



## Undergraduate Dissertation coversheet & feedback form

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*For completion by student:*

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No

*Dissertation title:*

The Governance Ideology of *Qun Shu Zhi Yao* (*The Essentials for Bringing about Order from Assembled Texts*) — Focusing on the Selection and Interpretation of ‘Zhong’ (Loyalty) in *Zuo Zhuan* (*Zuo Tradition*)

《群書治要》治世理念探析——以《左傳》「忠」德之選錄與詮釋為中心

*Supervisor:* Professor Chang kao ping

*Word count:* 1097

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Signed .....Jiahe Zhang.....

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## Reflective Reviews

My dissertation title is *The Governance Ideology of Qun Shu Zhi Yao (The Essentials for Bringing about Order from Assembled Texts)* — Focusing on the Selection and Interpretation of ‘Zhong’ (Loyalty) in *Zuo Zhuan (Zuo Tradition)*. I will share my writing experience from three aspects: the determination of the research direction, the completion of the core part of my dissertation, and the gains from the writing process.

### I. Determination of the Research Direction

In 2025, Professor Zhang Gaoping offered a course titled *Studies on Zuo Zhuan of the Spring and Autumn Annals (chunqiu zuozhuan yanjiu 春秋左傳研究)* at our academy, which planted the seed for my dissertation. The academy has long encouraged students to study the *Qun Shu Zhi Yao* in depth, and since Professor Zhang is an expert on the *Zuo Zhuan*, I proactively sought his guidance and expressed to him my wish that he supervise my dissertation.

Initially, Professor Zhang suggested that I focus on the *Shiji (Records of the Grand Historian 史記)* as excerpted in the *Qun Shu Zhi Yao*. He explained that the language of *Shiji* is less abstruse than that of *Zuo Zhuan*. The college also hoped students would delve into *Qun Shu Zhi Yao*, so he recommended that I choose *Shiji* in *Qun Shu Zhi Yao* as my research direction. However, I told the professor that I was somewhat familiar with *Zuo Zhuan*, because I had read it four times at the age of eighteen or nineteen and expressed my wish to delve deeper into *Zuo Zhuan* in *Qun Shu Zhi Yao*. The professor then agreed my idea and set the research direction of dissertation to *Zuo Zhuan* in *Qun Shu Zhi Yao*.

### II. Completion of the Core Part of the Dissertation

While reading *Zuo Zhuan* in *Qun Shu Zhi Yao*, I first classified various moral virtues (Benevolence 仁, Righteousness 義, Loyalty 忠, Trustworthiness 信) presented in the text. During this process, I found that loyalty (*zhong 忠*) was the most prominent and core virtue, which gave rise to my research question: Why did Wei Zheng (580—643) and other compilers of *Qun Shu Zhi Yao* attach such great importance to the loyalty of rulers and

ministers to the state and society? Why did they particularly highlight the minister's duty of loyal remonstrance and the spirit of faithful dedication to one's duties and responsibilities? With these questions, I officially entered the core writing stage of the dissertation.

Guided by these questions, I began a more focused investigation. First, I classified all instances of the character *zhong* (忠) appearing in the *Zuo Zhuan* in *Qun Shu Zhi Yao* and found they could be divided into loyalty to the state (*sheji zhizhong* 社稷之忠), loyalty through remonstrance (*jianzheng zhizhong* 諫諍之忠), and loyalty to the monarch's orders (*junming zhizhong* 君命之忠), among which loyalty to the state was dominant (appearing nine times). This classification was entirely based on the contextual meanings of 'zhong' as it appeared in the text. Second, I categorized the words and deeds of characters related to 'loyalty' in the excerpts, and found that the concept of 'loyalty to the monarch's orders' was relatively narrow. Following this classificatory approach, the words and deeds involving 'loyalty' could be divided into as many as nine categories.

However, a 10,000-word dissertation could not accommodate such detailed classifications. Therefore, I integrated and streamlined the categories. The final framework presented three positive categories, loyalty to the state (*sheji zhizhong* 社稷之忠), loyalty through remonstrance (*jianzheng zhizhong* 諫諍之忠), and loyalty to duty and integrity (*zhijie zhizhong* 職節之忠), and one negative category of lacking loyalty and virtue (*quezhong shide* 缺忠失德). This design both reflects the semantic distribution within the text itself and aligns with the *Qun Shu Zhi Yao*'s editorial principle of 'upholding virtue and stopping transgression, punishing evil and encouraging good (*chengquanshan zhaodesewei* 懲惡勸善, 昭德塞違),' ensuring the dissertation has a coherent internal logic.

Nevertheless, when the first draft of my dissertation was nearly completed, I found that there was a lack of organic connection between the chapters, and the individual paragraphs had not consistently responded to a clearly articulated central question. With only two weeks left before the submission deadline, a sense of anxiety set in. I sought feedback from senior students, but their opinions were varied: some thought it was merely a list of classifications lacking research value; others pointed out that analyzing the editorial logic of the *Qun Shu*

*Zhi Yao* required comparing what had been selected against what had been omitted from the source texts in order for the dissertation to carry genuine academic significance. These comments plunged me into deeper self-doubt. I was eager to write a good dissertation but unsure how to do it.

I then urgently contacted Professor Zhang and frankly stated my confusion. The professor replied: 'It is not that serious; with some moderate adjustments, there will be a great deal of improvement.' He also said: 'Don't panic or lose your composure! It is common for beginners of academic writing to lack confidence.' His words were like a calming pill, making me realize my dissertation might not be that bad. I cheered up again and revised my dissertation according to the professor's suggestions, finally submitting the first draft on time.

### **III. Gains from the Writing Process**

In completing this dissertation, what I gained was not only an academic outcome, but also a way of thinking, a method of discovering problems within classical texts and searching for answers.

The most profound insight is my understanding of the importance of research question awareness (*wenti yishi* 問題意識). Previously, 'research question awareness' was an abstract concept to me; after finishing this dissertation, I truly realized how it dominates the selection of materials, the arrangement of chapters, and even the argumentative direction of the entire dissertation. It was not until the first draft was nearly completed that I realized the arguments in the later chapters did not effectively respond to my initial research questions. I was forced to work backwards from the actual content of the full draft to reconstruct the underlying research purpose, and I undertook two rounds of structural revision.

This writing experience was certainly a winding path, but it was also invaluable. It made me see my shortcomings in academic writing and understand that moving from 'inexperienced' to 'proficient' requires repeated practice and revision.