

Call for Papers

Sounds of Early China: Rhyme, Memory, and Textual Formation

Tallinn University, Estonia

11th-12th June 2027

Organised within the framework of **EduCanon**, a project funded by the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Action (MSCA).

EduCanon investigates early Chinese educational and lexicographical texts and the processes through which authoritative materials were constructed, transmitted, and internalised by learners. The project focuses on how textual form may have supported literacy acquisition, comprehension, and memorisation, especially through patterned language, sound repetition, rhyme, cadence, and other recurrent phonological devices.

This conference takes **EduCanon**'s central research question as its point of departure and opens it to a broader discussion of early Chinese textual culture. Old Chinese phonology provides increasingly refined tools for reconstructing the sound structures underlying early texts, while philology and intellectual history continue to ask how texts were composed, transmitted, taught, performed, memorised, and eventually canonised. Yet the technical results of historical phonology are not always systematically integrated into the study of textual form and function, and studies of early Chinese textual culture do not always make full use of the range of available reconstruction models and the phonological evidence on which they are based.

Rather than treating sound as a feature of poetic form alone, the conference asks how rhyme, near-rhyme, cadence, repetition, and other recurrent sound patterns may have contributed to enhance mnemonic practice, rhetorical effectiveness, and the formation of literary and scholarly knowledge. Particular attention will be given to texts that are not formally classified as poetry, but may nevertheless display performance-relevant sound patterning.

The chronological focus of this academic event is early China, broadly understood, from the Western Zhou through the end of the Han period. Papers may address transmitted texts, excavated manuscripts, and related corpora, including bronze inscriptions.

Possible topics include, but are not limited to:

- Rhyme, near-rhyme, and other forms of recurrent sound patterning across textual genres, with particular attention paid to non-poetic materials, including educational, lexicographical, ritual, technical, philosophical, historical, and administrative texts
- The mnemonic, pedagogical, and performative functions of sound patterning in early Chinese textual transmission and, more broadly, what such features may reveal about the socio-cultural settings in which patterned texts were produced, used and transmitted
- The use of Old Chinese reconstruction models in the analysis of early Chinese sound patterning, including comparative and diachronic approaches to rhyme, cadence, alliteration, and approximate or irregular sound correspondences
- Digital, computational, visual, and annotation-based approaches to early Chinese rhymes and sound patterning, including methods for identifying and comparing recurrent sound relations across textual corpora

The conference aims to foster an interdisciplinary dialogue bringing together specialists with different expertise, including linguists, philologists, and scholars of early Chinese textual culture. Contributions are welcome whether they approach sound primarily as reconstructed phonological evidence, as a feature of textual performance and mnemonic practice, or through a combination of both. The language of communication of the event is English.

Abstract submission

Please submit the following information to **federico.valenti@tlu.ee**:

- Name, email, and institutional affiliation
- Paper title
- Abstract of **250–300 words**

Deadline for abstract submission: 30 November 2026

Notification of acceptance: 15th December 2026

Conference dates: 11th-12th June 2027

Venue: Tallinn University, Estonia

The conference will be held in person only. Conference participants are expected to cover their own travel and accommodation expenses. Lunch and coffee breaks during the event will be provided.

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