Thought and Religion in China from the Perspective of Manuscript Culture, Fourth Century BCE to Tenth Century CE

Workshop Sponsored by the Creel Center for Chinese Paleography, University of Chicago

Saturday, March 7, 2015

Location:

Franke Institute Conference Room, Regenstein Library S-102

9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Research Presentations:

* David Lebovitz: “What Does it Mean to Say ‘*chong-ru*’ 何謂寵辱?” in *Laozi* Manuscripts and Interpretive History
* Boqun Zhou: Virtue or Craft? Textual and Intellectual Problems of Chapter 36 of the *Laozi* in the Light of the Recently Discovered Manuscripts
* Ling Chan: Textual Variance and the Circulation of *Zhaiwen*: The *Zhaiwanwen* and Other Texts
* Professor Paul Copp: Writing Buddhist Liturgies at Dunhuang: Hints of the Ritualist's Craft
* Professor Victor Mair, University of Pennsylvania, Discussant

The four research presentations by members of the University of Chicago Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations apply the theoretical and methodological approaches of manuscript culture studies to the history of thought and religion in ancient and medieval China, based on the modern rediscovery of manuscripts since the twentieth century. The shared objectives are:

* Rethinking problems of text formation, circulation, and interpretation based on printed editions of transmitted texts (the later printed editions are cut off from the living practice of the mostly unknown copyists in their localities who produced manuscripts of all kinds during the roughly fourteen centuries when people experienced written texts in handwritten manuscripts).
* Consideration of the variety of texts related to thought and religion circulating in ancient and medieval manuscript culture as evidenced in the manuscripts now available to us, few of which have transmitted counterparts.

Each paper focuses on a group of manuscripts and texts and the issues arising from them. Collectively the presenters address a range of strategies that situate philosophical and religious ideas and practices in a new matrix: the materiality of the manuscripts themselves and manuscript production as the *locus* where ideas engaged people. David Lebovitz and Bochun Zhou are concerned with how *Laozi* manuscripts alter existing viewpoints while adding new problems rooted in the very activity of manuscript production, showing that the history of thought is intertwined with manuscript culture and the sociology of writing. Ling Chan and Paul Copp address the reflexivity between the engagement of local communities in religious life and the manuscripts they made as part of their engagement, manuscripts that were material elements of lived experience.

LUNCH BREAK

2:00-5:30 p.m.

Guided Reading of Chinese Manuscripts

Lebovitz and Zhou: Selected readings from the Peking University Han period *Laozi* manuscript

Chan and Copp: Selected readings from Dunhuang manuscripts

Paper Abstracts

David Lebovitz: “What Does it Mean to Say ‘*chong-ru*’ 何謂寵辱?” in *Laozi* Manuscripts and Interpretive History

Chapter 13 of the *Laozi* has long caused interpreters trouble. This paper will show that difficulties of interpretation are in fact inseparable from the syntactic and graphic variance found in recently excavated manuscripts we now have from the late Warring States and Han periods. Moreover, a variant in the newly excavated *Laozi* manuscript held by Beijing University offers a reading that restricts the interpretation of the troublesome first line in Chapter 13. The punctuation of the *Laozi* B manuscript excavated at Guodian will also be considered in light of the plurality of manuscript sources.

Boqun Zhou: Virtue or Craft? Textual and Intellectual Problems of Chapter 36 of the *Laozi* in the Light of the Recently Discovered Manuscripts

Manuscript discoveries in the past few decades have provided scholars with four (or six, depending on how one counts) chronologically diverse ancient manuscripts of *Laozi* related materials dating between the fourth and first centuries BCE. The new evidence makes it possible to reconsider *Laozi*’s textual form as well as its intellectual content. This paper examines how textual transmission can influence the transmission of ideas through a case study of *Laozi*, chap. 36, the *locus classicus* of a long standing controversy that revolves around whether Laozi encourages people to use craft. Especially since the rise of Neo-Confucianism in the eleventh century, chap. 36 has often been the target of Confucian scholars’ criticism because of its ethical ambiguity. Based on close analysis of the transmitted and manuscript versions of the text, I argue that a change introduced in the process of textual transmission resulted in a misunderstanding of its overall structure. Originally a verse of six couplets, the text is broken in the middle of the fifth couplet by later commentaries, which blurred its neat rhyme pattern. Having identified the misunderstanding with the help of manuscript evidence, we can see that chap. 36 is itself an engagement with an earlier (but lost) tradition of either the *Shi* or the *Shu*, both of which are highly esteemed by Confucians; that is, the supposed “teaching of craft” that came to be associated with Laozi actually originated from the classical tradition of *Shi* and *Shu*.

Ling Chan: Textual Variance and the Circulation of *Zhaiwen*: The *Zhaiwanwen* and Other Texts

The Dunhuang manuscripts contain a large volume of liturgical texts known as *zhaiwen*, which are highly important to the study of daily religious life in medieval China. The most structured and well-studied group of liturgical texts is the *Zhaiwanwen* collection, as evidenced by the more than ten manuscripts scholars have associated with the work. Building on the existing research centered on the *Zhaiwanwen,* this paper will examine how *zhaiwen* and *zhaiwen* collections were circulated, used, and compiled in the eighth to tenth centuries by studying two cases where distinctive segments of text (both considered to be parts of the *Zhaiwanwen*) were found in multiple manuscripts. In the first case consisting of six examples, an opening text appears attached to different prayers, some found in other collections of liturgical models and others in single texts tailored to specific *zhai* occasions (sometimes documented elsewhere), such as the dedicatory inscription in Dunhuang Cave 192. The second case focuses on examining the variance between a segment of text occurring in a section of the *Zhaiwanwen* dedicated to the appointment of officials and the equivalent text occurring in five different manuscripts.

Paul Copp: Writing Buddhist Liturgies at Dunhuang: Hints of the Ritualist's Craft

Manuscripts surviving from Dunhuang make possible, among many studies, close explorations of the ways Chinese Buddhists of the ninth and tenth centuries constructed ritual programs. This paper will examine three features of those constructions: the natures of the frames by which Buddhist cultic texts--narrative scriptures and incantations--were made the focuses of recitation rites, the borrowings and adaptations of existing materials of which those frames were made, and the understandings of the nature of scriptural language implicit in these practices. Though ritual practice is made up of far more than language, such language practices remain our chief form of evidence for Chinese Buddhist ritual practice at the close of the first millennium CE.