CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

This final chapter is divided into three sections. The first section presents a summary of findings throughout the various parts of this book, and the second provides an overview of the empirical and theoretical contributions of this book. The final section provides a brief discussion of future research.

6.1 Summary of Findings

There are a number of issues which have been treated in this book and, hopefully, clarified to some degree. The first of these is the phylogenetic structure of the Hlai language family. The evidence presented in chapter one provided evidence for a phylogenetic tree, based on innovations inferred from comparison of daughter branches and languages with Proto-Hlai. This tree retains all of the traditional groups from Ouyang & Zheng (1983) except for the Ha branch, where it was shown that each ‘Ha’ language either represents (Bouhin and Ha Em) or is part of (Lauhut) a separate branch of Hlai, and that these are probably grouped together based on shared cultural context as opposed to actual common descent. It was also argued that vocalic transfer across approximants was more likely to be shared via common descent as opposed to cross-language diffusion, and that this criteria was therefore a valuable one for subgrouping the Central Hlai languages. It was shown that subsequent to the fission of Proto-Hlai into branches, and of these branches into daughter languages, there were several points of intimate contact between various languages in different areas around the island. This contact shows up primarily through loan words, which are discernible through irregular reflexes of segments and tones, but also through various sound changes which have diffused within their respective areas.

An inventory of initials was reconstructed in chapter two for Proto-Hlai and evidence was provided for two types of words, monosyllabic and sesquisyllabic. There is occasionally evidence for the nature of the first vowel in a sesquisyllabic word, preserved in coarticulations on (primarily) approximants which occurred as a result of vocalic transfer. There is a noticeable difference in the kinds of initials which are reconstructed as word-initial as opposed to syllable-initial within a sesquisyllabic word. Most in the former category are reconstructed as aspirated, whereas most in the second category (with the
exception of the glottal stop) are more sonorous, and include primarily voiced members. Perhaps the most important force driving the evolution of Hlai initials was shown to be temporal compression, which led to continuous reduction of multiple segments in the onset until only a single segment remained.

The rime inventory was reconstructed in chapter three, including both the laryngeal as well as segmental components of the Proto-Hlai rimes. The four Kra-Dai tone categories were examined in the context of Proto-Hlai, and the three-way contrast in the first three categories (the fourth category ending in voiceless oral obstruents) was reconstructed as plain versus breathy voice versus constricted glottis. The segmental rime inventory was reconstructed, with three levels of height, three degrees of backness, and a length distinction in closed rimes. Several places of interaction between rime nuclei and final laryngeal elements were highlighted, including the diphthongization of high vowels before laryngeals in Greater Hlai.

Proto-Hlai was compared with Proto-Tai in chapter four. Comparison with Proto-Tai enabled a tentative reconstruction of Proto-Western Kam-Tai, from which a general evolution to Proto-Hlai could be inferred. Several changes were illustrated involving the initials, the most far-reaching of which include the first initial devoicing, intervocalic lenition and main-syllable aspiration. Two processes which began in Pre-Hlai but were only completed after the breakup of Proto-Hlai were monosyllabification and vocalic transfer. The most fundamental change in the rimes was shown to be peripheral mid vowel raising, which led the original mid vowels *e and *o and the secondarily-derived *ɤ to rise and merge with original *i, *u and *ɯ, allowing original *ɛ to rise in turn to *e.

The Jiamao language was the focus of chapter five. Jiamao has been a consistent enigma in the area of Hlai comparative work, and the idea originally advanced in Thurgood (1992) that Jiamao is originally a non-Hlai language was reinforced heavily in this chapter. Data was presented which shows that a subset of the Jiamao initials have two reflexes of Proto-Hlai initials, indicating two layers of borrowing; the nature of these reflexes also indicate that the earliest contact with Jiamao occurred during a later period of Pre-Hlai. Comparison of the rimes supported this analysis and, if anything, showed that it may be necessary to invoke more than two strata of loanwords in order to explain Jiamao variation, although another factor was undoubtedly transmission errors during borrowing. The fact that the Jiamao tone system is only loosely correlated with that of Proto-Hlai, along with the evidence given for a large group of core vocabulary of non-Hlai origin, serves to underscore the ultimately non-genetic relationship between Jiamao and Hlai.