
Scholar's Corner: Confucianism in and for the Modern World

A Critical Rereading of Ancient Classics: *The Harmony between Excavated and Transmitted Texts*

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I. A Brief Overview of the Studies on the Excavated Texts from Early China

At the center of the debate between “doubting the past” (*yigu* 疑古) and “explaining the past” (*shigu* 釋古) in the study of Chinese ancient history, which emerged after the end of the Qing dynasty, there was a methodological difference as to how to interpret transmitted ancient Chinese texts. However, the debate entered a new phase in the twentieth century as a large number of paper documents dating from the Northern and Southern dynasties to the Tang dynasty were discovered in Dunhuang, a town in northwest China. Since most of China’s transmitted texts date from the Song and the following dynasties, when woodblock printing became affordable and widespread, a comparative study between the newly excavated texts and the transmitted texts would be of great academic value. Unfortunately, however, the period when the Dunhuang documents were written is quite distant from the Spring and Autumn and the Warring States periods and the Qin and Han dynasties, when most of the Chinese classics originated.

However, in the 1970s, a number of important manuscripts written on wood, bamboo, and silk were discovered in various parts of China,

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offering the possibility of filling in many of the gaps in the ancient Chinese history as well as in the history of Chinese classics. The discovery of large numbers of administrative and military documents in Dunhuang and Juyan¹ in the northwestern border region provided much help in identifying the true features of the administrative system of the Qin and Han dynasties. In contrast, a significant amount of ideological and legal texts were discovered mainly in Hubei and Hunan provinces. Among them were texts of strategy (such as *Sunzi bingfa* 孫子兵法; “The Art of War”), philosophy (such as *Laozi*), law, medicine, mathematics, and geomancy dating from the Spring and Autumn and the Warring States periods to the Qin and Han dynasties. Moreover, the *Guodian chumu zhujian* 郭店楚墓竹簡 (The Bamboo Slips from the Chu Tomb at Guodian) and the *Shanghai bowuguan cang zhanguo chuzhushu* 上海博物館藏戰國楚竹書 (Shanghai Museum Bamboo Strips), both of which were discovered in 1993–1994, contain a large number of ideas that can neither be found in the study of ancient characters nor in the study by the “hundred schools of thought” (*zhuzi baijia* 諸子百家). Therefore, it can be said that the discovery of these two documents ushered in a turning point in the study of ancient Chinese culture and thought. This trend continued into the twenty-first century with the continuous discoveries of excavated texts. In particular, the discovery of the *Yuelu shuyuan cang Qin jian* 岳麓書院藏秦簡 (Qin Slips Housed at the Yuelu Academy) in 2007 provided information on not only the laws but also the social circumstances of Emperor Shihuang’s Qin dynasty. There are also other representative achievements in this regard, such as the *Qinghuadaxue cang zhanguo zhujian* 清華大學藏戰國竹簡 (Warring States Bamboo Slips in the Collection of Tsinghua University), a large batch of bamboo slips collected by Tsinghua University in 2008, and the excavated texts acquired and organized by Peking University in 2009–2010.

In this way, various ancient texts have been excavated in China from the 1970s to the present, and, especially since the 1990s, it has been possible to confirm the existence of transmitted texts written

¹ They are referred to as Dunhuang Hanjian 敦煌漢簡 (“Han texts found in Dunhuang”) and Juyan Hanjian 居延漢簡 (“Han texts found in Juyan”), respectively.

during the Warring States period. Thus, it became possible to skip 2,000 years and see the texts circulated at the time. Encounters between excavated texts and transmitted texts took place in various ways. Initially, in China, research of ancient classics was conducted only in the relevant field or subject, but the importance of new research methodologies has been on the rise as the proportion of newly excavated texts increased and accordingly the research focused on transmitted texts, which had had no counterparts for comparison in the past, inevitably began to be replaced with new methods of research.

II. The “Method of Dual Attestation” Proposed by Wang Guowei

“Ancient classics” are the landmark works that have been recognized for their value by many people over a long period of time and thus regarded as *exemplum virtutis*. In the East Asian world, classical works existed in the form of inscriptions on bamboo and wooden slips or silk even before the use of paper. A plethora of works inscribed on these writing materials have been passed down as classics in China and East Asia to this day, and it can be said that the recognition and reinterpretation of their meanings represent a new perception toward the future. For this reason, the development of Classical Studies in East Asia has not been limited to a specific country or region, but has progressed without interruption through exchanges and communications within the region, transcending the boundaries of time and region. If we examine the changes in Classical Studies through Chinese history, we can trace the origin of “classics” in East Asia to the literature written by the so-called “hundred schools of thought” (*zhuzi baijia* 諸子百家) of the Spring and Autumn Warring States period (770–221 BCE) and the historians and thinkers of the Qin and Han dynasties (221 BCE–220 CE). These classics were arranged and published by many later scholars over a long period of time and have now been passed down to us. For example, *Lunyu* 論語 (The Analects) compiled by Zhu Xi 朱熹 and *Laozi* 老子 (Book of Master Lao), annotated

by Wang Bi 王弼, are representative examples. However, many later scholars only assert their own interpretations and opinions regarding the classics compiled and edited by their predecessors, without realizing that the contents of these texts can be different from those of what was written by the original authors. This is because it is not easy to find other texts with the same contents that can be compared with the currently available versions of the classics.

The authenticity and reliability of the traditional firm belief that the texts of the classics remain unchanged gradually began to be questioned due to the influence of the Evidential Learning (Kaozhengxue 考證學) and the Doubting Antiquity Movement (Yigupai 疑古派) of the late Qing dynasty. Among these changes in academic atmosphere, the discovery and reinterpretation of different versions of classics were proposed in earnest as the original texts of the classics hidden “underground” began to surface in their true form “on paper,” drawing attention from the public. A representative example is the discovery and organization of various early Chinese writings inscribed on bamboo and wooden slips, which have been excavated from various parts of China since the twentieth century. Wang Guowei 王國維, a scholar in the late Qing dynasty and early Republic of China, was a representative scholar who attempted to freshly explore the texts already passed down “on paper” through the texts newly discovered “underground.” Presenting a new research method called the “method of dual attestation” (*erchong zhengjufa* 二重證據法) in the introduction to his *Gushi xinzheng* 古史新證 (New Criticisms of Ancient History) (1925), he mentioned as follows:

We are so fortunate to have been born in this period that we can have access to the new underground materials in addition to the existing materials on paper. From these materials, my generation has obtained with certainty the evidence to supplement and correct the materials on paper, and we can further prove certain parts of the ancient writings to be true records entirely.² (Wang [1925] 1994, 2)

² 吾輩生于今日，幸于紙上之材料外，更得地下之新材料。由此種材料，我輩固得據以補整紙上之材料，亦得證明古書之某部分全為實錄

Needless to say, the “ancient writings” mentioned here by Wang Guowei refer to the transmitted texts of the classics. Also, in 1925, Wang Guowei gave a lecture titled “Scholarly Knowledge of New Discoveries in China in the Past Twenty to Thirty Years” at the Tsinghua University at the request of its student council, in which he said, “From ancient times, most new scholarly knowledge has arisen from new discoveries” (Wang [1925] 1996, 175). The “new materials” that he also mentioned as worth noting include the inscribed oracle bones excavated from the Yinxu 殷墟 site in Anyang, Henan province, the writings on wooden tablets from the Han and Jin dynasties discovered around Dunhuang and the Western Regions, books and texts from the Six Dynasties and the Tang dynasty found in the Dunhuang area, and books published since the Yuan and Ming dynasties. His argument, that the discovery of new primary source materials can develop into a discipline enriched with new meanings and values, is equivalent to the claim that the study of classics in China should develop into a new discipline through the study of new materials. However, Wang Guowei’s outstanding academic prescience and foresight had yet to come through under the circumstances where there hadn’t been much progress in the excavation of new source materials from the “underground.” However, as the organization of the excavated source materials began to go into full swing after the 1970s, Wang Guowei’s predictive “method of dual attestation” began to gradually come to fruition, and accordingly the need for a new reading of the “classics” was raised. As is well known, in 1973, a wide variety of valuable grave goods were excavated from Tomb No. 3 of Mawangdui 馬王堆 site—the tomb of Li Cang, a ruler of the Changsha kingdom during the reign of Emperor Wen of Han (r. 180–157 BCE)—located in Changsha, Hunan province. What particularly attracted the attention of the public was the silk texts (*boshu* 帛書) of various characteristics,³ the most notable among which are *Laozi* 老子 (Book of Master Lao), *Zhanguo zongheng jiashu* 戰國縱橫家書 (Works from the School of Diplomacy during the Warring States Period; hereafter, *Warring States Diplomatic Works*), and *Zhouyi* 周易 (Book of Changes). While the bibliographical significance of

³ Qiu (2014) contains their actual photos.

these unearthed silk texts is obvious and already known, the structure of the *Book of Master Lao* in the newly discovered silk texts, which is divided into two parts *Dejing* 德經 (The Classic of Power) and *Daojing* 道經 (The Classic of Virtue), is slightly different from that of the existing version of the *Book of Master Lao* (Chen 2018). In addition, although prior to the discovery of the *Warring States Diplomatic Works*, there had been controversy over whether the contents described in *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策 (Stratagems of the Warring States) were true, the controversy was over after the same contents and sentences as the *Stratagems of the Warring States* were identified in the newly discovered *Warring States Diplomatic Works*. Furthermore, *Warring States Diplomatic Works* provided the basis for correcting the descriptive errors in *Shiji* 史記 (Historical Records) by Sima Qian 司馬遷 and the *Stratagems of the Warring States*. Although it is obvious to say, comparative studies between excavated and transmitted texts can provide valuable data that make it possible to correct errors in the historical books that have been transmitted to the present. In the following chapter, I will seek to verify this by examining some contents of *The Analects* and *Historical Records*.

III. The Bamboo-Strip Editions of the *Lunyu* (The Analects)

Recently excavated wooden- and bamboo-strip manuscripts have enabled a more diverse understanding of the transmitted texts, which can be illustrated by several examples of excavated texts. The first example to be considered is *The Analects*. In 1973, more than 660 bamboo slips of *The Analects*, which are so-called “Dingzhou lunyu zhujian 定州論語竹簡” (*The Analects* Bamboo Strips from the Han Tomb at Dingzhou; hereafter, “Dingzhou *Analects*”), were unearthed from Tomb No. 40 in Bajiaolang village, Dingzhou city, Hebei Province, China,⁴ and in 1997 through the comparative analysis with the existing text of *The Analects*, the textual explanation (*shiwen* 釋文) and collation notes (*jiaokanji* 校勘記) of the canon were published (Hebei Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archeology 1997). Comparable to the

⁴ See Hebei Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archeology (1981).

Dingzhou *Analects*, another notable excavated text of *The Analects* is the “Lelang lunyu zhujian 樂浪論語竹簡” (The Bamboo Slip Version of *The Analects* Discovered in Lelang; hereafter, “Lelang *Analects*”), which was excavated from Tomb No. 364 in Jeongbaek-dong during the construction of Tongil Street in Nangnang 樂浪 (Lelang in Chinese) district, Pyongyang, in the early 1990s. Although no official report has been yet published about the excavation and the bamboo slips, the research results to date, which have been obtained based on one or two photos released by experts, are that these slips are similar to the Dingzhou’s slips in terms of overall form and content (See Lee, Yun, and Kim 2009).⁵ In addition, wooden slips of *The Analects*, dating from the middle of the Former Han dynasty to the early Later Han dynasty, were discovered at the Xuanquanzhi 懸泉置 site near Dunhuang, Gansu province, and the Jianshuijinguan 肩水金關 site in the northern part of Jinta 金塔 county, Gansu province. Moreover, in 2016 more than 5,000 bamboo slips, including those of *The Analects*, *Liji* 禮記 (Book of Rites), and *I Ching* 易經 (Book of Changes), were excavated in Nanchang, Jiangxi province, along with various relics from the Tomb of Liu He 劉賀 (92–59 BCE), who had been formerly the Prince of Changyi (昌邑王) and was dethroned as emperor of the Han dynasty in 74 BCE but was later given the title “Haihunhou 海昏侯” (Marquis of Haihun) (Jiangxi Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology et al. 2016, 75), with those of *The Analects* drawing the most attention.

Among the above-mentioned excavated texts of *The Analects*, the Jinshuijinguan and Haihunhou editions show the most striking difference from the existing transmitted texts of *The Analects*. First, the contents of *The Analects* found in the Jinshuijinguan bamboo slips can be summarized as follows in Table 1 (Conservation and Research Center for Wooden Slips in Gansu, Gansu Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology, et al. 2011–2015).

⁵ See also its Chinese translation: Lee, Yun, and Kim (2011).

Table 1. Identified and Unidentified Passages from *The Analects* in the *Jianshuijinguan hanjian*, vols. 1–5

No.	No. of the Wooden Slip	Textual Explanation	Chapter of <i>The Analects</i>	Source (Page)
1	73EJT31:75	遷怒不貳過不幸短命死矣今	Yongye 雍也	San 參 (221)
2	73EJT31:77	☑於齊冉子爲其母請粟	Yongye 雍也	San 參 (221)
3	73EJT15:20	子曰大伯其可	Taibo 泰伯	Er 貳 (18)
4	73EJT24:802	☑毋遠慮必有近憂☑	Weilinggong 衛靈公	San 參 (27)
5	73EJT24:833	☑曰天何言哉四時行焉萬物生焉☑ 年之喪其已久矣君子三	Yanghuo 陽貨	San 參 (29)
6	73EJT22:6	• 孔子知道之易也易=云省三日子曰此道之美也☑		Er 貳 (94)
7	73EJT31:139	• 子曰自愛仁之至也自敬知之至也☑		San 參 (227)
8	73EJC:607	• 子轅曰九變復貫知言之寡居而俟合憂心操念國之虐子曰念國者操呼衡門之下		Wu 伍 (244)
9	73EJT14:7	• 子曰必富小人也貧小人也必貴小人也賤小人		Er 貳 (9)
10	73EJC:180	☑敬其父則子說敬其兄則弟說敬其君則☑		Wu 伍 (193)
11	73EJT9:58	• 子曰君子不假人君子樂□☑		Yi 壹 (203)
12	73EJT24:104	☑何以復見乎子轅爲之請子曰是☑		Er 貳 (290)
13	73EJH1:58	☑之方也思理自外可以知☑		Si 肆 (255)

In the table above (Table 1), nos. 1–5 are consistent with the passages in the transmitted texts of *The Analects*, while nos. 6–13 cannot be found in the latter texts. By the way, an interesting fact is observed in the analysis of the recently released bamboo strips of *The Analects* discovered in the tomb of Marquis Haihun in Nanchang. Some passages on the slips are as follows:

Slip A: The Master said: “Yong could fulfill the role of ‘facing south’ (being a ruler).” / Zi You became the governor of Wucheng. The Master said, “Have you been able to employ any good people?” / The Master

said: “The wise enjoy the sea, the humane enjoy the mountains. The wise are busy, the humane are tranquil. The wise are happy, the humane are eternal.”⁶ (Jiangxi Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology and the Capital Museum 2016, 186)

Slip B: Confucius knows that it is easy to practice the Way of the king. What is meant by “easy” is that one examines himself critically for three days. Confucius said, “The way of [the king] is beautiful. Why isn’t it practiced?” / Knowing the Way.⁷ (Jiangxi Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology 2016, 61)

The passage on Slip A is consistent in terms of content with that in the chapter “Yongye 雍也” of the transmitted edition of *The Analects*, although the words inside the parentheses are missing as the lower part of the bamboo slip is partially broken. Meanwhile, when the passage on Slip B is compared with the textual explanation of Slip 6 (73EJT22:6) in Table 1, it turns out to be almost the same as the latter. The different characters found in the *Analects* included in the *Jianshuijinguan hanjian* (Table 1) and the Haihunhou *Analects* are: *zhi* 知 and *zhi* 智, *yang* 易 = and *yangyang* 易易, and *sheng* 省 and *zhe* 者. In the slip, the sign “=” is the marker indicating repetition, used to avoid writing the same character twice; therefore, “易=” should be read as “易易,” which means “easy” (Xiao and Zhao 2014, 184–87). The most decisive difference between the Haihunhou edition and the *Jianshuijinguan hanjian* edition of *The Analects* is that while Slip B of the former records the chapter title as “智道” on the reverse, Slip 6 of the latter does not record the title separately.

Considering the statement in the “Yiwenzhi 藝文志” (Treatise on Literature) chapter of the *Hanshu* 漢書 (Book of Han), which says, “The Qi version of *The Analects* (Qilun 齊論) has twenty-two chapters, including the two extra chapters ‘Wenwang 問王’ and ‘Zhidaow 知道’” (齊 二十二篇. 多問王. 知道), it is highly probable that the “Zhidaow” chapter would be included in the Qi version, one of the tree versions

⁶ 子曰, 雍也可使南面 / 子游爲武城宰. 子曰, 女得人爲民乎. / 智者樂水, 仁者樂山. 智者動 仁(者靜 知者樂 仁者壽).

⁷ 孔子智道之易也, 易易云者, 三日. 子曰, 此道之美也, 莫之御也. / 智道.

of *The Analects*, which has been believed to be lost. Of course, it is still too early to conclude because there are various opinions in the academic community about it, but it cannot be denied that there exist variant versions of *The Analects*, not just the Lu 魯 version, which has been passed down in the form of transmitted texts. Therefore, if the existence of various versions of *The Analects* is confirmed through the discovery of its excavated texts, not only bibliographic studies of the transmitted texts of *The Analects* but also new perceptions and studies of Confucianism in general should be expanded.

IV. “Different Records” of the “Same Facts”

In recent China, critical readings of various classics through “different records” of the “same facts,” which cannot be verified in the existing transmitted texts, are being conducted. In this respect, several records in the *Historical Records* can be examined as examples. The first example is the record of the thirty-seventh year of the first Qin emperor in the “Qin shihuang benji 秦始皇本紀” (Basic Annals of the First Qin Emperor), chapter 6 of the *Historical Records*, which describes the stratagem used by Zhao Gao 趙高 and Li Si 李斯 to seize power on the death of Emperor Shihuang by putting the emperor’s youngest son Hu Hai 胡亥 on the throne (See Kim 2017). However, it has been recently found out that, among the bamboo-slip manuscripts of Han dynasty collected at Peking University, the *Zhaozhengshu* 趙正書 (The Book of Zhao Zheng), written on a multistrip manuscript comprising 52 reconstructed bamboo strips, contains different records from those in the *Historical Records* (Peking University Excavated Manuscript Research Center 2015). The book mainly deals with the death of Emperor Shihuang during his fifth tour of Eastern China (in the thirty-seventh year of Emperor Shihuang’s reign) and the process in which Emperor Huhai, the second emperor, ascended the throne and had many masters and ministers executed, thus bringing the empire to ruin, recording the words and deeds of Emperor Shihuang, Huhai, Li Si, Zhao Gao, and Ziyong 子嬰 in the format of dialogues.

The biggest difference between the descriptions in the “Basic Annals of the First Qin Emperor” and *The Book of Zhao Zheng* is that, according to the former, Emperor Shihuang became seriously ill in Pingyuanjin 平原津 and died in Shaqiu Palace while the latter records that the emperor fell ill in Bairen 柏人 and his condition worsened to death, without mentioning the testamentary edict. As is well known, according to the record in the “Basic Annals of the First Qin Emperor,” Emperor Shihuang’s “final edict” was not passed on to his eldest son, Buso 扶蘇, who instead was bestowed death. In contrast, *The Book of Zhao Zheng* records that, as Chief Minister Li Si and Right Prime Minister Feng Quji 馮去疾 earnestly requested the emperor to name Princess Huhai as successor to his throne, the emperor agreed to this. Relevant sentences in the original text are as follows:

Chief Minister Li Si and Right Prime Minister Feng Quji, risking death, said: “We have a long way to go, but we fear that if you make a decision by issuing an edict, the ministers will plot against you in the meantime. So, please appoint your son Huhai as your successor.” The emperor replied, “I approve.”⁸ (Peking University Excavated Manuscript Research Center 2015, 190)

By stating that Huhai’s succession to the throne was decided when Emperor Shihuang approved Li Si’s counsel after consultation with his subjects before his death, this record suggests that the succession was legitimate and not decided as a result of conspiracy as stated in “Basic Annals of the First Qin Emperor.” In relation to this, it is necessary to review the content of the “Qin Ershi yuannian shiyue jiauwu zhaoshu 秦二世元年十月甲午詔書” (Edict Issued on the Jiauwu Day of the Tenth Month of Second Emperor’s First Year), a wooden tablet excavated from Tuzishan Relics No. 9 in Yiyang, Hunan province, in 2013 (See Hunan Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology and Departments of Cultural Relics in Yiyang 2016; Zhang and Zhang 2015; W. Chen 2017; and Sun 2015). This edict, which was promulgated after Huhai ascended to the throne, emphasizes the legitimacy of Huhai’s

⁸ 丞相斯 御史臣去疾昧死頓首言曰, “今道遠而詔期窘(群)臣, 恐大臣之有謀, 請立子胡亥爲代後。” 王曰, “可。”

succession, announces major new political policies in the first year of the emperor, and offers statements to comfort the officials and people of the entire country and to implement virtuous rule (Sun 2015, 18).⁹ Therefore, it can be interpreted that the contents of the edict are consistent with those recorded in *The Book of Zhao Zheng* and that, based on these records, it is highly probable that Emperor Shihuang acknowledged Huhai as the successor to his throne just before his death.¹⁰ In that case, a question can naturally be raised: how to interpret the description in the *Historical Records*, which states that Huhai ascended to the throne through the conspiracy of Li Si and Zhao Gao?

This kind of contradiction is also found in the descriptions in the “Basic Annals of the First Qin Emperor” chapter of the *Historical Records* and the excavated “Yuelu qin jian 岳麓秦簡” (Qin Bamboo Slips Kept in Yuelu Academy).

Sailing down the Yangtze River, he reached the shrine at Mount Xiang. They encountered a great wind, and were almost unable to cross over. The Supreme One asked his scholars of broad learning: “What sort of deity is the Lady of the Xiang?” The scholars of broad learning replied: “We hear that she was the daughter of Yao and the wife of Shun and is buried here.” At that the First Emperor was furious and he made 3,000 convicts cut down all the trees on Mount Xiang, making the mountain naked.¹¹ (“Basic Annals of the First Qin Emperor,” ch. 6 of the *Historical Records*)

On the *jimao* day, fourth month, twenty-sixth year, Chief Ministers Wei Zhuang and Wang Wan received an Imperial decision regarding Mount

⁹ In addition, the legal texts from the reign of the second emperor of the Qin dynasty were discovered, showing that Haihu ruled the Jin dynasty as its second emperor, although his reign was short-lived, lasting only three years (S. Chen 2015, 88–92).

¹⁰ Ma (2017, 231–34) argues that the comprehensive analysis of *Shiji* (Historical Records), *Zhaozhengshu* (The Book of Zhao Zheng), and *Qin Ershi yuannian shiyue jiawu zhaoshu* (Edict Issued on the Jiawu Day of the Tenth Month of Second Emperor’s First Year) elucidates that Huhai was Qin Shihuang’s legal successor is more consistent with historical facts.

¹¹ 浮江, 至湘山祠。逢大風, 幾不得渡。上問博士曰 “湘君何神?” 博士對曰 “聞之, 堯女, 舜之妻, 而葬此。” 於是始皇大怒, 使刑徒三千人皆伐湘山樹, 赭其山。

Xiang from the emperor: "From the fact that I myself have pacified the All-under-Heaven; I personally comfort (the area) within the seas; I have traveled south reaching to Cangwu and have approached and crossed the waters of (Lake) Dongting, and have climbed Mount Xiang and Mount Ping; the wilds of the trees and woods are beautiful; and I have gazed on the trees and woods of Mount Luocui and southward and spied from afar that they are also beautiful. They should all be forbidden and not cut down."¹² ("Qin Bamboo Slips Kept in Yuelu Academy," vol. 5, slips 056–057)

As seen above, the transmitted text "Basic Annals of the First Qin Emperor" of the *Historical Records* and the excavated text "Qin Bamboo Slips Kept in Yuelu Academy" contain contradictory descriptions about cutting down trees on Mount Xiang. In this manner, when encountering conflicting records of the same events in different classical sources, researchers or readers cannot help but feel at a loss as to how to interpret them. However, it is almost impossible to deny the veracity of the contents of the classics that have been passed down in the form of transmitted texts, such as *The Analects and Historical Records*, which we have read without any doubt till now, or even if we had doubts, there have not been any other texts to be compared against for revision. This is a truly embarrassing problem in the study of classics. Then, should we judge the authenticity of the contents of the classics that we have read without any doubt till now? Or should we come up with another interpretation? This is an unexpected problem that has come up in the interpretation of transmitted texts, as the discovery of excavated texts has been continuously increasing.

V. Suggestions: New Methods of Reading Classics

By way of conclusion, I would like to suggest new methods of critically reading classics in two directions. First, I suggest deviating from the

¹² 廿六年四月己卯丞相臣狀·臣綰受制相(湘)山上, "自吾以天下已并, 新撫海(海)內, 南至蒼梧, 凌涉洞庭之水, 登相(湘)山·屏山。樹木野美, 望駱翠山以南樹木□見亦美, 其皆禁勿伐。

conventional text-centered method of reading classics and rather reading and studying classics based on interdisciplinary methodology, which needs to develop into a new discipline of a comprehensive nature. In general, if one starts reading classics as a researcher, it usually begins with admission to a relevant department at a university or a program provided by a professional institution. However, since most of these courses or programs are taught at a discipline-based academic level, they inevitably fail to provide sufficient learning and understanding of the whole society of the times when the classics were written. If we remember that classics are also products of “their” times, reading and study of classics should be conducted on the premise that they should entail a general understanding and knowledge of various fields such as the culture and society, to say nothing of the written history, of the times. Not only the current practice of reading the classical texts in Chinese language but also a basic understanding of the humanities as a whole should be preceded to deepen the understanding of the Chinese classics. It is because, with this understanding as a premise, even if new materials such as excavated texts are discovered, they can be considered as objects of “research” to enhance the understanding of transmitted texts, rather than as objects of “curiosity.”

Another suggestion is that the studies of Chinese classics should be in the center of the “academic community” as humanities studies, not as studies of Chinese literature. Conventionally, there have been two directions in perceptions and studies of classics: one of which leads to the academic area exclusive for researchers and another which leads to the area of liberal arts that the general public can easily access and learn. These two areas are by no means separate. It is very important for researchers to convey new resources to the general public in an easy-to-understand manner and expand the meaning and value of classics. However, as long as we study classics, it appears that we cannot avoid the gradual increase in “different records” of the “same facts,” as mentioned above. Moreover, unlike transmitted texts, excavated texts lack refined fonts and often contain incomplete sentences with omissions. And in some cases in which the arrangement of the sentences is not correct, it is not easy to understand even the

meaning. However, what is clear is that excavated texts contain important content that should be discussed in the study of “classics,” along with transmitted texts.

In this respect, it can be said that the study of “classics” using transmitted texts is no longer a research area based on conventional disciplinary approaches. Therefore, it needs to be reborn as a center of comprehensive interdisciplinary scholarship that reflects not only the newly discovered contents of excavated texts but also the research results of adjacent disciplines. At the very least, the study of classics in East Asia, which originated with the use of Chinese characters, should be re-established as an interdisciplinary pursuit that integrates “classical studies and history” or “literature and history,” rather than being relegated to segmented academic fields influenced by modern Western studies. In other words, it should be in the center of a new academic space where researchers in related fields gather and study together. Only then will we be able to meet the classics as variable and objective texts that exhibit flexible thinking befitting the situation of the times, not as carriers of immutable truths that cannot be changed. The “firm” belief that not even a single letter could be altered in Confucius’ words, which prevailed in the times when there were no other texts for comparison, is no longer rational to retain. The “classics” we want to meet are not merely texts stored in glass display cases in museums, which are often difficult to access. Rather, they are texts that facilitate the integration of various disciplines and are readily accessible to everyone in everyday life, housed on library shelves.

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