

The Shū Traditions and Philosophical Argument in Early China

1. Introduction: What are the Shu traditions: Situating the problem?

Lecture One highlights methodological concerns. To this day, students of early China often read China's past through an imperial lens. Inevitably this leads to distorted conclusions, especially with regard to the textual condition of the time. Imperial labels are all too often imposed on textual materials and taken as a historical reality, rather than understood as retrospectively devised concepts, used, for instance, in the context of libraries and as means of knowledge organisation. Albeit implicitly, such take on antiquity assumes the consistency of a model text. Generic references to cultural institutions—Songs (*shī* 詩); Documents (*shū* 書); Divination practices (*yì* 易); Rites and ritual propriety (*lǐ* 禮); Music (*yuè* 樂); Chronicles (*chūnqiū* 春秋)—are thus accepted as proof of the stability of the canon at the time. Such conclusions about Chinese antiquity should be questioned.

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KEYWORDS AND QUESTIONS

'Dialogic principle' (Mikhail Bakhtin, 1895–1975): a discourse is itself always a 'collage of quotations' and so the very nature of discourse is that it is fundamentally intertwined with other discourses.

'Intertextuality': processes that enable the commemorative actions which link the knowledge of cultures in literary and non-literary form, past and present. (Lachmann 301)

Schnapp 2013: 2 poses the intriguing epistemological question about the relationship between 'oral tradition, monument, object, and text' in the materialisation of the past.

The presentation of Songs (*shī* 詩); Documents (*shū* 書); Divination practices (*yì* 易); Rites and ritual propriety (*lǐ* 禮); Music (*yuè* 樂); Chronicles (*chūnqiū* 春秋) in:

- "*Jūnzǐ wéi lǐ" 君子為禮
- "*Liú dé" 六德

- “*Xìng zì mìng chū” 性自命出 and “*Xìng qíng lùn” 性情論
- “*Yǔ cóng” 語叢 1

2. The “Zīyī” and Shū traditions: What is going on?

To approach the nature of the Shū traditions during the Warring States period it is useful, as a first step, to see how they were used, explicitly, in a well-described text-environment. In this lecture I shall therefore explore the ways references to Shū traditions occur by name in the highly structured text environment of “Zīyī” 緇衣.

With its stand-alone units of thought that each present an isolated concern, the context-dependent text (Meyer 2011) “Zīyī” (Black Robes) is ideal for this task. The units are structured in a uniform manner. They each contain four voices, a statement by a—or *the*—master (Confucius), followed by phrases from the cultural lore of the day, mostly Shī and Shū, connected by an authorial voice. The different sources do not develop an argumentative pattern but feature co-ordinately in a formulaic reference structure that make “Zīyī” appear much like an archive storing phrases of cultural import.

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3. Can Shu be a genre?

In this lecture I seek to deepen my conceptualisation of Shū as a genre by primary reference to the Qīnghuá manuscript text “Hòu Fù” 厚父 (Uncle Hou). In “Zīyī” we already see segmental speech components paired with changing referential structures. The analysis of “Hòu Fù” takes this further by showing the profoundly modular built-up of what we later come to experience as Shū texts. It shows how conceptual communities revert to a standard repertoire of the pool of cultural capital, which they use according to certain ‘rules’, associative links that determine how Shū genre is employed at the time. By laying bare the deep structures of meaning production and argumentation in Shū genre the discussion casts into sharper relief the ways old cultural capital is refashioned in new problem space, lending weight to sociopolitical and philosophical thinking in the present. The analysis further suggests that taking “Hòu Fù” as ‘a lost chapter of the *Shàngshū*’, as is done repeatedly, is methodologically mistaken.

READING SUGGESTIONS

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Mèngzǐ “Liáng Huì Wáng xià”.

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KEYWORDS

‘cultural capital’ and ‘repertoire’: cultural capital points to the higher level of value. The repertoire is, in other words, the currency of the cultural capital, its actual, modular, representation.

4. One mould, two arguments: Reading "Gu ming" and "Bao xun"

Drawing on the previous discussion, this lecture aims to show how in the Shū genre solidified moulds of argumentation enable contrasting conceptual groups to link their sociopolitical and philosophical stance to a wider discourse. Framing structures are key to this. They serve as blueprints that determine how an argument is put. "Gù mìng" 顧命 (Testimentary Charge) of the *Shàngshū* and "*Bǎo xùn" 保訓 (Prized Instructions) of the *Qīnghuá* manuscripts serve as the prime examples of the analysis.

When reading "*Bǎo xùn" through "Gù mìng" we find reduplicative text patterns in the narrative framing devices that channel the ways a certain event is told. By relating a historical—or outright invented—event to such moulds, the narrativised event is transposed to further uses in different contexts and arguments. It no longer just represents the reported event itself; it now becomes a normative *type of event*. By taking its place in the narrative continuum of the textual tradition, this normative type now defines how to frame historical narratives more broadly. Recontextualisation is crucial here, with different contents to fill such moulds of argumentation. Once established, the frame thus shapes the discursive terms in which communities conduct their debates and claim their authority over the past for ends in the present. The frame thus enables a community to archive quasi-historical material in the target text. The text no longer just stores memory – it constructs memory.

When text is situated in a particular setting it is by way of ‘entextualisation’. This means certain elements are taken from other contexts (they thus become ‘decontextualised’) and placed in a new environment, the ‘target text’ (or argument). To move such elements and

integrate them in that new environment does not say, however, that they are simply transposed from A to B. Rather, entextualisation always means that the entextualised elements themselves take on a new reality within their changed environment. Similar patterns also apply when stand-alone texts (or arguments) circulate among different communities: either they become modular in their use, ever in need of contextualising structures *outside the text* to adapt them meaningfully to the needs of its conceptual communities; or they develop narrative structures where adaptation happens *within the text* to make them fit the needs of the communities. Such forms of text permutation may come about in many ways, and I shall depict some of such cases in this lecture.

READING SUGGESTIONS

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SOURCE MATERIALS

Gù Jiégāng 顧頡剛 and Liú Qǐyú 劉起鈞. 2005. *Shàngshū jiào shì yì lùn* 尚書校釋譯論. 4 vols. Běijīng: Zhōnghuá (vol. 4).

Qīnghuá Manuscripts (vol 5): "*Bǎo xùn".

KEYWORDS

Argumentative mould

5. The Duke of Zhou and King Wu

The focus of this lecture lies on the different textualisations of the tale in which Zhōu Gōng 周公, the famous Duke of Zhou, carries out a divination when his ruler—King Wu (Zhōu Wǔwáng 周武王, r. 1049/1045–1043 BC)—falls ill, and subsequently stores the record of his divination in a metal bound casket. The discussion will show how different communities use a known story by adapting it to their needs. The texts discussed are the received "Jīn téng" 金縢 (Metal-bound Casket) and its manuscript counterpart "Zhōu Wǔ Wáng yǒu jí" 周武王有疾, short for "Zhōu Wǔ Wáng yǒu jí Zhōu Gōng suǒ zì yǐ dài wáng zhī zhì" 周武王有疾周公所自代王之志 (The record of the Duke of Zhou putting himself forward in the place of the king when King Wu was suffering from illness).

The different textualisations of the tale present a stable set of key elements reproduced in both texts. However, the story they present differs profoundly. Right from the beginnings, the received "Jīn téng" confirms the duke's faithful intentions towards the House of the Zhōu. Not so the manuscript text. While "Jīn téng" leaves no doubt about the actual role of the duke in the reported events, the manuscript text is composed in such a manner that the duke's faithful intentions become apparent only towards the end of the text. The manuscript text thus plays with the presentation of the persona of the duke,

inviting suspicion on the part of the text recipient about his true intentions. The two textualisations of the tale clearly serve different ends.

While the received text has all the necessary ingredients to serve as a token for the mutual obligations of ruler and ruled, the manuscript text is the product of Eastern-Zhōu communities. It puts the materialisation of the text at a time when the House of Zhōu ruled the different territories only nominally, with local lords wilfully assuming the royal title of 'king' and serving the House of Zhōu just as suited their needs. This adds a whole new sociopolitical dimension to the manuscript text. While "Jīn téng" shows all the characteristics of a—much later—commemoration of the events, taking a rather distanced stance, the manuscript text surprises by its political urgency.

READING SUGGESTIONS

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Qīnghuá Manuscripts, volume 1, 14–17 for the photographic reproduction of the slips; 157–162 for the transcription of the text and annotations

KEYWORDS

The term 'textualisation' as used in this book is inspired by its use in Nagy 1996 with the caveat that I use it not just for 'composition-in-performance' (Nagy 1996: 40)

6. Shu genre and manuscript cultures

In this lecture I shall reflect on the dialectical relationship of the physical availability of written sources and flows of information, which lead to structurally novel features of text production in Shū genre. The role of the king changes in the texts of Shū traditions, as he becomes increasingly one of many actors; we find increased forms of narrativisation, as speech is reduced to a bare minimum (or disappears entirely); novel forms of focalisation occur, leading to the dramatisation of an event; shifts in the perspective of a narrator enable the portrayal of an 'extended event', covering a lengthy period of time.

These developments point to the growing sophistication of literary culture that gave rise to changed forms of text production and reception. Although the social setting of Shū often remains tied to acts of oral text delivery, at the time of consolidating manuscript cultures some Shū texts make for a good read. They mark a clear departure from the isolated speech in the traditions of Shū, adding to these texts layers of complexity, making them increasingly become items of literature and philosophy.

READING SUGGESTIONS

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"*Yǐn zhì" 尹至 and "Fù Yuè zhī mìng" 傅說之命: *Qīnghuá Manuscripts*

KEYWORDS

Manuscript cultures

7. Excursus: Shu and philosophical discourse

The conclusions of the previous lectures suggest that with the narrativisation of cultural capital in maturing manuscript cultures also comes its literalisation. The texts are not just becoming increasingly complex. They become literature, increasingly compelling in the ways they make their point, even if they were initially intended for use by a limited audience of insiders only.

Still, despite clear pushes towards repeated formulations, stabilising text clusters, and even the literalisation of a 'historical' event, the picture gained from the Qīnghuá manuscripts is overwhelmingly that of text fluidity, not stability, let alone fixity. However, there are exceptions to this. Of these most striking is "*Mìng xùn" 命訓, and this lecture will look at the dialectics of rule as outlined in the political philosophy of this manuscript text and its remarkably close counterpart in the *Yì Zhōushū*. "*Mìng xùn" develops a complex philosophy of rule wherein political power is produced, and reinforced, dialectically from the large to the small and vice versa.

READING SUGGESTIONS

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SOURCE MATERIALS

Yì Zhōushū, titled "Mìng xùn jiě" 命訓解: *Yì Zhōushū huìjiào jí zhù, juǎn* 1, Ch. 2: 20–40

Qīnghuá "**Mìng xùn**" 命訓: *Qīnghuá Manuscripts*

KEYWORDS

'Ancient quarrel' in western thought: the poetic form of doing philosophy.

8. Where does this leave us?

The final lecture closes the analysis with a discussion of the nature of the political argument in early China. It is shown as a creative space of cultural production within the accepted

framework of tradition. This space, defined by the confines of cultural normativity as set by the parameters of Shū genre allows contrasting communities, ancient and modern, to formulate novel, even heterodox, positions of sociopolitical and philosophical import.

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KEYWORDS

Multiple philosophies