



## Undergraduate assignment feedback form

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# The Analysis of philological and interpretive methods of studying Chinese classics

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Preface:

A brief description of philologic and interpretive approaches

(清) 姚鼐: "天下學問之事, 有義理、文章、考據之分。"

Yao Nai of the Qing dynasty said that, "Among the learning approaches, there are interpretive(義理), writing diction(文章) and philological(考據)."

Philology is also known as 樸學, Plain study, and its main direction is to collate, annotate and edit classical Chinese texts, mainly connecting with characters and rhyme. In Liang Qi Chao 梁啟超's "An Overview of Qing Dynasty Scholarship", he summarized the study of philology: "Its fundamental approach to scholarship is "to seek truth from facts" and "not to believe without evidence"."

梁啟超在《清代學術概述》中，有對考據學幾句扼要的總結：“其治學之根本方法，在“實事求是”，“無証不信”。”

It is also known as Han study, 漢學, because the method of scholarship in the Han dynasty was to collate and annotate ancient texts handed down from the pre-Qin dynasty; In the Qing dynasty, scholars also inherited this method. In the Ming and Qing dynasties, Philology were also involved in the field of phonetic exegesis, as most of the ancient sounds of the Chinese language had become unpronounceable. Therefore, in order to seek the most objective and correct interpretation of the classics, the Philology scholars used this method as an entry point.

In terms of interpretive study 義理學, originally, it was a method of study that allowed scholars to go beyond the complex symbols of the Zhou Yi 周易 and directly interpret its philosophical meaning. It is said that Wang Bi 王弼 of the Jin dynasty, who interpreted the Zhou Yi, was the originator of interpretive approach. It then flourished in the Song and Ming Dynasties and declined in the Qing Dynasty. The general direction of interpretive approach is to transcend

the tedious examination of characters and rhyme and to elucidate directly the meaning of the classics and their profound implications. So, as to bring out the deepest philosophical meaning of the texts, just like what Lu Jiuyuan 陸九淵 said in the Song dynasty: 'Establish the greatness firstly'. 陸九淵說的：“先立乎其大者”。 The essence of interpretive approach is to first establish the greater (i.e., the philosophical meaning) and therefore to ignore the lesser (the textual research). This is the way of interpretive approach.

## II. Methodology and examples:

The characteristics of philology:

1. emphasis is placed on rhymes and characters, and on the research for meaning.
2. focus on the truth and seek truth from facts

There are two main works:

One is the examination of classics;

The second is to verify historical events.

For philology:

It is important to have detailed quotations and objective arguments, any theory must be based on evidence, just like the words praising Gu Yanwu: "He is very knowledgeable and can be coherent, and every matter must be detailed with its beginning and end, with supporting evidence, and then records in the book, so that the quotations are voluminous and less

contradictory. 恰如這段描寫顧炎武的話：“博瞻而能通貫，每一事必詳其始末，參以証佐，而後策之于書，故引據浩繁而抵牾者少”。

Methodology:

Chen Yuan pointed out three different forms of evidence in philology: theoretical evidence, Documentary evidence and material evidence. Regardless of which method is used, it is necessary to have abundant evidence. The so-called philology means to produce evidence, which is essentially different from interpretation.

#### 1. Theoretical evidence:

Some historical materials are doubtful, but there is no conclusive evidence, so we have to judge their correctness or incorrectness according to logical reasoning. When using it, it is important to make more sense and, ideally, to present some facts in order to make your arguments stand up.

Theoretical evidence is a unique method, to master it well, you must have some basic skills as well as excellent identification and judgement, otherwise you will either fail to identify the problem or make arbitrary and subjective mistakes. Therefore, carefulness must be taken when using this method.

#### 2. Documentary evidence:

It is a method of examination that uses various types of archival/ɑ:ˈkaɪ vəl/ materials as well as various books as a basis for verifying the correctness and accuracy of historical materials.

3. Material evidence: This is a method of evidence based on excavated tortoiseshells, gold and stone, and other archaeological artefacts to verify the accuracy of historical materials.

Two examples are given below to illustrate this:

1, in the Qing dynasty, the philological scholar Mao Qiling (Xihe)毛奇齡, 毛西河, he believes that Zhu Xi's commentary "Four Books" has a lot of errors, so he wrote his own "Four Books Correction" to test these errors, in order to restore the "Four Books". He studied the Four Books using the method of Philology.

1. In the first page of his book, Mao Qiling examines the difference between the names of Liu Xiahui 柳下惠, because when Zhu Xi was commenting on the book, he said: "Liu Xiahui, Liuxia is his Fiefdom. But in another place, Zhu Xi said: "Liu Xiahui, he lived under the willow". The two places are different. Mao pointed out that: Liuxia hui was unable to use Fiefdom as his surname because is the Privilege for duke. The only exception was that he could use the place where he lived as his surname, and Mao cites some precedent for this, so Liu Xiahui's original

name was not called this.

2. In the Song dynasty, Hu Sanshou's 胡三省 commentary on the Zizhi Tongjian, he also adopted the method of philology, researching characters, rhymes to explain the classics as well as to verify the history of geographical names: in the Zizhi Tongjian - Vol. 1 - Zhou Ji I, he first explained the name of Zhao Jianzi 趙簡: the character "Jian" 簡 was his title; he quoted from the book, Bai Hu Tong 白虎通 and Zhaoqi 趙岐 to explain the meaning of the character "zi" 子, and citing the commentary of Kong Yingda 孔穎達 and Lu Deming 陸德明 to explain the character "書" (here is the verb "to write"). The evidence is detailed and very convincing.

## II. The interpretive approach:

There are two main ways in which the interpretive approach operates:

One is the application of one's own thought to the exegesis of the classics, paying little attention to rhyme, characters meaning, etc., but mainly to the interpretation of whole sentences and the distillation of the overall thought of the scriptures.

2. Another way was, by using the ideas of the late Confucians, developing their own thoughts. At this time, these ideas have initially become independent, and although related to the original texts, but not linked to it. For example, the scholars in Song focus on 氣 and Wang Yangming's 知行合一 both fall into this category.

### Examples:

1. Dai Zhen in the Qing dynasty, whose favourite approach was interpretation, advocated the establishment of meaning through research. Dai wrote the book 孟子字義疏證, which seems to be a work on philology but is purely devoted to the exposition of the meaning in Mencius. On "human nature" he said, "Nature is divided into yin and yang and the five elements, composed by blood, Qi, mind and sense.", and he says: "The blood, Qi, and mind are the entities of nature." Gradually, he interpreted "nature" in his own thoughts, departing from the meaning of Mencius' scriptures.

2. Chen Que (qianchu) in the Qing dynasty, who also studied the doctrine of Mencius, developed Mencius' "theory of the goodness of nature": "The human nature is born in goodness (as Mencius intended), but it is seen only after it has been expanded. 。。。。。。 The nature of a human is complete after he has been nurtured." This is also on his own ideas and a departure from the scriptures of Mencius, who argued that although human nature is inherently good, it can only be perfected through cultivation.

### Conclusion:

Which approach is more important, interpretive or philology, has been the most discussed topic among scholars over the years. Through the above analysis, I believe that both are

indispensable, and we should combine the two as Dai Zhen did, and use rigorous philology as the basis for one's ultimate development of interpreting the meanings;

The advantage of philology is that they are objective, with sufficient quotations and evidence, and they do not easily deviate too much from the classics; however, the disadvantage is that they can easily become trivial and complicated, just like "the evidence of a single character has to be taken from ten thousand volumes" and "whenever a theory is made, ancient books must be cited and evidence taken before it is concluded". If one is preoccupied with research, it is easy to lose sight of the great principles and philosophies of the classics and to believe what he has learned from research, falling into the trap of doubting the classics.

The advantage of the interpretation is that it can elucidate the profound meanings hidden in the classics, and that the depth of the doctrine obtained will mainly according to one's own degree. However, the disadvantage is that it is easy to engage in unfounded empty talk and fall into the trap of high-sounding metaphysics, where the theories are not supported and will mislead others.

Therefore, through the above analysis, the author believes that both philology and interpretation are indispensable and must be harmonised, in order to complement each other.