

Zeitschrift: Asiatische Studien : Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen Asiengesellschaft = Études asiatiques : revue de la Société Suisse-Asie

Herausgeber: Schweizerische Asiengesellschaft

Band: 56 (2002)

Heft: 3: Textual scholarship in Chinese studies : papers from the Munich conference 2000

Artikel: The Huang di neijing suwen project : methodology of style analysis

Autor: Tessenow, Hermann

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-147583>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 05.02.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

THE *HUANG DI NEIJING SUWEN* PROJECT – METHODOLOGY OF STYLE ANALYSIS –

Hermann Tessenow, University of Munich

1. A Few Characteristics of the *Suwen*

Principally, I distinguish the following definitions of “*Suwen* texts”:

- <1> *Suwen* materials (or “primary texts,” according to D. Keegan¹)
- <2> Early compilations of these materials (Han)
- <3> The later *Suwen* compilation (between Han and Tang)

The *Huang Di Neijing Suwen* 黃帝內經素問 (“The Inner Canon of the Yellow Emperor, Basic Questions”) was the most authoritative source relied upon by Chinese literati physicians since the Song dynasty. In spite of its title, and in spite of the fact that most of its material is presented in the form of dialogues between the legendary Huang Di and his ministers, the majority of the *Suwen* materials <1> was written by numerous unknown authors probably during the Han dynasty (206 BC – AD 220). In the same period, further authors appear to have collected and combined the original texts into different compilations <2>. The *Suwen* <3> (like its sister texts, the *Lingshu* and the *Taisu*) seems to be an even later compilation. The present version of the *Suwen* was given its final shape by Wang Bing in the Tang dynasty (8th century)².

The contents of the *Suwen* focus on theoretical discourse; the major issues concerned include diagnostics, discussions of disease, and therapeutic piercing (i.e., acupuncture and bloodletting).

- 1 David Keegan, *The “Huang-Ti Neiching”: The Structure of the Compilation; the Significance of the Structure*, Ann Arbor 1993. – Keegan distinguishes between “primary texts” on the one hand and different kinds or levels of “secondary texts” on the other. Secondary texts may be compilations or, as in the case of the *Huang Di Neijing*, compilations of compilations.
- 2 The Song edition of the *Suwen* (while recording the differences between the Wang Bing edition and other versions of the texts) did not change this shape.

2. The Main Objectives of the *Suwen* Project

The *Huang Di Neijing Suwen* has been the focus of research at the Institute for the History of Medicine of the University of Munich since 1990. The project initiated and directed by Paul U. Unschuld was funded in a pilot phase by the German Research Association (DFG) and in its main phase by the Volkswagen Foundation.

The project pursued four main objectives:

- First, to prepare a reliable and annotated English translation of the complete *Suwen* text. Existing translations into European languages were unreliable, both from a historical and from a sinological perspective, and, with the exception of a complete French translation by Nguyen Van Nghi, covered only a very small part of the text.
- Second, to collect and take into account the very comprehensive literature about the *Suwen* written by Chinese and Japanese scholars.
- Third, to analyse the different historical components of the *Suwen* text. The many primary texts forming the *Suwen* had to be separated from each other and from the secondary text parts written by compilers or commentators; identical “text layers” separated in the present text had to be recognised. Ideally, one result could have been a chronological classification of these different layers.
- Fourth, to prepare a technical apparatus (concordances, glossary, annotated bibliographies) to assist future *Suwen* research.

Paul U. Unschuld performed the first task of the project, i.e. the preparation of a first complete English translation of the text. He then discussed his version with me, and through our deliberations we have produced a result which we believe to be the first philological translation of the *Suwen* in a Western language. We remain, of course, fully aware of the fact that further analysis of the text may lead to corrections of some parts of our version.

A unique feature of the project is the translation, by Paul U. Unschuld, of excerpts from a large number of Chinese and Japanese commentaries, both from monographs of the past centuries as well as from articles published in the 20th century, and their inclusion in the notes. (Appendix I shows a sample page of the annotated translation of a passage from *Suwen* 12.)

Prof. Zheng Jinsheng of Beijing collected and indexed almost 3,000 articles of Chinese periodicals and prepared the bibliographical data of about 660 Chinese and Japanese monographs.

To conduct a thorough analysis of style and content of the *Suwen* components has been one of my tasks. In the present paper I shall elucidate some of the methods I have designed and employed in this regard.

3. Methodology of Style Analysis

Analysis to some extent relied upon electronic data processing. Rupprecht Mayer designed databases which contain all three Chinese texts identified by Chinese editors as parts of the Huang Di Neijing 黃帝內經, namely the *Suwen* 素問, the *Taisu* 太素, and the *Lingshu* 靈樞.³ Many passages of the *Suwen* were rhymed (most of them possibly because they originated from oral transmission), a feature which is not always easy to recognize because pronunciation of characters has changed since Han times. Therefore, I have designed a database which assigns each *Suwen* character to its ancient rhyme group and to other features.

Also, we developed some DBASE programs which helped us, in addition to some other tasks, to search for and count all kinds of stylistic features, to print the Chinese texts or parts of them, and to print a concordance. The more important steps of style analysis, however, relied on detailed studies of contexts which could not be done automatically (i.e. by programs etc.). The following is an outline of some of the steps involved.

- First, starting from the contents and the major structuring of the text and, in addition, based on a comparison of the *Suwen* with the *Taisu* (which contains most of the *Suwen* material in a parallel but differently structured edition), I have separated the entire text into what were presumably its constitutive segments, altogether 364.
- Second, I have analysed these segments according to their contents and stylistic features. Parameters like periodically recurring elements led me to determine the basic structure of these segments which I marked by

3 The edition of the *Suwen* he relied on for the database was the critical edition prepared by Renmin Weisheng Chubanshe, Beijing 1979, which was based on *Suwen* editions of 1550 and 1852. The databases were completed in China, and they were read and corrected several times.

dividing and restructuring the text, and (occasionally) by numbering paragraphs of a periodic nature. In addition, I have searched these texts for their rhyme structures, and I have marked dialogue structures, commentaries, and insertions made by the editors and compilers.

- I have identified comparable segments and determined their structural and stylistic distinctions.
- In order to identify different segments belonging to one historical layer, I have searched for the recurrence of distinctive features of one segment in other parts of the *Suwen*.

The following is an example based on the analysis of *Suwen* 19:

1. I had labelled “19B” a larger text portion of *Suwen* 19 differing greatly from the rest of *Suwen* 19. Within this text portion, I distinguished four segments and labelled them 19B1 through 19B4. (See App. II.)
2. Two of these segments—19B1 and 19B3—are comparable in view of content. After restructuring these passages, the differences in style and content became obvious. (See App. III.)
3. Both passages deal with the same issue, i.e. how diseases spread in the body, or more specifically, how they are transmitted from one organ to the other (the organs involved being only the five *zang* 藏, “depots”). Moreover, they deal with this issue in roughly the same way: in principle, the disease is transmitted according to the order of “overcoming/dominating” which is supposed to exist between the five *zang*, i.e. the disease passes, for example, from the kidneys to the heart, because the kidneys are associated with water, and the heart is associated with fire which is overcome/dominated by water. We can speak of two texts with similar contents.

Even though 19B1 and 19B3 are concerned with similar issues, the following major differences in structure and content are discernible (see App. III, paragraphs No. 1 through 5):

- a. In *Suwen* 19B3 only one transmission cycle is expounded. It begins with the lung and ends with the heart, following the order of “overcoming/dominating” (i.e. lung/metal → liver/wood → spleen/soil → kidneys/water → heart/fire). In contrast, *Suwen* 19B1 has five cycles, each beginning with a different *zang*. Viewed from the initial depots mentioned in these five cycles, the overall sequence of these five cycles does not follow the

order of “overcoming/dominating.” Rather, it follows the order of “generating” (i.e. liver/wood → heart/fire → spleen/soil → lung/metal → kidneys/water).

- b. In view of etiology and disease development, 19B1 is much more elaborate than 19B3: Not only the immediate transmission (*chuan* 傳) of the disease is described but also its respective primary source and its further development (including a possible fatal prognosis). Two statements, indicating the primary source and a possibly positive development of the disease, are clearly based on the order of “generating”: In the statement “x *shou qi yu* 受氣於 y,” “x gets the [disease] *qi* from y,” y always is the *zang* corresponding to the phase generated by the phase corresponding to *zang* x (or more simply, y is the “son” of x). In the statement “*qi she yu* 氣舍於 y,” “the [disease] *qi* is inactive in y,” y always is the *zang* corresponding to the phase generating the phase corresponding to *zang* x (or more simply, y is the “mother” of x).
- c. In contrast, 19B3 elaborates on specific illness descriptions and illness names, and for each step of transmission it gives therapeutic advice—both features are lacking in 19B1.

In addition, there are some stylistic differences:

- d. The main part of 19B1 (paragraphs 1 through 5) is rather uniform. It is based on a very limited, recurring terminology, and its statements always have four words. 19B3 is much more diversified, in spite of a recurring terminology.
 - e. In both passages there is a recurring phrase *chuan zhi* 傳之, “transmit the [disease] (to ..),” followed by a (local) object denoting the *zang* to which the disease is transmitted. While in 19B3 this object follows immediately after *chuan zhi*, in 19B1 the preposition *yu* 於 is always placed between *chuan zhi* and the object. (Both alternatives seem to be grammatically correct and do not differ in meaning.)
4. Once the distinctive stylistic features of 19B1 and 19B3 had been identified, I tried to find the same features in other parts of the *Suwen*. Here the programs mentioned above were very useful. In the ideal case, there is a cluster of stylistic features recurring in different parts of the text which can reveal the hand of one and the same author. (One example is a cluster appearing in *Suwen* 36A and 41A which belong to a needle treatment tradition and which were probably written by the same author.)

Generally, most of the primary texts seem to belong to different layers. They originate from different authors, and very often they belong to different medical traditions with sometimes even contradictory theories.⁴ However, those secondary parts of the *Suwen* which were written by compilers or commentators (e.g. the dialogue structure which appears in many *Suwen* chapters) show more common features, and probably some of its authors are identical. (App. V shows a sample page of what should eventually amount to three volumes of a structured edition of the original Chinese text showing the various layers, parallel texts, rhymes, and ancient commentaries, together with a detailed introduction describing the different traditions inherent in the *Suwen*.)

4 For an example of two *Suwen* texts with contradictory theories, see App. IV.

Appendix I

Example for the annotated translation (extract from *Suwen* 12):

Its people live in earthen mounds and the winds are frequent.⁵

The water and the soil are hard and strong.⁶

Its people do not dress with clothes but wear [garments of] hair and grasses.⁷

Its people [enjoy] rich food and they are fat.⁸

Hence,

[external] evil cannot harm their physical body;⁹

their diseases arise from within.¹⁰

5 WB: "Their residences resemble earthen mounds. Hence [the text] states: 'they live in mounds.'" XJZ: "Overall, the West is a region of high elevation and the people live on high mounds. Hence winds are frequent. This does not mean that their residences resemble earth mounds." ZZC: "An elevated plain is called 陸. A large 陸 is called 阜. A large 阜 is called 陵, 'mound.' Because they live on mountains and mounds, winds are frequent." YZA: "The Western people live in holes. This is so up to the very present. Because they use mounds as residences, [the text] states: 陵居." YC in his *Xiang cao xu jiao shu* 香草續校書 points out: "The [two characters] 其民 should be 其地, 'its land.' The text further down states for the first time 'its people do not dress in clothes but in hair and grasses.' To connect the present statement with the subsequent [statements of 'its people ...'] is a mistake." HC/183 supports the interpretation offered by YC. For details see there. See also YYC/399.

6 WB: "The *qi* of metal is stern and kills. Hence 'water and soil are hard and strong'."

7 WB: "They do not dress in silk, hence [the text] states: 不衣. 褐 refers to 毛布, 'fabrics made of hair.' 薦 is to say: 細草, 'fine grasses.'" The *Shi jing* 詩經, Part I, Bk xv, 7th month, has: 無衣無褐, "without the clothes and garments of hair."

8 WB: "華 is to say: 鮮, 'delicious,' 美, 'rich,' 酥酪, 'koumiss,' and bones as well as meat types [of food]."

9 WB: "The water and the soil are hard and strong; the beverages and the food are fat; the pores of the skin are tightly sealed; the blood and the *qi* are replete. Hence evil cannot cause any harm." GHY/30: "形體是身體的表面, 'the outside of the body.'"

10 WB: "'Within' is to say: excesses in joy, anger, sadness, grief, and fear, as well as drinking and eating and sexual intercourse." XJZ: "The 悲, 'sadness,' [in WB's commentary] should be 思, 'pensiveness.'" YZA: "邪 is 外邪, 'external evil.' The evil of the six excesses must enter [the body] from outside. Here now, the pores are sealed because of the fat; the body is warm because of the [garments made from] hair and grass. Hence the evil has no way to enter. Only if one overeats, then fat and sweetness accumulates in the intestines and in the stomach. [Similarly, excessive sexual] desires waste the true original [*qi*]. As a result, the disease is not outside, it is inside." GWJC/40: "内 is 内因, 'internal cause.'"

Appendix II

Suwen 19B with marked text segments:¹¹

SUWEN 19B (121 – 11 to 125 – 2)

- 121 – 11 (B1) 五藏受氣於其所生，傳之於其所勝，氣舍於其所
 12 生，死於其所不勝。病之且死，必先傳行至其所不勝，
 122 – 1 病乃死。此言氣之逆行也，故死。肝受氣於心，傳
 2 之於脾，氣舍於腎，至肺而死。心受氣於脾，傳之於
 3 肺，氣舍於肝，至腎而死。脾受氣於肺，傳之於腎，氣
 4 舍於心，至肝而死。肺受氣於腎，傳之於肝，氣舍於
 5 脾，至心而死。腎受氣於肝，傳之於心，氣舍於肺，至
 6 脾而死。此皆逆死也。一日一夜五分之，此所以占死
 7 生之早暮也。◆(B2) 黃帝曰：五藏相通，移皆有次，五
 8 藏有病，則各傳其所勝。不治，法三月若六月，若
 9 三日若六日，傳五藏而當死，是順傳所勝之次。
 10 故曰：別於陽者，知病從來；別於陰者，知死生之
 123 – 1 期。言知至其所困而死。◆(B3) 是故風者百病之長也，
 2 今風寒客於人，使人毫毛畢直，皮膚閉而爲熱，當是
 3 之時，可汗而發也；或痺不仁腫痛，當是之時，可湯
 4 熨及火灸刺而去之。弗治，病入舍於肺，名曰肺痺，
 5 發咳上氣。弗治，肺即傳而行之肝，病名曰肝痺，
 6 一名曰厥，脅痛出食，當是之時，可按若刺耳。弗
 7 治，肝傳之脾，病名曰脾風，發瘧，腹中熱。煩心出
 124 – 1 黃，當此之時，可按可藥可浴。弗治，脾傳之腎，病
 2 名曰疝瘕，少腹冤熱而痛，出白，一名曰蠱，當此之
 3 時，可按可藥。弗治，腎傳之心，病筋脈相引而急，病
 4 名曰癰，當此之時，可灸可藥。弗治，滿十日，法當
 5 死。腎因傳之心，心即復反傳而行之肺，發寒熱，法
 6 當三歲死，此病之次也。◆(B4) 然其卒發者，不必治於
 7 傳，或其傳化有不以次，不以次入者，憂恐悲喜怒，
 8 令不得以其次，故令人有大病矣。因而喜大虛則腎
 9 氣乘矣，怒則肝氣乘矣，悲則肺氣乘矣，恐則脾
 125 – 1 氣乘矣，憂則心氣乘矣，此其道也。故病有五，
 2 五五二十五變，及其傳化。傳，乘之名也。

11 Markers in the restructured text are used as follows: ◆ : different text segments, ▲ : beginning of an editorial element, ▼ : end of an editorial element (when this element covers more than one line), { ... } : a commentary integrated into the text, numbers (1), (2), (3), ... : different paragraphs of a periodic nature. Stylistic features like *chuan zhi yu* 傳之於 which are important for the comparison of passages are underlined.

Appendix III: 19B1 compared to 19B3, structural presentation

19B1, structural presentation:

S_19B1 (121 - 11)

五藏

受氣於其所生，

傳之於其所勝，

氣舍於其所生，

死於其所不勝。

病之且死，必先傳行至其所不勝，病乃死。

〔此言氣之逆行也，故死。〕

(1) 肝

受氣於心，

傳之於脾，

氣舍於腎，

至肺而死。

(2) 心

受氣於脾，

傳之於肺，

氣舍於肝，

至腎而死。

(3) 脾

受氣於肺，

傳之於腎，

氣舍於心，

至肝而死。

(4) 肺

受氣於腎，

傳之於肝，

氣舍於脾，

至心而死。

(5) 腎

受氣於肝，

傳之於心，

氣舍於肺，

至脾而死。

〔此皆逆死也。〕

〔一日一夜五分之，此所以占死生之早暮也。〕

19B3, structural presentation:

S_19B3 (123 - 1)

▲是故

風者百病之長也，

今▲

風寒客於人，

使人毫毛畢直，皮膚閉而爲熱，

當是之時，可汗而發也；

或痺不仁腫痛，

當是之時，可湯熨及火灸刺而去之。

(1)

弗治，病入舍於肺，

名曰肺痺，發咳上氣。

(2)

弗治，肺即傳而行之肝，

病名曰肝痺，一名曰厥，脅痛出食，

當是之時，可按若刺耳。

(3)

弗治，肝傳之脾，

病名曰脾風，發痺，腹中熱。煩心出

黃，

當此之時，可按可藥可浴。

(4)

弗治，脾傳之腎，

病名曰疝瘕，少腹冤熱而痛，出白，

一名曰蠱，

當此之時，可按可藥。

(5)

弗治，腎傳之心，

病筋脈相引而急，病名曰癰，

當此之時，可灸可藥。

(5.1)

弗治，滿十日，法當死。

(5.2)

腎因傳之心，心即復反傳而行之肺，

發寒熱，法當三歲死，

▲此病之次也。

Appendix IV

Example for contradictory theories in the *Suwen* (extracts from *Suwen* 16 and 64 compared):¹²

S_16A4	S_64D
<p>▲凡刺胸腹者，必避五藏。</p> <p>(1) 中心者環死，</p> <p>(2) 中脾者五日死，</p> <p>(3) 中腎者七日死，</p> <p>(4) 中肺者五日死，</p> <p>中鬲者，皆為傷中， 其病雖愈， 不過一歲必死。</p> <p>▲刺避五藏者，知逆從也。 〔所謂從者， 鬲與脾腎之處，不知者反之。〕</p> <p>刺胸腹者，必以布襪著之， 乃從單布上刺， 刺之不愈復刺，刺鍼必肅， 刺腫搖鍼，經刺勿搖， 此刺之道也。▲</p>	<p>▲刺五藏，</p> <p>(1) 中心一日死，(=)¹³ 其動為噫。 中肝五日死， 其動為語。</p> <p>(4) 中肺三日死，(N)¹⁴ 其動為咳。</p> <p>(3) 中腎六日死，(N) 其動為噦欠。</p> <p>(2) 中脾十日死，(N) 其動為吞。</p> <p>▲刺傷人五藏必死， 其動，則依其藏之所變候知其死也▲。</p>

12 (1), ... (4): comparable statements.

13 (=): statement of the same content.

14 (N): contradictory statement.

Appendix V

Example for the restructured and annotated *Suwen* text (extract from *Suwen* 1; the notes follow the German edition):

- 15 以欲竭其精 a,
以耗散其真 a,¹⁶
2-6 不知 / 持滿 a,¹⁷
不時御神 a,
務快其心 a,
逆於生樂 b¹⁸,
起居無節 b,
3-1 故半百而衰也。

S_1A2 (1 3 – 2) (// JY 11.7 tw.)

夫上古聖人之教下也，
3-3 皆謂之虛邪賊風，避之有 / 時¹⁹
20 恬惔虛無 a,²¹

- 15 Die folgenden beiden gereimten Fünfwortzeilen, die wiederum von Vierwortzeilen abgelöst werden, sind wohl ein stilistischer Kunstgriff, um die ansonsten einheitliche Vierwortzeilen-Struktur aufzulockern und Monotonie zu vermeiden (s.o.). Dieser Kunstgriff findet sich auch in A1,(1) und in A2. Nur sind dort diese Zeilen durch 故 bzw. 是以 von den vorigen Zeilen abgesetzt. – Hier sind diese Zeilen besonders gut in den vorigen Text integriert, da jede mit einem 以 beginnt und somit das sich in den vorigen Zeilen wiederholende 以 hier fortgesetzt wird.
Auch inhaltlich sind diese beiden Zeilen offenbar streng parallel konstruiert: In der ersten Zeile werden wohl geistige Abnutzungen, in der zweiten eher körperliche Abnutzungen beschrieben; 精 steht prägnant für 精神, 真 für 真氣 – diese beiden Komposita kommen in A2, 3-3, würden aber als Komposita an der vorliegenden Stelle die Metrik stören.
- 16 耗 kommt bereits in *Zhuangzi* 19/56 vor, und zwar mit dem Objekt 氣 (“Qi vergeuden”). Im vorliegenden *Suwen*-Text deckt 真 wohl ebenfalls Qi ab; 真 ist sicher eine Kurzform für das Kompositum 真氣, das weiter unten vorkommt, und wurde hier wohl wegen der Metrik gewählt (s.o.). – Möglicherweise greift also diese Stelle auf *Zhuangzi* zurück (siehe auch die oben erwähnte Stelle aus *Wenzi* 3).
- 17 Der Ausdruck 持滿 tritt noch in *Huainanzi* 13 (125–10) auf, der ähnliche Ausdruck 持盈 in *Huainanzi* 12 (119–16). 盈 würde sich auf Grund des anderen Tones (耕_p) im vorliegenden Kontext besser reimen als 滿 (元_s).
- 18 b 藥 / 質.
- 19 虛邪 und 賊風 finden sich in anderen *Suwen*-Kapiteln wieder (vergl. bes. 13A und 29A, wo beide Termini vorkommen, und 71A1_2 und 71A1_5, wo der Ausdruck 避虛邪 steht). Sie scheinen im *Huainanzi* etc. zu fehlen, stattdessen tritt im *Zhuangzi* und *Huainanzi* der Terminus 邪氣 auf (*Zhuangzi* 15/9, *Huainanzi* 7/55–24; 14/137–20,21,28; 20/211–19!!).

-
- 20 Der folgende gereimte Vierzeiler könnte ein Zitat sein; genausogut könnte er aber auf den Verfasser von S_1A zurückgehen: a 魚_p / 幽_s b 之_p / 之_p .
- 21 Im *Zhuangzi* (15/13) steht der umgekehrte Ausdruck, 虛無恬憺, und getrennt kommen die beiden Zweierverbindungen in demselben Kontext mehrmals vor (15/8: 恬憺寂漠虛無無爲, 15/9 zweimal: 恬憺). Der ganze *Zhuangzi*-Text ab 15/6, der u.a. auch die Vermeidung von Sorgen und Krankheiten thematisiert (der Terminus 邪氣 tritt auf!), könnte durchaus als Ausgangstext für S_1A2 gedient haben: Auch der Schluß von S_1A2 klingt wie eine Anspielung auf diesen Text (s.u.).