



Seminar

DIRK MEYER

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*The Materiality of “Shu” 書 Traditions:
The Ancient Classic Documents
in Light of Manuscripts from the
Warring States Period*

Tuesday, 19 May, 11:15 a.m.

In the Thunberg Lecture Hall
SCAS, Linneanum, Thunbergsvägen 2, Uppsala
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S W E D I S H
C O L L E G I U M
for ADVANCED STUDY

ABOUT DIRK MEYER

Dirk Meyer read Chinese Philology at National Taiwan University, and later Sinology and Philosophy at Universität Heidelberg and Leiden University. In 2008, he received his Ph.D. from Leiden University for the thesis ‘Meaning-Construction in Warring States Philosophical Discourse: A Discussion of the Palaeographic Materials from Tomb Guodian One’.

Meyer took up his position at the University of Oxford in 2007 and has been fully tenured since 2012. He has been Visiting Scholar at Princeton University and National Taiwan University, and Visiting Professor at the Renmin University of China (People’s University), Beijing.

Meyer’s research interests relate to the history of thought, focusing on the interplay of material conditions and ideas, orality and literacy in early Chinese philosophical discourse, transition periods in philosophy as well as argumentative strategies in early Chinese philosophy. He has worked extensively on text and manuscript culture, as well as on strategies of meaning production in early China.

Meyer is the author of *Philosophy on Bamboo: Text and the Production of Meaning in Early China* (2012), the first systematic study of excavated philosophical manuscripts from circa 350 BC to treat text as a cultural phenomenon in order to demonstrate the interplay among the material conditions of text and manuscript culture, writing and thought. Meyer is editor of *The Classic of Documents and the Origins of Chinese Political Philosophy* (with Martin Kern, Princeton University; forthcoming) and *Literary Forms of Argument in Early China* (with Joachim Gentz, University of Edinburgh; forthcoming). Currently, he is launching *The Journal of Manuscript and Text Culture* with colleagues in Egyptology, Classics and Ancient History.

At SCAS, Meyer will work on ‘The Creation of the Shangshu’ as a corpus-based conceptual history. Meyer reconsiders a core text from ancient China as a multilayered intellectual enterprise where ancient meaning communities verbally conceptualise changing social realities as well as adapt realms of experience to common concepts.

ABSTRACT

This paper offers a new reading of the *Shangshu*, *Classic of Documents*, a foremost foundational text of China, through reference to manuscript texts from the Warring states period (c. 456-222 BC). The *Shangshu* is highly layered anthology, with its earliest layers of text production dating to the 10th century BC. It contains a series of royal speeches that are central to the formation of core philosophical concepts in China, and it is commonly read as a text with a consistent Confucian outlook, and it is studied accordingly.

Manuscript texts dating from circa 300 BC, purchased in the summer of 2008 by Peking Tsinghua University, (Beijing Qinghua Daxue 北京清華大學) allow for a re-conceptualisation of the received Classic. While showing significant overlap with much of what is expressed in the transmitted *Shangshu*, they also yield major conceptual differences to the transmitted body of texts and allow for conclusions to be drawn about long evolving ‘Documents traditions’ (“Shu”). The different materials therefore manifest the changing philosophical concerns of diverse textual communities and their socio-political realities. This paper traces different material representations of these texts and addresses the conceptual differences between the received *Shangshu* and wider “Shu” traditions. By so doing, it engages in a broader discussion about the materiality of “Shu”, and reveals the spoken and written origins of these traditions. In the context of a stabilising manuscript culture around the fourth century BC and informed by the work of Reinhard Koselleck and Jan Assmann on conceptual history and memory production, my paper further enables new insights into the circulation of knowledge, as well as into the production and circulation of texts at the time.