Hang Lin

Looking Inside the Cover: Reconstructing Space and Time in Some Donglin Manuscripts

1 Introduction

If we happened to have a Chinese manuscript in front of us, what we would look at first is probably its cover. This would seem to be the part of a manuscript most likely to tell us about its contents, production and provenance. However, the unversed reader will often be disappointed to find that the cover of many Chinese manuscripts contains nothing more than a title. More information about the manuscript may be acquired if we take a look inside the cover, in particular if we examine any paratexts located at the beginning and end of the manuscripts, in the centrefold of its folios and at its edges and corners, for example.

This article considers the way in which various paratextual elements of manuscripts enable the reconstruction of space and time encountered in late imperial Chinese manuscripts by concentrating on a selection of manuscripts collectively referred to here as ‘Donglin manuscripts’. The corpus of these manuscripts consists mainly of commentaries and interpretative notes on Confucian canonical texts produced by members of the Donglin Faction (Donglin dang 東林黨), also known as the Donglin School, and later handmade copies (chaoben 鈔本 or 抄本) of these manuscripts. The name ‘Donglin’ derives from the name of the Donglin Academy (Donglin shuyuan 東林書院) in Wuxi, Jiangsu province, and members of the Donglin Faction were mostly well-educated literati. They were also politically active in the first three decades of the seventeenth century, which is traditionally considered to be the period of decline of the ruling Ming 明 dynasty (1368–1644).1

1 I owe a debt of gratitude to Kai Vogelsang and Max J. Fölster for their valuable comments and constructive suggestions on earlier drafts of this article. The research for this article was carried out within the scope of the work conducted by the SFB 950 ‘Manuskriptkulturen in Asien, Afrika und Europa’ / Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC), Hamburg, funded by the German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, DFG).

These manuscripts are therefore illustrative examples of Chinese literati manuscripts and can provide valuable insights into the intellectual and cultural milieu in late imperial China. Furthermore, the apogee of the Donglin movement at the beginning of the seventeenth century paralleled with a decisive turn in the history of the Chinese book. The proliferation of commercially printed books available at the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth century marked an “ascendance of imprints” in which printed books outnumbered manuscripts for the first time. This proliferation of imprints, however, did not entail the demise of manuscripts. In fact, manuscripts coexisted with printed books as “an important vehicle for textual transmission well into the 20th century” and there was continuous and evident mutual influence between the two media. At the same time, this period also witnessed a drastic expansion of paratexts – in the form of an increase in the number of prefaces and postfaces, reading guides and commentaries produced, which provide historians with more data for enquiries into the history of books, both in printed and handwritten form.

Many scholars have analysed paratexts as essential elements in the historical and sociocultural understanding of textual production in China, and they have ventured into questions such as how paratexts construct and contest authority, promote cultural values, articulate self-identity and influence readership. All of

4 On the change in the reading public brought up by the growth in imprints and the expansion of paratextual components in seventeenth-century China, see Chow 2004: 149–188 and McLaren 2005.
5 In her analysis of several Huizhou publishers in the mid-seventeenth century, Ellen Widmer (1996) describes how paratexts – glosses, indices and commentaries – were used to target specific readers. Marta Hanson (1997) unveils how editors of medical treatises made use of prefaces and commentaries to form a new medical tradition. By examining maps and illustrations in Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) blockprinted books, Lucille Chia (2002) explores how commercial publishers used non-textual paratexts – in particular illustrations and images – to design and modify the elements of the printed page to suit their various purposes. Kai-wing Chow (2004: esp. ch. 4) analyses various paratextual components in commercial printings of the sixteenth and seventeenth century to investigate the literati’s involvement in commercial publishing and to facilitate the conceptualisation of the impact of printing on the formation of reading publics and on political practices. Concentrating on the “female alchemy” (nüdan 女丹) texts in the Qing period, Elena Valussi (2008) expounds how prefaces and rearrangement of texts shaped the ways these texts were presented to the female public. Based on a survey of vernacular literature in the late Ming, Yuming He (2013) notes that the expansion of paratexts in the period was concomitant with an increase in the power of the editor over the printed text.
these studies investigate paratexts in various imprints in a context in which commercial printing was booming, whereas very few attempts have been made to explore paratexts and the impact they once had in Chinese manuscripts, in particular those produced in the late imperial period. As Kai Vogelsang notes, except for occasional inclusion of handmade copies of rare books, most cataloguing efforts in late imperial China focused on editions of printed works.\(^6\) Certainly bibliographers and connoisseurs of Chinese books, both handwritten and printed, have always been aware of the different kinds of information to be found in the paratexts they contain. Yet most of the paratextual components have heretofore served almost exclusively to help scholars deduce bibliographic data for cataloguing these works.\(^7\)

Drawing upon Paul Colilli’s assertion that paratextual research “deals with the pragmatics of transmission”,\(^8\) this article examines a number of Donglin manuscripts in order to unveil information about their production, provenance and transmission. It will focus on the paratextual elements that do not appear on the cover, concentrating mainly on prefaces, postfaces, colophons and certain formatting features whenever these are relevant. In addition, attention will be paid to the use of taboo characters (\textit{bihui zi} 避諱字), which can provide clues to help researchers to date a manuscript. Through this examination, I shall demonstrate how various paratextual components and other elements in Chinese manuscripts can furnish historians with feasible tools with which to retrieve spatial and temporal information.

2 Prefaces and prefatory notes

In most cases, the first set of texts that follow the cover page of a manuscript are prefaces (\textit{xu} 序 or \textit{敘}) and other prefatory notes. In his classical treatment of paratexts, Gérard Genette emphasises that a preface usually fulfils diverse functions and allows the person who writes it to do a variety of things at the same time: declare their intent, give generic definitions, narrate the book’s genesis or guide

\(^7\) Some catalogues or bibliographies, if they contain entries on manuscripts, occasionally devote several lines to describing whether the work contains a preface or postface. Even if such information is provided, though, no more details are usually supplied, except for mentioning the name of the author of the preface or the postface.
\(^8\) Colilli 2007: 445.
the reader. A preface can be considered a threshold that entices its potential readership to enter within.9 Regardless of its writer’s intentions, however, the preface constitutes a specific space in a manuscript that also accommodates various items of information about how it was composed, written or copied, edited and collated. This is clearly shown in the Zhouyi Kongyi 周易孔義 (‘Confucius’ Meaning of Zhouyi’)10 composed by Gao Panlong 高攀龍 (1562–1626), “a principal leader of both the intellectual and political movements associated with the Donglin Academy”.11

This manuscript, now kept by the Shanghai Library, is a hand-copy produced in the early twentieth century.12 Besides two prefatory notes written by anonymous authors, there are also three prefaces attached. The first was contributed by Hua Yuncheng 華允誠 (1588–1648), one of Gao’s favourite students, followed by a preface by Gao himself and another one by his nephew, Gao Shitai 高世泰 (fl. 1630s–1640s).13 The calligraphic style and page layout of the latter three prefices are identical to those of the main text, suggesting that they were probably all copied by the same hand. From these prefaces we learn that Gao finished his Zhouyi Kongyi in the winter of the renshu 壬戌 year during the reign-period of Tianqi 天啓 (1621–1627), that is, the year 1622, and that it was first printed at the end of the bingzi 丙子 year during the reign-period Chongzhen 崇禎 (1628–1644), which corresponds to 1636.14

---

10 Unless otherwise specified, all translations of manuscript and book titles in this paper are my own.
12 Collection number: xianpu 552233.
13 Gao’s own preface is actually his prefatory statement about another work, the Dayi yijian shuo 大易易簡說. Why it appears in the current manuscripts is unknown. On the Dayi yijian shuo, see Wang Shounan 1999: 89. After the fall of the Ming in 1644, Hua refused to serve the Qing and died with dignity when beheaded in 1648 in Nanjing after refusing to cut his hair at the order of the new Manchu regime. On Hua, see Mingshi, 258.6648–6650; Busch 1949–1955: 140–141. Gao Shitai restored the Donglin Academy in 1655 and taught there for over twenty years (Donglin shuyuan zhi zhengli weiyuanhui 2004: 15.608–609).
14 The term ‘reign-period’, nianhao 年號, is a way of naming regnal years in imperial China and many other East Asian countries. Most reign-period names originated as a motto or slogan chosen by the new emperor. Some emperors had several reign-period names, while each of the Ming and Qing emperors had only one reign-period title during their rule. For a comprehensive study of reign-period names in imperial China, see Li Chongzhi 2001.
The first anonymous prefatory note dated 1921 is of particular interest in my analysis of the spatial and temporal information about the manuscript. This succinct account yields some surprising facts about the production and transmission of this manuscript (Fig. 1):

鄉先賢高忠憲公《周易孔義》三卷，上下經各一卷，繫辭、說卦一卷。原本為明崇禎丙子邑人秦儼海氏所刊。每葉十八行，行十九字。民國五年，本館向邑中藏書家借得景寫副本，藏之館中。越五年，丁君仲祐自滬來只囑為代鈔一本，诏將有重刻之舉。亟為照彔是冊，並校閱一遍。書中有空白處，係蟲蝕殘闕，先照原刊寫彔。間有字句疑義者，亦不敢臆改，以存真也。滬上有藏書家，倘得別本，重為覆校，俾臻完善，則更佳矣。他日刊成，還乞惠賜一本，留存館中也。民國十年一月二十五日。  

Zhouyi Kongyi by the Honourable Gao Zhongxian, an earlier worthy of my native place, three juan, one for each of the two parts of the classic and one for ‘Xici’ and ‘Shuogua’. The original edition was printed in the bingzi year during the reign-period Chongzhen [1636] by a native called Qin Yanhai. Each leaf has eighteen lines and each line nineteen characters. In the fifth year of the Republic [1916], this library borrowed a facsimile hand-copy from a local book collector and stored it in the library. Five years later, Mr Ding Zhongyou came from Shanghai and only commissioned a hand-copy of this manuscript, announcing that there would be a reprint of it. These booklets were ordered immediately and were then examined once. The blank spaces in this manuscript are damages caused by wormholes in the original. They are copied in accordance with the print edition. Occasionally, there are doubts about some characters and sentences. I did not dare correct them merely by assumption, in order to keep the appearance of the original. If there is a book collector in Shanghai who obtains other editions and collates this version again to make it more complete, it would be much better. One day when the new edition has been published, I would like to receive a copy so it can be stored in the library. 25 January, tenth year of the Republic [1921].

15 Yanhai is the soubriquet of Qin Gang 秦嘯 (1587–1648; jinshi 1622), courtesy name Qixin 器新. As recorded on the first page of juan 1, he was also the editor of the Zhouyi Kongyi. See also Liu Shuxun 1920: 13a.
16 Zhongyou is the courtesy name of Ding Fubao 丁福保 (1874–1952), who was a scholar on Buddhism, a book collector and a publisher. For a short biography of Ding, see Boorman 1970: 3.269–270. See also Liang Zhan and Guo Qunyi 1991: 5; Reed 2004: 60; Kiely 2010: 191–194.
Fig. 1: Prefatory note in Zhouyi Kongyi. Courtesy of Shanghai Library, collection number: xianpu 552233.
Our knowledge about the manuscript is further enriched by a short note that preludes the above prefatory note (Fig. 2). Written on the back of the cover, it reads:

週易孔義計字弍萬玖千五百〇五个, 合洋四元七角二分。外代辦紙，洋壹角三分。二共洋四元八角五分。江记。

*Zhouyi Kongyi* consists of a total number of 29,505 characters, for 4.72 silver dollars; paper by commission for 0.13 silver dollars, making 4.85 silver dollars altogether. Noted by Jiang.

![Fig. 2: Short note in Zhouyi Kongyi. Courtesy of Shanghai Library, collection number: xianpu 552233.](image)

The last two characters, ‘Jiangji’, might be translated here as “noted by Jiang”. Alternatively, taken together, they may also be the name of the copyist or the copy shop that produced this manuscript (probably also in Wuxi). From the above notes it is interesting to observe that the current manuscript is a hand-copied duplicate of another hand-copy, which in turn is again a copy of the original...
printed version dating from the year 1636. Although no further information about the first hand-copy owned by the “local book collector” is provided, it is not impossible that it is one of the hand-copies produced by Ding Bing 丁丙 (1832–1899), a book collector from Hangzhou. Such a short note with detailed figures on costs is a rarity in Chinese manuscripts and is thus of particular importance for our understanding of the economic conditions in which this manuscript was produced. Ming and Qing 清 (1644–1911) literati, as Kai-wing Chow observes, “routinely and systematically suppressed or erased” all information with reference to economic undertakings, and often anything containing prices or payments would be expurgated.

It is also worth noting that this manuscript was created in 1921, a time when modern typography had already penetrated into the publishing world in China and lithographic printing was nothing new to the Chinese. This fact calls for a consideration of the persistence of manuscript production parallel to print in China. The tradition of producing and using manuscripts in many parts of China, in particular in the lower Yangzi delta, continued to have a life of its own and handwritten duplicates of existing imprints continued to be produced long after the ascendancy of print in the late sixteenth century. The Zhouyi Kongyi here is representative of these hand-copied facsimiles of imprints. In faithful imitation of the original printed version, each leaf has eighteen lines (nine per page) with nineteen characters in each line, and the scribe restricted himself to a formal calligraphic style neatly formatted on the page, adopting the precise layout of equal space for each character. The calligraphy is carefully executed, showing stylistic excellence that is not to be found in many second- or third-hand manuscripts.

17 The only extant copy of the 1636 edition, in five booklets (ce 册), is currently kept in the Wuxi Library (collection number 34251). According to Sun Zuji 1941: 經部1a, the imprint was published in 1636 by Jianguang ge 劍光閣.
18 In 1907, Ding’s entire collection was sold to the Jiangnan Library, later known as Nanjing Library, which was not far away from Wuxi. Possibly the book collector mentioned here acquired a copy produced by Ding from the Jiangnan Library. Ding notes explicitly in his Shanben shushi cangshu zhi that his copy is a hand-copy of the Ming printed version (1967: 1.18a–18b). On Ding, see Hummel 1943: 726–727; Liang Zhan and Guo Qunyi 1991: 1.
20 Although woodblock printing was invented as early as the eighth century and China also experienced its first ‘age of print’ under the Song 宋 dynasty (960–1276), it was only during the late sixteenth century that printed books became the predominant means of textual transmission, marked by an unprecedented boom in commercial printing and an ever-widening distribution network. On this historical transformation, see Inoue Susumu 2002: ch. 14; McDermott 2005; 2006: ch. 2.
The copy was collated carefully and this process is recorded in the red-inked marginalia above the main text. It is quite likely that this manuscript, as noted in the prefatory note, was prepared specifically for woodblock printing. The plan for the reprint had probably never been realised, however, as no later reprint of the work can be identified.

3 Postfaces and colophons

Quite often, though, manuscripts did not contain a preface or any prefatory notes, particularly if they were only drafts (gaoben 稿本). Unlike the chaoben, most draft manuscripts were not intended to be published or read by their ultimate readers, so they rarely contain prefaces or prefatory notes. Some of them did eventually come to light, however, and their later owners often appended their notes and comments to the end of the manuscript, usually as postfaces or colophons (ba 跋) written on additional sheets. Indeed, adding owners’ colophons and postfaces to both imprints and manuscripts was an established tradition among connoisseurs of Chinese books. This tradition is summarised by Ye Dehui 葉德輝 (1864–1927), a book collector and connoisseur of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century:

凡書經校過及新得異本，必係以題跋，方為不負此書。或論其著述之指要，或考其抄刻之源流。

When a book has been collated or a variant edition has been newly acquired, a postface or a colophon must be added to it, otherwise one would not do justice to it. Some postfaces or colophons outline the main points of its contents, while others examine the transmission of its hand-copies or printed editions.

For Gérard Genette, postfaces and colophons fulfil many of the informational functions of allographic prefaces which “retrace the stages of the work’s conception, writing, and publication and move on logically to a ‘history of the text’”. In this regard, these paratexts are also valuable for reconstructing the history of a manuscript.

The fact that postfaces and colophons reveal much of the history of a manuscript is shown in an autograph by Gao Panlong, posthumously entitled Gao

---

22 Cangshu shiyue, 235. See also Fang 1950: 151.
Hang Lin

Zhongxian gong shi shougao zhenji 高忠憲公詩手稿真蹟 (‘Autograph of Poems by the Honourable Gao Zhongxian’). The original manuscript, consisting of three booklets (ce 冊) which contain a total of 272 poems by Gao, is no longer extant, but fortunately there are still photo-lithographic reprints of it available. One well-preserved reprint is currently kept in the National Science Library of the Chinese Academy of Sciences in Beijing.24 A publisher’s note pasted onto the back cover of the reprint records that it was produced in 1924, approximately 300 years after the original manuscript was created. A brief table above the note provides a comparison of the contents of the original version and those of the Gaozi yishu 高子遺書 (‘Remaining Writings of Master Gao’), the most complete collection of Gao’s literary compositions to date. Yet far more can be learnt about the transmission and life of the original work when we cast a look inside the cover, in particular at the two postfaces. The first of them, written in 1881, is of special interest for my examination (Fig. 3):

此高忠憲公詩手稿也。公諱攀龍，字景逸，前明與顧端文公為東林講學之倡，氣節凜然。《明史》有傳，原不藉。區區翰墨見重。然即此冊而論，詩宗陶韋，書法雲林，亦非尋常翰墨家所能企及。

内有“玉齋曾藏”小印，又有“鼎雲”、“汾祥”兩印。25 “玉齋”諱勇均，乾隆己未科探花。鼎雲字汾祥，曾任如皋縣學教諭，族兄縵卿方伯之高曾祖也。蓋本其家所藏，不知何時流遺在外，予探究後得之。同里沈君旭亭藏公手剳一通，急伥之與之合對。

此高忠憲公詩手稿也。公諱攀龍，字景逸，前明與顧端文公為東林講學之倡，氣節凜然。《明史》有傳，原不藉。區區翰墨見重。然即此冊而論，詩宗陶韋，書法雲林，亦非尋常翰墨家所能企及。

內有“玉齋曾藏”小印，又有“鼎雲”、“汾祥”兩印。25 “玉齋”諱勇均，乾隆己未科探花。鼎雲字汾祥，曾任如皋縣學教諭，族兄縵卿方伯之高曾祖也。蓋本其家所藏，不知何時流遺在外，予探究後得之。同里沈君旭亭藏公手剳一通，急伥之與之合對。

筆墨的出一手，以視高子遺書所刻詩亦較多，其爲公手書底稿無疑。爰付裝池，釐爲三冊。今世得公片紙隻字往往珍如拱璧，況此煌煌全帙。其寶貴又當何如？光緒辛己仲秋邑後學秦臻謹跋。

This is an autograph of poems by the Honourable Gao Zhongxian. His given name is Panlong and his courtesy name is Jingyi. Formerly during the Ming dynasty, he initiated the discussion of learning at the Donglin Academy together with Gu Duanwen,26 and he was full of noble spirit and dignity. There is a biography of him in the History of Ming, but this [text] is not recorded there.27 Even small pieces of his handwriting are valued. With regard to this booklet, his poems follow the styles of Tao [Yuanming] and Wei [Yingwu] and his calligraphy is modelled on that of [Ni] Yunlin28 – certainly nothing that ordinary poets or

24 Collection numbers: 40307, 40308 and 40309. See also Sun Zuji 1941: 17a.
25 The second you 有 appears in its variant.
26 Duanwen is the posthumous title of Gu Xiancheng 顧憲成 (1550–1612), whose courtesy name was Shushi 叔時 and sobriquet Jingyang 涇陽. Gu was the founder of the Donglin Academy and another main leader of the Donglin in addition to Gao. For biographies of Gu, see Mingshi, 231.6029–6033; Donglin liezhujuan, 2.31–38; Busch 1976: 736–744. See also Busch 1949–1955: 144–176.
27 See Mingshi, 243.6311–6314.
28 Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (365?–427), also known as Tao Qian 陶潜, spent his life in reclusion. His poetry depicts an idyllic life of farming and drinking. From the eleventh century onward, he was regarded as the most famous pre-Tang 唐 (618–907) poet of all. For a recent study of Tao and
calligraphers can achieve. Inside the manuscript there is a small seal imprint reading “once held by Yuzhai”, accompanied by two other seal imprints reading ‘Dingyun’ and ‘Fenxiang’ respectively. ‘Yuzhai’ is the given name of [Qin] Yongjun, who ranked third in the palace examination of the jimo year during the reign-period of Qianlong [1739].29 [Qin] Dingyun, whose courtesy name was Fenxiang, used to be the director of the prefectural academy of Rugao.30 He is the great-great-grandfather of my elder cousin, [Qin] Manqing, whose courtesy name is Fangbo. Probably this manuscript was originally held by his family, but it is not clear when it left their possession. I acquired it after searching for it. Mr Shen Xuting, a native of my neighbourhood, possesses a letter written by the Honourable.31 I hurried to borrow it to compare it with this manuscript.32 There is no doubt that they were both written by the same hand. This manuscript also contains more poems than those printed in Gaozi yishu.33 There is no doubt that this was a draft written by Gao’s own hand. Therefore, I commissioned it to be mounted and arranged it into three booklets. Today, when only small pieces of writing or single characters by the Honourable are acquired, they are valued just as much as large jade tablets, so just imagine how valuable a complete manuscript is! How should one deal with this treasure? In the mid-autumn of the xinji year during the reign-period of Guangxu [1881], reverently written by Qin Zhen, a later student of the city [Wuxi].34

his literary production, see Tian 2005. Wei Yingwu 韦应物 (c. 733–793) was largely influenced by Tao and claimed to be imitating the Tao Yuanming style in many of his poems. For an examination of Wei and his poetry, see Nielson 1969. Yunlin is the soubriquet of Ni Zan 倪瓒 (1301–1374), a renowned painter-calligrapher during the late Yuan and early Ming periods. 

29 Qin Yongjun 秦勇均 (1701–1771), whose courtesy name was Jianzi 健資 and soubriquet Zhuchuan 柱川. His reading room was named Yuzhai 玉齋 (‘jade studio’).

30 Qin Dingyun 秦鼎雲 (1741–1805), whose courtesy name was Fenxiang 汾祥, was the son of Qin Yongjun and a devoted book collector. For more about Qin Dingyun, see his short biography in Liang Zhan and Guo Qunyi 1991: 340. Rugao is located in Jiangsu province, about 100 km north of Wuxi.

31 Probably the character ting 亭 is erroneously written. The correct character should be the homophone ting 庭. Xuting 旭庭 is the courtesy name of Shen Wu 沈梧 (1823–1887), a late-Qing painter-calligrapher and book collector. He had collected a large amount of private letters and correspondences, most of which are now kept in the National Palace Museum in Beijing.

32 The character chang 伥 used here is probably miswritten; the correct term should be jie 借.

33 There are 332 poems in Gao Zhongxian gong shi shougao zhenji, yet only 167 of them were published in Gaozi yishu.

34 Qin Zhen 秦臻 (1821–1898), courtesy name Sisheng 巳生, soubriquet Chaifeng 蔻風. On Qin Zhen, see Zhu Dechi 2004: 80.
The first lines of the second postface, probably written by Qiu Kefu 裘可桴 (1857–1943) on the occasion of donating this manuscript to the Wuxi Library on 2 October 1923, tells us about the further transmission of the manuscript (Fig. 4):

曩秦茝風先生贈余高忠憲公詩手稿三冊，與共昕夕垂三十年。今將浼鄉人致諸縣立圖書館。作暗示篇以送其行其氣。

Previously, Mr Qin Chaifeng gave me the three booklets of the autograph of poems of the Honourable Gao Zhongxian as a present. They have been in my possession day and night for almost thirty years. Now I’m about to request my countryman to take this manuscript to the Prefectural Library of Wuxi. I have composed this allusive piece to accompany the activities and spirits of its author.35

35 Another translation is “I compose this allusive piece to accompany the activities and spirits of its author”, because it is not impossible that the character 送 is mistakenly taken for its homophone 頌, meaning ‘to praise, to acclaim’.
After writing these sentences, Qiu continues to note down some details about why he considered this manuscript to be of special significance – not merely because of the literary accomplishment of its author and its artistic fineness, but more importantly because of what is hidden behind the words: the political consciousness and the unswerving spirit of Gao as well as the whole Donglin Faction. For Qiu, the disruptive and chaotic situation in China in the 1920s created an inviting context in which to compose this postface. The current photo-lithographic reproduction of the manuscript is probably the direct result of Qiu’s donation because the publisher’s note specifies that it was published in 1924.
4 Taboo characters

If little can be gained from reading the prefaces or postfaces of a manuscript or if neither of them is available, there are other ways of retrieving some spatial and temporal information about it such as by examining any taboo characters it happens to contain. The Chinese had a long tradition of indicating respect for hierarchy in writing. One common means of doing this was by the use of taboo characters for elders and superiors, usually by replacing characters in the personal names of superiors (such as emperors and ancestors) with homophones, synonyms or graphically altered characters. In imperial China, the use of characters in the Emperor’s personal name (and often that of the Empress, too) became taboo upon his death during the Qin 秦 (221–207 BCE) and the Han 漢 (202 BCE–220 CE) and upon his accession thereafter. Successive imperial dynasties institutionalised complex systems of language formalisation that included the compilation of official lists of taboo characters. Each time a new emperor ascended the throne, a new set of tabooed characters would be issued. This taboo applied not only to the reigning emperor, but also to all his predecessors from the same dynasty.

Using taboo characters was considered a severe offence to the authority of the Emperor and even the political legitimacy of the current dynasty. Thus authors would be extremely careful that their texts were not to be read as political allegories of the present, since careless use of such taboo characters would have serious consequences. The chief examiners in charge of the Shuntian provincial examination in 1456, for instance, were charged with selecting topics that violated the taboo against using characters identical to imperial names.36 During the first decades of the Qing dynasty, little attention was paid to setting up taboos on certain characters. It was only after the beginning of the Kangxi 康熙 Emperor’s reign (1662–1722) that a strictly observed system of taboos was applied to Chinese characters, and the regulations intensified during the reigns of Yongzheng 雍正 (r. 1722–1735) and his successor, Qianlong 乾隆 (r. 1735–1796).37 For example, one Qing scholar was executed after criticising the imperially compiled Kangxi Dictionary (Kangxi zidian 康熙字典) in his own dictionary and printing the taboo

37 For general accounts on the practice of avoiding taboo characters in the Qing period, see Li Guoqiang 2007; Inoue Susumu 2011: 160–165.
characters in the Emperor’s name in full, and twenty-one members of his family were enslaved.\(^{38}\)

To counteract the strict taboo applied to certain written characters, writers and printers found ways of avoiding taboo characters by dropping a stroke of the characters used in the personal names of emperors, using close homophones of such characters or adopting graphic variants as substitutes for such characters.\(^{39}\) Since different sets of taboo characters existed during different periods, examining the taboo characters and their substitutes in a manuscript (as well as an imprint) can therefore be very helpful in determining when it was produced.\(^{40}\) A large proportion of the Donglin manuscripts were produced sometime during the Qing period, therefore different regulations for avoiding taboo characters applied. This method is promising and instructive for this study.

By examining taboo characters, it is possible to rectify erroneous bibliographical information about a manuscript, in particular concerning the date of its production. For instance, a photo-lithographic facsimile of Gu Xiancheng’s 顧憲成 (1550–1612) Yu Meng shuolüe 語孟說略 (‘Brief Explanations andComments on the Work of Mencius’) is reprinted in Wuxi wenku 無錫文庫 (‘Literary Treasure of Wuxi’).\(^{41}\) A short editorial note in Wuxi wenku records that it was reprinted from a Ming manuscript kept in the Fudan University Library in Shanghai.\(^{42}\) In fact, this work must have been copied sometime during the Qing, and after 1662 to be more precise, because the final stroke of the character xuan 弦 in the name of Xu Jingxuan 徐儆弦 (fl. 1610–1630), one of the two main commentators of the text, was omitted (Fig. 5).\(^{43}\) From 1662 to the end of the Qing in 1911, the taboo of xuan 玄 in the name of the Kangxi Emperor, Xuanye 玄煥, also accounted for other characters, of which xuan was only one element. For example, the last stroke of

---

\(^{38}\) Fairbank 1992: 159.

\(^{39}\) There is a huge amount of graphic variation to be found in Chinese scripts. Li Pu’s Yitizi zidian (1997) contains nearly 10,000 head characters and about 50,000 graphic variants of them drawn from 151 dictionaries and epigraphical works from the tenth century to the present day.

\(^{40}\) By examining different taboo characters found in a collection of Tao Yuanming’s works whose date of production remained unknown for most of the twentieth century, Xiaofei Tian has identified the collection as an 1876 reprint of an earlier edition dating back to 1861 (2005: 292–293). With the help of different variants of taboo characters, Paul Ulrich Unschuld and Jingsheng Zheng have been able to determine the exact date of a group of medical manuscripts that had been vaguely labeled as “manuscripts dating from the Qing dynasty” (2012: 198–201). For more examples, see Li Guoqiang 2007.

\(^{41}\) Wuxi wenku bianji weiyuanhui 2011: 643–702.

\(^{42}\) Wuxi wenku bianji weiyuanhui 2011: 572c.

\(^{43}\) See, for instance, Wuxi wenku bianji weiyuanhui 2011: 643d.
the character *xuan* 弦 is always missing in the late eighteenth-century *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 (‘Complete Library of Four Treasures’) edition of *Yu Meng shuoliüe*. Thus, had this manuscript really been a Ming product, the *xuan* would have appeared unchanged in its standard form.

**Fig. 5:** The character *xuan* (in a red square) on page 1b of the hand-copied version of *Shuo Meng yulüe*. Source: Wuxi wenku, 643d.

More commonly, these characters provide us with many supplementary adminiciles for assessing the date of production of a manuscript if no such information is available elsewhere. One illustrative example is the manuscript *Gaozi yishu* kept in the National Library of China in Beijing, which contains an abridged version of the complete works of Gao Panlong. As is common in most traditional Chinese book catalogues, the entry of this manuscript in the Library’s catalogue

---

44 Collection number: wen 277.355.
only includes a very brief description of it, noting that the text was composed by Gao Panlong and that the manuscript was produced sometime between 1851 and 1949.\textsuperscript{45} The manuscript has no preface or postface that provides any information about its scribe or copyist, the date or place of production or the transmission of its later ownership. Only a very short note that follows the title of the first \textit{juan} states that the text of this \textit{juan} was collated by Gao Panlong himself and was printed in the autumn of the \textit{kuihai} 秜亥 year of the reign-period of Tianqi (1623). Despite the relative dearth of information about this manuscript, we may still be able to extract something out of the text it contains by taking a look at the taboo characters.

In line 10 of page 2a, the final stroke of the character \textit{xuan} 玄 was omitted and appears as \textit{玄} (Fig. 6). This is probably not a writing error by the scribe, but an intentional choice aiming at avoiding the taboo character \textit{xuan}, because this is the character in the personal name of the Kangxi Emperor. It will become clear that this manuscript must have been written sometime between 1662 and 1911, since the taboo associated with the name of the Kangxi Emperor was only valid in this period. Apart from the character \textit{xuan}, there are also other clues that can help us assess the age of this manuscript. In line 2 of page 2b and line 12 of page 4b, the character \textit{ning} 宁 appears in its graphic variant 宍, that is, the element \textit{xin} 心 (‘heart’) was omitted (Fig. 7). Here, the second character in the personal name of the Daoguang 道光 Emperor (r. 1820–1850), Minning 旻寧, was tabooed and 宍 was used instead of \textit{ning}. But as of the fourth year of his successor’s reign, in 1854, as ordered by an imperial edict, the character \textit{ning} was to be written as 宁 or 宍.\textsuperscript{46} Thus, whenever the latter two are seen as substitutes for \textit{ning}, the text was written in 1854 or later. Combining the two time spans as suggested by the taboo characters, it becomes clear that this version of \textit{Gaozi yishu} was probably produced sometime between 1820 and 1854.

\textsuperscript{45} An online entry in the catalogue is available at <http://find.nlc.gov.cn/search/show-DocDetails?docId=578028598958717171&dataSource=ucs01&query=高子遺書>.
Fig. 6: The character *xuan* (in red square) on page 2a of *Gaozi yishu*. Courtesy of National Library of China, collection number: wen 277.355.
Fig. 7: The character ning (in a red square) on page 2b of Gaozi yishu. Courtesy of the National Library of China, collection number: wen 277.355.
The method of locating a manuscript in time through the observation of taboo characters functions equally with the *Shiding lu* 事定錄 (‘Record of Sealed Affairs’) held by the Fu Ssu-Nien Library of Academia Sinica in Taipei.47 The text is dedicated to Gu Yuncheng 顧允成 (1554–1607) and it consists of three *juan*, one for his epitaph by his friend Shen Sixiao 沈思孝 (1542–1611), one for his biographical sketch by Gao Panlong and one for the descriptive record of his life written by his elder brother, Gu Xiancheng.48 The library’s catalogue merely notes that the current manuscript is “an old hand-copy” (*jiu chaoben* 舊鈔本) and it is incomplete, as a large part of the first *juan* and the last few pages of the second and the third were not extant. A closer examination of the manuscript reveals that the character *xuan* appears in its unaltered form in line 8 of page 1: 4b, line 5 of page 1: 15a and line 2 of page 3: 3b, suggesting that this manuscript was produced before the reign of Kangxi (Fig. 8).

Fig. 8: The character *xuan* (in a red square) on page 1.4b of the hand-copied version of *Shiding lu*. Courtesy of Fu Ssu-Nien Library of Academia Sinica, collection number: 172973.

---

47 Collection number: 172973.
The layout of this manuscript strictly follows the Ming dynasty’s pingque 平闕, also known as taitou 抬頭 (literally ‘shift head’), the practice of changing the line where an emperor is mentioned so that phrases referring to the emperor and his ancestors start on a new line. The same text of Shiding lu in the Siku quanshu edition, in contrast, has no pingque applied to it and also observes the Qing taboo against writing xuan (omitting the last stroke) (Fig. 9). As the Ming pingque practice was not followed during the Qing period, it is evident that the current manuscript must be a Ming product.

A comparison of the manuscript with a 1613 print version of the same text reproduced in the Gugong zhenben congkan 故宮珍本叢刊 ('Collection of Precious Books in the Palace Museum') (Fig. 10) shows that this manuscript is probably a handmade copy of the print: not only are their formats identical – eight lines per page with eighteen characters per line and the same pingque practice – but also the calligraphic styles of the scripts are noticeably similar. The calligraphy of the characters in the manuscript is not the standard script (kaishu 楷書), nor the ‘academic script’ (guange ti 館閣體 or taige ti 台閣體) popular in official Ming and Qing manuscripts. Slightly rectangular in shape and with sharply defined strokes, the style does not present the flowing brushstroke of a calligrapher, but is a close imitation of the so-called ‘Song style’ (songti 宋體), a common script used in contemporary woodblock imprints. Taking all these facts into consideration, it is probably safe to assume that this manuscript was produced sometime between 1613 and 1644. It therefore becomes evident that it is possible to date this manuscript with better precision by means of integrating textual (taboo characters) and non-textual (layout) observations, although no such information was provided in earlier catalogues.

---

49 Various pingque practices can be observed in some early manuscripts from Dunhuang. The first official regulations concerning pingque in formal writing were promulgated later in the Tang dynasty. They became more strict and detailed in the Ming, however. On pingque, see Wu Liyu 2002: 229–232; Lei Rongguang 2006.

50 Gugong bowuyuan 2001: 541.93–128. For the dating of this version, see Gugong bowuyuan 2001, 卷首, 88; Cui Jianying, Jia Weiming and Li Xiaoya 2006: 383.

51 Interestingly, the current manuscript may be a work of collaboration between two scribes since the second half of the manuscript appears in another calligraphic style than the first half, although both of them clearly reflect the Song style.
Fig. 9: The character xuan (in a red square) on page 1.5a of the Siku quanshu version of Shiding lu. Source: Yingyin Wenyuange Siku quanshu, 1296.696.
Whether or not such taboo characters can be considered as paratexts is still an open question. For the purpose of this paper, I propose to treat them as a special type of paratext, mainly because they have many of the functions that paratexts do. Although most taboo characters are found in the main text and therefore may not be qualified to be paratexts, they are not simply textual corrections, but are strong indicators of the temporal context in which a manuscript was produced. When it comes to locating a manuscript in space and time, these taboo characters link the manuscript and its text to the external world and may appear or disappear at any time “by authorial decision or outside intervention”.\(^\text{52}\) Certainly, one may argue that these characters are part of the editing process since they are proof of intervention in the main text, or rather, they are palaeographic features because they are variants of established writing standards. On the other hand,

\(^{52}\) Genette 1997: 6.
however, it should also be noted that they do not alter the original meaning of the text, nor do they represent the evolution of the style, but are rather an artificial suspension of the conventions for a limited time. Instead of attempting to draw clear demarcations between categories, the above examination aims at questioning the classification of taboo characters.

5 Concluding remarks

The previous discussion in this paper is by no means a comprehensive treatment of the complex subject of reconstructing the ‘position’ of manuscripts from late imperial China in terms of space and time, and many of the methods presented here are already familiar to Chinese editors and bibliographers. Several other types of paratexts, which are not dealt with in detail in this paper as they do not often appear in Donglin manuscripts, can also provide ways of retrieving spatial and temporal information about a manuscript. One useful paratextual element that provides such information is the collector’s seal (cangshu yin 藏書印). The act of putting a seal on a painting or book is a long-standing tradition among collectors in China. It was quite common for a collector to examine a new acquisition carefully and then stamp his personal seal on it, with or without a signature. Later collectors often added imprints of their seals to those of previous owners to mark their own possession of the article. Ye Dehui once stated that “a collected book must bear collectors’ seals”. Yet in reality, not all books, printed or handwritten, have seals stamped on them. However, if seals do happen to be found on a manuscript, they may help identify its owners. Each copy of Zhouyi kongyi and Gaozi yishu, for instance, bears only one collector’s seal added by its latest owner; these tell us at least that they now belong to the Shanghai Library and the National Library of China in Beijing respectively.

53 Other frequent variants for the collector’s seal are cangshu zhang 藏書章, cangshu yinzhang 藏書印章, tuyin 圖印, tuji 圖記, tuzhang 圖章 and yinji 印記. More often, the collector’s seal simply appears as yin or zhang. For an elaborate discussion of the terms, see Wagner 1987.

54 For a study of the history and function of book collectors’ seals, see Fölster 2015.

55 Cangshu shiyue, 238. See also Fang 1950: 156.

56 The seal on the last page of Gaozi yishu reads Beijing tushu guan 北京圖書館 (Beijing Library). This name existed from 1951 to 1998; it was changed to ‘National Library’ (Guojia tushuguan 國家圖書館) at the end of 1998. Since the seal reads Beijing tushuguan, we can tell that the current manuscript must have joined the Library’s collection before 1999.
Historians who examine Chinese manuscripts often encounter various obstacles in their attempts to reconstruct the spatial and temporal context of their objects of study. The first of these is the relative dearth of information available in existing catalogues and bibliographies, despite the long and thriving tradition of book study in China. Traditional connoisseurship and bibliographies of Chinese manuscripts have devoted considerable effort to recording aspects of texts contained in manuscripts such as their content, authors, editors and collators rather than examining their actual carriers, the manuscripts themselves. Even in the rare cases when information about a manuscript is actually provided, more often than not, it is merely about its visual appearance: mostly very basic data about its size, the number of characters on a page or the calligraphic style used. Sometimes, the overall condition of a manuscript can be gleaned from bibliographic information in the catalogues. Many other elements in manuscripts, however, have not been utilised in a way that creates what D.F. McKenzie has designated as bibliography in its broadest sense – a “sociology of texts” that studies them “as recorded forms, and the processes of their transmission, including their production and reception”.

By examining paratexts, we are able to overcome some of these obstacles. Many paratexts are hidden inside the cover and even between the lines of the main text, with the result that these ‘surplus texts’ have often been relegated to marginality in conventional studies of manuscripts and books. As Gérard Genette reminds us, though, finding a text that is free of paratexts is practically impossible: “a text without a paratext does not exist and never has existed,” he says. With the help of various paratextual elements in different parts of a manuscript, it is possible to retrieve information that can serve as a useful clue in locating the manuscript’s place in time and space and in helping us create a list of its manufacturing features and uncover its history of transmission. We should certainly not borrow any concepts used in the study of Western books in a hasty way without questioning them first, and this applies to paratexts as well. In the study of Chinese manuscript culture, as Joachim Kurtz suggests, such concepts must be subjected to necessary modifications due to different historical and cultural contexts. However, paratexts often contain rich spatial and temporal data, and together with other features such as taboo characters and pingque practice, they offer many insightful ways of developing a ‘sociology of the Chinese manuscript’.

---

57 McKenzie 1999: 12.
58 Genette 1991: 3.
59 Kurtz 2011: 210–211.
Manuscripts


Zhouyi Kongyi 周易孔義. Composed by Gao Panlong. 3 ce. Courtesy of Shanghai Library, collection number: xianpu 552233.

References


Unauthenticated


Hanson, Marta (1997). “Inventing a Tradition in Chinese Medicine: From Universal Canon to Local Medical Knowledge in South China, the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Century”. Ph.D Diss., University of Pennsylvania.


