

## THE ORIGIN OF THE ADJECTIVAL AND ADVERBIAL “MULAOLAO” IN WU CHINESE

Huayun Wang<sup>1,2</sup> Jianguo Xiong<sup>1</sup> Cenhong Luo<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Zhejiang University of Finance and Economics, Hangzhou

<sup>2</sup>Jiangsu Normal University, Xuzhou


### ABSTRACT

The word *mulaolao* (木佬佬) in Wu Chinese first appeared in written documents published during the period of the former Republic of China. It originated in Hangzhou dialect and spread to other regions such as Ningbo, Taizhou, Jinhua, and Shanghai. In Hangzhou dialect, *mulaolao* serves both adjectival and adverbial purposes, and it is believed to have derived from the expressive adjective *manlaolao* (蛮老老). In *manlaolao*, the suffix -*laolao* (老老) intensifies the degree of a state or property and is written as “佬佬” due to its uncertain etymology. The *man* (蛮) part originally meant “rude and unreasonable” or “doughty” but has evolved to also mean

---

**Acknowledgements** This paper represents a significant milestone achievement of the major project “The Interaction between Gan and Mandarin Chinese over the Past 600 Years: Historical Tracking, Current Investigation, and Corpus Construction” (Grant No. 18ZDA297), funded by the National Social Science Fund of China. We would like to extend our heartfelt appreciation to Prof. Zhiyun Cao, Prof. Weihui Wang, Prof. Shanjia Cui, Prof. Xiaoyu Zeng, Prof. Wei Wang, and Prof. Zihui Wu for their unwavering support and guidance. We are deeply grateful to our main pronunciation collaborators: Mr. Aquan Zhao, 75, worker; Mr. Zhenrong Yan, 72, worker; Mr. Tao Shan, 45, office worker; Ms. Chenyin Yang, 47, teacher; Mr. Renfei Gao, 25, office worker; and Ms. Bingling Xie, 33, teacher. The exceptional dedication and contributions by these and other collaborators in investigating relevant dialects have been instrumental in the success of this research. Lastly, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to the anonymous expert reviewers from JCL for their invaluable feedback and expert insights. We would like to dedicate this paper to the 50th anniversary celebration of Zhejiang University of Finance and Economics.

**Cenhong Luo** (罗岑弘; corresponding author) [icefire0434@163.com]; School of Humanities and Communication, Zhejiang University of Finance and Economics, No. 18, Xueyuan Street, Xiasha Higher Education Park, 310018, Hangzhou, Zhejiang, China;

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-7117-6264>

## 吴语形容词、副词“木佬佬”溯源

汪化云<sup>1,2</sup> 熊建国<sup>1</sup> 罗岑弘<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>浙江财经大学

<sup>2</sup>江苏师范大学

### 摘要

吴语的“木佬佬”一词，民国以降始见于书面，源头在杭州方言，扩散到了宁波、台州、金华、上海等地。杭州方言的“木佬佬”是形容词/副词，当来自形容词生动形式“蛮老老”：词缀“老老”表示程度极深，因词源不明被记作“佬佬”；“蛮”由“蛮横/强悍”义引申为“多”义，轻读促化而被记作同音的“木”。形容词“木佬佬”使用普遍，在状语位置上虚化为副词而后合音为“冒”。新派使用副词“木佬佬”较少。

### 关键词

木佬佬 溯源 促化 合音 冒