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*OPTIONALITY AND DEFINING THE GRAMMATICAL CATEGORIES IN CHINESE*

*The article views the factors and patterns of optionality of the grammatical markers of verbs and nouns in Chinese. The specific type of grammatical paradigm, in which the unmarked (neutral) form in certain conditions can convey the meaning inherent to any marked form accounts for the irregular distribution of the formatives, but the actual degree of their optionality may be greatly exaggerated. The functioning of the neutral and marked forms is subject to a multilevel complex of mutually related factors, such as semantic class, morphological composition, syntactic structure of the VP, logical stress, modality, prosodic factors, etc. The whole range and the relative influence of these factors have not been thoroughly explored yet, which, together with the multifunctional, cross-category nature of the formatives present a challenge to the defining of the grammatical categories in Chinese in the context of the Indo-European linguistic tradition.*