

Philosophical Interpretations of Spells in the Imperial Chinese Buddhism

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Abstract : The spells in Chinese Buddhism are often regarded by current scholarship as syllables with mystical power, as a ritual and practice of oral chanting, or as texts engraved on cultural relics. This study hopes to point out that the spell as a kind of behavior and material also provokes the believers to interpret its soteriology with various Buddhist doctrines and philosophies. It will analyze Mahāvairocana Tantra which is the main classic of the tradition regarded by the academic circles as 'Esoteric Buddhism', two annotations of these scriptures composed in the Tang and Liao Dynasty respectively, as well as some works of monks and lay Buddhists in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties. It aims to illustrate that spells in Chinese Buddhism are not simply magical voices and the words engraved on the cultural relics; they have also enriched the doctrines and thoughts of Chinese Buddhism. Their nature and soteriological methods are far more abundant than current academic circles have revealed.

Keywords : spell, Chinese Buddhism, philosophy, Buddhist doctrines

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