excluded that the Dakpa words are Tibetan loans.<sup>14</sup> Hyslop<sup>15</sup> may be correct that the etymon *kho* 'water' is not unique to Puroik, but her comparisons to Bodo *khwa* 'snow' and Dakpa *kho* 'water' mentioned by Thurgood are irrelevant (p. 28); they are loans from Tibetan *kha-ba* 'snow'.<sup>16</sup> Thurgood's further evidence for cognates between the Kho-Bwa cluster and wider Tibeto-Burman (p. 29) includes additional Tibetan loans; *karma* 'star' in Chug and Lish is borrowed from Tib. *skar-ma* 'star' and the words for 'eight' *sarge?*, *sarge?*, *sardzat*, *sargyat*, *sardze* in Chug, Lish, Rupa, Shergaon, and Sartang respectively, because they share with Tibetan an epenthetic *-g-* resulting from Li's law (Tib. *brgyad* < \*bryad, cf. OBur. *rhyat* and Chi. 八 \*p<sup>f</sup> ret) are either Tibetan borrowings or evidence that Kho-Bwa is a Bodish sub-branch.

Bibliographic lacunae in Thurgood's essay include Nishi's<sup>17</sup> important article on directional prefixes (p. 15), Button's<sup>18</sup> work in Kuki-Chin reconstruction (p. 23), and the works of Jones<sup>19</sup> and Haudricourt<sup>20</sup> on proto-Karenic (p. 27). One can also regret that the excellent works of Xun Gong on Tibetan historical phonology<sup>21</sup> appeared too recently for Thurgood to make use of.

### 'Overview of Sino-Tibetan morphosyntax' by Randy LaPolla.

LaPolla's article first discusses those morphosyntactic features that he sets up for the *Ursprache* and then turns to subgroups in tandem with their characteristic morphosyntax. LaPolla's subgrouping closely parallels Thurgood's and need not command our further attention here. The Tibetan evidence for some Sino-Tibetan morphemes is often more equivocal than LaPolla makes out. For

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words.

14 I propose \*-as > -os as a shared innovation indicative of the Bodish branch, since the change is preserved in Kurtöp in words where it was analogically leveled in Tibetan in prehistoric times. See Nathan W. Hill, "Tibetan \*-as > -os," pp. 163-173.

15 Gwendolyn Hyslop, *A grammar of Kurtöp*, p. 40, n. 14

16 Hyslop also compares Dzongkha *khau*, which, since Dzongkha is a Tibetan dialect, is an inherited pronunciation of the Tibetan word.

17 Nishi Yoshio 西義, 「中国国内のチベット・ビルマ語系の言語見られる方向指示の動詞接辞」, pp. 26-45

18 Christopher Button, *Proto-Northern Chin*.

19 Robert B. Jones, *Karen Linguistic Studies*.

20 André-Georges Haudricourt, "Restitution du Karen commun," pp. 103-111, and "A propos de la restitution du Karen commun," pp. 129-132.

21 Gong Xun, "A phonological history of Amdo Tibetan rhymes," pp. 347-374, and "Prenasalized reflex of Old Tibetan <ld> and related clusters in Central Tibetan," pp. 127-147.

example, he refers to Tibetan *m-* as an intransitivizing prefix (p. 42).<sup>22</sup> This *m-* is a ghost morpheme. The English translation of Tibetan verbs beginning with *m-* are transitive as often as intransitive. Snellgrove draws attention to *mthoñ* 'see', *mchod* 'honor', *mdzad* 'do'.<sup>23</sup> The *Paradebeispiel* for this would-be prefix is the pair *mnam* 'smell, stink' versus *snom*, *bsnams* 'sniff, take a smell of', but Jacques<sup>24</sup> demonstrates that the *m-* belongs to the verbal root; it is missing from the transitive verb due to a sound change \**smn-* > *sm-*.<sup>25</sup>

LaPolla also posits a Tibetan *-d* suffix causative;<sup>26</sup> this is another ghost, which results from confusing the *-d* present tense suffix in some transitive paradigms with derivation. If one cites the whole paradigms *h bye* (pres.), *bye* (past), *h bye* (fut.), *-* (imp.) 'open, separate' (vi) and *h byed*, *phye*, *dbye*, *phye* 'open, separate' (vt) rather than just the present tense the temptation to propose a *-d* transitivizing suffix disappears.<sup>27</sup> Clearly the reconstruction of Sino-Tibetan morphosyntax would benefit from greater attention to philological detail.

### 'Classical Tibetan' by Scott DeLancey

This article opens with the claim that "Tibetan is attested from the mid seventh century CE" (p. 369). In fact, although writing began around 650, the oldest attested document is the *Žol* inscription from after 763. DeLancey follows van Schaik's account of the origins of the Tibetan alphabet,<sup>28</sup> apparently unaware of Schuh's objections.<sup>29</sup> The definition of Old Tibetan as the "written language of documents and inscriptions of the Tibetan Empire" (p. 369) is inaccurate.

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22 As antecedents LaPolla cites Stuart N. Wolfenden, *Outlines of Tibeto-Burman Linguistic Morphology*, p. 27, and Matisoff, *Handbook*, p. 117.

23 David L. Snellgrove, review of Marcelle Lalou's *Manuel elementaire de tibétain classique*, p. 199. In my review of Matisoff's *Handbook*, I also note *mkhyud* 'conceal', *mkhyen* 'know', *mgar* 'smith, forge', *mthud* 'join, connect', and *mthol* 'confess'; see Nathan W. Hill, review of Matisoff's *Handbook*, p. 175.

24 Guillaume Jacques, "On Coblin's Law", pp. 155-165.

25 Although counter-evidence to an *m-* intransitive prefix has been marshaled repeatedly since 1954, some take no notice, for example James A. Matisoff, "The so-called prefixes of Tibeto-Burman", pp. 13-32.

26 The proposal of a Tibetan causative *-d* suffix originates with August Conrady, *Eine indochinesische Causativ-Denominativ-Bildung*, p. 45.

27 The article has a number of minor infelicities. The transliteration of the 23rd letter of the Tibetan alphabet causes LaPolla difficulties. He omits the letter both in initial and in final position, writing *a-chung* (p. 41) for *hia-chung* (*h a-chuñ* in my practice), the neologism used as the name of this letter in Western scholarship, and *bka* (p. 43) for *bkañ* (*bkañ* in my practice). Another infelicity is the omission of Tangut characters (p. 51).

28 Sam van Schaik, "A new look at the source of the Tibetan script," 45-96.

29 Dieter Schuh, "Tibetischen Inschriften ins Maul geschaut," 143-184.

Most Old Tibetan documents date from after the fall of the Empire.<sup>30</sup> Errors of fact and analysis also make their way into DeLancey's account of phonology and grammar. The description of the 23rd letter of the Tibetan alphabet is a case in point. How can the *ḥ* in *ḥ o-ma* be a "place-holder ... where there is no other consonant" (p. 371), when this word is pronounced with a uvular initial in Mgo-log *ḥoma* and other dialects.<sup>31</sup> The claim that this letter is used "to indicate the position of the vowel in an otherwise ambiguous sequence of consonants" (371) is also not correct. On the one hand the potentially ambiguous syllable /dga/ 'joy' is in Old Tibetan written both *dgaḥ* (PT 1047, l. 359 *myi dgaḥ žiñ ñ u žiñ*) and *dga* (PT 1134, l. 206 *dga-dañ skyid-pa*). On the other hand unambiguous syllables such as /pa/ and /la/ often occur as *paḥ* and *laḥ*. Even in later Tibetan the unambiguous syllable /bka/ 'word' is written *bkaḥ*. DeLancey describes *khyed* as honorific equivalent of *khyod* (p. 373). In fact, *khyod* is singular 'thou' and *khyed* plural 'you', as pointed out by Mi pham (1846-1912) and confirmed in more recent research.<sup>32</sup> In the treatment of case marking DeLancey omits the associative *-dañ* and the comparative *-bas* (p. 375).<sup>33</sup> He incorrectly states that the imperative is negated with *ma* (p. 380); any pedagogical grammar will confirm that the imperative is not normally negated and prohibitions use the present with *ma*. He incorrectly gives the paradigm of 'pursue' as *sñegs*, *bsñegs*, *bsñeg*, *sñegs* (p. 376). In fact, because all four stems of the verb appear in a single passage in the Old Tibetan version of the *Rāmāyaṇa*,<sup>34</sup> one can say with unique confidence that the paradigm is *sñegs*, *bsñags*, *bsñag*, *sñogs*.

DeLancey did not uniformly avail himself of the opportunity to update his article. The encoding of switch reference<sup>35</sup> and evidentiality<sup>36</sup> in the Classical Tibetan verbal system are the two major phenomena to become clear since 2003; DeLancey fails to mention either (p. 382). His bibliography is also missing

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30 Brandon Dotson and Agnieszka Helman-Wazny, *Codicology, Paleography, and Orthography of Early Tibetan Document*, pp. 18-19.

31 Sprigg, Richard Keith, " 'Rhinoglottophilia' revisited," p. 52.

32 *gañ -zag gcig-laḥ añ khyod ces gcig-tshig-dañ / že-sa sbyar-na khyed ces mañ -tshig-dañ* (Tshad ma rnam ḥ grel gyi gžuñ gsal bor bśad pa legs bśad snañ baḥ i gter, 24; ch. 1). The honorific use of the plural for the singular emerged later, as happened to French *vous* and English 'you'. See Nathan W. Hill, "The Emergence of the Pluralis majestatis," pp. 249-262.

33 See Nicolas Tournadre, "The Classical Tibetan cases and their transcategoriality," 87-125, and Nathan W. Hill, "Tibetan -las, -nas, and -bas," pp. 3-38.

34 I.O.L. Tib J 0737.1, ll. 144-150, see J. W. de Jong, *The story of Rāma in Tibet*, p. 113.

35 See Abel Zadoks, "Switch Evidence in Old Tibetan", "The Tibetan Connection" and Felix Haller, "Switch-Reference in Tibetan," 45-70.

36 See Hoshi Izumi 星泉, 「14世紀チベット語文獻『王統明示鏡』における存在動詞」, pp. 29-68, Nathan W. Hill, "ḥ dug as a testimonial marker in Classical and Old Tibetan," pp. 1-16, and Guillaume Oisel "On the origin of the Lhasa Tibetan evidentials *song* and *byung*," pp. 161-184.



important recent works. In particular, the only two grammars to rigorously cite examples, those of Peter Schwieger and Hoshi Izumi, are overlooked.<sup>37</sup>

As noted above, a cavalier handling of language data among field linguists of previous generations is no surprise. However, the cavalier handling of ancient languages was never a scholarly norm. Thus, DeLancey's practice of citing Classical Tibetan passages with no indication as to what text they come from is unexpected. The second example on page 375 is from the *Mdzañ s blun*, translated from Chinese into Tibetan by Chos grub (法成 Fǎ chéng) at Dunhuang in the ninth century. The example at the bottom of the previous pages is from the *Mi la ras paḥ i rnam thar*, written by Gtsaṅ smyon he ru ka rus paḥ i rgyan can (1452–1507) and published in 1488. Although DeLancey does not cite the passage, he does mention this text, saying that it “probably dates from the 14th century” (p. 369). I am familiar with these texts and can recognize some of the passages; an innocent reader would hardly suspect that in two pages DeLancey treats forms of language separated by six centuries. To appreciate the eccentricity of DeLancey's practice one need imagine a 10 page article on Middle English that said of the *The Canterbury Tales* merely that it probably dates from the 13th century. Further imagine that this article cited passages from Chaucer and from Virginia Woolf side by side without comment or attribution.

Despite its many problems, in places DeLancey describes subtleties of Tibetan grammar with clarity and insight. In particular, bearing in mind the caveat that he fails to distinguish *yañ* 'even' (with sandhi variant *kyañ*) from *yañ* 'also' (invariant), his discussion of *ni* versus *yañ* is the best I know (p. 381). Nonetheless, the limitations of the article necessarily engender skepticism vis-à-vis novel proposals such as that the “postclitic, *bo*, is occasionally encountered as a definite article” (p. 374). I have yet to encounter this clitic in my readings and wish DeLancey had included an example.

### Concluding remarks

The first edition of *The Sino-Tibetan Languages* has proven a useful resource to scholars and students alike. The second edition is a welcome expansion and improvement.<sup>38</sup> The book provides a good overview of the state of the art and its participants, if perhaps relying too much on scholars educated on the US' West Coast. Of course, the Tibeto-Burman language family is more extensive than any

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37 Peter Schwieger, *Handbuch zur Grammatik der klassischen tibetischen Schriftsprache*, and, Hoshi Izumi 星泉, 『古典チベット語文法—『王統明鏡史』』. Hoshi's grammar was probably too recently published to have been included.

38 In a work of this size and complexity a certain unevenness in editorial attention is inevitable. The inconsistent treatment of bibliographic items in Chinese, sometimes characters and no pinyin (p. 183), sometimes pinyin and no characters (p. 644), sometimes only translation into English (p. 844), is one example.

single volume can survey. Consequently, this book is best supplemented with reference to more comprehensive works, such as the 言語学大辞典 *Gengogaku Daijiten*, with 44 Tibeto-Burman related entries by Nishida Tatsuo and Nishi Yoshio alone, and more specialized works such as the 云南特殊语言研究 *Yúnnán tēshū yǔ yán yánjiū*.

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