Historical Review

Confucianism’s Exegesis of the Thirteen Classics and Chinese Traditional Culture

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Chinese traditional culture has substantial content. Everything that has existed, such as clothing, food, dwelling places and means of transportation can all be included into culture. But the most of the books and records on traditional culture mainly refer to the Confucian classics, history, philosophy and literature. That is, the Thirteen Classics, the Twenty-Four Histories, the various schools of thought and their exponents during the period from pre-Qin times to the early years of the Han Dynasty. Especially, the Thirteen Classics were the “Bible” of feudal China, the mainstay and core of Chinese traditional culture. They dominated and influenced the cultural development of China for thousands of years. Chinese traditional philosophy, literature, educational ethics, academic thought and pol-

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itics, economy, cultural activities and social trend all somewhere find their base in the Classics philosophy. The study of the Classics was the “national studies” of feudal China. The ruling class regarded it as the code for ruling the country. Literati set the thorough understanding and proper application as their lifelong goal, while ordinary citizens took them as the cardinal principle for character cultivation and behavior.

The creation of the Thirteen Classics underwent a long historical experience. The origin of the Book of Songs and the Book of History dated back to remote ages. The Zhou Dynasty valued literature and people were educated according to the Book of Songs, the Book of History, the Book of Rites and the Book of Music. For instance, according to records of the Discourses of the States, Discourses of Chu, during the mid-Spring and Autumn Period, Emperor Zhuang of the Kingdom of Chu was selecting teacher for his prince. Shen Shushi, a senior official, when asked by the emperor, said to “teach him history,” “teach him songs,” “teach him rites,” “teach him music” and “teach him gloss,” etc., which included content of the Book of Songs, the Book of History, the Book of Rites, the Book of Music and the Spring and Autumn Annals. In late spring and autumn, Confucius set up private schools and taught his disciples the Book of Songs, the Book of History, the Book of Rites and the Book of Music, laying a further foundation for the Classics system.

According to the historical records, Confucius compiled the Six Classics but there is difference of opinion of its validity among the scholars because the Six Classics were in existence during the Warring States Period. According to the records of the Book of Zhuang Zi, Evolution of Nature, “Confucius once told Lao Dan: Personally I think I have been studying the Six Classics, namely, the Book of Songs, the Book of History, the Book of Rites, the Book of Changes, the Spring and Autumn Annals for a long time.” There were a lot of fables in the Book of Zhuang Zi; so many people did not believe it. But in 1990’s, the Six Virtues written on the bamboo slip was unearthed at a cemetery of the then Kingdom of Chu, which was located at Guo Dian, the city
of Jingmen, and Hubei province. It was recorded that “the Book of Songs, the Book of History, the Book of Rites, the Book of Music, the Book of Changes and the Spring and Autumn Annals already existed.” The order of the Six Classics mentioned coincided with that of the Book of Zhuang Zi, which proved that the words “the Six Classics” were used during the mid-Warring States Period. Zhang Xuecheng, a scholar in the Qing Dynasty argued Zhuang Zi was the disciple of Zi Xia, therefore proclaimed “the wording of the Six Classics originated from the disciples of Confucius.” It is unproved yet whether Zhuang Zi was the disciple of Zi Xia. But Xun Zi was indeed the disciple of Zi Xia. The Book of Xun Zi, Exhortation to Learning said, “What is the beginning and end of study? Answer: in volume study begins with reading the Classics and ends with reading rites.” which proved that in the Warring States Period, Confucians started to call their books the Classics and it played an important role in social education.

At this point, we would like to explain the meaning of “the Classics.” Why the six books were specially named “the Classics”? There were two versions. First, the Classics were the official books. In ancient China, books of learning controlled by the government. Individuals did not have the right to write books. The so-called “Classics” were all official books, which were controlled by the official historiographers. Zuò Commentary, The Second Year in the Reign of King Zhao Gong recorded Han Xuanzi of the Kingdom of Jin found employment in the Kingdom of Lu. He studied books such as the Book of Changes, Xiang and the Spring and Autumn Annals from the Grand Historian, which indicates that the two books were held by the historiographers. Rites of the Zhou, Unofficial History said that historiographers controlled books for ancient rulers, which testified that the Book of History was held by historiographers. The Preface to Poetry said Shi Ke wrote Ode to the Kingdom of Lu, Zuò Commentary mentioned Yi Xiang recited the Petition for Confession, which proved that the Book of Songs was controlled by historiographers. Rites of the Zhou said the Grand Historians handled affairs in accordance to the book of rites, the Minor Historians often read rules on rites; Confu-
cius once went to the Kingdom of Zhou, he consulted Lao Zi, the Collection Historiographer of the Zhou Dynasty on rites. Confucius also consulted Chang Hong on music. Chang Hong was a historiographer of the Zhou Dynasty, too. The above proved that the Book of Rites and the Book of Music were kept by historiographers. The six Classics were all official books, so the bamboo slips were very huge. Legal rules were recorded on slips of 2 chi and 4 cun in length. Second, the sages created the Classics. Critical Editions and Commentaries said, “Works of sages were called the Classics, while works of worthies were called commentaries.” Why works of “sages” were called “Classics”? The reason was that the doctrines of sages were eternal. Notes to the Book on Filial Piety by Zheng Xuan said, “The Classics were names of eternity.” Interpreting Terms, Interpreting Ancient Books said, “The Classics, like roads, were invariable codes. Just as roads lead to anywhere, they can be applied to anything.” Huang Kan once said, “The Classics mean eternal doctrines and codes.” This argument was completely based on the concept that “Nature is eternal, so is the principle.”

The above two versions had different definitions of “the Classics” due to their different concepts. The former believed “the Classics” were the old codes of the duke of Zhou. Confucius was a scholar who “passed on the ancient culture without adding anything new to it and trusted and loved the works of the ancients.” He only “stated” or sorted out the Six Classics. Therefore, “the Classics” were official books. The latter believed that Confucius wrote the Six Classics to teach coming generations about the eternal principles. Therefore, “the Classics” were the works of the sage.

Many ancient books mentioned the function of the Six Classics. The earliest seemed to be the Book of Zhuang Zi, The World: “The Book of Songs expressed aspiration, the Book of History stated happenings, the Book of Rites talked about behaviors, the Book of Music was about harmony, the Book of Changes described yin and yang and the Spring and Autumn Annals argued about fame. The History of Grand Scribe, Biographies of the Humorous quoted a saying of Confucius: “Each
Classic served one purpose. The Book of Rites tells how to behave, the Book of Music tells how to be harmonious, the Book of History teaches how to reason, the Book of Songs teaches how to express ideas, the Book of Changes tells how to deify and the Spring and Autumn Annals tells morality and justice. The Self-Preface of the Grand Historian further explained: “The Book of Changes described heaven and earth, yin and yang, the four seasons and the five elements, so it was good at changes; the Book of Rites explained human relations, so it was good at behaviors; the Book of History recorded the earlier happenings, so it was good at politics; the Book of Songs depicted mountains, rivers, animals, plants, females and males, so it was good at scenery; the Book of Music enjoyed what had existed, so it was good at harmony; the Spring and Autumn Annals distinguished between right and wrong, so it was good at ruling people.”

The order of the Six Classics can be arranged in two different ways. One was the Book of Changes, the Book of History, the Book of Songs, the Book of Rites, the Book of Music, the Spring and Autumn Annals. The other was the Book of Songs, the Book of History, the Book of Rites, and the Book of Music, the Book of Changes and the Spring and Autumn Annals. Scholars who advocated the first arrangement argued that the Six Classics were the old books of the duke of Zhou, therefore, should be put in order according to the time when they were created: The Book of Changes originated from the Eight Diagrams drawn by Fu Xi, therefore arranged as the first chapter of the Book of History was the Records of Kings depicting Yao and Shun’s affairs, therefore arranged as the second; The Ballads of Bin and July in the Book of Songs were works when Zhou Wei left Bin and moved to Qi. Ode to the Shang Dynasty was movements for sacrifice in the Shang Dynasty, therefore arranged as the third; the Book of Rites and the Book of Music were created by the duke of Zhou, therefore arranged as the fourth and fifth; the Spring and Autumn Annals compiled by Confucius depicted the history of the Kingdom of Lu, therefore arranged as the sixth. Scholars who advocated the other order argued that the Six Classics were created by Confucius for
educational purposes, therefore should be arranged in accordance to the profundity of the works: the Book of Songs and the Book of History were for the learning of words. They were easy to understand, therefore arranged at the beginning. The Book of Rites was for binding people’s behavior; the Book of Music was for cultivating person’s temperament. They were a step further, therefore arranged after; the Book of Changes explained the changes between yin and yang, the relationship between heaven and man. The Spring and Autumn Annals stated Confucius’ political stand. By passing judgment its sublime words implied deep meaning. The two Classics had the most profound meaning, therefore, were arranged at last.

The History of Former Han, Treatise on Art and Literature stated that the Book of Music vanished with the decline of the Zhou Dynasty. Later Ying Shao, Shen Yue and other scholars attributed to the disappearance of the Book of Music to the Burning of Books by the tyrannical First Emperor of Qin. Another saying was that there was no, the Book of Music at all. It was just music scores attached to the Book of Songs. Of the Six Classics only five were left if the Book of Music was excluded. Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty “valued Confucianism only,” and founded Five Classics Scholars to inseminate the Five Classics. From then on, Confucianism became the orthodox ideology of feudal China and the Five Classics became the most fundamental books of Confucianism.

Since the Eastern Han Dynasty, the number of the Classics kept increasing. The commentaries and notes supplementary to the Five Classics, Analects and the Book on Filial Piety recording Confucius’ words and behaviors were all established as the Classics, the so-called “take the sublime words of sages and the supplements of the Classics and call all of them Classics.” Therefore, there was a saying that there were Seven Classics in the Eastern Han Dynasty, plus Analects and the Book on Filial Piety to the original Five Classics. During the Song of the Southern Dynasties, the government set up ten Imperial College Assistant, each of them in charge of one Classic. The Book of Changes, the Book of History, the Book of Songs, the Records of Rites,
Rites of the Zhou, Etiquettes and Rites, the Spring and Autumn Annals, Gong Yang Commentary, Gu Liang Commentary was one Classic respectively. Analects and the Book on Filial Piety were combined as one Classic. So there were ten Classics in name, but actually there were eleven Classics. In the year Kaiyuan during the Tang Dynasty, civil servants were selected through imperial examination. In the subject “Understanding the Classics,” nine Classics including three books of rites, three commentaries, the Book of Changes, the Book of Songs and the Book of History were tested. In the year Kaicheng of the king Wenzong of the Tang Dynasty, stone inscriptions were set up for the twelve Classics. That was, Analects, Dictionary of Terms, the Book on Filial Piety were added besides the nine Classics. In the year Shaoxi of the king Guangzong of the Southern Song Dynasty, The Book of Mencius was included into the Classics. So there were thirteen Classics in total. People in the Song Dynasty tried to add the Records of Rites of Dai Senior to make fourteen Classics altogether, but was not universally acknowledged.

Not all the thirteen Classics were formal ones. The Book of Changes, the Book of History, the Book of Songs, Rites of Zhou, Etiquette and Rites and the Spring and Autumn Annals were undoubtedly “Classics”; the Records of Rites were a “record.” Zuo Commentary, Gong Yang Commentary and Gu Liang Commentary were all “commentary.” Analects were a “record.” The nature of the Book on Filial Piety and Dictionary of Terms was similar to that of the Records of Rites. The Book of Mencius was regarded as Confucian with the Book of Xun Zi before the Song Dynasty, but not termed as a “Classic.” The Variorum of Commentaries on the Spring and Autumn Annals said, “The commentary is for handing down, to all ages by elaborating the Classics.” The Records of Rites, Rites of Behavior explained, “Commentary is so named for commentating and expounding Classics either by inheriting the principle of sages themselves or passing on to the disciples.” Analects, Study quoted Zeng Zi’s saying: “Have I not practiced what I have preached?” “Commentary” (?) in Analects was spelt as “zhuan” (?). Explaining Simple and Analyzing Compound Char -
acters: “zhuan means notebook of six cun in length. The length of bamboo slips for Classics such as the Spring and Autumn Annals was two chi and four cun, for the Book on Filial Piety was one chi and two cun, for Analects was eight cun. But the length of bamboo slip for commentary was only six cun for convenience of carrying and recording. Therefore, “commentary” on Classics was originally for the exposition of Classics. Gong Yang Commentary and Gu Liang Commentary were to expound the argumentation in the Spring and Autumn Annals. Zuo Commentary was for the exposition of the happenings recorded by the Spring and Autumn Annals. Strictly speaking, they can only be called “commentary” instead of “Classics.” As to “records,” Confucius’ disciples and other 70 scholars instead of Confucius himself recorded them. For instance, Analects was the compilation of records of Confucius’ disciples; scholars till the Han Dynasty compiled The Records of Rites; Dictionary of Terms even contained parts edited after Shu Suntong of the early Han Dynasty. Therefore, all these can only be called “records.”

Since Emperor Wu of the Western Han Dynasty “dismissed various schools of thoughts, established Confucianism as the canon,” and set up the institution of wujing-boshi (Erudite for the Five Classics) in the bureaucracy, study and veneration of Classics became a social trend. The prosperity of Classics study became the orthodox of feudal Chinese culture, overriding historiography, literature, art and various other academic fields. From the Han Dynasty to the Song Dynasty, authors for Classics annotation and commentary mushroomed and their works were countless. Among them Zheng Xuan (of the Han Dynasty), He Xiu, Kong Anguo, Zhao Qi, He Yan (of the Wei Dynasty), Wang Bi, Du Yu (of the Jin Dynasty), Fan Ning, Guo Pu, Kong Yingda (of the Tang Dynasty), Xu Yan, Yang Shixun, Li Longji, Xing Bing (of the Song Dynasty) stood out either for focused on explanation or argumentation, or for details or conciseness. Their exegesis to the Classics became irreplaceable works. Here are some examples:
Commentary on the Book of Changes - Annotated by Wang Bi and Han Kangbo of the Wei Dynasty, commented by Kong Yingda of the Tang Dynasty

Commentary on the Book of History - Commented by Kong Anguo of the Han Dynasty, interpreted by Kong Yingda of the Tang Dynasty

Commentary on the Book of Songs - Commented by the duke of Mao of the Han Dynasty, noted by Zheng Xuan, interpreted by Kong Yingda of the Tang Dynasty

Exegesis of The Rites of Zhou - Annotated by Zheng Xuan of The Han Dynasty, expounded by Jia Gongyan of The Tang Dynasty

Exegesis of the Etiquette and Rites - Annotated by Zheng Xuan of the Han Dynasty, expounded by Jia Gongyan of the Tang Dynasty

Commentary on the Records of Rites - Annotated by Zheng Xuan of the Han Dynasty, commented by Kong Yingda of the Tang Dynasty

Interpretation of Zuo Commentary - Noted by Du Yu of the Jin Dynasty, interpreted by Kong Yingda of the Tang Dynasty

Exegesis of Gong Yang Commentary - Noted by He Xiu of the Han Dynasty, expounded by Xu Yan of the Tang Dynasty

Exegesis of Gu Liang Commentary - Noted by Fan Ning of the Jin Dynasty, expounded by Yang Shixun of the Tang Dynasty

Exegesis of Analects - Noted by He Yan, etc. of the Wei Dynasty, expounded by Xing Bing of the Song Dynasty

Exegesis of the Book on Filial Piety - Noted by Emperor Xuan Zong of the Tang Dynasty, expounded by Xing Bing of the Song Dynasty
Exegesis of Dictionary of Terms - Noted by Guo Pu of the Jin Dynasty, expounded by Xing Bing of the Song Dynasty

Exegesis of the Book of Mencius - Noted by Zhao Qi of the Han Dynasty, expounded by Sun Shi of the Song Dynasty

Usually the Classics and their annotations and expositions were in separate editions. The first omnibus volume appeared in the year of Shao Xi of the Emperor Guang Zong in the Southern Song Dynasty, then was the exegesis volume with phonology explanation recorded in the *Examples of Evolution of Nine Classics and Three Commentaries* by Yue Ke of the Southern Song Dynasty, or generally called “Song Ten Lines Edition.” Later it was handed down through the Yuan Dynasty to the Ming Dynasty and had been revised several times during the course; in the Year of Jia Qing in the Ming Dynasty it was block printed again and was called “Min Edition” since then. In the Year of Wan Li of the Ming Dynasty, Ming Imperial Edition was block printed with Min Edition as the model. In the year of Chong Zhen of the Ming Dynasty, Mao Jin block printed Mao Edition at Jigu Library with Ming Imperial Edition as the prototype; then Wu Ying Palace Edition appeared during the reign of Emperor Qianlong in the Qing Dynasty. Because of many times of reprint and neglect or mistakes in revision, a lot of errors existed in Classics and their exegeses. Some handwritings were difficult to recognize due to wear or dampness. In the 21st year of Emperor Jia Qing of the Qing Dynasty, Ruan Yuannai re-edited on the basis of Eleven Classics in Song Ten Line Edition as well as *the Etiquette and Rites* and *Dictionary of Terms* in Northern Song Exposition Edition, and wrote *the Revision on Exegesis to Thirteen Classics*, in which he collated the Song Ten Line Edition with the stone-inscribed Classics of Tang Dynasty and the exegesis edition of the Song Dynasty, collated the various exegesis edition of the Ming Dynasty with the Song Ten Line Edition. With the revised edition by Lu Wenchao of the Qing Dynasty as the original version, he elaborated the similarities and
differences, distinguished between right and wrong, and attached them to each volume to correct the errors in various editions of the Ming Dynasty, hence its name Ruan Block Print Edition. It overhauled the Exegesis to Thirteen Classics and made great contribution to the study of Classics, so it was called The Good Edition and was widely circulated. Later, the Collected Publications from Four Categories and the Complete Essentials of Four Categories were printed, but both could not be compared with Ruan Block Print Edition.

In 1999 and 2000, Beijing University Publishing House published Exegesis of the Thirteen Classics revised by Li Xueqin in simplified and original Chinese characters respectively. The revision was on the basis of Ruan Block Print Edition. Besides applying new types of punctuation, it absorbed the Revision of Exegesis of Thirteen Classics by Ruan Yuan and the Collation of Exegesis of Thirteen Classics by Sun Yirang. Meanwhile, it assimilated nutriment from the collation, investigation and rectification of The Thirteen Classis and their exegesis by ancient and modern scholars. It adopted good points from all resources and we should say that so far it was the best edition for Exegesis of the Thirteen Classics.

As explained above, annotations in Exegesis of the Thirteen Classics were mostly done from the Han Dynasty to the Jin Dynasty. Generally speaking, they were the earliest and most complete notes existing today. The exposition was done in the Tang and Song Dynasties. So they were very precious. But during the period when Imperial Examination and Stereotyped writing were prevalent, Exegesis to Thirteen Classics was not given universal emphasis. Instead, the Four Books and the Five Classics noted by scholars in the Song and Yuan Dynasties were very popular. The so-called “Four Books” were The Great Learning, The Doctrine of the Mean, The Analects and the Book of Mencius, which were established by Zhu Xi in the year of Chun Xi of Emperor Xiao Zong in the Southern Song Dynasty. The Great Learning and the Doctrine of the Mean were two chapters in the Records of Rites. Zhu Xi sorted out these two chapters from the Records of Rites and combined The Analects and the Book of Mencius to
make the Four Books. He thought that Zeng Zi wrote *The Great Learning*, and Zi Si was the author of *the Doctrine of the Mean*. *The Analects* recorded sayings and behaviors of Confucius, and *the Book of Mencius* recorded the sayings and behaviors of Mencius. He argued that Zeng Zi was the disciple of Confucius and Zi Si was the disciple of Zeng Zi, while Mencius was the direct successor of Confucian orthodoxy. Therefore the four books were the crystallization of Confucian orthodoxy. Because of the advocacy of Zhu Xi, every household knew the Four Books. As to the Five Classics, *the Great Compendium of Five Classics* was printed in the year of Yong Le in the Ming Dynasty on the basis of Neo-Confucian principles. It was the so-called Ming Imperial Edition, annotated by scholars in the Song and Yuan Dynasties. *The Book of Changes* used *the Original Meaning of the Book of Changes* by Zhu Xi as annotation, while *The Book of History* used *Collected Commentaries on the Book of History* by Cai Shen as annotation, *the Book of Songs* used *Collected Commentaries on the Book of Songs* by Zhu Xi as annotation, *the Spring and Autumn Annals* used *Hu Anguo Commentary* as annotation and *the Records of Rites* used *Collected Explanations on the Record of Rites* by Chen Hao as annotation. During this period, most scholars shelved *Exegesis to Thirteen Classics*. They were even surprised to learn that others quoted *Exegesis to Thirteen Classics*. Only with the rise of the Han school of classical philosophy during the Qing Dynasty that Exegesis to Thirteen Classics was set great store by scholars.

The first achievement of Classics scholars in the Qing Dynasty was that they wrote new exegesis to Classics. Some significant ones were as follows:

*The Book of Changes* - *The Explanation on the Book of Changes* by Hui Dong; *Yushi Exposition on the Book of Changes* by Zhang Huiyan, who based his works on the schools of Xun Shuang and Yu Fan, various schools of Confucianism in the Hang Dynasty and *the Auxiliary Texts of the Book of Changes*. Besides the above two books, there were *the Amended Commentary on the Book of Changes* by Jiang
Fan, Yao Shi Studies on the Book of Changes by Yao Peizhong and Comprehensive Interpretation on the Book of Changes by Jiao Xun.

The Book of History - Collected Annotations to the Book of History in Alphabetical Order by Jiang Sheng, the Treatise on Exegesis of the Book of History in New and Old Texts by Sun Xingyan. Both of the two books criticized fake Book of History in ancient writing. The annotations mainly adopted those in the Great Commentary on the Book of History, the History of the Grand Scribe and Ma Rong and Zheng Xuan's views. Jiang Sheng also added his personal views. Besides the above two books there were also the Exposition of the Book of History by Wang Mingsheng and the Textual Research on the Book of History in Old Text by Duan Yucai.

The Book of Songs - Exegesis of Mao Commentary on the Book of Songs by Chen Huan, Comprehensive Exposition of Notes and Commentaries on the Book of Songs by Ma Ruichen. Chen's works used Mao's Commentary on the Book of Songs and gave up that of Zheng Xuan, to which Ma's works still kept to refer.

The Records of Rites - Collected Explanations on the Records of Rites by Sun Xidan. Besides adopting Zheng Xuan's notes and Kong Yingda's exposition, it also assimilated Confucian theories after the Song and Yuan Dynasties.

Etiquette and Rites - The Correct Interpretation of Etiquette and Rites by Hu Peihui. In addition, there was Exegesis to Etiquette and Rites in New and Old Texts by Hu Chenggong.

The Rites of Zhou - The Correct Interpretation of the Rites of Zhou by Sun Yirang. Due to meticulous textual research on gloss, titles, articles and systems, it was the most elaborate works on the study of the Rites of Zhou.

Zuo Commentary - The Treatise on Old Notes to Zuo Commentary by Liu Wenqi. Liu died before he finished his works. His son contin-
ued and finished it. There was also *the Amended Notes to Zuo Commentary* by Hui Dong.

**Gong Yang Commentary - Exposition on Gong Yang Commentary** by Chen Li. In addition, there were *Notes to Heshi Exposition on Gong Yang Commentary* and *Explanation with Examples on He Xiu’s Exposition on Gong Yang Commentary* by Liu Fenglu.

**Gu Liang Commentary - The Amended Exposition on Gu Liang Commentary** by Zhong Wenzheng. In addition, there was *The Correct Interpretation of Gu Liang Commentary* by Shao Jinhan, but it did not seem to popularize.

**Analects - The Correct Interpretation of Analects** by Liu Baonan. In addition, there was *Annotation to Analects* by Dai Wang.

**The Book on Filial Piety - The Exposition on Zheng Xuan’s Notes to Book on Filial Piety** by Pi Xirui. *Exegesis of the Thirteen Classics* used annotation by Emperor Xuan Zong of Tang Dynasty. While Pi’s works used annotation by Zheng Xuan.

**Dictionary of Terms - The Correct Interpretation of Dictionary of Terms** by Shao Jinhan; *The Exposition on Dictionary of Terms* by Hao Yixing. Both were more refined than Xing Bing’s works.

**The Book of Mencius - The Correct Interpretation of the Book of Mencius** by Jiao Xun. *The Book of Mencius* used to use fake exegesis by Sun Shi. Jiao’s works abandoned the fake exegesis and adhered to annotation by Zhao Qi.

Zhang Binglin believed these exegeses “kept the cream, referred to many resources and excelled the old ones.” And this was not an unearned praise. Books on study of rites, such as *the Comprehensive Studies on Book of Rites* by Huang Yizhou, almost summarized the three books on rites; *The Comprehensive Treatise on Five Rites* by Qin Huitian even tried to thoroughly study the ritual sys-
tems of over two thousand years. Since then it was regarded the
canon of rites. Though Zhang Binglin ridiculed it “tried to correct
the ancient rites with common views,” it was nevertheless a mon-
umental work on the study of rites.

The second achievement was that it propelled the development
of “philological studies” towards the systematic philology. The Histoi-
ry of Former Han, Treatise on Art and Literature recorded a catalogue of
existing writings, which was merely a book for the ancients to teach
children to read. For exposition on Classics, Classics scholars in the
Qing Dynasty carried out much more elaborate studies on the
rhymes, explanations and even forms of Chinese characters. Because
ancient characters were different from the modern ones, and study
of Classics set great store by oral instruction, there were differences
in tones due to dialects. For instance, there were classification of “Qi
dialect” and “Lu dialect” according to Gong Yang Commentary. And
there were other examples such as “long tone” and “short tone,”
“??” (read as) and “?[]” (read as). Especially for Dictionary of Terms
and Explaining Simple and Analyzing Compound Characters, both were
important books on study of explanations and forms. New exegeses
of Dictionary of Terms by Confucians in the Qing Dynasty were men-
tioned above. While the Treatise on Notes to Broadening the Refined
by Wang Niansun was more a creation of profundity and refinement.
As to Explaining Simple and Analyzing Compound Characters, besides
the most famous Annotation to Explaining Simple and Analyzing Com-
pound Characters by Duan Yucai, there were the Treatise on Interpreta-
tion of Explaining Simple and Analyzing Compound Characters by Gui
Fu, Notes to Explaining Characters and Exposition on Explaining Charac-
ters by Wang Yun, Exposition on Phonology in Explaining Characters by
Zhu Junsheng. Since brothers Xu Xuan and Xu Kai in the Northern
Song Dynasty, it seemed nobody paid any attention to Xu Shen’s
Explaining Simple and Analyzing Compound Characters. Therefore,
even less scholars in the Yuan and Ming Dynasties studied it. It was
only till the Qing Dynasty that many scholars advocated to study,
which almost enjoyed the same status as commentaries on Classics. Phonology was one of the three elements of characters. Therefore, philologists must study phonology. Wu Yu of the Song Dynasty, Chen Di of the Ming Dynasty already paid attention to ancient Chinese phonology. During the Qing Dynasty Gu Yanwu wrote the Five Books on Phonology, studying ancient Chinese phonology and Tang phonology. Jiang Yu, Dai Zhen, Duan Yucai, Kong Guanssen and contemporaries like Zhang Binglin and Huang Kan all carried out elaborate studies on phonology. So there were tremendous achievements in phonology. The Explanation of Words in Commentaries on Classics by Wang Yinzhi and Ways of Identification of Auxiliary Words by Liu Wenqi even extended from critical interpretation of ancient texts to usage of words and phrases; Examples of Questioned Interpretation of Ancient Books by Yu Yue stretched to sentence structures in ancient books, which extended to the fields of grammar and rhetoric.

The third achievement was their further contribution to textualism. At the end of the Western Han Dynasty, Liu Xiang and his son led in collating books, hence the origin of textualism. Yan’s Family Instructions and The Correction of Mistakes and Common Views were about collation. In the Song Dynasty, there were collation officials such as Liu Ban, Liu Shu and Song Qi. There were many Classics scholars in the Qing Dynasty who were famous for collation, such as Dai Zhen, Lu Wenchao and Gu Guangyin. Dai Zhen collated Commentary on the River Classic, Lu Wenchao collated “Baojingtang Acade-my Series,” Gu Guangyin collated Explaining Simple and Analyzing Compound Characters, the Records of Rites, Etiquette and Rites, the Discourses of the States, the Strategies of the Warring States, Selected Literature, etc. They all have reading notes attached and were very accurate. While Collation of Exegesis of the Thirteen Classics by Ruan Yuan made even greater contribution. Textual critics were those who revised the drop-off and disorder of the bamboo slips, the ‘___’ errors, omission and redundancy of characters to make the texts easy to understand. For instance, according to Records of the Han...
Dynasty, Liu Xiang collated Ou Yang, Xia Hou and Xia Hou Junior’s *the Book of History* in contemporary Chinese with mid-ancient Chinese and found *Announcement about Drunkenness* had one slip dropped off and *Announcement of Shaogong* had two slips dropped off, which was called “drop-off slips.” *The Book of Mencius, Try One’s Best* said in the chapter of Chen “What does drift mean? It means one’s acts belie one’s words, and vice versa. And he will still say the ancients acted like this, the ancients acted like this.” According to Yu Yue, this sentence should be moved next to “Then we say his ambition drifts” at the preceding part of the text. While the above “he will still say the ancients acted like this, the ancients acted like this” was redundancy. This was called “error slips.” Because in ancient China, people used bamboo slips instead of paper, and used leather or silk to bind them into books. If they were broken, then the slips would drop off or in mess. “Redundancy” meant one or several characters excessive. “Omission” meant one or more characters were omitted. “___Error” meant wrong characters, either because of similarity in form or in pronunciation, or due to combination of two words in one word or split of one word into two. Because ancient books were private copies, there were possibilities of redundancy, omission and “___errors.” It was difficult to understand without collation. The collation could be extended to a broader scope including investigation on genuineness of ancient books, the study on the quality of editions and reorganization of certain parts of books.

The fourth achievement was compilation of the lost books. There had been a lot of disasters for books such as the Burning of Books by the First Emperor of Qin. Many emperors in the Western Han Dynasty endeavored to seek books handed down and had a huge collection of them. No sooner had Liu Xiang and his son finished collation of them, than the continuous wars at the end of the reign by Wang Mang burned all of them into ashes. With the supply of emperors’ collection in the Eastern Han Dynasty, the grand scales of Lan Tai and Dong Guang libraries were gradually restored. But when Dong Zhuo coerced Emperor Xian to move west, books copied
on silk were lost again. Large ones were used as tents; small ones were used as bags. During the Great Turmoil of West Capital, over seventy carts of books heading west were lost. From the Wei Dynasty till Jin Dynasty, *the Classic of Centre* by Zheng Mo, Xun included a large number of books though still some were missing. But the Invasion of the Five Barbarian Tribes in the Western Jin Dynasty destroyed all of them. Books in the Southern Dynasties were first destroyed by Hong Jing Rebellion, and then burned by the invading army of Zhou. *Memorial to the Throne on Ways of Book Collections* by Niu Hong in the Sui Dynasty gave a very detailed depiction on these disasters. That was the situation before the Sui Dynasty and we can imagine what the situation was after the Tang Dynasty. The fact is that books suffered great loss in turmoil. So there were a large number of lost books. Wang Yinglin in the Song Dynasty compiled *Poetry* of three schools and *Notes to the Book of Changes* by Zheng Xuan, starting the practice of compiling the lost one. Confucians in the Qing Dynasty also worked diligently on the compilation of lost books. Hui Dong set rules and asked disciples to compile the ancient books respectively; *Exploration of Lost Content of Ancient Classics* by Yu Xiaoke was a compilation of lost ancient study on Classics. Other outstanding compilation on lost books included Sun Xingyan's edit on *Notes to the Book of History* by Ma Rong and Zheng Xuan, Chen Qiaocong’s compilation of *the Treatise on the Missing Poems of Three Schools* and Ma Guohan’s “Yuhan Mountain Cabin Series.”

The collation, treatise, explanation and compilation of the lost books by scholars in the Qing Dynasty was originally focused on the Classics, and then extended to works of other schools of thoughts and historical records. For instance, *Discussion on the Seventeen Histories* by Wang Mingsheng, *Appraisal on Various Schools of Thought* by Yu Yue were overall inclusion of various historical records and works of other schools of thought. *Reading Magazine* by Wang Niansun also included works of other schools of thought and historical records. Examples of compilation devoted to works of other schools of thought were *Collected Exposition on the Book of Zhuang Zi* by Wang
Xianqian, *Words Explanation on the Book of Mo Zi* by Sun Xianrang, *Collected Exposition on Han Fei Zi* by Wang Xianshen. While *Questions on History of the Grand Scribe* by Liang Yusheng and *Amended Notes to the History of Former Han* by Wang Xianqian were broad and profound works on historical records. These extended works were all due to the study of Classics.

There were two series collecting all works on Classics in the Qing Dynasty, which were *Royal Qing Exposition on Classics* and *Continued Royal Qing Exposition on Classics*. The former one was edited by Ruan Yuan, and printed at Xuehaitang Academy in Canton, so it was also named “Xuehaitang Academy Exposition on Classics.” It collected one hundred and eighty eight works on Classics exposition by scholars in the Qing Dynasty. The latter was Wang Xianqian’s continued compilation. It contained two hundred and nine volumes and was printed at Nan Jing Academy in Jiangyin, hence another name “Nan Jing Academy Exposition on Classics.” Generally speaking, these two books included all works on Classics research by Confucians in the Qing Dynasty. After reading these two series, we can imagine the prevalence of study on Classics in the Qing Dynasty, which was unmatched by that in the Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming and even the Han Dynasties.

In the preface to the Classics volume of *The General Catalogue of Complete Library of the Four Branches of Literature*, there was a paragraph summarizing concisely the study on Classics since the Han Dynasty, which was extracted as follows:

During the two thousand years since the founding of the Han Dynasty, the study on Confucian Classics experienced six changes. At the very beginning it was teaching and acceptance, disciples gradually accepted what the teacher instructed, and dared not accept what the teachers did not preach. They even strictly adhered to what the teachers granted about chapters, paragraphs and phrases. The study was sincere and rigorous, but the shortcoming was rigidity. Wang Bi and Wang Su held slightly different opinions and fanned by the remaining influence, some people accepted while others
questioned. After Kong, Jia, Dan and Zhao till the Northern Song Dynasty, Sun Fu, Liu Shang and other scholars built up their own theories and did not exercise control over each other, but the shortcoming was miscellany. Then Neo-Confucianism originated from Luoyang and Fujian and prospered. It cast off the old views of the Han and Tang Dynasties and studied the argumentation of Classics by itself. It regarded the old studies of Classics as incredible and rejected them. Its study must distinguish right from wrong and the shortcoming was toughness. (Original note: “For instance, Wang Bai and Wu Cheng attacked and refuted the Classics and always deleted or altered some content.”) From the end of the Song Dynasty to the beginning of the Ming Dynasty, new branches of schools kept emerging and more and more scholars attached themselves to various schools. They excluded dissidents and only respected their own theories. They were constant in their study but the shortcoming was partisanship. (Original note: “For instance, Collected Notes to Analects mistakenly quoted sayings of Bao Xian, Xia Hu and Shang Lian, while Zhang Cunzhong omitted it in Comprehensive Treatise on the Four Books to cover his mistake; For another example, Wang Bai deleted thirty two chapters from Airs of the States, which was questioned by Xu Qian, but screened by Wu Shidao.”) The heads of schools held excessive opinions and were partial to their own stand. They lacked wise discrimination and tended to go to extremes. Since the years of Zheng De and Jia Qing in the Ming Dynasty, each school aired its own views and the shortcoming was unscrupulousness. (Original note: “such as Wang Shouren, representative of decadent schools explained the Classics unrestrainedly.”) Scholars at the beginning of ming Dynasty indulged in empty words and assumption, and were always neglectful in textual research. So erudite scholars quoted ancient studies to criticize their mistakes. The study on Classics at the beginning of ming dynasty was to prove their theory was true instead of fabricated, but the shortcoming was triviality. (Original note: “such as using several hundred words for the explanation of a tone.”)
When Ji Jun was compiling the *General Catalogue of Complete Library of the Four Branches of Literature*, it was the climax period when Hui and Dai were preaching Confucian experts Xu and Zheng’s study on Classics. Scholars at that time quoted and cited extensively for explanation on Classics. For instance, Yan Zhitui ridiculed Qin Yanjun of Han nationality as “a Doctor selling donkeys. He wrote three pieces of paper without mentioning ‘donkey’ yet.” The Wu school of Confucianism was especially famous for its superfluity. Ji Jun summarized two thousand years study on Classics with hundreds of words and used only one word to describe the drawbacks of different period. It was hard to say that he was free of prejudice, but it provided us a concise summary. He referred “rigidity” to study on Classics in the Han Dynasty when disciples strictly stuck to teachers’ instruction; he referred “miscellany” to the study on Classics from the Wei and Jin Dynasties to the beginning of the Song Dynasty; he referred “toughness” to Classics study from Emperor Renzong of the Song Dynasty to the Southern Song Dynasty; he referred “partisanship” to Classics study from the end of the Song Dynasty to the beginning of the Ming Dynasty; he referred “unscrupulousness” to the Classics study at the end of the Ming Dynasty; while he referred “triviality” to the Classics study before Emperor Qian Long of the Qing Dynasty. Whenever a style of study reached its summit, there would be abuses. Ji Jun’s argumentation then can be said “if not straightly to the point, not far from it.”

The era when study of Confucian Classics was the core of Chinese academic and cultural history is long gone. But the great significance exerted by Confucian Classics on Chinese academic history cannot be denied. The research of Chinese traditional academic culture requires us to review Classics and its study from a historical perspective. Let us remember what Mr. Zhou Yutong from Fudan University said in *Classics, Classics Study, History of Classics Study* published in 1961: “‘Study of Confucian Classics’ has withdrawn from historical arena, but study of ‘history of the study of Classics’ needs to be carried out as soon as possible. (trans. by Jin Ming)