

REVIEW ARTICLE

Paul K. Benedict, *Sino-Tibetan: A Conspectus* (Princeton-Cambridge Studies in Chinese Linguistics), xi+230 pp. Cambridge, University Press, 1972. £15, \$49.50.

The opening sentence of the foreword, "the manuscript of this book was originally drafted over a quarter of a century ago", can hardly fail to raise serious doubts as to the value of *Sino-Tibetan: A Conspectus* to Sino-Tibetan comparatists a generation later, and fears for the perspicacity of Professor Matisoff in resurrecting it. Fortunately, that sentence is far from being the whole story: the "preface" (pp. ix-x) makes it clear that the author has not only rearranged some of the material of the 1942-3 manuscript, and added minor emendations, but has "extensively annotated the whole, with emphasis on the Karen and Chinese sections", while Matisoff has contributed notes on Lolo language material, and has brought the bibliography up to date. The result is rather like having two books between one set of covers, the original manuscript occupying at least part of 197 pages, with 133 footnotes, and the later work occupying much of the lower part of many of those pages, in the form of 361 additional footnotes, distinguished from those of the original study by italic figures. It is through these later footnotes that Professors Benedict and Matisoff bring the original text up to date from subsequent research, some of it their own, and the rest acknowledged to "Haudricourt (Karen reconstructions), Forrest (Lepcha analysis), R. B. Jones (Karen)", and others. Not a few of the later set of footnotes, especially in the Chinese sections (39-48), take up more of the page than the original text, occasionally forcing it into a mere three lines, and running, in the case of footnote 494, over four successive pages. Many and sizable stretches of the book are, consequently, by no means easy to read continuously; and the reader has to be his own editor from time to time, modernizing the original text from the footnotes, as on pp. 37-8, for example, where the original text contains forty-four "root-initial" "consonant clusters" (*kr, gl, tw, dy, etc.*); but the footnotes 121-2 instruct him to add six or, perhaps, seven more, **tr, *zl, etc.*, and to convert four of the clusters in the original table (*sy, zy, try, dzy*) into unit phonemes **s, *z, *ts, and *dz*, with corresponding changes in the table of "Tibeto-Burman initial consonants" on pp. 17-18. In fact, in order to see Benedict's current scheme at a glance one really needs to make new tables for one's self, and keep them with the book; in later editions the author might perhaps consider including revised tables in a folder.

Though the title of the book is "Sino-Tibetan", the greater part of it (pp. 4-126, 199-228) is given over to Tibeto-Burman, only a fraction over a quarter of the book to Chinese (pp. 152-98), and about an eighth to Karen (pp. 127-51). This balance, tilted in favour of Tibeto-Burman, possibly reflects the author's original conclusion (p. 154) that "the relationship between Tibeto-Burman and Chinese is a remote one"; and the minor position of Chinese in the book must have seemed still less significant in the original text, before the massive infusion of sixty footnotes had expanded the Chinese section to the forty-seven pages noted above. Footnote 417 contradicts the sentence just quoted with: "this is hardly an accurate statement; the term 'remote' should be applied to our state of knowledge at that time (early 1940s) rather than to the relationship between TB and Chinese. It is now clear that the great bulk of the core ST vocabulary is shared by these two language groups."

The author uses "Tibeto-Burman" (TB) for his reconstructed Tibeto-Burman forms as well as for forms in languages classified as Tibeto-Burman; it sometimes,

therefore, becomes necessary to examine the context rather carefully, to determine whether "Tibeto-Burman" refers there to forms contained in the many contemporary languages classified as Tibeto-Burman, or to the putative Tibeto-Burman, or common Tibeto-Burman, reconstructed forms. "The Tibeto-Burman languages, over one hundred of which have been recorded, make up the linguistic 'center of gravity' of the Sino-Tibetan stock" (p. 4) illustrates the former, or language-group, use; "some 16 consonant phonemes can be postulated for Tibeto-Burman" (p. 13) illustrates the latter, or common-Tibeto-Burman, use; and so do references to Tibeto-Burman roots such as "the TB root for 'pig'". The use of "Chinese", too, is apt to be confusing: one needs constantly to remind one's self that "the forms cited below accordingly are those of *Ar. Ch.*, often along with the later *Anc. Ch. forms*, all as given in the *Grammata Serica* of Karlgren" (p. 153).

Judged by the standards of Indo-European reconstruction Benedict has indeed been remarkably successful in the number of his Tibeto-Burman forms in this latter sense of the term. W. S. Allen has drawn attention to the restricted inventory of Indo-Aryan lexical items with the words: "it is hard to see how we can go beyond . . . a rather limited selection of lexical items - the latter indeed led one critic to suggest that IE Comparative Linguistics rested on a hundred-odd words, and always the same ones ('hundred', 'horse', 'carry', 'liver', etc.)." [L. Duvau, ap. Vendryès, *Bull. Soc. Ling.* XLII, p. 4; Trubetsky goes even further (*Acta Ling.* I. 2, p. 83, 'Es gibt wohl fast kein einziges Wort, das in allen indogermanischen Sprachen vorkommen würde.')] (*Transactions Phil. Soc.* 1953, p. 78). Benedict's list of "Tibeto-Burman roots" (App. I, pp. 199-209) comprises some 780 items. By no means all of these entries, however, can claim to have reflexes in each of his "seven primary divisions or nuclei of Tibeto-Burman", "Tibetan-Kanauri (Bodish-Himalayish)", "Bahing-Vayu (Kiranti)", "Abor-Miri-Dafla (Mirish)", "Kachin", "Burmese-Lolo (Burmish)", "Bodo-Garo (Barish)", "Kuki-Naga (Kukish)"; it is, consequently, difficult to determine what principles have guided Benedict in according the status of "Tibeto-Burman root" to some of them. Where a reflex can be cited from at least one language from each of his seven "divisions", no doubt the reconstructed form, or, rather, the possibility of reconstructing a form, will readily find acceptance. Such is item "402" "TB **mik*~*myak*", "eye", with cognates cited from seventeen languages, all seven "divisions" being represented, among others, by such lexical items as (Bodish-Himalayish) Tibetan *mi*g, (Kiranti) Bahing *mi-tsi*, (Mirish) Miri *amik*, (Luish) Kachin *myi*, (Burmish) Burmese *myak*, (Barish) Garo *mik*, and (Kukish) Lushei *mir*. This seven-fold representation, one extreme of the scale, is approached by item "87 **lam*", "road", where five of the seven divisions, a majority, are represented, only the Mirish and Kiranti being absent from the list: Tibetan *lam*, Kachin *lam*, Burmese *lām* (in Benedict's phonemic and tonemic transcription), Garo *ram-a*, and Lushei *lam*-. Others of the 780 or so items, on the other hand, exhibit reflexes in only a minority of the seven divisions; e.g., item "91 **wal*", "circular": Kachin *wan*, Burmese *wān*, Lushei *wal*; and, at the other extreme, item "110 **ok*", "below", is represented in two divisions only, Bodish-Himalayish, by Tibetan "2og" (Benedict's romanization), and Burmish, by Burmese *auk* (Benedict's phonemic transcription). Indeed, if one accepts the author's tentative classification of Nung as Burmish (p. 5), it is only in one of the seven divisions that item "113", "**ik*", "strangle", "throatle", is represented, by Nung "i < ik" and by Burmese "ais" (*ac* in the *Epigraphia Birmanica* system).

In such circumstances one wonders whether Benedict has not been too generous in conferring reconstructed Tibeto-Burman status on forms that are not well supported in terms of "divisions". Since the Tibeto-Burman language group owes its title more to prestige in literature than to the polarity of Burmese and Tibetan within the group, it would be unjust to try and insist that no reconstructed form should be admitted to *TB status unless the reflexes supporting it included both Burmese and Tibetan, languages that may ultimately turn out not to represent the two extremes of the Tibeto-Burman group; but, even so, it does come as something of a shock to find Benedict giving unqualified TB status to reconstructed items supported by only a single "division", such as the **ik* (Burmish only) mentioned above, to **ok* (Bodish-Himalayish and Burmish),

and to *wal (Kachin, Burmish, and Kukish), equally with those which are supported by cognates occurring in a majority of divisions, like "mik~myak (402)" and "lam (87)" already referred to. Here again I am reminded of a passage in Allen (*op. cit.* 64): "we should presumably expect that different asterisked labels, with different implications, would be required according to the number and nature of the languages compared; this point, however, seems to have been noted by surprisingly few linguists, and the system based on a particular chosen group of languages has been crystallized into the Indo-European system". Is not the great leap from representation in only one or two of the seven TB divisions to *TB not, perhaps, too great to be taken in a single stage?

Benedict takes a step in this direction by attempting to group the seven "divisions" into super-groups, including, for example, a super-group "Burmic", comprising Burmese-Lolo, Nung, and Kachin. The subordinate status that he gives Kachin as a member of a Burmic super-group seems, however, to conflict with the special status that he gives it as being "at the linguistic 'crossroads' of Tibeto-Burman", emphasized by his "schematic chart of ST Groups" (p. 6), in which only Kachin is shown in a direct line of descent from Tibeto-Burman, while Tibeto-Kanauri, Lepcha, Konyak, Burmese-Lolo, and seven other "divisions" and languages are shown as Tibeto-Burman only indirectly, via Kachin. It can hardly be that Kachin, recorded within the last hundred years, should display the valuable complexities of Tibetan, or even Burmese, orthography.

Examples from Tibetan are in orthography in an acceptable romanization; Burmese examples, on the other hand, are not in an established romanization, like that of the *Epigraphia Birmanica*, or a modification of it by Luce or Hla Pe, but in transcriptions of the author's own devising, whereby Luce's *khrok* "six", for example, appears now as *khrauik* now as *thyaui*? (p. 88), *sā*: "son" as *sā*, *ngā* "I" as *na*, and *si* "know" as *si*. This system of Benedict's has the disadvantage of appearing to impose the diphthongal pronunciations of contemporary Rangoon Burmese (his *-auk*, *-auy*) not only on Old Burmese forms in which the pure vowel [ɔ] of contemporary Tavoyan has just as good, or even a better, claim to have been conserved, but even on the contemporary Rangoon (and Tavoyan) pure vowels of examples such as *khā* (Rangoon [khā:]), Benedict's *khau*). The *EB* romanization has the advantage of being neutral in this respect, of symbolizing the contemporary Rangoon diphthong equally with the contemporary Tavoyan pure vowel, together with the corresponding vowel unit of earlier *états de langue*, whose precise phonetic features are a matter of speculation, and which quite possibly had even then as much dialectal variation as can be seen in the alternation of a diphthong in Rangoon Burmese with a pure vowel in Tavoyan cognates at the present time.

Benedict's phonemic transcription of Burmese is the only phonemic transcription in the book, though the theoretical basis of his approach to language comparison is avowedly phonemic: "the present work may be regarded as an attempt to systematize and extend these [*i.e.*, 'Shafer's and the writer's'] results along phonemic and morpho-phonemic lines" (p. 11). "Phonemic" is probably the more apt description of his analysis, than morpho-phonemic; for a morpho-phonemic analysis, like McDavid's, for example, in "Burmese phonemics", would have enabled Benedict to dispense with over-phonemic statements such as: "final stops and nasals make up distinct series in Tibeto-Burman, and most instances of interchange can readily be interpreted in terms of conditioning factors, *e.g.*, B. *yauk-mā*~*yauy-mā* 'pudding-stick', with *-k*~*ŋ* before *-mā*" (p. 14). A more morpho-phonemic treatment would recognize that the phonemes *k* and *ŋ* are (1) non-contrastive in this context (Benedict has, incidentally, omitted to mark the allophone of the [au] phoneme here, preceding *k/ŋ*, as being extremely short), and (2) complementarily distributed representations of a morpho-phoneme that could well be symbolized as *-K* (it is odd that, though the term *allophone* is available for complementarily distributed member segments of the same phoneme, there is no corresponding term for the complementarily distributed member phonemes of the same morpho-phoneme; *allophonema* suggests itself to me for the complementarily distributed phoneme members [k/ and ŋ/ of the proposed *-K* morpho-phoneme here).

Further, a more morpho-phonemic approach would have opened up to Benedict the possibility of analysing syllable-final consonants independently of syllable-initial consonants. While it is true that "final" consonants are dealt with in a separate chapter (7; pp. 13-17) from "initial" consonants (chap. 8; pp. 17-37) and from "consonant clusters" (chap. 9; pp. 37-57) too, a single overall phonemic inventory is stated to apply to all three contexts: "some 16 consonant phonemes can be postulated for Tibeto-Burman, as follows:

Velar:	g h y h
Dental:	d t n s z r l
Labial:	b p m
Semi-vowels:	w y.

Let us first examine the development of these consonants in root-final position. All except the sonants *g d b*, and *z*, also the aspirate *h*, appear in this position" (p. 13). In other words only eleven consonant units are distinguished in syllable-final position; consequently, the power of contrast, or the distinguishing role, of Benedict's syllable-final *k*, for example, which contrasts with his *ŋ*, *t*, *n*, *s*, *r*, *l*, *p*, *m*, *w*, and *y*, is very different from that of his syllable-initial *k*, which contrasts with all the other fifteen. So great is this difference in contrastive power, or distinctive function, that the eleven syllable-final units have, I should have thought, a strong claim to be considered as separate from, and independent of, any of the sixteen initial units. The case for independent treatment is particularly strong for his syllable-final *k*, *t*, *p*, and *s*, since there is no contrast, for each of these, with, respectively, *g*, *d*, *b*, and *z*. It is not, therefore, surprising that both voice and voicelessness can characterize the Lhasa-Tibetan reflexes of Benedict's **k*, **t*, and **p* in syllable-final position, according to context and tempo, *e.g.* (from my own observation) [-k/g] in [-lagbə] "hand" *lag-pa*, slow-tempo [-lakpə], [-x/ʃ] in [-laʃsə:] "glove" *lag-shubs*, slow-tempo [-lakʃu:], [-ŋ] in [-laŋzi:] "brawl" *lag-dzing*, and [-lak/ɡti:] "palm" *lag-mthil*; and it is by no means unlikely that this current context-determined and tempo-determined variation in voicing in one of the modern dialects might reflect a like variation in earlier *états de langue*. Nor is it only the voicing feature that fluctuates here: these examples of mine also show a fluctuation in stricture, between maximum stricture ([-k/g, -ŋ]) and intermediate stricture ([-x/ʃ]) (and, indeed, in word-final position, the minimum degree of stricture to be observed in the [a] of [-æ:la] "food" *zhal-lag*), and a fluctuation in nasality, between non-nasality ([-k/g/x/ʃ/a]) and nasality ([-ŋ]). It seems not unreasonable to regard this wide degree of contextual variation in such features as voicing, stricture, and nasality, not shared by the Lhasa-Tibetan reflex of Benedict's syllable-initial **k*, as reflecting a corresponding variation for Proto-Tibetan, and, possibly, *TB. At all events, prudence suggests a more flexible form of statement than Benedict's "in Classical Tibetan these final stops [*i.e.*, Tibeto-Burman 'sonants *g, d, b*'] are written as sonants (-*g*, -*d*, -*b*), and it has generally been supposed that they were originally sonant stops that have become unvoiced in modern Tibetan dialects. In view of the evidence from other TB languages, however, one must conclude that these stops were weakly articulated imploded lenis sounds . . ." (p. 13). The reading-style pronunciation, however, in which Classical Tibetan texts are read, approaches the degree of variation illustrated above from Lhasa Tibetan for its phonological units corresponding to Classical Tibetan *-g* and *-b* (the pronunciation of *-d* in both dialects is now purely vocalic: the length feature of [i: e: e: o: y:] *id, ed, ad, od, ud*, for example, the frontness feature of the last three, and the relative closeness of the first two as compared with such other finals as [ip ep], *-ib -eb*). Consequently, whether they are "sonant" or "surd" (or "stop" or "nasal") should not be rigidly specified: such features depend on the phonetic context in which each is pronounced; and *b* and *g* in the syllable final, in the absence of any contrast with a *p* or a *k* in that context, may well have exploited to the full the degree of voicing variation and stricture variation that is then open to these syllable-final units during a whole succession of *états de langue*.

Benedict's attitude towards his reconstructed TB phonemes is one of extreme realism. It will have been observed that in the passages cited in the last two paragraphs he does not hesitate to specify phonetic features for his reconstructed phonemes; *g, k, ŋ*,

and *h* are termed "velar", for example, and *g*, *d*, *b*, and *z* are termed "sonant". Again, while discussing his reconstructed phonemes in initial position, he writes: "it is not unlikely that TB sonant stops were somewhat aspirated in initial position and unaspirated after prefixes" (p. 21); and again: "the final velars (-*k*, -*ŋ*) tend to disappear much more readily than do the final dentals and labials" (p. 14). His approach is, therefore, at the opposite extreme to that of the more formulaic approach to be seen in the following passage from J. R. Firth: "the highest abstractions [in the comparative study of the Indo-European languages] are the so-called reconstructed or * (starred) forms, which are hypothetical summaries of sets of relations bringing comparable cognate words within one typological system, e.g., **ek₁* vo-s **p₁*tu-. They have morphological value only. Such formulas have not in themselves any actual pronunciations, nor do they refer to any recognizable animal, or ford, portal or port" (J. R. Firth, *Papers in Linguistics* 1934-1951, London, 1957, p. 178).

For Benedict, though, the connection between the *TB unit and units in current TB languages is so close that in some passages they almost seem to merge. One such passage is: "the root for 'leech' (text) does not appear to have a Chinese cognate, but Karen has prefixed **r*-" (p. 24). Since his **r*- is a theoretical unit, of Benedict's own devising, it is difficult to see how Karen can have prefixed it. Indeed, how is it possible for a current language to have a "starred form?" The "hocus pocus" linguist would not attempt to deny that the phonological forms that he ascribes to a current language such as Karen are devised; but they are devised as a result of analysis within Karen data. An asterisked form, on the other hand, is devised as a result of comparing cognates in at least two languages or dialects, and arriving at a means of symbolizing regular recurrent relationships between phonological units in these two or more languages. The nearest that a language can come to *having* a starred (or asterisked) form is having a reflex of that starred form.

It is, further, difficult to see how a current language can have lost a starred form: "Lushei (and general Kuki) has also lost initial **k*- before *w* in *wi* 'dog' < TB **kw*" (p. 26). Since Lushei has not, and cannot have, asterisked forms, it cannot have lost them. All that one can safely say in such a case, it seems to me, is that Lushei *w*- is the reflex of *TB **kw*-. Nothing has been lost; but if such phonetic features as velarity, plosion, and voicelessness be ascribed to *TB **k*-, in spite of Firth's insistence, in the passage quoted above, that starred forms are unpronounceable, then one could not say that there has been a loss but that there has been a *development* from a hypothetical **[kw-]* (or **[ku-]*) to an attested [u-], [ʔu-], [w-], or whatever the initial sound or sounds are in *wi* in Lushei. Indeed I should have thought it preferable, not merely in this particular instance but in general, to abandon the notion of "dropping", "losing", or "disappearing" in linguistic reconstruction in favour of the notion of *development*. "Tibetan has dropped the occlusive part of the affricate initial in *za-ba* 'eat' < TB **dza*, . . ." (p. 29) would then be re-stated as a process of development, from a speculative affrication (*[dz-]) to an actual (attested) friction ([z-]) in Tibetan. This would surely be nearer to the articulatory processes involved in such a change; for affrication and (audible) friction exist as articulatory categories, but "dropping" and "loss" do not.

Benedict also describes languages as *retaining* starred forms: "contrast the following showing retention of **k*- even before -*i* [misprint for *-*i*? Or can a starred symbol precede a current phoneme?]: (54, p. 26) *Kkhyi*~*tsyakhyi*~*sik-tsi*, . . . 'barking deer' (TB **d-hiy*). "Retention" must mean that the reflex in the modern language (Kachin) has the phonetic features (here, velarity, plosion, voicelessness, and aspiration, apparently) that Benedict, in his highly phonetic approach to reconstruction, has attributed to his starred form (**k*-).

More startling is the replacement of a starred form by a current phoneme; e.g. (1) "replacement" of "TB roots with final **ar* or **al* . . . by final -*n*: B. *pān* 'flower' < TB **ba-r*" (p. 15); (2) "replacement of final *-*s* by glottal stop in Lushei is further attested by *L hu* 'wet', *T hus* 'moisture'" (p. 17). Since a starred form (here, *-*ar*l and *-*s*) is a figment of Benedict's imagination, no Burman or Lushei can possibly replace it by -*n* or by a glottal stop, or anything else, for that matter. In such cases the *reflex* concept is invaluable: Benedict's TB *-*ar* can be stated to have -*an* as its reflex in

Burmese, and his *-*s* to have -ʔ as its reflex in Lushei, and -*s* in Written Tibetan. In its role of representing, or summarizing, a set of correspondences a starred form simply is not replaceable by current phonological units; if a particular starred form turns out, in the course of comparison, to be inefficient, it can be discarded, or it can be superseded by revised and more effective starred forms, just as Benedict's original reconstructed phoneme sequences **sv*-, **zy*-, and **tsy*- were superseded, in note 122 (revised series), by reconstructed unit phonemes **s*-, **z*-, and **tʃ*- (p. 37).

At the risk of being thought over-critical of Benedict's use of such concepts as "loss", "retention", and "replacement" of starred forms I have emphasized the highly phonetic nature of his reconstructions, so highly phonetic that he considers Lushei [-ʔ] to be too far removed from whatever phonetic features he has in mind for his starred form TB *-*s* for [-ʔ] to be a continuation of *-*s*; consequently [-ʔ] has to be treated as a "replacement". Tibetan orthographic -*s*, however, he finds acceptable; and it is ironic that the pronunciation of -*s* in the Spelling Style of pronunciation, in which Written-Tibetan forms are regularly cited, is, precisely, also [-ʔ] (*hus*, [-hyʔ]). Since most of the Tibeto-Burman language data that Benedict uses is orthographic, there is a danger that acceptability will commonly depend on a happy choice of letter or symbol by the missionary or whoever else it was that pioneered the orthography. Where that letter or symbol is the same, or very nearly the same, as the letter that Benedict adopts for his reconstruction, he will describe his reconstruction as being "maintained" in the language concerned; where it is as different as it was for the [-ʔ] of Lushei, then his reconstruction will be said to have been "replaced" by some other phoneme.

The "reflex" concept would, therefore, seem to be a useful addition to Benedict's linguistic armoury: it allows quite diverse sounds, and even features of sounds, and sequences of sounds, to be cited as current representatives of asterisked units, provided that the units compared are drawn from cognates, and provided that there are enough examples of them to establish a systematic relationship. (The term "reflex" does indeed appear in *Sino-Tibetan*, but, if I am not mistaken, only in the footnotes belonging to the revision, and to those parts which have been contributed by Matisoff.) I can speak, here, from experience, because I have myself exploited the flexibility that this concept gives one to state sets of initial cluster features as reflexes of the same asterisked form despite considerable phonetic differences: (1) the (phonological) g-cluster initial [ɣm-] of Balti Tibetan [ɣmɔl] 'silver', (2) the (phonological) r-cluster initial [rŋ-] of Golok Tibetan [rŋi:] 'silver', (3) the (phonological) combination of simple initial and tone 1 (or high tone), the [-ŋ-] of Lhasa-Tibetan [ŋy:] "silver" *angul*, all three, gm-, rŋ-, and rŋ-, as phonological reflexes of a member of a Proto-Tibetan *r-cluster syllable-initial, *rŋ-, though only in a certain type of syllable (*BSOAS*, XXXV, 3, pp. 378-9); and these sequences of sounds and combinations of features [ɣm-], [rŋ-], and [-ŋ-] are at least as different from each other in appearance as Benedict's Lushei [-ʔ] and Written-Tibetan -*s*.

I should not wish to go to the same extreme as Firth, and banish phonetic speculation entirely from linguistic reconstruction; but it would seem to be a useful precaution to treat specifically phonetic speculation as on an entirely different footing from the phonological and morphological, and differentiate it by combining the asterisk symbol, denoting a common, or reconstructed, form, with square brackets, the accepted symbol for the phonetic level. Thus, one might speculate that my *rŋ-, with phonological reflexes gm-, rŋ- and rŋ-, in Balti, Golok, and Lhasa dialects respectively, might have been expected to be pronounced *[rŋ-]. Such an attitude would be intermediate between the two extreme positions, Benedict's and Firth's, illustrated earlier. It would allow one to speculate that Golok had, in [rŋ-], conceivably "maintained", or conserved, a Proto-Tibetan *[rŋ-], the phonetic exponent of a phonological *rŋ-.

A possible reason for Benedict's highly phonetic approach to reconstruction may lie in the largely phonetic nature of the data that he has had to draw on: his "Section 6. Tibeto-Burman primary sources" (pp. 12-13) and "Appendix III, Primary Tibeto-Burman sources" (pp. 221-8) reveal a preponderance of early, and pre-phonemic, works, from Csoma de Kőrös (1834) and Hodgson (1847) onwards. Benedict claims to be making "an attempt to systematize these results [*i.e.* earlier phonemic generalizations by Shafer and himself] along phonemic and morphophonemic lines"; but it would

clearly have been an impossible task to phonemicize all these nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century sources; and he has not attempted it. Even so, he does appear to accept the symbols of these orthographies as though they had phonemic status or something like it. Consequently, one has the uneasy feeling that, with many of the less-known languages, he is not dealing with systems and terms in systems but with letters chosen more from phonetic than from phonemic or phonological considerations. *Sino-Tibetan* gives no clue to the contrastive power, or range of contrast, of, for example, Lushei -t (p. 14): whether it is phonemically distinct from -ʔ, and whether there is a/k/ in contrast with it in syllable-final position in some environments or in none. Ultimately, the only secure basis for TB comparison must be a systematic statement of all contrastive units, in terms of an accredited phonological theory, whether distinctive-feature, phonemic, or prosodic, for every language from which evidence is cited.

In the mean time it is not difficult to sympathize with Benedict's urge to look beyond all such particularities, and produce a model of what *TB and *ST might be expected to look like. His introductory sections provide a stimulating panorama of Sino-Tibetan comparative studies; and the book as a whole undoubtedly justifies Matisoff's comment "since 1940, nothing in my opinion has surpassed this *Conspectus* as the best general overview of the entire subject".

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