

The Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC)
announces an Informal Talk

by

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From Royal Court to Lineage Temple: Transposition of Investiture Documents in Early Chinese Bronze Epigraphy

While the earliest Chinese manuscripts written on bamboo strips date only to the late 5th century BCE, bronze inscriptions cast between 10th and 8th centuries BCE provide abundant evidence for the administrative use of manuscripts at the royal court, especially during the investiture ceremonies in which the royal secretaries read out king's appointment to high-ranking aristocrats. These investiture documents were often quoted in length in inscriptions cast on the ritual bronze vessels by these appointees, who had them displayed in their ancestral temples and used them in ancestral sacrifices and subsequent feasts.

In the first step, this talk will investigate the complex editorial process behind the transposition of the investiture documents onto bronze ritual paraphernalia. In general, such a process of transposition included 1. selection from several investiture documents, 2. abbreviation of the selected document, 3. contextualization of the investiture event, possibly with help of supplementary documents, 4. embedding of the text into the standard inscriptional template, 5. reformatting for the purposes of inscription, including change in style and size of the script, 6. transfer onto one or more intermediary manuscript and finally 7. transfer onto ceramic mould in which the inscribed vessel was cast. After bringing these individual phases under scrutiny and identifying common patterns of editorial work, I will discuss the shift in function of the transposed text from "archival" to the "monumental" (in terms of display function) or "canonical" function (in terms of cultural memory), and will further explore the differences in meaning and agency generated by the transfer of text from a perishable to a durable medium.

Thursday, 13 June 2019 at 4 pm
Room 2002, CSMC