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Conceptualizing authorship in late imperial Chinese philology

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2. Dissolving the author: Texts as historical artefacts with many creators

The first chapter has documented the consequences of the narrow concept of authorship that many Qing scholars employed in their textual research. Simply put, they expected a text to have one author. Any exception to this rule constituted a problem they had to solve, as the diverse attempts to come to terms with the input of the disciples in the creation of the *Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語) show. These attempts ranged from playing down this input to scrutinizing it for errors. In the case of the *Analects*, possible original contributions by disciples were a pressing issue of a highly concrete nature. If they introduced something new into the text, scholars had to identify it. Given the stature of Confucius, the figure described in the *Analects*, such an effort becomes understandable.

By contrast, scholars who pondered the history of texts associated with lesser figures had much more space to acknowledge later contributions. Freed from the need to defend the character of the supposed author, they sometimes formulated abstract concepts that explained why later contributions did not threaten the integrity of a work. So-called “master texts” (*zi shu* 子書) constituted the main source material for this undertaking, since they had a far lower standing in the intellectual hierarchy and a number of them bear obvious marks of having passed through many hands. Other texts, while more authoritative than the “master texts,” fit into the same line of inquiry because of their tenuous author-ascriptions. For those who reflected on prolonged processes of textual creation in the late 18th century, the *Zuo Tradition* (*Zuozhuan* 左傳) and the preface to the *Odes* (*Shijing* 詩經) offered valuable insights into the matter. The common thread that unites these deliberations is that the transmission of a text is an active process in which transmitters adapt knowledge and teachings to their historical circumstances, which invariably leaves its mark on the written record. In its most developed form, such an *expanded concept of authorship* recognized the value of the cumulative writing process as a reflection of the way in which texts were used in earlier times.

Doubts concerning the applicability of the narrow concept of authorship to pre-imperial texts constituted a challenge to evidential studies. This type of scholarship, which dominated the discourse in the 18th century, rested on the dualism of authentic versus forged and needed the single author to make this distinction. Based on a comparison between what the supposed author could have known, which includes both historical facts and intellectual insights, and what the

text contained, evidential scholars decided whether author and text matched. Both author and text were seen as closed, individual entities that did not develop over time. By contrast, the expanded, inclusive concept of authorship posited that no such borders existed, as many people worked together in producing a text that, once put into writing, remained open for revision. From such a point of view, the terms “authentic” and “forged,” at least as conventionally understood by Qing dynasty scholars, were meaningless.¹³⁰

A small number of scholars writing in the late 18th century, who generally did not fully identify with the intellectual mainstream of the time, visibly struggled to align what they knew about the earliest stages of transmission of a text with established author-ascriptions. The first section of this chapter analyzes attempts by Qing scholars to resolve the tension between the narrow concept of authorship and the peculiarities of many transmitted texts. It focuses on Zhang Xuecheng 章學誠 (1738-1801), who went furthest among his contemporaries by formulating an elaborate historical theory of an inclusive concept of authorship. According to Zhang, that a text was named after a certain person does not mean that he was the author, or even the creator of the content. Rather, authors named texts after the founders of intellectual lineages when they wrote down their teachings, which could happen centuries after these founders had passed away. In the world of oral transmission that was early China, the written word was secondary to the living spirit of teachings.

While its level of detail stands out, Zhang Xuecheng’s proposition must be understood as part of a more widespread tendency to shift attention away from the author and towards textual history. Abstract deliberations about concepts of authorship led to concrete changes in how scholars evaluated works whose authorship was in doubt. Qing scholars realized that when they worked with an inclusive concept of authorship, they were able to weaken claims of inauthenticity. The appeal of allowing multiple authors lay in the fact that by doing so, they could make a stronger case for the value of works that contained obvious later insertions. In effect, defending the integrity of the transmitted text with the inclusive concept of authorship shows its potential to overcome (or undo, depending on the perspective) what textual scholarship had arduously worked to prove in the preceding century or so.

¹³⁰ The conviction that the narrow concept of authorship is not conducive to the study of early Chinese texts has now become consensus among Sinologists. Cf. Paul Fischer, “Authentication Studies (辨偽學) Methodology and the Polymorphous Text Paradigm,” in *Early China* 32, 2008-2009, 1f. Martin Kern, “The ‘Masters’ in the *Shiji*,” in *T’oung Pao* 101, 4-5, 2015, 335-362. Tao Jiang, “The Problem of Authorship and the Project of Chinese Philosophy: Zhuang Zhou and the *Zhuangzi* between Sinology and Philosophy in the Western Academy,” in *Dao*, 15, 2016, 35-55.

The second section analyzes what may be one of the bigger ironies in Qing intellectual history. In the late 18th century, the very findings Yan Ruoqu's 閻若璩 (1636-1704) had amassed to prove the inauthenticity of the so-called "Old Text chapters" of the canonical *Venerated Documents* (*Guwen Shangshu* 古文尚書) gave rise to a wave of apologetic writings, defending what he had vehemently attacked. One of the central pillars of Yan's textual criticism was the claim that the Old Text chapters recycle a substantial number of phrases from other works. For Yan, the mistakes the forger made when incorporating these phrases into his text gave him away. Yan concluded that the Old Text chapters of the *Documents* were fabrications from the 3rd or 4th century CE, and that they were thus worthless.

From a conceptual perspective, Yan's conclusion is based on the idea that the forger is not identical to the author of the lost original Old Text chapters, and therefore cannot be trusted. This way of thinking is rooted in the narrow concept of authorship. At the same time, however, Yan Ruoqu's findings detail how much the forger had relied on existing traditions that preserved authentic fragments. From there, it was but a small step to the insight that this "forger" was a transmitter instead of a creator. 18th-century scholars only had to transpose Yan's findings into the broad concept of authorship to preserve at least some of the value of the Old Text chapters. As we will see, around the turn of the century, essays softening the verdict of Yan Ruoqu were so numerous that one contemporary feared the return of the specter of Mao Qiling 毛奇齡 (1623-1716), the infamous opponent of Yan and defender of the Old Text chapters.

The writings discussed in this chapter show that the narrow concept of authorship formed the basis for Qing scholars' engagement with transmitted text. While it was pervasive, though, it was not mandatory. Scholars questioned its applicability in theory, or in practice simply went beyond it as they saw fit. Both phenomena, however, only become fully understandable when the narrow concept is posited as the normal mode of approaching transmitted texts. They show that the friction between concept and reality did not go by unnoticed.

Justifying collaborative authorship of early texts

In some works that belong to the genre of "master texts," clear internal boundaries separate distinct layers. The *Mozi* 墨子 contains what could be called a "canon within," the "Mohist Canon" (*Mojing* 墨經) that is worlds apart from the chapters arguing about ghosts and fate in its sophisticated use of highly specialized terminology. The *Zhuangzi* 莊子 is organized in a tripartite structure with its inner, outer and miscellaneous chapters, which is even today used as

a basis for distinguishing authenticity.¹³¹ These works, scholars in the Qing were aware, contained more than just the sayings of Mo Di 墨翟 (5th century BCE) or Zhuang Zhou 莊周 (4th century BCE), the founders of the schools to which these texts belong.

Knowing that many of the transmitted texts had not been put together by their supposed authors, Qing scholars refrained from judging a book by its cover, at least with regard to the name that was written there. In a preface to the *Zhuangzi*, Yao Nai 姚鼐 (1732-1815) stated that there were certainly arbitrary insertions by later people in the 52 chapters that made up this book.¹³² The *General Catalog* (*Zongmu* 總目) of the *Complete Library of the Four Categories* (*Siku quanshu* 四庫全書), by nature concerned with establishing authorship, recognized that the *Han Feizi* 韓非子 was edited by followers of the titular author,¹³³ and that the *Mozi* contained obvious later additions that could not have been written by Mo Di himself.¹³⁴

For most, it seems, such discrepancies between author-ascription and actual creator did not pose a problem. The relatively low value scholars assigned to these texts is one possible explanation for this. The value assigned to a work within this intellectual order tends to correlate negatively with the amount of skepticism scholars expressed towards it. The weight of tradition kept important works in their place. The defense of the Old Text chapters of the *Documents* which I discuss below is one aspect of this trend. The *General Catalog* of the *Complete Library of the Four Categories* contains minor but telling hints to the same effect.¹³⁵ The *Rites of Zhou* (*Zhouli* 周禮), for example, comes first among the three ritual classics in the catalog and has traditionally been ascribed to the Duke of Zhou 周公. Even as the entry recognizes later insertions and differences with other classics, it affirms this ascription by incorporating these challenges into its narrative of a text that grew over time as the original laws fell out use. In

¹³¹ From the very extensive literature on this topic, two examples of opinions from both sides of the spectrum must suffice: Liu Xiaogan defends a close relationship between the historical Zhuang Zhou and the inner chapters, see his *Classifying the Zhuangzi Chapters* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, 1993). As argued by Esther Klein, however, this division may not even have existed in the Western Han 漢 (202 BCE-9 CE) and before, cf. Esther Klein, “Were there ‘Inner Chapters’ in the Warring States? A New Examination of Evidence about the *Zhuangzi*,” in *T’oung Pao* 96 (2011), 299-369.

¹³² Yao Nai 姚鼐, “Preface and Content of *The Meaning of the Zhuangzi, Chapter by Chapter*” (*Zhuangzi zhangyi xumu* 莊子章義序目), in idem, *The Meaning of the Zhuangzi, Chapter by Chapter*” (*Zhuangzi zhangyi* 莊子章義) (n.p., 1879), *juan shou* 卷首 2a.

¹³³ Lu Xixiong 陆锡熊 and Sun Shiyi 孙士毅 (eds.), *Qinding Siku quanshu zongmu zhengli ben* 欽定四庫全書總目整理本 (Collated Version of the General Catalog of the Imperially Commissioned Complete Library of the Four Categories) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997), vol.1, 1316.

¹³⁴ Ibid, vol. 1, 1564.

¹³⁵ There is no need to assume a unifying editorial hand for the catalog entries. It is probable that different staff members were responsible for each entry analyzed below, which only emphasizes the ubiquitous nature of this tendency.

other words, the challenges to authenticity become the basis of its defense. Had the *Rites of Zhou* been forged, the entry argues, it would be in accordance with the other records from the period when the forger had been active.¹³⁶ Given the choice between a sloppy forgery and a corrupted original work, the *General Catalog* opts for the latter. It thereby avoided the need to re-evaluate a work that had become foundational for political thought from a fundamental level: Maintaining the link to the Duke of Zhou indicates that the imperative for scholars was to filter out the later interpolations, not to disregard the text because of its dubious origins. The *Rites of Zhou* had been a classic since the Tang 唐 dynasty (618-906),¹³⁷ and it seems likely that the scholars responsible for the *General catalog*, who were additionally working in a project initiated and backed by the state, refrained from questioning the authority such an important work.

The same principle that worked in favor of the *Rites of Zhou* led to different assessments of the *Zuo*, *Gongyang* 公羊 and *Guliang* 穀梁 Traditions. The titles of these works are usually understood as containing the names of the founders of these schools, with a tendency to also consider them the authors. The catalog entries on all three texts mention later insertions, offering grounds for doubting the reliability of the standard ascriptions of authorship. How the catalog entries address this question in each case is markedly different, however. The entry on the *Zuo Tradition* declares that, despite the presence of material postdating the death of Zuo Qiuming 左丘明, it retains him as the author “in order to dispel popular doubts.”¹³⁸ By contrast, the other two works have their author-ascriptions either shifted to a later descendent of the Gongyang clan¹³⁹ or deemed unverifiable.¹⁴⁰ The challenges are identical in all cases, and the source material subject to similar restrictions, but the conclusions are diametrically opposed. The only variable is the status of the text. While the *Zuo Tradition* was considered one of the most important works of historiography throughout the history of imperial China, the *Gongyang* and *Guliang* commentaries lingered in comparative obscurity. There is little reason to assume that a challenge to their authorial ascriptions would have encountered serious backlash at that time. On the other hand, a scholarly consensus protected the established knowledge about the *Zuo Tradition*, including its authorship.

¹³⁶ Lu and Sun, *Qinding Siku quanshu zongmu*, vol.1, 235.

¹³⁷ Benjamin Elman and Martin Kern, “Introduction,” in idem (eds.), *Statecraft and Classical Learning. The Rituals of Zhou in East Asian Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 1.

¹³⁸ 今仍定為左丘明作，以祛衆惑。Lu and Sun, *Siku quanshu zongmu*, vol. 1, 329. The next chapter contains an analysis of some of these “popular doubts.”

¹³⁹ Ibid, 330.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 330.

Whereas scholars showed a tendency to maintain the link of authoritative works to their assumed authors, they treated less important works differently. In the cases mentioned above, this took the form of invalidating their usual author-ascriptions. Scholars less committed to the narrow concept of authorship exploited this comparative lack of stability of the author-text nexus to explore other explanations for why authorship was so difficult to pin down. Therefore, we find that most discussions about more inclusive models of authorship cluster around texts normally held in lower regard.

The frequency with which scholars discovered discrepancies between author-ascriptions and features of the text shows that this was not a niche phenomenon. However, while some were content to disprove author-ascriptions, the same realization drove others to question the feasibility of assigning one author to a text. From doubts concerning the applicability of the single-author paradigm, such deliberations led to the formulation of a model that considered collaborative authorship an acceptable mode of textual production.

The limits of the narrow concept of authorship

Qing Scholars rarely explicitly stated that traditional author-ascriptions were problematic as a principle, not only in individual cases. The examples of Sun Xingyan 孫星衍 (1752-1818) and Yao Nai show how those who struggled with the narrow concept of authorship articulated their concerns. Especially Yao Nai exemplifies what happened when detailed knowledge of textual history clashed with the requirement to assign one author to each text. His case highlights the difficulty of processing knowledge that does not fit into the model with which one usually makes sense of data.

Judging from his comments on the reliability of early Chinese texts, Sun Xingyan had arranged himself with the realization that forgery was prevalent among them. Few of them could be trusted to reflect the teachings of the persons they claimed to speak for. Evidently, he considered this insight neither startling nor in need of further explanation. Discussing the *Annals of Master Yan* (*Yanzi chunqiu* 晏子春秋), a work whose title links it to Yan Ying 晏嬰, a statesman who lived in the 6th century BCE, he could not have expressed his view in a more sober tone:

Master Yan's book is a product of the Warring States period [475-221 BCE]. In general, works that are named after a master are for the most part not written by [these men] themselves; there is nothing astonishing about this.¹⁴¹

晏子書成在戰國之世。凡稱子書，多非自著，無足怪者。

Sun considered the distance of more than two centuries separating supposed author and text not worthy of explanation; for him, this seems to have been common knowledge, just like the fact that “half of the outer chapters of the works of the ancients were merely attributed [to them].”¹⁴² In such statements, faith in the reliability of traditional author-ascriptions had reached the nadir. The consequence that Sun drew from this insights was not complete rejection of the texts, however. Sun Xingyan considered forged works so common that he wanted them to be part of basic education. Discussing how to teach “master texts,” he proposed to start with the ancient writings and then also include forged works.¹⁴³ This suggests that, at the very least, aspiring readers had to be prepared to deal with them. His attitude towards specific cases indicates that he deemed caution necessary in order to distinguish forged from authentic works, though he never elaborated whether this insight should have a more general effect on how scholars approach early texts.¹⁴⁴ What Sun's statements on the topic of authenticity do clearly show is that someone who took the narrow concept of authorship seriously and possessed sufficiently detailed knowledge about the nature of early texts would find himself confronted with many forged works, since knowledge and concept invariably came into conflict.

In contrast to Sun Xingyan's accepting attitude towards forged texts, Yao Nai's essays on this topic hint at a sense of bewilderment. Realizing, like Sun, that something was off with the author-ascriptions of numerous works, Yao attempted to determine whose text he was reading by looking at the history of textual transmission. Talking about the *Zuo Tradition*, a commentary to the *Annals* (*Chunqiu* 春秋) named after its supposed author Zuo Qiuming, Yao states that “the book by Mister Zuo was not the product of one man.”¹⁴⁵ Showing an awareness

¹⁴¹ Sun Xingyan, “Yanzi chunqiu xu” 晏子春秋序 (Preface to the *Annals of Master Yan*), in Wang Yunwu 王云五 (ed.), *Sun Yuanru xiansheng quanji* 孫淵如先生全集 (Complete Collection of Mister Sun Xingyan) (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1935), 76.

¹⁴² 古人書外篇，半由依托。Ibid.

¹⁴³ 先以古書，附以偽本。See Sun Xingyan “Sun Zhongmin hou citang cangshu ji” 孫忠愍侯祠堂藏書記 (Inscription for the Book Collection of the Ancestral Temple for Earl Sun Zhongmin [Xingzu 興祖]), in *ibid.*, 224.

¹⁴⁴ See the first section of the following chapter for Sun Xingyan's arguments in favor of a text whose authenticity had been disputed.

¹⁴⁵ 左氏之書非出一人所成。Yao Nai, “Zuozhuan buzhu xu” 左傳補注序 (Preface to *Additional Commentary to the Zuo Tradition*), in *idem*, *Xibaoxuan quanji* 惜抱軒全集 (Complete Collection of Yao Nai's Works) (Beijing: Zhongguo shudian, 1991), 24.

of texts accreting through the addition of new layers, Yao describes the earliest chain of transmission of the *Zuo Tradition* as recorded in early historical works. After listing six people who passed the text on to each other and expanded it, Yao admits that he is unable to draw a distinction between their contributions:

[These] later generations probably repeatedly added something. Now it is unclear how much of it is the old explanation of the classic by [Zuo] Qiuming, and how much has been added later.¹⁴⁶

蓋後人屢有附益。其為邱明說經之舊及為後所益者，今不知孰為多寡矣。

Ancient texts have come down to readers through a number of hands. This process, as pictured by Yao Nai, also affected the content of the text, since it is probable that those who are usually called “transmitters” contributed something to the content. Yao did not elaborate on the nature of or the reasons for the additions he mentions, but there is no question about the result: The text and its history of transmission are fused to such an extent that they have become impossible to distinguish. Despite the presence of later contributions, the text remains linked to the figure of Zuo Qiuming, and there exists no clear indication, apart maybe from chronological hints, who wrote what. Like in the case of Sun Xingyan outlined above, knowledge about the details of the history of textual transmission leads to doubts about the applicability of the narrow concept of authorship. Unlike Sun, however, Yao Nai does not apply the label “forged” to problematic works. In that respect, he goes beyond the narrow concept of authorship that, in principle, treats every text that cannot be traced back to one person as an exception. Yao still remains committed to this concept insofar as he wishes to separate the contributions and trace them to each person, even though he admits defeat before that challenge.

As Yao portrays it, it was a widespread practice of later transmitters of a text to contribute to its content. Besides works like the *Zhuangzi* and the *Liezi* 列子,¹⁴⁷ it affected even the way the classics were transmitted:

The origins of all the classics can be traced back to the school of the sage [Confucius], but which of them has not been subjected to willful additions by later scholars? The *Zuo Tradition* is not completely the work of Qiuming; those who follow the Qi-tradition of the *Odes* propose the absurdity that is the theory of the “four beginnings” and “five

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Yao Nai, “Ba Liezi” 跋列子 (Postscript to the *Liezi*), in op. cit., 213.

items," but this is not necessarily something that goes back to Yuan Gu [the founder of the Qi-tradition, fl. 2nd century BCE]. Fan Weizong [Ye 曄, author of the *Hou Han shu* 後漢書] says that Wei Hong [1st century CE] wrote the preface to the Mao-recension of the *Odes*; his words must have some basis. To say that the preface is completely by [Wei] Hong or [Yuan] Gu is [nevertheless] not permissible, and how could it be completely by Mister Mao [3rd or 2nd century BCE], or even by Zixia [a disciple of Confucius]?¹⁴⁸

且諸經之始，孰不原於聖門，而後學者得以意增益？如《左傳》非盡出邱明；言齊《詩》者乃有四始五際之詭誕，未必出於轅固。范蔚宗言衛宏為毛《詩》序，其言必有所從來。謂序盡出於宏、固不可，抑豈盡出於毛公，而況以言子夏乎？

In this dense passage, Yao Nai traces the transmission of the *Book of Odes* (*Shijing* 詩經) through its major early stages. He makes two distinct arguments about the fate of this text. First, the theories of the Qi 齊-tradition about the meaning of the work that Yao introduces as “absurdities”¹⁴⁹ could well be something that had been added later, and not the creation of the founder of this tradition. These interpretative traditions, he implies, changed over time and their founders cannot take the blame for all that their later followers do. Second, the question of who should count as the author of the preface to the *Book of Odes* is a thorny one. Similar to his treatment of the *Zuo Tradition*, Yao lists four contributors, spanning almost half a millennium, whom scholars had connected the transmission of the *Odes* in the long history of research on that topic. Yao wonders whom to consider the author of the preface, and again he can only give a negative answer by saying that none of them is exclusively responsible for the preface as he could read it.

In his deliberations on the composite nature of early texts like the *Zuo Tradition* and the preface to the *Odes*, Yao Nai came up against the limits of the narrow concept of authorship. Basing himself on early records that list the earliest known transmitters, Yao explicitly negates that any *one* of them was the sole creator. It is probable that, parallel to his understanding of the *Zuo*

¹⁴⁸ Yao Nai, *Xibaoxuan biji* 惜抱軒筆記 (Yao Nai's Notebook) (Taibei: Guangwen shuji, 1971), 40.

¹⁴⁹ There are diverging interpretations for the two terms that Yao Nai mentions. The different interpretations of the “four beginnings” all relate to the order of the sections of the *Book of Odes*, while the “five items” either cover the five cardinal human relations or 5 of the 12 earthly branches (*dizhi* 地支). See Jiang Guanghui 姜广辉 and Qiu Mengyan 邱梦严, “Qishi ‘sishi wuji’ shuo de zhengzhi zhexue jiemu” 齐诗“四始五际”说的政治哲学揭秘 (Exposing the Political Philosophy of the Theory of the “Four Beginnings and Five Items” theory of the Qi-*Odes*), in *Zhexue yanjiu* 哲学研究, vol. 12, 2013, 47-54.

Tradition, he saw the preface as having grown over time thanks to the textual input of those usually called transmitters. Such an accretion, of course, can hardly be squared with the narrow concept of authorship with its requirement of assigning one author to each text. Yao would have needed a different model to make sense of the information available to him. Yet he does not question the narrow concept itself, nor do his writings contain any indication that we was moving towards replacing it with a more appropriate model. Yao's detailed knowledge of textual transmission got him as far as questioning the practical applicability of the narrow concept of authorship, but nowhere beyond that.

Zhang Xuecheng's theory of collaborative authorship

Zhang Xuecheng developed a theory that abandoned the narrow concept of authorship and could explain the evolution of texts of time. In "Words Belong to Everyone" (*Yan gong* 言公), an essay in three parts written around 1783,¹⁵⁰ Zhang portrayed ancient text production as a collaborative enterprise. With this basic assumption, he is in full agreement with both Yao Nai and Sun Xingyan: The fact that a book is named after a certain master does not mean that it was indeed written by him. For Yao, this was an unsettling piece of knowledge, difficult to make sense of in his terms; Sun Xingyan accepted it without further ado. Zhang Xuecheng not only accepted that it was so in ancient times, he even delineated the conditions under which such a system of text production functioned and why it could not have been any other way.

The fame of Zhang Xuecheng rests in no small measure on his knack for stunning openers. The first sentence of his *Comprehensive Meaning of Writing and History* (*Wenshi tongyi* 文史通義) is: "The Six Classics are all history."¹⁵¹ Much ink has been spilled over the meaning and implication of this statement in relation to Qing dynasty scholarship. Fewer researchers have paid attention to the first part of the *second* sentence that is at least equally significant: "The ancients did not write books, (...)."¹⁵² In the context of the argument he makes in this essay, Zhang puts forward the thesis that in pre-imperial times, no one simply wrote down what came to mind. Rather, principle was always discussed in relation with concrete affairs. This does not mean, however, that the literal meaning of what he says is merely accidental. It rather points to

¹⁵⁰ David Nivison, *The Life and Thought of Chang Hsüeh-ch'eng (1731-1801)* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1966), 128.

¹⁵¹ 六經皆史也 See Zhang Xuecheng 章學誠, "Yi jiao shang" 易教上 (The Teaching of the *Changes*, First Part), in Cang Xiuliang 倉修良 (ed.), *Wenshi tongyi xinbian xinzhu* 文史通義新編新注 (Comprehensive Theory of Writing and History Newly Compiled with New Commentary) (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 2005), 1.

¹⁵² 古人不著書 Ibid.

a central quality of ancient learning as Zhang envisions it: authorship only played a secondary role in its transmission.

In “Words Belong to Everyone,” Zhang Xuecheng discusses a wide range of topics that pertain to ancient text production. As they all shape his theory to some degree, it is necessary to give an overview of the most important ideas before working out his conception of authorship. These ideas are (1) the relation between concrete affairs and words, (2) the “identical *dao*” (*tong dao* 同道) as an intellectual condition behind school traditions, and (3) writing as public property that literally belongs to everyone.

For Zhang, words do not float in a vacuum, but are strongly tied to actual affairs. Speaking is a way of doing. According to him, “the ancients did not discuss principle separated from concrete affairs.”¹⁵³ The example he gives in the essay is instructive:

The Duke of Zhou said: “The king speaks to the following effect: ‘[Ho! I make an announcement to you of the four states, and the] numerous [other] regions.’” This is the writing used in announcements to the four states. Those who explain this think that here the Duke of Zhou is taking the mandate of the king for himself; they do not know that these words certainly originate from the Duke of Zhou, and yet, when King Cheng approves of them and puts them into practice, they become the words of King Cheng.¹⁵⁴

周公曰：“王若曰多方。”誥四國之文也。說者以為周公將王之命，不知斯言固本於周公，成王允而行之，是即成王之言也。

What matters is who puts what has been said into practice, not so much who actually said it. Applying this idea to a passage of the *Documents*, Zhang makes a case for its explanatory value: Acting as a regent for King Cheng, whose father had established a new dynasty but died shortly afterwards, the Duke of Zhou gave a speech in which he referred to himself as the king. He was not overstepping his power, however, as the king subsequently put into practice what these words described and so made these words his own. Words are meant to do something to the world, and the agent is more important than the speaker.

With the “identical *dao*,” Zhang Xuecheng refers to an intellectual affinity or “closeness of techniques” (*shu jin* 術近, see quote below) between different thinkers. This principle stands

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Zhang Xuecheng, “Yan gong shang” 言公上 (Words Belong to Everyone, First Part), in op. cit., 200. Translation of the *Documents*-citation from James Legge, *The Chinese Classics, volume III, part II: the Shoo King or the Book of Historical Documents* (London: Trübner & Co, 1865), 492.

behind the fact that in some received texts ascribed to certain masters, one finds traces of other thinkers. The examples Zhang gives are not particularly striking for those acquainted with the works he mentions (the *Zhuangzi*, for example, makes little mention of Liezi), but they bring his point across all the same:

There are also those whose *dao* is identical and technique similar, but whose texts have unfortunately been lost. So they rely on those whose *dao* is identical for their transmission, like the corrupted *Liezi*, half of which can be found in the *Zhuangzi*, or Yang Zhu, whose texts have been lost, but many of his teachings can be found in the *Hanzi*. This is because Zhuangzi and Liezi both originated from the school of *dao* and Yang Zhu's technique for preservation of the self was similar to the school of names and regulations.¹⁵⁵

又有道同術近，其書不幸亡逸，藉同道以存者，《列子》殘闕，半述於莊生，楊朱書亡，多存於《韓子》；蓋莊、列同出於道家，而楊朱為我，其術自近名法也。

It is this principle that led to the stories about Liezi being told in the *Zhuangzi*: their *dao* was identical, but unlike Zhuangzi, Liezi did not manage to found his own school. Consequently, his learning appeared in the writings of the school of this similar thinker. Liezi's message was transmitted without having a book dedicated to it. The case of Yang Zhu 楊朱 was similar: The *Han Feizi* 韓非子, a text which Zhang envisions as having originated in a like-minded school tradition, came to his rescue so that his learning did not perish.

With the “identical *dao*,” Zhang Xuecheng outlines an intellectual condition that justifies why the learning of different school traditions appear in one work. Just as intellectual circumstances were different in ancient times, so were moral attitudes. The ancients did not write for personal gain, but to spread the *dao*. Therefore, as David Nivison put it, “the right and the true are not yours; they belong to no one, or rather, to everyone.”¹⁵⁶ Zhang summarizes this idea in a “chorus” that closes every section in the first part of “Words Belong to Everyone” and opens the whole essay:

That the words of the ancients belonged to everyone is due to the fact that they were never boastful about writing and selfishly saw it as their private possession.¹⁵⁷

古人之言，所以為公也，未嘗矜於文辭，而私據為己有也。

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 201.

¹⁵⁶ Nivison, *Chang Hsiieh-ch'eng*, 129.

¹⁵⁷ Zhang Xuecheng, “Yan gong shang,” 200.

Qian Zhongshu 錢鍾書 (1910-1998) has aptly translated Zhang Xuecheng's description into modern parlance as "relinquishing copyright."¹⁵⁸ What has been written is available for re-use in any way afterwards. Under such circumstances, learning does not depend on the books in which it is contained, but takes on a life of its own. It manifests itself tangibly in school traditions:

Since words belong to everyone in the world, the learning contained in books does not instantly vanish when the books get lost at some point. This is because when learning forms a school tradition and gets transmitted over a long period of time, it can be studied and discriminated when people examine it.¹⁵⁹

言公於世，則書有時而亡，其學不至遽絕也。蓋學成其家，而流衍者長，觀者考求而能識別也。

The three factors that define authorship for Zhang Xuecheng converge in the concept of the school tradition: People with an identical *dao* come together, and their words belong to the whole group. Furthermore, their words are much more than mere book learning and empty talk, which is why vanishing books do not harm their teachings. The extant "master texts" are products of such circumstances, and these circumstances explain many of their peculiarities.

Zhang elaborates this idea most fully for Han dynasty learning, but his essay strongly suggests the applicability of this model to the earlier "master texts" as well.¹⁶⁰ Indeed, this choice seems to be grounded in the fact that for the Han, actual historical records exist that allow one to trace the development of school traditions. Criticizing, for example, scholars who consider the question-and-answer-format employed in the *Guliang* 穀梁 and *Gongyang* 公羊 commentaries to the *Annals* (which Zhang discusses in the context of Han dynasty school traditions) a mere literary tool, Zhang explains:

¹⁵⁸ 不擅著作主權 See Qian Zhongshu 錢鍾書, "Zhang Shizhai yu Suiyuan" 章實齋與隨園 (Zhang Xuecheng and Yuan Mei) in idem, *Tanyi lu* 談藝錄 (Record of Deliberations on Literature) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 266.

¹⁵⁹ Zhang Xuecheng, "Yan gong zhong" 言公中 (Words Belong to Everyone, Second Part), in Cang Xueliang, *Wenshi tongyi*, 207.

¹⁶⁰ Paul Fischer explicitly refrains from crediting Zhang with the theory that "all Masters texts were not written by their titular 'authors.'" While that may be the case, it is beside the point: In my opinion, Zhang outlines a *principle* that was prominent in text production, without claiming that everyone adhered to it. This principle was furthermore not confined to the pre-imperial era, as Zhang's examples from the Han and even the Song indicate. Cf. Paul Fischer, "Authentication Studies (辨偽學) Methodology and the Polymorphous Text Paradigm," in *Early China* 32, 2008-2009, 21n53.

[But whoever says that] does not know that the ancients gave verbal instructions before they wrote anything on bamboo and silk, unlike the explanations of the classics by later generations, who had to put pen to paper if they wanted to make a name for themselves.¹⁶¹

不知古人先有口耳之授，而後著之竹帛焉，非如後人作經義，苟欲名家，必以著述為功也。

Written texts were merely a secondary product of school traditions as Zhang Xuecheng envisions them, not their mainstay. With this insight, we have come full circle back to the crucial second sentence of Zhang's *Comprehensive Meaning of Writing and History*, which is repeated in "Words Belong to Everyone" in a slightly different form:

Thus we know that the ancients wrote nothing down, but their words were transmitted all the same.¹⁶²

是知古人不著書，其言未嘗不傳也。

Looking at "master texts" from this perspective, their features become understandable. Zhang lists a number of examples to illustrate this: In the *Guanzi* 管子, many of the stories told refer to events and persons from a period when Guan Zhong 管仲, the statesman active in the 7th century BCE and presumed author of this work, had long been dead. What might have invited textual criticism in order to distinguish authentic from inauthentic material turns out to be an unproblematic feature of this text. The same is true for the speeches by Li Si 李斯 (3rd century BCE) contained in the *Han Feizi*. Zhang furthermore explicitly rejects certain terminology commonly used to make sense of such findings. Taking issue with Su Shi's 蘇軾 (1037-1101) claim that certain chapters of the *Zhuangzi* were "misattributed" (*weitu* 偽托),¹⁶³ he points out as a rebuttal that one should rather think of them as "added by students of Mister Zhuang."¹⁶⁴

Instead of criticizing the hunt for inauthentic elements of his time directly, Zhang Xuecheng questions what counts as inauthentic in the eyes of his contemporaries. He argues that ancient texts have to be viewed as materialized reflections of school traditions that persisted over long

¹⁶¹ Zhang Xuecheng, "Yan gong shang," 202-203.

¹⁶² Ibid, 203.

¹⁶³ For Su Shi's view of the *Zhuangzi*, see his "Zhuangzi citang ji" 莊子祠堂記 (Inscription for a Sacrificial Shrine for Zhuangzi), in Su Shi 蘇軾 (aut.), Fu Cheng 傅成, Mu Chou 穆儔 (eds.), *Su Shi quanji* 蘇軾全集 (Complete Collection of Su Shi's Works) (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 2000), vol. 2, 873.

¹⁶⁴ 為莊氏之學者所附益爾。 Ibid, 201.

periods, similar to what Yao Nai claimed for the *Zuo Tradition*. As such, they carry with them the changing concerns of those involved, to the extent that it becomes pointless to distinguish between the words of the teacher and those of the students.¹⁶⁵ Considering that Zhang sees learning as something that has an effect on the world, it would not make much sense if maxims once uttered by a teacher remained the same as if they were sacred. The resulting text, as the materialization of the teachings, mirrors this process with multiple contributors.

Zhang explicitly admits that things like plagiarism and forgery exist, and I will these aspects discuss below with respect to his views on the *Documents*. Even in these cases, however, his view of authorship is highly inclusive. In the case of “master texts,” he does not privilege the founder of a school over his disciples, no matter how much time separates them and no matter how great the gap in quality. They are all equal partners in the production of the received text.

That some works are named after a certain figure does not reflect actual authorship, neither in the narrow sense of the scribe nor in the sense of the originator of the content. Rather, the naming practice was a way of honoring the founder of a school tradition who created a specific teaching. Zhang compares this to the chapters in the *Mengzi* 孟子 named after the interlocutors they feature, such as Gaozi 告子 and Wanzhang 萬章.¹⁶⁶ Just as no one ever believed that these chapters were written by either Gaozi or Wanzhang, this comparison implies, it would be absurd to assume that the *Zhuangzi* was written by Zhuang Zhou.

Confronted with authorial ascriptions that were no longer tenable, some scholars, as discussed in the previous chapter, strove to fit the text back into the mold of the supposed author. This entailed proposing changes to the text. Zhang Xuecheng approached the same problem from the opposite direction. Instead of changing the text, he modified the conception of authorship. Taking historical processes of textual development into account, he described collaborative authorship under the banner of a school tradition. Understood in this way, the traditional author ascriptions made new sense. While Zuo Qiuming did not write the whole *Zuo Tradition* himself, he was the founder of a school that handed down his explanations of the *Annals*, and over time, his teachings were expanded. The *Zuo Tradition* in its received version was thus the result of this process, from which it cannot be separated.

Far from being arcane objects passing through time without meeting resistance, texts had a history in the 18th century already, and one that proved to be difficult to make sense of with a

¹⁶⁵ 不復辨其孰為師說，孰為徒說也。Ibid, 203.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, 201.

narrow conception of authorship. For all we know, however, Zhang's novel proposal did not garner much attention in his own time. Still, when his contemporaries began to re-evaluate the Old Text chapters of the *Venerated Documents*, they were in basic agreement with Zhang's own pronouncements on that topic. In that discussion, a focus on the textual history instead of the author proved useful for scholars who argued that these chapters, though put together much later than the rest of the *Documents*, contained ample portions of authentic material. They recognized that the forger was not the originator of the content, and this change of perspective made the forger less of a threat. The consensus that emerges from their writings is that condemning the Old Text chapters as forgeries does not do them justice. The realization that the forger was part of a long textual tradition trumps the indignation over the deception.

Author of a forged text: The Old Text chapters of the *Venerated Documents*

It would be an understatement to say that it is a well-known story how in the early years of the Qing, Yan Ruoqu convinced his contemporaries that the Old Text chapters of the *Venerated Documents* were forgeries. Rather, modern scholars view it as one of the hallmarks of Qing intellectual history.¹⁶⁷ Though accurate, this narrative at the same time draws attention away from the complex aftermath of this claim. This section tells the story of the aftermath as it unfolded during and shortly after the last decades of the 18th century. In order to put it into perspective, however, a short outline of the textual history of the *Documents* and the developments concerning its authenticity until around 1750 is necessary.

The *Venerated Documents* has a complicated textual history. The *Book of the [Former] Han* notes that the text was burned during the Qin 秦 dynasty (221-210 BCE), but a courageous man identified as Scholar Fu (Fu *sheng* 伏生, 3rd to 2nd century BCE) hid a version in the wall of his home. Some parts of the text were lost in these tumultuous years, but after the fall of the Qin, Fu Sheng taught the remaining chapters to students.¹⁶⁸ This part became known as the New Text (*jinwen* 今文) chapters. The so-called Old Text chapters, on the other hand, were allegedly found in yet another wall, namely that of the supposed former residence of Confucius, when it was about to be torn down. Kong Anguo 孔安國 (2nd to 1st century BCE), a descendant of

¹⁶⁷ Benjamin Elman, *From Philosophy to Philology. Intellectual and Social Aspects of Change in Late Imperial China*. (Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1984), 29-32. Edward Shaughnessy, "Shang Shu," in Michael Loewe (ed.), *Early Chinese Texts. A Bibliographical Guide* (Berkeley: Society for the study of early China, 1993), 376.

¹⁶⁸ See his biography in "Rulin zhuan" 儒林傳 (Biographies of Scholars) in *Hanshu* 漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 88.3603.

Confucius, got hold of the texts and presented them to the throne. In his recension, there were 16 chapters in addition to the content of the New Text version,¹⁶⁹ which was included with slight variants.

The history of doubts concerning the authenticity of the Old Text chapters is long, dating back to the Song 宋 dynasty (960-1279).¹⁷⁰ The defining moment, of overwhelming importance for all subsequent discussions, was when Yan Ruoqu convinced his contemporaries that the Old Text chapters were a forgery from the 3rd or 4th century CE. Yan made use of a wide array of tools to show that a lot of the received wisdom about them was questionable. Among other things, he compared the number of chapters of the *Documents* listed in earlier works,¹⁷¹ showed that the story of its presentation to the throne is at odds with the dates of the actors involved,¹⁷² and explained how sentences from different works reappeared in the text of the Old Text chapters.¹⁷³ Throughout his analysis, Yan Ruoqu stuck closely to verifiable issues: All of his claims were of a textual nature, and he backed them with an apparatus of quotations.

As Yan traced how these chapters were literally pieced together, he was very vocal about what he thought of their quality. Discussing how *Documents*-quotations from the *Mengzi*, which Yan believed to be from the same chapter of the *Mengzi*, reappeared in two different chapters of the Old Text chapters, he asked: “Does the forger of the Old Text not once again reveal his shortcomings (*pozhan* 破綻)?”¹⁷⁴ Analyzing how a narrative from the *Mengzi* ended up in the Old Text chapters, but with verbal quotations and elements of the narrative mixed up, Yan asked rhetorically: “Is this not getting the meaning of the *Mengzi* wrong?”¹⁷⁵ Yan’s identification of the inauthentic nature of the Old Text chapters rests partly on the identification of the mistakes the forger made when he gathered his source material.

For some, Yan’s findings were so convincing, they habitually referred to the Old Text chapters as the “forged Old Text” (*wei guwen* 偽古文). Even scholars who did so, however, often had

¹⁶⁹ “Yiwen zhi” 藝文志 (Treatise on Literature), in *Hanshu*, 30.1706.

¹⁷⁰ Short but thorough accounts of the history of doubt can be found in the following three studies: Benjamin Elman, “Philosophy (*i-li*) Versus Philology (*k'ao-cheng*). The *jen-hsin tao-hsin* Debate,” in *T'oung Pao* 69, nos. 4-5 (1983), 175-222. Michael Nylan, “The *ku wen Documents* in Han Times,” in *T'oung Pao* 81, no. 1 (1995), 25-50. Monique Nagel-Angermann, “Das *Diwang shiji* des Huangfu Mi (215-282),” diss. Uni Münster, 1999, 101-116.

¹⁷¹ Yan Ruoqu 閻若璩, *Shangshu Guwen shuzheng* 尚書古文疏證 (Evidential Analysis of the Old Text *Venerated Documents*) (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1987), #1, 35f. (This work is arranged in numbered sections, which I reference in the form of “#X.”)

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, #1, 38f.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, #9, 94-99.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, #11, 104.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, #9, 98.

more to say about this text. After Yan's conclusions had become mainstream knowledge by the middle of the 18th century, scholars started to realize that producing something like the Old Text chapters was the result of an effort. They recognized that this effort, which Yan had denigrated, was similar to other modes of textual research. The attitude expressed by Sun Zhizu 孫志祖 (1737-1801) hints at the dilemma by trying to gloss over it: In theory, given the widespread acceptance of Yan Ruoqu's conclusions, there should be nothing left to discuss. In practice, however, the more scholars knew about the background of the forgery, the more questions they could ask.

The inauthenticity of the Old Text chapters of the *Venerated Documents* is a settled case by now. There is no need to defend them, and there is no use in attacking them.¹⁷⁶

古文《尚書》之偽，至今日而論定，不必回護，亦無庸掇擊。

Is Sun's insistence that the case is closed a statement, or is it a plea? As the following analysis shows, his contemporaries discussed the Old Text chapters at length, and Sun was anything but oblivious to that. Even he himself did not completely refrain from delivering further judgments. While Sun expressly identified the chapters as a forgery by someone from the Wei-Jin 魏晉 period (220-420), he still distinguished between other forged texts and these chapters:

Forging the Old Text was difficult; forging [ordinary] forged books is easy.¹⁷⁷

偽古文難而偽偽書易。

The Old Text chapters were no ordinary forgeries in the eyes of mid-Qing scholars. As part of a canonical classic for more than a millennium, they had taken deep roots in elite culture. Therefore, many were reluctant to discard the Old Text chapters even though they were aware that the work was separated from the period it covered by more than one thousand years. The distinction Sun Zhizu had drawn reflects the smallest common denominator of the period: The label "forgery" may not tell the whole story.

Yao Nai's research on the working method of the forger

Yao Nai's essays about the Old Text chapters reflect this growing interest in the forger's approach and his connections to earlier sources, though they do not contain any softening of

¹⁷⁶ Sun Zhizu 孫志祖, "Nai he" 奈何 ([The Expression] *nai he*), in idem, *Dushu cuolu* 讀書臚錄 (Minor Remarks on Books Read) (Taipei: Guangwen shuju, 1963), 1.9a.

¹⁷⁷ Sun Zhizu, "Mengzi waishu" 孟子外書 (Outer Writings of Mencius), in idem, *Dushu cuolu*, 2.21b.

the verdict. Like Sun Zhizu, Yao was convinced of the inauthenticity of the chapters, which he said was “abundantly clear” (*da ming* 大明). He identified it as a work from the Eastern Jin dynasty (317-420).¹⁷⁸ All of this did not require further discussion; rather, his dating this work to the Eastern Jin served as the straightforward opening sentence of his preface to Tang Huan’s 唐煥 (d. 1789) *Authenticating the Venerable Documents* (*Shangshu bianwei* 尚書辨偽). In such a context, this assertion was certainly appropriate. In other contexts, Yao Nai explored different lines of inquiry that resulted from this conclusion.

In his notes (*biji* 筆記), Yao followed Yan Ruoqu’s lead and considered how the forger of the Old Text chapters had worked. Yao argued, for example, that the quotations from the *Documents* found in some Han dynasty works were traces of the authentic Old Text chapters that had once existed. Discussing phrases contained in the Old Text chapters the forger had *not* taken from the *Explanation of Graphs and Analysis of Characters* (*Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字), Yao explained:

The forger of the Old Text chapters went through all the explanations of the classics, here and there stealing their terms. Only in the case of the *Explanation of Graphs* was he negligent, so what this work quotes is mostly [authentic] Old Text, but the forger did not know how to make use of this.¹⁷⁹

作偽古文者，於諸經之訓，皆頗涉獵，雜竊其辭。獨於《說文》荒略，故《說文》引經多係古文，而作偽者不知取茲。

According to Yao Nai’s understanding, the Old Text chapters came into existence through the effort to amass passages, all of which were related to the content these chapters were supposed to encompass. The process of forging was thus not one of inventing ancient history, but of piecing it back together. Yan Ruoqu’s analysis of the forged text had made it possible for Yao Nai to trace the steps taken in its production further. Yao did so under the premise of forgery and refrained from taking the aspects linking the Old Text chapters to authentic material into consideration.

Discussing a passage in the *Records of the Historian* (*Shiji* 史記) that, Yao argued, was from the chapter “Counsels of the Great Yu” (*Da Yu mo* 大禹謨) of the authentic Old Text recension

¹⁷⁸ Yao Nai, “Shangshu bianwei xu” 尚書辨偽序 (Preface to *Authenticating the Venerable Documents*), in idem, *Xibaoxuan quanji*, 193.

¹⁷⁹ Yao Nai, *Xibaoxuan biji*, 10.

of the *Documents*, he again approached forgery from the perspective of textual recycling. His starting point was that the Han dynasty texts *Records of the Historian*, *Book of the [Former] Han* and *Explanation of Graphs and Analysis of Characters* all contained material from the authentic Old Text chapters:

These three authors [of the works mentioned above] had all really seen the Old Text recension of the “Counsels of the Great Yu” of the *Venerated Documents*. How could the forger of the Old Text “Counsels of Yu” not have seen this? Yet in forging [the works of] ancient people, producing theoretical expositions is rather easy, while producing a narrative is difficult. Therefore, even though he had seen this passage, [the forger] did not dare to use it.¹⁸⁰

此三家固皆真見古文《尚書·大禹謨》者也。作偽古文《禹謨》者，豈不見此？然偽作古人，為倫說之辭差易，為序事之辭則難，故雖見此語，而不敢用耳。

Forging is not as easy as it may sometimes seem. True to his practice, the author of the inauthentic Old Text chapters had perused all relevant works for source material on which he could base his text. Yao confidently asserts that the passage in the *Records of the Historian* was no exception, but it proved too difficult to include it. The passage from the *Records* describes the activities and travels of the Great Yu 大禹 when he was controlling the floods. Because the forger could come up with convincing abstract phrases with relative ease, according to Yao, but not with historical and non-contradictory narratives, he left this passage on the Great Yu 大禹 out.

As reconstructed by Yao Nai, the person responsible for the production of the inauthentic Old Text chapters had faced several challenges in his enterprise, not all of which he was able to overcome. The forger had not exhausted the pool of source material as he had overlooked relevant passages from the *Explanation of Graphs* and shied away from trying to construct a narrative out of another passage from the *Records of the Historian*. Yao does not display any sign of sympathy for the forger when he points out what exactly he found despicable about his work and its consequences:

That the *Venerated Documents* was changed and expanded by the forger of the Old Text [chapters] in order to throw the works of the sage into disorder is indeed appalling.¹⁸¹

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, 5.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, 25.

《尚書》為偽作古文者竄增，以亂聖籍，固可惡矣。

For Yao Nai, the forger is still the *bête noir* that betrayed the trust in the works of the sages and sowed disorder in the teaching. Even though Yao largely followed Yan Ruoqu in his analysis and did not explicitly defend the forger, his repeated references to the genuine fragments highlight the authentic aspects underlying the forged text. Considering the rhetoric employed, Yao Nai stresses the effort and difficulty. This stands in marked contrast to the repeated diatribes against the baseness of the forger that punctuated Yan Ruoqu's analysis. All it takes, however, to go from a description of the working method of the forger to an appraisal of the value of the Old Text chapters is a change of perspective. While Zhang Xuecheng's description of the practice of forging is very similar to Yao's, his assessment of this phenomenon, especially its ethical aspects, was completely different. For Zhang, the forger was in many ways comparable to a philologist.

Zhang Xuecheng and the moral dilemma of the forger

Zhang Xuecheng's position on the issue of forgery is more nuanced than Yao's. Zhang did not completely whitewash the forger and acquit him of all crimes. Yet, as described in the previous section, because Zhang had put so much effort in changing his reader's image of ancient text production and argued for a more inclusive conception of authorship, he was inclined to view the matter in a more differentiated light. To Zhang, the forger was in many respects a scholar of antiquity like many others, intent on preserving the textual heritage; it was only that some of the decisions the forger made were questionable.

Even if words belonged to everyone, there were still limits to taking them from someone else or attributing other's names to one's text. For Zhang, this was a highly charged question.

When someone takes his own creation and attributes it to one of the ancients, his strongest motivation is to arrogate benefit, and tampering is second to that (...).¹⁸²

以己之所作偽托古人者，奸利為甚，而好事次之(...).

What drove someone to forge a text was not, at least not primarily, the desire to throw the teachings of the ancient sages into disorder. Instead of such high-minded and abstract goals, Zhang assumes rather base motivations: such things happened mostly under the spell of power

¹⁸² Zhang Xuecheng, "Yan gong zhong," 207.

and fame. The forger was no evil genius who had a far-reaching agenda he wanted to support with his creation, but an ordinary scholar falling prey to human weakness.

Mei Ze 梅賾 (ca. 4th century), whom Zhang identified as the culprit behind the inauthentic Old Text chapters, was explicitly someone of this kind. His text, according to Zhang, was “created and submitted in response to imperial decrees in order to gain emolument and benefits.”¹⁸³ As judgment on the forger, this points in two contradictory directions: Is he *merely* a victim of lust for fame and Zhang considers such behavior understandable, or is he so base that such benefits can sway him to commit crimes?

The ambivalence in Zhang Xuecheng’s position shows through in virtually all his statements on Mei Ze. He asserts, for example, that the forger, by disgracing the words of the sage, commits a crime for which “even capital punishment does not suffice.”¹⁸⁴ Yet he appears to be impressed by the effort the forger put into his work:

Since the old scriptures were already lost and the forger was collecting and filling lacunae (like the Old Text chapters that have been put together, in which virtually nothing is omitted that appears here and there in other sources), it could well be that one tenth survived [thanks to the work of the “forger”].¹⁸⁵

夫墳、典既亡，而作偽者之搜輯補苴，（如古文之採輯逸書，散見於記傳者，幾無遺漏。）亦未必無什一之存也。

The overlap with Yao Nai’s discussions on the Old Text chapters is significant, but there are striking differences in perspective. Yao had also traced the way the forger had worked and acknowledged that he had gone through most available sources. Zhang Xuecheng alludes to the same practice, but explicitly commends the possible value such an enterprise can have for later generations, namely that certain text passages from already lost scriptures are kept in circulation. If his statement is stripped to its core assertion, it becomes almost a *contradictio in adiecto*: the forger preserves old texts.

How does this go together with the crimes that deserve capital punishment? The heart of the matter is what the forger, who until this point is indistinguishable from the philologist in his approach to ancient texts, decides to do with the fragments he has collected.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid. The part in round brackets is Zhang’s auto-commentary.

Yet one cannot but feel deep contempt for the forger who still conserves the meaning in adding leftover chapters and remnant sentences to the defective work, but destroys the meaning when he adds to it and turns it into a text.¹⁸⁶

然而不能不深惡於作偽者，遺篇逸句，附於闕文，而其義猶存；附會成書，而其義遂亡也。

Zhang Xuecheng envisions two stages that the process of forging entails. First comes the collecting of source material from other texts. This is in itself a highly commendable activity and no different from what a responsible textual critic would do. In the second step, however, the collected fragments are put together to form a new and arguably speculative context. The forger, we are to understand, might add connecting phrases between his collected fragments to link them together or device other means to turn his collection into a coherent text. It is with this step that the forger parts ways with the philologist and does something that is indefensible. In Zhang's words, he "destroys the meaning" of the fragments, most likely by putting them together in unjustifiable ways. The upright philologist would merely add the lost passages he has unearthed to the "defective work," similar to what is nowadays called a critical edition. Driven by his desire for fame and money, however, the forger opts for a definitive version of the text, which he produces himself.

As the difference between forger and philologist is reduced to a single decision late in the process of textual reconstruction, Zhang expresses his hope that the forger rejoins the community of righteous scholars:

Suppose the forger changed his mind and used his mental capacities to collect and emend. Would his merit be inferior to the *Rituals* of the King of Hejian or the *Documents* of [the lady of] Henei?¹⁸⁷

向令易作偽之心力，而以採輯補綴為己功，則功豈下於河間之《禮》，河內之《書》哉？

Liu De 劉德 (d. 129 BCE), King Xian of Hejian 河間獻王, was a famous book collector of the Han dynasty,¹⁸⁸ and the otherwise unknown lady of Henei 河內 is credited with finding lost

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ See his biography in the *Book of the [Former] Han*, esp. 53.2410.

chapters, among others from the *Documents*.¹⁸⁹ This is the prospect Zhang Xuecheng holds out for the forger: immortality as a benefactor of literati culture instead of short-term benefits such as fame. Instead of demonizing the forger, Zhang makes a case for seeing even him as a textual critic. The limitation is, however, that the textual critic becomes a “creator of content” at some point by generating meaning on his own; the product he brings into circulation is thus deceptive, even if it is based on authentic source material.

The forger, disappearing behind the history of the text

According to Lu Wenchao 盧文弨 (1717-1796), however, the creator of the Old Text chapters never reached the point where he created meaning on his own. Supporting an earlier scholar, Lu made this case in the aptly-titled essay “The Forged Old Text Chapters of the *Venerated Documents* Cannot Be Discarded” (*Wei Shangshu guwen bu ke fei* 偽尚書古文不可廢). Through extensive quotes from a text by Wang Maohong 王懋竑 (1668-1741), Lu explains where the value of the chapters lies, even while he expressly labels them a forgery in the title of his own essay. The following is the central part of what he quotes from Wang Maohong:

At that time, the chaos of the Yongjia-period [the fall of the capital of the Jin dynasty in 311 CE] had not yet taken place and the old texts were for the most part still extant. Plucking and compiling [from them], no character [in the Old Text chapters that were thus created] does not have a basis. It is only that the style of writing is weak, the phrases are not connected and the historical events do not match. Even though it is clear that they are not authentic, they still contain many guidelines and great lessons from the ancient sages.¹⁹⁰

其時未經永嘉之亂，古書多在。採摭綴緝，無一字無所本。特其文氣緩弱，又辭意不相連，屬時事不相對。值有以識其非真，而古聖賢之格言、大訓往往在焉。

¹⁸⁹ See Wang Chong 王充, “Zheng shuo” 正說 (Correcting Theories), in *Lunheng* 論衡 (Balanced Discourses) (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1990), 256.

¹⁹⁰ Lu Wenchao 盧文弨, “Wei Shangshu guwen bu ke fei” 偽尚書古文不可廢 (The Forged Old Text Chapters of the *Venerated Documents* Cannot Be Discarded), in idem, *Longcheng zhaji* 龍城札記 (Reading Notes Taken in Longcheng) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2010), 126. The original quote is from Wang Maohong 王懋竑, “Shangshu xulu” 尚書叙錄 (Record of Explanations on the *Venerated Documents*), in idem, *Baitian zazhu* 白田雜著 (*Miscellaneous writings by Wang Maohong*) (Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1983), 1.14b.

In his essay, Lu Wenchao does little more than express his full agreement with this quotation. According to this depiction, the forger, though limited in his literary abilities and uncertain grasp of chronology, still transmits the authentic sayings of the sages. This alone is enough to justify his actions. Wang Maohong's argument, which Lu Wenchao fully supports, is that the forger is a translucent and negligible part of the transmission history of the *Documents*. Because he did not interfere with the crucial parts of the text, the forger does not have the power to harm the teaching of the sages. While the use of the sagely teachings as an argument in defense of the Old Text chapters had fallen out of favor by the end of the 18th century, the position Lu expresses in his essay by quoting Wang is fairly typical for the time, derivative as it may be.

By emphasizing historical circumstances over the will to deceive, scholars could present the Old Text chapters as valuable documents, without taking recourse to the sagely wisdom they supposedly preserved. In this regard, Wang Mingsheng's 王鳴盛 (1722-1797) approach was much more in line with the scholarly predilections of his time. Based on a plethora of sources, Wang traced how and why these chapters were produced, and constructed a narrative that replaced the will to deceive with a laudable intention. According to him, his contemporaries missed the point in their oversimplified discussions of the authenticity of this work:

Since time immemorial, the case of the Old and New [Text chapters] of the *Venerated Documents* has not been laid to rest. Those who believe in the version that has been submitted by Mei Ze in the late Jin dynasty are all ignorant, base Confucians. Those who doubt it say: "The *Documents* consists only of the 28 New Text chapters, and what had been obtained from the wall of Confucius's [house] was lost during the witchcraft upheaval.¹⁹¹ The version by Mei [Ze] has been falsely attributed by later generations." These discussions completely miss the point of the issue of authenticity.¹⁹²

《尚書》古今文，千古聚訟不休。其信晚晉梅賾所獻本者，皆無識陋儒。即有疑之者直云：“《書》止今文二十八篇，而孔壁所得，遭巫蠱之難，遂以失傳，梅本乃後人假託。”此等議論，于真偽之辨，全不能得其要領。

¹⁹¹ "Witchcraft upheaval" refers to a violent power struggle in 91 BCE during which the crown prince of the Han imperial house was killed; the name derives from the fact that the emperor felt threatened by sorcerers and purges were carried out that became part of the power struggle.

¹⁹² Wang Mingsheng 王鳴盛, "Shangshu gu jin wen" 尚書古今文 (The Old and New Text [Chapters] of the *Venerated Documents*), in idem, *Yi shu bian* 蛾術編 (Compilation of Scholarship Accumulated in an Ant-Like Fashion) (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1958), 67.

Wang Mingsheng sketches two extreme positions concerning the authenticity of the Old Text chapters. On the one hand, there are the unwavering believers, and on the other hand, there are those who completely disregard them. While the second group, in its theories highly reminiscent of Yan Ruoqu, is able to trace the transmission history of the chapters to back any claims for inauthenticity and is thus, by implication, not as “base” as the faction of believers, they too do not get to the heart of the matter.

As Wang sees it, a number of different factors came together to produce the Old Text chapters, and these factors are not reducible to the concept of forgery. As he tells it, the story of the questionable chapters is one of an attempted revival of tradition, factional struggles and textual loss through war. If there was any intention to deceive on the side of the creator, Wang minimizes it as much as possible in his account:

Huangfu Mi was influential in the early years of the Jin dynasty. Seeing that this learning [of Kong Anguo] was about to vanish, he engaged in changing and creating, and furthermore acted in place of Anguo in creating a commentary. This is the current version. He thought that if there were a commentary by Anguo, then [the traditions of] Ma [Rong] and Zheng [Xuan] would be suppressed. Shortly afterwards, there was the chaos of the Yongjia-period, and the authentic Old Text [chapters] were unexpectedly lost.¹⁹³

皇甫謐名重晉初，見此學之將絕也，遂別為改作，且代安國為傳，即今本也。其意以有安國傳，則馬、鄭必為所壓伏耳。未幾而永嘉喪亂，真古文果亡。

According to Wang Mingsheng, Huangfu Mi 皇甫謐 (215-282) acted out of sympathy for the school tradition of Kong Anguo, whose fortune was in steep decline in Huangfu’s time, when he produced the Old Text chapters. Wang’s wording is vague, and purposely so, one can surmise: Huangfu engaged in “changing and creating” (*gai zuo* 改作) the text and “acted in place of” (*dai* 代) Kong Anguo when he wrote the commentary that was in the 18th century widely believed to be forged as well. Unlike forging, terming it “acting in place” implies the right to work in the name of someone else. Given the circumstances, Huangfu Mi did something commendable when he tried to save the learning of Kong Anguo from falling into oblivion by writing the commentary. That he at the same time intended to use this work to attack the

¹⁹³ Ibid, 68.

authority of other commentators serves, however, to scale back the good impression Wang Mingsheng gives.

Beyond this ambivalence, there is also a gap in the story as Wang tells it. If only the commentary is truly the work of Huangfu Mi's hands and the Old Text chapters are authentic, Huangfu's changes to the text must have been very severe. How else could Wang justify saying that the authentic chapters were lost in the chaos surrounding the fall of the Jin dynastic capital? It is likely that when Wang spoke of "changing and creating," he had the very same textual operations in mind that others referred to as "forging."

Just like adverse circumstances led to the replacement of the authentic chapters with a "rearranged" version, they forced the Tang 唐 (618-906) scholar Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574-648) to comment on the inauthentic Old Text chapters in order to not jeopardize the authority of the *Correct Meaning of the Five Classics* (*Wujing* 五經正義) project:

The forged version became current south of the Yangtze Delta; Liu Zhuo and Liu Xuan of the Sui dynasty [581-618] trusted in it and produced a sub-commentary, for which they became famous near and far. If Yingda relied on Zheng [Xuan], he would lack a commentary for half of the classic, and who would then still trust and follow him? He had no choice but to use the forged version [as his source text to comment upon].¹⁹⁴

蓋偽本始盛于江左，至隋劉焯、劉炫尊信作疏，聲燄大張。穎達倘依鄭，則經且少其半，孰信而從之？不得已用偽本。

As Wang tells the story, once the inauthentic Old Text chapters had gained momentum and were widely held to be authentic, everyone who slighted them ran the risk of becoming the laughing stock of the scholarly world. It was decidedly not the fault of Kong Yingda that they were honored with a place in the *Correct Meaning* project. Rather, Kong did not have a choice because all of his contemporaries put their faith in the Old Text chapters.¹⁹⁵ Thus, through a series of unfortunate circumstances and events, this inauthentic work became part of the influential state-sponsored compilation of canonical texts. No one participant had intended it, but the Old Text chapters made their way through the centuries and the hands of perceptive scholars all the same. Reducing this process to the term "forgery" is something Wang

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, 69.

¹⁹⁵ This was probably a direct response to Yan Ruoqu, who faulted Kong Yingda for lending the Old Text chapters credibility. See Yan Ruoqu, *Shangshu guwen shuzheng*, #17, 135.

Mingsheng finds questionable. Rather, according to his reading of the data, no one intended the deception, probably not even the creator of the inauthentic text.

Wang Mingsheng does not deny that these chapters are spurious. By focusing on the intention of Huangfu Mi, the man he considers responsible for the received text, Wang strives to show what value they could still possess. Yet he is still ambivalent in his judgment, as can be gathered from his contradicting terminology: The Old Text chapters are inauthentic, but what Huangfu did was “changing and creating,” which suggests some sort of foundation. Huangfu furthermore worked to preserve learning, a cause towards which Wang must have been sympathetic, at least in principle. In the end, Wang leaves the question to what extent Huangfu Mi is a dubious character unanswered. Given all the background information Wang Mingsheng gathers in order to explain the behavior of all historical actors involved, it seems that he considers Huangfu first a victim of adverse circumstances and only then a shady figure. As Wang implies with his approach, the Old Text chapters, though inauthentic, are something scholars should study closely, instead of just dismissing them as forged. As he sees it, there is a wide spectrum that is poorly covered by the dichotomy of “authentic - forged.”

Zhao Yi's defense of the Old Text chapters

Compared to the careful re-appraisals of the Old Text chapters analyzed so far, the strategy Zhao Yi 趙翼 (1727-1814) employs to defend their value drops all restraint. Zhao attacks the attackers. For this, he traces the doubts about the authenticity back to their origins in the Song. Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200) had wondered why the Old Text part of the *Documents* was so easy to read when, according to common sense and reading experience, it should be much more difficult than the New Text chapters.¹⁹⁶ The more archaic the language, the less accessible it should be. Zhao Yi also refers to Zhu Xi and Wu Cheng 吳澄 (1249-1333), who both had commented on the differences between the language of the Old Text chapters and other early texts.¹⁹⁷ In a sweeping generalization, he reduces all subsequent attacks on the authenticity of the chapters to the difficulty of reading them:

¹⁹⁶ “Shangshu yi, gangling” 尚書一綱領 (Venerated Documents, Part One, Generalities), in Wang Xingxian 王星賢 (ed.), *Zhuzi yulei* 朱子語類 (Classified Sayings of Master Zhu) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 1978.

¹⁹⁷ Zhao Yi 趙翼, “Song ru yi Guwen Shangshu” 宋儒疑古文尚書 (The Doubts of Song Confucians Concerning the Old Text *Venerated Documents*) in idem, *Gaiyu congkao* 陔餘叢考 (Various Studies Written While Caring for my Parents) (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 1990), 7f.

Since these three theories have been in circulation, everyone was making a fuss, but [what they said] does not go beyond the two questions “Why is the Old Text easy to read? Why is the New Text difficult to read?”¹⁹⁸

自此三說行，而後人附和紛紛，大概不越乎“古文何以皆易讀”、“今文何以皆難讀”二語。

As has become clear in the course of this section, the difficulty of the parts did not play a central role in the discussion. While this point might have given rise to the initial suspicions, scholars made the substantial arguments based on other aspects of the Old Text chapters, most prominently their textual history. Identifying the readability of the chapters as their Achilles’ heel, Zhao Yi’s goal is to prepare the ground for his defense, namely an explanation why this text is easier to read than its supposedly younger counterpart.

Ironically, Zhao too defends the Old Text chapters based on their textual history. He buttresses his claims with quotations from the *Records of the Historian* and the preface to the *Documents* ostensibly by Kong Anguo. In the “Biographies of Scholars” (*Rulin zhuan* 儒林傳) chapter in the *Records*, it says that “Anguo used current script to read” the chapters discovered in the wall of the Kong mansion.¹⁹⁹ In the preface to the *Documents*, it says that because no one knew how to read the tadpole script (*kedou shu* 科斗書) in which these chapters were written, the New Text chapters were used to “ascertain the meaning of the writing” (*kao lun wen yi* 考論文義).²⁰⁰ Taken together, Zhao asserts, these two statements make clear why the Old Text chapters are so readable:

Seen from this perspective, it is because Anguo simply did not know the old script that he used Fu Sheng’s version in new script as a comparison, and he guessed the characters based on the content of this version. When the old script parts were deciphered, he used

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, 8.

¹⁹⁹ 孔氏有古文《尚書》，而安國以今文讀之。“Rulin zhuan” 儒林傳 (Biographies of Scholars), in *Shiji* 史記 (Records of the Historian) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 121.3215. Hong Bosheng 洪博昇 has argued recently that the character *du* 讀 should be understood as “interpret” (*chouyi* 抽繹) in this case and commends Zhao Yi for his perceptive remarks. See his “Cong Duan Yucai dui du zi de xunjie, tan Kong Anguo yi jinwen zi du Guwen Shangshu de xiangguan wenti” 從段玉裁對讀字的訓解，談孔安國以今文字讀《古文尚書》的相關問題 (Discussing Questions Related to Kong Anguo’s Reading of the Old Text Documents with New Text Characters, Based on Duan Yucai’s Explanation of the Character *Du* [Read]), in *Shixin Zhongwen yanjiu jikan* 世新中文研究集刊, no 6, 2010, 195-226.

²⁰⁰ “Shangshu xu” 尚書序 (Preface to the *Venerated Documents*), in *Shangshu zhengyi* 尚書正義 (Correct Meaning of the *Venerated Documents*), in Li Xueqin 李學勤 et. al. (eds.), *Shisan jing zhushu zhengli ben* 十三經注疏整理本 (Collated Version of the Thirteen Classics with Commentary and Subcommentary) (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2000), vol. 2, 17a.

the characters shared by the new and old script versions to read the parts that were missing in the new script version. Where there were [gaps in the narrative because of] something left unrecognized, he bridged them based on the meaning of the text.²⁰¹

由此以觀，是安國本不識古文，以伏生之今文對讀，始以意揣而識其字。既識古文，則今文所無者，即以今文、古文相同之字讀之。間有不識者，則以文義貫穿之。

Building on his claim that the only thing that casts doubt on the Old Text chapters is that they are easy to read, Zhao Yi develops his defense by portraying Kong Anguo as a scholar that had faced many difficulties. Kong, widely accepted as having submitted the lost authentic Old Text chapters to the throne, was unable to read the text found in the wall of Confucius's home because he did not recognize the obsolete characters in which it was written. According to Zhao, Kong therefore relied on the content of the New Text version to decipher the Old Text chapters. What he could not read, Kong surmised based on the content in order to bind together the passages he had figured out. Thus, the text was simplified in the process of translation into a readable script. This simplification was unavoidable as the content was inaccessible and had to be re-created based on conjecture. Therefore, in a sense overlooked by others, Zhao Yi argued that Kong Anguo was the creator of the Old Text chapters because Kong was at least partly responsible for the content of the text. Far from being a forger, however, he had tried to save this oblique text written in an obsolete script from being forgotten.

In the version of the story Zhao Yi develops, the manner in which the forger had worked according to Yan Ruoqu is left intact, but agent and motivation are different. Yan had argued that for every phrase in the inauthentic text, there is a source in other texts (*ju ju you ben* 句句有本).²⁰² The forger just had to put them together to form a text. Zhao Yi accepts that the Old Text chapters were produced in this way, but under entirely different circumstances. First of all, it was not a forger, but Kong Anguo who had put the text together in this manner. His sources were also not disparate texts, but the actual Old Text version of the *Documents* found in a wall. For this reason, the Old Text chapters are closely connected to the authentic line of transmission. In short, Zhao does not deny that there was a rupture in the transmission history of this text. He rather argues that this rupture has been misunderstood.

²⁰¹ Zhao Yi, "Song ru yi Guwen Shangshu," 8.

²⁰² As seen in the title for, among others, section 33, which was part of the third *juan* that is not extant but listed in the table of contents. Cf. Yan Ruoqu, *Shangshu guwen shuzheng*, 19.

Zhao Yi does not mention other aspects that made the chapters look dubious, like the discrepancies in its transmission history as recorded in the *Book of the [Former] Han*. By declaring the quality of the transmitted text to be the defining aspect, Zhao rhetorically eliminates the necessity to take them into account. It only mattered that the text is so easy to read and seemingly the product of a single hand. Zhao's theory of how the Old Text chapters were produced indeed offers solutions for both problems and clears the work of all charges of inauthenticity coming from this particular direction. Zhao is also bold enough to deride the accusers when he claims that they are merely captivated because they do not understand the obscure phrasing of the New Text version. And cherishing something only because one does not understand it, he says, cannot be considered very reasonable.²⁰³

As mentioned in the beginning of this section, Sun Zhizu called the Old Text chapters of the *Documents* a settled case. Judging from the elaborate theories discussed so far, we have to read this not as a description of reality, but as a plea. Since Sun lacked the power to enforce an agenda upon his contemporaries, however, all he could do was to lament the state of affairs with biting irony:

If Mao Qiling were still alive, he would most certainly produce an *Extension of the Defense [of the Old Text version of the Venerated Documents]*!²⁰⁴

使毛西河至今存，必有《續冤詞》之作矣。

In the eyes of Sun Zhizu, scholars in the late 18th century were drifting away from the conclusions of Yan Ruoqu and moving towards the attitude of Mao Qiling, who had written a defense of the Old Text chapters in which he attacked the arguments brought forward by Yan. Sun, it should be noted, did not have a high opinion of Mao Qiling.²⁰⁵ In this case, Sun used him as a symbol for the tendency to write about the Old Text chapters in an apologetic manner and defend them to various degrees. The above quote was his way of expressing his disdain about this shift in attention.

The findings of Yan Ruoqu, as well as those by others like Hui Dong 惠棟 (1697-1758) and Cui Shu 崔述 (1740-1816) who expanded and confirmed the former's research, did not mark

²⁰³ 今因其艱濕不可解，遂謂之古奧而深信之，此更非通論語矣。 Zhao Yi, "Song ru yi Guwen Shangshu," 10.

²⁰⁴ Sun Zhizu, "Nai he," 1.9a.

²⁰⁵ See for example Sun Zhizu, "Can yue tiao sang" 蠶月條桑 ("In the Silkworm Month They Strip the Mulberry Branches of the Leaves"), in idem, *Dushu cuolu*, 1.19b.

the end of the debate.²⁰⁶ Rather, they provided the data for different interpretations and thus were the starting point for new discussions. Ironically, the approach used by Yan Ruoqu to prove the inauthenticity of the Old Text chapters could also be employed to argue for its value: By going through the early references to this version, Yan had stressed the transmission history as an important factor in showing its spuriousness. Scholars like Yao Nai, Zhang Xuecheng and Wang Mingsheng followed suit, but they found in the transmission history the very factor that showed that the Old Text chapters were closely linked with and the product of a tradition that stretched back into the Han dynasty. In different ways, Zhang and Wang furthermore presented the person who had produced these chapters as a scholar who cared about the tradition.

In keeping with the established picture of 18th-century scholarship, in all the cases analyzed above textually verifiable aspects were the final arbiters of truth. Instead of arguing for the validity of the principles espoused by the Old Text chapters, everyone accepted that the controversy had to be decided on the field of textual and historical studies. Yan Ruoqu had set the parameters and no one deviated from them, even if Yan's conclusions were doubted. The crucial part of all arguments was that the creator of the Old Text chapters had pieced his work together from earlier sources. This was exactly how Yan Ruoqu had identified it as inauthentic. But seen from another angle, it also placed the "forger" in a longer line of transmission. The more this aspect of the text's creation was stressed, the less dangerous the Old Text chapters appeared. In some respects, it seems as if Qing scholars, aware of the painstaking reconstructions of lost texts prevalent in their own time, developed sympathy for the "forger." Even if there was a consensus that the Old Text chapters were not authentic,²⁰⁷ there were other ways to defend their value.

Conclusion

Besides being an incentive for textual scholarship, the narrow concept of authorship also gave rise to critical reflection in the 18th century. Instead of simply applying it in their research, scholars questioned its validity based on the fundamental re-evaluation of the textual heritage that it mandated: Maybe it was not the fault of the early works that Qing scholars found every author-ascription problematic. Maybe they just looked at them from the wrong perspective. This is the basic tension described in the first section. After two millennia, the reason why the

²⁰⁶ For their studies of the Documents, see Benjamin Elman, "Philosophy (*I-li*) Versus Philology (*k'ao-cheng*). The jen-hsin tao-hsin Debate," in *T'oung Pao* 69, 4-5 (1983), 175-222, esp. 211ff.

²⁰⁷ Elman, "Philosophy Versus Philology," 213.

name of a figure had been chosen as the title of a book were no longer clear, and these titles became a source of confusion. In order to overcome this confusion, Zhang Xuecheng argued that in pre-imperial China, teachings were transmitted orally over long periods of time, while written records were less important. The name of the originator of these teachings was closely linked with the dynamic oral transmission, but less so with the written record that appeared at some point. Text production, according to Zhang, was a process that stretched over decades, if not centuries, during which teachings gestated and were reshaped over and over before being fixed. Tying the text that resulted from this process to the initial historical figure was bound to be misleading.

In a comparable manner, the contemporary discussion about the Old Text chapters of the *Documents* shifted the focus towards the textual history. This case, however, was more complex because the claim for inauthenticity was one of the defining events of the period,²⁰⁸ and due to the canonical status of the work. Accordingly, scholars who defended the Old Text chapters usually treaded more carefully, yet the tendency to highlight their value remains unmistakable. This was achieved by embedding the inauthentic parts in a textual history that stretched back at least to the 1st century BCE, when the authentic version was supposedly still in circulation. Looking at Yan Ruoqu's discrediting of the Old Text material through the eyes of his 18th-century readers brings out a tension inherent in his work. Yan's concrete findings indicate that the "forger" may have just pasted existing parts together, so his creative role may have been very limited. However, Yan, who repeatedly uses the term "forger" (*zuoweizhe* 作偽者), emphasizes the aspect of creation in his conclusions. In other words, for him the forger was the creator of the forged text in the full sense of the word. At the end of the 18th century, Yan's conclusions still mattered, but the textual overlap he had uncovered attracted even more attention. Consequently, the role of the forger was reduced to that of an editor who, based on existing material, assembled rather than created. If forgery, strictly defined, is speaking in the voice of someone else and pretending to be that person, then scholars no longer accepted it as an accurate description of the historical events. Yan's fuzzy use of the concept haunted the reception of his textual scholarship.

The concern that binds these deliberations about "master texts" and *Documents*-chapters together is the classificatory function of authorship. The figure of the author situates the text

²⁰⁸ Jiang Fan 江藩 (1761-1831), for example, gives pride of place to Yan Ruoqu as the first scholar treated in his *Guochao Hanxue shicheng ji* 國朝漢學師承記 (Record of Han Learning School Traditions in the Qing Dynasty) (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1937) and quotes at length from Yan's writings on the *Documents*. Ibid, 6-11.

that is ascribed to him. If the Old Text chapters were solely linked to someone from the 3rd or 4th century CE, then their description of events from a millennium earlier is at best of dubious value, supposing as Qing scholars did that time corrodes knowledge. The same holds true for works like the *Zhuangzi* and the *Mozi*. To what extent could they be relied upon given the obvious distance between the figures they described and the time in which they were composed?

It lies in the nature of the question that no consistent answer existed. How scholars coped with this problem remained an issue of personal preference. However, we can identify some general tendencies. There was a significant difference between works at the center and those at the periphery of the textual heritage. While scholars zealously sifted through the *Analects* to determine Confucius's authentic teachings, it mattered little that the *Guanzi* consisted at least partly of later material. The intellectual order built around the canon influenced where scholars applied their philological tools.

When the narrow concept of authorship dominated the philological discourse, scholars began to recognize its deficiencies. The alternative they developed was to take a closer look at the transmission of a text, instead of focusing on the one moment where the text was supposedly created. As a fundamental challenge to the binary distinction between forged and authentic, scholars who subscribed to this approach argued that calling someone a “forger” is misunderstanding how textual production functioned in pre-imperial times.