Constructing Sound Arguments: Paronomastic Premises and the Vocality of Validity in Early China

Professor Wolfgang Behr (University of Zürich)
5pm, March 11 (Wed), 2015; Rooms 8 & 9, FAMES

Abstract  While logical and analogical modes of argumentation in Early China have been explored in considerable detail, and, more often than not, dichotomized since the beginnings of sustained comparative studies of Classical Chinese philosophy and rhetoric in the 19th century, interest in the harnessing of figures of sound to construct persuasive statements or to vindicate evidence is recent and fairly unsystematic so far (cf., e.g., Long Yuchun 1962/63, Behr 2006, Suter 2014). Against the background of new models of Old Chinese phonology and morphology, this talk will trace some aspects of the early history of "sound argumentation" in China, from the Odes down to the Early Medieval period, and it will discuss how they fit into recent areal perspectives on the relationship between sound, meaning and aesthetics in East and Southeast Asia (Williams 2013) as well as into broader comparative debates about the "poetics of grammar" (e.g., LaPorta and Shulman 2007).

Wolfgang Behr is Professor and Traditional China Chair at the University of Zürich, Switzerland, since 2008, currently Director of its Priority Research Program "Asia and Europe" and President of the Swiss Asia Society. He read sinology, Slavic studies, Indo-European comparative linguistics and sociology at universities in Frankfurt, Shenyang, Changchun and Moscow. His research interests include the phonology, morphology, paleography and external contacts of Old Chinese, comparative Sino-Tibetan, pre-imperial Chinese argumentation, the history and epistemology of indigenous Chinese philology, and the theory of complex writing systems. His most recent book publications are a textbook and grammar of Classical Chinese (with Bob Gassmann, 3 vols., 2011-2013), an edited volume on (mis)conceptions of early Chinese rhetoric (with Lisa Indraccolo, 2014), and a Festschrift for Heiner Roetz (with C. Moll-Murata, L. die Giacinto and O. Doering, 2015). He is also one of the editors of the state-of-the art Encyclopedia of Chinese Language and Linguistics (5 vols.), forthcoming later in 2015 with E.J. Brill, Leiden.

All seminars take place on Wednesdays (unless otherwise arranged) at 5pm in rooms 8 & 9 in the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies. Tea will be served at the same venue at 4:45pm. All are welcome!