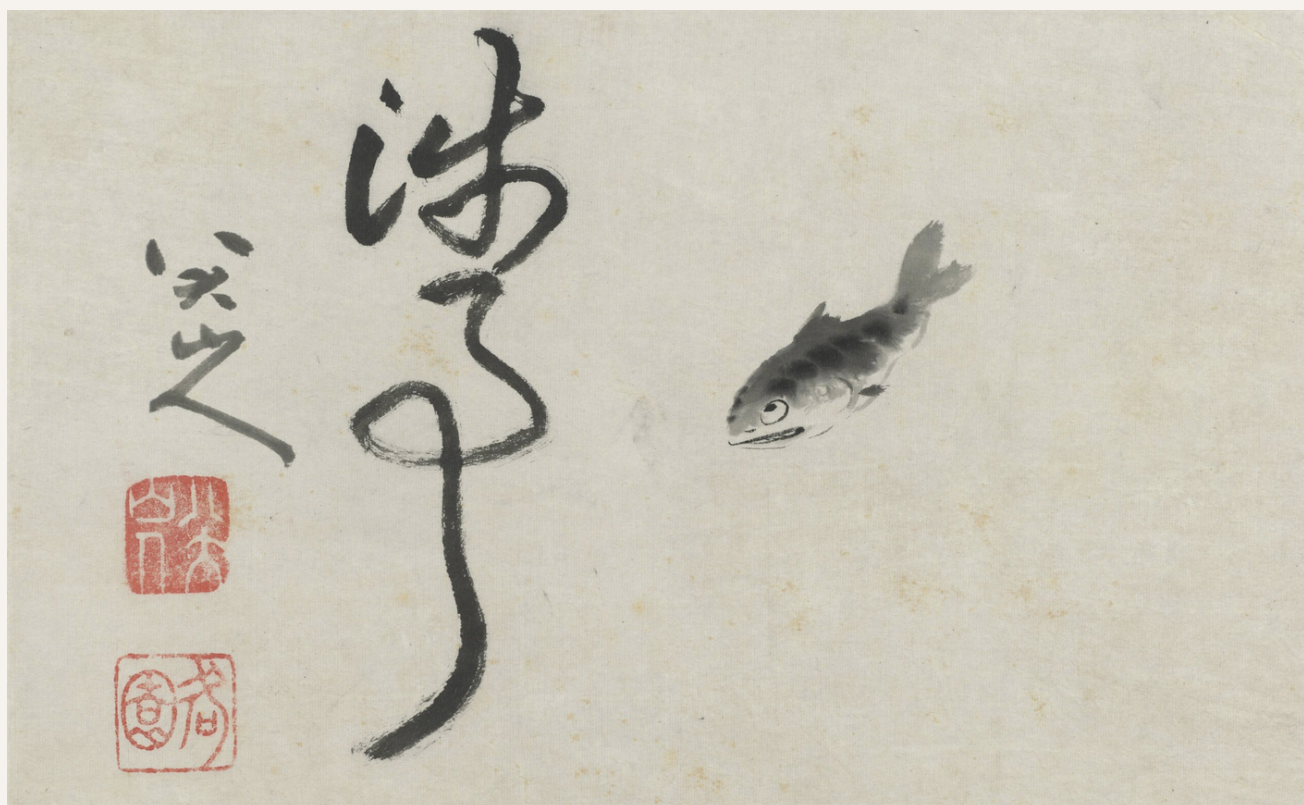




Zhu Da 朱耷 (1626–1705), leaf from the *Album of Sketches*. Shuge.org.

Linguistic Features as Text Structuring Devices in Early Chinese Texts

Digital Humanities Approaches and Beyond

International Workshop · 5–7 October 2026

This workshop explores how early Chinese texts deploy linguistic features as integral components of meaning construction—ranging from sound repetition and parallelism to graphic variation and indexical structures. By bringing digital and philological methodologies into dialogue, we tackle pressing contemporary questions concerning human-machine/AI co-interpretation: how might we engage critically and rigorously with machine-mined textual patterns? Intentionally interdisciplinary in scope, this event welcomes contributions that probe the methodological limits of either analytical approach.

Organization

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Registration

<https://www.aoi.uzh.ch/registration>

* Participants for crash courses are required to install R and RStudio in advance at:

https://www.stat.colostate.edu/~jah/talks_public_html/isec2020/installRStudio.html



Abstracts

Linguistic Features as Text Structuring Devices in Early Chinese Texts

Monday · 5 October 2026 Venue: KOL-N-1

Thomas Van Hoey

Balancing manual and statistical approaches to study Chinese ‘light’ ideophones throughout time

Premodern Chinese possesses quite a few ideophones (*nǐtài cí* 拟态词, although that terminology will be problematized in this talk) that vividly depict brightness or light. By taking a Diachronic Prototype Semantics approach (Geeraerts 1997), we can study the dynamic development of these words' polysemy structures, orthographic conflation, and system rearrangement throughout time. Methodologically, the talk progresses from more traditional approaches (manual identification and analysis, i.e., traditional lexicography) to semi-supervised methods (statistical identification and analysis, i.e., vector space approaches). While the focus lies on this type of ideophones, the methods shown are in principle available to all sorts of formalizable multiword constructions.

Crash course: R for (Classical) Chinese text-based data science

Part 1: How does R work and what can it do?

It is best to have R and Rstudio installed, here is a guide.

https://www.stat.colostate.edu/~jah/talks_public_html/isec2020/installRStudio.html

There are many other guides out there, so have a look around.

Part 2: Intro to working with text, esp. Chinese text

Goals and outcomes:

- Breaking down the process into size bite chunks
- Ability to run a basic analysis, from messy data to first visualization.
- Ability to handle basic text analysis (e.g., concordance, association measures)

Tuesday · 6 October 2026 Venue: KOL-G-212

Michele Pulini

Playing Lego with Historical Phonology: Some Examples from the Excavated *Cao Mo zhi zhen* 曹沫之陳

Chinese Historical Phonology has long been – and to some extent still is – an academically marginalized field beset by difficulties on many fronts. On the one hand, due to its heavy reliance on an indigenous philological tradition and lexicon rather than on the standard comparative method, it often appears obscure to historical linguists whose primary focus is not Chinese. On the other, it is also often perceived as such by Sinologists not trained in linguistics, whose primary focus is reading and making sense of the Early Chinese sources. It is only recently, with the increasing number of scholars working across long entrenched communities, and following a surging interest in rhetoric, argumentation and euphonics in Early Chinese texts, that some of the broader implications of this field are finally being acknowledged more

broadly. This talk will fall within this trend. By drawing examples from the two late 4th cen. BCE excavated Chu 楚 manuscript copies of *Cao Mo zhi zhen* 曹沫之陳 (Cao Mo's Military Formations) – a previously unknown 'persuasion' (*shui* 說) dealing with questions of warfare and ethics –, I will aim to illustrate different cases of application where Historical Phonology might turn out to be a useful tool for gaining a more thorough understanding of ancient Chinese texts, especially unearthed texts written in archaic and pre-standardized orthographies. As the title of this talk suggests, being able to unravel the soundscape of such texts often proves to be useful coordinates for putting together its pieces and reconstructing its meanings, much like a game of Lego.

Johann-Mattis List

Abstract to be announced.

Wednesday · 7 October 2026 Venue: KOL-G-212

Flaminia Pischedda & Federico Valenti

Aural Maps of Early Chinese Texts: Introducing a Computational Approach to Phonological Patterning

Rhyme constitutes one of the most securely attested forms of sound patterning in early Chinese texts and has long provided fundamental evidence for the reconstruction of Old Chinese phonology. Yet rhyme does not exhaust the possible interactions between similar sounds, particularly in texts and passages that are not organised as poetry. How might we identify and evaluate recurrent phonological relationships without automatically labelling them as rhymes?

This talk introduces **Sinorhyme**, an experimental workflow for producing “aural maps” of early Chinese texts. Taking the reconstructed Old Chinese rhymes of Baxter–Sagart (2014) as a starting point, we are developing a graded scoring system for phonological similarity between reconstructed OC rhymes (vowel nucleus + possible coda + possible post-coda). On our provisional **100-point** scale, exact reconstructed rhymes occupy the upper limit; different reconstructions belonging to historically established rhyme groups receive slightly lower values, while attested *tōngyùn* 通韻 and *héyùn* 合韻 relationships provide further historically documented points of comparison for assigning lower scores. Our principal experiment concerns the less secure intermediate range (**80-55**): relationships too weak to be identified as rhymes, but potentially strong enough, when recurrent or structurally distributed, to warrant further philological investigation.

Selected case studies will examine whether such intermediate relationships can reveal organization within apparently unrhymed passages and looser forms of phonological patterning in non-poetic and technical texts. Beyond pairwise rhyme similarity, the resulting aural maps can separately visualise distributions of vowels and final consonant classes, post-codas *-ʔ and *-s, as well as Type A/B syllable distinctions. The aim is not to automate philological judgement, but to make otherwise difficult-to-perceive phonological distributions available for systematic examination.

More than a Poetic Device: Rhymes and phono-rhetorical structures in Ancient Chinese “Technical Texts”

Rhyme is usually regarded as a simple poetic device, yet in ancient Chinese texts its use extended far beyond poetry. For example, it also appears in philosophical writings to underscore key ideas and highlight particularly significant passages. Recent archaeological discoveries further indicate that rhyme had an even broader function: beyond poetry and philosophy, it was employed as a linguistic device in texts commonly classified as “technical,” including those related to bureaucracy, education, and other specialised fields. Particularly noteworthy are three texts recovered over the past four decades: the **Weili zhi dao* 為吏之道 “The Way to Become a Good Official” (unearthed at Shuihudi 睡虎地 in 1970), the *Weili zhi guan ji qianshou* 為吏治官及黔首 “Overseeing the Administrative Apparatus and the People as a Good Official” (acquired by the Yuelu Academy 岳麓書院 in 2007), and the **Congzheng zhi jing* 從政之經 “Guidelines for Good Governance” (acquired by Peking University 北京大學 in 2010).

These texts, generally regarded as handbooks for early imperial officials, provide broad moral and practical guidelines for the proper administration of an imperial office. While previous scholarship has focused largely on their content, little attention has been paid to the formal strategies through which that content is organised. The aim of my talk is to offer an analysis of their structural features, with particular emphasis on their use of rhyme and phono-rhetorical structure. I will argue that these devices played a central role in shaping these works: they served as a device for articulating and linking their constituent ideas, and facilitated the study and memorisation of their instructional content.