Conceptualizing authorship in late imperial Chinese philology

Stumm, D.

3. Connecting the dots: Textual filiations as interpretation

In the previous two chapters, I have already discussed how the relationship between text and author became a focus of attention in the 18th century. For most scholars, the author was the source of authority for a text. A text whose authorship was in doubt was in danger of becoming worthless. Within this framework, scholars could make intricate and powerful statements about a certain text by either questioning or affirming its authorship.

While it was not equally central, scholars also looked into the relationship between an author and the intellectual world of his times. By assigning him to a certain school or portraying him as a disciple of someone else, Qing scholars indirectly expressed how the text of the author in question should be read. In a period when Confucius 孔子 (trad. 551-479 BCE) was regarded as the source of all acceptable learning, scholars were often preoccupied with how closely related an author was to this figure. Conversely, where this connection was questioned, the text faced a loss of status. Assigning an author to an intellectual lineage functioned both as a guide to interpretation and as a determinant of centrality.

What made this issue more pressing in the 18th century was the renewed interest in the masters (*zhu zi* 諸子) of lesser status. The masters were the supposed authors of many pre-imperial texts that belonged to intellectual lineages other than that of Confucius. Assigning these authors and their works a place within the spectrum of known schools was an important task for the scholars who worked on these texts, as it could justify why such studies mattered.[209]

The attention that scholars of the 18th century paid to the intellectual lineage to which an author belonged underlines that for them, a text became legible through its author, either through the author-text-nexus, or through the author-lineage-nexus. Ideally, a text had an author, and that author was linked to an intellectual lineage. The cases where either of those connections remained in doubt gave rise to the most heated philological discussions of the period, and this chapter will focus on the establishment of textual filiations as expressed through master-disciple-relationships between author-figures.

[209] These schools probably do not accurately reflect pre-imperial developments in intellectual history, but are retrospect constructions from the end of the 2nd century BCE. See Kidder Smith, "Sima Tan and the Invention of Daoism, 'Legalism,' et cetera," in *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 62, no. 1, 2003, 129-156.

Historical reconstructions of authorial biographies can easily be dismissed as having naïvely assumed that concrete narratives and literary topics found within the œuvre must be reflective of the author's life. Such an approach has come to be called the "biographical fallacy." Alexander Beecroft, who has extensively studied early anecdotes about the lives of writers, has argued that a wholesale dismissal of these sources has come to constitute what he labels the "reverse biographical fallacy," by which he means "the modern tendency to read all ancient biographical anecdotes as if they had been constructed according to the biographical fallacy (...)."[210] Instead, he proposes to understand biographies as devices that were used to express literary theory. While Qing scholars hardly ever engaged with extensive biographical anecdotes, and much less reconstructed complete biographies, their forays in this direction too were devices meant to express interpretative insights and guidelines.

Attempts to order texts through their authors have a long history in China, and found what was probably their most influential expression in the grouping of the Four Books (s*ishu* 四書) in the Southern Song 宋 dynasty (1127-1279). Two of these, the *Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語) and the *Mengzi* 孟子, were books that had been held in high regard for centuries. The other two, the "Great Learning" (*Daxue* 大學) and the "Middle and the Mean" (*Zhongyong* 中庸), were chapters of the *Record of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記), and had seldom attracted much attention. This began to change early in the Northern Song dynasty (960-1127), when scholars discovered them as answers to then-current questions about human nature and self-cultivation. Taking these two chapters out of their original context and establishing them as separate treatises, Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200) assigned them "an authorial pedigree that could not but inspire genuine awe and respect."[211] The "Great Learning," Zhu Xi claimed, consisted of a classic by Confucius himself and a commentary based on the ideas of his direct disciple Zengzi 曾子, whereas the "Middle and the Mean" had been written by Zisi 子思, grandson of Confucius and indirect teacher of Mengzi. According to this genealogy, the Four Books covered the whole development of classical Confucian teachings, which constituted a strong argument for their cohesiveness and their significance.

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[210] Alexander Beecroft, *Authorship and Cultural Identity in Early Greece and China. Patterns of Literary Circulation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 2.

[211] Daniel Gardner, *The Four Books: The Basic Teachings of the Later Confucian Tradition* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2007), xxiv-xxv. For a more detailed analysis of the reactions to Zhu Xi's proposals, see Christian Soffel and Hoyt Cleveland Tillman, *Cultural Authority and Political Culture in China. Exploring Issues with the "Zhongyong" and the "Daotong" during the Song, Jin and Yuan Dynasties* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2012), 54-86.

As far as we can tell, Zhu Xi did not discover that the "Middle and the Mean" had been written by Zisi and began to enjoy reading it afterwards. Rather, like many of his contemporaries, Zhu was fond of that text and expressed this respect through an author-ascription that was not rooted in transmitted knowledge, and that his later detractors accordingly called into question. The fact that the relations he assumed between the authors were commonly accepted facilitated Zhu's task, whereas the relation between author and text was unsettled. This was different in the cases to be analyzed below, though the basic approach is the same: Scholars who discussed the figure of the author often did so in order to discuss the text associated with him. The focus, however, was not on the connection between author and text, but on the relation of the author-figure to another historical figure.

The first section of this chapter discusses the case of the *Annals of Master Yan* (*Yanzi chunqiu* 晏子春秋), a collection of anecdotes and dialogs whose name links it to the statesman Yan Ying 晏嬰 (c. 6th century BCE). Since the 9th century, Chinese scholars considered this work to belong to the Mohist school of thought, and they regarded it as not worthy of study.[212] When some Qing scholars developed an interest in the *Annals of Master Yan*, they had to confront an intellectual mainstream that was not sympathetic towards their research. They met this challenge by arguing that on a personal level, Yan Ying was on good terms with Confucius, and from that they deduced that the teachings of both men were in general agreement. By doing so, scholars dealt with abstract, doctrinal problems on the concrete level of biography.

While the fate of the *Annals of Master Yan* remained a marginal issue in the 18th century, the second section of this chapter deals with a discussion that took aim at a pillar of both historical knowledge and Confucian doctrine. As a guide to the *Annals* (*Chunqiu* 春秋), the *Zuo Tradition* (*Zuozhuan* 左傳) was a classic in its own right and a work that Qing scholars held in high regard. Traditionally, Zuo Qiuming 左丘明 was accepted as its author, and early sources contained stories about his close collaboration with Confucius. This biographical connection was crucial for anyone who evaluated the *Zuo Tradition*: Depending on their view of the text, scholars formulated different versions of Zuo Qiuming's story. These versions reflect how reliable they considered the *Zuo Tradition* to be.

In a discourse where texts depended on their authors, some authors could not guarantee authority on their own, but depended themselves on another person. Scholars manipulated the

[212] Olivia Milburn, *The Spring and Autumn Annals of Master Yan* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 48-49.

relation between these two historical figures in a manner that correlated closely with their view on the value of the text. While this approach already had a long history in the Qing dynasty, its vitality indicates that scholars constantly re-evaluated the status of texts through their author-ascription. Within the context of Qing dynasty scholarship in general, the following analysis further attests to the central role of the author-figure as an organizing principle for the textual heritage. Whatever they wanted to say, scholars could (and often did) say it through the author.[213]

Master Yan, Master Mo and Master Kong

The *Annals of Master Yan* is a collection of anecdotes and dialogs whose name links it to the statesman Yan Ying. Its present form owes much to the editorial work undertaken by Liu Xiang 劉向 (77-6 BCE) at the imperial library; however, modern archaeological findings confirm that a written tradition of stories about Yan Ying existed at least by the end of the second century BCE, probably even more than a century earlier.[214]

In the "Treatise on Literature" (*Yiwen zhi* 藝文志) of the *Book of the [Former] Han* (*Hanshu* 漢書), a work with the title *Master Yan* (*Yanzi*) is listed as a Confucian text (*Ru jia* 儒家). It ranks first in a list of many illustrious texts bearing the names of Confucius's direct disciples and Mengzi. Despite such favorable treatment in the *Book of the [Former] Han*, the *Annals of Master Yan*, assuming it is indeed identical to the *Master Yan*, seems to not have attracted commentators, as no commentary is known to have existed. Such scholarly neglect was cemented in the Tang 唐 dynasty (618-907) when Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773-819) argued that the text was written by a "follower of Mozi" (*Mozi zhi tu* 墨子之徒) and should be classified accordingly. Liu argued that many of the positions expressed in the *Annals* are consistent with those of Mozi and stand in stark contrast to those of Confucius. He did not make a point about the authenticity of the text; rather, Liu expressed the belief that Yan Ying fit quite naturally into the Mohist narrative of frugality and egalitarianism.[215] Reassigning this text from the Confucian

[213] These are cases of what Michel Foucault has called "the complex operations that construct a certain rational being that one calls author." See Michel Foucault, "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?" in idem, *Dits et écrits 1: 1954-1969* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 800-801.

[214] Milburn, *Annals of Master Yan*, 3-17. The tomb in which the manuscript was found was closed during the reign of Emperor Wu 武 (r. 141-87 BCE), though the bamboo text with the stories about Master Yan is considered to be significantly older.

[215] Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元, "Bian Yanzi chunqiu" 辨晏子春秋 (Examining the *Annals of Master Yan*), 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), 63-64.

school to that of Mozi, mostly seen as antagonistic to Confucius and thus not a popular topic of discussion among scholars, meant that the *Annals* was now fully marginalized within the intellectual discourse for the following centuries.[216]

In the 18th century, the connection Liu Zongyuan had drawn between Yan Ying and the Mohist school still shaped the discussions about the *Annals of Master Yan*. For some scholars, it seems to have become so naturalized that they could refer to it in order to make a completely different point. Zhang Xuecheng 章學誠 (1738-1801), for example, argued that the *Annals* constitute a case where the title of the work does not give away any intellectual affinity. Like many other works of the pre-imperial period, he claimed, the inclusion of a personal name in the title is purely an indication of which figure appears in the text. The story of this figure could have been retold by anyone, so the agreement between pre-imperial authors and readers went, according to Zhang Xuecheng:

> Mister Liu [Zongyuan] says that the *Annals of Master Yan* consists of the words of a Mohist. He does not consider Master Yan a Mohist, [rather he thinks] that a follower of Mohist learning recounts the events in which Master Yan took part and named the book accordingly, much like the chapter names "Master Gao" and "Wan Zhang" in the *Mengzi*.[217]
>
> 《晏子春秋》，柳氏以謂墨者之言。非以晏子為墨，為墨學者述晏子事，以名其書，猶《孟子》之《告子》、《萬章》名其篇也。

Zhang's argument challenged the fact that his contemporaries approached early texts by assuming a close connection between title and author. The example of the *Annals of Master Yan* is meant to convince the intended reader that Zhang's point is not that novel after all. Therefore, it can be assumed that he chose it because he considered it uncontroversial.

Yao Nai's separation of man and text

Considering the lack of scholarly engagement with the *Annals*, it seems likely that the association with Mozi had a negative impact on the status of that text and its author. Yao Nai 姚鼐 (1731-1815) argued that the good name of the *real* Yan Ying had been stained because of

[216] Milburn, *Annals of Master Yan*, 46-54.
[217] Zhang Xuecheng 章學誠, "Yan gong shang" 言公上 (Words Belong to Everyone, First Part), in Cang Xiuliang 仓修良 (ed.), *Wenshi tongyi xinbian xinzhu* 文史通义新编新注 (Comprehensive Theory of Writing and History Newly Compiled with New Commentary) (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 2005), 201.

the unreliable text bearing his name. Similar to Zhang Xuecheng, Yao argued that the *Annals of Master Yan* had little to do with Yan, and a lot with Mohism. Drawing on stories recorded in the *Zuo Tradition*, Yao indicated that Yan Ying was a morally upright person. He even claimed that when Confucius went to the state Qi 齊, where Yan Ying was active, it was Yan who had used his clout to lay the groundwork for this visit.

> When Confucius arrived in Qi, how could he, given the incompetence of Duke Jing, have come to be treated as [having a rank of the level] "between [the influential clans of] Ji and Meng" at once, when he was a ritual [*ru*] scholar from a neighboring [state]? This must have been due to the recommendation of Master Yan. That [the duke] was not able to employ Confucius must have been to the chagrin of Master Yan, who knew that his state was going to fall and could not be saved. So, how could there have been the affair of him blocking [the enfeoffment of] Confucius?[218]
>
> 當孔子至齊，以景公之庸懦，豈遽能以"季、孟之間"期以待鄰之一儒士哉？此必晏子薦之故也，及其不能用孔子，此必晏子所痛，而知其國之將亡不可救者，夫何有反沮孔子事哉？

Yao Nai alludes to an anecdote that was usually read as an illustration of the strained relation between Confucius and Yan Ying.[219] It relates how Confucius advises Duke Jing of Qi about matters of governing. Initially, he earns the ruler's approval. However, once the duke decides to enfeoff Confucius, Yan Ying intervenes. In a lengthy tirade, he argues that the teachings of Confucius are corrosive for public mores and require the waste of resources on pointless rituals. Afterwards, the duke's treatment of Confucius grows more distant, until he explains that he cannot treat him as someone of the same rank as the Ji clan, the most powerful family in Confucius's home state of Lu 魯. Instead, Confucius is to be treated as someone ranking lower than the Ji clan but still higher than the second-most influential family, the Meng clan. Thereupon, Confucius leaves the state of Qi.

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[218] Yao Nai, "Yanzi bu shou Beidian lun" 晏子不受邶殿論 (Discussion of Master Yan Not Receiving Beidian), in idem, *Xibaoxuan quanji* 惜抱軒全集 (Complete Collection of Yao Nai's Works) (Beijing: Zhongguo shudian, 1991), 8.

[219] Two major elaborations exist: 1) "Hereditary House of Confucius" (*Kongzi shijia* 孔子世家), in *Shiji* 史記 (Records of the Historian) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973), 47.1644. 2) "Fei ru" 非儒 (Against Confucians), in Sun Yirang 孫詒讓, *Mozi jiangu* 墨子閒詁 (Exposing and Correcting the Mozi) (Taibei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1971), 189-190.

The most obvious interpretation of this anecdote is that Yan Ying maligned Confucius, which led to the duke's change of attitude. In order to uphold the image of a harmonious relation between the two men, Yao Nai doubts the authenticity of Yan's rebuttal of Confucius's teachings, and instead blames Confucius's decision to leave on the duke's inability to recognize worthy men. As the above quote makes clear, Yao Nai thinks that Confucius left because he expected to be treated better, even though he was merely a ritual scholar, not a high dignitary. Confucius could harbor such high expectations, Yao suggests, because Yan Ying, an influential political figure in Qi at that time, had recognized the talents of Confucius and had hoped for him to assist in saving the state.

The next challenge Yao Nai faces is to account for the anti-Confucian tirade, because if Yan Ying had such a high opinion of Confucius, he should not have opposed the latter's enfeoffment. Yao's strategy consists of doubting the authenticity of the tirade based on its textual provenance. Pointing out that the anecdote is first recorded in the *Mozi*, he insists that this is a deliberate misrepresentation, a point he makes by reiterating how Liu Zongyuan had characterized the *Annals*:

> Master Yan was famous for his frugality; after the Spring and Autumn Period, a follower of Mozi made use of stories about him to criticize Confucians. The affair of preventing the enfeoffment of Confucius was fabricated by a Mohist, thus it is recorded in the chapter "Against Confucianism" of the *Mozi*. Him saying that Confucians worship mourning and chase after grief, that they spend everything on lavish funerals, these are the shallow theories of the Mohists, not the words of the one who [donned] "mourning attire of the coarsest materials" to mourn [as if for] his own father and fully accorded with the rites.[220]
>
> 晏子以儉著，春秋之後，墨子之徒，假其說以難儒者。沮孔子封事，墨者造之也，故載於《墨子·非儒篇》。其言以儒者為崇喪遂哀，破產厚葬，此墨者之陋說，非"粗縗斬"以喪父盡禮者之言也。

In this passage, Yao Nai contrasts the information given about Yan Ying in two sources. According to the book *Mozi*, Yan was highly critical of the teachings of Confucius, while according to the *Zuo Tradition*, he mourned for his lord the way one usually mourns one's father. Yao Nai argues that everyone who dismisses Yan Ying as an enemy of Confucius does

[220] Ibid. The quote is from *Zuozhuan*, Xianggong 襄公 17.

so based on a less-than-credible source (the *Mozi*) and in complete disregard of another, canonical source (the *Zuo Tradition*). To further undermine the credibility of the story where Yan Ying speaks out against the enfeoffment of Confucius, Yao Nai argues that in the time when this is supposed to have taken place, the system of giving land to important servants of the state had not yet developed:

> That the feudal lords split up their territory to enfeoff their high ministers is a development of the period after the split of Jin into three states and after the Tian clan had taken over Qi. It is not a system of the time of Confucius when states gave no more than an estate or a town.[221]
>
> 諸侯裂地以封大夫，此三晉、田齊以後之事，非孔子時國不過賜田邑之制也。

Jin was split into three successor states over the course of the mid-5th century BCE, and the Tian-clan took power in Qi in the early 4th century BCE; thus, both allusions point to a time when Confucius had been dead for more than half a century. This makes it unlikely for Yao Nai that a ruler would have offered Confucius a fief. His textual operations only leave two parts of the passage in the *Records of the Historian* (*Shiji* 史記) intact: Yao does not question that Confucius discussed governing with Duke Jing, or that he left the state disgruntled. However, Yao considers this to be the result of the duke's lack of far-sightedness. The part of the story that put the blame on Yan Ying and thus harmed his reputation is anachronistic, Yao claims, and should not be given credence.

Throughout this essay, Yao Nai avoids directly engaging the *Annals of Master Yan*. The way he approaches the problems suggests that he wanted to draw a strict line between the historical Yan Ying, who is described in some passages of the *Zuo Tradition*, and the use to which this figure has been put in later literature. Specifically, Yao insists that in the *Records of the Historian* and the *Mozi*, the image of Yan Ying had been heavily distorted through contamination by Mohist concerns. By showing that both sources are not reliable, Yao Nai clears the name of Yan Ying by dissociating him from the Mohist tradition and establishes a connection to Confucius by claiming that Yan Ying had something to do with Confucius's visit to Qi.

Developing Liu Zongyuan's proposals about the disconnection between Yan Ying and the *Annals of Master Yan* further, Yao Nai pushes the issue in a direction that is characteristic for

[221] Ibid.

the 18th century. He considers Yan's character in need of defense and digs through the historical record to unearth evidence of actions that fully accord with ritual demands and show unfaltering loyalty in the face of the state's decline. According to Yao Nai, Yan Ying is an unambiguously virtuous person who, despite anecdotes that state the opposite, recognized the benefits of having Confucius close to the center of power. Beneath the Mohist surface, residues of the authentic and valuable insights of this statesman are still identifiable if one looks in the right places.

Sun Xingyan's portrayal of Yan Ying as a good Confucian

One of the more prolific students of "master texts" (*zi shu* 子書) in the 18th century was Sun Xingyan 孫星衍 (1753-1818), who edited and reprinted many such works. In his "Preface to the *Annals of Master Yan*" (*Yanzi chunqiu xu* 晏子春秋序), dated 1788, Sun goes one step further than Yao Nai by arguing that the value not only of Yan Ying himself, but also of this text should be reconsidered. He makes the point that the *Annals* in its extant form is not a forgery, but the authentic old text, put together by followers and retainers of Yan Ying, edited by Liu Xiang and formerly categorized as a Confucian work. Undermining the connection to Mohism, Sun emphasizes that despite some philosophical differences, Yan Ying and the work bearing his name fit into the Confucian school.

While explaining why this work is called "annals," Sun lays out his theory of circumstances of the textual formation:

> When Ying died, his retainers mourned him, picked out [stories about] his behavior from state chronicles and turned them into a text. Even though it does not contain years and months, they kept the old name. Minister Yu [mid-3rd century BCE] and Lu Jia [ca. 240-170 BCE] also employed such an appellation. The text *Master Yan* was produced in the Warring States period; in general, works named after a master are not written by these men, there is nothing astonishing about this.[222]
>
> 嬰死，其賓客哀之，從國史刺取其行事，成書，雖無年月，尚仍舊名。虞卿、陸賈等襲其號。《晏子》書成在戰國之世，凡稱子書，多非自著，無足怪者。

[222] 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.

The issue at stake is that usually, "annals" is used in the titles of state chronicles that record important events in a strictly chronological fashion and meticulously keep track of time by noting the progress of the seasons. The *Annals of Master Yan*, a collection of anecdotes, is not organized in a comparable manner. According to Sun Xingyan, the inclusion of the word "annals" in the title is because all stories contained in the work were drawn from such state chronicles by the retainers of Yan Ying. These retainers were thus responsible for this work, not some followers of Mozi.

While not written by Yan Ying himself, Sun portrays the *Annals* as a text put together by people who personally knew him. With Mohism out of the picture, another possible threat Sun perceives is that the extant *Annals* is considered a forgery. He argues against such doubts by devoting lengthy passages of his preface to a comparison of differences between the *Annals* and other early texts, such as similar anecdotes told with different protagonists or character variants. The high amount of such differences suggests to Sun Xingyan that the stories were adapted from hearsay and that the text has a long history of transmission, both of which point to an early date of production. Were it a forged text, Sun insists, the forger would have simply copied verbatim from other sources and such differences would not exist. Sun goes so far as to say that compared to many other works from the late pre-imperial and early imperial period (roughly the 3rd and 2nd century BCE), the style of the *Annals* is of the most ancient quality.[223]

Joining the age-old debate whether Master Yan is closer to Confucius or to Mozi, Sun Xinyan harshly criticizes Liu Zongyuan for his theory that there is a connection between Yan Ying and Mohism. Sun does not deny that there are differences between the teachings of Yan Ying and Confucius. He considers these differences less significant than the commonalities, however. Sun makes ample use of quotations from Confucian texts that display a welcoming attitude towards Yan Ying and show that this school is inclusive enough to tolerate internal conflict:

> Master Yan preferred frugal rites, that is what is referred to as "when the state is wasteful [with its resources], he shows an example of frugality." His exhausting the rites in mourning [his father] Yan Huanzi is also different from Mozi's model of short mourning periods. The *Kong Family Masters' Anthology* says: "Examining the records, [one finds that] what Master Yan has done is no different from the Confucians." The way of the Confucians is extremely broad, Confucius says of the behavior of a Confucian that "his errors and failings can be gently pointed out to him, but they should not be enumerated

[223] 文最古質 Ibid.

to his face." Thus Gongbo Liao spoke ill of Zilu, and yet he is equally included in the school of the sage.[224]

晏子尚儉禮，所謂"國奢，則示之以儉。"其居晏桓子之喪盡禮，亦與墨子短喪之法異。《孔叢》云："察傳記，晏子之所行，未有以異於儒焉。"儒之道甚大，孔子言儒行有"過失可微辨而不可面數。"故公伯寮愬子路，而同列聖門。

Liu Zongyuan had pointed out that the Mohists and Yan Ying shared a preference for frugality. Sun rebukes him by quoting the defense of Yan Ying brought forward by Zengzi 曾子, a disciple of Confucius, in the chapter "Tan Gong" 檀弓 of the *Record of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記). According to Zengzi's reasoning, Yan Ying's restrained approach to ritual matters was an indirect criticism of the extravagance of the ruling house, not a disregard of propriety. Yan Ying would have followed the prescriptions had the state been run differently. His approach to ritual was not a sign of neglect, but an expression of Yan's unwavering loyalty to the state which he served.

After this explicit endorsement of Yan Ying by a direct disciple of Confucius and another one from a text purporting to be by a member of the Kong clan, a quote from the *Record of Rites* and a final allusion to the *Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語) are meant to show that there had always been disagreements within the school of Confucius. Sun thereby implies that a critical opinion does not make one an enemy of Confucius and reduces the dissent to an intra-factional one.

In opposition to Liu Zongyuan's suggestion to categorize the *Annals of Master Yan* as a Mohist text, Sun subscribes to the view that Yan Ying was a respectable statesman whose differences with Confucius are so minor that they do not preclude his inclusion in the latter's school. In an attempt at complete rehabilitation, Sun Xingyan argues that the status of the historical Yan Ying should be recognized, and furthermore that the text ascribed to him is both valuable and as close to being authentic as works from this period can possibly be.

There was, however, opposition to such positive reassessments of Yan Ying and the *Annals*. Hong Liangji 洪亮吉 (1746-1809) personally faulted Sun Xingyan for the flimsy grounds on which the latter's defense rested:

[224] Ibid. Both Gongbo Liao and Zilu are disciples of Confucius.

> Recently, my friend Mister Sun Xingyan collated and printed the *Yanzi* and completely disagreed with [Liu] Zongyuan's theory, saying that Master Yan was loyal to his lord and loved the state, and should thus naturally be included in the Confucian school. But considering that Mister Mo got callous feet from saving Song [because he had to hurry to change the aggressor's mind in time], is he not loyal to his lord and loves his state? If we have to rely on this to distinguish Confucians from Mohists, it is a biased view.[225]
>
> 近吾友孫君星衍校刊《晏子》，深以宗元之說為非，謂晏子忠君愛國，自當入之儒家。然試思墨氏重趼救宋，獨非忠君愛國者乎？若必據此以為儒墨之分，則又一偏之見也。

As mentioned above, one of the positive aspects about Yan Ying that Sun had highlighted was his loyalty. As Hong Liangji shows by alluding to a well-known story, Mozi was no less dedicated a servant of the state: Upon hearing that Chu 楚 was about to attack Song 宋, Mozi, who had once held high office in Song, travelled for ten days and ten nights straight in order to persuade those who planned the attack to let it be.[226] The question, Hong insists, is not whether Mozi or Yan Ying were virtuous persons. Hong emphasizes the ideological issues that separate these schools of thought, and he drives home this point by quoting from the harsh tirade against Confucius's teachings ascribed to Yan in the *Records of the Historian*. Yan Ying and Confucius may both have been loyal advisers to their respective rulers, but this does not mean that there existed any significant overlap between their views. For Hong Liangji, claims of such an overlap are transparent attempts to bring heretic ideas back into circulation.

Relation of the Annals-*case to the debate about master's texts*

The case of the *Annals of Master Yan* described above is best understood as one facet of a larger trend of the time: During the 18th century, scholars began to seriously and favorably engage with texts that had previously been condemned as records of questionable values. The *Mozi* and the *Xunzi* are two high-profile cases that were affected by this re-evaluation, and they indicate a turn away from a Mencian conception of Confucianism. The *Mengzi* harshly criticizes the

[225] Hong Liangji 洪亮吉, "Xin kan Yanzi chunqiu shu hou" 新刊晏子春秋書後 (Written after Reading the Newly Printed *Annals of Master Yan*), in idem, *Juanshi ge wen jia ji* 卷施閣文甲集 (First Prose Collection from the Pavilion of the *juanshi* Flower), in *Sibu beiyao* 四部備要 (Complete Essentials of the Four Categories) (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1936), vol. 132, 10.13b.
[226] „Gong Shu" 公輸 (Gong Shu), in Sun Yirang, *Mozi jiangu*, 303-304.

ideas recorded in the *Mozi*, and the *Xunzi*, with its claim that human nature is bad, positions itself in direct opposition to the *Mengzi*.[227]

Through its connection to Mohism, the *Annals of Master Yan* shared the fate of the *Mozi*. As efforts at re-evaluation of the latter work had only just begun in the 18th century, with scholars such as Wang Zhong 汪中 (1745-1794) and Sun Xingyan, the only option left to defenders of Yan Ying was to dissociate him from Mohism.[228] It is telling, however, that the scholars who wanted to bring about a more positive assessment of Yan Ying did not stop at dissociating him from Mohism; they usually went out of their way to emphasize his proximity to Confucius. Sun Xingyan applied this strategy to defend not only the value of the *Annals*, but also of the *Mozi*. As mentioned above, Sun quoted texts from the Confucian tradition that explicitly endorsed Yan Ying and argued for an inclusive conception of the term "Confucian," as a home to many differing voices. He went one step further for Mozi, whom he introduced as a renegade disciple of the Confucian school that came to dismiss the rituals he had been taught as tedious and wasteful.[229] Despite these disagreements, Sun identified a substantial overlap between the teachings of Confucius and those of Mozi, for example in their shared support for "moderating expenses" (*jie yong* 節用).[230] Sun reduced the difference between Confucius and Mozi to one between the rites of the Zhou 周-dynasty and the rites of the Xia 夏-dynasty while he glossed over the numerous passages of the *Mozi* that criticize Confucian teachings.

These very early stages of the revival of the "master texts" constitute a revival under the aegis of Confucius. Scholars who claimed a higher status for neglected works had the tendency to do so by highlighting the biographical and ideological proximity of the authors to Confucius. They did not assign these masters an independent space within the spectrum of early intellectual lineages, and these masters were acceptable only insofar as they were in basic agreement with Confucian teachings. More often than not, such basic agreement was underwritten by anecdotes that highlight the personal amity between Confucius and another master. For Chinese philologists of the 18th century, biography and intellectual position went hand in hand.

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[227] 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), 76-78.
[228] For a general overview of the status of the *Mozi* in imperial China, see Carine Defoort, "The Modern Formation of Early Mohism: Sun Yirang's *Exposing and Correcting the Mozi*," in *T'oung Pao*, vol. 101, n. 1-3, 2015, 221-236.
[229] Based on a passage in "Yao lüe" 要略 (Outline of Essentials), in Zhang Shuangdi 張雙棣, *Huainanzi jiaoshi* 淮南子校釋 (Huainanzi Collated and Explained) (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1997), vol. 2, 2150.
[230] Sun Xingyan, "Mozi houxu" 墨子後序 (Postface to the *Mozi*), in Wang Yunwu (ed.), *Sun Yuanru xiansheng quanji*, 77.

In Yao Nai's defense of Yan Ying, one finds the most revealing application of this principle. Characteristically for the author-centered approach to interpretation, Yao all but constructed a biographical episode around the theoretical overlap between Confucius and Yan Ying. From the story of Confucius's visit to Qi, the tiniest of all clues with Qi being the state where Yan was active, he deduced that the latter had had something to do with this visit. This is not Yao committing a "biographical fallacy," as that would mean that he transposed an existing literary trope into a factual biography. There was no trope of Yan Ying inviting Confucius to Qi, only dots that could be connected to yield such an image given that one assumed, contrary to many well-known sources, that Yan Ying saw a kindred spirit in Confucius.

By making Yan Ying palpable to their contemporaries in this way, scholars like Yao Nai and Sun Xingyan in effect proposed a different reading of the *Annals of Master Yan*: Instead of considering the text a record of a critic of Confucius's teachings, they highlighted the possible consonances. Since neither of them engaged with the *Annals* in any depth, however, the exact direction they wanted the interpretation to take cannot be substantiated. After all, the *Annals* remained a marginal work. If Sun Xingyan's approach to the *Mozi* is any indication, it is likely that conceptual overlap with text from the Confucian tradition could have served as the basis for a more charitable reading of the *Annals*. As the rebuttal by Hong Liangji shows, however, such attempts at reassessment met with determined resistance.[231]

Getting the classic right with Mister Zuo

According to the traditional account, first recorded in the *Mengzi*, Confucius created the *Annals* (*Chunqiu* 春秋) as an indirect way to reprimand the ruling class of his time for their reckless behavior.[232] On the surface, this text is nothing but a chronicle of the state of Lu, sparse in detail and written in the most laconic way imaginable. In order to retrieve the messages that Confucius had hidden between the lines, scholars from at least the Han 漢 dynasty (202 BCE - 9 CE) onwards relied on auxiliary works that spelled out the events in much greater detail, which allowed them to fathom how the choice of words indicated moral judgment. Such works were referred to as "traditions" (*zhuan* 傳). Throughout most of the history of imperial China, the

[231] The resistance against a positive evaluation of the *Mozi* was even stronger and more emotional, cf. Defoort, "The Modern Formation of Early Mohism," 231-232.

[232] Mengzi 孟子,"Tengweng gong xia" 滕文公下 (Duke Tengweng, Part 2), 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), 273.

Zuo Tradition was held in highest regard and eclipsed its two other surviving competitors, the *Gongyang* 公羊 and the *Guliang* 穀梁 *Tradition*.

As Zuo, Gongyang, and Guliang are all family names, the connection between the people behind these names and Confucius became an issue whenever the reliability of their exegesis was at stake. Since at least Han times, Mister Zuo 左氏 (*shi*) was identified as Zuo Qiuming 左丘明, a person that Confucius mentions in the *Analects*:

> The Master said, "Adulating words, an insinuating appearance, and excessive respect - Zuo Qiuming was ashamed of them. I also am ashamed of them. To conceal resentment against a person, and appear friendly with him - Zuo Qiuming was ashamed of such conduct. I also am ashamed of it."[233]
>
> 子曰："巧言、令色、足恭，左丘明恥之，丘亦恥之。匿怨而友其人，左丘明恥之，丘亦恥之。"

Based on this flimsy account, Zuo Qiuming, about whom not much else is known, was turned into the author of the *Zuo Tradition*, and furnished with credentials. According to the *Records of the Historian*, Zuo Qiuming was afraid that the disciples of Confucius would start to interpret the *Annals* based on their own ideas and neglect what their teacher had told them, so he set out to compose the *Zuo Tradition*.[234] About two centuries later, the *Book of the [Former] Han* expanded his role, claiming that Confucius "read the scribal records [of the state of Lu] together with Zuo Qiuming."[235] According to this version of the story, Zuo Qiuming not only heard the teachings that the other disciples had heard, but was also present when Confucius prepared the project by digging into the sources. This is as close to the intention of Confucius as anyone could possible get, which is a strong argument in support of the authority of the *Zuo Tradition*.

The status of the Zuo Tradition *in the Qing*

The *Annals* in conjunction with the *Zuo Tradition* dominated the intellectual world in the late 18th and early 19th century. Towards the end of his life, the eminent scholar Duan Yucai 段玉裁 (1735-1815) produced a wide array of writings about the *Annals* that reflect the continuing

[233] *Analects*, 5.25. Translation by Legge, modified.
[234] "Shi'er zhuhou nianbiao" 十二諸侯年表 (Yearly Tables of the Twelve Lords), in *Shiji* 史記 (Records of the Historian) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 14.509-510.
[235] 與左丘明觀其史記 "Yiwen zhi" 藝文志 (Treatise on Literature), in *Hanshu* 漢書 (*Book of the [Former] Han*) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 30.1715.

interest in every detail of that work. Besides essays on questions such as why the season of winter was not explicitly recorded in one year[236] or how certain characters were to be understood, Duan especially focused on the difference between the verbs "to kill" (*sha* 殺) and "to commit regicide" (*shi* 弑), a distinction that he thought had been blurred over time as wrong characters crept in. He dedicated four essays to the task of clearing up the misunderstanding he saw arising from such carelessness.[237] The hunt for the subtle praise and blame encoded in the *Annals* was still on, as it made all the difference to Qing scholars whether Confucius had considered the violent dethronement of a ruler justified or not.

Even though Duan relied on all three commentarial traditions to arrive at his understanding of the classic, he reserved the highest praise for the *Zuo Tradition* and wrote two prefaces for new publications dealing with that work. In both of them, he diagnosed the respective author with a case of "*Zuo*-obsession" (*Zuo pi* 左癖),[238] described by Duan as the insatiable desire to collect each and every source pertaining to this text.[239] One of these authors, Zhang Congxian 張聰咸 (1783-1814), seems to have made a name for himself in that regard, as a poem by Hu Chenggong 胡承珙 (1776-1832) says of Zhang that he was "alone afflicted by an incurable disease, developing a *Zuo*-obsession."[240] Members of the scholarly community cultivated a jocular terminology to refer to the most dedicated researchers of the *Zuo Tradition*, which indicates its importance during the Qing.[241]

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[236] Even if nothing worthy of being chronicled happened, the *Annals* still kept track of time by simply listing the month and the season as an entry.

[237] Chapter (*juan* 卷) 4 of Duan Yucai's *Jingyun lou ji* 經韻樓集 (Collection from the Mansion of Classics and Rhymes) contains the following four essays on the difference between "to kill" and "to commit regicide:" "Chunqiu jing sha shi er zi bianbie kao" 春秋經殺弑二字辨別考 (Study on the Difference between the Two Characters "to kill" and "to commit regicide" in the Classic of the *Annals*); "Jin Like shi qi jun zhi zi Xiqi" 晉里克弑其君之子奚齊 (Like of Jin Committed Regicide against Xiqi, the Son of his Ruler); "Jun mu sha jun dang shu shi lun" 君母殺君當書弑論 (Discussing that the Mother of the Ruler Killed the Ruler Should be Recorded as "Committed Regicide"); and "Gongyang jingzhuan shi zi bian wu" 公羊經傳弑字辯誤 (Identifying Errors Concerning the Character "To Commit Regicide" in the Classic and Commentary of Gongyang).

[238] This specific type goes back to the *Jinshu*-biography of Du Yu 杜預 (222-285), an influential specialist on the *Zuo Tradition*. "Obsession" in general played an important role in the culture of the late Ming, cf. Judith Zeitlin, "The Petrified Heart: Obsession in Chinese Literature, Art and Medicine," in *Late Imperial China*, vol. 12, no. 1, 1991, 1-26.

[239] Duan Yucai, "Zuozhuan kan Du xu" 左傳刊杜序 (Preface to the *Zuo Tradition* in the version of Du [Yu]), in Zhao Hang 趙航 and Xue Zhengxing 薛正興 (eds.), *Jingyun lou ji* 經韻樓集 (Collection from the Mansion of Classics and Rhymes) (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2010), 70.

[240] 獨抱膏肓成左癖 Hu Chenggong 胡承珙, "Zeng Zhang Ruanlin (Congxian) xiaolian" 贈張阮林（聰咸）孝廉 (To the Recommended scholar Zhang Ruanlin [Congxian]), in idem, *Qiushi tang shiji* 求是堂詩集 (Poetry Collection from the Hall of Seeking What Is Correct), in *Xuxiu siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書 (Continued Complete Library of the Four Categories) (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 2002), vol. 1500, 225/13.5b.

[241] Usage of "Zuo obsession" peaked during the Qing, according to a full-text database search.

In contexts closer to the political center of power, the *Zuo Tradition* was also lauded as the *sine qua non* of scholarship on the *Annals*. Qi Zhaonan 齊召南 (1703-1768), a scholar of the prestigious Hanlin Academy, wrote the postface on the *Zuo Tradition* for the *Complete Library of the Four Categories* (*Siku quanshu* 四庫全書), the imperially commissioned anthology. Later, this postface was also included in the *Sequel to the Outstanding Writings of the August Qing* (*Huang Qing wenying xubian* 皇清文穎續編), the digest of the massive *Complete Library* meant for imperial perusal. Praising the abundance of details contained in the *Zuo Tradition* concerning the rise and fall of states and the development of inter-state relations between the poles of war and peace, Qi Zhaonan asks rhetorically how one was to make sense of the *Annals* without them.[242] In the elite world of scholars, either in close proximity to power or in less formal contexts, the *Zuo Tradition* retained its primacy among the exegetical traditions of the *Annals*. Or, as Qian Daxin 錢大昕 (1728-1804) confidently put it, "the superiority of Mister Zuo compared to Gongyang is appropriately recognized by everyone."[243]

In keeping with their tendency to read texts through their authors, Qing scholars attempted to pin down where "Mister Zuo" had his knowledge from. Wang Mingsheng 王鳴盛 (1722-1798), whose sister was married to Qian Daxin, presented a prototypical translation of this veneration of the *Zuo Tradition* into the realm of authorial biography:

> Mister Zuo personally received [instruction in] the classic from the sage. Gongyang and Guliang were both disciples of Zixia, making them only twice removed in the transmission, their judgments should also not be far off; yet there are still differences. When the Confucians of late Zhou, Qin and Han times received [instruction in] the classics, they all held on to the teachings of their teachers and called themselves a specialized school or famous lineage; there is nothing astonishing about this.[244]

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[242] Qi Zhaonan 齊召南, "Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhushu kaozheng houxu" 春秋左傳注疏考證後序 (Postface to the Evidential Analysis of the Commentary and Subcommentary of the *Zuo Tradition* of the *Annals*), in *Huang Qing Wenying xubian* 皇清文穎續編 (Sequel to the Outstanding Writings of the August Qing), in *Xuxiu siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書 (Continued Complete Library of the Four Categories) (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 2002), vol. 1664, 650/6.24a-b. Qi Zhaonan admits that this work's explanations of the classic are rather general and says that the creator of the *Tradition* had personally seen the records (as opposed to having learned directly from Confucius), yet it seems that the level of detail merits this high praise nonetheless.

[243] 夫《左氏》之勝《公羊》，宜乎夫人而知。 Qian Daxin, "Da wen si" 答問四 (Answering Questions, Section Four) 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, 84.

[244] Wang Mingsheng 王鳴盛, "San zhuan hu yi" 三傳互異 (Differences between the Three Traditions), in idem, *Yi shu bian* 蛾術編 (Compilation of Scholarship Accumulated in an Ant-Like Fashion) (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1958), 116.

> 左氏親受經于聖人。公羊、穀梁皆子夏弟子，相去不過再傳，其是非宜不大謬，然猶有彼此互異者。蓋晚周、秦、漢諸儒受經，各守師說，號為專門名家，無足怪也。

In Wang's opinion, which many of his contemporaries shared, the earlier a source, the more trustworthy it is, as knowledge gets lost in transmission. In keeping with the Han-dynasty portrait of the figure, Wang stressed that Zuo Qiuming had learned about the meaning of the *Annals* directly from Confucius. The competing exegetical traditions, however, were founded by men who were merely disciples of Zixia, himself a disciple of Confucius. Consequently, they only had indirect access to knowledge about this work. This explains why the latter two traditions were not always entirely correct in their interpretations. Mister Gongyang and Mister Guliang were part of the Confucian school (read: the *Gongyang* and *Guliang Tradition* are generally reliable), but not disciples of Confucius himself (read: the texts ascribed to them also contain misleading information). Furthermore, such variant interpretations persisted throughout time because disciples tended to defend the teachings of their master and had no incentive to correct them based on what other masters taught. In the essay from which this quotation is taken, Wang Mingsheng consequently goes on to show how the explanations provided in the *Zuo Tradition* in two cases are correct, while the other two works are wrong.

The genealogy which portrays the authors of the *Gongyang*- and the *Guliang*-commentaries as disciples of Zixia was not an innovation by Wang Mingsheng. In the Tang 唐 dynasty (618-906), Yang Shixun 楊士勛 (active ca. mid-7th-century) wrote a subcommentary for the *Guliang Tradition* in which he made the same claim.[245] Another Tang scholar, Xu Yan 徐彥 (active ca. late 8th- to early 9th century) said as much about the author of the *Gongyang Tradition* in his own subcommentary and quoted a lost source to that effect from the Later Han dynasty (25-220).[246] It seems likely that the line connecting "Master Gongyang" and "Master Guliang" to Zixia had already been established long before Tang scholars drew increased attention to this fact.

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[245] See Yang Shixun's subcommentary to Fan Ning's 范甯 (339-401) "Chunqiu Guliang zhuan xu" 春秋穀梁傳序 (Preface to the *Guliang Tradition* of the *Annals*), 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. 22, 3a-b.

[246] See Xu Yan's subcommentary to He Xiu's 何休 (129-182) preface to the *Gongyang Tradition*, "Han sikong yuan Rencheng Fan He Xiu xu" 漢司空掾任城樊何休序 (Preface by the Clerk to the Han Minister of Public Works, He Xiu from Fan in Rencheng), in Li Xueqin et. al. (eds.), *Shisan jing zhushu zhengli ben*, vol. 20, 4a. Xu Yan quotes Dai Hong 戴宏 (2nd century CE).

By repeating such claims, established as they may be, Wang Mingsheng affirmed them. He went further, however, when he explicitly connected them to his deliberations on the value of the different exegetical traditions: Wang identified Zixia, the additional chain in the transmission history, as a possible source of distortion and prioritized the *Zuo Tradition* with its unsurpassably close ties to Confucius himself. The raw material may have been there already, but Wang Mingsheng used it to justify the exalted position of the *Zuo Tradition*.

This is the background for how scholars of the Qing engaged with the exegetical traditions of the *Annals*. In keeping with their author-centered approach, they expressed their views on the value of the *Zuo Tradition* by supporting or questioning the lore surrounding Zuo Qiuming. As the renewed interest in the *Gongyang*- and *Guliang*-exegesis only began to enter the mainstream in the 19th century,[247] the scholars of the late 18th century still lived in an intellectual environment where the primacy of the *Zuo Tradition* was generally not questioned. Consequently, defenders of the *Zuo Tradition* did not go to great lengths to make their case, and critics made comparatively cautious claims. What is instructive about this debate, lacking in mass appeal and wide-ranging consequences, is how closely a scholar's appreciation of the *Zuo Tradition* correlates with the proximity he establishes between Zuo Qiuming and Confucius.

Doubts about the identity of Mister Zuo

A small number of Qing scholar questioned the close connection that early sources and contemporary scholars alike established between Confucius and the author of the *Zuo Tradition*. Cui Shu 崔述 (1740-1818) reminded his readers that some had posited that Mister Zuo was a man of the Qin 秦 dynasty (221-206 BCE), living more than two and a half centuries after Confucius. Navigating between this and the other extreme of accepting Mister Zuo as a contemporary of Confucius, Cui was convinced of two things: While Mister Zuo was not the Zuoqiu Ming (as he read the name) of the *Analects*, he was still close in time to Confucius:

> My remark: The *Zuo Tradition* ends with the death of Zhibo [in 453 BCE], and uses the posthumous name "Duke Dao" [of Lu, d. 437 BCE], [both events of] several decades after the death of Confucius; it also sometimes displays what is called a writing style that is different from the intention of the classic. That it was certainly not [written by]

[247] Benjamin Elman, *Classicism, Politics, and Kinship. The Ch'ang-chou School of New Text Confucianism in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), esp. 171-174.

someone who learned directly from Confucius is crystal clear, [so] one should not equate [this person] with the Zuoqiu Ming of the *Analects*.[248]

余按：《左傳》終於智伯之亡，係以悼公之謚，上詎孔子之卒已數十年，而所稱書法不合經意者亦往往有之，必非親炙於孔子者明甚，不得以《論語》之左丘明當之也。

Based on events recorded and posthumous names used in the *Zuo Tradition*, Cui Shu points out that several decades separate Confucius from the author of this work. Furthermore, it is not entirely faithful to the intention of the *Annals*, the text it is supposed to interpret. Therefore, Cui considers the lore that links the *Zuo Tradition* with Zuoqiu Ming/Zuo Qiuming and Confucius untenable. However, sticking to one of his perennial concerns, Cui Shu points out that the language of the *Zuo Tradition* is direct and terse, a feature it shares with other early texts like the *Analects* and certain chapters of the *Record of Rites*.[249] This makes a later date of writing unlikely.

Due to the lack of sources, Cui Shu has to leave his readers in the dark about the identity of this "Mister Zuo." While he is certain that "Mister Zuo" is not the same person as "Mister Zuoqiu" from the *Analects*, he lived not long after Confucius and he may or may not have been called Zuo Qiuming. Since the *Zuo Tradition* is *the* crucial source for the history of the Spring and Autumn Period, however, Cui is unable to leave the work dangling in the void without an author-ascription:

Yet without this exegetical tradition, the remnants of the system of the Three Dynasties, the events of the time of the Eastern Zhou [dynasty] as well as the dates and sequence of the affairs of the sages and worthies cannot be studied; this text is indeed [by] an accomplished supporter of the cause from the time after Confucius, so this person cannot but be identified.[250]

然無此傳則三代之遺制，東周之時事，與聖賢之事跡年月先後，皆無可考，則此書實孔子以後一大功臣也，不可不標其人。

[248] Cui Shu 崔述, "Zhu-Si kaoxin yulu juan zhi san" 洙泗考信餘錄卷之三 (Additional Record of Seeking What Is Trustworthy in [the History of] Confucius, Third Chapter), in Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛 (ed.), *Cui Dongbi yishu* 崔東壁遺書 (Works Bequeathed by Cui Shu) (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1983), 394b.
[249] Ibid.
[250] Ibid, 395a.

This passage contains one of the most explicit acknowledgments of the importance of the author-text-nexus for scholars of the Qing dynasty: The *Zuo Tradition* is a valuable text, yet Cui Shu finds the commonly given author ascription unsustainable. At the same time, the text cannot function within the discourse without an author. Cui's minimalist solution for this dilemma is to accept the "Mister Zuo" 左氏 from the transmitted full title of the *Zuo Tradition* (*Zuo shi zhuan* 左氏傳) and turn it into the cypher "Master Zuo" 左子. By discussing this figure right after the first-generation disciples of Confucius and before Confucius's grandson Zisi 子思, Cui Shu makes clear where he thinks "Master Zuo" belongs. Everything else about him remains shrouded in mystery, but at least now, furnished with credentials as a supporter of Confucius, he can take over the role of the author and anchor the *Zuo Tradition* within early intellectual history.

While Cui Shu only had his doubts about "Mister Zuo" but still defended the value of the *Zuo Tradition*, a few of his contemporaries traced the flaws in this text back to the missing biographical connection of its author to Confucius. In his characteristically careful manner, in the essay "The Three Traditions to the *Annals* all Originate from Zengzi" (*Chunqiu san zhuan jie chu yu Zengzi* 春秋三傳皆出於曾子), Lu Wenchao 盧文弨 (1717-1796) did little more than quoting lengthy excerpts from a preface by the Yuan 元 dynasty (1279-1368) scholar Hao Jing 郝經 (1223-1275). In the preface in question, Hao Jing developed a rather novel theory about the early transmission of the three exegetical traditions to the *Annals*. Hao claimed that all of them were transmitted through Zengzi. Basing himself on earlier records that listed Zuo Qiuming as the first transmitter, Hao Jing argued that the name "Zengzi" was missing above "Zuo Qiuming." In his view, in keeping with the lessons about frictions between fathers and sons in the *Annals*, Zengzi did not want to transmit his teachings directly to his son, so he passed them on to him through Zuo Qiuming. Counting the number of times followers of Confucius were mentioned in the three traditions, Hao further presented his theory that a certain "Luzi" 魯子 mentioned frequently was actually a miswriting of Zengzi 曾子, as the characters were graphically similar and no record of a "Luzi" was anywhere to be found. Based on these findings, Hao Jing constructs an elaborate genealogy for the early transmission of the teachings of the *Annals* that is centered on Zengzi.

This theory, it seems, did not convince too many people, and while Lu Wenchao did endorse it, we should not read too much into it. First, this "essay" consists almost exclusively of excerpts from Hao Jing's text, with but one sentence of endorsement added by Lu. Second, it is part of

a collection of writings that was published only in 1838, four decades after Lu had passed away.[251] By no means is this a central contribution to the debate about the interpretation of the *Annals*. Still, it is enlightening that Hao Jing's theory caught the eye of Lu and that the latter neither ignored nor refuted it, but praised it as "very reliable" (*po ke ju yi* 頗可據依) instead.[252] Though there seem to be no strong statements by Lu Wenchao about his view of the *Gongyang* and *Guliang* traditions, as a collator he frequently made use of both works, which indicates that at the very least, he valued them as sources for variant readings. Read in comparison to the contemporary debate, Lu's endorsement of Hao Jing's theory that all exegetical traditions go back to the same person is an indirect refutation of the primacy usually granted to the *Zuo Tradition*. If we understand Lu's essay in this way, then he challenges the primacy of Zuo Qiuming and his work quite literally by inserting someone else in the line of transmission before him: Zuo Qiuming, too, did not have direct access to Confucius, thus his interpretation is no better than those of his two competitors are.

In contrast to Lu Wenchao, Zhao Yi 趙翼 (1727-1814) was very outspoken about his doubts concerning the reliability of the *Zuo Tradition*. He discusses the value of this text in several essays contained in his *Various Studies Written While Caring for My Parents* (*Gaiyu congkao* 陔餘叢考). One of them is aptly titled "The Names in the Narratives of the *Zuo Tradition* are Disorderly and Messy" (*Zuozhuan xushi shiming cuoza* 《左傳》敘事氏名錯雜). In that essay, Zhao Yi complains that there is no apparent system to the use of different names such as personal names (*ming* 名), styles (*zi* 字) and posthumous names (*shihao* 諡號). Since they are used as if interchangeable, it becomes very challenging to follow the development of a story. Much more importantly, however, Zhao asks how one is to deduce the proverbial praise and blame encoded in the *Annals* if the names are not correct.[253]

Based on his critical opinion on the *Zuo Tradition*, Zhao Yi conceives of Zuo Qiuming as having worked separately from Confucius. He explains that there were two kinds of

[251] See the preface to the *Notes from Reading the Histories* (*Du shi zhaji* 讀史札記) by Lao Ge 勞格 (1820-1864), in Lu Wenchao 盧文弨, *Zhongshan zhaji, Longcheng zhaji, Du shi zhaji* 鍾山札記、龍城札記、讀史札記 (Zhongshan Reading Notes, Longcheng Reading Notes, Notes from Reading the Histories) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2010), 161.

[252] Lu Wenchao, "Chunqiu san zhuan jie chu yu Zengzi" 春秋三傳皆出於曾子 (The Three Traditions to the *Annals* all Originate from Zengzi), in idem, *Zhongshan zhaji, Longcheng zhaji, Du shi zhaji*, 168.

[253] Zhao Yi 趙翼, "Zuozhuan xushi shiming cuoza" 《左傳》敘事氏名錯雜 (The Names in the Narratives of the *Zuo Tradition* Are Disorderly and Messy), in idem, *Gaiyu congkao* 陔餘叢考 (Various Studies Written While Caring for my Parents) (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 1990), 36-37. Zhao refrains from using the phrase "correcting names" (*zheng ming* 正名).

governmental records in the time of Confucius, one for important matters of the state, and one for lesser events. Quoting the early commentator Du Yu 杜預 (222-285), Zhao says that Confucius only based himself on the record of important events in writing the *Annals*. When penning the *Zuo Tradition*, Zuo Qiuming also made use of all the other records:

> Yet even though the sage did not document it in the classic, the records still existed, thus Mister Zuo was able to use them as a basis to deduce the intention of the sage's not documenting them.[254]
>
> 然夫子雖不書於經，而記載自在，故左氏得據以推聖人不書之本意。

According to Zhao Yi, Zuo Qiuming culled his knowledge from historical records, by which Zhao implied that Zuo Qiuming did not get it directly from Confucius. The choice of words with which Zhao Yi describes the act of Zuo interpreting the *Annals* supports this reading: He had to "deduce" (*tui* 推) what Confucius had in mind when he did not document certain events. While access to the original records may have given Zuo an advantageous position to do so, this version of the story still introduces an element of uncertainty. Furthermore, this portrayal allows Zhao Yi to explain another curious feature of the *Zuo Tradition*, namely that in some years, it does not comment on the events of the *Annals* at all but talks about seemingly unrelated events:[255]

> Within [this] one year, the classic is the classic and the tradition is the tradition; if they have nothing to do with each other, that is probably because there are no other bamboo slips about the events documented in the classic to be examined in order to find out the details, thus [Zuo Qiuming] collected other events to fill up the tradition's text for that year.[256]
>
> 一年之內，經自經而傳自傳，若各不相涉者，蓋亦因經所書之事別無簡策可考以知其詳，故別摭他事以補此一年傳文也。

According to this description, the central impetus behind the creation of the *Zuo Tradition* may have been the wish to explain the *Annals*, but the extant documents put a limit on that

[254] Zhao Yi, "Zuozhuan suo ben" 《左傳》所本 (The Basis of the *Zuo Tradition*), in idem, *Gaiyu congkao*, 35.
[255] Present-day students of the *Zuo Tradition* consider this a reflection of the fact that the text was compiled from different sources with the intention to provide "a broad historical setting for the events" recorded in the *Annals*, not as a line-by-line commentary. See Yuri Pines, *Foundations of Confucian Thought. Intellectual Life in the Chunqiu Period, 722-453 BCE* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 27.
[256] Ibid, 36.

undertaking. Without access to Confucius's teachings, Zuo Qiuming recorded other events, with no apparent purpose beyond filling the gaps that would have otherwise appeared.

Finding fault with many aspects of the *Zuo Tradition*, it was inconceivable to Zhao Yi that its author had been in direct contact with Confucius. Zhao thus portrayed Zuo Qiuming as having based himself on documents, not direct instruction from the sage. This subtly yet unmistakably creates a distance between Zuo Qiuming and Confucius that undermines the former's credibility. To Zhao, this distance explains the weaknesses of the *Zuo Tradition* while simultaneously shielding Confucius from any blame. As shown in the first chapter, Zhao Yi considered Confucius a perfect human being and undermined hints in the sources that he could have erred. Seen against this background, it is a sign of Zhao Yi's consistency that his negative opinion of the *Zuo Tradition* leads him to dissociate Zuo Qiuming from Confucius.

While vocal criticism of the *Zuo Tradition* constituted the exception, scholars were familiar enough with such criticism to recognize how detractors of this text framed their attacks. In the *General Catalog* (*Zongmu* 總目) of the *Complete Library of the Four Categories*, we find an explicit reflection on the importance of the link between Zuo Qiuming and Confucius for the *Zuo Tradition*. This shows that scholars were consciously aware of the way in which their discussions functioned.

In accordance with the format of these introductory notes, a central concern is to establish authorship. In the case of the *Zuo Tradition*, the author recognizes the difficulties posed by obvious anachronisms within the text, such as references to persons that must have lived after Zuo Qiuming had died. Even though he acknowledges some input by later generations, the writer of the entry confidently confirms the authorship of Zuo Qiuming and reveals what he considers the motivation for doubting this ascription:

> Zhao Kuang [late 8th century] of the Tang dynasty first said that Mister Zuo is not Qiuming. Wanting to condemn [the fact] that the tradition is not in accordance with the classic, he probably first had to condemn [the fact] that the creator of the tradition did not receive [instruction in] the classic from Confucius. The principle is identical to that of Wang Bo [1197-1274] who, wanting to condemn the Mao-recension of the *Odes*, first had to condemn [the fact] that the Mao-*Odes* had not been transmitted by Zixia.[257]

[257] "Qinding siku quanshu zongmu, Chunqiu Zuozhuan Zhengyi liushi juan" 欽定四庫全書總目，春秋左傳正義六十卷 (General Catalog of the Imperially Commissioned *Complete Library of the Four Categories*, *Correct*

> 至唐趙匡始謂左氏非丘明，蓋欲攻傳之不合經，必先攻作傳之人非受經於孔子，與王柏欲攻《毛詩》，先攻《毛詩》不傳於子夏，其智一也。

Similar to Cui Shu's confession that the author of the *Zuo Tradition* "cannot but be identified," the anonymous staff member of the *Complete Library*-project responsible for this note shows that he knows the game that everyone plays but few discuss. If a valued text becomes legible through its author and the author receives his authority from another, more important historical figure, the weakest link in the chain is the connection between the author and his mentor. This explains why the discussion gravitated towards the identity of "Mister Zuo" and his relation with Confucius. Anyone who openly attacked the *Zuo Tradition* put himself in direct opposition to the academic mainstream of the 18th century, whereas discussions about the figure of Zuo Qiuming were less charged, even though they could serve the same purpose.

In the chapter on textual scholarship on the *Analects*, the analysis showed that Zhao Yi and Cui Shu were in full agreement that the lore surrounding Confucius was in dire needed of a critical revision. In the case of the *Zuo Tradition's* relation to Confucius, however, they were on opposing sides of the spectrum. Since Zhao Yi found that text of questionable value for the study of the *Annals*, he deduced that its putative author, Zuo Qiuming, had not received his insights directly from Confucius. Accordingly, Zhao changed the portrayal of Zuo Qiuming from a close associate of Confucius to a textual researcher without access to the hallowed knowledge of the sage. Starting from a different problem, Cui Shu's approach mirrored that of Zhao Yi. Doubting the identification of "Mister Zuo" with Zuo Qiuming, which for most scholars of the time constituted proof of the close relation to Confucius, Cui held the *Zuo Tradition* in such high esteem that he was convinced that whoever its author was, he must have been a supporter of Confucius.

The parallel case of the preface to the Odes

Disputes about authors and their relations to other figures arose not only about the *Zuo Tradition*. The preface to the *Book of Odes* (*Shijing* 詩經) posed similar challenges to scholars. According to a widely accepted version of the story, Confucius edited the *Book of Odes* and Zixia, his direct disciple, wrote the preface that remained a staple of literary theory. Consequently, there exists again a close correlation between how Qing scholars judged the preface and where they

Meaning of the Zuo Tradition to the Annals, Sixty *juan*), quoted in Li Xueqin et. al. (eds.), *Shisan jing zhushu zhengli ben*, vol. 16, 1a.

stood on Zixia's authorship. The important difference between Zuo Qiuming and Zixia is that in the case of the latter, it was nearly impossible to cast doubt on his relation to Confucius. Scholars thus focused on the link between Zixia and the preface, which shows how they adapted the basic principle to the circumstances.

On one side of the spectrum, Wang Mingsheng considers the Mao 毛-version of the *Book of Odes* along with the preface it contains superior to all competing exegetical traditions. In an essay discussing the authorship of the preface, he affirms that Zixia wrote it and establishes the transmission history of the *Book of Odes*.

> Confucius feared that it would not be transmitted, so he specifically arranged it and gave it to Zixia. Zixia gave it to Mister Mao and wrote a preface for it.[258]
>
> 孔子懼失其傳，特加整比，以授子夏。子夏授毛公，為之作序。

All the key agents in the history of the *Odes* are coming together in this version of the story. First, there is Confucius, believed to be responsible for imbuing the poems with a deeper meaning by ordering and editing the collection. Next, Zixia receives it directly from his teacher and writes the preface. Finally, the namesake of the extant version, Mister Mao, can claim a direct link to Zixia. No gaps impede the flow of knowledge. Against this background, it makes sense that Wang Mingsheng thinks very highly of the Mao-version of the *Odes*:

> The Lu, Qi and Han [versions] are all vulgar learning. The Mao-*Odes* originates from Zixia, it has the most solid basis. This is ancient learning.[259]
>
> 魯、齊、韓皆俗學。毛《詩》出於子夏，最為有本。此古學也。

On the other side of the spectrum, opposite of Wang Mingsheng, Cui Shu finds fault with many aspects of the preface and is convinced that Zixia could not have written it.

> Furthermore, there are many occasions where the preface is not in accord with the meaning of the classic. Comparing it to the historical sources, there are also many errors, and the phrases are a far cry from the *Analects*. It is obvious that it was not written by

[258] Wang Mingsheng, "Shi xu" 詩序 (The Preface to the *Odes*), in idem, *Yi shu bian* 蛾術編 (Compilation of Scholarship Accumulated in an Ant-Like Fashion) (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1958), 81.
[259] Wang Mingsheng, "Shi xu duan fei Wei Hong suo zuo" 詩序斷非衛宏所作 (The Preface to the *Odes* Was Certainly Not Written by Wei Hong), in idem, *Yi shu bian*, 84.

> Zixia. It was just that someone from the end of the Han or the Wei-Jin period who transmitted the Mao-*Odes* used Zixia's name to make it look important.[260]
>
> 且序之不合於經義者甚多。參之傳記，亦多舛誤，而文詞亦不逮《論語》遠甚。其非子夏所作顯然。不過漢末魏晉之人傳毛《詩》者，借子夏名以為重耳。

Besides issues with the language in which it is written and its uncertain grasp of the historical facts, Cui Shu finds the preface's interpretations questionable. Consequently, he condemns the thesis of Zixia's authorship as untenable and posits that it was written after 200 CE instead, more than half a millennium after what Wang Mingsheng had proposed.

In principle, the examples of Zuo Qiuming and Zixia work in the same way. Both show how Qing scholars used the figure of the author to classify texts according to quality. The complication is that the author-figures are in both cases dependent on someone else for their authority. The example of Zixia is instructive because it demonstrates that scholars had a number of variables at their disposal that they could manipulate. If the text did not live up to their expectations, they could look either at the line connecting text to author, or at the line connecting author to source of authority. In practice, there was no plausible way to disconnect Zixia from Confucius, whereas the connection between Zixia and the preface was contentious and thus an easy target for those who found little value in the preface. In the nexus "Confucius-Zuo Qiuming-*Zuo Tradition,*" every node was open for discussion. Scholars thus reformulated it in various ways, but always in accordance with two principles: First, Confucius was above criticism, so nothing negative was traced back to him. Second, the extant text that scholars could still read constituted the decisive factor. Everything else hinged on how one thought of it. Too little was known about the historical figures behind the texts to enforce any standard version of their story, so their biographies constituted the variables that changed according to the status of the text.

In the end, however, their own stories mattered little. Scholars cared about the lines that linked these authors to Confucius. Thus, we do not read about the personality and the deeds of Zuo Qiuming. We only learn whether he can rightfully claim to have been a close disciple of the master. As Cui Shu's invention of "Master Zuo" makes mercilessly clear, the discourse was not about authors, but about the function of the author to anchor the text.

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[260] Cui Shu, "Zhu-Si kaoxin yulu juan zhi er" 洙泗考信餘錄卷之二 (Additional Record of Seeking What Is Trustworthy in [the History of] Confucius, Second Chapter), in Gu Jiegang (ed.), *Cui Dongbi yishu*, 386a.

The fact that so many Qing scholars took recourse to earlier lore shows that this approach was far from novel; in fact, Qing sources even contain occasional explicit reflections about it, which indicates a conscious awareness resulting from continuous use. In conjunction with the general discourse on authorship and authenticity, the deployment of authorial biography underscores the crucial importance scholars assigned to the figure of the author in their attempts to make sense of, or discredit, any text.

Conclusion

When Qing scholars discussed a text, the historical figure who they thought had written it was invariably part of the equation. This figure anchored the text in the intellectual history of early China. Lacking sufficient weight, however, many of them depended on their associations to other figures to fulfill that function. Usually, this other figure was Confucius, the fountainhead of elite learning. Thus, Qing scholars attempted to establish in detail how the author whose text they were discussing positioned himself towards Confucius. In somewhat simplified terms, pre-imperial China was a world divided between fervent supporters and disgruntled followers of Confucius in the eyes of Qing scholars. Their task was to decide to which side an author belonged, with the ramifications for the writings of this person described above. These filiations gave order to the transmitted documents and established a hierarchy. It comes as no surprise that those who challenged this order included the filiations in their doubts.

This complicates the relation between text and author that played such an important role for the scholarship of the period. Not only the question of the relation between text and author was uncertain; even if an author could be assigned with reasonable certainty, the question of his relation to the rest of the *dramatis personae* of early China remained. The statement "The *Zuo Tradition* was written by Zuo Qiuming" could mean different things to different scholars, depending on whether they saw him as a close associate of Confucius or a later interpreter. Somewhat counterintuitively, severing the connection between the *Zuo Tradition* and Zuo Qiuming could also serve as an expression of respect towards the work. If one assumes that Zuo Qiuming lived long after Confucius, historical accuracy dictates that the record be set straight, which does not necessarily entail lowering the value of the text. Text, author and the author's relations are nodes in a nexus where every connection can be challenged based on the value assigned to the text, which remains the most stable entity despite all the textual criticism.

Against the background that, according to mid-Qing theories of scholarship, every claim needed evidence, the operations scholars undertook with the sources appear ambivalent at best. While they dutifully refer to the texts they consult, the leeway they allow themselves indicates that the sources were secondary to the interpretative concerns that motivated scholars to tackle an issue in the first place. The sources contain accounts that are diametrically opposed in their evaluation of a historical figure, so scholars highlighted those that best supported their claim. Where that did not suffice, scholars proposed a selective reading of a passage and buttressed it with textual and historical research. Evidence was part of the picture, but the way in which the dots were connected mattered far more.

The few reactions to attempts at changing the status of a text by manipulating the image of the author indicate it was not the handling of the sources that drew ire, but the ideological challenges inherent in the attempts. In order to enhance the status of a text, its author required proximity to Confucius. If explicit evidence of interaction was missing, scholars labored to produce proof of compatible worldviews. As their detractors were quick to point out, this led to a blurring of the lines that separated the school of Confucius from its competitors. The basic challenge faced by scholars promoting the study of "master texts" was that they had to sell difference as sameness. Teachings that contradicted those of Confucius had to find a place in a genealogy of early intellectual history that was centered on this very figure and only had space for non-hostile relations. This is the reason behind the painstaking attempts to find links between a certain master and Confucius, even where the evidential foundation of such claims is very thin.

The reactions to such revisions of the authorial biography furthermore indicate that this was a strategy that scholars consciously applied. At the very least, critics were not surprised that those who promoted works that had hitherto been largely neglected used the figure of the author to bring about a more positive evaluation. This degree of reflexivity can be understood in light of the long history of tying texts to people tied to other people. There is little that is qualitatively new about Qing approaches to the issues. However, the strategy played an important role in justifying the interest in these texts that became manifest in the late 18th century. Furthermore, its continuing relevance emphasizes just how central the figure of the author was for Qing dynasty scholarship.

Scholars who engaged in textual scholarship operated in a complex system where text and interpretation were bound to a degree where changes in one aspect reflected back on the other. Since author-ascriptions functioned as signifiers of interpretation, they too were invariably part

of the discourse. Research on neither text nor author took place outside of the process of making sense of the text. Consequently, textual scholarship and historically minded studies on the life of the author yield their full meaning in light of the interpretative issues they concern. Establishing authorship meant fixing an interpretation, and it entailed determining how the author-figure had related to the world around him.