Hans Stumpfeldt and the Texts Behind the Texts

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This volume marks a double anniversary. It is the 50th volume of *Oriens Extremus*, which has been published at the University of Hamburg since 1954. And its publication coincides with the 70th birthday of Hans Stumpfeldt, Emeritus Professor of Sinology at this university and long-time editor of *Oriens Extremus*. It is most fitting that this volume be dedicated to him, who has set the tone and temper of this journal and its home institute for a whole generation.

Or has he? Some readers, especially outside Germany, may be surprised at this homage, indeed, some may not even know Hans Stumpfeldt’s name. That is entirely understandable. Yet, Hans Stumpfeldt never sought the limelight. He never was a jet-set scholar flying from one conference to another, and he never played the publish-or-perish game. He worked quietly and meticulously, writing thoughtful “notes from a nocturnal desk” rather than flashy articles, preferring questions to ready-made answers, hinting at possibilities instead of asserting facts. In this way, acting behind the scenes as it were, Hans Stumpfeldt has inspired hundreds of students, quite a few of which have become established scholars themselves.

There is a certain inner logic to the fact that Hans Stumpfeldt has – among countless other things – devoted himself intensively to the study of “texts behind the texts,” a field that he himself has defined as follows:

One of the most conspicuous characteristics of the literature from classical and late classical times is the fact that very often two or more compilations of texts share the same passages, the so-called parallels. Such parallels may be fairly large, as in anecdotes, or they may be sayings that appear in different places in more or less the same wording. [...] Only in rare cases is it possible to demonstrate with a measure of certainty that a given transmitted text must have adapted this material from another transmitted text. In most cases the examination of such parallels suggests that there probably were intermediate stages of transmission or that both transmitted versions may derive from a shared older version. [...] It follows that there must have existed a host of texts hidden behind the transmitted texts. It would seem necessary to detect and, as far as possible, describe such “texts behind the texts.” This will perhaps change our concepts and impressions of the range, genres and forms of classical literature.  

Indeed, Hans Stumpfeldt’s recent studies have shown just how fruitful this approach is. Closely analyzing parallels of *Lunyu* passages, he found behind the words of Confucius a didactic poem that was put into his mouth bit by bit, pointed out surprising intertextual relations between the...
Lunyu and the “Hongfan” chapter of the Shujing and suggested convincingly that several anecdotes surrounding Confucius possibly derive from long lost travel accounts.\(^3\)

In other papers, Stumpfeldt suggests that behind the dictionary-type entries of the Erya there may have been a “song of songs,”\(^4\) that many anecdotes that are independently transmitted in Yanzi chunqiu and other texts originally belonged to larger narrative contexts, perhaps travelogues,\(^5\) and that texts like the Han Shi waizhuan or the Xinxu adopted material from a putative anecdotal commentary to the Lunyu.\(^6\) Analyzing outwardly meaningless “catalogues” of historical events, Stumpfeldt detects a genre of didactic literature that was perhaps meant to be memorized.\(^7\) Similarly enigmatic sayings are at the center of Stumpfeldt’s latest study, published in this volume. He suggests that such sayings as well as many anecdotes in Han Feizi, Huainan zi and Lüshi chunqiu derive from now lost thematic collections of anecdotes, perhaps connected to Zou Yan and the Yin-Yang school.

In all these studies, tentative though they may be, Hans Stumpfeldt opens exciting new perspectives on classical Chinese literature, especially works like Zuozhuan, Lunyu, Mengzi, Zhuangzi, Xunzi, Han Feizi, Lüshi chunqiu, Huainan zi, Shuoyuan, Hanshi waizhuan and others that transmit the anecdotal lore of ancient China. While parallels and other intertextual relations between these texts have long since been recognized, Stumpfeldt incisively argues that these anecdotes are but the tip of the iceberg: there must have been many other texts behind the transmitted texts. We can only conjecture their form and existence, but such conjectures may open up an entire field of research.

While Stumpfeldt has so far confined this line of research to classical texts, his approach may be applied to other fields as well. The papers assembled in this volume show just how fruitful it may be to not simply take Chinese texts as integral works, but to focus specifically on the manifold “texts behind the texts” that inform and structure them.

In a penetrating philosophical analysis, Ernst-Joachim Vierheller points his finger at a striking parallel between Zhuangzi and Gongsun longzi, concluding that Zhuangzi actually builds on material from the Gongsun longzi and cannot be understood without knowledge of the latter. Dennis Schilling, reexamining the relationship between hexagrams and the associated sayings (ci), traces the origins of the sayings not to notes on the milfoil oracle but to mythical poetry, perhaps connected to a larger cycle of myths, and to animal imagery, perhaps totemistic, as well as to elements of political discourse: such are the texts behind the sayings of the Yijing. Bill Nienhauser, focusing on the stories of the debauched minister Qing Feng of Qi and Duke Xian of Wey, examines the usage of songs in the Zuozhuan. He observes that often only selected lines of songs are quoted, hinting at the meaning of the entire song – and that while it was expected that educated men would understand the rest, this was not always the case: not recognizing the “texts behind texts” had an adverse effect on com-

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3 Cf. Stumpfeldt 2010.
4 Stumpfeldt 2007.
5 Stumpfeldt 2002, fn. 2.
6 Stumpfeldt 2006.
7 Stumpfeldt 2008.
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munication. Kai Vogelsang calls attention to a number of analeptic anecdotes in the Zuo-
zhuan that tell stories of love, intrigue and succession struggles; they seem to be independent
textual units, perhaps derived from court gossip and transmitted among the populace in
connection with songs. Anthony Barbieri-Low examines model forms of bureaucratic doc-
uments in early imperial China. Analyzing documents from Shuihu di, Zhangjia shan, Juyan
and Dunhuang, he alerts us to the fact that much of such official communication – even
wills – are not individual but standardized by model “texts behind texts” which are followed
more (in Qin and Han legal documents) or less (in Tang wills) closely. Hans van Ess, upon
meticulous comparison of parallels in the Shiji biography of Confucius and the Kongzi jiyu
(as well as other texts), tentatively suggests that the latter actually turns several unflattering
passages of the former into hagiographic accounts, thus creating a counter-narrative to the
Shiji. Imre Hamar discusses collections of miraculous stories about the Avatamsaka-sūtra,
demonstrating how popular traditions became part of the exegetical tradition of Huayan
Buddhism, thus spreading the faith to the lower rungs of society and creating a distinct
Huayan tradition. Dorothee Schaab-Hanke relates the description of Hangzhou in the
Ducheng jisheng to Meng Yuanlao’s account of Kaifeng in his Dongjing meng Hua lu, dem-
onstrating that the latter was in many ways the text behind the former. Kaifeng was the
“capital behind the capital” and a constant point of reference – which does not, however,
keep the author of the Ducheng jisheng from subtly elevating the new capital over the old one
and thereby warning his contemporaries of impeding decay. The most ingenious take on the
topic of “texts behind texts” is offered by Frank Kraushaar, who argues that since good trans-
lations do not reflect the original but, quite to the contrary, completely emancipate them-
"texts behind the text." Having said that, Kraushaar offers a delightful translation of Fan Chengda’s poetic cycle „Sishi tianyuan zaxing liushu shou.” Finally, Sarah Kirchberger describes the background and making of the famous
“truth criterion” article of May 1978, demonstrating that it was consciously modeled on
Mao’s even more famous article “On practice.” Kirchberger’s paper goes to show that CCP
documents, just like the classical texts that Hans Stumpfeldt deals with, may be adequately
understood only by close reading and, most of all, a careful look "behind the texts."

In some way related to the aspect "texts behind texts", even though not initially written
for this issue is the analysis of the meaning of the term fa by Miranda Brown and Charles
Sanft. They argue that the term fa as it occurs in archaeologically recovered documents such
as “Ernian lüling” and “Zouyanshu” refers to categories and should be rendered accordingly
rather than as a “principle” or “law” as it has been proposed earlier. These categories were
built from a list of prototypical situations and intended to guide an official to the statutes
applicable on a given case.
References


