

Text Reuse in the Medieval Chinese Public Inscriptions (618-907)

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It is commonly known that Chinese premodern authors preferred using a number of allusions originating from classics in their own works, which is certainly a way of text reuse. They sometimes quoted original texts directly, while sometimes substituted some characters or inverted grammatical constructions without changing the original meaning. What I want to study in this paper is to find the network of text reuse covering all the public inscriptions, including those inscribed on steles, walls or bells to which the public had access, in the Tang Dynasty China (618-907). A database including more than 1,000 inscriptions with about 1,000,000 Chinese characters / words has been built as the base of this project. Metadata such as authors, dates and places, have been manually added to each inscription. Based on the metadata, temporal and spatial distribution of the inscriptions will be visually displayed. According to my pilot studies, Confucian canons, especially the Five Classics, were quoted most frequently in the inscriptions. Based on close reading experience, history books and religious canons had great influence on medieval Chinese literati's writing as well. So I would like to discover the network which reflects how public inscriptions reused Chinese Confucian classics, prestigious history books, Buddhist and Daoist canons.

Beyond finding the network of text reuse, I also want to find out whether one author had preferences to some specific classical allusions, and which books were referred to the most frequently in different periods or places. Besides distant reading, I plan to do close reading of texts to show how genres of texts influenced authors' choices of text reuse and how authors' writing strategies were influenced by certain political contexts. Ideally, I want to further analyze the intellectual and political history behind the network of text reuse. This research is an experiment on applying digital humanities to Chinese history studies, in which methodological issues will be especially addressed.