Conceptualizing authorship in late imperial Chinese philology
Stumm, D.

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Propositions

1. Like 18th-century philologists in Europe, Qing scholars historicized traditional author ascriptions. However, their attempts to turn author-figures into tangible historical actors were still indebted to contemporary intellectual trends.

2. While Qing scholars discussed the value of philological theories, they hardly ever doubted philology's prerogative to solve interpretative issues.

3. Besides the elaboration of a narrow concept of authorship, the 18th century also witnessed the formulation of an inclusive concept of authorship that claimed to offer a comprehensive explanation of pre-imperial textual production.

4. For 18th-centruy scholars, making sense of a text included finding a place for its author in a genealogy of knowledge-transmitters. Confucius played a central role in this genealogy.

5. Qing scholars were engaged in a philological discourse that made them read transmitted texts as conglomerates of various, sometimes conflicting, voices. The coherence of the text was no longer an assumption; it had to be established.

6. Much of Chinese intellectual history is reception history, which in most periods can be studied through commentaries. However, the commentarial form of engagement with a text is less important in the Qing; this is a consequence of scholarly questioning of the canon's coherence.

7. The concept of authorship fulfills different functions in literary theory and philology. In the former, text and author are usually known entities; in the latter, there is at least one unknown in the equation, more often than not the relation between text and author.

8. Intellectual historians have recognized that written artifacts can be produced in a variety of ways, of which the single-author model is

merely one. This recognition is important because inappropriate application of this model distorts our perception of early texts.

9. The author is not dead. In the current literary market, "authorship" plays a highly prominent role; name recognition (even of people famous for things other than writing) helps to ensure sales and authors do literary readings to promote their work.

10. Readers accept what fulfills their expectations and find ways to justify ignoring the rest. Psychologists call this "confirmation bias."