

REVIEW OF *THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF CHINESE LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS (BRILL)*

Rikker Dockum
Yale University
rikker.dockum@yale.edu

In its publisher blurb, the *Encyclopedia of Chinese Language and Linguistics* (ECLL) (Brill, 2016, ISBN: 978-90-04-18643-9 (hardcover and available online), Editor-in-Chief: Rint Sybesma) is described as “a systematic and comprehensive overview of the languages of China” which provides “authoritative treatment of all important aspects of the languages spoken in China, today and in the past.” Despite the peril of claims of comprehensiveness and authoritativeness on any topic so broad, the ECLL largely delivers on these claims. The encyclopedia comprises more than 500 articles, written by top scholars in East and Southeast Asian linguistics, making the scholarship overall very high quality and up to date. It was published in a five-volume print edition at the end of 2016, but in the long term, the electronic version will no doubt prove to be of the greatest value, being full-text searchable, and easily updated and expanded. This review focuses on what the ECLL brings to the table for researchers in Southeast Asian linguistics.

For linguists working on Sinitic languages, the ECLL will be a useful supplement to the Routledge *Encyclopedia of the Chinese Language* (Chan 2016), though they no doubt cover some of the same ground. While that work focused on Sinitic, the scope of the ECLL is broader, covering the larger language ecology of China (broadly defined within the ECLL to include Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Tibet). This means that the ECLL is also extremely useful to Southeast Asian linguists and goes a long way toward bridging the gap that often exists between linguistic research in the geographic regions of Southeast Asia and China.

All of the major language families of Southeast Asia are represented in China, and the ECLL has good coverage here, including top-level overviews on *Austronesian* (Saillard), *Austroasiatic* (Diffloth & Badenoch), *Tai-Kadai* (Luo), *Hmong-Mien* (Taguchi), and *Tibeto-Burman* (Bradley), as well as a macro discussion *Languages and Language Families* (Bradley), which explains both contact and genetic affiliations. There are also more focused articles on individual branches and groups. Examples from Tai-Kadai include articles on Dǎi (Luo), Hlai (Norquest), Sui (Luo) and Zhuàng (Luo), and Austronesian languages of Taiwan are represented by articles on Rukai (Zeitoun), Atayal (Li), Puyuma (Teng), and Tsou (Chang). This is a boon to students and scholars who work in these families but do not focus on China, as it illuminates the situation of each family or subgroup within China, while also contextualizing them within current understanding of the family as a whole. A series of articles, each title starting with *Non-Sinitic Languages of*, gives additional broad coverage for *Northwest China* (Yakup), *Northeast China* (Janhunen), *Southeast China* (Ratliff), *Yúnnán and Sìchūān* (Chirkova), and *Tibet* (Bielmeier), with an overview for *Non-Chinese Substrates* (Norman) as well.

The lengths of the articles in the ECLL range from 1,000 to 6,000 words, with most articles mentioned in this review falling in the mid- to upper portion of that range. Article length is helpfully given in both search results and just under the title of each article, and (possibly less helpfully) the bibliography counts toward the reported word count. To give a few examples, the main Austroasiatic article is 5,888 words, the one on Hmong-Mien is 3,192, and *Non-IPA Symbols in IPA Transcriptions in China* (Handel) weighs in at 979 words.

The encyclopedia's panchronic approach means that there is ample historical and comparative material of interest as well, such as the *Sino-Tai Hypothesis* (Ostapirat), *Historical Phonology* (Sun), *Historical Syntax* (Peyraube), and *Dialect Geography* (Iwata). It is similarly useful to have overviews of *Middle Chinese Phonology* (Shen), *Old Chinese Phonology* (Sagart & Baxter), and a series of entries on premodern features of Chinese (e.g. aspect, modal verbs, word classes, concessives, indirect speech, wh-questions, and so forth). Language contact is another frequent theme, including entries on *Chinese and Thai* (Luo), *Chinese Loanwords*

in the *Languages of Southeast Asia* (Alves), *Chinese Loanwords in Vietnamese* (Alves), *Pre-Qín Loanwords* (Miyake) and *Pidgins and Creoles* (Ansaldo).

To give an example of an article that makes this a modern reference work, let's consider *Sino-Tai Hypothesis*. In it, Ostapirat lays out the origins of this idea, dating to the 19th century, and walks through the different lines of evidence used to debate the hypothesis by such scholars as Haas and Li. It discusses the competition of the Sino-Tai hypothesis with the Austro-Tai hypothesis of Benedict, often using the same data, but also shows how, while still unresolved, these debates over macro-relationships have helped to clarify reconstructions within the families involved as well. The article also covers the continuation of the debate in the past 20 years and the lines of inquiry that hold promise for eventually settling the matter in the future. Ostapirat's concise article (3,585 words) gives a laudably comprehensive and up-to-date primer on a long-standing debate in historical linguistics in southern China.

Another large portion of the articles in the ECLL covers major linguistic topics as applied to Sinitic data. Examples include high-level entries like *Phonetics* (Zhu), *Phonology* (Handel), *Syntax-Phonology Interface* (Feng), *Sociolinguistics* (Gao), and *Modern Morphology* (Arcodia & Basciano). Typological commonalities throughout East and Southeast Asia also will make these articles valuable to those looking for an overview of various theoretical approaches in the Sinosphere.

Importantly for the broader use and success of this resource, proper names of languages and locations are given in both Chinese characters and romanized transcriptions, complete with tone mark diacritics. Many times, three forms are given: common English, Chinese, and romanized Chinese. This benefits both Sinologists and non-Sinologists as a name familiar in one tradition may be lesser known in the other. The ECLL also includes biographies of notable Chinese linguists and Sinologists whose work is widely relevant in Southeast Asia, such as Y.R. Chao, Li Fang-Kuei, and André Haudricourt.

The only area where Brill leaves much to be desired is the web interface, where the advantages of digital over print resources are underutilized. The use of hyperlinking could be more extensive to highlight connections between topics and facilitate discovery. When browsing, the user can select a letter of the alphabet to browse, but each letter of the alphabet is further divided into four subsections regardless of how few articles there are. For only 13 articles beginning with the letter H, one must click [_H-Hg_](#) to view two of them, [_Hh-Hn_](#) to view five more, and [_Ho-Hu_](#) to view the last six. Such criticisms say nothing about the academic quality of the resource, but as a premium product carrying a substantial subscription price tag, it is surprising that Brill allows such good material to suffer under a suboptimal user experience.

Minor issues notwithstanding, the ECLL is a welcome new wealth of state-of-the-art reference material on topics that scholars with interest in Southeast Asia linguistics will certainly benefit from.

Reviewed: Received 15 January 2018, revised text accepted 15 April 2018, published 20 April 2018

Editors: Editor-In-Chief Dr Mark Alves | Managing Eds. Dr Paul Sidwell, Dr Nathan Hill, Dr Sigrid Lew