



Trinity Saint David

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<i>Module title: Sinological English I: A History of Chinese Classical Scholarship</i>	
<i>For completion by marker:</i> <i>Comments:</i>	
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Chapter Eight

The Three Kingdoms and the Prelude to Hermeneutics

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Date: 21 April 2026

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1. Historical Background

Fall of Han → Three Kingdoms period

- ▶ Cao Pi 曹丕 → Wei (Luoyang, 220 AD)
- ▶ Liu Bei 劉備 → Shu (Chengdu, 221 AD)
- ▶ Sun Quan 孫權 → Wu (Jianye/Nanjing, 229 AD)

- Chaotic age: Political instability
- Classical scholarship not a priority, except for political legitimacy

1. Historical Background—Core Argument

- Dynastic changes did not break the continuity of classical scholarship
- Cultural values and political goals remained largely unchanged
 - ↑ from late Eastern Han to fall of Western Jin
- Pi Xirui 皮錫瑞 grouped late Han, Three Kingdoms and Jin into one chapter:
 - ↑ “The Era of Declining Classical Scholarship” 經學中衰時代

1. Historical Background—Two Main Lines

- Wang Su Line 王肅一系

- ↑ Comprehensive synthesis and continuation of philology (traditional path)

- Wang Bi Line 王弼一系

- ↑ Metaphysical turn in Confucianism

- ↑ Integrating metaphysics into classical exegesis

- ↑ Wang Bi died at only 23

1. Historical Background—Additional Trends in the Period

- **Many classicists avoided Han exegetical styles**
 - ↑ Relied on their own ideas to explore classics (cosmology, politics, language and meaning)
- **Serious textual criticism mostly took place among the people, not in capitals**
- Rise of Xuanxue 玄學 (Learning of the Mysterious)
 - ↑ Inspired by Daoist ontology
 - ↑ Response to political division and social unrest
 - ↑ Traditional textual criticism and exegesis did not disappear

2. Concept Definition: Distinguishing Exegesis and Hermeneutics

- **Exegesis (訓詁)**

- ↑ Interpretation based on internal evidence from the text itself
- ↑ Example: Zheng Xuan used ritual system of Rites of Zhou

- **Hermeneutics (詮釋學)**

- ↑ Interpretation by applying an external theoretical framework
- ↑ Example: Using metaphysics to explain Confucian classics

2. Concept Definition: Distinguishing Exegesis and Hermeneutics

- Under influence of Daoist and Buddhist metaphysics

↑ Scholars began using metaphysical frameworks to interpret Confucian classics

↑ This is the prelude to hermeneutics 早期詮釋學

- Much earlier than formal “yishu” 義疏 commentaries in Tang Dynasty

3. 8.1 Wang Su and the Continuation of Philology

- Wang Su (195-256)

- ↑ Most important textual critic of the period
 - ↑ Synthesized Old and New Text learning, but often opposed Zheng Xuan
 - ↑ Known as “The Contention between Zheng and Wang” 鄭王之爭
- Motivation: Imitate Zheng Xuan and eventually replace him
 - ↑ More personal ambition than pure academic independence

3. 8.1 Wang Su and the Continuation of Philology

Features of Wang Su's scholarship

- ↑ Studied under Song Zhong 宋忠 of Jingzhou School 荊州學派
- ↑ Early influence: “Subtle Words and Grand Meanings” 微言大義
- ↑ First work: Commentary on Yang Xiong's Classic of Grandest Mystery
- ↑ Rigorous, rational philology
- ↑ Completely rejected apocryphal texts (讖緯)

3. 8.1 Wang Su and the Continuation of Philology

Zheng xuan

Wang su



3. 8.1 Wang Su and the Continuation of Philology



3. 8.1 Wang Su and the Continuation of Philology

1、 Rational side、 Brief and clear annotations

↑ Example: “Tun yu ji” 豚魚吉 → only 16 characters (vs. Zheng’s 98)

2、 Mystical side: Used numerology (象數)

↑ Result: Continued philological tradition + opened door to metaphysical exegesis

↑ Regarded as precursor to Wang Bi

- Professor Honey’s Evaluation:

- Early hybrid exegete-hermeneut (訓詁 + 詮釋) 混合型學者

4. 8.1.1 Du Yu and Annotating Zuo's Commentary

Du Yu (222-285)

- Famous general of Wei & Jin
- Late in life: Devoted to classical studies
- Major work: Collected Analyses of Spring and Autumn Annals and Zuo's Commentary
 - Later included in Thirteen Classics Commentaries

Features of Du Yu's exegesis

- **Strong emphasis on historical research**
 - ↑ Identified persons and supplied background
 - ↑ Example: “Cui Shu Murders His Lord” passage
- **Clear linguistic exegesis**
 - ↑ Simple explanations (e.g., “tu gui” 徒歸)

4. 8.1.1 Du Yu and Annotating Zuo's Commentary

- **Strong hermeneutic awareness**

↑ Proposed four narrative methods in Zuo's Commentary:

- 1) Commence with events to emphasize the classic
- 2) Slight wording to derive overall meaning
- 3) Analyze to derive principles
- 4) Harmonize different parts

↑ Created Explanatory Models in the Spring and Autumn Annals 春秋
釋例

- Summarized five “conditions of the patterns” 例之情
微而顯 志而晦 婉而成章 盡而不遷 懲惡而勸善

4. 8.1.1 Du Yu and Annotating Zuo's Commentary

- Combined Classic text + Commentary by year → “Collected Analyses”
集解
- ↑ This editorial format deeply influenced all later classical scholarship
- Du Yu's school flourished in the South (suited to pure conversation and xuanxue)
- Zheng Xuan tradition (via Fu Qian) prevailed in the North
- By Sui Dynasty: Du's commentary completely dominated
- ↑ Tang Correct Meaning of the Five Classics: Only realistic choice was Du Yu

5. Chapter Summary and Significance

- Wang Su: Rational philology + limited metaphysics → methodological model
- Wang Bi: Pushed metaphysics to peak using Laozi & Zhuangzi → true prelude to hermeneutics
- Du Yu: Early macro-narrative interpretation and structural study
- Although labeled “declining,” new exegetical methods rapidly developed
- Key Emphasis:
 - ↑ Intellectual trends matter more than dynastic changes.
 - ↑ Classical scholarship history should not be divided strictly by political boundaries.

Conclusion

Through case studies of Wang Su and Du Yu, Chapter Eight shows:

- Classical scholarship continued the Han philological tradition amid political chaos
- At the same time, influenced by xuanxue, it turned toward
↑ philosophical interpretation and nascent hermeneutics

→ Laid important foundation for Northern and Southern Dynasties and the Tang synthesis in Correct Meaning of the Five Classics

Thank you very much
for your patient listening.