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Reading Genesis 22 and *Analects* 18 in Late Antiquity¹

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ABSTRACT

This paper compares modes of scriptural interpretation from two ends of the Eurasian landmass in the late antique period (400–600 CE). Juxtaposing midrashim on Genesis with the *Lunyu yishu* 論語義疏, a famous expository commentary on the Confucian *Analects*, the paper argues that the difference between late-antique Confucian and Jewish commentarial practice lies in differing senses of responsibility for the sacred text. The *Lunyu yishu* curates the full *Analects* text, while midrashim presuppose a reader who turns elsewhere for the full version of the Hebrew Bible. The paper provides full typologies of commentarial technique in the midrashim and the *Lunyu yishu*; this is designed to assist comparison and further understanding of the practice of medieval Chinese commentary.

Key words: Commentary, *shu* 疏, *Analects*, *Lunyu yishu*, midrash

¹ Unless noted, all translations from Chinese are my own; translations from *Midrash Bereishit Rabbah* are from Neusner (1985) unless otherwise noted.

² See <https://languagelog ldc.upenn.edu/nll/?p=63904>

INTRODUCTION

This paper examines modes of scriptural interpretation in use in China and the Levant in late antiquity. A global “late antique” period witnessed religious traditions consolidating their canons and fleshing out the implications of their sacred texts. In particular, this paper examines the genres of interpretation often represented as most characteristic of their era: midrash, for Jewish Levantine communities, and *shu* 疏 or *yishu* 義疏 “expository subcommentary,” for medieval China.³ Midrash is known for its reliance on verbal play and close engagement with the physical form of the sacred text, with the aim of constructing ingenious arguments that leap across the breadth of canon, time, space, and logic. A comparison with a Chinese commentary text and its robust early manuscript tradition presents us with a very different mode of prioritizing the words *qua* words of scripture.

The paper is structured as follows. A brief discussion of comparative methodology and rationale for juxtaposing Genesis 22 with *Analects* 18 is followed by a descriptive summary of Midrash *Bereishit Rabbah* (BR; c. 300–500 CE), parashot 55 and 56, and a complete translation of Huang Kan’s *Lunyu yishu* 論語義疏 (LYS; c. 550 CE) on a target passage within *Analects* 18, 18.6. The choice of 18.6 to juxtapose with a whole chapter of the OT is discussed below. A translation of the entire commentary section on 18.6 is necessary due to the complete unavailability of published translations into English or any European language. BR has appeared in two widely available English translations⁴ that allow description without full translation. The final section is a comparative discussion that presents preliminary conclusions.

COMPARISON

Comparison without influence is hard. It takes skill to compare Christian readings of the Aqedah with the Rabbinic tradition. No demonstrable ties exist between Huang Kan and the rabbis of the Levant. Instead, we must frame comparison carefully to prevent the appearance of straw men and discern signal from noise.

³ For a concise introduction to *shu* in English, see Makeham (2003), chapter 3.

⁴ Those of Neusner (1985) (N) and Freedman (1983) (F).

Yishu and midrash are well matched. Both are genres of scriptural interpretation considered “characteristic” of a certain moment in the intellectual development of the Confucian and Jewish traditions respectively. Huang Kan and the BR are widely considered representative samples of their respective genres. Furthermore, *yishu* and midrash both appear to spring from oral interaction with sacred texts in the context of school lectures, debates, reading aloud, and preaching. The LYS and BR as they survived to us underwent curation, in their progress from oral products to fixed written records. We shall see that this curation—perhaps the work of Huang Kan himself—leads the LYS to assumptions about the underlying scripture different from those of midrash.

If genres of commentary allow for easy comparison, the sacred texts upon which they comment do not. This paper selects Genesis 22 as a prime example of a biblical passage posing provocative questions that cry out for exegetical intervention. The passage is redolent with tension, less because it depicts God demanding child sacrifice, than because the child to be sacrificed is the heir to God’s promises. Genesis 22 acquires its sting by being part of an origin story.

The Confucian canon has passages that are similar flashpoints. The most striking of these, however, are found in an anthology of ancient poems with a reception history too complex and obscure for comparative purposes (Porteous 2022). Furthermore, their main problematic did not appear fully in the reception tradition until after the year 1000 CE. A hunt for prose narrative about a founding figure brings us to the *Analects*, the best known of many collections of sayings attributed to Confucius that survive from Chinese antiquity.⁵

The *Analects* may be prose, but it is rarely narrative. Characteristic of the vast body of “Confucius literature” from ancient China, it either records pithy sayings without context, or else transmits skeletal narratives as foils for longer sections of didactic speech. Nowhere do we find mature stories like those present in Genesis or an extended and complex narrative filled with details or a discernable plot; sometimes there is no evident didactic intention. If we search the *Analects* for extended narration, we find Chapter 18, and particularly passages 18.5–18.7. These three sections, although formally distinct episodes, share a common theme, and each has a distinct plot. At stake is

⁵ The dating and composition of the *Analects* have inspired much controversy. The classic work is Brooks and Brooks (1998); more recently, Hunter (2017) presents a tendentious re-reading of the evidence.

Confucius' rejection of a hermit's life and his choice to seek after a government career, even though the political climate is dangerous and corrupt:⁶

18.5 The madman of Chu, Jie Yu, passed by Confucius, singing and saying, "Phoenix! Phoenix! How your virtue has degenerated! As to the past, reproof is useless; but the future may still be provided against. Give up your vain pursuit. Give up your vain pursuit. Peril awaits those who now engage in affairs of government." Confucius alighted and wished to converse with him, but Jie Yu hastened away, so that he could not talk with him.

18.6 Chang Ju and Jie Ni were ploughing side by side, when Confucius passed by them and sent Zi Lu to inquire about the ford. Chang Ju said, "Who is that man there holding the reins in the carriage?" Zi Lu told him, "It is Kong Qiu."⁷ "Is it Kong Qiu of Lu?" Chang asked. "Yes." "Then he knows the ford." Zi Lu then inquired of Jie Ni, who said to him, "Who are you, sir?" He answered, "I am Zhong You."⁸ "Are you not the disciple of Kong Qiu of Lu?" asked the other. "I am," he replied, and then Jie Ni said to him, "Disorder, like a swelling flood, spreads over the whole empire—who is he that will change its state for you? Rather than follow a man of culture who merely stays away from [evil] people, had you not better follow those who have withdrawn from the world altogether?" With this he fell to covering up the seed, and proceeded with his work, without stopping. Zi Lu went and reported their remarks. The Master looked perturbed, and said: "It is impossible to live in company with birds and beasts. If I were not to associate with the human race, with whom would I associate? If right principles prevailed through the realm, there would be no use for me to change its state."

6 Translation from James Legge, with alterations.

7 Confucius' personal name.

8 Zi Lu's personal name.

18.7 Zi Lu, following the Master, happened to fall behind, when he met an old man, carrying across his shoulder on a staff a basket for weeds. Zi Lu said to him, "Have you seen my master, sir?" The old man replied, "Your four limbs are unaccustomed to toil; you cannot distinguish the five kinds of grain—who is your master?" With this, he planted his staff in the ground, and proceeded to weed. Zi Lu joined his hands across his breast, and stood before him. The old man kept Zi Lu to pass the night in his house, killed a fowl, prepared millet, and feasted him. He also introduced to him his two sons. Next day, Zi Lu went on his way, and reported his adventure. The Master said, "He is a recluse," and sent Zi Lu back to see him again, but when he got to the place, the old man was gone. Zi Lu said, "Not to take office is not righteous. If the relations between old and young may not be neglected, how is it that he sets aside the duties that should be observed between sovereign and minister? Wishing to maintain his personal purity, he allows that great relation to come to confusion. A superior man takes office, and performs the righteous duties belonging to it. As to the failure of right principles to make progress, he is aware of that."

The three stories are filled with the self-irony that distinguishes the figure of Confucius in canonical and apocryphal literature alike. Confucius' government career is a failure (his unsuccessful attempts to implement reforms at the courts of various petty rulers are the subject of 18.3–4) and yet he will not give up trying. The approach of the madman Jie Yu begins three pericopes that present reclusion as safer, wiser, and potentially more ethical. Confucius rejects the temptation to leave public life, while apparently fully aware of the futility of his choice and the biting satire of those who have chosen reclusion. How an upright man should respond to political chaos and social decay—whether he should seek to fix the system, or withdraw and cultivate himself—is a question of appropriately weighty import for comparison with Genesis 22. Of the three pericopes, 18.6 stands out by virtue of its length and vivid dialogue.

MIDRASH ON THE AQEDAH

By the count of Theodor and Albeck, parashot 55 and 56 contain 19 distinct units of midrash, which Neusner further breaks down to give a total of 49 units.⁹ I propose the following typology of midrashim in these two parashot.

- A. **Exegesis:** The midrash quotes or otherwise interacts *directly* with the text of Genesis 22. It employs the full range of midrashic hermeneutic strategies, but cannot employ *narrative expansion*.
- B. **Narrative Expansion:** The midrash adds narrative elements—plot twists, dialogues, details of scenery—not present in the Biblical version of the Aqedah to answer exegetical questions.
- C. **Excursus:** The midrash does not interact explicitly with the text of Genesis 22, although it addresses larger questions raised by the text. Sometimes it can appear entirely tangential.

By this typology, the midrashim of parashot 55 and 56 can be divided as follows:¹⁰

Table 1 A Typology of Midrashim in Parashot 55 and 56

Midrash number	Class	Description (trans. Neusner)
55.I.1	A	Per Neusner: a test is not a capricious thing.
55.II.1	C	Why would God bother testing the righteous?
55.III.1	A	Same as above.
55.III.2	A	Why does God test when this seems against his way of operating?
55.IV.1	B	Abraham has a party and doesn't remember God.
55.IV.2	B	Ishmael and Isaac arguing
55.V.1	C	Presenting one's firstborn as an offering.
55.VI.1	A	Further discussion of testing.

⁹ I am greatly indebted to Neusner's careful breakdown of each *parashah*, which allows me to create a typology.

¹⁰ Numbering of midrashim follows Neusner.

Midrash number (Neusner)	Class	Description (trans. Neusner)
55.VI.2	B	"Here I am, ready for the priesthood, here I am, ready for the monarchy."
55.VII.1	B	Which son?
55.VII.2	A	Meaning and significance of "Moriah."
55.VII.3	B	"Is it possible to make an offering without a priest?"
55.VII.4	A	God reveals plans to people once they have acted first as he commands.
55.VIII.1	A	"Love disrupts the natural order of things."
55.VIII.2	A	"Let saddling counteract saddling."
55.VIII.3	A	What is the significance of the two servants?
55.VIII.4	A	Why is wood in the plural? Division of Red Sea.
55.VIII.5	A	Why are "arose" and "went" stated separately? (per Neusner)
56.I.1	A	Significance of "the third day."
56.I.2	B	Abraham sees cloud on the top of the mountain.
56.II.1	B	Dialogue with Isaac and servants; reason servants should stay behind.
56.II.2	C	"Will [the Temple Mount] ever be distant from its owner?"
56.II.3	B	"The end of 'thus.'"
56.II.4	A	"We will come back" (per Neusner).
56.II.5	A	The "merit owing to the act of prostration."
56.III.1	A	Carrying a cross on one's shoulder
56.III.2	A	"Acts of eating are on account of the merit gained through that 'eater.'"
56.III.3	A	"They both went on together."
56.IV.1	B	Samael comes to Abraham and Isaac.
56.V.1	B	Abraham hides Isaac lest he be damaged as an offering.
56.V.2	B	God binds sinister spiritual powers at the same time as Abraham binds Isaac.
56.V.3	B	Angels weep as Abraham stretches out his hand.
56.V.4	B	Angels plead on Abraham's behalf as he prepares to slaughter Isaac.

Midrash number	Class	Description (trans. Neusner) (Neusner)
56.VI.1	A	Legal discussion of the implements of slaughter.
56.VII.1	A	Why does the angel call Abraham's name twice in a row?
56.VII.2	B	The knife dissolved by tears; A. offers to strangle Isaac.
56.VIII.1	B	"Did I ever tell you to kill him? No, I told you 'bring him up.'"
56.IX.1	A	Discussion of the ram.
56.IX.2	B	"Regard the blood of this lamb as though it were the blood of Isaac."
56.X.1	B	A. asks God to keep his merit in mind when dealing with his descendants.
56.X.2	A	God decides on the name "Yireh-Shalem."
56.X.3	C	The building of the Temple.
56.X.4	A	"On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided."
56.XI.1	B	"By Myself I have sworn."
56.XI.2	B	Same as above.
56.XI.3	A	The last and most important of Abraham's trials.
56.XI.4	A	Repetition of "bless" and "multiply."
56.XI.5	A	"Gates of their enemies ... refers to Palmyra."
56.XI.6	B	Isaac sent to Shem to study Torah.

The total for each category is:

- A. 26 paragraphs
- B. 19 paragraphs
- C. 4 paragraphs

Midrashim of the A and B types can fall into one of two categories that describe in more detail how they interact with the Biblical text: exposition, or gloss. An expository midrash addresses a theological question raised by the text, while a gloss midrash explains a textual feature.

55.8 is a clear example of A-type midrash performing both expository and glossing functions. Following the numbering of Neusner, 56.8.1 is an expository gloss, 8.2 is pure exposition, and 8.3, 8.4, and 8.5 are expository glosses. 8.1 addresses וַיִּתְּבֵשׂ אֶת-הַמָּרֹךְ “he saddled up his donkey” in v. 3. To suggest that Abraham performs a menial function himself is strange to the rabbis. A series of analogous passages permit resolution of the narrative anomaly and allow the rabbis to draw a larger moral: love and hatred “disrupt the natural order of things.” Abraham, out of love for God and Isaac, saddles the donkey by himself, just as Joseph “made ready his [own] chariot.” By contrast, Balaam saddles his own donkey and Pharaoh prepares his own chariot out of violent hate.

8.2 does not explain any feature of the Genesis text, but expounds upon its theological significance, responding to 8.1: Abraham’s behavior accrues merit that God will hold to Israel’s credit, neutralizing the malevolent intentions of Balaam and Pharaoh. By the formal definitions of type given above, 8.2 must be A, since it quotes Genesis 22, but in character it is largely a C, excursive, not exegetical. 8.3 responds to the Biblical text’s precision—Abraham took “two” servants with him—and explains “two” as a mark of “appropriateness,” on the analogy of a passage from 1 Samuel. Similarly short is 8.5. A gloss on וַיִּקַּם וַיֵּלֶךְ “he got up and went,” this midrash imputes theological significance to a standard Biblical Hebrew construction: the two actions give Abraham two chances to accrue merit. 8.4 glosses the anomalous plural עֵצִי “wood,” explaining that Abraham must have carried out “two acts of wood cutting.” The merit he accrues from this repeated action of cutting gives Israel the gift of God’s cutting the Red Sea before it.

Midrashim of the B class are largely glosses: narrative expansion is necessary to explain a strange feature of the Biblical text. For the midrashist, these textual anomalies are the result of action happening just off camera in the Biblical account that must be filled in for full comprehension. Prime examples of B-class gloss midrashim are 55.7.1 (does God mean Ishmael or Isaac—glossing the apparently redundant series of modifiers אֶת-יִצְחָק אֶת-יִשְׁמָעֵאל אֶת-יִצְחָק); 56.4.1 (Šamael comes to Abraham and Isaac—a gloss on Isaac’s lone spoken line in the Biblical narrative), and 56.7.2. 56.7.2 is worth a closer analysis:

- A. “He said, ‘Do not lay your hand on the lad or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me’ (Gen. 22:12)
- B. Where was the knife [“Do not lay your hand”]?

- C. Tears from the ministering angels had fallen on it and dissolved it.
- D. Then he said, “So I shall strangle him.”
- E. He said to him, “Do not lay your hand on the lad.”
- F. Then he said, “Then let us at least draw a drop of blood [symbolic of the offering].”
- G. He said to him, “...or do anything to him.” (Trans. Neusner)

As Neusner’s own gloss helps to illustrate, the midrashist responds to two strange details in 22:12 (אל-תשלה ידך אל-הנער ואל-תעש לו מאומה): the disappearance of the *ma’akeleth*, signaled by a command to Abraham to withdraw his “hand,” and the prominent adverbial *məumāh* “in any way.” The first anomaly is explained by a plot twist, the intervention of angelic grief to destroy the knife, while the second is resolved in a clever dialogue. Abraham is forbidden to kill Isaac but tells the divine messenger he will “strangle him.” The midrashist repeats the quotation he has just explained, “do not lay a hand on him.” Abraham wants to “at least draw a drop of blood,” to which the messenger finishes off the Biblical verse “or do anything to him.”

The sequence 56.5.2–4 is an example of expository B-class midrashim. As Abraham prepares to make the sacrifice on Mount Moriah, in the heavens God is “binding the Princes of the nations” (.2), the angels weep (.3), and parry scriptural passages with God begging him to spare Isaac (.4). The sequence highlights the pathos of Abraham and Isaac and demonstrates that divine forces did not remain unmoved. Its interaction with the language of Genesis is useful for distinguishing between word play and glossing. 56.5.2 and .4 are inspired by details of Biblical language. Abraham’s “binding” of Isaac inspires the description of God’s doing the same thing to sinister powers. The long angelic dialogue in .4 is justified by an arguably extraneous prepositional clause in Genesis 22:9: על-המזבח ממעל לעצים “on the altar on top of the wood.” If Isaac is already “on the altar,” why does the text need to specify “on top of the wood”? “On top of/above the wood” is a key to read in the angelic world *above* the Aqedah. 56.5.3 is a meta-gloss: the midrashist links the angels’ weeping to an opaque verse in Isaiah (33:7): “their mighty men cry outside תצוה תצוה צעקו תצוה,” before turning a gloss on this verse (תצוה תצוה “outside [means] an unnatural deed,” playing on visual similarity of תצוה in both words) into a theological reflection on the Aqedah. Killing one’s son is unnatural.

56.8.1 sits on the boundary between glossing and exposition in B-class midrashim. The divine

relationship with Abraham rests on promises, and with these in mind Abraham accuses God of playing a mean joke on him. God's constancy is vindicated on a brilliant verbal technicality in the ensuing dialogue:

C. "True, I commanded you, 'Take now your son' (Gen. 33:2). 'I will not alter what has gone out of my lips' (Ps. 89:35). Did I ever tell you to kill him? No, I told you, 'Bring him up.'

D. "Well and good! You did indeed bring him up. Now take him down." (Trans. Neusner)

In the semantic world of the Hebrew Bible "to offer up [as a sacrifice]" is a recognized sense of עלה in Hiphil.¹¹ It should not require clarification in Genesis 22, especially when paired with לעלה "as a burnt offering." The issue for the midrashist is theological *not grammatical*. A gloss is not needed for readers of scripture to understand the significance of והעלהו. *Theological exegesis* is urgently needed to explain God's apparent fickleness.

A last kind of B-type midrash is that represented in 56.2.3 and 56.2.4. These are short glimpses into the mind and motives of a character that are usually glosses. 56.2.3 glosses the adverbial phrase –עד כה in Genesis 22:5. At Genesis 15: 5, God, pointing to the stars, had promised Abraham זרעך כה "thus will be your seed." The midrash reads:

"I and the lad will go thus far." Said R. Joshua b. Levi, "[He said] 'We shall go and see what will be the end of 'thus.'" (Trans. Neusner)

ואנ והנער נלכה עד-כה—אמר ר' יהושע בן לוי : נלך ונראה מה יהיה בסופו של 'כה'

R. Joshua's glimpse into the mind of Abraham preparing to ascend the mountain is proximately premised on the first-person plural prefix of "go,"¹² which is picked up by "we shall," making clear that

¹¹ See Brown (1939) s.v. Hiph. 8.

¹² Not visible in English, a language which does not distinguish number in the first person in primary verb forms.

what follows is attributed to Abraham and is not a devotional reflection by the midrashist.¹³ Ultimately, the parallel with Genesis 15:5 allows R. Joshua to picture Abraham, about to perform the Aqedah, pondering whether God will keep his promise. “Thus far” is not a mere expression of direction, but a Freudian slip that reveals Abraham’s thoughts.

55.2.1 displays the logic of a C-type midrash. It does not quote from Genesis 22 at all, but clearly responds to a question posed by the Biblical text: why does God test the righteous? The midrash acquires its significance from context: presumably it could have been copied into the midrash on any other instance in the Bible where the same question appears, such as Psalm 11, which it quotes. Its reliance on exempla (the potter, the flax worker, the owner of the heifers) highlights this generalizable quality.

THE TEMPTATION TO RECLUSION: *SHU* ON *ANALECTS* 18.6

The LYS is arguably the most textually contested work of classical scholarship from the Chinese Middle Ages. It was lost in China shortly after 1000 CE and brought back to China from Japan in full in the eighteenth century. Since then, debate about additions to the text and manipulation of the work’s formatting and overall design during its centuries in Japan has been incessant. The early 1900s discovery of Pelliot chinois 3573, a fragmentary manuscript from the ninth century CE, allowed scholars to speculate further about Huang Kan’s conception of LYS and the possibility of Japanese alteration.¹⁴ The assumptions of existing scholarship are likely to require revision since the formal publication of Keio University 132X.205.1 in 2021.¹⁵ The editors date this substantial fragment to within a century and more likely fifty years of Huang’s life.

¹³ Cf. the bidding prayer in the King’s College Lessons and Carols Service: “Beloved in Christ, be it this Christmas Eve our care and delight to prepare ourselves to hear again the message of the angels; in heart and mind *to go even unto Bethlehem and see this thing which is come to pass*, and the Babe lying in a manger.” (Italics mine.)

¹⁴ Fuehrer (2013) argues that the Pelliot manuscript is a classroom edition of LYS with little textual value; in other words, it can tell us about late medieval Chinese teaching about the *Analects*, but not about the original intent of Huang Kan or the formatting and lemma structure of his work.

¹⁵ Keio (2021). Fully available online here:

The number of scriptural lemmata preserved in the received edition of LYS is substantially greater than in the work’s earliest form, as a survey of the Keio manuscript shows. The alterations in the Japan recension probably originate from changing practice in the *mise en page* of commentaries, and not from an attempt to alter the LYS text. A comparison of the Keio manuscript to the editions of the eighteenth century demonstrates two vectors of constancy: (1) a basic stability of the LYS text, and (2) the entire text of the *Analects* copied once in every edition, even if not lemmatized exhaustively and repeatedly in the commentary.

To what degree LYS was intended as a “subcommentary” is debated, but the Keio manuscript demonstrates that it was always copied alongside an earlier collection of philologically oriented primary glosses on the *Analects*, compiled from a variety of sources by He Yan 何晏 (196–249). LYS in the Japanese recension presents the *Analects* text suspended in a preservative fluid of commentary like a biological specimen.

I propose the following typology of commentary in LYS ad *Analects* 18.6:

Table Two: A Typology of Commentarial Techniques in LYS ad *Analects* 18.6

- I. Gloss: Explaining the Words of the *Analects* Text
 - A. **Dictionary gloss:** The commentary provides a clearly structured definition for a word, usually in the format “X means Y.” (Color: light green)
 1. **Explanatory gloss:** the commentary explains *background information* with the same simple style as a full A-type gloss. (Color: dark green)
 - B. **Paraphrase/Translation gloss:** The commentary paraphrases a section of the *Analects* text or translates it into less obscure Chinese. (Color: light blue)
- II. Exposition: Expanding and Applying the Text
 - A. **Expository comment:** The commentary makes judgments about the characters in the text, their behavior, and its ramifications. It may reference additional contextual material or other sources. (Color: red)

<https://dcollections.lib.keio.ac.jp/sites/all/libraries/uv/uv.php?archive=RGS&id=132X-205-1-1&page=2#c=o&m=o&s=o&cv=6&r=o&z=947.1915%2C517.6425%2C6811.634%2C4917.7815>

- B. **Ventriloquism**: The commentator puts words into the mouth or mind of a character, outlining what he might be expected to say or think. (Color: dark orange)
1. **Ventriloquy as exposition**: The commentarial ventriloquy is extended; the ventriloquized words of the character are a foil for exposition. Grammatically, comments in this class can be distinguished by the vague “I” 我 我 that can either be a ventriloquized subject or an editorial voice. (Color: purple)

Color-coded according to this typology, the LYS on *Analects* 18.6 runs as follows:¹⁶

[*ANALECTS* TEXT, WITH HE YAN’S GLOSSING]

Chang Ju and Jie Ni were ploughing side by side (*ou*), when Confucius passed by them, and sent Zi Lu to inquire about the ford. Note: Zheng Xuan says “**Chang Ju and Jie Ni were hermits. A ploughshare is five *cun* wide—when two ploughshares are put together they form an *ou*. A ‘ford,’ is the place one crosses a body of water.**”

Chang Ju said, “Who is that man there holding the reins in the carriage?” Zi Lu told him, “It is Kong Qiu.” “Is it Kong Qiu of Lu?” Chang asked. “Yes,” “Then he knows the ford.” Note: Ma Rong says “[Chang Ju] is saying ‘Confucius has traveled repeatedly around the whole realm. He knows where the ford is.’”

Zi Lu then inquired of Jie Ni, who said to him, “Who are you, sir?” He answered, “I am Zhong You.” “Are you not the disciple of Kong Qiu of Lu?” asked the other. “I am,” he replied, and then Jie Ni said to him, “Disorder, like a swelling flood (*taotao*), spreads over the whole empire—who is he that will change its state for you? Kong Anguo says “*taotao*’ describes something that is all-encompassing. Jie Ni is saying ‘At this present time order and chaos in the realm are both mere vanity. You give up one and merely swing over to the other.’ Thus he says ‘who is he that will change its state for you?’”

Rather than follow a man of culture who merely stays away from [evil] people, had you not better follow those who have withdrawn from the world altogether?” Note: **The man of culture has the choice to stay away from evil people or to withdraw from the world altogether.** Chang Ju and Jie Ni are saying that Confucius has chosen the former, while they have chosen the latter.

¹⁶ *Analects* text, translated by James Legge with liberal adaptations, in bold.

With this he fell to covering up the seed (*you*), and proceeded with his work, without stopping (*chuo*).

Note: Zheng Xuan says "*you*' means 'to cover over seeds.' '*Chuo*' means to 'stop.' Jie Ni carries on with his work covering the seeds, and doesn't stop to tell [Zi Lu] where the ford is.

Zi Lu went and reported their remarks. The Master looked perturbed Note: He looked perturbed because he had not achieved his desire [to have a government career] and so he expresses disapproval at himself.

And said: "It is impossible to live in company with birds and beasts. Note: Kong Anguo says "To live in reclusion in the mountains and forests is 'to live in company with birds and beasts.'"

If I were not to associate with the human race, with whom would I associate? Note: Kong Anguo says "It is only fitting that I should live in company with the people of this realm. How could I possibly abandon people and live with birds and beasts?"

If right principles prevailed through the realm, there would be no use for me to change its state." Note: Kong Anguo says: "He is saying 'Wherever in the world there are [societies] that have the Way, I do not interfere with them.' This is because he is great and people at large are insignificant.

[START OF HUANG KAN'S "ORIGINAL" WORK]

Subcommentary, on "Chang Ju" until "change its state":

"Chang Ju and Jie Ni were ploughing side by side"—these two men were both recluses. Since the two of them had gone into reclusion in the mountains and wilds they were out in the field ploughing together.

"Confucius passed by them": On his journey Confucius passed by the place Ju and Ni were ploughing.

"He sent Zi Lu to inquire about the ford:" "a ford" is the place where one crosses over water. At the time Zi Lu was journeying with Confucius, and so Confucius sent him to pay his respects to Ju and Ni, seeking to find the place one crosses over the water. Fan Sheng says: "He wished to make his presence known, and thus he sent Zi Lu to ask."

As for "Chang Ju" and what follows: Zi Lu went over to ask about the ford. He first asked Chang Ju, but Chang Ju did not respond with the location of the ford and instead asked him a question in return. "Holding the *yu*," "holding the reins." At the beginning Zi Lu was in the chariot serving as the charioteer. The "charioteer" is the one who holds the reins. At the time this dialogue takes place he has gotten down from the chariot and gone over to ask about the ford, and in doing so has left the reins behind in

Confucius' hands. At the time Confucius was holding the reins. Thus Chang Ju asks Zi Lu "That man over there in the chariot holding the reins—who is he?"

Zi Lu told him, "It is Kong Qiu." Zi Lu responds "The man in the chariot holding the reins is Kong Qiu." Zi Lu, when asking Chang Ju, refers to the name of his teacher as Sagely Teacher. He wishes to make everyone in the realm aware of it.

"Is it Kong Qiu of Lu?" Chang Ju wishes to make very sure who it is. "Is this the Kong Qiu of the state of Lu?" [Zi Lu] responds "Yes." He responds "Yes, it is Kong Qiu from Lu." "Then he knows the ford." Ju has heard of Kong Qiu of Lu, and so he does not tell where the ford is. He is saying "If this man is in fact Kong Qiu of Lu, then he has traveled repeatedly around the whole realm. There is nowhere he hasn't gone. He is certain to know where the ford is; there is no need for me now to tell him all over again." Zi Lu then inquired of Jie Ni Chang Ju didn't give an answer, and so Zi Lu now asks Jie Ni. Who said to him, "Who are you, sir?" He asks Zi Lu back "Who are you?" He answered, "I am Zhong You." Zi Lu responds by saying "My family name is Zhong, and my name is You." "Are you not" and following Jie Ni asks another question: "Your name is You—aren't you one of Kong Qiu's disciples?" "I am," he replied. Zi Lu responds by saying "Yes, I am." Then Jie Ni said to him, "Disorder, like a swelling flood (*taotao*) and following "*Taotao*" is the same as "traveling all around."

Spreads over the whole empire means that everything is in trouble. Jie Ni continues talking: "What is Confucius doing traveling all around the realm like this? Order and chaos are the same in the realm of today.¹⁷ You give up one and merely swing over to the other. Who can change the state of things?" He is saying "Everything is in trouble."

Rather than and following With these words Jie Ni makes a subtle attempt to recruit Zi Lu into following him in the life of a recluse.

Thus he calls Confucius a man of culture who merely stays away from evil people, and himself a man who has withdrawn from the world altogether. He is saying "As of now you follow a man of culture who merely stays away from evil people. Isn't it better to follow a man who withdraws from the world altogether?"

¹⁷ I.e., "The realm is in utter chaos."

With this he fell to covering up the seed (*you*), and proceeded with his work, without stopping (*chuo*) and following. *You* means "to cover over seed." *Chuo* means "to cease." The two men [Chang Ju and Jie Ni] were ploughing the fields all the time they talked with Zi Lu, not ceasing from covering over the seeds. "To cover over seeds" is a method for planting grain: one first scatters the seed then covers it over. Zi Lu went and reported their remarks. Zi Lu asked the two men [about the ford] and neither of them gave him an answer. Instead, they asked their own questions and continued covering over the seed without ceasing. Thus Zi Lu went with their responses back to the carriage, and recounted them to Confucius.

The Master looked perturbed (*wuran*) *Wuran* means something like "shock." Confucius heard what Zi Lu reported, and was shocked that Chang and Jie would take their own dissatisfaction at not achieving their desire [to have a government career] and turn it into making fun of himself.

And said: "It is impossible to live in company with birds and following. Confucius expresses his shock with *wuran*, and then continues by saying "If I were to live in seclusion in the mountains and forests then I would be [of necessity] in the company of birds and beasts. If I were to enter into the social life of the world, then I would [of necessity] be a fellow traveler with the people of the world. As of now, I ought to enter into the social life of the world. There is no way I could live a live amidst the mountains and forests."

Thus he says "It is impossible to live in company with birds and beasts." "If I were not to associate" and following. This is saying "Given that I have entered into the social life of the world, I ought to be a fellow traveler with the people of the world."

Thus it says If I were not to associate with the human race, with whom would I associate? He is saying that he must associate with other human beings.

[CONCLUDING DISCUSSION OF LARGER PRINCIPLES]

"If right principles prevailed through the realm" and following. He is saying "My Way is not practiced throughout the realm, but wherever there is a Way being practiced in the realm, my Way never comes seeking to change it. This is because my Way is great, and other Ways are insignificant." Jiang Xi says: "The *Changes* tell us that 'Everything in the world returns to proper order, only by different paths. There

is in the end one proper result, though there might be a hundred anxious schemes to get there.”¹⁸ The Way of the superior man can include entering the world, or staying at home, silence or speech. In the end it is set to return to proper order and proper result by training well one’s students if one decides to stay away from government, and by having a deep concern for the principles of right teaching if one takes part in the affairs of the outside world—these two actions and nothing more. All teaching either follows the inspiration of the teacher to guide the world, or else pays back [the world] to make clear the teacher’s virtue, and to rescue the pressing crises of the times. Some [teachings] make evident the virtue of men like Ju and Ni. They give Zi Lu a difficult time because they know that he is not really asking about the location of the ford. At the time, mores and government were more corrupt by the day, and it was for good reason that neither could bring about change in the other.¹⁹ Thus Ju and Ni did not deign to engage in pleasantries. They did not stop their work in the fields. They did not answer a question asked in haste. This was all so that they could perfect their moral virtue in a chaotic age, while yet harboring a concern for Sagely teaching. **The Way is destroyed by this kind of behavior; the effects of this behavior are exactly the opposite of what it sets out to do.** This is why the Master **looks perturbed and says: It is impossible to live in company with birds and beasts** This makes clear that the principle behind what is said touches on the Central Human Relationships, things that I have not understood fully myself. If one wishes to keep oneself unstained and hide one’s tracks living amidst the birds and beasts, then one cannot be with the human race, and so one’s ability to practice the Central Human Relationships is lost. This is why in my words I cannot buy into what Ju and Jie practice. **There would be no use for me to change its state** Everything has a Way by which it operates. This is why great rulers like Tang and Wu praised Bo Yi,²⁰ praised Guan Zhong,²¹ and didn’t make fun of Shao Hu. Someone else has his own Way. I have my Way. I do not cling tightly to my Way and demand that he follow it. Neither do I let him change me. Could one be stubborn on this point?”²² Mr. Shen the Recluse says: **“When the**

¹⁸ Translation, James Legge, modified. *Xici*. II.5.

¹⁹ Presumably that neither Zi Lu/Confucius nor Chang Ju/Jie Ni could persuade the other side to change its position.

²⁰ A recluse famous for dying of starvation rather than serve a usurper.

²¹ A famous pragmatist statesman.

²² The quotation from Jiang Xi presumably ends here. On this I agree with the edition of Gao (2013).

age is chaotic, the one of moral character ought to go into reclusion and let his life take its natural course. The Sage ought to emerge to benefit the world."²³ Thus I make clear that my Way is designed to save the Central Human Relationships, while Ju and Ni's hiding away without a trace is because the age was in chaos. I endure toil, hurrying around, because the Way has been lost in the world. They and I have the same worry over the state of the world, but they are men of good-but-not-excellent character. They do not have a Way, and so they ought to go into reclusion, because they have not developed a teaching [worthy of promulgation]. I by contrast am the paragon of moral character, and ought to bring order to the Central Human Relationships. I have no other choice but to enter the world. I am not doing something wrong. They are not making a mistake. Neither they nor I have grounds to criticize the other party. Moreover, Ju and Ni exhorted Zi Lu; they did not exhort the Master himself. They told Zi Lu that he ought to follow them. They did not say that Confucius [ought to follow them]. My Way requires that I cannot associate with the birds and beasts, and rather that I ought to associate with human beings—this was never aimed at Ju and Ni. They live in the forests and wilds. Of course they have no choice but to associate with the birds and beasts. They take associating with the birds and beasts and withdrawing out of the world altogether to be behavior of high moral character. My first instinct is not to judge their behavior base. However, I am well established in my sense of mission, since I perceive what is great and abide in what is upright. It is fitting for me to make my presence felt in the world. **If right principles prevailed through the realm, there would be no use for me to change its state.** He is saying that each person in the realm de facto has his own Way. I don't seek to take my Way and change his for mine. Neither do I allow his Way to change my Way. Each person abides in what is suitable for himself. As Jiang Xi has said: "great rulers like Tang and Wu praised Bo Yi,²⁴ employed Guan Zhong,²⁵ and didn't make fun of Shao Hu."

²³ The quotation from Mr. Shen the Recluse could end here. Gao (2013) takes the whole remaining section of commentary to be from Mr. Shen.

²⁴ A recluse famous for dying of starvation rather than serve a usurper.

²⁵ A famous pragmatist statesman.

The commentary in the Japanese recension comes in three layers. In the first layer (marked 1), the entire text of *Analects* 18.6 appears surrounded by a matrix of glosses that paraphrase the scriptural text or make simple observations about it. This is the commentary of He Yan. In the second layer (2), Huang Kan writes his own glosses, expanded and less pedestrian. In (3), a final four glosses are a foil for Huang to reflect broadly on the principles at stake in the passage. The change from glossing to exposition is a change made clear by the sudden sparsity of lemmata and direct glosses in (3), and a demanding prose style different from that in (1) and (2).

The LYS relies heavily on gloss. While dictionary glosses (type I.A) are the least common commentarial technique deployed in the passage above, the paraphrase/translation gloss (type I.B) is a staple technique. A comparison with the authoritative modern Chinese translation and notes of Yang Bojun²⁶ reveals that I.B type glosses remain at the heart of modern engagement with the *Analects* text. The extreme redundancy of these glosses in LYS is suggestive of oral influence: it makes better sense to suppose they were originally a teacher's lecture on the passage than a carefully structured written work. The Chinese of the *Analects* would have been tantalizing for the medieval Chinese reader: it held out a promise of intelligibility while still requiring commentarial intervention. The overall effect of I.B glosses was probably similar to a modern English translation of the *Canterbury Tales* read next to the original text:

- 12 **Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,**
 Then folk long to go on pilgrimages,
- 13 **And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes,**
 And professional pilgrims to seek foreign shores,
- 14 **To ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londes;**
 To distant shrines, known in various lands;
- 15 **And specially from every shires ende**
 And specially from every shire's end
- 16 **Of Engelond to Caunterbury they wende,**
 Of England to Canterbury they travel,

²⁶ Yang (1980), 193–195.

- 17 **The hooly blisful martir for to seke,**
 To seek the holy blessed martyr,
 18 **That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke.**
 Who helped them when they were sick.²⁷

The I.B glosses that appear to repeat precisely what the *Analects* has just said add grammatical particles and alter vocabulary to ensure a reader fully understands the original, just as "And professional pilgrims to seek foreign shores, / To distant shrines, known in various lands" brings *And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes, / To ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londes* fully within a modern reader's grasp. For a couplet like *And specially from every shires ende* "And specially from every shire's end," / *Of Engeland to Caunterbury they wende* "Of England to Canterbury they travel" the translation is unnecessary for an educated reader and instead jarringly inelegant, replacing *wende* with "travel."²⁸

Expository commentarial techniques (type II) form the meat of LYS. Type II.A, plain exposition, appears twice in the first layer of commentary, at no time in the second layer, and seven times in the third layer, as Huang Kan unfurls his understanding of the passage. Type II. A glosses have to be read alongside their cousins, type II.B, ventriloquist glosses, in which the commentator puts words into the mouth or mind of one of the characters. These are the most innovative and significant way in which LYS expresses its commentarial opinions, and merit comparison with the "narrative expansion" technique we discerned in BR. The following comments on the same line from the *Analects*, from layers 1 and 2 of the LYS respectively, give a sense of basic type II.B glosses in action:

- (1) **The Master looked perturbed** Note: He looked perturbed because he had not achieved his desire [to have a government career] and so he expresses disapproval at himself.
- (2) **The Master looked perturbed (*wuran*)** *Wuran* means something like "shock." Confucius heard what Zi Lu reported, and was shocked that Chang and Jie would take their own dissatisfaction

²⁷ "Harvard's Geoffrey Chaucer Website: General Prologue." <https://chaucer.fas.harvard.edu/pages/general-prologue-o>. Accessed December 9, 2023.

²⁸ The charm of "wend" in modern vocabulary stems from nostalgic associations. In this regard, the translation is entirely justified to replace it with a pedestrian word like "travel," unless "*wende*" had been itself an antiquarian gesture in Chaucer's time.

at not achieving their desire [to have a government career] and turn it into making fun of himself.

(2) shows a clear progression. Beginning with a straightforward I.A-type gloss on the word “perturbed” 憊然, it continues with a type I.B gloss—“Confucius heard what Zi Lu reported.” Picking up on the original comment in (1), it then interprets Confucius’ thoughts. The difference between the ventriloquism of (1) and (2) reveals a general trend in the LYS: an eagerness to scrub the image of Confucius.²⁹ For He Yan in (1) Confucius is “perturbed” at his own failure. Huang Kan in (2) defends Confucius, attributing “perturbation” not to Confucius’ political failure, but to the moral failure of the two recluses who cannot control their bitterness. The Confucius of (2) is virtuously surprised that Ju and Ni vent their discontent on him.

Ju and Ni themselves are frequently ventriloquized in type II.B general glosses on the passage. Some of these are pithy restatements of the original dialogue that sit on the line between ventriloquism and paraphrase: “If this man is in fact Kong Qiu of Lu, then he has traveled repeatedly around the whole realm. There is nowhere he hasn’t gone. He is certain to know where the ford is; there is no need for me now to tell him all over again.” The lengthy excursus in layer 3 of the commentary continues Huang Kan’s project of framing Ju and Ni as morally dubious:

Thus Ju and Ni did not deign to engage in pleasantries. They did not stop their work in the fields. They did not answer a question asked in haste. This was all so that they could perfect their moral virtue in a chaotic age, while yet harboring a concern for Sagely teaching. The Way is destroyed by this kind of behavior; the effects of this behavior are exactly the opposite of what it sets out to do.

“Thus” through “Sagely teaching” plays out the mindset of the two recluses that Huang sees behind the *Analects* text: they know enough to care about the world and the preservation of “Sagely teaching,” and

²⁹ See Makeham (2003), 139–147.

yet they hide themselves away. The type-II.A gloss “the Way...to do” then offers his judgment of this behavior.

Glosses of the type II.B.1 present the ventriloquized voice of Confucius in the commentary. Grammatically type II.B.1 glosses are ambiguous: classical Chinese can allow the first-person singular personal pronoun to assume a general meaning roughly equivalent to the third-person general “one” in English.³⁰ The line “all teaching either follows the inspiration of the teacher to guide the world” in layer 3 of the commentary features this general use (凡教或即我以導物). In the second half of layer three, the first-person referent seems to come into focus as Confucius. Yet, some of the third-person vagueness remains, giving the effect that Confucius is speaking, but through the filter of the commentator, and not with the full directness of quoted speech.

Thus I make clear that my Way is designed to save the Central Human Relationships, while Ju and Ni’s hiding away without a trace is because the age was in chaos. I endure toil, hurrying around, because the Way has been lost in the world. They and I have the same worry over the state of the world, but they are men of good-but-not-excellent character. They do not have a Way, and so they ought to go into reclusion, because they have not developed a teaching [worthy of promulgation]. I by contrast am the paragon of moral character, and ought to bring order to the Central Human Relationships. I have no other choice but to enter the world. I am not doing something wrong. They are not making a mistake. Neither they nor I have grounds to criticize the other party.

The nature of this technique is well illustrated by the line “I by contrast am the paragon of moral character” 我則至德. The canonical Confucius tells us that he has a vital mission to spread throughout China insight Heaven has granted him into the way a harmonious society should function. He does not say—the Chinese is blunt to the point of crassness—that he is a “paragon of moral character.” Only a

³⁰ “I” becomes a general referent. The same trend in English is visible in an expression like “what doesn’t hurt me makes me stronger,” which could be just as well written “what doesn’t hurt a person makes him stronger.”

crude understanding of the canonical Confucius' nuanced image would think that this comment is "in character." It is obviously a commentator's *opinion* about Confucius.

COMPARISON

The descriptive sections above risk creating an artificial divide between BR and the LYS: there are a finite number of ways one can structure scriptural commentary. Superficial "difference" may in fact mask the exact same way of approaching a sacred text. Two points, however, merit comparative discussion.

Firstly, we notice that narrative expansion does not appear to be a fully-fledged technique for Huang Kan. Huang regularly ventriloquizes characters, but he does not add to the *plot*. The explanation for this is simple, I think: the *Analects* does not have a plot to alter. Confucius' presence is scattered throughout a collection of skeletal pericopes and sayings. By contrast, the Abraham story has a strong plot; this allows for narrative expansion by providing a narrative to be expanded, but it also creates *need* for narrative expansion. It is the *story* of YHWH's interactions with Abraham that makes the Aqedah shocking: why does God appear to go against his covenant? What parts of the story are not told in the Biblical account that might lead God suddenly to require Abraham to sacrifice his son? How does God justify this behavior to Abraham? Ju and Ni challenge Confucius and his core commitment to political and social engagement, but they do not constitute a plot twist in the *Analects*. The reader's understanding of the tension in *Analects* 18.6 must come from familiarity with the diffuse claims of a whole tradition, not with a single narrative.

Most striking, however, is the question of the physical relation of scriptural text to commentary. The Keio manuscript proves that from within a century of its original composition, the LYS came with a full text of the *Analects*. The commentary was added in interlinear fashion. (Image 1)

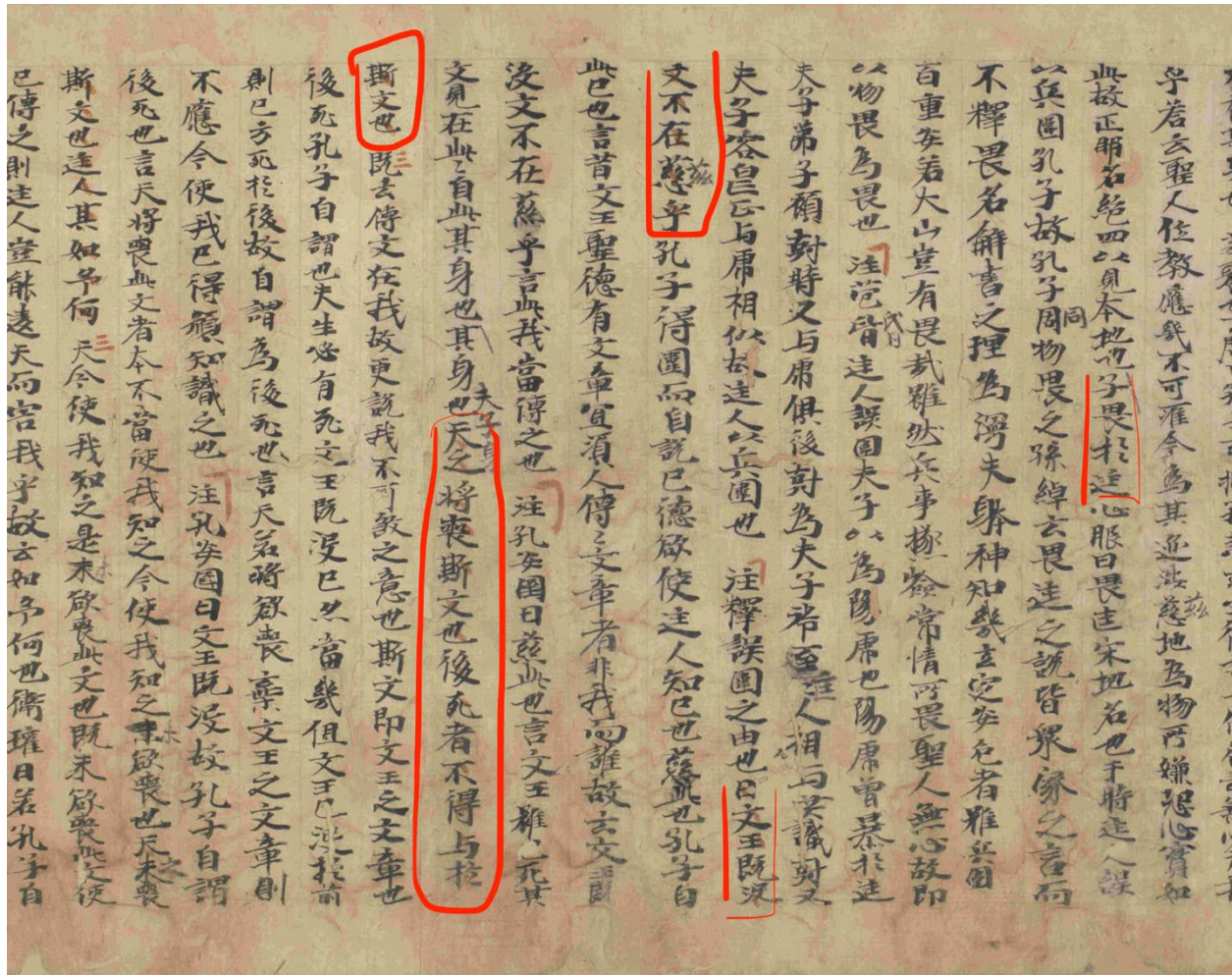


Image 1. Keio University 132X.205.1, selection. I have boxed in the *Analects* text in red. Chunks of the original are separated by the LYS commentary. Keio University Library

The supposition that a commentary comes with a complete version of its target text, and that a sacred text will come with a commentary underlies Confucian textual culture in the Middle Ages. Phrased differently, commentary to a Confucian sacred text finds its best material analogy in the vowel pointing and Masorah of the Leningrad and Aleppo Codices: commentarial intervention into the body of the sacred text itself, without which the sacred text risks losing intelligibility. Ferocious debate about government-sanctioned commentaries in medieval China demonstrates that commentary, scriptural recension, and scriptural intelligibility came as a package.

Midrash, by contrast, assumes that the reader has external knowledge of the Bible: without prior knowledge of Genesis 22, parashot 55 and 56 do not form a coherent entity. How the midrash of BR

would have interacted with the Biblical text in their original incarnation is difficult to tell since the primary witnesses are medieval.³¹ Nevertheless, the genre conventions of midrash make it unlikely one would find the midrashic manuscript equivalent of the Qumran *pesharim*, which often present a continuous Biblical text with running commentary, carefully formatted so the reader can distinguish between the Biblical book and commentary. (For copyright reasons an image of Qumran *pesharim* cannot be reproduced here; see the link <https://www.deadseascrolls.org.il/explore-the-archive/manuscript/4Q166-1>, which redirects to an image of 4Q166, a continuous *pesharim* on the minor prophet Hosea. The text of Hosea—the chunk of writing in the middle of the scroll—is distinguished from the surrounding *pesharim* by empty lines before and after it.³²)

It is unsurprising that the concise “interpretations” פִּשְׁרֵי of the *pesharim* should appear in an interlinear format. *Shu* take the scale and interpretive ambition of midrash and combine them with the *pesharim*'s close adherence to the continuous progression of the sacred text. The interpretive ambition of the rabbis is premised on the existence of a Biblical text independent of their interpretations. Perhaps this freedom from textual responsibility—their interpretations exist independently of textual transmission and they do not need to curate a version of Genesis—is what enabled rabbinic interpreters to play so freely with innovative glossing and word play. By contrast, Huang Kan's cumbersome definitions and paraphrases are perhaps the result of a sense of textual responsibility: readers will turn to LYS not only for Huang Kan's understanding of the *Analects*, but also for the original words of the *Analects* themselves. By this logic, the midrashists are analogous to an artist who comes to a museum for inspiration in the creation of his own work. Huang is analogous to a museum curator, who must explain the significance of collection items, but is also responsible for their physical care and maintenance.

How integrated a commentary can be with a sacred text, and to what degree the sacred text is permitted to be manipulated on the page to accommodate commentarial intervention should be a central theme of Jewish-Confucian comparative work going forward.

³¹ Vatican 30, from the eleventh century, Vatican 60 from the tenth century, and a British Library manuscript. Barth (1973) and Cassuto (1956).

³² Horgan (1994).

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