

Zhu Xi's Method of Phonetic Annotation in Ancient Chinese Books

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Abstract

Zhu Xi is not only a master of Confucianism, but also has made great achievements in exegesis. By studying Zhu Xi's exegetical thoughts and methods in the practice of exegesis, we can correctly evaluate Zhu Xi's historical position in the history of Chinese exegesis.

This article discusses Zhu Xi's methods of phonetic annotation, including Zhi Yin (direct sound), Bi Kuang (comparison), Fan Qie (recomposition), Bie Si Sheng and Biao Ru Zi (four tones) and Xie Yin (rhyme) in exegesis of ancient books. These annotations retain the actual phonetics of the Song Dynasty and are very important for studies of Chinese phonetics history.

Key words: Zhu Xi; Exegesis; Ancient Chinese books; Phonetic annotation

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Sound is the basis of language. It is the first thing that people have to learn before they can read and write. Hence, phonetic annotation of ancient Chinese books is the first step for understanding the context. Based on the existing exegetical material, phonetic annotation has a rather long history. It has undergone continuous evolution from simple and vague to precise and accurate. *Yan Shi Jia Xun-Yin Ci* described the emergence and evolution of the

phonetic annotation methods in Chinese exegesis: Before Zheng Xuan, few phonetic annotations were included in any written exegetical works. Since Zheng Xuan, Gao You, Xu Shen and Liu Xi, annotations that described pronunciations started to emerge. Fan Qie method was introduced by Sun Yan's *Er Ya Yin Yi* at the end of the Eastern Han Dynasty and become popular during Cao Wei Era. This was because verbal exegesis was heavily practiced between the master and students and written phonetics annotation was less important in the Western Han Dynasty. During that time, modern Confucianism become popular. Scholars spent their lives studying the content of a single scripture. Due to the limited amount of reading and the heavy practice of verbal exegesis, issues of pronunciation was neglected. During the late Eastern Han Dynasty, barriers between ancient and modern literary and classics disappeared. Confucians such as Ma Rong, Zheng Xuan, Jia Kui, Xu Shen, Gao You, and Fu Qian were masters in both ancient and modern literary and classics. This led the written exegesis become the main form of exegesis. Verbal exegesis had gradually decayed and opportunities for learning from readings had gradually increased. Therefore, phonetic annotation was added as part of exegesis study.

With the development of phonology, methods of phonetic annotation have increased. Methods including Pi Kuang (similarity), Zhi Yin (direct sound), Fan Qie (recomposition) and Bie Si Sheng (four tones) were commonly applied. *Jing Dian Shi Wen* by Lu Deming is a masterpiece on this topic. Xie Yun method in Southern and Northern Dynasties was renamed as Xie Yin and became widely used in the Song Dynasty. Although mistakes of this phonetic annotation method were criticized by later generations, it was quite popular after the Song Dynasty and was applied for more than seven hundred years. In Zhu Xi's exegetical works, in addition to the old phonetic annotation methods, he also adopted Xie Yin.

ZHI YIN

Zhi Yin is a phonetic annotation method that uses heterography word as phonetic transcription of the annotated characters. Zhu Xi often used this method to annotate rare or polyphonic characters in his exegetical works. The general form is ‘A, as B’. For example:

In the Section *Tang Feng-Yang Zhi Shui* of the *Book of Songs*, it stated, “Bringing a robe of white silk with a vermilion collar, we will follow you to Wo. When we have seen the princely lord, shall we not rejoice?” In his *Shi Ji Zhuan*, Zhu Xi noted, “褫(collar), as 博(bo). 乐(rejoice), as 洛(luo).”

In *Zhou Yi-Kun*, it stated, “The fourth SIX, divided, (shows the symbol of) a sack tied up. There will be no ground for blame or for praise.” In the *Zhou Yi Ben Yi*, Zhu Xi commented, “誉(praise), as 余(yu), also as 预(yu).”

According to the relationship between the annotated characters and the phonetic characters, Zhu Xi’s Zhi Yin annotation can be categorized into the following types:

A. The annotated characters and phonetic characters are like the accent (sound) of semantic-phonetic compound characters. This can be further divided into three kinds:

a. Annotated characters are the semantic-phonetic compound character, and the phonetic characters serve as the accent (sound).

In the Section *Zhou Nan-Guan Ju* of the *Book of Songs*, it stated, “Guan-guan go the ospreys, on the islet in the river. The modest, retiring, virtuous, young lady, for our prince a good mate she.” In his *Shi Ji Zhuan*, Zhu Xi noted, “逌(pursue), as 求(qiu).”

b. Annotated characters are the accent of the phonetic characters, which are also the semantic-phonetic compound characters.

In *Zhou Yi-Zhun*, it stated, “The third SIX, divided, shows one following the deer without (the guidance of) the forester, and only finding himself in the midst of the forest. The superior man, acquainted with the secret risks, thinks it is better to give up the chase. If he went forward, he would regret it.” In the *Zhou Yi Ben Yi*, Zhu Xi commented, “几(getting close), as 机(ji).”

c. Annotated characters and phonetic characters are both semantic-phonetic compound characters of the same accent.

In the Section *Xiao Ya-Si Mu* of the *Book of Songs*, it stated, “My four steeds advanced without stopping, they panted and snorted, the white steeds black-maned.”

In his *Shi Ji Zhuan*, Zhu Xi noted, “骆(a white horse with black mane), as 洛(luo).”

B. The annotated characters and the phonetic characters are the classical and modern versions of the same characters.

In the *Book of Rites-Zhong Yong*, it stated, “There is nothing more visible than what is secret, and nothing

more manifest than what is small. Therefore the superior man is watchful over himself, when he is alone.” In the *Si Shu Zhang Ju Ji Zhu*, Zhu Xi commented, “见(visible), as 现(xian).”

BI KUANG

This method uses the pronunciation of a character as the standard for the pronunciation of the annotated character. The common term is ‘du ru(读如)’, ‘du zuo(读作)’, ‘du wei(读为)’, and ‘du yue(读曰)’.¹ Scholars in the Qing Dynasty, such as Duan Yucai and Qian Daxin, had discussed the differences in the use of these terms. Duan Yucai thought the term ‘du ruo(读若)’ in *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* only indicates the similarity in sound but no change of the character. In fact, many of the usages included both sound and character change. Qian Daxin believed that Xu Shen’s saying of ‘du ruo(读若)’ and ‘du yu tong(读与同)’ are examples of rebus in ancient books. However, some of those usages only included sound similarity but not change of character. Both ideas were inconclusive.

When Zhu Xi used these terms in phonetic annotation, he did not distinguish between the two aspects. His method of phonetic annotation can be categorized into the following types:

A. Use the original character as the phonetic notation for rebus

In Chapter 19 of *Analects of Confucius*, Zi Xia said, “He, who from day to day recognizes what he has not yet known, and from month to month does not forget what he has attained to, may be said indeed to love to learn.” In the *Si Shu Zhang Ju Ji Zhu*, Zhu Xi commented, “亡(not know), read as 无(wu).”

Note: ‘亡’ is the rebus of ‘无’. Du Yucai noted in Chapter 12 of *Shuo Wen Jie Zi*, “𠄎, is a rebus of 无(wu).” ‘𠄎’ is another form of ‘无’. In *Ji Yun-Yang Yun*, it stated, “亡, can also be written as 𠄎.”

B. Use the modern characters as phonetic notation for ancient ones

In Section *Hu Zi Zhi Ge* in the *Afterword of Songs of Chu*, it stated, “Once the rope was pulled out, the beautiful jade started to sink; the God of Yellow River already agreed to regulate the river, but we do not have enough firewood.” In the *Chu Ci Ji Zhu*, Zhu Xi commented, “湛(sink), read as 沉(chen).”

Note: In Chapter 12 of *Shuo Wen Jie Zi*, it stated, “湛, means sink.” Duan Yucai also noted, “floating and sinking were mainly represented using the character ‘湛’ in ancient books. 湛 and 沉 are the ancient and modern version of the same character. 沉 is the common version of 沈.” ‘沉’ is the common version of ‘沈’, and ‘湛’ is an older version of ‘沉’.

¹ All of these terms mean ‘read as’ in English.

FAN QIE

Fan Qie is an advanced phonetic annotation method that first appeared during the Han and Wei Dynasties. It combines two Chinese characters to annotate the sound of a third one. It takes the consonant of the first character and the vowel and tone of the second character to form the sound of the annotated character. Because this method is more scientific, it was widely used in later generations. Zhu Xi also used this method to annotate text of ancient books:

In Chapter 7 of *Analects of Confucius*, the Master said, "I do not open up the truth to one who is not eager to get knowledge, nor help out any one who is not anxious to explain himself. When I have presented one corner of a subject to anyone, and he cannot from it learn the other three, I do not repeat my lesson." In the *Si Shu Zhang Ju Ji Zhu*, Zhu Xi commented, "愤(eager), recomposition of 房(fang) and 粉(fen). 悱(desirous of speaking), recomposition of 芳(fang) and 匪(wei). 复(repeat), recomposition of 扶(fu) and 又(you)."

In general, Zhu Xi only left one Fan Qie annotation for each of the annotated character, but sometimes he would leave two or more annotations for a single character. This is because the annotated character is polyphonic and/or polysemous. For example, in section *Yuan You* of *Songs of Chu*, it stated, "His skin is smooth and pretty like jade, his body is energetic and strong." Zhu Xi's phonetic annotation for '頰' is 'recomposition of 普 (pu) 茗 (ming) and of 普 (pu) 经 (jing)'. The consonant of the two recomposition is identical, but the vowels are different. The first recomposition has a Shang tone, which means 'face changes when angry'; while the second recomposition has a Ping tone, which means 'brilliant complexion'.

Zhu Xi's application of Fan Qie is of great value to the study of Chinese phonetics history. The main material used by Mr. Wang Li in the Chapter *Song Dynasty Phonetics* of *History of Chinese Phonetics* is based on Zhu Xi's method. Especially in his books the *Shi Ji Zhuan* and the *Chu Ci Ji Zhu*, Zhu Xi did not follow the rules in *Qie Yun*, but rather applied Fan Qie based on the pronunciation of the Song Dynasty. According to this, Mr. Wang Li found that there were 21 consonants in the Song Dynasty, which was greatly simplified comparing with the consonants in the late Tang and Five Dynasties. There were 32 vowels, and compared with the previous generations, many new rhyming parts were combined and transformed. Therefore, Zhu Xi's Fan Qie annotation is a very precious historical data of Chinese phonetics.

BIE SI SHENG AND BIAO RU ZI

Four tones began in Qi Liang Era of the Southern and Northern Dynasties (end of 5th century to beginning of 6th century). Tone is a characteristic of Chinese and an

inheritance of history. The existence of four tones is a fact. Since Shen Yue and Xie Tiao advocated the theory of four tones, scholars have used the function of four tones to make phonetic annotations in exegesis. In Zhu Xi's time, Bie Si Sheng was a common method for phonetic annotation. He used it often in his exegetic works:

In Chapter 1 of *Analects of Confucius*, You Zi said, "There are few who, being filial and fraternal, are fond of offending against their superiors." In the *Si Shu Zhang Ju Ji Zhu*, Zhu Xi commented, "鲜(few), Shang tone."

Characters that are annotated with the four-tone method generally have two or more tones. In order to clarify the pronunciation in a specific sentence, it is often necessary to mark the annotated characters with tones. In ancient times, the meanings and/or parts of speech were often distinguished based on the different pronunciation of words; this is called 'po du (破读)'. The main change in 'po du' is the tone. In most of the cases, the original Ping, Shang, Ru tones are changed to Qu tone. Thus, Qu tone is an important clue for us to identify 'po du' in ancient books.

The invention of 'po du' is due to the continuous extension of word meanings and the continuous differentiation of the part of speech. When a word is assigned a new meaning and a new grammatical function, a new pronunciation is required to distinguish the new word from the original one. Traditionally, the original pronunciation before 'po du' is called 'ru zi (如字)'. While annotating the new pronunciation, scholars also annotated when the word should be read using its original pronunciation. Zhu Xi inherited this phonetic annotation method well and often combined this with Bie Si Sheng:

In *Gongsun Chou I of Mencius*, it stated, "Mencius said, "Pursuing the examination of his dislike to what was evil, we find that he thought it necessary." In the *Si Shu Zhang Ju Ji Zhu*, Zhu Xi commented, "恶(dislike) 恶(evil), first one has a Qu tone, the latter one is read as normal."

In this example, the first character is a verb and has a Qu tone. The second one is a noun, and hence is read as normal. Zhu Xi applied both four tone and 'ru zi' here in order to mark the correct pronunciation for each character. Under a specific context, one character can only have one pronunciation.

Xie Yin

Xie Yin is an annotation method that scholars changed the pronunciation of characters in order to make it rhyme when they encountered the inharmonious rhymes in the rhyming verses in the ancient books. The general believe is that because of the limitation of his historical knowledge, Zhu Xi did not realize that sound and pronunciation of characters change over time. Therefore, he vigorously advocated Xie Yin method when he annotated ancient books. He would forcefully change the

pronunciation of the characters in order to make it rhyme based on the pronunciation in the Song Dynasty. This is embodied in his exegetical works the *Shi Ji Zhuan* and the *Chu Ci Ji Zhu*.

Zhu Xi's form of Xie Yin is usually 'Xie A Zhi Yin' or 'Xie A Fan Qie', and a few of them have the form of 'Xie A Si Sheng'. Examples include:

The second stanza of Section *Shao Nan-Xing Lu* in the *Book of Songs* stated, "Who can say the sparrow has no horn? How else can it bore through my house? Who can say that you did not get me betrothed? How else could you have urged on this trial?" In the *Shi Ji Zhuan*, Zhu Xi remarked, "家(home), Xie (read as) 谷 (gu)."

The third stanza of Section *Shao Nan-Xing Lu* in the *Book of Songs* stated, "Who can say that the rat has no molar teeth? How else could it bore through my wall? Who can say that you did not get me betrothed? How else could you have urged on this trial?" In the *Shi Ji Zhuan*, Zhu Xi remarked, "家 (home), Xie (read as) the recomposition of 各 (ge) 空 (kong)."

There is no difference in the meaning of the same word '家'. Zhu Xi changed the pronunciation as long as it did not rhyme. However, this leads to ill-defined and confusion of the sound of the word. This method has received strong criticism from scholars of the past generations. For example, Jiao Hong of the Ming Dynasty said in Volume III of *Jiao Shi Bi Sheng*, "In this way, 'East' can be read as 'West', 'South' can be read as 'North', 'up' can be read as 'down', 'before' can be read as 'after', there is no well-defined pronunciation for any words, and there would be no well-defined characters in any poems. This is unreasonable!"

Scholars believed that most of Zhu Xi's note of Xie Yin originated from Wu Yu's *Mao Shi Bu Yin* and *Yun Bu*, but Zhu Xi's annotation is not exactly the same as Wu Yu's. Modern scholars have different opinions on how many changes Zhu Xi made. We believe that not all of his annotation on Xie Yin has phonetic basis. Based on the examples given above, Zhu Xi often changed the pronunciation of characters according to their pronunciation in the Song Dynasty in order to rhyme. This is because Zhu Xi believed that the ancient phonetics were the same as those of later generations, and he did not understand the historical evolution of phonetics.

In conclusion, in his exegesis works, Zhu Xi fully inherited the phonetic annotation methods from the previous generations, and used many different methods to annotate the pronunciation of words in ancient books. Though he did not realize the historical evolution of phonetics when he applied Xie Yin, Zhu Xi's phonetic annotation retains the actual phonetics of the Song Dynasty. These annotations are of great value for the study of Song Dynasty phonetic system and modern Chinese phonetics.

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