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## Conceptualizing authorship in late imperial Chinese philology

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### Citation

Stumm, D. (2020, April 16). *Conceptualizing authorship in late imperial Chinese philology*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/87360>

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**Title:** Conceptualizing authorship in late imperial Chinese philology

**Issue Date:** 2020-04-16

## 4. All along the fault lines: Scholarly debates and self-reflection around textual studies

In the preceding chapters, I have argued that Chinese scholars in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century employed a narrow concept of authorship that did not fully accord with how pre-imperial Chinese texts were produced. Some scholars resolved the resulting friction either by proposing a highly selective reading of passages or by arguing their inauthenticity. For 21<sup>st</sup>-century readers, textual scholarship like this appears dubious, especially since they no longer share the image of antiquity that was prevalent in the Qing 清 (1644-1912). In chapter one I showed that little contemporary opposition arose around the handling of specific issues. In other words, while certain philological arguments were questioned, the prerogative of textual studies to solve interpretative problems and reverence for the sages inherent in those solutions were not. In this chapter I analyze the extent to which this prerogative was sanctioned by—and reflected in—Qing theorizations about philology.

I will not directly address the role of authorship in Qing evidential studies here. In that respect, this chapter is different from the previous ones. However, my analysis of contemporary theories of research and scholarly controversies around practice does show that the narrowing of the concept of authorship had subtle yet far-reaching consequences that did not go unnoticed. That narrowing destabilized the received text and opened opportunities for scholars to propose changes. For critics, this approach bordered on sacrilege. Thus, the motif of the overzealous researcher who meddles with the textual heritage runs through Qing scholars' reflections about the duties and limits of textual scholarship.

To situate these reflections, the first section looks at the theory on which evidential studies rested, as well as certain recurring catchphrases that characterize this kind of scholarship. From these pronouncements, “doubt” emerges as central to the scholar's work. A multi-faceted concept, doubt can first of all be seen as the driving force behind research; this view enjoys wide popularity across the secondary literature on Qing intellectual history, which often stresses that Qing scholars were motivated by doubt regarding interpretations derived from Song 宋 dynasty (960-1279) Neo-Confucianism.<sup>261</sup> There is, however, another form of doubt just as

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<sup>261</sup> Yü Ying-shih, “Some Preliminary Observations on the Rise of Ch'ing Confucian Intellectualism,” in *Tsing Hua Journal of Chinese Studies*, vol. 11, nos. 1&2, 1975, 112.

prominent in Qing discussions on scholarship: “excessive doubt,” which some contemporaries argued led scholars to question things they should not question. They struggled to find a theoretical balance that reined in excess but still allowed for critical research.

How did Qing scholars themselves talk about what they were doing? The sources I use to answer this question are comprised chiefly of theoretical statements and recurrent catchphrases that espoused and justified values such as the importance of a firm evidential basis for any claim and a cautious handling of challenging questions. Connecting these directives to findings from the previous chapters makes it clear that evidential scholars quite consciously set their sights on textual issues, wherein they turned the problem of interpretation into lexical analysis. This was central to their methodology.

Following these more abstract considerations, the second section looks at one of the most controversial evidential scholars of his time: Duan Yucai 段玉裁 (1735-1815). His contributions to scholarship are well known, but the controversies in which he became entangled are equally impressive, both for their viciousness and their magnitude. The distinguishing feature of Duan Yucai’s textual scholarship, especially in his later years, is his focus on “meaning and principle” (*yili* 義理) in the project of collating texts. The scholarly community did not always accept the emendations he made based on this approach, however. At issue in the discussions surrounding Duan and his work was what kind and degree of change to transmitted texts was acceptable. The attacks and Duan’s responses reveal how scholars conceived their role in the continuing transmission of early texts.

The scholarly controversies around Duan Yucai show that the theoretical statements and oft-repeated catchphrases highlighted in the first section were not just empty words, but had real consequences for how scholarship was discussed in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Controversy erupted around Duan because he stood at the heart of the academic mainstream but employed an approach considered on the very edge of accepted practice. In other words, criticism leveled at Duan Yucai was more than an attack on an individual scholar; it reveals serious fault lines in the foundation of the whole endeavor of evidential studies.

In the third and final section, I relate the critique of evidential studies leveled by Weng Fanggang 翁方綱 (1733-1818) to developments within the scholarly community that have been documented in historical research on the Qing. Weng Fanggang wrote in direct response to the problems of doubt about a work’s authenticity, the appropriate use of sources and the role of interpretation. His extensive meditation, comprising more than 6,000 characters in 11 folio

pages, gives a conclusive outline of the challenges evidential studies brought to the table during the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Weng wrote from the fringes of the academic mainstream and accused his contemporaries of engaging in scholarship merely for material gain. He also accused them of bias in their handling of sources, to the point where they knew their answer before even looking into a matter. In Weng's eyes, evidential scholarship did not respect the integrity of received texts and overstepped its bounds by questioning things it had no business challenging. His ideal was a more limited version of evidential studies that could be used to solve specific problems but cast no doubt on the sagely teachings.

The relation between the theory and practice of evidential studies is my key focus here. Contemporaneous reflections on Qing scholarly practices attest to a high degree of self-awareness. They help explain some of the habits that have come to be associated with evidential scholars, like the focus on the text and a reluctance to engage in abstract interpretation. With this basic information, the strengths and weaknesses of evidential studies can be assessed: For certain texts, especially when they concern the study of nature or applied technical knowledge, the theory of evidential studies forces a demanding reading strategy upon the reader—one that is ultimately conducive to arriving at an informed interpretation. For other areas of the textual heritage, however, the hermeneutical theory of evidential studies is severely limiting. This limitation becomes especially obvious in the reading of classical texts, concerned as they are with issues of ethics. Abstract interpretation remained a blind spot in the evidential tradition.

### **The epistemology of evidential studies and the benefits of doubt**

In the epistemological system of evidential studies, doubt had its place in the early stages of research, but conclusions reached should ideally rest on a rock-solid foundation. As outlined by Dai Zhen 戴震 (1727-1777) in what constitutes one of the most influential and poignant pronouncements on the theory behind evidential studies, a careful process focused heavily on lexicon and etymology could ensure that no questions were left open. The young Dai who, according to his own account, was unable to afford lessons, had to turn to other aids to arrive at an understanding of the classics: dictionaries.

Since I was young, my family was poor, so I did not get to have my own teacher. I heard that among the sages, there was one Confucius who had put together the six classics for later generations to see. I looked for one of the classics and opened and read it, but was

left baffled and clueless. Contemplating for some time, I said to myself: The apex of the classics is the Way. What makes the Way clear is their [the classics'] expressions. What forms the expressions are the characters. Understanding the expressions through the characters, and then understanding the Way through the expressions, one should be able to make progress step by step.<sup>262</sup>

僕自少時家貧，不獲親師。聞聖人之中有孔子者，定六經示後之人。求其一經，啟而讀之，茫茫然無覺。尋思之久，計於心曰：經之至者，道也。所以明道者，其詞也。所以成詞者，字也。由字以通其詞，由詞以通其道，必有漸。

According to the hermeneutical model Dai develops here, there exists a direct connection between the meaning of the character, the expressions formed in characters, and the Way. Once the basic elements of the texts are understood, the larger meaning naturally follows, so the most basic textual unit leads the reader to the all-encompassing Way. Or, as Dai puts it in another text: “Once the glosses are clear, the ancient classics are clear.”<sup>263</sup> This model considerably alleviates the burden of interpretation in favor of the study of etymology. There is actually no longer any need for interpretation, since the text under scrutiny will become transparent once every character is understood.

Qian Daxin 錢大昕 (1728-1804), a close associate of Dai Zhen's and another central figure in the scholarly world of his day, laid out a very similar epistemology:

When there are characters, there are glosses; when there are glosses, there is meaning. Glosses are that from which meaning emerges. There is no meaning beyond that which emerges from glosses.<sup>264</sup>

有文字而後有詁訓，有詁訓而後有義理。訓詁者，義理之所由出，非別有義理出乎訓詁之外者也。

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<sup>262</sup> Dai Zhen 戴震, “Yu Shi Zhongming lun xue shu” 與是仲明論學書 (Letter to Shi Zhongming Discussing Learning), in *Dongyuan ji* 東原集 (Collection of Dai Zhen), in *Sibu beiyao* 四部備要 (Complete Essentials of the Four Categories) (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1936), vol. 132, 9.4b.

<sup>263</sup> 故訓明則古經明。Dai Zhen, “Ti Hui Dingyu xiansheng shoujing tu” 題惠定宇先生授經圖 (Inscribing Mister Hui Dong's Chart of the Transmission of the Classics), in *Dongyuan ji*, 11.6a.

<sup>264</sup> Qian Daxin 錢大昕, “Jingji zhuang xu” 經籍撰詁序 (Preface to *Interpreting the Classical Texts*) in *Qianyan tang ji* 潛研堂集 (Collection from the Hall of Focused Research), in Chen Wenhe 陳文和 (ed.), *Jiading Qian Daxin quanji* 嘉定錢大昕全集 (Complete Collection of Qian Daxin from Jiading) (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1997), vol. 9, 392-393.

In principle, Qian Daxin does not go beyond what Dai Zhen has proposed in his manifesto. Meaning is generated at the lexical level. By explicitly denying the validity of any other source of meaning, however, Qian Daxin accentuates the exclusiveness of Dai's approach. The reader's only task is to establish the correct meaning of the characters; the interpretation of the text follows from this. The principle of engaging with a text at the lexical level is characteristic for evidential studies. It attests to the triumph of "lesser learning" (*xiaoxue* 小學) over "greater learning" (*daxue* 大學), or attention to minute textual details over grand interpretation.<sup>265</sup>

Since lexical analysis plays such a crucial rule, Dai Zhen envisions an encompassing understanding of characters. It entails familiarity with the technical and practical matters to which a character refers. Dai argues that a reader who does not understand, among other things, astronomy, historical architecture and ancient clothing styles will be unable to meaningfully engage the classics. Because the classic work presumes such knowledge from its readers, when the text makes a point, anyone who cannot relate what is described to what existed will certainly miss it. As Dai Zhen puts it in one of his examples:

When chanting the ancient *Classic of Rites*, the "Rites for Capping Noblemen" comes first, and if one does not know the ancient customs for rooms and clothing, then one loses one's direction and is unable to fathom its utility.<sup>266</sup>

誦古《禮經》，先《士冠禮》，不知古者宮室、衣服等制，則迷於其方，莫辨其用。

The *Classic of Rites*-chapter in question focuses on the positions of participants in the rite and the clothes they wear. Dai Zhen assumes that each position and each item of clothing has a special significance. Only a reader who can relate the positions to each other and to the general layout of buildings of the time is able to comprehend this rite of passage, and thus the text. This approach firmly establishes technical and applied knowledge as one of the central pillars of philology. In this regard, understanding a character or expression entails not just knowing what it refers to, but knowing the significance of the reference as well. Recognizing that a certain character refers to a certain kind of headwear, as in the example given above, is only the first step; it is equally necessary to know what that kind of headwear signifies in terms of ritual status.

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<sup>265</sup> See also Ori Sela, *China's Philological Turn. Scholars, Textualism, and the Dao in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia UP, 2018), 102-106.

<sup>266</sup> Dai Zhen, "Yu Shi Zhongming lun xue shu," 9.4b

To Dai Zhen and those who agreed with him, reading a text was all about knowing the characters. The limitation of this approach is that it is unable, even unwilling, to account for meaning generated at a level above the purely lexical. It assumes that a text is nothing but the sum of the characters that constitute it. While Dai Zhen takes context decidedly into account by linking the use of a character in one classic to its use in all the other classics, the references remain on the most basic level of the text and do not consider unspoken assumptions that may have guided textual production.<sup>267</sup> Interpretation is thus dissolved into lexical analysis.

#### *The importance and limits of evidence*

Focus on the lexicon is the first pillar of evidential studies. The second is the search for evidence, as the name of this tradition of scholarship implies. In theory, nothing can be claimed unless it is backed by evidence, which in most cases means citing passages that support one's argument. When a claim is based on demonstrable proof, there is no room for doubt. Short that, one should not be too quick to put one's trust in something. This mindset is neatly illustrated in an entry from Sun Zhizu's 孫志祖 (1737-1801) notebook:

Minzi cared for his stepmother and became famous for his filial piety. Hitherto I doubted there was proof [for this] in the writings.<sup>268</sup>

閔子事後母，以孝著。嘗疑於書傳無徵。

Following this introduction, Sun Zhizu proceeds to outline the provenance of and cite the proof he has found for Minzi's fame. One could discuss any number of passages that work along these lines, but this example is remarkable because it is so unremarkable. It concerns a minor issue, namely the exact circumstances in which the ethical quality of one of Confucius's more important disciples becomes visible. Still, it was a problem for Sun that he and everyone else had been unable to locate proof. Until someone found that proof, Sun Zhizu had reservations about the credibility of this story.

Inherent in the mandatory use of evidence is the reliance on former authorities. While this is not problematic where questions of historical events are concerned, issues of interpretation pose a challenge to this approach. Any evidence that shows *how* a text was read in the past only shows *that* it was read in this way, but does not mean that that reading is correct. Sun Zhizu

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<sup>267</sup> Ibid. It is also worth noting that this assumes complete coherence between the classics, which glosses over the temporal distance that separates them from each other.

<sup>268</sup> Sun Zhizu, „Minzi“ 閔子, in idem, *Dushu cuolu*, 10a.

applies the same approach he had used to substantiate Minzi's fame to the title of the second chapter of the *Zhuangzi* 莊子. The title of that chapter, "Qi wu lun" 齊物論, translates literally to "Balance-things-discourse." There has never been consensus on which characters belong together. Depending on how one interprets the contents of the chapter, one might read back the title as literally, (1) "Discourse on balancing things," or (2) "Balancing things-discourses." That is, the chapter might offer a method for bringing the things of the world into a state of harmony (option 1), or it might constitute an attempt to balance out (and thus bring into alignment) prevailing discourses about the material world (option 2).<sup>269</sup> Sun Zhizu quotes three examples from the Song dynasty that support option 2, but then provides evidence from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, a reading that supports option 1. On the latter he comments:

People of the Jin [dynasty, 265-420] held learning of the mysteries in high regard, yet none of them reads the two characters *wu* and *lun* together [as option 2 does].<sup>270</sup>

晉人崇尚元 [=玄] 學，然皆不以物論二字連讀也。

"Learning of the mysteries" was a vibrant intellectual trend of early medieval China and based itself heavily on Daoist texts such as the *Laozi* 老子, the *Zhuangzi*, and the *Classic of Changes* (*Yijing* 易經).<sup>271</sup> Sun Zhizu was probably well aware of this when he quoted from a 3<sup>rd</sup>-century source to support his own interpretation. Since scholars of the Jin were so familiar with the *Zhuangzi*, they would know how to read its chapter titles. To be sure, Sun does not openly give away his own position, nor does he explicitly say that the readings proposed during the Jin dynasty are correct. Yet the way he frames the quotations, including his comment above, strongly implies where his sympathies lay.

As far removed from each other as they might seem, the approaches to the meaning of texts proposed and employed by Dai Zhen and Sun Zhizu have one important common denominator: Both attempt to ascertain meaning without engaging themselves in the act of interpretation. For Dai, the characters produce meaning without requiring the reader's interpretation, while for Sun, a quote that supports one interpretation makes explicit argumentation unnecessary. The

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<sup>269</sup> The present author strongly supports the latter option.

<sup>270</sup> Sun Zhizu, "Qiwu lun" 齊物論 (Discussion on Balancing Things), in idem, *Dushu cuolu*, 6a. Since the character *xuan* 玄, being part of the personal name of the Kangxi 康熙 emperor (1654-1722), was tabooed during the Qing dynasty, it was commonly replaced with *yuan* 元 when discussing the so-called "learning of the dark."

<sup>271</sup> See Rudolf Wagner, *The Craft of a Chinese Commentator. Wang Bi on the Laozi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), chapter 1 and passim.

interpretative problem is either bracketed completely or reduced to one that can be solved through recourse to earlier authorities.

*The concept of doubt in the theory of evidential studies*

According to the Qing ideal, doubt motivated research that reached conclusions that were beyond doubt. The approaches analyzed above offered the means to reach that goal. While the example from Sun Zhizu's notebook may give the impression that anything could be challenged, some of his contemporaries argued there should be limits. We have seen the identification of inauthentic texts was an important part of scholarly practice, but some scholars came to think that authenticity concerns around the classics had been taken too far. These scholars regularly promoted correctives that became the emblematic catchphrases of Qing evidential studies.

Much like reactions to Yan Ruoku's 閻若璩 (1636-1704) claim that the Old Text chapters of the *Venerated Documents* (*Guwen Shangshu* 古文尚書) were forged, some 18<sup>th</sup>-century scholars expressed dismay about the practice of dismissing formerly esteemed texts as forgeries. Those dismissals commonly relied on two dicta of Confucius that highlight the master's fondness of antiquity. In the first, Confucius says of himself that he "transmits and does not create, trusts in and cherishes antiquity."<sup>272</sup> In the second passage, Confucius describes himself as someone who does not possess inborn knowledge, but rather "cherishes antiquity and perseveres in searching [out knowledge] there."<sup>273</sup>

Sun Xingyan 孫星衍 (1753-1818) made use of this terminological framework to justify the enterprise of evidential studies in a letter to Zhu Gui 朱珪 (1731-1807), younger brother of the famous patron of many important contemporary scholars, Zhu Yun 朱筠 (1729-1781). After defending the benefits of literary studies, Sun wrote:

You, my teacher [Zhu Gui], worry that evidential studies and poetry are the best means to ruin literary learning. How do you, then, conceive of evidential studies and poetry? Examining antiquity in accordance with heaven, following the precepts of the

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<sup>272</sup> 述而不作，信而好古(...). *Analects*, 7.1.

<sup>273</sup> (...) 好古，敏以求之者也。 *Analects*, 7.20.

regulations, *transmitting and not creating, trusting in and cherishing antiquity*, this too is evidential studies.<sup>274</sup>

吾師恐考據詞章，為非文學之上乘。亦視其考據詞章何如？稽古同天，祖述憲章，述而不作，信而好古，亦考據也。

Anticipating or perhaps responding to earlier criticism of evidential studies by Zhu Gui, Sun Xingyan reassures him that this kind of scholarship is in complete accordance with core Confucian values. His answer to the rhetorical question he poses draws on expressions from the *Documents*, the *Middle and the Mean* (*Zhongyong* 中庸) and the *Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語), all important sources for elite learning. The practices and attitudes described in these texts, Sun Xingyan implies, can be seen as a manifestation of evidential studies *avant la lettre*. Conversely, evidential practice is based in exactly these ways of behaving towards the past.

Later in the same letter, when Sun identifies the reason behind the great success of contemporary scholarship he links it to similar qualities:

The scholars of today are not willing to explain the classics with haphazard theories. Only by repeatedly looking into the ancient writings of the Three Dynasties, the glosses and sounds, and the forgotten theories of Han dynasty Confucians do they strive to be in accordance with the Way of the sage that consists of *cherishing antiquity and persevering in studying it*. This is why they are superior to the ancients.<sup>275</sup>

今之學者不肯以臆說解經，惟尋繹三代古書、訓詁聲音及漢儒墜緒，求合於聖人好古敏求之道。此則勝於古人。

In this depiction, 18<sup>th</sup>-century scholarship is presented as an undertaking that is both deeply Confucian and highly trustworthy. It concerns itself with the model writings of classical antiquity and proceeds by relying on glosses, phonetic studies and the work of Han Confucians, the guiding lights of contemporary scholars. Despite forays into dangerous territory where transmitted texts were questioned and attempts to strip them of their authority made, evidential studies, Sun argues, pose no threat to tradition. That such forays were actually quite frequent is not mentioned. Instead he twice cites the Confucian touchstone that one must trust in and

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<sup>274</sup> Sun Xingyan 孫星衍, “Cheng fu zuozhu Zhu Shijun shangshu” 呈覆座主朱石君尚書 (Respectfully Replying to Chief Examiner Minister Zhu Gui), in Wang Yunwu 王云五 (ed.), *Sun Yuanru xiansheng quanji* 孫淵如先生全集 (Complete Collection of Mister Sun Xingyan) (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1935), 195-196. Emphasis mine.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid, 198. Emphasis mine.

cherish antiquity in his lengthy letter. This is no coincidence; it is meant to alleviate the apprehension of the elder literatus about evidential scholarship being rash and destructive.

When speaking to his peers, Sun Xingyan explicitly condemned the tendency to doubt the textual heritage. In an essay meant to show that two chapters of the *Record of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記), the “Regulations of Kings” (*Wangzhi* 王制) and the “Monthly Ordinances” (*Yueling* 月令), were written sometime prior to the Qin 秦 dynasty (221-207 BCE), Sun sharply criticizes scholars who show a proclivity to challenge the authority of the classical works and lists their transgressions:

Since the Song, they have doubted the “Appended Judgments” [of the *Book of Changes*], criticized the preface to the *Documents*, the *Changes*, and the preface to the *Odes*, demolished the *Rites of Zhou*, slandered the *Annals* (Wang Anshi [1021-1086]), changed the *Classic of Filial Piety*, only took the chapters “Great Learning” and the “Middle and the Mean” from the text of the Younger Dai [i.e., *Record of Rites*] and doubted the other chapters; such cases are too numerous to be counted.<sup>276</sup>

自宋已來，乃至疑《繫辭》，訾《書序》、《易》、《詩序》，毀《周禮》，謗《春秋》（王安石），改《孝經》，獨取《大學》、《中庸》篇於小戴之書，而疑其餘篇，不一而足。

The list Sun gives here covers all the canonical Five Classics and two of the texts that constitute the Four Books. In effect, this implies nothing has been left standing of the canon as it was originally envisioned. Treating the textual heritage in this way, Sun Xingyan reminds his readers, is not the way to “make classical studies shine brightly in the world.”<sup>277</sup> Instead, the textual heritage should be treated according to the vision of Confucius expressed in “trust in and cherish antiquity.” Not that Sun advocates blind faith, but he certainly does not support a hermeneutics based in doubt.

The eminent scholar Qian Daxin similarly saw fondness for antiquity as a central value:

The Six Classics have been established by the highest sage, and if one forfeits the classics, then one lacks the means to engage in learning. The most important part of

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<sup>276</sup> Sun Xingyan, “Wangzhi, Yueling fei Qin Han ren suo zhuan bian” 《王制》、《月令》非秦漢人所撰辨 (Analysis that the ‘Regulations of Kings’ and the ‘Monthly Ordinances’ Were Not Written by People of the Qin and Han), in Wang Yunwu (ed.), *Sun Yuanru xiansheng quanji*, 304.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid.

learning about the Way is to cherish antiquity; if one looks down upon antiquity, then one lacks the means to see the Way.<sup>278</sup>

夫六經定於至聖，舍經則無以為學。學道要於好古，蔑古則無以見道。

In this conception, cherishing antiquity is the prerequisite for a meaningful engagement with the classics. Just as there is no learning without the classics, they will only yield their deeper meaning (what Qian refers to as “the Way”) to those who approach them with the right attitude. In a letter that dates to 1755,<sup>279</sup> Qian’s close associate Dai Zhen goes so far as to identify the tendency to doubt everything as the defining scholarly flaw of the time:

I only think that the fault lies in the fact that later generations are unable to thoroughly look into matters; they lightly doubt the past and create without insight.<sup>280</sup>

余獨以謂病在後人不能徧觀盡識，輕疑前古，不知而作也。

Dai Zhen here connects the proclivity to doubt to one of his central concerns, namely the need to take technical and specialized knowledge into consideration. As explained above, doubt is inherent in evidential studies, which requires proof to back up assertions made. On the other hand, in statements about his scholarly agenda, Dai Zhen declared specialized knowledge to be a necessary condition for a meaningful engagement with classical texts. Without such knowledge, this passage implies, doubts formed will be merely superficial and unjustified. Evidential research is not a vehicle suitable for those who give free rein to doubt and neglect their duty to go beyond superficial flaws. A scholar has to earn the right to doubt transmitted texts by proving himself a thorough and knowledgeable researcher. Dai reverses the Confucian dicta that urge one to transmit instead of create and to cherish antiquity to emphasize that this inverted approach can only turn normal order on its head.

No systematic analysis of the place of doubt within evidential studies was undertaken during the mid-Qing, yet the issue came up repeatedly. What unites these passages is their cautionary tone: There is room for doubt, but more importantly there are also limits. One of the most poignant formulation of the limitations of doubt appears in a discussion of Song dynasty textual

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<sup>278</sup> Qian Daxin, “Jingji zhuang xu,” 393-394.

<sup>279</sup> For a fuller discussion of this text, see Inoue Wataru 井上 亘, “Giko to shinko. Tai Shin ‘Yo Ō Naikan Hōkai sho’ wo megutte” 「疑古」と「信古」— 戴震「與王内翰鳳喈書」をめぐって (Doubting Antiquity and Trusting Antiquity. Revisiting Dai Zhen’s ‘Letter to Hanlin Scholar Wang Fengjie’), in *Jinmon kagaku* 人文科学, vol. 13, 2008, 1-15.

<sup>280</sup> Dai Zhen, “Yu Wang neihan Fengxie shu (yihai) 與王内翰鳳喈書(乙亥) (Letter to Hanlin Scholar Wang Fengjie [yihai year]), in *Dongyuan ji*, 3.3a.

studies. The question under consideration is whether the bamboo slips in one of the chapters of the *Documents* got misplaced, in which case the text would have to be rearranged. According to Sun Zhizu, no such mistake occurred and there was no justification for claiming it did:

These discussions of the Song Confucians are all unfounded; they doubted what they should not have doubted.<sup>281</sup>

此皆宋儒拘墟之論，疑其所不當疑者也。

While the scholarly community certainly demanded critical and informed research, the imperative was to “trust in and cherish antiquity,” not dismantle it. Not that there were clear formulations of what “should not be doubted”; the researcher had to know it without being told. Judging from these fragmentary and scattered pronouncements, it appears that doubt had to be confined to issues that did not challenge the authority of the transmitted heritage.

*“Be broadly knowledgeable and leave unresolved what is doubtful”*

The imperative to exercise caution found expression in the catchphrase “be broadly knowledgeable and leave unresolved what is doubtful” (*duo wen que yi* 多聞闕疑). This is part of the advice, originally found in *Analects* 2.18, that Confucius gives to a disciple who aspires to an official career.<sup>282</sup> This phrase has received much less attention than its counterpart, the supposed summary of the aim of evidential studies: “to seek what is so in actual facts” (*shi shi qiu shi* 實事求是). Approaching 18<sup>th</sup>-century intellectual history from the latter perspective highlights the positivist and evidence-based aspects that shaped scholarly work in this period. The focus on the “actual facts” emphasizes the break with the inquiries into metaphysical concepts such as mind (*xin* 心) and principle (*li* 理) that Qing scholars identified as the core of Ming 明 dynasty (1368-1644) scholarship. Qing scholars, by contrast, wanted to be seen as

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<sup>281</sup> Sun Zhizu, “Yaodian wu cuo jian” 《舜典》無錯簡 (There Are No Misplaced Bamboo Slips in the Canon of Yao), in idem, *Dushu cuolu*, 1.6a. A slightly younger contemporary, Peng Zhaosun 彭兆蓀 (1768-1821), confesses that he struggles with the same issue when it comes to Song scholarship: “As for Song Confucians, I most distrust their theories about misplaced bamboo slips.” 予於宋儒，最不信錯簡之說 Peng Zhaosun, *Panlan biji* 潘瀾筆記 (Negligible Notes), in *Congshu jicheng xubian* 叢書集成續編 (Continued Edition of the Complete Collectanea), vol. 22, 429/1.9b.

<sup>282</sup> In its original context in the *Analects*, the last two characters of this sentence are probably better translated as “leave out [i.e., pay no attention to] what is doubtful.” As the usage in the 18<sup>th</sup> century shows, however, this was not how evidential scholars understood this piece of advice. Instead, they used it to stress that in some cases, a question could not be answered satisfactorily because the sources were insufficient. I call this a “catchphrase” because it was never integrated into the theory of evidential studies, yet was often used to argue for a specific approach to this type of scholarship.

working on historical and thus verifiable issues. That this phrase includes the search for “what is so,” which could also be translated in a stronger way as “the truth,” reflects the confidence of Qing scholars that they could find out what things really had been like in the past.

Compared to “seeking what it so in actual facts,” the dictum to “be broadly knowledgeable and leave unresolved what is doubtful” betrays a more cautious attitude concerning the scope and certitude of scholarly research. It was the duty of every researcher to possess broad knowledge, but at the same time not to overstep the boundaries of what can be ascertained; if no definitive answer was possible, the problem was to be left unsolved. According to this understanding, doubts were not a bad thing per se, so they did not have to be resolved at all costs. Rather, the limitations of both human insight and the extant sources had to be taken into account.

In the eyes of Qing scholars, the imperative to leave certain matters unresolved was connected to the idea of holding to “trust in antiquity.” Consequently, the two expressions sometimes appear together, as in an essay by Wang Zhong 汪中 (1745-1794):

The past and the present are different, it is fitting that there should be some things that are incomprehensible. Trusting in antiquity and leaving unresolved what is doubtful is acceptable [in such cases].<sup>283</sup>

古今異，宜其有不可通者。信古而闕疑，可也。

Wang Zhong takes temporal distance into consideration when he suggests that there are cases where the sources cannot give all the answers contemporary readers would like to have. Under such circumstances, the imperative to trust in antiquity necessitates suspending one’s doubts and not forcing the text into an answer. Faith in antiquity tells the researcher where to stop asking questions. The perspective is slightly different here when compared to most of the passages discussed above, since Wang Zhong’s statement is first of all concerned with content that might be unclear, and not so much with issues such as authenticity. Still, when doubts concerning the authenticity of a text often hinge on dubious content, it becomes clear that the connection that Wang draws sheds light on an important aspect of the larger problem: A lack of faith in antiquity will ultimately lead scholars to treat their sources in inappropriate ways.

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<sup>283</sup> Wang Zhong 汪中, “Zhouguan zheng wen” 周官徵文 (Confirming the Text of the *Offices of Zhou*) in idem, *Shu xue* 述學 (Transmitting Learning), in *Sibu beiyao* 四部備要 (Complete Essentials of the Four Categories) (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1936), vol. 132, 2.10a.

Lu Wenchao 盧文弨 (1717-1796) explicitly spells out that for exaggerated distrust towards the received text, “leaving doubts unresolved” is a suitable remedy. In a letter that dates to 1790, Lu discusses the different recensions of the *Analects*:

Doubting the classics is indeed the flaw of scholars of our times. It starts from the *Analects*; I say that [the recensions from] Qi and Lu merely differ in [some] characters and phrases, it is not the case that the one has something that the other lacks.<sup>284</sup>

疑經自是近世學者之病。生於《論語》，謂齊、魯不過字句之異，非或有或無。

Lu recognizes that what his scholarly colleagues are doing with the *Analects* is not an isolated instance of suspicions going too far. On the contrary, a lack of respect for even the classics is in complete accordance with the zeitgeist. Like Wang Zhong, Lu points to the teachings of Confucius to counteract this tendency near the end of the same letter:

Furthermore, to be “broadly knowledgeable and leave unresolved what is doubtful, and talk cautiously about the rest” is certainly what the sage has taught.<sup>285</sup>

且多聞闕疑，慎言其餘，固聖人之所訓也。

Instead of doubting the repository of Confucius’s teachings on textual grounds, Lu urges his contemporaries to take those teachings to heart and live with certain doubts, nagging though they may be. Once new evidence comes to light, so the orthodox theory of evidential studies goes, the problem can be solved. Until then, one is not to rush to conclusions. As Dai Zhen puts it in a letter to Yao Nai 姚鼐 (1732-1815) dated to 1755, “if it is doubtful, leave it, then you will do no harm when mastering the classics.”<sup>286</sup>

Finally, Zhu Yun used “be broadly knowledgeable and leave unresolved what is doubtful” in a review of Dai Zhen’s recension of the *Classic of Waterways with Commentary* (*Shuijing zhu* 水經注). It was Dai’s great achievement to clean up this chaotic text, whose extant version dates from the late 5<sup>th</sup> or early 6<sup>th</sup> century. In the transmitted version the core text and commentary had been mixed to the point of unintelligibility. Zhu Yun acknowledged what Dai

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<sup>284</sup> Lu Wenchao, “Da Zang sheng Zaidong (Yongtang) shu (gengxu)” 答藏生在東（鏞堂）書（庚戌） (Letter in reply to Mister Zang Zaidong [Yongtang] [gengxu year]), in idem, *Baojing tang wen ji* 抱經堂文集 (Collection of Writings from the Hall of Embracing the Classics), in *Congshu jicheng chubian* 叢書集成初編 (First Compilation of the Complete Collection of Collectanea) (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1935), vol. 147, 302. For a detailed analysis of his position on the *Analects*, see chapter 1.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid, 304.

<sup>286</sup> 疑則闕，庶幾治經不害。 Dai Zhen, “Yao xiaolian Jichuan shu (yihai)” 姚孝廉姬傳書（乙亥） (Letter to Recommended Scholar Yao Nai [yihai Year]), in *Dongyuan ji*, 9.6a.

had done for the text but insisted there were some points where Dai had erred. He phrased his moderate criticism in a manner characteristic of Qing scholarship:

And yet sometimes he maybe puts too much faith in his theories and, without doubting, changes something straight away. Even though he is correct in eight or nine out of ten cases, I do not dare fully consider him in accordance with the dictum of the sage Confucius to be “broadly knowledgeable and leave unresolved what is doubtful.”<sup>287</sup>

然或過信其說，不疑而徑改者間有之。雖十得其八九，然於孔聖多聞闕疑之指未敢以為盡然也。

The significance of this passage is that its admonition to exercise caution with respect to received texts is addressed to someone who actively *changed* those texts. Collation, or the comparison of different editions to establish which copy is most faithful to the intention of the original author was a central pillar of Qing scholarship, and possibly a practice whose influence has endured the longest.<sup>288</sup> Important scholarly publishers in the Sinophone world still sell editions of early Chinese texts produced by Qing scholars. Despite their success and longevity, these editions and the practices by which they were made were not uncontroversial even when they were produced. Critics pointed out that they changed what should not be changed and doubted what should not be doubted.

As this section has shown, the methodological pronouncements of mid-Qing scholars premised a correct understanding of a text on the analysis of characters and expressions. Claims about the meaning of characters had to be backed by sources, hence the wave of new interest in dictionaries. The same standard was applied to any claim: only evidence guaranteed credibility. Ideally, everything would be clear if the researcher was able to answer all questions with proof. Qing scholars were realistic enough to see this was an ideal and that the sources were sometimes simply inconclusive. The rule of thumb formulated from this insight harkened back to the Confucian formulation to be “broadly knowledgeable and leave unresolved what is doubtful.” This was not understood as an invitation to stop asking questions altogether; rather it cautioned scholars that no matter how widely they read, there will always remain something that cannot be known. In other words, there was a line beyond which knowledge was no longer certain, but

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<sup>287</sup> Zhu Yun 朱筠, “Dai shi jiaoding Shuijing zhu shu hou” 戴氏校訂水經注書後 (Postscript to Mister Dai’s Collation of the *Classic of Waterways with Commentary*), in Zhu Yun, *Hesi wenji* 笥河文集 (Zhu Yun’s Prose Collection) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 104.

<sup>288</sup> Kai Vogelsang, “Introduction,” in *Asiatische Studien, Heft 3: Textual Scholarship in Chinese studies. Papers from the Munich Conference 2000*, Band 56, 2002, 529-532.

conjectural. When a scholar crossed this line, his peers reminded him in more-or-less strict terms that he had gone too far.

For concrete issues such as historical events or earlier meanings of a character, doubt was domesticated in the scholarly theory that prevailed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Based on the limitations imposed by this approach, an oft-voiced concern was that scholars lacked the proper faith in antiquity and questioned everything. This was a delicate line to draw, since the key imperative of the practice was to remain skeptical until proof had been found. The line, then, rested on the tacit assumption of a gentlemen's agreement: Some things were not to be doubted. Naturally, individual scholars interpreted this differently. There was minimal consensus, however, that canonical texts were off-limits and not to be tampered with.

### **Contemporary criticism of Duan Yucai's textual scholarship**

Judging from the comments of contemporaries like Qian Daxin and Weng Fanggang, Duan Yucai had a reputation for exceeding the limits of the appropriate in his textual scholarship. This is somewhat surprising, given the authoritative status enjoyed by one of his largest projects, the *Commentary on the Explication of Graphs and Analysis of Characters* (*Shuowen jiezi zhu* 說文解字注).<sup>289</sup> That Duan, who had been a disciple of Dai Zhen, chose to spend nearly thirty years of his life on this Eastern Han 漢 dynasty (25-220) character dictionary places him at the very center of evidential studies: Han sources were held in exceedingly high regard and dictionaries were esteemed as indispensable tools for determining the meaning of characters. Duan subscribed to the theory of evidential studies proposed by Dai, and in an essay on the interpretation of the *Great Learning* (*Daxue* 大學), he wrote:

That the classics are not clear is because their meaning has been lost. The meaning has been lost because in some cases the sentence divisions have been lost, in some cases the glosses have been lost, and in some cases the reading pronunciation has been lost. Losing all three and being able to get at the meaning is unheard of.<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>289</sup> Cf. Benjamin Elman, *From Philosophy to Philology. Intellectual and Social Aspects of Change in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1984), 206.

<sup>290</sup> Duan Yucai, "Zai ming ming de zai qin ming shuo" 在明明德在親民說 (Explanation of 'It Is in Making Illustrious Virtue Shine Bright, It Is in Being Close to the People'), in Zhao Hang 趙航 and Xue Zhengxing 薛正興 (eds.), *Jingyun lou ji* 經韻樓集 (Collection from the Mansion of Classics and Rhymes) (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2010), 57.

經之不明，由失其義理。義理所由失者，或失其句度，或失其故訓，或失其音讀。三者失而義理能得，未之有也。

Like Dai Zhen, Duan proposed that the meaning of a text will become clear once its constituents are deciphered. Besides single characters, which are covered by the terms “glosses” and “reading pronunciations,” Duan added the larger unit of the sentence, the parsing of which can be a thorny issue since entirely different readings can be argued by moving the full stop.<sup>291</sup> In terms of his methodology and approach, Duan Yucai can be considered fully representative of 18<sup>th</sup>-century evidential scholarship.

While Duan Yucai’s work was mostly received favorably, his peers took issue with his tendency to change characters. Tellingly, some of them invoked “leave unresolved what is doubtful.” Because Duan Yucai’s works present a case that negotiates the limits of acceptable interference with the textual heritage, I analyze criticisms directed at his research and the corresponding retorts to determine on what grounds such practice could be justified. What were the standards of validity that Duan and his opponents invoked, and how did these standards relate to the epistemology of evidential studies?

Given that Duan Yucai was part of the scholarly mainstream, it is important to stress that criticism of his work came both from within and outside that mainstream. Qian Daxin is an example of the former type. Qian was an early admirer of Duan’s teacher Dai Zhen and helped Dai gain a footing in the scholarly world of the capital in the 1750s. Qian also eagerly supported Dai’s theories on how research must be conducted, as I have shown in the first section of this chapter. Despite this common ground, Qian Daxin took issue with one of Duan Yucai’s suggestions, the theory on which it was based, and the manner in which Duan made his argument.

#### *Qian Daxin’s criticism of Duan Yucai*

In a letter Qian sent to Duan, he praised the latter’s study of the *Documents*, the *Compilation of Variants in the Old Text Venerated Documents* (*Guwen Shangshu zhuan* 古文尚書撰異) as having broken new ground in the research on differences between Old Text and New Text recensions. However, Qian disagrees with Duan’s proposition that all quotations from the *Documents* in the early dynastic histories should belong to the New Text tradition. This

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<sup>291</sup> For a detailed analysis of one example, see chapter 1, section 3.

conviction led Duan to conclude that in one specific case a character in the received text of one dynastic history should be changed to a variant that accorded with the New Text tradition. Qian Daxin is neither persuaded by this theory nor does he think that these are defensible grounds for emending a received text. The complex reasoning Duan Yucai proposed seemed less than credible to Qian:

You are of the opinion that [the character for] the river Yang 養 mentioned in the “Treatise [on Geography]” of the *Book of the [Former] Han* and the “Tributes of Yu” does not have the classifier for water, therefore you say that the New Text recension [of the *Documents*] writes it as Yang 養, and thus the *Records of the Historian* should also write it as Yang 養, [it was only that] some shallow person added the water classifier [making it 漾]. Leaving aside the fact that “the three words ‘there probably is’ will hardly convince everyone,”<sup>292</sup> I am afraid it is not easy to find a shallow person of this kind in the world. How so? If a shallow person were to change the *Records of the Historian* based on the *Venerated Documents*, he would invariably change the character to Yang 漾. A person who was able to change it to Yang 養 would have to have mastered the six rules of character formation. How could such an erudite person be willing to change old texts on a whim? Thus we can ascertain that it cannot be like this.<sup>293</sup>

足下以《漢志》、《禹貢》“養水”不從水旁，遂謂今文作“養”，《史記》亦當作“養”，淺人增加水旁。無論“莫須有三字，難以服天下”，恐世間如此淺人正不易得。何也？淺人依《尚書》改《史記》，必改為“漾”，其能改作“養”者，必係通曉六書之人。豈有通人而肯妄改古書者？此可斷其必不然矣。

The basic question in this exchange is how to account for the character *yang* 漾 in the name of a river in the *Records of the Historian*. According to Qian’s summary of Duan’s reasoning, it should originally have been *yang* 養, which is the same character without the classifier for water. It was only that someone who lacked proper understanding added this classifier. Qian, however,

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<sup>292</sup> This is a reference to an anecdote about the general Yue Fei 岳飛 (1103-1142). In the middle of a promising campaign against the Jurchen, who had taken over the territory of the Song dynasty in the north, his rivals at court charged him with treason. In an audience with emperor Gaozong 高宗 (r. 1127-1162), one of them said that even though evidence was missing, the incriminating event probably took place. The emperor replied: “How can the three words ‘there probably was’ convince the world?” Hence the phrase’s connection to baseless allegations. The story is recorded in Yue Fei’s biography in the *Song shi* 宋史 (History of the Song) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977), 365.11394.

<sup>293</sup> Qian Daxin, “Yu Duan Ruoying lun Shangshu shu” 與段若膺論尚書書 (Letter to Duan Yucai Discussing the *Venerated Documents*), in *Qianyan tang ji*, 599.

thinks that it would have actually taken someone who *had* the proper understanding to make this change, because it is in accordance with the usual rules for character formation, wherein a character can be used phonetically and new meaning specified by adding to it a classifier. This is what Duan's explanation suggests, and thus Qian topples it: Someone who had the knowledge to change the character according to the rules would not have changed it all. A simpleton, Qian claims, would have opted for the more common homophone *yang* 漾 instead.

The point is not who is correct here. It should be noted that Qian Daxin's theory rests on assumptions just as much as those of Duan Yucai, namely that it is more likely that a character is changed based on phonetical considerations than through the simple addition of three dots that signify water. Duan himself, on the other hand, expects total submission from the *Records* to the textual tradition he has established for it. Only then does his claim that the character variant in one text has influence on the variant in another text make sense. Leaving aside these assumptions, what matters is that a contemporary openly criticized Duan Yucai for taking so much license in dealing with the received text. The significance of this example will become clear once it is seen in connection to other reactions Duan's textual scholarship elicited in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

#### *Duan Yucai versus Gu Guangqi*

The richest resource for studying the controversial aspects of Duan Yucai's scholarship is his correspondence with Gu Guangqi 顧廣圻 (1766-1835). The unrelenting questioning from this younger contemporary forced Duan to justify his approach in detail. Prior to the sometimes spiteful exchanges, Duan and Gu were on good terms. Gu Guangqi even said of himself that he learned what he knew from Duan.<sup>294</sup> Duan Yucai, for his part, praised Gu in the 1790s in letters to his own friends<sup>295</sup> and requested books from his acquaintances on Gu's behalf.<sup>296</sup> Tension between the two seems to have built up around 1801 over the historical relation between commentary and subcommentary in printed texts: Were they already combined in the Song dynasty or was the subcommentary still printed as a separate physical entity?<sup>297</sup>

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<sup>294</sup> Li Qing 李庆, *Gu Qianli yanjiu* 顾千里研究 (Studies on Gu Guangqi) (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1989), 28.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid, 43.

<sup>297</sup> Liu Yuejin 刘跃进, "Duan Yucai juanru de liang ci xueshu lunzheng ji qita" 段玉裁卷入的两次学术论证及其他 (Two Academic Disputes in which Duan Yucai Was Embroiled and Other [Issues]), in *Wenshi zhishi* 文史知识, no 7, 2010, 30. Li Qing, *Gu Qianli yanjiu*, 87f.

In late 1806, Gu Guangqi finished a work for his patron Zhang Dunren 張敦仁 (1754-1834) on variants in a Song print of the *Record of Rites*, which resulted in the *Examination of Variants in the Record of Rites with Commentary by Zheng [Xuan]* (*Liji Zheng zhu kaoyi* 禮記鄭注考異). In this text Gu argues that one character in Zheng Xuan's 鄭玄 (127-200) commentary to the chapter "The Meaning of Sacrifices" (*Ji yi* 祭義) should be changed. After he had made this proposition public, Gu and Duan Yucai became locked in a ferocious argument about this one character and its implications for how the Zhou 周 dynasty (11<sup>th</sup> century-256 BCE) had set up its educational facilities.

The commentary in question is appended to the following sentence from the classic:

The son of heaven sets up the four schools; when he has to enter school, his eldest son takes his place according to his age.<sup>298</sup>

天子設四學，當入學，而大子齒。

According to the received text, the commentator Zheng Xuan explained this sentence in the following manner:

“Four schools” refers to the *yuxiang* [schools] of the Zhou in the four suburbs.<sup>299</sup>

四學，謂周四郊之虞庠也。

Gu Guangqi argues that there is a mistake in the received version of this phrase. The second *si* 四 (four) should be *xi* 西 (western), thus making it: “‘Four schools’ refers to the *yuxiang* [schools] of the Zhou in the western suburbs.” Gu bases his contention on a passage in another chapter of the *Record of Rites*, the “Regulations of Kings” (*Wangzhi* 王制), where the *yuxiang* school is explicitly located in the western suburb, and on the way commentary by Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574-648) in the *Correct Meaning of the Five Classics* (*Wujing zhengyi* 五經正義) explains the above-quoted sentence from the classic.<sup>300</sup>

In his earliest responses, Duan Yucai questions Gu's reasoning in a polite yet steadfast manner. Duan's main points are that the Zhou had set up schools of the *yuxiang* type in all four suburban

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<sup>298</sup> Li Xueqin 李學勤 et. al. (eds.), *Liji zhengyi* 禮記正義 (The Correct Meaning of the Record of Rites), in *Shisan jing zhushu zhengli ben* 十三經注疏整理本 (The Thirteen Classics with Commentary and Subcommentary, Revised Edition) (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2000), vol. 15, 1564.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid, 1564f.

<sup>300</sup> Gu Guangqi, “(Fu) Gu Qianli xuezhi beiwang zhi ji” (附) 顧千里學制備忘之記 ([Appendix:] Gu Guangqi's Memorandum on the Institutions of Learning), in Zhao and Xue, *Jingyun lou ji*, 284-286.

districts, and that the commentary by Zheng Xuan would make no sense if one substituted “western suburb” for “four suburbs.”<sup>301</sup> The argumentation both Duan and Gu employ in their exchange is subtle and intricate; disentangling it leads deep into comparison of different versions, disparate quotations from relevant texts in other documents, and earlier understandings of the Zhou educational system. Yet throughout the exchange, their arguments remain bound by the limited number of textual sources and the need to explain all references to either “western” or “four” suburbs convincingly by accounting for the way the Zhou rulers taught their subjects and children. The argument had little room for progress, since there was little common ground between Duan and Gu. Instead, the tone got sharper after Gu Guangqi sent an insulting letter and raised the big questions about collation and textual studies: Are there assumptions about the past the researcher is not aware of that guide the emendation of texts? Is it ever appropriate to change a received text?

The objections that Gu Guangqi raises against Duan Yucai are quite similar to the point made by Qian Daxin, namely that Duan took too much license in changing texts. It is ironic, however, that in this case it was Gu who first proposed to change a text, even if it only concerned the commentary. This blind spot in his criticism notwithstanding, Gu makes points that cut to the heart of many evidential studies practices:

You present grand theories about explicit and unequivocal passages in the classics, wiping them out saying they are miswritten [i.e., they include a wrong character]. All the while you do not consider that they come up again and again and [fit into their contexts] like pieces of a tally. For the explicit and unequivocal passages of commentary that come up again and again and [fit into their contexts] like pieces of a tally, you also wipe those out saying they are miswritten. The repeated occurrences of [the words of] Jia [Gongyan] and Kong [Yingda] in the *Correct Meaning* that in every case [fit into their contexts] like pieces of a tally cannot be wiped out by saying they are miswritten. Thus you change your tactics and wipe them out saying they are incorrect [content-wise]. Thereupon you laboriously call upon and widely quote other classics and other commentaries where there is no explicit text. All this in order to establish your own explanation, which is meant to bring it closer to what you want the explanation to be.

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<sup>301</sup> Duan Yucai, “Liji sijiao xiaoxue shuzheng” 禮記四郊小學疏證 (Evidential Analysis that the Four Suburbs All Had Lesser Schools According to the *Record of Rites*), in Zhao and Xue, *Jingyun lou ji*, 259-265. Cf. also Duan Yucai, “Yu Gu Qianli shu” 與顧千里書 (Letter to Gu Guangqi), in *ibid*, 279.

And yet, if one looks closely at the explanation thus established, it absolutely does not correspond to the original intention of the classic and the commentary.<sup>302</sup>

大說於經之明文鑿鑿者，抹殺之曰譌，不計其為一見再見，若合符節也。於注之明文鑿鑿、一見再見亦若合符節者，又悉抹殺之曰譌。於《正義》之累累見賈也、孔也，無不若合符節，不能謂之譌者，則又換一法悉抹殺之曰誤。然後煩稱博引他經、他注之非有明文者。為之自立一說，以就所欲說，然細按所立之說，絕非其經、其注之本旨。

Gu raises a very serious charge: What Duan Yucai really cares about is not the meaning of the classic, but his own explanation, which he projects onto the received text. The strategy he accuses Duan of employing consists of destabilizing the received text by questioning its integrity. Two approaches can achieve this goal. One is the identification of scribal errors. Incorrect characters would have to be changed back to the originals, thereby establishing a new definitive text. The other is a determination of content issues. If all extant versions of a text agree, then the error must have crept in very early. The Qing researcher could only establish this by, in the present case, knowing more about the educational system of the Zhou than had all earlier editors of the text. Gu does not fail to mention the mandatory search for evidence in other texts. The problem he identifies is that sources used to justify one's theory may be less clear than the passage in question. Gu charges that a deduction based on something uncertain is used to change that which is unequivocal. As offensive icing on this already insulting cake, Gu Guangqi accuses Duan Yucai of subscribing to Lu Jiuyuan's 陸九淵 (1139-1193) infamous dictum "The six classics are commentaries on my inborn wisdom."<sup>303</sup>

Putting aside Gu's harsh formulations, his letter gets to the heart of the problem with evidential studies I have outlined in previous chapters: This tradition of scholarship claims to be objective, when in practice it is blind to issues of interpretation. Therefore, evidential scholars are unable to see how their preconceived notions might influence research. The huge apparatus of quotations can support any kind of argument. As I explained in the first chapter, for example, it was possible to argue philologically that Confucius was a flawless sage who could not err in ethical matters. It is suggestive, then, that Gu stresses the ways Duan Yucai supposedly destabilized the received text, since it seems that many who were critical of evidential

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<sup>302</sup> Gu Guangqi, "(Fu) Gu Qianli di er zha" (附) 顧千里第二札 ([Appendix:] Second Letter by Gu Guangqi), in Zhao and Xue, *Jingyun lou ji*, 280.

<sup>303</sup> 六經注我之故智 Ibid.

scholarship saw the readiness of even prominent practitioners to question the classics as a serious concern. As far as I can tell, no Qing scholar linked the tendency to doubt a received text to concepts of authorship; still, it is significant that these two developments occurred simultaneously, since both proved corrosive to the authority of the textual heritage.

If one takes this larger perspective into account, it is conceivable that Gu's attack has less to do with Duan Yucai as an individual scholar than with mainstream scholarship in general, of which Duan served as a key representative. An overall frustration with the way scholarship was done in his time would go a long way to explain the extremely direct and impolite tone of Gu Guangqi's letter. Tellingly, there is but one short reference in this letter to whether classic and commentary should say "four" or "western" suburbs, the problem that caused the dispute in the first place.

Still, Gu's letter was addressed and sent to Duan Yucai and no one else,<sup>304</sup> and in 1809 Duan wrote a lengthy and equally biting retort. He acknowledged that changing characters was sometimes necessary even though hard evidence was lacking, but justified this approach by referring to the meaning of the text:

Collating the classics means seeking what is correct. If one knows that a character in the classics is miswritten, one changes it; this was the method of scholars of the Han [dynasty]. Han scholars looked at it from the meaning [of the text], and when it was appropriate to change it, they changed it; there was no need for supporting evidence.<sup>305</sup>

夫校經者將以求其是也。審知經字有譌，則改之，此漢人法也。漢人求諸義，而當改則改之，不必其有左證。

With this confession, Duan Yucai parts ways with the orthodox understanding of evidential studies: The final arbiter of truth is not evidence, but the proper understanding of the researcher. This claim is not as strong as it may seem at first. One cannot simply dismiss it as an expression of "scholarship relying on subjective arbitrary judgments."<sup>306</sup> Duan Yucai faced different and mutually exclusive versions of a text many times during his research. On what grounds could

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<sup>304</sup> Even though letters were usually public documents, unlike the way we think of them today.

<sup>305</sup> Duan Yucai, "Da Gu Qianli shu (yisi)" 答顧千里書 (己巳) (Letter in reply to Gu Guangqi [yisi year]), *ibid.*, 282.

<sup>306</sup> 显现出主观武断的学风。 Cf. Luo Junfeng 罗军凤, "Lun Duan Yucai de 'yili jiaokan.'" Wei Duan, Gu zhi zheng jin yi jie" 论段玉裁的"义理校勘"-为段、顾之争进一解 (On Duan Yucai's 'collation based on meaning and principle.' A further explication of the dispute between Duan and Gu), in *Xi'an Jitong daxue xuebao (Shehui kexue ban)* 西安交通大学学报 (社会科学版), vol. 28, no. 3, 2008, 96.

one determine which variant was correct? Obviously, mechanically quoting texts did not suffice, since all theories could be proven by referring to existing variants. One straightforward possibility that Duan sometimes exploited was to take into account the big picture presented by the sources. Arguing on behalf of the Ministry of Rites (*libu* 禮部) that a person with the surname Qiu 邱 was not eligible for the (theoretically hereditary) academic post in honor of Zuo Qiuming 左丘明 because the character was part of the given name, not the surname, Duan resorted to counting:

There are no fewer than a million occurrences of “Mister Zuo” in Han sources, but “Zuoqiu” is only found once here.<sup>307</sup>

漢人言左氏者，不下百千萬處，言左邱者，僅一見於是。

Duan admits that one could make a case for Zuoqiu being the surname and then prove it with reference to a text. Still, anyone familiar with the larger body of source material will recognize, Duan argues, that this one occurrence pales to insignificance when compared to the number of sources that support the other case. Mechanically quoting this one passage that supports one’s own theory and justifying it by pointing out that “the sources say so” is a gross misunderstanding of how scholarship works.

Especially where single characters are concerned, the most reliable guide to correct reading is the context, which here quite literally means characters surrounding the problematic one. They are assumed to be relatively stable, even when different variants for this one character exist and variations appear over a large timeframe. Duan implies that whichever variant makes more sense in context is to be accepted. One can justifiably say that “such active reliance on the meaning goes beyond a mere positivism.”<sup>308</sup> Yet at the same time, “meaning” remains a weak criterion: What had been accepted throughout most of the history of imperial China as part of the sayings of Confucius stopped making sense to Qing scholars, and thus they started to question certain passages. Meaning is determined by contemporary assumptions and understandings. These factors made a relatively sustained discussion about certain *Analects*-

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<sup>307</sup> Duan Yucai, “Bo Shandong xunfu qing yi Qiu xing ren chong xianxian Zuo Qiuming boshi – yi dai libu” 駁山東巡撫請以邱姓人充先賢左邱明博士 議代禮部 (Refuting the Request of the Governor of Shandong To Have a Person Surnamed Qiu Fill Out [the Post of] the Academician in Honor of the Former Worthy Zuo Qiuming – Arguing on Behalf of the Ministry of Rites), in Zhao and Xue, *Jingyun lou ji*, 73.

<sup>308</sup> こうした理への積極的な依存は、単なる実証性を超えたものがある。Hamaguchi Fujio 濱口富士雄, *Shindai kōkyōgaku no shisōshi teki kenkyū* 清代考拠学の思想史的研究 (Research on the Intellectual History of Qing Dynasty Evidential Studies) (Tokyo: Kokusho Kankōkai, 1994), 341.

passages possible: Everyone was convinced that Confucius was a person with high standards, even those who did not support the proposed redactions of the text. Scholarship is done by scholars, and with them come personal assumptions and individual tendencies to believe one thing while doubting another.

*The debate about collation between Duan Yucai and Gu Guangqi*

One final point that certainly informed this controversy but hardly made it to the fore in the letters exchanged was the friction between two approaches to collation. Whereas Duan Yucai favored establishing a definitive edition that imposed changes to the text (now usually called “living collation” *huojiao* 活校), Gu Guangqi defended his approach to leave the received text as it was and only point out variants through commentary (so-called “dead collation” *sijiao* 死校):

Without taking account of my humble abilities, I attempt to correct the faults, so I always say: Texts have to be collated through non-collation. Do not change the original; this is what “non-collation” means. Being able to know what caused the correct and the erroneous [passages]; this is what “collating it” means.<sup>309</sup>

廣圻竊不自量思救其弊，每言書必以不校校之；毋改易其本來，不校之謂也。  
能知其是非得失之所以然，校之之謂也。

Through “non-collation” Gu Guangqi makes the point that it is enough to figure out how the received text came to be, with all its peculiarities. If the received text has been analyzed thoroughly, there is no longer any need to actually change it. This implies that the received text itself has historical value because for a given period it served as the basis for scholarly and public engagement with the work’s meaning.

In his first letter to Gu dated to 1809, Duan Yucai took Gu to task for this approach. Duan’s counter-argumentation still contains some of the spite that permeates the early stages of the exchange, but only in moderate doses:

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<sup>309</sup> Gu Guangqi 顧廣圻, “Liji kaoyi ba” 禮記考異跋 (Postscript to *Examining Variants in the Record of Rites*), in idem, *Sishizhai ji* 思適齋集 (Collection from the Studio of Appropriate Considerations), in *Xuxiu siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書 (Continued Complete Library of the Four Categories) (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 2002), vol. 1491, 108/14.3a.

The aim of collating texts is to establish what is correct and to make the meaning of the sages and worthies shine bright in the world. It is not comparable to the vulgar scholars of the day who boast about broad and rich [knowledge] and brag about being able to engage in evidential studies. (...) Therefore, if the learning of those who print old texts is without insufficiencies, they will settle on a definitive version and make it public; Dai Zhen's [recensions of the] *Rites of the Greater Dai* and *Classic of Waterways with Commentary* are such cases. If they are uncertain about their learning, they will print according to the old versions and not dare to re-arrange a single character; [in such circumstances] it is not appropriate to [merely] collect from different versions and make grand claims about what is correct and what is not. Now you have written the *Examining Variants in the Record of Rites* but do not dare to settle on a definitive version, and still you want to discuss what is correct and what is not. If you were able to do so, then why did you not settle on a definitive version?<sup>310</sup>

凡校書者，欲定其一是，明賢聖之義理於天下萬世，非如今之俗子，誇博瞻，誇能考覈也。(…)故刊古書者，其學識無憾，則折衷為定本，以行於世，如東原師之《大戴禮》、《水經注》，是也。其學識不能自信，則照舊刊之，不敢措一辭，不當捃摭各本侈口談是非也。今足下為《禮記考異》，既不敢折衷定本，乃欲談是非耶。果能談是非，則何不折衷定本也？

What Gu Guangqi championed as a way to retain the historical appearance of the text Duan dismisses as a lack of confidence in the researcher's insight. If, as Gu claims, the point of non-collation is also to establish what is correct in the end, then why not take the next step and print the text with the relevant changes? This led Duan to assume that "non-collation" was merely an excuse for not being able to distinguish the correct variant and glossed over this shortcoming with a theory that makes a virtue out of necessity.

The issue of the right approach to collation is only of the many that comes up in the early letters. They began with two opinions on the correct emendation of a character in one text but went on to include what evidence that could justify changes to the text, the motivations for making changes, and the personal integrity of the discussants. In the later letters, the exchange normalizes and reverts back to a discussion of the correct understanding of the Zhou dynasty

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<sup>310</sup> Duan Yucai, "Da Gu Qianli shu (yisi)," 283.

system of education and partition of territory, which was the only way left to determine whether the text originally spoke of “four suburbs,” or the “western suburb.”

Present-day scholar Liu Yuejin 刘跃进 is certainly right when he expresses pessimism that the controversy between Duan and Gu could ever come to a fruitful resolution.<sup>311</sup> The two men had reached a deadlock: No further evidence could have changed the mind of either because both were convinced they had figured out how the Zhou educational system was set up. All they could do was to array the relevant passages according to their theories. Once dialog had resumed and the atmosphere had calmed after those heated first letters, both went to great lengths to spell out and prove their views about the Zhou state and its schools. There was no higher authority that could arbitrate since it was the authority of the received text that was challenged and thus limited, and the theoretical toolbox of evidential studies offered no help.

What were the results of this dispute? Not unexpectedly, Gu Guangqi and Duan Yucai broke off contact afterward. The relationship between Gu and Huang Pilie 黄丕烈 (1763-1825), with whom he had often worked closely, also became strained and later ended. One of the reasons for this certainly was the 1808 letter Huang wrote to Duan urging him not to be too harsh on Gu, whom Huang Pilie described as a plump youngster who had not yet paid his dues in the academic world.<sup>312</sup> No consensus was ever reached on how the character with which it all began should be emended.<sup>313</sup>

If Gu Guangqi hoped to achieve something with his direct criticism and challenge to the fundamentals of evidential studies, there is no evidence that he succeeded. Others critical of evidential studies did not unite behind him, nor was the reputation of Duan Yucai or the scholarship he was made to stand for in this controversy visibly tarnished. But the timing of the attack is probably relevant. By the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the great scholars who had dominated the discourse of the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century were either very old or had already passed away. It is conceivable that Gu Guangqi was aiming to discredit the old mainstream by taking on Duan. Duan, after all, through the topics of his research and his affiliation with Dai Zhen, can be seen

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<sup>311</sup> Liu Yuejin, “Duan Yucai juanru de liang ci xueshu lunzheng ji qita,” 33. Tracing the problem back to a friction between the different ways of doing “Han learning” espoused by Hui Dong 惠棟 (1697-1758) and Dai Zhen, however, misses the larger significance. Gu Guangqi’s criticism is simply too fundamental to reduce it to an intra-factional dispute.

<sup>312</sup> Li Qing, *Gu Qianli yanjiu*, 129.

<sup>313</sup> The modern editions of the *Record of Rites* that I have consulted do not incorporate Duan Yucai’s suggestion.

as the person most representative of the scholarly world of the 18<sup>th</sup> century still alive in the first decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Leaving such larger questions aside, why might Gu Guangqi have felt free to attack Duan Yucai in such a ferocious manner? I have already introduced Qian Daxin's criticism of Duan's textual research at the beginning of this chapter. That criticism came from the center of evidential studies. Weng Fanggang, who had gained the respect of the circle of evidential scholars through his collection of inscriptions, was also very vocal about the quality of Duan Yucai's emendations. Weng furthermore laid out an extensive and detailed critique of evidential studies that marked him as someone who did not share many of their assumptions. His is criticism coming from the fringes of the academic mainstream. In the last part of his critique, Weng discussed the general tendency to read one's own theories into the textual heritage. He saw Duan Yucai as part of this problem:

Also, in the literary collection of a friend I saw a quote concerning a recent theory by Duan Yucai. He explains that the commentary by Du [Yu] to the sentence, "Any man is a [potential] husband," from the *Zuo Tradition* contains the character *tian* 天 ["heaven," graphically similar to *fu* 夫, the character for "husband"] in several sentences, thus he wants to change it to "Man exhausts heaven." Is this admissible?<sup>314</sup>

又見一友集中，援近日段玉裁說《左傳》“人盡夫也”句，謂此條杜《註》數句皆有“天”字，欲改云：“人盡天也。”可乎？

The final question as to whether this is admissible is rhetorical, since Weng obviously expects the reader to consider Duan's proposal close to nonsensical.<sup>315</sup> Duan Yucai's reputation for overstepping the limits for justifiable emendations made him an easy target. There is no way to tell how much contemporary criticism Gu Guangqi had read, but it is very likely that the criticism quoted throughout this section was merely a manifestation of an opinion shared by a great number of people, and that Gu was aware of the general mood among the educated elite. It is thus possible that he attempted to take advantage of the situation and establish himself as

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<sup>314</sup> Weng Fanggang 翁方綱, "Kaoding lun xia zhi san" 考訂論下之三 (Discourse on Evidential Studies, Part C-3), in idem, *Fuchu zhai wenji* 復初齋文集 (Prose Collection from the Studio of Returning to the Beginning), in *Xuxiu siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書 (Continued Complete Library of the Four Categories) (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 2002), vol. 1455, 418/7.18b.

<sup>315</sup> For Duan's suggestion, see "Yu Yan Houmin Jie lun Zuozhuan yi ze (gengwu)" 與嚴厚民杰論左傳一則 (庚午) (Discussing an Issue with the *Zuo Tradition* with Yan Houmin Jie [gengwu Year]), in Zhao and Xue, *Jingyun lou ji*, 71.

the spokesperson for the critical spirits. His harsh and sometimes outright insulting language may be explained by his expectation of widespread support for his views. As mentioned above, however, there is no evidence that he succeeded.

Duan Yucai was a scholar who did not “leave unresolved what is doubtful.” While he certainly was not one of the more radical textual critics who challenged the authenticity of large parts of the textual heritage and even the integrity of the *Analects*, his tendency to change received texts alarmed some of his contemporaries. Critics of either Duan personally or evidential studies in general did not always distinguish between a radical and a moderate form of evidential studies. Judging from the writings of Weng Fanggang, whom I will discuss in detail in the next section, critics singled out the practice of changing texts at will as a prevalent form of mishandling the textual heritage.

It is no coincidence that scholars levelled this criticism at Duan Yucai on various occasions.<sup>316</sup> Late in his life, he explicitly incorporated the crucial role of the researcher’s judgment into his theory of collation. This came at the expense of the role of supporting evidence, which was denied a central place in the argumentation, since Duan recognized that evidence for practically any position could be found somewhere. The Achilles’ heel of this approach is that it gives the reader a lot of license when he encounters something that makes no sense to him. Duan Yucai did little more than to provide a theoretical justification for a practice that had long been common among scholars of the mid-Qing.

### **Weng Fanggang’s critique of evidential studies**

Weng Fanggang was not only an accomplished official, he also gained respect in the circles of evidential scholars with his research on epigraphy. His most prominent publication was the 1789 study on inscriptions from the Han dynasty (202 BCE-220 CE), the *Record of Inscriptions from the Two Han Dynasties* (*Liang Han jinshi ji* 兩漢金石記). While epigraphy was held in high regard in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century as an auxiliary discipline,<sup>317</sup> Weng Fanggang did not identify with the project of evidential studies. Rather, he vocally criticized it for grossly neglecting the “meaning and principles” (*yili* 義理) of its research subject and making unfounded changes to

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<sup>316</sup> Weng Fanggang, too, had more to say about Duan Yucai’s way of doing scholarship. For example, he tellingly opens his “Shu Jintan Duan shi Han du kao” 書金壇段氏《漢讀考》 (Reviewing Duan Yucai’s *Research on Han-Dynasty Readings*) in the following manner: “For the way of mastering the classics, it is most appropriate to make sure to leave unresolved what is doubtful. It is most inappropriate to engage in changing characters.” See Weng Fanggang, *Fuchu zhai wenji*, 504/16.9b.

<sup>317</sup> Elman, *From Philosophy to Philology*, 67.

various texts. In this section, I place Weng's criticism in the context of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Although he did use many of the same catchphrases as his contemporaries, Weng's extensive "Discourse on Evidential Studies" (*Kaoding lun* 考訂論) raises some unique points that show his fundamental opposition to many tenets of evidential scholarship. Furthermore, his "Discourse" brings together many criticisms that otherwise are scattered across the writings of mid-Qing scholars. Weng's "Discourse" manifests the undercurrent of contemporary critical assessments. Its existence demonstrates that the endangered integrity of the text and the unacknowledged influence of interpretation were not trivial concerns, but played a critical role in scholarly discussions.

#### *Weng's conception of evidential studies*

Weng Fanggang's "Discourse on Evidential Studies" comprises about 6,000 characters and takes up 11 folio pages in his collected works. Compared to other essays on the theory of scholarship written in the high Qing, the "Discourse" constitutes a major undertaking. It is divided into three parts (*shang zhong xia* 上中下, here given as A, B and C), each of which is subdivided into two (B) or three (A, C) sections (using Chinese numbers, here indicated by roman numbers). To bind the separate parts together, Weng uses a "chorus": The opening sentence, which lays out the central argument of the whole essay, also closes four of the eight parts. It reads:

Evidential scholarship takes focusing on meaning and principles as its mainstay.<sup>318</sup>

考訂之學以衷於義理為主。

For Weng, evidential scholarship is merely a means to a correct understand of the meaning and principles inherent in every text. Used in this way, Weng would have no objections to this kind of learning. In reality, however, Weng sees it as just an excuse for many to show off their erudition and so gain distinction in the scholarly world. If not that, it hunts after petty details and loses sight of the greater meaning.<sup>319</sup> Weng explicitly spells out where true and false scholarship part ways:

Evidential scholarship stands in contrast to baselessly discussing the learning of meaning and principles. In general, those who engage in evidential scholarship wish to

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<sup>318</sup> Weng Fanggang, „Kaoding lun shang zhi yi,” in *Fuchu zhai wenji*, 412/7.6b.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid, 412/7.6b-7a.

assist in the search for correct meaning and principles; this is the highest sphere. Simply bragging about one's erudition and analytical skills while ignoring whether meaning and principles are fundamentally true is the first step in going against the Way.<sup>320</sup>

考訂者，對空談義理之學而言之也。凡所為考訂者，欲以資義理之求是也，而其究也；惟博辨之是炫，而於義理之本然反置不問者，是即畔道之漸所由啟也。

Weng Fanggang links what he sees as the distortion of evidential scholarship as it is actually practiced to the works of Yan Ruoku 閻若璩 (1636-1704) and Hui Dong 惠棟 (1697-1758). Both had analyzed classical texts and argued that parts of them were later insertions or outright forgeries. Yan had done so for the *Venerated Documents* (*Shangshu* 尚書) and Hui for the *Classic of Changes* (*Yijing* 易經). With these examples, Weng Fanggang draws a close connection between “meaning and principles” and the received text. As his own practice makes clear (see below), Weng further envisions evidential studies as guided by established interpretation. Within a given interpretive framework, evidential studies can help solve specific questions, but they should never challenge the framework itself, as the following passage makes clear:

In general, evidential research is applied when there is no other way. If there are contradictions concerning a certain affair, one researches it; if theories challenge each other, one researches it; if the meaning is unfathomable, one researches it. When a way is blocked, one clears it; when a person is sick, one administers medicine.<sup>321</sup>

凡考訂之學，蓋出於不得已。事有歧出，而後考訂之；說有互難，而後考訂之；義有隱僻，而後考訂之。途有塞而後通之，人有病而後藥之也。

Evidential studies is useful when certain problems arise in research and there is no other way to solve them. Here Weng explicitly describes this as a last resort. The comparison to medicine is illuminating: Medical treatment can be very effective if the circumstances call for it, but it can be counterproductive to take medicine when one is healthy. Weng Fanggang argues that the use of evidential research is harmful in situations where it is not called for, and he mentions scholars like Yan Ruoku and Hui Dong, who challenged the authority of the canon, as having

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<sup>320</sup> Ibid.

<sup>321</sup> Weng Fanggang, “Kaoding lun xia zhi yi,” 416/7.15a.

done exactly that. Weng's criticism is that of a conservative who considers evidential studies dangerous to enshrined teachings.

Though Weng Fanggang may have second thoughts about the implications of evidential scholarship, he does not deny its overall validity. The opening sentence and chorus of the text already makes clear what good scholarship is founded on: "meaning and principles" are its main pillar.<sup>322</sup> As analyzed above, Weng closely aligns these with the accepted understanding of the classics, but this concept is not the only criterion that he requires from good researchers:

Speaking about the primary, it is focused on meaning and principles; speaking about the secondary, it is focused on the style of writing; speaking about practice, it is focused on the source on which something is based. When all three are complete, the method of evidential scholarship is completely correct.<sup>323</sup>

語其大者，則衷之於義理；語其小者，則衷之於文勢；語其實際，則衷之於所據之原處。三者備，而考訂之法盡是矣。

By mentioning "meaning and principles" first and calling them "primary," this quote focuses textual research as envisioned by Weng Fanggang on this aspect. As mentioned above, Weng had disparaged scholars like Hui Dong and Yan Ruoqu for their work that had challenged the status of formerly valued parts of the classics and he specifically criticized them for not paying sufficient attention to meaning and principles. This again highlights Weng's rejection of evidential scholarship that claimed to focus on finding the truth without regard for other concerns, including interpretation.

The focus on meaning and principles is complemented by an eye for the way the texts use language and careful consideration of the source used to back a claim. Weng elaborates on the question of sources in part A-2 of the "Discourse," though the focus remains on meaning and principles. He draws a distinction between different kinds of histories, for example, when researching events. Is the source an official history (*zhengshi* 正史) or an unofficial one (*yeshi* 野史)? Even with the official histories, Weng requires the researcher to look for corroborating evidence in other sources.<sup>324</sup> Regardless of the source, however, Weng insists that the consideration of meaning and principles governs the decision whether to apply one's text-

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<sup>322</sup> Ibid, 412/7.6b.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid, 413/7.8a. I assume that Weng Fanggang uses the characters *da* 大 and *xiao* 小 (big and small, respectively) in this passage to express a sense of hierarchy, hence the translation as "primary" and "secondary."

<sup>324</sup> Weng Fanggang, "Kaoding lun shang zhi er," 413/7.8b.

critical tools at all: “There is no need to employ evidential learning to argue against the records of rural songs common in the hamlets and widely circulated exhortations to do good if they accord with meaning and principles.”<sup>325</sup> While Weng does not explain this, from the context it seems probable that he thinks these kinds of works, being simple folk tales, contain historical accuracies that would invite textual criticism. Undertaking such a project, Weng implies, would be meaningless since there is nothing wrong with the values they promote.

*Weng’s criticism of contemporary scholarship*

When it comes to his standards for evidential research, Weng Fanggang largely agrees with his contemporaries. He lists three criteria that anyone must fulfill to qualify for the title of “evidential scholar:”

Being broadly knowledgeable, leaving unresolved what is doubtful, and being careful when speaking. When all three are given, then the Way of evidential scholarship is complete.<sup>326</sup>

曰多聞、曰闕疑、曰慎言。三者備而考訂之道盡於是矣。

Judging from Weng’s explanation in part 3-A, his understanding of these phrases does not differ fundamentally from that of other scholars of his time. Like them, he stresses that where evidence is insufficient, the researcher should abstain from pursuing the question further. What is remarkable, however, is the frequency with which Weng reminds others to “leave unresolved what is doubtful.”<sup>327</sup>

This emphasis, as the first section of this chapter has shown, was not innocent by the year 1800, because scholars had used it to argue for a more limited understanding of evidential research. Weng Fanggang was not only an avid promoter of this catchphrase, he also employed it to frame major issues he had with how evidential scholarship was used. His condemnation of the contemporary academic world went much further than anything his colleagues left recorded in

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<sup>325</sup> 即里俗鄉曲、傳誦勸善之文，苟其合於義理者，即無庸執考訂之學以駁難之。Ibid, 413/7.9a.

<sup>326</sup> Weng Fanggang, “Kaoding lun xia zhi er,” 416/7.15b/-417/7.16a. “Being careful when speaking” is part of the same *Analects*-passage in which the catchphrase “being broadly knowledgeable and leaving unresolved what is doubtful” appears.

<sup>327</sup> Besides the review of one of Duan Yucai’s works mentioned in footnote 316, the following texts show Weng’s emphasis of “leaving unresolved what is doubtful:” “Da youren xiaodu” 答友人小牘 (Small Epistle in Reply to a Friend), in Weng Fanggang, *Fuchu zhai wenji*, 452/11.16a. “Yu Wu Lanxue shu er tong” 與吳蘭雪書二通 (Letter to Wu Lanxue, Second Exchange), ibid, 547/11.27b. “Yu Chen Shishi lun kaoding shu” 與陳石士論考訂書 (Letter to Chen Shishi Discussing Evidential Studies), ibid, 451/11.15a. This slogan also repeatedly comes up in the “Discourse on Evidential Studies.”

writing. Weng may have acknowledged the validity of evidential studies in general, but he rejected how many scholars actually practiced it:

As to not wanting to leave unresolved what is undoubtable, or being unwilling to do so, this is the greatest error. Those who talk about evidential scholarship today mutually encourage each other to commit [this error]; all of them are like this. How so? They are not impartial, do not disregard their own preferences, and suffer from the fault of wanting to come out first [as if it was a contest]. Before having engaged in research, they already have the answer in their minds.<sup>328</sup>

至於不肯闕疑、不甘闕疑，則其弊最大。今之言考訂者，相率而蹈之者，比比皆是也。何者？不平心、不虛己，而好勝之害中之也。未考訂之前已有胸中成例在矣。

Not only were researchers willing to push their sources beyond acceptable limits by making claims that could not be verified, they also engaged in research just to support what they already assumed to know. The genuine quest for knowledge, Weng charges, is dead. Rather, he claims, evidential research was a veiled way of showing off one's erudition and originality without considering whether the results were defensible or in line with meaning and principles.<sup>329</sup> As Weng puts it early in the "Discourse," scholars "consider evidential scholarship an easy way to stand out."<sup>330</sup>

In the eyes of Weng Fanggang, the noble ideals by which evidential scholarship justified itself merely masked the struggle for attention within the circles of the scholarly elite. His criticism hints at the negative side of specialization and its link to remuneration. In a world where even the top graduates of the civil service examination had to wait years for a post, scholars had to find other ways to make a living. Some turned to the academies, where they taught and shaped the intellectual orientations of their home institutions, all the while still publishing their own research. Others worked as secretaries on the staff of accomplished officials, who sponsored research projects on a scale unavailable to individual scholars, and these projects needed specialists to carry out the work. Finally, massive state-sponsored projects promised both salary and distinction for those involved. The book collection project *Complete Writings of the Four*

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<sup>328</sup> Weng Fanggang, "Kaoding lun xia zhi er," 417/7.16a-417/7.16b.

<sup>329</sup> Idem, "Kaoding lun shang zhi yi," 412/7.7a.

<sup>330</sup> 以考訂為易於見長。 Ibid, 412/7.7b.

*Treasures* (*Siku quanshu* 四庫全書) of the 1770s and 1780s is certainly the most famous example of this, but far from the only one of its kind.<sup>331</sup>

Such posts and assignments were awarded on the basis on merit, at least on paper. One had to be known as a specialist in a certain field to be eligible. This turned academic publications into a currency, a kind of social capital, with which one could gain access to such positions. This is where Weng's criticism sets in: Whether one's research results were factually correct (never mind in accordance with accepted teachings) was less important than having something that proved one's erudition and originality. Weng implies that scholars would neglect their responsibilities as researchers to produce results. Under these circumstances, research was no longer disinterested because it affected the social and economic standing of the researcher, and the results suffered accordingly. Weng Fanggang does not directly connect his critique to this background, but the points he makes are fully congruent with these consequences: Scholarship had become something that scholars used to stand out.

The final sentence of the quote given above also deserves careful contextualization: "Before having engaged in research, they already have the answer in their mind." Weng Fanggang does not explain why he thinks this damning criticism is justified; it is conceivable that he mentions it to emphasize scholarship's lack of impartiality. Judging from this usage, impartiality has far-reaching connotations: The scholars Weng condemns are partial to the extent that the sources they encounter in the course of their research do not challenge their assumptions, but are instead fit into their pre-conceived framework.

Weng Fanggang did not invent strawmen that he could scold to score a rhetorical point. As we saw above in Qing discussions of the *Analects*, challenging the received text rather than questioning one's pre-conceived ideas was common practice among the more radical scholars. Research did not mean a quest for answers, since, as Weng points out, the answers were known to such scholars all along. Evidential research had become the means and justification for imprinting one's judgment into the text. As Weng formulated it, the terminology used by evidential scholars might appear innocent at first sight, but it actually betrayed egregious malpractice:

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<sup>331</sup> Elman, *From Philosophy to Philology*, 104-129. See also the section on the historical background of Qing dynasty evidential studies in the introduction of this dissertation.

Speaking of correcting errors opens the door to the mistake of presumptuously changing; speaking of misplaced bamboo slips opens [the door to] the mistake of presumptuously creating.<sup>332</sup>

言正誤，則開妄改之弊，言錯簡，則開妄作之弊。

For the uninitiated, talk of “correcting mistakes” and “misplaced bamboo slips” may seem like normal parts of textual research, especially considering the disorderly state of some received texts. Weng Fanggang, however, claims to see right through this pose and translates for his audience where such an approach leads. He criticizes scholars who claim to bring order to chaos for merely justifying making unwarranted changes to their subject texts.

Weng’s assessment of evidential studies gives an overview of scholarly practices in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century from a critical perspective. His observations can be fruitfully connected to many trends that modern-day scholarship on this period has identified as shaping the academic world of the Qing. He decries the fact that scholarship is no longer an end in itself, but a way to make a name for oneself in a competitive job market. This, Weng claims, leads the researcher to put external considerations like originality ahead of coming to defensible conclusions. Weng further condemns scholars for using the evidential tools like an awareness of errors in transmission, to destabilize a received text. Like other critics of his day, he singles out Duan Yucai as someone prone to propose substantial revisions.

*Weng’s approach to evidential studies and his own practice*

Weng Fanggang’s perspective was that of a conservative whose ire was most of all directed at the practice of questioning the accepted interpretation of a text using philological analysis. He views the disrespect for “meaning and principles” as the root of all evil and explicitly approves evidential scholarship that is exclusively used to solve questions within that established framework. His own interpretative work makes it possible to see what this meant in practice. The *Appended Notes on the Analects* (*Lunyu fuji* 論語附記) represents Weng’s engagement with the *Analects*. It weighs in on issues of “meaning and principle” and employs the language and tools of evidential research. Its form is telling in that the entries regularly begin with a quotation of Zhu Xi’s 朱熹 (1130-1200) explanation of the *Analects* passage in question. Weng

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<sup>332</sup> Weng Fanggang, „Kaoding lun shang zhi yi,” 413/7.8a.

praises Zhu Xi in no uncertain terms as an unprejudiced interpreter,<sup>333</sup> and when he questions Zhu, Weng does so in a very careful manner. This implies that his goal was not topple Zhu's interpretations, but rather to refine and supplement them. For example, Weng disagreed with Zhu about the identity of Zuo Qiuming, but affirmed Zhu's judgment of Zuo's reliability.<sup>334</sup> Weng had no reservations about using evidential research to correct factual errors, but he was much more careful where interpretations were concerned.

There is an *Analects* passage where Confucius bemoans the fact that he does not dream about the Duke of Zhou (Zhou gong 周公) anymore.<sup>335</sup> Zhu Xi's commentary states that in his prime years, Confucius had the intention to put the way of the Duke of Zhou into practice. However, in his old age, Zhu continues, Confucius was no longer able to practice it, and thus "he no longer had this mindset (*xin* 心), and also no longer had these dreams."<sup>336</sup> Weng Fanggang disagrees with this interpretation, yet makes his case in a careful manner that shows he fully accepts the exegetical framework Zhu Xi had put into place:

I humbly have some doubts. Thinking [as Zhu Xi does] that the mind of the sage "does not allow him to sigh [in despair] even for a moment," it is permissible to say that "he [Confucius] no longer had these dreams," but it is not permissible to say that "he no longer had this mindset."<sup>337</sup>

竊有所疑。以為聖人之心“一息未容稍慨，”謂“無復是夢”則可。謂“無復是心”則不可。

Does the sage despair over his lifelong failure to restore the ideal society of the past? In his commentary on the passage about Confucius no longer dreaming about the Duke of Zhou, Zhu Xi implies just that when he explains that the disappearance of the dreams reflects the disappearance of the will to implement the way of the Duke of Zhou. Weng Fanggang admits that the dreams about the Duke of Zhou may have stopped, since the passage explicitly states so. However, he disagrees that this equates to Confucius giving up on his quest, a crucial

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<sup>333</sup> 足見朱子之虛心至也。Weng Fanggang, *Lunyu fuji* 論語附記 (Appended Notes on the *Analects*), in *Congshu jicheng chubian* 叢書集成初編 (First Compilation of the Complete Collection of Collectanea) (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1936), vol. 32, 26.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>335</sup> *Analects*, 7.5.

<sup>336</sup> Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Sishu zhangju jizhu* 四書章句集注 (Collected commentaries to the chapters and verses of the Four Books) (Taipei: Changan chubanshe, 1991), 94.

<sup>337</sup> Weng Fanggang, *Lunyu fuji*, 24. The passage about sighing is a paraphrase of Zhu Xi's comment on *Analects* 8.7. See Zhu Xi, *Sishu zhangju jizhu*, 104. Note that *Analects* 8.7 records a statement of the disciple Zengzi 曾子 about the ideal person (*junzi* 君子) and does not contain any obvious reference to Confucius.

distinction Weng makes given its implications about the character of Confucius. The fact that Weng points to a different passage of Zhu Xi's commentary to make his case emphasizes the importance Weng attaches to Zhu's exegesis.

A second important feature of the *Appended Notes* is Weng's evident caution, which made him such a firm believer in the attitude of "leaving unresolved what is doubtable." In one entry, he criticizes readers who look for answers where Weng thinks none are to be found:

I do not know why everyone has to induce and infer, as if they had seen the contemporary events with their own eyes. This is a common pitfall of explaining the classics.<sup>338</sup>

不知諸家何為而必為之演測推論，若親見當日情事。此說經之通弊也。

Weng is concerned by his contemporaries' inability to recognize where to stop asking questions. At some point, he implies, adding inference upon inference becomes mere guesswork, as there is only a limited amount of information one can draw out from the written record. Weng makes few explicit statements about specific interpretations. In keeping with his own pronouncements, he primarily researches cases where he can improve factual accuracy but refrains from challenging Zhu Xi. Where there is no illness, applying medicine is superfluous.

Weng took the middle ground between rejecting and embracing evidential scholarship, probably because he had gained the respect of evidential scholars with his work on epigraphy, while his writings on textual issues were much less in accordance with the academic mainstream. This helps explain why it was Weng Fanggang who produced the most extensive piece of writing explicitly discussing evidential scholarship. Those who dismissed this kind of learning did not go into such depth, while the defenders restricted themselves to shorter theoretical statements, or invested their energy in establishing a genealogy for themselves. Whatever his motivations, Weng Fanggang's "Discourse on Evidential Studies" presents a competing ideal that offers an early critical characterization of scholarship as practiced during the middle of the Qing dynasty.

## Conclusion

From theoretical statements to heated philological controversies, Qing scholars produced a set of writings that allows us a glimpse into how they themselves thought about their research.

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<sup>338</sup> Weng Fanggang, *Lunyu fuji*, 46.

Their reflections show that the central issue was what role interpretation (or “meaning and principle,” as contemporaries called it) should play in research. Those whom we describe as mainstream evidential scholars like Dai Zhen, Duan Yucai and Qian Daxin subscribed to a hermeneutical model according to which meaning would become evident once all the characters constituting a text were understood through lexical analysis. Weng Fanggang, writing from a different perspective, argued that “meaning and principles” should determine where scholars could apply the tools of evidential research.

The tension between a lack of interpretative methods in the theoretical toolbox and the non-neutrality of evidential research goes to the heart of controversies in and about this scholarship. Scholars claimed to be uninterested in doctrinal questions, and possibly conceived of themselves in such a way when, in their theoretical pronouncements, they reduced the interpretation of a text to the lexical question of understanding characters correctly. However, the less a scholar subscribed to the agenda of evidential studies, the more likely he was to perceive such research, as Yao Nai put it, as something that “comes in handy to respond to enemies and leaves the defenders [of opposing views] dumbfounded”<sup>339</sup>—thus anything but neutral.

The debate between Duan Yucai and Gu Guangqi is emblematic of the tension between supposedly objective textual emendations and matters of interpretation. While they had opposite views about the locale of ancient educational facilities, both scholars believed they commanded the necessary sources to back their claims. Their exchange oscillated between a dispute about interpretation and contention about textual sources. With no clear distinction between these two issues, their debate shows that even though evidential scholars normally did not explicitly consider interpretation in their theoretical pronouncements, such issues remained central to their research. How scholars understood a single character was linked to their interpretation of the text as a whole and changing it could have ramifications for the entire exegetical enterprise.

While the limitations that received interpretations imposed on evidential scholarship remained largely outside the scope of discussion, scholars nevertheless were aware of its corrosive potential. The central role played by the concept of doubt emphasizes this problem. While it was a necessary starting point for critical scholarship, exactly how far it could and should be

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<sup>339</sup> 夫以考證斷者，利以應敵，使護之者不能出一辭。 Yao Nai 姚鼐, “Laozi zhangyi xu” 老子章義序 (Preface to *Meaning of the Laozi, Chapter by Chapter*), in idem, *Xibaoxuan quanji* 惜抱軒全集 (Complete Collection of Yao Nai’s Works) (Beijing: Zhongguo shudian, 1991), 22.

pushed remained a matter of dispute. Were the classics off limits? Were received texts or interpretations? Doubts were a double-edged sword that could easily turn from constructive to destructive and thus had to be reined in. Scholars fell back on the admonition “to be broadly knowledgeable and leave unresolved what is doubtable” to negotiate the boundaries of ascertainable knowledge.

Taking a step back from deliberations about the limits of evidential scholarship analyzed in this chapter, we can understand Qing scholars’ uncertainty about the appropriate scope of criticism as a reflection of the growing instability of the received text. With widespread currency of the narrow concept of authorship, the name of an author no longer held a work together. The extent to which this sanctioned efforts of scholars to emend and revise received texts became fundamental to all Qing discussions about the purpose of scholarship.