

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 probably 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 supplement them, and the third add 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 Micicians, 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, literarily, 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 **Analects**; for an introduction in historical context to the Analects and 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 development; compare #25, below.

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

⁵So Duhm **Twelve** 245-253.

B / BEFORE

Material can also be placed **at the head**, not the tail, of a text. That initial matter can powerfully affect future readers' perception of everything that follows.⁶

6. When Horace arranged his *Carmina* for publication, he placed first a poem to his patron Maecenas, as an acknowledgement of gratitude for Maecenas' support. His *Satires*, similarly, had a first *Satire* addressed to Maecenas (satirizing those who are dissatisfied with their lot). These works, as wholes, thus become *tributes to Maecenas*, as well as preserving the work of the poet himself.

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 preposed, 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 preposed paragraph *urges the opposite*: that 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 may have been the immediate motive for its addition.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 preposed 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 of the work. For the power of preposed material, see Brooks **Analects** Appendix 5. The present casual beginning of the *Analects* (1:1, "friends coming from afar, is this not delightful?") easily eclipses the career-oriented sayings of the original Confucius (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 number of 12 chapters, two earlier chapters, 11A and 11B, were pushed together as *Sūndž 11*, which betrays its origin in being twice as long as the average *Sūndž* chapter. Pushing existing chapters together to compensate for additions to a text is a common. See further at mode F, below; for the *Psalter*, see Brooks **Psalms 114-116**).

⁸Intertextual note: this reversal 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 others. We then have the sequence JZ 8B primitive > MC 6A12 in opposition > JZ 8A accepting the Mencian criticism.

The key issue here is whether human nature itself is natural or imposed. The Mencians argued for at least an inherent *capacity* for good; *Sywndž* regarded goodness as an acquired, indeed an *artificial*, quality. That human nature itself is everywhere the same is the common assumption of the time. That assumption MC 6A asserts, and JZ 8A finally accepts.

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

¹⁰See Fitzmyer **Luke** 1/304-312. Directionality note: The Lukan Birth Narrative is clearly secondary to, and grander than, its precedent in Matthew. Luke spends almost equal time on the birth of John the Baptist, 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

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 compatible with each other, and gives an overall impression of unity of thought.

11. **Rigveda** 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. **Dàu/Dǎ Jīng** 14, the core of that text, is a hymn to the Indian god of breath, Ātman, or as the text calls him, Ishvara, 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**, celebrating, and also redefining, Virtue (Dǎ).¹²

13. **Shāng-jyǎn 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 the climactic super-acrostic 119, allowing the whole collection to briefly 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 new material at the head (**1:1-2**) and tail (**4:12-5:11**) of the text, which addressed the crisis (“the fiery trial among you”), and transformed the homily into a message of encouragement in a new emergency.¹⁵

¹¹See the introduction to Jamison and Brereton **Rigveda**. The finalizing of the Vedic hymns at the number of 1000 is an example of the factor described in section F, below, a way of arresting the growth of a text (or here, a corpus) at a numerically satisfactory point.

¹²See Brooks **Formation**. His successor, Lǎudž, continued with head-and-tail alternation, but a military disaster (the expulsion of Chí from occupied 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 from the text by some early critic. (There were similar late extensions to both the Analects and the Mencius; both also eliminated by early critics. It has been claimed that the extra four Mencius chapters have been preserved outside the text, but this can be disputed).

¹⁴The shift from a previous Davidic focus to something post-monarchical presumably parallels the actual 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 first followed Psalms on the theme “God as King,” a rethinking of the monarchical idea, and later the Torah emphasis, which saw the Torah (“Teaching”) as something self-standing, needing reinforcement from neither God nor King.

¹⁵See Beare **First**. The original homily is preserved within the late version of the text. Besides converting the previous homily into an emergency tract, the bookending additions further claim Petrine authorship of the whole. This is one example of a widespread process of textual reattribution in the late 1st century; see Brooks **Apostolic**.

D / DISTINCTIVE MATERIAL

A passage may stand out as different in tone or content from its surroundings, or as interrupting a narrative flow. These are probable 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 a suspect passage, and the adjacent passages become consecutive, like your finger when you take a splinter out, then that was probably an interpolation.¹⁶

16. Youthful readers of Caesar's Gallic War may have noticed the place near the beginning; from "**Eorum illa pars**" onward, which outlines the geography of Gaul. Removing it leaves a continuous up-close account of the Helvetii and Orgetorix.¹⁷

17. Analects 12:2 (c0326), defining *rún*, 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 interpolated a similar saying in the core of their text, as **Analects *4:15**. It stands out *formally* as the answer to a disciple question; whereas its neighbors on both sides (4:14 and 4:16) are mere "The 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. *Substantively* interrupting that pair is **Analects *3:5** (c0310), a saying about a *different topic*: the superiority of Chinese to barbarian culture.¹⁸

19. An early version of the Goliath story (1 Sam 17:12-31 and other fragments) tells how David acted on his own initiative in killing Goliath. A later version, now interwound with the first (**1 Sam 16:14-15, 17:32-40, 42-48a, 49, and 51-54**),¹⁹ introduces David as playing the harp for sleepless King Saul; he attacks Goliath only when authorized by Saul. The later version is a pro-monarchic rewrite of the first.²⁰

20. The Farewells of Jesus in **John 15-17**, coming after a brief parting scene at the end of John 14, were introduced in order to extend this moment, so appropriate for "last words" advice to Jesus' disciples, who would later transmit Jesus' message.²¹

¹⁶Unless an adroit interpolator has carefully smoothed the edges of his addition. In that case, the distinctiveness of the contents is the only criterion that is left to the investigator.

¹⁷There is another such interpolation at 6:25-28, a description of the Hercynian forest and its animals, and still others elsewhere. They were probably made when the text was being used as an ethnographic manual. For other examples of group interpolation, see the opposite page.

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

¹⁹Analects comments about the neighboring peoples are at first moderate, and only later hostile. Recognizing the hostile *3:5 as an interpolation regularizes this pattern.

²⁰It is the *later* version which appears in the Septuagint translation; the typologically earlier one is found, intertwined with the other, only in the later Masoretic text. For one solution of this enigma, see Brooks **Goliath**. Another example of interwound versions is Noah: the earlier version gives men *all animals* as food (Gen 6:19, "every living thing"); the rewrite introduces the distinction between *clean and unclean* animals (Gen 7:2) "of every clean beast . . . of the beasts that are not clean . . ."). The intertwining is meant to create the illusion of a single text.

²¹See Wellhausen **Erweiterungen** (1907) 7-15.

[FURTHER EXAMPLES OF INTERPOLATIONS]

Interpolations may occur in groups; and in more than one place. They may alter or obscure the original. A later text may wholly replace an earlier text: each Christian Gospel was meant to replace, not to supplement, the previous Gospel or Gospels.

21. The **Venetian Scholia**, notes added to the margins of an early text of the Iliad, when published by Villoison in 1788, led to a revolution in Homeric study. These early scholarly opinions *about* the text allowed the identification of unsuspected interpolations *in* the text,²² leading finally to Wolf's decisive 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, precisely by *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 appended wordcounts to each chapter of the text. Once these interpolated strange beings are removed, those wordcounts once again match the original, uninterpolated text.²³

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 stuff come from? Someone accordingly went through the early part of 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**). These three patches together made the story retrospectively 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 very impressive, but they delay the introduction of the lawcode which had become the main interest of Exodus. Deuteronomy wished to present the code with less preliminary. The Egypt stuff is gone; the Forty Years are briefly recounted, and after a triumphal march through intervening territory, Israel is poised at the entry site in Transjordan, all in just four chapters. The revised code then begins in **Deut 5**. Deuteronomy is a *replacive rewrite* of the Exodus story and its code.²⁴

²²See Eichhorn **Higher**.

²³Nor 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 fascination with incredible beings simply took 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 for utilitarian use, giving information on foreign lands and peoples.

²⁴For a text modified not by additions to itself, but by *another* text, compare #3, above.

E / ECLECTIC MATERIAL

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.²⁵

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. **Yw Tsūng 4** includes, among others, two sayings which also appear in the Confucian Analects (completed in 0249).²⁶ 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 basic for students at the Imperial Academy, who 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 Jwàn, 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 60.²⁷ 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 deals with the destruction of Nineveh) perhaps added to make up the desirable total of Twelve.²⁸ The Twelve contain *not one word* besides the contents of the texts themselves.²⁹

²⁵For an overview, see Olivelle **Upaniṣads** 4-6.

²⁶For the full contents of the fourth Yǔ Tsúng, see Cook **Bamboo** 2/903-938.

²⁷See **Psalm 108** in Müller et al **Evidence** 157-177.

²⁸That Jonah is satire rather than prophecy per se has often been noted. Duhm 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..

²⁹But there may be (as in #28, above) an implicit logic to the whole, or to some groups within the whole; see Wenzel **Book** for efforts along this line with the “Book of the Twelve.” For “twelve” as itself a kind of tacit meaning, see the examples in the next section.

F (FINAL NUMERICAL CONSIDERATIONS)

If you are in charge of a growth text, where do you stop? The writer of a treatise may achieve a literarily satisfactory ending (part of the art of philology is in discerning satisfactory endings). Or an accumulation may reach a number that is *itself* satisfying. That satisfactory count may then be protected against further additions.

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 between Greece and Troy. To compensate for these additions, earlier chapters were pushed together at three places (easily located, since they result in chapters twice as long as the Iliad norm). In preserving the total of 24 books, the Iliad acknowledges the power of 24, the number of letters in the Greek alphabet. The first lays of Troy were doubtless oral, but "Homer" is clearly operating in an age of writing.³⁰

32. The Shī corpus of court poetry grew by addition until it reached 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 purportedly from the 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 Tsài, 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 work now stands at 130 chapters.

34. The Psalms had reached a satisfactory total of 150, and were virtually closed, but four Maccabean Psalms, responding to the desecration of the Temple under Antiochus IV Epiphanes, demanded to be included (as Psalms **44, 74, 79, 83**). They were compensated by pushing together two Psalms in four places, though *not the same* four places in the early Septuagint Vorlage and in the later Masoretic text.³¹

35. The Book of Judges (a mistranslation; read rather "Leaders") mentions twelve persons, some barely known, and others whose stories are told at length, probably based on exploits already established in 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, which then comprised Judges 3-16. Material later added to both ends of the text (**Judges 1-2, 17-21**) has tended to obscure that primary design, based on the significant number 12.

³⁰Compare the case of the pushed-together Sūndž 11A/B; #7 above.

³¹For the Maccabean Psalms, see Creelman; for the adjustments, Brooks **Psalms 114-116**.

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 forms 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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