

Conclusion

The main portion of this review has been concerned with three or four problems that I perceive in Matthias Richter's *The Embodied Text*. I would hate for these perceived problems to give the impression that I think this book is anything other than a superb work of scholarship. Indeed, as I said at the outset, in its care for the presentation of the manuscript itself, Richter's study of *Min zhi fumu* will surely serve as a model for future studies of the many individual manuscripts of ancient China that have been unearthed in recent years. If I have dwelled on perceived problems in his broader discussion of the manuscript's intellectual context—problems that I freely admit have long been preoccupations of my own and concerning which I have a particular viewpoint that is by no means shared by all in the field—rather than the book's manifold excellences, it is because I think these are basic methodological issues that are open to further discussion. Since Richter will surely continue to be among the leaders of this still new field, I hope my raising them here will encourage him to bring his care and erudition to their resolution in further such studies.

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Philosophy on Bamboo: Text and the Production of Meaning in Early China. By Dirk Meyer. Studies in the History of Chinese Texts, no. 2. Leiden: Brill, 2012. Pp. x + 395. €137.00/\$182.00.

The title *Philosophy on Bamboo* might lead one to think this book is about reading and interpreting Chinese philosophy as contained in ancient bamboo texts. In fact, the focus of discussion is rather “philosophising” and the production of meaning in ancient Chinese texts. In this volume, Dirk Meyer lays out a “structural” analysis of texts chosen from the Guodian 郭店 corpus, a cache of bamboo manuscripts disinterred in 1993 in Hubei province, China. With the aim of exploring the relationship between manuscript culture and meaning creation, Meyer examines how the authors of these Warring States (c. 481–221 B.C.) discourses structured their philosophical arguments.

(Note 11—*Continued*)

unit and should therefore be reserved for terminological use.” In fact, in studies of early manuscripts, the term *cuo jian* is indeed reserved for this use, and it was with this meaning that Chen Jian used it.

Setting aside the traditional treatment of texts as repositories of ideas, Meyer argues texts should be considered meaningful objects in their own right (p. 31). It is on this premise that arguments are presented concerning the early Chinese cultural phenomena of philosophizing, interpretation and transmission of thought, as well as “textual communities.” In this way, Meyer intends to showcase a novel methodology for engaging with written ideas in ancient China (p. 12).

For Meyer, two different genres of philosophical writing can be found in Guodian: “argument-based texts” and “context-dependent texts.” The former are those that generate meaning by advancing argumentative patterns, whereas the latter do not seek to establish argumentative force by virtue of reason (p. 11). The argument-based texts analysed include “Zhong xin zhi dao” 忠信之道 (The way of fidelity and trustworthiness), “Qiong da yi shi” 窮達以時 (Failure and success appear at their respective times), “Wu xing” 五行 (Five aspects of virtuous conduct), “Xing zi ming chu” 性自命出 (Human nature is brought forth by decree), and “Tai yi sheng shui” 太一生水 (The Ultimate One gives birth to water). Context-dependent texts are “Laozi A, B, and C” 老子甲、乙、丙 and “Zi yi” 緇衣 (Black robes).

The book consists of three parts. Part I focuses on “Analysis: Text and Structure” in which the argument-based texts (except “Tai yi sheng shui,” as explained later) are covered. Part II is devoted to discussions of the relationship between material conditions and manuscript culture, philosophizing, writing, and meaning construction. Here Meyer introduces the context-dependent texts of “Laozi” and “Zi yi” and highlights their non-argumentative form. Part III provides translations of the argument-based texts, with annotations, and philological notes. Where there are textual counterparts, such as the Mawangdui 馬王堆 “Wu xing,” the Shanghai Museum collection of “Xing qing lun” 性情論 (Treatise on nature and sentiment), the received *Dao de jing* 道德經 and “Zi yi” in the *Li ji* 禮記, comparisons with the Guodian instantiations are presented where relevant.

Meyer approaches the argument-based texts systematically, first by outlining the physical condition of the bamboo strips, then the thought and content of the discourses. Analyses of their structural forms are then undertaken by dividing the discourses arbitrarily into pericopes, cantos and subcantos, or “building blocks” of argumentative structure. Analytical expositions, supplemented with diagrams explaining how the building blocks are interrelated to create meaning and textual coherence, are set out in painstaking detail demanding no less painstaking attention on the reader’s part. These cohesive connections—the “symbiotic webs” comprising “overlapping structures,” “double-directed segments,” “bridges,” etc., as Meyer calls them—can be understood simply as systems of anaphoric (earlier in the text) and cataphoric (later in the text) references.

What is interesting is Meyer’s discernment of meaning creation strategies where-by form is used to corroborate content. In the case of “Zhong xin zhi dao” the

“building blocks” define the dyadic concepts (e.g. *zhong* 忠 [loyalty] and *xin* 信 [fidelity]) before drawing a conclusion; this formulaic pattern is mimicked in the macrostructure of the discourse. In other words, “the text as a whole basically works in the same fashion as the individual building blocks” (p. 50). In “Qiong da yi shi,” the intrinsic tensions between the antonyms and hyponyms of Heaven and Man, success and failure, “have” and “have not,” etc., find expression in the formal structure of the text. Meyer identifies the bi-axial structure of the discourse: the horizontal structure advances arguments in a linear fashion whilst the vertical structure does so in a hierarchical way, each leading to a different, and apparently contradictory, conclusion. However, the binary notions are finally resolved by the addition of a concluding section (p. 73). The structures of “Zhong xin zhi dao” and “Qiong da yi shi,” Meyer claims, present them as semantically stable, closed discourses that cannot be rearranged in any other way.

In analysing “Wu xing” Meyer shifts his focus of critical interest to comparing the two manifestations—the Guodian and Mawangdui texts—that share as many phrasal and lexical similarities as they do textual differences. He argues that, notwithstanding the dissimilar manifestations, the “Wu xing” is one self-contained piece of thought (p. 81–82)—what Meyer terms the “Wu xing theory” (p. 27). By comparing the stable building blocks of the two texts, Meyer finds that meaning is constructed not only by anaphoric and cataphoric connectors throughout the texts but also exophoric (outside the text) sources such as quotations from the *Book of Odes*. For Meyer, the *Wu xing* theory propounds the “paradox of self-cultivation” whereby the “[realization] of [each of?] the five virtues simultaneously depends on the accomplished cultivation of the other [four?] virtues.” Content is thus reflected in the formal organization of the text, as the ideas presented at the start cannot be fully understood without proceeding all the way through to the later part of the text (p. 128). But is this mode of meaning perception typical or exceptional?

Meyer’s analysis of “Xing zi ming chu” is focused more on the ideas expressed than the structural form of the discourse. But through interpretation and translation of the text Meyer is able to draw inferences about the textual culture of the time. He points out that the first halves (or the “core text”) of the Guodian “Xing zi ming chu” and the Shanghai “Xing qing lun” are strikingly similar, but that the similarity breaks down in their second halves, though there are still stable text clusters (p. 151). He maintains that as a theory of human nature and “unshaped feelings,” the Guodian and the Shanghai manuscripts are individual instantiations, neither serving as the *Vorlage* for the other, as each might have been orally transmitted or copied from an imagined third source text (p. 150); however, their spatial and chronological propinquity can be reasonably assumed (p. 171). Meyer further points out that the mention of the odes, documents, rites, and music within the “core text” does not necessarily identify these as texts but rather as traditions—“something being performed” (p. 170), thus

seeking to refute the claim that when “Xing zi ming chu” was written, the *Odes*, the *Documents*, etc. existed in textual form.

In Part II Meyer sums up how meaning in argument-based texts was created in well-crafted and complex but fully integrated structures, resulting in the production of systematic and self-contained philosophical thought. On the other hand, the context-dependent texts, of which the Guodian “Laozi” and “Zi yi” are examples, are the antipodes of argument-based texts. Context-dependent texts are anthologies of individual textual units that address a particular philosophical situation, and structurally they are not integrated with the other units within the manuscript to form a self-contained theory. The meaning of these units, according to Meyer, is “[constructed with] reference to authority and . . . cultural interpretations, but not in the written text itself” (p. 204). Meaning conveyance, as Meyer claims, is bound by the triangular relationship between the text, the mediator of meaning and the recipient of the message (p. 204). Applying the methodology of structural analysis that he has developed thus far, Meyer identifies “Tai yi sheng shui” as an independent argument-based text, whose composition features “repeated contrast of different concepts with each other in order to define their conceptual meaning” (p. 219). Notwithstanding the fact that the text shares the material space within the “Laozi C” bundle and is therefore thought to have been part of the latter, Meyer dismisses the suggestion that it is a lost part of an imagined “Proto-*Laozi*” (p. 226).

Meyer’s translation of the argument-based texts is provided in Part III. Although one might have different opinions on how certain words or phrases should be rendered, the detailed annotation on interpretive choices, supported by philological and critical research, is evidence of Meyer’s sustained effort to reconstruct and interpret what are very difficult ancient texts. However, some of his renditions are puzzling; for instance, Meyer’s semantic treatment of *qing* 情 which is prefixed by the unexplained attribute “unshaped” in some of his translations (pp. 135, 138). Such minor issues aside, the translations are a valuable contribution to the study of the Guodian bamboo slip texts.

Meyer’s vision of his project is to reconstruct and manifest the practice of philosophizing in the Warring States period through analysing textual structures of philosophical writings. It appears that seven primary texts from a single corpus may well be too small a sample for probing into the complex and dynamic cultural phenomena of that bygone era. By his own admission, the distinction of argument-based vs. context-dependent texts is not impermeable (p. 245). The reality is that between the opposition of “argumentative” to “contextual” lie hybrids of all sorts (e.g. the parabolic as in the *Zhuangzi* and the dialogic as found in the *Mengzi*), yet on this simple dichotomy hangs Myer’s conclusion concerning the practice of philosophizing. Furthermore, does this dichotomy, as proposed by Meyer, then imply that

the two main approaches to textual analysis, namely, the historical and scriptural, should be applied exclusively and separately to these two categories of texts?

Although Meyer's primary concern is the structural form of a text rather than its meaning, his project would have benefited from engaging Derrida, Barthes, and others. Whether or not one subscribes to their (post-)structural theories, their thinking on meaning creation, perception, and transmission may be too influential to be ignored. Before the emergence of structuralism in the last century in the West, Chinese scholars such as Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619–1692) and Tan Xian 譚獻 (1832–1901) had already asserted that textual meaning is not only constructed by the author but also the reader.¹ If “deconstructed” (Derrida's term), Meyer's methodology cannot stand confirmed by privileging formal analysis alone; ultimately it has to refer to textual meaning, that is, treating text as a carrier of meaning. One has only to follow the lines and arrows of Figure 5 to discern how the ideas of “Zhong xin zhi dao” (p. 49), and for that matter, Figure 11 of “Qiong da yi shi,” are connected (p. 74), not with reference to the rhetorical patterns of the building blocks, but to the meaning of the text. In analysing “Xing zi ming chu,” no new rhetorical patterns other than those already discussed in “Zhong xin zhi dao” and “Qiong da yi shi” were identified (p. 136). On the other hand, meaning is forever deferred (*différance*—according to Derrida). “Tai yi sheng shui” serves as an analogy of *différance* (without Meyer acknowledging it) as its concepts are defined by a series of contrasts, as pointed out earlier. Thus, even if the argument-based texts are structurally closed and stable, meaning is forever open to subjective interpretation, irrespective of argumentative patterns or persuasive power, a fact of which Meyer is aware (p. 231); but the lack of further discussion of such issues undermines his claims concerning the efficacy of structural form as a means of meaning creation. Indeed, many of the ancient texts evolved gradually into their received form; this means the texts remained open to successive modifications to fit composers' purposes. Intended variation in language and structure therefore can provide insight into distinct, possibly divergent, purposes and thereby into meaning creation. A shift of phrase or, at times, a change of a single character can change the meaning of the text. One of these examples is the textual disparity between the Guodian “Laozi” and other versions of the *Laozi*. Where the

¹ Wang asserts that “作者用一致之思，讀者各以其情而自得” (an author's thought may tend towards a particular idea, readers may derive meaning according to what they feel); see *Chuanshan yishi: Shiyi* 船山遺詩：詩譯 (The literary legacy of Chuanshan: poetics). Tan adopts a similar line, “作者之用心未必然，而讀者之心何必不然” (an author's intent may not mean it, that does not preclude readers from thinking that it is what the author meant); see *Jiecunzhai lunci zazhu: Futang cihua* 介存齋論詞雜著：復堂詞話 (Futang's poetics).

Mawangdui and received versions read: 絕聖棄智，民利百倍 “Renounce sagacity and abandon knowledge, and the people will benefit a hundred fold” and 絕仁棄義，民復孝慈 “Renounce humanity and abandon rightness, and the people will return to filial piety and parental affection”; the Guodian passage instead reads 絕智棄辯 “Renounce knowledge and abandon volubility” and 絕僞棄詐 “Renounce ingenuity and abandon deception.” The discrepancy in wording is remarkable with the changes of two characters. Classical Chinese, in particular written texts, relies heavily on allusion to a corpus of “traditions” (later texts) to convey meaning, implication, and subtext. Sometimes the wording is vague and ambiguous. It can be difficult to determine conclusively where one sentence ends and the next begins. Moving a full-stop a few graphs forward or back, or inserting a comma, can profoundly alter the meaning of many passages. Such divisions and meanings must now be reviewed and assessed by a cautious modern reader. Sometimes the recovered texts are so corrupt that it is impossible to understand some passages without rearranging whole sequences of characters. In ancient times, when the texts were still recited, that oral delivery would have made clear many ambiguities mentioned here, which only appear in the *written* form of the discourse. Whereas the oral version would have embodied “punctuation” via prosody—pauses and intonation patterns, the (written) texts now *look to us* far more ambiguous than they *sounded* to those who knew them in their recited or chanted form, and all of these may need more than examining the structural form of the texts. It would appear that Meyer has not adequately addressed the “larger questions” of “meaning construction” and the “dialectical processes between social [textual?] communities . . . and philosophical text” (p. 13) that he has set for this project.

Meyer asserts that as the context-dependent texts are not integrated into self-contained theories, the transmission of meaning is bound by the triangular relationship of the text, the mediator, and the recipient. Philosophizing thus grew out of an oral tradition wherein the mediator contextualized ideas and meaning to bridge the gaps between unrelated textual units that lacked argumentative force. Such oral traditions are no longer retrievable, as Meyer has rightly pointed out. But for Meyer’s proposition to make sense, one of his unarticulated assumptions would be that the mediator must provide not only the contexts but also, to a certain extent, the arguments and reasoning bridging those gaps; otherwise, the mediator becomes just another recipient and interpreter of a textual tradition, in which case the triangular relationship would break down and become a linear progression. If this were to happen, then the formation of abstract arguments would not have depended to the same degree on “writing for meaning construction,” or on the material condition of lightweight bamboo strips, which is no more than a medium for the creation of written texts, and therefore perhaps of less relevance than Meyer has claimed (p. 247).

In spite of the shortcomings of Meyer's proposed methodology for engaging with ancient Chinese texts, his proposals are important initiatives providing a different angle from which to view inquiry into early Chinese writings. Meyer's book is therefore a welcome and much needed contribution to the field of early Chinese textuality and intellectual history; it is as insightful as it is inspiring, and it may motivate the committed reader to look for deeper strata of meaning-creation in ancient Chinese texts.

No doubt, the recovered ancient bamboo texts, just like the received texts, will remain a subject of study for many years to come, given the multiplicity of texts, the scope of discussion in which the texts engage, and the difficulty of the early language in its many manifestations. All these will remain a great challenge to modern readers, separated by more than 2,000 years from the original users of these texts, whether oral or written.

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The Bamboo Texts of Guodian: A Study & Complete Translation. By Scott Cook. Cornell East Asia Series 164–165. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University East Asia Program, 2012. Two volumes. Pp. xviii + 1200. \$178.00 hardcover, \$138.00 paperback.*

In 1993, in the village of Guodian 郭店, Hubei province, a set of bamboo texts was excavated from a Warring States period (403–221 B.C.) tomb. For scholars of ancient China, these texts are easily the single most significant manuscript find since the year A.D. 279, the last time a textual cache of similar import was unearthed. Sixteen years have passed since their first publication in 1998. Over most of that time, Scott Cook has been preparing this comprehensive study and English translation, producing a massive two-volume work that is likely to serve as the definitive Western translation and key reference for the Guodian texts for decades to come.

Cook wrote his Master's thesis in 1990 on the "Yue ji" 樂記 (Record of music), the earliest fully-developed extant treatise on music, which was written no later

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