

Zuozhuan and Early Chinese Historiography

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Contents

Notes on Contributors VII
Acknowledgments VIII
List of Figures and Tables IX

Introduction: *Zuozhuan* and the Beginnings of Chinese
Historiography 1
Yuri Pines, Martin Kern, and Nino Luraghi

- 1 *Zuozhuan* Source Materials in Light of Newly Discovered
Manuscripts 21
Yuri Pines
- 2 How to Understand “Empty” Records: On the Format and Compilation
of *Chunqiu* from the Perspective of Bamboo Manuscripts 63
Chen Minzhen
- 3 The Problem of “Other Annals” Embedded in *Zuozhuan* 89
Stephen Durrant
- 4 Inconvenient and Unnecessary Details in *Zuozhuan* 125
Wai-yee Li
- 5 Poetry Quotation, Commentary, and the Ritual Order: Staging the
“Noble Man” in *Zuozhuan* 153
Martin Kern
- 6 On Quoted Speech in Anecdotal History: *Zhanguoce* as Foil
to *Zuozhuan* 209
David Schaberg
- 7 *Gongyang zhuan*, Father of Chinese Historiography 244
Joachim Gentz
- 8 “Times Have Changed”: History beyond the *Zuozhuan* 289
Kai Vogelsang

- 9 The Historian's Task in Classical Greece 325
Nino Luraghi
- 10 Imagined Ancestors: The Stories Roman History Tells about Itself 353
Ellen O'Gorman
- Index Locorum 381
- Index 384

Introduction: *Zuozhuan* and the Beginnings of Chinese Historiography

Yuri Pines, Martin Kern and Nino Luraghi

Zuozhuan 左傳 is by far the largest, richest, and one of the most controversial texts from preimperial (pre-221 BCE) China. This chronologically arranged text covers thickly described events in the major polities of the Zhou 周 world from 722 to 468 BCE. It provides an unparalleled wealth of information about wars and diplomacy, power struggles, elite social life, religion, climatic anomalies, and so forth. At times it is overtly didactic, but this didactic message is often contradicted—explicitly or implicitly—in other parts of the narrative. The text contains not a few literary gems, which influenced Chinese literature for millennia to come; but these coexist with fairly tedious sections that are “little more than an arid concatenation of dated events” (Durrant, this volume, p. 103). The rigid chronological framework often demands that the narrative be cut into small segments intertwined with other unrelated narratives, which makes following each of the narrative lines a challenging task. As Kern notes in this volume, “The text resists being called a single, coherent work structured by the intent and firm hand of a single author, and it demands very significant hermeneutic effort—and the reader’s ability to track multiple events and names across extended yet scattered passages of historical time and narrative text—in order to be understood” (p. 154).

Its bewildering complexity notwithstanding, *Zuozhuan* is one of a few texts that no student of early China—not just of the Springs and Autumns period (Chunqiu 春秋, 770–453 BCE) but also the preceding Western Zhou era (Xi-Zhou 西周, ca. 1046–771 BCE) and subsequent Warring States period (Zhanguo 戰國, 453–221 BCE)—can afford to ignore. It is essential for political, social, economic, military, institutional, and gender history; it is a must for anybody engaged in studies of historical geography, family composition, rituals, religious beliefs, and ethnocultural identities in the Zhou world; and it is highly important for students of literature, philosophy, poetry, and political thought. The text is also one of the cornerstones of China’s “canonical studies” (*jingxue* 經學)—both because it is purportedly built as a commentary on the canonical *Springs and Autumns* (*Chunqiu* 春秋, hereinafter *Annals*)¹ of the state of

1 The contributors to this volume adopt different variants of translating the title *Chunqiu*, and some prefer to transliterate. We opted not to impose uniformity in this case, or in the case of other early Chinese texts.

Lu 魯, and because it contains abundant citations of or references to other canonical texts, such as the *Classic of Documents* (*Shujing* 書經 or *Shangshu* 尚書), *Classic of Poetry* (*Shijing* 詩經), and *Classic of Changes* (*Yijing* 易經 or *Zhouyi* 周易). No other preimperial text can even remotely match this wealth of information.

Zuozhuan is doubly invaluable for those who deal with China's early historiographic tradition. It is the only sizeable historical text from the preimperial era that can be compared to later Chinese official historiography in terms of the thickness of coverage of major political events and in terms of combining rich information about the past with sophisticated didactic devices. It served as a major source material and, just as much, also a major source of inspiration for the fathers of China's imperial historiography, Sima Tan 司馬談 (d. 110 BCE) and his son, Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145–ca. 90 BCE), for their *Records of the Historian* (*Shiji* 史記). And yet *Zuozhuan* differs dramatically from *Records of the Historian* in terms of the transparency of its design. To excerpt some points from Kern's summary (p. 153): "Its way of narrating the past is strikingly unique across the ancient world: neither the author nor the scope or content of the text are identified; the text does not speak in a single voice but appears compiled from multiple, diverse sources; it does not have a specific focus or topic ... it mentions a very large number of historical actors, but more than a few names appear only once, without any further explanation as to the person's identity or historical significance; it contains any number of historical details whose significance is entirely obscure." That scholars continue to debate who composed *Zuozhuan*, when, and for what purpose is, therefore, not surprising.

Zuozhuan's richness on the one hand and its immense complexity on the other explain why, even after two millennia of its continuous study, the text still offers many new avenues of research; and thus, the current volume attempts to engage *Zuozhuan* anew. We hope that by providing additional angles of discussion, we shall contribute to further engagement with *Zuozhuan* both by historians of China and by colleagues working on other historiographic traditions.

1 Debates about *Zuozhuan*

As just mentioned, *Zuozhuan* is one of the most controversial texts in China's history. The millennia-old debates about its nature (whether or not it is the *Annals'* commentary), time of composition, authorship, and historical reliability have been summarized in several major studies and will not be addressed

here anew in detail.² Instead, we want to outline the basic parameters of earlier debates and explain how our volume differs from them in terms of the questions asked.

At the heart of traditional (pre-twentieth century) controversies stands the question of *Zuozhuan's* relations to the *Annals*. The import of this question is often undervalued by modern scholars, but it was central in traditional China. Recall that the *Annals* were viewed from the Han 漢 dynasty (206/202 BCE³–220 CE) onward, if not already before, as the epitome of the political wisdom of Confucius 孔子 (551–479 BCE), China's most revered thinker. The terse and laconic text allegedly sufficed to overawe “rebellious ministers and murderous sons” 亂臣賊子 (*Mengzi* 6.9) and “to bring order to generations of turmoil and return them to the right” 撥亂世，反諸正 (*Gongyang zhuan*, Ai 14.1). The veneration of the *Annals* became fully visible early in the Han. As one of the five canonical texts of the Confucian curriculum, the *Annals* were taught in the Imperial Academy by officially appointed court academicians (*boshi* 博士) explicitly dedicated to elucidating its “great principles in subtle words” 微言大義.

The earliest official commentary on the *Annals* approved by the Han court was the *Gongyang Tradition* or *Commentary*⁴ (*Gongyang zhuan* 公羊傳). This tradition, discussed by Gentz in this volume,⁵ was predicated on the idea that the *Annals*, edited by Confucius, contains the ultimate blueprint for proper political order. The same idea is endorsed by the second officially approved commentary on the *Annals*, the *Guliang Tradition* or *Commentary* (*Guliang zhuan* 穀梁傳). However, when the Han imperial librarian Liu Xin 劉歆 (46 BCE–23 CE) proposed, toward the end of the first century BCE, to establish an academician office for *Zuozhuan* (the *Zuo Tradition* or *Commentary*) he encountered bitter resentment. The details of the controversy are not known, except that Liu Xin's opponents insisted that *Zuozhuan* was not a real commentary on the *Annals*.⁶ This claim was repeated by countless opponents of *Zuozhuan* ever since, peaking at the very end of China's imperial history with

2 See details in Schaberg 2001; Pines 2002; Li 2007; and Durrant, Li, and Schaberg 2016, “Introduction.”

3 Liu Bang 劉邦 (d. 195 BCE) became King of Han in 206 BCE and the founding emperor of the Han dynasty in 202 BCE.

4 *Zhuan* 傳, the homographic nominal form of *chuan* 傳 (“to transmit”), literally means “tradition” in the sense of “exegetical tradition,” which in its written exposition becomes a type of “commentary.”

5 See also Gentz 2001, 2005a, 2005b and 2015, and more in Queen and Gentz, forthcoming.

6 *Hanshu* 36: 1967–70.

the attempt by Kang Youwei 康有為 (1859–1927) to dismiss *Zuozhuan* in its entirety as Liu Xin's forgery.⁷ Whereas Kang's claim that *Zuozhuan* is nothing but a forgery was swiftly rejected, the notion that the "original" *Zuozhuan* had little if anything to do with the *Annals* remained the mainstream scholarly conclusion throughout the twentieth century.⁸

The most common argument against *Zuozhuan*'s identification as a commentary is the text's format. Unlike the line-by-line catechistic commentary of the *Gongyang zhuan* and *Guliang zhuan*, *Zuozhuan* provides primarily broad historical narratives, many of which are only indirectly related to the *Annals*' entries. Yet this is arguably a minor point. What is at stake—and not articulated openly by traditional scholars—is the subversive nature of *Zuozhuan* as commentary. *Zuozhuan* dissociates the *Annals*, even if not explicitly, from Confucius's editorial efforts. The *Zuo* version of the *Annals* ends with Confucius's death in 479 BCE, while both the *Gongyang* and *Guliang* versions end with the capture of a mythical beast, the *lin* 麟, in 481 BCE. Whereas the final entry of the *Zuo* version marks immense respect to Confucius, who actually becomes therewith the only member of low nobility to be mentioned in the *Annals*,⁹ it also means that Confucius could not have edited the *Annals*' final version, let alone composed it. Second, unlike the *Gongyang zhuan* and *Guliang zhuan*, *Zuozhuan* is largely devoid of the disproportionate reverence for the *Annals*. Aside from two panegyrics to the *Annals*, oddly attached to otherwise inconspicuous entries (Cheng 14.4 and Zhao 31.5), *Zuozhuan* rarely if at all treats the *Annals* as reflecting supreme political wisdom. Rather, one gets the impression that the *Annals* is the product of the Lu scribes—a highly respected court chronicle but not the sacrosanct text by the singular sage.¹⁰ And third, much more consequentially, *Zuozhuan* exposes not a few problematic entries in the *Annals*, which further undermine the latter's credentials as a proper guide to political action.

7 For Kang Youwei's views, see Kang Youwei 1955; for criticism of Kang's shortcomings, see van Ess 1994: 148–50; for the intellectual background of Kang's iconoclastic assault on *Zuozhuan* and certain other classics, see Wong You-tsu 2010.

8 By contrast, more recent studies tend to confirm *Zuozhuan*'s status as a commentary; see Zhao Shengqun 2000 and Van Auken 2016.

9 Note that both the *Gongyang* and *Guliang* versions of the *Annals* include an entry (at the end of Xiang 21) about the birth of Confucius. In the *Zuozhuan* version, this entry is absent. Normally, the *Annals* does not record births of individuals, the only exception being the case of the future Lord Zhuang of Lu in Huan 6.5 (see also Durrant, Li, and Schaberg 2016: 94n47). All references to *Chunqiu* and *Zuozhuan* are to the lord year, with its subsections further identified after Durrant, Li, and Schaberg 2016, who in turn draw their identifiers from Yang Bojun 1990.

10 For a few examples, see Gentz, this volume, p. 267, note 85.

This last point remained muted throughout much of China's imperial period, although some astute critics such as Liu Zhiji 劉知幾 (661–721) pointed out that, judging from *Zuozhuan*, the *Annals* contains several instances of politically or morally problematic records, including, scandalously, the repeated coverup of rulers' assassinations.¹¹ *Zuozhuan* does not make this criticism explicit but incidentally hints that the *Annals'* records were adjusted due to political contingency rather than lofty principles. For instance, the Xi 28.2 entry in *Chunqiu* was designed, according to *Zuozhuan's* interpretation, to obscure Lu's betrayal of its alliance with Chu 楚 and Lu's bowing to Jin's 晉 pressure. Elsewhere, the text implies that the role of two Wei 衛 ministers who expelled their ruler was concealed through post-factum manipulation.¹² Worse, as noted by Liu Zhiji, the *Zuozhuan* narrative hints that the *Annals* covered up several assassinations of rulers, reproducing the false record of the incumbent's death presumably provided by the assassins themselves.¹³ Such a critique of the *Annals* in light of *Zuozhuan* undermined, even if inadvertently, the very foundations of the reverence for the *Annals* in the imperial era. That defendants of the *Annals* were ready to invest considerable efforts to discredit *Zuozhuan* comes therefore as no surprise.

This backdrop explains not just the intensity of debates about *Zuozhuan's* commentarial value but also much of the ostensibly unrelated interest in the text's authorship and date of composition. Sima Qian, who was the first to address the authorship issue, attributed the text's composition to Confucius's contemporary, "a noble man from the state of Lu, Zuo Qiuming [or Zuoqiu Ming]" 魯君子左丘明 (*Shiji* 14: 509–10). Liu Xin used this attribution to bolster *Zuozhuan's* commentarial import. He claimed that "Zuo Qiuming shared the sage's (Confucius's) likes and dislikes; he personally had met the Master. As for *Gongyang* and *Guliang*, they were composed after [Confucius's] seventy disciples; the hearsay transmission cannot be compared to personal observation; hence [these two commentaries] differ [from *Zuozhuan*] in terms of details and abridgement" 左丘明好惡與聖人同，親見夫子，而公羊、穀梁在

11 See *Shitong* 14: 397–99. Note that Pu Qilong 浦起龍 (1679–1762), the author of the most authoritative commentary to *Shitong*, seems appalled by the possibility that Liu Zhiji assaults the *Annals'* credibility and tries to offer an alternative interpretation to Liu's analysis; see Pu's notes in *ibid.*, p. 397.

12 See the *Chunqiu* record in Xiang 14.4 versus the *Zuozhuan* record in Xiang 20.7; see more in Durrant, Li, and Schaberg 2016: 1006n365 and the explanation to the entry Xiang 20.7 on p. 1075.

13 See *Chunqiu*, Xiang 7.9, and *Zuozhuan*, Xiang 7.9 (discussed in Pines 2009: 329–31); *Chunqiu*, Zhao 1.10, and *Zuozhuan*, Zhao 1.13; *Chunqiu*, Ai 10.3, and *Zuozhuan*, Ai 10.3. Van Auken (2023: 167–70) discusses the discrepancies between the *Annals'* and the *Zuozhuan* versions of assassination stories but does not mention these three cases.

七十子後，傳聞之與親見之，其詳略不同 (*Hanshu* 36: 1967). To undermine this argument about *Zuozhuan's* superiority, some of *Zuozhuan's* opponents focused on refuting its attribution to Confucius's contemporary.

Generations of scholars starting with Dan Zhu 啖助 (724–770) put forward a wide range of theories about the dating and authorship of *Zuozhuan* or of its commentarial segments. Some of these theories are based on astute observations; others are purely speculative. In many (albeit not all) cases, the hidden goal of the discussion was to discredit *Zuozhuan's* value as a commentary. For instance, when Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) averred that *Zuozhuan* might have been produced by a Chu scribe, he did so primarily to question its connection with the *Annals*. First, the inference was that the *Zuozhuan* author “had *not* personally met” Confucius; and second, the text was associated with the culturally peripheral state of Chu, which implied that the *Zuo* interpretation of the *Annals* was less compelling, coming only from the margins of the Zhou cultured world.¹⁴ For the vast majority of traditional scholars engaged in the dating and authorship discussion, what mattered was not *Zuozhuan's* historical reliability (which was frequently hailed even by the text's critics, such as the aforementioned Dan Zhu), but rather its validity as the commentary on the revered canonical text.¹⁵

In the twentieth century, the questions of *Zuozhuan's* authorship and of its time, or times, of composition—largely dissociated from the previous burden of commentarial debates—received the lion's share of scholarship on the text. Modern scholars used the achievements of their predecessors and added to them new methods and insights from philology to paleo-astronomy, and from archeology to paleography. They arrived at a bewildering cacophony of conclusions, attributing *Zuozhuan's* composition to dozens of personalities—from Confucius himself to Liu Xin. Accordingly, the composition of *Zuozhuan* was dated to any period from the fifth century BCE to the last years of the Former Han dynasty (前漢, 206/202 BCE–9 CE).¹⁶ Very impressive efforts were made to distinguish between earlier and later layers of *Zuozhuan*. These discussions enriched the field immensely; without them none of the most recent studies

14 *Zhuzi yulei* 83: 2152–53. Zhu Xi attributed *Zuozhuan* to an anonymous descendant of the famous Chu scribe-of-the-left, Yixiang 左史倚相. The ostensible reason for this attribution was that *Zuozhuan* is “most detailed” when it narrates Chu history. The observation itself may have been borrowed from Zhu's elder contemporary, Zheng Qiao 鄭樵 (1104–1162), for whose views, see *Liu jing aolun* 4: 36–39.

15 Dan Zhu was much impressed with the degree of historical detail provided in *Zuozhuan* but suggested that the commentarial layer was added by later transmitters; see *Chunqiu jizhuan zuanli* 1: 5–6.

16 See a brief summary in Pines 2002: 27–28, q.v. for further references.

could have been accomplished. However, it is now clear that we should move to a different set of questions.

First, the question of *Zuozhuan's* authorship has lost much of its relevance. The idea of an active author engaged in dialogue with his readers, who expresses his personal feelings, and hints at his hidden or overt agenda gained importance in China only in the Han dynasty, most notably with Sima Qian.¹⁷ Earlier, the authors particularly of historical texts preferred to remain hidden, and speak, if at all, through the unspecific voice of “a noble man” (see Kern, this volume). This alone makes the question of “who composed *Zuozhuan*” less important for the study of the text (to say nothing of the inevitably speculative nature of any conclusion). But there is another reason to leave aside the authorship question: the understanding that *Zuozhuan* is a composite text to which many individuals contributed at very different periods of time.

Recall that *Zuozhuan's* composition involved several stages. The text was not written from scratch but incorporated divergent sources, some of which were probably lengthy local histories from the major states of the Springs and Autumns world. (These histories were in all likelihood themselves composite works that incorporated archival materials and stories coming from oral lore or from the court scribes' imagination; see Pines and Durrant, this volume.) Then came the major step: at a certain point in the fifth or fourth century BCE—as still under debate—the primary compiler(s) of *Zuozhuan* selected those sections of these histories that were relevant to the *Annals*, merged them, and arranged them chronologically so as to fit, not always successfully, the *Annals'* narrative, eliminating in the process nearly all double accounts of a single event (Schaberg, this volume). This was not the end of the story, though. Subsequent transmitters and editors appear to have intervened in the text by, for instance, adding favorable accounts of their patrons, expanding meta-textual layers (such as the “noble man” comments), and so forth. This lengthy process ended with the editorial efforts by Liu Xin, or, possibly, even only with *Zuozhuan's* most renowned commentator, Du Yu 杜預 (222–285), who finally gave the text its current form.¹⁸ Speaking of a single “author” against this backdrop is untenable and unproductive. A reasonable,

17 See Kern 2016; see also Zhang Hanmo 2018. For further references to the problem of authorship in early China, see Lewis 1999, Du 2018, Kern 2018 and 2022, Li 1994 and 2017, Nylan 2014, Beecroft 2010, and Walker 1982: 22–87. For the possibility that the oldest surviving single-authored work is *New Discourses* (*Xinyu* 新語) by Lu Jia 陸賈 (ca. 228–ca. 140 BCE), see Goldin and Sabatini 2020: 6.

18 That Liu Xin's intervention may have influenced certain aspects of *Zuozhuan*, such as the dating of certain events, is asserted in Xu Jianwei 2017: 181–246; cf. Qiao Zhizhong (2016), who avers Liu's more substantial intervention in the text's content. Du Yu's

even if not incontestable, assumption might be that the initial compilation of different local histories and their merging with the *Annals'* commentary was perhaps the work of a small group of individuals. The exceptional carefulness of *Zuozhuan's* chronological arrangement noted by Schaberg in this volume supports this scenario.

The above observation explains also why it is so difficult to speak of the time of *Zuozhuan's* composition. Attempts to fix this composition to one short period of time, such as 404–389 BCE, as suggested by Yang Bojun,¹⁹ are intrinsically weak. To demonstrate the difficulty of arriving at a convincing answer, it suffices to consider a single example of an irresolvable contradiction. *Zuozhuan* contains no fewer than five predictions that were based on calculations of Jupiter's position. As paleo-astronomers have demonstrated, these calculations were retroactively produced after 375 or 365 BCE and then incorporated into the text.²⁰ On the other hand, *Zuozhuan* contains a famous prediction by the “noble man,” according to which “Qin will not march eastward again” 秦之不復東征 (Wen 6.3). This prediction was probably made in the fifth century BCE, when Qin's power reached its lowest point; it surely could not have been made after the 360s BCE, when Qin renewed its eastward expansion.²¹ These examples of mutually contradictory dates can easily be multiplied. They suffice to clarify: *Zuozhuan* comprises several temporal layers. Efforts to distinguish between earlier and later strata have yielded many impressive results and will continue.²² But overall, there is no possibility of fixing with certainty either the date of the initial compilation or the dates of multiple later redactional efforts.

major intervention was the interspersing of the *Annals* with *Zuozhuan* (Durrant, Li, and Schaberg 2016: lvii).

19 Yang Bojun 1990: 36–43.

20 These cases (*Zuozhuan*, Xiang 28.1, 30.10, Zhao 8.6, 9.4, 11.2) are summarized in Hu Nianyi 1987: 57–61. Qiao Zhizhong (2016) puts forward strong arguments in favor of identifying these passages and a few parallel passages in the *Guoyu* 國語 (*Discourses of the States*) as Liu Xin's interpolation.

21 After a prolonged period of relative weakness in the fifth century BCE (*Shiji* 5: 198–202), Qin regained power under Lords Xian 秦獻公 (r. 384–362 BCE) and Xiao 秦孝公 (r. 361–338 BCE). It scored its first major victories against its eastern neighbor, Wei 魏, in 364 and 362 BCE.

22 For major studies that deal with the dating of *Zuozhuan* and its different layers, see, e.g., Gu Jiegang 1988 (a summary of Gu's lectures from the 1940s); Zhang Handong 1988 (penned in the 1960s); Zhao Guangxian 1980–1981; Hu Nianyi 1987 (originally published in 1981); and Wang He 1984 and 2011, superseded in Wang He 2019. See also Pines 2002: 221–26 and 233–46 for further exploration of this topic.

By the late twentieth century, as the field became saturated with discussions about *Zuozhuan's* dating and authorship, academic interest shifted to other questions. In China and Japan, the intensity of the explorations of *Zuozhuan* as a text receded, with scholars preferring instead to mine its information about Zhou history.²³ In Western scholarship, by contrast, a long period of only occasional articles on *Zuozhuan* ended with an outburst of publications that explored a broad range of topics related to *Zuozhuan's* intellectual content, rhetoric, narrative patterns, and the ways it creates and problematizes the meaning of the past.²⁴ These publications culminated with a pathbreaking translation cum study of *Zuozhuan* published by Stephen Durrant, Li Wai-yee and David Schaberg in 2016.²⁵ This excellently annotated translation is immensely helpful for navigating the text, as it elucidates complex interrelations among its component parts. It made *Zuozhuan* incomparably more accessible to students, scholars from other subfields of Sinology, and, most laudably, to comparatists working on other historiographic traditions. Together, the new studies and the new translation of *Zuozhuan* allow us to take new steps toward understanding this fascinating text. This is the goal of the present volume.

2 Chapter Summaries

Scholars who have dedicated a significant part of their career to *Zuozhuan* studies may well feel frustrated. Our efforts all too often appear like failing at an impossible, indeed sisyphian task. Anything we can produce—even a lengthy monograph—will cover only a few aspects of *Zuozhuan* and must leave dozens of topics beyond its manageable scope of discussion. No single explanatory framework can cover the text in its entirety; no master key unlocks all its doors

23 For notable exceptions, see Yamane 2009 and Wang He 2019 (based on his much earlier studies). Slightly earlier, Hirase Takeo dedicated a lengthy—and very controversial—monograph to *Zuozhuan* (Hirase 1998).

24 These topics are explored in three complementary monographs, published within just a few years of one another, by Schaberg 2001, Pines 2002, and Li 2007, heralded by two extensive and competing essays published in the same issue of *Early China*, Pines 1997 and Schaberg 1997. By contrast, from the time of Bernhard Karlgren's (1889–1978) pioneering study of the language of *Zuozhuan* (1926) to the very end of the twentieth century, *Zuozhuan* merited less than a dozen articles in all European languages combined, most importantly Wilhelm 1959; Rubin 1966; Felber 1966; John Wang 1977; Egan 1977; Johnson 1981; Smith 1989; Boltz 1990; and Durrant 1992. In addition, Watson (1989) provided a partial translation cum study.

25 Earlier full translations of *Zuozhuan* into Western languages had been Legge 1872 and Couvreur 1951.

and secrets; interpretations that fit well some of *Zuozhuan's* segments appear irrelevant in the face of others. The problem is not just the sheer magnitude of the text, but primarily its immense heterogeneity. For illustration, suffice it to recall Geoffrey E.R. Lloyd's insightful summary in the first volume of *The Oxford History of Historical Writing*. Lloyd enumerates the aims and objectives of historians working in different places of the ancient world, in different sociopolitical contexts, and with different audiences in mind. Each of his eleven items—from (1) entertainment to (2) commemoration, (3) glorification and celebration, (4) legitimatizing the ruling regime, (5) justifying past actions, (6) explaining why things happened as they did, (7) offering instruction on the basis of past experience, (8) providing records for administrative use, (9) warning, admonishing, or remonstrating, (10) criticizing others' interpretations of the past, and, finally, to (11) 'just' recording the past²⁶—can match some of *Zuozhuan's* segments. None can be used as the singularly correct approach to, or explanation of, the entire text.

To fully grasp *Zuozhuan's* complexities, we sometimes need to go beyond its textual confines by addressing its source materials, its sociopolitical setting (the understanding of which requires excursions into paleography and archeology, among others), its dialogue with other texts, and multiple interpretations by later readers which shape many of our viewpoints. Looking at *Zuozhuan* from each of these angles provides very different understandings of its nature. Demonstrating the advantages of this multi-faceted perspective is the major goal of this volume.

The ten contributions to this volume can be divided into two groups. To use a traditional Chinese metaphor, the first five look at *Zuozhuan* from its roots and the trunk—its source materials, narrative patterns, and meta-narrative devices. The second group focuses on the branches—understanding *Zuozhuan* from comparative perspectives. The division is naturally not rigid—both “internal” and “external” perspectives are duly present in most of the chapters—but it is heuristically useful to distinguish between two types of discussion.

The first chapters focus on *Zuozhuan's* sources. Yuri Pines assesses these primarily through the comparison of the *Zuozhuan* narrative with recently discovered materials, in particular the bamboo manuscript *Xinian* 繫年 (*String of Years* or *Linked Years*) from the Tsinghua University collection of looted manuscripts. In his interpretation, the primary building blocks of *Zuozhuan* were local histories from the major states of the Springs and Autumns period. These histories, probably prepared by local court scribes, were themselves composite works, which incorporated contemporaneous records of major events as well

26 Lloyd 2011: 603.

as other materials coming from oral lore or the scribes' imagination. The incorporation of these divergent sources explains, in Pines's view, the coexistence of highly different modes of narration and different historical and ideological viewpoints in *Zuozhuan*.

Chen Minzhen's contribution focuses on just one—yet exceptionally important—source text of *Zuozhuan*, namely the *Annals*. Chen investigates one of the *Annals*' most perplexing features—the abundance of blank seasonal records, which inform the reader only about the season and its first month without giving any additional information. This feature, according to Chen, may be connected to the materiality of the *Annals* manuscript text, which was almost certainly written on bamboo slips. Judging from a few recently discovered calendrical texts, we may assume that the yearly account of the *Annals* was filled into a table, in which seasonal divisions were prearranged. If nothing noteworthy happened, the seasonal record remained untouched (or just the number of the first seasonal month was added). This understanding not only offers a plausible solution to the riddle of the blank records but also allows us to come to terms with the *Annals*' notorious brevity: the table format would have precluded detailed discussions of the reported events.

The *Annals* or *Annals*-like records are also the focus of Stephen Durrant's contribution. Durrant engages the segments of *Zuozhuan* that are all too often ignored by scholars—the highly detailed but lifeless accounts of events that recur in many narratives (often side-by-side with more engaging and picturesque details). Do these segments come from the *Annals*-like court chronicles from such states as Zheng 鄭, Jin, and the Zhou royal domain, or do they come from other, more detailed records prepared by court scribes? Does the abundance of dates (including hundreds of cases in which the exact day of an event is provided) imply higher factual accuracy or at least higher reliability of the narrative? Durrant abstains from definitive answers, preferring instead to systematically analyze multiple aspects of these annalistic records in order to provide a solid foundation for future research. What is clear is that *Zuozhuan* is exceptional in the landscape of preimperial historical and quasihistorical texts by its inclusion of these “arid” accounts. Plausibly, their inclusion was a result of the habitual incorporation of the text's primary sources through some kind of “copy and paste” method. Future studies can utilize Durrant's insights to test this hypothesis further.

Li Wai-yee's essay shifts the focus to the more picturesque and literarily and philosophically engaging segments of *Zuozhuan*; yet, much like Durrant, she notes *Zuozhuan*'s exceptionality. Many accounts of events in the text contain “inconvenient” or “unnecessary” details, which problematize or even undermine the text's avowed moralizing message. These details are absent from

other narrations of the same anecdotes in preimperial and early imperial historical and philosophical texts. Why do they persist in *Zuozhuan*? Is it because of the text's incorporation of different materials that have left some "suture points"? Is it the text's sequential nature, which by itself challenges the logical self-containment of moral lessons? Is it an unintentional result of the conjunction of chains of anecdotes with different orientations? Or, more intriguingly, is it a conscious narrative device employed by *Zuozhuan* compilers to allow "deliberations on value judgments and definitions of value" (p. 150)? Li shows how in some narratives "inconvenient details consistently 'convene' and result in a conception of moral action premised on efficacy and recognition of practical limits" (p. 150). Once again, a definitive explanation of the abundance of "inconvenient" details in the text remains elusive. Yet either as a conscious device or as an accidental byproduct of *Zuozhuan*'s composite, multi-source nature, these details add unusual depth to *Zuozhuan*, allowing it to challenge the simplistic and heavy-handed didacticism of many Warring States-period anecdotes.

Martin Kern shifts our attention from *Zuozhuan*'s narrative to its meta-narrative level. The latter is exemplified primarily in the comments of the "noble man" (often identified as the staged voice of the text's compiler[s]), which are scattered throughout *Zuozhuan* as seemingly detached from the narratives themselves. In addition, comments on the *Annals*, statements on what is and isn't in accordance with "ritual" (*li* 禮), and numerous quotations from the canonical texts, most notably what became the *Classic of Poetry* (*Shijing* 詩經), operate as additional meta-textual devices. Kern demonstrates how deeply these devices are interwoven both with one another and with the narrative, on occasion not responding to the latter but, intriguingly, driving it. Kern proposes a decidedly new reading of parts of *Zuozhuan*—less as a historical narrative but than as a text designed for communal and didactic engagement. In this reading, the "noble man" is theatrically staged as the ideal reader whose utterances "*perform and externalize* the act of interpretation in a demonstrative and didactic fashion, prompting the reader to connect history, historiography, historical evaluation, and poetry" (p. 165, italics in original).

David Schaberg's essay is the first of three chapters that compare *Zuozhuan* with historical and quasihistorical texts from the Warring States period. Schaberg focuses on the *Stratagems of the Warring States* (*Zhanguo ce* 戰國策), the largest collection of speeches attributed to "roving persuaders" (*youshui* 游說) or "peripatetic men-of-service" (*youshi* 遊士) of the Warring States. The abundance of speeches in *Zhanguo ce* resembles to some extent *Zuozhuan*; but Schaberg shows how different the two compilations are. In the *Stratagems*, the context of the speech is often blurred, as "precision and consistency were not

criteria for the preservation of speeches” (p. 224). This approach is consistent with the text’s mode of “treating historical circumstances as subject to manipulation through speech” (p. 215). By contrast, the strict chronological arrangement of *Zuozhuan* narratives, its careful exclusion of multiple versions of a single event or a speech, its “internal discipline ... which is also a kind of ascetism and deliberate forgetting” (p. 237) present an entirely different approach to historical events. Schaberg’s highly original comparison of *Zuozhuan* with the *Stratagems* opens new and promising avenues or further research and discussion.

Joachim Gentz in his chapter tackles the *Gongyang Tradition*, that is, *Zuozhuan*’s major rival as the *Annals*’ commentary. This text is commonly disparaged by *Zuozhuan* scholars, (including one contributor to this introduction) as an ahistorical commentary; in Gentz’s own words, it is predicated more on “ritual reality,”²⁷ being more often prescriptive than descriptive. Against dismissive views that treat *Gongyang Tradition* as either ahistorical or tedious (or both), Gentz defends *Gongyang Tradition* as “the most sophisticated of all early Chinese historiographies in terms of theoretical reflection on historiographical principles” (p. 250), the first Chinese text to reflect on the reliability of the sources of a historical text; on the process of selecting and using these sources; and on the historical context and intent of the author and its impact on the formation of the text. Furthermore, Gentz’s argues, *Gongyang Tradition* presents the *Annals* as transmitting “the perfect ritual and moral standards of the Zhou” through their perfect textual representation (p. 277). However, with this, the methodologically more rigorous *Gongyang Tradition* also appears less concerned with historical accuracy than *Zuozhuan*, a text without a single moral perspective.

Kai Vogelsang explores a new vision of history which he sees emerging during the second half of the Warring States period. It was then that “the paradigm of ‘exemplary history,’ which was based on analogies in which historical patterns repeated themselves” (p. 319), was challenged. For *Zuozhuan*, grounded as it is in the aristocratic age, continuity and stability are most prized. The past and the present were parts of the same continuum as it was “assumed that the course of history always follows the same patterns: similar actions will lead to similar results” (p. 294). In contrast, the new historical outlook associated with promoters of the *fa* 法 tradition—conventionally dubbed “Legalists”; Vogelsang prefers “Political Realists”—emphasized constant historical change, and that the past is largely irrelevant to the present. This surprisingly “modern” outlook (which Vogelsang explicitly compares to Schiller’s) proliferated during

²⁷ Gentz 2005a.

the Warring States period yet largely waned thereafter. Why the “exemplary” history model associated with *Zuozhuan* and endorsed by countless anecdote producers proved more viable in the long term remains a topic for further discussion.

The final two chapters present a different comparative angle, namely, the intercultural one. Luraghi and O’Gorman outline basic aspects of early Greek (fifth to fourth century BCE) and Roman (third to first century BCE) historiography that throw the peculiarities of *Zuozhuan* and early Chinese writings of history into sharper relief. They also chart the course for future comparative exploration.

As noted above, one immediate difference between the Greco-Roman cases and that of preimperial China is the notably weak (if at all existing) idea of authorship in the latter.²⁸ In both Mediterranean cultures, historiography is inseparable from the figure—and configuration—of its author whose personal experience, erudition, and (in the Roman case) political standing are of crucial importance to his authority and credibility. Moreover, historians early on formed “a sort of tightly-knit guild” (Luraghi, p. 340), which encouraged them to polemicize with each other—overtly or covertly—and to engage in the conscious positioning of their work vis-à-vis that of their predecessors. All these features will become prominent in imperial China but are absent from the world of *Zuozhuan*, in which all but a few historians remain unidentified. One cannot imagine an early Chinese historian who, like Cato, openly cites his own speeches (O’Gorman, p. 363n25). While the notion of a “tightly-knit guild” may fit well the stratum of court scribes who were arguably the earliest producers of historical knowledge in China, we know nothing about their personal background, their views of their peers or predecessors, or their methodology and principles. Even where we might discern a methodological debate—for example, among the different interpretations of the *Annals* (Gentz, this volume)—this debate will remain implicit well until much later, that is, the end of the Former Han dynasty.

The second major difference is related to the sources used by the historian. In Greece, as Luraghi emphasizes (p. 337), there was “a very clear preference for oral sources over written ones” (even if gradually the matter changed, especially due to the broad incorporation of the works of predecessors). In the case of *Zuozhuan*, where oral lore is surely present though difficult to ascertain in

28 *Zuozhuan* speakers cite several times the maxims of Scribe Yi 史佚 who was apparently an early Zhou personality (see *Zuozhuan*, Xi 15.4; Wen 15.4; Cheng 4.4; Xuan 12.3; Xiang 14.9; Zhao 1.13). Whether or not these maxims or *Records* (*zhi* 志) were related to a systematic historical work penned by Scribe Yi is impossible to ascertain.

scope, it seems clear that considerable segments of the narrative are based on archival materials that, along with oral sources, were mediated by various local histories incorporated into *Zuozhuan* (Pines and Durrant, this volume). In most stories in *Zuozhuan*, archival sources appear to provide a factual skeleton to which further materials—oral or otherwise—were added; this is not the case for Greek works.

The difference in sources is most obviously reflected on the level of *spatium historicum*. Unlike in Greece, where Herodotus established a threshold of historical memory of about a hundred years—and even this was too long a period for Thucydides—for the *Zuozhuan* compilers such a threshold would have been meaningless.²⁹ To the contrary, the *Zuozhuan* narrative peaks in its density almost fifty years before it ends, that is, in the latter half of the reign of Lord Zhao of Lu (541–510 BCE), whereas the last two reigns, which are closer to the compilers' life-time, are depicted more sketchily (Durrant; see also the appendices to his essay). Setting aside Pines's (p. 56) speculation of the "double date" of *Zuozhuan*'s initial composition—the possibility that originally, the text was supposed to end with Lord Zhao's reign—we are justified to say that the *Zuozhuan* compilers trusted transmitted sources more than personal or more recent experience. In China, once again, this would only change with Sima Qian who speaks of his personal travels, interviews, and observations.

The early Chinese historians' dislike of active engagement with the immediate past could be related less to their preference for a certain type of sources and more to political sensibilities. Depiction of most recent events could be a dangerous task, as explicitly acknowledged in *Gongyang Tradition* (Gentz, pp. 261–62). This allows us to focus on another angle of similarities and differences between historians in China, Greece, and Rome—the political importance of the historical work. Here, there is a certain difference between Greek and Roman historians. Whereas the Greek historians (most notably Thucydides) often focused on political and military history and surely believed in the importance of mastering history for politicians and would-be politicians, they "did not present the apportioning of praise and blame and the provision of models of moral behavior as a specific task of the historian" (Luraghi, p. 329). For the Romans, on the other hand, the "civic voice" was more important. Cicero (cited by O'Gorman, p. 376) seems to be amused by the fact that "history delights men of the lowest fortune, with no hope of undertaking public actions, even craftsmen," and those who "are removed from the expectation of making history by old age." Cicero's implications are clear: the writing

29 Gentz in this volume identifies in *Gongyang zhuan* a notion of *spatium historicum* of two centuries (p. 255).

of history should target policy-makers, even if it tangentially also entertains broader segments of the population. This view matches nicely the Chinese case. *Zuozhuan* repeatedly reminds the readers of the importance of mastering history for political success—be it in gaining factual knowledge of important precedents, understanding the patterns of the events unfolding, or just gleaning moral lessons from the past.³⁰ Without a doubt, the text addresses the educated members of the political and cultural elite while remaining manifestly inaccessible to the people of “the lowest fortune” (who, nonetheless, may well be the subject of elite concern, as O’Gorman reminds us). In early China, “the apportioning of praise and blame” is the historian’s most urgent and noble task.

We hope that the preliminary comparative observations in the present volume will lay the foundations for a more systematic cross-cultural comparison of premodern historiography. Who wrote history and for what audience, what were the preferred sources, what was the habitual *spatium historicum*, how was the historians’ authority constituted, how did different historical texts interact—all these topics could be fruitfully compared across a variety of traditions in the ancient world. Furthermore, the role of historiography in broader political and intellectual processes is another topic in need of systematic cross-cultural comparison.

Comparisons aside, the essays collected in this volume offer further directions for exploring *Zuozhuan*. For instance, can we discern distinct narrative patterns in textual segments that come from different states? Can we advance further in trying to understand the mystery of the shrinking narrative in the last forty-odd years of the text? And finally, can we extend the insights from *Zuozhuan* studies to the analysis of another early—and less examined—text that shares material with *Zuozhuan* but presents it in a rather different format, namely, the *Discourses of the States* (*Guoyu* 國語)? Can we utilize this comparison also to learn more about the peculiarities of *Zuozhuan* itself?³¹ Wherever we may turn our attention, *Zuozhuan* will remain inexhaustible for generations to come. A true classic of the human occupation with the past, it will have “never finished saying what it has to say” (Italo Calvino).

30 See, e.g., Li 2007: 371–96; Schaberg 2013.

31 The connections between the two texts, which share a large number of overlapping and sometimes almost identical narratives, have been discussed many times, especially in light of Kang Youwei’s claim that Liu Xin used the *Discourses* in his alleged forgery of *Zuozhuan*. Today, it appears clear that the two texts did not come from the same authors or compilers, or that one borrowed from the other (Zhang Yiren 1962 and 1963); more likely, parts of the *Discourses* shared the same source materials with *Zuozhuan* (e.g., Boltz 1990). A systematic discussion of how these sources were utilized by the compilers of the two texts is still lacking.

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