Foreword

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1.   The facts

Asia is a land frequently described in superlative terms, but in somewhat incongruent ways. For instance, it is the world's largest continent, with roughly one-third of the land surface of Earth; it also has its most physiographic extremes, with both the highest peak – Mount Everest – and the lowest place – the Dead Sea. It is the most populous of the continents, containing nearly three-fifths of the world's people, but they are divided into approximately 1000 ethnic groups, the world's largest number.[1] It is home for some of world's most ancient civilizations and birthplace of its major religions, but no civilization or religion is predominant in the region. At present, it contains countries that are considered as the most economically developed in the world, as well as ones that are among the most impoverished (Mason 2005).

Simultaneously great and diverse properties are witnessed in the realm of Asian Languages as well. It is the cradle of the world's two largest language families in terms of number of speakers: Indo-European and Sino-Tibetan; it is also home to the smallest family – the Paleosiberian, with merely 23,000 speakers; moreover, more than 20 language families, including the isolates, are presently in use on this continent, compared to only 5 in Europe. It leads the world in the number of spoken languages with 2303, about eight times more than in Europe, which has 288 (Eberhard et al. 2019). Among these languages, Chinese (including all dialects), Hindi-Urdu, and Arabic are on the list of the top six languages with the most native speakers; at the other extreme, 203 languages have so few speakers as to be listed as dying languages, including Ainu in Japan, Pazeh in Taiwan, and many more in the Himalayan area; In addition, pidgins and creoles still serve as a means of communication in parts of the continent, especially in Southeast Asia (Ansaldo 2012). Many of the languages of Asia, such as classic Sanskrit and Chinese, have millennia of written documentation, whereas others lack any form of written records. The diversity of Asian languages does not stop at the level of lan-

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1.   Source: Encyclopedia Britannica. https://www.britannica.com/place/Asia

guages and their groups; it is observed in various properties and features as well. Asian languages represent a large range of typological features, from inflectional and agglutinating to analytic. They show various properties that are absent from European languages, such as classifier systems, radical pro-drop, serial verb constructions, lexical tones, and a large array of reduplication devices.

Asia has an honored tradition of linguistic research. Due in part to the rich diversity, Asian languages have always been a treasure trove for linguists, on the basis of which many significant discoveries and theoretical innovations have been made. For instance, the earliest existing treatise on descriptive grammar was written by Panini of Ancient India. His work on Sanskrit grammar, known as *Ashtadhyayi* ("Eight Chapters"), is generally recognized as the acme of the traditional grammatical theory and a profound inspiration for modern linguistics (see, for instance, Bloomfield 1933). In a separate tradition, Chinese philologists made outstanding contributions in lexical semantics and phonology, as embodied in *Shuowen Jiezi* ('Analysis of Characters'), the earliest dictionary of Chinese characters. The abundant literature of Sanskrit and Classical Chinese facilitated the respective discoveries of the Indo-European and Sino-Tibetan language families in modern linguistics. In contemporary linguistics, many Asian languages have become a testing ground for various linguistic theories. For example, the well-known non-concatenative morphology of Semitic languages stimulated the formulation of Templatic Phonology (Kiparsky 1979, 1982) and the substantial improvement of Distributed Morphology (Arad 2003, 2005). In the study of syntactic structures, data from Asian languages, in particular the relatively better studied East Asian languages, are frequently cited as evidence for or against certain theories or generalizations, as is seen in the work of Huang (1982), Fukui (1995), Miyagawa (2003, 2010), Xu (1986), to name just a few. Languages of Mainland Southeast Asia have provided keen insights into the importance of language contact in shaping linguistic similarities, as evidenced in the work of, for example, Nick Enfield (Enfield 2003; Enfield and Comrie 2015), as well as into the nature and properties of grammaticalization processes (see, for instance, Bisang 2011, 2015). Asian languages have also been important in expanding our understanding of typology, e.g. noun-modifying strategies that go well beyond just relative clauses (Matsumoto et. al 2017).

On the other hand, studies of Asian languages are valuable for their own sake, as there is an urgent need for an improved understanding of various aspects of these languages. A case in point is the genealogical relations between and among various groups of the languages on this ancient continent. As is known, the classification of Asian languages has always been shrouded in controversy, with hypotheses regularly formulated, debated, challenged, and frequently discredited. For a well-known example, the reconstruction of the Sino-Tibetan family is much

less developed than that of the Indo-European family though its existence is now broadly accepted. As such, the genetic relations in this family have long been a topic of hot debate. For instance, many Western scholars argue against Li's (1937/ 1973) original inclusion of the Kam-Tai (Zhuang – Dong) and Miao-Yao languages into the Sino-Tibetan family. They instead believe it more appropriate to classify them either as independent families, or group Tai with Austronesian languages, known as the Austro-Tai Family (see, for instance, Benedict (1975)). Sagart (2005) goes one step further in suggesting a genetic relationship between Chinese and the Austronesian languages. Many other researchers, notably Starostin (1995), maintain that there might be several other linguistic macrofamilies, including Sino-Caucasian, Eurasiatic, and Afroasiatic. In contrast to these more traditional proposals, Blevins (2007) suggests an exclusive relationship of Austronesian with the Ongan languages, whereas Starosta (2005) includes Sino-Tibetan, Austronesian, Kra – Dai, Austroasiatic, and Hmong – Mien as part of an East Asian superphylum. Such unceasing rounds of proposals may be taken as indicating the scarcity of sure knowledge on Asian languages.

In addition to the aforementioned academic values, there are practical needs for integrated studies on Asian languages as well. The diversity of language families in use on this continent offers a prism into the complex patterns of population movements as well as the wealth of contact phenomena. Recent studies by Sagart et al. (2019) and Zhang et al. (2019) provide valuable attempts in this direction. Moreover, Asia has witnessed unprecedented economic growth and prosperity over the past decades, with a concurrent acceleration of communication and exchanges in areas of politics, economy, culture, and education, among others. Bilingualism, as well as multilingualism, has become much more common in many parts of the continent. A better understanding of Asian languages and linguistics is therefore called for as part of the effort to strengthen ties among the nations.

2.   The journal

We see the facts outlined above as calling for a better study of Asian languages, not only as reference to existing theories, but also for the understanding of Asian languages themselves and their relevance to their cultures and societies. We gradually realized the necessity of having a new academic journal which takes all Asian languages in its scope, so that specialists in the field of Asian languages could find a common forum for relevant discussions. This wish was eventually turned into reality when the present journal – *Asian Languages and Linguistics* – was created, thanks to the generous sponsorship of Beijing Normal University (BNU). Need-

less to say, BNU is the best possible sponsor that we could expect for the journal, for its privileged position in the areas of linguistics and modern languages within and outside of China.

This new journal is intended to be an outlet for cutting-edge research on Asian languages and linguistics in any domain conducted under any theoretical framework. As stated on the journal webpage, "*Asian Languages and Linguistics* aims to enhance high-quality research on the description and analysis of languages throughout Asia. The journal encourages submissions on a wide range of topics, including but not limited to the following: (i) Research on the syntax, semantics, phonology, morphology, and pragmatics of any Asian language, and the interface studies such as syntax-semantics interface and morphology-phonology interface. (ii) Typological or other theoretical analysis on the structural diversities and cross-linguistic variation among Asian languages or between Asian languages and other languages. (iii) Diachronic research based on a careful investigation of Asian language data that contributes to the theory or methodology of historical linguistics, as well as interdisciplinary studies which link historical linguistics to corpus-based research, language variation, and typology. (iv) Cross-disciplinary research involving linguistics and philosophy, psychology, language processing, and other fields that contributes to the understanding of Asian languages." (See http://benjamins.com/catalog/alal for the full text.)

We have high expectations for this journal. To state it briefly, we hope that, after a few years' efforts, it will become one of the most reputable international journals in the field, as well as an important hub for research, discussion, and academic exchanges on language-related issues of Asia. Furthermore, we hope it will become a leading international journal of linguistics in China in terms of academic impact and influence, which could set a new standard and direction for future linguistic studies in China in terms of keeping abreast with the top journals of the field worldwide.

We consider ourselves lucky to have an excellent board of editors, composed of internationally renowned experts in Asian languages and linguistics. The first editorial board meeting of *Asian Languages and Linguistics* and the 2019 Asian Languages Roundtable Forum was held on November 30--December 1, at Beijing Normal University at Zhuhai. Most of the members of the editorial board attended the meeting, where they discussed a large range of issues related to the organization and future development of the journal, presented papers and exchanged insights and ideas which reflected the state of the art in the field. As editors, we are grateful to the members of the board, for their constructive suggestions, enthusiastic support, and contributions of all kinds. We are all the more confident that, working together with such a high-standing editorial board, *Asian Languages and Linguistics* will become the journal we wish it to be, one that could

provide a better understanding of properties of Asian languages, their unity and diversity, and one that could lead the research in the field.

3. This volume

The present volume is the inaugural volume of *Asian Languages and Linguistics*. Though limited by space, it nonetheless features a broad range of topics, from morphology and syntax to semantics, covering both synchronic and diachronic issues, and attending to some major languages as well as endangered or under-described ones. It also represents different theoretical and methodological approaches, including both functional-typological and formal approaches.

The volume starts with Abbi and Vysakh's report of the word-formation processes in Luro, a critically endangered language spoken on one of the Nicobar Islands in the Bay of Bengal, India. Based on first-hand data collected from the native speakers, the authors provide a detailed documentation of the diverse affixation and compounding processes involved in the language, including nominalization, causative formation, negation, pronouns and their case marking, kinship terminology, and numeral system.

The second paper by Walter Bisang looks at the relationship between radically analytic morphology and radical pro-drop. It is shown that no correlation exists between the two, as radical pro-drop is prohibited in highly analytic languages of West Africa but is allowed in equally analytic languages of East and mainland Southeast Asian languages (EMSEA). The author argues that the real determining factor is whether the ancestor languages involved had inflectional morphological paradigms for agreement features or not. EMSEA languages did not have such paradigms in their ancestor languages and are overwhelmingly radical pro-drop, while the analytic languages of West Africa had them and show no radical pro-drop. He attributes this difference to two types of complexity strategies: the explicitness-driven "overt complexity" based on phonological marking of grammatical categories and the economy-driven "hidden complexity" whose information must be pragmatically inferred from context.

The third contribution by Cheng and Liu attempts to unify two seemingly divergent word-formation processes: compounding in Chinese and the root-and-pattern system in Hebrew. It shows that they involve fundamentally the same syntactic operations and observe the same locality constraints. More specifically, it addresses the well-known continuum in Chinese that the coordinate and attributive compounds behave more like words, whereas resultative and subordinate compounds are much more like phrases. It puts forward the idea that this continuum can be accounted for by assuming the same distinction forcibly argued by

Arad (2003, 2005) as existing in Hebrew between word-formation from roots and word-formation from words, with the former giving rise to more lexical properties and the latter more phrasal properties.

The fourth paper by Izutsu and Kim studies alternations between the accusative and the dative/comitative cases in Korean and Japanese. It shows that the basic pattern is that the accusative marks a changed (affected) participant whereas the other two mark a change-independent participant. Moreover, Korean differs from Japanese in extending the accusative case to participants that undergo some fictive (mental) change in a discourse-based event conception. Japanese, on the other hand, is more likely to extend the accusative case to entities that undergo a fictive change in the conceptions of mental/bodily experiences.

The paper by Randy LaPolla argues against the structuralist view which takes linguistics as the study of linguistic forms in the abstract; Instead, he argues that language should be understood as a type of behavior involved in communication, and that the study of language should be able to help in understanding how the human mind creates meaning and the many different ways it can understand the world, and how that affects our behavior. The way to achieve the goal, according to the author, is to return to the 19th-century tradition initiated by Wilhelm von Humboldt and many others, which takes each language as a manifestation of a unique world view, and to give priority to the understanding of these world views and the differences between cultures in this regard.

The last paper in this volume was contributed by Chenlei Zhou and is concerned with the effect on linguistic forms of a particular scenario of language contact in the border area of Gansu and Qinghai, in northwest China, where a number of Chinese dialects, Amdo Tibetan, and Altaic languages interact with each other in complex ways, giving rise to the Gansu-Qinghai linguistic area (GQLA). The author presents interesting findings with respect to case markers, which in turn shed lights on the distribution and strata of the language contact in the area.

At the end of this foreword, we would like to once again express our heartfelt gratitude to all the people, especially members of the editorial board, the reviewers, and the editorial office members, for their wholehearted support for this inaugural volume from its inception. Special thanks go to Ms. Esther Roth, the acquisition editor of John Benjamins Publishing Company and Dr. Esther Enns of Saint Mary's University, Canada. Ms. Roth helped us all the way through the journal's creation, and Dr. Enns helped us with the editing of the articles in the volume.

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