

Summary

The edition represents a complete translation and multi-level study of the ancient Chinese treatise *Xīn yǔ* (“New Sayings” or “New Discussions”), traditionally attributed to Lu Jia (d. 170 BCE), one of the closest associates of Liu Bang, the founder of the Han Dynasty (202 BC – 220 AD). The treatise addresses fundamental issues of state governance, morality, and political philosophy, positioned at the intersection of Confucianism, Legalism, and Daoism, thus making it one of the key texts for understanding the political thought of early Imperial China.

The idea for this work emerged from a seminar on the study of ancient Chinese texts, organized back in 2014 at the Russian State University for the Humanities (RSUH) and, since 2021, based at the Institute of Oriental and Classical Studies of the Higher School of Economics (HSE). One of the seminar’s original main goals was to develop a new methodological approach to the analysis of these texts, combining linguistic, philological, historical, and cultural research rather than keeping them confined to separate studies. To illustrate the benefits of this comprehensive approach, core members of the seminar specifically turned to Lu Jia’s “New Sayings” as a literary monument which integrates philosophical, historical, artistic, and rhetorical elements, and, despite its relatively small volume, remains a complex and multilayered work. Additionally, although several translations into European languages are available, the text has so far eluded a complete Russian translation, making it of particular interest to sinologists in Russia.

In its essence, “New Sayings” functioned as a political guide intended for the rulers of the early Han Empire. Its content includes recommendations on governance, maintaining justice, strengthening the authority of the ruler, and moral guidance of the sovereign. Lu Jia emphasizes the need to follow the Dao and act in accordance with humanity (*rén*) and righteousness (*yì*), criticizing the harsh governance and militarism typical of the preceding Qin dynasty. The treatise illustrates its ideas with numerous examples from ancient Chinese history and mythology, stressing that proper governance must be grounded in moral and ethical norms. Although “New Sayings” ultimately did not become as popular as other classic Confucian works, it had a significant impact on the development of Chinese political philosophy.

Literary translation of the treatise into Russian is accompanied and, to a large degree, explicitly justified through a comprehensive analysis of its text, with particular emphasis on passages whose meaning continues to be obscured, either because of our unfamiliarity with the material and linguistic realities of its time or because of errors accumulated with the text’s transmission over time. Attention is paid to the historical and cultural context in which this work was created, as well as the interaction of various philosophical traditions of that time. It is shown that, while Lu Jia was a representative of the Confucian school, he was not limited to Confucian ideas alone; his work also reveals elements of natural philosophy and Daoism, characteristic of the intellectual climate of the early Han period.

A significant part of the study is the linguistic analysis of the text. The treatise is written in rhythmic prose that is generally typical of the Chu-Han literary tradition originating around the 4th–3rd centuries BC, as can be seen from detailed analysis of certain lexical and grammatical features of the text. The authors find no significant evidence to support the occasional claims of “New Sayings” as a later forgery, as the language is generally consistent with what is known about the linguistic properties of Old Chinese around the 2nd century BC, though inclusion of occasional interpolations from later periods certainly cannot be excluded. Despite the presence of numerous rhymes and parallels, the structure of the text remains flexible, allowing the author to express both philosophical and political ideas through artistic means. Lu Jia employs not only the standard literary techniques of his time but also unique stylistic decisions, including exclusive alliterations and rare word combinations.

The textual analysis of the treatise also plays an important role in the research. The study addresses the issues of the text's preservation, differences between various editions, and probable interpolations that may have occurred during the centuries of its transmission. Comparison of versions shows that the original text of "New Sayings" has most likely not survived in its original form, with many of its fragments either altered or lost; the original text can sometimes be tentatively recovered by putting together the contrasting fragments, or by consulting parallel textual segments in such other classical works of Chinese philosophy as *Lun Yu* ("The Analects"), *Mengzi*, and *Xunzi*.

In an innovative structural decision, commentary on each of the translated chapters is divided into three sections — "Linguo-philological", dealing with the linguistic properties of specific words and phrases as well as the differences between transmitted versions of the text; "Textological", addressing the numerous parallels between "New Sayings" and other classical Chinese literary works that either precede "New Sayings" chronologically or are more or less contemporary with it; and "Historical-Cultural", addressing the numerous material, cultural, and historical realities referenced to in the text. This makes it easier for the text to be perused by different target groups, ranging from professional Sinologists conducting their own research on the classics to general readers who are interested in broadening their understanding of the literature and culture of Ancient China.

Lastly, the translation and commentary is accompanied by a complete dictionary/thesaurus (compiled by Marina Lorentz and Andrey Ivolska) that helps form a complete picture of what might be called "the language of Lu Jia", allegedly typical of many other works commonly dated to the Han dynasty.

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