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# The language of Chinese Buddhism

## From the perspective of Chinese historical linguistics

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This is a more detailed introduction of the language of Chinese Buddhism based on our latest research of Buddhist Chinese, which is a modern Chinese historical linguistic category applied to a form of written Chinese originated for and used in Buddhist texts, including the translations into Chinese of Indian Buddhist scriptures and all Chinese works of Buddhism composed by Chinese monks and lay Buddhists in the past. We attempt to answer in this paper the following questions: What is Buddhist Chinese? What is the main difference between Buddhist Chinese and non-Buddhist Chinese? What role did this language play in the history of Chinese language development? And what is the value of this language for the Chinese Historical Linguistics?

**Keywords:** Buddhist Chinese, Chinese translation of Indian Buddhist scriptures, Sanskrit-Chinese comparative collation, Chinese historical linguistics, Classical written Chinese, vernacular written Chinese

### 1. Introduction

The language of Buddhism in China is denoted as *Fojiao Hanyu* 佛教漢語 “Buddhist Chinese”, a modern Chinese historical linguistic category applied to a form of written Chinese originated for and used in Buddhist texts, including the translations into Chinese of Indian Buddhist scriptures and all Chinese works of Buddhism composed by Chinese monks and lay Buddhists. It differs from indigenous non-Buddhist Chinese – whether any kind of spoken Chinese used in various areas or the form of written Chinese known as *wenyan* 文言, i.e., Classical written Chinese – to a greater or lesser degree, in vocabulary, grammar, genre

(Ch. *wenti* 文體), and register (Ch. *yuti* 語體) (Zürcher 1977, 1991; Zhu 1992, 2001, 2010).

Spoken Chinese is, of course, not a single monolithic language but one that takes differing forms in various parts of China; over time these topolects of Chinese have changed not only in pronunciation but also in vocabulary and grammar, as all languages do. Contrasting with this is the overall stability of written Chinese, moving from the Han 漢 (206 BCE–220 CE) through the Qing 清 (1616–1911) Dynasties with relatively small changes, paralleled by great changes in the spoken varieties during that time. Buddhist Chinese, however, is different from both spoken Chinese and written Chinese. It is a variant of written Chinese but changed following spoken Chinese over time.

It should also be noted that Buddhist Chinese is the “Church language” of East Asian Buddhism, and that it was and still is used in Korea and Japan as well. Thus Chinese Buddhist works were composed not only in China but also in other lands, although the spoken languages in these regions are unrelated to Chinese (Mair 1994).

This article attempts to answer the following questions: What is Buddhist Chinese? What is the main difference between Buddhist Chinese and non-Buddhist Chinese? What role did this language play in the history of Chinese language development? And what is the value of this language for the Chinese historical linguistics?

Buddhist Chinese can be divided into two categories: the language of Chinese translations of Indian Buddhist scriptures and the language of indigenous Chinese compositions. The former is the Chinese expression of Indian Buddhism, and it provides the foundation for the latter; the latter is the Chinese expression of Chinese Buddhism, and thus also the result of the complete Sinification of the former. We will analyze these two categories first from the perspective of genre and register (for summary, please see Table 1).

## 2. The language of Chinese translations of Indian Buddhist scriptures

The foundational texts for Buddhist Chinese are those produced by Chinese translations of the Indian Buddhist scriptures (afterwards CTIBS). And the language of the Chinese translations of the Indian Buddhist scriptures (afterwards LCTIBS) is the touchstone of Buddhist Chinese.

The earliest authenticated records of Buddhism in Chinese were produced in the mid-second century CE (Zürcher 1990; Nattier 2008:38). The oral recitation and explanation of Indian Buddhist sutras by foreign monks who came from Central or Western Asia provided the primitive template for Indian Buddhist

Table 1. Summary of the categories of Buddhist Chinese

Category	Representative
Colloquial Chinese register	Translations by An Shigao 安世高 and Lokakṣema (Ch. Zhi Loujiachen 支婁迦讖, or Zhi Chen 支謙 for short) in the Eastern Han 東漢 (25–220, a period of <i>Guyi</i> 古譯 “Ancient translation”)
Written Chinese register	Translation works by Kang Mengxiang 康孟詳 in the Eastern Han and Kang Senghui 康僧會 in the Three Kingdoms 三國 (220–280, a period of “Ancient translation”)
Chinese translations of Buddhist scriptures	Translation works by Zhi Qian 支謙 in the Three Kingdoms and Dharmarakṣa (Ch. Zhu Fahu 竺法護) in the Western Jin 西晉 (226–316, a period of “Ancient translation”)
Translation genre	Works produced during the period of <i>Jiuyi</i> 舊譯 “Old translation” by Kumārajīva (Ch. Jiunoluoshi 鳩摩羅什) in the Late Qin Kingdom 後秦 (384–417) and others, as well as some produced in the period of <i>Xinyi</i> 新譯 “New translation”, such as those by Yijing 義淨 in the Tang 唐 Dynasty (618–907)
Formative period	Most of the works produced during the period of the “New translation”, represented by the translations of Xuanzang 玄奘 in the Tang Dynasty and Dānapāla (Ch. Shihu 施護) in the Northern Song 北宋 (960–1127)
Hybrid register	Almost all the compositions written in classical Chinese, including apocrypha, commentaries on sutras, argumentations to anti-Buddhism scholars, historical and geographical works, biographies, catalogues, phonological and semasiological studies of Buddhist terms, narrative texts, etc.
Mature period	<i>Jiangjing wen</i> 講經文 “sutra lectures” associated with <i>Dunhuang bianwen</i> 敦煌變文 “Dunhuang transformation texts”
Stylized or technical written register	Poems by Wang Fanzhi 王梵志 and Hanshan 寒山, <i>quzi ci</i> 曲子辭 “lyrics of <i>quzi</i> ”, “cantos”
Classical written Chinese register	<i>Yulu</i> 語錄 “recorded sayings” of Chan School 禪宗 (Ch. <i>Chan zong</i> ) masters
Transformation texts and related genres	
Vernacular written Chinese register	
Recorded sayings genre	

sutra translation. The written records of these recitations and explanations, modified to a greater or lesser extent by their Chinese assistants or followers, provided the earliest CTIBS, setting the form of language in which Indian Buddhism would be promulgated and discussed in China from that time on.

The most significant feature of the LCTIBS is its two types of hybrid, the hybrid of the target language with elements of the source language, and the hybrid of the spoken language with elements from written language. For this reason, the LCTIBS is sometimes called Buddhist Hybrid Chinese or Buddhist Hybrid Sinitic in English (Harbsmeier 1989; Mair 1994) and *Fojiao Hunhe Hanyu* 佛教混合漢語 in Chinese (Zhu 1992: 15) .

## 2.1 Hybrid of the target language with source language elements

The hybridization of the target language with source language elements means that, while Buddhist Chinese is undoubtedly a variety of Chinese language, it contains many non-Chinese elements, which came from Middle Indic and some Central Asian languages in the early period and later from Sanskrit (Zürcher 1991; Karashima 1994, 2006; Boucher 1998, 2000).

The most significant indicator regarding this matter is the great quantity of words and expressions of non-Chinese origin in its vocabulary, including (phonetically transcribed) loan words, both Buddhist technical terms, such as *fo* 佛 (EMC \**but* < Toch. *but*) or *fo**tuo* 佛陀 (EMC \**butda* < Skt. *buddha*) “the Enlightened One”; *niepan* 涅槃 (EMC \**netban* < Skt. *nirvāna*) “absolute extinction” or “annihilation”, and common words, such as *diedie* 爹爹 (originally *duoduo* 多多, EMC \**tata* < Skt. *tāta*) “father”, *shan* 驢 (originally *shan* 扇, EMC \**cian*<sup>h</sup>, a monosyllabic form of *shancha* 扇侘/攄, MC \**cian*<sup>h</sup>*tha/thaɪ* < Skt. *ṣaṅḍha*) “castrate or eunuch”, etc. (Pulleyblank 1991; Zhu 1993, 1994).

Apart from these, there is also a large amount of loan translation or calque (Ch. *fangyi* 仿譯, lit. “imitative translation”) words and free translation (Ch. *yiyi* 意譯, lit. “translation according to meaning”) words in its vocabulary, both Buddhist technical terms, such as *juezhe* 覺者 (lit. “person who is aware” < Skt. *buddha*) “the Awakened One”; *miedu* 滅度 (lit. “disappear and cross” < Skt. *nirvāna*) “the Extinction”; *fannao* 煩惱 (lit. “irritated and angry” < Skt. *kleśa*) “something causing pain, anguish, suffering, distress, trouble”; *fangbian* 方便 (lit. “method and convenience” < Skt. *upāya*) “something by which one reaches one’s aim”, and common words, such as *jiangwu* 將無 (lit. “will not” < BHS. *mā* or *mā evaṃ*). In classical Sanskrit, *mā* is a negative adverb meaning “no” or “not.” “perhaps”, *gu'er* 故二 or *ben'er* 本二 (lit. “old or former two” < Skt. *purāṇa-dvitiya/ya*, lit. “old or former-two”) “ex-husband” or “ex-wife”, *yishi* 一時 (lit. “one

time” < Skt. *ekadā* “once”, *fuci* 復次 (lit. “repeat time” < Skt. *api*) “then, afterwards”, etc. All of these words are neologisms (Zhu 2007).

A well-known example of the syntactical influence of such Indic originals is the first sentence of most of the Chinese sutras, *rushi wo wen* 如是我聞 (lit. “like this I heard”), translated word by word from its Indic parallel of *evam mayā śrutam* (lit. “thus by me it was heard”), while the expression does not obey the rule of Chinese grammar (compare another translation, *wen rushi* 聞如是 “heard like this”, which is more acceptable grammatically).

Another example is the use of vocatives in the middle of a sentence (Zürcher 1977; Zhu 2015b), which are very common in Chinese translation though not allowed by the grammar of Chinese, a language that uses word order as its main grammatical indicator rather than using word inflection as do most Indo-European languages.

Here, for instance, is a sentence selected at random from the *Weimojie jing* 維摩詰經 translated by Zhi Qian, one of the three Chinese translations of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*. After obeying Buddha’s order to visit ailing layman Vimalakīrti, Sariputra, one of Buddha’s disciples, recalled what happened when he met Vimalakīrti before. He was criticized by Vimalakīrti and had no word to reply.

時， 我 世尊 聞 是 法， 默 而 止， 不 能 加 報。  
 moment I Lord hear this Law silent and stop not can reply  
 Lord, at that moment, I heard this law, [I was] silent and stopped [to say any  
 more.]

(T14, no. 474, p. 521, c10–11)

If we follow Chinese grammar, the sentence has two subjects – “I” and “Lord” – as possible actors who hear the law. Obviously this is not acceptable.

The reason for such an incorrect sentence is that the translator followed the Sanskrit word order rather than the Chinese word order. The Sanskrit parallel of “時， 我世尊聞是法， 默而止” is as follows.

Skt. sas aham bhagavan etām śrutvā tūṣṇīm eva abhūvam  
 grm. pron. 1SG voc. pron. v. (ger.) adv. adv. v.  
 lit. this I Lord this hear silently thus become  
 Eng. Lord, after hearing this, so I am silent.

(Vkn MS 12a2–12a3)

The word *bhagavan*, the vocative form of *bhagavat*, is inset freely in the sentence.

Sentences exhibiting awkward word order, as in the previous two examples, are easily found in the CTIBS. The main reason is that at times the translators applied the strategy of loan translation, that is to say, using the words of the target

language to translate the source language while following the word order of the source language, instead of adapting to the word order of the target language.

## 2.2 Hybrid of the spoken language with written language elements

The LCTIBS is based generally on spoken Chinese but blends in written Chinese elements, thus mixing together two completely different languages and creating a very unconventional style in Chinese written language.

At the time Indian Buddhist literature started to be translated, there were two types of Chinese, i.e., spoken and written. Spoken Chinese includes many topolects that are used in various areas of China, including some special words and grammatical elements that could not be written by Chinese characters. Written Chinese is the language of classical literature, for example, of *Lunyu* 論語 [The Analects of Confucius], *Dao de jing* 道德經 [The Classic Book of Integrity and the Way], and *Shiji* 史記 [The Records of the Grand Historian], and so on from the end of the Spring and Autumn period 春秋 (770–476 BCE) through the end of the Han Dynasty. This written language was used for almost all formal writings from the Han to the early 20th century and was called *wenyan* 文言 (lit. “text language” or “literary language”) in Chinese, or Classical written Chinese, after a new written Chinese formally emerged in the Tang Dynasty, which was called *baihua* 白話 (lit. “white color [i.e., plain] language”) in Chinese, namely vernacular written Chinese or the written vernacular Chinese (Lü 1944; Norman 1988: 111).

In the earliest days only a few written elements were mixed in, with gradually more added as time went on. On the one hand, compared to written Chinese, the LCTIBS has a very strong flavor of spoken Chinese. On the other hand, it has a number of characteristics of written Chinese, as compared to relatively “pure” oral Chinese (Zürcher 1977, 1991).

A recent study of the usage of the Chinese first person pronoun, based on statistical data categorizing its usage in various kinds of texts, demonstrates this point clearly (Zhu 2014).

In the language of the Classics of the pre-Qin period 先秦 (221 BCE and before), which are the foundation and standard of written Chinese, there were at least three first person pronouns – *wo* 我, *wu* 吾, and *yu* 余 – used at the same period in the same texts. The reason for this violation of the (language) economy principle has never been discovered. But only *wo* remained in spoken language during the Han Dynasty and afterward. Translations by An Shigao demonstrate the situation very clearly, because he used only *wo* in them; at the time written Chinese had not changed at all. In the translations by Lokakşema, another word, *wu*, which is treated as a typical element of written Chinese, appeared, although

in only a very few places. But it soon appeared increasingly in the works of such subsequent translators as Zhi Qian, Dharmarakṣa, Kumārajīva, and others after them (Zhu 2012).

### 2.3 Main reasons for the two hybrids

Several possible reasons for these two hybrids are generally acknowledged.

First, there is a huge difference between Chinese and Indian cultures, and a great many new words and expressions representing Buddhism and its culture in the original literature had no equivalents in Chinese. Translators had no choice but to borrow or create them.

Second, there is also a great difference between the source language and target language from the perspective of language typology. The former, Middle Indic, or Sanskrit, is a typical member of the inflectional language group, while the latter, Chinese, is typical of the non-inflectional language. For instance, the grammatical meaning of sentence constituents in Chinese is expressed through word order, not by using grammatical markers, as does Sanskrit. Because it appears that the translation of the Buddhist scriptures is the first large-scale translation project between languages of these two types in human history, the translators had no precedents at all. Without any way to handle satisfactorily such difficult code-switching, many of the translators employed several kinds of strategies, such as transliteration and loan translation.

Third, according to Buddhist legend, a “language policy” existed in which Śākyamuni asked his disciples not to use Sanskrit but their own vernaculars (Prakrit) to preach (Ji 1985:7). And it was necessary, in any case, to use colloquial language to do missionary work in China because most of the potential audience was composed of uneducated people of the lower classes.

The last, and perhaps most unusual reason involves the specific cultural and language background of the translators. There are 134 *zhuyi* 主譯 “chief translator”, the person who recites the original and/or interprets it into Chinese, who left their traces in the history of Chinese Buddhism from the Eastern Han to the Northern Song Dynasties. Of these, 128 were foreigners; among them, 51 came from India, 14 from Kashmir, 6 from Khotan, 4 from Kucha, 7 from Kushan, 5 from Parthia, 2 from Punam, 2 from Simhala, 5 from Sogdiana, and 32 from other areas outside of China. They account for 95.5% of the whole, while the rest, 4.5%, were native translators – just 6 persons – and only Xuanzang, in the Tang Dynasty, later played a leading role (Gu 1955).

As we know, translations are dominantly influenced by either the source language or the target language; what varies is which provides the influence and to what degree the influence occurs. Generally speaking, if the target language is the

translator's native language, the interference is relatively lower; and conversely the influence will be higher if the translator's first language is not the target language. Most of the translators of the CTIBS belong to the latter group. They came from *Xiyu* 西域 "the Western Regions", and their native languages were Indo-European, very different from Chinese. These monks devoted themselves to preaching Buddhism in China and tried to learn Chinese as quickly as possible, but it is unlikely that the Chinese they spoke was good enough to enable them to translate the Buddhist doctrine from their native language into competent Chinese. Quite the reverse, the Chinese they spoke was quite likely a pidgin and inadequate to the task. Driven by their enthusiasm for Buddhism, the monks nevertheless translated the Buddhist scriptures from their own languages, or languages with a close relationship to their own, into Chinese, as best they could. What followed seems inevitable: the translators, encountering an expression that had no parallel in Chinese, created an equivalent as they saw it; when a suitable expression in Chinese did already exist, they often did not know it, and so also made up a new expression. For the same reason, they often added lexical and grammatical elements that had no parallel in Chinese, or they used the corresponding elements in Chinese, but, as the translators had not absorbed them into their own speech system, chose ones that were inapt. This led to the hybrid of non-Chinese elements and indigenous Chinese.

Hybridization of spoken Chinese with written Chinese also occurred. The foreign monks almost certainly could only speak but not write Chinese, so most of them could only translate orally. When it was then written down by Chinese collaborators, the texts would necessarily be restricted by the traditions of written Chinese. When they recorded the oral translation of the foreign monks, the intellectuals who worked as scribes would do some "polishing" – correcting mistakes, changing the vernacular words or expressions to more elegant ones – to meet the standard of written Chinese.

These two kinds of hybrid in Buddhist Chinese are the most distinctive features of Buddhist translations produced during the period from the Eastern Han to the Northern Song Dynasties. As a result, Buddhist Chinese was a new kind of written language in ancient China that, especially with regard to register, presented a fresh and lively appearance. This will be discussed next.

## 2.4 Colloquial Chinese register

The so-called colloquial or spoken register and the written register are described as such only in relation to each other, because there actually is no such thing as either a pure colloquial or a pure written language, especially when the written language is derived from the spoken one.

The earliest translator of Buddhist scriptures for whom we possess reliable evidence is An Shigao, a Parthian (Ch. *Anxi* 安息) monk (see Forte 1995, however, for a different opinion) active in Luoyang 洛陽 from around 148. According to the *Chu sanzang ji ji* 出三藏記集 [Collection of records on the production of *Tripitaka*], a catalogue by Sengyou 僧祐 of the Liang 梁 Dynasty (502–557), An Shigao “*chu* 出” (lit. “produced”) 34 works, around 200,000 characters (Storch 2014: 21–46). Another famous monk of the Eastern Han, following in An’s steps, was Lokakṣema from Kushan (Ch. *Da yuezhi* 大月支). According to Sengyou’s catalogue, during the period of 178–189 Lokakṣema produced more than 20 works in a method similar to that of An Shigao (Nattier 2008: 75–76). The longest of Lokakṣema’s translations is the *Daoxing bore jing* 道行般若經 (\**Aṣṭasāhasrikā prajñāpāramitā*), around 80,000 characters, which is also the longest translation of Buddhist scriptures in the Han and Three Kingdoms periods. Others of significance are An Xuan 安玄 and Zhi Yao 支曜.

The foreign monks worked very hard to recite and explain the teachings of Buddhism in Chinese, and this effort marks the formal beginning of Buddhist language in China.

It is generally agreed that, while An Shigao and Lokakṣema were able to speak Chinese, it was obviously not at a very fluent and correct level; most probably they spoke a kind of pidgin Chinese with non-Chinese elements based on the dialect or dialects of a particular place or places in China, rather than on written Chinese, and they used it or them to “translate”.

Since the amount of oral preaching that could be offered by the monks was restricted by limitations of time and space, it was necessary for the teachings to be written down in order to satisfy the needs of the increasing number of disciples. Although the majority of the audience members were illiterate, unable to either read or write Chinese characters, there were nevertheless a few persons among the hearers who had learned the Chinese characters to varying degrees. These “literate” disciples attempted to write down their teachers’ oral sermons. This helped the teachings of Buddha to break through the restrictions of time and space, spreading to other areas and finding new disciples. This kind of written record existed in the time of An Shigao. During the period when Lokakṣema was active, a person called *bishou* 筆受 “scribe”, recorded what he heard from a preacher; this developed into a fixed role within the translation team, joining the oral translator and several scribes.

With the inevitable influence of the standardization of written language and the Chinese character system, the colloquial speech of the oral translators was more or less “writtenized” by the scribes during the process of recording, and the language of these written texts also to some degree reduced the spoken-language features of their colloquial originals (Nattier 2008: 103, 125). Although

the language of these texts was called “written language” by the Chinese literati, it was in fact the Chinese Buddhist language in embryo. Orality was the fundamental feature of the translation genre from the very beginning, and so it remained.

## 2.5 Written Chinese register

Other translators active during the Han and the Three Kingdoms periods tried to adopt a register closer to written Chinese.

Kang Mengxiang, the son of Sogdian (Ch. *Kangju* 康居) immigrants, translated an important biography of the Buddha, the *Zhong benqi jing* 中本起經 [Middle (length) scripture on former events]. If we compare the language of this sutra with that used by An Shigao and Lokakṣema, we can see an obvious difference of register between them. The *Liudu ji jing* 六度集經 [Compendium on the six perfections], issued under the name of Kang Senghui in the Three Kingdoms period, has a similar language register. These translations in written Chinese can be regarded as an effort to meet the needs of the Chinese cultural tradition.

However, the written Chinese register required a translator with a better education in classical Chinese culture. Such knowledge was a privilege of nobles and elites and was largely unknown to ordinary people, so, of course, this register was not adopted by the other translators. As a result, a register that used spoken Chinese as its base and mixed in several classical written elements – a kind of hybrid writing register, emerged.

## 2.6 Hybrid register

The language of this register is representative of one of the two hybrids discussed above, i.e., a hybrid of spoken Chinese with written Chinese elements. It seems to have been based on spoken Chinese with the addition of more or less written language elements, resulting in a discourse enriched by the flavor of the Classics. We do not know, however, if this is what the translators intended.

The probable pioneer of this register is Zhi Qian, the offspring of Kushan immigrants, who was active during the Three Kingdoms period. Zhi Qian’s language can be understood as a compromise between the register of An Shigao on the one hand, and that of Kang Mengxiang and Kang Senghui on the other.<sup>1</sup> One who followed Zhi Qian’s path was Dharmarakṣa, who was also from a Kushan

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1. Jan Nattier (2008:121) argues that, “There is a considerable degree of overlap between the vocabulary and style employed in much of Zhi Qian’s corpus and in that of Kang Senghui, a confluence so great that it seems appropriate to speak of a ‘Wu 吳 scriptural idiom.’” In

family that had lived in Dunhuang 敦煌 for generations. But the hybrid writing register was brought to maturity by Kumārajīva, a great translator active during the first half of the fifth century.

Kumārajīva was well-positioned to make such a transition. First, by his time, the translation of Buddhist scriptures into Chinese had a history of more than 200 years, and Buddhism had attracted the attention of not only the lower classes but also the literati and the ruling class, gradually entering the mainstream culture. But neither the colloquial Chinese register, the written Chinese register, nor the literal translation strategy could satisfy the need for appropriate translation. Second, Kumārajīva was not only a master of Buddhism but also an experienced translator who was proficient in Chinese. Third, he benefited from a unique and much better translation technique, the so-called *yi jiang tong shi* 譯講同施 “translation, explanation, and discussion carried out simultaneously”, which we would like to discuss here in more detail.

In the era of An Shigao and Lokakṣema, foreign monks recited the sutras in Chinese and tried to explain the meaning of terms and sentences the audiences were not able to understand, discussing with their followers anything that needed clarification, deciding which was the better translation, and so on. Therefore, some audiences actually took part in the translation process, and the translation thus was no longer the personal work of the missionaries themselves. As time went on, this mechanism progressively improved and became a very efficient translation tool.

Mention should also be made of the important translation activities carried out in Chang’an 長安, the capital of the Late Qin Kingdom, at the end of the fourth century, mainly under the direction of Dao’an 道安. These activities took place before the arrival of Kumārajīva and were instrumental in establishing the latter’s translation team.

When Kumārajīva was forced to move to Chang’an in 401, the Emperor Yao Xing 姚興 awarded him the title *guoshi* 國師 “teacher of the nation”, and asked him to organize an *yichang* 譯場 “assembly for translation” of unprecedented size. Yao provided the Xiaoyao Garden 逍遙園, one of the imperial villas in the city outskirts, to house Kumārajīva and his assembly, including more than 800 students, all intellectuals who probably knew both traditional Chinese culture and Indian Buddhism well, to serve as his translating assistants, and tens of thousands of monks throughout the country as his audience. The essential scene of translation was now established: when translating Buddhist scriptures, Kumārajīva read the Sanskrit original text sentence by sentence and explained its meaning, inter-

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our observation, however, the degree of classicalization, or wenyanlisation 文言化 of Kang Senghui’s language is much higher than that of Zhi Qian.

preting it into Chinese first. Then the assistants, and even some of the audience of monks, discussed and gave their comments and suggestions for improvement. After the approved translation was written down by *bishou*, some other members of the assembly called *yizheng* 義證 (lit. “meaning verify”) reviewed it for internal consistency and made sure there were no ambiguities in the transmission of the texts, etc. (Tso 1963).

Kumārajīva stayed with the principle of “taking whatever translation strategy that follows the style of Chinese first, as long as the meaning of translation does not deviate from the original texts” (Ch. *qu cong fangyan, er qu bu guai ben* 曲從方言，而趣不乖本 in *Fahua zongyao xu* 法華宗要序 [Preface to *The fundamental tenets of the Lotus School*] by Huiguan 慧觀, in *Chu sanzang ji ji* 出三藏記集, vol. 8, T.55, no. 2145, p.57, b8–9). He intentionally gave up *zhiyi* 直譯 (lit. “direct translation”), the traditional method of translation rendering the text from one language into another “word-for-word” (Latin *verbum pro verbo*), with or without conveying the sense of the original, which sometimes required the creation of awkward neologisms; instead he applied free, or liberal, translation. And, as noted above, he pointed out that translation should follow the characteristics of Chinese, with Chinese elements integrated as long as they did not violate the meaning of the original texts. In addition, he emphasized elegance and fluency of language. Based on these principles, the high-quality work produced by Kumārajīva’s translation team came to the fore among the translations since the Eastern Han, and it created a hybrid writing register for the language of Buddhist translation. The practice and theory put forward by Kumārajīva affected the translations from the Southern and Northern Dynasties 南北朝 (420–589) to the Tang and Song 宋 (960–1279) Dynasties. This hybrid register became a new form of written language and laid the foundation for the emergence of *baihua* 白話, the only formal vernacular written Chinese, to emerge as a parallel to *wenyan* 文言 in Chinese language history (Zhu 2015a).

## 2.7 Stylized/technical writing register

Modern Chinese scholars concluded the principals of ancient Chinese translation as *xin* 信 “faithfulness”, *da* 達 “comprehensibility” and *ya* 雅 “elegance” (Ma 2004: 261). These three words had been used in the medieval period by an anonymous scholar in *Faju jing xu* 法句經序 [Preface to *The Dharmapada Sutra*] (collected in Sengyou’s *Chu sanzang ji ji*, vol. 7), who believed that Chinese Buddhist translation could only satisfy the faithfulness, but it was impossible to satisfy comprehensibility and elegance. In the primitive period of Buddhist translation, “faithfulness” meant the loan translation or literal translation of original texts, with a lot of non-Chinese elements mixed in, and the

readers/audiences could not de facto get the exact meaning of the translations. When it comes to Kumārajīva's time, he intended to get rid of the non-Chinese elements in translation, and took "comprehensibility" as the foremost principal. So the translation works of Kumārajīva has a rich flavor of indigenous Chinese, but not always in accordance with the original texts. On this occasion, Xuanzang, a talented translator of Tang Dynasty, took "faithfulness" to the original texts to the first place again, because following the Buddha's teachings with no deviation should be the most important principal in preaching. However, he created a new method to do so, namely creating a set of standard Chinese translations for words, expressions and even sentences from original texts, which met the need of "comprehensibility" and "elegance" at the same time. And Xuanzang labeled the works by themselves as *Xinyi* 新譯 "New translation", while belittling the works by Kumārajīva and his followers as *Jiuyi* 舊譯 "Old translation" and the works by An Shigao, Zhi Qian, and Dharmarakṣa as *Guyi* 古譯 "Ancient translation".

Benefitting from his unique bilingual and bicultural background of both China and India, and a deep understanding of Buddhism in both the Indian and Chinese forms, and having the assistance of the *yijing yuan* 譯經院 (Department of the Translation of Buddhist Sutra, which was organized and supported financially by the central government), Xuanzang, one of the most illustrious monks in the history of Chinese Buddhism, initiated a new register of Buddhist Chinese. It was distinguished by the characteristics of faithfulness and elegance, the latter means it was in accord with the standard of Chinese written language, i.e., Classical Chinese. He is admired as the greatest figure in Chinese translation of Indian Buddhist literature in history, not only because of the great quantity of his translation but also its high quality.

Nevertheless, from a linguistic point of view, so called "faithfulness" actually is technicality. The pursuit of a strict parallel in both content and form to the Sanskrit originals required by the New translation school made the language of translation a total stylization, because almost all the terms, grammatical elements, and structures of the original texts had their "standard" or immutable Chinese parallels in the translations. The artificial flavor of this language lost the natural beauty and vitality of the language of the Old translations. This "faithfulness", together with "native-likeness", made the New translations too high in style and thus out of reach for ordinary people. Therefore, though the translators in this period produced a large number of translated Buddhist scriptures, including such core texts of the Vijñānavāda (Ch. *Faxiang zong* 法相宗, *Ci'en zong* 慈恩宗, or *Weishi zong* 唯識宗) as *Vijñāptimātrasiddhi* (Ch. *Cheng weishi lun* 成唯識論) and *Yogācārabhūmi* (Ch. *Yujiashi di lun* 瑜伽師地論), the school's influence on the development of Chinese Buddhism and culture was by comparison not that remarkable. This is due to the fact that the contents and the doctrines were too

abstract and the language was too stylized. During this period, a new Buddhist school of China, Chan 禪, attracted the majority of Buddhist disciples. The proponents of Chan Buddhism chose the extremely different language policy of popularization and colloquialization to express its doctrines. One might say that this extreme version was a reaction to the stylization and elite register of these new translations, since they were too difficult to understand.

### 3. Language of Chinese indigenous Buddhist compositions

The establishment of Chinese Buddhism relied not only on the Buddhist scriptures that had been translated into Chinese, but also on the compositions of Chinese disciples. The language of such compositions can be divided into two types according to language register: classical written register and vernacular written register.

The former register already existed and was used to express traditional Chinese culture, it was now used by the literati who converted to Buddhism to express both Indian Buddhist theory and their own experience during the practice of Buddhism. This signified that Chinese Buddhism finally had its own literary register. The latter was a new creation in Chinese language history by Chinese monks and their followers, who belonged to non-elite society. Their creation, the vernacular written register, showed strong vitality and brought new blood into Chinese culture, and became one of the most valuable characteristics of Chinese Buddhist compositions. In sum, the emergence of the language of Chinese indigenous Buddhist compositions marked the acquisition by Chinese Buddhism of its own language.

#### 3.1 Classical written Chinese register

No later than the last period of the Eastern Han, Chinese monks produced annotations and comments for the translated Buddhist scriptures, such as the *Preface to the Shami shi hui zhangju* 沙彌十慧章句序 (in *Chu sanzang ji ji* 出三藏記集 T. 2145 p. 69c 19–70a) by Yan Fotiao 嚴佛調, presumably composed during the second half of the second century, and the *Annotated Edition of Yinchiru jing* 陰持入經注 (T. 1694) by Chen Hui 陳慧 in the Three Kingdoms period, following the tradition of scholars who offered commentaries on the Confucian classics. This effort continued until the Qing Dynasty, and gradually formed the distinct genre of Chinese Buddhist studies. A great many commentaries and annotated works are collected in the three parts of *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō* (大正新脩大藏經): the *jingshu* 經疏 “Commentaries for sutras”, located in volumes 33–39; the

*lüshu* 律疏 “Commentaries for rules”, in volume 40; and *lunshu* 論疏 “Commentaries for treaties” in volumes 40–44. Many works on phonology, semantics, and philology are to be found in a section named *shihui* 事彙 “Collection of other matters” in volumes 53 and 54, which are made up of two great dictionaries of Chinese words and terms collected from Buddhist translations named *Yiqie jing yinyi* 一切經音義 [Pronunciation and meaning of all sutras] by Xuanying 玄應 and Huilin 慧琳 of the Tang Dynasty, and *Xu yiqie jing yinyi* 續一切經音義 [Continuation of pronunciation and meaning of all sutras] by Xilin 希麟 of the Liao 遼 Dynasty (907–1125). There is also a dictionary of Chinese characters collected from Buddhist manuscripts named *Longkan shoujian* 龍龕手鑿 [Hand mirror of the dragon shrine] by Xingjun 行均 of the Liao.

Buddhist catalogues first appeared no later than the Western Jin, and these catalogues not only listed the titles of translated Buddhist scriptures, but also contained the biographies of the translators and, in addition, new stories for the translation process, represented by *Chu sanzang ji ji* 出三藏記集, and *Lidai sanbao ji* 歷代三寶記 [Record of three treasures for all dynasties] by Fei Zhangfang 費長房 of the Sui 隋 Dynasty (581–618). Works of Buddhist history and geography started to appear in the Eastern Jin 東晉 (317–420), including travel notes such as *Foguo ji* 佛國記 [Record of the Buddhist kingdoms] by Faxian 法顯, followed by *Datang xiyu ji* 大唐西域記 [The Great Tang Dynasty Record of the Western Regions] by Xuanzang, and *Nanhai jigui neifa zhuan* 南海寄歸內法傳 [A Record of the Buddhist Religion as Practiced in India and the Malay Archipelago] by Yijing of the Tang Dynasty. There are also such compositions on geography as *Luoyang qielan ji* 洛陽伽藍記 [Record of temples in Luoyang] by Yang Xuanzhi 楊銜之 of the Northern Wei 北魏 (386–534).

*Mingseng zhuan* 名僧傳 [Biographies of famous monks] by Baochang 寶唱 (who lived in the period between Qi 齊, 479–502, and Liang 梁 Dynasties), which is lost, apart from excerpts preserved in a 13th-century Japanese anthology, Shūshō’s 宗性 *Meisōden shō* 名僧傳抄 (included in the *Zoku zōkyō* 續藏經), marked the opening of biographical writing on Buddhist figures. It was followed by *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 [Biography of eminent monks] by Huijiao 慧皎 of the Liang, and *Tang gaoseng zhuan* 唐高僧傳 [Biography of eminent monks of Tang], *Datang xiyu qiu fa gaoseng zhuan* 大唐西域求法高僧傳 [Biography of Tang eminent monks who went to the Western Regions to look for the Dharma], and *Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳 [Biography of eminent monks of the Song Dynasty].

Since the Eastern Jin, controversy between Buddhist scholars and non- or anti-Buddhist scholars has often occurred. In the Liang Dynasty, Sengyou selected over 30 of the compositions written by Buddhist scholars from the Eastern Han to the Liang Dynasties to include in a monograph named *Hong ming ji* 弘明集

[Collection of promotion for the Brightness], followed by *Guang hong ming ji* 廣弘明集, intended as a sequel to the *Hong ming ji* composed by Daoxuan 道宣 in the Tang Dynasty. The authors of the books mentioned above were mostly well-educated monks or disciples, so the language of these compositions can be treated as classical written Chinese with obvious Buddhist features. In these compositions, we not only see a great number of Buddhist technical terms and words with a Buddhist flavor, but also find relatively more colloquial words than in other Chinese compositions (Dong 1998).

### 3.2 Vernacular written Chinese register

Works in vernacular written Chinese occupied a very important position in indigenous Chinese Buddhist compositions. Beginning in the Six Dynasties 六朝 (222–589), the Sinicization of Indian Buddhism emerged and continued to deepen, and Chinese Buddhism developed a strong tendency toward secularization. As a result, in the period of the Late Tang 晚唐 (836–907) and the Five Dynasties 五代 (907–960), it became a popular folk belief. Corresponding to this is that the vehicle by which Buddhism was conveyed had also undergone significant changes. On the one hand, outside of the Sangha, translated sutras were replaced by *jiang jingwen* 講經文 “sutra lectures”, which are customarily grouped with *bianwen* 變文 “transformation texts”, and folk songs, some of which were likely composed by monks. In addition, serious preaching was replaced by more attractive theatrical performances, such as *bian* 變 “transformation”, *shuohua* 說話 “story-telling”, and other folk arts. On the other hand, within the Sangha, the style of speech and the deportment of the monks or masters had changed as well.

Buddhist Chinese in the vernacular written Chinese register is represented by the language of Buddhist popular literatures, such as that of what usually called *Dunhuang wenxue* 敦煌文學 “literature discovered in Dunhuang” today. And the language of Buddhist recorded sayings, such as the Chan *yulu* 語錄 “recorded sayings” literature, including individual *yulu* 語錄 “discourse records” texts and *chuandeng lu* 傳燈錄 “transmission of the lamp” texts during the period extending from the Late Tang and the Five Dynasties to the Song and Yuan 元 (1206–1368) periods (Zhou 2009).

#### 3.2.1 Language of Dunhuang popular literature

Vernacularized native Buddhist compositions rose under the influence of oralized Buddhist translations no later than the Southern and Northern Dynasties. What appeared first could have been expected to be Buddhist literatures in *baihua* 白話 “vernacular written Chinese”, which was different from Classical written Chinese. However, at the beginning these compositions were mostly orally transmitted, not

written down. So the earliest extant compositions in vernacular writing language are *jiangjing wen* 講經文 “sutra lectures”, which is a kind of *bianwen* 變文 “transformation texts”, and *quzi ci* 曲子詞 “cantos”, both of which are part of the popular literature that prevailed in the Tang, Wudai, and Northern Song periods in northern China. These texts, however, were not preserved in the mainstream tradition, because they were considered vulgar and therefore neglected by officials and orthodox scholars, but they were rediscovered in a cave shrine of a temple in Dunhuang, a principal town on the Silk Road in northwestern China in the beginning of the 20th century. They are therefore now called “Dunhuang Popular Literature” (Idema and Haft 1997).

#### *Genre of transformation texts*

Some of the manuscripts found in Dunhuang, called *bianwen* 變文 by scholars, are scripts for the talking and singing show of pictures called *bianxiang* 變相. The number of Dunhuang transformation texts is as many as 86 (Zhang and Huang 1998). The manuscripts vary in both content and theme: 59 of them deal with Buddhist themes; the rest are on secular themes concerning historical events and real happenings.

It is easy to see the connection between the language of *bianwen* and that of the CTIBS. First, it is composed of prose and verse, with narrations in prose and conversations in verse; and the verses shift line by line. This style obviously followed that of the CTIBS, since we do not find the same usage in Chinese native compositions at that time. Second, the vocabulary of the scripts is also closely related to that of the CTIBS. More than 20% of the vocabulary of *jiangjing wen* originated in the CTIBS, including both Buddhist technical terms and common words. Jiang (1988) has discussed more than 800 words used in Dunhuang *bianwen*, which are new or very difficult to understand correctly, at least a third of which first appeared in the CTIBS. Last, the language of *bianwen* inherited the oral flavor of the CTIBS, with a rich amount of evidence from vocabulary, although we have not gained more knowledge on syntax. There is no doubt that the language of *bianwen* is a mature and newly oralized literary language (Mair 1989, 2014).

#### *Genre of vernacular poetry*

One more category of popular literature had close connections with Buddhism; it is represented by the *baihua shi* 白話詩 “vernacular poems” and by *quzi ci* 曲子詞 “cantos”.

*Baihua shi* emerged in the pre-Tang period and boomed in the Tang and the Five Dynasties periods. A representative of the *baihua shi* is the so-called *Wang Fanzhi shi* 王梵志詩 “Brahmin Wang’s poems”, a general designation given to all the poems (the total number is 390) composed by Buddhist monks and lay people,

whose names are now lost, and *Hanshan shi* 寒山詩 “Hanshan’s poems”, which were composed by a Chan Buddhist monk named Hanshan (lit. “cold mountain”) (Iriya 1983; Xiang 2004).

*Quzi ci* refers to the words of *quzi*, a kind of popular song appearing in the manuscripts rediscovered in Dunhuang, which was produced by monks in temples or by followers. In *Dunhuang geci zongbian* 敦煌歌辭總編 [A Corpus of the words for songs found in Dunhuang manuscripts] edited by Ren Bantang 任半塘, there were more than 1,300 cantos.

The language of the composition of the vernacular poetry genre was itself of the vernacular, with a large number of oral and vulgar words, e.g., *tu mantou* 土饅頭 “steamed bun made up of soil” which refers to a tomb, *yanlao* 閻老 “Yama geezer”, a nickname given to Yama; *chou pidai* 臭皮袋 “smelly leather bag”, which refers to the body of human beings; *chalang* 查郎 “unrestrained man”, and *maoshao* 貌哨 “ugly”, etc.

### 3.2.2 Recorded sayings

Chan Buddhism, one of the most influential schools of Buddhism in China, sprung up during the Tang Dynasty. This school created a special textual genre that was different from traditional Chinese compositions, or the CTIBS, to express the quite different philosophy of this school. The words of Chan masters from various periods were recorded so as to form collections of *yulu* 語錄 “recorded sayings”, which is typical of the Chan school. This composition style was called the *yulu ti* 語錄體 “recorded sayings genre”.

The Chan recorded sayings were characterized by their distinctly oral register (Zhou 2009; Yuan and Kang 2010). For instance, the following paragraph, selected from *Wudeng Huiyuan* 五燈會元 [Compendium of five lamps] of the Song Dynasty, could well demonstrate such a feature:

這裏無祖無佛。達磨是老臊胡，釋迦老子是乾屎橛，文殊普賢是擔屎漢，等覺妙覺是破執凡夫，菩提涅槃是繫驢橛，十二分教是鬼神簿、拭瘡疣紙，四果三賢、初心十地是守古塚鬼。（CBETA, X80, no. 1565, p. 143, b2-5）

Neither patriarch nor Buddha is here. Bodhidharma is an old barbarian with body odor. Father Śākyamuni is a piece of dry shit. Manjuśrī and Samantabhadra are men who carry dung. Equal-enlightenment and great-enlightenment are common people who have destroyed obsession. Enlightenment and nirvana are a wooden stake for tying up donkeys. The twelve schools are books of ghosts and demons, tissues for wiping sores. Four fruits and three virtues, primary thinking, and ten places are ghosts who guard ancient tombs.

In the paragraph above, *lao saohu* 老臊胡 “old barbarian with body odor”, *gan shijue* 乾屎橛 “a piece of dry shit”, *danshi han* 擔屎漢 “men who carry dung”,

*jilü jue* 繫驢橛 “wooden stake for tying up donkeys”, *shi chuangyou zhi* 拭瘡癩紙 “tissues for wiping sores”, *shou guzhong gui* 守古塚鬼 “ghosts who guard ancient tombs” were all extremely abusive and coarse words and expressions that came from vulgar oral Chinese.

#### 4. The Influence of the Chinese translations of Indian Buddhist scriptures on the evolution of Chinese and Chinese language studies

Buddhist scripture translation actually was the most comprehensive cultural communication between China and any foreign country in history. Through translation, the Indian culture carried by an Indo-European language entered Chinese culture. The foreign terms added a variety of fresh elements to Chinese, though not all of the elements obeyed the rules of Chinese. In this way, the translation of Buddhist scriptures created a new language form – Buddhist Chinese. If we observe the phenomenon from the perspective of historical linguistics, Buddhist Chinese is the product of language contact between Chinese, which belongs to the Sino-Tibetan language family, and Sanskrit, a member of the Indo-European family. Although the LCTIBS was not conveyed in pure or totally correct Chinese, it was nevertheless fully accepted by the Chinese people because it accompanied the very powerful surge of Buddhism, and it gradually influenced the language they used every day. Eventually, the contact between Chinese and Sanskrit, and the influence brought by that contact, became one of the most important mechanisms and motivations for the evolution and development in Chinese language and culture (Zhu 2008).

The influence on vocabulary is easily found. There had been some Buddhist terms in non-Buddhist texts as early as the Three Kingdoms period. The great poet of the Eastern Jin, Tao Yuanming 陶淵明, was not a Buddhist disciple, but we find in his work many words that came from Buddhism or Buddhist scriptures, such as *chenwang* 塵網 (lit. “net of dust”) “the net of six *guṇas*”, i.e., those connected with the six senses, *huanhua* 幻化 (lit. “magical transformation”, *huan* 幻 < Skt. *māyā*) “illusory transformation”, *kongwu* 空無 (lit. “empty and having nothing”) “unreality” or “immateriality”, *mingbao* 冥報 (lit. “dark retribution”) “retribution after death”, *wuwei* 無為 (lit. “not do” < Skt. *asaṃskṛta*) “unconditioned” or “uncreated”, *liuhuan* 流幻 (lit. “ephemeral illusion” < Skt. *saṃsāra*) “transmigration”, *rendao* 人道 (lit. “human’s way” < Skt. *manuṣyagati*) “human existence of the six realms of reincarnation”, *bao* 報 (lit. “answer” < Skt. *karma*) “recompense”, *ying* 應 (lit. “answer” < Skt. *karma*) “corresponding retribution”, *menghuan* 夢幻 “dream and illusion”, *shisu* 世俗 (lit. “world and secularity” < Skt. *laukika*)

“common or ordinary things, custom, etc.”, *juewu* 覺悟 (lit. “wake and awake” <Skt. *bodhi*) “enlightenment”, etc.

The examples of influence on grammar are not as numerous as those on vocabulary. But during the past 20 years, more than 20 special grammatical elements that first appeared in the CTIBS and were later adapted by literati, have been discussed in studies, such as the prefix “*suo* 所” used as a passive marker before a transitive verb, the particle “*yi* 已” used as a perfective aspect marker of the semelfactive verb, etc. (Zhu and Zhu 2006; Zhu 2013).

We will below discuss this matter in more detail, from five perspectives.

#### 4.1 The creation of *baihua*

The most significant influence of Buddhist Chinese on Chinese language is that from the cultural perspective, as this provided the possibility for the existence and development of *baihua* 白話, a vernacular written Chinese (Mair 1994; Zhu 2015a).

The existence of vernacular written Chinese was one of the most important events in the history of Chinese culture, and it can be treated as a revolution in written Chinese. Its importance and value in the development of Chinese culture are inestimable. As noted above, there was only one type of written language in China before the Buddhist translations, and that was *wenyan* 文言, Classical written Chinese. It was the privilege of only a few people to know it, because it was very different from oral Chinese and required a long period of devoted study before one could master it. Buddhist translation provided the possibility of composing in oral language. This stimulated the emergence of a written colloquial language, or more exactly, a written colloquial Chinese that developed synchronously under influence from oral colloquial language. It is generally accepted that the language of popular literature, represented by the transformation text genre, was the origin of vernacular written Chinese. Meanwhile, some researchers suggest that the true source of vernacular written Chinese must be the CTIBS in the hybrid writing register. No matter what the exact source is, it is clear that Buddhist translations directly influenced the emergence of vernacular written Chinese (Mair 1994).

#### 4.2 Speeding up bisyllabicization

The most remarkable development in Chinese vocabulary from the ancient period to modern times is bisyllabicization. In the pre-Qin period, the basic phonetic form of a Chinese word was monosyllabic. Because one Chinese character

recorded one syllable, it followed that one character equaled one word in most cases.

However, with the rapid development of Chinese society, more and more new concepts appeared, and the old monosyllabic form of vocabulary could not record them all, because a single syllable bore too many meanings, and this led to more and more ambiguities, so that the accuracy of the intended expression was seriously damaged. Therefore, increasing the number of syllables in a word became an important part of the development of Chinese vocabulary. Yet, differently from many other languages (such as English, which has almost no limitation on the number of syllables that can be used for word creation), due to the constraints of Chinese prosodic structure, this development finally ended in achieving the bisyllabicization of Chinese vocabulary (Feng 2009: 2–3, 6).

This process started from the Spring and Autumn period, but it was too slow to be noticed. In the medieval period (from the Eastern Han to the Early Tang, around 100–700), the process drastically speeded up. At this time, not only were most newly formed words disyllabic or multisyllabic, but also most monosyllabic words had their disyllabic forms. Studies have proved that this acceleration has a direct connection with the translation of Buddhist scriptures (Zhu 1992, 2001).

In all Chinese literature of the medieval period, the percentages of disyllabic or multisyllabic words in the CTIBS are much higher than those in indigenous Chinese compositions. Because most of the scriptures, especially *sūtrānta*, e.g. the Sutra of Tripitaka, were intentionally translated into *sizi ge* 四字格 “four-character structure”, i.e., a four-syllable structure, to meet the need of rhythmical recitation, and most words of this four-character structure were composed of two disyllable units (Feng 2009: 55). This is the main reason there were so many new disyllable words and expressions created during translation. Some of the disyllabic words disappeared shortly after emergence, but others were repeatedly used and preserved in the CTIBS. If these words broke the boundary of the CTIBS and were used in Chinese indigenous Buddhist compositions first and/or then non-Buddhist texts, they became the new blood of the Chinese lexical system. In fact, hundreds of thousands of such words and phrases originating in the LCTIBS are used in non-Buddhist Chinese. So the translation of Buddhist scriptures is the main reason for the sudden acceleration of bisyllabicization in the medieval period.

#### 4.3 Adoption of plural markers for nouns and personal pronouns

Another feature of Buddhist Chinese that proved influential on the historical development of the Chinese language is the widespread use of plural markers. Modern Chinese possesses a plural marker, which is *men* 們, used after personal

nouns and personal pronouns. The plural marker *men* appeared in dialects of northern China around the Song Dynasty, and was in complementary distribution with classifiers, e.g., *liangci* 量詞 “measure word”, with the same function. The only explanation for this unusual phenomenon is that it was a foreign element loaned from another language, probably Sanskrit, when translating Buddhist scriptures.

The character 們 was perhaps coined ad hoc in order to write the plural marker *men*. As a grammatical element, *men* came from *bei* 輩. The original meaning of *bei* was “same kind (of people)”, and it was used after personal pronouns and proper nouns (such as names of human beings) to express the collective meaning. Sanskrit is a language that uses plural marker to express the grammatical category of number, so the translators tried to find a similar way in Chinese to express the plural meaning in nouns and personal pronouns, but there were no parallels in Chinese (at that time no one knew the classifier has the same grammatical function as the plural marker). So, *bei*, originally used to express collective meaning, was chosen to translate the plural markers in the language of Indian Buddhist scriptures. This is why there is a plural marker in Chinese, a typical classifier language. *Bei* is just one of a number of morphemes commonly used as plural markers in Buddhist translations, other common forms are *deng* 等 and *cao* 曹 (Zürcher 1977; Jiang 2011; Zhu 2014).

#### 4.4 Promoting language contact

Social linguists believe that the main mechanism for language evolution is language contact, and they further divide the contact into two types. One is contact between different languages; the other is contact between spoken language and written language. Buddhist translation integrated these two types of contacts, and Buddhist Chinese is the result (Yu 2004; Zhu 2007; Zhu 2013).

As a result of the translation of Buddhist scriptures into Chinese, a number of Sanskrit words made their way into the common language. For example, *guoqu* 過去 “past” (lit. *guo* 過 “across or over” and *qu* 去 “go” < Skt. *atīta* < *ati*, prefix “beyond, over” + *ita*, “gone”), *weilai* 未來 “future” (lit. *wei* 未 “not”, *lai* 來 “come” < Skt. *anāgata* < *an/a*, prefix “not, non” + *āgata*, “come”), and *xianzai* 現在 “now” (lit. *xian* 現 “appear” and *zai* 在 “exist” or “existing at present”, < Skt. *pratyutpanna* “existing at the present moment” < *prati* “at time of, at this point” + *utpanna* “come forth, appeared”), are time words that are frequently used in modern Chinese and that originated from Buddhist translations. These three disyllabic words eventually took the places of monosyllabic words *xi* 昔 “past”, *jin* 今 “today”, and *ming* 明 “tomorrow”.

Similarly, Buddhist translation helped many vernacular elements in spoken Chinese enter written Chinese. Some of these had their own characters, and some of them acquired a flavor of elegance because of being used in Buddhist texts first. Then some of them became the elements of written Chinese, even of Classical written Chinese. For example, *wu* 嗚 was a vulgar word, equated to *qin* 親 “kiss” in oral Chinese. It was written as 歎 in *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 [Explanations on characters], the first dictionary of Chinese characters, by Xu Shen 許慎 in the Eastern Han. But the word was not found in written texts before the Jin Dynasty. This suggests that it did not originate as a word from written Chinese. However, it appeared in *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語 [A New Account of the Tales of the World], a very famous book of anecdotes about literati in the Southern Dynasties, which is a little surprising.

Why did Liu Yiqing 劉義慶, its author, use *wu* 嗚 in his composition? A possible answer is that the word was frequently used in the CTIBS because the translators were not familiar with its register and so did not avoid using it in the translation. It appeared in totally different contexts, both “lower-class” such as *wukou shunzu* 嗚口吮足 “kiss mouth and suck feet”, and “higher-class” such as *kouwu fozu* 口嗚佛足 “kiss Buddha’s feet with mouth” (*Liudu jijing* 六度集經, Ch. 5. To3, no. 152, p. 24, c23–26).

Since *wu* had been used in holy Buddhist scriptures, it became less oral, so the literati used it in their compositions.

#### 4.5 Promoting ancient Chinese language studies

Compared with Chinese people of the early medieval period, the ancient Indians had much more knowledge about language, the most important tool for human communication. Their achievements in linguistics, including awareness of sound, vocabulary, and grammar, and the ability to analyze their inner structures, were more or less retained in Buddhist scriptures. From their work in translating Buddhist sutras, these skills were gradually learned by the Chinese, and promoted the development of Chinese linguistics.

##### 4.5.1 *Fanqie* 反切

*Fanqie* 反切 is both a method to indicate the pronunciation of a Chinese character (usually equals to a word) in traditional Chinese lexicography and a method of analysis of the phonetic structure of a Chinese character that emerged around the Three Kingdoms period. Before *fanqie* appeared, scholars used the method of *duruo* 讀若 (lit. “read as”), giving a homophone to indicate the pronunciation of another character. The limitations of *duruo* are obvious, since many homophonous characters are needed. And some of them are of numerous strokes, and

rarely used in daily life. After Buddhism was introduced into China, the Chinese, inspired by the Indian practice of phonetics, knew for the first time that the sound of a character, i.e., a syllable, could be further divided into three parts: *sheng* 聲 (lit. “sound”) “initial of a syllable”, usually formed by a consonant, *yun* 韻 “final of a syllable formed by a vowel or vowel with a consonant-final” or “rhyme group”, and *diao* 調 “tone”. Based on this new linguistic knowledge, some scholars created the *fanqie* method, which uses two other Chinese characters to indicate the pronunciation of a given Chinese character. The first character, called the *fanqie shangzi* 反切上字 “upper character of *fanqie*”, as Chinese was written vertically, indicates the *sheng*, and the second one, called the *fanqie xiazi* 反切下字 “lower character of *fanqie*”, indicates *yun* and *diao*. Theoretically, one syllable needs only one *fanqie*, a method much more convenient than *durou*.

#### 4.5.2 *Zimu* 字母

*Zimu* 字母 refers to a group of special Chinese characters that represent the different initials of a Chinese syllable. *Fanqie*, discussed above, is a method to indicate the pronunciation of a character by using two other characters, each giving part of the pronunciation, but it is possible that different people would use different characters. Around the late Tang Dynasty, according to legend, a Buddhist monk named Shouwen 守溫 initiated a method that used one specific character as a representative of one initial; he called it *zimu* 字母 (lit. “mother of character” < Skt. *mātrkā*). Not only that, but he also grouped a total of thirty of these into five columns according to the place of the articulation of each of the initials, *chun* 脣 “lip”, *she* 舌 “tongue”, *ya* 牙 “back tooth”, *chi* 齒 “front tooth”, and *hou* 喉 “throat”. The emergence of *zimu* marked a major development in Chinese phonology.

#### 4.5.3 *Yuntu* 韻圖

*Yuntu* 韻圖 is a rime table tabulating all Chinese characters in the series of rime dictionaries. The extant earliest rime dictionary is the *Qieyun* 切韻 (601), which served as a guide to the recitation of literary texts and an aid in the composition of verse, using their onsets, rhyme groups, tones, and other properties. The method gave a significantly more precise and systematic account of the sounds of those dictionaries and also indicated that the Chinese had learned much more about the language itself.

The earliest rime tables were associated with Chinese Buddhist monks, who are believed to have been inspired by the Sanskrit syllable charts in the *siddham* script they used to study the language (Branner 2006).

#### 4.5.4 *Xitan xue* 悉曇學

*Xitan xue* 悉曇學 “Studies on *siddham*”, refers to a kind of phonology in ancient China and Japan, which was developed from the study of Sanskrit.

*Xitan* 悉曇, a transcribed Chinese word for *siddham*, is the name of a script used for writing Sanskrit ca. 600–1200 in India. Since the Six Dynasties, many of the Buddhist texts that were taken to China were written in the *siddham* script, especially the Buddhist esoteric texts.

In the Tang Dynasty, Esoteric Buddhism (Ch. *Mi zong* 密宗 or *Mi jiao* 密教) was rising, and Buddhist monks in China paid special attention to the study of *siddham* because it was considered important to preserve the pronunciation of mantras, and the traditional method of transliteration was not suitable for writing the sounds of Sanskrit for this kind of use. These translators did not just learn how to pronounce the sounds of Sanskrit correctly but also studied the principle and linguistic theory behind this kind of script, which is called *Xitan xue*. This led Chinese monks and laymen to gain more Indian phonological knowledge and therefor benefited the development of Chinese phonology generally.

A Japanese monk, Kūkai 空海, introduced the *siddham* script and *Xitan xue* to Japan when he returned from China in 806.

#### 4.6 Revolutionizing the modern study of Chinese historical linguistics

Finally, we would like to mention very briefly the special value of Buddhist Chinese for the modern Chinese historical linguistics.

In the past, the main materials used by historical linguists of Chinese were drawn from literature written in *wenyan*, i.e., classical Chinese, but these texts were incapable of representing the living Chinese language. At the beginning of the 20th century, a few international scholars began to use Buddhist literature to study ancient Chinese language. As a result, Buddhist Chinese has provided some of the most important data for the modern study of Chinese linguistic history, including the synchronic description of features of the living language at various times, as well as diachronic change and the evolution of Chinese language in history (Zhu 2001, 2010). Among these, the most noteworthy are *Fan-han duiyin* 梵漢對音 “Sanskrit-Chinese corresponding sounds”, used for the reconstruction of the ancient sound system, and *Fan-han duikan* 梵漢對勘 “Sanskrit-Chinese comparative collation”, which enabled scholars to trace the influence of the original languages of Indian Buddhist literature on Chinese.

#### 4.6.1 *Fan-han duiyin* 梵漢對音 and its importance for historical Chinese phonology

*Fan-han duiyin* 梵漢對音, namely Chinese transcription of Sanskrit words and *dhāraṇīs*, refers to all transliteration in Buddhist Chinese translation texts, which provides very valuable and important material for Chinese historical linguistics.

Chinese, of course, uses characters in its writing system, and these are a kind of logograph and therefore unable to record the sound of words accurately. It is almost impossible for scholars who research the history of Chinese phonetics to get an accurate idea of the pronunciation of Chinese words through the Chinese characters used for writing at different stages in history. Scripts that were used for writing Sanskrit, however, relied on phonography, which much better reflects the pronunciation of words than do Chinese characters. Therefore, through the Sanskrit original scholars can get much more information about the pronunciation of its Chinese transcription.

The pioneers in the method of using Chinese transcription of Sanskrit for Chinese character-pronunciation reconstruction and reconstruction of the phonetic system of Middle Chinese were Bernhard Karlgren (1899–1978), a Swedish Sinologist and Chinese linguist, Henri Maspero (1882–1945), a French Sinologist, Alexander von Staël-Holstein (1877–1937), a Russian and Estonian Sinologist and Sanskritologist, and Wang Rongbao 汪榮寶 (1878–1933) and Luo Changpei 羅常培 (1899–1958), both Chinese phonologists. They initiated the modern study of historical Chinese phonology and are considered to have opened the era of the modern Chinese historical linguistics (Zhu 1999).

#### 4.6.2 Buddhist Chinese studies based on *Fan-han duikan* 梵漢對勘

The Chinese translated texts of ancient Indian Buddhist scriptures and their original Indic (Sanskrit or Prakrit) parallels are valuable materials for conducting research on contact linguistics in ancient Chinese. The objective of such studies is to find the language elements and other language phenomena in the Chinese translated texts that are related to the original texts and to reveal the impact that the importation of Indian Buddhism and its cultures had upon the Chinese language. It adopts the research method of *Fan-han duikan* 梵漢對勘, a comparative analysis of the original Sanskrit texts with the equivalent Chinese translated texts, to conduct an exhaustive survey of representative collections of Buddhist scriptures. From the perspective of linguistic typological comparison between Sanskrit and Chinese, which are respectively members of the Indo-European language and the Sino-Tibetan language families, this study is aimed at finding all the lexical, semantic and grammatical elements in the Chinese translated texts that correspond to those in the ancient Indian parallel texts, and to explore all the

special language phenomena in the translated Chinese texts that occurred because of the influence of the original Sanskrit texts. This study also provides a basis for further research in tracing how these elements with foreign origins and Chinese forms have influenced the development of the Chinese language (Jiang 2011; Wang 2014; Zhu et al. 2015c).

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## Abbreviations

adv.	adverb
BHS	Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit
Ch.	Chinese
CTIBS	Chinese translations of Indian Buddhist scriptures
Eng.	English
ger.	gerund
grm.	grammar
LCTIBS	language of Chinese translations of Indian Buddhist scriptures
lit.	literally
EMC	Early Middle Chinese
pron.	pronoun
Skt.	Sanskrit
Toch.	Tocharian
v.	verb
voc.	vocative case
1SG	first person singular

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