

A Text Formation Primer

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Ancient texts, unlike modern ones, may grow in several ways. Here are some of the commonest modes of text formation, illustrated with examples which will be familiar to those studying classical China or the Bible.

A / AFTER

The easiest place to add something to a text is **at the end**, like an E-mail postscript or the next episode in a radio serial. It is the commonest mode of text growth.

1. The **Gortyn Law Code** was engraved on the walls of the city hearing chamber. We still possess the original stones.¹ In terms of content, the laws are in three groups. The first group has a logical sequence, the second supplements them, the third adds further refinements. The content of the second and third groups suggests updating. This is proved for the third group, which is *in a different handwriting*.

2. The **Analects** (Lún Yǔ) began as a group of *remembered* sayings of Confucius. This was expanded by adding further chapters of *invented* sayings of Confucius, as the school's ideas, and its image of its founder, evolved. Total time depth: 230 years, from the death of Confucius in 0479 to the end of his state, Lǔ, in 0249.²

3. **Mwòdž 17-19**, three tracts giving the Mician school's view of war, begin with total opposition (MZ 17, 0390), continue with an argument from cost (MZ 18, 0362), and conclude with acceptance of "righteous war" (MZ 19, 0326). These are changes in the views of the sub-elite Micians, as they gradually assimilated to elite values.³

4. To the **Isaiah** core (Isa 1-39, pre-Exilic) was added Deutero (Isa 40-55, Exilic) and Trito (Isa 56-66, post-Exilic), each adjusting former doctrine to changing times.⁴

5. "**Second Zechariah**" (Zech 9-14) is distinguished from the preceding Zech 1-8 in substance by its later theology, and in literary form by its distinctive "Oracle" labels. Other evidence suggests further distinguishing Zech 12-14 as a Third Zechariah.⁵

¹Some of them damaged (they were repurposed in antiquity); photos in Willetts **Gortyn**.

²For details of this central Confucian text, see Brooks **Original**; for an introduction in historical context, to the Analects and to other classical Chinese texts, see Brooks **Emergence**.

³See Brooks **MZ 17-19**, and for the larger situation, Brooks **Ethical**. These separate texts function as stages in a continuous doctrinal development; compare Deuteronomy, #25 below.

⁴For a review of scholarly opinion, see Williamson **Book** 1-3.

⁵So Duhm **Twelve** 245-253.

B / BEFORE

New material can be placed **at the head**, not the tail, of a text. That first contact can powerfully affect future readers' perception of everything that follows.⁶ To do so was precisely the intent of whoever proposed that material.

6. When Horace arranged his first collection of *Carmina* (the present Books I-III), for publication, he placed first a poem to his patron Maecenas, acknowledging his gratitude for Maecenas' support. The poem is in 36 lines, and begins:

Maecenas, atavis edite regibus
Maecenas, risen from kings as your ancestors . . .

It offers the entire work of the poet, which then follows, as a tribute to the patron.

7. The steadily expanding military text *Sūndž* had reached 12 chapters. When presented to the Chí ruler in 0319, a new chapter, **Sūndž 1**, was proposed, stressing the importance of war to the survival of the state, and serving as a presentation letter.⁷

8. **Jwāngdž 8**, the first of three Primitivist chapters, argues that webbed toes or an extra finger are natural, and should be accepted; it opposes all forced standardization. A proposed paragraph *urges the opposite*: such irregularities should be removed.⁸

9. The seven-day creation story in **Genesis 1** precedes and contrasts with the older Eden story, Genesis 2-3, and surpasses that story in a new and universalist direction. It also gives cosmic sanction to the seven-day Sabbath custom, and to make that point was probably the motive for its addition, and its prominent placement.⁹

10. The addition of a supernatural Birth Story in **Luke 1-2**, overriding the original beginning of that text (the synchronisms of Luke 3), gave a new and supernatural dimension to Mark's earlier, or Luke's own previous, story of a merely human Jesus.¹⁰

⁶It may seem that proposed material cannot outweigh, in the reader's mind, all that follows. But a new reader has *not yet seen* what follows, and the first thing encountered will set the tone for the rest; see Brooks **Original** Appendix 5. The casual beginning of the present *Analects* (1:1, "friends coming from afar, is this not delightful?") easily eclipses the career-oriented sayings of the original Confucius in LY 4 (4:1, "It is best to dwell in rǎn. If someone choose *not* to abide in rǎn, how will he get to be known?").

⁷To preserve the desirable total number of 12 chapters, two original chapters were pushed together as *Sūndž* 11. It betrays its origin in being twice as long as the average *Sūndž* chapter. For pushing chapters together to make room for later additions, see further section F, below.

⁸This reversal of doctrine was probably prompted by Mencius 6A12, itself a criticism of the original Primitivist idea. It notes that someone with a crooked finger would go any distance to find a doctor to straighten it, so he can be like other people. We would then have the sequence JZ 8B primitive > MC 6A12 in opposition > JZ 8A accepting the Mencian criticism. The issue here is whether human nature itself is natural or imposed. That human nature itself is everywhere the same is the common assumption of the time. That assumption MC 6A12 asserts, and JZ 8A (the proposed addition) finally accepts.

⁹For a plausible Mesopotamian source for the Gen 1 story, see Speiser **Genesis** 9-10.

¹⁰See Fitzmyer **Luke** 1/304-312. The Lukan Birth Narrative is clearly secondary to, and grander than, the one in Matthew. Luke spends almost equal time on the birth of John the Baptist. John was himself a priest's son, and famous for his adherence to food rules. His diet was locusts (allowed by Lev 11:22) and wild honey (as gathered direct from nature); in short, nothing that requires the slightest intermediary human processing.

C / CONCENTRIC ADDITIONS

New material may be added at **both the head and tail** of a text, either successively or as a one-time framing device. This keeps the ends of the work mutually compatible, and gives an overall impression of unity of thought in an evolving text.

11. **Rgveda** 2-8, the “family books,” supplemented by book 9, anthologizing some Soma Pavamāna hymns from various sages, were then bookended by books 1 and 10, the latter containing some of the latest material.¹¹

12. **Dào/Dǔ Jīng** 14, the core of that text, is a hymn to “The Lord,” Ishvara; in fact Ātman or breath, suitable to a breath-control meditation group. Further chapters on meditation-based government were added both after (DJ 15-16) and before (DDJ 13) that core. The last chapters by the first master of that school were the symmetrical **DDJ 10 and 21**, the first places in the text where the term Dǔ 德 “power” occurs.¹²

13. **Shāng-jyǔn Shū** (The Book of Lord Shāng) was built on a concentric plan, with a core at SJS 10-11 (on military matters, probably by the historical Lord Shāng). The framing **SJS 1** (adapting an earlier story)¹³ and **26** explicitly added Lord Shāng’s name to the text, which up to then had been only tacitly associated with him.

14. **The Torah Psalter**. At one point, the evolving Psalms collection was framed by the head-and-tail addition of Torah Psalms 1 and 119, making whole collection proclaim that post-monarchic theme.¹⁴

15. **1 Peter**, a widely distributed baptismal homily, responded to the expulsion of Jesus followers from synagogues (c85) by adding material at the head (**1:1-2**) and tail (**4:12-5:11**) of the text to address the new emergency (“the fiery trial among you”). This transformed the already familiar homily into a message of encouragement and reaffirmation in a new emergency.¹⁵

¹¹See the introduction to Jamison and Brereton **Rigveda**. The finalizing of the Vedic hymns at the number of 1000 (due to later additions, now 1028) is an example of arresting the growth of a text (here, a corpus) at a numerically satisfactory point; see further Section F, below.

¹²See Brooks **Formation**, and Liebenthal **Lord**. His successor, Lǎudǔ, continued to use head-and-tail alternation, but a military disaster in Yēn, reflected in DDJ 30-31, caused a shift to basic end-accretion, which continued until the end of the text, at DDJ 81.

¹³For JGT 6, the source of SJS 1, see Duyvendak **Book** 167n. Three chapters, SJS 27-29, have been lost from the end of the SJS; they were probably later accretions, quite properly excised by some early critic. There were late extensions to both the Analects and the Mencius; both also eliminated by early critics.

¹⁴The shift from a previous Davidic focus to something post-monarchical parallels the end of the monarchy, recorded in the Books of Kings, which conclude with the death, without a successor, of Jehoiachin, the last King of Judah, in Babylonian captivity. There next followed the Psalms of Ascent (Psa 120-134), entertaining the possibility of a Davidic renewal, but chiefly shifting focus to the Temple. The also post-Exilic Chronicles does exactly the same.

¹⁵See Beare **First**. The original homily is preserved in the final version of the text. Besides converting the original homily into an emergency message, the bookending additions further claim Petrine authorship of the whole. This is a prime example of NT textual reattribution, which was common in the late 1st century; see Brooks **Apostolic**.

D / DISTINCTIVE MATERIAL: INTERPOLATIONS

A passage may stand out as different in tone or content from its surroundings, or as interrupting a narrative flow. These are probably interpolations. How do they arise? An author may insert new material to homogenize a text whose doctrine is evolving; an editor may add a variant of a popular tale; an enemy may post a hostile broadside. If you remove some suspect passage, and the adjacent passages become consecutive, like your finger when you take a splinter out, *that* was probably an interpolation.¹⁶

16. Readers of Caesar's Gallic War may have noticed the part near the beginning; from "**Eorum illa pars**," which gives an outline of the geography of Gaul. Removing it leaves a continuous account of Orgetorix and the Helvetii.¹⁷

17. Analects 12:2 (c0326), defining the virtue *rín* (otherness), says "What he himself does not want, let him not do it to others." This idea had been *rejected*, back at Analects 5:12 (c0470). To reduce the anomaly of its acceptance, the Analects proprietor (the head of the Confucian school at that time) interpolated a similar saying in the core of the text, as **Analects *4:15**. In that context, it stands out *formally* as the answer to a disciple question; whereas its neighbors (Analects 4:14 and 4:16) are mere "Master said" sayings, and on a *different topic*: qualification for office.

18. Analects 3:4 and 3:6 (c0342) are paired sayings about Lín Fàng's knowledge of ritual. Interrupting that pair is **Analects *3:5** (c0310), a saying on a *different topic*: the superiority of Chinese to barbarian culture.¹⁸

19. The story of Noah (**Gen 6-9**) is really two stories, now interwound. In what is obviously the earlier, Noah saves *all* the animals; in the later version, he distinguishes between clean and unclean ones.¹⁹ The intertwining creates the illusion of a single text, and presents the theological update as original.

20. The Farewells of Jesus in **John 15-17**, coming after a brief parting scene at the end of John 14, and directly before the arrest of Jesus, were introduced in order to extend this moment, so appropriate for "last words" advice to Jesus' disciples, who would later transmit Jesus' message to Christian posterity.²⁰

¹⁶Unless an adroit interpolator has carefully smoothed the edges of his addition. In that case, the distinctiveness of the content is the only evidence available to the investigator.

¹⁷There are other such interpolation at 6:25-28, a description of the Hercynian forest and its animals and elsewhere, perhaps added to make the text more geographically useful. For other groups of related interpolations, see #23. below.

¹⁸Early sayings about neighboring peoples are balanced, whereas later ones are hostile. Analects *3:5 is hostile, and belongs to a later period than do its current neighbors, Analects 3:4 and 3:6. This *substantive* inconsistency reinforces the evidence of *formal* inconsistency.

¹⁹Compare Gen 6:19 ("And of every living thing of all flesh, two of every sort shalt thou bring into the ark, to keep them alive with thee; they shall be male and female.") with Gen 7:2 ("of every clean beast thou shalt take to thee seven and seven, the male and his female, and of the beasts that are not clean two, the male and his female"). The later is not only different from the earlier, but includes the earlier in its instruction. Also at variance in the two versions are how long the Flood lasted, and how it ended: the earlier with God's covenant in the rainbow, and the later with a sacrifice by Noah.

²⁰See Wellhausen **Erweiterungen** 7-15.

Most interpolations are written *into* an earlier text . Some are added in the margins, a later copyist may include these in the text proper. (Some marginalia, as in #21 below, are of incidental use to scholars). In such ways, texts may add, but they rarely delete. These are public documents: additions can be accepted, while deletions would detract from the text’s previously established authority. But a *later* text may delete, as in #25. Each Christian Gospel was meant to supersede, not to supplement, the previous one, and Chronicles is a post-Exilic rewrite of Kings – and of *all* earlier Biblical tradition.

21. The **Venetian Scholia**, notes in the margins of an early manuscript of the Iliad, published by Villoison in 1788, made a revolution in Homeric study. These early opinions *about* the text allowed the identification of many interpolations *in* the text,²¹ and led to Wolf’s Prolegomena of 1795.

22. Dž-syà in **Analects 3:8**, asking “Confucius” about Shī 57, quotes these lines:

The artful smile so charming, ah,
The lovely eyes so sparkling, ah,
The plain on which to make the painting, ah . . .

The third line does not quite rhyme, but it mimics the “ah” of the other lines, and tries to pass itself off as part of the poem. It is not. It was inserted into the poem as part of a Shī commentary (the rest is lost) which evidently attempted to give the whole Shī a ritual character, by formally *infiltrating* the Shī.

23. The **Shān Jīng** (“Classic of Mountains”) was at first a resource map of China. Later, those mountains began to be peopled by interpolated strange beings. The Hàn librarians, aware of the danger of such interpolations, had recorded wordcounts for each chapter of the text. Once these interpolated strange beings have been removed, the wordcounts once again match the original, uninterpolated text.²²

24. Israel left Egypt in haste, their mixing-bowls on their backs (Exod 12:34). Later, they give so much gold and fine fabric to the Tabernacle that the collection was halted (Exod 35:20-36:7). Where did all that come from? Someone went through the text and explained how, before they left, the people had “despoiled the Egyptians” of their treasures (**Exod 3:21-22, 11:2, 12:35-36**), thus making the story consistent.

25. A text rarely deletes; to do so lessens its credibility as an authority. But a *later* text may safely do so. The Egyptian Plagues and the drowning of Pharaoh’s chariots in Exodus are impressive, but they delay the introduction of the lawcode which begins with the Decalogue at **Exod 20**. Law had become the main interest of Exodus. Deuteronomy sought to present it with less preliminary. The Egypt miracles are gone, the Forty Years are briefly told. After a triumphal march through intervening territory, Israel is at the Jordan, all in just four chapters. The new code then begins at **Deut 5**. Deuteronomy is a *replacive rewrite* of the Exodus story and its code.

²¹See Eichhorn **Higher**.

²²Nor was this the end. To the five chapters of the original “Mountains” survey there were added chapters on places *beyond* China, the expanded work being called the Shān/Hǎi Jīng (“Classic of Mountains and Seas”); in them, the incredible beings simply take over the text. Centuries later, the text had become mere recreational reading, and was no longer of any economic importance. Contrast the Gallic War example (#16 above), where a narrative account was modified by added material, to give useful information on foreign lands and peoples.

E / ECLECTIC ASSEMBLAGES

A text may be no more than an assembly, created by combining previously existing texts which are thought to share some characteristic. Here are five examples.

26. Of the first of the Upanishads, there once existed three versions, each with its own slightly differing transmission genealogy. Perhaps for simplicity, these were later combined as one, the current **Bṛhad Aranyaka Upaniṣad**. The original separate texts are still discernible as sections 1-2, 3-4, and 5-6 of the present composite text.²³

27. The **Yǔ Tsúng** or “Sayings Collections” are four previously unknown texts recovered archaeologically from the Gwōdyèn 1 tomb in 1993. Those texts were written before 0278. **Yǔ Tsúng 4** includes, among others, two sayings which also appear in the Confucian Analects (completed in 0249).²⁴ The included Analects sayings thus represent outside use of material from a *still active* textual tradition.

28. The **Hàn Stone Classics** of 173-183 are seven texts taught at the Imperial Academy; students could make their own rubbings from the engraved stones. The seven texts are arranged on a discernible principle. They are: (1) the **Shī**, or Poetry (thought to have been selected by Confucius), at the beginning, and (7) Confucius himself (his sayings in the Analects), at the end. After the **Shī** come: (2) the **Shū**, conventionally paired with the **Shī**, and then, in historical order, (3) the **Yì** or “Changes,” attributed to the **Jōu** founders, (4) the **Chūn/Chyōu** (late **Jōu**), (6) the **Gūngyáng Jwǎn**, a commentary on the **Chūn/Chyōu**, and (6) the ritual text **Yí Lǐ**, whose core is from the late 03c. Some of these texts include lists of variant readings, but the group of stones contains *not a word* besides the contents of the included texts.

29. **Psalm 108** is a combination of portions of Psalms 57 and 60.²⁵ The composite nature of Psalm 108 is discernible only by one who also knows its constituents in their original form. Psalm 108 has the superscription, “A Song; of David,” which differs from the superscriptions of 57 (“to [the tune] Al-tashheth. Of David. Michtam; when he fled from Saul, in the cave”) and 60 (“to Shushan Eduth, Michtam of David, to teach; when he strove with Aram-naharaim and with Aram-zobah, and Joab returned and smote of Edom in the Valley of Salt twelve thousand”). Parts of two Psalms are here combined as one Psalm, one which *obliterates all memory* of its textual origins.

30. **The Book of the Twelve** gathered the shorter Prophets into one collection, with Jonah (a satire on the prophets of doom, specifically Nahum, which rejoices at the destruction of Nineveh) perhaps added to make up the desirable total of twelve.²⁶ The Twelve contain *not one word* besides the contents of the texts themselves.²⁷

²³For an overview, see Olivelle **Upaniṣads** 4-6.

²⁴For the full contents of the fourth **Yǔ Tsúng**, see Cook **Bamboo** 2/903-938.

²⁵See Müller et al **Evidence** 157-177.

²⁶That Jonah is satire, not prophecy has often been noticed; see Duhm **Twelve** 257 note 1, “a keen though humorous attack on intolerance and inhumanity.” For the later protection of the satisfactory total count (here, twelve) of a composite text, see the next section and #7, above.

²⁷Nogalski **Twelve** 29 notes keywords at the end of one prophet and the beginning of the next, implying editorial linking. Those links *fail* with Jonah (a satire, not a prophecy, added to make up the magic number twelve, and with Second Zechariah (see #5, above).

F / FINAL NUMERICAL CONSIDERATIONS

If you are in charge of a growth text, where do you stop? An accumulation may reach a satisfying total number, which will then be protected against further additions – or maybe not.

31. The *Iliad*, the story of the Wrath of Achilles, logically ends at *Iliad* 22, the death of Hector and the mourning of his wife. Later, there were added ***Iliad* 10** (the manifestly late Doloneia) and **23-24**, which go beyond the original plan, returning Hector's body to Priam, reconciling Greeks and Trojans, and all but ending the war. To compensate for these additions, two earlier chapters were pushed together as one at three places (easily located; they produce chapters twice as long as the *Iliad* norm). In preserving that total number, the *Iliad* acknowledges the power of 24, which is the number of letters in the Greek alphabet. The first lays of Troy were undoubtedly oral, but "Homer," the author of our *Iliad*, seems to be operating in an age of writing.²⁸

32. The *Shī* corpus of Chinese court poetry expanded until it included 300 poems, all of them in different ways telling of the glory of the *Jōu* tradition. The later addition of poems glorifying Confucius' state of *Lǔ* forced the elimination of six poems previously included (the *Máu* commentary preserves their titles and general purport). Still later, when five poems supposedly from the earlier *Shāng* Dynasty appeared, their addition was not accepted by all parties. Those who did accept them numbered them as ***Shī* 301-305**, giving up the previous attempt to protect the old total.

33. *Szmǎ Tán's Shǐ Jì* was planned as a double sixty: 120 chapters. Of these, 30 (SJ 31-60) were allotted to hereditary rulerships. Unfortunately, during the course of the work, the Emperor created new hereditary kingships for some of his sons. *Tán* added them as SJ 60 ("The Three Kings"), but compensated by pushing together two previously written chapters, on *Gwǎn* and *Tsà*, as the present **SJ 34**. *Tán's* son *Chyēn*, on taking up the unfinished *Shǐ Jì*, added ten new collective biographies to the last half of the work. No compensation was made, and the *Shǐ Jì* now stands at 130 chapters.

34. The *Psalms* had reached a satisfactory total of 150, but two Maccabean *Psalms*, responding to the 0168 desecration of the Temple under Antiochus IV Epiphanes, demanded to be included; they are now *Psalms* **74** and **79**. Room was made for them by eliminating the last *Korah Psalm*, just before the two *Ezra* *Psalms*, *Psa* 88-89 (notice the double heading of *Psa* 88), and pushing two others together as one.²⁹

35. The *Book of Judges* mentions twelve persons, some barely known, and others whose stories are told at length, probably derived from pre-existing popular tradition. These twelve are claimed to have led Israel in the way of God, for a multiple or submultiple of the generational 40 years, only to have Israel go back to its usual *Baal* worship immediately thereafter. This was the original design of the work. Material later added to the text (***Judges* 17-21**) has obscured that still-visible primary design, based on the significant number 12.

²⁸Compare the case of the pushed-together *Sūndž* 11A/B; #7 above.

²⁹Brooks ***Psalms* 114-116**. *Psa* 44 and 83, laments for the destruction of the Temple, were also sung at this time, leading Theodore, Bishop of Mopsuestia in 392-428, to regard all four as Maccabean in origin. For a careful discussion of the four, see Creelman **Maccabean**.

In Conclusion

The patterns of text formation mentioned here are nothing new; they have been known to scholarship since antiquity. For interpolations, we have Zenodotus and the other Alexandrian critics (the Iliad); for detecting spurious texts, Stilo (on Seneca) and Valla (on the Donation of Constantine, a forgery of Charlemagne's time); for early versions underlying late texts, Lachmann (again the Iliad). We offer these examples, most of them already familiar in their respective fields, as reminders of what is gained by taking into consideration more than one ancient literature.

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