Conceptualizing authorship in late imperial Chinese philology

Stumm, D.

Introduction

Text and interpretation, philology and authorship

The written word tends to be stubborn. Only the most drastic measures can change what a text says. This leads to the problem, common to all text-based cultures with a sufficiently long history, of such changed expectations among the reading audience that hallowed writings no longer immediately make sense. At that point, a text seems dated, and its stories speak to concerns that have become obsolete and propagate values no longer shared. How did custodians of textual traditions avoid having to discard their texts? One customary way of solving this problem was to read them allegorically.[1] Such a reading leaves the surface intact while it alters the interpretation, sometimes fundamentally, by introducing a non-explicit layer of meaning. A Chinese anecdote from the 3rd century BCE gives a succinct summary of this approach: Composing a letter at night, a man asked his servant to "raise the candle." In a slip of the pen, he included these words in his letter. When the recipient, a high official, read, "raise the candle," he understood it as a metaphor for promoting wise men in government. He enthusiastically put it into practice, and in the end, the measure had very beneficial results for the state.[2] The power of allegory is that it endows even the most trivial utterances with deep significance without challenging the wording of the text.

The tension between written words and meaning can be conceptualized as one between two conflicting imperatives. On the one hand, the received text's authority demands that it be passed on unchanged, letter for letter and character for character. This has been called "preservation of the text" (*Textpflege*). At the same time, a text still must speak to its readers, and this is achieved through "preservation of meaning" (*Sinnpflege*),[3] for which allegory is one important tool. Preservation does not imply adherence to an interpretation formulated in the past, but the creation of one that relates to questions current at a given time.

As researchers in the 20th century usually understood it, the discipline of philology concerned itself with the preservation of the text and paid little to no attention to meaning.[4] Based on recent

[1] Allegory is chief among the means "by which the old document may be induced to signify what it cannot be said to have expressly stated." Frank Kermode, *The Classic* (London: Faber & Faber, 1975), 40.

[2] "Wai chushuo zuo shang" 外儲說左上 (Outer Storage of Sayings, Upper Left), in Wang Xianshen 王先慎, *Han Feizi jijie* 韓非子集解 (Collected Explanations of the Han Feizi) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2013), 301.

[3] For these two terms, see Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (München: C.H. Beck, 2013 [1992]), 88-96.

[4] That is to say that according to this view, it is not the duty of philologists to make a text speak to their contemporaries. Kermode, for example, admits as much when he limits the enterprise of philology to the reconstruction of historical meanings. Kermode, *The Classic*, 40.

developments in the research on this subject, however, I employ the term philology in its broad sense. I understand it as the study of a text as text. This encompasses everything from materiality and transmission history to use of language, variant readings and interpretation.[5] The inclusion of interpretation in this list is a recognition of the "lack of any pre-hermeneutic moment in our textual relations."[6] No matter how innocent it seems, every textual operation ultimately makes an interpretative statement. Philology, in other words, is intrinsically concerned with the preservation of meaning. Historically, at times when philology dominated the discourse, scholars constructed their arguments around textual problems and buttressed their claims with quotations that displayed their familiarity with the sources. The expert who could join the discussion was an expert on the text, and not the perceptive interpreter. Yet it is often only against the background of interpretative problems that the full significance of a philological problem becomes clear.

One of the central tasks of philology is to determine the authorship of a work. Usually, philologists rely on the historical information contained within the text and the writing style to judge whether the assumed author could really have written the work. If a text describes events that occurred when the assumed author must have been dead, it is a good indication that the ascription may not be correct. Such a judgment, however, is again part of a larger framework. The name of the author functions as a classifier,[7] and guarantees the legibility of a text by anchoring it in time and space. As such, scholars can manipulate it in various ways to affirm or negate its value. Calling a text forged is the most straightforward way to undermine its status. Subtler challenges limit themselves to certain sections of a work, and the sections chosen for criticism sometimes reveal more about the scholar who picked them than the work under scrutiny. All discussions about authorship are implicated in, though not reducible to, interpretative questions. This is the perspective from which I will discuss them here.

Concepts of authorship and their role in Qing philology

During the Qing 清 dynasty (1644-1912), especially in the 18th and early 19th centuries, philology dominated the intellectual scene in China. Scholars spent years, if not decades, of their lives working through ancient dictionaries to master the challenging archaic language of

[5] Cf. Sheldon Pollock, "Introduction," in idem, Benjamin Elman and Ku-ming Kevin Chang (eds.), *World Philology* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2015), 12.
[6] Michelle R. Warren, "The Politics of Textual Scholarship," in Neil Fraistat and Julia Flanders, *The Cambridge Companion to Textual Scholarship* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2013), 131.
[7] Michel Foucault, "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?" in idem, *Dits et écrits 1: 1954-1969* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 798.

the classics. They collated early texts on an unprecedented scale in order to restore their original appearance, and studied the details of their histories of transmission. The scholarship of this era is known as "evidential learning" (*kaozheng xue* 考證學).

In this dissertation, I offer a new perspective on evidential learning by analyzing the conceptual framework on which it rested. I argue that Qing scholars employed a narrow concept of authorship that posited only one author for each text. This shaped the ways they approached texts from the pre-imperial period (ca. 5th to 3rd century BCE). Employing this narrow concept focused attention on the different voices contained in these often multi-layered texts, and so Qing scholars used authorship to delegitimize some voices as they tried to establish with greater precision biographical details of the speakers they identified so as to assess their credibility. Authorship mattered because Qing scholars recognized that the author's perspective influenced what kind of story they were able to read.

The consequences of this author-centered approach become visible in the ways Qing scholars approached the *Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語). Everyone agreed that this repository of the words and deeds of Confucius 孔子 (trad. 551-479 BCE) had been put together by his disciples. This knowledge, however, raised the question of the transmitters' reliability. In their discussions, scholars set out to save the authority of the *Analects* by establishing, as precisely as possible, which disciple was responsible for including which saying in the text, or by revaluating the content based on their expectations of sagely behavior. Under the philological gaze, the received text fell apart into conflicting strands of rival stories and the scholars had to find a way to put the pieces back together.

In my analysis of scholarly discussions on the reliability of the *Analects* and other issues of a similar nature, I consider several questions: What were the criteria by which scholars delegitimized some of the voices contained in a text? On what grounds did they justify their textual operations? If every textual operation is an interpretation, which interpretation found the most widespread support? Conversely, which elements of this type of scholarship became the target of contemporary critics? These questions are central to understanding the epistemic and doctrinal foundations of Chinese philology as practiced in the 18th and early 19th centuries.

Literature review

In the last four decades, scholars have generally approached the topic of Qing evidential learning from three different angles. In the 1970s and 1980s, scholars looked for what could be

termed the "indigenous sprouts of modernity." Going back to the Chinese modernization discourse of the early 20th century, the distinctive characteristic of this approach is that it focuses on the achievements of Qing scholars in technical fields such as mathematics, astronomy, historical geography and phonology, highlighting their proto-scientific quality. Benjamin Elman, for example, worked within this framework. His studies that focus on the 18th century provide convincing arguments for the importance of social factors, such as career opportunities in the history of evidential studies, but he does not address the doctrinal struggles carried out with the same philological tools in the field of classical studies.[8] Instead, in his most recent work on the subject, Elman maintains that Qing "classicists advocated an impartial program" of research.[9] This holds up philology as an idealized pursuit of truth, which ignores the fact that Qing scholars used philology as a means to very different ends. Philology constituted a discourse within which they spoke to each other, and one has to exercise caution and distinguish their goals, formulated as ideals, from what they argued in their research practice. Elman's studies highlight the social developments that gave rise to evidential studies but obscure the intellectual principles on which it was based.

From the 1990s to the beginning of the 21st century, by contrast, most researchers who dealt with Qing evidential studies used hermeneutics as their interpretative framework, especially as developed by Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002).[10] Consequently, researchers paid more attention to the assumptions evidential scholars brought to the texts they read. The hermeneutical approach questions the existence of objective truths and probes the historical-intellectual circumstances of understanding. Michael Quirin has argued through a case study on the Qing scholar Cui Shu 崔述 (1740-1816) that description and value judgment remained closely intertwined in evidential scholarship.[11] Quirin's conclusions contradict assessments of evidential studies as impartial or even objective scholarship. Similarly, Shao Dongfang claimed

[8] Benjamin Elman, *From Philosophy to Philology. Intellectual and Social Aspects of Change in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1984).
[9] Benjamin Elman, "Early Modern or Late Imperial? The Crisis of Classical Philology in Eighteenth-Century China," in Sheldon Pollock, Benjamin Elman and Chang Ku-ming (eds.), *World Philology*, 231. Elman's follow-up to *From Philosophy to Philology* convincingly argues for the political implications inherent in New Text Confucianism of the 19th century and traces its attempts to distinguish itself from competing interpretations, but does not substantially modify his conclusions about scholarship of the 18th century. See Benjamin Elman, *Classicism, Politics, and Kinship. The Ch'ang-chou School of New Text Confucianism in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).
[10] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1960).
[11] Michael Quirin, "Scholarship, Value, Method, and Hermeneutics in kaozheng: Some Reflections on Cui Shu (1740-1816) and the Confucian Classics," in *History and Theory*, vol. 35, no. 4, December 1996, 34-53.

that Cui Shu drew no distinction between scholarly truth and value judgment.[12] In an encompassing study of the intellectual history of the late imperial China, Kai-Wing Chow has stressed the purist and ritualist tendencies that guided the application of evidential studies.[13] These authors have shown that the hermeneutic approach can productively address the scholarly disputes of the Qing dynasty. Many studies carried out in this framework, however, exhibit a tendency towards the abstract, philosophical questions inherent in hermeneutics, neglecting the practices of textual studies.[14] Interest in the entanglement between actual philological methods and preconceived notions remains on the level of the case study, more often than not of the work of Cui Shu. By terming his scholarship an "alternative" to standard evidential studies, Kai-Wing Chow reinforces the idealization of 18th-century scholarship.[15] As a result, the mechanisms by which biases inherent in Qing dynasty scholarship affected research and argumentation remain uncharted. Considering those mechanisms will allow us to identify and understand characteristic features of evidential learning that distinguish it from other types of scholarship.

In recent years, there has been renewed interest in philology's development into a distinct academic discipline, with a special focus on early modern times (16th to 18th centuries).[16] Ultimately rooted in the history of scholarship,[17] this project traces how deeply philology, in both its methods and its results, has been shaped by the assumptions held by individual practitioners. Despite the apparent idiosyncrasy of many of their assumptions, the philologists of early modern times and the results of their research have long been hailed as scholarly examples and praised for their objectivity, a view that many recent publications dispute. Today

[12] Shao Dongfang 邵東方, *Cui Shu xueshu kaolun* 崔述學術考論 (A Critical Study of Cui Shu's [1740-1816] Scholarship) (Taibei: Airiti Press, 2010 [1997]), 285.
[13] Most extensively in Kai-Wing Chow, *The Rise of Confucian Ritualism in Late Imperial China. Ethics, Classics and Lineage Discourse* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1994).
[14] Cf. the essays collected in the following edited volumes: Kai-Wing Chow, On-cho Ng and John B. Henderson (eds.), *Imagining Boundaries. Changing Confucian Doctrines, Texts and Hermeneutics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999). Ching-I Tu (ed.), *Classics and Interpretations. The Hermeneutic Traditions in Chinese Culture* (New Jersey: Transaction, 2000). Ching-I Tu (ed.), *Interpretation and Intellectual Change. Chinese Hermeneutics in Historical Perspective* (New Brunswick: Transaction publishers, 2005).
[15] Kai-Wing Chow, "An Alternative Hermeneutics of Truth. Cui Shu's Evidential Scholarship on Confucius" in Ching-I Tu (ed.), *Interpretation and Intellectual Change. Chinese Hermeneutics in Historical Perspective*, 19-31.
[16] James Crewdson Turner, *Philology. The Forgotten Origins of Modern Humanities* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2014). Sheldon Pollock, Benjamin Elman and Chang Ku-ming (eds.), *World Philology* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2015). Anthony Grafton and Glenn Most (eds.), *Canonical Texts and Scholarly Practices. A Global Comparative Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2016).
[17] Perhaps most influentially Anthony Grafton, *Defenders of the Text. The Traditions of Scholarship in an Age of Science* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1991).

historians of philology argue that the motivations behind even the most arcane applications of textual scholarship must be taken seriously.[18]

Taking philology as a distinct field of knowledge production, tied to specific actors and their beliefs, opens promising avenues for understanding the unique features of this scholarly activity.[19] In textual scholarship, there is always more at stake than the individual word or character since this word or character is embedded in a larger interpretative system. Despite the eminently global orientation of this approach, scholars have only just begun to study late imperial Chinese scholarship based on this new understanding of philology.[20] Furthermore, some research gravitates towards case-based, source-heavy research that neglects the more abstract concepts that played a role in the work of early modern philologists. As I argue in this study, the concept of authorship informed critical questions Qing scholars raised and the ways they addressed them.

Methodology

Combining the strengths of the hermeneutical and the philological-historical approaches, this dissertation analyzes how the concepts and preconceived notions of mid-Qing scholars shaped their textual scholarship. Based on a close reading of their writings, I show how they defended their beliefs by applying methods that were supposed to guarantee objective and factually correct results. These methods include copious quotations from primary and secondary sources, extensive inquiries into transmission histories and attention to the usage of period-specific language.

The working assumption of Qing textual scholarship was that every text belonged to one author. This *narrow* concept of authorship understands text production as a process where one person has an idea and writes it down by himself. In other words, the author is the originator of the content and the creator of the written text[21] in one person.[22] There is now broad consensus that

[18] See Grafton, *Defenders of the Text*, 161.
[19] In a recent article, Nathan Vedal has shown that contemporary cosmological speculations inspired phonological innovations in the Ming dynasty. See his "New Scripts for All Sounds: Cosmology and Universal Phonetic Notation Systems in Late Imperial China," in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 78, no. 1, June 2018, 1-46.
[20] One such work is Ori Sela, *China's Philological Turn. Scholars, Textualism, and the Dao in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia UP, 2018).
[21] At the very least, the originator of content is also centrally involved in the process of textual creation. For example, this could mean that he is dictating, as was the practice in European antiquity. See Harold Love, *Attributing Authorship. An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), 34.
[22] For recent takes on how to conceptualize authorship and authenticity, especially for pre-modern texts, see the following: Armin Daniel Baum, *Pseudepigraphie und literarische Fälschung im frühen Christentum. Mit ausgewählten Quellentexten samt deutscher Übersetzung* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001). Scott McGill,

this model is not applicable to most early Chinese texts (those believed to have their roots in the pre-imperial period) in their received form. Instead, as Paul Fischer has argued, there is good reason to assume that what we think of as a "text" took shape over long periods of time, during which bits and pieces circulated independently and in competing versions.[23] There was not one, but many authors for what later became a single text named after one person. Most Qing scholars did not think along these lines, thus there existed a discrepancy between concept and research material: They expected to read texts by a single author, but could not ignore the fact that early texts did not fit into this mold. My interest lies in the productive tension to which this discrepancy gave rise. Scholars had to adapt their judgments to the actual features of the texts, which they did by assigning ownership of individual passages and whole chapters to historical figures. They used the model of school traditions to identify the historical actors and coupled these identifications with value judgments. Thus, in Qing portrayals, the original master was an infallible source of wisdom and responsible for the "best" parts of a work, while his followers were at best partially reliable transmitters who could be blamed for problematic content.

The sources I use span the period from roughly 1750 to 1820. These decades constitute the pinnacle of evidential learning, situated between the formative first century of the Qing dynasty and the loss of its dominant position in the discourse during the decades leading up to the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864), when widespread warfare disrupted the pursuit of scholarship.[24] All sources relevant to my analysis can be found in prose collections (*wenji* 文集), some published during the author's lifetime, some posthumously. These collections consist of prefaces and letters, as well as brief essays that often discuss one specific issue or text. The short essay, in the form of an analysis (*bian* 辨), study (*kao* 考) or discussion (*lun* 論), was the preferred format in which many Qing scholars discussed issues related either to the authorship of pre-imperial texts or to the way scholarship was to be done, and this constitutes the key

Plagiarism in Latin Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012). Irene Peirano, *The Rhetoric of the Roman Fake: Latin Pseudepigrapha in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012). Javier Martinez (ed.), *Fakes and Forgers of Classical Literature. Ergo Decipiatur!* (Leiden: Brill, 2014). Christian Schwermann and Raji Steineck (eds.), *That Wonderful Composite Called Author. Authorship in East Asian Literatures from the Beginnings to the Seventeenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2014). The introduction of this last work gives a detailed overview of the different roles the figure of the author can play.

[23] Cf. Paul Fischer, "Authentication Studies (辨偽學) Methodology and the Polymorphous Text Paradigm," in *Early China* 32, 2008-2009, 1f.

[24] Chinese-language scholarship refers to this period as the Qian-Jia era (Qian-Jia *shidai* 乾嘉時代), after the Qianlong 乾隆 (1736-1796) and Jiaqing 嘉慶 (1796-1820) reigns that coincide with these intellectual developments.

source material for my analysis. More extensive works such as monographs and commentaries engage with these issues less frequently, therefore they are less important for this dissertation.

All Qing figures usually considered to have been evidential scholars in recent scholarship make their appearance at some point in the following pages. However, I do not draw a strict line separating them from their contemporaries not usually considered due to their distance from the academic mainstream. The assumption behind my inclusive approach to the *dramatis personae* is that there was significant overlap in both methodology and topic. The assumptions of evidential learning were so pervasive that hardly anyone went public with his opinion without the accompanying apparatus of textual evidence. Everyone spoke the same language. At the same time, the issues I discuss concerned a sizeable number of researchers in one way or another, regardless of their intellectual affiliation. Challenges to author-ascriptions that had been accepted for centuries, for example, were bound to create controversy; therefore, many scholars formulated their own take on the issue. Besides the *Analects* already mentioned above, struggles around authorship extended to the *Venerated Documents* (*Shangshu* 尚書), the *Zuo Tradition* (*Zuozhuan* 左傳) and the preface to the *Book of Odes* (*Shijing* 詩經). Furthermore, by including figures besides the big names of the period such as Dai Zhen 戴震 (1724-1777) and Qian Daxin 錢大昕 (1728-1804), I show that the discourse was not limited to a few intellectual giants. Within the circle of educated elites, philology had a broad basis among scholars who contributed to and sustained research.

Contributions

The goal of this dissertation is to show how the concept of authorship Qing scholars employed forced them to face interpretative issues, which they resolved in ways that bear the mark of the social conservatism of the period. The underlying question is how the concept of authorship interacted with an idealized image of antiquity to drive philological research in a direction that distinguishes the scholarship of the mid-Qing from other periods.

I have already laid out how Qing scholars started their research with the assumption that every early Chinese text was produced by one author. When this narrow concept of authorship reached its limits because it did not allow space for differing voices within a work, scholars were forced to decide which of these voices belonged to the legitimate author (the creator of the content), and which represented additions by other contributors. The scarcity of external evidence turned this issue into a question of interpretation. Scholars could only rely on what

they believed the legitimate author would have said to distinguish genuine from spurious. This, however, proved to be a highly subjective criterion.

A pattern emerges when we scrutinize the ways Qing scholars legitimized or devalued the different voices in a single text. In the most general terms, they usually thought highly of the figure whose name graced the title page and blamed his followers for the shortcomings and cruder passages within the text. As my case study of Confucius and the *Analects* shows, the standards scholars applied to Confucius's words and behavior correlate closely with the social conservatism of the Qing dynasty.

The prominent role of interpretative issues and the preconceptions about the correct behavior of the sages of antiquity shows that Qing evidential learning was neither impartial nor objective. Rather, it constituted a scholarly discourse that remained within the boundaries of a classical interpretation that was centered on Confucius. Scholars defended his character with the philological tools at their disposal and assigned other received texts a place in an intellectual genealogy they arranged around him.[25] Ori Sela has recently pointed out that the discussions Qing scholars had about other aspects of evidential learning, such as astronomy, were similarly constrained by their need to defend their identity against the perceived threat of Western knowledge.[26] All this throws assessments of evidential learning as unbiased scholarship into question. It is true that the use of evidence played an important role; reliance on evidence alone, however, does not qualify scholarship as objective or impartial. Scholars' assumptions, for example about the behavior of historical figures, influence the direction their research takes. Sometimes they defend those assumptions despite statements in the sources that seem to contradict them, thus reducing evidence to a mere rhetorical device.

Finally, beyond reassessing the intellectual history of late imperial China, this dissertation contributes to the study of philology on a global scale. Recent publications in this burgeoning field duly recognize the importance of Qing China's fully developed philological tradition, yet specialized research remains scarce. While my aim is not to do a comparative study, the significant commonalities between the European and the Chinese practices of philology can serve as a reminder that scholars working in different textual cultures often have to deal with

[25] This intellectual genealogy is independent of the state's efforts to enshrine historical figures in the temples of Confucius. For the latter, see Thomas A. Wilson, *The Genealogy of the Way. The Construction and Uses of the Confucian Tradition in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1995), 60-71.

[26] Sela, *China's Philological Turn*, 150-158. That supposedly universal scientific findings are, after all, not "placeless" but often geographically bound in their production and reception is not unique to China. See David Livingstone, *Putting Science in its Place. Geographies of Scientific Knowledge* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 1-5.

the same problems and sometimes find similar solutions. As much as the concrete examples may differ, the ways in which textual researchers approach their sources often serve the purpose of making sense of the writings in light of shared assumptions.

Historical background

To situate this study of textual scholarship undertaken by the elite literati of late imperial China, a cursory overview of the historical circumstances under which they worked is helpful. Three aspects are relevant: Their social standing and working environment, the tradition of textual scholarship they inherited from previous centuries, and the atmosphere of social conservatism that permeated Qing society.

A common explanation for the rapid development of scholarship in Qing times is the large number of men passing the official examinations, who subsequently faced abysmal odds when trying to find a position in the imperial bureaucracy. While the population doubled during the 18th century, the number of official posts stagnated. Passing the civil service examinations remained an important part of elite identity, but the pool of graduates with little prospect of finding employment grew out of proportion, so that even the top candidates had to wait years before being called upon to serve. These highly educated men often turned to scholarship to make a living. This became possible thanks to large-scale collaborative projects initiated by the government and wealthy individuals; these employed dozens, and in some cases hundreds, of educated men. These projects might involve writing local gazetteers, editing and reprinting rare texts, or doing research on ritual.[27] Individual officials sometimes also staffed their "private secretariat" with scholars who were unable to secure another job. These scholars would then either do research or support their employer by ghostwriting the prefaces often requested from prominent officials.[28]

During the Qing, local academies, both state-run and private, were important centers of learning. They attracted various elites, including some officials who gave up their careers long before retirement was due to teach and pursue their own scholarly interests. The number of academies

[27] Elman, *From Philosophy to Philology*, 100-112.

[28] Prefaces by well-known scholars added to the prestige of any publication, thus the fame of some led to a situation where they received too many requests to handle on their own. Ironically, in an age that problematized the authorship of received texts, who owned these prefaces became an issue as well: Was it the patron in whose name it was written, or the actual writer? See Mizukami Masaharu 水上 雅晴, "Ch'ing Scholarship and Private Secretariats. With a Focus on Compilatory Publications and Proxy Writing," in *Acta Asiatica*, no. 110, 2016,77-98.

grew exponentially, supported by funding from the state.[29] Comparable to the projects mentioned above, academies enabled literati to focus on scholarship, a development that fostered specialization. Closely associated with an income and expertise, scholarship was more than an idle pastime. Scholars were expected by their colleagues to maintain certain standards, among which a thorough command of the sources ranked high.

With these economic and professional supports, scholars who had already mastered the classics according to the standards set by the civil service examinations could stay abreast of the latest trends in scholarship. For many, reliance on the institutional framework of scholarly projects and academies was a necessity in the face of dwindling prospects for official appointment. For others, it allowed them the freedom to follow their passion for learning. Regardless of individual motivations, the circumstances of the mid-Qing proved fertile ground for specialized scholarship.

As for the concrete content of their research, Qing scholars were not the first to question the author ascriptions of received texts. Writings by Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773-819) already contain mature insights into the textual history of a number of early works, preceding the Qing developments by a thousand years. Similarly, Song 宋 dynasty (960-1279) scholars voiced increased skepticism concerning traditional author ascriptions and made numerous attempts to change the classics.[30] One can already find many of the approaches that became prevalent in the Qing in these earlier discussions, and the arguments brought forward did not change drastically over time. What sets the Qing apart is the fact that these debates rest on a much broader foundation, with more scholars offering a wider range of opinions.

Qing scholars were aware of the long history of Chinese textual studies. To a certain degree, they kept a dialog with that past alive, using quotes of earlier assessments to either refute certain arguments or support their own judgments. However, explicit engagement remained sporadic, especially at higher levels of abstraction, with the exception of a few key issues: The doubts scholars since the Song and Yuan 元 (1279-1368) dynasties had expressed about the *Documents* reverberated in Qing debates, while the rearrangements and novel author ascriptions proposed by adherents of "learning of the Way" (*daoxue* 道學) continued to cause controversy. In general,

[29] The cases of academies in Guangzhou 廣州 described by Steven Miles can illustrate how academies functioned in the Qing. See Steven B. Miles, *The Sea of Learning. Mobility and Identity in Nineteenth-Century Guangzhou* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2006), esp. 74-84 and chapter 3.

[30] Ye Guoliang 葉國良, *Songren yijing gaijing kao* 宋人疑經改經考 (Study of Doubting and Changing the Classics in the Song) (Taibei: Taiwan daxue chuban weiyuanhui, 1980).

Qing scholars did not see themselves as radically breaking with their predecessors, with perhaps the exception of the Ming 明 (1368-1644), an era in which real learning was seen to have been in short supply. They acknowledged working within a long tradition but directed their attention to debating each other. The dichotomy of Han learning versus Song learning did not play a decisive role in the period under discussion here; that aspect only gained currency in the early 19th century and, in my opinion, distracts more from issues at the center of scholarly discourse than it is conducive to understanding them.[31]

Beyond textual scholarship and the study of authorship, evidential learning encompassed a wide range of disciplines and areas of research, and these activities rested on a much broader social base since they attracted many literati. In this key respect developments in the Qing contrasted sharply with earlier periods. Outside their study chambers, scholars began to survey the world around them, describing localities, the people who lived there and their customs. Historical monuments drew attention, especially when they bore an inscription, and this interest advanced the development of epigraphy. Scholars traveled far and wide to make rubbings of inscriptions, which were then collected and verified against other sources. Familiarity with earlier scripts and character variants was required for such undertakings. Scholars also recognized the value of arcane subjects such as mathematics and astronomy, both in their application to contemporary problems and in their historical aspects. The latter led to the re-publication of relevant old texts.[32] Finally, historical phonology made great strides as scholars focused their energy on reconstructing historical Chinese pronunciations and rhyme groups. Evidential scholarship had a wide-ranging influence on what Qing literati did and how they did it.

The advances in scholarship in Qing China did not go by unnoticed in neighboring countries. In Joseon Korea, Kim Chŏnghŭi 김정희 (Ch. 金正喜, 1786-1856) was prominent among those who promoted "practical learning" (*silhak* 실학, Ch. *shixue* 實學). Visiting China in 1809, Kim met with such men of distinction as Weng Fanggang 翁方綱 (1733-1818) and Ruan Yuan 阮元 (1764-1849), and in 1816 wrote "An explanation of searching what is correct in the actual facts" (*silsa gusi sŏl* 실사구시설, Ch. *shishi qiushi shuo* 實事求是說), referencing a central motto of evidential studies.[33] In 19th-century Nguyen Vietnam, scholars kept track of the latest

[31] Cf. also the critique in Sela, *China's Philological Turn*, 11.
[32] Minghui Hu, *China's Transition to Modernity. The New Classical Vision of Dai Zhen* (Seattle: University of Washington Press 2015), 20.
[33] See Ko Chaeuk 고재욱, "Kim Chŏnghŭi ŭi silhak sasang gwa ch'ŏngdae kojŭnghak" 金正喜의 實學思想과 清代 考證學 (Kim Chŏnghŭi's silhak Thought and Qing Evidential Scholarship)," in *Tae-dong Yearly Review of Classics*, no. 10, 1993, 737-748. I thank Kanghun Ahn for bringing this to my attention.

developments in gazetteer writing and confidently challenged the Chinese written record where their local knowledge contradicted it.[34]

The case of Japan was made more complex by the fact that for some Japanese, the Manchu conquest had proven that Japan was the superior culture[35] and the forming of a nativist movement later labeled "national learning" (*kokugaku* 国学, Ch. *guoxue*) that looked down on all things Chinese. Proponents claimed, for example, to have deciphered the original Japanese language behind the Chinese characters used in the earliest Japanese texts.[36] Despite circumstances so unconducive to the reception of Chinese scholarship, books on evidential learning still found an admiring audience among Japanese classicists.[37]

Even though Chinese scholars produced some of the most advanced scholarship of the time, whose fame radiated beyond the borders of the Qing Empire, the writings they published still carried the imprint of the time and place where they produced them. The Qing government and local literati propagated values and standards of correct behavior centered on "filial devotion, loyalty to the monarch, and wifely fidelity."[38] In line with these values, in Beijing it banned forms of dramas that "employed colloquial language, lewd innuendoes and relied on seductive female impersonators in starring roles."[39] My discussion will focus on the area that has received the most scholarly attention and is thus best documented, namely, the purity of women, located at the intersection of ritual and sexuality. Besides conveying the conservative atmosphere that permeated Qing society, scholars of the time inserted the strict separation of the sexes current at that time into the texts they researched.

Qing dynasty legislation and cultural activities, especially beginning with the Yongzheng 雍正 reign (1723-1735), displayed an "anxiety over female chastity."[40] Widespread literati concern with female chastity began in the late Ming, yet it was during the Yongzheng reign that the state

[34] Kathlene Baldanze, "Books without Borders: Phạm Thận Duật (1825–1885) and the Culture of Knowledge in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Vietnam," in *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 77, no. 3, 2018, 713–40.
[35] Benjamin Elman, "Sinophiles and Sinophobes in Tokugawa Japan. Politics, Classicism, and Medicine during the Eighteenth Century," in *East Asian Science, Technology and Society: an International Journal*, vol. 2, 2008, 97-99.
[36] Susan Burns, *Before the Nation. Kokugaku and the Imagining of Community in Early Modern Japan* (Durham: Duke UP, 2003), 69.
[37] Elman, "Sinophiles and Sinophobes in Tokugawa Japan," 106f.
[38] Chow, *Confucian Ritualism*, 3.
[39] Harriet Zurndorfer, "Han-hsüeh, 'Evidential Research,' and Female Chastity: A Re-examination of Intellectual Attitudes and Social Ideals in 18th Century China," in Wilt Idema and Erik Zürcher (eds.), *Thought and Law in Qin and Han China. Studies Presented to Anthony Hulsewé on the Occasion of his Eightieth Birthday* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 211.
[40] Matthew Sommer, *Sex, Law and Society in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000), 10.

assumed a prominent controlling and centralizing function in this drive.[41] On the one hand, it extended elite norms of behavior to the whole population, which meant that prostitution and extra-marital intercourse were proscribed.[42] On the other hand, both the central government and the local power holders expanded the celebration of virtuous female conduct. This led to the construction of arches for faithful widows who, no matter how old or young, did not remarry after their husband's death. Local gazetteers honored the many who gave their lives in defense of their virtue in a special section on exemplary women.[43] While men still could take concubines, a woman was limited to one sexual partner over her whole life, guarded by the institution of marriage. Women had to fight off anyone who threatened their chastity, ideally leaving physical traces of the struggle. Anything less and they too would be punished for consensual illicit intercourse if their case was brought to court.[44]

This widespread and intensive concern with female chastity made its way into scholarly research. We can see this in the reception history of the highly regarded female poet Li Qingzhao 李清照 (late 11th to mid-12th c.) in the early 19th century. After losing her husband in 1129, she was married to another man for a short time. While this had been a stain on her reputation ever since, scholars had never doubted the fact that the marriage had taken place. Knowledge of the remarriage coexisted with admiration of her poetry. Once Qing scholars got involved, they used their philological skills to erase the second marriage from the record to restore Li's good name. Different theories were proposed, and their authors forcefully disputed each other's reasoning. Whether they argued that the inferior style of the passages mentioning the marriage gave them away as corruptions or that the name of the husband was intentionally changed to slander Li Qingzhao, all shared "the a priori conviction that Li Qingzhao could not have remarried."[45] These scholars, it seems, were unable to square the literary talent they recognized in Li with her supposedly immoral life choices and set out to sanitize her image by questioning the records of her behavior. In a related development, her category in local gazetteers shifted from a literary figure to an exemplary woman.[46]

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[41] Siyen Fei, "Writing for Justice. An Activist Beginning of the Cult of Female Chastity in Late Imperial China," in *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 71, no. 4, 2012, 991-1012.
[42] Ibid, 9-10.
[43] Mark Elvin, "Female Virtue and the State in China," in *Past & Present*, no. 104, 1984, 111-152. Susan Mann, *Precious Records. Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997).
[44] Vivien Ng, "Ideology and Sexuality: Rape Laws in Qing China," in *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 46, no. 1, 1987, 57-70.
[45] Ronald Egan, *The Burden of Female Talent. The Poet Li Qingzhao and Her History in China* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2013), 277. I thank Wilt Idema for bringing this to my attention.
[46] Ibid, 279-80.

The pressure to read current values back into the textual heritage shines through most prominently in Qing studies of the life and deeds of Confucius. As my first chapter shows, a concern with the high ethical standards Confucius was supposed to embody affected his portrayal at all levels. And once a woman entered the picture, the stakes became even higher. Thus, the episode where Confucius meets Nanzi 南子, the wife of a contemporary ruler, was subjected to a rigorous philological treatment that showed the text could not be trusted. As they explained the story away, scholars showed that for them, preservation of meaning took precedence over preservation of the text. In the charged atmosphere of the Qing, no ambiguity in the behavior of the sage was tolerable if he was to retain his status. While this aspect did not affect all areas of research equally, it was enough of a factor to direct the attention of scholars to certain issues, and to influence the results of their research.

Content and structure

This dissertation consists of four chapters, each of which focuses on a different aspect of the concept of authorship. The first chapter studies how Qing scholars evaluated the authority of the *Analects*. They all agreed that Confucius's disciples produced the text and that the disciples' claim to authority hinged on their link to Confucius. In discussions on this topic, the challenges generated by the narrow concept of authorship unfolded in all their nuances because of the centrality of the *Analects*. As they coped with these challenges, scholars had to decide which passages they could still trust, and to justify their choices to critical colleagues. The second chapter looks at attempts to develop a model of authorship that corresponds more closely with the peculiar features of the received texts, such as different textual layers and traces of accumulation over time. I follow the application of the narrow model of authorship to the point where scholars started to realize its limitations and analyze a contemporary theory that proposed a broader concept of authorship. With few exceptions, overcoming the narrow concept of authorship remained inconsequential in Qing discussions. And even those exceptions highlight the tenacity of tradition in the face of philological challenges.

The third chapter traces how the need to assign a singular author to each work led to the fashioning of biographies and establishing individual characteristics for important author-figures. The biographical material scholars created shows the importance of identifying a tangible historical author-figure that could anchor the text in Chinese intellectual history. The author-figure that resulted from a scholar's choice and treatment of biographical episodes functioned as an encapsulation of his interpretation of the text. An analysis of how the textual

operations of Qing scholars fit in with the theoretical pronouncements about evidential learning is the focus of chapter four. Critics identified the gap between theory and practice when they questioned the interpretative choices textual scholars invariably had to make in their research. The contemporary discussions around this issue point towards the limits of objectivity that critics and practitioners alike were aware of. This dissertation thus explores the tensions present in the development of philology in China. In my conclusion, I offer preliminary observations about the role of authorship in philology during the early modern period on a more abstract level. There, I take contemporary European trends into account in the hope of offering new perspectives from which to study a field of learning that has profoundly shaped how we see the past.