

**Confucian education in a Buddhist environment:
Medieval manuscripts and imprints of the *Mengqiu***

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The overall majority of the enormous collection of manuscripts discovered at the Dunhuang 敦煌 library cave (i.e. Cave 17) in the early part of the twentieth century is of Buddhist content.¹

This comes as no surprise because the cave itself formed part of a larger cave complex built by local Buddhist communities over the course of several centuries. The library cave containing tens of thousands of medieval manuscripts was sealed around 1006 and there is reason to believe that at least part of its content used to belong to the Sanjie monastery 三界寺 in Dunhuang.²

Therefore we are likely to be dealing with a monastic library and it is only to be expected that the content of most of the manuscripts would be in one way or other related to Buddhism. Yet as it is common with monastic libraries around the world, the Dunhuang manuscripts also contain other types of texts, ranging from Confucian and Daoist classics to works of popular literature and military treatises.³ There are also texts related to local administration and economy, including official correspondence, sales contracts, household registers or documents concerning lay Buddhist associations. Several other sites in northwestern China similarly yielded handwritten and printed texts of a predominantly Buddhist nature with a smaller quantity of non-religious material. One of the largest such discoveries was at the ruins of the forgotten Tangut city of Khara-khoto (Ch. Heishuicheng 黑水城) in modern-day Inner Mongolia where thousands of manuscripts and printed books in Tangut (i.e. Xixia 西夏) and Chinese were excavated about the same time as the Dunhuang manuscripts were being acquired by foreign explorers.

¹ Bits of an early version of this paper have been included in my new book *Chinese Literature in Tangut: Manuscripts and Printed Books from Khara-khoto* (Galambos forthcoming); the present paper represents an expanded and improved version. I am grateful for the valuable comments and suggestions I received from colleagues and friends who heard me presenting my new research concerning the *Mengqiu* at Princeton University (September 2014) and Mount Emei (December 2014). I would also like to thank Prof. Chen Jinhua for his enthusiasm and untiring support for this research project.

² For an overview of the role of Sanjie monastery in the building of the original manuscript collection and the function of the cave, see van Schaik and Galambos 2012: 18–28.

³ Monastic libraries in medieval Europe also commonly included non-religious works such as the classics or medical and other technical texts. For an example of the mixing of religious and secular books, see Scrivner 1980 describing the catalogues of Carolingian monastic libraries roughly contemporaneous with the bulk of the Dunhuang manuscripts.

Among the surviving materials, primers and didactic texts composed for educational purposes are yet another important genre, as they can be used to complement our rather limited knowledge of traditional education.⁴ Educational texts are well known to us through transmitted sources and quite a few of them not only survived into the modern period but continued to be used for similar purposes until very recently.⁵ Yet excavated manuscripts and imprints have the potential to shed light on how these texts were used in medieval society and what the circumstances of their production were. In other words, we can learn through them not only about the texts but also the people and institutions that produced the surviving copies of these texts. It is reasonable to expect a certain degree of continuity with the later lives of these primers but there might also be details that may escape our attention if we solely rely on transmitted sources. On the most basic level, the surviving manuscripts and imprints are first-hand witnesses of medieval educational practices and most of them were copied by students as part of their schoolwork.

One of the noteworthy examples of medieval primers is the *Mengqiu* 蒙求, a work attributed to Li Han 李瀚 (d. u.) of the Tang dynasty. Although following the Song period the text fell into disuse, early copies survived in Japan, where it remained in continuous use all the way through modern times. During the twentieth century several copies of the text were discovered at the margins of Chinese civilization, notably among the Dunhuang manuscripts, the ruins of Kharakhoto, and the Liao 遼 period (907–1125) wooden pagoda in Ying county 應縣. Most interestingly, all of these sites belonged to border regimes which at the time were not part of China proper, and thus the finds attest to the popularity of the text among the inhabitants of these states. This paper examines the handwritten and printed versions of the *Mengqiu* from these sites in an attempt to highlight the text's significance in Chinese-language education beyond the frontier. It also investigate the phenomenon of finding copies of the *Mengqiu*—and other primers—in medieval Buddhist libraries, even if those primers are collections of stories propagating the virtues and morals of the Confucian tradition and contain no Buddhist content whatsoever.

⁴ For a comprehensive study of educational texts from Dunhuang, see Zheng 2002.

⁵ An English-language general overview of educational texts in traditional China is found in Lee 2000: 431-541.

1. The *Mengqiu*

The *Mengqiu* is not listed in bibliographic chapters of the *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書 (1060) but appears in the Song catalogue *Chongwen zongmu* 崇文總目 (1042). But the *Xin Tangshu* mentions a sequel to the *Mengqiu* (*Xu Mengqiu* 續蒙求) compiled by Wang Fan 王範 in three *juan* 卷, which provides an indirect proof that a *Mengqiu* had already existed before that.⁶ The identity of Li Han and the period he lived in have been disputed, most likely because by the Qing period the text lost its popularity and there was little information concerning its author. As part of the problem, even his personal name was handed down in variant versions, including 瀚, 翰, 幹, or 澣.⁷ Some considered him to be Li Han 李翰 (717–?), an eighth-century native of Zanhuang 贊皇 county in Zhaozhou 趙州 prefecture (modern Hebei), a son or nephew of Li Hua 李華 (715–766).⁸ According to another theory, the person in question was Li Han 李澣 (?–962) of the Later Jin 後晉 (936–947) and Liao periods, a native of Wannian 萬年 county in Jingzhao 京兆 (modern Shaanxi). But one of the Dunhuang copies of the *Mengqiu* includes a dated memorial that proves that the *Mengqiu* must have been written during the Tang period the latest. The fragments from Dunhuang also ascertain that the author was a native of Anping 安平 county (modern Hebei), who served as director of granaries (*sicang canjun* 司倉參軍) in Xinzhou 信州 prefecture (modern Jiangxi). Nevertheless, in the two Dunhuang manuscripts where the author's name survives, the personal name is written with two different characters, which makes it problematic to determine what the correct or original “spelling” was.⁹

According to the memorial that is appended to the beginning of the text, it was “submitted by Li Liang 李良, prefect of Raozhou 饒州 on the first day of the eighth month of the fifth year of the Tianbao 天寶 reign,” which corresponds to 746. The validity of this claim has been called into

⁶ Yang 1967, vol. 3: 721. See also Zhang 2012.

⁷ Hayakawa 1973: 26.

⁸ For a summary of theories regarding the *Mengqiu*'s authorship, see Tang 2008.

⁹ We should note that among the Dunhuang material there are cases when the same name was written in two or more different ways even by the very person or those in immediate contact with him. An example of this is a donor on a silk painting (Stein 1919,0101,0.54) at the British Museum, whose name appears on the painting as Mi Yande 米延德 but whose name appears in a manuscript S.4649 as Mi Yuande 米員德. That the two names refer to the same person is corroborated, besides the fact that both come from the same cave library in Dunhuang, by the temporal proximity of the painting (dated 983) and the manuscript (dated 970); see Ji et al. 1998: 465.

question on several grounds.¹⁰ One of them was that the Tang had changed character 年 to 載 in 744, yet the memorial writes the date 746 as “Tianbao wu nian” 天寶五年 (“the fifth year of Tianbao”), which violates this rule. Another problem was that in 742 Raozhou had been renamed Boyang commandery 鄱陽郡, yet Li Liang is mentioned as being the prefect of Raozhou in 746. Thus there are still some problems surrounding specific details concerning the date and authorship of the text but it is generally accepted that it was produced by Li Han (regardless of how he wrote his name) around the mid-eighth century.

The title of the *Mengqiu* comes from the *Zhouyi* 周易, where the hexagram *meng* 蒙 is explained the following way:

Meng: success. It is not that I seek the youthful ignorant, but he seeks me. 蒙, 亨。

匪我求童蒙, 童蒙求我。

While the original meaning of the above explanation in the *Zhouyi* is far from clear, the title of the *Mengqiu* is meant in the sense of something that the youth seek, which in this context would be sound education. The word *meng* 蒙 means someone without knowledge, i.e. a young pupil who is at the early stages of learning. The title is analogous to that of the roughly contemporaneous character dictionary *Ganlu zishu* 干祿字書, compiled by Yan Yuansun 顏元孫 (d. 714), in the title of which the expression *ganlu* 干祿 is a reference to *Lunyu* 論語 2:18 where it is used in the sense of seeking official employment. In the title of the dictionary, this intends to signify that the work should be perused by those who aspire to gain an official post. Along the same line of thought, in the case of the *Mengqiu* the target audience would have been elementary school children.

From the point of view of its composition, the *Mengqiu* is written as a series of four-character segments, with every second one rhyming. Thus it essentially consists of rhyming segments of eight characters, in which every four characters reference a story from the Confucian tradition, providing compact allusions to persons and events that may serve as exemplary models for students. Modern scholars sometimes mention that the stories include both historical and

¹⁰ Yu 1980: 960–975.

mythical figures,¹¹ even though at the time these two categories would not have been seen as separate ones. Nüwa 女媧 would have been just as much part of the Chinese historical tradition as King Wen 文王 or Zhuge Liang 諸葛亮 (181–234) and separating them into real and fictive categories probably reflects a modern understanding of the past.

Naturally, four characters are insufficient to retell entire narratives so instead they function as a mnemonic aid to recall stories already known to the audience. To illustrate its nature, let us look at the first eight segments of the text:

王戎簡要 Wang Rong, simple and efficient;

裴楷清通 Pei Kai, honest and liberal-minded.

孔明臥龍 Kongming, a sleeping dragon;

呂望非熊 Lü Wang (i.e. Lü Shang 呂尚), not a bear.

楊震關西 Yang Zhen east of the pass;

丁寬易東 Ding Kuan [who made] the *Changes* spread eastward.

謝安高洁 Xie An, noble and pure;

王導公忠 Wang Dao, impartial and loyal.¹²

The last character of every second segment rhymes, and the same rhyme continues four times before switching to another one. In this way, the rhyming words in the above section are *tong* 通, *xiong* 熊, *dong* 東 and *zhong* 忠. The rhymes continue according to the sequence in the *Qieyun* 切韻, starting with *dong* 東. Thus the sequence itself can also aid memorization. As it can be seen from the example, without knowing the background stories, the segments are decidedly cryptic and almost impossible to understand unless one is already familiar with the background stories. But for someone who had heard the stories, it is relatively easy to recall them using the four character references. Essentially, by memorizing the nearly six hundred four-character segments in the *Mengqiu* one can gain access to a surprisingly large pool of classical narratives, all of which carry some sort of educational message. Initially, Li Han also included his own commentary to the work, which was not so much a commentary but a compilation of the relevant stories as they appeared in their *loci classici* (e.g. *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書, *Jinshu* 晉書). This was

¹¹ E.g. Bi 1982: 20.

¹² The first two lines of this translation are done by Burton Watson (Li and Hsü 1979: 19–21), the rest is my own.

essentially a decoding device for the terse phrases of the main text and was often—though not always—transmitted together with the text.

In the above section, the first segment talks about Wang Rong (AD 234–305) of the of the Western Jin 西晉 dynasty (AD 265–316), known as one of the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove 竹林七賢, whereas the second, Pei Kai (AD 237–291) who was famous on account of his handsome appearance and rhetorical skills. These two segments are taken over verbatim from the “Shangyu” 賞譽 chapter of the *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語 and the only change is that their sequence is reversed, no doubt to fit the rhyme pattern of the primer.¹³ This way of incorporating pre-existing segments from former works is not unusual for the *Mengqiu*. To cite another example, the segments “Zhen feared the ‘four who know’; Bing cast off the three delusions” 震畏四知, 秉去三惑 is taken over without any change from the *zan* 贊 (“commendation; eulogy”) part at the end of Yang Zhen’s 楊震 (54-124) biography in the *Hou Han shu* 後漢書.¹⁴

Interestingly, the commentary cites the stories of Yang Zhen and his son Yang Bing 楊秉 (92-165) in the main text of the biography to explain what the terms “four who know” *sizhi* 四知 and “three delusions” (*sanhuo* 三惑) mean but does not cite the *zan* part which it actually quotes.¹⁵

Yet it would be a mistake to conclude that the *Mengqiu* entirely consists of pre-made blocks of text arranged into a new structure. As a collection of references to exemplary figures from the written tradition, it is only natural that it would have to employ phrases and names that trigger the memory and establish a link with a well-known source where the original story occurs. Even so, four-character segments borrowed from elsewhere are not the norm and in most cases the connection is established through a two-character phrase or a name. In his preface, Li Hua praised Li Han’s skill in compiling the *Mengqiu*, saying that he managed to compress into the book 40–50% of the essence of the classics and the histories and that with this text in hand one can “know the world without leaving the scroll” 不出卷而知天下.

¹³ *Shishuo xinyu* 8: 419.

¹⁴ *Hou Han shu* 54: 1791.

¹⁵ The “four who know” refers to the story when someone tried to bribe Yang Zhen in the middle of the night, suggesting that nobody would know about it, to which Yang Zhen replied that heaven and the spirits and the two of them would know. The “three delusions” are the three things Yang Bing claimed not to have been troubled with: alcohol 酒, sex 色 and money 財.

An example of less direct borrowing is seen in the double segment “Sun Kang reflected snow; Ju Yin gathered fireflies” 孫康映雪，車胤聚螢. The commentary directs us to the text of a petition by Ren Yansheng 任彥昇 (i.e. Ren Fang 任昉, 460–508), entitled “Wei Xiao Yangzhou jianshi biao” 為蕭揚州荐士表, which survived in the *Wen xuan* 文選.¹⁶ Here we find the phrases “gathering fireflies and reflecting snow” 集螢映雪 together as part of four-character expression. Li Shan’s 李善 (d. 689) commentary quotes additional sources to explain that in their youth both Sun Kang and Ju Yin were so poor that they could not afford the lantern oil and had to study using the light reflected from snow and that provided by fireflies. Even though two *Mengqiu* segments reverse the phrases and add the names, they seem to rely on this particular instance in Ren Yansheng’s writing. But we should also realize that this pair of tropes also occurs in other writings before the Tang. Among others, Yan Zhitui 顏之推 (531–591) employs the phrase “illuminating snow and gathering fireflies” 照雪聚螢 in the “Mianxue” 勉學 chapter of his *Yanshi jiaxun* 顏氏家訓.¹⁷ Interestingly, this reverses the sequence of the two tropes in comparison with Ren Yansheng’s usage, thereby matching the sequence in the *Mengqiu*. But when in the twelfth century the Song writer Zhang Xianwu 張憲武 (fl. 1130s) in his “Shi kexi” 十可惜 (Ten Lamentable Things) writes the phrase “gathering fireflies and reflecting the snow” 聚螢映雪, the reference is too “fuzzy” to be considered a direct quote from either the *Wen xuan*, the *Yanshi jiaxun* or the *Mengqiu* because it incorporates elements from each version in these, at the same time not being identical to any of them.¹⁸

Within the corpus of popular educational texts, it is interesting to compare the characters used in the *Mengqiu* with those in the *Qianziwen* 千字文. In total, the *Mengqiu* consists of 596 quadrisyllabic lines, which amount to a total of 2,384 characters. Many of these are duplicates, showing that avoiding repeated characters was not an issue, unlike it was in the case of the *Qianziwen*. Yet the number of unique characters in the *Mengqiu* is only 1,290, which is roughly comparable to that in the *Qianziwen*. That being the case, the two sets of characters only partially

¹⁶ *Wen xuan* 38: 1742–1746.

¹⁷ *Yanshi jiaxun* 3 (8): 198.

¹⁸ Zhang Xianwu’s “Shi kexi” is preserved in the Song-Yuan encyclopedia *Shilin guangji* 事林廣記. For a translation and study, see West 2009.

overlap, with merely 505 characters occurring in both texts. Accordingly, almost 80% of the total number of characters in the *Mengqiu* are not in the *Qianziwen*, and almost half of those in the *Qianziwen* are not in the *Mengqiu*. Moreover, the *Mengqiu* contains a number of less uncommon characters (e.g. 竺, 韞, 樂), part of the reason for which is that the text—in contrast with the *Qianziwen*—places the emphasis on didactic content and the knowledge of the Confucian tradition, rather than teaching a minimal set of characters.

The *Mengqiu* was extremely popular in the Tang and later periods, becoming one of the most commonly used primers along with the *Qianziwen* and the *Xiaojing* 孝經. Although in comparison with the latter two texts only a limited number of manuscripts and imprints survive, there is ample evidence in later literature to its influence. Later primers (e.g. *Sanzijing* 三字經, *Longwen bianying* 龍文鞭影) also commonly borrow from the *Mengqiu*, attesting not only to its prevalence but also to its authority as a work of didactic nature. Because the *Mengqiu* itself is a collection of references to earlier sources (e.g. *Shi ji* 史記, *Hou Han shu*, *Jin shu*), we often do not immediately recognize it as the source behind an allusion and at times only closer scrutiny can reveal the *Mengqiu* as the immediate inspiration.

Nothing demonstrates the success of the *Mengqiu* better than the fact that later scholars authored a series of primers mimicking its arrangement and way of presenting didactic information. These new primers used the phrase *mengqiu* in their titles and thereby explicitly linked themselves with Li Han's *Mengqiu*, referencing it as an authority in the sphere of didactic texts. Such titles include the *Liuqing mengqiu* 六經蒙求, *Jingzhuan mengqiu* 經傳蒙求, *Wenzi mengqiu* 文字蒙求, *Shuowen mengqiu* 說文蒙求, *Ziti mengqiu* 字體蒙求, *Kaiti mengqiu* 楷體蒙求, *Mingwu mengqiu* 名物蒙求, *Xiaoshuo mengqiu* 小說蒙求, *Lidai mingyi mengqiu* 歷代名醫蒙求, *Chanyuan mengqiu* 禪苑蒙求, *Chunqiu* 春秋蒙求, *Xunnü mengqiu* 訓女蒙求, and *Nü mengqiu* 女蒙求.¹⁹ Accordingly, the popularity of the *Mengqiu* triggered the development of a specific genre of primers which continued to be written long after the “real” *Mengqiu* had fallen into

¹⁹ Most of the *mengqiu*-type works listed here are based on Zheng 2003: 177.

disuse.²⁰ In addition, up to a certain point in the time the original *Mengqiu* itself also evolved further by acquiring a new commentary by the Song scholar Xu Ziguang 徐子光 (fl. late twelfth century) which improved the original commentary in many respects and subsequently became part of most later editions.

Although with time the *Mengqiu* lost its popularity in China, it continued to be used in Japan and Korea. There were some local adaptations, such as the *Mōgyū waka* 蒙求和歌, a partial translation with appended *waka* poems, compiled by Minamoto no Mitsuyuki 源光行 (1163–1244) in 1204. But the Chinese text itself also survived in a number of early manuscripts and editions. Some of these were rediscovered for Chinese scholarly circles by the late Qing diplomat and collector Yang Shoujing 楊守敬 (1839–1915) during his stay in Japan.²¹ He brought back with him a manuscript copy from the late Heian period (794–1185), which is today kept at the National Palace Museum in Taipei.²² A collection of early manuscripts and prints from Japan were published in 1988–1990 as facsimile copies in four volumes by Ikeda Toshio 池田利夫 of Tsurumi University.²³ In the late 1970s, Burton Watson published an English translation of about one fourth of the complete text under the title *Meng-ch'iu: Famous Episodes from Chinese History and Legend*.²⁴

At the beginning of the twentieth century, manuscript fragments of the *Mengqiu* were found at the Mogao caves near Dunhuang in Gansu and at the ruins of Khara-khoto in Inner Mongolia, all of which predate hitherto available copies. In the 1970s, a printed edition was discovered among the Liao period books recovered from a wooden pagoda at Ying county. The finds all come from the peripheries of the Chinese state and the question arises whether this is caused by mere coincidence or it in fact reflects a contemporary pattern of use and distribution. In the following, I shall introduce each of these newly discovered early witnesses, drawing attention to their peculiarities.

²⁰ Because of the proliferation of primers with the phrase *mengqiu* in their title, with time the original *Mengqiu* was sometimes referred to as *The Mengqiu of Mr. Li* 李氏蒙求 to distinguish it from the many other ones.

²¹ Yang 1967, vol. 3: 721–731.

²² Zheng 2002: 229.

²³ Ikeda Toshio 1988–1990.

²⁴ Li and Hsü 1979. For a book review, see Goodrich 1981.

2. The Dunhuang copies

Three incomplete fragments of the *Mengqiu* were found among the Dunhuang manuscripts, two of which (P.2710 and P.4877) were taken back to Paris by Paul Pelliot (1878–1945) and are now kept at the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF). Photographs of the manuscripts are available from Gallica (<http://gallica.bnf.fr>), the BnF’s digital library website. Until relatively recently, only these two manuscripts kept in Paris were recognized as copies of the *Mengqiu* and they are sometimes referred to in secondary literature as Copy A 甲本 and Copy B 乙本.²⁵ Yet there is a third manuscript which had been acquired by a domestic collector and eventually found its way to the Dunhuang Academy where it was catalogued under the pressmark Dunyan 敦研 95 (DY095).²⁶

DY045

This is a notebook fragment that contains the beginning of the *Mengqiu* with Li Han’s own commentary. At the beginning of the main text, we find the words “compiled and annotated by Li Han, a native of Anping” 安平李翰撰并注, where the personal name of Li Han is written with the character 翰. There are a total of eleven half-pages but the text ends midline about a third through the eleventh half-page. Based on the facsimile copies it is impossible to tell whether the rest of the page is damaged or the copyist simply interrupted his work, never to resume it. In its current form the manuscript contains exactly fifty segments, which is less than a tenth of the entire work. After the text ends there are two additional half-pages with three dates. The first is “the fourth year of the Xiantian era” 先天四年, an impossible date because the Xiantian era (712–713) only lasted two years.²⁷ Then come two additional dates, both denoting

²⁵ As far as I can tell, the first person to identify these two copies was Wang Zhongmin 王重民 who wrote up a catalogue entry of the two Pelliot fragments in December 1936; see Wang 1979: 207–208.

²⁶ For photographs of this manuscript, see Gansu cang Dunhuang wenxian bianweihui et al. 1999: 100–103. On the manuscript in the collection of the Dunhuang Academy and its comparison with the manuscript copies kept in Japan, see Zhang 2002. For a general description of the three Dunhuang manuscripts of the *Mengqiu*, see Zheng 2003 and Zheng 2002: 227–253.

²⁷ Such impossible dates are not rare in the Dunhuang manuscripts. Some researchers have suggested that because of Dunhuang’s physical remoteness from China proper and its isolation following the Tibetan conquest, the people of the region may not have immediately learned about the advent of a new reign period and at times continued to use the old one for several more years. For a detailed explanation of this phenomenon, see Rong 1996: 51–52.

the year 1913. One of them is “the *guichou* year of the Xuantonq reign of the Great Qing” 大清宣統癸丑, the other is “the second year of the Chinese Republic” 中華民國二年.²⁸ The date 1913 probably refers to the acquisition of this manuscript but the Tang date is not only impossible but is hard to connect with the manuscript which, based on its calligraphy, was most likely copied in the ninth-tenth century.

The first seventeen lines of the manuscript contain Li Liang’s memorial recommending the *Mengqiu* to the throne (“Jian *Mengqiu* biao” 薦《蒙求》表); the next four lines, Li Hua’s 李華 preface (“*Mengqiu xu*” 蒙求序); and the rest of the text is the *Mengqiu* with Li Han’s original commentary.²⁹ The text itself closely follows that in other versions. The one conspicuous discrepancy is that Mozi 墨子 appears in the manuscript as Dizi 翟子, using Mozi’s personal name instead of his surname.

The paper of the notebook is unruled and there are eight lines per half-page. The commentary runs in double-line small script, inserted after each rhyme (i.e. eight characters). It typically ends with the particle *ye* 也, in which the last stroke is often extended far down, especially if there is additional space left in the second line of the commentary. The imbalance between the two small-script lines of the commentary is obviously the result of not having counted the characters to know where to halve the relevant text of the commentary so that it is evenly distributed. For example, at the end of the seventh half-page about a third of the last line is left blank even after having significantly extended the last stroke of the final character 也. There are no punctuation marks except for correction marks used to reverse the order of two accidentally inverted characters. The line breaks do not follow the rhythm of the text and the text on the pages is not visually segmented in any way, other than the contrast between the large characters of the main text and the small ones of the commentary. This consistent pattern of having smaller characters after eight large ones is of course already a kind of rhythm and could be regarded as a form of segmentation.

²⁸ Theoretically the Xuantonq reign ended a year earlier with the last emperor’s abdication but it was evidently continued to be used by scholars of the old regime.

²⁹ Zheng 2003: 180.

With regard to the date of the manuscript, Zheng Acai 鄭阿財 pointed out that the characters 虎 and 世 appear with a missing stroke which is one of the ways to avoid the Tang imperial name taboo. The character 虎 appears in the name of Emperor Gaozu's 高祖 (r. 618–626) grandfather Li Hu 李虎 (d. 551), whereas the character 世 was part of the name of Li Shimin 李世民 (d. 598–649), i.e. Emperor Taizong 太宗 (r. 626–649).³⁰ These taboos would indicate a Tang date anywhere between 618 and the end of the dynasty, as the Tang name taboos would have lost their binding effect after that. However, as far as it is possible to tell from the published images of the manuscript, the character 虎 seems to be not the tabooed form but a *suzi* 俗字, that is, a non-standard variant with a 巾 in place of the 几 in the lower part of the character. The character 世 on the other hand occurs several times in its tabooed form, which would theoretically suggest a Tang date. Having said that, despite their common use for this purpose, taboo characters are admittedly not a fully reliable method of dating manuscripts, as medieval copyists often copied orthographic features of earlier manuscripts along with the text. Perhaps more reliable would be to date the manuscript on the basis of its book form and calligraphy, both of which would point to the ninth-tenth century.

P.2710

Judging from its online photograph available through the Gallica website, this manuscript appears to be a fragment of a scroll. It consists of only twenty-eight lines, representing the beginning of the *Mengqiu* with its original commentary. As far as we can see from the photographs, the paper is unruled and the calligraphy is relatively skilled. The manuscript begins with the memorial of Li Liang, followed by Li Hua's preface. After this comes the main text with no commentaries. There are only seven lines of this, amounting to a total of twenty-eight four-character segments, that is, the very beginning of the text. The text is continuous, there is no punctuation and the only type of spatial segmentation is the spaces left in the lines that contain the titles of the memorial, the preface and the main text.

Although at first sight it may seem that we do not have the rest of the main text because the original scroll is damaged, the manuscript may in fact be complete in its current form. The

³⁰ *Ibid.*

reason for this assumption is that about two characters worth of space at the end of the last line is left unfilled. The text ends here after the twenty-eighth segment (“Zhou Chu sanhai” 周處三害), yet if the manuscript had originally continued further, we would expect to see this space filled. Moreover, the edges of the paper sheet on both the left and right hand side are not torn but represent the original boundaries of the sheet. With twenty-eight lines on it, this seems to be a complete sheet of paper, the type that is ordinarily used for creating scrolls. This is generally achieved by gluing together the separate sheets into a continuous writing surface, which is then rolled up into a scroll form. Yet this sheet has margins on the left and right sides, a two character empty space at the end, all of which suggests that the copying was interrupted exactly where the text ends today and there were no second, third or further sheets. It may have been rolled up as a small scroll but it was a single sheet of paper with the unfinished *Mengqiu*. We do not know why the copyist stopped copying the text but in its current state the manuscript is similar to DY045 discussed above, which also ends midline.

P.4877

The manuscript consists of one sheet of paper which used to form four half-pages of a notebook. In the middle of the sheet, at the folding line there are several small holes giving evidence that the original book was once sewn together with a thread. The paper itself is ruled so that there are six lines per half-page but the ruling is observed relatively loosely. The commentary runs in smaller script in two lines. The fragment only contains sixteen segments of the original texts, including the commentary. Whoever copied the text did this not with a brush but a pen which in Dunhuang is generally considered to have replaced the brush from about the 770s, after the region came under Tibetan control. We can further narrow the time window based on the type of writing and the physical form of the manuscript, which make it likely that it was produced around anywhere between the second half of the ninth until the end of the tenth century.

The calligraphy is visibly inferior to that in the other two Dunhuang manuscripts and there are also problems with the spatial arrangement of the lines. Although the lines are ruled and the copyist obviously tried to follow the traditional way of writing the main text in a single line and the small-script commentaries in double ones, he was not able to do this consistently. In fact, the very first line of the manuscript has only one line of commentary, which should not have

happened. Then on the second half-page, the second line of the double-line commentary is left empty halfway through because the copyist did not divide the text of the commentary evenly between the two lines. In order not to leave a large chunk of space which in principle should not remain empty, he dotted out the rest of the line. He used the same technique to remedy the same type of mistake in the first line of the fourth half-page. But earlier on the third half-page, he missed count of the commentary lines and, disregarding the ruling of the page, began a line of full-size characters in a half-size commentary line. This completely disrupted the layout of the page and to rectify the problem he had to apply several ad-hoc solutions, none of which fully resolved the layout issues.

There are also numerous corrections either using proper correction marks or simply by writing over mistaken characters. In the segment “Xie Shang and the myna dance” 謝尚鷓鴣 the last character is accidentally omitted, then inserted on the right hand side. All of these features suggest that the manuscript was copied by a student with a relatively low level of education, perhaps a child who was still in the process of learning basic literacy skills.

3. The Khara-khoto copy

During his 1914 visit to the ruins of Khara-khoto near the Edzin-gol river, Sir Aurel Stein (1862–1943) excavated several thousand Tangut fragments and some Chinese texts.³¹ Among the Chinese material was a one-page copy of the *Mengqiu*, unearthed from among the debris and refuse heaps within the walls of the city, not far from the stupa where Piotr K. Kozlov (1863–1935) had found a spectacular collection of Tangut manuscripts and imprints in 1908–1909.³² A transcription of the *Mengqiu* manuscript first appeared in Guo Feng’s 郭峰 book which catalogued and transcribed the Chinese manuscripts from Gansu and Xinjiang Stein acquired in the course of his third expedition to Central Asia.³³ Without having seen the actual manuscript, Zhang Nali 張娜麗 drew attention to some discrepancies in the transcription, suggesting that

³¹ An even smaller number of manuscripts were in Tibetan and a few additional fragments in other languages (e.g. Uighur, Persian, Syriac).

³² The original location of the manuscript is evident from the code Stein initially assigned to the manuscript: KK0149a, in which the letters “KK,” without additional Roman numerals following it, designate the walled city of Khara-khoto. The modern pressmark for this text at the British Library is Or.8212/1344.

³³ Guo 1993: 26–27, 160–161.

they might be transcription errors.³⁴ Now that we have access to a high quality photograph through the IDP website (Fig. 1), we can confirm that her suspicion was well-founded and the characters in question had indeed been mistakenly transcribed (束<東; 阿<河; 計<識).

The manuscript is written on a very thin, almost transparent sheet of unruled paper, roughly square in shape. It is damaged in several places, resulting in missing characters which can only be reconstructed on the basis of the transmitted text. The top part of the manuscript has a margin but the bottom does not. The text is consistently punctuated with small circles placed after each four-character segment. The calligraphy is relatively careless and of mediocre quality. The text is preceded by the title *Mengqiu* on a separate line. Not counting the line with the title, the surviving part of the manuscript consists of eleven lines. Each line contains three segments which shows that, unlike in the case of the Liao printed copy (see below), the line breaks do not match the rhymes. While such a mismatch between physical layout and the text's internal structure is common in the medieval period, it also makes it easier to accidentally leave out or interpolate bits of text. Indeed, our manuscript contains an example for such a mistake as it omits the segment "Wang Xun duan bu" 王珣短簿. This is an obvious error not just because it differs from other versions of the text but also because the omission disrupts the carefully observed parallelism of the *Mengqiu* and leaves out the rhyme. This is perhaps yet another indication that this copy was made by a student, rather than a fully educated person.

Another noteworthy variation is writing the personal name of Liang Xi 梁習 (d. 230) as Ji 集 in the phrase "Liang Xi was the greatest in governance" 梁習治最. Considering that Liang Xi was an attested historical figure and that the name Xi appears correctly, among others, in manuscript DY049, this variant may be simply discounted as a copying mistake. Nevertheless, several of the surviving Japanese manuscripts also write the name as Ji 集, matching in this respect the Khara-khoto copy. In other words, even if the name is here a mistake, it was probably not the fault of the copyist of this particular manuscript but was a variant reading that was part of a specific line of transmission. Moreover, the fact that this character in the Khara-khoto copy matches some early Japanese manuscripts cannot be attributed to a coincidence but suggests a connection

³⁴ Zhang 2002: 81.

between those lineages. Such a connection certainly deserves more attention and its nature and extent need to be examined more carefully.

The discovery of the *Mengqiu* in Khara-khoto amidst a multitude of Tangut manuscripts and imprints confirms that the text circulated in the Tangut state. As a further demonstration of this fact, there is a Tangut manuscript fragment (pressmark Or.12380/2579) among the Tangut material at the British Library which shows some parallels with the Chinese *Mengqiu*.³⁵ This is a one sheet manuscript representing two pages of an original book, most likely translated from a now lost Chinese original. The surviving bits of text reveal that the text contained a didactic text in the form of questions and answers between Emperor Taizong and his minister(s), even though it does not match any known Chinese texts. The discussions retell a number of stories from the Chinese tradition and even within this small fragment at least three match those in the *Mengqiu*. These are (i) Zihan 子罕 refusing the jade offered to him; (ii) Yang Zhen who declined the bribe he was offered in the middle of the night because even in the dark there would be “four who know” 四知, i.e. heaven, the gods, he himself and the briber; (iii) Yan Shuzi 顏叔子 who accepted a woman into his home during a night storm but held a torch all night long so that he would not be tempted to violate propriety. Although the Tangut relates the stories in full sentences, considering the small size of the fragment, the overlap is significant, especially that the three stories are found in the *Mengqiu* relatively close to each other. In addition, the Tangut text also matches some specific phrases and names in the Chinese *Mengqiu*. For example, it uses a word for word rendition of the Chinese phrase *sizhi* (“four know”, i.e. “the four who know”), just like the *Mengqiu*. More importantly, it refers to Yan Shuzi as Yan Shu, omitting the last syllable of his name, which is significant because this name is almost never written like this, except in the *Mengqiu* (i.e. “Yan Shu bing zhu” 顏叔秉燭) where it is necessitated by the tetrasyllabic format of the segments.³⁶ Therefore, even though it is clear that the Tangut text is not the translation of the *Mengqiu*, it was translated from a Chinese text that relied heavily on the *Mengqiu* and was itself a primer.

³⁵ On this manuscript, see Galambos forthcoming.

³⁶ I have found the same abbreviated form in a Han dynasty tomb illustration but otherwise it seems to be unattested.

4. The Liao printed copy

A printed book of the *Mengqiu* was discovered among a large collection of printed and handwritten material in the summer of 1974 inside the Buddhist pagoda at Fogong monastery 佛宮寺 in Ying county.³⁷ The imprint is a notebook bound in a butterfly form, missing only the first and the second half of the ninth page. It contains the main text of the *Mengqiu* without commentaries. Each half-page is made up of ten lines of text and each line had sixteen characters. Based on the received version of the *Mengqiu* we can ascertain that there are 160 characters missing from the beginning of the text, that is, exactly one half-page. This suggests that in its complete form the book did not include the preface and the memorial, unless they were arranged along with the title on exactly one half-page, which is unlikely considering their length. Yet as we have seen in the case of two copies from Dunhuang, the preface and the memorial were often transmitted together with the main text already before the end of the tenth century.

In the imprint, the characters 明 and 真 appear with a missing stroke, indicating an imperial name taboo, which led the organizers of the material to the conclusion that the book must have been printed during or after the reign of the Khitan Emperor Xingzong 興宗 (r. 1031–1055), whose personal name was Zongzhen 宗真.³⁸ The character 明 must have been tabooed because it was part of the name of Emperor Muzong 穆宗 (r. 951–969) who had changed his personal name from Jing 璟 to Ming 明.³⁹ In addition, on the published facsimile images the character 布 seems to be missing its last (vertical) stroke, which is consistent with the practice of name taboos but does not occur in the personal name of any of the Khitan emperors.⁴⁰ This circumstance, however, was not taken into consideration by the organizers of the material, perhaps because being able to consult the original artefact they could see that the missing stroke was simply a printing error or other non-consequential discrepancy.⁴¹ In any case, without examining the

³⁷ Reports on the discovery and initial introductions of the material appeared in *Wenwu* 文物 1982, No. 6. For a discussion of the *Mengqiu*, see Bi 1982; Du and Ma 2014.

³⁸ Shanxi sheng wenwuju 1991: 52.

³⁹ Wang 1997: 329.

⁴⁰ Wang Yankun 王彥坤 (*ibid.*: 34) mentions that 布 was one of the 167 inauspicious characters prohibited in 1266 by the Yuan from being used in memorials presented to the throne.

⁴¹ There is another occurrence of the character 布 earlier in the text but there it appears in its full form.

original leaves it is impossible to be sure whether the missing stroke is an intentional omission.⁴² On the basis of the Liao dynasty taboo characters, modern scholars thought it to date no earlier than the beginning of Xingzong's reign, that is, 1031. Thus this is the earliest printed copy of the main-text only *Mengqiu*, even though all three manuscript copies from Dunhuang pre-date it because the Dunhuang cave library is believed to have been sealed around 1006.

The text is separated into three *juan* (*shang* 上, *zhong* 中 and *xia* 下), each clearly marked at the beginning and end. Although the beginning of the text is missing, the end has the words 'three *juan* in one' 一部三卷. Yet the places where the three *juan* are divided do not match the divisions of early manuscript witnesses. The layout of the printed pages is such that the four-character segments are separated by white spaces. Each line has four such segments and each half-page has ten lines. Following the text is a short lexicographic section listing the pronunciation of some characters in the text, presumably the ones deemed difficult for the readership. Finally, on the top margin of this last half-page we see a hand-drawn caricature of a man spreading his arms, obviously a later addition, perhaps drawn by a young student while using the book.

As it has been noted by modern scholars who compared it with other versions of the *Mengqiu*, the printed fragment has a relatively large number of mistakes and is thus not very reliable as a textual witness.⁴³ While some of the discrepancies with other early versions can be attributed to being part of a different transmission lineage, there are also variants that are plainly wrong and are particular to this one copy. For example, the character *zi* 自 ("self") occurs in place of *bai* 白 ("white") in the phrase "Zheng Jun's white clothes" 鄭均白衣, in reference to the Eastern Han official Zheng Jun (?–96) who had the nickname White-clothed Minister 白衣尚書.⁴⁴ To cite another example, the surname of another Eastern Han official Du Lin 杜林 is mistakenly written as She 社. In both cases, the mistake is clearly due to the graphic similarity of characters yet they would have been easy to spot if someone took the effort to proofread the text. This level of

⁴² Bi Sujuan 畢素娟 (1982: 25) lists this truncated form among the discrepancies between early versions of the *Mengqiu* but does not identify it as a taboo character.

⁴³ E.g. Bi 1982: 27.

⁴⁴ *Hou Han shu* 237: 946.

textual inaccuracy, coupled with the crude style of the printed characters, led researchers to the conclusion that this copy must have been done at the Western Capital of the Liao and was intended for local schools.⁴⁵

As a tangential note, we may also add that the *Mengqiu* may have had an influence on Khitan art. In his book on Liao tomb stones in Manchuria, the Japanese anthropologist Torii Ryūzō 鳥居龍藏 (1870–1953) describes some engraved tomb stones which had pictorial representations of the story of Guo Ju 郭巨 (dates unknown) who was famous for his sense of filial duty towards his mother. Although the story appears in a number of earlier sources, Torii opines that the examples seen on Liao tombs come from the *Mengqiu* where it occurs as the four-character phrase “Guo Ju is about to dig a hole” 郭巨將坑.⁴⁶ If his hypothesis is true, the tomb stone images would be further evidence of the popularity of the *Mengqiu* in the Liao empire.

5. Buddhism and secular education at the margins

All four copies of the *Mengqiu* discussed above come from sites that at the time when the texts were produced were not part of the Chinese state. The Dunhuang manuscripts were produced in ninth or tenth century Dunhuang, which was under the Guiyijun 歸義軍 regime, a military governorship nominally controlled by the Tang state and its successors but in effect an independent kingdom with its own ruling house and a multilingual and multicultural population.⁴⁷ The Khara-khoto copy came from the site of an abandoned city which used to be a garrison town in the Tangut state. Most of the textual material excavated at this site was written in Tangut but there were also some in Chinese in Tibetan. The Tangut translation of a primer which had some connection with the *Mengqiu* is yet another evidence for the popularity and influence of the work in the Tangut domain. Finally, the printed edition of the *Mengqiu* found in

⁴⁵ Bi 1982: 27.

⁴⁶ Torii 1942: 22–23, 103–106. The *Mengqiu* mentions digging a hole because according to the story in the *Soushenji* 搜神記, Guo Ju and his wife were taking care of his old mother when the wife gave birth to a son. Guo Ju feared that the son might hamper their caring for his mother and, in addition, the old lady might be willing to share her food with her grandson, thereby depriving herself of nourishment. On account of these two reasons, he dug a hole in the ground in a field and was about to bury his son when he came across a pot of gold hidden under a stone lid. The pot also had a note saying that the gold was intended for him to take care of his mother, since he had already demonstrated his filial piety. An English translation of the story appears in DeWoskin and Crump 1996: 132.

⁴⁷ For the history of the Guiyijun regime, see Rong 1996.

the wooden pagoda at Ying county came from the Khitan state that controlled a large part of northern China in the tenth and eleventh centuries.

Other known early copies of the *Mengqiu* survive in Japan and, to a lesser degree, Korea. There are more early manuscripts of this work in Japan than in all other places together, which attests not only to the popularity of this work on the Japanese archipelago but also to its continuous use for almost a millennium. It is a curious fact that no copy was found in Central China, even though that is where it was written. Naturally, one of the main reasons for this may be that there have been no great manuscript discoveries in Central China, whereas the desert climate and physical isolation of the northwestern regions facilitated the preservation of manuscripts. While there might be some truth to this theory, it does not explain the high survival rate of medieval Chinese manuscripts in Japan and Korea.

Another obvious question is why these bordering states were interested in the *Mengqiu*. Needless to say, their interest lay not in the book itself but in Chinese language education and the *Mengqiu* was merely one of the means to this end. Apart from providing a practical tool for the acquisition of Chinese characters, it also encapsulated a large pool of stories from the Confucian tradition, presenting them to students in an accessible and easily memorizable way. The main value of the text surely was its connection with traditional Chinese sources, in essence functioning as an index to a wide range of exemplary cases that may be of concern to young learners. For the same reason, there were a number of other works used for similar purposes, most notably the *Qianziwen* and the *Xiaojing* but it is only the *Mengqiu* that survived not only in Dunhuang and Japan but also in Khara-khoto and on the territory of the old Khitan state. In one sense, this is purely a coincidence because we know for certain that other texts used as primers, such as the *Xiaojing*, were in use in all of these states, even if we do not have archaeological finds to corroborate this. There are numerous copies of the *Xiaojing* among the Dunhuang manuscripts and at least two Tangut-language versions were found among at the ruins of Khara-khoto. There are also numerous early copies surviving in Japan and Korea where the text has been in uninterrupted use more or less until modern times. But even though there are references in historical sources to a Jurchen *Xiaojing*, no physical copy of it has been found so far. Having

said that, the discovery of the *Mengqiu* copies proves the widespread distribution of the work and its pragmatic qualities that made it useful for didactic purposes among China's neighbors.

Another conspicuous feature of these late medieval copies of the *Mengqiu* discovered along the northwestern peripheries of China is that they all survived as parts of Buddhist collections or libraries. Both in Dunhuang and Khara-khoto, the vast majority of manuscripts and imprints were Buddhist in nature and only a much smaller portion comprised texts we may categorize as secular. Even though the Khara-khoto fragment was found within the city walls, rather than in the large stupa outside the walls which yielded most of the Tangut and Chinese books, it nevertheless came from a site which had a strong Buddhist component to it. Similarly, the Liao imprint surfaced inside a Buddhist pagoda (i.e. stupa) along with Buddhist scriptures. There is little doubt that the copies of the *Mengqiu* found at these sites were all related to teaching literacy skills to students and in some cases were actually copied by the students themselves. This raises the question why would students be learning texts propagating Confucian values in a Buddhist environment.

While we have little information on the role of education in development of the collections at Khara-khoto and the Liao pagoda in Ying county, we are much more fortunate when it comes to the Dunhuang cave library where there is quite a bit of material that can be linked to the schooling of children. Whether the availability of the material is due to the sheer size of the Dunhuang corpus, it is a fact that there is a considerable number of manuscripts that are now believed to have been produced either by students or by others in the course of teaching students. Back in 1981 Victor Mair compiled a catalogue of nearly 600 Dunhuang manuscripts which he identified as having been copied by "lay students who were enrolled in monastery schools in Dunhuang."⁴⁸ One of the important points stressed by Mair was that the popular narratives which used to be interpreted as being used by monks for "evangelistic purposes" were in fact written by students as part of their schoolwork.

Most important among these manuscripts are the ones that contain colophons as these provide direct evidence to who, when and why copied the text. This smaller group of manuscripts is

⁴⁸ Mair 1981: 5.

identified by having similar colophons in which the students refer to themselves as a *xuelang* 學郎, *xueshilang* 學士郎 or *xuesheng* 學生.⁴⁹ Li Zhengyu 李正宇 collected a total of 144 such colophons, of which 72 had a clearly identifiable date.⁵⁰ Other colophons either did not have dates or the dates were given as a combination of Heavenly Stems and Earthly Branches (*tiangan dizhi* 天干地支), which repeats every sixty years and is thus not a fully reliable way of dating, especially from a distance of a whole millennium. But the dates of the unambiguously dated colophons almost exclusively come from the second half of the ninth through the end of the tenth centuries.⁵¹ In Dunhuang, this coincides with the Guiyijun period which began in 848 after the Tibetans withdrew from the region and the city came under the rule of first the Zhang 張 and subsequently the Cao 曹 families.⁵²

Typically, such colophons appear at the end of a copied text, often a primer or didactic text such as the *Qianziwen* or the *Taigong jiajiao* 太公家教, and record the name of the student and the time when the copying was completed.⁵³ Often the student is also identified as belonging to a specific monastery in Dunhuang. For example, manuscript S.395 contains a copy of the didactic text *Kongzi Xiang Tuo* 孔子項托 in a decidedly crude hand, to which the following colophon is appended:

Recorded by Zhang Yanbao, lay student at the Jingtū monastery, on the tenth day of the eleventh month in the eighth year of the Tianfu reign (943). 天福八年癸卯歲十一月十日淨土寺孛郎張延保記。

Although we know that the bulk of manuscripts in the Dunhuang cave library initially came from the Sanjie monastery, the colophons also identify other monasteries, such as the Dayun 大雲 or Longxing 龍興 monasteries. Thus the phenomenon of lay students studying at Buddhist monasteries was not limited to one particular monastery but seems to have been a general

⁴⁹ The word *xueshilang* alternatively appears in the manuscripts as 學仕郎. Another common characteristic of this group of colophons is that the character 學 is often written with the variant 孛.

⁵⁰ Li 1987: 26. The issue of *xuelang* students had been raised earlier by the Japanese scholar Ogawa Kan'ichi 小川貫弑 in two articles; see Ogawa 1973a and 1973b.

⁵¹ Zürcher 1989: 47.

⁵² In her book on education in Dunhuang, Itō Mieko 伊藤美重子 compiled lists of colophons written during the periods when Dunhuang was ruled by the Zhang and Cao families, respectively, see Itō 2008: 44–68.

⁵³ Zürcher (1989: 46–47) emphasizes that the *xuelang* colophons are almost exclusively attached to copies of texts of secular nature and only in one case does one follow a copy of the *Diamond sutra*.

practice in Dunhuang in the ninth and tenth centuries. Whether the situation we see in the Dunhuang manuscripts was representative for the rest of China is impossible to tell but the discovery of primers and other educational texts at other Buddhist sites in the northwest suggest that at least in these peripheral semi-Chinese regions this may have been the case.

Manuscript S.707 has a copy of the *Xiaojing* and the colophon identifies the person who copied it as Cao Yuanshen 曹元深, a student at the Sanjie monastery. This is no other than the son of Cao Yijin 曹議金 (d. 935) who was the ruler of Dunhuang at the time when the manuscript was copied (925).⁵⁴ His son Yuanshen himself ruled from 939 to 945 but at this point in time he was at most twenty years old, apparently still studying. Obviously, the ruling family was both wealthy and powerful and the fact that they sent the young Yuanshen to study at a local monastery is significant with regard to the social background of the students whose colophons we see on the manuscripts. It is also clear that they were studying at monasteries not with the aim to become fully ordained and to join the *samgha* but to receive basic education from which they could benefit in the secular sphere. This may be the reason why we see so many secular texts in manuscripts copied by these students.

Coming back to the *Mengqiu*, none of the excavated copies had colophons and thus we do not have an explicit connection with the students whose colophons are found on other manuscripts at Dunhuang. But judging from their handwriting style and other external characteristics (e.g. quality and color of paper, layout), the three copies found in Dunhuang all date to the ninth or tenth centuries. In addition, they are copies of didactic primers of Confucian nature found in the same cave amidst tens of thousands of Buddhist manuscripts. These circumstances provide an implicit, yet fairly reliable link with the group of manuscripts that carry students' colophons. Even though we do not have the same amount detail for the background of the Khara-khoto material, it is very likely that the secular primers (whether Chinese or Tangut) are related to some kind of educational activity carried on in local Buddhist monasteries. Similarly, the printed

⁵⁴ Cao Yuanshen's name is prefixed by the title *langjun* 郎君, which has a variety of meanings but in this case probably means something like "prince" and designate the son of the ruler. The colophon of manuscript P.2808 from two years earlier (923) includes several names, including a "Cao *langjun*" whose personal name cannot be seen anymore. Considering the temporal proximity of the two manuscripts, it is possible that this *langjun* is also Cao Yuanshen, although in this case the students listed in the colophon belong to the Jingtuo monastery. For the text of both colophons, see Li 1987: 31.

Khitan copy from Ying county was obviously produced for educational purposes and, judging by the little hand-drawn figure on the last page, had in fact been used by a student. The fact that it was found in a stupa along with a collection of Buddhist scriptures links it with secular education in a monastic environment.

Conclusions

The copies of the *Mengqiu* discussed in this paper all come from the northwestern periphery of China and range in date from the ninth to the twelfth centuries. Other early copies survive in Japan but remarkably none from Central China where the book was quite popular until at least the end of the Song period. This phenomenon is of course not particular to the *Mengqiu*, as archaeological discoveries of manuscripts and printed books from this period mainly happened along the northwestern peripheries of today's China. Regardless whether this is a coincidence or the result of environmental factors, most of our material comes from regions along the frontier. The use of Chinese primers in an environment where Chinese language was merely one of the languages (perhaps not always the dominant one) shows the enormous prestige Chinese written culture commanded in East and Central Asia. Many of China's neighbors were active consumers of this culture as it is amply illustrated by the surviving manuscripts and imprints.

Excavated copies of the *Mengqiu* provide first-hand evidence to how works of the Confucian tradition survived in monastic libraries along with much larger quantities of Buddhist texts. The examples from Dunhuang suggest that the reason why these fragments were intermixed with Buddhist works is that local monasteries were also the place where lay students studied. The manuscripts attest that as part of their training, the students—possibly sons of prominent families—predominantly copied secular texts, including primers and other educational works. The copies of the *Mengqiu* found inside the Dunhuang library can probably also be linked with this teaching activity of local monasteries. Although we have much less background information for the materials discovered at Khara-khoto and inside the pagoda at Ying county, it is likely that the *Mengqiu* copies from these two sites had at one time been also part of a schooling activity, presumably directed at lay students. All in all, such examples emphasize the positive role Buddhist monasteries played in secular education during the ninth-twelfth centuries.

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Fig. 1. The Khara-khoto *Mengqiu*. Copyright The British Library Or.12380/2579, image used with permission.