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Sūn Hóngkāi 孙宏开, editor. *Zhōngguó xīn fāxiàn yǔyán yánjiū cóngshū* 中国新发现语言研究丛书. [New Found Minority Languages in China Series], 31 Volumes. Beijing 北京: Chinese Academy of Social Sciences 中国社会科学院.

0. Introduction

In the late 1990s, the Institute of Minorities of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences launched a new book series, *Zhōngguó xīn fāxiàn yǔyán yánjiū cóngshū* [New Found Minority Languages in China Series] (hereafter *Xīn fāxiàn yǔyán*). Under the general editorship of Sūn Hóngkāi, this series documents little studied and often highly endangered languages of the People's Republic of China (PRC), one language per volume. It serves as a sequel to another influential series, *Zhōngguó shǎoshù mínzú yǔyán jiǎnzhì* [Outlines of Minority Languages of China] (hereafter *Yǔyán jiǎnzhì*), which was published in the 1980s and which provides concise descriptions of 59 languages. With over thirty volumes published and ten more in preparation, *Xīn fāxiàn yǔyán* complements *Yǔyán jiǎnzhì* in documenting all minority languages of China.¹

The new series has received critical acclaim in China and abroad, for it constitutes an important contribution to the fields of language documentation and of descriptive and historical linguistics.² Although each volume deserves to be reviewed separately, the present review comments on the series as a whole—presenting its history, general build-up and characteristic features. A complete list of published volumes is given in the Appendix.

1. History of the series, scope, authors, languages

Yǔyán jiǎnzhì series outlines languages based on data collected during the large survey in the 1950s that established the current framework of the PRC's 56 recognized nationalities. The *Xīn fāxiàn yǔyán* series revisits languages for which insufficient data had been collected in the 1950s and also describes languages that were discovered in the 1980s. Research on the newly discovered languages has been carried out mostly in the 1990s and continues to date.

The two series differ in length and scope. Whereas each *Yǔyán jiǎnzhì* volume contains a brief linguistic description followed by a 1,000-word list of basic vocabulary, *Xīn fāxiàn yǔyán* volumes consist of more detailed outlines of the phonetics/phonology, morphology, and syntax of each language as well as an expanded word list. Moreover, each volume in the new series includes additional chapters that (1) comment on the sociolinguistic situation in which the language is spoken, as well as on the culture of the respective ethnic group; (2) introduce the dialects of the language, if any; (3) discuss its linguistic affiliation; and (4) provide a collection of stories supplied with glosses and an idiomatic Chinese translation.

Given the variety of languages covered, the new series is marked by great diversity in all aspects. Authors of individual volumes include renowned experts of minority studies, many of whom also contributed to the *Yǔyán jiǎnzhì* series, such as Dài Qìngxià, Máo Zōngwǔ and Ōuyáng Juéyà, but also young thriving linguists, such as Huáng Chénglóng, Lǐ Yúnbīng and Mù Shìhuá, who are often themselves native speakers of a minority language. The latter aspect is important, because most languages covered in the series are spoken in a complex sociolinguistic situation and adequate description requires thorough knowledge of neighboring languages and local Chinese dialects. For example, the Bùxīng language, spoken by 539 people in Měnglà County, Yúnnán Province, is surrounded by Dǎi, Hāní, Kè mù, Miáo and a local Chinese dialect; hence, good command of at least some of these languages is essential for resolving questions of lexical borrowing and areal influences.

When describing one minority language, *Xīn fāxiàn yǔyán* authors often provide valuable information of hitherto unknown varieties of languages spoken in its immediate neighbourhood. For example, in his grammar of Yidū, Jiāng Dí (2005: 48-49) comments on characteristic features of the highly aberrant local Tibetan dialect Sōnglínhuà; and in their study of Biāohuà, Liáng Mǐn and Zhāng Jūnrú (2002) demonstrate fine knowledge of the Yuè dialects surrounding this language.

The new series describes languages from nearly all language families represented in China, such as Altaic, Tibeto-Burman, Tai-Kadai, Hmong-Mien,

Austroasiatic, and Austronesian. The linguistic affiliation of some languages, such as Yidū and Sūlóng, tentatively argued to be independent Tibeto-Burman languages, is still uncertain.

Most languages described within the series are severely endangered: their number of speakers is well below 1,000. In many cases, the actual number of speakers of a language is much smaller than the number of members of its respective ethnic group. For example, Mùlǎo, a language of South and Southeast Guìzhōu, is almost extinct, despite the large number of ethnic Mùlǎo, estimated at over 28,000 people. Data for this volume has been elicited from a language consultant of 87 years of age, who has some passive knowledge of Mùlǎo. For this reason, the Mùlǎo volume, in contrast to all other volumes, contains no appended stories.

Due to the large number of undescribed languages and the urgency of documentation, the actual time of fieldwork is usually short, sometimes even less than two months. Naturally, longer periods of fieldwork yield more elaborated descriptions. For instance, Sūn Hóngkǎi worked over 40 years with the Ānóng language, which allows him to elaborate on the history of language endangerment and decline in his book.

2. Structure of linguistic description

The goal of the new series—to provide the most detailed possible language descriptions—determines the structure of individual volumes, which normally consist of separate chapters on (1) phonology and phonetics, (2) lexicon and morphology, and (3) syntax, in that order. The relative proportion of these three chapters varies per volume, but the overall approach is unified throughout the series. It follows a distinct Sinocentric model for linguistic description based on the Chinese language.

The chapter on phonetics and phonology is divided into three parts, as customary of traditional Chinese linguistic practice: the initial consonant; the rhyme,

further consisting of the nucleus and a coda; and the tone. It is concluded by a discussion of sandhi rules.

The chapter on lexicon first draws a distinction between monosyllabic and multisyllabic words and between non-composite and composite words and then discusses prefixed, infix, and suffixed elements in composite words, reduplication, and other manners of word formation. It ends with an analysis of Chinese loans into the language in question.

The chapter on grammar, following a dichotomy established in the first Chinese grammar *Mǎ shì wéntōng* (1898), first elaborates on content words (i.e., nouns, pronouns, numerals, classifiers, measure words, verbs, adjectives and adverbs) and then on function words (i.e., prepositions, conjunctions, particles and interjections). The description then proceeds to various kinds of phrases, such as topic phrases, verb phrases, prepositional phrases, and set phrases (including some typically Chinese-specific). The description ends with a discussion of sentence types (declaratives, interrogatives, commands and exclamations), sentence parts and their classification. Complex sentences conclude the outline.

Overall, the choice of Chinese as the model for linguistic description is understandable, as most of the described languages (naturally excluding the Altaic group) are typologically similar to Chinese in being tonal, topic prominent, lacking inflection, and having syntax operating primarily through word order and the use of grammatical function words.

Furthermore, this unified approach is an advantage for the series as a whole, because it allows the reader to quickly locate parts of the description for, say, comparative purposes. However, this type of framework inevitably has as a consequence that important typological features of individual languages are occasionally overlooked, if absent in the Sinocentric model for description (cf. Chappell 2006). Conversely, Chinese-specific features and patterns are at times postulated for languages that lack these. For example, the standard section on verbs includes a description of copulas. Whereas in some languages there is no copula verb in equative sentences, a word corresponding to the Chinese copula 是 *shì* 'be'

is sometimes put forward. Thus, Lǐ Dàqín (2004) argues that the Sūlóng language has a copula verb [wi⁵⁵] (p. 97). Paradoxically, he notes that this verb cannot be used in equative sentences, but only on its own, when answering yes/no questions or confirming something said by another speaker. The provided Chinese gloss and translation is 是的 *shì de* ‘yes, right’. For example, [wi⁵⁵, dza³³ɕ i⁵⁵ ɿ e³³ va^{r 55}] ‘Yes, he is Bkra-shis.’ In negative equative sentences, the form [hi³³bua[?] 55] is used, for example, [va^{r 55} ɿ e³³ dza³³ɕ i⁵⁵ hi³³bua[?] 55] ‘He is not Bkra-shis.’ The link between the latter form and the purported copula [wi⁵⁵], if any, is not discussed. I note that the form [bua[?] 55] at the same time bears a striking resemblance with the negative form [bua[?] 55] of the existential verb [wa[?] 55] (p. 98), and that the general negator in Sūlóng is [ba⁵³] or [ba³¹] (p. 117). It thus appears that the only reason for analyzing [wi⁵⁵] as a copular verb is because it loosely corresponds to *shì* in the example sentences.

Of all parts of speech, the descriptions of function words are probably the least refined, which is due to the short time of fieldwork and perhaps also to the general tendency in the Chinese linguistic tradition to attribute more weight to phonetics/phonology and morphology than to syntax. These descriptions are more often than not based on few examples without context. Furthermore, function words are often explained through their Chinese near-equivalents, which makes it difficult to get a good understanding of their meanings and functions.

Although the relative brevity of fieldwork has its impact on some volumes, it is remarkable to see how accurate and detailed descriptions can be produced in limited timeframes. Hence, these critical comments should not distract the reader from the overall high quality and value of the pioneering work carried out by the authors.

3. Linguistic affiliation

In addition to describing lesser-known minority languages of China, the series also aims to ascertain their linguistic affiliation, as part of ongoing efforts by the Institute of Minorities of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences to classify all languages spoken within the Chinese borders.

The unified word list of basic vocabulary used in the series is also used as foundation for the database of Sino-Tibetan languages, created by the Institute in 1998 in cooperation with the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology and conceived to perform multi-levelled research in Sino-Tibetan linguistics.³ Fieldwork on languages for the series thus also serves to provide the database with first hand data on little known minority languages.

Discussion of linguistic affiliation in the series is mainly based on lexicostatistical methods (counting the percentage of corresponding cognate sets) and is typically structured as follows. The authors first identify languages to which the language in question is supposedly related and subsequently carry out detailed phonological comparisons (separate for initials, main vowels and codas) between these languages based on the Swadesh lists of basic vocabulary. Then follow lexical and syntactic comparisons and, as a conclusion, an assessment of the degree of similarity between the languages and a tentative subgrouping of the relative language group. Unfortunately, the authors never provide either the reconstructed forms (and, at times, even no sound correspondences) or a description of the features of the parent language. Rather, they organize and classify the amassed data in lengthy comparative tables, letting the tables speak for themselves. Sometimes that is indeed all the authors can do, given the uncertain linguistic affiliation of some languages and the complex sociolinguistic situation in which they are spoken. In such cases, reconstruction of proto-forms would require a separate study.

4. Appendices

4.1. Word list

The standard elicitation set of 1,000 words in the *Yǔyán jiǎnzhì* series is expanded in the *Xīn fāxiàn yǔyán* series to over 2,000 lexical items, grouped by semantic field in the following order: (1) Nouns (natural world, directions, time, animals, plants, body parts, people, forms of address, buildings, clothing, food, tools, transportation, culture), (2) Verbs, (3) Adjectives, (4) Numbers, (5) Measure Words, (6) Pronouns, (7) Adverbs, and (8) Grammatical Function Words. Word lists are arranged by Chinese items (with one exception: in the grammar of Manchu, the word list is organized by written Manchu), and are mostly unnumbered.

The advantages and disadvantages of a unified word list are similar to those of a unified structure of linguistic description. While it is convenient for cross-linguistic comparison, the unfortunate by-product of a fixed word list is that it inevitably fails to include some culture-specific words. Whereas many typically Chinese cultural items, such as *dòufu* ‘bean curd’ or *mántou* ‘steamed bun’, predictably loans from the local Chinese dialect, faithfully appear on the list in each volume, many words characteristic for each respective culture are overlooked. For example, in his outline of the culture of the Bùxīng group, Gāo (2004: 14) mentions that speakers of Bùxīng have a habit of chewing betel nut, but the word for ‘betel’ is missing from the word list.

On the other hand, those culture-specific words that are provided in International Phonetic Alphabet transcription in the introductory chapter are sometimes regrettably not included in the general list. Thus, also in the study of Bùxīng, none of the many traditional festivities of the Bùxīng group, as described in the ethnological overview, are mentioned in the word list.

Occasionally, the authors are not specific enough in their translations of local plant and animal names. For instance, in his description of Gémàn, Lǐ Dàqín (2002: 73) comments on the fact that the Gémàn people have an elaborate vocabulary for various kinds of rodents. Unfortunately, it is impossible to understand from his list what these rodents are, as [a³¹si³⁵] and [nam⁵⁵si³⁵] are both

translated as ‘kind of rodent’; [ŋ in⁵⁵si³⁵] is rendered as ‘a small edible rodent of the squirrel kind’ and [si³⁵kh_ɿ oŋ⁵⁵] as ‘kind of small mouse with a white belly’.

Notably, more recent volumes in the series are marked by a growing awareness of the value of culture-specific vocabulary. Thus, in his study of Yidū, Jiāng Dí (2005: 35) devotes a separate section to it, because he finds that the best way to analyze the lexicon of a given language is to search for the most basic phenomena reflected in the core vocabulary, including also words which reflect the everyday life of the group in question. Also, in the outline of Kèmiè, Chén (2005) adds to the standard word list many plant and animal names typical of the natural habitat of the Kèmiè people, such as various kinds of fungi and tropical fruit as ‘lychee’ and ‘coconut’.

Apart from occasionally missing culture-specific words, I also note recurrent discrepancies between the list of measure words as given in the word list and in the relevant section in the grammar description. For example, in the volume on Mǎng, the word corresponding to the most general measure word in Chinese, *ge* ‘item’, is listed on page 263 as [mɛ⁵⁵], but in the outline of measure words on page 88, the same word [mɛ⁵⁵] is translated as ‘one’. Furthermore, on pages 86-87, it is explained that the most frequent measure word in Mǎng, which would then be more corresponding to the most frequent measure word in Chinese, *ge*, is [dɔ ŋ³¹]).

In sum, in addition to a more culture-specific word list, one would wish for more coherence between the analysis in the linguistic description and the appended word list.

4.2. Stories

The *Xīn fāxiàn yǔyán* volumes contain, on an average, three stories and at times also traditional song lyrics, accompanied by Chinese interlinear and idiomatic translation, but no sentence-by-sentence translation. The stories constitute priceless material for further research on these languages and can serve as a terrain for testing the analysis provided in the grammatical description. The minor points of the analysis are also

inevitably manifested. The indecisiveness of the authors with respect to the exact meanings and functions of grammatical function words leads to two problems with glossing (also in example sentences): the provided glosses are occasionally unsystematic or not sufficiently specific.

The former problem consists in one and the same form being glossed by several Chinese words. For example, the verb [wu⁵⁵] in Sūlóng is glossed as ‘come’ on page 141, as ‘go’ on page 150, and as ‘walk’ on page 158.

Glosses are also not sufficiently specific, which manifests in glossing the function words of the researched language with Chinese near-equivalents, which is potentially misleading. For example, the function word [ʔ ə n³¹] in Mǎng, marker of the progressive aspect, is tersely defined as being “semantically and functionally roughly equivalent to the Chinese progressive particle *zhe*” and the accompanying word [tə³¹] as a modal marker being equivalent to the Chinese sentence final modal particles *le* and *ne* (p. 125). In Chinese, the combination of the durative particle *zhe* and the sentence final particle *ne* functions to express durative meaning, but also as an intensifier, for example, *pàng zhe ne* ‘really fat’. Should one infer that the combination of [ʔ ə n³¹] and [tə³¹] yields the same meaning in Mǎng?

What makes the stories and example sentences somewhat less reader friendly is that the authors often choose to gloss all grammatical function words simply as *zhùcí* ‘particles’ or as *xūcí* ‘function words’, which makes it impossible to tell one function word from another. Glossing in the two most recent volumes, on Ānóng and Yìdū, uses Chinese and English abbreviations, respectively, which effectively solve all the problems outlined above. Forthcoming volumes hopefully follow this practice. While reading through the volumes, I found it a pity that only in very few instances examples derived from the stories are used as example sentences in grammatical outlines. Instead, stories seem to be independent of the analytic sections. One apparent exception is a study of Biāohuà by Liáng Mǐn and Zhāng Jūnrú (2002), who not only quote material from the stories while describing various aspects of syntactic usage but also add references to the quoted texts.

5. Concluding Remarks

The *Xīn fāxiàn yǔyán* series is by all standards a highly valuable contribution to the field of East and Southeast Asian linguistics. As one would expect from a series of this scope, there are some flaws. Most importantly, one would wish for more coherence and interrelation between the analytic part of the linguistic description and the appended word list and stories. It would be helpful for the reader if an index of grammatical function words was provided and if entries in the word list were numbered. It would also be useful if the introductory part could be supplied with photos and maps showing the distribution of the languages. Notably, the lack of visual material is felt by the authors, who at times supply the text with drawings, for instance of traditional tattoos (Sūlóng 2004: 8) or of traditional buildings (Bùxīng 2004: 17).

For most of the languages, these volumes are a first full length study. The volumes fill the gaps in our knowledge of the linguistic diversity in China and it is to be hoped that more detailed grammars of these languages will follow. In the time of global language endangerment and extinction, the significant and lasting contribution of this series consists in amassing accurate and reliable primary data, which is of use for a variety of purposes and which will serve as foundation for generations of studies to come.

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Notes

1. According to Sūn (2001: 3), China hosts 128 minority languages, two of which have recently become extinct. Of the remaining 126 languages, 19 are spoken in Taiwan. This brings the amount of minority languages spoken in Mainland China in Sūn's estimations to 107. *Yǔyán jiǎnzhi* with 59 languages and *Xīn fāxiàn yǔyán* with over 40 languages thus cover all minority languages recognized by Sūn. Notably, estimates of the number of distinct ethnic groups and languages in China vary. For instance, of all endangered languages spoken in Mainland China discussed by Bradley (2006), 41 are not mentioned on Sūn's list.

2. The *Xīn fāxiàn yǔyán* series has already been introduced and reviewed at an earlier stage by Thurgood and Li (2003) and Sagart (2003), respectively, and some individual volumes have also been reviewed in the Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman area. The overall significance of the series and the recent publication of over ten new volumes merit another, lengthier review.

3. The results of this work have been presented in the “Cognate Words in Sino-Tibetan Languages” series (3 volumes released to date) co-edited by Ting Pang-Hsin and Sūn Hóngkǎi. For a short review, see Chirkova (2007).

Appendix: Volumes published in the *Zhōngguó xīn fāxiàn yǔyán yánjiū cóngshū* series

- (1) Bó Wénzé 薄文泽. *Yánghuāngyǔ yánjiū* 《佯僂语研究》 [A study of Yánghuāng/Then]. Shànghǎi 上海: Shànghǎi Yuǎndōng Chūbǎnshè 上海远东出版社, 1997. 2, 2, 242 pp. Paperback CNY 25, ISBN 7-80613-410-7. [A Kam-Sui (Tai-Kadai) language.]
- (2) Liáng Mǐn 梁敏, Zhāng Jūnrú 张均如. *Língāoyǔ yánjiū* 《临高语研究》 [A study of Língāo]. Shànghǎi 上海: Shànghǎi Yuǎndōng Chūbǎnshè 上海远

- 东出版社, 1997. 2, 1, 335 pp. Paperback CNY 25, ISBN 7-80613-409-3. [A Kam-Sui (Tai-Kadai) language.]
- (3) Máo Zōngwǔ 毛宗武, Lǐ Yúnbīng 李云兵. *Bāhēngyǔ yánjiū* 《巴哼语研究》 [A study of Pa-Hng]. Shànghǎi 上海: Shànghǎi Yuǎndōng Chūbǎnshè 上海远东出版社, 1997. 2, 2, 344 pp. Paperback CNY 25, ISBN 7-80613-371-2. [A Hmong-Mien language.]
- (4) Zhèng Yíqīng 郑贻青. *Huíhuīyǔ yánjiū* 《回辉话研究》 [A study of Huíhuī/Tsat]. Shànghǎi 上海: Shànghǎi Yuǎndōng Chūbǎnshè 上海远东出版社, 1997. 2, 2, 250 pp. Paperback CNY 25, ISBN 7-80613-372-0. [A Chamic (Austronesian) language.]
- (5) Ōuyáng Juéyà 欧阳觉亚. *Cūnyǔ yánjiū* 《村语研究》 [A study of Cūn]. Shànghǎi 上海: Shànghǎi Yuǎndōng Chūbǎnshè 上海远东出版社, 1998. 2, 2, 254 pp. Paperback CNY 50, ISBN 7-80613-586-3. [A Hlai (Tai-Kadai) language.]
- (6) Xú Shìxuán 徐世璇. *Bìsūyǔ yánjiū* 《毕苏语研究》 [A study of Bisū]. Shànghǎi 上海: Shànghǎi Yuǎndōng Chūbǎnshè 上海远东出版社, 1998. 2, 2, 272 pp. Paperback CNY 50, ISBN 7-80613-585-5. [A Lolo-Burmese (Tibeto-Burman) language.]
- (7) Lǐ Jǐnfāng 李锦芳. *Bùyāngyǔ yánjiū* 《布央语研究》 [A study of Bùyāng]. Běijīng 北京: Zhōngyāng Mínzú Dàxué Chūbǎnshè 中央民族大学出版社, 1999. 2, 2, 286 pp. Hardcover CNY 35, Paperback CNY 28, ISBN 7-81056-059-X. [A Tai-Kadai language.]
- (8) Lǐ Xùliàn 李旭练. *Làiyǔ yánjiū* 《俛语研究》 [A study of Lài/Hlai]. Běijīng 北京: Zhōngyāng Mínzú Dàxué Chūbǎnshè 中央民族大学出版社, 1999. 2, 2, 302 pp. Hardcover CNY 35, Paperback CNY 28, ISBN 7-81056-403-X. [A Tai-Kadai language.]
- (9) Sīqīn Cháokètú 斯钦朝克图. *Kāngjiāyǔ yánjiū* 《康家语研究》 [A study of Kāngjiā]. Shànghǎi 上海: Shànghǎi Yuǎndōng Chūbǎnshè 上海远东出版

- 社, 1999. 2, 2, 330 pp. Paperback CNY 50, ISBN 7-80613-534-0. [A Mongolian (Altaic) language.]
- (10) Wú Hóngwěi 吴宏伟. *Túwǎyǔ yánjiū* 《图瓦语研究》 [A study of Túwǎ/Tuvin]. Shànghǎi 上海: Shànghǎi Yuǎndōng Chūbǎnshè 上海远东出版社, 1999. 2, 2, 234 pp. Paperback CNY 50, ISBN 7-80613-832-3. [A Turkic (Altaic) language.]
- (11) Lǐ Yúnbīng 李云兵. *Lājīyǔ yánjiū* 《拉基语研究》 [A study of Lājī/Lakkia]. Běijīng 北京: Zhōngyāng Mínzú Dàxué Chūbǎnshè 中央民族大学出版社, 2000. 2, 2, 333 pp. Hardcover CNY 35, Paperback CNY 28, ISBN 7-81056-428-5. [A Tai-Kadai language.]
- (12) Yáng Tōngyín 杨通银. *Mòyǔ yánjiū* 《莫语研究》 [A study of Mò/Mak]. Běijīng 北京: Zhōngyāng Mínzú Dàxué Chūbǎnshè 中央民族大学出版社, 2000. 2, 1, 313 pp. Hardcover CNY 35, Paperback CNY 28. ISBN 7-81056-427-7. [A Kam-Sui (Tai-Kadai) language.]
- (13) Bó Wénzé 薄文泽. *Mùlǎoyǔ yánjiū* 《木佬语研究》 [A study of Mùlǎo/Mulam]. Běijīng 北京: Mínzú Chūbǎnshè 民族出版社, 2002. 2, 2, 186 pp. Hardcover CNY 36, ISBN 7-105-05291-0. [A Kam-Sui (Tai-Kadai) language.]
- (14) Chén Guóqìng 陈国庆. *Kè mùyǔ yánjiū* 《克木语研究》 [A study of Kè mù/Khmu]. Běijīng 北京: Mínzú Chūbǎnshè 民族出版社, 2002. 2, 4, 325 pp. Hardcover CNY 36, ISBN 7-105-05279-1. [A Mon-Khmer (Austroasiatic) language.]
- (15) Gāo Yǒngqí 高永奇. *Mǎngyǔ yánjiū* 《莽语研究》 [A study of Mǎng]. Běijīng 北京: Mínzú Chūbǎnshè 民族出版社, 2002. 2, 2, 283 pp. Hardcover CNY 36, ISBN 7-105-05243-0. [A Mon-Khmer (Austroasiatic) language.]
- (16) Lǐ Dàqín 李大勤. *Gémànyǔ yánjiū* 《格曼语研究》 [A study of Gémàn]. Běijīng 北京: Mínzú Chūbǎnshè 民族出版社, 2002. 2, 2, 320 pp.

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