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Between the Eyes and the Ears: Ethnic Perspective on the Development of Philological Traditions, First Millennium AD

by
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ABSTRACT

The present inquiry stands as a foray into what may be thought of as a “Summa Philologica Sinica.” To be more precise, this paper is about the study and developmental trajectory of philology rather than philology per se. The approach here, drawing on the prefaces and comments of primary historical resources, conceives of philology as subject to the transitions of philosophy, an amalgam within which variegated traditions and schools contend and consent with each other, rather than as a static, ahistorical antithesis between the study of script and that of sound. The bifocal panoply behind philological texts and the *shì* 勢 (“immanent configuration”) that oscillates between indigenous systems of thought and foreign philosophy, defense of nationality and openness to foreign voices, reflected in the realm of language studies, presents itself as focused on characters (eyes) versus sounds (ears).

This investigation endeavors to explain the diachronic function that the characters were imagined to carry in Chinese civilization. This imagining, and the developmental trajectory it implied for the pragmatics of characters as the adhesive pivot of a distinctive national character, is key to this paper’s agenda and its choice of primary textual evidence.

This essay, thus, has two major goals. First, it recounts China’s philological transitions under a framework of a vacillating, ethno-philosophical-oriented intellectual history; second, it sums up the Chinese literati’s own recounting of such transitions. Following Christopher Connery’s model — he calls his monograph “a history of reading” (Connery 1998: 9) — this essay is intended to construct a picture of Chinese philology that unveils a history of analysis. It aims to investigate the transformation of the methods of Chinese philological studies during the “middle millennium” (i.e., the millennium from Han through Song), providing a new approach to the discipline of Chinese philology by closely reading the prefaces of lexicographic texts. It takes into account the role of Buddhism, but views it in a more nuanced fashion than the mere importance of “sound” as a religious doctrine (cf. Sanskrit *vac*) or phonological science. It conceives of the Chinese literary learning tradition as subject to the transition of ethnic philosophy in response to incoming foreign voices. Whether a scholar focuses on shape or

¹ Christopher Connery, *The Empire of the Text: Writing and Authority in Early Imperial China* (Lanham, Boulder, New York, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1998), 9

sound is demarcated not by his Buddhist or Confucian belief, but by his readiness — as a member of and cultivated in Chinese civilization — to have sufficient reasons to collectively and systematically adopt another voice, had it existed for a long time or was it newly introduced. This pendulum movement underlies the first millennium AD of China, which is distinguished by an ethnic hybridization that brings about a pursuit of balancing inner constancy with outer turbulence. Whether China focused on enjoying and preserving the transient and palpable present depends on whether the culture was experiencing a cognitively unified period or a cognitively disturbed one. Such shared sentiments born of an agenda of ethno-philosophical self-reestablishment are reflected in the shared social and intellectual practices throughout the “middle millennium,” be these counterparts of the Chinese people the Indo-Iranian Hu 胡 in the fourth century or the Tungusic Jurchens and Para-Mongolic Khitans around the twelfth.

Key words: Zheng Qiao; Chinese-Foreign Encounters; Kehong; the struggle of canonism; the Self-vis-à-vis-Other modes in different divisional episodes

Foreword

Victor H. Mair

It is with great pride and pleasure that I celebrate the publication of the 300th issue of *Sino-Platonic Papers*. The title of this paper is “Between the Eyes and the Ears: Ethnic Perspective on the Development of Philological Traditions, First Millennium AD.” The co-authors are Shuheng Zhang, a Ph.D. candidate in South Asian Studies at the University of Pennsylvania, and yours truly, the editor of the journal. Shuheng is already familiar to readers of *SPP*, having previously published “The Reins of Language: The Mantra of the *Heart Sutra* in *The Journey to the West*,” 286 (June, 2019) and “Three Ancient Words for Bear,” 294 (November, 2019), and is a regular contributor to *Language Log*, with numerous comments and posts such as “[Tocharian love poem](#)” (4/1/20) and “[Ancient Chinese mottos](#)” (4/5/20).

“Between the Eyes and the Ears” is the perfect paper for this auspicious occasion. It is focused on Chinese language and script (especially vernacular vs. classical), emphasizes philological research, takes comparison / interaction with other cultures and languages seriously, and is centered on a premodern period (in this case the medieval era). Although not all *SPP* fit all of the rubrics in this template, they usually include at least two or three of them.

SPP is well known for promoting new, cutting edge approaches to challenging problems that have never before been addressed adequately, if at all. Such is certainly true of “Between the Eyes and the Ears,” which is a first attempt to examine the political-philosophical-philological nexus of script orthodoxy vs. phonological representation as they evolved in the encounter between indigenous intellectual traditions and Buddhism across the first millennium AD. It will be noticed that the authors do not discuss Buddhism and Confucianism as religious and ideological entities, nor do they treat script and language as objects of linguistic inquiry per se. Rather, they intently examine the ethnic and intellectual motivation of the leading lexicographers of the age in clinging to or critiquing the notion of “correct characters,” i.e., “orthography,” in the face of phonological analysis of words.

So that is “Between the Eyes and the Ears.” In a moment you can turn the page to read the essay itself, but first a word about the history of this journal from its inception in early 1986 up to today.

Since it was begun as a strictly one-man operation in February 1986, I had no grand aspirations for *SPP*. I simply wanted some place to tell people about my plan for a single-sort, alphabetically ordered dictionary of Mandarin. Eventually, the dream for such a user-friendly dictionary was realized in the *ABC Chinese-English Dictionary* (1996) and its successors at the University of Hawaii Press.

It must be remembered that, at the birth of *SPP*, there was no convenient means to distribute scholarly materials electronically, so I took the papers to a local copy shop, had nice blue covers printed for them, and stapled them together.

As the months and years wore on, I gradually came to realize that I could issue outstanding, innovative papers by young and established scholars alike in this format, and in the course of time I also published thirteen special issues consisting only of reviews, in which more than three hundred books were featured.

Even in the first few years, many noteworthy papers by reputable scholars appeared in the pages of *SPP*. As word spread of what was being made available through *SPP*, individuals and libraries around the world wrote to me asking if they could subscribe to the journal, so I began to print more copies. I was especially honored to know that places like Antonino Forte’s Italian School of Oriental Studies in Kyoto and the School of Oriental and African Studies in London had complete runs of the journal on the shelves of their libraries.

But all of that success meant more volume and more work. Driving around to pick up the papers from the copy shop, bringing them home, wrapping and packaging, preparing invoices, addressing the envelopes and boxes, carrying the heavy parcels to the post office, standing in line... all became a trial, especially in the heat of summer when I was getting ready to go to Central Asia for an expedition. Moreover, there was always a significant loss of parcels in the mail, and then the problem of payment from countries with different currencies, and so forth and so on.

Though I loved the work I was doing, *SPP*’s success was killing me. Mercifully, an angel in Taiwan spoke to me around the beginning of the year 2006, twenty years after *SPP* was born: “Would you like for me to turn *SPP* into an online journal, with all back issues available as pdfs?” I thought I was hallucinating. Naturally I accepted the angel’s offer, and the rest is history. So you see, I’m still alive.

The Taiwan angel's name is Mark Swofford, who is also host of the venerable Pinyin.info and co-founder of Camphor Press. He is the technical editor of *SPP*. Around the same time, Mark was joined by Paula Roberts, who had had decades of experience in academic publishing. She is the manuscript editor of the journal. Together, we make a congenial, cooperative team who work together efficiently to bring out up to a dozen or so issues of *SPP* every year.

A very famous Sinologist once captiously queried, "Why didn't you call it *Helleno-Mencian Papers*?" In a mellow tone of voice, I replied, "I could have, but that's not what this journal is about."

I will leave you with a Zen koan to mull over or munch on, as you wish: what is the meaning of "Sino-Platonic"? Hundreds of people have asked me what the title of this journal signifies. Only one person has ever answered that question completely and correctly, and that is the person (aside from myself), who has authored the most *SPPs*. That is also a bit of a conundrum, isn't it?

Between the Eyes and the Ears:
Ethnic Perspective on the Development of Philological Traditions,
First Millennium AD

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The encyclopedist Zheng Qiao's 鄭樵 (1104–1162) “A Sketch of the Six Styles [of Chinese character formation]” (*liushu lüe* 六書略, abbr. “Sketch”) has an “On Mother and Son” (*lun zi mu* 論子母) section, which is threaded together with a central theme: the mother-son relationship between the study of the script system and that of the sound system. In the “Sketch” the former is represented by *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 (lit., “Explaining the Graphs and Expatiating on the Characters”; abbr. *Shuowen*) and the latter by *Guangyun* 廣韻 (lit. “Rimes Extended”). Zheng states that:

Those in the category of “establishing” are the mothers; those in the category of “following” are the sons. The mothers are in charge of shapes; the sons are in charge of sounds. (In this way,) *Shuowen* is the study of the eyes: in which categories are formed when eyes see them, but not when ears hear them. (On the contrary,) *Guangyun* is the study of the ears — in which categories are formed when ears hear them, but not when the eyes see them. Therefore, *Shuowen* primarily concerns the mothers using (their) sons for service; *Guangyun* primarily concerns the sons commanding (their) mothers. *Shuowen* (is about) shapes, which are (the equivalent of) rituals; *Guangyun* (is about) sounds, which are (equivalent to) music. *Shuowen* uses the mother to govern her son;

Guangyun uses the son to embrace his mother. ... The mother [writing] can give birth, but the son cannot.

立類為母，從類為子。母主形，子主聲。說文眼學，眼見之則成類，耳聽之則不成類。廣韻耳學，耳聽之則成類，眼見之則不成類。故說文主母而役子，廣韻主子而率母。說文形也，禮也；廣韻聲也，樂也。說文以母統子，廣韻以子該母。..... [字]母能生而子不能生。²

“Generative ability” (*neng sheng* 能生) — the generative nature of lexicographical procedures — suggests the demarcating criterion of “mother” apart from “child” in Zheng Qiao’s view, according to which standard he charged the *Shuowen* with contriving character-to-character connections on an all-orthographical basis. “Now *Shuowen* (among its five-hundred-and-forty categories) mistakenly took two-hundred-and-ten ‘mother’ categories as ‘sons.’” ... Since sons cannot give birth, therefore (the *Shuowen*’s postulation) is an empty predication.” 今說文誤以子為母者二百十類.....子不能生，是為虛設。³

These passages seem, for the first time in Chinese philological history, to place the study of the writing system and that of the sound system (instead of the objects of these studies per se, which have been much studied throughout traditional Chinese intellectual history) on the two ends of the same scale. We yet notice the counter-intuitiveness and irony of this criterion of “generative ability” upon realizing the identity of its proposer: he is a historian, philologist, Siddham-enthusiast, and a critic of “Chinese learning” as it was represented by Confucianism. The concept of “mother” (*mu* 母) in the realm of writing — lit. “the mother of writings” (*zimu* 字母) — had been a Buddhist product. The first appearance of the word *zimu* 字母 in a Chinese text was in the Liang Dynasty, Samghabhara’s (460–524) translation of the *Sutra of the Questions of Mañjuśrī* (*Wenshushili wenjing* 文殊師利問經, Skt. *Mañjuśrīparipṛcchā*) (T 468), in which the fourteenth chapter is called “*Varga* on the Mother of Writings”

² Zheng Qiao 鄭樵, *Tongzhi ershi lue* 通志二十略 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1995), 1,344. All English translations of the primary texts in this paper are our own unless otherwise specified.

³ Ibid., 345.

(*zimu pin* 字母品), opening with a remark made by the Buddha to Mañjuśrī: “All Dharmas entered into ‘the mother of writings’ and the Dhāraṇī letters” 佛告文殊師利一切諸法入於字母及陀羅尼字.⁴ Samghabhara thrived at the beginning of the sixth century; before his usage of *zimu*, associating the “mother” of writings with “sounds,” the most similar expression was to call it the “root of writing” (*ziben* 字本), which first appeared in the “Bibliographical Treatise” (*yiwen zhi* 藝文志) in the *Book of Han* (*Han shu* 漢書) in the first century AD: “Resembling a shape; featuring an affair; combining (existing) elements; mimicking sounds; extending meanings; borrowing and loaning; (these) are the roots of making (a) writing (system).” 謂象形、象事、象意、象聲、轉註、假借，造字之本也。⁵ Although *zimu* and *ziben* are similar in their surface forms — mother versus root — the underlying cores are drastically different; the “mother” refers to the phonemic inventory — the collection of the basic units of the sounds of a language, while the “root” refers to the variegated ways of forming a character. *Zimu* bears the power of orality and aurality; *ziben* indicates skill in visuality and transmissibility.

So, how to track this *zimu*–*ziben* duality to its source? Even in the Buddhist context, the difference between the usages of *zimu* versus *ziben* were not quite clearly divided. For example, in the thirty-ninth chapter, *Gaṇḍavyūha* [sūtra] (*Ru fajie pin* 入法界品), of the *Mahā-vaipulya-buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra* (*Dafang guang fo huayan jing* 大方廣佛華嚴經), the two Tang Chinese translations, both in the mid-late seventh century, bear different renditions of the same sentence: “I keep devotedly singing these ‘roots of writings’ that [will lead me] into such liberation” 我恒唱持入此解脫根本之字⁶ by Divākara [*Dipoheluo* 地婆訶羅] (613–687), from Central India,⁷ and “I keep devotedly singing these ‘mothers of writings’” 我恒唱持此之字母 by Śikṣānanda [*Shichanantuo* 實叉難陀] (652–710), from the kingdom of Khotan on the southern edge of the Taklamakan Desert.⁸ One

4 T 468, *Taishō shinshu Tripiṭaka*, 14.498a.

5 Ban Gu 班固, *Han shu* 漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 30.1720.

6 Skt. *parikīrtayati* (*changchi* 唱持), lit. “*pari-* [prefix of very roundabout] *kīrtayati* [to sing].” Thus, we translate *changchi* into “devotedly singing” without implying excessively the special Buddhist context.

7 T 295, *Taishō* 10.877a.

8 T 279, *Taishō* 10.418a.

can see that the two translators represented a not-so-clearly demarcated state between *zimu* and *ziben* in the Early-to-High Tang period, although when it came to half a century later — as Buddhism climaxed during the Kaiyuan–Tianbao reign (713–756) — Amoghavajra’s [*Bukong* 不空] (705–774) writings already used *zimu* consistently (e.g., *Yujia jingangdingjing shi zimu pin* 瑜伽金剛頂經釋字母品, T 880) when referring to the Sanskrit phonemic inventory. The notion of *zimu*, instead of *ziben*, gradually produced a school of Chinese philology (mostly Buddhism-originated) throughout the Tang, culminating in the consolidation of its status as the *unus et solus* terminology for Chinese, or any language’s phonemic inventory in general, by Shouwen’s 守溫 36-*zimu* system at the beginning of the Five Dynasties, which immediately follows the Tang. After that, *ziben* was the sole remnant of the philological, or hermeneutical, studies surrounding topics of *liushu* 六書. In the same compilation, *Tongzhi* 通志 (lit. “compendium”) by Zheng Qiao, but in a different chapter (Chapter 64, “Foreign Books” [*fan shu* 蕃書]), the historian praised the significance of such a development on Chinese language studies: “The learning of tomic rhymes began in the Western Regions.⁹ This is the old (system) of fourteen letters’ [*akṣara*] encompassing all sounds, where the script is minimal but the language is ample; this is called Brahmi. But that was not yet the end (of the development). Later, there was in addition the 36-*zimu*, whereupon the path of phonology was prepared.” 切韻之學起自西域，舊所傳‘十四字貫一切音，文省而言博，謂之婆羅門書。’然猶未也。其後又得三十六字母，而音韻之道始備。¹⁰ That Zheng established a new sub-category, “Foreign Books,” under the “Category of Textual Studies” (*xiaoxue lei* 小學類), reflects his appreciation and thorough understanding of the distinction between indigenous Chinese studies and those borrowed from “foreign” studies.

The clear recognition of the distinction between the pragmatics of sounds and scripts in Chinese Buddhist literature comes even earlier, in the Eastern Jin, first represented in Buddhaghosa’s depiction of Sudhanakumāra’s encounter with Vasumitrā, an enlightened prostitute, in which the narrator eulogizes her virtue: “All living beings, with their differences in speech sounds, [she] comprehended them completely and fully; [she] deeply understood the meaning of writing and was

⁹ For Victor Mair’s invention of the term “tomic rhymes” for *qieyun* 切韻, see Victor H. Mair, “A Hypothesis Concerning the Origin of the Term *fanqie* (‘Countertomy’),” in “Two Papers on Sinolinguistics,” *Sino-Platonic Papers*, 34 (1992): 13.

¹⁰ *Tongzhi ershi lüe* 2.1517.

adept at speaking and narrating, as though ([she] were possessed of) miraculous knowledge and (was able) to enter the gate of expedient methods [*upāya*].” 一切眾生，差別言音，悉皆具足，無不解了；深達字義，善巧談說，得如幻智，入方便門。¹¹ Buddhahadra assesses the acquisition of sounds as an understanding of the sentient beings’ natures, but that of script as the acquisition of *upāya* in communicating with the sentient beings. The innateness of sounds versus the artificiality of script is a key point drawn by Buddhahadra, one that Zheng Qiao does not fail to grasp. It is vital to observe that this enhanced understanding of the relationship between writing and speech is attributed to an enlightened prostitute, which is a signal that this is something traditional male scholars were incapable of. Moreover, this radical breakthrough that views script as a type of *upāya* (“expedient means”), which for teaching purposes privileges speech over writing — the former as fundamental, the latter as derivative — constitutes an advanced type of linguistic comprehension that Zheng Qiao picked up on in another percipient disquisition.

The innate lack of perceptability of the distinction between phonetic values and the scripts used to represent sounds among indigenous Chinese intellectuals even provoked Zheng Qiao to write a denunciation of this phenomenon in the tripartite “On Chinese and Indian [Scripts]” (*Lun Hua Fan* 論華梵):

Chinese are encumbered by their inability to distinguish sounds. Phonological studies were completely unknown before the Han period and, indeed, they entered the Central Realm from the Western Regions. Therefore, the followers of Buddhism are, for the most part, able to discuss rime charts and the like, whereas Confucians are ignorant of their basic premises because the fountainhead of the charts lies elsewhere.

華人苦不別音，如切韻之學，自漢以前人皆不識，實自西域流入中土，所以韻圖之類，釋子多能言之，而儒者皆不識起例，以其源流出於彼耳。¹²

¹¹ *Taishō* 10.365c.

¹² *Tongzhi*, 352; Engl. trans. of the entire text, “Cheng Ch’iao’s Understanding of Sanskrit: The Concept of Spelling in China,”

That Buddhist intellectuals tried to balance the studies of both paleography / orthography and phonology, while the Confucians in part overemphasized the former, seems to be a partial cause of Zheng Qiao’s reprimand of “Chinese (intellectuals)” (*huaren* 華人), Confucians (*ruzhe* 儒者) especially, in comparison with monks (*shizi* 釋子). The famous Sui translator — the first person to translate from Chinese to Sanskrit in Chinese Buddhist history — Yancong 彥琮 (557–610), in his “A Discourse on Determining the Proper” (*bianzheng lun* 辨正論, T 2110), employed “Eight Preparations” (*babei* 八備) and “Ten Principles” (*shitiao* 十條) to establish the regulations for translation, in which the seventh and the eighth “Preparations” stress the importance of balancing Sanskrit and Chinese, and phonology and paleography / orthography: “One must understand the Sanskrit language without falling short in the study of ‘the other’ [India]; 要識梵言，不墜彼學; “one must peruse and pass on (the study of) ‘Cangjie pian’ and ‘Erya’ and be roughly skilled in the Seal Script and the Clerical Script, without being ignorant in the study of our [Chinese] texts.” 傳閱蒼雅，粗諳篆隸，不昧此文. Among the “Ten Principles,” too, the ninth “semantic classifier” (*zibu* 字部) and the tenth “phonology” (*zisheng* 字聲) are juxtaposed with each other, signifying their equal status in Buddhist learning and translating.¹³ It is noteworthy that Yancong nicely balances *bi xue* 彼學 (“that [i.e., Indian] studies”) with *ci wen* 此文 (“this [i.e., Chinese] writing”) in paired, antithetical prose. This shows that he is able to comfortably absorb foreign learning (phonological analysis) into his familiar Chinese mode of expression (characters and their construction).

Historical anecdotes also well-support this aspect in Chinese Buddhist intellectual history. For instance, a story from the *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 (T 2059) (Biographies of Eminent Monks) features Shi Dao’an’s 釋道安 (312–385) paleographic knowledge:

At that time Lantian County acquired a big tripod measuring 27 *hu* (about 270 pecks).
On its side there were inscriptions in seal script that no one could understand.
Whereupon (it was) shown to [Shi Dao]An. Shi Dao’an said: “This is an archaic Seal

in *China and Beyond: A Collection of Essays by Victor H. Mair*, ed. Rebecca Shuang Fu et al. (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2013), 191–196.

¹³ *Fanyi mingyi ji*, juan 1 翻譯名義集卷一.

Script inscription. It says ‘cast by Duke Xiang of Lu.’” And he wrote down the clerical form of the inscription. One other time there was someone holding a copper bushel who wanted to sell it in the market. Its shape was a proper circle, and towards the bottom it narrowed down and became square, with a handle. The higher end of the beam joined with the lower end of the handle. On one end of the beam there was a key; the key was half-fit with the stoup. On the bushel’s side there was an inscription. Fu Jian asked Shi Dao’an about [this inscription]. Shi Dao’an said: “This is what Wang Mang¹⁴ said of himself: ‘Came out of the Emperor Shun; dragons gathered on the *wu-chen* day; the fixing of the first day of the calendar year forthwith becomes effective. This is to equalize the standard of measurement; spread it [the new standard] to the four directions.’ (It signifies how Wang Mang) desired that all containers and weight units large and small in the sub-celestial realm were commanded to accord to the new standard by this means.”

時藍田縣得一大鼎容二十七斛，邊有篆銘，人莫能識，乃以示安。釋道安云：“此古篆書。云魯襄公所鑄。乃寫為隸文。”又有人持一銅斛於市賣之。其形正圓，下向為鬥，橫梁昂者為鬥低者為合，梁一頭為籥，籥同鐘容半合，邊有篆銘。符堅以問釋道安。釋道安云：“此王莽自言：‘出自舜皇，龍集戊辰，改正即真。以同律量，布之四方。’欲小大器鈞令天下取平焉。”¹⁵

It was a Buddhist intellectual who was turned to, instead of a traditional secular scholar, when archaeological and paleographic problems were raised; according to his hagiography, “in Chang’an (city), young people of the gentry who composed poems and rhapsodies would all attach themselves to him to enhance their reputation.” 長安中衣冠子弟為詩賦者皆依附致譽。¹⁶ Here we see aspiring young Chinese gentry seeking to ingratiate themselves with a Buddhist monk. It would be one thing if they

¹⁴ Wang Mang (45 BC–23 AD) seized the Western Han throne and established his own dynasty, the Xin (9–23 AD).

¹⁵ *Huijiao* 慧皎, Tang Yongtong 湯用彤, commentator, *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 (T 2059, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992), 181.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

wanted religious instruction, but that is far from their minds in this case. What they are after is inspiration and edification in the ways of writing secular literature (specifically traditional Chinese poetic composition) that had nothing to do with Buddhism or things Indian. One can imagine the acute embarrassment that secular scholars may have felt when they were passed over by their countrymen in favor of a Buddhist monk. Without wanting to impose too many assumptions about mentalities and the relation between text and psyche that are unprovable, we yet wish to highlight the contrast between Buddhist and indigenous (which is not to say “Confucian”) traditions of learning, the former of which features a balance between sound/Other (*bi xue* 彼學 “that / Indian studies”) and script/Self (*ci wen* 此文 “this [i.e., Chinese] writing”), while the latter is script-partial only.

The script-partial Confucian learning tradition demonstrated its inferiority in the face of the Buddhists’ learning tradition, which valued both script and sounds. The loss of *hua xue* 華學 (“Chinese learning”) vis-à-vis *fan xue* 梵學 (“Sanskrit learning”) stimulated Zheng Qiao’s reflection, as a historian, on how his work might serve as an appeal for fundamental and compelling changes to be initiated at his moment (at the end of the “middle millennium”) — especially as he found himself in the midst of another China-vis-à-vis-Other encounter, though the Other in this case were the Tungusic and Para-Mongolic Northerners (Jurchens, Khitans, etc.), rather than the Indo-Iranians of Zheng’s time. In the same “*liushu lüe*” (“Sketch”), he noted a demarcation between the two types of systems in the passage immediately preceding the mother-son analogy of *Shuowen* and *Guangyun*. This set the scene for the denigration of Xu Shen and his *Shuowen* system that represented the major force of pre-Buddhist Chinese indigenous learning and the tradition that had been followed for the succeeding millennium. It is interesting that Zheng Qiao does this from a non-Buddhist standpoint (but a secular one):

My “Chapter on Confirmation of the Six Styles” was indeed compiled on the basis of (assessing) *Shuowen*. In general, I follow Xu whenever he is correct, and go against Xu whenever he is wrong. What I agree (on) with Xu is that single-component characters are founded on pictures, (therefore) there must be an elucidation for every single-component character; compound characters are founded on single-component characters, (therefore) there must be an explanation for every compound. Where I disagree with Xu is that I bring together how single-component and compound

characters are formed and attest them (in accordance with) the “Six Styles” (i.e., regarding how Xu assigns a Style to each character). Therefore (my work) is called “Chapter on Confirmation of the Six Styles.” Moreover, Xu has a lot of empty verbiage; (my) “Confirmation” contains only concrete meanings. What Xu says is mostly stultified and moribund; what (my) “Confirmation” says alone, vivifying. This is because the meaning that Xu assigns (to the Six Styles) is written on slips and documents but cannot be separated from textuality. Thus I call it “moribund.” The meanings in my “Confirmation” discard the textual vestiges and can fly, walk, or run without getting stuck in a corner. Thus I call them “vivifying.”

臣六書證篇實本說文而作，凡許氏是者從之，非者違之。其同乎許氏者，因畫成文，文必有說；因文成字，字必有解。其異乎許氏者，每篇總文字之成，而證以六書之義，故曰六書證篇。然許氏多虛言，證篇惟實義。許氏所說多滯於死，證篇所說獨得其生。蓋許氏之義，著於簡書而不能離簡書，故謂之死。證篇之義，捨簡書之陳跡，能飛行走動不滯一隅，故謂之生。¹⁷

In expanding on Cheng’s critique in “Confirmation” of Xu’s *Shuowen*, he decries what is stillborn and inanimate because it is tied too solely and closely to texts. He strives for an analysis of language that is more dynamic and invigorating, not static and lifeless. He wants his discussion of language to be solid, not vapid. In short, Zheng depreciates *Shuowen* for being unable to leave its specific context of self-consistency, namely, the archaic forms. In contrast, Zheng strives to make his work applicable to wider discourses, both synchronically and diachronically.

While perspicacious enough to recognize that it is the word rather than script, sound rather than shape, etymological derivation rather than writing system that carries the generative ability in a language — while maintaining strong reservations toward the *Shuowen* tradition — what does Zheng mean as he identifies the “Expatriation on Characters” rather than the “Explanation of Rimes” as bearing the generative ability? Zheng’s enumerative yet brief examples drawn from the *Shuowen* do not suffice

¹⁷ *Tongzhi ershi lüe* 1.343.

for persuasion. Rather, it is an addendum, in the form of an independent essay later in the compilation, “On Where the ‘Sons’ and the ‘Mothers’ come from” (*Lun zi mu suo zi* 論子母所自) that gives a palpable unveiling of a key item in his agenda — namely, “having gained propensity” (*deshi* 得勢).

Someone says: “Textual composition was at its original stage actually entitative (rather than dualistic). On what basis is a ‘mother’ developed? On what basis is a son developed?” — (And I) answer: “The evident is the mother; the obscure is the son. The near is the mother; the distant is the son. The structured is the mother; the (organically) multiplied is the son. That which is in use is the mother; that which is not in use is the son. That which is in the ascendant is the mother; that which is not in the ascendant is the son.”

或曰：作文之始，其實一也。何以成母？何以成子？曰：顯成母，隱成子。近成母，遠成子。約成母，滋成子。用成母，不用成子。得勢成母，不得勢成子。¹⁸

Shi 勢, “propensity,” has long been an important term in Chinese tradition. Famously polysemous, *shi* has been rendered in English as “force; power; energy; tendency; trend; inertia; configuration; posture; position; pose; bearing; momentum; potential; situation; state of affairs; disposition; influence; sign; circumstances; conditions; outward appearance of something; male genitals,” etc. As François Jullien has elaborated in his monograph *The Propensity of Things: Toward a History of Efficacy in China* (1995), *shi* was particularly favored by strategists who used it in their analyses of the deployment of military forces. It also had application to political arrangements and interactions, the esthetics of calligraphy and painting, as well as literary criticism; and from reflection on history to fundamental philosophical questions. Where all of these aspects of *shi* conjoin, it becomes evident that reality may be perceived as the disposition of things.

In received texts, the earliest attestation of *deshi* 得勢 (“achieving propensity”) can be traced

¹⁸ *Tongzhi ershi lue* 1.345.

back to the *Xunzi* 6, “Negating the Twelve Masters” (*fei shier zi* 非十二子): “Sages who do not ‘gain propensity’ are such as Zhongni [Confucius] and Zigong. ... Sages who do ‘gain propensity’ are such as Shun and Yu” 聖人之不得勢者也 仲尼子弓是也... 聖人之得勢者 舜禹是也.¹⁹ Tellingly, the *deshi* sages are defined with reference to Shun and Yu — the two mythological sovereigns who were enthroned without disruption following the abdication of their equally powerful predecessors — and their opposite with the politically disfavored Confucius, whose life was much depleted by his exile, necessitating journeying to small kingdoms, and by the repeated rejection of his political goals. This definition, with its examples, delimits the original concept of *shi* to the political dimension, where bureaucratic, supervisory authority plays a major role.

Comprehending full well the productive capacity of sounds (word roots) and the incapacity of shapes, what does Zheng really mean about “generative ability” — especially since, by that time, monk Shouwen’s thirty-six initials had already been widely adopted, if not yet fully utilized? We propose that such counter-intuitiveness presaged Zheng Qiao’s deliberate effort to draw the reader’s attention to the interplay between contemporary philological policies and the political authority that enables them. Artificial versus organic, politically supported versus naturally derived — in an almost brazenly straightforward manner, Zheng Qiao pinpointed the regarding of shapes, or characters, as the center of attention throughout the Chinese tradition of “textual composition” (*zuowen* 作文). That Zheng equates the study of characters / shape with “gaining propensity” becomes, now, an insinuation of the power of political support behind the ostensibly apolitical philology.

Our epistemological stance in this paper draws primarily on the work of intellectual historians whose agenda was to pursue the interplay between ethno-social history and linguistic policies. As early as in 1984, Benjamin Elman’s *From Philosophy to Philology: Intellectual and Social Aspects of Change in Late Imperial China* discussed the social, especially ethnic, discourses in the revolution of scholarly attention from the pursuit of Confucian thought to linguistic clarity and how they shaped the ground for critical perspective. Elman views the Manchu–Han contention, shaping politics and scholarship as it does, as the “vice of the Confucian intellectual” (Elman, 1984, 13).

¹⁹ According to Michael Loewe, ed., *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide* (1993), the chapter titled “Fei shier zi” (No. 6) is among those regarding the authenticity of which “no doubts [have] been raised” (180).

In 1994, in a long article in the *Journal of Asian Studies*, "Buddhism and the Rise of the Written Vernacular in East Asia: The Making of National Languages," Victor Mair describes Literary Sinitic as artificial and its correspondence to the vernacular as analogous to the "relationship between a code or a cipher and the natural language upon which it was based" (Mair, 1994, 708), whence the literary surface representation of the Chinese language, in the millennia-spanning imperial era, is no longer taken intuitively as the written record of "language" of the Chinese people, but the maneuver belying a quasi-monolithic, orthodox "tradition" that the descendants of the Yellow River valley civilization had been holding on to since its time of consolidation circa the beginning of the Common Era.

Mair's stance forms the basis of Christopher Connery's groundbreaking narrative in his monograph *Empire of the Text: Writing and Authority in Early Imperial China* (1998), throughout which the author, by defining China as the "textual empire" (Connery, 1998, 14), in which the elites are the product of the textual culture rather than its producer, reconsiders the relationship between textuality and authority. He focuses on textual authority as a denaturalized and historicizable process (Connery 1998:15) and introduces the notion of textuality and textual authority in the context of the Han Dynasty — the "age of the consolidation" of the "codified system" (Mair's words) and philological studies as the medium itself (Connery, 1998, 8).

In almost the same year, in a work bearing the same title and scope, Mark Lewis examined book knowledge and its epistemological domain in the Han as an "encyclopedic epoch" (Lewis, 1999, 773) probing the consolidation of the Chinese model for the systematic presentation of knowledge about "standards" — be the standard that of tenor, ritual, orbits of celestial bodies, or texts and language.

These four scholars' positions, exemplifying the politico-textual complication of a certain era, benefit the present project in allowing the fullest possible understanding to be reached under a variety of circumstances; this enables us to continue such a practice by threading together a series of vacillations between the pursuit of contrived Confucian orthodoxy and organic sound representation, between unification and multiplicity, between a welcoming of hybrid existence and the rejection of it.

In short, between the eyes and the ears there is not a linear procession or connection. While scholars have reached a consensual acknowledgment of the Buddhist influence on Chinese language philosophy, there have been a number of major suppositions that the advent of Buddhism, as a new foreign religion, essentially and eternally shifted the way that Chinese treat Confucianism and the

zhengtong 正統 (“orthodox”) tradition. A key to understanding the difference between *zheng* 正 and *zhengtong* 正統 is that the former just means “right, proper, correct, positive, straight, upright, rectified,” whereas the latter has added in the notion of “govern, command, control, unite,” hence “orthodox; legitimate.” Owing to this, *zhengtong* is one of the most important terms in Chinese political thought. Characterizing a stance as *zhengtong* means that it sanctions and upholds official control. Approbation of a religion or other system of thought as *zhengtong* recognizes that it is in harmony with the goals of the ruling authorities. In contrast, that which contravenes official attitudes and governance is stigmatized as *xie* 邪 (“heterodox”). What is *xie* is dangerous and should be guarded against or outlawed. Popular, folk religious movements often fell into this category.

This view — that Buddhism’s impingement on the Central Kingdom forever altered the Chinese view of Confucianism and all that it espouses — is best represented by Erik Zürcher’s *Buddhist Conquest of China* (1959). A landmark in Buddhology and Sinology, although it was published more than six decades ago, Zürcher’s *Buddhist Conquest of China* is still as authoritative now as the day it first appeared. As a study of the arrival of Buddhism in China and its initial impact during the first century AD and the following few centuries, this book presents a thorough, reliable, and accurate account of the major figures and scriptures associated with Buddhism during its early phases in China. Two things it does not pay much attention to, however, are the subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) resistance to and adaptation of Buddhist positions and premises, on the one hand, and, on the other, the interaction of Buddhism with representatives of orthodoxy in the new land to which it had come. Focused more on religious doctrines and practices per se, *Buddhist Conquest of China* gives little attention to language issues and their concomitant philosophical-philological aspects, which we, on the other hand, view as fundamental to the intellectual history of the first millennium AD.²⁰

This essay, thus, has two major aims. First, it recounts China’s philological development under the framework of an oscillating, ethno-philosophical-oriented intellectual history; second, it summarizes the Chinese literati’s recounting of such transitions. Following Connery’s model — he calls his monograph “a history of reading” (Connery 1998, 9) — this essay hopes to construct a picture of

²⁰ Tsukamoto Zenryū’s *A History of Early Chinese Buddhism*, especially in its English translation by Leon Hurvitz (1985) is a valuable complement and supplement to Zürcher’s volume. For more extensive reference to this work, see our discussion of the “struggle of Canonism” below.

Chinese philology so as to unveil a history of analyzing. It aims to investigate the transition of the methods of Chinese philological studies for the “middle millennium,” providing a new approach to the discipline of Chinese philology by closely reading the prefaces of lexicographic texts. It takes into account the role of Buddhism but views it in a more nuanced fashion than the mere importance of “sound” as a religious doctrine (cf. Sanskrit *vac*), which is the usual approach to the impact of Buddhism on language studies in China. It conceives of the Chinese literary learning tradition as subject to the transition of ethnic philosophy in response to incoming foreign voices. Whether a scholar focuses on shape or sound is demarcated not by his Buddhist or Confucian belief, but by his readiness — as a member of and cultivated in Chinese civilization — to have sufficient reasons to collectively and systematically adopt another voice, whether it had existed for a long time or was newly introduced. This pendulum lies beneath the first millennium AD of China, which is distinguished by ethnic hybridization that brings about a pursuit of balancing inner constancy with outer turbulence. Whether it focused on enjoying and preserving the transient and palpable present depends on whether the culture was experiencing a cognitively unified period or a cognitively disturbed one. Such shared sentiments born of an agenda of ethno-philosophical self-reestablishment are reflected in the shared social and intellectual practices throughout the “middle millennium,” be these counterparts of the Chinese people the Indo-Iranian Hu barbarians in the fourth century or Tungusic Jurchens and Para-Mongolic Khitans around the twelfth.

The genetrix of this interplay — the way that *shi* has been involved in philology — is therefore pivotal in studying the developmental and interactive nature of the social-intellectual discourse in medieval China. The tradition of “philology,” just like that of “Confucianism,” seems to have become a label that was imposed upon China to differentiate the civilization’s particularity that it is “others” who were the ones whose textual residue has mostly (if not entirely) been composed in phonetic writing systems. It should be treated as an amalgam within which variegated schools contend and consent with each other rather than as a static, ahistorical entity. With Zheng Qiao’s manifestation of orthographic studies as “propensity acquisition” and phonological studies as “propensity diminishment,” we would like to support his work by also turning our helm towards a political rather than purely philological realm and elaborating on Zheng’s criticism of the “authoritative support” of studying characters — the

attempt to “recover” a sole interpretation of the Sage’s words — that belies philology throughout its development in China during the first millennium AD.

Here we need to step back a moment and introduce the notion of “division,” since it is crucial for the unfolding of Chinese history and the manner in which indigenous scholars approach it. If there is anything truly distinctive about Chinese history, it is arguably the sustained sweep of an ethno-political entity through more than three millennia up to the modern era. Of course, most people know that there have been numerous times when “China” was divided, often for centuries at a time, and there have been many Chinese dynasties ruled over by non-Sinitic peoples, again often for centuries at a time. Yet there has always and ever been a strong, compelling urge for unification under the banner of *zhengtong* orthodoxy, enabling China again and again to reconstitute itself. Consequently, Chinese thinkers have ineluctably taken “division” as a serious problem for solemn contemplation and cause for the formulation of proposals to understand its roots and how to overcome them. The view that indigenous philologists were deeply involved in these ethno-political debates over the sources of division is central to this inquiry.

For the convenience of constructing this essay, we designate the “divisional period” as sandwiched between the “First Division Episode” and the “Second Division Episode,” based on China’s experience of two cataclysmic upheavals that shook the empire to its roots. The first was the disorder of the Yongjia 永嘉 reign period (307–313), when the five barbarian forces captured and sacked Luoyang, which led to the fall of the Western Jin and the reestablishment of the Eastern Jin in the South. The second was the incident during the Jingkang 靖康 reign period (1126–1127), when the Jurchen-led Jin dynasty captured and sacked Bianjing 汴京 (present-day Kaifeng 開封), resulting in the collapse of the (Northern) Song and the escape of some members of the royal family to the South, where they refounded a dynasty whose new iteration became known as the Southern Song. A key feature of both episodes was the massive exodus of intellectuals from the North to the South, where they experienced a profound crisis and transformation of their mode of thinking. In both episodes involving the movement of vast numbers of individuals from North to South, the self-reflective intellectuals among them had to adapt to the completely new physical, esthetic, and spiritual environment in which they found themselves. This resulted in a sense of alienation and alterity that led to the creation of novel forms of literature, art, and linguistic expression. Because of the mixing of Northern and Southern

elements that occurred, we may speak of a process of hybridization that followed these tumultuous events and a condition of pre-hybridization that obtained before they took place.

We begin the next section of our inquiry by examining how the Spring-and-Autumn and Warring States language policies were accounted for in two representative works of the pre-divisional period of China: The "Bibliographical Treatise" (*yiwen zhi* 藝文志) in *The Book of Han* (*Han shu* 漢書), authored by Ban Gu 班固 (32–92), and the preface to *Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters* (*Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字) authored ca. 100 by Xu Shen (c. 58 – c. 148). Scholars have long paid attention to studies of the content of these two texts by Sinological methods; this essay, however, focuses on the textual variations between the adaptation of a certain paragraph from the *Han shu* in the "Preface to *Shuowen*" that accounts for the "administration of the pattern of sounds."

In the translations of Chinese texts that follow, and throughout this paper, parentheses are used to indicate words added to supply text missing in a sentence, while a pair of brackets shows added explanatory material.

In *Han shu*, "Bibliographical Treatise":

As for the ancient times, (students) entered elementary school at the age of eight. Thereupon, the Palace Protector, a Zhou official position, took charge of nurturing the children of the State and taught them the Six Styles (of Chinese character formation). They are called "resembling shapes," "featuring affairs," "combining (existing) elements," "mimicking sounds," "extending meanings," and "borrowing and loaning." (These) are the roots of making (a) writing (system). When the Han prospered and Xiao He drafted its criminal codes, he wrote down its [Han's] statutes that say: "When the Grand Scribe tested the school children, only those who could recite from memory more than nine thousand characters might become scribes. Moreover (the Grand Scribe) tested them with the Six Patterns; the most able ones are assigned (the positions of) Chief Stewards of Writing, Royal Scribes, or Calligraphy Clerks. When low-level clerks and common people present a piece of writing, sometimes their characters are incorrect, (and) immediately they are reported and charged with crime." The Six Patterns are "archaic

graphs,” “extraordinary characters,” “seal script,” “clerical script,” “variant seal (script),” and “insect script.” These are all means to thoroughly know the writings and scripts of the ancient and present times (in order) to copy stamps and to write on pennons and letters.

... (After) the Han prospered, scribes in native villages combined the three chapters of Cangjie, Yuanli, and Boxue (into one); every sixty characters were broken apart into one section, making a sum of fifty-five chapters. Together (the whole text) was called the “Cangjie Chapter.” In Emperor Wu’s reign (141–87 BC), Sima Xiangru composed the “Fan jiang Chapter,” which had no repetitive characters. During Emperor Yuan’s reign (49–33 BC), the Director of Eunuch Attendants, Shi You, composed the “Jijiu Chapter.” During Emperor Cheng’s reign (33–7 BC), the Chamberlain for the Palace Buildings, Li Chang, composed the “Yuanshang Chapter.” They [the latter two] all used the standard forms of characters in the Cangjie Chapter. The “Fanjiang (Chapter),” however, has some non-standard ones. Up to the middle of the Yuanshi (Emperor Ping, 1–5 AD) reign, (the emperor) recruited in the sub-celestial realm hundreds of those who comprehensively understood philology and asked each (of them) to write from memory characters (that they knew) in the center of the main hall. Yang Xiong (53 BC–18 AD) took (from what they wrote) the commonly used ones and compiled the Xunzuan Chapter (lit., “exemplary compilation”) as the continuation of the Cangjie Chapter. He further replaced the characters that had already appeared in the Cangjie Chapter, and made a total of eighty-nine sections. I (Ban Gu,) again made the continuation to Yang Xiong’s Xunzuan Chapter with another twelve sections to make a total of a hundred and two sections. There is not a single repeated character (among the hundred and two sections). The characters that appeared in the various texts of the Six Classics are all here. In the Cangjie Chapter there are many archaic forms. Commonplace preceptors would read them mistakenly. In Emperor Xuan’s reign (74–48 BC) he recruited from the Qi people those who could read them correctly; Zhang Chang subsequently took charge of this matter. (This position) was passed down to the son of his grandson (on the

daughter's side), Du Lin. Because I am making a model for philological studies, I juxtapose the two of them [Zhang Chang and Du Lin].

古者八歲入小學，故周官保氏掌養國子，教之六書，謂象形、象事、象意、象聲、轉註、假借，造字之本也。漢興，蕭何草律，亦著其法，曰：“太史試學童，能諷書九千字以上，乃得為史。又以六體試之，課最者以為尚書、禦史、史書令史。吏民上書，字或不正，輒舉劾。”六體者，古文、奇字、篆書、隸書、繆篆、蟲書，皆所以通知古今文字，摹印章，書幡信也。……漢興，閭裏書師合蒼頡、爰歷、博學三篇，斷六十字以為一章，凡五十五章，並為蒼頡篇。武帝時司馬相如作凡將篇，無復字。元帝時黃門令史遊作急就篇，成帝時將作大匠李長作元尚篇，皆蒼頡中正字也。凡將則頗有出矣。至元始中，徵天下通小學者以百數，各令記字於庭中。揚雄取其有用者以作訓纂篇，順續蒼頡，又易蒼頡中重複之字，凡八十九章。臣復續揚雄作十二章，凡一百二章，無復字，六藝群書所載略備矣。蒼頡多古字，俗師失其讀，宣帝時徵齊人能正讀者，張敞從受之，傳至外孫之子杜林，為作訓故，並列焉。

21

In the “Preface to *Shuowen jiezi*”:

From (the Zhou Dynasty) up to the Qin, writing had eight patterns: the first was called large seal; the second, small seal; the third, tally engraving; the fourth, insect script; the fifth, copy stamp; the sixth, public official script; the seventh, spear script; the eighth, clerical script. When the Han arose, draft script appeared. According to the codes of the Commandant of Punishment (the Han criminal codes), when students reach their seventeenth year or more, they begin the exams, reciting from memory 9,000 characters, and only then do they obtain the position of Bureau Clerk. The eight patterns of writing are also used to test them. The provinces send them to the Grand Scribe, who examines

21 *Han shu* 30.1720–21.

them on both counts [i.e., the 9,000 characters and the eight styles]. The best are made Chief Stewards of Writing. If the writing is not proper, (these Scribes) abruptly report and censure it. Now, although the codes of the Commandant of Punishment exist, there are no examinations. Philological studies are not practiced,²² and no one has gone through the explanations for a very long time now. During the time of Filial Emperor Xuan (74–48 BC), (the Emperor) summoned all those who could read the Cangjie Chapter. Zhang Chang had received it from someone. Du Ye, the Regional Inspector of Liangzhou, Yuan Li from Pei, and Qin Jin, Grandee for the Exposition of Education, for their part were able to recite it. During the time of Filial Emperor Ping, the Emperor summoned Yuan Li and others, more than one hundred men. He ordered them to explain writing systems and written words in the Weiyang Palace. He made Yuan Li the Paramount Serviceman of Philological Studies. The Gentleman Attendant at the Palace Gate, Yang Xiong, gathered their explanations in order to make the Xunzuan Chapter. In all, from the Cangjie Chapter to the most recent, there are fourteen Chapters. As for that which has been recorded in the various writings, these lexicographic works have roughly preserved it.”²³

自爾秦書有八體：一曰大篆，二曰小篆，三曰刻符，四曰蟲書，五曰摹印，六曰署書，七曰殳書，八曰隸書。漢興有草書。尉律：學僮十七以上始試。諷籀書九千字，乃得為史。又以八體試之。郡移太史並課。最者以為尚書史。書或不正，輒舉劾之。今雖有尉律，不課，小學不修，莫達其說久矣。孝宣皇帝時，召通倉頡讀者，張敞從受之。涼州刺史杜業，沛人爰禮，講學大夫秦近，亦能言之。孝平皇帝時，徵禮等百余人，令說文字未央廷中，以禮為

22 Translation adapted from Timothy O'Neill, "Xu Shen's Scholarly Agenda: A New Interpretation of the Postface of *Shuowen jiezi*," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 133.3 (2013), 413–440. O'Neill translates *xiaoxue* 小學 as "elementary education," but that is not correct. It means "minor learning," referring to philological studies.

23 The English rendition roughly follows that provided in O'Neill, "Xu Shen's Scholarly Agenda," 433–434. However, these are our own translations, which, while based on O'Neill's version, correct many loosely translated terms found there.

小學元士。黃門侍郎揚雄，采以作訓²⁴纂篇。凡倉頡以下十四篇，群書所載，略存之矣。

It is noticeable that the base text is the same as the one Xu Shen quoted from the “Bibliographical Treatise” in his preface. Most of the differences between the two, regarding this paragraph, are the degrees of detail in the case of each event. However, what instantly catches one’s eye are Xu Shen’s switching the subject of being instantly charged with an offense when the writer does not follow orthography in a letter or petition (字或不正輒舉劾). In the “Bibliographical Treatise,” it is the “low-level clerks and common people” (*li min* 吏民) who were reported and convicted for not using “correct characters” (*zhengzi* 正字); but when it comes to the “Preface,” those liable to being convicted become the adult pupils (over seventeen years old, *shiqi yishang* 十七以上) in the Imperial College of Supreme Learning (*xuetong* 學僮) — the highest educational institute — whose ultimate goals were to become officials, as high as Chief Stewards of Writing, in the Department of State Affairs (*shangshu shi* 尚書史). The object of *bu zheng* 不正 (“incorrect”) also switches from *zi* 字 to *shu* 書, from the specifics of using certain “correct forms of characters” (*zhengzi*) to the general “writing in a proper way” (*zhengshu* 正書). This may seem to be merely a nuance, but the significance is great. First, it reflects a smart juggling of the grammatical double-interpretation of *zheng* when combined with *zi* (*zhengzi* is an established disyllabic word meaning “orthography,” or *shu* (**zhengshu* is not a word, but simply a phrase meaning “proper writings”). Second, not being able to follow propriety in general writing represents a dereliction of duty for pupils in the Imperial College who would become the Empire’s future officials, while not being able to follow orthography in presenting a letter (*shang shu* 上書) is to be expected from common people (*li min* 吏民). Punishing the former is a part of the regulations, while punishing the latter speaks, ironically, more for harsh government than for emphasis on *zhengzi* (“orthography”).

In this way, we may say that Ban Gu’s “Bibliographical Treatise” implies a latent accusation of the harsh orthographical policy that stretches into and affects the literary lives of common writers, while Xu Shen, judging from his sharp and sensitive attention to such a point (conjecturing Xu’s psychology here), erased this condemnation by replacing condemnatory terms with synonyms that bear

²⁴ Yan Kejun, ed., *Quan Hou Han wen* 1.496.

ostensible semantic similarity (while not really doing so, to a pair of acute eyes). Timothy O'Neill argues that, since the *Shuowen* was a work intended to be submitted to the Han emperor in 121 AD, its structure is “designed to prove that the changes in the writing systems are historically and graphemically observable, and consequently that the original intentions of the sages who used archaic forms (*guwen* 古文) to write the classics are literally recoverable by working backwards through the reforms and changes in writing to a proper understanding of how they classified and used their words in the *guwen* writing system” (O'Neill 2013, 413). But we need to inspect such a quest of recoverability, observability, and transmissibility on a more macrostructural level in the history of Chinese philology, and emphasize the role of *Shuowen* as the first player onstage that begins a viable “Middle China” concept that is upheld by the repeated process of changing from resistance to the resilience of the Chinese nationality in dealing with a foreign culture. In this larger Self–Other, Resistance–Resilience framework, we call for a more systematic and pragmatic investigation of Xu Shen's agenda — as represented in his Preface (reference to which is however limited by the scope of this paper) — in order to trace the history of the script-centered lineage in the next millennium, which Zheng Qiao assessed in the “*liushu lüe*” (“Sketch”).

Such pragmatism has characterized the examination of Chinese script since the time of its first attestation, while language has been the means whereby administrators negotiate between political principles and the actualities of governance. The earliest record of the pragmatic relationship between the pattern of sounds and administrative governance can be found in the “Greater Preface” to the *Book of Odes* (comp. ca. fifth century BC): “When sentiments are manifested via sounds of patterns, then we call it music....The Principle of Sounds is connected with the Principle of Administration.” 情動於中，故形於聲。聲成文，謂之音。... 聲音之道，與政通矣. The assertion that “The Principle of Sounds” is connected with “The Principle of Administration” may seem like an innocuous, even casual, statement, but in the context of the philosophical-political-philological nexus that concerns us in this inquiry, it is a matter of the utmost gravity. Already at this very early stage in the development of Chinese literature, in the minds of Chinese literati, there was a direct linkage between sounds and governance. In the pre-imperial period, this passage was quoted in the “Records on Music,” *The Book of Rites* (comp. ca. third century BC). The tradition of closely associating “patterns” — whether of sounds or of shapes — in the politically utilitarian way in the Chinese context perhaps starts from here, emphasized by Xu Shen's Preface as: “As for scripts and characters, they mark the beginning of a king's administration.

They are the things which the ancestors pass on to their posterity, and by which later people can experience the past.” 蓋文字者，王政之始。前人所以垂後，後人所以識古。 Such beliefs help to explain the diachronic function that the characters were imagined to carry in Chinese civilization. This imagining, and the developmental trajectory of such imagining, of the function of characters as the adhesive of a distinctive national character, is key to this paper’s aims and its choice of primary textual evidence.

So we see that the Preface stresses two agenda items: “broadly gathering in order to pass through (different) peoples” 博采通人 and “to be credible with evidence” 信而有證; transmissibility in a way that is both synchronic (*tong* 通) and diachronic (*zheng* 證) — if the administration (*zheng* 政) were believed to be widespread and everlasting. Administration, an abstract concept, is epitomized in concrete forms via consistent written records employing them. Abundant examples demonstrate how the flourishing of literacy or orality would be directly associated with the surging of a prosperous age or the falling of a chaotic age. The “Bibliographical Treatise” records:

According to the ancient tradition, writings must use the same script. If one did not know (how to write a character), then he left it blank and asked his senior acquaintances about it. As for a declining period, there is no rectified standard to correctness and incorrectness, and everyone uses whatever (forms fit the sounds) of their own (speech).

古制，書必同文。不知則闕，問諸故老。至於衰世，是非無正，人用其私。

Let us look at some of the chief differences between orality and literacy that are germane to our inquiry. Orality is distinguished by different forms of speech and a deficiency of recorded evidence. It is open to reinterpretation and allows for the free expression of ideas. Since it is specific to individuals, it is non-inheritable, giving rise to unpredictable and disorderly administration. In contrast, literacy is distinguished by one unified form and the presence of recorded evidence. It is inheritable and transmittable through space and time, enabling regulated administration. This explains how the elaboration of literacy and the denigration of orality are reflected in the realm of philological studies of the two primary desiderata in the pre-divisional Chinese politico-philosophical tradition: “constancy”

(*zheng* 正) and “unity” (*tong* 同), and how “private usage” (*si* 私) reflects the opposite of what *zheng* and *tong* together may establish in the Chinese fusion of textual and politico-philosophical culture. This apprehension of the private leads to the fear that it will result in ungovernability, hence social chaos. Such qualms are deep-seated among social thinkers in China, who are wary of orality (especially as it varies so greatly through space and time) but well-disposed toward literacy of the type they command.

Mr. Zuo (Qiuming, the commentator on Confucius' *Annals of the Spring-and-Autumn Period*) ... orally instructed his disciples. After the disciples went back, each spoke different words.... (Zuo) Qiuming was afraid that each of his disciples harbored his own intention that deviated from the truth. Therefore, in order to talk about fundamental affairs, he recorded (his words) via writing. This is to signify how the Master did not talk about the Classics with empty spoken words.

左氏.....口授弟子，弟子退而異言。.....丘明恐弟子各安其意，以失其真，故論本事而作傳，明夫子不以空言說經也。

The Chinese ruling class realizes the continuous, unified, (pre-)designated, and provable nature of literacy compared to the transient, diversified, individualized, and unprovable nature of orality, by which “speaking different words” (*yiyen* 異言) signifies a peril to “be afraid of” (*kong* 恐): the allowance by orality for the differences of individual apprehension presages the harboring of one's own intention that diverges from that originally assigned by its interpreters. The further corroboration of this comparison below may stand for the first “censorship” in China:

In the *Annals of the Spring-and-Autumn Period* (the first history of China), when different powers denigrated the Great People, since all the facts were recorded in writings, the texts had to be secluded and not exhibited in order to evade the calamities of the age. In the last phase of the period (when things were disorderly), oral explanation became popular. Consequently, there were the Gongyang, Guliang, Zou, and Jia commentaries....”

春秋所貶損大人，當世君臣，有威權勢力，其事實皆形於傳，是以隱其書而不宣，所以免時難也。及末世口說流行，故有公羊、穀梁、鄒、夾之傳。²⁵

These treatises on pre-Qin Chinese language policies always focus on, and keep coming back to, the pragmatics of scripts and their patterns in politics.

Xu Shen sees having “a system that encompasses all” as a means to overcome difficulties in understanding and encompassing variants. As work to be presented to the throne, Xu believes that his *Shuowen* should ease the qualms of the emperor and the era. Yet whence come the qualms? Chiefly, they resulted from the Chinese encounter with Indo-Iranians and the cultural invasion of Buddhism they brought with them. Prior to this foreign invasion even Qin was incorporated as its Self. As Mark Lewis points out in his *The Early Chinese Empires: Qin and Han* (2007), the Qin state was not only clearly identified by Confucianists as barbarian, but itself adopted this persona of a state distinct from and hostile to the culture of the Central Plain. That is to say, Qin had come to pride itself on its presumed cultural distinctiveness. The “us-them” mentality in Qin and the utilization of such anti-foreign sentiment towards the Qin court (not only its violent governance) was in part due to the cohesive force of the Han Empire, shaped by such a reaction to the Qin rulership. However, in the face of a genuinely foreign “them” — the Indo-Iranians — even the Qin was treated as “us,” such an acquiescence manifesting itself in the beginning of the “six styles” and “eight patterns” that Han was willing to inherit to defend the fountainhead of Chinese nationality.

Based on such foundational elements, our paper argues another perspective that has been overlooked by traditional scholars. We have shown how propensity, or *shi*, in the discourse of Chinese politico-intellectual history that has permeated the philological discipline for millennia, was manifested by the twelfth-century intellectual, Sanskrit-infatuate historian Zheng Qiao in his discussion of Xu Shen and his followers of the “studies of eyes.” We have investigated the involvement of *shi* from Xu Shen’s time up to Zheng Qiao’s time, a period that spans and legitimizes the concept of “Middle China.” This puts Xu and Zheng, the study of eyes and ears, on the same moving pendulum that was set

²⁵ Gongyang, Guliang, Zou, and Jia are all traditions of exegetical amplifications of the extremely terse Spring and Autumn Annals. This passage continues the quotation of the “Bibliographical Treatise”.

in motion and perpetuated by the tide of persisting indigenous-foreign interplay. In the case of Xu Shen and his Late Han time — the first century AD — the unified Qin-Han empire had for the first time been positioned on the cliff-edge of being “culturally conquered” rather than “culturally conquering” (this is in comparison to the Han-Xiongnu case), marking the beginning of this “middle” age. The influence of Buddhism, bringing along Indians and Iranians (the earliest translators of Buddhist texts into Chinese were Iranians) from the west, became a nascent yet prevalent phenomenon in major Chinese cities, especially Chang’an and Luoyang, quickly making them cosmopolises. Xu Shen’s and Ban Gu’s time of confronting a wave of foreign cultural penetration is commonly figured as a period of transformation — in the welcomers’ eyes — but also, crisis, in the conservatives’ eyes.

The most revelatory linguistic reflection of this cultural osmosis may be “the first mention of Buddhism in Chinese belles-lettres” as noted by Erik Zürcher,²⁶ which appeared in Zhang Heng’s 張衡 (78–139) “Rhapsody on the Western Capital” (*Xijing fu* 西京賦):

Even Zhan Ji or a *sangmen*, who would not be deluded?

展季桑門，誰能不營？²⁷

According to an annotation of the English translator, David Knechtges, Zhan Ji, often referred to as Liuxia Hui, lived at the end of the seventh century BC and was particularly well-known for high moral character: he allowed a homeless woman to sit on his lap all night without any aspersions being cast on his reputation. *Sangmen* was one of the early Chinese transcriptions of Sanskrit *śramaṇa* (lit., “one who exerts himself”), and is used to refer to Buddhist monks.²⁸ The context of this sentence in the rhapsody:

²⁶ Erik Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China: The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China* (Leiden: Brill, 1959; rpt. 2007), 28.

²⁷ Our translation is modified from David Knechtges’s translation of *Wen Xuan or Selections of Refined Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), 1.237: “Even Zhan Ji or a *sangmen*, no one could not but be deluded.” Original Chinese text: *Wenxuan* 文選, 6 volumes (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986) 3.79.

²⁸ Knechtges, 236.

"the emperor's mind was fully intoxicated.... a feeling of discontent gathered inside him. With a secret warning to the Rendezvous Gate, he went out incognito, bent and hunched like a commoner. From his exalted place he descended to the lower plane; he tucked away his seals and concealed his ribbons.... proceeded to the pleasure lodges... consorted with the pretty and graceful. They snuggled together on a narrow mat...."²⁹ The lines that follow are detailed depictions of charming dancers. In this rhapsody, Zhang Heng's juxtaposing of *śramaṇa* with the paragon Zhan Ji, both famously unaffected in the face of lust, shows his acquaintance and correct understanding with this simple Buddhist term. The non-Buddhist poet's adept usage of such a term, in a poem that targets the general secular public, points to a fairly strong influence of Buddhism in the capital around the end of the first and the beginning of the second century AD. This may signify that Chinese intelligentsia, even without being in the Buddhist picture, were conversant with palpable, distinct features of Buddhist *śramanas* such as self-abstinence. As intimated by Zürcher, Buddhism may have flourished more successfully than generally acknowledged in the Han Dynasty as soon as its fascinating, distinctive philosophy made its first converts among the Chinese intelligentsia at the beginning of the years anno Domini (Zürcher 1959, 18).

Tsukamoto Zenryū's *A History of Early Chinese Buddhism*, translated by Leon Hurvitz (Tokyo, New York, San Francisco: Kodansha International Ltd., 1985) provides invaluable insights into the similarities and differences between Indian philosophy and Chinese thought. Before the first century AD encounter between Buddhism and Confucianism, Indian and Chinese intellectuals had been pursuing two totally dissimilar and unrelated courses of development in India and China. "While India and China are ... both part of the same Asian land mass, they have been separated by mountain ranges, plateaus, and deserts ... all of them virtually impassable to the ancients" (3). "Of all the learned doctrines that had been vying with one another during the Spring and Autumn era and that of the Warring States, those of the 'various philosophers and the Hundred Schools,' Confucianism alone was adopted as State doctrine, and there was established a political and social structure, in keeping with the enthronement of Confucianism throughout the Han as 'official learning,' whose politics and morals were both based on the peculiarly Confucian classics" (21). "Confucianism... became linked with monarchical power, and

²⁹ Knechtges, 235.

the study of the five ‘warp books’ treated by that school as its classics, became an indispensable attainment for all officials” (21).

Monarchical power was marshalled to protect and foster Confucianism at the expense of all other schools. In a manner reminiscent of the role of Brahmanism in India, Chinese intellectuals were subject to severe restrictions from the classics on their thinking, their speech, their actions, indeed on everything, and came to believe that it was only by close reliance on the classics that one could speak, write, and act properly (21). Such considerations also determined the “morality of philology” — how people thought about and used language, how philology was an epitome of Chinese intellectual and political history. This amounted to a struggle of Canonism, where the Confucian classics ruled the roost as official doctrine (23–28).

“Yet the Buddhism received into China, without coming to terms in some way with China’s traditions, above all with classically based doctrines such as Confucianism and traditional popular beliefs which originated as a development out of these, could never have become a Chinese religion” (37).

Thus Buddhism, and aspects of the Indian philosophy it represents, were circulating in China by around the turn of the first century to the second century AD. But just how different were its basic premises from what Chinese were used to according to their own systems of thought? In Richard King’s *Indian Philosophy* (1999), we note the following aspects of Buddhist thought, all of which would have been alien to Chinese during the first century AD and before:

- Three marks of existence (*tri-lakṣaṇa*): 1. all compounded things are unsatisfactory / painful (*duḥkha*); 2. all compounded things are impermanent (*anitya*); 3. everything lacks an-abiding-self (*anātman*)."
- In Buddhism there is a state of permanent contentment and that is nirvāṇa. It is achieved through the cessation of all craving (*tṛṣṇā*) and the attainment of enlightenment (*bodhi*). This amounts to a full existential realization and acceptance of the four noble truths and the three marks of existence.
- Life is unsatisfactory. Primarily this is because it is impermanent. If all things are impermanent, that is, subject to change and decay, then they cannot be said to have a durable essence.

- The doctrine of no-abiding-self (< *anātman*) is the most distinctive feature of Buddhist thought and constitutes the fundamental starting point of virtually all schools of Buddhist philosophy in India.
- There is no substantial or essential self which persists or “passes through” this series. The quintessential transmissibility (*tong* 通) — both synchronically and diachronically — which the core pre-divisional Chinese philosophy pursued — is utterly “empty” (*śūnyatā*) in Buddhist philosophy.

This congeries of Indian ineffabilities, as they would have been seen by Chinese thinkers who confronted them for the first time, came face to face with Confucianism at this particular moment in history. Let us see how that worked out in the transition from Ban Gu to Xu Shen in terms of the way they viewed the emerging systematization of the script during their era.

We have already familiarized ourselves with Xu Shen’s motives and *modus operandi* for compiling his *Shuo wen* and presenting it to the throne. Ban Gu’s background and milieu were of a quite different nature. Ban flourished during Emperor Ming’s reign (57–75 AD) and was commanded by the Emperor to compile the later-lost *Dongguan Han ji* 東觀漢記 (Recordings of the Han from the Eastern Tower). Xu flourished a generation later. Why does this matter? We would approach this question by first answering who Emperor Ming was through realizing his role as the imagined center in this Confucian-Buddhist contention of discourse power. On the Buddhist side, Emperor Ming was the celebrated dreamer of Buddha in the preface to “Sishier zhang jing 四十二章經” (Sutra in Forty-two Chapters), which is often regarded as the first translation of a Buddhist scripture into Chinese. Regardless of the fact that the preface was a subsequent addition to the already problematic *Sutra in Forty-two Chapters*, Emperor Ming was so conceived partly owing to his diplomatic openness; he dispatched Ban Chao (32–102 AD) to visit the western realms for the first time since the fall of the Western Han (or the establishment of the Eastern Han).

And who is Ban Chao? None other than Ban Gu’s brother. One brother became the court historian operating the Confucian rudder of the ship of state, and the other reestablished Chinese control over Central Asia via his military power and diplomatic ingenuity — this parallel provided immense scope for conjecture, especially in the eyes of Chinese Buddhists (the ultimate ideal of whom

was the merger of Buddhist culture with Chinese indigenous culture). Notably, Chinese Buddhism never seeks to monopolize the stage of Sinitic civilization (unlike Confucianism on Chinese land or Brahmanism on Indian land). Chinese Buddhists, at least during the divisional period, pursued a well-rounded mixture rather than a split.

We do not know how the preface to *Sishier zhangjing* was added to the text, and even the history of the main text is dubious.³⁰ We simply know that the story of Emperor Ming's dream started from Yuan Hong's (328–397) *Hou Han Ji* 後漢紀 (Annals of the Later Han)— this is crucial, since it was added considerably later than the period to which the work itself is ascribed. The preface is first included in Sengyou's (445–518) *Chu Sanzang ji ji* 出三藏記集 (Collected Records concerning the Tripitaka). It is highly likely that Sengyou adopted Yuan Hong's account in a way similar to what Fan Ye (398–445) had done when he included it in the official history *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 (Book of the Later Han) as an enigmatic, exotic bit of imperial lore that fit the zeitgeist.

Back to the main thrust of the philosophy of philology at the time: how do these stories fit together like pearls threaded on the same necklace? They are elements in “the struggle of Canonism” that we examined above in our discussion of Tsukamoto's account of the encounter between Confucianism and Buddhism. Philologists such as Ban Gu, in his *Baihu tong* 白虎通 (lit. Discussions from the White Tiger Pavilion), by straining through the sound symbolism of the words that they glossed — usually in hermeneutic ways — are not nostalgic for the forfeited freedom of the exegetical dry learning of the classics per se, but for the imagined “golden past” that Confucianism represented: unified, prosperous, martially powerful, and ethnically conquering instead of conquered, which marks the main difference between the peak of Western Han and the trough of mid-late Eastern Han. Such a dramatic, even traumatic, transition would be easily overlooked had anyone not paid attention to the emotions and perceptions conveyed in the works we have been examining — the fears, struggles, and inner contentions expressed by their authors.

³⁰ See the entry “Sishi'er zhangjing” 四十二章經 in Robert E. Buswell, Jr., and Donald S. Lopez, Jr., eds., *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019–2020).

From the *Sutra in Forty-two Chapters*, we leap ahead nearly a thousand years to acquaint ourselves with an even more curious text, the *Zangjing yinyi sui han lu xu* 藏經音義隨函錄序 (Preface to the *Accompanying Letter of [the Dictionary] of Sounds and Meanings [of Characters] in the Tripitaka*). The work was compiled during the Five Dynasties period between the years 931–940 by the quaint, quixotic monk Kehong 可洪. We will examine this unique document in detail below, and provide a complete, annotated translation to its preface. Suffice it for the moment to say that it is full of Kehong’s harping and nitpicking on characters that are erroneous and miswritten, i.e., that are not *zheng* 正.

We have seen how both Ban Gu and Xu Shen — neither of whom was Buddhist, of course — were fixated on getting the characters right (*zhengzi* 正字) in the face of Buddhist cultural (especially phonological) encroachment during the middle of the Eastern Han dynasty. Some may say that the “Buddhist Conquest” changed everything, and that Xu Shen and Ban Gu felt the way they did about characters because they were pre-Buddhist figures. But not really, since Kehong, who is a Buddhist in post-Tang times, is basically in the same boat with Ban and Xu when it comes to proper writing. The shared obsession with proper characters is not about Buddhism or Confucianism, but rather it is mostly about the fear of losing identity stability and the nostalgia for a unified era that drive them in common to hold on to the pillar of the Sinographic writing system as a chief determinative attribute of their distinctive nationality. Thus the holding on to a unified writing system is an expression of the frustration experienced by knowledge systematizers like Xu Shen and Ban Gu, who took up the challenge to schematize “our identity” on a palpable, textual level as fully or as crisply as in other cultural, social, and political domains — in the face of “theirs.” The same holds true for Kehong as we shall soon see in extraordinary detail.

The entire agenda of this paper is inspired by this obscure preface by Kehong. It reflects that one’s identity as a Buddhist and one’s knowledge of a foreign language whose script is phonetic (such as Sanskrit) do not guarantee one’s attitude towards the importance of studying characters versus sounds. Kehong is a Buddhist and able to compile a sound gloss dictionary for his time, yet he emphasizes the necessity of character rectitude no less than Xu Shen and Ban Gu. His work is often valued in respect to studying nonstandard forms of Chinese characters (*suzi* 俗字) or middle vernacular language or the development of Buddhist philology in the Tang-Song transitional time (as he is almost contemporary with Shouwen), yet understudied as a byproduct of Five-Dynasty intelligentsia’s

collective nostalgia (Buddhists included) for a unified and sovereign Tang empire — a cosmopolitan furnace within which different ethnic groups and ideas melded so well as “Tang elements” that its adherents would only imagine the solidarity of these symbols towards a unity, “empire.” Such imagining of an entitative Tang, beginning from the Five Dynasties, raised the curtain of the collective exertion of shaping a Cultural Tang (Stephen Owen’s concept, 2014, published as chapter 4 in *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature*, ed. Kang-i Sun Chang) since Northern Song times. The distinct, even contrastive paths that Kehong and Shouwen took as two coeval Buddhist philologists, corroborate this paper’s suggestion that it depends on the authorial coterie’s standpoint of inclining towards unification or multiplicity, sovereignty or individualism, authoritative or autonomous interpretation that bespeaks its attention to *zi* 字 (“writing”) or *yin* 音 (“sound”) in the philological realm.

“Preface to the Accompanying Letter of [the Dictionary] of Sounds and Meanings [of Characters] in the Tripitaka,” by Kehong 可洪 “藏經音義隨函錄序”³¹

The text shown in bold in the passages below highlights Kehong’s nitpicking regarding correct characters. Many among them are supposed to be transcriptions of Sanskrit sounds in Buddhist texts (especially those so indicated with mouth □ radicals). This is meant to be the preface to a compilation of sounds for the purpose of assisting people to read and pronounce words in the canons. Yet semantic classifiers are so insisted upon by Kehong 可洪 that he stresses “standardized transcriptional characters,” as in the following:

When it comes to worldly sentiments and actual situations, basically they were not vacuous; the greater self and the profound principles, by origin they had no signs. In addition, the measure (of Buddhism) encompasses seas and mountains; the longevity (of Buddhism) is equal to (that of) the Great Void [universe]. The comprehension (of these) comes from Nature [*bhūtataṭhātā*]; how could it ever be mulled over by carving

³¹ K1257, 高麗藏 *Tripitaka Koreana* 12.246–7. This text has a unique textual history from *Zhaocheng jinzang* 趙城金藏, which was discovered in Shanxi 山西, China. It appears only in the Korean version of the Tripitaka, not in Taishō.

and polishing? Surely, because of the unbroken Root-Sentience, (a spirit) becomes entrusted in the oviparous [*aṇḍaja*] and viviparous [*jarāyuja*] (births); owing to the unforgotten Seed-Consciousness [*ālayavijñāna*], instead (it) conforms with water-born [*saṃsvedaja*] and metamorphic [*aupapāduka*]. The Four Forms of Births [*caturyonī*] are already in existence; the Three Realms [*trailokya*] are in no case empty. The Inclination to Bitterness [*duḥkha*] is regarded (by people) as (their) hometown; the Illusory [*māyā*] Body is used as (their) residence. Cycling and circulating (in) permanent ages [*kalpa*], whenever (do they) engender the heart to return to (their) origin? Drifting and roaming about for a long time, (they) never have thoughts of going back to the fountainhead that emerged among them. Having become confused about the Truth [*bhūtatathatā*]; constantly (they) experience jeopardy along the peregrination³² Unleashing (my) thoughts toward the Eastern Region,³³ (their people) did not know the requisites for renunciation (of the family, namely, becoming a monk [*pravrajya*]). Therefore, various Buddhas and Masters-of-Taming-and-Controlling [*puruṣadamyasārathi*], by means of sending music of great Compassion into the Dense Forest [*gahana*, ref. “dense vexation of sentient beings”], showed them the right way. Although the sage [Buddha] appears, there is no way to appeal to His time without words and speeches; although words and speeches flourish, there is no way to transmit His mandate without scripts and writings. However, as for the dispositions of all living creatures, they are different in acumen.

32 *tú* 逵 is the archaic form of *tú* 徒. However, it is not related to *tú* 途. In the sense of “walking on foot,” 徒 is a verb, “to walk on foot,” and 途 is a noun, “the walk.” The two words were homophonous in Kehong’s time (Five Dynasties). The grammar here in the Factor–Object 歷險逵 “to experience a dangerous journey/walk” clearly shows that 逵 should represent a noun. Therefore Kehong seems to make a mistake in the utilization of 逵, which may be caused by perplexity resulting from his forced use of “correct characters” only. It seems that, in the pursuit of archaism in character forms, Kehong loses track of the word that a character represents. The misuse of 逵/徒 is a revealing case of such groundless, phantasmal pursuit of *zhengzi*.

33 *yífāng* 夷方 (lit. barbarian region) was an archaic, Oracle Bones Inscriptional reference to “the East.” E.g., 王來征夷方 “the king comes to subjugate the Eastern Barbarians.” *Yífāng* is the Other that the king conquers rather than where one’s homeland is located. It is interesting that Kehong, as a Chinese Buddhist, refers to China as “Eastern Barbarians.” One reason may be because of the Buddhist context. China, located to the east of India, is the Other land to that of the Buddha’s Zhongguo 中國 (Madhyadeśa). Another would be the quest of archaic uses in every possible way.

(Therefore,) the means by which various Buddhas exert influence and transform living beings are also different. Some (Buddhas) do not blink or talk but simply take Buddhist actions; some move their brows and eyes to instruct living beings; some use their chanting and body movements, and (what they do) is called “expounding Buddhist teachings [*dharma*]”; some exhale with their mouths open and cough, and (what they do) is noted as proclaiming and preaching; some use expedient methods [*upāya*] according with the capacity (of their recipients), and expound by means of writing. (The last one is) exactly the founder of Our Religion, Śākyamuni the Cultured and Enlightened One. As soon as script and writing are utilized, canons and exhortations are thereupon displayed. The standards for “Ten excellent characteristics of a holy Buddha” and “Three virtuous states of a bodhisattva,” are all thus taken (from those written records of canons and exhortations). From here, (one may) count on exegetical methods such as *gǔ* [paraphrasing archaic words in current language] and *xùn* [critical explanations/interpretation] and find contentment in the “(Treatise of) Knowledge on Sounds” [*Śabdavidyā*].³⁴ The Four Arguments [*catvāri pratisaṃvidā*] are then perfect; the Myriad Regulations [*dharma*] all cleared up. After that (one may) acquire the truth and forget about the image; acquire the meanings and forget about the words. Outside the Realm (his) derangement dissipates; inside the Sphere (he is) extraordinarily unconcerned. Is it not nice to be so? Truly (the attainment of such a state) is attributed to a master’s training skills.

遼(逮)夫界情實相，本不窳隆；大我玄宗，元無朕兆。加以量含海嶽，壽等太虛，體自天真，詎煩瑣琢？良以根情不斷，來託卵胎；種識未忘，還依溼化。四生既有，三界莫空。以苦趣為家鄉，即幻軀為屋舍。循環永劫，何嘗生返本之心；流浪長時，未省發還源之念。既迷真際，恒歷險迭(徒)。縱念夷方，罔知出要，是故諸佛調御，以大慈悲曲入稠林，示其正道。聖人雖現，非言說無以適其時；言說既興，非文字無以傳其旨(旨)。然則眾生之性，利

34 Here Kehong parallels the traditional Chinese and Indian exegetical methods: *gǔ xùn* and *Śabdavidyā*.

鈍不同；諸佛化生，設教亦異。或有不瞬(瞬)不言，而作佛事；或有動眉動目，而誨眾生；或有以念以身，名為說法；或有攸欸警欬，号曰宣談；或有方便隨機，以文字說。即我等教主釋迦文佛是也。文字既用，典誥爰彰；十聖三賢，咸依取則。繇是資乎詰訓，足以聲明。四辯斯圓，萬法皆爽(爽)。然後得真忘像，得意忘言；於域外而盡融，在囊中而偶儻。豈不善矣哉？寔由師範也。

However, the writings and characters in the Buddhist Scripture collections [*tripitaka*] have multitudinous errors. To sum up by their essences, there are no more than three (kinds of mistakes).³⁵ Some (characters) are too artful at embellishing, determining the (characters') forms based on (their) interpretations; some (characters) have groundless increase of semantic classifiers, and the character is used capriciously according to (the writer's) will; some (of the characters) do not even have such forms in existence, but (the writer) fabricated its form by phonetic borrowing; some (characters) acquire erroneous strokes during writing, (such as) reduction or addition of horizontal strokes or dots. When the writing errs, both the genuine and the popular forms are lost; if the usage is irregular, then both the sentence and the flavor would be deficient. It would make those who pursue proper understanding stumble over Heavenly books (ref. "abstruse writings"), leading those who chant the text to falter at the bird tracks ("illegible writing"). All these errors are owing to how the people who take charge of the writing brush give free rein to whatever they may imagine, or how the scribes and copyists toy with their writing tablets and brush-tips. In consequence, they have paved roads into barren wastelands, and they mix rubble together with pearls and jades. Ah! Accepting or rejecting either extreme, indeed it is hard (for me) to wield my brush. I would like to chant only following what is written in the text, but the meaning (of such miswritten characters) may (even) be opposite (to the original); I would like to refer to them according to the (character's supposed) meaning, again the form of the character

³⁵ Actually, four, according to the immediately following sentences.

does not match (what was originally there). Left and right, I look once again with extra caution; one after another, I break up the elements (of each character) and inspect (each element) separately. Thinking about it [this problem] with the tip of my writing brush moistened and black (with ink) — what should I follow? As in the canon, the Buddha's words say: "Rely on insight instead of experience; rely on proper meanings instead of written texts." This saying is true!

然藏經文字，謬誤頗繁。以要言之，不過三種。或有巧於潤色，考義定文；或有妄益偏傍，率情用字；或有此方無體，假借成形；或有書寫筆訛，減增畫點。筆訛則真俗並失，用乖則句味兼差。令討義者敲(敲)口於天書，俾(俾)誦文者躑躅於鳥跡。此皆筆受者肆其智臆，臆流者弄厥槩毫。遂令坦路變為丘墟，瓦礫渾其珠玉。吁哉！取捨兩端，實難措筆。只欲依文喚也，又反義焉；只欲就義呼之，復違字矣。更相戾眛，遞乎胥屠。黷聿思之，寧從？佛語經云：依智不依識，依義不依文，茲言是也。

Although it is hard to investigate the meanings of miscellaneous *dhāraṇī* [lit. "incantations"] and the names of humans and non-humans, they are, all the same, in common use. I am collecting all the writing errors among contemporary (Buddhist) textual compositions. (I) sometimes pair up two transcriptions (of the same term) and examine them together, in order to put down (the correct form); (I) sometimes compare (the texts across) different Tripiṭaka collections, and go into the particulars of each before determining (the final form); (I) sometimes investigate a variety of previous compositions, and call the old (forms) as they are; (I) sometimes adhere to that which pleases my own mind, and presumptuously I make sound glosses for them.

雖諸陀羅尼，及人，非人等名字，難究其旨，亦在俗用。書錯中攝今之所撰，或有將雙譯對會，驗以施行；或有諸藏勘同，詳之取定；或有檢諸先作，據舊而呼；或有自通詭懷，輒為音釋。

Pausing for a bit in the middle of this translation, the authors note that, except where we explicitly give “translations,” many of the characters in this section are being used for sound transcriptional purposes only. Kehong is only complaining about their being miswritten, that is, having the wrong shapes. But in general, Kehong complains about how miswritten forms mix up the distinction between homophonous Chinese words.

As for instance, the characters of 羯鞞 (“*kalavinka* bird, an immortal creature in Buddhism, with a human head, a bird’s torso, and a long flowing tail”) are written as [鳥曷]鞞,³⁶ and a text with 鞞航 is written as 鞞鞞;³⁷ 扉曇 (“hidden cavity”) becomes 蓓蓓 (“flower bud”),³⁸ while 葑苢 (“a kind of unknown grass” + “Chinese wolfberry”) is equated to 薅耨 (“to weed with a hoe”),³⁹ for 庶幾 (“in the hope that”) they employ 謔謔 (“hope” + “deride”),⁴⁰ for 狎習 (“become improperly intimate”) they use 評譖

36 佛學大辭典: “可洪音義三下曰: 「鷄鶻, 正作羯鞞也, 或云羯毘, 或云羯鞞, 皆梵音楚夏耳。正言迦陵頻伽。」” Since *kalavinka* is a bird’s name, the bird 鳥 semantic classifier (Kangxi No. 196) is used by some copyists when writing it down.

37 Unknown word. One wonders whether it is a word at all. But according to the structure of this paragraph, there are eight examples of writing errors corresponding to four categories of errors. The *kalavinka* and this case, as the first and second among the eight, must symbolize the first problem: “artful at embellishing, determining the (characters’) forms based on (their) interpretations.” 巧於潤色, 考義定文.

38 扉曇 and 蓓蓓 were homophonous in Kehong’s time. This is a good example of how two homophonous (or near-homophonous) Chinese words must be distinguished by written forms and semantic classifiers to tell them apart on the textual level.

39 Another instance of how written forms may be the only way to differentiate near-homophonous words in Chinese. Notably, via currently available lexicographic sources we do not know what 葑苢 stands for. The *Kangxi Dictionary* 康熙字典 quotes *Leipian*’s 類篇 definition of 葑苢 by only two words: “Name of a certain grass” 草名. Whether it is an irregular variant form of a historically continued character requires more investigation. But on the basis of pronunciation, it is unlikely to form a binome with 苢 (“Chinese wolfberry”).

40 庶幾 is a common, disyllabic function word that means “perhaps, hopefully” in Classical Chinese. 謔謔 is not a word. We conjecture that the copyist added the speech semantic classifier 言 (Kangxi No. 149) owing to the probable reason that particles such as 庶幾 play a syntactic role in a sentence.

(“loquacious” + “threaten”),⁴¹ for 被褙 (“bag for carrying bedding while traveling”) they apply 被關 (“quilt in the bed”), and for 天甦 (“coming back to life after natural death”) they set up 天暈 (“heavenly stars???”).⁴²

且如羯鞞之字作[鳥曷]騃，鞭駟之文為軻軌，扉疊將為蓓蕾，荇荈以當薺勑，庶幾乃使譙譙，狎習而用評譖，被褙仍施被關，天甦又設天暈。

謙 (“modest”) and 噤 (“clench in one’s teeth”) were barely distinguished; 蹇 (“lame, crippled”) and 癖 (“obsession”) were confused with each other — all these are cases of capricious usages (of characters) according to one’s will.

謙噤莫分，蹇癖相紊，並是率意所用者也。

As for 喇啞哩嚶 (the preceding four characters are referred to as [their sounds] are read out by the tongue), 嚶呖[口鏤]叭, 嚶咤 嚶嚶, 嚶嚶嚶嚶 (the preceding four characters are referred to as [their sounds] are read out), the written forms 嚶嚶嚶嚶 and the characters [言置] 嚶嚶 etc., the vocables arbitrarily placed in certain rimes — all these are cases of phonetic borrowings (of characters).

⁴¹ 狎習 is a binome meaning “becoming too (disrespectfully) intimate.” However, similar to the 譙譙’s case, 評譖, with each element homophonous to the case of 狎習, is not a word. Kehong once again exposes a writer/copyist’s common problem, in the Chinese context, of imagining/assigning an assimilated semantic classifier for binomes or disyllabic words to create a visually harmonious effect for literal interpretation. The four cases above are all instances of the second problem: “groundless increase of semantic classifiers, and the character is used capriciously according to (the writer’s) will.” 妄益偏傍，率情用字。

⁴² Neither 天甦 or 天暈 is a word. And 暈 is not a historically continued orthographic form. Its meaning is unknown. We conjecture that the copyist may not have understood the meaning of 甦 (“come back to life”) — an abstruse word — and that he imagines the meaning of the phrase as being based on the meaning of 天 (heaven), thus giving it rain 雨 and sun 日 classifiers, both representing meteorological phenomena, for emphatic purposes (as if justifying his understanding).

如喇嚕哩嚕 (已上四字彈舌呼之)，𪔐𪔐[口𪔐]𪔐，𪔐𪔐𪔐𪔐𪔐，𪔐𪔐𪔐 (已上諸字並彈舌呼)，𪔐𪔐𪔐𪔐等文，[言置]𪔐𪔐𪔐之字，並是假借所用也。

As for 骨瑣 (“bone-chains”) changing into 骨瑄,⁴³ 病瘦 (“emaciated due to sickness”) turning into 病瘦,⁴⁴ 瑠璃 (“glaze”) becoming 瑠瑤 (“chalcedony”),⁴⁵ 真珠 (“pearl”) transforming into 瑱珠 (“bead on jade pendant suspended from official cap and hanging beside the ears”),⁴⁶

如骨瑣變為骨瑄，病瘦更為病瘦，瑠璃遂成瑠瑤，真珠轉作瑱珠，

𪔐 (“scorpion”) being drawn in the shape of 𪔐 (“a pheasant-like mythological bird”), 𪔐 (“exhaust”) is written in the form of 𪔐 (“halcyon kingfisher”).

43 Both 瑣 and 瑄 are variant forms of the orthographic character 𪔐 𪔐 (“chain”). 骨𪔐 (“bone-chain”) is an interpretation of Śaṅkara, “auspicious,” a name for Śiva; usually it refers to Adi Śaṅkarācārya 商羯羅阿闍梨 (ca. 788–820), the celebrated Indian philosopher who is known as a great opponent of Buddhism.

44 瘦 and 瘦 are variant forms of the same word, “emaciate, become thin.” In this parallel structure that contains four instances, the former two cases stand for orthographic variants that do not affect the meaning of the word, while the latter two cases exemplify how the words change along with that of the character forms.

45 瑠 is the variant form of 瑠. 瑠/瑠瑤 (“glaze”) comes from an unidentified language in the Western Regions, perhaps a Prakrit language (e.g., Gandhari). Compare Pali *veḷuriya* (“precious stone, maybe lapis lazuli”) and Sanskrit *vaidūrya* (“cat’s-eye, beryl”). 瑠瑤 is not a word; 瑤 by itself means “chalcedony stone,” and it is used here in this context to symbolize the incorrectly written character, 瑤.

46 瑱 is pronounced *diàn* or *zhèn*. As *diàn*, it either means the jade pendants that are suspended from official caps and hang beside the ears, symbolizing the wearer’s refusal to hear malevolent words (not jade earplugs!) or the variant form of *tián* 瑱 (“fill up”). As *zhèn*, it is a variant of the homophonous *zhèn* 鎮 (“press down, weigh”). In any case 瑱 is never a variant of *zhēn* 真 (“real”). 瑱珠 is an exemplification of how the same semantic classifier would be mistakenly added to both elements of a disyllabic word (Kangxi No. 96, the jade semantic classifier, 玉, is added to 真 in this case) to fit the word’s meaning. This phenomenon is called “semantic classifier assimilation” (*leihua pianpang* 類化偏旁) in modern linguistic usage.

蠍畫鵙形，竭書鵙體。

攝 (“gather”) and 搨 (“grasp with hand”) were never differentiated, and surely 飭 (“put in order”) and 飾 (“decorate”) were not distinct. As for the common run of 翳 (“illusory”) and 寶 (a variant form of 填 “fill up”; the copyist may mistreat this character as a variant form of 真 “true” that forms the antonym to the previous character in the Buddhist context) and the class of [𠂔脩] (non-existent character that is the most likely to mistakenly intended to write 遊 “roam” that rhymes with 脩 in the Five Dynasties literary reading) and [𠂔仔] (non-existent character, most likely to write 學 “study” with similar shape) — all these are cases of mistaken copies by the scribes.

攝搨莫辯，飭飾寧分；翳寶之流，[𠂔脩][𠂔仔]之類，並是書人筆誤也。

Instances as such above are only given two or three (for each category); their numbers are too great to enumerate individually.

如是等例，略舉二三，厥數頗多，羌難具列。

It was my great honor to peruse the masses of Canons From the Palace of Nāgārjuna [ref. “Mahāyāna Buddhist Canons”], and compile twenty-five scrolls⁴⁷ of difficult characters from seven *sūtras*, *viyanas*, *śāstras*, and biographies. Aside from duplicates / pairs (??) and their appended parts (??) together with annotations and corrections, the same number represents different chapters (??), different titles bear the same content. In general, those which have spellers with them sum up to 120,222 characters. From the beginning to the end, it took ten years to finally complete my compilation and

47 Translating *juàn* 卷 as “scroll” merely follows the Chinese naming tradition for sections in a textual work. In Kehong’s case (and his time), his work was bound in the book (*cè* 冊) form with paper as its material, instead of bamboo scrolls.

composition. I used nine hundred pieces of paper to write fifteen booklets⁴⁸ of entries (for this work). It is called "Record of the Accompanying Letter of the Pronouncing Dictionary of Tripitaka" therefrom. In this way, horizontally bound are letter numbers; vertically the sutra names are listed. The sides are spread with the (main) body of the text; below (each character) the spellers are located. What I wish for is that there is no repetition or omission in my writing, and each character is distinct from another. (And I also wish that), exposing the spindle-stick, the entire section would be natural and graceful throughout; unfolding the scroll, every chapter [*varga*] would flow freely and uninterruptedly to the end. Though my explications on meanings are yet deficient, roughly my intentions can be discerned: (I want it to be) an empty boat for those who roam in the sea of dharma, (or) an essential road for those who pass through the garden of diction. All the non-standard writings throughout the mistakenly expounded canons by assorted masters are reviewed and scrutinized for their truthfulness or falsehoods and commentated on within these booklets. I nevertheless still exalt the beauty of their voices; here I am recounting the beginning of everything. I hope that (you,) eminent and profound scholars, please do not snicker at my deficiency and clumsiness. Now is the fifth year of the Tianfu reign (940 AD), Gengzi by star-year, the twentieth day of the sixth month (counting from the beginning of the second year of the Changxing reign [931], the star-year of Xinmao).

洪倅依龍藏披覽眾經，於經律論傳七例之中錄出難字二十五卷。除其雙書翼從及以注正說文於中，同號別章，名殊體一。凡具音切者，總一十二万二千二百二十二字。首尾十載，綴撰方周。用紙九百張，寫成十五篇(冊)目，曰《藏經音義隨函錄》焉。於是橫維函號，縱列經題，傍布文身，下安切脚。所冀文無交斥，字有區分，開軸而落落終篇，啟卷而聯聯盡品。雖貧義詁，粗有指歸：遊法海者虛舟，歷詞園者要路。所有諸師誤釋經裏謙文，並皆詳審是

48 It is interesting how Kehong sticks to using the archaic form of 冊 as 篇 with the bamboo classifier (Kangxi No. 118) even as he states that he was using "nine hundred pieces of paper" as the material on which his booklets are written.

非，註之籀內。仍興耀唱，紀述源由。諸碩學洪儒，望不^啞於寡拙。耳時
天福五年，歲次庚子六月二十日也(從長興二年辛卯(卯)歲起首)。

Kehong's text ends here, but, by way of elaboration, we may add the following observations. The clarification of the preface's date in the ending parenthesis is vital to corroborate Kehong's stance. Changxing 長興 (930–933) is the reign title for the Later Tang 後唐 Dynasty. Kehong lived in the Later Jin 後晉 (937–946) Dynasty, the immediate dynasty after the Later Tang, which eliminated the Later Tang with the assistance of the Khitans. Although the royal clan of the Later Tang were the Shatuo people (a branch of the Western Turks), the dynasty name that it chose was the same one as the great Tang. To the mentality of the adherents of the Tang, living in a Khitan-established Later Jin would have been more of a humiliation compared to living in the Later Tang. So it had been quite common for Later Jin authors and scribes to either use a Later Tang reign title or make an obvious connection with a well-known Later Tang date.

Zheng Qiao, although a non-Buddhist ensconced in the Sinitic Southern Song Dynasty, was more attentive to the frailties of overemphasis on graphemic rectitude and neglect of phonological verities than Kehong. Again, this contrast serves to highlight the importance of personal and ideological predilections over religious and intellectual affiliations.

This inquiry is an attempt to reconcile the seemingly disparate cultural phenomena that spanned a millennium, a reconsideration of history that calls into question the tendency for modern scholarship to neglect the pendulum of philology alternating between eyes and ears. Instead, many treat the process as if it were linear, as if Buddhist conquered Chinese philology and changed it entirely after its advent, or as if treasuring the value of sound would always override that of the “nation.” The reexamination put forward here unequivocally shows that attempts to explain the profound changes in philosophy and other manifestations of culture (language, literature, etc.) during this period to a monolithic Buddho-centric analysis are inadequate and require study from the point of view that we have outlined.

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