

# Medieval Chinese Buddhist Exegesis and Chinese Grammatical Studies

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## Abstract

The purpose of this article a preliminary study aiming to demonstrate how the medieval indigenous Chinese Buddhist literature, especially the Buddhist exegeses, could contribute to our understanding of the grammatical knowledge of the medieval Chinese Buddhist scholarly monks in particular, and to the overall picture of the premodern Chinese grammatical studies in general. Much ink has been spilled on the important influences of the Chinese translation of Buddhist texts (漢譯佛典) on the development and innovation of Chinese language, so much so that the “Chinese language” of these translated texts has been regarded as a distinct type of Chinese language known as the “Buddhist hybrid Chinese” (佛教混合漢語)<sup>1</sup>. Rather than embarking this trend of study, this paper takes a different source and undertakes a different kind

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<sup>1</sup> This term was probably coined by Zhu Qingzhi 朱慶之 borrowing from an idea found in Edgerton’s “Buddhist hybrid Sanskrit”. Wan Jinchuan 萬金川 argued that this term is inappropriate, because unlike Buddhist hybrid Sanskrit 佛教混合梵語 which was a product of interactive usage between Prakrit and Sanskrit, the so called Buddhist hybrid Chinese did not go through such interaction between Chinese and Sanskrit. (Wang, 60 -68).

of research: instead of the Chinese translation of Buddhist texts, it studies the indigenous writings by the Chinese Buddhist exegetes and studies their grammatical accounts and understanding. Admittedly, the subject matter of their discussion is Sanskrit grammar, but the fact that the target language of their grammatical analysis and application is Chinese gives us an unusual opportunity otherwise unavailable for studying an alternative Chinese grammatical knowledge outside of the traditional sinology. Although a few scholars such as Zhou Yiliang 周一良, Lu Cheng 呂澂, R. van Gulik, C. Harbsmeier, have begun to address this subject, but their findings that ancient Chinese scholarly monks were either uninterested or ignorant in Sanskrit grammar are, in my view, oversimplified and inaccurate. This article will also serve as a corrective to such findings.

**Keywords:** Chinese Buddhist exegesis, Sanskrit studies in China, Chinese grammatical studies, Kuiji

## 漢傳佛教注疏與中古漢語文法學

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### 摘要

本文主要目的在於展示中古漢傳佛教文獻，特別是本土的佛教注疏，對於了解佛教古德的文法知識以及古代中國文法學的整體面貌，可能有的貢獻。佛教對中國文化的影響是巨大而多元的，舉凡文學、哲學、音韻學、宗教、政治經濟，甚至物質文明等等。近年來已經有很多學者讓我們注意到漢譯佛典語言對於古漢語研究的重要性。例如竺家寧、梁曉紅、萬金川、朱慶之、辛島靜志等學者指出古漢語出現新的語義、新的複合語、新的句法的出現與佛典的漢譯有密切的關係。然而這些研究比較缺乏本土的佛教注疏與古漢語文法的關係。本文因此主要考察古代僧人的梵語文法知識，試圖分析作為古代中國人的僧人對「文法」的理解以及局限性。這方面雖然有少數的研究，如周一良、呂澂、van Gulik、Harbsmeier 等，但大多的意見都認為古代文人，包括僧人對文法是沒興趣也沒有概念的。本文的研究發現，雖然古人對梵語「文法」的理解有許多局限，但也有許多精闢的解釋、評論及創新的運用。本研究的主要目的亦是在「佛教與中國文化」之課題下，介紹這個較少被注意到的面向。

**關鍵詞：**中國佛教注疏、中國梵語學、中國文法學、窺基

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