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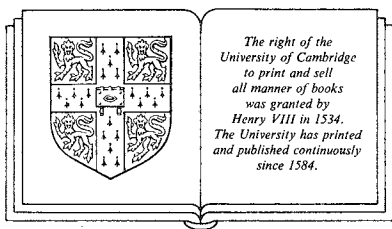
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CHINESE

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PREFACE

Chinese is only one of a very few contemporary languages whose history is documented in an unbroken tradition extending back to the second millennium BC. At the same time, in its numerous dialectal forms, it has more speakers than any language spoken in the modern world. This vast extension in time and space has imparted to the study of Chinese a complexity hardly equaled elsewhere. In the present book, I have attempted to sketch a general picture of this language in both its synchronic and its diachronic aspects. Due to the limits of space and my own personal background, some areas have been treated in more detail than others; but it is my hope that, despite whatever deficiencies the book may have in this regard, it will serve as a relatively safe introduction to the study of the Chinese language. In writing the book, I have tried to keep in mind both the general linguist as well as the specialist in Chinese studies; I can only hope that both groups will be able to glean some profit from perusing its pages.

I began to work on this book in 1979; the bulk of the writing was done in 1980 and 1981, when I had the good fortune to receive two fellowships, one from the Committee on Chinese Civilization of the American Council of Learned Societies, and the second from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation. I am profoundly grateful to both of the organizations for their timely support.

During the course of writing the present book, a number of professional colleagues and friends have read parts of the manuscript and provided me with valuable suggestions. I would like to express especial thanks to Professors Tsulin Mei, of Cornell University, Qiú Xīgūi, of Peking University, and William S.-Y. Wang, of the University of California at Berkeley, for their comments and assistance. In addition, I would like to thank Ms Zhāng Huīyīng of the Institute of Linguistics of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, who provided me with a number of extremely useful comments on chapters 3–5. My student, Mr Li Míng-kuang, gave me valuable assistance in compiling the bibliography. Finally, I owe a great deal to Professor Eugénie Henderson, who read through the entire

manuscript and offered countless excellent suggestions; her frequent words of encouragement were no small help in bringing the book to successful completion. I scarcely need add, I think, that final responsibility for all views expressed, as well as any errors or shortcomings, rests entirely with the author.