Medieval Chinese Syntax

1. General Observations and Periodization

A definition of the periodization of Early Medieval Chinese (EMC) in terms of syntactic development can only be provided tentatively. By convention, the beginning of Early Medieval Chinese is usually associated with the introduction of Buddhism to China, and the beginning of translation activities from Indic languages from circa the 2nd century CE onwards. This dating is based on the observation that many new grammatical markers and syntactic constructions for the first time surfaced (although some may well have existed earlier in the spoken language) in translated Buddhist texts, and that translation activities eventually had a considerable impact on language development.

However, some important changes can already be traced back to texts of the early Hán Dynasty (e.g., the Shìjì 史記; c. 109 BCE), and even before (although the first glimpse of these developments are practically exclusively seen in excavated texts from Northwestern Chinese; see for example Wèi 2000 and Jǐ 2004). The Eastern Hán Dynasty (25–220 CE) can be regarded as a period of transition during which some of the features of Early Medieval Chinese are seen gradually emerging in written texts. A controversial case that has been widely studied in secondary literature is the development of shì 是 into a full copula during this period. Manuscript texts seem to feature an early usage of shì as a copula to a larger extent; however, also the usage in edited classical literature is disputed (see for example Guō 1990/1997, arguing for early usages in the Měngzǐ 孟子, Hánfēizǐ 韓非子, etc.). Yáng (2009) argues against an early usage of shì as copula, and, analyzing manuscript literature, assumes that shì grammaticalized from the construction shì wéi 是謂 ‘this means’ (‘> ‘this’ > COP ‘be’), current during the later Warring States and Qin periods. Although the origins of copula shì might have been considerably earlier, the regular usage of this function can be traced to early Buddhist translation literature. However, systematic research on relatively recent archaeological findings (such as the manuscripts found at Liyé 里耶, dating from the late 3rd cent. BCE.) will hopefully shed new light on the development of the copula. As such, the very early/transition phase of Early Medieval Chinese should be dated to circa 2nd/1st century BCE, coinciding with major changes concerning the phonology.

Lukáš Zádrapa
and morphology in the transition from earlier stages of Chinese to Medieval Chinese, and the Early Medieval Chinese period “proper” starting with the emergence of Chinese Buddhist texts. However, the question of periodization is (and probably will remain) a major headache for historical linguists.

The differentiation between Early Medieval Chinese and Late Medieval Chinese (LMC) is somewhat artificial, but expedient for the study of the varieties of Medieval Chinese. Traditionally, the differentiation between Early Medieval Chinese and Late Medieval Chinese was based on phonological considerations (in these studies the acronyms EMC and LMC usually stand for “Early Middle Chinese” and “Late Middle Chinese”, respectively). However, this does not necessarily coincide with major syntactic changes. Because of the rather abrupt emergence of (nearly exclusively Buddhist) texts which show distinctively different features from Literary Chinese (LC), Early Medieval Chinese has been referred to as the “first vernacular revolution” by Mair (1994:717; and accordingly the emergence of highly vernacular LMC texts as a “second vernacular revolution” in the Chinese context), who also tries to determine the most important reasons for this development. Likewise, the transition to the colloquial Late Medieval Chinese takes place from circa 700 CE onwards, and might have been triggered by a larger context of committing spoken languages to a written form, taking place in Central Asia and Northwestern China, e.g., Old Uyghur (5th cent.), written Tibetan (mid-7th cent.); written Khotanese (from c. 700), and written Sogdian (from c. 700), and the multicultural and multilingual context of these regions (for an excellent concise discussion, see Takata 2000). In addition, Buddhist genres provided the ideal framework for the full surfacing of vernacular features (which might have been in use for a considerably longer time already), both syntactic and semantic, since their restrictions on style were far less rigid as compared to texts written in Literary Chinese.

Late Medieval Chinese texts show a significant amount of characteristics of the contemporary colloquial language of the Táng Dynasty (618–907), and feature the very early usage of many syntactic markers still current in Modern Mandarin and other contemporary Chinese dialects. This period is also characterized by the non-standardized usage of phonetic transcriptions of newly emerging function words, e.g. (note that the final stop -t in the 没 (mî) pronunciations probably had disappeared by the 10th century):

1. 異沒時作勿生。

   Yìmò shí zuòwùshēng.

   /ji`(ji h)-mut/ /tsuɔ`(tsɔ h)-mut-ʂiaŋ/

   be.like (such) time how.about

   ’If it is like this what shall be done?’

   (8th cent.; ms. Pelliot 3047; yìmò 異沒/zhìmò

   只沒 also appear in ms. Dûnbó 77)

In this phrase (which roughly corresponds to Modern Mandarin zhèmè shì zěnmeyàng? 這麼時怎麼樣?), the only Chinese character used semantically is shí 時 ‘when > if’, whereas all the other characters transcribe vernacular words which did not have a standardized graphical representation at that time.

During the early and mid-Sòng period (Sòng Dynasty: 960–1279) many of the Late Medieval Chinese texts were “sanitized” by removing phonetic loan characters typical for hand-copied texts (as evidenced by the Dûnhuáng 敦煌 manuscript remains) of the Táng, thereby streamlining the transcription of colloquial function words. A good example is the early development of Modern Mandarin shènmé 什麼; the Chinese character 時 became current in the early Sòng in order to represent the phoneme mə/me in colloquial function words (see for example Féng 2006):

[hevù 何物 (what thing → what)] ⇒ Circa mid- and late 8th century; 甚没 [Bđölän zhuàn 寶林傳, 801 CE], 是物, 是沒 [ms. Dûnbó 77] (/ʃhiˈmui/ /ʃhiumæ/) ⇒ Circa late 8th–9th century; 是沒, 甚没 [ms. Stein 2503], 甚没 [ms. Stein 2669] (/ʃhɪma/) ⇒ Circa late 9th–10th century; 什没, 什没 (/ʃhɪˈma/ /ʃhɪma/ /ʃhɪmo/) ⇒ “Standard” form from the early 11th century onwards: 什麼

For use by the Author only | © 2017 Koninklijke Brill NV
Scholarly attempts to determine more accurate features of the periodization of Early Medieval Chinese/Late Medieval Chinese are merely at its very beginnings and have to await more detailed studies. This is also complicated by the fact that text styles and linguistic features of earlier periods continued to be used, and that the different genres (and the language used in them) constantly influenced each other. In addition, there is not necessarily a linear development from less to more vernacular textual features (for an attempt to quantify this genre-dependency, see Zimmer 1999). For example, many of the Buddhist Hybrid Chinese (BHC) translations dating from the Táng period tried to adapt to Literary Chinese principles to a much higher degree than earlier texts. The famous translator Kumārajīva (343–413 CE), for example, had a great impact on successive translation practices, and the intrusion of new vernacular elements into Buddhist Hybrid Chinese decreased (for a very good discussion on which Buddhist texts should be used for the study of vernacular elements, see Zürcher 1996; for a list of scriptures, see Zürcher 1996:28–33; on the constraints imposed by prosody and versification, see Zürcher 1996:10f.; for a concrete example of the techniques of “re-literalization” of a Buddhist narrative, see Anderl and Pons, forthcoming, 389–392). Buddhist Hybrid Chinese style texts typical for Early Medieval Chinese also continued to be a dominant Buddhist written medium in the Late Medieval Chinese period, and fully vernacular features only appeared in the dialogues of a small number of Buddhist genres (for a very good concise overview of vernacular literature preserved in Dūnhuáng, see Schmid 2000; most importantly the biànwén 變文 ‘transformation texts’, the jiāngjīng wén 講經文 ‘sūtra lecture texts’ and related genres, certain types of poetry, and the dialogue sections of the early treatises and historiographies of the Chán (禪) school; as for printed texts, the 10th century Zǔtáng jí 祖堂集 ‘Collection from the Patriarchs’ Hall’ (ZTJ) as preserved in an appendix to the Korean canon).

Genre dependence can also be deduced from the analysis of Early Medieval Chinese Buddhist texts: colloquial features (both in terms of the lexicon and syntax) mostly appear in the dialogue sections of narrative literature such as the jātaka (Birth stories, i.e., accounts of Buddha’s previous lives), avadāna (noble deeds), nidāna (i.e., accounts of Buddha’s life), or, more generally, collections of popular stories such as the Bā Büyük jīng 百喻經 [Hundred parables scripture] and the Xiányú jīng 賢愚經 [Scripture of the wise and foolish] (for an interesting comparison of LC and EMC features in parts of the Xiányú jīng, see Harbsmeier 2012). Among non-Buddhist Early Medieval Chinese texts, only relatively few show a significant amount of vernacular elements, such as the Lùnhéng 附論 [The balance of discourses], the Shìshuō xīnyǔ 世說新語 [A new account of tales of the world], and (sections of) the Daoist Tàipíng jīng 太平經 [Scripture of great peace].

2. ASPECTS OF THE STUDY OF EARLY MEDIEVAL CHINESE

A broader interest in the study of Early Medieval Chinese only developed in recent years and since then certain aspects of Early Medieval Chinese grammar have received intense scholarly attention. This is exemplified by the numerous studies on various constructions, among them the passive (for a discussion of the various scholarly interpretations and ample bibliographical references, see Zêng, forthcoming) and object disposal forms (for references, see below). Concerning the passive construction, despite the great number of publications, there is as yet no coherent and convincing account of the development, let alone the transition from older strata of Chinese to the Hàn/Early Medieval Chinese periods. A close examination of Chinese and Western secondary literature on passives reveals some of the more general problems related to the approach to Early Medieval Chinese: during the last 20 years, there has been a strong focus on
lack of direct parallel texts. More often than not, it is not even clear on which source language a translation is based. Moreover, many early Chinese translations seem to be only rough renderings of specific Indic texts, or are even based on oral versions (see for example Mair 2012). Recently, meticulous philological studies on very early translations (and the distorted Chinese sometimes resulting from them) have produced important results concerning the understanding of Early Medieval Chinese texts. For example, Zacchetti (2007) analyzes the approach of Ān Shìgāo (148–180 CE) and his translation technique of strictly following the syntax of Indic languages, which results in syntactic structures such as zài fó ‘from the buddha’). Consider the following Chinese sentence, which tries to faithfully follow the syntax of the Indic original, becomes enigmatic in the target language. The key structure of the Pāli phrase, marking ajjhattaṃ kāye kāyānupassī ‘reflect the body in the body’ as a specification of viharati ‘he dwelt’, is lost in Chinese:

2. 比丘自身身相觀行止。
Bǐqiū zìshēn shēn
monk self.body body
shēnxiàngguān xíngzhǐ.
body.characteristic.contemplation walk.stop
bikkhu ajjhattaṃ kāye
monk.nom inwardly.adv body.loc
kāyānupassī viharati. (Pāli)
body.reflect.PTCP dwell-3sg
(> concerning the body)
‘A monk dwells contemplating (the nature of) the body in the body in regard to himself.’
(T.33, no. 1694. 173c-174a; translation based on Zacchetti 2007; the Pāli parallel and its English translation is taken from Vibhaṅga, 193)

Attempts to prove direct influences from Indic languages (e.g., Zhū Qìngzhī 1993; with rather doubtful conclusions concerning the interpretation of suǒ 所 in “passives”) on the development of specific markers and constructions in Early Medieval Chinese are only in an initial stage of scholarly research. This is especially true for the formative period of Early Medieval Chinese reflected in early translation literature, due the tracing changes based on mechanisms as defined in various theoretical frameworks of historical linguistics. Whereas this has yielded many valuable insights, it also has led to certain oversights and shortcomings (see Zēng, forthcoming, showing that there is no mature passive with wéi 為 before the Hàn/early medieval period). Trying to mainly trace the developments of full words into function words, the exact analyses of syntactic features, as well as their pragmatic and idiomatic contexts have not received sufficient attention yet. In addition, important questions such as the restrictions and constraints on the use of passive need more investigation (Harbsmeier 2012:69), as well as the close study of the syntactic features of early translation literature.

There are very promising recent developments which eventually will enable a more systematic approach to and deeper understanding of the syntax of Early Medieval Chinese texts, such as the meticulous comparative studies on Buddhist translation literature, published in the form of word lists, comparative editions, and analytic studies (e.g., Karashima 1998, 2001a, etc.; Zacchetti 2005, 2007, 2012), the development of digital parallel corpora (e.g., Thesaurus Literaturae Buddhicae, TLB), and detailed studies on the development of specific constructions and systems (e.g., the immense complexity and the subtleties of the → medieval modal system; see especially Meisterernst 2008, 2010, 2011; for a rough outline of aspects of the LMC modal system, see Anderl 2004: vol. I, 384–435, 2006a). In addition, the important question of syntactic change has recently received renewed attention by Aldridge (2013), who emphasizes correctly that in passive sentences in the medieval period neither wéi 為 nor bèi 被 should syntactically be regarded as “coverb/preposition”, nor as “agent marker”, but as verbs with a sentential object.

More generally, it is assumed that for example the usage of plural markers -děng 等, affixed to human nouns, including pronouns, and zhū- 諸, which developed from a quantifier marking members of a class to more generally plural in prenominal position, rather than meaning ‘all’ (clear marking of ‘all’ usually requires an addition, such as yīqiè zhū 一切諸), as well as the
For use by the Author only | © 2017 Koninklijke Brill NV

The Buddha dwelled together (v) with (cov) an assembly of 1,250 great bhikṣus (monks) at (cov) Jetavana Anāthapiṇḍadārāma in Śrāvasti.' (T.8, no.235, 748c)
An Shigao in the course of his early translation activities, see Zacchetti 2007). This was probably also reinforced by the fact that translations frequently were the result of collective efforts in the framework of “translation teams” who worked at translation offices (yichang 譯場; on the production process of translations, see for example Fuchs 1930; Tso 1963).

For instance, during the Six Dynasties period (3rd–6th century CE) more than 35 disyllabic quantifying adverbs with identical or nearly identical meaning (‘all; each’) were used in Buddhist texts (Chen 2008:38), in addition to numerous monosyllabic and even a few trisyllabic ones. Tables of distribution show that some of them were only used in Buddhist material, and others in both Buddhist and non-Buddhist texts, usually with significant differences concerning their frequency of occurrence. Despite the large amount of quantifiers, only very few have a high frequency, e.g., jiēxī 皆悉 and xījiē 悉皆 are clearly the dominating quantifiers in Buddhist texts of that period (for tables of distribution, see Chen 2008:66–69, 73–76). More generally, a huge diversification of adverbal modifiers can be observed (for an exhaustive list of adverbs in a historical perspective, see Hé 1994:1–258).

Changes in language use are disproportionally observable in Buddhist literature, and a number of reasons have been established for this phenomenon (see for example Mair 1994). Among Buddhist texts, usually those including lengthy, narrative passages and dialogues include more “colloquial” features. As such, narrative literature (or narrative passages in other Buddhist genres) such as the jātaka, avadāna, and nidana are of great interest, in addition to the various compilations of Buddhist parables edited during the medieval period:

5. 我是王國中人，與盲父母俱來入山中，學道二十餘年，未曾為虎狼、毒蟲所害，今便為王所射殺。

Wǒ shì wángguó zhōng 1sg cop king.country middle rén, yǔ máng fùmǔ person with blind father.mother jù lái rù shān zhōng, together come enter mountain middle xué dào èr-shí yú nián, wèicéng study way 20 more year never.ever wèi hǔ láng, dú chóng suǒ-jiàn cov tiger wolf poison animal part.part hài, jīn biàn wèi wáng suǒ hurt now then cov king part shè-shā. shoot-dead

‘I am a person from this kingly realm, having come together with my blind parents to enter the mountains (i.e., pursue ascetic practices); we have studied the Way for more than twenty years, and have never ever been hurt by tigers, wolves, or poisonous beasts; today, however, I have been shot dead by the King.’ (T.3, no.174, 437a)

In the translation of T.175, 442c (jīn biàn wèi wáng jiàn suǒ shè-shā zhī 今便為王箭所射殺之), there is an additional zhī 之; this is an interesting (and not unusual) case of a redundant usage of the 3rd person object pronoun zhī in a passive construction. It follows after the complex verb shè-shā ‘shoot dead’ despite shā being already “passivized” by the construction [wéi + agent + suǒ 所 + passivized verb]; and, indeed referring back to the patient which is the speaker himself! The example sentences also feature the EMC passive marker suǒ-jiàn 所見 (more common in early Buddhist translations, e.g., the Lotus sūtra translation of Dharmarakṣa; see Karashima 1998, 435–436, Karashima 2001, 261; Ōta 1988, 54).

4. Accumulative and Inflative Features

In Early Medieval Chinese, and, to an even higher degree, in Late Medieval Chinese texts, one can often observe a certain “inflation” of grammatical markers and functions. On the one hand, a vast amount of grammatical markers have accumulated throughout the various periods of language development and they often co-appear in the very same Late Medieval Chinese text. These are sometimes unevenly distributed according to the structure of a text, e.g., the narrative passages in historiographical texts show markers typical for Literary Chinese
and Buddhist Hybrid Chinese, whereas in the dialogues vernacular markers will dominate. In some texts, obviously a “dual” system is used, for example for “what”-questions, a system based on hé 何 and compounds, and one based on the vernacular shìmò 什麼, with near-identical meanings and functions. In addition, many markers of the Late Medieval Chinese period absorbed new usages or expanded their functional realm, thereby increasingly overlapping with other function words. For example, the verbs of direction còng 從 ‘from’ and xiàng 向 ‘to, towards’, were occasionally also used for indicating location (‘at; in’). Interestingly, untypical usages of còng were recently also observed in the earliest Buddhist translation literature (còng jiè 從戒 ‘by means of discipline’, reflecting sīlena ‘with discipline’; in the text analyzed by Zacchetti 2007, còng basically had assumed most of the functions of Literary Chinese yǐ 以 ‘with, by means of’).

Another example is the established Early Medieval Chinese interrogative rúhé 如何 ‘how’, which in Late Medieval Chinese is frequently used in syntactic environments preceding the copula shì for purposes of “topic raising” (rúhé shì 如何是 X ‘how about X?’). Some particles such as sentence final yě 也 accumulated so many functions (indicating nominal predicates, emphasis, requests/orders, questions, perfective aspect, etc.) and became so all-pervasive that the informativeness of yě marking decreased, and, by consequence, eventually led to the emergence or proliferation of alternative markers. In addition, rare, highly specialized, or dialect markers could surface in texts. In Chán texts, e.g., lán 簡 ‘block’ and mò 墨 ‘mount a horse’ could mark a body part which is negatively affected by an action: shì biàn mò miàn tuò 師便著面唾 ‘Thereupon, the master spat him into the face’ (ZTJ 2.026).

5. Nouns, Classifiers and Pronouns

In Late Medieval Chinese vernacular texts, the number of polysyllabic nouns increased further. One type of polysyllabic nouns frequently employed consists of reduplicated words, usually functioning as quantifiers (zhòngzhòng 種種 ‘all kinds of; various’), adverbs (rìrì 日日 ‘daily’), or merely indicating plural (zǔzǔ 祖祖 ‘all patriarchs’). Occasionally, AABB patterns are encountered (zhīzhī yěyě 支支葉葉 ‘each branch and each leaf’).

Several semi-grammaticalized nouns (hòu 後 ‘behind’; lǐ 裏 ‘inside’; nèi 內 ‘inside’; qián 前 ‘in front of’; shàng 陞 ‘above’; xià 下 ‘below’; wài 外 ‘outside’; zhōng 中 ‘in the middle of’; zhōngjiān 中間 ‘in between’) are often postposed to NPs, and have the function to localize the event relative to the NP they are attached to. Some of them are regularly attached to abstract nouns (jiào zhōng yì hé wéi lǐ 交中以何為理 ‘What does one regard as propriety in [Buddhist] teaching?’).

The noun phrases can be highly complex and modifying NPs and VPs can be linked to the head by the vernacular particle de 底 (the predecessor of Modern Mandarin de 的) or Literary Chinese zhī 之.

The system of classifiers of Late Medieval Chinese (for an overview, see Anderl 2004, vol. I:113–120) is highly complex, each classifier having an individual history of grammaticalization. Classifier phrases (i.e., num+clf) can be preposed to the noun although post-nominal usage is still frequently encountered. Wáng (1992) is a thorough study of Táng classifiers; basic patterns of classifier usage are treated in Peyraube (1998). Economic treatises among the Dùnhuáng manuscripts contain a wealth of information on classifiers (including extremely rarely used classifiers; for a recent study, see Hóng 2004):

6. 白羅裳壹紫緞壹緋緞壹段色物事三。  
Bái luó yí zhú duàn zǐ shī yī white silk one CLF purple silk one fēichóu yí duàn sè wù sān shí. silk one CLF color thing three CLF ‘One item of white silk gauze, one [item] of purple silk fabric, one [item] of bright red silk, three pieces of coloured things.’  
(ms. Stein 5804)

By the middle of the 10th century, gè 個/簡/個 had developed into the general purpose classifier (replacing EMC méi 夾). In addition to combining with any type of noun, it can co-appear with (demonstrative) pronouns (e.g., nà-gè 那...
One of the most important changes as compared to Literary Chinese is the appearance of 

nouns affixes, e.g., prefixes à-阿 and lǎo-老 (e.g., attached to family names). “Plural suffixes” such as -bèi 輩 and -dēng 等 became commonly used after nouns with human referents. In Early Medieval Chinese there also emerged a small number of affixes which could attach to verbs and adverbs, such as zì-自, probably in the process of building disyllabic compounds, e.g., zìdāng 自當 ‘necessarily, certainly’ (see Karashima 2001). However, the system of affixes did not fully develop before the Late Medieval Chinese period. Besides prefixes à- and lǎo-, commonly used suffixes include -tóu 头 (usually suffixed to concrete nouns, but also to some abstract nouns, localizers, and demonstratives, etc.), -ér 兒 (human and animal reference), and -zǐ 子 (human, animal, and concrete references).

There are also a few instances where suffixes attach to verbs, adverbs, and adjectives (e.g., xiēzi 些子 ‘little-adv’; ruòzi 若子 ‘like this, such’). Some suffixes developed specialized usages. Thus, from the Táng period, -zǐ combined with concrete nouns, where the resulting compound referred to low-status professions, e.g., mén 門 ‘gate’ + zǐ 子 > ménzi 門子 ‘gatekeeper’ (for an overview of LMC affixes, see Anderl 2004, vol. l:125–158). From the 10th century onwards, the vernacular verbal suffix shēng 生 (today still current in the → Wú 吳 dialect) became commonly used with VPs (emphatic: tài gāo shēng 太高生 ‘too lofty!’; ZTJ, 1.150) and especially interrogatives (shimōshēng 是摩生 ‘what does that mean?’). Other verbal affixes and structure words in Late Medieval Chinese include dà- 打 (dà-shuí 打睡 ‘to sleep’); dāng 当 (shi-dāng 試當 ‘to try’); -duàn 斷 (especially used in the biānwén literature, such as wàng-duàn 望斷 ‘to hope’); qí 其 (biānwén literature, such as shuō-qí 說其 ‘to speak’, yǒu-qí 有其 ‘have’); and -yǒu 有 (zhī-yǒu 知有 ‘to know’).

One of the systems which underwent most drastic changes concerns the use of pronouns in medieval Chinese texts. The exact circumstances of this development are no quite clear yet but wǒ 我 had developed into the all-purpose first-person pronoun by Qin times, and has remained so since then. The development of wū 吾 is highly complicated and still a matter of scholarly research. From the Hán period onwards, the usage of wū decreased (or became oblique) in many texts, or is distributed unevenly, depending on the region and/or translator (compare Lokaksema/Zhi Lòujiāchén 支婁迦謙, born 147 CE in T.225, versus Zhi Qiān 支謙, fl. 222–252 in T.226, for example, wǒ fūmǔ 我父母 ‘my father and mother’ (parents): wǒ qīn 吾親 ‘my relatives/parents’; see Zürcher 1996:5). In the Late Medieval Chinese period it reemerged in colloquial Buddhist texts as emphatic first person pronoun (wū shī 吾師 ‘my master’). Shēn 身 (‘body’ → ‘T’) was occasionally used as first-person pronoun from the Six Dynasties period onwards. More rarely, the pronouns of Wú 吳 origin, such as nǒng 濃 ‘T’ (Qin 1996:44), wǒnǐng 我濃 ‘we’ and nǒngjiā 儂家 ‘we’, are used. Among the newly emerging pronouns in Early Medieval Chinese/Late Medieval Chinese, there are also the deprecative mǒuyǐ 某乙 ‘so-and-so’ → ‘T’ and nǚ 奴 ‘slave’ → ‘T’. We also find exotic varieties in the vernacular manuscript literature preserved in Dūnhuáng, such as ànīshēn 阿奴身 ‘pref.slave.body’ → ‘T’ (ms. Pelliot 2187), a self-derogatory first person pronoun for females (‘I, your slave’).

Among the second person pronouns, rǔ 汝 is the most important one. In Late Medieval Chinese, the 2nd person pronoun nǐ 你 and the 3rd person pronoun tā 他 (with occasional usages in pre-Táng times) became current. Tā also developed important modal functions in Late Medieval Chinese and successive periods, an issue not studied thoroughly so far. In Buddhist texts, xiàng 相 ‘each other’ → him/her/it started to be frequently used as 3rd person pronoun, proposed to the transitive verb (“unidirectional” xiàng as opposed to its original reciprocal usage, i.e., ‘each other’).

Besides Literary Chinese/Early Medieval Chinese cí此 and shì是 ‘this’, important demonstrative pronouns in Late Medieval Chinese include zhě 者/zhē 這. Short-range demonstratives can also express modality (usually derogative): zhè ā-shí 這阿師 ‘This monk!’ (ZTJ, 1.152). The common word for ‘here’ is zhè-lǐ 這裏. The most
important long-range demonstrative pronoun is nà 那, usually appearing with gè 個 in adnominal position (nàgè rén 那個人 ‘that person’).

Dozens of new disyllabic interrogative pronouns became common in Early Medieval Chinese. For example, the ancient all-purpose nouns became common in Early Medieval derived compounds such as shímó-řén 什摩人 ‘who’; shímó-chù 什摩處 ‘where’; zuòshímó 作什摩 ‘for what purpose’; wèishímó 為什摩 ‘why’; gèshímó 個什摩 ‘what’s the worry’ [> relax!] [TJ, 1.166]; shímó-shèng 什摩生 ‘what about’; and zuòmó 作摩 ‘how’; zuòmómósheng 作摩生 ‘how; how about’; zuòmó-chù 作摩處 ‘where’). Interrogatives with an antonymic morphemic buildup were occasionally already used in Early Modern Chinese, but increased in usage during later periods, cf., e.g., zào wán 早晚 ‘early-late → when’; duōshào 多少 ‘many-few → how many’; duōshàoshì 多少時 ‘many-few-time → when’, dà-xiǎo 大小 ‘big-small → what size’.

6. Verbs

One of the major developments concerning verb constructions is the consolidation of the copula shì (see also above). Shì appears in a variety of patterns, including emphatically postpositioning and indicating identity X wǒ shèn shì yě 我身是我 ‘X is my very body → is myself’. There is also an expansion of the functions of copulas, such as the marking of alternative questions, e.g., wéi 為 A B; wéi 為 A wéi 為 B ‘is it A or B?’; zuò yǔ xíng wéi tòng bù tóng? 坐與行為同不 同? ‘Is walking and sitting the same or not the same?’ (An Shigào, T.15, no.602, 166a). In these usages, the copula often was compounded with a suffix in Late Medieval Chinese. For a list of dozens of patterns with compounds, see Hé (1994:377–389).

The early medieval period also witnesses the development of complex coverbal (prepositional) constructions, some of them highly specialized (for an overview in a historical perspective, see Hé 1994:259–331 and especially Mǎ 2002), including many disyllabic and even trisyllabic function words. Frequently, the original semantics of the copverb is persevering, as in the following example:

7. 象坐牙死犀坐其角翠為毛故麋鹿為皮肉故。

Xiàng zuò yá sì xì elephant cov tooth die rhinoceros zuò qí jiǎo cuì wéi rhinoceros cov poss horn kingfisher cov máo gù zhānglù wèi pi feather cause deer cov skin ròu gù meat cause

The elephant dies (i.e., is killed) because of his teeth, the rhinoceros because of his horn, the kingfisher bird for his feathers, and the Moschus deer for his skin and meat.’

(T.3, no.175a, 438c–439a)

Note the particular usage of zuò 坐 here, being used like a copverb expressing cause/reason. This usage is mentioned in Jī (2008:1212–1213), and glossed as ‘based on, because of’. The usage seems to be derived from the lexical meaning ‘to be brought to justice’ and ‘to be liable for’ attested for in Qin and Hàn times (see for example Lau and Lüdke 2012). Also note the variatio in the third and fourth phrases, using the more common wéi 為...gù 故 ‘because of...reason’ Literary Chinese construction.

In the following example, lèi 累 appears as part of a serial verb construction, functioning similar to a copverb, based on an extension of meaning ‘to trouble → cause’; the object of the main verb gòngngyǎng is fronted and marked with the copverb yǐ 以:
Among the serial verb constructions, the “disposal form” (fronting the direct object of ditransitive verbs), most importantly the one marked with jiāng 將 (LMC: bǎ 把), has been studied thoroughly. Moreover, the functional realm of the pre-Buddhist yǐ 以為 expanded significantly during that period, and could form various patterns. Based on the semantics ‘to take’, other verbs with similar meaning grammaticalized into this function by analogy, such as qǔ 取 ‘grasp’ (especially in early translation literature; see Cão 2000; Yù 2000:555–556), chí 持 ‘hold’, and zhuó 著/着 ‘attach’. In narrative passages, the object was regularly disposed of in front of the main verbal phrase in constructions with ditransitive verbs. In the example below, the direct object is marked with yǐ 以為, and the indirect object with xiàng 往→→→→→/to (usually with human objects and appearing with a restricted number of verbs indicating speech acts; see Anderl 2004, vol. 1, 334–335). This strategy of “differential object marking” was more commonly used from the Táng periods onwards, but there are occasional examples from earlier periods:

9. 王以啖語向父母說。
   Wáng yǐ Shān yǔ xiàng
   king COV NPR word COV
   fùmǔ shuō.
   father.mother say

   ‘The king told Śyāma’s words to the parents.’
   (T.3, no.175, 443b)

The parallel passage in a somewhat earlier translation shows a more complex and less transparent construction, featuring a redundant (or rather resumptive) third person pronoun zhī 之 after the main verb, referring back to the direct object disposed of by yǐ 以為 (which is followed by a verbal phrase nominalized with suǒ):

10. 王具以啖口中所言向盲父母說之。
    Wáng jù yǐ Shān kǒu-zhōng
    king ADV COV NPR mouth-LOC
    suǒ yán xiàng zhī fùmǔ
    nmlz speak COV blind father.mother
    shuō zhī.
    say 3PL

   ‘The King entirely told the parents what Shānzǐ had said (lit. inside his mouth).’
   (T.3, no.174, 437b)
adding the notion of a request or mild imperative (qìng hēshāng dàpō jiànglái 請和尚打破將來 ‘I request you, Preceptor, to destroy it!’; ZTJ, 5.138). These complex verb phrases can combine with vernacular emphatic sentence finals (bèi sūhàn nòng jiāngqù zài 被俗漢弄將去在 ‘[...] and will be made fun of by vulgar fellows!’; ZTJ, 4.134). Other important complements include -qù 取 (indicating attainment/completion); -què 却 (completion); -zhào/zhe 著/着 (completion or state/progression; e.g., fùgài-zhe 覆蓋著 ‘be covered’). For an overall presentation of verbal complements in the transformation texts/biànwén, see for example Wú (1996:286–311).

7. Markers of Modality and Sentence Final Particles

One of the aspects which underwent most changes, is the modal system. The richness and complexity of modal markers manifests itself usually in the dialogue sections of the narrative passages (for recent studies of modal markers of the Hàn period and EMC, see Meisterernst 2008, 2011, 2012a; for a useful lists of function words of the modal system in a historical perspective, see Hé 1994:476–503; for modal verbs in LMC, see Anderl 2004, vol. I:385–435). The constituents of modal constructions include sentence initials, interrogative pronouns, a great variety of modal verbs, and sentence final particles. Among the last category, a variety of new markers emerged during the 4th and 5th centuries. One example is the vernacular sentence final particle pó 沛, appearing in a Vinaya translation at the end of the 4th century (T.24, no.1464). It marks interrogative sentences and is used like Literary Chinese yé 耶 and hù 乎. Karashima (1997) regards it as the predecessor of sentence finals such as mó 摩/磨 (→ me 磨 in early Mandarin), whereas others see it as phonetically related to bù 不 (Féng 2000; see also Lóng 2004:36–37) in sentence final position. In Early Medieval Chinese, we also see an increasing usage of sentence finals marking yes/no questions, such as bù 不; fǒu 否; and wéi 未, the last one originally being ‘tensed’, maybe (see Harbsmeier 2012:183, fn.20).

In Late Medieval Chinese, the system of sentence final modal particles developed further, including hǎo 好, expressing deontic modality, often interacting with the modal verb xū 須 (xū zìxì hào 須子細好! ‘[You] should be careful!’; ZTJ, 3.039; compare zhe 著/著 with the similar meaning of exhortation: zìxì sìliàng zhe 子細思量著 ‘Think carefully about it!’; ms. Pel- liot 2838) or double-negations. Particles giving emphasis to a statement include lǐ 裏/裡 and zài 在 (zhè-gè rén wèi chūjiā zài 這個人未出家在! ‘This person hasn’t left home yet (i.e., is not a real monk yet’; ZTJ, 2.048). Precursors of interrogative ne 呢 in Late Medieval Chinese include ni 你/儂/尼/呪 (between the Southern Sòng until the Yuán, often replaced by lǐ 裏/里): cí rén ne 此人儂 ‘What about this person?’. ZTJ, 2.146. A related particle is na 那, with occasional Early Medieval Chinese examples (appearing in interrogative questions or conveying suggestive mood/mild imperative; see Zürcher 1996:18–19: bǐqiū nǎ qu 比丘那去 ‘Where did the monk go to?’). Sentence final qù conveys the speaker’s conviction that an event/action will take place (or is desired to be realized) in the future, in addition to giving emphasis to the apodosis in conditional sentences (both factual and hypothetical): yān mó zé wù shèng qù yě 與摩則無聖去也 ‘If that’s the case then sages do not exist’ (ZTJ, 1.082).

Although the study of Medieval Chinese has progressed significantly during the recent years, there are many aspects which need further investigation, and studies have to be systematized and related to each other to a higher degree, in order to gain an understanding of the general development of Medieval Chinese grammar. Non-edited handwritten texts are of paramount importance for the research on Medieval Chinese. First of all, manuscripts dating from the early Hàn have to be further analyzed in order to determine the early use of some Early Medieval Chinese syntactic features. Systematic research on the syntactic features of Dūnhuáng manuscript texts are only in its initial phase, and will occupy linguists for the coming decades. Another important topic for future research will be early Buddhist translation literature, including comparative studies with Indic parallel texts. Last but not least, the relation between language and genre (and the genre constraints on language expression) will
need much more detailed studies in order to understand how features of Medieval Chinese language were committed to a written form.

**Bibliography**

**Primary Sources**


Dūnbō: Dūnhuáng manuscripts preserved at the Dūnhuáng bówùguǎn 敦煌博物館. Pelliot: Dūnhuáng manuscripts preserved at the Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Stein: Dūnhuáng manuscripts preserved at the British Library.


Anderl, Christoph, ed., Thesaurus Literaturae Buddhicae [An annotated selection of Buddhist Narratives Along the Silk Route: Dynamics of Text Corpora and Image Programs], Leiden: Brill, forthcoming, [Page numbers refer to the draft version].


Fēng Chúntiān 冯春田, Yīwēn dàicí 'zuòwù' 'shìwù' de xíngchéng 疑问代词‘作勿’‘是勿’的形式 [The formation of the interrogative pronoun zuòwù and shìwù], Zhōngguó yìwén 中国语文 2, 2006, 135–141.


Guó Xiǎlìng 郭锡良, “Guānyú xìcì ‘shì’ chǎnshēng dúdzì hě láiyuán lùnzhèng de jǐdiǎn rènshí 关于系词‘是’产生时代和来源论争的几点认识” [Several insights concerning the debate on the period


Liǔ Shírù 刘世儒, "Wèi-Jìn Nànbèi cháo gōng pǐ lǎncè yànyú 魏晉南北朝宮_personal quantity word research" [Study on the individual classifiers of the Wèi-Jin and Northern and Southern Dynasties periods], *Zhōngguó yìwéi 中国语文* 10/1, 1961, 26–20.


Lóng Guófú 龙国富, *Yào-Qín yìjīng zhùcí yánjiū 姚秦 繁经助词研究* [Research on the function words of translated sūtras of the period from 351 to 394], Chǎngshā 长沙: Hùnān shīfān dáxué 湖南师范大学出版社, 2004.


Christoph Anderl