

Introduction

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INTRODUCTION

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There is an air of redundancy about a volume entitled “Textual Scholarship in Chinese Studies”. Are not Chinese Studies all about textual scholarship? Do not paleography, bibliography, textual criticism, and scholarly editing constitute the very essence of what has traditionally been called *kuo-hsüeh* in China and Sinology in the West? Textual scholarship in China is said to date from pre-Han times; for more than two millennia Chinese scholars have pondered their literary heritage, producing a bulk of catalogues, commentaries, anthologies, and scholarly editions that brooks no comparison. Every character of the ancient texts has been scrutinized and commented upon *in extenso*, and virtually all important works of the Imperial period are available in scholarly editions. When it comes to textual scholarship, the Chinese are second to none.

What more should there be to do? Indeed, Western Sinologists, beginning in the 19th century, seem to have regarded the work of textual scholarship as performed so far as it is performable. Henceforth, they turned to the more obviously rewarding—and admittedly urgent—task of translation and interpretation. In an age when Biblical and Classical studies were revolutionized by new standards of criticism, Sinology contented itself with exegetical endeavors.

This tradition has remained with us. With the growth of Chinese collections in Western libraries and the availability of huge corpora of literature like the *Ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu* and its successors at their fingertips, Sinologists have become even further removed from the worries of textual scholarship. Sinological research is mostly based on readily available published texts. Why bother looking up old hard-to-decipher manuscripts when we possess modern punctuated editions? Why consider different versions of a text when our library holds the imperially approved edition? To be sure, scholars in other fields proceed likewise: students of English literature will consult the *New Variorum Edition* of Shakespeare's works rather than the First Folio, and biblical scholars will refer to the apparatus of the *Biblia Hebraica* rather than to the original codices. The difference is that other disciplines have long since done their textual homework and produced critical editions that deserve the name, whereas Sinology has not.

The heavy reliance on Chinese scholarship, especially on that of the ‘critical’ *k’ao-cheng* school of Ch’ing times (1644–1912) has obscured the fact that this scholarship was not very critical at all. Producing a welter of erudite notes and annotations, Ch’ing scholars have always given exegesis precedence over the bread-and-butter work of textual criticism. It is no accident that Ch’ing editions usually conceal a modest ‘critical apparatus’ amidst copious annotations. Textual criticism was never emancipated from interpretation. Nor did its results come to bear on the constitution of the text. Rather than taking textual decisions on doubtful points, trying to restore them to an original form, Ch’ing scholars would usually leave the traditional reading in possession of the text and *explain* it. Exegesis was extolled at the expense of emendation. The resulting editions, as a rule, did not critically establish a text (based on collation), but simply reproduce an existing text which they used as a vehicle for annotation—and this makes them decidedly *non-critical*.

Not that the art of collation was entirely unknown to Chinese scholars, far from it. It was simply not systematically applied. Ch’en Yüan, in his authoritative work on textual criticism, distinguishes ‘reasoned’ and ‘collational revision’ (*li-chiao* 理校 and *tui-chiao* 對校) of texts and goes on to argue that *only* reasoning, cautiously applied, may justify alteration, whereas collation may *never* be used for the settlement of a text.¹ In textual criticism *more sinico*, then, conjectures are governed by considerations of intrinsic probability alone. Readings could be impugned on various grounds: that they give no appropriate sense, that they involve idioms not current at the presumed time of composition, that they are stylistically or even morally unacceptable. Arguments of documental or transcriptional probability, however, were deemed neither necessary nor sufficient conditions for alterations: the suggested emendation needed not be supported by a textual witness nor shown to have potentially given rise to the corruption in question.

Evidently, the ‘reasoned’ method encourages the application of the critic’s own standards of style, taste, or morals to the judgment of the text before him. His concern becomes, not with what a particular writer did actually say, but with what he *ought* to have said. With this, the way is paved for interpolation of texts by way of deliberate substitution, addition, or omission. Such fraudulence can affect single characters, passages, or even longer units of texts. It may be more than mere coincidence that the corpus of Chinese literature is fraught with

1 Ch’en Yüan 陳垣, *Chiao-k’an hsüeh shih-li* 校勘學釋例 (1931), in: Liu Meng-hsi 劉夢溪 (ed.), *Chung-kuo hsien-tai hsüeh-shu ming-tien. Ch’en Yüan chüan* 中國現代學術名典陳垣卷, Shih-chia chuang 1996, 315–442, esp. 421–24.

forged books. So numerous are these fakes that they have given rise to an entire field of scholarship.² Again, *k'ao-cheng* scholarship has set the standard for this field; and again, its methods rely heavily upon considerations of intrinsic probability. In other words, the same standards of criticism that had given rise to interpolations in the first place were applied to heal them. Chinese textual scholarship had come full circle.

The pioneers of Western Sinology—missionaries for whom the Bible was a sacred, untouchable text—had little to do with biblical criticism. This may explain how they could have overlooked the gulf that separates *k'ao-cheng* scholarship from the achievements of 19th-century biblical scholarship. Although problems of transmission and corruption were almost identical—the *codex Leningradensis* dating from 1008 and the earliest surviving witnesses of ancient Chinese texts dating from the Sung (960–1279)—textual criticism in China differed significantly from its Western counterpart. Although ancient Chinese texts, just like the Old Testament, were shaped in an extended process, involving various writers and editors, and combining different sources, literary criticism, tradition criticism, form criticism, and redaction criticism were all but non-existent in China. Although questions of manuscript books were of similar concern—some 5,000 New Testament manuscripts and roughly 50,000 Ch'ing manuscripts being extant—there existed no such discipline as codicology in China; whereas print editions ranked as prime sources for texts, autographs had little more than antiquarian value. And although Classical Chinese was equally removed in time as Biblical Hebrew, philological criticism and the study of Chinese grammar were not systematically conducted.

In short, there were no Lachmanns, Wellhausens, or Bultmanns in China—but neither were there any in Sinology. Western Sinologists until today have passed over textual scholarship in a cavalier manner. They have skipped their 19th century.

The contributions to this volume, originally presented during a conference in Munich, June 30–July 1 2000, are among the few efforts to apply textual scholarship to Chinese Studies in a variety of ways. The broad scope of their subject matter, ranging from classical to 20th-century texts, testifies to the low level of differentiation in the field. The conference provided a rare occasion for scholars usually separated by the diversity of their fields to discuss their problems

2 Witness Teng Jui-ch'üan 鄧瑞全 / Wang Kuan-ying 王冠英 (eds.), *Chung-kuo wei-shu tsung-k'ao* 中國偽書綜考, Hefei 1998, which discusses 1,200 titles that are forged in varying degrees.

together. It turned out that they share many fundamental concerns: How may the integrity of ancient texts be determined (Robert Gassmann)? How reliable are our received texts (Hans van Ess)? How can stemmatology (Wojciech Simson) or textual bibliography (Kai Vogelsang) be applied to Chinese texts? How should a critical edition dealing with manuscript witnesses be prepared (Raoul Findeisen)? How may different components of Chinese texts be detected through philological (Matthias Richter) or isocolometrical criticism (William Boltz) and presented in a scholarly edition (Hermann Tessenow)? How can semantic analysis (Rudolf Pfister) or knowledge of the creation process (Dennis Schilling) enhance our understanding of old texts?

The reader will find certain *leitmotifs* reappearing in a number of studies: the effects of the bibliographical carrier on the contents of texts, for example, or the question whether one can speak of an 'original' or a 'final intention' of Chinese texts at all. But he will find no single ready-made answer to these problems. The proposed solutions differ just like the case studies presented in this volume. Nor have there been any editorial attempts to harmonize the studies in terms of style (for example, transcription of Chinese words has not been standardized) or content. The volume presents contributions to a young, diverse field in which there are many open questions and few stock answers. Yet there is one point on which all contributors agree: that it is of paramount importance that Chinese texts be dealt with in a methodologically sound manner. There is nothing redundant about textual scholarship in Chinese Studies.