



Linguistic Convergence and Typological Evolution: A Report on the International Symposium on Silk Road Linguistics

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Abstract

The International Symposium on Silk Road Linguistics was held at The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) in May 2024. Hosted by the T.T. Ng Chinese Language Research Centre of the Institute of Chinese Studies at CUHK and sponsored by the CUHK Research Summit Series, the two-day event featured seven invited speeches alongside 42 academic presentations addressing diverse issues in Silk Road linguistics. Bringing together researchers from eight countries – including China, Germany, Finland, France, Japan, Kazakhstan, Morocco, and the United States – the Symposium drew an audience of nearly 100 participants, fostering a robust international dialogue.

The International Symposium on Silk Road Linguistics was held on 30–31 May 2024 at The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK). The Symposium was organized by the T.T. Ng Chinese Language Research Centre (CLRC) of the Institute of Chinese Studies at CUHK and sponsored by the CUHK Research Summit Series, serving also as one of the prominent academic events celebrating the 60th anniversary of the University. As the host, CUHK has long been committed to promoting Chinese studies, language research, and intellectual exchange between China and the wider world, facilitating cross-cultural scholarship and the study of Chinese language in relation to broader Asian and Eurasian contexts. Chronologically, this Symposium built upon a prior academic initiative by the CLRC – the “Maritime Silk Road Suite” organized in 2017. While the earlier event focused on maritime routes, the 2024 Symposium shifted its analytical focus to the land routes of the Silk Road and the Silk Road Economic Belt, representing a sustained institutional effort to map linguistic phenomena across the broader Belt and Road regions.

Over many centuries, the Silk Road served as a vast and intricate geographic network defined by continuous cultural and linguistic contact. While the historical scope of this region encompasses an immense diversity of tongues, the individual studies presented at this Symposium provided a rich array of analytical approaches, spanning various structural components from phonological developments and lexical borrowings to complex morphological re-functionalizations and syntactic variations. By gathering these distinct empirical investigations under one umbrella, the conference effectively demonstrated how localized, micro-level language interactions can illuminate broader, multifaceted patterns of Trans-Eurasian linguistic convergence and evolutionary change.

The academic breadth of these collective inquiries was supported by the Symposium’s highly competitive selection process and prestigious scholarly representation. The organizing committee received a total of 148 abstract submissions, from which 42 papers were ultimately selected for presentation. Elevating the intellectual rigour of the event, seven renowned experts were invited to deliver foundational addresses as the Symposium’s featured speakers: Dr. Benjamin Brosig (Nazarbayev University), Professor Hilary Chappell (*École des hautes études en sciences sociales* / The Chinese University of Hong Kong), Professor Yen-hui Audrey Li (University of Southern California), Dr. Erika Sandman (University of Helsinki), Professor Shuangcheng Wang (Shanghai Normal University), Professor Dan Xu (Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz), and Professor Yonglong Yang (Chinese Academy of Social Sciences). Alongside these plenary sessions, the selected studies were distributed across parallel sessions. International presenters hailed from countries such as Finland, France, Germany, Kazakhstan, Japan, Morocco, and the United States, while domestic participants drew expertise from Beijing, Shanghai, Gansu, Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, Shaanxi, and Hong Kong. This diverse assembly effectively mirrored

the multi-regional dynamics of the historical Silk Road, transforming it into a modern academic network that fosters dialogue across traditionally separated speech communities.

At the opening ceremony, Professor Alan K. L. Chan, Provost and J. S. Lee Professor of Chinese Culture at CUHK, delivered the opening remarks. Professor Chan extended his sincere gratitude to the invited speakers, distinguished guests, and all participants for their presence and contributions. Reflecting on the historical trajectories of the University and the CLRC, alongside his personal connections to Chinese studies, he emphasized CUHK's long-standing dedication to promoting Chinese language and culture. Professor Chan also shared his insights into the profound and inseparable relationship between language and culture, illustrating how linguistic structures serve as vital conduits for cultural heritage and conceptual evolution. His remarks underscored the University's strategic support for major research initiatives that foster international dialogue and cross-disciplinary scholarship. Following the opening address, Professor Sze-Wing Tang, Director of the CLRC and convener of the Symposium, delivered the welcoming remarks. Professor Tang situated the event within the Centre's enduring mission to advance research on the Chinese language, dialects, and linguistic contact by balancing traditional scholarship with theoretical innovation. In his remarks, he articulated the strategic vision behind this academic transition to the land routes of the Silk Road, framing the Symposium not as a sequence of isolated presentations, but as an integrative platform designed to place diverse linguistic traditions and geographical specializations into sustained conversation. Highlighting Hong Kong's strategic role as a key link for the Belt and Road Initiative, he noted that the University's robust academic connections – such as the University Alliance of the Silk Road – further reinforce CUHK's position as an outstanding research hub for Chinese linguistics and cross-regional academic exchange.

To translate this strategic vision and these institutional ambitions into rigorous scientific inquiry, the seven invited speeches offered macro-typological frameworks, interdisciplinary insights, and detailed case studies that traversed the historic trade routes and interconnected Eurasian language families.

Opening this macro-perspective, Professor Hilary Chappell, a leading specialist in Sinitic typology, examined the structural and semantic types used to express causation across Sinitic varieties to identify prominent areal patterns extending along and across China's frontiers. Her analysis focused particularly on analytic causative constructions. By tracing the diachronic origins of causative verbs, she noted that the principal lexical sources for these constructions include SPEECH ACT verbs, GIVE/TAKE, DO/PUT, WAIT, and CONTACT verbs. While CONTACT and GIVE verbs are common in Southeast Asia, the unusual source of WAIT appears to be little attested outside of Sinitic, whereas Northwestern Sinitic privileges derivational morphology and clause-final SAY verbs. Incorporating and adapting elements from existing linguistic frameworks, Professor Chappell established a

new semantic model applicable to Sinitic data, allowing for the classification of causation into coercive, manipulative, directive, and permissive types.

Further illuminating the linguistic landscape of Northwestern China, Dr. Erika Sandman presented a descriptive typological study on Wutun, a Northwest Sinitic contact variety spoken by approximately 4,000 people in the Tongren County of Huangnan Autonomous Prefecture. Bringing her expertise in Northwest Sinitic fieldwork, typology, and interactional linguistics to the study, she traced the origins of Wutun back to the Ming Dynasty, when government troop deployments led to intermarriage between Sinitic speakers and local Tibetans, creating a mixed language variety. Because Amdo Tibetan remains the primary lingua franca, nearly all Wutun speakers are bilingual, leading to a profound Tibetan-influenced restructuring of Wutun syntax. Her analysis showed that while Wutun's basic word order is verb-final, pragmatically marked verb-medial structures persist. Wutun also exhibits several head-initial nominal and verbal structures that deviate from Northern Chinese varieties like Mandarin, such as the post-nominal positioning of demonstratives and numerals within a noun phrase and the existence of post-verbal negative constructions. By comparing Wutun with other Northwest Mandarin contact varieties like Tangwang and Zhoutun, she concluded that while Wutun is an integral member of the Amdo or Qinghai-Gansu Sprachbund, its unique word order profile ultimately reflects a distinct contact scenario and sociolinguistic setting.

This focus on the Hehuang linguistic area was expanded by Professor Yonglong Yang, a specialist in Chinese grammatical history, dialectology, and language contact. His report focused on the Gangou dialect, which is situated within the Hehuang area and exhibits strong SOV word order characteristics. He demonstrated that while the particle *de* in Gangou performs typical Mandarin-like functions – such as serving as a possessive marker, an adjectival suffix, a relative clause marker, and a nominalization marker indicating type shifting – it also displays a unique self-referential usage characteristic of Hehuang Chinese. In this capacity, *de* occurs after object or subject clauses, functioning similarly to a complementizer in environments such as Subject + [Object Clause + *de*] + Predicate. His syntactic analysis showed that the accusative marker *ha* or its weakened form *a* can append to this self-referential *de*, occasionally inducing syntactic ambiguity in isolation. Framing the transition from extranodal reference to self-reference as a process of grammaticalization, he connected the emergence of this function to interference caused by language shift, drawing parallels to two phenomena in surrounding minority languages: the syncretism of possessive-accusative case markings and the capacity of gerundive/participial markers to function as nominalization markers.

Concluding the theoretical explorations of Sinitic nominal linkers, Professor Yen-hui Audrey Li, an expert in syntax and its interfaces with semantics, phonology, and discourse, explored the grammatical properties of linkers across

languages. Her presentation contrasted the structural properties of “Ezafe” and “reverse Ezafe” constructions. The standard Ezafe construction, found in Iranian and Central Asian Iranian languages like Persian, Tajiki, and Kurdish, typically appears after a head noun, preceding its modifiers, complements, or possessors. Conversely, languages with reverse word orders like Chinese exhibit a “reverse Ezafe” pattern where the linker *de* follows the modifier and precedes the head noun, and may be repeated based on the number of modifying constituents. Reviewing representative theoretical approaches that have variously analyzed these linkers as Case-markers, phonological linkers, syntactic movement markers, conjunctive heads, or nominalizers, she demonstrated how a Case-based account is better positioned to capture the core properties of these markers across both head-initial and head-final languages. While acknowledging lingering structural challenges concerning prepositional phrases and clauses, she proposed syntactic solutions that open up further avenues for exploring dependency relations across various Ezafe systems.

Shifting the methodology toward an interdisciplinary paradigm, Professor Dan Xu, whose research focuses on typology, historical linguistics, and cross-linguistic approaches, explored the complex relationships between population genetics and linguistic evolution along the Silk Road. She investigated language formation, admixture, and replacement models in the Gansu-Qinghai area following the 13th century AD, a region inhabited by diverse ethnic groups including the Han, Hui, Dongxiang, Baonan, Tu, Yugur, Salar, and Amdo Tibetan. Combining linguistic data with molecular biology, history, and archaeology, her study analyzed the correlations and non-correlations between genetic lineages and contemporary spoken languages over identical timescales. The research revealed that historical migrations from Central and Western Asia produced varied trajectories: while paternal DNA and languages correspond closely among the Salars, who largely retained their ancestral language, groups like the Dongxiang and Baonan experienced total language replacement, with the Yugur clans presenting even more complex replacement scenarios. To explain these divergent paths, she applied the conceptual frameworks of the ELITE DOMINANCE and CULTURE DOMINANCE models, emphasizing that an interdisciplinary approach provides a more accurate historical description of how long-term population migrations and social dynamics reshape the ethnolinguistic landscape.

The diachronic evolution of non-Sinitic languages within this shared geographic space was further illuminated by Dr. Benjamin Brosig, whose research centres on modern and historical Mongolic linguistics, morphosyntax, semantics, and Turkic-Mongolic contact. He examined the evolution of the Southern Mongolic evidential system, specifically focusing on the structural opposition between the “subjective” marker *-i* and the “objective” marker *-a*, which denote high versus low personal involvement of the speaker across languages such as Mongghul, Mangghuer, Bonan, and Kangjia. He argued that while Middle Mongol utilized a fundamentally different set of evidential categories, this unique personal

involvement distinction emerged under the structural influence of Amdo Tibetan. Addressing long-standing etymological debates, Dr. Brosig proposed a novel historical account tracing both *-i* and *-a* back to a reconstructed 15th-century copula system based on the forms *bui* and *bayina*. To substantiate this diachronic pathway, he provided comparative evidence showing parallel grammaticalization trajectories of these cognate forms in Eastern Yugur and Deedmongol, offering critical insights into how intense, cross-family language contact drives long-term morphological change and structural convergence.

Finally, Professor Shuangcheng Wang, an expert in historical linguistics, linguistic typology, and language contact, provided a comprehensive look at morphosyntactic restructuring in the Gan-Qing region. He noted that through long-term contact with neighbouring SOV languages, Sinitic dialects in this vital section of the Silk Road underwent profound changes, shifting from SVO to SOV word order, developing case markers, and undergoing gradual morphological agglutination. Taking the Xining dialect as a primary case study, he provided a detailed analysis of two commonly used case markers: the proclitic *pa-* and the enclitic *-xa*, noting that *pa-* functions exclusively as an accusative marker, whereas *-xa* serves as both an accusative and a dative marker, alongside the dative proclitic *ki-*. These markers can further co-occur to form circumfixes such as *pa...xa* or *ki...xa*. He argued that the complexity of these accusative-dative markings, combined with OV word order and developing verbal morphology, frequently generates syntactic ambiguity in the absence of specific contextual support, when possessive markers (such as *-tsɿ* in Xining or *-ti* in Linxia) are omitted, or when verbal semantics allow for bidirectional interpretation, thereby highlighting the interplay between contact-driven structural evolution and semantic ambiguity.

The profound insights articulated in the seven invited speeches collectively established a dual-directional theoretical matrix that redefined the analytical boundaries of Silk Road linguistics. On one hand, these foundational studies demonstrated that Sinitic peripheral varieties can no longer be evaluated through a purely monocentric Han-centric lens; rather, their structural shifts – ranging from the syntactic inversion in Wutun and Gangou to the functional extensions of accusative marking in the Xining dialect – must be reconciled as vibrant products of Trans-Eurasian areal convergence. On the other hand, the integration of molecular genetics, historical philology, and cognitive aspectual paradigms across Mongolic, Turkic, and Sinitic boundaries illustrated a shared methodological shift toward multidisciplinary corroboration. By transitioning from isolated, micro-descriptive accounts to integrative macro-typological models, these plenary speakers underscored a central thesis of the Symposium: that the historic land routes operated not merely as passive vectors of commercial exchange, but as dynamic, long-term zones of structural hybridization and grammatical acceleration.

To translate these overarching theoretical frameworks into a granular, bottom-up exploration, the parallel presentations of the symposium engaged in rigorous empirical inquiries across 42 selected papers. To facilitate structured dialogue, these studies were organized into major thematic areas, mapping out a multi-dimensional overview of historical convergence along the ancient trade routes and advancing our understanding of both the deep linguistic intertwinings and contemporary realities of the Silk Road.

As the largest share of the conference programme, 15 presentations dedicated to language contact delineated a comprehensive landscape of language evolution in multilingual environments, moving from macro-level philology to micro-level contact-induced syntactic changes. At the macro-level of historical philology and lexical transmission, researchers utilized multilingual documents to excavate early traces of contact, examining Chinese loanwords in Old Uyghur via the *Gaochangguan Zazi*, analyzing bureaucratic terms in Khitan Large Script inscriptions, and conducting historical lexical comparisons of cognates and loanwords in Altai and Mongolian. Adopting a unique material-cultural perspective, another study investigated the naming practices and conceptual shifts of the Persian date in Chinese texts to demonstrate how a foreign object evolved from an exoticized literary imagination into an ordinary, phonetically transliterated item.

Multilingual manuscripts and dictionaries also provided crucial windows into historical and contemporary colloquial realities. A study utilizing ninth-century Tibetan-Chinese phrasebooks from Dunhuang examined sentence-final particles in colloquial Old Northwestern Chinese, highlighting the unique value of phonetic transcriptions in reconstructing historical speech, while an analysis of entry data from *A Dictionary of Dungan* investigated lexical features and internal variations within this Central Asian Sinitic variety, revealing extensive lexical restructuring induced by contact with Russian and Turkic environments.

When language contact occurs through textual transmission, the mechanism of translation frequently acts as a fertile site for grammatical acceleration. A study on parallel Sanskrit-Chinese and Chinese-Uyghur materials demonstrated that the causative verb *shi* ‘make’ developed a clause-integrating conditional function because translation contexts forced bilingual scribes to find structural equivalents across disparate syntactic systems. Similarly exploring written translation as a non-natural mode of contact, an investigation into Old Uyghur Buddhist translations showed that responding to the highly analytic characteristics of Chinese source texts drove a major typological shift in Uyghur adverbial clauses, transitioning them from a traditionally left-branching type to a balanced bi-directional marking type.

As language contact intensifies within long-standing multilingual communities, the grammatical mechanisms of neighbouring families undergo structural alignment and hybridization. A study on bilingual verbs in Dongxiang offered a vivid

illustration of contact-induced grammatical creativity, demonstrating how borrowed Chinese verbs are structurally integrated via Dongxiang derivational suffixes and auxiliary constructions to create a systematic, hybrid verbal pattern. Capturing a rare direction of grammatical change, an investigation of Tongren Bonan examined the degrammaticalization of a coordinating converb into a coordinating conjunction, proving that a single pivot of syntactic change under intense multilingual pressures can trigger a cascading series of morphosyntactic realignments.

This deep structural intertwining left its most profound marks on Northwestern Sinitic dialects, which exhibit collective typological shifts under Trans-Eurasian areal pressure. One paper explored the “finitization” process of the imperfective aspect marker *zhe* in Northwestern Chinese, showing that its conversion from marking secondary predicates to primary predicates shares widespread grammaticalization pathways within an areal typological framework. Providing a contact-based diachronic explanation for word-order variations, a comparative study argued that the “*jia*-V” and “V-*jia*” constructions signifying ‘returning home’ in Eastern Mandarin and Wu dialects originated during the Jin and Yuan dynasties due to intensive contact with Jurchen and Mongolian.

Furthermore, contact has significantly expanded syntactic valence and produced distinct geographical gradients within Sinitic varieties. A comparative analysis of the applicative “V-*gei*” construction revealed that while Standard Mandarin restricts this structure to transfer verbs, Northwestern contact dialects allow non-transfer verbs and adjectives to license the construction, effectively promoting adjuncts or arguments with peripheral semantic roles to core objects. Moving to morphosyntactic suffixes, a study on the *-zi* suffix in Northwestern Central Plains Mandarin showed that its functional generalization from a diminutive noun suffix to a state marker displays a clear geographical gradient that gradually decreases from west to east. Finally, an examination of three Dungan constructions involving the inchoative particle [k^hæ] demonstrated distinct structural preferences between Gansu- and Shaanxi-related Dungan dialects, identifying the double-marking structure as a late-developing product of grammatical layering.

The extensive data presented across the 15 language contact studies provided a critical empirical foundation that naturally repositioned the analytical lens from external sociolinguistic pressures to the internal, self-regulating mechanisms of linguistic systems. While textual translations, historical bilingual phrasebooks, and intense multilingual contact zones vividly illustrated how external linguistic topography can destabilize traditional syntactic structures, they simultaneously brought to light a deeper theoretical question: how do these diverse language families maintain systemic coherence under such pervasive contact-induced pressures? The structural variations scrutinized by the presenters revealed that grammatical restructuring along the Silk Road does not unfold as arbitrary lexical borrowing or chaotic syntactic disintegration; instead, it adheres to systematic, constrained pathways of typological alignment. Consequently, exploring the internal

morphosyntactic mechanisms of Altaic, ancient languages, and various Sinitic varieties serves as an indispensable counterpart to contact linguistics, allowing researchers to discern the complex interplay between external contact-driven acceleration and the universal cognitive constraints governing grammar formation.

To advance this understanding of core structural analysis, 10 presentations dove deeper into several theoretical frameworks of grammar. Within the domain of Altaic and Central Asian Turkic morphosyntax, researchers approached traditional categories through modern typological frameworks. A study on Kazakh constructed a hierarchical system for its spatial category, dividing meanings into dynamic and static relationships from a cognitive perspective. Shifting to functional morphology, an investigation across 23 Altaic languages explored echo reduplication, revealing that while it signifies an associative plural or vague quantity, it frequently develops evaluative meanings and suggests lateral diffusion to neighbouring language families. On a regional scale, a comparative analysis of the auxiliary construct *V-(I) p bol-* across 12 Turkic languages mapped its functional variation, demonstrating that while potential readings are widespread, the aspect of completion serves as a specialized characteristic confined to Central Asian Turkic languages.

Ancient manuscript discoveries and textual philology further provided touchstones for exploring these syntactic commonalities. A revisionist study on split ergativity in Sogdian leveraged data from ancient letters to challenge traditional typological assertions regarding ergative marking triggers, highlighting the limitations of standard hierarchies and urging a deeper evaluation of past stem formation. In the realm of cross-linguistic syntax, a comparative study between Sanskrit and Chinese uncovered systemic alignments between the Sanskrit genitive absolute structure and the Chinese “V+N” subordinating compound structure, illustrating a typological continuum. Furthermore, the syntax of sluicing-like constructions was put to a comparative test using data from Mandarin, Uyghur, and Mongolian, establishing that while the existence of clausal ellipsis derivation varies, pronominal derivation remains universally available.

The structural legacy of these multilingual environments was also prominently mirrored in the morphosyntactic restructuring of Sinitic dialects driven by Trans-Eurasian areal convergence. An examination of the Ordos Mongolian suffix *-tʰe:* illustrated a reverse grammaticalization pathway from a possessive marker to a comitative case suffix. In terms of voice and argument structure, a comparative study argued that the passive interpretation of the causative auxiliaries *gei* and *rang* in Northern Sinitic varieties developed via contact with languages like Mongolian, driving a syntactic reanalysis of *gei* from the Qing Dynasty onward. Similarly, the Jimsar dialect of Xinjiang highlighted how internal development and Altaic contact work in tandem, where the probabilistic adverbs *haohao* ‘frequently’ (formed via reduplication) and *shen* ‘frequently’ were derived through parallel tracks of grammaticalization from their respective degree-adverb counterparts. Finally, the morphological effects of language contact were reconciled in a study on the

Chinese plural marker *-men* across bilingual acquisition and the Amdo-Gansu Sinitic dialects, ultimately suggesting that long-term dialectal variations and short-term interlanguage outputs share identical morphological mechanisms.

Closely intertwined with these broader grammatical inquiries, a specialized subset of five presentations zoomed in on the category of functional words, exploring the grammaticalization pathways, syntactic distribution, and typological significance of markers under intensive language contact across the Northwest Sinitic boundary. In the domain of case marking and differential argument marking within Northwest Sinitic varieties, researchers investigated the synchronous variations of object and comitative markers induced by areal contact. A fieldwork-based study on the Hezhou dialect islands in Gansu Province analyzed the distribution of the comitative/accusative marker *ha*, revealing varying degrees of structural divergence across locations and deducing that its formation occurred prior to the late Qing Dynasty. Expanding this inquiry, a regional investigation into the Gansu-Qinghai Hehuang dialects examined the cooperative and competitive relationships between the prepositive *ba* and postpositive *ha*, demonstrating how a stricter SOV alignment correlates with more developed postpositional case markers and mapping the local language contact hierarchy into four distinct development stages.

Turning to macro-typological perspectives, historical documentation and linguistic surveys clarified the evolutionary patterns of coordinate conjunctions. Based on large-scale cross-linguistic data, a typological study proposed structural correlations governing the grammaticalization of coordinate conjunctions from comitative markers, distinguishing between co-agent types (tending to connect animate nouns, as in Dungan) and co-patient types (connecting inanimate nouns, as in Uzbek and Uyghur). The study also identified two formal strategies among Silk Road languages: conjunctions homophonous with the numeral “one” (such as in Georgian and Salar) and those homophonous with the numeral “two” or dual/plural suffixes (such as in Bonan, Dongxiang, and Monguor).

The structural complexity of functional words was further scrutinized through two separate studies on Wutun, a highly mixed language spoken in Tongren, Qinghai Province. The first study analyzed the plural category in Wutun, revealing a multi-source system drawing phonetic forms and functions from Chinese elements, a Mongolic-derived suffix, and a pronominal marker to distinguish dual number alongside large and small plurals. The second Wutun study investigated the highly multifunctional particle [ʒa], which developed as a consequence of intense multilingual contact. Syntactically, [ʒa] operates as a converb marker expressing coordination, succession, hypothesis, concession, or result; as an ablative case marker denoting origins; and as a component marking comparative and limitative cases, alongside extended functions as a complementizer and a topic marker.

Expanding the analytical continuum from structural syntax and the grammaticalization of functional words to include the acoustic and phonological

foundations of the Silk Road varieties, the Symposium achieved a holistic, vertical integration of linguistic analysis. While functional morphemes, case markers, and coordinate conjunctions offer visible evidence of high-level syntactic reanalysis, these abstract structural innovations are ultimately anchored in, and facilitated by, long-term sound contact and structural alignments at the phonetic level. The morphosyntactic legacies observed across the Eurasian ecotone cannot be fully decoupled from the underlying diachronic processes of historical phonological re-layering, phonotactic constraints, and contact-driven sound changes. By pivoting downward to examine the material properties of historical speech and textual interfaces, the participants effectively demonstrated that phonology functions as the empirical bedrock of Silk Road linguistics, providing the primary acoustic and structural evidence needed to reconstruct the exact timelines and geographical trajectories of historical language convergence.

Complementing these macro-level investigations of syntax and functional morphemes, a specialized thematic cluster of three presentations focused explicitly on the phonetic and phonological foundations of Silk Road varieties. These studies demonstrated how the comparative study of parallel texts, loanword phonology, and historical philology can solve long-standing historical, geographical, and linguistic puzzles along the ancient trade routes. Within the realm of early Buddhist translation materials, an investigation into the fifth-century Hexi dialect analyzed the transliterations within the Buddhist sutras translated by the monk Dharmakṣema in Guzang. By executing a meticulous comparative study of parallel Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Chinese texts, the research outlined the precise phonological profile of this early ancient Northwestern variety, revealing specific features of its initials and rimes. This study demonstrated that the loss and modification of rime endings in the *Geng* rhyme group (*Geng-she*) represented a defining regional feature of this dialect, while simultaneously showing that the translations were notably influenced by Pali or Prakrit, thereby deepening the historical context of Buddhist propagation in the Hexi corridor.

The contact between different language types and its consequences for loanword phonology were further illuminated by an investigation into the contemporary pronunciations of the Chinese loanword *cha* ‘tea’ in standard Mongolian dialects. By establishing a complete phonological correspondence, this study demonstrated that the original borrowed etymon was the disyllabic *chaye* ‘tea leaves’ rather than the monosyllabic *cha*, indicating that the borrowing occurred no earlier than the compilation era of the *Zhongyuan Yinyun*. The findings showed that these contemporary pronunciations were shaped by both the original phonological matching rules between Chinese and Mongolian at the time of borrowing and the subsequent internal sound change laws within the Mongolian system, proving that the phonological changes of loanwords operate in a systematic manner.

The alignment between Chinese historical phonology and Central Asian scripts was applied to historical geography in an exegesis of the Sogdian transliterated

place names found in Sogdian Ancient Document No. 2, dated between 312 and 313 CE. Leveraging Han-Wei phonological features rather than relying solely on the *Qieyun* system, the paper meticulously decoded several long-contested or undeciphered toponyms, such as re-interpreting specific terms as Runan, Kucha, and Jinzhong. By achieving a highly precise fit between Chinese phonological reconstructions and Sogdian transliterations, the study provided a robust mutual verification between linguistics and history that aligns perfectly with the early fourth-century date of the Sogdian letters.

Just as internal sound systems and functional words undergo systemic realignments, the historical scripts and language structures of the Silk Road are inseparable from the social matrices of their speakers. Addressing this interface, three insightful presentations within the domain of sociolinguistics and historical onomastics illustrated how written artifacts, naming customs, and the history of linguistic scholarship reflect broader patterns of migration, cultural assimilation, and international exchange. An investigation into the traditional writing system of the Salar people in Xunhua County, Qinghai Province, shed light on one of the least studied Turkic varieties by completing an outline description of *türkoğuş*. Through the exploitation of gathered historical documents, the study made public critical data regarding the grammatical, phonological, and lexical peculiarities of this old written register. The findings demonstrated that the written language preserved in *türkoğuş* differs structurally and lexically from ordinary spoken Salar, providing a vital historical and sociolinguistic baseline for understanding how the language evolved under isolation and long-term contact.

A massive statistical analysis of Han Dynasty bamboo slips and wooden tablets excavated from the Hexi Corridor shifted the focus to the intersection of sociolinguistics, cultural history, and demography. Gathering over twenty thousand personal names from Northwest garrison documents, the research identified prominent naming conventions, including a high prevalence of single-character given names and specific structural trends in two-character names, such as the use of laudatory terms, age-related characters, and negative adverbs. Culturally, this lexical data revealed a sociolinguistic shift toward the pursuit of auspicious meanings, manifesting patriotic aspirations, Taoist desires for longevity, and Confucian virtues that map the social consciousness of frontier garrisons.

The dissemination and external institutionalization of linguistic knowledge were addressed in an overview tracing Chinese linguistics research in Russia from its 18th-century origins to the modern era. The study outlined how early Russian Sinology prioritized the practical value of language learning before maturing during the Soviet period, where scholars turned their attention toward classical Chinese, dialectology, and the structural classification of parts of speech and syntactic units. By reviewing the formation of prominent Sinological centres and the mutual translation of academic works, the research underscored how tracing the historiography of linguistics can foster contemporary academic cooperation and promote international language dissemination.

In tandem with these sociolinguistic considerations, another major thematic thread consisting of three compelling presentations in lexicology highlighted how internal structural rules, modern socio-political shifts, and intercultural exchanges continually shape and reconfigure the lexicon of Silk Road languages. In the domain of descriptive lexicology, a comprehensive review of the modern Uyghur word-formation system examined influential grammatical works to clarify theoretical and taxonomic debates. Addressing the structural complexities of an agglutinative language, the study established precise word boundaries by leveraging orthographic, semantic, structural, and phonetic features to separate compound words from syntactic phrases. It evaluated past academic achievements through traditional grammatical lenses – endorsing a structural classification of root, derived, solidified, compound, paired, and abbreviated words – while also exploring a novel phonetic perspective based on additive and non-additive morphemic changes.

The practical and cognitive dimensions of terminology within contemporary regional networks were further explored through a study focusing on the standardization of the English translation of Xinjiang characteristic catering terms. Operating from the perspective of frame-based terminology theory, this research addressed the rampant mistranslations and inconsistent nomenclature currently hindering the international dissemination of Xinjiang's unique minority culinary culture. By analyzing the multidimensional, communicative, and cognitive facets of frame terminology, the study proposed operational strategies for regional cultural preservation, including the formulation of local translation standards and the construction of a multimodal terminology knowledge base.

The immediate lexical consequences of sociolinguistic contact were captured in a case study tracking Chinese-Uyghur language contact through COVID-19 pandemic terminology. By analyzing a diverse corpus of written media from 2019 to 2022 alongside oral recordings, the study mapped dynamic adjustments across the dimensions of language influence, code-mixing, and language shift. The findings revealed that while written registers increasingly adopted Chinese *Pinyin* or simplified expressions, oral communication among youth and public servants was dominated by code-mixing, where Chinese terms were routinely embedded into Uyghur syntactic frames or creatively blended with traditional cultural elements.

Forming another core thematic dimension that focused on cognitive mechanisms and cross-linguistic variations, research in applied linguistics and the evolution of the Manchu-Sibe branch provided critical empirical insights into language acquisition and structural shift. In the domain of second language phonological acquisition and the specific challenges of lexical tone mastery, investigators examined how a learner's native language phonology interacts with target phonetic cues. An empirical study investigated adult native speakers of Moroccan Arabic acquiring Mandarin tones at their initial state. Utilizing PRAAT to analyze production data alongside semantic

perception experiments, the research revealed a structural deafness to lexical tone in perception, while finding that production accuracy varied based on tonal positions within the phonological domain. To model these behaviours, the study applied an Optimality Theory framework to map out constraint rankings of perceptual cues, markedness, and faithfulness.

A closely related tonal experiment analyzed Mandarin monosyllabic tone production among 15 primary learners from Turkmenistan. Evaluated by native Mandarin listeners, the results established an accuracy hierarchy across the four tones, descending from Tone 1 (72.4%), Tone 4 (71.1%), and Tone 3 (63.6%), down to Tone 2 (52.4%). The error types for Tone 2 proved to be the most complex, with the study demonstrating that phonetic environments – such as syllable structures and local consonant conditions – significantly influence L2 tonal production accuracy.

Within this same theme, the analytical focus extended from phonetic acquisition to corpus-based historical syntax and comparative linguistics through a study tracking the historical development of the word *ningge* within the Manchu-Sibe language branch. By matching a Manchu-Chinese bilingual document corpus from the Qing Dynasty against a contemporary Sibe syntactic treebank, the research captured a significant typological shift between the two closely related branches. While *ningge* served exclusively as a nominalizer in historical Manchu – attaching most frequently to adjectives – its distribution in contemporary spoken Sibe has shifted primarily to post-nominal positions. Functionally, modern Sibe *ningge* has expanded beyond its legacy nominalization role to develop an innovative topic-marking function, which it now performs at a higher frequency than nominalization, offering a stark illustration of the fluid, adaptive nature of structural variations under conditions of long-term language contact.

The Symposium culminated in a closing ceremony featuring concluding remarks delivered by the convener, Professor Sze-Wing Tang. On behalf of the organizing committee, Professor Tang expressed his profound gratitude to Professor Alan K. L. Chan, Provost of CUHK, for his steadfast and vital support, and extended sincere appreciation to the seven invited speakers, the parallel session presenters, and the session chairs for their respective contributions. He also acknowledged the vital participation of the broader audience and the meticulous coordination of the administrative staff, whose collective efforts ensured the seamless execution of the event. In his final synthesis, Professor Tang characterized the two-day symposium as a highly fruitful forum that successfully established a dynamic, modern academic network across traditionally separated speech communities.

Viewed in their entirety, the 42 selected presentations and seven plenary addresses delivered over this intensive programme represented a major milestone in the systematic consolidation of Silk Road linguistics as a distinct, epistemological field. By seamlessly weaving together the philological scrutiny of ancient manuscripts with modern acoustic phonetics, frame terminology frameworks, second-language acquisition models, and corpus-driven historical treebanks, the

participating scholars successfully transcended traditional boundaries to implement a multi-scalar approach that balances micro-level empirical fieldwork with macro-level comparative typologies. This rich, multi-dimensional cross-fertilization of ideas not only solved long-standing historical-geographical puzzles but also generated innovative theoretical paradigms, successfully charting the future horizons for collaborative, cross-regional scholarship in the decades to come.

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語言接觸與類型演變：絲綢之路語言學國際研討會綜述

吳多泰中國語文研究中心

香港中文大學

提要

“絲綢之路語言學國際研討會”於2024年5月在香港中文大學舉行。會議為期兩天，由香港中文大學中國文化研究所吳多泰中國語文研究中心主辦，並獲香港中文大學學術研究會議資助計劃贊助。來自德國、法國、芬蘭、哈薩克斯坦、美國、摩洛哥、日本和中國八個國家的學者齊聚一堂，共呈現七場特邀報告及42場學術報告，吸引聽眾近百人，氣氛熱烈，成功促進了深入的國際學術對話。