Across Text and Source

BACKGROUND DOCUMENT

Nearly every field of study in the humanities is in some degree and manner involved in the disciplines of literary studies and history. Metaphorically speaking, these two grand departments live intellectually side-by-side in a semi-detached house, sharing a conceptual wall that equally separates and joins them. Literary theorists refer to their side of the wall as "the text" while historians call their side "the source". For either discipline, the wall forms a discursive *apriorism* around which the rest of its theoretical and methodological structure has been built and is being rebuilt.

The **discipline of history**[1] admittedly operates with a large taxonomy of present historical material of the now absent past, including – according to the nineteenth-century theorist Johann Gustav DROYSEN – concrete remains (*Überreste*), sources (*Quellen*), and monuments (*Denkmäler*).[2] Among these, the written source – which **in literary terms** is "the text" – holds a uniquely constitutive significance for **the historical discipline**, since it is the emergence of a written record that traditionally marks the diachronic borderline between pre-history and history. Moreover, **historiography**'s truth claim of producing an academically accurate representation of the past (or **in literary terms**, *mimesis* in its general sense) rests methodologically on how the historical narrative can be documented with critically assessed sources. Essentially, this means propping up and legitimizing the historiographical text by means of other texts.

According to the traditional understanding represented by DROYSEN, the term "source" (*Quelle*) is defined as "that which, concerning a given matter of [historical] inquiry, has become part of human ideas and been transmitted for the sake of remembering..." or, in other words, "that wherein 'past events, as they have been conceived of and shaped by human understanding, have been transmitted for the sake of remembering'."[3] DROYSEN, moreover, distinguished between an oral and a written transmission (*mündlicher und schriftlicher Ueberlieferung*) of sources, with the latter type being constituted by texts.[4] In such a traditional **historicist**

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[1] As suggested by the workshop's subtitle "Comparative Perspectives in Literary and History Theory", this *Background Document* moves between presenting somewhat discipline-specific viewpoints on the notion of "source" from the **theory of history** and ideas about "text" from **literary theory**. In order to draw the reader's attention to the implicit conceptual boundaries where the document shifts from the framework of one of these disciplines to the other, a **boldface font** has been used to highlight the particular humanist discipline that is being discussed in a given paragraph or series of paragraphs. Paying heed to these field-boundaries seems necessary for the reading of the document, since each field entails its own set of theories and terminology, albeit oftentimes overlapping to some extent with the other discipline.

[2] Johann Gustav DROYSEN, *Grundriss der Historik* (1858; 3rd edition 1882), 14 (§21).

[3] DROYSEN, *Grundriss*, 14 (§21): "Historisches Material ist theils, was aus jenen Gegenwarten, deren Verständniss wir suchen, noch unmittelbar vorhanden ist (Ueberreste), theils *was von derselben in die Vorstellungen der Menschen übergegangen und zum Zweck der Erinnerung überliefert ist (Quellen),* theils Dinge, in denen sich beide Formen verbinden (Denkmäler)." And (§24): "In den Quellen *sind die Vergangenheiten, wie menschliches Verständniss sie aufgefasst und sich geformt hat, zum Zwecke der Erinnerung überliefert.*" Emphasis added.

[4] Op.cit., 15 (§24).

framework, prior to post-structuralist theory, the term "source" might then also be defined more simply as an object or record which enables knowledge or memory of the past, in that it is regarded as a window on the past.

As a brief digression, attention here needs to be brought to the fact that there actually also exists a second usage of the terms "source" and "source criticism" in the humanities, which differ (entirely) from the use of these terms in **the theory of history**. These other usages of the identical set of terms occur in **the humanist disciplines of textual scholarship**, such as Classical philology, Biblical criticism, Asian philology, and religious studies. In this usage, the term "source" does not denote a source of knowledge of past historical events but rather refers to the (textual) "origin" of a text's contents, and the term "source criticism" then signifies the textual methodologies employed by philologists to locate and identify such textual sources behind the given text; e.g., the textual origin of a direct quotation or paraphrase of an earlier text occurring within a given text. For example, the 18th-century French scholar Jean ASTRUC is said to have been one of the first humanists to have used such a *source critical* method in his search for the possible *sources* of the Biblical *Genesis* story in the Greek classics. Another example might be the Biblical Studies hypothesis of the so-called "Q document" (Q stands for German "Quelle"), being one or more lost text(s) that is believed to have been a shared textual ancestor behind the two New Testament Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Although these notions of "source" and "source criticism" surely also are worthwhile topics of inquiry, it should be stressed that the present workshop's concern with the term "source" primarily is focused on the **historicist** understanding of "source" as signifying a source of knowledge or memory of past historical events, and not as a textual source of texts.

When "source" is seen as a source of knowledge or memory of past events, the term not only refers to concrete objects of empirical perception that may evoke direct memories of the near and personally experienced past. Rather, in most of **history** writing, the sources in question are abstract objects of knowledge expressed in larger discourses involving ideas and narratives of distant past events, especially the discourse of written records having the form of texts. It is here notable that the **historiographical sense** of "source" implicitly operates with **literary notions** of "text" that are at once concrete as well as abstract.

In **literary theory**, the "text" is said to consist of writing, yet it cannot be reduced to writing. The word "text" denotes the overall meaning that inheres in one or more instances of writing, and in this sense "text" signifies an abstraction or a generality. It is for this reason that it is possible to consider a single text as consisting of several versions, when for example speaking of many different reprints, editions, or individual manuscripts as containing one and the same text, such as an authored work by a given writer.

This reveals a basic alterity between the individual word and the text, where writing only becomes text when words are woven together to form a larger *texture* or structure of meaning. Hence, the text stands apart from writing being neither wholly identical to nor separate from the written word. The alterity was implied already by the first-century Hispanic rhetorician Quintilian, whose work on oratory (*Institutio oratoria*, 9.4.3-23) contains the possibly only passage in classical Latin, wherein the Latin words *textus* ("web, texture") and *textum* ("woven fabric, texture") are used in a language-oriented sense coming close to the modern English usage of "text".[5]

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[5] See Toivo VILJAMAA, "*Text* as *Hyphos* in Quintilian: *Institutio oratoria* 9.4.3-23," in *Ad itum liberum: Essays in Honour of Anne Helttula*, edited by O. MERISALO and R. VAINIO, (Jyväskylä, 2007), 131-138.

Quintilian drew a subtle line between word and text when he spoke of the importance of stringing words well together with rhythm and melody in a simple and smooth texture (*textum tenue atque rasum*).

The alterity between word and text reemerged in the Medieval Latin usage of *textus*, when the term came to signify a piece of writing, whence the modern English meaning of "text" has been derived. Medieval Biblical scholars used the term *textus* to refer to a passage (*pericope*) of Holy Scripture placed on the manuscript page as distinct from accompanying annotations, interpolations, and commentary.[6] Here "text" came to mean significant (scriptural) words to be read and explained individually, yet simultaneously rendered meaningful in their interpretive entirety as constituting the fabric of meaning of the scriptural passage as a whole.

In this figurative meaning of "text" as anything that can be read and understood as meaningful, a number of modern scholars in the humanities have expanded the term "text" when speaking of other forms of "reading" and "meaning-production", for example presenting physical and aesthetic objects as readable "texts", including works of art, landscapes, archaeological artifacts, and cultural practices. Meanwhile, other theorists have voiced criticisms as to the suitability of stretching the term "text" so far into its figurative, abstract sense.

Considering these layers of the "text"-notion in **literary theory** and in the humanities more broadly, it would seem that the term entails multiple interpretive gazes. In a close-up way of looking, the "text" is simply the written word embodied in the document on the physical page with all the epistemological notions of empiricism this act of reading may involve. Stepping back and further away from the writing on the page, the "text" takes on more figurative, abstract meanings of authored works, textual transmissions, discourse, and perhaps even the semiotic act of meaning-making as such.

For **the theory of history**, it is significant to observe that historicist uses of "text" as "source" involve these differing levels, premised on a transparent understanding of texts as windows on the past, because it is the combined textual levels of concretization and abstraction that allow the historiographical method to operate with texts as sources in literal as well as figurative senses, or – to put it in other traditional methodological phrases – from perspectives of both lower and higher criticism.

For **historical** imagination, this may be comparable to the manner in which a tapestry depicting a scene from ancient mythology is neither reducible to the threads that make up the fabric nor wholly separate as an image existing apart from the threads. It is only by stepping back and disregarding the individual threads that the larger picture on the tapestry emerges into view. In fact, it would seem that it is this very act of textual distancing that constitutes the scholarly "objectivity", which traditionally is said to be required for the source critical method in **history** writing.

The above reflections on the terms "text" and "source" and their possible interrelations as respectively being synchronic and diachronic *apriorism*s for many of the academic disciplines in the humanities are intended to provide inspiration and clarification for one of the themes to be discussed during the April 2016 Chicago workshop, *Across Text and Source*. This is the theme of exploring how these two constitutive terms "text" and "source" have been conceived, received, and employed in the Western tradition of the humanities, from disciplinary comparative perspectives of **literary theory** and **theory of history**. Moreover, further questions

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[6] Ibid.

might be raised as to how thinking across these theoretical traditions may lead to new cross-insights into the terms and their possible methodological uses. At the workshop, specialists of Western intellectual traditions – ranging from classical, medieval, and modern studies of literature and history – have been invited to speak on issues involving these notions within each scholar's own field of expertise and scholarship.

This theme, however, only makes up a part of what is intended to be examined in the workshop. A further point of departure for the workshop is the observation that the epistemology – i.e., the theory of knowledge – that underpins the humanities as a scholarly discipline is but one possible theoretical mode. Key features of the humanist condition of knowledge consist in culturally bound concepts originating in European thought, including the terms "text" and "source", which may be less universally applicable than generally assumed. Conversely, non-Western knowledge systems have been diversely built on often radically different notions of the basic epistemic elements that make up their modes of thought, language, literature, and culture.

With the global spread of Western-style higher education and the university, non-Western societies in Asia and elsewhere have in recent centuries appropriated the words "text" and "source" as well as many other terms of European humanist thought along with the sundry social, political, cultural, and epistemological presuppositions these terms entail. For instance, "text" and in some cases also "source" have been adopted as direct loanwords in modern Japanese (*tekisuto* テキスト, *sōsu* ソース), Korean (*tegseuteu* 텍스트, *soseu* 소스), Indonesian (*teks*), and Hindi (*ṭeksṭ* टेक्स्ट).

In other cases, the terms "text" and "source" in their Western humanist senses have been employed in modern Asian languages by creating neologisms. These neologisms have been formed on the basis of older indigenous terms, which still remain partly associated with their earlier significations from the non-Western intellectual traditions whence they hail, thereby adding other nuances of meaning to the local signification of the new terms. In a sense, to borrow the Dependency terminology of the Latin American cultural-political theorists Roberto SCHWARZ and Elías J. PALTI, these seem to be cases of "misplaced ideas" which have been appropriated at the political-cultural periphery from the dominant political-cultural core, whereby the placement of the terms in altered contexts ends up skewing the meaning of the terms themselves.

Concerning these Asian neologisms, other modern Hindi words for "text" and "source" are respectively *pāṭh* (पाठ) and *srot* (स्रोत), being terms that originally belonged to the classical Indian traditions of scriptural oral recitation (*pāṭha* पाठ) and hearing (*śruta* श्रुत or *śrauta* श्रौत). In modern East Asian languages, the standard words for "text" (Japanese *honbun* 本文, Korean *bonmun* 본문, Chinese *wénběn* 文本 or *zhèngwén* 正文) all draw on the Classical Chinese term *wén* (文), which originally carried the sense of the patterns, colors, and order observed in both nature and literary writing.[7] The modern East Asian term for "source" (Japanese *shiryō* 史料, Korean *jalyo* 자료, Chinese *shǐliào* 史料), which literally means "historical record" or "historical data", has been formed by joining the classical Chinese term for history (*shǐ* 史) with an utilitarian word *liào* (料, literally meaning "a measure of rice" and figuratively meaning "raw material", "grain", or "stuff"), thereby giving the occidental term "source" a less accentuated epistemological sense in its East Asian usage.[8] In Central Asia, the neologisms used in

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[7] I thank Professor Ping WANG for drawing attention to these semantic nuances of the Classical Chinese term.

[8] It should here be noted that the Occidental term "source" (German *Quelle*) in the second sense in which it appears in the humanities, i.e., when denoting the textual "origin" of something as the term is employed in textual scholarship, is translated by an entirely different word into East Asian languages (Japanese *minamoto* 源, Chinese *yuán* 源 or *yuānyuán* 渊源 or 淵源).

modern Tibetan reveal a manner of creating syncretic terms that seem to combine the English senses with Tibetan words hailing from the strong pre-modern local tradition of textual scholarship, as seen in the Tibetan words for "text" (*yig gzhi* ཡིག་གཞི་ literally meaning "letter-based", or *ma dpe* མ་དཔེ་ literally meaning "mother-scripture" or "archetype") and "source" (*'byung khungs* འབྱུང་ཁུངས་, literally meaning "source of arising", which, in turn, is related with a common classical Tibetan term for "history," viz. *chos 'byung*, literally meaning "the arising of things" or "the arising of religion").

Conversely, there exist several phrases and terms employed in pre-modern Asian languages that bear partial similarity in meaning and usage to the English terms "text" and "source", but which were not adopted in modern Asian languages to denote these Occidental notions. For instance, the Chinese historian ZHĀNG Xuéchéng (章学诚 or 章學誠, 1738-1801), who composed innovative Chinese works within the pre-modern Chinese tradition of historiography shortly before the first influx of modern (Occidental) traditions of historiography, argued for the importance in historiography of critically relying on "documentation" (*jìzhù* 记注 or 記註, literally meaning "notes on records"). The word *jìzhù* is a traditional Chinese term which in ZHĀNG's usage comes close in meaning to the Occidental term "source", but without entailing the Latin weaving-metaphor of *textus* as the texture of woven cloth.

Other examples may illustrate how certain classical Asian literary terms, in fact, involve tropes of threads, weaving, and texture, thereby being comparable to the literal meaning of the Latin *textus*, but which in their Asian contexts have other, narrower connotations than those of the modern English word "text". The Sanskrit term *sūtra* (सूत्र) literally means a "thread". In the Indian Brahmanical tradition, this word was used in its figurative sense to denote a particular type of classical Indian text written in a mnemonic format that allowed easy memorization, "with a [mnemonic] thread running through it" so to speak. In other Indian interpretive communities, namely among Indian Buddhists, the same word *sūtra* was employed to refer to a genre of sermons spoken by the Buddha, thereby denoting a type of "discourse". Similarly, the term for the textual "Classics" of the classical Chinese tradition is *jīng* (经 or 經), whose literal meaning is "warp", i.e., the vertical strings in a cloth around which the horizontal wefts are woven. A similar use of the word "warp" to denote a kind of text occurs in the Sanskrit word *tantra* (तन्त्र), being the Indian genre name for a specific type of exegetical or ritual religious text.

Although the thread-trope of the Indian word *sūtra* and the warp-tropes of the Chinese term *jīng* and the Indian genre *tantra* come close in meaning to the weaving-trope of the Latin term "text", neither *sūtra*, *jīng*, nor *tantra* has ever been employed in classical or modern Asian languages to denote the Occidental term "text".

These perhaps trifle matters of Western terms in non-Western contexts – whether as loanwords or neologisms – along with the presence of allied or contrary theoretical terms in the literary, historical, and epistemological traditions that lie outside the dominant *episteme* of the globalized humanities underpin larger issues of dormant significance for comparative literary and historical theory. A possibility may be lurking here of rethinking text and source as objects of study for the humanities across the synchronic and diachronic perspectives of the *episteme*s of multiple intellectual traditions. These bigger questions, moreover, are tied in with non-Western traditions of the book, scripture, writing, reading, recitation, orality, and the performance of discourse.

A few random practical examples of possible theoretical consequence may be offered here. For instance, if the French literary theorist Gérard GENETTE has been right in arguing that the physical form of the text is significant

for its creation of meaning, what would the consequences be for the study of Asian texts, which traditionally were produced in document forms that are very different from the European book?

Further, if the British literary scholar Frank KERMODE has been right in hypothesizing that it was the Middle Eastern — Western development from scroll to codex that gave rise to the literary sense of endings along with the idea of a text being something that should be read from cover to cover *in lieu* of the episodic manner of reading, which prior to the Late Middle Ages traditionally was associated with scripture and epic in the Middle East and the West, what might then be said of the traditional South and Central Asian use of loose-leaf *pothī* manuscripts (पोथी), being neither scroll nor bound book, or the traditional Indian concept of the inauspiciousness of starting the reading of a text from its beginning?

Finally, if the American specialist of medieval manuscript culture Paul SAENGER has been right in saying that it was the introduction of spaces between words in Latin manuscripts that in the European Middle Ages gradually gave birth to the practice of silent reading, the institution of the quiet library, along with the associated idea of individualized, personal reading, what would the consequences be for the historical understanding of reading in pre-modern Asian societies where word-spacing first was introduced in South Asia during the colonial time, East Asian scripts still remain unspaced, and most textual engagement traditionally was and occasionally still is not silent but performatory, as seen in ritual, the recital of scripture, the dramatic orality of the bard, or the festive narrative performances of religious epics?

Moreover, if the humanist discipline of **history** rests on the notion of the "source" as its epistemological instrument for knowing or remembering the past, how can the now globalized modern tradition of academic, source-critical **history writing** then be understood in relation to the traditional Asian literary and religious *episteme*s, which regard the Chinese Classics (*jīng* 经 or 經) or the Indian Vedic hearing-transmitted tradition (*śruti* श्रुति) as authoritative, or in relation to the Asian epistemological traditions that sanction empirical perception (*pratyakṣa* प्रत्यक्ष) and logical deduction (*anumāna* अनुमान) but reject memory (*smṛti* स्मृति) and verbal testimony (*śabda* शब्द) as reliable means of knowledge (*pramāṇa* प्रमाण)?

With these further – admittedly very preliminary – reflections in mind, the second theme to be explored in the Chicago workshop *Across Text and Source* is a discussion of comparative perspectives of Western and non-Western intellectual traditions, with the notions of "text" and "source" as the key conversational themes. To this end, the workshop will include specialists of classical, medieval, and modern Asian and Middle Eastern studies, with the main foci being on India and China.