

Discussion on How to Use Grammatical Means to Proofread Ancient Text

Jianjiao Zhou

Faculty of Liberal Arts
Northwest University
Xi'an, China 710127

Abstract—In the proofreading ancient books and all kinds of ancient written materials, it is an effective means to infer by means of grammar besides the means of words and exegesis. When there are differences between the ancient books of circulation edition and the unearthed ones, it's feasible to find out the errors in the texts by comparing the sentence patterns. It's also workable to start with the grammatical meaning of the function words and compare the proofread and correct ancient handed-down books of circulation edition, so that future generations can get a correct understanding. In addition, when interpreting unearthed written materials, proofreaders can also question them from the grammatical point of view and find the correct solution.

Keywords—grammar; proofreading ancient books; exegesis

I. INTRODUCTION

When the predecessors proofread ancient books, they usually used the means of word and exegesis. For example, Mr. Qiu Xigui (1980) emphasized the importance of archaeological discoveries of ancient copies and other ancient written materials in proofreading ancient handed-down books, referring to the use of ancient written data to clarify the meaning of certain words in ancient handed-down books, and proofreading the exact meaning of certain words in ancient books according to the use of words and writing habits in archaeological materials. In the process of reading, the author also realized that we can sometimes seek breakthroughs from the perspective of grammar in proofreading ancient books and materials.

II. TO FIND OUT THE ERRORS IN THE CIRCULATION EDITION BY COMPARING THE SENTENCE PATTERNS

When ancient books of circulation edition are different from that of unearthed ones, we can find out the errors in the circulation edition by comparing sentence patterns.

Lao Tzu is one of the earliest philosophical classics in China. Apart from numerous circulation editions of past dynasties, two versions of Lao Tzu of Silk Manuscript, A and B, unearthed from Mawangdui Han Tomb and three versions of Lao Tzu of Bamboo Slip, A, B and C, unearthed from Guodian Chu Tomb in recent years, show the original ancient book of Lao Tzu. In the comparative reading of three versions

of Lao Tzu, the author occasionally gained it by comparing sentence patterns.

Chapter 39 Wang Bi's Notes to Lao Tzu:

(1) The things which in all ages have got the Tao are — the heaven which by it is bright and pure, the earth which by it is quiet and peaceful, spirits which by it are magic and efficacious, rivers which by it are plentiful and all creatures which through it do live and princes and kings who from it get a peaceful state. All these are the result of the Tao. If the heaven cannot keep bright and pure, it will crack; if the earth cannot maintain quiet, it will collapse; if spirits cannot be magic and efficacious, they will disappear; if rivers are not plentiful, they will dry; if creatures cannot grow, they will die out; if princes and kings cannot keep quiet and clam, they will be overthrown.

There are many variants of “侯王无以贵将恐蹶”. For example,

(2) 侯王無以为正(贞)而贵高将恐蹶¹;

(Princes and kings without that moral sway, however grand and high would all decay.)

(3) 王侯無以为贞而贵高将恐蹶²;

(Princes and kings without that moral sway, however grand and high would all decay.)

(4) 王侯無以为贞将恐蹶³;

(Without that moral, princes and kings would decay.)

(5) 王侯無以贵高将恐蹶⁴;

(Princes and kings without that moral sway, however grand and high would all decay.)

(6) 侯王無以贞而贵高将恐蹶⁵;

¹ Yan Zun's Daode Zhenjing Zhigui, School Journal of Yilantang, Chengdu. In addition, Shao Ruoyu's Daode Zhenjing Zhijie, Shanghai Hanfenlou's photocopy of Tao Cang, "Gai" five ones and "Gai" eight.

² Fu Yi's Ancient Text of Tao Te Jing, Shanghai Hanfenlou's photocopy of Tao Cang, "Mu" 2.

³ Fan Yingyuan's Notes to Ancient Text of Lao Tzu's Tao Te Jing, Continuation to Ancient Book Serious, a photocopy of Fu Yuanshu's Song Collection.

⁴ Suizhou Steles of Tao Te Jing, short for Suizhou Version.

(Princes and kings without that moral sway, however grand and high would all decay.)

(7) 侯王無以貴高將恐蹶⁶;

(Princes and kings without that moral sway, however grand and high would all decay.)

Comparing with Wang Bi's version, an important difference of these versions is to add a word "貞". Liu Shipei said: "according to above text, '天無以清', '地無以寧', '神無以靈', '谷無以盈' and '萬物無以生' connect the preceding part of the text, '以清', '以寧', '以靈', '以盈' and '以生'. But '無以貴高' doesn't correspond to '以為天下貞'. It is doubted '貴' is mistaken and it should be '貞'".⁷ It can be seen that Mr. Liu thought the meaning of "以" in "無以" is same with the meaning of "以" in "天得一以清". Ren Jiyu translated "侯王無以貴高將恐蹶" into: if princes and kings cannot keep a high and royal status, they will be overthrown.⁸ Same with Liu Shipei, Mr. Ren also treated "以" as a preposition "用". "無以" means not used to ... (methods). This is the understanding of most modern books.

But this sentence in the B version of Lao Tzu, silk manuscript unearthed from Mawangdui later:

(8) If the heaven cannot keep bright and pure, it will crack; if the earth cannot maintain quiet, it will collapse; if spirits cannot be magic and efficacious, they will disappear; if rivers are not plentiful, they will dry; if creatures cannot grow, they will die out; if princes and kings cannot keep quiet and calm, they will be overthrown.

All "無以" in today's version is "毋已" in silk manuscript. Guangyun · Zhiyun: "已, 止也". Book of Songs · Zheng Feng · Wind and Rain: "風雨如晦, 鷄鳴不已". It notes "已, 止也". In this sentence, "毋已" means endless and uncontrolled. If the heaven is prolonged endlessly (without alternation of day and night), I am afraid it will no longer be the heaven. In term of "天無以清將恐裂", He Shangong noted: "The heaven shall be spread with Yin and Yang, and alternates day and night. It should not only be bright and pure but also regular, or it will crack"⁹. It can be seen that "無以" in Heshang Version means "無已". Why later generations changed it into "以" is because they have misunderstood the meaning. It is same as "以" in "天得一以清" and "地得一以寧".

III. TO MAKE PAUSE ACCURATELY FROM DEFINITE MEANINGS

A. To Make Pause from Definite Meanings

Land-purchasing Ticket was a kind of document reflecting the private ownership of land and its concept, which was buried with the dead in the Han Dynasty and especially in the Eastern Han Dynasty. Tomb prose refers to the relief words written on pottery of tomb in the middle and late Eastern Han Dynasty. The purpose was to pray for the living, to relieve the disaster of the dead and avoid the suffering of punishment in the underworld, reflecting the thought of early Taoism. Taiping Classic is an early Taoist classic written in the late Eastern Han Dynasty. Because it was mainly preached among the people, its language was simple and some spoken languages were used at that time. Many texts and sentences in these documents and materials of similar times and related contents can be mutually authenticated.

Huang Jingchun's Interpretation and Pause Making in Liu Yuantai's Land-purchasing Ticket¹⁰:

(9) The witnesses at the time of building the tomb were Liu Yuanni and Zhen Anju. They wrote a contract with Ping Zhi. It was forbidden by law if anyone violated the contract and traded freely. This is to certify.¹¹

Huang Jingchun interprets "平執" as a name, thus making a sentence with the latter "不當賣而賣". The author believes that "平執" should mean "公平執行".

According to page 148 of Taiping Classic · Vol. 48 · Three-in-one Formula 65,

(10) "平" is to say that the monarch governs fairly and equally, that all political affairs are properly handled, and that there is no more evil and selfish phenomena. The meaning of the word "平" is like that the earth is below, and the duty is to uphold fairness!

It can be seen that "平執" and "執平" were common expressions at that time. Huainanzi · Zhushuxun: "使人主執正持平, 如從繩准高下". It can be seen "平執" in example 9 is not a name. "平" means just and fair. "平執" means to govern and deal with things fairly. The pause-making sentence should be as follows:

(11) The witnesses at the time of building the tomb were Liu Yuanni and Zhen Anju. They wrote a contract justly. It was forbidden by law to violate the contract. This is to certify.

B. To Proofread and Correct the Circulation Version by Contrasting the Use of Function Words

When there are differences between the circulation version of ancient books and the unearthed ones, we can also start with the grammatical meaning of key function words and compare

⁵ Shaanxi's Louguantai Steles of Tao Te Jing, short for Louguantai Version. Jiao Hong's Lao Tzu Yi, Jianxicunshe Version.

⁶ Li Daochun's Daode Huiyuan, and Shanghai Hanfenlou's photocopy of Tao Cang, "Tan" three ones and "Tan" four.

⁷ Liu Shipei's Laozi Jiaobu, see 26 Vol. of Liu Shipei's Mr. Liu Shenshu's Posthumous Paper.

⁸ Ren Jiyu, Modern Translation of Lao Tzu, Beijing Ancient Books Publishing House, 1956.

⁹ He Shangong's Lao Tzu's Moral Classic Sentences, Shanghai Haifenlou's photocopy of Changshu Qu's Song Collection, short of Heshang Version.

¹⁰ Liu Yuantai's Land-purchasing Ticket, Cultural Relics, February 1980.

¹¹ Huang Jingchun. Collection and Research of Earlier Land-purchasing Tickets and Tomb Texts, Doctoral Thesis of East China Normal University, 2004, P 69.

them with the original ones to help us get a correct understanding.

Chapter 61 Lao Tzu:

Wang Bi's Notes to Lao Tzu:

(12) So if a big country is modest toward a small country, it can win the allegiance of the small country; if a small country is modest toward a big country, it can be accepted by the big country.

Fu Yi's version:

(13) So if a big country is modest toward a small country, it can win the allegiance of the small country; if a small country is modest toward a big country, it can be accepted by the big country.

There are above two statements in various versions of Lao Tzu. Both of them eliminate “于” and record “取小国” and “取大国”. Otherwise, they add “于” and record “取于小国” and “取于大国”. All in all, the two sentences are of same sentence pattern. From the context, the two “取” are different in meaning. The purposes of big country and small country are different. The purpose of small country is to “入事大国”. It can be seen “取” in “小国取大国” is passive, so it is translated as accepted by the big country. Tao Shaoxue's Proofreading Lao Tzu said: "seen from the meaning of the text, the first sentence should have no ‘于’ but the second sentence should add ‘于’"¹². Our predecessors have noticed the difference. From Lao Tzu, silk manuscript unearthed from Mawangdui later, the two sentences do have a difference:

Version A

(14) So if a big country is modest toward a small country, it can win the allegiance of the small country; if a small country is modest toward a big country, it can be accepted by the big country.

Version B:

(15) (Translation: So if a big country is modest toward a small country, it can win the allegiance of the small country; if a small country is modest toward a big country, it can be accepted by the big country.)

Both Version A and B of Tao Tzu of silk manuscript add “于” to the second sentence after “取”.

In ancient Chinese, “于” often introduces the initiative in the passive sentence, expressing the passive meaning. “取于大国” means a small country is collected by a big country. Gao Ming noted: “‘大国以下小国, 则取小国’ means that if a big country is modest to a small country, it can win the allegiance of the small country. ‘小国以下大国, 则取于大国’ means if a small country is modest to a big country, it can be accepted by the big country”¹³. It has “于” in the silk manuscript, which proves the suspicion of Tao Shaoxing.

Look at another example.

Huang Jingchun's translation of Wang's Tomb Prose in 4th Chuping Year:

(16) A thousand liang of gold was used to protect the door of the tomb, to remove the record of the dead, to move the documents recording the fate and fortune to other places, and to avoid all kinds of calamities. The immortals in charge of the way of Tao mix five kinds of stones to stabilize the tomb door for him, bless his descendants, and use a magic bottle to protect the tomb door.

The author considers that the interpretation at the underline should be as follows,

(17) 地下死籍削除, 文、他央咎转。要道中人和以五石之精安冢墓.....

According to the record of Taiping Classic, the prevailing Taoist thought at that time believed that “籍系星宿, 命在天曹”. It means the life time of worldly people was appointed by the heaven. At the time of birth, Siming god and Jianshi god were appointed to record the bibliographic records of the man, and submitted to the heaven. The records include life and death records, records of the good and the evil and the immortal.

Taiping Classic 181 The Life Records of the Good:

(18) To do good deeds, one can enjoy all the years of life. To do bad deeds, one cannot be long-lived but short-lived, and the more and endless bad deeds he does, the more the disasters will extend to future generations. What can he hope for?

(19) The golden chamber for collecting the roster of future immortal is in heaven, which is used to bestow to good people. They would warn their descendants to be cautious about it. Return back on the right road, repent of your mistakes, one can enjoy life again. Distinguish clearly, think about what you have done, and stop resenting god. If you do good deeds, your children will live longer; if you indulge yourself, don't complain about the heaven.

In addition to “籍系星宿, 命在天曹”, there are also 28 stars, the sun, the moon, Five Stars and Tai Sui to check the rights and wrongs of the world. All the gods inside and outside the human body are monitoring the good and evil practices of the world at all times, and without omission, written in detail and clearly into a special report document, reported to the heaven, so that "all the gods" "know all peoples' deeds in the earth". According to these records and after verification, the heaven court will rise the good to be immortal after his/her death if his/her name is listed on the immortal record, increase life span of the good if his/her name is listed on the record of the good and he/she will become a happy ghost in the underworld; and the blessings will extend to his descendants. From generation to generation, he will have a large family and his families will enjoy honors and wealth. “文” in Wang's Tomb Prose in 4th Chuping Year means the report document recording the good and evil deeds of the world.

For those who have been evil in the world, the heaven court will "reduce his life years" and make him suffer from ghostly diseases, even make him die. For those who perpetrate more and accumulate more evils, give him "disasters" and put

¹² Tao Shaoxue's Proofreading Lao Tzu, Shunde Huang's Manuscript Collection.

¹³ Gao Ming. Notes to Lao Tzu of Silk Manuscript. Zhonghua Book Company, 1996.

him in the ranks of evil spirits, and bring disasters to his descendants until they die out. “他殃咎” in Wang’s Tomb Prose in 4th Chuping Year refers to various punishment disasters that will affect future generations.

But those who do evil but regret themselves can turn their lives to the record of the good. “If common man can reflect on his personal fault, turn toward good and become a good man, big gods will check and know his deeds. If he pursues good and long life, the god will record his fate and life span on the record of long life and continue supervise him until he is allowed to fill the vacancy of immortal”. Here, the so-called change of life according to the good and evil is the so-called “转” in Wang’s Tomb Prose in 4th Chuping Year.

Therefore, Wang’s Tomb Prose in 4th Chuping Year has a sentence “地下死籍削除，文、他央咎转”。 “地下死籍削除” means the death cannot be recorded on the death record. “文” means the fate-recording diction in Taiping Classic. So, “文” and other disasters can be “transformed” — life recording can be transcribed in the records of the good or immortals, and other disasters can also be avoided.

In Wang’s Tomb Prose in 4th Chuping Year, “要道中人” refers to “要文大道的神人”. In Taiping Classic, there are many expressions such as “要文” and “要文大道”. For example,

(20) Feiming is a second-largest celestial phenomenon after the sun, moon and stars. All are connected to the ground, hanging above the sky, shining and echoing with people and all things on the earth, which is the proof of the way of Tao.

(21) Therefore, ancient sages attached great importance to strange disasters and used them to correct themselves, so as to achieve absolute harmony with the way of Tao. In fact, to do everything faithfully, one will no longer be dangerous.)

“要文” and “要文大道” refer to the most important “道”.

“五石” in “五石之精” refer to five mineral drugs, such as cinnabar, copper sulfate and realgar. According to Shennong’s Herbal Classic, these drugs have the effect of “killing evil spirits”.

The whole sentence of Wang’s Tomb Prose in 4th Chuping Year means: A thousand liang of gold was used to protect the door of the tomb, to remove the record of the dead, to move the documents recording the fate and fortune to other places, and to avoid all kinds of calamities. The immortals in charge of the way of Tao mix five kinds of stones to stabilize the tomb door for him, bless his descendants, and use a magic bottle to protect the tomb door.

IV. INTERPRETATION OF UNEARTHED WRITTEN MATERIALS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF GRAMMAR

When interpreting unearthed written materials, we can also question them from a grammatical point of view and find the correct solution.

(22) So, write a contract with cinnabar to relieve the disaster. Don't pester the living for thousands of years.

This is from tomb-protecting ticket of the Eastern Han Dynasty. Luo Zhenyu's Ancient Posthumous Papers of

Zhensongtang Collection, in Vol. 15, recorded “莫相来索”. In my opinion, it is doubtful that there is a mistake to interpret the word “求” as “来”.

First of all, if it is “来”, it is grammatical to say “莫来相索”, because “相” is an adverb. According to Dictionary of Functional Words in Ancient Chinese, on page 646, in the mutual treatment relationship between the two sides... ‘相’ generally has the function of referring to the receiving party, so it is usually close to the verbs it ornaments, which is also proved by the use cases in classics. In Example 22, the verb that can express the meaning of treatment is “索”, so it is inferred that “相” should be located before “索”, and “莫相来索” is improper and illogical.

Secondly, Cheng’s Red-ink Tomb Prose in 3rd Yongshou Year of Eastern Han Dynasty said: “死生异簿，千秋万岁，不得复相求索。” At same age, Taiping Classic, from Vol. 120 to 136, recorded: “凡仁者自来相求，以仁招仁，仁人尽来矣。” (People who seek for benevolence and righteousness will attract people who seek benevolence and righteousness). Sandao Wenshu Jue of Laishan Collection, in Vol. 86, recorded, “各以其类相求索，令德君数遣信吏，问民间有疽痂者。” (Each of them seeks for each other according to their own category. The moral monarch dispatches honest officials to inquire about the number of people who have sores and furuncles). These two examples are indirect evidence of Example 22, so the more reliable interpretation is “莫相求索”.

V. CONCLUSION

Through the brief introduction above, we can see that grammar is also an effective auxiliary means in proofreading and interpreting ancient documents. Correct application can help us to solve the problems of text and exegesis which are difficult to detect in ancient books, and to better proofread ancient books.

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