Conceptualizing authorship in late imperial Chinese philology

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1. **The cracks in the texture: Authorship and authority of the *Analects***

Praise

When Herr K. heard that he was praised by former students, he said:

"After the students have long forgotten the mistakes of the master,

he himself still remembers them."[47]

Bertolt Brecht

Compared to many other pre-imperial texts, the question of authorship of the *Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語) seems very straightforward, thanks to the "Treatise on Literature" (*Yiwen zhi* 藝文志) in the *Book of the [Former] Han* (*Hanshu* 漢書), completed in the early second century of the common era. According to this account,[48] the *Analects* was compiled by unidentified disciples (*menren* 門人) of Confucius 孔子 (traditional dating 551-479 BCE). They had each written down what they heard the master say or what was spoken among each other, and after Confucius passed away, they combined their notes and turned that into the work called *Analects*.[49] This account formed the basis of virtually all Qing 清 (1644-1912) discussions on the *Analects*. The only modification was that at least since the Tang 唐 (618-907), doubts had been raised whether "disciples" in this case really referred to first-generation disciples. Afterwards, the majority of scholars considered the *Analects* to be a product of second-generation disciples (more on this below).

Since Qing scholars assumed that they were reading the notes of the disciples, it was necessary to justify why the words of the disciples should be as authoritative as the words of Confucius

[47] Das Lob: Als Herr K. hörte, daß er von früheren Schülern gelobt wurde, sagte er: "Nachdem die Schüler schon längst die Fehler des Meisters vergessen haben, erinnert er selbst sich noch immer daran." Bertolt Brecht, *Geschichten vom Herrn Keuner* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1971), 41.

[48] *Hanshu* 漢書 (*Book of the [Former] Han*), "Yiwen zhi" 藝文志 (Treatise on Literature) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 30.1717.

[49] That this account is not entirely trustworthy is clear from the fact that quotations of Confucius in other early texts hardly ever match passages from the received *Analects*. So, at the very least, the *Analects* we have now are not the product of Confucius's disciples. For a substantial treatment of this question and some of the others that are discussed in this chapter, see John Makeham, "The formation of Lunyu as a Book," in *Monumenta Serica* 44.1996, 1-24. This article argues for a date between 150 and 140 BCE as most likely for the completion of the *Analects* as we know them today. For a recent take on this thesis and the different narratives about Confucius that preceded the *Analects*, see Michael Hunter, *Confucius beyond the Analects* (Leiden: Brill, 2017). For a discussion about the ramifications of the textual history for our understanding of the *Analects*, see Michael Hunter and Martin Kern (eds.), *Confucius and the* Analects *Revisited. New Perspectives on Composition, Dating, and Authorship* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

himself. The argument put forward in response was that the disciples of Confucius merely recounted the teachings of their master. To Qing scholars, the disciples were translucent links in the chain of transmission who did not alter the slightest bit what they had learned. In the first section of this chapter, I discuss how Qing scholars defended this position.

The same passage in the *Book of the [Former] Han* also mentions three different recensions of the *Analects* that had been in circulation during the early years of the Han 漢 dynasty (202 BCE – 9 CE). These were the *Old Text Analects* (*Gu Lun* 古論), a version written in an old script, and two regional traditions called Qi-*Analects* (*Qi Lun* 齊論) and Lu-*Analects* (*Lu Lun* 魯論), named after the states in which they were supposedly transmitted.[50] All of them were said to employ slightly different chapter arrangements. These traditions disappeared after Zhang Yu 張禹 (d. 5 BCE) created his own version of the *Analects*, possibly a hybrid of the recensions from Qi and Lu.[51] Scholars in the Qing invoked these recensions in order to illustrate why a certain local color showed through in the final version of the text. In a remarkable diachronic exchange that spans two centuries, scholars of the late Ming 明 (1368-1644) and the Qing pondered why Confucius would have praised the virtue of Guan Zhong 管仲 (active 7th century BCE). Most agreed that this was due to the influence of disciples from the state of Qi, where Guan Zhong had been a high official in government. For those who employed this approach, the disciples were necessarily not translucent, but rather had to be reckoned with as agents with their own agenda. The discussion about this topic is at the center of the second section.

The view that the editors of the *Analects* had their own interests was taken to extremes by a small minority in the scholarly community. Proponents of this view did not consider the *Analects* a faithful repository of Confucius teachings. Rather, their goal was to detect the distortions that were introduced into this work by its editors. These scholars were treading on thin ice: They challenged the authority of the *Analects*, widely considered the most authoritative collection of Confucius's teachings, by harking back to the authority of Confucius. In other words, due to their highly idealized image of Confucius, the *Analects* were not Confucian

[50] For the continuing grip that this framework has on our scholarly imagination, one only needs to take a look at the buzz that the excavation of a bamboo strip with the characters *zhi dao* 智道 (knowing the way) on the verso side has generated. The *Book of the [Former] Han* lists those characters in connection with the Qi-version, which led the authors of the initial excavation report to propose that they had found a fragment of this elusive *Analects*-recension. For an evaluation of this proposal and the larger discussion that ensued, see Charles Sanft, "Questions about the Qi *Lunyu*," in *T'oung Pao*, vol. 104, no. 1-2, 2018, 189-194.
[51] Makeham, "The formation of Lunyu as a Book," 23.

enough for their taste. In the third section of this chapter, I analyze how they philologically defended this claim.

The main question of this chapter is how the narrow concept of authorship manifested itself in scholarly treatments of the *Analects*. The fact that this work was not authored by Confucius in the full sense of the word created an aura of uncertainty around it. Scholars dealt with this uncertainty by strengthening the authority of the actual authors – the disciples of Confucius – or by dissecting the text in order to identify and remove their contributions.

Negligible editorship: Disciples that transmit but do not create

The *Analects* has been an important text in China since the Han dynasty and the subject of a large number of commentaries.[52] It was considered a classic since the Tang. Since the Southern Song 宋 (1127-1279), it was part of the Four Books (*si shu* 四書) that soon began to outshine the other canonical classics.[53] All this time, readers agreed that this was a collection put together by the disciples of Confucius, not by the master himself, but this gap in the transmission history was not problematized. The only aspect of *Analects*-authorship that did generate discussion was which disciples were behind the compilation. Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773-819) argued that the editors were not direct disciples, but second-generation disciples of Confucius.[54] This assessment was followed by Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033-1107) and Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200).[55] There is little indication that for mainstream scholars, this posed any challenge to the authority of the received text.

Against the backdrop of the narrowing of the concept of authorship that took place in the Qing, however, this gap in the transmission history required an explanation. It no longer went without saying that if Confucius did not in fact author the *Analects*, the text could still faithfully reflect

[52] The four most prominent ones are discussed in John Makeham, *Transmitters and Creators. Chinese Commentators and Commentaries on the Analects* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2003).
[53] Daniel Gardner, *Zhu Xi's Reading of the Analects. Canon, Commentary and the Classical Tradition* (New York: Columbia UP, 2003), 1-3.
[54] Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元, „Lunyu bian er pian" 論語辯二篇 (Two Essays Examining the *Analects*), in Yi Xinding 易新鼎 and Mu Gengcai 母庚才 (eds.), *Liu Zongyuan ji* 柳宗元集 (Collection of Liu Zongyuan) (Beijing: Zhongguo shudian, 2000), 61-62.
[55] "Lunyu xu shuo" 論語序說 (Prefatory Comments on the *Analects*) in Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Sishu zhangju jizhu* 四書章句集注 (Collected Commentaries to the Chapters and Verses of the Four Books) (Taibei: Changan chubanshe, 1991), 43.

his teachings. It was Qian Daxin 錢大昕 (1728-1804), towering giant of 18th-century evidential studies, who provided this explanation.

In a passage in the question-and-answer format (*da wen* 答問), an interlocutor wonders why scholars in the past consistently misattributed *Analects*-quotations to Confucius when in fact the sentence in question had been uttered by disciples. The interlocutor, who is probably only a rhetorical device instead of an actual person, closes his display of examples from official histories with the astonished question:

> The *Analects* is not an obscure work, whence such errors?[56]
>
> 《論語》非僻書，何以舛謬乃爾？

This question touches on two concerns: First, everyone knows the *Analects*. Indeed, in the period when this question was asked, every scholar who aspired to a certain status knew the *Analects* by heart, because the understanding of this work was frequently tested in the first session of the official examinations.[57] Every serious scholar should have been able to recognize such a mistake instantly, and even those with a less reliable memory would probably have had quick and easy access to an edition to check. To the interlocutor, such an egregious mistake seems all but inconceivable. Second, such misattributions are *mistakes*. For the questioner, there exists a clear distinction between Confucius and his disciples, which those who quote a line from the *Analects* have to respect.

Qian Daxin begins his explication of this riddle by giving even more examples of quotes from disciples that have been wrongly ascribed to Confucius. But it is not that those who did so were lacking in their scholarship. They did not even commit an error:

> But does this indeed mean that people in the past erred a lot? No. The "Treatise on Literature" in the *Book of the [Former] Han* states: "The *Analects* consists of the words of Confucius answering to his disciples and other contemporaries, and what the disciples discussed among themselves and heard from the master." Therefore, in quoting the

[56] Qian Daxin 錢大昕, "Da wen liu" 答問六 (Answering Questions, Section Six), in *Qianyan tang ji* 潛研堂集 (Collection from the Hall of Focused Research), in Chen Wenhe 陳文和 (ed.), *Jiading Qian Daxin quanji* 嘉定錢大昕全集 (Complete Collection of Qian Daxin from Jiading) (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1997), vol. 9, 124.
[57] In the first session, a line from one of the Four Books was given, of which the *Analects* is one. The examinee had to provide the complete passage and spell out its implications. Benjamin Elman, *A Cultural History of Civil Service Examinations in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 273.

Analects, Confucians of the Han and the Tang traced the utterances back to Confucius, even when they had been spoken by disciples.[58]

然則古人固多誤乎？非也。《漢・藝文志》云：“《論語》者，孔子應答弟子時人及弟子相與言而接聞於夫子之語也。”故漢、唐諸儒引用《論語》，雖弟子之言，皆歸之孔子。

Qian explains the practice of assigning the words of disciples to Confucius by quoting the seminal passage on the formation of the *Analects* from the *Book of the [Former] Han*. It is not immediately clear, however, why he responds the way he does. The passage states that the "disciples discuss among themselves" (弟子相與言), with no reference to Confucius, who is explicitly removed from the scene. Taken at face value, this statement indicates that parts of the *Analects* consist of discussions between the disciples in which Confucius was not involved. One possible reading of this, then, is that besides Confucius, there are other, independent voices present in the text. Qian Daxin, however, confidently asserts that quoting these statements as dicta of Confucius is fully justified.

Qian gives the first clue for understanding his position at the end of his answer, when he says of the disciples whose utterances have been assigned to Confucius in the past that "they had all heard these words from the master."[59] In other contexts, Qian Daxin makes his case along similar lines of reasoning. He declares, for example, that a specific passage of the *Analects* consists "completely of words with which Zixia [a disciple of Confucius] transmits what he has heard, not a single utterance has been created by him."[60] For Qian, who argues in defense of the passage, this does not indicate a lack of creativity, but rather faithful adherence to what Zixia has learned from Confucius.

Qian Daxin was not only proud of his theory, he was also in the position to force others to engage with it. When drafting the policy question (*ce wen* 策問) for an unspecified civil service examination,[61] he built it around the idea developed in the answer to the interlocutor. The opening sentences set the tone for the question and lay out in detail why Qian considers it unproblematic to draw no distinction between the words of Confucius and those of the disciples:

[58] Qian Daxin, "Da wen liu," 124.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid, 121.
[61] In the Qing, these questions were notorious for being convoluted and exceeding the answers expected from examinees in length. See Elman, *Cultural History*, 447.

> The *Analects* consist of the subtle words of Confucius that the disciples have recorded. Within the work, there are also parts that originate from the disciples, but these [utterances] too have to respect what [the disciples] have heard [from Confucius] and cannot go against the principles of the sage.[62]
>
> 《論語》一書，弟子所記孔子之微言。間有出於諸弟子者，亦必尊其所聞而不戾乎聖人之旨者也。

Qian goes on to compare utterances by Ziyou 子游 and Zigong 子貢, disciples of Confucius, and Zhang Zai 張載 (1020-1077), a Song dynasty philosopher, to things Confucius himself said to show that they are in accordance with each other. The point is to make clear that even though something may not have been uttered by Confucius himself, the fact that it comes from the mouth of a faithful disciple is sufficient to guarantee its validity. Negatively put, Qian denies the disciples any agency. Whatever they said, they were acting as the mouthpieces of their teacher. Given such a close and almost symbiotic relationship, there is no need for later generations of readers to distinguish the words of the disciples from those of the master.

The examinee, who has his task set out for him in such detail, is finally asked to consider this problem:

> If one looks for the flaws in single words, then there is much that is debatable in the six classics. What do you gentlemen think about this?[63]
>
> 求疵於一言之間，六經之可議者多矣。諸生以為何如？

Besides being an almost stereotypical case of an examination question that is its own answer, this links what began in Qian's writings as an *Analects*-issue to the entirety of the six classics. Qian Daxin's effort to keep the established wisdom of the *Analects* intact becomes understandable against the background of the narrow concept of authorship that forced scholars to reconsider author ascriptions. The foil for his argument are scholars who may have acknowledged the authority of Confucius, but not that of the disciples. This not only implies that everything contained in the *Analects* that is not an utterance of Confucius himself has lost its value, but that the whole text has only a tenuous, indirect link to a source of authority: As a product of the disciples, it is only authoritative as long as the disciples faithfully transmit the teachings of Confucius. This is what Qian Daxin's argument asserts with a heavy hand by

[62] Qian Daxin, "Ce wen" 策問 (Policy Questions), in Chen Wenhe (ed.), *Qianyan tang ji*, 268.
[63] Ibid.

postulating complete correspondence between the learning of the disciples and the principles of Confucius. Qian assumed completely static traditions in which learning was being perfectly conserved and handed down from generation to generation.

This argument was warmly received by posterity. Liang Yusheng 梁玉繩 (1744-1819), who wrote a short entry in his notes in which he struggled with the very same issue of seemingly misattributed quotations, cites Qian's solution to the conundrum and calls it "exceedingly clear and comprehensive" (*ji ming tong* 極明通).[64] Wang Xianqian 王先謙 (1842-1917), the prolific late-Qing philologist, also included it in his commentary on the *Book of the Later Han* (*Hou Hanshu* 後漢書).[65] Taking the larger Qing discourse on the *Analects* into account, however, Qian's was a lone voice, supported only by a few scholars from later generations. It was not the case that anyone explicitly took issue with it. But if his argument had been persuasive, there would not have been a need for textual scholarship on the *Analects* that tries to isolate the influence of specific disciples, because according to Qian, the individual disciple did not have a view that differed from that of Confucius. The majority of contemporary scholars who discussed the reliability of the *Analects* thought otherwise, and their views will be discussed in the next two sections.

Layered texts discussing layered texts: How disciples from the state of Qi shaped the *Analects*

In two consecutive passages in the 14th chapter of the *Analects*, Confucius praises Guan Zhong, minister of the state of Qi.[66] Some Qing scholars considered such praise excessive, especially in light of another passage in chapter 3 of the *Analects*, in which Confucius calls the "capacity" of Guan Zhong "small" (*qi xiao* 器小)[67] and Confucius's general restraint in complimenting the humaneness (*ren* 仁) of others. The fact that a Qi-recension (i.e. the state where Guan Zhong was active) of the *Analects* is mentioned in the *Book of the [Former] Han*,[68] and that records

[64] Liang Yusheng 梁玉繩, *Pie ji* 瞥記 (Notes Taken after Perusing), 3.20b in *Congshu jicheng xubian* 叢書集成續編 (Extended Compilation of the Complete Collection of Collectanea) (Taibei: Xinwenfeng chuban gongsi, 1989), vol. 22, 719. The preface to the note collection is dated to 1798.
[65] Wang Xianqian 王先謙, *Hou Hanshu jijie* 後漢書集解 (Collected Explanations of the Book of the Later Han) (Taibei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1968), vol. 10-2, 133.
[66] *Analects* 14.16 and 17. A third passage, 14.9, also discusses Guan Zhong but is not as laudatory.
[67] *Analects* 3.22.
[68] *Hanshu*, 30.1716.

existed that linked disciples to that state, gave scholars the opportunity to question philologically whether Confucius's word of praise were genuine.[69]

Intellectual historians of China have long pointed out that despite contemporary and later attempts to portray Qing developments as a break with those of the Ming, there are many aspects that bear witness to a continuity between the two.[70] The discussion about Confucius's praise for Guan Zhong is a very concrete example of such a continuity. A passage on this issue from the collected works of the Ming scholar Gu Xiancheng 顧憲成 (1550-1612), one of the founders of the Donglin 東林 academy, was picked up by Lu Wenchao 盧文弨 (1717-1796) in the Qing and approvingly connected to the arguments of another Qing scholar, Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716-1798). A contemporary of both, Sun Zhizu 孫志祖 (1737-1801), took issue with their theories, which were finally rejected in the first half of the 19th century by Shen Tao 沈濤 (c. 1792-1855).

Besides what this case can tell us about the authority of the *Analects*, it is interesting because it illustrates the style of cumulative research practiced during the Qing.[71] The tendency among scholars was to disclose the provenance of a piece of information, in order to make clear whose work they were building on. They often did this by placing a quotation at the beginning of their text. The rest of the text then discusses the view expressed in the quotation. For the reader, this practice is convenient because it introduces the topic and stakes out the position that the author engages. When the next contributor joined the debate, he had the option to retain both the original quote and the gist of the previous discussion. In this way, the first part of his text became a survey history of the debate thus far. While this approach to writing enhanced transparency, excessive use sometimes leaves the reader with a sense of information overkill.

In order to give a better sense of the structure of the debate, Figure 1 illustrates how the texts build upon each other. Solid arrows show who quoted whom; dotted lines indicate reference.

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[69] Hu Chusheng has argued that scholars who lived through the Ming-Qing transition still felt highly sympathetic towards these words of praise because they associated Guan Zhong with the establishment of clear distinctions between the Chinese and the barbarians. I do not agree with his assessment, however, that their experiences during the Manchu conquest enabled them to *correctly* understand these passages. By the late 18th century, which Hu does not mention, scholars seem to have forgotten about that discourse and looked at the stories from the perspective of Confucius's high standards in evaluating people. Cf. Hu Chusheng 胡楚生, "Qingchu zhuru lun Guan Zhong bu si Zijiu shenyi" 清初諸儒論'管仲不死子糾'申義 (An Interpretation of the Discussions of Early-Qing Confucians about Guan Zhong Not Dying for Zijiu), in idem, *Qingdai xueshushi yanjiu* 清代學術史研究 (Studies on the History of Qing Scholarship) (Taibei: Xuesheng shuju, 1993), 125-139.

[70] Yü Ying-shih, "Some Preliminary Observations on the Rise of Ch'ing Confucian Intellectualism," in *Tsing Hua Journal of Chinese Studies*, vol. 11, no. 1-2, 1975, 110-116.

[71] Cf. Elman, *From Philosophy to Philology*, 204-221.

Scholars inside the box share the assumption that the Qi-recension of the *Analects* can explain why the received *Analects* contains positive remarks about Guan Zhong, while those outside of criticize them for that assumption. Sun Zhizu reacts to the argument shared by Yuan Mei and Lu Wenchao without explicitly mentioning any of them; Shen Tao reacts to the whole discussion that preceded him.

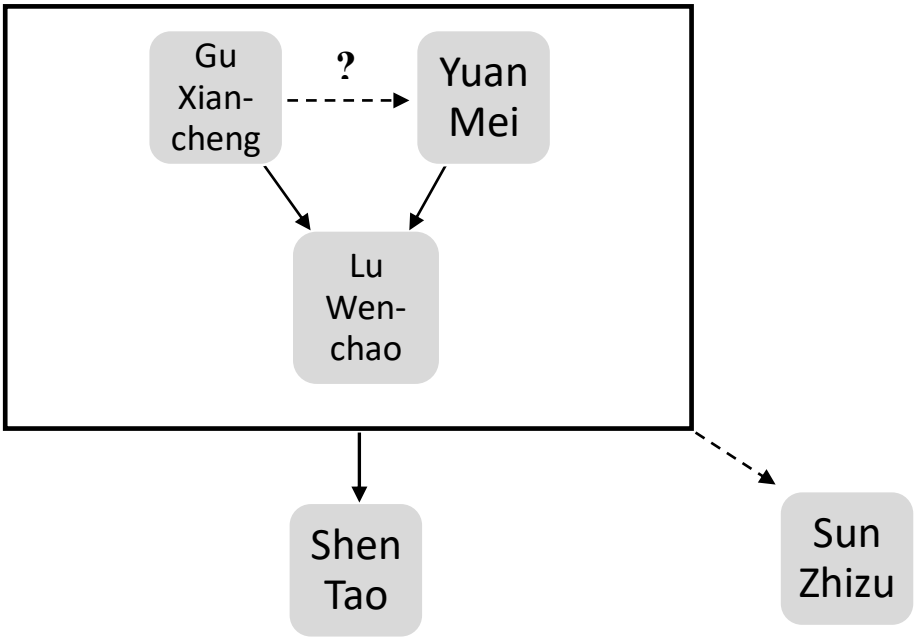

Figure 1: Flowchart of scholars involved in the debate over Confucius's praise for Guan Zhong

The starting point: Gu Xiancheng

It all started with a discussion between Gu Xiancheng and his younger brother Gu Yuncheng 顧允成 (1554-1607, style [*zi* 字] Jishi 季時). As recorded in an essay collected in the works of Gu Xiancheng:

> I said to Jishi: "I recently read the two passages in which Confucius assesses the humaneness of Guan Zhong with Zilu and Zigong and found them highly questionable. In praising [the sage emperor] Shun, Confucius only said "no flaw" twice; in praising Yan [Yuan, normally portrayed as Confucius most promising disciple], he said "Worthy!" twice. Now in this case he says "How humane he was!" twice about [Guan]

Zhong, when throughout his life Confucius never casually granted someone the label of humaneness, which he here in this singular instance grants Zhong. How can that be?"[72]

予謂季時：“頃讀孔子與子路、子貢評管仲二條，殊可疑。孔子僅於贊禹兩言“無間然”，於贊顏兩言“賢哉”。今於仲亦兩言“如其仁”，且仁之一字生平未嘗漫以許人而獨許仲，何也。

The basis for Gu Xiancheng's argumentation is that the behavior of Confucius in the passages where he praises Guan Zhong is not compatible with his behavior in other parts of the *Analects*. In the other parts, which Gu defines as the rule, Confucius is sparing in his compliments. Even the mythical sage emperor Shun is only said to have "no flaw," a statement that does not explicitly link Shun to any positive quality, and Confucius's favorite disciple Yan Yuan is "worthy," a quality that ranks lower than humaneness. That Guan Zhong should outrank these two figures is inconceivable to Gu Xiancheng.

Gu makes his case in a way that is typical for many applications of textual scholarship: The reader has formed expectations concerning the protagonist after a set of passages that share certain characteristics. Assuming that the work in question is coherent, the reader finds his expectations thwarted by other passages where these characteristics are turned on their head.[73] Under such circumstances, the original assumption of a coherent work can only be sustained if other factors are taken into account. The protagonist could have evolved, for example. This pushes the issue toward questions of literature and narrative theory. For the philologist, the figure that concerns me here, the conclusion is usually that the text contains different layers that are at odds with each other.

The next step is to determine which behavior of the protagonist is to be considered the rule, and which the exception. Gu Xiancheng favors the Confucius for whom humaneness is a virtue that few can claim to possess, and who is restrained in his praise for others accordingly, over the Confucius who commends liberally. If this is the rule, how does one explain the exception? Gu Xiancheng's younger brother provides him with an answer:

[72] Gu Xiancheng 顧憲成, *Gu Duan Wengong yishu* 顧端文公遺書 (Works Bequeathed by Gu Xiancheng), in *Xuxiu siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書 (Continued Complete Library of the Four Categories) (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 2002), vol. 943, 190/12.2a-b.

[73] This perspective is based on the discussion of reading expectations in Wolfgang Iser, *Der Akt des Lesens* (München: Wilhelm Fink, 1976), esp. 193-204.

> Jishi said: "I suspect that these are exaggerated words of people from Qi that have been attributed to Confucius. In the past, the Lu-recension of the *Analects* and the Qi-recension of the *Analects* have been transmitted. Maybe the Qi-recension has made its way into the Lu-recension, there is no way to know. Saying that [this statement] originates from Confucius seems to be wrong."[74]
>
> 季時曰："此恐是齊人張大之辭而託於孔子耳。舊傳有《魯論語》、《齊論語》；或《齊論語》竄入《魯論語》中，未可知也。謂出自孔子，似乎不然。"

Gu Yuncheng shares the suspicion of his brother that the statement about Guan Zhong being humane is out of character for Confucius. It makes perfect sense to him, however, as praise coming from someone from Qi, where Guan Zhong had been active and supposedly was fondly remembered. Not much is known about the Qi-recension of the *Analects* beyond the fact that it once existed, some Han dynasty links in its chain of transmission, and a few variant characters retained in early commentaries. As Gu Yuncheng pieces the information together, its connection to Qi implies that disciples coming from that place have been able to include some local color, which manifests itself here as a positive remark about Guan Zhong. This passage may then have found its way into the Lu-recension and from there into the hybrid recension that finally eclipsed the other editions. Once that happened, Confucius's praise of Guan Zhong, which would otherwise have remained apocryphal, had become canonical.

Yuan Mei's changing views on the Analects

The discussion between Gu Xiancheng and his brother is the earliest formulation of this problem that Qing scholars picked up in their discussion. The second is the theory that Yuan Mei proposed. Yuan Mei is well known as a literary figure, but his contributions to Qing scholarship, while not entirely ignored,[75] do not receive nearly as much attention. He is, however, often grappling with the very same issues that fuel the research of the most prominent scholars. For example, the question of the reliability of the *Analects* occupied him as well. In a letter to Li Fu 李紱 (1675-1750), who has been called the "most outstanding representative" of

[74] Gu Xiancheng, *Gu Duan Wengong yishu*, 190/12.2a-b.
[75] Jerry D. Schmidt, *Harmony Garden. The Life, Literary Criticism, and Poetry of Yuan Mei (1716-1798)* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 342-346.

the thought of Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472-1529) in the Qing,[76] Yuan spelled out a very simple solution to this problem:

> The words of Confucius are widely diverging; as for what can be relied on, luckily there is the *Analects*.[77]
>
> 孔子之言又雜矣，今之可信者，賴有《論語》。

In this letter, which must be considered a document of the thought of Yuan's earlier years (the recipient died when Yuan was 34), he acknowledges that there are a wide variety of sayings that have been ascribed to Confucius. They cannot all be authentic, but he puts his faith in the editors of the *Analects*: The content of this work reflects the true teachings of Confucius.

In the course of his life, Yuan seems to have developed a more complex evaluation of the matter. In a long essay called "Four Explanations on the *Analects*" (*Lunyu jie si pian* 論語解四篇) that dissects aspects of the work that require careful consideration in order to not be misunderstood, Confucius's praise of Guan Zhong is the first issue he tackles. Yuan Mei opens the essay by retracting the unconditional faith he had in the *Analects* in his early years:

> It happened often that the various masters of the hundred schools spoke in the name of Confucius. Even in the case of the *Analects,* I cannot be without doubt.[78]
>
> 諸子百家冒孔子之言者多矣。雖《論語》，吾不能無疑焉。

For Yuan, the editors of the *Analects* are no longer the strict gatekeepers that successfully weeded out all sayings that had been wrongly ascribed to Confucius. They have become agents in the creation of the text instead. Without reference to the previous considerations by Gu Xiancheng, Yuan too identifies the disciples by their regional affiliations and refers to the different recensions of the *Analects* that were once transmitted. For Yuan Mei, too, the bone of contention is the fact that Confucius calls Guan Zhong humane even though the master usually

[76] Chin-Shing Huang, *Philosophy, Philology, and Politics in Eighteenth-Century China. Li Fu and the Lu-Wang School Under the Ch'ing* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995), 1.
[77] Yuan Mei, "Da Li Mutang xiansheng wen san Li shu" 答李穆堂先生問三禮書 (Letter Answering Li Fu's Question Concerning the Three Books of Rites), in *Xiaocangshan fang wenji* 小倉山房文集 (Prose Collection from the Cabin on Little Granary Hill), in *Xuxiu siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書 (Continued Complete Library of the Four Categories) (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 2002), vol. 1432, 149/15.8a.
[78] Yuan Mei, "Lunyu jie si pian" 論語解四篇 (Four Explanations on the *Analects*), in *Xiaocangshan fang wenji*, 267/24.8a.

refrains from lavishing such high praise on others. In order to invalidate what cannot be, textual scholarship is brought into play:

> For the *Analects*, there is the difference between the Qi-recension and the Lu-recension. The people of Qi held Guan Zhong in highest esteem, this is what is referred to in [the *Mengzi*-passage where Mengzi says to a disciple] "You truly are a man of Qi! You know about Guan Zhong and Master Yan, and that is all." When Guan Zhong is considered humane, it is the record of disciples from Qi. Therefore, in the passage above [the one where Confucius calls Guan humane], the text says: "Duke Huan of Qi was upright but not crafty." And in a passage below, the text says: "Chen Chengzi killed Duke Jian [of Qi]." If these [passages] are not from the Qi-recension of the *Analects*, then what are they?[79]
>
> 《論語》有《齊論》、《魯論》之分。齊人最尊管仲，所謂"子誠齊人也，知管仲、晏子而已矣。"以管仲為仁者，齊之弟子記之也。故上篇"齊桓公正而不譎"，下篇"陳成子弒簡公"，非《齊論》而何？

Yuan Mei's argument creates a complex intertextual space[80] in which the questionable *Analects*-passage finds its proper place as a relic from a local tradition. The fact that the passage concerns Qi relates it to the account in the *Book of the [Former] Han* about the different recensions. So far, this is nothing new. On top of that, however, Yuan adds corroborating evidence from the *Mengzi*. The passage he quotes, authoritative due to its canonical origin, explicitly points out that the horizon of people from Qi was so limited that all they knew about was Guan Zhong. The conclusion that follows is that even when they set out to record the words of Confucius, disciples that have ties to Qi end up talking about Guan Zhong, hence the praise in the *Analects*-passage in question.

Once Yuan Mei has focused on the influence of affairs related to Qi on the *Analects*, other passages in the same chapter appear in a new light. As Yuan describes it, the dubious passage about Guan Zhong is surrounded by other passages that also make reference to Qi lore, such as the quality of one former ruler or the killing of another. The fact that these passages cluster in one chapter makes it all the more conspicuous, which leads Yuan to the conclusion that these passages originated in the Qi-recension.

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[79] Ibid.

[80] I borrow this term from Susan Burns, *Before the Nation. Kokugaku and the Imagining of Community in Early Modern Japan* (Durham: Duke UP, 2003), 45.

To round off the picture, Yuan also identifies what the disciples from Lu thought about Guan Zhong: they made Confucius say that his capacity was small. In Lu, then, people found less reason to praise this figure. Yuan Mei points out that this passage is surrounded by others where Confucius interacts with important figures of Lu to provide evidence that the recension from that state made its way into this part of the *Analects*. Finally, Yuan Mei also enlightens the reader what Confucius really thought about Guan Zhong, without his disciples putting words into his mouth, by quoting yet another *Analects*-passage:

> [Confucius said:] He was a man. He took the city of Pian with its 300 families from the clan of Bo, and for the rest of their lives they did not hold a grudge against him.[81]
>
> 人也，奪伯氏駢邑三百，没齒而無怨焉。

After this analysis, the *Analects* emerges as a complex web formed by conflicting agendas. Yuan Mei no longer reads it as a unified work that can be consumed uncritically. Taken in isolation, this conclusion may seem laudable and valuable to a modern reader. In abstracting from the argumentation that led to it, however, the assumptions on which this conclusion is based are obscured. As long as the reader agrees that humaneness is the highest value in the Confucian axiology, that Confucius exercises restraint in praising others, that Guan Zhong consequently does not deserve such praise and that the horizon of the people from Qi is indeed limited to the extent that all they can speak of is Guan Zhong, then the textual operations that Yuan Mei performs are justified. The catalyst, without which probably none of this would have been defendable and thus publishable in the 18th century, was the historical evidence for the existence of a Qi-recension of the *Analects*. All the other arguments Yuan Mei makes are grouped around this point that serves as the backbone of his argumentation.

It is important to keep in mind that this Qi-recension was an unknown entity, as it remains even today. Beyond single characters, it is uncertain where it differed from the other editions. As such, it could be conveniently used to lend support to one's argumentation. This case thus highlights the difficulty of disentangling the use of textual evidence from the guiding assumptions. There is a strong incentive to conceive of the Qi-recension in the way Gu Yuncheng and Yuan Mei did if the goal is to invalidate certain passages in the *Analects* that pertain to this state. If one has different assumptions about what Confucius would and would

[81] Yuan Mei, "Lunyu jie si pian," 267/24.8b. Cf. *Analects* 14.9. Yuan Mei quotes a shortened version of the final sentence of this passage, leaving out the three characters that mean "eating coarse rice" (*fan shu shi* 飯疏食) that are supposed to come after the last comma in the source text.

not say or about the nature of the Qi-recension, arguments like that of Yuan Mei lose their efficacy, situated as they are in the borderland of textual scholarship and interpretation. There were indeed two scholars during the Qing who publicly challenged this line of reasoning because they had a very different conception of the Qi-recension. Their writings will be analyzed after a discussion of an essay by Lu Wenchao, who wrote in strong support of Yuan Mei's thesis.

Lu Wenchao's views on the different Analects*-recensions*

So far, I have presented two very similar theories on the same issue. There is no indication that Yuan Mei had read the work of Gu Xiancheng, but the possibility cannot be ruled out. The question that concerns me here is not whether there was unacknowledged influence of whether the theory of Yuan Mei was not original. Rather, what matters, because it is indicative of the cumulative style of scholarship practiced during the 18th century, is that this similarity did not go by unnoticed, was picked up and the argument bolstered with new insights.

Normally, Lu Wenchao was not the man for the grand questions and grander theories. He had made himself a name as a collator and publisher. Most of the writings included in his collections stick to these fields and the modest issues that come with them, such as variations between different editions. His essay "On Zilu and Zigong doubting the humaneness of Guan Zhong in the *Analects*" (*Lunyu Zilu Zigong yi Guan Zhong fei ren* 《論語》子路、子貢疑管仲非仁) is one of the few exceptions. This may explain why more than a third of it consists of quotations that give the gist of the arguments by Gu Xiancheng and Yuan Mei, while Lu only adds a comment or remark (*an* 案), which is again full of quotations.

In his remark, Lu Wenchao refines the theory of his predecessors and marshals more supporting evidence. The first aspect that he wants to improve is the identification of the authors of the Qi-recension. This had not been an issue for the Gu brothers, and Yuan Mei had only mentioned "disciples from Qi" (*Qi zhi dizi* 齊之弟子) in passing. As already mentioned, there existed scholarship that argued that it was only with the second generation of disciples (i.e. disciples of Confucius's disciples) that the *Analects* came into existence. Lu Wenchao reminds the participants of this discussion of this:

> Wenchao's [=My] comment: [In the *Xunzi* it is said:] "Among the disciples of Confucius, even boys no taller than 5 feet considered it disgraceful to discuss the five earls."[82] The insight of those from Qi among the disciples of Confucius like Zigao and Jici was especially keen; it goes without saying that they should not have had such an opinion [of praising Guan Zhong]. It is said [in the *Book of the [Former] Han*] that "when Confucius was no more, the subtle words broke off; when the seventy disciples passed away, the great meaning became corrupted." The *Analects* has been written down by students, which refers to disciples of disciples, who often included the teachings of their masters. The generation of Xunzi and Wu Qi also originated from among the [disciples of disciples]; the farther it was transmitted, the more of the original teaching was lost, and it is for this reason that there are such disparate and impure discussions.[83]
>
> 文弨案："孔子之門，五尺童子羞稱五伯。"齊人在聖門者若子羔、季次諸人見地特高，亦不應有此理，固。謂"仲尼沒而微言絕，七十子喪而大義乖"，《論語》蓋門人所記，乃弟子之弟子也，故往往附載其師之說。荀卿、吳起之儔亦出其中，流愈遠而失其真，故有此雜而不純之論。

In this dense quote full of references to important sources about the history of Confucius and his disciples, Lu Wenchao follows the trail set by Yuan Mei: If disciples with ties to Qi have influenced the *Analects*, it should be possible to identify them using the available records. Specifically, Lu bases himself on the *School Sayings of Confucius* (*Kongzi jiayu* 孔子家語), a work of that lists the regional affiliation of many disciples in the chapter "Explanation on the 72 disciples" (*Qishier dizi jie* 七十二弟子解), even where no such information is given in the earlier "Arranged biographies of Zhongni's [i.e. Confucius's] disciples" (*Zhongni dizi liezhuan* 仲尼弟子列傳) in the *Records of the Historian* (*Shiji* 史記). The *School Sayings of Confucius* came under intense scrutiny in the Qing and was dismissed by a number of scholars as an unreliable, late forgery, but the only cause for concern Lu Wenchao himself saw with this work

[82] The "five earls" refers to five rulers from the 7th to the 6th century BCE. Duke Huan of Qi, whom Guan Zhong served, was one of them. With this quote, Lu Wenchao makes clear that followers of Confucius look down upon matters relating to Duke Huan and, by extension, Guan Zhong. This would make it unlikely that Confucius himself had praised Guan Zhong.

[83] Lu Wenchao 盧文弨, "Lunyu Zilu Zigong yi Guan Zhong fei ren" 《論語》子路、子貢疑管仲非仁 (On Zilu and Zigong Doubting the Humaneness of Guan Zhong in the *Analects*), in idem, *Zhongshan zhaji* 鍾山札記 (Reading Notes from Zhongshan [Academy]) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2010), 24. The preface to this collection is dated to 1790.

were the numerous scribal errors that had crept in during the long history of transmission.[84] With the help of this work, or at least some text that uses it as its source, Lu identifies Zigao and Jici as disciples from Qi, but dismisses them as possible culprits because they should have been above such trifling matters.

Since they are not to blame, Lu opts to combine the narrative of the gradual decline of Confucius's teachings with the insight that the *Analects* is the product of second-generation disciples. By their time, both "subtle words" and "great meaning" of Confucius's teachings had been lost, thus the editors cannot be measured with the same standards that would have applied to first-generation disciples of Confucius. As Lu puts it, the second-generation disciples incorporated what they had learned from their teachers, which could already be far removed from the original message of the sage. The positive influence of Confucius did not outlast him for long, a factor that also negatively influenced the composition of the *Analects*.

In the last part of this essay, Lu Wenchao adduces further pieces of evidence that speak against the authenticity of Confucius's praise for Guan Zhong. Lu maintains that the "manner of phrasing" (*ci qi* 辭氣) here is of a completely different kind when compared to the one Confucius normally uses. Furthermore, he quotes the *Mengzi* saying that "among the disciples of Confucius, there is no one who talks about the affairs of [the dukes] Huan and Wen." (仲尼之徒無道桓、文之事者) Duke Huan is the ruler in whose questionable rise to power Guan Zhong was implicated, which is alluded to in the *Analects*. If the *Mengzi* says that the disciples of Confucius do not discuss such things, then a passage containing such discussions has no place in the *Analects*. Lu Wenchao closes his argumentation with an exclamation that is meant to express his certainty in this case:

> Extreme indeed! This is how one knows that Confucius by no means could have said something like this.[85]
>
> 甚哉！有以知孔子之必無是謂矣。

As the argumentation of the first scholar to publicly refute this theory shows, Lu Wenchao made the right rhetorical move when he refused to believe that Confucius could have uttered this

[84] Lu Wenchao, "Chong ke He zhu Kongzi jiayu xu" 重刻何註孔子家語序 (Preface to the Reprint of the *School Sayings of Confucius* with the He-Commentary), in *Baojing tang wen ji* 抱經堂文集 (*Collection of Writings from the Hall of Embracing the Classics*), in *Congshu jicheng chubian* 叢書集成初編 (First Compilation of the Complete Collection of Collectanea) (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1935), vol. 147, 78.
[85] Ibid.

statement. This at least even Sun Zhizu, who argued against the solution proposed by Yuan Mei and Lu, would not question. Rather, Sun affirmed this principle, but found the argumentation that was supposed to back it up flawed. The discourse on Confucius in the late 18th century staunchly insisted on a pure and sanitized image of the master. In this case, it even developed into a competition to find the best explanation that would remove passages staining the image of Confucius.

Sun Zhizu's criticism of the debate

The title of Sun's text already gives the first clue as to where the argument is coming from. Where Lu had included the formulation "doubting the humaneness of Guan Zhong" (*yi Guan Zhong fei ren* 疑管仲非仁) in title of his essay, Sun simply called his "Guan Zhong is not Humane" (*Guan Zhong fei ren* 管仲非仁). There is no longer any doubt about Guan Zhong's moral qualities. If this is an allusion, it would imply that Sun was aware of Lu's research, but the formulation is generic enough to make a final decision impossible.

Sun Zhizu opens his essay by pointing out that Guan Zhong was "talented rather than virtuous" (*cai you yu de* 才優于德),[86] that he can take credit for a number of achievements and, most importantly, that Confucius did acknowledge these achievements. Even though Confucius had a favorable opinion of Guan's achievements, he did not praise Guan's moral standards, but had his doubts about them:

> The formulation "How was he humane?" [translated above as "How humane he was!"] probably expresses that [Confucius] remained unconvinced and did not grant it; it is not repeated to mean that he gladly granted it. How could the master lightly grant Guan Zhong the label of humaneness?[87]
>
> "如其仁？如其仁？"者，蓋疑而不許之詞，非重言以深許之也。豈有夫子而輕以仁許管仲乎？

Sun Zhizu shares the fundamental assumption with all the others who had worked on these passages: Confucius cannot have praised Guan Zhong for his morality. Instead of attacking this passage from the perspective of textual scholarship, Sun proposes a radically different reading

[86] Sun Zhizu 孫志祖, "Guan Zhong fei ren" 管仲非仁 (Guan Zhong is Not Humane), in *Du shu cuo lu* 讀書脞錄 (Minor Remarks on Books Read) (Taibei: Guangwen shuju, 1963), 2.17a.
[87] Ibid.

of its key formulation.[88] According to Sun, Confucius is asking a rhetorical question, expressing that Guan Zhong is not humane at all. Furthermore, Confucius is not repeating the phrase to stress his admiration, but to express exactly the opposite.

Sun Zhizu also displays an awareness of the textual scholarship meant to invalidate the passages about Guan Zhong as lore from Qi. While he never mentions Lu Wenchao or Yuan Mei, he argues against the exact position they had defended. Sun shows that he takes it serious as research by criticizing their handling of the sources:

> Scholars of later generations thereupon became suspicious that the pronouncements of the sage are one-sided and utterly at odds with the appraisal expressed in the passage on the "small capacity." They wanted to include these two passages in the Qi-recension of the *Analects* because they believed that all people from Qi know about is that there was a Guan Zhong. They did not know, however, that the Qi-recension is different because it contains the two additional chapters "Asking about the King" and "Knowing the Way." It is not that within the [shared] 20 chapters there is something the Lu-recension lacks that was added in the Qi-recension. Furthermore, the Qi-recension too is a true transmission from the school of Confucius, how could there have been deletions and insertions by people from Qi?[89]
>
> 後世學者遂疑聖人立論之偏與"器小"章抑揚懸絕，欲置此二章於《齊論》之內，以為齊人祇知有管仲云爾。不知《齊論》之所多者，《問王》、《知道》二篇，非此二十篇中亦有《魯論》所無，而為《齊論》所增者也。且《齊論》亦必是孔門之舊，豈容齊人刪潤點竄於其間乎。

If the title of Sun's essay alludes vaguely to Lu Wenchao, the fact that Sun mentions the trope of the limited horizon of the people from Qi may betray an awareness of the argument Yuan Mei had made. To be sure, this trope does go back to a dialog in the *Mengzi* and thus a basic text in late imperial higher education. Still, Yuan had used it to support his reasoning and was the first to do so in this scholarly exchange. Even though there is no clear evidence, it thus seems conceivable that Sun Zhizu had read the texts of both Lu and Yuan. Indeed, Lu's essay contains an explicit reference to Yuan, so that Sun was at least aware of Yuan's research is very likely, no matter where he read about this discussion.

[88] The solution that Sun Zhizu proposed is grammatically just as defendable as the standard reading.
[89] Ibid.

Whereas it is not entirely clear whom exactly Sun Zhizu was writing against, there can be no doubt that he thought little of the scholarly value of this debate. The bone of contention is the nature of the regional *Analects*-recensions. Yuan and Lu had invoked the one from Qi as a possible weak point in the transmission history, because words they considered subpar had been put into the mouth of Confucius through this recension. This implies that there had existed substantial differences in content between the recensions from Lu and from Qi. For Sun, such an image of the early *Analects* is unjustifiable and does not tally with what the sources have to say. He points out that the recensions only differ in terms of the presence (Qi-recension) or absence (Lu-recension) of two chapters towards the end of the text, and that the two recensions are otherwise identical. Finally, even though one of the recension has the label "Qi" attached to it, it is still subject to the same quality standards as everything else coming from the school of Confucius. Thus, there should not have been an opportunity for misguided followers to infuse their own ideas into the text.

The crux of the matter is that Sun criticizes the scholarship of the discussants while he himself makes an argument that rests solely on the *silence* of the sources. All the *Book of the [Former] Han* tells the reader about the 22 chapters of the Qi-recension of the *Analects* is a short comment saying: "Additionally 'Asking about the King' and 'Knowing the Way.'"[90] This is commonly understood to refer to two chapters that distinguish the Qi-recension from the one from Lu. Whether or not this means that both versions are the same in all other respects is an entirely different question. Yuan and Lu both argued based on the understanding that they are not identical, Sun explains that they are. This means that Sun has to give another explanation why the passages in which Confucius praises Guan Zhong should be invalidated, and he does so by offering a new interpretation. The fundamental question of whose reading of the source material is correct is not explicitly addressed. Both sides have settled on one possible understanding and build their argumentation on that basis. Both sides, in other words, fill the gap in the sources in a distinct way, and the further steps they take to make their points are determined by that choice.

A belated response by Shen Tao

In a belated response to this debate by Shen Tao, every aspect has become more complex, but the guiding assumptions remain firmly in place. The preface of the collection of notes in which Shen discusses this issue is dated to 1836, by which time all discussants analyzed so far had

[90] "多問王知道" *Hanshu*, 30.1716.

long passed away. The first of the two consecutive entries on the topic is similar to Sun Zhizu's argumentation in that it questions the understanding of the different recensions that the discussants have upheld. The second one produces evidence from the *Book of the Later Han* to show that the Confucians of the Han dynasty favored a different reading of one of the passages relating to Guan Zhong, which moderates the positive impression of Guan Zhong.

In a long citation, which I analyze in detail below, Shen Tao introduces the development of the debate from Gu Xiancheng to Lu Wenchao. The gist is that passages from the Qi-recension of the *Analects* have made their way into the Lu-recension. Like Lu Wenchao, Shen attaches his opinion on what he quotes in the form of a comment:

> Tao's [=My] comment: This theory is complete nonsense. The Qi- and Lu-*Analects* are like the Qi- and Lu-*Odes*. At that time, the teachers of the classics from Qi and Lu all held on to their school traditions, as there were differences between them when it came to the glosses and the [divisions of] verses and chapters. As a consequence, there was the differentiation between the schools of Qi and Lu. It is not as if there was one *Analects*-text from Qi and different *Analects*-text from Lu.[91]
>
> 濤案：此說謬甚。齊《論》、魯《論》猶齊《詩》、魯《詩》，當時齊、魯經生各守師說，訓詁章句間有不同，遂有齊、魯二家之別。非齊《論語》一書而魯《論語》又一書也。

The main thrust of Shen's argument is that the regional qualifier before the name of the work does not suggest different texts, but local schools of interpretation that have developed a distinct profile. In doing so, he connects the discussion on the *Analects* to the larger issue of early modes of textual transmission. His aim is to denigrate the theories put forward by the Gu brothers, Yuan Mei, and Lu Wenchao: They had identified certain passages in the received *Analects* as relics originating from assumed regional recensions. If there had never been regional recensions, their arguments collapse.

Operating with the same source base as Sun Zhizu, Shen Thao refers back to the *Book of the [Former] Han* and the two additional *Analects*-chapters in the Qi-recension it mentions. According to his reading of the passage, which is again reminiscent of Sun's argumentation,

[91] Shen Tao, *Jiaocui xuan biji* 交翠軒筆記 (Notebook from the Hut of Exchange of Green Jade), 3.4b, in *Qing ren kaoding biji* 清人考訂筆記 (Evidential Notebooks by Qing Scholars) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004), 460.

the fact that two additional chapters are recognized as the main difference "clearly" (*ming* 明)[92] means that the recensions are identical in all other respects. That is to say, in effect, that the passages everyone agrees are dubious cannot be invalidated on textual grounds as they are shared by all known early editions. Shen finds harsh words for those who attempt to do so:

> How does one not make a fool of oneself when, like these two gentlemen [Gu Xiancheng and Yuan Mei], one points out that this passage in the *Analects* is from the Qi-recension and that passage from the Lu-recension? Both Gu and Yuan are no men of learning, so it is not at all unusual that they propose unfounded theories. However, that scholars [or: Lu Wenchao, who was often addressed by his bureaucratic rank "Academician"] too adopt these farfetched theories with great fanfare when they explain the classics is something that deserves capital punishment that cannot be mitigated.[93]
>
> 若如二君所云是一《論語》中此章指為齊《論》，彼章指為魯《論》，豈不可笑？顧、袁均非學人，臆說固無足怪。學士說經鏗鏗乃亦取此謬悠之論，誅不可解。

In these closing sentences of his essay, Shen Tao denies some of the participants in this debate the status of a "man of learning"[94] and questions the judgment of those who build their arguments on theories proposed by non-scholars. Shen maintains that none of the explanations successfully invalidate those passages where Confucius speaks highly of Guan Zhong. According to Shen, the passages have to be accepted as they are found in the received text, and the idea that the different regional labels refer to distinct recensions is a product of unscholarly fancy.

To say that the passages have to be accepted does not mean that their interpretation is obvious. Like Sun Zhizu, Shen Tao questions whether Confucius's words indeed amount to praise for Guan Zhong. But unlike Sun, Shen is able to produce textual evidence for a different reading of one of the passages. He discusses it in the entry in his notes that comes right after the one just analyzed.

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[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid, 3.5a/461.
[94] One possible reason why Shen Tao does not call Gu Xiancheng and Yuan Mei „men of learning" is that Gu was most active in politics, and Yuan is best remembered as a poet. It is furthermore important to keep in mind that Shen lived much later than all the other scholars considered in this study; the scholars who were active in the 18th and early 19th century did not insist on such distinctions, as far as I am aware.

In chapter 14 of the *Analects*, Confucius discusses Guan Zhong in three passages. In the last one, Confucius justifies Guan Zhong's decision not to die with his lord,[95] as the code of conduct of the period would expect him to. At least this is the majority reading, to which Shen Tao objects. The last and crucial part of the passage goes as follows:

> Why should he behave like common men and common women, who, in their faithfulness, drown themselves in drains and ditches, without anyone knowing about them?[96]
>
> 豈若匹夫匹婦之為諒也，自經於溝瀆，而莫之知也。

According to the majority reading, Confucius does not expect Guan Zhong to die because the latter is no ordinary man, but rather one who still has a lot to give to the Chinese people. This reading has the benefit of being entirely intuitive as Confucius lays out Guan Zhong's contributions in detail right before that sentence, thus Guan is the assumed topic of this sentence, too.

In his note on this sentence, Shen Tao deviates from traditional readings in two ways. First, he claims that *gou du* 溝瀆 ("drains and ditches") is in fact the name of a place in Lu, namely the "hill of Judu" (*Judu zhi qiu* 句瀆之丘), which is also mentioned in the *Zuo Tradition* (*Zuozhuan* 左傳). Second, and more important, Shen produces evidence that in the Han dynasty, this passage was understood quite differently:

> In the "Biography of Ying Shao" in the *Book of the Later Han*, it says: "In the past, there was the trouble with Zhao Hu's relative Zijiu, and Confucius said: 'To drown himself in the hill of Judu [or: in drains and ditches], without anyone knowing about him.'" This shows that the Confucians of the Han thought that this expression refers to Zhao Hu.[97]
>
> 《後漢書・應劭傳》："昔召忽親子糾之難，而孔子曰：'自經於溝瀆，而莫之知。'"是漢儒以此語為指召忽而言。

The part Shen Tao quotes is an excerpt from a discussion by the official Ying Shao 應劭 (died ca. 204 CE), in which no mention is made of Guan Zhong. The most obvious option for the reader is to follow Shen's suggestion and accept that Ying Shao takes the statement in question

[95] Guan Zhong was the tutor of one of the princes of Qi. This prince contended for the throne with his brother, lost the power struggle and consequently his life.
[96] *Analects* 14.17.
[97] Shen Tao, *Jiaocui xuan biji*, 3.5a-5b/461.

to refer to Zhao Hu. It is not my concern here to judge the reading Shen Tao proposes, but it is nevertheless important to note the issues that arise when one follows his suggestion. As already mentioned, the understanding that the sentence in the *Analects* refers to Guan Zhong is intuitive because he is the topic throughout Confucius's utterance. While silent changes of the subject are not at all alien to Classical Chinese, this would be an extreme case. Furthermore, even if this last sentence of the passage does not talk about Guan Zhong in an apologetic manner, the rest unambiguously does. Even if one grants Shen Tao the partial invalidation of Confucius's praise, the bulk of his *laudatio* remains unchallenged.

Besides the argumentation, the format in which Shen Tao made his case illustrates how the scholarly discourse functioned in the Qing. In the first part of the first entry concerning the issue of Confucius's praise for Guan Zhong, Shen extensively quotes from Lu Wenchao's essay. Because Shen quotes the part where Lu himself quotes others, the result is a complex textual web with threads originating from different texts, in which quotations reach the fourth level. Figure 2 illustrates how the different sources are nested within each other as they convey the history of the discussion.

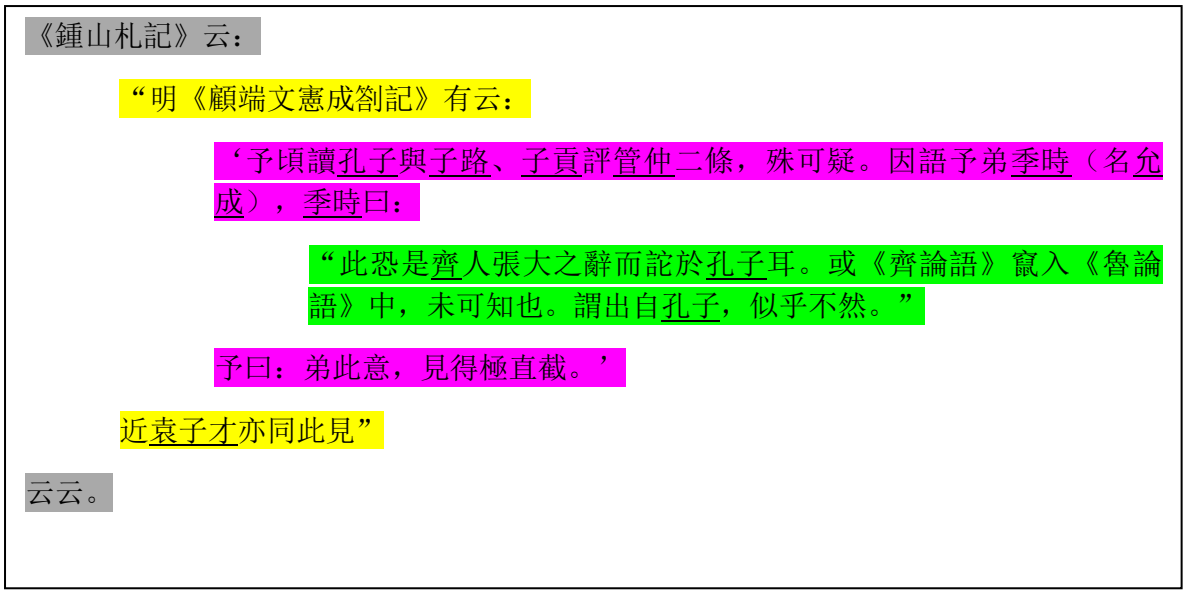

Figure 2: Quotations within quotations in Shen Tao's notebook entry

In principle, this is the standard format for many scholarly essays from that period, though most cases are less complex. The outermost frame refers to Lu Wenchao's text, which itself quotes from Gu Xiancheng's writings. Gu's text is the substantive center that contains more than just the formulaic "X says." However, instead of offering his own position, Gu quotes his brother, whose suggestion that a passage from the Qi-*Analects* made its way into the other recensions is

at the core of the whole exchange. In essence, the first three lines introduce a text or a speaker by name. The fourth line contains the theory, which I have translated above. The fifth and sixth line contain words of agreement, and the final line contains an "et cetera" that refers to the rest of Lu's essay. I have assigned a color to every speaker for enhanced clarity. Shen Tao is grey, Lu Wenchao is yellow, Gu Xiancheng is purple, and his brother Gu Yuncheng is green.

In an intricate yet economical manner, Shen Tao has introduced not only the proposition he is about to discuss in his essay, but also the names of the scholars involved and with that a sense of the history of the debate.

Regardless of the persuasiveness of his proposals, Shen Tao argues in a manner that is highly indicative how the discourse on the *Analects* functioned during the late 18th and the early 19th century. The assumption was that Confucius was a man of high ethical standards who never erred in his judgments. Since Guan Zhong did not live up to the standards that Qing scholars applied, they doubted whether Confucius would have praised him. This image of Confucius was the benchmark against which they measured everything, and the basis on which they dismissed passages as untrustworthy.

Due to an intellectual climate obsessed with textual evidence, this dismissal depended on proof from the sources. The line of reasoning which the Gu brothers, Yuan Mei and Lu Wenchao chose was that Guan Zhong was linked to the state of Qi, which was linked to a specific *Analects*-recension. In order to prove that Confucius had not said what the text claimed he did, they questioned the reliability of the Qi-recension and had the relevant quotes at hand. Sun Zhizu and Shen Tao vehemently disagreed, and offered proof that the recensions must have been in agreement about the content of this specific chapter. Tellingly, however, they too made an effort to show that Confucius had not praised Guan Zhong by offering a different interpretation of his words. The character of Confucius was at the heart of the discussion, not a textual question per se. Qing scholars relied on evidence, and (as figure 2 makes clear) were not afraid to make ample use of it. Yet, their primary concern was to negate anything that challenged their reading expectations, which were based on a highly selective image of antiquity.

Dissecting the *Analects*: Employing textual scholarship to whitewash the image of Confucius

In the eyes of Qing scholars, the fact that Confucius praised Guan Zhong as humane was only the tip of a large iceberg consisting of material collected in the *Analects* that made Confucius appear in a dubious light. In the previous section, I have focused on a set of passages linked to one specific issue in the transmission history of the *Analects* to highlight the stability of the basic assumption about the flawlessness of Confucius. This section analyzes different issues scholars had with the received texts and the various solutions they proposed. These solutions range from grand theories about the early transmission of the *Analects* to microscopic philological research on the punctuation of one sentence. Behind the widely diverging nature of the answers, the same assumption shows through. Those passages that challenged this image of Confucius attracted the bulk of textual criticism

As a counterpoint to what is to follow, it is helpful to keep in mind what Christoph Harbsmeier did a long time ago: to group an array of *Analects*-passages around themes of humor and jest. According to his interpretation, Confucius is "an impulsive, emotional, and informal man."[98] The *Analects* indeed offers ample material that lends itself to light-hearted interpretations of Confucius. No such lightheartedness shows through in the readings discussed in this section. Rather, Confucius appears as a serious man who is aware of his mission to stem the tide of the times, and who is out to better the world. This awareness did not lead to arrogance, however, as scholars read the *Analects* in a way that brought out the modesty of Confucius.

Sun Zhizu, who contributed to the debate analyzed in the previous section with a radically new reading of an *Analects*-passage on Guan Zhong, also had something to say about one passage in which Confucius immodestly puts his love of learning above that of everyone else:

> The master says: "In a hamlet of ten families, there certainly are those who are as loyal and trustworthy as I am, but they are not as fond of learning as I am."[99]
>
> 子曰："十室之邑，必有忠信如丘者焉，不如丘之好學也。"

According to the mainstream interpretation, Confucius says here that his outstanding quality is his love of learning. While others may be as loyal and trustworthy as Confucius, they cannot be

[98] Christoph Harbsmeier, "Confucius Ridens: Humor in the *Analects*," in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, no. 50, vol.1, June 1990, 131.
[99] *Analects* 5.28.

considered his equal in this regard. Although this reading was not entirely stable throughout all times, it usually prevailed without much challenge. Sun Zhizu, however, assembled the most prominent of those who disagreed in the second and final part of a short essay titled "Punctuation of the *Analects*" (*Lunyu dianju* 論語點句). Each part consists of an extensive quotation from the *Collectanea of the Guest from the Wild* (*Yeke congshu* 野客叢書) by the Southern Song scholar Wang Mao 王楙 (1151-1213) concerning punctuation in the *Analects*, which is followed by Sun Zhizu's assessment. The second part records what Wang Mao had learned from his teacher about this *Analects*-passage and how he disagrees:

> [My (i.e., Wang Mao's) teacher] said: "Confucius was modest in all respects; he should not himself say that others were not as fond of learning as he was. If one only moves the full stop after the character *yan* to before that character and reads *yan* [焉] as *yan* [煙], the meaning of the text becomes completely different." [Wang Mao:] Yet if one looks at how the *History of the Northern Dynasties* quotes this sentence, then it breaks off after *yan*. Thus one can see that later scholars did not need to come up with unfounded theories in their agitation when explaining the sagely classics.
>
> Zhizu's [=my] comment: The *Explanation of Texts* by Lu Deming says: "*Yan*, standard reading of the character. Wei Guan says: 'Read as *y*[*u*]+[*qi*]*an*, acts as head of the lower sentence.'" Thus the reading of the teacher certainly has basis.[100]
>
> 謂"孔子每事謙遜，不應自謂人不如我好學。只移'焉'字下一點於'焉'字上，以'焉'字作'煙'字讀，文意夐別。"然觀《北史》引此語，則曰"如某者焉"，因知後學之解聖經不必用意過當為穿鑿之說。
>
> 志祖案：陸德明《釋文》云："焉，如字。衛瓘：'於虔反，為下句首。'"則老先生之讀解固有本矣。

There is a lot of going back and forth within these few lines. Wang Mao reports the reading of his teacher, only to contradict it. Sun Zhizu, who used the quote in his essay, finally supports Wang's teacher with yet another quote. Sun and the teacher of Wang Mao defend their preferred reading based on a change of punctuation. This is an option because texts in Classical Chinese

[100] Sun Zhizu, "*Lunyu dianju*" 論語點句 (Punctuation of the *Analects*), in idem, *Dushu cuolu*, 2.16a. Both functions of the character *yan* are now pronounced in an identical manner. According to the reconstruction of Baxter and Sagart, their initials still distinguished them in Middle Chinese. See William Baxter and Laurent Sagart, *Old Chinese. A New Reconstruction* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013), 370. The *fanqie* 反切 transcription offered by Lu Deming, in yet another quote, belongs to its use as "how?" in an initial position.

are normally not punctuated, and adding punctuation marks is thus inherently an act of interpretation.

The multiple meanings of the character *yan* 焉 are central for this operation. *Yan* can mean "therein/in relation to it" and is then mostly used at the end of a phrase. Another option for a final *yan* would be to see it as an emphatic particle. Both readings make sense in the *Analects*-passage in question, as understood by the majority of scholars. An initial *yan* in this passage, or more generally one before a verb, has an entirely different meaning. In such circumstances, *yan* acts as a question particle meaning "how?" Therefore, Confucius would say something along the following lines:

> The master says: "In a hamlet of ten families, there certainly are those who are as loyal and trustworthy as I am. How would there not be some as fond of learning as me?"
>
> 子曰："十室之邑，必有忠信如丘者，焉不如丘之好學也？"

In stark contrast to the reading translated above, Confucius affirms that the average person matches all of his positive qualities through a rhetorical question. A hamlet of ten families is not a particularly large settlement, but Confucius expresses certainty that he will find his equal within such a group. He may be the sage, but he considers himself no better than everyone else and exhibits modesty.

Going back to a comment by Wei Guan 衛瓘 (220-291) preserved in the Lu Deming's 陸德明 (556-627) *Explanation of the Texts of the Classics* (*Jingdian shiwen* 經典釋文), Sun Zhizu reinforces what the teacher of Wang Mao had proposed, namely that Confucius "should not" talk about himself in such a laudatory manner. None of the discussants considers this an apocryphal statement erroneously attributed to Confucius. Rather, the weak point in the fabric of the *Analects* is the uncertainty about the role the character *yan* plays in this passage. Since both its initial and its final usage can make sense in this case and textual sources are available to support either understanding, the image one has of Confucius determines the reading: Either he is modest, or he stresses the importance of learning. Sun Zhizu chooses to stress his modesty.

Zhao Yi's doubts about the reliability of the Analects

Zhao Yi's 趙翼 (1729-1814) attempts to reconcile his faith in the sagely character of Confucius with the actual behavior of this figure recorded in the sources show far less respect for the integrity of the received texts. He considered them to be unreliable and thus stressed that one

had to exercise caution when reading them. Based on detailed historical analyses, Zhao argued that many stories about Confucius, even in authoritative sources, were spurious. All the while, however, it remained his goal to defend the image of Confucius against what he perceived to be defamation.

Zhao Yi's treatment of a story in the *Record of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記) is instructive for how he approaches the lore about Confucius. The chapter "Tan Gong" 檀弓 records that Confucius lost his father while still young, but did not learn about the location of the grave until he had reached an age at which he already had disciples. This glaring lack of filial piety was inconceivable to Zhao Yi:

> Confucius was a numinous sage since birth, how did he not inquire about the grave of his father while his mother was still alive?[101]
>
> 孔子生而神聖，豈有母在時不問知父墓者？

According to Zhao, Confucius was not only a sage, but a numinous sage. Furthermore, this was no state he had reached at some point in his life, but an inborn quality. As such, Confucius surely would not have acted so contrary to the demands of filial piety as to not care about the location of his father's grave. Since his enlightened behavior was inborn, one cannot point to a long process of self-cultivation as an excuse for Confucius's delay in finding out about his ancestor.

After stating his assumptions, Zhao Yi's argumentation takes a philological turn. He takes issue with apologetic theories that try to save the face of Confucius by pointing out that the standard punctuation for one of the sentences is mistaken. One such theory posits that instead of not knowing where his father's grave was, Confucius simply did not know whether the coffin had been put in a shallow, temporary burial ground (*bin* 殯) or the funerary rites had been completed and the coffin was already buried deeply (*zang* 葬).[102] This would have made Confucius's oversight less severe. Instead of attempting a re-interpretation of the passage, however, Zhao Yi introduces his theory about the origins of the stories about Confucius in order to challenge their authority.

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[101] Zhao Yi 趙翼, „*Wufu qu*" 五父衢 (The Street of Wufu), in idem, *Gaiyu congkao* 陔餘叢考 (Various Studies Written While Caring for my Parents) (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 1990), 45.
[102] Ibid.

> In general, those who recorded [things about] the rites got [these stories] from hearsay. They had no time to investigate them and wrote them down in books straight away, which is why there are such egregious mistakes. There are numerous anecdotes about Confucius in works like *Zhuangzi*, *Garden of Sayings*, *New Arrangement [of Anecdotes]*, *School Sayings of Confucius*, and *Kong Family Masters' Anthology*, and if one considers every single one of them true, then the sage becomes a shallow person.[103]
>
> 總由於記禮之家得諸傳聞，不暇審訂，輒筆之於書，故有此等謬誤。觀《莊子》及《說苑》、《新序》、《孔子家語》、《孔叢子》等書所傳孔子佚事甚多，若一一信以為真，則聖人反淺。

For Zhao Yi, the story in the *Record of Rites* is merely one instance of a much larger problem. Much like some of the scholars described in the previous section, such as Yuan Mei and Lu Wenchao, he has lost his faith in the editors of canonical works and no longer considers them reliable gatekeepers. Instead of taking a second look whether the stories they have gathered are true, these editors rushed to write them down and thereby granted them authority. The difference between them and the editors of works long held in much lower esteem is one of degree, and it is quite small. Thus, while works like the *Record of Rites* may for the most part be reliable, not everything they contain is authentic. Just as it would be absurd to take the *Zhuangzi* into account when constructing one's image of Confucius, Zhao implies, one cannot uncritically rely on the canon, but has to check even that material against what one knows about Confucius. For the *Analects*, Zhao Yi illustrates the matter in some detail:

> The books of people from the Warring States and early Han periods contain a great many bequeathed words of Confucius. Basically, what the *Analects* records is of the same kind as these records. It was only given the title *Analects* after the Confucians of Qi and Lu had discussed and ascertained [its content]. The character *yu* [speech; of the title *Lunyu*] refers to the words of the sage; the character *lun* [discussion] refers to the discussions of the Confucians. In picking out the purest parts from among the variegated and muddled records about the sage that do not differentiate between authentic and inauthentic when compiling this work, they certainly showed their insight, but how could it have been the case that they did not once or twice accept something superfluous?

[103] Ibid.

> Certainly one cannot consider every single story factual even when it is recorded in the *Analects*.[104]
>
> 戰國及漢初人書所載孔子遺言甚多，《論語》所記本亦同此記載之類，齊、魯諸儒討論而定，始謂之《論語》。語者，聖人之遺語；論者，諸儒之討論也。於雜記聖人言行真偽錯雜中取其純粹，以成此書，固見其有識，然安必無一二濫收者？固未可以其載在《論語》而遂一一信以為實事也。

This assessment connects two aspects of the genesis of the *Analects*: that it is the product not of Confucius himself, but of disciples, and that there existed many stories, often contradicting, about the master from which these disciples-turned-editors had to select. The historical trajectory that Zhao Yi envisions is that after the death of Confucius, the number of stories about him multiplied. The editors of the *Analects*, the identity of which Zhao Yi never specifies beyond the very generic "Confucians of Qi and Lu" in this essay, were faced with the sorry task of sifting through the material in order to collect the stories that best represent Confucius. They generally did a good job, but in the long run the *Analects* cannot deny its genealogy: It may consist of the words of Confucius selected by insightful disciples, but they have been chosen from a pool of stories of widely varying quality all the same, and this still shows through in some of them. In other words, for Zhao Yi Confucius may have been flawless, but the editors of the *Analects* were not. Therefore, one has to judge their product against one's own standards.

Based on this reasoning, Zhao Yi harnesses the superior historical knowledge provided by hindsight in order to evaluate the criteria the editors had applied to the lore about Confucius. In *Analects* 17.5, for example, Confucius entertains the possibility of following an invitation by a rebellious minister named Gongshan Furao 公山弗擾, the objection of his disciple Zilu notwithstanding. Zhao goes to great lengths to determine the historical background of this episode with the help of the *Zuo Tradition*, especially in order to find out when this is supposed to have happened. Based on his calculations, Zhao first faults the *Records of the Historian* for placing this story *after* the insurrection in its chronology, while granting the possibility that it would be conceivable that Gongshan could have issued the invitation *before* it. Armed with his detailed knowledge of historical and biographical background, however, Zhao denies the story in its current form any credibility:

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[104] Zhao Yi, "Gongshan Furao zhao Kongzi zhi bu ke xin" 公山弗擾召孔子之不可信 ([The Story of] Gongshan Furao Inviting Confucius is Not Trustworthy), in idem, *Gaiyu congkao*, 61.

> Since it was after the rebellion, when Confucius had just become minister of justice, there decidedly never occurred such a thing as him being invited and wanting to go. Our generation reads and learns the *Analects* as children, upon which one believes in it without the slightest doubt. No one ever goes back to the *Zuo Tradition* to check, [and failing to do so is] base indeed.[105]
>
> 既叛以後則孔子方為司寇，斷無召而欲往之事也。世人讀《論語》，童而習之，遂深信不疑，而不復參考《左傳》，其亦陋矣。

Being the numinous sage, Confucius would have never associated with someone like Gongshan Furao, whose rebellion Zhao Yi apparently considered at odds with Confucius's insistence on loyalty. This is especially obvious to Zhao given that, by his calculations, Confucius had just secured a high position in his home state of Lu as minister of justice when the rebellion broke out. All one needs to know to figure this out is available in the *Zuo Tradition*, the seminal commentary to the *Annals* (*Chunqiu* 春秋), so why did no one look into the matter? The answer lies in the way in which everyone learns about the *Analects*: Reading it at a young age, everyone develops a faith in it that could aptly be termed "child-like," and thus never engages with it critically.[106]

Cui Shu's critical biography of Confucius

Taking Zhao Yi's theories about the formation of the *Analects* to their logical conclusion, readers themselves have to decide what to believe about Confucius. The text has lost its final authority over the image of Confucius and has to be completely scrutinized for erroneous inclusions of unfitting material. It was Cui Shu 崔述 (1740-1816) who took this rather extreme step.

Zhao and Cui employ very compatible approaches. No issue is too minute too escape their attention, like Zhao Yi considering whether Confucius would bathe nude in public or whether hot springs were secluded areas.[107] Both rely heavily on the *Mengzi* for their sanitized image of

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[105] Ibid.

[106] The fact that it is the institutional setting that determines the reading of the *Analects* links well to Virginia Mayer Chan's assessment that Zhao Yi is deeply interested in institutional and social topics in his research. See Virgina Mayer Chan, "Historical Consciousness in Eighteenth-Century China. A Case Study of Zhao Yi and the 'Zhexi' Historians" (Ann Arbor: UMI dissertation publishing, 1982), 74.

[107] This becomes an issue in the discussion of *Analects* 11.26, where Confucius asks some disciples about their dreams and expresses his admiration for the one who talks about taking a bath in spring. See Zhao Yi, "Yu hu Yi

Confucius. Yet while they have a lot in common, Cui Shu takes everything several steps further. This starts with the scale of the enterprise. Whereas Zhao has a small number of essays on this topic, Cui constructs a complete biography of Confucius. Zhao discusses the reliability of a few stories about Confucius in the *Analects* and the *Record of Rites*, Cui considers all of the lore about the master in all sources. Finally, whereas Zhao Yi at times contents himself with offering a new interpretation of a passage he considers dubious, Cui Shu is less reluctant to employ textual criticism and deny it any value.[108]

Unlike most of the other figures discussed in this chapter, Cui Shu has been of great interest to modern scholars since his endorsement by leading intellectuals of the republican period (1912-1949) like Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛 (1893-1980) and Hu Shi 胡適 (1892-1961). In Cui Shu, they found a native forerunner to the scientific methods in historical research that were *en vogue* then but mostly seen as something foreign from the West.[109] Kai-Wing Chow wrote his insightful article on Cui's "system of intelligibility" in response to the image of Cui Shu that grew out of his rediscovery in the early 20th century. Chow argues that construing Cui's research as objective was inaccurate and makes a number of important points that tally well with my own analysis in this chapter .[110] He states that "Cui's images of Confucius were preconceived and ideologically and methodologically driven by a powerful Confucian purism."[111] As Chow describes it, however, it appears as if Cui was going against the grain by doing so when in fact he was just the most extreme of a considerable group of scholars whose work on Confucius was guided by similar assumptions. Furthermore, Chow pays no attention to the philological theories that Cui evoked at every turn to substantiate his assumptions, and the neglect of this aspect obscures to what extent they were intertwined. Thus, I will argue here that the textual research of Cui Shu is one of the clearest expressions of Qing scholarship because Cui applied the narrow concept of authorship with utmost consistency, expressed much more detailed insights into matters of textual history, and was very vocal about how he expected Confucius to behave.

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feng hu Wuyu" 浴乎沂風乎舞雩 (Bathing in the Yi, Enjoying the Breeze at the Rain Altar), in idem, *Gaiyu congkao*, 64.

[108] For example, both take issue with the story of Confucius's visit to Nanzi in *Analects* 6.28, but Zhao proposes a new interpretation while Cui forcefully relegates it to the trash bin of apocrypha. I will discuss this below.

[109] Cf. Joshua Fogel, "On the 'Rediscovery' of the Chinese Past: Cui Shu and Related Cases," in idem, *The Cultural Dimension of Sino-Japanese Relations. Essays on the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: Sharpe, 1995), 3-22.

[110] 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* (New Brunswick: Transaction publishers, 2005), 19-32.

[111] Ibid, 21.

Zhao Yi had formulated why the received texts were not fully reliable and expressed his esteem for the character of Confucius. As we have seen, this turned out to be a decisive yet unacknowledged criterion in his evaluations of the stories he read. Cui Shu, by contrast, explicitly stated what ranked higher than the text itself in determining credibility. The guideline for reading the classics he proposed is as follows:

> Therefore I say that in reading the classics, one does not need to superficially respect them because they are the classics, but should only look for the intention of the sage, because if one knows that the cultivation of the sage is both profound and excellent, then what is forged will naturally be unable to throw the truth into disorder.[112]
>
> 故余謂讀經不必以經之故浮尊之，而但當求聖人之意；果知聖人之文之高且美，則偽者自不能亂真。

For Cui, the classics are the only gateway to the truth, but that does not mean that they are completely reliable. Rather, readers have to measure them against the "intention of the sage," and then they will easily identify the inauthentic parts. This statement makes clear that it is the sage that is authoritative, not the text of the classics. The classics are useful only insofar as they are conducive to finding the "intention of the sage." Due to their tenuous authority in such matters, doubts about the text of the classics are not harmful per se. In the case of the *Analects*, Cui identifies a number of obvious challenges to an early date of completion. These include some of the rulers of Lu during the time of Confucius being addressed with posthumous names, and disciples like Zengzi 曾子 and Youzi 有子 being "masters." However, his tone is not as pessimistic as that of the scholars discussed in the previous section, who had imagined many interested parties, some with intentions quite different from Confucius, taking part in compiling the *Analects*. While Cui does take issue with the way in which the "Treatise on Literature" portrays the textual history of the *Analects*, he describes the production circumstances of the work in favorable terms:

> Thus it was several decades after the demise of Confucius that disciples of [Confucius's] seventy disciples recorded what their teachers had relayed to them and turned it into chapters, and later Confucians collected it into a book. It was not the [first-generation] disciples of Confucius that recorded and collected it. And yet the meaning and principles

[112] Cui Shu 崔述, "Kaoxin lu tiyao juan shang" 考信錄提要卷上 (Higher Scroll of the Essentials of the *Record of Seeking What Is Trustworthy*), in Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛 (ed.), *Cui Dongbi yishu* 崔東壁遺書 (Works Bequeathed by Cui Shu) (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1983), 11a.

> [of the *Analects*] are profound and pure, its style is clear and simple; compared to the *Record* [*of Rites*] by Dai, it alone has gotten hold of the truth. This is probably because they were sincere Confucians who cautiously corroborated the words of their teachers and did not dare to make great additions.[113]
>
> 則是孔子既没數十年後，七十子之門人追記其師所述以成篇，而後儒輯之以成書者，非孔子之門人弟子之所記而輯焉者也。然其義理精純，文體簡質，較之戴《記》，獨為得真。蓋皆篤實之儒，謹識師言，而不敢大有所增益於其間也。

As a rule of thumb, the *Analects* ranks high in Cui Shu's hierarchy of credibility. It was compiled by conscientious Confucians. At the same time, and comparable to what Zhao Yi had said, one still cannot believe everything only because these gatekeepers had allowed it in. In this passage, Cui also describes two important criteria with which he measured stories about Confucius: "meaning and principle" (*yili* 義理) and "style of writing" (*wenti* 文體). Cui accepts only those stories that are in accordance with Confucius's high ethical standards and written in the terse and plain style of the Spring and Autumn-period (8th to 5th century BCE).

The first important exception to the rule that the *Analects* is mostly reliable is that Cui Shu considers the last five chapters to be spurious collections that were appended very late.[114] Once Cui actually works on the text, this nice and clean-cut distinction necessarily fails, however, because it clashes with his two other criteria, namely principle and style. The existence of passages that seem questionable based on these criteria in other parts of the work forces him to adapt and fine-tune his theory in order to still harness its explanatory value. In the end, it is always about the credibility of the behavior ascribed to Confucius. Any other consideration, the theory about textual layers included, is secondary to that.[115]

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[113] Cui Shu, "Zhu-Si kaoxin lu" 洙泗考信錄 (Record of Seeking What Is Trustworthy in the [History of] Confucius) in Gu Jiegang (ed.), *Cui Dongbi yishu*, 321b.

[114] Ibid. Cui does not specify when the last five chapters were added; he only mentions the Warring States period (ca. 5th to 3rd century BCE) in this context, which makes it likely that he dated them to this time. For observations such as this one, Cui Shu is credited as the inventor of "layer theory" about the *Analects*, according to which the text consists of disparate, identifiable layers. As a result, modern works of textual scholarship proudly sport his name in their dedication. Cf. the dedication in Bruce and Taeko Brooks, *The Original Analects. Sayings of Confucius and his Successors* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

[115] Cui Shu dedicates long stretches of text to questions that pertain only to the textual history of the *Analects*, and his description of the various early recensions and how they were subsumed in the now-current hybrid version is miles ahead of what others like Lu Wenchao and Sun Zhizu had laid out. I did not analyze his theories in the second section because he has little to say about the Qi- and Lu-recensions and is not engaged in the same discussion. See Cui Shu, "Zhu-Si kaoxin lu," 284b-286a. It is this aspect that so endears Cui Shu to modern textual critics, but it remains an aspect.

On what grounds does Cui Shu define Confucius's ethical standards, and how does he support his reasoning? To answer these questions, it is instructive to go back to the story about Confucius considering to accept the invitation by the rebelling minister named Gongshan Furao, which, as explained above, was a thorn in the side of Zhao Yi, too. It should be noted that this story is to be found in chapter 17 of the *Analects*, i.e. in one of the "corrupt" ones as identified by Cui Shu, but that fact alone is not enough to discredit it.

First of all, Cui invokes the authority of the *Zuo Tradition*, where a passage states that Confucius in fact led the attack against the insubordinate subject in question. He continues by citing the passage from the *Mengzi* that Confucius produced the *Annals* precisely to inspire fear in the hearts of rebellious ministers, and would thus never come to their aid. Cui then quotes the *Annals* itself to showcase how Confucius criticized unruly underlings. Stories about Confucius's dismissive attitude towards persons of low ethical standards that Cui deems credible round off the picture. Cui finally points out, as did Zhao Yi, that by the time of the rebellion, Confucius had just become minister of justice. [116] This extensive display of sources is meant to rule out any possibility that the story told in the *Analects* ever took place. It consists of a mix of historical background information and what is known about Confucius's attitude towards political mutiny.

To Cui, the origins of stories such as this one are obvious, as is the identity of those who are to blame for their inclusion in the canon:

> This probably originates from strategists from the Warring States period who wanted to damage the reputation of the sage to serve their own selfish needs. Because they had only heard that Buniu [usually identified as a variation of Gongshan Furao's name] had rebelled against Lu, they expanded on that, claiming that Confucius had wanted to go [in response to the invitation], without knowing that the years do not match. (…) These strategists are not to blame, only the Confucians of later ages are, who, one after another, did nothing but high-mindedly discuss nature and fate (…).[117]
>
> 此蓋戰國橫議之士欲誣聖人以便其私，但聞不狃嘗畔魯，則附會之以為孔子欲往，而不知其年之不符也。(…) 彼橫議者固不足怪，獨怪後世之儒肩相望，踵相接，而但高談性命 (…)。

[116] Ibid, 283b-284b.
[117] Ibid, 292b.

In the world of the Warring States as envisioned by Cui Shu, traveling political and military consultants had an incentive to legitimize their own behavior of taking any employment offered, regardless of the ethical implications, by ascribing the same behavior to Confucius. This is simply part of the natural development of the culture of argumentation in early China, Cui asserts. What he cannot accept, however, is that none of the followers of Confucius looked into the matter, because anyone who did so would invariably have recognized the gross errors, such as mistaken dates. Instead, throughout history Confucians engaged in idle metaphysical speculation about "human nature and fate" (*xing ming* 性命), when the true way of Confucius was to be found in the traces of his actions all along.[118] One of the few who understood this principle was the Han dynasty scholar Zhao Qi 趙岐 (108-201), author of the earliest extant commentary on the *Mengzi*. Cui Shu repeatedly expresses his regret that no one did for the *Analects* what Zhao had done for the *Mengzi*, namely to carefully weed out everything that does not belong in the work.[119]

Special cases, like the one above, require a special and extensive treatment, even if they are recorded in the most unreliable parts of the *Analects*. Conversely, even the largely dependable chapters of that work sometimes contain dubious material. For such cases, Cui Shu sharpens his analytical instruments by refining what is to be considered core and what fringe *within* the chapters. The 23 characters in chapter 6 of the *Analects* that recount the aftermath of Confucius's visit to Nanzi 南子, the wife of Duke Ling of Wei 衛靈公, have given rise to wide range of interpretations in the long history of *Analects*-commentary.[120] The complete passage is as follows:

> The master visited Nanzi. Zilu was displeased. The master swore to him, saying: "Wherein I have acted improperly, may heaven strike me down! May heaven strike me down!"[121]
>
> 子見南子。子路不說。夫子矢之曰：“予所否者，天厭之！天厭之！”

It consists of two sections of roughly equal length: First comes the narrative, stripped to its bare bones, that introduces the context, upon which follows the utterance of Confucius. Save for the reaction of the disciple Zilu, Cui Shu finds fault with every aspect of this passage. Following

[118] Ibid, 326a.
[119] For example ibid, 285b.
[120] See Makeham, *Transmitters and Creators*, esp. 57-59 and 139-141.
[121] *Analects* 6.28.

the lead of the commentary ascribed to Kong Anguo 孔安國 (2nd to 1st century BCE), which expressed doubts about the veracity of this story, Cui explains why it is highly dubious:

> Due to the separation of men and women, they should not have seen each other in the first place. Add to this [her] licentiousness and unruliness, and it becomes all the more inappropriate. Pointing to heaven and swearing is also at odds with the way the sage normally expresses himself as recorded in the *Analects*. Mister Kong is correct in doubting this.[122]
>
> 蓋男女之別，本不應見。加以淫亂，益非所宜，而指天為誓，亦與《論語》所記聖人平日之言不倫。孔氏疑之是也。

Meeting with a woman that acts in opposition to his standards (by taking part in her husband's governing activities) *and* despite the separation of sexes, only to swear in front of a disciple who expresses dissatisfaction with his behavior afterwards is not something the Confucius Cui Shu knows would have done. To be sure, all major *Analects*-commentators had attempted to smooth out the rough edges of Confucius in this story, but they did so by pointing to the desperate situation of Confucius at the time, or alternatively that he had to accept an invitation to see her to avoid greater harm. Cui Shu displays an awareness of this part of the commentarial tradition, but dismisses it in a roundabout manner as unfounded and forced apologetics. His theory about the textual history of the *Analects*, however, is the key to the riddle:

> Note: This passage is located at the end of chapter 6, only 2 passages come after it. What is recorded within a chapter may mostly be pure, but at the end of a chapter there are often a couple of passages that are not of a kind with the rest. (…) [Their] meaning and style is at odds with the rest of the chapter, and some of the sayings are fragmentary. All of this looks like broken slips of bamboo as well as insertions and additions to the text by later generations. It was probably that, in the beginning, the chapters were all transmitted separately, and those who transmitted them pasted their continuations to the end of the chapters.[123]

[122] Cui Shu, "Zhu-Si kaoxin lu," 290b.
[123] Ibid, 290b-291a.

按：此章在《雍也篇》末，其後僅兩章。篇中所記雖多醇粹，然諸篇之末往往有一二章不相類者。(…) 意旨文體皆與篇中不倫，而語亦或殘缺。皆似斷簡，後人之所續入。蓋當其初，篇皆別行，傳之者各附其所續得於篇末。

As Cui Shu has already explained, chapters 1 to 15 make up to the core of the *Analects*. Yet within these chapters, a further differentiation is necessary, due to the circumstances in which the early versions of this work were transmitted. Every chapter formed a stand-alone unit, and people added to the end of a chapter passages they deemed worthy of inclusion. This explains why the story about Confucius and Nanzi as well as three other dubious passages Cui lists are all to be found near or at the end of their respective chapter. This difference manifests itself in stylistic variations as well:

> Furthermore, when the *Analects* records something about Confucius, it invariably refers to him as "master" (*zi*). Only this passage and the three passages on "[the disciples] sitting in attendance," "Yi and Ao" and "city of Wu" use "honorable master" (*fuzi*), which is questionable, too. Thus these three passages below have probably been taken from other books by later generations and added to the chapter ends, without anyone finding the time to check their quality. What they describe did not necessarily take place; there is no need to come up with contorted explanations for them.[124]

且《論語》記孔子事，皆稱"子"，惟此章及"侍坐"、"羿羿"、"武城"三章稱"夫子"，亦其可疑者。然則此下三章，蓋後人采他書之文，附之篇末，而未暇別其醇疵者。其事固未必有，不必曲為之解也。

What sets the episode about Nanzi apart from the rest of the *Analects* is the use of the appellation for Confucius. While the appellation "master" (*zi*) is ubiquitous in the text, the appellation "honorable master" (*fuzi*) is relatively rare, and, what matters here, mostly appears in direct speech when others address Confucius or speak about him. In the narrative parts, it is only used five times.[125] Since this long list of factors speaks against the credibility of the story of Confucius's visit to Nanzi, Cui Shu sees no reason to come up with farfetched explanations to justify Confucius's behavior. The story is simply apocryphal.

[124] Ibid, 291a.
[125] Besides the four instances mentioned by Cui Shu, there is *Analects* 18.6. Maybe this does not count for him because it is from one of the last chapters.

Cui Shu has a lot more to say about the lore about Confucius, but the pattern outlined above remains fairly stable. Indignation about the content of a passage invariably leads to an argumentation that denies it any credibility. For this, Cui often harnesses the power of arguments informed by his knowledge about the textual history of the *Analects* and stylistic criteria. All in all, however, Cui's contributions are a mixed blessing for Chinese textual criticism. While his keen eye for slight differences in style is undeniable, Cui is first and foremost out to defend his idealized image of Confucius. Scholars have long recognized this,[126] but if Cui's approach is juxtaposed with that of others who were active during the late 18th century, it becomes possible to see how intertwined textual criticism and doctrinal assumptions were. One can credit these scholars with many discoveries about the nature of early texts like the *Analects*. But because they were concerned with interpretative issues, they never crossed the threshold and abstracted from their images of what Confucius would have said and done.

Conclusion

Like any other formative text, the *Analects* presents a perennial problem to its readers. Though a product of a certain time, it is supposed to have timeless value, but some parts resist easy transposition to the age of the reader because they record behavior that has become indefensible. Sometimes, this discrepancy is resolved through interpretative devices such as allegorical readings.

In 18th-century China, where knowledge about and interest in the textual histories of early works was common among the scholarly elite, discussion followed a different trajectory. The deeds and sayings of Confucius were no longer Confucian enough for some scholars, and the nature of the discourse on early texts gave them the power to challenge not only earlier readings, but also the sources. In a discourse in which the authority of agents involved in the production of early texts other than the author was in need of defense, the fact that the *Analects* was compiled by disciples became a liability. In other words, because the concept of authorship was narrowing down to only include one person, the cracks in the texture of early works came under intense scrutiny.

This is the point at which explicit discussions in the Qing set in. That Qian Daxin denied the disciples of Confucius any agency becomes fully understandable against the potential loss of

[126] Kai-Wing Chow quotes something similar from Gu Jiegang's preface to Cui Shu's collected works, which is dated to 1980. See Kai-Wing Chow, "An Alternative Hermeneutics of Truth," 21.

authority that threatened the *Analects* because of its textual history. His reasoning is simple: Because the disciples were mere mouthpieces, faithful but uncreative, the fact that they were the ones who transmitted the words of Confucius has no influence on the status of these words. They are translucent to the point of virtual non-existence. Without actually widening the concept of authorship, Qian finds room for more people in the confined space of the single author.

While Qian's theory was picked up by some contemporary and later scholars, it remained a marginal voice in intense debates over the exact nature of the influence that the disciples of Confucius had wielded over the formation of the *Analects*. The distinction between the recensions of the states of Qi and Lu was crucial for this undertaking, since it allowed scholars to classify dubious material that related to all things Qi as remnants of the long-lost Qi-recension. The exact nature of this recension remained unclear, but some of the scholars involved argued that it allowed for the influx of stories with a certain local color. Others denied that the nature of the Qi-recension was like this, but even the detractors agreed that the passages in question were not in accordance with the expected behavior of Confucius. They defended their image of Confucius not through textual operations, but by challenging the established interpretation. Even more fundamental, thus, than the textual history of the *Analects* was the idealized image of the sage that informed interpretation and textual scholarship alike. To speak in terms understandable to Herr K., cited at the beginning of the chapter, the students had long forgotten the mistakes of the master.

As the research of the most comprehensive critics of the lore about Confucius indicates, it must have been a very thorough forgetting. Cui Shu's attempt to overhaul the biography of Confucius from scratch turned it into nothing less than a hagiography. Not the slightest stain was allowed on the record of the sage. Along the way, Cui Shu developed an advanced and complex theory about the formation and early transmission of the *Analects*. Even though he took everything that informed the research of other scholars like Zhao Yi, Yuan Mei and Lu Wenchao one step further, Cui was by no means unique in his approach. For all their use of textual evidence and detailed analyses, the scholarship of these men remained bound by their assumptions about the ethical standards of Confucius. Research on the *Analects* never broke free from these confines in the 18th century.[127]

[127] It is not unconceivable that it was exactly this over-idealized image, nourished throughout the heyday of the Qing dynasty, that played in the role in the outburst of anti-Confucian sentiments of the early 20th century.

As far as textual scholarship motivated by preconceived ideas goes, there is an intriguing parallel in European humanism. Isaac Causabon (1559-1614) was propelled to prove the inauthenticity of a text because he was unable to accept "a pagan revelation clearer than the Jewish."[128] At issue was that the text in question was supposed to be a translation of ancient Egyptian wisdom. As such, it would have predated Moses, which in turn would mean that God had revealed himself to the pagans first, and only then to his so-called chosen people. It is not hard to see why this conclusion would have been too much for steadfast Christians. Despite the advanced *instrumentarium* that Causabon employed in his reasoning, such as linguistic analysis, modern scholars evaluate him critically. According to Anthony Grafton, the "defects in Causabon's historical insight, moreover, stemmed from the convictions that impelled him to attack Hermes in the first place."[129]

Regardless of all their differences, the philologists of early modern Europe and the Qing dynasty shared the tendency to grant their reading expectations a decisive role in their textual scholarship. They were certain that they already possessed a correct understanding of ancient history, and used this understanding as the benchmark against which to measure the texts they studied. For the present-day researcher, this means that awareness of their motives is an important precondition for the analysis of the writings of these philologists, since these motives shaped their results.

That scholars had certain assumptions about the texts they read, however, is not enough to explain the reorganizations of the received text that scholars proposed. The aura of uncertainty that surrounded the texts made it possible for scholars to imprint their own readings back into the texts, and this uncertainty was a result of the stringent application of the narrow concept of authorship. In the terms introduced in the introduction, Confucius was the originator of the content, and as such remained unassailable. His disciples, however, no matter of which generation, were the creators of the *Analects* and could thus be blamed for everything that was wrong with the text. The identification of specific errors remained bound by the assumptions of Confucius's infallibility that characterized the scholarship of the period, but how scholars dealt with these errors is equally symptomatic. They exploited the loss of authority the text suffered once distance between the creator of the content and the creator of the text had become an issue.

[128] Anthony Grafton, *Defenders of the Text. The Traditions of Scholarship in an Age of Science, 1450-1800* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1991), 169.
[129] Ibid, 161.