

# Foreword

 <https://doi.org/10.1075/cilt.271.foreword>

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**The Chinese Rime Tables: Linguistic philosophy and  
historical-comparative phonology**

**Edited by David Prager Branner**

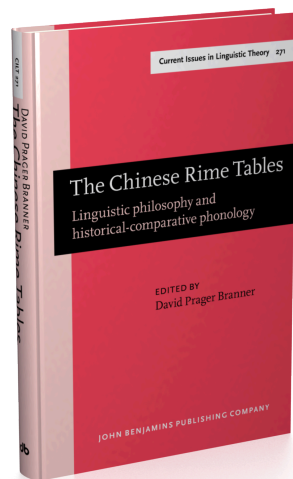
[Current Issues in Linguistic Theory, 271]

2006. viii, 358 pp.

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## FOREWORD

Early in my Chinese education I became fascinated with the Medieval Chinese rime tables. They were plainly intended to make phonology easier to learn and use, but somehow have left us, instead, a snarl of problems persisting from generation to generation. The more I learned about the tables, the more it seemed to me that their central place in the ‘reconstruction’ of Chinese, combined with our apparently flawed understanding about what they meant, were one of the greatest obstacles to a clear view of Medieval and early Chinese.

In my third year of graduate school I wrote a paper on the influence of the tables’ structure on Simon Schaank, a Dutch colonial official in Indonesia a century ago, who left us the basic model still used for their interpretation. That paper appears in print here for the first time. In 1998, I organized a symposium at the University of Minnesota, entitled ‘New Views on the Linguistic Philosophy Underlying the Rime Tables’, at which a number of the other papers printed here were first read. Others were accumulated after that, in order to fill out the collection into what I hope is an entirely fresh look at China’s most important native phonological tool.

I am very grateful to Shujen Yeo, Victor Mair, Tom Weiss, and Sarah Pradt for moral support during dark days when I first began work on this volume, to the (apparently) inexhaustible patience of the contributors, and to the kind forbearance of Konrad Koerner and Anke de Looper at John Benjamins. A conversation with Scott McGinnis in 2001 led me to rethink the goal of the whole book, and I wish to acknowledge his contribution here.

Late proofreading assistance was given by Shirley Prager Branner and Christopher Blair-Gould, both far better proofreaders than I will ever be. For the errors that inevitably remain, I beg the reader’s tolerance.

May, 2005

David Prager Branner

New York City