CHAPTER 5

Co-authorship without Authors? Some Perspectives from Early China

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For a full millennium after our earliest material witnesses of Chinese writing around 1250 BCE, ancient Chinese civilisation did not prize individual authorship.* It did not share the Greco-Roman emphasis on named creators that in Greece emerged in the late eighth century BCE, first known to us from Hesiod in the *Theogony*, and extended beyond textual compositions also to the "making" (*poiêsis*) of works of painting and sculpture, as seen in pottery from the late seventh century BCE onward. The moment a major Greek text became widely known and travelled the panhellenic world, it carried with it the name of its author. Sometimes that name may have been a retrospective attribution or even fiction: Homer the author came into being only through the panhellenic rhapsodic performances of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as a function of their actualisation, reception and interpretation. But when this happened, it was fully aligned with the procedures of and ideas about contemporary literature where *living* authors of the time were known and celebrated by name and dead ones cherished by their latter-born interpreters.

Not so in China before its first imperial unification in 221 BCE. The canonical curriculum[1] of the "Six Arts" (*liu yi* 六藝)—the *Poetry* (*Shi* 詩), the *Changes* (*Yi* 易), the *Documents* (*Shu* 書), the *Rituals* (*Li* 禮), the *Music* (*Yue* 樂) and the *Springs and Autumns Annals* (*Chunqiu* 春秋)—had developed into recognised textual repertoires sustained by practices of teaching, learning, writing, performance and commentary no later than in the fourth century BCE; yet very rarely was any of it attributed to an author, or authors.[2] These texts were

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1 Canonical in a quasi-religious sense; see Guo Xi'an 郭西安, "Bianwei yu canjian: 'jing' de dangdai yingyi jiqi kuayuji xieshang" 變位與參鑒: "經" 的當代英譯及其跨語際協商, *Wenxue pinglun* 文學評論 4 (2020): 5–15.

2 On very rare occasions, we find just a shorter text associated with the canons attributed to an early culture hero. For example, the Duke of Zhou 周公 (r. 1042–1035 BCE) in the *Documents* chapter "The Metal-Bound Coffer" ("Jinteng" 金縢) is credited with the poem "The Owl" ("Chixiao" 鴟鴞, a version of which is extant in the *Poetry*, #155); in the *Zuo Tradition*

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widely known and cited, but not under the names of those who made them. The overall titles of these repertoires were fixed, while some of their constituent parts, in particular chapters in the received *Documents*, circulated individually under other titles before the empire, as seen in recently discovered bamboo manuscripts from ca. 300 BCE.[3]

Texts across all disciplines, genres and contents in early China were anonymously composed in response to particular circumstances, were organised as collaborative projects, or were "edited", "collected", "compiled" or "perfected" in gestures of filial piety, loyalty to a philosophical master, guidance for rulers and others involved in governing, commemoration, technical and pragmatic knowledge, occasions of ritual and other purposes. In both writing and orally, texts were composed and re-composed, performed and re-performed, as shared communal properties whose significance was sought and found not in their point of origin or the authority of the single author, but in their perceptive reception. Anonymous poems of unknown provenance were creatively "revoiced"[4] and applied to everchanging situational circumstances and in the process changed their "meaning" in response to those;[5] older scribal records,

(*Zuozhuan* 左傳) (Lord Wen 18.7), he also has a *Documents*-type "Oath Command" ("*Shiming*" 誓命, no longer extant) attributed to him. Similarly, the Duke of Shao, Mu 召穆公 (dates unknown), is credited with a poem in *Zuozhuan* (Lord Xi 24.2). For Confucius as the "maker" of the *Springs and Autumns*, see below. Within the *Documents*, many chapters are royal speeches, typically with a brief narrative frame; but as I will discuss below, speakers *within* a text are not authors *of* a text.

3 See, e.g., discussions of the manuscript version of "The Metal-Bound Coffer" in the collection of looted manuscripts held by Tsinghua University in Beijing: Magnus Ribbing Gren, "The Qinghua 'Jinteng' 金縢 Manuscript: What It Does Not Tell Us about the Duke of Zhou," in *Origins of Chinese Political Philosophy: Studies in the Composition and Thought of the* Shangshu (*Classic of Documents*), ed. Martin Kern and Dirk Meyer (Leiden 2017), 193–223; Dirk Meyer, "'Shu' Traditions and Text Recomposition: A Reevaluation of 'Jinteng' 金縢 and 'Zhou Wu Wang you ji' 周武王有疾," in *Origins of Chinese Political Philosophy*, 224–248.

4 To use David Schaberg's term; see David Schaberg, "Search and Intent: Early Chinese Literature for Now," in *Literary History in and beyond China: Reading Text and World*, ed. Sarah M. Allen, Jack W. Chen and Xiaofei Tian (Cambridge, MA 2023), 37.

5 A phenomenon most clearly visible in *Zuozhuan*, which mentions dozens of poetry recitations on diplomatic occasions; see Mark Edward Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China* (Albany 1999), 147–193; Wai-yee Li, "Poetry and Diplomacy in Zuozhuan," *Journal of Chinese Literature and Culture* 1, no. 1–2 (2014): 242–261; David Schaberg, *A Patterned Past: Form and Thought in Early Chinese Historiography* (Cambridge, MA 2001), 86–95, 222–255; Martin Kern, "Poetry Quotation, Commentary, and the Ritual Order: Staging the Noble Man in *Zuozhuan*," in Zuozhuan *and Early Chinese Historiography*, ed. Yuri Pines, Martin Kern, and Nino Luraghi (Leiden 2023), 153–208; Martin Kern, "The Formation of the *Classic of Poetry*," in *The Homeric Epics and the Chinese Book of Songs: Foundational Texts Compared*, ed. Fritz-Heiner Mutschler (Newcastle upon Tyne 2018), 39–71. Major Chinese studies include Zeng Qinliang

whose original composition was believed to have come from the collective efforts of anonymous court scribes or archivists, were edited and encoded with new meaning by a supremely perspicacious editor and then decoded by his perceptive audience;[6] auto-commentary to assist the interpretation of historical narrative was attributed to the generic persona of "a noble man";[7] the oral teachings of a philosophical "master" proliferated over time as they were recollected by subsequent generations of disciples.[8] Canonical texts such as the *Poetry*, the *Changes*, or the *Springs and Autumn Annals* were all semantically underdetermined and hence demanded interpretation in order to express and deliver their presumed (or preferred) meaning—and over time, each of them attracted multiple lineages of exegesis and transmission that led to different versions not only of commentary but also, to some extent, of the core text itself.

One way or another, these lineages must have originated already before the empire, but in our received sources, all of them—no matter their uncertain original dates—become visible only over the course of the Han Dynasty (202 BCE–220 CE), when they are also named: sometimes after pre-imperial states from which they had purportedly originated, as with the Qi 齊 and Lu 魯 traditions of the *Poetry*; sometimes after some otherwise entirely obscure historical figure, as with the Han 韓 tradition of the *Poetry* or the Zuo 左, Gongyang 公羊, and Guliang 谷梁 traditions of the *Springs and Autumns*.

曾勤良, *Zuozhuan yinshi fushi zhi shijiao yanjiu* 左傳引詩賦詩之詩教研究 (Taipei 1993); Zhang Suqing 張素卿, *Zuozhuan chengshi yanjiu* 左傳稱詩研究 (Taipei 1991); and Mao Zhenhua 毛振華, Zuozhuan *fushi yanjiu* 《左傳》賦詩研究 (Shanghai 2011). Even on the very occasions in *Zuozhuan* where apparently a new poem was composed (as opposed to an existing poem being recited), the same verb is used, namely, *fu* 賦, "to present" or "to recite". This lack of distinction between original composition and performance of existing texts is itself meaningful.

6 See the discussion of Confucius below.

7 See Kern, "Poetry Quotation, Commentary, and the Ritual Order"; Eric Henry, "'Junzi Yue' Versus 'Zhongni Yue' in *Zuozhuan*," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 59, no. 1 (1999): 125–161; Newell Ann Van Auken, "Judgments of the Gentleman: A New Analysis of the Place of *Junzi* Comments in *Zuozhuan* Composition," *Monumenta Serica* 64, no. 2 (2016): 277–302; Newell Ann Van Auken, *The Commentarial Transformation of the Spring and Autumn* (Albany 2017), 121–146; David Schaberg, "Platitude and Persona: *Junzi* Comments in the *Zuozhuan* and Beyond," in *Historical Truth, Historical Criticism, and Ideology: Chinese Historiography and Historical Culture from a New Comparative Perspective*, ed. Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer, Achim Mittag and Jörn Rüsen (Leiden 2015), 1–20.

8 This "accretion theory" has been advanced in particular with respect to the Confucian *Analects*; for both its critique and defence, see the essays collected in Michael Hunter and Martin Kern, eds., *Confucius and the Analects Revisited: New Perspectives on Dating, Composition, and Authorship* (Leiden 2018).

None of the diverse scenarios of text production was presented as solitary composition by a single author; all involved acts of collecting, editing, complementing, selecting, reducing, commenting, and interpreting. In other words, the roles and functions of authorship were distributed across a wide range of agents and activities. The acts of composing and performing on the one hand, and those of listening, reading and interpreting on the other, were consistently represented as mutually constitutive and should be properly conceptualised as co-authorship, or multiple authorship.

While the literature on the question of authorship fills libraries, I find particularly instructive and relevant the concept of "multiple authorship" as developed by Jack Stillinger across multiple examples of nineteenth- and twentieth-century English and American literature. In his most condensed statement, Stillinger draws on the earlier work by Jerome J. McGann as follows:

> McGann wants to promote what he calls "a socialized concept of authorship and textual authority," a concept involving not only authors but publishers, editors, printers, booksellers, purchasers, readers, reviewers, critics, teachers, and students. "Literary production is not an autonomous and self-reflexive activity; it is a social and an institutional event." The "textual authority" of a work "rests neither with the author nor with his affiliated institution [by which McGann means the publisher]; it resides in the actual structure of the agreements which these two cooperating authorities [and, I would add, the rest of the participants as well] reach in specific cases."[9]

In opposition to the "myth of solitary genius", Stillinger and McGann reflect on a post-enlightenment textual world where the idea of the singular author is virtually the only one—and even in that world profoundly misguided. Authorial agency—by which I mean not merely the author's control over textual production but also the capacity to shape, at least to some extent, subsequent interpretation—was and still is not at all a solitary enterprise but a web of intersecting social practices that all contribute to how a text comes into being and how it is being understood. This, I shall outline in the following, is the only model that holds for authorship in pre-imperial China, where all authorship is "multiple", "socialised" or "co-"authorship.

9 Jack Stillinger, *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius* (New York 1991), 199, citing Jerome McGann, *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* (Chicago 1983), 8, 100, 54.

In early China, no text was under the authority or control of its author. Instead, texts existed in a vibrant communicative tradition—perhaps best imagined as an interconnected horizontal system or rhizome—whose individual parts were anonymous, shared and open to continuous variation, expansion, re-composition and borrowing. No author could limit the circulation of his ideas. Historical anecdotes, poetic lines and philosophical arguments were expressed not only once but repeatedly across different texts, and in different yet recognisably related versions; their transmission was not circumscribed by the boundaries of any specific text in which they may have first appeared. Textual boundaries themselves were often fluid, with ideas, themes, expressions, poems and stories floating with relative ease, written or oral. In their accumulation, texts existed as ever-evolving instantiations and variations of ideas and expressions that were rarely unique. They were by definition composite artefacts. In thinking about early Chinese texts, we should therefore consider a multiplicity of textual practices—from composition and recomposition to performance, memorisation, circulation and interpretation—instead of a series of texts as objects. Pascale Bourgain's comment on medieval European manuscripts easily applies to ancient Chinese texts:

> Ultimately, save for a few very great authors who enjoyed a particular status and prestige, there was nothing inviolable about a text. It could be continuously rewritten, interpolated, and even re-transcribed as part of another book. In this way, collections were constituted of any particular subject based on patristic works and collections, and adapted to the needs of users. … The mutability of texts was indeed an inherent part of their use. From the moment that they served a purpose, they were constantly modified and, in the minds of the copyists and clients, improved. Hybridization and revival were constant.[10]

The smallest stable textual units in ancient Chinese literature have been called "building blocks", "modules" or "pericopes" by modern scholars and typically extend over what we would call short paragraphs or, in poetry, individual stanzas or even just couplets.[11] Some have argued that these units corresponded

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10 Pascale Bourgain, "The Circulation of Texts in Manuscript Culture," in *The Medieval Manuscript Book: Cultural Approaches*, ed. Michael Johnston and Michael Van Dussen (Cambridge 2015), 154. Note that this goes far beyond what is observed by Bernard Cerquiglini, *In Praise of the Variant: A Critical History of Philology*, trans. Betsy Wing (Baltimore 1999).

11 E.g., William G. Boltz, "The Composite Nature of Early Chinese Texts," in *Text and Ritual in Early China*, ed. Martin Kern (Seattle 2005), 50–78.

to the number of Chinese graphs a single bamboo slip—with strung-together slips being the standard manuscript stationery at the time—could accommodate,[12] although that kind of material determinism was at most a contributing factor. The textual units travelled not only vertically through time, that is, from earlier to later versions of the same text, but also horizontally among contemporaneous texts: the "same" anecdote can be found in various texts that are otherwise considered distinct, but that in reality are all composite and, as a result, also often internally disjointed. More often than not, such texts—of a size we would recognise not as books but as chapters—were composed of repertoires of ideas and their correlated expressions that, as textual material, already existed or were, so to speak, "in the air".[13] What Stephen Owen has noted for medieval Chinese poetry is even more true of the pre-imperial textual world before its texts became, under the institutions, procedures and demands of the imperial state, gradually arrested under defined titles and retrospectively attributed to individual authors:

> When we set aside questions of the "original text," authorship, and relative dating, we can think of each extant text as a single realization of many possible poems that might have been composed. What survives is certainly only a small fraction of all the poems actually composed and of different realizations of the texts that survive. We have textual variants, texts given as "variant versions" of the "same" poem, and poems considered "different" but which have lengthy passages in common. When we think of this as a spectrum of variation, we realize there is no absolute boundary separating another version of the "same" poem from a "differ-

12 From recently discovered ancient manuscripts we know that bamboo slips, typically less than one centimetre wide, varied in length; most of them were around twenty or thirty centimetres long, but some could go to more than fifty, an unwieldy format difficult to handle and perhaps of more representational than practical purpose and value. Connected horizontally and read from top to bottom, right to left, the slips were tightly strung together with hemp or silk strings and could be rolled up or, sometimes, folded. The longest known example from before the imperial unification in 221 BCE, a historical text, contains 138 slips, see Yuri Pines, *Zhou History Unearthed: The Bamboo Manuscript Xinian and Early Chinese Historiography* (New York 2020); by contrast, a manuscript whose title refers to the legal statutes of 178 BCE, that is, from the early imperial state, extends over 526 slips, see Anthony Barbieri-Low and Robin D.S. Yates, *Law, State, and Society in Early Imperial China: A Study with Critical Edition and Translation of the Legal Texts from Zhangjiashan Tomb no. 247* (Leiden 2015).

13 To borrow the formulation from Peter Stallybrass, "Against Thinking," *PMLA* 122, no. 5 (2007): 1580–1587, made in the context of famous lines that Shakespeare's works share with those of slightly earlier or contemporary writers.

> ent" poem. When we imagine the variations that no longer survive and segments combined in different ways, we begin to think of this as "one poetry," as a single continuum rather than as a corpus of texts either canonized or ignored. It has its recurrent themes, its relatively stable passages and line patterns, and its procedures.[14]

In other words, early Chinese poetry and prose were frequently interconnected with other texts. Where Owen speaks of "repertoires" in medieval Chinese poetry,[15] Boltz expounds on the "composite nature" of early Chinese texts more generally;[16] and in my own work on early poetry, I have further described how "composite texts" derive from shared, circumscribed "repertoires";[17] we may thus think of early Chinese texts in analogy to Jakobson's "poetic function" constituted by "selection" and "combination".[18] These composite texts, or

14 Stephen Owen, *The Making of Early Chinese Classical Poetry* (Cambridge, MA 2006), 73.

15 Owen, *The Making of Early Chinese Classical Poetry*, 15: "it is useful to begin by thinking of 'poetic material,' with particular texts not as independent 'creations' but as realizations of one piece of a shared repertoire."

16 Boltz, "The Composite Nature of Early Chinese Texts." See also Boltz, "Why So Many *Laozi*s?," in *Studies in Chinese Manuscripts: From the Warring States Period to the 20th Century*, ed. Imre Galambos (Budapest 2013), 9–10: "A large part of the evidence of recently excavated pre-Han and early Han manuscripts suggests that to think we will find 'originals' of well-known works, which can be identified from the outset as single texts composed by a single author at a single time is an unwarranted presumption. The manuscript evidence suggests instead that early Chinese texts often are not comparable to, for example, early Greek or Latin texts where we typically find a clear authorial identity and a stable compositional structure …" For excellent earlier accounts of early Chinese textuality in the same vein, see Yu Jiaxi 余嘉錫, *Gushu tongli* 古書通例 (Shanghai 1985) and, more recently, Li Ling 李零, *Jianbo gushu yu xueshu yuanliu* 簡帛古書與學術源流 (Beijing 2008). For "commonly shared source material" (*gonggong sucai* 公共素材) as the core of early Chinese textuality, see Sun Shaohua 孫少華 and Xu Jianwei 徐建委, *Cong wenxian dao wenben: Xian Tang jingdian wenben de chaozhuan yu liubian* 從文獻到文本: 先唐經典文本的抄撰與流變 (Shanghai 2016), 112–212; further on the "heterogeneity" of early Chinese texts, see also Cheng Sudong 程蘇東, "Xiechaoben shidai yizhixing wenben de faxian yu yanjiu." 寫抄本時代異質性文本的發現與研究, *Beijing daxue xuebao* 北京大學學報 53, no. 2 (2016): 148–157.

17 Martin Kern, "'Xi shuai' and Its Consequences: Issues in Early Chinese Poetry and Manuscript Studies," *Early China* 42 (2019): 39–74.

18 Roman Jakobson, "Linguistics and Poetics," in Jakobson, *Language in Literature*, ed. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy (Cambridge, MA 1987), 71: "The selection is produced on the basis of equivalence, similarity and dissimilarity, synonymy and antonymy, while the combination, the build-up of the sequence, is based on contiguity. The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination." While Jakobson here defines specifically the structure of poetic language, in early China, the joint principles of selection and combination operate equally on the scale of entire texts regardless of genre.

mini-anthologies, were not yet "books": the prose writings of early China were then further organised into our received books at the imperial academy and imperial libraries of the Western Han 西漢 (202 BCE–9 CE) capital Chang'an 長安, at regional courts of Han kings like Liu An 劉安 (King of Huainan 淮南, r. 164–122 BCE) and Liu De 劉德 (King of Hejian 河間, r. 155–129 BCE), and in addition, in particular since Eastern Han 東漢 (25–220 CE) times, also on private initiative. However, one such book, *Mr. Lü's Springs and Autumns* (*Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋)—compiled under the patronage of the merchant and Qin chancellor Lü Buwei 呂不韋 (d. 235 BCE) and dating in part to 239 BCE—shows that the development of large-scale books had been underway already before the imperial period. While anthologies like *Mr. Lü's Springs and Autumns* and *The Master of Huainan* (*Huainanzi* 淮南子, completed in 139 BCE under Liu An's patronage) were likely composed of newly written chapters, their contents were based on deep layers of traditional knowledge and inherited forms of expression.[19]

Meanwhile, most transmitted books from the pre-imperial period are visibly anthologies of shorter writings that had originally circulated independently before being transformed into book chapters, whether by imperial editors or slightly earlier. Yet even in their received form as book chapters, these writings still include passages shared with other such chapters; furthermore, repetitions within a single chapter suggest that chapter's own composite nature. Exceptions are highly specific pragmatic or technical (administrative, legal, medical, astrological, calendric, economic etc.) writings whose content is defined by extratextual realities. In general, such writings—very few of which have survived in the received tradition, while many have been archaeologically found in recent years—are authorless texts that represent not individual inspiration but institutional knowledge: they were not supposed to reflect the whims of specific individuals.[20] Yet even such texts, for example military writings, could be reassembled in new versions and then given new titles, as described in Sima Qian's 司馬遷 (ca. 145–ca. 85 BCE) *Records of the Historian* (*Shiji* 史記) from around 100 BCE, that is, well into the Han Empire:

19 See John Knoblock and Jeffrey Riegel, eds., *The Annals of Lü Buwei: A Complete Translation and Study* (Stanford 2000); John S. Major et al., *The Huainanzi: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Government in Early China* (New York 2010); Sarah A. Queen and Michael Puett, eds., *The Huainanzi and Textual Production in Early China* (Leiden 2014).

20 I once labelled them "texts without history" in distinction to texts intended to be transmitted through time; see Martin Kern, "Methodological Reflections on the Analysis of Textual Variants and the Modes of Manuscript Production in Early China," *Journal of East Asian Archaeology* 4, no. 1–4 (2002): 143–181.

King Wei of Qi ordered his ministers to seek out and arrange the *Marshal's Methods of War* of old, and to add Rangju's to it, and then named it *Marshal Rangju's Methods of War*.

齊威王使大夫追論古者司馬兵法而附穰苴於其中，因號曰司馬穰苴兵法。[21]

At the time, the Noble Scion's power shook All Under Heaven. Retainers from the many lords presented [their own writings on] the methods of war, and the Noble Scion gave titles to all of them; thus, in our times [their collection] is commonly called *The Noble Scion of Wei's Methods of War*.

當是時，公子威振天下，諸侯之客進兵法，公子皆名之，故世俗稱魏公子兵法。[22]

Such examples do not refer to individual authorship and do not tie the text to individual engagement as reflected in a given text. The text does not attain a specific meaning by being attributed to a particular historical individual and that person's biographical circumstances, intentions, emotions and thoughts. It does not generate an interpretation based on biography. Still, at least with respect to pragmatic or technical works it would be useful to know whether or not the text was composed by a practitioner of such technical expertise, or rather by someone who thought about this expertise from a more distanced, perhaps more conceptual or even philosophical vantage point. Practitioners may be held responsible for the precepts they promote; philosophers may be forgiven more easily. Either way, the early technical works are not attributed to single individuals.[23]

In recent decades, hundreds of manuscripts on wood, bamboo and silk from the last four centuries BCE have been either archaeologically recovered or looted (and then rerouted via Hong Kong to mainland Chinese museums or universities),[24] some with counterparts in texts of the received tradition, but most—in particular pragmatic or technical writings—previously unknown to

21 Sima Qian, *Shiji* 史記 (Beijing 1982), 64.2160. For *lun* 論 as "to arrange" or "to put in order" (here and elsewhere below with regard to texts), see Zhang Taiyan 章太炎 (1869–1936), *Guogu Lunheng* 国故論衡 (Beijing 2010), 80, who interprets the graph as *lun* 侖.

22 *Shiji*, 77.2384.

23 Compare the mathematical treatises studied by Karine Chemla in this volume.

24 How much such looted material has by now disappeared into private collections is anyone's guess.

modern scholars. Many of them carry titles; none carries the name of an author, and none refers to an author of another text. The manuscripts show beyond doubt that the model of composite, non-individual authorship and its claim for collective, anonymous authority extended across all genres of texts, including texts that in early imperial times were retrospectively attributed to historical individuals.

Thus, over the past quarter-century, as Sinologists have been reflecting more systematically on their own epistemological categories from comparative perspectives, most have come to agree that individual authors in the Greco-Roman (let alone modern) sense were never the norm in pre-imperial China.[25] Consider what Mark Edward Lewis notes about the philosophical texts from that period, most of them eponymously titled after their philosophical "master" figure that, however, should not be confused with the author of the text:

> [T]he text, the master, and the disciples were inextricably bound together. Without the text there was no master and no disciples (beyond the lives of the individuals involved); without the master there was no authoritative text or transmitters of the text; and without the disciples the text was not written or transmitted, and the master vanished together with his teaching.[26]

25 For discussions of authorship in early China, see (among others) Alexander Beecroft, *Authorship and Cultural Identity in Early Greece and China: Patterns of Literary Circulation* (Cambridge 2010); Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China*; Zhang Hanmo, *Authorship and Text-making in Early China* (Berlin 2018); Griet Vankeerberghen, "Text and Authors in the *Shiji*," in *China's Early Empires: A Re-appraisal*, ed. Michael Nylan and Michael Loewe (Cambridge 2010), 461–479; Michael Nylan, "Manuscript Culture in Late Western Han, and the Implications for Authors and Authority," *Journal of Chinese Literature and Culture* 1, no. 1–2 (2014): 155–185; Wai-yee Li, "The Idea of Authority in the *Shih chi* (*Records of the Historian*)," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Study* 54, no. 2 (1994): 345–405; Wai-yee Li, "Concepts of Authorship," in *The Oxford Handbook of Classical Chinese Literature*, ed. Wiebke Denecke, Wai-yee Li and Xiaofei Tian (Oxford 2017), 360–376; Martin Kern, "*Shiji* li de 'zuozhe' gainian" 《史記》裡的 '作者' 概念, in *Shiji xue yu shijie hanxue lunji xubian* 史記學與世界漢學論集續編, ed. Martin Kern and Lee Chi-hsiang 李紀祥 (Taipei 2016), 23–61; Martin Kern, "The 'Masters' in the *Shiji*," *T'oung Pao* 101, no. 4–5 (2015): 335–362; Martin Kern, "Kongzi as Author in the Han," in *The Analects Revisited: New Perspectives on the Dating of a Classic*, ed. Michael Hunter and Martin Kern (Leiden 2018), 268–307; Tao Jiang, *Origins of Moral-Political Philosophy in Early China* (Oxford 2021), 7–25; Li Chunqing 李春青, "Zhongguo gudai 'zuozhe' guan de shengcheng yanbian jiqi wenhua yiwei" 中國古代 "作者" 觀的生成演變及其文化意味, *Wenyi lilun yanjiu* 文藝理論研究 5 (2013): 87–102; Cheng Sudong, "Xiechaoben shidai yizhixing wenben de faxian yu yanjiu"; Cheng Sudong, "Ye tan Zhanguo Qin Han shiqi 'zuozhe' wenti de chuxian" 也談戰國秦漢時期 "作者" 問題的出現, *Wenyi pinglun* 文藝評論 8 (2017): 4–10.

26 Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China*, 58.

The resulting "masters texts" are anthologies of highly diverse chapters that often lack in coherence with one another. Many of these texts were first compiled in the library of the late Western Han imperial court or over subsequent centuries. As I commented in my review of Lewis's magnum opus, his master-disciple lineage model of textual production emulates

> the oldest, most enduring, and most effective production of authority in traditional China, namely, ancestor worship. Without explicitly pointing to these correlations, Lewis has convincingly established the structural identity between ancestral and philosophical lineages, sacrificial worship and exegetical transmission. The master and his legacy are invented and perpetuated in precisely the way ancestors are; the authority of his disciples in transmitting his words corresponds to the continuation of an ancestor's virtuous power through his descendants; and the act of making oneself a name (*ming* 名) by praising an ancestor in an inscription (*ming* 銘), as described in the famous *Li ji* 禮記 passage on the inscription of tripods, tallies with the disciples' teaching of the master's thought.[27]

In this scenario, "authors" are not the origin but the result of the text. Of course they existed—someone must have composed the texts we have—but it does not appear that their individual role as originator was considered of primary importance; they did not, so to speak, get credit. No pre-imperial "master" is on record having claimed to have written "his" text,[28] as the early Greek historians Hecataeus of Miletus, Herodotus and Thucydides each did in the very first words of their big books. What is more, the extremely rare (and dubious) cases prior to the empire where individual authorship of a text is attributed to someone in the third person are at best the exceptions that prove the rule.[29]

This does not mean that from a certain time onward, particular ideas were not associated with historical individuals. Several "masters texts" explicitly and

27 Martin Kern, "Feature: *Writing and Authority in Early China*, by Mark Edward Lewis," *China Review International* 7, no. 2 (2000): 347.

28 All named philosophical masters, purported writers of history, and poets of pre-imperial China were male.

29 What matters is not when authorship was "first" attributed to a text, a question that is in any case unanswerable given that all pre-imperial texts for several centuries underwent subsequent editing and reorganising, a continuous process during which additional materials were inserted at unknown moments. What matters is when the very notion of authorship became more widely recognised, valorised, and made productive in the interpretation of early texts—which can only be documented after the establishment of the empire in 221 BCE.

critically discuss entire series of other thinkers for their positions and arguments.[30] Historically, these panoramic discussions of sages and thinkers from high antiquity through the late Warring States period (453–221 BCE) are to be placed on the eve of the emerging imperial unification or, in some cases, even into the early Han Empire. This is the time that Lewis has labelled "the encyclopedic epoch" when new forms of texts emerged "intended to encompass the world in writing":

> These works were part of a general trend proclaiming completeness or totality as the highest form of authority. This dream of writing the world in a single text prefigured, in turn, the enterprise of uniting the world in a single state. The close links in imperial China of political authority with textual mastery or patronage emerged out of this conflation of the intellectual and political realms in a shared ideal of a single, comprehensive authority.[31]

In other words, the systematic identification of ideas with their authors must be seen in the context of the emerging or newly established imperial state; mirroring its totalising impulses as a polity, it lays out an entire intellectual history, diverse and complex. Note, however, that even at this late moment, only thinkers are named but none of their writings is. Who actually had access to what texts remains impossible to determine[32]—and remember that the "masters texts" themselves are anthologies of diverse origin. Even in the early Western Han, when Sima Tan 司馬談 (d. 110 BCE) reflected on the "essentials of the six philosophical lineages" ("liu jia zhi yao" 六家之要), he did not identify a single author for any of them.[33] Systematically assigning books to authors had to wait for nearly another century until the imperial bibliographer Liu Xiang 劉向 (77–76 BCE) compiled the catalogue of the inner palace's imperial library.[34]

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30 Prominent examples are *Xunzi* 荀子, "Against Twelve Masters" ("Fei shi'er zi" 非十二子, chapter 6) and "Dissolving Blindness" ("Jie bi" 解蔽, chapter 21); *Zhuangzi* 莊子, "All Under Heaven" ("Tianxia" 天下, chapter 33); *Han Feizi* 韓非子, "Eminence in Learning" ("Xian xue" 顯學, chapter 50); *Mozi* 墨子, "Against the Ru" ("Fei Ru" 非儒, chapter 39). In addition, "masters texts" on various occasions mention other thinkers in passing.

31 Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China*, 287.

32 See, e.g., Michael Hunter, "Did Mencius Know the *Analects*?," *T'oung Pao* 100, no. 1–3 (2014): 33–79. The same question can be asked about all the chapters listed in note 30 above.

33 *Shiji*, 130.3288–3293.

34 Contained in abbreviated form as the "Monograph on Arts and Letters" ("Yiwen zhi" 藝文志) in Ban Gu 班固 (32–92), *Hanshu* 漢書 (Beijing 1962), 30.1701–1784. On the Han imperial library project, see Xu Jianwei 徐建委, *Wenben geming: Liu Xiang*, Hanshu Yiwenzhi *yu*

Another place where one might look for authors would be the canonical *Documents* which in chapter after chapter stages ancient sages and kings to deliver expansive speeches. Yet here it is necessary to distinguish between the named speakers *in the text* and the anonymous authors *of the text*.[35] Above all, these speeches are markers of occasion and charisma; often delivered at specific moments such as the founding of a new capital or in the hour before a decisive battle, they map both the speaker and his utterances onto historical moments of paramount significance, making the speakers say what "was called for by each situation".[36] There is no indication that early Chinese thinkers thought of these speeches as authored texts. Furthermore, while one can argue that the statesmen and scholars at the Qin (221–207 BCE) and Western Han imperial courts, when petitioning their monarchs in writing, were the successors to pre-imperial advisors who in early historiography addressed their superiors in often elaborately crafted speeches,[37] none of these early speakers were mentioned or cited as authors of texts. Speeches, it appears, were considered delivered and performed but not "made" as discrete artefacts. A speech was not a portable object; to become one, as in the various Han dynasty anecdote collections compiled by Liu Xiang, it had to be framed and arranged within stories by (anonymous) narrators.

This overall situation creates a problem when thinking about "co-authorship". If "co-authorship" is some plural form of "authorship", how can we identify additional authors where we cannot even find the first one? For describing co-authorship in early China, we cannot start with authorship in the Greek sense; we need different categories altogether. If authorship was not claimed by individual humans (nor attributed to them) and no words from gods or Muses could be invoked, how was the agency of textual production represented in early China? This situation calls for a brief reflection to clarify what we actually mean by "authorship" and "co-authorship".

Roland Barthes, despite his professed curiosity about what he calls "ethnographic societies", claims in "The Death of the Author" that "the author is

zaoqi wenben yanjiu 文本革命：劉向、《漢書·藝文志》與早期文本研究 (Beijing 2017); Luke Waring, "From Stone Canal to Orchid Terrace: Libraries and Archives in the Two Han Capitals," *T'oung Pao* 109, no. 5–6 (2023): 437–477; Michael Hunter, "The 'Yiwen zhi' 藝文志 (Treatise on Arts and Letters) Bibliography in Its Own Context," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 138, no. 4 (2018): 763–780.

35 For this crucial distinction, see Cheng Sudong, "Xiechaoben shidai yizhixing wenben de faxian yu yanjiu."

36 Rex Warner, trans., *Thucydides. The Peloponnesian War* (Harmondsworth 1985), 47 [1.22].

37 On the speeches in *Zuozhuan*, see Schaberg, *A Patterned Past*; see also Cheng Sudong, "Ye tan Zhanguo Qin Han shiqi 'zuozhe' wenti de chuxian."

a modern figure" which had emerged only with "English empiricism, French rationalism and the personal faith of the Reformation" due to which "our society"—some undefined English-French-German cultural conglomerate?—"discovered the prestige of the individual, of, as it is more nobly put, the 'human person'".[38] Unless one were to define the notion of the author in the narrow sense that matches *only* its appearance in modern Western Europe, Barthes' claim (which is shared by Foucault) does not chime well with what we know from Mediterranean antiquity, the European medieval period, or other ancient cultures that very much insisted on their authors and sometimes did so even in profoundly cosmological and psychologising ways (in China since at least the third century CE).[39] Yet further on in his essay, where Barthes turns to the intricate question of authorship as self-expression, he does have a point: no writing can be taken as unmediated, implicitly or explicitly autobiographical expression. And Barthes is further right in noting that "to give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing", and that "a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination",[40] that is, in its interpretation at the hands of readers, interpreters, critics, commentators and editors. This is what Foucault calls "the principle of thrift in the proliferation of meaning"[41] where the "author function" is not the origin of the text but a limiting function of its interpretation. What is then "missing" in early China is obviously not the act of textual creation (through whatever processes). What is missing is the Foucauldian "author function" as the unifying vanishing point from where to interpret the text.

The operative distinction lies in what exactly we mean by "authorship": the original making of the text—something elusive in early China and perhaps also elsewhere too easily taken in good faith—or, rather, the making of sense of the text, that is, the multiple acts of interpretation and textual reconstitution that only gradually took the author function as their historical anchor? Here, I would first like to call upon Alexander Nehamas' critique of Foucault (and by extension Barthes): according to Nehamas, Foucault conflates "text" with "work" and "writer" with "author". All "texts" have "writers" (or oral creators), but only a text subjected to interpretation is a "work" and has, as such,

38 Roland Barthes, *Image—Music—Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York 1977), 142–143 ("The Death of the Author").

39 Consider, e.g., the case of Lu Ji's 陸機 (261–303) "Poetic Exposition on Literature" ("Wen fu" 文賦), translated and discussed in Stephen Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought* (Cambridge, MA 1992), 73–181.

40 Barthes, *Image—Music—Text*, 147–148.

41 Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?," in *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, ed. Josué V. Harari (Ithaca 1979), 159.

the construct of the "author" manifested within it.[42] Yet while I agree with Nehamas' critique, for early China the distinction between writer and author is not easily maintained, as becomes clear once we consider the question of "co-authorship"—and this is precisely why that question must be brought into view. The problem Nehamas tries to solve is still entirely focused on the solitary figure, be it the "writer" of the "text" or the "author" in the "work", which appears to be the central aporia of the modern debate on authorship. As noted by Stillinger,

> In the context of the present study of multiple authorship, what these theoretical writings have in common, in their quite different ways of regarding the place of authorial intention in interpretation, is their virtually universal belief in the myth of the author as a single entity. Anti-intentionalists like Wimsatt and Beardsley, intentionalists like E.D. Hirsch … and author-banishers like Barthes and Foucault all embrace or reject the traditional concept of the single author, the mastermind creator of whatever work is the occasion for thinking pro or con about authorship. And while the substitution of multiple authorship in place of the traditional concept may not disconcert the anti-intentionalists (after all, it is as easy to reject the intentions of two or three authors as it is to reject those of the more usual single author), it does quite possibly throw a cloud of uncertainty over the single-author ideal on which the intentionalists theoretically depend.[43]

The case of early China, even more fundamentally than the modern examples examined by Stillinger, invites us to suspend that notion of solitary authorship altogether. Some of the functions of "co-authorship" I discuss in the present essay may better be termed, following Nehamas, "co-writership" in the sense that they concern the production of the "text", not of the "work". But, as will be seen, that is not true for *all* the functions involved. In fact, it was precisely through certain procedures of "co-writership" that "texts" turned into "works" and attained authors in the Foucauldian sense of the author function. In early

42 Alexander Nehamas, "Writer, Text, Work, Author," in *Literature and the Question of Philosophy*, ed. Anthony J. Cascardi (Baltimore 1987), 267–291; see also Alexander Nehamas, "What an Author Is," *The Journal of Philosophy* 83, no. 11 (1986): 685–691.

43 Stillinger, *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of the Solitary Genius*, 193, referencing the classic oppositional statements of William K. Jr. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," *The Sewanee Review* 54, no. 3 (1946), 468–488, and Eric Donald Jr. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven 1967).

China, the procedures of compiling and editing, writing and interpreting, are deeply intertwined and hence are, overwhelmingly, the acts through which textual material is shaped not only into "texts" but also into "works" as discrete and circumscribed artefacts subject to interpretation. As will be shown below, this situation invites us to consider the text/work and writer/author distinctions in relation to the notion of co-authorship.

From the perspective of early China, this notion should be further expanded beyond the meaning of "writing together", that is, working concomitantly; it can also mean "writing in sequence". Traditionally, we call one person the author while thinking of those who come later as contributors, editors, collators or commentators. We imagine a hierarchy where the latter roles seem to merely follow from and build upon the former one. This presumed hierarchy of what is original and what is secondary, however, is problematic. In early China, more often than not, such a hierarchy of significance—and of signification—is indeed reversed. What unites those who, in one way or another, exerted their agency over a preexisting work is a fundamental quest: not for the creation but for the perfection (or manipulation) of the text as a new "original" that replaces the first one. Their activity was only seemingly of a secondary nature. Accordingly, often enough we do not know the names of those who created the original yet still imperfect, or incomplete, texts but the names of those who perfected, interpreted or presented them and whose engagement resulted in entirely new "original texts" and indeed "works" in Nehamas's sense, subject to further interpretation. Not only do we thus recognise a plurality of "original moments" of textual creation; in addition, while procedures such as compiling or reorganising were performed on preexisting materials and often postdated those by decades and centuries, the agency, power, and control that the later editors and compilers held over the text exceeded that of the original (anonymous) author. Consider the philosophical "masters texts" noted above: we can certainly assume that the "masters"—actual historical individuals—did teach their ideas with authority and were revered for that. But they did not create their eponymous, multi-chapter texts; that role, instead, fell to subsequent generations who constructed and staged the earlier "masters" as the authors of their ideas. Frequently, through processes of accretion and the circulation of parallel (but not identical) versions, the material associated with the master would first grow considerably before it was once again shrunk by a later editor—e.g., an imperial librarian—who set out to finally delimit the corpus and turn it into a book.[44] Both the adding of new materials and their

44 See Kern, "The Masters in the *Shiji*," 341, 357. Regularly, the editing resulted in cutting ninety percent of the materials at hand.

subsequent reduction were not just editorial but authorial acts, that is, acts of co-authorship, because they radically transformed and literally rewrote the existing textual material into a new form that had never existed before and was now subject to a new and different interpretation. This kind of shared, distributed authorship, or co-authorship, can be found everywhere in early China.

As noted above, both Lü Buwei and Liu An were the patrons, not the authors, of the diverse essays assembled in their sprawling compilations—essays that themselves, even if newly composed, drew on earlier materials. None of the chapters of *Mr. Lü's Springs and Autumns* or *The Master of Huainan* are assigned to a single author. If it is true that Liu An had assembled several thousand scholars at his princely court,[45] we can safely assume that every one of the twenty technical essays of *The Master of Huainan* that together constitute the totality of knowledge for how to rule the empire had been co-authored by a group of specialists on the respective subject.[46] And yet, a patron like Liu An also takes on one of the most crucial aspects of Foucault's "author function": he takes personal responsibility for "his" text, and he can be punished for it.

Another form of co-authorship can be identified in the grand historiographies of early China, first in the *Zuozhuan*[47] and then in the *Shiji* that was originally begun by Sima Tan and then completed by his son Sima Qian. With respect to the *Shiji*, my point here is not the successive co-authorship of father and son—by the father's tearful deathbed command to his son—but the fact that this text, just like *Zuozhuan*, is largely compiled from existing records and anecdotes, not newly authored.[48] To balance this composite and often disparate or

45 *Hanshu*, 44.2145.

46 For a discussion, see Zhang, *Authorship and Text-making in Early China*, 175–239; Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 1–39.

47 On *Zuozhuan*, see Stephen Durrant, Wai-yee Li and David Schaberg, eds., *Zuo Tradition—Zuozhuan: Commentary on the "Spring and Autumn Annals"* (Seattle 2016); Li, *The Readability of the Past in Early Chinese Historiography* (Cambridge 2007); Schaberg, *A Patterned Past*; Yuri Pines, *Foundations of Confucian Thought: Intellectual Life in the Chunqiu Period, 722–453 B.C.E.* (Honolulu 2002). In *Shiji*, 14.510, the otherwise obscure figure Zuo Qiuming 左丘明 (mentioned in passing in *Analects* 5.25) is named as the author of the *Zuo Tradition*.

48 We know that what is included in the *Records* represents but a fraction of the textual sources available to Sima Qian (even though he complains how much was lost and destroyed before him), and we know further that in many cases, his version of events is only one among many others that were available and possibly even known to him; a perfect example of the latter situation is Sima Qian's account of Wu Zixu 伍子胥 (d. 484 BCE; *Shiji* chapter 66), whose story appears in multiple early texts; for a compilation of these materials, see Wu Enpei 吳恩培, *Wu Zixu shiliao xinbian* 伍子胥史料新編 (Yangzhou 2007).

haphazard nature of the text, in both cases a unifying principle of historical judgement is represented in a paratextual layer: some ninety, irregularly interspersed comments attributed to a "noble man" (*junzi* 君子) in *Zuozhuan*,[49] generally associated with the *Zuozhuan* compilers, and the statements by the "grand lord archivist" (*taishi gong* 太史公) that are systematically attached to all but two of the one hundred and thirty chapters of the *Shiji* and conventionally considered the judgements by Sima Qian himself.[50] While these comments may reflect the voice of the historian(s), if only in a highly formulaic way, they are not comparable to the omnipresence of a Greek historian whose narrative is presented as spoken in his own voice; in *Zuozhuan* and *Shiji*, the explicit historical judgements are external to the historical narrative, and they themselves represent an act of co-authorship.[51] For the interpretation of the text, and of history, this co-authorship is by no means secondary. To the contrary, it appropriates the assembled records and anecdotes toward its own primacy of voice and judgement.

A third form of co-authorship can be found in the existence of parallel but different versions of the same stories, anecdotes, philosophical arguments or poems. Such parallels are ubiquitous in early Chinese literature: within the transmitted corpus, between transmitted texts and recently discovered manuscripts, or between different such manuscripts. How can we best make sense of such textual *mouvance*?[52] When two texts both largely overlap and yet are clearly different, so that they are neither two separate texts nor two versions of the same text (but could be considered as being both), perhaps one author changed, expanded or abbreviated the text of the other; or both authors drew in different ways from a repertoire of shared textual material; or

49 See note 7 above.

50 For a new study of the *taishi gong* comments, see Martin Kern, "The Grand Lord Archivist Speaks," in *Lives and Power. Biographical Writing in Sima Qian's Work and Beyond, in Ancient China and Rome*, ed. Béatrice L'Haridon and Grégoire Espesset (Paris 2025), 289–313.

51 A productive line of inquiry—beyond the present essay—would be to compare Herodotus' concept of *legein ta legomena*, where the historian invokes the voices of others, to the practice of the *Zuo Tradition* narrative where the historical actors themselves deliver their own judgements on the course of events, that is, not mediated through the historian's voice.

52 To use Paul Zumthor's term; see Paul Zumthor, *Toward a Medieval Poetics*, trans. Philip Bennett (Minneapolis 1992). Note that Zumthor's idea of *mouvance*—unlike Cerquiglini's of *variance*—is focused on oral, not written, textual culture. This divide did not exist in ancient China, despite considerable efforts to uphold it, as in, e.g., Edward L. Shaughnessy, "Unearthed Documents and the Question of the Oral versus Written of the *Classic of Poetry*," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 75, no. 2 (2015): 331–375.

one or both recalled from memory, or learned from their teachers or communities, the story or poem in one particular form. Perhaps someone had *written* (or orally composed) the original text; but then it got *written down* in a new and different form every time an occasion arose. This parallel writing, too, is co-authorship: every scribe or scholar who *wrote down* a text in his particular, idiosyncratic way assumed part of the agency of the original author who had once created the text in the first place but had no authority or control over "his" anonymous text's future iterations.[53] Every new instantiation of the text was thus a new fragment of the totality of *all* such instantiations; every one of them drew on a preexisting corpus, changed it in one particular way based on interpretation and imagination. While each such instantiation was to some extent an autonomous, parallel event, it contributed further to the overall corpus. In each case, interpretation and imagination did not merely follow a preexisting text; instead, they preceded and engendered that text's every new and original reconstitution.

Co-authorship thus takes various forms in early China. In the following, I will primarily call upon the most famous case of all, namely, that of Confucius (551–479 BCE), ancient China's paradigmatic philosopher who purportedly reconstituted an existing text in an entirely new meaning. When Confucius famously stated, "I transmit but do not create" (*shu er bu zuo* 述而不作),[54] he expressed himself with modesty, since only a sage (*sheng* 聖) was supposed to truly "create" (*zuo* 作)—not texts but civilisational achievements such as the invention of agriculture, of divination and writing, of music, of water management, and so on.[55] And yet, we would be wrong in understanding him as being *only* modest; instead, *shu er bu zuo* also points to the genuine significance of reception, transmission and interpretation. If we are accustomed to think of the "original text" as primary and its subsequent editing or commentary as secondary, early

53 For case studies, see, e.g., Matthias L. Richter, *The Embodied Text: Establishing Textual Identity in Early Chinese Manuscripts* (Leiden 2013); Rens Krijgsman, *Early Chinese Manuscript Collections: Sayings, Memory, Verse, and Knowledge* (Leiden 2023); Kern, "'Xi shuai' and Its Consequences"; Ribbing Gren, "The Qinghua "Jinteng" 金縢 Manuscript"; Meyer, "'Shu' Traditions and Text Recomposition"; Dirk Meyer, *Documentation and Argument in Early China: The Shàngshū* (*Venerated Documents*) *and the Shū Traditions* (Berlin 2021); Yuri Pines, "Didactic Narrative and the Art of Self-Strengthening: Reading the Bamboo Manuscript *Yue Gong Qi Shi* 越公其事," *Early China* 45 (2022): 375–412.

54 *Analects* 7.1.

55 On the intricate issue of "creation" in early China, see Michael J. Puett, *The Ambivalence of Creation: Debates Concerning Innovation and Artifice in Early China* (Stanford 2002). This understanding of *sheng* is expressed, e.g., in the manuscript from ca. 300 BCE, *Xing zi ming chu* 性自命出 (*Human Nature Emerges from the Mandate*); see Scott Cook, *The Bamboo Texts of Guodian: A Study and Complete Translation* (Ithaca, NY 2012), 709–712.

Chinese practices prompt us to reverse this hierarchical relationship.[56] The commonplace that the commentary "makes" the canon—that a canonical text only becomes canonical by way of its commentary—is vividly on display in early China. Not surprisingly, *shu er bu zuo*, while from some point onward most famously associated with Confucius, was itself, in one form or another, a more commonly used formula.[57] In a world where original claims to authorship were all but absent, claims to editorship, compilation and commentary were all the more important, consequential and authoritative.

The text most closely associated with Confucius is—unlike the anthologies associated with the other philosophical "masters"—not named after its principal figure but is simply called *Lunyu* 論語 (*Analects*). Since antiquity, nobody has ever argued that Confucius wrote the *Analects*. Instead, early sources—including Sima Qian's *Records of the Historian*—place the composition with successive generations of the master's lineage of disciples. The names of those purported author-compilers are mostly unknown.[58] While according to this tradition, the *Analects* continued to grow over time until it was finally arrested in something similar to its received version, recent scholarship has instead suggested that the text was selectively compiled—that is, drastically reduced—from a much larger corpus of Confucius' sayings, of which thousands are found across numerous other early texts.[59] Be that as it may, there is little to suggest that early readers ever worried that not all those utterances could be plausibly attributed to the principal and apparently most talkative philosopher of ancient China.

Remarkably, it is also Confucius who was most prominently called an author as early as the Warring States period—not for the *Analects* but, as the *only* figure in all Warring States sources mentioned as the author of any major text, for the *Springs and Autumns Annals*, the chronicle of twelve rulers from his home state of Lu 魯 spanning the 255 years from 722 to 486 BCE. According to *Mencius* 3B/9,

56 For a sophisticated discussion of the tension between "to create" and "to transmit" and of the inversion of their hierarchy, see Guo Xi'an 郭西安, "Quexi zhi 'zuo' yu tibu zhi 'shu'—Kongzi 'shu er bu zuo' shuo de jiegou weidu" 缺席之 "作" 與替補之 "述"——孔子 "述而不作" 說的結構維度, *Zhongguo bijiao wenxue* 中國比較文學 99, no. 2 (2015): 38–54.

57 Michael Hunter, *Confucius Beyond the Analects* (Leiden 2017), 26–30.

58 On this model of textual production and transmission, see Oliver Weingarten, "What Did Disciples Do? *Dizi* 弟子 in Early Chinese Texts," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 75, no. 1 (2015): 29–75.

59 Hunter, *Confucius Beyond the Analects*, with further references.

> When the world declined and the Way fell into obscurity, heresies and violence arose. There were instances of regicides and patricides. Confucius was apprehensive and created the *Springs and Autumns*. The *Springs and Autumns* concerns the business of the Son of Heaven. Because of this, Confucius said, "Those who understand me will do so for the *Springs and Autumns*; those who find me guilty of crimes will do so for the *Springs and Autumns*."
>
> 世衰道微，邪說暴行有作。臣弒其君者有之，子弒其父者有之。孔子懼，作《春秋》。《春秋》、天子之事也；是故孔子曰：知我者其惟《春秋》乎！罪我者其惟《春秋》乎！[60]

Shortly thereafter, *Mencius* concludes:

> After Confucius had completed the *Springs and Autumns*, rebellious ministers and murderous sons lived in fear.
>
> 孔子成《春秋》而亂臣賊子懼。[61]

The authenticity of these passages has been disputed,[62] and so has been the substance of the claim advanced here. For some, Confucius had nothing to do with the text at all;[63] yet since Han times, others saw him to be indeed its principal author who had endowed the text—now *his* text—with meaning and significance. If originally the *Annals* was the product of the anonymous court archivists in Lu, it was the sage who then "fashioned" (*zhi* 制), "did"

60 Jiao Xun 焦循, *Mengzi zhengyi* 孟子正義 (Beijing 1987), 452; D.C. Lau. *Mencius* (Harmondsworth 1970), 114.

61 Jiao Xun, *Mengzi Zhengyi*, 459; Lau, *Mencius*, 115.

62 Hans van Ess, in a detailed discussion, suggests that *Mencius* 3B/9 is a later interpolation based on the account of Confucius in Sima Qian's *Records of the Historian*; see Hans van Ess, "Mengzi 3B9 und die Unzufriedenheit mit dem Recht der Han," *Bochumer Jahrbuch zur Ostasienforschung* 38 (2015): 225–243. A small number of early Han thinkers—none more explicitly than Sima Qian—however, believed in and elaborated upon Confucius's involvement with the *Springs and Autumns*; see Kern, "Kongzi as Author in the Han." It is impossible to prove or disprove the authenticity of the *Mencius* passage, given that our received text—or something similar to it—was compiled only by Zhao Qi 趙岐 (d. 201) some five centuries later. What matters, however, is that in pre-imperial times, the phrase "Confucius created the *Springs and Autumns*" is unique to the *Mencius*. Perhaps it is an interpolation; perhaps it was an outlier in its time.

63 E.g., Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注 (Beijing 1981), 5–16, also adducing the opinions of various premodern commentators.

(*wei* 為), "organised" (*zhi* 治), "arranged in sequence" (*ci* 次), "transmitted" (*shu* 述), "brought to completion" (*cheng* 成) or "perfected" (*xiu* 修) the text.[64] Nobody—presumably not even the author of the *Mencius*—claims that Confucius actually created (*zuo*) the *Annals* from scratch. Instead, he "raised" (also *zuo*)—or "augmented," as with the Latin verb *augeo* that is the root of the word "author"—them to a new significance through his editing, where he deployed "subtle phrases" to convey "great principles" (*weiyan dayi* 微言大義), or re-created the text by giving it an entirely new meaning. In either sense, Confucius was a co-author who transformed and thus newly created an existing text by encoding it with new significance and purpose. This co-author was then the principal author—and his "text" now a "work"—replacing the earlier anonymous archivists who remain invisible and without any agency at all. Moreover, just as Confucius transformed the original text, this second "creation" in turn also transformed Confucius into a sage, sanctifying both text and author.[65] That said, as Cheng Sudong points out, the context in *Mencius* about Confucius's "creating" the *Annals* is actually a discussion on excellence in oratory, not writing, and is thus mobilising the more ancient paradigm of skilful speech.[66] Three times in Sima Qian's *Shiji* one finds that Confucius "relied on the records of the archivists to create the *Springs and Autumns Annals*" (*yin shiji zuo Chunqiu* 因史記作春秋) or "relied on the text of the archivists to arrange the *Springs and Autumns Annals* (*yin shiwen ci Chunqiu* 因史文次春秋)".[67] His agency was of such centrality that the account describing the creation of the Western Han imperial library begins as follows: "In the past, after Zhongni [i.e., Confucius] had perished, his subtle words were cut off; after his seventy disciples had died, the great principles became perverted" 昔仲尼沒而微言絕，七十子喪而大義

64 All terms used for his engagement with the *Annals*. For a full discussion of the complexities involved in Confucius as author, see Kern, "Kongzi as Author in the Han."

65 See Guo Xi'an 郭西安, "Shengren, shengyan yu shengxing: zuowei yizhong jingxue panduan de 'Kongzi zuo *Chunqiu*'" 聖人，聖言與聖行: 作為一種經學判斷的 "孔子作《春秋》," *Hunan daxue xuebao* 湖南大學報 (*shehui kexue ban* 社會科學版) 30, no. 1 (2016): 47–55; and further Guo Xi'an, "Xiuci celue zhong de 'zuozhe'—Xi-Han 'Kongzi zuo *Chunqiu*' shuo de huayu shijian" 修辭策略中的 "作者"——西漢 "孔子作《春秋》" 說的話語實踐, *Shanghai shifan daxue xuebao* 上海師範大學學報 (*zhexue shehui kexue ban* 哲學社會科學版) 43, no. 3 (2014): 99–106. See also Li Chunqing, "Zhongguo gudai 'zuozhe' guan de shengcheng yanbian jiqi wenhua yiwei."

66 Cheng Sudong, "Ye tan Zhanguo Qin Han shiqi 'zuozhe' wenti de chuxian." On earlier oratory as reflected in *Zuozhuan*, see Schaberg, *A Patterned Past*, and, most recently, David Schaberg, "On Quoted Speech in Anecdotal History: *Zhanguoce* as Foil to *Zuozhuan*," in Zuozhuan *and Early Chinese Historiography*, ed. Yuri Pines, Martin Kern and Nino Luraghi (Leiden 2023), 209–243.

67 *Shiji*, 47.1943, 121.3115, and 13.487.

乖.[68] No other name from the "original" authors—the anonymous court archivists of Lu—is attributed to the *Annals*, and all history of writing since Confucius is a history of decline.

Remarkably, Confucius is not said to have added to the *Annals*. To the contrary, he reduced them: he "abbreviated the patterned phrasing while signifying broadly" (*yue qi wenci er zhi bo* 約其文辭而指博),[69] "arranged the records of the archivists and oral accounts of old knowledge" (*lun shiji jiuwen* 論史記舊聞), "abbreviated the patterned phrases" (*yue qi ciwen* 約其辭文), "removed the superfluous duplicates" (*qu qi fanchong* 去其煩重), and leaving to oral instruction what "was not permissible to be made manifest in writing" (*bu keyi shu xian* 不可以書見).[70] In all this, the author-editor Confucius seems to have set the model for others to follow. The otherwise obscure Zuo Qiuming 左丘明, purportedly a contemporary of Confucius, is said to have "relied on Confucius's records of the archivists and comprehensively arranged his accounts" (*yin Kongzi shiji ju lun qi yu* 因孔子史記具論其語) in order to compile the greatest work of pre-imperial Chinese historiography, *Mr. Zuo's Springs and Autumns* (*Zuoshi chunqiu* 左氏春秋), or the *Zuo Tradition*.[71] Thereafter, Duo Jiao 鐸椒, tutor to King Wei of Chu (r. 339–329 BCE) believing that the king could not handle the entire text of the *Zuo Tradition*, "selectively chose accounts of success and failure" (*cai qu chengbai* 采取成敗) to create his own version of the text.[72] In the same vein, the statesman Excellency Yu 虞卿 "selected from the [*Zuo Tradition* of the] *Springs and Autumns*" (*cai Chunqiu* 采春秋) and "contemplated recent circumstances" (*guan jinshi* 觀近勢) to create *Mr. Yu's Springs and Autumns* (*Yushi chunqiu* 虞氏春秋);[73] and when Lü Buwei compiled *Mr. Lü's Springs and Autumns*, he "cut and chose from the [*Zuo Tradition* of the] *Springs and Autumns*" (*shanshi Chunqiu* 刪拾春秋).[74] Similarly, Sima Qian tells us, the various philosophical masters "Excellency Xun, Master Meng, Gongsun Gu, Han Fei, and the like all frequently collected [material] selectively from the [*Zuo Tradition* of the] *Springs and Autumns* to compose their writings; such cases are more frequent than can be counted" (*Xun Qing, Mengzi, Gongsun Gu,*

68 *Hanshu*, 30.1701.

69 *Shiji*, 47.1943.

70 *Shiji*, 14.509.

71 *Shiji*, 14.510. For *yu* 語 as "accounts" (or "texts" or "documents"), see Paul Fahr, "On General Terms for Texts in Early China," *T'oung Pao* 108, no. 5–6 (2022): 566–579.

72 *Shiji*, 14.510.

73 *Shiji*, 14.510. Compare the slightly different wording in *Shiji*, 76.2375. Duo Jiao, Excellency Yu, and others selected not from the *Springs and Autumns* but from the *Zuo Tradition*, which in Han texts often appears under the overall category of *Springs and Autumns*.

74 *Shiji*, 14.510. Compare the different account in *Shiji*, 85.2510.

Han Fei zhi tu, ge wangwang junzhi Chunqiu zhi wen yi zhu shu, buke shengji 荀卿、孟子、公孫固、韓非之徒，各往往捃摭春秋之文以著書，不可勝紀).[75]

All these accounts present the creation of texts as part authoring, part compiling, part editing, part reducing. They all deploy the same vocabulary of "selecting", "cutting", "choosing" and "removing", that is, textual reduction and refinement, or what in early Chinese sources is often called "cutting [the text] down to its essence" (*shan qi yao* 刪其要). The result is never seen as a lesser text but, instead, as an improved one. Confucius himself is said, once again in Sima Qian's *Records*, to have compiled the 305 poems of the *Classic of Poetry* by selecting them from a corpus of "more than 3,000": he "removed duplicates and selected those pieces that could be applied to the principles of ritual" (*qu qi chong, qu keshi yu liyi* 去其重，取可施於禮義).[76] It is not clear what is meant by "duplicates", but these cannot have been just multiple physical bamboo texts of the exact same content. Instead, as we now find repeatedly in newly discovered manuscripts, they would have been a range of different versions drawn from the same overall textual repertoire.[77] Han dynasty imperial editors followed the same logic and practice, as is documented for several major pre-imperial works.[78] Such a scenario of textual reduction also explains that in various cases, Sima Qian mentions that a certain work comprised "more than one hundred thousand" or even "several hundred thousand" words when our received text is only a fraction of that size. It is hardly conceivable that a difference so large, and in several mutually independent texts, was simply due to textual loss over time.

It is against this wider background that we must consider Confucius's involvement with the *Annals* (assuming that he was indeed involved). Strictly speaking, the *Annals* before Confucius—a text to which we have no access—was probably nothing more than a list of bare annalistic entries so extremely terse and esoteric as to be scarcely comprehensible to those who did not have access to their contexts. One of the perplexing features of its received version is the abundance of blank annalistic records that only note the season and its first month without any further information. This has recently been interpreted as evidence that the archivists at Lu, writing on bamboo slips, had first designed a table of seasons and months which they then filled with brief records; where nothing important was to note, the respective space remained

75 *Shiji*, 14.510. For more, see Kern, "The Masters in the Shiji."
76 *Shiji*, 47.1936.
77 See Kern, "'Xi shuai' and Its Consequences."
78 See Piet van der Loon, "On the Transmission of Kuan-tzu," *T'oung Pao* 41 (1952): 357–393; Paul R. Goldin, *The Art of Chinese Philosophy: Eight Classical Texts and How to Read Them* (Princeton 2020), 1–12.

empty.[79] Remarkably, even this indication of the absence of events was then faithfully preserved by Confucius (once again, if we allow for his editing of the text). Yet this was not the final act of authorship that constituted the *Annals* as a classic to be studied by imperial scholars since Han times. It was only its oldest teaching tradition under the name of the (otherwise completely unknown) Master Gongyang 公羊—a "tradition" (*zhuan* 傳) that appears to have started from oral instruction before becoming fixed into the written commentary (also *zhuan*) of the *Gongyang zhuan* 公羊傳—that transmitted the text together with an extremely rigorous catechistic exegesis. This exegesis claimed that Confucius had systematically encoded the text by using "subtle words" that now had to be carefully decoded, word by word, to reveal Confucius's "great principles" and historical judgements.[80]

The Gongyang commentary contains one passage where Confucius is quoted as identifying himself as the author of the *Annals*:

> In the twelfth year [of Lord Zhao, 530 BCE], in spring, Gao Yan of Qi led an army and brought to power the Northern Yan Earl at Yang. What is meant by "Earl at Yang"? It is Prince Yang. The Master said: "I already knew this [miswriting of a personal name as a location]." A bystander said: "If you knew this, why did you not change it?" [The Master] said: "What about those [other instances] where one does not know [that something is wrong]? The *Springs and Autumns* is so faithful to history that its sequence [of lords is the one established] by Lord Huan of Qi and Lord Wen of Jin, and its accounts of assemblies [match] how they were arranged by the hosts. [However,] as for its phrasing, I, Qiu, must bear the blame alone."
>
> 十有二年。春。齊高偃帥師。納北燕伯于陽。伯于陽者何。公子陽生也。子曰：我乃知之矣。在側者曰：子苟知之，何以不革。曰：如爾所不知何。《春秋》之信史也。其序則齊桓晉文。其會則主會者為之也。其詞則丘有罪焉耳。[81]

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79 Minzhen Chen, "How to Understand 'Empty' Records: On the Format and Compilation of Chunqiu from the Perspective of Bamboo Manuscripts," in Zuozhuan *and Early Chinese Historiography*, ed. Yuri Pines, Martin Kern and Nino Luraghi (Leiden 2023), 63–88.

80 On the *Gongyang Tradition*, see Joachim Gentz, *Das Gongyang zhuan: Auslegung und Kanonisierung der Frühlings- und Herbstannalen* (*Chunqiu*) (Wiesbaden 2001). Gentz has since published numerous studies on the Gongyang tradition, most recently Joachim Gentz, "*Gongyang zhuan*, Father of Chinese Historiography," in Zuozhuan *and Early Chinese Historiography*, ed. Yuri Pines, Martin Kern and Nino Luraghi (Leiden 2023), 244–288.

81 *Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan zhushu* 春秋公羊傳注疏 (Beijing 2000), 566–569. See also

Thus, according to the Gongyang commentary, the esoteric annalistic notes by the Lu archivists had been transformed into another esoteric text whose authorship was assigned to Confucius. He is credited not with the facts of the matter but merely with their "phrasing"—yet this "phrasing" created a new text whose significance could only be attained through the procedures, teachings and acts of transmission performed by Master Gongyang and his followers.

This tradition was complemented by two others, the Guliang 穀梁 and Zuo 左 traditions that were based on different versions of the *Annals*—and all three were subsequently taught in parallel at the Western Han imperial academy, each being assigned to officially appointed and salaried court scholars. Thereafter, they attracted further subcommentaries during the second (Gongyang), third (Zuo), and fourth (Guliang) centuries of the common era; in the process, each tradition (and its subcommentaries) was then intercalated into the text of the *Annals* itself. It was in this new format that the three commentarial traditions are included in state-sponsored compilations of the classics in their received versions. In short, the formation of the *Annals* was not a single event of authorial action; it was a centuries-long process of authorship, transformation, exegesis and textual reconstitution that involved a multiplicity of agents both known and unknown.

Among the ancient Chinese classics, the case of the *Annals* is of unique complexity. This complexity arises from the text's ambiguous attribution to Confucius as both secondary and principal author. On the one hand, Confucius is less than a true author in the sense of original creator: the text already precedes him. On the other hand, he is an author in the fullest sense as he impregnates the *Annals* with his personal judgements; according to both *Mencius* and the Gongyang commentary he takes responsibility for the text and is willing to be condemned for it. He is the author not because he created the text but because he perfected it; as a result, he can be known by the text, can be held responsible for it, and, with Foucault, can be punished for it.

This leads us to another important aspect in which co-authorship is configured in early China: the death of the first author—not in the Barthian sense but in the physical one. All philosophical masters whose names are literally turned into books are dead by the time their disciples and later followers get to work. Meanwhile, the few early political philosophers whom the tradition knows as authors—such as the "legalist" or "realist" thinkers Shang Yang

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Gentz, *Das Gongyang zhuan*, 96–98; Göran Malmqvist, "What *Did* the Master Say?," in *Ancient China: Studies in Early Civilization*, ed. David T. Roy and Tsuen-hsuin Tsien (Hong Kong 1978), 137; Göran Malmqvist, "Studies on the Gongyang and Guuliang Commentaries," *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 43 (1971): 203.

商鞅 (390–338 BCE) or Han Fei 韓非 (d. 233 BCE)—and who were actually involved in government all ended under horrific circumstances, either gruesomely executed (Shang Yang) or forced into suicide (Han Fei). Even mere patrons of philosophical works on government such as Lü Buwei or Liu An were coerced to kill themselves. Not surprisingly, the theme of death is central also with regard to Confucius and Sima Qian.[82] In the Gongyang version of the *Annals*, Confucius's death in 479 BCE is presaged in the final entry for the year 481 BCE:

> In the fourteenth year [of Lord Ai], in the spring, at the hunt in the western regions they caught a unicorn.
>
> 十有四年春，西狩獲麟。[83]

The Gongyang commentary explains:

> The unicorn is a beast of benevolence. When there is one who acts as a true king, it arrives; when there is none who acts as king, it does not arrive … Confucius said, "For whom did it come! For whom did it come!" As he turned his sleeve and wiped his face, tears soaked his gown. When Yan Yuan died, the Master said, "Ah! Heaven has bereft me!" When Zilu died, the Master said: "Ah! Heaven has cut me off!" When at the hunt in the western regions, they caught the unicorn, Confucius said, "My way has now reached its end."
>
> 麟者，仁獸也。有王者則至，無王者則不至 … 孔子曰：孰為來哉！孰為來哉！反袂拭面，涕沾袍。顏淵死，子曰：噫！天喪予！子路死，子曰：噫！天祝予！西狩獲麟。孔子曰：吾道窮矣。[84]

When Confucius—and Confucius alone—recognises the unicorn, he takes it as a sign of his imminent demise that, furthermore, triggers the memory of his

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82 In Sima Qian's case, his father had to die for the son to be charged with continuing the work; and when Sima Qian himself was charged with a crime of disloyalty, he chose castration over the (more honourable) option of suicide so that he could complete the text; see, e.g., Burton Watson, *Ssu-ma Ch'ien, Grand Historian of China* (New York 1958); Stephen W. Durrant, *The Cloudy Mirror: Tension and Conflict in the Writings of Sima Qian* (Albany 1995); and Stephen Durrant et al., *The Letter to Ren An and Sima Qian's Legacy* (Seattle 2016).

83 *Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan zhushu*, 709.

84 *Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan zhushu*, 711–716.

disciples' premature death. (Notice in this context the role of the remaining disciples in the authorship of the *Analects*.)[85] Thereafter follows the Gongyang's epilogue that refers to the "maker" of the *Annals* in the past tense who could only look forward to future sages to recognise him posthumously:

> Why did the noble man make the *Springs and Autumns*? Given that, for bringing order to an age of chaos and returning it to correctness, nothing comes even close to the *Springs and Autumns*, would it be that he made it for this reason? Or was it because, as a noble man, he delighted in speaking of the Way of Yao and Shun? Or, finally, was it not because he was delighted that [future sages similar to a] Yao or Shun would recognise the noble man?[86] When fashioning the right principle of the *Springs and Autumns* in order to await [his recognition by] later sages, this surely is what a noble man would delight in.
>
> 君子曷為為《春秋》？撥亂世，反諸正，莫近諸《春秋》，則未知其為是與？其諸君子樂道堯舜之道與？末不亦樂乎堯舜之知君子也？制《春秋》之義，以俟後聖，以君子之為亦有樂乎此也。[87]

If the allusion to Confucius's death is somewhat oblique in the Gongyang tradition, it becomes explicit in the Zuo version of the *Annals*, which continues the text for another two years:

> In the summer [of the sixteenth year of Lord Ai], in the fourth month, on the *jichou* day, Kong Qiu expired.[88]
>
> 夏四月己丑，孔丘卒。

85 As I noted elsewhere ("Kongzi as Author in the Han," 276), "My way has now reached its end" can be read in two ways: either Confucius despairs at the absence of a true king or he realises that Heaven has recognised him as a sage and given him the mandate to create the *Annals*. In either case, the close connection with death is unmistakable.

86 The sentence is ambiguous; I follow Malmquist, "Studies on the Gongyang and Guuliang Commentaries," 218–219; Gentz, *Das Gongyang zhuan*, 90; and Li, *The Readability of the Past*, 412, who all take it to express the hope that future sages in the mould of Yao and Shun will recognise the author of the *Springs and Autumns*. Earlier, I had questioned the mainstream opinion that the "noble man" in this passage refers to Confucius (see Kern, "Kongzi as Author in the Han," 279), but I am now inclined to accept it.

87 *Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan zhushu*, 719–721. Gentz, *Das Gongyang zhuan*, 89–90, 384, has also identified this passage as a postface. In addition to Gentz's analysis, see also the discussions in Schaberg, *A Patterned Past*, 305–306, and, most detailed, in Li, *The Readability of the Past*, 411–421.

88 *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi* 春秋左傳正義 (Beijing 2000), 1944.

This is the final sentence of the Zuo tradition *Annals*, according to the Gongyang tradition concluding with the death of its own author. Sima Qian, whose *Records of the Historian* is informed by both traditions, refers to Confucius as the author of the *Annals* on three separate occasions:

> The Master said, "Alas, alas! The noble man resents leaving the world without having his name recognised. My Way is not put into practice, so what can I use to show myself to later generations?" Thus, relying on the records of the archivists, he created the *Springs and Autumns* … [His] principles of criticising and diminishing [the rulers of the past] were upheld and applied by true kings of later times. When the principles of the *Springs and Autumns* are put into practice, rebellious ministers and murderous sons from all across the realm will live in fear of them … When the disciples received the *Springs and Autumns*, Confucius said, "Those who in later generations understand me will do so for the *Springs and Autumns*, and those who will find [me,] Qiu, guilty of crimes will also do so for the *Springs and Autumns*."
>
> 子曰：弗乎弗乎，君子病沒世而名不稱焉。吾道不行矣，吾何以自見於後世哉？乃因史記作《春秋》 … 貶損之義，後有王者舉而開之。《春秋》之義行，則天下亂臣賊子懼焉 … 弟子受《春秋》，孔子曰：後世知丘者以《春秋》，而罪丘者亦以《春秋》。[89]
>
> When at the hunt in the western region they captured the unicorn, [Confucius] said, "My Way has now reached its end!" Thus, relying on the records of the archivists he created the *Springs and Autumns* so as to conform to the kingly law, with his phrasing subtle and his guidance broad. In later generations, many were the scholars who quoted from it.
>
> 西狩獲麟，曰：吾道窮矣！故因史記作《春秋》，以當王法，其辭微而指博，後世學者多錄焉。[90]
>
> In the past, the Overlord of the West was incarcerated in Youli, and he expanded the *Classic of Changes*; Confucius was in a desperate situation

89 *Shiji*, 47.1943–1944. The passage includes parallels from *Analects* 15/20, *Shiji*, 61.2127, and *Mencius* 3B/9.

90 *Shiji*, 121.3115.

> between Chen and Cai, and he created the *Springs and Autumns*; Qu Yuan was banished, and he composed "Encountering Sorrow"; Zuo Qiuming lost his eyesight, and there was the *Discourses of the States*; Sunzi got his feet chopped off, and he arranged the *Methods of War*; Lü Buwei was banished to Shu, and his contemporaries transmitted *Lü's Survey*; Han Fei was imprisoned in Qin, and [there were] the "Difficulties of Persuasion" and "Resentment about Solitude." Most of the three hundred *Odes* [in the *Classic of Poetry*] were made by worthies who gave expression to their rage. All these men had something eating away at their hearts. They could not carry out the Way, and hence they wrote about the past while thinking of those to come.
>
> 昔西伯拘羑里，演《周易》；孔子厄陳蔡，作《春秋》；屈原放逐，著《離騷》；左丘失明，厥有《國語》；孫子臏腳，而論《兵法》；不韋遷蜀，世傳《呂覽》；韓非囚秦，《說難》、《孤憤》；《詩》三百篇，大抵賢聖發憤之所為作也。此人皆意有所鬱結，不得通其道也，故述往事，思來者。[91]

In these three different passages in the *Records of the Historian*, we find three different rationales for Confucius's authorial transformation of the *Annals*: first is his concern about posterity; second is his response to the capture of the unicorn; third is his suffering on the road between the states of Chen and Cai. In the first and second instances, he is said to have "relied on the records of the archivists", while in the third he is included in a genealogy of suffering authors into which Sima Qian ultimately inscribes himself.[92] Confucius's authorship is not voluntary in either beginning or end: like that of many others, it is born out of suffering and ends with, or near, his death.[93]

Consider the person who immediately follows Confucius in the genealogy: Qu Yuan 屈原 (ca. 300 BCE), the archetypal poet of ancient China who died

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91 *Shiji*, 130.3300.

92 The passage appears both here (Sima Qian's final "Auto-summary" [*zixu* 自敘] to the entire *Records of the Historian*) as well as in his "Letter to Ren An" ("Bao Ren Shaoqing shu" 報任少卿書) that is included in Sima Qian's biography (*Hanshu*, 62. 2725–2736) and in the early medieval anthology *Wenxuan* 文選; for the latter, see *Liu chen zhu Wenxuan* 六臣注文選 (Beijing 1987), 41.9b–27a. For a translation and critical discussion of the letter, see Durrant et al., *The Letter to Ren An and Sima Qian's Legacy*. The attribution of the letter to Sima Qian remains contested.

93 Sima Qian's genealogy of historical actors who turned into authors only out of the experience of horrible suffering should not be taken literally, as it is clearly contradicted elsewhere (including in other passages in the *Records of the Historian*). However, suffering

of suicide after having been banished from court. While unknown from any pre-imperial source, Qu Yuan is first mentioned by name in the early second century BCE by the (likewise banished) Western Han statesman and poet Jia Yi 賈誼 (201–169 BCE) in a composition titled "Mourning Qu Yuan" (Diao Qu Yuan 吊屈原). Subsequent Han writers attribute a series of poems to Qu Yuan that are preserved in the *Verses from Chu* (*Chuci* 楚辭), an anthology that likely took its initial shape at the court of Liu An but was closed, complete with a commentary, only by Wang Yi 王逸 (89–158) some three centuries later. Note what Wang Yi has to say about the poems he attributes to Qu Yuan: for the cycle "Jiu zhang" 九章 (Nine Manifestations), he states that after Qu Yuan's death, "the people of Chu grieved and mourned him; generation after generation appraised his phrases and transmitted his verses from one to the next" 楚人惜而哀之，世論其詞，以相傳焉.[94] For "Tian wen" 天問 (Heavenly Questions): "The people of Chu mourned and grieved over Qu Yuan; they collectively arranged and transmitted [the poem], and this is why it is said not to be in a meaningful order" 楚人哀惜屈原，因共論述，故其文義不次序云爾.[95] For "Yufu" 漁父 (The Fisherman): "The people of Chu longed and yearned for Qu Yuan and for this reason arranged his phrases so as to transmit them onward" 楚人思念屈原，因敘其詞以相傳焉.[96] For the cycle "Jiu ge" 九歌 (Nine Songs), Wang Yi notes that Qu Yuan encountered during his wandering in exile some vulgar southern religious songs, which he then remade into a proper text in order to express his own grievances; and yet, because of their questionable origin, "their textual sense is incoherent, their stanzas and lines are mixed up, and they broadly diverge from the right principles" 故其文意不同，章句雜錯，而廣異義焉.[97] In short, even to Qu Yuan, who for Wang Yi is the unquestionable creator of these diverse songs, Wang Yi assigns only limited control over "his" texts: some were hopelessly chaotic to begin with, while others deteriorated over time. None of them should be mistaken for Qu Yuan's own, original and final compositions; all their various forms and states of imperfection are in one way or another attributable to others. At the same time, Wang Yi relates all of them to Qu Yuan's tragic death that was mourned by "the people of Chu" who then became the caretakers of

a terrible fate was indeed often related to political authorship even if it is not always clear whether the punishment preceded or followed the act of textual composition. In more than one case, the early tradition preserves contradictory statements in this respect, including for Sima Qian's own punishment and textual production.

94 Hong Xingzu 洪興祖, *Chuci buzhu* 楚辭補注 (Beijing 1983), 4.120–121.

95 Hong Xingzu 洪興祖, *Chuci buzhu* 楚辭補注, 3.85.

96 Hong Xingzu 洪興祖, *Chuci buzhu* 楚辭補注, 7.179.

97 Hong Xingzu 洪興祖, *Chuci buzhu* 楚辭補注, 2.55.

his works—texts that without exception were only born out of Qu Yuan's suffering that ultimately led to his suicide.[98]

In Sima Qian's genealogy as in various other early imperial accounts, Qu Yuan's authorship, like that of Confucius, is thus described not as a creation ex nihilo but, instead, as an extension of, and response to—usually devastating—circumstances. Such composition was seen as fundamentally truthful because it did not emerge from conscious authorial manipulation: it came into being because, in a quasi-cosmological event, it had to. This model of text production downplayed the autonomy of the controlling author. Yet what was lost in control was gained in credibility. Pace Plato, such an author did not know how to lie.[99] The same logic is expressed in the Han dynasty "Great Preface" ("Da xu" 大序) to the *Classic of Poetry*, in the many accounts of poetic composition in early historiography where individuals burst into song at the moment of despair or imminent demise,[100] and in the various "Minor Prefaces" to the individual songs in the *Classic of Poetry* that identify "the people" or "the men of the state" of a certain domain as collective authors who composed poetry in response to a ruler's failure and the resulting moral, social and political chaos. As Sima Qian quotes from an unnamed source, "when the house of Zhou declined, [the poem] 'Guanju' arose" (*Zhou shi shuai er Guanju zuo* 周室衰而關雎作) as a critical response.[101]

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98 For an insightful study that links the death of Qu Yuan to the structure of Wang Yi's anthology, see Heng Du, "The Author's Two Bodies: The Death of Qu Yuan and the Birth of *Chuci zhangju* 楚辭章句," in *Qu Yuan and the Chuci: New Approaches*, ed. Martin Kern and Stephen Owen (Leiden 2023), 98–155. For a complete reconsideration of the Qu Yuan figure as a creation out of "his" poetry, see Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China*, 186, and more extensively Martin Kern, "Reconstructing Qu Yuan," in *Qu Yuan and the Chuci: New Approaches*, ed. Martin Kern and Stephen Owen (Leiden 2023), 16–97.

99 Such deterministic and expressive theories of literary authorship are by no means the only ones in early China; see James J.Y. Liu, *Chinese Theories of Literature* (Chicago 1975). Certain "masters texts" (of what has been called "sophist" rhetoric), speeches of political persuasion (regarded as deceptive and morally dubious), logic (as in the "masters text" *Mozi* 墨子) and Western Han "poetic expositions" (*fu* 賦) all showcase literary composition as rhetorical craft. Above all, the heterogeneous "masters text" *Zhuangzi* 莊子 is celebrated, in large parts, as a masterpiece of literary brilliance that pushes the limits of both language and reasoning.

100 Martin Kern, "The Poetry of Han Historiography," *Early Medieval China* 10–11, no. 1 (2004): 23–65; Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*, 37–56; Steven Van Zoeren, *Poetry and Personality: Reading, Exegesis, and Hermeneutics in Traditional China* (Stanford 1991). For a different view, see Martin Svensson, "A Second Look at the Great Preface on the Way to a New Understanding of Han Dynasty Poetics," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 21 (1999): 1–33.

101 *Shiji*, 121.3115. Note the use of *zuo* 作 here in the intransitive sense of "to arise"; this is the same verb that is used transitively with Confucius "creating" the *Annals*.

Likewise, Confucius could not but create the *Springs and Autumns Annals*. With his text, he is the pivotal co-author who stands on the threshold between two other groups of authors: preceded by the anonymous archivists of Lu and followed by the readers, editors and commentators of "later generations" (*houshi* 後世) and "those to come" (*laizhe* 來者) on whom the *Annals* depended for their transmission, legibility and recognition. Thus, well beyond the truism that all literary writings are to some extent continuously reshaped by their *longue durée* reception, Confucius's authorship—in his own voice and that of others—is from its inception configured as both derivative and unfinished, depending on the writings of those before and after. It is from this perspective that his dictum "I transmit but do not create" points in both directions, analogous to the filial son who presents sacrifices to his ancestors and thereby establishes himself as a model future ancestor: Confucius transmits the writings and teachings of old and gazes toward "later generations" to see his own words transmitted. Confucius's co-authorship is rooted and performed within a temporal structure where the present attains its purpose and meaning from its liminal position between past and future.

To return once again to Barthes, the "text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination". In the case of the *Annals*, this destination is not just any anonymous reader. It is not, with Plato's *Phaedrus*, a discourse that because it is written "roams about everywhere, reaching indiscriminately those with understanding no less than those who have no business with it, and it doesn't know to whom it should speak and to whom it should not."[102] Instead, it is meant strictly for those reader-commentators who themselves would come to reveal the work of the earlier reader-editor Confucius, another set of co-authors who are needed to complete his endeavour and reveal its significance. In thinking about texts in early China, we therefore need to broaden the Barthian (and later reception theorists') emphasis on the reader toward a plurality of readers/recipients who all participated in interpreting, commenting, editing and authorising, and, ultimately, re-authoring the text. Such various forms of distributed authorship remained highly ambiguous, with no clear distinction between composition, performance, and the interventions of commentators and editors.[103] Thus, the author function of the text crystallised only over time through the sequential contributions of transmitters, compilers, interpreters or performers of texts. Their roles were united in the quest for the perfection of the text. Due to their

102 *Phaedrus* 275d–e; translation from Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, trans., *Plato: Phaedrus* (Indianapolis 1995), 80–81.

103 See Kern, "The 'Masters' in the *Shiji*."

efforts, there is the work and, finally, the book as a "work"; before them, there was only textual material.

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Co-authorship. Collaboration, Multiple Authorship and the Melding of Minds in Literature, Arts and Sciences

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Co-authorship. Collaboration, Multiple Authorship and the Melding of Minds in Literature, Arts and Sciences

Papers in Honour of Glenn W. Most

Edited by

Manuel Baumbach

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