



Trinity Saint David

Student Name: Estienne Ren	
Module Code: SICH5011 Module title: Sinological English II	Student number: 206032
For completion by marker: Comments:	
Marker's signature:	Date:
Provisional mark: NB. All marks are provisional until confirmed by the final examination board.	

Analysis of Philological and Interpretive Approaches of Confucian Classics

Good morning, Provost, and fellow students. Today's subject of my talk is an analysis of two main approaches to studying the Confucian classics. I'm going to divide my presentation into four parts: a brief introduction about the two approaches, followed by an analysis of the first approaches, the philological, and then the interpretive. Finally, conclude with my personal opinion and preferences of the approaches as a classicist.

I- Introduction

The philological approach is “defined as the study of literary texts and written records, the establishment of their authenticity and their original form, and the determination of their meaning”¹. And the interpretive approach encompasses social theories and perspectives that embrace a view of reality as ethically and morally constructed or made meaningful through classicist understanding and knowledge.

II- The philological approach of Confucian classics

a. Wang Niansun's 王念孫 approach

Wang Niansun is a scholar who especially studies exegesis. There is a book written by Liu Jingcheng 劉精盛 named *The Study of Wang Niansun's Exegesis* 王念孫之訓詁學研究, which mainly discusses his innovation in exegetical theory and its influence on exegetical methods, and focuses on his outstanding contributions and existing problems in the collation of *Reading Magazine* 讀書雜誌 and the study of cognate words. Wang Niansun proposed to use the methods of “get the ancient meanings based on ancient sounds”², which means he has achieved remarkable results in his exegesis by taking the method and approach from loan characters to find the original characters and their meanings. Because ancient Chinese philology focus on the font of the characters rather than the sounds, so Wang Niansun spent ten years making annotations on *Guangya* 廣雅, citing scriptures and biographies, taking into account all the opinions, examining them in detail, and correcting many mistakes, omissions and derivations of the original book. He succeeded in applying the method of comparison as evidence and the

¹<[² Original text: “就古声以求古义”](https://www.uio.no/studier/emner/hf/iln/VMS4100/#:~:text=It%20is%20commonly%20defined%20as,the%20determination%20of%20their%20meaning.></p></div><div data-bbox=)

induction approach as the foundation for his research. It is a comprehensive study of linguistic phenomena in terms of philology, phonology, exegesis, grammar, and canonical systems, and it is a complex and well-organized study. He made a significant contribution to the development of ancient Chinese exegesis.

b. Pi Xirui's 皮錫瑞 approach

Pi Xirui began to be a classicist at the age of thirty when he edited a treatise on Confucian classics that understands the changes of the past and the present, and its purpose is to explain the necessity and the usefulness of respecting Confucius and the classics. He put forward the term « be conservative » in his *History of Confucian Classics* 經學歷史 as a term to summarize the characteristics of Chinese Confucian classics. Pi Xirui believes that Confucian classics are different from other kinds of learning, he thinks that all studies seek updates, but the study of classics must focus on previous research. To interpret the classics, he emphasized that one should first know the principles and methods of the Han dynasty's modern and ancient literary schools. Moreover, the *History of Confucian Classics* is one of Pi Xirui's more influential works on Confucian classics, and it is also China's first monograph on the history of Confucian classics.

III- Interpretive approach of *The Great Learning*

a. Kong Yingda's 孔穎達 approach

Concerning the interpretive approach, I've chosen two scholars and they both have influenced the classic: *The Great Learning*. Firstly, Kong Yingda is a classicist of the Tang dynasty and his greatest achievement in Confucian classics is that he presided over the compilation of the old materials—*The Corrected Interpretations of the Five Classics* 五經正義; creating a unified set of scripture annotations as a standard, so that scholars can learn from their ancestors and select scholars through imperial examinations. Additionally, in the sense of Confucian classics, the so-called “zhengyi” means to clarify and explain the meaning of the text based on ancient annotations. Although Kong Yingda wrote the classics based on Zhengxuan's annotations, it is not difficult to find that he reinterpreted the classics from his perspective. For instance, for the classic *The Great Learning*, although in some circumstances he annotates from the original text or Zhengxuan's 鄭玄 commentary, after comparison, we realize that in both contents the term “sincerity” is not mentioned. However, Kong Yingda will especially emphasize this in the book.

b. Han Yu's 韓愈 approach

Finally, Han Yu, a scholar from the Tang dynasty, who is also specialized in poems. In terms of feudal ideology and morality, he also made unique contributions, vigorously advocating Confucianism. Claiming to inherit Confucianism orthodoxy and be the pioneer of the neo-Confucianism in Song and Ming dynasties. Then, he described Mencius as the successor of Confucius in his orthodoxy, which greatly improved the status of Mencius. Later, neo-Confucianism scholars in the Song and Ming dynasties included the book Mencius in the *Four Books*, which raised the status of Mencius in Chinese culture. In addition, *The Great Learning* was honored as one of the *Four Books* in the Song dynasty and gained the status of an important Confucian classic. Han Yu had already begun to elucidate *The Great Learning*.

IV- Conclusion

Through the analysis of these four classicists, I would personally Han Yu's approach, because he considered inheritance important. He also mentioned in his famous essay *Discourse on Teacher* 師說 the importance of teaching, he said: "In ancient times, those who wanted to learn would surely have a teacher. A teacher, is a person who passes down the Dao, imparts professional knowledge, and resolves doubt [...] Having doubt but neglect learning from a teacher, one's doubt will never be resolved"³. Additionally, in his neo-Confucianism in the Song and Ming dynasties, although it is focused on Confucianism, also borrows ideas from Taoism and even Buddhism. So, I think that as a classicist we should broaden our horizons and propose more domains of knowledge to expand ours. Han Yu uses both methods, on one hand, he respects his ancestors' knowledge and learns from it, and on the other hand, he collects other knowledge to make a relationship with it. So, I think his methods of study are worth learning.

³ <https://www.academia.edu/35903850/A_Translation_of_the_Shi_Shuo_Discourse_on_Teacher_by_Hanyu_韩愈_师说_之英译
#:~:text=Download%20Free%20DOCX-,A%20Translation%20of%20the%20Shi%20Shuo%20(Discourse%20on%20Teacher)%20by,师说》之英译>