

Analyzing Early Buddhist Vernacular Chinese Prose Style: The Case of the Baiyujing and the Xianyujing

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This presentation will demonstrate in practice the application to the text of the Baiyujing of the elaborate system of syntactic analysis of the database THESAURUS LINGUAE SERICAE. Special attention will be paid to those syntactic constructions which might be viewed as influenced by Sanskrit and other languages present in the Chinese Buddhist environment. In addition, I shall present the results of a comprehensive inventory of rhetorical devices employed in the Baiyujing. Finally, I shall describe in detail the principles of the rhythmically regular gatha style and its pervasive contrasts with the pre-Buddhist quadrisyllabic style. My presentation will be illustrated throughout from the complete analysis and translation of the Baiyujing, and the extensive analysis of the Xianyujing in THESAURUS LINGUAE SERICAE, and I shall try to demonstrate that Buddhist Chinese must be studied as an integral part of Chinese linguistic history seen in intense cross-linguistic interaction with various non-Sinitic languages involved in the transmission of Buddhist texts to China. Thus I want to provide some detailed evidence to illustrate how the specificities of Buddhist Chinese will only be properly appreciated if at every point they are held up against well-established pre-Buddhist Chinese linguistic and literary practice.