

Scholars of Sino-Tibetan languages scheduled to take part in the Sixth International Conference on Sino-Tibetan Language and Linguistics Studies at UCSD

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Nearly 100 scholars - representing all of the world's important researchers in the field of Sino-Tibetan languages - are scheduled to take part in the Sixth International Conference on Sino-Tibetan Language and Linguistics Studies Friday through Monday (October 19 - 22) at the University of California, San Diego.

The conference, under the direction of Dr. Benjamin K. T'sou, Assistant Professor of Linguistics at UCSD, is being held for the first time on the west coast. It will open with a welcoming ceremony at 9:00 a.m. Friday in the International Center at UCSD. Most of the following sessions will consist of panels dealing with linguistic research topics in such areas as historical phonology, tone, areal diffusion and internal reconstruction, and synchronic studies. More than 50 participants from throughout the world have been invited to read research papers.

A workshop on the "Current Status of Minority Languages in Southwest China" is scheduled for 3:45 p.m. Sunday in Conference Room A on the Matthews Campus. Featured speaker for the workshop will be Mr. Fook-Chuen Chan of Hong Kong.

According to T'sou, roughly one fourth of the world's population speaks one of the Sino-Tibetan languages making it the largest single group of speakers of language in the world.

"Despite the number of people it covers, Sino-Tibetan is one of the least studied language families in the western part of the world," T'sou said. "It has only been since the time of the Second World War that people in this area have become interested in the Chinese language, the largest branch of the Sino-Tibetan family.

Today, however, the study of the Chinese language has caught up with and, in many areas of the United States, even surpassed, the study of Russian. In the University of California system there are currently more students studying Chinese than Russian," he said.

According to T'sou, even though a fourth of the world's population speaks one of the Sino-Tibetan languages, there have been relatively few concerted efforts to coordinate and upgrade the research activities in these languages.

"This language family is one of the few to have an extensive written tradition," he said. "Written records go back as far as 4,500 years and some researchers have been trying to reconstruct a language as far back as 5,000 or 6,000 years. The hypothesis, of course, is that it is related to the language of the American Indian," he said.

According to T'sou, recent developments in linguistic theory, coupled with the momentum now in evidence in Sino-Tibetan linguistics, make the UCSD conference an important pivotal point for future Sino-Tibetan linguistics studies. He said the conference should serve a catalytic function by broadening the scope of the field as it now stands through the panels and workshops where specialists from both within and outside the field will participate.

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