

From Abhidhamma to Abhidharma: Early Buddhist Scholasticism in India,  
Central-Asia, and China

“Kuiji's Abhidharmic Recontextualization of Chinese Buddhism”

Weijen Teng, Dharma Drum Buddhist College, Taiwan

Abstract:

This paper studies Kuiji's 窺基 employment of theories of Abhidharma as a methodology for interpreting and explaining some of the Mahāyāna Buddhist thoughts and tries to understand what it meant for Kuiji to do so in the context of Chinese Buddhist exegetical tradition. In this study I found that Kuiji's employment of Abhidharma was one of his exegetical strategies to recontextualize Chinese Buddhism, that is, to set Chinese understanding of Buddhism aright by reorienting it toward Indian Buddhism.

The purpose of this study, along with my other study on Kuiji's exegetical methodology, is to reveal a significant yet unnoticed aspect of Kuiji's contribution to the Chinese Buddhist scholasticism. As the study hopes to demonstrate, Kuiji, the alleged predecessor of Xuanzang's legacy, is not a mere promoter of a Yogācāra Buddhism, but, in my view, more importantly, a visionary who tried to construct a more scholastic and rigorous methodological foundation for Chinese Buddhist intellectual practice.