

Despite these ways in which Liu might have better contextualized and theorized his contribution, the book is an unambiguous contribution, both to East Asian economic history and to the history of capitalism. The detailed treatment of the burning of incense sticks to set the pace of work in tea production alone constitutes a valuable contribution to our understanding of the historical emergence in a non-European context of “socially necessary abstract labor time” – the lynchpin of Marx’s entire system.

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Paul Sidwell and Mathias Jenny (eds): *The Languages and Linguistics of Mainland Southeast Asia*

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Running to nearly 1,000 pages, Paul Sidwell and Mathias Jenny’s *The Languages and Linguistics of Mainland Southeast Asia* (LLMSEA) is the latest entry in de Gruyter’s World of Linguistics series, the stated aim of which is to present not only the major achievements in linguistic research in each geographical area, but also topics that are controversial or under-researched. Given the explosive growth in scholarship on Southeast Asian languages and linguistics in the past 50 years, one may wonder how LLMSEA distinguishes itself from other recent handbooks focused on the region, such as Enfield’s *The Languages of Mainland Southeast Asia* (Cambridge University Press, 2021) or the present editors’ own two-volume *The Handbook of Austroasiatic Languages* (Leiden: Brill, 2014). Unlike most traditional handbooks, which are organized in terms of sketch grammars of specific languages or typological surveys of particular linguistic features, LLMSEA stands out by focusing on broader language groupings and more general themes, such as language contact or classification, alongside historiographies tracing the different research traditions of Mainland Southeast Asian linguistics and contributions on the historical circumstances that led to the creation of Mainland Southeast Asia as a renowned “linguistic area”.

The chapters in LLMSEA can be categorized broadly into six sections. The first three chapters are devoted to Neolithic Southeast Asia, a discussion of linguistic homelands and dispersal histories, and the origins and spread of cereal agriculture. These provide brief but thorough summaries of our current understanding of Mainland Southeast Asian prehistory, much of which may be new to readers with primarily linguistic, rather than historical or area-studies, backgrounds.

The six historiographical chapters on the scholarship traditions of Mainland Southeast Asian languages are both unusual and welcome. The bulk of each of the chapters on Austroasiatic, Tai-Kadai, Hmong-Mien, and Tibeto-Burman linguistics is devoted to citing and reviewing important scholarly contributions to the study of those phyla; however, some chapters also include considerable detail about people, places and events that, while no doubt familiar to some practitioners, may be unknown to a younger generation



of researchers. Of particular interest are two chapters on the many contributions made to Mainland Southeast Asian linguistics by French scholars and those associated with the faith-based Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL). One hopes that a future edition might include similarly detailed coverage of autochthonous scholarship largely published in the national languages of the region, such as the work of the Vietnamese Institute of Linguistics (*Viện Ngôn ngữ học*), the small but active Department of Linguistics at the Royal University of Phnom Penh, and of course the enormous body of theses, dissertations, monographs and research articles published in Thai.

Much of the material in the five chapters reviewing evidence for language classification and the ten “typological profile” chapters can be found elsewhere, for example in the aforementioned Jenny and Sidwell 2014, or in relevant volumes of the Routledge Language Family series. Nevertheless, they provide succinct and convenient synopses of the current state of knowledge, and the common structure shared by the typological profiles facilitates easy comparison between them. In some cases, the groupings are not uncontroversial; in particular, I am not sure I am convinced by the justifications for treating “Northern Austroasiatic”, “Eastern Austroasiatic”, and especially the national languages as coherent groups. This is not to say that the evidence is completely lacking, but simply that these groupings reflect a particular editorial perspective.

Related to this, one cannot help but notice that out of 38 chapters, twelve are (in some cases co-)written by one or both of the editors. While both Sidwell and Jenny are senior figures in the field, and between them surely well placed to comment with some authority on a broad range of topics, this makes it at times difficult to distinguish authorial prerogative from editorial direction (although some might argue it also brings a welcome cohesion often missing from large edited handbooks). This situation may have as much to do with necessity as with design. As noted in the Preface, managing contributor involvement in a project of this scale can be a serious challenge; unanticipated changes often mean that new authors must be found at short notice, which can be difficult or impossible for some highly specialized topics.

The remaining 14 chapters are nominally assigned to the themes of “areality and contact” and “language and society”. While it is difficult to identify unambiguously most of these chapters with just one of these themes, the contributions are no less valuable as a result. Here we find chapters devoted to a diverse range of topics including phonological or grammatical features common to languages of the region, such as phonological register, nominal classifiers, and expressives; contributions on language policy and planning, and the role of language in the formation of the Mainland Southeast Asian nation-state; discussions of the effects of “Sinospheric” and “Indospheric” language contact; and two very useful chapters on writing systems and epigraphy.

In summary, *LLMSEA* provides a practical overview of the state of Southeast Asian languages and linguistics in the early twenty-first century. The contributions provide concise summaries of existing scholarship and draw attention to areas where further research is (in most cases, urgently) needed. *LLMSEA* will no doubt serve as a convenient reference work for areal specialists, but also as a helpful point of departure for anyone seeking to familiarize themselves with the past as well as the present state of Mainland Southeast Asian linguistics.

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