

Seminar SAW History of Science, History of Text, 2011-2016

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Genres of writing in the history of ancient science

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Establishing the orthodox: Writing and editing biographies of practitioners in the mathematical sciences in Chinese Qing Dynasty

塑造传统：中国清代对畴人传记的编写

Abstract – The Biographies of Astronomers and Mathematicians (Chouren zhuan 畴人傳, hereafter CRZ) edited by Ruan Yuan (1764-1849) is the first Chinese book on biographies of practitioners who specialized in astronomy and mathematics. What interests us is not only how the book deals with these practitioners' activities, works, and mathematical thoughts—which would mean we use the book as a source to enquire into the biographies of these actors—, but also the activity of writing and editing such biographies in and of itself. The enquiry into the latter subject derives from our curiosity about the efforts Confucian scholars made in Chinese Qing Dynasty to reincorporate the mathematical sciences into a Confucian orthodoxy which ruled over the legitimacy of knowledge in the ancient world. Why were these Confucian scholars at the time enthusiastic about mainstreaming the mathematical study into their philological work? Writing and editing biographies for mathematicians and astronomers is an obvious manifestation for this fact. We try to answer this question by addressing the motivations for these scholars' work. We will also examine how they composed biographies and how they edited their sources to achieve their aims. In addition, the CRZ is one of the significant references in the Draft Biographies of Confucians (儒林傳稿) which was also edited by Ruan Yuan. We will examine the biographies of some Qing scholars both in these two books, comparing the overlaps and the differences, in order to do a case study on the role of CRZ during the establishment of the mathematical sciences as a part of the Confucian orthodoxy.